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.

Send up to five poems and up to three stories or other manuscripts (up to 2,500 words per submission, MS Word). Artwork should be high resolution jpeg format of at least 300 dpi. We accept submissions year-round, but we will not respond until Spring 2016.
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acknowledgements
We are sincerely grateful to our donors and supporters and for the many writers and artists who submitted their work for consideration. Thank you.

special thanks
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tribute
We dedicate the 2015 Cosumnes River Journal to our former colleagues Debbie Travis, Celia Esposito-Noy, and Jamey Nye, educators and administrators committed to the growth and development of our learning community. Their legacy at CRC will not be forgotten.

In her five years of dedicated service to CRC, President Travis was responsible for offering the resources and support to grow this publication from a grassroots endeavor to the journal we have today. Her whole-hearted support of our literary endeavors and our work both inside the classroom and out have inspired and continue to inspire creativity and innovation. In all, President Travis spent twenty-five years with the Los Rios Community College District. Our campus and community are better for her generosity of heart, warmth, and wisdom.

Celia Esposito-Noy, our former Vice President of Student Services (and interim President for a short time in 2009), was instrumental in establishing high standards and accountability and, simultaneously, a nurturing and inclusive culture across our campus. A tireless supporter of student success, she served our campus for over ten years. Her exemplary leadership included advocacy for mental health services and commitment to helping to transform students’ experiences. We are grateful that she shared her strength and compassion with CRC.

Jamey Nye, our dear friend and colleague, has been an inspiration to us as an English department colleague, a fiction writer, a faculty leader, a hardworking dean and administrator. Though we are sad to see him leave our campus, we know he will serve our District well in his new role as Associate Vice Chancellor of Instruction. A (barefoot) marathon runner, he is unstoppable in his pursuit of excellence, unmatched in his professionalism and diplomacy, indefatigable in his commitment to community college students, and steadfast as our friend and extraordinary colleague.

president’s message
Please join me in celebrating the ninth edition of the Cosumnes River Journal. You should know that this annual collection is a labor of love for the faculty and students who devote their time to its creation and publication. The Journal is one of many examples of the creative opportunities we provide the students at Cosumnes River College to engage in the arts. We appreciate the many students who poured their hearts and creative energies into their literary and artistic submissions in hopes of being published.

A combination of skills, talents, and learning is manifested in this publication. Please take a moment to find your favorite reading spot and enjoy.

Whitney Yamamura
Interim President
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Give Me Your Hand

My eyes wandered through a cluster of my relatives’ faces, blurred, as I scanned the room for the wooden rocking chair where my grandmother, Lola Inang, would usually be situated. Since she was the eldest living family member of the gathering, I made sure I would greet her first. I weaved through the crowd of aunts, uncles, cousins, and other acquaintances. The second she saw me, Lola stretched her trembling arm towards me just so I could take hold of her wrinkly hand to gently place on my forehead. Performing this gesture brought the sincerest smile to Lola’s face, one that radiated her warmth all throughout the room. Then I proceeded to perform the same gesture to the remainder of the elder family members, nearly taking half an hour to complete as Filipino family gatherings typically hosted a crowd of people ranging from familiar family members to people I have never laid my eyes upon in the past. I approached my father’s siblings, my mother’s siblings, and anyone else who lived long enough and worthy of respect. They all took delight in the practice of the mano po, our Filipino culture’s way of having the young request for blessings from the elderly. Their happiness must have likely stemmed from the sense of respect that aged Filipinos feel when the mano po is carried out.

It was as if I were programmed to always perform the mano po for every single instance I bump into one of the elderly Filipinos. Perhaps, after finally learning how to steadily balance myself to waddle on my own and begin a conversation of meaningless chit chat, the next motor skill my parents wanted me to perfect was the mano po. My fear of disappointing all who hold authority over me still holds today, and I attribute that fear back to as early as I began to practice the ritual. Failing to take the hand of my elder and press it onto my forehead meant a spanking would be waiting at home for me. My mother, whose typical weapon of choice was her pair of dusty house slippers, usually meted out the punishment.

“| said my mother, amidst the sound of the loud whams. Tears streamed down my face, resulting from the combination of the abrupt flashes of pain from being the root of her frustration. But what distressed me the most was my inability to understand the meaning of this entire tradition. A sea of questions continuously inundated my thoughts. Why is respect expressed in the way of the mano po? Why must my parents be angry when I fail to show respect through the mano po? Why is the mano po even mandatory to begin with? And I knew that if I were to articulate my queries, I would be met with varied, ambiguous answers. As a fledgling who attempted to make sense out of all of the occurrences that life presented, I could barely grasp the significance beneath the mano po. Constant confusion somehow helped me piece up a viable reason to continue practicing this custom.

I realized how deeply mano po was ingrained in me when I made my acquaintance with the parent of one of my American friends. The sound of sports commentary from the skinny, high definition television set reverberated upon my entry of her household, and the aroma of roast beef pleased my nose as I strolled through the living room halls. Her mother caught a glimpse of my face as she realized I was a new guest. She immediately walked toward me to introduce herself while extending her hand towards mine. I somehow put away from my mind the fact that I was in an American household, and I involuntarily expressed my subservience to my elders through the mano po. But the woman’s hand stopped during my attempt to place it against my forehead, and I was taken aback by her actions. Her surprised expression instantly made me realize what I had done, and I could not help apologizing profusely. To my embarrassment, I had to explain my family’s tradition. How could I forget that I was not in Filipino household? How could I forget that I was in a different place? Then I shook the woman’s hand, feeling silly for forgetting that Americans typically offer a friendly handshake and a phrase like “Nice to meet you!” instead of the mano po. The corners of the woman’s mouth curled into a smile, a sight that relieved me of my worries. I created a lasting impression on this woman, and I finally understood that the mano po is a practice that sets Filipinos apart from others in American society.

This very gesture of respect is definitive of being raised on different ideals. It is one where respect is of utmost importance. Mano po is symbolic of my deep roots in the Filipino culture—it is a part of my upbringing and my identity.
Jennifer Hayes was **stunning**. And I don’t mean the kind of stunning that would lead a guy to tell all his friends how hot she was. No. Jennifer Hayes was the kind of stunning that would make a guy drop to his knees and consider proposing to her right then and there. And that hot, summer day, talking to her in the backseat of my aunt’s tiny Corolla on the way to my favorite place in the whole world, I knew what lay ahead of me. To put it bluntly, I was doomed.

Let’s rewind. When I was ten years old, my Aunt Sadie and Vovo, which means “Grandma” in Portuguese, decided to take my younger brother Dennis and me to a week long summer camp nestled in the woods outside of Lake Tahoe called Camp Sacramento. That very first day of camp, I stepped onto the dirt and inhaled the scent of pine trees and I knew that I was smitten. The wooden buildings surrounded by trees that stretched to the very edge of the sky would be my home for the next six days and I intended to cherish it. That week, I met 3 people who would become lifelong friends. There was Reese whose hair was as bright and red as the campfires we had every night, Annie whose wit and charm was unmatched by any other, and Eli whose sense of humor and optimism never failed to put a smile on my face. That very same week, I met Jackson Stone Sinclair. And I swear that boy was an angel. His dark curly locks hung perfectly around his face, his big brown eyes lit up every time he smiled which was often, and his deep voice, which seemed to defy his prepubescent age, brought shivers to the surface of my skin every time he spoke. He was the kindest soul I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. From then on, I was hooked on that place and those people. I never allowed my family to take us anywhere other than my little slice of Heaven in the summer.

The camp changed over the years and so did the people. But the affection I had for my curly headed angel never faded. On every first star in the night sky, on every penny I found on the ground, I wished for him to fall for me the way I’d fallen for him. But years came and went and the story never changed. So, naturally, when my Aunt Sadie called me a
Few days after I turned 15 to tell me we were taking stunning Jenny with us to camp the next week, I threw up. Jenny was Aunt Sadie’s best friend’s daughter. She was a grade below me but if anything, people would guess she was older. I towered over her in an awkward, spindly way whereas she looked more like a girl you’d find on the cover of Vogue. Where my pale skin and unnaturally bony body resembled that of an emaciated ghost, she was perfectly tanned and attractively fit. She had naturally long, dense eyelashes, gorgeous green eyes, and dark waves of hair that flowed down to her waist. I had plain brown eyes and stringy brown hair.

Deep down, I knew that being gorgeous didn’t necessarily make a person a pompous jerk or a brainless airhead but I couldn’t help but hope she would be just so I could feel secure in knowing that there was something ugly to her after all. To say I was jealous of Jenny would be an understatement but I knew I would need to push that feeling aside because she was turning out to be kind of a cool person and I couldn’t keep comparing myself to her. It was only making me feel worse about myself and assume the worst about her. “How long have you been going to camp?” She asked me to break the silence in the car.

“This will be my fifth year. How many times have you been?”

“Too many to count!” She laughed. Her teeth were perfectly aligned and as pure white as teeth could be. “It’s my favorite place in the whole world.”


“I hope your friends like me.” She sighed. She seemed so sweet and I started to feel awful about the ugly thoughts I had earlier. She made friendship seem so effortless so I reassured her, “Don’t worry. They’re really nice and you’re really nice so you’ll probably get along.”

“What are they like?”

“Well Reese, Annie, and Eli are pretty much my best friends there and Jack is… all right I guess.”

“Do you not like him or something?”

“Oh no not at all.” I laughed, my cheeks tingling as I began to blush. “Actually I’ve kind of had a crush on him for the past five summers.”

“Aw that’s so adorable!” Jenny chimed. “You should tell him! Maybe he’ll feel the same.”

“Maybe.” I turned my face to the window so she couldn’t see how red I was. Within minutes, we were parked in camp and I saw him through the window. My heart stopped. I looked over at Jenny who was looking as stunning as ever and took a deep breath. It didn’t help. Because the moment she stepped out of that car behind me, his gaze shifted. He looked at her the way I’d longed for him to look at me for the past five summers. By the end of the week Jenny confessed that she had fallen for him and had the nerve to ask me if she had my blessing. What was I supposed to say? As much as I wished he could be, he wasn’t mine to give away. So I lied and told her it was okay; I was okay. And for a while I believed I would be. He lived in Las Vegas and we lived in Elk Grove and it would be a year until they saw each other again. Eventually the distance would tear them apart, right?

It didn’t.

My sixteenth summer at Camp Sacramento was my own personal hell. I couldn’t walk from the lodge to my cabin without seeing the two of them holding hands behind the dining hall or cuddling on the playground bench. I couldn’t be in my cabin with Jenny without her telling me in intricate detail about the way his eyes light up when he smiles, his endlessly hilarious sense of humor, and the kindness in his heart all of which I already had permanently etched into my brain. Then one night she told me, “You’ll never guess what happened. He kissed me, my first kiss!” As soon as we turned the lights off to go to sleep that night, I felt the tears spilling over my eyelids and did my best to stay silent as I tried to blink them away. I’d always hoped he would be my first kiss instead of a boy from my PE class during a game of truth or dare.

Camp became dark to me. It was a prison I couldn’t escape. All of my friends noticed and tried to console me but it was useless. On the last night, Jenny and I were in the bathroom brushing our teeth and getting ready for our departure the next morning. Jenny turned to me. “Hey, are you okay?” Well it only took her the entire week to notice something was wrong but better later than never, I suppose.

“Yeah I think I’m fine.” She nodded and looked back into the mirror. I took a deep breath. I was going to need all the courage I had to say the next thing. “I’ve been really upset this week you know. Watching you with Jack and hearing all of your cute stories has been really rough. You know I’ve always liked him. It’s really depressing when you just hold his hand and kiss him in front of me when you know how I used to feel.”

“Still feel, my thoughts corrected me.

“Well I knew you were upset but I kinda figured Carpe Diem, you know? It’s only a week.” Jenny replied as nonchalantly as ever.

Carpe Diem? I cried myself to sleep every night because you figured carpe diem? I was furious. I pretended all was well again but I stopped talking to her that year. Even though it took me so long to finally stand up for myself, I finally realized I was strong enough to leave the toxic yet stunning Jenny behind me. The next year when she asked my aunt if she could go to camp again I called her to tell her “I’m actually really happy for you, Jenny. I’m glad you got to ‘seize the day’ last year. But now it’s my turn and you aren’t going to be there for it.”

“WILLOW”

AMANDA STURGEON » » » PHOTOGRAPHY
1. Girls were icky.
2. Insecurity, doubt, anxiety, lack of confidence, ugliness.
3. She chased me a lot. I liked being chased. What else was there? I beat Final Fantasy 8.
4. She was the cutest girl in my grade. I had no idea why she talked to me. She was dating the coolest guy in my grade. I had no idea why he talked to me either. I thought a lot about Magic the Gathering, then.
5. I was tall and so was she. She always made eye contact in the hall. She was beautiful. Maybe somebody was behind me. She started dating one of the cool kids. I was still working on Final Fantasy 9.
6. She had dark, wavy hair. Pretty. Attitude and confidence for days. She let me touch her face once. My D&D character was a sorcerer.
7. She was tall and redheaded. She thought I was a boring. I beat Final Fantasy 10.
8. I bought a leather jacket that made me feel cool. She liked my leather jacket. Why wouldn't she? It was shiny and expensive.
9. She never noticed me. I told her she wasn't very smart. She knew who I was after that.
10. She liked that I didn't like her. I lied about not liking her. It was the only time she'd talk to me.
11. She was really annoying and beautiful and always got her way. She pissed me off. She loved it. I refused to dance with her. She loved that too. A lot of guys respected me after that. Video games are stupid.
12. I'm super cool and awesome and handsome. I'm also single. Probably not related.
13. She knew one of my best friends. She looked like my best friend's girl friend. She was assertive. I was a charming virgin.
14. She knew my college friends. She was also assertive. I was receptive.
15. She was gorgeous. I had the confidence and charm of a madman. I seduced the whole class just for her. She later dumped me. Nerds are lame.
16. She was different. Philosophical. Berkley student. I was still a madman possessed by some 10,000-year-old demon spirit. We meditated together. She projected her bipolar disorder onto me. She proposed. She screamed at me. I started therapy and so did she.
17. She wanted something casual and I didn't. I drank and played nineties PC games and felt sad.
18. He was ugly and I was blacked out. I cried in therapy. I never laughed harder at The Daily Show.
19. She was intelligent but physically unattractive. I was nice and bored and wanted to forget about the past. Games load slowly on my phone.
Sometimes I can't sleep. It's even worse at night because no matter how heavy my eyelids are and no matter how good of a day I've had, I just can't sleep. “Are you okay?” my friend asks me before I crawl into bed. I think for a minute before I reply with, “Yeah, I'm just feeling... sad.” As I move around on my bed, I hug my pillow and adjust the blanket trying to find a comfortable position. I try to remember how I even fell asleep the past night. I gave up eventually and curled up in the fetal position with my head tucked under the blankets. I turn the screen on from my phone so that the light illuminates the safe little hovel I've made. I can hear my heart beating and I count the rhythmic thumps; slowly I close my eyes. As I try to sleep, my mind wanders and I start thinking. Thoughts are jumping sporadically from what I'll do the next day to the thought of where I'll be in a year. Am I doing well in college? I just started but I'm already worrying. Then I think about myself and what I'm going to do with my life. I try to stop myself from thinking too much because I know that I need sleep, so I reach for my stuffed bear. I hug it tightly and bury my face against the soft fabric until I finally fall asleep. The comfortable slumber never lasts though as I wake up two hours later and sigh. I go through the same routine, falling asleep and waking back up again and again.

Sometimes I can't eat. I open my eyes and catch a ray of sunlight peeking through the slightly open blinds. I don't want to get up but I know that I need to. After what feels like an hour, I finally muster up the strength to drag myself out of bed and walk into the kitchen. I open the cupboard to take out a glass bowl decorated with floral designs. I set it down on the quail-egg-speckled counter and shiver because it's 7AM and there's a slight breeze emanating from the open window. Under the cupboard is the cereal. I grab it and hold it over my bowl, opening the top of it, and pour. I listen as the cereal falls, making little clinks against the glass surface of the bowl. I take a deep breath and smell the aftermath of rain; then, I suddenly decide that I'm not really hungry. I fill the bowl only a third, close the box and put it away. I open the fridge and look for the last ingredient to complete my cereal. I grab the carton and as I fill the bowl up with milk, I hear a slight crackle from the cereal flakes as milk cascades over them. By the time I've closed the carton and put the milk back, I don't even feel like eating anymore. I want to eat but I have no appetite, so I end up skipping breakfast. My family is worried and tells me to eat but I tell them nothing is wrong. I just don't feel like eating.

Sometimes I don't feel like moving. I receive a text from my aunt about my cousin's birthday saying, “You should come! We haven't seen you in a while!” As I think of a reply, I reminisce about the same event a few years ago. I arrived at their house and recognized my aunts' and uncles' cars parked along the street. I was excited as I walked up to the door but then had second thoughts. I could be doing something else right now, playing my games at home or talking to my friends. I knocked on the door and my grandma opened it, opening her arms expecting a warm greeting embrace. I was hesitant to return the hug because I hadn't seen her in such a long time, but I gave her one anyway. Looking over her shoulder, I saw a pile of colorful gifts and made up a quick excuse to avoid having a conversation with her. As I hurried over to set down the gift, my cousins rushed into the room and gave me hugs to express how long it had been since they had last seen me. I walked into the living room and my relatives seemed surprised I was even there; I never leave the house. I waved and smiled as I said “Hi,” mentally retaliating as I waited for them to make snarky comments about my weight, but they just went back to what they were doing. The day dragged on and I sat quietly in the living room, watching my relatives drink and talk about their lives. Finally the cake was taken out, a signal that the party would be over soon. Everyone sang “Happy Birthday!” and congratulated my cousin for turning a year older. I was so relieved to be going back home to my safe and comfortable bubble. So this time, I sigh and I text her back, “No, I don't really feel well. I don't think I'll be going.” I really want to go, I really do but my body just doesn't allow me to. A voice in my head tells me that everything would be better if I stayed home. So I listen to it and I convince myself that I just don't want to go out.

Rarely am I able to resist these thoughts, but most of the time it just isn't possible for me. It's so difficult when I really want to do something, but then there's this imaginary force pushing me back as if I'm not capable of making my own decisions or someone else is in control of me. I've tried so many times to ignore this force that seems to hold me back, but each time I get close to a goal I've set, my mood plummets and I feel as if I am even farther from where I started. I keep my feelings and emotions to myself, not even bothering to talk to anyone. When someone asks me what's wrong, all that I can reply with is, “I'm just feeling... sad.”
It only takes a moment to make someone’s day—to become a Daymaker. Sometimes those moments even change lives as I discovered a number of years ago. I was working in salon one day when a client came in to have her hair styled. I was surprised to see her since it was right in the middle of her five-week period between haircuts. I figured that she must have an important social engagement, so I asked her about her evening plans.

“I don’t have anything special going on,” she told me, “I just want to look and feel good tonight.”

I gave her a great scalp massage, then shampooed and styled her hair. During our thirty minutes together, we joked and laughed. At the end, she smiled radiantly, hugging me goodbye.

A few days later, I received a letter from this client and began to realize the enormous potential of Daymaking. My client admitted that she had wanted her hair styled for her own funeral. She had planned to commit suicide that evening. But the wonderful time she had during our appointment had given her hope that things could get better. She decided to check herself into the hospital and get professional help. She thanked me for caring, even though I hadn’t known what she was going through. She wrote “Thank you for being there without knowing that you were.”

I was stunned. I had spent time with this woman once a month for three years, yet that day I had no inkling she was so distressed. I was glad to have made such a difference, yet the experience left me with an enormous sense of responsibility. What if I had been upset, distracted, or hurried when she came by to see me? That experience made me take stock of myself as a stylist and as a person. How many of the ten clients I saw each day might be in personal crisis? Even if it were only one person per day, I might have no way of knowing who needed some extra attention. I resolved to treat every person I meet as I had treated that woman. It might sound like a lot of work, but it wasn’t hard to have fun with my client that day. It was natural and made my day brighter, too.

After the experience, I vowed to give care and attention to everyone I see. I figure it will make their day a little better, and who knows, it might save a life. I still thank my client for the gift of that letter because it changed my life as much as my kindness changed hers. When you realize the difference you make for others, whether by spending a light-hearted half hour together, giving a smile, or simply holding the door open for them, your whole approach to life can shift.

Why have random acts of kindness when we can have intentional acts of good will?
I love to tell people about my journey of how I came to wear the hijab and the reason why I still wear it proudly today. Growing up in America as a Muslim girl, I did not know much of who I was. All I knew is that I was supposed to be oppressed and uneducated. I heard that I, as a Muslim girl, was a treasure to be used when I got married, and all that I was useful for was popping out babies. These allegations made me so confused because my parents never told me that I was only good for marriage. My parents had always encouraged me to do my best in school and to strive for education. My family consists of three girls, including me, and all three of us have amazing life goals—outside of marriage. My dream career is to be a pediatrician or a general practitioner so that I can go back to my country and help the poor with their medical needs. As I realize that people in America want me to be their interpretation of what Islam is, I strive to be what they don’t expect me to be.

In middle school I had always been accompanied by great friends and supporting teachers. I had great grades and was always the class clown. I always had a big group of friends who always liked to laugh and be obnoxious. I lived an amazing middle school life until eighth grade. The Hijab is a headscarf that Muslim women wear in order to obtain modesty. I did not know much about the hijab, but I felt like I was ready for the new challenge in my life. I thought I had a great support system behind me. I thought my friends would still hang out with me and that the teachers in my school would still support me. I was wrong. Besides my family, I had lost everything that an eighth grader needed. My friends stopped hanging out with me and, in fact, during lunch they would run away from me. My teachers would ignore me and would not help me when I needed it. I would go home and cry to my mother because I did not understand what I had done wrong. My mother taught me a lot about how the world views Islam, and now that I am a representation of Islam, I am also part of the Islamic stereotype.

I am a terrorist searching for jihad or I am an oppressed girl with no dreams, they say. Why did I get sucked into their stereotypes? I wore a hijab in order to be modest and to represent Islam. During my eighth grade year I had to change schools due to harassment and depression. Gladly, I made new friends in my new school and began to feel like myself again. I realized that this world wasn’t meant for me. I realized that everything is a test sent from God (the one and only). As years went on I realized that the hijab is me and I am the hijab. The hijab represents Islam and I am part of this magnificent religion. Never will I be ashamed of who I am. I will always go through struggles and challenges and I will forever be grateful to them. The challenges that I face on a daily basis are what make me stronger and are what make me love my hijab even more than the day before. I never felt more beautiful and strong and educated in my life. I will be a doctor as long as God wills it; none of the white superiorities will tell me otherwise.

No, I am not oppressed and yes, I am educated and yes, as a Muslim woman I have a duty to fulfill and I will fulfill it in marriage, but there is nothing wrong with being a wife and a mother. In Islam women and men are equal and as I wear my hijab I feel the equality and pride that runs in me. Hijab means that I respect myself and that I am ready to represent Islam in the best way possible. My hijab is me and I am the hijab.
“Oh.”

And then silence hangs in the air.

This is the reaction I receive every time a new acquaintance finds out that I am a vegetarian. They pause for a moment, studying me, trying to figure me out. In this time I can feel their mind working, picturing the vegetarians that they have known, seen, or heard about. Then, after their inner jury has argued with itself and come to no clear conclusion they stammer, “But you don’t look like a vegetarian.”

What does a vegetarian look like? Is his hair long and untamed? Do his toes poke out from a pair of tattered sandals? Is she holding a sign, protesting for some cause in Washington as she marches along with a smug air of self-righteousness? Being raised in a vegetarian household, I have lived with these stereotypes my entire life and for most of it have tried to rationalize my diet with those who get to know me. It is never the first thing I share with someone, and usually only arises when we share our first meal. I usually try to laugh it off, stating, “I was raised vegetarian, so I just can’t digest meat that well. It’s not like I’m super passionate about the issues or anything.” It wasn’t that I was ashamed of who I was, but rather a feeling of fear that drove me to make these kind of statements, even though they are true. I didn’t want the other person to judge me or throw away a possible friendship because they perceived me as someone unappealing and annoying. I let other people’s perceptions of who I was impact the way that I acted. Stereotypes can define people unfairly in others minds and cause those being stereotyped to change who they are, but ultimately it is the stereotyped person’s decision to be defined by the views of others. Through my experiences as a vegetarian, I have learned that because it is a lifestyle choice, as opposed to race or sex, people tend to trust the stereotypes about who vegetarians are. It is these perceptions that caused me to try and explain my vegetarianism, to try and make myself seem less threatening.

I have eaten meat before in my life on multiple occasions, mostly out of curiosity, and it is never something that I really enjoy. It feels heavy in my stomach, as if I had just binge eaten half a dozen donuts. When I do eat meat, even with friends that I am
I have never really understood pop-culture’s obsession with bacon. It seems that everywhere I turn people are putting bacon on things and making ridiculous statements that give the impression that it has semi-magical properties. Everywhere I turn people are putting bacon on things and making ridiculous statements that give the impression that it has semi-magical properties. When I tried bacon for the first time, it was a strange situation. It was the morning after a party at my friend’s house and his mom made bacon for the six of us that had stayed the night. Everyone tried it, showered her with compliments, calling it the best bacon they ever had. I must admit that it smelled amazing, and with my empty stomach I decided that this would be the perfect time to see what the hype was all about. I tried it and hated it. It was greasy, salty, and definitely didn’t seem like something I should be putting into my body. My face must have twisted into a look of disgust, because his mom, not knowing that I was a vegetarian, seemed hurt by my reaction to her acclaimed bacon. “I’m a vegetarian,” I stammered apologetically. “I’ve never tried bacon before.” I could tell from her face that she was put off by this statement, as if she felt as though she was expected to make special concessions for me due to my diet. She eyed me as if I was some kind of fragile, antique art piece that she had to tread lightly around or else I might shatter into a thousand pieces. “I’m not a passionate vegetarian,” I explained. “I was raised in a vegetarian family, it’s not like I’m an activist for the liberal agenda or animal rights. I just can’t digest meat that well.” I tried to make the situation a little bit less uncomfortable, to make myself feel like less of a self-righteous prick.

I remember the first time that I stopped making excuses for my vegetarianism vividly. During one of the first few weeks of my tenure as a student at the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB), our two hall RAs called a hall meeting in the common area to go over simple guidelines and to show us the various opportunities that UCSB had to offer freshmen. We all gathered and listened to the RAs speak. I sat next to someone that lived in the room across from mine; we had spoken a few times previously and got along. When the meeting ended the RAs brought out the In-N-Out burgers that they promised us as incentive to attend the meeting. Peter, the RA from my hall, told us to form an orderly line and to be respectful. He also mentioned that they picked up some grilled cheeses for the vegetarians. It was at this moment while everyone madly dashed towards the table in the front that Nick nudged me with a smile on his face and chuckled, “they got those for the fucking queers.” I knew that he didn’t mean anything by it, that he was just trying to share a joke with a new friend, but it still shocked me a little. I didn’t say anything, just smiled and let out a slight laugh as to not make the situation uncomfortable. I muttered something about the line being too long for it to be worth it and headed back to my room, where I collapsed into my bed.

I tried to shake his comment off, get it out of my mind, but it just wouldn’t leave. It wasn’t that his words had hurt me personally, I had become used to the stereotypes that vegetarians were, but it bugged me that I hadn’t spoken up, proudly stated who I was. In this new environment of college where I had a chance to define myself, and be proud of who I was, instead I just chose to follow the same path I had always followed, quietly accepting the fact that I was something other than normal. I became ashamed of my ashamedness. I thought about what it was that made people’s view about vegetarians so concrete. I came to the conclusion that it was because it was a lifestyle choice rather than an unchangeable feature about someone such as race or sex. As a vegetarian, I have found that people, even those who believe themselves conscious of others, tend to trust the stereotypes about vegetarians. I knew that I could just begin to eat meat, let my body adjust and fit in without feeling left out, but that felt wrong as well. I realized that I couldn’t just turn my back on who I had become in my life up to this point. I decided that I would never apologize for being a vegetarian or try to justify my diet again.

I won’t change who I am to belong. If others have negative views about who I am due to my diet, then my rationalizing, my efforts to convince them that I am an exception to the stereotype, will only support their beliefs more. Whereas, if I am proud and not taken aback by their reaction then I can change the way that they see vegetarians, and alter the stereotype in their mind. Even though others have a perception of me that is through the lens of a stereotype, it is my choice to make that small snapshot what defines me.

“But you don’t look like a vegetarian.” Actually, I do.
I hear the sound of waves crashing over the peer and as it crashes, the smell of sea salt comes rushing through my nostrils, essentially waking me up. It was difficult to see anything for the thick blanket of the night still covered the ocean. Lying idly by, below the flickering light of stars, I start to think about my need to set off to sail.

For a very long time, I had this preconception that people who went to State schools have more exceptional lives than those who went “dumb-old” community colleges, and as soon as I made the decision not to join a university, I came to the conclusion that I’m frankly just giving up on life; I’m giving up the opportunity of a lifetime. It was as if I was seeing my close friends drifting away at the top most floor of some extravagant cruise ship, and all I could do is just wave goodbye and watch as I saw them disappear along the sunset of the horizon. I felt this sense of dread, a boulder pressing hard against my chest. I’m losing my chance to be with the best and brightest, to be with individuals who worked harder than anyone else, and to be with people who knew exactly what they wanted to do with their lives. I was just sailing off with just my little sailing dinghy, with no particular direction. I had expectations that life had to be a certain way for it to be fun and fulfilling, needing to sail on that expensive yacht to really experience life. Over the course of many semesters, I have learned this not to be true. The type of boat to sail through my world doesn’t have to look amazing at all.

My friend Joey illustrated community college perfectly: “It’s basically the thirteenth grade for us; the only difference now is that we can smoke in public.” Believing in him, my expectations for my first semesters is seeing other “fresh out of high school” teens who were looking forward to turning the ripe age of getting dragon tattoos. Like many first days with school, anxiety struck walking around new environments and avoiding the tense awkwardness of sitting with random strangers. To my surprise, not everyone looked like they were all the same age. Having people from all walks of life, there were a few students who were as old as the professor teaching the class, possibly even older. I could see their silvery hair as proof of a life more experienced than mine. There was one particular old man named Jimmy, who, throughout the course of the semester, proved to be one of the smartest men I’ve ever met. Jimmy was small and always dressed the
same: green long sleeves with khaki pants. The only thing that didn’t stay consistent was Jimmy’s hair, his balding head was shinier than a double waxed car. But his lack of hair wasn’t the only thing that shined from Jimmy. Whenever I got a glance of him talking, he would always have the biggest smile on his face, which was actually quite contagious. He was quick with answers, so fast that Jimmy’s hand would be up before the professor even finished asking us questions. What was great about Jimmy was him explaining a lot about his life, his travels around the world and witnessing the small similarities that were akin with people. The class and I grew fond of hearing such stories from him. What I remember most about Jimmy was how he once boasted, “We’re all cut from the same cloth.” Jimmy believed that anyone has the ability to do what he can do for we are all essentially the same. I never imagined meeting such an inspiring person in a school like this. Though Jimmy definitely earned his place being a man who glowed brightly with knowledge, I still was not convinced that community colleges were on par with university schools.

My faith with universities was tested again when an old friend, Derrick, and I decided to catch up and have lunch. With his slick black hair, five o’clock shadow and leather jacket, his look was the epitome of how I pictured what great university students looked like. I remembered Derrick as being a smart guy, even attending a pretty prestigious school. A good comparison of him would be a young Jimmy of our time, but with a sense of style. I was eager to hear some great and inspiring stories from him. We sat down, ate greasy burgers that oozed out cheese and olive oil which we knew we would regret consuming later on. Our conversations were about ridiculous school fights and old crushes but eventually lead to school, and to my surprise, Derrick was in the process of going to a “crummy old community college.” I was in such awe of what he was telling me that I couldn’t comprehend why such a smart guy would make this sort of decision. I mumbled, “What happen? Did you get burnt out of school or something?” Derrick shook his head, revealing to me the truth about this phenomenon. “You see,” Derrick confessed, “I was smart yeah but I was super lazy, I didn’t really care about school.” He continued, “It also didn’t help I had no idea what the hell I really wanted to do there.” Because of this, Derrick’s grades reflected his attitude and he eventually accumulated a ludicrous amount of debt. “You’re lucky” Derrick remarked, “you’d probably be on the same boat as me, with a whole mountain of debt if you did go to my school.” I agreed with him completely, I am twice as lazy and to imagine having that type of debt on me, it would be like hitting a huge ice berg.

A good way to stay with the university level thinking is to be around with university educated people. The best candidate for this type of mentality were professors. The ones who already have Bachelor’s degrees, Master’s degrees, and maybe even PhD’s. One professor in particular I admired is Professor Melies. I saw her as a mentor, like a navigator to my little sailing dinghy she helped guide my way towards a path that I would grow to enjoy. I went to my Professor’s office hours constantly asking for some sort of advice or discussing her experience going to a state school. Her office definitely fit with her personality. Pictures of prior students, a box loaded with lanyards and a whole section of wall dedicated to famous movie posters. Professor would try to make it her office homey for her students by bringing in a small table which contain a small assortment of biscuits on top. While stuffing our faces with these British cookies, we were chatting about finishing up a huge project in class. I told Melies jokingly, “From the looks of things, I’ll probably be stuck here at CRC till the end of time.” My professor chuckled and confessed, “I felt the same way when I was going here too.” To my astonishment, my mentor also has sailed through the journey of community college. I felt ashamed for I tend to bash about how university schools were way better than what our school was offering. I could feel my ears heating up and expanding out of embarrassment and all I wanted to do was put my head down as though I was in deep thought, but my mentor was kind. She sort of understood where I was coming from and being the great navigator that she was, she maneuvered me to not look life in such a superficial way. Professor Melies expressed, “You should expand your horizons, Drahcir. You might be surprised on where it will take you.” My professor actually enjoyed the company of her community college students more than the students she taught at her state school. “Many of the students there” she whispered, “still have no idea what they’re doing.” I left her room feeling my world shake, as though someone broke the glass and revealed the truth about life.

Perhaps my pre-conceptions are wrong about the life of Universities. Perhaps everyone that goes there immediately isn’t necessarily the best and brightest, who want to work harder than ever before or even have any idea on what they want to do with their lives. Maybe the people who go to community college aren’t just washed out students who weren’t smart enough to go to the “better schools.” From what I’ve seen, heard, and experienced so far, the type of boat to sail through the world doesn’t have to look amazing at first. I thought about how getting some piece of paper doesn’t equate to a successful life; everyone starts off somewhere. Over the years, the pressure on my chest started to lessen. I thought about very successful people such as Steve Jobs who never let school stop him from achieving his goals. But this is not to say that I was refuting school altogether, quite the opposite. I wanted to work harder than ever before; I wanted to show that I too can be inspirational to be around. The journey toward these goals is what makes life fun and exciting, to sail across the unknown.

I looked back again at the horizon and realized that I’m not circling around the pier anymore. I was actually feeling grateful to be on my boat, my own little sailing dinghy. Though it may have the capacity of a small closet and the speed of a large manatee, I’m finally off towards the horizon where the sun was starting to rise.
Soufflé by Gospel Cruz

My mother & I used to bake so often that I’d get flour under my fingernails for days, when we baked soufflés, she’d always remind me to not take them out until they were ready; to not touch them until I was sure they’d stand up. So, I’d wait there for what felt like hours, hand hovering over the top, feeling the warmth leave feeling the anticipation — one false move & I’d lose our bet.

And that’s how I touched my mother when she was dying.

Hand hovering over her warmth, too afraid to touch because she could collapse any second. But she grabbed my wrist firmly & told me, “Baby, I’m not a goddamn soufflé,” so I hugged her tight until the air left her lungs in one soft sigh like all the times I had lost our bet.
A young Madonna, lips open, 
leans her cleavage to the camera 
to record fleshy club-girl sass.

By her 30s she knows to tilt her head 
for a zoom on the perfect horizon 
of her throat. She adds more men

to the dance numbers, muscle 
she undulates into, men to lift her toward 
a camera hung from the ceiling.

At 40 she runs a gloved hand down 
her own cheek, taut with focus, 
with macrobiotics and fan kicks 

100 times a day, attuned 
to low lights, long shots 
of her sculpted silhouette 

as she privately works the inside, 
her own sinew and sweat, 
blood in the purple veins 

rising to the surface of her hands. 
She leans into the mic and mouths 
Fuck Fifty, and in video strobe light 

proves she still inhabits 
the material world, humping a boom box 
in case we didn’t get it

then spins closer to the camera, 
each turn centered 
as she spots the lens.

Her mother’s gift 
years fray the lace 
pretty faded floral print, 
clouds of bleach stains; 
strings tied with a flourish 
into pink bows around the waist 
she’s battled for years.

shields 
favorite jeans, t shirts, 
going-out-kicking-up-her-heels-skirts, 
holiday vests, 
what it could not: 
the wound over her heart, 
a first husband the cemetery keeps, 
sons to the Iraq War, 
a daughter married too soon, 
one given to drink.

The apron holds what the day offers: 
lost toys, zinnias’ red heads, tears, 
stray kittens, a finch’s repose 
cell phones, winter greens, 
toddlers sticky fingers, 
what’s left behind— 
what’s discovered.

LISA DOMÍNGUEZ ABRAHAM
Selfie

JENNIFER O’NEILL PICKERING
The Apron

"SOUFFLÉ"
GOSPEL CRUZ POETRY AND ART
Thinking of you this sultry summer night, I see fireflies. When I was six, I darted from my Midwestern front porch to capture them in a mason jar, poking holes in the tin lid with my father’s can opener. I didn’t understand they might be dead by morning. All I cared about was the light. Wanting to chase it, capture it.

I’ve learned more since then. Fireflies produce a cold light, a luminescence without heat, to attract a mate, or prey. You did both, with flash and sparkle. Brilliant mind, dazzling smile, fiery touch—with you, I was six again, all chase and capture. Only caring about the light, not thinking about what might be dead by morning.

The first time I saw Carvaggio’s painting, Conversion on the Way to Damascus, I, like St. Paul, was thrown from my horse, struck dumb by the light. I was standing in front of the painting in Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome. I’ve learned more since then, about the life of the body, the nature of light, and Carvaggio—how he prepared his canvases with a pigment from the powder of dried firefly wings. Like me, all he cared about was the light.
Many times my mother spoke of going
to her Home in Heaven. Preparing,
she labeled all the family photos,
wrote notes to all her grandchildren.

Destroy my diaries when I’m gone,
she told me. And so,
a dutiful daughter, I did that—
just tossed them into the trash.

Years later, I found in the barn
a dusty box with more diaries. I read them
without guilt. I told myself:
pages of cramped words in minuscule script.

Lists of daily plans, meals eaten, phone calls—
who called, how long they spoke, invitations to her siblings:
to lunch, to dinner, to church—
invitations, I know, mostly unaccepted.

At the end of her life, she begged friends
for rides to church, with promises of lunch afterwards.
What emotions were unwritten—perhaps lurking
in small scribbles of shorthand I couldn’t read.
Porcelain person,
    are you peaceful on the plate,
    dreaming downy mashed potatoes?

Or do the rumpled sheets reveal your restlessness?

You must be stone-cold,
    tucked in glossy iridescence,
    alone.

Is this a life? Awakening under steak?
The ever-present threat of saucy stains?

Your hair—spaghetti strands,
    your fragile, bone-white hand,
    this figure face-down on two smooth pillows

Charms me
    with... false? serenity,
    the glint of glaze,
And how your sleeping eyes won’t meet my gaze.

Your miniscule world—
    a wonder.
    I wonder
    what you might be dreaming.

SARAH LYN ROGERS

"Sleeping Lady Plate,"1976
I spent my life sketching God’s face. With clumsy strokes, thick, with the extravagant colors of childish crayons, with markers on the surface of a balloon that I let rise so He might look at Himself as if in a mirror and recognize Himself in the great smiling face.

Then I tried with books, verbose and ambitious like cathedrals, or wild like a garden in which only the capricious herb grows. But God did not stay in the delicate cathedral or in the bristly garden.

Now I no longer sketch. I remain very quiet, as if I had no will. In silence, as if I had no voice.

I close my eyes to better feel the insect touch of God’s fingers, to catch God who continues restlessly drawing the features of my face, the lines of my body.
MARIE REYNOLDS

Night’s Edge

My mother sits in her green chair knitting,
and lets the truth slip out,
like stitches dropped from a needle.
She can no longer follow the pattern
of lies and omissions.

Her words leap—a footbridge—
between earth and dreams.

The long steel needles click
like an old Underwood typewriter,
like her heels—
California Street, 1947.
Click-click-click.
Sound unpacks the memory—war chest
of secrets and betrayals.

She takes my father’s photo
down from the wall, exiles him
from the family album.

My mother sits in her green chair, tells
stories for the approach of night.
The past spins in and out
of darkness, its axis off-kilter.

Truth—a tangled skein.
She knits. She unravels.
March in My Midtown Yard by the Freeway

Tiny buds on the fig tree
Clover weeds abound in the clay pots
The hardy fruit tree, its waxy green leaves
Stems heavy with kumquats

A new red and orange and yellow
Gerber daisy surprises each day
The variegated lemon heavy with striped leaves
and cotton candy pink buds
But no fruit

The persimmon still bare, slow to move from winter to spring
I come up so close with the hose
And there I can see
The tiniest buds

Light green weeds push up between cinder blocks
Waiting for me
To put flip flops on
And carry the teapot
Heavy with boiling water left after the French press
I tip it and steam those weeds
By tomorrow they’ll be the color of over cooked asparagus
The following day they’ll be gone

Japanese maple, your stems are reddish brown sticks
Not yet a blossom
Empty beehive pot with the greenish blue glaze
You are memories from the big house
With its expansive healthy yard
You are heavy with with dry soil
You’re a blank canvas
Waiting for this year’s plantings
I’m thinking
An expressionistic planting of bright annuals
Or maybe an Impressionistic landscape of lavender
Or a Sacramento Valley palate of camellias

Ivy topiary you were a gift
Who didn’t like to be inside by the open shutters
Sadly you don’t like to be outside on the wrought iron table either
And I don’t like ivy anyway
The feeling is mutual

Little midtown garden who can hear the 50 freeway
And the sirens
And the chatty neighbors

You smell the cooking from the Chinese family to the left
And the Indian family behind you who likes to bar-b-que
And you smell the cigarette smoke from the lady in the yard to the right
Who looks sad and much older than her years

And I’m glad you thrive
I was worried
But sun is sun
And water is water
And life springs eternal

In March in my midtown yard by the freeway
They say it—the anger—started with the very first grito of Hidalgo y Costilla. The yearning and cry for independence: the awareness of their condition.

Some say it was a very old grito, cried long long ago in the age of becoming. Others say the grito never finished, and that shit never landed and spread properly into the lands of independent México; the men felt just as they’d felt before the damned grito. Though nobody spoke of the feeling, everyone heard the yelling, and everyone heard how empty the yell rang. The yell sounded like an unfinished task, like church bells that never quite finished their calling for mass or like the felling of trees that never touched ground.

With it, they survived; with it, they made war. Inevitably, they made a war out of love. Like all wars, this one could be traced back to the moment before it were yelled or indulged. It could be traced in that outdoor kitchen located just beyond Díaz Street. The roads were unpaved, but they had names. And that one right there was Díaz Street. Everybody knew that much. Most, however, did not know that street because of the erect sign claiming it, but because of the wisp of smoke that climbed to the thick orange hue in the early morning of each day, earlier than the rooster that crowed at the break of dawn. Doña Mali was always out there cooking up something she could feed the seven mouths that would contribute, what every acquaintance told her was a blessing of having all boys, muchos cheques.

If one were only to listen, one would hear a grito still trying to reach the heavens—a yell that animated itself like the desperate fin of a whale, reaching and reaching, waving and waving toward the sky like the angriest fist of the angriest of angry men.

In that small town of Atecucario, México, it is said that you could hear an anger so audible, so pronounced and alive, so powerful that the men had relied on a camaraderie built on it; from the beginning, they had learned, as all the boys of Atecucario had, to use anger as substance—as violence—to form it and shape it and express it until it became every emotion: until anger became sadness, pain, warmth, compassion, and love.

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never be broken, or one that would be a shame if it ever were. But what impressed him most, perhaps, were her eyes and the way they looked at him. Eyes shaped by the most astute cheekbones. He could not tell if she looked more india or more guera. But those eyes. They were dark; not quite black, just dark. Just warm. Once again, just power. However, it was a power that did not feel threatening, certainly no threatening like the power his own father had had over him when he was just a boy running from el cinto.

He felt, as she looked at him the way he’d never looked at Mali, disgusted with himself; nobody had ever given him his manhood like that. No, he did not feel Mariposa take it away. He felt a relief in her holding his warmth down there, despite the way he knew he was supposed to feel. He knew that with Mali he had to, always, hold onto his own manhood.

The idea that a woman could help him hold it puzzled him until now. He knew that when his father had told him to court Mali, to marry her, that he was going to have to hold his for the rest of his life: to hang onto it for dear life the way his own father had. Had not his father held onto it so tight that it bruised his mother’s eye the way Mali’s had been bruised when he came home drunk? Hadn’t that been his father’s hand he had once hated—one that now did not look so different from his? Maybe that’s why his father had named him after him: Porfirio. But when he, Porfirio, had once again named his own boy—the youngest—Porfirio, he did not do it for the hope that his son would follow in his steps, but because he deeply hoped that his boy might rename him. Might find some other way.

So he stood there, feeling his tired warmth go limp and cold. He walked to that in between land where he knew he’d find the pattern of his life, one so parallel it might as well look like the tilled fields and crops he was supposed to be laboring in that day.

He had walked away from Mariposa Street, down the small corridor that also had a name, though it looked like nothing more than a dirty alleyway. He had walked past the corridor and ended up in the center of Zamora where he’d been offered an array of children’s toys and shoes that he could not afford. He had walked past the Cathedral that was still not finished but that managed to stare at him from the heights of the heavens. And finally, he had walked past the stands in the middle of the plaza that sold fruta y papas covered with chili powder, lime, and salt. He had wanted one real bad, but to be self-indulgent after the act had made him feel guilty. He walked away. Walked back, as he always did. Ordered one.
in each house, like his and Mali’s, located in that town that was both a place and not, they consumed. Those who did not weren’t men. They consumed every color of plumb they gave to the eyes of their viejas. Every slap that drew a blood with a deeper red than menstrual: a blood more unwarranted than a woman’s first drop during those terrifying years of becoming. And…and, perhaps, most importantly and devastatingly, every eye of their children who watched. Consumed.

Fucking with a passion that never quite hit on love. But, as men.

**

There it lay, nestled between two tomatoes, a handful of green tomatillos, three roasted serranos, two cloves of garlic and her chalky brown hand. It was there. You could hear it in the grating screech of stone to stone.

Porfirio heard it before he consumed it. The sound of the hissing and bubbling frijolitos prefigured it.

His mother grabbed the stone mortar and began to grind; and he, Porfirio, knew that if he could describe how he felt, as he watched his mother bring the pestle into the mortar, that he’d find it there in that very bowl made of stone: just mixture, just revuelto. Just that sound: raucous. Just the popping of tenderly roasted tomatoes that made it easy to rupture; just that sound of the aromatic chiles swirling into the tomatillos; just the sound of garlic and salt. Just the sound of the yell waiting to come out of his throat. One so rough and one so mixed even language could not gather the cud of sounds. Certainly, not like water.

Un taquito mijo?

Sure, ma.

Con unos frijolitos y salsa.

Mmmmmmmm

Yes, Ma. Nobody can make it like you. Ay well whatever it takes to keep you around, mi gordo.

I suppose Porfirio didn’t feel all grinded up like that until his father came home and the grinding became different. Took on a different meaning. During the absence of his father, Porfirio adored the hand that sustained him; yet, he hated how powerless her grip became the moment his father entered the room. The subsistence provided by the molcajete immediately lost its value when those heavy footsteps came through the front door and fell hard. The nourishment left the stone bowl; and as Porfirio consumed the spices, he seethed.

His father would walk in. Late again. He’d give her a smack on the ass. Order a plate. Sit in the living room. Raise his feet (yeah, to get that circulation from a long day’s work… yeah uh, huh, sure that circulation, that blood flowing from a very long day). His routine was like clockwork, despite his late arrival.

He’d call Porfirio over and ask him how many muchachas he had following him at school. Cuantos te cojiste, mijo? And he’d give a disgusting wink.

Porfirio! What on earth do you think you’re asking him. He’s 12!

Mija I’m just making sure my boy is being a boy. He’s becoming a man, after all, whether you like it or not.

Her eyes glazed with a fear every mother of a son will have experienced. They glazed with the realization that her boy, her baby, her child, was becoming a man. A man. What did that mean for the boy that had come out and into the world crying, longing for her arms that mean for the boy that had come out and into the world crying, longing for her arms... What did it mean for him to come into the world so terrified and in need of her. Would he, her own son, need another woman the way her husband ran from them and into another woman’s? What did it mean for him to come into the world so terrified and in need of her. Would he, her own son, need another woman the way he had once needed her? Not the kind of needing his father called for every night, with the scent of an unfamiliar body he had touched just hours earlier. She wanted her son to need a woman the way he had needed his mother the day he was born; she wanted him to need someone in the way that we all need someone: to need someone for them, because of them, because of their purpose... not for us, not for our own.

Don Porfirio saw the glaze come over her eyes.

Come on mija, you know I was only
When you learn to flatten that tortilla as well as your mother than maybe we can talk about a pinche escuela. He began to roar with laughter, his rotted teeth hardly hanging to the gums.

Ha. Escuela, he hollered once more as he scratched his inner thigh with a gusto so hard you could hear the pubic hair brushing into his crotch.

Maybe that is when she first learned it. Or maybe she learned it when Porfirio came back from California, back from working in the strange lands of the north, Los Estados Unidos. Still a man; for men seemed to mean the same thing there as they did here. She had hoped that he’d come back not so ready to unfasten his belt when little Porfirio, or any of her boys, did something wrong or when he were ready to mount her again each night. Maybe that is when she’d learned it. When she learned the place didn’t matter. When the hope had been lost. Hope that there had been a place in the world for men. Hope that there had been a place for women. Hope for it to mean something different, to be a man.

**

Now the real grito not heard near the hidden brush and creek of Atecucario, where the shade of the nighttime always covered first, now that was a cry begging to be heard. It needed to be heard, but the anger always left the job undone.

If one were to only listen, one would hear, surely, not the cry of La Llorona. Most of the people in Atecucario still tell the story that way. But those who were really there, those who are still there listening to the cry, know that this cry came from the throat of a boy.

The boy. They called him Ishmael, though they did not know his name.

They called him un maricón, a faggot, when they wanted to destroy him. They needed to break him because for him to be whole threatened what they thought it meant to be, wholly, un hombre. He was going to ruin the name of their sagrada familia—el nombre de los hermanos—el nombre del hombre.

Porfirio and the boys relied on their hate for Ishmael the way their fathers did; but hate never frees, hate chains. They laughed at him the way they had heard their own fathers laugh at boys like him, and although Ishmael was from the city of Zamora, and would only come into town to visit his grandmother each week, they named him El Maricón de Atecucario. Perhaps they named him to both deny him and make him theirs.

The group of boys that walked alongside Porfirio circled Ishmael as they saw him walking near the edge of the creek. He had hair the color of dried bark; it looked dirty, and most of it covered his face. His hands were in his pockets, as they always were; he kept his hands hidden, and repressed all forms of expression for fear that everyone was reading him the way he was, desperately, reading the world. He had always found, when looking down the rubble at the edge of the water, a peace and appreciation for how easily the water formed to the edge of the creek. He loved that it too—water—formed to him when he decided to dip in his legs. Ishmael wished it were that easy to immerse oneself into the rest of the world.

When they found him, they took Ishmael behind the creek where the burnt and golden grass hardly stood tall, where the flaming and setting sun allowed the Jacaranda tree to produce the shade they needed, and where they knew the yells of un maricón would remain silent. There his voice would echo into
the lifeless ripples of the muddied waters; the yells would crawl just above the surface of the troubled water and his voice would fall with the others that had sunk before him, down where the pescados searched for food among the verdure left by moss-covered stone, down where only the light of the sunset or incoming moonlight would come forth like an interrupted thought, down where another life began to gurgle, deeper, deeper, drowned, down where another life existed: the life and listening the boys needed, but would never know or find or hear.

They grabbed onto his wrists placing the darker sides of his hands behind his back. Ishmael was quiet, and he did not answer their questions. He let them fill his silence. And when he did yell from the pain of the glass breaking his backside, nobody heard him.

It was an act of men fucking men: the only way it could happen for them.

“Te gusta la verga buey,” Porfirio whispered as he unbuckled the pants and pulled them down until Ishmael’s brown buttocks were left trembling, cold and exposed. The muscles of Ishmael’s thighs contracted and he felt the soft dirt tremble beneath his feet. The earth felt marshy and the grass lied compressed beneath the feet of Porfirio who stood directly behind Ishmael.

The group of boys did not know why, but their knees always buckled around Ishmael; they had trouble holding their feet up. They lost the feeling and ground they felt as hombres con cojones—as hombres who would go a chingar their viejas grabbing hold of her like she was meant to be on all fours. They broke their women and fucked them the way they wanted to break Ishmael for being un joto; they wanted to chingar him they way they did their wives, fucking them as men. So they could stand, as men.

So they decided to give Ishmael the fuck they figured he’d always wanted. They grabbed the dirty glass that was an empty Coca Cola bottle and shoved it right up into the boy’s anus until he shrieked, bleeding. He cried as he felt the cold and lifeless entrance.

Porfirio played with the bottle, half in and half out, and proceeded to break the bottle in half so the glass would remain inside of Ishmael—marking Ishmael; fucked and his, Porfirio felt grounded.

And the waters sang, and the waters cried for Ishmael:

* * *

There by the waters, as the colors of dusk cover the creek like a blanket, it is said a woman is spotted mourning her lost son. Some still say she goes by La Llorona. Others know better and say her name is Mariposa. Some say she cries for more than one child. Others say all that is left of her cry is the light flutter of butterflies that come each spring to sit on the edge of leaves that sprout from the pebbles lining the water. That is the only cry they hear now.

They forget the cry of Ishmael as he stood there on all fours. Alone, feeling as lifeless as the bottle inside of him. They forget that he had screamed all he could scream until the roar became a light clamor only the rings left by the surface of the water could speak and understand. They forget that the waters spoke that day. An unfinished grito, they said.

* * *
"JADED"
APRRIEL NEGRETE -> MIXED MEDIA
Catalina sweeps the courtyard of leaves—yellow, gold, red—from the Ginkgo trees and the Japanese maples. Violet plants with tiny buds sprout from the ground beneath the fallen leaves. Sadness fills her body. Her movements are slow. Her arms hurt. Later she clears more leaves with the blower, a daily task in autumn. She is in the back of the parking lot under the shadow of tall trees.

She thinks about her son, Joseph. He is small for his age, thin, delicate-boned, with silky black hair. His sixth grade teacher says that he is very quiet in class. But when he and Catalina are alone he’s more talkative, and he likes to gently tease her, to pull at strands of her tinted hair, and to caress her shoulders.

Then there are her girls who still live in the Michoacan mountain village where they grew up. They’re women by now. Sexy. Full of life from what she can see in their photos. The older one is married and has a four-year-old boy. But Catalina has never met him. She longs to return. To be with her family, with the friends she has known all her life, to cook and eat familiar food and speak Spanish, and not feel flustered in English-speaking stores and frightened, as she sometimes feels in the pit of her stomach.

But she cannot go back. The trip across the border when Joseph was only eight years old was too hard to repeat. At least twenty of them, mothers and children and old men and little children, were squeezed together like fish, a baby’s foot nearly in her mouth, and above them, with only a tiny air space, a metal platform, and they could scarcely breathe the smelly air. Finally they got off, staggering, too dangerous to repeat. That time they had luck—

Catalina finishes sweeping the courtyard. Then using the noisy blower, which she hates, she cleans off more leaves from the parking lot. Finally she turns it off and takes relief in the silence that follows, broken only by the hum of cars from the nearby freeway. She sits down on the steps of the courtyard and gazes up at the sky.

How did anyone survive here without the comfort of a large family? she wondered. In this land where she does not speak the language, there is only Aunt Mathilda. She will not let herself become a burden to her aunt. She will make her own way. Carry her own weight. Catalina is a large woman, large in body and spirit, with soft brown eyes that lose focus as she contemplates the sky, the surroundings, and her life.

If only Armando would marry her. At the beginning, he had promised that he would.

Odor of tamales, of birria, of chiles, of chicken mole—good Mexican food—comes from her neighbor Mercedes’ apartment. Sometimes Catalina helps Mercedes and other tenants with cleaning. This money that she earns, along with small amounts of cash that Armando gives her, is all that she has. He can be generous if he’s in the mood. But at other times she has to beg and plead for just a few dollars with which to buy their food.

Tough to depend on him. He knows that. Damn him!

“Amor!” she cries out across the courtyard. Armando is painting the door of Apartment 109 with a fresh coat of glossy brown paint. “Amor! I am going for a walk.”

“Okay,” he says.

She treads along the path that leads out of the parking lot onto the suburban street with its shady trees and stucco houses. The sidewalk is narrow, and there is little traffic at this time of day. How empty of life the streets are here. There are no corner tiendas, no people. No taco stands. No music. No trucks that blare their wares through loud speakers. No chickens or stray dogs. Everything tidy and neat and lifeless! Except for the tawdry “gentlemen’s club” that Armando occasionally visits. Except for a small Spanish-speaking bar downtown where she once went alone.

The sun is beginning to sink lower in the sky, and a chill comes over her. Lost in her thoughts, she turns back. She has to clean a vacant apartment, then prepare dinner. He has imported her as a servant. That’s the truth. Someone to fuck and cook and clean. Promise her a
That night after he has settled down in front of the TV with a Dos Equis to watch the News on Channel Four, she says in a strangulated voice, “I am your slave.”

“What?” He puts down his beer on the coffee table. It will leave a mark that she will try to eradicate with lemon oil. “Slave? That’s bullshit. You take my car and drive wherever you want. You go to bars and meet strange men. Puta.”

“Only once did I go! I never messed with anyone! You’re no one to talk.”

He draws back his hand as if to hit her. He is a small, wiry man, and he is strong.

“Stop!” She backs away. “I cook and clean and cook for you. I made the posole tonight. I help you paint the empty apartments, and I scrub the toilets and mop the floors, and I use the heavy carpet steamer even though it hurts my back.”

Joseph, she realizes, is listening. He always stays very quiet, hidden in his room during their fights. Poor kid. What is all this doing to him? And after the doings of his own father, Hector? Men. Mierda. Bastards!

“What is it you want?” Armando asks, his voice changing into a gentler tone.

“Marry me. Then I’ll have papers, and I can get a real job and go back to visit my children. Then I won’t be afraid any longer of la migra.”

She bursts into tears and collapses on the couch.

She hears Joseph’s soft footsteps. He has gone into the kitchen for something, and then he creeps back to his room to study or perhaps to play the video game that Armando bought him for Christmas.

“Amor,” he says, folding her in his arms. “I love you. I love your son. Isn’t that enough?”

“No,” she sobs. “It isn’t.” She wrenches away from him, and she begins drying their dinner dishes. Joseph can hear every word. She is embarrassed for him, hurting to realize that her hurt affects him.

Later that night she and Armando watch a TV wedding conducted at a chapel in Las Vegas.

“We could get married in Las Vegas,” she says.

“Catalina, don’t bug me! You know I love you. But you go to bars.”

“I only went once.”

Have you been with anyone else? Tell me the truth?”

“No,” she says. “You’re more than enough! But I need marriage papers so I can get a job and go to night school.”

He walks out and slams the door behind him.

“Wait,” her mother would have advised. “Paciencia. Men are afraid of marriage. Look what he went through getting a divorce. Paciencia, m’hija.”

“That was years ago, Mama.”

Over the next few days she drags her body through the motions of housework, cleaning, cooking, and submits passively to him in bed. Sometimes she pretends to be sound asleep, but she can’t sleep easily, and long after he is snoring she lies awake, thinking.

Joseph is happy here. He likes his school. He is making friends. Learning English. Armando has treated him decently. She cannot not take her son away from all this and take him back to their mountain village. Drug cartels have bypassed their village so far. Joseph could
marry a local girl, lead a peaceful and happy life among his own people. There were so many dangers here, even in the suburbs. Drugs and sex and crime and gangs.

Maybe in the end, he will be happier back home!

But if they leave, they cannot return.

As if picking up her thoughts, a change comes over Joseph. He has always been a good child, but he becomes irritable and rude. One morning he yells at Armando, who slaps him hard across the face.

“Your son is learning bad habits,” Armando shouts. “He’s spoiled!” She grabs Joseph’s hand. “Go!” she says. “Go now and wait for the school bus!” She thrusts his lunch in its paper bag into his hands. “Go!”

“Fuck!” he shouts with his new-found English. “Fuck you. Armando!”


She turns her back to him and finishes washing the breakfast dishes through a haze of tears. When she hears Armando leave, she breathes a sigh of relief.

That night Catalina goes back to the Spanish-speaking bar. “You can stay with me,” offers a woman with long red hair from San Cristobal.

“No, I don’t want to do that,” murmurs Catalina. She bursts into a flood of weeping. Ignoring the crowd of men, the woman embraces Catalina, holds her close against her bosom, and tries to comfort her.

“You’re right,” she announces to Armando the next morning, after Joseph has left on the school bus. “It’s better we go back. It’s been three years now. You have had time to marry me! It’s power you want. You don’t want to lose it. You want to keep me under your thumb.”

He shakes his head. “No. No, mi amor.”

He takes a bottle of Dos Equis out of the refrigerator, although it’s still early in the morning. Lately he has been drinking more.

“How would you feel if we left?” she asks Joseph that afternoon. He looks sad for a moment, and then he shrugs. “I don’t care,” he says. “It doesn’t matter.”

“Will you miss school?”

“I don’t know.”

“If we go back to Mexico, we’ll be with the family.”

“Mama, he doesn’t treat you right,” he says in a low voice.

The next morning, after Armando has gone on an errand, she swiftly packs a suitcase with a few essential items. Just as she is fastening the suitcase, she hears his footsteps, and he comes up behind her.

“Amor,” he says. “I don’t want to lose you.” His voice is gentle. When she looks into his dark eyes, she sees so much sadness, along with fear.

She almost melts. She lets him hold her, and she feels his tears against her face. He kisses her hungrily, and she lets him make love to her on the bed, amidst the pile of clothing she is going to leave behind.

But after lunch, while he is driving out to Concord to get a plumbing part, she packs Joseph’s things, calls a taxi, picks up Joseph at his school, and has the driver take them to the Greyhound Terminal in gritty downtown Oakland.

While they wait for the bus, she fingers her cell phone. The waiting room has hard plastic seats, a floor strewn with cigarette butts, an overflowing garbage can, the smell of chewing gum and smoke and stale food from the hamburger stand. A few men are waiting. One smells of alcohol. Another mutters to himself. A very large woman with a tiny little blonde girl plops down next to them.

“My it’s hot in here,” she says to Catalina.

“No entiendo,” says Catalina, although she did understand. Oh, to be back in her country!

“I’m hungry, Mom.”

Mom. Already he is Americanized. She buys him a hot dog and Cokes for both of them. She is too tense to swallow anything solid.

The bus arrives at six that evening, and they board. As they roll south through San Jose and towards Fresno, Joseph falls asleep, his head nestled in her lap. She is sweating, and he feels too heavy, but she doesn’t want to wake him.

Armando barely registers the images moving across the TV screen. He gets up, opens another Dos Equis, and soon drains its contents, adding it to the five empty bottles on the table in front of him. He rubs his eyes.

At midnight he calls her cell phone. No answer. After a few minutes, he tries again. Where would the bus be by now? Were they already at the border? Had she really planned to go back to Mexico? Maybe they would stay with her aunt. Or perhaps she had another man already on the side. One from the Spanish-speaking bar. She drove Armando’s car freely to shop for groceries and God knows what else. Armando had rarely questioned her.

Then there was Joseph. Until recently the boy had been sweet-tempered, obedient. Armando already misses him! The boy and Catalina have both grown on him, embedded in his heart.

He picks up the phone and calls again. And again. No answer. Finally he falls asleep at the kitchen table, the phone cradled in his hand. At dawn he wakes up with a start. Pale light seeps through the hand-sewn curtains.

They are in San Ysidro, and the Customs Station looms ahead. She looks at her cell phone, realizes for the first time that it has been off all night, and turns it back on.

Seconds later it rings.

As he prays to hear her voice, he hears the pounding of his heart.
Little Jimmy and Thompson walked through a dense forest at night, with only a flashlight and crescent moon for illumination. Twigs snapped under their feet, accompanied by the baritone hoots of owls. Hairs stood on the back of their necks, as they saw the shadow of an abnormally long figure cast itself on the ground. They broke out into a sprint, only to come face to face with—

“If it turns out to be slenderman, I’m going to punch something.” Thompson threatened. It was not slenderman, as Thompson had feared, but a vampire, and it—

“You’re not serious, are you? A vampire? What am I, a teenage girl?”

A werewolf howled in the distance—

“That’s just as bad.”

A hooded figure with a chainsaw—

Little Jimmy yawned and rolled like a dog on the ground out of boredom.

Thunder roared overhead—

“I like thunder.” Little Jimmy protested.

A malevolent animatronic from Chuck-E-Cheese’s lunged at Thompson—

“Jumpscares are overused.”

An army of zombies made their way toward the two brothers—

“I have zombie repellant.”

Suddenly, the narrator tightened her hands around Thompson’s throat and threatened to kill him off for real if he didn’t shape up and start acting scared. “I need to move this plot along somehow!”

“Not my problem.” Thompson shrugged. “And go ahead and kill me off. I’m not afraid of dying if it means I can leave this boring place.”

The narrator realized she needed to get more creative. Fine. A snowman with octopus arms and cactus for teeth—No, too silly. A cabin—no, cabins are overused. A spider—no, overused. A fireman, who had gone insane from toxic waste—

“ Toxic waste is overused.”

—took toward Thompson and Little Jimmy on all fours. His hat blew off in the wind, revealing a third eye and terrifying poor Little Jimmy—

“I’m not scared.”

Little Jimmy was so scared, in fact, that he clutched to Thompson with shaking hands. Thompson, although terrified also, embraced him and assured him he would die before he let the rabid fireman kill Little Jimmy.

“I would never embrace my brother, let alone die for him. I kick him on a daily basis.”

The narrator screamed and pounded her keyboard with two enraged fists. “That’s it! I’m ending this right now before I get an ulcer!” A bear came and ate their family but they survived and learned the importance of defending and loving one another and they sang songs with woodland creatures THE END!

“…but we didn’t have a family to begin with.”
The woman with the octopus arms growing out of her head was unhappy. Rippling with strength, constantly moving, the unruly tentacles were a huge hassle. If she didn’t wear a tightly-tied scarf on her head, they would get into all kinds of mischief at times like this when she was walking home from work. People reacted with either fascination or horror when they saw her hair. Children tended to be louder, more vocal than adults and a child’s exclamation was often her first clue that a loose tentacle was working its way out from underneath the scarf. It’s why she didn’t go out much. Walking down the street to cries of “Oh my God” and “Can I touch them?” was tiring.

On a positive note she was glad to have a new job. The job at the auto dismantlers had gotten her through hard times but she never wanted to remove another hub cap from a wheel again. The guys at the yard loved to stand around and watch her tentacles grab the edge of the hub cap, twist and—bam—quick as that it was off. The tentacles were strong—as one guy found out who decided to get a little too personal for her taste.

But it was dirty, hard work and she was the only woman. So she had applied right away when she saw the sign in the candy factory window on her way home. The candy factory was much cleaner than the auto dismantlers. And the men all worked as janitors—only other women on the line right now. She knew that was sexist of the company but she felt more comfortable around other women and liked it. They had gradually learned to accept her unique abilities. She’d hid the tentacles at first and just used two hands to pack the fancy bonbons into their little boxes. But one day when it was hot she’d taken off her scarf and discovered the tentacles could help. With plastic wrap rubber-banded over the tips for cleanliness, it turned out they could do delicate work too. Now she got more candies packed than anyone else and they were always perfect. Unfortunately this didn’t endear her to her co-workers, which brought her back to another issue.

She longed for a friend. No one wanted to date a girl with eight brawny arms for hair. She couldn’t really blame them and found she wasn’t really interested in changing that. She’d been lonely all her life, no reason to expect it to be different now. At least Mom understood what it was like to be “special” although personally Anemone, better known as Annie, was glad she hadn’t inherited Mom’s slick, straight, coal black hair. It just lay there and Mom couldn’t do a thing with it. The time she got that perm done it was right back to straight the next day. Annie was surprised the hairdresser had managed to do the perm at all, what with the static electricity Mom’s hair generated. But she could walk down the street and pass for normal—unless it was stormy. The lightning bolts leaking out tended to draw attention. Mom always complained about split ends the next day, Annie remembered with a smile. No, she got her hair from Dad’s side of the family. Of course she would get the more dramatic presentation. No discrete little arms mixed with frizzy hair like cousin Abalone. Abby hardly had any problems getting dates, although Annie had heard that getting a second date could be tough for Abby so she shouldn’t be too jealous she supposed.

She’d tried getting to know some of the women at the candy factory but they were apparently put off by her hair or by the competition or both. She had thought things might be different there but she was wrong. She did her job and that was it. Life was incredibly boring. Maybe she should take up a
hobby—watercolor, puzzles, ships in a bottle? She’d visit the hobby store tomorrow. Now she wanted to get home, take off her uniform and let down her hair, so to speak.

The next afternoon Annie worked her way from one end of the hobby store to the other. She had wrapped her head in her biggest scarf to try to contain the arms and keep them from disturbing the displays. It kept the stares down for a while but once people noticed that the scarf’s bulges were moving they huddled together on the other side of the store. She finally settled on knitting, buying an instruction video along with red yarn and needles. She bought a special basket to hold it all. She couldn’t wait to get home.

She watched the video and carefully followed the instructions. After a few tries she had cast her first stitch and completed a row. She was feeling quite good about herself. The video suggested knitting a scarf as your first project so Annie went back to work, hair quiescent as she knitted and purled. It wasn’t long before she had produced a respectable length. The tentacles hadn’t gotten into any trouble while she was working. She had been a little afraid they would start playing with the yarn and make a huge tangled mess. It seemed that knitting was good for her hair, what a wonderful bonus.

She stopped to make herself coffee and turned on the TV. There was an ad for the big aquarium downtown, some special deal tomorrow only. Maybe she should go. So far she’d kept away from aquariums of all kinds and sizes. She wasn’t sure how her hair would react. But she was curious about the exhibits, especially the octopus. She didn’t know how realistic her hair was except from pictures. She got ready for bed, letting the idea simmer in the back of her mind.

In the morning she decided to go to the aquarium. She wore her scarf again—she didn’t want to be mistaken for a display or something. After she paid for her ticket, she followed the arrows to the elevator and the octopus and squid exhibits. As she drew close to the octopus tank she could see that her hair was very realistic. If she took off her scarf you wouldn’t be able to tell it apart from the octopus behind the glass. She wasn’t sure how she felt about that.

She walked over to the giant squid’s tank and peered through the dim waters at its long, lanky form. It was beautiful, quite handsome with its black skin and wing-like fins; much more attractive than the octopus. It had tentacles too but they were slim and sleek, much nicer looking than her big, ropy ones. She wondered if the squid—“Susan” said a little plaque on the glass—would come closer if she took off her scarf. What would she do if she saw Annie’s hair, writhing in the glaring light of the corridor? Some wild impulse seized her and she whipped off her scarf, to the dismay of all the bystanders. All eight tentacles reached for the glass, the closest ones adhering themselves and drawing her steadily closer. At first the squid inside didn’t notice anything. But then she seemed to come alert, her own tentacles twitching and straining in Annie’s direction. She swam closer and closer until her shorter tentacles reached out and touched the glass, matching Annie’s, suction cup for suction cup as far as hers would reach. Her eye approached the glass and they stared at each other unblinking for the longest time.

Ten years later and they were still happy together despite the many obstacles they had overcome. Annie recalled the wedding ceremony at the Aquarium’s outdoor pool like it was yesterday. It had been in all the papers. Her white spandex outfit and oxygen tank had been stunning next to Susan’s dark beauty. They had two young children. The girl, Octavia, took after Susan and swam with her in the special tank they had built in the back yard. The boy, Zeus, took after his grandmother, which made it hard to get the whole family together for a picture. Lightning and water don’t mix. Nevertheless, Annie was very happy and her cousin Abby was jealous, which, Annie thought, was only fair.
The spinning sensation of the merry-go-round left me feeling as if I wanted to throw up. Only after it slowed down did I realize that was the least of my worries. As it came to a complete stop, I looked up and there she was. A five-foot-two-inch giant staring me down. Out of all the kids at the park that day, she chose me. How could I possibly be a fair match for this girl? I was small enough to be mistaken for a malnourished three-year-old.

Her two ponytails stuck straight out horizontally, screaming for someone to pin them down. She wore a black polka dot skirt, white sweater with black and white oxfords that looked painfully tight on her feet. Her legs seemed to take strides towards me like a galloping giraffe. She was dark as the frying pan my mother would fry my eggs in and as mean as the steam flowing from our whistling teakettle.

She jumped onto the merry-go-round and punched me with all her might right in the center of my back. As I stumbled and held on to the cold steel bar of the merry-go-round, I stared at her, eyes as big as the circles of a beaming flashlight. I was in shock, didn’t know what to do, so I stood there expressionless. As she pulled my long ponytails with red ribbons, my mother took pride in pressing bone straight every Sunday, she laughed out loud from the painful expressions coming from my face.

The playground bully was mad because my ponytails were long and hers weren’t. She said I thought I was better because my hair was long.

After it was over, I ran home as fast as I could and told no one what happened to me at the park. The feeling I used to get of the wind hitting my face as I went around and around on that merry-go-round ended for me that day.
Panting, moaning, and groaning wafted through the walls. Again. The first time it had been exciting. A stranger in the house. After hours whispers woke me. Even after dessert was served. Glorious dessert. Only served when Papa was gone. And boy, was he gone.

Ice cream. We never got ice cream. The Neapolitan bubbled in my gut. There was a reason I never ate it. Alone in the dark bathroom I could hear the giggles of my mother amidst the rumblings of the man. The man I had smelled the moment he entered our humble home. Clean. The crisp poignant cut of cologne splashed on a fresh shave. The mint blended with the musk. I liked the musk. Despite the cries of my bowels, I listened as intently as I could.

I had never seen his face. Never a shred of his clothing. I imagined as I shivered on the white porcelain, if he was rich or poor. If he was handsome or rugged. My father was neither. He ambled around with a large and superfluous belly and temper. He smelled of sitting. Sitting all day in a truck with wrappers falling out and catching the wind when he heaved out of that big rig truck. Sitting when he got home, on the worn couch imprinted with his smell of sit. Never fresh and clean. Never sharp and enticing.

I preferred sharp and enticing. So did Mama. Obviously.

Papa’s truck roared when it pulled up on our street. Sometimes he would blast the horn if someone parked in his spot. No one did that anymore. Maple Street knew when he was home. The screaming and the fighting would be the echo to his horn. Always loud. Never whispers like when the musk and mint crept through the dark house. Never ice cream. Dreaded ice cream.

The last night there had been pie. Pie with no ice cream. Good for a greedy boy who would scoop it on with no regard to his aching belly later. No ice cream. No pent breath yearning for slivers of hushed conversations.

A quiet click of the backdoor went unheard. The screams were muffled, deaf.

Daylight brought me to the kitchen. Papa was home. Soundless and smug. No fighting. No screaming. Mama was still in bed? He ruffles my hair on his way out the door. He is whistling a tune I don’t know. Ice cream in the freezer. A gift from Papa.

The house is quiet. So quiet. Musk and mint are in the air, but not alone. Something else. Something sharp and unfamiliar. Something that reminds me of the time I got into Papa’s tools and nearly took my finger clean off.

I pause as Papa’s truck roars to life far away. Around the corner. By Billy’s house. Peering out the window I see the smoke stack between a break in the trees. Eyes down. Dirt in the yard. Upturned. Something on the top of the dirt.

Curious, I push the back door open and walk slowly to the mound. The heap of earth seems ominous. Forbidden. Even a boy with eyes as young as mine knows that the shiny pair of shoes I eyed from the window upstairs carry the scent of mint and musk for a reason. Why are they stacked on the pile? Why are Mama’s shoes sitting quietly by? Clean. Perfect. Ready to slip on and go out dancing.

I furrow my brow and glance to the left. Why did I look there? The makeshift cross is broken now. Just a stick with Pluto’s name in misspelled sharpie marker. I look back to the display before me. My mouth gapes open in a scream no one hears.
People say Mexico is hot. Those who would say that aren’t lying, but the weather really isn’t as intense as some might say. There are places here in America were the sun scorches the earth with unrelenting force. What makes the heat bad, so unbearable in Mexico, is the lack of modern amenities. No air conditioning makes the houses muggy like a sauna. The best choice for most is to lay on the shaded cement in the streets.

I travelled to the ghetto of Tecate, Mexico, and was able to experience the poverty that the people down there have to live through every day of their life. At one point during the week I was down there, I was playing soccer with some of the local area’s children. The ball was kicked a little too far to the side and consequently rolled into one of the many garbage filled ditches. These dirty, dusty ditches populate the unorganized dirt roads of the city. And even in the more developed parts, they run unopposed. Stepping around the broken glass, decimated computers, and other such waste no one has cared to clean up, I came upon a folded up mattress. Another friend and I, thinking nothing of it, picked up the ball and left to continue our game.

A few hours later, dirty and parched, we walked back to the shade of the small local church where we had been spending the past few days. I was communicating with a few of my friends and some of the locals, and one word kept popping up. “Body.” Upon further listening, I found out that the mattress from earlier hadn’t been empty. There was a body inside, probably a couple days old. A coffin for those too poor to afford a real one, and no one was going to clean it up. Not the police, the locals, or the dead man’s family and friends (assuming he had any). I realized how luxurious America is, how privileged we are. All while in a place where a dead body is just another everyday occurrence. Trash on the already cluttered street.
I knew I had one.

I had to have one; I was a woman after all.

Okay, I was a girl.

Simply, a girl.

But where could it be?

I had never seen it, or touched it, but I had complete confidence that it existed.

My nine-year-old self sat on the edge of my bed, my thighs shaking in anticipation.

I was fumbling as I pulled down my white cotton panties, shimmying them down, past my never-shaven legs, off my ankles, and finally to the floor.

Biting down on my lower lip, I looked to my pure white night stand, at my bedazzled hand mirror, a gift with a matching hairbrush that arrived in my stocking the prior Christmas.

I picked up the mirror, staring at the wide-eyed reflection looking back at me.

With one swift movement, I rested back on my butterfly pillow, gliding the mirror between my quivering legs.

After building up enough courage to look down, I peeked, one eye at a time.

Slowly, then all at once.

Cocking my head from side to side, I squinted, unsure of what I was looking at.

It occurred to me to shift the mirror downwards.

I did so slowly.

There it was!
Knock knock. My mother was at my bedroom door, interrupting me from my nap. My mom looked surprisingly anxious to share some news. She took a photograph from behind her faded skirt; on it appeared a man. He was in a tuxedo, and the photograph looked studio finished. He had a dashing smile, incredibly curly hair, and an intimidating look in his eyes. He was attractive.

My mom explained, “He lives in the US, and his family is arranging for you to get married to him.” I was shocked as my mom explained his occupation and went into detail about his family.

America? I was eighteen years old, living in a small village in the Vanua Levu island of Fiji. My family is small, and we were indescribably poor. Nevertheless here was my mom relishing the fact that someone from America wanted to marry me and give me the life I had never dreamed of.

This was the day that I realized my life could be something different. This is the day that I discovered the potential of the world I lived in. The opportunities were endless for me, and it all started with this one photograph.
T H A D  S Z Y M A N S K I

Twin Rainbows

Rainbows are depicted as
Illusions famed with mundane eyes
To wander from with saddened sighs.
Lonely hearts with uplifting faces
Deepening their God’s good graces.
Eyes wander of their own accord
To treasure they can scarce afford
A while at least to glimpse its beauty,
Rainbows have two duties.
Most don’t realize rainbows as twins
Unseen although it’s there—
Every rainbow is a pair.
The second a space apart from the first
Colors similar, twin-like, reversed.
As brightest blue claims high/lower edges,
The inner partitions need most to be mended.
A room of nothing between them exists
A vacuum of colors that ever persists
Emptiness, darkness, resists and consists
An area darkened by ignorant bliss
Like a vacuum designed to undo the confused,
Of the space between me—and someone like you.
“Eureka!—I have found it!”
—Archimedes

“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”
—Henry David Thoreau

“Gratitude bestows reverence, allowing us to encounter everyday epiphanies, those transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience life and the world.”
—John Milton

“One could kick oneself for not having the idea earlier; it now seems so obvious. Yet before, everything was in a fog.”
—Francis Crick

“The most exciting phrase to hear in science, the one that heralds new discoveries, is not 'Eureka!' but 'That's funny...’”
—Isaac Asimov

“We even call it a flash (of insight), a eureka moment, a light bulb in our heads that suddenly turns on. But if you reflect on this phenomenon for a moment, you know you don't go suddenly from a blank mind to a fully formed solution…. Insight comes in small increments, leveraging what was already there.”
—M

“Creativity and insight almost always involve an experience of acute pattern recognition: the eureka moment in which we perceive the interconnection between disparate concepts or ideas to reveal something new.”
—Jason Silva

“The most exciting phrase to hear in science, the one that heralds new discoveries, is not 'Eureka!' but 'That’s funny...’”
—Isaac Asimov

“Try curiosity..”
—Dorothy Parker

“If you think of feelings you have when you are awed by something—for example, knowing that elements in your body trace to exploded stars—I call that a spiritual reaction, speaking of awe and majesty, where words fail you.”
—Neil deGrasse Tyson

“A likely impossibility is always preferable to an unconvincing possibility”
—Aristotle
"PAPA'S PIANO"
GOSPEL CRUZ » » » PHOTOGRAPHY
Lisa Dominguez Abraham teaches at CRC. Her poems have appeared in many journals, including *Prairie Schooner* and *The North American Review*. Periodically she collaborates with Mathilde Mukantabana (former CRC history teacher and current Rwandan ambassador to the US) translating oral folk tales from Rwanda into English.

Diane Lovegrove Bader is the editor of *Crone Times* and past editor of the *West Virginia Cursillo* newsletter. She has been published in *The Sacramento AIDS Manual*, *Buffalo Women’s Vision*, *Catholic Women’s Network*, and *Cosumnes River Journal*. A former teacher and church liturgist, she has sung with the CRC Gospel Choir since 2000.

Drahcir Ballesteros has been a CRC student since late 2010. Born in the Philippines, he is the first of his family to attend college in the US. Drahcir is pursuing a television and film major and is looking forward to transferring to CSU San Francisco.

Rehnaz Bi is originally from a small town in Fiji called Vanua-levu. Her family was poor and endured many hardships and struggles to come to the US. This is her first semester at CRC, and she hopes to transfer to CSU Sacramento to pursue a career as a registered nurse.

Kelsie Burnell is a twenty-year-old English major at Sacramento City College. This is her final semester before transferring to CSU Sacramento to finish her Bachelor’s. In the future, she plans on teaching English at the high school level and furthering her education as far as it may take her.

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Sarah Cheadle is a married mom of a half-dozen kids. She has lived in California her entire life, save for a few years in the US Army. She is attending CRC with plans to transfer to CSU Sacramento for a Master’s in Social Work. She enjoys writing, children, and life.

Gospel Cruz is a writer, photographer, dancer, musician, singer, baker, foreign language enthusiast, and aspiring filmmaker. It sounds impressive, but she never reveals that she is actually terrible at all of these things. She thrives on being mediocre in low-standard places; the minimal amount work for the max amount of praise.

José Alfaro was raised in Sacramento, California in a working class Mexican American family. He completed his Bachelor’s in English Literature at CSU San Francisco in 2014. He is a current PhD student of English at UC Riverside where he observes the intersections between Latino/a Studies, Queer Theory, Masculinity Studies, and Borderlands Discourse.

Malaak Allathkani is a student at Cosumnes River College who plans on transferring to UC Davis in the next year. She plans on majoring in human development and then go to medical school. Her dream is to become a general practitioner in order to help refugees in the Middle East.

Nina Adkins is a retired Registered Nurse and educator, who has been painting for nearly thirty years. She is a mixed media artist with an eclectic style. The beautiful landscape of New Mexico inspires her work. Nina is represented at the Yucca Gallery and Gallery ABQ, both in Albuquerque. More about Nina and her art can be found at www.facebook.com/Ninaadkinsartist.

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Katrina Mae Cruz traveled from Saipan, a tiny island in the Pacific, nearly a year ago to start and finish her college education in California. Currently, she is majoring in biology in hopes of working in the medical field. When she is not seen vigorously studying or hanging out with her friends, Katrina can be found listening to music, playing musical instruments, and completing her quest to find the best tteokbokki (an awesome Korean snack she will most definitely recommend to anyone) in the world.

Paul Eberhart-Phillips is a twenty-year-old second-year student. He enjoys songwriting, playing music, and basketball. Born in New Zealand, Paul has lived in Alaska, Kansas, and California, most recently in Santa Barbara before moving to Elk Grove. In his piece, Paul speaks about being a vegetarian and the reactions of others to that part of his life.
**María Espinosa** has published four novels, among which *Longing* received an American Book Award and *Dying Unfinished* a PEN Oakland Award. She has also published two poetry chapbooks and a critical translation of George Sand’s 19th-century French novel *Lelia*. A California native, she recently moved to New Mexico.

**Susan Flynn** is a poet and psychoanalyst, who lives, works, and writes in Sacramento and Georgetown, California. Her poetry has been published in the *Tule Review*, the *Oberon Journal*, the anthology *Late Peaches*, and in *The Outrider Review*. Her work has also been published in the difficult art of drinking copious cups of coffee. His work has also been published in *The Outrider Review*.

**Xico González** is an educator, artist, poet, and a political and cultural activista based in Sacramento, California. He received a Master’s in Spanish from CSU Sacramento and a Master’s of Fine Arts in Art Studio from UC Davis. González currently teaches Spanish and Art Studio at the Met Sacramento High School.

**Cody Grey** is a CSU Sacramento English graduate, who dabbles in poetry and prose when not engaged in his studies. While passionate for literature, academia, creativity, and transgender studies, he seeks to master the difficult art of drinking copious cups of coffee. His work has also been published in *The Outrider Review*.

**Aumreena Iqbal** is a twenty-one-year-old Sacramento native, who began attending CRC in 2012. Her major is kinesiology, and she hopes to one day earn a doctorate in physical therapy. In addition to being a photographer extraordinaire, her hobbies include supporting artists from all around the county. Aumreena is a devoted volunteer, who enjoys both working in the emergency room and coaching youth soccer on her days off. At the age of five, she received her first camera and proudly named him Niko the Nikon. An influential role model in her photography career is her dad.

**Adam Lawlor** is a CRC student. He has enjoyed writing since childhood, often writing short novels with friends. Adam currently lives in Elk Grove, California and works at Newsongs School of Music, teaching piano to young, aspiring pianists.

**Tenley Lillegard** is a hardworking intellectual, a tree-hugging environmental activist, a student politician, a loving daughter and sister, and a dependable colleague and friend. But above all she is just an ordinary girl with an extraordinary imagination. She enjoys writing because it allows her to give life to her wild imagination.

**María Rosa Lojo**, An Argentine writer and literary scholar, is an internationally recognized representative of the Latin American “new historical narrative” movement. Among her popular work are the novels *La pasión de los nómades* (1994), *Finisterre* (2005), *Árbol de familia* (2010), and *Todos éramos hijos* (2014); the story collections *Historias de la Recoleta* (2000) and *Cuerpos resplandecientes* (2007); and poetry or micro-fiction including *Esperan la mañana verde* (1998) and *Bosque de ojos* (2011). She may be contacted via her website: www.mariarosalolojo.com.ar.

**Appria Negrete** (Artist Paradox) writes: “Jaded.” is the first in a series titled, “Secondary Colors, Primary Emotions.” Prints of “Jaded” are available. Contact: NegreteAppria@yahoo.com.

**Yen Nguyen** is a second-year student majoring in nursing at CRC and is hoping to transfer in fall of 2016. She lives in Sacramento, California. She came to the United States when she was seventeen. Yen is currently working and going to school at the same time; becoming a nurse is the dream that she is trying achieve. She is an award-winning artist. Her visual art and poetry have been exhibited and published widely, from Fe Gallery to the Crocker Art Gallery, from the Sacramento Bee to literary and art journals. She has taught at CRC, the Colonial Heights Library, St. John’s Shelter for Women and Children, and elsewhere. She has published two books: *Poems with the Element of Water and Mandala Art, Poetry, and Instruction*. She is the curator editor of Sable and Quill, an anthology and showcase of the visual art and writing of writers who are also artists, fine literature, and music from classic songwriters such as Katy Perry.
Marie Reynolds lives in Sacramento and facilitates a writing group using the Amherst Writers and Artists method. Her poems have appeared in journals including Poetry Now, Rattlesnake Review, Tule Review, Ekphrasis, and Ars Medica: A Journal of Medicine, the Arts and Humanities, as well the Sacramento anthology, Late Peaches. She has work forthcoming in Prairie Schooner in 2015.

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.

Thad Szymanski is a divorced father of two children, one son and one daughter. He is a twelve-and-a-half year active army veteran who was deployed four times as an Apache helicopter mechanic and technical inspector. He has written music, poetry, and stories and is currently working on a Bachelor’s in Accounting.

Carolyn Thomas is the fifth child of eight siblings. She has always loved reading and getting lost in a good book. A little secret about her is that she started writing a book five years ago. She has not finished it yet, but she promises it will be very juicy and exciting, and she looks forward to publishing it one day. She says: “I believe it will be a #1 seller!”

Sarah Lyn Rogers is an author, editor, and illustrator from the San Francisco Bay Area. Sarah is the assistant fiction editor for The Rumpus. Additionally, Sarah gives editorial feedback to young writers through Society of Young Inklings and plays drums in a chamber pop band called Elflock.

Pia Sieroty Spector is a divorced professional and a daughter to her parents, who gave her the fire in her belly that has gotten her through many a blaze. And, she has finally listened to her daughters, who shouted: “Live your dreams, Mom.” And indeed she is. Pia is a published poet, who is now focused on the art of creative nonfiction.

Alexandra Elizabeth Weise is a twenty-one-year-old CRC student. She is self-taught and has no college-level art training. She is transferring to university next year, but she still is undeclared about her major; her dream would be to major in illustration at Academy of Art University.

Skylar Saeyang is nineteen and very shy but really talkative once she is comfortable around someone. It’s her first year and second semester at CRC. She likes to play games (PC Master Race!) and is currently looking to major in computer science–security.

Brett Alan Sanders is a literary translator, writer, and retired teacher. His work of translations from the Spanish include María Rosa Lojo’s Awaiting the Green Morning (Host Publications, 2008) and Passionate Nomads (Aliform Publishing, 2011). His original YA novella A Bride Called Freedom appeared in 2003 in a bilingual edition by Ediciones Nuevo Espacio. He may be reached via his website/blog: www.brettalansanders.wordpress.com

Stephan Starnes graduated from CRC with three associate degrees before moving to Phoenix, Arizona. As a fiction author, journalist, and photographer, Stephan got his start on CRC’s newspaper, The Connection. Using his experience as a springboard, Stephan plans to take on the world and become John Green famous.

Patricia Wentzel is an emerging writer with a dark past as a visual artist. She writes poetry, the occasional story and creative non-fiction piece. She is an active member of Sacramento’s Women’s Wisdom Art poetry group. Her work has been published in Brevities, Poetry Now, Medusa’s Kitchen and upcoming in The Light Ekphrastic.

Jillian Self enjoys writing poetry and flash fiction. She does not enjoy writing biographies because she would rather talk about a fictional character. Her hobbies include talking to herself in a bathroom mirror and making silly faces. If she were elected president, she would make everyone dress in steampunk fashion.

Amanda Sturgeon, self-proclaimed bird enthusiast and Texas native, is an experimental filmmaker at CRC and Vice President of Incandescent Films. She is currently working toward a Bachelor’s in Film & Television Production.