

OUR VOICES

OUR VOICES

JOURNAL OF CULTURE AND DIVERSITY



**NEW
POST**

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OUR VOICES

GONZAGA UNIVERSITY
VOLUME XII • 2025

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Journal Of Culture and Diversity



**“THE ONE THING THAT YOU HAVE
THAT NOBODY ELSE HAS IS YOU.
YOUR VOICE, YOUR MIND, YOUR
STORY, YOUR VISION. SO WRITE
AND DRAW AND BUILD AND
PLAY AND DANCE AND LIVE
ONLY AS YOU CAN.”**

- Neil Gaiman

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~ Trigger Warning: As a reader the pieces you will be reading may include discussions on sensitive topics that might be disturbing or triggering. Our Voices values the pieces of our authors and we want to respect their personal stories. Please proceed with care and consider your own well-being before reading.

DEAR READER,

As you dive into this book, I hope you keep yourself in mind. Remember who you are. It is easy to be confused about who we are in this world, especially as we navigate through an era where identity and self are defined by statistics, status, and identity wheels. That said, you always have a self, someone you see in your mind, or in the mirror. Remember who you are inside, and your identity, even if the reflection seems murky.

Going through curriculum and student life at Gonzaga University has taught me a lot about my responsibilities as an Asian-American woman. I have navigated the underlying currents of identity. Who I am, and where I am, shape what I do. I know many others, maybe including yourself, are still wondering who they are, and how to find their way to identity through the people around them and the things they learn. Rest assured, we never stop learning who we are.

For about twelve years, there used to be a fourth journal at Gonzaga, dedicated to sharing stories of international experiences. This journal was the journal of social justice, while Our Voices has historically been about identity. That being said, the fourth journal, One World stopped publishing in 2019 and Our Voices has been sort of fielding stories for both topics since then. This might seem odd, but really, how can you separate social justice from your sense of self?

Identity and Diversity may seem like two separate categories, but it is in our differences that we align with each other, positive or negative. This space is filled with stories, including some stories that don't always seem to fit together, and I hope you embrace it. I hope when reading this book, you embrace the foreign and unfamiliar, and that you are able to sit with discomfort for the sake of learning. We start our lives curious, and I hope these stories refresh your curiosity about the world around you, so you can explore the world around you, but also the realms of your thoughts and self.

In reading this journal, we hope that you are able to learn about others, and find things that teach you about yourself as well.

WITH LOVE,
Carissa Kanae



ESSAY

Pages 18 - 25

THE COURAGE TO QUESTION

Alyssa Johnston-Guzman

For me, curiosity always trumped fear, yet curiosity still shook the foundation of my identity. Growing up, I never questioned who I was. I was family-oriented, grounded, and knew what I valued in life. But then, in fifth grade, a simple self-portrait assignment changed everything. As I started sketching, I looked for a dark brown pencil to match my own deeper skin tone, so different from my “father’s” fair complexion. My mom has black, wavy hair and tan skin, while Brian, my father, has blonde hair and blue eyes. And then there’s me with brown, curly hair, and medium brown skin, caught somewhere between them.

I remember pausing, pencil in hand, staring down at that portrait. For the first time, I felt a creeping uncertainty about who I was and why I looked the way I did. That day opened a floodgate of questions and a journey of self-discovery that would shape me deeply. It was the first time I felt the complexity of identity, and it left an indelible mark on who I would become.

Fast forward to the start of high school, where during my freshman and sophomore year I found myself often being told that I did not look Hispanic enough or that I should not speak Spanish, despite it being my first language, simply because I did not fit the exact Latina stereotype.

But I knew who I was: I was Hispanic, a proud descendant of grandparents from Irapuato, Guanajuato, and a mother from Tijuana. My family's culture, traditions, values, and language were woven into my identity, and yet, as I heard these comments, my sense of self started to feel unsteady. Every time someone questioned my heritage, it was as though my identity, something I had always cherished, was being questioned too. The weight of piecing everything together felt overwhelming. I found myself desperately trying to prove to people who I was because their perception was all that mattered to me at the time.

Their hands spoke of different times, different worlds, and countless hardships that I was too young to understand but could feel. My grandmother left everything behind to bring her four children from Tijuana, Mexico, to start a new life in the United States. That journey and the strength it required laid the foundation of our family, a legacy I carry with me every day. They taught me the meaning of resilience, sacrifice, and love. From a young age, my grandma and mom have taught me how to be a kind leader, to always be proud of wearing my heart on my sleeve, and to never apologize for having curiosity be one of the driving forces in my life.

The summer after my freshman year, I found myself consumed by a need for answers. I searched through documents around the house, reaching out to family members and friends, but many urged me to stop because I was too young, that I should wait until I was 18 and “more emotionally mature.” For as long as I could remember, there was a dark wooden chest in our living room that held belongings from my childhood, but my mom never let me open it. One day, when my mom wasn't home, I decided to see for myself. The moment I opened the chest, an intense scent of wood filled the air, and I saw photos stacked on top, along with layers of keepsakes from when my brother and I were younger. I had always thought that the chest might hold the answers to my questions,

but as I sifted through it, I found nothing that could explain the mystery I was trying to solve. Determined, I went to the storage shed in our backyard where we keep more family mementos and holiday decor. Unlocking the door, I searched through file cabinets until I came across my birth certificate. My heart stopped. The line for my father's name was blank. A gut-wrenching feeling pulled me back inside our home, to a hallway closet I had never given much thought to. There, I discovered old calendars from 2003 and 2004, with notes my mom had written around the time I was born. I read one entry in blue ink that pierced me deeply: “D.F.J did not want anything to do with her, my heart is broken.”

July 19, 2019, was the day I never saw things the same again.

How I identified myself completely changed. Knowing curiosity is the key to courage, I made the bold decision to ask my grandma if “el Brian es mi biológico papa?” which translates to “is Brian my biological father?” She hesitated, and said that he was not my biological father and that no one in my family knew who he was. For over a year, I had cringed when someone would ask me what my race was. Truth be told, how could I answer when I didn't completely know? All I knew was that my biological father disappeared and he somehow managed to leave a lingering mark on me. That absence sparked questions about who I was and where I belonged. My journey to understanding and embracing my identity hasn't been linear, but I can confidently say that I now know who I am, what I stand for, and where I'm headed.

Being Latina is more than the color of your skin or the texture of your hair. It's in the traditions passed down through generations, the resilience woven into our history, and the deep sense of belonging that transcends physical appearance. Replaying in my head are the memories of watching my grandma cut the spikes off the nopales, the excitement I feel when unwrapping tamales during the holidays, and the way Mexican music instantly makes me feel at home. My connection to my culture has never been about how I look, it's about the stories, the flavors, the music, and the moments that have shaped me. Curiosity can lead to unexpected places. Some are strange but some push us to grow and face the uncomfortable. I now understand: curiosity killed the cat, but satisfaction brought it back.

REMEMBER THE HANDS THAT PICKED YOUR FOOD

Araceli Lopez Ayala Vanover

When you're a kid, the world seems so bright. You only take in what you see and listen, and at that time you simply see the beauty of family gatherings. You hear the laughter of your family when they talk about some memory back in Mexico, while you're chasing your primas in neon green chancas across the cherry orchards. All you see is the pink and orange hued sunset when you're sitting outside having a carne asada at your abuelo and abuela house.

But then your world starts to become darker when you hear someone yell at your dad to go back to where he came from, while walking to the mailbox.

The world becomes slightly darker because you don't see your parents in the crowd at your school play because they couldn't get out of work, and in your eyes everyone else's parents did. Angry that they didn't make it to your school plays and recitals, you ignore and begin to shut them out, but then your world gets darker when you begin to notice that your parents are scared to ask their boss for time off because they're hurt because they fell from the ladder. From there you only see the cracked skin on their hands and the sinking eyebags. You begin to see the poorly built farming housing. Then you start seeing how discreetly racist your high school is towards its Latino students. All you see and hear is how mistreated your community is.

The world you once loved is all grey when you have to watch a president say that immigrants, specifically Mexicans, are dangerous and are poisoning the blood of the United States. However, the last straw turning everything pitch black is when your siblings ask you if we are going to be separated from our family and friends because they were born in Mexico, and you don't know how to respond to them because you ask the same question to yourself.

But then the world becomes slightly brighter when you see your community protesting for their culture, for their people. You see your community remember what it means to be part of la raza,

what it means to be together without leaving anyone who wants a better life behind. The world becomes slightly better when the daughter who couldn't have her parents at her performances starts to speak up for them because they are too exhausted to do so.

To all those who voted for a president because he would supposedly lower grocery prices, remember the hands that picked your food. They are from Hispanic workers who came to the U.S. because they wanted a better life for their children. They want to be at their daughters' school play but can't because they are too busy picking the food you all eat. You drive past them everyday. Maybe you see them picking the fruit you eat, but maybe you see them when they are simply picking up their mail.

WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

Charlie Herman

“Where are you from?” This is a question that we all come across quite frequently in our lives. It is a great way to start getting to know one another. We often find connections, close or distant, to the place someone is from and use it as a jumping-off point to learn more about them. This question is so common in our daily lives but something that I have often had to think a lot about.

I moved to Costa Rica from Denver when I was six years old and lived there until coming to Gonzaga. This added a complex layer to the answer of where I am from. When visiting the United States on quick trips, the question would frequently be posed by strangers: “Where are you from?”

Our family would choose between two answers—Costa Rica or Colorado. Both were true, but one came with a lot more follow-ups and confusion. More often than not, we chose Colorado to avoid the frequent and often frustrating follow-ups that came with answering Costa Rica.

So, when my older sister went off to school, we discussed what answers she would give. Early on, when meeting every new freshman on campus, she would lead with Colorado—it’s easier that way. But Costa Rica is also where she grew up, and as she created a new community, she realized the importance of sharing that part of her identity with the people she was building relationships with.

Therefore, while the categories above are important to identity, they do not capture the entirety of one's identity. Throughout my college experience, I have felt most seen when people have been curious about who I am and where I'm from. This has shown me the importance of approaching new relationships with curiosity, not judgment, and being excited to learn more about the small and big things that make someone who they are.

So, the next time you ask—or are asked—where you are from, I encourage you to dig deeper and learn more about the place someone is from and what it means to them.

PROSE

Pages 28 - 62

CLASS OF '25

Lucy Brunelli

You are a student, first. You introduce yourself as one, have done so for 18 years now. It's the first thing people ask you about: what grade are you in? What year? What are you studying? How was school today? Etc., Etc., Etc. And, at some point, you realize you've been defining yourself as a student for all your formative years. That is all you are. Your hobbies—you've never known what to say when someone asks—are just schoolwork. You rise and fall with your GPA, live and die by teacher feedback. You breathe at the pace of the giant clock on the back wall of the classroom. And when you realize this about yourself, when you stop everything and examine your life like any adolescent should and must, you come to terms with a horrifying truth: You are a student first and last.

That is all there is.

Someone told you when you were very young—you can't remember precisely what age—that you were good at school and so that is where you stayed for years. You rose and rose and then plateaued. When you wonder what it'd be like to fall down even just a little bit, the fall looks like it could kill you. And it would.

When you're seven years old, teachers are all too happy to tell you that you've surpassed others in your first-grade class because you can read books for big kids. Your name gets added to a wall of stars when you're in third grade, reading at a sixth-grade level. You win reading trophies. You read books with ever higher page counts, with words like cacophony and monotonous,

words you don't know how to pronounce or use in a sentence, but since you read them, the teachers think you must know what they mean. You teach yourself what they mean because they've taken away the ladder and left you stranded in the tree they told you—no, encouraged you—to climb.

You get excused from class to go to the pizza party for Accelerated Readers while your friends stay behind in the art room.

They make spin-art paintings on paper plates while you stand around a folding table drinking fruit punch and watching the big kids eat pizza off the same plates. You don't even like pizza.

You stay behind in the fourth-grade classroom to watch Matilda with the rest of your grade while a select few get chosen to take an aptitude test for higher-level math the next year. You were chosen as well, but you stammer out a polite “No, thank you” to the Assistant Principal. You are too afraid of failing the test that you refuse to take it. You stay in your own grade level, you rise to the top of the class. They ask you to take the test again the next year. Again, you refuse.

No one is allowed to see your mistakes. You procrastinate in silence. You forget an assignment, so you fake an illness. In second grade, you stuff your only F—an inconsequential quiz grade—deep down into the kitchen trash can,

where no one will ever find it. In eighth grade, you get a B+ instead of an A+ 100, and you lock yourself in your closet, you break the screen of your school iPad, you bury your head in your backpack to catch your breath. Years later, you realize that you were having a panic attack. You've been having them for years, you just didn't have the vocabulary to explain it.

When you do too much for an assignment—say, you write seven pages instead of the required two—people stare at you blankly. You feel their eyes on you as you request more paper during a test.

You feel like a try-hard for caring. You stop trying to be creative. Life drains out of your schoolwork, paper-thin, black and white.

You start tutoring someone in geometry because you get extra credit for it. You hate geometry and hate having to explain the steps. You get annoyed by their questions and even more annoyed when you don't have answers. You stick it out for an entire semester. You get a 101 in the class. They have to round it down.

You spend Friday nights at the kitchen table with your physics notes—even though you loved your chemistry class, you chose AP Physics because you thought it would look better on your high school transcript if you diversified.

You test out of college-level math. Even though you actually enjoy it—the methodology of equations is soothing to you—you take no math classes at all. You don't have to. You've been given a pass, so you take it. You regret it.

You choke up on every essay, every written response, every paragraph longer than three sentences. Writing becomes a chore because it has to be perfect. You're a writer, aren't you? It shouldn't be so hard, but you act like every sentence must be golden before it falls under the professor's gaze. You have to prove yourself. You labeled yourself as a writer the moment you stepped foot on campus, so you have to make sure that everything you ever write is worthy. That you are worthy.

You learn how to appease. You learn how to win. You learn that life is one competition after another, even if the prizes don't matter. You learn to enjoy studying, even if it's on a Friday night. Even if you're invited to sleepovers or parties, even if you're asked on dates. You don't realize you stopped getting invited until your photo gallery is just screenshots of song titles and pictures of shopping lists.

You know how to be a teacher's pet, even in the absence of a teacher. You live off gold stars and pats on the head and A+ 100s, and you come to the end, the finish line of college, and you realize how pathetic all of it is.

How shallow your education has been and how superior it has made you feel.

What did they even teach you at that fancy school of yours? They taught you MLA format and the passé composé and that adverbs are a blight on the English language. They taught you to do the bare minimum to succeed and get overwhelmed by any amount of work. They taught you to spout pseudo-intellectual buzzwords, but you don't know what they mean. They didn't teach you the definitions. They taught you how to type in questions and have a machine answer them.

You think you know how to tell a good story—that's what all of this has been about, right?—but maybe they're just humoring you like they have been for 18 years, nodding

dumbly along at your achievements and making you feel the nano-second of pleasure that comes with academic validation, then moving on to do it to another student, another person who's forfeited their personality to the academic system and gained not only an education but a God complex, a serious case of imposter syndrome, and a mind that has emptied of all practical knowledge and become instead a battleground for the first two to war with one another for the rest of time.

You take a class in the fall of your senior year of college that enrages you to such a severe degree that you can't put it into words because you just devolve into guttural groaning. *I feel so creatively stifled, I can't fucking do this anymore.*

Your roommates
sympathize with you,
hold you when you cry.
You shouldn't feel this
strongly about it and you
know it. You're overre-
acting to a class that isn't
even in your discipline.
It shouldn't be this hard.
Yet every time you walk
into the classroom, your
ability to think critically,
to form sentences, to
regulate your emotions
all flies out the third-
floor window you sit in
front of—a window that
is always cracked open,
no matter the tempera-
ture outside, so you're
forever turning around
at the slightest noise: the
bell that's consistently
two minutes late ringing
out from the library, the
lawn mowers and plows
and leaf blowers. All that
noise, noise, noise is so
much more intellectu-
ally stimulating than
anything that's going on
in the classroom in front
of you.

You realize you hate it
because it's challenging.
You're not good at it. It's
the first time ever that
you haven't been able
to weasel your way into
an easy good grade or
convince yourself you're
having fun in order to
get by. It's not because
your fellow students are
stupid—they're all vastly
superior to you in this
field that isn't yours. It's
not because the profes-
sor is bad at their job—
they're doing great, and
it's not their fault they've
been temporarily desig-
nated your arch-nemesis.

You still get a good grade
in the class, but it doesn't
register. It makes you
hate academia. It makes
you realize you've hated
academia all along. This
has never been fun. This
has never been fulfilling.

Your parents used to joke with you about getting “A+ 100s” but you always took them at their word. They were joking, or so they say. They drilled into you that phrase: A+ 100, A+ 100, A+ 100. It got you through elementary school, then high school. It’s gotten you this far into college. It’s motivated you, but with the vague threat lingering behind it, the loaded gun just out of reach, but loaded, nonetheless. In recent years, they’ve made the joke less and less, probably because you’ve expressed your annoyance, your distaste, your disgust, even at your status as a student. In recent years, your father has looked you in the eyes, deeply empathetic, and asked you,

“You’re still having fun, right? You’re still enjoying yourself?” and you grit your teeth and smile at him reassuringly because what do you say to that? What kind of person would you be for expressing disinterest, disgust even, in something someone else has paid for? What kind of person would you be to take something your parents have so lovingly given you, to take it for all four years, and then at the end say, “Nope. Not for me. But thanks for financing my way through hell, love you!”

The same semester, your second-to-last, you take another class. This one doesn’t enrage you. This one unlocks something in you, excites you in a way you’ve rarely felt in college,

especially in a class where you have to sit in a circle made of desks and stare at your peers as they fulfill their once-per-class requirement of speaking. In this class, you have to write differently than you ever have before. You are the central figure, you are the point of view. Everything you've ever written before this has been fiction, an escape from the hell you put yourself through. This time, you write from your own perspective. You have to focus on the world as it happens around you. You watch your friends going about their days. You sit in moments as they happen, let yourself feel things, let yourself waste time.

You should be doing other schoolwork—that annotated bibliography won't write itself, that fucking theory of constructivism is just waiting to be applied to that reading you haven't done yet! But you let yourself pause.

You reminisce. You become entrenched in a beautiful nostalgia that gets you through midterms and due dates and that one goddamn class you can't stand. You write about your friends, the people who made the last four years bearable. You write about the fun you've had—the escape rooms and scavenger hunts, the coffee runs at 11:30 pm, the “cura personalis” days you and your roommates spent watching a show for the fourth time.

See, you're still having fun. You're enjoying yourself.

You write something that takes research, interviewing, deep reflection on yourself and your own history and the history of the people who have meant the world to you. It makes you realize, all of a sudden, that this is the end. You've been here four years, but didn't you just get here yesterday? No. It's been that long. You're 22, not 18. You're about to enter the job market, you're about to shed the persona of "student." You gain some kind of self-awareness, an inkling of self-knowledge. You allow yourself to look back with a neutral eye at the years you've so maligned in your head, and you realize, another realization way too late,

that your years in academia were hard, they were mind-numbing and soul-sucking, yes, but they were also so wonderfully helpful. You learned you liked literature in a classroom in the third grade. You learned you wanted to be a writer in the seventh grade. You liked this once, you found yourself engaged once, you discovered who you were once.

In this class, you write something you're desperately proud of. You force your friends to read it. You force your coworkers to read it. You can't shut up about it, because it made you remember what you are good at. You are a writer. Your talent exists.

Years of education haven't beaten it all out of you—not for lack of trying—and you can see yourself doing this professionally. Maybe not right away, maybe you'll start with baby steps, maybe you'll get a desk job tangentially related to your degree and wile away the years post-grad in a cubicle or open floor-plan office with a ping pong table in the corner.

Maybe you'll look back on being a student and remember only the parts where you actually learned something valuable, about yourself, about the world, about human nature and the human condition. Maybe you'll crack open the MLA Handbook for shits and giggles, or maybe you might even need it.

Maybe, then, you'll have forgotten the guilt of failure, the competitiveness that almost killed you, the acronyms you memorized for a test you took on the Ottoman Empire in the 10th grade.

Maybe one day, in the bright spring of some far-off year, in the shade of some tree that's just started to blossom again, you will sit and write in a notebook. You will go home and type up those words. You'll print out the page, maybe the first page or maybe the 301st of some project, maybe fiction or maybe not, and you'll take a highlighter and red pen to it. You'll be merciless, chopping out beautiful turns of phrase because something even better has just come to you.

You'll be grateful for the education you got, years ago, for its push toward self-awareness, for its painful clarity, for its back-aching monotony that prompted you to write in the margins of your notebooks. You'll be thankful to your parents for giving you the opportunity to be bored, thankful to your friends for sticking around even if you never hung out with them, even more thankful to them for dragging you along when you were cooped up for hours. You'll appreciate the plaque on your wall for its aesthetic value, the tassel hanging from your rearview mirror for the memories it represents.

You'll love the number 25 for the rest of your life because it's your graduation year.

HANDS THAT PURSUED A DREAM

Angela Macabinguil

My hands are not like my father's hands. Mine are smooth and dainty, while his are rough, covered in calluses, hands that tell stories of hardship and labor, hands attached to someone who has traveled miles away from his homeland.

As a child, I despised holding his hands, so coarse and rugged, never realizing the journeys those hands endured.

In the fields of the Philippines, my father's hands farmed rice, worked tirelessly to feed his family of ten, fishing for hours, sewing clothes for his sisters, playing basketball with his brothers, but also fueling his dream of the American Dream.

Who knew he would use those hands to make the dream into a reality at the age of 16.

My father used his hands to agree to an opportunity to juggle in America.

He would be driving stick shifts across the nation, entertaining at events, schools, competitions, and was able to juggle on a unicycle with 3 of his cousins also juggling on his shoulders.

He wasn't only juggling clubs and bean bags but hopes and dreams for his family, he was able to send earnings back home so his siblings could get an education unlike he did. He never used his hands to write, to read, as he was denied an education in pursuit of a dream.

When the association disbanded, reality struck hard. He had grown up in America, rooted deep in its soil, too late to return, too soon to let go.

Those hands scrubbed toilets, farmed, and built homes to grip onto a dream that he never wanted to wake up from because it was now his reality.

However, he eventually used his hands to propose to my mother, held my sister when she was born, and wiped tears away at the thought of deportation and leaving our family. Together with my mother, they sought out help for my dad to keep clinging on to the American Dream. As it was not his goal to keep his dream alive, but it was for his two daughters and a wife to have happiness, opportunities, and better lives.

Soon those rough and callous hands signed his name for U.S. citizenship, hands that learned, adapted, and endured, holding onto a dream through hardships and pain.

Now, those rough and calloused hands work tirelessly to pay off my tuition, sneak treats to our pets, wipe away my tears when I miss home, ensuring that my hands need not carry the same burdens, so my hands remain smooth and dainty, unlike his rough and calloused hands.

THE HEALING STEP

Evelyn Shelton

“WHACK... SLAP!” was the sound of a wooden stick hitting against my skin. This was the sound I remembered most from my childhood while living in an orphanage in China with 150 other children. I feel like I lost the first ten years of my childhood. I knew how to wash my clothes and change a baby’s diaper by the time I was four years old. I was punished for behaviors that are supposed to be natural for a child to do. Because of my paralyzed leg, I fell a lot, but falling was not an option because it created too much work for the caretakers. The “caretakers” constantly threw punishments my way, like having to be in a squat position for two hours while being watched and often getting my meals taken away.

We orphans were not given the same education as the other kids, so I did not care much for school and skipped a lot, often searching for food. It felt like the teachers treated us like we were simple-minded and didn’t even put any effort into teaching us.

Growing up in the orphanage, we knew that our abandonment was related to our disability (70% of us were disabled) and of course, our gender, as nearly all of us were girls. When I was finally adopted by my forever family, I had my doubts because it did not end well the first time. I had been adopted previously but was returned in less than two weeks because they thought I was too disabled for them. This time I remembered feeling so excited to get out of the orphanage. I hoped I would finally have a better life but often still thought,

“Who would want a child who has a bum leg and cannot do anything?” Over time, my thoughts about how I was nothing and insignificant slowly disappeared. My parents gave me the affection that I did not know I needed. They were kind and loving towards me, and that was when I realized that my old wounds were starting to heal. But with everyone around me not being differently abled, as in the orphanage, insecurities about my leg soon emerged.

My mother put me in third grade when I was eleven years old because I did not know any English and was behind in school. I did not think about how much this would affect me later in my school career.

I second-guessed myself frequently because of the extra help I received from teachers, especially since I was older. Generally, being the oldest is correlated with being the wisest, but sometimes I avoided sharing my ideas in class because I was worried they sounded foolish. I put a lot of pressure on my shoulders and tried to get A's in all my classes, especially in English.

A common perception of people in wheelchairs is that we struggle with daily tasks. Sometimes this perception can make things harder for me. For example, I have been looking for a part-time job and have been unable to get hired. Although I cannot say for sure, I can see their immediate concern upon meeting them. Comments that underestimate my abilities fuel me to work hard and defy stereotypes.

The difficulties I've faced, motivate me to overcome obstacles and reach my goals. Understanding the hardships is the first step in healing. I will always strive to do my best in everything, whether in school, in my personal life, or in the future. Despite the traumatic events I've experienced, I am confident that I will continue to grow and move forward. Rather than seeing it as something negative that happened to me, I will look at it as an opportunity to learn and grow from it. Since I did not get a fair chance to learn in China, I will make the most of this opportunity instead of wasting it.

I AM A PIANO

Adrian Valenzuela

If there is anything my friends know about me, it's that I am a piano.
"Give me an A flat."

You got it.

"Name the pitch of that car horn."

No problem.

Becoming a piano didn't happen overnight, in fact I wasn't supposed to be one. I had my first piano lesson when I was eight. It was supposed to be my brother that would be taking those piano lessons. Fate thought otherwise. He quit right before he was enrolled, so my mom turned to me. The rest is history.

Pianos have unique abilities. One is the ability to connect.

During my freshman year of high school, I participated in my first coffeehouse by performing a piano piece in front of my classmates. The performance was online, and I expected it to have little impact on anyone.

Little impact on anyone, except my math teacher apparently.

"Oh, you're the piano player that performed the Christmas remix of Chopin's Nocturne in C minor for last year's Christmas coffeehouse!" says he, passing me by in the halls one day. Being a piano has the ability to create connections in the most unexpected ways.

It's in a piano's nature to have an audience. Being a piano, I am often exposed to audiences with the goal to inspire and spread happiness. I make it my mission, whether it be performing in assisted living homes or in the school cafeteria, to put smiles on the faces of people I come across. It is my duty to speak to my audience through diversifying chords and melodies.

The audience changes constantly. Sometimes the audience needs a light, bouncy melody filled with energy and excitement, like the children at a pee-wee basketball camp. Other times it might be a friend in need of comfort, someone in need of a soothing Clair de Lune.

Being a piano has its difficulties. It might not be played for a while. Freshman year, I felt dust gathering as I sat in the corner of the room. Going unnoticed by a crowd of people. My wooden legs cracking and giving way. The beautiful progressions and melodies once played left unheard. But one person in the crowd stepped out. Inexperienced and unsure, they played a note anyway. The vibrations and bass of that one note was enough to shake the dust lodged within. While I was a bit out of tune, it felt great to hear the familiar notes within me being played again.

And just like any other instrument, as a piano I am bound to hit a couple sour notes.

One time I absolutely botched a music audition for a scholarship. The chords within me were dissonant after the performance, leaving me unsatisfied and confused. But I received so much support from my mom and loved ones reassuring me. It was enough for me to figure out how to resolve those tense chords back to my familiar, comfortable tonic roots.

If there's anything I learned from being a piano, it is to be full of surprises. My family, or anyone really, could have expected me to become a piano. I couldn't have guessed that one day I would be blessed with perfect pitch. Or that I'd stumble upon the ability to connect through pianos.

To go out, uncertain of who I'd be playing for. But that's the beauty of being a piano. It is the sense of uncertainty that makes me who I am.

For every sour note played.
For every wrong chord.
Being a piano means that sometimes you may not know how the melody will shape out. You might just be given a list of chords and expected to improvise, uncertain where the music will take you. It's okay to be afraid to hit a sour note or blunder a chord.

But you don't know how your song will play out unless you step out and play that first note.

SEAGLASS-COLORED LENSES

Olivia Sandvik

I
I'm standing in line at
Workman's. ID in hand,
I prepare for the worst.
*"This doesn't look like
you."* *"Are you sure
you're twenty years old?"*
I offer my plastic card to
the bouncer, waiting to
be rejected. He gives it a
quick glance and ushers
me in. My unwarranted
stress dissipates into the
foggy air. Why was I
so stressed when I had
done this exact thing the
night before?

Techno music
from upstairs echoes
down the creaky steps.
The sound is almost
deafening as we ascend,
my ears already ringing.
The first room we enter
is blanketed in a blue
hue. Some stand in line
for drinks while others
dance with no inhibition.
I feel a bit out of
place in my very American-tourist clothing—
my worn white sneakers,
mom jeans, and Trinity
College pullover.

But then I remember
that I *am* a tourist from
America, and no one here
cares about my outfit; at
Workman's, people's problems and desires are much
bigger than American
Eagle denim and cotton
university merch.

Now over the
weekend, it is much more
packed than yesterday. We
zig zag around swaying
bodies as we make our way
across the sticky floor to
the roofless smoking room.
With every breath, my
lungs seize up (thank you,
asthma). I remind myself
to take shallow breaths and
face away from the direction
of the wind. I take a
puff from my inhaler for
good measure. I want to
escape to another room,
but I wait for everyone to
get their drinks. As I wait,
I look at my friends having
fun. Their joy rubs off on
me, bringing a smile to my
face.

With a renewed sense of adventure, I find myself at the bar top. I order a Jameson & ginger ale, a drink I've never tried before. The bubbly libation burns on my tongue just right.

Tonight is all about new experiences.

II

The salty air is warm upon my skin, even as the coastal breeze whips around me. The sky is azure, spotted with silvery pearls. I take in a deep breath and smile. Tension immediately fizzles out from my shoulders. Unlike the club, the air is fresh in Sandycove.

I have always preferred mountains to beaches, and yet, I come to appreciate how the ferocity of the waves shapes the environment at will.

In this moment, I realize that Ireland is shaping me the same way. The bombardment of new and strange things has forced me to live outside my comfort zone and confront the unknown.

The beach attracts us like moths to a flame, hypnotizing. With time to spare, we walk down the steps of the sea wall. Others stay there to look out at the ocean while I shuffle along the narrow ledge that leads further down the beach. Two from our lively group are already down there, exploring the new terrain.

I look down at the slick, kelp-covered shelf and let out a laugh; small animal prints are embedded in the concrete. A dog must have ventured here while the concrete was still drying. I take a picture to remember.

I lower myself to the edge and carefully jump down onto the rocky beach. My leather boots crunch against the sandy pebbles. One of the women in the group waves me over and I trek towards her. Scattered around me are smooth, tan rock formations, all with shallow pools of water.

Now that I have finally made it to the shore, I let my excitement run wild. I sway to the beat when I am on the dance floor; I sway with the whooshing curves of sea and rock when I am on the shore. Different is not always bad.

III

I look up at the starless sky through the roofless smoking room with sober eyes. Do the stars ever poke out in Dublin?

Or are they scared of the lively night? I stay in this position for a second, empty glass in hand. A slight of cool air drizzles down, a welcome contrast to the hazy, humid room. A friend takes my glass and gives it back to a bartender. I yell "thank you" as she does, my voice competing with dozens of others.

We all migrate to another space themed with old posters and the front of a car sticking out of a wall. All that illuminates this room are the soft purple and blue hues emanating from strobes lights on the ceiling. There is a DJ in the corner, bobbing his head to the beat. It's much more crowded here, and I have to squeeze by people to find an open space. I eventually find a table near the bar and station myself there. A group of three friends stand on the other side of the pub table.

My group forms a circle to continue our talk and I chat with my friend, Riley, for a good amount of time. When a natural lull comes, one of the girls next to me strikes up a conversation. Her bright pink shirt stands out from her tan skin and dark hair.

We hit it off right away. "You're American? I love Americans!" She says. "I spent a year in Philadelphia."

After several minutes, we finally get around to introducing ourselves. She tells me that her name is Saoirse and the man next to her is Alan. Their other friend, Kelly, had just left, saying that she would be back in 5 minutes. Saoirse tells me that her, Alan, and Kelly are all actors who graduated from Bow Street Academy.

"I'm acting for a short film right now. It will be coming out soon," she says, excitement radiating off her. I wish my memory were better, because the film title fades only a minute after she tells me.

When I see that Rachel is not preoccupied at the moment, I drag her into our conversation. I know she will be excited to meet local actors. Her and Saoirse talk to one another as Alan asks me where I'm from. The night is young, and it is already deviating from my expectations. The most memorable adventures are always the least predictable.

IV

There are rocky beaches on the West Coast, but Sandycove is much different than any other I have visited.

I was curious how the seashells would differ since I live near the Pacific Ocean, not the Atlantic. I discovered that beaches on both oceans have mollusks, but common and flat periwinkles and Pfeiffer's top shells are only found on Atlantic coasts.

I was amazed to find an abundance of sea glass and broken pottery amongst the rocks and shells. Many of us looked for red sea glass because, according to Kaelyn, it is very rare. Unfortunately, we could not find any for her. To my delight though, I found a chunk of obsidian.

As I was traversing through the rock formations, my mind drifted to what the locals must think of us.

There we were, a bunch of adults in our early twenties, climbing rocks and digging in the sand to find things that they probably would not give a second glance to. I almost laughed just thinking about it. Still, I feel completely at peace here. I can wander the beaches and flow with the steady tide.

V

We are out much later than I originally anticipated. Workman's closed a while ago, and now we are in a sketchy McDonald's. On our way out, the security guards help direct Kaelyn and I when we mistakenly try to open the locked door—both of us confused and in desperate need of sleep. I eat my nuggets and fries as we stroll to Goldsmith Hall, slightly disappointed that I did not receive the iconic red Happy Meal box. We hurry our pace across the bridge as we see what looks like a crime scene near the river.

Maybe it's the heat from the club still clinging to my skin, but the sunless sky and gentle wind complements the tranquil walk back to campus.

Sunrise will be upon us in an hour. We decide that it is worth it to stay up, all of us looking forward to ending the night basking in the pink and orange light that comes with a rising sun. Rachel and I leave the skybridge to wander the pedestrian refuge islands below. When the sun gifts us happiness, we return the favor with thankfulness.

My experiences in Ireland gifted me with wisdom—understanding myself and the world better.

Letting those gifts inform your response to new situations shows that you're giving yourself room to grow. Before Ireland, I had never been outside of the States; I knew very little of the world beyond. I had to wear sea-glass-colored lenses before I could see the world for what it really is and what it can be.

THE “LIVING” ROOM

Jacqueline Manness

The sterile beige couch, framed by silver silk drapes, mocks me upon entering my childhood home. Its corners are stuffed with deep turquoise and speckled gray decorative pillows, arranged and fluffed with precision. In front of it, a dark mahogany table sits perfectly centered on a thick, blue rug.

If you're lucky enough to step close to this table, you'll find your reflection staring back, giving you the middle finger. Quick, before mom catches you! If you were smart, you would have taken that bird as your warning!

“The Living Room” is not to be lived in, don't be so naive. Of course, it is only for show and reserved for guests only. A shrine to normalcy, or at least the illusion of it. Do the stiff furniture and faux pais pillows convince you that everything is fine? I dare you to take a closer look and count the cracks hidden beneath the polish.

A KILLER NAME

Jhanesty Vaye Bautista

I have a killer name.
Not like the enthusiastic, “Oh, that’s a killer name!” But in the most literal sense. Childhood innocence crushed, arms stained a sickly red, and ambulances called to the scene.

My name is a
cold-blooded murderer.

Well, at least I thought it
was a murderer.

Names hold power.
Instead of believing in
defining the power of my
name, I let it be associated
with fatal events that
almost ended my life
and the lives of others
as well.

I was born with the
name Jhanesty, but
three other names replaced it.

The first is JhaNasty.
JhaNasty revealed the
harsh reality of having
parents who were present
but never really there; this
left a lack of support in
my early childhood years.
It killed the thought that
somebody could love me
just for being me.

Consequently, the name
Jhan let such insecurities
affect my relationships. I
kept people in my life even
though they only sought to
make me their academic
slave, even if they were
horrible friends. But the
self-torture didn’t end
there.

Manang was the guilt I
felt for not getting home
fast enough. It signifies
the shame of watching
my brother take his last
breath and the silence that
took over when he became
utterly nonverbal. As the
Ilokano term translates to
older sister and illustrates
respect, I felt I deserved no
such title.

It was difficult to admit that these events truly affected me. I wanted to believe that I was strong and had armor made of gold. But being strong never meant I couldn't be weak.

Accepting that these events happened, grasping the pain it brought, and reflecting on how I let it negatively affect my outlook on life and people changed my perspective on the three names.

I recognize that my parents aren't perfect. Before me, they had to quickly overcome the pains of living a loveless childhood with numerous struggles greater than mine. They had done their best to raise me while healing from their past. JhaNasty never meant I was incapable of being loved. It manifested because my parents loved me so much,

that they gave me a silly nickname to make me laugh.

The number of people who use the name Jhan that would protect me from manipulation is far more significant than those who would cruelly attempt to. The name represents the trust and beauty of forming relationships, as there are always people who will support me throughout life and give me never-ending memories of love.

Lastly, I earned back the right to be called *Manang*, not that I ever lost it in the first place. The guilt I felt was misplaced. It was a stage of grief that I had felt after facing a traumatic event. I grew tired of blaming myself and decided to spend time with my brother. I taught him to sign words and phrases like eat, please, thank you, etc. I taught him how to write, although his Cs would end up backward. I got him to mumble a sound that resembled the word, cheese.

Four years have passed since his accident, and my brother can now write his name, Zac, with the letter c facing the right way. He can say the word Mom out loud. He can sign the word sister. I gave him back his voice and realized the power of my name.

My name is anything but a murderer.

As I search for the meaning of Jhanessty Vaye, nothing shows up. I am the first Jhanessty Vaye to exist. I'm the only person who can truly define my name.

I am the ability to be vulnerable, the art of compassion, and blessed with the gift of teaching. With a life of new experiences and people ahead, I won't limit myself to just one definition. I won't be limited to just one name.

XIPE AND MY TÍO

Inés Marquez

My uncle's dog went missing and I think that good things are in a short store.

I worry if the world turns its shoulder just a bit more firmly these days.

My uncle's dog is black and white and a demon of maintenance.'

I never met him. But I know my tío, so I worry anyways.

My worries gather in the same line that runs across my mother's forehead, different shape, but passed on to me all the same.

I worry. I worry for his crazy, I worry for his way of talking that snaps sharp as the spurs on his stingray boots,

I worry for that fragile fierce look in his eyes that seemed so much like ours when we were kids, so much like the fear you have when you go into the world and everything is so much bigger than you and you can't change it, so we would laugh and play and steal his glasses all the same.

Oh, I'm worried, tío.

I know that Xipe was your world and your hopes and maybe a bit of the you that you still like so much and the bit that my mother still loves despite. I know that he will most likely not come home, but I don't know how much more sorrow that bird flitting in your eyes can take.

I keep growing and it hurts to look at you sometimes because the bigness of it all has still has not gone away, has it, tío, and oh, I wish better things stayed, tío.

YOUR CAT

Tessa Watkins

I type “Girls Kissing” into the Youtube search bar and watch as many videos as I can. 10 years old and I finally have access to the internet on my iPad mini and my brain goes wild. “Boobs.” As soon as I press search I close my iPad and cry into my pillow. I can’t even count how many “Am I gay?” quizzes I took from age 10 to 16 - all of them confirming what I already knew. For as long as I can remember, I would suppress any thoughts of maybe being gay or bi or queer or any of the nasty words I would hear the boys at school say. It wouldn’t matter anyways; I ALWAYS talked about the middle school crushes I had on the boys and would NEVER talk about how I would avoid eye contact with any of the girls in the PE locker room.

Once I got to 8th grade, instead of crying for myself, I started crying for my little sister. I would think, “No, she can’t one day be what I am, and go through what I’m going through. She’s only 7 and I don’t want her world to feel like mine: like it’s ending”. I was 13 and going through a crisis that I thought I could never share with anyone.

Flash forward to sophomore year of high school. A boy finally asked me out and I thought, “OK, this is it, I can get a boyfriend and my 13 year old brother can stop asking me if I don’t have a boyfriend because I like girls.” It was a movie theater date, obviously, and with 20 minutes left in the movie he holds my hand and my entire body gets stiff. “Nerves,” I think to myself. “Just don’t think about how sweaty your hand is.” Afterwards we walk around the mall and he asks if I want a piece of gum.

Of course I decline because *of course* I don't want to kiss a BOY.

We both eventually get picked up with nothing but a wave goodbye. You think that is the end of this crush, but just wait.

Junior year of high school. My younger cousin snapchat's me and says "I think I like girls." and I say, "Me too!" We give each other a virtual high five and for the rest of the year; no one else knew except her. She was the only one I knew for sure would not judge me for my sexuality. However, I saw how hard it was for her to come out to her parents, especially with the slight homophobic comments that we've both heard from our families and friends our whole lives. "That's so gay," was something we both grew up hearing every family vacation.

And then she had to deal with her first girlfriend who broke her heart. She said it was the hardest time of her life and what she shared with me, it was. No way I could go through that. But, I did feel a lot better now that someone knew and someone accepted me, so I decided to tell my best friend Haley. If I'm being honest, I totally had a crush on Haley which, of course, started out as a joke. All she said was "I know," and went on with her conversation. This made me feel like my sexuality didn't matter, but in a good way: like no one would change their perception of me just because I like girls. But I still had doubts and was constantly struggling with internalized homophobia and external homophobia all around me.

Also, at this point, I still had no experience with boys or girls so along comes my Senior Year grad party. Remember the Movie Date boy? Well, he's back and everyone was determined for something to happen between us. I may have had a little too much "juice" that night and decided to make the first move and kiss him in the basement of my house. "Interesting," was the only thing I said to him afterwards. Then I went upstairs and asked my friends, "Are you supposed to feel anything?" They just laughed and said that I was probably too drunk, and I shrugged my shoulders and agreed with them. I had always thought that, in college, I would get all the experience I needed with guys, find a boyfriend, and everything would be ok.

Freshman year of college. I came to school three days after knee surgery and I hardly met anyone my first semester of college. This was then my Tinder era. And no luck. However, another night after too much "juice", I confessed to two of my closest friends that I think I like girls. They were so supportive and asked so many questions which made me want to tell more people and figure it out for myself. Cut to summer before sophomore year and I was finally pretty sure of myself. The thought of ever dating a man made me shrivel up, but the thought of being with a woman sounded so very lovely. I still didn't have much experience with boys and absolutely no experience with girls but I wanted to tell my other close friends at home. I received only love and support from them, which made me feel so good and, most importantly, heard.

Sophomore year started and I took a leap of faith and changed my Tinder to guys and girls. After about a week of swiping with matches not really going anywhere, I saw the cutest little kitten I have ever seen. Then came the best opening line ever (if I do say so myself): “YOUR CAT” in all caps. After three days of texting and talking on the phone, we finally met for the first time. Of course I was freaking out the entire time and it took me all night to make a move. Right before I left, I kissed her. I instantly thought to myself, “Ohhh, this is how it’s supposed to feel.” And that was it for me. I was hooked on the most beautiful, kind, and loving woman I have ever met. Step one of figuring out if I liked girls or not... Check. Step two of telling my parents and family... in action.

It actually took forever for me to tell my parents because I spent 19 years of my life hearing slightly homophobic comments from my dad with my mom not stepping up... but, then again, I hadn’t stepped up either. I told my mom right before Thanksgiving and said that me and that girl I hung out with all the time are actually dating. She said, “I had a feeling.” It wasn’t until Christmas break that I told my dad. We were in the doctor’s office waiting for a hearing test and he said, “Who’s that on your wallpaper?” I thought it was now or never, so I said, “Well since you asked, that is actually my girlfriend. We’ve been dating for 3 months.” He laughed. My heart sank. “Do you hate me?” All he said was “No, I don’t hate you.” And that was the end of the conversation. It took all of winter break for him to even mention her and it took weeks after for him to call her my girlfriend instead of, “how’s your friend?”

He came around after a while even though it was rough at first. New Years was my hard launch on Instagram and then my entire family knew. I was nervous to see them and nervous about what they were going to say. So many of them were so supportive and so many of them were so excited. However, there were some, like my grandpa, who asked my dad where they went wrong. That is what hurt. People thought that since I came out, I was suddenly a different person, when this has been me my entire life and I've just kept myself hidden for so long. I know they still love me and it will just take them a little longer than it took other people.

It's been two and a half years now. My grandpa asks about my girlfriend every time we talk. My dad gets her Christmas and graduation gifts. My brothers wish me happy Pride. Long story short, I am the happiest I've been in forever. Figuring out where my sexuality is on the spectrum made me see just how beautiful life can be and how fulfilled I can feel in my own body.

VISUAL ARTS

Pages 66 - 69

KILMURVEY BEACH

Olivia Sandvik



This photograph was taken in the summer of 2023 when I studied abroad in Ireland.

This excursion to the Aran Islands did not come easy; taking this photo required me to take a bus and a ferry and then bike several miles with a chest cold and asthma.

Every time I look at this photo I am reminded of the fruits that come from perseverance.

MEMORIES ABROAD

Olivia Sandvik



In this collage, I incorporate images and colors that encapsulate my experience studying abroad in Ireland during the summer of 2023.

Included are photos, postcards, shells, and sea-glass that I collected there, as well as abstract representations of my discoveries.

I made this piece in the spring of 2024.

The twine outlines my side profile; I am reflecting upon the artistic representations of my experiences. The swirls of blue and green evoke the lushness of the island's rich history and how it has been intertwined into my own history.

This collage is the physical manifestation of how I grew in creativity and understanding during my study abroad experience.

POETRY

Pages 72 - 92

A PRIEST'S APOLOGY

Harrison Mains

For a while, I felt nothing.

Or at least, it was the absence of something.

I walked for hours on the beach, and stared at the sand for even longer.

A sweet, dying presence invaded my life.

I didn't know what to do, how to fix it, how to permeate the membrane of an invisible problem.

I looked up to God a few times.

Asked him for guidance, a sign, an acknowledgement.

What I received wasn't nothing, but a chilling silence.

A deep, resounding moan of air, wind, trees, the ocean, love, attachment, the sun, the stars, hillsides, grasses, boredom, trinkets, toys, airplanes, and travel.

I didn't receive any notion that it was going to stop soon - that he was going to stop soon - and so, the deep and resounding silence it was.

So, it was.

I'd be lying if I said it didn't affect me.

Of course it did; you, me, and everyone else, too.

God's silence.

The silence of the stars.

The silence of our bodies, waiting to be held, cared for, whispered away into nothingness.

The sound of it all.

Loud, quiet, nothing.

And I chose to believe
this, chose to devote my
life to it.

The silence, the heart
of it.

The beating of nothing,
everything, sadness,
happiness, joy, loss,
forgetting, giving.

So, I reached in

and tore it to pieces.

Mine, I said.

Mine.

I ripped it to shreds, tore
everyone and every-
thing.

Only to find that, yes, it
was me - just me - at the
end of it.

The answer I already knew.

There was no question.

It stood plainly out before
me.

I didn't need to look closer,
or find it upside down, or
tear its heart to shreds.

I didn't need to.

And yet, I did.

You, me, and everyone
else, too.

EXTINCTION

Rachael Jenness

The last of my race	I'm the last one alive
There's no one around	No one answers the call
I call out to space	No others survived
But there is no sound.	I'm the last of them all.
There's no one around	No one answers the call
I wish they could hear me	No one answers my cry
But there is no sound	I'm the last of them all
There is no one near me.	The last mournful good-bye.
I wish they could hear me	No one answers my cry
I'm the last one alive	My friends are all gone
There is no one near me	The last mournful goodbye
No others survived.	The last Kauai O'o song.

My friends are all gone

They'll never be heard

The last Kauai O'o song

I am the last bird.

They'll never be heard

I take to the sky

I am the last bird

Doomed also to die.

HEALING A WOUNDED ĀINA AND HOME

Carlo Cortez

Near the coast and
streets, on a day like no
other, flames erupted
Smoke clouded the sky
with a sickening shade
of gray as a wave of fear
crashed over my body
I may not have been in
it, but on the other side
of the island, I heard it,

I felt it

Not just the blaze on the
outside, but rather, the
smoldering flames that
resided with each person
Engulfed in conflict, sor-
row, fear, I could only try
to sympathize with what
I could not fathom
Families leaving their
houses desperately as
each second the land
around them had started
to deconstruct
People forced into the
oceans fearing that they
may burn but also fear-
ing that they may not
resurface

It wasn't just the conflict
within them fighting to
survive, but the turmoil
fighting to leave what
they've lived for all behind
Lives not only filled with
the value of what was built,
but what it took to build
everything gone in a mere
day

My heart is torn, as the
land of Lahaina is beautiful
Its elegance defined by the
sculpture of the land but
also the deep rooted histo-
ry and culture within it
A place where it was once
known as the royal capital
of Hawai'i
A place where kings and
queens of the island used
to rule and reside
A place where a diversity
of people started life
A place where it was also
anguished by colonialism
A place taken for more
than granted
As marvelous as it is, even
before the fires, there was
always a wound
An excruciating, deep and
painful wound, and to this
day it hasn't healed.
It feels like it never healed.

The fires may have desecrated the land, but there was bleeding between the people

On one end there were others who merely viewed the area as just a place to vacation on Another where the blame was put on someone else for the responsibility of a loved one's life Chaos erupted, and it was more than just to rebuild the homes lost but also the spirits that lost all hope

And that chaos remains, even to this day.

While there was undeniable damage and suffering, what I saw was the beauty of not only Lahaina but Hawai'i, resurface

Communities putting aside everything from the ones in Maui

And even the outer islands coming together to start helping those affected by the fire recover and sustain their lives for as long as they possibly could

Shelters, families, opening up to house those who lost their homes and hearts hoping to once reclaim them

An effort I couldn't even fully describe or put into words other than, "this is what a community should be"

I recall one of the memories I had when I was volunteering at my old preschool

I had worked alongside people from everywhere on the island in order to make food for those in need and tender those sheltering in place Experiencing the product of so many graciously gifted hands was unreal

However, the thing I
remember the most
was about this couple
from London who were
helping us throughout
the process
They had told the story
of how when they realized
the fires were occurring,
they immediately
laid down everything
and decided to help at
multiple shelters before
they had flown back

Seeing that there were
so many people on the
outside that seemed
so apathetic about the
situation, this was more
than touching
The whole experience
gave me hope, it gave
others hope, and an example
of how to *mālama*
the āina
To *mālama the āina*
means to tender and
take care of the land
It is to not just take care
of the physical actuality
of it, but also of the
people who have helped
cultivate this land and
that have resided on it's
soil

It is to show compassion,
as how we treat the people
of our community and
home reflects how we treat
our land
With our *āina* still hurting,
we must continue to heal
the wound
Continue even when it
seems like it's healed.

While the wound in the
land and people still remains
to this day, I believe
the wound can be healed
A wound that may always
hurt, but also a wound
that no longer bleeds and
serves as a symbol of its
history
Like the banyan tree which
miraculously survived the
fire, as damaged as it may
be, the roots aren't shriveled
and forgotten
They continue to revitalize
and heal, for as long as
they are able to, for as long
as they remain
To *mālama the āina* is to
instill a sense of belonging,
a sense of purpose, and a
sense of hope
A hope, that I believe will
heal our home.

NOT A WEED

Ramona Tyler

I am not a weed.

I am a dandelion, one
of the first foods for the
bees.

I am not a weed.

I am a dandelion tea you
use to help with diges-
tion.

I am not a weed.

I am a plant that holds
5 times the amount of
vitamin K you may need.

I am not a weed.

I am a dandelion; there
may be a look-a-like,
but they cannot out do
me in nutritional value,
and they are furry, who
wants to eat fur!

I am not a weed.

I am an extra watering
source for your plants and
lawn as my tap roots bring
up the water and wick it
out to my surroundings.

I am not a weed.

I am the beginning, the
middle, and the end.

I am strength in adversity.

Yes! I am that plant, that
can plant myself where no
others would think to grow
or even survive, and still I
thrive.

I am not a weed.

Remember, I am the
bees' source of food, I
feed the surrounding
environment, and some
animals, and yes, my
dear friends I even feed
you.

If you only take the time
to get to know me, you
will understand how
important I am and the
role I play in the survival
of the fittest!

I am not a weed.

I am strength.

I am sustainment.

I am life!

HOLD ME A LITTLE CLOSER BEFORE YOU GO

Carlo Cortez

I can feel your hold
The plane's moving and
I can feel you both hold-
ing on to me
I'm a junior in college
and your arms still grav-
itate towards clinging to
mine
Mom, dad, don't let go

Wait, I can feel your hold
The bed's not moving
and I can feel you both
holding on to me
I'm a junior in high
school and I still can't
escape your grasp
Mom, dad, let go.

In this miniscule house,
I'm obligated to sleep
in a bed where you still
grasp to me
A house where the word
obligated has always
been nothing less than
chains slapped onto my
arms since I was a kid
because I saw nothing to
be obligated for
A house where *utang na
loob*, has been nothing
but a constant reminder
of why I hate feeling
obligated

A house where dad you've
always been home since
your retirement from the
time I was born
Where I wished that your
age of wisdom at 77 was
more youthful to match
my childhood at 8 with
the other kids at the soccer
field

Ashamed when your
presence was amongst my
peers, where I knew whose
parents were whose, but to
them you're my grandpa
Always at my back,
clutching onto me tightly,
screaming at me that I
need to listen, fight back
against you, not be a mess,
why the hell should I ever
want to be like you?
Why should I be obligated
to *you?*
This isn't asking for much,
dad, let go.

A house where mom you
were barely home when I
needed attention as a kid
Where I wish instead
of telling me to water
the flowers you'd spend
more time with your
son watering the entire
garden together instead
of telling me about your
day at work
Embarrassed when at every
outing and event you
take an unimaginable
amount of photos and
tell me to smile every
five seconds just for your
Facebook post
Always arguing with me
over what I should be
doing, why the choices
I've made aren't the best,
coming home late when
I just want to be with my
friends and not deal with
you and dad screaming
at each others lungs for
the 4th time that week,
pushing me onto what
you want me to be, why
would I ever want to
listen to your voice?
Why should I be obligated
to *you*?
This isn't asking for
much, mom, let go.

I can't feel your hold
Finally, the bed's my own
and I don't feel squeezed
I'm a senior in high school
and I'm free from your
grasp
In this miniscule house, I
finally feel like I'm living

Dad you've started going
out more, I don't see you in
the house constantly
I feel like I'm finally living
my youth frequently going
out with my friends
You don't have to be there
at school meetings so
much with me so I won't
hear, "he's your grandpa
right?"
You're no longer behind
me all the time, not
screaming anymore, telling
me how to be you.
I finally don't feel obligated
to you.
Dad, thanks for letting go.

Mom you've been
at home more since
quarantine, and I get
the attention from you I
once craved as a kid
You barely remind me
to water the flowers any-
more, and you rarely talk
about your day at work
You take maybe 3 or 4
photos whenever we go
out, and you've finally
stopped telling me to
smile so much
You nag at me less
nowadays, less for me to
listen.
I finally don't feel obli-
gated to you.
Mom, thanks for letting
go.

Suddenly it starts getting
too cold, and I wake up
I'm on the plane and
we're still moving
I'm still a junior in
college
You still haven't let go
On this plane, I start to
think wide awake more
about all of it

I think back at our small
house, about how I have
my own room and bed
But also where mom's bed
is in the office and the
couch that dad comfort-
ably sleeps on now in the
living room

Dad you've just hit 80 and
I hope you're there for so
much longer to give me
advice until I'm 30 watch-
ing my kids play soccer
I hope that when I'm home
we find more time to just
go out
Your youth has always
been in your soul, despite
the amount of times you've
fought in the hospital for
us

I think back to when you
were at my back, telling
me to be a good listener to
others, be strong willed,
and stay organized, can I
still be like you?

Mom you're still working
hard to support me and
my education in college
while making time for
when I come home
I've wanted to get back
into gardening, and I'll
gladly water the plants
outside while you talk
about your day at work
I always take a lot of
photos now, just like
you, not just to post but
to keep memory of as
you have with us
I miss us arguing over
the smallest things
sometimes, about my
cooking, my college
lifestyle, always being
out with my friends
late, constantly pushing
myself to be the best and
happiest I can be, can I
still listen to your voice?

Obligation that was once
a bitter word due to how
I viewed my life
Is not as bitter as the re-
gret I have for taking the
time I had for granted
with both of you

Utang na loob at its finest
to me can be a terrible
phrase, but also one of the
most beautiful and genu-
ine feelings

I am not bound by obliga-
tion, but I feel obligated to
give back to my commu-
nity, to my friends, to my
family, and most certainly
to my parents who've both
sacrificed more things
than I can ever come to
comprehend

We are never obligated to
anyone in this life other
than ourselves, and yet
to feel obligated towards
other people is a different
kind of love that is special
and unique

Not once, mom and dad,
were you ever obligated
towards me, but feeling
obligated towards me had
never ever wavered for
both of you in any slice of
time that I exist

I can feel your hold
When this plane stops
moving, I hope I still
feel it, I hope I can hold
onto the both of you too
as you've held onto me
your entire life
I'm a junior in college,
and in every single day
that I am here I aim to
do well so that I can try
to repay the hold of your
arms in the means that
I can support yours too
just as you have support-
ed mine

You don't have to ask me
to do more as without
knowing I will do, but
this is the last thing I'll
ever only truly ask of
both of you
Mom, dad, please,
Hold me a little closer
before you go

OCEANSIDE

Grace Applegate

We search all over, and
attention dreams of
detail,
an answer to us all
around and yet forgot-
ten.

Which one? We peek the
lining of foam and froth,
turn
urchin inside out among
these bulbous, pointed
stars.

We search all over, take
flint to the only sky and
hold
the smoulder up to
strangers, aliens, tax
collectors

of sand, mirrors and
strings found at our
ankles
backlit from all the same
sun, growing tight but
still

we search all over, try to
find it in our brother's
favorite
place, turn filmed locket
over thumb from some
relation,

look for features and push
through walls of violence
at the tabernacle of expect-
tation, and search becomes
sound:

which is me? Which is Me?
While listening only in
percentage, then not at all.

SCRAPER

Inés Marquez

scraped this off the bot-
tom of my shoe

gave it to you and

it was holy.

dug into my pockets

read off the faded crum-
pled receipts and

it was radical.

picked my tooth

for mango beans rice
corn dirt or whatever-
outhinkieat left over and

it fed your crowd like
Jesus.

looked down at my hands

flashed the brown skin on
its edge and
you were Techni-Color
blinded.

and you-

all of you-

still won't

remember me

tomorrow.

TAKING THE TRAIN

Carlo Cortez

Train tracks, 4pm
I drag my belongings
but, there seems to be no
weight
Yet, somehow the walk
feels heavy

I board, seated, waiting
for the engines to roll
Within that timespan I
ask myself
Why did I take the train?

I could've taken a plane,
or possibly a car
Maybe a yellow school
bus, one I took in ele-
mentary
Maybe a boat, albeit I
may get seasick
If I'm crazy, I could walk
till my legs give out

Reality comes back into
my view and before I knew
it, we were already moving
I glance over to the sight of
the lake and the side of the
tracks

Realizing I've seen a sim-
ilar view, if not the same,
just in a different photo

Maybe I was meant to take
the train

I wonder what ride you
take

Whether its a train, plane,
car, bus or a boat

What photo do your eyes
take as you pass by?

And when we both reach
our stop, how do you cap-
ture your journey?

As I recall slideshows of
when we used to be on the
same ride

Somehow, we end up again
in the same place

I know now I was meant to
take the train

THE BOXER

Zoe Schinko

When I was five years
old

My father taught me
how to punch
How to square my
shoulders like a man
so I could not be
touched

He showed me how to
curl my fingers
And ball them into a fist
How to shift my weight,
to find my balance
So I wouldn't miss

He taught me how to
pitch a tent
And how to whistle like
the lark

He taught me how to
bite with teeth
I learned to maneuver in
the dark

How life is played like a
game of memory
Nothing is done unless
it's gone

But if a man tries to take
advantage of you
Then don't be smart - just
run

Womanhood will take my
hand
And lead me down the
stairs
I'll catch my reflection in
the mirror -
Time will show its wear

But I'm as delicate as gravel
And as subtle as the sun
A ballerina in the boxing
ring
The match only stops when
I've won

It hits you
During these dew encased
mornings
That break the dawn of
spring
I am my father's daughter
And I'm a wild wild thing.

TREE OF DREAMS

Deeya Chandran

According to the Oxford dictionary, a journey is “an act of traveling from one place to another” the Hindi word for journey is *safar*.

My anglophone brain hears that and understands pain, don't they both mean the same anyway?

The journey of dreams is windy and cruel.

As your stomach aches, you pretend that it's your favorite ride.

After all, motion sickness must be a sign of success.

Wipe your sweat, carry on, don't admit defeat and let it slip that you, too, are human.

What good would a dream be if it wasn't worth suffering for?

My ancestors traveled down this path, leaving a clearing for me.

What was a rocky, overgrown mess for them, tripping them with every step became smoothed into pavement with branches perfectly trimmed above my head.

My path is leisurely so it must be worth their pain. The responsibility of ease, the responsibility to achieve every goal and pursue every opportunity, the responsibility to never lose myself, who we are, who I was molded to be.

But what if, in following their path, I've gotten lost? A screw fallen loose from a cemented legacy that was drilled into me as a little girl, but has been hammered so deep that I've grown blind to it.

Although it hides, I can
still hear it's motivating
words
sending shivers down
my spine.
The angel on my shoulder
tells me to never give
up,
while the devil tells
me that I will never do
enough.

I am but an extension of
the generations before
me,
a family tree with roots
so deep
sometimes it feels like
they'll burst out of the
ground just to grab me,
because as much as the
apple doesn't fall far
from the tree,
sometimes she tumbles
away.

The roots fight to keep
her close,
trying to reach her from
beneath decades of dirt
and Earth,

but there's only so much
they can do,
because with each fallen
apple grows a new tree that
drops new apples
and the natural cycle of life
repeats.

Sometimes I fear I've
strayed,
chasing a dream, rolling
further and further away,
but at the end of the day,
the line between my dream
and their dream blurs,
becoming our dream.
One that we've inherited,
one that we've built our-
selves but haven't quite
attained.
My dreams are compound-
ed upon theirs,
a culmination of genera-
tions of change
that have sought stability
and serenity at the expense
of simplicity.

A search that took them
across borders and
oceans,
time and time again,
until they found a place
to replant their tree,
one where she could
grow strong and fruitful,
branch out and bear
vibrant hues,
providing shade over a
new path.

I would be foolish to
think that with me, this
journey ends.
There are footsteps
carved into the pave-
ment,
and I have a trail to blaze
with them.
And although I will
venture further away,
straying from this path,
I know I will always find
my way back.

DIVERSITY MONOLOGUE

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TOO MANY JOKES TO TELL

Abby Morioka

Our family has a couple of running jokes that make it into our typical dinner conversations

We joke about getting the word rice tattooed on us, and even our tattoo hating mom has agreed just so that she can match with us.

The conversations, though, inevitably turn to the question of whether we get rice tattooed in English or traditional kanji?

My other favorite running joke we have is about what would happen if a race war broke out in the US.

We construct our plan of which parent each kid would go with while giggling at the dinner table.

We've decided that on the basis of survival my mom would take my brother, sister, and my best friend with my best friend's dad.

My dad and I would go with my best friend's brother and mom.

We joke that it's because we have a higher chance of survival because of the lighter shade of our skin.

In just the short time that it has been since my dad passed, we've joked that now our plan is ruined.

But then we joke that a race war won't actually break out.

We joke about staying inside on December 7—just in case—because just a month after Pearl Harbor my grandpa entered the world,

not being given the name my Bachi wished for him.

We joke about my grandpa's name being Franklin because the white nurse told our Bachi to protect him as he came into the cold winter season.

The same cold that they felt as they covered their skin to be bussed to the Tule Lake Internment camp just weeks later,

putting on layer after layer to protect from the cold while at the same time, covering their skin to protect from far more than the elements.

We joke that my Grandpa Franklin was kept in a drawer instead of a bassinet for the first few months of his life that he spent in the camps, as if he was an item to keep hidden and protected from the things in the world that could harm him.

The things that place babies in drawers to hide them away and give them the names of the oppressors, all in the name of protection though, right?

We joke that my Bachi was unbelievably stubborn and how she insisted that her name was Francis, and sometimes insisted that it was Francis Haru.

We joke about how my middle name is Haru and how I was supposed to be named after her.

We joke about finding
out her name was Ha-
ruko, or Spring Beauty,
when we got her death
certificate,

realizing that Haruko
was simply an accidental
dead name, removing
the beauty from her
name to try and protect
herself.

We joke about how I
carry the beauty of Haru,
spring, and the burden
of Abigail, my father's
joy.

And how I am just a
part in the cycle of the
seasons,

The cold winter, the
season that brings the
birth and beginning of
Moriokas and the death
of all that has bloomed
in spring.

The spring that comes
from cold winter, deprived
of the beauty that could
have been.

All parts of our cycle carry
the last name Morioka,
which means forest heal,
and how Morioka is the
healing factor of all of our
seasons.

My mom and her sister
keep their last name be-
cause we can not afford to
lose our rhetorical
healing power when so
much has been lost.

The beauty in spring, what
could have been if Frank-
lin wasn't the president,
the healing power
of the forest,

there are just too many
jokes to tell.

TO THE RHYTHM THAT SAVED ME

Amari Troutt

As a child,
the only light I received
was the light that I let in.

A crack in the blinds of a
shadowed room.
You weren't just a flicker,
you were the moon on
restless nights,
guiding me through
a darkness I was too
young to understand.

The voices in my head
screamed
they weren't echoes of
my soul,
but thunderclaps in a
storm I did not sum-
mon.
But you?
You came in soft like a
whispering tide,
then hit hard,
like a drumline at sun-
rise.
You made the chaos
sing.

You're my rhythm, my
muse,
the pen that wrote the
verses when there were
none.,
turning blank pages into
poetry.
You're the arms that held
me
when the world let me fall.
When my soul longs for
something I cannot give it,
you come through
a hand outstretched in the
desert,
a river where I thought I'd
only find sand.

But there's a shadow in my
love for you.
I know you're not mine
alone.
You belong to everyone,
whispering to strangers in
a language I thought was
ours.
Your songs don't wear my
name,
your chords don't bend
just for me.
And still, I cling to the
notes,
jealous of the way you heal
them too

You hum like a breeze,
caress like the ocean,
but roar like a wildfire
when I'm breaking open.
You're smooth as jazz,
but sharp as truth-
a melody of hope,
a harmony of healing

Lauryn said nothing
even matters,
and somehow with you,
I believe her.
Beyonce told me, to run
the world
and I've been sprinting
ever since.
J. Cole said love yours
and you taught me how
to love the sound of my
own scars.
Jazmine sang, Forever
Don't Last,
but with you forever
feels possible.

You are more than sound.
You're sunrise after sleep-
less nights.
You're the smell of rain on
dry soil,
the crash of waves on wea-
ry shores.
You speak in keys,
unlocking doors I didn't
know existed.
You cut me open like
poetry,
then sew me up with the
same thread.

You're the love I can't hold,
but always feel.
The touch of wind on my
skin,
the shiver of something
holy.
You don't just play,
you baptize me
and with every note, is a
mirror reminding me
that I am growing into a
song I've always wanted to
hear.

You hold me in every
line,
every pause,
every forte.
You hold my silence,
my sorrow,
my joy.

You're my sanctuary,
my prayer,
my answer.

And now I thank you
not just for carrying me,
but for making me.
For giving me courage
in your crescendos and
peace in your silences.
For teaching me
that every soul deserves
a song
even when it's broken

So here's my vow
sealed in a rhyme:
I'll carry you with me
through every lifetime.
Even if you love them too,
I'll hold the parts of you
that are mine.

You're not just sound-
you're the lifeline I hold,

forever the rhythm,
the echo of my soul

Forever yours,

Me

A CUB KNOWS BEST THE BITE OF HER MOTHER

Stefanie Hinkaew-Marlow

My best friend and my
greatest enemy,
Were once the same
person.

Did you see someone
else when you looked at
me?

There is something
inside you, an echo,
haunting and bodiless,
And it won't leave you,
but it haunts me instead.

I used to ask,
Did you see someone
that you wanted to hate?
Now I look back, and
instead I should have
asked,
Did you see someone
that you could not save?

Change didn't spare me,
neither did it you,
And I see things now
that I didn't before.
A cub knows best the
bite of her mother,
The sharpness of her
teeth, and sting of her
words.

But who else does she
hold, when she's cold
and afraid?

Who did the mother hold,
when she was cold and
afraid?

You were sculpture,
smooth and tall,
But the haze cleared and
instead I saw,
A statue worn by rain,
something recklessly
wrought.
Someone's wife, someone's
mother, but first, some-
one's daughter.
And I forgive you now,
forever until forever,
Because I know now,
We hate the things that
remind us of us.
The things we could not
have.
And the things we could
not save.

Seasons changed, and war
was over.
I saw you cry for the first
time ever,
It was my hand that you
reached for, however.
I hope you see her, when
you look at me,
And when I look at you,
I hope I saved her.

T_{rs}
Roland Allen

We went down to the
river
Some friends and I, sun
glitter and a picnic.

I remember when my
parents split,
at my mom's house with
the big window above
the headboard
dust on the sunbeams
squeezing past the
blinds.
Saturday, so we could
sleep in.
I turn over and there you
were.

Turn away, drown it out,
watch the water.
those pretty little phase
portraits.

Back then, I'd lean on
you.
and I study like an
alcoholic
so I see your face in
these dusty textbooks

We mathematicians are all
the same.
I'd like the whole absurd
story in curves

-trace it with your index
and feel the bends-
I try to bury it, running my
hand across your cheek
-and those are functions
too-
I want one for you. So $f(x,$
 $y, z)$ returns me to you.

It even has your stretch
marks (you will notice)
turning back, -ring finger,
smooth across your neck-
-cut now to the river-

You're still in my head
rattling with Gödel and
Galois.

One time, we woke up
too early.
on one of those cheap
pull out couch beds.
and I'd peel the minutes
into primes because
3,11,5,2 felt longer than
3:30

Nat, I'm Sorry,

I should've gave it up a
while ago,
But we mathematicians
are all the same.

Even your tears follow a
curve.

I WANTED TO BE A TEACHER

Rajane Edwards

I
You told me I can be
anything I wanted
Why is it now that you
condemn me?
For my pursuit for something more
For my gift of thoughtfulness
For my gift of patience

I told you I wanted to be
a teacher
That I can mold the
minds of our youth
To give them the glory,
the will, the blessing
Of knowledge

That my hands will ache
by the end of the night
From responding to
what my children would
say.
Grading piece by piece,
just to see if they comprehend
What I have taught
them.

That my voice will grow
hoarse.
Riddled with weakness
because I chose to lead a
classroom.

That each time a child has
a lack of ambition,
I will choose to have a
broken heart
Because in my eyes, I see a
smart mind
While they see less than
who they truly are.

I told you I wanted to be a
teacher.

How could thou sit there?
Perceiving our next
Generation with the eye of
unease.

Wondering if they have
lost thy minds.
Thou ought to wonder the
reason why?

For 't is thou that create
this tension.

"We know what we are, but
not know what we may be."
Shakespeare placed that in
our hands.

To reveal one's capabilities,
to be greater
than your past self, than
your lower self.

The self you don't desire
Perhaps I neglected that I
lost myself too

The day I called myself
an adult. That was the
day
I stopped learning.

I stopped learning when
the
Quality of life became
cash and commodities.
I stopped learning when
I had to give up
my favorite toy because I
was too old. I
Stopped learning when
the cousins sleepover
Stopped happening. I
stopped learning when
Grades became a greater
priority compared to my
well-being.

It was so easy to forget
the joy that each gave
to me,
An aimless shot in the
sky, uncontrolled by my
thrill
Of a blissful oblivious
life. A time where
Being overjoyed didn't
feel like a chore. My
laughter
Didn't come with stress.
But I learned something,
for the first time in a
while.

I learned that I am to be a
teacher

Because I know what I
lacked before, and I would
Falter at the sight if I knew
someone who would
Lack the same way.

I am aware that many of us
lost a piece of themselves.
We don't express joy
Like we used to. We don't
smile at each other any-
more.
We don't communicate.
Have we lost our
Humanity?

I am to be a teacher to
teach humanity.
To teach the value of
self-respect
To teach the value of
love, compassion, the use
of hate
And how it drives our fears
of the unknown.
I am here to teach freedom
of mind
I am here to teach the
freedom of self.

And when I have sets of
eyes that meet mine.
And my name is on a
dotted line.
Across the page that
called me a professional.

Dammit, I will be a
teacher.
I will be the one speak-
ing life into our children.
I will be the one to hold,
to caress, to carry our
sweet minds.
I would rather die saving
our youth
Than to leave the world
with
Nothing to show

Without the morality of
others.
The morality of yourself.
You are nothing but a
shell of a human.

You told me I can be
anything I wanted.
I told you I wanted to be
a teacher.

TWO CULTURES, ONE HOME

Kira 森 Bifone

My leg is shaking, I close
my eyes.

My heart is pounding, I
close my eyes tighter.

My eyes are closed, but
I can see the Pacific
Ocean.

I am bobbing up and
down, diving beneath
the surface of the water.
In another life, I would
be a mermaid; I just
know it.

I grew up on the beaches
of Oahu, a place my
mom always called
home.

The comforting warmth
of the sun hits my face.

The taste of salt water on
my lips.

The ocean is my safe
place, I am home.

Every day I am Chinese.
Every day I am Ameri-
can. Every day I am Chi-
nese American when I
defend my identity, cele-
brate Chinese New Year,
or when someone asks
me where I'm from.
But like *really* from?

I am never truly home. I
see home in glimpses: fits of
laughter, watching Love Actu-
ally, airport
gates, and good books. I am
closest and farthest from
home in the feeling of in-be-
tween.

Chinese. American. Adoptee.

Across the Pacific Ocean, a
woman shares my DNA. I
don't know her name, her
age, or if she's even alive. 20
years ago, on a day I imagine
as bitterly cold, she left her
bundled-up baby, hoping to
give her new life.

I think about my birth mother
often.

I wonder if she would be
proud of me.

I wonder how often she thinks
of me.

My therapist once told
me that anxiety can be
genetic. Feeding a baby
life-sustaining nutrients
alongside her anxieties.
A mother who knows
she can't keep this child
because she is a girl.

In all of my wonder, all
I hope is that I have her
brown eyes.

I am sick of being
stuck in the ocean. The
familiar feeling of my
shriveled and wrinkled
skin,
but I'm 16.
I'm not Chinese enough.
No tiger mom or apolo-
gy fruit.
I'm not American
enough.
The Italian name and
Asian face.

I've worn my middle
name every day.

Sen, meaning forest. But
forests stand unchanged in
the wind, the opposite of
this feeling of
being tossed by the ocean.
Sen is an anchor, my given
first name in China, my
middle name in America.

I didn't like living in the
ocean, treading water.
I was constantly frustrated
and tired, gasping for air.
Waves of culture hitting
me from either side, I am
barely keeping my head
above water.
I was desperate to find an
island, to cling to a culture,
an identity.

Convinced I had been
thrown into the deep end,
I realized swimming was
my only option.
Instead of finding an
island, or swim lessons, I
was just going to figure it
out.
In between waves, I saw
that I wasn't alone in the
ocean.

Honorary Auntie Janah
was the first to jump in,
showing me how to exist
as a proud Asian
American.

A breath of fresh air
came with academics,
a home in the world of
asking questions.
Suddenly I saw that
everyone was swimming
in the ocean.
Everyone is looking for
an island, a place where
they confidently belong.

Instead of fighting the
rip current that pushes
me further out to sea, I
float on my back.
Once again, I close my
eyes.
I learned to rest and to
accept that sometimes
the current is too strong.
The ocean air in my
lungs keeps me afloat.
Floating in the ocean, I
am home.

ROSE, INK ON SKIN, 8"X2", 2025

Odalys Sanchez Cedillo

Etched into my skin
the words "*Fall in love
with your journey*"
adorn my body in the
shape of a rose
Whose petals never fall,
A flower claiming im-
mortality
It needs not water nor
soil

I give it sun every now
and then
But it lives in darkness
and relishes in it's secret
existence
It's quiet, but the words
it speaks are bolder than
it thinks

This rose everlasting
and withstanding every
wind...

It was made to last
Made to survive every
evil thought
To push the wind away
as the chaos of every
storm tries to rip it out
of the ground...
But she survives

A rose so beautifully
drawn you'd never realize
she has thorns
They pierce her own skin
drawing wounds in red ink
Soon, they become scarred
roots
Roots from which she
grows and remembers to
love her life
Her leaves embrace her
as the wind flows every
which way,
Holding her heart togeth-
er as though it carries a
bright red "Fragile" label
on it

She stands mighty in every
storm
So stubborn she won't
move
Why?
Why fall in love with a
journey that makes her feel
stuck in one place?

From the darkness,
The petals answer:
“Fall in love with your
truth;
They say comparison is
the thief of joy;
Love your path and
think of yours only”

So selfish those petals
are,
As if they haven't relied
on stem and roots,
leaves, and thorns
But they think of their
strength
They think of their own
role
To adorn my body
To stamp it with omnip-
otent words
And hang as a painting
in a museum

A motto that fights against
haunting words
A beautiful rose fixed into
the ground
Which feeds it warmth and
keeps it growing
It slowly blooms and she
remembers to fall in love
with every step of her own
journey

LAST SUPPER

Stephanie Garcia Avila

Dinner bells toll
Slowly open the plate
that uncovers my head
Honey eyes covered by
blood and dollar signs
Glossy apple resides
between chin and mind
While asking me not
to, they hold my mouth
pried
Questions get you dead;
pray, curiosity subsides

Next to me is Malcolm
X's all over his head
For America, too hot too
grim
"Cool it down, brothers"
They extinguished people
like him.

Run, the government's a
stalker

Gone catch me up like
David Walker

Like "America your
country's done"

Burn this whole thing
down, call me the sun

wait, here comes the waiter
- help me understand why

Abolition admired only
from afar
Because brainwashed
beings be belligerent
Capitalism brain code,
computer chip corrupted

Disk deliberately decom-
posing

Econ – error – entered
Flawlessly fabricated fa-
cade infiltrating systems
Glorified government
greed disguised as com-
mon good

Hostility holds humanity
back

Incite peaceful protest
inside capitalism

Just to please the white
man

Ludicrous labor yet per-
ceived as lazy

Money made merely for
manipulation

Neoliberalism engraved
with needles, numbing the
nerves

Operation down, open
your eyes

Promising people a piece
of power
Quench your questions
by remaining quiet
Radioactive racism
reliant on reversed repu-
diation
Sustained through
civility- survivors of civil
suffrage suffer still in
silence, silenced
Translucent tyranny
teaches me timidity
Unilateral organization
un-organizing my mind
Vile perpetuation vio-
lently violates views
Xenophobia shows me as
extraterrestrial
Youth is over there, yon-
der, yelling into the void
Westernized mindset
washes me away
Zeal of Capitalism seeds
greed and need

Please, I need to under-
stand.

Waiter, help me under-
stand

White world will tell me
no
While they feed off my
contributions
They won't keep me from
revolution
The solitary solution

I'm afraid of the racist
rhetoric,
Fearful of real danger,
Frightened by random acts
of violence
Committed by completely
random strangers.
But not so scared, that I'd
choose silence

I WONDER

Daija Tramble

Place based wonder
(Burien love letter)
I wonder by kanye west
is one of my favorite
songs because
I always, wonder, what it
all really means

The poverty, structural
failure, understaffed,
Underfunded, fights in
the breezeway

Poor school, dumb
school,
Stereotypes placed on
my learning place

Worst hospital, my
Neighborhood,
Up to no good, while
being pushed out for the
new unit, new family,
new starbucks.

How could we begin
to address the medical
malpractice when 3
more men just came in
with bullet holes

I wonder

Instead of a fit check
friends and family
Choose an outfit for the
casket

One memorial on the
street 2 memorial on the
street

Try talking to homeless
man with nothing to eat
I am enthralled by your
lack of empathy

The kind of hyper aware-
ness that led to
A loss of innocence
Pass it off as calling me an
old soul

I felt that anxiety in ele-
mentary school

Dads in jail moms laid off
im in child therapy,
But Never alone in my
community,

A melting pot we come
together to create new,
The culture runs deep and
I can smell it on me
A Salvadorean bakery next
to the Cambodian market,

Most of us with jobs
before we were 16
support the family,
phone bill, translate,
A language you look at
sideways
Never once coming to
their aid

White and poor but with
more heart and character
than the 6 figure rent
takers,
mom didn't have money
but we always had fun

Taught the values of
spirituality and a connection
to nature
Authenticity in rat city is
the way they raised me

I wonder

I see dance and song
passed down through
generations
A sacred tongue,
Tongan and Mexican
folks teach their history
through movement
An education I won't get
in the classroom.

Being challenged by two
life altering events before
teens were over
covid highschooler, moms
passing, but my progress is
not stalled

A product of my environment,
I am aware that I am
not alone
This internalized grief i sit
with seeps through,
Liquor, weed, gang to
numb the pain
Don't call the blue and red
lights,
Hug tight, visit the graveyard
at night

Shut down Alki beach,
sweep the streets
Narcan, back to life, revive,
second chance
Gun violence, drug usage,
mental illness
and you think the response
is more police
Why is the chief apologizing
to me for misconduct
We had to grow up early

I don't blame them
Doing what they think is
the best
During times of unrest,
Redlined by the toxins

Dark skin crinkled
hands,
A community united in
hardship and triumph

I wouldn't change it, no I
wouldn't change it
Resilience seeps through
a weeping place
Census designated,
Washington state
Break the curse, break
the chain
Elders watch over us

Culture runs through us
and what we touch
Young entrepreneurs,
artists, managers, aca-
demics athletes caregiv-
ers.

Carriers of disappearing,
native language to the
homeland
Speech with conviction
you can't buy in stores
To redefine and build is a
gift

Offered scholarships
On behalf of our leader-
ship

I wonder

A generation of movers
and shakers
Stars in a world taking
their rights away
All we need is us,
Because all we ever had,
was us,
A love letter,
Burien and rat city
A home where I found
meaning

AUTHORS

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THE COURAGE TO QUESTION

Alyssa Guzman-Johnston

Alyssa Guzman-Johnston is a Junior from San Diego, California and is majoring in Political Science and Public Relations with a minor in Leadership Studies.

REMEMBER THE HANDS THAT PICKED YOUR FOOD

Araceli Lopez Ayala Vanover

Araceli Lopez Ayala Vanover is a Sophomore from Hood River, Oregon and is double majoring in English with a writing concentration and Public Relations. Additionally, she is a Mexican-American, first-generation student.

WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

Charlie Herman

Charlie Herman is a Junior from Tamarindo, Costa Rica and is Majoring in Accounting and Business with a minor in Leadership Studies.

CLASS OF '25

Lucy Brunelli

Lucy Brunelli is a Senior English Writing major with a minor in Public Relations.

HANDS THAT PURSUED A DREAM

Angela Macabinguil

Angela Macabinguil is a Junior from Spokane, Washington and is majoring in Biology. She is the Filipino American Student Union President, a Gonzaga Organic Chemistry Student Researcher, NGTB Advanced Technician II, and OnBase Database Technician I. She has many titles and obligations, but she has always loved to write Spoken Word and Our Voices pieces and has been doing it for the last 3 years.

HEALING STEP

Evelyn Shelton

Evelyn Shelton is a Freshman from Mill Creek, WA and is majoring in Business with a music minor.

I AM A PIANO

Adrian Valenzuela

Adrian is a Freshman in Gonzaga University from Portland Oregon. He is majoring in Computer Engineering with a minor in Music.

SEAGLASS-COLORED LENSES, KILMURVEY BEACH, MEMOIES ABROAD

Olivia Sandvik

Olivia Sandvik is a published poet, essayist, and photographer, and she is a senior pursuing Bachelor's degrees in English Writing and Public Relations at Gonzaga University. Her work can be found in Charter, Grit and Grace, and Behind the Vision. A native of the Pacific Northwest, Olivia uses her surroundings to foster her creativity and curiosity. In her free time, Olivia enjoys experimenting in the kitchen and curling up with a good book.

THE "LIVING" ROOM

Jacqueline Maness

Jacqueline Maness is a Senior from Denver, CO and is majoring in Journalism with minors in Public Relations and Writing.

A KILLER NAME

Jhanesty Vaye Bautista

Jhanesty Vaye Bautista is a Freshman from Maui, Hawai'i and is majoring in Community, Culture and Language with a minor in Psychology. She is a first-generation college student who has a love for the arts, especially graphic design and writing. She works as the Graphic Designer with the Our Voices Staff.

XIPE AND MY TIO, SCRAPER

Inés Marquez

Ines Marquez is a Junior from Columbus, OH. She is majoring in English, with minors in Latin American History and Spanish. She works as a co-editor on the Our Voices staff.

YOUR CAT

Tessa Watkins

Tessa Watkins is a Senior from Simi Valley, CA and is majoring in English Lit with a minor in Health Equity. Also known as Big T to the English community. She plays club volleyball and loves to wear a silly t-shirt. Ask her about Taylor Swift and she will squeal in delight.

A PRIEST'S APOLOGY

Harrison Mains

Harrison Mains is a senior from San Francisco, CA. They are majoring in psychology with a minor in writing.

EXTINCTION

Rachael Jenness

Rachael Jenness is a Senior from Colorado Springs Colorado. She is majoring in International Studies and Criminology with a minor in Spanish, and hopes to go to law school when she graduates this year.

HEALING A 'WOUNDED ĀINA AND HOME, 'HOLD ME A LITTLE CLOSER 'BEFORE YOU GO, TAKING THE TRAIN

Carlo Cortez

Hi my name is Carlo Cortez (he/him) and I am currently a third-year student majoring in Computer Engineering and minoring in Philosophy! I'm the president for the IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) club, and one of the culinary chairs for FASU (the Filipino American Student Union). I am Filipino American, and I was born and raised in Maui, Hawai'i, and have lived there my entire life. In my free time outside of engineering, I've really come to enjoy writing as a way to express myself and my thoughts creatively. For me it's become a great hobby of mine as of late, and it's also become an outlet that I can always turn to. I like to write lots of poems and prose when I get the chance, and I enjoy focusing on themes of growth, reflection, identity, and introspection!

NOT A WEED

Ramona Tyler

I am a daughter, sister, mother, aunt, and an Oma. I am a caregiver, a gardener, a lover of nature, and a friend to all. I am the one you turn to when you need someone to listen, someone to lean on, or simply someone who understands with their whole heart. My name is Ramona, which means “advice and protector,” from Spanish and Old German, and it feels like a true reflection of my journey. I’ve always felt a calling to listen, to be present for others, and to offer whatever help I canâ€”especially when it comes to nourishing both the body and soul. Over time, I’ve come to realize how many people face food insecurity and how deeply that affects communities. When I was given the gift of a garden, I knew it was my chance to make a real difference. For the past four years, I’ve grown and shared hundreds of pounds of fresh vegetables and flowers, giving not just food but also friendship and connection. Moving forward, I want to teach others to grow and thrive in their own spaces, to become strong like the dandelion’s resilient and ever-spreading hope. Ramona-A heart with purpose!

OCEANSIDE

Grace Applegate

Grace Applegate is a Junior from rainy Oregon, currently pursuing a degree in English Writing and Music. She enjoys writing poetry and works as a co-editor on the Our Voices staff.

THE BOXER

Zoe Schinko

Zoe Schinko is a Senior from Menlo Park, CA and is majoring in Psychology on the Pre-Health track, with a minor in Writing and Biology. She works as a co-editor on the Our Voices staff.

TREE OF DREAMS

Deeya Chandran

Deeya Chandran is a Junior from Portland, OR and is majoring in Biology and Spanish with a minor in Health Equity.

DIVERSITY MONOLOGUES

TOO MANY JOKES TO TELL

Abby Morioka

I am a senior Psychology major and Communication Studies minor. I have been working in UMEC as a Social Justice Peer Educator for the past 3 years and have loved my time in UMEC. I am from Sacramento CA with my parents and two siblings! I have a cat named Pickle as well!

TO THE RHYTHM THAT SAVED ME

Amari Troutt

Amari Troutt is a Senior from Spokane, WA, and is majoring in Sport Management.

A CUB KNOWS BEST THE BITE OF HER MOTHER

Stefanie Hinakaew-Marlow

Stefanie Hinkaew Marlow is a senior studying Biology at Gonzaga University. During her time at GU, she has served as a BRIDGE peer mentor, a Social Justice Peer Educator, worked as a TA and a work-study student, and has taken on the roles of Night Market Chair and President of AAU for three years. Determined to leave her mark wherever she goes, she finds new and challenging creative outlets to express her voice and her lived experiences, hoping to inspire others to seek the courage to try new things and create change wherever they go. Born and raised in Portland, Oregon, she dreams of attending law school to pursue intellectual property law, and to one day, finally achieve her long-time dream of writing and publishing a novel.

TRs

Roland Allen

Roland Allen is from Beaverton Oregon and is a first year studying Mathematics. He enjoys reading, writing, math and of course poetry. His biggest inspirations are Mary Oliver, George Trakl and T.S Elliot.

I WANTED TO BE A TEACHER

Rajane Edwards

Rajane Edwards (Raj) is 20 years old, a junior at Gonzaga and is majoring in English literature. Rajane loves to write dark fantasy books, loves to draw mythical beings vampires, zombies, mermaids, etc.), enjoys vocabulary flash cards, and thinks learning is one of the most amazing things a human could do. They aspire to be a teacher and a writer, eventually, wants to become a professor. They don't know where yet, but they'll figure it out. They want to leave a mark everywhere they go. They want people to recognize them for their art, writing, and values. They won't stop until they make it a reality. They want to be at peace with themselves. They want to understand that they are enough and are worthy of doing all the good God has to offer them.

TWO CULTURES, ONE HOME

Kira森Bifone

Kira is currently a third-year student at Gonzaga University. She was adopted from China when she was nine months old and grew up in Seattle, WA. Interested in pursuing a career in cultural studies, Kira uses her experience as a transnational adoptee to ground her work in exploring race, identity, and belonging.

ROSE, INK ON SKIN, 8"X2", 2025

Odalys Sanchez Cedillo

Odalys Sanchez Cedillo is a Senior studying Business Administration with concentrations in Multicultural Marketing and Management Information Systems. She also holds a minor in Communication Studies and hopes to connect these fields of study through cultural research. Odalys' work is inspired by her Mexican heritage, shaping her passion for storytelling and representation. Through her work, she hopes to foster deeper understanding and meaningful connections with her audience.

LAST SUPPER

Stephanie Garcia Avila

Stephanie Garcia Avila is a creator, activist, and scholar from Richmond, California. They have been writing for ten years and have been involved in activism for thirteen years. Stephanie likes to write about her experiences, struggles, and goals for a better future. For fun, Stephanie likes to craft, listen to Rauw Alejandro, and hang out with their cats Milk and Nico. They will be graduating in May and going back to Richmond to teach. Her ultimate goal is to build a curriculum in her former district.

1 WONDER

Daija Tramble

Daija is a Junior from Burien, Washington and is Majoring in Environmental Studies with minors in both Critical Race Theory and Sustainable Business. Daija has aspirations of protecting her community from the effects of climate change while pushing back against the powers of greenwashing and gentrification.

Thank you for reading this journal. Our Voices Volume 12 was published March 26th, 2025 at Lawton Printing in Spokane, Washington with the assistance of Tammy Head. Our Voices is also supervised by its Faculty Advisor, Michele Pajer from the Gonzaga English Department. This journal was edited by Carissa Kanae, Zoe Schinko, Grace Applegate, Ines Marquez and Giona Hoaglund. The cover and pages were designed by Jhanessty Vaye Bautista. It was printed using Accent paper, 80# C1S 4/0 for the cover and 70# Natural text for the inside pages. It is 8.5 inches by 5.5 inches. Additional journals can be attained by emailing ourvoices@gonzaga.edu or visiting the Student Media Office at College 433.