



Writers Unmasked

West Chester Writing Project Institute
Summer 2021 Anthology



To Our First Official WCWP Teacher Leaders,

What a wonderful way to return to in-person learning on campus! Thank you for your willingness to unmask both your face and your inner selves. We have enjoyed getting to know everyone's passions and interests (even the ones that involve scary clowns). You dove right into these two weeks after our virtual Saturdays with dedication and enthusiasm. You embraced our new identity as a writing project, as well as each other's identities as writers, teachers, and humans. From poetry to dialect to trauma-informed teaching to telling a story with rich characters, you gave it your all in every way. As you head back into the world, which still remains a little uncertain, may your t-shirts always match and your ghosts always have arms.

With Gratitude

Pauline + Jen

What do you do when you stop doing what you've done for years?

Roberta Burzynski

June 30, 2021

Retirement.

First, there was the sense of freedom—ahhhh ...

After 42 years, I had the chance to just live, to enjoy the novelty of “playing house” and to spend more time tending flowers, plants, shrubs, and trees in my yard. Critters that chew on vegetables had steered me away from growing vegetables years earlier.

Oh, the garden! A long-suffering victim of benign neglect would finally get the attention it needed—or so I imagined. Being outside and physical exertion were a refreshing change from sitting at a computer.

Not only that, when I have felt stressed or faced with a difficult decision, the sure remedy has been to put my hands in the dirt. Little did I know at the beginning of retirement, the situation to come that would make me turn once again to the earth.

I never minded weeding. It has a meditative quality, a lot like the editing “trance” I experienced when I worked as a technical editor for the U.S. Forest Service. Both involve assessing the big picture, identifying the intended message or appearance, and methodically removing excesses and undesirables that distract from a harmonious presentation.

When there was gardening to do, which was always, it got precedence over housework. Despite my best efforts, however, there were always more weeds to pluck, more branches to clip, and more plants to relocate.

So I hired a gardening crew. To my surprise, even with weekly visits of two or three able-bodied young women and my working along with them, there were always tasks that remained undone. Plants that had been trapped in containers for years had to remain there through another winter. I had great expectations for keeping ahead of the yard work the following year.

The coronavirus pandemic that began early in 2020 brought many businesses and plans to a halt, but not gardening. It was my saving grace once again. Wearing the required masks and being outdoors at safe distances made it possible for the crew and me to attack the gardening chores with gusto and deep appreciation for the normalcy the work provided.

The yard shaped up nicely through the warm season and stretched into chilly fall days that had us wrapped in knitted hats, warm jackets, warm gloves, and boots. The containerized plants were finally freed from their captivity. Spreading dried leaves and grass clippings on the flower beds wrapped them in a winter blanket and closed the gardening season to our satisfaction. My yard was one beneficiary of our efforts during the first summer of the pandemic. I was another.

Winter returned. The novelty of cooking and house-tidying lost its appeal. Sorting papers and gathering a boxful for shredding felt productive and entertained me for a time. I'd had enough of a break from working as a writer-editor that I decided to turn my attention back to writing about a burning topic for me—plastic pollution.

I signed up for a remote course in nonfiction writing. The instruction was top-notch and input from instructors was constructive and encouraging. Research into the plastic pollution problem armed me with much new information. I was surprised, however, to realize that the effort it would have taken for me to mold it into a document worthy of publication was not something I wanted to do. And I had learned the problem was worse than I knew, both overwhelming and depressing. I have ideas on ways other than writing to spread the information about problems

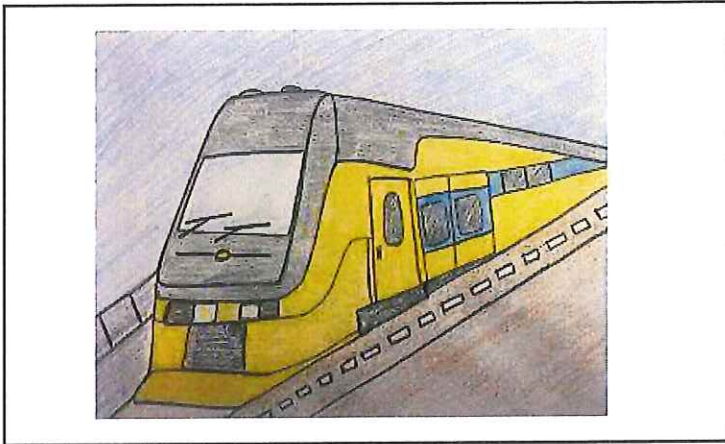
associated with single-use plastics and have begun to act on them. At this point I realized I want writing not to be so serious, but fun.

Again my yard was my saving grace. When spring returned it provided me with endless topics that inspired me to play with haiku. But I still longed for regular purposeful activity that reached beyond my yard.

In the meantime, a product of the pandemic was meetings by Zoom. By regularly attending continuing education presentations by the state literacy association, I was rewarded with a connection to the Pennsylvania Writing and Literature Project (PAWLP). First I was able to visit a friendly group in one of their inspiring Saturday morning writing sessions. Soon after I was asked to PAWLP's Writing Institute for Summer 2021 at West Chester University.

The institute may be just what I need—a chance to meet new people, explore genres besides the too-familiar nonfiction, focus on a constructive pursuit, earn needed Act 48 credits, and perhaps lead to regular involvement with teaching writing. At the same time, vaccinations for coronavirus are being distributed, and mask and distance restrictions are starting to lift.

So here I am, full of hope that I have found the purpose I realized I was missing in retirement and that improving pandemic conditions will allow me to pursue it.



The
Big
Yellow
Train
By
Liz
Doyle

I took a step off the train and into a cold, cavernous, concrete train station. The yellow train stood solid behind me, and more yellow trains sat in front of me. A train roared into the station as yet another picked up speed as it left. I could feel the breeze created by the movement of the trains. Passengers blurred in front of me--walking, running, strolling to and from the trains. They chatted with one another. A voice boomed from the loud speaker. I understood none of it. They were speaking Dutch, a language I had only just begun to learn. I was lost, lost in a crowd of people who knew exactly what they were doing and where they were going. And I was jealous of their certainty. I stood cold, frozen in place. I just stood still trying to figure out where to go and what to do. The only solid, focused thing I understood was the big yellow train--half its size from the beginning of the journey--that had taken me to the wrong city. And I, once again, was the one who had messed up.

On a spring morning of 1997, I caught the 6:30 am train out of Enschede, The Netherlands, and I proved once again that I don't don't always get it right. My destination was The Hague. I was scheduled to meet other au pairs as I had on several prior occasions. There was nothing particularly different about this excursion, at least at the start. I had learned during the first few months of living in The Netherlands to navigate the bus and train systems. So I took the bus to the train station--as usual. I bought my ticket--as usual. I walked to the train, but something was...unusual. I noticed the train was long. Really long. Too many years have passed for me to remember how many cars were attached that morning, but I remember it was much longer than the other trains I usually boarded. Is this the right train? The train station in Enschede had only two train tracks, one on each side of the platform. As the other track was empty, I assumed I had the right train. The sign next to the door of the train confirmed it. It read Rotterdam-Hague. So, shaking my head, I boarded a car, sat down, and enjoyed the view of the flat fields of The Netherlands. And I trusted that the big yellow train would take me to where I needed to go.

Two hours later, I arrived...in Rotterdam. At some point half-way through the country—probably just after Utrecht—the train had split. I had sat in the wrong car. And it suddenly occurred to me, “So that’s what they announced!” And that’s why the train was so long. Something had been unusual. Something had been different about the train. I did a mental slap to my head, wondering why I missed that so spectacularly. But if understanding announcements on trains is hard enough, add a foreign language I only rudimentarily understood, and it’s understandable how easily I completely missed what the announcement said. At least that's what I told myself to feel just a little better about my ignorance of the Dutch train system.

I sat in the train for a minute while everyone deboarded. I didn't want to get off. Maybe the train would pull off and continue to The Hague? Maybe this isn't the end of the line? My naivete was soon dispelled. The ticket checker approached, telling me I had to get off the train. He said it in Dutch, so I'm not quite sure what he said, but I understood him all the same.

As I stepped off the train--into the wrong train station--I realized that I was lost. I knew I was in Rotterdam. I knew I was in a train station. But I had no idea how to get to The Hague. How to find the au pairs. How to salvage the day. But this was not the first time I had been lost. When I was three, I walked away from my parents, lost in the city of Baltimore. When I was eight, I walked away from my mom, lost in the American History Museum in Washington D.C.

So there I was again, alone and embarrassed, but this time in Rotterdam. But I relied on the lessons I have learned. My immediate response to the situation—a 19 year old American woman with no money in the wrong European city—was to seek a security guard, okay not a guard, but train personnel. He had been walking toward me, dressed in all black. His face gave away nothing. No smile. No expression.

“Excuse me,” I timidly asked. Because besides being completely embarrassed at being in the wrong city, I knew that I was a lost American who didn’t speak the language. And this man didn’t seem like he was interested in hearing my story.

“Yes?” he indulged me in English.

“I’m supposed to be in The Hague. I didn’t realize that the train split.”

“They announced that.” He wasn’t giving me any comfort or understanding. His direct manner made me feel worse.

“Yea, I know. I didn’t understand what they were saying. I know the numbers, but I couldn’t understand the announcer. Is there any way I can get a ticket to The Hague?”

“The ticket office is over there.”

“Ok, thank you.” For nothing, I added only in my mind.

I reached the ticket office, following the signs. I could at least do that. But now the real embarrassing part of the story begins. I had to play the part of being a poor American girl who is lost. I really was lost, so maybe I wasn’t playing a part, but being the part.

I explained the story again to the woman behind the counter. She had long, dirty blond hair, and she wore the same expression the man on the train platform had worn. Well, here it goes, I thought. “I’m sorry, I really could not understand what the announcement said. I’m taking Dutch lessons, but I just could not make out the numbers, and I have no extra money for another ticket. Is there any way I can get a ticket to The Hague from Rotterdam?”

She just looked at me for a pregnant moment. She really did not want to give me the ticket, her expression said. “We don’t normally give out free tickets.”

“Well, I did pay for a ticket. I have a group waiting for me in The Hague. Is there any way you can make an exception?” I knew I was putting the innocence on thick, but in the end, it worked.

With a frown and a look that said, “Another spoiled American,” she handed me the ticket.

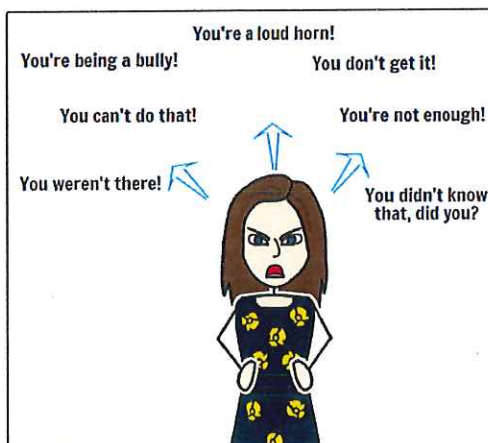
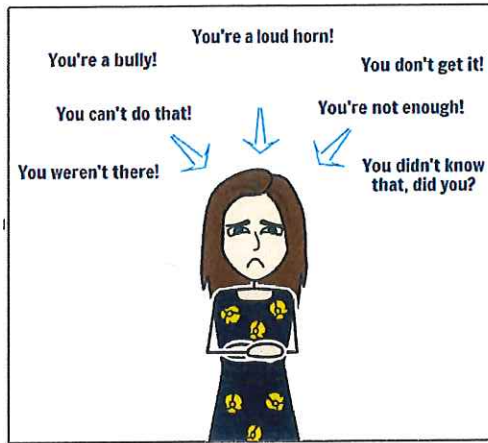
So I was on my way. I'm not super proud of this moment in the story. But I was also quite proud of myself at that moment. I had what I needed to continue the journey. With the new ticket in my hand, I boarded another yellow train. This time, I knew I was on the right train to the right city.

But the challenge didn't end there. I still had to find the group of au pairs. There was no way of telling them that I was on my way. No way to find them, until I remembered that I had a map and an itinerary. No GPS—it was 1997 after all. (And I had a dad who insisted on teaching me how to read maps.) So I took out the map and the itinerary from my backpack. Checked my watch. And decided where I was most likely to catch up.

I saw that at 10:30 am, the group would be only three blocks from the train station. Yep, only three blocks. From the map, I thought I would be walking for about 15 minutes. I exited the train station, paused to find the street that matched the route on my map, and started walking. The city of The Hague blurred the same way the train station in Rotterdam did. I had a singular focus, to find that group. And within only five minutes of leaving the station—in the correct city this time—I saw a large group gathered in the middle of the city's central market. As I approached the group, the leader saw me and immediately knew that I was Elizabeth, the missing au pair. I don't know how she knew 😊.

And that's how most of my stories end: adventures turning into misadventures where I prove that I don't always know what I'm doing. But my stories are small successes. My successes. In thinking on my feet. In being resourceful. In feeling proud of myself. I may end up sometimes on the wrong train in the wrong city, but I have the strength to correct my course. Usually on my own.

The Shit People Say - Liz Doyle



An NPR Interview with Frederick Douglass
(Inspired by our writing stop at the Frederick Douglas statue
on campus)
By Janice Ewing

Terry Gross: Our guest today is Frederick Douglass. It's an honor to talk to you, Mr. Douglass.

Frederick Douglass: I'm glad to be here talking to you, although I'm still not sure I understand how you made this possible.

T.G.: Well, I don't entirely understand that part myself. Maybe our tech team can explain that later, but what I'd particularly like to know is how you feel about your statue on the West Chester University campus.

F.D.: Well, I'm proud, of course, and I'm glad to continue to stand, literally, for freedom and equity...

T.G.: It sounds as if you want to say something more though.

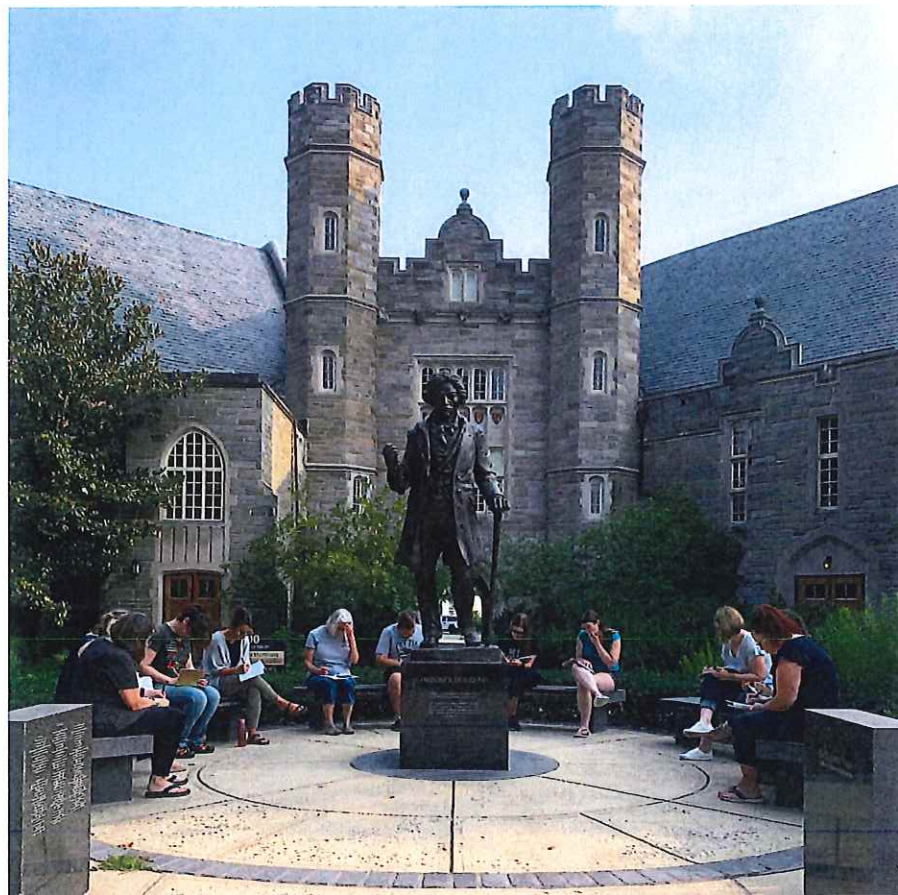
F.D.: Yes, what I'm also thinking is that a statue, no matter how prominently it stands and how often it's viewed, can only do so much.

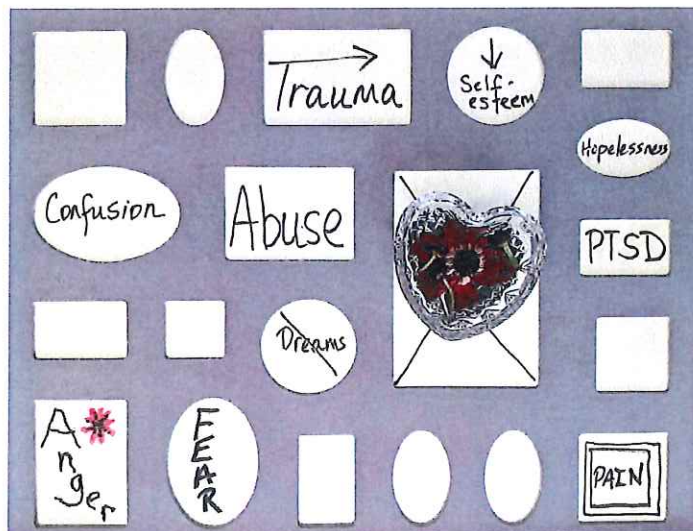
T.G.: Can you explain that a little more?

F.D.: What I mean is, without people doing the work, I just become a historical artifact; I stay in the past.

T.G.: So your goal is for your message to stay alive and be carried on with each generation?

F.D.: Yes. I spoke at West Chester University many times, and I hope that my voice is still being heard, still serving as a call to action. I've said this before, but it bears repeating: "If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."





TRAUMA

By Deanna Gabe

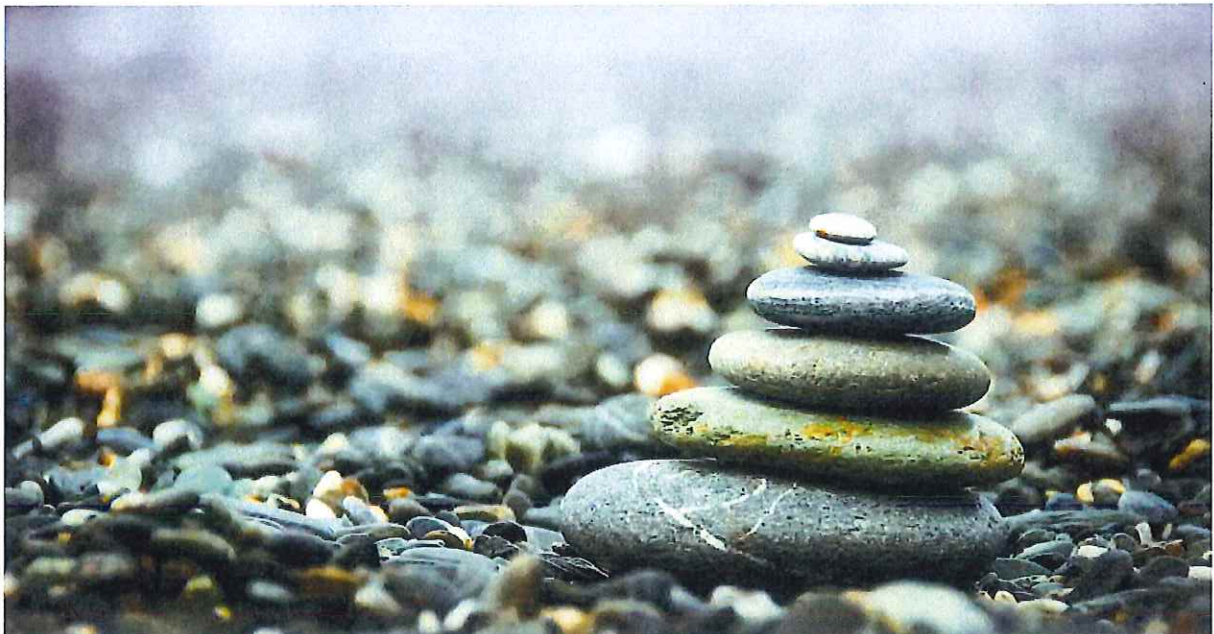
Trauma walks into the coffee shop on high alert. She needs caffeine to study after another sleepless night. The first thing she sees is a man drinking coffee alone in the corner, and she chooses a seat across the room where she can keep an eye on him and the door at the same time. She clutches her pepper spray, and looks

around to find all of the exits. Trauma tries to settle in to study, but the chatter and music are overwhelming today, and the room is too bright. She feels weird. It's like she's not really there, but watching the scene around her on a movie screen. Her head aches. A waiter drops a tray, and Trauma jumps up from her seat with pepper spray at the ready. She feels foolish, and sits back down. "Take a breath," she tells herself. She takes three deep slow ones, and opens her book. Trauma reads the same paragraph for the third time, and still doesn't understand what she's read. She looks at the clock. "How has an hour passed?" she asks herself. She just can't concentrate. "I'm too stupid to get this degree," she thinks. Trauma buys an assortment of pastries at the coffee counter, and goes home to eat them in secret. She stuffs herself until she feels sick, lethargic, and strung out at the same time. She turns on the TV and binge watches YouTube videos until 1am. A wave of shame and self-loathing washes over her. "Nothing is ever going to change. It would be better if I just weren't here," she tells herself. The next day when she doesn't show up to class, Trauma's project partner calls, but she doesn't answer the phone. She's too ashamed.

Peace & FRIENDS

By Deanna Gabe

Peace wakes up, and before opening her eyes, she takes a moment to center herself. "Three deep breaths," is her first sleepy thought. She breathes in deeply through her nose and releases the breath slowly out of her mouth. Peace gets up slowly, makes her bed, and sets her intentions for the day. She makes a plan to meet up with her friends Safety and Generosity for a picnic. Later that day, Peace places a blanket and her basket of food on the bank of a river, and lays down on her back underneath the drooping branches of an old willow tree. She trails her hand in the cool water, and shivers at the brisk breeze blowing across her shoulders. She enjoys the warm sensation of the sun on her cold skin. The quick expansion of her capillaries makes her feel like she's being shrink wrapped, and she giggles. For a few minutes she listens intently, enthralled at the sound of gurgling water, birdsong, and of rustling leaves. After a time, Safety and Generosity join Peace. Her good friends are always with her. "Hello," she smiles up at them. They open their baskets, and arrange the food on the blanket. Safety makes sure that they are at a safe distance from the edge of the river bank, and Generosity has brought more than enough food for everyone. Peace, Safety, and Generosity feed themselves first. Once they have been nourished, they lay out food for any creature that may need it. Then they take their leave hand-in-hand.



Hope

By Deanna Gabe

Hope bounds across an open field with her arms outspread. The adored youngest of five - her siblings being generosity, love, justice, resilience - Hope has grown up believin' that the world is a wonderful place, and that people will love her.



The Unwanted Guest

Anxiety is a terrible houseguest. She never calls ahead to tell you when she's coming. Instead, she just shows up without warning, holding a lot of luggage. She does not give you time to clean up the house, shove things into the closet, or change the sheets in the guest room before she barges in, unannounced.

Anxiety never gives an end date to the visit. She hovers over you as you try to watch TV. She distracts you when you're cooking so you accidentally burn your dinner. And worst of all, she wakes you up in the middle of the night, jumping on the bed asking a steady stream of questions in a sing-song voice.

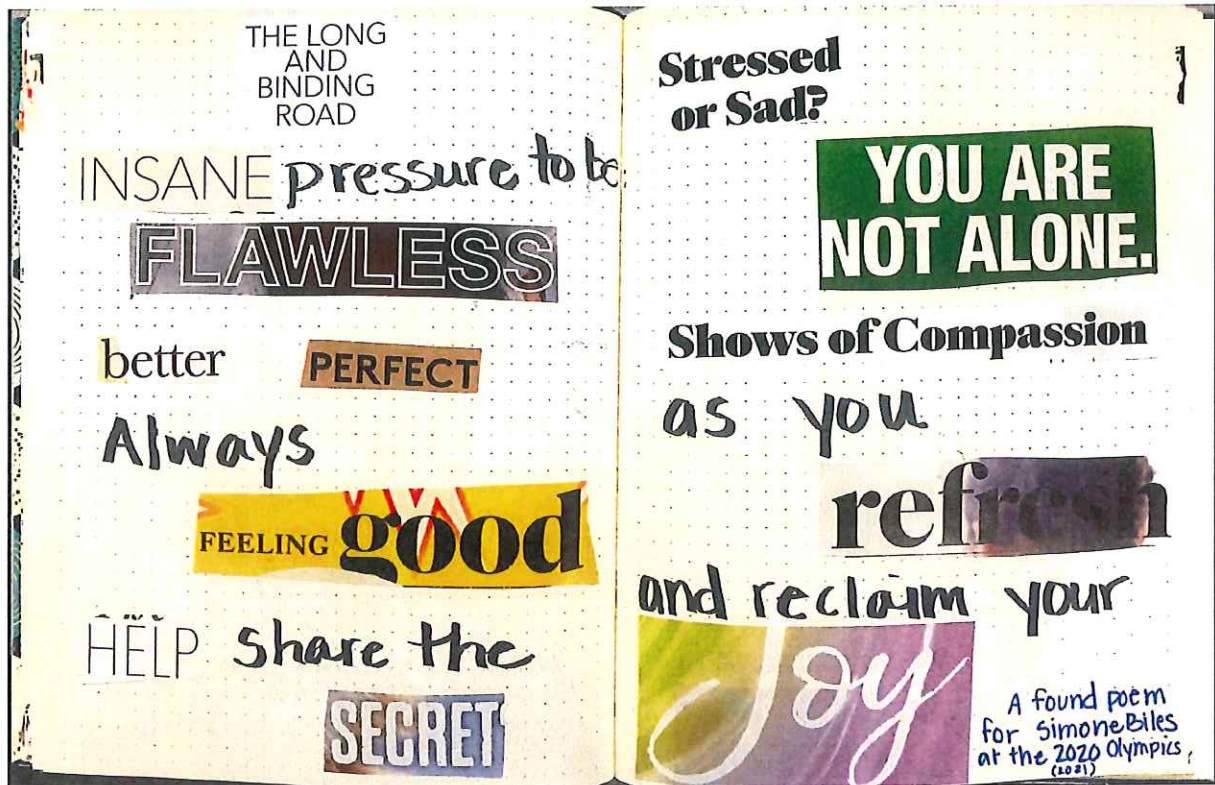
Anxiety has no manners. She will stare at you, even though you have no idea what she wants. She definitely won't tell you, so you just keep looking at each other, both at a loss. She taps your shoulder incessantly, but won't tell you exactly what she's thinking. She's got a penchant for lurking.

Anxiety does not care that you have things to do, that her visit is most inconvenient. She is the kind of guest who expects you to be at her beck and call. She does not give a **** that you have work to do. She will interrupt at a moment's notice.

Anxiety may go away, temporarily of course, if you invite another guest over to visit. Anxiety's worst frenemy is Lexapro. Those two do not like to be in the same room together. Lexapro can usually get Anxiety to vacate the premises, if only for a short while.....but rest assured that Anxiety will be back.

Because Anxiety is a terrible houseguest.

A Found Poem for Simone Biles at the 2020 Olympics, where she found the courage to prioritize her mental health over America's expectations.



Obituary for Self-Doubt
By Erika Hunsicker

On Tuesday, July 20, Self-Doubt, faithful companion and pain-in-the-ass, passed away at the age of 26.

Self-Doubt was born on August 28, 2006 in Norristown, Pennsylvania to her parents, Belonging and Anxiety. Through her middle and high school years, Self-Doubt spent much of her time ogling her fellow classmates' accomplishments from the sideline, too scared to let herself be seen. In college, Self-Doubt majored in the art of Overanalyzing and Overthinking, excelling at the top of her class.

Self-Doubt had a passion for daydreaming about living life to the fullest and achieving her goals. However, she was also shy and had a tendency to worry, causing her to back down from accomplishing these goals whenever the opportunity presented itself. She often spent her time absorbed in her editing job, constantly improving other's work and lives rather than her own. She is known for her incessant rambling, negative energy, and self-absorption in her own troubles.

She is preceded in death by her parents, Anxiety and Belonging. She is survived by her siblings, Confidence, Positivity, and Happiness.

Creativity
By Erika Hunsicker

Creativity is a light in the darkness
Of mundane and boring days
Sometimes it feels though it is stuck in hiding
Waiting for the opportune moment
Or simply waiting until it is three in the morning
When you are tossing and turning
And all you want is blessed sleep
But then Creativity strikes
And you are up, coffee in hand
Bursting with an energy you didn't know you had
And that energy would not go away
Until the words were on the page
Or the drawing was nearly complete
And your eyes are nearly stinging with lack of sleep
But it is in those chaotic moments
Where you find your inner piece
And feel content and happy
Because you are home.

Anxiety's Love

by Sarah Hyson

Anxiety has no brain-to-mouth filter and does not care to develop one. He is always there with a comment on every situation, offering his unsolicited opinions. "What if...," "I think...," "But maybe...," like an Internet troll. Anxiety fashions himself the expert on every subject, from what to wear on a particular day, to whether sleep is an appropriate activity, to the state of global politics. As much as others try to reason with Anxiety, he is unrelenting in his opinions, steadfast in inserting himself into all aspects of life. Anxiety cares not for fact. He bypasses logos and heads straight for pathos, always inflating his own ethos (though no one agrees).

Though it is unrequited, Anxiety is in love with Love.

There is nothing Anxiety will not do to gain Love's attention. He firmly believes that volume will wear down Reason, will drown out Affinity, and carry Love away to join him in conquering all. Love, however, has shown remarkable resilience, and will not give Anxiety the attention he craves.

Anxiety does not like being ignored.

"Look at me! Look at me! Over here!"

Anxiety intentionally upstages everyone else, blurts out his answers without waiting for questions, seeking to convince any who will listen to his inherent superiority. Anxiety spends far too much time in front of the mirror, enamored with himself.

Love hopes that someday Anxiety will realize that it is not Love he loves; it is the reflection he sees when he peers into Love's eyes.

SAWDUST MEMORIES

What kind of girl am I?

I prefer the smell
of sawdust

to perfume

But I also wear flowing skirts
and ~~steel~~ ^{combat} boots,
sometimes together

As my daughter explores
who she is, what kind of girl she
will become, can my sawdust and skirts
memories help her?

Paint-splattered hands on a hair model,
combatting contradictions

Sarah Hyson

Katelyn Kirk
WCWP 2021
Personal Narrative

The Journey to Johnson & Johnson

"Katelyn Kirk, 4:15 appointment," I stated for the first of many times that afternoon. "Okay Katelyn, please follow the signs to the next checkpoint."

It had been a year since I had been in any bar or club, yet here was a bouncer, somewhat out of place. Instead of checking IDs at the door of a busy drinking establishment to make sure no one underage or overly intoxicated could enter, this man was ensured with the task of checking in exhausted teachers who had a hell of a year. Maybe not the same exact concept, but equally if not more important. I walked past the vaccine bouncer of IU 14 and into the dimly lit hallway. I was greeted again by a second keeper of the shots (and not the fun kind, either). "Hello, please continue into the check-in area." I thanked the woman who was dedicating her afternoon to keeping track of the teachers of Berks county and made my way into the maze. I started to feel like a mouse who had entered a labyrinth, promised a morsel of cheese.

Four stations were set up in a large conference room, all with pleasant looking healthcare workers ready to check us in. I was corralled to the far end of the massive room.

"Name?"

"Katelyn Kirk."

"Driver's license?"

After digging through my purse for a moment, I handed my drivers license to the cheery woman dressed in scrubs on the other side of the plexi-glass partition.

"Hmm... there seems to be a problem," she said as she studied my ID.

Ah crap. I was already late to my appointment due to an accident on the highway. *Now what?* I had already spent a lot of time mentally preparing myself for this day, and I was not ready to be turned away by yet another protector of the precious Johnson & Johnson (a family company). I was a big fan of their "No-Tears" baby shampoo in my younger years, so I figured the vaccine ought to leave me tearless as well.

"Your birthday on your registration form doesn't match your ID," the attendant explained.

Are you kidding me?

"Oh, I must've clicked the wrong button because the registration email was sent so late at night."

It was true. After weeks of trying to secure a vaccine appointment through Walgreens, Wegmans, Walmart (I think that's all the Ws), CVS, and random doctor's offices, the email came through stating that Berks county teachers were FINALLY able to get vaccinated. I had been frantically checking my email all day, eager for my shot (literally). In a last ditch effort, I checked my email right before going to bed (10:30 is late for a teacher, but to be fair it's also a little late to send out a life changing email notifying educators that they can finally gain immunity to a pandemic). And apparently in my excitement and exhaustion, I had clicked January instead of February for my birthday. At least I had gotten the day and year right.

The woman's supervisor came over and took a look at my mistake. My heart sank as he inspected my ID, then the computer screen.

"Okay, I'm going to have to enter her birthday manually into the system."

I was a bit worried, fearing that after spending so much time here already, I would have to come back another day. What would it take for me to verify my identity? Honestly, it was easier to change my last name at the social security office after I got married. This seemed like a much more tightly run operation. Did they need my fingerprints? They were within a year old, so surely that would suffice. Would I have to correctly answer a riddle from a troll under a bridge? I'm pretty decent at trivia. Thankfully, I wasn't turned away. I just had to awkwardly wait as I heard a few others nearby describe their peculiar situations: "I accidentally typed in my old address", "The year was off only by one, I promise I'm actually 59!" "Vaccine clinic? I thought this was a Wendy's!"

After what felt like an eternity but was realistically less than 20 minutes, the supervisor returned. "It will take 24 hours for the system to update your information, but you can go back now."

Thank goodness. I was only a few minutes away from freaking out, being recorded by a fellow teacher, and having the video posted on Youtube. My students would surely watch that. I can just hear them saying, "Mrs. Kirk, we saw you flipping shit at the IU because you couldn't remember your birthday." How embarrassing.

I got up from the hard chair, and was greeted by yet another friendly masked face ushering me down another corridor. Truly starting to feel like I should have left a breadcrumb trail, I continued down yet another nondescript hallway.

I had reached my destination at last. I was guided to a small table within a room of about ten stations. At this point, I was just ready to get it over with. Not exactly a sentiment you want

to have when you know there are scientists somewhere catching up on their sleep because they spent countless hours making this whole thing possible.

The nurses at the other stations were counting down, preparing people for the one-and-done miracle. "One, two, three..." "Okay, you're going to feel a pinch..."

My nurse, on the other hand, just went for it. No countdown, just a needle entered into my deltoid, making me feel like I just got punched in the arm.

"Congratulations!" she said.

"Thank you," I replied as I stood up, welcomed by yet ANOTHER person who asked me my name, just in case this vaccine did have some wacky side effects like total amnesia. At last, I had reached the promised land-- a large conference room of neatly rowed chairs with a bunch of teachers spread 6 feet apart. I was reminded of an airport. Except this airport didn't have a Cinnabon, shoe shiners, or moving sidewalks: the holy trinity of airport amenities.

"Please have a seat for 15 minutes, then you can go," explained the man behind the official looking podium. "Do I have to check in with anyone when I leave?" I was surprised that he said no. This building was like the Fort Knox of modern medicine.

So I sat, and I waited. And nothing happened. I was hungry, tired, and ready to chug a bottle of Gatorade in my car. Now I just had to find my way out of this place, the easiest part so far. All I had to do was walk out the door.

Katelyn Kirk
WCWP 2021
"Qualities" Piece

Jealousy
Inspired by "Jealousy, Jealousy" by Olivia Rodrigo



Scan with your Spotify app.

Jealousy sits by herself in the cafeteria, checking out everyone who comes into the room.

She broods. She plots.

"Why can't I be like them?" she thinks, glaring at her cell phone.

She is joined at the table by Self-Acceptance.

"It's all good, just be yourself," he says, patting her on the shoulder.

"Easy for you to say, you're so sure of yourself."

Jealousy does not want to make friends, she just wants to be someone else-- anyone else. If she could have a different life, everything would be better. Heck, she wouldn't even mind being Weakness or Laziness. Everyone else pulls it off so well. And she wants it all.

To Caroline

By Amanda Lightner

I often feel guilty, Caroline. A good mother should be able to recount every detail of her child's birth, shouldn't she? I'm sorry I can't. I remember only fragments of the day you were born.

~

Your father and I left for the hospital before dawn, the sky a shade of indigo, the stars a piercing white. While he drove, Dad kept his hand on my knee and we talked about miracles.

"What do *you* think about miracles?" I asked him.

"Well," he said after a pause, "we don't earn them. We can't twist God's arm or make bargains to get what we want."

"So why do they happen?"

"To bring glory and honor to God."

I fixed my eyes on the moon and thought about you, all the while conscious of the comforting weight of your father's hand.

~

I remember taking the elevator to the eighth floor of Harrisburg Hospital where a nurse met us and handed me a gown with pink and blue diamonds. "We're happy to see you!" she said sincerely. "My team has had a quiet night--no babies. We need something to do."

Behind a curtain, I undressed and slipped into the gown. Dad folded my clothes and helped me into bed. (You know how he needs to feel useful.) "Do you want another pillow? Some ice chips? A book?" Before I could nod, he rooted around in my overnight bag and pulled out a novel: *The Help*. "Here you go."

I reread the same sentence for five minutes--*five minutes!*--while the cheery nurse strapped a monitor around my middle. How could I possibly concentrate when you were about to enter my world?

~

I remember that, all of a sudden, the room began to spin like the tilting teacups of an amusement park. (You know I get sick on those rides.) I gripped the sides of the bed to fight the feeling of sinking and urged your dad, "Call the nurse. Now."

He put down his phone and knelt beside me, studying my face. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know exactly, but something is. Please just call someone."

~

My memory gets a little muddy here, as muddy as our creek after a thunderstorm. There was a swirl of confusion in my room: the persistent panic of beeping machines, the scuffling of feet, your father's voice rising each time he demanded *Tell me what's happening*. I do remember hands. There were hands trying to move you around inside of me, hands taking my pulse, hands patting my shoulder, hands snapping the sides of the gurney upright. Someone soothed, "Hold tight, honey." At once my bed was being pushed at a run, jolting, clattering, rattling. Dad was somewhere behind, but I couldn't see him. It was just me and you and the light panels pulsing in the ceiling. I tried to pray. I only managed *please, please, please* before a mask came down over my face and all I could do was trust those hands.

~

I remember trembling like a newborn foal. The voice in my head screamed, "Where is she? Where is my baby? Is she breathing?" But my teeth chattered so violently I could not ask

aloud about you and, in truth, I was afraid to hear the answer. Finally, a nurse noticed my open eyes. She smiled. "You did good, Mama. Eight pounds this one. A little doll baby."

"Why am I shaking?"

"You've been through quite a shock," she replied as she placed you--bundled in a pink-striped blanket--on my chest.

"I'm so afraid I'll drop her."

But you never stirred.

~

Back in our room, I held you while you slept, your walnut-sized fist tucked tight to your chin. Your eyelids were the palest of purple, like Grandma's irises outside our kitchen window, and you had a dimple beneath each eye and one on either side of your mouth--angel kisses we called them.

Dr. Bucher, the doctor who was supposed to deliver you, knocked at the door.

"Congratulations, Mom and Dad. Let's take a look at this little lady."

I shifted you in my arms so Dr. Bucher could see your face.

"What's her name?"

"Caroline Grace."

"Grace. Perfect." Nodding his approval, he looked at me, then at your father, then back at me. "You do know that you have this child by the grace of God, don't you?"

I was surprised to hear him mention God.

Dr. Bucher continued, "Everything had to happen as it did." He ticked off each detail: "You arrived at the hospital at just the right time. You were the only expectant mother on the floor. The nurses were paying close attention to your monitors. The attending doctor came



Free Fall

Kami Mulzet

She leaped off of Victoria Falls Bridge in Southern Africa, flying toward the Zambezi River with nothing but a harness and a thin cord attached. After a moment of ecstatic

exhilaration, as the wind whistled past her, with the river looming closer, and closer, she must have felt such freedom – until the bungee yanked her back into the air, and bounced her again, and again.

Knowing the risks, and feeling enormous fear, Caitlin made that leap. Having chosen the free fall, she changed her life forever.

About a month after that jump an Australian woman took that same leap of faith. As she flew toward the water, I assume she felt that same sense of both freedom and fear, but Erin waited for the cord to pull her back into the air, and it didn't. It snapped, giving her speed and trajectory a new level of terror.

At that speed, she was slapped into unconsciousness when she hit the unforgiving and crocodile infested river below. And, as the horrified onlookers watched from the bridge, she simply floated, lifeless. Until – GASP – she again started to breathe! The onlookers breathed, too, having witnessed her terrifying fall. Their cheers followed her swim to the river-bank.

Knowing the risks, Erin chose that leap. Miraculously, she made it to the shore. Having chosen the free fall, she changed her life forever.

As teachers, we sometimes feel like the spectators on that bridge. We strap our students into the harness, we witness as they weave the rope through each loophole. We watch in mute wonder as they leap, courage in hand, off that high bridge.

We too wait for the moment when the rope will pull them back up, but occasionally we've also seen their safety rope snap. We've watched , breath held in fear, during the free fall, and the harsh landing. We've waited to see if consciousness will return, to see if our student will swim for the river-bank.

Like spectators on the bridge, we too feel an overwhelming relief in the miraculous moment when a student, against the odds, fills their lungs with air and swims to safety. Though teachers are spectators, we feel every breath and stroke.

Knowing the risks, you may choose the leap and free fall, or you may be a spectator on the bridge. Both choices will change your life forever.



The Monkey Bridge

Kami Mulzet

The light is fading as our feet crunch on the red gravel driveway. We're almost home. That's when I see the look of anger on my father's face. A police car is parked in the driveway's circle, and I hear my father say, "It's okay. There they are. We found them." Then, scowling, he turns to me, "Where have you been?"

Where I had been:

Sixth grade has ended, and an entire summer stretches before me. I am free! I look down through the wooden slats and see the creek, rocks protruding, as the shadow-streaked water rushes through. Closing my eyes, I listen to the water, the insects, and the birds singing in the nearby trees. These are the comforting sounds of the woods. The bridge sways and the strong metal cables bounce with my movements. I feel exhilarated and nervous as the open-slatted wire bridge swings beneath me.

That morning, my best friend Susie had told me that she had heard about a "monkey bridge" built by the workers at a power company close to our home. The bridge is both solid and flexible, made of the metal cables and wooden slats that are now beneath my feet. It leads from an access road that was once a logging trail across a small shallow creek to a forest of pine trees planted in neat rows. There, we find row after row of white pines, branches well above our heads and perfectly aligned, just waiting to be explored. Susie and I run through the dense rows of tall trees, red pine needles muffling our foot falls. We build a lean-two, play tag, and imagine living here forever. The day is warm, but the air under the trees is cool and inviting. I inhale the fresh forest scents, and feel the breeze as it sways the branches above my head. The bright sun finds only a few spots where it reaches the ground, washing color away. This place feels magical. We're in our own little kingdom.

Back on the bridge, the sun is more direct. I can feel freckles forming on my face, and the skin on my arm begins to redden. The sunlight filtering through leaves of the trees above make patterns of shadows and light all around me. As I carefully shift my weight from one slat to the next, I venture closer to the middle, farther out over the stream. I am deathly afraid of heights, but this is manageable. But when Susie joins me, the bridge bounces even more. My hands grip the cable tightly as the shift of weight makes me sway unsteadily. Susie sees my

concern. With a smile, she bounces the bridge again. My grip tightens. I don't feel threatened. We're having fun. I even dip my own knees in response, making the bridge bounce again and again. I am white knuckles and giggles, feeling so alive. I laugh joyously as fear and freedom wash over me. Then, I test my fear with more bouncing.

This is a perfect day. This is a perfect moment. I don't want this feeling to end. We continue to explore the area, traipsing through the cold stream with our shoes in our hands, walking, running, and bouncing our way both under and over the bridge so many times, I lose count. Finally, reluctantly, we begin to head home. Gathering our things, we wrestle our damp socks onto our wet feet, pull on our shoes, and begin the journey laughing and reminiscing about all that we have done. The joy of the day infuses us with warmth and wellbeing. This day is an unexpected gift.

The Reckoning:

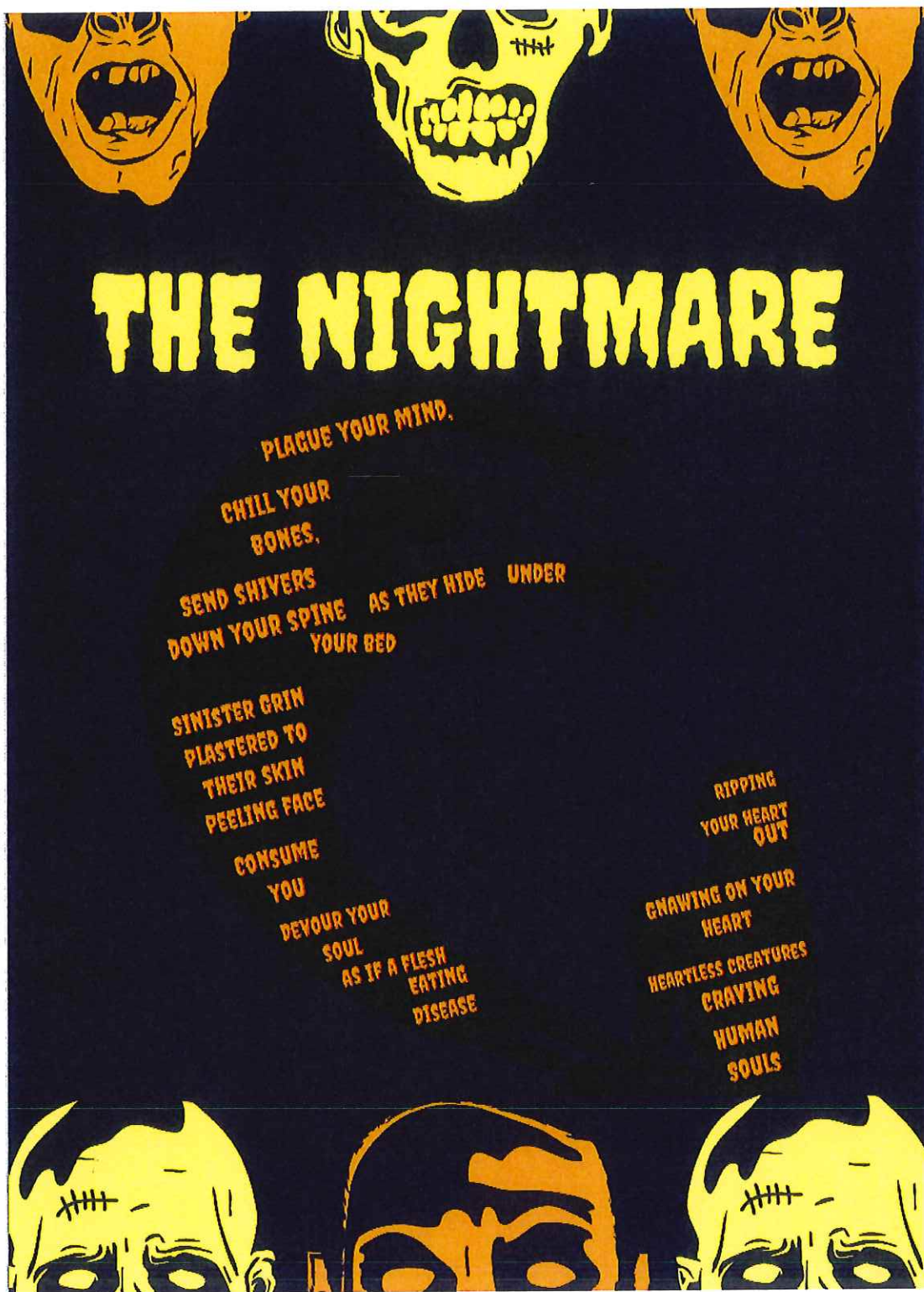
I yelled up the stairs on my way out the door, "Mom, Susie and I are going for a walk!" That was eight hours ago. Where did all that time go? I have no idea. But now, facing my angry and concerned father, I can see the hours of worry on his face.

Standing with the imposing bearing of a former military commander, my father explodes, "You're grounded, young lady!" I'm shocked by the ferocity of his anger. Ironically, Susie, who lives in a perpetual state of being grounded, is not punished today. I, however, am told not to leave the house for two weeks. Feeling small and deflated, I hear all about how my father called the police because we were "missing." My father's anger is palpable and visceral.

Suddenly, *I* am angry. Doesn't he trust me? Doesn't he know how often I walk in the woods? Am I in trouble because he happened to be home from work early today? It isn't fair! Yes, I lost track of time, but this punishment feels like it has more to do with my father's fear than my "crime" of having stayed out too long. I bang the bedroom door, hoping he can hear it. I resent his fear and worry. My perfect day, and the promised freedom of summer, has come crashing down around me.

Reflecting back:

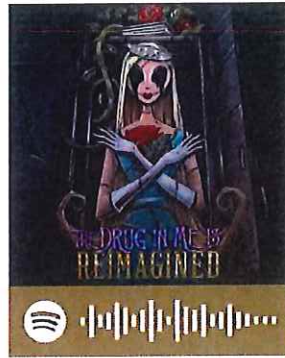
Years later, I examine this memory as I am now, a parent with a daughter. From this perspective, the fear, anguish, and explosive anger my father exhibited that day makes all the sense in the world to me. However, we now have cell phones, and I can track my daughter's movements when she travels. I am never out of touch with her if I need to be. Now I wonder, how did my parents live with the uncertainty of not knowing? I have infinite compassion and empathy for my father's intense anger and concern for me that day. And yet, that day on the Monkey Bridge remains one of my most cherished memories. Given the chance to go back in time, I would do it all over again, without hesitation.



BOBBY REA

Deadly Tiding

(Inspired by "The Drug In Me Is Reimagined")



The rain pours onto the lifeless body that stares up at the hole in the empty theatre. The rain drops fall gently down on the man's face as if tears of despair. Rolling that crooked dice where he dragged that coffin around just in case, she came back for him. Wheeling the body out in the bleak black body bag. I stare at that awful black bag whispering I can't believe I am actually meant to be here. That black bag tore me from my body. My soul being plucked from my body. As the feeling of mortal stalking still reverberates, saying feet don't fail me now. Yet, I lost my god damn mind. Tears stream down my face. Gone. Abandoned. Invisible. Death staring me in the face, she took my life by slipping cyanide into my drink. I wrestle with my thoughts as she said she wanted to be friends. I thought she meant it. Now being thrown like limp meat onto a morgue table. I'm so high on misery as this harsh world kisses me with its violent violet lipstick. Still plastered on my forehead, death slinks around. Painting a beautiful world

has been dissolved into a black and white silent film. Trying to shake the hand of doubt that of all people she, the embodiment of death has come for my soul. Feeling the darkness trying to pull me down as a man stands in front of my ghostly body. Offering me a second chance as if I must be running from my past, saying feet don't fail me now. How do I accept being someone new? A new face. But me. Same personality trapped like the kind of dark that haunts a hundred-year-old house. Signing my soul to the man who all of a sudden spreads his velvety black wings. Winding up feeling a burning sensation in my throat. To make matters worse, as I open the cold wooden door, I find death staring me in the face once again. Walls made of icy concrete blocks. Dimly lit by the black candle. Death's sinister grin glaring back at me as she adorns her ruby red amulet. Dragging me like a coffin to her odd throne with skulls all around it. She stares into my lifeless soul. A salty tear dropping to the floor like a tidal wave crashing onto a rocky coast. I whisper I lost my god damn mind as I gasp for air.

Perfection's World

By Nicole Schiff

Perfectionism stares in the mirror while brushing her teeth. She sees the single pimple forming, rising to the surface of her skin. Residing on the edge of her chin, monstrous, disastrous to the rest of her face. She fixates on the blemish, hoping the seething glare coming from her eyes will make it disappear.

She realizes she has been brushing too long and throws her face toward the sink to spit out the toothpaste dripping down out of her lips. After spitting the toothpaste down the drain, she rises back up to her own reflection a bit longer. Once her eyes refocus, she realizes her self-worth lingering behind her right shoulder.

Perfectionism instantly became even more irritated; She always shows up at the most inconvenient times. It's like she knows I have somewhere to be and wants to throw off my entire day.

"What's on your mind today?" Self Worth asks Perfect.

"I don't even know where to start today. Too much to get done. Not enough time. On top of that, look at this BS on my face."

Self rolls her eyes behind Perfection's back. "Do better dude, you know everything will be okay. Getting things done today, or any day for that matter, does not equate to how great you are."

"How can you even say that?" Perfect knew this was coming. Self Worth is always bringing in the sappy words. She just doesn't get it. She doesn't mind being lazy. Things need to be done, and done well in Perfect's world.

"I get it, I get it." Perfect brushed off what Self was trying to say. She just needed to get on with the day, there was no time for that hippie dippy self care in Perfect's world.

Rooted by Nicole Schiff

On Mother's day, six months after my reality was torn to pieces, I planted two small window boxes with Mom. We walked the aisles of the massive outdoor plant shop finding the right plants to reside in the tiny garden we were going to create together. Mint. Thyme. Rosemary. Eucalyptus. All with different scents, textures, and beauties. They now hang proudly on the fences of my apartment patio, bringing life to the small, square, slab of concrete engulfed by tall buildings leaving only the sky in sight. We carefully removed each plant from their original green plastic pots. Before planting them into their new soil, we had to tear the bottoms of their roots so they could be exposed to the nutrients of their new home.

When a root is pulled from their original ground, the soil becomes soft again, less solid. This uprooting makes it easier for something to take its place. When a person's roots are torn apart, there is a chance they become softer; more accepting and willing for change. Becoming susceptible to new beliefs and understandings. Their soil softens.

Six months before planting these vibrant plants, I was uprooted from my own bliss, my own understanding of myself and those around me. All that I knew about myself before, changed instantly when I found myself torn to pieces one morning before work. Plain and simple, the person I thought loved me unconditionally, had been cheating on me for most of the relationship.

Now I sit alone in my car on 95 heading south back into the city of brotherly love. The flow of traffic is never too fast, allowing too much time for my own thoughts to linger. To reminisce on the now tainted images I have of him and the happiness we shared; on the bliss I was once fully consumed by.

I'm buckled into a vortex of my emotions that I have pent up and stored away the entire day, locked behind a smile for the sake of those I interact with. I have become accustomed to

sitting with these emotions until I put the car in park. As I glide down the highway, the skyline glimmers at me, reminding me of how small I truly am in this world filled with different stories, different joys, different despairs. All of these people going the same direction as me, but each with different destinations and desires. Not one of these people in the cars surrounding me share the same experiences, yet I still find myself wondering how many of these drivers have harbored similar feelings that I now conceal for most of my days.

I think about him and his betrayal. The lack of remorse for cheating on someone he claimed to "love". I think about the lack of love most frequently on 95 when there is traffic. Solely because my body tenses each time I see a silver Nissan Altima. I imagine what would happen if I were to be driving, and see his profile in the tinted windows of his car, while sitting in traffic. Reels of scenarios tick through my mind. Would I try my best to speed off to avoid all of the pain he has caused? Or would I just break down and cry by the sight of him?

"I wish you the best" were the final words said over the phone while I cruised down the same highway, facing the outline of buildings. Whether I truly meant those words or not, whether I actually want him to do well in this world of chaos or not, those words were the stepping stones for me to separate myself further from the choices he made. With each word, I was able to disconnect a bit more.

My roots may have been ripped from my life's soil, but they are beginning to be nourished by my own love; instead of being deprived by the hope of receiving it from others. My soil will bring new love and life to my world.

Where I'm From...by Pauline Skowron Schmidt

I'm from Villa Maria Academy, in Buffalo, NY.
From all-girls' Catholic education.
With Sister Michaeline's apple crisp,
School songs, The Sweet Shop, and navy blue knee socks.
From Sister Angelica's "A word to the wise should be sufficient"
And staying to the right side of the staircase
Where I found myself.

I'm from the Social Hall,
With Friday fish fries in Lent
And leaving room for the holy spirit at dances.
From Annual Sleepovers and watching "Pretty Woman"
with Sister Sharon.
From Freshman Welcome "Crayola Crayons" to "M&Ms"
and everything in between.
Where I found lifelong friends.

I'm from the Academy Chapel, with its ornate wooden altar.
From liturgical gestures to
"Eagle's Wings" and "Eternal Flame".
I'm from Junior Ring Day and 91 turns to the left.
Where I found faith.

I'm from (Sister) Damian's religion class,
Listening to "Man in the Mirror" and "Jonathan Livingston Seagull"
While lying on the carpet with Julie.
I'm from good intentions and integrity
From curiosity and questioning.
Where I found social justice.

I'm from Mr. Warren's dramatic passion.
Where he taught us, while standing on one leg.
Reciting "The Prayer of St. Francis" alongside Shakespearean sonnets.
From deep thinking about handmaids and their tales.
Where I found my voice.

I'm from all of this, which brought me here.
To embracing intersectional, feminist theory,
To seeing our daughters as full of potential.
To seeing other women as support, not competition.
Where women have the power to change the world.

Teachers of the Pandemic

By: Emily Wisniewski

**We are still in a state of apprehension,
a forceful storm demands everything of us.
a never-ending revolving door of change,
the ether of the world leeching our energies.**

**A forceful storm demanding everything of us,
stealing my proclivity,
the ether of the world leeching our energies.
Yet, we continue to battle on.**

**Stealing my proclivity.
Emotions, transformed into untamable beasts.
Yet, we continue to battle on,
for we know they need us.**

**Emotions transformed into untamable beasts,
a never-ending revolving door of change
for we know they need us.
We are still in a state of apprehension.**

When the World Burns




By: Emily Wisniewski





The roses' soft petals hung limply from the stem. The once bright and colorful bloom is no longer able to stand the pressures of the world which was once full of greenery. But that greenery has slowly been eviscerated by the warming Earth, polluted waters, and chemicaled soils. Now, as the once vivid colors of the world go extinct, I sit watching the last rose bush die painfully, its roots searching for water that does not come except for the little that cascades down the slopes of my once youthful, and rosy cheeks, falling to the cracked Earth.

But it is hopeless trying to keep the roses from becoming extinct while everything else on this land is lost due to the desert land of parched soil and cloudless skies. Why prolong its tortured soul any longer? It deserved a life worth living, to be gawked at, and cared for. Loved. But this plant was born during humanity's destruction of the only environment it ever knew. And while the bourgeoisie spent money on hopeless adventures in space, desperate to find a new planet to live on, the human world learned that Earth was the only place that the humans could live. But, it was too late for the humans to do anything about it. They destroyed everything for their own personal gain. Forgetting that nature itself is a living and breathing creature that was suffocated, burned, and depleted for its saboteurs. Who, in the end, only caused their own doom, their hubris deluding them into thinking that they could ever survive when the world burned around them.

As a child born into this world of putrefying death, born alongside the flowers that no longer bloom, I realize that when this flower dies, my once vibrant world, once filled with brilliance, is finally bleached of all its color.

2021 Summer Institute Participants

| Name: | Bio: |
|---|---|
| <p>Roberta</p>  | <p>Roberta returned to West Chester University for the Writing Institute after earning her literacy certificate here. She retired from a career in technical writing and editing for the U.S. Forest Service. A dedicated journaler, she also enjoys gardening both indoors and out.</p> |
| <p>Liz</p>  | <p>Liz Doyle is entering her 19th year of teaching in the West Chester Area School District. Liz has been teaching AP Language for eight years, but she has taught all high school grades--her favorite of which is 11th grade. She has found most of her joy in teaching writing. Her only goal each year is to help students find their voices. When she is not teaching, Liz is chasing after two children, two dogs, and her spouse. She also enjoys reading in multiple genres--mystery, romance, fantasy. Now, after participating in WCWP's Summer Institute, Liz identifies herself as a writer, and she is spending more time sitting with her journal...and trying to remember to water her plants.</p> |
| <p>Janice</p>  | <p>Janice Ewing is a retired reading specialist, literacy coach, and grad school instructor. She values her connection to PAWLP, now WCWP, especially the opportunity to serve as a coach in the Summer Institute. She lives with her husband and two cats, and has two adult daughters . When she's at home, she's often reading or writing with a cat on her lap.</p> |

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|--|--|
| <p>Deanna</p>  | <p>Deanna Gabe loves teaching pre-service teachers at West Chester University. She also loves reading, hiking, cooking, and her kids and puppy. She aspires to get her T-shirt game on point, and to continue growing as a teacher and writer. Now that she knows ghosts can have arms, the sky's the limit!</p> |
| <p>Jen</p>  | <p>Jen Greene is a 2nd grade teacher at Penn Wood Elementary School in the West Chester Area School District. She is also a doctoral candidate at Widener University, pursuing the challenging task of writing a dissertation during a global pandemic (10/10 do not recommend). When not teaching or writing, Jen can be found reading, writing, dancing, taking photographs, or hiking with her two Dalmatians, Murphy and Maeve.</p> |
| <p>Erika</p>  | <p>Erika is a substitute teacher for several school districts in the Montgomery Country area. She graduated from West Chester University with a Bachelors in Secondary English Education. She is currently working on a Masters in English at West Chester University while searching for a permanent teaching position. In her free time, Erika likes to hike, exercise, read, write, and sing. She lives in Collegeville with her parents, brother, three dogs, and cat, but is saving up to get an apartment with her fiance.</p> |
| <p>Sarah</p>  | <p>Sarah (she/her) has a BFA in Technical Theatre from UConn, an MS in Historic Preservation from UPenn, Secondary English Certification (Post-Bacc at WCU), and an MA in English (creative writing focus) from WCU, so of course she is taking more grad courses. Apart from teaching First-Year Writing courses at West Chester University, Sarah publishes her poetry and personal essays online, and is currently querying literary agents for her collaborative YA novel. She also writes monologues which have been performed through Barley Sheaf Players (Monologue Mondays on YouTube). Sarah lives with her husband, daughter, and son in West Bradford.</p> |