Spirited Words

An Anthology of Literary Non-Fiction

EDITED BY ROBERT G. MAY

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Queen's University at Kingston.

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Preface

ROBERT G. MAY

SPIRITED WORDS is the fourth annual WRIT 290 anthology of literary non-fiction, written by WRIT 290 students during the 2016-2017 academic year.

WRIT 290 is an online course devoted to writing literary non-fiction, offered by the Faculty of Arts and Science at Queen's University, Kingston. In the course, students have the opportunity to read several works of literary non-fiction by authors such as Anne Lammott, Barbara Ehrenreich, Mark Kingwell, and others. Students learn about the elements and devices authors put into their works of literary non-fiction, and what the genre's central characteristics are. Students discuss with each other the major themes and preoccupations of the various works via discussion forums and other online tools.

Students' final assignment for the course is to compose an original work of literary non-fiction on a subject of their choice. First, students write a proposal and sketch out an outline. Then, they develop their outline into a working rough draft. Finally, they revise their rough draft into a polished, publication-ready final version. At every step of the process, students receive advice, feedback, and notes from myself or a teaching assistant. Students' final works are then published here with minimal further editing. I have made some minor corrections to spelling and formatting, but generally speaking I have published students' final drafts as submitted at the end of the course. Students who wished to opt out of having their work published here had the

opportunity to do so if they wished, but I am pleased to say that most students participated in the project. The works of literary non-fiction in this collection thus represent the product of several months' work by a group of dedicated and diligent students of writing. It's work they can be immensely proud of.

One of the most important elements of literary non-fiction—and of good writing in general—is its ability to affect the reader on a deeply personal level. *Spirited Words* is thus an appropriate title for this anthology; the works of literary non-fiction published here all have emerged from the individual minds and spirits of their authors, and they all express their author's most personal feelings.

The title *Spirited Words* also reminds me of a passage from Algernon Charles Swinburne's epic poem "Tristram of Lyonesse" (1882), in which the title character finds solace in the natural landscape because it speaks to him as lucidly as the spoken word:

> The heart of the ancient hills and his were one;
> The winds took counsel with him, and the sun
> Spake comfort; in his ears the shout of birds
> Was as the sound of clear, sweet-spirited words....

I hope these works of literary non-fiction speak to you as spiritedly as the hills, winds, and birds spoke to Tristram of Lyonesse.

Interested readers may also download the first three WRIT 290 anthologies of literary non-fiction, *Through the Eyes of Ourselves* (2014), *The Scene and the Unseen* (2015), and *Unearthed Treasure* (2016), at:

http://post.queensu.ca/~mayr/anthologies.html

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Many thanks to the diligent students of WRIT 290 who contributed their original works of literary non-fiction to this anthology.

Thanks as well to the dedicated teaching assistants for WRIT 290, Roger Martin and Jane Russell Corbett, who helped guide students' pieces through each stage of the writing process, from proposal, to outline, to rough draft, and to final version.

And thanks to the many WRIT 290 students who contributed ideas for the cover design and the title for this year's anthology. The title *Spirited Words* is based on a suggestion by Rose Baotic. The cover photograph was taken by Sue A. Lefebvre. She writes, "I bought this typewriter for twenty Euro at a flea market when I lived in Europe. Its serial number indicates it was used during the Second World War."

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Lost Boy

MATTHEW BAKER

I SIT next to Luke. He's been my friend since kindergarten. We sit next to each other in high-school Geography. The teacher gives us an inspiring first-day-of-school speech. This includes a sombre warning: before we turn twenty-five, we would be attending the funeral of a classmate, due to their poor choices. Silly choices with big consequences.

I grew up on an acre of land just outside of Perth. My backyard was my kingdom, and the forest beyond a vast wilderness of mystery. My father steps down from his job. It means saying goodbye to people I have known my whole life.

We find a farmhouse in Maberly, an agricultural settlement that has been home to families living there for generations. One winter day, I go for a walk in the ninety-acre backyard. I'm used to a quainter kingdom. I turn to head home. I figure the dog would know the way back, so I let her lead. Silly little choices like that can set you off course in big ways.

I am lost for hours. Trees are all I see now. Trees that once marked borders between fields have grown into micro-forests, all part of the redneck jungle of Maberly. Above, the branches net the sky. I march. I meet a fence, and joy erases the hours of my straying. I come to a road, where the gravel feels good and solid. I feel something is telling me to walk in the other direction. I turn around, and the feeling was right. When I walk through the door, mom is about to dial 911. Her child is lost. There is a sense of relief and annoyance at my disappearing act, as we get ready for the Christmas Eve service.

After seventeen months, we leave the liminal land of Maberly. Like Israel in the wilderness longed to return to Egypt, I long to go back to Perth, where people know my family's name. Our isolation in Maberly prepares us to appreciate our Promised Land. The move challenges my faith, and I find myself relying more on God to be my source of confidence and peace. Our new home of Smiths Falls is where my dad was born, back when the town was in a golden age. Now, people know it for its drug abuse and fading industries. When I enter Smiths Falls, I see a rusted Bascule drawbridge, drawn upwards above the water. The train track it's a part of has long been out of use. It is the town's unofficial monument, a bridge to nowhere. The storm clouds of teenaged angst gather overhead, and I let go of faith more as I sink into an inner isolation. People change. The bonds I have slowly knit with my friends strain and fray by the pull of distance and time.

In the summer, I visit Perth friends. As children, we ran around, played games, watched movies, and were content. Just a little older now, the game has changed to drinking. I down it eagerly—quickly, my first time. My two friends are old hands at it by now. A few drinks and we are innocent kids again, just hanging out. My friend Luke, from Geography class, drinks a lot more than the rest of us. We tell each other our tales of woe. Sadness becomes this vaster wild; the depths of misery expand into a void. The giants that occupy the land seem too big to conquer. I had family history with alcohol abuse, and should have known better.

After I left Perth, Luke's heart collided with a girl he met. They decided they should take it further, despite their Pentecostal upbringings. When she got pregnant, Luke was elated, but she was scared. I can only wonder at the terror two teenage lovers feel, with their world gone off track. The pressure on a young girl, from family, life, and lover. Those choices feel anything but silly. Luke speaks, leaning on me without shame, like a child. His face is wet with tears. He says, in a voice I've known for years, "Matt, she killed our child."

The next day we are all more distant with each other, and I am relieved to get back to Smiths Falls. Months pass since my first drink with Luke. My family decides to go to Perth for the Christmas Eve service. Luke's family is there, but he is not. Later I find out he drove his truck into a ditch that night. He was fine, just drunk and lost. I hear little after that.

One morning in June, my Geography teacher's words come true. Luke gets lost in the woods of his mind, and makes a choice of his own. By morning, he is gone.

Luke dies on Father's Day weekend. Familiar faces gather to bury our childhood. Luke's parents bury their child. I miss my friend. We all do. I indulge my grief and self-pity for a few years, unable to see I am not the forest, just a tree. My mother and father suffer day and night; her son is lost but there is no one to call. Maybe God.

I follow the liquor trail into darkness. Silly little choices. When I drink, the bleak streets of Smiths Falls sing memories to me. My friend found comfort from his bottle, for a while, but at the bottom was a lie. In the story of the prodigal son, Jesus does not tell us the son is sorry or regretful when he decides to return home. The prodigal is hungry and remembers his father's house. I am exhausted when I ask for help. For hope. A few weeks later, I pass out in a snowbank. The doctors and my family call it luck. My drinking days are numbered. I feel the inconvenience. I choose to trust what other people tell me: "It gets better." Other people's help is the fence I asked for. I accept it, and it gets me out of the woods. However, I am not home yet. Something tells me to stay on the road. I was not looking for God—He is searching for me.

> But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.... [T]he father said ... "For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." (Luke 15.20-22 NIV).

By Circumstance

ROSE BAOTIC

"IF THE house were on fire, who would you save first?" Understandably, my mom, a kind and loving mother of four, quickly became apprehensive and annoyed when I asked her the question as part of my twisted game of dilemmas. In her terribly reluctant riposte, she rationalized her decision to save two of my siblings first because they're parents (read: higher life value). As for my bachelor brother, the willing, yet-to-be-father, well, he would be next. So. I guess this leaves the aging, barren one resigned to a toasty death in a lonely inferno. Damn, Mama, why didn't I have babies?

It used to be that if a woman didn't have children, the world would blindly assume she had a medical condition that rendered her incapable of conceiving a child, and she'd be cast off as pitiful and desperate, an object of hushed ridicule. In more recent years, as women began shunning more traditional life trajectories, choice became another explanation for childlessness. Yet today, it's rarely an absolute issue; a woman's state of motherhood, or non-motherhood, as it were, concerns a number of variables, all of which add to the already complex and nebulous conundrum:

To breed or not to breed?

The simple truth is some infertile women simply abandon the journey to motherhood, bowing out of the fertilization race gracefully, broken, perhaps, but accepting nonetheless. For others, not having children is an uncompromising choice, born of the sheer absence of desire (read: sleep as the highest human value). And often, these women are cattle-branded as selfish, leaving gossipers confused as to

why a woman would want to keep her womb to herself. However, many women are childless by circumstance, and thus fall out of the bounds of the "can't have" and "won't have" sets. Many times, their decision or indecision relates to vocational, financial, emotional, or relationship uncertainty, while in some cases, past experiences play a role.

All this talk of women. If I remember anything from rudimentary Health classes, mommy *and* daddy and baby makes three. Or so the old, non-PC story went. Yet where making babies is concerned, how do men fit into the equation? On one hand, I've personally been witness to the lasting happiness of DINK couples (Dual Income, No Kids. And no pun intended!), while on the other, I feel it behoves the broody woman to carefully consult with her potential mate before she tasks him with the painfully sweaty jobs of installing baby car seats and hauling twenty-pound cases of infant formula home from Costco. A man is always involved, and in a number of ways.

That may be, but wait. What would Jesus say? After all, it's true that cultural institutions contribute to the warped perceptions of the childless woman. Christian doctrine in particular imagines a woman as a baby maker, and, arguably, nowhere is this idea more rampant than among the Catholic, Eastern-European populace, where childlessness is anathema. As a non-believer in an ethnic world of genuflecting, I'm constantly battling the pressure to procreate, to fulfil God's plan. There are the countless, awkward encounters at weddings and bridal and baby showers with the thick-ankle set, the well-meaning but myopic aunties in the Croatian community. I've grown so tired of the predictable and nauseating rapid-fire grilling that I've found ways to shut the conversations down as quickly as they begin.

"Do you have special boyfriend now?"

"No, but I have a special waffle maker. And let me tell you, it's getting pretty serious." I slap the outside of my thighs.

"But God wants you to be a mother."

"Tell Him that's fine, only I want to be paid first. And in cash this time."

"You don't have much time. And my nephew's here. He's older and lonely too! Be right back."

"Great. Does he also have a hunchback and live in his mother's basement?"

Then there are the hordes of my extended family overseas, who as far as I know, believe the reason why I'm still childless is because I don't go to church, or have leprosy. In any case, the equating of motherhood with godliness and the obsessive need to breed is so hopelessly entrenched in the mindsets of those close to me in heart, that in my childless state, I'm likely to face judgement forever. Bring on the flames.

If anyone were to take an interest (and ask me nicely), I would probably tell them that for me, being a single woman in my late thirties with no children is not down to infertility, nor is it a lifestyle choice, per se. I arrived at my current status largely by circumstance, through a series of personal experiences, some controllable and others not so much. I used to wonder if my decision to not keep a baby at the age of twenty informed my once conflicted feelings about motherhood. Was this the nucleus, the moment I started to subconsciously pull away from the idea, the moment when I became "pro-me"? Moreover, throughout my twenties, I don't recall ever once having the pang of desire to have a child. On the very rare occasion, I would question whether I was normal, but in reality, I was too busy enjoying a hedonistic lifestyle to bother with anyone else's interests. Diaper duty? No way. Happy hour at the pool bar with a luscious Latino? *Si*.

Stumbling into my thirties, I stopped being warm from tequila and instead began slowly warming to the now, very normal, child-free version of normal. Now on the cusp of another decade, I come across other people like me, men and women who have also emerged from miserable career circumstances to return to full-time studies, and who, like me, may also be deaf to the sounds of any ticking clocks. As for any pangs, I get them from time to time, but they're either caused by an ulcer flare-up or the nefarious lava wave known as the perimenopausal hot flash, which most times feels like blazing hell. And that's quite enough heat for me in this lifetime, thank you.

Is Aruba Still One Happy Island?

DOUGLAS BREWER

ARUBA HAS long been known as "One Happy Island," a unique place in the Caribbean where cultures have merged seamlessly to create a fantastic place to live or play. The island has white-sand beaches, top-notch hotels and amenities, the best drinking water in the Caribbean, an extremely low crime rate, terrific shopping, and great nightlife. But the greatest threat to the culture of Aruba may be the burgeoning Americanism brought about by an influx of New York tourists, and the restaurants and bars springing up to service them. The culture of "One Happy Island" is being steadily erased, or at least changed beyond recognition ... and not for the better.

For many years, one of the favourite watering holes on the Caribbean island of Aruba was called Local Store. Perched above the main street with open air on three sides, Local Store featured a bird's-eye view of downtown Orangestad, the Renaissance Casino, the waterfront developments, and the cruise ship terminal. Strategically located on L.G. Smith Boulevard, which is the main street and waterfront route from the airport to the hotels, it even sat diagonally across from the main bus terminal for the island. Local Store was the kind of place for everyone in Aruba; locals, workers, tourists, and even temporary visitors from the cruise ships would gather to swap stories. Locally owned and serving buckets of the local beers Balashi and Chill, the spot offered a party atmosphere with a local feel. But Local Store is gone now, yet another victim of the American commercialism sweeping the island paradise. The formerly grand location is now shared by three stores: Baskin Robbins, Dunkin' Donuts, and Little

Caesars, each of which offer no local atmosphere whatsoever, save for the weather outside.

The downtown district isn't the only place that the landscape is changing. The corner of J.E. Irasquin Boulevard and Route 3 on the Palm Beach strip of Aruba once held local bars and restaurants with local flavours and low-key, friendly atmospheres. Today, that corner features McDonald's, Soprano's, The Hard Rock Café, and Hooters, and is virtually indistinguishable from a block in Scranton, Pennsylvania (except that Scranton only has a Hooters in episodes of *The Office* and not in real life). One block up Aruba Route 3 are Wendy's and Texas de Brazil, and just down the strip on Irasquin are Tony Roma's and TGI Fridays. The theory seems to be that American-style restaurants might feel more like home for American tourists, and the strategy seems to be working. American tourists are becoming a larger percentage of the island's visitors every year, and this may be contributing to the seemingly endless demand for American-style hotels, restaurants, and bars. American tourism is driving the total number of visitors to Aruba higher: an average of eight percent per year higher since 2012 ("Destination"). This overall increase in tourism dollars drives growth in facilities. New hotel rooms, bars, and restaurants are good for the economy, but tough on the landscape.

Although tourism is up in Aruba overall, visits are down from several countries that are traditionally high sources. The costs of airline fares from Europe have increased, which is believed responsible for decreased tourist visits from the Netherlands since they summited in 2012. Similarly, it is believed that the weakness in the Canadian dollar is responsible for the decrease in annual visitors from Canada each year since they peaked in 2012 (Central). And those are certainly valid reasons. But lost in those figures might be the Canadians, Dutch, and other Europeans who feel that Aruba is a little less unique and special every year, and a little more like Cleveland. My wife and I love Aruba, and we'll continue to visit once or twice per year from Canada. But there's definitely been a change that is disappointing and one we never expected would be allowed by the protective government.

Aruba is a Dutch island, and their immigration policies are very tough for foreigners. It is also among the most difficult countries in which to establish a new business, so it's difficult to imagine the ease and speed with which this change has occurred. The Chamber of Commerce for Aruba works with and advises the Department of Economic Affairs on which new business ventures deserve licencing.

Among the criteria are that the new business activity will contribute positively to the Aruban economy and its diversification, and that the business activity will fortify and/or boost local entrepreneurship. In addition, at least sixty percent of the shares must be owned by locals, or the equivalent of a local, or a legal entity incorporated under the laws of Aruba of which all shareholders are local (Aruba). While one could easily argue the merits of Hooters and its contribution to the Aruban economy, it is clear that there are no guidelines that protect the island's culture. The answer to the question of whether American tourists would actually want to visit a Hooters or McDonald's on their beach vacation seems to be affirmative, as the businesses appear to be flourishing. It is also clear that there are as many enterprising Aruban-born entrepreneurs who are willing to own a piece of an American fast-food franchise as there are American corporations seeking to find a workaround to gain a foothold in paradise.

Aruba has a history of colonization, and the onslaught of American products and ideas just seems like the latest instalment of colonial expansionism. A huge, new Ritz Carlton has been added to the prime Palm Beach Aruban real estate market, right next to the Marriott compound, which houses the largest number of rooms on the island. The Holiday Inn, Hilton, and Hyatt round out the U.S. brands with a strong presence. The local flavour of "One Happy Island" is being erased one block at a time, one hotel at a time, one restaurant at a time, and sadly, one Local Store at a time, in the same way that the island's native populations were once eliminated. All that will soon remain are the American icons. It might be hard to find a Balashi beer in the future, so be prepared to ask for a Budweiser.

The Local Store bar, featuring the local beer Balashi and displaying its friendly gathering tables, in the author's own photo, taken February 4, 2014.

A 2016 photo with three American icons replacing the Local Store.

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Singing Up the Mekong

LIN MORENCY BUCKLAND

I WAS born on an island, and I grew up on another one. Perhaps for that reason, I've always been most comfortable surrounded by water.

When I was planning a trip to Southeast Asia some years ago, I organized it to take place as much as possible on, beside, and along the Mekong River. That grand waterway runs through four of the countries I hoped to visit: Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia. While some destinations—Angkor Wat, for example—did not have a direct Mekong link, I was nevertheless able to arrange for several watery experiences, particularly in Laos.

My time in Laos began with a journey of several days on the Mekong River in a small converted log ferry. From Pakse in the south, we made our way slowly, in a stately fashion. The boat had been renovated to a nostalgic early-twentieth-century imperial style, with teak cabins, brass fixtures, and potted ferns and wicker chairs on deck. There were only four other passengers on board, all from France, and we had lively discussions over meals, with some teasing me about my "quaint" Canadian French accent.

Travelling in this manner meant that we did not cluster at the most popular visitor spots. Instead, we had a chance to appreciate the natural beauty of forests and fields along the shores, and to see farming and fishing villages.

At one stop along the river, we took a memorable trek a little way inland to the ruins of a ninth-century Khmer temple, Oum Muang, which for me ended up rivalling the spectacular *wats* I saw later on the trip. This one, in a quiet forest, had crumbling walls of stone and carvings covered in vines, under the deep green canopy of tall trees.

Nature and creation by human hands had joined in this very old and spirit-touching place. We lingered in the quiet.

After the boat trip, I moved further north in Laos for a longer stay in the town of Luang Prabang. My guest house was right beside the Mekong, near where that river and the Kahn River meet. We took our meals sitting out on the banks of the river, and my bougainvillea-festooned balcony looked over the water.

Luang Prabang is a special place. It is popular with backpackers because of its laid-back atmosphere and because it is relatively cheap. It is not only that accommodations and food are inexpensive, but also that there are so many experiences to be had for little or no money. Outstanding in these experiences are the temples.

Luang Prabang has an abundance of Buddhist temples, some very old. At least thirty-four temples in the central area have UNESCO designation, and each temple is a work of art in itself. Long rooves curve down, often with intricate wooden carvings, some clad in gold leaf. Inside, the walls are black or deep red lacquer, with gold stencilling of mythical creatures or historical scenes. Ceilings feature frescoes. Tall pillars, again with stencilling on a black background, culminate in gold-painted lotus carvings. In some cases, exterior or interior walls have coloured glass mosaics, such as the Tree of Life, set against a deep red background. The statues of Buddha, usually finished in gold, and often adorned with additional gold leaf, glow from within the temples. The overall effect is one of deep beauty and serenity.

I spent hours visiting the temples, especially early in the mornings, after the monks' processions through the streets with their rice bowls, when the people in the community provide them with food. In the mornings, the younger monks sweep and tidy the temple grounds, and classes begin. One goes quietly and respectfully; it is a gift of time and space in which to reflect and remember, surrounded by art created to honour a venerable spiritual system.

Sleeping beside the Mekong at night, and spending the mornings in the temples, I felt as if I had entered some other realm: watery, golden, dreamy. I stayed in that kind of soft, gentle state most of my time in Luang Prabang.

There were a few non-quiet moments, however, and they were part of yet another river experience. I was in a boat with the young man who was my frequent guide in Laos, on a short trip up the river to visit the Pakou Caves. These caves, right in the banks of the Mekong, hold more than four thousand small wooden icons, placed there over hundreds of

years by local people to honour the Buddha, and, some say, the river gods, too. I was looking forward to seeing this unusual site. But I was also happy to enjoy the trip up in a local "long tail" motor boat.

My guide, whom I'll call Keo, had a jolly kind of personality. He was knowledgeable—and sometimes whimsical—in the historical and cultural explanations he had shared with me during our previous outings. We had had some interesting exchanges, and had started to fill in our life histories with each other, too.

This day, the noise of the motor on the boat would likely drown out conversations on Lao cultural history and personal stories. So Keo suggested that we sing. Brilliant! But he was a young Laotian and I was a not-so-young Canadian. What songs could we possibly find that we both knew? We each ran through a variety of suggestions. Suddenly, we both lit up: The Everly Brothers! Someone, at some point, had given Keo a tape of these 1960s crooners, and they were familiar to me, too, from my own long-ago teenage years. So we began.

We were astounded, at each other and at ourselves, for the way the words came back. "Wake Up, Little Susie." "Dream, Dream, Dream." "Let It Be Me." "Devoted to You." "Bye Bye, Love." "'Til I Kissed You." "Cathy's Clown." We went through the whole repertoire, with increasing loudness and enthusiasm. Then we went through it again, this time remembering the words even more fully.

As we sounded the last note of "All I Have to Do Is Dream," we rounded the corner and there were the caves. Even though we had arrived in somewhat non-meditative fashion, it was still a moving experience to see the thousands of carved wooden Buddha statues. We were hushed and appreciative.

When I think of Laos, I think of the river, the golden temples, the quiet spaces, the beautifully crafted art. But I also remember those delightful hours of corny sentimental music, shared with Keo, singing up the Mekong.

Not Another Orphan Annie Story

But a Tale of a Foster Kid

BRIANNE CALLAGHAN

MY CASE record follows. Name: Payton, Parker. Date of birth: April 16, 1999 (New York). Biological Parent(s): Payton, Joe; mother diseased. Sibling(s): Payton, Isabella (age 6). Foster-care Facility(s): HSVS (Brooklyn), Mercy First (Brooklyn), Leake and Watts Services (Bronx), Sheltering Arms (Manhattan), etc. The list continues, that is if you count the five halfway homes, seven foster homes, and three shelters in the last five years.

I've been a child of the state since the age of twelve. My mother died during childbirth, and because of this my father couldn't cope. After my mother's death, Joe stopped being a father. He began to drink. A lot. And eventually, I became the only guardian Bella would know.

It sucked being a father figure, especially when you didn't have much of one yourself. But it didn't matter that I was hurt or abandoned, I had to grow up. It was hard trying to explain to a child what was happening around her. She didn't look like a regular six-year-old girl. She was so skinny, like she hadn't eaten in months, her clothes were so rugged and baggy. Her long and frizzy brown hair looked as if it hadn't been brushed or cut in years. It's not like we had a parent to look after us. Being passed from foster care, to group homes, to shelters was the only life we've known. Apparently a mad and heart-broken kid was frowned upon if you want to be adopted. Could you blame me? *No one cares about a foster kid.*

Now we live cramped up with our new foster parents in Queens: Vince and Cocoa Colletti. Vince dressed as if he was part of the Italian

mob in those old gangster movies. If you've seen Al Pacino in *Donnie Brasco*, but with a chunky, tacky, fake chain: that would be Vince. Not to mention the greasy gelled hair, or what was left of it. As for "Cocoa," which I don't even think is her real name: big blonde hair with cheap, long talons for nails. She looks as if she could be part of *The Jersey Shore* cast. It's now been three months living with the Collettis and I've already discovered their real professions. Vince, a coke dealer with very few connections, and Cocoa, an amateur dancer at the Show Palace in Long Island. Definitely not the occupations they put on their file, am I right? It still amazes me how they ever took in three foster kids before us. "The pair of you are just another thousand dollars a month from the state," Cocoa always screams when she is fed up with my sarcasm. (What else am I supposed to do for entertainment?) But I get it, we're just a fixed income because cocaine and stripping don't always pay the bills.

Now if you have read this far, you have probably now realized this isn't another *Orphan Annie* story. And this definitely is no musical. This is my actual life. You may be thinking, "why would someone want to live here in this crummy place?" But it's not like I chose this place. We get dropped of like clothes in a donation bin. That's what we are: donations.

Tomorrow I will be turning eighteen and will no longer be in custody of the state. I have just a little over one thousand dollars, two bus tickets to South Port, and signed guardianship forms stored in a shoe box under my bed. Title IV-E of the Social Security Act requires relatives, starting with grandparents, followed by aunts and uncles, then adult siblings, when determining placement of a child. That would be page one in case you're thinking I'm making this stuff up. In less then twenty-four hours we will disappear from both the hands of the Collettis and the state.

This is the thirteenth school I have attended in my high-school career. I head several blocks down until I notice I am being followed. It's just two losers from my History class, so I turn my head and continue walking. They manage to catch up and block me from passing. "Nice holes," one says, yanking on my jeans. I've become accustomed to the homeless remarks since the age of thirteen, so I just keep walking. "Where'd you get them, Value Village?" *How Original.* Now, I don't really enjoy the company of other kids, especially arrogant, privileged ones. But I continue to walk. "Aren't those the same pants you've worn all week, Parker? Can your mother not afford?". *Smack!* I

pop the first kid in the jaw. You could instantly see the lip swell. The second kid punches me directly in the eye, and the first kicks me to the ground. I'm repetitively kicked until I've had enough. I can feel my eye starting to close and the cold blood dripping down my shirt, like I just got back from war. I just lay on the sidewalk, dumped like trash, but I'm used to it. *No one cares about a foster kid.*

When I get back to Casa Colletti, I can hear Isabella crying. When I open the door, my shoe box is on a table covered with white powder as if it were the first snowfall. I could assure you, it isn't snow. She looks up at me, and I can see the fear in her eyes. I didn't know what she was more afraid of, the unconscious addict or how banged up I was. Vince is at the table counting my money. And his pupils, the size of Mars. He didn't care that his wife was strung out on the floor, nor the fact that my six-year-old sister was exposed to his blow.

That night, I stood outside yet another broken home in the downtown of Queens. There are two cars parked outside: the Collettis' in cuffs in the first, and Isabella in the back of another. Our eyes met once again, but this time hers broke my heart. Anger, disappointment, but what about her pain? "Until the preliminary hearing, Isabella must stay in state custody," the social worker says. The court determines whether to temporarily allow the child to be placed elsewhere (page three). I couldn't seem to catch a break. Until I was financially capable on my own, I was not "fit to be a kinship giver." It wouldn't be at least until six months for a review trial, where as a permanency hearing wouldn't be until twelve to fourteen months (page four). Who knows where Bella would end up now? Another shelter, another place like this? And I was homeless, with no job, and without the one thing that mattered.

Now I sit in a cheap motel in Queens. Like I said before, this is no musical, this is my life. Mr Warbucks wasn't coming to save me anytime soon. But I suppose it was a hard-knock life. *That is, for a foster kid.* I live within a corrupt system, designed for kids like me to fail. My own father didn't want me, why would anyone else? The world is a hard place for foster kids. No one wants us. We're like old dogs in the shelter. Right about now you're thinking, "wow, what a terrible story." But that's the point. We get tossed from shelter to home like a stray. There are no happy endings for us. There is no happy ending for me. You grow up hurt, angry, and lonely. And eventually,

you end up a broke, homeless orphan, on the brink of suicide. Because no one ever wants someone else's kid. No one will love a kid like me as much as their own. No one loves a foster kid. Because *no one cares about a foster kid*. Except for a foster kid.

The Ugly Side of Beauty

JESSICA CHEN

HEART POUNDING, voice still raw from our previous argument, I found myself choking back the uncertainty that was crawling up my throat to ask my boyfriend if he even liked me. He blinked, but said without hesitation, "Of course I do. You're so pretty." His forehead creased in puzzlement when I cringed and turned my face away from him as if he had slapped me. And in truth, it would almost have hurt less if he had. My stomach was squirming like a hundred rattlesnakes were laying eggs inside it, and I wanted to rip it out. I felt the lump rise back up in my throat, and I cursed my over-active tear glands. After awhile, I felt a hand on my shoulder, and my boyfriend asked gently, "Are you okay? Please look at me." I took a moment to gather myself, then turned to face him. My eyes wandered over the familiar lines of my boyfriend's face, from the still-present furrow in his forehead to the contours of the mouth that I knew so well. In that moment, however, he had never looked so much like a stranger.

At the time, I could not have explained why the compliment had upset me so much. After all, my boyfriend had meant it to be an act of reconciliation after our first fight. Furthermore, his confusion in response to my evident agitation indicated to me that he could not perceive any way that his comment could have been misconstrued. On further reflection, I realized that, given the context of my question, his praise offended me because I felt as if it came with an implication that the only reason he valued me was because he thought I was pretty. Although I appreciated the occasional endorsement of my appearance, I also knew that my personal value was far beyond the sum of a face and

body. I wondered if my boyfriend knew that, too. However, if I had to fault my boyfriend for falling victim to the fallacy that physical appearance correlates with a person's worth, I had a lot of other places to point fingers. For example, anyone scrolling through social media is at risk of being swallowed up by a torrent of posts captioned with some version of "everyone is beautiful." While the friends and relatives that shared the posts probably had only the best intentions in mind, their messages are misconceived and damaging. To address the first point, insisting that a quality is universal to everyone divests the quality of any meaning. Surely no one would insist that everyone has a good singing voice. On the other hand, we feel as if it is our duty to promote the idea of universal beauty to little girls, even though our actions perpetuate the misconception that beauty is the Holy Grail of achievement.

My boyfriend was consistently attentive when I dressed myself in a manner that I knew he would appreciate. On one occasion, I asked him why he never put in much effort in that department for me. His reply that he did not believe that women were visual creatures irritated me, but also rang true to a certain degree. During the 2012 Olympic Games, a Turkish man published an article to proclaim his distaste for the appearance of the female competitors. It is tragic that a woman can be a remarkable athlete, a gifted artist, or a successful businesswoman, but be ultimately judged by her looks. And it is even more tragic that the belief that beauty is synonymous with value is an issue that primarily plagues women. This issue is one of the remaining obstacles between our society and true gender equality, and must therefore be addressed. I have noticed that when we disagree with a woman, we often disparage her appearance, thus turning her into a straw man to beat down, rather than addressing the real point of difference. On the other hand, we tend the praise the physical attributes of women we respect and admire. These toxic behavioural patterns must be overcome. However, I also believe that, under the right circumstances, praising a woman on her appearance is perfectly acceptable, provided that we place an equal amount of weight on her other qualities.

The first time my boyfriend kissed me, he leaned over the centre console of his car, looked at me with the light of a streetlamp reflected in his eyes, and told me that I was beautiful. I remember the way my breath had caught in my throat in the best way possible. During the first few months we were together, he said those exact words to me a thousand times: when we sat together on the beach to watch the sunset,

when he kissed me again in front of a coffee shop that served delectable macaroons, when he watched me brush my teeth in his bathroom mirror. And I will admit that, for a while, it was flattering. As my family believed that spending money and effort on my appearance instead of intellectual pursuits was frivolous, I spent much of high school in ill-fitting jeans and sweatshirts. This was the first time in my life that I had felt pretty. But the satisfaction soon faded into indifference, which in turn became aversion. It was at that point that the compliments stopped coming as frequently. In hindsight, I recognize that this was not an indicator that my boyfriend had lost interest in me. However, at the time, I wilted from the lack of praise I had grown used to receiving from him.

Whereas previously I cringed every time my boyfriend told me I was pretty, I also cringed when he stopped.

The Power of Headaches

ABDULLAH CHOKSI

RICKY MARTIN came on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* to talk about his coming out as a gay man. I watched that episode in my parents' bedroom with the volume so low hat no one else in the house could hear. Oprah was asking Ricky questions about fear, shame, the aftermath of coming out, and what triggered him to come out in the first place. Ricky had recently fathered two twin boys, and he told Oprah that he didn't want to teach his boys to live a lie.

That line tipped every stone covering my heart, and wiped countless tears of crying myself to sleep. I realized that I was teaching people in my life how to lie. I told myself that I would have to live in denial for the rest of my life rather than come out of the closet. A week after that episode aired, I watched an interview with Dr Maya Angelou where she said, "we're all teachers, whether we know it or not; whether we take responsibility for it or not." I connected that statement with what Ricky Martin said about teaching his children to live a lie. I was teaching everyone, whether I knew it or not, how to lie. I was attracting more lies.

Dr Angelou quoted a famous Roman playwright by the name of Terentius, from a play he wrote in the seventeenth century called *Heauton Timorumenos*. The famous quote in Latin was, "*A homo sum humani nihil a me alienum puto*," which translates to English as, "I am a human being, nothing human can be alien to me." Dr Angelou went on to explain why this quote is so important and how it changed her life. One of the reasons she gave was that because the playwright was a black African, living in Rome in the seventeenth century, when slavery

was a way of life. Terentius wasn't just a playwright trying to make it big, he was the big playwright. He was the playwright for the royal courts of Europe. His plays were taken all over the world, and kings would admire his work.

I realized if a black African could make his dreams come true at a time when black Africans were forced into slavery just because of their skin colour, that me being a Muslim and being gay could both be in existence at the same time. My background is Muslim, pure Muslim. The kind where your family owns a Mosque and an Islamic school. I realized that if I am a human being, then being anything human cannot be alien to me. I knew I was on to something. At the time, I used to paint frequently, or rather when I would get inspired. I was inspired by this sharing by Maya Angelou of the quote by the playwright. So I decided to paint the quote on a canvas. I hung the canvas in my bedroom and read the quote every morning and every night.

Since I had painted the quote, I got chronic headaches every night, migraines to be specific. I was overthinking without even knowing it. I was thinking about coming out or staying in denial forever. My brain couldn't handle the pain anymore. I was in the middle of either dying or giving birth to something amazing. On April 17th, 2011, I woke up to another migraine. From the floor-to-ceiling window in my bedroom shone an unwelcome stinging light from the sun. I turned my head away from the window to ease the pain to my eyes, but that was no use because my room was painted a banana yellow. Everywhere I turned my head, it looked like the sun was blasting into my room. The sun was bouncing off the walls, which made my headache worse.

It was around two o'clock in the afternoon when I finally pulled the duvet off my face and tried to stand up without getting dizzy. I could feel the thread of the carpet on the bottom of my feet, and it tickled. I could not stand up, my migraine was mine. I sat at the edge of my bed, and I tried to remember my dream from the night, but all I could remember was how much I cried about the thought of being disowned by my family for being gay. My headache grew. Warm tears started to slide down my face. Some tears were so big that they slid down to my collar bone. *You're a loser,* I told myself, *you're going to hell, God doesn't love you, you should kill yourself so your family won't be humiliated*. My prayer for so many years was to die. I wished that my prayer would come true at that moment. I took a deep breath, stood up, locked my bedroom door, and walked over to the mirror. I

looked into my eyes, and I learned that it was impossible to look at both at the same time, so I alternated between them.

Years later, I learned in a Neuroscience class that repetition creates new neuron pathways in the brain. I looked into my right eye and whispered, *I am Abdullah, I am gay, I am not going to hell, I am not an idiot*. I then looked in my left eye and said the same thing again. I looked back in my right eye and said, *you are gay, get over it*. I looked back into my left eye and asked, *why can't I be gay?* I answered myself, *you can be, you can be anything, but you must be happy about it*, *it's okay to be gay, there's nothing wrong with it.* I stood doing nothing for a moment. Then I looked over at the painting of the magical Latin quote. "I am a human being, nothing human can be alien to me," it read. I stood in awe, looking at my painting. All my problems were gone. Everything I was ever afraid of was gone. My fear of rejection, religious prosecution, or my family disowning me were all gone. I realized at that moment that anything can happen to me, and I might or might not survive, and that's okay. I also realized that my headache was gone. I was free at last.

The Persistence

EVIE KATES

THERE IS something magical about the evening sun. Cast in the warm glow of the sun's last rays, even the most mundane pebbles appear spectacular. One particularly divine evening, a couple were strolling the path that meandered along the north shore of Lake Ontario. The surface of the water glistened like a million shards of moving glass, reflecting the heavens above. As the setting sun dipped into the distant horizon, it painted the sky with broad strokes of orange and red. The brilliant spectrum was only interrupted by wispy Cirrus clouds set ablaze by the evening sun.

"No!", she exclaimed, "I'm not going to be the bad cop, our children are going to like me too much." The woman giggled, as she shuffled to keep up with the man's long stride. His voice dripping with sarcasm, he retorted, "Well, aren't you so humble!" The two continued to bicker playfully as the sun disappeared behind the horizon.

The couple returned home in the eerie glow of twilight. In the absence of sun-kissed radiance, their mundane environment returned to its familiar dullness. Indeed, yanked back into the starkness of reality, I remember that I *am* the woman.

Granted, our perfect date seemed like a distant memory now, so it was no surprise that the woman seemed like a stranger from another life. *Perhaps it was a dream*, I thought, as we settled into bed. No sooner had the man rested his head on the pillow than the faint hum of his snoring began to resonate in the small room. His breath tickled my left ear, and I smiled: *Only he could fall asleep that quickly!*

While I waited patiently for sleep to take me, my mind began to wander. *What does the future really hold?* My brain began to buzz as I considered several potential life choices and their outcomes. *Will I be happy?* Distracted by my ruminations, I didn't notice the anxiety that had begun to creep under my skin with sinister subtlety. It was akin to demonic possession in the 2010 supernatural horror film, *Insidious*. As I brushed away a tickle on my cheek, I realized that it was wet with tears. *Why am I crying?* Confused and unsettled by this revelation, my anxiety began to overflow. Dread. Cold sweat. Heart palpitations—my demons were battering me down. As I propped myself up on my elbow, I felt the wet spot on my pillow where my tears had drenched the cotton. As I gazed at the man lying next to me, I admired his peaceful face. He was so blissfully unaware of the storm raging on next to him. Suddenly, I was overcome by a wave jealousy. *Why can't I be that peaceful?* I turned over to face the dark room. *Okay, how do people find happiness?* Clearly, whatever I was doing was unsuccessful. Perhaps I needed to make a change.

Recall Einstein's definition of insanity: doing the same thing repeatedly, but expecting a different outcome. By a genius's logic, complacency in a cycle of unhappiness is probably the worst course of action. Thus, with fierce conviction, I resolved to reject my complacency. If uprooting my life was my only chance at happiness, then I was not going to let fear hold me back. Take Walt Disney, for example. He spent his early career virtually homeless. It was only after he made a drastic change (spending his last dollars on a bus ticket to Hollywood) that he began to build up the enormously successful enterprise known as Disney today. So, as heart-wrenching as leaving the man would be initially, perhaps I would be happier in the future. With tears in my eyes, I committed to changing my life.

Inexplicably, as if sensing my desperation, the man turned over in his sleep and rested his hand on my side. With each breath, I felt his hand rise and fall in time. He cradled me, the broken girl. So, despite all my cracks and faults, I did not break apart. Though a seemingly inconsequential gesture, the physical connection served as my lifeline back to reality. My heart rate slowed, and my body fell limp into the mattress.

In the morning light, I sluggishly struggled to pry my eyes open—they were glued shut by dried tears. Finally succeeding, my gaze fell upon a ray of early morning sun that peeked through the slatted blinds. It glinted off the man's hair, framing his serene face. Relishing the

beauty of the moment, I felt unequivocally peaceful, as well. But, as the night's turmoil suddenly washed over me, I was overcome with embarrassment. I propped myself up on my elbow and noticed that the wet spot on my pillow had disappeared. Along with it, all evidence of last night's cataclysm had vanished. I was stunned. In a single moment of weakness, I had almost set fire to my entire life. Looking towards the man at my side in the morning light, I realized how grateful I was to have him. A smile cracked across my face and, there, the woman beamed with rapture.

In the context of a new day, all the tribulations of the previous night faded into irrelevance. Demons that went bump in the night were scorched by the morning sun. Storms that raged in the blackness of night were suddenly gone as quickly as they came. In the light of this new day, I realized that happy moments wax and wane like the phases of the moon. Though there is a human tendency to run at the first hint of trouble, it is nonetheless imperative to persist; waiting on the other side of every distress is another beautiful morning sun.

Grow

KATHERINE EVANS

FEBRUARY 24TH, 1959: a baby girl enters the world in Vernon, British Columbia.

It was a fluke that my mother was born in Vernon—she was two weeks early; her mother was visiting her own mother. It was almost as if, as a fetus, she knew just how important the town would become to her. At one week after birth, her parents returned her to their home in Vancouver. Then, in three- and four-year increments, they moved to Vernon, Nakusp, Richmond, and Cranbrook. When my mother finished high school, she escaped, on her own, to the big city where she was supposed to have been born, making a home for herself in the bustling dorms of the University of British Columbia. But throughout her childhood, every summer, holiday, and grape-crushing season, my mother's family would travel to visit her grandparents. I was born in the city suburbs, but she was born a farm girl. She made friends with the cats, the crops, and the constant companions of Life and Death.

My mother's maternal grandparents, Yohan and Marta Ketterer, owned farm property at the base of Vernon's Silver Star mountain. The property was expansive, brimming with life, but my mother's young eyes were always drawn to the palace of a barn that stood in the farm's centre. It could house thirty cows, with room enough for thousands of hay bales in the high reaches of the loft, stacked for the winter. Swallows nestled into mud nests in the rafters above. In the upper storage rooms of the barn rested old tack, stainless-steel pails, milking stools, worn rope, ancient tools, and bags upon bags of feed for the

chickens and cows and calves. Down on the ground floor, feral cats stalked mice and staked out territory.

There would be kittens, but often not for long. Unless their mothers were clever and tough, the kittens would die at the claws of the old toms. My mother once found a young cat, a new mother, pure black from head to tail. Care was a foreign concept to the black cat, barely more than a baby herself, surrounded by her fading young: an assortment of tiny black and white things, one nearly as black as his mother, with just a speck of white on his nose. My mother brought the kittens home and gave them to her little tortoiseshell cat, Sally. A stream of kittens trailed Sally Cat wherever she went—some biological, others Sally had adopted on her own. Sally Cat knew exactly how to take care of the black cat's babies. She took them out to the field to eat cucumbers off the vine.

Past the cucumber fields, northeast of the barn, and up the hill, my mother would trek with her younger siblings, innertubes slung over shoulders pink with sun. An irrigation ditch ran down from high on the hill, feeding the land's thirst and the children's thirst for summer adventure. My mother would slip through the water in her innertube, the smells of the land intensified in the molasses of the thirty-five-degree summer air. The heady scents of rubber and freshly cut alfalfa swam into her nose as the sun poured through the canopy of willow trees above her and onto her skin. Water scooters zipped alongside her. She couldn't have known then that the neighbouring farms would go on to fail. Someone would shut the irrigation down. The willow trees would die.

She couldn't see it from the hill with the ditch, but not far from there, near Kalamalka Lake, lay the Webster farm. This farm, belonging to my mother's paternal grandparents, Pearl and John Webster, had no large barn at its centre. Instead, it had trees—trees upon trees, fields upon fields. Next door, my mother's great aunt and uncle planted asparagus crops at the base of one hill. Years after they had plowed under those crops, my mother climbed the hill with an aunt, and a selection of siblings and picnic baskets. As my mother's aunt started the campfire, the children wandered in the wildflower- and cacti-flecked grasses. My mother found thick asparagus growing wild—the crops had decided to migrate upwards. The family cooked the stalks there on the hill.

You could see the whole orchard from that hill. John Lindsey, a horticulturalist, was as passionate and persistent as his crops. But he

died in 1984, and the orchard followed him. Eventually, people came to rip out the trees—most of them. When my mother was in Vernon for work three years ago, she visited the remains of the farm. Huge Red Delicious apples hung heavy on twenty abandoned trees. In a small valley to the east, a wild copse of plums grew. Nearby, remnants of rhubarb still broke through the earth. Rhubarb had once possessed a special place in my great-grandfather's heart. He had more than a dozen varieties in his fields—plants other horticulturalists had mailed to him from South America, from Germany. From above, you would only see the green and greener leaves, but the stalks below were vivid red.

Twenty years ago, after my mother visited Vernon to see her family and the land, she returned home to Victoria with a small rhubarb plant. She gave it a home in the smooth soil of the backyard of her first house with my father and older sister. She tended to it, and it grew. Rhubarb teased my family members' tongues for years—my mother baked it into pie, crisp, crumble, cobbler, and muffins. When my mother, father, and sister moved, they took the rhubarb plant with them. But then I was born, and the rhubarb faded into the greenery of the garden weeds. I lived my entire childhood in that second house. I never moved once.

Until now. Now, I live in Vancouver. I will attend the University of British Columbia in the fall. I visit what I still consider to be home, in Victoria, but I do not visit the rhubarb plant. I know it is still there—it lives behind the compost bucket, pale and dying.

I don't like to think about the rhubarb. When permanence escapes me, I find comfort in my mother's arms. When my orange cat dies and the earth beneath my feet dries up and fractures, my mother says that this time, it was his time.

February 24th, 2009: a young girl asks to see the farms of her mother's childhood, but only one, in paltry part, exists today. The girl must see what they once were through the stories her mother tells her.

Not *All* Cancer Is Pink

JUDITH A. FURTADO

TIREDNESS, BRUISING, and tiny red dots under the skin; these were the symptoms that my mother and I plugged into the go-to doctor of today's society, WebMD. We diligently researched the top three results: thrombosis, over-exertion, and, the least likely, leukemia. It was impossible that my dad could have something so serious; he was probably just tired from his squash game.

Leukemia. That one little word changed my life forever. Looking at my dad with a full head of black curly hair and a smile on his face, it was hard to picture the disease running rampant throughout his body. My hero, who taught me how to play squash, lifted me up to put the angel atop the Christmas tree, gave me donkey rides with never-ending enthusiasm. It was impossible that he would be sick.

The doctors determined that they were unable to treat my dad's condition in Bermuda, and he was immediately airlifted to Brigham and Women's hospital in Boston, Massachusetts. One of the first of many e-mails from my mom came in at 4.00 a.m.:

> We haven't been able to get any sleep since Norm has already seen three doctors, been swabbed, dripped, poked, prodded, and questioned, all very graciously, and the chief doctor will be coming just after six, so it doesn't really make sense to try and sleep now.

After my dad was diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia (ALL), our relationship changed. It became caregiver-patient rather than father-daughter. My dad also became very vocal, documenting all of his symptoms, a by-product of being asked every day for two and a half years how he was feeling, a drastic change from a man who told only my mom that he was having hernia surgery. My mom took leave from her job in Bermuda to move up to Boston, and I took a semester off school to fly back and forth. My first visit to Boston was after my dad had started his initial round of chemotherapy, so his hair was starting to fall out. My mom thought it would help if my brother and I watched as the nurse shaved my dad's hair. It's funny how something as simple as a haircut can suddenly make you realize life has really changed. I watched my dad's hair fall to the ground, and it felt as though my familiar image of my dad was falling with it—what was left was a short-buzzed head that I didn't recognize.

It is nearly impossible to describe the anguish of watching a loved one undergo cancer treatment, but there are moments that almost make up for the agony. Because I was unable to always be in Boston, our communication skills had to improve—our standard conversations about my squash game were no longer sufficient. We got very close, to the point where my mom called us "the Tweedles."

Everything changed again when he relapsed. My heart dropped when I read my mom's e-mail that day:

> Leukemia is back in the spine and bone marrow. Procedure is to clear the CSF disease with weekly spinal chemo, treat the systemic disease with an antibody therapy, then *if* remission is achieved then an allogeneic stem cell transplant would be considered.

The hunt for a stem-cell donor began with my dad's siblings, the most likely matches. Both of his sisters initially refused to be tested to see if they were donor matches, and his brother unfortunately was not a match. One sister eventually agreed to be tested, and it turned out she was a perfect match. She agreed to donate stem cells, a procedure which involved a nine-hour blood transfusion. One week before the scheduled stem cell transfusion, my dad's sister changed her mind. She refused to explain, she ignored our pleas, and her children stepped in and stopped all further contact. It was heartbreaking. This meant that my dad would have to go back on another round of antibody therapy—

a pump attached to his body twenty-four hours a day—that eventually caused paralysis in his left arm. I have never felt so much anger. I was extremely protective of my dad, since my mom had not been allowed in the house when his sister told him. He had been alone when she had taken away his hope.

How could a sister abandon her brother like that? Somehow it was worse than refusing to get tested at all. She had wasted my dad's time, time that could have been spent looking for another donor match. There was no time to waste; the search for stem-cell donors began. So many people contacted us to see if they were matches. A couple people even contacted me about the possibility of paying my dad's sister for her stem cells. This was clearly unethical, but the fact that they offered twenty thousand dollars for her to do it was incredible. Thankfully, the doctors were able to find an unrelated donor in Europe, who, according to the nurses, gave my dad an "extremely large amount of bone marrow." We were not given his information, but after two years we are allowed to write a letter, and the donor can decide to contact us if he wants.

I hope he does contact us. I would love to be able to share what his donation gave us: an extra six months with my dad. We got six months of laughter, love, and moments that I will never forget. My boyfriend was able to ask my dad's permission to marry me, and even though my dad will not be able to walk me down the aisle, knowing that he accepted my boyfriend into our family means the world. We spent my dad's final days in England. It was a time filled with love and joy. My dad held his granddaughter, hugged his son and daughter, shared his last words of wisdom and a little humour, and was able to say goodbye to all of us.

After two years in the cancer world, one thing I would like to see change is an increase in the profile of leukemia. There are pink ribbons for breast cancer almost everywhere you look, but there are so many more cancers that need more recognition, such as the orange ribbon that is associated with leukemia. It is important to remember that not *all* cancer is pink.

Six months after his death, I am reminded of what an incredible man he was. It is very rare to find someone who inspires and makes such a difference in the lives of everyone he met. I could not have asked for a more loving, kind, and wonderful father, and I am so proud to have been his daughter.

My Woodstock

MICHELE GARDNER

THE DECISION had been made for me long before I realized it. Goldenvoice (the company responsible for such events as the Coachella Valley Music Festival) announced that the first ever Desert Trip Music Festival would take place in Indio, California in 2016. They would be hosting six of the most monumental musical performers that got their start in the 1960s, and I'd been listening to almost all of the headliners since I could remember. To me, The Beatles meant putting on my mom's vinyl records and making up silly dances. Pink Floyd meant watching with youthful envy as my big sister smoked some weed and headed over to the Bloor Street Cinema to see *Dark Side of Oz*. Bob Dylan, The Stones, Neil Young, and The Who were as much a part of my life as any other classic rock lover born after its heyday can claim, and I had grown up feeling more nostalgic towards the era of my parents' childhood than my own. I figured I must have been born in the wrong time. An ugly, uninspiring time, compared to that psychedelic age of massive civil-rights movements, funky fashion, and good old rock 'n' roll.

One order of time travel with a side of nostalgia? That'll be two thousand dollars, please.

I will never forget the sight that greeted me when I unzipped the tent that first morning after our exhausted midnight arrival to the festival grounds. Pink mountains enclosed a tent city bordered by palm trees. A short walk over to the RV camping area showcased just how cozy and cool a patch of grass can become as cheerful campers arranged their mid-century modern lounge chairs over their afghan rugs

(we even saw a VW van dressed as a yellow submarine). We spent the day mingling, drinking coconut milk straight out of the coconut, checking out the craft tents, and playing human-sized foosball games.

The mood was palpable as we (and thousands of other euphoric music fans) made our way through the marked paths into the concert venue. A wide-open expanse of people facing a massive stage holding three display screens. We sat down to watch Bob Dylan officially kick off the weekend. He had just won the Nobel Prize for Literature, but it was the same old Dylan performance. We laughed particularly hard when Mick Jagger opened The Rolling Stones' set by saying, "We aren't going to make any age jokes, but welcome to the Palm Springs Retirement Home for Genteel English Musicians!" Despite the persistent "Oldchella" jokes, the audience was a delightful generational melting pot, all come together for one epic party.

Fun experiment idea: if you ever want to know how it feels to be microwaved, try waking up in a tent in the middle of a desert, hungover.

Heading back to the venue the next day for Neil Young, we spotted four white tepees positioned along the stage with the words "Water is Life" on the front in large black letters to protest the Dakota Access Pipeline. Neil arrived onstage to thunderous applause and joked, "What an historical event! We've got Paul McCartney up next, and tomorrow night Roger Waters is going to build a wall and make Mexico great again." He shredded his way through a two-hour set. My tears flowed freely when Paul McCartney arrived onstage to dedicate "Baby I'm Amazed" to his first wife Linda, and "Here Today" to John Lennon. He regaled us with the tale of the time Jimi Hendrix put his guitar out of tune trying to solo on "Come Together," compelling Eric Clapton to come tune it for him. Neil rejoined the stage to help perform "Give Peace a Chance." My friends and I stood on our chairs, passing a joint, and looked around at tens of thousands of people singing along to "Hey Jude." We thought of our childhoods listening to this music, parents and family who introduced us to it, and of our futures where we knew it would hold an even more special place after this night.

The final day came, bittersweet. We danced and sang all through The Who's performance, relishing that last precious evening. The sun's warmth radiated back out from the earth after another blazing day, but a gentle balmy breeze tickled our skin. I glanced behind me through the hazy crowd at the psychedelic light-up ferris wheel. The border of palm trees lit from beneath was a now familiar sight that I just couldn't

properly capture with my camera phone. After a quick bathroom and snack break, we noticed a faint rumbling sound that seemed to be getting louder. The house lights turned the crowd into a sea of red faces. Suddenly four huge pillars topped with fire arose from behind the screens, transforming the stage into Battersea Power Station. I scanned the crowd and my jaw dropped. A gigantic floating pig was making its way towards me with Donald Trump's face and the words "united we stand, divided we fall" Photoshopped onto its torso. Suddenly the opening notes to "Pigs (Three Different Ones)" were blaring to a synchronized visual display showing Trump in various positions. Wearing red lipstick and a bra, face digitally imposed onto a pig's body, wearing a dunce cap. It would be less than a month until the craziest presidential election in living memory, and Roger Waters had something to say. He brought Mexican high-school student onstage to sing the chorus of "Another Brick in the Wall." I barely blinked out of fear of missing a single moment of his set. There was a spectacular fireworks display and then, all too soon, Waters was performing "Comfortably Numb" for his encore. By the end of the song there was a fully formed laser prism onstage, and beams of multicoloured light were shooting out into the air twenty feet above our heads. We stumbled back to the campgrounds slack-jawed and awe-struck. I sprawled on my back on the ground because the only thing beautiful enough to compare to the spectacle we had just witnessed was that starry California night sky.

There is work to be done and there are songs to be sung.

Even though I was sad to be flying home the following day, returning to life as scheduled, for the first time I felt like I was returning to the life I was supposed to have. I hadn't just escaped for a weekend to some romanticized time capsule of 1965, I had witnessed history of my very own. These musicians are not in the past. They are touring and releasing new albums. Ringo Starr's son played the drums for The Who, and two of Willie Nelson's sons belong to Neil Young's backing band. The lyrical protest in the songs written by these people were in response to environmental and human-rights struggles that are very much still alive. I could now listen to it without that heavy burden of nostalgia, but with fresh and eager ears. I can hear it knowing that it does belong to my time, and should not be tucked away in some dark corner of the past to be dusted off and pined over. There is no expiration date on freedom of expression, and my musical heroes of the 1960s have not gone gently into that good night.

They still want us to give peace a chance.

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To Be Misrepresented Is to Be Bipolar

ELIZABETH GAUTHIER

TO HAVE a mental illness is to have a secret. An inescapable secret that, at times, can bring you to both the edge of reason and your life. Recently, mental health has become more socially discussed and prevalent in the media, but there remains a gap between acceptance and true understanding. Acceptance does not necessarily mean that those individuals who endorse the enterprise of "Bell Let's Talk" will view an individual struggling with mental illness as their equal or even completely understand their plight. Among these misunderstood mental illnesses, depression, anxiety, and attention deficit disorder, there is one that is grossly misrepresented by popular culture and used in everyday language.

A common phrase I heard as a teenager was, "you are acting so bipolar." The word was not misused, per se, for to be bipolar is to "have extreme mood swings" that "affect how people think, behave, and function" (CAMH). It is apparent, though, the term *bipolar* was being grossly misunderstood. *Bipolar* was given a negative connotation as an individual whose moods are an inconvenience, annoyance, or hindrance to another person. Is being bipolar a nuisance to outsiders? By stereotyping people whose moods shift as "being bipolar," do these empathetic individuals who say "let's talk about mental illness" not completely undermine their goal? The power of words has become more evident than ever, and now more and more those with mental health should use these words to educate those without, so let's start here.

I have bipolar disorder. To be more specific, I have Bipolar-I disorder. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) classifies Bipolar-I as people who "experience manic (or mixed), depressed and well phases during their illness." To simplify that, individuals who suffer from Bipolar-I disorder go through cycles. They go up and down like a roller-coaster, and damn, it is quite the ride! There are other types of bipolar disorder, such as Bipolar-II or rapid-cycling. These are variances of Bipolar-I and are well explained by CAMH (for further research, see "The Clinical Features of Bipolar Disorder").

No matter how someone thinks of the disorder, bipolar cannot be thought of as uncomplicated mood shifts, for it is far messier than that. I remember periods of mania where suicidal thoughts accompanied, and I recall believing that flying from a great height in an extraordinary fashion could not entirely be ruled out as a fantastical way to end my life. These thoughts were frightening, and at times they have drawn me to extreme drug abuse for release from the critical nature of my moods, but it remains that sometimes when on medication, I miss the feelings the shifts caused. They frightened me, but also drove me, for they made me feel alive.

Finding a proper diagnosis may be the most painful, unsettling experience a person with a mental illness can go through. It is not as easy as confessing your problems, and poof! they are gone. It is mentally and physically gruelling. Healthcare professionals are helpful; yet, it felt as if they threatened the very things that created me. To be constantly bombarded with the idea that perhaps what is considered you isn't, in fact, you at all, is unsettling. The doctors, therapists, and physiatrists I visited dissected every aspect of my life and childhood until, finally, I was a folder of facts. I became a patient, and this patient was bipolar. I came to the same conclusion Laura Bain did in 2011, for she declared like I did one day in 2012, "I wonder, after this, are you going to call me Laura? Or are you going to call me bipolar?" The answer is straightforward and questionable, for as I enter my psychiatrist's office being called by name, it takes a look at my chart and a recap of my symptoms to declare who I am. For, although the doctor knows me, he is only able to recognise me by my diagnosis, symptoms, and medications. Now being bipolar, they must fix you, for you cannot live as you are, it is unpredictable and dangerous; you must fix it. Medications and cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) are two ways to control mental illness's harmful effects. CBT "is a practical,

short-term form of psychotherapy" (CAMH), which creates a balanced relationship between medication and people. But all through this I could not help but think, is this what it takes to be normal? Is this what is needed to be like my friends, like my family, like my co-workers? Is this what is needed to just be?

I have found all these questions have no answer. Social media would have you believe that it is easy, that confessing your illness would bring about some magic solution, that taking your medications and admitting your secret solves all. As I write this statement, I feel the need to roll my eyes. Social movements such as "Bell Let's Talk" are only one step in the long process of existing as someone with mental illness. Mental illness cannot be solved by declaring your support, for what little does that do. Those struggling with disorders or mental illness must live a determined existence to remain. They must will themselves to live, will themselves to want to live, and maintain that will through the good and the bad. It is actually unclear to me if receiving help can make someone "normal"; nevertheless, this does not stop social movements from shoving their judgement and ideas down our throats. Remaining is the stigma of medications (Lancione) and the ever-present theories from those who have never lived with mental illness.

To have a mental illness is to have a secret. An inescapable mystery that has not been made better by public stigma and judgement. Bipolar has become much more than a mental illness or a disorder to me; it is, as much as I hate to say it, part of who I am. And as a person with mental illness, I must say, "Bell Let's Talk" has brought ending stigma to the media, but it does not stop stigma. People's personal understanding and knowledge of mental health must expand. Change must enter the home, not just become your status for a day. You can start by watching your words and recognizing the need for personal involvement. Maybe Bell should adopt a new slogan, something like "Bell Let's Accept—more than just once a year."

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A Girl's Best Friend

SARAH GRIGNET

LIVING WITH anxiety and depression can be like trying to find your way through a dense fog. I could see the shapes and outlines of my life, but I couldn't see anything clearly. I slept for twelve hours a day, and when I could finally get out of bed, I barely knew what was going on. Going to work became nearly impossible to manage because of the chronic fatigue and anxiety attacks. One day I showed up for work and got about halfway through my shift before the nausea, dizziness, and heart palpitations set in. I couldn't take it anymore. I felt like I was going crazy. I said I was sick and I went home. That was my last day of work.

After that day, I completely shut down. I was in bed almost all day except to pee every few hours. I would sometimes go to the kitchen for water. I had no interest in feeding myself or socializing. My boyfriend, Bruce, would come home and stare at me with sad eyes and sympathy. I knew I needed help, but I couldn't fight my way out of my own sick brain. One day, Bruce texted me, saying there was a puppy that we should go and meet. This news was a bit of light beyond the fog; I had been wanting a dog for a while. I stared out the window as we drove, going over every reason I shouldn't get a dog. When we finally came to a stop, I saw him, all the negative thoughts vanished, and I fell immediately in love. I rode home with a tiny, fluffy, two-pound toy poodle on my lap, and I named him Wesley.

After the euphoria of holding Wesley started to ebb, the reality of raising a puppy settled in. I had to get up every two hours so he could pee, give him lots of attention, and of course with a puppy comes lots

and lots of energy. I loved Wesley so immediately and so much, I found the energy to take care of him. It also meant that I was going outside every day, even if it was only for five minutes at a time. It was a huge change from not going outside for days at a time. We would step outside the door, a little hesitant at first, but once we looked at each other we could step onto the grass and start our walk. The fog seemed a little clearer and less terrifying when I had Wesley with me.

After a few weeks, training was going well, and we both started to feel a lot more comfortable venturing outside. I looked forward to our walks, the sunshine, and the fresh air. We developed a routine, and we relied on each other to face the world. I had been out of work for a while, feeling useless, with no money of my own. I started thinking more and more about what I wanted to do with my life. Retail? No. Sit around and do nothing? No. The haze I used to see when I looked around had started to fade, and I just wanted to be a part of the world again. My focus was sharpening, and Wesley and I had big things ahead for us. Now that I was regaining my self-confidence, I started to realize how much I had been missing.

The summer was baring down on us, and I needed to make some decisions. Wesley had one more vet visit for the year, a surgery, and I had to get myself to the doctor. I made an appointment, and I gathered all the courage I had to walk in my doctor's office and tell her everything that I had been going through: the depression, the anxiety attacks, quitting my job, not leaving the house. I asked for help, and I knew I owed so much of that courage to a rambunctious toy poodle. Even though I had made so much progress, I had two more hurdles to jump. I knew I wanted to finally go to university, and I had to get Wesley through a complicated surgery. Unfortunately, Wesley was born with an undescended testicle, and that surgery is very hard and painful. Wesley became everything to me, and I was terrified of losing him.

Springtime became a new beginning for us. I applied to Queen's University, and I was actually looking forward to the future. A few weeks passed and there, sitting in my inbox, was an e-mail telling me I had been accepted to Queen's. I was excited and terrified, and I wanted to say no. What was I doing? What made me think I could handle any of this? I had Wesley's surgery to worry about, my own mental health, and I did not feel I should attempt something so foolish. Self-doubt is a bitch. I thought about it, I cried about it, and I talked it over with everyone I know. I had everything I had been wanting right at my

fingertips, and I almost didn't grab it. The more I thought about it, the more I realized I had done so much that I thought I could never do. I raised an amazing puppy who has given me more than I ever thought possible. I could barely take care of myself when he came in to my life, and then he looked up at me with his big brown eyes, and I found so much strength.

I nursed Wesley through his recovery. He came out of it stronger and happier, and so did I. I managed to surprise myself in so many ways. Wesley is turning two years old soon, and we are still learning to navigate the world together. I've made more connections to the world through Wesley than I ever thought possible. There is no quick fix when dealing with mental-health issues. I think my connection with Wesley saved my life. I had stopped living before I found him. Existing is not living, and I was barely existing. I have enrolled in school, gotten back out into the work force, and re-established many relationships. It's important to find your connection to the world when you feel it slipping. I found a wonderful dog. Yours might be something different, but it's out there. Getting through that fog is a long and continuous journey, but Wesley and I will continue it together. Wesley may not be a traditional therapy dog, but he is definitely my therapy dog.

Perception's Perception

SHANNON GRIST

I MEET him in a hospital hallway when I am two years old. I am wearing a hospital gown, Snoopy slippers, and nervousness on my face because of my pending tonsillectomy. He is my first memory. I do not see him again until I am eight years old. However, looking back, I think he is always with me. He is with me when I stand beside my mother in front of our family car. My inebriated father is inside, my mother is crying for him to get out of the car, and I am using my little body to implore my father to turn the ignition off. We lose the battle that night. My father drives away, but not before narrowly missing me. When I ask my family about my memories, their versions are entirely different than my own. Apparently, they too have met him throughout their lives, but he is someone completely different to each of them. He is Perception, and he skews our memories.

To fully understand my relationship with my father, it is important to go back to where it all began: the death of my grandfather. My grandfather died in 1978, one week before Christmas and four months before my birth. I have heard the stories of how my father spent Christmas at his father's gravesite, mourning the loss of a man he idolized while his mother and sisters carried on with the Christmas holiday. Perception whispers in my father's ear, "nobody cares enough to hate this holiday as much as you do," and so from this moment, my father hates Christmas. And I don't mean that he hates Christmas like the Grinch hates Christmas when he claims, "Hate, hate, hate. Hate, hate, hate. Double Hate. Loathe entirely!" (Khurana). I mean, "ruin-Christmas-for-everyone-around-him" hates Christmas. I have asked my

mother why my father drinks, and she tells me it's because his father died. My older brother never answers my question. I think it's because the death of his father broke him, and the alcohol lubricates the pieces of his life like the adhesive element of glue to bind his broken pieces together. I once heard a parable about a butterfly struggling to free itself from its chrysalis. If a butterfly is cut from the chrysalis without the inner friction of working its way out, the fluid surrounding the butterfly engorges its body, and it is unable to fly. The butterfly requires the struggle out of the chrysalis to reach its potential: flight. My father drowns himself in the alcohol that keeps his tattered and broken wings cocooned within so he can avoid the struggle required of him: the undertaking of selflessly being a good husband and father.

Perception is with me in the mornings after an evening of restless sleep from listening to my father's drunken banging and fluttering into furniture. I see my father sleeping on the couch, again, and ask my mother if I can watch cartoons. "Of course not," she says, "you know you're not allowed to watch cartoons when your dad is sleeping." Perception whispers seductively in my ear, "I think it's odd that he doesn't sleep in his own bed. Maybe your parents are getting divorced." I hold my breath for a second and ask, "are you and daddy getting divorced? Daddy never sleeps in your bed." My mother laughs at this assumption and reminds me that it's normal for married people to sleep separately.

I am seven years old when Perception burrows himself into my mind on the event that forever changed my life. It is a sunny day with a sky full of billowy clouds, and I am running into my childhood home. The back door is wide open, which is odd, but my young brain does not grasp this unusual situation. I come rushing into the living room with a big smile on my face: it is Girl Guides night, and I can't wait to go. I hear her before I see her. My mother's uncontrollable sobs echo off the walls. She is standing in the bathroom, her hands are gripping the sides of the sink, her hair is in disarray, and her face is blotchy from crying. She tells me through laboured breaths that my father has been in a horrific accident. (I am paraphrasing because, at seven, who knows what words she actually used.) My father was drunk and smashed our family car into a telephone pole. He survives this accident. Years later, the only significant importance of this event to my father—the idea that he took away from it—was that he hates hospitals. His perception of this memory for his family is how inconvenient it was to him. My memory is different; I see my mother morph into a shattered, abused

woman married to an alcoholic husband who cares nothing for his family, yet she is too committed to her marriage to leave. I am forever changed at this moment because I now see my world in a new image; the world where abusive, alcoholic men can affect the people around them with no consequences for their actions, and women who believe in the sanctity of marriage over protecting their children.

Perception fills my memories with the sound of ice clinking in a glass just before the pouring of alcohol, and loathing and loving my parents at the same time for the choices they made. Hating my father for not being stronger for his family, despising my mother for not protecting her children against abuse, and resenting my older brother for going into hiding during my father's fits of alcoholic rage, which left me to fend for myself.

The butterfly's transformation comforts me because I have a better understanding of why my mind has chosen to accept Perception in the form that he has selected to present himself to me. An alcoholic father, an overworked mother, and a distant brother fill my childhood memories. At eighteen, when I confront my father with "quit or never see me again," I feel the tiny hole of my cocoon begin to expand. My fluid of memories of childhood abuse begins to disperse itself from the shell that was once me, and I feel the sweet release of all my anger as I break free from the cocoon that has constricted me. Perception watches me with pride as I accept my last conflict with my father, and fly free from the memories that bind me.

Regardless of our memories and our unique perceptions, many times we must go through conflict to become something else. My perception of my memories may be different than my family's perception, but without the differences, I would not be able to see life as I see it now, like a cup that is neither half empty or half full, but overflowing.

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Immigrant Lives

CLAIRE HE

IN 2004, our immigration application to Canada was approved. One year later, my parents and I packed up six large suitcases and entered a new country, leaving our stable life behind in the city of Shanghai, and not knowing what would lie ahead. Our plane landed in Vancouver, British Columbia on August 31st, 2005. That year alone, 42,568 other Chinese nationals were admitted into Canada with permanent resident visas (Statistics). I started grade five, and my mother started her studies in the Master of Publishing program at Simon Fraser University. With a deep yearning to still see us from time to time, my father became a frequent flyer, who navigated between the two countries as he kept his businesses in China.

Being hampered by her parents in our hometown, my mother never worked with any cooking utensils until she was left with only me in our Canadian home. With melancholy tears in her eyes, my mother knew she had to take control. She slowly learned to take care of me, cooking warm meals for me after school and handling household duties while pursuing her studies. Her sparerib and tomato soup was a favourite during the winter season, and even though she was periodically absent at home, I thought of her dearly as I munched on the delicious soup she had prepared in the morning. Then, my grandmother proudly transferred the torch of responsibility to her. As days grew shorter and time became more cramped, my mother's persistence showed. Her anecdote of how she fell asleep on the bus ride home from school and ended up in the terminal station made me laugh. It wasn't until years later that I realized the sacrifices she made in bringing our family to

this country. My mother was a strong woman and remained positive despite setbacks: she laboured late into the night, laughed with me, and did not let her fears dampen her hopes. Through her actions, my mother showed me that if a person is determined, any obstacle can be eradicated. I was dependent on her, and the family needed her. With her broken English, she never hesitated to reach out. Although sometimes words may not be understood properly and a cynical smile surfaced from the listeners, she kept her head high.

Towards the end of elementary school, my mother's desire for me to receive a high-quality secondary education culminated into me getting accepted by a prestigious private school, ranked number one in the Greater Vancouver area. The decision to attend wasn't unanimous in the family. My father worried if I'd fit in, but my mother was firm. In a sturdy voice, she insisted upon the decision. The girl in the tennis skirt on the playground suddenly became the hard-working girl in uniform. Having already moved twice within the last two years for my education, I wholeheartedly felt the guilt and burden that accompanied all those moves. School fees were high, money became tight. I attempted to find consolation in the darkness as I drifted off to sleep every night.

As usual, my mother prepared me breakfast every morning, including weekends. We set up a routine of telling her what I wanted to eat the next day before I went to bed. A bowl of congee or noodle soup was always ready on the table the next morning. I always had a full tummy for school. I only hope that in the future, I will be as much of a nurturing mother as she was. The bond between us was deep; I understood my mother's sacrifice, and she sensed my mood swings. As adolescence came, our norms and values became distinct and different. Those years were marked by continual conflicts with her. My father became more absent in the household. Whenever I noticed the empty chair in the living room that he always sat on, my heart wrenched, and a part of me yearned for his return. At school, I involved myself in club activities, sport teams, and bonding with classmates. A new world lit up before me and pushed me to merge into a new identity. I was exposed to eating pancakes as breakfast, hockey as the favourite sport, and living freely as the life motto. This was different from our way of life at home, and this scared my mother. She always said to me, "You are not going to do that!" as the last resort to pull me back from my new self. I always responded, "Why can't I? It is none of your business." Parental

conflicts, cultural differences, and increased academic pressure drained my mother's energy and my happiness.

Since our arrival in Canada, my mother never succeeded in getting another job in the publishing sector. She had worked at a bookstore, at university as a teaching assistant, and at a tutoring centre as an administrative assistant. Her limited English was not enticing in the job market. She sent out many résumés, but there were few responses. Being a Fudan University graduate, young and ambitious, she used to embody the definition of success. Her Chinese co-workers perceived her as the rising star among the industry's top leaders. In many ways, she did not achieve the career success in Canada that she had envisioned. To me, my mother's success lies in her unwavering commitment to be a responsible mother and faithful wife. Her persistence is admirable. During the second half of high school, I developed anxiety issues with the imminent coming of university applications. My mother declined adamantly a tutoring-centre senior-management offer to help me regain my life balance. Battling mental challenges is difficult, but I always had my mother beside me. On Mother's Day near the end of high school in 2013, I took her out for tea and thanked her for everything she had done for me. The tea was especially fragrant and toasty that day, and so were the memories.

Bringing flower bouquets with them, my parents attended my high-school graduation ceremony. The signature picture from that day serves as a reminder of all the struggles we've been through together in this immigration experience. Although I initially resisted my mother's advice on how to live a meaningful life, I learned to accept her for who she is and for who I am. Among the loud chattering on graduation day, my mother's calm voice stood out, a voice that had carried me through during all those difficult years. That day she laughed with me, but in her eyes I saw a little bit of regret, guilt, and longing. Despite the treacherous setbacks and regrets, my mother was my role model, who taught me to be tenacious no matter the circumstances. As we fought through the turbulent waters of growing up together, she taught me to never give up, to have my voice heard, and to take responsibility for my actions.

It had been eight years since we landed on Canadian soil. We are three out of the 42,568 Chinese nationals who left their homes for a better life. We could only imagine how much our life experiences would differ for the better or for the worse if our immigrant application had not been approved. Many things had changed during this journey,

but the love between the three of us is a testimony that stands against time. Our experiences as immigrants became an irreplaceable component of our identities. We are grateful, but most importantly, we are hopeful.

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From the Clouds

MICHAEL J. RIVERS

FEW THINGS catch my father off guard. An ex-cop turned lawyer, he was the right mix of tough, funny, and smart. I figured if I was going to convince myself, I would need to convince him. Like all good parents, mine were voluntary litmus tests for bad ideas. My trepidation was obvious. With cold hands and uncertainty in my voice, I plainly explained the situation. I was going to jump out of a plane. The initial shock of my lofty goal widened his eyes, but he collected himself quickly, evidently seasoned from the time I first signalled my intent to join the army at the height of the war in Afghanistan. In his best Clint Eastwood, he asked why I would jump out of a perfectly good aircraft. It was a fair question, but the obvious rhetoric signalled his approval. I was at the beginning of my career. What better way to prove myself? I thought, maybe the airplanes aren't as reliable as he assumes, and better to have a parachute as contingency. Despite my best reasoning, his question lingered, and forced me to think back.

Canadian paratroopers first made their mark on history in World War II, volunteering for rigorous training before making consecutive jumps when fighting through hostile territories in Nazi-occupied Europe. Their valour was legendary, and it set standards for customs and traditions observed today. They armed our generation of paratroopers with prominent symbolism: the logo of a Pegasus, the maroon beret, and a motto that defines the very nature of the job—*Ex Coelis*, Latin for "From the Clouds." But to me, among all the symbols, the most elevated is also the simplest. Since the inception of paratroopers, successful candidates were offered a pair of wings to

identify their qualification. Similar to pilots, these wings signalled the paratrooper's rightful place in the sky. Upon graduation, these wings were gently placed on the uniform, and punched into the chest of the beleaguered soldier. Two pins behind the decal would pierce through the uniform and into the chest like a staple, leaving the soldier bloodied, bruised, and smiling.

Perhaps it was for Queen and Country that I marched onwards to Trenton, home to the Canadian Forces Land Advanced Warfare Centre. The humid air from Lake Ontario complemented the dusty floor of the school, a floor every paratrooper becomes intimately familiar with. The stifling situation was abundantly clear from the beginning: every mistake would be followed by a close encounter with said floor. Face down, back flat, arms extended, hands shoulder-width apart, in unison, every candidate pushed against the Earth, counting upwards until instructed otherwise. For two long weeks, positive punishment conditioned each candidate to eliminate mistake from body, mind, and vocabulary. Indeed, psychology had made its way into the program. The delivery of coded script, diligently memorized by each instructor, provided the necessary sense of security for each candidate to accomplish the mission. Every key instruction began with the two most direct and reaffirming words ever said: *You will*. "You will attach this." "You will connect that." "You will verify this." *You will* became the stimulus that triggered whatever action finished the instruction, leaving no opportunity for the disciplined soldier to rebuke. All phraseology was specifically designed to reinforce one singular idea without ever needing mention: you will jump.

And so on I went for two long weeks, up and down, and up again, eliminating mistakes at the will of my intractable instructors. The floor, whom I learned was named Earth, became my best friend and worst enemy. He made me laugh, he made me cry, and sometimes he made me bleed all over his dusty face. We first met with push-ups, and progressed onto landing swings—a ten-foot suspended drop designed to simulate the most delicate part of the operation: landing properly. Earth and I said goodbye and hello again at a mock tower, the final real test: a thirty-three-foot-high platform that I simply had to jump out of in perfect paratrooper form. Testing our form seemed a guise for a more important observation: at thirty feet, the phobia of heights triggers a fight-or-flight response. This was a test of commitment. After all, conquering fear was always the prerequisite for becoming airborne.

Cognitive dissonance finds a way to eliminate the toughest soldiers from this test of commitment, but I prevailed.

On the third week, Earth and I parted ways, inevitably destined to meet again, if only one last time. A C-130 Hercules would substitute for my Pegasus, and lift me to new heights. The funny thing about commitment is that perspectives tend to change when looking out the open door of an aircraft at the height of the Empire Sate Building. At 1250 feet in the air, most people become keenly aware of the decisions made that brought them to such a point. Here, perhaps in protest to our separation, Earth shows another face: a cold hard surface, merciless and inevitable. The engines of my sweet Pegasus sputter in objection, but the crisp air above the clouds reinvigorate my determination, and a few kind words from a jump master set muscle memory to work. I became Bellerophon in the form of a human lawn dart, a plastic C7 rifle as my spear, and snowshoes in the middle of summer, useless unless otherwise designed to break my fall. The descent is short-lived, but the view is entrancing. The world is a snow globe, and I am its handler. My dear friend Earth welcomes me happily as his warm embrace knocks the wind out of my lungs. As I collect myself, an instructor greets me and indicates what is next: another jump—Sisyphus reinvented.

A decade later, I walk down the grand hall of a new thirty-five-million-dollar school freshly titled "The Canadian Army Advanced Warfare Centre." New walls to house the memories, both good and bad, of those who served with maroon berets. New doors to invite the next generation of paratroopers, one equally as tenacious yet more inviting to women, members of the LGBTQ community, minorities, entitled millennials, anyone, and new floors to greet their sweaty and determined faces. No one cares who they are or where they come from. Just jump and get the job done. As I stand on these floors, feet firmly planted, I see a group of young soldiers hustling into parade formation. Wings are on display nearby, eagerly waiting to be fastened to a soldier's chest—using tape now instead of pins. I always feel a sensation near my heart, where my soul was once stamped. I always question their reasoning, as I once did my own. Whether it is service to higher authority, or in memory and honour of someone gone before us, or simply because we want to scare the shit out of our parents, the reason is immaterial. Very rarely, yet with a few great things in life, it is not the reason, nor the journey that truly matters. The destination is what grounds us more firmly on this Earth. These types of high aspirations, only once fully achieved, place us in the company of

something that is very much greater than ourselves in the singular. I became a better version of myself when I stood in parade and greeted with a smile, a jab, and a pair of wings. For this young group, in becoming airborne, and with all things in life, I hope they find their cloud and bravely ride towards it on a winged horse.

Toughie

SUE A. LEFEBVRE

MY BROTHER and I pile into my dad's car, and we are so excited. We are going on a big trip. It is 1969, and my parents decide to try their luck in the United States of America. Québec is in a recession, and people are being laid off. My dad wants to provide for his family, and he feels this move to the land of plenty will provide financial stability. They choose New England for the opportunity to live the American Dream. However, my parents do not foresee the detrimental effects this move will make on my self-confidence and my fight to belong. At first, I think it is a fun trip. It is not long before I am exposed to discrimination—for being French.

I am the eldest child of two when we move. They rent an inner-city, two-bedroom apartment. My father quickly finds work. My mother does all she can to keep the place on Pine Street comfortable, but the smell of oil is nauseating. The apartment is also adjacent to a cemetery, and this spooks my mother. My father teases, "there's nothing to worry about, honey, they're all dead." But that doesn't appease her. At times, when I get up at night to go to the washroom, I see my mother sitting by the window, staring out, smoking, lost in thought, as the moon reveals the tears cascading down her cheeks. She is unhappy, and I think it is something I did wrong. She tucks me back into bed. I look at her face, and I understand her loneliness, though I don't know why yet.

The first day of school is devastating for me. I can still see myself, surrounded by my staring classmates, while the teacher wants me to do something on the board. I hear giggling. My face burns with shyness,

and I desperately try to suppress oncoming tears. To me, the teacher sounds like the adults in *Peanuts*. I do not understand anyone, and no one understands me. Every night for homework I am given flashcards. My mother holds a card in front of me, and I struggle to remember the word. When we've gone through the deck more than once, my brother says the word before I have a chance to, and I burst into tears. The frustration is overwhelming, and I feel a panic for me to learn. I am young, but I feel lonely, stupid, and excluded. At school, I am quiet and timid, though I innately realize that if I am going to fit in, I need to know this stuff. I am determined to assimilate.

"Frenchy," "French Fry," "French Toast," "French Frog." By the middle of the school year, I have heard them all. But it is at my first fight in school where I earn the nickname that will stick: "Toughie." It is the fight that establishes me in the schoolyard as someone who is going to push back, and gain respect in the process.

So, there is this one boy. He is relentless in the schoolyard at recess. He is one grade ahead of me. He corners me in the far end of the school grounds. He trips me as I try to pass by. He pulls my hair. He spits in my face. "Stupid Frenchy. Go back to where you come from!" One night at home, with a black eye and in tears, my father forces me to tell him what happened. To my mother's dismay, he teaches me how to fight. "The left hand in a fist, up to your chin, to protect your face. The right hand is to hit." But he is clear: "Do not go looking for fights."

Days later, I see the kid. My legs weaken. My heartbeat quickens. Same smirk on his face. He pushes me. I fall against the gate. I give him a chance, and I try to walk past him. He trips me again. I get up. In slow motion, I see my right hand reach back as far as I can behind me. I don't bring my left fist to my face for protection, because somehow, I know I won't need it. And I do not hold anything back. I punch him soundly in the mouth. The fist-to-mouth contact can be heard into the principal's office, I am sure. The crowd chants, "Fight! Fight! Fight! Fight!" The kid is sitting on the ground, his mouth bloody, a tooth loose. My teacher shows up, and parts the sea of children. The kid is crying and, surprisingly, I don't feel any better. I know I'm in trouble, but I think my teacher understands. What kids cannot verbalize they will physicalize. She knows I have been kicked, spit on, and laughed at since the first day. "Get inside, Toughie." As I make my way towards the building, I notice the kids looking at me differently now. They are in awe.

I am ten years old when my sister is born. The following year my father decides it is time to go back home to Québec. “Why?” I ask my father, “I am home.”

On moving day, the car is bursting with children, adults, boxes, and bags of things that couldn’t fit into a box. Behind our car is a U-Haul driven by my uncle. On the road, mom and dad are not talking. Johnny Cash is playing on the eight-track, as usual. Both are smoking, and I am relieved the windows are slightly ajar. I feel sick to my stomach, but I don’t know if it is the cigarette smoke or the sadness. I am still too young to disentangle my emotions.

My first day of school in Québec is in February. It doesn’t take long for people to notice the new kid in class with an American accent. I am quickly ostracized once again. *Here we go.*

I was a long time angry with my parents for uprooting me from my home in the States. Feeling out of place was an all too familiar emotion for me. Kids are naturally hard on each other, but when one is forced to stand out, like moving to a new environment, the taunting can be relentless.

By my senior year, I won a college scholarship, had close friends, and participated in my community. Oh, I have had other self-confidence issues to fight in my life. If there is one thing I can always count on to help me succeed, it is that I am a Toughie.

The House I Was Made

AMBER LEONARD-FREE

AS I stepped onto that foreign asphalt, I gazed up and saw the new building. The building was so big; it was as big as a castle. My mother told me that this was going to be our new house. I did not know what was wrong with our old house or why we left it to come to here. All I knew was that I wasn't very excited about the move. Although this house was bigger than our old home, the backyard was much smaller, and we lived beside a busy street. I couldn't run free like I used to. I felt restricted. This was not my only concern, either. I was scared about making new friends, to meet our neighbours, and if I would like it here. But, as my six-year-old self, I stood strong, and followed my mom through the front door.

"House" is defined as a building in which people live; a residence for human beings.

As the days passed, we settled into our new house. Since my seventh birthday was near, mom had bought me a bike. She taught me how to ride the bike on the driveway. She told me that it would be easier to learn on the pavement, compared to our old house, where the driveway was gravel. I really did not like the new driveway. I fell so many times, and my knees were scraped up. This did not seem easier. But finally, with my mom's motivation, I did it. I rode that bike! As of that day, the driveway was my new favourite spot of the house. Throughout the weeks, I spent all day and night riding circles around the driveway. I was beginning to adjust to the house just like I was beginning to adjust to my bike. As I kept pedalling, I learned how to keep my balance and could anticipate how the bike would move with

my body. That moment, I knew that I would grow comfortable with riding my bike, but more particularly, I would grow more comfortable with the house, as long as I just kept pedalling.

Over the years, we spent much of our time in the kitchen. As I grew up, I did not realize the significance the kitchen would hold. The kitchen was our sanctuary. Here, we cooked, laughed, and grew together. My mom taught me how to make many different meals. My favourite meal she taught me was the turkey dinner. Every year since I was nine years old, she designated making the gravy to me. I would stir it and then let it simmer, stir it and repeat. As I stir the gravy now as my adolescent self, I not only stir the liquid, but I stir up all kinds of emotion, thinking of my memories. I think of all the times we would bake. I think of all the times we would welcome guests. I think of all the times we loved and laughed. And the memories just simmer. They are always there, warm enough to make me feel happy, but never too overwhelming to make me cry.

"Home" is defined as a social unit that is made up by a family living together.

The living room in the house was a sanctuary for all my family members, where we could find refuge, celebrate, and create memories. Here, we celebrated many birthdays, holidays, and hosted gatherings. Here, I had my first birthday party, had my first sleepover, and had my first kiss. It's the room where I studied and persevered, and where we celebrated my high-school graduation and university acceptance. I remember this room so specifically. The couch faced the television, and the loveseat sat next to it at a ninety-degree angle. The sliding glass deck doors is where the sun shone through onto the couch every morning. The fireplace was positioned directly across from the loveseat, where it provided warmth and comfort every movie night. There were always red blankets, red pillows, and red candles, which represented the love and warmth that was found in this room. Although this room rarely changed over the years, new memories were always formed there. In this room, my nephews read their first words. In this room, my niece took her first steps. In this room, we stood hand in hand, as we looked at the room for the last time, together.

"Home" is often described as a familiar or usual setting, and that the focus of one's domestic attention is that "home is where the heart is."

Here I stand, one final time, on the asphalt where I learned to ride a bike. I looked up at my castle once more. This castle holds my own

personalized fairy tale. This castle was my haven, where I found refuge and love. These memories and lessons that took place in the house are what made this house a home to me. These memories and experiences are all a part of what shaped me to be the woman I am today.

Finally, I looked down at the pavement. The driveway marks where the house started to feel like home. The day that my mom taught me how to ride my bike was the day the house began to win my heart over. It wasn't my love towards the house, or even the driveway where I balanced on my bike, but it was the memory I created with my mom that made the driveway so special. I smiled to myself, for I knew that even though life was changing, it was all going to be okay, as long as I just kept pedalling and kept my family near. I learned that even though this house was my home, my family and the memories we made within this house is what made it so special. Like the famous saying goes, "home is where the heart is," and my family had my heart. As I stepped in my car, I looked up again and smiled. For I thanked my mom, my sister, and my grandma, for making this house my home. I knew that wherever we went, as long as we were together, I would always feel like I am at home.

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Caroline

JULIA LISUS-REITER

I AM narrating from within the audience of an amphitheatre whose walls are falling outwards. The room mumbles, the black curtain hangs still. Behind it stands two sets of lives: the characters in the show and the actors who play them. Among them is my sister Caroline, getting into character, ready to live inside somebody else for the next little while. I have waited eight months to witness my sister act, and as the lights finally dim, I brace myself to experience her mind in the spotlight.

As soon as I developed the capacity to think them, I feared deep thoughts. I would exercise and kept myself busy in order to maintain a happy exhaustion, to keep my mind in blissful limbo between the shallow pool of certainty and the dark, murky deep end just beyond it. With tenacity, I shoved my brain into a box so that my thoughts might go around and around in a circle forever, never straying from safety. Its walls watched down on me as I slaved away in the confines of mediocrity, wondering how to escape while thankful to be contained. When I was seventeen, a stream of light revealed a hole in the box. I found Caroline shaking on our bathroom floor, gasping between tears. Somehow I knew the question before she asked it: we were both desperate to find answers to the riddles of life, to be sure of the uncertain. But I knew we couldn't be. My lips parted in a freeze as the quiet mania consumed us both.

For most of my life, I have feared our similarities. Knowing that Caroline's behaviour is often a window into my own self, I have rejected it with stiff contempt. As a kid, I hated when she sang; she

would belt out a tune without regard for anyone listening, sometimes in the presence of company, neither trying to put on a show nor hoping to be noticed. I always tried to silence her through laughing at her volume or belittling her passion. I was shocked at her lack of self-deprecation; in my family, we were taught to laugh at ourselves before others could laugh at us. I wanted to put Caroline in a box, so that she would stop threatening to tear mine open.

Our differences have always been rooted in Caroline's courage and my lack thereof. Realizing she suffered from anxious thoughts, Caroline embraced her busy mind by converting her unrest into poetry. In the car during one family road trip, Caroline offered to read us a poem she had written somewhere between Boston and Maine. We obliged, ready to hear a dose of standard thirteen-year-old angst and misused vocabulary. However, what we heard was a poem larger than life; it rung with anguish, uncertainty, and self-actualization, concepts that most only grasp in the wisdom of old age. We sat in silence for the next twenty minutes. Caroline saw the world, and now we saw it too.

On a coffee date one day, Caroline and I got to discussing the concept of lying. I was trying to convince her that pathological lying was a manipulative practice. A particular friend of hers was under scrutiny. "Why give your friendship to somebody who isn't going to be honest with you?", I asked. Staring judiciously back at me, in her pink headband and sneakers, she replied, "She is honest with me, to the best of her abilities. Therefore, what I deem a lie might be real to her; one's honesty accords only with one's own reality. It is all a matter of perception."

When I was in high school, Caroline kept an outfit reserved in case I had friends over. A pair of glistening black spandex and a mini t-shirt were stored in a special place in her closet, in case she wished to transition into the brilliance of adolescence if the mood called for it. When the two-piece began to burst at the seams, she hastily replaced it, indifferent to the absence of any particular future event to justify the purchase. The outfit served as a mechanism for moving from one state of mind to another, just like that.

Now, the stage lights glare over Caroline's porcelain skin. The plot follows a family from Fort McMurray that has evacuated its home in the wake of the fires. We experience the play through Caroline's character, the protagonist, watching a drug-addicted mother grieve her fractured relationship with her daughter, and a flame-battered family see their memories burn to ashes. At some point, I close my eyes for a

moment to isolate the actors' voices. Caroline's seems suddenly different. I am no longer listening to my sister play a character; the depth in her voice seems to encapsulate an entire life. I think back to Caroline's stifling anxiety and her bold prose, losing my place in the story as I connect this internal chaos to the incredible character she is portraying. I am jolted back into reality when a brilliant, spirited laugh echoes from the stage. Caroline's character has cut through the darkness of the play through offering an unexpected flash of humour. I open my eyes. Every muscle on her powdered face is alive. Her eyes reveal more than just comic relief; they expose wit in the face of grief, clarity in the face of madness. When the audience applauds at the end of the show, I join in late, slowly lifting my clammy palms from the claustrophobic edges of my seat.

In Passing

KATIE MCLEAN

I WAKE up from a shallow sleep sometime after 3.00 a.m., wheezing. My breath is stuck in my throat, creeping upwards, pooling in the hollow notch there. The only light in the room comes from a crack between the blinds. I see shards of moonlight, and not much else. The dorm next to me is still awake, muffled laughter streaming between heavy thuds of hip-hop. It disrupts the stillness and invades like roaches. An unwanted visitor. I smear away the clamminess from my temple onto the sleeve of my t-shirt and try knocking the air back down to the lungs. I've been suffocating on lucid dreams, having the life choked out of me by some wispy creation existent only from my own imagination. There's this doctor I saw one or twice a while back who said that when you're born, you're biologically created to breathe into your abdomen. This reflex wanes as you grow. On your deathbed, the air only reaches your throat. That's how you know you're a goner.

For me, the insomnia started when the sickness did. It was Thanksgiving. Fall is a season of change. I watched the potted plants in the doctor's office wilt, petals speckled across the granite, blush to auburn and then dark rust, like seeping out brightness from a photograph. I remember thinking when the doctor gave me the diagnosis that health is fickle and fleeting. Autoimmune diseases are something of a mystery to the medical world. *The body attacking itself*, and whatnot. Wars aren't waged unless someone throws the first stone. Doctors like to hedge their bets, like casino players holding at seventeen at the blackjack table. The liver can withstand immunosuppressant bullets long enough to save the skin, they say. My

doctor was a little man with beady eyes and a weird face. Not the betting type.

The thing about immunosuppressant drugs is that they suck the life out of the body but keep the mind wired. It's rock climbing with belays, knowing the drop is safe but not wanting to let go of the cliff. The body wants to escape, but the mind won't let it. Insomnia is a privilege and a curse. Things are different at night, when time slows and guards slip down. It's like seeing the underbelly of the world and getting to poke at it. But daytime doesn't stalk like the night does. It's easier to hide in the crowded light. Sleep is escapism. The truth comes out from the shadows at night, it slithers through the cracks like sludgy black matter and threatens to infect. I'm awake to feel it when it does, staring down demons, alone with my own thoughts. It makes my stomach curdle. Insomnia is a routine, like anything else. Constant repetition expecting a new result isn't always foolish. I do the same thing most nights in the same order. It's easier to tune out the noise that way. I don't wait for sleep I know is not coming.

I've got a bottle of melatonin on my bedside table that's been sitting there all year. The doctor with the weird face gave them to me shortly after the disease diagnosis. Insomnia and illness are close friends. One knocks on the other's door and invites itself in for coffee. *Stay awhile and settle in.* Neither is very good at leaving, even when asked. The irony is that illness is best healed with sleep, but sleep is rarely possible when the mind is filled to the brim with thoughts, like a tap that keeps dripping into a glass already full. Destructive behaviour ensues.

There's a girl named Sam I visit most nights at dawn, when the sleep is nipping at my heels and sinking its teeth in. Her best friend died when she was in high school, so she's well versed in depression and illness. She knows the system well, although you wouldn't be able to tell from looking at her. She's the type of person who's built like an elaborate façade, glossed over and advertised, like vendors selling tickets to a Broadway play that has no cast. She hides her story well. Isolation demands company, I've found, as counterintuitive as that may be. Even the loneliest of souls crave connection.

"Take care of yourself, kid," she'd say through stiff air on the mornings I'd slip into her room and settle down, eyelids heavy. The sound would always hang in the space between us. It was a bit like telling a deaf dog to stop pissing on the carpet.

"Will do," I'd say, and then she'd be off to class.

Most of my relationships follow the same pattern. That tends to be the result of insomnia and illness added together. I'm puffy-faced and odd-faced, and a social malignancy to most teenagers in the college landscape. I've been downgraded to wordless exchanges and connections that come and go, as though people and I are two parallel lines that can see each other but never intersect. Even in the prescience of others, there is isolation in insomnia. Sleep seems to come when you least want it to. My brain has got the timing of things mixed. It's bustling when the world is asleep, vacant when it's awake. In the daylight, I am an empty city.

I go to bed sometime after 7.00 a.m., when my eyelids are weighed down like oil-spilled hummingbird wings. There's dewy light at the window. It draws a line across the bed sheets. There's a spin cycle to insomnia. It's escapable in the daylight. For the first time all night, I see dark.

Paris in the Summer

TRISTAN O'CONNELL

I HAD very little knowledge of the world outside of Canada before making the impromptu decision to travel to Paris, France. My impulsive sister, who was anxious to see the world, decided on a trip abroad, her persuasive argument leaving little room for any dispute. Disagreeing was not a viable option, but with the travel manuals fanned out before me, I was overcome with questions: What if the language barrier is too much and we can't understand anyone? What happens if something goes wrong with the plane? Am I able to travel this far from home? My stomach twisted as it fluctuated between anguish and anticipation. This was the trip of a lifetime: seven days breathing in Parisian air, six nights gorging on bread and wine, strolling through parks and discussing fine art. What if the food was too strange for my palate? Would I be able to adjust to the time change? How would we navigate a foreign city on our own?

Before I knew it, the wheels had left the tarmac and we were airborne, bound for the city of lights. Painfully aware that changing my mind was no longer an option, I buckled up for the eight-hour flight and buckled in my apprehensions. As our altitude increased, so did my excitement. The previous doubt that had clouded my mind was slowly fading as I rested my head against the window, the uncertainty falling away just as Ottawa seemed to disappear under the airplane's wings. A mediocre romantic comedy playing on a loop provided the soundtrack to the nap that would supposedly save me from insufferable jetlag as the six-dollar snack-size Pringles satisfied my hunger. As much as I would try to succumb to sleep, it evaded me as I peeked out of the

small window and eagerly checked the built-in GPS to determine how close we were to landing. Just when I believed the anticipation would kill me, a man came over the speaker system—a voice as if from heaven—informing us that we had begun our descent. I fastened my seatbelt as the apprehensions momentarily returned. Vigorously dismissing my concerns, I awaited the jolt that would come from returning to the ground.

The Parisian air caressed my skin as I stepped off the airplane. I was greeted with the French language and the overwhelming desire to sip coffee in a café. We walked in a daze towards the luggage carousel, the reality of what we had done not quite settling in. We brushed past running businessmen and children with their parents, all speaking eloquently in a foreign language that suddenly made us realize our elementary French would not prove to be as practical as we had originally thought. The luggage carousel beeped and turned as it spit out luggage, and we smiled and giggled as we waited for ours. Eventually hauling our bags off the belt and by our sides, we looked at each other as though we were both waiting for instructions. The degree of our independence settled in as we were forced to make fast decisions. "Come on," my sister said as she tugged at my arm, "Paris waits for no one."

Our taxi weaved in and out of traffic at speeds that were far too high for bumper-to-bumper highway driving. We clutched our seats and attempted to soak in the atmosphere surrounding us, at this point amounting to little more than graffiti and concrete medians. Seconds later we were at the hotel, exhausted from the trip and our attempts to observe every minute and every building in the city. Our backpacks packed and our city guidebooks at hand, we ventured out into the city.

The city was full of spirit and vigour, and before I knew it, it had all transferred to me. I was no longer tired, but rather revitalized, the energy of the city coursing through my veins. We spent hours walking around the cobblestone walkways, stopping to take in the vastness of the city. The Eiffel Tower loomed over us, beckoning us to come closer. The sheer magnitude of the structure left us awestruck and speechless; this manmade tower surpassed all previously conceived notions, all imagination, the result humbling us both with the overwhelming need to re-examine our place in the world. We took our seats on the grass and stared at the landmark for hours. Pleasant conversation and a plethora of pictures proceeded until dusk signalled that the moment we had been waiting for was just seconds away.

Suddenly, the sky was illuminated as the tower shone with bright, white lights that flickered in shyness and then brilliantly shone. The golden lights climbed the tower and covered it in a warm, yellow glow. Minutes later, the crowd burst into applause, the hope of an encore that would not come until the next night.

We spent our days in taxis, buses, and subways, venturing to museums and landmarks where historic monuments stood erect, pronouncing the prosperity and elegance of the city. The gargoyle-guarded gothic churches, flower gardens, and lavish shopping consumed us. The city seemed to accept us as one of its own as we traversed through the other tourists and snuck through passages as our guidebooks advised. We closed the week in paradise with a monumental meal of bread, cheese, wine, pizza, and pastries that would cause any foreigner to salivate at their mere mention. Satisfied with our excursions, we slowly packed up our suitcases, quadruple checked to ensure we had our passports, and called one final taxi for the airport.

A week ago, my heart pounded at the apprehension of seeking out adventure in a foreign country, but now it pounded at the thought of ever leaving. I slowly boarded the plane, grudgingly found my seat, and reluctantly sat down. Painfully aware of our departure, I buckled up for the eight-hour flight and buckled in my despondency. Resting my head against the window and closing my eyes, the memories still fresh in my mind.

Untitled

MEGAN PHILLIPS

MY FEET stay safely on the dirt path, subconsciously guiding me through the forest that I know better than my own backyard. I continue to walk around the outer path of the woods, circling the perimeter and slowly working my way towards the centre, the place where I spent countless hours of my childhood. It's a good thing my body knows where to take me; my mind is far away, laying in the hospital where my dad is now trapped.

A stroke? Two weeks ago I hardly even knew what a stroke was or what it did. How could he have suffered a stroke?

Leaves crunch under my boot-clad feet, breaking into tiny pieces in my wake. The dusty remains, now unrecognizable for what they once were, float behind me as I continue to walk. Looking up as I pass a tree that looks like a chair, I cannot help but remember a night from over a decade ago. Seven-year-old me clutched my father's hand, the two of us rushing to escape the mosquitoes that seemed intent on eating us alive. I looked up then, too, amazed to see what looked like a million little stars up above. The light from the fireflies cast a golden glow on the chair tree and the green leaves surrounding it. The air was warm that night, warm enough to make it seem as if the fireflies held the heat of the sun, carrying it to bring joy to the creatures of the night. My dad let me pause to observe for a few seconds before gently tugging on my hand to let me know it was time to go.

And then I am back in the present. I do not pause as I did so many years ago, but simply glance up as I pass the chair tree and pull my coat tighter to protect myself against the biting wind. The warmth of

summer is long gone, replaced by the chilly promise of a winter soon to come. The last rays of sun are hardly visible through the trees, the pressing darkness another subtle reminder of what I have lost.

Would he walk again? Regain the use of his left arm? He seemed spacey and confused, not really sure what was going on. Would he ever fully be himself again?

I make another right and find another ghost ahead of me; the bike jumps made of packed dirt look haunting in the near darkness, everything around them eerily still. I remember the day my dad first tried to get me to try the jumps. Unlike most kids I knew, I was always overly cautious, scared of anything even remotely adventurous.

"C'mon, honey, give them a try. I'm sure you'll love it." My dad urged me to try the jumps, worried that the city would remove them before I got a chance. Driving my bike to the top of the first jump, I quickly shook my head and backed up as far as I could, terrified at the sight in front of me. I caught a slight hint of annoyance but missed the words my dad muttered under his breath before he took off, zooming over each jump with an elegance I had never before seen. Standing on his pedals and closing his eyes as the wind whipped across his face, my dad looked like the coolest man alive. I always envied him; he was so full of life, so vivacious and daring. Even as a young child, I could see that there was something he had and I didn't, something that made me too scared to live.

Now I walk on, pausing only briefly to take in the sight in front of me. I pass yet another fallen log as I make another right turn onto a path that leads farther into the forest, this one leaning on a pile of rubble, and cracked in the middle, leaving two pieces of a whole. This was the log we once used as a teeter-totter, my friend and I having the time of our lives while our dads stood watch. Perhaps we were the only ones who thought to use it in such a way, or maybe dozens of other kids did the same thing. I only know that we were the ones who broke it. Tired of always watching but never having fun themselves, our dads decided to take their own turn on the makeshift teeter-totter. We watched first as the men went up, down, up, down, and then as the log split nearly in the centre, sending them crashing to the forest floor. My friend and I were outraged, already mourning the loss of our favourite spot in the woods. We managed to find other spots for fun, but nothing that quite filled the gap of our missing teeter-totter. To this day, I glance at it longingly every time I walk past. I don't think our favourite

things in life can ever be forgotten or replaced, the empty spot they leave always throbbing.

Why did his body fail us once again? None of us are strangers to the hospital, dad least of all. He's there every year, but he always recovers. How could my hero fail me like that? How could he leave me?

One more right turn and I am there, finally at the pond I know so well. It is where I first learned to catch frogs, where we caught minnows and goldfish to fill our fish tank at home. It is where we rode our bikes and dug for treasure, where we once sat with a picnic, and where my dad brought me when I was in a bad mood. It feels as if it, like my dad, was the centre of my childhood, much like it is the centre of the woods. And yet I can't help but cringe at the murky water, at the algae that has begun to build up over the years of neglect from the city. With a final glance I leave for home. The woods is no longer a safe haven, but has instead become a graveyard full of ghosts and bittersweet memories.

Because he has. He has left me. He is no longer the man I knew, the man I still yearn for. Even when I sit in his hospital room, it feels as if there is a stranger in his place. The body in that hospital bed may be familiar on the outside, but I lost my father weeks ago.

The Things We Leave

ALICE PIOTROWSKA

JOAN DIDION knows: it is easy to see the beginnings of things. I still remember when Montreal began for me, when I left the Pierre Trudeau terminal for the first time. I was wearing a coffee-coloured coat that already seemed unfashionably European next to everyone's North Face jackets, and dragging a cheap plastic suitcase on its two broken wheels. I must have visited at least thirty different airports by now, and I forget all about them after a week or two, but I still remember the way the air felt when I left the Pierre Trudeau: crisp, sharp, full of exhaust fumes and cigarette smoke. By the time I arrived in the city and checked into my hostel, it was midnight. I spent the next five hours awake with jet lag and excitement, craving the rice cakes I had in my suitcase but being too terrified of waking up the two Brazilian girls sleeping in the same room. "Was anyone ever so young?", Didion asks. I was. Twenty-one and hungry for adventure. There was nothing that chased me out of Poland and then England—not really. Nothing besides curiosity, an inherently human belief that there might be something brighter and better waiting outside my backyard.

After a month, I stopped using Google Maps to get to the nearest metro; after two, I could walk from my apartment to the Verdun station with my eyes closed, but I still e-mailed my brother every day. I convinced myself that home was never too far; it was only a ten-hour flight away, a few clicks on the Web site, a few hundred dollars I could always borrow. Technology made my world smaller. My brother would tell me what to do with an overheating laptop two minutes after I mentioned the issue; my best friend would call from Aberdeen to

perform Skype exorcisms involving candles and incense, after I cheerfully led her to believe that my apartment was haunted. I was having a blast. Somehow, during the first few months, it had never occurred to me that my move to Montreal was pointless. I couldn't speak French. I was barely scraping by on what I earned in two part-time jobs and, out of sudden loneliness and boredom, found a Canadian boyfriend I didn't even care about. After I realized I should move west, where English would be enough, it was too late. I was tired, homesick, and convinced that I needed to go back to Europe.

When, in the early 1980s, my father, a twenty-two-year-old Polish sailor, left his employer's ship at the Port of Montreal with no intention to ever get back on board, he didn't have Google Maps. I imagine the air might have smelled the same, a crisp pre-winter blend of moisture and smoke. I imagine he felt the same excitement and apprehension. Of course, I wouldn't know. My father tells anecdotes, not emotions, and he seems to never run out of stories. Forget your second uncle, telling the same pointless tale of his car breaking down on the way to Germany, every year on Christmas Day. My father picks stories like lint from a sweater, non-chalantly and without thinking, and they are always relevant to the conversation. He has a few he especially likes. When someone asks him about his first days in Montreal, my father tells about the cigarettes. "We had only a few dollars on us," he says ("we," meaning his friend and him), "no money for food, but I was craving cigarettes *so bad*, and I was complaining to Roman until he finally bought me a pack. He didn't smoke, so there was one condition: he keeps the pack and gives me cigarettes like candy, you know, one every few hours for good behaviour, because we couldn't afford more. Ha, ha!" Cigarettes, rice cakes. The things we remember.

In a few years, my father went from sleeping in a YMCA hostel to owning one of the most successful jazz bars in Montreal. He was the epitome of the (North-) American Dream, a guy with three dollars in his pocket and no English besides "Hello" and "Thank you," who washed dishes for money, made friends with jazzmen and former Broadway stars, and gradually, persistently, earned the success he was always meant to have. One day, after I witnessed him having a heated discussion in English, I asked, "Dad, how come you have a perfect American accent?" He shrugged, and said, "I worked with an American guy in Montreal. He was the one who taught me English." Easy. How much effort did it take for it to sound so easy now? With no access to modern technology, no language skills, and no opportunity to come

back home at any time, he scrambled his way up. When he and my mother, already with two children, decided to go back to Poland after a decade, it was not only out of homesickness. Communism in Poland was over, and they recognized the opportunity to rebuild their lives in a place they still considered home.

My father and I share many things: curiosity, stubbornness, the view that people should not be confined to one profession or one place throughout their lives. Why was it so much easier for me to give up? With modern technology making the world smaller, might immigration feel more like a short-term adventure, even when we buy a one-way ticket? Or, perhaps, this is all about the things we leave behind? Thirty years ago, my father escaped a country that made him wait in line for six hours to get baby formula for his son. He didn't know that communism would be over in a few years, so what was there to wait for? Today, despite their challenges, the countries in western and middle Europe are still free and relatively wealthy. My European friends, the twenty- and thirty-somethings, leave and come back all the time. Why do we relocate in the first place? Most of us, I believe, are curious and restless, unable to resist the pleasure of experiencing a different life. For some, North America still has a lure crafted by the ever-present pop culture, an idealized image that gets a little pale upon arrival. For most of us, coming back is easy. Perhaps it is harder to let go of what we already have, to forget the things we left behind, to look at a new country and think, *my future is here*.

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Field Studies

Life Lessons from the World's Worst Horse

CHELSEA POPE

THE EXAM hall looms in front of me. Half-dead ivy clings to the cool grey stone of its exterior. *I don't want to do this*. Along the sidewalk, crusty leaves mingle with forgotten litter, the detritus of another semester near completion. *I can't do this*. Cigarette butts float by in the puddles like half-sunken life rafts. They're not like the mud puddles at home, which, crafted by the rain and the soil, somehow seem purer than this city sidewalk variety. *What if I turn around and catch a train home instead?* My overstuffed schoolbag digs with cruel claws into my shoulders. *Do I need even need accounting?* I stare at the steps to the entrance. *Do I even need a degree?* I take a deep breath. I have one more week in the city, one more week of exams, before Christmas break. What would Coach Tara say to this attitude? I hear her voice in my head right away, and can almost picture myself in the saddle instead of on this sidewalk: "Just keep pushing forward," she'd yell. "Eyes up, leg on. Eyes up, leg on!" Finally, I step out of the rain and into the exam hall. *Eyes up, leg on*. That simple lesson I'd carried from riding to exams and interviews, to break-ups and arguments. That vital message articulated by Tara, but delivered over and over by a particularly wicked little horse named Bristol whom I loved so much.

Bristol was the youngest horse I'd ever owned. I should have known what I was getting into when I took her for a test ride. She'd had "basic training," whatever that meant, and I sat on her for all of ten minutes, walking in circles in three feet of snow. "Wow," I said to my dad as Bristol steadily ploughed on. "She seems so calm, for a three-year-old." I hopped off shortly after, stroking her nose. She nuzzled in for more. "Sold!"

When the day came to take Bristol home, it took over an hour to load her into the trailer. "I swear she's done it perfectly before, on the first try!" said her previous owner, who was picking up each hoof, one by one, and manually trying to pull them further up the trailer ramp with great effort. Bristol would go along with it for a few minutes, then suddenly back straight up, ruining the progress in a matter of seconds. Eventually, we got her to the farm, where I noticed small white specks

scurrying about in her mane. *Lice*. I had planned to quarantine her anyway, as should be done with new horses, but this development made quarantine absolutely critical. I released her in a special indoor pen at the back of the barn. It shared a wall with the pasture, but a portion of the wall was missing, blown off in a recent windstorm. I had carefully patched the gap with large pieces of wood, nailed securely in place. Bristol would be safe here until I could come back to the farm later to check on her. When I arrived that evening, I saw her, with her unmistakable black-and-white markings laid across her body like a world map, trotting happily round the open pasture, tail raised high in the air like a flag. Her pen was empty, save for the tell-tale pieces of broken wood on the ground and the tufts of white hair caught in the wall. When I checked on her in the field, her legs were covered in scrapes, and streaks of blood ran down her chest. She had literally busted a hole in the wall and climbed through it. The other horses, looking intrigued but wary, wisely kept their distance.

Within a few weeks of having Bristol at the farm, I started riding her. By this point, there was no more snow, just the cold, hard dirt, which I quickly became very familiar with. Bristol had a penchant for acting like a saint for the first ten minutes of every ride. Then, in what soon became a predictable turn of events, she'd become a rodeo horse, bucking and rearing and lurching and hopping until I was left on the ground, dusty and dazed. Bristol would proudly trot around the riding pen, her flag-like tail raised, looking like she knew she had won yet again. No, she wasn't a rodeo horse. She was a rodeo *queen*.

Eventually, I called my old riding coach, begging for her assistance. "I need help training her," I said, shamefully. "Before she trains me." Once a week for the rest of the summer, Tara would come to the farm to provide some tough love. The problem quickly became apparent with another set of eyes. "You may not notice," Tara said during one particularly rough lesson, "but when you get nervous or anxious, you clamp your hands extra tight on the reins, and you pinch the saddle with your knees. Bristol can feel that, because you're transferring that energy to her. She's just testing you. All you have to do is keep pushing forward. Eyes up, leg (*not* knee) on." I tried it. Asking this thousand-pound, independent, capricious creature to move faster when it starts trying to toss you on the ground goes against every part of human nature, but I did it. *Eyes up, leg on*. Bristol couldn't buck as easily when she was moving at a faster pace, and the shift in gears

gave her something to think about. Looking ahead gave me a sense of direction, too.

Eyes up, leg on. It became my mantra during every ride. I'm sure the neighbour across the road could see me chanting aloud to myself while riding. "Another one of those crazy horse girls," he'd probably be thinking. But Bristol improved. She started to anticipate my response to her outbursts, and she no longer tried to test me by the end of the summer. Instead, she saved her wildness for tearing around the field and antagonizing her elderly pasture mates after each ride. Fortunately, they would ignore her, swishing their tails in mild irritation as if she were a fly. Most importantly, though, with this new approach to take to my anxiety, I improved, too.

The neighbours still have their half-dead string of Christmas lights up. I can hear the couple across the street screaming at each other through a window accidentally left open, and somewhere nearby a dog won't stop barking at nothing. The steps to my apartment are covered in snow and ice, and I know I forgot to take the trash out before I left for those glorious three weeks at home. It's like there's a thousand signs telling me to turn around and leave already, and I haven't even gone inside yet. I grab the shovel and salt from under the steps anyway. *Eyes up, leg on*.

A photo of Bristol, looking attentively for some more trouble to get into.

What's the Point (of Giving Up)?

LIANE SEPENTGIS

DEPRESSION IS a tricky thing. It turns days into months into years, and suddenly your entire life drives by and you've forgotten to get on board. When I was younger, pigtails reaching past my skirts, a scowl stretching pudgy cheeks at the thought of eating mom's casserole, I wanted to grow up the perfect working woman. Climbing mountains is a hell of a lot of work, though, and walking to the top with nothing but an outdated map isn't the smartest way to go about becoming queen of the world.

I suppose "it" all started when I was about fourteen, around the time I traded skirts for jeans and pigtails for Green Day beanies. Picture for a moment a lanky, blonde, scowling preteen, friendship bracelets fraying on her wrists, her hair a scraggly mess. Consider her at the start of a full-body punk-rock transformation, like those magical girls from the cartoons back in the eighties. Except instead of frills and glittering nails, I was draped in oversized Nirvana hoodies and ripped jeans. I was frustrated with a lot of things back then, mainly frustrated that I was always frustrated, what I would describe now as a horrific way to grab puberty by horns. Fast-forward to my twentieth year, and that detached, frustrated girl hadn't exactly changed very much. I mean, I gained a few pounds, changed a few friends, and got my diploma, but the frustrated part still remained. When they teach you about depression in high school, you watch those videos with a lot of crying teenagers. They warn you to know the signs of mental illness, talk to your doctor, speak up when bad days start to outweigh the good. I had this image of a kid in my head, curled into a corner, hair over his or her eyes, like

depression was that easy to see. That image was so clear to me that I refused to see the skeletons flooding out of my closet and onto the floor. I had no energy back then, no motivation; I was never engaged. My goals were impossible to reach, and when they fell through, I fell hard. Admitting we need support should not be as devastating as it is to some people, but I still found myself scared to admit when I was lost. Besides, laying on the kitchen floor eating stale Cheerios seemed a lot more appealing than a degree at the time.

When you get to the point that you know what the problem is, but are too tired to deal with it, maybe a break is exactly what you need; maybe a doctor and a prescription are not as horrible as they sound, either. It's hard to realize how long you spend regretting the past until you start missing most of what's going on in the present. The way we treat ourselves is often unfair, though. A dollar is still worth a dollar rusted; it might not look perfect, and we might wish it was shinier, but it's still worth a dollar, right? Why don't we treat ourselves the same? Being depressed feels like you're a kid who's broken a vase; you try to hide the pieces under the bed to get out of trouble, but you're just delaying the problem. We don't want people to worry or be upset, so we hide the way we feel, letting it fester. Denial only ever makes things worse, though, and at the time, looking like a deadbeat felt less embarrassing than admitting I needed help.

When you run out of Cheerios to eat, you might as well go buy groceries. And once that's done, you might as well clean your room. And once that's done, you might as well do your homework. And once that's done.... After spending a long time sitting around being bored, I started to get bored of it. Somewhere in between the laying around and moping, I managed to snag a part-time job just down the street, and decided it was about damn time to get off the couch. The job, while a little mundane, made me come to a few important realizations. I had completely lost touch with my life; it's weird to forget what the world is like when you wake up before noon, that and I really needed to start eating breakfast once in a while. Eventually, I started to feel pretty proud of managing to finish each shift, though. As it turns out, life doesn't end once you mess up your first plan. Watching my life drive by so fast for so long, I've come to realize that walking along the shoulder of the road is a lot better than sitting around having dust blown in my face. I spent so long being angry that anything else was kind of alarming, but little by little, everyday life seemed to be less apocalyptic and more of a welcome challenge to me.

Life becomes a lot easier once you realize that twenty-one years old is not even close to being too late to start over. Neither is thirty-four, or even fifty-seven, for that matter. That lesson was just about toughest I've learned, but once I did, I was a lot less scared of reflecting on the last few years of my life. When I was finally ready to speak to my family about what was happening, it turned out I'd spent all that time trying to hide that vase when my family saw it break. That love I was so afraid of losing by admitting I wasn't okay had never been stronger.

It's necessary to fail at a life plan; failing and falling down makes us aware of what we are missing, what we truly want, and how we can become kinder to ourselves. The greatest lesson I've ever learned happened to come during the worst time of my life. I'm young, I have a lot to learn before I can be considered wise, and I have a long road to recovery ahead of me. What I do know is that through my illness I discovered a whole lot of love I didn't know I had. I'm not here to tell anyone it's easy to pick yourself up off the floor, and I certainly won't say it gets better overnight. What I can tell you, however, is that life has a funny way of making things right, and getting up and moving forwards sure is a good start to finding out how things can change for the better.

Tracking Downwind

AUSTIN SOWINSKI

AFTER GETTING to the most isolated archipelago in the world, finding your way to Maliko Bay is fairly easy. From the Kahului Airport in Maui, take the highway past the iconic surf town of Pa'ia, and continue on for about two miles past Ho'okipa Beach Park until the road dips down to sea level. Turn *makai*—Hawaiian for "towards the sea"—and head to the beach to begin your journey. This is the starting point for the Holy Grail of downwind stand-up paddle boarding (SUP)—known as the Maliko Run. Like so many things in Hawai'i, the name of something is just a starting point or an ending point. The destination is the journey itself.

As you listen to your guide, be sure to take in your surroundings as you mentally prepare for the open ocean. There is a serene and rhythmic harmony that exits within one's senses at Maliko Bay. The lush green foliage, the electric blue sky, and the turquoise ocean combine with the salty smell of the sea, the subtle chirps of delicate birds, and the gentle swishing and swooshing of the tide. This tranquil bay is like a womb that protects you while paddling out towards the seemingly harsh and chaotic elements of Maui's north shore.

The endpoint of the Maliko Run is the industrial port of Kahului Harbour. Interestingly, it is here that I contemplated my own endpoint a few years ago. My emotional stability has always seemed just out reach. I imagine myself sharing the fate of Tantalus and his elusive drinking water. Whenever I grasp for some sense of normalcy, it recedes from me. Losing the girl wasn't what had such a profound effect on me, but rather losing the life I envisioned having with her.

The Maliko Run is dangerous. There is no question about it. The best days to do it are when the SUP rental shops decide that water conditions are too severe to rent their boards out to tourists. A guide is essential to help you negotiate your way along the open ocean swells for the ten miles until you reach Kahului Harbour. It is important to know how to harness nature's energy on your journey. A guide can teach you how to chase waves, how to ride them as long as possible, how to accept losing them, and how to prepare for the next one.

A few weeks after we broke up, I travelled to Maui to do some bicycling and hopefully clear my thoughts. After a long ride around the mountains one day, I stopped at a gas station across the street from my hotel to pick up some well-earned beers. Upon entering the store, the young girl at the cash register was crying, and another lady was frantically trying to get through to someone on her cellphone. A massive earthquake had just hit off the coast of Japan, which created an enormous tsunami. Thousands were already thought to be dead. Considering the large ethnic Japanese population in Maui, it is easy to understand the level of alertness and concern the people in the gas station were feeling.

As you are born into the open ocean out of Maliko Bay, the power of the wind and waves will seem chaotic. At first, the relentless wind will be deafening. It will feel like some deity is trying to blow you away from safety. Don't panic. Compose yourself. Think of the wind as trying to push you to safety. After your board is angled properly, the noise will seem to fade into the background. Simultaneously, the waves will feel like they are trying to bump you off your board. Again, once you are aligned properly, these bumps are what you will chase and ride as they swell from behind you. Don't be afraid to move your feet.

The alertness and concern on the faces of the people in Kahului soon turned to panic and chaos as they realized that the tsunami was on an unimpeded collision course with Maui, travelling at an astonishing speed of five hundred miles per hour. The panic and chaos was only on their faces; it was not in their actions. Cars lined up at gas stations and horns honked, but the presence of the National Guard, the police, and the other emergency response services kept things orderly. The continuous wailing of the tsunami sirens was deafening. As the city was being evacuated to higher ground, the security guards came around to all the hotel rooms to make sure everyone went to the shelters. As they were about to open my door, I made a split-second decision: I hid under my bed and decided to stay at the coast.

After you get accustomed to the conditions, riding the bumps is based on feeling the energy behind you. It is important to not be rigid in your direction. The more flexible you are to following the energy of the waves and wind, the more fun you have. You will be pushed in the general direction of the endpoint, but don't worry if the line isn't totally straight. Less paddling and more riding is the point of downwind SUP. A perfect ride will feel like the Holy Trinity of paddle boarding: the energy, your board, and you. The longer you can maintain all of these things as one, the better. It is important to accept losing a wave and not waste your energy trying to paddle into the back of one. Wait for the next one. Paddle hard when you feel it. It will come. They always do.

After the civilian population was evacuated, all the emergency response services left, as well. After some time, the tsunami sirens stopped. After pacifying my mom with a text—*Yes, mom, I evacuated to the shelter. Everything is fine*—I walked down to the beach and sat there for a couple hours looking out at the ocean. I thought to myself, *I might be the only person on a beach in Maui at this very moment. How often has that ever happened?* In the presence of this danger, a tranquillity set over me and I smiled. My first genuine smile in some time. I went back to my hotel room on the second floor and hoped for the best. The tsunami came, but it did not do very much damage in Maui. I woke up the next morning, however, feeling like a lot of my negative feelings had been swept away.

The Travelling Vegan

MARINA THOMPSON

WHEN PEOPLE think of veganism, they think of plants. When people think of veganism, they think of tree huggers. When people think of veganism, they think of broccoli and celery sticks. Although I can appreciate all of these things as a vegan, there is so much more to veganism than people realize. Veganism is a lifestyle that can benefit both our individual selves and the planet we live in. Despite the many pros of becoming vegan, people typically struggle with the idea of veganism due to its overwhelming perception of time consumption and extreme effort. When people challenge me on the difficulty behind leading a vegan lifestyle, I like telling them about my experiences travelling as a vegan. Travelling is very time- and energy-consuming, and by proving that leading a vegan lifestyle is possible while living a hectic lifestyle, like travel, I feel I am (hopefully) influencing others to consider this lifestyle.

Although my transition to veganism has been comfortable, it can still be quite difficult to accommodate my veganism in certain circumstances, especially while I'm travelling. I recently travelled to Nevada during the winter months with a friend who also happens to be vegan. Surrounding yourself with a strong and supportive foundation of vegan promotion is essential when considering veganism. My vegan travel friend, acting as a pillar in my foundation of a vegan lifestyle, eases and supports my decisions living a plant-based diet. Throughout my travels, my vegan pillar experienced the interesting adventures of travelling to Las Vegas as a vegan. From gourmet vegan restaurants to modest hotel-room vegan cooking, travelling to Las Vegas taught us

the many difficulties and inconveniences of being vegan, but it also taught us just how worthwhile being vegan can be.

Prior to departure, it is important to do some research on the food culture that exists within the city you're visiting. In our case, Las Vegas was surprisingly vegan friendly. Although many of the gourmet and celebrity restaurants celebrated meat- and dairy-food culture, certain restaurants offered entirely vegan menus, such as the Wynn Hotel. Vegan pasta dishes, vegan chicken parmesan, and vegan love were only some of the many vegan options at the restaurants in The Wynn. Steve Wynn ensured that all his restaurants were allergen and dietary friendly, as he has many relatives who have serious dietary restrictions. These strong family ties are reflected within Wynn's restaurants and hotel, which is something we greatly appreciated. Although we were able to bask in vegan goodness at the Wynn Hotel, other hotels were not as welcoming to vegans. Las Vegas is populated with specialty and celebrity dining options, which typically emphasize very meat- and dairy-based flavours.

As a vegan traveller, the great emphasis on meat- and dairy-based dining in specific regions further motivates us to test out our own kitchen skills. In Las Vegas, although provided with some vegan options, we found ourselves surrounded by a meat-consuming culture. We decided to purchase our own food and cook it ourselves in our hotel room. A snug, double-queen, standard-sized hotel room is not an ideal place to set up a vegan kitchen, but we made it work. We transformed our hotel room into a fully functional vegan kitchen. Fresh organic produce was replaced with whatever packaged fruit and vegetables we could gather from the Walgreens "Farm"-acy. Freshly baked chocolate and vanilla cake was replaced by four packs of Oreos. State-of-the-art grills and ovens were replaced by hair-flattening irons and parchment paper. Our vegan kitchen may not have been ideal for most, but it was just what we needed to cook vegan-friendly meals. We assembled quesadillas using Walgreens products like cheese, tomato sauce, and tortillas. We then baked the quesadillas by heating them between two pieces of parchment paper using a flattening iron. The whole process truly did make us realize the convenience of being vegan, even while living a busy lifestyle within a culture that does not always accept veganism.

As my first time travelling as a vegan, I can honestly say that I have never felt more energized and more satisfied on any other trip I had taken as a non-vegan. Utilizing local vegan dining options, while

improvising certain meals in a hotel room, are only some of the many ways veganism is possible while travelling. Although veganism is not appropriate for everyone, travelling as a vegan to Las Vegas has shown me that leading a consistent vegan lifestyle is truly possible.

Sue and Trev

and a Bottle of Goldschläger

EMILY VANDERHEYDEN

"YOU CANNOT have children." One brief statement, made by a doctor, can completely ruin a person's life, take away their identity as a mother or father. My mother and father were told that children were not an option, and that if my mother were to get pregnant her body was so weak that she may not be able to survive birth. My mother has always been in and out of hospitals for various medical problems. Her body does not handle stress well; her body rejects it to the point that she becomes physically ill. When she gets sick, her organs shut down, and she is unable to handle the stress of being stressed. The idea of this drove my parents apart and ultimately could have been the end of their relationship.

My parents met when they were eighteen, two teenagers that kissed during a weekend camping trip to Wasaga Beach. Their relationship certainly had its ups and downs, but it was their undeniable love and passion for one another that led them to their engagement. Their wedding was complicated by unwelcome drama within their families. My paternal grandparents refused to accept my mother into their family. Their obstinacy divided our families and put extraordinary stress on both my mom and dad, creating a truly difficult time for the young honeymooners. The stress of their wedding consumed my mother. The hatred she felt within her new family was too much to bear, and it made her sick. Not sick like you and I would experience, but sick to the point of hospitalization, life support, and the potential of her organs shutting down. Her body could not handle the stress of her

work, her new relationship, and the problems with the family. After quite a scare, she overcame this and had a full recovery. My parents moved into their own apartment, where they began talking about having children. My mother had always dreamed of being a mother. She was very close to her mother, so she dreamed of having the same relationship with her own daughter. Something she longed for became a life dream. Now, I don't ever want to imagine having my parents having sex. *Ew!* But they were having complications in the bedroom, and when they started having trouble, she visited her family doctor. The doctor put mom's health before all else, and told my mom getting pregnant was not possible and could put her life at risk. Sitting in that office, my mother was forced to reflect on the fact that her dream of being a mother may be sacrificed for the chance of living. The idea that creating one life could be taking another life is quite a predicament. I can only imagine the things that were going through her head, sitting in that doctor's office. The two of them decided to focus on what they had with one another rather than what they did not, so they left the idea alone, focusing on bettering their own relationship, and moving on with their lives.

Goldschläger is a Swiss premium schnapps. It contains flecks of twenty-four-karat gold that make it a unique drinking experience. My favourite drink is Goldschläger. This is because, one night, courtesy of a bottle of Goldschläger, my parents made love, and that love was me. The gold was no longer in the bottle; it was in my mother's stomach with her miracle baby. When pregnancy became a plausible thought, my parents visited a doctor, shocked that they had beaten the odds. Immediately, the family doctor ran tests to make sure that my mother would be able to withstand the pregnancy, and through the testing found out there would definitely be something medically wrong with me. Knowing that the pregnancy was putting my mother's life at risk and that I was going to have medical complications, my mother and father were forced to make the decision: risk my mother's life to have a baby, or abort the pregnancy altogether. Sleepless nights, hesitation in their decision, all happening to a woman, my mother, who had previously been on life support due to stress, did not create a healthy pregnancy. Through it all, they did not abandon me. Before I was born, my mom and dad believed in me.

To my understanding, spina bifida is a birth defect in babies that can alter the way their lower body works, as it disconnects the spinal cord from the lower body and can come in multiple levels of severity. I

was born with spina bifida. I honestly don't know what type I had; my parents don't like to talk about it. I think it is a sensitive topic for them because it reminds them of the stress it put on their relationship and our family. I have always respected this, and have never looked much into it because of this. Since the doctors *knew* something would be wrong with me, they decided to do multiple tests, and at age one I was given an emergency surgery where my life was forever altered and ultimately saved. Luckily, today I am completely healthy. I am extremely prone to throwing out my back, but I really don't think that has changed the quality of my life. My mother did not leave my side. For an entire week during one of the busiest times at work, she slept on a hard bench at my bedside. My dad came in every day after work and, slowly but surely, day after day, our little family of three was able to be. My parents said the only time I smiled was when the three of us were together. Even as an infant, I knew the amount of love that was in the embrace of my family.

My parents worked very hard, both growing up without a lot of money. They knew they wanted to create a better life for themselves and me. When I was four, my father picked up a second job delivering pizzas at night. Every Friday night, mom and I would order pizza, and my dad, the coolest man in the world, would bring the pizza to my doorstep. It was pretty awesome. My mom, instead of getting a bonus at work, asked for her company to help her complete her MBA, so she spent most of her time in her office doing schoolwork. For Christmas, I went to my mother and asked for a "'puter" so I could be like mommy in her office. My mother and father put their own lives on hold to make sure our family had the best quality of life possible.

Growing up, my mom spent hours at the kitchen table helping me study, a kid who hated school. Frustrated with my homework, I would scream at her. Fortunately, she was able to calm me down and help me do well in school. My father loved sports, and the miracle of my surgery was able to create a common ground between us of sports. I can only imagine his thoughts on his baby girl who was born with a spinal defect walking onto the soccer field for the first time, but he did not leave my side. In fact, my father was my soccer coach for ten years. He was always the head coach, and my friends said I had the coolest dad ever. When I got older, I played competitive volleyball, and my parents came to every single game, bringing snacks for the team, helping with the score, lineskeeping, everything and anything they could do to show their support in my efforts. Their constant love and

support while I was in competitive sports was so beyond anything anyone could expect from a mother and father.

My mother once told me that whenever I ask permission for something, she asks herself, "if something bad were to happen, could I forgive myself?" That stuck with me. Going next door for a sleepover, knowing the kindness of our neighbours, was okay. Going to a party at the age of fourteen without parental supervision and the chances of alcohol being present? Absolutely not. I was her prized possession. She often still jokes with me that she "doesn't have a replacement if she messes me up." I truly believe that she still cherishes the miracle baby she was able to have.

My parents aren't perfect. They have made mistakes. They don't always make the best decisions. But neither do I. Our recognition of these imperfections is quite perfect. I have never felt ashamed for being myself. I don't know about you, but I have friends who have done things and made decisions where they have avoided their families completely or cried because their parents will "hate them" once they find out what they've done. It is remarkable the sense of security that I have with these two people. I know that no matter how many mistakes I may make in my life, they will always love me unconditionally.

"Sue and Trev!" This is what my friends call my parents, and it's what I call them when I am being silly. The names of two best friends, lovers, and parents. Each and every day they show me what true love is. The love and compassion they have for one another is something I feel I can only dream of having one day. "Mom, when did dad ask you to marry him?", I asked one day, sitting in the kitchen. She looked at me and replied, "on our first date, he said we would probably get married one day." It was that certainty, and the pure admiration they had for one another, that drove their love story to be what it is today. Seeing this relationship has given me a perspective on what to look for when deciding on a life partner, finding a man who loves me just as much, or almost as much (he loves her *a lot*) as my father loves my mother.

Love is magical, love can surprise you, love can disappoint you. It can give you harsh and unexpected choices, and it can offer remarkable highs. The love my parents and I share, my parents share with one another. The love that I have for myself because of their tried-and tested-love is what has made me into the woman that I am today. I am humbled to have been a part of their love story. Sue and Trev are the love of each others' lives. Their love has been tested on levels one

cannot begin to imagine, but through it all they have not given up on each other, on me, or on our family. I am their miracle baby. I am that fleck of gold at the bottom of the bottle that turned a marriage into a family. Our family is what it is today because of their enormous hearts, their compassion, and a bottle of Goldschläger.

Untitled

JULIA WILSON

I GUESS I will start with him, because nothing really happened before him, and I think that is why he is so important. To describe him in too great detail would diminish his allusiveness, thereby reducing his allure. I remember him in my head only as this: tall, thin, cigarettes. But I will try to be more open-minded. He smoked his *own* cigarettes, drank his friends' wine, and slept with everybody else's women. Nothing was taboo for him. He had no shame. He spoke like sex and velvet, and even his closest friends in the world could not call him an asshole for it. He seduced everyone. Still, I attribute my infatuation to the sheer flattery that he had chosen me as his summer conquest. Other times I take it more personally. The first night I met him, he had made a hundred-dollar bet with DD Turnbull that he could drink him under the table. The men contrasted in every aspect. DD was a bodybuilder and a meathead, but I suppose that is redundant. He, on the other hand, had the height-to-width ratio of the many cigarettes he smoked to maintain his lank. But I put my money on him anyway, always more inclined to experience than to size. Drinks stronger than our willpower, he kissed me in the very early hours of the morning, perhaps made maudlin by his victory. This began my constant understanding that his attention and lust had little to do with me and much to do with the fact that we were always the last two standing. But I did not mind. He let me smoke his cigarettes, I let him drink my wine.

I came to love him very fast. The summer heat intensified everything. Humidity hung like a magnifying glass around us, blurring the edges. I suppose the parties did not help, the countless nights we

drank into the early hours of the morning. We would sit sunset to sunrise in the dark some July nights, with twenty of our closest friends, debating with passion if Plato or Jesus had a greater influence on society. I would watch him from across the busy table, conducting the debate with his wine glass, dancing in the palm of his pale hand as he spoke. When he lost interest, he would escape for what seemed like hours into the kitchen. I could never really know what he was doing, and I would never check. Sometimes he would emerge after twenty minutes with a pitcher of mojitos for all of his guests, made with fresh mint from his grandmother's garden. Other times, he would not return until most of the guests had left, having nothing to show for his disappearance but a small glass of water for himself, no ice. He was the first man I ever connected to on an intellectual level, and that had a strange effect on me. I was different when I was with him; I was the version of myself that I had always been in my mind. The version I had always hoped was remembered of me, though I know it was seldom seen. Around him emerged all my wit, satire, insightfulness, and cruelty. I never wanted to return to the boys I was used to. The boys who only knew how to flirt by pulling away something of mine and holding it in a fist-clenched hand, arm raised high above their heads, forcing me to jump, giggle, and pull on them, only letting it down once they had met their fix of affection. With him, there was something macabre about the romance. I learned to indulge in that. Slow dancing to J.J Cale's *Don't Cry Sister Cry* on vinyl. The smell of perfume from my neck onto his hands and into my hair. The fading inscriptions we hid in the margins of each other's books. Him, my mother's copy of *The Republic*. Me, his brand new copy of the *New Testament*.

Though I was perpetually infatuated by him, I tried to act coolly. I continued to bring bottles of red wine to dinner despite his now monogamous relationship with gin. I became attracted to all of his addictions: cigarettes, alcohol, literature, women. But as his obsessions began to overtake him, I lost all desire to wake up next to him, though my desire to fall asleep beside him remained strong. I had heard her name was Bridget, and when the smell of her perfume on his sheets prevailed over mine, I waited until he was asleep to leave. I tried to act coolly then, too.

We saw precious little of one another in the final evenings of the summer, and though I never saw her, I knew she was more beautiful than I. And I hoped it made their conversations more meaningful, and the sincerity of his affection towards her more convincing. By the end

of August, I was in one of my too familiar phases of sleeping too little and drinking too much. I would supplement the crowded nightly debates with comments of cynicism, pessimism, and obscure perspective. It was during these weeks that my friends would describe me as being at my funniest. Those who could keep up, that is. His narcissism was contagious. And even though I was no longer around him, I continued to suffer from a heightened air of self-confidence. It would not be until months after we split that I realized it was not him I was struggling to get over, it was myself.

I saw him once more before the end of the summer. I was walking home alone at nearly four o'clock in the morning in the first week of September. He was smoking in the darkness between the glow of two streetlights on a small bridge, overlooking the still illuminated downtown I had come from. As he lifted his thin fingers from over the bridge's railing to his lips, golden sparks from his cigarette sailed smoothly through the royal blue sky, and burned out just before hitting the water. I watched him take several drags before folding away into the darkness.

History Through Art

DANYI WU

SINCE ELEMENTARY school, my father had always liked to give me life lectures on what I could and should be doing to live a successful life. Some of the recurring pieces of advice that were repeated on multiple car rides, or discussions in my room before I zoned out, included the importance of having a knowledge of history, which encompassed reading (auto)biographies of important figures in history to learn how the minds of successful people worked. As someone who knew from an early age that she wanted to be an English and art teacher, I didn't see how learning about events that had already occurred in the past, especially in countries across the ocean from me, could have any impact on my life. I told myself, "well, I have an interest in *art* history, isn't that enough?" Besides, I did have a general knowledge of history from what remained in my memory from high school. Furthermore, this knowledge had never proved to be relevant in my post-secondary education, so why would I bother to learn more, right?

Having been proven wrong on almost all things I disagreed with my father on, I really thought I had been right about this one. And to be fair, this assumption didn't have an effect on me until my twentieth year of life, so I had been right for, assumingly, a quarter of my life. However, my views on the relevance of history changed over the past summer while I was in Spain, teaching English in the small town of Prades. This being my first time in Europe, I planned to travel beforehand, to see all the artworks I had previously seen only on a projector screen.

It was at the moment, standing in the Reina Sophia, staring at the overwhelming size of Picasso's Guernica (Fig. 3), along with almost thirty other onlookers, disappointed with the lack of information being provided to me by an audio guide, that my self-directed lesson on history began. Like the descriptions of some other pieces in the gallery, the audio guide alluded to the Spanish Civil War like it was something I, the listener, had a working knowledge of. Thus, in order to better know Guernica, I had better start developing a working knowledge of this mysterious civil war that tore Spain into two separate sides, with lasting consequences to this day, yet never appeared in any of my textbooks.

I wanted to know what it was about the Spanish Civil War that brought Joan Miró to the point of burning and slashing apart his canvases (Figs. 1, 2), and Pablo Picasso to break his reputation as a politically neutral figure. Following my visits to La Reina Sofia and El Museo del Prado, I extensively researched the Spanish Civil War, and to my surprise learned its application to other aspects of my life. Suddenly, all those Catalan flags I had seen around Prades made a lot more sense. I learned why none of the words on the menus in Prades were coming up with proper translations in my Spanish-English translator app. "Spanish is not a language. You are referring to Castellano," one of my students' father informed me. Prades is located in the region of Catalonia. Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia, was the final city to be captured by Nationalist troops, before forcing a Republican surrender. Castellano, the language of the Nationalists, was adopted as the official "Spanish" language. Thus, as a sign of protest, the habitants of Prades, Catalonia communicate exclusively in Catalan, reflected in the menus I was unable to translate through Spanish.

Before reaching Spain, I visited Peggy Guggenheim's gallery in Venice, where once again an audio guide brought to my attention the lack of knowledge I had in European (art) history. As it turns out, Guggenheim was the main reason Jackson Pollock had the means to create the art he is so well known for (Fig. 4).

As someone who had claimed to be such a huge Pollock enthusiast, I was annoyed with myself, and then bothered that I had paid six-hundred dollars per Art History course to have never heard of the name Peggy Guggenheim. Having once again to take matters into my own hands, I bought *Peggy Guggenheim: The Shock of the Modern*, my first biography purchase ever. Through it, I learned about her huge impact in

the appreciation for modern art, which at the time the Louvre did not feel was significant enough to warrant safe basement storage during the Second World War.

But it wasn't enough for me to know about her life through the lens of the biography author; I needed to know about her. Peggy Guggenheim's autobiography, *Art of this Century: Confessions of an Art Addict*, currently sits on my nightstand, allowing me to enter the mind of this art collector. I admired and envied the period of time in which she was living. She was among the greatest artists of the modern period, having lunch with Duchamp, bartering deals on Brancusi sculptures with Brancusi himself, and even doing favours for Kandinsky.

It is the most influential events in an artist's life that inform their artworks, so to understand a piece entirely, one must understand the context in which it was created. It may seem obvious to most, but it never occurred to be that something as far away in time and place such as the Spanish Civil War or the art scene of the mid-1900s would have such a transformative impact on my life today. Imagine that! My dad was right *again!* But I don't tell him about how learning more about the life of Peggy Guggenheim has caused me to plan to do a placement at the Guggenheim in Venice during teachers' college, or that through learning about the history of the Spanish Civil War, I want to live in and teach in Spain post-graduation to soak in the rich culture that manages to thrive still today.

Figure 1. Joan Miro, *Burnt Canvas 1* (1973)

Figure 2. Joan Miro, *Burnt Canvas 1* (1973)

Figure 3. Pablo Picasso, *Guernica* (1937)

Figure 4. Peggy Guggenheim and Jackson Pollock standing in front of Pollock's *Mural* (1943)

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Destination: Happiness

The Long Way Around

CECILEA Y. XUE

NEW YORK, Paris, Tokyo. They top an unofficial list in my head as I contemplate a map in the university bookstore. A bulletin board on the adjacent wall is plastered with travel brochures and study-abroad opportunities. Their bold texts and colourful graphics are painfully enticing.

Yet, of all the places I long to visit before my life draws to a bittersweet conclusion adorned with withering, ostensibly bright flowers, the one I dream of the most doesn't even exist on a map. It's elusive, you never stay for long, and rarely is it in the same place twice. Round-trip fares only, tax not included.

In May of 1994, in a last-ditch attempt to patch up the gaping holes in their marriage, a Chinese couple brought into the world a slippery, nine-ounce mass of screaming infant. They had no idea that their precarious relationship would mark a life riddled with health defects and temperament issues. That desperate clutching at what was never love to begin with, resulted in, fourteen years later, a girl with bloated cheeks repeatedly ramming a toothbrush down her throat over a toilet prone to clogging. That now-divorced couple, after a decade of court dates and mutual hatred, still doesn't know how she sometimes struggles to make it into the shower more than once a week. They don't see her home littered with half-started projects and flickering passions and forgotten inspirations. They spare either too much attention or too little for their other daughter (a tumultuous accident). And they

certainly could not predict, six years after the husband had left for good, that the one with bloated cheeks would be sitting amid a pile of pills scattered across a cold laminate floor with Heineken dripping down her shirt, while the wife called a boyfriend to "take this mess to the hospital before she dies in my kitchen."

"This is a scent-free zone. We share the air. Please keep it fragrance-free."

That's what the sign next to my bed says. I wrinkle my nose at faded black ink on yellowing paper curled in at the corners. Like it's unsure of itself.

Do you ever notice hospitals have this weird smell? And I don't mean the melange of germs and instant coffee in paper cups that doctors pull their diagnoses from. The wall the sign is situated on is the colour of old pea soup. I read somewhere that hospitals are painted green because it's a calming colour. What bullshit.

Incidentally, that's what it smells like, too.

New York, New York. The city that never sleeps. Bustling with the melody of life, it pops ecstasy every night and goes for joyrides on the backs of peoples' dreams. Then wakes each morning to a hangover as loud and unwelcome as the devil in church, only to do it all again the next night. A grand picture, isn't it?

But behind the velvet Broadway curtains, what you cannot glean from a four-day tour of Central Park and the Met, are neighbours who don't speak to each other and strangers refusing to make eye contact. A city of emotional landmines, where everyone is so intent on achieving for themselves that they forget others are human, too.

Dan Buettner, a writer in an infinite sea of writers, concluded that the four happiest cities to live in are Singapore, Arhus, San Luis Obispo, and Monterrey. Not New York, or Paris, or Beijing. Not the places we flock to in droves, chasing material wealth and instant gratification. Beneath juxtaposing layers of smog and sky, against which a backdrop of towers and normality leans, we reach for and greedily snatch up what is only, always and temporarily, an illusion.

These metropoles, they're where real life happens.

Happiness is a vacation destination.

At midnight in a local hospital, eight hundred kilometres away from Times Square, I see Jesus' silhouette in wrinkled linen. A nurse is walking away with four vials of my blood while I press a cotton ball

against where the needle had intruded. I've been given an electrolyte drink that tastes of almonds and orange soda gone bad. On a nearby shelf, books on depression, eating disorders, and maladies of the brain jostle for space. Which reminds me, a doctor named Richard Bentall once proposed to classify happiness as a psychiatric disorder. I wonder if there's a prescription for that.

Hours pass unnoticed while Scotch-soaked memories taunt me. Warped and twisting in on themselves by crystalline powder and puffs of smoke, they float in misshapen tendrils across the surface of my mind. I barely register another nurse coming in, laden with ointments and gauze. Forgetting all about New York and Richard Bentall, I turn away onto my side so she can scrub the ghostly remnants and tortured screams from the trenches carved into my arms. I look again for the face of Jesus, but it's gone.

I remember that I'm not religious.

"She's been moved to the inpatient psychiatric ward. Fourth floor."

That's what the receptionist told us, over the beeping of a hundred heart monitors, right before we stepped inside an old elevator with creaking joints. It was also only ten minutes ago. I don't understand why we're leaving already.

It's almost impossible to tear my eyes away from my sister's ashen face. Her arms are freshly bandaged, perhaps to obscure any physical evidence that might suggest she's falling apart from the inside out. There's no hint of emotion in those statuesque features, as if it were not just blood, but her spirit that had trickled out with each violent laceration of the razor blade. My stomach churns queasily as the memory of her shredded cries percolates through my mind.

My mother—our mother—leads me out through sliding glass doors into gloomy afternoon heat. Some time ago, hushed confessions that I was supposed to have been aborted had made their way to my unwitting ears. Apparently, when mom decided against it, dad tried to "take matters into his own hands." She tells me now, as we're driving away, that what my sister did was selfish. That people who try to take their lives don't care about their families. I'm barely listening, though, preoccupied as I am with the state of things. I guess I consider myself lucky to have successfully fought my way into this fucked up world. And that it isn't me who's all alone right now in a hospital room for the

"mentally unstable." Is that fair? No. Am I relieved, in a nauseating kind of way?

No comment.

In between the tedium of puberty and middle-school drama, I often think back to that night. The raging and the blood, the cowering of the dogs, and the fleetingness of what should have been a happy eighteenth birthday. I see the lines branded into her flesh, wounds continuing to fester unseen beneath the surface, and wonder how anyone suffering the way she suffers could be happy at all. It reminds me a little of how the Mexicans celebrate death. Because I'm fairly certain that something inside my sister, some essential part of her, died that day in the hospital. I've decided that if no one else is going to honour it, then I will.

They discharge her two days later.

Nurses pass by in a blur and doctors' coats flap importantly behind them. Crash carts rush down corridors, chased by paramedics scrambling to save another life. They all leave behind them a trail of strange perfume. Saccharine. It defies the all-important fragrance-free rule. It's always there, but in the confusion created by stomach pumps and emotional turmoil, you miss it.

The colour of a newborn's cries. The taste of its mother's tears. It reminds you of sandcastles and bicycles, of warm milk with honey, and muddy sandals in the playground. It lingers. And long after you've left behind the sickly green walls, it stays with you, even when all you want to do is run away and hide from it.

The smell of hope. The touch of joy.

Reminiscent of spring dissolving into fall, with summer appearing only in brief flashes. It waits for you. It doesn't care where you're from or where you're going. It doesn't discriminate.

Fading scars, broken china.

A fresh, floral sigh of acceptance.

A promise, carried by the wind.

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Two to Five

JODY

"BRYAN FERRY, *A Brilliant Life*. Don't forget. That's what I want played at my funeral." We shimmied and giggled.

"The artist's wrong. At least get your funeral song right," I jibed. It wasn't a jab, but I regret being flippant. Liz showed me her iPod: "Bryan Ferry*, A Brilliant Light*." Not "*Life*." We were both wrong.

"Dancing," she said, slurring. ALS began in her mouth; bulbar ALS, common in women. "I may not be able to speak well, but I can move ... for now." Soon after, Liz spoke through type-to-speech software and couldn't swallow.

Nowadays, large families seem obsolete. No longer do couples have five to ten children, as many baptisms, competitive in-house Easter egg hunts, and meals where if you don't get in soon, you don't eat. Liz and I are two of five siblings blessed with loving parents. I joke I raised myself, being the fifth-born, ten years after Liz. We appeared the perfect family, with perfect Christmases, Easters, Thanksgivings—well, those when Richard didn't sing "Why Are We Waiting" to the tune of "O Come, All Ye Faithful," as his sisters toiled in the kitchen. We existed in blissful oblivion for years. Normal family scars existed, court cases, divorces, affairs, but were external forces. Ex-in-laws and the like became mere droplets in a wide, flowing river.

My brother's symptoms began in China. By the time he returned to Canada with his Internet bride, he was already experiencing ALS paralysis in his hands and feet. This unusual diagnosis baffled us. Within a year of us knowing, he died. Like a log jammed in the

riverbank that dislodged and floated away. I blinked and Richard was gone.

Watching my brother die of this disease, we knew ALS wasn't pretty. Less than a year later, ALS reared its Lernean Hydra head again. Liz had to contemplate a living nightmare, knowing how she would die in two to five years. Prison sentences are more hopeful. I'd endure flagellations than let her go through this. I'd heal. How could this happen *twice*? I began researching: stem cells, genetics, nutrition. I pored over articles, medical research papers, clinical trials, newsletters, latest discoveries, and the progress of research hospitals, ALS walks, and the Ice-Bucket Challenge. *Bam!* I renewed my hope, my faith in medicine, my faith.

Please, God!

Liz was the fun, party gal; the selfless, big-hearted, generous one. Liz loved everyone. She loved me. We were close. She kept my secrets I'll never share, but I'll tell you another: when I was young and unmarked by disease, a lifetime ago, I believed in survival of the fittest. It sounds wicked to admit this now. Naïve and wicked, but disease was foreign to me. I made donations when they came to the door, the disease fighters—the army of disease warriors. Never much a believer in fate, I truly believed that what you ate, how you lived, made you what you were physically. In those days, ALS wasn't in our history; there was no disease present that we knew of. My parents lived to ripe old ages, as did my grandparents and their parents, all without ALS. I just didn't get it. And then, I did.

Genealogy.

Genetics.

Dad traced our family tree back to Mona Lisa and Jesus. He spoke of our ancestry *ad nauseum*. I began listening once Richard passed away. ALS skipped not one but two or more generations in our case. Death certificates reported paralysis of the extremities or neurological difficulties. They just didn't have words for it. They didn't have Lou Gehrig to give a face and a name to the worst way to die.

Liz was the boulder plunging into our Darwinian river. Sinking, settling at the bottom. Cold, heavy, silent. Liz wore a bag on the side of her belly filled with a milkshake-like substance, one she couldn't taste but which kept her alive—that, and her will to live. Anything, too much saliva, would choke her, drown her. She couldn't swallow and had to use a suction device, like dentists use. That's just for starters.

Liz stayed positive. If she had meltdowns, I didn't see them.

"But I did have one. A doozy," she confessed.

"Hallelujah!", I replied. "You're entitled."

Unblinking, I kept sentinel. I watched ALS with guard-dog vigilance. I kept an eye on promising research. I gave money. I became the pest and worshiper of doctors.

Just please, hurry up!

The family drew together yet fell into different camps. I lived in the camp of "Do Something!" Others remained fatalistic. It was my job to save Liz. Why wasn't anyone searching for cures like me? When my sisters Carol, Marie, and I were genetically tested, I remember my smug feeling of being the youngest and fittest. Marie and I met at Sunnybrook's ALS Clinic for our results. Carol would receive hers the following week. When the doctor told me I carried the ALS gene, my ears blanked out. I was underwater. No, doc's mistaken. I couldn't. In the next room, Marie's informed that she's clear of the deadly gene; she too thought he was wrong, convinced she *did* have it. Somewhere a landslide shot down the mountain and smothered the river. The next week, Carol learned she had the mutation, too. Then Liz died and I was pinned under, drowning.

The C9ORF72 mutant gene doesn't mean I'll develop ALS. When dad passed at eighty-nine, researchers discovered he carried the mutation, yet had a secret something in him that barred his developing ALS. We latched onto this floating log, temporarily safe from being pulled under by a force that we don't fully understand. We were now the diseased and the non-diseased. There were children and grandchildren to consider, though doc said a cure would soon exist for them.

Stay calm. Construct a raft. Let only Happiness aboard. The Alsatian in me keeps Moros at bay. The raft wobbles. I stay positive, mind over matter, but how do I live if I only may have ten years left? To the fullest? Love? Travel? Live in the moment? I was born the consummate planner. I'm told that, in my lifetime, once a month, doctors will be able to inject a spinal infusion of "good genes" to cancel out my "bad genes." I begin paddling. Green meadows appear. Birds chirp in the distance. Today, Carol lives with advanced bulbar ALS. This cure's in trial mode, unavailable. "It can be five to ten years before a drug can go from the first clinical trial to being submitted for

approval by Health Canada" ("Clinical"). The disease fighters are working on it.

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I'll Love You Forever, Buds

CARLY ZATZMAN

NOTHING LASTS forever. This is a saying that I have learned and reiterated constantly throughout my life. In a lifetime, if we are lucky, we are blessed with meeting a few people who can contribute to who we are as people, and they help us grow. These people that we meet throughout our lives are not going to be there forever. I learned this pretty early on when I had to experience my first true form of loss. When we are young, we do not think about the end; we feel as though our lives have only just begun. We have so much to offer, see, and achieve. This is true to some extent. If we are generally healthy, with little to no complications, we do get to experience a long, fulfilling life. Some are not as fortunate, and don't get the opportunity to reach their full potential.

If any experience has changed me at all in my lifetime up to this point, it is the death my grandmother, whom I called Buddie. I was old enough to have many memories and understand the situation far better then my younger siblings could at the time of her death. Some people don't know what they have until it's gone, but I'm very confident in saying I knew exactly what I had. Knowing this made the process of grief and loss even harder for me. We used to go on drives together, go to the movies, have sleepovers on New Year's Eve, and talk on the phone every day. These are just a few of the special moments I have shared with her. Buddie was an exceptional woman who had a love of jewellery. She would design jewellery using her creative mind, and constantly tried to work on improving her pieces. Buddie inspires me every day to be the best person I can be. My Buddie was someone I

could count on for anything. If I was afraid to tell my parents something, I would tell her. If I wanted to make plans, she was the first person I would ask. If I wanted support, she was always there for me.

I remember this day perfectly. My mom's cellphone was off the entire day. It was a great day. We had the best time together. The weather was warm and sunny. The food we had that day was awesome, no complaints whatsoever. It's crazy how such a perfect day can turn into the worst day imaginable. We got back to the hotel room and were watching movies before boarding the cruise ship the next morning. My mom turned her cellphone back on and had several missed calls. She bolted from the room, and when I saw this happen I knew something must have been wrong. My mom didn't come back for a long time, and the whole time I sat quietly because I had such a weird feeling that something had gone wrong and it was about my Buddie. My mom pulled my dad out of the room quickly, and my mom didn't look like herself when I saw this happen. Next thing I know, my dad walks in the room, calls us over, and tells us that Buddie was gone. Those were his exact words. I remember the feeling of my heart physically breaking when he said those words to me. I'd never seen my dad so emotional before, and I was in a traumatic shock because I was under the impression that she was getting better. I didn't believe she died, I didn't think it was real. I felt emotionless, broken, tired, and numb. My Buddie was gone, and I couldn't do anything about it. She passed away quickly and with little to no pain. By the time help arrived, it was too late.

Something I loved the most about my Buddie was her kind, generous heart. She is part of the reason I am the way I am. She always told me I had a good heart, and to make her proud I always make it a priority of mine to keep that up even when it gets hard. Buddie would always donate to important causes, hold the door for strangers, and put others before herself. I still think to this day if there was anyone who could help me through grief it, was Buddie. I just wasn't prepared for the fact that the first person I would need to grieve for would be her. The only person who could keep up my attitude would have been Buddie.

It's very difficult for me to hear other people my age not appreciating their grandparents while they are alive. I'm extremely sensitive to seeing people with their grandparents, especially at huge events such as graduations, weddings, or bar mitzvahs. I remind myself when I get upset that I was lucky to have her in my life for as long as I

did. She was all four grandparents in one to me, and I wouldn't trade that. As I grew older, I came to terms with myself that my Buddie was everything and more to me for thirteen years. I was so fortunate to have known her for that amount of time. This loss was so sudden for me, and I replay it in my mind to this day. I think there that in a lifetime everyone at one point can go back to a moment that made their heart hurt. Buddie's sudden and unexpected death was that moment for me. My Buddie was sixty-nine years old and generally healthy. She had high blood pressure and was not regularly active, but other than that she had no serious health problems. My Buddie was the type of person who kept things quiet when she was in pain. For months, she was feeling a pain in her stomach and did not say anything. In early December 2009, this caught up with her. The pain was unbearable, and she had to immediately go to the hospital where they told her she had a hernia. Hearing this, I thought the doctors would handle it, operate, she would get better, and everything would go back to normal. She started gaining her strength back and was on the road to recovery. She left the hospital and got to return to her condo where she felt most at home. My mom would only bring me to visit out of my siblings because I was the oldest and my family didn't want everyone seeing her in her sick state. This made me feel as though my family thought I was capable of handling serious and emotional situations.

My family is Jewish, and in my religion when a girl turns twelve or thirteen she has a bat mitzvah. This is a coming-of-age ceremony where a Jewish girl reads from the Torah to claim her entrance into adulthood. Unfortunately, this was all happening just a few weeks before my bat mitzvah. I was having it with my sister because I was thirteen and she was twelve. Now that I'm older, I understand a common connection between the timing of my bat mitzvah and Buddie's death. Both were coming-of-age experiences. Both experiences gave me new forms of responsibility as well as awareness and maturity. At my bat mitzvah, I wrote a speech for my Buddie and lit a candle in her honour. This made me feel as if she was there or at least watching over me. I also read a passage to describe how I felt at this time in my life and what I wanted to strive for emotionally in my everyday life. The Talmud states:

> Live each day to the fullest. Get the most from each hour, each day, and each age of your life. Then you can look forward with confidence and back without regrets. Be yourself but be your best self. Dare to be different and to follow your own

> star, and don't be afraid to be happy. Enjoy what is beautiful. Love with all your heart and soul. Believe that those you love, love you. Forget what you have done for your friends and remember what they have done for you. Disregard what the world owes you and concentrate on what you owe the world. When you are faced with a decision, make the decision as wisely as possible—then forget it. The moment of absolute certainty never arrives. Blessed is the generation in which the old listen to the young, and double blessed is the generation in which the young listen to the old.

I choked up while reading this piece from the Talmud, as it described my current state of mind and represented my religion.

Mourning was a horrible experience that each member of my family did in a different way. My brother was throwing up. My sister watched movies to get her mind off of it. I cried a lot, and tried to balance time alone and time spent with people. All I could think was that Buddie wasn't supposed to go yet. This was only a few short weeks from my bat mitzvah. She had the invitation on her fridge, and she even saw the dress that I was going to wear for it. It was heartbreaking to know that she wasn't going to be there for this milestone in my life. I started thinking about how this was only one of the many milestones she wasn't going to see. I wanted her to see me graduate middle school, I wanted her to see my first day of high school, I wanted her to see my university acceptance, my wedding, my first child, I wanted her to see everything. It bothers me that I've grown so much since I was thirteen and she didn't get to meet so many new sides of me. She will never know my career path, or meet my best friends, or learn about my accomplishments and goals. I still wish she could know these things.

I continue to let this day affect me but not hold me back. I know that she would be happy where I'm at currently and I keep her close to me with sentimental jewellery that she has given me growing up. Jewellery is very important to me because it is a complete reminder of her. Buddie used to love crafting her jewellery. She focused on improving her work and helping her business grow. In a way, this is what she has done with me. She has helped me improve on myself and allowed me to grow as an independent individual just like she has done with her pieces and business. Essentially, she shaped and moulded her jewellery and her granddaughter. To this day, I don't watch family

movies because it's hard to see her. It's hard for me to see how things used to be and how they are not the same now. My Buddie was always laughing, and we were together every day. She's in every home movie.

Death is a part of life, and we must understand that it happens eventually and that life goes on afterwards. I hope to have expressed the emotions that surrounded me regarding this time. I don't talk about it much, but it doesn't mean she doesn't cross my mind every day. My Buds was something special, and I'm so grateful that I got to know her for a short thirteen years. If I could go back, I wouldn't do anything differently. Life goes on, but it leaves a mark, that's for sure. I'll love you forever, Buds.