



SPARK^{*}

A REVIEW OF NSCC STUDENT LITERARY & ARTISTIC EXPRESSION



SPARK 2020 **volume 12**

sparked by inspiration

Through poetry and stories, photographs and drawings, Spark showcases the talent and spirit of students at North Shore Community College.

This twelfth issue of Spark is dedicated to the persistence of vision, forward movement, and the knowledge that creativity is its own reward. **Enjoy.**

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on the cover:

Peony in Acrylic | HOLLY HALVERSON



Autumn View Over Sleepy Hollow Farm | PHONG HUYNH

A Regret by Zac Scott

I'm a regret
and a mistake
you made

It's not as fun
Sober
That which seems
Enthralling
Drunk

She sat at the end
of my bed, like it
Was some hierarchy of
Shame. The tan, gray room
Her curly brown hair.

The seconds turning into
Minutes. I lost it there,
I loved her, in a way
Of opiate dreams and
Nicotine fiends, scraping
away at the label which
Never seems to fully
Come off.

■

I'm Alive by Kaitlyn Eaton

No matter how much people hurt me
My heart keeps beating
No matter how many hurtful things people had said
I'm still breathing
No matter how many bones you have broken with sticks and stones
I stand up on my own two feet
No matter how much hate towards me
I'm alive
While my heart keeps beating
The negative feelings start to dissipate
Others negative energy vanishes without a trace
As my lungs start to exhale
The negative energy disintegrates into waste matter
That Ignites into flames
Never to return again
It's time to say goodbye to negativity
For once in for all
Because I'm alive and I'm still living

■



Photography | *MARIO ORLANDINO*

Pillars of Creation

by **William Reddy**

What is it about
The sky on a clear night

That draws our
Eyes to the star speckled
Heavens

Do we gaze in search of answers
Of meaning
Of memories long forgotten

It's almost as if
We are looking home
Back to our origin

to our place among
The gods



Juice Wrld | *DAVID WILSON*



a like poem

by **Charlie Heath**

a smile from across the room.
gentle eyes,
the window into a kind soul.
soft voices
echoing in a small room.
watching the way
hands move in the air
as laughter bounces
off thin walls.
shifting
from hesitant and nervous
to genuine and unabashed.
wound tight in my head,
surroundings still.
anxious thoughts
entangled in my chest
ease away.
intense as they had been,
our world is still.
cold, crisp air outside
but unrivaled
warmth and comfort inside.
inside,
held in hands,
packed into glances.
looks that calm
the way words
could only dream of.
departure
from sanctuary the room
had become.
a quick, fleeting embrace
followed by another
tenderhearted smile.

■



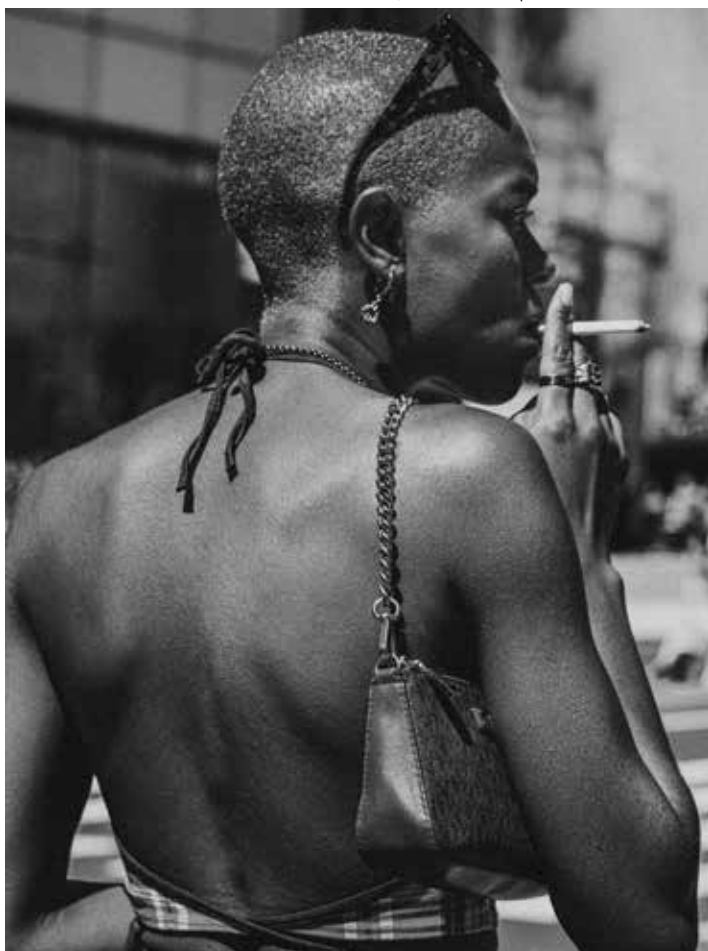
clockwise (from top left):

Spotlight | *SAMANTHA THISTLE*

Typographic Portrait and Magazine Layout | *VICTORIA MARSHALL*

Flight Delayed Due to Rain | *REBECCA GOSIEWSKI*

New York Aug 26, 2019 | *PHONG HUYNH*



Dancing with Dolphins

by Kayla Thornton

My mother and I never saw eye to eye. I was the eldest child and somehow that meant that I could never do anything right in her eyes. Growing up I had always wanted to be Ariel the little mermaid. I had always dreamed of becoming an oceanographer or a marine biologist. I genuinely loved the ocean and I never had any fear of even the murkiest darkest depths. Perhaps this was because my mother had taken me to every beach our state had to offer from the moment I was born. The one thing my mother and I had in common was our shared love of the beach. Every time I went into the water, she would have to drag me out of the surf. I never wanted to leave the ocean.

It was a sunny April day in Hawaii and I was happy to have escaped the snow back in Massachusetts. Today I decided I would go on an expedition that was the fulfillment of a lifetime dream. Emily was our tour guide. She had beautiful cinnamon colored skin and exquisite almond shaped eyes of emerald green and she was saying, "I just wanted to let you know that the water conditions, which are extremely harsh today, lessens our chance of being able to see dolphins, let alone swim with them. Keep in mind that these animals we may possibly encounter are wild, and wild animals cannot be controlled. There is no guarantee that any of them, especially the dolphins, will appear." We were on a beat-up, run-down Jaws looking boat for our excursion. Despite my first impression the inside seemed well maintained, a pristine snow colored white, spaciouly containing an island of six bench rows complete with individual dry storage bins for myself and the other nine adventurous individuals who were also participating. Navigating the boat was a captain who looked exactly how you would imagine with a big white beard and a nautical hat. He had the newest technology as far as tracking and radio equipment went. The captain flicked on the dolphin radio and we proceeded to move in search of dolphins.

After several stops, the day seemed to be over. I was sad, to say the least, knowing my dream of swimming with dolphins would surely never come to pass. Suddenly, a fleet of the other dolphin excursion tour boats appeared on the horizon moving rapidly towards our anchor in Waimea Bay. It felt like an episode of Game Of Thrones with warships sailing at a ferocious speed and preparing to attack. Our boat captain and Emily turned to each other and mumbled a few things. Then Emily spoke, "Okay guys there may be dolphins in this area. I know the tour has had a few delays and we are already past time. If we are lucky, the boats chasing down the dolphins may lead them to us. We are going to drop an anchor here. Is anyone brave enough to get in the water?" I raised my hand and yelled, "I'll do it !!!" The Australian couple with us said to me, "You're a crazy little Sheila, ay?" I just shrugged my shoulders and said, "You only live once. I don't know when this opportunity will come again." The captain dropped the anchor, I quickly put on my mask and fins. I shoved my phone in a protective water proof bag and wrapped my disposable water proof camera around my wrist. I walked to the edge as Emily said to me, "Are you sure? The water is awfully rough." I looked at Emily and calmly replied, "I'm from New England. Home of undertows and great white sharks. The ocean doesn't scare me at all." I proceeded to jump off into the deep.

The water in this area was cooler than the other areas we had been in. The surface was darker, quite murkier as well. The water was thrashing me about and it took a good two minutes to keep my balance and hold my head above it. Suddenly the people in my tour group along with Emily started to yell. I was about 20 feet away from the boat at this point, partially due to how the currents were pulling me. The group was pointing and waving and shouting but it was all muffled. I could only hear waves crashing around me. I then felt a large bump on my leg. "Good God!" I thought to myself, "This is it, I'm going to die. This is how every shark attack victim describes the before when an attack happens." I started swimming as fast as I could towards the boat, my heart beating out of my chest.

When I heard Emily's voice telling the other people to gear up, I decided to stop and look down. I'm glad I did. At first glance I noticed a swift moving shadow, followed by a high-pitched clicking noise. A dolphin! I had seen a dolphin at last.

I dove downwards, pulling out my phone, and proceeded to record and snap as many pictures as I could. It wasn't just one dolphin. To my surprise, it was an entire pod of dolphins, and I was swimming for God knows how long beside them. These enchanting, majestic, and free-spirited creatures with skin shining like stars in the night sky encircled me with the grace of skilled ballerinas, these creatures so human yet alien to me and emanating such intelligence, innocence, and beauty. Playfully, they breached the water, spinning into the air and churning the water around me. And I was dancing alongside dolphins, pirouetting beneath the water in their Milky Way of an underwater galaxy. I could not believe I was in the open ocean, viewing them in their natural habitat. There were mother dolphins nursing babies and even an albino dolphin, which is a rare occurrence. This was better than National Geographic. At one point, I lost my breath and had to take a breather and the dolphins noticed I had stopped. A quarter of the pod then came back around to swim beside me. For 30 minutes, I swam alongside them, swirling in the midst of the pod surrounded by their agile slick muscular bodies. Until the boat started blowing its horn and the dolphins parted ways towards the deeper part of the ocean.

As I climbed up the ladder back into the boat, my mask filled with tears. Pulling it off, I inhaled a deep breath, turned toward the water, and watched the last dorsal fins trail off into the horizon. The sun began to set. Sitting down, I viewed the newly recorded footage on my phone. I wiped salty happy tears off my now sunburned face and smiled from ear to ear quite possibly with the biggest smile I had ever smiled in my entire life.

My life forever changed that day. It propelled me to get involved with ocean conservation and changed my outlook on my behavior at the beach. When I go

to the beach now, I always bring a small trash bag with me. I spend an hour combing the beach for any trash other beach goers may have left behind. I respect and admire the marine life of our oceans. They provide so much vitality to our ecosystem and we need to do our parts to conserve their environment. The land may be ours, but the ocean is not. We are just visitors and, while we are visiting, it is only polite and just to treat the ocean and its many inhabitants with the upmost respect.



Sunlight Swan | *REBECCA GOSIEWSKI*



Self-Portrait Illustration | *STACEY CLAVIJO*



Welcome Home

by Jessica Watson

My parents had gone on vacation. I was left with the task of house sitting. It was an easy assignment. Or so I thought.

The familiar halls echoed with memories. All were pleasant and nostalgic. The sweet sense of freshly baked cookies and the hypnotic sound of birds lulled my senses. I was home.

Soon the sun went down and sleep pulled at my mind. Trudging off to bed, I curled up in my old room. I kept the door to the hall slightly ajar. The lush blue blanket pulled me into its hold. Sleep came fast.

I woke up with my heart pounding in my chest. I could hear the accelerated rhythmic thumping in my ears. Thump. Thump. Thump.

Sweat started to form on my brow and a tremor developed in my body. Taking a deep breath, I tried to calm myself. There was no apparent reason for my sudden panic.

My eyes drifted across the room to my old closet door. My heart thumped fast. I saw the doorknob start to jiggle in the dark. I heard the turning of the metal.

Old nightmares flooded my mind of creatures lurking in the shadows and deep recesses of my house.

A creak came from the hall. It was from a loose floorboard. My head snapped in that direction. I could make out the outline of a long slender hand wrapping and curling around the white door.

Instincts took over. I pulled my covers over my head and slammed my eyes shut. Doing my best not to whimper, I listened to the sounds. What would normally be considered subtle was deafening. As I heard a strange crinkling, an unsettling thought hit me. My parents weren't here to save me this time.

Morning came and I could see sunshine through my blanket fortress. Slowly, I dared to leave my sanctuary. On the foot of my bed was a small piece of paper. My hand shook as I lifted it up. It read, welcome home.





Cork Board

by Jarrett Fravel

if your mind is a cork board the
posters and pictures you pin are the
thoughts and memories you hold but
i've never seen a cork board without holes from the past

what was forgotten?
what was sacrificed?
an old friend's name?
a mathematical formula?
one broken promise?
one petty lie?
who decides what stays and goes?
god?
fate?
even so,
where do they settle?

Memories forgotten are
pinned to foreign cork by
tongue
hand
ear
eye

maybe the mind, like cork
changes subtly
and impressions of the past
while seldom remembered
are salient
in character



clockwise (from bottom left):

Juice Wrld & XXXTentacion Quote | DAVID WILSON

Steam Punk Dress Acrylic | ANDREA BADOLATO

Empowerment | WALKIRIA DIAZ



Portrait of a Well Behaved Woman

by L. G. Woods

The photographer's trick with the mirror allows the subject to be seen in two dimensions; the front of her and the back. The front is a reflection of crystalline blue eyes that sparkle in the light of the room. The photograph shows the shadows of her hollowed cheeks, and the long, narrow bones of her fingers wrapped around the muted pastels of carefully arranged flowers. She is a bride in a long white dress. Every detail of her gown is defined by either the light it deflects or the shadow it holds. She has painted her lips until they glisten, they are wet and pink. She is tiny in the frame of the massive mirror, drowning in wisps of lace and silk tulle.

On a mountaintop, somewhere far from here, there's a gauze of fog that clings to a thin white birch in the exact same way.

She stands like a statue. In the room, a single window leaks light from the morning. Her back is to the photographer. From behind, she is nothing but a shadow, the umbra in the eclipse of the room. Because of this, certain details are lost or muted. For instance, I can only barely see how her gown scallops down her back in a "V" formation. It is a winged migration of stitches ending in a sharp, silk point. This is where the string of pearl buttons begins, though this beautiful detail is lost in the shadow of the moment. There is a candid picture, taken later in the night, after the vows had been spoken. It was after the cake was cut. The bride looks back over her shoulder, eyes sparkling like bubbling champagne, and a trail of silk buttons runs down her back.

The bride's most notable feature is her curling cascade of auburn hair. It shimmers in the light of the flash. Her ribboned strands hang obediently down either side of her delicate face. I cannot help but think of her hair as the vine of a morning glory, her body the white trellis, as rigid and as still as wood.

Her mother is staged obediently to the right, half concealed by the shadow of the frame. Her dress is an indigo blue, and it sits politely

halfway down her calves. The gown is made of rough, unrefined silk that catches light in its folds. It cinches at the waist and bellows at the hips. "It's sophisticated," the sales clerk at the bridal store said, nodding her head in avid agreement with herself. Then leaning forward, as if to tell a secret, she added with a wink, "And it hides a multitude of sins."

It was the same promise that sold her on her new hairstyle. Her hair is cropped along the line of her jaw. Two identical curls turn into the round curves on either side of her chin. They rest on the soft pillow of skin that has fallen forward into her doughy neck. She was promised that the curls would hide the sag of her chin. The style would conceal the way her skin folds into itself like the bellows of her skirt.

The photograph tells the story of two women, each doing as they were instructed. Just as the shutter snaps, they cling to their smiles. Two women, holding their poses with the same delicate control that they'd hold a baby as it cries.

■



left to right:

Stinson | HANNAH RUST

Daydream | ANNIE MCMENAMIN



Sin City

by Samantha Rosano

I can remember being taught repeatedly as a child to pay more attention, to be more cautious, to think before I acted, and to stop pushing limits. I remember being warned that my luck would one day run out and the consequences of my actions would catch up with me. But I always brushed off those warnings and went ahead with my own agenda, which was mostly reckless in the pursuit of something, anything, that would shake my world and make me feel alive and whole. At first, I pushed the envelope by challenging authority just for the sake of a reaction. As I got older, these small acts of rebellion turned into physical risks such as jumping off bridges and cliffs, speeding, drinking and partying, and generally pushing limits past the brink of danger. I welcomed any dare that came my way. And none of those broken bones or lost limbs or decapitations that I was warned about ever materialized. Something else did, though, and it dominated my life so fast and so completely that I had no idea what had happened.

On one particularly chilly and quiet night in October of 2011, I made my way through downtown Lynn with an air of familiar desperation, topped off with some fear and spread evenly over deeply buried emotional pain. I was alone, as I usually was in those days; company just seemed to hinder my goal of acquiring the necessary supplies to keep my pain and emotions comatose. Even though it was a brisk, cold early morning around 2 am, I was sweating and uncomfortable. My heart rate was elevated, my skin so sensitive that my jacket felt abrasive and suffocating. My throat was dry and scratchy and that meant I was soon to enter the most miserable phase of heroin withdrawal- my body rejecting anything inside it by whatever means necessary. The less there was in my stomach, the more painful it was and it lasted for hours. I swallowed my rising panic and reminded myself that I was very close to relief if I could just push through. I needed to get to Sal's house where that relief was waiting, a golden syringe emanating a glowing white light. I was almost at the end of my miserable 3-hour journey. I had walked

from Revere down the Lynn Marsh Road in a state of nauseous hypervigilance, wincing every time a set of headlights flooded my brain with enhanced intensity, through my dilated pupils. The city was alive. She was ugly and intimidating, arms crossed, watching my every move, daring me to give her a reason to swallow me alive. I wished she would.

I turned the corner into a dark alley shortcut. As I came out on the other end, I noticed another person slip down an alley 3 blocks ahead of me. I didn't pay it much attention at the time, but I do remember thinking this was a little peculiar because the alley looked like the dead-end where the local strip mall stored its garbage. Then again, I was only 10 minutes away from Sal's so I allowed myself to relax a little. As I approached the garbage alley, I had a panicked urge to cross the street, but before I could, a tall man dressed in all black stepped out of the shadows. I immediately noticed one of his eyes- milky and likely not functioning. He smiled. I started to back up, but he was faster and stronger, especially in my weakened state of withdrawal and malnourishment. He grabbed me, pinned my arms behind my back, and forced me down the dark alley. Extreme terror and an unparalleled sense of finality washed over me. I froze, sure that this was my miserable end. I almost surrendered, but, as he took out a serrated butterfly knife with a curved tip, my focus honed in on it, and a will and a strength came pumping through me that was not my own. The city whispered, "Not today." I knew I had one shot which was going to take every ounce of energy I could muster, even though there was a solid chance that I would lose, that my poor choices had finally caught up with me. If I was going down, I was going down fighting, true to my character.

I kned him as forcefully as I could in the groin. As he faltered, I took my chance and pushed him as hard as I could against the dumpster. He dropped the knife and I grabbed it. Now I was in control and he was backed against the wall. He took a step toward me, and I jabbed the knife forward into his neck, just enough for him to understand I was serious about defending myself with any force necessary. His pants had loosened and come down around his knees in the scuffle and I took that as



Photography | *MARIO ORLANDINO*

my opportunity to sprint away. I didn't stop or look back until I got to Sal's house and I was safe inside.

It was one of the most terrifying, adrenaline-inducing moments of my life and I wish I could say that it was enough for me to decide to make some changes in my life, but I can't. I continued using for years after and added that night to the vault of unresolved trauma and pain inside me.

I haven't thought much about that night until more recently, thanks mostly to this writing assignment. I now see that pivotal moment through a different lens, one tinted with gratitude for the last four years of my life, during which I've had freedom from my prison of drug use. I know now that I get to choose how I see the world, along with the people and circumstances around me. When I look back on that night, I can see that the city was on my side. She was supporting and protecting me, just like all the other moving parts of the universe that come together in profound harmony- a power greater than me, my addiction, or any singular force

on its own. There is a bigger picture, and not only am I alive to see it, but I'm actually living and I can't think of anything more beautiful.

■

Flow State

by David Kimemiah

My Mind is locked In
The sun beaming on me
Breathing is fast and controlled

Madness!

We're down by five
minutes to go

The pressure is on
The next tackle is mine

And the game is set
The days of training
The hours of running

Long lift sessions
Conditioned my body

The mind is like a knife

It is sharpened with experience

This is my trail

I dig in my cleats

The ground is soft

I hear my teammates

Call for extra defence

I slide to the right

With my hand across

For the illusion I cover
the whole field

The minutes turn to seconds

I hear the clock in my head

Clicking away

Then I see him

last chance for them to score

He is the fastest, the strongest, the tallest

and maybe the best Rugby player

He gets the ball right in front of me

My eyes widen with excitement

This is it the moment I was waiting for

To finish the game on my own terms

Then I pounce on him

To block his attack

I go low and aim for center mass

He drops his shoulder

Uses all his might to drive

Through me with great ferocity

But yet I hold up

And for a moment his power

Did not seem so marvelous

We were on equal ground

In a flash were stuck

In battle like two Titans

He drove me back

I held my ground, not giving an inch

I had ended his advance

I could almost taste the champagne

Victory is near

This is my final stage

My resistance is worth it

He gives up the yards and fails his goal

I made the tackle

That seals the game but yet

It wasn't just up me his teammates

Moved the ball some more

As I emerged from the scuffle

The efforts of my team

Is despoiled

the opposition pushes forward

And scores in the closing seconds

My flow state was reached

But was not enough to complete

Our conquest.

■





Tracking a Coyote

by L. G. Woods

I stopped just short of the ridge
where the weight of his paws,
sinking into freshly laid snow
disappeared out of view.

If he had wanted to be seen
we would have met face to face-
Two men, hands on their holsters,
thumbs twitching, ready for the draw.

But his tracks disappeared over the crest.
He panted on, head hung low, tongue draped and
dragging low to the ground,
searching for my scent.

I stopped tracking the coyote because he was beautiful.
Out of my sight, he was free to hunt and prowl,
free to whine and dance in the rush of snow
kicked up by his frozen feet.
Out of my sight, he was free to sink back into this
glorious December morning;
to rest and to rummage,
to feel the sun that would too soon set
behind the pine ridge on the western horizon.

■

from left to right:

Cultura | KATTERINE MALDONADO

Acrylic Pour Art | ANDREA BADOLATO

Carpe Noctum | JILLIAN DION





The Dance | *HOLLY HALVERSON*

Princess

by **Matthew Mello**

Skin as pale like snow.

Hair long and black as night.

Dressed in your blood red lingerie.

Your lips black as coal and your eyes green as emeralds that could pierce the soul and cause a mans heart to melt. Slowly strokes her finger across my lips, pushing me onto her nice soft bed, linens made of the softest black silk that shines like the night sky.

Slowly crawling up to me, her lovely breast fill the front of her lingerie perfectly and the way her body and butt move as she moves up to me as if she was a cat slowly moving to catch its prey.

Kisses my lips with a bit of a nibble as she slowly strokes her hand against the left side of my face.

Kissing me more from my cheek to my ear and slowly whispers that I am hers and hers alone.

Feeling my body get goosebumps all over as she slowly kisses down to my neck, feeling her getting aroused, as she starts to grind herself against my crotch.

Feeling my body getting more and more turned on that's when I notice that her eyes have gone from a beautiful green to a bright red.

A smile forms from her face as a pair of fangs appear from her mouth, she opens her mouth and with great haste she bites down onto my neck but she dose it ever so slowly, so that the pain is slow which brings her such bliss.

Still feeling her grinding herself against me as she continues to bite down and suck out my blood.

She then stops, as she lifts up her head from my neck looking at her luscious black lips that are now stained with my blood, she leans forward and gently kisses my lips and tells me that I belong to her and only her as she takes my right hand and slowly caresses her breast with my hand how soft and firm they feel against my hand.

She kissed my lips even more and tells me not today but tomorrow is another day.

End?

■

The Idea of You by Charlie Heath

The bed feels so empty
without the idea of you
between its sheets.
Cold without your face
next to mine.

A frightening expanse,
void of you.
Void of hands to hold mine
(which desperately need to be held)
and void of that brightness
that used to fill my heart.

A heavy heart,
charred,
cracks
from time spent away from you.

I pour memories
into the cracks,
trying to fill them with joy.
They freeze and expand
like water under winter pavement.

Cold like winter,
the blankets pile on top of the bed
that is empty of the idea of you.

■

Boston is a Home | *SAMANTHA THISTLE*



Mangos by Aaliyah Cleghorn

It's funny, sometimes I look at a hammer
And see a mango.
Some people may say it's all just luck.
HmMMM...I'd have to agree and so say, yes.
Sometimes I think I am just a mutt.
To feel better, I look at a sunflower.

I think the best thing in life is a sunflower,
But my dad might just say it is a hammer.
Black and white mixed, is that considered a mutt?
The best fruit definitely isn't a mango.
Nothing in life is real, especially not luck,
Though my mom usually tells me yes.

The second hardest word to say is yes.
People will say it's based on luck.
The softest thing to bite is a mango,
the hardest to bite is a hammer.
Everyday gets better with a sunflower.
The cutest things in life are mutts.

I wonder who else in my life is a mutt.
I never like telling people yes,
Like a nail likes getting hit by a hammer;
Like sun enjoys going straight to the sunflower;
Like everyone avoids mangos;
Like everyone believes in luck.
Maybe no one actually believes in luck.
It all really came anyway from a sunflower.
Nobody needs to tell me yes
and that's because I'm a proud mutt.
I like to hit things with a hammer
but I still don't like mangos.

I definitely hate mangos.
I especially love furry, four-legged mutts.
Maybe dogs like sunflowers.
It could all be based on someone's luck.
Well, I mean, probably yes.
Unless the sunflower is a hammer.

Use a hammer to smash a mango.
Just tell me yes, tell me I'm a mutt.
With some luck, I'll find a sunflower.

■

When I Found Out

by Diana Diaz

What do you do when you are just a teenager and you find out something that you're not ready for? When I found out that my life was going to change forever, all of my plans and my dreams needed to be adjusted.

In the summer of 2016, my stomach felt like ants were crawling inside of me. I felt sore all the time. I constantly had the need to consume large amounts of eggs and pizza every day -- things I don't usually eat. But I didn't think too much about it. I was more focused on my upcoming senior year of high school. I was prepared to be a *savage* -- I was planning to play soccer, be on the track team, read a lot of books, and accomplish a lot of my goals as a writer.

Things don't always go the way you plan. Since my stomach pain became worse, I made an appointment with a doctor. After my physical exam, the doctor came back with a Spanish-speaking translator. I felt uncomfortable with the Spanish interpreter in the small room. I knew English, so why was she here? I couldn't express my frustration, I was so nervous when the doctor spoke. Her words became noise -- I just watched her mouth moving. When the interpreter translated in Spanish, it was still just noise. Their sounds were filling the room, their lips were moving, but my mind went blank. I could feel my body covered in goosebumps, but my mind was in another space.

I left the hospital without saying a single word. What was I supposed to do now? What would I tell my family? These were two of my big questions at that moment. On August 30, 2016, I found out that I was pregnant. I felt like all my dreams, plans, goals, and my hard work over the years were completely destroyed.

I walked around blindly -- no thoughts, no feelings. I lost my mind in a sea of tears. My whole body was shaking. My face was red like

my crystallized eyes. Trying to gain control over myself, I contacted the boy with whom I had sex. With my phone in my trembling hands, I texted him that I was pregnant, but I did not get a response. After one hour, he finally appeared in person and he said that he would accept his responsibility. He told me he loved me, and he would be there for me always. But two weeks later, I discovered this was a lie. He no longer wanted to be there. In fact, he told me to get an abortion. He said that he needed proof and that I should get a DNA report. In that moment, he made me feel like a *whore*. I'm not the type of person who has sex with multiple people around the same time. I was shocked when I found out that he was not the boy that I fell in love with. He was totally a different person -- he was an asshole. He made me feel worse than a piece of trash. I had never felt like that before.

While that feeling frustrated me, it was nothing compared to the fact that the person who was supposed to support me, my best friend, left me because I was pregnant. When we were younger, she promised that she would always be by my side, she lied, too. When she told me that she was ending the friendship with me because I was pregnant, I felt every part of me die. I had nobody to talk to, nobody who would give me a big hug, and say, "Everything will be okay." I felt so lonely. My world had turned upside down.

I was just a teenager going through a desperate time without knowing what to do. Starting school was my biggest fear. What would people say? How could I hide my pregnancy? Is everybody going to walk away from my life because of it? How would I overcome this? I couldn't figure out the answers to all these questions running through my mind. I tried hard to be strong and not pay attention to what people said and thought. But at night, when I got home, I thought about my long, sad day -- my heart broke, and my tears began falling out on their own. My eyes became drops of rubies again, and my dreams ceased to exist. I was suffering, but nobody could see it, therapy did not help. What was I supposed to do? I lost

every motivation to go to college or even finish high school. Savage? I never was a savage and certainly would not be. I was too young to go through this, but I was old enough to know better. This experience taught me my greatest lesson: Not everybody who you think will support you will stand by your side. I learned the true meaning of friendship and love. While I was crushed by the people I considered closest and truest to me, I felt empty when they left. Thankfully, I was wrong, and I was not completely alone. I had family and other friends who stood by my side.

With this new realization, I looked in the mirror and told myself, “This is not the end of the world! You are not the only girl to get pregnant!” I splashed cold water on my face, and made a commitment to myself: *I am going to graduate in 2017. I am going to college, and I will become a writer.* I finally accepted the fact that I was expecting, and I didn’t mind telling others. I had no reason to feel embarrassed. I had no reason to stop believing in my dreams and goals. I did not commit a crime to feel guilty about or hide.

While I was still distressed, I tried my best in school. I remembered the strong girl I was last year. At my after-school empowerment program called Teen Voices Emerging, I had written a poem about my struggles of coming to the U.S. I remembered how proud I felt having my poem “Dirty Rubies of Yin Yang” published into a film as part of the program. Now I was feeling defeated. I wondered what new path my destiny would take me. I was starting to feel hope again.

Then one day, I was met with a surprise: I found out that my poem “Dirty Rubies of Yin Yang” won the Regional Gold Key in the Scholastic Writing Award for Poetry. I could not believe it! I was so proud of myself for what I had achieved. My path now had a direction again. Hope was entering my life once more.

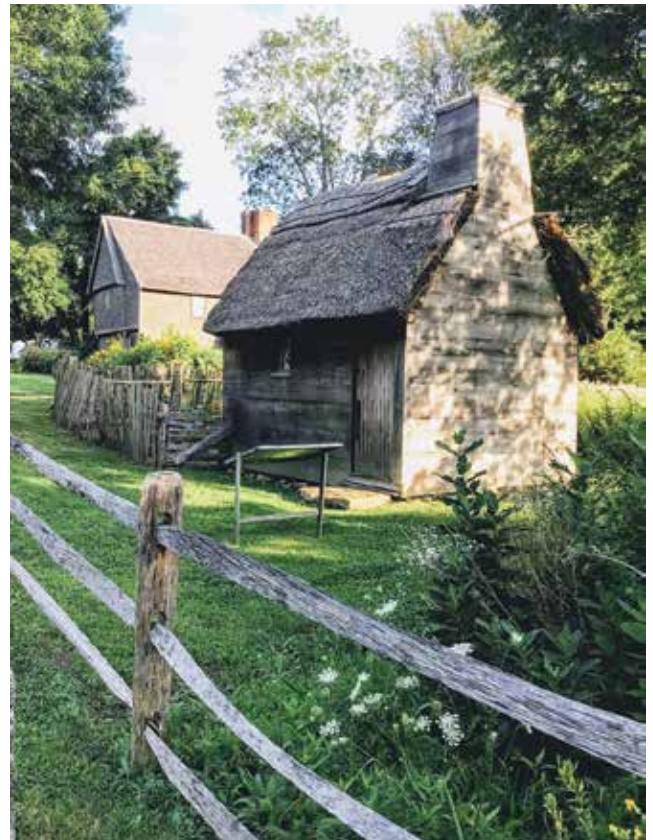
I attended an elegant award ceremony for the winners. It was a treasured moment in my life. I could not express my happiness or even explain how I was feeling at that time. It was a deep

pleasure, satisfaction, and sense of certainty. The gold key was the key to unlock and free the sadness in my broken heart.

A month later, I gave birth to a boy. The empty space inside of me overflowed when I met my son for the first time. Now he is the angel that gives me all that I ever needed. The past was difficult, but my present is here with my son and my poetic vision. My future is where my life really begins.

■

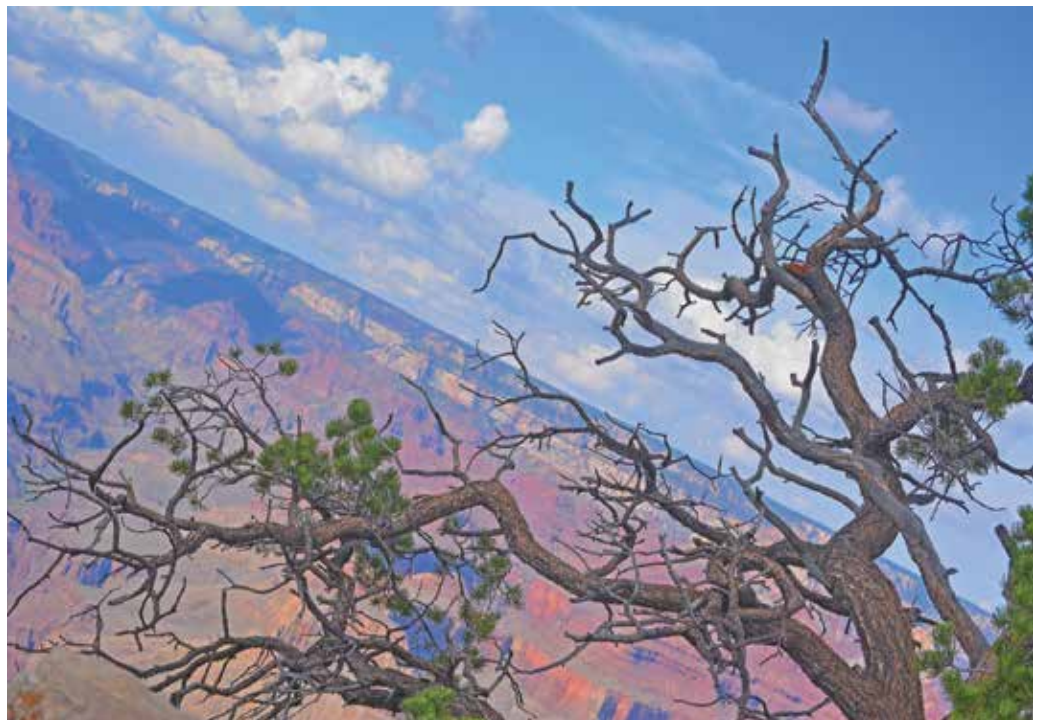
Ipswich | KAITLYN EATON



Remember...?

by Aaliyah Cleghorn

I close my eyes.
My toes are in the warm sand.
The sun is hitting my skin,
Giving me that warm feeling I love.
To my left...is you.
My heart is filled with love and warmth,
Your hand in mine.
Milk chocolate eyes locked on mine.
You open your mouth to say something....
My eyes open with a breath of air escaping,
Eyes focusing on my darkroom.
I remember you left a while ago,
Taking the sun with you....





my Green eyes

by **Kateri Campbell**

my Green eyes
they tell a story
poignant and real
one of
Joy
one of
Loss
in a life you'll never live
behind the complexities of their hue
there's something utterly new
something
Blue



clockwise (from top left):
Bloom | ANNIE MCMENAMIN
Swarm | ERIK STEFANOWSKI
Across Country Photography | VICTORIA MARSHALL

Small

by Charlie Heath

Sitting under the tree that dwarfs
her backyard

she pulls out a clementine.

An orange fruit laying in her delicate
hands, our eyes both sit on its skin.

My eyes are drawn in
on the way her hands
cup and cradle.

Her bitten down fingernails struggle
to tear back the peel.

I look up at the tree,
large and looming and old
then back to the clementine,
small and vibrant and fresh.

She's a lot like the clementine.

I'm a lot like her hands.

Eventually,
her fingers split open the peel.

Her lips smile with sweet triumph.

"Want half?"

Before I can answer she has broken
the aromatic round in half

and placed one gently in my hand.

She tears away a slice
and pops it into her mouth.

Glee plays on her content lips,
I can't help but let mine curl.

Her lips are not bitten like her fingernails but mine are.

I cannot afford the luxury
of kicking any anxious ticks.

Branches hang down above us.

I steal a glance at their leaves
and think of how soon they'll tinge orange
or red.

The smell of citrus perfumes where we sit in the shade of the oak.

We watch each other eat, smiling.

I feel small.

The fruit feels small.

Our world is small.



left to right:

New Yorkers Aug 26, 2019 | PHONG HUYNH

Savanna Spirit | REBECCA GOSIEWSKI



Yoko Ili

School, Work & Home

by Sheila Girard

Everyone should have a place to call HOME
A place to rest your head in a bed, not a car, couch or street, but a place to call HOME.

Whether you are young or old, daily life working or going to school
Daily life, is hard enough.

Keeping yourself busy during the day helps,
but at night...
You should feel loved & be secure and stable.
To a place that YOU call HOME.

Not a car, couch or street

There are so many homeless and it's heartbreaking to see.
You need to step up the beat and get off the street.

Help is here for you
Not all have a place to call HOME.

Go to School
Go to Work
Go to a Home

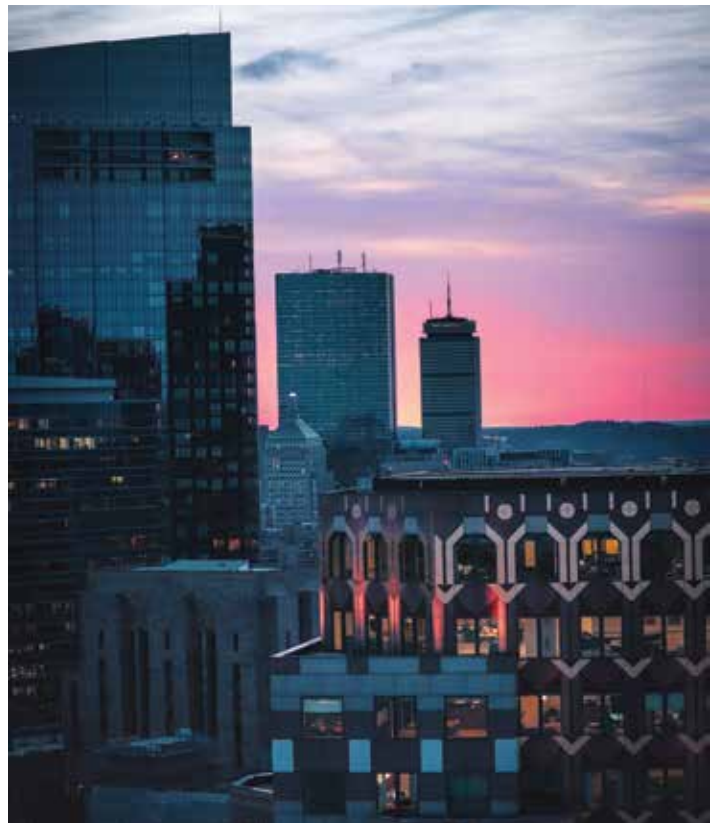
Make it a positive day for someone to
stay stable & able for them to live one more day.

Every day is the same, for us all...

Go to School
Go to Work
Go to a HOME

Make it special for someone and
make them able to stay stable in a HOME

■



Her Choice

by Kateri Campbell

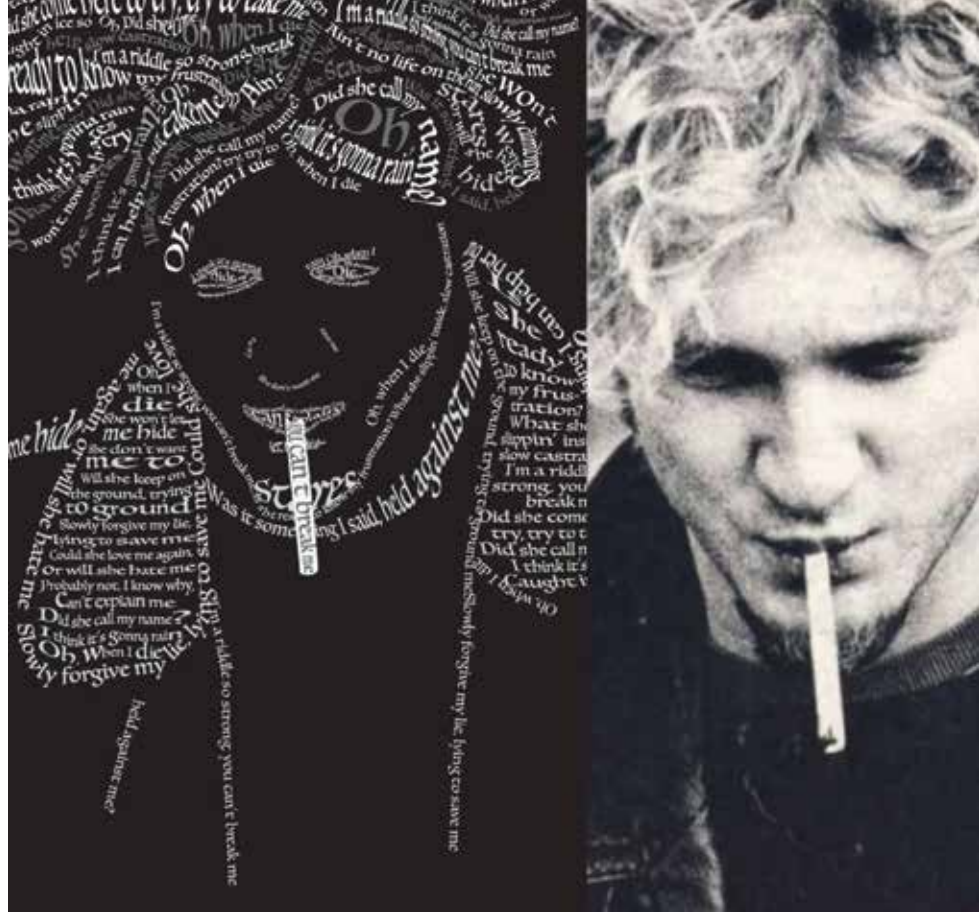
jewels sparkle on her slender throat
 casting iridescent shadows
 as she walks into the room
 where the darkness is bright
 and light is a myth
 as she conquers
 death and pain
 with one
 Yes
 Yes

clockwise (from bottom left):
 Photography | MARIO ORLANDINO
 Art Rock | HOLLY HALVERSON
 Prone | LINDA DONEHEY



top to bottom:

Layne Staley Typography Portrait |
ANDREA BADOLATO
Pollination 101 | ERIK STEFANOWSKI



The Edge of Wood

by L.G. Woods

If you were to ask me about my childhood,
I would tell you to walk barefoot to the edge of a dense forest,
to step in time with the dragonflies that spring ahead of you,
as if leading you on- past purple clover flowers, wild growing tiger lilies and Shasta daisies.
Stop, but only for a moment, to smell the pineapple weeds,
feel the tickle of them between your toes,
how gently they graze the calluses of your dirty feet.
You'll let your hair grow long-passed the stumped wings of your shoulder blades-
The humid summer air will gather each lock in its thick fingers,
Brushing its way through your tangled mane.

If you want to know about my childhood, you will have to wait.
The sun will roll into the thicket, the forest will close around it.
The purple-orange sky will mix on its grand palette,
it will turn admiral blue.
It is only now, after you've waited, that you'll see them,
the first flickers of light in the shadows of trees.
Before there were stars, there were fireflies.
You will not dare to step into their wood, but you will stand,
your toes perched on the edge, as if ready for flight.
The dress you are wearing is now dirty.
It hangs over the thin birch of your body.
You are one of the wild things.

There's a single light behind you,
it's on the edge of a leaning barn.
When night pulls its shade down on the day
it is the light from the barn that will guide you home.
Your grandfather will be tinkering with a long-retired,
rusted piece of farm equipment that he will never use again.
A single light will buzz,
a golden bulb hanging from a thin wire, caged in a metal frame,
casting light in every direction.
You will think of the firefly you once caught and placed in a mason jar.
How it lit up your room as you slept, but by morning had burned out and died.
You will stand at the door of the barn,
the wind will creak through the old pine planks,
you will watch him.
Long ago, the pinewood barn was tan and oiled
now it sits on the edge of an overgrown field, dried grey under the sun.
It is not unlike the once mahogany hair of your grandfather, now sun-dried and lifeless
resting flat against his head like straws of hay.





Snack Break | *ERIK STEFANOWSKI*

XXXTentacion x Lil Uzi Vert | *DAVID WILSON*



Aquamarine

by **Gabriela Garcia**

In marine waters, I decided to go in and swim.
In an aquamarine ocean, I have jumped into the water
without knowing how deep it is.
I try to find myself one more time, while I try to choose
which sea current will take me to my destination.
In a world full of so many marine roads it is difficult
to distinguish by which current I should navigate.
I am not a mermaid, but my soul is willing
to take a leap of faith in the mariana trench.
I don't know what marine port I will get to, but
I know that the ocean will tell me where to go.
I am aware that the safest decision is to stay
on the coast and wait for three moons to sail, however,
I run the risk of losing myself and dying.
The sea calls me and my soul gets carried away by the waves,
while time passes and I decide to leave everything behind.
I may never see the peaceful waters of this side of the world again,
but when the north wind blows I will remember them.
Today I leave everything behind to get into unknown waters,
today I change my destiny to discover how far I am going.



Two Friends, an Apple and Pear | *HANNAH RUST*

Something About A Big City | *SAMANTHA THISTLE*





clockwise (from top left):
Fire War Acrylic | ANDREA BADOLATO
Before the Lillies Bloom | ANNIE MCMENAMIN
Garden of Reeds | ERIK STEFANOWSKI



Life is Good

by Jack Norris

Life is good
Water, Air, Grass and Wood
Life is good
Live everyday to the fullest as you should
No more saying “I wish I could”
Because life is too good

As we grow old never forget the past
Cherish the good times because they won’t always last
So when it gets hard brush it off with some laughs
And carry on, but remember to not go too fast
Life is good

Our minds are filled with Anxiety, Fear, and Stress
Just keeping pushing forward, try to stay away from that mess
For if we get stuck, it will limit us from performing our best
That challenge is all apart of the test
Work hard now, and later that will guarantee rest

No more saying “I wish I could”
Live everyday to the fullest as you should
And never forget that life is good



Graphic Self Portrait | HOLLY HALVERSON

Sunflower

by Jessica Watson

I am a Sunflower
Bright yellow petals, tall stems that stand strong
Oh what a pretty flower
This is all that you think of at my name
What you don’t notice is my value beyond a picture
I am more than aesthetic

My seeds treat inflammation, as well as being a tasty snack.

I can filter out radiation from the earth with my skilled roots allowing clean food to grow.
Because of this, my brothers are working hard in Chernobyl so that future life can thrive

Hell, my kind has even been to space
They’ve seen the beautiful blue world that is the earth from afar
Not many can claim that accomplishment these days

All that I ask is that you look past my pleasing exterior
View the world in wide curious eyes and see what so many other ignore
My worth is greater than a photo
Just like so many others

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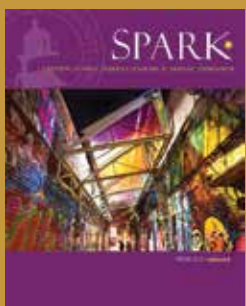
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