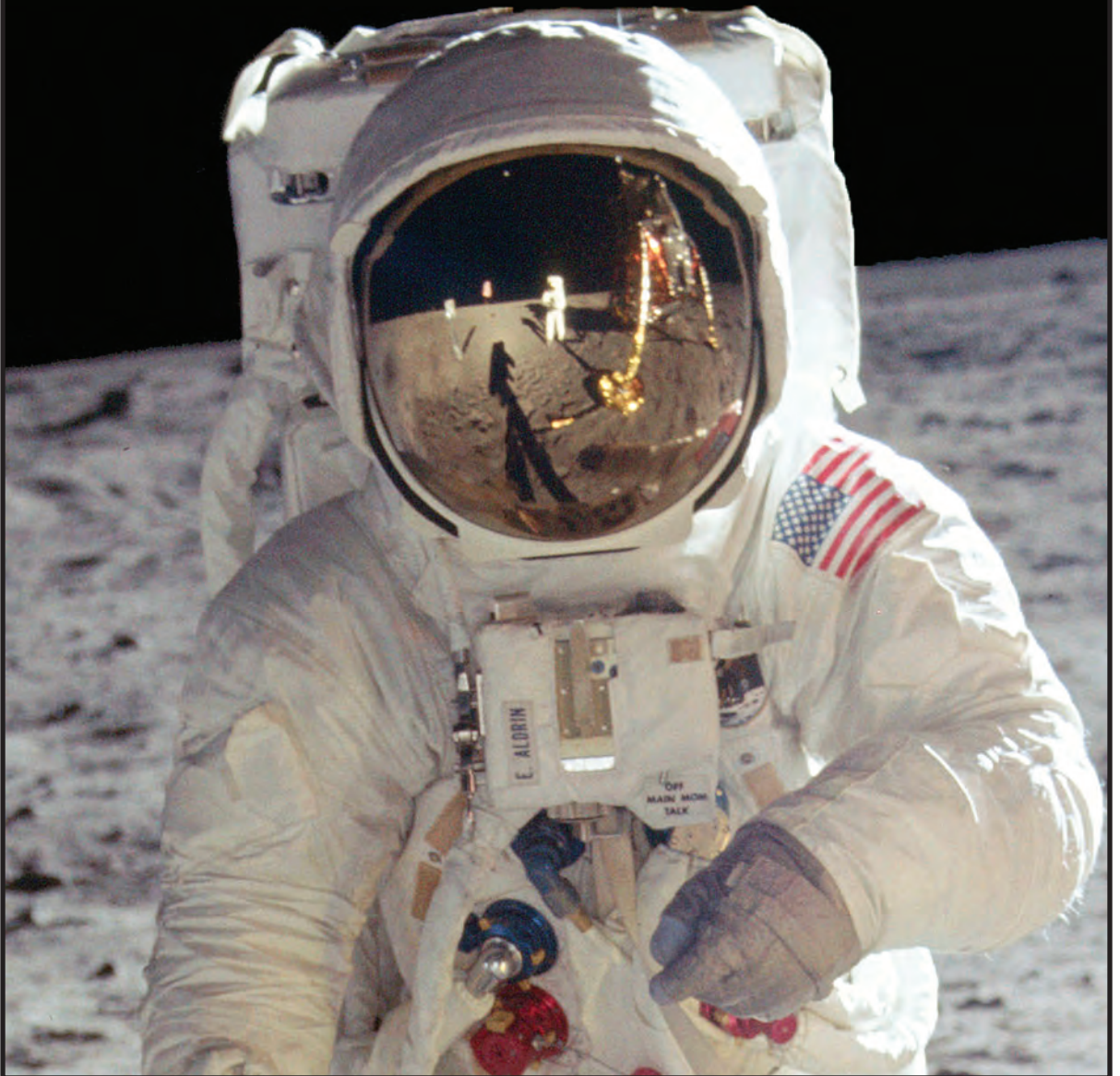


CONFLUENCE

2 0 1 9



con•flu•ence \kən-**flü**-ən(t)s\ noun

1. A coming or flowing together; meeting or gathering at one point.

• *a happy confluence of weather and scenery*

2. The flowing together of two or more streams.

• *the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers*

3. The creative writing journal at Three Rivers College

• *an issue of **Confluence** in your hands*

CONFLUENCE

2 0 1 9

WHERE STUDENTS AND CREATIVITY CONVERGE



The literary journal of

THREE RIVERS COLLEGE

2080 Three Rivers Blvd. • Poplar Bluff, MO 63901

1-877-879-8722 • www.trcc.edu

Volume Eleven

CONFLUENCE

GORDONIA AWARD FOR WRITING DISTINCTION

2009

Megan McKay, "Life Is..."
Corey Lutton, "A Short Tale"

2010

Paula Robinson, "What Our Future Holds"
Will Stephens, "My Old Baseball"
Jessica Downing, "Monster Inside"

2011

Cara M. Sorrell, "Summertime"
Jennifer C. Wendler, "My Festival Frock"
Elizabeth L. Twaddell "... I miss you, Daddy"

2012

Heidi Neuschwander Sopko, "Defeating Fear of Mind"
Damien D. Rivera, "The Phantoms"

2013

Damien D. Rivera, "Passion"
Michaela Smith, "Test Taking"
Bob Amendola, "The Coven of Incubus"

2014

Mark Herman Deaton, "Adventure Bag"
Tora M. Ellis, "A Walk on Campus"
Tom Turner, "Icebergs"

2015

Cassandra Priest, "End or Beginning"
Alexander Jameson, "Eremophobia"

2016

Damien D. Rivera, "What is Man"
Sheria R. Macklin, "Don't Be Blinded By Love"

2017

Bethany S. Colvin, "Smile for the Camera"
Conner G. Terrill, "The Urchin Sea"

2018

David K. Kearby, "I Am"
Conner G. Terrill, "Muse in the Stars"

2019

Levi D. Wilhelm, "The Unspoken Pain"
Cindy White, "Past, Present, Future"
Emmaleigh G. Stone, "Little Lamb"
Patrick W. Wheeler, "The Bible: Chapter I"

All students, faculty, and staff may submit essay, poetry, or fiction. Submissions are accepted each school year from November to February. Each entry may be 1,000 words or less, maximum three entries per author. Entries must be submitted digitally and can be emailed to the editor at gsnell@trcc.edu.

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Confluence Editor: Gregory Snell

Graphic Design: Mark J. Sanders

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Kenneth Renshaw

NASA SOLAR SYSTEM AMBASSADOR

FOREWORD

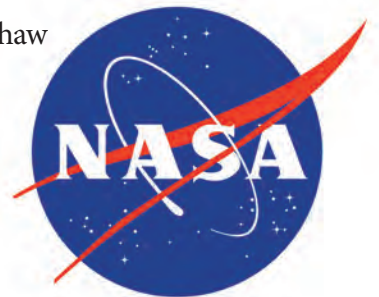
Fifty years ago this summer, on July 20, 1969, at 3:18 PM Central Daylight Time, NASA first landed two men on another celestial object, the Moon. This moment in history, the U.S. won the space race with U.S.S.R., prepared humans for further space exploration, and the use of this technology for human good. Our next goal is being on the Moon long-term and going to Mars. We now can monitor our planet's resources, weather, and safety with hundreds of satellites, understand our fabulous solar system, and even find possible habitable planets around other stars.

Technology has brought us from the top of human ability of 78 Kilobytes memory on the Apollo 11 flight to hundreds of Gigabytes now on a home computer—much more communication!

Then, and now, accurate communication is absolutely essential for spacecraft to travel with accuracy, assure that humans and other life are safe from danger or even death, for the public to know what good their taxes are producing, for the government to fund this technological progress, and for history to tell those in the future how the space program has helped them.

May I encourage you to continue your education and all means of self-improvement to effectively communicate as students, friends, family, and professionals. Congratulations upon your completion of Spring 2019 at Three Rivers College and best wishes for a great future!

Kenneth Renshaw
*Solar System
Ambassador,
NASA*



Gregory Snell

CONFLUENCE EDITOR

★ INTRODUCTION ★

One Small Step...

College is a time to experiment. Students confront new ideas in classes, develop relationships with people who may be different from those with which they grew up, try different majors in search of a career, and discover life through . . . new experiences. The way a student arrives at campus can (and should) be vastly different than the way a student leaves— for better or worse. That's the whole point of college. Cole Porter, famous composer and songwriter, supported the notion when writing:

“Experiment.
Be curious,
Though interfering friends may frown.
Get furious
At each attempt to hold you down.
If this advice you always employ
The future can offer you infinite joy
And merriment,
Experiment”

College is a great place to try new things—hopefully good ones. At a college, you are surrounded by experts that introduce you to new things, encourage you to test your abilities, and show you how to improve if you make a mistake. Once you start working, your boss may expect you to know what to do and a mistake can be costly. But at college... each day is just one small step toward graduation.

For this volume of *Confluence*, we've encouraged writers to try something new--six word stories. This literary tradition was made popular by Ernest Hemingway. Check out the explanation and famous examples on the next page. For some, writing a six word story was a new experience. Mary Poppins stresses the importance of that first step when she tells us that “well begun is half done.” Perhaps these beginnings will be one small step leading to a lifelong habit with writing.

The selections in *Confluence* 2019 reflect a campus-wide call for writing from students, staff, and faculty. This is not a contest where authors compete, instead *Confluence* is a mirror of the diverse creative talent in our community. This year 56 authors submitted 125 poems and stories. Submissions are read by a student group whose scores select which pieces are published. The top ranking items are scored by a panel of faculty and staff representing diverse fields. These scores select pieces that receive the Gordonia for distinguished writing.

This year's recipients of the Gordonia for writing distinction are: Levi Wilhelm “The Unspoken Pain,” Six Word Story—student; Cindy White, “Past, Present, Future,” Six Word Story—faculty; Emmaleigh G. Stone, “Little Lamb,” Poetry, and Patrick W. Wheeler, “The Bible: Chapter I,” Fiction. We thank this year's committee: Melissa Davis, Agriculture; Michelle Fisher, Biology; Alexander Jameson, Financial Aid; Andrew Rivetti, Spanish; Tiechera Samuel, English; Sheila Ursery, Library Services. This award is named

after retired head librarian and English instructor, Gordon T. Johnston. In 1996, his vision and leadership created and organized an annual poetry reading to celebrate National Poetry Month. The award brings no prize or expensive trophy, instead it recognizes the merit of those who savor the craft of writing and know, like Henry Miller, that “writing is its own reward.”

“One Small Step” commemorates the 50th anniversary of Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walking on the moon. This year also celebrates the 10th anniversary of *Confluence*. I remember long nights at the photo copy machine in order to “publish” the first issue of *Confluence*. There wasn’t even a budget to pay four cents to magazine staple each booklet. So we are very thankful to the administration’s continued support. Small beginnings can have big results: a handful of years for a college education, ten years printing *Confluence*, 50 years since walking on the moon, and a lifetime writing. The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step... one small step.

Six- Word Stories

Six word stories are an example of flash fiction. These extremely brief works still demonstrate character and plot development. With only six words, the authors suggest a larger story than what is stated. The tradition is attributed to Ernest Hemingway because of his terse economic writing style. Science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke tells the story:

“More than thirty years ago, at the beginning of my career, I had lunch with a well-established newspaper syndicator who told me the following story:

Ernest Hemingway was lunching at the Algonquin, sitting at the famous ‘round table’ with several writers, claiming he could write a six-word-long short story. The other writers balked. Hemingway told them to ante up ten dollars each. If he was wrong, he would match it; if he was right, he would keep the pot. He quickly wrote six words on a napkin and passed it around. The words were: ‘For Sale, Baby Shoes, Never Worn.’ Papa won the bet: His short story was complete. It had a beginning, a middle, and an end!”

Since then others famous individuals have added to the collection of six word stories. You can read more at sixwordstories.net In keeping with this year’s theme, “One Small Step,” writers have been encouraged to carry on this grand literary tradition.

Poison; meditation; skiing; ants—nothing worked.
—*Edward Albee*

Starlet sex scandal. Giant squid involved.
—*Margaret Atwood*

Found true love. Married someone else.
—*Dave Eggers*

Defenestrated baby, methamphetamine, prison, rehab, relapse.
—*Jeffrey Eugenides*

Easy. Just touch the match to.
—*Ursula K. Le Guin*

Kirby had never eaten toes before.
—*Kevin Smith*

LOVELY SPRING WEATHER
BUBONIC PLAGUE RAGING
—*Evelyn Waugh*

AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES

ABIGAIL S. HENSON

Abigail is a nursing major and a waitress. She enjoys listening to music and watching Netflix. Her favorite bands are Panic at the Disco and Twenty One Pilots.

ALEXIS D. OVERFIELD

Hi! My name is Alexis Overfield and I am studying accounting technology at Three Rivers. I use creative writing as a way to "escape." But I enjoy things like painting, crafts, being outdoors and spending time with my family.

ALLISON N. RAWLINGS

Allison Rawlings studies music education. In her free time she records interpretive dance using bleach wipes.

AMBER R. GARRISON

Amber Garrison studies general education and drinks her tea stirred, not shaken.

ANDREW F. RIVETTI

Andrew F. Rivetti is an Associate Professor of Foreign Language at TRC. He loves God, family, friends, and Spanish.

BRETT Q. JACKSON

My name is Brett Jackson I am currently enrolled in Three Rivers College. I am currently working towards my Gen Ed. I wrote this poem because I feel like we do not appreciate what our soldiers have to risk for us to have the lives we live.

BRITTANY AUSTIN

Brittany Austin studies health sciences at Three Rivers College. Her plan to capture the Loch Ness Monster is unbelievable.

C. JAMES MATSON

C. James Matson was born to parents during a year. He has lived life for years. His pastimes include eating, drinking, and breathing. He plans to continue living, before eventually dying.

CINDY WHITE

Cindy White, a vocalist, oboist and pianist, is Professor of Music at Three Rivers College.

CODY R. KING

Cody King is a student at TRC and CMU who is pursuing his bachelor of science in business management. In his free time, he enjoys to read dystopian fiction and write poetry. He also enjoys playing all sports, though his favorite sports are baseball, basketball, and volleyball.

DALTON A. MACLIN

I'm 6'4", Irish, and have a cat named Gizmoe.

DANIEL YBARRA

Daniel Ybarra studies pre-engineering and is valuable in an escape room. "Live. Breathe. Blue!"

DAVID FIELDING

David Fielding teaches art at Three River College and is an emerging poet in the Bootheel poetry scene. He is known for his quirky off beat poems/stories about iconic figures. He is currently working on a collection of poems titled the Buddha Files. He says, "Poetry is like painting with words."

DEBORAH W. YOUNG

Debbie currently works in Rutland Library as the Library Administrative Services Coordinator. Her passions are spending time with her family, reading, cooking, eating, traveling, and petting her cat, Bailey.

DEVIN SIMMERS

My name is Devin Simmers. I'm 26 years old from Sturdivant, MO. I'm currently studying pre-medicine at TRC. I write to keep myself in a creative state of mind. I also enjoy going hiking, swimming, playing in a band, and spending time with family or watching movies.

DILLON HARPER

Dillon Harper studied elementary education and enjoys bluegrass music.

DYLAN W. CAUSBIE

Dylan Causbie studied physics. He is an entrepreneur who enjoys yoga and travel.

ELIJAH JONES

I've written poetry for as long as I can remember and it's always been a great coping mechanism for me. I usu-

ally take my emotions and use them as inspiration. I'm a transgender writer, and I'm excited to see how my journey with writing, directing film, and transitioning progress throughout the years.

EMMALEIGH G. STONE

Emmaleigh Stone studies elementary education. She has never been sky diving.

GREGORY D. SNELL

Gregory Snell teaches writing, recommends travel, and is experimenting with torte recipes.

HALEY B. CORNETT

Hi my name is Haley Cornett. I graduate in May with my associates in pre-engineering. I'm a hopeless romantic from Texas, enjoy horror movies, pineapple on pizza, and a daily dose of Dr.Pepper!

HEATHER FREEMAN

Heather Freeman studies health science and likes extra credit.

JADA L. LEWIS

My name is Jada Lewis. I'm a freshman at Three Rivers. I absolutely love writing fiction, specifically horror, psychological, and mystery thrillers. My favorite writers are Edgar Allan Poe and Stephen King.

JASON COWAN

Jason Cowan teaches English and has a strong connection with the Chicago Cubs.

JAZZMA SMITH

Jazzma has been published in [Confluence](#) for five years.

JESSICA L. WHITE

My name is Jessica White. I'm majoring in medical billing and coding. I'm a wife, mother, and cosmetologist. My goals are simply to excel at these things. Poetry has always been an outlet for me and I love to read and listen to it as well.

JOSEPH WALLIS

I write for one reason--because I can't imagine a life without creativity. A life without creativity is not a life I want to live, so I write for no other reason than to add to the mountain of love crafted not only by words, but by everyone who goes out of their way to create.

JOSHUA D. WEBB

Joshua Webb studies business administration. Ask about his plans to start a pineapple pizza franchise.

JUSTIN W. HENSON

Justin Henson is interested in engineering. He has two dogs and enjoys kayaking.

JUSTIN O. HOGGARD

Justin Hoggard is the Chief Academic Officer and is working on a script for the Hallmark Channel movie.

KALI M. DAWES

My name is Kali Dawes. I'm 36 years-old. I am the single mother of one daughter named Hattie. I will be graduating in May 2019 with an AA in General Education. I plan to further my degree in social work.

KATE K. WHEELER

Kate Wheeler is a homeschooled high school student, taking classes at Three Rivers to further her education. When she isn't attending school or writing, one can find her performing on the stage, cheering at siblings' sports events, practicing and writing music, hanging out with relatives and friends, or curled up with a good story.

KATIE L. ELLIS

My name is Katie Ellis. I have decided to go to TRC to further my education in writing. I have enjoyed writing since I was young, but now at 67, I have time to fulfill my dreams of becoming a writer. I love how choosing the right words makes writing a challenge and fun.

KAYLA C. SANDERSON

Kayla Sanderson is a writer who enjoys poetry, short stories and is currently writing her first novel. With a quirky love for the 1950s, she finds beauty in simplicity as well as the complex feelings behind the peaceful facade of the time period working as a wonderful muse. She is a history major as well, interested in perfecting her historical fiction writing skills and becoming a history professor.

KIANNA G. JOHNSON

My name is Kianna Johnson. I am a Business Major here at Three Rivers College. Poplar Bluff is my home campus because I am a Poplar Bluff native. I have hopes of one day becoming my own boss. I picked up a knack for writing during 5th grade and I have been writing ever since.

KIMBERLY PENSE

Nearly 32 years ago I was diagnosed with primary lymphedema. I am a mom with four children and a rather complicated life. Writing is my escape and my way of dealing with the stress that life brings.

LARYN D. RISINGER

Laryn is a second year psychology major and finds joy in appreciating writing, art, and theatre. She loves food and sleep like every other college student and can't think of a better day spent than in bed with hot cocoa, no pants, no people, and Hulu.

LEVI D. WILHELM

Hello my name is Levi, I am attending TRC to get a general education so I can transfer to a 4 year university and pursue a degree in Network Management.

MALINDA S. LEE

Malinda Lee studies Middle School Education and enjoys fantasy writing.

MARIAH M. ATCHISON

Mariah Atchison likes the beach, surfing, and surf 'n' turf.

MARK J. SANDERS

Mark J. Sanders is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and English at Three Rivers College. His novel, "Dylan's Treasure," is available in paperback and Kindle Ebooks formats at www.amazon.com.

MIRANDA S. JAMES

Miranda James likes Grey's Anatomy and bonus points.

NATHAN A. GLEN

I love to read books. I often write down ideas for books, but sadly I haven't turned them into more than just ideas. Seeing my work published here gives me the boost to write my ideas into reality.

PATRICK W. WHEELER

Right now I'm a senior in high school; I expect to get a bachelor's degree and hope to travel the world (especially France and Germany). In my free time, I read both fiction and nonfiction and listen to foreign music.

SAMANTHA J. LUCAS

Sam Lucas studies art and plays the ukulele.

SHEILA URSERY

Sheila Ursery is the Library Outreach Coordinator for Three Rivers. When her face isn't in front of a computer or when her nose isn't stuck in a book, she spends her time with family and the great outdoors.

SHELBY R. MANIS

I write to express my feelings and for fun. Listening to music, watching movies, and reading books help me come up with topics and influence what I write. I do not know exactly what my plans are for the future, but I know I would really like more people to read my work.

SKYLAR J. VAUGHN

My name is Skylar Jacob Vaughn and I was born in Memphis, TN. My family moved to Missouri after I was born so I now reside here in Missouri. I like to write things because it makes me feel good. I study art. In the future I'll become the quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys and make my Dad in Heaven proud.

TIECHERA SAMUEL

My name is Tiechera Samuel and I have been teaching English at Three Rivers College for fifteen years. Although my primary interests are in early British and American Literature, I enjoy writing a bit for fun every now and then. Personally, I live with my husband, Chris, and our children, James and Emily, in Poplar Bluff, Missouri. I also love to read, and when I'm not spending time with my kiddos, I'm usually curled up with a good book.

TIFFANY F. FRIDAY

My name is Tiffany Friday, I study history and plan to be a teacher. I love cooking and writing because both take me away from this world. Writing creates tiny universes that I breathe life into and shape in my imagination.

VICKY L. TURNER

Vicky Turner has written poems since she was quite young. She is married to a wonderfulman, has eight children, thirty-five grandchildren, and one great grandchild. She enjoys traveling, writing, and spending time with family.

Emmaleigh G. Stone

LITTLE LAMB

I am ashamed of the hands you put on my body
I did not give you permission but still it haunts me
I am unclean I am hurt I am sore
I am the one who is still searching for something to live for
What happiness that comes at a price
And I'm tired of feeling your fist clenched like a vice
I am broken I am battered I am bruised
All I know is I am sick of feeling used
Your nails dig in your grubby fingers crawl up
And now it's seems as if I am forever stuck
I am angry I am weary but I can't seem to let go
Muddy is my fleece when all I pray for is snow



Kianna G. Johnson

THREE A.M.

He says, "Wait, I really like you."
But he has no time for love.
We smoked until we were in our feelings.
It's then that he told me some things,

In which my heart was shoved.

"Girl I'll do you bad. . ."

But knowing me,

In my recklessness I wouldn't budge.

So me not wanting to kill the vibe,

I become his peace and not the judge.

We lay beneath the stars for hours,

Rather above them if you catch my drift.

And we're talking endlessly with so much in common.

One moment, I just really go off inside.

And I'm ready to take that risk.

I don't wish you take me for a lunatic,

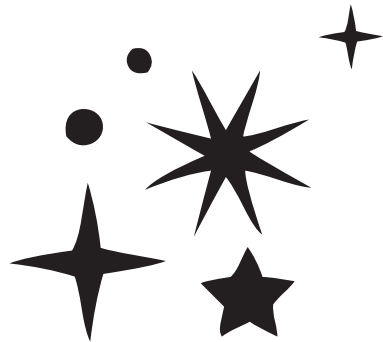
But that night I prayed a love and 'war prayer' type of wish.

I believe God and the Angels took me anyway as a fool that night,

But He was sympathetic in my wish.

Hoping a part of you would love me,

That same night I dreamed of fish.



Haley B. Cornett

GREENER GRASS

She thought the grass would be greener.
Why isn't it easier?
Doves were to be set free.
Hell. Angels were supposed to sing.

Where was the fire?

She knew what she desired.

He knew her.

His words flowed like a fountain.

Oh. Baby. He would move the mountains.

He did. His enduring journey was relief.

Their time together was brief.

She didn't know there would be compensation.

Alone. A room. Where was her protection!

Her desire was misguided. The fire went dim from his touch. The angels were not singing.

But yet she was easy.

Her grass will never be any greener.



Laryn D. Risinger

A MESSAGE FOR THE BOYS WITH BAD INTENTIONS

“I don’t need a man.” A phrase said by many.
But this phrase makes less sense than a singular penny.

It’s not about need, it’s all about want.
A lifelong partner: a girl’s unspoken hunt

This hunt is still present, just the reward is much less
For the men of today lack courtly finesse

I hate to categorize, and say they’re all the same
But men seem to be playing the same degrading game

“Roleplay?” “Trade?” “Netflix and chill?”
I’m sure I’m not the only one who gets asked these still

What happened to courtship? Manners? Or just plain respect?
Is it really that hard to give women just that?

Does it always have to be “How many can I tap?”
Don’t you think, we mean a little more than that?

We're people, man, we have emotions and lives
Not just pieces of meat with your preferred body size

I can speak, I can think, I can feel and hurt too
Yet you don't care, you just keep doing what you do

Saying "I'd do her" or getting lead on
Doesn't it seem even a little bit wrong?

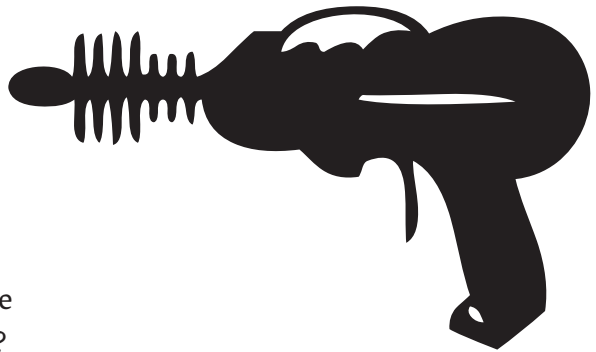
Shouldn't you care how you make us feel?
Oh wait, right, is not a big deal.

We're just put here for your pleasure and use
Then after you're done you just cut us loose?

That sounds awful doesn't it, a little bit cruel
Well that's how we get treated, it's pretty selfish too

So maybe if you're "that guy" please think again
Because your fun is f-ing up our self-worth instead

Sincerely,
The Good Hearted Girls Everywhere



Six- Word Stories

Alexis D. Overfield

Hard push. Baby's here. No heartbeat.

Alexis D. Overfield

Out jogging. Being followed. Now missing.

Mark J. Sanders

Wanted: tiger keeper. No experience necessary.



Katie L. Ellis

ALONE, MAYBE NOT!

*H*alloween has never been a day I like to celebrate, but here I am at a pub with friends discussing scary movies we have seen and true to life events that have happened that are scarier than any movie. Happy hour is offering half priced drinks, and appetizers in the shape of skulls, bats and mummies. My bloody Mary drink is still half full and a cookie in the shape of a skull is showing nibble marks. The boss is treating us to dinner and is leading co-workers to the backroom.

“No thanks”, I say as I grab my purse and sweater. “I still have boxes to unpack and my apartment’s a disaster”.

“You’ll be sorry if you don’t join us” they screech; following with evil laughs.

I open the door to leave and a blanket of heavy misty evening air circles around me. An eerie feeling takes over me as I head down the block. I don’t like walking alone at night, especially on Halloween, but am not too worried because my apartment is only three and a half blocks away. The half block is going to be a little scary because it is a private run-down block that the city does not take care of so there are no street lights.

My apartment is on the second floor of an old four story Victorian home that takes up most of the block. Freshly painted walls cover up damp moldy odors that linger throughout the hall but seem stop at my door. It’s so clean compared to the hall and I wonder if the other apartments are as nice as mine. The bathroom and kitchen are not modern, but they are eloquent with touches of Victorian history.

I have been in my apartment for a week and find it odd that I never see another person coming or going. I come and go a lot and never hear voices in the apartments, it’s just weird. It could be that the building is run down and looks creepy from the outside and maybe others are not financially desperate like me and can find nicer places to live.

The only person I have seen is the landlady. She showed me the apartment and came to collect the rent the day when I was moving in. She's a nice old lady with very long gray hair that falls around her thin body. She looks so frail that I expect her to topple over at any time and make sure that I am ready to catch her is she does. When I asked where my mail box was she whispered, "Mail is never delivered here, nothing can be delivered here and there are no phone lines". I stood in disbelief as I watched her slowly walk to the stairs.

She lives alone on the floor above me, which is below the huge attic that has shuttered windows. A few cats live with her, I hear them scurrying around at all hours and when she calls them for their evening milk she never calls out a name, just kitty. I figure she doesn't care about names because she never told me hers and never asked for mine. However, I made sure that my full name was on the receipt I filled out for my first two months' rent. She looked at the receipt, shoved it into her apron pocket and took in a heavy sigh as she turned to leave.

I put my key into the door and suddenly have an urge to go back to the pub and have fun with friends. Unpacking and organizing my apartment can be put on hold, after all I am the only one living here and I don't care if things are a mess for another day or

two. I step into my apartment reach for my warm coat and head into the bedroom to get money. I can't believe my eyes; the living room is spotless and there are no boxes to unpack. Did I clean up the living room and just forgot because I have been so busy? Wow I really need a break! I must have done this because all my collectibles are displayed so I can see them no matter where I sit. But I don't see my favorite snow globe that I got when I was sixteen, so I did not unpack anything! Someone did, and I am going to find out who before the nights ends.

When I got to the bedroom the door was open and I closed it when I left for work. I open the closet doors and find clothes hanging that are not mine and shoes that I have never seen. An overwhelming flowering fragrance is floating from the bathroom and I am afraid to find out what it is. My body is shaking as I walk slowly into the bathroom and find a tub filled with bubbles and a little black duck is sitting on its edge. I have never had a yellow duck and would never want a black one.

"What do you want from me?" I yelled at the top of my lungs. "Leave me alone, I'm calling the cops." I reached for my cell phone and start calling for help when I see my snow globe. Next to it is a note that is written on very old, elegant stationary, and I start reading.

My sweet Angeline,

I have been waiting an eternity for you and now you are mine.

You will live a wonderful life with me and will not want for anything, just ask the old lady when you see her again. She is my twelfth wife and is very happy and content at 400. Other wives tried to leave but are still here and they are not happy. Soon you will meet me, and you will not be disappointed, that is, if you are smart!

Welcome to my world,

Jim





BODIES WANTED

For all seeking a quick payout in these hard times: *Club N* is offering payment up to **\$20,000** for all rights to your body*. With one quick signature and you could walk out the door with enough money to support your family for an entire month!

Call today at 212-664-7665 or come in to *Club N* with one of these slips @ the Upper District, 223 Washington Blvd and get a fast \$20k today!

*Other contracts may be negotiated for the return of your corpse to your family after usage at Club N; these contracts will settle for lesser amounts than advertised. Failure to comply with the terms of the contract will result in asset seizure up to the value of the contract payout and interest accrued.

 223 Washington Boulevard Upper District	 223 Washington Boulevard Upper District	 223 Washington Boulevard Upper District	 223 Washington Boulevard Upper District	 223 Washington Boulevard Upper District	 223 Washington Boulevard Upper District	 223 Washington Boulevard Upper District	 223 Washington Boulevard Upper District	 223 Washington Boulevard Upper District	 223 Washington Boulevard Upper District	 223 Washington Boulevard Upper District	 223 Washington Boulevard Upper District	 223 Washington Boulevard Upper District	 223 Washington Boulevard Upper District
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For distribution in the unemployed district

Tear off this section and cut along indicated edges.

Six- Word Stories

Laryn D. Risinger

I asked. No answer. Moved on.

Levi D. Wilhelm

THE UNSPOKEN PAIN

She's always right, the bruises show.

Sheila Ursery

I love him. I must go.

Jessica L. White

YOU'RE LIKE

*Y*ou're like a bad habit
I can't seem to break.
You're like an addiction
I can't seem to shake.
You're like a hell-on-earth
I can't seem to escape.
You're like a restriction
I can't get past your yellow tape.
You're like a knot
I'll never be able to untie.
You're like the tear
I just can't seem to cry.
You're like a one night stand
I can't bring myself to end.
You're like a broken heart
That I'll never be able to mend.



Elijah Jones

POISON

Boy, you spent your life in garden gloves and dirty knees.
You made friends out of those vines and cactus needles.
You sewed your heart into your sleeves and dreamt of purple skies.

Boy, you were locked away in a body you didn't belong in.
You didn't feel the lonely, because lonely was all you knew.
Your demons couldn't reach you in the clouds.

Boy, your skin is made of acid and your lips are laced in toxin.
You didn't know what the warmth felt like.
You didn't know the dangers ahead.
You had no fears.

Boy, you found love and learned what it meant to lose it.
Now what will you do with the heart that you so lovingly stitched into your very being?
You now know what loneliness means.
Your demons didn't need to climb, you fell right into their claws.



Emmaleigh G. Stone

SICK OF THE SEA

I'm ungrateful. I hate who we are now.
Now everything we could have been is done.
My life is a field and you are the plow;
I am upturned, there is nowhere to run.

I still dream of your skin pressed into mine
And I'd give anything to hold your hand.
If the world had only given us time,
We could've sank our toes deep into sand.
My lips long for the hollow of your neck,
But it's impossible to win you back.
I feel like I'm destined to be a wreck,
But you own it all despite what I lack.
I give you everything forevermore.
I don't want ocean; just stay, be my shore.



Allison N. Rawlings

BUTTERFLIES[★]

You used to fill my heart with song for the butterflies to flutter to
Those songs have since gone sour
And anger turned the butterflies in my stomach into bees,
Your honey will not calm them.
—you cannot destroy my forest



Miranda S. James

TO THE GIRL WHO TOOK MY PLACE

Breakups are hard, but eventually people move on. After all the time spent together, you really learn to understand a person.

He's passionate. That's the easiest way to describe him. He's passionate about everything he does, whether he's winning or losing. He's passionate about what he loves, he even hates with passion.

If you get him talking about something he loves he could talk for hours, especially if it's his car. He could think of a million things he would love to change about his car to make it better but he loves his car more than life.

He hates fishing. Not because it bores him but because he's scared of touching the fish. The slime and scales gross him out.

He loves macaroni and cheese, grilled cheese, and cheese pizza.

He hates the smell of spaghetti and won't get close to it if he doesn't have to.

He won't eat Jell-O, pudding, or jelly because the jiggly texture grosses him out.

He just recently tasted a noodle that was spiral shaped. He's always had this mindset that the shapes change the taste of the noodles...he now knows it doesn't.

His family is everything to him. No matter how much he loves you, he will always love them more.

He's a very private person and the best at keeping secrets.

He loves to make people happy, even when he's sad.

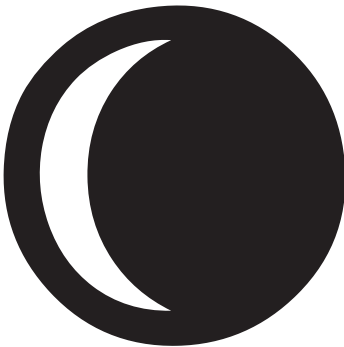
Most importantly, he loves with everything he has. He doesn't hold back, and he doesn't expect the same love in return. He will go to the ends of the earth and back if it means making the person he loves happy.

Don't take this type of love for granted. Cherish every moment, and remind him that no matter what he does, you still love him and you are proud of him.

Jessica L. White

FEAR

A afraid I'll drown,
I'm in so deep.
Afraid of death,
I'll never sleep.
Afraid to live,
Without you.
Afraid of love,
Or anything true.
Afraid to wish,
I hate to dream.
Afraid of pain,
And its agonizing scream.
Afraid to be happy,
I know it'll never last.
Afraid of the future,
And haunted by my past.
Afraid of this place,
I hate being here.
I'm afraid of everything,
Even you I fear.



Samantha J. Lucas

BIRTHDAY BLUES

*T*hat day started so sweet—
Sitting on my love seat.
Now, I've got the birthday blues
And it's not going away, tonight.

We were so great together.
But now I can't seem to gather
Why I've got the birthday blues.
And why I can't seem to let go.

You promised not to betray,
But you seem to have strayed,
Cause now I've got the birthday blues
And I still seem to want you.

Can you even hear my plea
That I want you to still love me?
Cause now I've got the birthday blues,
And letting go is just too hard.

I don't know what to do
But say "happy birthday" to you,
Cause now I've got the birthday blues,
And it's not going away, tonight.



Miranda S. James

I WENT GROCERY SHOPPING

I went grocery shopping.
Macaroni, not the kind with the gooey liquid cheese. The kind with the powder cheese.
I better grab 2 boxes, cause I know it's your favorite.
I went grocery shopping.
Chicken strips, the kind your mom used to buy.
Even though I don't like them, I know you do.
I went grocery shopping.
Pizza, the expensive brand.
Not the kind I usually buy, but I know you like the raised crust.
I went grocery shopping.
Soda, the brand you made me fall in love with over the years.
I grab 12, even though I'm trying to cut back on the sugar.
I went grocery shopping.
Preheat the oven, boil the water, heat the grease, cool the soda.
It's almost time for you to be here.
I keep playing the conversation over in my brain.
The moment you told me you were coming over so we could catch up.
I got so excited, I went grocery shopping.
The minutes tick by, but maybe work ran late.
I'll shut the grease off for now.
More minutes go by, but maybe you ran home to change.
I'll stop boiling the water for now.
An hour has passed, but maybe you're talking to your family.
I'll turn off the oven for now.
Another hour ticks by, but I'm still holding out hope, I mean
I went grocery shopping.
It's dark out, and you're 4 hours late but,
I went grocery shopping.
I see your story...
You're eating Mexican with your friends.
But I went grocery shopping.
Now I have macaroni, chicken strips, pizza and soda.
I haven't eaten them in a year, since the break up.
But I know they are your favorites,
So I went grocery shopping.



Six- Word Stories

Jason Cowan

Dog wishes he left with her.

Mark J. Sanders

“I’m pregnant.”

“Really?”

“It’s not yours.”



Patrick W. Wheeler

THE BIBLE: CHAPTER 1

In the beginning, God sneezed. He wasn't sick, just suffering from seasonal allergies. But the sneeze formed a wave of radiation that spread throughout the void and lit it up like God's very own Christmas tree. Since God firmly believed in turning life's lemons into lemonade, he figured he'd use some of this radiation to fashion the universe. Thereafter God created the stars, planets, and China. Once China finished making the rest of the earth, God constructed its modern plants and animals. Vainly attempting to stifle his chuckles, God planted fossils of ridiculous, gigantic animals to test the faith of the Christians he planned to create later. But as God scattered T-Rex bones all over the earth, he realized that these "dinosaurs" were actually doper than any of his REAL animals, so he decided to build some living ones. Naturally disaster ensued for most of the non-dinos.

Once God obtained sufficient mirth from the dinosaur's antics, he spit his asteroid-flavored bubble gum out of his mouth and onto the earth. Once the ash settled, God re-created animals previously mauled by the dinosaurs and rested for a couple years. One day, as he relaxed on the beach and drew stick figures in the sand, one of his sketches sat up. "Hi, I'm Adam," the sketch-animal said. God turned abruptly and smacked Adam's head off, because hearing voices always startled him. However, God soon regretted decapitating Adam, so he restored his head and created a paradise and a rather lovely woman named Eve for him.

Adam and Eve ventured around their paradise together, observing God's incredible creatures. Once, God walked with them, and a multicolored talking bird alighted on Adam's shoulder. "Look, God!" Adam boasted, "I think your parrot likes me!" God's brow

furrowed. HE'D wanted to name HIS animals, but he forgave Adam for this slight offense. God worried whether the world's cutest couple really respected him, or if they only cared about his hip paradise. So he planted an apple tree and laced its fruit with opium, instructing the humans to strictly avoid it. In secret he created a giant winged green snake which HE named Lucifer Satan. God instructed it to tempt Eve to pocket an apple, then hid himself in the garden to watch what would transpire.

"Did God tell you—" the Lucifer paused, his mouth agape, when he spotted Eve and Adam hiding under bush, their mouths wet with apple juice. Apparently neither of the humans required any prompting to devour the forbidden fruit. Teleporting from his hiding spot to the garden's exterior, God nonchalantly strolled back into the garden to "discover" the couple downing their last bite of apple. When questioned about incident, both spouses insisted that Lucifer had tempted them to consume the fruit. Since God couldn't contest this claim without admitting he'd been secretly watching, he "punished" the snake by removing its wings, which didn't bother Satan due to his fear of heights.

God wasn't sure whether to just forgive Eve and Adam or to banish them from their paradise and sacrifice himself to himself hundreds of years later to recompense himself for their sins. After some deliberation, he decided on forgiveness, but not until they suffered a dull lecture about respecting one's elders. However, Eve soon became unsatisfied with living in the garden, because God hadn't given Adam the plumbing to please her, because no one draws stick figures with sex organs. Out of sheer boredom, Eve ate the drugged apples AGAIN, and God defaulted to his second plan.

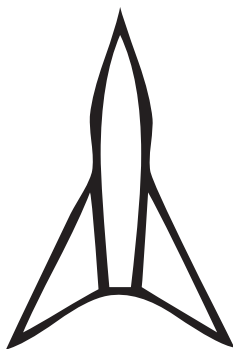
Six- Word Stories

Justin O. Hoggard

They call me Ishmael—not really.

Kianna G. Johnson

Nice Girl, Modern Day “Daisy Miller.”



Tiffany F. Friday

QUEEN OF DUALITY

*A*s I strolled into the room I was, once again, struck by the beauty draped in silk and dripping in gold and precious gems. Gazing into the fire without even turning around to address me,

“Tell me again, the stories they spread of me.”

Cold as always.

“Of course, my Queen,” I smiled. That smile that only adorns my face only when I’m near her.

“they tell stories of your beauty and kindness, your loving heart and passion for life. They say you were kidnapped and forced against your will to eat the pomegranate seeds,” I pause to let out a small laugh “they say you long to return to your mother. That none of this was your making, your choice.”

A cold metallic laugh followed.

“How foolish, to think they would believe that I would settle for such a life of farming and normality. I strive for nothing less than excellence, I long for the rust and desire. The elegance in decay and destruction. Mother always wanted me to drape myself in the half-truths of her desires, I was always better at tearing things down rather than building them up. I grew Thorns where she grew flowers.”

“And what beautiful thorns they were, my Queen. At least they were right about one thing, your radiant Beauty.”

“Be serious, my husband,” she turns to face me. “I do not appreciate the fact that they deem you a kidnapper when it was of my own choice.”

“It simply cannot be helped, my love. I wish the world knew of your darker side. The side I have come to truly love, my Queen of Duality. I wish they knew you were such a wonderful ruler, one to be feared and admired.”

“And what of you, my dear husband? A gentle king, guiding souls to their ever resting place. Truly a star among the darkness here. And yet you were cast in nothing but Shadows as you’re talked about and feared. Mother made sure of that when I came here, telling everyone of a wicked man that steals innocent women.”

She glided closer to me, cupping my cheek, “You don’t deserve that, if either of us should be deemed loving and kind it should be you.”

I grasp her hand and bring it to my lips, kissing her palm. “Bare no ill will toward your mother, she just worries. Besides, I did steal you from her, your heart at least. I will gladly endure the hate and fear a thousand times over if I have you by my side. My Queen.”

“You truly are too kind, my love. You’re the only one that ever found a way to thaw my frozen heart. If I didn’t know better, I’d say I was the one destined to rule here and you are of the world above.” And she smiled, such splendor, such beauty! My Queen. “people truly are ridiculous are they not? I tell them losing everything is what saved me, and it wasn’t enough. So, I told them I would leave once I’m bored of you, but that is not today.” She smirked at me, I could not help but smile.

“Don’t lie to me, my love. I know you were strong and stubborn if you really wanted to leave you would have. Tell me I’m the reason you stay. Tell me that when you are away it’s the waiting that always brings you back. Tell me, if you could, that you would stay here with me forever.”

“But husband,” she walked away swaying her hips, “what fun would it be if I told you everything you wanted to hear? Why make it easy for you?” I could hear the smile in her voice.

My Queen, my cold-hearted Queen of duality.

Kate K. Wheeler

DEAR RAPHAEL

Our dearest Raphael,

Though but a few months have occurred since the passing of your last Soul, the Holy Father has decided to commission the next Soul for you. Because of the terrible loss you so recently received, I wish to offer some words encouragement and advice to you as the next assignment begins.

As we both know, you spent the utmost effort encouraging your last assignment, proving the love and grace of the Holy Father. However, like so many other angels, the Soul was lost because of the effects of the Great War which has caused the descent of many Souls. Each passing day causes more grief to the Holy Father and all the inhabitants of Heaven. Fortunately, the graces permitted during this tragedy continue to abound as opportunities for salvation continue to grow.

Now, on to your assignment. The Soul will be born in two months, giving you time for recuperation and review of the Holy Father's Truths. Of utmost importance is proper coordination with Adriel and Malik, the two assigned to your Soul's parents. These parents are considering rejecting their religious beliefs, so the Rebirth of the Soul may not occur. Work with Adriel and Malik to strengthen their faith so the Rebirth may properly take place.

When the Soul is young, continue to coordinate with the parents' Guardians about the teachings of the Faith. The influence and example of parents is critical in the first few years of life in developing a child's beliefs. If the parents aren't beneficiary to the Soul's faith, look for important opportunities to broaden her ideas and character.

We understand you may be hesitant with starting another long assignment, but do not lose hope. Spend the time you have visiting other angels and reviewing your Truths. Make sure to be evaluated by a Specialist, and report if you need delay or reject this assignment to permit you more time. May the Holy Spirit be with you.

Michael & Committee

**based off The Screwtape Letters by C. S. Lewis*

**names taken from page 121 of The Shadowhunter's Codex as compiled by Cassandra Clare and Joshua Lewis*

Malinda S. Lee

OUT MY WINDOW[★]

Out my window it was sparkling white,
The pine trees laden with heavy snow,
I was warm inside, wrapped up tight,
Hot chocolate in hand, time moving slow.

Out my window grey snowbirds play,
Glittering snow powder flung left, then right,
Searching for seed like a feathery ballet,
Then out of fright, they took flight.

Out my window was a cardinal, bright red,
A fluffy ornament perched up on a limb,
Snowflakes fluttered down, resting on his head,
In the final light, singing one last hymn.



David Fielding

NEWS FROM PARSONS

I am in parsons
give me a call
steve

You never know
when your last trip will be
the last trip
but this was the last trip

the house
an old milk carton
full of
50 years of old milk
white clap board
built by her father
she was born in that house
my mother was born in that house
and I was there
before I was born



my teeny tiny fetal eyes
peering through
my mother's translucent belly
while
Pattie's careful long fingers
stroke it
while glaring at my father

the cats

a week before there would have been twelve
but now we were down to four
or maybe five
the last kitten
mittens
three paws
and a couple of fugitives in the basement
pat was a care giver for stray cats
and enjoyed
stealing other people's cats
if they wandered by
canned tuna
was the key



the gun

I hated the gun
a chrome
double barrel 22 derringer
and
I am happy
to have nothing to do with it
ever ever ever again



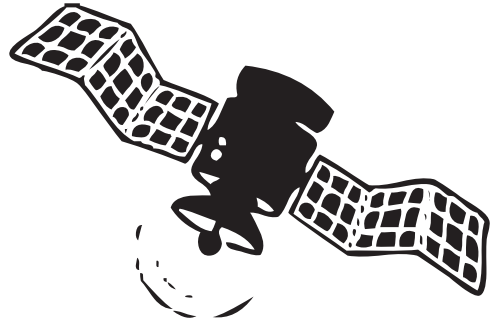
the drunk driver

in front of me was driving squirrely
I mentioned it to pat
she pulled out the gun
and loaded it
I don't know what she was thinking
she only had one good eye
I don't think she had ever even fired it
but I was afraid she might
someday
but that day never came

radio waves

the last time

my mom saw pat
it was a scene directly out of mad max
she was sitting at her computer
with her dark green
welding glasses on
keeping the radio waves
they were beaming into her house
out of her head
at least she hadn't resorted
to aluminum foil.



news from parsons

I guess you can't send an email
that says pattie died
thursday
get over here

Patrick W. Wheeler

CRAZY POET

Shotgun seat. dark night. rain.
pen scribbles. am I insane?
many hours, no inspiration
now, bursting with passion
ecstasy. hope. flawless rhyme.
no trouble, effortless this time.

baked a cake. now I know.
my past, that I'll show.
our delicious dessert, labor's reward.
grace streams down earthward.
golden ideas. recounting the actions.
odd sentences. rhetorical questions.

eggs to mix. list items all.
first time, no fail or fall.
not just work. also patience.
cooking's art, not science.
to describe design, that's sufficient.
use nature, it's never deficient.


her joy. haunting memories.
Beethoven would use symphonies.
no composer here. poet amateur.
you've heard better, I'm sure.
shotgun seat. dark night. rain.
pen still scribbles. am I sane?

arms stretch. poem completed.
not a verse deleted.
could be even longer.
each word significantly stronger.
no need. this is sufficient.
want better? write, become proficient.



Dylan W. Causbie

MUSTACHE BLUES

h this damn thing just won't act right
I can twist and hold or curl with mold
But no matter what I do
This damn thing just won't act right

Before I leave, I need it to look just right
I need the perfect shape without curious strays
I need it to look the same on both sides
But I just can't leave until I get it just right

It's like a black hole, sucking in everything I hate
Crumbs, gum, and half of the lunch that I ate
It can be fun, and that I do love
But everything else, Yes everything else I hate

My lady wants it gone forever and ever
She says it tickles like a feather and coarser than leather
So I'll wax it up for one last picture, then break out the razor
I'll say farewell for now, but not forever!



Malinda S. Lee

ODE TO A BEETLE

A big beetle came crawling
over leaves and pebbles
it climbed up my pants leg
stopping at my knee
the beetle was smooth as an ancient railing
ran over by thousands of hands
with my thumb and index
I lifted it up as if it was a royal jewel
careful not to tarnish its
opal shell,
its pincers were vice grip jaws
gnashing open and close
its feet were like a wave of tiny needles
scraping my fingers
like crowbars
my eyes were dazzled by the brilliance of
the beetle
it seemed as if the heavens had lost all
wonder this beetle deserved a palace
for its beauty
not the rotting decaying ground
that the beetle was forced to traverse
it is like a pearl being used as a ball bearing

I shouldn't hold such a magnificent creature
with my clumsy peasant meat hooks
begging for meager scraps
sultans kept such things
as their tapestries of gold and statues of jade
the beetle should be kept in a penthouse
with flowing fountains nectar and honey
people should be afraid of every step
they take
for the fear of stepping on the living work
of art
I unearth my camera from my worn out bag
I snap a shot hoping to capture just a
fraction of its glory.

The moral of my ode is this:
Beauty is twice beauty
And what is good is doubly good
When it is a matter of finding a beetle
on a morning stroll.

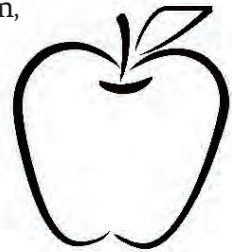


Kate K. Wheeler

JUST GET IT DONE

*M*om shook her head as she departed,
Leaving me to my dilemma.
Turning my gaze from her retreat,
I suspiciously glanced down.
Oh no!
He was still there!
Though he was no longer facing me,
I could imagine that innocent look
gracing his features.
I knew better.
As sweat slowly gathered at the base
of my neck and
Began its slow, itchy descent down
my spine,
I recalled him hounding me
For months, years, lifetimes.
“Eat this, replenish with that,”
Echoed through my ears.

Finally, we had come together,
Yet I was not ready to put us out of
our miseries.
I watched as my hand began
To creep across the table,
Grasping the knife.
No!
Not yet!
I began to slowly lift the handle,
Blade shining in the lamplight.
Not like this!
Quickly, my other hand snaked out
Grabbing my enemy
And slowly lifting him,
This glistening apple,
To my face.
I took a bite.
Chewed.
Swallowed.
My fears had been vanquished.



Abigail S. Henson

SHE SITS ALONE

She sits alone
Thoughts cross her mind
None of them positive
She sits alone

Scrolling through the internet

Dreaming of what she wishes could be

She sits alone

Crying herself to sleep

Because of what she doesn't have

She sits alone

Looking around the room

Looking for a way out

She sits alone

Grabbing her bottle of antidepressants

Swallowing them all

She sits alone

Waiting for the effects to hit

Crashing to the floor

She sits alone

No one around to help

No one around to care

Shelby R. Manis

BLOOD RUNNING TO THE FLOOR

Blood running to the floor
Broken like a mirror
But on the inside

Some say you are mad

Others

Just lost

You take the herb

That is illegal

It's the only way to quiet your mind

Besides calling the suicide hotline

Miranda S. James

NOBODY KNEW

*H*e walks down the hallway,
Waves and smiles at everyone he sees.
Patches cover his Varsity Jacket,
He was just crowned Prom king.

She's the star on and off the court,
Volleyball, Basketball, Cheerleading too.
She has metals and trophies,
All locked up in her room.

He's student council president,
Ruler of the school.
She's pretty and smart,
The definition of cool.

Everyone sees two perfect people.
Little do they know,
The secrets that are hidden,
Are ready to be shown.

He's clinically depressed,
Cries himself to sleep.
Her life's always been a wreck,
She's cut way too deep.

He's over this life,
Ready for it to end.
He wrote his final letter,
To his family and his friends.

She goes to a party,
No one knows it's her last.
She finally gets home,
The moments coming so fast.

He grabs the rope,
Ties a nice knot.
She holds the gun,
Awaiting the shot.

Her mom comes running,
Afraid of what she'll see.
His family doesn't hear a thing,
They don't know he's finally free.

The funerals are on Sunday,
Everyone's dressed in black.
Family in the front row,
Strangers in the back.

There's an assembly at school,
No one can believe the news.
Their lockers are covered in flowers,
And memorials with pretty views.

Everyone thought they were happy,
Never thought they were suicidal.
Eventually everyone will forget,
Or live forever in denial.

Daniel Ybarra

RED SEA

To stumble and crawl
To reach and to fall
For the first heart that loves
Now the last to give all

To hear and to see

The red river I bleed

Dripping down watch it flow

As I part the Red Sea

A trick of old time

Too trusted and tried

To wash all my sins

In my spoiled red wine.

Dillon Harper

★ I TOOK IT ALL

The door opened up, and he walked in
In a moment two worlds collided
One was free and one in the pin
I said, I've got some questions about why you're here
Just from those few simple words
His ol' blue eyes filled up with tears
He said, I don't know who you are
Naw sir, I don't know your name
But for twenty years I been here
And I'm the only one to blame
I'll tell you

How I took it all from that family, April seventeenth
I thought I was having a ball, runnin' from police
They couldn't dare catch me
But ever since that day
I have a price that I'll have to pay
Cause I took it all

I was forty-one, but I was wild at heart
And chose to make decisions
That never were to smart
Drunk and on the run
Pedal to the floor

I never seen her comin'
Till I slammed into her door
I walked away without a scratch
But I took that woman's life
She was a mother of a child
And she was a young man's wife

I answered, I'm her son, and I forgive
But it's all because of Jesus
His Spirit in me lives
Do you wanna know
Just how it feels
To have God's love surround you
And your conscience to be healed
As the tears rolled down his cheeks
The old man slowly bowed his head
Memories raced through his mind
As he looked up and said

"Lord I'm sorry for it all please make my heart your home, I don't want to be alone
I know that I'll die in here, but I want to know I'll die without any fear"
It was one week later
when they laid him in the ground
I preached at his funeral
About the lost sheep that was found



Mariah M. Atchison

ALL THE THINGS THAT ONE SHOULD HAVE

Present them day to day
They must be a lifestyle that one should gain
Joy and peace comforting me
Kindness and goodness are how it should be
Faithfulness and gentleness in good manner
Patience and self-control should be practiced
Love for eternity



Six- Word Stories

Mark J. Sanders

Bloody cross.

Empty tomb.

Eternal life.



Kali M. Dawes

SPOKEN WORD POEM

SHE REMEMBERED

Looking back is not easy. It feels like when you put on a pair of shoes that are way too small. It is constricting and uncomfortable. Maybe that is not the best description. No, a better way to describe it is that it feels like a knife going into your skin. It cuts and can cause great pain.

Those days were hard, and she felt like there was nothing to gain. Just a dark empty hole that she couldn't climb out of. She was drowning in a pool of misery and there was no lifeguard on duty. Sinking, sinking, deeper, and deeper into a pit of destruction. Painting a sign with the words HELP ME on it, because she was too weak to speak. Hurting herself just so she could feel something, medicating herself just so she would feel nothing.

Then it happened, the moment that changed it all. Everything she ever knew flashed before her eyes. She then looked down and remembered the first time that she heard her daughter speak to say, "Mama". The sirens went off, just like they would when a tornado hits the flatlands. It was no longer about herself. She had wasted so much time focused on the wrong things and now all that she truly cared about would be taken away.

She dropped to her knees on a dark cloudy day. She screamed at the top of her lungs. No one around to hear it, but it pierced through the sky and went up above. That's when the heavens opened, and a beautiful light shined into the darkness. It shined so bright she had to cover her eyes. That's when the healing came and now she will never be the same. Her heart is filled with hope and love like never before. She is no longer drowning in the sea of life, but now is on the dry land with her daughter building a castle.

Six- Word Stories

Skylar J. Vaughn

桜
いい日
あなたがいなくて寂しいです



Translation:

Cherry blossoms

Beautiful Day

Miss You

Andrew F. Rivetti

Mañana voy a escribir algo mejor.

Translation:

I will write something better—tomorrow.



Patrick W. Wheeler

NOS IDOLES

Avec les sabres et la guillotine
Nous tuions nos anciens maîtres
Ayant démolì Louis l'idole roi
Nous servions un dieu : liberté
Mais quand notre pays a été chassé
Par les loups de les îles occidentales
Un lion a dévoré nos beaux rêves
Éteint l'espoir pour la démocratie
Échangé Dieu pour idoles encore
Ce méchant lion était Bonaparte

Translation:

*Our Idols
With swords and the guillotine
We were killing our former masters
Having demolished Louis the idol king
We were serving one god: liberty
But when our country was being chased
By the wolves from the western isles
A lion devoured our beautiful dreams
Put out hope for democracy
Exchanged God for idols again
This evil lion was Bonaparte*



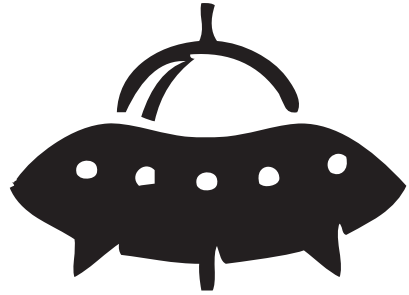
Dalton A. Maclin

TRYING

I'm tired of trying
I try so hard
To blink
To breathe
To keep myself together
Simply by a thread
I try so hard
Getting nowhere
Yet, it seems I'm being stretched everywhere
Wherever that may be
No time for anything
No longer am I me
I tired of trying
I think I need some sleep



Six- Word Stories



Cindy White

WEEKEND

Not invited, Not welcome . . . Not going!

Kali M. Dawes

Young girl. Broken. Addicted. Changed. Restored.

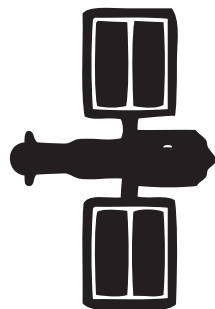
Kali M. Dawes

Start test. Computer crashes. No redo.

Dalton A. Maclin

★ I AM EVERYWHERE

I am everywhere
Too high
Too low
Just a little too far to the left
Being used by everyone
Though I'm never in the right spot
I'm used by everyone
Out in this spot
I didn't choose this place
I was put here by others who use me like everyone else
I help people to make them feel better when they're feeling drained
I am an outlet
When I'm through
I'll probably be replaced
When I'm no longer of use



Jada L. Lewis

MY BODYGUARD

Lying on this bed I stare up at the ceiling above me. The blank white ceiling that reminds me of my own hair. My pure white hair that once was as black as oil, but now is as white as this ceiling and the snow outside. It bothered me so much, but this was normal for me. It had become the norm ever since my old life was taken from me and I was forced to don the mask of another for survival. Thinking back on that makes me question it all over again. How long has it been? How long have I been living in this horrible lie of mine? How long have I been clinging to a life that I can no longer have? How long am I going to try and save myself? When in reality, I'm already dead and just waiting for it to end in the most painful way possible. These thoughts and questions roll through my mind, but I try my best to forget them. At least I try to forget until I have to come back to the house. This house that's neither home nor sanctuary.

"Hey! Doctor Jackson, we have to go in five minutes!"

That voice, I know it well. It was the voice of the military guard I have. Hearing him, obviously means I have to go back outside and face my reality again. My horrible, bloody, gruesome reality. I slowly pushed myself off the bed I was on and started to make my way out of the room. I stopped in the kitchen and bathroom on my way out though. The kitchen for my lunch and the bathroom for a moment to make sure I was calm and composed. If I wasn't, I would be suspected and questioned which would ultimately end in my demise with a bullet to the head. Gotta be safe they would say. Gotta be sure we can contain it. Horrible, but true, since the world we live in is rotten to the core both literally and figuratively. When I reached the front door, I could only stare at it for a moment. I didn't want to go out, but I needed to. I needed to be brave. I slowly reached out and grabbed the doorknob. Once I did, I pushed it open and stepped outside into the light. The first thing that greeted me was the metallic smell of blood. Yes, the smell of blood is what met me first. The next thing to meet me was the bitter cold and the face of another person. A man dressed in grade A military clothing carrying a loaded rifle.

“Good morning, Doctor Jackson.”

“Good morning, Robert.” This man named Robert was my bodyguard. Why do I need a bodyguard again? Oh, that’s right. I need one so that I don’t get killed by angry parents, I also need one so that I don’t get attacked by an infected individual.

“Are you ready to go?”

“Yeah, I’m as ready as I can be.”

As soon as I said that we started making our way down the street. The street that’s been stained by blood and damaged by bullets. The street where armed military patrols and watches all who come out their own homes. It scares me so much because I’m exactly what they’re watching for. I am what they shoot on sight. The only reason I haven’t been shot is that I have deceived them. If I had never done that, I would be dead right now and my body would be ash left over from the burning of a pile of bodies.

“We’re here”.

I was suddenly snapped out of my thoughts. I was so focused on the world around me that I hadn’t noticed that I reached my destination. I was at the local high school, yes, a high school. This is where I come every day. Every day to inspect and decide the fates of teenagers as they just try to live what bit of a normal life they can. Looking forward I could already see the inspection room ready for me. I could also see the giant line of teens waiting to be inspected by me. It was saddening to see so many who were practically my peers waiting to be inspected by me. They all were waiting to see if they lived another day or not. I continued to look around, but only for a moment before making my way to the inspection room. As I neared the door, I heard a scream, then the sound of feet running across the pavement, and then a loud bang. I already knew what it was. I don’t need to turn around to know what had happened. I didn’t need to look to know another had been shot down and killed. I didn’t need to look to know that the person who just died, was a rotten person.

Jada L. Lewis

THE LETTER

I slowly opened my eyes to the world. The first thing I saw was the semi-white, brown cornered ceiling with chipped pieces ready to fall below and on me. Though to be honest I could already feel some on me and around me on the bed. I quickly wiped away what was on my face before sitting up and examining the room.

The windows were still boarded up, and faint rays of light shined through enough to illuminate the room. The floor was still the same as before. It was grey, chipped, split, and rotting. It almost makes me afraid to get up and move. I always think that I'll fall through and die on a heap of splintery wood. It's never happened though, not once since I've been here. I've always been safe here. I don't know why or how, but this house protects me.

I lay there thinking a bit more about where I was until my stomach growled. That growl obviously meant that it was time to eat. I quickly got up from the bed and made my way out the nearby door and down the dark

hallway. There were barely any windows, so almost no light shined through. To be honest, I could barely see anything, but I've gone down this hall so many times I no longer need to rely on eyesight so much. When I reached the end of the hall, I started to walk down the old creaky staircase. Each would make the wood below my feet bend inwards as if it was ready to snap.

Once I reached the bottom, I reached to my side and flipped a switch. Lights flickered on and illuminated the room. It was the same room as always. A torn-up couch in the center stained to the brim with previous meals. A television in front of it, but sadly broken with a cracked screen. The side of the room held the kitchen which just contained an old fridge, a gas stove, an empty counter, and a sink with a rusty faucet.

I stood there staring at the room to process my surroundings for a moment before making my way to the door beside the fridge. When I reached it, I unlocked it with the key hanging on the doorknob. I don't know why I used this key. Nobody else was

here beside me, but still, I used it. After unlocking it I stepped inside to see the shelves lined with the usual. They were cans full of tuna, spam, fruit, vegetables, and other assorted goods. I don't know why everything had to be preserved food and nothing fresh, but it was better than nothing.

Searching the shelves for something decent to eat. I have tried everything in this Pantry, but still, I don't want the same food every day. I only get to choose three cans to eat from every day, and with such a limited choice system I eat the same things a lot. I don't want to eat meat so early in the day so instead, I'll settle for a can of fruit. I reached up and grabbed a can labeled fruit cocktail and made my way out of the pantry.

When I was out, I locked it and started to open and eat the can's contents. While eating I walked towards the trash can by the boarded-up door but stopped when I heard a loud crackle. The crackle sounded familiar, but I can't remember what made it. Staring down at the ground I saw something white. It was pure white and bright. I Haven't seen something that white in years.

I reached down slowly and picked it up. It felt quite scary to look at it. If memory serves correctly, then isn't this a letter? If so then it means someone actually wrote to

me. This hasn't happened in years, actually, this has never happened till now. Also, who would want to write to me?

I can't remember other humans being in my life besides my mother and sister. My mother raised me here till she died at age forty I believe. I think I was only eighteen, and my sister left home long before that. I think she had run off with some boy she had met while I was thirteen.

Could this be from her? I doubt it since it's been God knows how long. Still, the thought of her wanting to write me brings about a sense of slight joy. Without hesitation, I opened up the letter, but to be honest I ripped it more than opened it. When it was out, I scanned the paper. It was from my sister, she was sending her love and kindness. Sadly, though she still thought mother was alive. I had no idea where she was so I couldn't inform her.

It pains me a bit, however, this letter and its words make me happy. I wonder if I have any paper around to write with. If I do, I should use it to write back. If I do it will be the first time I've communicated with a person in years. So many years.

Joseph Wallis

A PLACE OF GRAY

As the large black bus moves through the thundering night the members on board know one thing; peace will not be waiting for them at their destination. They sit one to each seat not allowed to converse or communicate. Their hands lay between their knees—wrists bound via a zip tie. The only comfort they're allowed is looking through the windows to view the stormy landscape beyond them.

These criminals are heading to Grayville; an island compound isolated from the rest of the world. It's self-sufficient and self-maintaining in every way. The only thing not curated by the prisoners are the lookout towers surrounding the entire island. This facility is meant to house one specific type of criminal; the writer. Grayville is about to house a group of celebrities in its walls. They are a group known as The Crusaders.

In the year 2133, after a long time of debate and argument; a global peace program known as "The Cleansing" created a policy that outlawed the distribution and speaking of creative written word. This was done to help abolish opinion and work towards creating a true world utopia. The public lash out was immense, and it spread

across the entire world; however, people were eventually silenced.

Ten long years went by, and along with it went The Bible, The Vedas, The Sacred Buddhist text, and every other religious work was destroyed. The word "martyr" was engraved into the forehead of anyone who refused to hand over their books. It took quite some time, but "The Cleansing" did away with the soul and shrouded billions of believers in darkness. Without words to guide them, and a growing military threat millions took their own lives in an event known as "The great surviving soul" it was meant to wake up the government and show them the truth of their actions. It was ignored.

Fiction too was a target; perhaps an even larger one than religion. While churches were sacked and robbed of their books. Libraries were simply burned to a pile of rubble. Every book was destroyed and their writers silenced. Homes were ransacked and much like the martyrs of religion; we too had a sign placed on our bodies. Anyone who didn't submit was forced down to the floor and branded with a message on the palms and backs of their dominant hands reading "This mind has been cleansed, they are

no longer a threat to what's best for you and me." Some claim it still stings to this day.

A team of six known only as the Crusaders dedicated their lives to recreating and distributing life's greatest creations. They traveled wherever they could to spread their message and distribute classic books and religious texts. They became celebrities, but more importantly, criminals. They sent out secret letters through thousands of people with one message; "Rise Up!" For their actions and immense popularity they were persecuted more than any other person or thing on the whole planet. The manhunt was legendary, and the body count grueling. The Crusaders gave themselves up to prevent any more deaths.

The bus's breaks screech to a halt as the front gate of the huge complex nears. The first member of the team looks back slightly and gives a wink to his team.

"Stand up," the bus driver says gingerly as he stands himself.

Each member stands one after another from front to back. Their backs and legs aching from the long ride here. They each turn to the center of the bus in preparation to exit the bus.

"Step forward and off of the bus one at a time. Be slow about it too." The bus driver says intently "See that fence out there?" he asks while pointing out the door window.

"You'll walk there and face the fence, then stretch out your arms and grab it. Do not move

after you've done that." he motions with his hand to the first member.

The first member approaches the driver cautiously. He stands a foot between them hoping he's not too close as it is. The driver turns his gaze to the Crusader and gestures with his head down, not breaking eye contact. The Crusader looks down to see a brand on the driver's left hand. The Crusader smiles and looks back up to the driver.

"Be careful, and do everything you're told. The Warden is not a friendly gu-" he stops as he notices the warden approaching the bus. He turns quickly and pulls the handle in a frantic panic.

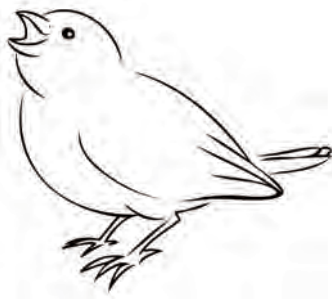
"Floop" the door goes as it swings open. The driver widens his eyes and quickly gestures his head towards the door. The first member wastes no time as he turns and exits into the pouring rain. The rain fiercely hits his head as he squints to make sure none gets in his eyes. The black figure approaches quickly; a duster can be seen being whipped around by the force of the wind. The Crusader straightens his posture and awaits anxiously for the encounter. The figure draws into sight making his final wet and sappy steps until he's close enough to be heard over the rain. The Crusader quickly eyes him up and down until his eye is caught onto a stunning sight.

"I know," the Warden says smiling. "How can a Martyr be in a position like this?"

Jazzma Smith

MY SILENT LITTLE SPARROW

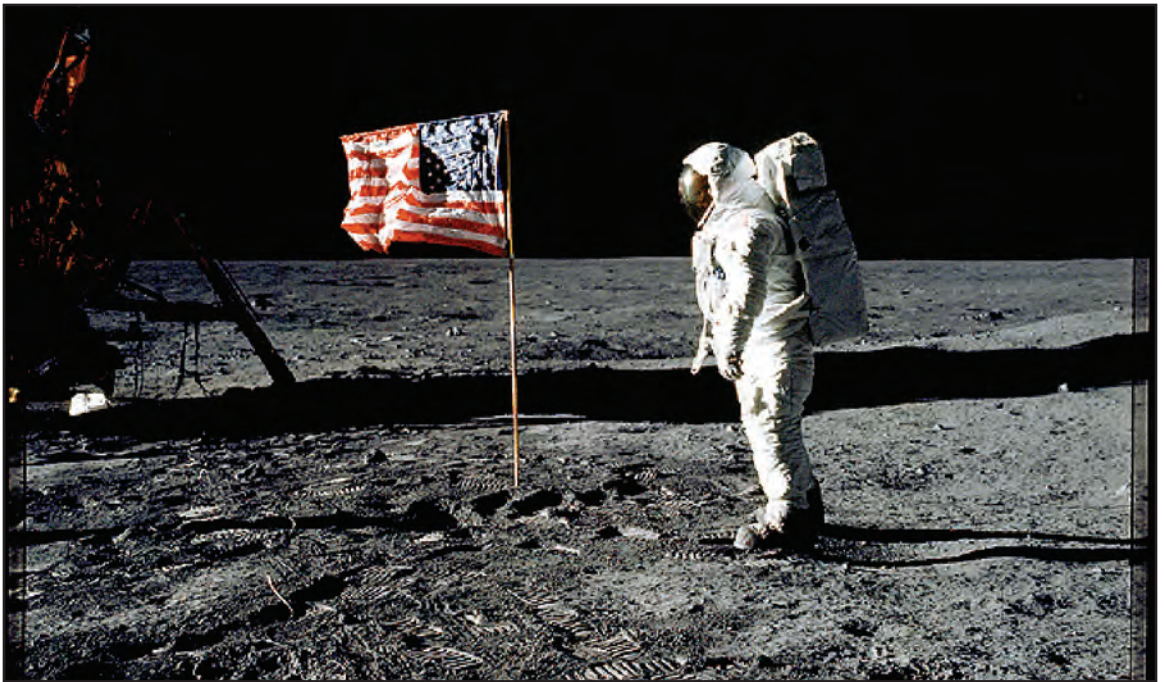
*M*y silent little sparrow
you seemed calm.
You were light and warm.
How could I have guessed
that you were a
broken little sparrow?
There was no idea
you were weeping inside
and bleeding inside.
Why did you take
your bow and arrow
and strike the life
out of yourself,
my silent little sparrow?



Brett Q. Jackson

AMERICA

*A*s the red blood stains the battlefield,
As the white flowers are placed upon the caskets,
As the families weep under the blue sky,
We raise the proud Red, White, and Blue for those who gave all, for her.



Six- Word Stories

Devin Simmers

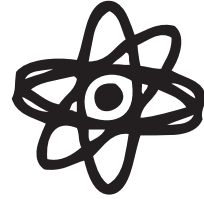
Hospital

oncologist

cancer

terminal

plot purchased



Jazzma Smith

SEED

From troubled seed to predator.
A troubled seed came among
filled with toil and sickness.
Perhaps it was an ill seed
arisen with strife and spite.
Perhaps it was struggling
to navigate itself
from all of the abound.

On that broad December day
strife and spite loses itself.
The troubled seed suddenly
becomes a predator.
Finds itself in a field
of twenty-six innocent prey.
Twenty small prey and six large prey.

On that day the time stood still.
The innocent prey perished.
There a garden of grief
for all to bare.
Then predator fades out
with the perished prey.
Predator now its own prey.



Kayla C. Sanderson

NEVER FORGOTTEN

The moment is so clear, more so than cellophane
and right then and there,
it doesn't take long to know who to blame.

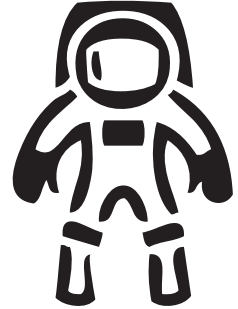
The world that you once knew was once so vibrant and bright
has now turned cold, dark, melancholy and affright.
the world around you fades,
and the ringing sounds in your ears—
the words you never wanted to hear.

The ones you've been ignoring.
The ones you've been avoiding.
The ones you've been dreading.
The ones you've been denying.

“He's gone.”

The one you've admired,
the one who's inspired,
the one-man fighter—

is a fighter no more.

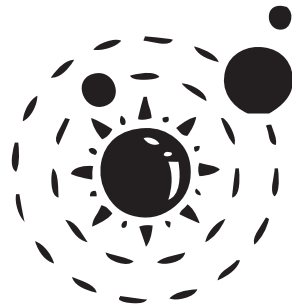


He was the superman
who could never be damned.
He was the stallion
who could never be branded.
He was the image of faith
painted on a golden canvas.
He was your world,
your heart,
and most importantly,
your father.

But now he was but a shell
of who he once was
and there was nothing you could do but stand
and ponder
the “because.”
And in that moment,
the never forgotten moment,
it is the moment
you wished you could forget.

Brittany Austin

MY ANGEL ★ IN HEAVEN



*O*n one rainy day,
The angels took my grandma away.
Through the quietness in the night,
I could hear her say

Grandchild—I miss you.
You have always meant so much to me,
But in heaven I'll be.

So, remember the good times,
Don't be sad.
Enjoy all the special moments,
Through the years we've had.

Heather M. Freeman

SISSY

IN LOVING MEMORY OF CRYSTAL CARTER-THOMAS

The pedestal I kept you on reached higher than any star.
Now I wish upon them and wonder where you are.
Did your plan work, are you out of pain?
Or did it make it worse, no peace to gain?
You were my big sister, though you didn't have to be.
You were the prettiest girl I ever did see.
With beautiful black hair and big brown eyes,
A smile so bright, and to me so wise.
You dolled me up for my first prom and wedding too,
You were so proud, but I was prouder of you.
When someone mentioned you, I would beam and say,
"That's my Sissy, I want to be just like her someday."
I never knew just how much you were hiding.
The broken heart and addiction you were fighting.
I never expected you to leave me so soon.
You took your life under that winter moon.
I wish I had said and done so much more
To show love is stronger than the pain you bore.
I wish I had told you just how much you mean to me,
How much I need you and when I look at you, what I see.
Beauty, Love, Intelligence, and Strength
Witty jokes and great stories with so much length,
God knows how I miss and love you with all of me.
Tell Momma I love her and be sure to keep her company,
Until I see you both again, my sweet Sissy.

Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-8255

David Fielding

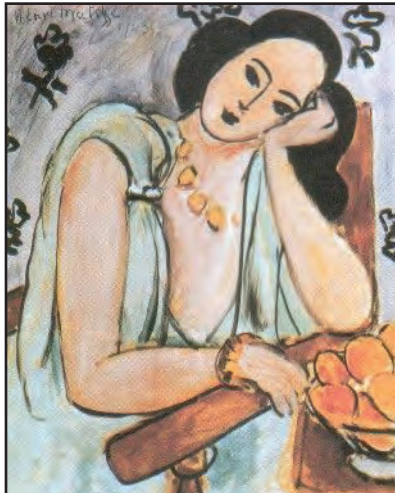
MATISSE AND MONIQUE

there was a french man
named Matisse
and conveniently
a french woman
named Monique.

She was a nurse
And he was not feeling so well
so she took care of that

Matisse the painter needed a model
and
Monique was a painter's model
So she took care of that too

they became friends
and maybe friendly
so that was that



Monique was quiet
like a church mouse
and poor like a country mouse
she was very hungry and needed milk
so
Matisse the painter fed her
sugar and milk with a shot of cognac

she got so full
and in time
some meat on her bones.

A few years go by
and
Monique becomes a french nun.
that upset Matisse.
but
they were still friends

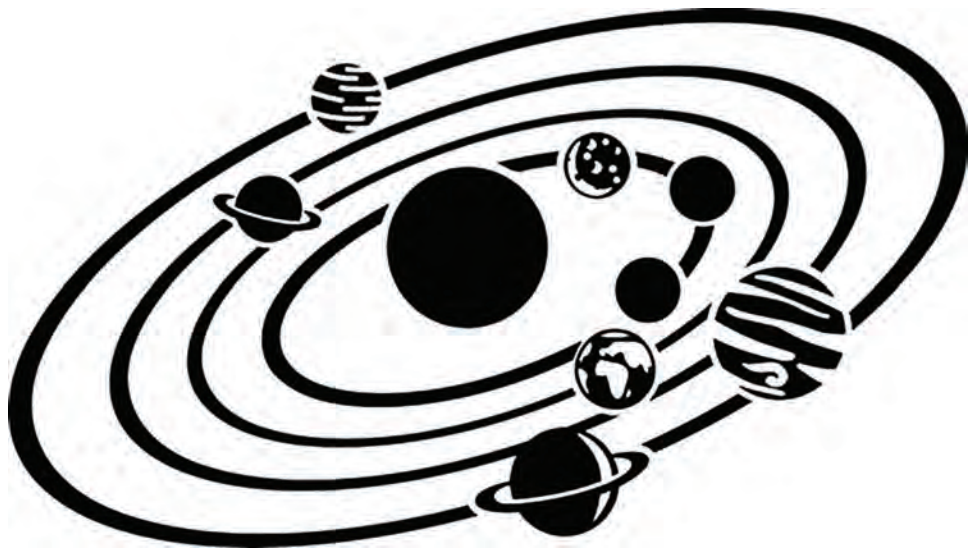
one day in the fall
Matisse dies
Monique did not attend Matisse's funeral
even after everything he had done for her
she would not and did not attend
because she was a french nun.
they were still friends
but no longer friendly
so that was that



Vicky L. Turner

SOLAR SYSTEM

I'll give you the moon; I would if I could.
I'll give you the stars, maybe even mars; I would if I could.
I'll give you Saturn, Jupiter, Neptune and more; I would if I could.
Do you want Mercury or Venus, Pluto maybe?
Uranus, the Earth or even the Sun?
Wouldn't that be fun; I would if I could.
Well maybe I can.
I have a telescope the planets are at your disguise.
So now I did it you have them all, from very big to very small.



Cody R. King

MATCH

Don't be afraid
because of an old flame.
You may have found the perfect match,
but you're scared of striking it
because of being burned again.
I won't burn you.
Strike your match.



Six- Word Stories



Deborah W. Young

Burned toast. Firemen and love arrived.

David Fielding

HOW I MET MY WIFE ON THE SECOND FRIDAY IN APRIL

he smiled

she winked

oh baby

Cindy White

PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

MY world. Your world. Our world.

Shelby R. Manis

PERFECT



Perfect
In the dictionary it means
“Excellent or complete beyond practical”
Perfect

To me means

You

I know you don't like it

When I call you that

I don't mean it the way

That the dictionary says

I mean it

With how you make me feel

Happy

Loved

Wanted

To me

That is perfect

Therefore

You are perfect

To me

Amber Garrison

TEAPOT

The
Whistle of
A Kettle, A Baa
Steaming Within Hot Water
A Quiet Day of Forgotten Memories
Open Arms, Welcoming Me Home
Joy A Family Member Once Lost
Here With Me, Tea cups in hand
Telling Each Other of all
Since We Last Spoke
Our Chatter Does Not Cease
Untill..... I Wake

Elijah Jones

MONSTER IN THE CLOSET

*H*e was all seven of the deadly sins.
His hunger for power over me.
His need to be the god I worshipped.
His wrath that tore apart my universe.

He was the karma for every bad thing I thought to do.
The angel who set the world on fire.
The monster under the bed.
The ring around the rosie.

He was the car crash that changed everything.
His empty words.
His seductive smile.
His everything.

He was the reason I took those pills.
The reason I stopped loving.
The reason I started hating.
The reason I died.
The reason I met you.



Haley B. Cornett

ONE SMALL STEP

Breathe.
Air fills young lungs.
Sunshine peaks through the blinds.

Tired, puffy eyes forced open.

Horrid smell.

Brush teeth. Floss.

Wash Face.

Comb the curly locks.

Breathe.

Bacon? Can't. Banana.

Take medication.

Barking blasts through the house.

Opinion, opinion, opinion, FACT, opinion.

Why waste time listening to that.

The crisp morning wind chills the cheeks.

Breathe.

BUZZ *RING*

The telephone is conveniently ungrounded.

Notifications replace conversations.

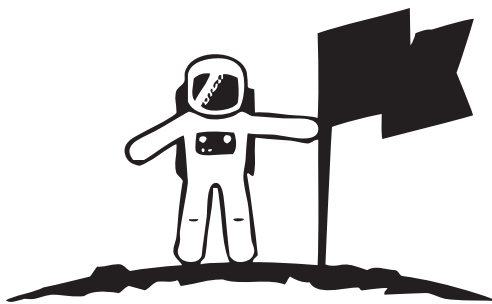
The line for coffee snakes through the street.

The money keeps brewing.

Caffeine is like cocaine.

Is parking an acquired trait.

Breathe.



HA HA GIGGLE, SNORT What!?

The sky is baby blue.

The trees are still bare.

NO. It's not very nice to stare.

Learn to tie shoes and enjoy the view.

Words can also be spoken.

DING "Steven updated his status"

Forget it.

Social only refers to media.

Dime denotes fine.

DTF? HA no. Be salty.

A phone call is considered "extra."

Holding the door open is a grand gesture.

Breathe.

There are bigger problems to solve.

Revolvers are easy to carry.

Insurance is outrageous.

Soldiers are deployed.

Families lives are destroyed.

Bills are overdue.

What can I do?

Breathe.

It only takes,
one small step,
to get out of bed.



Justin W. Henson

EARTH

*T*he earth keeps on cryin'
And the caps keep on shrinkin'
The politicians keep on lyin'
And it just keeps me thinkin'

When the last missile we fire
When the last child is dead
When the world is full of ire
And the innocence has all fled

Where will the discrimination be
When all our beauty is destroyed
Then can the truth we see
There's more to be enjoyed

Peace is within our reach
The world still can be saved
Tolerance we must teach
A new road must be paved



Kianna G. Johnson

SMH AT OUR GENERATION[★]

I don't believe in soul mates.

I believe you find someone who drives you out of your mind.

I believe you see someone's imperfections,

And you begin to see them as perfections.

In and out,

In and out,

In and out of time.

I believe you have the arguments,

And even the bad days too.

But you grab that person so tight,

And you hug them!

Like a jelly filled donut, squeeze out the goo.

I believe courage doesn't always roar,

Sometimes it may squeak.

David slayed Goliath and he feared he wouldn't see next week.

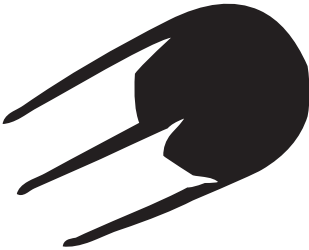
I believe relationships have three cords,

These cords hold it all together.

God is the thickest cord,

Without him. . .

Things just really don't work together.



We live in a generation of not loving.
Marriages falling apart.
Individuals always cheating,
And they were supposed to be holding someone's heart!
We're quick to throw away titles,
Boyfriend, Girlfriend, Husband, Wife.
Now we call individuals our cuddy buddies,
And act as if that's really a life!
Families are tearing apart,
Or there's no family at all.
I suggest we embrace each other.



Fix it!
Or we're all going to fall.
What is it with our generation?
I'm not trying to diss us,
But we have to straighten up our acts.
We have our children and our children's children lives to make better.
I would hope we leave them with some tact.
I weep for my generation,
I shed so many tears.
We choose our joys and sorrows,
And we're choosing our biggest fears!
I can't make you stop this madness.
I'm just trying to shed some truth.
The only person stopping you isn't the devil.
It's built in you!

Gregory D. Snell

SPOKEN WORD POEM

HAPPINESS IS A CHOICE

You make me so mad” you hissed. I almost laughed, because if I were really “making you” do something... this is not the reaction I would choose. It’s so easy to refuse to take responsibility for our emotions. We hear others say “I didn’t tell her because I didn’t want to make her mad.” “Boys will be boys.” “The Devil made me do it.” I heard a guy say “If you agree to go out with me, I will make you the happiest person in the world for the rest of your life.” I roll my eyes when I hear that and think “Yeah, you can do everything ‘right’ and that other person can still find a way to be unhappy with you.”

Happiness is a choice. If I am in stuck a situation that I cannot change... I can be happy or miserable. I’d rather be happy. So I choose to be happy. You can’t “make” me. Happiness is MY choice.

I choose to be happy because I have class at 7.30 in the morning.

Yes, it means I have to go to the cafeteria early. There aren’t many people at that hour.

Fewer of them are awake, but you happen to be one of them. And I’d kinda like to meet you.

I choose to be happy because you have no sense of humor.

I ran into you in the hall after class. I was so flustered I didn’t know what to say so I repeated the joke I heard on the radio...

“If Olivia Newton-John married Wayne Newton and divorced him to marry Elton John, she’d be... Olivia Newton-John Newton-John.” And you actually laughed.

I started to leave, but you said “That’s a cool t-shirt you’re wearing. Where’d you get it?” I said I bought it on vacation. You asked where I went. I told you. You said that seemed like a great place and asked me about it. And we had a little exchange.

I choose to be happy that there were no free study tables near you in the library.

I had to sit all the way across the room, in the corner, over by the pencil sharpener. I'm happy I was so far away and you were so busy writing that you wouldn't notice if I was staring. I'm happy you walked all the way across the room to sharpen your pencil... three times.

I choose to be happy that the zipper on my jacket broke.

When I told you I needed to go shopping, you said you had the afternoon free and asked if I'd like a 2nd opinion. I said 'yes.' At the mall, you tried on some shoes. I told you which ones I liked. When we passed the fragrance counter you pointed out which was your favorite. I didn't find a new jacket. But you bought a pair of shoes. I went home with a new scent.

Later I found out you had to rearrange your work schedule to have that afternoon free.

I choose to be happy it rained on the weekend.

Your place is so relaxing when it rains. I like being near the river. Sure, sometimes the place leaks, but I love the sound of rain on the tin roof. I'm happy sitting on the deck, eating blueberry bagels, and watching the sunrise with you... before crashing. And then waking up to do it all again. One day, I'll beat you at CLUE. But I hope it's never Colonel Mustard. With the wrench. On the porch. Fixing that leak.

I choose to be happy for leftovers.

I tried a new recipe for my parent's anniversary party. Nutella Cheesecake is easy to make and easier to eat. I asked if you wanted to try some. You said you'd just started a diet as part of your new gym routine. I guess that just means I don't have to share the last piece with you.

I choose to be happy for burned cookies.

The first time you invited me over, we made cookies. While they were baking you introduced me to a new band – Pokey LaFarge. We were so busy watching their music videos that we didn't hear the timer and the cookies burned. Later, I was excited when I snagged a pair of tickets to hear Pokey LaFarge. I was super happy to hear them play... even though you were super busy and couldn't make it.

I choose to be happy we're honest.

For my birthday, I wanted to try an escape room. You'd had a very stressful week and just weren't up for a timed event, locked in a room, with a group of my friends. I'm happy you were honest with me about needing to recharge alone. When the rain canceled your hike and you went out with some other friends instead... I chose to be happy you have friends that help you relax... even though you didn't call me.

I choose to be happy that I can stand up in the shower.

When I was learning to dive from the high dive in swimming class, the teacher told us: Stretch your arms above your head and jump as high as you can. When you reach the peak of your jump, bend in half, point your hands toward the water. As you push your head toward your feet, the momentum will straighten your legs behind you allowing you to slice cleanly into the water, dive deeply, and arc gracefully back to the surface.

Somehow, that never worked for me. I would jump and point and much like a giraffe bending over for a drink, I would tip and fall into the water... arms flailing, legs apart, splashing into the water unable to know which direction was up and I'd surface gasping for breath.

While I never really learned to dive, I did learn that when I fell into the water, if I just lay still the pressure of the water would figure out which way was up and raise me to where I could catch my breath. The lesson stuck with me. On days when pressures just seemed too much, I learned if I just sat still on the floor of the shower, I could figure out which way was up and rise above the pressure to where I could breathe again.

But today... I stood to take a shower rather than sitting on the floor.

I choose to be happy the walls of my apartment are thin.

The walls are so thin I can hear everything my neighbors do. When they interrupt my sleep in the middle of the night... I'm happy because... for once you're not the first thing I'm thinking about when I wake up.

I choose to be happy that I forgot it was your birthday.

Yesterday.

I'd been planning for your birthday. I bought your gift months ago while surfing Ebay. I was so pleased I'd found you something that had your initials on it. All 3 of them. Somehow it seems fitting I forgot... the first person with those initials doesn't have the item anymore. You have the same monogram and don't have it either.

Today I choose to be happy because...

NO! I am happy because I choose to be. And. It. Has.... nothing. To do. With you!

Kimberly Peuse

THE BEAST

*M*y tale is one of many seasons. I'm writing this with hopes that it may bring hope to those who must follow the path I've been sent down. I want to help give words to those who have no words to describe this monster that we must face. I write to bring encouragement and renewed strength to those who have lost their will to keep fighting. I have been there many times before and I'm sure I will be there again.

The beast we face strikes many, without care if you have fought other battles and won. It doesn't care if you're young or old. It doesn't care how strong or weak you are, it is relentless. I have learned it will never stop coming, no matter how many times you beat it. This is a war that cannot be won. You're going to feel trapped, lonely and scared. I am not going to sugar coat this for you. There will be days you want to quit. You will want to give in and just let him win. You will want to just let the beast consume you, so that it's over.

Then other days you will feel stronger, you will stand up to fight and just when you thought you have won, the vile monster will knock you to your feet with a power you never knew it had.

When you think you are in control, he will show you that you're wrong. He will hit you with the speed of light and drain every bit of energy you have left in you. I know it's hard to fight something you can't even see. You can only see the effects it brings. I picture as an awful three-headed monster trying to take my life from me, for no reason other than it can. I don't know whether to hate it or to thank it for making me this strong. It will you know? Make you stronger, stronger than you ever thought possible.

When you stand against this beast, when you enter this war you will become one of the few who are this strong, chosen because you have what it takes, you have the strength. You just have to find it. Others will never understand what it takes to fight these battles. You will surprise yourself with how strong you can be, with how strong you have to be. You will find renewed strength you never knew was inside of you.

In this journey you will go to men and women who are supposed to be older and wiser than you for guidance or a strategy so to speak. They are supposed to have the answer but none of them will. You will have to build your own armor, come up with your own tactics and while you can work with them for guidance none of them can fight this for you. You will have to be your own advocate and your own healer.

With time you will learn you're not alone in this war. You can join together with others who are also fighting. Then you will begin to see the light in the darkness. Be warned that the loneliness can make it hard to see the light. It makes it hard to hold on to the rest of that are fighting. It's far easier to sink into the dark and let go then to fight.

While we can't win this war, we can win the battles and one battle at the time we can take our small victories.

I fight for the moments of bright light on my face. I fight for the small miracles, for those times it feels like I can win. So when darkness falls again and it will my friends, it always does remember those moments in the sun. Remember how it felt to feel the warmth on your skin, the comfort of knowing you're not alone. While we can't always be together, we are not alone in this fight.

I want to end with this while our path maybe rocky, dark and rather dreary at times it has bright, beautiful moments. Moments that are worth fighting for, moments that make the darkness not so dark. So keep fighting and even though the war can not be won, together we will win these battles. One battle at a time we can take on this beast and we can win by being strong and not quitting. We can push back, we can be stronger and braver and we can support one another. When it seems darkest, don't forget that tomorrow is your moment in the sun!



Daniel Ybarra

YOU ARE LOVED

STUDENT: I was 17 years old in juvenile hall, I had no idea what love was. Unsure of who I was as a person, if I could call myself a person. I let every label slice itself into my brain.

Voice 1: Liability,

Voice 2: criminal,

Voice 3: felon,

Voice 1: monster,

Voice 2: gangster,

Voice 3: addict

STUDENT: and I believed every lie. I didn't know what its meant to be blessed or loved.

Voice 1: I thought I was "blessed" whenever I had a lot of drugs

Voice 2: and alcohol.

Voice 3: No wonder I brought myself to juvenile hall.

STUDENT: But while I was exiled to my cell, a pastor would come in on sundays and preach the word; I'd be let out of my cell to listen and learn about the truth. To paint the picture, I'm sitting there in a orange jump suit surrounded by all my peers in grey. (Kids trialed as adults had to be easily identified in the facility.) and as I'm sitting there proudly being every label given to me in life. He looks me dead in the eye to tell me something I've never heard before

Voice 2: "You are not a criminal, you are not a felon, you are not a mistake, YOU. ARE. LOVED."

STUDENT: The concrete expression on my face hid every tear I cried that night. I was never told anything like that before in my life. A stranger, a man who knows nothing about me, had the compassion and the boldness to speak truth and life to the heart of a child.

Voice 1: I truly believed I was destined to live in a cell for the rest of his life
Voice 2: I truly believed I could not function with society.
Voice 3: I truly believed every lie,
STUDENT: until Jesus spoke through that man to reach out to me in a pit of despair and broke every link/label from the chains that held me down. It may seem so small, but it meant everything to me.

Voice 1: Because I never knew the truth.
Voice 2: That man reflected the love of Christ.
Voice 3: He did the mission he was lead to do.
STUDENT: I don't know what made me remember that. But I know I'm supposed to share it. I KNOW. Im not perfect, BUT I also KNOW

Voice 1: I'm not a criminal, monster, gangster,
Voice 2: I'm not a liability, mistake, screw up,
Voice 3: I'm not a felon, addict, or troublemaker.
STUDENT: I KNOW.....but there's someone out there that doesn't know. Let them know.



Gregory D. Snell

SPOKEN WORD POEM

AT LEAST

Looking over the edge of the hiking trail and seeing my fiancé lying unconscious 20 feet down... I had to quickly make several decisions...
Should I try to climb down to her or go for help?
Would I find help quicker if I hiked back to my car or pushed on toward the next town?
I questioned my choices for a long time after that.

At her funeral, my fiancé's mother insisted I sit in the front row with her, even though the funeral director said it was reserved "for family only."

In the receiving line after the funeral, I know my classmates and teachers meant well, but they said things like...

"At least you're young... you have time to find someone else."

At least I'm young? That just means I have more years to miss her.

"At least you weren't married yet."

At least? That just means:

I don't have 23 years of marriage memories for comfort

The only time I see her come down the church aisle she's in a coffin instead of her wedding dress.

When her mother hugs me and cries, it's not because she's gaining a son... she really is losing her daughter!

Not being married... that might be the least comforting thing.

After my first job following grad school, I fell in love with a woman... knowing she had leukemia.

We were married 3 years

The last year, we were in and out of the hospital.

Now I am sitting in the waiting room.

This time she is in intensive care...

Hospitals have limits on the visiting hours.

Nurses have limits on how much morphine they can give a patient

Doctors limit the types of treatments they'll recommend.

Insurance companies put limits on how much they spend for tests.

But no one limits how long you have to wait until you feel better again.

No one limits how much pain you feel or how long you cry.

At her funeral, I know my co-workers meant well. But they said things like...

"At least you knew she wasn't healthy when you married her."

Yes, at least I proposed to someone that I knew had a terminal disease. You see, I'd already proposed to a healthy girl... and that didn't turn out so well.

At least the 2nd time, I chose someone who wasn't strong enough to go on a weekend backpack trip, fall over a cliff, and die while her fiancé ran for help. At least, I knew all about that.

This time I couldn't run for help.

I had to sit.

I had to wait.

I had to listen to her monitor beep... slower. And then. Not beep. At all.

At least...

At least my wife knew she was going to die.

Time is a great equalizer.

Time gave her limits. Made her prioritize.

At least, (when it's not a luxury we have) Time makes us appreciate.

Don't be satisfied with "at least." Make death catch up with you.

Go! Are you just waiting for "at least?"

Joshua D. Webb

A LETTER TO MY FORMER SELF

*A*s bleak as your life may seem
It's all in the distinctive mind you see
What do you need to consider yourself free?
A life stress free?

A soul sin free?

Would you appreciate it if it was free?

No, but it would probably be easier

If you didn't have to teeter

Yet, if you never swayed:

Then would the happiness go away?

Could you tell the difference between night and day?

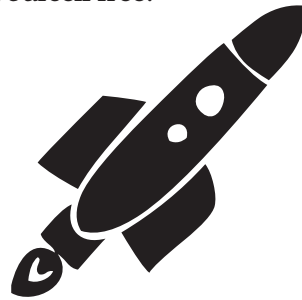
Perspective goes a long way

with pain

that leaves something to gain.

Can I show you the way?

It would really make my day



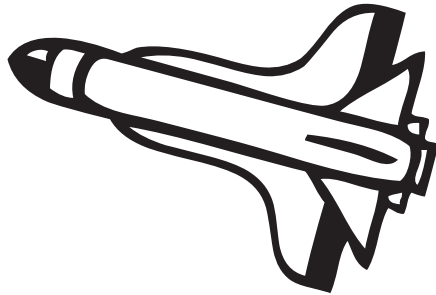
Six- Word Stories

Nathan A. Glen

Took a wrong turn found myself.

Jason Cowan

Presidential Library
crayons available upon request



Tiechera Samuel

THE WINDOWSILL

golden light
slips down onto
weathered wood

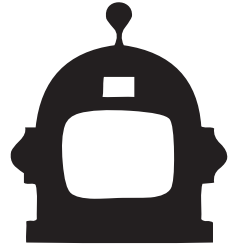
that has known
children with
sticky hands,
clinging,
gaining stability,
women with
floury grasps of
anticipation
for his arrival,
men with
aching fingers,
grime-edged
fingernails tapping
impatience

the bottom edge of glass
suspended between
now and next



Kate K. Wheeler

I KNEW WHO YOU WERE



I knew who you were when I first saw you in the bookstore. I was strolling down the aisles when I saw you. I knew what I was looking for but forgot it when I saw you.

You were leaning against the murky-brown bookcase, a story gently cupped in your hands. I watched you worryingly place your lip between your teeth, your anticipation slowly drawing deep gorges down your face. I knew who you were.

You were a stranger, shaking my hand while sweat trickled into my palms. You politely listened to every stuttering word I spoke, not even glancing at your watch though you were late for your next class or rushing away from me after I stole so much of your time.

You were an acquaintance, casually meeting my shaking self for a quick meal. You noticed my new shirt that was freshly ironed, my painted nails, and recently-dyed hair, but not how I stole your receipt and pressed it close to my heart, trying to savor your fingerprints.

You were my close friend, calling me at 2 A.M. after you cut all ties and heart with your girlfriend. I cried with and comforted you, but you didn't notice our tears flowing from two different emotions.

You were finally my boyfriend, my hands no longer shaking or sweating as they held yours while we strolled across the city watching the sun glide down through the hills. You held me close at night, but you didn't notice as I touched your fingertips while you slept.

You were my only, slowly pressing our lips together as bronze bells sang above us. You stayed with me through our life, no more deep gorges or sweaty hands, only fingertips forever united. You held me as my lungs rattled shakily for the last time.

But you were also none of these things, because I didn't wipe my hands on my pants, I didn't take a breath, and I didn't stroll up to you. I just watched you study your story then walked on. Just as nerves brought me closer to you, nerves took you away. When I left, I knew everything you were to me and nothing which you are.

Vicky L. Turner

MY REFLECTIONS[★]

I looked in the mirror today, and what did I see?
I saw someone else staring back at me.
Who is this woman I ask myself.
It can't be me that I see.

This woman is much older, has wrinkles and white hair.

Please tell me who she is, because its not me that's there.

I am still young, don't have wrinkles, and my hair is blonde, I know for a fact.

So who is that woman standing there staring back?

I guess mother nature did a number on me.

Because that really is me that I see.

It makes me sad I want to cry.

I keep asking myself why, why, why?

Well I learned a very important lesson in life.

I learned how to fight and overcome strife.

I have overcome sadness, heartache, and pain you can't see.

That's why I've changed, and that's why that's me.

I have overcome sickness, It's all taken a toll.

But it's also made me who I am, It's made me whole.

I've learned how to love and how to have fun.

And have tried to do everything under the sun.

I've slowly left that little girl behind,

But i guess in a way, I really don't mind.

I've left that young lady that enjoyed life so,

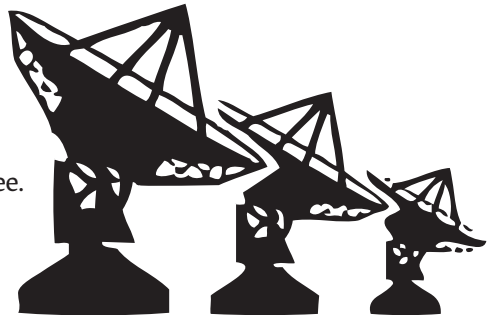
I've left that middle aged lady that had such a glow.

The years flew by so swiftly, like almost overnight,

I've loved each and every one of them with all of my might.

I'm left with these golden years that really don't seem gold,

But it happens to all of us, we must eventually grow old.



CONFLUENCE

COLOPHON

The cover stock is 12-point C1S gloss cover printed in full process color.

The text stock is 80# white gloss matte printed in full process color.

Headlines are set in **LAIKA FREE** typeface.

Masthead, subheads, and folios are set in **AQUA GROTESQUE**.

Author's Names are set in *Variante Script*.

Six-Word Stories logo is set in *Kinkes Decor*.

Text is set in Fenix Standard.

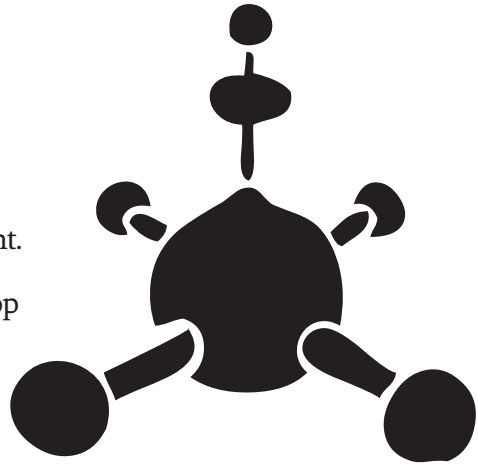
Retro space wingdings taken from Other Space Font.

Design software: Adobe InDesign, Adobe Photoshop

Graphic Design: Mark J. Sanders

Editing/Proofreading: Gregory Snell

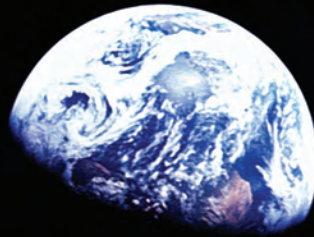
Confluence is funded annually by Three Rivers College



SUBMISSIONS

All students, faculty, and staff may submit essay, poetry, or fiction. Submissions are accepted each school year from November to February.; Each entry may be 1,000 words or less, maximum three entries per author. Entries must be submitted digitally and can be emailed to the editor at gsnell@trcc.edu.

WHERE STUDENTS AND CREATIVITY CONVERGE



THREE RIVERS COLLEGE