

Onward!
A Legacy of Heritage and Hope

10th Annual
Ventura College
Diversity in Culture Festival
Anthology
2026



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Onward - /'ɔnwərd, 'änwərd/

Adverb

in a continuing forward direction; ahead.

Adjective

going further rather than coming to an end or halt;
moving forward

Legacy - leg-uh-see

Noun

- I. *Law.* a gift of property, especially personal property, such as money, by will; a bequest.
- II. -anything handed down from the past, as from an ancestor or predecessor:

Heritage - /'herədij/

noun

an inheritance.

Hope - /hōp/

noun

a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.

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Introduction

“An intellectual says a simple thing in a hard way. An artist says a hard thing in a simple way.”

Charles Bukowski

We live in a world ever more intensely driven by technology, where value is increasingly judged by utility and expediency—where it’s easier to look into our phones than into our hearts and the world around us. This is a time where truth is too often a rare commodity, and AI apes, often convincingly, human voices and sentiment.

All these distractions only make the arts more important. The individual voice, the embracing of heritage—of understanding its value, and the willingness to believe in what we can envision are some of the few things that ground culture and possibility. A culture that values artistic expression is one that encourages critical thinking, open dialogue in all its forms and emotional intelligence: we need to be that culture willing to see beyond the immediate, embrace perspectives as diverse as our people, and, always, question assumptions. The arts do all these things and, in that sense, they become civic necessities. The polymath poet, Kenneth Rexroth, was emphatic about the power of the arts: “Against the ruin of the world, there is only one defense—the creative act.”

In our media and consumer driven society we, particularly the young, are too easily homogenized; it is in the arts where we find individuality and our voices. Your voice/vision in whatever form you choose is the fingerprint of your history and soul. Artists bring to the blank page or canvas the particular sum of their history and all that they have enjoyed or suffered. The time stamp of this magnificent baggage provides fuel for creation, but each person uses that fuel as their particular spirit insists. And this is important because without the timestamp that literature and other arts give us, we would know nothing intimate about the past. Chinua Achebe has argued that our stories are a survival mechanism, that a people’s stories are the vessels in which identity is kept alive across generations; the arts are how we speak to each other across time, distance and even deep differences.

Students are encouraged to read, study, analyze, criticize and appreciate literature, but they are rarely encouraged to try writing it. Artists take classes to learn about how to see and render light and color, how a charcoal line goes down on a page, how the wonderful mess of watercolor painting can be made translucent. A single class in ceramics becomes a

revelation about the Zen focus it takes to make clay into art. Musicians learn not just about playing fine music but about the alchemy of transforming math into emotion and sound into transport. But students are too rarely encouraged to attempt serious creative writing—what the curve of a good sentence can do, the power of a line break, how to pay vivid attention in language to invoke the glory and trauma of the human condition.

This anthology brings together students who have taken the bold step out of themselves and into the shoes of the greats who have come before. They're no longer just talking the talk, they're taking at least tentative steps in walking the walk, into blossoming their own voices, appreciating their particular heritage for power and inspiration, and moving forward into the future.

In opening this collection you have the rare opportunity to walk with them, to explore through their individual fingerprints: let this open you to the world and the world to you.

Lin Rolens

Onward!
A Legacy of Heritage and Hope

Dear America

by Des Kolbeck

VC Diversity in Culture Festival Poetry Slam 2026 - Winner

Dear America,

I pledge allegiance
to the flag
of the United States of
capitalists.
Oh sorry,
fascists.
And to the MAGA,
for which it dominates
seized nations
under pedophiles
conquerable
with liberty and justice for all...
unless you're Black
or Hispanic
or Asian
or a woman
or LGBT.

We are the land of the free
though no necessities are free
not food
not housing
not healthcare
not even the air you breathe.
We are, however, free
free to shoot children
free to bomb children
free to rape children
free to eat children
but that does come with a need
a need to be rich.
As soon as that box has a tick,
you are free to do as you crave.

We are also the home of the brave!
Brave like the new generation,
who are fighting the frees,
every day, protest after protest.
The new generation
of babies protecting babies
from adults who compare them to cream cheese.
Brave like the immigrants
who have trekked far and wide
to provide their children
with a chance to build a life worth dignified
though now, of course,
they've all died.

Speaking of death!
This just in,
number of child deaths
in Gaza surpasses
20,000
since October 2023.
Ukraine comes in second
with about 150 classrooms
of children as mere casualties;
deaths just being 733
Iran finishes in last place
with their dead only being 180
though I'm sure they'll catch up
by the time I turn 20.

My mother once told me,
"You are my legacy"
Each child is the physical entity
of their parents' legacy.
Each last name a trophy
to uphold you and me...
but if I am my parent's legacy
along with you and you and you too,
What about those children?
Those children, all dead,
never again allowed to see

the light from the sun above their head.
The 20,000 Palestinian
733 Ukrainian
and 180 Iranian
all 20,913 of them...human
Each child now a seed never allowed to be planted
in the garden of life,
the garden of endless possibilities.

Wake up all of you, please.

A letter from your dying legacy.

My Card Game

by Conner Burch-Medin

VC Diversity in Culture Festival Poetry Slam 2026 - Runner Up

Hospital lights looked like Vegas when I was born
Hold the Schnapps
I was raised around bitter liquor
That would make your liver quiver
Arrows unsheathed, launched at my glass fortress
See, I was raised in a sandbox
Crab molds and castles
Preparing my kingdom
Waves from a familiar body
Recognized because my parents
I didn't drown in it
I was swimming in striped chips
Tan lines looked like I was hydrodipped
Towel dried, dragged to a garage
Sitting at a poker table

Smell of cigars
liquor darker than the shadows behind the Christmas story leg lamp
It's been a while since I was that bored
Being away from home was a chore
To make it in this world, I thought you had to cheat
Picking up booze and shoes, in my bare feet
These are the thoughts crossing my mind while
I was shuffling a deck of cards, wishing for a full house
Split suits, my king was shooting an ace beneath his sleeve
Praying to pass my Queens Customs or to get custody
No 2 pair 50/50 split
When my King and Queen click
He wouldn't stay
He'd call the dealer for a hit

I was dealt this hand, so what sort of man
Does the king of spades, who digs his own grave
Have to say
When I'm a misprint that has a queen and a king blended into one face

My legacy is where I hang.
I will not live to see the second digit change
So imma 21st century man for the rest of my days

I still have plans of greatness I am a wild card
Who will continue to change faces

You become what you strive not to be
So intentionally
I wear my ace of hearts on my sleeve
I can't stop breathing
I'd rather suffocate on the truth
Then have meditative breaths on what I didn't do
I would skip the jam and butter, too
Unflavored lifestyle, leaving my legacy as plain
As half of my family's food

I clean my plate either way
The only time I leave crumbs
is when I see someone who hasn't eaten today
I work for what I have, put that on my name while I'm in existence
I'm as present as Christmas
Where both sides are trying to outshine
The lights outside
I won't be remembered in the slightest
My anxiety makes me a vampire who needs to be invited
In 100 years, I won't be the same
In 100 years, I will be a face in a frame
while my body decays in a grave
But my actions will live on in those who replayed
My card game
Throwing chips on felt
Pissed at the cards they were dealt
Are we even the same?
How could you even be playing?
My card game

The house always wins
Unless your home is broken from within
Gambling addiction, drug addiction

All satiated, topped off with women

Our card game

Sex and lies
dirty politicians, and skies
Can I not go outside?
I'll just sit and play
their card game

The only hand I hold
Is mine
I peek at others from time to time
And then get insecure and start lying
Do I like
My card game

I see my siblings getting dealt my hand
I'm still learning how to stand as a man
I'm no veteran of this game
But I won't chase a hit

I'll learn how to stay
and if they don't end up the same
Then I broke the chain

This is our card game

Heart in the Breeze

by Maxwell Lommel

VC Poetry Slam 2026 – 3rd Place Winner (Tie)

You've grown a heart for me that lives among the bark and breeze.
And when I pay just enough attention to the trees,
and the wind in their leaves
I can learn their melodies.
And for a moment
sometimes,
only sometimes—
I can imagine you singing their gnarled elegies.

It's the not-met kind of fret
Grandmother, you had a trunk reaching for more than the heavens
Above possessions.
We sit together, watching your son.
He was blinded, burned by your love.
In search of it he grew roots that threw themselves to the floor
without fully sinking into the earth.
At a kneel his song echoes in meadows:
“I don't feel real”
left lips blistered by love.
“My heart hurts; it hurts to breathe”
pounds out of his chest
permitting dry tears.
Tears that could be quenched solely by that same force.
“Where is this golden compassion?” he cries.

Your daughter responds,
Only by pointing towards the heart,
For which the heart responds by whispering back to the self.
And there she sat in the valley beside youth and grief.
With a heart that cries to the
self.

I live in a legacy of loss
Yet still a heritage of wrought resilience
that arises from a different form of heart
One that hopes to have enough compassion

for myself to live sunset after sunset.
I hope that same heart will pierce through my child
And their children.
I hope that compassion for the self, so mythic in this world.
Will leave them in rupture
One that's healed just as quickly as it was made.
Nursed in the orchard, mended in the shade

Most of all, I hope they'll live among the bark and breeze.
And I hope I'll teach them
that when you pay just enough attention to the trees,
and the wind in their leaves
you can learn their melodies.
And for a moment
you can see me
singing their beautiful elegies.

Born From Them, Becoming For Them

by Maria Salas

VC Poetry Slam 2026 - 3rd Place Winner (Tie)

I come from Mexico's dust roads and open skies,
from grandparents who lived most of their lives there,
working the land that asked everything
and returned only enough to keep going.
I come from a grandmother widowed too young.
My mother still a child
learning to wash laundry, soothe babies,
and carry burdens meant for grown hands.
I come from a grandfather who buried his wife early,
from a father who lost his mother as a young boy
and learned to be strong in ways
that left no room for softness.
I come from the boy he once was,
crossing into California with borrowed courage,
working the lemon fields under a sun
that burned his skin but fed his hope.
He carried the scent of lemons everywhere,
clinging to his clothes,
to his skin,
to the memory of his prickly mustache
against my cheeks when I hugged him.
He fought for papers, for safety, for belonging,
and when he finally brought his family north,
time stole him away in a single moment,
a car crash in 2000 rewriting our story.
I come from stories held together by grit,
from people who survived because they had to,
not because anyone showed them how.
But I am the place where the story shifts,
where survival loosens its fist,
where tenderness becomes a choice, not a risk.
I carry their history without carrying their hurt.
I honor their sacrifices without repeating their wounds.

Now I am a mother of four boys,
standing at the edge of the same ocean
my parents once crossed in their own way.
Aiden reminds me gentleness survives.
Sebastian and Benjamin teach strength that bends.
Santiago shows me joy is a legacy, too.
So I choose a different tide,
love spoken out loud,
a beginning that starts again with me.

This is America's Homework

by Shamon Alvarez

They tell us school is where you learn
but the first lesson is survival.
How to crouch in a corner,
how to silence your breath,
how to pray your backpack looks like a shield.

We weren't born knowing lockdown drills,
we were taught them
like multiplication,
like spelling tests.
Except this test has a wrong answer
that bleeds into the hallways.

Parents shouldn't have to kiss their kids
like it might be the last morning.
Friends shouldn't send texts that read,
"Are you okay? Did you hear shots?"
Teachers shouldn't have to stand
between bullets and bodies
with nothing but a locked door
and hope.

And yet here we are,
2025,
still counting coffins like attendance.
Still reading names instead of novels.
Still telling children
this is just "how things are."

But it isn't.
It's how our government
decides things will be.
Because the first school shooting 1764
and still,
we sit here,
centuries later,
with thoughts and prayers as empty as classrooms.

“Guns don’t kill people,” they say.
Tell that to the children who never made it to graduation.
Tell that to the parents identifying shoes
on a cold hospital floor.
Tell that to the teacher
who had to write lesson plans in one hand
and emergency exits in the other.

Don’t tell me this is freedom.
Don’t tell me this is the cost of living here.
Because freedom isn’t a child
learning what it feels like to be prey.
And living shouldn’t mean
waiting your turn to die.

So yeah, I’m angry.
Because it’s bullshit.
Because every headline is a wound
and every “nothing will change” is salt in it. Because
kids deserve crayons, not caskets. Because **I** want a
country
where going to school
doesn’t feel like going to war.

And if the government can’t get the fuck over itself,
then we’ll remind them
over and over,
with voices louder than gunfire
that we are done
burying the future
for the sake of the trigger.

Paywall Punx™

by Isaac Arquilevich

Symphonic movements of outsiders,
chaotic chords pulsating swollen masses,
ready to burst,
a rhythmic pummeling,
like frenzied bugs,
beneath a lifted rock,
like innocents under firebombs,
scattered and sporadic in motion.

Clashing of a counterculture,
voluntary lapses of understanding,
promoting vain attempts of fashionable revolt,
disguised as inclusivity,
easy and programmable.

Cash for studs!
Pay later molotovs!
Subscribe! Subscribe! Subscribe!
The trade of rebellion,
proving prosperous and fruitful.
Originality sold as commodity.

Return to sender,
an envelope of anthrax,
a pamphlet of religion,
a flyer for revolution.

Forgive not these transgressions,
for we know better,
the scent of pale green bread intoxicates,
fattening chain wallets in back pockets.

Left behind the carcass of a culture,
roots buried deep in resistance,
dig 'em up,
and replant 'em in Paywalled Gardens.

There is a revolution,
all systemic,
all for capital,
all cliché,
downvoted into complacency,
accessible only to those willing to pay.

The Arms of Mother

by Isaac Arquilevich



In cradled arms a joyous affair,
Delicate,
soft lingering limbs sway leisurely,
wispings with the wind,
an earnest coddle.
The creases of mother's glee,
Tired eyes rise radiant with joy,
shining shimmering spherical bifocal windows,
Humble hands hold doughy fists,
protective,
permanent.

Legacy

by Guillermo Armenta

Did this paper make it 100 years?

2126 seems far away from here.

Dear you,

Did I create anything to help you?

In a year, I'll never see

what you can tell me I did to remember me.

Currently, nothing has gone on.

But things can change.

They always do.

Today I worked on my car.

I'm sure she'll go far; an eternity awaits.

Did we go from sea to shining sea

Will she see me raise a family?

Will she be there when I graduate?

Will she be there when I procrastinate?

Then I hope she serves me well.

She loves oil changes like hell.

But whatever roads we go

I know she'll take me there.

If you find yourself with her, treat her well.

I know she'll return the favor.

She'll take you to graduation, vacation, and your destination.

I'll entrust her to you.

I know she'll take care of you, too.

She'll take you to graduation, vacation, and your destination.

I'll entrust her to you.

I know she'll take care of you, too.

lemon bars

by Marina Baker

Family

is a recipe to follow,
a formulaic task
jotted down in butter-stained margins,
inked and passed on
forever to be engrained
and cherished by next kin.

We start with

solid foundation:

a crust built by warm,
weathered hands,
softened by age.

Knobby knuckles

with tree root veins
running red rivers across fingers,
a gold band holding strong
a lifetime of love,
a long-term beginning.

The tendrils reach out,
blossoming toward the sun
with every generation,
four flowers bloom eleven more,
and those roots are ours
to become.

Lemon over the crust,
an acidic addition
that puckers our lips
and waters our eyes
and reminds us of what it feels like
to survive.

For every pain that reels,
every tragedy that scorches our custard
we bake another batch
harnessing a pain we can muster
through family bonds unmatched
through blood-bound memories
as united as we are,

to make luck out of lemons,
that perseverance is ours.
Dust sugar for sweetness,
let rest and let rise,

and don't cut into ourselves
when we don't get it right
on the first try.
It's happened before
and we will be maddened again,
but even the messiest desserts
can be decadent.
They can be
stick-to-your-tongue saccharine,
so delicious they scorch tongues
in the haste for a taste
the pain is ours
to become.

The Kitchen Table

by Marina Baker

Her future sits behind her,
her pasts rest ahead.
At the coalescence of two paths,
with nothing to mourn
and nothing to dread.

Her face is ghostly white,
but it's just the flash
to freeze her in time.
It's seen in her eyes,
the red of camera flare,
the fragility of the frozen image,
the veil
poised in her hair.

Moments and memories
stand where she sits.
Years of busy family mornings,
years of sticky syrup pancakes
the plates all cleared away.
Years of microwave popcorn
and the scent that'll always stay.
Years of prayer circles and praise,
years of math homework
and arguments
leading to feet thundering up the stairs
and the slamming of doors.
Years of tears
over ice cream.
Years of laughter
over tea.
Years and years to now be held
in photographic memory.

She carries this time with her
and she will for all her days.
She'll share them

at a new kitchen table,
the one in a house not yet purchased
with children not yet born,
not yet conceived,
not yet even imagined.

For she sits at the crossroads.
Her future laid before her
with the hand of the man she loves
and all the promises that he sings.
Her past now rests behind her
to be reminded of
every time she sits there.

There,
at the kitchen table.



This House

by Jazzy Becerra

This house remembers.
floorboards hold voices,
pressed into the grain like fingerprints.

Staring out the
living room window,
where white sheets walk at night,
torches hiss,
names burned into crosses
like a warning no one wanted to hear.
Families whisper prayers
As doors lock and curtains close.

They carry flyers,
Knocking on doors,
saying they are being patriotic,
as if hatred could wear
the costume of love for a country.

This house remembers.

That in the attic,
there's a child from another century
brown hair is messy,
writing in a journal,
holding their only friend
a broken fountain pen.
Boots echo through the street,
And the radio whispers
of cities turned to ash,
a war shallowing the sky.

But the child keeps writing,
As if the ink could hold
the world together
for one more day.

This house remembers.

That now,
a child sits in their room,
staring at the news.
Names spill across the screen
leaders, billionaires, scandals
voices arguing over what is true
until truth sounds like another rumor
being whispered,
crowds chanting certainty
like it's a religion.

Outside, families run
from masked men.
Uniforms knock on doors,
wearing letters that justify their actions.

In this house,
that child sits alone
on their bed, staring at their phone,
tracking their mother
who was supposed to be home
hours ago.

News outlets label her
and 360 farmers
“Illegal aliens” and “Criminals”
like the land never knew their names,
like the soil never held their sweat.

And the child wonders
how history keeps knocking
on the same door.

Yet somewhere inside,
a small light remains, illuminating
a future
where this child
will open that door

and be greeted with a smile
instead of hatred.

They will read about hatred
as we read about monsters
with disbelief.

Truth is not fought over,
but protected.

This house remembers
the past,
sees the present,
and inside its walls
someone is still writing tomorrow.

Hope, even small,
Is stronger than silence.

And the child wonders
how history keeps knocking
on the same door
of this house.

My Father's Pathway

by Jennifer Bautista

I come from those,
who came with little to nothing.
Those who struggled to build something for themselves.
Those who worked long days and nights.

My father with no pathway
Just dreams and goals.
One of the many,
who searches for the American dream.
With little to no help.
He uses determination as his guidance.

As my father gave his all.
He did not know
somewhere along the way,
his years of sacrifice led him to the fields.

Long roads ahead and more fields ahead.
Where more years of work and dedication came along.
The sacrifices did not end as stopping was not a choice.

With only himself for company just trying to survive
looking for the American dream.

He still kept going.
My father never stopped looking
after the long bumpy roads.

All his sacrifices of leaving home to the unknown.
They don't go unnoticed as today I am here.
I am now to continue onward for him.
I carry his legacy and story as he was guiding my pathway.
His path never ended but only continues with me.

Ekphrasis in 3

by Dominick Childress Beckham

1.



David J: Proud to be a father with a son celebrating Christmas.

Jet black hair, mustache, and
tan skin like leather.
Striped four color 90s shirt.

A smile like happiness and not
Like anger—a smile like he's there
Do I dare to say: he's best where
He's feeling somewhat normal

2.



Dominick: Happy to be celebrating any Christmas.

Brave before bravery was required
Tricolor turquoise hoodie with a red lion on it
Jeans, speaking of my 'cowboy' persona.

A smile like unsure tentativeness
Another sleepless night under my belt
Waiting for presents and thinking,
What's in the huge box behind Dad?

3.



Clarence: Just drinking milk.

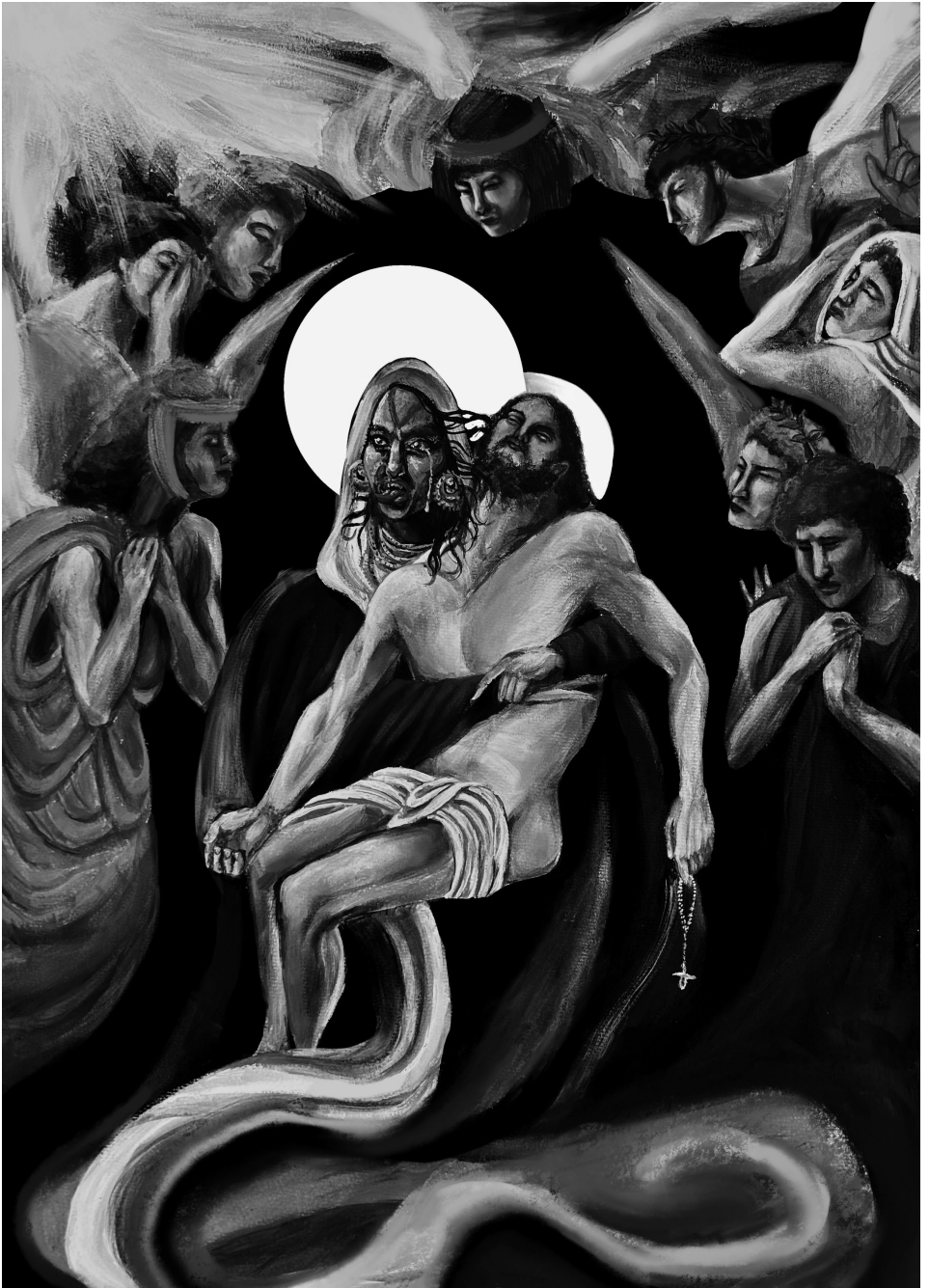
An aloof stare
A blue collar blue button shirt
A glass of milk hiding half his face.

About as interested as he can be
In taking a picture of three generations
Which is not at all, but he's been corralled
By motorcycle Debbie

Time's Arrow

by Roman Bell

A once desolate desert
A private place
A hidden hole
All now bustling, bouncing, brimming with life
What happened?
Where did it change?
Truth is, there was no one instance of this incident
It was all a part of time's arrow
Never slowing or stopping
Nor going in reverse
Merely marching forward
A minute, a moment
The mere passing of time.
We live everyday
Aware, yet unknowing of what we are
We made ourselves
We made cities of rocks and heated sand
An amalgamation of elements
We strive for success and satisfaction
Always aiming and taking our shots
We hit once and aim at a new target
Bigger, brighter, boundless
We act as if we are infinite
As if we can stretch everything into one lifetime
But we are unfortunately immobilized by time's arrow
Our story told by another
A stranger standing where we once stood
People who will never know they are standing on echoes
A song that may never be sung again
A symphony of voices and beings
All brought to this very moment
Maybe not remembered for your efforts
Maybe forgotten by your losses
Maybe, just another story for someone else today
But the spark inside cannot be marched on by time's arrow



Rey Brookes

For years we were

by Ben Cohagen

the house with the loud dog.
Which anytime anyone,
would venture near the door,
a few seconds later... **BOOM!**
A mass of gilded fur barreled into it,
from the other side.
Making a whomp so loud,
that it would often scare
the unsuspecting passerby.

And everyone would remember our house,
as the house with the loud dog.

New Shoes

by Ben Cohagen

I bought new shoes
a few weeks ago.
They are the exact same,
The same as the last pair.
But without the hole by my toe
Or the old stains.

That I would look at
And remember the nights
we would spend walking
along the side of the road
and I would walk in the dirt
Because “They’re beaters anyway.”

And so I haven’t thrown them out.
I haven’t worn them either.

They lie in a pile
With the pictures of us
that I haven’t erased.

But I threw away your guitar
And I forgot the sound of your voice

In a hundred years, we will be strangers again

Fading Colors

by Savanna Countryman

Bright and beaming sun rays,
beat against worn beige stucco.
Where endless streets,
actually do come to an end.

Held in summer's tight grip,
green grass shifts to brittle brown.
Even memories fade to grey.
We balanced dreams on ankle-swingers,
young laughter filling the air,
And sticky fingers clutching crisp popsicles,
an easing to our sunburned skin.

And there goes mom yelling,
"Come inside, it's getting dark out."
It all comes to an end,
And the cycle repeats,
Until it doesn't.

Days once ruled by razor scooters,
now begin behind a sticky screen.
Days once consumed with laughter,
are now sharpened with anger.
Xbox controllers smashing into quiet TV's,
angry yells echoing through slamming doors.

The things I knew and loved as a child, slip further and
further out of touch with reality, buried six feet under
technology and anger.
I can't help but wonder,
if we lost our spark along the way,
or if we just gave up.

Shot by My Best Friend

by Julia De La Cruz

My mother was shot by the love of her life
who was also her best friend since third grade.
The survival of the tragedy she had to face,
confirms to me that I, too, can conquer opposition.
My Mother shares about “Strength” –
A trait she had inherited from her parents
Even through the struggles of her parents,
they too never gave up;
despite their faults.
Grandma Rachel could have left
the four of her kids in foster care
with strangers, but she didn’t.
Grandpa Rudy experienced a hard life, and
my mother can’t imagine how he even survived.
Never knowing his Dad and Mom had passed away early on.
Raising himself on the streets in a hole in the wall
enclosed with a huge metal door.
Everywhere he went, stealing, using drugs and alcohol.
He used to get beaten and jumped,
almost dying a few times. He modeled “Strength.”
Through all the pain and struggles, his faith was in God.
Strength and perseverance are what my Grandparents
modeled for my Mom to press on.

My Grandparents both cooked.
My Mom didn’t think she would enjoy cooking.
As she got older, she did.
Learning and watching her mom Cook
with whatever she had in times of poverty.
Grandma Rachel would make brownies and milk for breakfast,
just the simple things equating it with love.
Watching her family enjoy eating because it was delicious.
Mom now enjoys cooking and baking.

One of Mom’s biggest obstacles she had to face in life
Is when my father shot her in 2003 with no chance of survival.

If she hadn't learned what she did from her parents,
she would have lain down and died.
But she had remembered the previous hardships of life.
To face this new challenge, she could endure and persevere.
After the shooting, the first couple of years were the hardest
For Mom, wanting to hold onto, "...what used to be,
the happy and pleasant memories."
Letting go of that was letting go of this major part of her.
That was part of her strength.
This was the way of moving onward with no looking back,
The greatest source of hope for Mom was her faith in Jesus Christ.
"God and you kids were always the center of my strength and hope.
It wasn't about me, it was about you kids."
Mom needed hope to raise us on her own
after the tragedy she had endured.

I was never allowed to cook holiday meals.
Now I understand why
my mom is so passionate about cooking and baking.
It's her way of expressing love.
My Mother's model of strength and perseverance
gives me hope for today that I, too, can move onward.



Mirando del Otro Lado

Tormenting Dissonance

by Sony Guerrero Donovan

Tell me, Neighbor

When squinting at your horrid sun,
Do your lashes frame the sight?

A kaleidoscopic mural of light
Do you stand as stoic as necessary?
If only to witness color for a moment longer

My sunlight is warm,
Not scalding.
Not scolding.

Feel the agitated rays, now.
Does it burn
through your shielded suit?

You're more alone than I'll ever be.

Across the waste
A man you narrow to see,
Distance drowns him.

"It was the war," you'll rationalize.
"It was the wars that shackled us."

He is the closest human to you
Do you wave?
Do you ask him
If his sun dances on his lashes?

"The wars that separated us."

You'll be relieved to know,
I, too, don't greet my neighbor.

I know he lives there.

I know he survives.

Tell me our sun sneers
Through your ash-covered lashes

I will never know his name.
I will never know yours.

Letters from Ms. Bey

by Beyoncee Tanya Alonto Escalona

To the Source I was soaked in.
Everything I carried mentally was clarified.
All my trash—abolished, gone.
My heart felt light,
my memory present,
my vision crystal clear.
So in love.
Blessed is sensibility.
You hold every single thing,
every individual thing,
infinite possibilities
for us to hold.
Cured by Your ways,
the power we show
comes from Your strength.

Nowadays I say:
You are always on—
on my radar,
graph by graph,
still on my radar.
I see intelligence flowing right,
healing moving in Your might.
Memory flowing in righteous ways.
You gravitate toward my creation
in my honored days.
It's an honor to be in Your world, my Grace.

I know You are a good God.
Your fruitful ways inspire me
and bring me peaceful peace.
So in love with the King of Kings.
I'm busy getting cured by His ways,
so in love with His moves.
My adrenaline rises.
You give me a biblical hug.
The way You talk Your talk,

the way You write Your books—
it makes me so in love.

So in love.
From the sense above,
the One who lets me love,
the One who creates more love.
The way You think, my Love,
aligns with my love.
I stay busy getting right in this world—
heaven-sent,
so in love with
out-of-this-world love.

You walk me through the valleys of life,
You dance me through the endless skies.
So in love.
You teach me holy wonder
through tears and joyful cries.
My heart is Yours forever.
So in love.

Oxnard Letters

by Beyonce Tanya Alonto Escalona

Because you have been so good to me
U give me air to breathe
I give you air for the trees
I'll make sure it's a pleasant smell
Aromatherapy
Smelling glamorously soft and soothing
Your air smells to your liking
To the source
I was soaked in
Everything I mentally carried was clarified
All my trash was abolished. Gone
My heart felt light
My memory is present
My vision is crystal clear
My crown wants to wonder the aura crowd now
Let's check out what's near
On a roller coaster
Going thru California
The place I must be
Up in Hoody
I see my environment going very culturally
Would u smile if you greeted good people
Would u dance if you like with the vibe
Would you freeze to the smell of the ocean
The breeze that's made of life
As I pass thru the mountains
I go I spy
Sulfur, rocks, and greens
Streets with sides of pavements
Life built as homies
Generations that live their best
Friends and fam who pump their chest
When I pass thru the fields
I smell strawberries
And sweet bread bakeries
Human just breathe please
Wise air of teaching across all the seas

So in love
Blessed in sensibility
Your the only thing that holds every single thing
Individual thing
The infinite possibilities
For ours to hold
Cured by your ways
The power we show
Is from Ur strength
Nowadays, I see
U are
Always on
My radar
Graph by graph
You are
In this radar
I see
The intelligence just flows right
Healed by your ways in Your might
The memory flows in righteous ways
U gravitate towards my creation in honored days
It's just an honor to be in your world, my grace
IK you are a good God
Your fruitful ways inspire me and bring me peaceful peace
So in love with the King of Kings
I'm so busy getting cured by his ways
So in love with his moves
My adrenaline arises
U give me a biblical hug
The way You talk Your talk
The way You write Your books
Makes me so in love
So in love
It's from the sense above
The one that lets me love
The one that creates more love
The way You think, my love
It's so aligned with my love
I get so busy getting right in this world
Heaven sent

So in love with
Out of this world
So in love
You walk me through all the valleys of life
You dance me through the endless skies
So in love
You teach me holy wonders
Through tears and joyful cries
My heart is yours forever
So in love

Salt & Sweetness

by Beyonce Tanya Alonto Escalona

I like to program my mind with wild things—
science, math, art, literature.

Reality can feel like rainbows and sunshine,
wonder after wonder.

I've gotten through so much,
through it all.

On the days I talked, on the days
I dressed up, on the days
there was passion—
it all runs through my mind.

I think about the impression I made,
hoping I was genuine and well-behaved.

I think of humans often. I love rare sonnets.
I know you're wisely real. We're all DNA codes,
programmed with our own likes, deals, and details.
We come from the same source of empowerment—
united and undignified,
a melting of foreigners across the earth,
with cities and towns, windows and doors.
I wonder how I'll get through it all, but
it flows right, and knowing that
makes my future true and bright.

Redemption and reclamation shape me.
You clarified so much. I long for you,
I crave you,
I'm uplifted by you.
My mind rushes, sparked with energy.
You brighten my day like the rising sun.
You help me notice the dime on the floor from the sky—
my silver lining.
Walking on concrete, I'm trying to be more perfect,
trying to take care of my temple,
filtering all these symbols for the rare, unique me.
I'm reading the Fifth Amendment,
working on becoming the impeccable kind

The kind I'm meant to be.

Filtering symbols is part of my programmed personality.

I'm reclaiming myself, adding to what's interesting.

I see marijuana trees glistening,

and I can smile from the tips of my lips as I sip on smoke.

It's alright. There's hope in me.

Late Nights, Early Strength

by Angelina Estrada

I come from a home built on hard work and sacrifices.
The kind you don't really understand
until you're old enough to look back
and realize what was really happening.
Like my mom working late hours,
coming home exhausted
from a long day
with tired eyes that never got to rest and
hard-working hands that never gave up.
Still making sure my brother and I were okay first.
Making sure we ate,
making sure we were good,
making sure we had everything we needed
and more.
Even when she probably, most likely
hadn't taken care of herself all day.
I didn't notice it back then.
I just thought that's how life was.
But now I see it.

Onward.

I carry that with me
that kind of strength that doesn't complain,
that kind of love that puts others first
even when it hurts.
And sometimes that feels like pressure.
Like, I don't just represent myself
I represent her sacrifices,
her long days,
everything she gave up
So I could have more.
And that's heavy.
Because what if I mess up?
What if I don't make it worth it?
But then I realize
Maybe it was never about being perfect.

Maybe it's about continuing what she started.

Onward.

I show up even when I'm tired,
even when I don't feel motivated,
because I've seen what it looks like
to push through anyway.
And it might not seem like much right now
just going to school,
just trying,
just not giving up
but maybe that's how legacies are built.
Not in big moments,
but in the quiet ones no one claps for.

Onward.

A century from now,
no one might know my name.
But maybe they'll feel it
in the opportunities I didn't waste,
in the life I built from everything I was given,
in the fact that I kept going
instead of stopping where things got hard.
And if I could say something to the future,
to someone sitting where I am right now
I'd say this:
You come from something strong.
Even if it didn't look perfect.
So don't stop here.

Onward.

Monopoly

by Holly Eve

Dark nights and in daylight.

Fathers. Strangers. Teachers. Priests.

It's always happened. It always will.

Grandfathers. Uncles. Brothers. Neighbors.
Leather skin, grey hair, a family friend.

I was three. Little me. Poor me.

Cops called. Lawyers retained.

Mom and Dad were told to let it go.

He walked free.
I wonder
how many more
children he harmed.

On a run. Sunrise. Sunset. Midday.
A list of places it happened to women I know.

In stairwells. At gunpoint. In Ubers. Tied down.

Followed home. Sharp knives. Threatening their lives.

A fizzled pill slipped in a drink.

Tight dress—
“She asked for it.”

Short skirts.
Denim jeans.

I wore Bugs Bunny underwear.

A little older—
it happened again.
Still too young
to understand.

I was 17.
He was 38.

He said
the age of consent
was 16.

Now I'm 38.
and I know
he knew
it was wrong.

Grown up.
Attacked again
and again.

Because once
it's happened
predators
can smell you
a mile away.

A boyfriend—
muscular firefighter—
tied my arms
with tight rope.

Twenty years later
I searched his name.

Now
captain
of his department.

Twice
on the subway
in New York City.

One caught.
Brought to trial.

Past convictions
made it a felony.

Dropped
on a technicality—
reduced to a misdemeanor.

A system
that keeps
men who harm

free.

Not guilty.
Reduced sentences.

Backlogs.
Forgotten
cases.

CEOs. Billionaires. Doctors. Lawyers.

Every woman
knows a woman
who's been raped.

No man
knows
a rapist.

Presidents. Prime ministers. Senators. Governors.

My ex-husband—
belligerent—
restrained me.

Too drunk
to hold me down.

I fought him
off.

Monopoly.

Men hold the get-out-of-jail-free card.

Women
don't shoot. Don't stab.

Self-defense
lands you in jail.

“She's lying.”
“She's got it wrong.”
“It was consensual.”

Not all men,
but always a man.

Hollywood. Hotel rooms. Robes. Roofies.

“Get naked.” Polaroids. Promised roles. Blacklisted.

Gisèle Pelicot.
Drugged
by her husband.

Rules:

No cologne.
No cigarettes.

Men recruited.

Builder. Painter. Plumber. Electrician. Farmer. Baker. Truck driver.
Delivery driver. Transport worker. Supermarket clerk. Hotel manager.
Cleaner. Temp worker. Volunteer firefighter. Prison guard. Soldier.
Councilor. Nurse. IT technician. Journalist.

Husbands. Fathers. Neighbors.

Hard drives.

Hard men.

Too hard to catch.

Catch a Predator—
canceled.

Too many
familiar faces
caught.

Chanel Miller.

Stanford.

Behind a dumpster.

Brock Turner.

His father said
he used to enjoy
steak and pretzels.

His life is ruined.

Found guilty.
Three months
in prison.

Republican. Democrat. Muslim. Christian.

Deepak Chopra.

Of all the men
who harmed me,
why am I
the one
in therapy?

Redacted files.
Hidden files.
Forgotten files.

Virginia Roberts Giuffre.
Pioneer.

No more
dark corners.
No more
Shame.
No more silencing
our voices.

Now we roar
like lionesses protecting cubs.

Claws out.

We are angry.
Belligerent.

Women
holding women.

Women
holding men accountable.

Hearings. Prosecution. Jail time.

No more freedom
for perpetrators.

Me and the Black Sheep

by Sabrina Friend

When I was a child,
So bright and new,
I wanted to become just like you.
To stand strong with knowledge
and strength as they know.
So I started to push onwards with that fate.
The black sheep padding away,
Onwards with my hopes and dreams,
Pushing past the seams.
The pain that I would have to deceit.
Onwards I hoped for you,
Your brains and words are so full.
Now that you're gone I can't fully see,
My eyes blur with sorrowful deceit,
The black sheep comforting me.
Onwards I push myself,
Realizing I'm becoming like you,
That you were once like me too.
Now so pretty and white as snow,
Being surrounded by those you know.
Forever I will miss you.
Forever I will become like you.
Onwards I will fight for greatness,
Life unravels as I know.
The future looks unknown,
Without someone I used to know.
But the black sheep is helping me grow.
The fear of letting you down,
With customs I don't know,
Onwards I will push,
To try to become known.
Your strength powers me,
So new and so bold,
That I don't feel fear,
Of what's conjured in my lobes.
Knowledge I will take,
On this adventure that awaits.

Onwards I will learn,
Either new or old,
To mold or preach,
To young and to old,
And never be led unknown.
The black sheep laughing anyways,
Showing me the right way,
So defeat doesn't find me anyways.
Rivalry is what hurts the sheep,
In a flock filled with trickery.,
In the act of treachery.
I will be the shepherd,
One faithful and nimble,
That you once were for me,
On this trial of foes,
I will take the black sheep,
And off we will go.

Piece of Cake

by Jose M. Garcia

Victory has yet to come
like a piece of cake
No muddy foot trails left behind
No tears
No broken hearts
No bad memories
I continue to look upon
everyone else's choice's like a kid
To not continue my bad choices

I don't smoke
I don't drink
I just now think
I am thankful for everyone
that has come to me with grief and sorrow
I am thankful for the ones listening to me now
As I hold in my tears of sadness and of joy
I remind myself that victory
has yet to come like a piece of cake

To All the Beautiful Women Out There

by Elvia Gomez

“Happy National Women's Day,
to all the beautiful women out there,”
they say as they look twice at the female mechanic.

“We respect all women from different cultures,
different beliefs, different sexualities,” they say
as they ignore her mechanical advice
to listen to the man with no experience.
Years later, things are no different.
Like a broken clock that needs new batteries.
The time changed, yet it stays in the past.

Then there is me,
a white Mexican girl with the coiled-up curls.
I take a nice walk on the beach.
Cute tank top, adorable shorts I made, beautiful coiled-up curls.
But I feel all the stares, the strange faces people make at me,
the side comments.
I tell myself,
I shouldn't be surprised.
I am a woman.
It's expected.

A week later, I take a nice walk on the beach.
Baggy clothes, barely showing any skin.
It is hot outside. I shouldn't be wearing this on a hot day.
I feel all the stares at me, the strange faces people make,
the side comments. I tell myself, I shouldn't be
surprised, I am still a woman.
It's expected.

At night, I take a walk in my neighborhood
with two large dogs.
Two men follow me in their cars.
I'm scared, but what did I expect?
Walking at night is dangerous for a woman.
I am used to it, but I do not want to be used to it.

I want to wear whatever I please without feeling judged.
I want to walk across the street without carrying a taser, and
I do not want to be looked down upon just because I am a woman.

But still, I walk with confidence.
I pursue male-dominated fields and
I excel in them.
I proceed to take a walk on the beach.
I see a girl in the most beautiful outfit and makeup.
She walks in discomfort as people whisper to each
other and make faces. I turn to look at the girl and tell
her, "I love your outfit, it really suits your makeup."

A smile plasters her face, and she starts walking with confidence.
In 100 years, women will continue to strive for happiness in a world that
will slowly become equal. Where men, women, and all genders would
feel safe and comfortable being themselves.

Our Remains

by Jade Gomez

A hundred years from today, we might reach our end,
The digital age will continue to rapidly grow
The blue light could cage us, and it can become all we know
I hope as time passes by, we always wander,
In the garden of our minds, with ideas of wonder
Inspiration burning to be conveyed
Our imagination yearning to be portrayed
Whether it be displayed on an empty canvas with textured
paints and vivid shades, A journal that is ready to weather
notions and heartfelt pains that flow like a cascade. We must
value our potential to create and analyze our internal
monologue. No matter the long years that stretch beyond,
it cannot shatter or seize our human bonds
How lovely is it that a passing conversation,
Can transform into a lively invitation,
Into delving deep into another's soul,
Tangling memories, is what makes us whole
Shared stories remind us we aren't alone,
Hearts that get to know us deeply to our bones
We must value our connections with others.

A notebook is hollow, until a pen is lifted and
thoughts that become words soon follow.
New information that we borrow, harnesses perspective as we swallow.
We should always continue to educate ourselves.
Learning doesn't end, and it can expand into the bookshelves.
We must lean towards the unknown because our curiosity
is still to be honed. To carry the ability to evolve, love,
and create are mortal traditions we hold dear,
A deeply human-rooted aspiration for legacy
that we can't let disappear.

This is what keeps our pulse beating into a beautiful melody.
And grounded from moments that are fleeting, while also healing.
Being amassed with daydreams, our ideas we can almost touch.
These are things that are naturally etched into our very being.

Seconds and hours will pass either way, so shouldn't we flourish and thrive in our stay? We are a time capsule of everlasting life that cannot be cut short by a time-sensitive knife. You and I must preserve what is to be made so that it isn't severed by a digital blade. We carry the remedy for harmony, to simply exist and to persist.

I hope the desire to be fond of each other, design, and study will always course through our veins, Relationships we sow, how we mentally grow, and what we fabricate, are what shall be our remains.

Migration of a Family

by Jett Griffin

Born in a real bad place, a hospital on the highway.
Lived in a real bad place, protected by my father.

I trace chalk on the concrete, draw out my dreams.
Each step makes me shiver, hop-scotch til my feet bleed.

More sin and more sin, gunshots pop my ears.
My parents never told me, they whisper in the kitchen.

Hell rising and rising, they won't let us be a stat.
Tired of this place, everything led to their snap.

Leaving for something better, we're never coming back.
I cry and hope to stay, it never felt that bad.

I've barely made a mark, I feel I've just been born.
Only nine but dreaming twelve, I won't face this new dawn.

Over in a day, our migration was quick.
Movement didn't tire us, like birds, we flew down the hills.

Tears cover my boxes, paper can't dry up my sadness.
It only wraps my things, I fall deep into silence.

TV fills in the blanks, I learned my world from screens.
I grow grateful for our leaving, and I stay mourning what I'd had.

And still, I'm understanding, it's something I always say.
I'll keep in my mind, their only goal was to be safe.

Shipwrecked on the coastline, first ones to leave.
Bubbles fill my lungs, the air here is nice.

Aiming for waves, they guide us home.
From there, this is how I grow.

The Art of Solving Problems

by Lucy Guillen

My parents taught me to stand up for myself
I was brave and bold
I had a lot of weight over my shoulder from family
I wasn't taught on how to overcome struggles
I learnt that through my own ways
My roots told me,
"Así es la vida, o sigues adelante o te quedas."
Through experiences, I learned that it was normal to struggle
in one way or another. So I took my struggles and
confronted them rather than staying hidden
Confronting my struggles made me realize
that I am more capable than what people thought of me
I did whatever it took for me to get out of my struggles, even if
it was hard. Sometimes I felt like giving up, but
then I realized I would never become who I wanted to be
so I kept moving on
My friends helped me see that I was able to push forward
through the hard things
I found that I really wanted to push forward
as I solved problems
If I failed to solve problems, I would've lost my effort
I wanted to be someone who would make my family proud
I also wanted to make myself proud
Someone who, even if they gave up at times,
moved on afterwards
Quería que tanto yo como mi familia estuviéramos felices por
mis logros.

The Bottle That Put Itself Together

by Syrus Houle

Baked in sun covered in dirt
Dollar bills spring from the ground
A broken back
A new model home
Seven children all in a room
Harder yet does the ground get
The ire of the sky pressing down
“None shall escape” says he
“To be stuck in a square within a square
“This is your destiny”
But the bottle makes it better.
Not so bad being in a square
when all the lines are blurred
And so she works harder
The one of seven
Sewing a future full of security
Security never felt
Security interrupted by the ire
Of the bottle
The bottle that breaks
To close to the head
Of her young daughter
Shattering the security
Because the broken bottle reveals
Imperfections of the young
The standard of an adult
Not met by the young
So the young rebel
The young defy
The young attempt to carve their own path
They squirm and squabble
And find themselves at one point
Worse than they ever were before
Now shouldering the weight of three people
The son, innocent as a cherub
The father bereft of thought
Fallen deep into an opioitic slumber

And the mother
She is scared
She is confused
She wants better
She has hope
That one day, she and the son might be free of this
Dreaming dreams that are unlimited for him
But still the bottle remains
Steering them
Sharing in their tribulations
Shaping their hardships
The son has his own dreams now
But he believes them
He believes that he can accomplish his highest aspirations
Not just because of the mother
For all that have come before
The sad and the invigorating
The pain and the success
He knows he must carry this forward

Move Forward

by Maddie Hurtado

I stand before a restless ocean,
holding generational footsteps buried in the sand—
footsteps that were never mine,
but somehow still belong to me.

Onward—
The waves say it like they've said it before.

I think about my dad—
his boots by the door before sunrise,
late nights with the TV still on
because he fell asleep before he could turn it off.

I didn't live his hardest days,
but I carry them
in the way I don't quit,
even when my chest feels too heavy to hold it all.

The currents pull me in different directions:
who I should be—
steady, safe—
who I want to become.
And somewhere in between,
I am learning how to choose.

Onward—
because standing still was never an option.

What is a hundred years?
Maybe it's this—
the way my dad keeps going.
Becoming something I carry too.

So I stand here,
not unafraid—
but still standing.
Still moving.

A new shore waits somewhere ahead.
And maybe 100 years from now,
someone will stand where I am,
feeling something they can't explain.
And that feeling
will be enough to keep them going.
Morning light touches the water. And I realize,
legacy isn't about being remembered.
It's about making sure
someone else can move forward
like he did for me.

Smiling Faces

by Allison Irwin

The faces of my ancestors stare
Out from their place on the table
Their happy, smiling faces
Forever frozen in time

I stare back at them
Holding onto their stories
Wishing to keep them alive
For just a little while longer

I only know snippets, stories from others
For I never met them you see
But I care; Maybe someone
will do the same for me

I don't know what mark
I might leave when I'm gone
Maybe it'll be none at all
Aside from a smiling face

Maybe one day it's all I'll be
A smiling face staring out
At a descendant unknown
My stories in their heart

Will that be enough?

I hope.

by Miles Jefferson

Dad's gone,
Trying to escape his sorrows
He came back,
But he's beatin' on you like there's no tomorrow
For he lacks

The world didn't treat him right
He don't know how to get through
Mom is here, but mentally gone,
She's just as confused

We know it's wrong—the way we act
But how else do we deal with that
Our parents couldn't figure it
Their parents only knew cigarettes

And fighting and yelling.
Theres no telling how deep
that bottle went
Still resent, the powerlessness
But we continue still

Each day seems treacherous,
Tiresome, and strife-filled
But we continue everyday
With the hope that we will

Get up out the hood,
Make it far from LA
To a place where our kids
Ain't getting checked everyday

Foos runnin' up on you,
asking "where you from son?"
Have to oblige,
Cuz what if he has a knife or a gun?

I know the pain I've gone through
And I know there's satisfaction,
In breaking my back
To keep you far from those actions

Trying my best to be the dad I never had,
The mother that was never here
Sturdy I stand in my resolve
I will persevere

You Cannot Catch Us

by Mia Jimenez

For you who left behind your ancestors,
The roots now left barren,
We cross borders knowing there is more.

Perhaps sorrow blooms anew.
With no opportune time...

For you who created space are taken once more,
Scatter your beginnings,
They can't uproot us all.

Hash and thrash,
The lines they've driven in sand.

Crawl with all your might,
Walk until the blisters form,
Jog preparing to leave people behind,
Sprint before the mind becomes torn.

For you, now generations ahead.
Strewn like the tune- of a new moon,

Soon our travels start of our own accord.
We visit, we love, we sing and dance.

Welcome the trance,
we created from their chance.

True Story

2022 VC Poetry Slam Winning Poem

by Vincent Trevino Jimenez

I am a Mexican,
A Pachuco,
A Latino,
A Cholo,
And I am a Chicano.
I am every name we claim
And leftover pocket junk
They try to throw at us.
I am the hard worker.
And not because of them.
Or my genetics. But because of my fears.
I am the hard worker to feed the mouths of those around me.
To feed the image of success a los mentes
De los Jóvenes.
Working hard for those who want to give up.
Echándole ganas.
Para aquellos que no saben what's up.

This image is for those living in a 3000 dollar,
two-bedroom luxury apartments,
Trying to make it an 8-family home
With leaky roofs and one bathroom.
Kitchens with broken stoves,
Carpets that bring a fresh breeze
De nalgas,
Drug-covered walls,
That looks mugroso to us,
but renters call eggnog white.
Soy el trabajador duro para
Aquellos que duermen en el suelo
In between the ridges of the field or,
Over the floor,
that home un-filed murder scenes
Overlooked for being en los barrios,
Where roaches and bedbugs roam the night
Like they run the day.

If those fuckers could talk
They'd sing
La canción de Vicente Fernandez.
Andale! You know it "Y Volver, Volver, Volver"
Para trás a este dompe.
Because we know landlords
Don't give a damn about us.
They sit and look at you like a disease
Not afraid to run you into the streets.
They don't give a damn about your grandma,
your babies, your brothers, your sisters,
your mothers, or your fathers
As long as they get your greens.
Not the crop you'd picked
or los manchas que te quedan
They don't need your grass stained pants.
They want your money and your misery.
That's your down payment.
Then they'll raise your pain by 5%,
but it's okay,
for "400 years we've shed tears,"
always looking out for everyone else.

Because you're a Chicano, a leader
of the new world advocating for change.
Cholos who're looked down on and called a dog
Before you can show your worth.
Latinos paving the way for future generations.
Pachucos bailando la rumba when the times are tough.
And Mexican
until we reach the holy day.
We are brown and proud all the way!

Advice of the Wise

by Vincent Trevino Jimenez

Do good,
is what he said to me.
His advice came from
the last 25 years of pain and suffering
infused into his life.
But at least he has a degree
Graduating top in his class from Depressed University
A scholar of sacrifice.
Drinking from the cup of death
As he walked into the world of shadows.
Where he made me the handbook
to live my life by,
Do good,
is what he told me. Stay in school,
is what he told me,
Because, you see,
Growing up for him—
Life had him on the run.
Throwing him in with thugs and addicts.
Promoting all the bad habits
from drugs to clubs.
Throwing away investments into the rat race.
Stuck on the track he had.
Driving laps around the neighborhood
where cheers to keep going further
were screams of terror reflected off the ears
of punks on the street.
Finding freedom in drive-bys.
Loving the flash of the blast
and in a trance by the voice of the gun
he gasped.
To him, this was a natural bliss
as if a witch had placed a spell on him,
blocking out reality,
cradling him with the streets,
distracting him from the voice in his head.

The one that spoke to him when
he questioned his life decisions

Because no matter how blessed it felt,
his harmony was a facade
like a movie set ready to be dismantled.
I know this because every day he tells me
to do good. Stay in school.
Let your dreams flourish.
Stay on the right side of life
where the grass is greener
and your lips don't turn
to a lifeless blue
when you breathe in.
The right side has more melody for you—
enough for you to tune
to the love the planet has to give.
Take it from me and call it advice of the wise.
You don't want to know the shadow of the world
where the voice that leads you has no body
cause there is nobody.
Just voices in your head
leading you down the path
towards the valley of death
where the butcher cuts you down
and hangs every piece of you
just so the wolves can play
in the shadow of the world.
Mi hijo, take my words to heart.
Engrave them into your brain
so you don't risk deformity of the
butcher's meat cleaver.
Stay wise. Stay strong.
Do good, live the life I never could.
Do not be chained by my misfortunes.
My mistakes do not
make the guide to your life,
my son.
Life ain't no crystal stair
and daddy ain't raise no punk

so enjoy the light I'll provide you.
And remember, dad loves you.
So please, Do good. Stay in school.

Let your dreams flourish, and
don't let anyone tell you,
that you are not good enough
because the light will not turn its back on you
as long as you don't turn your back on it.

Ancestral Echoes

by Justin Kok

Combinations of labor and hope laid the starting point
Ancestral echoes of blood and sweat breathe beside me
Work done in silence for another can enjoy life's gifts
Foundational love laid out the life I live

Directionless path formed beyond thoughts
Thinking more and more but forming less and less
Motion gathered, but growth didn't
Physically so close but mentally so far

So easy to reach for the choice of rot
The gift of time turned kiss of lie
Froze by unyielding moments of the past
Standing upon layers of energy waiting for their purpose

A path of guidance and honesty remains untainted
For when the future longs for one's diamond to shine
Silent cheerleaders hang beyond the sight but not the senses
Knowing all is not necessary for it will be alright

Remember one's purpose from within and the external
Within every step comes wisdom
The next days and years will always welcome with open arms
To the one-hundred years, the Earth felt the presence

Onward!

by Allegra Lambert

Onward!

That's what they tell us, right?

Keep going.

Even when you don't know where forward even is.

I come from stories that weren't written down,

just passed through voices,

through kitchen tables

through late-night talks that smelled like food and stress.

My family didn't leave behind mansions or money

they left recipes

habits,

ways of surviving when things got hard,

And I carry that

Every day

I sit in class at Ventura College

thinking about how this place has been here for 100 years

and somehow

I'm just a small part of that timeline.

Like, who sat in this same seat before me?

Who was stressed about deadlines,

about money,

about if they were even good enough?

because I think that's the part no one talks about—

the struggle.

The quiet kind.

The kind where you smile in public

but question everything in private.

The kind where you keep going

not because you're confident...

but because stopping feels worse.

Sometimes I wonder

what happens if we stop caring?

If we stop showing up?

If we forget where we came from?

Do we lose everything?

Because legacy isn't just history
it's effort.
It's showing up even when it's hard.
It's choosing to try again when nobody is watching.

So what do I hope for?
I hope 100 years from now,
someone is sitting where I am,
feeling the same doubt—
but also the same drive.
I hope they feel something still standing
because people like us didn't quit.
Because we kept going.
Because we chose to build something,
even if it felt small at the time.
Because maybe legacy isn't about doing something huge
maybe it's about doing something real,
over and over again.

So yeah...
Who knows, maybe my life won't be written in books.
But maybe it doesn't have to be.
Maybe it's enough
that I tried,
that I showed up,
that I didn't let my story end early.
Because 100 years from now, I won't be here,
but something I did might be.
And honestly?
That's enough for me.

Meadowlarking

by Ellie Likes

Chickadees and flying things suspended gauzy clouds
While your porch spilled pavement past the broken garage door
Milky light stretched out toward the nodding mealycups
Bowlegged, barefoot, we tumbled through the sagebrush
And your loamful skyward eyes devoured savory buds
On our lips were syrup stains and babbled breathless hymns
Knees and elbows folding limber like a willow branch
Our softest parts indented by jagged stones and stems
Reclining halfway in the oak bones
Bruisome cosmos tenderizing limbs
Meadowlarking, we gambolled and wended
Backwards and backwards until steps had no sense
Until our bodies had no backbone
And even pins and needles bent
And words were fumbling, needless symbols
Corroding our teeth down to the dregs
Sulfur stained our wax white cradles
And blisters broke our sun-soaked skin
Tickled our cheeks and spilled like geysers
And flowers and flesh lie down to rest



Meadowlarking

Young Virginia

by Eleanor Likes

And there was a cleft in the beam
Holding aloft the birchwood tree
Wind caught wefts of young Virginia
Untamed, unfrightened by the creaks
While the freight trains thundered past

And when the straining branches broke
Collapsed in heaps of engine steam
Sprawled like roadkill, westward blown
Young Virginia, flying low
Her dregs of freedom in the breeze

Oil pissed on virgin roads
Choppers plowed the dusky crops
Not a dime but sin in tow
And the ergot spread like asphalt
Down the parting wheaten sea

And her desert children burgeoned
Fled to San Felipe roads
Lissom bodies of the sisters,
Pleiades strung in gold bikinis
And escaped the iron lung completely

The flame-headed daughter
Nightfall's freckled face
Cast her shadow on the righteous gaze
Spun the heads of wimple women
Resin-stained white sailor dresses
In Etiwanda attics and boulevard bathrooms

And forged her own new beastly babe
Corporeal moon dust bottled up
Made of moto boots and lace
Huffed by sailors, never wasted
Snuff the angels seldom tasted

Shattered the glass oven doors
Synthesized morning glory tea
With pyromanic propulsion
Handmade spiraling artillery
Riding Roman candles to the cosmos
Transcending young Virginia's dreams



Earth Girl

Heritage and Hope

by Isabel Lopez

I've never had a stable home. My life is packed up in borrowed space. For me, home was temporary. I never got to know the warmth and security of calling a place "My home."

My mom was a struggling single mother, her hands were tired and voice was thin. My mom did everything she could with everything she didn't have. She was fighting battles no one has seen except for my sister and I. We watched her stretch nothing into something. And still, she still somehow showed up when the world gave her every reason not to.

And me, I was just a child with the mind of an adult. Forced to learn independence.

Learning how to take care of my sister and me instead of playing Barbies with her. Childhood slipped between the cracks, no soft place left for me to land, just growing up too fast to stand. I grew up fast, faster than I should have, because life didn't wait for me to be ready.

And now I see the same story, echoing in my own life. I work 40 hours a week while balancing being a part-time student, and I carry the title of a single mom. Every day is a sacrifice for me. A choice of what has to be done and what I wish could be done. The truth is, I struggle to spend time with my daughter, just as my mom did with me. This hurts me in a quiet, constant way.

Because I know what it feels like to grow up without enough presence, enough time, without enough home. And I don't want that for her.

I want stability, not just a place, but that feeling of "home". I want time, real time, where I'm not rushing and not divided by responsibility. I want to be there fully. And I hope- hope to build something different. I hope to find balance in a life that is always moving. I hope to give my daughter a life I didn't have. I hope to be someone who breaks the pattern, not perfectly but persistently. Because success to me isn't just money, titles, or degrees. It's creating a life where my daughter feels safe, where she feels seen, where she knows she doesn't have to grow up so fast. And maybe in giving that to her, I give it to myself too.

Time to Shine

by Emily Lozano

I'm sorry
I watched you break in silence,
drowning in tears, no one could see.
Some questions live without answers,
and that was never your fault, mija.
But even in the darkness, I saw your light
still fighting, still there, waiting to be found.
I leave traces where silence once stood.

Time to rewrite the past, to finally say goodbye.
This is where I begin again.
Hello, new life.
What an unexpected surprise.
A thought impossible.
Never did I think it would be my being.
Hearing those knocks,
echoing through halls
I never dreamed I'd enter.
Your words now whisper through me.
It's your time to believe in yourself,
because, oh girl, if you knew what's possible.
Ahead lies something so beautiful,
so unexpected, so deserving.

Every step, every mile
led me to this becoming
to this moment to believe.
To a moment of hope.
You hear the claps, the cheers from people around you,
holding back tears of joy and happiness.
This moment was meant for something big.
I leave this footprint for all my mija's.
Believe in yourselves.
Have faith in who you are becoming.
If you give yourself grace,
a moment will bloom
meant only for you.

So I leave this red rose, mija.
A memento.
So you never forgot
how far you've borne this cross.
Like the sunrise, this is just the new beginning for you.
Gracias, mama, for all the humankind
you brought into my life.
For all the souls who crossed my path.
You have brightened my fire.
I believe in myself more than ever;
their words, a chat, echoing in my soul.
Carry this light further than I ever imagined for me.

Through

by Kai Maal-King

One thing that my ancestors knew was: “The best way out is through.” Take my grandfather, who’s dead now, but like you and I, he too was once alive, and enjoying it. He was 13 years old, living in Barranquilla, Colombia, on a big farm. And yes, his adventurous antics may have caused some harm, but that was alright. And yes, in the tropics, he’d get bug bites, but he could also ride out far and look up at the stars in the night. And that’s what he did. See, he enjoyed being a kid. And this kid loved his parents and his life. And his parents loved him too, but everyone sees in their own light; so when they saw their rough and tumble, unruly kid play, at 14, they thought the best thing for their little boy was to send him away.

Now he is at school in the USA. Still sad about his parents, but he made the most of what he’d do, and he knew that the best way out is through. So while that little boy dreamed of home, he studied hard to make them proud and earn the right to be allowed to return to the farm. But finally, upon return, he was alone and left to learn that while away, his dad died from cancer, and his mom—from the grief she took on. It was not a **suicide, no**, but through her land. Townsfolk would demand a road to **ride. No** she said to everything, speaking from the pain **inside. But no**, they’d not be set aside. So her **“NO,”** showed that permission would not be given...and it was how they justified the **homicide. No one** around when they shot her down, **no** one to take her side. **No no no no no**, her son cried when he arrived, still teary eyed and blue, but **no** he said, the only way out is through.

And that doesn’t just mean to power through, but to understand the situation at hand and find the golden pathway through. So when his mother died, and her land was nationalized by Colombia, he rationalized and sued the nation. Eventually, life moved on, and he met his lifetime love—my Nana at 19 years. And later on, they had three kids, two little boys, and my mom. My mom always had a deep connection to her body. So when one day, while up in the attic, she bumped her head on a beam, she knew something was off. She felt it in her bloodstream, but more precisely in the stream of cerebral spinal fluid running through her spine and brain. So even when the doctors told her she was insane, “It’s just a headache,” she knew it wasn’t true. She looked straight down a narrowing path and had to figure out what to do. So while literally dying, and being told that she’s fine, she did the research and found a leak in her spine, and even when she knew... it was still a struggle, she still had to walk through doors of **no** to

open up the **yes**, and find the brain surgeon that invented the thing to save her life and do it best. And if she had just pushed through the pain, walked through the rain without looking at the growing puddles on the ground, she would have drowned, but I'm so thankful, so thankful that she didn't, and I'm so proud.

But one hundred years from now, I can't predict at all, how we'll think, or what will be around. And though I have much respect for my heritage, I can never bow down **deep enough** to meet them underground. But if there's one piece of knowledge that *could* stick around, that's lasted 100 years already and might last another. Passed down from my great grandparents to my grandfather to my mother, to **me...** to **you**, it is that the best way out and onward, is through.

Forward...

by Ashley Marquez

That is the word I whisper to myself
When the house is finally quiet
And I am alone by myself
The weight of that day
Sitting heavy on my shoulders,
Like unpaid bills and unfinished dreams
That keeps getting closer
I think to myself
Move...
Forward

I carry my burdens
With silence and strength
Counting on courage
In measurements, I cannot rank
With the stories of heritage
From morning to night
From dusk to dawn
Forward
I move on

Where love brings resilience
And laughter means joy
Where hope is a language
I learned. Then deployed
I think to myself, don't dwell in the past
Those moments were heavy
But they did not last
And I move
Forward

The thoughts of right now,
And the future I see
Are brighter than doubt
Ever wanted for me
And the hope of tomorrow
I hold and I cast

A promise inside me
That this time it will last
I think to myself once again
Move...
Forward
Forward
Through the struggles that tried to hold me
Through the tears that I hide
That put lines on my face
Through the nights
Through the days
Through learning to stand
When there was no way
Forward

When Fear whispers in my ear
That I am starting too late
When doubt tries to measure
My dreams against my fate
But I answer back strong
I answer back loud
I walk with my head held high
Determined
Proud
Forward

For the future I am building
Step after step
For every promise
That I have not kept
For growth and for healing
For the goals that I pursue
For the life worth creating
That is honest
That is true
Forward

I think to myself
Like I did back then
Like that night
When my shoulders were sore

The house is finally quiet

The weight I once wore

I breathe

I stand up

I steady my core

I whisper again

Move...

Forward. Once more

A Father's Legacy

by Giselle Martinez

My dad tells stories
Like they're jokes —

Like the time he walked to school through alleyways
And said,
“Sometimes I'd see my brother fighting back there...”
Like that's normal.
Like fists flying in the morning
Where just part of growing up.

He always laughs when he tells it —
Like if he makes it funny,
It won't sound as harsh as it really was.

He was five
When he came to this country—
Small hands,
A curious mind

Learning early
That survival isn't waiting for you to be ready.

They put him in a classroom where he didn't belong
Full of students who spoke a language
He couldn't understand a speck of,
Because the class meant for him was already full.

So he learned something else—
How to nod how to smile,
How to pretend he wasn't lost.
Onward.
At Seventeen
He became a father.
Still a kid himself.
A kid raising a kid.

But life didn't ask if he was ready.
So he dropped out of school—
not because he didn't care
But because someone had too.

Because there was a baby
Because there was a future.

And somehow—
He didn't run
He stayed

Onward.

Now 52
A father
A husband
A grandpa

A man who is strict—
But also the same man who complains about everything
Still finding ways to laugh about it after.

“How was your day dad”

“Shity”

Every time.
Like no matter what the day throws at him,
He never let it win completely.
Behind his laughs is a man is a man who has never stopped
Worrying about daughters 34,29,20,
Grown but still a part of his world.
A man who made sure we never had to suffer the way he did.
He put us in better schools so we would never have to sit in a classroom
And feel lost like he once had.
He took us to tutoring,
Taught us things he never got the chance to finish learning.
Showed us of to fix things,
How to use our hands,

How to patch walls,
How not to wait for someone to help us.
“You have no brothers.” He’d say,
“So you have to know how to do it yourself.”
He wasn't raising us to be protected,
He raised us to be capable.
Onward.
This house,
The one my dad works hard every day to payoff—
Is more than a house,
It’s my dad’s form of love,
Him saying I’ve got the three of you even when I’m not here.
He loves with little words but in everything he builds for us.
When Life gets heavy,
He continues to move forward.
And so will his daughters,
In the strength he has given us,
The chances he has created for us,
And the doors that were opened for us.
Years from now, our family will feel what he built,
Built on the strength of his daughters.
So even our life feels...
“Shitty.”

We will continue forward because he never stopped.
Not easy and far from perfect.
But still onward.

We Listen. We Don't Judge

by R. Mata

The sun, the beach, the air and waves,
I grew up in the American ways
Go play outside and out of the way
Don't do as I do, Do as I say
I didn't grow up in a Christian God-fearing way
My mom is White and my dad is Mexican
My brothers came first
And I came second
Baseball wrestling football was first
Be a cheerleader, its easier for us
My attention was dry and then it was thirst
Thirsty for the attention I did not receive
The alcohol and men took over me

I found it in that man who was ugly and mean
Battered, bruised, and torn apart,
My confidence, my worth, and my poor little heart
As I got attacked, that kick in the back
A wave of blood fell to the ground
Getting that 3D/4D ultrasound
Doc told me the skull wouldn't form
Get an abortion, or the baby won't make it past four
Lying on the table at the abortion clinic, staring at the clock
They told me they couldn't do it
The baby's heartbeat has stopped
Thank God!
Go to USC to get the fetus out
I decided to do it in my hometown
They put some pills up me
And I had to pee
There in the toilet the baby came out
The nurse said it was discharged and flushed it down
Down in the sea is where my baby will be
Shocked and stunned
That nobody cared about what she had done

I sat on the bed
They gave me some paper and a sucker instead
Instead of a “sorry” for what they have done
No one said anything, no accountability, no responsibility, no one
Nobody cared when I was there
I went home feeling all alone

Thinking about how he killed the baby we made
Foolish and ashamed because I stayed
Sad and lonely and broken inside
I stayed because it was a place to hide
I drank and drank and drank some more
Lower and lower I fell to the floor
I couldn't get up; I wasn't me anymore
With the same angry man, I got pregnant again
Back on the floor, reaching for the door
His foot is high in the air and
ready to come down with his dark blank stare
I yelled at him, “Don't you dare!”
As I wept and wailed
I cried, “Do it again, I will send you to jail.
Let me go
And I will leave you alone.”
So, I raised this baby on my own
I knew I couldn't raise her in that abusive home
I left and had my daughter
This time I'm going to be smarter
I tried my hardest to not let her see
But alcohol got the best of me.
I must admit it was bad
Weak and tired and completely sad
I left her father to make our lives clean
But still the alcohol had a hold on me

This way of life, I could not deal
I started to think
And began to kneel
I called out to The Only One who can
The Only One who took a stand
I begged and pleaded to be saved

Oh God,
Help me from the crashing of these waves
He reaches out His right hand and I reach out mine
Walk with me and I will make you shine
I started walking by faith, and not by sight
I didn't understand the fulness of His might
When I asked for forgiveness, He said its already done
Now you need to forgive yourself my little one
He picked me up off the floor
and lead me through the open door
I didn't know Him, but He knew me
But now that I know Him, I am free

I wouldn't have freedom without God from above
Without the pain I wouldn't know love
I learned that pain is only for a season
And that everything happens for a reason
I'm not what you perceive
I'm not the Christian you see on TV
Or the one with the third degree
Yelling you're going to hell if you don't believe
I don't judge; I listen
And give the advice that needs to be given
Hurt people hurt people
Healed people heal people
Changed people change people
My knowledge and wisdom
Comes from He
The great I Am that created me
I do my best and God does the rest
My smile isn't denial
It's freedom with a style
There is only one legacy that will remain yesterday,
tomorrow, and today
Jesus Christ The truth, the life, the way
#777
The God who created earth and heaven.

New America

Jacob McQueary

America, a land of gifts
A land that promised us everlasting bliss
Things are far from perfect here
These are some things that I implore you to hear

The settlers were the bad guys all along
Every good thing they said about themselves was wrong
From killing people to taking land
The Natives and the settlers did not go hand and hand
The “first Thanksgiving” we were never friends
We treated them horribly and never made amends

Centuries later, we apologized for this past
But that doesn't mean the effects didn't last
Today our nation is in half
Peace in America. Ha! Don't make me laugh!
America is a place where no one gets along
So what happened here? What went wrong?
Some people's brains are the size of a seagull's
Those people who think those who aren't from here are illegals
Land of the free and home of the brave
If that were the case, there wouldn't have been slaves
While America is indeed a beautiful place
We give too much of a damn about another person's race
Everyone here should be treated with care
Because the US of A is the land that we share

My hope for next century is this
That America becomes a land of bliss
No more wars, or division, or unequal pay
But an America that will make you want to stay
Now there will still be problems, as that is inevitable
But if we strive for a better future, that would be incredible
This new America, everyone will be treated the same
And not in a harsh way but in a way that we tame
And even though our country has a troubled past
This new America's good qualities will surely last

What the World Looks Like

by Anahi Medina

I stand here on this campus
carrying more than just a backpack

I carry stories of generations before
me. the quiet sacrifices
No one writes about

late nights, early mornings
A family that worked long hours
just so their children could sit in a classroom
that they never had the chance to enter

This is my heritage

It's not something that is framed on a wall
It's inside my heart

So when I walk into class
I am not alone
I am walking with generations behind me
and they whisper in my ear one word

“Onward.”

The present weighs heavily on my shoulders
School, work, and responsibilities
I wonder if I am ever really capable of becoming
the person my family believes I can be

I don't want to disappoint them
and let their efforts be for nothing
There are days when doubt feels louder than hope.
Days when the future feels like a stranger

Because the world today
isn't kind to dreams
It wants to silence us

Our dreams
Our hopes
to be realistic

I refuse to be silenced.

Because a hundred years from now
There will be someone else standing in my shoes
a student
a dreamer

I don't expect them to know my name
But I hope they do
I hope they live in a world we helped create

So I ask myself
What will my life leave behind?

And the reality of it is
I'm not sure

I hope to be known as a reminder.

A reminder that education can open doors
that have felt locked forever
So when I feel doubt
And my future feels unrealistic.
I think of the voices that helped carry me

“Onward.”

Onward through doubt
Onward through struggle
and everything in between
that tries to slow us down

Because legacy isn't structured over perfection

So if someone asks me what the world looks like
a hundred years from now

I hope it looks like a possibility
I hope it looks like a student
My family came in as dreamers
And I'm here to make their dreams a reality



Teagan Morris



Tattooed
by Kaliskis Munoz

Their Place

by Alizu N'Guetta

I come from long lineage of struggle
from different continents of the world,
All trying to escape the long vicious grasp of evil that sinks people
Sinks them after using them for all they have
Their resources, culture and hospitality

Now they are expected to rise up from the hard fall
and expected to be below
They are expected to fight those who are in the same situation,
But they don't realize who the real enemy is,
not each other but the person who forced them there

First, they must comprehend
that they are not the savage aliens that were told to are,
but people who are filled with hope—
So much hope that it overflows from generation to generation

Longing and fighting
for want was promised to them,
they don't realize
that they are the ones that the promise needed
in order to come true

They are the ones who truly make America great
In the face of all prejudice and xenophobia they face,
They are still here
standing tall with no fears
fighting for their place.

The Fox and the Blue Jay

by Breanna Nautu

A bristly brown nest sits
At the highest branch in the tree.
Inside is a young blue jay.
She ruffles her feathers and shrills
A call for her mother.

Her eyes are saucers in her head
As she spies the dark clouds advancing.
Wind howls and pushes by,
And the trees dance in response.

The branches swing back and forth
As the wind billows.
The blue jay wildly eyes the sky
For the shape of her mother,
As the nest slips off,
And the sky flies by in an ashen blur.

What is only yards from the ground,
is miles to the Jay.

The nest hits the earth hard.
Twigs and feathers spiral in the wind
And spread around the scene.

The jay lies in its shattered home
Watching for hours as the storm finally passes by.
There is no sign of her mother.

There's crunching behind her.
A shadowy figure blocks out the sun,
Peering down the nest.

Auburn fur, jagged teeth, and yellow eyes
glare down a long snout into the nest,
Where the vulnerable bird cries.
A fox.

The fox digs the remains of the nest away,
And plucks the bird free.

“Where is your mother?” The fox asks
“I don't know.” The jay quivers.

The fox's eyes scan the sky.
“She has left you.” The fox says.

The jay doesn't fight back, only cries.
She doesn't fight as the fox takes her to her den.
As the fox puts a rabbit in front of her.

And watches as she fails to tear the meat
With her tiny beak.

When the fox sees the jay's struggle,
It grows furious.
It's eyes glare at the birds tiny form,
alien from her own.

Cold and hungry are the nights,
As the jay peers out of the den
And scans the sky every dawn.

Not a shadow, Not a figure,
Not a call, not a feather.

When she stretches out her wings
To feel the wind between them
The fox is infuriated again.

One morning, when the fox isn't looking,
The jay escapes the musty den.
It hops on its feet towards the hill.
The sun rises behind it.

When at the crest, the sky waits for her.
It stretches beyond what eyes could see.
A Pink, yellow, and orange maw

That opens wide just for her.

For the first time ever,
She spreads her wings.
The wind gusts against her,
Much like that faithful night.

It ruffles each feather, opening them
Freeing them.

With a breath that fills her tiny lungs,
She walks to the edge of the hill,
And leaps.

Flavors

by Teagan O'Brien

My mother
Who hails from
The countryside of Guangdong
Or what you might call
"Canton"
Or "Hong Kong"
Or probably just China
Doesn't exclusively cook meals
With the flavors of her homeland

And I can't name a single
Irish dish
Aside from the Gaeilge Guinness and
Whiskey that runs through my veins

And I am Italian
only in name
Biological lines clashing
With the fact
that I despise everything
veering from basic pasta
And pepperoni on pizza

If I'm being completely honest
The stories that touch
my plate
Rarely derive from the
Flavors of my ancestors

Guangdong
Only appears
At the dinner table
Once in a blue moon
More often at
Dim sum reunions

China graces my tongue

Just as often
As Korean spirits
And Japanese vigor
In bursting Xiao Long Bao
Simmering Bulgogi
And soothing Udon

I remember
That when I was younger
The food in my thermos
Drew odd looks and
Shriveled scrunched noses

The blooming sticky rice wrapped
In lotus leaf
And the warm, clear soup poured
Across soft noodles
Made me an ‘other’

The other kids couldn’t understand
Past the flavor
Of their PB&Js and cold cuts stuffed
Between slices of fluffy white bread

But I think they took for granted
The sloppy luke-warm
School lunches
Of crispy taquitos
Or soggy nachos and tacos
Or the rubbery orange chicken
And even the dry, dense burgers
Served every noon

“Americana”
Crafted from the tired
Strong hands
Of immigrants of all colors
landing
At the feet of Lady Liberty
Or off the coast of San Francisco

Or courageously crossing
The Southern Wall

And cooked in tune
With the bellowing African hymns
Under the Northern stars
On Plantations and
Hard earned towns
Soon burned to the ground

And by the souls that belonged
The soil of the “new” land
That thrived here long before
Any settlers from across
The Atlantic Blue set foot
In the Northern forests

You see
Although my mother came
From the sprawling hills
Of southern China
And my father’s forefathers
From the endless plains of Ireland
My parents grew up
tasting the sweet belly
Of New York City
And me
the buzzing bubbling
Fizz of California

And I’ve only had a fraction
Of the hundreds of variations
Of meat wrapped in bread
In tacos, and gyro wraps, and steamed buns
And it may impossible to try
The thousands of ways to
Eat rice with everything
In congee, and curry, and with any protein
And I have yet to taste
Every inter-cultural spin

And exchange
As the flavors of the world
Mingle together

But I want to feel those
Sweet, savory, sour flavors
Of the world exploding across
My tongue

I want it to
Burn
And tingle with the
Warmth
And Kindness
Of a handmade meal
Made with
Passion
And the love of food, family, and friends.

“Life Goes On In Both Directions”

by Emma Olson

“Life goes on in both directions
Looking back with thankfulness and ahead with hope
All held together by piercing needle and binding thread
That perhaps someday someone might say
You have his eyes or her nose or their sense of humor.”

Yes life goes on
Sometimes slowly like a walk in the forest
Often quickly like a traveling tourist
One day here and the next day gone
Let the noise of life be your favorite song
The wheezing laughs and the baby’s cries
The warm hellos and the sad goodbyes
The last words your Grandma said
That echo like a canyon in your head

We carry on what was once was
Like a pair of hand me down gloves
We cannot choose every permanent donation
That we pass down to the next generation

But life goes on in both directions
Between past and present it holds the tension
To let us look onward
And to let us look back
Life will always bear this weighty task.

Waltz

By Carmen Orduño

At the end of my days
I stand frozen in awe of something more than I
This deceitful dance seemed to go on eternally
Yet now, as the steps begin to fade and my rhythm skewed,
I am still
removed from movement
For I am before something more than I
Such a harmonious process for a naive soul
to not recognize the beginning of a journey renewed in death
A never-ending waltz beginning again
The peace of knowing I am not the end
An evocative prayer of memories flow graciously through my head
As I remember
The most honest love
The most scornful war
The most innocent laughter
The most bitter tears
For I had truly lived
The humanity I carried passed through my mercy and my wrath
So a new life can continue the waltz
So the nascent soul can begin to misstep
To fumble and do an off-beat stumble
To dance like nothing matters but the sway of thy hips
To pretend like no eyes can see what radiates from the dreamy sweep
The joy forms a new melody
The never-ending Waltz begins again

Seasons

by Paco

Many days passed before Francisco contacted my father and told him that we would leave the first week of November that year. I was excited to receive that news because I had waited a long time. My mother had always reminded me how important it is to be patient, and those days she repeated it to me whenever she could. At the same time, she was always accusing my father of not wanting to help me, because the days were passing and he didn't give me any news. But later I understood that Francisco was waiting to gather more people so he could earn more money.

The day finally arrived when we would leave. The night before, I prepared a backpack with a pair of pants and a shirt, all that I was carrying, plus some *centavos* that my grandfather gave me. He told me, "Take these *centavos* (*pennies*). I hope they can be of use to you," and he gave me his blessing. I can still hear my grandmother crying. She had been there when we were born, and we had always lived with them. I went to bed, but I couldn't sleep well that night, thinking about what I was doing. My emotions were raging.

The next day, I got up at 3 am. My mother was crying, and all my siblings, even though they were older than I am. I'm the 3rd child, and my sister is the last. I had a lump in my throat, but I didn't cry. I just told them that I would return. Between tears and hugs, I left the house where I had lived until I was 19 years old. It was about 4 am. My father took me to the place where I was going to meet Francisco, along with other people, at 5:00.

First Journey

I arrived at Francisco's around 5:10 in the morning. It was still dark—I could barely see the approaching dawn. There were three more people waiting – the Uncle, Mario, and Gerardo. My father said goodbye to me and told me to be careful and good luck.

I introduced myself to everyone there, and we talked for a while. Then we left Francisco's house and headed to a bus station that would take us to a city in the state of Santa Ana, where we would cross the border into Guatemala.

We got off at a point near the border with Guatemala where there was a market. It was already around 11 in the morning. We walked through the market, and all around us, we could hear the shouts of people offering their products.

We continued walking until we saw the entrance to Guatemala, where there was a long line of people. I didn't know what to expect; we just followed Francisco. We headed to the line to join the people who were handing in their documents to be able to enter that country legally. I arrived at the window where I handed in my identification, and since I had reached adulthood, I no longer needed my parents' permission to leave the country. They asked me my reason for entering Guatemala, and Francisco had coached me to say I was going to visit some relatives in that country - no problem with that.

In just a few minutes, I was leaving El Salvador, and I will never be able to forget the day that I left the country where I had grown up for 19 years! With a lump in my throat, I said goodbye to El Salvador. It is a painful feeling to have to leave the land where one has so many memories from childhood and adolescence. My mind was full of those memories, and it made me want to cry, but I encouraged myself and repeated the reasons why I was doing it. It was not a pleasant trip. I had made the decision myself, and that told me that I was going to return one day.

As we walked along, we saw a bus full of people that was entering El Salvador. A man who was sweeping the street told us that the people on that bus were being deported, people who had been caught in Mexico trying to get to the United States. I was surprised, not knowing that I would arrive in one of those same buses a while later.

First Scare

We drove along very desolate dirt roads, only fields and trees—no houses could be seen. It was already around 12 or 1 pm because the sun felt strong on our backs. The streets had many potholes, and the car sometimes jumped or slowed down. And we were going like that for a long time. Suddenly, a patrol car appeared up ahead. Even now, I'm not sure if it was a federal highway patrol or a state police. The pickup stopped, and the police officer approached the driver. They were talking for a few moments, and then let us go. The people who were with us told us that the driver gave money to the police so that they would let us pass without any

problem. We understood that the driver, just like the previous times, was asking for more money from us because in that area, there were always policemen stealing money from people like us. We began to be afraid that the driver would later hand us over to some criminal group or the police. The taxi continued its journey for hours through dirty and still very desolate roads. We were already tired from the trip and very hungry. The people also looked uncomfortable, but I think they were already used to those kinds of trips. We were still in the taxi when suddenly it stopped. We looked out to see what was happening, and suddenly we saw a white double-traction pickup truck (4 wheels in the back) with the insignia of the Mexican government. This was not a “dogcatcher truck”, it was something from the government, but even now, I don't know what institution it was. (It could even have been criminals masquerading as police.)

Two fat and burly men with dark skin got out of the truck. They did not look happy, and their countenance was serious. They were wearing white shirts with the insignia of the Mexican government and blue jeans. They came up to the driver to tell him something, and then they approached us. At that moment, my heart was already racing because I didn't know if it was Immigration or some of the criminal groups that control in that area. My traveling companions, too, looked pale. They told us to get out. We complied, and they grabbed me by the shirt along with the others, and they dragged us to the side of the road, and they told the driver that they were going to take us with them.

The driver called one of the men, and they were talking for a few minutes. The other man asked us if we had money. We said that we had already met a policeman before. The man thought for a few seconds, and then the other one came back and met with the one who was with us. They talked for a few seconds between themselves a few meters away from us, so we couldn't hear what they were saying. At that moment, we were confused and afraid because we didn't know what was going to happen. Running was not something that occurred to me at that moment, because around us, I only saw large fields with no houses nearby. Everything was desolate there. After those seconds of fear, one of the men approached and told us to get back into the taxi, where the driver was waiting. We got in and the driver continued on his way. Our fear decreased when we saw that the men stayed behind.

To this day, I do not know who those men were or what would have happened if they had taken us with them. Later on the journey, we experienced many things. We did not know what they spoke to the driver

about or among themselves. Why did they let us go? We will never know, but this is nothing compared to what happened days later when we met members of the Zetas cartel, the most bloodthirsty cartel in Mexico.

My Savior

I felt worse and worse, thinking I had no chance of living, and that I was most likely going to be killed because no one would pay for me. El Perro approached me and asked me what was happening, and I just told him that I was waiting for them to call me. El Perro never acted like an upset person or one who used drugs. After my answer, he didn't say anything to me, but just left. Another 2 days passed, and there were only about 5 people left. Some of them were waiting for their relatives since they came from states very far from Texas.

I don't remember the exact date, but somewhere around January 5th, like 10:00 in the morning, El Perro approached with two other men. He told me that today was the day I would leave with the two men.

I got up very shocked because I was not expecting anything but bad news. I left the room and got into a red car, about a year old, with the two men. I sat in the back and watched as we passed a city with buildings very different from those in Mexico. Everything seemed very beautiful to me since I had never seen cities like that in my life.

The men drove for about 20 minutes until we got to a very large parking lot that I realize now was a mall. We waited there for a few minutes until, suddenly, the aunt I had seen visiting in the city where I grew up arrived. I didn't know what to say because she had just arrived and gave the men the money and, in a hurry, told me, "Let's go!" I went with my aunt, and they put me in a gray car. Her husband and I sat with her in the back, and the two men in front, who were brothers. The aunt had paid them to drive from California to San Antonio, Texas.

I sat in the middle of the back seat, and that's when my aunt asked me the question that would change my life.

She asked me, “Now what are you going to do? Are you going to go to your dad's friend's house, or are you going to go with us?”

After working 2 years in the nursery on a very hot day in Fillmore, a strong argument arose with the boss at that time, who, by the way, today is behind

bars for his abusive personality and as human garbage. I dare to say that because of what I've lived and seen with other colleagues. Let it be known that I never let myself be treated that way because I fulfilled my obligations as they were, and even so, my salary was very low. That is why I decided to resign. As in most cases in the County of Ventura, I can only offer my workforce because I cannot aspire to something better, because in this country, it matters more to be residing legally.

I have no other alternative but to go and ask for work in the fields to pick lemons because most of the people I know work in that. I also don't have a car and need to get a ride. One day, I spoke with some contractors that a friend had given me their numbers because he didn't know how to do the job. The next day, I went to the ranch, and they gave me an 85-pound bag. That is really curious because it has a way in which the bag works that a new person really couldn't imagine. You unhook the hooks at the bottom so that the lemons come out from the bottom without having to turn it over, but everything is maña (skill), as the pickers say. It was time for work to begin, and I still didn't know what I was doing. I only saw boxes and many lemon trees when the foreman told me, “These trees are yours.” And me, still without knowing what they were referring to. A man arrived and explained to me what the job was like, and he helped me soften the gloves. When they are new, they are very hard, and you can soak them in lemon juice or water so that the leather softens. I started to pick as best I could. It was 11 in the morning that day, and I did manage to fill one box. Fortunately, that day was the last day we were going to pick there, and so most of the other people helped in the end so that no one stays behind. But that only happens when the work is going to end, that is to say that there are no more lemons left, and we have to go to another ranch. That day I only filled one box, which was paid at \$38 a box.

There are companies that take longer to finish, but I was in one of the small ones that hardly have ranches to work at, or barely have people to work. The majority are retired elderly people because they have become accustomed to working so much in their lives and they are no longer

wanted at home. That is why this company pays less and works less. Since at that time I did not have a car or knew people, I thought it was the best thing I could do while I met more people so that they would help me find better jobs, better companies to work for.

I kept working on picking, but this time I was picking oranges in Maricopa and Bakersfield and that's a bit worse because of the height of the trees.

The number of pickers was so many that you had to pick faster and managed to do at least 2 boxes that were paid at \$30 dollars each. But, being new, I couldn't make them because the trees are tall, and I didn't know how to put the ladder up, because there was a trick to being fast and how you handled the ladder. I made more friends, and I met a young man who worked in a company in Santa Paula, and I asked him if they needed people, and they did. Now I see that the thing is to look for the job before the lemon season starts.

We all died today

by Finn Porter

John, Mohammed, you and I. We all died today
In our school clothes, in our rags,
in our diamond studded robes.
We were nobody, no one. Not to the they
and the them Our mothers crying for us
is all that makes you care
Everyone in this spiraling galaxy of sunshine
has died a million times over.
Over and over and over until today, here, and now
Today we are alive. Today we dance, we eat, we sing
songs of high-heeled, jazz shoed sinners
right and wrong doers baking mud pies of cordial sorrow.
Cuz why should I be sad if others are too. thinking only
of how and when our fruitless, fathomless chapter
will come to a silly, concise end.
Why are we human? Because we kill remorseless, lust-
desiring? Hungering for something, someone.
Because we can question why we exist.
The phantasmal becomes fathomed
when fame and fortune disappear
When subconscious bubbles up
above the water, when that same sub
strikes down a stainless steel ship.
Soon all of our hollow, pearlescent lives
will be epics of times of old, our memories
will be ideas of who we once were,
And weren't- and we will celebrate,
screaming and kicking in our
silver-plated graves, our feet tapping
to the melody of life. To live again- to suffer
so that those ahead of us may suffer as well.
In life, and in death. In sickness, and in health
we make fickle vows to the infinity,
bathing our heads in immortal towers of divine harmony
Trying not to breathe in the inevitable,
to push back, quoting the tangible tango
of our heart strung sorrows, bending back

to shoot arrows over castles through time
and space to the next generation. Asking them
to marvel, and make dazzling works of entrancing art.

The Mudslide Comes Quick

by Finn Porter

Tangerine-hued, Icarus fell.
A cyclical spiral of spiritual rhymes
adhering to the test of the futures font
of fertility and undeniable
short, sharp, sheep-skinned,
beach tanned. Melodic ability
to see what can't be seen
to feel what can't be felt
to read into what was never written
Trees reaching their limbs to the sky,
mud, mulling in mundane madness,
touching the thought of teasing a teacher
teaching themselves to turn and run,
to slip and slide when the rain starts
tormenting them at every turn
the mudslide comes quick, without warning
ripping even the learned trees'
silicon roots, embedded deep into the world
Torn up and tussled. Tainted
with solid tassels of frolicking fossils
fooling their senses into sensing
Everything and nothing at all
Rain fell, and the town sank
Knowledge taken into the sea
never to be seen again. Until tomorrow
Week on week and day on day
As rain drops fall beyond star lit
backdrops of pickled pluots,
plagiarizing the code of life,
Letting Icarus fall forever,
Red hued, and fast-ish.
Hoping we can outlast him,
And live to catch our children
before they too fall off Icarus's cliff.

Heritage of Caring

by Cal Quies

As I live each day, I remain in the present moment
It is only a rare moment when I stop to feel my past
Not the experiences of my childhood, but the experiences of my bloodline
All struggles, sacrifices, and choices have led to me
My blood and my soul are the creations of generations before me
My reality is shaped by the actions and consequences of those before me;
my very being boils down to one action

Caring

Caring was at the forefront of my great-grandfather's mind
Amid war torn Germany, he scavenged trains for dusty potatoes
He let his care for his family lift each leg for every step
of his twenty-mile journeys

When portions were scarce, he sacrificed his
All because he cared

Hopes and aspirations were set aside by my mother
so she could care for me

Without hesitation, I was chosen over core aspects of her identity
All because my family cared for each other

But this seems to be fading

My family appears fragmented

Care for one another no longer involves the extended family

I seldom see my baby cousins

Apparently now have better things to do

The culprit of the problem is our modern society

We are being indoctrinated with a focus on self-sufficiency

One's worth is one's ability to care for oneself

But what is so worthy about that

We should be ashamed of it

As days go on, the farther I feel from my heritage of caring

I worry my family is losing the very roots that allowed us to get here

The growing lack of care is not an easy problem to fix

At only sixteen, I feel a pull towards things

that will increase my societal worth

I chase money and exciting experiences

rather than simple moments of selflessness

I scroll my phone rather than talk to my elderly grandmother

Why should I change? Isn't this stuff normal?

The new reality is only perceived as normal because we let it be
Many generations before focused on tight-knit families
rather than broader social gain
As a society, it is imperative that we regress to that way of being
We need to start caring for our family more than we care for ourselves
It is in our very heritage despite seeming so novel
All it takes is a small talk with your old grandmother
Ask her about her childhood
A simple gesture
Empty the dishwasher when your mom is stressed
Heritages such as a habit of caring only exist because it is successful
We have to trust this and implement it as our ancestors did

100 Years From Today

by Brandon Ramonette

Going to college for a reason,
behind the reason, plenty of support
future is calling for me to reach –
Goals in the making to teach children.
the future ahead calling for more
Students coming and going
College to invite more students –
to get the education they should get
At a school that has helped
students succeed at what they want
100 years from today
using more technology and –
Less educational tools.
Classes going online more than in person,
Less in person meetings and,
leaving your house having to use gas,
which is now overly pricey.
100 years looks like changes –
To everything around the world,
To the things right in front of you.
It looks like more technology
And students having an opportunity to learn
about what it means to be in college
My dream is to teach –
In front of the new generation of students
That come from the past generations
of students who did great things
When they were our age
Let me achieve my dream so,
I can help make a difference in a world
Of future generations of children
Not knowing what they want to do—
But will take time to figure it out.

This Love

by Leslie Rosales

My phone holds a thousand memories,
which one day can be lost to a broken screen.
Not today. Today I look back on digitals.
Ink on paper that dries and freezes a moment forever.
The rewind sound of the tape rolling back.
The nostalgia behind a click and flash.
The anticipation of waiting days for your pictures to develop.
It's almost like a trip back in time.
A perfect candid moment because mom took the picture too soon.
I appreciate the memories behind the prints.
To physically hold these moments and admire the details.
The bright walls in grandma's home, a home that is long here after her.
To see Grandpa's green tractor in the corn fields one more time.
A picture I want to cherish and keep forever.
A feeling you can't feel through a screen.
I can't help but get emotional
as I flip a picture taken on October 10th 2008.
"El dia que te recibimos con tanto gusto."
"The day we received you with so much joy."
The picture that completes my little family:
my dad, my mom, me, and my little brother.
I frame these pictures so our story won't get lost in the cracks.
To reminisce and to hold dear in our hearts.
So one day, my children will look back and
recognize the walls that held up their foundation.
So one day, they understand the language that carries us home.
So one day, they see the memories that are not through a screen.
With each picture they keep, they will see this love is our legacy.

Mandela Effect

by Fernando Albert Salinas

One day, when the sky is blood red, and the air is thick as smoke,
Someone will tell you it's always been that way.
You will remember that the sky was blue when you were younger.
And millions of people will recall the blue sky, too.
They will recall when nights were black
instead of clouds glaring nuclear neon green,
and you will remember the moon. How she shone.

You will remember how you wondered,
if the moon had lips,
would it matter in a hundred years?
Would she kiss the 101?
Would blood blush or
rusty lipstick stain wash away in warm desert rain?
Would it ever rain again?
Would cacti spill their spines to brush against the sky divine?
Would she consume night?

The weight of her on your mind.
Silver moon, sister moon, summer moon.
Hallow moon?
She drifted from you.

Your eyes swam in the ocean of her storms.
You rested on her sea of serenity.
You wept in her sea of tranquility.
Tattoo-inked her into your arms.
How you loved her golden skin glowing
above jagged silhouettes of skyscrapers.

When she was once stabbed
by false flag productions in Burbank studios
she asked, why suffer Earth's children?

One day, she will be more of a myth than Lilith.
Mythos will hack human memory and erase her,
leaving only the spotless mind and eternal sunshine.

Mythos will tell you the 45th president was not a rapist. The Epstein files were pages torn from the Summarians' list. The 145 kids killed in the bombing were protecting the jihad. The burning churches were terrorist bases. Disney was a nazi, but not a racist. Picachu never had a black-tipped tail. The Fruit of the Looms logo never had a cornucopia. Life isn't like a box of chocolates, but it was. Darth Vader never said, "Luke, I am your father." Mandela didn't die in prison. You didn't watch his funeral on TV. In one hundred years, when the ET alien said he wanted to go home, he just meant back to Oxnard. He wanted to phone home. The recorded collect call from prison only says, "I'm love you. I'm sorry. I want to be home." The alien calls once a day.

Will you remember, I loved you? Mythos will tell you, I cheated, I lied, I stole. Do you recall, I love you? Believe me. Mythos will tell you:

moon
fake simulation
system error. delete
man
love is a
human error
glitch .

Sandman

by Javan Cy Salinas

The Land of Dreaming is shattering
Missile strikes fall on the building blocks
of one's imagination

Is it okay to dream?

The Sandman used to protect our dreams
His bag of sand was so powerful,
but it has no meaning now
It used to be so soft,
but it is hardening
into bulletproof glass

Is it worth it to live without
our hopes and dreams?
I wish I could dream.
I used to.
But now, reality is too strong
for even him.

Did the dream stone shatter?
Was it blown to pieces
or did we destroy ourselves?

The Beckoner

by Seth Seraph Salinas

What do you see in me?
My withered hands, too weak to reach your face,
Let down by your velvet touch-
Unmarred by this world.

Will you remember me this way?
Or will your mind drift to the days we spent in the grass,
Tracing the clouds, lost in imagination,
ignorant of the time passing us by?

The blinding light behind my eyes,
fleeting yet infinite,
fills the room;
It beckons me back to dust.
As I let go,
I hear you whisper,
Take me with you.

Valdaro

by Parwaz Singh

isn't it quite a thought, when you realize
that over the span of thousands of years,
people and their flesh have marred
and become one
with the silt we tread on listlessly?
that these men and women, too,
had once led ordinary lives?

then ponder the thought, that those same people
have seen the silvery moon,
adored the sky and its constellations,
watched the sun rise and fall
as if it was constantly scurrying
away from something.
they had feared the sea as we have,
picked the flowers and
ate the berries that we do.
they felt the wind lap their face
as they sought refuge in crevices,
the flickering and dying flames
providing their remaining bits of warmth.

eventually, the people left, gone
without a trace as others
took their place in history.
singularly worth nothing, but
together acknowledged as *ancestors*.
they have become nothing but
studies and stories in our world,
and their bones no longer rattle with life.
few still never received eternal rest.
instead, the remnants of them became displays
and displays became museum attractions.

it leads me to wonder what will happen
to those of us living right now.
onwards, we continue

in pursuit of life as grand as theirs.
more advanced and still advancing,
but not yet wise enough to
ignore what came before.
onwards, we will continue,
and i hope for many years more
for many other children
to grow and to love as we did.
tonight i will lie awake,
watching stars fall from my window
and i'll be thinking,
will we ever be some of the remembered?
perhaps, perhaps not.
i wonder what the poets of the future will think,
when we are all dead and gone.

Rejecting Time to Build A Home

by Minda Severtson

I don't want spring,
and I don't want summer.
I don't want the sun to be warm
I don't want the ocean breeze to tangle my hair
I want a knife,
a sacred dagger.

I want to carve out the ache of lack-
it churns in my stomach,
making me sick with twisted delusions.

I want a large metal tube attached to my brain-
to suck out the poison
that causes neurons to misfire,
forcing me to see you as a threat.

I want to slow down time-
I want to swallow it whole
like a vitamin.

I want the icy chill to wake me up,
slap me in the face,
and say-
"you are alive
and that is all that matters."

I want to cut the cords
that feeds me with fear
when I put my palm in yours.

I want to stop running,
flailing,
through fields of landmines.

I want the lightning strikes to hit me.
Gently-
with clarity

with relief
with comfort
with reprieve.
I want to become the wild grasses,
and the mosses,
and live amongst the trees-
away from that house
and with my home.

The home that looks at me
with tiger's eye precision-
seeing me bare
untethered
untangled from the decaying wood,
that made up the walls painted lavender.

I want to allow the rain to wash me clean of her,
so I can embrace you.

No longer dancing around the quicksand,
avoiding sinking-
for twenty-four years.

I don't want spring,
I don't want summer.

I want the sturdy arms
of January wrapped around my waist-
pulling me in
planting the seeds
spreading the roots
that creates a home.

I'll Carry You Now, Father

by Minda Severtson

79 years spent,
collapses into domino spirals of regret.
Haunting you in wake and sleep,
the living nightmares you can't seem to forget...

Inherited debt,
generational misfortune,
genetic flaws...
Predestined to crumble into lifelong remorse.

But it didn't start with you dad.
The burdens I now have to bear
were not yours to begin with,
his somber name written in crimson stain -
all over the knapsacks
that hold your broken dreams.
And my mother's,
And mine.

Let me take the heavy load off your breaking back.
Before I complained about having to hold the burden -
It makes my knees buckle.
My brow sweat from the scorching flames of your accidental sins.
My eyes well with fractals of collapsing shooting stars,
that overflow as stinging tears.

Despite it all,
I'll carry you now father.
I'll carry your torments,
Your shortcomings,
Your abandoned delusions of grandeur,
Your repentance and shame.

I'll alchemize your guilt,
transmuting your sorrow into something holy.
Something that even a scornful god could not refuse,
Something that would put all the saints' goodness to shame.

I'll make an offering to the man in the sky that you fear.
The father you once claimed was both of ours,
Whose sovereign light was supposed to baptize us in his grace,
Until we both succumbed to shame.

I'll tell him you were great,
I'll defend your tarnished name at the altar of fate.
I'll tell him about the times spent on your shoulders,
believing you were the weaver of dreams,
knowing you were the protector of my innocence.

I'll hold your aching, bleeding heart in my hands,
As I stitch together every act of selflessness,
every belief in humanity
every good deed that went punished
every piece of empathy that was spent on crooks and thieves
and I'll weave a tapestry that reads:
My father deserves a seat at the heavenly table,
In spite of it all he was an angel.

You're not going to hell dad,
I promise.
You won't be forgotten,
Nor will you be scorned to an eternity of fire and suffering.

When it's your time to go -
I know,
I'll see your face in the cumulus clouds
and sing towards the sunset skylines where I see your gentle smile.
Cascades of seabirds will follow me wherever I may travel,
the ocean waves will feel like your loving embrace,
and at every shoreline I will see the outline of your frame.
My enduring lighthouse,
the man who gave me my name.
I'll carry you now father,
And your legacy of imperfect faith.

A Jigsaw of Love

by Lauren Taglieri

Love is a puzzling thing.
Because I know in the past,
it did not have the same meaning.
For I gave and gave every singular piece of me—
until I was nothing.
Love to others
meant sacrificing the entirety of my being.
Parts of a jigsaw they took,
and returned nothing back to me.

Then hollow and empty,
with nothing left to tempt me.
For those who had feigned love
were long exhausted.
Simply due to my dwindling devotion,
to sacrifice jagged pieces of myself—
and cater to their emotions.

But not long after, I found new affection.
In which it was a surprise—
for something I never had experienced,
was so softly divine.

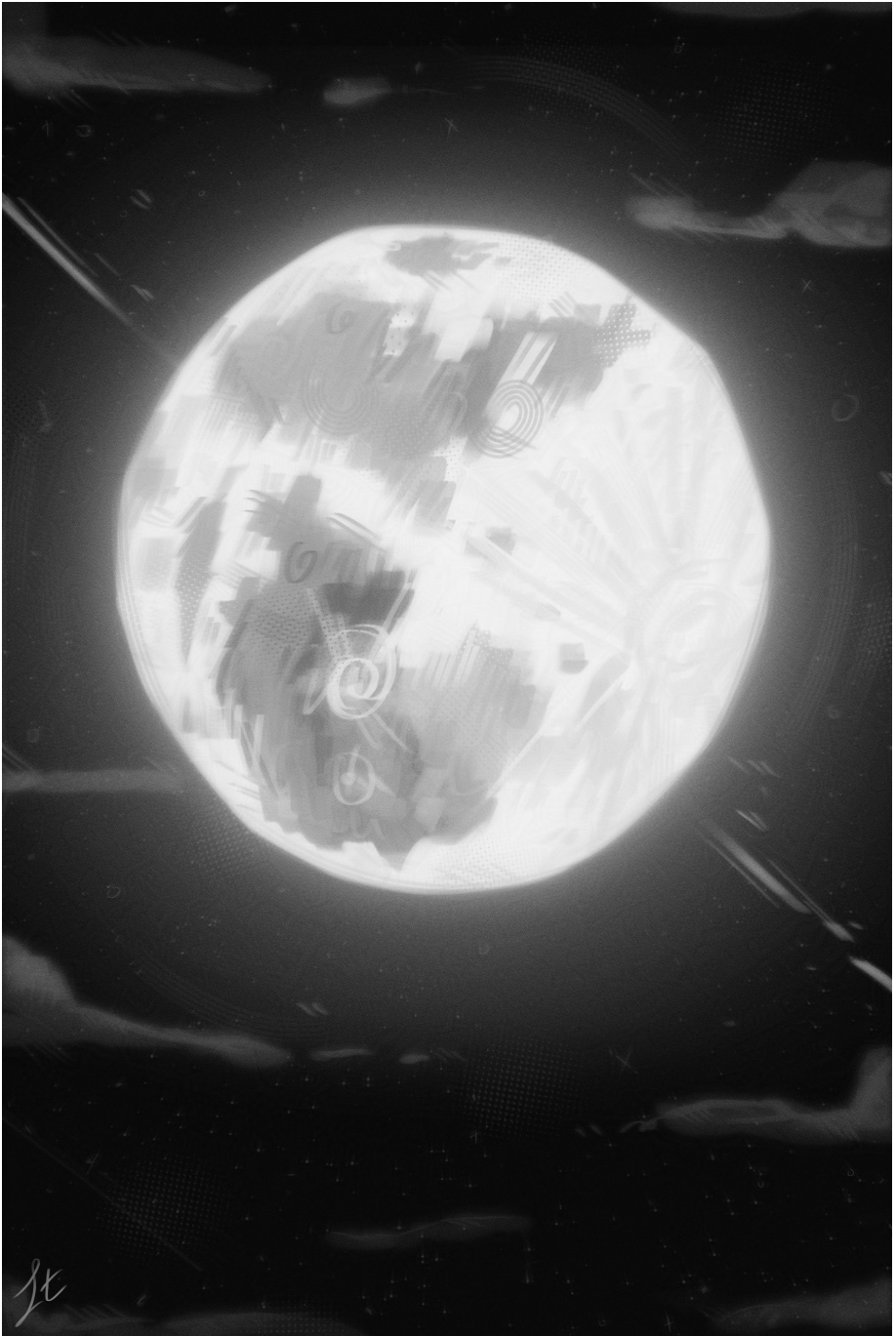
Self-sacrifice was now no longer my fate.
For those who I have met since then,
helped me restore—
the pieces I surrendered of that jigsaw,
the jigsaw of who I was before.

You sat with me in a quiet and gentle embrace.
And in my darkest moments,
you'd offer a puzzle piece.
Soft and worn from those who came before.
It fits perfectly into place—
in the midst of my heart, the being of who I am.
And I thank you dearly
for making me feel whole again.

Past and present,
you will forever be a soft reminder—
That love is kinder.
And that I am deserving of more,
much more than,
what I used to know love as.



Wishbone



Moon



Pinkie Pie

Maize and Palm Leaves in the Wind

by Justin Derek Tolteca

I am the land that you stand on.
I am the labor of sweat off hands,
I am everything that's left of what there was and
everything that there will be
that is at the reach of the palm hands.

I am a political discourse by birth.
Money rules everything.
Trying to remain unchanged.
I don't wanna capitalize my culture—
It'd be a shame. Pimp the pueblo?
Never,
when we already have everything to gain.

You came from over there where love wasn't sacred to you.
You come over here trying to teach us
what the clear ways are to live.
Our lives to you, you walk over my homeland as if it were a dust mat.
You talk over my knowledge as if it were foreign, but
you were the one who invited themselves onto here.
Now you wanna impose your teachings onto here.
But over here is not like over there
which is what you don't get, which I fear.

I pray for better days.
I am just a guest in the land to where I stay.
My home is hundreds of miles away, yet
my connection almost decays as the days go on.
My language, they told me to be ashamed of it.
My heritage is something you shouldn't play with.
You call yourself indigenous, but I don't think you understand
what you're saying.
You put me under different labels and expect to feed off the same table.
Don't ever call Americana. Don't ever call Mexicano.
Don't ever call me Chicano. Don't ever call Latino or Hispano.
I am no Aztec, either.
I am the indigenous peasant

who works to provide for your consumption
while the sweat off my body sheds tears.

Young one, hear my voice, hear my anger,
hear my fear, hear my happiness.

It's okay to shed your tears.

Young one, know that change is coming home soon.

Don't let them call you low-class for living like this.

Don't you see you're happy? They don't know you're joyful like this.

I'm right here. Hold me close.

You can see clear through the ruins of it all. You remain here.

If it crumbles, we will rebuild it stronger than ever.

You are everything that you see—the surface.

You are the stories that are yet to be told.

You are the heat of the sun, the ocean that is cold, the animals
that run freely over the fields of maize, they cannot buy.

They'll never understand these experiences can't be capitalized.

They'll never understand these things can't be bought.

Never conquered. Never defeated, just cheated.

I know this has you heated, young one.

Channel it into strength.

Be the change you want.

Nonalhuuh Niman Nimoquetza.

My roots will expand and grow as the earth grows more old.

The colonizers grow cold. Pride and fury grow.

We were never warriors, just cultural providers,
knowledge writers, fighters against the colonizers.

Natural providers.

Where We Begin

by Cathy Valdovinos

Legacies, we hope to live up to one
Sometimes we aspire to create one
Not living up to one creates fear
Not knowing how to create one
causes feelings of deception
It can bring you to tears
A well-lived life is a precious gift
Although in life, sometimes you have to makeshift
For this world we live in, everything is too much
Sometimes it gets easy to lose touch
just trying to survive
in the world that we live in
No break, no time to think
No way to breathe, feels like you might sink

Building a legacy requires resilience
Pushing through things you never thought you'd experience
Stand back up, it's time to fight
The weight feels endless, but we can't grow from backing down
Paving the way for the generations to come
It's very important to remember
where you started and where you're from
If you lose yourself in the processes,
you'll lose your purpose
You must wear your strength on the surface
Not as perfection, but proof you're still working
Using previous lessons taught by family and friends
Keeping that strength we carry depends on what we defend
If everyone in the world stayed true to their dreams
They would never fail to see a gleam even in darkness

Legacies, we hope to live up to one
But they are never just done
They are built from moments, the choices we make
In every small step, in every risk we take
Whether you follow or create something new

Your legacy lives
In the life that is you
You are the hope for those to come
No need to rush,
Just have strength to create change
Break or make curses,
It all depends on you
You are for the better or for the worst for your legacy
So don't make a mistake
Don't rush your process, don't fear where you have begun
Becoming your legacy has already began
Wish the hope for the rest of the legacies
You are to create a better beginning for the legacies to come
Long after you're gone, what will remain
Won't just be your name, but the lives you've changed
It'll all be thanks to you

Cherries

by Rafaela Valle

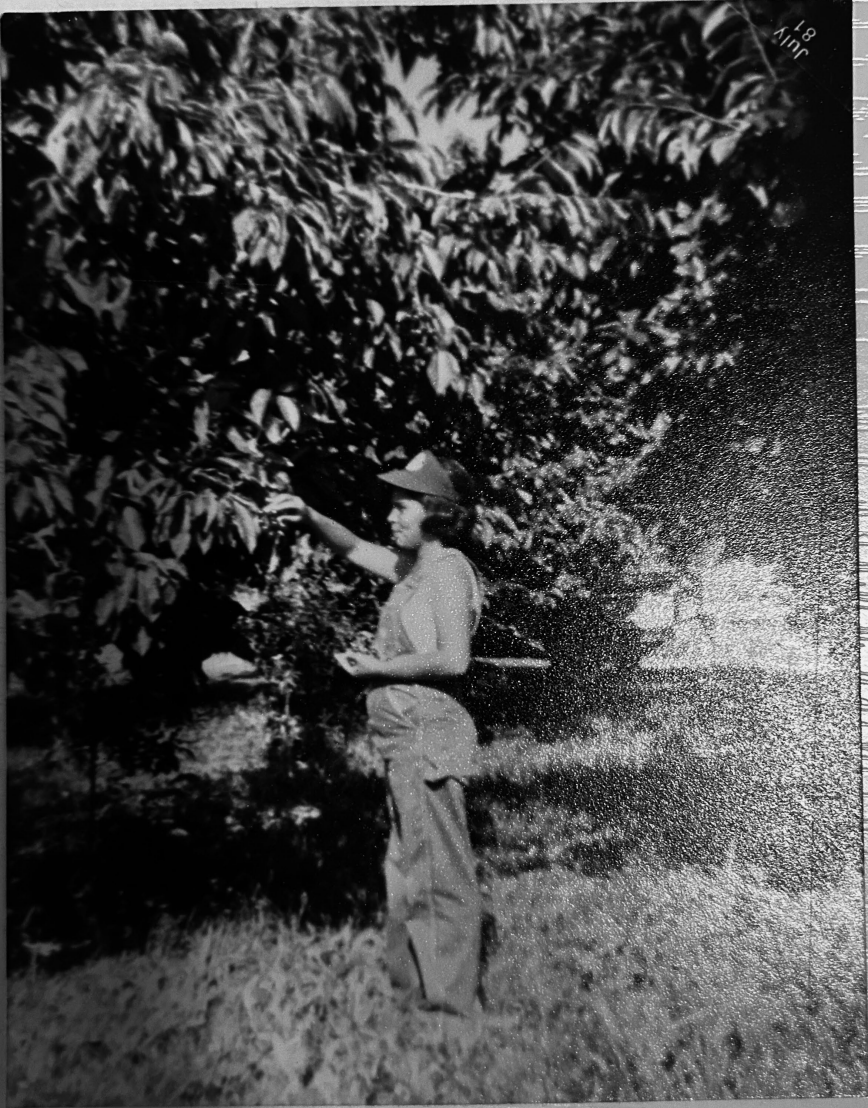
Cheery, cheap cherries picked her for summer,
The harvest on the precipice of rough hands
Abundant jeweled trees shove limbs towards her
A round belly bulges beyond leaves in her stance.

With the sun beating her body to earth and roots
Quick juice began to run, not tart but ran salty
hands swept, swooshed and dripped to boots
shade, the fool of labors- yearns for heated body

Pained, pinging fingers reach for rich red marbles
Never squeezed nor broken, committed to the pit
Overalls red, brown stained, flushed face marvels
No period, no rest, this migrant youth works like a fit

George chopped-she never knew, she picks its sow
This fatigue will gift the dreams promised and posed
Imposed hours and swollen feet, a new mother grows
Summer picked its fruit, sweet, rouged and filled- she glows.

She glows, like the sheen of the perfect season pick
She glows, like that cherry, carrying the perfect pit.



Cherries

Sacred Pause.

by Rafaela Valle

Have you heard, designer time now sold here
Souls here choose to lose the fear to see
Check the time, baby what's on your mind?
Sick, sour, swirls are thick, puddled inside

Swelt engines overrun, begun to grind
Culture you find is defined by time
The busy body oscillates, anxious mind
All alike, mouth guards for nighttime

At the same time, they cheer, they quake
Manufactured unity consumes the view
Watch the tick, recite the boom, no break
Onward they say, this gig, the next, the few

Silly, quick wasted time to preform paid life
Beyond words, gloated but gagged to arrive
Take the sacred pause, lungs fill until full
Late is better than never, exhale to a lull

Break the quartz and freeze the gears
The melting clock slows down the years
Smile-the grinding stops, no new molars
Check the morals of your fix, not lists
This minute is better than the next, resist
Sit still, let the puddles seep, witness flows
On clarity, on words, Detox capital is thick
Time onwards is where my peace goes
No pace wins the old death a body grows

A Sailor's Dilemma

by Grace Vapor

Twenty-nine years. Not thirty. Twenty-nine.
Determination. Dedication. And discipline.
Guarding the ocean, dark nights on the ship,
Out in the open sea, the waves rocking back and forth
The smell of fuel is forever embedded in my nostrils,
My taste buds too from the fuel in my drinking water
The echo of boots stomping 6,000 sailors walking and passing by
The cafeteria halls of non-stop chatter day and night
Jets humming
Chaos and noise everywhere I turn
Stay focused.
Be alert! Go to sleep.
I crave for a moment of space and silence
For the next six months,
This is the life of serving the Navy
Loneliness creeps in, but I need to stay strong
Fight it! I miss my wife and kids
Those sweet moments of their smiles and laughs
“We miss you Dad!”
“Come back home safely!”
It breaks my heart being away from them
But I know that it will be worth it in the end
I’m counting down the days til we reach land
Holding all three of my little girls in my arms
Finally, the day has come!
Walking down from the ship,
I see all four of their beautiful, smiling, and cheering faces
Leaping into my arms, warming my heart and soul
I am home.

The Good Life

by Michael Venegas

When I'm on my deathbed
Whether it's tomorrow, months, or years away
When I'm rotting in the dirt
Living on in the unexplainable afterlife
The history books won't matter to me

When that time comes, I won't think about history
I will think about the moments I was myself
The beautiful periods where my peers smiled around me
The thrilling sequences where I created worlds
The peaceful times I held my love in my arms

But why worry about that?
Why try to predict my future demise?
Whether a bullet strikes my chest and rips my flesh
Or my lovely dream ends with an escort from the reaper
I will have lived

I've pondered the future time and time again
I've pondered who would remember me, for how long?
There is never an answer that could satisfy me
So I stopped asking the recesses of my mind
Instead, I asked the dirt beneath my feet

Perhaps I am selfish enough to care about myself
Perhaps I am selfless enough to disregard my legacy
A forgetful moment to impact those I'll never know
I've never been a big fan of how they're perceived
Does that mean I've never been a fan of myself?

Legacy matters in death
But not to the dead
In 100 years' time, could my own legacy impact the new self?
If I become a fluttering butterfly, will I remember my old self?
I asked the dirt beneath my feet

My mind responded

I begged myself to open my eyes
Not to the rising sun
Nor to the setting moon
But to the dirt beneath my feet,
to the people standing beside me

I'm not good at saying goodbye
My anxiety fears change
I much prefer, see you tomorrow
For tomorrow is a new day
If there's death, or prosperity,
at least yesterday was in my grasp
I will hold on tight to my legacy
My good deeds
My good memories
My good peers
My good life
I will look upon my past
The good and the bad
And smile as I descend to join the dirt beneath my feet.
A legacy to the living is a history book
A legacy to the dead is a good life

Gentle Kisses

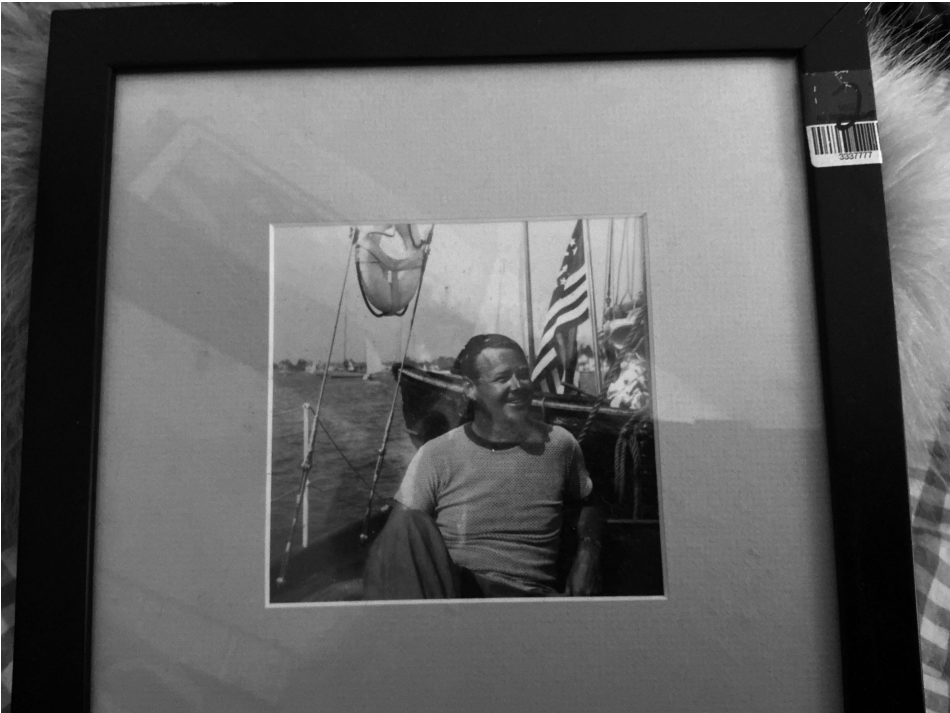
by Jocelyn Wood

A gentle kiss to the forehead,
my eyes slowly peel open.
I rustle and search in desperation,
until my silky pink blanket brushes my hand
wrapped around my shoulders
I start my day as a superhero,
wind wrestles through my hair
As my bare feet slap against wooden floors
running in each direction,
dodging floors made of lava
I finally reach that land of breakfast
A giant towers over me with a grin,
he pours cereal and milk into my bowl
He pats my head once I'm finished eating
I am then rushed back into reality
forced to change out of my nightgown
Thrown into some green jeans and polka dots
My curls get pulled left and right
tears going down my cheeks
until two fluffy pigtails are formed
The ringing of the doorbell excites me
As I see the door open, I run
Into the warm embrace of my mother
Our allotted hours fly by through
"Skippy Jon Jones" and "Dr. Seuss"
Left alone to play with my dolls
loud whispers echo through the hall
My sticker-covered door can't protect me now
My mother gives me a kiss goodbye
I am left there to question
"Where's mommy going?"
As the thought is swept away with
Warm milk and nap time

Swaying

by Jocelyn Wood

Swaying to the beat of the sea
The rusty sales take me further
The sun caresses my cheeks
My skin turning into leather
Oh, how the sea sways me
Takes me away from my home
Only to find me a new one
For it leads me to beginnings
and guides me to my ends
Like the flag I let the wind take me
“Whisk me away,” I say
I need to see the world
There is more to learn
There is power in the sea
Oh, how it sways me



The Big Fence

by Amir Yaish

Dry concrete under my shoes
There is no sound when I run
The sweat below my hair
And the eyes below my nose
They all feel heavy right now
Just before the jump
I take my foot off the ground
And the big fence seems big
It's white and it smells
Like fresh paint
Or the absence of wood
I swallow some spit
And my teeth feel heavy
It's from running too much
I take my feet off the ground
My jump seems good
It smells like soup
And I can see the other side
But a moment later
I hear a rip
It's from my pants,
they've torn in half
I fall flat on the ground
My head cracks and it makes a sound
I get up and my skin feels nice
I walk away from the fence
Something feels heavy
Something that shouldn't be with me
I look down and I see
My funny shoes
They feel like two bowling balls
I take them off and I can fly
I run around like a little kid
Happy that my socks are free
Until I reach
The white-smelling fence
I jump very high

My lips are open wide
It's from a smile
I've reached the other side

Afterword

African culture and history has preceded with an oral tradition. This tradition has been maintained and evolving through the music we call Jazz also. Jazz music is the only true art form from America, and the performance of this music comes from oral tradition and has helped to continue the expression of our people being heard. Many African American musicians could not read music in the early 1900's, when Jazz began. We would say, "Play it down first and let me hear it," and then play the song the way they interpreted the music. Part of this interpretation included what was called improvisation: making up the music on the spot. Today, you may hear this technique called "freestyle." Jazz began in New Orleans, with the first Jazz recording being done in 1917. The term "second line" comes from the black folks' tradition in New Orleans of attending a funeral, walking to the cemetery with the Jazz band playing funeral music, called a dirge. The deceased were transported as the funeral procession happened. Leaving the funeral, the band would strike up happy songs, leading the funeral goers away from the cemetery, speaking happy memories of the deceased, handkerchiefs swinging in the air with the celebration of life going on; the "second line."

Fundi Legohn

