

# The Sheaf Magazine

Union County College

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Vasiliki Vlastaras

## The Best Version of You

Susan Benavente

You will never  
be like the girl  
with the perfect  
life, nose, big  
lips, big chest,  
and big butt  
that men are  
drooling over at  
10k followers.

You will never  
be like the man  
with a six pack,  
perfect body,  
hair, eyes,  
nose,  
personality,  
money, power and  
several women  
on the side.

And why should you?

Being you is  
enough.

Being the *best*  
version of *you*,  
is enough.



Marina Romero Grullon

## Tree Thing

Phillip Azevedo

It was just standing there  
since forever, or at least  
for as long as I can remember,  
waiting for what, only it knows.  
Good things come to those who wait,  
but it never seems to come.  
It looks like some tree thing  
alone and still waiting.



Wanchalerm  
Lamyaiapon

# Sequence of My

Laurie Theodule


Andrea Develasco

# Life



I'm tired of the rain clouds  
that hover over me.  
What do I do, do I run?  
Why can't I escape?  
Why can't I fight?  
When times get tough  
do I just smile  
though inside I'm gone?  
The reason I won't break

—because I'm a black woman  
In the United States.  
We're taught to not show  
emotions, not to complain.  
I won't cry, I won't scream.  
I'll just keep my thoughts to myself.  
I'm going to succeed, I won't fail.  
When will I feel like I did well?  
Now I know  
someday I'll prevail.



## Dismal

Jashar Banks

I won't say *good morning*,  
refuse to state *goodnight*,  
I won't pronounce  
*don't jump*,  
because truthfully I might.  
Each day that passes  
is worse for my life,  
I won't tell you  
you're wrong,  
unaware of what's right.  
Sometimes I wish  
I were dreaming.  
Many dreams I wish  
were real,  
as opposed to telling  
the truth.  
Attempts are made  
to conceal.  
Sunrises gone  
without sleep,  
the mien of smiles  
is fake.  
Moments once full of joy,  
are overhauled  
by hate.

Don't ask  
how I'm doing.  
You'll force me to lie.  
Conceptions  
of the wrong,  
perpetually  
ask why.  
Solitary discourses  
state what we need  
to hear.  
The future has passed,  
my demise is now near.  
I'm mindful of thoughts  
I once could resist.  
Ideation of the end  
endlessly persists.  
This is my grievance  
written in ink.  
I've had more than enough  
time to rethink.  
Sorry I've thought  
of suicide,  
sorry I won't naturally die,  
sorry I have to say  
goodbye.  
Sorry I'm no longer alive.





Sabir Alim



Andrea Develasco



Skyler Huss

## **The Carrot Peel**

Marina Romero Grullon

For most of my childhood I spoke very little to my father. It was not until I left my mother's house when I was sixteen that our relationship became stronger. My parents divorced and my father remarried. I did not understand what was happening with him and my mother during my teen years.

The unhappiest day of my life was the day when my mother Dominga told me how much she regretted having a daughter. It was Independence Day in the Dominican Republic and weeks after my thirteenth birthday. I was trying to prepare a family dinner, a chicken vegetable soup, my mother's favorite soup at the time. As I was preparing it, my mom came close to observe my progress. I thought I was doing a good job; however, she thought otherwise.

"These vegetables are overcooked!" Everything changed. She broke a carrot in two and threw the pieces at me. I came over to apologize to her for my mistake. At that moment, she turned to me and asked me to take the trash to the back of the house. I did, but I forgot the carrot peel. It was the carrot peel that made my mother explode in fury. When I returned to the kitchen, we both saw the carrot peel. She proceeded to smash the empty soup bowl and coffee mug on the floor. Also, she took the last carrot from the counter and pointed it at me. Her words hurt me for years afterwards.

I ran to the back of the house and she screamed, "You created too much work for me. I had to teach you how to cook, how to dress, how to shower, how to clean house. I should never have had a daughter. The boys were easy to teach." After I heard all of that I started crying in the backyard. After being there a long time, I returned to the house by the kitchen door. The soup and my mother were both gone. My mother was coming from the front door with the soup container empty. She had poured it out entirely. Needless to say, I made the soup over. No more words passed between my mother and me.

In the three years afterwards, the communication between my mother and me dwindled to a minimum. My mother set strict rules that I was forced to obey the best way I could. I refrained from answering her back in order to avoid further confrontations. The tension in my household was so thick you could cut it with a knife.

My father had been trying to contact me, and after a while I decided to be receptive to his overtures. My feelings toward him turned out to be very positive. I stopped thinking that I was alone and that no one loved me, and my self-esteem was restored. I no longer considered myself to be a terrible person. My father and I became best friend/family and remain so today.



Joel Concepcion

## Stroke

Katherine Piedl

Acorn showers predicted  
a short biting autumn.  
The acorns, like so many gumballs,  
went unraked that season.  
Snow came before the leaves fell.  
The new snow shovels had not been  
bought nor the garage door fixed. Can't get to  
the snow blower.  
The storm windows,  
houseplants on summer hiatus,  
the sheer curtains,  
the birdbath,  
untrimmed shrubs,  
the push-mower by the garage door  
stand in mute testimony.  
Witness, witness  
advanced old age, her withered hands  
lie idle in her lap  
and the deer, nightly,  
leave a pile of shit  
on the lawn.



Marina Romero Grullon



Marcel Idrovo

## Reality

Phillip Azevedo

From now on there are no more surprises.  
Everything has been heard and thought of.  
Then you meet a certain nun.  
You accept the flyer she hands you  
out of kindness and then ask:  
'Sure, but can I ask you question?'  
And after her nodding acceptance,  
'Why are you so sad?'  
Looking toward you desperately,  
she steps back and jumps off the bridge.



Dominique Mcgrath

## Citizenship Test

Luis Miranda



Andrea Develasco

Victor looked down at the paper, and then back up at the clock. He didn't have a time limit to take this test but felt he should have at least answered one question by now since he spent so much time preparing for it. He was born in Colombia, but his parents brought him to America at the age of 4, and ever since, America was all he'd known. He was now sitting in front of a few pieces of paper that would decide whether he could stay in this country or not.

"I'll just answer the questions that I remember and skip the others," he whispered to himself, determined to do his best and not let his family down.

He started to count down the answered questions. "Question one done! two done! three CRAP!" He exclaimed this out loud. The immigration officer walked over and asked Victor, "Is everything alright? If you need

assistance just raise your hand, and I'll come over. We do not want to disturb anyone else." Question three asked him to write a phrase in the national anthem. He got a flashback of a high school baseball game.

"Vic run, we are going to be late," said Tristen. "We are going to be fine, the band still has to play, and we are having a guest of honor who will sing," Victor replied. A few minutes later the two teens entered the field. Music was playing, and everyone was standing. Victor stopped and let Tristen continue without him. He was paralyzed by the sound. "Oh, say can you see by the dawn's early light." Victor did not know the words of the national anthem by heart, but neither did his friends. All Victor knew was that when he heard this song, his body reacted in a strange way. He felt like he must be quiet, and remain still, otherwise it would be disrespectful to the song. His arms, neck, back, and even his legs got goosebumps as every drum drop in the background made a sound. He always knew this reaction was different than that of his Hispanic friends, but being part of what this song meant made him connected to it.

"Land of the free and home of the brave," thought Victor with a smirk on his face. He quickly wrote it down and continued to count down the answers.

In the test, question ten asked him for the governor of his state. He had a hard time remembering. In high school, he thought he could vote since this is what he was taught in history class.

"During the Vietnam war, teenagers were drafted into the military. This meant it was not voluntary, they were forced, and many died. Teenagers decided to ask the government for more rights as they asked duties of them. This act eventually made the government change the voting age to 18 and up." This had been explained by Mr. Vendol before the bell rang, but he had lost the interest of most of the students. Mr. Vendol had captured Victor's

curiosity, however.

"Pa! Today I learned that I will be able to vote next year," said Victor. Victor's father interrupted him, "You will not be able to vote, your friends will, those who were born here, but not you." Victor did not understand this. His father explained was an illegal alien, and that meant he was different from his friends.

Victor had stopped paying attention to politics a few years back and lost interest. He learned that he was different and did not have certain rights. The answer to the question finally came to him. "Chris Christie," and he wrote it down.

He looked over to his left. He saw this tall, tan, blue eyed, and blond guy walk over to the immigration officer, hand in his test, and leave with a concerned face. He was the first person to finish the test. Why should he be concerned? He looked just like Victor's friends did.

"Vic focus, you got this, what does he have that you don't?" Victor whispered to himself. Question seventeen asked, "Do you currently or have you ever worked with a name other than the one stated in this test while in the United States?" His parents had not been able to fully support him regardless of the multiple jobs they had. Victor had worked a few waiter jobs and got paid cash. He used that money to pay his school's sports' uniforms, and sometimes spent it on weekend nights with friends. He did not feel bad about working. He was the oldest, and his parents still had to take care of two more kids. He remembered when he had gone to the mall to look for a job without telling anyone.

"Name, address, social security number? Well I don't have one," thought Victor. He was filling out a job application. He knew he did not have a social security number but was not expecting to be asked for one that day. He left it blank and gave the paper to one of the store's employees. He was called back a few days later.

We are sorry to inform you that we chose another

*applicant for the position. Thank you for applying," said the person over the phone. Victor told his mother about the call and she explained, "Since you were not born here, you do not have a social, and they are only given to kids that were born in the country."*

The jobs he was able to find without a social security card were never on record, so he answered "No" to this question.

"What is the highest form of education completed?" This question was particularly painful for him, so he skipped it without reading the options.

"Today we will have on-site college representatives, and they will conduct application processes on the spot. All students will be able to sit down, and have a conversation with them. They will explain their school programs, and you all may decide which school you would like to attend and apply," announced Mrs. Maller. She was Victor's math teacher, and she was always so kind and told him that he would do great in business. That day, Victor sat down with one of the representatives and she quickly noticed the social security number slot in the application was empty. Vic found out then that this meant he wasn't able to apply.

"High school," answered Victor. As he answered the last question, he wondered if this could really be it. Was this piece of paper going to decide his future? He felt emotional and dropped a few tears on the paper in front of him. A few months before he had learned how different he was, and his whole life, all he could remember, was living here. This was his country! He knew his family came from a different country, but he grew up here. How did this make him different than his friends born here? They spoke the same language, attended the same schools, celebrated the same holidays, and loved this country just the same. But a piece of paper could decide who was American, who had certain rights, who was different. Victor, with a smile, turned his paper in to

the immigration officer.

For weeks he waited by the mailbox. He knew that his life would change. He knew that he had done his best.

He remembered what his father always said to make him feel better, "What do these other kids have that you don't?"

Victor had applied to join the Marines because he felt that it was his duty to serve and protect his country. But you had to have legal status to do that. Now he had to wait. He was waiting on was the results from immigration, to let him know whether he was allowed to serve his country, whether he was an American or not.



Nancy Pena

# Untitled

Amanda Vogel

So we've established that we're all flawed, broken, but incredibly special and wonderful at the same time. We've taken the time to bring light to our dark places and realize that no one is free from insecurity and pain. We've maybe even taken small steps to let go of a hurt that we've been holding onto. Even through all this, it may still be difficult to look in the mirror. Maybe when you close your eyes at night there are painful visions of moments you wish you could change. Maybe your grip isn't as tight as you wish it was. What I want you to know is that everyone experiences this. Everyone falls and fails and cracks around the edges.

I recently had a conversation with a friend about how everyone is 'weird' in their own way, just some people hide it more than others. 'Normal' is relative. Normal can change on a daily basis, or it can change after a traumatic experience. It's okay to shift and adjust your normal. It's okay to take five steps forward then two steps back. This is the dance with life we are all learning and will never truly master.

The point is that you're trying, and the fact that you're still reading this means that you care about your happiness. You care about your mental health and clarity. Maybe it's buried beneath layers of shame and guilt and uncertainty, but hope is there.

Self-care is not just repeating phrases about loving yourself and maybe getting an occasional massage or pedicure. Self-care is a life-long journey, and it is a practice. Take your time with it, breathe it in, and let it make a home in your heart. You'll fail because we all fail. You'll get hurt because you're human.

Self-care is fighting for your joy through the pain. It's finding peace and contentment in any situation. It's being patient with yourself while you grow.

I belong among the wildflowers. Tom Petty taught me that.

## Laika, the First Dog in Space

Robin Mimoso

Laika,  
Did they warn you  
about the cold grave?  
While they took photos  
of you still alive,  
breathing in your tomb,  
they dressed you real pretty  
like a daughter.  
Did they tell you  
how precious  
you really were,  
did they make you  
value your life  
until the very end?  
Did they make you love them  
only to be betrayed?  
Orphan of the streets,  
how many hands struck you?  
How many hands touched  
your delicate fur?  
Who told you 'Good girl,'  
and who told you  
'Bad Dog?'  
What did you think  
of humanity  
as they shot you,  
the bullet big enough

to carry your soul  
into the greatest unknown?  
We were too cowardly  
to put one of our own  
in space, so we  
skinned you alive.  
Laika,  
child of the streets,  
Good Girl,  
the first space princess.  
If I sing you  
your praises now,  
could you forgive humanity  
for what we did?  
When your spaceship burnt up  
where did your atoms go?  
Are you breathing good  
into the world  
or breathing fire?  
I don't blame you  
either way,  
but when I see a dog loved,  
part of a family,  
I hope a part of you  
is there, getting  
what you really deserved.



Adriana Morillo



Jesssica Argueta

Vasiliki Vlastaras

I look into the sky and spin, or rather  
you are spinning! And woooooohoooooo  
I am being pulled in circles  
by your orb of light  
The ground shifts beneath my feet And I inch  
around your craters

They will be suspicious if I am not back  
As we dance for hours and we hold  
each other So I don't float away  
Hwoooo Haaaaaaaaaaaaa  
my lungs are being vacuum-sealed,  
but I don't care I don't have the time  
What will I say when they ask  
I have been waiting forever to dance  
My legs ache I will keep  
my soreness as a souvenir  
I fill my pockets with your rocks  
I am heavy now I can stay but you still  
hold me And it is a beautiful afternoon  
I unpack our picnic and bury cheese and  
crackers in the ground  
with a splash of sweet wine  
Why do they scare me?  
It is a beautiful afternoon  
The wine makes dark rivers on your skin  
Its puddle widens I am lucky to be here  
We tell jokes and the ground shakes  
as you laugh  
I am covered in dust  
It is a beautiful afternoon

## Home

Murielle Mason

The way I remember my mother:  
she exists eternally  
wearing that same red T-shirt,  
laughing at the head of the table.

I remember  
the marks in the kitchen doorway  
from years of standing on my tiptoes  
trying to be taller than my sister,

the smell of pancakes in the morning  
and being the last one to run to the table,  
the cake my grandmother makes from memory  
that my sister swears she knows the recipe to,

the pictures that are taped to the fridge  
and haven't been changed in years,  
pictures of my first birthday  
next to my college graduation,

the shoes left by the back door,  
the same ones that I wore all summer  
with the grass stains on white sides  
and the Nike check colored in blue.



Maria Robles



Marina Romero Gullon

## Crescent Bridge

Katherine Piedl

It was fall  
when they fell. Monday night  
after a fight.  
It happens every day. Men use children  
as weapons to hurt women.  
I drive on this road every day.  
I pass over the overpass.  
The Crescent Bridge is  
high over  
the Wanaque River  
This is no suicide.  
This is a deliberate act of violence.  
*Suffer, suffer, suffer, suffer*, he said.  
*Hurts me too.*  
*This is for you.*  
Her tender babies  
fell like acorns  
through the canopy.  
He fell like a bag of cement.  
The trees  
cradled the boys  
in their arms. They were found  
unharmd  
among the yellow and ochre leaves  
next to their broken father  
one hundred feet  
below.

## Strings Attached

Anthony Raymond

By the time he cut loose, he was ten years older, a tear away from crying, a bullet away from death. But he was one of the few who got the gift. Having looked back on it all, he was lucky to make it out alive. Too many people hit the grave the first go nowadays. It's hard to develop a habit. The term "hit rock bottom" no longer exists. His immunity to the disease, fueled by his ego, ironically kept him from the life he tried to grasp like a ball on a string. Every time he got close to grabbing the ball of life, his disease pulled it away. He was born into this situation. His father was a veteran in the war on drugs and both suffer what's called a problem, an epidemic, or addiction--it just depends on who you ask. But when you're lost in the sauce, I call it being the obligated puppet.

There's a fine line between recreation and obligation. Once you cross over, the puppet master pulls the strings and free will disappears like cigarette smoke. Under its control the puppet burns bridges faster than he can drink the bottle he lives in. His eyes only see guilt, so he shuts them while selling his soul for 10 bucks a pop. As the puppet master gets stronger, his family disappears like the power he once had to cut the strings, when everything was "recreational."

The obligated puppet wants to have a happy life, but when addiction pulls the strings all he knows is failure. The obligated puppet breathes pain with every sigh and lives a nightmare difficult to survive. "Evil" is "live" spelled backwards, and since he's not going forward it's easy for people to see him as such. Loneliness, darkness, and cold are what he's got left, and his only potential is death unless he's granted the gift of desperation.



Amanda Swindell



Santiago Hoyos

## **A Lucky Bug**

Phillip Azevedo

Flying through enormous utterances  
is just like a lucky bug  
endeavoring to escape its near death.  
Tightly does it escape  
the moonlight of the door  
and wander to its private world.



**Vasiliki Vlastaras**

## XO. Sincerely, XY

Maar Maar

If I could stop it—  
it is a part of God's immaturity—  
as fast as a bullet, I'd jump  
Her pain means so much more to me

I wish that were her last pain  
I wish that were her last pain killer  
I wish I could say I understand  
I wish I would've stayed with her

...well, I also don't like it  
when they harass her,  
when they grab her, when  
they ask her, "do you have one?"  
When she knows it's all to smash her

I wish she knew we existed  
I wish she didn't hate us  
We have our demons as well as hers  
I wish she wouldn't blame us

I wish I could walk with her  
when the moon makes its appearance,  
when the wolves walk behind her—  
with a lion, they would perish

I wish she knew  
We cry as much as we lie  
When the porn stops,  
when the game pauses  
we sit,  
we deny

We will not show  
an ounce of emotion  
Should I be weak or potent?

Power of the hormone  
They are angry, so I am  
They are crazy, so I am  
I don't taste it. I am a man.

If I could pull the plug,  
make it a phased endeavor,  
if she and I traded places—  
why does she think she could do  
better?





Arshy Hernandez

## **Tempest**

Jashar Banks

A raging storm,  
is brewing below.  
I hold it in,  
but the wind will soon blow,  
stronger than a gale,  
typhoon or blast.  
Unseen by all,  
even the forecast,  
leaves utter disbelief—  
the damage left behind.  
This tempest has been brewing,  
for quite some time.  
Once it had potential to be small,  
but now will strike,  
worse than a squall.  
a growing cloud.  
The weatherman is unaware;  
a huge storm  
is soon to be here.

## Until This Ice Shatters

Malik Naloev

Love is often compared to fire,  
desire burning,  
passion engulfing,  
a beautiful conflagration.

Yet, in my eyes, love is a  
frigid winter,  
hearts yearning, hands  
outstretched, grasping  
for warmth,  
forced to freeze  
within this whiteout.  
Her stare roots me,  
leaving me numb,  
demanding my attention.  
I watch the seconds waste,  
ticking away beyond  
each fantasized embrace.  
Eyes wide open,  
yet my mouth stays firmly shut,  
for I find myself unable  
to overcome this silence.  
My frigid prison  
only grips me tighter,  
my remaining warmth  
beginning to escape.  
Unrequited love is a story  
I've yet to finish,

and I wish you would not add  
another chapter since  
this tale is one no author  
writes with pride.

I only wish to turn the page,  
and start anew,  
an eternity that starts  
with you. A smile  
that plagues my dreams  
with something desired,  
my mind deprived of the air  
that you breathe.

My bones begin to chill,  
denied your warmth.  
Beyond this storm, surely  
your lips are just as red,  
Your eyes are just as bright,  
revealing a truth:

until this ice shatters,  
until I break free from this  
prison of fear,  
I will never feel the warmth  
of your sun.

Perhaps a fiery inferno,  
a magnificent heavenly body,  
does indeed lie before me—  
if only I could reach it.



Hillary Franco



Adiel Ayala

## **Newborn Baby**

Joe Charlie

There is a newborn expected to arrive.  
The baby is latent in the mother's womb,  
impending, about to be born.  
As the mother pushes the baby out,  
thus she has given life to a newborn baby.  
The baby is brought to the planet Earth  
and is introduced to the parents  
and all life that surrounds them.  
The love for the parents and baby begins  
as the newborn baby explores  
the prodigious creation they now live in.  
The parents were given a magnificent gift  
from the Good Lord above

Adiel Ayala





Skyler Huss

## Water

Sabrina Olivera

Crashed against her,

from her polished toes  
to the ends of her wavy  
red hair,  
she savored  
the bitter cold.  
Her skin tightened  
as the electricity  
jolted through her body.

Air bubbles  
gently kissed  
her cheeks goodbye  
as they danced up towards  
the sun.

Relinquished survival  
escaped sweetly  
from her cracked lips.

With open eyes  
she looked at nothing.

The darkness hugged her  
like a weighted blanket.  
Beside herself  
she felt surrounded.

Silence grew louder,  
interrupted only  
by the passing wave  
collecting its toll  
as it swept the ocean  
into itself.

With a pinch the fire  
burned in her lungs,  
the pressure built  
seemingly  
from the outside in,  
sent life scurrying  
back into place.

In a moment she rose  
up and out towards  
the air,

crashed against her.



Alejandra Mafla



Jessica Cisse



Maria Robles



**Maria Robles**

## **And I Believed**

Sofia Pena

I will die in the ocean.

The waves will drown me.

The current will smash me against the rocks,  
crushing my bones and breaking my body.

My carcass will sink

and hit the sand at the bottom,  
producing no sound.

You see, everyone told me to learn to swim

but I waited to grow gills.  
Everyone called me a fool,  
but you once told me  
if I believed in something enough,  
it would come true.  
So I believed with everything in me  
that gills would sprout from my neck.  
And as the water fills my lungs  
and I try to gasp for air, I will wonder  
"Did I disappoint you?"



**Yaiza Gonzalez**

## Lessons

Maar Maar

We were kicked out of our motel today due to lack of payment. First, we were evicted and then moved into the motel while saving up for a new apartment. 4 grand. My father had a stable job until quitting due to being overworked and not getting paid for his hours. He did eventually get another job at a gas station but someone was shot there, or so he says, and they closed down right when they were going to bring him in for orientation. Then he filed for unemployment. He hadn't gotten his last check so the filing came late. That was the first time we were going to be homeless before I took care of things.

Eventually he got the check and everything was fine... until unemployment stopped sending him checks. I am now homeless. Before, it was a one day thing you know? I'd get people to loan me money before being able to pay the motel for another week. This time... it's the real deal. Although, I've envisioned this happening, I never would have thought I wouldn't have at least 5 dollars for some food. I always thought my dad would be prepared. Especially at his age and how much he's worked, it's strange that he isn't. There was \$4,000 in his bank account. He spent all of it and told me that he was just trying to fix his credit score so we could find a place to live.... Oh, the irony.

The reality is, I've been thinking about his death a lot over the years and how I would manage after it. Considering I've been living off of him and now, the result is this-- it says a lot about my ability to take care of myself. I know I'm only 23, but I figured I'd at least have a job by now or would have kept one of the six I've previously had.

I can't seem to shake this feeling that we're better off apart, but I do have some speculations about him being a little mental. When he met my mother, he was single, fresh out of college and had a few stable forms of income. Despite my mom being a mother of 5 kids, 4 different baby fathers, living in the projects and on drugs-- he still got her pregnant. It's weird, right?

Say what you want, but if your son came home saying he got a drug addict with 5 kids pregnant, I'm sure you'd be upset. I'd say the weirdest part is that after I was conceived, we never had much of a bond despite him being an active father. He always managed to make bad decisions even

though he was in positions not to. The house he bought to move us out of the projects was already falling apart when we moved in it. And as time grew, it just kept getting worse. The more I did, the less he felt like doing. Sooner or later, the lights stopped working. The water stopped running. The mold got thicker and the roof collapsed little by little. So maybe it was a good thing the eviction came. The motel was much better, but now we don't even have that.

The women that work at the motel have always been nice to us. I thought they'd be more respectful when watching me deal with this shit. But once again, I'm wrong. They look at me like I'm worthless. Like I'm a burden. They've agreed to hold our stuff in a safe place until we have the money to pay them, but every time I try to come get my clothes, it's almost like I'm a cockroach they thought they'd killed but it keeps popping up.

It's been about 3 days and man, I never thought I'd cry this much in my life. It's kind of difficult watching people who I thought would always be down for me lie about not having money to loan me, then catch them flashing stacks on IG.

One of the girls at the motel who works nights at the motel was there when I got jumped after trying to defend some lady from being abused by her husband. She was worried for me. She called the cops to protect me that night. But now when she talks to me, I can feel her looking down on me. Not caring about my situation. Not having remorse for me. She watched me cry with a straight face.



# A Memorial For Tito Caballero

## To Keep Alive

Katherine Murphy

### I. Ikebana—Ikebana etymology:

ikeru: to keep alive hana: flowers

Ikebana is the Japanese art of arranging flowers:

*It was introduced in Japan in the sixth century by Chinese Buddhist missionaries, who had formalized the ritual of offering flowers to Buddha. The art is based on the harmony of simple linear constructions and the appreciation of the subtle beauty of flowers and natural material, such as branches and stems...In its highest form, this art form is spiritual and philosophical in nature. ("Ikebana" Merriam-Webster)*

I have this comic, "Ikebana" by Yumi Sakugawa, and I made a mix with an illustration from the comic on the cover. The illustration, like the comic, is of a girl who is presenting a final piece of art for her class, but instead of work separate from herself, she presents herself as if she were a plant in the form of Ikebana. I thought it was appropriate, because I, too was presenting myself, in a way. I made the mix for the "Full Disclosure" final Honors in Action event for Phi Theta Kappa which was held on September 28th, 2018. It was our project to destigmatize issues of mental health through interpersonal connection. The music was my form of disclosure of my experiences. I never completed burning the CDs for so many reasons, never gave it to any friend. Especially, I never gave it to Tito who really wanted it. He said, "Senpai made me a mix!" It's a stupid thing that I regret a lot. Endlessly. Tito was the most important part of that night for me, even though the project was a culmination of months of hard and personal work, but my relationship with him was too. And he was maybe the most important thing for me after that.

During the event, I became overwhelmed with anxiety, froze in the middle of speaking, and didn't get to share anything with the community. But I talked with Tito outside and shared more than I intended to share with anyone. I felt like a complete failure. I felt that my struggles and weaknesses had won out over what I worked so hard for. But Tito showed me

everything good he saw, as well as his own struggles. This he juxtaposed with his incredible kindness and softness, his resilience and strength, and his willingness to be present and vulnerable to me. I finally read the comic instead of just looking at the pictures. And I think my growth and expression in all moments following that event, inevitably in relation to Tito, were like Ikebana: in the simplicity of existence, mine and his, unfolding, and in the reverence those days in themselves paid to my life, Tito's life, and life itself. I feel overwhelmed, like there is an ocean in my throat, and at once, I am submerged deeply in that ocean. It is a beautiful life we lived together and apart. Tito's life was a beautiful life, and mine, more beautiful for it.

## **II. I'll Be Your Mirror, Reflect What You Are**

I want to share this with Tito, the most I can, which is by sharing it with anyone who cared about him, by sharing it at all. I entitled the playlist, "I'll Be Your Mirror, Reflect What You Are" because the Honors In Action project made me realize how much our personal struggles can warp the way we see ourselves, and how we sometimes need others to show us who we are. When you care about someone, you want to show them what you see in them. Tito saw so much in me. I wanted to show him what I saw in him too. But I'm thinking maybe being there for him, as someone he saw so much in, was acting as a mirror enough. I hope so.

*When you think the night has seen your mind  
That inside you're twisted and unkind  
Let me stand to show that you are blind  
Please put down your hands  
'Cause I see you  
(The Velvet Underground).*

### **Disc 1**

1. Wave of mutilation - Pixies
2. Feel the pain - Dinosaur Jr.
3. Helplessly Hoping - Crosby Stills and Nash
4. All Apologies - Nirvana
5. Miss World - Hole
6. The Wrong Child - R.E.M.

7. Hairshirt - R.E.M.
8. Talkin' Shit about a pretty sunset - Modest Mouse
9. No Name #4 - Elliott Smith
10. Brave as a noun - Andrew Jackson Jihad
11. Survival song - Andrew Jackson Jihad
12. False Start - Bikini Kill
13. Blowing it - Dinosaur Jr.
14. Say yes - Elliott Smith

## **Disc 2**

1. Wolfman of Del Rio - Terry Allen
2. Everyone Says - The Brian Jonestown Massacre
3. All Cleaned Out - Elliott Smith
4. People II: The Reckoning - Andrew Jackson Jihad
5. Sense & Sensibility - Andrew Jackson Jihad
6. Christmas Lights - Paul Baribeau
7. First Day of My Life - Bright Eyes
8. Valentine - Fiona Apple
9. Elephant Woman - Blonde Redhead
10. Give Out - Sharon Van Etten
11. These Days - St. Vincent cover (DUMBO session)
12. Hyperballad - Bjork
13. Terrible Love - The National
14. To live is to fly - Townes Van Zandt
15. Unsatisfied - The Replacements
16. Georgia Georgia - Elliott Smith
17. I'll Be Your Mirror - Nico & The Velvet Underground
18. Choir of Angels - Deer Tick
19. Chinatown - Girlpool
20. Static Buzz - Snail Mail Band
21. People - Andrew Jackson Jihad

## Tito

By Moujnir Lewis

Some people radiate sunshine without speaking a single word. Perhaps it's the way that they smile, the gleam in their eye as they speak to you, or even the simple gesture of a hand on a shoulder or a genuine nod, allowing you to know that no matter how small you feel, to this person, you are important. You are worth listening to.

Such people are the light in the middle of an eclipse, a guiding light, so to speak. It is rare that one gets to shine in every such way possible. You, my friend, were that rare gem.

The first moment I met you, you treated me with a level of familiarity beyond even that of family members. Without knowing my name, my background, my level of intelligence or maturity, you smiled at me, locking with my eyes as I said a shaky hello, attempting to avoid personal contact. It was nothing against you, just my own lack of self-confidence convincing me that I was not worthy to share space with someone so accomplished and driven.

You were the pinnacle of that word, "driven," always determined to excel in your academics, extracurricular activities, and work. One had to look no further than your title "Middle States Regional President" to see that. With my awe at being acknowledged by you, I felt that my first day of working as a tutor was destined to be a complete failure.

How could I have been hired when one of my co-workers was basically the ideal of the college? What a joke. I had already started to turn away when you placed a gentle hand on my shoulder, finding a path to conversation.

"Your Deadpool shirt is epic," you stated with a grin. "You know, if you help the students pass the class, they might just buy you tacos - and if you help them get an A, chimichangas!" You smiled at your own joke as I burst out laughing. Then you offered this piece of wisdom, saying "Seriously though, you got this. Just take your time and don't be too proud to ask for help. Work hard. It sounds cheesy, but it's true."

Don't be too proud to ask for help. Pride is a sin I combat daily. Yet your words stuck with me, and through the rest of my time as not only a tutor, but a Union County College student, I worked hard, and when it hurt my pride the most,

I asked for help because I knew I needed it. I joined Phi Theta Kappa, Iota XI, our honor society because I knew that people were following your lead within the Chapter. They were becoming kind, generous, ambitious, and hardworking, simply by following your example and making an effort to learn from it.

The most important factor of all, though, was that they were making an effort to be *honest*.

You never shied away from your battles with choosing your major, never ignored the reality of how difficult it was to find your passion. You did not make the road to your successes seem easy, or even attainable for that matter. You simply were honest, and truthful about battling your own demons, overcoming them for the sake of achieving a dream that, once you found it, was so powerful that it fueled every single light within you, igniting an unstoppable energy.

I wish everyone could be that honest and raw. We are all scared of ourselves, and in the age of social media especially, we present only the best of the best to others—our travels, our best grades, our academic service awards and material possessions. Yet we shun the sharing of the infuriatingly long nights of studying it took to achieve those grades, the less than glamorous labor involved in affording that trip, the patience and diligence required to be involved in our community enough to warrant an academic service award.

You didn't shy away from the realities, though. You showed your best, but you were not afraid to show your worst. You were quiet, yet boisterous, contradictory in all the right ways. You were honest, you were beautiful, you were a beacon of hope and duty to all who admired you.

And the thing is, Tito, you still are.

The hearts of everyone whose life you touched are full with the memory of your uniquely brilliant soul. You shine on in the accomplishments of the PTK family you adored, in the heart of your lover, in the mind and soul of every single family member, friend, professor, and acquaintance that you impacted here.

Tito, we have to say goodbye. That doesn't mean we forget. You were, and forever will be, one of the most beautiful souls I ever had the honor of walking amongst in this earthly realm. Your sunshine will always be remembered.

Always.

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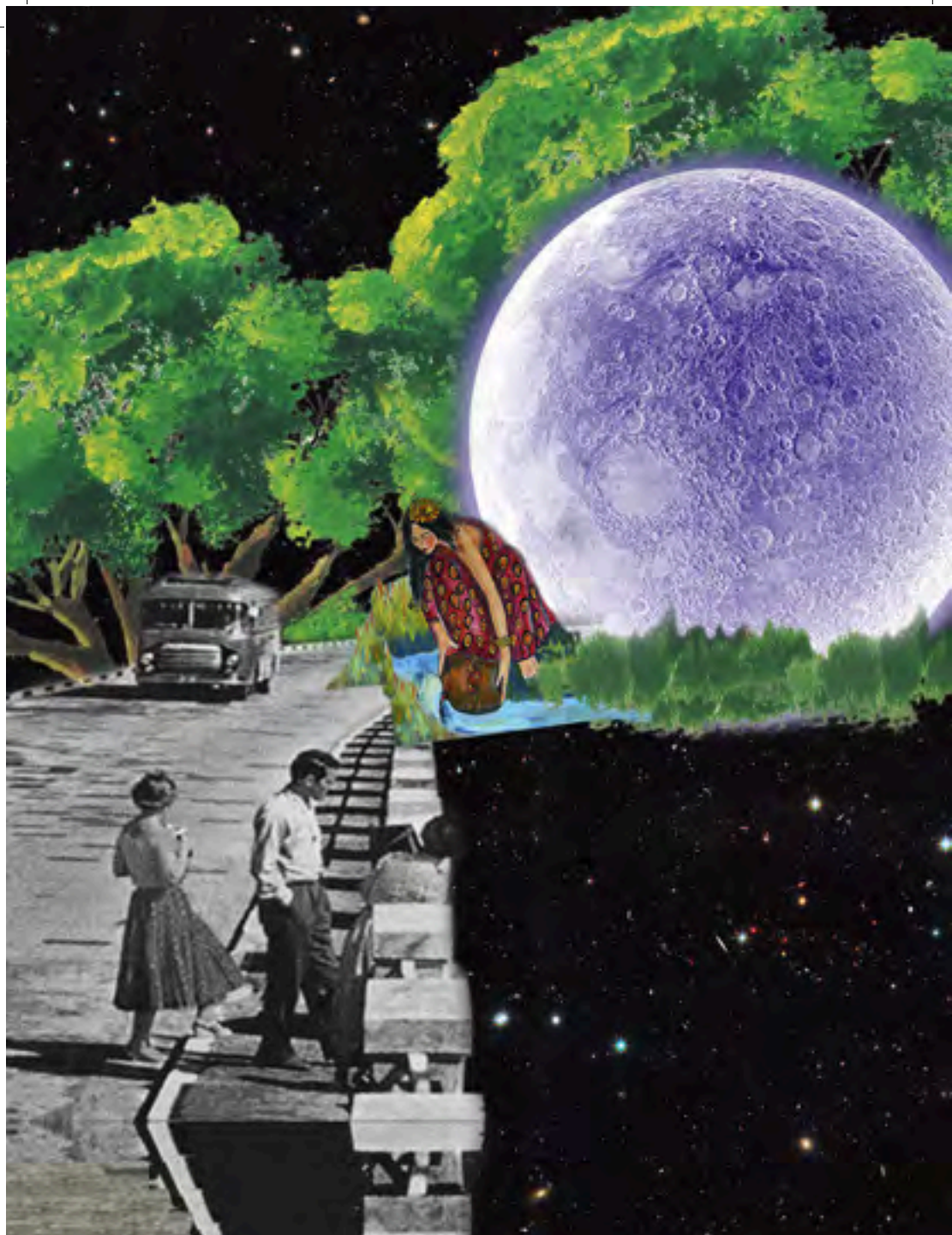
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Maria Robles



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One Student at a Time*