



KLIO - Volume 1 - 2016

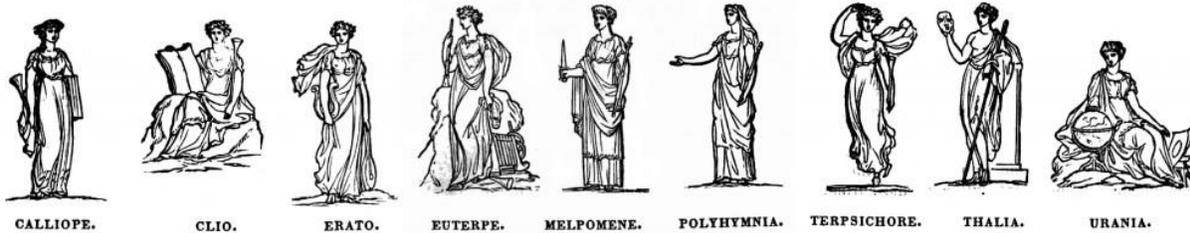
Penn State's Online Literary Magazine

klio.psu.edu



Cover Art: Bird, by Elizabeth Shen, Penn State University Park

KLIO 2016



OUR MISSION

Klio is an online literary magazine created by Penn State undergraduate students at University Park in a course entitled English 209: Literary Journal Practicum. Conceived and published for the first time in the fall 2016 semester, the online magazine builds on the tradition of our sister print magazine, *Kalliope*, and includes works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and visual arts.

Among the nine Greek muses of the arts and sciences, both *Kalliope* and *Klio* were called on by early Greek writers and artists for inspiration. The name “*Kalliope*” is derived from the Greek muse of epic poetry, and “*Klio*” is derived from the muse of history.

We encourage all students who love taking writing risks and want to connect their work with readers, to please submit. We seek to create a sense of community among our writers, along with a freedom of expression through literary and visual art. We reach out to undergraduates at Penn State’s University Park campus along with those at the Commonwealth Campuses.

In addition to new material, *Klio* includes some archived pieces from previous issues of *Kalliope* under the collection entitled “Musings.” We nudge students toward creativity by encouraging them to respond periodically to a prompt—either through writing or art. Our blog introduces readers to literary and artistic events and people in the Penn State community.

Our mission statement coincides with *Kalliope*’s: “to further the ideals of free and open literary expression by establishing a writing community...and providing a literary outlet through the publication of student work, public readings, and lectures.”

Klio offers a learning platform for students to come together, to experience other writers’ and artists’ work while also providing the opportunity to have their work recognized. It’s a place for students to take chances on themselves because it’s not just about getting published—it’s about growing, creating, and being the best version of you.

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This print version of *Klio* assembles and reproduces the fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and artwork published in the fall 2016 edition of the magazine online. For blog posts and Musings features, visit the website at: klio.psu.edu.

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FICTION

Pirouettes and Masculinity ~ by Hannah Cardona, Penn State Altoona

The sky was a demonic, pale gray on the Friday that I had to explain to my father that I wasn't gay.

It was my dad's Einstein idea to flee Puerto Rico and raise me in a place where I'm more likely to become a fancy lawyer or a police officer. Well, it's been seventeen years. We now live in Jersey City, New Jersey, and I want to be a ballet dancer. My house is the only orange-juice-colored building on our entire avenue; my dad painted it. He said he chose it because, "it was the cheapest paint color at the hardware store," and my mother didn't fight him about it because it matched six of her sun dresses and one of her nightgowns. According to her, the coincidence should excite me. They're not really prize-winning adults — as you've probably already assumed. Yet, if you were to count every grain of sand on a beach, and multiply that outrageous number by infinity, you'd get the amount of love I have for them.

Every weekday morning excited me the way your taste buds might get excited by the flavor of tap water. Work for them, high school for me. Except for the Friday my dad asked if I was gay. On that day, I ditched classes to stay home, and began choreographing a dance for an audition I had scheduled at Juilliard's Dance Division. An acceptance into that program is my ticket to being the person I want to be.

I made sure that, like shadows on a cloudy day, I became invisible to my parents. I slithered outside after a hurried, "Te amo Mami, Te amo Papi."

To which my mom responded, "Bring home the A's, or I'll give you one of those slaps on the head that you like so much," which always made me giggle.

My dad just responded by saying that I should "try out for the baseball team or something today," which always enflamed my annoyance, especially because he very well knew that I lacked the ant-sized talent that it took to hold a baseball bat correctly, let alone hit a homerun, or make the team.

I hid among a small family of trees that served as a border between the Johnsons' home and the Rivera home. I was a ghost staring down my parents as their aging bones clicked and clacked on their journey into my father's rusted, night black pick-up truck. I

think about their aging bodies every day and how my bones will one day start clicking and clacking too. Shit, I'll probably be the old man in Room 235, on his deathbed, trying to dance to the music they play on the hospital radio.

Once I was one thousand percent positive that my parents had driven far away from our home, towards their separate jobs, I bulleted into my room, carefully tied my ballet slippers on, squeezed on a pair of black tights and surrendered to music's authority. God, I know my body was built to dance.

I was a feather-weighted eagle with wings so sprung open that they could have stretched around the curvy hips of the Earth and given it a hug. I ruled over the kingdom of air that my twig-thin body twirled itself into. When I'm dancing, there is no womb in which worry might develop its body.

When I'm dancing, I swear I feel like the strongest man in existence, but it never lasts as long as I want it to.

I pirouetted my body down into the hardwood floor, as three murderous knocks, rammed their way into my room's door.

My heart suddenly felt as if it were being shredded to pieces in the razor-filled mouth of a starving shark, and my lungs felt chained to an anchor under deep waters. My voice became void of all muscle. My face a purple, white tint.

"JAMES?!? WHY AREN'T YOU AT SCHOOL? WHAT IS THAT MUSIC? IF YOU DON'T START TALKING I'LL SLAP THE HELL OUT OF YOU!"

I could only sit there paralyzed, working my ass off just to simply muster enough strength to breathe. Breathing is astoundingly taken for granted, as are open-minded fathers.

Papi bolted forward into my room. He stood over me. His eyes glazed over, entirely unlatched, piercing into my very being like a spear. His breath sounded as if he had just run 200 miles without a single moment to rest – each deeper into his big belly than the next. His face was fuming red with irritation and grief. I could easily see the eternal number of thoughts that stomped in circles within his narrow mind.

His voice trembled when he finally uttered his accusation. "James...you...are gay?" Those words tasted like a bucket load of salt upon his tongue.

"No Papa...I'm not...gay...I just love to dance...I want to go to school for ballet. I love the way I feel when I dance, Papa. I love the music and the flying and the twirling. It's very athletic and..."

“SHUT UP! You’re a boy, James. Boys...boys don’t do this twirling you talk about and boys don’t do these shoes! You are not being a boy. You are not being a good *son*. You are acting like a gay boy. I came back to this house to grab my wallet and I find this...sin.”

“PAPA THIS IS NOT A SIN! I’M A BOY AND I’M GOOD AT DANCE. MEN IN THE BIBLE DANCED PAPA. I LOVE GIRLS AND I LOVE GOD AND I LOVE TO DANCE. I KNOW BASEBALL PLAYERS AT MY SCHOOL THAT ARE GAY.”

“I did not raise you to be a ballet dancer. I taught you how to play boy sports. I taught you how to be a man! And don’t you dare bring the Bible into this. Those men danced for our God, and they didn’t wear these tight pants.”

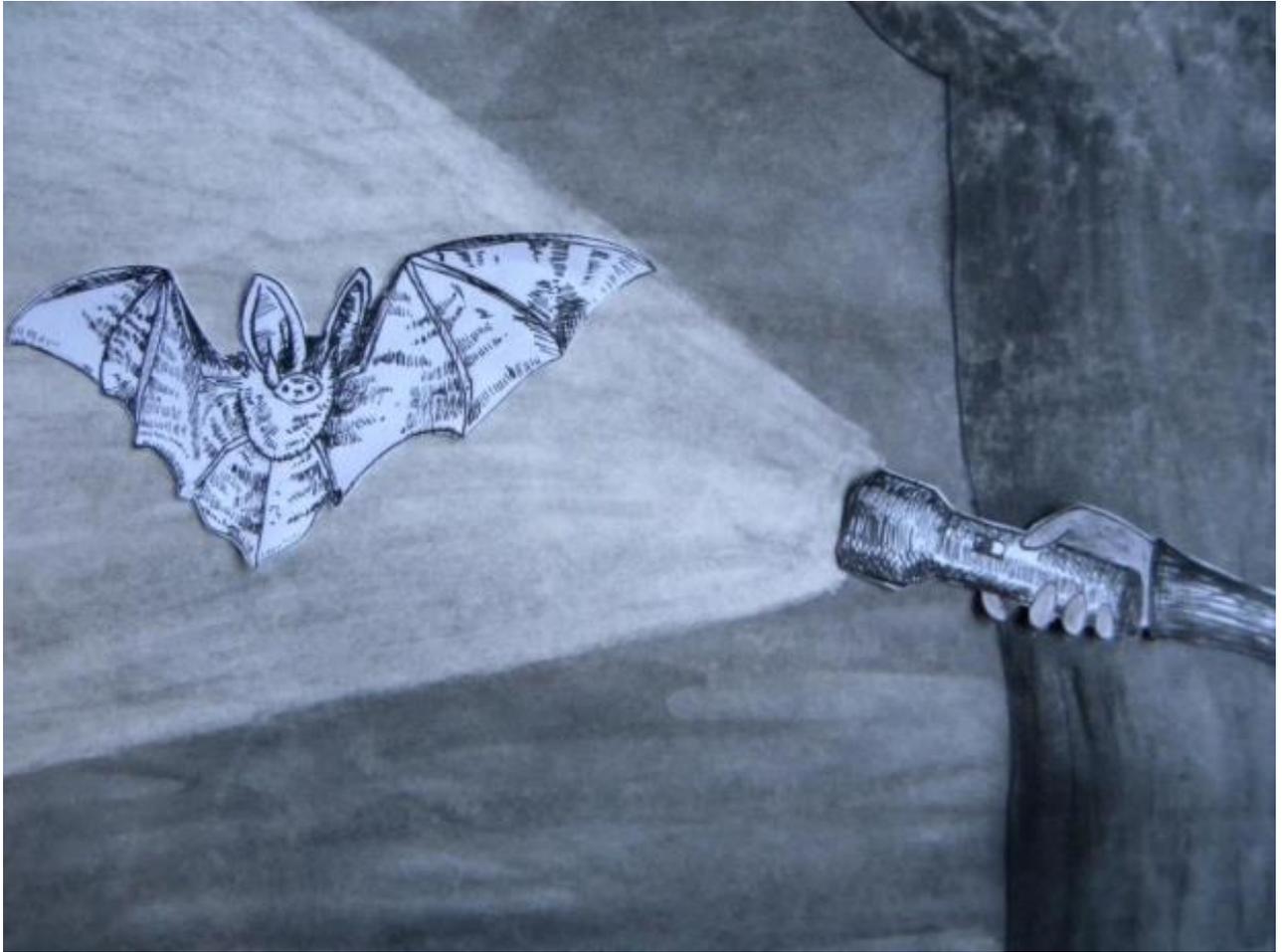
“I feel so strong when I dance Papa. I feel like a man.”

“I sacrifice everything for you, James. Me and your mother left Puerto Rico so you could be anything you wanted to become, and you want to dance with girl slippers on?”

“It’s who I already am Papa. There are other boys who like dancing just like I do. Please just forgive me.”

I was a puzzle with 2,098,998,999 pieces to me, and my father felt as though he needed to solve me. I was something to be fixed.

He violently turned around, and raced out of our arsenic argument. I lay there still. Still a dancer, still not gay, still a boy, but not so much a son anymore.



Fear of the Unknown
by Christy Xu, Penn State University Park

Exhale ~ by Zana Allen, Penn State Harrisburg

I hear the sound of the shower filling the loft, blending with the silent hums from the fall rain. There's this intense sadness that comes with fall rain I always enjoy — a pain not even nature can withstand. This is the rain before the snow, and the rain that washes away the leftovers of the Indian summer. With each drop there's less vibrant hues, smells, and soon-to-come lifeless evergreen. I lie mummified from his daily vengeful rage that he mistakes for love. The shower's sound triggers a silent cry, and I know it's either now or never. If I leave now he won't be able to stop me. The sound of his razor is reassuring of his distraction. He takes great care of himself, but that's where the nurturing stops. Why am I not good enough? I sit up on the bed without much success; my legs are severely bruised, and my rib isn't quite healed from last week's encounter.

The loft is filled with darkness all around, and the lights from distant skylines reflect the rain on the snow-white walls. After much restraint, I sit up on the bed. I catch glimpses of blood on the white sheets. This is our fourth set this week. I slowly throw the covers back and place my feet on the floor. The marble floor is ice cold, stopping me within my tracks. I inhale, and I start to contemplate whether this is the right time. He really does love me; he just has anger problems. Goose bumps begin to develop around my naked body, and I'm stuck between rolling back in bed or fleeing to the dresser. The sound of his razor comes to a halt, and I can hear the sound of the rain once again. I can see the steam of the shower flowing through the light under the bathroom door. That's the only light throughout the apartment.

I instantly hop to my feet at the sound of him ripping back the curtains, and I'm limping with great restraint to find clothes. Do I bring bags of clothes or just go with what I have? I know he keeps cash in his pocket, and that'll be enough to get me out of Venice. I breathe in deeply, and try to keep myself focused on my initial goal. With each inhalation, the room becomes even more chilling, and the rain sounds even louder. I rip open the dresser without much assistance from my eyes. I battle with finding a pair of underwear in my drawer, and after great restraint I aim for just my socks. I slam the drawer. The echo of the drawer sings throughout the whole loft, and I am instantly stone. *Inhales. Exhales.* The air falls silent, and I can hear the sound of lint floating past the shadows. The soap drops in the shower, and I know now that he is becoming slightly mysterious. His showers are never short, but I never underestimate. I rip open the second drawer in hopes of a shirt. No luck. I repeat with the third, and I find only his clothes. Fuck it. I grab his gym shirt, and I catch a glimpse of my grey sweats peeking out of the dirty laundry. In my Bambi stance, I hop swiftly to the other side of

the room. The laundry basket sits next to the bathroom door, so I move as silently as possible. I grab the bottoms, and I struggle sliding into them. I step my right leg into them with no problem, but I struggle with my left. The injury is far too great on my right side to hold my weight. I hop back towards the bed, sit and get the pants up finally.

I sit and decide whether this is really what I want to do. The room is warming up, and my blood pressure rises, while the steam of the shower heats the place. *Deeply Inhales.* I'm up again, off the bed, and I hear the apartment is more silent than before. The rain has fallen to a slight drizzle. I limp to grab my shoes from beside the kitchen counter. Then it dawns on me, it was always drizzling. The shower has stopped. I trip over the room divider while fleeing for my shoes. My breathing is picking up, and I'm scrambling to slide into my shoes. I grab the socks, but forget to put them on, and at this point it's no use. I slam my feet into the shoes, and I can hear the sound of his towel leaving the rack. I panic. I lose sight of my focus, and scramble across the house for the keys. Where are his keys? I need his keys. I quickly feel around the kitchen island, then search loudly through the drawers. I no longer can restrain my fear, and I proceed to move loudly throughout the loft. I search the cracks of the couch, as tears are filling up in my eyes, and my lungs cannot take this intense fear. I glimpse his pants he had on before our Monday night episode, and I flee to them. The fear exceeds the pain, and I am off in lightning speed. I dig my hands in his pocket first and feel the keys & wallet instantly. The bathroom door opens instantaneously, and we're in a deep stare off. Possum. I cannot decide whether to run or prepare for another beating. With confusion on his face, he decides to speak.

"What are you doing? Are you leaving me?" he says. I freeze, and in this moment I have to make a choice. Do I really want to leave him? I cannot take his beatings anymore. But I also know that no one else will love me. He only has anger problems, and if I stop being annoying he won't be mad at me. This time it was my fault. Who else will I have if I leave Dre? I can't go back to Compton. I am nothing without this man. I fall to my knees, the exhaustion slowly taking over after such an anxiety attack. I inhale.

"No, I was running to go grab some more bed sheets, but I couldn't find the keys," I exhale.



Broken Plane
by Joanna Nawn, Penn State Abington

Malaysia Flight 370 ~ by Calla Boyer, Penn State University Park

23:40 MYT
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
7 March 2014

I boarded the plane 15 minutes earlier than most of my coworkers. I saw Embong, a veteran flight attendant, pour a miniature bottle of Malaysian Jaz Beer into a clear, almost conically shaped cup of Tropicana orange juice. He smiled at me as he mixed the cocktail with a bamboo coffee stirrer.

"It's early," Embong began, yawning in between thoughts as he raised the cup towards me. "This is for me," he chuckled as he dropped a green cocktail umbrella into the sunrise concoction and took a sip. "Do you want me to make you one? It looks like you could use it. "Just look at yourself!" He pointed to the stainless steel cabinet, urging me to analyze the tired figure that forgot to apply mascara back at my hotel room.

I stared at her, unsurprised by what I saw: lilac rings that flirted with the crimson roots of my hazel eyes, chapped, yellowing lips, and eyebrows that could stand a good tweezing; too bad I left my favorite pair of Tweezermans back in Minneapolis the last time I visited my parents for Valentine's Day a few weeks prior. I always felt the need to check in with them and prove that, although at 24 I only held a high school diploma, I felt content and successful traveling the world as a stewardess.

"I'll tell you something, though, Adrienne," he began mid-gulp as he aimed the cup towards me, spilling some of the on-the-rocks drink onto the black carpet of the Boeing 777, "for a zombie, your uniform sure is pristine."

I bashfully smoothed my turquoise and fuchsia, psychedelic-floral sarong with my dry, crackling fingertips. Some of the rough patches from my hands began to pick at the fabric of the fragile, paper dress. I stared at Embong—a short but muscular man, dressed fully in a flamboyant suit, complete with a turquoise bow tie and a new, gold-lettered name tag.

“You know what? Make me one of those,” I spontaneously exclaimed as I tilted my head and pointed at Embong’s beverage. “Midnight’s a perfect time for a drink,” I snickered as I rolled my eyes at him.

“Great! I have an idea for one that looks like a Vietnamese sunrise,” he declared as he jollily nodded his head and retrieved a can of unopened cranberry juice from the miniature refrigerator.

00:05 MYT
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
8 March 2014

I just finished counting – more than half of all expected passengers had already boarded the plane, so it was too late to evacuate them all into the cooler, 85° temperature of the jet bridge. Neither Embong nor I understood why the air conditioning wouldn’t work, but as he attempted to calm a few frantic newlyweds in Vietnamese, I absentmindedly stared out the plane’s door, watching our pilot, Captain Zaharie Ahmad Shah, explain why the passengers on the jet bridge could not yet board the plane.

“It should only be 10 more minutes before the rest of you can board. The air conditioning in the aircraft isn’t working. I’ll explain everything over the intercom once everyone is in the cabin.” Standing passengers stared at each other – maybe due to his obvious – borderline incomprehensible – Malaysian accent.

Immediate chatter in a plethora of European and Asian languages polluted the humid, gray jet bridge. A man near the front of the line, dressed in a black, pinstriped suit waved his brown, leather briefcase so Zaharie could see.

“Excuse me,” he began in a refined, Russian accent, “but how long will this take? I don’t mean to be impatient, but I have a meeting in Beijing this morning that I can’t be late for.”

“Sir, you can go back to the gate and request a different flight to China,” Zaharie declared as he shrugged his shoulders in conversational forfeiture. The man picked up the expensive-looking blazer that rested on his black, leather shoes and purposefully trudged back to the gate. To me, he seemed ungrateful, considering he just escaped a death sentence.

The noise from the alarms punctured my slightly intoxicated composure. A Nordic-looking mother with three young children stood near the front of the line. The oldest one, probably around eight years old, attempted to coddle the toddler as the mother caressed the newborn’s sobbing face. “Excuse me, but is there any way these alarms could be shut off? I think it’s beginning to irritate everyone on and off board.” Her Dutch cadence could lull me to sleep like a special on the History Channel.

“Madam, we’re in the process,” Zaharie nearly whispered in attempts not to agitate the crying baby any further. “It’ll be no longer than 10 more minutes, I promise.” He smiled sympathetically at her and offered her a gray, plastic, fold-up chair to sit in.

She nodded her head and half-smiled. “Johannes,” she directed at the eight-year-old boy,

“Go take Piers and sit on the chair the nice man set out for us.” The boy took his brother and nestled in the seat next to the woman.

“Madam, I can request a different flight for you and your children if you wish.”

“No, it’s alright, my husband is waiting for us in Beijing... he knows the flight number and planned accordingly. I tried texting him, but it seems the cell reception is insufficient on the tarmac.”

Zaharie nodded respectfully and stepped back from her, “As you wish.”

*00:15 MYT
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
8 March 2014*

They supplied air conditioning to the cabin via some white, industrial-looking truck on the tarmac. Everyone eventually boarded the plane, and Zaharie explained the issue, “Overheating of the aircraft due to unknown technicalities.” He explained over the intercom that it would only delay the flight by 20 minutes, and the aircraft could still fly without mechanical issues. The stewardesses’ chairs folded out at the backs of the aisles. Embong insisted he sit next to a Vietnamese transvestite he apparently recognized from somewhere, so I sat next to the woman whose husband awaited in Beijing.

“Don’t worry, technical difficulties occur occasionally on these types of planes. I was flight attending on a trip to Kathmandu, and all of the lights went out,” I whispered, trying not to wake her now sleeping children. “But, it actually wasn’t a horrible situation, because everyone could actually fall asleep more easily. Not every passenger is as well behaved as your children,” I murmured as I pointed to the plump baby, wrapped in a pink blanket, in her lap. The creases on her body reminded me of a doll’s seams.

“Thank you, Miliamiss is usually like this, very peaceful... but back in that hallway, she began to cry hysterically.”

"I mean, sometimes flying is scary. You're basically leaving your life with the pilot... I think air travel is one of the easiest ways to reveal how trusting someone is. But, Flight 370 is totally safe... there's nothing to fear."

"Adrienne, can you assist me with the blankets?" Embong sarcastically remarked from halfway down the aisle as he tossed the Saran-wrapped cloths at me.

*00:50 MYT
Malaysian Airspace
8 March 2014*

Air Traffic Control cleared us to climb to 35,000 feet. Once we dispersed coffees and pretzels to the first-class passengers, I walked back to my aisle seat, excited to converse with the woman.

"So, Mrs..."

"Vandenhende," she interjected politely as she burped a disoriented Miliamiss in her lap. Through the dimmed lights, I could see her eyes close for 15 seconds at a time, only to open them without warning, causing her to jolt in her seat.

"So, what's in Beijing?" I knew she hadn't noticed my listening to her conversation on the air bridge, and I figured talking might relax her.

"My husband, and our new house. He just got a job with Lenovo there, and he's been living away from us in the Netherlands since January. We finally closed on our house in Rotterdam in mid-February, so we're moving there. I actually have an appointment at two to enroll Johannes, here," she pointed to the blond, freckled child who cuddled Piers in the wide seat next to her as he napped, "in an elementary school near our new house, so I hope the captain can make up for the time we lose." She stared at me whenever she ended her melodious sentences – I wondered if she could smell the Jaz Beer on my breath.

"You're really pretty, you know." She suddenly reached out her hand in a friendly way.

"I'm Margaux. You don't have to call me Mrs. Vandenhende. Sometimes I don't even feel like that's my last name, considering I haven't seen my husband in so long."

"Thank you," I chirped quietly as I smiled. "It's nice to meet you." I reached my rough hand out. "My name's Adrienne."

01:37 MYT
South China Sea?
8 March 2014

I just assumed we were too high—I figured passengers complained of lightheadedness because of the altitude... not because Fariq intentionally depressurized the cabin. I kept telling Zaharie to ease up on the throttle once he opened the cockpit to flight attendants... which, by the way, was against protocol. By the time Embong and I passed out the pieces of assorted Malaysian gummy candy to raise their blood sugars, two elderly women and Margaux had already passed out. Thankfully, the night's gloom had masked the earth below, so no experienced flyers could visualize our abnormally high altitude... but even if it was bright outside, I'd bet we were already trekking across the South China Sea—even though the GPS had given out. Zaharie calmly updated ATC over the radio: "Saigon Center, Malaysia Flight 370, Captain Zaharie Ahmad Shah, we're a B 777 and our GPS systems are no longer functioning. We have reason to believe that this is a result of or related to the technical difficulties we experienced while still on ground at Kuala Lumpur International, Kilo Uniform Lima. It's believe that we are either over the Gulf of Thailand or South China Sea, and we're not sure if we're on track for Beijing. Over." No response, except for the flickering of the controls and a muffled static on the other line. Zaharie couldn't tell whether Saigon International in Vietnam could even hear us, but he knew they'd be no help. He maintained composure and attempted to contact the tower again, this time only reporting facts and numbers:

"There are 270 passengers on board, 12 crew members. My co-pilot is Fariq Abdul Hamid. We have a combined over 20,000 hours of flight experience. We are a Boeing 777/ Alpha en route to Beijing Capital International, Papa Echo Kilo. Over."

The overhead alarms suddenly began to siren, and the lights in the cabin intermittently turned a horrible shade of crimson. The conscious passengers screamed and retrieved their cell phones from their leather purses and briefcases, as if to call for help. I regret not trying to calm the passengers—I just stood in the corner of the kitchenette near the cockpit, staring at myself in the stainless steel cabinet. Through my reflection, I saw Embong dry heaving in an unconscious woman's fabric purse. Fariq, the copilot, suddenly slammed the cockpit door closed—I assumed it was so they could concentrate.

"Flight 370, mayday ATC Boeing 777/ Alpha. Report engine failure, 282 souls onboard. Mayday," Zaharie proclaimed with a more pronounced nonchalance this time. He knew no one could hear him. That's why he cut the lines back in Kuala Lumpur. "Won't be long now." He glanced at Fariq with a devious smile that makes even me, a soul in the afterlife, cringe with disgust. He and Fariq smirked about the suicide mission to themselves as Zaharie pressed on the throttle of the 777, causing it to tilt towards the marine wasteland.

Suddenly, Embong's cocktail tipped over and spilled onto the floor. Small children and pre-prepared pancake breakfasts jolted towards the cockpit. Zaharie's smile gleamed as he focused on the waves, glistened by the moon.

"Come on, just a little faster," he proclaimed in ecstasy as he checked the airspeed indicator one last time. "Come on, let's get to 600 knots!"

At this point, my dark circles were pressed so tightly against the steel cabinet that I could see every premature wrinkle on my tired face. I weakly crawled back among the sirens and screaming passengers, urging them to buckle their seat belts and attempting to calm them down with the gummy candies. I assumed Zaharie had lost control of the plane... maybe he had passed out.

But my efforts proved no use. Within 15 seconds, the plane smacked the middle of the Indian Ocean, going 586 miles per hour. The aircraft blew apart upon impact, killing every passenger on board instantly: Zaharie, Margaux, Embong, everyone.

They never found any of us. I'm surprised it took marine biologists so long to figure out that a few vicious Dusky Sharks devoured our mangled corpses within hours of the crash. Not that it would've mattered anyways, considering everyone conducted the rescue expeditions in all the wrong parts of the ocean. They searched way too far east – they spent too much time around the Andaman Sea, and they should've focused on the Bay of Bengal. I mean, the heavier remains were visible from the bottom of the ocean, so if someone actually searched near the Nicobar Islands, off the coast of Myanmar, they might've found the plane, retrieved the black box that recorded the messages to ATC and logged reports, and figured out that Zaharie killed us for some twisted revenge for God knows what.

I still feel bad for many of the passengers' families – some assumed that we survived the crash and were just sun-tanning on a beach of an unknown location. I wish I could've told my parents that no one survived – they were one of those families for almost a year after the crash. Both of my parents boycott air travel now, but only because they believe that the mechanics are still unsafe. News reporters never should've doubted the possibility of a rogue pilot. But when the black box gave out in May 2014, most people stopped looking for us anyways. Zaharie died an accomplished pilot, and us the victims of unknown mechanical failures.

*Réunion, French West Indies
29 July 2015*

They found the first clearly identifiable components of the aircraft today – part of a wing with a serial number that matched our plane. A few locals found it on the shore. What an eerie reunion. Scientists are going to test it to make sure that it's a match, but I put it there to put my family's hopes of my survival to death. Maybe that's selfish, but

I'm tired of my mom's 'Welcome Home' banner sitting in the empty garage, waiting for my arrival.

They'll also discover a barnacled, fold out chair, surfing the ocean's waves in its lonesome. It's the same chair Johannes held his brother on, just minutes before their deaths.

The Great Chilean Earthquake ~ by Jillian Barton, Penn State University Park

Mauricio clung to the thick wooden leg of the kitchen table. It was the same table that Mama and Papa had served *Pastel de choclo* – Chilean corn and meat pie – on every Sunday night; it was the same table that held their conversations over dinner. It was the same table where Mama listened to the rock and roll of the latest American icon, Elvis Presley, on Saturday mornings and swallowed her steaming lemon and ginger tea. And it was the same table that Papa sat at when he played his red piano accordion in between Mama's songs that hummed from the rectangular baby blue radio. Now, Mauricio was sure this table was the only piece of furniture left in his house that was still standing.

The shaking had lasted less than a minute. He had thrown himself out of the chair where he was doing his homework and fell to the ground, taking shelter underneath the table. It was as if the earth had transformed into a torrential raging sea and his body was a dinghy tossed up and over the swells of waves. Mama's ceramic dishes howled as they crashed to the floor; the intricate hand-painted flowers that once graced the clay were now reduced to shards. The old saucepans that hung loosely on the wall by nails had slapped against the walls of the house until surrendering to the monster and smashing to the ground. The wobbly wooden chairs had danced around him as he clutched the table, eventually collapsing on the kitchen floor, motionless. And when the shaking had ceased, he wasn't certain if the earth was stationary again –if it had stopped trembling – or if it was just his body that was shuddering so violently.

An eerie silence swallowed the room and not a sound could be heard except for the tinkling of angelic glass falling from the shattered windows of his home. The darkness encircling Mauricio obscured the horrors of his home. And oddly, all felt calm

momentarily – the still and silence of the debris dug into his slumped body. He feared even the slightest adjustment of his position, for he would disrupt the balance of life. He imagined the rubble as a house of cards – wooden planks carefully leaning on each other, ready to crumble at any moment. And in the waveless peace, all that he had ever done in his life passed before him.

Mauricio transported about five years back in time; his seven-year-old self was staring at a boy of about the same age. The boy's body was tanned and his cheeks were flushed as if he had just been playing football. Tight, dark curls relaxed on top of his head. When he was positioned just right in the sun's rays, his almond-shaped eyes glistened a rich, root beer brown. Mama said his name was Luis and he was the new neighbor. He and Mauricio were to walk to school and back together every day from then on. Mauricio lifted his eyes and looked into Luis's. The left side of Luis's lip curled up into a smile and he extended his hand.

Now, Mauricio was back in the present day, but it was earlier – before the earthquake. Mauricio and Luis stopped into Los Caramelos, the eccentric, pink-and-white-striped candy store on their way home from school. It was a Friday afternoon, the best day of the week. Mauricio pulled out the pesos that Mama had given him that morning from the pocket in his cargo shorts. Mauricio picked out his usual strawberry shortcake lollipop while Luis always settled for lime. Sitting on the hard steel bench outside and licking their lollipops, they watched people breeze by them as they talked about the universe.

“So what do you think is up there on Mars?” Mauricio asked.

Luis had been the one to tell Mauricio about the Soviet Union's latest attempt to launch a spacecraft that would visit Mars. Mauricio loved to let his mind ponder the intricacies of interplanetary space travel. The thought that something bigger than himself existed – some other species that proved man was not alone in this universe– energized him.

“Probably big rocks and stuff,” Luis shrugged his shoulders, clearly distracted by his candy.

“But do you think there are...” Mauricio's voice trailed off, whispering, “aliens?”

Luis chuckled. “Of course there's aliens, Mauricio. Their green little bodies are ten times more advanced than we are, and they are running around up there with a thousand eyes, laughing at us because we have no idea that they even exist.”

Mauricio wanted to look into Luis's eyes to see if he was serious, but Luis had already scooted off of the bench and started walking back home. Mauricio followed him until he had made his way to the front steps of his house and said goodbye to Luis.

Suddenly, the ground began to pound again and Mauricio cradled his head in his hands. Dust filled his esophagus, sending him into uncontrollable hacking fits as rubble cracked around him. When the world was still again, there was an excruciating pain in his lower right leg that was unbearable. It was as if someone was standing on top of his leg, placing the sheer force of their weight onto his small, youthful body. Mauricio

amassed all of the energy he had remaining and managed to pull himself upward onto his feet. There was one spot of light he saw above his head and he beat on the boards that entrapped him with his fists. Suddenly, he felt his chest bare. His poncho had caught on a wood plank and ripped, sending the horrible noise of cotton fibers tearing into the warm air. He felt the wreckage shift and white light blinded his eyes. Slowly, he crawled out of his destroyed home.

But he never could have prepared himself for what he saw next. Gone was his once cerulean home with its scalloped pink clay top. Pieces of the blue home were scattered around his body. Gone were the laurel and magnolia trees that had lined the front windows of his home. Gone was the gravel walkway to his door that he had too often run on in the summer on his bare feet, causing him to leap in agony. Gone was *Los Caramelos*, the candy store on the corner of his street where he had just bought lollipops with Luis an hour before. In its place stood a skeleton of a building. One of its brick walls was left standing and the rest was reduced to rubble. Gone was one of his neighbor's homes, The Espinoza's Residence, where Mama, Papa, and he visited once a week for a shared meal of fresh *Chilean corn humitas*. All that remained was a pile of wooden planks, sticking out from the ground like swords piercing the air, and rocks of fragmented concrete scattered around like massive ornaments. Gone were the rolling emerald hills of his Chilean village, Valdivia, and the aquamarine sky that ever so slowly faded to a milky white the closer it grew to the horizon. The pristine beauty of Valdivia was masked by a dense and growing smog of sorrow. And Mauricio could feel the full weight of its presence pressing against his chest.

The portions of the cobblestone road that he could still see had split into thousands of delicate lightning bolt-like patterns, exposing the dirt underneath. Parking meters that once lined his street were now bent into the earth, as if they were as easy to bend as pipe cleaners. The landscape around him was a sickening sea of sirens and horrified screams coming from the mouths of men, women, and children. The few homes that were still standing were sunken into the ground like a giant had sat upon them. A wispy plume of smoke as tall as a volcano curled in the air far in the distance and a repulsive burnt smell entered his nostrils. All around him, Mauricio heard children and parents wailing, desperate to find their loved ones. *His Mama. His Papa.* They were still working at the bakery - *Hope Pastelería* - when the earthquake struck. He must find them. He must go to the bakery immediately.

But there was a figure clouding his view. Mauricio's eyes zoomed into focus and realized he was gazing at Luis' thin body standing thirty feet away from him on the road. His hands were stuffed inside his pockets and his head was cast downward at the rubble that used to be his house. Gone was Luis's salmon-colored home and the manicured garden that once spilled over with fuchsia bellflowers and tangerine-colored poppies. As Mauricio propelled his legs toward his friend, he realized that Luis was not alone. A woman was standing beside him. Her hair was sliced against her forehead,

encased with sweat, and she was holding her left arm with her bloodied hand. Gray powder from the debris caked the ragged red jacket she was wearing. A deep gash cut into her shin and a stream of blood oozed from the wound. Mauricio recognized her – even in her disheveled state. The woman was Luis’s mother.

And suddenly, Mauricio was pulled back into the past. It was summertime and about a few years earlier. Mauricio and Luis were in Luis’s kitchen, sitting on the wobbly stools, their faces flushed from just playing football outside. Mrs. Romero, Luis’s mother, was baking chocolate chip cookies for the two of them. The sweet aroma steaming off the cookies wafted into Mauricio’s nostrils, instinctively causing his mouth to water. Mrs. Romero pulled the baking sheet out of the oven and placed it on the granite countertop. Unable to wait for them to cool, the boys reached for the cookies.

“Watch it guys!” Mrs. Romero warned as they dropped the burning, gooey cookies onto the counter in pain.

But Luis picked his cookie back up and stuffed it in his mouth, smiling and laughing as he did so. “Mmmmm,” he let out.

“I’m so glad that Luis has a friend like you,” Mrs. Romero said, her eyes sincere and her smile gentle. “I was worried with the move and everything.”

Mauricio didn’t think much of it. Instead, he just smiled at Mrs. Romero and said, “Of course.”

“Mauricio!” Luis’s mother shouted, waving her hand at him. He decided to walk over toward her. Maybe it was the way her wild eyes were bugging out of her sunken sockets or the syrupy saliva that was spilling down her chin, but Mauricio began to feel uneasy. He had a feeling that this was not the same Mrs. Romero who had kindly invited him into their home as if it were his and had treated Mauricio as if he were her son. In a swift motion, Mrs. Romero grabbed his wrist and squeezed, suffocating his tiny arm.

“Mauricio!” she said again, yanking his wrist and tugging his body closer to hers so that he could now feel her sickly warm breath on his forehead. “You must help me.... You must help me find Jose!” Jose was Luis’s little brother. Mauricio had grown up teaching Jose how to play football with Luis. Mauricio admitted that Jose had promisingly skills; he would most likely grow up to be better than Luis and Mauricio.

Mauricio glanced at Luis standing like a phantom next to his mother. But Luis just stared at Mauricio, his face blank and his eyes vacant, as if he didn’t inhabit his own body. Then, Luis’s eyes pulled away from Mauricio’s and blinked back down at the chaos before him. The world had opened up into an abyss into which he had stumbled and fallen.

"Mrs. Romero..." Mauricio started, but suddenly, his mouth dried up like a shriveled flower. With his esophagus burning, he tried to swallow. "Mrs. Romero, where is Jose?" Mauricio's eyes darted to the rubble that was the Romero's home but quickly focused back on Mrs. Romero in front of him.

"He-He didn't come out with Luis and me." Mauricio was convinced that Mrs. Romero was becoming unhinged -or already was. Her shoulders were the victims of uncontrollable tremors and her face was twisting in abnormal expressions. One minute she was hungry and desperate, with her eyes protruding and her mouth curled down; the next she was wildly happy, the skin on her cheeks stretched back.

"Was he home?" Mauricio's voice croaked when he asked the question, afraid to hear her answer.

"Yes!" Mrs. Romero wailed. "He was home with Luis and me. We were in the kitchen. Jose was watching television in the living room. Luis and I escaped. We tried to look for Jose but we couldn't move the debris. It's just everywhere..." Her eyes wandered off into the space behind Mauricio. Small convulsions began to wrack her limbs as she repeated, "Everywhere... Everywhere... The debris." From the corners of her lips, foam began to form.

At the sight of this, Mauricio's heart quickened. The seal of safety that Mrs. Romero's presence used to comfort him with had been broken. Instead, standing before him was a woman that had been injured and pulverized by loss. He was afraid of being susceptible to her madness that only appeared to be growing by the minute.

But just then, the wind shifted. And amidst the jumble of agony and anguish, Mauricio swore he detected the faintest whiff of fresh baked bread linger under his nostrils. *Mama and Papa*. He had to go find them; he had to go now. He would not think about the possibility of their death for he could not fathom the force of such a tragedy bearing down on his body. In this moment, all he could do was go to the bakery.

"Mrs. Romero... I'm so sorry," Mauricio began to say.

All of a sudden, Mauricio's legs lost their footing in a blur. Mrs. Romero stretched out her two arms and strained him, forcing him even closer to her. With her eyes close to his boyish face, he could practically see her soul in the white crescents that hugged her iron-colored irises. And inside, he saw a desperate mother in search of her son. With her emotions unraveling like a spool of thread, she fell to the earth on her knees and let out a loud, nauseating sob.

“Please Mauricio! Please... My son...” Mrs. Romero’s voice cracked horribly, plummeting him back into the reality of what he knew he had to do.

“I’m- I’m sorry. I cannot help you find Jose.” And now that those words had rolled off his lips, tears began to tumble down his reddened cheeks. His body ached for Mrs. Romero and the ghost that was now Luis. Mauricio understood; he felt their pain for they were one and the same.

“No. No. No.” Mrs. Romero’s thick eyebrows twirled downward and her head shook back and forth.

“I need to go find my Mama and Papa,” Mauricio croaked, trying his best to explain, but his voice was failing him. There were never words for a catastrophe.

Breaking free from her rigid grip, Mauricio took one last look at Luis. He wouldn’t even raise his eyes to Mauricio’s. A vacuum opened up inside of his stomach, spiraling out of control. But he peeled his eyes away from Luis’s and sprinted off in the other direction.

He could feel the adrenaline pumping through his constricted blood vessels as the sudden urgency to locate his parents overcame him. The bakery was three blocks away. He could run there in less than a minute. But the landscape that lay in front of his eyes was a minefield of personal belongings and confusion. Couches and chairs were hidden under crumpled walls. Uprooted trees were expelled from the soil, exposing their spider web-like systems. He could hardly make out what buildings used to stand in their now-empty and crushed plots of land. Lunging over monoliths, he turned the corner of his street and made his way to the where the bakery was *supposed* to be. Whether it was still intact was another question he did not want to consider.

But his feet dragged on the earth and he thudded to a halt when his eyes locked onto the bakery. There was no bakery – not even the frame of the building was detectable. Instead, the land had been completely flattened, as if nothing had stood there in his lifetime. The only evidence was the stripped wood and crumpled brick walls that were scattered on the plot of land. Slowly, he inched toward the wreckage, but not a sound could be heard coming from inside of the bakery. The ghostly silence crept from the ruins and embraced his body. A lump formed deep within his throat, tightening his airways and leaving him gasping for air. The world had opened up into an abyss which he had hopelessly and inevitably plunged into.

The morning the earth opened up, Mama packed Mauricio’s rocket ship lunchbox with his usual ham and cheese sandwich as he sat at the kitchen table slurping down his cereal. She placed the bag in his small hands and knelt down in front of him before he escaped out the door to school. Mauricio turned his cheek away from her moist lips; he was too old for kisses. But her pink lipstick planted a kiss on his face anyway.

And when the wind howled again, he swore he could feel Mama's lipstick residue on his right cheek from this morning. Through the misery and the confusion – the ruins and the disarray – Mauricio lifted his trembling fingers to his face. But there was nothing there; his imagination had planted this idea within his mind. The only hints of his parents' love that lingered on his cheek were the remains of a memory. His heart was a ship that had capsized in the storm.

All at once, Mauricio shrunk down to the earth and collapsed to his knees. Rapidly, he began to desperately peel away the wreckage with his puny arms.

One last time, Mauricio was in the past. It was a year ago and he was sitting on the steps in his home – in the shadows and hiding from his arguing parents. They were sitting at the kitchen table across from one another.

“Maria, this has been our dream for years. We've talked about this. We both agreed that when we got enough money we would purchase the bakery and take it over,” Papa urged, his hands folded in front of him. “I don't understand what changed.”

“What if we don't have enough money to run it? What if it fails miserably? We have Mauricio to think about, Juan. We can't just go jumping into this.”

“We are not jumping into this!” he thundered. “Do you realize just how tirelessly I have worked to make this dream come true?” Papa stood up and paced behind his chair. “I have worked three jobs, Maria! Three jobs! So that one day, we could own our own business. So that one day, we could run everything for a change.”

Mama exhaled a gust of air from her mouth. “I am just cautious, Juan.” She raised her eyes to his and he came over to her and embraced her.

“We will be okay, trust me. We have each other. Sometimes, we have to take risks. Otherwise, we will always be living in the shadows.” Papa kissed her on the cheek and Mama nodded. It had been decided; they were going to purchase the bakery.

Despite the absence of the bakery, the aromas lingered. Mauricio could smell the fresh *cachitos* – ham-filled, crescent-shaped rolls – that Mama and Papa baked daily. He could smell the *empanadas* – stuffed bread that was filled with gooey, steamy cheese. And best of all, he could smell the *chilenitos* – the sweet floury pastries stuffed with rich caramel that caused his mouth to water. The smells of the bakery were all that remained. Mauricio didn't want to accept what he knew, but it was eating away at his stomach. The inescapable truth was that his parents' dream – the dream that they had worked so hard for their whole life – had buried them alive.

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

A Straightforward Wave ~ by Robert Forrest, Penn State University Park

“Dad?”

“DAD?”

“DAAAAADD?” I screamed for the third time. “WHERE ARE YOU?”

With a gut-wrenching pain in my stomach, I sprinted up and down the scorching shoreline, scanning the sea for any sight of my dad. As the waves calmly crashed on the sand, and no one was within sight, I began to panic. Running back into the water, I continued to cry “DAD?” to an empty sea. Tears of fear stained my eyes as I retreated from the water, sprinting back along the shoreline. My two younger sisters were just returning from their walk along the beach, and when their confused, distraught faces met mine, my heart sank.

“Bobby?” my youngest sister said with uncertainty and unease. “Where’s Dad? What’s going on?”

“Uhhhm,” I replied with watery eyes. “I’m not sure. But it’s going to be okay.” And in my short 15 years of life I don’t think I had ever told a lie as blatant as that one. It was the 28th of August, a Tuesday that had begun as any other. My family and I were vacationing in the Outer Banks for the very last time, and my excitement was immeasurable. Traveling in North Carolina meant spending an entire week with my extended family, all sixteen of us, and nothing in the world was better than that. We had overcome everything imaginable in our seven years down the Outer Banks, from natural disasters, to immense flooding, to swarms of green flies, but not in a million years could I have been prepared for the heartache that would occur on this trip.

As hope seemed to be waning as quickly as the waves crashed and receded again, I hastily ran back to our tent and told my aunts and uncles as we desperately searched for help.

“HEY LIFEGUARD. HEY OVER HERE. WE NEED HELP,” I screamed as I flung my arms in the air. “OVER HERE.”

“What’s wrong? What’s happening?”

“We can’t ... we can’t find my dad,” I said as I gasped for air.

“Where was he last seen? And what does he look like?” the lifeguard responded as he dialed 911.

“Um, a blue bathing suit with a gray swim shirt. He’s like 6 feet tall, brown hair, brown eyes, 190 lbs. We were swimming back from the sandbar and when I got to shore he was gone.”

“Okay okay, I’ll call for help.”

With every family member trying to provide help in some way, my cousin Danny ran back to the house to see if my dad had somehow returned, but instead of finding my dad, he found my mother. And when she sprinted onto the beach, and my exhausted eyes met hers, every ounce of life and love I had within me was immediately sucked out. The overwhelming nausea of my stomach caused me to collapse to the ground, as I buried my face in the sand.

“Mom . . . I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry, it’s all my fault,” I uttered again and again with tears streaking down my sunburnt cheeks. “We were both in the water just riding waves, and I saw him on his back moving his arms backward, but I thought he was just relaxing, and doing backstroke, I swear,” . . . I continued, as I gasped for air. “SHIT, NO ... Please God, Please. Please wake up, Bobby. WAKE UP. This has to be a nightmare ... Please someone, ANYONE ... HELP.”

And in that very moment, I felt utterly submerged in water, yet I had never been thirstier in my entire life. And that’s the *tragedy* of living.

Four blistering, wretched hours later, my dad was found by a man and his son a mere hundred yards from where we were sitting. They had spotted him as he began to wash up on shore, and dragged him onto the sand.

This was it. The hope ran out.

The paramedics diagnosed the death as a drowning, but we all knew that wasn't the case. It couldn't have been. A helicopter flew over the ocean once more and I knew this was the end. The scuba divers retreated from the ocean, the lifeguards got back on their ATV's, and everyone on the beach returned to their normal lives. Except for me. Except for us. And despite the incredible amount of bustling going on all around me, my eyes were paralyzed in a blank, ghost-like stare. My cheeks were sandy and sunburnt, and a single tear rolled down my face and onto my chapped lips. Accompanied by my mother and two sisters, I stared out over the ocean as I had a million times before, but I wasn't waiting for a dolphin to leap and make a splash this time. I was waiting for my dad. And for the first time in my life, he wasn't coming home.

Broken glass. Punctured walls. Bruised knuckles. Bloody fists. Spotty vision. Chills. Numb.

Black. Black everywhere. Where was I? What was happening? Dad? DAD? I couldn't breathe. I woke up in a cold sweat a day after everything happened, sprawled out on the front deck directly outside of my mom's bedroom. How did I get there? Where was everyone? I walked back inside to find my family on the back deck looking for life in the sunrise, all still trying to piece together the events of the previous day. And in a room full of my closest family, I had never felt so alone. So I grabbed a glass of water, and returned to the front balcony.

The porch was dressed with a wooden balcony about four feet high; the pegs were separated just enough that my feet fit snug between them, and I stood against it. My vision once again became blurry. My hands began to shake so severely to the point where I couldn't hold my glass anymore. "CLING PSHHHHH," I heard as the glass shattered against the driveway below, the sound ringing in my ears. My knees began to give out as my legs quivered; I rocked back and forth on the railing as my vision went in and out.

"This can't be real, this can't be real," I keep trying to tell myself. "This has to be a fucked up dream."

There was so much shit racing through the cracks and crevices of my bones that I was numb. Numb to the point where I considered throwing my body over that balcony just like the glass. How much more could I be hurt when my soul was already shattered? I was drowning. Drowning in the chaos between my ears, and in the blood splattered throughout my broken heart. My mind became an ocean, flooded with nightmares that crashed so ferociously I could hardly breathe. I was sobbing and shedding tears at a rate

not healthy for human eyes, as I continued to unsteadily rock back and forth. How could I live like this? With this unbelievably colossal amount of guilt crushing every bone and organ within me. I was collapsing from the inside out reliving the events of the day over and over and over ...

Why hadn't I run back in sooner?

What the fuck was I doing?

How could I be so blind and stupid?

Why me, why me?

If only it had been me.

And as the questions continued to consume me, the tears only got worse as I continued to search for answers I would never find. I was stuck in a tsunami wave wearing only a t-shirt and shorts, and had never wanted to drown so much in my entire life. And then, he arrived.

All of a sudden, a beautiful red bird exhibiting the most unique colors I had ever seen captivated my weary eyes. Coming from a neighbor's tree, he swiftly flew across the yard and landed on the railing of the balcony, as if he were trying to keep me from going over. While perched on the railing, his broad and sturdy shoulders manifested his dominant physique, reminding me of my dad. The bright and vivid colors of his feathers reflected in the sunlight, as did his beady eyes, which resembled that of a black gemstone, just as my dad's dark brown eyes had. As the bird's eyes stared into my own, I felt united to him as though he was my dad. Remembering the connection my dad shared with the birds in our own garden, I wondered if it could really be him.

As the bird began to sing, his sweet chirp sounded like that of a beautiful flute, one that would linger in my ears for days to come. It was a sound that would bring joy to its listeners; one that could produce a smile in the very worst of days. The sound was new to me, something that I had never heard before, but surely, a sound I would never forget. As the beautiful song ended, the bird glanced back once more before his jagged-shaped wings began to flap, gracefully flying away into the sea blue sky. Gazing into the sun, I kept an eye on the bird for as long as I possibly could, until it was far from my view.

It's hard to describe the impact the bird had on my life, but I can guarantee I'll never experience something like it again. There were things that went through my mind on that balcony that I'm not proud of, and they definitely aren't my first choice for discussion, but in a way they formed the soul that I bear today. I'm no longer a 19 year-

old kid with a 19 year-old soul, but rather a soul far beyond my years. And I'll forever be grateful for how my mind was able to overcome those demons. I'd become a dusty broken record if I recalled everything I learned on that balcony, but above all, it was the uncertainty of life that struck me hardest. People die every day, every minute, every second, yet we never expect death to creep into our backdoors, stealing our loved ones faster than we're able to turn around. The bird helped me realize that. He helped me realize that maybe we should turn around a little more often. Maybe we should stop and breathe every once in a while, and not worry as much about whether or not we'll make the next train home. He helped me realize the importance of being straightforward with those you hold closest to your heart.

I've learned a lot in the past four years, but most notably, how quickly the things we love most are taken from us. Be straightforward. Tell those that you love that you love them. Because at the end of the day, we never know what lies ahead. We never know when our last day will be.

We never know when that wave is coming.



Bird, by Elizabeth Shen, Penn State University Park

It Is All in the Footnotes ~by Austin Shay, Penn State Harrisburg

I finally decided that it was time to get ready after my mother called that morning. This was the first time she had come to visit me at Milton Hershey School. She was excited to see her “little boy.” I haven’t been a little boy for at least seven years. She must have been trying to make up for lost time because I haven’t seen her for about a year. She was not even at her mother’s funeral.

My phone buzzed. Sheila. I picked up.

“I’ll be right down.”

My mom leaned against her black Pontiac Sunfire in a black lace skirt with a lilac underlay. It was a bit fringed at the hem. Her shirt was an off-white tank top, and her boobs were sagging even though just last week I told her to buy a better bra at JCPenney – I may not have seen her for about a year but she does call me weekly so I cannot seem to get rid of her. She was texting on her phone. A toothy grin reached me.

“Kerry¹ said he is going to try to get vacation time to come up here.”

Her dry, brittle salt-and-pepper hair stained by red L’Oreal hair dye and her thick glasses yellowed and old reminded me of how long it’s been since things have been normal or if our family was ever normal.

“Sure mother,²” I said trying not to sound sarcastic, “Kerry will be home soon.”

“What do you want to do for the weekend?” she said like I had a plan.

“I have a ticket to Hersheypark you could use, and then I can use my ID to get in. I mean if you wanted to go.”

“I want to do anything that you want to do.³”

¹ Kerry wasn’t the most appropriate guy for my mother. She was a recovering drug addict at this time, and we all know that Kerry was addicted to heroin. They lived together until Kerry got laid off and had to move away to make some money. It would also be about a month before Kerry would die of a “heart attack”. My mother called it a heart attack but we all know it was a heroin overdose.

² My mother was only 33 years old now, but years of drug abuse have taken their toll. She began greying around 26, and she lost all of her teeth before 28. My family has never been normal, but I would like to think that we all made a decent effort to be normal.

She began to drive toward the amusement park. She tried to act like she knew where she was going. My mother had never left western Pennsylvania. I was surprised that she even made it to Hershey by herself. It would not be too long before she decided that she needed to go to the bar, or needed her fix.

“How long have you been clean?⁴”

“About three months.”

Her answers were always quick and short. It was like she could tell when I knew she was lying. She was usually lying⁵.

“Do you have anything planned for us to do, or do you want me to figure it out as we go?”

“It is completely up to you.”

This answer has always been my least favorite. I am terrible at making decisions⁶, and apparently, she is as well. I just sighed, and she pulled onto Hersheypark Drive.

“Have you been to the park before?”

“I have been here a few times. It would probably be safe to say that I have been here at least once a month for the past five years.”

“That is nice. Do you have any favorite rides?⁷”

³ My mother would get into this anything-to-please-you-honey kind of phase right after she had either relapsed or directly after she became clean. My sister would fall for this easier than I would. I had seen some of her worst moments, and would not fall for any guilt trip that might be coming. She has tried to persuade me to move in with her so many times that it is ridiculous. What is even more ridiculous could be the time that I almost fell for it.

⁴ This question I had asked my mother many times. I would never think that I would have to ask my mother this question at all. Recently, she told me that she has been clean but the news headline said otherwise. Her boyfriend was arrested for stabbing someone else in the eye with a screwdriver. The part of the story that she left out to me--but the newspaper said--was that they were high on crack. There are many times that I do not believe her answer.

⁵ The day after my grandfather died she said she would be in town to help my grandmother and me go through his stuff. She was nowhere to be found, but we got a call from the police. She ended up getting drunk at the bar and getting into a fight. My mother was an alcoholic and she was an angry one. This is one of the many moments that I am glad that I was not raised by her.

⁶ This is true to this day. I am horrible at making decisions, and this is probably the reason that I cannot push my mother out of my life. I honestly think that I would be better off without her in my life.

⁷ When my mother gets nervous she asks a lot of questions. I have just started to assume that she was trying to make something up to me. She never could be straight with me. She would write me letters while she was in prison but she would never tell me why she was there, or when she would be getting out.

“I like a few of the roller coasters.” I somehow forgot that I don’t like hanging out with my mother. I have built up a tolerance to her. I would only be with her whenever she complained that we never spent time together.⁸

“Have you found a nice boy yet? Or a girl?”

Here we go again. I cannot believe that my mother still asked me about finding a girlfriend. I thought that when I told her I was gay,⁹ that would be enough. She remembered the last guy that I had dated. Then the other one that bought me a rose for Valentine’s Day. But I reluctantly answered that I am still single.

Why do parents always ask the questions that make you feel like shit? My mother probably wouldn’t come to my graduation¹⁰ in a month. She would find something that is more important to do.

She finally found a parking spot, and we trotted out of the car toward the entrance to the park. She looked at me. I had caught her looking me up and down.

“Have you lost weight?”

“No.”

“Are you sure?”

“I am sure. I have been the same weight for the past three years.”

As we waited in line for The Comet, I saw that my mother’s hands were shaking. Was she going through withdrawal? If she had been clean¹¹ for three months, then she would be experiencing a bit I guess.

We were seated, and before I knew it we started up the first hill. My mother grabbed my hand. She was afraid of heights but was doing this for me. Maybe she was trying to

⁸ In 2016, I spent Spring Break with my mother and have never quite recovered from that experience. If you wanted to know what actually happened I would suggest asking my ENGL 212 class. They remember “Have You Ever Tried Crack?” But for the few of you that do not understand, all you need to know is: Hepatitis C, crack, and rancid vaginas.

⁹ I think that my mother took my homosexuality the hardest. She complained that no one would carry on the family name. My uncle had two daughters, and I was the only boy. She grew to the idea of having a “queer” son. For the first year she would continue to use baseball metaphors to describe my sex life to her friends and to me. I felt quite awkward that my mother was interested in my sex life.

¹⁰ In case you were wondering, she did not come to my graduation. She decided that she would like to get high with her new boyfriend. It wasn’t even a week after Kerry had died, but she had found a new boyfriend already.

¹¹ I have seen my mother go through withdrawal many times, but it is nothing compared to right after she relapses. She becomes violent and forgets to do basic things. I have seen her forget to feed herself for a week. This was the last time she relapsed. Luckily she moved in with my grandmother in 2012.

be a better person? Maybe she was trying to change her ways? Or maybe she was just faking it?¹²

¹² The rest of the day at the park is not important. My mother would leave at the end of the weekend, and I would only see her twice a year. The three years since the day at the park would be full of visits to the hospital, unpaid fines, and small spurts of jail sentences. I believe that I paid at least a fine a year, and helped pay her rent twice in that three-year period. Jimmy and Chris (both of her boyfriends) would abuse her, but she would never listen to me when I told her to move out. She was stuck in the cycle of violence. But Chris is now dead, and Jimmy is missing an eyeball. She would continue to call weekly when she could. Ten days ago she told me that people are calling her the black widow because all of her boyfriends are dying. The man who stabbed the other one in the eye passed away in his sleep, and this solidified her reputation as the black widow. I thought that these women received large sums of money from the deaths, but my mother only inherited Hepatitis C and infected skin at the injection site.

POETRY

Asheville ~ by Erin Servey, Penn State University Park

-For Zelda Fitzgerald

Glints reflect off the walls
through the eye of my subconscious.
Placated and paralyzed
I dream of heat and fire
and reflect on myself.

American flapper: diagnosed
(incorrectly) with schizophrenia, aged
and sedated in a hospital bed,
clenching a ballet slipper.

What could I do
but fight domestication
while dancing and painting,
outshone by a sane, alcoholic, husband

who claimed my insanity,
placing me in various hospitals,
to finally abandon and
send me here, where

mania kept me hostage with virulent
eczema worsening along with it, red
and scaly, spirit of fire-
a nightmare in my present condition-
doctors pried my mind, wrong

in their assumptions like Pliny
proved incorrect that salamanders
could extinguish fire with their
cold bodies. During that time

letters were exchanged.
From Scott; To Scott.
In one I admitted in frustration I was
*tired of being told that you 'used to wonder why
they kept princesses in towers...'*
because I feel as though I'm in one.

Now, my hands clutch dreams.
I believed I was a salamander,
A dusky dreamy smell
and iridescent light surrounds as,
at last; I'm set aflame.

Untitled ~ by Julia Gray, Penn State University Park

I am having trouble
trying to capture my spark
and turn it into a consistent flame
or even
a one-time explosion

~ on motivation or masturbation

Purpose ~ by Christy Xu, Penn State University Park

Walnut Springs Park

Our TA tells us to take a ten-minute walk on a green path

“Choose something that stands out to you, and bring it back to share”

I begin to walk in linear time

Towards now, towards never

Nothing draws me in anymore

A bumblebee dances between some pastel purple flowers

Mother Nature’s gifted bowls of fragrant nectar

I kneel to respectfully observe the fuzzy creature

Something always draws me in – when I let it

I notice three classmates pick some flowers in full blossom

Their petals bleed saturation

My bee buddy begins drinking the juicy florals

He buzzes from cup to cup in rapid motion

Is speed relative to size?

He withholds me from sacrificing his teatime

I realize I do not need them more than he does

Go forth

Keep walking through this physical dimension

I am so grateful this body is an anchor

I am so glad this vessel of flesh can ground me

My glance catches another flutter

I kneel down to seek what is seeking me

A camouflaged moth and her friend halt in time on a shattered log

There is something silently beautiful about what is not pretty on the surface

My perspective shifts to an open walnut

Broken on both sides in a forgiving manner, as if it were sculpted that way

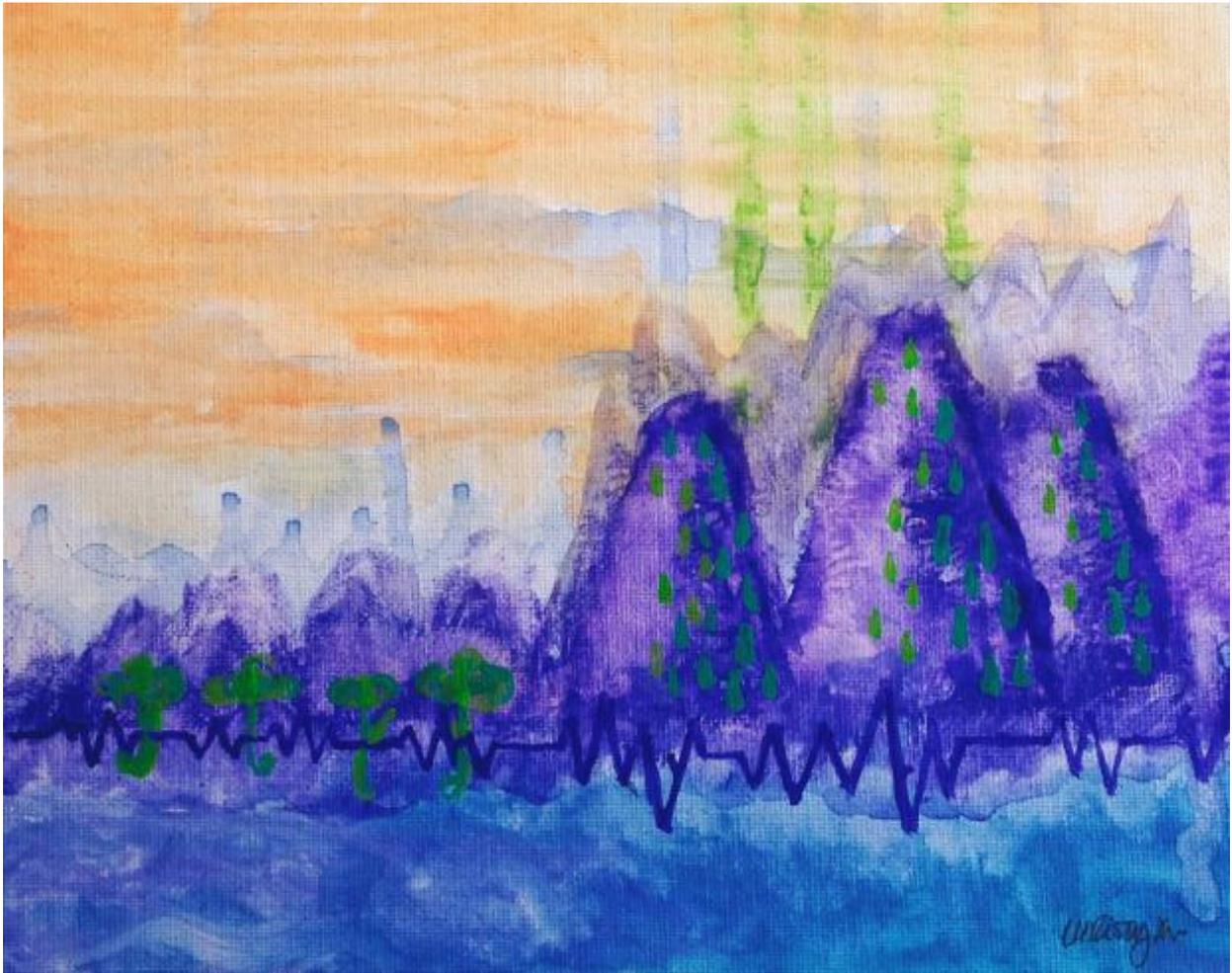
So symmetrical from all angles

Math exists within every existence

Why do we foolishly disrespect it?

I choose the simple brown walnut

Simple yet complex



Earthbeat ~ by Christy Xu, Penn State University Park

Siamese Fighting Fish ~ by Danielle Fruehan, Penn State University Park

If you show a Betta fish a mirror,
the piscivore flares its gills in detest.
Not for lack of self-image,
(for it ignores the decadence of
its royal blue iridescence shining blood red,
undulating fins rippling like sheets in the wind)
but instead as mere aggression
toward a perceived opposing fish,
recognizing competition in its reflection.
It doesn't realize it is
preparing its defenses
against only itself.
Furthermore, if you show
a Betta fish a mirror
next to a rubber duck
(or a marker
or an orange
or a penny)
about five times in a row,
it will flare its gills
at the rubber duck alone.
In 5th grade, I told the girls in my class
that Amanda Hall stuffed her bra.
She did stuff her bra.
But so did I.

On My Book Stack ~ by Han Yu, Penn State University Park

I don't have much attachment.

That house's gone; I'm here.

The city's burnt down; I'm here.

I don't have any attachment.

Oh yeah maybe I

Yes, I do.

Seventy titles of myth

Several columns of poetry

Bacon and Lamb are never to be roasted:

Or if you'd call that "digestion".

And digestion disorders haunt me,

So I'd prefer not to

Have it medium well, please.

Stacked up, piled high,

Dusted and rugged and seasoned

With my own words.

Would you like the prose du jour with that?

Can't Barre The Noise ~ by Leighton Young, Penn State University Park

I just Quit,
That which soothes me so,
Yet sucks the damn life out of me sometimes.
Fast-forward. Rewind. Fretboard.
Pause. Breathe.
Does it really matter?
Yes.
I got caught up, along a road I never really Knew,
Wished for or fully respected.
Opened a door to some reckless day now in rearview.
Hey Jimmy, ever Ask for a passion to control you?
Set you down, turn you inside out,
Ask you to give everything for it?
Ask yourself to abandon everything else,
All you worked towards?
Ignoring the warning signs along the way,
Leading up to that one day you signed a mere slip of paper
that only brought disaster,
A young man's dropout progression.
Ain't no Grateful Dead story to tell you,
Sell you, Melt you down, Through rhythmic romance,
Timed, Just, Right.
Ain't some sorry night I shared betwixt familial wit
Mixed with a little lingual lick
That didn't quite stick, Till Just, Right, Now.
Well, oh well, I believe I've found my misstep
Which of course serves as a plurality of paths
Walked upon supposedly in Isolation.
Manifestations of interrelations brought upon my inquiry
To where I went wrong.
Just a sore Individual. Who fell down a well, for a short while, he never expected.

Bubblegum Pink Bubbles ~ by Austin Shay, Penn State Harrisburg

Bubblegum pink bubbles stick to the white porcelain sides of the tub,
but I don't move an inch. I haven't told him yet
that it's him I am interested in.

I sometimes wonder what it would've changed if I had?

"Ryker?" There is a voice through the door.

I take a minute to make sure my voice
is strong enough to speak. "Yeah?"

He clears his throat, "I was just wondering, um."

I am sitting naked in the bathtub, tanned summer skin
contrasting with the soapy white all around me. "How was your day?"

I lean my head back against the tile of the shower wall,
closing my eyes. "It was better than yesterday," I tell him.

He is quiet for a long moment, and I am just starting to
become cold again in the lavender light of the bathroom.

Silence lapses between us again, and I think maybe
he has walked away, until: "Do you know that my mother
told me how much she loved you the other day?"

I smile now. I start getting out of the tub,
and feel a repressed shiver build up.

"Well, I might hope she at least likes me a little bit." I chuckle as I dry off.

"It has been three years, after all."

"Yeah," I hear.

I recognize the drifting sound he is hiding in his voice.

A spike of concern jumps through me, and I open
the door to face him, only realizing what I have done a second too late.



Self Portrait,
By Isabelle Helmich, Penn State University Park

Unspoken ~ by Rachel Gallagher, Penn State Altoona

So many words, left
unsaid, all we had
were broken phrases. Constantly misplacing
pages of our lives. Every day a new
chapter was written, new characters joined
us in our plot for
happiness. Emotions embellished
with personification, foreshadowing left
me unaware, our book had
been started, the middle never
fully filled, your ending
was written. The writer left
uncertain details undone. Words here
typed on a page, salt soaked pages
that would not flatten. More and more
our book came unbound. Papers
disintegrating in my
hands, our book was so
fragile, like a first
edition novel, so much dialogue
left unwritten, the writer
no longer picked up the pen.

**Vincent - November, 1888 ~ by Danielle Fruehan, Penn State University
Park**

The mirror inside this little yellow house
paints me melancholy
this morning—
pale blue brushstrokes beneath my eyes,
in the hollow of my cheeks.
I remind myself that I am the artist,
and squeeze a dirty tube of cadmium yellow
into my mouth.
I taste nothing.
I press the tube hard against canvas,
and spread until it runs out.
I know there must be more inside,
and I slice the bottom with a pocketknife.
I start to cut off my hand,
but write a letter first instead:

Dear Theo,

The sadness will last forever.

PROMPT WINNER

The prompt: Write a myth/legend/fable/allegory as to why trees lose their leaves every Fall. Or interpret this photo any way you please, with a focus on fall.



Bare ~ Samantha Friedman, Penn State University Park

I am a Maple Tree. My leaves are usually the colors of a pumpkin pie. They absorb the warm tangerine and lemon rays of the sunlight that beats down on me from above the wooded plains I live in. My leaves keep me warm. They are who I am, my protective barrier. The leaves on my branches differentiate me from the Oaks, the Birches, the Beeches, and the Firs that I share this earth with. As you cling to your chestnut colored wool sweater, as you hike along these woods, I tightly hold onto my leaves for the same comfort and support. I feel more appropriate keeping my leaves on, rather than exposing myself like us trees must do every year. We do so during the mating season in the hopes of finding a male who believes that our naked trunks, raw branches, and leafless twigs are beautiful.

It is rare for us trees to keep our leaves through the months of October to December. When I first started to grow into this life as a young sapling, I never thought I would be a part of it. I saw the trees around me without their leaves to be lonely, in longing

search of a spouse. As all of my friends around me lost their leaves, I began to see it as something I had to be a part of, or at least experience. I would listen to their stories of how they confidently shook off their leaves for the first time. "But didn't you feel so helpless?" I would ask the older trees, searching for advice or guidance.

The first time I experienced the month of October, I felt cold and transparent. I wanted to be seen and accepted but I felt like I was just going through the motions. It was hard for me to believe that the older trees saw losing their leaves as a holy ceremony. My first time did not feel special. When the time came, I felt like I was being taken advantage of. Your kind would even walk by and photograph my nakedness to show to all of their friends. I stood bare among other trees whose bodies were unique and intricate, unlike my own. My bark was plain and vertical striped, while the Beeches beside me had bark as smooth as stone. I looked around at the Birches that had peeling bark and the other maple families that had rough ridges. Some trees enjoy October and stand firmly rooted in the ground during this time of the year because they feel desired. Meanwhile, I hunched over and waited as the time passed until it finally ended. They shook their branches beside me, as their leaves fell to the ground and the world suddenly became silent.

To me, I feel most beautiful when I am able to decorate myself, to cover the wooden pieces I am made of that remain as hard as steel. As trees, we are taught to trade our strength with fragility and to lose a piece of ourselves just so we can gain approval, a part in which we never really needed. This deep belonging, the need we all have to fit in is rooted within all of us. Human or nature, the immense hole I have in my trunk is not unlike the one you feel within your stomach.