



As I sit here in quarantine finishing up this magazine, I keep thinking through how much has changed so quickly. They say things cannot go back to the way they were and, in some ways, I suppose that is for the best. But I'd like to say "hello" and tell you that I'm glad you're here, wherever "here" may be. Grab something warm to drink and find a good nook. Take a few deep breaths and let these authors and artists take your mind off of COVID-19, jobs, or graduation. It's a stressful time but I'm glad we can be "here" together.

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Editor-in-Chief

Ashlyn Brisley

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Saturn are Singing Lullabies by Jarrett Whitener

Cover Design.......Tree Trunk Rivers by Elizabeth Walters



Through the window of our dining room I watched my stepfather skin a buck.

Each leg was tied to a rope

that attached to a tree. He took

his knife and glided across the brownish-grey fur.

The ribcage split open for display.

A flap of belly hung down.

Intestines pooled toward the ground as he salvaged the parts to be processed.

When mama wanted steak,

we would go to Clark Brother's Butcher.

In the warmer seasons, my stepdad and I would go fishing. We would prepare the fish

to be grilled on our back porch. The knife

would scrape off scales and they would pile on the wood.

It smelled like a dog coming in from the rain mixed with metal as he fileted the fish. Always

providing us dinner in the most primal ways.



An echo from shoe clad feet, stair light ghostly flickering.

The cluster of keys familiarly jagging my right-hand palm,

out of breath the final step is climbed.

Clustered shoes in the highway, dropped school bags by the turn,

the whistle of the apron-clad man standing by the kitchen stove,

where will today's story go? "How was my day?"

Look at the clock hand, it always runs so quick.

How can one ever be on time when

lost along the trail? Charts are hard to read,

instructions even harder to follow. Stubborn thorns can linger.

Pieces put together show the final picture frame.

Tales entrusted and shared, over a pancake plate with strawberry jam.

We ventured to the time of Aquila, who swayed peacefully about

as her sky-blue cloak soaked in the golden fish shimmer. The chase of laughter never a forgotten trail,

As the teasing brackish waters kept us in place

Not needing to walk a polished plank, we all leaped in, free of fright,

feeling the cool lapping of waves devour us in delight.

Sore smiles spread further as the light "Hello"

and shuffling footsteps reached the kitchenette.

Four hearts gathered in the molded sofa, eagerly awaiting another tale.



As Good As It Gets
Holly Smith



"The righteous cry, and the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles." - Psalms 34:17

God gave me two beautiful children even though I didn't ask for them. I wasn't ready. In fact, I don't know if I would have ever been ready.

God promised Abraham descendants that would outnumber the stars, but Sarah, his wife, was barren. God visited Abraham and told him that Sarah would bear a child. Sarah overheard and giggled. God called her a foolish woman.

Some people pray that God will heal their children rather than getting them medical treatment. Grace Foster let her two-year-old die of pneumonia instead of taking her to the doctor to get a simple round of antibiotics. She attributed the death of her daughter to "God's will."

In December 2010, North Georgia got a foot of snow, which was way more than the usual amount. My son had just turned one and spiked a high fever. The fear of his fever outweighed my fear of driving on the ice-crusted highway. I prayed God would protect us on the way to the doctor. I couldn't watch him suffer when I could do something about it. As a parent, how do you not try to stop their suffering?

God gave Abraham and Sarah a child when they were really old, something that would be considered a miracle today. They named him Isaac which means "he will laugh." Sometimes God gives children to people that he shouldn't and doesn't give them to people that he should.

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Sometimes I wonder if I'm good enough to have children. Or why God allows children in our screwed-up world at all.

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I don't know what I did to deserve my children. I lose patience and yell when I shouldn't. Sometimes my depression prevents me from playing with them because my brain has gone into autopilot mode, and sometimes I can't regain control. My anxiety keeps me from taking them to playdates with their friends because I can't leave the house because of the ten tons of pressure on my chest making it impossible to breathe. It's not fair to them. What could they have possibly done to deserve me as a mother? I wish I could be more present in their lives. They deserve more. I will never be good enough for them.

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Megan Huntsman who murdered six of her children. From 1996-2006 she would suffocate them right after giving birth. At her trial she said she didn't feel strong enough to be a mother to them and wanted to prevent suffering they may experience due to her bad parenting.

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People who murder their children are called filicides.

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I ask God for direction, but he doesn't respond. I want God to make my depression go away. I want him to make me a better Mom. I want him to show me how to raise my kids. Friends tell me to pray and keep the faith.

Abraham had faith. So much so that God wanted him to prove it by sacrificing Isaac, his miracle child.

Deena Schlosser listened to gospel music and chanted "Thank you Lord" while cutting off the arms of her 11-month-old daughter. I wonder which song she listened to as her baby's blood soaked through her clothes. Did she hear the cries of terror or just turn up the music to drown out the noise?

I'm beginning to question the faith I have. It scares me a little. It goes against everything I know to be true. I've been indoctrinated to trust God and obey him, and as long as I am faithful, he would take care of me. I feel like I've been faithful, yet he has allowed so much hardship and pain in my life. The more I think about it, the more I don't understand why. I need to understand.

Abraham takes Isaac from Sarah and leads him up Mount Moriah. I wonder what Abraham told Sarah before they left knowing he was about to take their child's life. Most of all, I wonder what he told Isaac. He binds his hands and lays him on the altar. Did Isaac fight back or lie still for God's will to be done? Did he see Abraham's faith or see a psychopath created by God? I can't imagine Isaac ever truly trusted Abraham again or how he could ever trust the God that asked Abraham to kill him. Did he ever understand?

Andrea Yates drowned her five children in the bathtub because they were not righteous and doomed to hell. The oldest was seven.

I look at my children and see nothing but the light, the best of God. To me, they emit evidence of God's love, proof of his existence. I want them to know him better than me, even if I don't take them to church anymore. Counterproductive, I know. I just can't make myself go right now. My family thinks it's because I can't get up early enough to go, but really, it's that I can't sit there and worship God while I search for an explanation. It's easier to let them believe that I'm lazy rather than explaining that I'm jealous of the other people around me that seem to be wrapped in the Holy Spirit while they sing praise and worship. I want to have that experience. I want to feel it, but right now I'm too angry that God allowed my children to suffer instead of me. They were innocent, and I wanted to take their place. I hope their faith is stronger than mine.

Abraham raises the knife, preparing to stab his beloved child. I wonder if Abraham hesitated as he looked down on Isaac bound on the altar.

Deanna Laney hit her three children in the head with a rock and said she had to kill her children to test her faith. I wonder if she made them go out and get the rock she was going to kill them with.

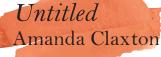
God says stop before Abraham's hand comes down. Abraham sees a ram in the thicket. He unties Isaac and sacrifices the ram instead. Did Abraham explain it all on the way back down the mountain?

Some of these mothers plead insanity, spent time in a mental hospital, and then were released. Others plead guilty, declaring that it was God's will. They sit in prison.

I just want to feel God's love pour over me like rain.

Some days I contemplate why I continue to live, but my children always seem to know because they will come running up to me. I smile and remember that they are my purpose for living. I hug them tightly and hope that I will find God again.







The women think the forest is on fire, but we know it isn't. My wad of searing pine straw is bellowing out of my steel pheromone-masking tool. Inside the home, ladies engorge themselves with some of the sweet sourwood they have made, to build a new home once this one burns. We know otherwise.

A few girls are strung like lace amid frames. Holding one another hand in hand, leg in leg, festooning. Maybe, they are determining three-eighths of an inch so they can get by. Maybe, they are devising their own scaffolding to build upon their home. Or, maybe, we are wrong.





In 1963, a Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhist Monk, Thich Quang Duc, self-immolated in an intersection in Saigon. A picture of this event, captured by Malcolm Browne, won the World Press Photo of the Year award and later aided in his winning the Pulitzer Prize for reporting.

Gasoline chases my robes of bittersweet. Refine them as silver is refined. I am baptized in the tongue of your diatribes. Test them as gold is tested. Each prayer bead crested with a steady finger; they pass back to my chest. Hollow oaken eyes. Worn dun skin baking in the concrete heat of a Saigon intersection, bartering Buddhist prayer for a match to drop into the smithing forge. We are but iron and bronze, and lead is consumed by fire. Divinity brands my tongue but it tastes like week old bread and gutter water. Prayers graffiti brick from robes and black habits but the words are overborn by traffic. The bellows blow fiercely and my lungs do the same to fan the flames that refine me. I am not silver but some grasses still grow in the winter and surely there is a mine for silver and a place where they refine gold.



Sara Rowland

Self Portrait in Regret Emma Andersson

REGRETS FOR BEING GREEDY

Hot cocoa is boiling hot; I promise I know this. Why then, did I take a mouthful of Dunkin Donuts' hot chocolate without checking the temperature first? My tongue, palate and gum payed the price for four miserable days.

A FORMER KINDRED SPIRIT

I know it is your life; I have no say about it. However, you have strayed down roads we both used to say were disgraceful. I have known you for such a long time, but right now, I have no idea who you are. There is no trace of the girl I grew up with and had everything from water fights to walks in the city with. I regret not being there for you when this change began to root into your being. You did not deserve my kindness after all the things that you said and did, but I could have done something.

TO THE TWO GIRLS IN THIRD GRADE

A trio of girls has never been a good combination, I regret trusting you at all. The only thing you two wanted was to make me feel miserable. You succeeded.

TO THE GRANDPARENTS WHO DID NOT CARE The wine and whisky glass were too important, just like the packet saying Smoking Kills laying in your back pockets. After you two showed up disheveled and drunk on my sixth birthday party, you were no longer welcomed to our home. Grandpa passed and you, grandma, disappeared. Seeing you occasionally walking the city streets, I would say "Hi" without receiving any recognition. I regret that we are not closer.

REGRETS FOR NOT PUSHING AWAY AND SAY-ING "NO"

I do not see myself as a gullible person, but for some reason, I was at that moment in your room. So naively thinking that surely you did not expect such a step on our second date. Well, I was wrong. I should have pushed you off when you clearly did not register my retracting movements to put distance between us. You

kept turning my head. Why did I not do anything? I felt your heartbeat against my back and guessed that you were just as nervous as me, the only difference was that yours was of exhilaration. I should have just left. I wanted to scream at you, show you how violated I felt, but you would not understand; nothing came out. You stole from me, something that was not yours to take, and I will forever regret that I did nothing about it.

REGRETTING NOT READING YOU MORE OFTEN

You lovely lot of pages draped in wondrous words—I wish I had more time and willpower to open your covers more frequently. You so often manage to whisk me away, allowing me to wander like an outlander in strange lands. I am in grave need of your enthralling nature.

REGRETS FOR NOT GIVING ANOTHER HUG I am deeply sorry, grandmother, for not realizing that my last visit before returning to college, would be the last time I got to give you a hug. Deep down I probably knew, but foolishly I clung to the hope that you would be fine. You could not leave us now; you had just returned from the hospital. The food had started to stay in your body, giving you more energy. You were getting a new rollator, a smaller and lighter one since the former would be too clumsy and ruin the doorframes. The fridge was filled with the orange juice you had missed so much while being away, and you could finally sit in your favorite chair in the living room and read tabloids. You were feeling better. But then, you got worse and there was nothing I could do to make you stay.

REGRETS FOR NOT TAKING CARE OF MYSELF So many distractions. So much time spent on the wrong things. Such cleverly thought out justifications. The time to tend for my own wellbeing has officially arrived.

REGRETS FOR BEING A FOOL

Standing behind the light gray desk at work, I could not find that five-dollar fee button in the computer system. Having already disturbed my coworker numerous times, I did not want to ask another silly question. I ended up panicking and gave you the plastic card without the extra fee. You knew what I had done because I told you and

said that it was alright, that I would let it slide this time.

You came back a mere ten minutes later, claiming that the machine refused the card and that you needed to-kens instead. I named their price, but you hurriedly grabbed them, telling me that I could let it slide again, and then you had the stomach to wink at me. You probably thought that I was an unexperienced little girl: and apparently, you were right.

I felt so ridiculous.

REGRETS TO MY PILLOW

I really should sleep on you more often. Well, I do sleep on you, but not nearly enough...my brain needs a break.

REGRETS FOR BEING AWAY

When I called you, after that text from dad, it was the first time in a long while I had cried with someone else as witness. It was the first time since your dad's funeral that I had heard you cry. My dear mother, I have never so forcefully wanted to embrace you in a bone-crushing, full-out sobbing and trembling hug.

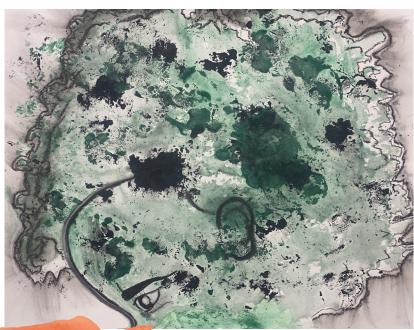
7 315 KILOMETERS.

4 545 MILES.

A far distance to put between a family when the loss of a loved one unsettles the order. Helplessly living across the Atlantic, unable to give physical comfort. I should have been there with you.



Tuck it away, let dust form layers like the cake that you never got for your birthday. Pretend like you are normal, don't show the cracks and crevices that allow the stories to pop up like weeds, put on your makeup, wear long sleeves and pants, don't let the world see that there is more to you. Don't let them see that you are complicated. Don't let them know the family secrets hiding in that untouched box in the attic. They don't need to know how you feel about the unwanted touches. They don't need to know when they swept it under the rug, dust would slowly seep back up through the woven fibers. You inhale it and it builds up in the lungs providing the soil for the weeds to thrive, but frustration overpowers the uninvited, radiating beauty of the flower, cut down by the blade of a lawnmower, swirling around only to be ejected with the rest of the grass. Rejected, rotting, and left to restore the land, hoping those that come after you are strong enough to survive, because your fight softened the soil for them.



Gaea All Natural Stephen Danvers



In my last seven seconds I want to remember ping pong balls glued to a string of christmas lights the slurred curse hurled at princess peach the squeaky couches and soft blankets the spicy ramen noodles I want to remember a deserted walmart parking lot at 3am the dent we got in my bumper on the way back the dark chocolate paired with raspberry wine the dim light from illegal candles



Page 15 Brooke Vecchio



There's a baby in my arms, a holy burden. He's dense. I sink into the khaki fake leather couch, straining my aching back to gently rock him. I feel his solid body stilling, but his dark eyes are wide and welcoming like an open door. The velvety gray blanket wrapping him intensifies his radiating body heat and warms my thighs. Weathered gray sweatpants, shrunken from years of washing and drying, expose my ankles just enough to allow the draft to slither up my legs, an icy serpent.

I turn to the giant window to my right, so massive it occupies an entire wall. Curse myself for sitting so close to it. A broken heater hangs tauntingly over the window, jeering at my chill bumps. Light leaks from the storage room to my left, infiltrating the dim room. All I hear is the faint snoring of babies and my own hushed singing.

A movement—the blanket wiggles, his left hand emerges and ascends to my face. He strains to tickle my pale chin. I let him. Tiny fingers, smooth and stocky, tenderly graze my skin. It's not working, but I keep singing. He's in no mood to sleep. Playfulness frolics in his eyes.

Two weeks ago, I may have been frustrated, insecure thoughts racing through my mind that I was holding him incorrectly, unfit to assess a child's needs. I would have turned his precious blanket into a strait jacket, securely rewrapped his arms to his side, rocked him harder and sang louder. The singular failure to put one child to sleep, a tiny snowball, would tumble down a mountain of insecurities, swelling in size and momentum before resulting in tearful acceptance that I won't be a good mom.

I thought a good mom could put a child to sleep swiftly, never failed to magically transform screaming tears into tranquility and always remembered when the next feeding was due. But my view was dangerously flawed.

A good mother rocks her baby to slay any dreads and discomfort that fight to thwart his sleep. She nestles him to her chest to steady his heartbeat, to teach him that some people are safe, to instill in him a capacity for peace.

He may not fall asleep to my singing and that's okay. The point is not that I can execute a flawless lullaby. The point is not that he can fall asleep sooner and get a little more rest.

The point is that he needs to know there is someone who will sing to him.

Someone who will
stroke his delicate head,
caress his plump cheeks,
scratch his smooth back,
meet his adoring gaze,
match his brutal love.

Someone who will sacrifice her own sleep so his sleep can be sweeter.







Is it as I remember itthe draw of vowels

hanging tight to my tongue, rolling off unto the foothills?

The vibrant pastures mile after mile, losing me

but the cold cement blocks of an eagle caging me in.

This place is what you make of it, its red hue glowing about from a single

red caution light, flashing the heartbeat of the town.

The quaint holy place sitting tall on a hill for all sinners to see,

the voices of singing saints echoing throughout the valley.

The town line wrapping you up as you enter,

unraveling as you move on. How quickly the smell of

fresh cut hay tickles the nose no more, and the mist of rain belting over the mountain

is no longer bubbling on my skin. Absence for what seems to pass quick as the water

flows from the flood gates, actually passes at the speed of a tractor on the four lane.

My eyes and ears may strive to remember, but my heart beats in a red hue. How quickly the smell of

fresh cut hay tickles the nose no more, and the mist of rain belting over the mountain

is no longer bubbling on my skin. The vibrant pastures mile after mile,

losing me but the cold cement blocks of an eagle caging me in.



Original Sin Sara Rowland

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I wanted to die today. You didn't answer but that's not new.

You didn't answer but how is that new? I said to the electronic ghost of you.

I used to talk to the ghost of you Back when I wanted you to love me.

Back when I needed you to love me, I didn't know what I wanted.

I didn't know what I wanted But I never wanted to feel alone

I never wanted to feel alone But I had to survive on my own

I have been surviving on my own But I wanted to die today.



In a literary sense, my name means *universal* or *whole*. The name is a condensed version of German names such as Ermenegildo and Ermene, making an even shorter name unlikely to find. In a way, my existence is as wide as the land seasonal birds have to cross to find their way back home. To be truly, purely, *whole* would be a delusion—a hoax I hope I never fall for.

Names of power: Aristotle, Einstein and Hitler lacked the worldwide recognition they now contain before the deeds of their bearers changed the world. Uniqueness and influence during and after their lifetime, awakened the vigor of their names. How could one ever make such a name for oneself when called *Emma*: the mere spelling is frightfully ridiculous.

Knowing somebody's name can be advantageous. A dog's name can be said out loud then answered fiercely by a happy soul ready to obey. A cat's might be acknowledged, if lucky, even respected. A person's name will gain attention, but the way it is used will lead to different responses. The voice of a lover, softly teasing with gentleness, or the harshness of a sister, who did not understand.

From first to sixth grade, I shared names with two others. Then, it increased to at least four. None remotely similar to the other, despite our names being the same. None were as beautiful as the first one, nor as fearsome amongst the boys as the second, nor as popular as the third, and no one was like me.

To a stranger—I am simply a character. They will lay their eyes on a somewhat short woman with a light-colored lion mane, a round monkey face and broad shoulders in her twenties—nothing to the world but a spender of carbon dioxide and stealer of oxygen. A blank canvas that will tell them nothing. "Hi, my name is *Emma*": what do they see now?

What my parents chose to name me, had yet to be used in the family. They simply *felt* how that name was

destined to be mine. For them, *Emma* is someone who smiles with the sun and the moonlight. She is someone who is as clever as a trap made for a fox; as controlling as her mother; and as stubborn as her father. She never fails nor disappoints and always aims to do her best. I wish I could live up to that image.

For me, it is the calmness after a storm at sea; lingering debris from sunken ships occasionally reaching the surface while the rest is safely kept hidden underneath. It is a brain that never quiets down. It is the flight of thought, contemplating the evolution of an eagle, to how wisps of air can move strays of hair from a shoulder. It is cowardice of intimacy. The red fear of love. The worn-down spines standing in a shelf. A bear's smile while running in the forest. A shaft with a head, stubbornly hitting a ball. The encompassment of hot water, slowly heating a pair of cold feet.

It is the name of books, of actors ruling the stage. It is soft and smooth, rolling effortlessly off any pair of lips. It has the color of the forest moss and the lightness of a newborn butterfly. The echo of emptiness capable of sending a cry far overseas. The name of a lost friend. It is a name you can shout out until I hear or whisper to me when I am near.

There is no certain exactness of character in a name—everyone is unique. I will never be like the three other *Emmas* I knew while growing up, just as they will never be like me. To them, I was strange. I chose to learn instead of pretending to know. I strayed like a pondering wolf in the background, watching mistakes so easily evaded be done while deciding what to do in a world that I was too old for. Never underestimate the lessons you can learn through observation.

There are two different kinds of names. Those you are born with and those you deserve after a time—either bad or good ones. A nickname, a loving name, a hateful name. Something that describes your capabilities as a human. My cousin gained the name of *intelligence*, I wish to someday do the same. Cinderella earned the name of *courage* as she dared to be nothing but herself. My grandaunt was named *kind* because of her helping

nature. I never met the woman, but grandma always spoke of her so fondly. Imagine earning the name of *kindness*. Wouldn't that be something?



Day Dreaming
Dominique Sharpe

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Sometimes I wish we could go back, before there were little clones of us stumbling from one room to another, just the five of us and the extra chocolate pie, secured with cling wrap in her refrigerator.

I wonder if you knew that you were always my favorite. My big brother, the coolest person I knew. I remember you sitting with me every other Saturday morning, two cereal bowls and the box of Corn Flakes, watching the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, letting me drive your go-kart, 4-wheeler, and your truck before it was legal, every time wishing, I could see you more.

I remember desperately wiping counters as dishes piled in the sink. A last-ditch effort to make the old, cluttered house presentable.

The aroma of turkey and dressing wafted through the house beckoning everyone into the kitchen. I always landed in the living room to eat instead of the table, where you were.

I didn't understand at the time why Mama always made an extra chocolate pie just for you to take home. I think it was her way of staying in your thoughts until the pie was gone.



Brown is for death, an apple sliced and abandoned to rot; Brown is for growth, the natural, the whole; A bay mare glistening as she bathes in the sunshine; Bitter sludge sloshing in a mug, remnants of a cup of coffee; Empty brown of boredom; copperhead coiled, deathly quiet as he waits; The brown of wadded tobacco topping an inflamed bee sting, nicotine to soothe the pain; Muddled confusion, ambiguity; too many paints married in hasty union; Brown is physical labor, days that feel like years; steadfastness, a firm foundation; Cinnamon swirling in apple cider;

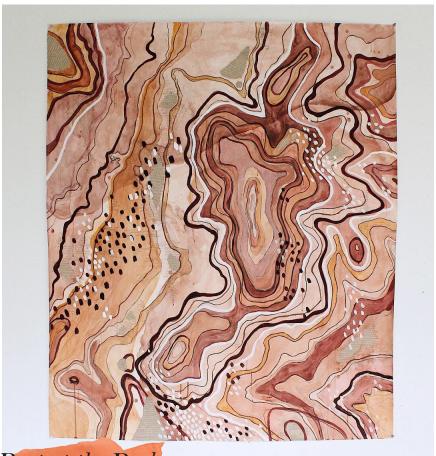
shame, nights that should have been spent in bed; Hot fudge, a mud slide down vanilla ice cream, warmth contending with the cold;

Brown sugar,

brown eyes,

brown bag

hiding brown liquor;



Protect the Parks
Josanna Rowe

Neptune is the Color of the Eyes I will Drown in, Devils don't Die and the Rings of Saturn are Singing Lullabies Jarrett Whitener

The air on Venus is toxic. I took a spaceship to land on the stars and the sun was so bright and orange begging me to fly into it. I haven't felt a warmth like that in years so how could I not? Fly into the sun... fly into the sun. How close could I get before the ship would melt? Light years away from Earth where you can be lonely and you could have company at the same time. My head is killing me. Is this a migraine? No, just a headache. No. My head is killing me. It has a gun pressed on the inside of my skull. Brain goop says words that tempt me to fly into the sun which is flaring up like an infection, a warm infection lashing flaming whips at me or reaching out for a handshake. My head hurts and I need a painkiller. Take one...no three. Take three and wash it down with dish soap, then water, then water to make sure I washed out all the bubbles. When I speak there are bubbles that are choking me Because they fill the hole in my throat. Spit clean vomit on the counter, the marble counter. Is it called an island because it is deserted in the middle of the kitchen where food gets thrown and tile walls are stained by spaghetti because we argued over how much garlic goes in it. Mom's recipe calls for a tablespoon. A tablespoon would make the difference all the difference and the food would be good, so good. I was right about the garlic but the spagnetti doesn't taste good when I am the only one eating it. Earth from space looks so peaceful. A blue ball with spots of mold and bacteria growing on the mold. And bacteria growing on the bacteria. I'm being kissed by the warmth of the sun and I still can't escape how lonely it is.



We are sincerely grateful to Jo Bearse for her generous support and her funding in honor of Danny Bearse, class of 1979.

From the staff of 2020, Thank you.



