

Trestle | CREEK | Review

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Note: An arrow (→) at the bottom of the page means no stanza break.

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Early Egress

a cloudful of white
halved into wispy blurs of mist
you slid softly away
emerging from the plies of flannel and wool
into the shiver of pre-dawn chill

arching like the fading moon-silver
you slither into soft, pale denim and silent poncho
with spectral shifts and reaches

but even you
sly as a pursuant wolf
spry as a snowshoe hare in flee
even you
could not evade
the telltale whispers
of pine-fir slat underfoot
even you
could not escape
the tireless criss-cross of daybreak rays
piercing the network of frosted panes
casting your fluid form across my wall

and no cover, however tightly woven,
is enough shelter
from that suffocating instant
somewhere between
the crackle of a young fire
and the shattering whistle of the morning kettle

Tang

Incendiary

Glass insides tinkle, swirling
 with a spoon—dust flutters
 in sunlight slats slanting through the room,
 spills through the powder dissolve,
 focused, diffracted, and shaded orange.

A crockpot loosens flesh from bones,
 softens potatoes. Mom mends
 on the broad, mahogany table.
 Her Singer's faint, tiny engines whir—
 needle threading stitches,
 the bobbin spins.

Dad's gone to war again, asleep
 in the muted bedroom. The Braves game
 on his old black-and-white almost hides
 dreams' muffled desperations.

I have faith

the astronaut on the label,
 framed in darkness and stars,
 is connected umbilically to something
 off-picture. Otherwise
 he'd be just atwirl in space.



Salish Sea Tarmac

The moon will never be so full as it is on this Salish Sea night, on a transfer flight back to Idaho. I am flying home from Fairbanks, from seeing my big brother Tony and his first son. I have nephew snot on my shirt. I'm wearing my cold-weather bunny boots. Tony's second child is due. Now.

My other big brother—Ian—lives in Seattle. I am desperate to get off the plane to find Ian. Yet I sit like a fucking toadstool inside the plane on the tarmac at Sea-Tac, looking at the big, monstrous moon.

My brothers, eighteen months apart, are no longer two-as-one, but have grown into separate men. We grew up near Seattle, on Bainbridge Island, surrounded by salt spray and pasture. Ian has only recently returned to the Pacific Northwest by way of Connecticut, then Massachusetts, then Georgia, then Idaho. He likes mountain bikes and history. Tony likes cold places and fish. I consider our family home to be in northern Idaho, but both my brothers would disagree. I no longer sit and look pretty for either. I still have the little sister complex.

I worry about my big brothers. Tony. Constantly about Ian.

Ian has multiple sclerosis. He has not been well. He has not talked to me for months. Our last phone conversation was strange. “Where is my passport, Renée? Can you find it?” “What is happening to you, Ian?” “What do you mean? I have MS.”

The questions haunt me. Ian did not talk to me for months before that. He did not talk to parents, nor Tony, for years before that. Then suddenly Ian reached out, and Tony helped move Ian from his faculty position at the University of Georgia across the country back home to recover in northern Idaho. Our parents opened their arms and gave him the rental house in which to live.

Then Ian left. Again. And stopped talking to all of us. Again.

I moved from New York City to Idaho and into the rental that had been saved for Ian. I touched the few things he left. I used his garlic press.

Dad mailed Ian checks; Ian cashed them.

For his December birthday, Mom sent Ian a box of special-order grapefruit. She had always given Ian huge boxes of Florida grapefruit. Sweet, bitter, tang.

A long-standing mother-son tradition. Fresh citrus in winter. Mom received a phone call from a local domestic violence coordinator. Ian told her to tell Mom not to send grapefruit. Mom pressed the speakerphone.

The lady said, “If he had a been my son, saying he didn't wanna talk to me, I'd a had leaved him alone.” I shook. Mental health in the hands of this voice. Mom looked stunned.

None of us could track what was happening. So slow. So fast. So unknown.

Ian phoned Tony's mother-in-law and father-in-law. Tony begged them to tell him when it happened again. They promised. Ian phoned over and over; they said nothing. After Ian's suicide, they will become a Greek chorus and say: We figured it—Ian's phone calls—didn't matter.

The woman from whom Ian rented a basement apartment will write to say, “If he had been my son, I would have been at his doorstep.” My mother never swears, never calls anyone a bad word. “Bitch,” Mom will say.

Everyone will be full of good advice. All of it will be bullshit.

But I failed him, too.

Inside that plane, on the tarmac near the Salish Sea, I inhabit the full mad moon, urge myself to scream, “Stop the take-off,” to get off the plane, to smell the salt spray, to find my brother Ian.

But I don't. I sit there, obedient. The moon will never be so full again.

My brother Ian kills himself the next day.

The day after his suicide, my brother Tony's second son Aghi is born. We find out about birth first, death second. Baby Aghi is born in the hours my brother Ian lies dead, yet unfound. Breath first, none second. A fire consumes me, burning inside out. I release belief—but not the dead. I release love—but not my brother. I grind down to the duff. The print of the dead.

Multiple sclerosis is not known to be hereditary. So far.

The smell of ash and lavender.

And the weight. The weight on my chest.

Remember.

∴: The first definition of the word *experimental* is of a witness: *having actual or personal experience of anything.* —Lance Olsen [[there.]]

The Occasional Smile

When I was a kid,
 I hardly smiled.
 At least
 That's what old Kodak photos indicate.
 I didn't appear to grasp the idea
 Of flashing a crooked, childlike grin then,
 So I could smile at the memory later.
 Instead, a perplexed look crossed my face,
 Which seemed to say:
 "That camera you're holding is a strange intruder,
 Don't you think?"
 Then again,
 What kid really comprehends the documenting of playtime?
 "Memorable" is not the word to describe stuffed animal conferences,
 Or impromptu "tea" parties with lemonade as a substitute.
 Those were commonplace activities,
 Inconsequential, as far as I was concerned.
 And I'll be the first to admit,
 I was a serious kid,
 Thinking a little too much
 And far too hard.
 I'm sure some therapist would have said:
 "It's not healthy for a child to have such a solemn temperament."
 That's probably true,
 But at the time,
 I didn't understand child stereotypes
 And just how I was expected to conform accordingly.
 Because of this,
 When I look back at my childhood in the form of color prints,

→

I can usually determine the emotion I felt,
 From the expression that was captured on my face.
 My favorite picture is one my aunt took.
 I was four years old.
 Two small braids hung like waterfalls on either side of my head,
 And there I stood,
 On the shore of a man-made pond in California,
 Proudly wearing a kitten t-shirt and pink, cotton shorts,
 My hand thrust into a paper bag full of stale bread:
 A peace offering of sorts
 For permission to tread on waterfowl territory.
 Feeding the ducks was my favorite thing,
 And you could tell:
 My head was tilted upward,
 With closed eyes and a contented smile.

Native Song

The Lowest Parts of Our Valley



Sculpture: *The Chief* by Smoker Marchand

The lowest parts of our valley are the holes we dig—
a mile, maybe two mile below.

It wasn't long ago that smelting smoke lingered on the hills
and choked all the green, seemed like every living thing

had to be scraped clean again—roads, rivers, fish gills,
even people had to be checked by the EPA.

Still, we bury ourselves in the ground
even though everything is back to green;

the money is where the holes are dug,
as far down as a man can go.

Sometimes parts of men don't come up from below;
their hearts are back where the money is,

sometimes their bodies, too; we pull out as much as we can,
then seal the tunnel shut 'til it becomes their tomb.

The Wall**Water Abstract**

I looked for you
 but mistook your name—
 missing, I suppose, even now.
 Somewhere, you are among
 fifty-eight thousand, two hundred seventy-two
 and counting.
 How can we still be counting?
 Without you,
 it would be
 fifty-eight thousand, two hundred seventy-one.

The people who made you
 made me—
 in that, we are the same.
 As my fingers trail
 along each dark panel,
 my reflection walks behind every name.

Maybe somewhere
 I will find you by touch,
 maybe somehow,
 engraved on my palm;
 instead of granite
 you are etched on my heart,
 and maybe now
 I can carry you home.



A Visit to the Aquarium

You shut your dirty mouth, Cuttlefish. You shut your dirty mouth and stow your judgment. Because your name alone—sounds like “cuddle,” right?—tells me everything I need to know. Your openness and emotional vulnerability ensure that you will never be without love. You have many friends who you count as close confidants. Your support network is as wide-reaching as the Pacific Fucking Ocean.

It doesn't hurt that you're cute, either. But this plaque says you take a new mate each spring and then ABANDON her once you're done fertilizing her eggs or whatever. Just like all the rest.

So leave me alone. You and all the other cute, likable, deceitful fish just leave me alone. Please.

And if I even so much as see an otter, I'm going to punch its fuzzy throat, so help me God. Frat boys of the ocean is all they are.

Last year, I read an article about an octopus. It lived alone in a tank, but its keepers had given it a Mr. Potato Head doll as, I don't know, some sick joke. But guess what? It absolutely loved that doll. It refused to ever give it up again. Wouldn't even put it down during feeding time. It would hold onto its Mr. Potato Head with one tentacle and eat with another.

And I read that and thought, there's a creature that understands loneliness. There's a creature that understands desperation.

But people like octopi. Lonely or not, that bastard's got a fan club. He might even be playing up the whole my-only-friend-is-made-of-plastic-and-shaped-like-a-root-vegetable thing for attention. I don't know. I'm inclined to take everyone at face value. That's my big fault. I'm too trusting. I've been burned before.

So what I figure I need is someone too ugly to lie.

In Panama, I went snorkeling along a coral reef. I followed close behind our indigenous guide who stopped from time to time to poke at sea life with a pointed stick for the amusement and edification of us gringos. Something that would never happen here, Cuttlefish. This is why scientific advancement in the first world has more or less come to a halt—lack of willingness to poke at nature with a stick.

We found a school of flat, brightly colored little fish. Nice, whatever. But just below the school, peering up at them with lecherous eyes and lecherous scales was a giant jagged torpedo of a creature, gunmetal gray and ninety percent teeth. Hideous. Our guide ushered us away. At the surface, he took off his mask. “Barracuda,” he said.

That's who I'm here for. Me and my bucket and my pool net, that's who we're here for. Back home, I've got a bathtub full of salt water. I've got a freezer bag full of guppies. I've got the 1992 edition of Encyclopedia Britannica, volume B.

We'll be all right, him and me. We'll be better off together. Alone together. And the otters of the world can have their party and dance and crack abalone shells on their adorable chests and invite all their friends and I don't even care. See if I care. Barracuda doesn't care. That's for damn sure.

So, Cuttlefish, if you'll kindly point me toward my destination, I'll be on my way. I'll leave you to your loving and your swimming and your cuteness and your happiness. I'll get what I came for and go.

Woodcut with Haiku



Stripper auditions:
Epic dance, strip, trip, and fall,
but the ears stayed on.

Sexting

We are two Indians in the same canoe.

Extremely dissimilar tribes.

*I was quoting the song, tell me how you think we're different though,
please.*

You're building cities into desert cliff faces and I'm stalking buffalo
through Yellowstone.

More.

You're dancing naked under purple and blue stars around a roaring bonfire
and I'm making a guttural chant buried under furs in the snow.
I'm staring at a smolder.

You're dashing across grassy plains with a herd of antelope.
I'm tiptoeing over granite bluffs in the night with a family of elk.
You've begun and I'm waiting to.

Tommy

Baby's breath in your pocket,
Soil under your nails.
Berry-stained mouth,
A feral child.
My nocturnal boy:
Asleep when I need him,
Awake
When I don't.

The Crab



Assisted

There is a huge hotel across the street from the place I work. It can be seen from the back window of nearly every resident's apartment. It seems a trivial thing, but it has an impact on the world of those so close and yet so far away. I have often thought that it was an unhappy idea to place these two establishments so very close together. They are on polar ends of the independence spectrum, the hotel being the very definition of freedom and the assisted living next door holding many restless souls.

I was helping Mary to bed the other day, and I saw that she agreed with me. Usually cheerful and optimistic, Mary was having a rough night. The whites of her eyes were visible all the way around her faded irises. She sat on the edge of the bed, and I struggled to free her legs, restricted in thick elastic TED hose to prevent thrombosis. This job always seems harder than it is; I could not help but subconsciously adopt Mary's labored, heaving breaths. It was less strange than accepting that they could come from one so still. "Stockings on steroids," I called her TED hose. It's the same joke every day, but she always laughs.

Tonight, she would leave the blinds open, she insisted. She stared at the green and blue lights from the hotel as if mesmerized, and moved a little closer to them and into a much more precarious position on the edge of the bed. My panicked hand suddenly on her arm to steady her brought her back from her trance. She said, "Look. They are free over there but we are stuck." Only at night when her confusion is the worst does Mary include me among the confined. Somehow I'm always a little flattered.

I like my facility. It never smells of urine as you walk through the door, and the residents are always clean. I have worked in many places, and I know that where I work now is a step above other facilities. It's the best in Coeur d'Alene, as so many of my residents have told me; their children found the best place possible for them. I enjoy my work, and yet I have always felt an aversion to assisted livings in general. It was curiosity that sent me to the place down the street. I was curious to know if my aversion was really founded in anything. Everyone I have heard speak on the subject has always said, "It's fine if you

choose carefully," and, "There are good ones out there," and yet I still wonder: Are my people really home? Can these places ever really be home? Is it just my whimsical nature, my desire to have Grannie sitting by a hearth reading to small children, that makes me discontent with what is really a happy arrangement?

I walked into the place down the road and told the smiling receptionist that I was writing a paper on assisted livings, and would it be possible for me to talk to some of the residents? Marveling at my own stupidity, I left the receptionist scowling and scraping her long orange nails across the counter and drove ten minutes to another facility farther into town. To its smiling lady I said that I was writing a paper on people of the World War II generation, and would it be all right if I asked some of the residents to tell me about their lives? The smile remained, and I was shown into the common area where a few of them were milling about. I was told that Bob would probably like to talk, that I would love Bob, that Bob was awesome.

The only man in the room watched me from the only angle his permanently-bent neck would allow. I had been prepared to spend some time establishing his level of lucidity, but it wasn't necessary. I could see the sharpness in his mischievous gaze. As I prepared myself to have a complete stranger focus on me with the kind intensity I have only ever felt from the elderly, two caregivers walked past on their way to call lights down the hall. Both saw Bob and extended loud greetings. Bob shook his finger at them as they passed, and they chuckled loudly. Well, now I knew who Bob was. He was well-liked. He was the popular one.

"My name is Elizabeth." I extended my hand, and he shook it hard.

"What can I do for you?" he said. His smile widened, and his eyes grew larger as he tried to force his vision through his bushy eyebrows. I leaned forward in my chair to arrange myself in his line of sight, and his eyes relaxed. I explained that I was writing a paper and flipped through my notebook to find the page of prepared questions, but he was off. "Well, you know I'm ninety-two."

I anticipated the response he wanted and gave him my best "No! What's your secret?"

“Yes! I’m too ornery to die!” he beamed with pride. I relaxed. I knew Bob, there was a Bob in every place I had ever worked. Bob rambled over his truly amazing life. He had been in the Navy. War was hell, and that is all anyone needed to know about it. He had had two wives and been a policeman. Back home he had bottles of spirits dating back to the prohibition. He loved old things; I was too young for him, did he mention that I was too young for him? Tee hee hee.

I could see that he was a happy man. He was at peace with his life. He enjoyed the bustling atmosphere of his facility. He made distinctions between home and his life there, but it seemed that he was proud of the life he had had and was happy to be where he was. As he talked with glee, directing me to the most important things to write down, a woman sitting a few yards away in a wheel chair groaned, “Just let me die,” in barely understandable words. It’s not an uncommon thing to hear in an assisted living, and I didn’t even process it for a moment. Bob didn’t stop his monologue, and the caregivers rushing about didn’t register it at all.

I watched the woman in my peripheral vision. She was drooling and hunched. Her black shirt was covered in skin flakes, and her lips were dry, cracked and bleeding a little. I knew her too. She would be dramatic and difficult to care for, two of the things that annoy caregivers the most. Later I thought about her as I finished my rounds at work. Out of curiosity I asked a coworker if he ever felt the likability of a resident was directly related to how well taken care of they were. I was writing a paper about assisted livings, I explained. He said, “Like Bea and Hugh?”

Bea is the person that makes the newbies feel like they can handle this job after all. She is full of praise and is in the delightful habit of forcing jelly beans on everyone who walks through her door. I remember meeting her for the first time when she had just returned from a hospital stay. I stood among chiming clocks and strings of bright, gaudy jewelry as she told me she was so happy to be back in her own bed, to be home. Bea was Bob: cheerful and loved. She was content, and it came out in jellybeans, her painted canes, and her beloved Facebook account. Hugh, by sharp contrast, felt the weight of the world in every boo-boo. His eyebrows were forever fixed into one worried line. The first day I worked I counted his pillows for him and showed him again and again the day of his

next doctor’s appointment marked on the calendar. As I left he gave me a black sharpie, and asked me to write my name on a battered empty tissue box. I later learned that it was the mark of the elect to have one’s name on the tissue box.

“I think so. Hugh calls for stupid reasons. It’s easier to take Bea seriously.” My coworker was nonchalant. I thought about the time Hugh couldn’t sleep and had shown me his purple hearts. I thought about the lucid look that came into his eyes along with the animation of his story. He had jumped from the airplane and landed in the trees. He shuddered, recalling the terror of seeing the enemy beneath his feet, but an air of pride had come over him, giving me a glimpse of his past, vibrant and powerful. But now he needed his pillows counted and he stared at the hotel across the street.

I returned to the facility in town a few days later to interview someone else and was shown to the door of an apartment belonging to a resident named Sue. Sue had jokes and quaint sayings cut out and taped to her door. “Whatever the question the answer is wine,” and, “Don’t look back, you’re not going that way,” among several others. I knocked on the door, and then opened it a little to peer in. Sue had not heard me, she was sitting in her wheelchair with a huge book on her lap, staring out the window with a mournful expression. I announced myself loudly, and her face lit up with excitement. “Look at this, dear,” she near-shouted and thrust the book into my hands with surprising agility. I tried to explain who I was, but Sue did not appear to be interested. “It’s Idaho’s history,” she told me. “It will help me with my book.” We went through half the pictures in the book before I was able to get out the reason for my visit. Her response was, “Well, I will tell you all about my life but not in too much detail. It’s all going in my book, see.”

I settled into a chair and looked at Sue. She was happy, animated and very oriented, but this was not the impression I had gotten of her from the door. I asked her to tell me about her book and watched her eyes start to glow. “It’s about my life,” she told me. “I was born in 1922.” Sue told me about her Swedish immigrant parents dying when she was seven, about accidentally killing one of the saddle horses the government kept on the family land when she was thirteen and all the nightmares she had had about them punishing her for it. She told me about

not knowing whether her sweetheart was alive or dead during the war, and being so poor when they lived in the Veterans Village that she used to eat the baby food when the baby was done. She showed me a map on the wall with red lines through every state; these were all the places she and her husband had traveled after he found a job promoting lumber.

I stared at Sue. I could not believe her energy. She bounced up and down in her wheelchair as she told me about her incredible life and spoke with the ease of someone much younger, the only indication of her age coming out in the repetition of stories she had already told me. “I don’t know if I will actually finish it, you know.” She stopped in the middle of a story about hobos in the park to return to the topic of her book. Sue smiled and said, “People don’t like a winner! And I have succeeded in everything I ever tried to do!” She was right. She had gone to university at seventeen, been a golf champion, learned Swedish on her own, and the room was decorated with beautiful paintings she had done herself. “I was always pretty, too. My hair never even went white.”

I swiftly directed my gaze away from her very white hair and said, “You should finish your book! Your life has been amazing!”

I knew immediately that I had said the wrong thing. Tears welled in Sue’s eyes, and she began to rock back and forth in the chair. I moved closer, ready to catch her and asked her what was wrong. “This can’t be the last chapter,” she sputtered and started to push her dentures back and forth with her tongue.

“It’s alright,” I said, feeling the lameness of the words as they came out of me.

“They tricked me.” Sue’s crying calmed but was replaced by a sharp bitter look. “They told me I would go home after this. They don’t know why I’m not happy and tell me to fly straight, but I just don’t know what to do anymore. I have always lived for them, and now it’s just me, and I don’t know what to do.” I squeezed her hand and asked her quietly if she had friends. “No,” she said. “Everyone is like kids again. We say, ‘Hi, do you want to be friends?’, but I’ve already done enough of that for one lifetime, and it’s hard. I always had my husband before, see.”

I was able to steer Sue to happier topics and was shown pictures of children and grandchildren all living in California, where assisted livings are very expensive. On my way out I wheeled her down to the dining room as she told me how ridiculous it was for anyone to have dinner at four in the afternoon and how now all of these old fogies would probably go to bed. She told me how much she hated to eat in the dining room, with all the people who drooled and could not feed themselves, because it was so sad.

As I drove away, I reminded myself that I did not know Sue’s family, but I still felt angry. Family is the first line of defense when it comes to problems that are not readily seen on the surface. I thought of Hugh and how he had complained of back pain for two months before he was finally taken to the doctor. It was discovered that he had two cracked vertebrae, but everyone had thought it was just Hugh being Hugh. Where had his family been? Bea and Bob are home, but the more delicate and less orientated need someone to tend to their needs that are not always visible or strictly physical.

I checked on Dorothy, one of my favorite residents, just the other night to find her sitting up in bed crying. She told me it was because everyone was gone and she had dreamed about what’s-his-name who had been the class clown. His plane had been shot down, and he was never found. She got a dreamy look in her eye as she said, “He must have been some kind of wonderful if we are sitting here talking about him at three in the morning.” Dorothy is beautiful; she has lived a life already; she has fought the good fight. She is a person, not a thing to be fed and cleaned and left alone at possibly one of the hardest times of her life, when the role of nurturer and protector that she has been perfecting for sixty years has been taken away, leaving her the needy one. Like so many, she will not be home until she is a person again.

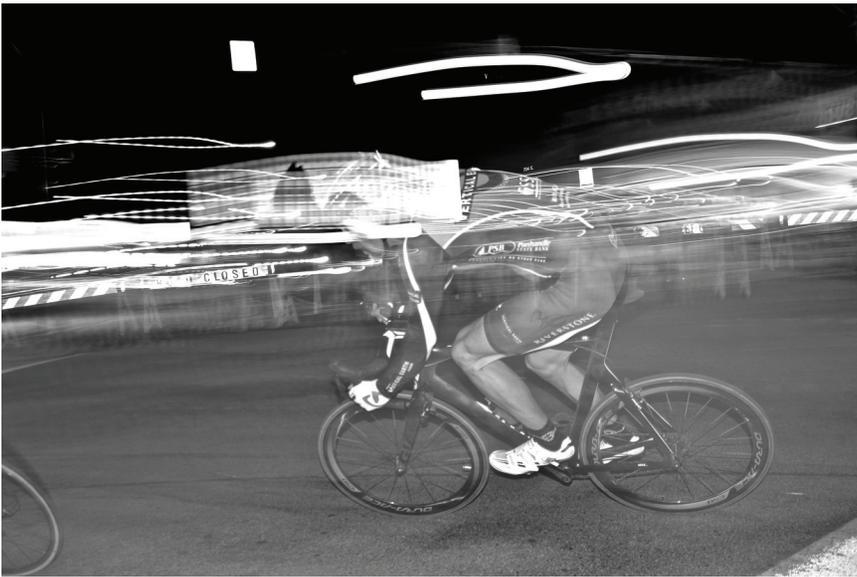
Los Coyotes**Ghost Pack**

Before the birth of dawn
 was peeking through
 the eucalyptus trees,
 I saw two yellow coyotes hiding
 in a small grove of shrubbery
 behind our house.
 It was as if somehow
 I was looking through
 the watchful, solemn eyes
 of a mother cow.
 When they thought
 the time was wide open,
 they would circle, yipping
 like untrained heelers,
 spooking our baby calves
 into a storm cloud of dust.
 After several invasions,
 a shot from my husband's
 .44 Winchester rang
 over their heads.
 They sprang off like
 out of a racing gate
 and into the shadows.
 I told myself they wouldn't
 be back, but I was wrong.

You never know
 when you will see one of
 these creatures of habit.
 Mostly at night they exist
 behind the thick patches of fog
 that roll in gradually and hover
 over the heart of your house
 after the public goes to sleep
 under the same dense cloud.



Making the Turn



Humans

Teeth gnashing, grinding—
 a primal hunger
 in our full and starving hearts.
 Insatiable to find reason—why
 and who and what to be.
 Craving to know what it means, what we are—a tidy
 chaos—a structured mess of
 hidden ligaments, filaments,
 flustered heartstrings, organs,
 and bones. Muscles and weakness—
 outward and subcutaneous.
 With spears and souls in hand, we
 hunt
 for it.
 Humans and the creases in our arthritic and able
 hands.
 Hands
 that raised
 civilizations and
 ethereal intentions from infancy.
 These hands
 nurtured from sands and stone temples
 steadfast. Enduring the fatal fall of countless at the
 call of God and gods.
 People—plebian and prophetic—fervently persist on
 insisting that we earthbound are lowly.
 We earthbound can never be holy.
 Are we not as wide as the sky?
 As fantastic as the dying star?

→

Miraculous minds meddled in
 madness, we discover and transcend.
 Acting in arrogance,
 harming and healing on whim our
 home and humanity.
 Stumbling to assemble and then
 to destruct.
 But we do create.
 Industry and machine
 raging sweetly.
 Building and moving, we
 are in the sea, in the sky, and we never stop.
 We give blood and bone and marrow—
 we give organ and eyes and skin.
 We give everything to life.
 Yes,
 we live meanly, gorging on the muscle of life.
 We burrow and bare
 our lovely bones—hesitate wholehearted into
 hurt. Our hands digging
 in each other's wounds while working to cradle the pain.

How can you verily deny that we are divine?
 Do not so definitively draw the line between
 earth and the heavenly divide.

That luminary sphere appearing nocturnally
 outside the atmosphere—pulls and drags.
 Magnetism calling to multitudes—the waves in rancor and
 resplendence—
 crashing.

→

I know the icy contempt—
 I know the warm content—
 of each droplet world of rain.
 Do not sermonize that this sky is not mine.
 We were meant for the earth—
 the soil—this soil—and its
 neighbors. Delving roots and celestial branches
 of immortal trees—mine, divine, and holy.
 All the colors we perceive in vivid, whispering, and
 visceral hues.
 Gazing starwards, we are embroidered into the
 universe.
 The universe
 splash,
 plashing in pieces upon our moon-eyed
 countenance—
 craning upwards with planets in our eyes and constellations across
 our hearts.
 Do not tell me we do not belong.
 With grace and catastrophe, are we not candescent?
 Feeling fire within through various passion, we alight.
 We are light.
 The soul inside is howling,
 what is holier than you and I?

Idaho Pet



Guinea Pig

Kevin had already sold his car. I told him not to. It wasn't even worth that much. He said every little bit would help. Besides he could ride his bike most places. Except it turned out there were plenty of places he couldn't ride his bike. I ended up driving him a lot. Like on the first guinea pig day. I would have driven him that day anyway. I didn't want him to go alone.

It was early when I got to Kevin's house and I didn't ring the doorbell for fear of waking his roommates. I went around to the back door and knocked "shave-and-a-haircut" like always. No answer. I tried calling his phone. It was cold out and clear. I pressed my face against his bedroom window to see past the glare. He was still in bed. The sheets were bunched up and I could see his bare legs and the back of his head. That was all. I thought about his greasy hair and how he wouldn't have time to shower.

I tapped on the window. Kevin didn't move. I tapped harder. He saw me this time. I watched him walk across his room and then out of sight. Then the door opened. He looked small with his shoulders hunched and nothing on except his boxer shorts.

Kevin: I didn't mean to sleep so long.

Me: You're going to get fired before you even start.

Kevin: I'm not sure it's the sort of job you can get fired from.

He dressed in a hurry. Black jeans. Black t-shirt with the name of a band. Gray sweatshirt. I had suggested he file for unemployment. He said he knew people who did this for a living. They owned a condo.

I drove slow and got us lost once on purpose. Kevin didn't seem to notice. I punched him twice for out-of-state license plates. He wasn't playing and I stopped. Nothing is fun when you're worried about money.

The first floor looked like an office building with a lobby and a security guard. Kevin signed in at the guard's desk. I took a pen with the company logo printed on it. The second floor looked like a hospital. Across the street was a funeral parlor. I pointed toward the window.

Me: There's a funeral parlor across the street.

Kevin: Don't say things like that.

He filled out forms on a clipboard and I read the worst parts from the waiver out loud. Possible side effects include nausea and vomiting and dizziness and headache. There is a slight chance of a pulmonary embolism. There is a slight chance of septic shock. There is a slight chance of kidney failure.

Kevin: How slight?

Me: There's a thirty percent chance you'll be in the control group if you're selected.

Kevin: I thought it was a fifty percent chance.

Me: No. It says thirty.

Me again: It says you get lasagna for dinner the first night. And pancakes for breakfast.

Kevin: I like pancakes.

Other people came into the waiting room. They too were given clipboards and they sat hunched and concentrating. I flipped through back issues of *Vogue* and *Newsweek*. I put my hand on Kevin's knee. He looked nervous and I thought about how he hadn't eaten anything before we left. I hoped he wouldn't pass out.

Me: It says you don't get paid unless you finish the entire study.

He put his hand on my knee so our arms crossed in the middle. No one else in the waiting room was being cute. They were all just there to do their job.

We'd been together since June. He'd been out of work since August. At first it didn't seem so bad. He'd only recently started asking questions. Will you stay with me if we can't go see movies? Will you stay if we can't go out to eat? Will you stay if I can't pitch in for gas? Will you stay if I have to sell my body to science?

I never thought he was joking. I said yes to each one.

This was October. I told him not to worry. He told me I didn't know what it was like to be with someone who can't find a job. I offered to lend him money. He told me I didn't know what it was like to be with someone who couldn't stand on his own two feet. This is a twenty-four-year-old's concept of manhood. I didn't try to correct him. It's not like I knew so much better.

There was a digital clock with big green numbers on the wall. There were no other decorations. A woman with a stethoscope around her neck called Kevin's name and signaled for him to go through a door marked *Exit*. He did as he was told.

I waited. I read some more magazines. I watched people come in and take clipboards and have their names called. Everyone kept going in the *Exit* door. A man came in with a little boy. The receptionist gave the man a clipboard and asked the little boy if he wanted crackers and apple juice. He said yes and thank you. The receptionist smiled and opened the apple juice can before handing it to him. I imagined someone would probably get Kevin crackers and juice if he passed out during his blood tests. Everyone seemed nice enough.

It had been over an hour. I watched the *Entrance* door and expected each person who came out to be Kevin. I thought about asking the receptionist to check on him. It didn't seem like something I should do. This wasn't a real hospital. So I waited some more. I drew a picture of a rabbit on the back of my hand with my new pen. I tried to sleep sitting up. Another hour passed. I thought about how I'm always doing stupid things for boys I like.

Kevin insisted he couldn't afford another month's rent. Will you stay if I have to move back home? I printed out ads from Craigslist I thought he might be qualified for. Regular jobs. Same kind of jobs he said he'd always had. Bartending or retail. He worked at a hardware store before he got laid off. He never liked that job anyway. I don't know if he replied to any of the ads. I didn't ask. I worried about being too pushy. I called his mother and she said he'd always been this way. Stubborn. She said to let him figure it out on his own.

This was him figuring it out on his own. I wasn't sure what he was trying to prove.

I was convinced they were harvesting his organs. The chairs in the waiting room were plastic and I couldn't stay sitting up straight. I stood. I sat down. The man and the little boy were still in the waiting room as well. I smiled at the little boy. He smiled back. I asked the man if he had been there before. He nodded without looking at me.

Me: Does it always take this long?

Man: Does what always take this long?

Me: I'm waiting for someone. I'm starting to worry about him.

Man: It takes as long as it takes.

I told the man I'd be happy to keep an eye on his little boy for him when his name got called. The man said the little boy could look after himself just fine. I thought about how I'm always trying to take care of people who don't actually need to be taken care of.

The big clock said one more hour. What if this was the experiment? How long will girlfriends sit in plastic chairs? I couldn't stay still anymore. I didn't want Kevin to come out and find me not there. But I didn't want to be part of someone's science project. I stood up again and walked out.

It was warmer outside. I took off my sweater. I folded it and put it on the grass underneath my head. Power lines buzzed over my body. I read something once that said living near power lines causes cancer. I thought about how it seems like everything causes cancer. These people were trying to cure cancer. Or something just as serious as cancer. Was cancer one of the side effects? I couldn't remember.

Will you stay if I get cancer? It seemed like a joke. Or a trick.

The front doors to the building were glass and I tried to look inside without moving my head. I could only see into the windows on the top floor. They had bunk beds in them. They made me think of a college dormitory. Or maybe a minimum-security prison. I felt guilty for being so free out on the grass in the bright daylight. I felt guilty for having a job and money when Kevin didn't. It gave me power in certain ways. But then it gave him power in other ways too. It gave him the power to ask just how much I'd put up with.

The sun made it hard to look at anything for too long. Even sunlight causes cancer. I thought he might be dead even though I knew he wasn't. Had he listed me as his emergency contact? Something could have happened to him and I wouldn't even know it. I didn't want to go back inside to ask.

Will you stay if it means coming back here?

A wasp hummed near my legs. I tried to hold very still. I watched the front doors and willed Kevin to walk through them so we could go home. The wasp settled on my sneaker for a second. I didn't breathe. It didn't stay. I concentrated on the doors. Finally they opened and it was Kevin. He carried his sweatshirt and had a band-aid covering a cotton ball stuck to his left forearm.

I waved. He smiled and jogged over to the grass.

Me: How did it go?

I wanted him to point to his arm and shake his head and tell me how everything smelled like antiseptic and everyone looked like a zombie. I waited for him to say we should leave and never come back. I waited for him to say let's figure something else out together.

Kevin: It was okay.

I nodded.

Me: You could get another job. There are a lot of things you could do. You just need to give it more time.

He shrugged as if it was all the same.

Kevin: Or I could just do this.

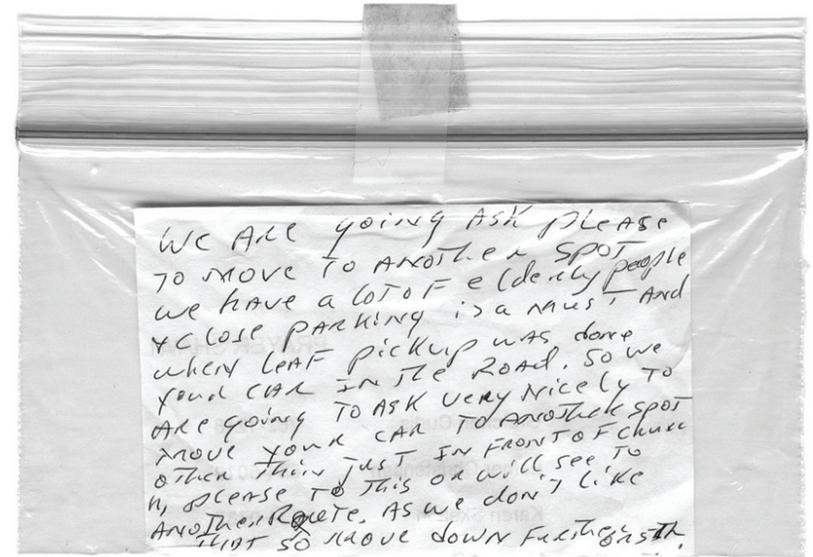
It was like he was testing me.

Found Items

Whether it is a snapshot of the kitchen to use up the last frame in a roll of film or a sticky note with a new word to remember for an English paper, we document daily life in our steps between an idea and a finished product. The remnants of this documentation are often discarded or lost in the transition to our end goal. The pieces that follow are a collection of such items, gathered over years. Presented here, they offer a glimpse into the space between someone else's start and finish line and bridge the gap between beginning thoughts and the refined work in the rest of this publication. With each significant found item comes a humbling insight reminding us that our lives are not the only ones in a stressful, confused, joyous rotation around the sun.

—D.C.

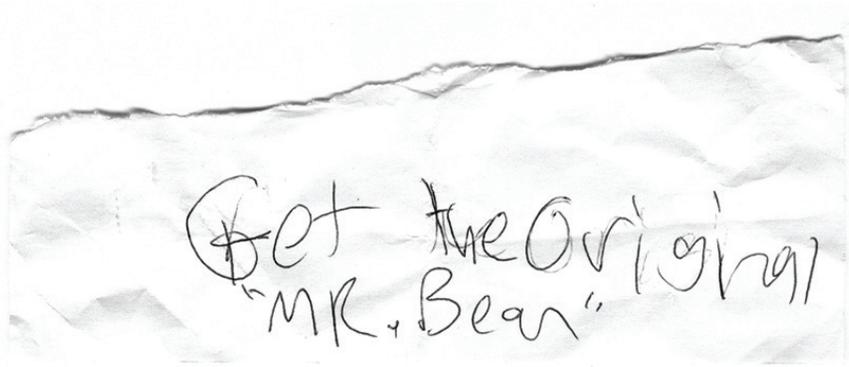
[We are going to ask please]



taped to car

We are going to ask please
to move to another spot
we have a lot of elderly people
& close parking is a must and
when leaf pickup was done
your car in the road. So we
are going to ask very nicely to
move your car to another spot
other than just in front of church,
please to this or will see to
another route. As we don't like
that so move down further on 5th.

Mr. Bean



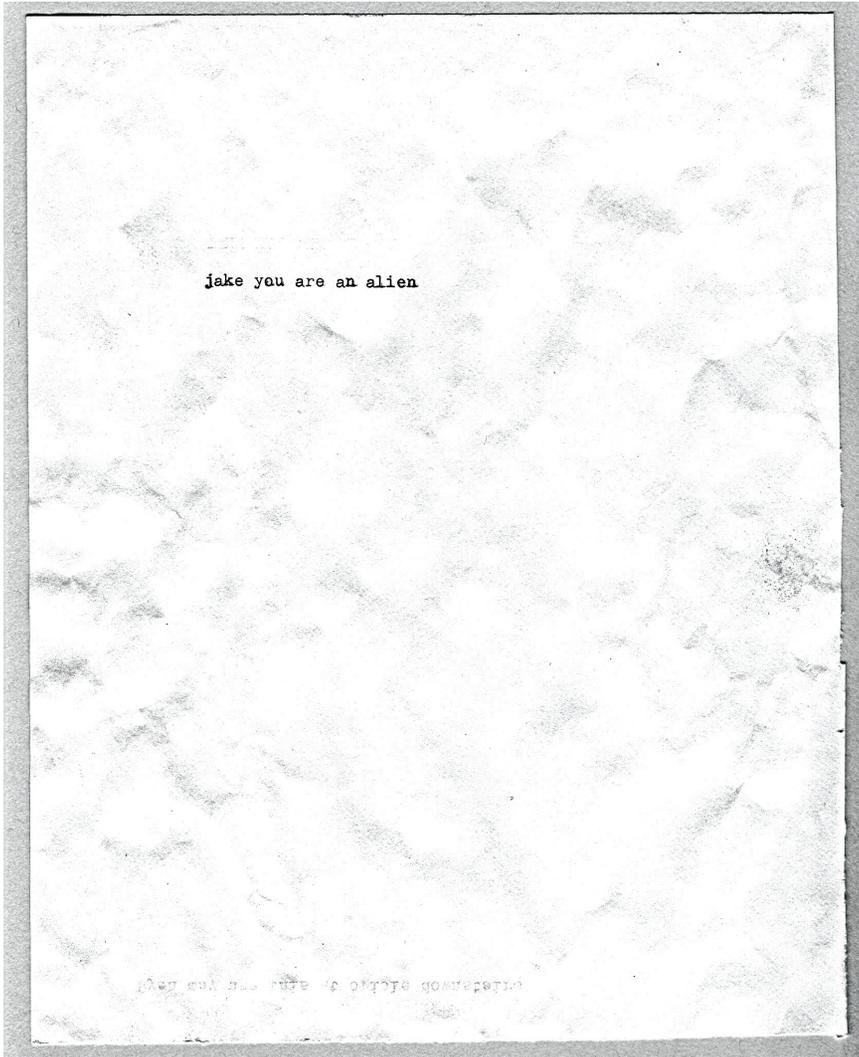
tucked in empty binder pocket

Triptych



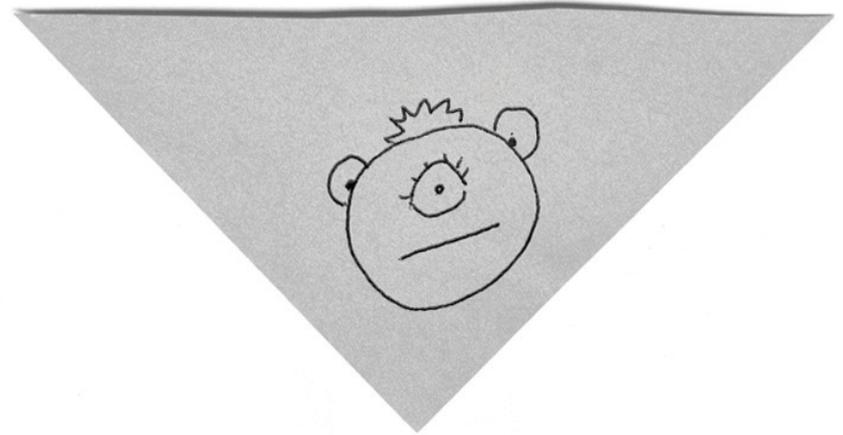
bookmark in used book

Memo for Jake



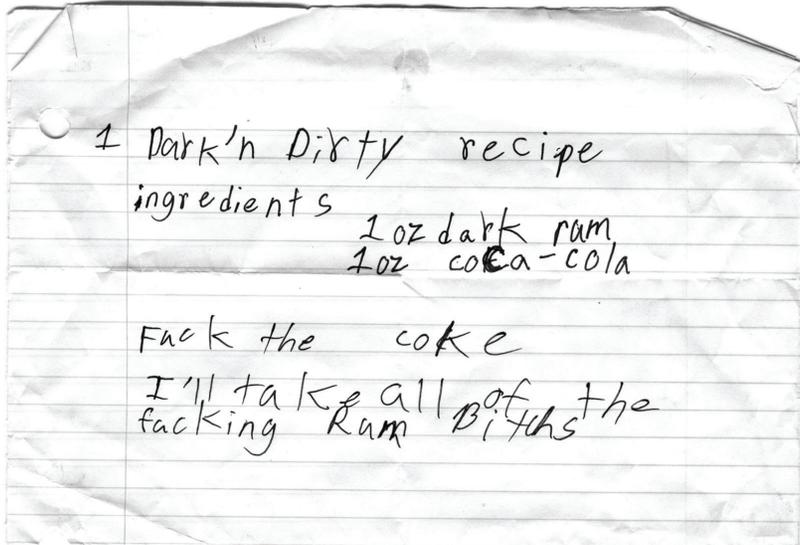
left in unattended typewriter

Cyclops



doodled on TCR flyer

Dark 'n Dirty Recipe



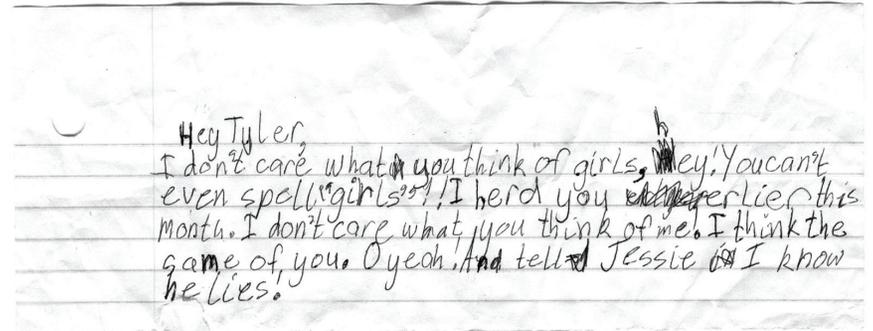
crumpled in junk drawer

1 Dark 'n Dirty recipe ingredients

- 1 oz dark rum
- 1 oz coca-cola

Fuck the coke
I'll take all of the
fucking Rum Bitches

Tell Jessie I Know He Lies!



in discarded notebook

Hey Tyler,
I don't care what u you think of girls, Hhey! You can't
even spell "girls"! I herd you erlier erlier this
month. I don't care what you think of me! I think the
same of you. O yeah! And tell J Jessie in I know
he lies!

Contributors

Joshua Blakley is twenty-three years old, and is from Cincinnati, Ohio. He is currently attending North Idaho College in the Graphic Design program. He works at IEGA as a Parkour/Freerunning coach in the program that he helped start from the ground up. He also works at the Circling Raven Golf Club, as a Guest Service Rep, where he met his lovely girlfriend of five years. He enjoys doing photography, backpacking, mountain biking, and videography, anything outdoors. His goal is to travel to many different countries and get the most gorgeous photos while doing so. Of course he would like to have a steady job doing what he loves to do, and that is to create, move, and travel. So far, he is doing that.

Danielle Combs attends NIC and works with teens and young adults. She currently lives in her brother's basement, and her favorite food is chili.

Renée E. D'Aoust's first book *Body of a Dancer* (Etruscan Press) was a ForeWord Reviews Book of the Year finalist (memoir). Recent publications include *Assay*, *Ballet Review*, *Rain Taxi*, and *TriQuarterly Review*. Recent honors include a Notable Essay listing in *Best American Essays* for a piece published by Trestle Creek Review. D'Aoust is an adjunct online instructor at North Idaho College. For more information, please visit: www.reneedaoust.com.

David Harker is a head-in-the-clouds graphic design student with feet firmly planted in North Idaho dirt. For twenty years, David ignored the call of the graphic arts while pursuing a worthless career in a totally unrelated field, which should probably not be mentioned in this short biography. It was hotel management. At age forty-one, David finally decided to answer the lifelong call and enroll in NIC's Graphic Design program. As of Spring 2015, David is only six classes away from earning his AAS degree. David enjoys the life of a happy Head of Household with his wife and son in Post Falls.

Lainey Hubbs is a student studying English at NIC. You've probably seen her sprinting across campus. She's really just trying to set a personal "arriving to class at a reasonably late time" record. She hopes to become a literature teacher in the future, which means four more years of sprinting to her favorite kind of classes. Wish her luck!

Emily Jannings-Thomas is a Portland transplant from northern Idaho. She primarily works in watercolor and gouache with a focus on figurative works of the everyday.

John Jensen is a North Idaho College alumnus (1987) and an advisor to the NIC Philosophy Club. After receiving his Philosophy MA from the University of Idaho in 2005, he has been teaching philosophy, speech, and English courses at NIC. John has always been fascinated by the struggles of the human condition and enjoys exploring those topics in his philosophy courses at NIC. He has a lovely wife, three wonderful step-daughters, and a faithful feline sidekick named Flopsy, who loves eating the flaky seed coatings inside pistachio shells.

May Jordan served in the Marine Corps during the Vietnam War. She has a bachelor's degree in English from Fresno State University. She published her first poetry book, *Dreaming of Horses*, in 2006. It is an account of a painful childhood abduction of her brother and herself in the summer of 1964. She's working on a second edition, an ebook of *Dreaming of Horses*. Also, she is working on a second book of poetry titled *Los Coyotes*. Her poems have appeared in *Loss Journal*, *Clarkstreet Review*, *Plato's Tavern*, *Penwood Review*, *Trestle Creek Review*, and *Clements Garden Club*.

Clark Karoses is a former MFA student from the University of Idaho. He lives in Coeur d'Alene now with his two kids, Maggie and Quinn. He writes from time to time, and teaches, and studies yoga.

Leyna Krow is an English instructor at NIC. Her fiction has previously appeared in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *Prairie Schooner*, *South Dakota Review*, *Santa Monica Review*, and other publications. She has an MFA in creative writing from Eastern Washington University. She lives in Spokane with her fiancé and a dog.

Annalise Luttrupp is a graphic design student at North Idaho College. Annalise was born in Washington, and moved to Idaho in 2004. She enjoys outdoor activities and is a movie buff. In the summer of 2015, Annalise hopes to get an internship that is challenging and will push her design skills to the next level.

Andrea Nagel is a writer and photographer with a passion for the Northwest. She loves the outdoors and animals, good food, wine, and time with her husband, family, and friends. Some of her hobbies include running, blogging, reading, and photography. See more of Andrea's work at StuckinNorthIdaho.com.

Kyle Nagel is a husband, brother, triathlete, and the unofficial poster child for adult ADHD. He moved to Coeur d'Alene with his family from Boise seventeen years ago and has only tried to leave once. He married his high school sweetheart five years ago, and they started a business together (StuckinNorthIdaho.com), which he admits is more like a really cool hobby. After burning out at Boise State University in 2007, Kyle went back to school as a non-traditional student at NIC. He has also worked at Biolife while going to school for the last three and a half years and is excited to graduate this spring with an AS degree in business administration.

Quincee Nuffer is currently a student at NIC in pursuit of an English degree. She is definitively a Harry Potter fan, but shouldn't be categorized as a fanatic. Quincee also loves Tolkien, and... well, it wouldn't be friendly to ink-efficiency to go on about all the books she is fond of. She grew up wild in the wild of central Idaho with sisters and animals.

Meagan Pattis is an alumna of NIC, and she lives in Coeur d'Alene. In recent months she has started painting. She picked up a brush in August and has made it a daily routine. Her motivation for painting became animals, especially other people's. She began to post paintings of different pets on social media. People started requesting more paintings, and she began to give away weekly giveaways. She gets so much pleasure from her new hobby as well as helping others receive paintings that are special and unique for them. The painting published here is one of her most recent portraits. It is of a pet that has passed named Robot.

Alyssa Schmidt is a graphic design major, who graduates in May 2015. Her main objective with graphic design is to convey a story without actually telling it. She believes that, as Chuck DeLaney says, "We are moved by photographs. Photographs become icons of our lives, the way we remember our children, our friends, and our experiences. Photographic images teach us about the world, influence who we admire, and show us what we can't live without." With this in mind, Alyssa plans on making an impact with graphic design.

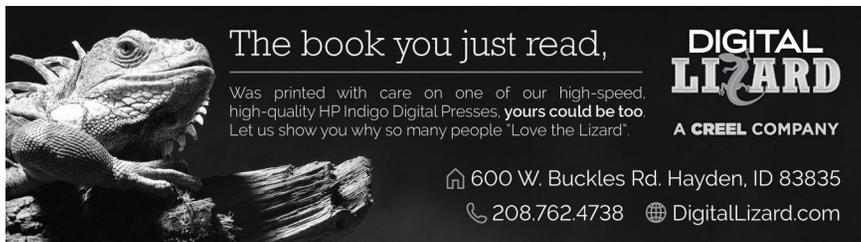
Sam Smith just completed her freshman year at NIC. She likes listening to Father John Misty, she thinks about the Grand Canyon a lot. Her favorite book is *Just Kids*, her favorite color is white, and her favorite roommate is Maria.

When **Aubrey Stribling** discovered that poets have day jobs, she became an accountant's bookkeeper, putting her BA in English and time teaching in China to no practical use. She occupies her brain cells with songwriting, painting, reading, running, and (let's face it) television.

Elizabeth Tardiff is a student at North Idaho College.

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welcomes submissions of any genre of literary or creative work for its 2016 issue. Submissions of poetry (3-5 poems per submission), prose (5,000 words maximum), or black-and-white artwork (any style or medium) may be sent via email. We consider work by any member of the North Idaho College community—including students, faculty, staff, and alumni—and by residents of Idaho's northern five counties.

No previously published work can be considered, but simultaneous submissions are welcome. Please include a brief bio with your submission. More information and complete submission guidelines are available at our website, www.nic.edu/tcr. Submission deadline is **January 31, 2016**, for May publication.

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