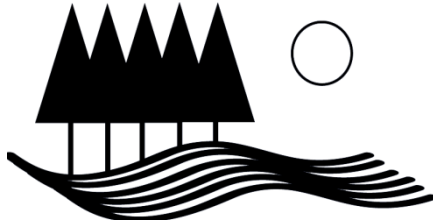


# BLACK RIVER REVIEW

A Journal of Poetry, Prose, and Fine Arts



Jefferson Community College  
State University of New York  
Watertown, New York

Volume XXXIV  
Spring 2024

## EDITORS & JUDGES

Christine Pristash and Michael Avery, *Co-Editors*

Erin Kuhn, *Art Editor*

Roy Romano, Josh Dickinson, and April Schmidt, *Literary Judges*

Josh Dickinson, *Literary Editor/Proofreader*

Lucinda Barbour, *Art Judging/Layout*

Jess Leigh, *Online Editor*

## COVER ART

Olivia Mae Cratsenburg

**A Change in Perspective**

(colored pencil)

Opinions expressed by the authors and artists do not necessarily reflect those of the editors or of Jefferson Community College.

## SUBMISSIONS

The editors seek original submissions for the *Black River Review* in the following categories:

**Poetry:** Up to 5 poems, not to exceed 50 lines each

**Fiction:** Up to 2 short stories, not to exceed 1500 words each

**Non-Fiction:** Up to 2 essays, not to exceed 1500 words each

**Plays:** Up to 2 one-act plays, not to exceed 1500 words each

**Artwork:** Up to 4 works in the original medium, such as black ink or charcoal drawing, computer graphics, b/w photographs, even if printed from color film

**Music:** Up to 2 compositions 16 or more measures in length

Only submissions from Jefferson Community College students (full or part time), faculty, staff, and alumni will be considered. Cash awards for outstanding work will be awarded.

Submitting and presenting work:

For *Black River Review* submissions, include name, address, phone number, and status (i.e., staff, faculty, student, alumni with grad class year) on each submitted work as well as a biographical note of thirty words or fewer when submitting. See <http://www.sunyjefferson.edu/brr> for submission information. All submissions become the property of the *Black River Review*; submitted works will not be returned. However, after first publication, all rights revert back to authors.

Award recipients are encouraged to participate in the reading of works and presentation of awards during the *Black River Review* unveiling in Spring 2024.

**Deadline for Volume XXXV:** February 14, 2025

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## CREDITS

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## Michael Avery

### Introduction

The *Black River Review* is back again. The unveiling of our beloved journal always happens after the long winter, which wasn't as severe this year, and the North Country is on the verge of seasonal change as I write and look forward to both spring followed closely by summer.

This year's issue is not to disappoint. Filled with the frankness of nonfiction, the music of poetry, the surprises of creative storytelling, and the immediacy of art, this year's *Black River Review* contains many works located in nature. Poems that speak of rivers, trees, and seasons, much of it located right here in our North Country, sing of our natural world. Many of the art pieces complement this subject, with images from the outdoors.

But even in our celebration of our local, natural world, artists reach out and remember more: a portrait of Frida Kahlo, among others, a longing for New York City and its famous Central Park, and an homage to Hemingway!

And still there is more. Other works delve into mental health, beginnings and endings, and growing up and breaking out. We are reminded through the fine arts that life is a collage of hopes and dreams, fears and courage, and reflection and remembrance. The contributors in this year's collection are committed to carrying the responsibility of sharing emotion and ideas through representation.

We hope you enjoy this year's edition of the *BRR*. Turn these pages as we turn to another year of hope and promise.

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**Olivia Mae Cratsenburg**  
Frontispiece: Piper Mae

**Glenn Erick Miller – WINTER**

11:02,  
December—  
The gray night already  
is too much.

Must  
and  
do  
and  
be.

Movies in the morning.  
French toast at midnight.  
All is topsy-turvy.

Another  
I  
my  
and  
I  
father.

Another  
father  
do  
and  
be  
I.

11:03,  
December—  
Total black  
Is sometimes a blessing.

Must



and  
do  
and  
be.

Candles at lunch.  
Coffee before sleep.  
Topsy-turvy 'til spring.



**Rachel Filkins** – Otter Creek in December

## Melisa Gibbs – A Work of Heart

*“Nursing isn’t just the science of medicine and following doctor’s orders. Nursing is a work of heart, one in which our greatest impacts on a patient’s life are not the medications we administer, but in the ways, we treat them most human.”*

I vividly remember my favorite professor’s voice as she stood in front of our graduating class and spoke to us with a tone that seemed both pleading and stern in the same breath. It was the cornerstone of most of her lessons, and at least once a week she would remind us about this, usually when we were going over our reflection paperwork for clinicals. I spoke the mantra; I figured it fell in line with the usual reasons people tell you they go into nursing: to help people. Of course, I wanted to help people, so obviously that was ingrained into my heart.

As I move around the halls with my vitals machine, complaining out loud to the other night nurse working with me about our hand-me-down equipment, I do the usual routine. At precisely 6:30 pm I clock in, go to the computer, and look up my patient assignment, write down the important things in this perfect little diagram I’ve come up with on the computer and take a few sips of my iced coffee to get into the mindset of a psychiatric RN. The noises around me are a cacophony of wild laughter, angry screaming and sobs as a patient blames her mother for having her committed. The usual. I hear Reggie say something along the lines of “Great, another thug who should be in jail”. When I see the name on the roster, I don’t recognize it, but I’m still a new nurse to this hospital and haven’t learned the “frequent flyers” yet.

My first introduction to this patient is Reggie walking me to the back where all new and/or acute patients and known aggressive ones are held until they’ve earned their way to the front section of the unit. This patient is massive compared to me at only five-foot-nothing, has arms thicker than my thighs and an expression that can only be translated in a long string of expletives even I am a little hesitant to put into legal documentation in Meditech. Reggie introduces me, the patient cusses at him and threatens to assault him in the same motion he gets up out of his bed with fury in his motions. I’m not quite sure what to do other than to look up at this man who towers over me and remember something my Mama always taught me: kindness is as simple as a sandwich.

“Are you hungry?” I ask where I stand in front of Reggie, who is ready to call security.

I don’t think he knows how to take this, because he stops walking menacing toward us at the door and just blinks down at me. Brows furrowing, he says, “What did you just ask me?”

I smile at him, as Southern women tend to do in any given situation, and again repeat, “Are you hungry? I know it was meatloaf on the menu tonight; I’ve seen it, and it gives me the heebie jeebies, but the café is still open to staff. I could go down and get you a sandwich, on the premise you quit acting like you ain’t got manners.” I continued into the room with my vitals machine despite the other nurse telling me to just leave. “Now sit so I can get your blood pressure and temperature; I can’t give you any medications until I have your vitals and I’m not leaving the unit for a sandwich until I make sure all of my patients are at least breathing.”

Reggie is more startled than I am when the patient barks out a laugh and holds up his hands. He smiles at me, saying “You’ve got some balls to come in here telling me I have no manners, but alright, let’s see what else you got, pint-size.”

At this point I’m able to get my vitals, he sits there watching me in a way that reminds me of some predator assessing a threat, but I pay no mind.

“You really gonna get me a sandwich?”

“I said I would.”

“People say shit all the time, hardly ever back it up.”

I look at him then, see the shift in his aura, hear it in the slight octave change of his tone. He’s been hurt by broken promises, I’m willing to bet. “I have to finish getting vitals and then do my medication pass. I’ll save your meds for last and then come back here so we can sit and talk. It won’t be until after nine, but I’ll get your sandwich now and put it in the fridge.”

He doesn’t say anything in response, just watches me, and I know this is where I either put my money where my mouth is, or I sow distrust and breed animosity. I do go and get that sandwich, which I hide away because we aren’t supposed to be giving the patients stuff that doesn’t come up on the carts, but when have I ever followed the rules over my instincts?

It’s almost eleven by the time I get back to the patient, between an admission and then having to deal with the usual sprouting of patient problems, and when I find him in his room, he’s lying with the blanket over his head in the dark. I figure he’s asleep or

doesn't want to talk, so I'm not going to bother him and choose to set the sandwich down on the table beside his bed, intent on leaving.

"You actually brought it?"

"I said I would."

There's silence for a solid thirty seconds before I hear him shuffle in the bed, sitting up at the edge. "Bitches lie, you know." I pause where I stand and tip my head thoughtfully. "Well, I don't lie, but I'll own that first part."

Again, he laughs, lifts the sandwich and takes a bite. He watches me with another pregnant pause before putting the food down and lying back in the bed, looking up at the ceiling. "Aren't you afraid I'm gonna put you through the wall?"

I shrug. "I'll get to go home early at least."

"I like your tattoos. And your hair color. My sister was into that stuff."

"Is she still?"

"She's dead."

There's such a darkness to his voice that I can't help but wince. "You guys were close?"

"She was all I really had once Mom overdosed. Don't know who my sperm donor is."

Choosing a place of soft curiosity, I say, "It doesn't sound like life's been kind to you. Is that why you come out of the cage snarling before anyone else can kick you?"

He doesn't say anything at first, but turns his head to look at me, holding eye contact and searching my features for something. When he does finally answer, it's in a tone much less aggressive and standoffish than in hours prior. "You ever felt like you got knocked down and now every time you try to get up, someone else kicks you before you can even take a breath?"

The patient proceeds to tell me about his life growing up, about his incarcerated father and his drug-addicted mom who always left him alone to take care of his younger sister with no help. He told me about her, his little sister, and how beautiful she made his world. He'd turned to selling drugs to take care of her, put her through school and give her a better life. His "partner" had raped her, and shortly after finding out about his secret life, she had taken her own life. He has blamed himself all this time and continues to live a life of crime because he's not worthy of anything more and thinks about suicide himself. He cries, hiding his face under his arms at one point. By the time he is finished, it's almost 2:00 am.

When there is silence for more than a minute, I know he is finished.

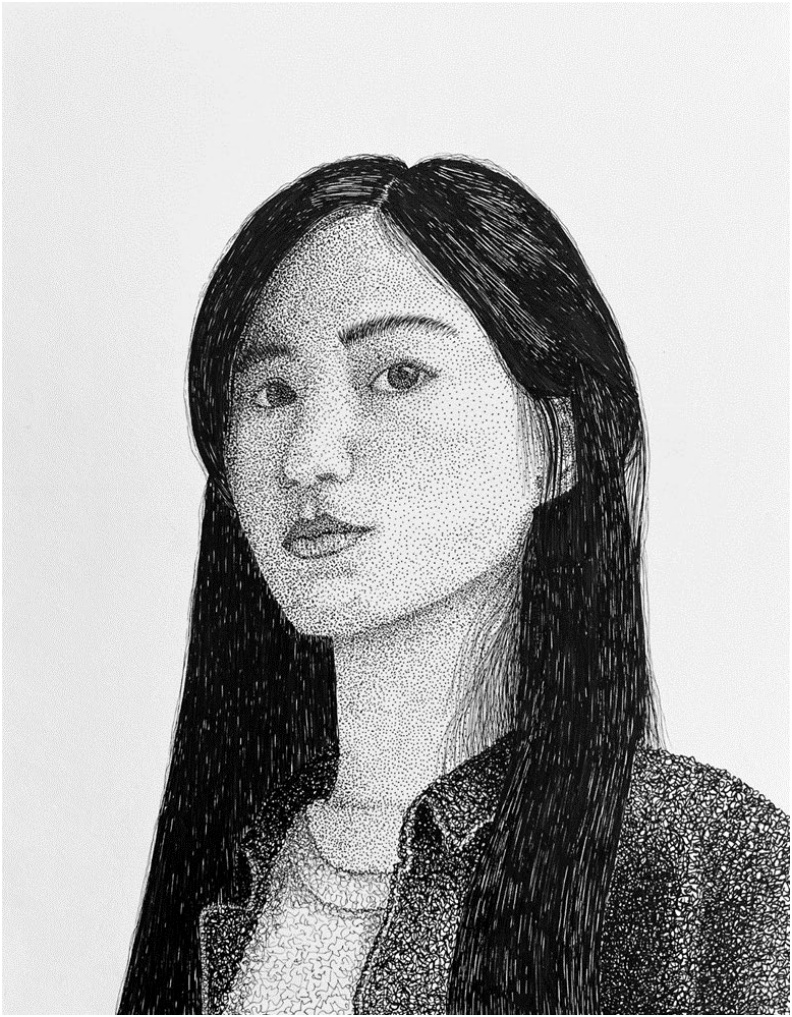
“I’m gonna go do my paperwork, but if you need anything, I’m here until 6:00 am.” I get up from my seat, heading toward the door knowing he may not want to talk more after all he’s just divulged to me over the last few hours in conversation. Before I make it out the door, I hear him speak softly.

“I wish I had your heart.”

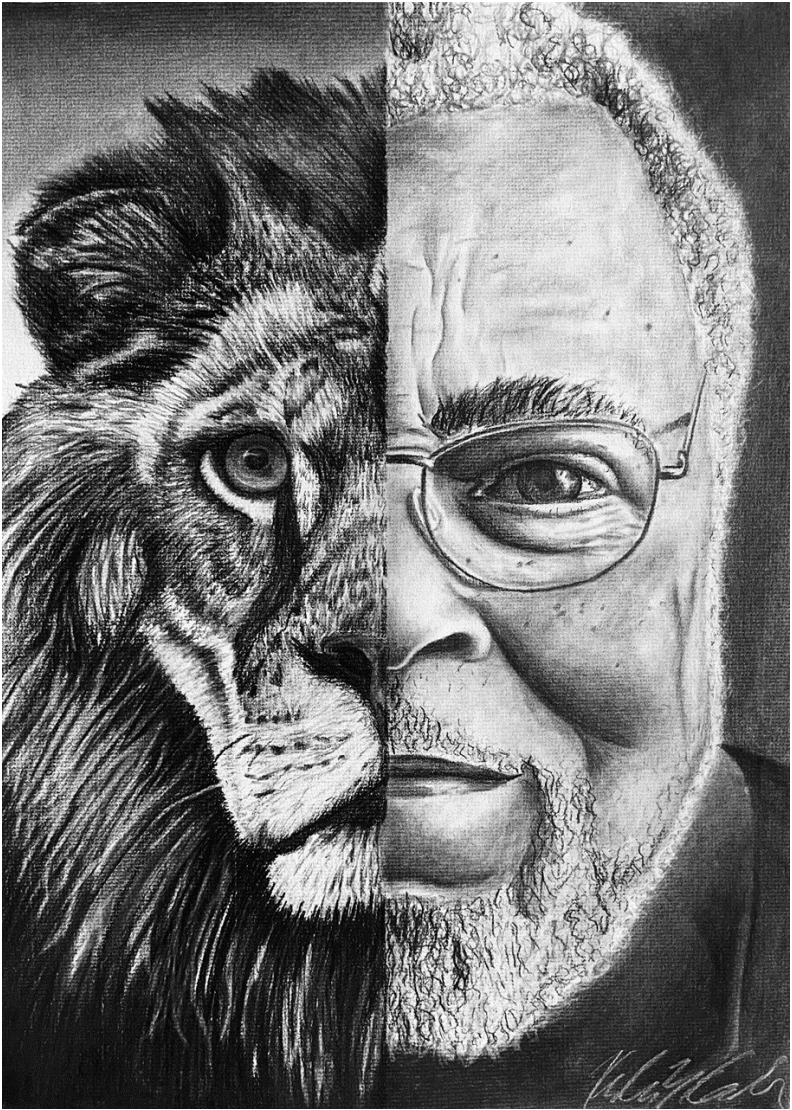
“You don’t. You have yours. That’s good enough.”

Four years later, across the country in my new home and new life, I receive a letter in the mail from the hospital I worked at with a photograph of my patient in a graduation gown as he smiles with a beautiful girlfriend and his nursing diploma. A note is tucked away inside and, as I read it, tears fall.

It reads: “Thanks for the sandwich.”



**Katelyn M. Adams – Monica**



Kaden McConnell – Lion King

**Ashley DeMar** – Home Collage

*So it's there, my homage's due.*

I have always admired New York:  
“The Empire State.”

An entire kingdom of dizzying duality –

for me she was always this:  
leather before noon  
draft latte  
dripping into cold brew  
chipped gold nail polish  
clutching at vintage, ivory luggage  
tapping at keyboards  
booking flights and  
gripping pens

*In New York you can be a new man.*

But in the North,  
she is burnt sienna.  
She is spiced apple cider and grist mills  
she is quaint Edens made of maple syrup  
& shrines to derelict dairy farms.

*Feels like home to me  
feels like home to me  
feels like I'm all the way back –*

back home to me.





**Eric Carden** – NYC Central Park

**Ashley DeMar** – Love Letter

There is magic in being of a place.

A home for rootedness,  
and for returning.

My home is the coffee ground leftovers of an ancient glacial  
lake.

Where fossils become skipping stones  
and skipping stones becomes summers.

And enough  
stacked between sugar cake autumns  
and heady lilac springs  
lying dormant  
under lake effected winters  
become entire lifetimes.

And I could spend mine  
slow sipping from backyard fountainheads,  
waiting until that special kind of twilight moment for the  
Waterfowl Flyover,  
listening to their great ancestral song.  
Calling me back again and again  
to my home waters.

The way the night smells sweet,  
inviting all the heat of the day to rise from thirsty ground and  
rest in her boundless starry arms.

Or when it is cold,  
snow-angeled looking up  
and how the falling makes you feel like flying.  
Nothing but sky and snow and the silent sound it all makes.  
My home is great lakes  
waters lapping at the doorsteps of the people who guide me,  
who shape me.

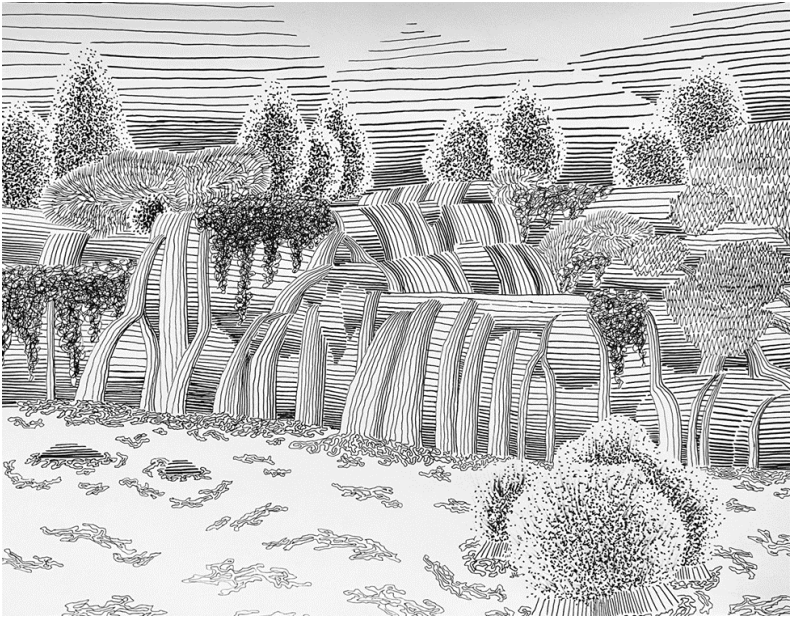
My home -  
this great northern country  
which taught me  
to love and honor Nature  
for the absolute force that She is.  
With seasons that crash and demand us sit back and watch -  
whether we had other plans or not.

Oh, how I love the hidden waterfalls  
and fantasy greens,  
the magnificent seaways  
and the lakes that feel like oceans.

How from the Ontario bottom  
to the very Adirondack tip top of my heart,

I am of this place.

And it carries me,  
no matter where I go.



Jennavieve Edwards – Waterfalls

**Ashley DeMar** – The Neighbors Say I am a Witch

The neighbors say I am a witch  
(and in good conscience  
who can blame them?)

For all my flames and earthly aims –  
all the better  
to entertain them –

Though surely rather "Witch"  
than bitch and fail  
the judgment made  
to restrain them.

The neighbors say I am a witch  
lest they allow  
the truth to pain them:

That dancing skirts  
are masks for hurts  
and flames for those who set them.

And black smoke thick  
to carry pricks  
of roses past which wet them.

For thunder heads  
above the dead  
we drink in celebration

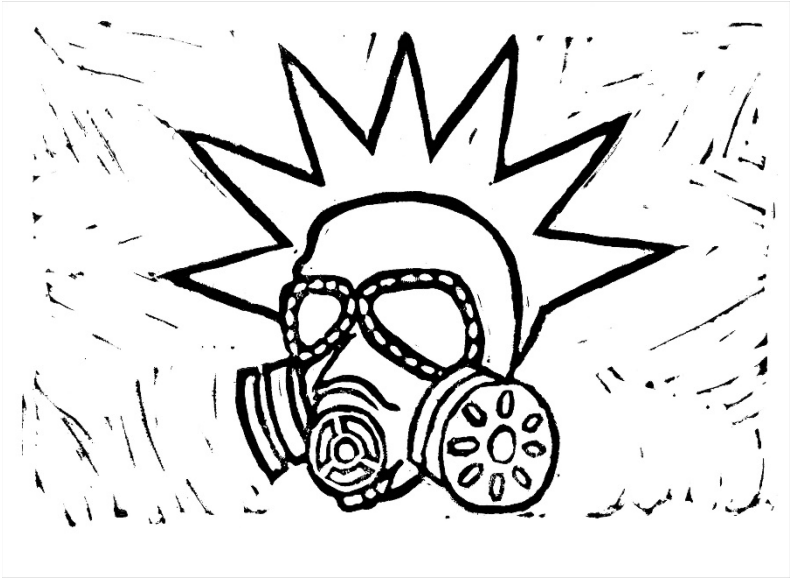
as Mother Nature  
spills her tears  
in years of skilled libation.

The neighbors say I am a witch  
as rhymes and incense blind them,

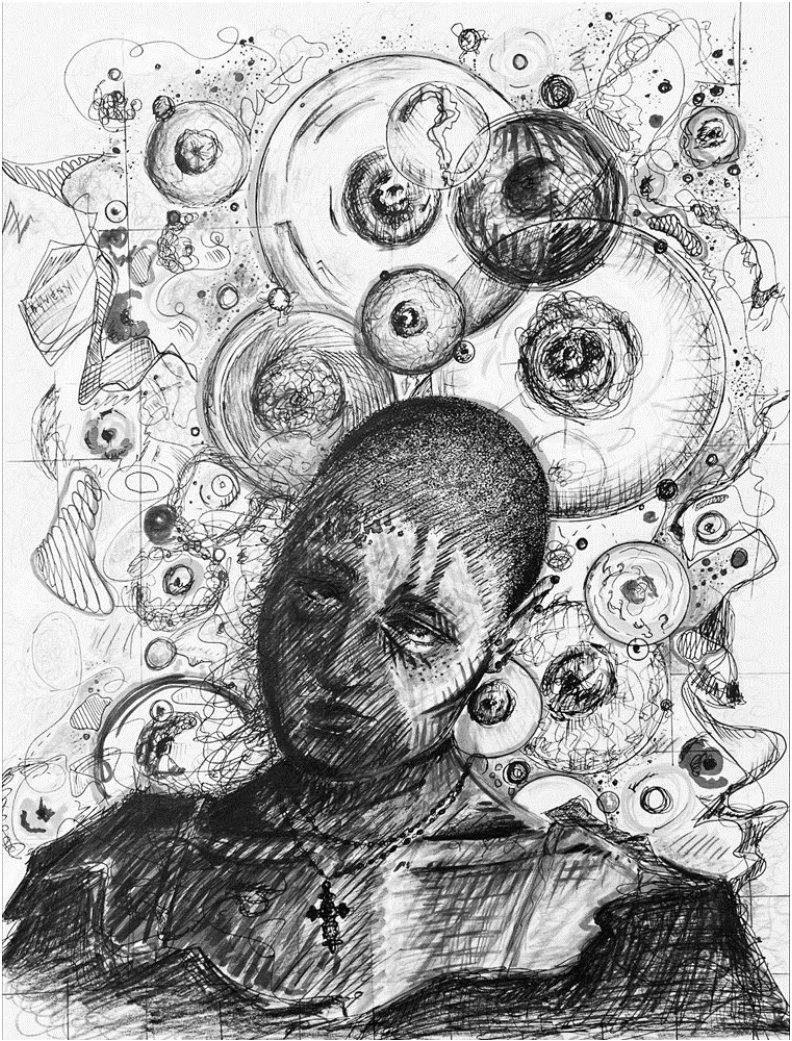
sharp closing doors,  
latched windows 'fore  
their own Truths come to find them.

For no more Witch  
than He or She  
when kept from prying eyes.

The neighbors say I am a witch  
and my neighbors tell no lies.



**Jade Ramirez – Time Bomb**



**Tye LaClair** – Too Much on the Mind, Not Enough Behind the Eyes



## Loralei Deasy – Cherry Slushies and the Trials and Tribulations of Life

“So . . . what are your plans?”

“Hmm?” Camren looks up, knocked from her thoughts. Blake smiles, faintly.

“After high school.” Blake nudges their shoulder into hers, as the warm summer wind sweeps over them. “You don’t really talk about it, you know. I mean—neither do I, but . . . you know.” they shrug, slightly.

“I know,” she sighs, kicking a rock ahead. The rock skitters into the lit streetlamp with a soft ping. “I don’t . . . I don’t know.”

She swallows hard. Blake exhales, softly, tilting their face to the sky.

“I don’t either,” they admit, after a moment. Their eyes drop to the sidewalk, before they look over at Camren, expression vulnerable. They look –

Afraid. Young – younger than they were when they came out to her. Camren sighs, twisting the green ring on her finger. Vines bite into her fingertips.

“I mean . . . who does?” she says, finally. She shrugs. “We’re seventeen. Who knows what they’re doing at seventeen anyway?”

“Olivia. Nathan. Troy—”

“Okay, so all the popular kids who have supportive families and money. They don’t count – besides, they’re all going to be doctors and engineers. Do *you* think we’re engineers or doctors?”

Blake thinks for a long moment. Their face scrunches up, before they shake their head.

“No,” they say, finally, quietly.

“Exactly. Our lives are – different from theirs. They can follow the status quo if they want but we can’t. I guess it’s more freeing that way,” she adds, more thoughtfully. She twists her ring, steady with the pulse ringing in her ears. The wind’s soft against her face. “Don’t have to worry about a husband when neither of us like men.”

“And one of us isn’t even a woman or a man.” Camren chuckles.

“Exactly,” she agrees, with a smile. “Just two lesbians figuring the world out. They’ll never have to deal with that—the stigma, the struggle – the familial shit.” She exhales, softly. “But we’re more aware because of it. We can do some good – however

that is. I think that's a bit more important than doctors. Making sure people like us don't kill themselves, right?"

"Yeah. I wish we didn't have to fight for it though." Camren exhales, as they turn the street. Their shoulder brushes against her bare one, the denim soft and reassuring against her skin.

"Me too." She pauses. "Still haven't said anything to your family?"

"They'd kick me out." They shrug, simply – which, really is all they can do. They can't change minds if they don't want to be changed – even if it *is* the family who's supposed to love them. That's one of the hardest pills to swallow.

Sometimes, there's nothing to be done. Sometimes, the only thing left to do is to just walk away. Live in peace away from all the violence and hatred. Live freely without it from those closest to you – though, were they *ever* close if they did that to you?

It's a question that's kept her up more nights than she'd like to admit – like this one.

"You told yours?"

She shakes her head. "They'd kick me out too." She reaches for the necklace, the cool stone resting at her neck. It's soft, reassuring like Blake's denim jacket. Her best friend and her grandmother. "I've saved up money though."

"How much are you up to now? Last time you said it was what? One thousand?"

"One thousand and five dollars and thirty-five cents," she confirms, with a small smile. She rolls the stone between her fingers. "I'm up to one thousand, five hundred now – with fifty cents, too."

"Oh, my God! Camren, that's awesome!" they laugh, as they sweep Camren in for a hug – swinging her around like it's nothing. Camren laughs, arms tight around their neck. Their hair tickles her nose. "And they still don't know?"

"Not a clue – they still think I'm just in my rebellious phase or something, but since my grades are good, they aren't worried." She grins widely. Her fingers tangle in the short hair at the back of their neck, soft against her fingers.

"Gas station is going good for money. Last person quit, so it's just me now. I'm racking a ton of hours. I've saved almost a thousand." They grin. "We *could* move in together by the end of this year – if you don't mind waitressing more."

"I'd waitress more than forty hours a week if it meant I didn't live in fear anymore," she tells them, truthfully. They set her

down, fingers warm and reassuring against her arms, smile bright, face flushed. Her grin widens at it without her even meaning too, her chest warm. “And it’d be nice to go to college somewhere more open, if that’s what I want in the future.”

“What would you go for?” Blake asks, curiously. Camren thinks for a moment, before she shrugs.

“I don’t know,” she admits, after a moment. “But I’ve always liked history, art. Maybe I could do something with that.”

“Maybe you could spray paint the local ‘Pregnancy Center’ again. That warning was *lit*.” They use air quotes with a fond laugh. Then Carmen bursts out laughing.

“God, my parents were so pissed.” She remembers before she laughs again, shaking her head. “So was my brother.”

“Well, your brother’s a different breed.” She snorts.

“Literally – *and* my hands were dyed red for a whole week.” She grins at her hands.

“Good thing your palms are already kind of red,” they tell her, amusedly. Camren snorts.

“Good thing I’m Oglala Lakota.” She grins, before she knocks her shoulder into theirs. “You want a slushie? I think I could go for a slushie right now.”

“You could *always* go for a slushie. I swear if you could marry one, you would,” they tell her, as they turn the corner laughing. She grins, skipping after them.

“I would! I’d be Mrs. Gas Station Slushie the Third!”

“The Third? Why the Third?” They turn around as she reaches their side with a grin.

“Because it sounds cooler!” Blake grabs her hand, spinning her around them. She laughs freely, hair flying. “*Unless* . . .”

“Unless *what*?” they ask, fondly and amusedly. She grins.

“Unless you lose the race, slow poke!” Their lips part in surprise, as Carmen darts away, hand slipping free of theirs with a bubbling laugh.

“Camren!” They chase after her, as she turns the corner with a laugh.

“Loser buys the slushies!” she calls behind her. Blake curses, fluidly.

“Unfair!” Blake shouts. Camren just cackles, as the building comes up, lights twitching in the small window.

“Not to me!”

She jumps off the sidewalk onto the pavement, the force jolting her legs. She laughs as she turns, watching as Blake scrambles down the sidewalk with a laugh.

*Freedom and living.* This is what that feels like to her – and she never wants to let it go. Even if it means having to leave everything she knew behind.

But she's always been prepared to do that since she realized who she was anyway.

Blake crashes into her back, laughing, fingers warm against her arms.

And with a loud, carefree laugh, they crash inside to the sticky floors and the slushie machine, *closer to real, complete freedom at last.*

And with a warm feeling of home, as they crash down the aisles to the swirling machine of cherry slushies.

“You got your passport?”

“And birth certificate,” she confirms, shoving it into the sleeve of her diploma. She jams it into her backpack. “Meds?”

“Yep. You?”

“Yep.” She zips her bag up, exhaling deeply. *This is actually happening. I'm leaving.* She turns to look at Blake, as they finish zipping their own backpack up.

*Their apartment. They are leaving. Never coming back.*

“You ready?” Blake asks, seriously, tugging on their tank top. It clings to their sides, as they tug it down. They'll drive the first stretch to the hotel and Camren will finish it. She's more comfortable driving in cities than they are. “Nervous?”

“A little,” she admits, as she slings her backpack over her shoulder. She tugs her hair out from underneath, letting it fall over her jacket instead. Her stone is cool against her neck, as she smiles. “But – this'll be good. Are *you* ready?”

“I am,” they smile, as they sling their backpack over their shoulder. They extend a hand.

“Are *you*?” she smiles too, as she reaches for them. Their hand is warm in hers, reassuring.

“More than ready,” she confirms. “Let's go finally live.”

And they grin, as they squeeze through the doorway to Camren's car, already packed. An idea lights in her head.

“Last to the car pays for slushies!” She darts away, laughing as Blake laughs, dirt crunching underneath their Vans.

“Unfair!” they call behind her. She just laughs, as she swings into the passenger seat.

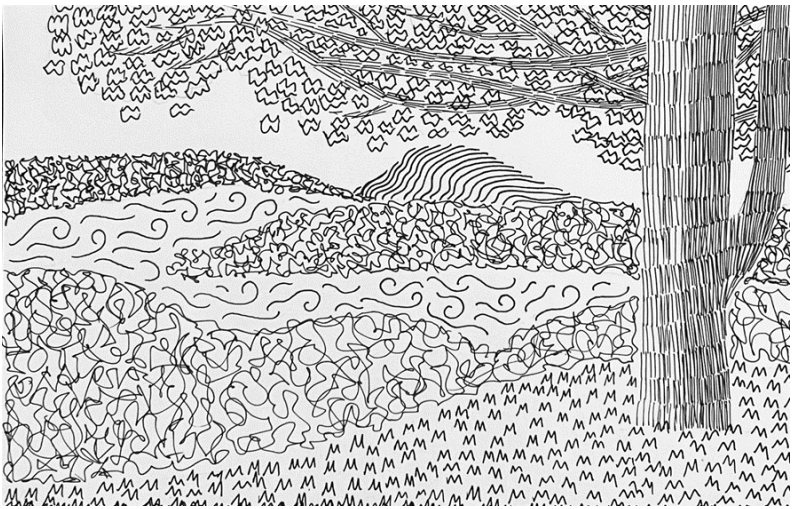
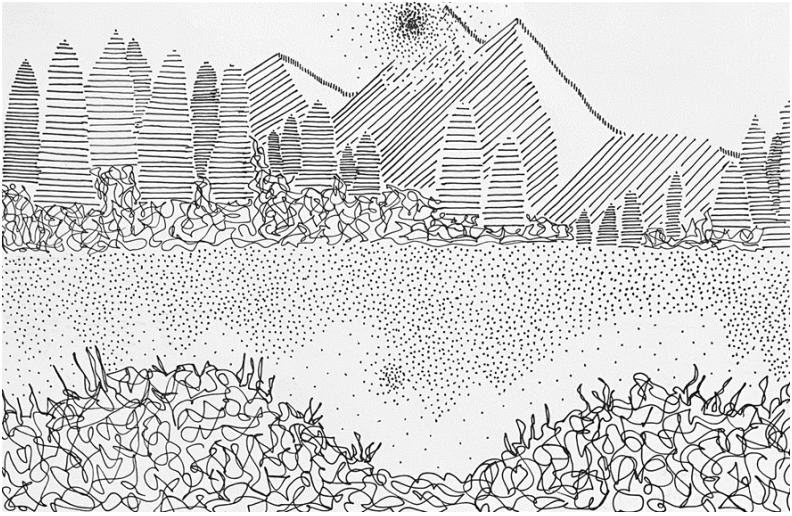
“Not to me!” She slams the door shut, as Blake swings into the driver’s seat, laughing. They turn the car on with a warm purr. She squeezes her hand, warmly, as they grin at each other.

They put the car into drive.

“First stop of our new lives – cherry slushies!” she laughs, sticking her hand out of the sunroof, as the wind roars. And she screams into the night:

*“Hell yeah!”*

*Let’s go finally live.*



**Katelyn M. Adams – Nature**

**Kenyon Wells** – And It Was Just Right

She discovers the beginning now  
by a trick of light and memory  
that guides her to this place  
at the edge of the tall trees,  
out beyond the boundary,  
of what was, at the time, her known world.

Before her, then, appeared an opening.  
and through it she had skipped  
in her new dress and her guilelessness  
onto a path leading to adventure,  
a spontaneous decision, made before  
she knew the meaning of the word.

She lingers today for a moment or two  
then moves with steady purpose,  
no longer jaunty and carefree  
as she once was when, long ago,  
without worry or concern,  
she had entered this forest.

The shaggy remnants of a clearing  
appear much sooner in front of her  
than she remembers the distance to be.  
Like so much in her life, new growth  
has obscured or taken the place of things  
she thought she had always known.

Now she removes the stocking cap  
that covers colorless stubble,  
all that is left of what was once golden.  
She looks up at the sky  
through a screen of leaves and years,  
her face wistful and happy.

Long ago at this spot in the forest  
when she was a child but not childish,  
her mind open to wonders and wisdom,  
she had discovered in the reality of daydreams,  
a middle ground of acceptance and comfort,  
a sanctuary that she never really left.

What was really in this place  
shaded now as then by these trees and those times?  
Was there magic that day that guided her  
into a setting of her own making,

a place where she would fit perfectly  
where everything made sense?

The idea of magic left her sadly  
with the diagnosis of mortality.  
She returns to experience, as her time runs out,  
what gave her joy and purpose  
when her time was beginning  
and it was just right.



## Glenn LaFave – For Whom the Sun Rises

It was a good night. Although Nick sat alone in Harry's Bar and American Grill in the Seaway Plaza, this was not a lonely place. At a table two rows from the empty dance floor, on the aisle of standing and leaning room in front of the bar, he relaxed in the plastic and metal chair at a round table for two, his large frame casting a shadow larger than the tabletop. The early evening scents of perfume and clean hair were now the smells of spilled beer and cigarette smoke. He sipped his Margarita, which wasn't really a Margarita since they were out of Triple Sec and "bug juice," the generic lemony bar mix used to make shaker drinks. So, he sipped his tequila on ice cubes, which weren't really cubes, as they had melted some and long lost their regular shape. Melting ice cubes were as common here as blood in the bullring, as the ice machine never really worked right. As evenings wore on, more water would leak out creating "the swamp," his station behind the bar where the floor was too wet and the overhead glasses racks too high for anyone but him to reach, as they were suspended by two—not four—links of chain. Even when high voltage wires ran near his damp feet, this was where Nick tended bar (not "bartended", a non-word used only by the ignorant and Alexander Haig). The chance of impending electrocution was another reason to drink, to celebrate life, to tease death.

There was a quiet here at three in the morning. A quiet in contrast to the earlier hearing-threatening volumes of amplified rock bands. Nick took a sip of the tequila, walked to the bar and spit it into the sink. "Why do I even drink tequila or scotch? I don't enjoy either," he thought to himself. At least, he *thought* he thought to himself, but really, he spoke aloud. Nick often talked to himself when he was alone, thinking he was just thinking silently. Near closing time, a girl at the bar had been drinking tequila and had bought one for Nick, too, so he politely made himself a poor Margarita. It didn't do him any good, as she was just being polite and left with the brood of girls she had come in with. He would've preferred a cash tip or action in the parking lot.

He reached into the cooler and pulled out a Heineken. "Those Europeans sure can make beer," Nick thought, "but it takes us Americans to import it."

A tiny, sharp pain erupted in his neck as a mosquito bit him. "*Hijo de puta*," Nick muttered, swatting the insect. He liked to

mutter and swear in Spanish for no real reason. When he was really peeved, Nick would call out in italics.

Returning to the table, Nick carefully placed the pen, paper, and envelope he had retrieved from the back-bar shelf. He sat, sipped his drink, and thought about what he planned to write. As he stroked his face, his finger crossed the scar. It was a good scar as it was earned in manhood, not one of those unavoidable accident or childhood disease scars that carry no glory. The scar was no longer very conspicuous, as, over the years, his skin had healed. It was long and thin but with a split down the middle that rose up above the edges a little, like a frozen stream in the flat tundra of the high latitudes when the water freezes and the ice rises slightly above the banks. Latitude and longitude puzzled him. “Why did the creators of latitude make it go as high as 90, but longitude goes up to 180? Did they think the earth was twice as wide as it is tall?” he wondered. He also puzzled over Westmoreland’s reports on North Vietnamese troop strength and battle mortality figures. But these puzzlements were controlled and healthy.

He got himself another beer and plugged in the jukebox, hoping it still had some songs to play. As Neil Young’s “Sugar Mountain” began, he returned to his letter and forgot what he was about to write. Then he again rubbed his cheek and thought about the scar. It made sense to think about the scar at this time, as Nick was writing the letter to David. In his mind, Nick clearly recalled the events where he earned the scar, as he gazed at the middle bar area where the incident took place.

It had been a hot, summer night, not unlike this one, and the place was packed. Nick was in “the swamp” with Pauly at the far end and David in the middle. David was working at his usual, efficient, fast pace yet looking relaxed as he sipped his Chivas Regal, when The Offender entered, walked to the bar, and sat in front of David. Nick monitored the conversation as best he could from a distance and came closer when he heard the offensive words. Nick had to take action for David’s sake, for David’s honor.

Nick dove across the bar and threw a crunching right cross that knocked The Offender over backwards—out cold on the floor. As Nick stood above, he looked down at the still form and yelled, “It’s VERSE David writes, not poetry!”

As Nick returned around the end of the bar, he noticed a trickle of blood on his cheek. He wiped it away and more blood

came. “Must be her spike heel caught me on the way down,” Nick muttered, pulling a napkin from his ear and holding it tight against the gash. Someone carried her out and the night continued.

As Nick now stroked his scar, in his mind the incident was as distinct as anything. All was still as Nick hoisted the long-neck beer bottle and placed it against his lips, the way a man drinks a man’s beer. He gazed thoughtfully at the ceiling as he sipped, then began to write:

*Dear David,*

*Enclosed is a book my sister Anne gave me a few years ago. When I read it, I made note of the stories I enjoyed. I finished reading it two years ago. I attempted to find a copy for you but have had no luck.*

Nick finished his beer and got a fresh, cold one.

*Over a year ago, you and I were having a drink in Gary’s Café Americain. We spoke of how neither of us are book lenders, as too many oafs will not return the book, read or unread. I asked if you would be interested in borrowing a book if there was no time limit on how long you could keep it. Well, here it is. Please return it sometime in this lifetime.*

Now came the hard part. Nick knew what he wanted to say, but he didn’t have the guts. He chugged the last of his beer, except the foam, and got another one. The swamp was now a lake.

*I found parts of the book to be more enjoyable than others. Some sections are redundant or only mildly amusing. I recommend you read the Introduction first, and then the stories that begin on these pages: 5, 12, 30, 52, 85, 120.*

Nick knew that he was now going out on a limb. Although Nick had been a literature major in college, David was a literature major in life. Would David read the book in this prescribed way, skipping stories? Could David read a book “the wrong way” or would he begin at the front cover and frenetically go page by page? Would he read the other stories Nick didn’t recommend, critiquing his contemporary, finding worth his friend had missed?

*Hope you enjoy it. Happy reading. Keep in touch.*

*Sincerely,*

*Nick*

It was done. The letter and the beer were finished. Nick picked up the envelope that already contained the book, folded the letter and dropped it in. He addressed, licked and sealed the envelope, pulled stamps from his wallet and stuck them on. He turned out the rest of the lights and walked out, locking the front door behind him. He sauntered down the sidewalk and dropped his packet into a mailbox. In the distance a church bell tolled, but Nick didn't know why. As he turned toward the parking lot, the first beams of sunlight caught his eye. It was dawn. As he walked to his '57 Chevy, he moved directly into the sun, the way a fighter pilot should never. He didn't love the sun. Others would soak up the sun on a beach today, but to him, the sun was just a distraction that, like noise, interfered with his day's sleep. He scorned the sun.

As he began the drive home, Nick looked again at the sun's reflection in his rearview mirror and remarked, "I don't know for whom the sun rises, but it's not for me."



**Tatsuo Kyoto – Solitude**



**Tatsuo Kyoto – Defeat**

## **Mitch Fidler** – “Only God Can Make a Tree”: A History of Lewis County’s Hough Memorial Forest

“Poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree.” When American poet Joyce Kilmer penned these lines in February of 1913, he was no doubt inspired by the power and beauty of one of God’s greatest gifts to man. Since he wrote the poem at the family residence in Mahwah, New Jersey, scholars believe he was motivated by the well-wooded lawn of the family residence that overlooked the forested Ramapo Valley. The forests of the Black River Valley have likewise motivated people from Lewis County. The New York State Conservation Department entitled Martinsburg native Franklin B. Hough the Father of American Forestry. His son, Romeyn, published a fourteen-volume masterwork, *American Woods*, a book that remains invaluable to silviculturists. Lewis County’s first Forester, Castorland native Theodore P. Wooschlagler, has done more than most, on the local level, to advance the importance of forests and to honor the memory and contributions of the Houghs. Ted Wooschlagler was the driving force behind the creation of Lewis County’s Hough Memorial Forest.

The elder Hough’s contributions to forestry are enormous and well known to many in the area. An 1843 graduate of Union College, Hough began publishing scientific writings shortly thereafter. He obtained his MD in 1848 but was drawn more to research and writing. By 1862, he had published histories of St. Lawrence, Franklin, Jefferson and Lewis counties. He returned to medicine as a surgeon for the 97<sup>th</sup> NY Infantry during the Civil War. In 1855 and 1865, Hough oversaw the compilation of the New York State Census. This is where he noticed an alarming decline in the availability of timber in that ten-year period. Hough then began to lobby Congress on the dangers of deforestation and to regulate the use of forests and establish forestry schools. His 650-page *Report on Forestry* (1877) was widely read, and in 1881 the U.S. Department of Agriculture created the Division of Forestry. Lewis County’s F.B. Hough was chosen to be the first United States Forester.

Hough’s second son, Romeyn Beck Hough, is also a noted student of botany and forestry. He obtained degrees from Cornell University and studied medicine at Columbia. Like his father he set aside the practice of medicine to be a writer. In 1888, three years after his father’s death, he published the first volume of tree studies titled *American Woods*. This work, totaling fourteen volumes and

featuring twenty-five trees each, is invaluable to botanists, technical schools, libraries and industry because it identifies properties, use and distribution of 354 varieties of trees in the US and Canada. Hough provides three samples of each tree studied in the form of a wafer-thin, translucent slice. This slicing machine itself became so popular that a factory was built to produce them after Romeyn obtained his patent. R.B. Hough died at his summer cottage on Brantingham Lake in 1924. In 2009, appraiser Ken Sanders valued a complete set of *American Woods* at \$30,000.

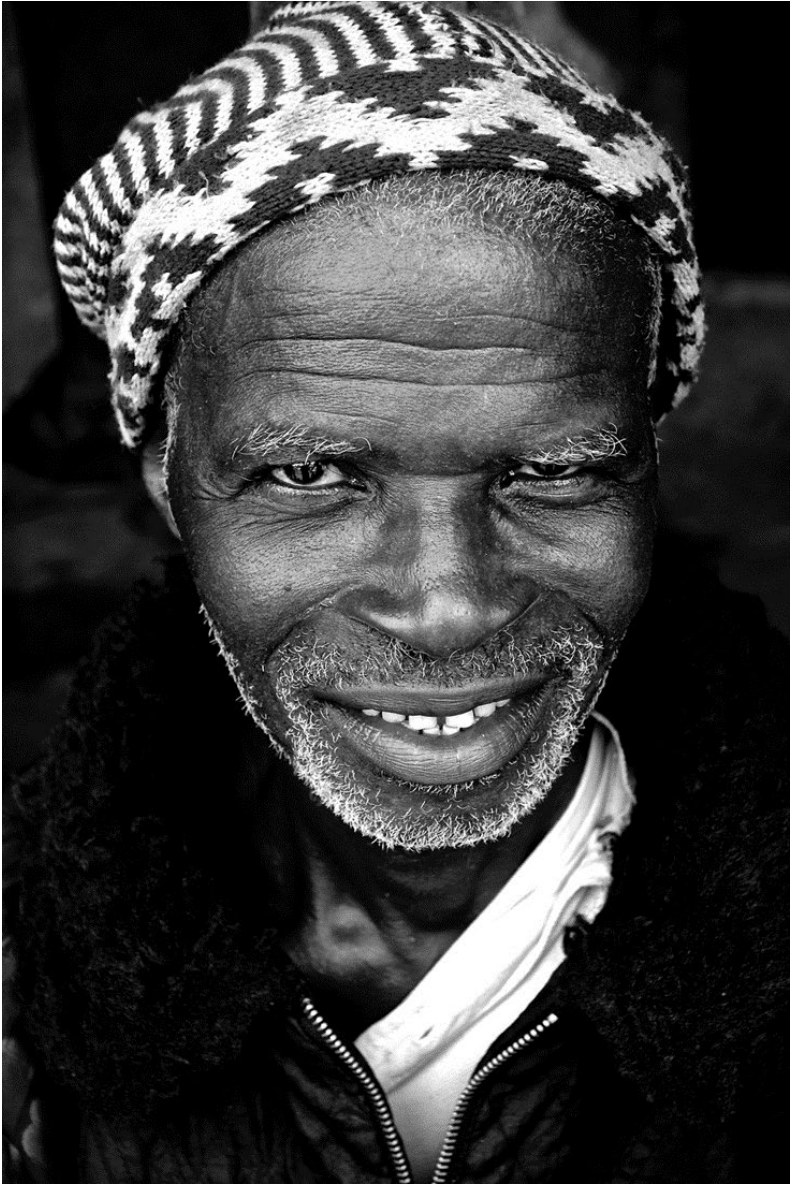
To honor the memory and contributions of the Houghs, Theodore P. Woolschlager planned the Hough Memorial Forest in New Bremen. Ted was Lewis County's first forester. He grew up on the family farm on the Merz Road in Castorland. He graduated from Carthage High in 1913. He then attended one year of teacher training at a normal school and taught for two years in Castorland. He then enrolled in the College of Forestry at Syracuse University but was drafted in 1917 as the U.S. prepared for World War I. He served in the 78th Infantry Division. He finished college in Syracuse in 1922 and began a twenty-nine-year career with the U.S. Forest Service and Department of Agriculture. His specialty was pathology, where he studied tree diseases in New York, and cartography, where he created property maps so that regions could manage their forests now and in the future.

It is only in his retirement that Ted planned and carried out the creation of the Hough Memorial Forest in New Bremen. In 1958, Mr. Woolschlager had recently completed a project on a picnic area with stunning views of waterfalls on Fish Creek as it tumbles toward the Black River. This popular 105-acre tract in the Town of Greig is known as Singing Waters. He then turned his attention to a 61-acre parcel then for sale as part of the Sam and Mary Kieffer estate located one mile east of the hamlet of New Bremen on State Route 812. Theodore encouraged County leaders to purchase the aging sugar bush with the specific purpose of creating an arboretum and thereby encouraging botanical study. This area would not be like Singing Waters with its one hundred camp sites. This property would host forty-two one-acre plots in checkerboard fashion, each planted with a different tree species. Eventually, there were sixty different varieties. The plots are labeled for study and observation. On many occasions, Hough Forest has become an outdoor classroom for local schools and colleges. This focus on learning would certainly have delighted the Houghs.

Mr. Wooschlager called the memorial project an “experimental forest.” It consisted of native and introduced conifers and hardwoods. Most of the trees were grown from seed collected by the County Forester in seed beds at the Lowville State Nursery at Dadville. Some of the seeds were western varieties sent east by Wooschlager’s son, Hawley, a forester in Washington State. Other tree species came from exotic seeds collected by Ted. The first trees were planted in the fall of 1958. Visitors today can see labeled examples of sugar maple, soft maple, red oak, white oak, white pine, Austrian pine, white spruce, Norway spruce, black walnut, white ash, Japanese larch, red cedar, elm, yellow poplar, white cedar, red pine, blue spruce, silver maple, black locust, Norwegian maple, jack pine, hemlock, horse chestnut, butternut, yellow birch, white birch, gray birch, tamarack, Scotch pine, hickory, beech, Douglas fir and balsam fir. The old sugar bush hardwood was thinned out in 1975, the balsam fir stands were selectively cut in the 1990s, and some of the red pine was harvested after falling over in 2004.

On July 1, 1963, dignitaries and citizens gathered to dedicate the arboretum to the memory of Franklin and Romeyn Hough. Folks have enjoyed the scenic walking trails there ever since then. Later, county foresters have kept the significance of the forest alive, especially Randy Kerr. He wrote several articles about Ted Wooschlager’s efforts and organized work details at the site. In 1990, the County Highway Department built a gravel road leading into the forest, and the County Historical Society assisted in the replacement of the identification signs. Some of the original signs can be seen at the county Historical Society. This fitting tribute to Lewis County natives, who made a national impact, remains a treasure to be enjoyed for generations to come.





**Kate Newtown** – Canoe Maker; Sierra Leone Series

## Elena Dickinson – Garrison Road

When I was five years old, my parents bought me a “big girl” bike. It was purple and plastered with Disney princesses. There were tinsel streamers on the handlebars that seemed to celebrate my transition from tricycle to training wheels. It was my father who insisted that I was ready for the stabilizers to be removed. I would learn to embrace these changes of route, while refusing to stray too far from the familiar.

“Don’t let go!” I shrieked as he trailed behind me.

Had I dared look back, I would’ve noticed his tongue set in the same concentrative manner as mine. Within minutes, I was shakily steering on my own, my twin sister never far behind. She, in her unicorn helmet, and myself in a shark helmet marketed towards little boys. We chose them ourselves in Walmart. There was never any concern about fighting over the same style. An outsider would have deemed us polar opposites for this, but we were simply raised to be individuals. In baby photos, you could always find Natalie on the right in pink, leaving me on the left in blue.

Our driveway is long and paved: perfect for pedaling. There are lamp posts every twenty feet or so. Mom and dad preferred we stay close to the house, no further than two posts away. With 812 on the other end, it would only take one absent-minded driver to cause an accident. But wearing my helmet gave me a false sense of invincibility – that and my older brother taunting me from his blue mountain bike.

“Come on, Lanie. Race me down to ‘The Dip,’” he would dare.

The Dip was a smoothed abnormality in the pavement located at the tail end of our driveway. It generally took little convincing before my pigtails were swallowed up by the toothy grin of my helmet, and I paid the mandatory “weee” fee. I routinely waved at my cautious counterpart, but she refused to break the boundaries; for someone riding a Dora the Explorer bike, she wasn’t all that curious.

There is one race in which all children, even my Natalie, must participate: the race to grow up. Of course, we never had to pump our legs very hard in order for that to happen. It was a processional done in step, with my heart the only organ playing. To

the tune, my cold-blooded confidante refused to clip below my chin; The Dip's "weee" sang out of key.

Making sure to look both ways before crossing, our dad introduced us to our new route: The Garrison Road. From that first ride, I had been transfixed by its artful juxtaposition. Mr. Bango's blue barn sat next to the ever-barking black lab chained to a double-wide. The sound of a turkey's gobble as we passed a "no trespassing" sign that swore in bright red spray paint. A wood stove heating a home that was never sided. The faded floral wreath that hung over a ditch that killed someone. A brown workhorse, which hid behind trees in its pasture. An unenthusiastic stream. Scrooge-like goats that disapproved of laughter with a "baaah." It was a collection of backcountry landmarks, none of which have lost their nostalgic vibrance with age.

Though I no longer pick rocks to hear their "plunk" in the stream, I seek solace in the things that never seem to change and find beauty in those that do. I can rely on residents of the cemetery to listen without interruption. In return, I set their flags upright and fluffed their faux bouquets. I have read in the scratchy grass and written poems about the violet veil that descends over the gravesite in May. The headstone of one is isolated from the others. I pity her, Marion J. Lang, for she is alone for what must already be a very bleak affair. Though I am no taphologist, I noticed her stone is engraved in support of the New York Yankees. I report their stats to her after complaining about my own mortal dilemmas.

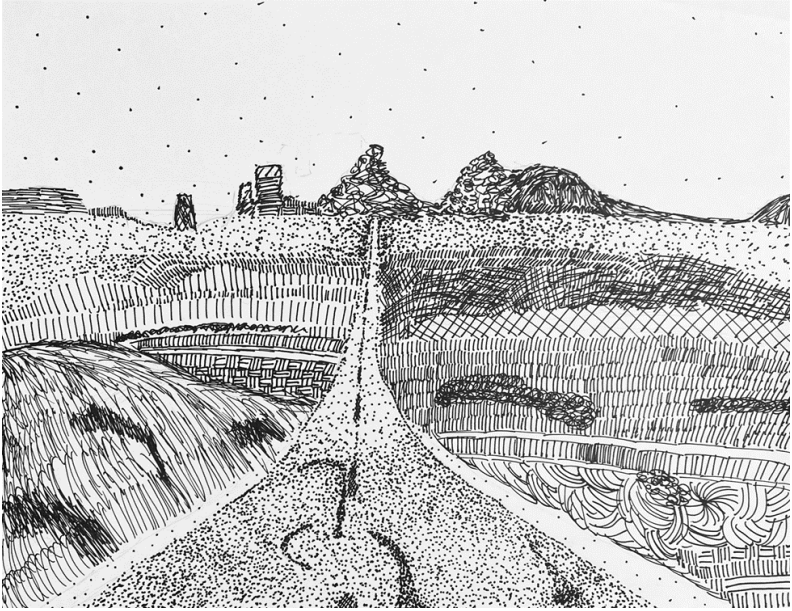
Like a *Firefly Lane* girl, I ditch the handlebars and pretend to fly down the hill following the cemetery. Sometimes, my business is with the unkempt grass fields to either side of me. I pick goldenrod, Queen Anne's lace, and black-eyed Susans for my mother and Marion. Other times, you can find me flailing freely to the twang of a Bob Dylan song, frolicking through fields in spite of the deer ticks.

Rounding another corner, I pause my music even though the cows are used to me by now. I never used to ride this far. It was my brother who challenged me to ride to the end of the road with him. I gave in, as was expected of me. It was then that we found the hidden hobby farms. I could hardly wait to get back home to tell my sister, whose refusal was predictable.

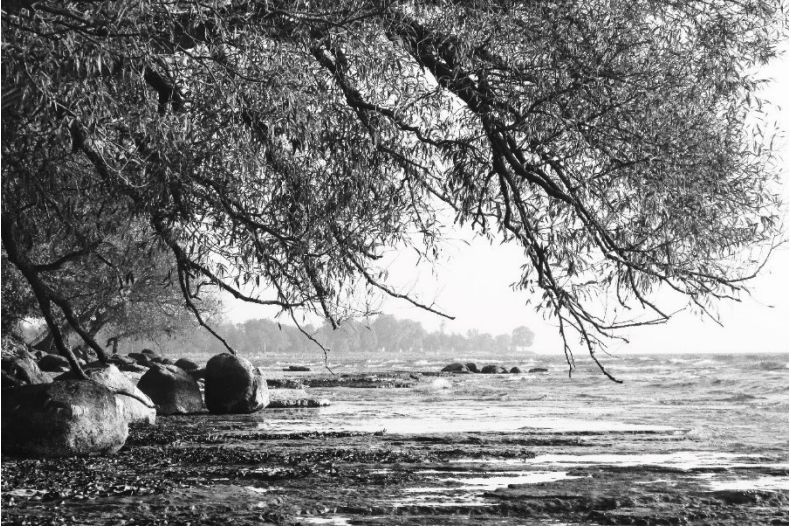
Now the herd of eleven makes their way to the barbed wire fence at the sight of my peach-colored cruiser. I offer them grass—identical to the blades growing within their enclosure—and head

scratches. They contort their necks expertly through the fence for my donations. I believe I excite them because I exist beyond their boundaries, but also because I have become familiar. I am their Garrison Road.

While aspects of Garrison Road are grim, others are sweet-smelling and wild. Some change with the season, and others are reliably familiar. Life, too, varies with each bend and dip, but I know how to pedal with my arms outstretched to enjoy the ride.



**Emily Bombard** – Untitled



**Rachel Filkins** – Calm Afternoon at Robert Wehle Park

**Michael Del Signore** – Musings By the River

In some hot, dry summers  
The Black River, normally  
A raging torrent, settles  
into a gentle roll

At these times you can  
Walk the banks and see  
Million-year-old secrets  
Of an ancient sea

Flora and fauna that existed  
In a primordial past  
Countless confirmations of  
Never-ending life cycles

Vast evidence to confront  
Denial of extinction  
Clues for understanding  
The meaning of life

On a warm summer day  
I walk among my ancestors  
And I am reminded that  
I am not a survivor

I realize that I am  
Only a consequence of  
The conditions supporting  
My cellular structure

I am delivered from  
A lifetime of existential  
Exploration meant to  
Justify my survival

I am a million years old  
And my human form  
Is tired and certain of  
Only my demise

But at this moment  
Near this old River  
Certainty does not matter  
I am only here now





**Rachel Filkins** – December Weather at Robert Wehle Park

**Kenyon Wells** – Telltale Signs of Love

The arrogance of trees  
rooted in the earth as we can never be  
assures our fragile faith in the nature of things.  
The telltale signs of love  
incite our waking dreams,  
and interrupt our sleeping ones.  
The cycle of the seasons, it seems,  
is not a perfect circle after all;  
it bulges, here and there, to intersect  
the longitude of our reasonableness,  
just as our secret longings, sometimes,  
cross the boundary of our trust in one another  
into the land of mutual deception.



**Arsynio Robinson** – Depths of the Universe

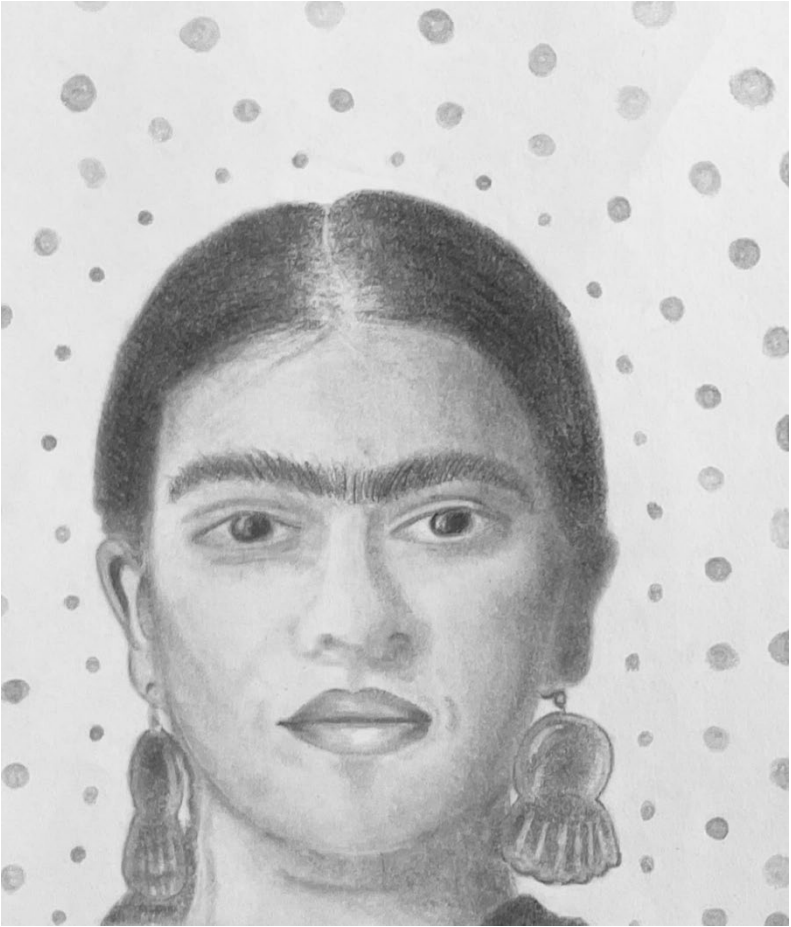
**Arynsio Robinson** – The Same Love

My love was bitter  
so I took her out to dance  
we laughed, she sang, I loved,  
but she remained the same.

My love was tender  
so I held her tight in bed  
We breathed, she ached, I soothed,  
but she remained the same.

My love was numb  
so I kissed her fingers as we walked  
We talked, she smiled, I was relieved,  
but, she remained the same.

My love was her own  
so I learned to love her as is  
We laughed, she ached, I was relieved,  
and so she remained the same.



**Katelyn M. Adams – Frida Kahlo**

**Alesa Bernat** – What We Said When I Left the Mental Ward

It went something like this:

They told him -

secure the guns and the pills

They told me +

take time to breathe

They told him -

try not to leave her alone

They told me +

sleep with Trazodone

They told him -

keep things routine

They told me +

eat healthy and exercise

They told him -

make safety plans

They told me +

go to counseling, take your meds

They told him -

watch for signs

I told them =

no one noticed the signs before

do we need to change the equation?



Kaden McConnell – Self-Portrait

**Glenn Erick Miller** – Waking Up

The last time I woke up,  
a few hours ago,  
I sought out your bare hip.

You were lost  
on the expanse of bed,  
a soft speck in an ocean of pack-ice.

Now you are closer,  
and everything is immediate—  
breakfast,  
my brother's last phone number,  
frost on the windows.

I consider the promise  
of plunging temperatures  
and bloated clouds.

Heavy snow compresses on the power lines,  
turning black to white,  
covering oil with fleece.

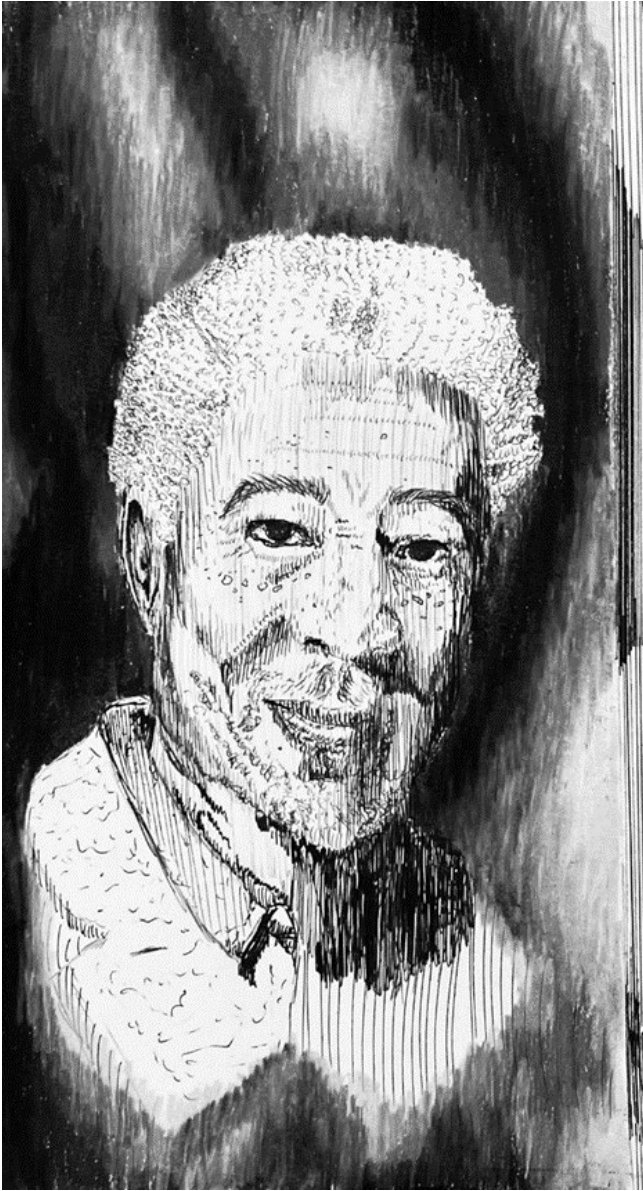
I never tumble out of my dreams  
completely,  
and the day is marked  
with half-  
steps and freeze-frames.

They rise and fall,  
stitching day over night,  
night over day.

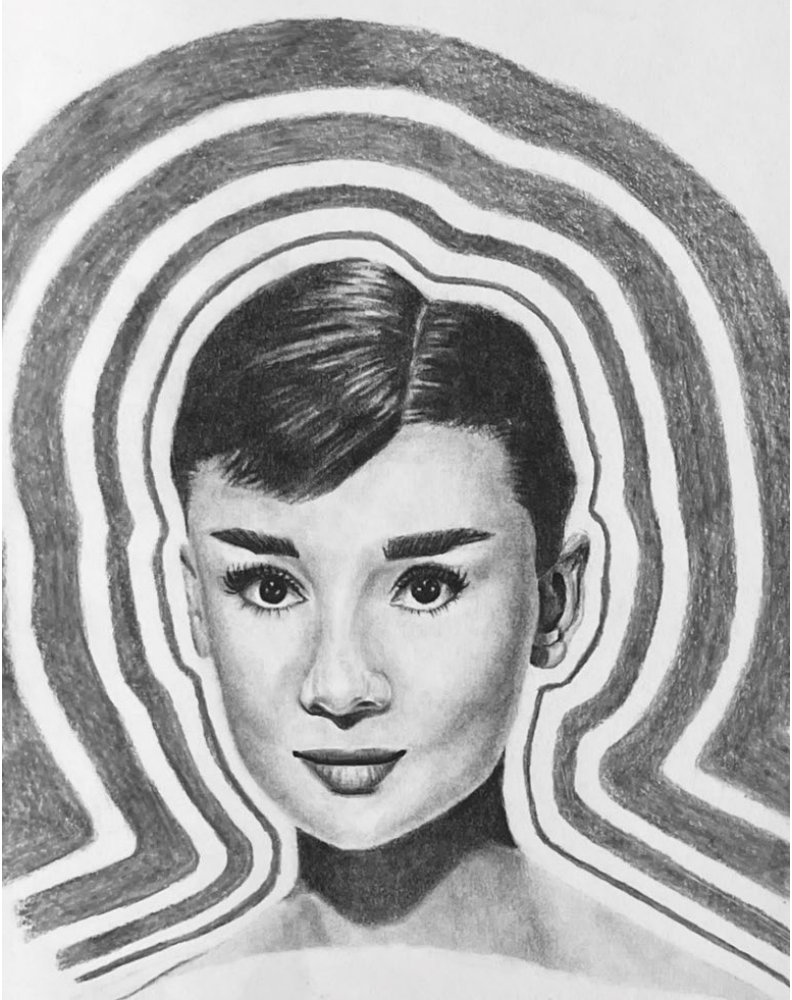




**Rachel Filkins – Backyard Cosmos**



**Natalia Moore – Morgan Freeman**



**Jennavieve Edwards** – Audrey Hepburn

## Contributors' Notes

**Katelyn Adams** is a full-time college student at JCC and a Humanities major. They are not new to art classes, but it has been a while since they practiced in a structured setting. Being in art class again has allowed them to develop their love for art and learn new techniques.

**Alesa Bernat**, JCC alum, is the author of the poetry collection, "Everything is Fine." Her poems have previously been featured in Black River Review, ZPlatt, and Sad Girl Diaries.

**Emily Bombard** is from Watertown, NY, is currently a freshman studying Human Services and plays soccer for the JCC women's soccer team.

**Eric Carden** grew up in the Central New York region learning and loving the field of education. He followed his pursuits of motivating students to make the most of their college experience by getting his master's degree of School Counseling in 2017 at the University of Buffalo (SUNY). He worked in the school counseling field for a few years before moving up to work in higher education. When he is not working, he not only enjoys taking pictures, but also enjoys going on long walks and playing games/trivia with close friends.

**Olivia Mae Cratsenburg** is from LaFargeville, New York and is 20 years old. She is a recent Jefferson alum. Her plans are to continue her education further in the fall.

**Loralei Deasy** writes sci-fi and fantasy with a more casual focus on representations of different ethnicities, cultures, religions, sexualities, gender identities and mental health in books, short stories, and movies.

**Ashley DeMar** is a writer, actor, recording artist, and arts educator originally from Watertown, New York, now living on a tree farm in western North Carolina. Her work has appeared previously with the Black River Review, the Adirondack Center for Writing's Poem Village, and the North Country Arts Council. She has also been published in several poetry anthologies. In 2021, her work was chosen to be part of the U.S. debut of the *Of Earth and Sky* outdoor

exhibition and its corresponding poetry anthology in Charlotte, North Carolina. Find her on social media @ashtreeofthesea to follow along for more updates on words and wanderings.

**Elena Dickinson** is an EDGE student who takes pride in her old soul and love for nature. When she's not crocheting, letter-writing, or reading, she is hiking, biking, and kayaking in the Adirondacks with her dad. She plans to attend St. Lawrence University in the fall as a biology major.

**Michael Del Signore** is a member of JCC's Class of 1970. He is a retired clinical social worker and a former adjunct faculty for SUNY Plattsburgh.

**Jennavieve Edwards** is a JCC college student, born and raised in Upstate New York. Although they do not draw professionally, they have had many pieces displayed in local art shows in Watertown, NY. Their preferred medium for drawing is graphite pencils, and subjects are either portraits, of people or animals, and plant life. They have taken many different art classes and experimented with various styles through both their high school and college career and, even though they love graphite pencils, their overall favorite artistic medium is photography.

**Mitch Fidler** taught high school history at Beaver River CSD for thirty years and was an adjunct instructor for JCC for seventeen years, retiring in 2017.

**Rachel Filkins** is a 2019 graduate who enjoys writing and photography.

**Melisa Gibbs** is part of the JCC nursing program. When not studying or working, she enjoys reading, writing, photography, drawing, Oxford commas, and her cats.

**Tatsuo Kyota** is 19 years old and considers themselves an artist and photographer. They've been drawing as a hobby most of their life, and it wasn't until last year that they found their passion in photography. They are mainly passionate about street photography but find themselves diving into every genre. They would love to take these skills to the professional level at some point and eventually

become a creative director but for now have a long road ahead of them in improving their skills. The main message Tatsuo would like to send to fellow photographers through their work is “You don’t need anything fancy or expensive to get great photos.”

**Tye LaClair** often prefers to work with pen and limited color; this artist decided to challenge themselves and opt for color (which cannot be seen). This piece is a typical example of patterns, eyes, and hidden pictures that the artist likes to include in many of their works. While always changing, this style and technique originated from a high school art class when the artist was introduced to zentangles (images drawn with structured patterns).

**Glenn LaFave** was the Vice-President of the class of 1972 at JCC where he was later an adjunct instructor. He is a retired General Brown teacher.

**Kaden McConnell** is a Humanities and Social Sciences major at JCC. Once they graduate from JCC, they will major in Animation at their next college. Kaden fell in love with art when they were in high school and always tried their best with each project that they worked on. They went a couple years without creating any big projects and are now taking a drawing class to perfect their skill for the future. Enjoy.

**Glenn Erick Miller** is a former JCC English professor. The author of three books, he currently lives in Florida.

**Natalia Moore** is originally from Houston, Texas where they started to pick up drawing in school, using many techniques. However, they favored pen and charcoal because of their ability to create dramatic value.

**Kate Newtown** is an artist and art educator at Carthage High School as well as Jefferson Community College. She works across many mediums exploring everything from the whimsical, to the serious, and many stops between. Kate enjoys finding beauty in the things that are often overlooked. If you are looking for beauty, you will find it.

**Jade Ramirez** is in their second year at JCC and plans to transfer to a four-year school to pursue Art Education. They take much of their inspiration from music and alternative subcultures like punk and metal. They love to explore many different areas and mediums such as painting, clothing design, tattooing, and sculpture, but their main goal is to continue to spread their passion and love for art to future generations.

**Arsynio Robinson** is a queer artist currently working in the tattoo industry. They've been writing poems since middle school, usually during classes when it got boring, but they've never been shared before. Fascinated with all areas of the arts. He's not sure what the future holds for him but is definitely curious.

**Kenyon Wells** is a retired member of the Melvil Dewey Library at JCC and current member of the Cosmic Writers Group living in the Sunny Southland.



**Jennavieve Edwards – Thank You**