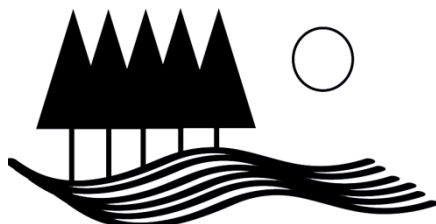


BLACK RIVER REVIEW

A Journal of Poetry, Prose, and Fine Arts



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

Volume XXXV
Spring 2025

EDITORS & JUDGES

Christine Pristash and Michael Avery, *Co-Editors-in-Chief*
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COVER ART

Jade Ramirez
Punk
Mixed media

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. 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/ artists.

Award recipients are encouraged to participate in the reading of works and presentation of awards during the *Black River Review* unveiling in Spring 2025.

Deadline for Volume XXXVI: February 13, 2026

APPRECIATION

Publication of the *Black River Review* is made possible by support from the School of Arts & Humanities. Outstanding Contributor award funds for artwork and writing are provided by the Campus Life committee's Social-Cultural grant.

CREDITS

Typing and layout for this volume of the *Black River Review* is done using Microsoft Word. Prize notification and event coordination by Heather Natali. Original logo design by Dave Bowhall. Cover art digitizing by Keri Chubb (Class of 2010) and Gillian Maitland (Class of 1993). Website content production by Andrew Lackey and Erin Kuhn. Printing by Speedway Press.

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Michael Avery

Introduction

Welcome to our 35th edition of the *Black River Review*. This is a true collaboration of all its participants: from the students, faculty, staff, and alumni who contribute to its contents to the members of the campus community who bring it to life in the form you see before you. We celebrate as another winter has passed and we offer this work as a gift of spring and summer to come.

This year's iteration deals with some perennial themes: rural and urban scenes, nature, relationships, life, and death. But it also features the fantastic. Kirsten Pratt's "The Girl in Blue" presents a haunted mansion with a mysterious and evil inhabitant. Aurora Siegrist's "Facing Your Fears" is a drawing depicting a heavenly warrior against a cartoonish monster. Two photographs by Rose Slate show high-contrast portraits that refuse to be ignored. Another story by Dallas Parker is about a strange "Hidden Grove" that the protagonist finds himself in after what apparent abuse and disconnection. Perhaps it is the fantastic that always keeps us turning the pages. But all the work—the poems, essays, stories, drawings, and photographs—give us a glimpse into our wonderful Jefferson community.

I am particularly drawn to this year's cover, entitled "Punk," by Jade Ramirez. It reminds me, along with her drawing "Say Cheesel," of a particular definition of punk by Kurt Cobain: "...liking and accepting anything that you like...whatever you want...as long as it's good and it has passion¹." To me, Ramirez's cover and drawing are punk. In fact, everything in this year's issue is punk.

Dig in and dig the issue. Discover the passion inside the work. Happy reading!

¹ Coffman, Tim. "Kurt Cobain's Definition of Punk."

Faroutmagazine.co.uk, 16 June 2023, faroutmagazine.co.uk/kurt-cobain-definition-of-punk/. Accessed 30 Mar. 2025.

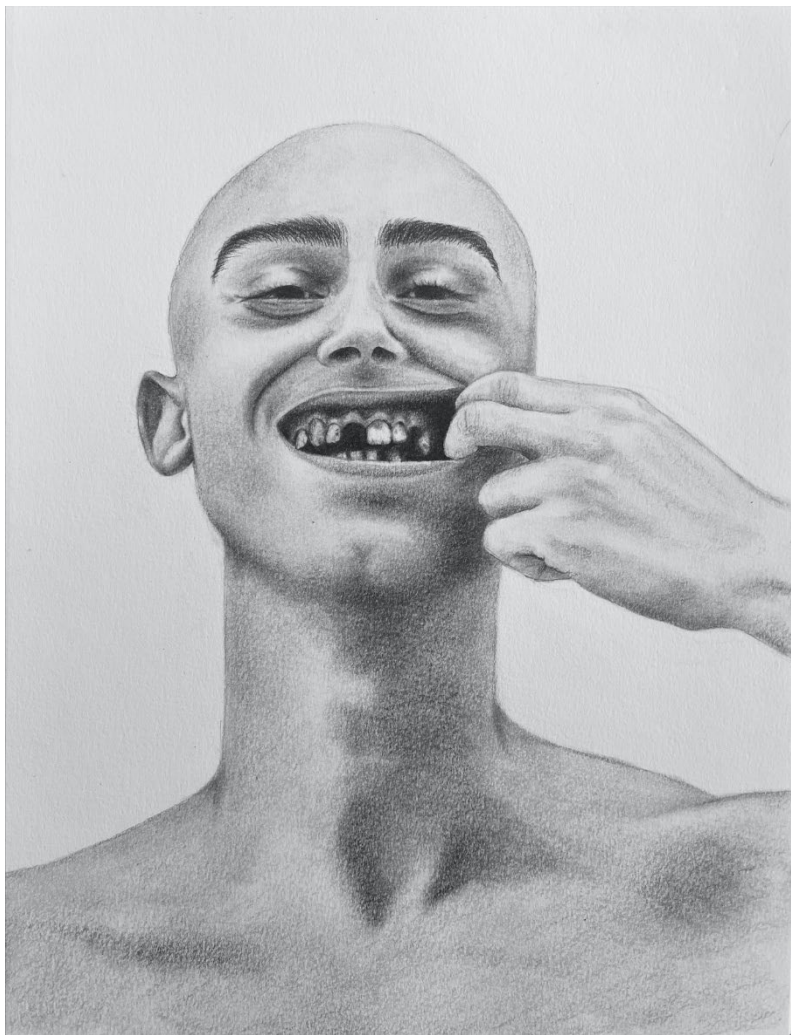
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Jade Ramirez

Frontispiece: Say Cheese! (graphite)



Elena Dickinson – Bullet Holes in the Signs (poem)

From child's pose, muffle something into the carpet about
going for a walk
Let Dad preach about plow makers getting off for lunch and
not seeing me
Farther from the white line than the ditch
Disoriented by the colors of my alma mater
Grass somewhat alive under slush, orange pine needles,
Bullet holes in the signs,
Rust.

Stretches I used to scrap for five-cent cans we could take to the
redemption center
"Smile, You're on Camera"
Hard not to
Small-town snake charmer
Just passing through

"Posted"
Like a trespasser in her hometown, toeing lines drawn
A semester before she could be sure they'd hold.
Now, left breathless by what could have been
Burnt wrapping paper and assorted plastic cutlery,
Toddlers on bony hips belonging to hens turned loose
Pecking at pavement
"Eggs 4 Sale, Free Range, \$3 a Dozen"
"Beware of Dog"
Like the pit bull that follows me half a mile down the street
"Til the guy in the flannel called Daisy to "c'mon back" to the
doublewide
With the garden out front
And the black lab that only once stopped barking
Buried out back.

Lillian Kilionski – She's Just Hungry (photograph)



James Shaw – Lines of Enclosure (nonfiction)

It's morning and you wake up in a rectangle bed, leave your square room, and shower (which is a rectangle) in your square bathroom. Your straight lines are broken up by breakfast on a round plate.

You now leave your rectangle house, drive your rectangle car on mostly straight roads just to get to work at another rectangle building. Before entering, you glance at the circular morning sun and hopefully smile.

You enter rectangle doors, walk to the square elevator, head to your square office (or cubicle), sit at your rectangle desk and start typing on your square computer. Your boss has a problem for you to solve and asks you to think outside the box.

It's the end of the day; you pull out of the rectangle parking space, and you drive by all the rectangle and square buildings. You stop by a square restaurant to get a square-bagged (or boxed) meal, paying for it with a rectangle card.

Now you're home, ready to sit on your rectangle couch (or square chair) and eat your boxed dinner but something stirs in you. Instead of watching your rectangle TV, you go to your square closet and grab a square blanket. You take this and your food outside to your backyard which, ironically, has no fence.

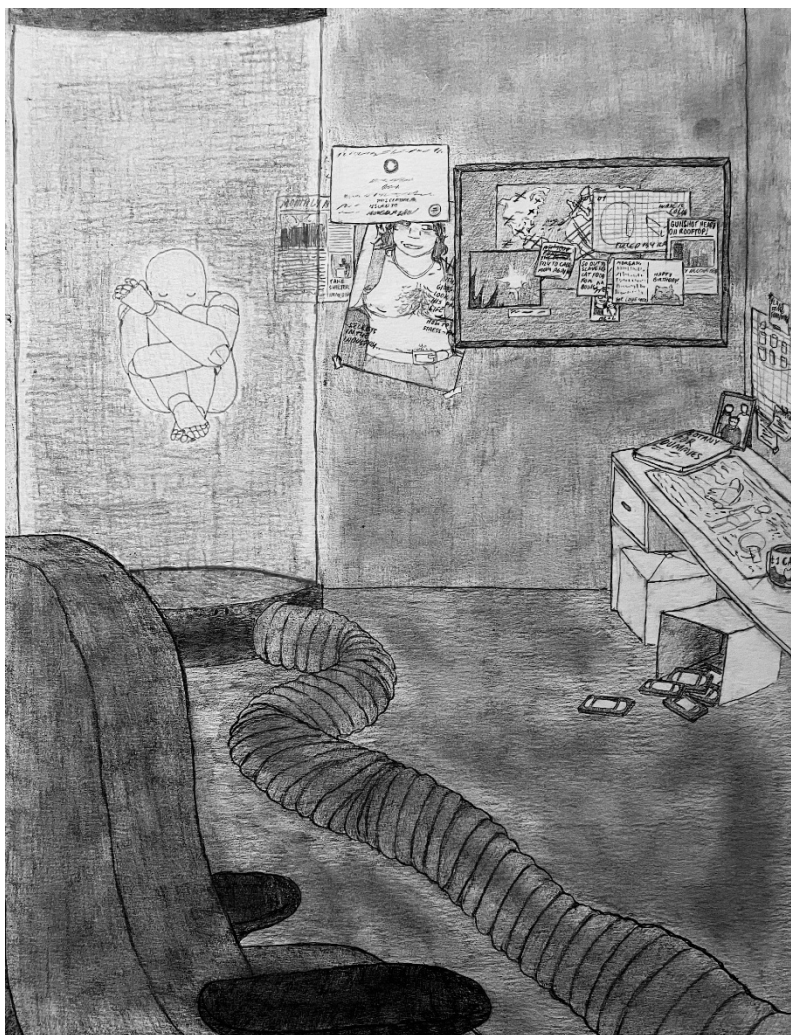
While you're sitting outside on the ground eating your dinner you look up. You notice the irregular shapes of the trees and bushes. You see the shapes and flight patterns of the insects as they go about their business.

You set your food down to watch the sunset full of orange, red, and pink hues blur into one another. You look up and enjoy the freedom that the open sky represents, no enclosing

lines or reassuring ceiling to protect you. You smile at the wonder of creation, at the constant changes.

Enclose your mind with only the possible, and you limit yourself to what is possible. Think of the impossible, and the possibilities in your life will truly be limitless.

Ruby Stump – Bunker Daughter (graphite, colored pencil, marker)



Kenyon Wells – A Pail of Water (poem)

Boys will be boys, of course,
so he would have preferred
in his new awareness
of independence and responsibility
to go up the hill alone.
But he liked the girl.
She was a friend and funny.
After all, he'd get to carry the pail
all the way wouldn't he?
There seemed to be no downside.

She never even considered
not taking her part in this adventure.
They were pals and always would be,
she thought, as she saw him up ahead.
“Wait up!” I'm coming, too!
It's a long way to the top, isn't it?
And I can help, you know! “I always do”
He waited and then they went up.
Jack came down in a pile.
Jill was at his side in a hurry.

The hill no longer looks so tall
as they stand hand in hand
at the bottom.
The walk up to the top now
is an intimate ritual,
a reminder of shared tasks,
shared declines, shared successes.
The pail sits by their back door,
more holes in it every spring,
but always full of flowers.

Pamela Dixon – Lunch for One (photograph)



Alesa Bernat – Song of the Stars (poem)

Her substantia nigra is disappearing.
The act seems so definitive.
The inverse of the way
dark matter consumes a galaxy.

She's disintegrating.
Gray matter and white matter.
Does it matter?

The way they say *extrapyramidal disorder*
makes it seem like she'll be gaining something,
but really she's losing motor control.
As though she's an engine with a clogged air filter
or a fuel injector pump that's not quite right.

When a star dies, is it gaining or losing?
It looks extra as it throws matter into space.
Super wouldn't be in the word supernova
if it were less than *extra*.

What if galaxies are just made by gyrification –
Gyrus and sulcus – folds of matter
on a gigantic cerebral cortex.

Is it synaptic pruning when a star is dying?
Does it matter?

Eric Carden – Under London's Gaze 2 (photograph)



Chris Fuller – Layman's Guide for Adventures on the Felts Mills Creek (nonfiction)

In the quaint North Country hamlet of Felts Mills, New York lies a little-known stream of water. The stream, called Felts Mills Creek, derives its name from the hamlet mentioned above. Both the hamlet of Felts Mills and its creek have a rich and interesting history that is little known to the local area. This article will provide a brief history of the Felts Mills Creek and will also include my personal experiences to highlight the recreational value of the stream.

The hamlet of Felts Mills originally derived its name from John Felts, who founded the hamlet and started a Paper Mill. The Felts Mills Creek contains the remnants of several paper mills, and the structures associated with them. Coincidentally, these remnants make for scenic photos and enjoyable fishing spots. Felts Mills was founded in the early nineteenth century and is home to several structures from the period that are still standing. For example, the Felts Mansion which was recently sold at auction for several million dollars. These factors all combine to provide the hamlet of Felts Mills with a unique charm few other places have.

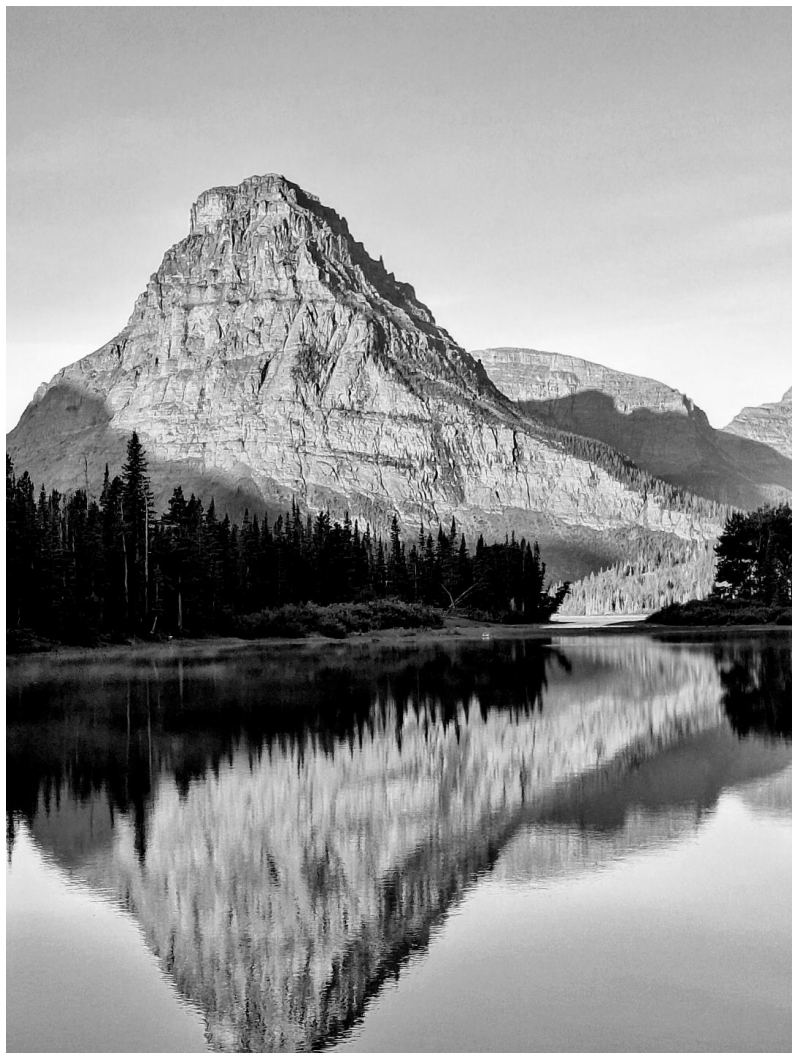
Refocusing, there are several recreational opportunities available around Felts Mills due to the presence of the Felts Mills Creek. Every spring the Felts Mills Creek is stocked with brook trout at several locations. There are multiple public access points located within Felts Mills itself. The access point closest to the mouth of the stream is located on the property of the Felts Mills Volunteer Fire Department. Notably the remnants of one of Felts Mills's paper mills can be viewed from the mouth of the stream. From this point you can access the stream and go trout fishing. Another public access point is located in the Jefferson County Forest off Perigo Road. There are several access points to the Jefferson County Forest in Felts Mills, but I often choose to use the walking trail located on Perrigo Road. The trail used to be accessible by all-terrain vehicles, but the County placed large boulders on the trail to

prevent further damage caused by ATV tires. Upon entering the “county land,” you will find two walkable paths, both of which lead to the Felts Mills Creek. The path to the left of the sandpit leads to a small dam, which is a popular fishing location.

After you have reached the dam located in the “county land,” scenic walking trails surrounded by a short but intense wilderness can be found. The forest’s atmosphere is enhanced by the sound of the creek water modestly moving over the dam. It is not uncommon to sight whitetail deer and rabbits during any time you may choose to spend in the “county land.” Should you choose to go fishing you may catch brook trout or a species of minnows I learned to call “chubs” from a young age. I will note that it is hard to find native trout in the Felts Mills creek, but late season fishing presents a unique and rewarding challenge.

The history of Felts Mills and the recreational value of its creek are a little-known highlight of Jefferson County. This article is only a small survey of the Felts Mills Creek. I hope the greater North Country community will find the area as interesting as I do.

James McFaul – Two Medicine Lake (photograph)



Dalton Hall – 10/27/2024 (poem)

A morning of pre-winter work trimming the oak in the yard.
Someone before us cut it down
Leaving the rooted stump untouched on the property line
Defiant and alive.

It still grows forth in hundreds of infantile shoots
All reaching desperate to drink of the sunlight.
Each year we cut them back to slow their campaign
Stymy the overgrowth.

The kids drag the spoils to the truck
Laughter and play suffuse the toil
Yet I'm barely awake; the autumn air is shrill
Filling my sinuses with ache.

Ache is with the season, it riddles us
And tears apart our insides, like
Allergies and postnasal drip,
Incessant and vile.
We spend the days knowing
What little time there is before the snow.
Trying desperately to make the most
Of the intermediate. The liminal.
The time we wish would end,
For a worse time to start, the winter
Grip to take hold as we make for
Hibernation and burn memories
Of the summer heat to stay warm.
This work, this ache, it keeps us
Moving in the right direction
It keeps us defiant and alive.

I drive to my parents' house to unload the trimmings,
Back past the swing set and the kennels.

Past my sister's house next door
Where my grandparents used to live.
When the work is done, and all the
Oak branches lay piled in the woods,
I walk to the house.
Under the roof of the porch dad built this year,
All silent and still. No one home save the dog,
White haired and weary.

She sleeps on the couch while I pour water
And gaze out at my childhood home,
All its unmoving yet ever-changing pieces,
Like this hound, too stubborn to die, we are
Defiant and alive

Eric Carden – Under London's Gaze (1) (photograph)



Eiffel Vitug – Presence (poem)

A room is still
the same,
with and without the
light.
But there
is still a difference.

Kirsten Pratt – The Girl in Blue (fiction)

The abandoned house loomed ahead like a monster in the shadows. The wind rustled through the trees, whispering warnings to stay away. 'Children's stories,' I chided myself. The gravel crackled beneath our bike tires as Alice and I exchanged nervous glances before riding down the long driveway. Investigative journalism at its finest—two junior reporters sent to uncover the truth about

"I don't... think I want to do this, Ally." Alice's voice was hoarse with anxiety next to me, and a glance at her revealed white knuckles clutching the blue handles of her bicycle.

"We don't have a choice," I said, though my voice wasn't any stronger. "They're just rumors, Al. If this house was really haunted, wouldn't the government have sent scientists by now? Let's just walk through and see what happens."

Alice did not look impressed, but after a long, exaggerated moment of looking behind her to the relative 'safety' of the street, she let out a defeated sigh and pushed her bike forward. "This isn't going to end well."

Alice was more into those supernatural things than I was. I don't even really know why I volunteered for this assignment. A fool's errand? The misguided hope that I'd find something inside. It could make... or break my career.

"What if the Lady in Blue is actually some kidnapped woman?" I joked.

"Oh yeah, much better than a ghost." Alice rolled her eyes. "Let's just get this over with."

We rested our bikes against the weathered, cracking porch and stared upwards at the rotting shell of what used to be a beautiful house. Like something out of a Stephen King novel, the faded blue Victorian home before us had seen better days. The greyish, shingled roof was cracked in places and missing pieces. The wood had weathered and worn down over time. Moss and vines crawled up the sides, seeking to consume what humans had long before taken from nature.

I put my hand on the metal rail of the stairs and felt the roughened, rusting metal give way in some places beneath my fingertips. Knowing our luck, we wouldn't die because of some ghost. We'd get killed by the rusty, decrepit house we were sent to investigate—death by rusted metal.

"Honestly, it looks intriguing. I bet it has a thousand stories to tell." I don't know who I was trying to reassure, her or me. Releasing the rail, I mounted the stairs and listened as each and every one creaked ominously beneath my weight. *'Well, if the sex trafficking pirates... or ghosts didn't know we were here before, they do now.'* The accompanying whine of wood to my left let me know that Alice had joined me on our ascent to hell.

"It's certainly old and smells like it," Alice admitted. "This must've been a beautiful house once."

"I don't know, I still think it's beautiful. In a haunting sort of way. Do you have your camera?" I asked as we reached the top of the steps.

"Yeah," she held it up. "I thought ghosts couldn't be captured on camera. Like vampires and mirrors."

"I guess we're about to find out," I joked as I reached for the door. Once, it was painted a dark, greyish blue that must've been vibrant. It was faded and worn, with cracked paint and a cracked glass panel on the top. The old, ornate copper door handle was a blackened work of art. I turned it, and the door creaked open ominously. A gust of stale wind swept old dead leaves and scraps of paper through the door, whipping at our clothes. "Woah."

"I... maybe I should uhm... wait outside. In case you need help or something, I mean, one of us should be able to run for help... sh-should something go uhm... go wrong." Alice's eyes were wide, frightened.

"I'll go, you stay" I said and held out my hand for the camera.

Alice reluctantly handed it over. I stepped inside. The air was thick with the scent of mildew and time. The grand mahogany staircase spiraled upward, intricate carvings

decorating its railings. Antiques, covered in dust-laden sheets, stood as forgotten relics of the past.

The walls held echoes of past voices, of forgotten lives. The chandeliers above, once sparkling with light, hung heavy with dust and cobwebs.

I turned on the camera. “Th-this is Allison Reed. I am exploring what is rumored to be the most haunted Victorian house in Connecticut. Built in the late 1800s by a wealthy English lord and his eccentric schoolteacher wife, it was abandoned in the 1950s. Since the late 70s, there have been reports of a pale woman in a blue dress wandering the halls. No one has been able to prove anything.”

I filmed each room—furniture left untouched, a half-renovated kitchen with outdated appliances, as if someone had fled in the middle of construction. The wallpaper in some rooms was peeling, revealing layers of history beneath. My footsteps echoed eerily as I made my way back to the front hall.

Alice peeked inside. “Find anything?”

I shook my head. “Just antiques. I’m going upstairs.”

Alice paled. “Up there? That doesn’t look safe.”

I swallowed my own apprehension. “We can’t leave without checking.”

The stairs on the inside creaked just as ominously as those outside. The rail was caked in a thick layer of dust, and a small cloud of dirt lifted with each step. The top of the stairs split into two different hallways. The left was pitch dark, the right offered only a sliver of light from a broken window at the end. I turned right first. The air up here was different—heavier, charged with something unseen.

The rooms were filled with regal furniture, rotting floors exposing the lower level. The air was thick, heavy. My breath felt constricted. I pushed on.

At the end of the hall, a set of double doors stood intact, unlike the others. Their mahogany surface was untouched by time, intricate designs etched into the wood. My instincts

screamed at me to turn back, but curiosity propelled me forward.

“What’s behind door number one?” I muttered, reaching for the copper handle.

The room beyond was a stark contrast to the house’s grandeur. Grime-covered windows let in only slivers of dim light. A massive hole gaped in the middle of the floor. Across the room sat a canopy bed, its blue and gold comforter faded, the lace drapes tattered. A shattered vanity mirror lay in shards on the table beneath it.

I stepped inside. The air turned frigid.

The door slammed shut.

I whipped around, heart hammering. The doors rattled as if shivering in fear themselves.

Then I saw her.

My heart leaped out of my chest and into my throat when I turned around. There, sitting on the edge of the big hole in the floor, sat a woman in a vibrant off-the-shoulder blue dress. She was pale, wearing white wool stockings. Her chestnut hair was unkempt and wild, framing her face as her head tilted down like she was looking into the floor below her. Fear froze me solid. My mouth was dropped open, my breath shallow, my eyes wide. My fingers clutched at the camera between them, shaking so hard the footage would be brutal to look through later.

“Wh... Who are you?” My voice shook. The woman didn’t move.

“My name is Allison Reed,” I tried again. “I’m an investigative journalist for the *Still Water Times*. A-are you alone here? Do you need help?”

The woman lifted her head.

My blood turned to ice. Her eyes—bottomless, hollow, black as the abyss—bored into mine. An unnatural, soulless void.

“Run.”

Her voice rattled through the walls, a chorus of a thousand dead voices. The doors behind me burst open. My feet moved

before my brain caught up, and I bolted, tearing down the stairs.

“Ally!” Alice shouted as I shot past her. “What happened?”

I barely registered her words. My breath came in ragged sobs. I skidded to a stop halfway down the driveway, too afraid to go back for my bike.

“What happened?” Alice panted beside me.

I pointed at the house, unable to speak.

Alice turned to look. “What, Ally? What are you pointing at?”

In the upstairs window, the woman stood. Her head thrown back in silent laughter.

Alice saw nothing.

“Let’s go,” I begged.

Alice retrieved both bikes while I stood frozen, unable to look away from the window. As we pedaled away, the woman’s voice lingered in my mind.

This wasn’t the last time I would see her. I knew that much.

The Lady in Blue wasn’t finished with me.

Aurora Siegrist – Facing Your Fears (graphite and ink)



Alesa Bernat – Shadow Loss (poem)

You never really went away
if you were never *here*
to begin with.

Sometimes I stared at myself.
Mirrors and windows –
as though I would know you
in a wisp of my reflection.

The shadow loss of you,
visible in the slope of my nose,
the dried brown paint of my freckles,
the thin length of my toes.

When I wept, he made me a cradle
out of arms – a ward
from dark specters,
saying without saying
ghosts *are* figments.

My mind full of phantom fear
searched the corners,
like a ghost would be lurking.

You never really went away.

Rose Slate – The Abyss Within (photograph)



Elena Dickinson – Hand-In-Bare-Hand (poem)

“They’re dry,” I warn
As his palm grazes my knuckle
And twists the ring off my finger
A citrine stone wrapped in wire
Doesn’t matter how long he looks at it, metal warming in his
hands, he’s not from here.
Can afford to go mittenless as we walk hand-in-bare-hand.
But I keep mine cupped, fearful I’ll spill the exhales I’ve spent
warming ‘em up
I think I wore a scarf that day
Wrapped it around my neck
Hoping my naïveté wouldn’t betray me
And leave it wrung like the songbird in *Trifles*
Stuffed into a sewing box.
If my fate be surrounded by pincushion lookalikes
Eyes replaced by buttons
Feathers made from felt
I should like to at least fly first
But heavy is the head that lolls to the side of my body
Keeping my feet firmly on the ground
As we reach the end of the dirt path
Where we squint at passing cars and I shiver
For December chews on clouds and spits like the son of a
farmhand back home

Pamela Dixon – Web of Lies? Truth? Neither? (photograph)



Dallas Parker – The Trap of His Mind (fiction)

Looking out at the screaming sun, Theodore can't bring himself to look away. The smell of smoke wafting off his mother is suffocating. He touches his throat, reliving the night before: him on the ground, his mother sneering, calloused fingers tightening around his neck. Theodore thanked the gods of The Hidden Grove for pulling him away before it was too late.

The sun peeks into the car, eavesdropping on the nonsense his mother spews. Theodore stares into it, eyes burning, tears threatening to spill. He rolls his eyes back so far they should meet darkness, but instead, the light intensifies, swallowing all absence of color. A brilliant flash. A universe colliding within itself. Theodore reaches upward, as if gratitude could heal him. "The Hidden Grove," he whispers. "Thank you."

The wind picks up, answering in murmurs, wrapping around him, carrying him deeper. Statues greet him—figures of those he loves. His mother, stone-faced yet beautiful, his brother, towering over her. Another statue emerges, unformed, a mere hunk of stone, too heavy to move. He traces its rough edges, wondering who it's meant to become.

"Theo!"

His mother's chain-smoked voice cuts through the trees. The wind howls, lifting him higher. *Isn't it lovely here? Come home, Theodore.*

"Theo!"

This time, Noah's voice slaps him awake.

"What?" Theo blinks.

"We're at school. Let's go."

Noah's lanky frame looms over him, his black Nirvana shirt and long white sleeves a stark contrast against the morning light. Theo, a smaller mirror of his brother, with red hair, pale skin, and constellations of freckles, exhales sharply. Stares claw at him from all directions—kids, teachers, ghosts of people he'll never meet. He can feel them all around, but never catches them.

He grips the metal seat and steps out. *You can let it all go. It's called freefall, Theodore.*

Looking up at the daunting atmosphere of brick and expectation, Theo gulps down his urge to crawl back to The Hidden Grove. His legs falter, but Noah catches him before he crumples. "I got you, buddy." Noah's smile is an anchor, keeping him from slipping away to the Hidden Grove that calls his name. *Theodore!*

Between this reality and the next, Noah will always be his favorite person.

Rushing inside, Theo spots Penny Lockie. Once, they shared lunch. Now, she clutches her books tighter, eyes flicking over him, weighing, judging. *She'll never accept you for who you are.*

Blinking away the sting in his eyes, Theo hurries to Mrs. Satinwood's room. Middle school math. "Hello, Mrs. Satinwood."

He slides into the cold metal chair in the back. The air smells like cinnamon and mint, just as it always does.

"Good morning, Theodore."

Her voice, wobbly with age, makes his stomach sink. She won't be around forever. She smiles, then frowns. She sees the welt on his head, the green bruises blooming around his eye like circling sharks. But she says nothing. At least, not right now. She's battled this before.

Blinking away tears, Theodore doesn't notice. "I'll see you at lunch?" she asks gently.

"Yes," Theo whispers, feeling like indigo wrapped in tears.

When lunch rolls around, Theo hurries back. But before he reaches the dimly lit room, he hears a muffled sob seeping out of the classroom. Peeking in, he sees Penny, face in her hands, Mrs. Satinwood rubbing slow, comforting circles on her back.

"Mrs. Satinwood?" Penny hiccups, voice fragile.

"Yes, Penny?"

"Is Theodore coming today?"

"Yes. He's usually here by now."

They turn toward the door. Theo stumbles back, tripping into the lockers with a thud. Darkness pulls him in. *Welcome home, Theodore.*

He wakes in The Hidden Grove, sprawled among snow white daisies with golden middles. Aromatic smells fill his nostrils. The statues stand before him, the unformed one shifting, taking shape. It's taller now, softer. He knows this face. Urging The Hidden Grove to let him leave – if only for a second.

The wind sighs. *You can go, but not for long.*

Pain throbs at the back of his head. His fingers come away wet with crimson. Before he's yanked back into the Grove, he catches a glimpse of a cascade of men in uniforms rushing to his side. His vision blurring in and out – his eyes rolling back again and the bright sun illuminating and radiating the abyss of The Hidden Grove.

He rushes to the statue. It's her. Mrs. Satinwood. He grabs his paints, filling the stone with color. He steps back, breath hitching. What if this is all he has left of her when he's gone?

"Theodore?" The wind carries him up and lets him fall all the way to – he awakens with his chest heaving, begging for raw air. Panting.

A flashlight waves in front of his face. He's lying on the floor. A uniformed man kneels beside him. "I'm a first responder. My name is Jarred Bristol."

Theo sits up too fast, wincing at the bandages wrapped around his head. His vision swims. "Where are the cops?"

"No cops." He thinks he must've imagined them, or maybe it was his vision tricking him. Blending realities.

Theo blinks, adjusting to the bright lights. Penny and Mrs. Satinwood huddle across the room, faces streaked with tears.

"Can you tell me your name?" Jarred asks.

"Theodore, sir."

"Good. And the date?"

Theo scoffs, encouraging the rage of pain inside of his head to grow. "April 3rd, 2006."

Jarred's pitying smile gnaws at him. "Why are they crying? What's with all the questions?" Penny is crying from the other side of the room. Her broken sobs echo.

Mrs. Satinwood kneels beside him, tears threatening to fall – voice steady but thick with emotion. "We're just worried about you."

Jarred exhales. "You have bruises, old and new. But what concerns me most are the multiple concussions."

Theo already knows. He feels the swelling pressing – knocking against his skull, the ache seeping into his bones.

"They can't be old," he protests.

"The green and yellow ones say otherwise." Jarred's tone has turned cold, if only to enforce certainty.

Theo wipes his face. His hands come away wet with tears.

The Hidden Grove calls, whispering false promises. Everything comes to kiss the pain away. Everywhere, everything comes here to decompose into clandestine meetings. But Theo sees it now—the lies. Its true purpose. This place doesn't protect him. It hides the truth.

He stumbles to the statue. "Mrs. Satinwood," he calls. Again and again, voice cracking, throat burning as metallic spreads in his mouth. Rain begins to fall. The Grove has never seen rain before. It pelts his skin, seeps into the earth. The world unravels. Planets crash, colliding into the Trap of His Mind.

He falls to his knees, surrendering to the weight of it all. Letting go always seemed like darkness, but it isn't dark at all. It's light. It's warmth. It wraps around him, smooth and endless, holding him still – constricting. Forcing the natural flow of life.

Theodore exhales as rain starts to pour from the sky. The rain gradually picks up, coming down faster and faster until it bites his skin. Until it hugs him. The atmosphere starts to crash into The Trap of His Mind, releasing him to the Gods. Theo drops even lower, going down as he lets this world swallow him whole and lets the essence of himself implode. Because none of it was ever real.

And the trap lets him go.

Amanda Chamberlain – Untamed (painting)



Dalton Hall – Another Poem about Deer (poem)

Because the pangs of remorse are crippling.
I didn't even think I hit you;
Was it not you who trotted off?
Of all the group it was you
Who looked large and wise,
With a keen eye beaming my way.
A big doe, I thought,
Who'd seen plenty of years, bore many children,
Eaten the fruits of the field myriad nights.

I've got mouths to feed, and
Anyways, how else are you going to die?
We've hunted out your other predators.
Save the rare coydog, who would
One day catch up to
Gnaw on your hindquarters while you
Bleat to your uncaring progeny.

They would leave you in the end,
Just as they left you now.
The sudden thunderclap that puts you away
Scares them to the forest edge,
Where the headlights catch their eyes
In the last of the evening glow before
They turn to wisps within the trees.

Then the light falls on you.
I see your spikes, never visible in the grey twilight.
A child. A young buck.
No myriad nights of graze, no children born.
Just one of a few short years, chasing tail,
Barely off the teat, laid in the grass
Staring into the truck lights.
Wheezing hopelessly through blood-matted jowls.

Why?

Why must I do this?

Reaching into the well of certainty

Just to pull out the drowned infant of error.

To clean up the mess it makes.

Another double tap

Another wasted youth

Another hopeless gaze

From the end of a muzzle pressed to temple

Begging for a way out that isn't this.

But that path doesn't exist.

I am the coydog.

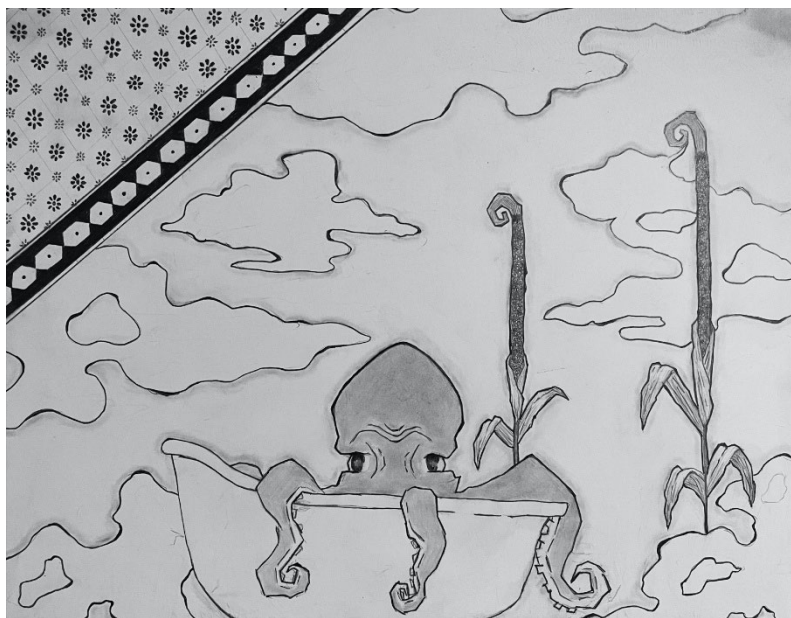
Chantell Beach – Endless Possibilities (graphite and pastel)



Kenyon Wells – A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall (poem)

Sudden, like an intake of breath
when startled from a reverie,
Southern summer rain
often arrives as unexpectedly,
and, sometimes about as welcome,
as a process server on your front porch.
Not Shakespeare's rain dropping gently
but a steel grey curtain,
heavy and thudding,
roaring to the ground
from a blast furnace sky.
Hot and hard and mean.
And after, quickly and with purpose,
the land swallows and steams,
licks its wounds back to smoothness.
Feels no grief.
Holds no grudge.
Suffers no regrets.

Jasmyn Marrero – Simple Pleasures (graphite)



Joshua Dickinson – Diotima Diorama (poem)

Greek ladders given by whores
Diotima the instructress that -ess misapplied to her
A she not of actual Earth—would anyone claim her
provenance
Search chipped ruins for Diotima's tomb
Who lived in sex in Socrates's eyes, gleaming with irony
for Symposium fodder
The bandy-legged paunches bandying jokes on love
To an audience of men
of “complex” sexuality
Being played to with pipes lubricated by girls.
This their nesting box
puzzles
Hers the ages' fame undermined
Given only this, would Diotima nod approval
Sagely unwinging her arms, unwinding those real legs from her
couch
Welcoming the perceiver into her boudoir?
Such, such are the joys of being objectified
(The *by men* is assumed, is it not?)

Madison Shepherd – The Forbidden Fruit (graphite)



Alesa Bernat – My Anger is a Triangle (poem)

My anger is a triangle.

Every corner a sharp edge
and each side a flat face.

My anger is trilateral.

It moves my body until I tip -
up on razor points -
flop forward, drop back -

My anger is trapped.

I'm cornered at odd angles,
first acute, then obtuse,
sometimes scalene or isosceles,
never equilateral or right.

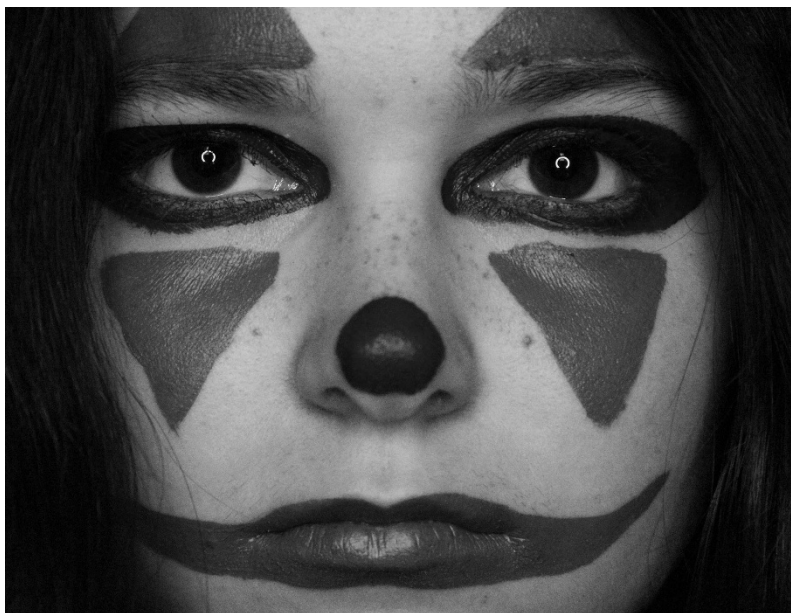
Why couldn't my anger have been
a more pleasant shape?

Perhaps a classic teardrop.
Where the sharp edge molds
smoothly into a soft swollen curve.

Why couldn't my anger
have been a circle?

It could roll about in its rage
and never have barbs
to prick people with.
Why couldn't my anger
be a thing without form?

Rose Slate – Jester's Veil (photograph)



Eiffel Vitug – I Write Because... (poem)

Honorable Mention

It's fun.

I often feel excessive emotions and cannot express them.

I enjoy stories that are satisfactory.

I hyper fixate.

I like to keep my hands busy.

It's more fun than my schoolwork.

I can't play videogames while spinning in an office chair.

I am delusional.

I want my parents to be proud.

I crave praise.

I spiral into mentally deep holes.

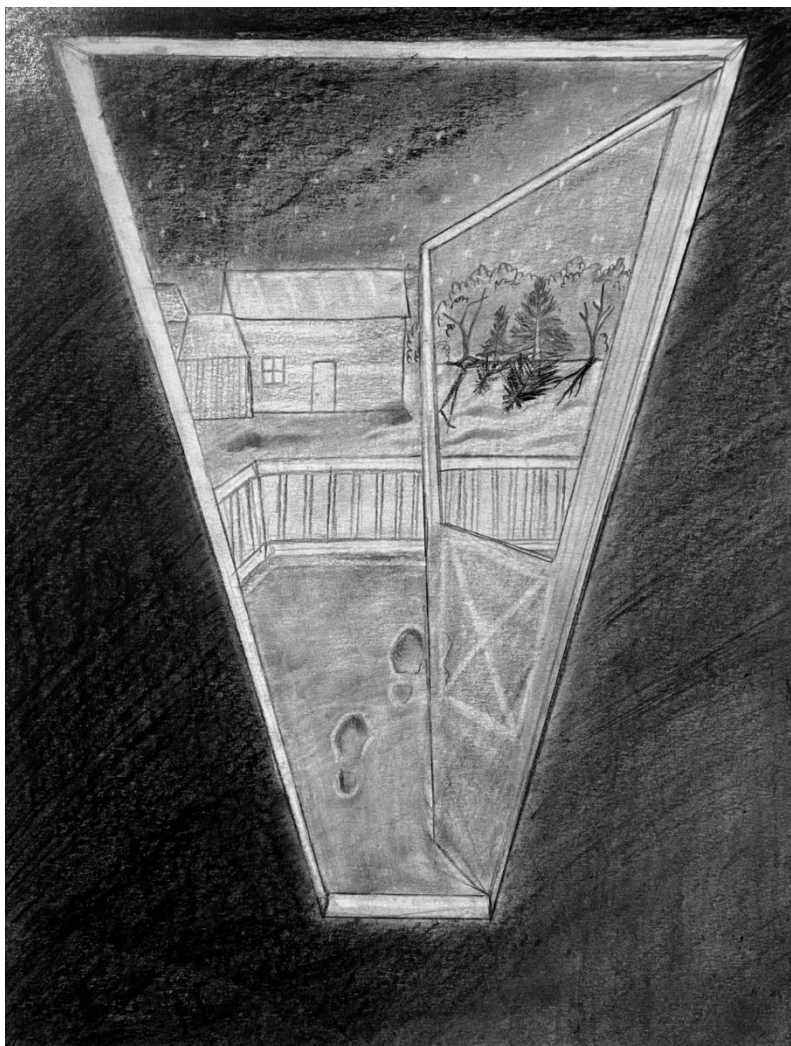
I want to publish something.

I want to be at least good at one thing.

I like being alone.

I want to be remembered.

Christopher Bolton – The Threshold is Band in a Sea of Monsters (graphite)



Lucinda Barbour – Woman in a Wave (poem)

Rediscovered in a pocket were three gifts:

a smooth shard of blue-green sea glass

a soft dove wing form of white shell

and a tumbled heart of cool gray stone.

Lively memories come with them:

toes search for purchase on shifting pebbles

crashing salty waves - cold and invigorating

warm sunshine, wind, and soaring gulls.

Standing chest deep until she was enveloped

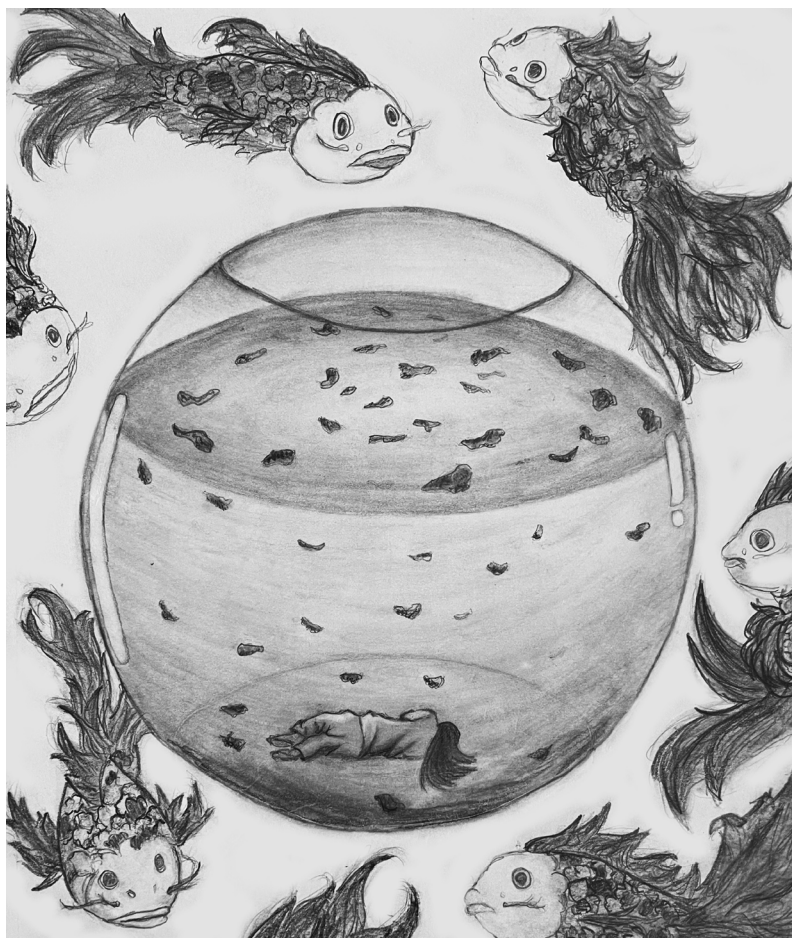
her hair moved in a wave - flowing freely

with the current and churning of the ocean.

Buoyant her silhouette appeared ultramarine.

Spirits lifted by the moon and pulled by the tides.

Eiffel Vitug – Melancholy (graphite)



Contributors' Notes

Lucinda Barbour served as Art Professor at JCC for 28 years, where she enjoyed encouraging her students' artistic development. She recently taught an art workshop for UK veterans and hopes to continue this gratifying work.

Chantell Beach, a current JCC student, says that "When I create something, I want it to be able to trigger emotions. My grandfather was the one who always supported my art and that is the reason why I continue to draw."

Alesa Bernat (Class of 2009) received an honorable mention in Seneca Park Zoo's 2024 Nature Poetry Contest. She previously published poems in *Boreal Zine*, *Sad Girl Diaries*, *North Star*, and *Black River Review*.

Christopher Bolton is a 22-year-old student at JCC. He hopes to become an attorney in the next 8 years. He is passionate about the creative arts, primarily writing and music.

Eric Carden has been a part of the JCC Enrollment Services team for over a year and a half, assisting students apply and get accepted in the Northern New York and NYC areas. Eric moved to the Watertown area over 5 years ago and grew to love the area from taking pictures of beautiful nature to enjoying time with friends.

Amanda Chamberlain was born and raised in Upstate, NY. She is currently attending JCC full-time for Human Services and plans to transfer after graduation. Amanda wants to pursue a career in Mental Health Counseling/Art Therapy.

Elena Dickinson, an Anne of Green Gables enthusiast, is studying Biomedical Sciences at St. Lawrence University in hopes of one day becoming a Pediatric Cardiologist. Like Anne, Elena indulges her curiosity, while remaining determined that the best lies around the bend.

Josh Dickinson studied at Jefferson and currently teaches writing and literature here. He enjoys reading banned books and

participating in the National Novel Writing Month contest each November.

Pamela Dixon (Class of 2000) holds an associate degree from Jefferson Community College and a bachelor's degree from Franklin University. Her work has been featured in past issues of the *Black River Review* and this year, she earned first place in the North Country Arts Council Fall 2024 show, photography category. Her dream as a photographer is to cross paths with a moose, camera in hand, or to spot a fox in her garden, camera ready.

Chris Fuller (Class of 2022) was born and raised in Felts Mills, NY. Chris graduated from Jefferson Community College in 2022.

Dalton Hall (Class of 2014) is a JCC alum from Brownville, a father of three, a journeyman in the pipe trades, the drummer for Small Town Dreamers, and the songwriter behind Consanguine.

Lillian (Benson) Kilionski (Class of 2017) is a JCC graduate who enjoys traveling and photographing people, animals, and nature.

Jasmyn Marrero is a current JCC student born in Hyannis, Massachusetts. This was her first time drawing after a three-year hiatus and this art class has reignited her passion for art.

James McFaul (Class of 1974) has over 33 years' experience in adult and community education including administrative positions with Western Wyoming College, Indiana University- Kokomo, Western Michigan University and Vincennes University. James retired in 2020.

Dallas Parker is a current student at JCC studying creative writing. She plans on pursuing journalism but is currently undecided about what school she wants to attend. Dallas likes to explore the complexities of the mind, weaving emotions and reality through her writing.

Kirsten Pratt is a psychology major, writer, and a mother. She is passionate about storytelling, raising awareness of mental health challenges in society, and someday hopes to publish a novel.

Jade Ramirez is a 21-year-old queer artist and JCC student who focuses on expressive portraiture and surrealism.

Madison Shepherd is eighteen years old and currently enrolled at JCC in the Creative Writing program. Despite her writing major, she's been drawing for almost 9 years and hopes to continue to draw and improve for many more.

James Shaw (Class of 2017) is a local JCC alum and a veteran NY national guardsman. He enjoys writing and is currently working on his first science fiction novel.

Aurora Siegrist, a current JCC student, has always loved art. She somehow finds time for the many projects she is both writing and drawing for, most of which are fantasy fiction.

Rose Slate (Class of 2024) balances her studies in education with her passion for photography, capturing the raw essence of human emotion in her New York-based art and exploring themes of identity.

Ruby Stump is an 18-year-old student at JCC. Ruby likes drawing what they want and when they want—which usually means they're drawing made up characters all the time. If you're reading this: "Hi Mom!!!"

Eiffel Vitug, a current JCC student, has used writing for the last 7 years as an outlet to express emotions, struggles, and interests without needing to find the right words. Eiffel is able to explore her own complexities and create a piece that won't limit her voice.

Kenyon Wells is a retired member of the Melvil Dewey Library All-Star staff. He writes poetry and takes photos down South these days.

Lillian Kilionski – Iguana with a Tick Problem (photograph)

