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Intertext is a publication of the Syracuse University Writing Program. It features the work of Writing Program students and represents the quality and variety of writing produced in its undergraduate courses.

The Louise Wetherbee Phelps Award recognizes excellence in writing in the Writing Program’s courses. Submissions are evaluated on depth, complexity, technical control, emotional and intellectual appeal, and how well they reflect the goals of the Writing Program. The 2013 winners are Red Thomas for “Smoke Break” and Annemarie Menna for “Ari Folman’s Ethical, Psychic Warzone.”
INTRODUCTION
On paper, it takes fourteen people a little over forty-one hours to produce a publication like Intertext. Every Friday morning for fifteen weeks, our group met for three hours to read, discuss, edit, review, organize, design, and package these stories into the magazine you hold in your hands today. We would split up to read and re-read, edit and re-edit, only to come back together and agree, disagree, and change our minds entirely. Forty-one classroom hours later, the 21st annual issue of Intertext was complete.

In reality, though, this publication represents so much more than the sum of those hours.

The thirteen students in the WRT 340: Advanced Editing Studio course that makes up the Intertext staff had the privilege of reading some of the best writing the Syracuse University Writing Program has to offer. Each student brought his or her own strengths to the course and aspired to learn new skills that would help them grow as editors. We relished the opportunity to hone our editing, publishing, and design skills while putting together an invaluable compendium that showcases the work of writing students across the SU campus and beyond.

Submissions from upper- and lower-division courses proved to be as wide and varied in topics as they were in voices. Each had a specific message to tell and a unique way of conveying that message through the written word. These pieces are all now part of an impressive compilation through Intertext magazine, a tradition that has been in place since 1993.

In addition, we are excited to present web-based content at http://wrt-intertext.syr.edu/ that complements the print edition we have worked so hard to perfect. We hope to enhance the Writing Program’s many ties with the Syracuse community through this new, multi-faceted medium. Through text, video, and speech, we wish to highlight the value of interpersonal communication and represent the best of not just the University, but Syracuse at large.

We are proud to present you with a diverse sample of the work our fellow students produced this year; their devotion to the craft and their unending talent is on full display for you to enjoy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We, of course, have to thank Professor Patrick W. Berry, our advisor. Without his dedication, expertise, and patience throughout the semester, Intertext would have been impossible. We are indebted to the College of Arts and Sciences’ iLEARN program for their continued support. We thank the Writing Program for their commitment to excellent undergraduate writing and to Intertext, including Lois Agnew, Kristi Johnson, Ivy Kleinhart, Christine Palmer, Steve Parks, LouAnn Payne, Minnie Bruce Pratt, George Rhinehart, Eileen Schell, and Beth Wagner.

We thank the Louise Wetherbee Phelps Award judges for 2013: John Colasacco, Anne Fitzsimmons, Kate Navickas, and Tony Scott.

We also thank those who have contributed to our class: Benay Bubar, Sarah Deem, and Wendy Mansfield.

Lastly, a huge thanks to all the writers for their submissions. If it weren’t for your continued interest, this magazine would not have been able to maintain its high quality for twenty-one inspiring years, and hopefully will continue in the future.

—Jayme Brown and Hayley Kang

Published by SURFACE, 2013
Red Thomas, Major: Writing and Rhetoric, “Smoke Break,” written for WRT 422

“‘Smoke Break’ is a reflection on a talk late outside a small town bar about how to navigate life as a transgendered person.”
WINNER: BEST UPPER-DIVISION WRITING 2013

Annemarie Menna, Major: Anthropology, “Ari Folman’s Ethical, Psychic Warzone,” written for WRT 200

“I was fascinated by how Folman bent the definition of a documentary to play with the very idea of what truth really is to each individual person.”
WINNER: BEST LOWER-DIVISION WRITING 2013

Andrew Montemarano, Major: Finance and Accounting, “Prison Break: Religion as a Way Out of Jail,” written for WRT 105

“Being involved with religion my entire life and interested in a career in law, I decided to explore religious practice and conversion among the incarcerated in U.S. prisons.”

Courtney Hytower, Major: Political Science, “The Salvation of Whiskey,” written for WRT 114, and “Pathway for Life,” available online at http://wrt-intertext.syr.edu/

“This piece is a spiritual reflection on the wonders of life, the paths we choose, and corruptions we encounter along the way—towards achieving our goals.”

Ginger Star Gunnip, Major: Bioengineering; Minor: Writing and Rhetoric, “Human Nature,” written for WRT 308

“This piece is a spiritual reflection on the wonders of life, the paths we choose, and corruptions we encounter along the way—towards achieving our goals.”

Ralph Willsey, Major: Criminal Justice, “Made for Walking: An Open Letter To My Boots,” SYRACUSE VETERAN’S WRITING GROUP.

“I’m a veteran of two tours of Iraq, and I take it as it comes.”
Ashley White, Major: Political Science and History; Minor: Writing and Rhetoric, “Tiger Lily,” written for WRT 308

“Having a sister is like having a best friend you can’t get rid of; you know whatever you do, she’ll still be there.”

Andrew Miller, Unmatriculated Graduate Student, “An Ugly Place,” written for WRT 422

“I visited a place with no rules and saw what it can do to us. This is one story from that ugly place.”

Annie Licata, Major: Magazine Journalism and Writing and Rhetoric, “Allie,” written for WRT 255

“This is a story about the most courageous person I know, and she’s my hero.”

Tatiana Aviles Andino, Major: Communications, “Between Two Worlds,” written for WRT 114

“Immersing myself in Hispanic culture on the Lower East Side, I discovered the important role that our roots and identity play in each of our lives and realized that there is no place like home.”

Nijmeh Ali, Doctoral student and teacher in the Political Studies Department at Al Quds University in Jerusalem. Read about Nijmeh’s visit to Steve Parks’ civic writing class, and you can hear her story “The People Did Not Stop” at http://wrt-intertext.syr.edu/

Searching for Truth
At the end of my suffering
there was a door.

There are moments in our lives when reality presents itself as ambiguous or, for better or worse, troubling. We try to make sense of our world using our experiences—what we heard, what we saw, what we read, what we remember from our pasts. Yet what we make of them is entirely up to us—or is it? We live in obscurity. We have questions; we get lost along the way.

Where do you seek your answers to questions in life? Books? God? Mentors? Do you take long walks? When something bothers you, how do you go about getting your mind off of it?

It is terrible to survive as consciousness buried in the dark earth.

When you have a nagging thought, a lingering pain, or a returning question, it’s common to dig deep, to discover yourself, to find your truths. Some do it by self-searching, by reaching out to others, or by re-evaluating their choices. Whatever they’re searching for, they all embark on a journey to discover their truths.

Then it was over: that which you fear, being a soul and unable to speak, ending abruptly, the stiff earth bending a little. And what I took to be birds darting in low shrubs.

The stories in this section have an emerging theme of finding and uncovering truths. Follow along with these authors on their journeys. See if their earth bends, notice the way their birds dart across the low shrubs. Perhaps you will find your own truths along the way.

—Taylor Baker, Sarah Cho, Nicky Zamoida, and Brittany Zar

Excerpts from the poem “The Wild Iris” by Louise Gluck.
It’s odd how it works. Each time I say “no,” my resolve grows to stay alive, to keep on living. After a while, living becomes as regular as muscle memory. I take shot after shot of pain, and it strengthens my will to keep living. I learn what it means to become more alive and want to live life all the more. But, again, it comes crashing down.

I pick up the glass and down a few gulps; better to get that out of the way. I glance over at Kaeli and watch curiously as she sips her beer. She cocks her eyebrow and asks, “What?” She places her hands on the bar and looks around at the other people.

“Nothing,” I blurt, looking guiltily away. “Nothing much at all…” Shrugging, I rigidly shoot my upper body higher towards the ceiling. I want to be tall. I square my already broad shoulders as I stare around for somebody to talk to. While I do this, Kaeli fixes her hair and plays with her neatly lacquered nails. She examines nicks and scratches on them, all the while complaining how hockey keeps ruining the polish.

I frown. “Good thing you haven’t been going, then.” Whump! She hits me. “Tell no one!” She hisses. “My family doesn’t know. I’m tired of playing; I don’t like it anymore.” “Then what do you like?
Your nails?” I ask in a high-pitched voice—feigning femininity.

She glares tight at me, “Yes, and I need a rest. Work and then hockey is too much.” “Then go back to your old job.” “I don’t like the office. The fire station is much better. Plus I’m trying to change location to Providence.”

“Wanna come to the lake tomorrow? I’ll be home alone. You can bring Dan, too.” “Oh,” I say. “Okay.” “Hey, listen, we gotta talk…” I begin. Kaeli arches those perfect eyebrows again. “What about? Aren’t we talking now?” I cannot entirely tell if she is trying to dodge the subject. “About me,” I nonchalantly nod. “And this.” I stick out my index finger and raise it to the level of my hair, pointing at the short, deceivingly dark strands. “This is important, you know.” She makes a non-comprehending face, “Since when is you getting a haircut news?”

“Sooo… Can we get into it? I’m—” “Yugh!” my friend proclaims as she stands.

“I need a cigarette.” I nod slowly and we trudge outside into the sweet summer night. We turn the corner and dwell in a slightly less trafficked area out of the way of the door. I lean against the wall of the bar, the alcohol starting...
to take effect. I am such a lightweight, especially on my new OCD meds.

Kaeli doesn’t bother with propping herself up; she just stands near the door and opens a new pack of her “Cowboy Killers,” as she calls them. She picks one out and thrusts it in my direction. Why not? I like cigars, after all.

My head swims as I take the cigarette from her hands and hold it shakily up. I dredge the bright white True-Value lighter from my pocket (I had somehow intuited that I’d need it) and sharply suck air in as I create a flame that flashes at the end of the cancerous tube. It lights. I inhale and cough heartily as I enjoy the feeling of floundering—the gasping for air. I am Ender in space. After that I just suck and hold.

I take a few more drags and wait for my tears to subside. Wondering where they came from, I wipe the traitorous streams away with the back of my wrist, stopping them from carving any more lines down my face. “I’m a man,” I finally utter, crunching down on the filter of the cigarette.

I damn nearly bite it off before I regain my composure and pull it from my mouth to spit. Whenever I smoke, I am John Lydon and Nicholas D. Wolfwood—all in one. I slouch against the building and spit some more. “I am a man,” I murmur agitatedly, excitably.

Oblivious to my personal torment, Kaeli asks the wrong question: “Why do you keep spitting?” “I’m a fish on land!” I proclaim, and spit once again, this time much closer to her. She sidesteps and offers me another cigarette. I did not even realize I had finished the first. I gratefully decline and toss dark looks into the dusky corner of the building. I am Dean. I crush the butt against my rubber sandal and fling it into the trash.

My first time at a bar and I’m crying like a little bitch. I think I’ve already drunkenly introduced myself to everyone here as a middle-aged man trapped in this horrendous body. Maybe not, but by the looks I’m getting as I glance around the corner at the other smokers, I probably have. Comes with the territory. On my own in a foreign land, I am Ivan Denisovich.

I like smoking. I like feeling death caress my mouth. I like blowing out silvery jets of air. I like the feeling of being choked, suffocated, infected…hollowed out. I am Yutaka Ozaki. It keeps me in check.

Dan wishes I’d quit. He also wishes I weren’t a man, or that I wasn’t a mess. But hey, that comes with the territory.

Kaeli is still taking luxurious drags from her death device. I shoot her a look laced with murder, and she finally asks the right question: “What’s wrong?” “Nothing,” I muster. “I just needed someone to know, and now I think you do.”

“You can see right through me. I’m not really a man, not quite a girl, never to be complete.”
Kaeli has been my best friend, the one who has known me the longest, the one with whom I have not had any physical attachment. People think they know me, but they don’t. One single person could never truly understand my history. My lifeblood seeps out to all who meet me; my vital organs are passed out to close friends. There’s always more to go around; the more the merrier, they say. I pass out my heartbeats like potato chips to all the passersby.

I am Troubled Joe, and you can know me for free! No fee. I watch Kaeli’s cigarette burn down towards the end. “You know, at least,” I venture. “I know you know.” You know The Truth. I am The Truth. “Know what?” she asks. “That I am nothing.” You can see right through me. I’m not really a man, not quite a girl, never to be complete. Kaeli rolls her eyes at this.

“Can you all see through me,” I continue. I'm a ghost: a scary, scary ghost. “You’ll have to believe I’m a man, though.” Ghosts float. “We all float down here.” God, where was that from? Some book? A song? “I need someone to believe it for me after I die. If not, I’ll just be a dead girl.” A very, very dead girl. I think back to the incident from about a month before...

“I’m trans,” I text to Raymond, under the table. He glances over at me and looks mad. “Okay, Genevieve,” Raymond says. “Sure yah are.” My name’s Red, I think. He can’t possibly be talking to me. “Hmm?” my mom asks, looking around at the dinner table. We are out to eat at Nonna’s Trattoria in Geneva, visiting my brother at his school and the food has just been served. It is Mom, Ray and his girlfriend, Nana, and myself. Ray and I were conversing about what is new with me, and so I sent him that text message.

Shifting in his chair, Raymond glances over at my mom, who is glaring at me the entire time. “Nothing,” he says. “She’s being stupid.” I snap out of it. Not even my memories provide safety.

I realize Kaeli’s kick with the cancer stick is almost at its end. I watch the embers wind their way down towards her mouth. That mouth speaks truth; it has to. She mmhmm’s me and throws the nasty butt on the ground. “But you’re still a girl.” She stomps it out.

I allow my eyes to glaze over as I sink into a drunken haze. I swim back into the bar. I’ll be Craig Ferguson with a few more drinks in me.

I sit and stare blankly at the empty glass before me. I am the glass: a transparent husk. My core poured out, never to be known. I turn to ashes: my feet, legs, up my torso, all the way to my head. Every time I move I feel a piece of my being dissolving into the wind.

I turn to Kaeli, to tell her something—anything. I need to let her know I’m corroding from the outside in. I open my mouth to speak, but it is full of fluffy ash-flakes of white. I try to talk and the pieces flutter away, dispersing. There is nothing left.

I need to complete this journey and cross back into the light. This constant, weighing depression sinks into me every day. There are the good moments that make life worth it, but the bad ones turn the tide.

Every day is a battle inside of my head: boy, girl, boy, carefree, rolling zombie; who will I be today? But it’s not necessarily a bad thing, it grants me another chance to get life right.
ARI FOLMAN’S ETHICAL, PSYCHIC WARZONE

Annemarie Menna

War is often portrayed as a battle of good versus evil, an ordeal we must undertake to command nobility, honor, and power. Ari Folman’s animated memoir Waltz with Bashir depicts none of these bombastic ideals—it instead mourns the loss of a young Israeli man’s identity in the chaos of the horrors inflicted during the Lebanon War. It is a discussion of moral responsibility that painstakingly traces Folman’s mental and physical path through the conflict until his final moments of self-reconciliation, ultimately calling into question the principle of truth.

Folman creates this film to link the man he once was with the man he is now—a concept he cannot grasp since he has suppressed all of his memories from the 1982 conflict. It is, in essence, a quest to uncover what kind of responsibility he bears for the atrocities committed at the end of the war. In order to do this, he must explore not only personal, historical events, but also the memories, hallucinations, and dreams of the common soldier, all illustrated digitally. For this reason, Waltz with Bashir is labeled a documentary, but critics and audiences have kicked up a storm debating the possibility that an animated film can really be a documentary. If real events are not actually recorded as they occur, how can their animation be called reality?

To this question, Folman’s easy response is, “Well, what is real?” Are emotions and memories—even those tainted by human perception—just as real as the truth? Even further, what is true in the ambiguity of war? Folman had difficulty in securing funds for the film because no one understood how such a formula could make sense when it did not adhere to the typical constructions of what a war documentary was (Esther). His visual portrait creates a world of chaos where drawing a definitive line between good, evil, and historical fact is nigh impossible. There is no impeachable construction of war. To the filmmakers, the war existed in their memories and dreams decades after their numb march into Lebanon.

The animation of Waltz with Bashir affords a kind of surrealism that mirrors the madness and scars the war left behind. Buildings, people, and landscapes often seem larger than they are. Euphemisms cloud harsh reality: women, children, and men living in Beirut are not “people” but “suspected terrorists.” Contrast between the guerilla battlefield and the soldiers’ idyllic beachfront camp rings with alarming irony. In one particularly bucolic, peaceful scene in an apple orchard, the shadow of a person fires a rocket straight into a battalion of troops. Seconds later, the audience discovers that it was a child who pulled the trigger.

The music and cinematography are also key to creating the nightmarish atmosphere. The cinematography itself is characteristic of a live-action blockbuster; certain shots would be impossible to frame in a typical documentary: some shots are from miles above looking down on Lebanon, some are quick tracking transitions from a forest in Denmark to a battlefield in Lebanon, and still others are shot in the middle of a fire-fight from an all-encompassing angle. It is dramatic and larger-than-life. The music adds not only to the surrealism and visions in Folman’s mind, but also to the name of the film. Battle sequences are not arranged to
deep, rousing cinematic overtures, but instead
to ominous, drawn-out notes, or lilting piano
music. This is the case when one of Folman’s
comrades, pinned down by enemy fire, sprints
into the street and fires at random in a mindless
frenzy. The waltzing music that drowns out the
kick from his gun is quick and melancholy—a
final waltz following the assassination of Bashir.

Folman manipulates chronology to construct
the twisting sequence of events he traces through
his head and the minds of other soldiers. The
film itself begins with a dream: twenty-six fanged,
slobbering dogs are running through the dark,
rainy streets of Tel Aviv, snapping at pedestrians’
ankles. The dream belongs to a friend who has
called Folman to a bar to discuss his nightmares.
Over the course of the conversation, Folman
realizes the holes in his memory about his own
stint in Lebanon, and so his project begins.
Whereas the point of some filmmakers’ projects
is abstract or hidden, Folman’s is distinct and
purposeful.

Folman’s own hallucinations of the Lebanon
War begin with three soldiers, including himself,
wading from the ocean onto the beach. It is an
eerie scene of skeletal buildings and crumbling
debis, highlighted with a dingy orange glow.
From there, he recalls bits and pieces of his
first days at war, and the near-death experiences
of his friends—either in reality, or in the realm
of morbid fantasy. Folman eventually describes
landing in Beirut and subsequently realizing
that all he wanted was to be anywhere else.

Garrett Stewart, a professor of film,
fiction, and textual theory at the University
of Iowa, discusses Folman’s methods in an
essay exploring “screen memory.” He writes,
“As a psychic topography, [the film] amounts
less to an autobiographical through-line than
to the layering of a collective unconscious”
(58). There are no stated facts, only the
subconscious—or conscious—submersion of
a generation’s memories. Folman remembers
the sounds of bombs and sirens. He remembers
a firefight in the streets, but then nothing more.
The rest of his memory is blank. Again we
see his hallucination, the dingy light, and the
excruciatingly slow movements as if these
young men are still wading under the water.

It is revealed that Folman himself did not
take part in the massacre. So then why continue
the film? After reconstructing the night in
question over a series of interviews, he is finally
able to place himself in the scene of events: on a
rooftop, firing off flares so that the Phalangists
(the murderers) could continue their massacres
throughout the night. And suddenly, just at the
moment of realization—when we are in the
midst of watching the last part of Folman’s
elusive hallucination morph into reality—the
animation turns from monochrome orange
and black to live-action footage. Women are
screaming, tearing at their hair, and children lie
dead among the rubble.

What is the reason for the abrupt
switch? What did the animation
accomplish, aside from lending a
surreal, grotesque ambiance to the war? In the
context of memories and dreams, live-action
footage would not have the same impact.
Folman would have had to rely heavily on
interviews and stories to recreate the horror and confusion; it was more effective to create a new world—a world in which these young men were confronted with something ambiguous, mind-numbing, and mortifying. The animation is an illustrative coping mechanism meant to filter the images into another light or perspective, so to speak. The designs are simple but bold, and the use of color signifies the gravity of the situation—all is normal inside Folman’s friends’ houses and offices, but in his memories, everything has a monotone or lurid hue to it.

Animation also allows the filmmaker to extend beyond the literal to the subjective, given that all memory submits to subjectivity. Between the colors and the cinematography, a certain degree of idiosyncrasy is achieved. In “The Animated Text: Definition,” Raz Greenburg, drawing on the work of Nelson Goodman, discusses the representational quality of animation, in which “the animator aspires to remove the object from the ‘representation as’ mode, to reach total abstract representation, the core concept behind the image” (5). Folman’s use of animation also serves to soften the blow of harsh reality. It is less disturbing to see mangled corpses lying in the street rendered through a sketch than it is to see bloody corpses displayed openly. Jane Gaines explores the relationship between the audience and the subject in her essay “Political Mimesis,” where she explains that very few documentaries do, in fact, “change the world,” but still manage to inspire (94).

The theory of political mimesis states that film is an “agitational spectacle,” a mirroring effect of some kind within the body—for instance, the reaction of laughter, or horror, or sympathy (Gaines 88). Simply put, it is inspirational pathos because it inspires the viewer to react in some way. Rhetoric maintains a relationship with the audience and manipulates their reactions by selectively choosing which person to interview, which events to cover, the language used, and the pacing of the narrative. While Waltz with Bashir oozes pathos, it deliberately dulls the relationship between audience and subject, making the audience dig deeper into the context to sort out meaning or intention. Robert Terrill describes similar acts of mimesis as “creative reenactments” not meant to instruct, but to create a point of view (136). When Folman shifts from “abstract representation” to reality, there is no more “creative reenactment,” only shock and, again, the flagrant, concrete reiteration of senseless destruction. These last two minutes of the film are the culmination of Folman’s search for truth and responsibility in an ethical warzone.

After throwing around the terms “abstract representation” and “reenactment,” can it still be said that Waltz with Bashir is intrinsically truthful? Can Waltz with Bashir still claim to be right if its truth stems from personal consequence? This is a question that extends beyond film. As philosopher Donald Davidson suggests, “how to relate truth to human desires, beliefs, intentions, and the use of language… seems to be the right one to concentrate on in thinking of the truth” (280).

Essentially, truth is as subjective as memory. Waltz with Bashir’s animation, of course, relies on a certain amount of reenactment for dreams and past events, and some would use this to discredit it as a documentary. However, consider James Marsh’s Project Nim, a film about a chimp
adopted and raised by a group of researchers in the 1970s. When archival footage wasn’t available, Marsh dressed an actor as a chimp and recreated scenes so well that the audience was unaware they were, in fact, sometimes watching a human in a monkey suit. Marsh’s film is undoubtedly considered a documentary. Drawing on the work on Bill Nichols, Sybil DelGaudio reminds us that all documentaries are, to some extent, fabrications (189).

Waltz with Bashir is by no means a complete fabrication, but neither is it an explicit documentary or Folman’s analysis of mental trauma. The film is not infused with any particular drama, aside from the surreal visions found behind the animation. War is prominent, but not in the typical fashion that emphasizes heroes and gore; it is a tedious thing that wears on the audience’s patience at times. It is a simple thing—almost mechanical, almost lifeless.

In an interview with film critic John Esther, Folman says, “I made a lot of effort to show war is really stupid. It’s a useless idea. It has none of the glamor or glory you sometimes see in American movies. Other than that, there is nothing there in terms of statements.” Because there was no “glamor or glory,” the film dragged for the audience in exactly the way it dragged for the common soldier. Folman’s concept of war as “stupid” is expressed in the scene where various soldiers, helicopters, rockets, and bombs are all aimed at destroying a single car meandering down a tiny road in Lebanon. Every shot misses, taking out buildings and passersby instead. Did this actually happen? We can never be sure. Does it express Folman’s idea of what war is—simply put, stupid? Exactly: it is Folman’s body of proof, so to speak.

A documentary in itself does not constitute absolute truth—but it can reveal individual truths to an audience. Ari Folman has taken a chance to prove this. We watch in awe as a young, silent Folman speaks through the hallucinations and events of history, offering an alternate face to war—the singularly faceless being that confronts every soldier on the battlefield. Through Ari Folman’s mimetic analysis of his memories, he worked to solidify the link to his past and his own truth in the wake of the 1982 Lebanon War, and to possibly inspire a new creation of truth in his audience.
DARK LIGHTS, CRumbling PAINT, IRON bars, AND LOTS (AND LOTS) OF SHOUTING; THIS IS HOW SOCIETY OFTEN ENVISIONS THE INSIDE OF A UNITED STATES PENITENTIARY. THE EXTREMELY CONFINING CELLS, LACK OF PRIVACY, AND HORRIBLY DEPRESSING DECOR PROVIDE A CLEAR MESSAGE TO THOSE WHO LIVE WITHIN THESE WALLS. NOTHING QUITE SAYS, “WELCOME TO PRISON; YOU ARE HERE TO STAY,” LIKE FLOOR-TO-CEILING IRON BARS, A STAINLESS STEEL SINK AND TOILET, A RICKETY OLD BUNK BED, AND, IN SOME CASES, THE DAILY PROCEDURE OF BEING HANDEIFFED EVERY TIME ONE LEAVES THE CELL.

EVEN A PRISONER’S OWN CLOTHING IS CONSTRICITIVE, USUALLY CONSISTING OF A BRIGHT ORANGE JUMPSUIT WITH NO BELT IN ORDER TO PREVENT INMATES FROM USING THEM AS WEAPONS OR AS A MEANS TO HANG THEMSELVES. WHEN ALL THESE PARTS ARE PUT TOGETHER, THE COLD, DARK REALITY OF PRISON LIFE SETS IN; YOU ARE HERE FOR THE LONG HAUL.

MAKE NO MISTAKE: THE EXTREMELY CONFINING CONDITIONS OF PRISON LIFE ARE NOT CONSTRUCTED BY CHANCE. THE CLAUSTROPHOBIC CELLS, STRICT DAILY ROUTINES, BLEAK INTERIOR, AND LACK OF PERSONAL FREEDOMS FORCE PRISONERS TO FOCUS ON WHAT THEY DID TO GET THEMSELVES IN PRISON. THOUGH BELIEFS GUIDING HOW THE SYSTEM IS RUN MAY VARY FROM PRISON TO PRISON—SOME FOCUSING SOLELY ON PUNISHMENT, SUCH AS MANY MAXIMUM-SECURITY PENITENTIARIES, WHILE OTHERS ARE GEARED MORE TOWARDS REPENTANCE AND REFORM—THE GENERAL CONCEPT OF PRISONS REMAINS THE SAME ACROSS ALL AREAS: PRISONERS ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO ENJOY THEIR TIME THERE.

RELIGION IS OFTEN THE PATH PEOPLE CHOOSE WHEN THEY NEED HELP FROM ALL THE BURDENS THAT LIFE PUTS ON THEM, AND THIS IS NOT EXCLUSIVE TO PRISONERS ALONE. BUSINESS EXECUTIVES, POWERFUL POLITICIANS, NURSING MOTHERS, AND EVEN NON-BELIEVERS ALL TURN TO SOME FORM OF FAITH WHEN TIMES ARE AT THEIR WORST. FOR INMATES, HOWEVER, SOME FORM OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IS OFTEN SEEN AS VITAL NOT ONLY FOR AN INMATE TO SURVIVE AND OVERCOME THE PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BURDENS OF PRISON LIFE, BUT ALSO TO AID REHABILITATION AND AVOID RETURNING TO PRISON AFTER RELEASE. WITH THE POPULAR BELIEF THAT PRISONS ARE A PLACE OF HOPELESSNESS AND DESPAIR FOR THE LOST AND THE DAMNED OF SOCIETY, RELIGION PROVIDES A PHYSICAL AND MENTAL ESCAPE FROM THE CONSTRAINTS OF LIFE BEHIND BARS AND A WAY OF SURVIVING AMERICA’S PENAL SYSTEM.

THE PEW FORUM OF RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE CONTACTED ALL 1,474 PROFESSIONAL CHAPLAINS WORKING IN STATE PRISONS ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND ASKED THEM TO FILL OUT A SERIES OF QUESTIONNAIRES REGARDING THE RELIGIOUS LIVES OF WHAT IS NOW MORE THAN 2.2 MILLION PEOPLE INCARCERATED NATIONWIDE (LUGO ET AL.). THIS STUDY IS VALUABLE BECAUSE IT COLLECTED INFORMATION REGARDING PERSONAL BELIEFS ABOUT RELIGION IN UNITED STATES PRISONS FROM A PRISONER’S “RIGHT-HAND MAN” WHEN IT COMES TO FAITH BEHIND BARS. PUBLISHED IN MARCH OF 2012, THE INFORMATION RELEASED IN THIS STUDY IS FROM QUESTIONNAIRES RETURNED BY 730 CHAPLAINS, WHICH IS A RESPONSE RATE OF ABOUT 50% (LUGO ET AL.).

OF COURSE, ONE CANNOT DENY THAT MANY PRISONERS ARE GUILTY OF THE CRIMES IN WHICH THEY ARE CONVICTED. PRISON IS A JUST FORM OF RETRIBUTION FOR THEIR ACTIONS; MANY PRISONERS RECOGNIZE THE HARM THEY HAVE DONE AND OFTEN TAKE FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR EVEN THE MOST HEINOUS CRIMES. OCCASIONALLY IT IS TRUE THAT SOME
prisoners simply wish to do harm to others; however, it is ignorant to think that all prisoners are rotten to the core. Here, religion, more than anything else, serves as quintessential evidence that prisoners often have the same mindset and future goals as other citizens. Unfortunately, prisoners have made a mistake much more grave than most others. As Robert Hawkins, associate pastor at the New Pilgrim Baptist Church, put it, “We’ve all done something we’re guilty of, [prisoners] just got caught” (Hartley).

Picture the scene: you are a newly incarcerated inmate who has just stepped into the bright orange jumpsuit that you will be sporting daily for the next five years. You never meant to hurt anyone by selling drugs on the corner; you desperately needed the money to feed your family. Growing up in poverty without a father and no more than a few years of a high school education meant that the odds of monetary success were highly stacked up against you. You knew what you were doing wasn’t right but was necessary at the time, and this decision landed you in a six-by-eight foot cage with a roommate whose crimes could range from robbing a convenience store to murdering his children. Of course not all crimes fit this simple description, but let us imagine for a moment that it conveys a reality for some inmates, who knew what they were doing but felt that it was necessary. With no way of physical escape, some form of religious observance can pull prisoners out from the depths of their own despair. This is why religion is so vital to rehabilitation in the lives of those behind bars. Once the idea of a faith-based lifestyle is presented, the prisoner can use it as a guide for tearing down the physical, psychological, and societal barriers that prison puts up. As former inmate Debra Brown, who was incarcerated for murdering her boss, said about her jailhouse religion, “You know what happens when you plant seeds. Stuff starts growing whether you like it or not…. The more I learned, the more I knew I was getting on the right track” (Hartley).

Since religion is often a common theme in prison life and can be used by prisoners to cope and get through the trials and tribulations of the penal system, inmates are frequently known to either join, rediscover, or convert religions once they become situated to life behind bars. According to the Pew Study, the majority of chaplains answered that there was either “a lot” of religious switching (26%) or “some” switching (51%) among inmates, a significantly high combined rate of 77% (Lugo et al.). As a follow up question, when chaplains were asked to estimate whether the number of inmates in a selected group of twelve religions was either increasing, decreasing, or staying the same, chaplains responded that the number of Muslims (51%) and Protestant Christians (47%) were growing; this is no surprise considering that these are the two most popular religions in the world (Lugo et al.). The Pew Study stressed, however, that these are only percentages of the number of inmates in that specific growing
religion, and may not represent the actual size of that religion in prison.

In fact, seven in ten chaplains considered access to religion-related programs in prison to be “absolutely critical” for successful rehabilitation and re-entry into society (Lugo et al.). With a smorgasbord of all different religions flowing through the penal system, inmates can use any one of these religions as a tool for successful rehabilitation and reform as well as a mental- and faith-based solace.

Beyond the psychological and rehabilitative benefits of being part of a religion in prison, membership and continued support for many religious organizations can often come with high levels of respect as well as an increased status, both inside and out of prison. The benefits certain religions receive can vary depending on the size of that religion and the availability and content of its practices, ranging from access to religious texts, special meeting times with certain faith leaders, such
as a priest or rabbi, to a special religious diet. According to the Pew study, when chaplains were asked whether requests by inmates for certain religious items or practices were either “usually approved,” “sometimes approved,” or “usually denied,” 82% of chaplains said religious texts were “usually approved,” 71% approved meetings with faith leaders, 53% for a special religious diet, and 51% for religious items or clothing (Lugo et al.). Some
due to the refusal of inmates to adhere to such limiting standards is a prime example of how inmates can use religion as a tool for respect and power even at a national level.

Though the rate of recidivism is high in the United States, many prisoners wish to turn their lives around in an honest fashion and often use religion as a tool to do so. The reasons vary, whether it is to get adjusted to the harsh reality of prison life, to gain status among the inmate population who value a particular religion, or simply to practice one’s faith. When individuals put their beliefs in something outside of themselves, they often find they can do things they never thought possible, such as survive life behind bars.

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I think I can actually count the times I’ve had a pleasant conversation with my grandfather on one hand, all of them being the few times I encountered him sober. The rest have become the only way I know how to characterize him: a stereotypical Native American drunk. I remember standing in front of my seventh-grade class with a white poster board displaying my family heritage with a collage of different Native American flags that had long been forgotten. Unlike my mostly-white classmates—whose boards showed pictures of the widely known Irish, Italian, and French flags—I had to explain which tribe each flag belonged to, what they meant, and why they no longer appeared as “national” flags. It was a lot more than I had the knowledge to express. All I knew was that there were three tribes—Blackfoot, Cherokee, and Apache—that ran through my blood, and these were their flags. The rest had never been passed down to me; the knowledge was lost to a generation before my time.

I blamed my grandfather for that. Had he not been drunk off his rocker from a bottle of whiskey half the time, perhaps he would have been able to share more about the history of our people (his people) with my mother, and then later with me. The best he did at any point in my life was suggest a few lengthy books on tribal lineage that he thought I could read in my spare time. While it was a kind gesture at heart, I still longed to sit on his lap and listen to his grand tales of both the triumphs and horrors of each of my ancestors from the three tribes. There was so much I wanted to know—to be able to share about my ancestors that I was so proud.
of—yet my access to this experience had been blocked by alcohol's relentless grip on my grandfather. My substantial lack of understanding led me to ask “why,” which became the first stepping-stone through a journey of research. What I found was neither what I expected nor what I wanted, but simply a layout of an unfading truth.

As I look at my notes, I have listed a YouTube documentary on a homeless Native American as the starting point for my research, which I find striking now, considering what conclusions I have drawn from this quest. I originally used YouTube just to see what I might find, but I instead stumbled upon a multipart documentary called *Wolf: Homeless in Native America*. In this fourteen-part production, an aging man named Wolf discusses his life experiences as a homeless, alcoholic Native American. At one point in the series, he begins describing the different standards to which he has lowered himself in order to receive enough money to buy more beer. He describes one night where he was offered twenty dollars by a group of filmmakers to participate in a *Fight Club*-like battle against another man—with a bottle of whiskey as the prize. It was an eye-opening look at the type of desperation that could so easily outweigh a person's ability to place reason first. Later, Wolf goes on to identify the everlasting rage he feels as a result of his own past struggles, as well as those of his people. He comes to the conclusion that when he is sober with a clear mind, all of his pain and suffering come to the forefront, and the only way he knows how to dim the aching of this harsh reality is by drinking. Alcohol, he claims, is his only way to “find momentary peace.” As I finished the final installment of the documentary, I was moved by the depths of pain Wolf had endured but was unwilling to admit the connection between the sorrows of a single man, the agony of an entire race, and the sickening image of a bottle of cheap whiskey.

As I continued this “quest,” swarms of questions began filling my head, to the point where I was agitated by the task of determining where to look next. I settled on a question that had come to mind both before and after my chance encounter with Wolf: why did alcohol seem to affect Native Americans in a negative way more than other races? My choice of direction led me to an article by Matthew Kelley of the Na'nizhoozhi Center that explained some of the reasons of common alcohol abuse among Native Americans. One anthropologist, Robert Mail, who was cited in the article, suggested that alcohol use among Native Americans was a way to shield the pain and cope with their own historical trauma, describing them as “an oppressed people who have suffered from ‘deculturation’ stresses.” Drawing on the work of other researchers, Kelley also noted that “200-500 years of physical suppression, domination, depopulation, and relocation of the Native American race have produced a cultural trauma which has in effect led to excessive drinking.” It was a survival method, I concluded, and simply a means to building a faulty desire to keep living.

As I continued researching, I was able to find a more contemporary source to expand upon what these anthropologists were implying. Laurence Armand French discusses the difference in methodologies between the west-oriented society and that of traditional Native American ways in his 2008 article “Alcohol and Other Drug Addictions Among Native Americans.” He notes that western societal values are based upon the Protestant ethic, with individual competition being at the core, while the Native American belief system is shaped upon the Harmony Ethos, focusing on cooperation and group responsibility. As a result, French believes that Native Americans becomes subject to psychocultural marginality; because they are denied their “traditional enculturation,” they are placed at a
higher risk for “self-medication and escapism,” with alcohol as an enticing option (84).

From there I spiraled off to another question: how had alcohol been introduced to Native Americans in the first place? I found myself gazing over pages of a montana.edu site focused on Native Americans’ first experiences with European settlers in the 16th century. One of the pages, titled “An Introduction of Alcohol Through the Fur Trade: A Brief Overview,” indicated that the European settlers (mostly along the East coast) introduced alcohol as a trading mechanism with the Native Americans. By trading their furs, Native Americans who lacked social status were able to increase their wealth and standing within a given tribe, making it a seemingly worthwhile deal.

However, European traders were able to take advantage of them when whiskey became involved, thus creating a vicious cycle within the tribe: the Native American man trades his furs for whiskey, eventually losing his earnings from this addiction. He forfeits his standing within the tribe, becoming depressed—and sometimes violent. The cycle continues until it has affected many families, ultimately leading to the suffering of the tribe as a whole. At the top of the site the author included a series of quotes concerning Native Americans and the fur trade in early settlement days. One in particular caught my attention, as an expert from E.C. Abbott in the semi-autobiographical novel *We Pointed Them North*: “You take one barrel of Missouri River water, and two gallons of alcohol. Then you add two ounces of strychnine (poison) to make them go crazy—because strychnine is the greatest stimulant in the world—and three plugs of tobacco to make them sick—an Indian wouldn’t figure it was whisky unless it made him sick—...and boil it until it’s brown. Strain into a bottle, and you’ve got Indian whisky; that one bottle calls for one buffalo robe and when the Indian got drunk it was two robes.”

The feelings that grew within me were not what I had expected. I knew the gist of the tragic Native American history from years of schooling, so reading these should not have affected me like they did. Yet I found myself writing down my reactions at the bottom of my notes: I was empathetic, resentful, dispirited; filled with grief, disgust, and absolute loathing...rage.

I was home for Thanksgiving break in Illinois at the time, and I knew that this would be the opportune time to visit an Indian reservation somewhere near my home. Although I’d done some research, I still needed my own account to confirm the information I had already found. There was a difference between obtaining information online and ac-
tually experiencing it for myself. When I tried to search for Native American reservations in my area to visit, I was directed to a separate link claiming that I had reached the Native Americans by States portion of the Native-Languages.org website. Right below the headline, a miniature map of Illinois displayed where Native American tribes—such as the Shawnee and Dakota—used to live. The site made it clear, however, that these tribes (and all tribes in general) no longer dwelled there, having been forced out to Oklahoma reservations by the American government many centuries ago. These tribes ceased to exist in their home state.

Again, I found myself feeling the urge to write down my reaction to this new information. On a fresh page of notes, I wrote: anger, resentment, a storm of despair, and misplaced irritation. Despite the knowledge that there were no reservations left in Illinois, I decided to drive to the area where the Shawnee tribe had lived, just to see what had become of the land that rightfully belonged to them. After about a two-hour drive south of Chicago, I came upon a neighborhood my map marked as former Shawnee territory. There was a series of townhomes and complexes grouped together in units sprawled along both sides of the road. Most of the tree life had been cut down, and from what I could see, the majority of people who lived in the complexes were white. The stores and other businesses in the surrounding area appeared rather well-off, with a few designer boutiques that ran along the streets and women pushing strollers with Marc Jacobs bags in hand. I left the neighborhood and drove back to Chicago, realizing how much I resented these people I knew nothing about, simply because I assumed they lived their quaint lives with no thought of who came before them.

As I sat down to write this, I found my thoughts drifting back to the image of Wolf. He had described the rage that kept him drinking each day, and the more research I did on Native Americans and their long-standing history with alcohol, the closer I grew to accepting that same rage in my heart. By the end of it all, I found myself wanting a drink as well. I wanted to numb the pain of past discrepancies I could not change. I came to see the staggering impact of alcohol on Native Americans as one that was by no means commendable, yet not without history and reason. With a new set of eyes, I thought of my grandfather and his infatuation with whiskey and decided to give him a call.

Works Cited
There are times in our lives when the best means of self-expression is putting pen to paper and letting emotions become words.

The articulation of thoughts and feelings requires courage, and it can act as catharsis. The relief of externalizing deeply personal narratives is an acute, yet temporary state.

However, the story itself is not temporary. It stays on paper, to be read by others and perhaps becomes a part of someone else’s narrative. The authors leave themselves open to vulnerability as they share their stories.

 Normally letters are private conversations intended for a single recipient and response. While open letters are meant to invoke widespread consideration, they also maintain the intimacy of personal conversation.

The act of writing a letter goes beyond sim-
ple communication; you are also constructing your own reality. Letters emerge from private thoughts and can sometimes articulate ideas too difficult to express in face-to-face conversation.

The writers in this section have taken a deliberate leap of faith in publishing their accounts. Not only have they revealed raw emotion, but they have attached their names and identities to these deeply private matters.

Sometimes you open letters, and sometimes letters open you. They can hold words that are too difficult to be said aloud, yet too important to be kept a secret.

Here are our contributors’ dedications and declarations—their open letters.

—Roland Cody, Danielle Kolodkin, Samantha Mangovski, David Swenton, and Katie Tull
Dandelions dance on the lawn.
Sun-rays pierce my soul; I feel whole.
God is by my side always my guide,
pushing me back on the right track.

One deep breath unveils a unique smell from the jagged, yellow petals, as they warm in the summer sun. The odor processes in my mind where I associate the nostalgic smell with my childhood home. The inviting flower lures my attention as I stare into the golden bloom, wondering about its creation, for what seems to be an eternity. Time has stopped all around me as I lie on the corner-lawn and interact with this gorgeous phenomenon of life. I study its intricate detail; every inch that is above ground will undergo thorough analysis as my mind attempts to define the meaning of its beauty on Earth. Color variations reflect into my eyes, revealing a densely packed, deep yellow center, like a nucleolus in the nucleus of the flower to the faint, yellow plasma membrane on the outer surface. The delicate dandelion blooms open in the day and close at night while I sleep.

My heart skips along with me throughout the grass as I gather a bouquet for my mother. Where is she? Never here, it seems. I give them to Gramma, instead; she is grateful for the gift of love. Others bash my hand-picked perfection and claim they are merely weeds. I disagree. They are youthful and free, just like me. They are my favorite flower; clear is my favorite color; air is my favorite smell; water is my favorite taste. The youth-inspired feeling of freedom subsides each time I ride in the
back seat, glaring out the window at the neighbors; mowing straight through their own, God-given spread of dandelions. I scream, “NO!” But they do not hear; “Just leave that last patch of dandelions there, please!” But I cannot save their lives. The green and yellow mulch quickly spits out the side of the mower as the human hastily pushes through each strip of their manufactured lawn and the motor slices into my innocence a bit deeper with each clatter; it cuts. No dandelion remains; the weed-eater finishes the job with nothing but sticky dandelion residue left behind.

I slowly breathe the crisp, Wisconsin air as wind blows my hair
Every which way, which I cannot control; God is the keeper of this soul. I grow old.

A child hands me a dandelion with a look of pride and overwhelming innocence in his soul. I see myself in his eyes. I do not want to touch the messy weed with its hollow, leafless flower stem (Hanrahan). Nonetheless, I am inclined to accept this compliment. He picked it for me. “Thank you.” Milky-white puss oozes from the stem and interacts with my skin cells, leaving a feeling, sticky and bitter. A pungent smell of death enters my nasal passages. I pretend that it is the most beautiful, long-stem rose, free of thorns. I over-accentuate breathing in to smell it. I caress the weed and hold it to my heart, as if it was the most precious garnet in all the Earth. He turns away from me with a sense of satisfaction; I throw it to the ground. Dismissing the young man’s intelligence, I smile to myself, “He bought it.” Then, he lifts up the discarded dandelion and hands it to me again. “No, thank you.” I say. “It is yucky. I don’t want it. Stop handing it to me; I don’t want it.” I have become the human I despise. I push the mower. I consider the dandelion a pest.

The dandelions all spring back up from beneath the surface of the ground, despite their severed heads. The Taraxacum officinale was blessed with a persistent tap root. It is quite large, with numerous hairy rootlets spreading deep and wide into the ground (Hanrahan). In addition to the wind spreading its wishful seeds, it can reproduce from any part of the taproot remaining in the ground after mechanical removal—it is nearly impossible for the ignorant hand to just pluck away its pesky blooms from their lawn. Humans are forced to study the plant’s genetics to create herbicides, which can keep our unnatural lawns high-maintenance, but weed-free. Thank God for biotechnology? We shall see…

Works Cited

Dedicated to my grandmother, Theresa Rita Jones, who raised me like a mother and passed away last May.

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Made for Walking
An Open Letter to My Best Boots
Ralph Willsey
We’ve been everywhere together. Not really everywhere, but we’ve been a lot of places: Seattle, Omaha, Syracuse, Bakersfield, Mosul, Kuwait City, Dublin, Reykjavík, Maine, and Portugal. Hell, I’ve worn you so many places you should have your own passport.

I joke that you two have spent more time in combat than some people, but it’s not so true anymore. We’ve sure got any deployment dodger beat with our two years, three months, and three days. Maybe we should have done the paperwork and hoop jumping to get you a DD214 and a CAB. You would have earned it with me in Baghdad on CSM Huggins’ truck during that three-mile running shootout. Do you remember that? We were coming back from FOB Loyalty the night when the Iraqis won that big soccer game. Sotillo was yelling about how the .50 wouldn’t fire, and he had forgotten his M4 back in the parking area. Clayton and CSM Huggins were up in the air guard hatches, firing off rounds like it was going out of style. Verne—SrA Patterson—was sitting in the belly of the Stryker with us, pucker factor maximum, prepped and ready to pull down casualties and hoping no one got hurt. Then the shock and surprise at the “LOCK AND CLEAR!” from Huggy Bear as we entered Taji. Our first real combat, and we didn’t even get out of the truck. Oh, but we got our fill later, didn’t we?

We went on leave, and you got your first taste of snow after all that rain and mud in Baghdad. Two inches of sandy sludge stuck to your soles as we slid and slithered through chow halls and airports. But we made it. First to Erin’s warm apartment, with your cozy place by the door, ready to be laced up at a moment’s notice; then to Dad’s for a while, Snoopy snuffling all the Iraq on you. I think he might have loved you as much as I do because of all your smells. And then the St. Patty’s Day parade where you couldn’t quite keep my feet warm enough. It’s not your fault, not in the least. You’re desert boots—you weren’t made for temperatures below fifty degrees, let alone zero.
always walking. You got a nice break while I VCed 34 victor, even though I was going stir crazy in the belly of that truck. Then May 6th happened, and we wandered FOB Warhorse for a while. I did clean you up a bit for the memorial, and my rifle, Julia, too. We had to look good for the gun salute. That was the first time you saw me weep. It wasn’t the last, though.

We still had a mission to complete. We laced up, rucked up, and drove on. No more cushy trucks for us. Radio duty and acting as personal security detachment for CPT Williams was our new job. I lost weight and you gained salt stains as we humped a load that weighed more than I did. All three hundred pounds rested on your heels. I swear, some days it was you guys holding me up, figuratively and literally. If you hadn’t been broken in by that point, I would have been in even more pain than I already was. Even being as hard and tough as I was then, I don’t think I could have taken it without you.

Eventually, we rotated back to Kuwait and the US. You got a nice break for a while, but I wore you on the flights home. I wouldn’t have dared to pack you two away after all we went through. I wore you as much I could in the States. That first tour took as big a toll on your suede and your soles as it did on my body and my soul. You became my field boots, worn for ranges, ruck marches, battle focus PT, trips to the woods, and to Yakima. I got another pair for ceremonies, drill, and the NCO Academy, but if it was a memorial for the Tweezy, then I wore you. Because you had been there, you would want to see the honors rendered. But, man, they hated seeing you as WLC. What a fucking joke that course

"Even with as hard and tough as I was then, I don’t think I could have taken it without you."
was. You had spent more time deployed and in actual combat than half of the instructors. But CSM Huggins recognized you. He remembered you from our time in S-3 and authorized you for the “field problems” that the school held. You sure as hell weren’t garrison boots, just as much as I wasn’t a garrison soldier. Dirty, disheveled, beaten, worn, but put us in the field, and we were magic. We could almost work miracles. I know I’m exaggerating, but it certainly felt like we did sometimes. We made a few trips to Syracuse, we did EIB, we were in the field a bit, and we were transient. But, no matter where I went, you were right there with me.

Eventually, we deployed again. By that point, you had some serious aging and a few holes. I wasn’t allowed to wear you, but I’d sneak you on now and again. I bought those two pairs of Oakley boots and brought them to you. I saw you treating them how I treated the cherries, showing them the ropes, telling them how shit actually worked. And just like new guys, one couldn’t take the strain—couldn’t cut it. Sadly, that pair had to be tossed. But you taught the other pair well, like I taught Squier and Hill. They’re still not as comfy as you are, but they let me give you a break when you need it.

I couldn’t wear you often in Iraq because it was almost as much garrison as Fort Lewis was. But I still brought you along so I could keep up the claim that you had more time in combat. Selfish, I know, but I would have missed you if I had left you in storage. I wore you to Shay and Selge’s memorial because you knew them just as well as I did. You would have been pissed at me if I hadn’t. Once we got out to Caldwell, I got to wear you more often because of the relaxed atmosphere. CPT Case, LT Bradway, and a handful of the other officers paid you backhanded compliments, but 1SG Stokely and CPT Lynch both appreciated you for what you are: solid, broken-in boots. We made another two trips to Minoa and back. I would have liked to wear you to Dad’s funeral and memorial, but you don’t play well with my class As. We finished that tour with the poise and grace expected of us: dirty, angry, tired, happy to be leaving, and more roughed up.

When we got home, we started clearing post and getting ready to leave the Army behind. I gave you another break, wearing my Converse around post while in civvies. But as soon as I had to start standing in lines for hours at a time, you were right there with me. We finished up, packed up and made the U-Haul trip with Frew to Utah. His couch was pretty comfy, but there you were, right by the door and eager to get moving again. So we got a rental and hit the road. Those were some of the best times. I’d get up and dressed, tying you on even before I had finished packing, then we’d take off. We’d drive for a few hours and hit a rest stop; I’d have something to eat, and you’d wander around on the grass or sidewalk or whatever there was, getting a feel for each state we went through and helping work the kinks out of my legs.

Eventually we made it to Syracuse; eventually we settled in. It took both of us some time to get used to the winter again. We haven’t traveled much since we’ve arrived here. A camping trip once in a while, yeah, but it’s mostly to and from work or school. And I can only take you to work on weekends because you aren’t “presentable” at a retail job. This is the longest we’ve ever been in one place. I know you’re getting the itch to travel somewhere because I am too.

We’ve logged some serious mileage, and we’ve earned these holes and stains. Along the way you’ve earned my loyalty. You are the best transport I own. No matter how old we get, how much wear we acquire, we’ll do it together. When I pass from this existence into whatever comes next, I know you’ll be there—my favorite boots waiting by the door, looking factory new but as well fitting as ever. And I’ll pull you on, lace you up, shoulder our load, and move out. Because if there’s one thing you’ve taught me, it’s that home isn’t where you hang your hat, it’s where your boots are.
Tiger Lily
Ashley White
It was our first day on the bus, I was nervous. I wore my new Aéropostale sweatshirt and a pair of Phat Farm shoes, attempting to fit in. I did my best to eliminate “y’all” from my vocabulary, and I practiced saying “towel,” not “tal.”

As we stepped onto the bus, I squeezed my older sister’s hand. She gave me a reassuring smile and squeezed my hand back. We sat in the front seat, and I tried not to draw attention to myself, but there was one thing that separated us from the rest of the kids. We were brown.

“He better not say it again,” she said through gritted teeth.

From the back of the bus I heard him say it again: “nigger.”

Her eyes got big, and I knew he was going to get it. She wouldn’t think about what she was going to do next. It didn’t take much to piss her off either. She went straight to the back of the bus and smacked the Yankee asshole in the face with her textbook.

She broke his nose.

Kim didn’t take shit from anyone. Not in Houston, and not in the middle of bumfuck Western New York.

I wish I were like that.

Everyone always said we were two of a kind, two peas in a pod, inseparable.

The truth was that we were nothing alike. Kim was a hell’s angel. I idolized her; she was brave and wild. She could be a hard ass, but when I came home crying because one of the Case boys picked on my accent, she told me it was because he liked me. When Chris Whiting broke my heart in the eighth grade, she made sure I looked smoking hot at the homecoming dance. And when she was moving out at the age of 16 with an older boy, I begged her to stay. She did.

“Just for tonight.”

Kim is my sister, a real hell-raiser, and my best friend. Five years later, where are we?

I lay down on a black leather table, and I wish it wasn’t my turn first. I grab her hand and squeeze it. I hear a buzz. Not the soft buzz of a bumblebee, but a much louder buzz that stings my ears. As it pokes and scratches at my skin, it pierces me with pain. It fucking hurts. The longer the buzzing continues, the louder it becomes and the more painful the sting.

What is the point of this?

I’m going to college in two days.

Am I afraid?

Is it art?

Exhibiting control over my own body?

To make our father so angry that his face turns as red as a baboon’s ass?

No, it’s much more than that.

I’m holding her hand, squeezing it.

“Fuueck that hurt,” I scream, waiting for all the pain to cease.

We’re branded together forever. My tiger will always be with me, and her lily will always be with her.
An Ugly Place
Andrew Miller
A clear blue sky hangs over me and dangles a few wispy clouds. Out to my right is a striking mountain range; the beginnings of the Hindu Kush are here. I face towards my home and a lone feature dominates, spanning from my front to my right. I call it “The Matterhorn” but never learn its real name. We’re driving along a road, contained on its left by a six-foot-tall mud wall. This road. Light, dusty, grey. Dirt that’s easy to dig in, easy to dig deep, easy to hide things deep below. Between me and The Matterhorn at right are irrigated farm fields that survive off the spring melt from above.

April 29th starts cold at seven thousand feet of elevation. The open sun issues a hollow challenge to the early afternoon; I feel a superficial warmth that won’t last and will not pierce any surface. It’s still cold in the shade.

It smells, it smells like so many things. Sweat. Anger. Gunpowder, dirt, blood. Oil, fire, engine fluids.

I have never been so thirsty in my life. I cannot overcome the dryness to speak. Even if I could, nothing would be heard. The machines are too loud. Everyone around me is using his machine. Some are louder than others, some bigger. As though you could make someone more dead if your machine was bigger.

The machine that started this, that heated this country road to become a hot brand whose mark I keep with me, sits nearby. It was more effective, simpler, smaller, and cheaper than any of our machines.

Between mechanical roars, I reach some awareness of screams, commands, confusion. Their machine worked just as intended and now I can’t stop staring. The muscles directing and focusing my vision are paralyzed. My eyes continue to pull the truth and explain clearly, but my brain refuses the dialogue. I know this is death. I’ve seen death before. I can’t bridge the connection and my brain stalls on this concept like an engine sucking water. The Kid occupies a tired, ashen, dignified pose that none around him disturb. Unrelenting, my eyes repeat the same exhausted argument through nerves into my head as I flash through my last words to him, to get the fuck out of the operations center, go write home somewhere else. Finally, I am pulled back to the things around me. Seconds have passed. I leave him alone, as the others already have.

The ongoing screaming around me finally registers. That Kid is gone but others aren’t; one has no legs. I had left my Radio Man to tell our story to Our Friends back home, and between sprints I become voiceless. I have to drink. The road’s dust becomes less hostile once I have my water. My huge gulps calm my body. I find my Radio Man as a confused parrot, echoing broken bits of others’ shouts and sharing fear over the net. I take his radio and give Our Friends the news; I tell them what we need and where we need it. We need it now. The biggest machines in this terrible place are with Our Friends. We will hear those machines cheering soon.

Later, the noises lessen. Only burning and dimly popping pine needles carry this aural wildfire into darkness: potshots from the smallest machines. Sober pauses and delayed acceptance converge on the survivors like plague, amputating hopes and euthanizing feelings. This part is unfamiliar to me and feels more savage than anything else done us. All of the machines that deserved a chance to speak have, in turn, done so. The great sun sinks into retirement as I would imagine a humiliated old patriarch, astonished at how we treat each other.
August. Alright, so she is finally admitting she needs help. That’s a step. There’s no way she could’ve kept on living like that—illicitly making money while barely holding on to life in that run-down apartment. Nobody knows what to do next. Everyone is scared. All we know is that she’s got a drug problem.

Now that she is off of her medication and spiraling downwards quickly, it’s only a matter of time before she hits bottom—again. Maybe she will learn something this time.

There was no way I could understand it at the time, but my sister was sick. She didn’t have a cough or anything like that; she was sick with a disease that many don’t fully comprehend. I certainly didn’t at first. It took me a long time to understand what was ruining her.

My sister. The sister I looked up to my entire life.

It’s a good thing that she moved home. It’s almost September; school is starting soon, so she better not get in my way. The whole fam-
ily is stressed now that she’s home; her boyfriend might follow suit—even though he’s been banned from our household. He’s a real bad apple and has already spread his seed with one flower. They go to the methadone clinic together to get more drugs to help them get off of the drugs they are already on. I find that hard to believe. $65.00 a week to keep this fucking charade up.

Round two. Heroin. Round one was Xanax—last year. That phase of addiction led her to the outpatient program, where she was given counseling and weekly drug tests that she failed. “I’ll always smoke pot and drink, so the outpatient program is never going to work,” she said.

Happy Halloween. How did it come to this? I used to have a sister. Sure, she wasn’t always the nicest person that ever lived, but she used to be alive. Now she’s just a ghost, floating through the world of the living. Her face is sunken in, and her skin is pale; she’s just an emaciated shell. Mom told me she’s using heroin. Doesn’t she know that shit kills people? No respect.

I am mad. Frustrated. Fed up. My entire family has been robbed, lied to, schemed, like poor suckers on the streets. Doesn’t she realize what she’s putting everybody through? I’m tired of retreating to a broken home because my sister is high while my mom is downstairs crying. I thought Mom was making dinner tonight, but I guess not.

She didn’t have to miss family functions or not sleep at night for us to know she was using heroin. We already knew. The recently incarcerated boyfriend, the insufficient funds for basic necessities, the constant weight loss. I said I would never forgive her.

It happened right under our noses. It’s not like the family abandoned her and she came back a drug addict. Allie’s emotional trauma, mentally abusive relationships, external forces and inner conflicts—among many other things—led to her need to get high.

Merry Christmas. I am confused, jealous, and enraged. My mother is always spending time with her, always crying about her. I want to see my mother happy again. I want to see everyone happy again. I want to see her pay attention to the whole family and not just to my sister. She is my sister’s mother; but she’s my mother too, and she’s my brother’s mother, and she’s also a loving wife.

In the midst of financial hardships, full-time jobs, and Christmas trees, there was an addict wasting away in an apartment that was twenty minutes from home, and now she’s wasting away upstairs. Even though she’s in our house, she’s not really here. For one thing, she still gets high. My mom is begging her to get help but she won’t. She has the support of
someone who loves her, and she still won’t get better. Selfish bitch.

Allie had a disease. In addition to her bi-polar and borderline personality disorder, she was an addict. Little did I know that she couldn’t help it. My stepdad Eric said she needed to be thrown out on the streets. I just wanted her out of my life, so I could get on with transferring to a new school. Everyone was mad except my mom, who knew that what she really needed was medical attention. She needed therapy and rehab.

Mom is looking into rehab. Allie finally said she would go. After months of my mother going into her room, holding her while she rocked back and forth on the bed, disgusted and ashamed of what she had become, she finally agreed to try. She should be ashamed. Rehab isn’t going to help her. She’s already gone.

Mom feels responsible in part for Allie’s situation. She’s always stressed out or on the phone. Insurance company this, rehab facility that. She’s even taking off work to help her. It’s a full-time job helping a drug addict get healthy. The family is having a hard time accepting the fact that she’s choosing heroin instead of the opportunities that were offered to her, but my mom is trying to tell us that she didn’t choose this lifestyle.

It was starting to take a heavy toll on everyone’s life in the house. My mother kept things going for everyone: she made lunch for my little brother everyday before school, she fed and walked the dogs, and she watched movies on the couch with my stepdad at night. But Allie was dying. And my mom was all she had. So all of that family stuff came to an end.

I was working my ass off and I wanted a pat on the back. My sister was going to either die of an overdose or kill herself if she didn’t get help, and all I cared about was myself. When she needed me most, I turned my back on her. And I didn’t care. After everything that she had put my family through, I could justify my feelings.

A nice little facility in Florida is $10,000 for two weeks. What a nice vacation for her. Starting therapy again when she gets back is going to require weekly payments. Her medication, mood stabilizers, anti-anxieties, and anti-depressants cost about $300 a month—yet another expense. My stepdad just lost his job. And Mom gives me shit for the cost of college applications.

Honestly, I can’t wait for Allie to leave. It will give everyone a break. My mom took her phone, her car keys, and everything else she could attempt to control—like that really stops a drug addict. A cloud has risen over this family, and when she leaves, the sun will shine again. Sometimes I wish she would go and never come back.
Allie was driving to Newark two to three times a day to pick up her poison. She mingled with drug dealers in one of the worst parts of New Jersey and stepped over overdose dead bodies to buy the next bag. Sometimes she would go to hotel rooms for a night with her boyfriend and do heroin and other drugs. She said her favorite part of the day was going to get the heroin—the only exciting and hopeful moments of the nightmare she was in.

Nobody wants to live his or her life like that. Allie knew that what she was doing would leave her dead or in jail. She was certainly not a stupid girl, and at first she thought she could cry alone but come out victorious. Later she knew the only way was to cry for help.

I am powerless. Scared...a little. Allie is leaving for rehab today. Mom is driving her. My birthday is tomorrow. February 4th. It's going to be the worst birthday ever. It's going to be the worst birthday ever. I wonder if Mom even remembers that she birthed me twenty years ago tomorrow. As if the past few months weren't enough, my sister even ruins things from afar.

Mom keeps saying that when my sister gets back she's going to need a lot of support from us. She said, “Either everybody needs to get on board with her addiction, or you need to get out of my way. Because the only person who is here for her and trying to understand her is me.” I'm not giving Allie shit. I don't really care what she needs; it's not like she has ever reciprocated anything. There is a family weekend at her rehab facility where everyone goes to support the addict and learn about addiction, but there is no way in hell that I am going to that.

It finally hit me when Allie went away. Don't get me wrong. I was so happy when she was out of the house. Everyone seemed a little less worried, like no one was picturing her dead in a ditch somewhere with a needle sticking out of her arm. At least we knew where she was and what she was doing. It was a peace of mind that everyone needed since the ordeal began. But it really sunk in when she left that my sister was a hardcore heroin addict.

I didn't want to go to the rehab facility for family weekend. Nobody in my family was forcing me, but my mom kept saying, “I think it would be best for you, not just for her.” She could tell that I was struggling emotionally with the downfall of one of my heroes, my older sister.

I am going to the rehab facility family weekend; for the rest of my life, if Allie gets better, which I doubt, she is going to say that I wasn't there. Even though I hate her so much, I can't live with that. Even though I think that drug addicts make their beds and therefore must lay them, I needed to be there.
In a large room in South Jersey with a fireplace and a counselor, a group of families sat in a circle and awaited their drug addicts to retreat from their rooms. My mom, Eric, and I sat in the circle where the counselor asked questions about what we knew about addiction. She asked me if I wanted to be there. “No.”

It was a classy facility on a farm in the rural part of southern New Jersey. It was a month-long program. The chances of success after that month in a facility were low unless the addict goes on for extended treatment—like a half-way house. It was a happy place, bright and beautiful.

At the rehab facility, Allie was on a strict schedule. After her two-day withdrawal process, she was woken up early to start arts and crafts, yoga, a massage, or therapy. She was in and out of activities and therapy until around 9 o’clock at night, where she then read and probably tossed and turned. I don’t think she got much sleep.

Outpatient would have never worked for her. It wasn’t until I was sitting in her rehab facility that I realized how bad the addiction really was. I thought the vomit on the toilet was just from a bad night, but it was actually her brushing hands with death, withdrawing. I thought she was just naturally skinny, but it was the drugs that kept her merely skin and bones. I thought she chose getting high over me, but it wasn’t that.

People think drug addicts or alcoholics want to be the way they are. You hear things like, “They should get a job.” Or “Cut them off, then see what they do.” But a drug addict need not be thrown out like the trash. They need nourishment, constant love, and a reminder that it’s important for them to stay alive. Allie found her reasons, and after rehab and extended care in Florida for a few weeks, she came back clean. Her sober date is my birthday, February 4th. This upcoming birthday, we will celebrate her second year clean. Our home is at peace.

It’s my turn to talk. “If this was vice versa, Allie, and you needed to be somewhere for me, you wouldn’t. You would be out getting high. You don’t care about anybody but yourself. When there is no one else but our brothers and us, I will not take care of you. I’m mad about the way you’ve treated this family, and me. I smoked weed for the first time at 11 years old because of you. I didn’t want to be here today, but I came because I want you to get better. I want my sister back.”

Everyone is going around in the circle, telling their loved ones how they feel about addiction. The addicts are all sitting with their families. Some are young men and women with their parents, some are men and women with their older children and spouses, and some are my age, or younger. I didn’t know addiction affected so many different kinds of people, so many different families. These people don’t look like monsters. They look like they need help.
In written text, writers sometimes undergo a transformation: at times little, other times profound. Efforts to rewrite a paragraph, alter a sentence, or even a word can result in a completely evolved text. Throughout this process, writers can experience a change of their own: in how they recollect their memories and how they perceive themselves. In the process of writing, undertaking research, raising awareness for a cause, or challenging perceptions, transformation is possible.

In the stories that follow, each of the author’s memories take us to places that may be unfamiliar or even frightening. Yet contained within the stories are elements that are known to all of us: fear, courage, passion, uncertainty, and justice.

The authors describe events that have affected them personally in such a way that readers have to take notice. Readers gain a sense of how uniting towards a common goal can lead to transformation. The writers in this section have a sense of history and a need to create change. Despite differences in causes, these writers use language to move readers to awareness about themselves and the world around them.

By trying to see the world anew, to see possibility, each writer asks us to think about change—and how transformation is possible. Like the butterfly emerging from the chrysalis, each piece shows us the change that can arise when we slow down and reimagine a particular situation.

We invite you to discover these transformations for yourself, and perhaps to see how everyone has the potential to bring about change.

—Emily Gilson and Ceasia King
The bright lights were shining from afar. After six long hours sitting on the back of a bus, trying to contain excitement and anxiety, I could finally see the skyscrapers of New York City. “We’re here,” Andrea said with a nostalgic tone in her voice. Andrea, my Mexican friend, had invited me to stay with her during our Thanksgiving break because it was too expensive for me to go back home to Puerto Rico. I had mixed feelings about going to Andrea’s home since I honestly just wanted to go to my own. Still, it was a relief to go with her and explore the city for the first time rather than staying in my dorm alone in Syracuse, while everybody else enjoyed their vacations with their families. I have to admit that the transition to a whole new world—college life—was not easy, but I wanted to try something new.

We got off the bus and took a taxi to the Lower East Side. I could see how the environment changed from one place to another. As we got closer to our destination, a brownish color began to take hold of the surroundings, the lights started to get dimmer, the skyscrapers turned into tenement buildings, and the Olive Gardens and McDonald’s turned into taco kiosks and Spanish restaurants.

The cab dropped us off on Second Avenue, where I felt strangely comfortable after hearing almost everyone speaking Spanish. When I saw the Puerto Rican flag hanging outside a restaurant called Casa Adela near Andrea’s home, my heart felt warm and cozy. The three red stripes on the flag reminded me of the never-changing, 90 degree weather on the island; the two white stripes reminded me of the bright sun that you
can always spot in the sky; and the one lone star reminded me of my small but beautiful island, and of course, my cultural pride.

No matter where Puerto Ricans go, we take our flag and, with it, our identity. I felt a sudden urge to run to that restaurant so that I could get a little piece of home. As we went up to the fifth floor, I could see excitement on Andrea’s face. Her brother welcomed her, and as I went inside I saw a Mexican flag, hung with pride in the middle of the kitchen. I realized the importance of having something that reminds you of who you are and where you come from.

Her mom greeted me in Spanish because, even though she’d been living in NYC for more than 20 years, she never learned English. Later on, I had the audacity to ask her if she understood English, to which she answered in Spanish: “I had the chance to learn English; I just chose not to. When I came here, I was terrified of what might happen. I took a risk, I took a chance and soon enough, I found my people, who went through the same stuff and came from the same place.”

Her sister had tamales prepared for us, a staple of Mexican cuisine. Andrea was filled with joy. I tried to pretend that I liked them, but I was used to my own kind of staple—starchy dough filled with beef called pasteles. Although tamales and pasteles are basically the same, they do differ: tamales are made with corn, and pasteles are made with plantains. One night, we had a Puerto Rican dish that consisted of the lower part of the pig, called pernil, for dinner. I asked Andrea where her mom got it. She said it was from a kiosk two blocks away. Later, I noticed that there were a lot of stores and food places representing different races. It turns out that the Lower East Side used to attract immigrants from the working class because of its cheap rent and diversity.

According to The Lower East Side Business Improvement District, the immigration to the
Lower East Side started in the early 1800s, when immigrants from different countries were directed to live there. During these years, the region became a home for low- to middle-class workers who wanted to start a life in the city that never sleeps. Since the 1960s, the Lower East Side has become more Hispanic, due to a large number of immigrants from Latin America. Today, one-third of its residents are Hispanic; they often refer to the Lower East Side as “Loisaida,” derived from the Latino pronunciation of Lower East Side, and are currently trying to keep their culture alive in a neighborhood that is rapidly changing.

During my stay, I heard many stories of what it was like to come to New York City. Andrea's mom, Luisa, decided to come twenty-four years ago in search of a better life, what some call the “American Dream.” As an illegal immigrant, she left behind her family and her rights. “That’s the price to pay if you come illegally,” she said to me one night while we were enjoying some empanadas, a type of fried stuffed bread. What really surprised me was how many Mexicans lived in the city. I had the opportunity to immerse myself in the culture for a week, and it was fascinating to see the close-knit community that had formed, with people living in the same buildings, going to the same church, and always helping each other out. Andrea once told me that her biggest fear was to be left alone in the U.S.; because she is the only one in her family who was born here, she is the only one who has citizenship. And maybe that fear is one of the reasons they stay together.

I went to a special activity at Andrea’s church on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. She was part of the church chorus, which was a mariachi group. They were all dressed in the traditional “traje de charro,” consisting of a short jacket and pants with metal buttons for the men, skirts for the women, a big bow tie, boots, and a sombrero. I would have never imagined myself singing classic Christian songs to the tune of mariachis. For a moment, I almost felt as if I were in Mexico. And isn’t that what everyone in that church wanted? To feel like themselves again, to prove to each other that neither time nor location will ever change them? There appeared to be a sense of comfort and pride in many people’s eyes during the mass, whether they were born in Mexico or in the U.S., and whether they’ve been in the U.S. for ten years—or thirty years.

Most of the Mexicans in that church all shared a similar story: they came to the U.S. illegally for a better quality of life. According to the Fiscal Policy Institute, approximately 535,000 illegal immigrants live in New York City. Twenty-seven percent of them are from Mexico and Central America (Fiscal Policy Institute 25). Illegal Mexicans are the most employed of the immigrant group, working as dishwashers, maids, waiters, janitors, and other occupations. They usually get paid less than minimum wage and work more than sixty hours a week. Luisa cleans houses, working flexible hours, sometimes during the holidays. Her boss is also Mexican. Pilar, Andrea's sister, holds a bachelor’s degree, but works as a waitress at a restaurant, since she doesn't have a work permit to be able to compete with other candidates for jobs. Her boss and colleagues are all Mexicans.

One morning, we went out to walk her dog. I noticed the different types of symbols representing certain ethnicities that marked a lot of the stores and restaurants. Whether it was a phrase, like “El Castillo de Jagua,” the name of a castle in Cuba, or a painting of a “coqui,” a type of frog that lives in Puerto Rico, the symbols were everywhere, and I could easily identify the Puerto Rican ones. I also noticed the great disparity among different parts of the area. I saw boutiques between bodegas, hotels between housing projects, and luxury condominiums between cramped buildings. I couldn't help but ask Luisa about this. She told me, “They’re trying to make this place into another area for the rich to hang out. Even if...
everyone here comes from around the world, we all know we are part of a community. We work hard; we share some of each other’s traditions and culture. We have made this place. But, as you can see, we are fighting against the rich who want to destroy what took years of hard work to build,” referring to all the different stores, buildings, restaurants, and companies that the working class has built in the Lower East Side.

Right now, what’s happening on the Lower East Side is called gentrification, which is when a place or neighborhood gets renewed, attracting affluent people and increasing rent prices, leading to a displacement of the poor. The culture of the Lower East Side is made up of dozens of ethnic groups, and although they tend to stick to their own, they all have something in common: they belong to the lower-middle class. Now, as more hipsters and artists come to live there, the essence of the area is vanishing. “Rents are going up, a lot of people are moving to Queens for more space,” Luisa told me, giving me the example of her son, Julio, who moved to Queens seven months ago. The issue is affecting everyone, and people believe that the Spanish culture will slowly disappear if rents continue to rise.

The Saturday after Thanksgiving, I was so homesick I went out to a snack bar where they sold fried Caribbean food. I immediately felt at ease when I saw the lady making the food. Her wavy dark brown hair and accent gave her away immediately; I could tell she was Puerto Rican. She asked me, in Spanish, what I wanted. I guess my own curly hair and facial features gave me away, too. It was a relief to talk to her for a few minutes since, after spending a whole week with Mexicans, I felt like I was beginning to talk like them. It was there that I came to the conclusion that the more time I spent away from my roots, the more they marked me.

On the last day of vacation, Luisa and Pilar said goodbye by giving me one kiss on the cheek, a common ritual in Hispanic cultures. Andrea stopped for a minute to talk to her mom in Spanish. During the ride back home, I was filled with curiosity, so I asked her what it was like to grow up between two worlds. She said it was not a big deal. “Learning two languages was the hardest part. But my school was filled with Latinos, especially Mexicans, so we were all going through the same situation. We were taught to speak to each other in English, but when we were home, everything was in Spanish. It’s way easier when all your friends can relate to you—when you’re not the newcomer, you’re not the exception, and you’re not the weirdo.” And I understood why many of us don’t branch out: it’s because we are terrified of being “the weirdo.” We don’t want to be isolated because we don’t like the same things, or because there is nothing alike between us.

Upon my return to my dorm room after the break, I saw the little Puerto Rican flag on my desk. It reminded me of the Big Apple, the city where you can find the most diversity, and the restaurant near Andrea’s place, Casa Adela, that has been there for more than thirty-five years. The new owner grew up in the streets of the Lower East Side, but his heart belongs to the island of Puerto Rico. The red, green, and white flag hanging in the kitchen of Andrea’s house represents much more than just a country. It represents Luisa’s life, her family’s life, as well as the life of many illegal Mexicans in NYC. Even when you leave your country of origin, you never forget home.

Works Cited
“The people did not stop.”

How does community change happen?
In order to break the ice, each person was urged to share a story of a pivotal moment, big or small, when they took a stand. We observed and listened as each speaker courageously invited strangers into their personal world, vividly illustrating past events of struggle, hardship, and triumph. As the class listened, we saw students and educators deeply engage and bond with each other through a shared humanity.

Listening to Nijmeh Ali, a doctoral student and teacher in the Political Studies Department at Al Quds University in Jerusalem, we were captivated as her deep words commanded the attention of the entire room. Standing before us, Nijmeh retold a story of a time that made her realize what it really meant to live through political occupation: strolling through the streets of Jerusalem on what seemed to be an ordinary day, Nijmeh witnessed an act of unprovoked aggression by an Israeli soldier against an elderly merchant. As others continued to walk by as if nothing had happened, Nijmeh acted on her instincts and ran to the aid of an old man crying alone in the street.

In hindsight, Nijmeh recalls how this event taught her that simply reading books about political reform was not enough to elicit tangible change in the world. Change lies in acting and in choice—the choice to do what is right. Nijmeh's story shows that the catalyst for change lies within each one of us.

Nijmeh tells how she found the courage to stand up for what is right, even when it meant putting her own safety on the line. To view Nijmeh telling her story, “The People Did Not Stop,” visit http://wrt-intertext.syr.edu.

—Taylor Baker and Samantha Mangovski

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Libya: the Revolution of Four Days

Ibrahim Yousif Shebani

An excerpt from Revolution by Love, a collection of personal narratives from activists involved in the Arab Spring: http://revolutionbylove.com
Seven months after the beginning of the uprising in Libya, more than 40,000 of Libya’s youth went missing. 30,000 were martyred. Horrific stories of rape and torture circulated throughout Libyan households, spreading fear and anger.

February 12th
I woke to find an invitation on Facebook to join a group calling for an uprising in Libya inspired by the huge success of the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions. *This is a joke*, I thought, as I went about randomly inviting friends to join. As word of mouth was circulating, the Facebook page and the possibility of an uprising were the core conversation in every café and gathering in Libya.

February 15th
At a dear friend’s birthday dinner, I received a phone call from my friend Ahmed in Benghazi. He said Benghazi has awakened. Everybody was chanting, “Wake up! Wake up! Benghazi, the day you have long awaited has come!” I had mixed emotions: worry for friends and family in Benghazi and happiness that the dormant people of Libya had taken action. Soon the birthday dinner became a debate between those that were pro-peace and those that were anti-Gadhafi. There were doubts: would Libyans overpower Gadhafi? What is going to happen exactly?

I arrived home from the birthday party and signed onto Facebook where videos of the first protest were uploaded. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. I shared the videos on my Facebook page and received an enormous amount of phone calls from friends telling me to remove the videos. I knew if I got caught I would be facing real troubles but after thinking about it, I concluded that what I was doing wasn’t really dangerous. If the government wanted to end a revolution, they would have so many other things to take care of rather than spying on people’s Facebook accounts. Back then, I never thought I would have friends who would take Gadhafi’s side.

February 16th
I arrived in Benghazi on an 8:00 p.m. flight. My friends, Ahmed and Suliman, picked me up from the airport. We went straight downtown where many young Libyans already started protesting and had clashes with police forces loyal to Gadhafi. As we got close enough to see what was happening, walking through the dark alleys of downtown Benghazi, we encountered police forces and armed men. They told us to keep our distance or the consequences would be severe. Some of the men didn’t care and started to scream and curse Gadhafi.

It was impossible for us to join the protestors from this side of the city. We drove the car through alleys to find a way to join them. We got very close to the action, but were scared to join. All I could see were security forces trying to clamp down on the protestors, while angry protestors shouted: “Down! Down, Gadhafi!” “The police’s duty is to serve and protect the civilians!” and, “The people want the downfall of the regime!”

It all took me by surprise; adrenaline rushed through my veins. I wanted to join the front line of the protestors and shout the many things I dreamed of saying ever since we came back to live in Libya from exile back in the early 1990s. I turned on the video camera on my mobile phone and held it over my head, my hoodie pulled up and my sunglasses on.

I joined the protestors and I couldn’t stop screaming, “The people want the downfall of the regime!” As I arrived to the front, I saw security forces blocking the Tree Square and a cameraman working for the regime trying to film the protestors. That was one of the Gadhafi regime’s dirty games; it only meant that they would pick up these protestors in
their homes later. As I was safe in a sweatshirt, sunglasses, and a beard, I figured they would never be able to identify me.

Then, all of a sudden, I saw Mr. M.B., whom I knew worked for the government. I went to school with his daughter, and his other daughter was one of my sister’s best friends. They lived next to my aunt’s house. I knew his whole family! Why is he doing this? I thought. Why is he here to harm young protestors? As I saw him I got scared, thinking, What if he recognizes me? I ran back to join my friends at the end of the street.

We decided to leave and as we got close to the car, the security forces started chasing the protestors, capturing as many as possible. As they were chasing us, I looked to my right and saw Suliman running next to me. “Where is Ahmed?” I asked our other friend. Ahmed weighs over 110 kilograms and had several operations on both of his legs after a car accident a few years ago. We couldn’t find him behind us. We stopped, but they were getting closer. We started shouting, “Ahmed!” And there he was, running faster than both Suliman and me. After what he saw the night before, he was scared of being captured, and I guess the adrenaline boost helped him. That was the joke we talked about all night.

When I went to my bed that night, all I could think of was what would happen next. Is it worth it? I wondered. I came from a well-off family, lived in a villa, had my own business and car, and often travelled. Why am I putting myself in this situation? Yes, I do agree that we live like cattle: we have no rights, no freedom of speech, and no freedom of press. The country was messed up, but I always had contacts and knew someone who knew someone to get through all the obstacles of living in Libya.

February 17th

I woke up early like a little kid on the first day of school. Although I knew that the protest wouldn’t start until 3 p.m., I got ready and waited for my friends to pick me up.

I had no clue what the regime had in mind for the protestors. We arrived at the court where only around five protestors, mainly lawyers, had gathered. I was disappointed. According to the vision I structured in my mind, every Libyan in Benghazi was going to be there. I decided to leave and head back home to Tripoli.

As I was getting close to the airport, my friend Salma called. “Ibrahim, are you in front of the court?” she asked. “No,” I responded. “I went and nothing was happening.” She said, “No, man, I just talked to people and they are arriving to the court from every street in Benghazi. Everybody is marching to the court! Even women are going!” I thought a bit about it and asked Suliman, “What do you think? Should we go back?”

We drove back. There weren’t many people out in front of the court, but protestors started chanting, “Constitution, freedom, and equality!” We joined them, waiting for the rest to arrive. Suliman made some phone calls, and everybody we called said they were on their way. Thousands of people were marching from downtown Benghazi and through the western part of the city.

Our numbers were increasing. I couldn’t stop calling family and friends to tell them what I was witnessing. We waited for the marching groups to join us but no one arrived. We received a phone call from our friend, Osama, and he told us his side of the story. Over 10,000 men were marching. He said he went up on a mosque’s roof to see the end of the line, and he said there were men marching as far as he could see. These men went over the bridge crossing the lake of Benghazi and had no clue what was waiting for them—including my friend, Osama. As they were passing the bridge, mercenaries dressed in custodial outfits and yellow helmets were providing support to
the army who were shooting at the unarmed protestors with heavy artillery, anti-aircraft weapons, Kalashnikovs, tear bombs, batons, and machetes.

Chaos broke through. Protestors were being pushed back, and those on the front lines were murdered. Many of them jumped in the lake and many of them were captured. The people gathered in front of the court were receiving phone calls, and many stories were being told and anger was showing on the protestors’ faces. Everybody was shouting, “People want the downfall of Gadhafi.” I saw rage and anger that nothing could stop and people decided to spend the night in front of the court. We decided to leave by 10 p.m. and head over to see what was happening in front of Alfaed Buomar Brigade Compound, which is Gadhafi’s most important site of power in Benghazi. We parked a bit far and as we got closer, we could see the military shooting carelessly at groups of young men.

We ran. Soon, we found Osama and Mohamed, and it was Mohamed’s time to tell us his story. He was marching earlier that day with thousands of men through Jamal Abdul Nasser Street. He told us that women were ululating in balconies and sending off their husbands and sons to join the march. Women were chanting, “See how beautiful my country is! Look at the sons of Libya who would die protecting it!” He said that men were marching with tears flowing from their eyes out of pride and joy, and the sounds of ululating women would echo everywhere. These marching protestors weren’t much luckier. As they approached the court, they were attacked by military and mercenaries/“yellow helmets,” the term used by Benghazi people.

February 18th

I woke up early again to go with my friend Ahmed to try to collect money, blankets, pillows, mattresses, and food for the crowd that decided to camp in front of the court. There were still police and military forces in the streets, and we were trying to find our way through the alleys of Benghazi to avoid them.

I was heading downtown, and all I could see were big clouds of smoke coming up from most of the regime’s buildings. The people of Benghazi were fighting without arms; all they had were gas, matches, rage, and will.

As I approached the court, the only thing I could see was a massive independence flag waving from the courthouse! This flag was even forbidden to talk about during the past forty-two years; the majority of Libyans who were born and raised under the Gadhafi regime didn’t even know it existed. In front of the court, there were thousands of protestors. I saw Mohamed. He told me he was going home to bring a satellite Internet system to the court in order to connect to Al Jazeera.

It took almost forty-five minutes to move the heavy satellite dish. As we drove, all I could see was a helicopter flying over Mohamed’s house, and I was concerned they were taking pictures from that helicopter. I thought, What if they have a machine gun over there? As we were driving and getting closer to the court, I was trying to calm myself down, but couldn’t help but worry. What if we were stopped by the police or the army? I told the driver to let me do the talking if we were stopped. We made up a story together and decided we would tell them that this satellite we were carrying was just a normal TV satellite dish and that we are making a delivery. I would tell them I was a technician. After all, they wouldn’t be able to distinguish an Internet satellite dish from a TV satellite dish. How would they know? As we were getting closer to the city, the streets were empty, and the only thing we could see was the smoke of the burning buildings. We arrived safely to the court. That was my mission of the day. People were happy to see the satellite. Finally, the world would witness our happiness, our liberation. I felt so proud to be part of this small mission.
Taylor Baker is a junior Writing and Rhetoric major, as well as a member of the SU Cheerleading team. Originally from Rochester, New York, she is addicted to clean, crisp grammar and exceptional writing. With a love for expressing her own opinions, Taylor aspires to attend law school after graduation.

Jayme Brown is a senior Writing and Rhetoric major. Hailing from the small, scenic town of Gardiner, New York, she loves the mountains but one day hopes to move to a city in a cool climate. Talk to her about her favorite author—Joyce Carol Oates—her favorite country—the UK—or her favorite stimulant—caffeine.

Sarah Cho is a senior Electrical Engineering major with minors in Computer Engineering and Writing and Rhetoric. She is at the stage in her life where she is starting to appreciate coffee and tea, and is standing at the crossroads between becoming a writer, a songwriter, a poet, an engineer, or even better—all of them.

Roland Cody is a junior Writing and Rhetoric major here at Syracuse University. He currently writes for 20 Watts Magazine. He plans on writing in the future for big name publications before he goes on to start one of his own. He enjoys writing, covering live events, making music, and playing sports.

Emily Gilson is a dual Writing and Rhetoric and French and Francophone Studies major. Although this junior is from Orangefield, Texas, she did not choose to go to Syracuse University solely because she likes orange. Since languages fascinate her, Emily plans to study linguistics and translation in multiple languages after graduation.

Hayley Kang is a graduating senior with a dual major in Writing and Rhetoric and English and Textual Studies along with a minor in Public Communications. Although currently living in Pennsylvania, she hopes to work in Boston as a book editor and visit London one day.
Ceasia King is twenty years old and from Brooklyn, New York. She is a junior at SU with a Writing and Rhetoric major. Writing has been her passion for as long as she can remember. Without using writing as a creative outlet to express personal issues, she wouldn’t be the determined individual she is today.

Danielle Kolodkin is a Writing and Rhetoric major with a minor in English and Textual Studies. A junior from Paramus, New Jersey, she has a passion for writing, reading, and entertainment. Danielle aspires to one day be an editor for children’s books at a New York City publishing company.

Samantha Mangovski is a senior Writing and Rhetoric major and a member of the Orange Pulse Dance Troupe. She is a Syracuse native who wouldn’t be complete without reading, writing, or dancing in her life. Samantha one day aspires to work in the editing and publishing field and to pen a few books of her own.

David Swenton is a junior Writing and Rhetoric and Political Science double major, as well as a drum major of the SU Marching Band. Coming from the sleepy town of Owego, New York, David is passionate about American politics, music, and writing. His aspirations include attending law school and running for office.

Katie Tull is a dual Writing and Rhetoric and English and Textual Studies major on the Creative Writing track. A junior from Atlanta, she spends her summers with her beloved pit-mix Syd Vicious and as many books as she can consume. Katie aspires to work in the publishing industry.

Nicky Zamoida is a junior Writing and Rhetoric major with a minor in LGBT studies. She is from Manchester, New Hampshire and lives for her annual trip to the White Mountains. Her dream is to use her writing and editing skills to contribute to the LGBT Young Adult literature genre.

Brittany Zar is a senior Writing and Rhetoric major, as well as a member of the sorority Sigma Delta Tau. From Syosset, New York, anyone that knows Brittany would be aware of her strong passion for writing, reading, and fashion. In the future, she hopes to become an editor for a fashion magazine.
This year we invited artists who are also students at Syracuse University to submit work that we might feature in the issue. Below are the original images that appear in this year’s *Intertext* along with some information about the artists.

**Greg Mawicke** is a Milwaukee-born painter who studied History and Industrial Design at Syracuse and will be graduating this spring: http://www.behance.net/gmawicke

![Image](http://example.com/image1)

**Hannah Nast** is a senior Art Photography and Religion major hoping to pursue a career as an NGO photographer: http://hbnast.viewbook.com/portfolio/hbnast

![Image](http://example.com/image2)
Sage Adrian Cruz Field is a Painting major at Syracuse University with a focus on graphic design, painting, and typography: http://www.behance.net/SageCruzField

Meg O’Malley is a senior communications photographer studying Photo Illustration and Sociology. She, alongside Madeline Holloway and Keaton Fox, is currently building a creative community known as Girl on Girl Productions to encourage collaboration and support among female artists, and across artistic mediums: www.girlongirlproductions.com; http://megomalley.com/
Submit to *Intertext*, an anthology of some of the best writing produced by students in courses taken with the Syracuse University Writing Program.

Submissions are accepted on a rolling basis.

Find out more at http://wrt-intertext.syr.edu/about.html