Intertext

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2015

Intertext 2015 — Complete Issue

INTERTEXT

2015 | SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY WRITING PROGRAM

INTERTEXT 2015
CONTENTS

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.

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http://wrt-intertext.syr.edu

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 2015 winners are Puhup Manas for "Scars of a Culture" and Michaela Thorley for "The Invisible Cage."

Cover layout and photograph by Annemarie Menna. This spread by Victoria Luyckx. Photograph by Annemarie Menna. Back cover layout by Caleigh Gran. Photograph by T.J. Tree.

introduction

The courses offered through the Writing Program bring out the wordsmith in us all. Every day, more and more students are discovering their passion and talent for the craft. Yet, we often miss out on the chance to celebrate our peers' most compelling work. This edition of *Intertext* has given us the chance to do just that. The publication provides students with the chance to have their best work published from Writing Program courses at all levels and genres. From creative nonfiction to argumentative writing, this edition explores issues of identity, home, and perspective. Each piece is unique and reflective of our students, our society, and Syracuse University, leaving behind a legacy for us to muse on long after the pages are closed. Most importantly, *Intertext* enhances the sense of community amongst writers from all majors across campus.

Working behind the scenes allowed us to put everything we have learned from our own writing courses into action as we proofread, edited, and designed this publication from start to finish. This collaborative and occasionally chaotic process strengthened our involvement in the writing community and provided us with an idea of what it means to be a part of the publishing industry. Not only that, but we simply enjoyed the experience. The contributions to this issue electrified us, moved us to get human—to laugh, to cry, and to open our eyes to the world around us. Some of these essays are comical, some are serious, and some are a combination of both. This year's issue invites us to reflect on the humor and heartbreak of everyday life. It was a challenging journey bringing these pieces together from manuscript to publication, but we truly believe all the hard work paid off. From all of us here at *Intertext*, we hope you enjoy the read, and remember, of course, to GET HUMAN!

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we would like to thank our professor, Patrick W. Berry, without whom none of this would be possible. He facilitated the production of this issue and generously offered his guidance, support, and occasionally cupcakes, all while having unyielding faith and patience in our multifarious opinions, questionable time management skills, and budding abilities.

We are sincerely grateful to Professor Lois Agnew, the Writing Program, and the College of Arts and Sciences, including its iLEARN program, for supporting our work at *Intertext* and all of the aspiring writers here at Syracuse University.

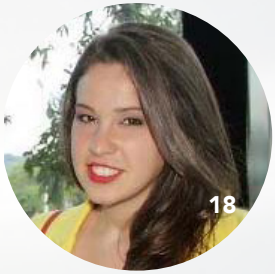
Our gratitude also goes out to Benay Bubar and Wendy Mansfield for providing us with added professional guidance to help make this magazine the best it can be.

We also want to thank the Louise Wetherbee Phelps Award judges—Tyler Dorholt, Anne Fitzsimmons, Brice Nordquist, and Jessica Pauszek—for putting significant time and consideration into choosing the most compelling upper- and lower-division works to receive these awards.

Last, but not least, we are dearly thankful to all of the writers and artists who contributed their work to the magazine this year. *Intertext* is made possible by your willingness to share your work with us and with the Syracuse University community.

—Maura Buckley,
Caleigh Gran, and T.J. Tree

Layout and photograph by Emily Goldberg.



Olivia Accardo, Major: **Visual & Performing Arts**
"Biking Wrong," written for WRT 422

"This piece is about the anxiety-ridden thoughts of a nineteen-year-old version of myself as I ride a bike and cry."

Roland Cody Jr., Major: **Writing & Rhetoric**
"A Black Male," written for WRT 424

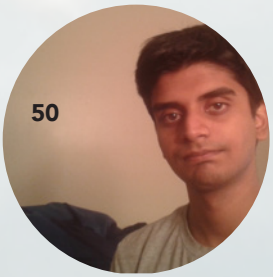
"This piece is an essay about what it means to carry the identity marker of a black male wherever you go."

Doug D'Elia, **Syracuse Veterans' Writing Group**
Poems: "A Geometry Problem" and "Tombstone Blues"

"'A Geometry Problem' was inspired by my friend Pete McShane, who was wounded in a bamboo grove. 'Tombstone Blues' is a story about survivor's guilt and PTSD among non-combatants."

Padraic Kane, Major: **Writing & Rhetoric**
"Without You," written for WRT 422

"I wrote this piece to give others a closer look into who I am and to help those who have also felt like no one was there."



Puhup Manas, Major: **Computer Science**
"Scars of a Culture," written for WRT 105

"'Scars of a Culture' analyzes the Abused Goddesses campaign and its implications regarding the position of women in Indian culture."

Johnathan McClintick, Majors: **English & Textual Studies**; **Writing & Rhetoric**
"Postcards from Tornado Alley" and "For Those Who Do Not Swallow," written for WRT 422

"These pieces are from an experimental memoir. An excerpt work has been published in *The Hawai'i Pacific Review*."

Katrina Sotiropoulos, Major: **Writing & Rhetoric**
"Sugar," written for WRT 255

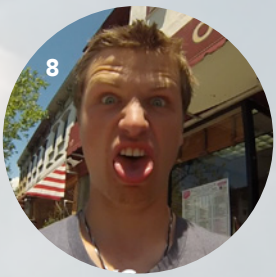
"I wrote this memoir for a course where we had to look at ethical issues in society and how they affect our own lives."

Michaela Thorley, Major: **Writing & Rhetoric**
"The Invisible Cage," written for WRT 400

"This piece was my attempt to grapple with Michelle Alexander's concept of the New Jim Crow."

Julia Whittley, Major: **Sociology**
"Grandpapa," written for WRT 114

"This piece was written about the most influential person in my life. My relationship with him shows how a loving adult can have a great impact on a child's life, even if their paths only cross for a short amount of time."



Steven Young, Major: **English & Textual Studies**
"A Simple Push," written for WRT 255

"For the first time in history, Ethiopians are being introduced to the blissful art of skateboarding."


Perspective

Perspective is far more than simply a point of view. Perspective is an understanding of reality. It is not merely what we see, but the experience of it: what we think, what we feel, what we know. Our ability to reflect on what we perceive is what makes us human, and the many ways of perceiving reality are what differentiates us from one another. Perspective is intricately woven into our identities as individuals.

Everyone has a perspective, and everyone's perspective is different. This fact can make life difficult: If everyone saw and felt exactly the same, we would have very few problems. Yet, a globally homogenous perspective would also make life rather dull. One of the many wonders of humanity is that despite all of the people who exist, who have existed, and who will exist, each person has, has had, and will have a different understanding of reality. They will have the ability to change, evolve, morph, and rearrange the views of the world, as we consistently learn to perceive each other and ourselves in new and different ways.

It is disturbingly easy to become attached to a single perspective and to ignore all others. And why not? After all, perspective is what makes each person unique. Why should anyone have to change his or her perspective because of someone else? Because this ignorance has been the cause of war and suffering throughout our existence. Asking this is much like asking: *Why do we need compassion?*

We need compassion because we need each other, and we cannot live with each other unless we understand one another. So while perspective is a major indicator of individuality, this openness to experiencing the views of others is a key element of harmony and humanity.

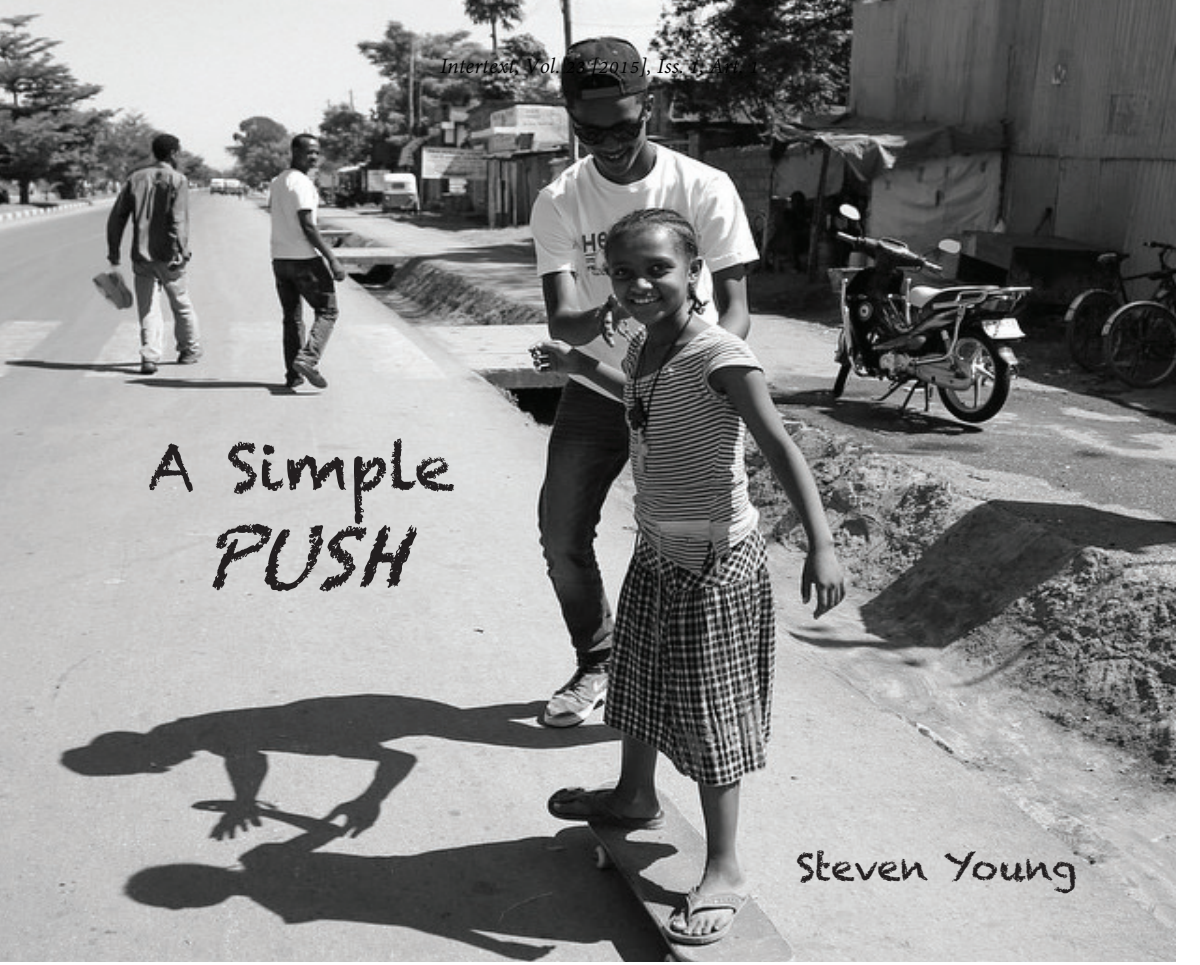
Perspective, identity, compassion—these are the keys to a rich life and a peaceful world. In the following three essays—"A Simple Push," "Sugar," and "Biking Wrong"—the authors' courage to step away from their own perspectives and into another's world, and their courage to share these experiences, demonstrate this truth. Each of the following pieces reflects differentiating points of view and unique, fresh perspectives of ourselves, of other people, and of life. The endearing personalities of these skilled writers combined with their bold receptiveness to change makes each of these essays simultaneously touching, inspirational, and a pleasure to read.

The writers reveal that the best way to gain perspective in our own lives is to experience life from another's point of view. Leaving their comfort zones in order to see life through a different lens, all three of these authors discover a new sense of purpose and, as a result, grow from their experiences. After reading these essays, you may feel like you've gained some wisdom as well. At the very least, these essays will hopefully persuade you to re-evaluate your own perspective.

That's our perspective anyway.

—Maura Buckley,
Emily Goldberg, and T.J. Tree

Layout by Caleigh Gran. Photograph by Annemarie Menna.



A skateboard is a modest toy: a piece of wood that sits on two trucks and four wheels. I have been playing with this toy since I was ten, and it remains the only toy I can never seem to throw away. My bike, pogo stick, action figures, and Yu-Gi-Oh! cards were all tossed into a large dumpster with an eye roll and a shoulder shrug when I was fourteen (when I thought I was a grown-up). But my skateboard has remained perched on the wall next to my bed where the wheels leave black marks from the miles of pavement they have crossed. I enjoy few things, but that toy that sits next to my bed remains one of them.

Abenezer Temesgen's board has a different story. His board has traveled halfway around the world. Abenezer is a sixteen-year-old boy who was born and raised in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. He shares his skateboard with other kids who are more than eager to try the tricks they see Abenezer perform. His city only has seven skateboards, and Abenezer uses them to teach twenty-five kids how to skate. And that number is growing. Every skateboard, every set of wheels, bearings,

and trucks that arrives in Addis Ababa, comes from donations made from around the world—donations that are just enough to allow Abenezer and a small group of kids to have the opportunity to skate each day.

Every day of every summer since I was eleven, I would take my skateboard apart and put it back together, caring for it like a finely tuned musical instrument. Each tiny piece was plucked out, cleaned carefully, and lubricated to ensure it was as fast as possible. I did this while I sat on my couch and watched, over and over again, a professional skate video that my parents had bought me. I began to love the scent of the griptape on the board, and the smell when I washed my WD-40-soaked hands with the coconut-scented soap in our bathroom.

But I spent most of my time in my front yard, where there was a slab of concrete that gave me just enough room to practice flat ground tricks, like kickflips and pop shove-its. There was also enough room to set up the small plastic ramp I got for Christmas that year. When the school year started, I would practice tricks before the school bus came and after dinner until the sun went down.

Most kids in Addis Ababa do not go to school. They get jobs that pay a couple of dollars a day. Their daily goal is to survive; other than that, there isn't time for much else. These skaters see the constant struggle around them, and they lack a creative outlet. The toys that are sent from all over the world to Addis Ababa, especially the skateboards, become that outlet. As Abenezer says, "Skating empowers kids to be individuals." A skateboard is essentially an urban paintbrush on a canvas of pavement, ledges, rails, and ramps. Every push of the board, every trick performed, translates into a picture, a picture that can be limitless based on a kid's creativity with that piece of wood on those trucks and wheels.

Inspired by this, Abenezer created a skateboarding campaign called Ethiopia Skate that is primarily aimed at raising money to build Ethiopia's first skate park. The goal is based around the fact that law enforcement in Ethiopia does not welcome skateboarding. However, Abenezer isn't just giving kids a place to skate: He's providing a place where they can interact with other kids and find a sense of individuality and empowerment. The campaign is also aimed at gathering donated skateboards and other skating supplies so as many kids as possible have the opportunity to skate.

Skateboarding frees the mind. It is a form of meditation, allowing a person to forget everything around them and to focus solely on the task at hand. Skateboarding also teaches one to be resilient.

Layout by T.J. Tree. Opposite page: "Back in the day..." by Instagram user ethiopiaskate: http://instagram.com/p/tiPCk-wiZM/?modal=true. This page: "We just want to skate" by Instagram user ethiopiaskate: http://instagram.com/p/tSx7DsQic1/?modal=true.

Every skateboarder quickly learns how important it is to fall in order to learn. Most people don't fall as much as skateboarders do. Falling and picking yourself back up becomes normal. A skater will sometimes fall a hundred times trying to land a single trick. Even professionals fall many times before landing a difficult trick. Skaters must learn to laugh at their mistakes, get up, and try again.

There is a very unique sensation in landing a trick. The first kickflip I ever landed was enough to make me run around my yard screaming like a five-year-old who had just been told he was going to Disney World. I remember thinking, *Wow, what other tricks could I learn now?* Just that one trick opened up an entire world of possibilities and improved my confidence. I still get the same feeling when I land this trick today. Even though I land it every time, the trick has not lost its value. While I have learned to restrain myself from running around and screaming after every landing, I often can't help but let out a smile and an, "AW YEAH!"

I remember reading about the Ethiopia Skate campaign for the first time on a notable skateboarding site called Transworld Skateboarding. I had suspicions despite reading about it on such a prominent website, and did a quick Google search. I was in awe to find so many popular skateboarding sites with a very similar write up and video about the campaign and its goal. I remember having a strange sensation of pride. I was proud of this kid, Abenezer, halfway around the world, whom I had never met, for taking something as seemingly simple as a skateboard and using it to implement positive change for kids like him in his country.

I purchased an Ethiopia Skate campaign T-shirt to contribute to their goal of building a skate park. I wore it one morning to breakfast at a small diner in Rhode Island and noticed that as I stood up to leave, the cook was staring at the shirt from behind the counter.

He laughed, pointed at my shirt, and asked what it was about.

"Ah, it's a campaign from Ethiopia aimed at raising money for a skate park. They are also trying to get people to donate skateboards for kids who don't have access to them," I explained.

He laughed again, "That's a bit silly. What those kids over in Ethiopia need is food."

I left the diner with the type of anger that turns you into a bad-mouthing machine. I was enraged with this man's statement and made that rage very clear to my friends as we walked home. How could this man be so narrow-minded about human life as to think that the kids in Ethiopia should just settle for survival, that they shouldn't be worried about being creative or empowered or having fun simply because they were born in Ethiopia?

Over time, I slowly began to see the man's point and acknowledged my harsh overreaction. People over there do need food, resources, and more access to clean water. And while this is certainly something those kids have to worry about, they also need something that empowers and motivates them; something that teaches them to keep trying; something they can love and enjoy.

This past March, Ethiopia Skate held a workshop in Addis Ababa and sixteen kids attended. The workshop taught basic instructions and tool safety, and then

taught the skaters how to make skateboard ramps out of bamboo and other common materials. This workshop not only taught them how to build their own skate spots, it also taught them problem-solving skills, imagination, teamwork, and resourcefulness. As I thought more about what the cook had said to me, I realized that I should have explained to him the great things that the campaign was actually accomplishing. I should have told him about the small steps it was making to give children better lives. In fact, Ethiopia Skate has now received tens of thousands of dollars in donations and enough skateboards for every kid who wants one of their own.

It's not just skateboarding. It's not just playing. It is a reason to get out of bed in the morning because you can't wait to skate with your friends or try that trick you couldn't land yesterday. It's that feeling of empowerment you get from landing a trick, and knowing that everyday you improve just a little bit more. Most important, this is something fun and creative that allows kids to be themselves. So yes, while kids in Ethiopia do need access to more clean water and a larger food supply, they also need that form of empowerment, because survival alone should not be all a kid in Ethiopia has to focus on each day.

This summer, I will be skateboarding 270 miles from Syracuse to New York City wearing my Ethiopia Skate shirt the whole way. This trip is to honor Ethiopia Skate, and although it won't be something that directly gives the campaign a donation, I hope it shows them a huge amount of support and respect for what they are trying to do. I will be documenting the entire trip and posting the final product to YouTube as well as e-mailing it to the founder of Ethiopia Skate to make sure they see the support.

I look forward to making a trip to Ethiopia after I graduate to skate the park that the campaign will build. Until then, I will continue to do what I can to help kids in Ethiopia get what they need to skate by donating boards, supplies, and any funds I can spare.

"We just want to skate," says Abenezer to finish off the campaign video. Every time I watch the video, the phrase sends chills down my spine. Such a simple request from a kid who might as well be saying, "We just want to be kids." This is the reason this campaign deserves support—so these kids can be kids.

Work Cited

Stromsoe, Sean. "Ethiopia Skate, A Message to the World." Online video clip. Vimeo. 20 Oct. 2013: Web. 19 Sept. 2014.

Photograph by Steven Young.

Sugar

Katrina Sotiropoulos

Layout by Emily Goldberg. "Summer Camp" by Flickr user Sarah Joy, CC BY-SA 2.0: https://www.flickr.com/photos/joybot/9015037562/.

Medical records and information are updated and exchanged, medication is collected and sent to Club Med, and signatures are scribbled on forms that specify that the campers will not dose themselves unless instructed and overseen by a member of the medical staff. When they get to camp, the kids and their parents go through an extensive check-in process. Some of these kids have been dosing themselves for years, using their pumps to regulate their insulin. Many of them are in their teens and are rebellious and defiant to any and all authority. Quite a few of them continue to adjust their dosing without the proper supervision.

The result is dangerously low or sickeningly high blood sugars, often because they continue to be dosed by the medical staff at the normal dosing times. They also eat what they want when they want, sneaking snacks into the cabins and then only eating a plate of pasta and six cookies for dinner. And because they're old enough to pick and choose their own meals, they don't have an issue starting arguments with their counselors when they are asked to eat something with protein, or even a vegetable.

When their blood sugar does drop low or shoot high, campers never feel well. Their mood sours and sometimes they cry, wanting to go back to the cabin and nap. Or their energy skyrockets, and getting them to calm down and listen is nearly impossible. When this happens, the counselors then have to spend the remainder of the day chasing them around, waving ketone test strips in their faces only to have them swatted away, or listening to them sob into their pillows in the cabin, sniffling about how awful they feel.

I am one of those counselors, usually assigned to the oldest or second oldest set of girls at camp. Their hormones are off the wall, and all they want to do is find a cute date to the camp dance.

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When I first arrive at camp, I have to check in. My not being diabetic, my check-in is quick and more like a "Hey, how are you?" rather than checking to see if I am old enough to handle my medication, who my doctors are, and so on. I receive my cabin assignment, hoping it's one of the newer cabins, but so far that hasn't happened.

My friend from high school comes with me, and we drive down to our cabin to begin the sweaty process of unloading our things. It's ten days out of the summer, and it's solely volunteer work. We are dressed in old T-shirts and shorts, our feet clad in flip-flops and ratty sneakers. Makeup stays in the car, or better yet at home. We make sure to rest up beforehand because soon sleep will become a novelty.

After setting up our things on the least saggy cot and swatting all of the spiderwebs from under the toilets and beneath the rafters, we gather in the mess hall to meet our fellow staff members. Many of us have done this before, while some are just doing it for service hours or to fulfill a degree requirement. I signed up in an attempt to fulfill an easy fifty service-hour credits while in high school. We range in ages from mid-teens to mid-to-late-sixties. But despite our varying backgrounds and appearances, at the end of the day, we're all here for the same reason: the campers.

We spend the next day and a half

learning about diabetes, its causes and the various ways in which it's kept in check. We learn about what to do when blood sugars shoot up or plummet, and the dangers of both. I'm not sure I'll ever fully understand just how hard it is for a diabetic kid to live a normal life. Some are diagnosed months after birth, so all they know is this disease. Others may have been diagnosed in their early teens, so adjusting to their limits is an ongoing challenge.

When move-in day rolls around, we hang out in our cabins and wait for our campers. The process is slow: It takes the better part of a day for everyone to arrive and get settled. Still, it's exciting with the sounds of children yelling and laughing coming from their families as they move from the parking lot to check in. The whir of golf carts whizzing by with stacks of suitcases and the campers' belongings fills the humid and hot air.

Occasionally a stray pillow flies off a cart, and screeching and arguing between the two drivers ensues. Each staff member's walkie-talkie receives a constant flow of instructions and directions from all over camp. The air feels electric with the mixed feelings of excitement, apprehension, and nervousness generated from tearful goodbyes, bashful hellos, and ecstatic reunions. Energy surrounds the day with potential for the week—for the campers, their counselors, the medical staff, and all other volunteers.

• • •

During my second summer volunteering as a counselor, I had five campers between the ages of thirteen and fourteen. One thirteen-year-old camper had never been to camp before and wasn't too keen on the whole idea. She had recently been diagnosed with diabetes—only a year or two earlier. A newly emotional teen, she did not want to follow any of the rules. Her hair was dyed a dark red, her eyes were lined with black eyeliner, and she covertly used her phone when she thought I wasn't looking. She was quiet at first, but as she became more comfortable—coming out of her shell—she became difficult. She didn't listen to any of the counselors and would leave the cabin without telling anyone to go hang out with friends in another cabin.

She also had a lot of problems with her blood sugar levels. The campers were always dosed before and after meals, and then before bedtime. Depending on their levels at bedtime, they could even be woken up around 2 a.m. to check that they hadn't gone too low or too high. This girl always had levels that didn't match up with what she had eaten or how much insulin she had been given. The conclusion was that she had been dosing herself when she shouldn't have, causing the medical staff to become impatient with her. She felt poorly a lot of the time, which didn't help her attitude—or mine either.

As the week went on, her blood sugar levels began to improve a little, but the site where she received her insulin—pumped from a little box she carried around, down through a tiny tube into her body through a little needle—started to give her problems. When the infusion set ripped out the first time, I went with her to Club Med to have it changed. She whined a little, lifting up her shirt to reveal her bloated tummy, covered in faint bruises from past pump site spots. But then she silently found a healed section

of skin, puffy from the scar tissue that had begun to accumulate there, and attached a new infusion set.

Soon after we left Club Med, we began to talk. Of course we had talked before, multiple times, but at this point, she began to unload some of the baggage she had been carrying around, and her vulnerable side began to show. She told me what it was like to be diagnosed with diabetes, and how she had been so skinny before. Now she didn't like the way she looked in a bathing suit. She was only thirteen and already had a poor body image. We continued to talk, and I found out more about her, specifically how she knew how to dose herself—and how she did so at her discretion when she was at home. She had only had diabetes for a couple of years, but she was dedicated to trying to keep her blood sugar as stable as possible. Just from looking at her, you wouldn't know this—that she was such a strong girl. She hadn't felt physically bad in a while and only wished she could continue to dose herself in the way she was used to.

The next day, her infusion set ripped out again. She was clearly upset about it, but calmly walked back to Club Med with me. This time, when she lifted up her shirt, she grimaced as she searched for a new patch of unblemished skin; the spot she had just used yesterday was pink, and a pinprick of blood sat welled in the tiny cut where the needle had been inserted. Snapping it into place with the inserter, she replaced her bunched-up shirt and we walked out. She was less chatty today, but I could tell she was thinking. I told her how brave I thought she was—how brave I thought everyone with diabetes at this camp was. She shrugged and

"First Campfires!" by Flickr user Camp Pinewood, CC BY 2.0: https://www.flickr.com/photos/camppinewood/9452703900/.

said, "We have no choice, we have to be." She rejoined her bunkmates, and I watched her go, slipping easily back into a happier mood as her mind was distracted from what had just happened.

Later that day, while my cabin had pool time, she came up to me again, her face red and splotched, her mouth twisted downward. She showed me her infusion set, torn out for a third time in twenty-four hours, and so we went back up the hill towards Club Med, stopping only at the cabin to collect a new site needle. I asked her as we were walking if this happened a lot to her, and she said no. She said that she didn't usually have any issue with her infusion set staying intact, but it hurt her and she hated the bruising and swelling. I asked her if she had ever used shots, and she said for a brief period when she had first been diagnosed, but her doctor thought it would be easier for her to use the pump. I asked her if she felt that was true, and she shook her head, her eyes filling with tears.

We walked into the cabin; the medical staff on duty looked surprised to see us back so soon. They weren't friendly, though, and clearly believed that my camper had been reckless with her site. She began to cry as she lifted her top for the second time that day, this time not even bothering to look for un-bruised skin. She inserted the infusion set, sniffling. I suggested to one of the doctors that maybe a note should be put in her file recommending that she go back to shots, that she hated the pump and wanted to try something else. All he said was that she could take this up with her doctor when she got home. I sat silently

Photographs by Emily Goldberg and Flickr user White Birch Sf, CC BY 2.0: https://www.flickr.com/photos/white_birch/8806142486/.

for the rest of the time we were there, thinking about the doctor's treatment of her, and the obvious pain that he was ignoring.

• • •

Looking back now, I don't think the medical staff was doing a poor job of dosing any of the campers. I don't think that they weren't knowledgeable or that they didn't care. I don't even think that they wanted to upset any of the campers. But I do think that at least in the case of this girl, they had failed her. She was thirteen and vulnerable to a hateful body image, and lack of self-respect. She was vulnerable to thinking of herself as different in a bad way, and vulnerable to hurting herself in an attempt to fit in. She was vulnerable to hating her diabetes because it hurt her so much, and she hadn't been allowed to do what she knew would make her feel good. Yes, she was under eighteen, as were all of the campers. They had to do what their doctors and parents felt was right for dethem, but sometimes the opinions of the adults would overpower the opinions of the child and, though they might think they knew best, who knows one's body better than oneself? When a kid doesn't feel good, how can someone tell her that no, she is wrong, that she feels fine? Why should doctors, who know all the available options for receiving insulin and self-dosing, prevent a child from trying a new option or keeping with their known schedule, if it poses no harm to the child?

That challenges a previous statement pointing out that teenagers are rebellious and flighty, and their decisions are not always stable. So what would be the fair thing to do here? To take their voice away from them because they aren't deemed emotionally stable enough? What if the adults were to listen to their voices, take into consideration their opinions on how they are feeling because maybe, just maybe, they are being truthful? In this day and age, the pressure to succeed is so high and demanding. Parents control all that they can for their children, often more than they should. They believe that they know what is best from their own experience, but how can their children really learn if they aren't allowed to have their own experiences and make their own mistakes?

That camper never came back. I've spent multiple summers there since, and have met and had to deal with so many other kids. But the memory of her story stays with me. I have had campers who have missed out on fun activities and hanging out with other kids because their daily routine at home wasn't the same as the camp-instituted routine; as a result, their blood sugar was all out of whack and they felt sick. Is it worth keeping all of the kids on the same schedule so it's easier for the medical staff to keep track of when they have been dosed, even if it makes many of the kids sick? I don't think so. It would be difficult to keep them all on a schedule, but not much more than getting all of their records and medications from their parents when they drop them off. It would be difficult, but not impossible.

Many of these kids have to mature faster than most ibn order to deal with their diabetes, so why not give them the benefit of the doubt if it might make their camp experience better, as well as their experience with their diabetes? I think we can afford to have a little faith.

Biking Wrong

Olivia Accardo

My Aunt Nadine hands me what appears to be a tiny Capri Sun, minus the straw. It's a little aluminum pouch with the word "GU" on the front and seems to be some sort of endurance supplement. She offers me a smile and throws her leg over her thin white road bike, jams her cycling clips noisily into the pedals, and blasts off down the highway, followed by many other muscley-legged, middle-aged athletes.

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A little under a month before this moment, I had searched the words "green bike" on Craigslist. I figured it was probably time I learned to ride a bike, preferably a green one. A green one because all I knew about bikes—as far as what kinds existed—was that they came in different colors. It was Bike Day at the daycare center and the secret was out: *Miss Olivia doesn't know how to ride one*. I hadn't felt particularly embarrassed about it. In fact, I appreciated the irony of being responsible for a group of bicycling six- to ten-year-olds as a twenty-year-old cycling novice.

•••

Meanwhile, I'm watching Nadine fade into the miles of concrete that lie before me. My heart is pounding so hard—I think it might break my rib cage. My lungs ache with varying levels of anxiety. Maybe I'm having a heart attack. Maybe I should eat some of this GU. I stand next to my delightfully forest-green, hybrid bike with one chipped-nail polish–baring hand gripping the saddle and the other hand

squeezing the remainder of the chocolate mystery GU into my mouth.

"Let's go! You can do this. You're great!" shouts Mark Wilson, the world's most cheerful sixty-year-old seven-time Ironman (also probably the best-looking). He effortlessly hops off his bike and stands next to me.

"Today we're doing about thirty miles, but don't worry," he says.

I'm worried.

Behind me is a picturesque lakefront parking lot, and before me is thirty miles of hills, potholes, blaring car horns, pedestrians, possibly bears, and a herd of middle-aged muscled Ironmen.

Mark clips into his several-thousand-dollar bicycle and gestures that I follow him as he starts mile one of thirty.

I feel I perform my best when I'm not given the time to be concerned, and so I clumsily toss my left leg over the bike and begin to pedal, swerving and jerking the handlebars quickly left and right. If I avert my eyes from the road, I will surely crash.

"Look ahead of you! Not down at the ground," Mark yells. He turns around and circles me. I'm sure his face offers some sort of reassuring smile. But again, if I avert my eyes from the road, I will surely crash.

•••

I find it a lot easier to stare past my handlebars at the asphalt of this parking lot than the highway. It's actually less intimi-

dating to ride this forest-green hybrid in circles around a different kind of parking lot, the kind where my fellow cyclists are tiny children who throw little toys at me and chant, "Miss Olivia's a wuss, Miss Olivia's a wuss."

The first circle I made around that parking lot on my bicycle was freeing, so much so that I handed my iPhone to a nine-year-old and insisted that she snap a photo for Facebook. I felt a sense of ecstasy. As much as I pretended that I had been fine with being unable to ride a bike, it was always something I envied about other people—including children.

After I had done multiple laps around the little parking lot outside of the daycare center on Bike Day, I ran inside to mass-text my friends this important event—just in case they hadn't seen my new Facebook picture. This was a life-changing day and I needed to share. One person who I knew would certainly appreciate this was my Aunt Nadine.

"I'm not sure if ponytails can hurt, but mine definitely does."

"I finally rode my bike! I rode a bike today," I said.

Nadine responded confidently, "Perfect! Join me on Sunday; the triathlon team and I are meeting at the state park and going for a ride. The coach will be there. He can help you." And at the time, it truly seemed like a good idea.

•••

So, here I am swiveling around mile one of thirty on my delightfully forest-green bicycle. This is the second time I've ridden a bike in my life, but I just keep telling myself, *This is easy, it's just like riding a bike,* as if riding a bike was a thing I already found easy to do.

It's still mile one. I love my bike. It's beautiful. This helmet gives me a headache and my ponytail hurts. I'm not sure if ponytails can hurt, but mine definitely does. I am wearing a pair of cycling gloves and that's all I can see: my hands, my gloves. My bare fingers poke out the ends of them because the gloves are mostly designed to protect the palms of my hands, so they cut off at the first joint of my fingers. It's a good thing they're so padded because I am gripping onto this bicycle for my life. I can't decide if it would be safer to let go of the bike and get off, or to continue to hold on to it and let the bike keep moving me forward. I'm not a quitter, and I'm moving forward. All I can see for this first mile is the chipped nail polish on my exposed fingertips. I am straining my ears for the sounds of Mark's bike ahead of me—straining, straining….

I don't hear anything. Finally, I avert my eyes from the ground and from my hands to discover that I am on the highway with no other bicycles in sight. I must be that far behind. I experience a sense of accomplishment at my ability to look up and ahead while simultaneously maintaining a somewhat reasonable cadence. This sense of accomplishment quickly transforms into fear because it's been several miles now

and I have no idea where I am or where anyone else is, where Aunt Nadine is, where sexy Coach Mark is. He's not sexy, he's old. I have to keep in mind that I am lost and also on a bicycle, and this is terrifying to me. I look ahead and see an exit off of the highway and decide to take it, while fast cars pass and blow their horns at me. Fear begins swelling up in my chest, like a great big balloon of wussy sadness. I'm not sure I have the ability to operate a bicycle, look ahead of me, and cry all at the same time.

•••

Imagine what a newborn baby deer might look like riding a bike, except less svelte. That's me, crying at a stop sign off of some exit on some highway that I should have paid more attention to. I awkwardly climb off my bike and manage to scrape the cassette of the bike painfully across my right calf. I unclip my helmet, releasing my throbbing ponytail and squeezed temples. I instantly feel a release in my skull, headache fading slowly but tears still rolling down my big baby cheeks. I look down at my leg and see a combination of blackish bike grease and crimson blood. I can't help but think about every single time anyone ever said, "It's easy, just like riding a bike." And how every single time I ever heard it, I couldn't help but laugh to myself because I didn't know how to ride one. The sounds of chirping birds and blaring car horns pull me out of my aching skull.

•••

"Do you need help?" calls a man in a red pickup truck as he rolls down his passenger's seat window.

"Uh, no. I'm fine. My, I…help is coming!" I lie, and feign cheerfulness. He pulls away.

I stare at the big red stop sign and reach my right hand into the pouch on the back of my cycling jersey to pull out my cell phone. I don't have Mark's cell phone number. Nadine's phone is in her car. I don't even know the address of where Nadine parked her car. I couldn't ask anyone for directions and, to top it off, I don't have a smartphone.

"A desperate phone call to my mommy to match my big baby tears and inability to ride a bike or be an adult."

Last-resort emergency contact: Mommy. A desperate phone call to my mommy to match my big baby tears and inability to ride a bike or be an adult.

"Olivia?" I hate that. I hate when my mother picks up the phone asking if I'm Olivia. Yes, Mother. This is Olivia.

Then I remember I am experiencing a sort of emergency.

"Mom, can you do me a favor? Can you Google 'Mark H. Wilson' for me?" I don't want to concern her with the details—that I am bleeding, greasy, crying, and sweaty on the side of a mysterious highway somewhere in upstate New York.

"Okay, sure. Why?" I can hear the clattering of my mother's long fingernails at her computer keyboard.

"Oh, I just need his phone number."


STOP

The glaring sun has successfully dried the tears to my face, so they mess well with the now dried sweat.

After some back-and-forth, she recites a phone number to me.

"Thanks so much!" I hang up the phone quickly, repeating the digits in my head. As I dial, more cars stop and pass, with people craning their necks in curiosity at the less-than-svelte bloodied "cyclist" on the side of the road.

The phone is ringing in my ear and a delicate older woman's voice picks up. Crap.

"Oh, hi. Sorry, I…thought I was calling Mark Wilson."

"You are. Well, this is the home phone. He's out right now, do you want me to leave him a message?"

"I'm sorry, who am I speaking to?" If my suspicions are correct—

"I'm Rose. I'm Mark's wife." He's married? I should probably focus on the present issue.

"Hi, Rose. Do you have his cell phone number? I apologize. I'm Olivia. I…am, or was, riding my bike with him and the team…and now I'm lost."

Rose, the wife of the world's most cheerful sixty-year-old seven-time Ironman, recites her old-but-still-hot husband's cell phone number to me.

"Thanks so much!" I hang up the phone quickly, repeating the digits in my head, hoping my fingers will dial the right number for the actual right person this time—and they do.

I finally get hold of Mark, who doesn't feign cheerfulness on the phone because he's actually cheerful. His honest optimism rubs off on me. By the time I hang up, I find myself genuinely appreciating how beautiful the day is and how weirdly happy I am.

I had to get lost to learn how to ride a bike. I ridden to this no-name intersection, and Mark is coming to my rescue (from my vague description of the location, he seems to have an idea of precisely where I am).

•••

Another truck rolls up to this big, red stop sign. It's Mark. He opens his door and hops down, offering a big genuine smile. He picks up my bike with ease and gently places it in the bed of his truck.

"How did you do?" he asks, genuinely curious. I simply laugh and relax into the passenger seat as he gets behind the wheel, starting the car.

"Everyone else has started the 10K run. Nadine is waiting for you in the parking lot. Are you up for it?" he continues.

I mentally sigh. If I don't run, that will officially make me a baby.

"Of course!"

Only 6.2 more miles to go.

Check out Intertext Online for the video version!

www.wrt-intertext.syr.edu

"Stop Sign" by Flickr user Kt Ann, CC BY 2.0: https://www.flickr.com/photos/54409200@N04/5070012761.

There's no place like

Each and every one of us walks a different road that intersects and diverges with other roads over and over again throughout the course of our lives. But each and every one of these roads will either begin or end at home. Home, as these writers understand it, is never just a house or a place: Home is a person. Home is a feeling, a smell, a sound. Home is a place we simultaneously love, long for, and at times, loathe. The writers in this section take us from Los Angeles to Oklahoma to Vietnam and back to Syracuse, where pen is finally put to paper.

These stories redefine the concept of home. They dismiss the idea that home is a singular place, experience, or person. They understand it as something existing within multiple universes of identity as opposed to a vacuum.

We question the ideal picket fence and mowed green lawn. We question the two-parent household. We question death, love, and war. We look to ask a child how she feels. We ultimately ask ourselves if homogeny can really exist in the most personal vein of life. These writers express themselves through their questions, their fears, and their hopes: Where do we go when we can't stay in our own mother's house, or when our home has been torn to pieces by Mother Nature? How do we know that home is more than skin color, more than just a roof over our heads? What lessons does it teach us?

Maya Angelou says, "The ache for home lives in all of us. The safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned." This quote reflects the courage these writers have in addressing their own personal journeys. We as readers were struck by the ways in which these writers approached a concept that is so much a part of us as human beings. Sometimes they find the safe place that Angelou describes; other times they find themselves robbed of that safe place, forced to adapt and overcome.

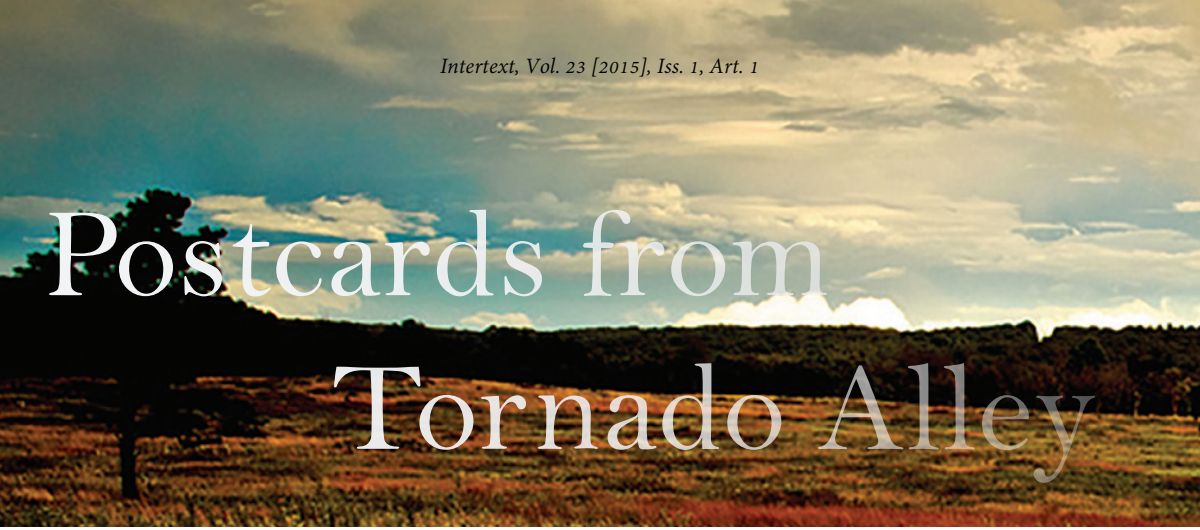
But more so, these writers communicate that home is within us if we are ever away from "where we can go as we are and not be questioned." The "ache" that Angelou describes can be felt beyond the pages of these stories.

As these writers set out to create their own destinies, their notion of home will always reside deep within them. Home is something that these authors carry in their roots: Sometimes the soil around them is watered so they can sprout and grow, while at times, they are ripped from the ground and forced to plant themselves somewhere new.

Home has a lesson to teach us all. Whether that lesson has a positive or negative influence on our lives, it has a purpose. It teaches us that no matter how far we venture in life, we know where our starting point was, and from there, we can navigate toward the future.

—Caleigh Gran, Victoria Luyckx, Annemarie Menna, and Chamelia Moore

home



Postcards from Tornado Alley

Weather Patterns

Locked in my parents' closet when I was seven. We could hear the twister from a mile off. I was chewing gum and blowing bubbles. My brother smacked me and said, "I don't want that to be the last thing I hear."

•

The birds yelled from the eyeball sockets of trees. The clouds cracked open—a canvas by Monet hanging in the air. On the ground people tiptoed over rooftop shingles and upturned nails. Kids made a fort beneath an overturned truck. Power lines let down their hair. The windows busied at picking themselves up off the lawn. Adults spoke to their scalped homes to take stock of what needed doctoring.

A baby is found buried in the mud, ten miles from the home it was plucked from. It is completely untouched, like the tornado rocked it to sleep and set it in its dirt crib.

•

Last May, a storm went through South Carolina that was pleasant and soft. I opened the window to let its song soothe me to sleep. Seven hours before, in Oklahoma, a wall of debris fenced in my neighborhood. A headline read, "PEOPLE ARE WALKING AROUND LIKE ZOMBIES." My friends' homes were brushed aside. Twenty kids killed inside an elementary school. My sister's grade school swept over. There is a video on YouTube of a teacher recording the strike on her cellphone, and in the background my sister is shouting, "I hate this."

•

Kids are tucked in and lulled to sleep with stories of squall lines and dips in barometric pressure. On Saturdays we know exactly when to go in for lunch. The siren alert system is tested at noon, and all through the state the air is saturated with a ghostly aria.

Surprised by Joy

Two teens slurp their Icees by the road in the rain. A truck hydroplanes, ballet-

Johnathan McClintick

spins off the road, scoops dirt into the air and scatters it like dandelion seeds. The teens are a few feet away. They know the driver and flip him off before walking back to class. So above it all. Their straws make throaty growls in the dregs of their cups.

•

A taste of steel in stomach. The vodka steeped in the metal flask under the bed, all of it on an empty stomach. Standing by the window and fingering the blinds, pictures of slamming the car door on your arm. The kiss of electricity when you press a metal prong into an outlet. The current of butterflies beating beneath the skin of your arm into your shoulder. Dinner is ready! You sit with them, and when they leave the room, you are surprised how easy it is to run the knife over and over and over your arm. How good it feels to be slapped when you're caught.

•

Traveling through time—more like never getting off this freaking highway. Float for six hours, sing for sixteen more until, at three in the morning, the horizon resembles hammered steel. Slip into the furnace of the city at dawn. Wait out the sunrise at an IHOP, stacking coffee creamers until it is a decent time to wake your family and have breakfast with them. The first time in a year. At the door, Father tells you Mother has been in the hospital the last two weeks.

•

The Tulsa Race Riots happened from May 31st through June 1st in 1921. Six thousand African Americans were arrested, the rest corralled into holding pens. Thirty-five blocks of buildings charred to the ground by fire. It is the first and only time U.S. aircraft bombed a U.S. city. Officially, thirty-nine black people died, but three hundred were estimated missing.

None of this is taught in my Oklahoma history class. The textbook spares a paragraph, a cute anecdote about the only remaining building from the riots, and the bullet holes still notched into the walls.

Layout by Annemarie Menna. Photograph by Mark Warfel Jr.

Without You

Padraic Kane

I returned to the Boulevard, which seemed strange, but at the same time so familiar.

I stood there waiting for him, like I have been my entire life.

I stood nervous, with butterflies in my stomach, as if I were meeting a complete stranger.

I returned to that moment—not just that one, but all the moments he hadn't been there.

I stood there asking myself, *Why am I even here*?

But despite all these thoughts, I still stood there waiting. Hoping that one day *he* would be there.

•••

I met him at the 7-Eleven on the corner of Van Nuys Boulevard. It is where most of my memories of him take place. He offered to buy me whatever I wanted in the store, and not having seen him in years, I opted for a Big Gulp and some nachos. Shortly after that, he began with the typical questions about everything going on in my life. I initially thought, *What is the point of letting him know what is going on when I know he is going to be out of my life as soon as I finish my Big Gulp*?

About an hour into our meet-up, a man from the 7-Eleven came outside; it was clear he knew my father, because they dapped each other up—from where I was standing, I could hear the clap of their hands as they came together. I noticed the man didn't call my dad by his real name. At this point in my life, I knew that my father was a part of gang life, and I was pretty familiar with gang lingo. They called him "Boog." He had even shown me the tattoo with his name and set, and at that moment, I had known this was something that was branded on him forever. Branded so much that there was no hope of his ever leaving that life.

•••

I know how things look right now. If you go on my Instagram or Facebook page, or catch me out on the weekends having a great time with my friends, you might

Layout by Chamelia Moore. "The Blemish Redefined" by Ashli Fiorini.

make certain assumptions about my life. For the most part, the assumptions might be, "He is really enjoying life." You might assume that since I am from Los Angeles—a place where it's eighty degrees and sunny in March—I have it made. You might think, *I wish I had his life. I'm so jealous of him.*

But what if I told you that it's not always sunny in California? What if I told you I had to go through adolescence watching my mother deal with the stress of raising me on her own and using prescription pills to deal with the stress? What if I told you I lived with an uncle who was an alcoholic and who stumbled into my house night after night reeking of Popov vodka? What if I told you that when I was younger, I was sexually abused at my own elementary school by a teacher? Last, what if I told you that while all this was going on, I didn't have the one person in my life who could have made a difference?

My father. There are some days when I wonder why I put the word "my" in front of "father" when I talk about him. It's hard to claim something or someone when he is never there to claim. I could easily count on both hands the number of times I've seen my father, and I'm twenty-three now. I was five when he went away, convicted of assault and gang affiliation, for just the first of many times.

I always ask myself how he could continue to do all the bullshit, knowing that he has a son. *What kind of man are you? What are the incentives for getting in-*

volved in things that you know you could easily be locked up for? And all the times you told me that things were going to be different—that you were changing. Growing up with an incarcerated parent is tough. The feelings of isolation and stigma that I and others like me experienced were difficult burdens to bear. It was often as if I were alone in a dark, deep hole, trying to find my way out to the light.

•••

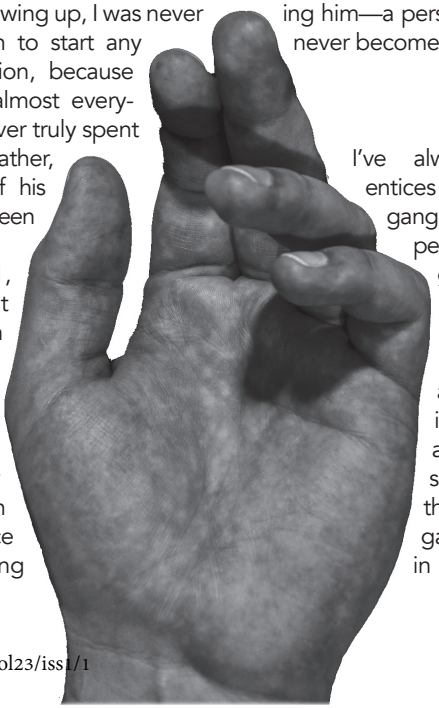
"Hotheaded," "short-tempered," and "ticking time bomb." All three of these descriptors could be used to describe my father. My mom would always tell me he was like a tornado when he lost his cool—everything in his path would be destroyed. Fortunately, I never had to witness this with my own eyes, and I didn't think much of it until my first semester at Syracuse University. Growing up, I was never the kind of person to start any kind of confrontation, because I got along with almost everybody. Because I never truly spent time with my father, I thought most of his traits had never been passed down to me.

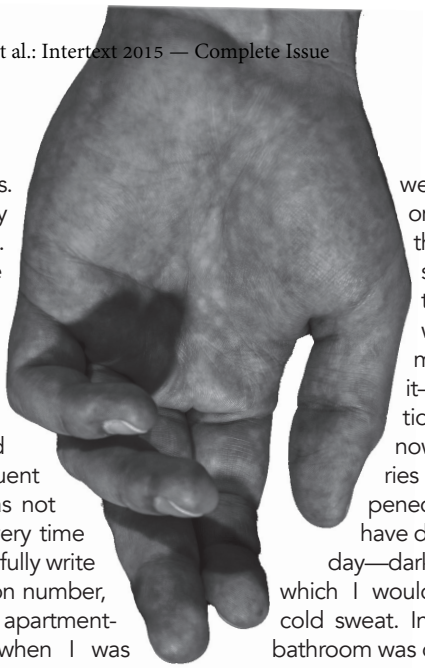
In the fall of 2011, I was hanging out in my room with my friends Sam and Sarah after getting back from a party on South Campus. Twenty minutes later, in walked Shawn. Since he started pledging a fraternity, we had seen him change, and we didn't like it. That night, Sam and Sarah had some "liquid courage" in them and started calling Shawn out. They were both making valid points, so I decided to give my two cents, and I got into a heated argument with Shawn—one that could have been settled with calmer words. But something inside me didn't want to solve this with words. About five minutes into the argument, I lost myself and went off on him. A couple of minutes later, I had him bleeding on the floor. I stormed outside and questioned whether what had just happened was real. At that moment, I realized that I was more like my father than I could ever have imagined.

That was the first of several moments when I've seen him come out in me. At these times, it feels as if everything I know suddenly means nothing. These times make me wonder if I am becoming him—a person I told myself I would never become.

•••

I've always wondered what entices someone to be in a gang. Maybe it's because people become bolder in groups and will do things they would never dream of doing on their own. Because of the isolation already present in many individuals' lives, gangs are able to become their support system. In turn, this will typically give the gang whatever it needs in order to maintain its





membership and privileges. Was this the case with my dad? I honestly have no idea. Maybe one day I will get the chance to ask him.

•••

At the beginning of his absence, we maintained contact through infrequent phone calls, although I was not aware of where he was. Every time I wrote to my father, I'd carefully write his department identification number, thinking it was a code for an apartment-complex mailbox—until, when I was eight, my mom informed me that my dad was in prison.

My mom would always ask if I wanted to know exactly why he was in prison, but there was a part of me that knew that if I were to know the details, it would change my perception of him. I'm glad I didn't learn what he did until I was older, because learning something like that at a young age can really create a sense of resentment later on in life. At the time I was already dealing with enough stuff, more than any child should have to go through.

•••

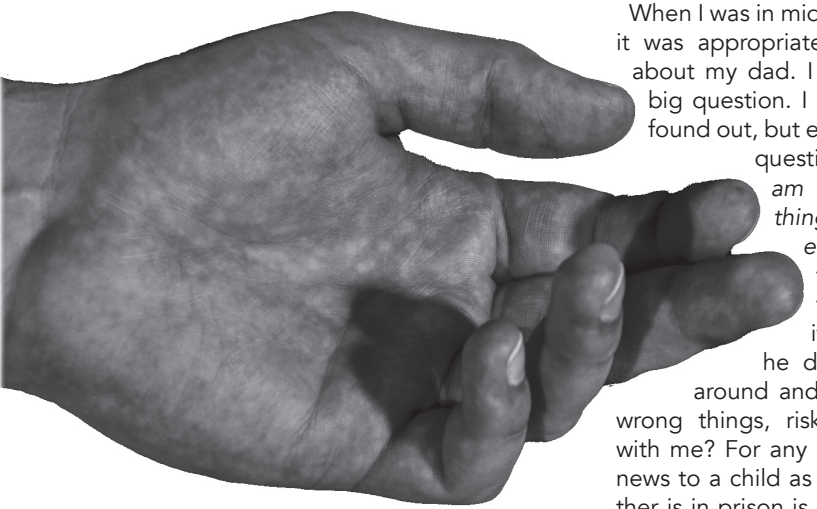
The concept of things being "forgotten" is one that I have struggled with my whole life. As much as I've tried to put myself in places and situations where that part of my life could be burned and buried, it always manages to resurface. I can still see Children's Place vividly, and it's been almost fifteen years since I last set foot there: The playground with the wooden train we would all play on during recess, the stepping-stone in front of the homeroom with all my classmates' names on it—these recollections are tainted now by the memories of what happened there. I used to have dreams about that day—dark dreams, from which I would wake up in a cold sweat. In the dream, the bathroom was darker than it was when the event took place. I had no way out. Then *it* walked in. *It* was always a dark figure that was hard to make out, and no matter where I tried to hide, time after time It always seemed to find me.

Since I was in fourth grade, I have thought, talked, and—most important—written about that person who left a scar on my life. It has never come down to talking about the cold, hard facts; instead, it has been about the emotional impact that the experience has had on me. Going to therapy might have helped me talk about things more, but I don't think it was until I was older that I realized how it affected me. I know now why it is hard for me to establish mutual trust with others, because I lost trust in a person I thought was looking out for me. I'm not the most open person because I opened up to someone who took advantage of me.

Can writing about this serve as a form of justice? Probably not, but it can serve as a catalyst to unite the many people in the world who have

tried to forget similar memories. Maybe this can inspire others to tell their untold stories. It's never easy to deal with things of this nature on your own. I appreciate everything my mom did for me—but at the same time, there remains the lingering cloud of the one person who wasn't there when he needed to be.

I remember telling my best friend, Stanley, in eighth grade about what had happened to me. The look on his face, the lack of words, was something that I was familiar with. This was always



followed by the typical "I'm really sorry that happened to you." Hearing that never really did anything for me. Hearing it from counselors, friends, and family was swell, but the one person who could have made a difference hasn't even acknowledged it.

•••

I was seeing a therapist three to four times a week. This was a pivotal point in my life, a time when I think my father could have really helped me cope. Don't get me wrong, I love my mom for all the support she offered me when this happened, but having that masculine shoulder to lean on and learn from would have really helped me. This was just one of the many things I had to learn to get through on my own.

•••

When I was in middle school, I thought it was appropriate to learn the truth about my dad. I asked my mom the big question. I began to cry when I found out, but even then I remember questioning my tears. *Why am I crying for something that he could have easily prevented?* I think most of the tears were because it made me think he didn't care. Why run around and get involved in the wrong things, risking his relationship with me? For any parent, breaking the news to a child as to why his or her father is in prison is difficult. I just knew I wouldn't be seeing any more of my dad.

My father didn't leave just me when he went away; he also left my mom alone to raise me. The job of a single parent is one that I believe only a few can do successfully, and I applaud her for everything she did to help me get to where I am today. Raising a child by yourself adds a financial strain to the emotional distress. This stress led my mom to adopt bad habits, such as her

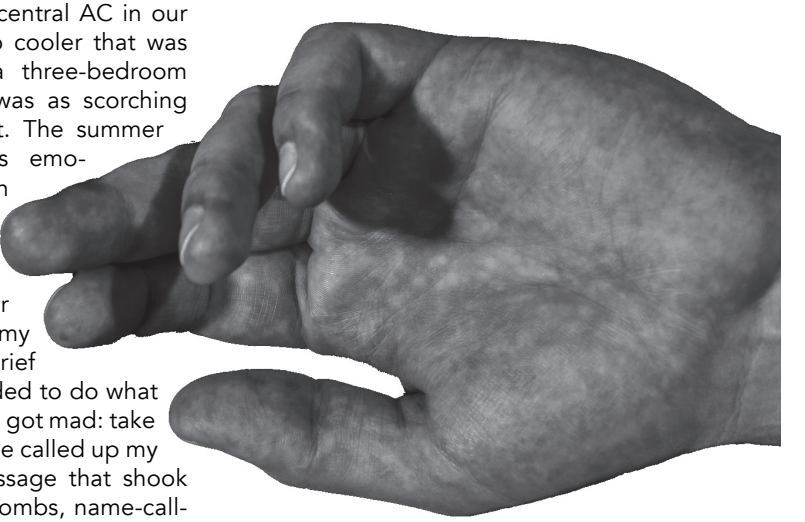
addiction to prescription pills.

My mom has been a nurse since she was in her twenties. She saw her access to prescription drugs as an easy way to relieve the pain. Her dependence on these drugs caused her to lose her job and her nursing license. For a while, I hated her for resorting to this option.

•••

I could see the anger and frustration that my mom had toward my father, specifically on one hot summer day. We didn't have central AC in our house, only a swamp cooler that was supposed to cool a three-bedroom house. The kitchen was as scorching as the Sahara Desert. The summer heat had everyone's emotions cooking like an egg on a hot skillet. My mother was hurting financially, and it was causing her to fume. At the time, my father was out for a brief period, and she decided to do what she did best when she got mad: take it out on someone. She called up my father and left a message that shook the heavens. The F-bombs, name-calling, and excessive cursing had me in awe. At the same time, I felt that what she was saying, each and every word coming out of her mouth, was true. This only made me angry and added fuel to the fire. Still, I couldn't find it in me to write him off. There remained a glimmer of hope that he might attempt to salvage what relationship he had left with me.

As my mother left the message for my father, I could see my grandmother's uneasiness as she sat in her chair. The look of disappointment, anger, and embarrassment that two of her own family members could actually be going back and forth like this was beyond her control. It had to be one of the most uncomfortable situations possible. Her youngest daughter yelling and screaming at her own son; her grandson yelling and cursing at his own mother. What was she to do? Not only was my grandmother a witness to World War lll; so were many of my cousins, aunts, and uncles.



I remember going back and forth down the hall between my room and the kitchen. Each and every time, we had something to say to each other. Many of my family members tried to calm the long-overdue storm, but there was nothing they could do. They told me I should just stop and let it go, but aside from keeping me in the same

complacent position I was always in, what would that have done? I had never stood up for myself before. No—this was it. I had to show her that I wasn't always going to adhere to everything she said, and that I was perfectly capable of making responsible decisions on my own.

Right before I left, I remember crying in the bathroom. The emotions of the situation had consumed me. I packed a duffle bag of clothes, gathered what money I had, and left. I then walked to the Orange Line so I could go to stay with my friend Greg, because I couldn't stay in that house anymore. Soon afterward, my mom took it upon herself to cut off my phone so that I really was on my own. On top of all this, I was still going to school at Valley College and working at Marshalls. I made sure to hide whatever feelings I had from my peers and coworkers. This was something I had programmed myself to do since I was a child.

Even after my mom lost her job, she was still finding ways to get her hands on medications, and it became so frequent that we had to call the ambulance on several occasions because she was unresponsive. I can't say for sure if my dad's being around would have kept my mom from going down this path, but whenever you have someone else to lean on, it makes any adversity easier to overcome.

•••

Maintaining communication with my dad had become important to me. Like any person, I wanted to make sense of my existence. My childhood was full of positives and negatives, yet a cloud filled with doubt and anger hung over me at times, making me wonder whether or not I was worthy of love. I regularly dealt with awkward conversations that started with the question, "So what does your dad do for a living?" For a while, I wouldn't even bring up my dad, and it often hurt to see a lot of my friends doing stuff with their dads. I thank God every day that I was blessed with strong, caring uncles to look out for me, but it still wasn't enough to make up for the absence of my father.

After some practice in these situations, I came up with different lies depending on whom I was speaking with. It wasn't until I reached college that I fully realized the impact of my father's incarcation on me.

•••

Setting: Walking down Sherman Way at one in the morning to get Casa de Tacos on a summer Tuesday night.

Zac: It's crazy, man, to think that….

Me: That's what I'm saying, man; I ask myself the same question every day about my dad. How could someone continue to do the same bullshit, day after day, knowing he has a son at home?

Zac: Did he ever tell you why he was doing what he was doing?

Me: Nah, dog. In the handful of times that I have seen him, the only thing

he would say every time was that he was staying out of trouble, and that we were going to see each other more.

Zac: Crazy.

Me: Yeah, man. I haven't spoken to him since my senior year of high school. No call. No letter. Nothing.

Zac: It's crazy because I would have never thought of you being in this kind of situation, because you would never be able to tell from the outside.

Me: Yeah, it's a fucked-up situation, and there used to be a point where I really didn't feel comfortable talking about him to others. I can remember back in middle school, when one Sunday he met me after church. It had to be one of the most nerve-racking experiences ever. The mixture of feelings and thoughts that were running through my head was enough to drive you off a cliff. Questions like, What are my friends going to think about him showing up after all these years? How is he going to act when he meets the other parents? It was just wild.

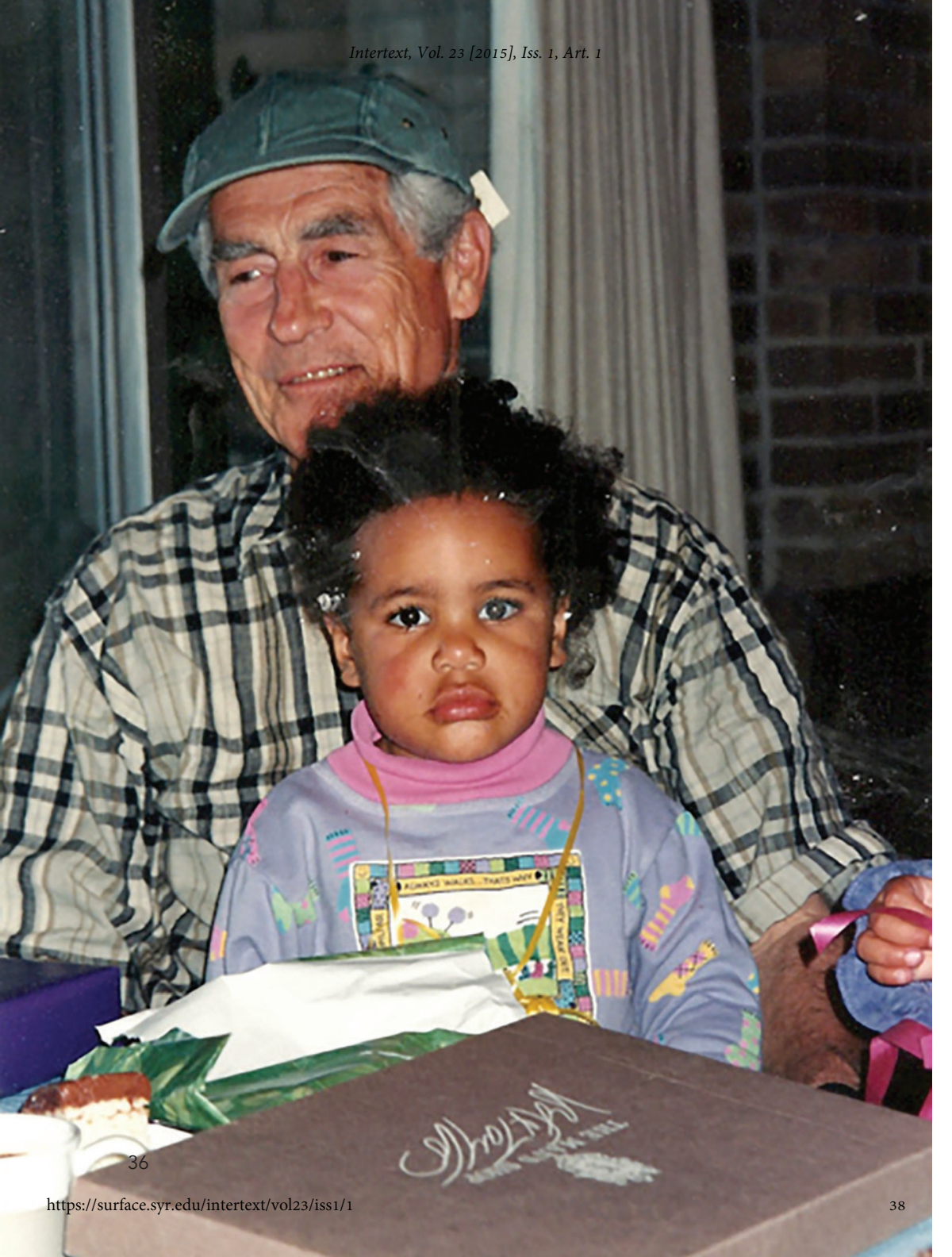
Zac: That's a trip, man. I couldn't imagine.

•••

Even within my circle of family and friends, I did not know how to have a conversation about my dad's situation. I internalized my feelings of shame, letting them spill out only to my mother at times.

I never met other kids who experienced anything similar to my situation. I was always a quiet child, but I think the situation further encouraged me not to stand out or share too much with others. I didn't deserve to grow up without a father, but I was still capable of becoming a healthy, competent adult who had gained maturity and strength through all of life's challenges. It is interesting to consider who I might be had I never faced certain challenges in my life. Not everything is as it seems. I may never know what it is like to call my dad when I feel like it. I have to wait for a phone call from him, and who knows when that day will come. I always tell myself there may still be a chance that he will be released one day.

Photograph courtesy of Padraic Kane.



Grandpapa

Julia Whittley

The pantry door stands one and a half feet open. The sound of crinkling plastic and munching comes through the opening. An almond drops and rolls out onto the cold kitchen tile. "God dammit!" a raspy voice mutters from behind the door. The owner of the voice peeks his wispy white-haired head through the crack, looking for the almond. As he bends, his stiff, skinny legs in beige khaki pants, he catches me standing there. His eyes rise from my filthy and bare little feet, to my stained floral dress, to my missing front tooth. A smile instantly erupts across his wrinkled face, and a twinkle flickers in his cloudy eyes. "Ah! My favorite grandson!" he booms and chuckles at his own joke.

He eases his body back upright and walks unsteadily toward me. I stand still, smiling in anticipation with my chipmunk cheeks, until he reaches out and swoops me in with his long, strong arms. He nestles my ear against his chest where I can hear his wavering heartbeat, his five o'clock shadow scratching against my head. I wrap my thick arms all the way around his waist and let myself sink into his embrace, soaking up his unconditional love.

I was too young to wonder how he felt about having a black grandchild. What went through his mind when I would sit on his lap with my ashy legs and out-of-control nappy fro? I looked at him like he was my sunshine. What did he see when he looked back at me? What did he think when he held me in a bundled blanket the day I was born and gazed down at his own granddaughter whose skin color he had been taught to hate?

It took me years after he died to identify why I somehow felt more loved by him than by anyone else. It was because he didn't notice my dark skin and ashy legs, and he loved my nappy fro. I was different and that made me important to him. I looked at him like he was my sunshine; the twinkle in his eyes told me I was his.

Standing there in that hug, I let myself relax into his love. I closed my eyes, letting the edges of my mouth turn up into a smile, and a childish giggle flowed out of my strawberry popsicle-stained lips.

Layout by Victoria Luyckx. Photograph courtesy of Julia Whittley.


For
Those
Who
Do Not
Swallow
Johnathan McClintick

Layout and photograph by Annemarie Menna.

The sun angles shadow onto the man's face but colors his friend's in light. She lights a cigarette and draws. They talk about her husband. How he has not wanted to sleep with her in three months. They are sitting on a bench at a local marketplace and letting their problems be carried store to store on the ears of passing customers. The breeze rolls the cigarette up its stem. She ashes. The man lays a hand on her thigh and promises he will talk to the husband tonight when she is at work.

•

Later, when she is at work, the man grabs the throat of the husband. The man pushes him into the wedding bed. They are tearing at each other's clothes. When they kiss, it sizzles with the anger of fired coal sinking to a well's bottom. When they lock hands, the wedding band pinches the man's skin. The man sinks lower to taste.

•

On March 5th an apartment building in London was set ablaze by a pigeon. Matt Cullen of the London Fire Brigade explained, "The smoking gun was when we found a partially burnt bird's nest." This theory corroborates eyewitness accounts that said they saw a pigeon take a recently smoked cigarette, thinking it would be a fine addition to its nest. The pigeon, simply wanting to build a home among other like-minded London citizens, could not be reached for comment. The story serves as a reminder for all those who do not swallow their cigarettes.

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The man brushes his teeth before the wife gets home. She accepts the kisses of her husband; the two embrace and talk about her night. The man slides into a background where a discarded cigarette might be found. Its smoke twisting into the vaporous air.

A GEOMETRY PROBLEM

When I was a boy Dad told me
about the planet Phaethon,
how it used to orbit between
Mars and Jupiter
before it collided
with something bigger
and exploded, sending
hot metal debris
in new directions and
random trajectories.

That's what I was thinking
about when the
Viet Cong opened fire
on us in the bamboo grove.
Their rounds hitting the bamboo
with a zip, crack, click, making the whistling
sound of a flute played with dry lips.

A shredded leaf falling, splintered
branches in flight like arrows
with indiscriminate destinations,
ears to the ground ducking asteroids.
Then, the fire ended. The enemy passed.

Leaving the trees bent
in odd ways, intersecting angles,
geometry problems
to be solved by future
generations of geometers,
bamboo growers,
or fathers and sons
walking together in wonder,
heads arching skyward
looking for the place where
war and peace
intersect.

TOMBSTONE BLUES

Mom insists on living
next to the graveyard
where my brother is buried
to lay fresh flowers
on him after dinner
and arrange little toys
on his stone, talk to him
like he's sitting here
at dinner waiting
for the meatloaf
to reach his side of the table.

It's been three years since
Khe Sanh, since they
brought him home
in the metal box
and the notification officers
came knocking on our door.
It's been two years
since the war ended,
and one year since Dad left,
a lifetime since I opened
the letter approving my
student deferment.

I can see the cemetery from
my bedroom window.
It used to bother me.
I used to have trouble sleeping,
but I've grown used to seeing
him sitting there in his dress uniform
looking up at my window,
tossing pebbles into the darkness,
his eyes scanning the void between us,
his face showing confusion and want
while I sit at the window with my guitar,
dodging pebbles and singing the
"Tombstone Blues."

Identity

Who are you?

Or, perhaps, more importantly…who are they? We've become comfortable living our own realities, but how often do we stop to think about how the person who sits next to us in class every day sees things? How often do we try to strike up a conversation with someone less familiar? Or when have we actually stopped to walk in someone else's shoes?

The pieces chosen for this section encourage the reader to consider life from another's point of view. These pieces are a window into social issues many face on a daily basis. Some from a research standpoint, others from personal experiences, these stories provide insights on how people judge. We're all members of a society struggling to define who we are. This section is about stereotypes, racial profiling, domestic violence, and race and gender abuse.

The contributors in this section allow readers to get a glimpse into the complexities of race and gender. In "A Black Male," readers explore the implications of what it's like to have an identity marker you cannot rid yourself of. The author, Roland Cody Jr., explains in a refreshingly honest manner the hardships of bearing the responsibilities of being black in a so-called "post-racial" society. "Scars of a Culture" explores the hypocrisy behind Indian men worshipping traditional goddesses yet beating their wives in an analysis of the Abused Goddesses campaign. "The Invisible Cage" deals with everyday racial prejudice in the streets, schools, and public spaces in America. It opens your eyes to the injustices some people face on a daily basis. It shows us how we sometimes misjudge others with no knowledge of who they are and what they have gone through.

People say we're living in "post-racial" and "postfeminist" times, but but these pieces beg to differ. With so many racial and gender issues arising today—often brought to our attention by the media—we can say that the "perfect" society where everyone is accepting of one another is just another dream waiting to become a reality.

Each in its own way, these three pieces work together to enhance our understanding of identity and the dangers of judging before knowing.

As you read these stories, you may feel uncomfortable at times, maybe even judged or misrepresented, but you may also laugh, cry, and maybe, just maybe…identify.

—Maryann Akinboyewa, Jaye Michelle Harris, and Gilmarie Perea-Ruiz

A BLACK MALE

Roland Cody Jr.

Figured worlds: We know they exist. We gave birth to them through our historical traditions, cultures, and actions. We continue to give birth to them through our consistent reenactments of those same traditions, cultures, and actions. But figured worlds change; they are as negotiable as our behavior in established traditions from years past. We learn, we adapt, we act, we negotiate, we learn again, we adapt again, and we act again. That's a figured world, and we all act out our roles in those worlds as is deemed socially acceptable, or based on societal norms determined by our past.

The roles in figured worlds have much to do with identity markers that we either embrace or shun, love or hate, acquire or are born with. Some identity markers we can choose, such as political identifiers like Democrat, Republican, liberal, or religious identity markers such as Christian, Muslim, or Buddhist. From other identity markers, some more significant than others, there is no escaping. I wish to focus on one of the latter type, an inescapable identity marker with significant impact regardless of the figured world in which one who has it happens to be acting. I know because I am one: a black male.

I carefully choose the word "male" as opposed to "man" because I feel that the word "man" disregards youth. At this point in my life, I would use the word "man" to appropriately define myself, but because I don't want to dismiss my younger days I use the word "male," which incorporates all stages of my life: past, present, and future.

While this essay may be thought-provoking, eye-opening, and uncomfortable for many, I intend it to provide a

Layout and photographs by Maryann Akinboyewa.

deeper understanding of what it means, and what it feels like, to carry such a strong and visible identity marker throughout the course of one's lifetime in any figured world.

I think the most appropriate way to begin my analysis is with an icebreaker, so here it is: "Even if you in a Benz, you still a nigga in a coupe." That quote from Kanye West was my answer when I asked myself, "If I had to summarize in one line what it means to be a black male in any figured world, what would I say?" *Even if you in a Benz, you still a nigga in a coupe.*

What does that mean? Well, the simplest interpretation of that line is that no matter where you are or how far you've made it, you're still an inferior being who will be treated as such; you are still a black male. Now, does that mean the definition of "nigga" is "a black male"? No, not exactly. In fact, in figured worlds where "nigga" is an embraced term, anybody can be a nigga, including those who are male, female, white, black, Asian, etc. It doesn't matter, and the word is not used to be offensive. But in the specific line above, "nigga" does correlate more with the well-documented negative connotations of the word. Meaning, whatever progress you've made, you're still viewed as a no-good black male who is up to trouble. You still must face the same challenges as the black male in the projects or in jail. There is no difference: You're a black male, and that's what you'll always be, no matter what.

The question now is, *What is a black male?* What does it mean, exactly, to be a black male? "Black male" is a loaded identity marker, not just a descriptor of skin color and gender. To the black

male, it is an innate burden and an obstacle simply because of what it represents to others.

When I say "others," I want to be careful not to overgeneralize or make assumptions, but I will state observations based on past experience. For instance, take the example of my walking onto a basketball court in an environment where I'm the only black male amongst a white crowd, which has happened many times before (especially on campus). I'll more than likely be the first guy picked for a team, leading to a sigh of relief from anyone on my team. The members of the other team now believe they have to deal with a more rugged, physical player who's assumed to be better and stronger than everyone else. Instantly, one of two things happens: Either the opposition plays tougher, hitting harder, shoving more, and being extremely aggressive, as if they have to prove to me that they will not be bullied, or they completely shy away, play timidly, and are extremely soft, in fear of going at me so hard that I might lash out and retaliate violently.

So with that information in mind, it's up to me; it is my burden to ease the minds of everyone around me from the time I walk into the gym. I must smile and be overly friendly, laugh at everyone's jokes, take some bass out of my voice, and ask politely to play the next game. That's just to start: I must maintain this behavior, as well as other less aggressive characteristics on the court, for a certain period of time. Then I will notice a collective sigh of relief (sometimes literally), as if to say, "Oh, thank God, he's not *that* type of black guy."

Let's take a look at the workplace. For the past five and a half years, I've worked on Wall Street and in similar environments, where again I must adjust dramatically in order not to be considered a threat in some way. I am spoken to more politely than others in the office so that the person speaking to me won't feel that they're stepping on my toes and, again, fear that I might lash out violently. I now find myself in many instances fearful of the consequences of the fears of others because of my identity as a "black male."

The black male does not have the luxury of "being himself" without penalty, mostly because "himself," in most figured worlds, is the wrong thing to be.

It has become rather popular and a cliché for black males to use phrases like "I can't do that, because I'm black." To some that may seem silly or exaggerated, but to black males, it is very true.

Let's look, for instance, at the case of Trayvon Martin, a young black male who was killed for what most in the black community would consider "just being black." As I mentioned before, being a black male is a burden, and unfortunately for Trayvon Martin, maybe at such a young age he was not yet aware of the responsibility that came with that burden: the responsibility to ease the minds of those around him. Sometimes that includes taking off your hoodie, and certainly it means not running at night with it on, especially not in certain communities. It doesn't matter if it's raining and you're trying to make it home to see a basketball game. To that a black male would say, "I can't do that, because I'm black."

How about being at a restaurant and, toward the end of your meal, getting up and going to the bathroom? I can't do that, because I'm black. Sometimes I try

it just to see if anything has changed, but no, the waiters and owners still watch from a distance or rush to the table to make sure I'm not attempting to run out on the bill. So what's my responsibility as a black male? I first call over a waiter and ask for the bill, then randomly blurt out that I'm going to head to the restroom while they bring out the check. That eases their minds.

Assuming the responsibility of easing the minds of others around you as a black male is not easy, but it is necessary if you want to be treated fairly—or sometimes, as in Trayvon Martin's case, if you want to live. It comes with much practice, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Some are better at it than others. But I can guarantee you that any successful black male has mastered the art of easing the minds of people around him.

It's as if a pit bull were sat in the middle of a room full of people: Nobody would make any sudden movements until the dog showed signs that it was not like other pit bulls they had heard stories of or seen on TV. For some, however, there is never enough proof. As Kanye said, "Even if you in a Benz, you still a nigga in a coupe."

Until this point I've focused for the most part on how black males are perceived by others who are not black males, but what about how black males are perceived by other black males—the black male who hasn't "made it" versus the black male who has?

Most who've "made it," as I mentioned before, know how to ease the minds of others around them. That includes the minds of other black males. I myself haven't yet "made it" in the sense of being extremely financially successful, but I am successful in the sense that I've "made it" out of the projects from which I came to a corporate job and a private university.

So how does that call for me to ease the minds of other black males back at home who haven't "made it"? Well, with them, it's almost the opposite of what I do elsewhere. I toughen back up, loosen up the tie, put the bass back

in my voice, get more aggressive, talk more loudly, change my language back to what I'm accustomed to, and don't talk about all I've learned elsewhere, because that's irrelevant to where I am now. This switch, this easing of minds, is still a survival tactic; it's still not easy, but it's necessary if you want to be treated fairly—and yes, sometimes even live—even amongst your own.

There was a kid who grew up in the projects with me—a black male, a very talented basketball player who was on scholarship to play for a Division 1 school. My guess is that he wasn't aware of his responsibility to ease the minds of his fellow black males, because he came off as arrogant, as if he thought he was better than everyone else back at home. They cut off his legs, as if to tell him, "Even if you in a Benz, you still a nigga in a coupe"—and don't you forget it.

Whenever I come home from school, everyone greets me with open arms. They call me "College": "Yo, that's my man College right there! You back, my nigga? You not too good yet?" That's what they say. My response? "Of course I'm back, nigga! Where the fuck else I'ma go? This home." I think I've gotten pretty good at it. My mom tells me to be careful when I'm home, stay prayerful, and be smart. She's well aware of the burden I carry and the responsibility that comes with it, as is my father.

I look at successful black males on television such as Stephen A. Smith, a sports broadcaster for ESPN who is one of the two most notable faces on the very popular morning show *First Take.* Often on *First Take,* they discuss topics dealing with race and perception in America. On such occasions, Smith demonstrates knowledge of his responsibilities as a black male. In a recent episode, he said, "…I understand that … [judging] a book by its cover is wrong, but it's also reality, and you have to deal with that. And as a result, when I sit here on national TV every morning, and I am a black man who is educated and who understands the porosity of opportunity that ex-

ists out in this world for us…and we complain in our community about the absence of opportunities accorded to us in comparison to other groups that exist in this country…. Well, what do we do to facilitate that? If you come across, and the imagery that you provide, is not something that ingratiates yourself with a potential employer, where does that leave you? I feel an obligation to react to that and to make sure that I present myself in a fashion that, dare I say, is receptive to corporate America, because I understand the importance of imagery."

The quote above highlights my argument regarding the responsibility of every black male to ease the minds of the people around him, or as Smith put it, to "change their perception by [his] presentation." Smith also speaks on the show about how he talks, dresses, and acts differently when he goes back home. It's not to say that black males are the only ones who act differently at work than outside of work or differently at school than outside of school. But such drastic change and the reason for it is something to which not everyone can relate.

I also look at other notable black male figures such as Sean Combs or Sean Carter, both of whom made their names in hip-hop, which is a very aggressive culture and a predominantly black male industry in which the street life and culture is praised and rewarded. In the hip-hop world, Combs goes by "Diddy" and Carter goes by "Jay-Z," and they display images and lifestyles that are popular in the hip-hop world. However, in the course of other business ventures such as buying sports teams and owning vodka lines, Macy's clothing brands, and television stations, they drop their stage names, put on suits and glasses, and change their language, all of which allows them to be successful in other areas.

That said, however, there is still seemingly a "ceiling" for black males. Kanye West refers to this in his popular rants about trying to break into the fashion industry. He talks about making a lot of money but still nothing in comparison to the one who signs his checks, and how the ceiling created by his identity marker as a black male will probably never allow him to be the one who signs the checks for future Kanye Wests. Again, "Even if you in a Benz, you still a nigga in a coupe."

With all of the boundaries, burdens, and responsibilities of being a black male, what does it all mean? I have discussed shifting from one figured world to another: on campus, on the basketball court, at work, and at home, and how the changes in language, attitudes, attire, and overall aura are necessary for fair treatment and, in some cases, survival.

Where does the black male receive a break? Where is the black male safe? Who *is* the black male, really, when he has to change and adapt no matter where he happens to be in order to be successful or survive? In what figured world is the black male not seen as a black male? As I mentioned at the very beginning, for some identity markers, there is no escape; there is one inescapable identity marker with significant impact, no matter what figured world one with it happens to be acting in. I know because I am one: a black male.

Scars of a Culture

Puhup Manas

In September 2013, there was an explosion of online activity across India centered on a set of three images. Commissioned by the international non-governmental organization Save the Children India, and created by the Mumbai-based advertising agency Taproot India, these images were designed for a campaign against domestic violence. Entitled Abused Goddesses, the campaign depicts domestic violence victims through the bruised faces of revered Hindu goddesses and raises questions about the place women occupy in Indian society.

The Abused Goddesses campaign consists of three photographs, each representing a prominent goddess of the Hindu religion. One depicts Saraswati, the goddess of music, nature, and knowledge; another shows Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity; and the third shows Durga, the goddess of valor. In Hindu mythology, these three goddesses comprise the *Tridevi* or the "three goddesses." The power and divinity typically associated with these goddesses have been shattered by Taproot India's depictions. India is not the safest country in the world for women; in fact, it is often listed as one of the worst (Lahiri). In what could be called a fairly bold move, the Abused Goddesses campaign contrasts this grotesque reality faced by the common Indian woman with notions of divinity and spirituality—a very substantial and intrinsic part of Indian culture. By showing scars, bruises, and other signs of abuse on the faces of revered goddesses, the campaign merges the sacred with the abusive and distinguishes itself from other domestic abuse campaigns in India.

The images themselves, minus the signs of abuse, bear a stark resemblance to the portraits of gods and goddesses adorning many households in India. This is no coincidence. Taproot India explicitly states, "Hand-painted posters of Gods and Goddesses can be found in every place of work, worship and residence [in India]. Hence, we recreated the hand-painted poster style to emotionally communicate

to the TG [Target Group]." Their image of the goddess Saraswati features many of the usual elements, including flowing water, a swan near her feet, and a peacock. Normally, she is portrayed as a very fair woman dressed in white, holding a stringed instrument, the Saraswati Veena; her depiction in the Abused Goddesses campaign stays true to all these traits.

This attention to authenticity is an integral part of the campaign and plays a major role in making the images connect with the Indian audience on an intimate level. It would certainly have been possible to convey a message against domestic abuse without any religious imagery at all, but such an approach tends to suggest that our normal lives—in which we socialize, eat, drink, and sleep—are separate from the dull and gloomy place where women are disrespected and abused. The Abused Goddesses campaign's integration of domestic abuse with an item of everyday prevalence shatters this imaginary boundary and makes us come to terms with domestic abuse as something all too real. It enforces the fact that abuse is not as rare and infrequent as some may claim, but something that is a disturbingly prominent part of many Indian households.

Along with forging an intimate connection with the Indian audience, use of religious imagery from Hindu mythology also serves to effectively convey one of the greatest hypocrisies of Indian culture. Indian women are continuously deemed to conform to the virtues of purity and greatness, and encouraged to transcend the baseness of men through their faith and devotion. In return, they are supposed to be honored with deep respect and admiration. This seems to be at odds with the fact that around seventy percent of women in India are subject to domestic abuse, keeping in mind that these figures generally tend to be underestimated (Fernandez).

But there is more to this interplay of religious overtones and facial scars. Because India tends to be so predominantly religious, religion itself, as a prominent and important factor, is often spared the prying eye. The unique nature of the campaign allows us to explore deeper connections between the mistreatment of women and their deification. To fully appreciate the significance of this, we first need a slightly nuanced understanding of the role religion plays in Indian culture.

Every morning in the average Indian middle-class household, you will hear the

Layout by Jaye Michelle Harris. Illustrations by Taproot India.

ringing of melodious bells, accompanied by prayers sung by the mother in the prayer room of the house. The aroma of incense fills the air. When young children throughout the country go to take their examinations, they do so with a *tika* on their foreheads, a quick bite of some *prashad*, and prayers on their lips. The richest businessmen in India fly in helicopters to offer prayers on auspicious occasions, while the lowest of untouchables believe their sorrows are justified by sins in their past lives. India is a developing country,

neta Jha has the following to say about the deification of women:

"Pedestalisation of women as goddesses is as damaging as portraying them as sex objects. Both dehumanize women. Both leave no space in between for women to exercise their will or have feelings and opinions and flaws and desires as human beings. Trapping women into images of a supposed ideal is one of the oldest strategies of patriarchy—and if we do not fit the image, it is deemed alright to 'punish' and violate us" (Jha).

and Indians face many hard problems on a daily basis. Religion serves as a source of strength, a comforting belief that justice is eventually served. Religion gives a reason to look beyond one's petty worries and believe in a greater cause.

Religion also tends to give people a specific place in society. Particularly, it gives women a specific space in Indian culture. The ideal woman is selfless, catering to the needs of her family over herself. Her duty is to tend to her husband, raise her children, and take care of the household chores without question or hesitation. It is her duty to ignore whatever hurt or pain is bestowed upon her and to suffer silently.

In her article in the *Hindustan Times*, Pra-

The same view is reiterated in an article by Vaishna Roy, featured in *The Hindu*, which says, "Deification conveniently places the woman on an impossible pedestal from which it takes very little to fall off and thus invite abuse." All of this suggests that domestic violence is not so much an independent act as it is the outcome of a sociocultural system that consistently dehumanizes women. Sanjay Srivastava, a Delhi-based sociologist, mentions another aspect of the deification of women: "Given India's patriarchal status, the worship of goddess[es] and the iconic status of a deity bequeathed to domesticated female figures is 'a symptom of male anxiety and guilt'" (Tilak).

Many may see blaming religious prac-

tices for the abuse of women as a bold and mistaken step. For instance, such practices are something not usually found in Western societies; yet do they not suffer from the problem of domestic abuse as well? Yes, but there is a crucial difference between domestic abuse in countries like the United States and domestic abuse in India.

Perhaps the best way to summarize this difference is to simply quote the headline of a *Times of India* article: "57% of Boys, 53% of Girls [in India] Think Wife-beating is Justified" (Sinha). The figures took me by surprise. When I mentioned this to a friend in India, she responded in an unnervingly plain voice, "I thought the percentage would be higher." There is a troublesome belief in India that blames the woman for provoking domestic abuse. When a normal human being has to fit the shoes of a goddess, how can she not consistently feel at fault?

There is a certain blankness in the face of the abused goddess who sits adorned with the pretty dress, makeup, and the Veena. Her face is not one of anguish, nor of anger, but one of silent acceptance. I think about the multitude of women I know in India who are beaten regularly by their husbands. I look at this image, and I see a similarity. When a woman is said to be treated as a goddess, how could she possibly complain? Beautiful scenery, majestic animals, gushing water, and fabulous jewelry do not seem to fit a scarred and bruised face. Instead they feel like a façade, a mere illusion to hide the grotesque nature of the truth, an attempt to soothe male anxiety and guilt. How is our deification of abused women in real life any different?

In the end, the hard truth remains that the intellectual insights offered to us by the campaign will probably do little for the woman who is currently being beaten by her husband because the curry contained too much salt. However, the exposure of society's unwritten rules and invisible customs that keep the oppressed in their place is the first step to radical change. The unique nature of the Abused Goddesses campaign visualizes the control that dominant religious beliefs have over women in India. Hopefully, in the long run, it will be these systematic deconstructions of oppressive customs that will motivate the Indian woman to stop seeing her abuse as something she deserves, and instead ask what the true worth is of the respect she is proclaimed to command. There is undoubtedly a long way to go, but the Abused Goddesses campaign is certainly a step forward.

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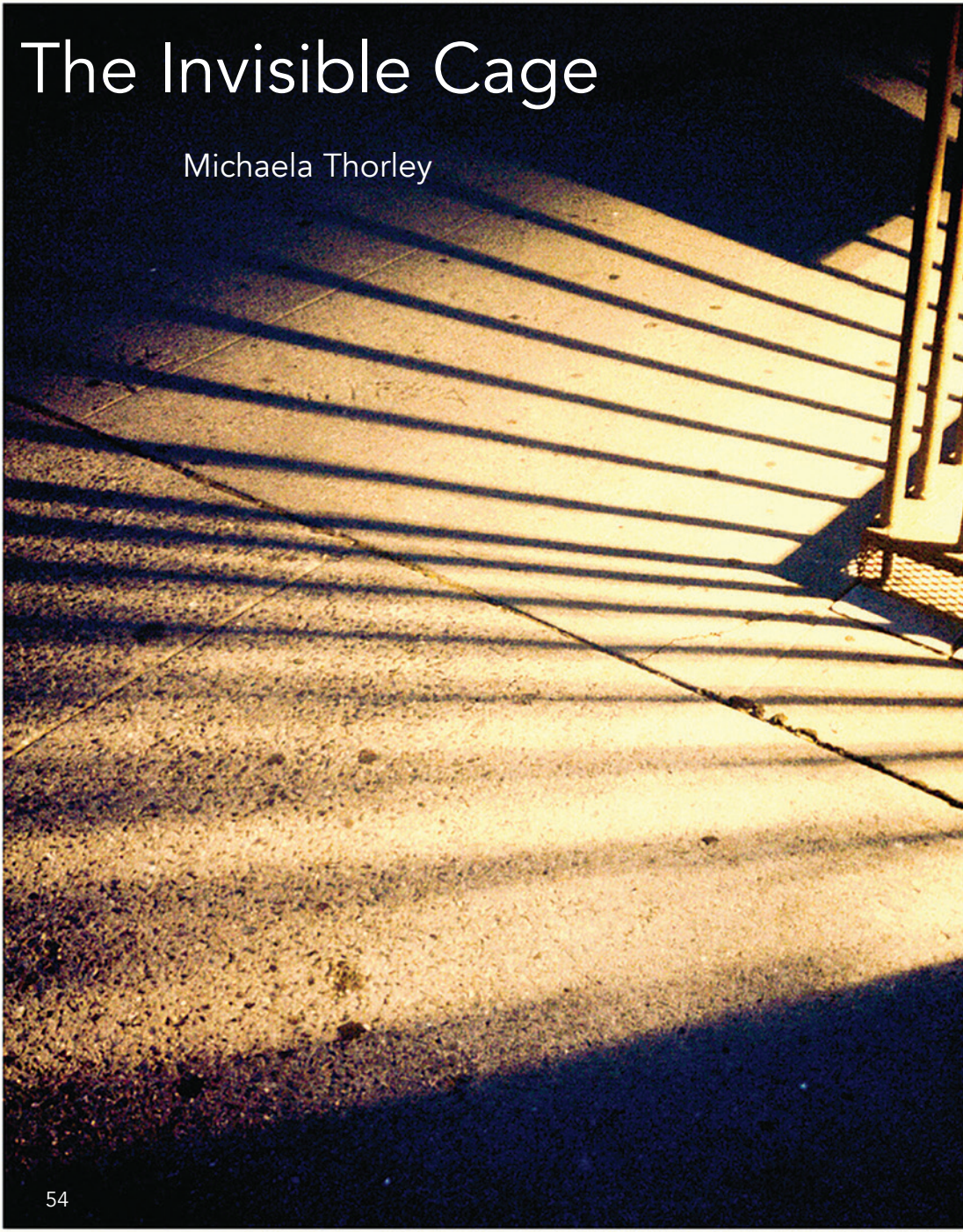
The Invisible Cage

Michaela Thorley



Layout by Gilmarie Perea-Ruiz. Image by Flickr user Michael, CC BY 2.0: https://www.flickr.com/photos/helloturkeytoe/5892214260/in/photostream/.

I'm sitting at a Greyhound station in upstate New York, and my bus is going to be late. There's a crowd of people and we're all waiting to leave this tiny town to go somewhere different. Out of all the people huddled on the sidewalk, I am lucky enough to be sitting on a hard wooden bench, next to a man in simple clothes that don't look like his own. I lean my head back against the brick of the building and look him over. He is one of several men wearing the same outfit, holding nothing but a plastic bag. A handsome man with a face that has been kicked around by life, but still holds sweetness. I feel inclined to talk to him. I turn and ask where he's going and if he's heard anything about the buses. He seems anxious to talk to someone, and soon he's telling me that he has just been released from a prison nearby, and that he's heading home to the city. He can't wait to get out of these clothes, to go to the Bronx and buy new ones, and to eat a hot meal. He's got a woman at home, and even though she never made it up to visit him, he knows she's still waiting for him because they've got love like that.

In this moment, I am moved by a vision of his future. I'm sitting with his girlfriend. I taste the Philly cheesesteak he eats and feel her hand in the back pocket of his new jeans. I believe in his freedom. But I am not naïve. I know that he is heading back into the world with a label that he did not have before he went to prison. I didn't need Michelle Alexander, a law professor and author of *The New Jim Crow*, to tell me that his life after prison will be a changed one. Whatever his intentions may be with his newly acquired "freedom," there is something about him that may never have been free, and that now, surely never will be. It is on the face of the old white woman who looks at us from the corner of her eye. Several feet over on the same sidewalk, she clutches her purse to her chest and avoids eye contact. When I catch her eye, she is issuing me a warning. She didn't need to hear this man's story to know that he is a "criminal." She can see the bars around his body. As a black man in the United States, he was born into a tentatively constructed trap, one with few ways out. He was not expected by most to avoid his current situation. He has lived his life in an "invisible cage," which solidified around him when he left the prison with his newly

granted "freedom" (Alexander 186).

A month later, I am at a movie theater with my best friend, L. We are here to see *Fruitvale Station*, a movie based on the story of Oscar Grant, who was shot and killed by a police officer in Oakland, California, in 2009. After traveling through Oscar's last day with him, we are present for his death: shot facedown while handcuffed by a white officer who claimed that he confused his gun with his Taser. L and I squeeze each other's fingers and I feel her flinch as the shot runs through us, reverberating, not as a single shot, but as one small piece of a collective injustice. We sit in our seats longer than I have ever sat after a movie is over, drive home silently, and park in front of my house, where we both start to cry. We are not shocked. We are aware. That black and brown bodies, especially those that are male or masculine, are not safe in our country. That black and brown bodies are treated like they don't matter. That black and brown bodies are disposable.

And so it is not surprising a few weeks later when we are driving home from a weekend in Pennsylvania that we are followed into the parking lot of a rest stop by a state trooper. He drives up behind us in his big white van and parks, blocking us in, and steps up to the window. I am sitting in the passenger seat and fight the urge to roll my eyes as he authoritatively asks me to show him the contents of a plastic bag on the floor of the car, clearly implying that he believes there are drugs inside. The bag contains a paper towel and the crumbs of a turkey sandwich.

"Oh," he says sheepishly, "I guess you must have had sandwiches."

L is a masculine-of-center black woman with a shaved head and a Yankees fitted cap, so when he asks her to step out of the car and step back, it is an all too familiar scene. I know that we are both flashing back to *Fruitvale Station*. We both know that to be young, black, and male or masculine-identified is to be "equated with reasonable suspicion" (Alexander 199). We tread lightly, delicately. For a white friend or family member, my fear is of tickets and fines, but with my black and brown loved ones, I am afraid of arrest, physical brutality, and even death.

I grew up in a mixed black and white neighborhood in Syracuse where I spent all of my grade school years going to a public school. Part of a white minority, I was both surrounded by and separate from what it meant to be "black" in the U.S. When we were kids, the boys I knew said that they wanted to be rappers and ballplayers. From a young age, the ideas of success and possibility for many of the black boys I went to school with were limited—in their heads, and in the heads of the mostly white authority figures in their lives (teachers, administrators, principals, etc.). As we got older, these same authority figures began instructing black boys in their criminality. The Syracuse city schools have been known for their high suspension rates of black boys; according to a 2013 UCLA study, "Fifty-two percent of black male students in Syracuse's middle and high schools were suspended at least once during the 2009-10 school year" (Reide).

Black boys grew accustomed to punishment and harsh judgment. On some mornings, school security would roll the metal detectors to the front doors of my high school. The line stretched out to the parking lot, where we would wait

regardless of the weather, sweating in the sunshine or blowing our breath out in the cold as we waited to be searched. Both female and white, I watched from the sidelines of a system that treated me with much more respect than my black male peers. Black male students were much more likely to be pulled aside and searched with more authority and suspicion. They were subject to significantly more "random and degrading" searches, and it was clear that they were always "potential suspects" (Alexander 200). This no doubt stemmed from the view of young black men as criminals in the making and was one of many "racially biased school discipline policies" that pushed my black male peers out of our "underfunded, crumbling schools" (Alexander 199).

On one particular morning during a search, our valedictorian was found with weed. After a short suspension, his only punishment was a weekly appointment with the school psychologist. One of the few upper-middle-class Jewish kids at my high school, he was still allowed to give a speech at graduation, to walk the stage, and to go on to NYU with no marks on his permanent record. Had he been poor and black, he would not have received such light treatment. This stems from the same system that rarely arrests white drug offenders and that consistently treats them more favorably. The same behavior from a white student did not warrant the same treatment. Although his behavior was criminal, he was not "made" criminal in the way that a black male student might have been.

Coming to college was a rude awakening. Entering into an arena of deeply unexplored privilege and "colorblindness," I was (and continue to be) struck by the differences in perspective that drastically separate me and the kids I grew up with from many of my college peers. In one class, which grappled with issues of class, race, and education, I was stunned by the ways in which students continued to cling to the "American Dream," the ways in which they looked to stories of success to appease any guilt or fear that might arise when confronted with their privilege. But this is not a singular experience. It is repeated in most classes in which issues of race, class, ethnicity, and opportunity appear. Alexander points out that many people's eyes are "fixed on people like Barack Obama and Oprah Winfrey, who have defied the odds and risen to power, fame, and fortune" (180). There is rarely a discussion of what odds are being defied, but on numerous occasions, I have heard these extreme success stories referenced as proof that those who deserve success will earn it and that, if you try hard enough, you can achieve anything. But I have the feeling that if you asked the kids I went to high school with,

For a white friend or family member, my fear is of tickets and fines, but with my black and brown loved ones, I am afraid of arrest and physical brutality, or even death.

you would get a different response.

When I walk through the university area on a Friday night, I often hear the shouts and screams of young white men. Unburdened by insecurity and perceived criminality as they are, I have seen them break exit lights in dorm building hallways, kick trash cans, and snort cocaine on a frat house sink. The point is not that all white men conduct themselves in this particular way, but rather that these examples of disrespect and misconduct tend to go unnoticed. People turn blind eyes to youthful blunders based on privilege. Boys will be boys. Unless the boys are black boys. Privilege erases slates and provides second chances in ways that go unrecognized.

"Greyhound Station" by Flickr user Hape Oßwald de Albstenstein, CC BY 2.0: https://www.flickr.com/photos/hapephotographix/7280650004/.

This is how I know that "denial… is complicated" (Cohen in Alexander 182). Those who are not forced to face their color are allowed to believe in colorblindness. Those who are not forced to face their privilege believe in free will and choice, unburdened by structural inequalities. Thus, those who are not affected by or close to those affected by racism often incorrectly believe that "those who are trapped in [systems of inequality] were free to avoid [them]" (Alexander 184). So when Alexander states that "schoolchildren wonder out loud how discrimination could ever have been legal in this great land of ours," it hits home for me (192).

My childhood was shaped by an attention and proximity to issues of race and class that might have startled some suburban white parents. My own parents, open-minded and aware in many respects, still can't fully grasp the depth of attachment I have to my school culture. I have not yet learned how to take my anger and outrage and shape it into something informative and telling. I have not figured out how to transform the moments of ignorance that I witness into moments of illumination. I am still grasping, tripping, falling over myself. My voice still shakes, my breath speeds as I struggle to verbalize things so deeply embedded, to forgive the white people who surround me now for the unexplored privilege that makes them selectively colorblind. I forget that these were things I learned early on—on a school bus, in a lunchroom, on the playground, in the back row of churches.

I will never see what kind of future he headed into. But I think of him often, singing hopefully through the bars of his invisible cage.

I know that a resolution cannot be found in defensiveness or fear of acknowledging privilege. The point is to open your eyes if you are in a position of privilege and to recognize that this is a position of power and influence, no matter who you are. White people are often able to put off facing the realities of racism that many black and brown children must face at a startlingly young age. A fundamental misunderstanding exists about racism, especially within the white community. Much of this stems from the belief that racism is based on "a function of attitudes" (Alexander 183). But it is the natural, invisible functions of structural racism that are to be feared.

I am asking for an acknowledgment of, as Alexander puts it, the "state of perpetual insecurity and fear" faced by black men in the United States (210). Born with the mark of criminality, black boys are expected to "be on their best behavior," whatever that may mean at any given moment (215). Please recognize, however, that Oscar Grant placed his hands behind his back, let himself be handcuffed, trusting the administration of justice, and was shot in the back for it. And that this was not a solitary story.

Michelle Alexander's argument began in a church, and mine ends there. Over the past several years, I have attended church services at a black Baptist church in my neighborhood. I have had the unique privilege to be present in a space that is generally not seen by those outside of the black community. I have heard, from the mouths of pastors and their congregations, stories of struggle, lack of options, and fear. Through their stories, the stories of my loved ones, and the stories of those I grew up going to school with, I know that race has a strong influence on the "administration of justice" (Alexander 187). I know that black men and black masculine women are never truly free—even when they are technically free—because of the fear and intimidation that is used against them as a means of control.

I don't want to eliminate the acknowledgment of those boys who made it out, or the presence of hope. Because I have seen boys slip through the bars they were born with, to raise beautiful children, go to college, manage businesses, and make five-year plans. And I recognize that not everyone can or will hear these stories directly from the source—either those of fear and intimidation or those of unexpected triumph and hope. It scares me that many people in positions of power and privilege will never see for themselves the effects of mass incarceration and structural racism on a human level. Without this, I do not know how people are supposed to resist the seductive "myth of choice," to look beyond the labels of criminal and non-criminal and recognize that "all people make mistakes. All of us are sinners. All of us are criminals" (Alexander 197, 215).

At the Greyhound station, they make a final call for my seatmate's bus. I will never see what kind of future he headed into. But I think of him often, singing hopefully through the bars of his invisible cage.

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EDITORS

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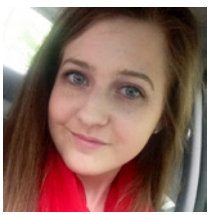

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Layout and photographs by Annemarie Menna.

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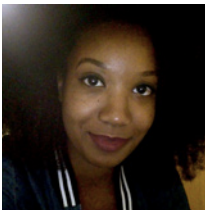

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Mark**WarfelJr.** has been chronicling life and experiences in photographs since 2007 and focuses on creating a dynamic experience for the viewer that transports him or her to a place and time. You can view his work at http://markwarfel.com.

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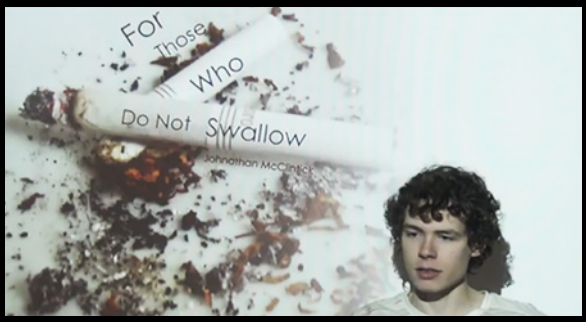

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