

**Byways**

**Journal of Arts**

**and Letters**

**Spring 2023**

*S. Wilson*



# **Byways: Journal of Arts and Letters Spring 2023**

Cover Art  
“Blind Faith” by Sheri Wilson

2024 Poster Art  
“Rainfall” by Daniel Mendiola

Hobby Memorial Library  
Editorial Staff

# Forward

*Byways: Journal of Arts and Letters* is an annual collection of creative works submitted by Central Texas College students. The works presented in this issue are original works of mixed media art, digital art, drawings, metalwork, musical scores, musical lyrics, paintings, photography, playwriting, poetry, sculpture, and short stories. The pieces showcased in this issue represent the best in their respective categories.

The journal invites discussion and an exchange of intellectual ideas between the creator and audience. This type of creative stimulation offers each person the opportunity for growth, expanding our knowledge levels while encouraging us to think beyond the limits of today's boundaries.

Students submitted many pieces for inclusion for this year's *Byways* issue. The works included in this volume represent the best of CTC students' creative abilities. For all authors and artists that submitted works that were not published in this year's issue, your pieces were commendable and showed great potential for your future development. Lastly, the editorial staff wishes all submitters the very best in whichever direction your artistic talents guide you.

*Byways* Editorial Staff

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*Angels*  
Sheri Wilson  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place Sculpture



**“Infinite Prism”**  
Konstantine Cross-Furr  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place Poetry - Tied

The prismatic reflection of light creates rainbows on the tips of my eyelashes.  
Almost like droplets of passion.

They reside to remind me the universe of colors within me.  
The fire that melts away the winter is my passion, that of which will never be snuffed  
out.

My body can turn white light into color. Reminding myself that I truly am.  
Infinite.

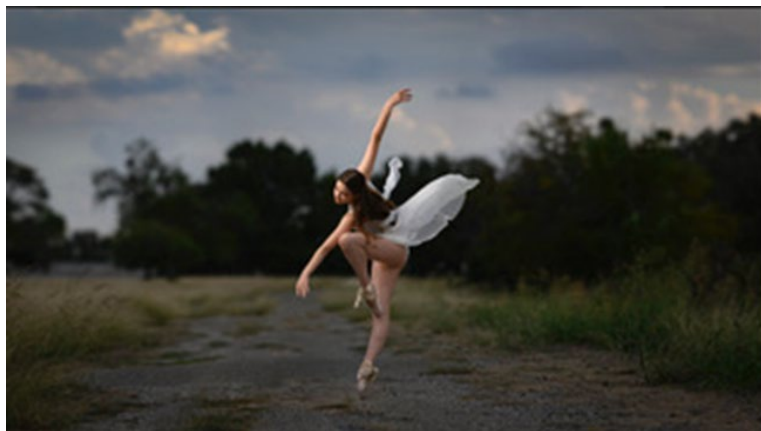
# “Letters to the Sky”

Ashley Demers

3<sup>rd</sup> Place Music Lyrics

Words of pain, of sorrow, of love  
Mix onto this parchment I'm sending above  
Your letter to us through shimmering snow stars  
Softened the rawness of heartbeat scars  
Sometimes I just don't know what to say  
I'm angry with myself because the words won't come  
Just sit silently and feel the music, hum  
We miss you so much, there's an empty space in our hearts  
Sometimes the pain just tears us apart  
But now we must settle for spoken words to empty rooms  
Simplicity is key, you know what we feel for you  
So, I write a letter to the sky  
Wondering what heaven is like  
Have you seen the rainbow bridge?  
Of dogs chasing butterflies  
Sometimes I catch myself starting to cry  
At first, I question it, but of course I know why  
The reassurance I have is your continuous light  
It shines in our lives; your happiness shines so bright  
Her face kissed by the sweet sunshine  
Of your love so fierce, as she marvels at that sight  
She writes letters to the sky with her tears at night  
Before you rock her to sleep, you catch her tears with your smile

*The Fairy*  
Daniel Mendiola  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place Photography



*Redeye*  
Cy Thomas  
1<sup>st</sup> Place Digital Art



# “A Walk to the Car”

Ryen Becerril

3<sup>rd</sup> Place Poetry - Tied

Despite itself, the moon glows brightly,  
Every visible crevice in the sidewalk illuminated.  
I wave farewell to my coworkers with a smile and unlike the moon, I do not glow.

The walk to my car is not far.  
I tell myself this, but I am still tense.  
It's quiet out here, I am alone.  
I tell myself this, but I am still afraid.

My footsteps acquire an echo And my heart drops.  
I can see my car, but for some reason I do not speed up. The echo does.

His hands are rough, they hurt my own wrists.  
My bag drops to the ground and I'm worried my birthday gift breaks. I'd struggle harder  
but it seems I cannot.  
The moon shines its spotlight down on us.

I'm shaking, from what I do not know.  
It's cold, he's here, I'm tired, he's here, I'm scared, he's here.  
It could be anything. My wrists will bruise.

The cold turns warm and I am suddenly without him.  
On the ground, favorite sweater torn, landed on my bag. My gift is most definitely  
broken.  
But now I worry about my heart, my mind.

My coworker grabs my hand and pulls me up. She envelops me in a hug but I do not feel  
safe. Will I ever feel safe again?  
The moon drags its spotlight away to someone else in town.



# *La Rosalia*

Oscar Roman  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place Digital Art



*Barn Owl*  
Madison Jones  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place Digital Art



# “The Dilemma of a Libra”

Ashari Brown

1<sup>st</sup> Place Poetry

Charming, Beautiful, Flawless  
That’s what I’m supposed to be?  
Social, Refined, Romantic  
Is that how people should see me?

Balanced like the scale holding two hearts  
Both filled with equal parts compassion and love  
No hate within each even when justifiable

If perfect is what I should be....  
Then what is this imperfection I see?

I’m fair, but willing to manipulate for self-gain  
I’m rational, but can’t decide between the smallest things  
I’m easygoing, but have a real fragile heart that absorbs pain  
I’m fun loving, but I’m indolent to almost everything

Is this the dilemma of a Libra?  
A supposed Peacemaker? Well-balanced?  
My scale is tipping  
The scale has started to fall

It’s lopsided  
It’s unequal  
It’s unstable  
It’s.... Unbalanced

## *Self Portrait*

Emeli Vasquez

3<sup>rd</sup> Place Painting



# “The Perfect Day”

Ryen Becerril

1<sup>st</sup> Place Short Story

It wasn't the alarm that woke up her up this time, it was in fact the sound of songbirds singing to each other outside her window. Eyes fluttering open, she took in the light of the room streaming in from her curtains. Across from her bed, she could see the aforementioned songbirds jumping back and forth on the branch of a great elm, harmonizing and chatting with each other. She smiled to herself and stretched in bed, shoulders and hips cracking. Another pleasant morning after another pleasant sleep. Slowly lowering her legs over the side of the lacy, quilted bed, the 75-year-old Dunia toed for her slippers. It wasn't a particularly chilly day. In fact, it seemed she might be able to get most of her chores done without having to take breaks inside the warmth of her cottage. Slipping into her soft slippers, Dunia slowly stood up and stretched again. Although 75, she was still able to move about without the aid of a walking cane or stroller. She prided herself on this, being able to do the things she does at her age. Even her wake ups weren't painful like they were for some of her aging peers. Dunia shuffled out of her bedroom, grabbing and pulling on her light pink cardigan she'd draped over the rocking chair. It was only when she'd exited the bedroom, climbed down the stairs while holding the banister, passed the small living room which housed a fireplace with a dying fire from last night, and entered the kitchen did she realize her tabby, Stop Sign, had not followed her. *Odd, he must have been rather tired from last night*, she thought to herself. Perhaps he was still in bed, curled up in her great-grandmother's old country quilt.

Stop Sign never did like the winter, especially now at the old age of 14.

Dunia opened a cabinet to grab a can of cat food and waited. After a moment, she used the electric can opener to open the can and again waited. Still nothing. She then bent down, trying not to go too slowly, and spooned some of the food into Stop Sign's blue food bowl.

Still nothing. Strange. Even if he stayed in, Stop Sign would eventually come downstairs when he heard food available. Come to think of it, she didn't remember seeing him in bed with her when she woke up. Dunia remembered the medication he was on for his age and knew one of the symptoms was grogginess. It was getting harder and harder for Stop Sign to wake up early like her. She shrugged and decided he'd get his food when he was ready.

Dunia then went to work making her breakfast. She had plenty of eggs in the fridge from her chickens and decided an omelet sounded heavenly. Mixing in egg, green onions, bell pepper, and a little French cheese, Dunia dutifully stood over the stove, folding her omelet and cooking it the exact right temperature she liked. When she sat down to eat, along with a cup of tea with milk from her dairy cow, Dunia admired her kitchen, as she did every morning.

Handed down through generations from her great-grandmother to her daughter to Dunia's mother and then eventually to Dunia, the cottage was a beautifully hand-built Tudor abode with open shutters and hand-painted doors, sills, and walls, in colors of teal, olive, yellow, and pink. The floors were masonry, laid by her great-grandfather in what must have taken weeks. Rugs were hand-woven by neighbors and curtains were imported from Germany. Outside, ivy and wisteria blanketed the cottage walls, complimented by the dancing willow trees and tall hydrangea bushes. The cottage looked as if it had been pulled right out of a Beatrix Potter fable, complete with little garden mice and hungry rabbits who respected Dunia's gardens and munched on weeds and sunflowers instead of her peonies. Outside, in the backyard, almost a meadow surrounded by elms and oaks, a hutch for chickens sat with ample room for the hens to dance about. A solitary female dairy cow stood vigil in the meadow, munching on grass and snorting at pesky birds. Dunia's peony garden sat well-tended to next to her produce garden, laden with tomatoes and herbs and corn.

Dunia sighed contently, hugging her tea cup in her hands a beautiful delftware piece imported from the Netherlands and hand-painted by famous artisans. Along with the cottage, the tea set had been a gift from her mother, who had bought it for herself as a reward for graduating college. Pride for her mother swelled in Dunia and she blew on her cup before taking a sip to keep from smiling too much. Suddenly, a loud bang against the outside wall made her jump in her seat. Hot tea splashed from the cup onto her lap and she yelped, dropping the tea cup. In a matter of seconds, it smashed into dozens of pieces on the tile ground.

"No! Oh, no, no, no!" Dunia cried, kneeling down from her seat to start picking up the pieces. She'd promised her mother to always keep it safe, and now, the only cup to the teapot, was broken. Possibly beyond repair. The tile hurt her unprotected knees as she tried to gather the pieces. Tea that had soaked into her nightgown began dripping onto the tile as well. As she felt the once hot tea now cold falling down her leg, she picked up an especially large piece and cut her thumb on it. She hissed, instinctively drawing back and dropping all the pieces back onto the ground.

She squeezed her thumb in her other hand, watching the blood dot up. At her age, it was tough to stop bleeding from cuts. She stood up, trying to ignore her shaking legs as she did, and trudged over to the sink to wash it. Another bang sounds from outside but this time she ignored it, washing away the blood in her kitchen sink then searching for a Band-Aid. By the time a third bang almost shook her house, she'd cleaned up her finger and wrapped it. In a huff, pulling her cardigan tighter around herself, she speed-walked to her back doors, anxious of what she'd find.

It wasn't pretty.

Something must have spooked Mrs. Manager, her dairy cow. Possibly a fox or young deer. The heifer had run away from the meadow in a panic and crashed into the fencing around her chickens. The hutched was untouched, by all of her hens were now free in the meadow, with no safety between them and the forest beyond. Mrs. Manager had also crashed into her gardens, slicing up produce stems with her hooves and tramping



peonies. The third crash must have been from where she was now, dazed and staring at the back wall of the house where she must have face planted. Dunia could see a horn on the ground and blood completely covering her cow's head.

It was hard to even pick one emotion to feel. Her mind swam and her heart raced. From her spot, standing in the doorway, she could see a couple of hens where Mrs. Manager must have trampled them on accident. The yip of a fox out in the forest caused her blood to boil.

But before she could move to grab her outside boots and her hay rake, there was a knock on her front door. This day was supposed to be like every other, uneventful and peaceful. Now she had lost her mother's tea cup, would have to rebuild her chicken coop, start her garden all over again in the spring, and tend to Mrs. Manager's wounds. Who knew if she'd even produce milk with this stress? And her poor chickens!

Another knock bellowed from the front door and Dunia couldn't help yelling, "I'm coming!" with irritation. She made her way to the front door, telling herself she'd pick up the pieces of her broken teacup later as she passed it, and pulled her cardigan tight once more before opening the door.

In front of her stood a tall man in a dark grey suit. He was white with curly red hair and a kind smile. She guessed he must be Irish and was surprised when he spoke with an American accent.

"Hello, ma'am! I am looking for Ms. Dunia Willows?" Dunia nodded, not saying anything.

The man's smile lowered a little. "My name is Louis Baggs. May I come in? I have important information regarding your home."

Dunia shook her head. "I'm sorry Mr. Baggs, but I am rather busy today-

"Unfortunately, this cannot wait," the man interjected. His face held a somber tone to it and Dunia paused a moment before side-stepping and allowing him entry.

Because of the broken china in the kitchen, they decided to sit face to face in the living room, Dunia in her father's old armchair and Baggs in the plush loveseat. He produced a folder from his jacket with sticky notes poking out of the top of it. When he opened the folder and pulled out some papers, Dunia saw a logo with a house on it. She swallowed, the fireplace no longer warm despite its embers.

"Ms. Willows, I am from the county bank and we've been notified that payments have not been made on this property in several years, almost a decade," began Baggs. "Unless payment can be made in full, unfortunately, the bank will have to foreclose and take this property."

Despite appreciating his bluntness and to the point-ness, Dunia felt all the air in the room leave. "That's impossible. When my mother died, she left this house to me, it's been paid in full. She died a decade ago and I've never had to pay."

Baggs grimaced. "I am aware, Ms. Willows, but the payments had interest with them that your mother never paid. The bank has been sending letters for a very long time."

Dunia remembered all the mail she had gotten for her parents over the years, how she had thrown them away without opening them in fear of feeling the grief again. She hated being reminded they were gone.

“Ms. Willows, this is a very expensive property. Lots of land, good climate, hand-built home. Over the years, the value of this property has skyrocketed and we haven’t seen a dime for it.” He leaned a little bit forward to her. “I’m under the impression you’ve never married or had kids, Ms. Willows?”

Dunia was taken aback and began fiddling with the buttons of her cardigan. “I hardly see how that matters,” she sniped.

Baggs frowned. “Ms. Willows, the bank has already foreclosed. Payment was due a very, very long time ago and was never made. They are taking the home as collateral.” Baggs seemed genuinely sad for a moment. “I asked about family because they will need to be a place that will take you or you’ll risk homelessness.”

Dunia almost choked. “Wait, I’m being kicked out of my home?”

“You will have two months to make arrangements. We here understand your situation as well, and have taken your age into account. We are not monsters.”

Dunia would disagree with that notion. After a couple more hours of discussing financials and what would happen, Baggs gathered his things, stood up, and bid the broken woman before him farewell. He made his way to the front door, Dunia not bothering to get up and see him out. But before he left, his hand on the doorknob, he turned to her and said, “By the way, I don’t wish to alarm you, but there’s a dead cat out in your bushes. I wish you luck, Ms. Willows,” and then left.

## *Under the Texas Sky*

Nadiya Filimonova

3<sup>rd</sup> Place Photography



*Rainfall*  
Daniel Mendiola  
1<sup>st</sup> Place Photography  
**2024 Byways Poster Art**



# “Snowflakes”

Ashley Demers

2<sup>nd</sup> Place Poetry

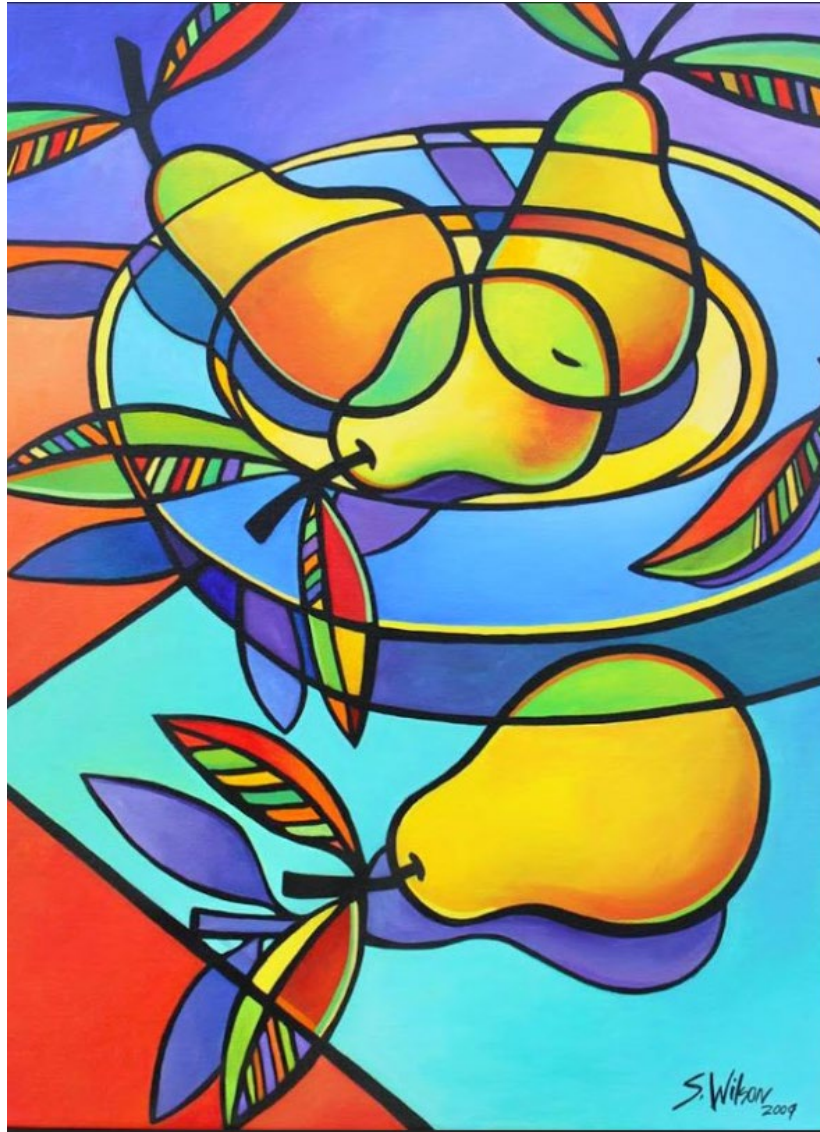
The vivid beauty of the scene in front of me doesn't seem real  
In fact, nothing seems real these days...  
I shake the dark thoughts away and focus on what's before me  
A white morning, yet not mourning  
Happy tears spring to my eyes  
I let them fall with a contented sigh  
Everything looks so soft, so serene  
A soft snow is falling, yet the sun is still shining  
I know you're there...  
I can't believe how beautiful it is  
I walk slowly outside and hold out my hand  
Tilt back my head, close my eyes and smile  
Like being kissed by the snowfall  
I don't mind the cold at all  
In my hand, I catch a snowflake  
I gaze in awe at its beauty  
I wish I could save it for all eternity  
But as it melts, another falls on me  
I know you're here...  
Your smile is the sun  
Your laughter is the gentle wind  
Your spirit is the snowflakes dancing in the air  
Like a child, I spin under dancing flakes of ice  
As the snowflakes melt on my face, I start to cry  
I love you, I miss you, I long to see your smile  
Please don't go, just stay for awhile  
And then the snowflakes fall more and more  
I feel a warmth that wasn't there just days before  
As I stop, I feel a simmering peace  
In my heart, in my soul, I feel God speak to me  
He will see me through, and that man by my side will carry me too  
As I look in the mirror, as I stand and stare  
I wonder if a snowflake can fall and not vanish in the air  
I may not be able to catch snowflakes every day  
But with child-like wonder, I wish upon a silvery snow star and say  
Maybe I'll send a letter to the sky someday...



# *Two Pairs of Pears*

Sheri Wilson

2<sup>nd</sup> Place Painting



# “Constant Thoughts”

Carrah Cemone Robinson

1st Place Music Score

Please click on the link to view and listen to the complete score. Once on the page, click on the play icon. [Constant Thoughts - Flat](#)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

♩ = 80

Violin 1  
Violin 2  
Viola  
Cello  
Contrabass

*mf* *f* *fff*

*mf* *fff*

*mf* *f* *fff*

*mf* *f* *fff*

*mf* *f* *fff*

Detailed description: This block shows the first nine measures of the score. It features five staves: Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Cello, and Contrabass. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 80. The key signature has one flat. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *f*, and *fff*, along with accents and hairpins. The Violin 1 part starts with a blue hairpin. The Viola part has a blue hairpin. The Cello and Contrabass parts have blue hairpins. The score is written in 4/4 time.

10 11 12

10

V1  
V2  
V.  
C.  
C.

*mf* *p*

*p*

*fff* *mf*

*fff* *mf* *f*

*fff* *f*

Detailed description: This block shows measures 10, 11, and 12 of the score. It features five staves: Violin 1 (V1), Violin 2 (V2), Viola (V.), Cello (C.), and Contrabass (C.). Measure 10 is highlighted with a box containing the number 10. The Violin 1 part has a blue hairpin. The Viola part has a blue hairpin. The Cello and Contrabass parts have blue hairpins. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *p*, and *fff*, along with accents and hairpins. The score is written in 4/4 time.

# “Black and White Finger Paint”

Natalie Rogers

1<sup>st</sup> Place Music Lyrics

Chords: Em G D C

*Verse 1:*

Layin' on a bed that she couldn't call her own  
Comparin' how long she'd be in this place called home  
Since the last time she was told she didn't belong  
Wonderin' when she could move on

*Verse 2:*

Now she heard the same story a million times  
Of two strange people tellin' her she'd be fine  
She was lonely and she was lost  
And she didn't know if she could keep pushin' on

[Chorus]

Her life was like black and white finger paint  
So innocent yet so faint  
Had no purpose than filling in the spots  
Normal kids could not  
With black and white finger paint

*Verse 3*

Years pass by and she still lay in that same old bed  
Wonderin' if she could trust again  
Until then

[Chorus]

Her life was like black and white finger paint  
So innocent yet so faint  
Had no purpose than filling in the spots  
Normal kids could not  
With black and white finger paint

[Bridge]

Years pass by and now she's all grown up

And she realized what two strangers had done  
They gave her love  
They gave her love

[Chorus]

Her life was like black and white finger paint  
So innocent yet so faint  
Had a purpose than filling in the spots  
Normal kids could not  
With black and white finger paint

*Rose*  
Mackenzie Alcaraz  
3rd Place Metalwork





# *Blind Faith*

Sheri Wilson

1<sup>st</sup> Place Painting

**Cover Art**



# “Therapy”

Ryen Becerril

1<sup>st</sup> Place Short Play

## 1. INT. THERAPIST WAITING ROOM – DAY. 11:03 AM

*LOUIS BAGGS (late thirties, male) sits on the plush seat of the waiting room chair. He’s nervous, bouncing his leg anxiously and fiddling with his thumbs. He’s picked the skin around his thumbnail raw. He watches as the SECRETARY behind the desk ends her phone call, writes something down, and looks up at him.*

SECRETARY

Dr. Fielding will be just another moment.

*LOUIS doesn’t respond, just nods his head. The SECRETARY frowns.*

SECRETARY

Could I get you anything? We have cups for the water cooler over there.

*LOUIS sighs, finally ending the war with his thumb.*

LOUIS

Yes, actually, I’d love that.

*The SECRETARY smiles and bends under her desk to retrieve a cup. LOUIS stands, fixing his shirt, and makes his way to the front desk. The SECRETARY straightens up before he can get there, though, and frowns again.*

SECRETARY

I’m so sorry...I think we ran out of cups. Do you want me to check in the bathroom? I think we keep more there.

*He suppresses a second sigh.*

LOUIS

No that’s alright. I’ll be fine.

*Before the SECRETARY can object, he turns around and sits back in his chair, continuing to pick at his fingers. There’s a LADY to his right, sitting in the corner next to the bathroom door. She’s knitting. It’s pink, possibly a scarf. She looks up from her work and smiles at him. He smiles back, only halfheartedly. She SPEAKS up with a thick British accent.*

LADY

Don't fancy being here, ay?

*LOUIS nods. The LADY grins to herself and returns to her work.*

LADY

Me neither. Keep tellin' myself I'll get better, but I never do.

*LOUIS is unnerved by this declaration and looks away. He takes in the details of the room, to which there are none. No posters or framed pictures. Just a drinking fountain that doesn't work and long listicles of the steps through therapy on the walls. It is now 10 minutes past his appointed time.*

*Suddenly, the front door chimes. It sounds like an old buzzer gas stations might have. In walks a woman, her child trailing behind her. She looks around the room before entering, meeting the eyes of both LOUIS and the LADY. She walks inside but the BOY hangs outside, fiddling with something off camera. The MOTHER turns to him and whisper-shouts, ushering him inside.*

MOTHER

Get in here! It's freezing outside.

BOY

I'm fixing Brody's collar.

MOTHER

Well hurry up. We're already late.

*The MOTHER approaches the front desk, giving the SECRETARY her name or her child's name. LOUIS cannot hear and so isn't interested. He continues watching the BOY fiddle with "BRODY'S collar" outside. LOUIS doesn't look away, too eager to see what breed of dog it is. Finally, the BOY faces the waiting room and walks in, tugging a leash behind him. LOUIS leans a little bit closer.*

BRODY CLANG, CLING, CLONK.

*LOUIS watches the BOY tug a metal bear trap on a rope leash into the waiting room. It bangs and clatters against the wood floor. Wide eyes, mouth slightly open, LOUIS watches this child of possibly 8 years old drag the bear trap to his MOTHER and look on it with fondness as she continues talking to the SECRETARY. LOUIS feels lost. He turns to look at the LADY to get her take on it, but she is still down in her work, focusing on knitting.*

*The MOTHER finishes talking and grabs the BOY's hand, pulling him to sit in one of two waiting room chairs. BRODY follows dutifully along on his "leash".*

BRODY CLONG, CLONK, CLANG.

*LOUIS keeps both eyes centered on the bear trap, unable to look away. He watches the BOY reach down and pat its metal “head”, cooing at it about if it “wanted a treat after this”. LOUIS cannot keep quiet.*

LOUIS  
Excuse me, ma’am?

*The MOTHER whips to look at him, eyes wide and face stern. It’s the “shut up” look. He shuts up.*

BOY  
How’s about it, Brody? Wanna walk after this?

*There’s silence, BRODY just sits there on the ground. The BOY suddenly smiles brightly and pets its head again.*

BOY  
Good boy!

*The door next to the front desk opens and DR. FIELDING appears, holding a clipboard.*

DR. FIELDING  
Mr. Baggs?

*LOUIS stands up after waiting a second, eyes still on the metal bear trap. He walks over to the doctor and follows her through the door, finally looking at her when BRODY is out of view. He follows DR. FIELDING to their usual room, sitting in his usual chair. DR. FIELDING fiddles with some papers before finally sitting down and looking at LOUIS.*

DR. FIELDING  
So, Mr. Baggs. What brings you in today?

LOUIS  
I’ve been having mental issues regarding my job again. I just don’t feel right taking homes from...I’m sorry, was that a bear trap in the waiting room? Was a child just playing with a bear trap?

*DR. FIELDING smiles.*

DR. FIELDING  
Yes, that’s Brody. Cute little guy, isn’t he?

*LOUIS blinks at her.*

LOUIS  
Excuse me?

*DR. FIELDING sighs, lowering her glasses from her nose.*

DR. FIELDING  
Mr. Baggs, I don't have to discuss the reason for an emotional support animal, do I? I do believe you've been here a couple times to know what that is.

*LOUIS looks astounded.*

LOUIS  
I'm sorry, an emotional support...? It's a bear trap!

*DR. FIELDING furrows her brow at LOUIS, obviously upset.*

DR. FIELDING  
All breeds of canines can be emotional support animals, Mr. Baggs. Please have some consideration for others. Now, please, let us focus on your mental health.

LOUIS  
IT'S A BEAR TRAP!

**END**

## *Octopus in Coral*

Sheri Wilson

2<sup>nd</sup> Place Metalwork





# *Hand Sculpture Auschwitz*

Emeli Vasquez  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place Sculpture



*Prayers*  
Sheri Wilson  
1<sup>st</sup> Place Sculpture



# “Whispers Above as Echoes Below”

Edward Alvarado Rafael Eliza

3<sup>rd</sup> Place Short Story

A man was leaning against the wall, sweat and tears were running down his exhausted body slowly and cruelly. The room he found himself in had thick walls and heavy metal doors, with hermetic seals around the edges. There were basic pieces of furniture such as a cot, a table, and a chair, as well as a gas mask hanging on one wall. The air was stale and heavy. The lighting was dim, only having enough to see as if it were an interrogation room. The man had been there for about two days now, accompanied only by the loud explosions occurring on the surface.

"How could this have happened to me, isn't it fair?" The man lamented, recalling again the circumstances that led to that moment. He was a powerful industrialist who had built his empire on the backs of working children in developing countries. He had turned a blind eye to his suffering, all in the name of profit.

The man looked at the door, remembering the gas leak that had occurred, he was trapped. Would he die in that place, with an end worthy of a rat? That problem afflicted him, until out of nowhere, he heard a sound coming out of the bathroom in the room, and something was scratching the door. There was no way anyone was there, as everyone with him was killed outside the room by the gas.

"Knock, knock", a macabre voice was heard from behind the door. The man breathed in panic as he could, perhaps the lack of air made him hallucinate. "Who are you?" asked the man, disturbed. "Did you think you could run away from what you threw others into, that taking millions to the grave would keep you from this one?" A skeletal hand opened the door slightly, tearing the metal and leaving marks before the man's astonished eyes. Following that, the crying of many children echoed through the room. Along with these horrors, smoke began to come out under the door, just like the one that was outside the room. The man for a few seconds faced his death, closing his eyes full of terror.

Opening them, he noticed that he was still alive. He thought it was a hallucination until he saw the marks on the door. He began to hyperventilate, it was as if his weakened mind had become a target of supernatural beings, stalking his healing like birds of prey. That made him think about what would happen to him when he died. He had never thought about it, he didn't want to think about it...until now. Would it have been worth trying to lead his life another way?

As those thoughts plagued him, he noticed that the gas mask had disappeared. Turning his head to the left in a panic, he saw a figure in front of him, who was wearing his mask and looking at him with its head raised to the left. The eyes of the mask and the mouth looked like two bottomless voids.

This figure seemed to measure the same as the man, but had a malnourished brown body, with a triangular-tipped tail that moved like a cat's watching its prey. His right arm appeared to be broken or fractured, having a disfigurement that allowed him to move only behind his back. He also had a small hammer that was filled with blood at both ends, dripping this liquid onto the ceiling instead of the floor. This detail shook the man, who could only look at the being in fear.

"Please don't hurt me, I'll do what you want, I promise," the man begged, shaking with fear. The creature took a few steps towards him, bringing its face closer to the man.

A great sigh came from the mask, was it contempt, disappointment, or something worse? "How does it feel... that because of you all the nations are killing each other for the third time?" The demonic being's voice was indifferent and elegant, despite looking gaunt and weak.

"It's not my fault... there were a lot of things out of my control, things I couldn't control", the man replied, sure that he couldn't have done anything about it, especially with those pedantic rulers who couldn't be questioned, that's just the way it was.

The demon took a few steps back, beginning to growl in frustration, cocking his head to the right now. He gripped his hammer tighter as he sent small blows into the air with his good arm. The growls of frustration began to turn into ones of pain, bringing her left hand to his face, something seemed to emerge from the holes in the mask.

Three faces appeared, pressed close together like Siamese twins, also gaunt and vacant-eyed. The man recognized the faces, one was of a man who provoked his anger, his father; the other frustration, this being that of the president, and the last, below the other two, uncertainty, that of a child.

"You could have taken care of me, had control of your life when you could, but you didn't. You only settled for doing what you are ordered," said the face of his father. "You could have done more to make me listen, but you never did enough," the president scolded. Finally, the boy, who took a deep breath before speaking, accused him "Why did you do what you wanted to do with them? You're not fair!" the boy accuses him.

At the man's silence, the figure charged at him furiously, throwing his hammer as best it could. Feeling the adrenaline rush at the moment, the man raised both his arms and covered himself in fear, hearing a loud impact near him. Pulling his arms away from him, he saw the hammer mark next to him, no trace of the being around.

The man, as best he could, hugged his legs and squeezed them as best he could as if they were a blanket that protected him against the monsters of the night. This caused pain in his arms, which made him think about the injustice of the situation. It was others who led him to that situation, unfair people who showed him that there is no loving god, but rather that you have to fight for power to be free. It was not his fault for what he did to others, it was the fault of life that hurt him, and just like energy, that damage had to be transferred to live fully. At that moment, he began to hear heavy breathing. The man

could already foresee the worst, which is why he covered his face with both hands, hoping that it would go away as soon as possible.

"Are you going to keep hiding like the rat you are, making others clean your dirty dishes?" a familiar voice recriminated hatefully. That person was the one who had infiltrated the facility, the man being the one who allowed him to enter in an act of shame. Gaining everyone's trust, he caused the gas leak at the worst moment in an act of hate. He wanted to eliminate those who always abused those below them, even if he had to die too.

"You are such a disgusting being that you even closed the door to those behind you, all to preserve your dirty life", the man widened his eyes, seeing that what seemed to be the woman who had started everything was another demon. This one was similar to the woman, but with reddish skin and a more disfigured and grotesque appearance, especially his jaw, which was gaping to inhuman levels, with teeth like those of a hungry shark.

"You are the one who is doing this? If so, forgive me, please!" The man begged, however, to no avail. The demon grabbed the only chair in the room and hurled it at the man in a fury. He tried to cover himself with his hands to be safe, however, the chair ended up colliding with the wall just above him, breaking into pieces as if it were a toy. Lowering his hands, he noticed that the demon was gone. Certainly, he looked like he was going crazy, even though the pieces of the chair spread around him contradicted that.

He felt like a wounded and desolate animal, with vultures stalking him without giving him the slightest rest. He was afraid of what was to follow after that. During his life he hadn't been taken seriously, being bossed around and being at the mercy of others who might contradict themselves, and make mistakes; and even so, they believed they were always right, having the right to do what they wanted and then ask for respect and obedience. They were gods, not benevolent because they were, but because they had the power to force others to think so. That was the way things were, and when their time came to be one, they followed the natural order of things.

"I have done nothing wrong, my only crime was having a moment of weakness... my only crime was not being almighty", the man thought to himself in the darkest moment of his life, this being perhaps the last.

The man realized that the rumble of the bombs on the surface had stopped, perhaps a ray of hope among all the darkness. However, the room started to rumble unexpectedly, as if a giant was closing in on him. The rotten man's heart pounded with each step as if he were trying to get out of his body. The air felt colder and heavier around him as if an impending calamity was drawing near.

In the blink of an eye, a huge being appeared in the middle of the room, his eyes reflecting indifference, while his faint smile reflected guilty satisfaction. The being had six fingers on each hand, a muscular body like stone and full of thorns, with a pair of white wings. He was dressed in purple rags, holding a golden scepter that had the shape

of the planet earth at the tip, along with a loose ring that encircled it and made metallic sounds. Mostly, he had one eye that covered his entire face, however, it seemed to have an open mouth in the pupil of the eye. Faced with such a scene, the man began to tremble, feeling around him an air of impotence in the face of the monster's superiority, as if he were facing an authority beyond his understanding.

"What are you?", asked as quickly as possible, hoping perhaps that the fact that he spoke would make the monster look more human in his mind, and that it would calm him down a bit. However, it was certain that he would end up judging and sentencing him to the worst of fates, and he couldn't do anything.

The being was silent for a few moments. Finally, the center of his eye opened and he began to speak "I present myself with satisfaction to those who shudder from the lowest to the highest of things, believing that their traces are invisible. With joy, I take those who shake others, being full of pride and frustration... and especially... having power", the man turned pale upon hearing that. Everything was going to be taken from him unless he tried to do something.

"I did what anyone in my position would have done. A person who is above others does not have to listen to those below, a person who is above others is never wrong," the industrialist defended himself with indignation. It wasn't fair that in the end, the rules would change, only to punish him for doing things that others did and never suffered doing.

"That's the funniest part, there's always someone above you, watching you, judging by their own rules. You're never going to be free in your life, you never were. No matter how much power you accumulate," the demon replied nonchalantly, seeming to enjoy the torment the man was going through. Thinking for a few seconds about those words, maybe there was some truth. Maybe everyone who is like him always gets his moment of retribution, even maybe those he hadn't seen pay, and having a moment like the one he was going through now.

"I... I give up," the man admitted, coming face to face with that revelation. Given his situation, it was impossible to deny otherwise, perhaps there was some justice in his downfall. Still, he couldn't help but feel afraid, even if he knew that those he hated ended up just like him. "Is there anything I can do... to follow the rules of that highest authority?" The man admitted in another moment of weakness, one that he hoped would give him a second chance... a chance to act as he should have done all his life, without letting himself be carried away by the appearances that passing power gave him.

Despite that act of submission, the man noticed that the demon had vanished as if he had never been there. He hadn't even left anything behind like the previous ones, which made him panic, he had nowhere to go. However, if he stayed there, he knew, without an ounce of doubt that he would die.

Wasting no time, the man scrambled to his feet, putting both his hands on the metal door that had prevented the deadly gas from entering the room all this time. He took

one last look at the room, noting that it was spotless, the only abnormal thing about the place was a golden ring on the floor.

Steeling himself with determination, he decided to open the door. If he was going to die, he wouldn't do it inside that place, he wasn't going to resign himself to such a fate. Not allowing himself the luxury of further hesitation, the man opened the door, and smoke poured in.

# *Dinosaur*

## Mackenzie Alcaraz

1<sup>st</sup> Place Metalwork



# “It’s Not Over Yet”

Amare D’sean Dykes

2<sup>nd</sup> Place Short Play

*(The city was destroyed with Remix placing his flag on the ground)*

Rin: Did...did we just lose?

Haymi: No...

Time Man: Not yet.

Fake Man: What’s done is done, Time.

Time Man: Not yet, I’m going to do something I haven’t done in a long time.

*(Time Man makes hand symbols and the hands on his clock on his chest start to move backwards)*

Time Man: The deed is done.

Haymi: I don’t want to question your gimmick but, what exactly did you do?  
Everything still looks the same.

Fake Man: Well, if he did it right, it will only look like this for a few seconds.

*(Slowly, time is reversed)*

Rin: Time is going backwards.

Time Man: It means we have another chance.

*(While time is reversing, a bunch of rubble lifts off of Tundra Man, Time Man taps Tundra Man and he’s able to move along with the group)*

Time Man: Okay everyone, this may be our last shot. MAKE. IT. COUNT.



# “A Letter to You”

Victoria Kim

2<sup>nd</sup> Place Music Lyrics

[Verse]

Hey, there's something that I need you to know.  
I'm really not that cool, I feel like a fool when I come close to you.  
I'm not even PMS-ing but I still present myself as a mess.

[Chorus]

Cause so many thoughts are going through my head.  
Do you like me? Do I like you?  
I don't want to admit it, but I'm going to admit it.  
'Cause you have found a place in my heart (2x)

[Bridge]

And it tears me apart that I can only look at you  
Like a piece of art specially handcrafted for me. (For me)  
But what if you belong to somebody else and what if I belong to somebody else?

I know I've only ever seen you in the halls.  
I know my heart deceives my thinking.  
But oh, why do I still get butterflies when you look at me?

## *Attachments #1*

Sheri Wilson

2<sup>nd</sup> Place Drawing





*Black is Pink*  
Dezmone Roberts  
1<sup>st</sup> Place Collage

*Moon Knight*  
Valerie Rivera  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place Drawing



# “Through the Rear-View Mirror”

Victoria Kim

2<sup>nd</sup> Place Short Story

A Friday that feels like a Thursday. A long day of doing nothing. Procrastinating and putting off daily tasks that would benefit me in the future. The clock ticks to 4:20pm and I grudgingly grip the steering wheel of my car and drive to work. A lethargic ache overcomes my soul.

A man of a slender figure walks into traffic. His beard was long and gray. The type of gray that told a story to its readers. An innocent blond that has experienced the world and how cruel it can be. The man's eyes held the baggage of his past as he walked in shame. His heart was out on a piece of cardboard that he found.

“Anything will help, God bless.”

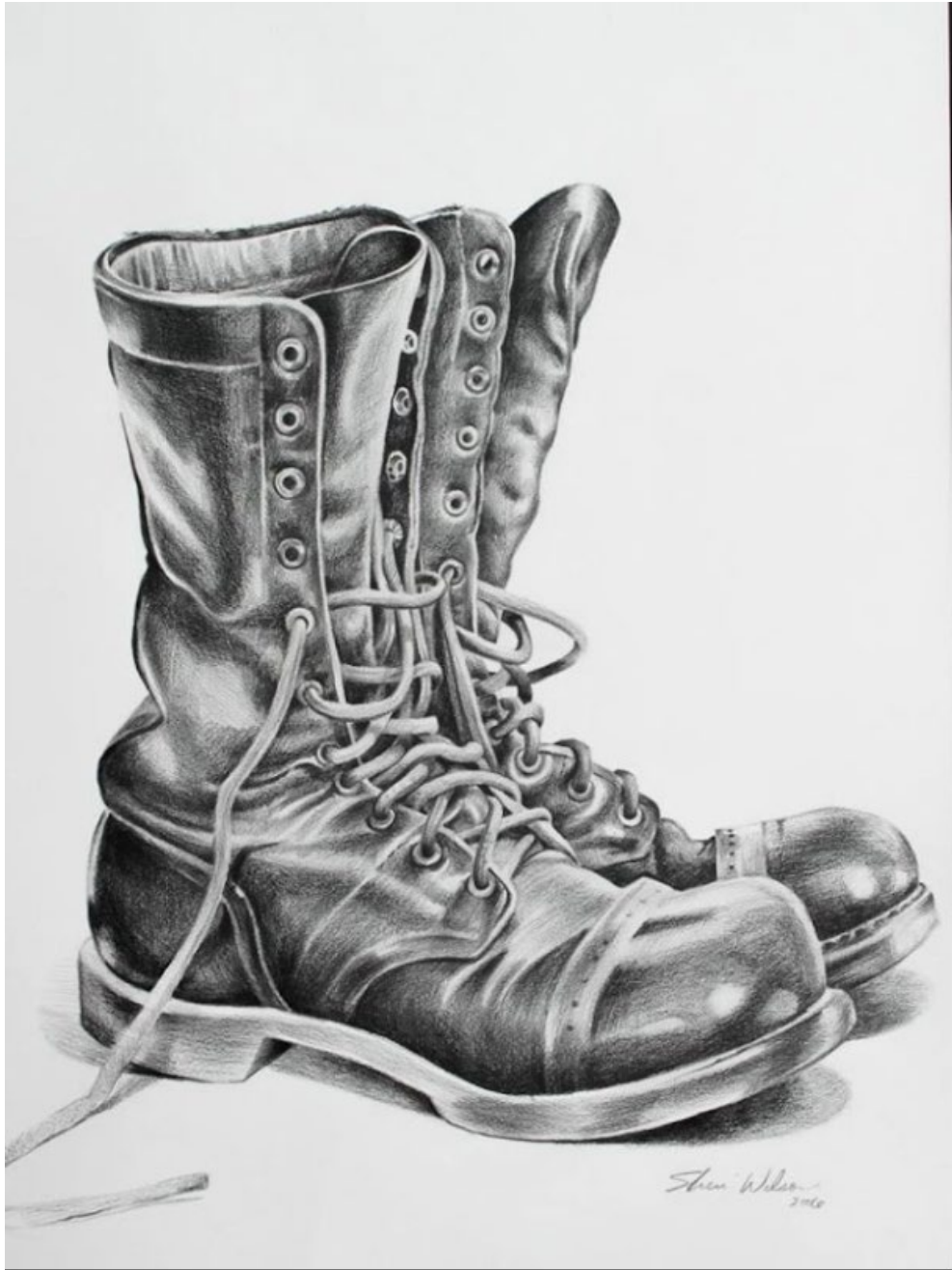
The stop light flashes red and all the cars around became motionless. The grey clouds matched the melancholy setting. As I sat in silence, I tried not to look at the man as he dragged himself past my car. I hastily jerk my head to the opposite side of my window to avoid the guilt. I felt a feeling of eagerness and determination, but also a feeling of guilt and shame. It was as if his soul somehow touched mine.

Through the rear - view mirror, I could see the man getting smaller and smaller. The vehicles in line remained at rest, giving the man time to skim by and plead. A maroon truck rolls down their window and a pale hand reaches out with a brown bag. The man of sorrow looked up and down and immediately grabbed the gift. At that moment, his expression shifted immensely. For a moment, his face glowed with an unimaginable hope. His face relaxed, as if the burdens of his life just rolled off his shoulders. Shortly after, I saw the soft pale hand reach out and grasp the rough textured hand of the man.

A kind gesture that brightened a jaded heart.

The light flashed green and I continued forward.

*Boots*  
Sheri Wilson  
1<sup>st</sup> Place Drawing



***Byways: Journal of Arts and Literature*** is a student publication featuring original creative written work: short fiction, poetry, song writing, non-fiction and drama. It also includes original art work: paintings, sculptures, photography, music score, music lyrics, short plays, and metal works.

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Please include your **title of work, art medium, email address, phone number** and **physical mailing address** with your submission.

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**“So innocent yet so faint”  
(Black and White Finger Paint by Natalie Rogers)**

**“His heart was out on a piece of cardboard that he found.”  
(Through the Rear-View Mirror by Victoria Kim)**

**“Time is going backwards.”  
(It’s Not Over Yet” by Amare D’sean Dykes)**

**“How could this have happened to me, isn’t it fair?”  
(Whispers Above as Echoes Below by Edward Eliza)**

**“IT’S A BEAR TRAP!”  
(Therapy by Ryen Becerril)**

**“In my hand, I catch a snowflake”  
(Snowflakes by Ashley Demers)**

**“Reminding myself that I truly am. Infinite.”  
(Infinite Prism by Konstantine Cross-Furr)**

