

Millpond Mosaic



2023

WELCOME TO OUR READERS

From Janine Dalton



elcome to Haywood Community College's First Edition of *Millpond Mosaic*!

We are beyond excited and so proud to share with you the creative talents and unique, artistic insights from our campus community! A mosaic presents a variety of perspectives in various shades and shapes that make up a visual collective. The small parts—while beautiful on their own—blend to make one visual from many pieces. The voices and views that emerge from the short stories, essays, photographs, and original artwork here present individual, meaningful experiences and let us see “behind the eyes” of the artist in a way that resonates.

That's what is powerful and necessary about art...it reveals connection on the most meaningful level. It explores what it means to be human in various places and times. What we learn is that while time and place may change, we are motivated by the need to be seen and understood—to connect our personal experience to the larger mosaic of our community's shared experience. Art is where humanity is shared; where we explore the triumphs, the tragedies, the beauty, and the pain—and where we recognize our similarities and appreciate our differences as part of the overall mosaic of life.

Art brings that intangible recognition of community to life, through shared stories, appreciation of artwork, music, and dance. A story or essay resonates with our own experience or allows us to better understand another's experience or views. A photograph or painting puts us “behind the eyes” of the artist and allows us to see through another's lens and perhaps reimagine the familiar. We come to realize that there always is and always will be more to the story of our individual lives and the life of our community.

We hope you find enlightenment, joy, hope, and insight through the written and visual art shared so gra-

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ciously with our campus community in this first edition of HCC's *Millpond Mosaic*.

Thank you to the writers and artists whose insights, experiences, and perspectives are collected here. And much appreciation to HCC faculty and staff who've lent their time, talent, and expertise to our first publication!

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KENNA LAWING

First Place Original Artwork
Untitled





Autumn, 2022.

I do not have connections with other people,
Although I long to.

But Nature, you are always around me,
So, I will complement you.

You are a witness to my loneliness.

You feel my hurt and pain.

Your emotions are expressed

In storms, wind, and rain.

You smile at me with sunshine

To dry my tears away.

You fill my ears with bird's song

To calm my heart each day.

My anger is something that

You are acquainted with quite well.

For I have heard you express it

In Thunder's yell.

The reason you bring destruction

Is to make things new again.

So, I will take comfort in this fact,

And know that you are my friend.

Expressions of your personality

Are complements to me.

So, I will accept them with grace

And humility.

Grim Reaper Meets Carnival Barker

The explosion fractures the flesh and bones from the spirit. Your soulmate's energy exiting from the tangible world generates the detonation that envelopes you, causing hope to wither and die with undeniable finality. You will be in a fugue-like state of mind as you wade through the fragmentation left behind. The barker beckons you to participate in the activities. Like an ill child on the brink of vomiting on the midway, you would rather not partake of the displays, sideshows, and rides the Grim Reaper has orchestrated for your survival.

After observing the life ebb from a person's body, the emotional rollercoaster plummets you down as you express your final private goodbyes to the shell of the person you once cherished. The stillness does not grant you a sigh, a smile, or a grasp of their once-warm hand. This tragic moment of loss is for you and yours to share intimately. Your tears flowing damp upon their unresponsive frame will be only a trickle compared to the flood of emotions to come.

The subsequent entrants to the "show" are the medical practitioner required to declare a death and the arrangers that dispose of the remains. Likely feeling in-firm, you must set the wheels of inevitability in motion by allowing strangers in your midst. A nurse or doctor will arrive to document that you, indeed, have lost the love of your life. Undertakers have an all-season pass to the spectacle of death and will next roll in with their own wheels of motion, departing with an unwieldy

load, not nearly as heavy as the heart left behind.

While your heart tightens in your throat, you are obliged to initiate verbal contact with children, siblings, friends, and relatives to convey the news. Though this duty is painful, there are no concessions. What kind of carnival is this? You are stuck inside a Gravitron, unable to pull away from the pressure. The pounding in your ears sounds like an echo outside your body as you utter words such as, "...died..." "I hadn't thought..." "...funeral, yes."

Soon a parade of people descends upon your doorstep with copious amounts of food. Now commences a sideshow that will call for great skill and daring. As steaming casseroles and a palette of edibles magically appear on your countertops, you hope a talented grand marshal is among the parade's participants to balance, shove, and maneuver the oblong dishes with the hexagonal plates. The Tupperware containers that do not stack get squeezed into the nooks and crannies of your refrigerator, and nonperishables remain Jackson Pollock-style, splashed upon the dining table, the buffet, and any horizontal surface covered with Formica. You will be overwhelmed and confused by the volume of provisions residing alongside your queasy stomach. You are confident that consuming the victuals will result in a more elaborate artistic expression of the paint job in your kitchen.

Now that your support people are with you, you will be back on the rollercoaster, but this time with a bud-


dy. You can permit the masquerade to fall away. “Step right up! Get your despair and all the tears you want right here! We’ve got sobs for mama and blubbering for papa. If you want something special for aunts and uncles, try the deep moans and high keening.” The barker, however, offers a concession or two as shared memories surface to give way to a chuckle or teary-eyed laughter, a lofty reprieve from the nosedive you have endured on the ride thus far.

While you have someone at your side, it is time to handle the imperative task of tending to final arrangements. Your experience at the mortuary might feel like you are back on the midway, with hawker’s wares placed on display. In one corner, you may see an exhibition of luxurious silks with colors akin to gemstones: ruby, emerald, citrine, and lapis lazuli, representative swatches for the interior of a casket. Another niche may present rich brown walnut, reddish-brown cherry, or white pine, all carved to hold the remains of your cherished person when their time has expired. If you choose cremation, you will get to select your prize, be it metal, stone, or wood; the urn can reside on the shelf in the same room as the Pikachu won in a test-your-skills game before the Grim Reaper arrived. Hmm, ash and Pikachu are together, and you smile to yourself, knowing the joke would please your loved one—the rails of the rollercoaster track slope upward for a fleeting moment.

The next ride’s twists and twirls will make you feel like you just stepped off the Scrambler. At the funeral home, you are confused by the melange hitting your senses. You view pictures placed hither and thither, featuring notable events involving your beloved from a previous existence that seems surreal. You hear sniffing, whimpering, and snatches of conversation visitors attempt to shield from your comprehension. The usually intoxicating sweet perfume of roses, the pungent odors of lilies and chrysanthemums, and the spicy

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aroma of carnations are thick in the air, like the fog in your head. Your mind is dizzy, still spinning as you endure ceremonies telling tales of days when your dearest was alive.

Following the memorial service, as the procession of guests marches back to their former lives, you are faced with a lifelong pass to amusements and entertainments without your significant other. As the condolence flowers wither and die, the barker will continue to cajole you into partaking in life. There will be ups and downs, jolts, and jumps along the way. A smorgasbord of events and exhibits will present themselves and sometimes overwhelm you. Until the Grim Reaper appears for the next harvest—try to enjoy the show. 

ELIZABETH ASHCRAFT

First Place Photography
Untitled



El Ser o No Ser?

It was October 27, 2003, when I was born, and I stayed in the U.S until my mom recovered from labor. Once she recovered, we visited Mexico, where I would spend 2-3 years living there. Schooling in Mexico was not the best, but these were the years that I learned my first language, Spanish. I became fluent and could communicate my wants and needs in Spanish. It wasn't just the language; it was the collectivistic culture, the authentic food, and the honoring traditions. It was time to come to the United States and attend kindergarten. I didn't understand English; therefore, making friends was hard. I felt like no one understood me, and it wasn't until 5th grade that I had finally mastered English with some friends with me. I noticed that without English, I would not have friends. This realization impacted me in my adolescent years and led me to doubts.

"Why didn't you make friends with other Hispanic kids?". You may be asking.

Being in an unfamiliar environment and being the new kid didn't make me any more comfortable with them.

Going into high school, I had concluded that if I only spoke English, I would have more friends. I did make many friends using English, so I started letting Spanish go slowly. I'd forget phrases or words, and it went to a point where I did not want to be in a romantic relationship with a Hispanic man. I had a bad example of male

Hispanic partners growing up. I distinctly remember one afternoon coming home from Sam's Club. My brother, along with my mom, were collectively bringing the groceries into the house. I had an interaction with my brother.

"Where do you want me to put this?". My brother asked, holding a big box of Capri-suns.

"Uh pónmelo en la sandía?".


After those words left my mouth, I was astonished. "Put it on the watermelon." How did I forget how to say table in Spanish? Such a simple word, and I failed. It still shocks me to this day, and I remember whenever I forget a word.

I didn't like Hispanic music, but it happened to be my mom's whole playlist. I remember telling her I didn't like it and it was imposible to understand. Then, my sophomore year of high school, my mom invited me to a party where Hispanic music was playing, of course. I had nothing to do, so I agreed. The music at this party was so loud that we had to yell to talk. As the night passed, I found myself dancing with a guy to the music. I find out he only speaks one language, Spanish. I get to talk with this guy named Elio, and we eventually become a couple. He sent me a Hispanic love song, and suddenly, the music flowed perfectly. The song was called "Pídeme" and the lyrics are beautiful. "Pídeme la luna para ir por ella O tal ves la rosa mas bella, pide lo que quieras pero no me pidas que me olvide de ti".

Translated to English is “ask for the moon so I can go get it for you or maybe the most beautiful rose, but don’t ask me to forget about you”.

The drums, trumpets, trombones, and words fit so beautifully. Slowly my playlist became filled with Hispanic music, and I loved it. Elio forced me to re-learn Spanish. I ended up learning more than I had ever known. My relationship with Elio eventually ended, but my love for my culture grew.

As time went by, I started to embrace my ethnic side. I even went as far as making Mexican sweet bread which takes 6 hours. I am still into Hispanic music of any kind, from reggaetón to cumbia. My favorite genre must be corrido’s tumbados. I recovered my accent and knew more Spanish than “street talk,” which I take pride in. I learned more about culture-related hairstyles and even went as far as learning about my bloodline. Looking at the region my parents are from, I am full Aztec! I will learn more about myself and hopefully master a dialect native to Mexico. Until then, I will keep cooking and baking more into my culture.

If there is anything to gather from this literacy narrative, it would be not to lose yourself. The idea of yourself is what makes you, you. It may be your language, culture, or even ethical features of yourself. I know what it is like to realize that one language unites you with friends and ties your own language to your roots. What would have happened if I had never accepted my mom’s invitation? What if I never fully heard the music? My love for my culture is a big part of me and makes me who I am. Yes, we have a lot of issues in our community, but what community doesn’t? To be or not to be? I am Mexicana and proud of my culture. 

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KENNA LAWING

Untitled



My Eightieth Birthday, 2056

Well, today is May 6, and it is my birthday. I am turning 80 today. As I sit inside my pod, I am reflecting on many of my birthdays. I have had some good ones and others that were not so good. I remember my seventh birthday. It was one of my favorites. My grandmother sent me seven dollars in the mail that year. That was a lot of money back in 1983. My brother walked me to the corner store, and we bought a lot of candy with those seven dollars. The walk was about one-fourth a mile. It was a pleasant walk. The flowers were in full bloom, and I could smell their pleasant fragrance. There were roses, daffodils, and gardenias blooming in my mother's yard when we stepped outside. Their scent was so enticing that I had to pause, bend down, smell and touch them. I am adding this because today, we do not get to do this. We live in our pods and just engage in virtual reality. We click on the links of places that we want to visit. We have a device that we hold to our nose, and we can click on an item if we want to smell it. That is not the same as picking up a living flower and holding it in our hands. I will never forget the first time I held one of my mom's roses in my hand and smelled it. It was a beautiful experience...the first time I ever touched na-

ture and smelled it. How nice it was to engage in sweet communion with my mother's flowers before walking to that corner store. That memory still sticks with me even though it was 73 years ago today.

I stuck one of those flowers in my hair behind my ear and walked with my brother to the store. We picked out all kinds of candy: Now and Later, suckers, chocolate Reese cups, Babe Ruths, a Payday, and Three Musketeers. We also bought each of us some Coca-Colas. Yes, my seventh birthday was one of my favorites.

When we got home my mother had made some fried chicken patties with mashed potatoes, butter beans, and a homemade chocolate cake with icing. My twin sister and I enjoyed every bite. It was a wonderful dinner, and we were so happy that our grandparents showed up.

Another birthday I will never forget is my ninth birthday. When my twin sister and I got home from school, we were surprised to see one of our parent's friends at our house. She did not come over that often. We did not realize that she was here to see us. Our mother told us to sit on the couch for a moment and when we did, we were given the doll that we had been wanting for a year. It was a baby doll that came with a bottle; when you fed it the bottle, the baby doll would

move. It was a cute baby doll wearing a pink shorts suit with puffed sleeves. The doll had curly blonde hair with plump arms and legs and cute dimples in its cheeks. My twin sister and I used to go outside and push our dolls in a plastic stroller for hours. We used to pretend that we were mothers. We had not heard of video games, iPhones, iPads, or virtual reality. We had imaginations in those days. Nature was our playhouse. We experienced the whole outdoors. It was wonderful! We may not have seen the world with our natural eyes, but we experienced it. People today do not understand what it is like to feel the warm, sandy beach underneath their feet. They do not know the feeling of running on the hot concrete in the summer or cold and damp grass on an early spring morning. I would not even know how to begin to express to someone what it is like to be young and build a Sandcastle for the first time. It is a shame that people do not know today.

A few people in the cloud have asked me what I want for my 80th birthday. I wonder what they would think if I told them that it is to experience life out in the real world, out in nature with the birds, the flowers, and the scents of the trees. I want to hear dogs barking, birds singing, a cat with a soft meow, and a cow moo again. I want to hear it in real life like I used to. I want to smell the scent of living things. I want to walk along and feel the apples as they start to ripen on their trees like I did when I was a girl on Evening Drive. And I want to pass this love of land and nature to the people in the modern generation. We were never meant to live in pods connected to a virtual world. We were meant to be out in nature, connecting with it and being one with it. H

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JACOB HOKE

“Looking Glass”



ALISSA HOLMES

“Summer”

Autumn, 2022.

Summer, you are a friend of mine.

You bring me luscious fruit on the vine.

You surround me with the sun's soft
warmth

And refresh me with your breeze.

You serenade me with exquisite music

When birds sing in the trees.

You provide for me the magnificent gift,

Of a grassy lawn,

Which is a soft carpet

For my feet to walk upon.

You deliver a plethora

Of delightful smells my way.

Transporting me to nostalgic time

From long ago days.

I wish that you could abide with me

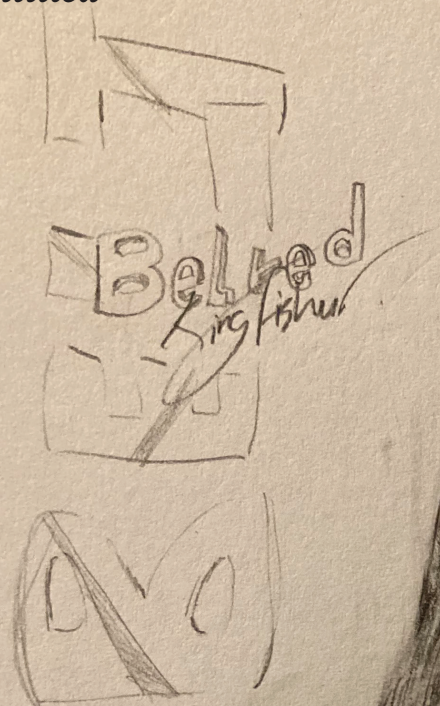
Till my life's days are through,

Because I find such delight

In spending time with you.

SOPHIA STEELE

Untitled



JACOB HOKE

“Overlook”



Dancing with the Stars

Astronomy, where can I even begin? Well, probably at the beginning. My fascination with the stars began around the ripe age of ten; all I could do was look up at the sky and see little bright lights. As my curiosity grew, I accumulated more knowledge from my father's childhood friend. He would show me how certain stars would line up to form a "constellation" and showed me Orion and The Big Dipper. We would go out late at night and see how many I could identify. Eventually, times became difficult, and my late-night adventure to the back porch no longer took place.

Throughout my life, I have always looked up to the sky. It was an escape from reality. It was an escape that helped me cope with the world around me. I could stay up so late to look at the stars in the first place because I was not enrolled in school for a lovely five years. When my parents split apart, my world fell apart. I had to go back to school one year behind what I should have been. I didn't realize my life was about to become more complex. When things eventually got worse, I needed that escape to the night sky more than ever. The only person I could rely on was myself, and I lived in my head more than in the "real world" because it was safe. I wasn't judged for my looks or lifestyle by anyone; ev-

erything was possible. Through all those moments of trauma and fear, I would leave and sit outside as inside was not safe. I would look around the darkness and wonder what was lurking. What was lurking in the places I could not see? The sky would eventually catch my attention. As I looked up, counting each star and pointing out each constellation, I felt relief. There is more out there than the little life I live, and this moment will pass and all the other scary moments that follow.

Once I finally gained freedom from my situation; I could entirely focus on what expanded my mind. What intellectually simulated me? What was my passion? It turned out to be Astronomy. Well, it's not that simple. I was initially going to pursue a degree in Criminal justice, thinking that was my calling. But then I went to spend time with my distant family, and I got a whole new perspective. When discussing my career goals and passions, I never mentioned anything related to Criminal Justice. I talked my families ears off about Astronomy for hours. Both my aunt and uncle said, "you are so passionate and knowledgeable in science and astronomy, this is what you should pursue career wise not criminal justice".

I thought about it for a few days and realized they

were right! I quickly changed my schedule about three days before school started, and here I am. I never thought the thing that helped me cope with the world around me would become the passion I pursued in college and as a career. As a child in an abusive situation, I was never truly present. It hurt too much. But now that I can be mentally present again, I am here to make a difference. I'm here to create a positive change and to show myself how far I have come. I am proud to be independent, strong, and courageous. I did it all by myself. I'm literate in astronomy because I have a personal connection to it. Always being curious made me want to know the science behind it. I knew the classes I would have to take wouldn't be easy but necessary. This path, not being easily accessible, will make it more memorable. This path will show that I am more than capable of accomplishing anything I set my mind to. For me the night sky was an escape because it was larger than life itself. It always grabbed my attention as a child growing up, especially through the abusive parts of my life. It was beyond my reality, and it slowly became a possibility for my future educational goals and career. I'm thankful I was given the chance to pursue my passions and learn more about what's outside the small life I live.



As I looked up, counting each star and pointing out each constellation, I felt relief. There is more out there than the little life I live, and this moment will pass and all the other scary moments that follow.

MARIAH PUTNAM

Untitled



KENNA LAWING

Untitled



A Jungle in the Sand

Dancing within a daze of imaginary play, the boy pranced down the beach. His hair swayed in the breeze as he glanced out at the vast expanse of water, making pirate ships of the sea foam on the horizon and adventure beckoned just beyond his grasp. Young children always dream of grand adventure and travel, but the boy had an imagination barely within grasp, able to dream up mountains of possibilities while his home remained within his gaze.

The boy leapt upon a rock and roared at the sea, calling up jubilation at the wild nature of childhood and laughed himself silly when he watched the seagulls swoop down into the waters, imagining them to be fighter pilots for him to defeat.

He flung broken shells at their wings, earning his victory over the great bird army. He cheered at his own success and began his trek towards the mainland, envisioning his next battle strategies for when the pirates one day reached the shore.

The boy often concocted images of war, much to his mother's dismay, and the battle cry he had developed was fierce enough for her to contain any comments she may have made on the matter. His spirit was left untamed by his parentage, and his banishment to the outdoors most days allowed the child to revel in every moment of his fantasies.

The harsh clanging sound of the dinner bell called the child back to reality, as he began sprinting up the dune and peered down at his home built on the solid sand a distance away from the shifting coast. He imagined what awaited him within those secure walls and the sounds of explosions rang through his ears. A wide grin was drawn across his face by his recollection. Barely keeping traction as he barreled down the hill, the boy began to smell charred cod and boiled vegetables that

his mother has prepared for him.

Despaired by the idea of such a vile meal, the bitter taste vividly recalled to his tongue, the boy swiftly ducked around the house and fled towards the small grove of trees that blocked him from an oasis of tide pools and the balmy, coastal breeze. He could hide in the bleak paradise for as long as he wished and live within his own reality without the pounding of his head that always formed from consuming his mother's cooking.

Trudging through the brush and bog, the child paused in wonder as his imagination transformed the dull wood into a thick jungle. Vines dropped around him, with thick, luscious bushes sprouting in his wake. The low-lying trees shot towards the sky and their canopies bloomed with leaves that blocked out the sweltering sun and left the boy in the dim light of dusk.

He created before him a perfect rendering of the Vietnam jungles shown night after night on the living room television, for he was an avid watcher of the war coverage. The boy laughed joyously, as his ears filled with the sounds of birds, and he heard the riotous cry of monkeys in the distance. He quickly searched the ground, until he found the perfect specimen. A long, smooth stick found his eye, but all he saw was the gleam of a clean rifle. He grabbed it in his small fists and rested the base on his shoulder, his finger naturally finding the trigger, before he began his advance into the great unknown.

Even with the dark surrounding, the boy gave no pause and continued into the dark wood. His familiarity with the scene would bewilder most individuals, but his mind had become at home in the foreign biome over the past year. The skip in his step only faltered when stepping over logs or traversing thick brambles

AUTUMN MCCARSON

Literary Magazine Submission

that caught and ripped his clothes and left small cat scratches smeared with blood across his skin.

The boy's finger remained posed, ready to fire at the first sign of danger. The shrill cries of the monkeys echoed towards him as he continued to press on, growing nearer to their chaotic symphony. Goose bumps arose on the child's flesh and nerves raced down his back as the sounds echoed through his bones.

As he grew near the cacophony, the screams began to surround him. Yet, the closer he grew, the more the screams seemed to change. With his eyes peeled wide, the boy stumbled to the top of a hill within the forest and peered down through the lush, tropical foliage to the valley below.

What startled the boy most was not the presence of a hundred howling men, but rather the rich, vibrant red of the water running through the center of the valley. The waters ran heavily downstream, disappearing into thicker jungle, yet the red and pink hues could be seen through the whole length of the stream visible from the boy's vantage point.

The child had only ever dreamed up waters of turquoise and deep blue before, shades he found in books displaying images from across the world but seeing the shades of red and pink sent a thrill through him. He had never imagined such pretty, gem-colored waters. He began to tumble down the hill, practically somersaulting in his haste to reach the sweet waters.

In his bound, he wound past the noisy men and avoided vast craters. The men's moans rested easy in the child's ears, becoming as forgotten as the serene, idle chatter of chickadees. Resting his rifle down on a rock by the riverbank, the child knelt by the stream. The mud squished under his knees and soaked through his pant legs. The boy dreamed as he gazed into the waters, his mind jumping to the delicious juice of cherries his mother often bought him, drawing up his memory of the delectable treat filling his tastebuds with tarte delight.

Hunching his small shoulders forward, he cupped his hands in the stream. The boy had quickly brought the chilled water to his lips and drank swiftly. Where

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Literary Magazine Submission

his tongue expected the sweetness of berries it was met with brine and iron. The child swallowed with a cringe and flinched back from the waters, causing himself to fall backwards.

His hands braced behind to catch himself and met the earth with a squelch. The boy peered over his shoulder and found clumpy, red muck smooshed under his palms. He paused, as he glanced at the ground, wondering at the light pink and tan goo that littered the earth. He shuddered when he realized the remaining intestines of a man was what oozed from beneath his fingers, the stickiness of the flesh immediately nauseating him.

His brief scream melded with the sickening serenade playing around him. The child pushed away and fell forward on his knees before he clawed at the earth in an attempt to steady himself before he stood. His dreams had always offered him hours of bliss, but the horror of the moment struck him like an iron fist.

The boy looked down at his hands, appalled at the small chunks of flesh and blood that stained his palms, and the shock rocked him as he began to tremble. He took many quick steps backwards, trying to escape his body that felt defiled by the gore stuck beneath his nails. When he looked back towards the woods around him, his eyes began to finally register the nightmare he resided in.

Within the large craters he had previously ignored, men lay in shambles. Half a face, ripped from a man ten meters away, lay less than a foot away from the long-forgotten rifle. The screams were clawed from the fortunate survivors who had only lost limbs in the explosions that had torn through the earth. Yet, many of

the living men were covered in the burnt skin and organs of their fallen companions.

The boy immediately turned his back on the scene, bile stirring in his gut, and sprinted through the stream to escape his demonic surroundings. His feet hit the far bank and he began to descend further into the wood. His mind reeled with the dreamscape that surrounded him, but before he made it ten feet into the thicker jungle, the earth beneath him rocked with the great powers of an explosion.

Swept from his feet, the child flew through the air, with his ears ringing and the tang of blood sweeping his tongue. When his body returned violently to the ground, the boy lay dazed before coughs racked through his body and his blood ran from his lips.

Though the men that he had witnessed in agony were capable of wailing, both here in his personal hellscape and on the television screen he loved so much, small whines were all that passed through him, and his eyelids began to flutter with the weight of keeping them open.

At home, his mother stood concerned but patient on the porch, watching the top of the dune. A small bottle of pills rattled in her hand, as she waited for her son to arrive home for supper.

The schizophrenic boy lay still in the wood though, as scenes of war ripped through his head as fast as the events played out on the TV every evening. His vision blurred and reality began to right itself around him, showing the edge of the small grove of trees by the sea. The child lay impaled on a freshly fallen branch, ripped from a nearby tree during a recent storm, and his eyes shut one final time as the incessant clanging of the dinner bell entered his ears.



SHERI CONNER

Untitled



JACOB HOKE

“Proximity”



JACOB HOKE

"Graveyard"



KEGAN HAMPTON

“Ode to a Butterfly”

How sad butterfly, that you should fall and die.
Amongst the shining daisies thy lofty body lie.
If thou wer't dull and lifeless as is the woodland moth,
No sylph of sky which flips and dives could fold thee in thy coff'.
But thou wouldst hide in vernal times and drink in darkest night,
And none would see thy neon beams a'flashing in the light.

KADEN BYRNE

Untitled



SHERI CONNER

Untitled



From Scented Markers to Oil Paint

Developing my painting and art literacy has helped me build confidence, develop a sense of self, and has been a steady source of comfort that I have always been able to come back to. Art has been a familiar face my whole life, but somehow I think I have always kind of taken it for granted. But when I stop to ponder it, I have realized that this literacy has really been remarkable for me.

I can so vividly remember that pan of dollar tree markers. Some of them had a scent to them, you know; like the red one was cherry, and so on. This pleased my four year old self. Some nights, when I wouldn't be able to sleep, I remember clambering down the stairs and retreating to my little corner in the living room to draw. And it would feel so late at night to me, though it was probably only 8:30, and I remember feeling hazy in that poorly lit corner. But I felt completely content criss-cross applesauced on the hardwood floor; drawing with my cheap but treasured art supplies. And all too soon it was suddenly back up the dark stairs again. I remember also being very young, and drawing hands.

Page after page, I would lay there in my corner, with bony elbows digging into the hard floor. I don't remember much about those distorted outlines of "hands," but I remember feeling unsatisfied with them. And my four year old self would unsteadily draw the blob, crumple it, and get another 8.5x11 piece of paper. I didn't seem to care if I failed, I just loved the literal act of drawing. It made me content.

Even if I had not developed a personal love for art, I still would have been exposed to it. My Dad is a professional oil painter. He graduated from Indiana University, and moved to New York City where he got his graduate degree. My whole life, I've always been able to see him in his studio, painting. I grew accustomed to the musty smell of oil paint early on. I have young memories of going into my Dad's studio just to watch him. I would spin around and around on that black swivel chair while my Dad painted pieces that I can now appreciate more. I believe that we are influenced by what is around us a lot more than we realize. This was certainly true for me. There is no doubt in my mind

MARGARET ALLSBROOK

Literary Magazine Submission

that my Dad's art career has influenced me to develop a love, and more importantly, appreciation for art.

Being the youngest in a family definitely has perks, but like everything in the world, it also has some downsides. Growing up, I definitely developed a sense of inferiority. This gradually became heightened as my older siblings started going to high school, college, studying abroad, getting married, and so on. It is sometimes difficult for me to not feel left behind. I have always been the one who went to every band concert. Every dance recital. Every graduation ceremony. And then eventually, it was my turn to play in the concert, and my turn to graduate middle school. Except, my parents were usually the only attenders. This burden is a light one to carry; but as a little girl, it sometimes felt crushing. Somehow my art literacy helped me with this. Art speaks for itself. That, I think, is the beauty of it. I don't have to perform; the art itself already does that. I look back and cringe at some of the sketches that I once believed to be absolute perfection. But those were the drawings that comforted me so much. And somehow it didn't matter how horrible the drawing was, because it was mine. I drew it.

Art has always been a strong, guiding friend to me. From the time that I spent sprawled on that hardwood floor, to now. My art literacy has impacted who I am as a person. It has built my confidence, guided me to finding my sense of self, and has quietly comforted me through whatever hardships I have gone through. Just like that little girl with her scented markers, I still get up to draw whenever I cannot sleep. I always will. ✚

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JACOB HOKE

“River”



SHERI CONNER

Untitled



Football's Impact

When people talk about football, it usually consists of competition or rivalry. While those aspects are certainly important, many people don't think about the sport's other more hidden qualities like comradery and bond building. When adversity presents itself throughout the season, good teams become closer and overcome obstacles together. This effort and comradery could be compared to soldiers sharing the same roof or even brothers looking out for one another. Moving at a key age in my childhood, I would come to appreciate these qualities more as playing football allowed me to create crucial friendships I couldn't imagine not having today.

I remember the first day I showed up to football practice in North Carolina. It was the summer of 5th grade, and I was the introverted new kid who just so happened to be bigger than everyone on my team. I wasn't a stranger to this though as I've played football most of my memorable life. I was in fact, though, a stranger to making friends. I feel this is because of my shy tendency to not reach out and talk to people so naturally.

That first day of practice with my team in NC, I was nervous on the car ride to the field. I showed up late because of sign-up procedures, but this was right at the time hitting drills started. I was anxiously sitting in line waiting for my turn, but I knew this was my make-or-break moment to prove myself. When the time arrived, the coaches looked at me and said, "Line this boy against someone more his size!" With that came this huge kid from the back of the line. I felt as if he was towering over me in size, but I was determined to stand my ground and not make a fool out of myself on the first day. We got in our stances and when the whistle blew, we both sprung forward. Neither of us could push the other back and after two grueling minutes, the

coaches finally decided to call a stalemate.

As average as that sounds, the whole team was cheering for me ecstatically as I held my own against the strongest kid on my new team. After practice, the kid came up to me to officially introduce himself as Jason! We found it awesome that we had the same name and were both strong starters on the team. We talked for some time and continued to hang out at practice. Our friendship evolved to the point where we're still good buddies to this day. This practice, or the entire season rather, boosted my confidence and helped me develop many early friendships going into my first year at a new school. Most of my team friendships are ongoing and football helped contribute to the development of close connections and others down the road.


Football has off-the-field aspects that helped develop my confidence as well. Still being as big as I was entering high school, I naturally picked up weightlifting as easily as football itself. Nobody knew this though because I was a rising freshman in high school. I would get labeled as a "freshie" and would have to do extra chores or after-practice cleanups. During the summer before the season started, our whole team maxed out on lifts to get accurate percentages for our routine. The varsity all went first and got their maxes before the freshman because naturally, they would have higher numbers. When I did my series of squats and bench presses, the numbers I produced were higher than most of the varsity team in general. This had the coaches shocked and the players even more surprised. I earned the respect that I could not have gotten any other way, especially being the "new kid" and self-isolated like I am. People started talking to me more and even gave me the nickname "Iron Wall." I was able to evolve my personality and confidence from the benefits of weightlifting and

JASON LANGLEY

Literary Magazine Submission

football, allowing me to come out of my shell. Halfway through my freshman season, I even developed the reputation to play in the starting squad. This was an honorable feat for a first-year high school player and new kid on the block! I developed confidence and got to know the upperclassmen as teammates and friends. I benefited in other ways too by creating a habit of working out daily, a discipline that I keep up with to this day.

My efforts to lay a foundational legacy in football did not just benefit me but have helped my siblings as well. I'm the oldest of four kids, all separated by three years each; so they were not far behind me. After I made a name for myself and completed my football career in elementary and middle school, my brother had to step into my shoes. He also has a passion for football but is introverted even more so than me. This shared love of football allowed us to bond well together but did not bode well for when we moved. So, I'm glad for him that he got to come into an environment that already knew the last name "Langley." People would ask him questions like "Are you going to be as good as your brother?" or say things like "I can't wait to watch you play!" This motivation really gave him that initial drive to be good or "live up to that legacy" because he did take the challenge to heart when he played. Every year he is striving to become better because he knows he must leave that same foundation when our next youngest brother gets to that point. It gets even better to think about the fact that it goes beyond football too. People all over the county now know about us through the teams we have played in and the places we have been.

It is fascinating the number of ways a sport like football can bring people together. No matter how you experience the game, from sitting on the couch watching your favorite team with family all the way to experiencing the game yourself with fellow brothers at war, football carries the building blocks to create long-lasting relationships, self-discipline, and connections to those who will follow in your footsteps. Without playing football, I would not be the same person I am right now and so many people that I call my friends would be complete strangers to me. 

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KENNA LAWING

Untitled



JACOB HOKE

"Haywood County"



KAYLEE BRYSON

“Reflections on a Mill Closure”



I remember as a small child, the first time I took notice of the Canton paper mill’s smokestacks. They sent out a puffy white smoke which ran directly into the clouds above. I remember asking my mother, “is that where clouds come from?” Similarly, whenever the black smoke came out of the paper mill’s smokestacks, I assumed that meant workers must be making storm

clouds. Sometimes, I would want to go outside and I wouldn’t be able to because it was stormy and raining. With my innocent world view, I would just blame the paper mill for making dark clouds that day. It’s hard to believe they are closing down the cloud maker that is such a part of our town’s history and our memories.

