

20
26

Millpond Mosaic



Alexis Castro

"Mill Wheel"



Millpond Mosaic 2026

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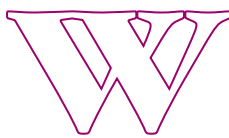
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From Janine Dalton

“For every oak and birch too growing on the hill-top, as well as for these elms and willows, we knew that there was a graceful ethereal and ideal tree making down from the roots, and sometimes Nature in high tide brings her mirror to its foot and makes it visible.”

—Henry David Thoreau, *“A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers,”* 1849

hen reflecting on HCC’s 60th anniversary, I have tried to imagine how the campus grounds must have looked back in 1965. Did the graceful and welcoming canopy of trees that line Freedlander Drive begin as saplings that stretched toward the sun in their daily commitment to growth? And the campus trails enjoyed by students, faculty, the community (human and furry friends), did these begin as wild woods that were tamed and cultivated over time?

The college’s main drive, Freedlander, is named in honor of a generous benefactor, A. L. Freedlander, whose vision and support for HCC’s place in and service to the community were the seeds planted in 1965. Four years later in 1969, a major site plan was developed by accomplished landscape architect, Doan Ogden, for HCC’s campus that included Freedlander’s vision for the future of Haywood Community College.

Freedlander’s vision would be many years in the making, beyond his lifetime, an investment in the community that would grow steadily over time. This vision was that HCC’s campus would be cultivated and nurtured, becoming one of the most diverse and gracious-

ly landscaped areas in Haywood County. Freedlander also envisioned and prescribed the planting and maintenance of a dahlia garden, as part of the campus landscape. One wonders if Freedlander might have likened the education and growth of HCC students to the care and maintenance of dahlias, with the end goal of seeing a stunning display of late season blooms each year.

While Freedlander participated in the groundbreaking on site in 1970 for HCC’s future campus, he passed in 1971 without seeing the campus grow from seedling, to sapling, to maturity. Freedlander likely understood the wisdom of the proverb, “A society grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they shall never sit.” The captivating natural beauty of HCC’s campus is a testament to the investment Freedlander and others made six decades ago, knowing that opportunities for learning, growth, and community service would thrive here among such natural beauty.

Sixty years later, our campus community continues to adapt to the changing vision for Haywood County, growing and thriving along with the diversity of over 1,000 trees that populate HCC’s campus, some over 140 years old, including Balsam, Alder, Hickory, Dogwood, Buckeye, Elm, Poplar, Birch, Willow, Oak, Hemlock, Pine, and more.

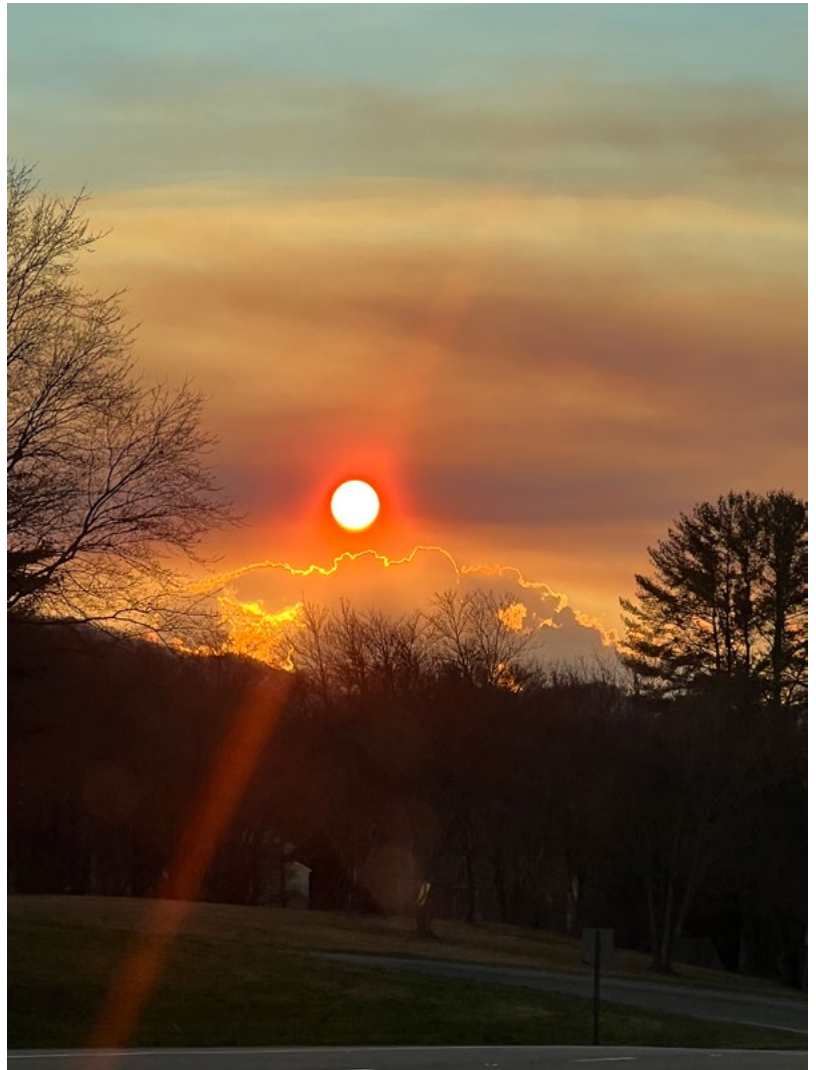
In 1979, Freedlander’s estate donated a mill wheel in memory of his generosity and vision for Haywood Community College. Following this donation, HCC students designed and constructed the mill house, located by the pond and visible from the college’s entrance. In 1987, a dedication ceremony recognized the unique collaboration among Freedlander’s estate (donating the mill wheel) and HCC students (building the mill house). One must imagine that Freedlander’s vision for the college’s role in the community was apparent in this moment.

Haywood Community College continues cultivating Freedlander’s vision, with nearly 40 more years of service to the community since the dedication of the mill house and Freedlander’s mill wheel in 1987. The mill pond and mill house are visual reminders that the past is present in many ways, that growth requires investment and cultivation, and that future generations benefit from the vision we embrace and foster today. ✦

Annette Crite

Between the Noise

*There is a quiet
hidden beneath the noise
between notifications,
unfinished thoughts,
and the hum of everything
I'm supposed to be.
It lives in small moments:
a pause,
a breath,
a second where nothing is expected.
I don't always notice it,
but it's there
waiting
for me to slow down
long enough
to hear it.*



Edith Juarez-Reyes

"Sun and Cloud"

Melina Strivelli

A Spring Scene

*Solace no longer
when the blooms
reach their peak*

*nostalgia by the river's shore
spring's the newest comfort of the week*

*As the wind blows
our sullen loneliness of
frost
quickly dissolves*

*Soft calls of birds invite skips in the park,
the sun offering warmth in the breeze*

*Until then, the blossoms await
the eternal peace
gifted by the ground below*

*and adoration
from us tranquil beings
who wish for
anything but snow*



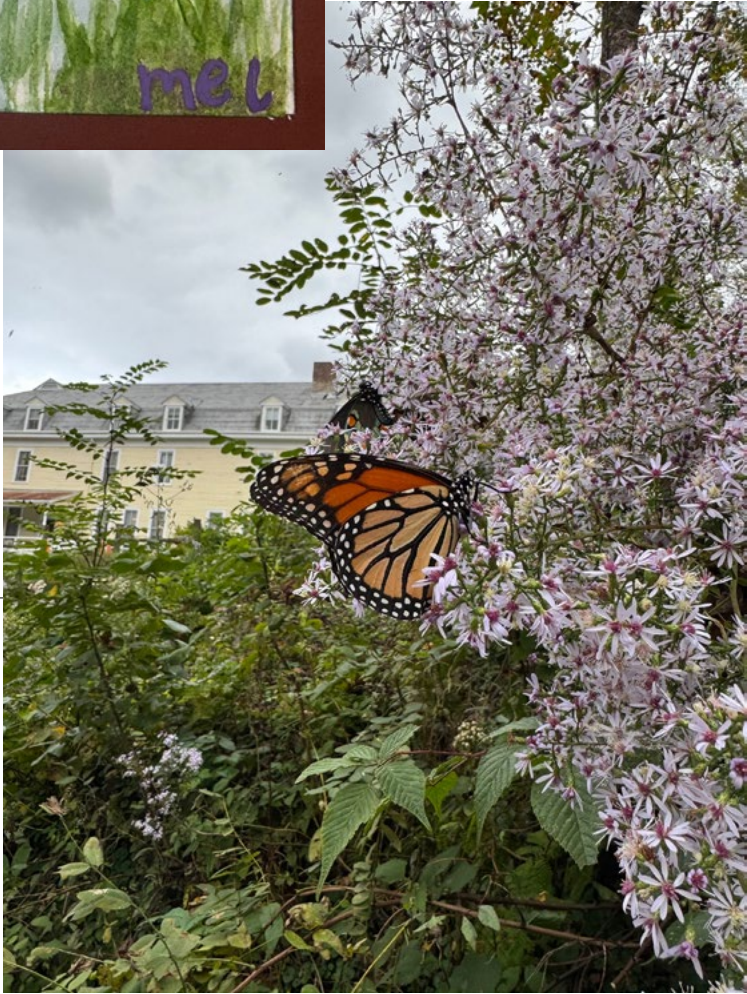
Helena Godfrey

"Friendsgiving"



Melina
Strivelli

"Monarch on Clover"



Helena Godfrey

"Monarch Musings"

The Woman Named Dolly

The following is an excerpt from a written interview based on a conversation between an anonymous Interviewer and Dolly Haney-Parsons. This interview was recorded in 1998.

The year is 1998. Three years before the new millennium. I have traveled to the small town of Masons, Ohio. It was there where I met Dolly Haney. Born Roberta June Haney, to parents Orson and Lacey Haney. Roberta changed her name legally at the age of sixteen to Dolly. To her parents' dismay, Roberta named herself after none other than singer, actress, and country music icon, Dolly Parton.

I sat down with Roberta to document her story; she was quick to correct me after I asked her if she preferred I call her Roberta or Dolly. She told me that legally, she was Dolly and that she only answered to that name. I interviewed those close to her. Her father, mother, sisters, and ex-husband share their stories on what life is like living with Dolly. I also interviewed some of the townsfolk in Masons. Everyone of the locals knew about Dolly. In fact, she had become known throughout the United States as the "crazy Dolly Parton lady." When I heard about this, I immediately knew that I would have to interview this woman. The following documents my time with Dolly.

I sat down with Dolly at her home. She lives in a beautiful two-story house surrounded by young trees. Some, no taller than five feet. When we first met, I made sure to inquire about the trees.

"Now, what kind of trees are these? Whatever they are, you must be fond of them; they surround the property!"

"Those are tulip poplars, I've grown them from saplings; they're like my babies!"

"Why Tulip poplars?"

"That's the prominent tree that populates Sevierville, Tennessee! That's where Dolly Parton's from. I just love that dear woman!"

"So, it is true then? You do love Dolly Parton?"

"With a passion! I'm just crazy about her. I think she's wonderful!"

"So, is she your idol?"

"Oh, goodness no! God is my idol, if I had an idol! I don't have one!"

Everyone of the locals knew about Dolly. In fact, she had become known throughout the United States as the "crazy Dolly Parton lady." When I heard about this, I immediately knew that I would have to interview this woman.

"Okay, so she's not your idol. But you do admire her, don't you?"

"If I saw her today, I would sing to her "I will always love you"! That's how much I admire her. After I'd sing to her, we both would cry. We would also hug!"

Roberta, or Dolly, is an Ohio native. Her accent though, is reminiscent of a Great Smokey Mountain, Tennessean accent.

"Your accent,"

"Yes?"

"It's very different from the other locals. Have you

Helena Godfrey

"Mountain Melodies"

always talked like you were from Tennessee?"

"Well, I use to sound like everyone else. But, I'm not like everyone else! I'm different. I'm Dolly! I've got to talk like Dolly! It's only right!"

After talking to Dolly, one of her sisters, Marla, arrived. I asked her some questions as Dolly left to make us some sweet tea.

"Marla, what has it been like to grow up with a sister like yours? Has it been difficult? I'm sure it has been far from normal."

"Well, that's putting it nicely! I've gotten use to it by now! For as long as I can remember she has always been "Dolly"."

"And how does the rest of your family feel? Your parents, your other sister?"

"...."

Marla didn't have any words to respond with. Dolly walked back out to the front porch, where Dolly and I had started the interview

"Let me give you the house tour! I'm so excited! You and Marla just come right on in!"

Dolly guided me and her sister through the house's front door into the living room. I bumped into a Dolly Parton life-sized wax figure which stood there in my way as soon as I walked through the front door.

"Oh, My!"

"I see you two have met!"

Dolly walked over to the wax figure and gave it a hug. "Here she is in all glory! A lady made this for me five years ago. We met at a Dolly festival in Texas, where she was from! She was so nice to gift this to me"

"Gift!? I thought you paid five-thousand dollars for this!"

"Shut up, Marla! It was a gift, a gift! We are best friends; we write each other all the time, Marla! Shut up!"

"She asked you to stop writing! Last thing she mailed you was a restraining order!"



After Marla's comment, we proceeded with the tour. We went deeper into the living room, which was littered with Dolly Parton Memorabilia. Dolly shows off her walls, which are covered with Posters and pictures from magazines.

"I've been following Dolly since '67. I've documented her entire career!"

"What you've done is create a fire hazard! One tiny little cigarette butt could burn this place down!"

"That's not going to happen, Marla! I told you that wouldn't happen again since I banned Uncle Abner from my house!"

"What happened?"

"Oh, Nothing! Just a little family squabble, that's all! Let's tour the upstairs, shall we?"

We make our way up the staircase leading to the second story of this residential shrine.

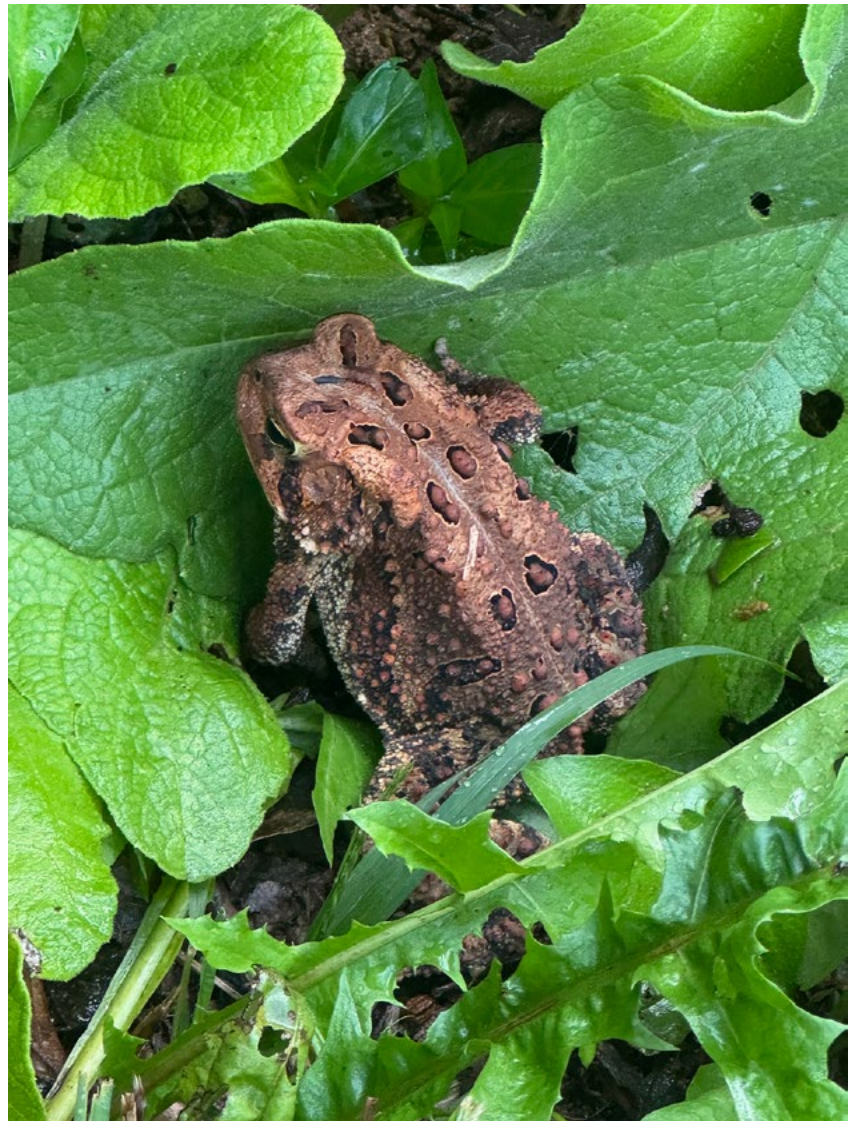
This is the end of the excerpt from the written interview based on a conversation between an anonymous Interviewer and Dolly Haney-Parsons. This interview was recorded in 1998.





Helena Godfrey

"Mushroom Meltdown"



Helena
Godfrey

"Forest Floor Frog"

Trans-Panic Defense

I'd prefer you don't.

Trans-panic.

Boys do cry.

Girls are strong.

They can: beat, rape, stalk, chase, kill, lie.

*I will say it again, rape is never consensual
it does not matter if it "felt good" that
does not equate to
consent.*

Fire my skin.

They have and they will.

28 dead and counting.

They can hide between
the law
and lies.

There is
a difference

between "them"
and
me.

the skins we wear~
How I evolve.

Darwin's theories first rejected.
The original Christians
questioned god.

My pronouns are he, him, his--...

It doesn't matter what I look like.
I am who I am.

Like the wind,
they cannot control me.

And, so they try harder
to push me, hold me down.
to make me smaller.

I am
a speck
of
stardust
a reflection
a
truth.

The in-between.
Intersex.



Trans-Panic Defense, continued

Uncircumcised.
I clean.

Dead name me, to see
if I am
a real boy?

I dare to walk, sing, dance, laugh, live,
create, read, dream,
hear
heal my own
voice
out loud in the tone and bathroom.

I choose.

I can, bind, remove, heal,
lift, learn, pass,
and earn equal pay
one day.

I want Respect.

To feel safe
walking down the street--
Eating dinner at a welcoming table in a
stable house.

It is ok to rent this home to me
- to be alone and at peace.



No more living every moment with fear.

No.

I cannot wait
inside,
alone, in the closet,
in a box,
under my bed.

No.

In a coffin, while, I am still breathing.
just lay here XXX
and play dead.

No.

Not today.
Not tomorrow.
No, thank you.

No.

I will wear my skin,
inside and outside,
all the same?

No.



Trans-Panic Defense, continued

I am sorry
I cannot help or hold your shame.

No.

My arms are filled with hope.

No.

That venom
Doesn't work on me
any
more.

No.

I have had enough.

NO.

No, thank you.

I am very different.

NO.

Please do not.

Trans-panic me.

No.\

The first words I spoke,
as an infant were,
no.

Please do not
Make me,

Make them
Be my last.

Sonnet of the Lost

*The warm summer's day beamed down blissful warmth
Exiting the cramped truck that drove us here
Sand I could see, from east, south, west, and north
And perfect silence was all I could hear*

*The trail of a river points to its head
The mouth of a beast that's long laid to rest
Its jaw stuck in motion left nothing unsaid
Say for the puddle that deafened its breath*

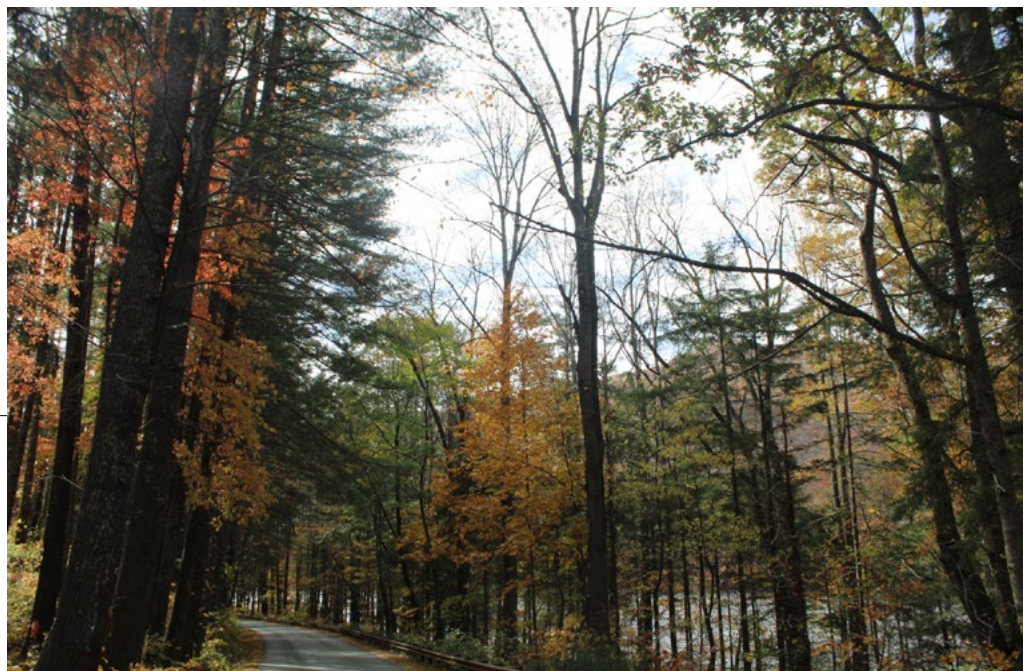
*Look! In the sky a bird, no two and three
Dancing like shadows above the canyon
As they descend to the cliffs gracefully
To gawk about their newfound companions*

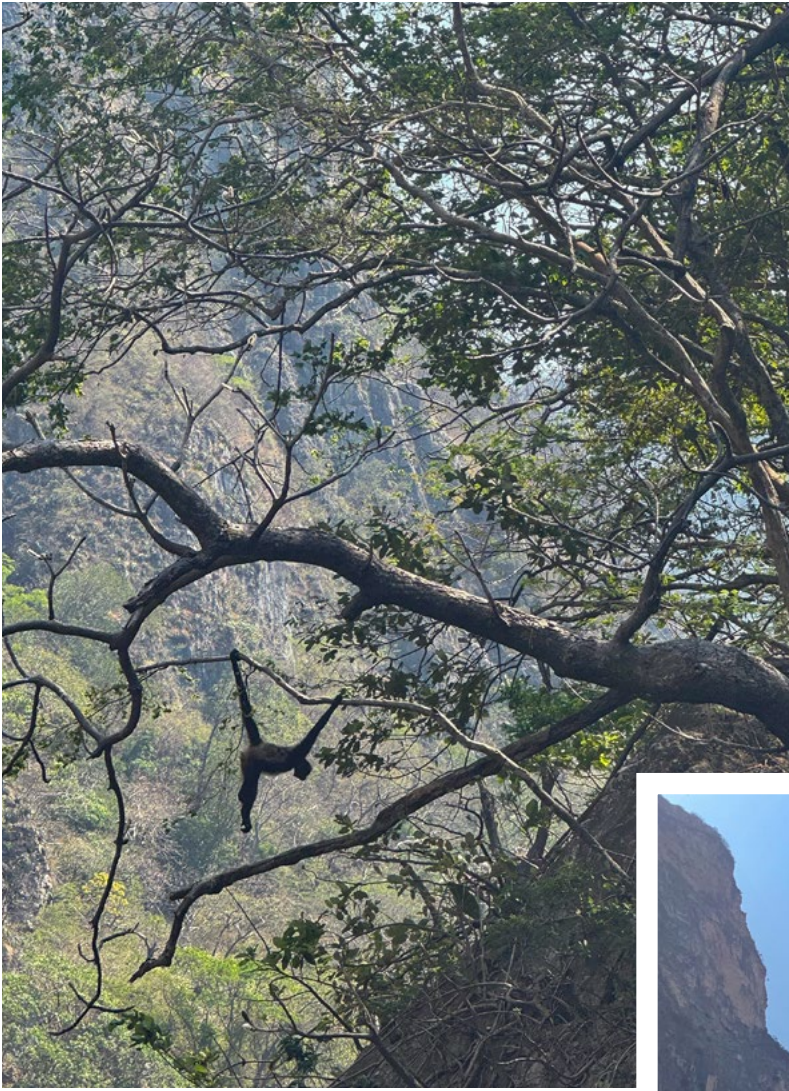
*Alas, I must depart; leave this place behind
And all I take is a shell to remind*

Dylan Doggett

Helena
Godfrey

"Forest Path"





Helena Godfrey

"Monkey Branches"

Helena Godfrey

"Mountains to Sea"





Guess Who?

Call it happenstance, wrong timing, serendipity, rough break, good fortune, big luck, tough luck, catching a silver lining, born under a dark cloud... All of these are euphemisms for that which may feel miraculous or at times sinister and is often unexplainable from a logical point of view. And yet, would not most all agree that flashes and dashes of this, the unexplainable, throughout our lives, provides a significant turning point along the way?

Here is a vivid little illustration of such an occurrence. Richard was a man of no singular affect, save for his right ear, which seemed to protrude from the side of his head at nearly a 90° angle. He was, by nature, a quiet man. A native of New Orleans, he had made his way north to Chicago after graduating from high school. This was a singular accomplishment for a man like him at that time. Upon arriving in Chicago in the late 30s, Richard set about to seek employment and build a future. Richard possessed a freed man of color's early dreams.

In late 1940, Richard found his way into the arms of a tiny woman whose tenderness served to quiet and steady him. They entwined themselves in a warm, loving relationship. Her name was Cara and she showed

Richard much affection. Soon a child was on the way. Richard and Cara hastily made plans for the future. It was unseemly at those times for Cara to be unwed while expecting a child. Richard and Cara could not afford a wedding, but went quietly to the justice of the peace and got married.

In the 1930s and through the 40s, there was much unrest and protest in Chicago caused by a variety of societal challenges. Organized crime exerted influence in Chicago and thoroughly entwined itself in the politics of this city, quilted with minorities of race and ethnicity. Chicago pre-WW II was very alive but unable to accommodate the numbers of regular folks coming from all over who provided the working base. Naturally, this was a platform for unrest. Housing was a particular hotbed issue, and especially for people of color. Many had struggled up from the south as descendants of freed slaves and building free lives step by step, brick by brick.

Richard held impassioned beliefs for justice and equality while realizing it's a deliberate process. He engaged locally to petition those who could make a difference to invest in housing for the black community. He had a way of cocking his perpendicular right ear in the direction of the person speaking to him that folks somehow felt was charming! About six weeks before Richard's and Cara's child was due, he participated in a demonstration on the south side of Chicago to protest a commercial venture gobbling up housing populated by people of color. Things were a little testy as WW II was breaking out and the USA was entering it. Everyone was on edge. The protest intensified with rhetoric shouted from both sides. Emotions and distrust on

both sides ran hot. It was never determined who actually threw something, but a brick landed in between the clash, and it incited a melee among the protesters and the city police. Fighting broke out, with many injured and arrests occurred. The officials carted Richard off to jail.


Meanwhile, Cara, while out grocery shopping, fainted in the store and hit her head hard on the steel refrigerated meat case. The store owner summoned help, as it was obvious Cara was pregnant. However, at that time, for individuals who were not Anglo appearing by birth, services were not as consistently applied to populations of different colors. Cara was taken to the closest hospital that primarily served the black population. Due to overcrowding, they could not accommodate Cara because of treating so many injured from the protest earlier that Richard attended, and for which he was arrested. They then took Cara to a hospital serving primarily the white population, and it also stated it had no capacity for Cara. Within the midst of these shifting sands, Richard and Cara were forever separated, a bad break. Due to overcrowding at the other facilities, Cara drew the short straw and was shuttled to a makeshift first aid station set up to treat injured protesters. There, the unconscious Cara was delivered of a healthy daughter, but Cara died as a result of her brain injury from the fall. Within all this confusion and inadequate facilities, there was no credible documentation of the birth of Cara's daughter. Her wallet in Cara's possession at the grocery store was now ten hands down the lane.

Lifetimes ensued for both Richard and Cara's daughter who ultimately wound up carrying the name Amanda. The one thing Amanda possessed as a legacy from her mother was a locket with her father's picture in it. Amanda thought she had been born around late fall 1941.

We move ahead many years to the 1980s. Richard is now a senior citizen and Amanda is in her 40s. Richard received an emergency phone call that his sister in his native New Orleans lay dying. He quickly arranged a late-night flight from Chicago to New Orleans. As luck

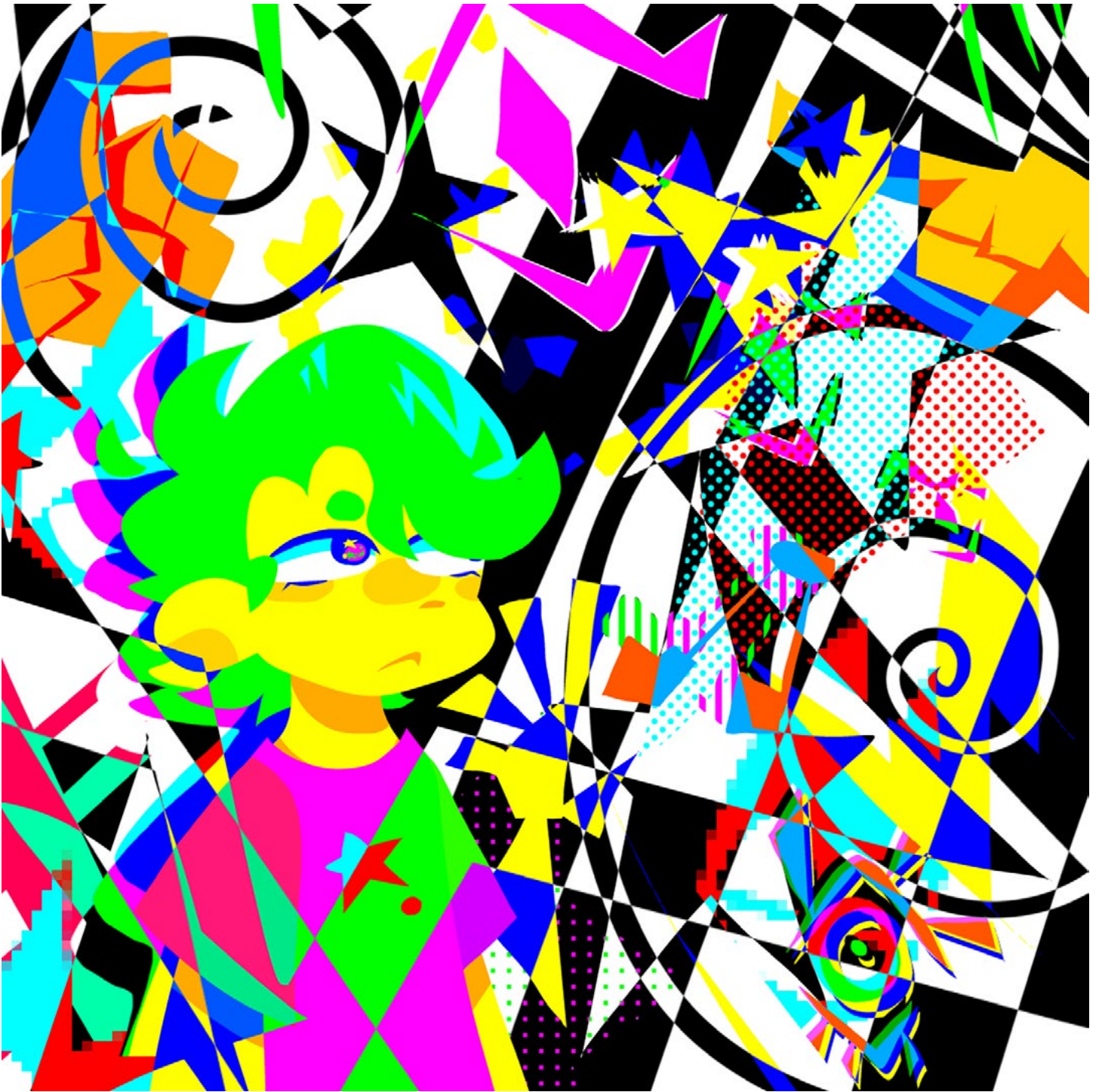
Upon arriving in Chicago in the late 30s, Richard set about to seek employment and build a future. Richard possessed a freed man of color's early dreams.

would have it, Richard wound up with a window seat on the left side of the plane. Slowly the bleary-eyed, late-night passengers filed in and slid into their seats. A woman about 20 years younger than Richard settled into the middle seat to his right. She double checked her seat assignment and slid her travel bag of personal items under the seat in front of her. Then the woman, known as Amanda, began studying Richard in earnest but side-eyed, trying to avoid being too obvious. She casually slipped her hand under her collar and lifted out the locket she had worn for over 40 years. She opened it, fingers trembling, and looked at the picture and then at the man to her left and then the picture, then the man, back-and-forth, her eyes widening at the picture of the man and at the man next to her. It was unmistakable, the ear. It was THE ear. THAT ear. HIS ear. Her Dad's ear. Could it really be so? What are the odds? Cautiously, she ventured to speak to the man. And then Amanda showed him the locket. They stared at each other while a panoply of emotion splayed across each of their faces. Her left arm and his right nestled together on the tiny airline armrest that separated them. Tears slowly slid from each of their eyes and dripped unnoticed into their laps. What good fortune had rained upon them? Without speaking, they reached for that tiny armrest at the same instant and pushed it back up so that no barrier existed between them.

Thus began a long-awaited embrace that seemed to go on forever but had only just begun. 

Zig Henderson

"What's On Your Mind?"



Helena Godfrey

"Frida Dolls"



Helena Godfrey

"Fancy Fences"

Naomi Hatcher

First Place, Photography
"Spiderweb"



Helena Godfrey

Runner Up, Photography
"Graffiti Graphics"





That Old Hopi Poem

*If everyone knew that old, Hopi poem
about water*

*Knowing yours and
how to swim, or simply float, it was -
like driftwood - even as
you are burning...*

*Keep breathing,
it read. (Hot ashes we)
all are sleeping (steaming) pockets
-full of shimmering (financially-fueled
beliefs,
(drenched in water-starved dollars
drowning with thirst.)*

*Not ironically,
sky reflects only sea;
not dirt, not even
soaked earth, the mud bodies of people become.*

*The wisdom of water defines
rhythm as the structure of freedom
where intention becomes melody.*

*Solemn though, our business in paper dust...
with all these collars and coats,
merrily dressed expressions of hope,
faces entitled by their longing...
eyes dulled in dim routine -
the wet depth of passion
drying up, crumbling lust, easily blown
away. we. will be forgotten,
(and all these cities rotten)
Even as we tear holes in the heavens,
where clouds once burst,
pouring self-love down mountainsides
mating oceans with land and death. Life,
no doubt,
rains
from above.*

*The Hopi ancestors knew
what it would cost
to forget
where your water is.*

Inspired by my spontaneous, solo visit to the Contemporary Art Museum in Baltimore circa 2005, on a road trip.

Maya Haynes

"Water is Life"



ARTIST'S STATEMENT:

My collage explores the connection between nature and humanity, experimenting with the balance of creation and human effects. I specifically chose to display the impact of waste on the great oceans. Every year, 19 to 23 million tons of trash and plastic are dumped into the sea, creating a stressful and polluted environment for all aquatic life. I wanted to share the earth-shattering impact of destroying one of the most critical environments on this planet. By destroying the ocean, we are not only destroying our aquatic creatures but also jeopardizing our clean water levels worldwide.

Protecting our oceans is vital because I am happiest at the beach or in the water. I have also found an interest in learning about exploring the sea and its aquatic creatures. In a century, the health of the sea will be in rapid decline, worsening every day. I wanted to display a 3D element in my collage to bring the viewers' attention into and out of the art. I used plastic and tin foil as shells and sea glass, showing how our trash mixes and combines with the environment of aquatic creatures. The bright colors, blending, and 3D elements catch the viewer's eye, creating movement throughout the collage.

I cut up ridged strips of dark, light, and bold blues to simulate the different layers and colors of the sea. The bright yellows and oranges were cut in the same manner to express the difference in levels of a sunset. I chose to cut smaller pieces so every piece would be unique and precise. Small pieces were added to each other, making a mosaic scene. I wanted every piece to blend into the others, trying to avoid the colors becoming choppy or ragged. The viewer's eye should glide over the scene smoothly and peacefully.

I used techniques and tips from the video *How to Make a Collage - Materials, Composition, and Tips* (Mr. Otter Art Studio). I first wanted to layer different materials to see the visual impact and effects it would deliver to the scene. After that, I experimented with the balance of colors and filling negative space to add to the overall message of the collage. I liked the idea of tape transfer, but did not find anything I wanted to transfer, so I added a clear cast of tape over my collage to simulate the shiny, glossy effect of the sea. I decided to cut my pieces instead of tearing for a cleaner look. Ultimately, my collage combines different colors, materials, and textures, creating a beautiful mosaic scene. Behind the aesthetic bright colors of this collage, there is a story with a deeper meaning, fighting for a cause, our life in the health of earth's oceans.

Naomi Hatcher

"Crows"



Naomi Hatcher

"Dandelion"



ARTIST'S STATEMENT: LAYERS OF PEACE: COLLAGING AWAY STRESS

The central theme of my collage is that the influence of relaxation surpasses that of outside stressors. While the world is overwhelming and has an abundance of stress, individuals can learn to maintain control over their own capacity for relaxation.

The message conveyed through my collage holds significant personal value, as I have recognized a tendency to be adversely affected by stress. Through recent experiences, I am learning that life is brief, and it is essential to take time to relax. While sources of stress are inevitable, it is necessary to seek out and embrace moments of joy.

In my opinion, the elephant family is the most captivating—not only due to their prominent, significant presence in the image, but also because they represent strength, unity, peace, and happiness. I made them the primary focus since they bring a sense of calm to me. Their size and position command attention within the composition. The contrast between their rough skin and the gentle, smooth clouds and slender grass adds texture. As

the elephants' stride towards you, the scene conveys a vivid sense of movement and vitality.

I used different-sized elements to create my collage. I wanted to make my calming, peaceful elements larger than the stressor elements to show that they are of more importance. By using layering, I created richer depth and enhanced texture in my work. As previously noted, I experimented with perspective by positioning the larger image prominently in the center, while placing the medium and smaller images toward the background and lower sections of the composition.

I am reminding myself and viewers that inner peace can be cultivated, regardless of external circumstances. The process of creating this collage was therapeutic for me. It allowed me to visually express my journey toward prioritizing relaxation and well-being. I found that as I arranged each element, I was able to reflect on my own experiences and recognize the importance of self-care. This artwork serves as a personal reminder to seek balance, appreciate moments of tranquility, and not let stress overshadow the beauty and joy that life has to offer.



Ode to Titan

*Your glossy brown eyes beckon to me
from across the pavement
And the fields of dreamless grass.
You had dreams like them once,
You used to frolick with them in
The fuzziness of your dreams.
But now, neck encased in cold,
Restrictive metal, tail chopped short
of its purpose, paws callused
by the mud and clay that
is your home, you sit across
The street with that rusty chain
Molded into your skin. There's heating
In that little house, they say,
Forgetting the spiders in the
Corners and the floor that has
Fallen through. And yet, one
Thing about you has not changed.
Your dreamy eyes, milky brown,
Scrunched with excitement as
You spot me across the street.*

*The mailman despises you,
Not knowing that
His visits are your only respite
After long days of
Entrapment in your circle.
Your owners like you because you
Scare people away, but that was
Never your purpose. Yea, you
Were meant to play, to frolick
With the hills and make buddies
With the mailman. Your tail was
Meant to wag and your neck
Meant to sustain hearty barks
That echo as laughter in the milky
Sunlight that is your eyes.
Titan, we miss you.*

Jonathan
Harrin

"Forest Leaves"



Naomi
Hatcher

"Squirrel Snack"

Charles Schilling

‘Modest Star’

*Dear only Sun, hung
forever to burn for us,
Thanks for floating on...*

*As long as the sun
rides high above, we survive...
and when it doesn't?*

*secrets in the wind ~
laughter of leaves, silence sees
as stillness listens*

*Long, slender trees bend,
gently sway, a dance with wind;
why fight your nature?*

*When the Light plays tricks
on your eyes, do you blame God?
or your black pupils?*

*If darkness had friends,
would they gossip about light,
jealous and with dreams?*

*Leaf, pedal, stem, seed,
bosom-bearing-born, we bleed.
Death's harvest, next: Spring!*

*Far away they are,
Clifftop dreams, high, giant reach!
One step at a time...*

*Inside the valley
shaded vision holds one back.
Climb your mountain - See!*

*Disappointment dips
Like valleys, between life's peaks:
Carry on, Hikers!*

Naomi
Hatcher

"Sunrise"



Milena
Strivelli

"Swan"

Veronica Steele

First Place, Original Art
"Celestial Shower"





Veronica Steele

"Misa Misa"

Mollie Eason

"Tortie in New Orleans"





Tears and Strength Behind My Scrubs

Some people have a talent for music, art, or athletics. While these talents shine on stages and fields, my superpower works in hospital rooms and family moments, where compassion becomes a different kind of strength. My “superpower”—is compassionate caregiving. Through my work in healthcare and my role within my family, I have learned how to care for others with patience, empathy, and emotional strength. This ability did not develop overnight. It grew from long shifts, difficult moments, and life experiences that changed me deeply. Compassionate caregiving has shaped who I am, strengthened me through challenges, and allowed me to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others. It is the foundation of my story and the lens through which I understand my growth.

Behind my scrubs is more than a healthcare worker; there is a woman shaped by the loss of her father, Romulo I. Aguilar, who passed away on October 29, 2012. At that time, I was working abroad in Hong Kong, watching through a screen as nurses pressed on

his chest, pumping his heart again just to catch a heartbeat. Tears fell nonstop from my eyes as I whispered, “Dad, I am here,” even though I was thousands of miles away. I watched his chest rise and fall under the force of their hands, and the pain of that moment was unbearable. I kept watching the monitor as his vital signs declined and the rhythm turned into flat line. In that moment, I understood that my father had passed away, and I could do nothing but cry from a distance. I felt both helpless and awakened. I wanted to be the person beside the bed, not the daughter watching from a screen. In that painful moment, I made a quiet promise to my father and to myself that I would dedicate my life to caring for others the way I wished I could have cared for him. That experience inspired me to pursue nursing and became the foundation of my journey into healthcare. Every patient I comfort, every family I support, and every long shift I endure is a way of honoring my father’s memory and turning my loss into purpose. It turned my pain into motivation and planted the seed that one day I would become a nurse who treats every patient with compassion, dignity, and presence.

Compassionate caregiving has also helped me form meaningful connections with others. In the hospital, patients are often at their most vulnerable. They are scared, in pain, or worried about their future. I have learned that sometimes the most important part of caregiving is simply being present. I remember a patient named Sarah who was very anxious before her procedure. I used to call her “Mommy” because she reminded me of my own mother. I could not change her medical situation, but I could sit beside Sarah and hold her cold hands as she spoke about her fears. I saw the worry in her teary eyes. With one hand holding her left hand and the other gently tapping her back, I reassured Sarah that she was not alone. Later, she thanked me for


staying and talking with her, saying that it made her feel calmer. Moments like that remind me that compassion creates trust. My superpower is not just about performing tasks; it is about seeing people as human beings and offering comfort when they need it most.

My caregiving experience has also shown me how much small words of appreciation matter. Many of the nurses I work with greet me with smiles and say, “Oh Amy is here—this is a good day.” Those simple words, along with hugs and encouragement, give me motivation during long and difficult shifts. One moment that stayed with me was when my charge nurse, Jason, said “Thank you, Amy- you’re a rockstar.” I was surprised and deeply touched. Hearing that reminded me that the care I give is valued. The support of my team inspires me to keep showing up with the same compassion and energy, even on the hardest days.

My ability to care for others does not stop at the hospital doors. It is also a central part of my life at home. As a parent and a partner, I use the same patience and empathy with my family that I give to my patients. This is essential to me because caregiving is not just a job-it is my identity and my purpose. The compassion I show at work would mean little if I did not practice it with the people I love most. Caring for my family allows me to live out my superpower every day, not only in moments of illness or difficulty but also in simple acts of listening, supporting, and being present. It reminds me that true caregiving is a way of life, one that strengthens my relationships and keeps me grounded in what matters most. My “superpower” is woven into every part of my life, shaping how I treat people in both professional and personal settings. At home, after a long hospital shift, I am available to sit and talk with my twenty-two-year-old daughter, listening to her worries and goals with patience and empathy. I also give the same attention to my husband’s needs, whether that means listening after his long day, offering encouragement, or simply being present beside him. These moments create a home built on trust, understanding, and emotion-

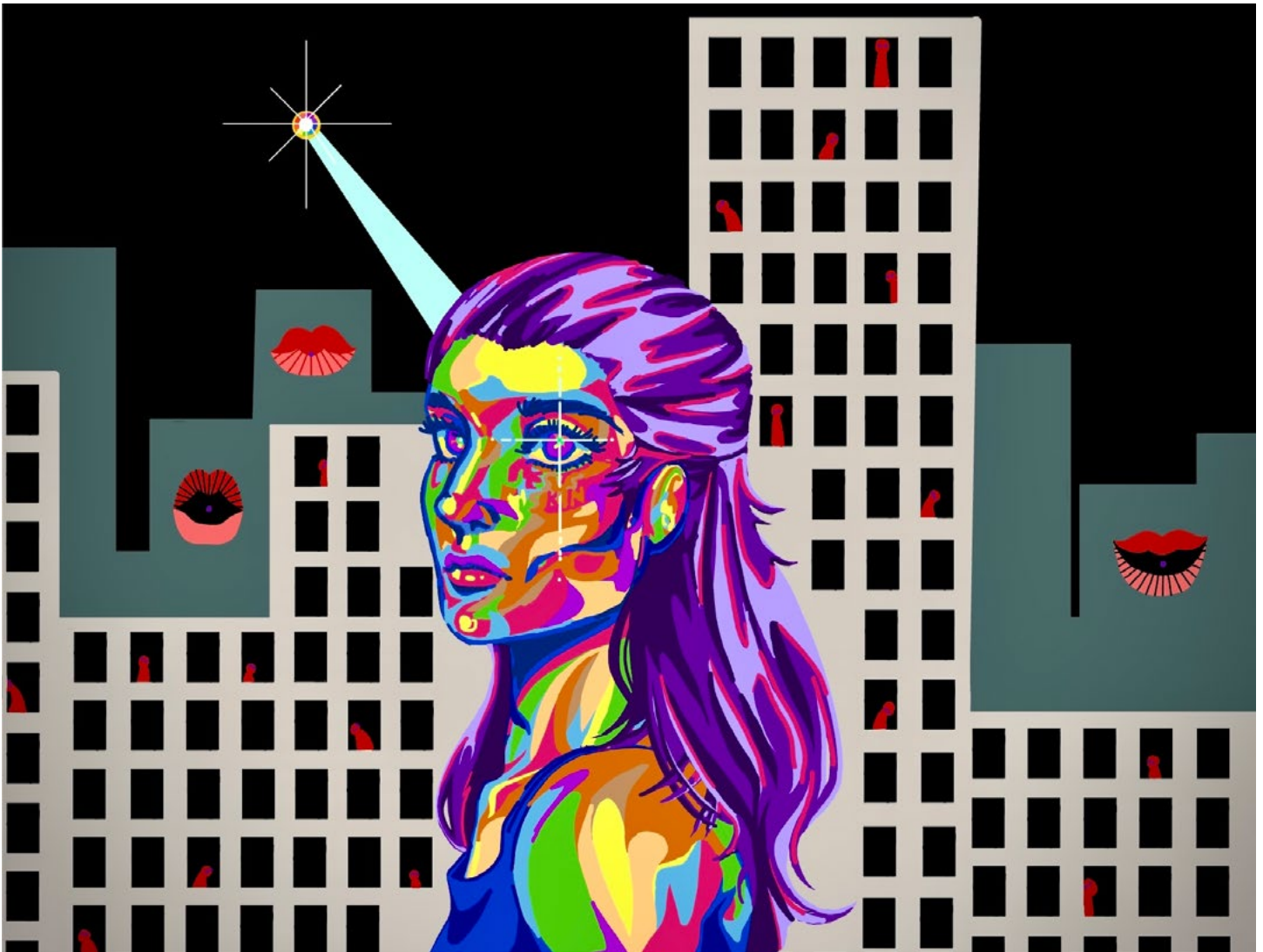
In that moment, I understood that my father had passed away, and I could do nothing but cry from a distance. I felt both helpless and awakened. I wanted to be the person beside the bed, not the daughter watching from a screen. In that painful moment, I made a quiet promise to my father and to myself that I would dedicate my life to caring for others the way I wished I could have cared for him.

al support. My compassion helps my family by giving them a safe space to be heard and valued, and it helps me as a reminder that caregiving begins with the people closest to my heart. Practicing my superpower at home strengthens our relationships and gives deeper meaning to the care I provide in the hospital.

I have learned that caring is powerful. It connects people, builds trust, and brings comfort when needed most. All the tears I have shed along the way have become my strength, serving as motivation to keep moving forward toward my goals. Behind my scrubs are stories of grief, growth, and resilience-proof that even pain can shape purpose. The loss of my father taught me the value of presence, my patients have shown me the importance of compassion, and my family reminds me every day why my work matters. Compassionate caregiving is not only what I do; it is who I am and who I am becoming as I continue my journey toward nursing. 

Erin Greene

"Kingdom Come"

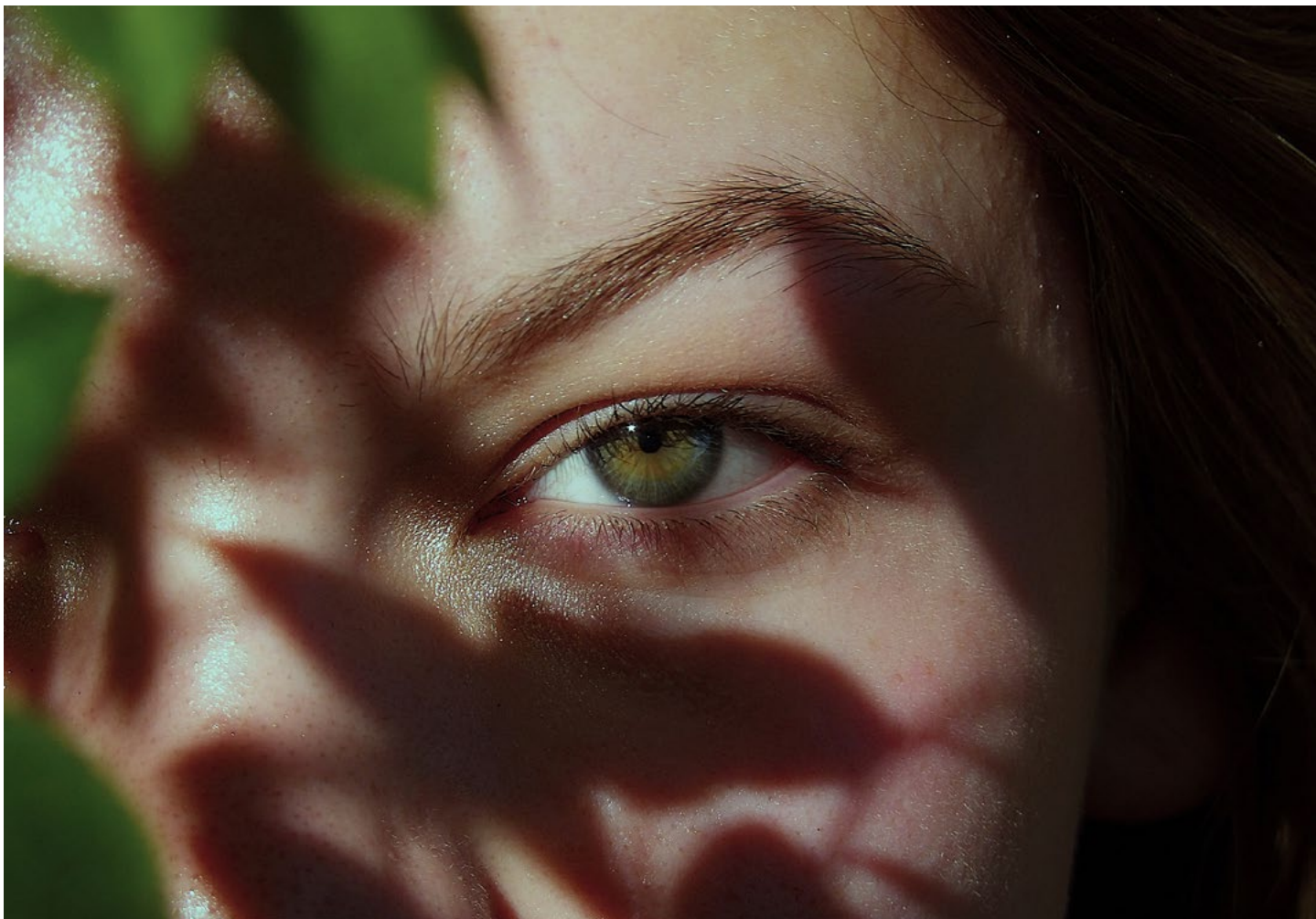


Naomi Hatcher

"Half Moon"

Naomi Hatcher

"Green Eyes"



Sophia Steele

"Silver Snake"





Nancy Cross

"Caught in the Act"



Sophia Steele

"Take A Leap"

Helena Godfrey

"Misty Mountain Peace"



Jonathan Harrin

"Nothing Gold"

Naomi Hatcher

"Sunset Portrait"





Helena Godfrey

"Smoky Blues"

Alexis Castro

"Built by Students"

