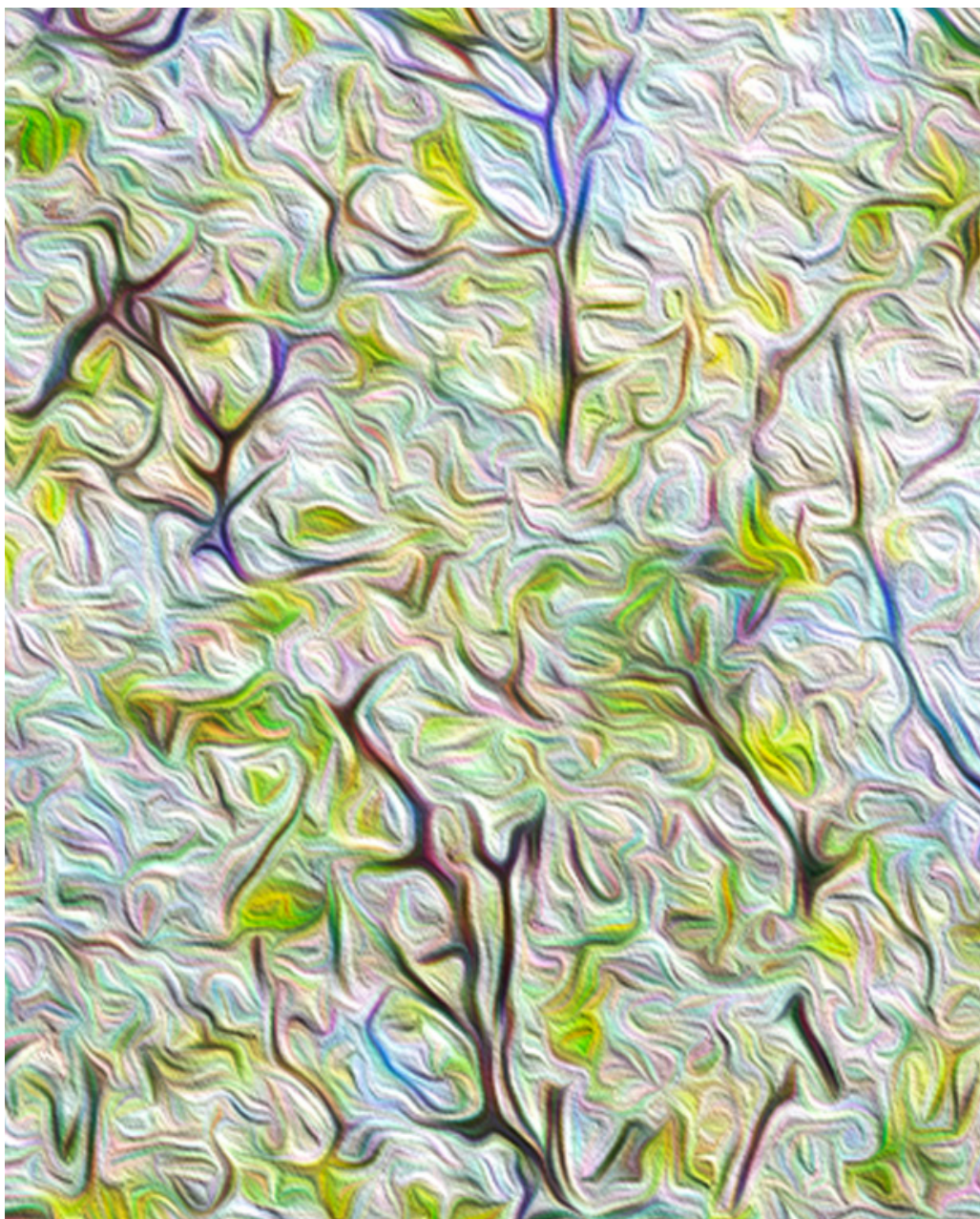


Writer *to* Writer

a journal by writers, for writers



ISSUE 4

SPRING 2021

Writer *to* Writer

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Writer *to* Writer



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Letter from the Editor

Dear reader,

Welcome to the fourth edition of *Writer to Writer*, a literary journal run by students in collaboration with the Sweetland Center for Writing. We aim to foster interdisciplinary creativity across a variety of modes, mediums, and genres and encourage conversation and growth among our community of writers.

In our third year as an organization, we were met with the unique obstacles introduced by the coronavirus pandemic. As classes switched from in-person to remote, so did all our operations. Since moving to a completely digital space, we've had to rethink how to connect as a community of writers without the ability to gather in person. Fortunately, *Writer to Writer* is full of motivated individuals who rose to the challenge and convened regularly over Zoom or Google Meet to share ideas, review submissions, and work together to produce the latest edition of our publication.

Within this issue, you will find pieces that all touch upon common themes of identity and reflection, particularly within their familial relationships. Across the daughters that bond with their fathers through athleticism to romantic partners having fallen apart, we hope that you see yourself in this wonderful microcosm of writing, and that you enjoy the stories our writers have chosen to share.

As always, our journal strives to celebrate multimodality in writing as well as the individual writing process for different writers with our "Spotlight Interviews." You can find snippets

of these interviews with featured writers in the publication itself, and you can hear them in full by scanning the supplemental QR code to listen on our website.

Lastly, this journal would not be possible without the generous support of the Sweetland Center for Writing, especially from our wonderful faculty advisor Dr. Shelley Manis. Her thoughtful guidance and enthusiasm have been absolutely essential in producing our journal and continuing our growth as a young publication. To Shelley, the Sweetland Center for Writing, the contributing writers, and to you, reader, we are so grateful. Thank you for all your support.

Sincerely,

Aylin Gunal
Editor-in-Chief
Writer to Writer

Table of Contents

1	The Value of Writing in My Life Julia Meguid	30	Trauma Lily Jin
3	Gift Tahani Almujaheed	31	Area Code +901 Haneen Hasan
5	Offerings Tahani Almujaheed	34	Another Mother's Summer Alex Pan
7	Running With My Dad Aylin Gunal	47	Here Writing a Poem About It Taylor Schott
15	Music Sydney Wagner	49	Jubilee Eleanor Scott
16	Bipolar Kingdom Priscila Flores		
18	I Am Frances from <i>Conversations with Friends</i> and Frances Is Me Kristen Boudreau		
20	Keeping Score Aria Gerson		
27	Guilt on Vinyl Heather Sherr		
28	10 Ways to Make Someone Fall Out of Love With You Madi Altman		

The Value of Writing in My Life

by Julia Meguid

The words string together like garland on a Christmas tree; they wrap and support each other all while embellishing ideas that exist in writers' minds. Each word has a purpose, its own story that contributes to something much larger than itself. Whether the story is realistic or not, based on data or not, meant to be shared with others or not, the words are always there, doing their job. I write to express what I feel.

After a busy and exciting nationals dance competition, my family and dance friends were waiting in the airport for our flight back home to Shelby Township, Michigan. Two nights before, one of the moms of my friends started an argument with my family. It was difficult to watch and hear as someone whom I thought was an ally, a second-mother and role model verbally attacked and charged at my own family. Anger ran through me from the top of my head into my fingertips. Tears welled in my eyes. I had never known rage until then. My thoughts were frazzled, and I did not know how to handle it, so I used the anger in my fingertips and converted them into words.

About three months later, I sat in the airport again- this time on a trip to Boston with my mother for a tap dance convention. Our flight was pushed back once, then twice, and so I let my worries drift away and travelled to a new state of the world that only existed in my mind. I watched as others walked by- some fast, others leisurely- and I wondered where each person was headed and what their next journey entailed. And so, once again I turned to words to explain what I was observing.

Government and politics were never something I was passionate about until my eleventh grade government class, when we were tasked with thinking about a concern we have in society- locally, nationally, or even globally. It was then that I knew I could no longer disregard politics and pretend to hide behind a curtain and pretend to hide behind a curtain of excuses and ignorance. I wanted to be an advocate for women. I wanted to explain the anger

and frustration that I felt and the fear that I had due to a biological difference that someone along the way decided that would mean that I, along with my women counterparts, were lesser for it. And so, I wrote.

My family means everything to me--they are the people who will always have my back regardless of whatever life has in store. My sister, specifically, is the person who quite frankly is my inspiration even though she is three years younger than me. She has a drive like no other--a force to be reckoned with. Anytime one of us has something important--an exam, a dance competition, an interview--we motivate each other. And so, we write.

Writing, for me, is a collection of thoughts, feelings, and expressions. Writing is my comfort--it is the way I feel that I can be accepted and understood without having to hold back any emotions or thoughts. My mind can run free and the only boundaries are the lines on the pages. Emotions are universal across the world. Anger, disgust, happiness, sadness, surprise, fear, and contempt are emotions that can be read on anyone's face regardless of language, culture, background or experience.¹ Some even argue that those seven basic emotions are innate, that we are born knowing what they are and how to recognize them. Writing is a way for me to cope with those emotions--positive or negative. However, not only is writing a way for me to emote, but also a way to express--gratitude, happiness, appreciation. In all of the instances when I wrote, I did so to put my feelings down; in some cases they were for others to read so they, too, can get a sense of what I was feeling at the time. In other cases, they were for me to take out an emotion and keep it privately to myself.

Writing is an important part of who I am. Without writing, I would not have an outlet for my mind to explore the crevices of this world, nor a safe haven to feel better, and not even a way to attempt to change something. I am a writer and I choose to write for the sake of being imperfectly perfect. It is a way I can be imperfect without having the societal pressure of hiding it from others.

Works Cited

Universal Emotions: What are Emotions? (2020, January 30). Retrieved January 21, 2021., Retrieved from <https://www.paulekman.com/universal-emotions/>

Gift

by Tahani Almujaheed

I was buying books,
just one of them
was for you, from that indie bookstore I walked by
my first day there. I recognized the name of it from
the picture you have on the fridge with your little brother.

It was easy to blame it on the weather
if it meant that I could follow the wind.

For that reason, I entered, leaped in confidence,
if by coincidence, I could run into you here. Even
if I knew you wouldn't be in "hell's corner."

I thought it would make you think of me,
of this other planet you tried to forget. If I bought you this book,
you'd remember its origin forever. I wanted to unravel
your history. I wanted to write to you to understand me.
I wondered what I would leave in a letter.

You moved to Ann Arbor that year, you knew nothing of
that new city but you said it was better than here, better than
that heaven on fire.

I thought that if I explained how this store hid behind
the grocery store on the street I can't remember, just across
my hotel for those three days,

It would click, and you'd remember this place, some place
you destroyed after your home went on fire. I have a theory of why
you ran away after the burned-down house. You couldn't make a
new home. You wanted to start from scratch, sell everything that
was left.

I keep having dreams that you will erase me too. I want you to re-
member the times in your life before the blaze. You say you feel like
you made yourself up. Are we dreaming now?

I want this book to stray you away from the dizziness. You say I
always pry, and I can't help it
I want you to think of the child knocking his hands in the air at the
streetlight. How much he

looks like your brother.

Offerings by Tahani Almujaheed

The first time I went to the farm
with my father, he told me not to worry. All the other
children will be there, watching their fathers too, like they
were lining up at the edge of heaven.

My father held its slender body, instructing his desire, a sacrifice.
the way our prophet Ibrahim did, almost with his son, then, with
Allah's exchange for an animal. A logic, a test of obedience, to the
one who created us

Allah's voice calls and sounds like blustering wind for the ones who
choose not to obey, weeping in blood-squished condensation

When I saw how the sheep was killed, head pointing in the air,
I thought, It's time. It's dying already. It will meet its creator in a fog
of a day's celebration

But not for me,
I felt an inarticulate ache in my chest. Then,
I reasoned, it is gone, far away, in a better place. It did not
cry for a blessing. It rested its jaw in a solitary offering.

Still, I cannot tell the line between enchanted and enchained. But
when there is a living creature in your hands, their life between your
fingers, safety or demise. Or sometimes, both in a secret of blood's
splatter,

The power is daunting, it is never truly yours. Everything is written.
We go back to our roots.

The meat, its tenderness melts on my tongue.
my head is thick. My mind is always
hungry. My grave is already plotted.

Writer Spotlight Tahani Almujaheed

“...On one hand, you want to represent your community in the best way that you can and also call out issues that you and your community might be facing. Sometimes, I try to stray away from it; I try not to fall into the orientalist tropes. Sometimes we don't realize we're doing it. And especially being children of immigrants; sometimes you might be unwittingly writing off the experience of your parents, or writing off experiences of people in your community who you aren't even related to. I always question myself and think, 'Am I allowed to write about these others' experiences? Does it even remain authentic?'... How do you write an authentic piece of work without overstepping towards any group of people, even if that group of people are your own?

The ending of the poem is what I find most important. I know, a lot of people think that they need to have that starting point where they think, 'Oh, if I read this first line, everything else after that is going to be so good.' I feel the need to have the story reel in the reader at the beginning subtly, but at the end, I really want to leave them with the punch.”

Hear more from the writer on our website!



Running With My Dad

by Aylin Gunal

It's a Saturday morning in late July and I wake up at 8AM. I put on my grubbiest pair of athletic shorts and a roomy t-shirt covered in bleach stains. My dad's already downstairs with his running outfit on, steeping himself a cup of tea. I eat a handful of almonds and then we're out the door.

We park at the hospital entrance to Nichol's Arboretum. The parking lot is bare and quiet, and the Huron river sparkles serenely below us. We start running along the dirt pathway and almost immediately, my dad puts a hand on my shoulder.

"Slow down, pace yourself," he says.

"Let's just go fast while we can still go fast," I say. I'm kind of joking.

"No," he says.

That is the first conversation that we have during this long run. It's a 10k--the first one I will ever run--and it's supposedly going to help us train for the Detroit Free Press Marathon in the fall. I'm fairly certain that we're not going to be racing anywhere at any point in time, but running in the Arb is a good summer workout.

...

My usual running workout starts at Gallup Park instead of the Arb, and it's only a 5k. I run along a paved path, parallel to train tracks and the Huron river. There's a wire fence between the path and the train tracks, and at some point a hole appears in the fence. My dad introduced me to this gateway.

"There's a sign here that says DO NOT ENTER," I said. The bold black words were faded and criss-crossed with graffiti, and the sign's stem was slightly keeled over.

It looked exhausted next to the hole in the fence, a raggedy triangle that was comfortably large; I would barely have to duck to pass through. The edges of the wire were bent backwards and stub-

by, as though the hole had been there for a long time, continuously worn down and expanded.

My dad shrugged and pointed at the lonely traffic light that signaled for oncoming trains beyond the fence. "Just make sure you don't cross the tracks while the light is red."

The rest of the route was easy. Hop through the hole, jump across the train tracks, and run into the underbrush on the other side. Emerge in the Alex Dow field in the Arb. Run along the outskirts of the tall grasses until hitting the Amphitheater--a steep, nearly concave hillside that has a pretty metal awning at the base--then take a left turn to run along the main dirt path along the river up towards the University of Michigan hospital. At the parking lot of the hospital entrance to the Arb, turn around and retrace the route back to Gallup, red-faced and hungry for dinner.

A few years ago, the local government determined that this hole in the fence was a little too easy access to the train tracks and was therefore a hazard to the people. One evening the hole in the fence was there, and the next there was fresh, clean wire locking us out of our gateway into the Arb.

"This sucks," I said, huffing as we passed. On this rare occasion, we were going to have to run along Fuller Road up to the hospital. The Arb, with sunlight twinkling through its woodsy canopy upon slender, peaceful trails would stay untouched.

"Don't worry," my dad said between breaths. "That new fence won't be up for long."

"It's like, wire," I said. "Metal wire."

"People take the path seriously. I give the new fence three days at most."

Sure enough, the next week brought with it a new hole in the fence, right where it used to be. The hole was neatly cut, the wire bent in opposite directions to allow for a small triangular gateway. We ducked through it for the rest of the summer.

"How'd you know?" I asked him at some point.

"Like I said, people take it seriously," my dad said. "The runners are dedicated."

...

The heat is heavy and we keep running into clouds of flies.

The main pathway opens up and branches off into paths into the hills to our right and down the river bank to our left. There's one hill in particular that slowly winds up to the Geddes Road entrance of the Arb, meandering through trees and flowers. It overlooks the Main Valley, an expanse of green grass that provides space for spontaneous yoga sessions and ultimate frisbee games in the summer.

Sometimes I like to see how fast I can run up this hill, or how many times I can run up and down it consecutively without pausing for a breather—not with a PR time or distance in mind. Sometimes I want to run just until I get tired. My dad, cool and methodical, doesn't like this approach. Before he steps foot on a running trail, he knows exactly where each of his steps will land and how far they will reach.

We continue to run and about fifteen minutes later we're in Gallup. The heat is beginning to truly beat down and we're no longer under the tree protection of the Arb. It's only about 9:30 in the morning.

We pass by the kid's play structures and picnic tables. My calves are stinging and there's a constant stream of sweat dribbling off of the tip of my nose. I am focusing on my breathing and I almost don't notice that we cross paths with Nejat and his daughter, Suzan. Nejat is a friend of my dad's from college.

Nejat is balding in the exact same way as my dad: in an expanding teardrop shape on top of his head, with short, salt-and-pepper hair remaining along the back and sides. I poke my dad in the side and puff out: "Isn't that Nejat and Suzan?"

Nejat and Suzan are training to run a marathon. They are running for one minute and walking for the next minute, and repeating that. Nejat and my dad say "Hi", and Suzan and I say "Hi", and then we move past each other. We are here to run, not to chat with old friends.

I remember the story that my dad once told me about Nejat, about how they became friends. It was an interesting story, and one that I wouldn't have learned if I hadn't asked one innocuous question.

On shorter runs, he would be the one asking me questions

– what classes are you taking? How much longer do you want to run? – or it was him giving me advice – you need to breathe from your diaphragm. Don't stress about discrete mathematics. I would respond in between breaths in short, choppy sentences. I swear I'm not tired, and I got a 40% on the last exam. Those were evening runs, when my dad was home from work and I was home from school, and we each had an hour where he wasn't tapping at his home computer and I wasn't stuck nose-first inside a textbook.

...

Two years ago, my dad and I were running in Gallup Park on a warm summer evening. The air was hot and humid and filled with flies. The trees on either side of the trail were alive with chattering squirrels and chirruping birds, and drunk college students floated on colorful tubes down the river through the trees.

I had a midterm coming up and was full of nervous energy. I needed a distraction and asked my dad the first question that popped into my head.

"How did you meet Nejat?" I asked. Nejat and my dad had gone to the same college for undergrad engineering in Turkey and then parted ways, and then somehow both wound up moving to the United States and settling down in the exact same city and state. I was friends and classmates with his daughter, Suzan, who happens to be the same age as I am.

"We went to the same college," he started off. We rounded a corner. "I didn't know him very well, at first. I knew him through friends, but we weren't friends for some time. We ended up really talking for the first time when hiding from a shooting."

He said this nonchalantly. The birds and squirrels continued their noise around us.

"You survived a school shooting?" I said through choppy breaths. We took a turn to slip through the fence surrounding the train tracks. We hopped the train tracks and into the bushes to the arboretum on the other side.

A very narrow path in the undergrowth followed. I darted across tree roots and stepped up into the clearing and began run-

ning steadily once more. My dad joined me in a few seconds, and continued talking.

“It wasn’t really a school shooting,” he said, maintaining his matter-of-fact voice. “I went to Otdu, which is a very progressive, liberal school in Turkey. At the time, there was a lot of civil unrest—you’ll recall there was an unsuccessful coup very recently. Often we would have student protesters get into shootouts with civilians. Then the police would get involved and there would be even more violence.

“One day there was gunfire near campus and I went to hide somewhere. Nejat and I ended up in the same spot, and we were there for a few hours.”

“Nothing to do but bond?”

“Exactly.”

...

We continue to run through Gallup, and then instead of taking the loop that circles the park, we run straight and continue along the train tracks. This path will take us to a dam that I don’t know the name of. The Skyline High School crew team houses their boats nearby.

Neither of us talk. I feel like I’m swimming in my own sweat. There’s a pain blossoming in my legs, and I know it isn’t a reaction to the distance we’ve run so far, but rather dread for the distance we have yet to complete.

My dad continues to run like a machine. A machine slowing down with a face that is red as a strawberry, but a machine nonetheless. His elbows are tucked at his sides and his hands are relaxed. His strides have a rhythm. They are mechanical. There is something about the way he looks into the horizon that says, *I have not attained my goal yet. Therefore, there is no reason to stop what I am doing.*

By his side is someone who is, at best, flopping down the paved path. My hands are balled up into fists and my shoulders are going up and down. I’m running jerkily and I don’t trust my knees. Every step is an experiment; drag the feet to see if that helps with

the leg pain, throw my arms to my sides to try to relax my chest, run a little faster to see if a change in pace will help anything.

There’s a point where I start to walk. We’re just a few hundred meters from the halfway mark of 5k. My dad slows down with me, but doesn’t stop jogging.

I can’t help but feel a little sad. Here is my dad, man extraordinaire: successful engineer with an incredible discipline that transcends his career and gives him the structure to run for miles. It sometimes seems like all my dad might know about me these days is that I can’t run a full 10k without walking for portions of it.

We make it to the halfway mark, where the paved path ends at the stairs to the top of the dam. There’s a small dock off to the side. As my dad runs in circles, I go down to the dock and look out onto the Huron River, hands on my knees, my chest heaving as I try to catch my breath. Nothing but geese on the water and strolling down the path. It’s just me and my dad here, at the end of this little running path.

...

There was one summer where my dad and I ended up running together every single evening. Always in or around Nichol’s Arboretum, we ran about 6,000 kilometers each time and eventually built up enough muscle and lung capacity to be able to talk comfortably as we ran.

“What are your thoughts on religion?” my dad asked, one summer evening.

The sky was an umbrella of clouds, all puffs of graying white. The air smelled salty, the way it smells just before a storm. A breeze, barely a whisper, shook the heads of the reeds in the Alex Dow field. The question was a surprise and I thought for a moment before answering.

“Um,” I said.

My parents raised my sister and I as loosely Muslim. Neither of us can recite a prayer longer than a single word, and we haven’t read any of the relevant texts. The extent to which religion touched our lives was when my mom would visit our bedrooms

after school and tell us that God wanted us to study hard; it was Number One on the Quran to-do list.

But they were religious, to some extent. I was never sure just how much. It never really came up. Sometime in the meanwhile, the little bit of attachment I had to the Muslim portion of my identity fell away. There were other things to do in the day than follow rules and recite prayers that I didn't see the point in, especially since my parents didn't care enough to enforce them.

Bearing this in mind, I decided to tell him the truth.

"I think that hypothetically it's okay," I said. "If people want to have moral guidelines to follow, it's cool. Or I guess maybe you might feel less lonely if you knew that no matter what, there was a great big conscientious being in the sky that could see you and hear you; I guess your thoughts are always somewhat validated."

"What about God, then?" my dad asked.

"I think, um," I said. "I don't think, um, I don't think that I believe that there's a conscientious being up there in the sky, you know? I don't think there's someone up there, making decisions and listening to individuals' concerns."

"But there's definitely something. There's like, an energy? For lack of a better word. There's some sort of energy or force that started the universe. Like, that I'm absolutely positive of. I think that energy is still around, too; it connects us all to some extent. I'm not sure how or what it is, but there's something. I think."

My dad didn't say anything for a minute. Everything was quiet, and we jogged around a little bend. Then he said, "I agree."

I turned to him and raised my eyebrows as high as they would go.

"It's funny, because I completely agree, but I didn't come to that conclusion until just a few years ago," he said. "All my life I believed in Allah, and religion was a prominent component of my life. But a few years ago, I started to really think about what I really believed in."

"It's funny how you came to these conclusions before I did," he laughed. "About 20 years earlier, in fact."

Maybe I wasn't as boring of a running buddy I had always pegged myself to be.

...

We head back, and the second half of the run is much easier than the first half was. I don't feel as heavy. My dad and I move back past the play structures in Gallup Park and head back down the stretch towards Nichol's Arboretum.

More pedestrians are starting to mill onto the walking paths. We pass by other joggers and a few power-walkers. I have an urge to say "Hello" to all of them and follow up with an "I've been running for 7km!"

My dad and I are chatting a little bit more, now. We're not exactly running at a runner's high, but our lungs feel more open and our legs a little bit more steady underneath. It's small talk. I ask him about work and the summer interns in his department. He asks me about whether or not I'm still planning on majoring in computer science.

The questions that we ask each other are casual but there's a game that constantly lurks underneath the surface – one in which each of us is trying to pry information from the other. One of these questions is going to reveal an exciting story, or a nuanced opinion. There's no telling which question will hit the target; it's a matter of persistence over time. It's a peculiar, roundabout way of getting to know each other, and it only seems to work when we are on these runs.

We eventually get back to the main pathway in the Arb. Our final hurrah. We both pick up the pace and run without stopping or slowing down, all the way back to the parking lot.

We pass by the Huron River, not so much sparkling but reflecting blinding white light. It's about 10AM when we finally stop by the car. My dad probably high-fives me, or says that we should do this more often. I agree with him; a 10k every weekend would probably do wonders for my metabolism. In a way that I'm not sure is big or small, it will probably be good for our relationship, too.

Music

by Sydney Wagner

Humans,
in our cruelty,
do not deserve music.
We devastate
and destroy
and take advantage of
what others create.
We stab it on a spit
and roast it 'til it's crisp,
drooling, licking our lips
as we stare at it,
scorched and
overplayed,
inattentive in our boredom
until the salivating ceases
once presented with a rare, beautiful creature,
a beast that mirrors my reflection.
Alive, it nurtures me with a tentative hand.
How is it that my destruction
and devastation,
my cruelty
is rewarded with medicine?
I'll drink myself sick on it.

Bipolar Kingdom

by Priscila Flores

An amusement park exists within my brain.
Some days I ride the rollercoasters,
some days I stick to dark rides,
pushed by a slow-moving stream of recycled water.

I much prefer the rollercoasters.
The violent pull of the wind,
the stomach-churning drops inciting uncontrollable laughter,
and that submission to the chance of being flung off the tracks,
landing miles away in a heap of indistinguishable parts.

But through the excitement exists that back-of-the-mind anxiety
that it'll all be over soon.
So when I'm on that roller coaster
and the opportunistic panic of making every moment last settles in,
my neurons violently vibrate.

I'm on my feet. In the air. Outside. Inside.
Outside. Inside. Jumping. Running.
Screaming. Singing.
I'm outside. Two miles away. Screaming. Jumping.

I'm inside. Writing.
Writing.
Writing.
Jumping. Singing. Screaming.
I'm outside. Writing. Running.
Writing. Jumping.
The air reeks of word vomit.
Running. Screaming. Writing.
Inhaling, exhaling, or something in between.

Singing.
Dancing.
Writing.
Screaming.
Resisting the tug of animatronics in the darkness,
fighting to stay locked on that roller coaster of frenzied behavior.

Is it wrong to treat my mania like some unrequited lover?
To work ferociously and live extremely, taking advantage of the
ecstasy before it slips through
my fingers?
I feel indebted to my brain when my limbs crackle with electricity,
feel that my overdue payments are what make my episodic motiva-
tion abandon me.
How can one inhabit a space split between two extreme climates?
When my clouds replace my lightning
I retreat to my amusement park,
carried through crowds in a state of paralysis.
I let strangers guide me to my seat,
moving slowly in manufactured darkness
like Snow White
being chased
by her ever-present shadow.

I Am Frances from *Conversations with Friends* and Frances is Me

by Kristen Boudreau

frances feels like an empty cup so did i you pour a little bit into one
person then they want more so you pour a little bit more they don't
pour as much into your glass you're losing more water over time as
you keep pouring it into their glass. losing water faster than they
are because you're replenishing them but they're not replenishing
you soon you're out of water you have none to drink and none to
give they are out of water because they have drained the source
they go looking for another spring a pond a lake a river an ocean
anything that will give them more water they don't ask you to go
with them they just leave you there but why would they leave they
said they cared frances was empty i am empty too

maybe i'm not as great anymore they left me with nothing and now
i have nothing left to give that's all i was good for all i am good for
is what i can give others now that i have nothing to give i'm not
good for anything for anyone what is my purpose then i have none
why am i still here i don't know

//

i am not like her i disgust i am not worthy
comparison is the thief of joy but what can it steal from me
i'm too crass too naïve i'm sheltered and inexperienced
she has been around the block a few times
frances is skinny and she couldn't get them to stay either
she was too crass too overbearing too sad
maybe frances wasn't skinny enough that's why they left they didn't
like her weight
they only like skinny girls i am not skinny enough
frances cut a hole in her left thigh i don't want to do that i will not
do that
i will leave my stomach wanting i will get skinny

//

i am living in the past everyone else is looking toward the future
i can't seem to turn my head around and face forward
i'm still waiting for them to return
to regain my purpose time keeps going on while i'm still here
waiting
frances has distractions i have distractions but that's all they are
is distractions
distractions while the thing you are waiting for doesn't happen
even though it continues not to happen and it's been a while
years you can't stop
can't stop waiting maybe you'll never stop waiting frances
stopped waiting

i don't understand why i'm still waiting

i'm funny i'm smart i'm compassionate i'm honest i'm trustworthy
is my body all that i'm good for?

Writer Spotlight

Kristen Boudreau

“One of the lines I have in there, “Comparison is a thief of joy”, is a really important message that I wanted people to take away as well as the fact that you're worth more than your body. That's something that I've struggled with the past couple of years, so I think it's important that other people know that you have so much more to offer than that.

“There are so many different things you can manipulate and be intentional about like the shape of the poem, line breaks, stanza breaks, line length. You can even play with the sound because poems are supposed to be read aloud and you associate certain emotions with different sounds, which is something I still kind of struggle with. I do prefer writing poetry over any other genre because it doesn't really have any rules.”

Hear more from the writer on our website!



Keeping Score

by Aria Gerson

I'd walked through the Olympia Sports at the Cape Cod Mall three times and been unsuccessful at finding what I was looking for. They had plenty of Red Sox, Patriots and Bruins gear, baseball and football and soccer equipment and all the dri-fit you could possibly need. But what I needed was a tool of a dying art.

"Do you guys have baseball scorebooks?" I asked.

"Yeah, we have them over here," the saleswoman said. "Follow me."

As she pointed me toward a thin stack of scorebooks high up on a shelf of miscellaneous goods — a place no one would find on their own — it occurred to me that the saleswoman probably wondered what I was doing there. Why would a girl my age need a baseball scorebook, of all things? The only people who used those anymore were coaches and the elderly.

I had never been to Cape Cod before the summer of 2019, but thanks to my first-ever sports writing internship, there I was covering the Cape Cod Baseball League for the Cape Cod Times. I was used to covering Michigan sports, where keeping score was just something you did to show off thanks to all the live stats on the internet. Here, though, it was almost as if I was transported back to baseball's old days. The live stats weren't reliable, nor was the presence of WiFi or outlets.

Every time I covered a game, I balanced my old scorebook in my lap, marking each play with a purple pen. Every time, I thought, *Could you script it any better than this?*

The bin

My childhood bedroom is like a relic these days. A painted pink bulletin board still hangs on the lime green walls, featuring college acceptance letters and ticket stubs for concerts I attended

years ago. The bin on the bottom shelf of my bookshelf fits right in — zebra print on the outside, purple on the inside. Spread throughout the bin are years of baseball scorecards. Most of them — in game programs and spiral-bound scorebooks and good old stand-alone cardstock scorecards — haven't seen the light of day since the game they were from.

Keeping score is an art, some people say, but the aesthetic of my scorecards is the opposite of artsy. On some, the colored ink — from pens, always pens, because pencil fades and sometimes I fear it disappearing forever — is smudged. There are scorecards where I messed up a few squares and tried to correct them, rendering them unreadable. There are scorecards that are missing squares, or where I flat out guessed at the outcome of a play because I wasn't paying close enough attention. On others, the handwriting changes, the result of my dad taking over for me while I went to get an ice cream helmet or another carton of fries. My scorebooks don't close perfectly. Several pages are wrinkled from water damage from rain. The spiral-bound scorebooks have torn at the bottom. Still, I keep every one.

Scorecards are remnants of another time in baseball. You're supposed to be able to look at one and be able to tell exactly how the game went. Not just the score, but the flow of the game, how each of the runs were scored. The real pros can keep track of every ball and every strike. Keeping score requires an intimate knowledge of baseball. It requires patience and attention to detail. Most of all, it requires dedication. When old people see me keeping score at the ballpark, they always stop and marvel at my commitment to the lost art. Implicit in it all is a question: Why would anyone my age keep score when you can get box scores, live play-by-play and even video from the game on your phone? Why dedicate the attention needed to fill out a scorecard to something you might dig out of your basement once a year? Those older people keep score out of habit. They do it because they've always done it, and now it's their connection to the good old days. But people my age don't just start keeping score — there's no incentive. If they do it, it's for a reason. On the surface, keeping score requires a lot of energy for little payoff. For me, though, keeping score isn't just about a game.

It's about the person who taught me the lost art in the first place.
Keeping score is about family.

Angels vs. Rangers, 1992

"Dad!" I shouted. "How come you didn't tell me you had these?"

I had been looking for something else that night my senior year of high school, scouring the basement bookshelf for a novel I hadn't touched in years. The book never turned up, but I found something else on that shelf — a few of my dad's old scorecards, including one from the Major League Baseball All-Star Game and one from a game Nolan Ryan had pitched in against my dad's favorite team, the Los Angeles Angels. My dad took me to my first game when I was a toddler. He bought me scorecards and programs and pens. Somehow it had never come up that buried in our house he had relics of when his dad did the same for him.

I went into the living room and sat down next to Dad on the couch.

"Nolan Ryan was great as an Angel," he said. "But people know him better with the Rangers. It's a shame."

For the rest of the night, he told me about how he had Nolan Ryan's rookie card, how his brother helped him save up, how Nolan Ryan is still one of my dad's favorite players today.

Someday, I realized, I would be the one telling these stories.

Salt Lake Bees, April 2009

I learned to keep score when I was eight or nine, old enough to understand what was happening at a baseball game but young enough that I forgot the rules every game and had to ask Dad, "What's a fielder's choice again?" He was patient with me, reminding me to fill in the diagonal line when someone got a base hit and that the first baseman was represented by the number three.

Our tradition was to go to a handful of Salt Lake Bees games every summer. Salt Lake was 40 minutes away, which

at that age was far enough to make it something special. We drove almost all the way there, then took the train to the ballpark.

Back then, sure, I liked baseball, but I wasn't truly into it in the way my dad was. I didn't watch games on TV and didn't cheer for MLB teams, not even the Angels, but going to games in person seemed special. When my mom and sister caught the flu over spring break in fourth grade — leaving me stuck at home with nothing to do — my dad came home from work one day with Bees tickets and saved me. That night, we drove to Salt Lake and took the train into the ballpark as usual. I'd just picked up my game program, complete with a scorecard, when a man approached us as we walked to our seats.

"We're looking for someone to be our Announcer for the Day," he said. "Would you be interested?"

That's how I ended up on top of the first-base dugout in the third inning, announcing each player as he came up to bat, drawing out the names like I felt a real announcer would do: "HANK CONGERRRRRR!"

I took my free t-shirt and went back to my seat. My dad patted me on the back. We resumed keeping score.

Chicago Cubs, April 2014

My family moved to Michigan in 2012. We instantly replaced the Salt Lake Bees with the West Michigan Whitecaps, our new local minor-league team, but soon we decided we wanted to branch out.

"I want you to pick an MLB team for us to root for," Dad said. "You can pick any team and I'll cheer for them with you. Even the Rangers."

But I was too indecisive to choose just one, so in 2014, my dad picked for me.

"People say the Cubs are cursed," he told me as we settled into our seats at Wrigley Field. "But they have a lot of good young players. They'll be good in a few years." It was a mid-April day game, the kind only the Chicago Cubs were crazy enough to host. The temperature was in the 60s and a spring wind blew over the

wind blew over the ballpark. Wrigley was nearly empty, partially due to the weather and partially due to the hopeless Cubs, World Series-less for over a century. I knew that my dad had picked this game as my first MLB game not because of any affinity for the Cubs, but because tickets were dirt-cheap on StubHub and a day game meant we didn't have to pay for a hotel.

Dad bought me a Chicago Cubs scorecard for 50 cents.

"These prices probably haven't changed since keeping score was something people actually did regularly," I joked.

Even as a light drizzle descended on the ballpark, I kept marking my scorecard. I was out of practice — this was my first game of the season — and accidentally drew Emilio Bonifacio going to third instead of first when he took a leadoff walk. Dad corrected me and we had a good laugh.

I dug out the slightly wrinkled, slightly messed up scorecard in 2016, after the Cubs — true to my dad's prediction — won the World Series as we watched together. Two years later, only three of the players I'd seen were still on the team. The scorecard was already a relic. Cubs tickets, once the epitome of cheap, were so expensive that we couldn't go regularly. Instead, we decided to go to as many different ballparks as we could and made weekend trips out of them.

My family never really went on vacation when I was growing up, a combination of not being able to afford it and my parents' work schedules never matching up with my sister's and my school schedules. Every time we did go somewhere, we could never agree what to do. My dad and I wanted to do something with sports. My mom and sister wanted to do anything but that. When Dad and I started making our ballpark trips, it was a chance to take our daddy-daughter baseball bonding dates to the next level.

The scorecard collection in my bin began to multiply. I have scorecards from Chicago (both teams), Detroit, Cleveland, Baltimore, Pittsburgh and Boston, preserved for posterity. Each one I go through takes me back to not just a game, but a time in my life and more importantly, a day with my dad.

Boston Red Sox, August 2019

My dad always harbored secret dreams of me becoming a sports broadcaster, something that started that April day on top of the Salt Lake Bees dugout. Despite the constant presence of the ballpark growing up, I never thought that's where I'd grow up to work. Somehow, though, I ended up a sports writer, and there's no doubt it was my dad who planted the seed. I couldn't have known when I was eight years old, taking the time to learn a lost art reminiscent of a time before I was born, but learning to keep score actually would come in handy someday. First, it was during my semester covering Michigan softball for *The Michigan Daily* my freshman year, then my internship with the *Cape Cod Times*.

When I headed to the Cape, I took a scorebook with me. Dad had sent it as a Valentine's Day present back when I covered softball. After about a month, though, I filled it up and headed to the mall to buy two new ones. As I walked out to my car, books in hand, I knew this career was meant to be.

Dad and I only went to two games together that summer. The first was a Cubs game in May, before I packed up for New England — the tickets were my birthday present — and the second a Red Sox game at Fenway Park. Dad came to pick me up from the Cape so he could take me to Fenway. It was the summer's last hurrah.

"Have you guys been to Fenway before?" an attendant asked as my dad bought me a scorecard.

"It's her first time," Dad said.

The attendant handed me two Red Sox stickers, a small bag of Fenway dirt and a button that said "My 1st time at Fenway!" with a picture of the Green Monster. I was clearly too old for all of it, but I appreciated it anyway. It was almost like we were back watching the Salt Lake Bees, with Dad next to me teaching me the intricacies of the game.

For a sports writer, keeping score isn't an odd hobby that gives old people pause. It's an expectation, part of the job. But when I cover games now, that's not how I see it. Every time I fill in another starting lineup, I imagine my dad next to me, telling me which players are his favorites and reminding me how to score properly.

The empty pages

Dad and I both know it's coming. One day soon, I'll be out of the house forever, and suddenly, our summers won't be filled with baseball games together. We always knew trying to visit all 30 ballparks was unrealistic, but the day is fast approaching when we officially know it's not happening.

That's the thing about keeping score, though. People grow up and move on, but scorecards are forever, a preservation of a moment in time. The day will come that I'll move the zebra print bin out of my childhood home and transfer the scorecards somewhere more suited to my age, a place where I know they'll always remain, even if they just sit there collecting dust. If I have a kid someday, I know I'll take her to the ballpark and buy her a scorecard. I imagine them being just as cheap as they were when my dad bought them for me.

"When you keep score, each position is represented by a number," I'll say.

Then, when we get home, I'll show her my own scorecards, old-fashioned in even her mom's time.

"Why would you mark the score on paper when you can use an app?" she'll ask, and I'll tell her that, yes, it's true that scorecards don't have much of a practical application anymore unless you work in baseball — but that ignores their true utility. Keeping score isn't about knowing the exact outcome of a game years later. It's about family and about memories. It's about preservation in an era of fleeting attention. Most of all, it's about the game of baseball and how it has a funny way of bringing people together.

Guilt on Vinyl

by Heather Sherr

I owe my existence to the noodle-soup fog of March, for I was granted newfound vision through phone flashes. The steam of the shower stall swallowed me whole while I ignored my morning routine to stand still, my towel-wrapped body melting and oozing into my screen, anticipating his emoji-filled aphorisms. "Do you want to start a Spotify playlist?" A tractor beam focused on me through the haze and I cautiously accepted what would be, unbeknownst to him, his greatest charity project;

Humbly, his invisible hands guided me through hyperpopian electro-maximalisms, yearning sobs of rock alternativism, indie-pop that empties and refills my ventricles with bass riffs, and seemingly every song that will ever deserve a listen; he is my own personal Pitchfork, from garden tool to gospel, an all-knowing one, unaware of his omnipotence;

I hate feeling like his wasteland. He brings variety, sweet and salty popcorn excitement to me, who used to be the picture of naivete. Morphing into bittersweet weed vine, I coil around his legs and poison his senses with infantile ignorance and a culture-vulture aesthetic. He was a fool to open heaven's sonical gates, for now the metal clangs behind him as they swing until being left ajar in dissonance;

Oh, to send him a song! But, if I did, it would be a regurgitation of his philanthropy, a sick distortion of his pink-sky disposition and multiplicity. I am a melody that is dreadfully familiar, with simple lyrics and GarageBand amateurism. He wants me to be as nuanced as he is, I know he does, but he'll never say so.

10 Ways to Make Someone Fall Out of Love with You

by Madi Altman

1. **Really listen to them when they are speaking.** Make sure your attention is completely on them and do not interrupt them. Nod your head and smile when appropriate. Let them know that you are completely invested in whatever they are saying.

2. **Inquire about their lives.** Ask about their childhood. Ask about their family; if they have a favorite sibling or a favorite parent. Inquire about their hopes and dreams. Request to know a bucket list item of theirs. Ask if they could go anywhere in the world, where would they go.

3. **Take interest in their interests.** If they like cars, ask what their favorite model is and why. If they are a gamer, try to learn the games they enjoy most. If reading is a hobby of theirs, try reading their favorite novels. Maybe they are watching a TV show and you should ask if you could watch an episode together so you get the gist of it.

4. **Send them your favorite songs.** Find out their favorite genre of music and start to listen to it. Grow an attachment to certain songs because the lyrics match how you feel or match your situation. Send them those specific songs and say they just reminded you of that person. Ask them to let you know what they thought of the song and feel giddy that they liked it.

5. **Tease them.** Be sarcastic. People think playful banter is attractive. Joke about not wanting to see them or that you actually do not enjoy talking to them. Roll your eyes and chuckle when they give you sass as well. Keep reminding yourself that their sarcasm is just a joke; they must be interested if they flirt with you like this.

6. **Ask if you can see them soon.** Try not to ask too much, as you should feel like the want to see each other is evenly distributed, but ask enough to show that you are interested. Say that you want to see them, even if it is just for a quick moment. Asking once a week is reasonable; you will not appear needy if you do this.

7. **Send them pictures and videos that remind you of them.** Whether this is memes, Instagram posts, Tik Toks, even a picture of the sunset, any picture or video counts. Show them how your surroundings remind you of them. Allow little parts of them to slowly invade your daily life.

8. **Introduce them to your family.** Have them come to your front door in order to appease your father. Joke about how scary your father is and how they will just have to learn to love him like you do. Let them joke around with your siblings and ease your mother's worries. Allow your family to like them, too.

9. **Indulge them with your deepest secrets.** Finally allow them to see the darkest parts of you. Tell them your insecurities. Let them help you through a panic attack and believe their reassurances. Grant them access into your head and your heart. Allow them to go deeper into your psyche than anyone ever has.

10. **Tell them you love them.** Tell them you love them every day. Every morning and every night. When you feel insecure, when you feel happy. Do not question when they don't say it back, just assume that they had a crazy day. Do not overthink it.

If you follow these simple steps, I can guarantee that they will fall out of love with you, as it has worked for me every time.

Trauma

by Lily Jin

A match lit sets off its burn and wilt
Fire is an irreversible ritual
The scent of smoke attaches to whatever stays near
A subtle, straying souvenir

It lingers on my favorite knitted sweater
A delicate garment unable to be thrown in the wash
It's dry clean only, but I can't bear to pay
So it sits, stitches fraying
Discarded in a dark closet corner

Sometimes my lungs still burn and constrict
A suffocating inhale that drags up my chest
Warms my cheeks
And threatens to spill over as tears

Only, water is a temporary reprieve
It blooms smoke that sizzles in my ears
The ash is soft but stains everything I touch

Slowly, a fire dies down
The embers lie dormant, unassuming
But its pulsing glow taunts crackles, snaps
Reignition hangs in the air

A match once lit is determined
Flame travels down the splint
Dancing a lively path of destruction
What's touched cannot be unscorched

Area Code +901

by Haneen Hasan

Here's the thing about life. You should be able to categorize moments in these tiny boxes. There should be happy moments, sad moments, angry moments, and loving moments, but it's when they begin to seep out from their neat boxes and bleed together that you realize life is more complicated than you thought. Memories should stay intact in these boxes and it doesn't seem fair that they be tainted by all of the other emotions. But what's even worse is when you realize that your loved ones sometimes categorize your shared experiences in different boxes than you do.

Whenever I saw the orange flash of our landline I would bounce in excitement to see if I could recognize the number, however there was one specific area code I anticipated, +901: Karachi, Pakistan. I would probably categorize those moments in the 'elated' box, tucked neatly away in the confines of my memories. I could always count on excited chatter and loud boisterous laughter from both ends of the phone. There were smiles on my parents' faces that were specific to the connection to their homeland, and these were smiles that we couldn't replicate here.

There was something special about the calls from family members when I didn't get to grow up with many of them. I knew the importance of blood relatives in our culture, and regardless of the amazing community and pseudo-family we had built for ourselves right here in Michigan, I still felt like I was missing a part of life, a part of myself. There was something about the unconditional bond that came with family that tugged at my heart and I always felt left out. It's hard for people that don't come from immigrant families to understand; every year I would hear the excited chatter around the holidays about my classmates visiting their relatives, but what was oftentimes a long drive for them to meet their relatives would be an 18 hour flight for me. We would go years on end without visiting each other and it felt like physical pieces of me drifting away as I spent less and less time with the people I

shared blood with. However, everytime the +901 flashed on our phone, I felt those pieces get closer and closer.

There was something about knowing that I could rely on my relatives to ease the homesickness of my parents that released a weight off my shoulders. In no way did I feel responsible for their happiness, but that didn't mean I wasn't worried about them. Afterall, if I felt missing pieces of myself despite living in the US my entire life, I couldn't fathom how much worse it was for my parents who left behind families knowing the love that came with them.

Everything came crashing down March of my freshman year in High School. I woke up bleary eyed at 5 in the morning to a sight I'd never thought I'd see. My father, sitting on the stairs with his head in his hands, silent tears dripping down his cheeks. As I woke up a little more, minute by minute, the picture became clearer. My cousin had just called my dad from Pakistan to tell him that his sister's doctors informed family members that they should probably say goodbye. My aunt had been unwell for some time but nobody could predict it would come to this so fast. The entire morning became a blur as we quickly packed my dad's clothes and searched for same day flights. There was a rush I had never felt before, new emotions that I felt like I unlocked in that morning, but the biggest I could recognize was guilt. I couldn't believe I hadn't made more of an effort to bond with my aunt. She practically raised my father and all these years I stood in the background while my parents talked to their family when I should have been making my own connections to them. Now, I was 14 and there was a pretty high possibility that I wouldn't ever be able to make that connection.

The week after my dad left for Pakistan was when I had my epiphany about moments and their categories. Suddenly whenever my mom's phone rang with the numbers +901 on the screen, I flinched. My heart would stop and I could feel the panic in my throat, expecting devastating news. My brothers and I would collectively hold our breaths and wait for my mom to answer the phone. That moment, I realized my mom and I had categorized as outliers of the entire experience of area code +901. In that one moment of sheer fright in March I felt my boxes bleed together,

I felt heartbreak for both of my parents as I recognized their stress of not being able to do anything while the people they grew up with silently withered away. My memory filing system was now in complete disarray.

My heart broke a little that week, and I swear I grew gray hairs each time I saw +901, but I also took the opportunity to grow. I learned to look at things from more than one lens and to recognize and appreciate the gray from the black and white. My aunt got better much faster in the company of family and love and I promised myself that I would make more of an effort to build relationships with the people who shared my blood. Now, 5 years later, I can't say it's all perfect and I call my aunts and uncles to share everything about my life, but I can say that we're much better than the strangers we had been 5 years ago.

Another Mother's Summer

by Alex Pan

MA

Toby! It's your ma.

Oh, I told you to set up your voicemail. People need to know when they're calling Toby "Baker."

...

I know you're busy, Toby. But—

...

I was calling Nancy and talking to her, telling her all about you. I said: "Toby's an artist! Can ya believe it?"

She didn't believe it.

She discreetly though fragilely laughs back.

*She sighs, trying to return to the
"conversation."*

MA

You're doing good, Toby. Right?

*Beat. The uncertainty of the statement cuts
her stitched wounds open.*

MA

Well, I'm glad you're doing good.

(And she quickly mends herself and gets right back at it.)

Nancy's boys – Sam and Caleb – they're doing well too. You remember the summers with them?

I was going to invite Nancy over—

She pauses, holding her breath.

MA

Well. Actually. I already invited her over!

(A very unconvincing excitement takes over)

And I told her you'd be coming back home to visit us! How's that

huh?

You don't want to let down Sam and Caleb, right? And Nancy? Oh, she has such a good heart in her.

And—

*Ma pauses and holds in all her pressured
urgency, again running out of things to say.*

*Beat, as she lets go of it all in one long,
weary sigh.*

MA

(Tenderly) Toby. When are you coming home to visit your ma?

...

Come on, Toby, I'm your ma! You can be honest with me. You can tell me.

You can tell me anything!

*Beat, as Ma's eyelids lower, numbing her
hopeful words and afraid eyes from the
truth.*

*But another Beat, as Ma reassures against
her thoughts and reclaims herself,
revitalising with a jump out of bed.*

MA

Oh, it's the summer! We should be happy! Both of us!

*She quickly moves with a determined pace,
but one that gradually fades until she is lost
in her interwoven path again.*

*Beat, as she loses all her energy
immediately, sinking back into the void of
the bed's dark corner.*

*Amidst another awkward silence and
continued home decorating, she tries to*

revive the one-way conversation.

MA

Well. I've been cleaning your old room. I always told you to clean it— Oh, it's alright. It gives me something to do now.

Beat, as she finally crosses paths with the unopened gift box. She gazes at it, as if she had forgotten it was ever there.

And she pauses, scanning the whole room, realising how empty it is now – there's only the phone, the tired old bed, probably a loose sock here and there... and the gift box. But nothing else. Just Ma and her humming.

She ENDS the "call," ending the message. She returns to sit atop Toby's bed, her last haven, giving herself a moment to think.

MA

He'll come back home to visit.

Beat. She second-guesses herself.

MA

Even if he doesn't—

...but confidently shakes off the doubt.

MA

That's alright.

She nods to confirm herself.

But a Beat, as she pulls back and reflects the doubt back.

MA

Oh, it's the summer though.

Kids always come back in the summer.

Ma channels her unreturned love by arbitrarily readjusting or cleaning something nearby, such as making the bed. The sense of purposeful action reassures her, though the doubt still is overwhelming.

MA

He'll visit.

He'll come back home.

Ma thinks about it a bit more, trying to cling onto any possibility of the statement coming true.

But the odds might be against her, so she lets go of the negative thoughts and quickly dials the phone to try and force the visit to come true. She skips straight to voicemail and rises again.

*PLEASE LEAVE YOUR MESSAGE AFTER
THE TONE.*

BEEP.

MA

Toby! It's your ma.

I thought I'd just leave a message for you this time. I know you're busy.

She carefully considers every single word for Toby's sake, even if it means awkward silences and sharp conversational whiplash.

MA

I just wanted to let you know.

You're doing great, Toby. Your ma's proud of you.

...

And I'm doing well too.

...

I saw your name at the very end of that movie, in the theatre down the street. "Toby Baker." Why'd they put it in such small letters, huh? I can barely read it. They could have at least let you star in a role! I was hoping to see your face.

She sincerely smiles and nods to herself, her cheerful flow in decorating the room returning.

MA

I heard your jingle. Y'know—

Ma rushes through humming the jingle, though still with all her heart put into it.

MA

I made it so when you call me, now my phone will make that sound! Oh, I can't wait to hear it!

She gives the most promising smile, one filled with years of unrequited hopes and dreams.

MA

And Nancy – you know her – she said she loves your jingle too.

Long beat, as she runs out of things to say again... so, she resorts to what's truly on her mind:

MA

Oh, Toby. Tell your ma. What made you go all the way down to California? They have wildfires every day. And earthquakes. And—

...

I just wish you'd tell me things, Toby. That's all.

I just wish you'd tell me things, Toby. That's all.

(Happier Beat)

I want to know what exciting things are going on in your life!

Beat. She stops herself short and makes a hard turn away from the sombre topic.

MA

Like that lucky girl of yours you met! From the Dakotas? She doesn't live very far away from us.

I've been saving money, Toby – I don't need much for myself. I can rent a nice apartment nearby for both of you to move in this summer. Or anytime. That's enough, right? Just having someone there, who loves you.

(No reply)

You always need a backup plan, Toby... just in case things don't go as planned.

She looks around at everything she's lost – there's nothing to really look at.

Beat. She catches herself getting into the sad truths again and stops.

MA

Look at me, huh? I'm talking too much about myself. I know you don't like that. Don't worry about it, Toby. You don't owe me anything.

She firmly nods, trying to drive the statement home to nobody but herself. Ma's voice scratches like a discarded, broken record.

MA

I shouldn't make you feel bad. It's not your fault.

Beat. Ma interrupts herself yet again from digging herself deeper into her honest despair.

MA

You're doing good. This is what I want you to be doing.
I'm proud of you.

*She scans the empty room, trying to find
anything to restore her mood and start
talking again just so she can have a reason
to stay on the call for a bit longer.*

MA

Oh! I've been going to the seniors' club. The one you emailed me
about. I made some friends there. I go on Thursdays, just to chat
with them. It's alright. They don't talk much though. At least not on
Thursdays.

...

I don't know, Toby. I don't belong there.
I'm not that old.

Beat. Her scattered staring says otherwise.

MA

They're nice people. But it reminds me of how I feel with Nancy,
you know? Now that you're all grown up and out of school—
She's out there doing her own things and—

(Self-aware chuckling)

Look at me, I don't really do much but make the bed, cook some
food, clean the dishes, maybe go out and buy groceries for myself
every now and then. I don't really have anything to talk about with
her anymore.

...

I'm scared to talk to her.

...

I just want to have something to talk about. Something to show,
when they ask, "how was your week?" and I can say something
other than just, "it was good." You know?

Amidst her decluttering of the space, she

*finds Toby's old winter clothes. It gives her
a more relatable talking point, and one
that's a bit more uplifting even if it comes
out of nowhere.*

MA

(Playfully shivering) Brrr! Oh!

(Laughing, like the good times) It always feels so cold here at home!
Do you ever feel cold down there, Toby?

*She shivers more from being alone, hugging
herself to get any warmth.*

*Beat. She sighs and lets go of the winter
clothes, putting them away under the bed or
in the bottom of an armoire to rot.*

MA

Oh, you don't have to tell me, Toby. I know I talk too much.
Maybe I'm just getting old.

*She half-laugh, a suppressed chuckle
restrained by the other half of her that
knows the truth.*

MA

I don't know.

I guess you don't say much now when we do talk.

So I just talk a lot.

(Chuckling)

(Still light-heartedly hopeful) Are you usually like that with your
friends, Toby? Or with that nice girl of yours?

*Beat. She looks away, protecting herself
from an imaginative reply.*

*She catches herself asking gloomy questions
again and restarts her mood.*

MA

Oh, it's alright, Toby.
So long as you're happy, I'm happy.

*Ma's proud smile quivers, as she also finally
runs out of things to decorate, tuck away, or
clean up in the now spotless yet emptier
room that she had reclaimed.*

*Beat. Amidst the open emptiness, she wants
to say something, but can't admit it, until
finally...*

MA

Don't worry about visiting this weekend, Toby.

*Ma weakly removes the patient gift box,
hiding it somewhere else in the room to rot
as well, like it was never there to begin.
Without the lively gift box, there's nothing
much left in the room besides maybe the
phone, the bed, and her self-pity. But she
owns up to it – at least as much as her weak
heart can.*

MA

I know you're busy, doing great things out there.
How about you just call me back, hm? Sometime in the evening
when I'm having dinner. Just so I can hear your voice and have
someone to talk to.

...

Or how about after work? Anytime.
I can make time for you.

*Beat. She fills in the blank to her question
with an imagined, terrible reply and digs
herself even deeper.*

MA

You can just leave me a message.
(As if Toby replied and pitied her) Oh, it's fine.
A message is enough for your ma.

Ma holds a skinny smile without much left.

MA

And maybe you could put that nice girl you met on the phone with
you too? She doesn't have to say much. Just enough so I can hear
how her voice sounds like. You can just say, "Hey, Ma!"
And that nice girl of yours, she can just say, "Hey, Toby's Ma!"
And then you can go back to your work.
It's enough. It's enough to make your ma happy.

*Long Beat. She maintains her composure,
but her dying voice crumbles into pieces
now that she has finally exhausted all
options, none of which ever seemed possible
to begin.*

MA

I'm alone.
(Taking time to let the truth bleed)
Toby.
I'm alone.

*Ma surrenders to the surrounding emptiness
and darkness that pushes against her lone
body. Even amidst it all, her raspy voice
selflessly fights back for Toby's sake.*

MA

Oh, I'm talking too much again.
I know you won't have time to listen to me for this long.
Ma motions for the phone.

MA

It's not your fault, Toby. Don't worry about it.

— YOUR MESSAGE HAS BEEN ERASED.

MA

It's not anyone's fault.

She's barely comprehensible from the sorrow that chokes her, but still presses the phone. She light-heartedly admits her feelings through nodding and shrugging, speaking them like they're old news:

MA

You're just all grown up.

— YOUR MESSAGE HAS BEEN ERASED.

But she clings on to the phone, trying again.

I'm old.

— YOUR MESSAGE HAS BEEN ERASED.

MA

I'm useless.

—...YOUR MESSAGE HAS BEEN
ERASED.

Beat. Ma can't speak. She has no reason to. What else is there even worth saying? She stares at the phone without much to do.

*Ma ends all her efforts and clumsily ENDS
idle voicemail.*

Beat. Ma still stares at the phone, conflicted. Complete silence, one that feels impatiently long, as Ma loyally gazes upon the phone, as if something's going to happen, that it will ring, and maybe Toby's jingle ringtone will

finally go off from the phone for her...

...but nothing.

...

...absolutely nothing.

...

BLACKOUT.

Writer Spotlight

Alex Pan

The piece has been truncated to fit publication requirements. If you would like to read *Another Mother's Summer* in full, please visit our website.



“The very first version of this piece was mostly just the dialogue, and all the explanatory stage actions were just beats; it was really minimal... The biggest revision was that at one point, I had a different ending... a very traditional Hollywood ending twist, something that’s really happy. But after a lot of deliberation, I moved onto this final version, because I realized that a lot of the core of the piece is the character study and empathizing with the struggle of this mother, who is alone. Bringing in this external character in at the end, it had a really happy ending and could make readers feel warm inside.

“With the first draft, I was still trying to figure out the physical space of the area... One example of this was about popsicles. She made these popsicles and brought them in. There was this whole situation where the popsicles melted and she put the sticks away in a drawer. And she earlier alludes to it as, ‘Toby, I put the sticks in there’ and we actually figure out that she had put them there because she’s waited so long. That was the original idea. I removed that though, because it became distracting. It felt unrealistic. Why does this person bring in popsicles knowing they’re going to melt?...If the audience is distracted and thinking about the logic of it instead of feeling the emotions of it, that’s a major problem... It wasn’t necessary. It’s repetitive. Removing those props really allowed me to focus on just the core of the text... There was clutter in the beginning. And in the end, there’s no clutter.”

Hear more from the writer on our website!



Here Writing a Poem About It

by Taylor Schott

I am not asleep but I am not awake either,
a halfway state in which the days tasks seem impossible to
accomplish

and therefore not worth attempting.
Allow me to elaborate:

My arm hangs over the edge of the bed,
as if it were acting independently from the rest of my body,

urging it to get up and out,
but it never ends up convincing any other limb.

I think it just feels good to have it hanging out and off like that,
dulled in feeling from the discomfort of the position.

And my face has to be pressed up on the pillow
my cheeks inflating against the cotton sheets,

for me to feel the full effects of this particular malaise.
My eyelids sag as if I were tired, or on something

which I am (tired)
but not enough to fall asleep.

And it's like I said, I have things I could be doing,
things I should be doing,

but none of those tasks would be done in the way that I want them
to be done, not if I were to complete them now, in such a state.

All I want to do is continue watching and feeling the hairs on my

arm tickle from the going fan

and when I get bored of that, resume ripping the hangnails off my
poor fingers.
I am a painter, and scrub my hands abraded,

which is why they are dry, cracking at the knuckles, and tired of
being abused.

I am also a poet, often twisting observations into bits of phrases
on my way to the bathroom, in the kitchen making dinner,

and I'll feel an urge to write it down.
That is the poet part of me.

And then I'll walk outside and see some pretty collection of space,
wishing I had my paints.

This is, obviously, the painter part.
But then, like now, I'll be in bed,

wishing I was neither, in fact,
wishing I was nothing.

Because when you are nothing,
there is no pressure to be constantly creating, mastering,

Which is funny,
because even now, doing nothing, wanting nothing,

I am here writing a poem about it.

Jubilee

by Eleanor Scott

what does it look like to you, our wasted year?
i have watched two springs stretch their legs from my window.
my indoor summer was puzzles, was amsterdam in pieces, seeing
places i once touched in shreds and fitting the pictures back together for some grasp at control.
now i wish for sunlit sadness, when at least the world i gazed at was green,
button stuck on pause. simple fix. dig a butter knife in around the edges, jiggle 'til it pops
back into place. i waited patiently, or just about. now free-fall
tells me a finger slipped somewhere: eject.

winter smoothed away all my best edges, left me dumb.
dull, endless dark, no holiday, no valentine - the season is
a parasite, a germ, some towering mass i can give no correct metaphor -
what absorbs everything it touches, scoops light and flower and me into its maw like
a whale swallowing up krill? what curses its prey with its own affliction, tars it
with matching shadows? what villain, what black midas?

i can't remember if it's always this bad.
i can't remember much at all. do you
feel shrunken and pale like me? do you feel anything? my heart
beats very slowly now.
my energy all goes to daydreams, wistful, viridian thoughts,
barcelona or a crossword. a bear cave. forsythia. the mercy of the end.

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and you!

