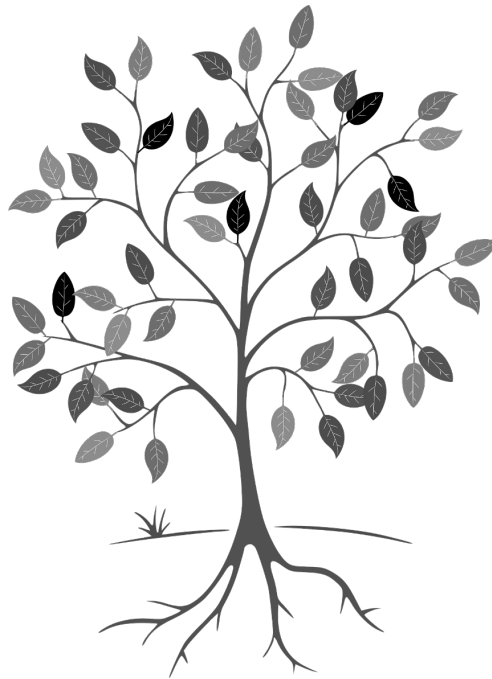


root and branch
volume XV



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April 2022

The name *root and branch* was chosen as a symbol of students' lives at Ivy Tech: they come with solid roots but grow and branch out—intellectually and creatively—through their college experiences.

Special thanks to Dr. Emily Bobo, Annie Gray, the Ivy Tech-Bloomington English Department, and Susie Graham.

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I Am From . . .

Emma Golden

I am from Rocky's dusty halter.
From honey sticks and Citrusolve.
I am from the living room I was born in and still watch TV in.
Cozy, safe, infinitely interesting from different angles.
I am from puffball mushrooms that explode when you kick them,
Spreading their spores to the next generation.
I'm from board games and competitive banter.
From Mike and Mike and sometimes Eileen.
I'm from the overly boisterous Golden cackle and Ellinger elbows.
From "smile for the camera" and "Do the Simmons dance!"
I'm from the generation that broke Catholicism.
From my grandmother's stare judging us as she gets ready for church.
I'm from Bloomington, and the Irish Golden from Eastern
 Pennsylvania, and the Weisses from Austria.
From my dad's apple pie and my mom's salad with pumpkin seeds.
My dad's casual suggestion, "We could get married."
My grandmother taking things out of the oven with her bare hands,
Cursing *Scheisse* under her breath.
I am from the wooden figurine of a golfer my grandfather showed me
 countless times
As his mind was lost to dementia,
And the repetitive joy it brought him to share something he loved.



Gristmill of the Past - *Jeffrey Grounds*

The Baby Behind the Cash Register at the Restaurant

Lisa Kwong

The *ring, ring* of the cash register wakes you, but you don't know names for sounds yet. All you hear is noise: strangers' voices, doors swinging, rushing feet. Your mother speaks in a garbled language different from when she rocks you to sleep. Your tiny nose scrunches at all the colliding smells; gas wok smoke, garlic chicken, Szechuan beef, and kung po shrimp float by. Moved to a counter where powdered-face women talk to you in squeaky voices, you begin to cry.

Your whole life will be under spotlights and never meet anyone's expectations: be cute, be quiet, never get in trouble, get straight As, always know everything, never feel anything. First American-born Daughter, you carry the bridge between China and America. You are not meant to be ordinary. The way you learn to survive, then thrive: take different worlds and fuse them into a kaleidoscope universe no one has ever seen. Refuse to be written out of history. Tell the world to burn all their Chinese takeout boxes—you won't see the inside of even one.

Love Poem to the Freckle on My Right Wrist

Zipporah Breunig

I have known you were there as far back as I can remember
small and brown and a little puckered
the hairs you sprout a little darker than the rest of my arm.

I knew you, and I loved you.

I know you have a twin, on my left wrist,
but it's now covered by the watch I wear,
that unfortunate mark of adolescence ended.

I knew you long before I discovered
the other blemishes on my skin:
Swatch of bleached skin on my left breast, shaped like a crab—

Delicate mole on my upper left thigh—
Scars scattered haphazardly,
disorganized minutemen always eager to recall their last battle—
you I knew and I loved.

I want you to swallow me whole
a single pinpoint of light expanding to consume me
my edges start to diminish, and all becomes Real in you, a bizarre
second belly button sprouting from my wrist.
I am absorbed, not a sinew nor ventricle remains.

*You've taken me prisoner,
I'll say,
My love for you is unending.*

I cannot be found.

Nothing can hurt me now.



Black-eyed Susan - *Avery Loren*

Other Brother

Anastasia McDaniel

He just needed some sleep, Douglas thought as he relaxed into the study chair beside his son's bed. He cracked open the spine of the book—*The Little Prince*—and started reading.

Charlie lay on his back underneath a navy blanket that reached up to his neck and surrounded his dark curly hair. Charlie slowly closed his eyes as Douglas went on reading, but his fingers twitched and rubbed the corner of his blanket with the manufacturing tag.

Douglas read a fourth of the way in and yawned. Charlie's finger crinkled the plastic paper up and down.

"Feeling sleepy yet?" Douglas said.

Charlie shrugged.

Great, so this wasn't helping either. Well, why should reading a book work better than melatonin or those prescription pills? Douglas stared at the book, and his eyelids started to close in protest. If he looked it for one second longer, he was the one who would be going to sleep. He put the book aside and stared at the room.

Notebooks, pens, highlighters, printouts of seeds germinating, types of chemical bonding, and some math homework were scattered around the main study desk. A bookcase held folders full of scrap paper and notes, and side tables held their fair share of random knick-knacks. The study lamp beside the bed gave a faint but warm glow to the room. At the corners and edges of the wall where the lamp light barely reached, white slips of paper and colorful candy wrappers peeked out of the dark.

Douglas asked, just to double check in case Charlie forgot, "Did you take the melatonin?"

Charlie nodded. "Maybe . . . I'm just keeping myself up at night."

"What for?" Douglas frowned.

“Thinking.”

“Stop thinking then. Think during the day. Did you tell the therapist about that?”

Charlie shifted and the blanket crept up his face. “Yeah.”

“And what did she tell you?”

“Think some other time.”

Douglas stared at him. “Did you do it?”

“I did.”

Douglas paused. “What were you thinking about?”

“School.”

“Your writing assignment again?”

Charlie gave him a mumble. Maybe he was getting sleepy. Douglas went on, “There isn’t anything wrong with your essays, you just need to get it done and move on. Besides, you’re the writer of the house. But if you need me to take a look at it, I can.”

“It’s fine.”

“Then what are you thinking about?” Douglas withheld a sigh. “Is it about your math grades? Have you talked to your teacher yet?”

“They’re busy.” Charlie fiddled with the paper tag again, and now the blanket hid his face.

“So are you. It’s their job to help you, so take advantage of it.”

“Uh huh.”

Douglas waited for any additional thoughts, but Charlie stayed silent. Charlie never mentioned this sleep problem until the grades started to really decline and Douglas asked him what was happening. Douglas’s sister had

insomnia, so he figured Charlie must be starting to take after her.

“Starting to feel sleepy?”

“I guess.” The paper crinkled again.

Douglas set the book on the floor. He had read this out loud to Charlie when he was little, and then he would tuck him in and they’d both go to sleep at a reasonable hour. Oh, and Charlie would always ask right before Douglas closed the door, to look under the bed for monsters.

Douglas stood up and Charlie shifted to look at him. His form blended into the blanket. “I think I’m sleepy. Goodnight.”

Some faint part of his mind regretted the spontaneous idea, but Douglas said, “Not yet, not until I look under your bed for monsters.”

Charlie blankly stared at him, and Douglas squatted down. It was a stupid idea but who knows, maybe this last routine would put Charlie to sleep or something. That or they’d find a new therapist before the midterms.

Underneath the bed, notebooks, plastic and paper trash, and headphones crept out from the edge. Douglas sat back, held onto the bed frame, and leaned down enough so he could look underneath the bed without sticking his head into the trash.

Charlie lay under the bed.

Douglas froze. What-what was this? How could he be down here? Douglas’s heart beat in his throat, and he gripped the bed so he wouldn’t fall back. Why was there some twin of his son down here?

The Charlie under the bed watched him, his eyes half closed because of tears. He whispered, “Is there someone on my bed?”

This couldn’t be real. He looked like ten-year-old Charlie who had woken up from a terrible nightmare.

The child reached for his hand. “Don’t let him eat me.”

Douglas opened his mouth and then closed it. No, no, this can’t be

happening. It didn't make sense, it had to be a dream. Douglas slowly held out a hand to the child.

"Did you spot a mouse under my bed?" Charlie asked from on top of the bed.

Douglas scrambled to his feet, the mattress hiding the desperate eyes of the child beneath.

Charlie lay with his back to the room. There had to be a second one underneath the bed because Charlie couldn't switch places so fast. But how could logic apply to what he saw? Douglas started, "No, it's just . . ."

Douglas glanced at the edge of the bed. The child was probably listening. Douglas needed to say something quickly, so Charlie wouldn't be suspicious or frightened. "I'm just tired and sleepy."

Charlie nudged his head in a semblance to a nod.

Douglas quickly squatted back down. The child had vanished. Douglas swore it was there a second ago. He was hallucinating, wasn't he?

Douglas stared, but the other Charlie failed to reappear. Why should he? That child couldn't have been real, his imagination was getting to him. The child had asked if there was a monster on top and if it was going to eat him. That didn't make any sense though. If this monster under the bed was worried about being eaten by the real child above, did it expect the father to help?

Yeah, Douglas thought, none of this made any sense. Who was he kidding? He peeked under the bed to find a monster? Charlie had kept him up way too long. Douglas gripped the bed to lift himself back up, but paused, his back tense.

Charlie would have mentioned it. The child sounded nothing like a mouse, and obviously if there really was some impostor under the bed, then Douglas wouldn't have been the only one to have heard it.

Douglas rubbed his eyes and stood up. "Well, I'm going to sleep. Goodnight, I hope the bed bugs don't bite."

A muffled goodnight answered him along with some shifting paper. Charlie sounded sleepy, so who knows, maybe it worked.

Douglas opened the door of the bedroom but spared a glance back at the bottom of the bed. Still empty, as it should be.

Why was that child even there in the first place, and why was it gone now? Scared off? Douglas worried for a moment that the monster was waiting for him to leave but brushed the concern away. If there was a problem, Charlie would tell him. The more Douglas thought about it, the more stupid it sounded. There weren't any monsters under the bed, and there was no reason to dwell on such pointless, irrational matters.

He just needed some sleep.

the earth, my mother

Elizabeth M. Allen

bow my temple to her grass,
chant my holy prayer,
lose my inhibition, let go my grasp
i sink into her mire

suspend me underground, in green
and boggy tones, lay me down to rest,
shush my clattering bones

i'll succumb to her church of moss
and the march of countless years,
return me to the womb,
a place of distant fears

inhaling heavy earth, dense
and damp, descending through the dirt,
dark caverns and empty dens

clasped hands, take me down
below her molten earth, return me
to my mother, of tumbled rock
and humble, primordial birth

i am borne upon her skin
as waves of rolling grass,
daisies, and wildflowers,
remade as her place of mass

her flowers kiss my crown, her vines
embrace my bones, drowned
in green abyss, i am small but finally home

my body as her temple,
i serve as steady ground,
to feed her children, guide their steps
as they traverse her marvelous gifts



Cabin in the Valley - *Jeffrey Grounds*

Fall

Neil Frederick

Everything leaves
Unnoticed by the leaves
Of trees
In October
Roots
Soil
Bones
Of our mother
Father
This everything
Like a carpet to be spent
On the stitching of the next quilt
This yesterday built
On gifted craftsmanship
This everything of others
Celebrating now
This belief
This love reprising
Our next winter's spring.

One-Way Road

Elizabeth M. Allen

The road ahead is dark,
unknown, miles meted out
in the undertow
of spinning, rubber-burning wheels.

Time slips out the window
in a drag of cloying,
serpentine smoke, and
scathing, shrieking wind.

The beast's paws bound forth
atop the dark lane, asphalt sputtering,
shuddering, the road rearview cracking
into canyons, gullies, ravines.

A slippery yellow tongue
streams headlong, shining,
sliding, lolling up
and down the hills ahead.

Its speed is roaring and rising,
racing forth to the mountain,
looming black, opaque,
obscure, and ominous overhead.

Clouds flicker and flash,
slipping 'round heaven's peak,
whipping freely like a fish,
drawn and spat around rocks downstream.

Deep moody greens, damp,
lifeless oranges fly by, smeared
by wet hands, fingers grasping,
gasping for any purchase.

White knuckles, cold, sweaty
hands wrenched 'round the wheel,

latched to fate's driver, droning
down the one-way.

The beast takes higher,
whipping and winding 'round
the mountain's sharp edges,
rising with tectonic thunder.

The dark road fades behind,
the one-way ahead misty,
awaiting, the beast and its rider
racing for the mountaintop.



Death and the Maiden - *Avery Loren*

Four Days

Hillary Schackmuth

- Friday: My sister calls, her voice trembling; something isn't right.
Nick has drowned; nothing could be done.
Breathless, thoughtless, frozen—what can I do?
Six hours away in Chicago, I can't go home.
Longest, darkest drive back to my grandparents' house.
- Saturday: We go shopping at Marshalls.
I wander down the men's aisle looking at the t-shirts and shorts.
Nick would always wear those, no matter the weather.
And I would be outside with him, having a blast.
I'm imagining the good times we would have when I get back.
Shooting hoops, playing monopoly, enjoying summers with
Nick.
Using the sun to tell time; no worries in the world.
Can't wait to go home to see my friend.
- Sunday: Time to go home.
Sitting in the back of the white car, staring aimlessly into the
gray motionless clouds.
Replaying the phone call in my mind: Nick has drowned;
nothing could be done.
Nick's showing is in less than 12 hours.
Slowing down, pulling in the driveway, about to see my friend
for the last time.
Getting ready, holding back the tears, then I break.
I cry, I scream.
We arrive; the room is filled wall to wall with Nick's family and
friends; I can't get to him.
I just want to say goodbye.
His five-year-old twin sisters stand on a stool, leaning over the
casket looking at him.
I stand at the end of the casket, waiting.
They run off; my feet slide on the ground, moving closer and
closer to the front.
I stop.
His eyes closed.
His red hair going in all directions.

His head slightly propped up on a pillow.
A fine powder covering his face.
A rosary wrapped around his soft, small, delicate hands.
Five Pixie Sticks lay in his breast pocket: green, blue, yellow,
orange, pink—his favorite candy.
An angel in waiting.

Monday: The funeral is today.
The clock strikes 11; it has started.
But I'm in class thinking what the hell am I doing.
First day of college or friend's funeral.
I've made the wrong decision.



Seeing What the Future Holds - *Hillary Schackmuth*

The Blanket

Emma Golden

I was sitting in my bed, crocheting a blanket,
round and round in circles.
But then the yarn ran out.
I gathered up my pillowcase
and added it to my work.
But then that ran out, so I pulled the map
from my wall, crocheting it into the blanket.
The needle flew as I found more and more things to add.
My curtains and wallpaper and books were soon
woven in and there I was, madly stitching,
half hoping the paper yarn would break, and I would be free.

Sleepless at Sophia's

Emma Golden

Growing up, my friends and I were not your average little girls. We were steeped in our parents' child-rearing philosophies. Which resulted in three young ladies who rarely wore shoes, were usually covered in mud, and hardly ever brushed their hair. I don't want to say that we were not like other girls, but we were definitely not like other girls. It became an obsession of ours to be as far from the norm as we could get. Once we even decreed that weird would no longer be an insult among us, but a compliment. Looking back, it's hard not to cringe at how strange we were. At the same time, though, we were undeniably genuine, something that cannot be said about many people in our society. We did what made us happy without any regard for what others said. In doing what we wanted, we made some particularly unforgettable memories, some of which are so absurd I can't now fathom our reasoning.

One of these infamous occasions occurred one evening when I was sleeping over at my best friend Sofia's house. We spent so much time at each other's houses that sleepovers had lost their sparkly excitement. So that night, somewhat unintentionally, we brought the excitement back to every sleepover we had for a few weeks. This came about when we were getting ready for bed. Thinking back, I have no idea how the idea got into our heads, but suddenly we decided that we should sleep in Sofia's bathtub. It seemed like such a Shel Silverstein-like idea that we just had to do it. Perhaps something else you should know about me and my friends is that we are some of the most competitive people you will ever meet, and it was especially true in our younger years. When a challenge was set, there was no choice but to follow through. So, grabbing a few blankets and pillows, we climbed into Sofia's tub. Now this tub was no Jacuzzi; it was not long enough for us to lay anywhere close to flat and too narrow to fit comfortably side by side. We rock-paper-scissored for who had to put their head on the side with the spigot and settled in, head-to-feet and feet-to-head, with Sofia on the spigot side. I was reassured by the fact that, if by some freak accident, one of us accidentally turned the water on in the night, it would be Sofia who would have the torrent of cold water rush into her face. However, I was not comfortable by any means. I could feel my hip bones scraping into the porcelain on one side and into Sofia's leg on the other. But the shame of giving up on one's resolution was far worse than

the idea of waking up sore, so I shut my eyes and resolved to fall asleep, still practically sitting up.

Luckily, I am a very good sleeper and thus only woke up a few times throughout the night, attempting to stretch out my contorted legs. If I had to guess, Sofia did not have such a pleasant night. The next morning, we woke up to an epiphany – we could put ourselves through this kind of torture every night! I don't think that is how we put it in our minds then, but, looking back, that was the result. Ever the creatives, we resolved to come up with a new challenging place to sleep every time we had a sleepover. We found a fresh notebook and titled the first page "Places We Have Slept." With great pride, we began our list: "1. In 'The Bathtub'" and gleefully ran off in search of other agonizing places to spend the night.

Just like we planned, we slept in different places every sleepover for the next several weeks. Sofia and I tried to rope our other best friend, Cora, into the plan, but she, the crowned "most reasonable one," only participated a few times, one of which was quite memorable.

Sofia's family had recently cut down a few of the trees in the woods surrounding their house. The workmen had stacked the great rounds of wood in a haphazard pile by their driveway, to be broken down for firewood. When I arrived one day for a sleepover, Sofia practically tackled me in the driveway, informing me she'd found our next spot. She vehemently pointed to the large stack of logs that looked far from hospitable. "And since it's winter, there won't even be snakes!"

I was swept up in her enthusiasm.

Of course, this notion that there would be no snakes because it was cold also meant that it would be absolutely freezing during the night, but we innocently failed to consider this fact. Cora came later, and we filled her in on the plan; she agreed that this was a great idea (maybe she was not so reasonable after all). Of course, by dinner, Sofia's little brother, Zaku, had weaseled his way into joining us. We dug a few sleeping bags out of the basement and went out to the wood pile. We each chose a spot, flat enough to lay down on, and set out our bedding. Then, because we couldn't do anything halfway, we collected some wood, and each made ourselves a little cooking fire on the rounds of wood. We roasted some apples and ate the food we had taken from the house. Altogether, the evening was shaping up to be fun! The sun's warmth had not yet leached out of the wood, and we

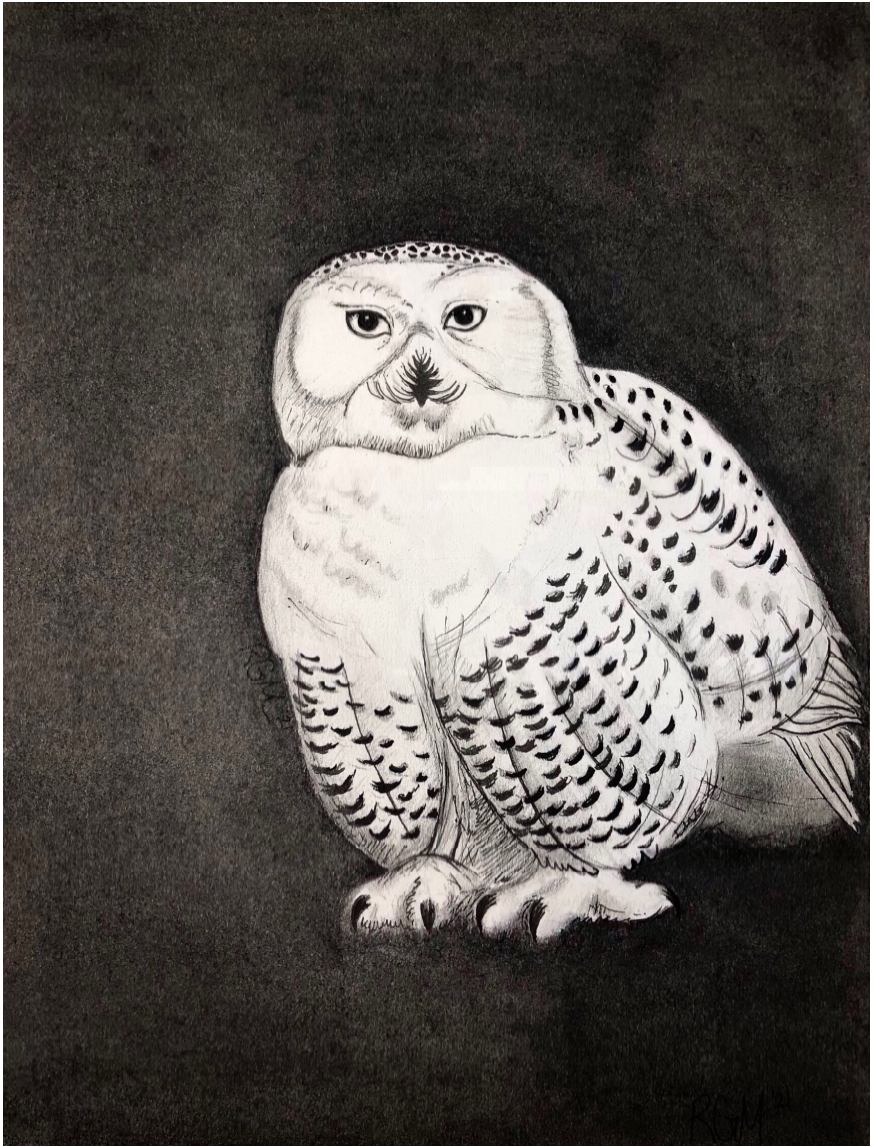
were kept warm by our little cooking fires. That all changed when we decided it was time to sleep. Extinguishing my fire, I curled into my sleeping bag and stared up at the stars, waiting for sleep to come. After about ten minutes, I could already feel the cold of the ground seeping through my sleeping bag.

The thing about sleeping in a sleeping bag is that you can make a little pocket of warmth which is delightful, but the second you move, the warmth escapes, and you are left shivering. I unfortunately move a lot in my sleep, especially when I am trying to get comfortable on a pile of logs. As you can imagine this combination was not pleasant in the least. To add to the discomfort, the place I had chosen to sleep was slanted downward off the side of the pile. The slippery material of my sleeping bag did not stay comfortably laid out as I'd intended, but instead slid down the side of the log pile, making it so that I periodically had to shove my way back up, losing even more of my precious warmth.

These two instances were just the tip of the iceberg. We had at least nine different entries in our notebook, cataloging our victories. One of the most impressive feats was when we slept on the dividers between Sofia's living and dining room. There are two of them, big cutouts in the wall, about four feet up. Sofia and I each took one, clearing the decor off the ledges and settling in for the night. The ledges are only about three feet long and ten inches wide, thus we had to lay on our backs with our knees tucked up and stay attentive to avoid falling off. This was obviously not conducive to sleep, of which we got little.

I honestly have no idea why we continued our challenge for so long. It was so annoying to actually sleep through the night, but the sense of victory in the morning was apparently worth it. So, we continued: on the stairs, in kayaks laid out on the porch, in a coat closet, on the hardwood floor with no blankets or pillows, and on and on until our fire for the craft sputtered out and we decided to call it quits. I am sure Sofia still has the notebook with our list of sleeping locations, and for a few months before the wood pile was removed, you could still see the blackened spots where we had made our fires. Although the nights were unpleasant, the memories I have from those days are priceless. It is fun to look back and realize that even though we channeled our energy into something so absurd, those nights proved that our competitive drive and determination were there from the beginning. Even though our days of sleeping in bathtubs are long gone, Sofia, Cora, and I are still unnecessarily competitive and will follow through

with any goal we make. We have taught ourselves many obscure hobbies, such as knife throwing and archery, as well as making full length colonial style cloaks out of little more than fabric and dedication. I can still fall asleep anywhere, and when I go to Sofia's, I still just sleep on her wood floor with just a blanket.



Snowy Owl, *Nyctea scandiaca* - Regan McKim

Canoe

Zipporah Breunig

She didn't give me long to love her, but I did, right from the start. I sat with her in an old canoe, which creaked with each lap of the lake's water against its sides. I sat in the front of the small boat; my eyes were firmly fixed on the glittering waterline while the sun beat down on our bodies like a drum. I always loved hard in summer. The heat ran down our faces in rivers, warning us of the impending storm. She paddled, her strong arms moving us closer to shore to wait out the rain. We'd brought no shoes, and the damp gravel crunched beneath my toes, stinging like so many small needles. I watched her prepare an avocado, her long fingers making quick work with the short knife she'd kept with her. It was creamy and warm, and I let it melt in my mouth as I looked at her, looking at me. I wanted to tell her, then, how much she meant to me, but I couldn't find the words. My tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth as she touched my ankle, and her fingers peeled my heart like the avocado.

Schrödinger's Quilt

Elliott Samons

I heard the wall whisper my name in your voice, and I was brought to where you stood outside in the cold. Three stories up. A thousand stories out of your mouth wrapped around our names like a double helix, a double history being messily folded into one. I knew the hug of a ghost and the leech of grief made me a host. We touched earth and trekked through that old forest, my thoughts snagging on rose bushes wiped barren by the winter. No bright colors left to warn me of the danger. I left the thoughts to hang, willing more to be pulled up and out.

It's movie night, and the screen has no edges. Memory lane has escaped our minds, surrounding us now, and we're driving slowly, finally able to see both sides of the road at once. The clocks have learned to turn in new directions, past and future arced into each other like a globular spiderweb. This patchwork of memory made into a quilt to shield from the cold and grey of endless night, endless winter. I roll the quilt over every patch of ground we crossed, like a lint roller trying to peel memories from the dirt. I dance between our lives, learning new patterns in which the colors come together. Faint pink embarrassment, fierce red love, and green to mark our meeting. That green the color of the sea of memory. I dive in, swimming deep into the trenches, so effortlessly and without a gravity to indicate if I'm swimming in a sea or a sky. That green the color of the paint in your childhood room, where I sit alone, bouncing your name off the concrete walls like the dirty grass-stained tennis ball we used to hit home runs with. The creeping grayness stops the name from bouncing back, and it sits heavy on the floor. The weights I've neglected to lift over the years haunt me now, my back too weak and crooked for the repetition of a name.

I reach down, knowing my future movements will carry the movement of this strain on my entire being. I should have made the effort sooner, but we can't leave our dreams to be black and white. Tears and sweat mix down my neck as I excavate our names, wrapping them in the quilt. I continue rolling the quilt until it surrounds me too, squeezing the shakes from my body and blurring my vision with a maelstrom of color. Pink and red clash with green and brown, an alien sky mixed with familiar earth tones, the emergence of youth twisted into a return to dirt. I take the colors within and hold them close, alive now. The weight of memory tears the quilt apart, and I throw its pieces against the walls, leaving spots of grey as my eyes fixate on color.

Violet

Mars Abbett

The taste of purple skin
Has the aftertaste of poison

The stain of lavender tears on my pillowcase
Cannot be washed out of my memory
No matter how many showers I take

Iris thoughts race through my head and I dream of violet skies
I never thought lilac would be a color I despised

Indigo footprints linger after replacing the
Carpet seven times

Amethyst collarbones carved with careful trust
Destroyed by the heather pain of violent touch

Magenta fingertips plucking the strings of an age-old guitar
To a song written by the whispers of a broken heart

Periwinkle dresses and mauve sun hats burned
By the scorch of torn emotion
Beautiful orchid curtains lined the walls of aggression

The boysenberry brain matter sprayed against the wall
Is a clue
That maybe
We should've just stayed red and blue.



Growth - *Avery Loren*

Acrylic Environments

Elliott Samons

Jaime dabbed the red paint into the white, using her wrist to twist them into a lighter pink than she had intended. She added some red, too much, sighing with impatience at her overcorrection. She grabbed the white paint, dolloping on a large glob onto her palette. Slowly mixing, she finally got the shade of pink she wanted. More paint than she needed now, but at least the color was right. Picking up her brush, she turned to the canvas, gently adding some of the pink and feeling her breath steady. As she settled into the calmness, she painted more freely, applying more paint to her paint brush as she hit a groove.

Tracing a large pink outline, Jaime jumped as her phone vibrated, causing a large pink diagonal streak across the painting. She swore under her breath, cleaning her hands as she stepped toward her phone.

“It’s Jaime,” she answered, feeling a sharpness in her breath.

A whirlwind of words came from the other end, “Hey Jaime, it’s Brad, how’s your day off?” Jaime drew a breath to answer, but Brad cut in, “We’re shorthanded again. We need you immediately. We’ll throw in a free dinner!”

“It’s my day off,” Jaime said despondently.

“I know, I know, but we’re busy enough that the tips should be worth your day off! And you know some of us don’t get days off.”

“You own the place, and you get more days off than me.”

“I work from home,” Brad said defensively. “We need you here in twenty. See ya then.”

Brad hung up, and Jaime swore again. She looked at her mess of paints and tossed the brush into a vase of water, promising herself she’d paint more when she got home. This was supposed to be her first day off in a couple weeks. Her work uniform wasn’t exactly clean, but Brad would get what he paid for. She stumbled out her door and down the stairs of her apartment building, unpleasantly surprised by the rain. Hurrying down the sidewalk,

she tried rubbing a pain out of her back. This job was catching up in more ways than one.

At the ringing of a bell, Jaime looked over her shoulder and saw a bicyclist coming up behind her on the sidewalk. She spun out of the way just in time, but before she could catch her balance, she was bumped by a man briskly taking his phone call for a walk. As the ground zoomed up towards her, she reached out her arms to catch herself. She heard a sound reminding her of the great winds she had heard in the forests where she grew up, and the concrete disappeared.

Jaime felt her fingers gripping the grass like she was worried she would fall away from the ground. She attempted to look around, but a gust of wind forced her eyes shut, squeezing streams of tears. The wind calmed and Jaime became aware of the sun's heat washing over her. She looked around, still squinting but now from the brightness, taking in the grassy hill on which she stood. For a moment she was pleased by the peaceful view and the singing of the pine trees stretching out from the bottom of the hill.

Suddenly remembering where she was supposed to be, she panicked, then confusion set in as she breathed in her change of setting. She felt an inward anger about her worrying about work in the midst of such chaos, but the diner had been the focus of her life lately. Still, she pulled her phone from her pocket, her fingers dialing Brad's number from muscle memory.

No service. *Where am I?* she wondered. She looked at her phone to check the time. The numbers blinked in and out of focus, changing rapidly. She shoved the phone back into her pocket and sat down in the grass to assess her surroundings. The grass closest to her was short and green, but taller patches dotted and snaked over the surrounding hillside. Violets and dandelion polka-dotted the greenscape with purple and yellow. Running her fingers through the cool grass, she closed her eyes and inhaled deeply, the smell of pine rolling on the wind. She meditated on the smell, letting it take her once again to her comfortable childhood forest. For the first time in a long time, it didn't seem so far away.

She laughed, jumping to a stand and opening her eyes in one instance. Overcome by a sudden impulse, she ran to the top of the hill and lay down. Folding her arms over her chest, she rolled down the hill. She couldn't say what, but something stronger than gravity was calling her towards the trees. Why else would she be here? She couldn't name where she was, but the

wind carried a feeling of familiarity that negated the need for a name. She laughed hysterically as she rolled down the hill, going so recklessly fast that she nearly bounced on her way down.

She stood up at the bottom of the hill, bending over with laughter and brushing herself off. Another impulse coursed through her, and she took a couple steps towards the forest line. As her foot landed silently on the burnt orange pine needles, she leaned forward into a sprint, throwing herself fully into the woods.

Jaime ran until her legs were burning. The pain in her back disappeared at the edge of the forest or somewhere up on that grassy hill. Her feet danced over roots, her silent sprint only marked by her increasingly sharp breaths. Squirrels and birds darted, chirping and singing warnings of her sudden presence to the rest of the forest. Exhausted, she slowed to a stop, leaning against a tall white pine. She traced her fingers over the scaly bark, feeling the soft bumps of dried sap. She inhaled as she looked up to take in the full height of the tree. The top of the tree swayed as the sound of the wind moved closer.

Jaime couldn't resist the ladder-like branches circling tightly up the tall tree. She grabbed a couple low, thick ones and pulled herself up. She rested her feet on them and stretched up next to the tree. She felt a twinge of nervousness about being off the ground and leaned into the trunk to wrap her arms around it. Then she resumed her climb, now feeling more confident with each movement. Her muscles awakened with the memories of trees climbed in her youth, firing up forgotten synapses. The memories reached deeper than her muscles, channeling images of changing seasons and echoes of her father's voice through her head.

Her history flashed intensely before her eyes, making it hard for her to see more than a few feet ahead of her. Pulse quickening, she pushed through, a grunt coming from a place unknown within her. Voices crashed through her ears like massive waves, bouncing off each other eerily. Occasionally she pulled her name from the mess. As she reached for the next branch, she felt the sun in her palm and recoiled, blurring her sense of up and down. Suddenly the tree was back within her focus, falling away with a rush of wind. Jaime realized it wasn't the tree that was falling.

Jaime gulped, suddenly aware that her clothes were drenched. She adjusted her eyes to the blinding grey of the city around her. Instinctively she tried

shaking herself dry, tried shaking some order into her head. She squeezed her eyes shut, looking for a trace of the landscape she had just been floating through. She heard a bell and quickly opened her eyes again, dodging another cyclist.

Ducking under an awning, she wriggled her phone out of her pocket to check the time. As if on cue, the phone shook to life, Brad's name flashing across the screen. Jaime stared at her phone in disbelief. A drop of water fell from her hair and splashed onto her reflection on the screen. She laughed and rejected Brad's call. She set her phone to silent and walked back down the hill to her apartment complex.

Cubomedusae

Zipporah Breunig

A sting from certain kinds of box jellyfish can kill a person within minutes. The name betrays nothing of their secret deadliness, the nomenclature stemming from their cube-like shape rather than their potent poison. Their human taxonomer, perhaps, wanting them to be seen for more than the pernicious predators that they are. How deadly could something with the word “jelly” in its name be? It’s no poison dart frog, no viper, no deathstalker scorpion. How horrible it must be to feel the thin strips of cold fire take hold of one of your limbs and know that this, this is the end. To know that as the venom creeps through your veins, eventually stopping your heart, that you would not make a very tasty meal. Does the sting of the tentacles make a sound, underwater? Can you hear the reverberation of the deadly stingers, the electric buzz making contact with the skin, perhaps a warning to other creatures of the doom that awaits nearby? Or maybe their grip is grave-silent, a primordial scream of the ocean’s dark depths that says, with a smile, *you haven’t tamed me yet.*

SPIRIT OF DIVERSITY: THE POWER OF YOUR VOICE Creative Writing Competition 2021

At Ivy Tech Community College, we honor and appreciate diversity, equity, and belonging as essential elements of a highly functioning society. We are working every day to build educational environments that respect and affirm the unique contributions of each individual, regardless of race, ethnicity, religious belief, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, disability, or political affiliation. We strive to put diversity, equity, and inclusion into practice by graduating culturally literate individuals who will make positive contributions to local communities, and through recruitment and retention of talented faculty and staff who reflect our great state of Indiana. All belong at Ivy Tech.

The Spirit of Diversity Writing Competition is meant to honor and celebrate William R. Goins and the significance of his work in the history of Ivy Tech Community College. William R. Goins, affectionately known as Bill, served as an Ivy Tech State Trustee from 1995-2008, including chairing the State Board during a time of significant growth and development for the College. Bill led the College through a successful transition from Indiana Vocational Technical College to becoming Ivy Tech Community College, now the largest singly accredited statewide community college in the nation. Bill also served as the Foundation Board Director for more than 22 years. During his tenure, Bill Goins worked tirelessly to advance diversity initiatives to better serve our students, staff, and community. Until his death in 2020, he served as an effective voice and leader of Ivy Tech Community College, and his passion and commitment to education and equity has left a lasting legacy.

All enrolled students were invited to participate in the Creative Writing Competition. Its goals were to raise student awareness and understanding around issues of diversity; bring focus and attention to the power of one's voice and the voice of others; and inspire students to use the written word as a form of creative expression.

Contest Organizers:

Dr. Carey Treager
Assistant Vice President for Student Advocacy

Dr. Sam Levy-Arnold
Professor of English, Bloomington and Indiana Phi Theta Kappa

Dr. Allison Toren
Instructor of English and Program Chair, Kokomo

2021 Winners:

Westley Penland, Bloomington

Skye Winslow, Indianapolis

Chelsea Randolph, Fort Wayne

Zahavah Carter, Bloomington

A Note from Root and Branch:

We are grateful for the opportunity to share these student writers' work. Since our start, an important part of our mission has been to publish a variety of voices, styles, and themes so that our pages truly represent our community. Thank you to the organizers and to all who participated and congratulations to the winners.

Dear K. Penland

Westley Penland

April 8, 2008

Dear K. Penland,

You are sixteen, going on seventeen—I know you’ve had that song stuck in your head all week!

You’re probably wondering “Who is this guy writing to me? Do I have a distant relative in Indiana that forgot to put money in my birthday card?” Alas, no. I’m a present day you or, I guess, to you, a future you. And I know you may be thinking “No, you’re not—I’m a girl,” but I know that down in the depths of the dreams you have pushed out of your mind for fear of them being impossible, there is a tiny nameless voice of a boy saying, “Dear God, I hope he is me.” Sound about right?

So, why am I writing now, on the eve of our seventeenth birthday?

Well, I’m sorry to say, but this will be one of the hardest years of your life, and I want to give you some words of love. You have spent your life trying to figure out who you are, and that won’t stop for another ten years. You’ve never met anyone quite like you, and that makes you think that you are crazy for even having the notion that you could be a boy. When you came out to your mom as a lesbian, she made you promise two things: you would never get a sex change or The AIDs. In a few months you are going to get put into conversion therapy, and you will be misdiagnosed with borderline personality disorder when you try to explain how you have a voice of a boy inside you that tells you to act a certain way. What you’re experiencing is gender dysphoria, and it is perfectly normal for Trans people to experience, but you don’t have the tools to know this, so you will be heavily medicated instead. You will rent *Boys Don’t Cry* from Blockbuster and live in horror about what will happen to you if you let people see the real you. You will watch *The L Word* and read *Labor of Love* and see how Trans men are ridiculed and gawked at. You will move out before your eighteenth birthday and detox from medication on your apartment floor. You will build the highest walls around that boy’s voice because no one will ever hear him.

Until you are twenty-five, and you meet your first Trans man, Milo, and that boy's voice comes booming out of those walls screaming "THAT'S ME, THAT'S WHO WE ARE!" Our life was changed forever that day.

If you had more resources and guidance, maybe it wouldn't have taken twenty-seven years to start listening to that boy inside you. We are lucky – some Trans folx never make it out of these dark places and choose to end it all. Diversity and inclusion have saved a lot of people in the future, but there is still so much more work to be done.

I'm writing all this to tell you—to beg you—not to shut that voice out, not shut MY voice out. To tell you that you are more loved than you could ever imagine and that the world eventually will catch up to you. That being our most authentic self is the most liberating thing we have ever done. I love you. Please love yourself and be free.

Westley Penland
Executive Producer of Our Life

A Deafening Request

Skye Winslow

In 2006, I was hired as the marketing director for a deaf-owned company called PAW located on the eastside of Indianapolis. Having learned American Sign Language (ASL) in my twenties, I knew my skills were a bit rusty but felt I'd be up to speed pretty quickly.

On my first day at work, a young couple entered my office to ask for advice. Immediately, a warm and fuzzy feeling came over me, and I felt grateful for acceptance into the community so quickly. I took out paper and pen, ready to take notes and offer solutions to help this young couple achieve their goal. As the woman began her story, I thought I was misunderstanding what she was saying to me. So, I signed back her request, "You want my help to find a doctor who would be willing to surgically deafen your hearing child?" They both looked enthusiastic and signed back, "Yes! That's exactly what we want."

Stunned, my hands went silent, hanging in the air and seemingly unable to move. The woman continued. She explained that she and her husband were both born deaf, and they became the parents of three deaf children. However, two years ago she gave birth to a boy who was hearing. The couple feared his impairment would single him out, and they were sincerely concerned that he would become the target of life-long bullying. They felt sure the answer was to find a doctor who could surgically deafen the child before he turned three, an age when he might understand and begin to miss his hearing. "If he were deaf," she said, "he would fit in."

For the first time in my life, I was speechless. I glanced toward my treasonous hands as if to will them to jump in and say something—anything to stop this madness. With no response from me, the woman continued. She said they were unable to find a local doctor willing to perform the deafening surgery, but they did locate one in Brazil who understood their plight. They wanted me to help them access medical insurance to cover their expenses so they could travel to Brazil for their son's life-altering surgery. I felt faint and realized I had been holding my breath. It took me a second, but the only response I could muster was, "Are you sure you want to do this?" Nodding their heads in unison, the mother added, "It's the only way to ensure he has a normal life."

I sat motionless. After what seemed like an eternity the couple stood up and said, “This is how we feel when hearing people demand deaf children get surgery to ‘correct their problem.’ If you are going to work here, you need to understand that deaf people are not broken—they are simply people without hearing. Do you understand?” they asked.

Now, able to breathe again, tears filled my eyes. I stood up and hugged and thanked them for this very raw and very real lesson. By taking the time to challenge my thinking, I believe they helped to make me a better person. And while I am sure I have never recommended hearing aids or surgery to any deaf person, I am also sure that at some point in my life I have been guilty of trying to ‘fix’ someone when there was literally nothing to ‘fix’ . . . except my understanding.

No one should be made to feel ‘less than’ simply because they are different. Offering unsolicited suggestions to ‘fix’ someone in order for them to be accepted is abhorrent. I share this true story with you and ask you to challenge yourself. Are you or have you been guilty of ‘fixing’ people? Inclusion means we accept and celebrate those who are different from ourselves. Only when we learn to do this are we gifted with what makes the world truly beautiful—diversity.

Up

Chelsea Randolph

Growing up as the bronze girl in a white family, you get looked at. It's as simple as that. Tanned, olive skin, and dark hair standing next to pale peach and blonde, it really stands out. It stands out at the grocery store, and when you're out to eat. You're only four and you're throwing a fit in public, and strangers think that your dad is kidnapping you because he doesn't look like you, and you don't look like him. The white lady running after you is yelling *Stop!* and people around start to think that maybe something is wrong. But it's not. Your dad just did the normal parent thing and removed you from the situation when you started having a tantrum. And your mom is just running after you, trying to catch up, dragging along whatever your dad dropped in his haste. So you get used to being looked at.

Growing up as the mixed girl in your house, you get asked a lot of questions: *Why don't you look like your mom and dad? Why didn't your real mom want you?* You're only seven, so you really don't know the answers, but you learn them fast. Learn the ones that'll get them to stop asking the fastest. Learn how to shrug your shoulders just right. Learn how to keep your eyes from watering when you respond. Learn how to make it seem like it doesn't matter to you. You get used to the questions.

Growing up without knowing who you are, you stick out. You're only fifteen, but it seems like you've had to make eighty family trees at this point. You internally groan as the teacher explains the simple assignment, and you raise your hand AGAIN to say that you're adopted. In front of everyone. *Do you want me to do my known family or a different assignment?* Once, only once, they let you do a different project. You have a pile of posters in your room with pictures of your family plastered to them. White, white, white, and you. You get used to seeing yourself stick out among the rest.

Growing up as the different one, people don't understand your decisions. They don't get why you drop out of college, don't get when you make all the 'wrong' choices. Don't get why you act like you, finally. You're only twenty-three, but you're going a different path than they thought you would. Than they think you should. You marry a man that you adore, but you can't bring yourself to share his last name. To give up yours. They can't understand it. Can't fathom why. But it makes sense to you, and it makes you comfortable in ways you haven't felt since they first started asking all

those questions at seven years old. They beg to understand, to have it explained. But they either get it or they don't. And they don't. But you get used to being misunderstood.

Rising up, you struggle a lot. It gets harder when you start to question yourself. Gets harder when you start to question others. Gets even harder when the world starts to get ugly, and you're raising kids who don't look like you. You think you may know how they feel. Think you may even know how your parents felt back then. But you don't. You can't. It's different, and you think maybe you should do things differently. So, you do. You go back to being uncomfortable, so that your kids can be. You stand up, you correct. You learn and you change, and you take being the different one and you shove it in their faces. You question and you make them question, make them rethink what they know. And maybe, you give the kids who don't look like you room to rise, too.

The Lenses of Diversity

Zahavah Carter

The spirit of diversity beats within the hearts of us all. It is realizing and acknowledging the different experiences each individual faces. It is understanding the struggles that we don't face so we don't add to the problem. As a white-passing teen mother, the lens I look through is unique and if I limit myself to that lens alone, I will never understand how I could make a difference.

I am the fondue of America, the melting pot. I am a woman, a mother, a daughter, a partner. My femininity is one in a million. As unique as the snowflakes that fall each bitter winter. Together we're better. The cold winds of negativity dry my sinuses and as I cough, I can feel it tickling my throat. I've spread it. I've been sick with it before, but I got the vaccine.

Part of me is Pocahontas, only I don't know how to paint with the colors of the wind. Proving my heritage will be stringent upon tribal hearings and genealogical researchers. My mother's tribal number alone will not prove that I am a member. The only group bound to a blood quantum has been and is being killed off by the strength of our bloodline and the people who have claimed something they're not entitled to. My people are painted on the silver screen as uneducated savages, gamblers, and alcoholics. My mother's adoptive parents had to fight hard to keep her out of the reservation. Yet both of us have had teachers reject our heritage because we don't present as Natives.

I am Ashkanazi, but I never go to a temple. I have never studied the Torah and never had a bat mitzvah. But I grew up hearing Yiddish, celebrating Passover and Hanukkah, and speaking some Hebrew. Ignorance still seeps into the lives of people I once knew, believing the Holocaust never happened. A paper thrown at me as someone yells "shower time" and being likened to Anne Frank during history lessons paint me as the woman I am today.

I am a voice screaming that Black Lives Matter, because I know that the color of my skin grants me privileges others don't have. My life is already protected by the white guardian angels that have been painted in layers of oil and pushed by the oppressive white narrative. I owe it to the beauty of

diversity to create a better, fairer world for my daughter and her peers. I still am not doing enough.

My body is adorned with the colors of the rainbow. The pink, purple, and blue that shine from within are quieted by my heterosexual relationship. My love is not one to be shared, and yet I feel as though I am denying who I am if I identify as straight. My pride is quieted in order to protect my partner from their insecurities. I love proudly and openly but not with myself. Even writing this, I feel the fight brewing. “If you’re bi, why are you with me?” But just because I am a woman in love with a man, I shouldn’t deny that my first love was a girl. Our relationship was just as real as the one I’m in. But if I say that too loudly, or with too much pride, I risk offending my partner. When I came out, I was deemed a carpet muncher, confused, or worse (a whore). I can confirm that it was never just a phase.

Most importantly, I am human. The mistakes I’ve made and my background make up who I am today. This is not the “oppression olympics” where people break their backs to prove that their lives are worse. This is the age of awakening to the way we treat each other. There is power in being sensitive. Showing respect to one another as humans and correcting behaviors that need to be corrected are the only way for humanity to grow. Snowflakes are beautiful, so if I am one, I’m proud to be. And if adjusting the pronouns I use or being aware of microaggressions makes the lives of others even slightly more manageable, it’s the least I can do. America, the Land of the Free, is not free from the imperfections of the human condition.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Mars Abbett: "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll

Elizabeth M. Allen is a student at Ivy Tech Kokomo, who is pursuing an Associate's in Professional Communication. With her writing she hopes to explore the human condition, and to create a space for readers to escape to and find curiosity and comfort. She enjoys reading, writing, drawing, and spending time with friends, family, and cats.

Zahavah Carter was born and raised in Bloomington, Indiana. She grew up with a love and respect for English Language Arts and knew from a young age that she had found her passion in writing. As someone who recognizes the innate desire to be understood as a complete person, she has realized that she first has to understand individuals with varied experiences. She aspires to someday turn her hobby into a career.

Neil Frederick has been with Ivy Tech Community College Bloomington for 34 years and counting. He is currently an academic adviser who learns and is inspired by the students he serves. While attending Columbus East High School many years ago, he wrote for the school newspaper and was inducted into the Quill and Scroll Society. He majored in English at Ball State for no more than a semester or two before finishing with a B.S. majoring in Social Work and minoring in Interpersonal Communications. He now lives on five mostly wooded acres in Brown County and can find many reasons to write poetry and prose.

Zipporah Breunig took a wild, career-changing leap, and is now a student of Therapeutic Massage at Ivy Tech. They love beagles and bananas and dislike the cold.

Emma Golden is an aspiring author, horsewoman, and circus artist from Bloomington, Indiana. She is a lover of all things books, art, and animals. When not writing or at the stable, she enjoys spending time with her friends and family.

Jeffrey Grounds is an artist, musician, and photographer who enjoys the outdoors. He is an alumni of Ivy Tech and currently attending Indiana University.

A native of Radford, Virginia, **Lisa Kwong** identifies as an AppalAsian, an Asian from Appalachia. She is the author of *Becoming AppalAsian* (Glass Lyre Press, 2022). Her poems have appeared in *Best New Poets*, *A Literary Field Guide to Southern Appalachia*, *Still: The Journal*, *Pluck!*, and other publications. She teaches Asian American Studies at Indiana University and English at Ivy Tech in Bloomington.

Avery Loren is a visual artist located on the east side of Indianapolis. She's currently a student at Ivy Tech taking classes online with plans to transfer to IUPUI/Herron to study visual communications. She focuses primarily on conceptual passion projects, but also works as a freelance illustrator and muralist. She aims to explore intense emotions through use of saturated pallets and symbolism.

Anastasia McDaniel first moved to Indiana from Texas ten years ago, and recently earned her Associates degree in Biology from the Madison Ivy Tech campus. She originally set out to write fantasy stories but ended up leaning towards the science fiction and horror genres. While writing is one of her main hobbies, she also enjoys drawing in different mediums, challenging herself, and playing around with fountain pens.

Regan McKim is one of many students at Ivy Tech, and she is also working toward a degree in Fine Arts.

Westley Penland is an aspiring exercise physiologist. He has spent most of his adult life working as a chef and decided to change careers and continue education. After traveling and living all over the US, he, his wife, Amber, two dogs, and cat have now settled in Spencer, Indiana. His biggest hope is to make the world a safer place for the next generation of the LGBTQ+ Community through visibility.

Chelsea Randolph is a student at the Fort Wayne campus and will be graduating with an Associate's degree in business administration this spring. She hopes to continue with her education to receive a Bachelor's degree in business, and eventually work in the nonprofit sector. She lives in Fort Wayne with her husband, foster children, and two dogs.

Elliott Samons is a student from Seymour, who likes planting seeds, making music, and rollerblading. He has an interest in language and culture and wants to someday become a teacher.

Hillary Schackmuth is an amateur photographer from Michigan. Photography has been her hobby for the past couple of years. After moving to Indiana in 2019 she decided to make photography a bigger part of her life. Her inspiration comes from her husband who is in the Coast Guard. Her love of the water came from growing up on Lake Huron, and she gets her inspiration from the Great Lakes.

A lifelong learner, **Skye Winslow** enrolled at Ivy Tech on her 60th birthday to pursue dual degrees in nursing and psychology. A former television broadcaster and business owner, Skye found herself a student again after undergoing brain surgery to remove a benign tumor. Her healing journey has led to various degrees and certifications including master hypnotist, naturopathic doctor, health coach and raw food chef. She is married to CBS4 news anchor Bob Donaldson.

