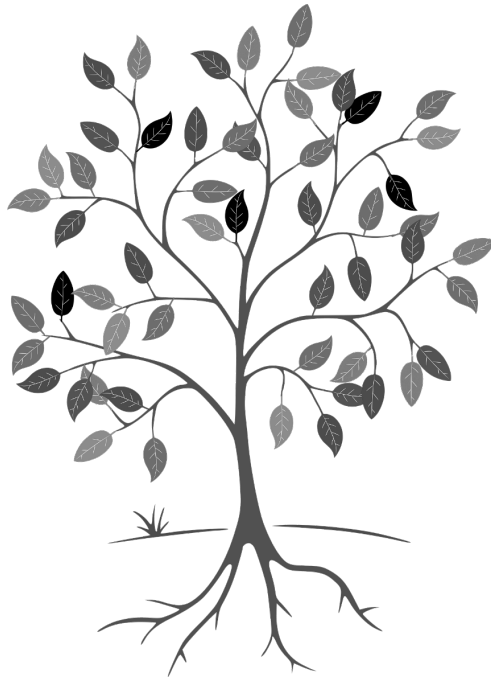


root and branch
volume XVIII



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.

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Viewpoint – *Bert Gilbert*

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MISSION

root and branch magazine publishes quality writing on any subject in any genre and in any style by members of the Ivy Tech community. Our volumes acknowledge and showcase our students' own genuine voices and experiences, which is why the magazine prefers works that are not AI-generated. *root and branch* serves as an archive for the creative lives of the Ivy Tech community.

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Bert Gilbert

In The Future

In the future,
death will be only a matter of luck
every other variable
being controlled
and chance
with its intimate bedfellow
statistics
will be
worshiped and venerated.



Home of the Spirits – *Jeffrey Grounds*

Blow It Off the Hinges

Closet doors are one of the last things to go up when building a house
But I feel like I've been putting those doors up long before this house was
ever finished.

My closet now is built over a trap door, there is more room to hide
There are spaces between hell and me where I can store my deepest secrets.
7 minutes of heaven couldn't save me from my own fears

And I just want to know who told me to hide them in the first place.

I have outfitted myself with words for every season

Coats of armor, a trig collection of scarf tight nooses,

Hoping every season I dress closer to my true colors.

And I hate feeling like I need to announce myself.

Announce my new skin, declare my next fit

Come out of the cellar and show my glowing fingertips

See, See! Look how he shines,

He shines so bright for us!

And everything is performative of myself.

They want to watch me glow, not realizing they made me illuminate, in the
first place.

That my body had to go through evolution to survive

That I trapped myself in the closet, trapped myself between hell

So the rest of the house could get walls put up around me.

And I keep going back to that purgatory

I keep trying to find ways to make my whole body luminous

I keep layering my body with tapestries, so they can't see the light

Hiding the new bits and buttons until I am sure and shrouded they can't
tell.

This season is new

And I crawl from the depth so bright

You might think I'm a False God.

I emerge in my skin, my naked form

Every pore is vibrant

Every bead of sweat glistens off my light.

I am glowing with such intensity

I can no longer hide.

I must go into this world

With light burning through my retinas

No longer able to see labels.

A flash bang and the skeletons
Left hanging in rows on the rack
Are turned to dust in cremation.
I punch a hole in the roof of my limbo.
The crowd gathers to see who I have become.
I hear someone scream
HE IS TOO BRIGHT, A DEVIL ON FIRE
The crowd chants
DEVIL DEVIL DEVIL
A beam pulsates out of my body
And with laser like precision
Finds the naysayers
And I say
I am God's Creation, I am salvation.
I am the Devil's apprentice
A fallen angel, living on broken ideations
Under heaven, over hell
Left to my own interpretations
Of self-love stuffed in closets.
Had to be my own illumination
Too bright, on fire
For this dull nation.
You call me a devil
It's an ungodly annihilation.
Love is god's brightest light
Hate is the true abomination.
And I am here.
No longer hiding
No longer afraid
Because truth
Has set me free.



The Hasey Experience – *Emma Sayward*

A Selection from the Novel: Chinese Fortune

Samantha Bailey took another spoonful of Chinese fried rice from the buffet bar and then walked over to the other side to wait while Stan, a burly man with tattoos on both forearms, removed an empty pan and replaced it with a fresh pan of chicken on a stick.

"I thought you'd never bring these out," she said firmly to Stan. "You know they're my favorite. I like them hot. When they're cold, they taste like rubber."

Stan put a large brown hand on Samantha's shoulder and wiped his face with a dishtowel he removed from his back pants pocket. He never could get her name right, but it didn't matter. Samantha had corrected him once, but he was so endearing that she did not want to hurt his feelings, so she never corrected him again.

"Now Sammy," he tried to speak softly but his voice was too large for that, "you know if you want fresh chicken on a stick, all you gotta do is to come back in the kitchen and *ask*." And with that he swooped down and made a flourishing gesture with the dishtowel in a bow of sorts. Some of the people nearby in the small restaurant clapped. Samantha piled several of the chicken on a stick on her plate.

"Stan, you're the man," called out Leslie from the back booth. He was sitting with Old German as usual on Friday nights. Old German was sixty five years old and had been eating Chinese food on Friday nights at Five Dragons since he had come to America from Germany in the eighties. He still lived in the same apartment on West Avenue, exactly five blocks away from the restaurant. Before he shared his meals with Leslie, a petite man with large bug-eye glasses perched atop his nose, he had eaten with Ida, his wife, but she passed on a few years ago. For a time, Old German had eaten alone, crumbling up the two fortune cookies Stan still left on the bill tray, sticking the fortunes hastily in his pants pocket so no one would see, but everyone knew. It took him a long time to get over his wife. He didn't bother much with anyone then, just came and ate his meal on Friday nights as usual, never missing a beat.

Leslie was rather new to the restaurant. He started coming around on Friday nights during the mid-nineties when he retired from selling shoes in Chicago for twenty-seven years. He moved to the area to be closer to his two children and grandchildren. Leslie had lost his wife in 1990, so he knew a little about what Old German was feeling.

Leslie used to watch Ida and Old German from time to time as they frolicked like teenagers in the back booth, kissing and sitting close. He

didn't know Old German then, but after Ida had been dead a reasonable mourning period of time, Leslie got up from his booth, took his plate of food over to Old German's booth, and had eaten with him ever since.

Friday night was busy for Five Dragons. They had the best Chinese buffet in town. Sam usually went with one of her buddies at the bank where she was a teller, but everyone had had something to do this particular night, so she went alone and brought the new self-help book she was currently reading. She read self-help books because she thought that it was more convenient and less costly than going to see a therapist. After all, she was pretty good with other people. She usually had the longest lines; some of her regular customers would stand in her line even if another teller were available just so they could talk with Samantha. *She listens well*, Samantha will frequently hear somewhere down the line. Samantha often wonders *listens to what? All I do is hand out money when they cash their checks.* But the people who stand in Samantha's line know that she listens to much more than that: why they want the money, what they will do with the money, how they got the money, and so on. She counts the money again for the older customers or helps them with the deposit slips and she will give her own advice when asked, which was quite often. Frequently, people will be at her station longer than the other stations, sometimes she has long lines – but no one ever complains.

Stan disappeared into the kitchen and reappeared with a new tray of honey chicken. Several voices called out to Stan from the kitchen, and he answered them in their language. Stan was not from China, but he had learned it after coming to Five Dragons several years ago when he lost his entire family in a fire on Fourth Street. It was then he quit his job at the factory and decided to answer the ad in the newspaper for Five Dragons. He took a big cut in pay, but he didn't care; the work appealed to him. And he could start living another life. "Sammy, what you gonna do this weekend? Live a little, maybe?" Stan was always trying to get Samantha out more, get involved in people, and maybe find someone and settle down. "Maybe you can get a guy at a nice party you invited to, huh?"

Samantha smiled and raised her eyebrows at Stan while she helped herself to some wontons. "Maybe I don't wanna guy, Stan. Maybe I'm just not the 'wanna guy and children, mortgage, and new car' kinda girl. I'm a loner *and* a workaholic. Who would want that in their lives? I wouldn't even be home for the kids. I had enough of that when I was a kid, why would I want to bring that into my life again?"

Stan winked at Leslie and Old German before he spoke to Samantha again. They had the same conversation almost every Friday night, so they knew it by heart. "Maybe you don't know until you try, Sammy.

You'd be great with kids, they'd love you. They love you here. You never know until you try. You never know what's out there for you."

Several children belonging to the current owners ran out of the kitchen at that moment and weaved through the crowd to inspect the other pans. They were the messengers, intended to report what was needed to keep the pans full. It was Stan's job to refill the pans.

"Okay, maybe I'll find a guy at the bookstore tomorrow night, huh? Someone like me in the self-help aisle. Or maybe there'll be a guy just waiting in travel to take me on a cruise? Or maybe," she thought for a moment, "someone rich in the start-your-own-business aisle, someone with a lot of money? No such luck Stan, I've given up hope there is someone out there for me."

"Well, Sammy, what do you expect when you only go to bookstores by yourself? You can't find a guy that way! You gotta go to parties, socialize, get someone to fix ya up. That's how I met Sadie, at a party. And we were happy..."

Samantha just smiled and shook her head, taking her plates back to her booth. She was a methodical eater, one kind of food at a time. First she dug into the sweet and sour soup that she had sprinkled with crunchy noodles. She savored each drop of the soup, adding tiny sprinkles of hot pepper sauce, pulled the shells from about thirty shrimp, then attacked a plate of rice, mushrooms, sweet and sour chicken, wontons, and General Tso's chicken. When she finished, she got up to get her second favorite – an egg roll she dipped into hot Chinese mustard. The mustard was so hot that she felt a rush of warmth that went up through her sinuses into the top of her head and brought tears to her eyes every time she ate it. She always imagined steam coming out of her head, and she usually looked around to see if anyone noticed, which, of course, they had not. Everyone was always busy ladling food onto their plates, eating, or talking with someone to notice Samantha eating hot mustard with an egg roll.

Stan knew everyone, especially those who came in on Friday nights. Samantha, Leslie, Old German, all the children, the owners, the couple who started dating and came in from time to time, the grandmother who had just lost her husband and came in with her family, a father who was trying to get his adult son back on the right track, the accountant who brought in a different woman twenty years his senior every time. Everyone.

The night dwindled down. Samantha grabbed her fortune cookie and opened it on her way to the counter.

Watch for blinding lights, it professed.

"I've had a lot of crazy fortunes, but never one like this," she mused as she put on her coat. Samantha took her check to the counter,

stopping as she always did at the wishing pond up in the front of the restaurant near the door. Stan emerged for the hundredth time that night through the kitchen doors, busily taking pans back into the kitchen. Five Dragons was closing for the night. Taking a penny from her purse, Samantha threw it into the pond. A koi nosed it as it sunk to the bottom, taking its place with the countless other coins that had been thrown in that year. The owners of the restaurant cleaned it out from time to time, but it became full again almost as if by magic overnight.

“I wish...”

She was interrupted by a blast of wind and a long, black coat that came in from the door.

“I guess I’m late.” A youngish looking man in his thirties smiled sheepishly at Samantha. “Damn! Took me a while to find the place.”

“Yeah, it’s a little hole in the wall, but they’re open tomorrow. Come back then,” Samantha said as she eyed the man the wind had blown in. He wore his hair long, in a ponytail.

“But I heard Friday nights are the best.”

Ms. Luong looked up from the counter where a family had just finished paying for their meals. “Oh sorry, no more food tonight. Buffet closed.”

Almost sheepishly, the man said, “I hear this place is the best in town.”

Ms. Luong didn’t want to lose a potential customer, especially one who might come regularly every Friday night. It was the Friday night customers who brought in the business. “You hungry for Chinese? I see what’s left in back and bring to you, okay? You take home.”

“Gee, that’s awfully nice of you, are you sure?”

“No problem. You wait here,” Ms. Luong told a waitress to take over ringing up the checks and disappeared through the swinging doors into the kitchen yelling for Stan.

Samantha realized she hadn’t made her wish yet. It was the same wish she’d made every Friday night ever since she’d come to Five Dragons, the same wish that never came true. The man in the ponytail smiled at Samantha.

“You come here often?”

“Every Friday night.” Samantha thought of her wish.

“Is the food as good as everyone says? I moved to town over a month ago and I have been dying for Chinese food, but I didn’t want to go just anywhere. You know how that is, trying a new Chinese place and all. Some of them...”

Stan came out with a white bag. "You like chicken on a stick?" He addressed the man in the back coat.

"My favorite."

"Good. You come back and get the buffet next time. Come early. No charge tonight."

"Hey, that's nice of you. I was working late at the bookstore, but I'll be here early next week."

Stan winked at Samantha as he quickly hurried back into the kitchen.

"You work at the bookstore?" Samantha had never seen him there.

"Yeah, just started. I had to work late tonight because I'm training, but they told me that I'll usually have Friday nights off. They really want me to work Saturday nights."

"What section?"

"Self-help. I'm kind of an expert on them."

Samantha stared at him. Was this the blinding light? "You like self-help books?"

"I'm kind of a nut about them," the man with the ponytail expressed. "I'm on a constant mission to improve. Must be something that happened to me in another life. Hey, you leaving now?"

Samantha paid the check. "Yes, and I guess you are too now that you have your addiction fulfilled for the night."

"Well, I can eat this later. You want to get a coffee? I'm sort of a night owl..."

"I know a great place not far from here." Samantha offered. "You can follow me." She couldn't believe her luck. If she had come with friends or not stopped at the wishing pond, she might not have noticed this pony-haired, long black coat, brilliant light man and gone home empty as usual. They walked out of the restaurant together and stepped off the curb to cross the small street to the parking lot across the way. Samantha heard Stan's voice boom into the dark night. "Hey, you sir, you want some fried rice and General Tso to go with that? We got an order never picked up."

Samantha and the man with the ponytail stopped. "You go ahead, I'll wait in the lot," she said and watched him for a moment as he bounded back up onto the curb and into the store. *At least he's exuberant*, she thought. When she turned back to cross the street, she was blinded by a bright light that came sharply around the corner of the building. For a moment, she was confused, and when, in a split second, she realized what it was, it was too late. She heard the screech of tires, felt the bump and then felt her body being lifted in the air as if she were flying, and then it was quiet.



Koi-cola – *Jeanette Harper*



Shop Notes – Bert Gilbert

Where I'm From

I'm from good boys
navy blue pearl snapped cross ties
and scratchy white shirts
and honest mile long walks
to and from school

At this time of year
Autumn's windows would be populated
with waxy Crayola renditions
of jack-o'-lanterns
Their blank eyes
and toothy grins
welcoming hordes of
Trick or Treaters

Each morning
five blocks
to pick up the papers
for your route
then fold, or band, and deliver
rain, snow, or shine
not yet a teen
This
was
not
abnormal

We free ranged
roaming the streets and alleys
hunting treasure
two cent deposit soda bottles
used furniture and broken toys
until Mom rang the cowbell
calling us to dinner
at precisely
five twenty
before dad got home

Neighborhood pick-up games
bats and balls
always available
for anyone to borrow
from the unlocked
Beckman foyer closet
our thirsts quenched
from their free-to-use-hose provided
a hot
sour
rubbery
tasting elixir
that stayed with you a long time after you drank it

Football in the fall
Baseball in spring
Kick the can
deep into weekend nights
Summer afternoons
whiled away
batting a shuttlecock
over a net we made
of kite string and soda straws

A world where
we were told to always
tell the truth,
but were taught
to be afraid to

Abandoned dog houses
held a boy's secret
Playboy collections
strings stretched between our houses
cans on the ends
for conversations
beyond adults' prying ears

Strength is a resource in times of fear and uncertainty. Sadly, fear is much easier to manage than strength.

You sat there, watching as I traced the edge of the IV line from its incision in my hand to the towering monitor that gave it life. You watched with tired, sorrowful eyes as I admired the clear liquid that surged through the line and into my blue veins. The indentation of tears was burned down from my eyes, casting a dark shade of red from their burns. Your eyes, however, were without blemish; no tears were in sight.

You listened deeply as my stomach demanded its sustenance. The man who attached the line to my hand commanded me to refrain from solid foods, but those words fell on the deaf ears of my body. With pain and agony, you watched as I tried to remain strong, telling my stomach to go another day without being filled. That the clear liquid swimming into my hand from the IV tube would be enough to satisfy its needs.

What's strange is that I didn't see you succumbing to this same pressure. It was as if you and your stomach were perfectly in tune with one another: as if, unlike me, you didn't need sustenance to satisfy your hunger's wrath. I never understood why you were stronger than me. Was it because you were older? Not a child like me. Everything did seem too large and grand in my eyes. Looking at the tall monitor, listening to my heart reminded me of this fact.

As the liquid poured into my veins, you watched as I growled in pain. My veins erupted into a symphony of fire as the liquid burned once making first contact with my bloodstream. I was told it would remove the sickness, but it only sacrificed the sickness with fire and pain.

I watched as you stood up from your seat and carefully closed the distance between us. As soon as you reached me, you gently grabbed my hand and caressed it within yours. The burn didn't leave, but it did ease up as if your hand were a cold, damp washcloth. For the first time in days, I got to see your eyes up close once more. I had trouble deducing whether your eyes were covered with tiredness or fear. Shockingly, I finally decided that you had neither. Somehow, through all this, you were still brave. You held on like a tree rooted in unyielding soil, standing firm even as the storm of uncertainty battered its branches. I couldn't see it then – how much it cost you to remain strong, to be that pillar when the ground beneath us trembled with every shallow breath I struggled to take.

But your ease and protection comforted me, enough to allow Mr. Sandman to carry me off to sleep.

At night, when the fluorescent lights dimmed and my cries faded into uneasy sleep, you would slip away. Not far – never far – but just far enough to let yourself feel the weight of it all. The cafeteria was quiet at that hour, its hum of refrigerators and vending machines the only sound.

You walked to the deli counter, where the day's sandwiches sat wrapped in plastic, waiting for someone like you. Not because they were fresh or appealing, but because they were there, and you needed something – anything – to fill the emptiness clawing at your stomach.

The cashier barely looked up, tired from their own long shift, as you fumbled with crumpled bills. You didn't care about the food; it was sustenance, nothing more. But the act of eating felt like betrayal. How could you think of feeding yourself when your son lay upstairs, burning with pain?

Sitting at a corner table, you unwrapped the sandwich with trembling hands. It wasn't hunger that made your hands shake – it was the exhaustion, the helplessness, the quiet agony of watching your child endure something you couldn't take away. The first bite was mechanical, your teeth tearing through stale bread. You chewed slowly, the taste as empty as the room around you.

With every swallow, guilt followed. You were supposed to be strong, unshakable. Yet here you were, reduced to this: eating a cold sandwich in a fluorescent-lit cafeteria, your strength unraveling bite by bite. Tears threatened to spill, but you swallowed them down with the rest of it, burying your pain under layers of resolve.

You didn't let yourself linger. The deli was a momentary retreat, a place where you could fall apart just enough to gather yourself again. When you returned to my side, your mask was back in place. Your hands didn't tremble as you brushed the hair from my forehead, and your voice carried none of the doubt you felt only moments before.

But even as you held my hand, offering me the strength I desperately needed, a part of you remained in that cafeteria. The part that carried the pain you never let me see, the part that bore the hunger you refused to let me feel. You had to remain strong, for me.

You gave me the strength to push forward, even when going backwards seemed safer. LYM.



Mom Must Be Home Soon – *Cynthia Edwards*



An Artist's Eye – Yao Wang

Bleeding Heart

I cannot kill the drama
Which pulses through my veins,
The cadence of a heart
Which refuses to harden
Even as it cracks and leaks

I would sooner let this bleeding heart be the end of me
Than to stop its flow –
What is life if not the giving of it?
By bleeding?
I become.
Each drop a drop of paint across canvas
A capture of those lives I've touched.
A scarlet vein that carries my love through the world

Ask me: "How do you expect to see the beauty of today were you to let
yourself die?"
An answer simple:
By loving so deeply,
So fully,
Without any hesitation,
That I let my blood run through all that walks

And if I fade?
Let that painting show a final flourish
Crimson across that canvas
A river,
Flowing endlessly,
Free to take from to all who might need

Current

Flowing fast, flowing free, boundless heart
Springing forth, its timeless current holds true
Over hill and under star, however far
Rushing, roaring, quietly trickling, blue
Never at home where surely it once lay
At the slightest rain, it swells and flies fleet
Oft tumbling freely through the day
Rarely lulled by birdsong, sounding so sweet
Colored richly by its own hues of silt
Settling there, or rising with force
It flows true, flows free, dancing a soft lilt
Surely as it flows through me, lovely form
Away with speed from that it once did know
Onto wherever its current may flow



Rowing Along Life – *Jeffrey Grounds*



The Shell of What Remains – *Timothy Nottingham*

What I Think of When I Think of Fear

What in this world chills your heart? What keeps you up at night, tormented and wishing you could shut your mind off? What opens a pit in your stomach or lingers in the back of your head at the most important moments of your life? And what do you know about it?

I have vague memories of my fifth or sixth Christmas, going to see the tree lighting at Monument Circle. I remember huddling with my mom and sister, while we made our way across the red bricks of the road. All around me people were celebrating, out with their families and friends to enjoy the festivities. There was music, lights, and a bustling crowd, but I was too afraid to look up from the ground. My mind was glued to the towering heights of the buildings surrounding us. I was terrified of them, the way they loomed over all the adults, shooting into the sky, exposed to all the wind and weather. I felt as though they could fall over at any moment, destroying everything in their paths. Ever since, I've been deathly afraid of heights.

However, I fostered an even darker and more serious fear around then. Over many nights at that time in my life, I lay awake terrified, my eyes struggling against the dark as my mind raced. I wasn't afraid of a particular thing, though it all shared a general theme. Maybe the very origin of fear. I was afraid of death. Now, it must have been easy to convince my four-year-old self that my great-aunt Jackie had flown up to heaven and was smiling down on the world, when the most important things on my mind were Caillou and making mud cakes in the yard. Except the world eventually loses the luster of childhood. Death was very real – from the earliest I tried to conceptualize dying, but I couldn't make any sense of it. If they're real lucky, all a child knows is life and everything it has to give, everything it must teach you. But everything life gives, it must eventually take. And inevitably, it'll take you and me along with it, onto somewhere very different than the world we know. That's a heavy thing for a first grader to sleep on, and many nights I laid awake for what must have been hours after I shut my flashlight off and shoved my book under my pillow.

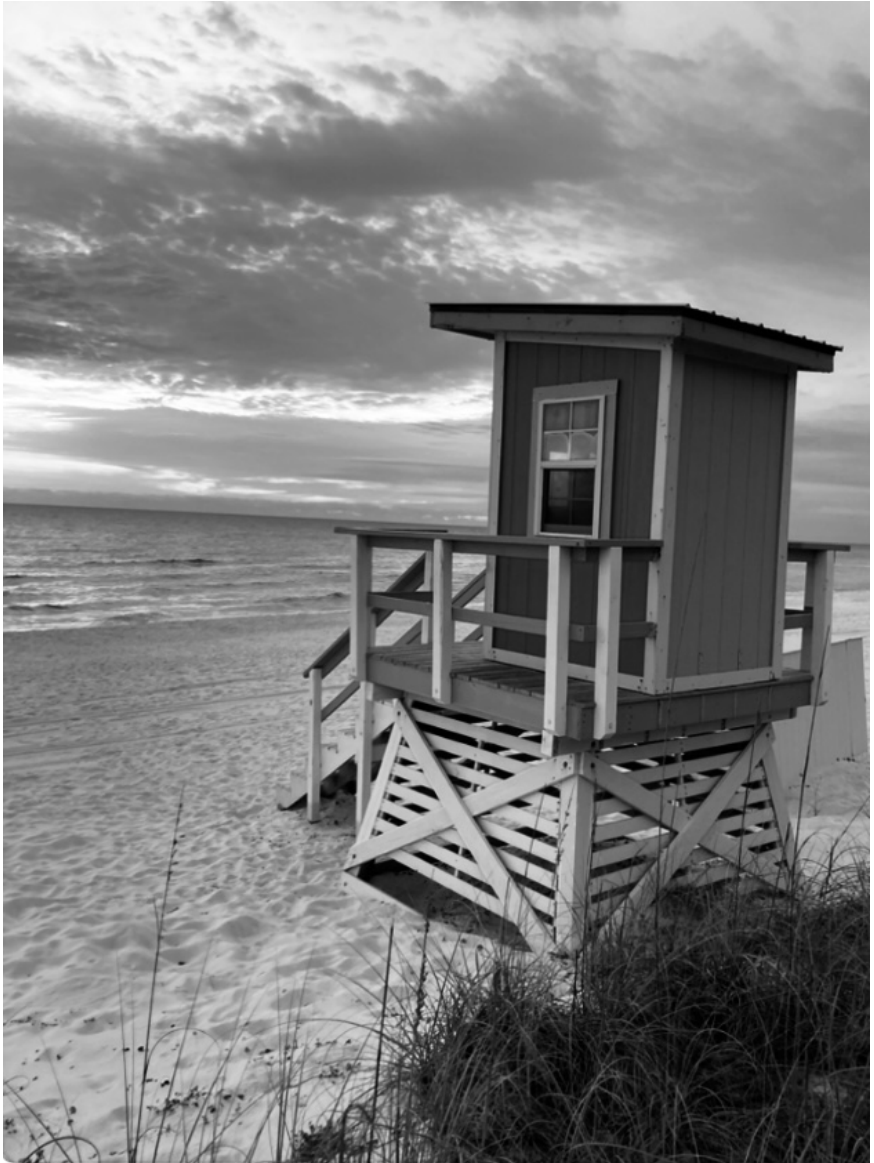
This was real fear. Of course I was afraid of all the horrible ways to die, falling included, but what really tied my mind in knots is whatever comes after. Like I said, being a Midwestern kid in the early 2000s, I heard plenty about God and heaven, and that was fine for a while. But then I encountered the concept of eternity. I figured that if enough time went on, I'd get bored existing, even in heaven. Especially if I knew that was the end of everything. But what were the alternatives? All I could think of was a

void, a suspension of consciousness and a dissolution of self, and that horrified me. I thought of the finality of dying, never seeing or holding my loved ones again, or even remembering who they were. The same for everything, for the whole world. I couldn't conceive of nothing, of blankness. My young mind was crushed under this weight, and I did all I could to rationalize it, but it still haunts me.

My fear of heights is real and visceral. I'm terrified of Ferris wheels, even after trying my best to get over it. I face heights when I can, pushing through the sandy feeling in my knees, the pit in my stomach. But, when I can't, I just back down.

But I can't back down from existing. I can't escape reality. I can't escape the feeling that everything I love is fleeting, and that I am, too. That's something we all must face and cope with. Some are at peace in their faith or in their own spirit, and I envy them greatly. I find I am only able to console myself with curiosity. With the reassurance that when the time comes, I will finally know, and even if I haven't made peace with it, I will have no choice.

Maybe we do have a spirit. I must believe that something wonderful lies outside the boundaries of our knowledge. Maybe I'll know. I only hope that I'll have a piece of who I am and find a piece of those I love. I hope I'll have fond memories of my life, and that drives me to make the most I can of it. These are the things I tell myself to get to sleep all these years later, and they're not too far from the things I told myself in first grade. Because ultimately this is what fear boils down to for me, and the only way for me to stay sane is to find that little bit of hope in it.



Watching Over You – *Jeffrey Grounds*

Sitting, Waiting, Wishing (OG and Midlife's Version)

Sit. Wait. Wish. Repeat.

Time is the cheapest and most expensive gift you can give someone.

It comes in all shapes and sizes, you can give time, take time, be on time, have no time or have free time. Time can be wasted, spent well , used, managed, and cherished.

Time is a lot of things.

For some, time is a torture device of waiting. Its malicious silence and loneliness mocks you with snarled teeth, it could kill the sanest of men.

For others, time is a wonderful device of spending. Its warm embrace and comfort brings you to smile, it could save the sickest of men.

For me, time is my insanity.

Sit. Wait. Wish. Repeat.

Sit. Wait. Wish. Repeat.

The constant tick that licks my ears as I watch the gift of my time go to waste. Is the juice worth the squeeze? Am I down too deep ? Can I reach the surface? Did I pay the time toll, or did time take its toll on me?

Sit.

Wait.

Wish.

Repeat.



Amy's World – Bert Gilbert

Better

I heard it once as a rumor
but I preferred to believe it
Hey,
Why not?
Rarely does one actually
honestly
get a compliment
they can accept when
it's presented face forward

The oblique
is always
the more acceptable
digestible
integrable
So yeah

oblique and positive

It made me feel good
It made me feel like I had
a private insight
into an external view
that was better
than I
believed
of myself

STUDENT WISDOM

In Spring 2025, the Bloomington Dean of Teaching and Learning Annie Gray ran a Student Wisdom contest, asking students to share a photo and some advice for other students. Her hopes were to engage students in ongoing campus dialogue centered on teaching and learning, to emphasize the “community” aspect of our community college and to create a more welcoming environment, as the ten winning entries would be turned into art to be displayed on the Bloomington campus. Over one hundred students submitted, and *root and branch* selected a few entries to share in our 2025 volume.



Rana Alfadhli, Pre-nursing

Success is built on consistent effort and dedication! By putting in the work, whether it's studying or participating in class regularly, you improve your skills and grow to achieve far more than what you expect.



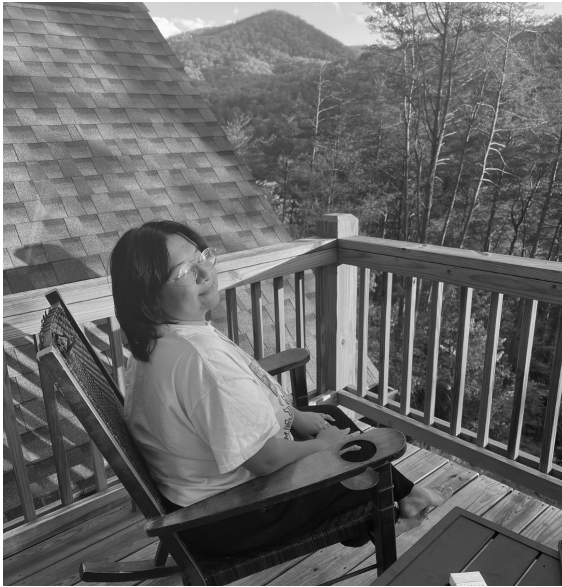
Kaycee Lee, General Studies

Not everyone will understand you, and people will judge.
My advice? Be the anomaly. Be the student who takes pride
in their uniqueness. Be you, no matter how different.



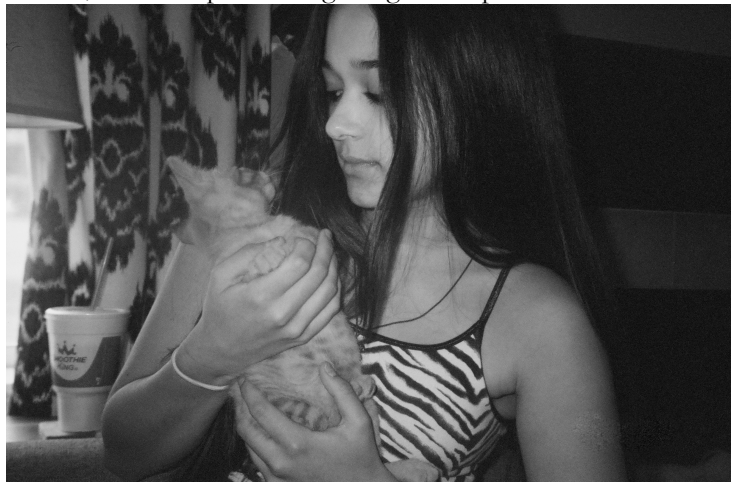
Alayna Mooy, Fine Arts

There's no right or wrong way to obtain your college degree.
Vitalize Ivy tech for what it's for, exploring new
unknown opportunities they have to offer here
in order to find what you love.



Jezebel Torres, Human Services

Stay curious, embrace challenges, and prioritize self-care. Balance your studies with activities you love, and remember, it's okay to stumble; what's important is getting back up.



Ava Garza, Professional Communications

Don't be afraid to reach out to your classmates. Creating and having a bond with your peers makes navigating your way through college a lot less intimidating.



Antonia Baham, Elementary Ed

Whether it's peers, faculty, or family, surround yourself with people who want to see you succeed as much as you want to succeed.



William Downey, Business Administration

It can often be overwhelming to complete so much, but it is possible. Try to remain calm, prioritize work, and don't be afraid to ask for help from your professors.



Hannah Elise, Phlebotomy

You should make sure to drink lots of water.

I also recomend creating a good rest vs study balance.

You won't retain information if you're exhausted and dehydrated.



Peyton Moore, EMT

Seek balance, stay organized, and prioritize self-care. Never shy away from asking for help, and get involved in campus activities because it enriches your experience and personal growth.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

Bert Gilbert is currently a senior scholar at the Ivy Tech Bloomington campus. Now retired, Bert and his wife created and ran a remodeling company in Bloomington, IN, raised a son and several cats and dogs, planted two thousand trees, and restored an 1860 farm house.

BJ Yoho is a fourth-year student at Ivy Tech Bloomington, who is planning to study film at Indiana University. Yoho was an editor for *root and branch* in 2023 and also authored the short story “Strong” in this volume. His favorite hobbies are writing, watching movies, and hanging out with friends.

Retired from my lifelong career in education, **Cynthia Edwards** now helps students with their English, Writing and MS Office assignments as a tutor at the Terre Haute campus. She and her husband still farm, but on a much smaller scale than years ago. Otherwise, she quilts, sews, reads, and gardens, gardens, gardens. Her kids are grown and stay very busy with families and careers. Her teen grandkids may be busier, and her oldest grandchild is now married. They don’t have as much time for grandparents while spreading their wings; however, she is finally enjoying the ‘career’ she always wanted.

Emma Sayward is a beginner concert photographer from Bloomington, Indiana. She has a passion for music and is always eager to meet new people and bands in the community.

Jeanette Harper has been drawing since before she could even talk, with her father guiding and supporting her throughout her artistic journey. She loves creating unique and bizarre artworks, often bringing ideas straight from her imagination to life. For Jeanette, drawing is a way to explore the endless possibilities of her mind, turning the unusual and fantastical into visual expression. Her passion lies in embracing the weird and the wonderful in every piece she creates.

Jeff Grounds is thankful and blessed to be able to share his talents.

Malachi Phelps is a 22-year old aspiring writer and scholar, currently living in Bloomington and developing an avid interest in various outdoor hobbies, home-cooking, gaming, and a variety of other interesting topics. Malachi is excited to share work pertaining to those topics, history, and experiences at a personal and professional level.

Timothy Nottingham is an IT student at the Bloomington, IN campus. He come from a family where everyone has had struggles with mental health. His piece “The Shell of What Remains” is a reflection on these personal issues and the feeling they leave him with.

Veronica Munn is an English instructor at the Ivy Tech Sellersburg campus and Ivy Online where she has taught a variety of English classes since 2017. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing and has taught high school and college English for over 27 years. She writes fiction, creative non-fiction, some poetry, and dabbles in playing the drums and spinning wool. She lives in the country with her husband, dogs, ducks, sheep, and nearby children and grandchildren.

Westley Penland was a 'Burp the Alphabet' kid. Despite his deviated septum, he was pretty good at it. He is a chef, a poet, and a dog dad. You can find his debut poetry chapbook, *Confirmation of Life*, on Amazon and follow him @simply_the_wes on IG.

R. Will Kehoe III is a student at Ivy Tech Bloomington, where they are pursuing Philosophy and Law. They have a passion for philosophy and reflection, often exploring themes of connection, introspection, and personal growth. When not writing, they enjoy engaging with literature, art, and the occasional chess game. Their works reflect a deep love for the human experience and the complexities of the world around them.

Yao Wang believes that with just the eyes, we see so little; thanks to Artists, the color of life can be painted. With an artist's eyes, creativity is absorbed into the mind. Picture by picture, creation by admiring creation, seen in the moment and always trying to understand more. Each day, they are grateful for the artists in life and for their own artistic eyes.

