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ETC: Embracing Identity

A Collection of Literature and Art

Based on We the Interwoven Vol. 2

Acknowledgments

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To Antonia Rivera, Ajla Dizdarević, Dawson Davenport, Sarah Elgatian, Rana Hewezi, Hieu Pham, and Anthony Mielke for sharing their stories and inspiring others to do the same.

To all those who submitted work to our magazine. We appreciate your talent and vulnerability for sharing your voices with us.

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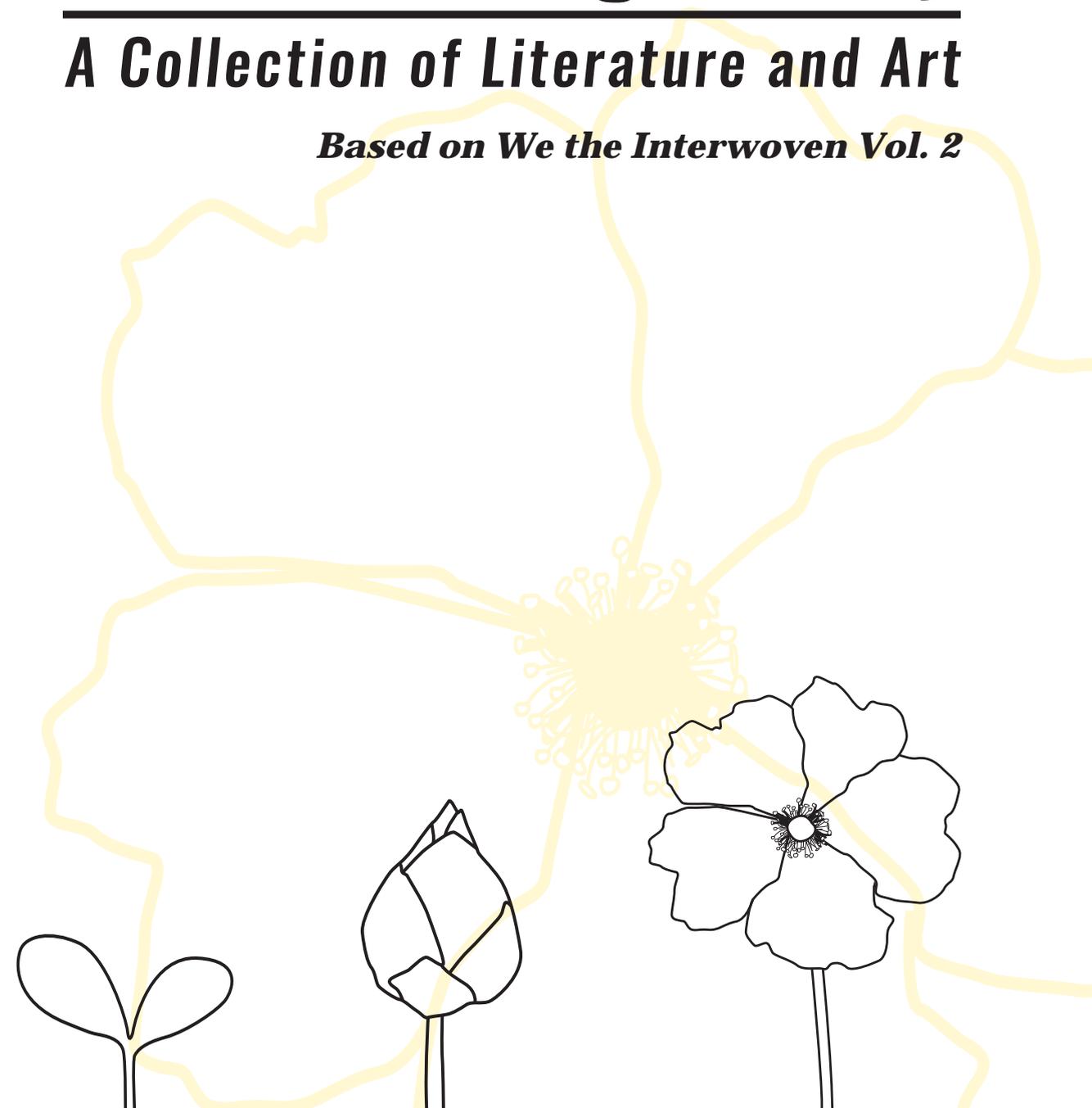
Del Rio Restaurante Mexicano of Independence, Iowa

Thank - You!

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FOREWARD

Identity is the foundation of every person. It is composed of and dictates who we were, who we are now and who we will become. All the different aspects of identity blend together to create a unique individual. This does not mean, however, that we as people can't find ways to relate to one another.

In *We the Interwoven Volume 2*, the authors Antonia Rivera, Ajla Dizdarević, Dawson Davenport, Sarah Elgatian, Rana Hewezi, Hieu Pham, and Anthony Mielke share stories about their own experiences and identities. These tales are raw and real, and the bravery of these authors inspired the ETC staff to use our magazine as a way to not only share art and literature based on our own experiences, but also showcase the works of our fellow students here at Hawkeye Community College.

There is a diverse population that exists here in Iowa, but it's impossible to know just what experiences a person has had with just a glance. Every day we walk by hundreds of people with no idea of the struggles or triumphs woven into their stories and how many similarities or differences they have to our own. It is a wondrous thought to consider that just one conversation could reveal a story that leaves you feeling more connected to someone than you ever have in your life.

Although our campus is composed of a diverse student body who each embrace our identities in different ways, we are all connected by our classification as college students, young adults, and much more. We hope that by sharing our experiences people will relate to them and be inspired to embrace their own identity and share their stories with others.

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who we WERE

Who we were is a question of our actions from the past. Actions that are many times defined by the people that surround us in our upbringing. Culture carries power beyond belief, and it allows us to be comfortable making unique decisions in our individual environment. Who We Were is a way to look at progress. How far we have come from our previous valley; or maybe how low we have fallen from our highest peaks. This phrase is humbling to all walks of life—Who We Were.

who we ARE

Who We Are in the moment is different from the past and future—the pieces in this section are meant to reflect that. There is tremendous power in the present tense of culture and how we personally fit into the ever-changing environment that surrounds us daily. We are defined by the actions that we make towards new directions in our lives and the ways in which we affect those around us.

who we WILL BE

By only defining ourselves by our past and our present selves, we risk limiting our perception of who we have the chance to be. We are not only our past and our present, but also our future—our hopes, dreams, and fears for Who We Will Be. While our past may affect who we are now, it is up to our own self to determine how it will define who we will be in years to come. This theme explores these possibilities.

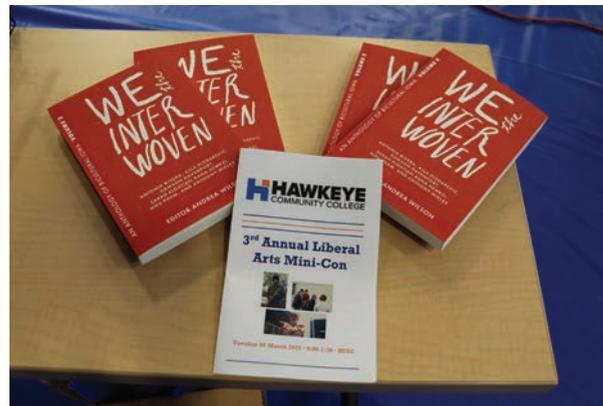
Panel Discussion

Our ETC staff had the privilege of facilitating a panel discussion with the editor and some of the featured authors from the 2021-2022 Hawkeye Reads book of the year: *We the Interwoven Vol. 2: An Anthology of Bicultural Iowa*. The answers displayed have been transcribed from the interviews.

Andrea Wilson is the founder and Executive Director of the Iowa Writers' House, the creator of the Bicultural Iowa Writers' Fellowship, and the series editor of *We the Interwoven* where she is dedicated to amplifying underrepresented voices.

Antonia Rivera writes about her journey of navigating life in the U.S as an undocumented immigrant and her constant fight for immigration rights.

Dawson Davenport is a member of the Meskwaki Nation and shares his stories about the Meskwaki way of life as well as the challenges he's faced in Iowa as a Native.



How do you feel this series has impacted people's perceptions of Iowa?

Andrea:

It has given people a first-hand experience of the different cultural experiences in our state. I didn't want the writers to have to change their stories for the sake of publication as they are so impactful. You get to know the writers and thus influence the way people see Iowa. The richness of their stories helps give an in-depth perspective about the cultures here. Both authors have made an impact outside of their stories: Antonia is active in local and state government to help make laws for immigrants and Dawson has opened an art gallery that showcases Indigenous people's art.

Antonia:

A lot of my friends from California would ask me why I chose Iowa. They would always ask me when I planned on coming back to California because there is nothing to do in Iowa—but there is actually more here than what you may think. When this book was published, I was able to show them why Iowa was the place to be. My friends began to realize just how diverse Iowa actually is.

Dawson:

So many people don't know Native people live here in Iowa. My people have been here for a long time and still feel like we are not considered a part of Iowa. There are many stereotypes and misconceptions about us and I hope that through this story people will see that we live just like everybody else. We have our own problems and things we go through—that we have to pay bills too. There are over 560 recognized tribal nations in this country, but there are so many more. We contribute to the land and soil—and that's what Iowa is truly known for. I heard stories of how beautiful this land was before it was cornfields and highways. I hope people learn that my people are still here and still care about this land even if we only have a little piece of it now.

who we WERE

Who we were is a question of our actions from the past. Actions that are many times defined by the people that surround us in our upbringing. Culture carries power beyond belief, and it allows us to be comfortable making unique decisions in our individual environments. Who We Were is a way to look at progress. How far we have come from our previous valley; or maybe how low we have fallen from our highest peaks. This phrase is humbling to all walks of life—Who We Were.



Panel Discussion

What advice would you give your younger self?

Andrea:

There is one thing I would tell my younger self: ask the hard questions—the big questions, the questions about humanity, and the questions about why are we here. What are we doing together? What is the purpose of this? How can I be part of something bigger? When working on this project, I couldn't stop asking questions. I learned that there was no one asking the big questions about this journey that we're on together. Asking questions is supposed to have ups and downs. And if we're dedicated to that, we can find ourselves in really wonderful moments where it feels like we're doing something true to ourselves, something like writing for our community. I think that all of us here are interesting questions to ask.

Antonia:

Writing this allowed me to get a new point of view on life. Since working on the book, my life has changed so much. I lived in the unknown for so long and felt pain that made me not want to look to the future at times. I have learned to write in the moment and that life keeps going. For my advice I would tell myself: don't be afraid of living.

Dawson:

I would say to my younger self to guide yourself more. Guide yourself through the negative things in your life. There are always gonna be those bad days, so guide yourself with love. Really loving yourself and being yourself will help you. You know you might fall into trouble along the way, but don't put yourself behind. Love yourself because everything will be alright. Everything has its funny way of working out as long as you love yourself.



Family Dinner

Ella Reed

Cedar Falls, Iowa

Written: Short Story

My story is a short commentary on the dynamic of family dinner as I become a young adult. My work relates to the themes of Family. It details my experiences of growing up creating a new identity for myself separate to that of my family.

For as long as I can remember, I have eaten dinner at the table with my family most every night. There have been some variables, whether it be different tables or houses, but the togetherness of family dinner has been constant.

Sometimes, family dinner was a painstaking process for me. I didn't get the seat I wanted, I didn't want to talk to anyone, mom made pot roast, etc. This has not always been something I look forward to and often dreaded. Recently, times have changed. I have a job at Panera Bread that I work most Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday nights. I have cheer practice Monday and Wednesday, with wrestling tournaments all day Saturdays. I have also developed a social life; and thanks to my ability to drive and spend money, I am often more inclined to go out with my friends and boyfriend instead of being at home during the little free time I have. Besides, I didn't like family dinner anyway.

Admittedly, I regret this decision, because there's no better time to start enjoying the company of family dinner than now. My parents regularly announce things like, "Hey, didn't know you lived here anymore" and "When will we have to start paying rent to Eli's (my partner's) parents?". These kinds of comments make me feel extremely guilty. Not the kind of guilty you get from eating a whole bag of Reese's in one sitting (been there done that), but the kind of guilty you get from accidentally stepping on your pet's tail and hearing them yelp. I didn't realize why it made me feel so bad, but it did.

Because of this, I have started staying home more. I have started practicing some self-control with my newfound freedom of being a young adult with money and a car.

I have started to practice more self-care, like cleaning my mess of a room and putting away week-old laundry. It sounds nice, but in reality, I would much rather be out of the house still. I enjoy being able to do what I want, without nagging parents, or rooms to clean,

or laundry to be put away, or annoying siblings, or the painstaking family dinner. I feel as though I flourish outside of that environment—no responsibilities, no obligations. But that's not realistic.

As a kid, I was a super picky eater. I complained about five of the seven meals my mom made in a week and often spent over an hour trying to finish my food at the dinner table, which time and again ended in tears and yelling parents. As I grew older that became something that happened occasionally, and now seldom. I eat whatever is given to me, no matter how gross I think it is. I have achieved an understanding that I don't always get the luxury of having what I want.

This kind of appreciation is something I'm trying to grow still, and my recent absence from family dinner is like April showers to my May flowers. I have suddenly grown an odd gratefulness for family dinner, while still not looking forward to it at times. As I try to stay home more, I experience more dinners and more togetherness with my family. When my mom texts me and asks if I will be home for dinner, I used to look for excuses to say no. The guilt of their comments about my vacancy made me start to think about my values and how I want to spend my last year at home with my family. I realized that although I feel like I'm ready to leave and begin a new chapter, I'm going to miss this. It's all I know, and all my family has known for sixteen years. I'm going to miss the bickering about who gets what seat, the annoyance of having to make conversation when I don't want to, and pot roast for dinner. I never thought that I would miss something that I felt was so insignificant, but the little time I have left here has made me realize that it is so much more than twenty minutes with my family every night. It's the togetherness and security of family. These times are coming to an end much quicker than I expected, and it makes me sad. I am still hopeful for my future independence, but with a greater appreciation for togetherness and the small things. After all, my family is my rock.

Portrait of the Verastegui Muscutt Family

David Verastegui
Cedar Falls, Iowa

Artistic: Drawing
Pen and Ink



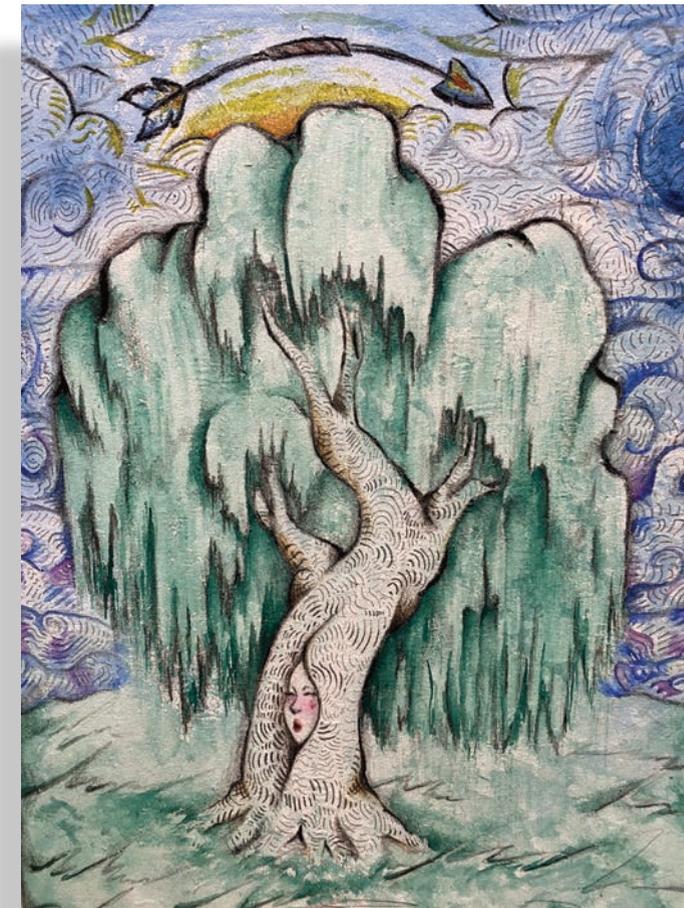
I chose to represent the theme of bi-cultural families through my own bi-cultural family. On the right are my grandfather and his parents, the Muscutt's. They descend from some of the first American settlers in Montana. On the left are my grandfather and his parents, the Verastegui's. They can trace their heritage back to Basque settlers and indigenous Mexicans. Together they make up one branch of my family lineage which is represented by the pecan tree branch that frames them, since my family grows pecans in Mexico.

Like many other bi-cultural Iowans, my heritage has impacted my life in more ways than I can list. I treasure the family which has given me this culturally distinct experience.

The Weeping Willows Call

Kayley Renslow
Traer, Iowa

Artistic: Illustration
Graphite Pencil, Watercolor



This artwork was inspired by how indigenous people were displaced from their homes.

A Portrait of my Grandfather

Sophia Mandt

Cedar Falls, Iowa

Written: Essay

My submission deals heavily with family dynamics such as life, loss, grief, diverse cultures, and family traditions. All of those aforementioned themes are prominently featured in the current Hawkeye Reads book among others such as community, interconnectedness, personal identity, storytelling, and immigration.

I always knew little about my Grandfather's Ukrainian heritage. I suppose my lack of knowledge wasn't helped by the fact that my Grandfather, sadly, ended up having Dementia.

I remember when I was in sixth grade, I noticed him forgetting the little things. He needed to ask me what grade I was in more than once for example. However, for a while, he was still able to lead a relatively normal life. He continued to drive, work outside, drink coffee, and overall be a caring and kind person.

As time went on, things grew worse. He was soon rendered unable to be left alone for long periods. My Grandmother took great care of him, always trying to aid his disease with any natural remedies she could find. But I could tell that her help was taking a stressful toll on her. In February of 2020, she passed away suddenly, leaving my Grandpa without a wife, my mother without a mom, and me and my sister without a Grandmother. And what a wonderful Grandmother she was! We spent time together and talked about various things with her all the time. We were close, and oddly enough, as my Grandpa's condition worsened, I found myself even closer to my Grandma.

After her sudden death, my Grandpa's condition deteriorated immensely. His wife was his rock, the one who always looked out for him, faithful to the end. He ended up living in assisted living until his death, six months later. After his death, I thought to myself, everyone has an identity. But what if you have Dementia? You still have an identity, but you may not remember it.

I imagine that had he not been stricken with Dementia, he would have told me countless stories of his grandparents' life in Ukraine, and how they faced intense persecution from the neighboring Russians. At least I was lucky enough to remember him telling stories about his job at Hawkeye Community College, as well as his hockey career, including that he once played for the Waterloo Blackhawks. Either way, I did

not feel interested in pursuing my family history because I felt that reminiscing about my Grandfather would only remind me of painful memories of his suffering and inability to remember past events. Plus, I felt as if knowing about his history mattered little. So, I pushed away all the pain, all the grief, and all the suffering out of my mind and got on with life. After all, I need to be tough! I need to be strong! It was not until I received a notification from Hawkeye Community College that I even considered writing about my Grandfather.

I was in the normal process of signing onto my Hawkeye account when I saw a notification that piqued my interest. Since I do not physically attend Hawkeye full-time, and only take an online course, I typically pay little attention to my notifications. But this one stood out to me given that it had to do with writing. You see, I have always struggled with properly expressing my words and what they mean in conversation. Yet, for some reason, I have never had that issue when writing. Plus, this was an opportunity to get my writing published. I have always dreamed of being able to write as a career. The fact that for the first time in my life, I had the opportunity to write something that others outside of my family could actually read and appreciate was what really drew me in.

But then, I looked at the topic, "identity." I tried to think of anything that stood out for my family and me regarding identity and diverse experiences. It was then that I realized I could research the history of my Grandpa and his family's life as Ukrainian immigrants in Canada before he moved to the US. This would be a unique perspective and topic about the Ukrainian experience. I should also mention that the recent turmoil between Russia and Ukraine also encouraged me to write. I wanted to write something for those who may want to understand what it is like to be of part Ukrainian origin, and see your people being oppressed and unjustly treated by a power-hungry leader who wishes for nothing more than additional territory.

Before researching, I knew already that there was one thing I did know about my Grandpa and his childhood. He grew up in Dauphin, Manitoba, a town in Canada with a large Ukrainian population. My mother had told me stories of how when her Dad was growing up, he did not speak English. He spoke only Ukrainian until grade school when he was finally taught the language. And it was not just my Grandpa who had to learn English! Even to this day, the largest ethnic group in Dauphin is Ukrainians, who, as of the 1996 Canadian census, make up around 41 percent of the population. Today roughly one in four people in Dauphin are fluent in speaking Ukrainian. When my Grandpa was a child, the percentage of people who were fluent in Ukrainian was even higher.

A few years back, my family and I went to Canada for vacation. While there, we stopped in the small town of Dauphin and visited a Ukrainian heritage store. I purchased a decorated pysanka (or decorated egg) keychain which I still keep with me. Our family saw, advertised all over the place, a massive summer Ukrainian heritage festival held right outside of Dauphin. While we did not go, I wish we could have. I know I would have learned a lot about Ukrainian culture had we gone. Either way, we did at least visit a Ukrainian museum. There I learned that historically, many of the Canadian Ukrainians had grown up extremely poor. The majority of them were without modern amenities such as electricity even until the 1980s!

When we left Dauphin, I felt as if I had become wiser and more knowledgeable about my Grandpa's heritage. Still, I felt as if I had more to learn. My mother has kept a cabinet full of Grandpa's things. After exploring the container's contents, I came across an old newspaper clipping where I learned that my Grandpa was an extraordinarily successful businessman. His job was to get people back on their feet and into the workforce again, or to quote the article, "He helped people whose livelihoods had gone south." In his career as a Job Training Leader, he saw many people who found themselves in hard situations. Whether due to finances, familial strife, or otherwise, my Grandpa believed that there was always a light at the end of the tunnel. He

is quoted as saying "Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem." He believed that with education and support, one can get back on the road of life again.

I remember at his funeral, his hockey friends told me that my Grandpa was "tough on the ice" but had a good heart. According to my Grandpa's past employees, he was a kind, dependable, and solid boss. I was glad to hear such good things about my Grandpa. Sometimes when someone suffers from Dementia it is hard to remember what they were like before their disease. It is good to hear that he once lived a life where he was not confused and forgetful. I was grateful to hear people sharing their memories of my Grandpa so that I can remember the Grandpa my mother wants me to remember. That is, the person he really was. A strong, good-natured, tough, and do-it-yourself kind of man.

I remember that his funeral had both a Canadian and American flag. You see, my Grandpa never technically became an American citizen. He chose to keep his Canadian citizenship yet live in the United States where he was able to pursue the American Dream. That is, the Dream his Ukrainian ancestors wanted for their future generations. My Grandpa is evidence that one can work hard and make something of themselves.

When I look at the news of Russia's invasion of Ukraine it angers me. Long ago, my Ukrainian ancestors left their homeland in hopes of going somewhere to avoid persecution. They left hoping that one day Ukraine would stop suffering from its oppressors. Yet, years later, we find ourselves in the same predicament. Millions of Ukrainian citizens are fleeing Ukraine because of one power-hungry leader. He wishes to control and take over a country filled with some of the kindest, hardworking, and strongest people I have ever known. We must stand together and unite with Ukraine. Remember, together we stand, divided we fall.

Life in a War

Lwee Zar
Waterloo, Iowa

Artistic: Graphic Design
Digital media

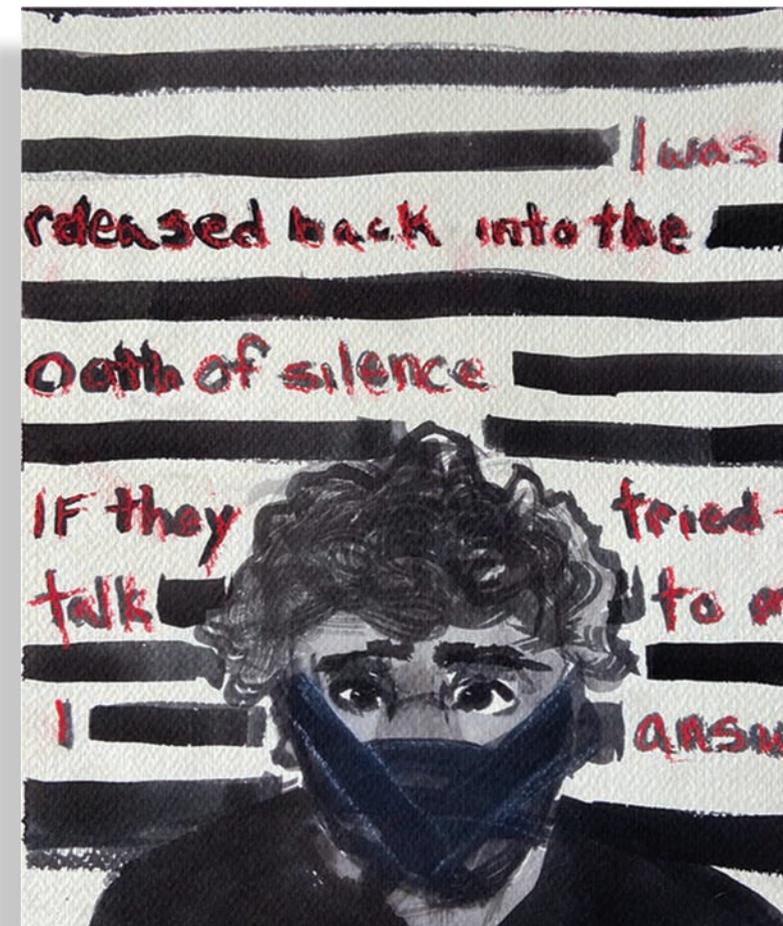


This piece tells about the effects of war and beginning a new life in another place. It relates to the story from Sarah Elgatian. It is also about my own personal story.

Oath of Silence

Maxwell Caughron
Evansdale, Iowa

Artistic: Drawing
Ink



This piece is a blackout poem. Based upon the section "The Wounded Warrior" by Antonia Rivera.

The 7-11

Rhett Peters

La Porte City, Iowa

Written: Poetry

Free verse poem

My inspiration for this particular poem came from Antonia's undocumented experience and her overwhelming ability to show how she persevered despite others mistreatment of her in a tone of inequality. I hope that my writing carries a strong sense of vigor towards the negative behavior of racism to those people of indifferent cultures. Since 2001 we as the United States have tried to become more interwoven, pushing equality standards in every way. But as a society we are still far from perfect, and the unfortunate part is that although this story is fictional by character, it's real by circumstance.

"It's what you are made for"

He never really told me much more.

"It'd be like Charlie Parker giving up the saxophone"

He said the difference is that I will never be known.

"Can you read a clock" he would ask

Yet when he dug into his booze after dark, I attended Harvard...
smartest in my class.

"Here this might feed your family tonight"

As he laid down a single snickers bar... he had already taken two bites.

"2 pack Marlboro" he would demand

I watched as Al smoked, his young daughter sitting near in his tattered
blue van.

"Good morning Amira" he'd say with a two tooth smile

I flipped on the television behind the counter; the sun rose into the
dirty windows.

"Good Morning America, it's 7AM on this sunny Tuesday September
11th, here in beautiful Manhattan"

It was the first day that Al didn't stop in for breakfast and his noon time
lunch of pizza, pepsi, and a pack.

"Look what you've done!" my boss exclaimed pointing at both planes

Immediately I was sent home, unsure for what I was blamed

"Amira clean the windows" I was greeted the next morning

Thursday Al came back in

"You bitch" he taunted spitting butterscotch in my face. The saliva fell
from both eyebrows; he grinned

I was given a day to apologize or else I'd be replaced.

It made Al happy...or at least he said

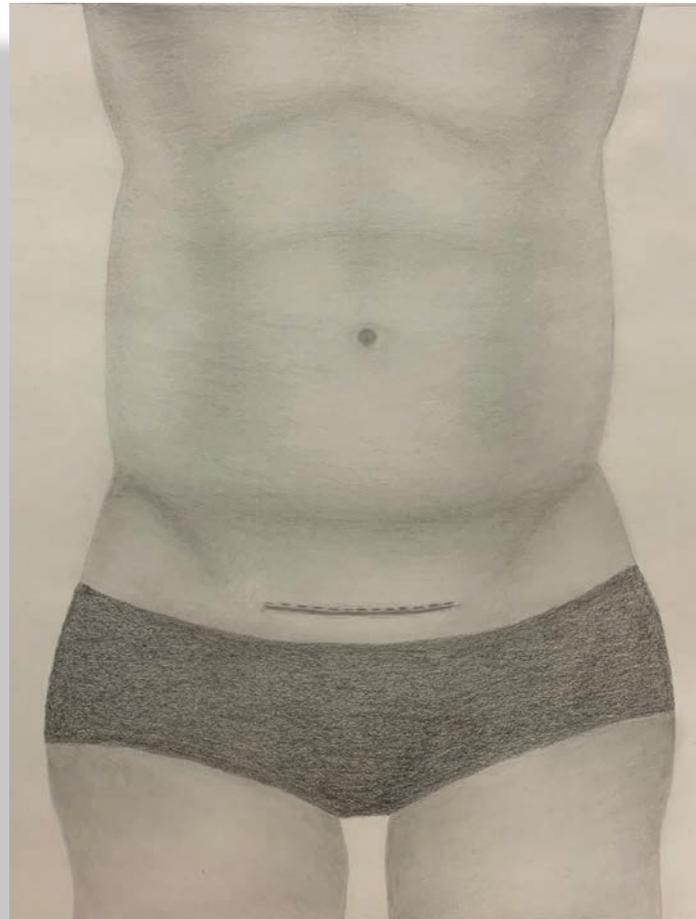
"Maybe now you'll be ashamed ... hell, finally learn who you really are"

He lit his cigar.

Motherhood

Mary Bennett
Ida Grove, Iowa

Artistic: Drawing
16" x 20" paper Graphite pencils



My artwork's theme came from the chapter "What We Owe Our Mothers" by Hieu Pham. I wanted to express the struggles she went through with her pregnancy by drawing a C-section scar.

The Therapy Friend

Kale Kampmann
Clarksville, Iowa

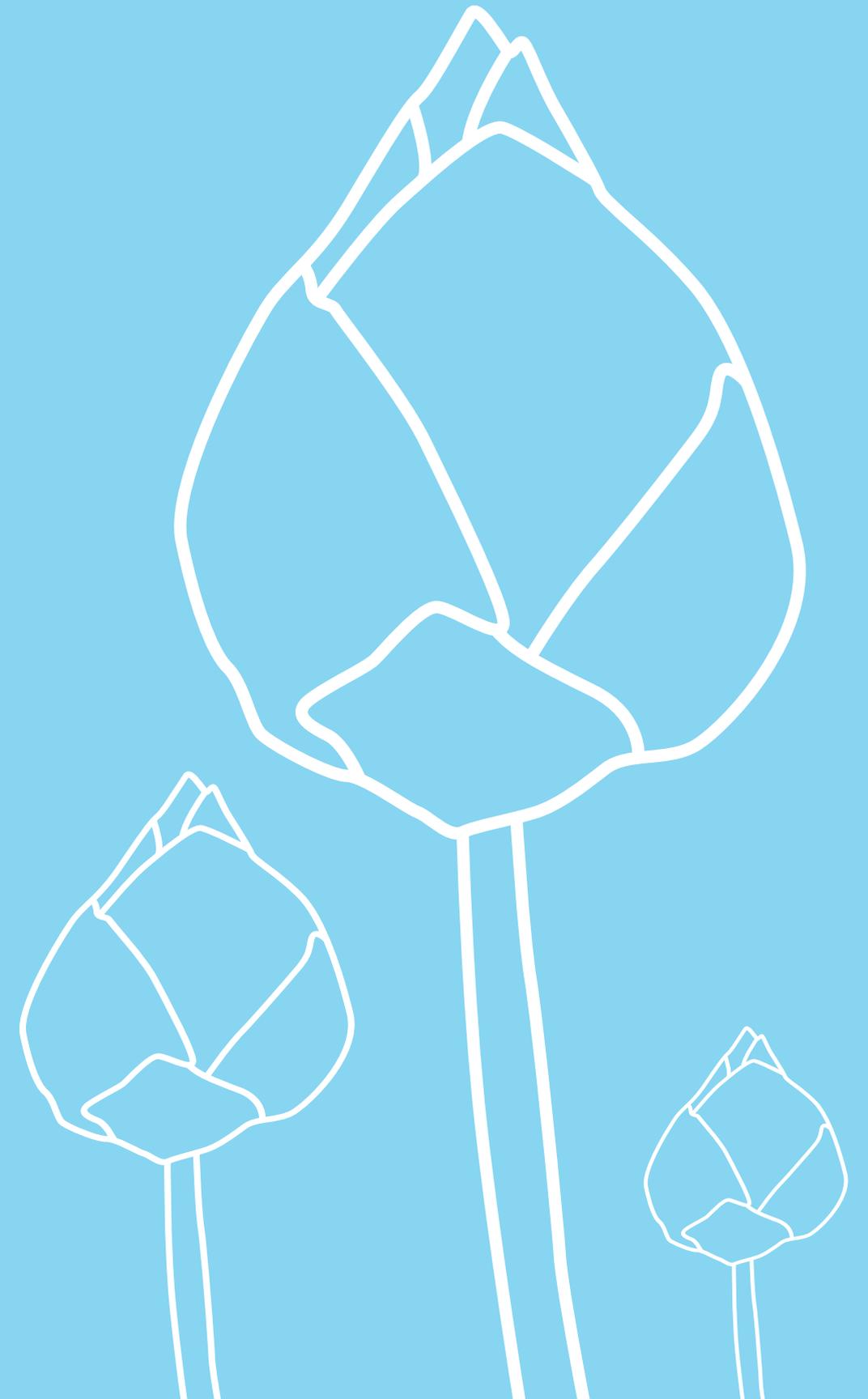
Written: Poetry
Free verse poem

This piece is meant to describe my role in friendships, in hopes that someone will understand and realize that they aren't alone in how they feel.

He is a vault of secrets
For both himself and others.
He is also the key to that vault
Which shall never open.
He is endless joy,
Which masks his skeletons in the closet.
It draws others in,
Convincing them that their secrets
Are safe behind his locks.
His friends always come to him,
Even when he cannot help himself.
He's always there to listen
Even if he cannot hear his thoughts.
He keeps his thoughts and feelings
Under heavy lock and key,
Purely out of fear of what could happen
Should he ever let them free.
He holds the weight of countless others
Added to the weight of himself.
He doesn't complain; it isn't much.
Instead he smiles and happily says
"It's what I do. I'm the therapy friend."

who we ARE

Who We Are in the moment is different from the past and future—the pieces in this section are meant to reflect that. There is tremendous power in the present tense of culture and how we personally fit into the ever changing environment that surrounds us daily. We are defined by the actions that we make towards new directions in our lives and the ways in which we affect those around us.



Panel Discussion

How has the writing of this book shaped your own identity?

Andrea:

It's hard to really describe how much this book has changed my life. It's shown me that we should all pursue the dreams and crazy ideas that we have. The world needs us to think about ways that we can use our creativity, our curiosity, and the big questions that move our world. Coming from a town that has a very limited diversity, I sought to give those voices an opportunity to speak for themselves about their personal experience on the topic. Now people across the state and beyond are reading these stories and learning more about the richness provided by diversity. Some cultural stories are hard to look at, often involving difficult conversations, but it's important that these conversations take place. These conversations truly have changed my life forever.

Antonia:

The different beliefs and cultural ideas that this book offers has changed my outlook on life. Since the publication of this book my way of thinking and living has been completely transformed. My own identity has been challenged by the multiple authors that shared their powerful stories for publication. Writing this book allowed me to reflect on my life over the past thirty years and where I have come from.

Dawson:

After writing my story, I began to understand that so many people don't know or understand that we exist. Even though we're small, we still contribute to society like everyone else. A lot of people don't know about the history of my tribe and the various other indigenous communities that have lived here. Writing this has allowed me to evaluate that it is my responsibility as an artist, as a writer, to sit down and talk with a new cultural audiences about my community. This book really gave me that look at my own life—that if I didn't even share it with the world, I knew that I couldn't do my work or make the change that is needed.



Searching for a Better Life

Sophia Kain
Independence, Iowa

Artistic: Painting

My canvas is 24"x 28" and I used water mixable oil paints.



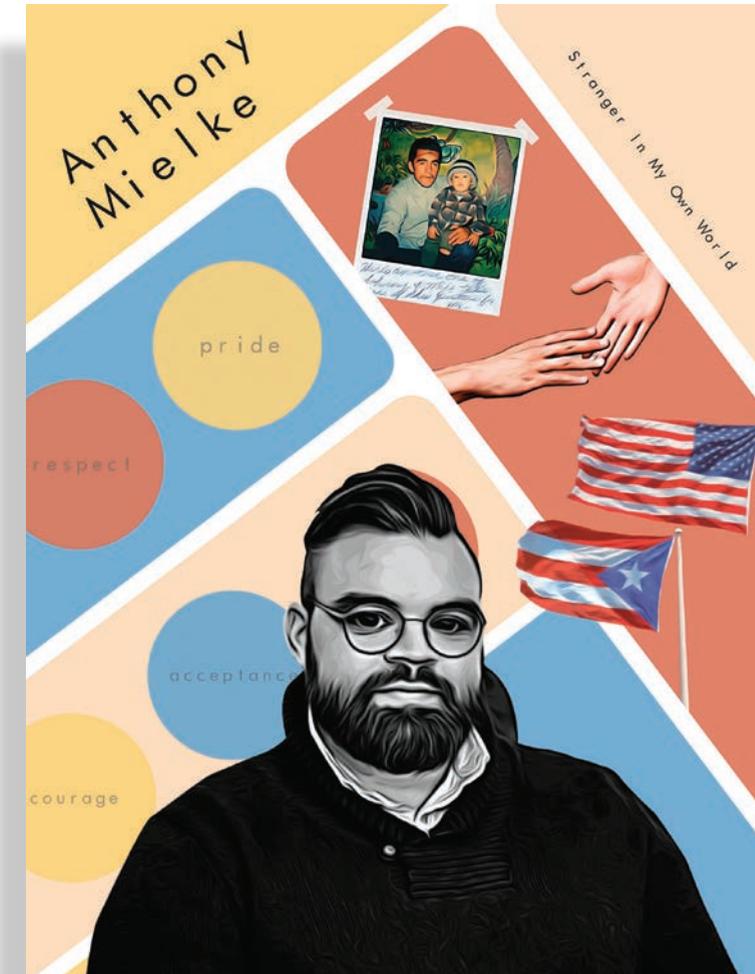
My piece was based on Antonia Rivera's immigration story from *We the Interwoven Vol. 2*. It shows that she had to immigrate to the United States to find freedom from hardships in Mexico and her abusive father. The Statue of Liberty represents the freedom Antonia and her family sought in the U.S. The wall signifies that they are blocked from freedom and shows what difficulties they have to go through to reach their goal. The stern look on Antonia's face represents her determination to endure the challenges she faces as an immigrant.

Stranger in My Own World

Brody Goos
Dike, Iowa

Artistic: Graphic Design

In this piece I use Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop to put together a collage.



My submission showcases the themes of acceptance and self love that were expressed throughout Anthony Mielke's story "Stranger in My Own World".

The Sun Rises Another Day

Elizabeth Halterman

Traer, Iowa

Written: Poetry

Poem on a piece of paper

This poem is based on my memories of a close friend from high school. My friend went through depression and committed suicide.

At the edge of dusk's crimson hue
Merging with night's black and blue
Was that mask you wore, merely a façade?
Unabashed love that you laud?

What more should I have done?
So you could see the rising sun
Professed upon a napkin note
You love me, all you wrote

I heard of your love before
The women you claimed were more
When the darkness has overtaken
And your desire was left forsaken

What more should I have done?
So you would meet the rising sun
I offer you residence in my mind
Tokens, gifts, my love in kind

The moon now rises stealing the show
In my musings, and my mental flow
If only I could satiate your lust
If only you could confide with trust

What more should I have done?
So you would sing to the sun
Your words found cracks in my wall
And then I joined you in call

Another day weeps, another day lost
If only I knew what your smile cost
I See you with another, hand in hand
My heart broken, blood turned to sand

What more should I have done?
So I could see the rising sun
Flirtatious you are, salacious you would be
Why did you ever see into me?

That note remains, with me today
By your grave, I silently pray
Even now, I hear your voice in the rain
Never hearing the sound of your pain

What more should I have done?
So you could see the rising sun
Was I wrong, or was it you?
Today, I think, I'll start anew

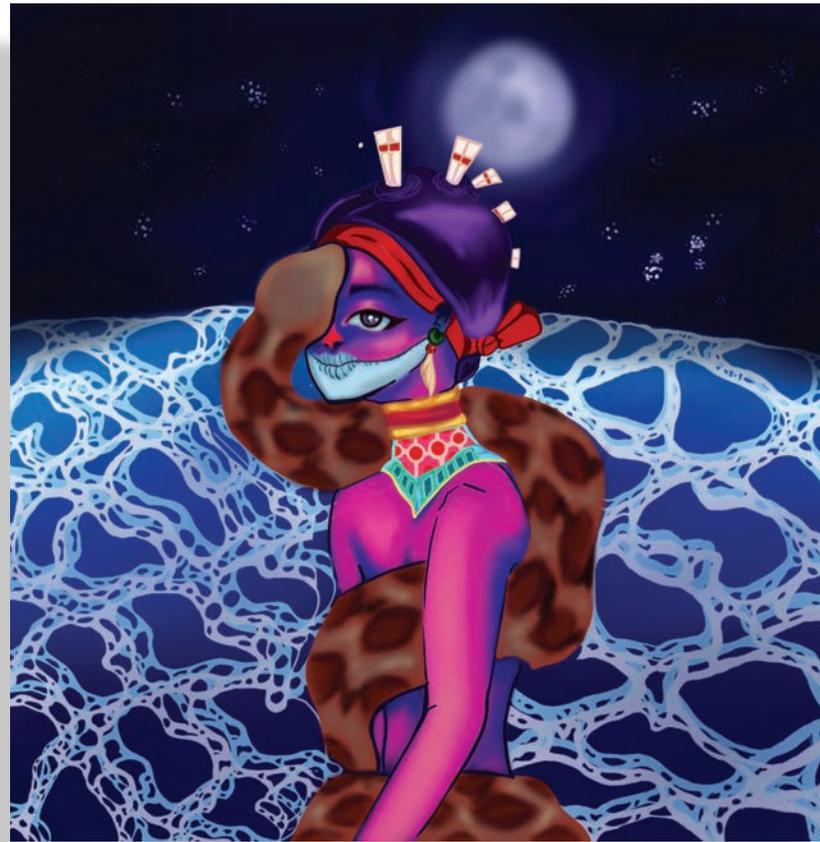
And dance in the rain with you.

Forgotten goddess

Citlalli Mendoza
Waterloo, Iowa

Artistic: Illustration

PNG file, program sketchbook, drawing tablet, drawing tablet pen



I am of Mexican heritage. I am named after the ancient goddess Citlalicue, the fallen star goddess. She was abandoned and almost forgotten, if it weren't for her fiery will to survive and thrive. Her story is of a woman who changes just like Mexico. This nation was built on top of water and another city. The serpent is meant to symbolize the great city of Tenochtitlan.

Black Thunder: An Iowa Landscape

David Blow
Waterloo, Iowa

Artistic: Drawing

Charcoal on paper, 30" x 22"



This piece is inspired by Dawson Davenport's story titled: "Black Thunder: A Meskwaki Story" in which he reveals that his Meskwaki name Makatenemekiwa translates to Black Thunder. He had an unfortunate adolescence living in the Meskwaki settlement. I wanted to express his experience with a dramatic landscape of Iowa featuring dark storm clouds reflecting his name.



Normal Fashion

Vincent Ali

Waterloo, Iowa

Written: Poetry

This piece is about being alienated for your identity while simultaneously being put on a pedestal of performative support. It's about wanting to live like everyone else while being ostracized by not only your peers, but also by your government.

Sometimes I fear that my progress is so small
That to outsiders looking in, it's no progress at all.
Every victory feels like displaying my happiness in chalk
And every setback rains defeat, washing it from the asphalt.
"Normal people do not dream of becoming someone new"
It's meant to reassure me and still it nullifies the truth.
Am I not normal in my normal little life?
With my normal ambitions and normal little strife?
My normal big emotions and my normal little dreams,
I ask "what makes them so normal?" even though I know what they mean.
I have a normal degree and attend a normal 2 year college,
I drive a normal car to the best of my budding normal knowledge,
I wear my normal clothes and my scuffed and normal boots,
If I am nothing close to normal then what else would I do?

Why is it "abnormal" to dream of becoming something new?
They tell me they meant that we are extraordinary but it nullifies the truth.
Am I extraordinary for living my extraordinary life?
With my extraordinary ambitions and my extraordinary strife?

My extraordinary emotions and my extraordinary dreams,
I ask "what makes me so extraordinary?" even though I know what they mean.

I have extraordinary talents and extraordinary passion,
I wear my extraordinary clothes in an extraordinary fashion,
I write my extraordinary feelings and my extraordinary truths,
If I am so extraordinary then what else should I do?

Sometimes I fear that my existence is no existence at all,
And to bigots and those complacent, it's no existence at all.
Every law and bill passed feel like spilling crimson red ink,
And every governor's and legislature's hands are stained red at the sink.
"These are not normal people who dream of becoming someone new."
This is meant to nullify our existence and create a different truth.

Do I not exist or live my existing life?

With my existing ambitions and my existing strife?

My existing emotions and my existing dreams?

They deny me my existence with their hateful shrunken hearts and corrupted regime.

They have hateful motives and little hateful comments,

They take large, hateful actions and scream long and hateful sonnets.

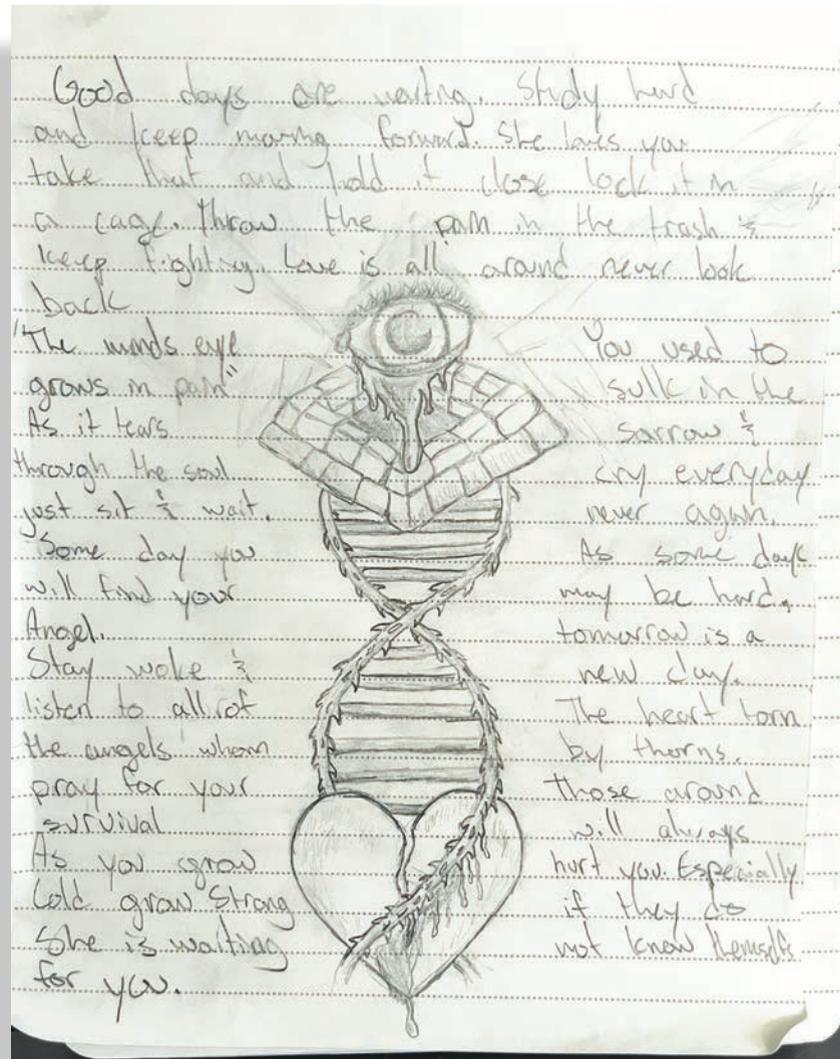
They write hateful little amendments and allow more hate to keep brewing,

If they are supposed to protect the people then what the hell are they doing?

Heart of stone

Nick Duffy
Cedar falls, Iowa

Artistic: Drawing
I drew this in my every day journal



My work relates to the theme of Storytelling. This piece symbolizes growth and strength through life's pain. It shows love and the ability to think using eyes that have seen more than they should.

Black Thunder

Sydney Latwesen
New Hartford, Iowa

Artistic: Graphic Design
Photoshop Collage



My work relates to the theme of Storytelling. This piece is inspired by the story "Black Thunder: a Meskwaki Story."

I am

Katherine Bonny

Waterloo, Iowa

Written: Poetry

Free verse poetry

After being tasked to write a free verse autobiographical poem by a professor, I quickly became cumbered by the magnitude of trying to define myself within a couple of lines. Instead of conjuring a profound image of myself, I decided to simply express how I have been feeling lately: out of place and running out of time, yet I am too tired to do anything about it. I discuss these feelings with both verbiage and visualization. Through this exploration, I have come to terms with how emotions don't have to be who you are and they certainly don't have to define who you will be.

The sun touches my fingertips
and I am the daylight.

For a moment, I glow with warmth
so bright and grand—

It will burn out slowly.

I can feel every second go by;
I am running out of time
I grasp tightly but I feel it
slip through my fingers
are blistered; they are speechless.

Tunnel vision; I try to write from
my heart
yearns for nothing;
for everything.

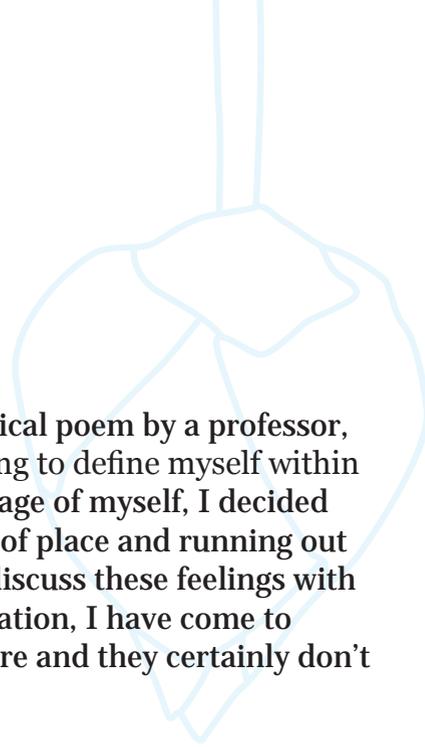
And I worry,
if this
is not
real.

I often sleepwalk
on the fault line;
My heavy footsteps
echo behind me
out of tune
to my heart
circulates elsewhere;

I know
I will feel better
when
I wake up.

So when you ask me
how I am feeling,
my mood rings
will say
I am
the fog at dawn;
the drizzle at lunchtime;
I am
light but so...
so
heavy.

I wonder
if this feeling
is contagious.
I wonder
if we are
all
tired.



Traditional Ice Cream Date

Madysen Leyen
Waverly, Iowa

Artistic: Photography
JPEG Image, Canon 5D Mark IV

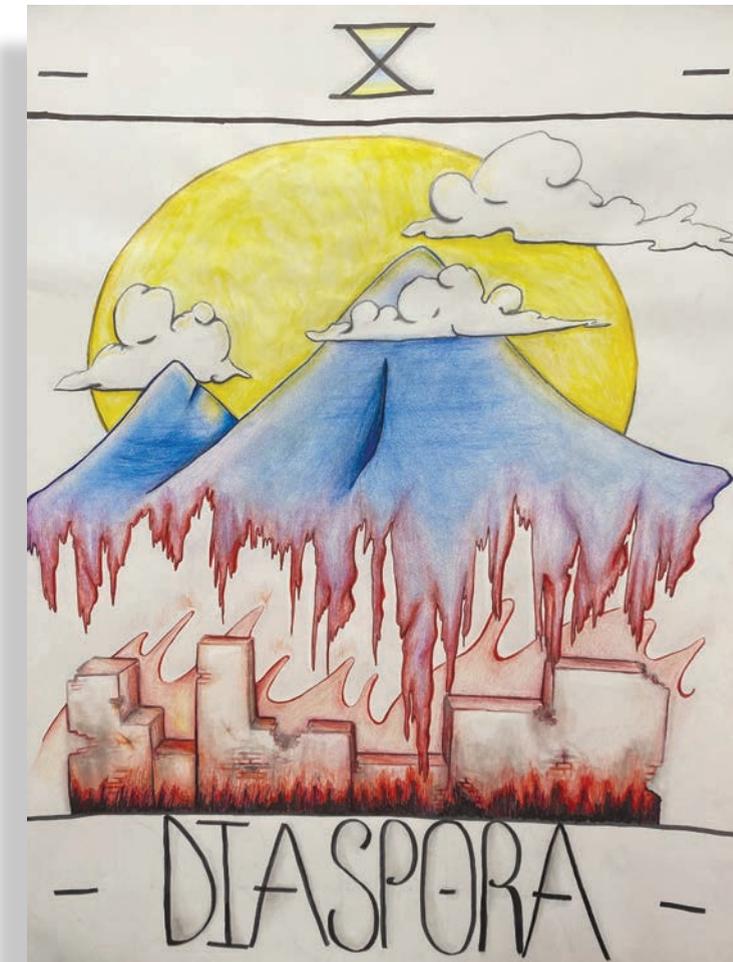


I chose to photograph this piece because it is something I do for my own grieving process. Typically, in the summer, I go to my grandpa's grave and I bring ice cream for myself. When I was younger, my grandpa would take me to the park and then we would go out for ice cream cones. I wanted to keep this tradition as I grew up. Once I could drive, it was something I would do every so often. It gave me an outlet to talk to my grandpa about my life. My brother is the model in this photograph.

Diaspora

Kayley Renslow
Traer, Iowa

Artistic: Drawing
Watercolor pencils, ink, graphite pencils, paper



This artwork represents how older generations see their home as a war torn country with nothing but despair. Yet, the younger generation wants to see the best parts of where they came from. This was done in a tarot card style to represent the wheel of fortune.

Parents

McKayla VerWoert

Adel, Iowa

Written: Short Story

This is a personal essay I wrote reflecting on the theme of family. I wrote about what we owe our parents, and how my parents have shaped me into who I am today.

It was a cold winter morning, and just like any other teenager, I was struggling to get up for school. It just so happened that that day was a day when my mother had to drive me to school, on her way to work. My alarm went off, and my brain told me to get up and start the day, but my ears told me to hit snooze as quick as I can. I mistakenly fell back asleep and was rudely awakened by my mother, who I just made late to work. With a stern voice, she says,

“Seriously Mik, I told you to set your alarm. We needed to be out the door 10 minutes ago! I do, and I do, and I do, for you, and this is the thanks I get?”

That was my mother’s famous phrase, but the guilt I felt every time she said it, I thought,

“What do we owe our parents?”

I started to think back to all of the things that my parents have done for me and quickly realized that we owe our parents everything. We owe them love. We owe them care. We owe them respect.

Robert Bault said, “A parent’s love is whole, no matter how many times divided.”

I’m sure many people can relate to this, but I grew up with a very strict mother. When I was in high school, my grades started to fall drastically which was a huge “no, no” with my parents, especially my mother. Every night, my mom would come into my room, sit me down, and have a talk with me about how my grades are bad, or how my room is messy, or how I “need to get myself together.” Being the youngest of four, I feel constantly like I’m being compared to my older siblings.

“Oh my gosh, you’re Mel’s sister?!”

“Jackson was such a good athlete, why don’t you play sports?”

“When I had Casey as a student, she always got an ‘A’.”

I didn’t care as much about how other people compared me, however, what hurt the most was when my parents would be the ones comparing. I understand that I am the baby of the family, but I wanted to be my own person. Not just someone’s little sister, or the child who is messy and gets bad grades. I finally built up the courage to sit down with my dad and talk to him about how I was feeling. My dad has always been someone I can turn to when I need someone because he will listen and understand me. I expressed to him how I always felt like mom was constantly disappointed in me, and felt like nothing I did will ever be good enough; my room is never clean enough, my grades are never good enough, I am never good enough.

Dad wiped my tears and said, “I understand where you’re coming from, sweetie. Your mom just wants the best for you. She is worried about you and loves you very much. She doesn’t always know how she comes across, and it can give off the wrong message.”

The words he told me have stuck with me ever since. I use his words as my reminder that even though my mom may be tough on me, it’s her way of showing she loves me and wants nothing but the best for me and my future.

I am not a parent myself, but watching my sister raise her three children has been a huge eye-opener for me. One of my sister’s daughters, Everleigh is three years old, and among my family we say she is very medically needy. Everleigh is a twin and was born with severe scoliosis, which brought up a number of other health issues. Ev spent the first 175 days of her life in the NICU, with a million cords and nurses around her at all times, while her twin sister was living with grandma and grandpa. At this time, my sister was only 25 years old, but she wasn’t, and hasn’t, let anything or anyone slow her down from being a wonderful mother to her son, and two daughters. Although I’m sure she and her husband are drowning in hospital bills and other expenses, the way she cares for her children is truly inspirational.

The outcomes of genocide

Simon Larsen
Waterloo, Iowa

Artistic: Drawing

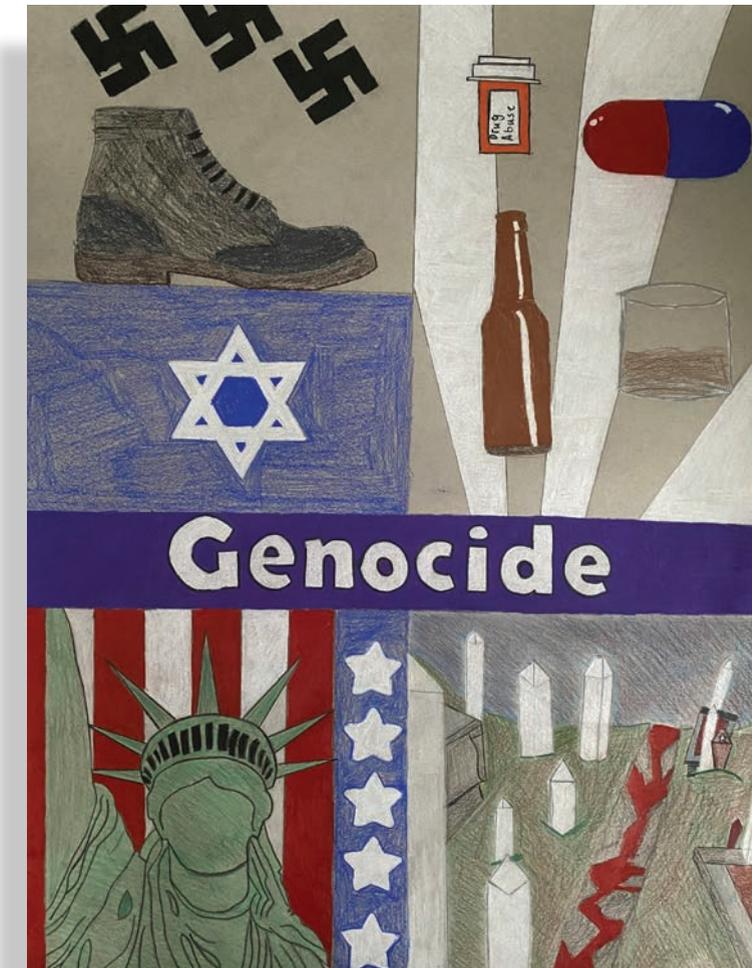
Grey paper, 18x24 inches, graphite and color pencil.

On one hand, she has Everleigh, who can't breathe on her own and needs 24/7 attention and care, and on the other hand, she has a son and daughter who crave just as much attention. Somehow, with the help of her husband, she makes it all work. My sister and her husband have made me realize that parents do everything in their power to care for their children, just as my parents did for my siblings and me. In the future, when my parents are elderly and can't take care of themselves, I will be the one to care for them, as they have cared for me.

After reflecting on how much my parents do for me, and thinking of what I owe them, I believe the biggest thing we owe our parents is respect. My father does so much for me. He taught me how to drive, how to fill my car tires with air, how to check my oil, and so much more. He has put all his efforts into making sure I am cared for and happy. I am also blessed to have a mother who deserves just as much respect. She was the one who taught me how to be a woman. I would not be the person I am today if it wasn't for her. Although there are always going to be rough times, the least I can do is show some respect to the people who shaped me.

With that being said, I give my parents respect. I show my parents love. I care for my parents. When they are elderly, I will take care of them, as they took care of me. I will hug my mom when she is upset, as she did to me. I will make my dad laugh, the way he made me.

What do we owe our parents? Everything.



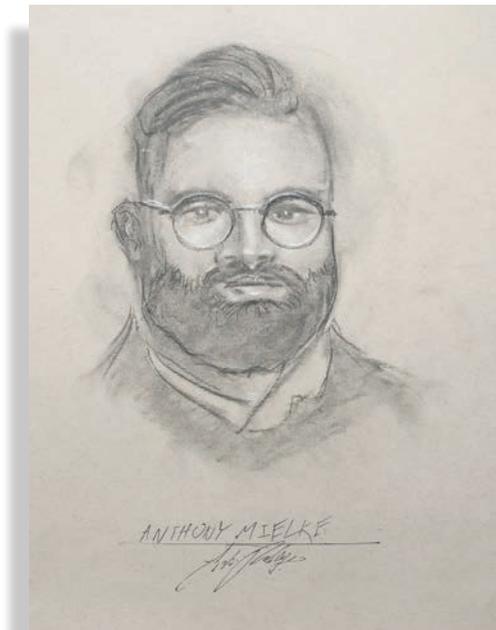
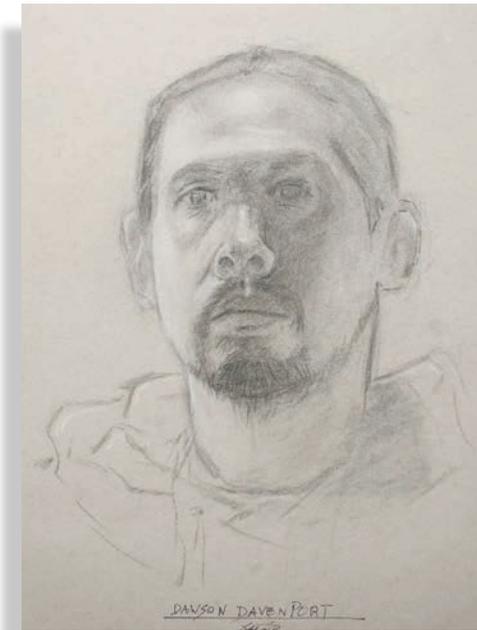
This piece shows what can happen during and after genocide. There are four different outcomes in this piece. The design is based upon historical propaganda posters used by governments to justify genocide.



We the Interwoven: Portrait Series

Luke Pailthorpe
Elberon, Iowa

Artistic: Drawing
Graphite, Charcoal, and white pastel



This portrait series depicts each writer who contributed to We The Interwoven: Volume II



Listening to Coltrane

Rhett Peters

La Porte City, Iowa

Written: Poetry

Free verse poem

As an avid lover of jazz music I figured why not tie the passion into my own personal voiced poem. This piece was a blast to write. It also was a tad challenging at times, not being able to create fictional feelings and instead having to use my very own. The ironically cool tie to jazz music is with John Coltrane's song "My Favorite Things." The perfect song for a poem of my very passions. My hope is that this piece gave an illusion to my personal likings in a complete way!

The buzz of Coltrane's sax starts his evening

The hushed beauty of the refrain provides focus

When he wrote, he relished the likes of a simple black ballpoint pen

It was easy to tell stories about the horrors of life

More enjoyable too

Waking up far past dark

He is goaded from the covers by others' hearts and minds.

A people person

Except he didn't love to orate orally

The swing of a combo and the drummer did the trick

Roach, Blakely, hell even Buddy

All rich

Sweets aren't a favorite

Main dish over dessert

He loves that small China Restaurant

"Hot Tea?"

"Yes, Please"

The seasoned chicken

The crisp dumpling appetizers

Filled with oozing glee

Euphoria that beat a Shakespeare soliloquy

He watched the news from his booth

Politics, policy

To him it beat watching a hit from the babe

Although he loved Ruth too

A baseball nut

He could play or watch,

That west coast seven inning stretch

Sent Coltrane back to work

And with a boxy smirk

The Crosley kicked out another classic

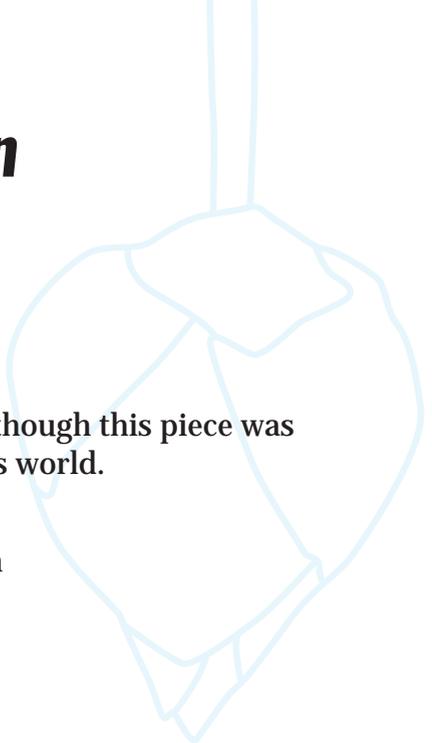
Coltrane's "My Favorite Things"

A Nervous and Awkward Man

Ethen Meyer
La Porte City, Iowa

Written: Poetry
Free verse poem

I wrote this piece describing my daily disposition. Although this piece was challenging, it opened my eyes to how I belong in this world.



I am a nervous and awkward man
who walks the road of life
I never know what to expect
for that is part of the journey
I only wonder how it will go
I am a nervous and awkward man

I have a dream I want to fulfill,
to write stories for others to read.
I struggle to pay attention,
but that is part of who I am.
I try hard to fit in
I am a nervous and awkward man

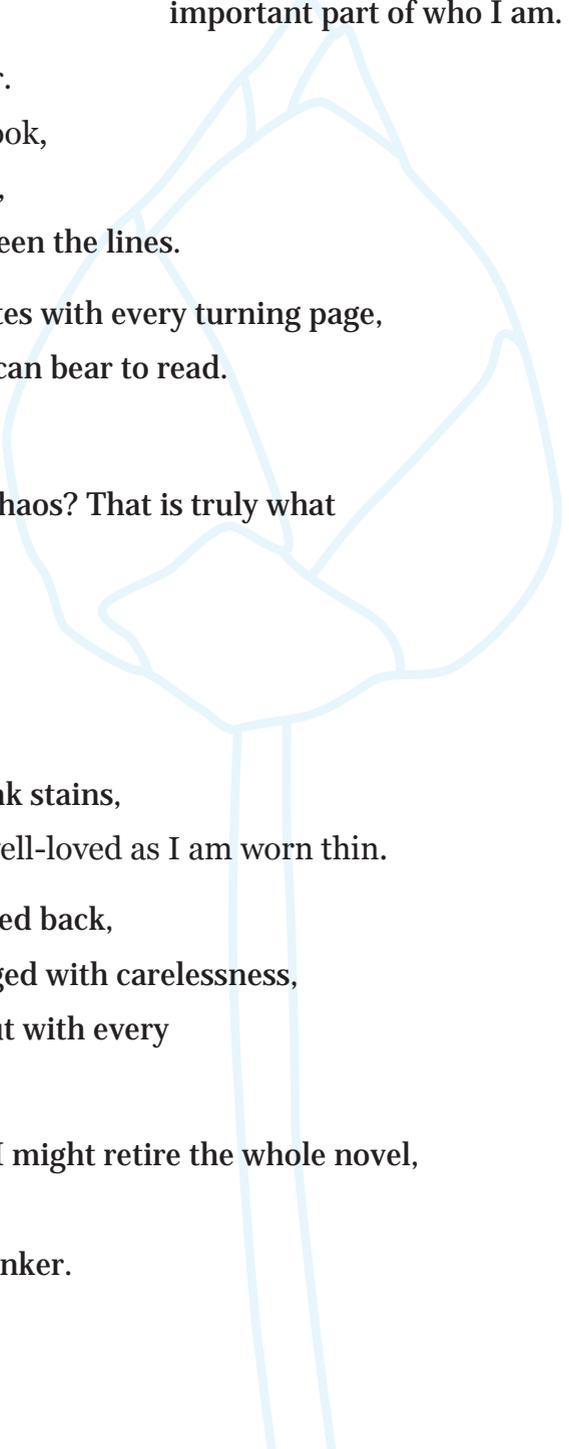
I hope to become successful
I suffer from an illness but few know about it
It makes learning hard sometimes.
I have accepted it as part of me,
For it helps me come up with stories,
I am a nervous and awkward man

I am an Overthinker

Ashlynn Walston
Cedar Falls, Iowa

Written: Poetry
Free verse poem

This poem explores the main theme of overthinking. It feels like no one can ever understand me as a writer. This is an identity piece that highlights an important part of who I am.



I am an overthinker.
Like a well-loved book,
aching with creases,
words written between the lines.

My voice reverberates with every turning page,
I am a novel only I can bear to read.

I have no title,
for who can name chaos? That is truly what
I am; a
whirlwind
of magnificent
horror.

My mind reeks of ink stains,
I am not so much well-loved as I am worn thin.

My corners are curled back,
coarse pages smudged with carelessness,
thoughts spilling out with every
stroke of the pen.

(Just as I thought) I might retire the whole novel,
I realized:
I am just an overthinker.

who we WILL BE

By only defining ourselves by our past and our present selves, we risk limiting our perception of who we have the chance to be. We are not only our past and our present, but also our future—our hopes, dreams, and fears for Who We Will Be. While our past may affect who we are now, it is up to our own self to determine how it will define who we will be in years to come. This theme explores these possibilities.



Panel Discussion

*How have you seen **We the Interwoven Vol. 2** impact the lives of others?*

Andrea:

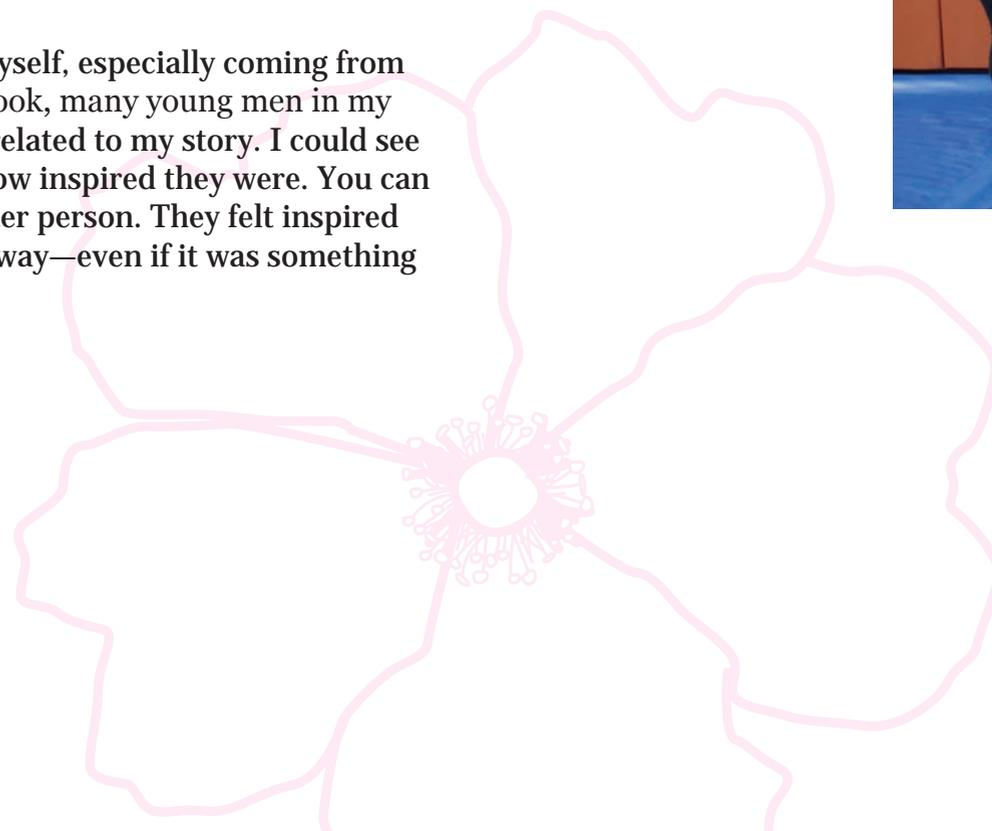
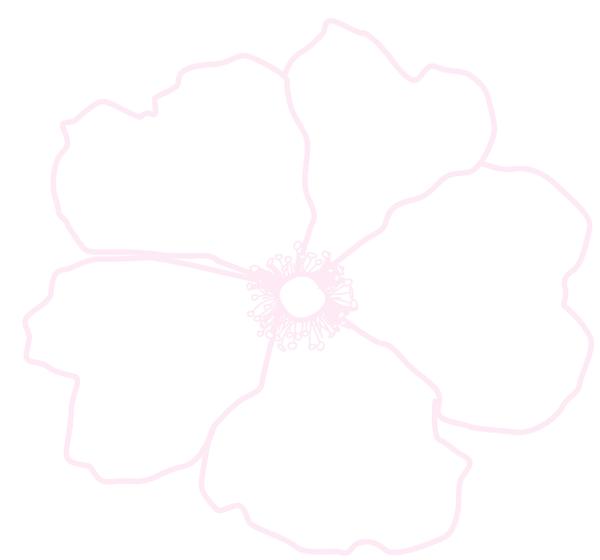
The interesting part about this book is that “what happens” after it’s been released is still unfolding. I’ve had the privilege of being the editor and when putting stuff on the website and in the book you never really know what the impact is going to be. I’ve watched lives change because of the authors’ words. Sharing these real stories that show real struggles lead to questions, curiosity, and important conversations.

Antonia:

When I first started writing I planned on writing about my culture as a whole. I never thought I would get so personal. I don’t know how it has impacted others, but I know I loved reading the other stories in this book. Being undocumented I always felt that I’m not from here, I’m not from there...I’m a little bit from here and a little bit from there—a little bit from I don’t know where. I have realized that while a lot of us came from opposite sides of the country and the world, all the stories are somehow connected. We really are interwoven.

Dawson:

I have always been scared to express myself, especially coming from such a tight-knit community. After this book, many young men in my community came up to tell me how they related to my story. I could see in their eyes how it impacted them and how inspired they were. You can make mistakes, get back up, and be a better person. They felt inspired to do something in their life in a positive way—even if it was something that seemed so small.



Ending to Start again

SaHarra Lawrence
Waterloo, Iowa

Artistic: Painting
Acrylic paint 13x12



The symbolism of a moth is rebirth, change, transformation, resurrection, and the power of regeneration in Native American mythology, alongside butterflies. Some of us seek out a spiritual path to satisfy the desire to find a purpose in life. The light is inside you. A moth lets you know that now is the time to tune into your intuition and use inner knowledge as a guiding light.

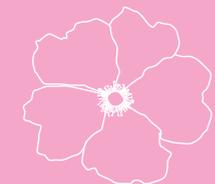
Beauty vs. Brains

Mireia Grant
Ames, Iowa

Artistic: Drawing
Art markers on white Bristol board



This piece was made in response to the story "A Gateway to Jenna" by Rana Hewezi. This refers to the women of this story who juggle being appreciated for both appearance and intelligence.



Not An Exit

Katherine Bonny

Waterloo, Iowa

Written: Poetry

Free verse poetry

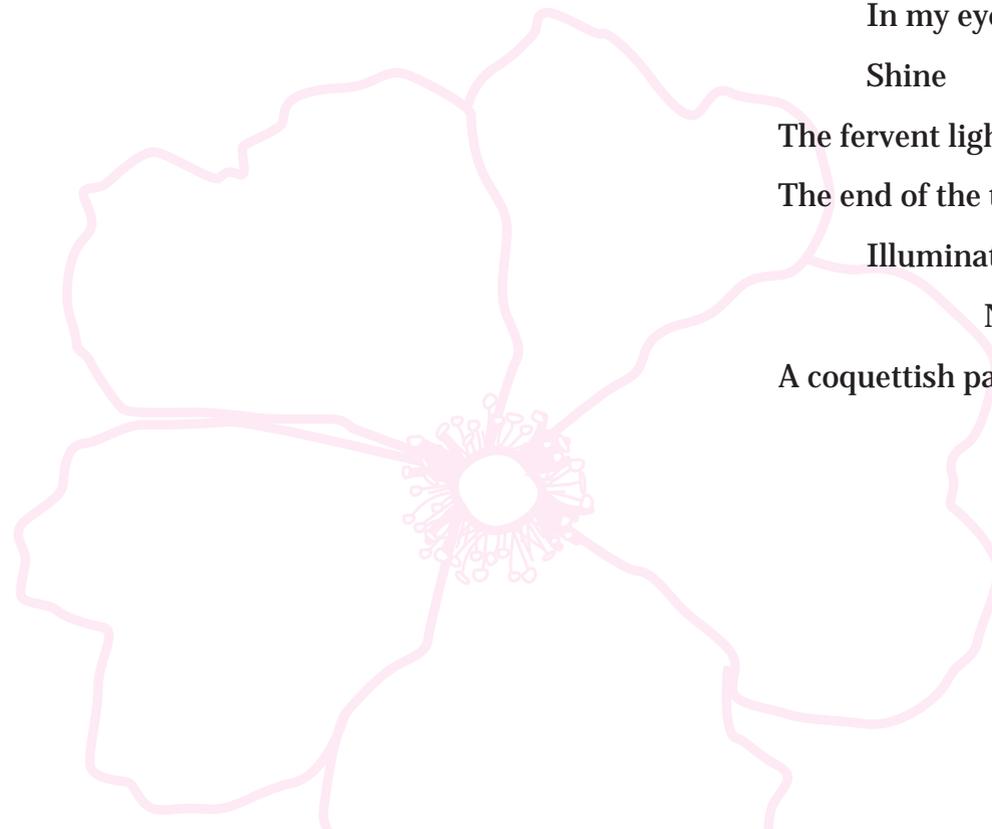
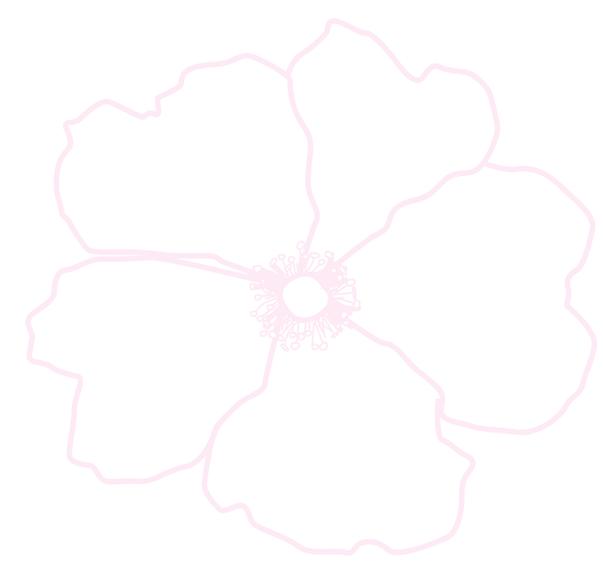
This piece is an exploration of free verse poetry and discusses the themes of addiction and recovery. This poem was inspired by the stories of addiction shared in *We the Interwoven*, Vol. 2 and expresses the difficult cycle of relapsing, as well as the reluctance and fear of recovering in the first place.

Bitter clouds sting
My skin
As they weep
Under the moonlight.
The torrential rain
Drips down
My spine
In melody to
The saccharine whispers
Until the sun
Begins to rise. I feel the
Thick, honey rays
Numbing and
Smoothing my smile lines.
And my heavy thoughts float away.
Suddenly—

I am the dawn,
I will
Warm the night's icy glow,
And dance to the soft breeze. I hear the
Morning songs
Mumbling and
Harmonizing to my spacious breath.

Immured by its embrace,
I will remain
The warmth
Until dusk approaches,
Her breathless wind
Simmers
In the colors of twilight. Together,
We will
Sway in the cotton candy skies
Until the sweet mien eclipses.
As the night's drizzle
Resumes, the sand
In my teeth
Sours. And the stars
In my eyes
Shine
The fervent light;
The end of the tunnel
Illuminates:
Not An Exit
A coquettish pallor—

The rain begins again
Beading against
The pall. I breathe in
The linen, shrouding
blushed cheeks and
serrated lips.
And this time,
The deluge will
Guarantee:
All I am left
Is bones.
I thought I would feel better by now.
Perhaps,
Any day now.



Rue and the Rain

Wesley Smith

Reinbeck, Iowa

Written: Short Story

I wrote this entry while listening to the sound of rain. Rain represents a large part of symbolism to the text of Rue and his melancholy feelings to life. The theme of this story was inspired by grief. The loss of a loved one can many times feel like weathering a windy storm.

This story says “It’ll be okay.” A person can move past grief, using their struggles to reach and achieve their new dreams.

Rue sits in his darkened room. Thunder roars outside, and rain pelts the window nearest to Rue who sits at his desk trying to force himself to type, to write. His computer rests in front of him, lying on his desk. His bedroom is cold; he’s cold. Rue glances over at his bed, his comfort place.

“Everyone has one of those.” Rue thinks to himself.

It’s something he tells himself every day, in order to justify his guilt of lying in bed for way too long. Rue tries to force himself to write, as his eyes wander around his mess of a bedroom and spots a picture on his wall that pulls his mind off the writing. The picture shows a younger him from six years ago, standing next to his brother Gus, who towers over Rue. The image of their previous visit to the Novae Spei aquarium. A fairly new aquarium at the time of the brothers’ visit. The picture was taken at Rue’s favorite part of the aquarium, the sea turtle exhibit. A few turtles swimming behind Rue and Gus in the photo. It was Gus’s birthday and he wanted to go to an aquarium. But only because he knew Rue would have fun. Truly, the photo brings to the surface another memory, not at the aquarium.

Rue is on his hands and knees looking up at the bullies of his school. They were making fun of his bald head, which was a choice he made on his own. Rue was always pretty small for his age, most likely due to him always being sick. The teens mock him, calling him names. Rue isn’t good at speaking to others, his mind always makes him panic and overthink situations. The bullies kick Rue and push him to the ground, he knows he should stand up for himself but part of him feels like he deserves it. Scandy was the loudest. He was the one putting in the most effort. Scandy calls Rue a monster, giving that to be the reason why he has no friends. Loud stomping footsteps approach and a familiar

booming voice echoes down the hallway. The stomps turn into Gus’s freshly shaven bald head shining in the light quickly approaching, drawing closer and closer. The teens scurried ... Gus is known for his right jab and uppercut.

Rue looked back at his computer, a blank document sat there. No title, nothing written. He shook his head, he was thinking too much. If Gus was in the room, he’d say-

“Just go for it!”

“Come on!”

“If you don’t like it, we can fix it together! If you wanna write you gotta just write.”

“Start somewhere!”

But the moment Rue’s fingers touch the keyboard he panics and pulls them away as if he accidentally had reached into a steaming oven. He had to write something, yet he was so scared and nervous that it wouldn’t be what they were looking for. Yet today was the day of its submission and he was gonna make it ... last minute.

Rue glanced back at the photo ... One night he was walking home with Gus, their bald heads reflecting the light of the setting sun.

“You know we only live once,”

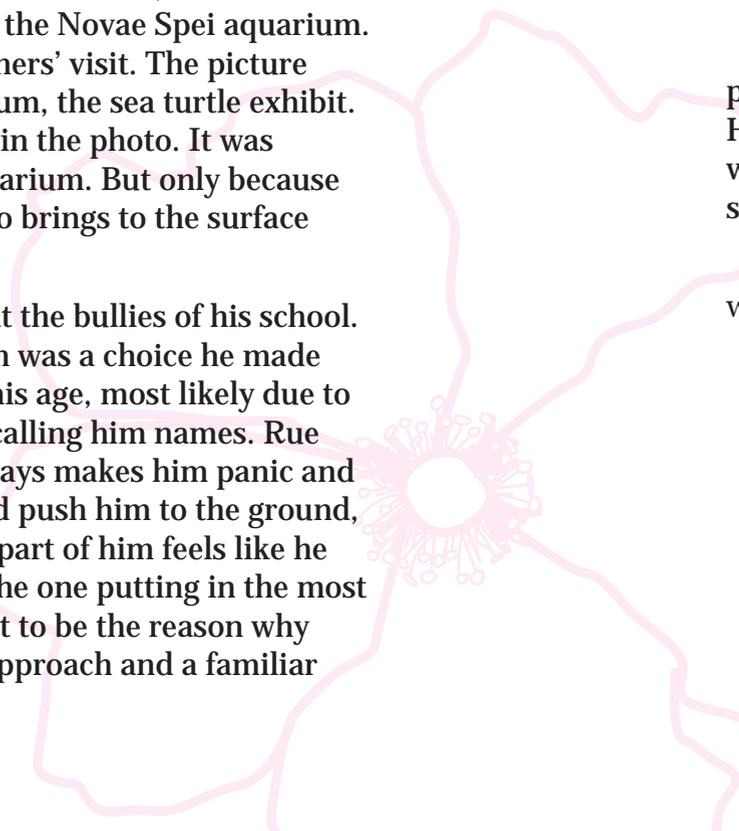
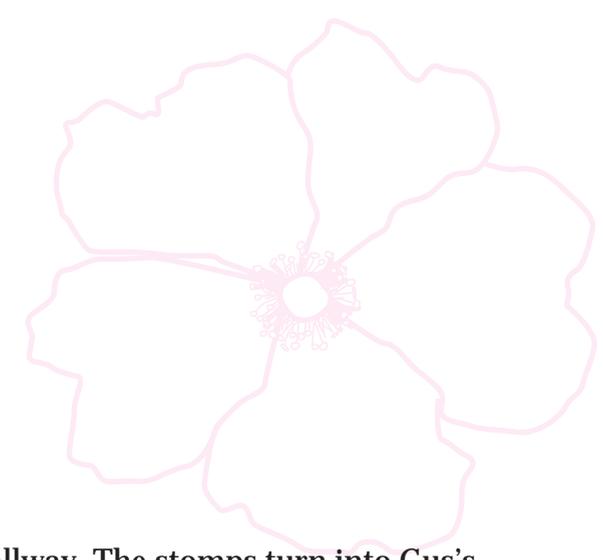
Rue glanced over to his brother.

“That’s what you and everyone else says,”

“Because it’s true, though kinda cliché. But seriously it’ll be okay,”

“How do you know?”

“Because when hasn’t something turned out okay?”



Gus's light blue eyes have dark rings around them. Rue thought about it. The dark rings around Gus's eyes. Even this worried him. It was common for Rue to be overly stressed or even to have occasional panic attacks. He worried about his goals, dreams, and how he might never reach either. Rue had the chance to take part in a writing contest to help him get his dream but he was scared. Yet when Rue wasn't panicking about his future he was loathing his past. Rue was looking at a piece of paper for a writing event. A contest with no real prize besides a small piece of paper saying the winner's name and that they had won. The contest was a thing a few schools were doing to encourage kids to write. The theme this year was family. Rue was interested in writing and quickly entered the contest as soon as it was available. When Gus came to pick him up, Rue began to regret taking the paper. He liked to write and enjoyed it but he had no real skill in it. Sure he could try and learn. "Practice makes perfect." Many would tell him, but Rue knew. He knew he wasn't good enough, he'd just fail. Either it wouldn't fit the theme of the contest perfectly or just not be good enough in quality.

"Story idea!"

"Two robots, their twins!"

"Bit and Bot."

"Bit is all jumpy and about the future, and Bot is caught up in the past"

Rue knew exactly what his brother was doing. Gus was taking one of the ideas Rue had from his journal.

"Bit is bubbly. He likes to make things. He makes buildings and machines. But Bot is scared and looks at the old buildings and machines from the past. He looks at them and sees how they went wrong, why they broke down or failed."

Rue lets himself get lost in his imagination; beginning to daydream about his story of two robot twins, now named Bit and Bot.

"Bot notices a lot of Bits creations and gets scared. He tells Bit that he's making the same mistakes as those before them. But Bit reassures Bot that he'll be okay. That his creations are worth the risk because they'll help people. Bit and Bot continue to argue. Until both agree to see what the other does. Bit runs towards the junkyard that Bot is always too caught up in. While Bot goes towards Bit's workshop to see the future that Bit talks so highly of."

Rue continues to tell the story of Bit and Bot, his eyes focusing more on the ground, lost in his daydream. Gus quietly listens for the end of the story. But as Rue gets ready to finish it, he looks at the paper in his hands.

"What if the story isn't good enough? You should just change it." Rue thought to himself.

Gus spoke, breaking Rue out of his deep self-loathing towards his work.

"Bot walks around Bit's workshop and sees all of his inventions and works. The building Bit has made and all the machines too. Devices that will help others, maybe a device that makes bullies stop being bullies, a machine that can cure any illness. Bot is so impressed and sees all of Bit's works. Bit is onto something. But of course what is a good story without a little more drama! Bit seeing all the broken-down machines and buildings makes a feeling come in! And he starts to grow scared. He feels like the past is trying to tell him something. That maybe Bot was right along, Bit is only going to repeat the past. Soon everything he has worked on is gonna end up in the junkyard. So both run back to one another. Both meet in the middle telling each other that the other was right. Bot notices Bit's fear and worry because Bot is always worried and scared for Bit. Bot wasn't truly worried about the past. He just didn't want Bit to be hurt."

Gus would continue to go on with the story. Even after they got home. Gus knew how the story went, he'd seen Rue write it and then delete it more times than he could count. But right before deleting Gus always got to see it. It changed a lot. But Gus knew the story was good, no one had to tell him that. He just wished Rue knew. It got to the point where Gus didn't know what happened because Rue never got past halfway.

Rue eventually snapped out of it. The daydream of his past with Gus put him in another place. Rue looked at the screen and the story about Bit and Bot. He began to panic and highlighted everything at once getting ready to delete it all... yet he froze. The story was different, it was still about two robots. Bit and Bot. But he almost felt like they weren't twins anymore. Bot was older now, he still lived in the junkyard, but everything in the junkyard was thrown in by Bit. Bit was making so many different machines, devices, and buildings. But halfway through one, he threw it away, trashed it. Bot stayed in the junkyard not because he thought everything was junk but because it wasn't junk. He had a different name for the place... "The Treasure Yard" he would say. Every time Bit made a mistake he threw it away and Bot would keep it because to him it was amazing, maybe not functional but still amazing. Everyday Bot would encourage Bit to keep trying. But Bit was scared the junkyard was a reminder of his past failures and he just knew he couldn't make a successful future. But Bot continued pushing him. So Bit kept trying. Rue looked over at two pieces of paper next to the photo. One is another poster of a previous contest, the theme being past, present, and future. The other piece of paper is a photo taken last year. A picture of Bit and Bot. Bot's shining bald robot head laying on a pillow, he looks so tired but with a strong smile on his face making finger guns at the camera. A Bit standing next to Bot, looking worried but happy at the same time.

Rue began to cry, all his love pouring into the photo. If only Bit knew a week after this photo that Bot would be shut down for good. Never to power on again. Rue looked at the document, with no title, two pages. A solid rough draft. He looks around his dark cold room. He walked over to the window... the storm had passed. It wasn't too cold nor too warm. Sunlight began to seep in. The only sound was birds singing and the sound of his computer running.

It was the morning of a new day.

"Everything will be okay."

Touch of Light

Vienna Greenway

Evansdale, Iowa

Written: Poetry

Free Form Poem

I began writing this poem when I was 16 and struggling with the death of my father. After reading about other people who struggled with grief and addiction/recovery, I knew that my piece needed to touch on how I felt as a child who lost their father because of drug addiction.

The Touch of Light

My father put his hands in the white light, and they never returned.

They never latched onto mine again, they never wrapped me in a hug.

I know he didn't mean to, that the light wasn't touched on purpose.

My father had a problem and it cost him his life.

He took his last breath on that couch, surrounded by swirling coils of smoke.

He wanted to sleep, that's why he also took that pill. However those swirling coils and that little capsule,

Didn't mix in very well.

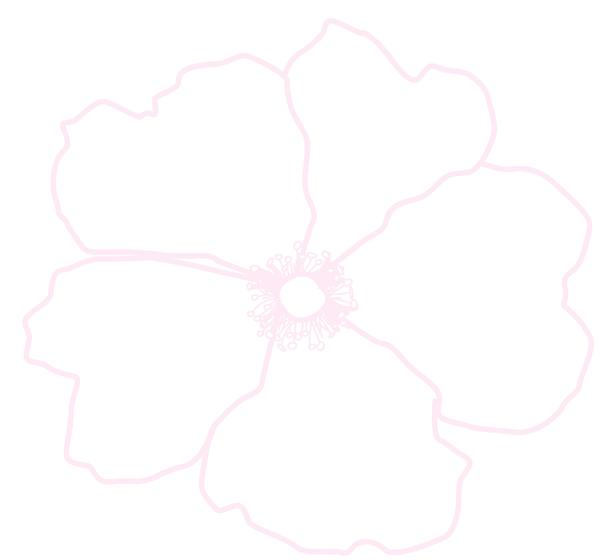
That was when the light swooped in,
Taking him from this life with a single touch.

He didn't mean to lure it in,
He didn't mean to touch the night.

And now all I'm left with, is the memory of him.

The memories are covered by clouds of smoke. I'll never know who he really was, only the man behind the clouds.

I barely remember the sound of his voice, but his laugh rings in my ears. I wish I had gotten to know him, the real him, in our ten years.



I can learn from this, I must.

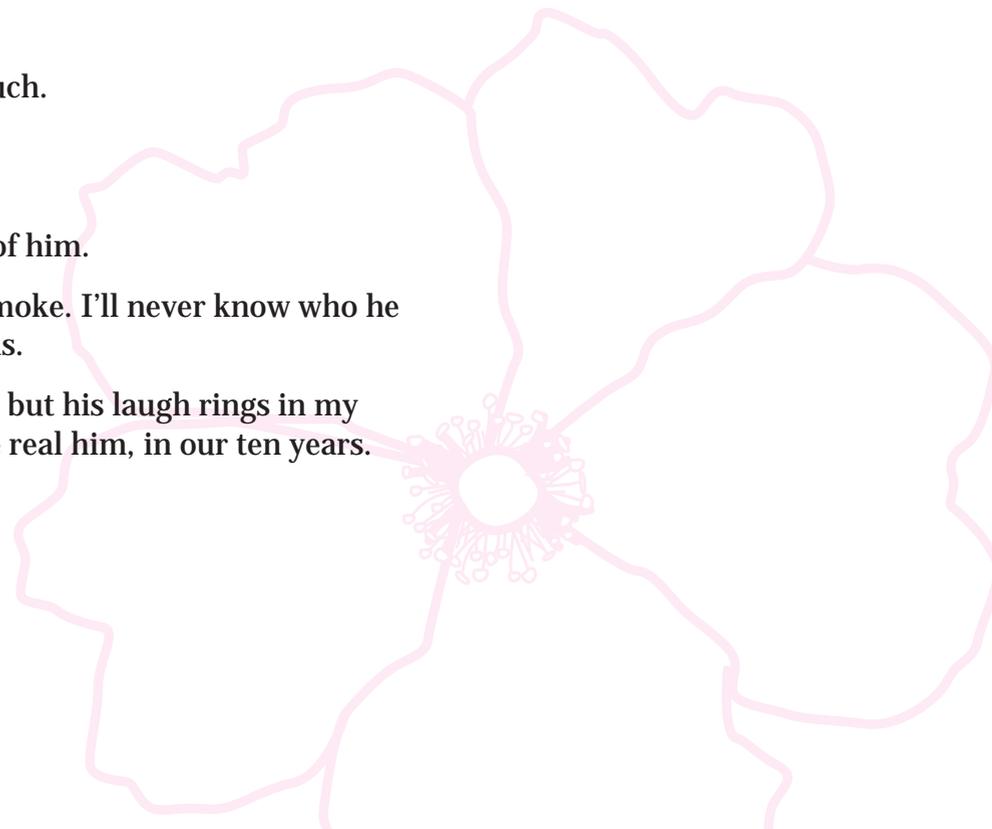
Losing my father and watching my mother climb out of those coils showed me that I can never be swallowed by them.

I refuse to be the next in line, taken by a deadly poison.

Instead I will live a healthy life,
Never beckoning the smoke.

I've learned my lesson and for that I am lucky.

I only wish that my father could've done the same,
That he never touched the light.



Interwoven Hands

Sophia Kain
Independence, Iowa

Artistic: Painting

I put the canvas together myself it is 36"x26" the hands are painted in oil paint and the background is acrylic paint.



We The Interwoven, Vol. 2 is about bicultural Iowans. Each story has similar themes and ties to all writers. These hands are meant to represent bicultural people physically being interconnected.

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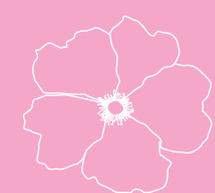
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STAFF INTERVIEWS

What defines your identity?

Rhett: Every person I've met and everything I do is what forms and defines my uniqueness, and my identity. From the watch I wear on my left wrist, to the coffee drop stain on my white pair of Vans, my wardrobe, and my walk—sort of like a cup of hot gumbo, the hodgepodge of ingredients creates the taste, the enjoyment, the identity.

What do you feel interwoven with?

Sophia: I feel interwoven with my boyfriend, Chris. We have been dating for six years and have gone through a lot together. When you are with someone, your stories and experiences become interwoven, and you are connected by that. Although we have different memories and stories, we can still connect and understand each other. I feel that our lives have meshed and we will continue to grow together.

What defines your identity?

Katherine: I define myself by the way I speak, the books I resonate with, and the songs I hum subconsciously. I am what I stand for, and who I stand by; the people I love unconditionally, and those I hate. For better or worse, I am the decisions I have made and those I fail to make; I am my past, but I am also my future and who I aspire to be.

What do you feel interwoven with?

McKayla: I feel interwoven with my mother. I look up to her so much—she is my biggest inspiration. We are interwoven from the way we talk, our personality, our nature, how we love and care for others, and even our laugh. I tell my mom everything. We have been through a lot together, both the good things and the bad.

What defines your identity?

Lauren: My identity is defined by the things that make me, me. Things like listening to Taylor Swift for hours on end, taking trips to Target when I have nothing to do, playing soccer with people from all around the world and discovering a love for reading books. It's a combination of the little things in life that I do everyday.

How has your identity grown?

Vienna: I feel like for most of my life I hid from my identity, burying myself in books and stories that were completely different from my own reality. As I grow older though, I find myself more and more comfortable telling others about my experiences. I've found that as I share my own identity with others it makes me feel more connected not only to them, but to myself as well.

STAFF INTERVIEWS

What defines your identity?

Wes: My good nature defines my identity, I guess. I try my best to be a good person. My goal in life is to do something that helps people in small ways...like writing a book that a person can read and make their day just a little better. I want to be able to do something that inspires others, or at the very least, turn their bad day into a tolerable one. A day that makes a person say, "It wasn't the best but it wasn't bad either."

What do you feel interwoven with?

Jennifer: I feel interwoven with my nuclear family. This includes my husband, my two daughters, and our dog Opal. Our family has navigated cancer, Covid-19, school, work, and the open journey that is life and death. Through our shared experiences and love, we have persevered through challenges that may have torn others apart—challenges that have woven our family together into a strong and beautiful tapestry.

Who and What do you feel interwoven with?

Robin: One of my favorite poems is "A Noiseless Patient Spider," by Walt Whitman. In the poem Whitman compares the web being spun by the spider to the soul; both cast out countless delicate threads to connect to others and to this world. Similarly, my web is intricate and strong. It consists of every moment, every person, every choice, and every interaction I've had across time. But what anchors me the most is my chosen family, which consists of my husband, my two adult children, my granddaughter, my dog and a handful of beautiful souls I am blessed to call friends.

What do you feel interwoven with?

Dan: I am interwoven with my wife and children. Our family is made up of individuals with many diverse backgrounds: biological, step, adoption, race, ethnicity, special needs, and geological. However, as a whole we are a solid "us". Together we fight, make up, celebrate, cry, hang out, and explore... but above all we will always have each other's back.



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