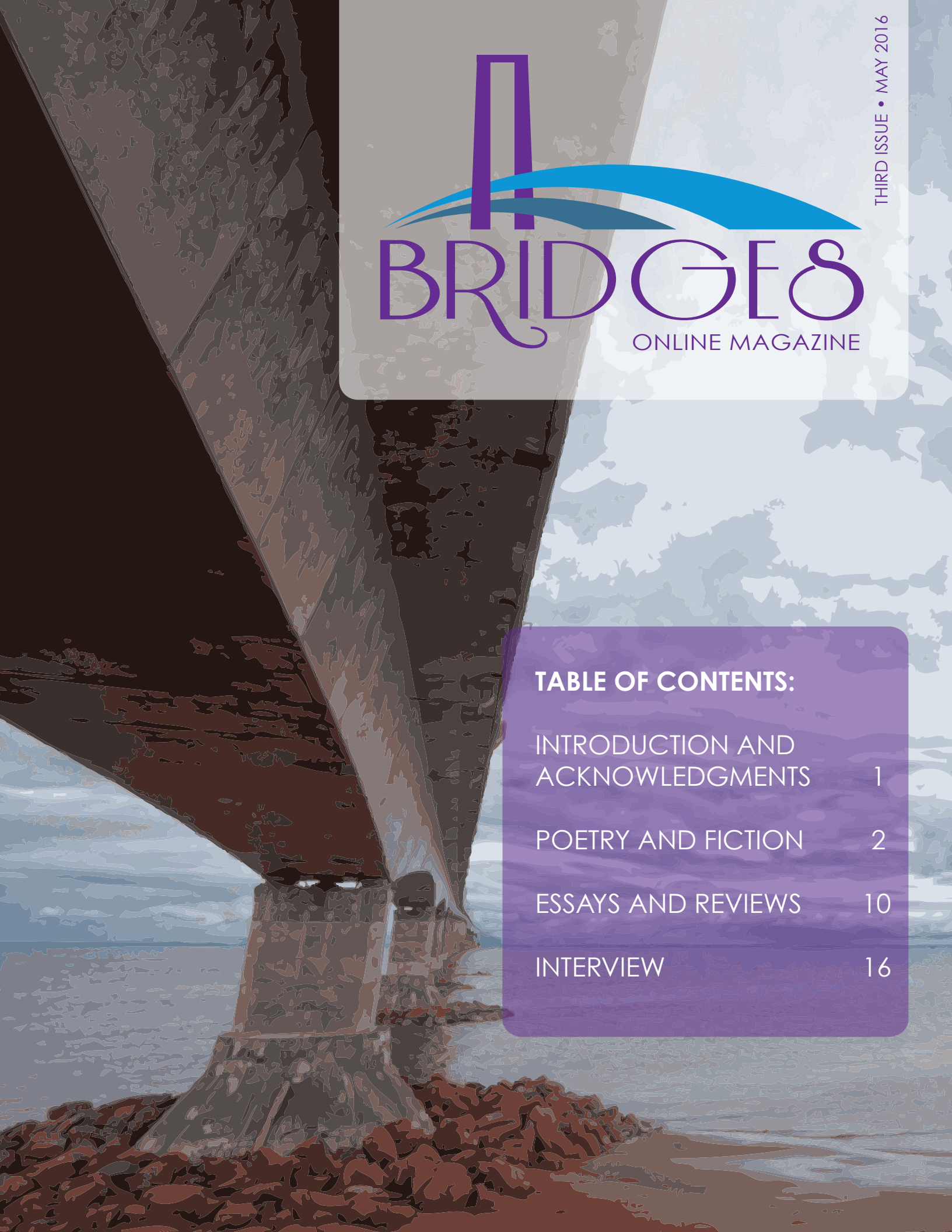




BRIDGES

ONLINE MAGAZINE

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Introduction

Dear Readers,

With pride and pleasure we present our third issue of Bridges, an online magazine showcasing the written work of students of English in the College of General Studies from all course levels: Intensive, Basic, Intermediate and Advanced. We aim to publish student voices from various levels of English proficiency who submit different kinds of texts: creative, academic and journalistic.

In this issue we recognize the creative talent, effort and hard work of our young authors. We have included the winning entries for the 48th Annual Literary Contest, which took place during the Spring semester of 2015, a review and an interview. Some of the entries are accompanied by original art composed for or inspired by their texts, illustrating how art inspires art.

Every year, our judges from the English Department carefully read each entry for the categories of short story, poetry and essay. Although the judges can only select the top three pieces and a very few honorable mentions, the Department acknowledges and congratulates every participant. Entering this contest as an undergraduate student is an exercise in one aspect of being a writer: competing. It means revising your text, organizing and preparing the necessary documents, seeking (and receiving) constructive criticism, and submitting your work to the scrutiny of strangers, well aware that your text will be compared to an unknown number of others. For all participants alike, it takes a particular kind of courage to enter a contest. You are our students and we are proud of you.

The short stories included all have a common element in their plots: anxieties and problem-solving; we meet characters who, amidst the chaos, injustice and disappointment in their lives, take control over their own fates. Their methods, however, range from slightly questionable to morally shocking. The poems share perspectives on the art of writing, life's uncertainties, and feelings of abandonment. The essays include a critical analysis of a closely read literary text, a personal narrative about a valuable life experience and a researched reflection about financial privilege and education.

This issue has two journalistic pieces: a critical response to the film "He Named Me Malala" (2015) and an interview with an author with questions focusing on her writing practices and one of her books. It so happens that the author in question is yours truly.

Difficult times call for creative measures. Most of the texts you are about to read reflect on struggles in different levels: emotional, social, political and physical. More importantly, they consider possibilities. Sometimes we find answers and solutions, happy endings to some of our lives' many chapters. But sometimes endings are open, unsatisfying, perhaps even tragic. A writer's task is to consider and be critical of reality; then, to transform it, to re-present it in metaphor, to take it apart and put it back together, to propose answers when there are none, to imagine outcomes to the "what ifs." In this issue, our students have done all of the above.

Happy reading.

Alejandra Reuhel Menegol
Editor in chief / Co-coordinator

Acknowledgments

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Carlos R. Echevarría Tirado, Graphic Designer

Contact us:

bridges.upr@gmail.com

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Do You Got Room for One More Troubled Soul?

by Alexandra L. Rivera Delgado

"I'm running away." I whisper. I'm standing in the middle of my brother's room and it's four o'clock in the morning. At this time, the sun isn't even thinking of rising up yet. Mum and Dad are sleeping two doors away, down the hallway. They might as well be two snoring logs, for how imperturbable their sleep is.

My brother is laying down on the floor, in his underwear and with a bottle of booze in hands, which I knew he had taken from dad's secret stash hidden in the basement. Mum doesn't approve of alcohol. I don't think much of it. My brother has a faraway look in his eyes, while staring at the picture of his ex-girlfriend in a square frame on his bedside table. He holds back a sob, and looks at me. His eyes seem lost and unfocused.

"What?" He slurs.

"I'm running away." I stated, more firmly this time.

"Why?" He asks.

"I want to see the world," is my answer. "Before I get stuck in one place for the rest of my life, I want to experience what I'll be missing on before it's too late."

"Oh," He mutters. "So what? Are you going on a road trip? That's not running away."

"It is, if I'm not planning on coming back." I told him, and I head towards the door.

"Wait!" His voice seems to have grasped a sense of consciousness. I look back to see him making a drunken attempt to stand up. He's soon on his feet, a bit wobbly, but standing nonetheless. His eyes still seem to be searching for something far beyond. We share a glance. "I'll go with you. I don't want to stay in one place either. Not without her." I can't help but look at the girl in the picture frame.

He wants an escape, and so do I. I nod, giving him my approval. "Pack something light, and whatever cash you got. We're going west."

I leave his room, and now I'm standing in the hallway. The fact that my parents are two doors over is more present than ever. But they won't come to stop me. They assume everything will be the same as any other day when the morning comes. But it won't be. That simple knowledge makes my skin shiver with both excitement and anxiety.

I walk down the stairs, and pass through the living room. I avoid looking at one of the walls where all of the family pictures are collected. I remember perfectly those long hours we had to wait stiffly for a simple picture to be taken. A portrait. The image of the perfect family. That's exactly what we are. An image.

But the truth is, we each wear our own masks.

I feel like I'm suffocating, so I leave the house, with my car keys in hands. Both mum and dad have a well-paying job, so there's three cars in the

garage. I had left my car parked outside, to avoid the hassle of waking the neighborhood up at four fifteen in the morning. My keys are in the ignition, when my brother comes out of the house, and closes the door behind him. He's now wearing some clothes, and he's holding another bottle of booze. I sighed as he gets in the passenger seat.

"You're an alcoholic," I say as we leave the house and the overly groomed neighborhood behind, the only place I called home for all my life. It hasn't felt like home for a long time.

"I'm not," he hiccups, and takes another swing of the sweet lethal liquid.

"You like to drink away to numb your feelings. You're an alcoholic. You're not even out of your teen years yet."

He doesn't try to argue. He's slumped on the seat, looking at everything with wide eyes. I feel he's not quite here, though. I continue to drive, passing by the shops and the streets I've known for seventeen years. It's funny and kind of eerie to see it in a different perspective. During night time, everything seems so lifeless, and stationary. I don't like it.

Eventually, I drive past the high school campus we both attend. I think one of the few things my brother and I agree on is that this place is purgatory. All inquisitive and curious souls die in a matter of seconds when they step into that building. I step on the gas a little bit, to get away from the place before its cold arms crash me in a suffocating embrace.

"I miss Rachel." My brother mumbles, tracing with his fingers imaginary lines on the window.

"She dumped you."

"I love her." He sounded more desperate this time, as if trying to convince someone. I can't help but shake my head in resignation. I don't think he loves her, more like he doesn't know how to be alone.

We leave the town behind us, and I get on the bridge that will lead us to the exit towards the highway. It's now four forty-five. I'm halfway down the bridge, and I keep my lights on to the minimum. There's a flash, a shadowy figure standing in front of us, and suddenly my brother is screaming at me to stop the car. I stepped on the break, heart beating wildly inside my ribcage. My brother stumbles out, spilling the booze all over the seat in the process. Instead, I'm frozen in the spot, and my thoughts are galloping without reign. My brother is shouting at someone, but all I can understand is the ringing in my ears. My head is spinning, and I can't seem to remember how to breathe.

I almost ran someone over. I almost killed a person.

After I get my nerves in check and my anxiety subsides a bit, I leave the car, and run towards my brother. The bridge we're currently on is a long one, stretching over a large lake. Standing on the edge of it, looming over the

never-ending blackness, is the same shadowy figure I saw previously, and which I almost ran over. This time I can see the person better, and I realize what they're trying to do, and why my brother is shouting so much.

"I don't care how bad you think your situation is, this is not the answer!" My brother was trying to get close to the person without the person noticing. I think he feared the person would jump if he did. Though what surprised me the most was his voice. It didn't sound anything at all like a few minutes ago, when he spoke of Rachel. Now I realized what true desperation was. Nothing like preventing the death of a person you don't know to bring out the most raw and cutting feelings from your very soul.

"You don't know anything! Stop speaking as if you do, Walker!" A tearful, slightly feminine voice spilled into the night. The mention of my brother's name took me by surprise. Whoever it was, they knew him, and by default, they must know me. Everyone in this fugging town knows about Walker's little sister.

The person was standing by the edge, and Walker was this close to sprinting and pulling them back.

I cleared my throat loudly. "We're running away. Do you want to come with us?"

The person, for the first in the whole five minutes we've been standing here, looks at me. I can't see their features very clearly, except that they have very short hair, and they're not very tall. I seem to have gotten their full attention, because I feel their gaze piercing my skin.

"Where are you going?" They ask.

Walker takes a step forward. "We're not--"

"We're heading west. All the way to California. At least that's what I'm planning." I told them.

"California?!" The person seemed very surprised at my destination. "Are you crazy?"

"Wait, we're going where?" My brother asks me, puzzled as well.

I shake my head, trying to figure out the current predicament I'm in. This trip has gone to an unexpected start, unbelievably. "If you would step down from that edge, I'll be willing to explain my plans. After I'm done, if you still feel like going for a swim, then I'm not stopping you."

My brother twisted his head towards me at my last words, disbelief shining inside his orbs. I shrugged. I don't have control over anybody's actions, and I really don't want to, either. Ironically, in my opinion, the person steps down the edge, and all their attention is centered on me.

"I'm searching for home." I confess, and the night seems to swallow my words. "I'm looking for a home which doesn't hide behind a family portrait. I'm running away because there's no way I'll live an adventure if I never leave what's holding me back. I'm not planning on coming back either. This world is too big to stay in a small town all my life."

There is a deafening silence. I know the person is looking at me as if I'm a lunatic who had escaped from the asylum.

"You're searching for adventure?" They ask.

"Yes,"

"You do know that's basically a road trip? You're going on a road trip; you're not running away. You're not escaping from anything. I don't think you even need to."

I think about it. "I'm escaping a life of complete predictability and tediousness. I think that's worth something."

"You're not even out of high school yet!" The person exclaims, exasperated. "You're too young to know how your life will be!"

"But I guess you're old enough to decide when to end your life, right?" I strike back. The person is frozen in the spot, realization hitting them like a bag of bricks. "We all have our own ways to deal with our frustrations and incompleteness; a road trip is how I deal with mine."

I hug my jacket closer to my body, and I glanced over at Walker. He looks dead on his feet and about to pass out, all his alcohol tolerance going down the drain. I have this strong urge of taking him back to the house and leave him on the doorstep, but I couldn't do that. If I did, this whole four-in-the-morning-escapee-that-is-really-an-awfully-planned-road-trip would have been for nothing. I step closer to my brother, and I put his arm around my shoulders for support.

"There's really no more than I can tell you." I turn around, and ever so slowly walk towards my car. "We will leave you to your suicide attempt in peace."

With caution, I place my brother in the back seat of the car. He's all but sleeping and slurring in his sleep. After I click on his seat belt (just in case another person decides to jump in front of the car and I have to step on the breaks again), I get in the driver's seat. Just as I'm starting on the engine, I see someone standing beside the passenger door.

"I still think this is pointless and irrational, and not so well-thought, but may I come along for the ride?"

For the first time in the whole night, I smile. "Come on then!"

As they get in, I can finally get a clear look of the person's features, and I immediately recognize who it is. Their name is Daniel/Diana Rivers, the first transgender student at our purgatory. I guess the bullying and the name-calling reached its turning point tonight.

"Why is your brother so drunk?" Diana asks as she clicks on her seatbelt, and I finally reach the other end of the bridge.

"He thinks he's worthless without a girl by his side." I tell her. "And maybe he really did love Rachel."

What followed was a comfortable silence between us. Diana was watching through the window how the sun peeked over the mountains and its mornings rays spread over the country side. It followed us all the whole time, as we raced against the clock. The reality of what we were doing will soon slap us full force, but I hope it was when we were far away from that small, frivolous town.

"Lily," Diana whispers. "Do you think we'll ever find home?"

"I hope so."

Godly Poet

by Yzahira del Valle



Artist: Yzahira del Valle

Poets are Gods trapped in human bodies.

I am a God of written creatures.

At my order and whim, I create poems.

They are my children.

My will awakens their mucky blood.

They are the brood of my ideals and truths.

In their thin bodies they carry the power
to move nations,

To destroy tyrannies and raise empires,

Quell wars and spark revolutions!

They shall provoke change, regardless if
they last seconds or centuries!

My children will always meet obstacles.

Fellow Gods shall disapprove and shun
rather than praise them.

Others will condemn them and I.

Many shall fall, but as long as I breathe
and write, more poems shall rise.

So I will continue to sit on my wooden throne,
birthing my children for years to come.

BAREFOOT

by Pablo Meléndez Carrasquillo

Long foot, short foot;
uncomfortable they walk.
Long distance, short road.
Barefoot.

My foot, your foot, our walk;
walking alone the way.
Two of them, one foot.
Barefoot.

Dumb feet, strange voyage;
only feats they make.
Known feet, wrong foot.
Barefoot.



Forget your troubles!

by Marilú Crespo Albars



"Painted Desert Landfill" Photo: Marilú Crespo Albars

"That's the last one", the man said as He slammed the trunk of their old mini-van and walked to the driver's side door, sliding into the front seat. Turning the keys in the ignition He looks over at his wife and asks: "Are you ready, hon?" She turns to face Him from the passenger side and only offers up a reassuring smile for an answer. He puts the gear in drive and pulls out of their driveway. Through the rearview mirror He sees the bright red letters spelling SOLD over the for sale sign they'd placed in front of the house less than a month ago. The drive to the place they'd picked was a few hours long, and so they settle into a familiar silence that lasts for the first couple of minutes of their drive.

Nearing the first hour of the drive He turns on the radio and smiles as He listens to the familiar accords of one of his favorite songs. "I love this song! One of those oldies but goodies, ya know?" He looks over at his wife and smiles.

"You remember this one. Come on, sing it with me!" The notes fill the morning air as the voice coming

from the stereo sings: *"Forget your troubles, come on get happy"*

He smiles and looks over at Her and says: "I already have!"

"You better chase all you cares away

Shout hallelujah

Come on get happy

Get ready for the judgment day"

With a worrisome look, She sighs heavily and refuses to look at Him focusing her gaze on the view outside of the car's window. She turns off the radio.

"But what of the children?" She asks with a mix of nervousness and sadness.

"They'll be fine, there's room for everyone where we're going." He says with a small laugh and a quick glance toward Her. He removes one hand from the steering wheel and places it on her hands, which are tightly interlocked on her lap.

"Relax, sweetie. This a fresh start for us, I know it's difficult but we've got everything figured out." He

squeezes her hand and smiles at Her once more. They continue their trip in silence, the only noise that can be heard is the hum of the air, their occasional sighs and the soft rustling of fabric on seats when they shift to find a more comfortable position.

It's already late in the afternoon when He notices that they are almost out of gas. "Nothing to worry about" He says in a low whisper, as if He was only talking to himself.

Looking over at Her, He says, in his ever cheerful tone: "I'm pretty sure there's a gas station up ahead on Navajo Boulevard, then we'll take the I – 40 and be at the new place in about fifteen minutes." Without waiting for an answer from Her, He speeds to the gas station. In less than ten minutes they fill up the tank and enjoy some snacks from the convenience store next to the gas station.

As they walk back to their car She takes the keys from his hand and says: "Maybe I should drive, you're probably tired anyway." He doesn't say a single word, just smiles at Her and walks toward the passenger side door. They both enter the car and once again they set off on their journey.

It's already dark outside when He finally speaks up: "This is it, take the next exit to Main Street and then a left on N Porter Road, and it should be on the left side of the road."

Exactly as He said, the sign indicating that they were, indeed, where they were supposed to be was on their left. They park just under the sign that reads:

After a pause that lasts a couple of minutes, She turns the key in the ignition and pops open the trunk. Together they pull out of the trunk four identical black bags that only differ in their weight. Two considerably larger and two so small that they weigh less than a hundred pounds each. Dismissively they throw the bags on top of the rest of the piled up trash. Throwing the last bag He says: "Well a family that dies together, stays together. Or however the saying goes..."

As they turn to leave the man hums a few beats of the song they were listening to earlier that day. "Now my troubles are surely forgotten..." He whispers as they get in the car once again and drive off into the dark night.

Belinda

by Nelson Febo Colón

She stared at the mirror as night invaded the house. Tears would fall down her cheeks as her thoughts would desecrate her reflection. She was beautiful to all, but ugly to herself.

Over a dozen magazines were on the floor. The women in those pictures were all so happy and joyful; she could hear their distant laughs and comments as if they were actually there with her. Before these magazines ever came to her life, there used to be a grandmother who would actually show Belinda what real beauty was every day after she came home from school. "Do not hide under masks of makeup, but rather, love yourself. ¡Ahí está la belleza real!" Then she went on to a better place to teach other angels the same thing, leaving this fallen angel with only memories. Her mother and father tried to replace the loss with little trinkets, with money, with clothing, and expensive trips to psychologists. Her father was the least interested in paying another person to tell her what he could easily say to her himself; "straighten up and live with it!" Her mother, though, often used to stand in front of the same mirror with her, going on and on about how beauty comes from within, not from the outside. But the small and disoriented child would close her eyes and dim the sound that was her mother's voice. Still, they tried their best as parents just to keep her from falling apart, up until she went off to college. They cared for her and called every day, but they didn't understand; no one did. And even though she was already grown up, studying what she wanted and trying not to fail, she could never shake off the idea of getting rid of the ugly herself, to finally feel beautiful.

Fat! Ugly! Pitiful! Disgusting! She would close her eyes and that's all she would hear coming from the women in the pictures. The same words her classmates used to torment her with throughout high school. Insults that came out of girls who, as they grew up, ended up getting pregnant, broken, out on the streets... their old selves deformed by the love of their lives. Perhaps, after all was said and done, they'd finally see that she was just as beautiful on the outside, like, supposedly, they all were.

They all said beauty was something you were born with, inside and out, and that she had none. No matter what, she couldn't even pay the price for beauty.

As she grew up, there were no brown eyes to look back at her, no long black hair that rested on her back, no lips of perfect symmetry, no cute nose, and no slender caramel-skin body. Belinda had completely blinded herself wishing for an image that would never be hers. Every day, the same skinny blue-eyed blondes would diminish her thoughts, and weaken her heart with the same words: "Too bad that she can't pay for real beauty."

One day she realized, that she didn't need to spend much to change her look and kill the ugly. Should she do it? Today? Why shouldn't she?

Belinda tried and tried to look and look at every mirror, every reflection, just to find what many people, including her family had told her forever. She couldn't, she was never able to see it. Belinda struggled immensely to answer these questions. If she did it today, it would result in a new her. After a painful process, Belinda would finally be able to feel pretty, like the girls in the magazines and in the billboards. Of course, once she did it, there would be no going back to the person she was before, but what did it matter? Her parents would still love her, regardless of her choices; her friends, if they were real friends, would understand why. The only thing that mattered was her own satisfaction. What would they say when they saw that there were no more brown eyes looking sad at the world? They'd finally say she's beautiful, really beautiful, or perhaps, they would say that she was still ugly. Her best friend would always try to snap her out of that thought. Maybe if Amanda saw the "new me" she would stop freaking out every time I mention something like that. Amanda had always maintained a strong bond with Belinda, especially whenever she would doze off in a trance in front of the mirror.

"Belinda, you are not ugly. You are not pitiful. You are not who you think you are."

But as she did with her mother, she'd nod and listen only to the mirror.

Maybe, with her new body, she wouldn't space out when she looked at herself. Maybe she would finally smile to herself, finally find real happiness and maybe even get married. People would stop and stare at her like they do with models or very attractive women. Maybe she would finally be treated as part of the "in crowd" back home. The possibilities were limitless, the perks were endless. Being a Puerto Rican in America was hard, but it was harder if you were ugly as she thought she was. She knew it was that drastic move from a small land to a bigger one that had contributed to her problem. As she grew, the white blue eyed blondes had acted as if they had never seen a Puerto Rican, or in her case, an ugly Puerto Rican girl. Luckily, in college nobody really cared for how you looked nor where you came from, but that still didn't help her.

Belinda earned enough money to buy the magazines and the Beauty Kit. She didn't care how much it would all cost her because it was all a small price to pay for true beauty. When she was younger, she wanted to buy them all —Cosmopolitan, Women's Fitness, People, and so forth—, but when her

parents found out that she had spent a lot of money, in what they believed was unnecessary, they cut her off. In order to pay for the magazines that she desperately craved, Belinda started working in high school. She earned a lot of cash and her parents never found out. She had worked very hard, graduated top of her class with many recommendations from professors and even with all of this, she still found herself unworthy and unattractive. It was very hard on her, but now that she was about to end it, she wasn't going to look back.

She opened her brown eyes and stared vaguely into the mirror. She was about to enter into a world of beauty, where the roads were golden and everybody accepted you. She grabbed magazines and cut off the pictures of the most breathtakingly beautiful women only to glue them all around the mirror. Their eyes were all staring at her and this seemed to put her on a trance. Different eyes would slowly judge her current persona, as she would too. She could hear them all saying "We can make you beautiful, we can help you," and she believed them. At the end of the day, they were, the world's most beautiful women, so why would she doubt it?

The procedure was very simple. She had bought dye for her hair, a sharpie, scissors that supposedly cut through anything, needles, syringes, morphine for the pain, bandages and a beeper that would contact any ambulance in case anything went wrong. She didn't remember where she first got the idea to do this but, in any case, it was cheaper than plastic surgery. Of course, she begged her parents to help her afford it, but when they found

out how gruesome the situation truly was they took her immediately to the best psychologist in town.

"These people are not beautiful, they are all just fake copies of what we want them to be," said the doctor, but for Belinda, this was only an old record stuck on repeat.

Night had finally set in the entire house. The only light in the whole place was behind a closed room. Belinda grabbed the sharpie and started drawing lines through her body. Some lines made a circle on her stomach, on her breasts, legs, nose and lips. Her whole body looked like a map with specific spots as to where to dig. Belinda injected the morphine without flinching. Her breathing and heartbeat slowed down. Belinda didn't seem as nervous as she thought she'd be. Once again, a soothing sensation took over



Artist: Glorisel Bretón Peroza

her, as if dancing with her soul. She remembered when her grandmother would dance like this with her in the living room. They danced to all sorts of baladas from Puerto Rico. She remembered her father trying to teach her the proper way to fix anything that was broken, and that she didn't need a man to do everything for her.

"You are my beautiful princess" they would both say.

Belinda grabbed the scissors and sat in the tub filled with iced water. As she mumbled to herself a lullaby her mother would sing to her whenever she was afraid at night, she began to cut the skin marked throughout her stomach. Her eyes showed no emotion, and that dim light that was still lit in her brown eyes, vanished. The blood started to flow in the water, dancing in ceremonial joy around her. Belinda kept going. Even with the excruciating pain, she didn't flinch. Her father had always told her, "It's okay to cry, but try not to let your heart feel any pain." She looked at the photograph of the sexiest model of 2007, looked at her waist and asked if she had also taken out her heart in order to not feel any pain as she did.

"Don't change, don't ever change for anybody." Amanda had told her when she left to college to start her new life. "Always remember who you were before they told you who you had to be, Belinda."

She didn't realize she had touched so many hearts. The same hearts that once tried to show her that the world wasn't as dark as she believed it was. Their voices would come inside her mind as a waves would rush to the shore. She held her chest tightly and felt. . . nothing. There was no life, there was no emotion. She was completely numb to the sadness, to happiness, and to her own destruction.

She felt the agonizing pain and injected more morphine into her system. She cried without feeling anything but the cold sharpness of the scissors. Careful! You have to be careful! The procedure went on for 40 minutes until the pain was too much to bear. She sewed her skin back together and applied bandages to her waist. The scissors were dripping small drops of blood into the water. Her eyes, lightless, stared at the mirror covered with pictures of beautiful women. Beauty was the only escape from her own demise, from the unhappy life she didn't want to live. Why should she live it? She had every right to happiness as anyone in this world. She pressed the beeper, and started to fade into an empty darkness. Belinda's eyes felt heavy, and every nerve in her body was dying along with all the ugly she had gotten rid of. Her grandmother would not let her die in this tub until she was finally beautiful. If this was the end, she thought, at least my grandma would save me and hold me in her arms where I'll be beautiful. Grandma will save me.

She stood in front of the mirror for the first time in days in her grandmother's house. It was a small house in the eastern side of Puerto Rico, near a beautiful beach and underneath a Caribbean blue sky. She held up her shirt and started looking at her waist, grabbing the skin and pulling it as if trying to unstick it from her own skin. A woman on TV had just lost forty pounds of unnecessary fat in order to impress a major producer and getting the final spot on a show. Through those wide brown eyes all she saw was layers of fat and nothing else. Her grandmother walked in on her and only

looked at her with pain. She knelt in front of her eleven-year old granddaughter and pulled down her shirt. She said nothing.

"Grandma, why are those people so pretty? Why can't I be like them?" asked the 11-year-old girl with tears almost falling off her face. Her grandmother caressed her cheek with her soft black hands, looking into Belinda's beautiful eyes. She turned Belinda around and alongside her looked at the mirror.

"Because those people don't have what you have. A beautiful heart that can't be seen in clear view, not through this mirror, nor any other." She held her granddaughter closer. "It can be looked at by staring deep into your eyes. Try it! And tell me your heart isn't beautiful." Belinda got closer to the mirror and stared into her own eyes. She squinted for a while and ended up smiling, with a great expression of joy.

"I see it! I can see my heart grandma! It's very pretty and it glows!"

Her grandmother smiled and kissed her head. "People put a price on beauty, but few know what it truly is. Some let beauty put a price on them, and sometimes the price is their own life. But Belinda. . ." She looked at her granddaughter with her own beautiful green eyes. "Don't let beauty put a price on you. Don't let it take your heart. God blessed you with an extraordinary beauty that many will love and many will hate mija. But never let them put it at risk."

She nodded to her grandmother's final words and looked at the people on TV. Her grandmother was right, these people didn't know what real beauty was, and probably never will. A young woman was shown crying on the show as she wasn't allowed to be a part of it. The judges quickly stated it was because she didn't measure up to the standards of real beauty. But, what is real beauty?

"Clear!"

They placed the paddle on her chest and let out the volts. There was still no heartbeat, and she flat lined in the ambulance. They tried it again, this time with a higher voltage.

"Clear!"

Her body thumped, and her heartbeat rose slowly. "Alright, we need to take her to the hospital." Belinda opened her left eye and was immediately blinded by the light on top of her. She breathed with difficulty, and felt the pain coming from her waist. She looked at the paramedics and was greeted with the most beautiful green eyes she had ever seen. The paramedic whispered in a hushed tone but Belinda couldn't understand what she said. It was her grandmother's eyes, it was her grandmother's hushed voice, and it was her grandmother who was holding on to her hand. Belinda knew it was her as she felt her heart glow for the very first time since her grandmothers passing. She felt an unexplainable sensation coming from within, as if the torches inside her body lit, restoring hope to her soul, until she finally closed her eye. The last thing she remembered was the echo of her heartbeat in a heartless world.

Forgotten

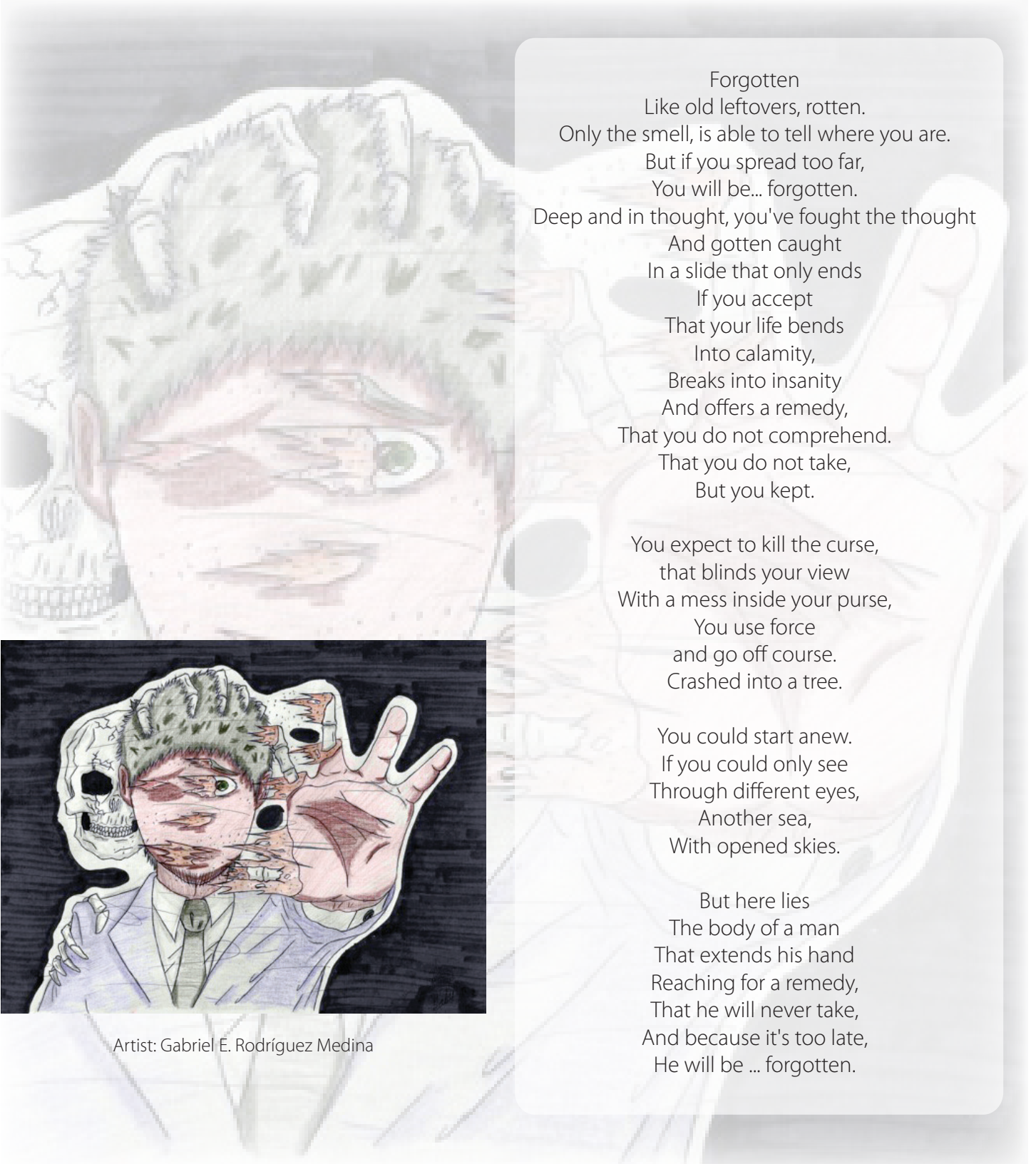
by Ángel Carrillo Laguna

Forgotten
 Like old leftovers, rotten.
 Only the smell, is able to tell where you are.
 But if you spread too far,
 You will be... forgotten.
 Deep and in thought, you've fought the thought
 And gotten caught
 In a slide that only ends
 If you accept
 That your life bends
 Into calamity,
 Breaks into insanity
 And offers a remedy,
 That you do not comprehend.
 That you do not take,
 But you kept.

You expect to kill the curse,
 that blinds your view
 With a mess inside your purse,
 You use force
 and go off course.
 Crashed into a tree.

You could start anew.
 If you could only see
 Through different eyes,
 Another sea,
 With opened skies.

But here lies
 The body of a man
 That extends his hand
 Reaching for a remedy,
 That he will never take,
 And because it's too late,
 He will be ... forgotten.



Artist: Gabriel E. Rodríguez Medina

The loss of innocence in Salinger's "A Perfect Day for Bananafish"

by Miranda K. Berger Nordelo

"A Perfect Day for Bananafish" by J.D. Salinger is a cluster of interwoven themes that play on the human conscience. The ever-present topic of a survivor's actions of redemption is a play on emotions on the psychological level that would take much more than one essay to decipher. Therefore, this essay tackles only one of those themes- the loss of innocence of a man, Seymour Glass, who comes home after war. The interrogative that stands still through the pages of the story seeps through every action narrated—"can he ever function as normally as society dictates an adult should?" His identifying with children, the separation between his wife (and the adult society as consequence) and his inability to regain his individuality before the war could attest to the negative. What starts off as the actions of a man who cannot deal with his memories takes life –and ends it- in the small space of a hotel in Florida. In the spaces of that hotel he tries –and fails- to regain his lost innocence by way of what represents salvation in his world-children.

The beginning of the story could be construed as a criticism of the adult society in its falsity. There is the undercurrent of pretentiousness in the actions of an adult. So is the case when the first character of the story is introduced. Seymour Glass's wife Muriel is the epitome of the adult world as it is presented throughout the story. She sets the stage for the contrast between what society deems 'normal' and what Seymour perceives as normal. This idea first comes when the reader is narrated into the story with where it takes place- at a hotel where there were a lot advertising men taking calls. Muriel is expressed to

spend the time waiting for her call to come through doing things. "She read article in a women's pocket-size magazine, called 'Sex is Fun—or Hell'... she tweezed out two freshly surfaced hairs in her mole" (3). These things could be seen be as a way to waste time, or her simply being 'self-absorbed'. When the call finally comes through, she takes her time finishing whatever activity had absorbed her attention before picking up the phone.

The caller, Muriel's mother, would prove to be one of the reasons the reader starts to notice something is wrong. Like any mother, Muriel's was worried for her daughter after certain events had taken place involving Seymour Glass, the main character and Muriel's husband. With this call, we realize that before coming to the hotel, Seymour had tried to end his life by driving towards the trees. This passage comes from when the mother asks, "Did he try any of that funny business with the trees?" in regards to

his driving (5). In Muriel's calm response comes the worrying reality of her unawareness of Seymour's problems. No matter what the mother tells her, to be aware of Seymour's actions, to be wary because he is bound to "lose control of himself" Muriel brushes off every concern.

Society tends to ignore certain concerns because they're not glaringly obvious to everybody if they are not looking for them. The term "ignorance is bliss" would fit nicely. But for Seymour Glass, his problems are very serious, and the only option out there for him to work through them is to try and regain what he lost. It comes to the hands of a child to soothe his





worries, alleviate his stress, play pretend with an adult who has lost a part of himself in a blood filled war. When most would ask how a child could help a war survivor regain his sense of self, the only option that stands true through everything is the fact that children do not judge. They do not pretend to be something they are not, to say something they don't mean. There is no hidden meaning in their actions or words. For Seymour, this is a balm that soothes his soul. His redemption comes at the hands of a child. His cure is the innocence of children and the way they do not judge.

This simplicity in the mind of a child gives him the opening to come out, vulnerable as he is, and talk about what happened. It is first noticed when Muriel talks about how he doesn't take off his robe even when out at the beach "...all he does is lie there. He won't take his bathrobe off" (9). But when he is with Sybil and starts to talk about the 'bananafish' he "undid the belt of his robe. He took off the robe" (13). Therein comes the contrast between Muriel and Sybil, the former being the one who encompasses the criticism of the adult world, and the latter that embodies innocence and lack of judgment. With the fact that Sybil is a child, and therefore more open to stories about things that do not exist, Seymour is giving a chance to talk about his past experiences in a different way not as expected of an adult.

The story of the bananafish could be interpreted as Seymour's confession of his experiences at war. "They lead a tragic life" Seymour starts, preparing the reader for what will not be a happy story. "They swim into a hole where there's a lot of bananas. They're very ordinary-looking fish when they swim in" which may reference the normal behavior of humans with their innocence intact because they haven't had any contact to an environment of war but "once they get in, they behave like pigs" (16). The change in behavior is drastic. Once a person has had a taste of war, there will be no going back to how it used to be, because the mind has adapted to living in an environment where it always have to be alert, where anyone could be an enemy and where whatever part of themselves was still holding on to a naïve perspective of the world, is gone. This is what Seymour is referring to when he says "they eat so many bananas they can't get out of the banana hole... they die" (16). The mind

changes irrevocably, and no amount of therapy, or remedy, can revert it to its original state. It is perhaps in this moment that Seymour realizes that there is no cure for what ails him. His redemption, Sybil, cannot bring back his lost innocence.

With the knowledge of the adult's mind inelasticity, Seymour enters the real world society by stepping into an elevator. In the elevator, he gets the last glance at the critical and judgmental perspective of the adult and his own mind's instability. It comes in the form of a woman, whom Seymour addresses with "I see you're looking at my feet" (17). The woman in question responds "I beg your pardon...let me out here, please" (17). These two responses would be the equivalent of what would happen if he continued on in the adult society. There would be the curious people, always asking about him, his condition and his mental situation and then there would be those that would be terrified and misunderstood. For Seymour there is no in-between living in a society that does not recognize these symptoms as a consequence of war. In that war, he lost his ability to fit in and, being in that elevator, he recognizes he cannot run away from reality.

Whatever hopes Seymour had of regaining what he has lost are destroyed when he faces the world of malice he ran away from when he came back from war. All the steps he has taken since have just solidified him not being adjusted in an adult society. In Salinger's "A Perfect Day for Bananafish", the bananafish story was a precursor to Seymour Glass's inner thoughts as it gave the reader an insight into what really happened while he was at war and the reason why he cannot interact in a world outside of children. The rift between Seymour and his wife, the distance between him and their family, and the lack of connection to adulthood with his interaction with children pertain to a failure to function "normally" in society that would then lead to his final act—suicide. It is this last action that reveals his inability to regain his lost innocence.

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Life Changing Journey

by Natallie Deida



Photo: ripplesonthepond.com

Experience and Situations we live each day are the ones that make up who we are. They define us and give us structures. Some more than others. There's different kinds of experiences we have. Some we don't remember because they changed so little in our personality and some mark us forever. I've lived through a few experiences that have changed me, but there's one that marked me forever.

On a Sunday morning my family and I were all together in the living room watching a movie. I was 14 years old and yet I felt like a still lived in a happy child's world. I still remember that morning and everything felt so peaceful like we were all just enjoying sitting there as a family.

The phone rang and my step dad paused the movie while my mom answered the phone. Suddenly she started screaming and dropped the phone. We all asked her what was going on and she said something had happened to her dad but she couldn't understand what. I remember a rushed upstairs to grab my phone to call my paternal grandfather because he used to live close by my mother's Dad. I make the call and he answers with a sad tone. I didn't even spoke when he says "I have to tell you

something, but you have to take it easy". Your grandfather hung himself"

It felt like the world just stop. While he's telling me this over the phone I see my mom running upstairs to change and go over my grandfather's house. I'm asking myself "How am I going to be the one to tell my mom her dad killed himself?". I was still a little girl. I mean 14 years isn't really nothing? My mom sees me holding my phone and she comes running to me and asks me "What happened?". I try to talk but nothing comes out of my mouth. My mom loses patient and starts to shake me and I finally say it. My mom falls to the floor. It felt like I've crushed her heart.

This experience made me grow up. My mom went through a rough path. I had to help with my little sister, which she was only 3 years old, more than I should have. I learned that the world isn't that perfect bubble I was living in. Bad things happen to good and bad people and we can't prevent them from happening. We can only accept them and try to learn from them.

Do witches get financial aid?

by Yacheliz M. Rosa Cartaya

Who am I? What will I do? Who will I become? These are normal questions a teenager asks herself. What am I? Not so much! Teen angst shouldn't include "Oh I just accidentally electrocuted my best friend since kindergarten maybe, I'm a teen witch!" Right off the screen of a bad 90s movie; only, no pathetic love interest that you know would never amount to anything on account of she is a witch and would probably get tired of a human boy and find a fellow wizard that really understood her and her, now, culture. I had enough on my plate having to get to know myself, going through puberty in the

States as a Latin American girl and now I'm a witch too. Really, is there a bigger minority? No. I'm serious. Is there? Is there financial aid for witches? I want to be a lawyer, but before I can even begin my real, life studies I have to get bachelors at something else. Apparently, it's not enough I have to spend 12 years studying stuff that will not be needed in my daily life but I also have to study and concentrate on another topic or topics for another 4 to 6 years. Is there fairness in the justice system? No, and it teaches you that right off the bat. Not only will I have to study the equivalent of excrement when it comes to what I really feel passionate about for 16 years, I will also have to take the most excruciatingly tedious exam, after the MCAT of course, in order to even be looked at by law schools that I can't even afford.

I'm not asking for much . . . Just your normal Law School tuition in the States, costing around \$45,000 a year. Not including room, or food, or public transportation, or books, or anything you might need to not fail at law school. Again, justice, is it present in law? They are teaching you this right now, before you even apply, that there is NOT any kind of justice present in the justice system, therefore none if you want to study it. Why would a witch want to study this then? Why would anybody want to study this? Let's call these people muggles. Read enough Harry Potter books to know that word. Yes, you guessed it I read none. I'm a witch, the rest are muggles. I've decided to be the only witch in the world, not for exclusivity, but because I guess I would get a free pass into whatever university or college I apply to. Full ride as they call this mythical promise in the muggle world, why is it mythical? How many people get a full ride to law school that have no connection to their family legacy at this school or through grants that are basically made for certain people? Exactly, a mythical promise for a mythical creature.

Let's go back to the tedious entrance exam called, The LSAT (or The Kraken as I am choosing to call it). The Kraken is an impossible test that ranges from 120-180. Personally, took a practice test at home, without even knowing

what I was taking and got a 151. You'd think, "Hey! That seems reasonable!" WRONG! It's the epitome of average. So if you planned on going to Harvard (wasn't) you should've started studying for this life changing and defining test since you graduated from high school. But wait! No! You have to have a bachelors before applying to this school. DO YOU SEE THE INJUSTICE?! As a witch, I've decided to go public with my new identity, maybe when I take the real test, I'll get that mythical score of 171-180 and get into the University of Michigan with that mythical promise called "full ride" and go to class in my broom or magic carpet. Haven't decided.

Who am I? A witch.

What will I do? Mythical promises and scores come true.

What will I become? A just lawyer.



Artist: Yacheliz M. Rosa Cartaya

Knowledge is Priceless: Education Comes With a Price Tag

by Ana Valeria Pérez Caballero

"The disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect persons of poor and mean conditions is the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments."

-Adam Smith

Scottish political economist (1723-1790)

On February 21st, 2014 I had the opportunity to sit at the University Theatre and listen to the 2001 Nobel Laureate in Economics, Dr. Joseph Stiglitz talk about income inequality. One of the things he said still lingers in my mind. He said there are two ways of becoming wealthy: to produce something valuable, or to get a larger share of the national income, wealth creation and wealth appropriation respectively. To produce something valuable, to create a product that people need, does seem like a fair way of getting wealthy. It takes dedication, hard work, and creativity. But, it also usually takes an elite diploma. The second one, wealth appropriation, takes an elite checkbook.

Back when I was in high school, I used to think that everyone had a fair chance at going to college. All you had to do was get good grades in high school, get Federal aid or a student loan, and pack your bags. It should be that easy. I got into many debates about this without doing my research, with no exposure whatsoever to the reality of many young people in Puerto Rico and around the world. However, I started hearing stories about young adults having to work fulltime jobs to care for their sick parents or younger siblings. Stories about people not having enough money to rent an apartment near the university area, nor to commute every day from their home. Stories about classmates not being able to accept a job offer, because they do not have the means of transportation to get to work every day. Stories of people making just enough money to be rejected for Federal aid, but at the same time not being able to pay for the house, car, electricity bill, and their tuition in the same month.

Income inequality is everyone not having a fair shot to make it. Not having enough money to get a quality education that could help them become part of that exclusive group of people that got rich by "wealth creation". Not being able to get a student loan in order to seek knowledge, and even if they did get the loan, not having the opportunity to pay it off due to the high interest rates and shortage of job opportunities. The cost of higher education has soared 1,120% in records dating to 1978, illustrating bloated tuition costs even as enrollment slows and graduates struggle to land jobs. Americans now owe more than \$1 trillion in student loans, and the high interest rates makes it harder for people to pay them back.

Rising college costs can be attributed to two trends: first, decreased

state funding for public universities, and second, increased spending on campuses, the majority of which has gone to non-academic personnel and non-academic projects. Can we talk about how college football coaches at the University of Alabama, Michigan State, and the University of Oklahoma are being paid \$6,950,203; \$5,611,845 and \$5,050,333 a year, respectively? This is not taking into consideration their bonuses, and this is all coming from students' tuition. This may just be part of the issue, or no issue at all, but I felt like it had to be mentioned to introduce one of the possible reasons why the cost of higher education has increased 12 fold over the past 30 years.

Overall, rising college costs are a setback for people who want to continue their education and climb up the socioeconomic ladder. This is especially true for people that are currently in the workforce. The reason why people are agreeing to pay so much for higher education is because they believe there is a high return on their investment. This used to be very true in the past, and it might still hold part of the original idea, but reality is that the unemployment rates keep increasing while wages have remained relatively the same. On top of this, technology is advancing faster than we can learn, and by the time someone graduates, his or her knowledge is already slightly outdated. This motivates workers to continue their education in order to keep up with the fast-paced, globally competitive job setting even after they have found a job. The problem arises when they can't afford paying their student loans while pursuing graduate studies.

Meanwhile, CEOs are making 250 times more money than the average worker, the worker who is trying to pay for school. There are investment bankers still receiving millionaire bonuses after creating a financial crisis that has lasted for years, and yet the banks they work for are still borrowing money from the government at ridiculously low rates. Rates much lower than student loan rates (three zeros to the left, to be exact). Overall, the rising tuition costs and interest rates on student loans prove that we do seem to neglect persons of poor and mean condition, and the subsidies we give to big financial institutions prove that we do worship the rich and the powerful. In fact, we are all, the poor and the rich, at war with one another.

He Named Me Malala

by Esther N. Vega Dávila

Photo: reporternuovo.it



Malala Yousafzai is an 18-years-old Pakistani activist woman who won the Nobel Prize in 2014 and fights for women's education rights. Her aim became an obstacle for some people who represented other ideologies, but she has stayed firm in her cause. She became internationally known in 2013 when a Taliban supporter shot her on the left side of her brain when she was in the school bus with other children. The documentary presents her story, the origin of her name, the culture and tradition in which she was raised and the power of a system of beliefs because as her father said, "Malala wasn't shot by a person, but an ideology." He was referring to the radicalized people who he said, "give Islam a bad name."

The director of *He Named Me Malala* is David Guggenheim, he is well-known for films like *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) and *Waiting for Superman* (2010). The executive producers are Mohamed Al Mubarak, Michael Garin, Jeffrey "Jeff" Scroll and Shannon Dill. The company that produces the film is Image Nation internationally known for movies such as *The Help* (2011) and *Sea Shadow* (2011). The company is one of the most important entertaining companies in Arabic-speaking countries and it is settled in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

The movie was a fusion of interviews, images, news sections, and animations. The animation was brilliant because it illustrates the short stories, events or memories that were narrated by a variety of narrative voices. The voices varied among Malala's father, Malala and another complementary voice that deepen the viewer into the events and how those events were the reason of strengthening the cause. The photos, animation, interviews, news clips, and videos were organized in a way that the viewer could understand the societal context in which the family lived. I like how the story was shown because it resembles a crescendo in an instrumental concert with a combination of sounds and silences: the

movie recreates the story in a way that the viewer can feel the ups and downs of Malala, her brothers and her father.

The instrumental music was strategically played along with the silences that transmit to the viewer emotions such as pain, tension, confusion and even shock. For example, when Malala was shot the music stopped and there were no images in the screen, everything was dark and silent for a couple of seconds. The shock that Malala's parents felt, that uncertainty of a father and a mother when they do not know if their child is alive or not is successfully transmitted through silence and darkness. Those long and silent seconds—in which the father talked about his thoughts, fears, and pain—make the viewer feel his words deeply.

Although the movie was really good, there was an interesting detail that remained unknown to the viewer: the perspective of Malala's mother, Toor Pekai Yousafzai. She barely appeared and talked in the film. Why did the mother not appear in the movie with the same frequency as the father? In the first 20 minutes of the movie she was mentioned less than 5 times and I was wondering why that happened. The silenced voiced of the mother is the only thing against the film.

In conclusion, I recommend this documentary film because her story is inspiring, hard, and full of kindness and passion at the same time. What happened to Malala should not happen to anyone. She is standing for the education of every child in the world, she is defending a cause to solve a problem that sometimes is unnoticeable to others. Malala is an example to humanity that people will always have to confront obstacles, but they can be overcome when somebody takes action thinking on an optimal future and with the support from others as visionary as them. I also encourage viewers to watch the film critically and analyze how each person is presented in order to be an active viewer.

Interview with Alejandra Reuhel

by Paola Méndez and Angiebel Rivera



Photo by William Ramos

Where Everything Lost is Found is a wonderful book that takes you to a place where you mind find yourself lost, but not to worry, after you finish the story you find yourself again, or do you? You have to find out yourself reading this four part poetic tale in which Alejandra creates a mysterious environment that you can identify yourself by reading. This reading may identify itself an easy and a psychological read, full of questions to be answered. Alejandra Reuhel was born across the globe in 1984, but up until today, she lives in Puerto Rico. Alejandra is an English professor in the UPR Río Piedras and Carolina campuses, and by experience, she is a wonderful and funny teacher. Besides *Where Everything Lost is Found*, she is also the author of *Stars Like Fish*, a collection of poems and short stories that takes you to a future past through images and emotions.

Paola Méndez

Paola: Do you plan to keep writing? If so, do you have something in mind or you haven't planned your ideas yet?

AR: I absolutely do plan to keep writing, for the rest of my life. I don't have anything immediately in mind, but I write poems out of habit. I might just have enough of them to put together in another book of poems, which will probably be my next project. However, I've been wanting to write short stories for a very long time. I find myself encouraging and helping others write them, but have a hard time doing it. That's an idea and a plan.

Angie: Do you have a writing routine?

AR: For the moment and since I started teaching many courses at once, it's been very hard for me to have a writing routine. My colleague, Dr. Cynthia Pittman, shared an inspiring piece of hers at the Annual Literary Contest award ceremony in 2014, which you can find in her blog, *Oasis Writing Link*. It was practical advice for writers, and setting a routine was a part of it. I'm referring others who might look in my direction as an example. When your life gets busy or complicated for a number of reasons, you might sometimes push your passion to the very end of your priorities.

I did have a writing routine for a long time, but in retrospect, it seems more like a matter of preference than discipline. Throughout my middle and high school years, I used to have a rocking chair in my room that I would sit in with a journal in my hands every evening. I'd sometimes be writing for hours, until I felt done. I eventually got rid of the rocker

because I broke it, actually. . . but I took my journals everywhere, I was addicted to writing. When I started college I joined a blog community called *livejournal*, and I would write there every day, sometimes multiple times a day. I'd often share creative pieces and get feedback from my friends. I never stopped writing in paper journals, though. I wrote every single day. I still carry journals with me at almost every moment, but I don't write every single day like I used to. I don't have a routine, but I do write for myself at least twice weekly, at any moment.

Angie: How do you balance your day job with writing poetry?

AR: Writing poetry is easy, at least for me. I know it isn't for everyone, but anyone who has found a creative outlet probably feels the same about theirs. It balances out because it's something that pours out of you. Abstract feelings and vivid dreams start collecting in you until it spills out in language form, because if you don't let it, you'll burst. That's what it feels like. I have lots of images floating around in my head all the time. Plus, I read lots I poetry as part of my day job, and I find that good poetry sticks to you and tends to be contagious. I might have phrases haunting me that I write in the margins of notebooks and work on later. Somehow, there's always time for poetry writing.

Paola: *Where Everything Lost is Found* is more for the adolescent side. Do you prefer writing for this audience or continue with other ideas of writing for others?

AR: I rarely, or rather, never consider an audience when I write (unless it's an essay, in that case, I do), but I love that you've asked me this. I

found myself when I was an adolescent, and writing played a huge part of that process. I've never forgotten how emotionally difficult being that age was, and sometimes, in my head, I feel the same way. Like that person still exists inside me and will probably come out as a character in a story, along with all her other characters that never got a proper ending, or will take possession of me and write again. It's very probable that future works might give people the same feeling, but I want to share my writing with anyone who enjoys it, at any age.

Paola: *Where Everything Lost is Found* offers drawings with different meanings, do you want to share some meanings with the audience of some of your favorite drawings?

AR: Back when I had a universe in my head, the time I had the writing routine I described in my response, I unconsciously created a collection of recurrent images that might mean whatever they mean to anyone who wants to exercise an interpretation. Many of the drawings offer images from the poems themselves, like mirrors, doors and rooms. These could signify imaginary escapes, possible journeys and real escapes, and being locked in. Sometimes the drawings are shirtless or naked girls. I think that can suggest being vulnerable, concealing nothing, or being able to conceal nothing. There are also images of stars and fish often, which might suggest where we desire to, but cannot be, yet always try to.

Paola: All drawings from your book are women, does this have to do with something in particular?

AR: Probably the fact that my poetry is told from the perspective of a teenage girl. Though the girls in the art are just characters (except for one, which is a self-portrait I drew when I was 14), they are also self-portraits of different aspects. Not physical ones, but feelings.

Paola: This book divides itself in 4 parts that are directed to lot people who want to find themselves and it also was written by you in your adolescence, would you say you were lost in that phase of age of yours?

AR: I was and wasn't. The first part, "Ribbon," was a dream I took poetic liberties with when writing. I often dream of falling in water, being underwater, something I like to do in waking life until it's time to come up for air. It leads to the next poem, which is about the deeply calming effect being underwater had for me at the time. I've learned to contain and channel all these things that made me such a tormented teen, but I remember having a mind so full of noise, a constant, heavy, trembling nervousness that being underwater always soothed.

The other parts are gardens, a house, and wilderness. I think the most uncomfortable poems in the book are the most domestic ones, the ones in "Gardens" and the "House". You can be in a safe place and still feel fearful of harm that comes from within, which also responds to your question about the meanings in the drawings. The more

monstrous-looking girls represent that aspect. In wilderness, however, you can "get lost" and "get found" in the process.

The poems are not arranged in chronological order, but by scenery. That's why "Ribbon" ties in with the last two poems, "Papersnake" and "Papersky". In a way, this book is the first part of *Stars Like Fish*. I was as lost as a lost sock in a bedroom, which isn't really lost, only coming in and out of another dimension.

Paola: This book might paint itself as a dark and mysterious tale. Do you like this kind of mystery more when you write or do you also like other styles of writing?

AR: I'm glad you see it as a tale. Poetry is often mysterious, but I know you mean the darker images in the poems. These images were more vivid at the time I wrote them, but they still pop up, only in more subtle ways. Since poetry can be very personal, I write what feels most natural for me, so I think I might always be a little dark. In fiction, though, I think the styles may be more neutral, only I may include characters that like dark things.

Angie: A favorite poet who nobody knows but should—who is it?

AR: I'm going to mention some I personally know rather than saying "nobody knows" them, because people do, but they're not in textbooks (that I know of). Joana C. Valente, Cynthia Pittman, Laura Martínez, Daniel Pommers, Nicole Fraticelli, Jesué Oliveras, Nadja M. Echevarría, Adriana I. Santiago, Cindy Jiménez, Javier Arus, Lynette Mabel Pérez, and more that I know I'm forgetting. I'm going to regret not including them later. All of them are alive, and should be read and praised while living. Mark Wekander is stardust, but also recommended.

Angie: If you could share only one piece of advice for fellow poets, what would it be?

AR: Make friends with other poets and read each other's poetry.



English Department

Dr. Mildred Lockwood Benet
Director

Frances Bezares
Secretary

Tel. (787) 764-0000
Exts. 88862, 88863, 88803

E-mail: eng.dept@upr.edu
<https://sites.google.com/site/departamentoingl>



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