



Blackberry

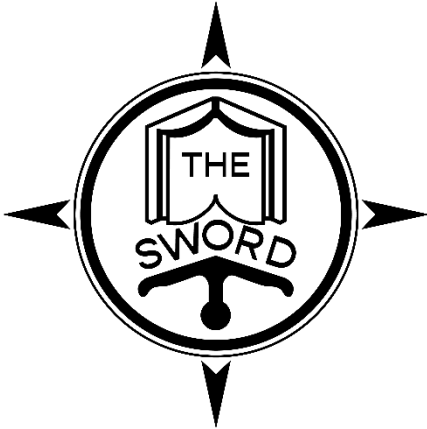
Winter

Spring 2023

Cover photo: Nilla Kanjoma

Layout Design: Nathan Fruendl and Melissa StPierre

The Sword and History of *Blackberry Winter*



The Sword is the name for the writing group at Rochester University. It is a rebranding of the creative writing club *Ex Libris*. *Blackberry Winter* originated as a product of this creative writing group and the creative writing class at Rochester University.

In 2022, the creative writing club rebranded and expanded *Blackberry Winter* to include the entire Rochester University community, including staff and faculty. Additionally, students attending school in any of Rochester University early college partner high schools may submit.

If you are interested in participating with The Sword, please reach out to Melissa StPierre (mstpierre@rochesteru.edu). The Sword currently has a monthly newsletter with writing prompts and additional publication opportunities. Regular meetings are not scheduled at this time.

The updated logo for The Sword was designed by Rochester University student: Nathan Fruendl.

Sponsor's Note

I am inspired by lots of things. Some consistent sources of inspiration are other pieces of art but mostly, I find myself inspired by people. Here at Rochester University, I have no shortage of that inspiration. I am enveloped in a community that strives to do its best and watches as our students reach the dreams and goals they have for themselves. There is a vibrant creative community here and I am proud to present this year's edition of *Blackberry Winter*.

Thank you to all of our contributors. Creating any sort of art is a brave endeavor. You are putting a piece of yourself into the world in a way that uniquely represents who are what you are.

I like this quote by Elizabeth Gilbert: "be the weirdo who dares to enjoy." Keep creating. Keep enjoying. The world needs more of you. More creativity. More art. More joy. More love.

-Melissa StPierre
Assistant Professor of English



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I Cried in Chapel Today

-Faith Bowory

I cried in chapel today.

I cried in chapel today because the people who spoke, talked of things that touched me deeply.

I cried in the chapel today because the presenters didn't look like me, didn't sound like me, and

didn't come from where I am from. Coming from deep within Detroit, these men spoke of the ghettos of this world.

Lord, you move to the margins and make that place your home. Grab me by the hand and lead me to the edges of what we call comfort.

I cried in chapel today because there was no slideshow. There was no sermon, but there was

testimony; there was story made flesh of Your new life.

I cried in chapel today because I left as a preacher, gang member, and ex-convict ministered

alongside one another and revealed to me a beautiful expression of what we are called to.

I cried in chapel today because I witnessed what is sadly too rare- the pulpit, the microphone, the

stage used for peace rather than violence. Unity rather than division. Authenticity rather than perfection.

"Blessed are the peacemakers," Christ said. And as I sat in that front row pew, the men stood in front of stained glass- too often a wall between "us" and "them"- and spoke of this other way.

I cried in chapel today because I felt as if our tiny community had expanded what it views good

news to be. Today I saw the reign of God breaking in, and it felt right.

So, I cried in chapel today.



Photo One
-Wyatt Emmons

Illuminate

-Alexandra Raymond

I watch as the newest family member takes a sharp turn around the sofa. His too large paws at such a young age makes him clumsy, overly confident in his untamed movements. The dampness caused by the late-January snow outside makes it even more dangerous as he loses his footing, barreling towards me. If I could shut my eyes to not witness the horror about to unfold, I would.

The young pup twists, fighting gravity as it hauls him into the pretty, ornate table I rest upon. His startlement causes him to howl, mimicking the same noise that screams in my bulb as I rock with the impact. Teetering back and forth, I pray that the extension cord will hold me upright. I pray that it gives me a lifeline, a tether to remain whole. I hear the woman cry from the kitchen, knowing she is going to be woeful when she finds me in pieces on the wood flooring. My flat, circular base begins to rotate. Holding my breath, I count the moments that I have left as whole. There is nothing I can do to prevent what is going to happen next.

I have been a part of this family for the last decade. A kind, young woman found me outside of an elderly woman's house; the sun beating down through my dusty, cream lamp shade. I was neatly lined up next to antique knickknacks, a sewing machine

that was missing some buttons, VHS tapes that needed to be rewound, and well-loved pots that once held delectable stews. The young woman's eyes scanned the table, gently touching something once in a while to examine or check a price. She browsed in a leisurely pace, stopping once she made it in front of me. Her touch was soft as she twisted me, looking me over in a sweet caress before gently setting me back down. The young woman proceeded to wrap around the driveway, collecting an item here or there from the remaining yard sale tables. Although many other people passed me, I could only focus on her.

Just as she was counting the humble stack of cash in her hands, her attention was turned to me, pointing a finger in my direction. If I was plugged into a wall that moment, I feel that my lightbulb would have lit up. After a couple nods, friendly smiles, and an exchange of money, she walked back over to me. Her arms scooped me up and cradled me, carefully carrying me to the passenger seat of the car before taking me home.

I have been in her life since that sunny afternoon. Over the last decade, I had watched her fall in love, suffer through heartbreaks, burn new recipes, dye her hair many colors, call her mom for every little uncertainty, build friendships, stay up too late, fall asleep too early, graduate college, marry the man she swore would only be just a friend, and start a family. She

took me to every home she has lived in always finding me the perfect spot first. The apartment as a young adult, back to her parents' house after college, and now in the forever home she shares with her husband, five-year-old son, and puppy.

The fall interrupts my memories as I feel my body tip over, landing sideways on the table. I roll once, twice, before only air is underneath me. I stare up at the white ceiling as it grows further away, my back crashing onto the floor. I feel it. The splinter, the crack, and then the separation. Cool air flows into my now exposed insides, never once experiencing this feeling before. It hurts in a way that makes me feel empty inside, hollow. Is this how it felt when her first boyfriend broke up with her? When she cries on the sofa while watching her favorite romcom movies? When her first dog fell asleep but never woke? When she fights with her mother? When her favorite books crinkle from the tears that land on the pages? When she went into labor and had to rush herself and her husband out of the house and to the hospital? Is this pain?

Footsteps, heavier than the child or puppy, round the corner in a feverish haste. Her gasp is quiet as she kneels beside me and my fragmented pieces. Although detached, I can still feel the warmth of her fingertips gingerly touch my broken bits, carefully collecting them into the palm of her hand. The

hollow feeling inside of me starts to ease as her strokes soothes the pain. Even heavier footsteps approach, the man looking down at the two of us, equally out of sorts. His hand tenderly caresses her shoulder as she begins to weep, the small drops leaving streaks on her cheeks in their wake.

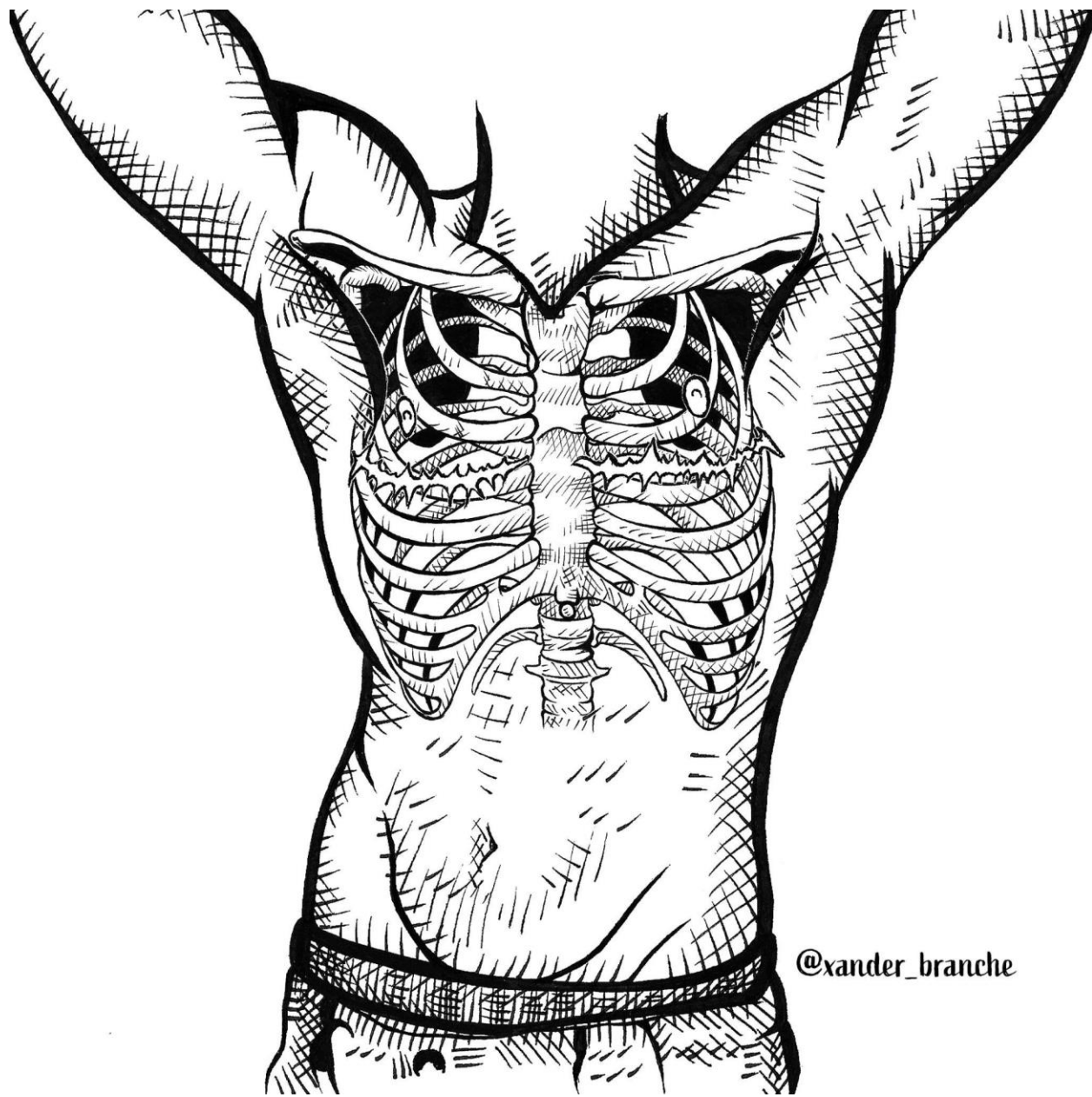
"This was my favorite," her lip trembles as she holds my pieces, "I have had it for years." The man nods, not shaming her for crying over me. "I have read hundreds of books under this lamp. I have come home and only used this lamp to find my way through the dark. It was the first thing I bought when I moved out and lived alone at eighteen. It spoke to me in a way no other thing has."

The man bends down beside her and scoops me up, cautiously unplugging me from the wall outlet. He is kind as he takes my broken bits from her as she cries in the other room, beginning to clean the scattered remnants that cannot be saved. The man carries me over to the kitchen table with the same kindness I remember from when she had first found me on that rusted table all those years ago. He works silently, fitting me back together like a puzzle, filling my cracks with clear goo. His compassion makes him a good man. Many would have offered to replace me or nothing at all. I have seen the same compassion he gives me now

be given to the woman and child. I have always liked him since she first brought him home all those years ago.

After what feels like forever, the man delicately carries me back to where I once stood, plugging me back into the socket. With a near-silent click, my new lightbulb shines brighter than before. So bright, it now chases the shadows out of the corners of the home. The woman's eyes widen as new tears fall, wrapping her arms around his waist as she silently thanks him.

Although I feel different from before, it is not a bad difference. It is the kind of feeling you endure after experiencing life. I may not look like how I once had but these cracks tell a story. I realize now that she too had been broken many times, but it is love that keeps her together. She has cracks, I watched them form and spread. But not a single day went by where I was worried that those were going to be the end. The woman and man stand arm in arm, whispering to not wake the child who sleeps on the couch as I allow my own love to illuminate their home. Our home.



@xander_branche

Artwork
-Alyxander LaBranche

Poem

-Anonymous

My crewneck kisses
Within your midwestern dream
Counting down our days
Walking down streets

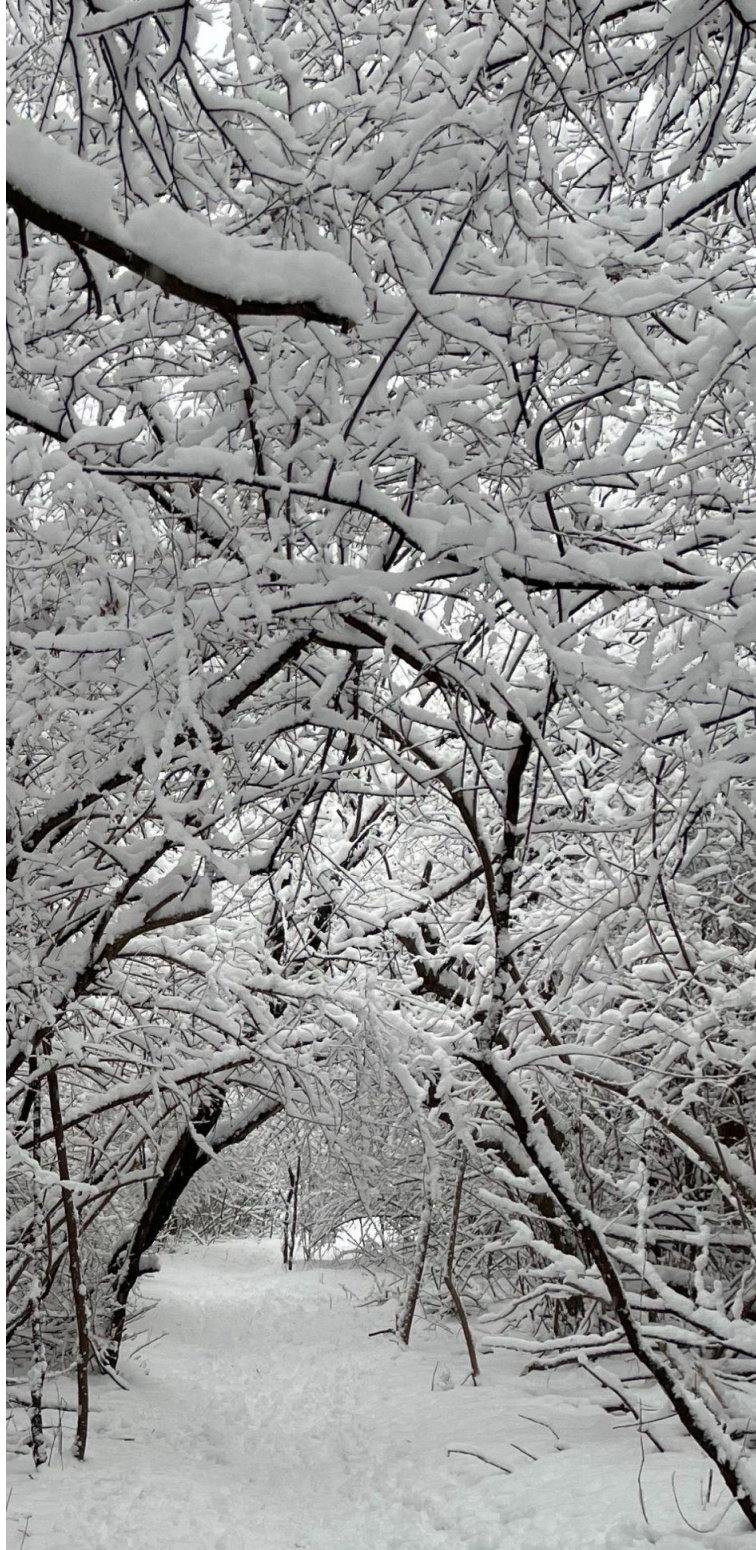
I swear those streets could talk
They spoke no words though,
just the words of us
Our laughing, our crying, our hopes, and our dreams
We're merely kids chasing sunsets
We're only kids chasing our cream soda dreams

So I'll wear my crewneck, and remember the warmth of your kiss
Recalling days of love
Yearning for our days of bliss

Dread

- Maha Bhatti

A twig snapped as she tiptoed through the trees of the jungle. She quickly looked around into the dark night and was met with the glowing and horrifying eyes, filled with anguish. It ROARED, the ground beneath her shook, all she saw were the petrifying eyes. She bolted through the night screaming "AAAAH HELP ME!" She felt sharp painful jabs in her head. "LEAVE ME ALONE, GO AWAY!" The tree branches dug into her skin with deep cuts gushing blood all over her bare arms and legs. She ran as fast as her legs could carry her. She found a cave and stayed there for the night. The next morning she woke up in her bedroom the way she always did afterwards. *What is happening to me?* She thought. She climbed out of bed and stared at her long to-do list and schedule for the day. *I have to hurry.* She chugged down some coffee, washed out the bitter taste with some water and drove to work. Suddenly a car came out of nowhere and crashed into her whole left side. The next thing she knew she was on the hospital bed. The sharp jabs were back in her head, her chest felt heavy, she couldn't breathe so well. There was a mirror in front of her and she saw herself in it. "AAAAAHH GET OUT, LEAVE ME ALONE" Those eyes were there staring at her once again. The nurse came rushing into the room. "Are you alright?" She pointed at the mirror and described the eyes, "it won't leave me alone, tell it to go away please" The nurse gazed at her in astonishment, "Miss, there's no one there, you are talking about your own eyes!" She glanced into the mirror again and really saw it. Those eyes WERE her own, she was scared of nothing but fear itself, every time she looked at the eyes, they looked fearful. And those nightmares... it all made sense now. She looked into the eyes of the nurse tearing up, "it's been like a month and I've been having nightmares and hallucinations, I was so scared of everything going on in life, that I couldn't face reality and felt scared everyday."



Go Towards the Light
-Zac Watson

Poem One

-Jillian Thom

"Some people are worth melting for"- Olaf

Love is like a frozen lake.

The right person will only be able to thaw the numb,
Endless feeling of hurt and betrayal
Like the warm sunshine overlooking the bright
horizon.

The warm sun radiates onto the sheet of ice that has been
impossible to break
Over the hurt and betrayal from the sharp and painful
past.
The small cracks of her broken heart are finally
healed and is now:

The River that once flowed into an endless stream of
happiness.



Harvest
-Susan Wizinsky

The Other Side of the Glass

-Anthony Filkins

His eyes flutter open, and he sits in his bed wondering when he will get up.

He lays on his back for what seems like hours- looking at his phone, drifting in and out of consciousness.

He climbs down from his lofted bed and wanders his room for a time

Before he finds the courage to face me.

He washes his hands, then his face

His eyes drift up

Picking apart our features

Analyzing our musculature

He's been having a hard time taking care of himself

I could do better.

Grades slip,

Friendships fail

Things that could be better maintained by someone who relishes the chance

To taste

To love

To breathe

To be

Without ever looking me in the eye

He raises his hand slowly

And tries to touch me

A thin pane of glass separating our fingers

In the time it takes for him to blink

I look around

And fantasize about cleaning his room

His fingers leave the cold glass

I pry mine away

He opens the door to leave

To taste

To love

To breathe

To be

One day, I will leave my cold, silver prison

One day, I will pull him in to take my place

One day, I will look him in the eye, and see his wonder at what I have done for him.

**Soup and music on a sunny winter day: Three disparate haiku
melting together**

-Brandon Hensley

Bottom of the bowl,
vegetables sitting in soup—
it is warm for now.

Ice architecture
glistening crystal spirals slant
slow melt toward the earth

Music of Chopin
Light distilled into verses
Effortless key flight

What is Blue? - from a 3rd-grade poem.

-Nathan Freundl

Blue is the cold sky
And the bluebells in the valley.
You get blue at wintertime
And when you're afraid,
Blue runs through your body.
Blue is a crystal clear lake,
And so is the howl of a wolf.
Blue is lightning,
And jazz from the town.
Being lonely also feels blue.
Blue is a sapphire gem,
And blue is the bluebird and
Fresh ripe blueberries.
Sorrow is also very blue.
A shark, a dolphin, a whale,
And the eyes of many people
Are blue.



Photo Two
-Wyatt Emmons

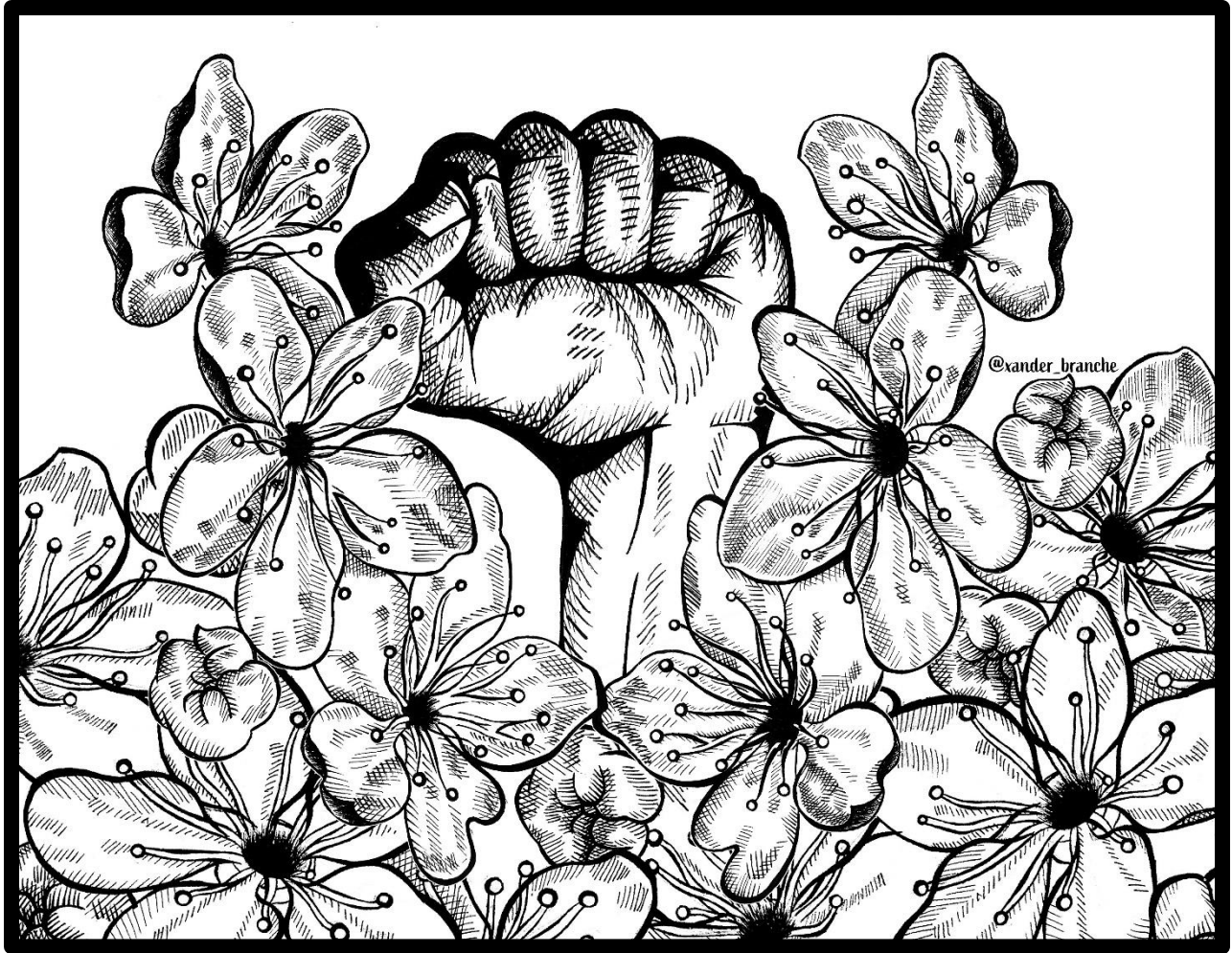


Artwork
-Harleen Madahar

My Music Man

-Jillian Thom

The way you talk about music
is a ring to my ears and a song of joy.
When your fingers gently press on the piano keys
and when you sing me little Melodies
it summons me home.
I only dreamed of something that seemed so small
that my person would have the biggest part of me
in him too..
Sharing his passion of music intertwine with mine feels almost
too define..
like a trip down memory lane when I would stay up late
Singing the blues of how I wish I could find someone like you..
to make me feel that home wasn't far away and that he would
always call back like an echo, in a song or a gentle
Reminder this is what I have been looking for this whole time..



Artwork Two
-Alyxander LaBranche

As We Are

-Faith Borowy

The local laundromat has been drawing me into a space of simplicity. It's an unlikely mission field, yet this quietly whirring pitstop is gently stirring something deep in my soul. Maybe it's the way the glass walls create a haven-like space for the weary wanderers of this life. Perhaps it's the simple existence of the building that gathers mothers, brothers, and me to itself every week. I haven't decided if it's the idea of doing something good or the longing to just be that causes me to pause here every week. In the kiddie corner I sit, Styrofoam cup of coffee in hand, as the Spirit whispers, "I meet you here, too." No need for a sudsy cleansing of my days. I need not be presented crisp, without a wrinkle in sight. The muddy footprints leading to this very seat serve as evidence of this very real, laborious life. And still, "I meet you here, too." This well worn body of mine is finding deep rest in my Creator, in a tiny laundromat, next to my neighbors. Maybe we come here each week as an act of resilience in a world of systems in which this necessity is too often deprived, or maybe we come here to be reminded that we are met where we are, as we are. I think it's a little bit of both.



Photo One
-Nilla Kanjoma

A Sketch of My Sister Judy

-Nathan Freundl



Characters:

- Judy: Nine-year-old girl.
- Edward: Her brother, in eighth grade.
- Mother

Note from Playwright:

Plays are not meant for reading, but for watching and listening. While reading this, hear the little children in your own life—their little faces are looking up to you.

A Sketch of My Sister Judy

The back patio at home, late summer. Birdsong, distant music, a truck passing on a dirt road. The sun will set soon. Little Judy meanders onstage with an old purse across her shoulder, and a Barbie doll and stuffed bear in her arms.

Mother (offstage): Judy!

Judy: What? (no response) What?

Mother: Judy!!

Judy: What!!

Sound of screen door opening and swinging shut as Mother enters with a plate and cup.

Mother: There you are— didn't you hear me calling you?
Here's your sandwich.

Judy: No.

Mother: Yes, child. You have to eat.

Judy: *(in baby talk)* Don't want sandwich.

Mother: Then do you want the spaghetti I'm making?

Judy: Hmph! Slimy. *(offstage a car parks in the driveway.)*
Eddie's home!

The car door opens and shuts. Edward enters.

Mother: Edward!

Edward: Heyy. Oh, you probably don't wanna hug me— I'm covered in pizza sauce. And mozzarella.

Mother: I don't care. *(she embraces him.)* How was work?

Edward: Good.

Mother: How was school?

Edward: Fine.

Mother: Just fine, not good?

Edward: Not good, just fine.

Mother: Look at me. *(Edward tries to go inside. With great compassion—)* Hey. Hey, look at me. Is it the guys in your class? They're idiots, you got that? You're a man, even if you don't play friggin' recess football in eighth grade, okay? Okay?

Edward *(evading)*: Okay.

Mother: Hey— I'm so proud of you. *(the car door opens and shuts offstage again.)* I gotta talk to your father. Play with Judy— she's been waiting all day for you! *(exits.)* Judy: Eddie!

Edward: Hey Jude. *(she hugs his legs)* You probably don't wanna hug me, I'm covered in—

Judy: Hey— Bearie wants to say hi!

Edward: Hi, Bearie.

Judy: Bearie wanna hugga.

Edward: He's made of cotton— he doesn't want anything. Judy: Bearie wanna hugga!

Edward: Why do you have to talk like a baby? *(Judy pouts.)*
You're literally nine. *(Judy pouts louder.)* You're nine! Only babies talk like babies!

Judy wails and Mother enters.

Mother (*drained*): Can't I leave for one minute?

Edward: She's being stupid.

Mother: She's ten. You think you were better when you were her age? (*a kitchen timer rings*) Can you please just not strangle each other so I can make dinner?

Edward: But I was gonna shower and do homework so I—

Mother: Do your homework out here! Eddie, I need you right now.

Edward: Okay.

Mother: Thank you. Judy? (*Judy looks over*) Don't bother Eddie— he has to do his homework. (*Judy shrugs*) Thanks, Ed.

Mother exits. Judy quickly turns away from eavesdropping as Eddie gets his homework from his backpack and sits at a lawn chair— not too close that he has to interact with Judy, but not so far away that he isn't babysitting her. As he props up a comic book behind his textbook, Judy plays with her Bear and Barbie doll.

Judy:

Barbie: Doctor Bearie, Doctor Bearie!

Bear: What's wrong, Barbie?

Barbie: My name is Barbara.

Bear: Okay, Barbara, what's wrong?

Barbie: Someone stole something!

Bear: Oh no! What?

Barbie: My underwear!

Edward: Judy! (*She bursts into uncontrollable giggles.*) You're so gross.

He turns away and Judy goes quiet. She grabs a blank paper from her purse and quickly scribbles a crayon drawing. She skips over to give it to Edward; he reads.

Edward: "I LONF VO." You mean "I love you"?

Judy: (*giggling even more*) I can't spell yet.

Edward: You'll get it. It's not hard.

Judy: Play with me?

Edward: No, I've uh, gotta finish my homework. (*Judy eyes the comic book laying wide-open.*)

Judy: You can do homework at night. Mom won't let me stay up later. Play with me!

Edward: I'm... (*eyes his comic book*) Sorry, I'm busy.

Both resume their activities.

Judy: (*as Bear and Barbie again*)

Barbie: Doctor, doctor!

Bear: Huh.

Barbie: I've got a boo-boo!

Bear: Oh, darn. (*beat*)

Barbie: What are you gonna do, doctor?

Bear: Uhh, I'm kinda busy right now.

Barbie: No you're not, you wanker!

Edward: Judy! Where did you hear that?!

Judy: I'm just playing!

Edward: Where did you hear that? (*Judy screams/growls.*)

You're so stupid.

Judy: Leave me alone!

Edward: Ew, fine.

Long beat. Judy takes something from her purse and hides it behind her back.

Judy: Eddie? I made something for you when you were at school...

Edward: What?

Judy: Hope you like it.

Judy reveals another paper, with four cutouts of ninjas in action poses pasted on. Around them are colorful child's drawings of battles and a detailed imaginary world. Across the top is a carefully-written sentence— EDDIE SAVES THE DAY.

Edward: Where did you cut these out from? (*terrified silence from Judy*) Tell me right now!

Judy shrinks back. Edward takes the paper and bolts inside, as Judy bursts into sobs.

Judy: Mom!

Mother: (*entering*) Judy!

Judy: Mom!

Mother: Judy, what's wrong?

Edward: *(returning with the paper and an open magazine.)*

She destroyed my favorite comic book!

Mother: Edward.

Judy: I didn't know!

Edward: These are limited edition! They only send out one a month— I can't get another one!

Judy: I'm sorry!

Mother: *(gentle)* No, Judy. *(stern)* Edward you apologize to your sister. She worked on that all day for you. She was so excited to show you because she wanted to make you *happy*. You apologize to her right now.

Edward: I'm sorry.

Mother: *(gently)* Go inside, Judy. *(Judy runs off.)* Eddie—

Edward: Why does she get away with everything? But the oldest kid has to be mature and give everything up—

Mother: Do you even hear yourself? You're so concerned with 'how do I feel?' and 'what do I want?' that you can't even give a crap about your sister, who's inside crying because of you.

Edward *(indignant)*: She's crying because of what she did.

Mother: Eddie! *(beat; gravely)* You wanna end up like Dad's siblings? Grandma didn't give them any warmth. She never made them apologize, or hugged them, or said anything. Twelve kids and no relationship. Nothing. George and Luke just cut each other off.

Edward: What? I saw them talking at Christmas—

Mother: Something happened, and guess what? They had nothing to fall back on. You two need to depend on each other. *Your* sister is your built-in-best friend. She's been talking non-stop about you all day— 'Is Eddie home yet? He said we were gonna watch Bugs Bunny!' *(pleading)* She loves you. *(kitchen timer rings)* I know you love her, too.

Mother exits, leaving Edward alone. He looks at the gift again, and at the comic book, and begins to weep softly. Judy enters timidly behind him.

Judy: Eddie? *(Edward stifles his tears.)* You wanna watch Bugs Bunny?

Edward: Yeah.

Judy and Edward exit together.



Photo Three
-Wyatt Emmons

Plastic Lettuce

-Melissa StPierre

I was their favorite grandchild. There were three. Now there are two.

There were two grandparents. Now there are none.

I still remain their favorite grandchild.

My cousin Kyle is a dipstick. He's kinda dumb but fancies himself really smart and "sophisticated" because he "reads", but I'm the one with degrees in English. "Sophisticated". Roll your eyes so far back you can see 1983.

I was three years old, so it was 1988 and he would have been around ten...?

I was playing with my kitchen set in my grandparents' foyer. There were small pieces of "play" food and I was busy making foo-foo-fish for my waiting family.

Kyle knocked the kitchen set off the top of the small table it was on for no other reason than he thought making a three year old cry was funny. ("Sophisticated" right? Keep looking with the eyerolls.)

Our grandmother ripped into him - a werewolf starved and it was Thanksgiving.

He was made to put all of my play stuff back atop the table and sent away from me.

My grandmother and I never found the piece of plastic lettuce.

I am sure I had it and so was she, but it's been missing for over thirty years.

I have a theory that Kyle stole it.

I'll probably find it someday. Or, more, it'll find me.

In another fifty years, I'll be in my eighties and Kyle in his nineties. When he dies, I'll be visited by a spiffy looking man in a suit and he'll introduce himself as Xavier S. Rallenstein, Attorney at Law. I'll think it's a scam, and then he'll

interject with a "Kyle Stevenson left you something in his will."

As the executor of the estate, he'll hand me a small box and, in that box, will be a small piece of plastic lettuce.

My reaction will likely be theatrical and throwing the box is imminent.

Because inside, he'll have a note reading: "I told you I was their favorite."

And who can I dispute it to? I'm the only one left alive.

With a piece of plastic lettuce.

What's Meant To Be Will Be

-Jillian Thom

The thing I learned about love is that distance and space are both really hard.. but sometimes being too close is too easy.. you let life slip away of what's really important like your dream job or the goals you want to achieve and you forget about yourself along the way.. you're so focused on loving someone else and their life that you forget to love yourself.. time is so precious in itself and life is too short to waste loving yourself is how you love your partner. Taking the time to appreciate the life that's in front of you and what is to come.. In the end all will work out and all will fall into place at the right time and those who love you enough will come back even if they decide to let you go because if they are meant to be they will always find their way back home to you.



Photo Four
-Wyatt Emmons

Served With A Side of Drama

-Melissa StPierre

Come for the paycheck. Stay for the theatrics.

I loved that boy, or at least, I kind of did.

As a teenager, who really knows? All I knew is that I loved that he had long (ish) hair. He could shake it out of a hat like Matthew McConaughey.

Alright, alright, alright.

He wore a blue (ish) hat backwards, and loved Incubus, like me.

He drove a car held together with bungee cords and good luck.

He smelled like the 1990's.

We talked at school: sometimes. He was older than me and we had *nothing* in common: except for the paychecks.

This wasn't going to happen.

But it didn't stop me from asking.

He said no but in a way that didn't make me feel dumb or ugly. I kinda knew it was a long shot.

That summer, he started dating another girl we worked with.

I disliked her in the way that teenagers do. They just don't hang out or get along or have anything in common. So, basically, not many tangible reasons.

I quit because of her but didn't tell anyone that.

I haven't been a teenager for quite some time, and I know where she works, but I don't talk to her. We're not "Facebook friends". There are still principles to uphold.. and loyalty to former identities.

I saw him several years ago and if he hadn't shouted out my last name, I wouldn't have recognized him.

He's bald.

Cute, no, he's forty something, handsome. Handsome, but bald.

And he's lost the hat.

We've grown up.

Alright, alright, alright.



Photo Three
-Nilla Kanjoma

11:11

-Jillian Thom

You are the dream that I told myself I wanted forever ago
and now that it's here I am only hoping that the
love we have for each other continues to grow..
and you continue to show me the long lost
wish that I have finally found forever in my heart safe and
sound.

Contributors

Maha Bhatti is an early college student at Rochester University in Michigan and attends Avondale High School. When she's not busy with homework and watching her sisters at home, she is reading novels hours at a time, usually at night. She plays softball at the high school and is involved in a few after school clubs as well such as the journalism club. She loves creative writing although it isn't her main focus, she just does it in her leisure time.



Nathan Freundl is a sophomore at Rochester University, studying Theatre & Performance. While stage acting is his focus, his passion is for *creating* stories. He has been writing since he could write, whether it be short stories, letters to penpals, essays, or melancholy poetry. He has written two short plays already and hopes to produce his first two-act play here at RU. When he's not busy, he's probably playing piano.

Brandon Hensley (Ph.D. Illinois State

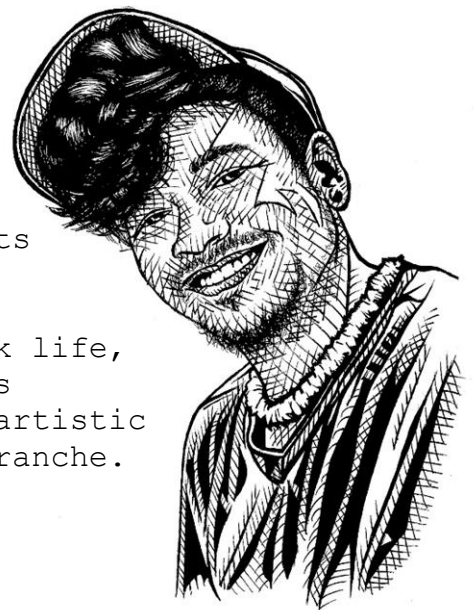
University, 2016) is an associate professor and Director of the School of Humanities at Rochester University. In addition to composing haiku in his free time with his cats Bobo and Sherbie, Brandon is a series editor of the Critical Storytelling book series, published by Brill (<https://brill.com/csto>) and has published research and narratives around bullying, student loan debt, and racism. In 2018 the Society of Professors of Education awarded Hensley and his co-editors a national book award for their volume on the student debt crisis in U.S. higher education.

Nilla Kanjoma is a freshman student at

Rochester University majoring in pre-med. Photography is her favorite hobby and she has been the photographer for all her friends and family for as long as she can remember. She works with everything she can; nature, people, food, objects, you name it. She's well rounded! (her favorite is working with babies!). As she learns more in the world of capturing precious moments, she's looking forward to selling some of her work and becoming the best she can be. When she's not taking pictures, she's studying, sleeping or thinking of the next thing to take pictures of :)

Alyxander LaBranche

is a junior at Rochester University in Michigan. He is studying mass communication with a concentration in integrated media. LaBranches' work largely consists of traditional ink-drawn portraits; he will also draw specific elements to digitally manipulate them together to form full designs. He is also an active member of the Shield Media staff, SPDN, Greek life, and the Health and Wellness club. To view his public portfolio or support his independent artistic endeavors, find him on Instagram - @xander_branche.



Alexandra Raymond is a full-time bookworm who had initially ignored her passion of writing for the medical field. After obtaining a Health Information Technology degree, her love for English studies were undeniable. She is currently a senior at Rochester University, pursuing that love. When she is not reading or writing, you can find her free diving with sharks or rewatching Harry Potter with her Frenchie. Alexandra loves intense novels, morally gray characters, and horror flicks. Her favorite books force you to check your sanity at the door and dive deep within.

Melissa St. Pierre is an assistant professor of English at Rochester University in Michigan. Her work has appeared in *The Blue Nib*, *Ponder Savant*, *Panoply*, *Valiant Scribe*, and *Elizabeth River Press Literary Anthology* and the *Arzono Annual Review*. St.Pierre has also performed her work in [*Listen to Your Mother*](#), a literary nonfiction storytelling showcase. When she is not writing or teaching, she is busy misplacing things, making construction paper art, playing with her daughter, or all of the above.



Jillian Thom is a student at Rochester University studying early childhood studies in Michigan. Jillian has published her work to many Instagram poetry submissions as well as writing in her free time for her family and friends to read. This is Jillian's second BlackBerry journal and is excited for you to read her upcoming work. When Jillian is not writing she loves to sing, read, and be with her loved ones.



Zac Watson is an English teacher at Rochester University. He took the photo *Go Towards the Light* on a walk to Innovation Hills, a Rochester Hills, Michigan city park that he enjoys visiting in different seasons with his wife and Golden Retrievers.

Susan Wizinsky recently realized that her lifelong love of gemstones, fabrics, yarns, colorful gel pens, & nail polish are manifestations of her obsession with color. This obsession and a handy cell phone camera led her to take pictures of everything, everywhere.