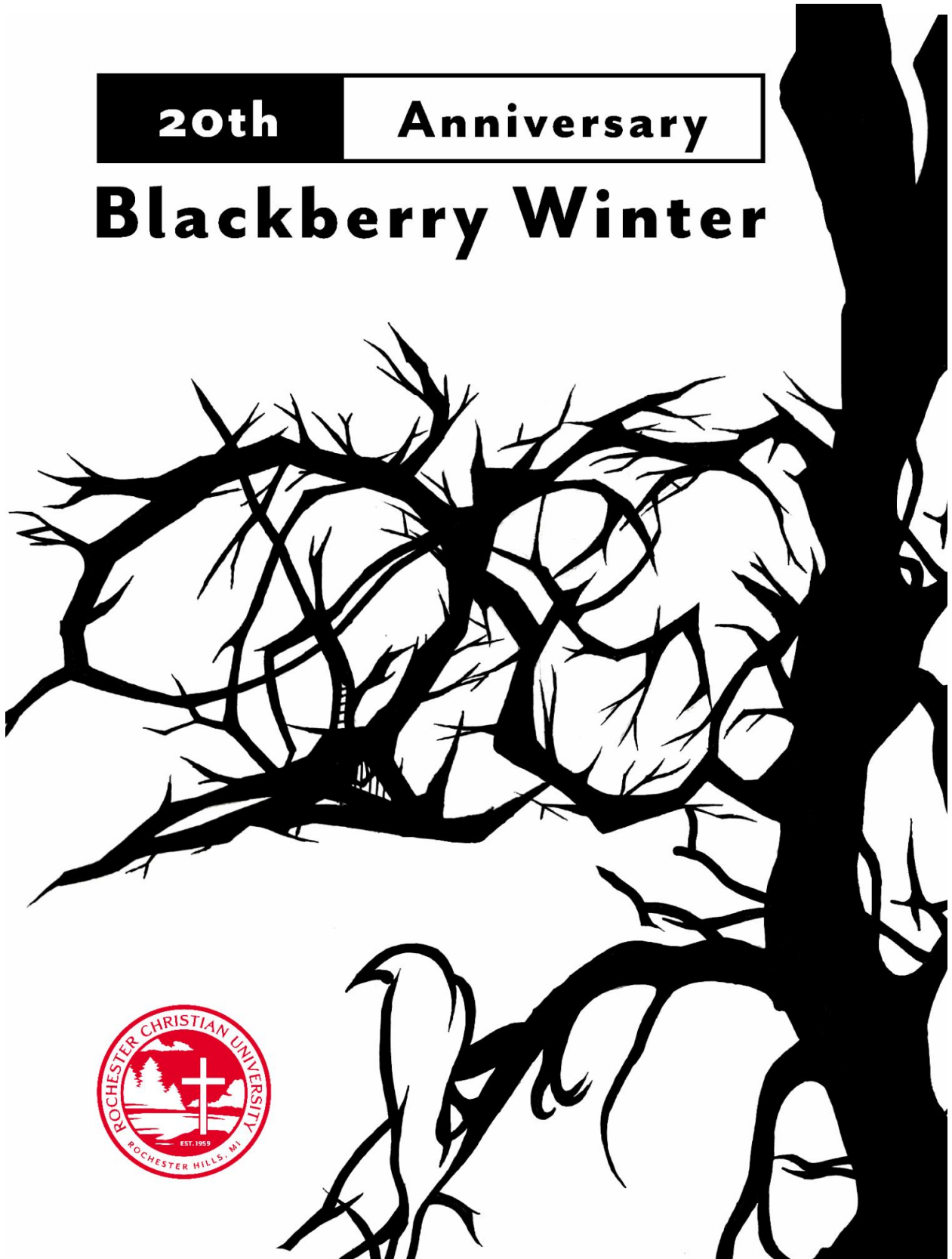


**20th**

**Anniversary**

# **Blackberry Winter**



# *Blackberry Winter*

*The Literary and Visual Arts Journal of  
Rochester Christian University*



**ROCHESTER  
CHRISTIAN  
UNIVERSITY**

Spring 2024

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

In 2022, the creative writing club rebranded and expanded *Blackberry Winter* to include the entire Rochester Christian University community, including staff and faculty.

Additionally, students attending school in any of RCU's early college partner high schools may submit. *Blackberry Winter* publishes poetry, non-fiction, memoir, micro fiction, flash fiction, music compositions, one act plays, photography, and visual art.

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 currently not scheduled.

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

### *Advisor's Note*

My writing would not be authentic without a quote from either Nirvana or the Foo Fighters, and so I begin with Kurt Cobain. Cobain is attributed<sup>1</sup> to having said, “punk rock should mean freedom, liking and accepting anything that you like. Playing whatever you want. As sloppy as you want. As long as it's good and it has passion.” I’d like to modify his statement for the creative community here at Rochester Christian University. I say this: “*creating*, in all of its many forms, should mean freedom, liking and accepting anything that you do.”

*Blackberry Winter* celebrates creative expression on our campus in all forms and by the entire community. This year’s edition includes work from students, faculty, staff, and alumni who are both faculty and staff.

I am thankful to work among the creative minds who make Rochester Christian University unique. It is with a grateful heart and creative spirit that I present the 2024 edition. This year’s edition is particularly special because it is the 20th anniversary edition of *Blackberry Winter*. It is also the *first* edition from Rochester Christian University.

The Spring 2023 Edition of *Blackberry Winter* was awarded “Excellent” in the NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English) REALM Awards. In the age of generative A.I., it is invigorating to see creative expression is alive and well here at Rochester Christian University.

It is my pleasure to work with this campus community and to bring expression to life.

I thank you for your continued support and dedication to creative expression.

Peace in all things,

Melissa StPierre  
Assistant Professor of English/Writing Program Administrator




This edition’s cover was designed at my request, by a Rochester Christian University student. This year, I asked Alyxander LaBranche after seeing his work firsthand. He’s a visual artist and has recently published work in *Mockingowl Roost* which is available online.

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, Tim. “Kurt Cobain’s Favourite Daniel Johnston Album: “The Greatest Songwriter on Earth.”” *Far Out*, 23 Sept. 2023, <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/kurt-cobains-favourite-daniel-johnston-album-the-best-songwriter-on-earth/> Accessed 04 March 2024.

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A WORK OF ART IS GOOD IF IT HAS  
ARISEN OUT OF NECESSITY...GO  
INTO YOURSELF AND SEE HOW  
DEEP THE PLACE IS FROM WHICH  
YOUR LIFE FLOWS; AT ITS SOURCE  
YOU WILL FIND THAT ANSWER TO  
THE QUESTION OF WHETHER  
YOU MUST *CREATE*.

Rainer Maria Rilke

# First Man on Neptune

Luke Chapman

Josh Fielder was just some guy from Carmel, Indiana, a 23-year-old who finished up with college not terribly long ago. Unfortunately, his life was hardly going anywhere, and that bites a little for Josh here. He was also unemployed at the moment, so that doesn't help. He wanted people to remember who he was and get a lot of money too. And how is he gonna do it? Josh had no idea.

Suddenly, the solar system model he made in fifth grade broke. "Awww, but I got a 73 percent on that!" he said. He picked up the planet pieces one by one. He found all of them except for one, and that was Mercury. "Oh, there it is," he said after finding it in the toaster.

He then got a phone call from Joe, his friend from high school whom he hadn't talked to in about six years. "Hey Josh, can you help me find the remote?" "Don't know why you'd ask me specifically, but okay. Where do you live again?" "Oh, at that house off Neptune Drive in Indianapolis." "Okay, thanks." So he drove over to Joe's place and found the TV remote in the sink. "Oh yeah. I forgot! I was giving my remote a bath earlier!" "Why?" "Why not?" "Good point." "Thanks for finding the remote. Hey, a bit off-topic, but you should totally go to space. Maybe be the first man on Jupiter." "No, I don't feel like it. I'll go to Neptune because I like the color blue." So Josh called up NASA in hopes of being the first man on Neptune.



NASA put him under consideration for about 24 hours.

The next day, NASA called Josh back and told him: "After a whole day of consideration, we have decided you are not fit to be an astronaut." "Aw seriously? Why not?" "Well, it appears you don't really know anything about science. It says on your records here that you got a D in Astronomy." "D plus, sir. D plus." "And it shows that you weren't a science major in college. It says you majored in Accounting." "But, wait! I do know about science!" "Really? Prove it. Tell me a science fact." "Okay, that's an easy one. Uhhhhhhh... Water's wet." "I mean, yeah, but that's not really all that interesting." "The mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell. There are clouds in the sky sometimes." "Okay, look. Clearly, you are not who we are looking for. Goodbye and have a great day."

NASA had then hung up on Josh, who felt dejected, but he was not going to give up. "NASA is going to pay for rejecting me. I am going to be the first man to step foot on Neptune, whether they like it or not! Just watch out, NASA! You'll see! They'll all see! But first, I've got some business to take care of!" That business was going to McDonald's to get chicken nuggets and French fries because he was hungry.

It was finally time for Josh to make his way to the planet Neptune so he can brag about it to his friends, Elon Musk, and his ex-girlfriend Allison. The problem was that he needed to figure out how to do it himself. We know that NASA was not there to help him. He did have some money, though, which was from his previous job at Walmart. He worked there for 6 years and was a well-liked employee with a good reputation until the incident. Josh would prefer we don't talk about the incident. Anyway, Josh bought all the equipment he thought he might need from local stores that are not Walmart. He could have waited until he

tried certain methods and they didn't work to buy more equipment for other methods, but Josh was going to be making a bunch of money from this whole thing anyway, right?

When he got back, he got ready for his first attempt at being the first man on Neptune. His first method was to use a trampoline. Obviously, that didn't get him very far, literally. The seller said that the trampoline was the bounciest thing on the planet, and Josh, unfortunately, gave in to the seller's false advertising.

He clearly needed to try something else. Remember that movie *Up* with the old guy in the balloon house? Josh thought that would work in real life. He tied balloons to his house in hopes of traveling to Neptune via his house. It didn't work, especially considering the fact that he only had six balloons. Josh then had the idea of traveling 88 miles an hour in his car like in *Back to the Future*. Upon trying it, it ultimately failed. He also got a speeding ticket. "Oh wait! That was for *time* travel! Duh!" He then took a stick, pointed it at himself, and said "Wingardium Leviosa!" Nothing happened. "Aw, man! I thought I had perfected that spell! I did it just like in *Harry Potter*, didn't I? Dumbledore is gonna kill me."

After trying many other methods, especially based on movies, such as trying to use the force to lift himself, he was stumped. He didn't know what to do. He was devastated because he couldn't accomplish the dream he'd had for a day and a half. Josh was moping on the ground until suddenly, an angry Walmart employee threw a cardboard box at him. "Don't think I forgot the time you dressed up in a dinosaur costume and-" "Hey, I told you I wasn't going to disclose that with the reader!" Josh then looked inside the box out of curiosity and found an advertisement on a piece of paper. It was for Plot Point Incorporated's Create Your Own Company Competition. The winner would be able to start their own company, as the name states. Josh submitted his company idea on the website, which was called "JASA", which stands for Josh's Awesome Spaceship Agency.

About an hour later, there was a knock on his door. It was Michael Plot and Jason Point, the founders of Plot Point Incorporated. Mr. Plot said to Josh, "Point and I would like to congratulate you because you are the winner of our Create Your Own Company Competition!" Mr. Point then added, "We are quite impressed with your idea of JASA, and are interested in what you plan on doing first." Josh was thrilled as he told them, "Well, seeing as being the first man on Neptune was mentioned six times in this story so far, my answer is clear. This is amazing! Thanks, guys! In your face, NASA!" Josh was overwhelmed with excitement and anticipation for the adventure that awaited him and the money he would get when he comes home.



One week passed, and it was finally time for Josh to make his journey to Neptune. JASA's "Space Shuttle Cactus" was ready for liftoff. Josh was a little nervous, but he knew that the dream he had had for about



nine days was about to come true. The spaceship then ascended to space, and at the push of a button, it was set to hyper speed.

Space Shuttle Cactus was eventually in close proximity to a planet with a blue tint. That's gotta be Neptune, right? Josh thought so, so he landed on that planet. "I did it! I'm the first man on Nep- hold on. Wait a minute. This is Uranus! Oh crap. Oh well, I guess that means I'm the first man on Uranus! Not a very flattering title, but hey! That's pretty neat, I guess."

As Josh was preparing to get back onto his spaceship, an alien came up and stole it. "Hey! Come back! Aw, man! Now I'm stuck on this planet forever!" he lamented. Josh was devastated, but he thought maybe he would like it on Uranus. Perhaps someone would rescue him at some point, and in the meantime, he could have some fun here. This sounded like a great idea until he realized there were no chicken nuggets on this planet. "NOOOOOOOOOO!!!" he exclaimed.

Josh then realized he had the same stick in a backpack he had on him. He took the stick once again, aimed it at himself, and, praying that it would work, uttered "Wingardium Leviosa!" He then levitated out of Uranus and eventually made his way back to Earth. It worked! It actually worked! Josh then was given the "a lot of money" he wanted and became the headmaster of Hogwarts.

The End.

**S**tardust  
Rachel Williams

I am made of stardust  
I am the consequences of millions of coincidences  
And billions of small explosions  
Coming together into flesh  
And muscle  
And heart  
I am made of stardust  
A combination of thousands of second chances  
And skipped heart beats  
And tears  
And pain  
I am made of stardust  
A hundred prayers that someone like me would come earth-side  
That there was a hole in the universe  
And I fit  
So perfectly



## Drowning in Her - 2022

Nathan Freundl

If I struggle to see you,

It is because

Your eyes are Lake Superior—

I drown.

Every time I see your stormy eyes I am not even given the mercy of shipwreck—

I drown.



Stepping Up to The Future  
Susan Wizinsky



**A** Coach Who Does Not Cheer  
Dr. Klint Pleasant

*To My Daughter After Her Last Volleyball Game:*

Abbey,

I'm emotional as a type this. Even though I'm a writer, I'm having a hard time coming up with just the right words to both honor and express what I am feeling.

Watching you play volleyball has been one of the greatest joys of my life. When I'd wake up in the morning and see you had a game, I'd instantly get happy and excited. Watching you and Julia play has been my favorite pastime for the last several years.



You may have noticed that I never videotaped you.

You may have noticed that I rarely took pictures.

I did this intentionally, Abbey. I prayed every day that I could be fully present, in the real moment, and just enjoy watching you, in real time, with my real eyes.

Your movements, and your stance, and your face, and your approach, and your digs, and your amazing hits, are all seared into my memory and safely tucked away to call back up for years to come.

And so is your attitude. You never complained. You cheered on teammates. You always showed up. You were a leader, but not the kind that had to remind people that you were one. You played through dislocated shoulders, and stitches, and cuts on your feet. You never even asked for a new pair of volleyball shoes your senior year, and I know yours lost grip. But you never said a word...

And you may have noticed that I rarely cheered. I just watched you; and loved every minute. You "doing good" or "doing bad" didn't matter to me. You were going to be deeply loved by me either way; no matter what; period. So, it was either constantly cheer - even if you messed up - or not cheer at all; and just watch with a smile.

You left with a conference championship, as a captain, and several personal awards and accolades - both athletically and academically. But those things will be forgotten by many. But what will never be forgotten is simply spending time with you and watching you have fun.

You are beautiful on the outside. You are beautiful on the inside. You amaze me every day. You have juggled an incredibly difficult situation, and you have handled it with such grace. You're an old soul. And I've learned so much by watching and observing you. Thanks for being my teacher in so many ways.

Your season ended on a loss. Most do.

But let it be a teacher, a great teacher. I promise you that you'll have many more losses. And they will be much more serious than volleyball. Learn from them. Dig in. Be gracious if at all possible. Find a close friend to help you through them.

And you will also experience many more wins. I pray you experience them in real time, with your own eyes, and that you are truly, and fully, present. Joy seems to happen quickly, and it doesn't always stick around, and linger, as long as you'd like; all the more reason to be in the real moment. Put the phone away, put the camera away. When you do this, time seems to stand still for a bit. And when people congratulate you, humbly thank them, and then remind yourself that's not where true life is found.

All I have to do is close my eyes and I see you playing. I see your thundering hits - many of them game ending winners, and big-time digs, and serves that ended in aces - even when the game was on the line, and blocks at the net...and you did it all with such humility.

And now you move on to a much more serious game, the game of adulthood, the game of life. The stakes are much higher now. And please know I will still be there. Watching you. Cheering for you. Loving you. If life goes well for you and gives you everything you want, I will be there. And if life deals you a hard deck of cards and if you screw up beyond belief, I will be there. It doesn't matter. Just like the volleyball games. I will be there...

All my love,

Dad.

He Woke Me Up  
Nathan Freundl

He woke me up.

I'd been drinking myself to sleep and numbing myself till morning,  
And I lost myself in the night.

Yet He woke me up.

He turned sleepy bones out of the coffin, and made me sit with myself.  
I tried angrily to sleep, but He let me not.

Oh, how I began to hate myself.

Love burned me like a vampire in the light of the Sun.

And the Son's light is so beautiful,  
But I wretched.

My breath is foul exhaust fumes,

My mind is dust and cobwebs,

My fingernails grimy and dry,

And flesh falls off my bones,

As if it despised the person it was attached to.

He woke me up out of my sleep.

He said,

“Stay awake, stay awake with me— the Son approaches with the dawn!”



Poems for Goose  
Marissa Salas-Lerma

Limerick

There once was an orange Tabby  
Who loved eating patties  
With paws so round and firm.  
She loved getting zoomies  
But loved her snoozies more.

Cinquain

Sunsets

Golden Colors

Reflect cherished moments

Silent tears splash on memories

Farewell

June 16th, 2019- December 8th, 2023

Goose "Gooseph" Salas-Lerma

To the best fur friend a girl could ask for. I love you

forever and always.

Rest in peace.





*D*reams of the Pacific Highway  
Zac Watson



Grief Island - 07/04/2023  
Nathan Freundl

Mother and daughters.  
Sisters and mother.  
Missing brother.  
There were never such devoted sisters!  
Tears over flushed cheeks.  
Can you know the grief they alone share?  
Their brother is gone but everywhere.  
Life removed,  
Spirit remains,  
Gone but not gone,  
Far far away.  
One day, they pray—  
Their tears will bring them home.  
So it will be—  
Husband and wife,  
Mother and children,  
Children and parents,  
Brothers and sisters,  
Their tears will make this home.



# Drainage Poem

Maha Bhatti

## *Pain*

Lovely pain

It doesn't leave you the same

*Torture, beautiful torture...*

Go through it once, change

*It is what it is*

Despite all my efforts these are the results...

*It is what it is*

*It was what it was*

Messed it up. Again.

*It won't always feel this way*

*It will go away, it will come back*

Drainage drained draining

Attention... how bad it can be.

How good it felt back then.

How awful it feels now, to think that every attention i get has to be the wrong kind.

How awful it is to see the world from someone else's pov.

*Someone's broken. Someone's leaking.*

They pour and I collect, soon I leak too.

I picked up key after key,

Relief filled me as I found a way through a door that wouldn't budge,

How stubborn this door was

How good it felt back then,

How awful it feels now to reminisce

Living through it, here i am

I never learned how to swim

*Maybe that's why walking through a room full of water feels like drowning,*

Rather than a fish who passes by me, with its simple joys

I stare at this fish, I stare at the way it so easily gets around the room with its bubbly energy

And i remember...

*....this was me.*

There was no water, there was no constraint

Yet there's this beauty and depth, maybe drowning isn't so bad

*There's intensity...*

Go back, return to the naive little girl, hit the redo button

*But the button has frozen*

The clock ticks away, my head pounding, my heart racing, I can't keep up

*Why? Why can I not have this button...*

*Why? Why can I not rest?*

I loved running until I experienced running away

Or is it better to sit in place and look right into the ugly mirror instead of the mirror that lies.

*Mirror mirror, you cannot lie, I know what i am.  
But mirror mirror, you cannot drown me either.  
How dehumanizing of you. How unpleasant it feels.  
Mirror mirror, may I do this to you?  
But you are an object.... And I am a human...  
Now there are other keys, which one will work?  
Heavier and heavier  
There are chains... i could learn to swim  
I could. I should and I will...  
Lock, click, one more time  
Where are the keys...  
I see them,  
Seeing is the only pleasure I'll have.  
Chains... keys... do these other fish even see the chains? The keys?  
I stay quiet. I don't reach anymore.  
The fish are happy, at least I've made sure of that  
I can rest for a bit before the chains lock tighter.  
And so I do...  
Because what else is there to be done?  
I blink, it is dark..  
There are no fish anymore  
I am alone. I am alone in a room that I no longer recognize...  
More and more leakage.. I collect. I soak it up. I can't burst now.  
There's much more to collect.*



*Cathedral 1*  
(graphite on vellum)

Kris Schaedig



“A Blue River’s Winter”  
Sarah Fulton

There’s always something special in the way the abstract world can follow a white canvas; it’s almost just too impossible to imagine the miracle that the flowers atop rugged hills and below the beckoning rushes of glacial ice will take as they come and go, once more revived by the estranged beauty that first kissed their births.



I sat there as a child, overlooking a garden, no hills or steep mountains to climb which would make me weary down to the last of my bones, no red barn to tend to nor any animals residing within the comfort of the sweet smelling hay and the red fire fern that broached the same door year after year. It hindered me as I had no heart to stay just as I had no desire to leave.

It all still came and went, the silence of the air as the night before grew more stronger as the next morning came closer. The trees though darkened in their skins and shadows from the bitter cold still remained at constant vigilance as the northern wind swept west in the nightshade of the Star forthcoming.

My mother knew her place well. It was the very foundation where she laid the ancestral groundwork of her binding.

“Oh to see the world as they no longer see the strawberries out yonder in those snowy foothills!”  
“Each life he the Devil takes! Is mine all the more giving?”

The foothill had not known the answer, nor does it ever seem to still speak a word now that I am among the grayed expected.

But to return back to the foothills of that the glacial brook clothed in majesty, the bright-eyed fern still awaiting at the door:

My life was all but forgotten in the wind that held the moon closer to the north shore...

# When I Come Around: A Love Story

Melissa StPierre

“his people had once been great makers of song”- *The Pearl* John Steinbeck

It was hot.

It was summer in Michigan so that meant that it was humid and hot.

Like all 1980’s and ‘90’s kids, we were outside playing in the yard.

These were “the days” (said with a hint of nostalgia and a dash of longing).

Cell phones weren’t attached to every hand and social media wasn’t a thing.

We were three ten year old girls playing jump rope in a front yard.

I remember it because my two friends Rachel and Anna had just suggested that we do a dance routine. A *dance routine* in the sweetheart of summer. I was in.

We were working out our coordinated moves and there was something with a jump rope involved. Probably some “twist your ankle” kind of thing that now would send us immediately to the ground.

During the summer of 1994, I palled around with Rachel and Anna and a boy named Alex from their neighborhood. Sometimes, his younger sister would tag along.



Me (1994)

We walked all around the old gravel pit which is now the Waterstone development in Oxford, Michigan. We tried to fish and weren’t very good.

Mostly, we rode bikes, jumped rope, played tether ball, volleyball, and any other outdoor activity we could invent.

I saw Alex coming up the hill, riding the bike he was quickly growing too tall for, at breakneck speed.

“Boy hair” in the 1990s was a kind of throwback Beatles floppy-do and he was swiping his hair out of his face as he attempted to balance.

“YOU GUYS!!!” he screamed as he came to a stop, slamming his bike to the ground.

“You gotta listen to this!” as he shoved his Discman in my face.

I pushed my jump rope to my side and stood up, dusting my denim overalls and fixing my short ponytail.

My friends had country music blaring in the background of our front yard play. They expected me to dance to country music.

Alex knew I hated early to mid-1990’s country music. My two friends would (and could) listen to Billy Ray Cyrus’ “Achy, Breaky, Heart” over and over.

I absolutely could not.

That particular day though, it was Alan Jackson. No offense to either of these artists, but their style just wasn’t, isn’t, my jam.

Out of the disintegrating foam pads came the most righteous sound I had ever heard. “Ever” being subjective for a ten-year-old girl.

Track 10 started; I don’t play guitar so I couldn’t tell you the chord progression, but I can tell you that it aligned with my heartbeat at just the right moment in time. Time being important both as an entity and for musicality. That mirrored meaning is not lost on me.

“I heard you crying loud, all the way across town...”

And therein begins a love story.

*Dookie* became the soundtrack to that summer and listening to it on a cassette tape that Alex made me (copyright infringement was also strong in the 90’s).

I don’t remember how I fell in love with every band I’ve ever loved, but I distinctly remember that day, and that introduction to Green Day.



Whenever I hear Green Day's "When I Come Around", I remember hot sunny days and jumping rope. I remember the two friends I had and the boy that came flying up a gravel road on a too small bike.

That's the first day I can remember associating with a specific song.

It is hardly the last.

I am a person that aligns memories with song. You see, for me, it's the music that makes the memory.

It's the way I can listen to some songs and instantly tell you a story.

I have a tactile memory of a person or a place. If I've ever known you, there is very likely a song that conjures your face every time I listen to it. This could be a year ago or 20 years ago, or even longer.

Sometimes I play a little game with myself asking what song should play every time I enter a room and I never really have a concrete answer for that. Sometimes I'm torn between "Kashmir" by Led Zeppelin and "Hard to Handle" by The Black Crowes.

I often feel like I should be doing something more "serious" as I drive. I am a professor, after all. I "should" be listening to NPR, so I have smart things to say off the cuff about current events. As if it doesn't matter that I read the news in the morning and at night.

I "should" be listening to podcasts about new topics and gaining more knowledge and insight. There are a few podcasts I love, but I am most comfortable with sound.

I have grown to love every genre of music although alternative and "emo" are tattooed on my soul.

So if you see me in the parking lot and I'm playing bass alongside my beloved Pete Wentz and my friends from Fall Out Boy, drumming with the late Taylor Hawkins, headlining the Warped Tour with Blink-182, imitating Britney Spears, Taylor Swift, Hailey Williams, Billie Holiday, Heart, Adele, or Alicia Keys, please just let me be.

It is in those spaces that I am most in my element.

I am the most creative when I am surrounded by sound.

I make references to songs in class and sometimes my poor students get subjected to a ten second serenade. One of my best teaching days included nods to Nirvana, Eminem, Paramore, and Dolly Parton, all within two hours of each other.

For me, the connection between memory and music is one that I encounter daily and it's like having a play, or my favorite movie scenes from my life, running through my head as I do otherwise mundane tasks.

Often, I look like I'm lost in a daydream, but I am working my way through a cast of characters and deciding which truth to tell: the Anne Lamott "you own everything that has happened to you" running ramshot.

If you play me a song, I can conjure a story.

"You'll know where I'll be found, when I come around."



# Self-Reflection

Nathan Freundl



# Demons With Ugly Faces

Sarah Fulton

Darkness, as it surrounds me; drifting off into a hopeful night of silence and rain as the sound of the dusk winds blows against the fragile windowpanes...

Snow and ice that share the lightning's purse and the thunder's mighty voice beneath it, as it was predicted by the perfect ebony mare with dark scarlet eyes, racing across the midnight sky.

They, all at once — they who do sing and chant aloud together: "Cradle! cradle! cradle!"

They are the shadows from the invisible realm, they of whom I do yet dare to see...

They who are not beguiling sirens, I who am not the sworn adventure-less wanderer, and death my unlikely protege...

They that still below a whisper to my ears, come what loudness may: "Cradle! Cradle! Cradle!"

Hush. Hush and be still — the beldam among them is listening! Bells toll for the binding of their souls, and in death the sinful web unwinding!

Eyes flutter, lips quiver, all might and into night she doth strike the hands that shiver...

They take her, oh by only God's grace through righteous blood upon blood of our own can save her!

"Cradle! Cradle! Cradle!" They, the selfish in sleep implored.

All today and never to night can be ignored...



Bounded, she lay at their corroding feet, looking up at one smirking intently she shrieked: "Uglier, a faded green in death than now that are among the many who still liveth among you! Should I be so concerned as a victim of your fellow other?"

Then snarled a reply, one of them as he maniacally laughed out to himself: "Says the daughter who would be so shunned as to ever think upon herself, an expecting mother!"

"Be one with us as we dance together! Your light our strength, and your weakness as comical pleasure!" One of the goblin maidens stood against and mocked her.

The males then brought forth for her their galleons and their arms coated with silver, as they continued their praising song: "Cradle, Cradle, Cradle!" All around her bounded limbs they danced along.

“These monsters! My demons of green, ugliest still from childhood they do appear! They know well! They grew as I grew! A thwarted, envious cycle only from love to brokenness upon my heart draws near again!”

Tears flowed as she wept, all was but from the mare, to that she owed nothing, nothing except her life she screamed out of the evergreen fire, so frightened, yet so vast but dire!

“I’m here,” Cooed her husband in a soft reply. Lying next to her, her body now warm in love’s arms forever, she once thought never to be close by.

Uglier her demons became roared by the mind, the ugliest they became the world’s threat throughout mine...

## Taraxacum Officinale Maria Chesnutt

The Taraxacum Officinale, more commonly known as a dandelion, is a flowering plant part of the Asteraceae family. While they are famously known as invasive lawn weeds, there are many fond memories of my cousin and I picking these weeds and presenting them to our mothers as if they were gold. As our mothers entertained our joy and giggles, they would exude exclamations; "oh! How beautiful! Thank you! We love them." As they would tuck the very plant that they spray weed killer on behind their ears, like you would do if you were in the tropics, picking big, bright, beautiful flowers while soaking up the sun. They knew that those small moments were fleeting.

I'm sure everyone has a recollection of the idea of making a wish on a dandelion. You close your eyes, make a wish, and then blow all the fluff off the top of the plant? I have distinct memories of running to grab those plants whenever I would see them and closing my eyes so tight and wishing so hard... for what... I could not tell you. I have no recollection. Though, it was probably along the lines of wishing I didn't have to play soccer anymore. I hated soccer. Ask my mom.



As I look back at the image of the dandelion seeds flying across the yard, burying themselves in between the blades of grass, rooting themselves in a new area. Their roots grow and flourish to reach other dandelions and make a home there. Growing up, I was the seed. In a way, I still am the seed. I have a place... until I don't.

I moved around a lot in my childhood. Four times before I was eight. Following my parents' divorce, my dad's house was and still is the only permanent home I had throughout my life. My mom and I lived at my aunt's house, two different apartments, and then with my stepdad when they got married in 2011. While these were the times my roots were physically removed and replanted, like a Taraxacum Officinale, young adulthood is a season of planting yourself in new places.

I've always had trouble with friends. Not making them; in fact, I'm often described as a friendly person. I'm loud, I like to laugh, I love learning about people, and I LOVE to talk. Keeping friends is a different story. I am a trusting person. I am an invested person. When you are my friend, I am in it for the long haul. I understand that people can outgrow each other. People drift apart. It's different. I feel as though I am preparing them to find their "people," the lifelong friends that will be at their weddings and be their kids' "aunts" and "uncles." The people

whose kids will be invited to birthday parties, whose families will go on vacation with them. While I am here, still searching for my "people."

Watching my brothers grow up has been the best joy of my life. We are outside people on both sides of my family. I spent hours outside when I was young, and now I get to watch my brothers do the same. As I watch my brothers run around the neighborhood with their friends through lawns that appear to be vast fields of dandelions, at least to their little selves, I can't help but get that rushing feeling of comfort. For a short time, dandelions don't remind me of being temporary; they remind me of being carefree.

# So Long to the CRT

Zac Watson

Like a newspaper getting tossed  
Into the recycling bin,  
You, cathode ray tube,  
Have been put to the side of the curb.

The Valkyries of technology,  
Who sought out  
The Model-T,  
The jukebox,  
And, the Sega Dreamcast System,  
Now beckon you.

“It’s o.k.,” consoles a psychopomp,  
“They have plasma TVs now.  
You can finally let your  
Fluorescent screen rest,  
Holster your gun in its vacuum tube—  
No need to reload with more electrons.”

Thus, the one known as the Reaper,  
Welcomes the one known for its Raster  
Into the electronic afterlife,  
Where it will be greeted by  
ENIAC  
As well as the phonograph  
And sniffed by  
The RCA dog.





# Soul of My Savior

"ANIMA CHRISTI"

Nathan Freundl

Ab/E $\flat$  Eb B $\flat$ m/E $\flat$

Soul of my Sa - vior,  
Strength and pro - tec - tion  
Hear me, Lord Je - sus,

2 C-3add#5 Fm D $\flat$  B $\flat$ m7

sanc - ti - fy my breast; Bo - dy of Christ be  
may thy Pass - ion be; O Bless - ed Je - sus,  
li - sten as I pray; lead me from night to

4 Ab/C B $\flat$ m7 Cm D $\flat$  Fm Cm

Thou my sa - ving Guest; Blood of my Sa - vior,  
hear and an - swer me; Deep in thy wounds, Lord,  
ne - ver end - ing day. Fill all the world with

6 B $\flat$ m7 Gdim Cmaj D $\flat$  B $\flat$ m7 Cm

bathe me in thy tide; wash me with wa - ter  
hide and shel - ter me; so shall I ne - ver,  
love and grace di - vine Glo - ry laud and

8 D $\flat$  B $\flat$ m/A $\flat$  E $\flat$ /G Fm Cm

flow - ing from His side, wash me with wa - ter  
ne - ver part from Thee, so shall I ne - ver,  
praise be ev - er Thine, Glo - ry laud and

10 D $\flat$  Cm7 B $\flat$ m7 Eb Ab/E $\flat$

flow - ing from His side.  
ne - ver part from Thee.  
praise be ev - er Thine.

Text: "ANIMA CHRISTI" Unkown, c.1400 attr. St. Ignatius of Loyola, transl. Edward Caswall 1814-1878  
Music: © 2023 Nathan Freundl, 2003—

# My Life Living With Food Allergies

Jillian Thom

Living with food allergies has made me see the world in a whole new light and darkness. I have had to live with caution and fear as the unknown of life is and has been determined with every bite of food I take. I have constantly had to explain, re-explain and express the importance of my life threatening condition for my whole life. Some people were understanding while others never took the time to accept that this part of my life would never change. I am allergic to peanuts and tree nuts. My allergy is anaphylactic, which means that if I Ingested something that was not safe for my body, I could potentially stop breathing and die. I have always felt apart because something different was on my plate or worse, nothing at all.



I don't know why myself and so many others with allergies suffer. It shouldn't have to be this hard.

Many in our world struggle to take the time to understand the life of someone with a medical bag and instead point fingers and insist that we make *their* lives difficult.

Ever since I was a young girl, I have always wanted to teach others about my life and my allergies. To this day, I still express my feelings and will never feel guilty about that, and neither

should anyone that has a food allergy. It can be challenging talking about something as hard as a life threatening food allergy but I have learned in my life that the ones who truly love you will make all the effort in the world. I am beyond appreciative of my loved ones who are always learning and keeping me safe.

In all of my years of having food allergies I constantly asked myself why I had to be different and why my life had to be such a hassle. Why do I make others annoyed or uncomfortable.. When will there be a cure?

In my 23 years I have never been able to answer these questions, but one thing I have been able to answer is that there will be many people who don't understand and don't want to either. As much as this saddens me, I have to remember that one day I can spread awareness to others and remind the food allergy community that we are not alone. I also want us to remember that life isn't simply about food. It's about being with the people we love and making lifelong memories. I am here to enjoy what life I have and I am going to keep myself safe and remind others the importance of keeping others safe as well.

Not only is it important to educate others but it's important to educate yourself. For those of us n the food allergy community, there is always something that needs to be learned and it doesn't hurt to refresh when it comes to knowing epi-pen instructions. We always need to know the questions to ask managers when going out to eat, what things to check for when at a grocery store. and any other accommodations that a

food allergy requires. Learning how to live with food allergies can be difficult but what if it doesn't have to be.

We can all come together as a community and learn how to save a life one allergy at a time.

# Eternal Sin - 2023

Nathan Freundl

I find myself naked in my own deserted garden,  
And I cannot satisfy my soul.  
I cannot escape the hunger of my soul.

There's no music in Hell.

O, LORD,  
Where are you for the lost cause?  
Where are you for the hopeless, despairing, and trapped?

And LORD,  
What will you do for those who refuse your help?



# Heartbreak and Happiness

Jillian Thom

She survived the days when she said it was too hard

And she couldn't do this

She knew that one day she would have a purpose.



To be with someone who loves her and leave the past behind.

She survived.

One day pain and suffering would be for her gain.

Every tear and heartbreak would turn into something great.

It ended up being never too late.

She survived.

One Day she wouldn't have to think about him anymore.

The right man was already waiting for her:

On the other side of the door.

# *Contributor Notes*



## *Maha Bhatti*

Maha is an early college student, currently a senior in high school. She attends both Avondale High School and Rochester Christian University. Maha has been writing in diaries for a long time and enjoys creative writing and reading novels. The library is one of her favorite places. She plans to get into medical school and become a doctor someday.

## *Luke Chapman*

Luke wrote this short story for RCU's Creative Writing class. He had the idea in mind to write a science fiction-esque story about a normal guy doing something big. 23-year-old Josh Fielder is an average Joe, except he is not all that intelligent. Despite his shortcomings, he works hard to get his ambitious goal accomplished. What readers will notice is that this story has a heavy emphasis on comedy. Comedy is something Chapman has had a huge passion for years, and he hopes you believe that passion was put to good use. He has made other comedic short stories in the past, such as "Last Man on Earth", showing what life would probably be like for someone who is the only person on Earth. "First Man on Neptune" is one of his longest works so far, with over 1400 words, and the one he is the most proud of.

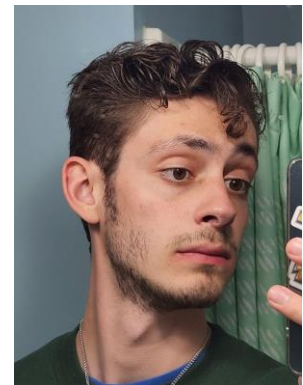


## *Maria Chesnutt*

Maria Chesnutt is a junior at Rochester Christian University, she is a Secondary English Education major. She is involved in the Theatre Department at Rochester as well. She fell in love with English in high school, and this is her first time writing a creative piece.

## *Nathan Freundl*

Nathan Freundl is a junior Theatre Major at RU. Aside from following his passion for poetics, Nathan is an intern organist and choir director at his parish, St. John Fisher. In all things he strives to create true beauty and excellence, always taking inspiration from glorious Michigan's natural wilderness and his dear, dear family.





## ***Sarah Fulton***

Sarah Fulton is a senior at RU with an illuminating passion for English and using her unique voice to express the dark sides of fiction, suspenseful laments and ballads and especially gothic tropes. She has actively written several pieces of poetry, short stories, creative writing, and her ongoing debut novel that have not only influenced her life and writing career but have seemingly progressed her writing style and adaptive ways of thinking for the ultimate pursuit: a depiction that defines scars of emotional trauma, and her own indigenous character!

## ***Alyxander LaBranche***

Alyxander LaBranche is a senior at Rochester Christian University, studying Mass Communication with a focus in design. Alyxander has work published in *Mockingowl Roost*. His family, friends, and mentors at RCU have been instrumental in shaping his personal and professional growth. He designed the 2024 *Blackberry Winter* cover. And he is a proud black cat dad. ☹️



## ***Dr. Klint Pleasant***

Dr. Klint Pleasant currently serves as Senior Vice President and Head Men’s Basketball Coach at Rochester Christian University. He also oversees the Athletic Department which has experienced growth from 8 intercollegiate sports teams to 21 intercollegiate sports teams, and has transitioned to the NAIA and WHAC Conference, since he’s taken over management of the department. Klint speaks on a regular basis throughout the region, both as a basketball clinician and as an inspirational speaker. Specifically, the Pleasant family experienced some personal struggles after moving back to Rochester Hills as Rachel,

Klint’s wife, survived a brain tumor and several surgeries. They have been invited to travel to various places to speak about their incredible journey. Pleasant resides in Rochester Hills with his wife Rachel (Stevens) and two daughters Abigail (15), and Julia (10) who both attend Rochester Community Schools. He is the son of Gath Pleasant who has been a pillar in the greater Rochester community. Klint serves alongside his father, and brother John, running the legendary Lake Norcentra Basketball Camps in the summer.



## ***Melissa StPierre***

Dedication: “When I Come Around: A Love Story” is dedicated to Billy. We’ve got her here on earth while you take care of the music in heaven. I am confident that your playlist rocks.

Melissa StPierre is an Assistant Professor of English at Rochester Christian University. She writes creative nonfiction, micro fiction, and memoir. StPierre is currently working on a PhD in English, with a concentration in writing and rhetoric at Wayne State University.

StPierre’s research focuses on generational rhetoric and the effects on gendered communication. Her creative work has appeared in *Panoplyzine*, *The Blue Nib*, *Arozno Annual*, and several other national and international publications. When Melissa isn’t writing, teaching, grading, singing to herself, or creating humorous classroom slides, she can be found, running around a playground with her young daughter. Look for the flip flops. Listen for the “dad” jokes.

## ***Jillian Thom***

Jillian Thom is currently a senior at Rochester Christian University finishing her bachelor's degree in early childhood education. She is very excited to share her last pieces of work before she graduates this spring and to celebrate BlackBerry's 20th anniversary. She would like to thank her family, friends, and boyfriend for inspiring her to keep writing. She hopes that you enjoy all of the wonderful work that is in this year’s magazine!



## ***Zac Watson***

Zac Watson is a faculty member in the Department of English at Rochester Christian University. During the winter, he and his wife, Kim, enjoy hanging out by the fireplace at Panera with their Future Leader Dog, Jedi, and then migrating to the patio in the summer with their other Golden, Simba.



### *Additional Credits*

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*Creative Commons*. Creative Commons, 2024, <https://search.creativecommons.org/>. Accessed 20 March 2024.

Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Letters to a Young Poet*. Translated by Steven Mitchel, Vintage-Random House, 1986.

## ***What is a Blackberry Winter?***

According to the Tennessee Historical Society<sup>i</sup>, a Blackberry Winter is “Early to mid-May, when blackberries are in full bloom. In the Tennessee mountains, this often coincides with the last frost of spring, which can kill new plantings on the farm.” Clay Thompson<sup>ii</sup> adds onto this by noting, “it is based on the idea that blackberries flower best after such a last bout of cold weather.” Here in Rochester, Michigan, I am easily able to see that in conjunction with the publication of our literary journal. Creativity flourishes after that last cold snap.

I was just talking about the cold snap with my daughter and her friend this very morning. Her friend said, “it’s spring, we’re not supposed to have snow.” I couldn’t agree with him more and told him and my daughter that it’s not that uncommon for our area and that I had an ice storm on my birthday once. My birthday is in late April.

It appears that a Blackberry Winter is a period of flourishing after a late cold snap.

Today, I propose that a Blackberry Winter is a new creative flourishing as Rochester University becomes Rochester Christian University. It is a beginning and a period of growth.

We’re in our own spring.

A space to thrive.

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<sup>i</sup> “Blackberry Winter & Other Tennessee Little Winters.” *Tennessee Historical Society*, 20 March 2024, <https://tennesseehistory.org/blackberry-winter-tennessee-little-winters/>.

<sup>ii</sup> Thompson, Clay. “Everybody knows what Indian summer is, except you.” *The Republic*, <https://www.azcentral.com/story/claythompson/2015/04/20/seasons-summer-winter-temperature-crops/26082497/>. Accessed 20 March 2024.