

46TH EDITION

# The Tuscarora Review



A FREDERICK COMMUNITY COLLEGE MAGAZINE OF THE CREATIVE ARTS

# Mission Statement

The mission of the Frederick Community College magazine of the creative arts, *Tuscarora Review*, is to provide an annual showcase for the outstanding literary and visual art created by the College community.

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# The Tuscarora Review

*A Frederick Community College Magazine  
of the Creative Arts*

~ ESTABLISHED IN 1980 ~



7932 Opossumtown Pike | Frederick, MD 21702

[frederick.edu](http://frederick.edu)

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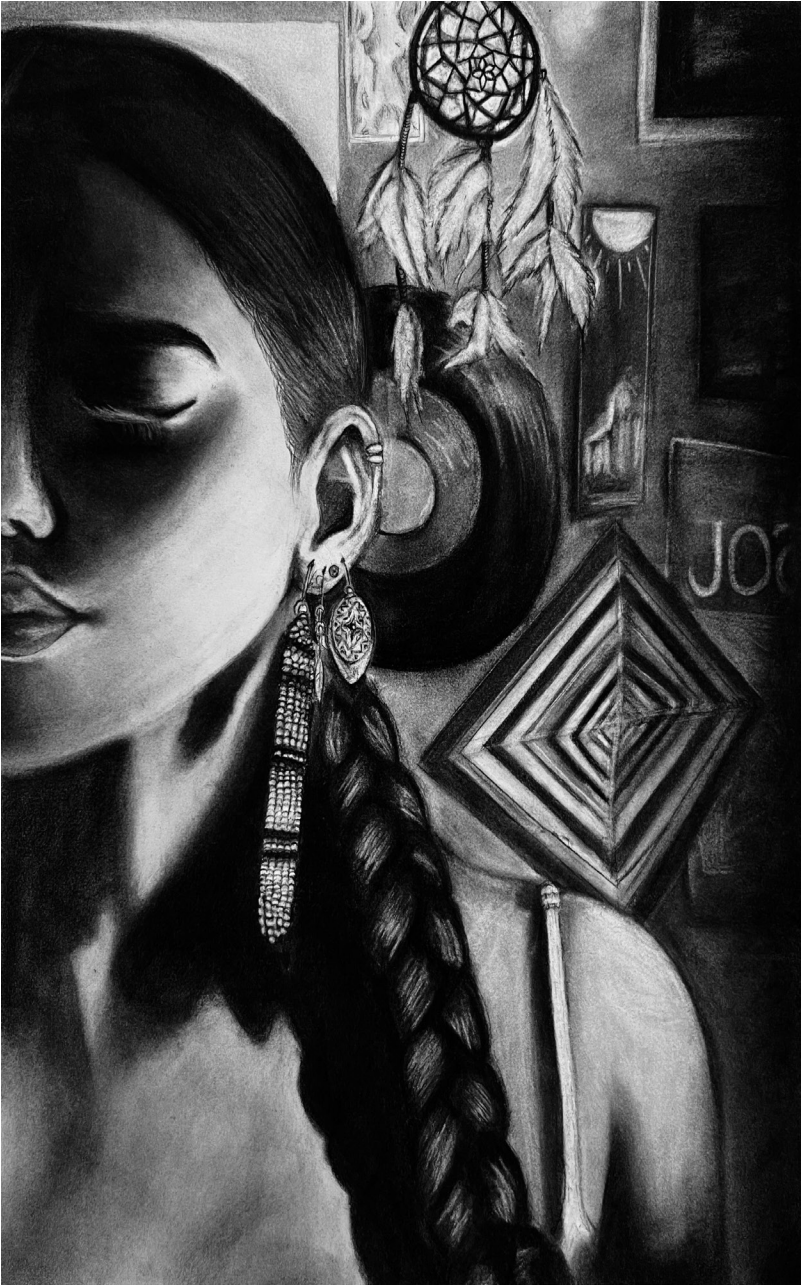
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**COLOPHON**

The magazine cover is printed on 80 pound Endurance Gloss Cover, four color inner pages are printed on 70 pound Endurance Gloss, and the inner pages are printed on 60 pound Finch 94 Smooth White Offset. The publication is perfect bound. The fonts used are Breuer Condensed Family, Breuer Text Family, Playfair Display Family, and Wingdings.



Know Thyself **Sophia Richards**

Charcoal

# Dedication

Professor Magin LaSov Gregg is a professor, mother, author, poet, and an inspiration to her students. This year, the editorial board decided to dedicate the 46th issue to Professor Gregg, who has advised this magazine for five years. We wanted students that have taken her classes to speak on behalf of this dedication. Here's what just a few of the students that she has impacted have to say about her:

## Professor Gregg...

"... always encouraged her students to be themselves; she did this first and foremost by being herself. Her classes had an unfiltered and genuine energy thanks to the students feeling safe to be themselves. I think that's Professor Gregg's strongest attribute as a professor."

"...s kindness, honesty, and authenticity made a difference in my learning experience. She made me feel supported as a mother, and encouraged as a student."

"... helped me find my voice in writing. Her guidance is inspiring and her passion for writing is contagious. I am beyond grateful to have been her student."

"... is not just the embodiment of a model educator but a person of naturally endearing character who shines as a beacon exuding warmth, understanding, and a major ingredient of teaching: curiosity."

"...s classes never just felt like classes, but a space where I was free to be vulnerable and imperfect. She always gave feedback that made me feel seen as a person and confident as a writer. I couldn't be happier to have been one of her students."

"...s class was honestly the best teacher to finish my semester with. She was always deeply understanding of students and their needs, and the class felt very welcoming in her presence."

"... isn't just any educator, she is what a model professor is. She understands and communicates the needs of every individual student, and supports them in any way she can. The passion she has for the creativity she desires to inspire in students is inspiring in itself. She has and will continue to always impact students in so many positive ways."

"Very few teachers fully follow disability accommodations and even fewer understand the disabilities themselves. "Pasta" Gregg is one in a million who have made me feel seen and understood in a system that is not designed to. I thank her for that from the bottom of my heart." ■



City of Starlight **Ella Brockey-Rogers**

Pastel

# Letter From the Editor

Literary magazines require so much effort and passion from many writers, artists, editors, designers to create a legacy that lasts forever. In a few years there will be nobody actively seeking this issue of the *Tuscarora Review*, nor any previous issues. Focus will be on the new issues, as happens in time. However, that only makes this magazine even more special, because it becomes exclusive to those it means the most to, who cherish the magazine for their whole lives. So if you're reading this issue on day one, year two, or decades in the future, know that *Tuscarora Review* is something special no matter how far time takes it away from the spotlight.

If you made it into this magazine, now or in the past, I hope you are as proud as I am to be a part of something so incredible. If you didn't, or have never submitted, I encourage you to in the future, so your work may become part of the powerful legacy of the *Tuscarora Review*

Before anybody else, I would first like to thank you, the reader, for picking up this issue and having the interest to see the wonderfully crafted pieces and artwork it holds within. I will next thank everyone that has helped this issue come to life:

To Professor Magin LaSov Gregg, our Faculty Advisor, who we dedicate this issue to: You helped so greatly with the creation of this issue. There are many things I could say, but as a whole, you've done an incredible job advising this team. You've also become an inspiration to me over the two semesters that I've gotten to know you, with how caring, kind, talented, and inspirational you are to me and everybody around you. Alongside being an amazing professor, you dual as an incredible mother. I can see just how your son matters to you and how much you love, care, and do for him. You have been, and continue to be a role model to all, especially me.

To Isa Rivera, our Chief Copy Editor: Your journalism and editing skills have been key in this process, especially in regard to the incredible Interview that you conducted this year. The flow of conversation and execution was incredible. This magazine would simply not be near as incredible as it has turned out without the immense help you have provided this semester.

To Riley DeVore, our Assistant Copy Editor: You have helped immensely with this issue and beyond. You brought a much needed varied opinion on many pieces that helped spark engaging discussions when considering pieces for the issue. Without you in this team it would simply have not felt whole. Never stop being your incredible and authentic self.

To Breanna Earl, our Assistant Copy Editor: You have done so much for us within the editorial board, with copy editing and selecting pieces. You are a very talented writer with a very successful future in the works for yourself. You have so much potential and I am sure that whatever you do after FCC and beyond you will do it incredibly.

To Joe Mattern, our Art Director: First I must comment that your style is impeccable. Every outfit you wear is like that of a rock star. Your skills in the arts have proved crucial for the selection of artwork in this year's issue. It would not look as visually stunning as it does without the work you have done with the art faculty, and being the first eyes on artwork selection.

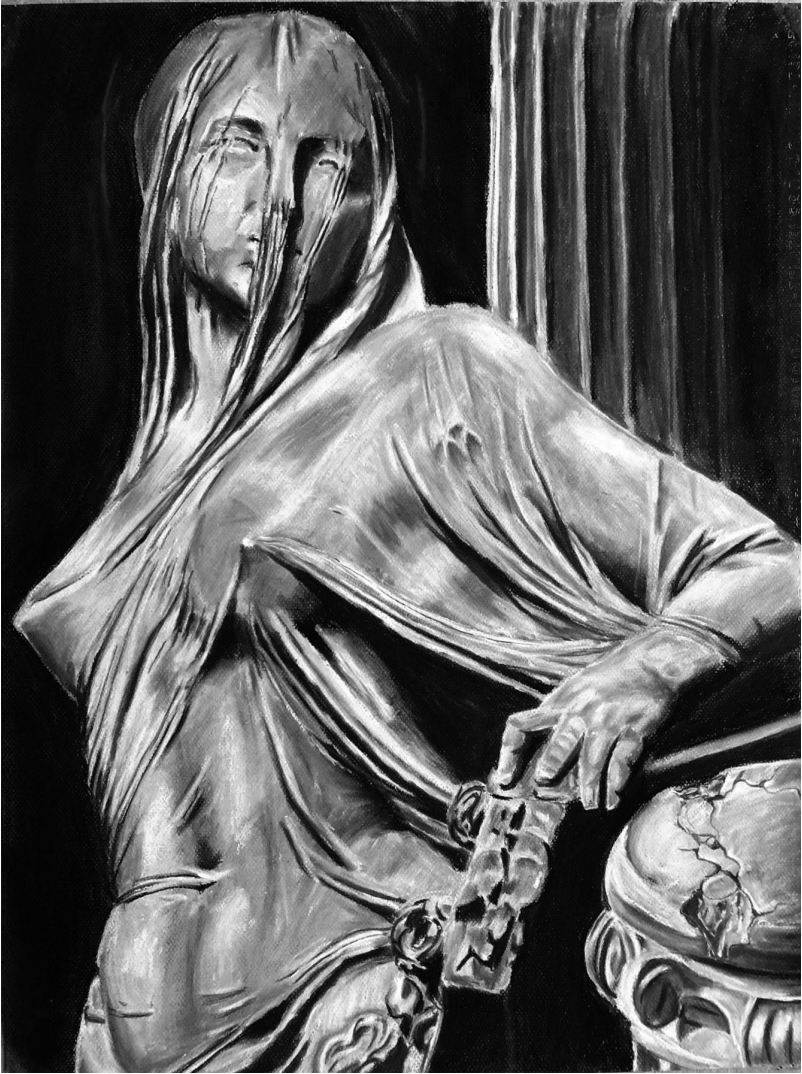
To Lori Schulman, our Graphic Designer: I've noticed you have never been individually thanked for your contributions alongside everybody else, which you rightfully deserve. At the point of writing this letter, due to the order of the process, we have not yet truly begun to work with you yet. However, I have seen the work you've done previously for the *Tuscarora Review*, and you are a very talented Graphic Designer. I am confident you will do an excellent job with this issue, and as all readers will see, I was correct.

To Valerie Fox, Wendell M. Poindexter, Cynthia Baush, and Georgia Geisser: I thank you for your contributions to this issue as well. All of you deserve the thanks that I have never seen you receive alongside the rest. Even though you are working behind the scenes, your efforts still matter greatly to all of us and we appreciate each one of you!

Finally, to my personal biggest inspiration, the reason I wanted to take part in this project to begin with, GTJHS English teacher Mary Beam: For both my Junior and Senior year, I took your creative writing class, and we created a literary magazine. That was my favorite class in high school and helped me keep going and shape me into who I am today. Without you and your will to push back against the school when they wanted to end the literary magazine, I would've never gotten to the point of being Editor-In-Chief for the *Tuscarora Review*. You are a strong, inspirational, funny, and wisdom-carrying woman. You are truly somebody I strive to be in life.

The pages ahead are full of humanity. They include hidden struggles that aren't commonly discussed because they are stigmatized by people in power who it doesn't personally benefit to address. I hope this issue holds as much power as we have crafted it to, and you breathe the fresh air within these pages. Be your true self, be proud to be you, and be vocal about the burdens you and others carry silently. We're all human and the hatred of some want to erase that, so take the pencil back, turn it around, and redraw the story others want to erase. ■

— Eclipse Fowle, *Editor-in-Chief*



Veiled Guardian Maddie Ryerson

Pastel



Crash Boat Beach **Milanna Young**

Pastel

# Alone

By Breanna Earl

Within the four-and-a-half walls  
of my eternal sanctuary;  
my mother's hollering  
and my father's cursing  
are drowned out by a squall,  
a whirlwind of memories.

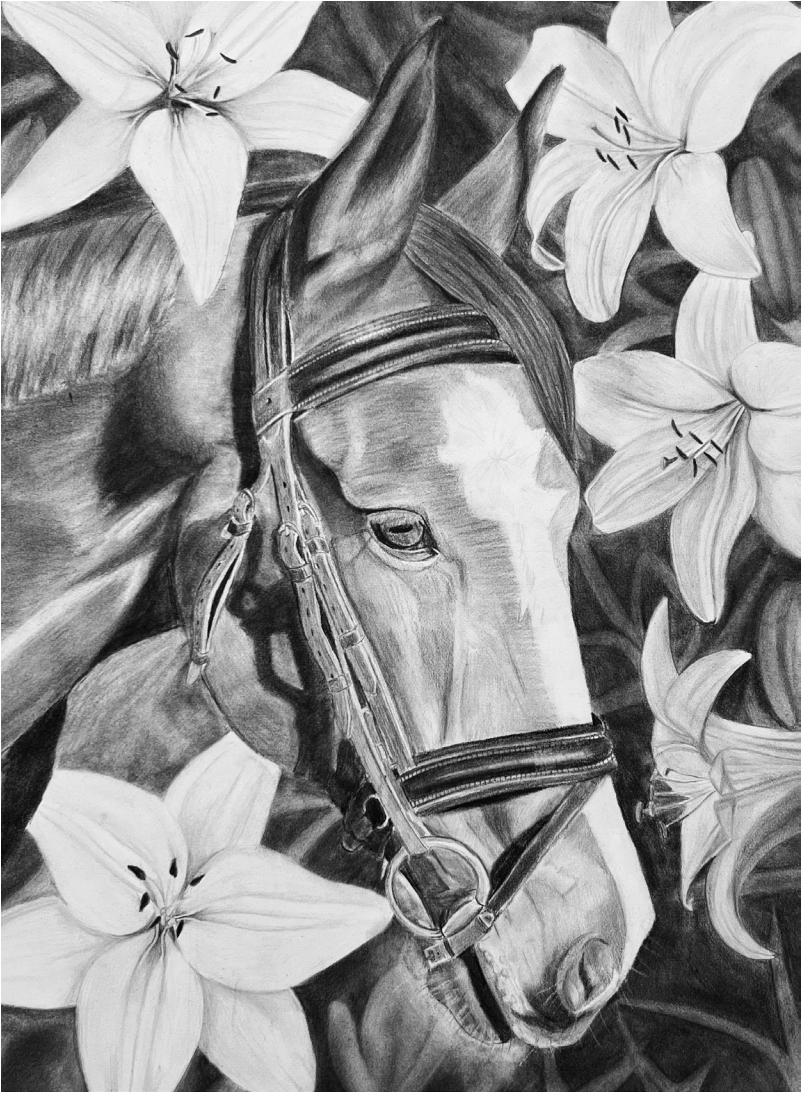
My first-born brother with a violent temper  
acts blindly on a hair-trigger.  
A misspoken word  
is an intentional slight.  
An accidental glance  
is a purposeful glare.  
So make sure to hold your tongue  
and keep your head down.

My second-born brother is uncertain and changes at the flip of a coin.  
One day, he'll offer a trip down  
to the basketball court to play "Horse."  
One evening, he'll sport a look of disdain  
like he's just squished a bug under bare foot.  
So make sure to watch your tone  
and don't smile too wide.

My only sister is my lifeline,  
the sole person I can rely on.  
But she has a life of her own  
that she wants to keep hidden.  
She holds things close to her chest  
in hopes that people will leave her be.  
So make sure not to ask too much  
and learn how to read the air.

They've been with me my whole life.  
Of course I wouldn't trade them for anything.  
But sometimes I look at the pink flowers  
painted in soft strokes around me,  
and I wonder if this is what it's like to truly feel alone. ■

**Author's Inspiration:** This piece of poetry started out from an assignment prompt where I needed to write a poem combining enjambment and end-stopped lines. The poem itself draws on my perception of my own life based on exaggerated depictions of things I've had to go through or have seen. This poem is mainly a form of self-expression that is meant to convey the feelings of isolation, fear, and rejection that I've come to associate with my family at times.



Narrative **Anna Schmuck**

Graphite

# Bonfire

By Leah Wright

The flames licked at the shadows  
Of the warm night,  
Sending sparks skittering  
Along the breeze,  
As the smell of cheap hot dogs  
And burnt s'mores  
Reached my red, runny nose

My eyes traced the blaze,  
Watching as the strangers around me  
Tended to it,  
Their laughter and conversations  
Fading as the roaring in my ears  
Got louder with each *pop*  
Of the wooden logs.

The inferno stung my eyes,  
Already wet with tears  
That I refused to shed again.  
But I could not look away,  
Not when the fire and I  
Both seemed to rage and scorch  
Until we had nothing left to burn. ■

**Author's Inspiration:** I wrote this piece as part of an assignment in my poetry course and it ended up resonating with me more than I thought it would.



Floating Koi **Collin Dollarhide**

Charcoal

# Piggy

By Kaylie O'Day

A gift from Rebekah's mother,  
wrapped in second birthday paper,  
you slipped into my arms  
like you had always belonged.

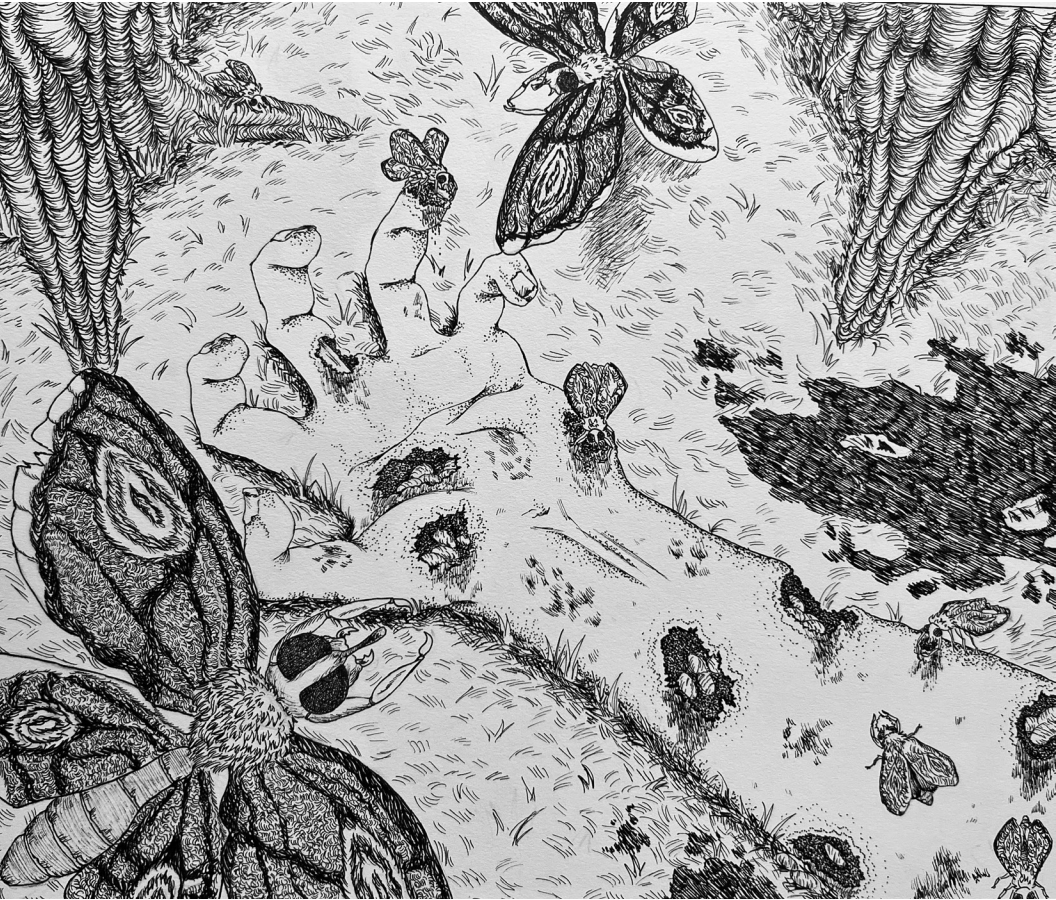
Thumb, the pink bear, faded first,  
and the row of tiny ducks lined the shelves,  
but you stayed  
beads spilling out night after night,  
stitched seams tightening like whispered promises.

You rode in the backseats,  
hid in backpacks,  
waited on unfamiliar pillows  
when the world felt too big.  
A best friend made of fabric and thread,  
you never let go.

One day, anger sharp as scissors  
took your tail,  
yet you stayed.

Now, twenty-one years later,  
you still curl in my bed,  
your body patched but faithful.  
Your shape inked into my skin,  
so even when stitches fail,  
and beads are gone,  
I will lie with you until my final dawn. ■

**Author's Inspiration:** I am submitting "Piggy" as part of my coursework assignment and to practice the submission process. I chose this piece because it explores attachment and endurance of a lifelong best friend in a physical object. The physical wear and (lack of) repair shows the memory and time put into this object.



Beast **Kylie Taylor**

Pen and Ink

# Towards the Sun

By Mia Florencia Guillen Swenson

Sometimes I still smell the stench of the city on my skin, even after all this time. Not the good parts of it, not the smell of bakeries in the morning or rain on brick, but the kind that clings no matter how many showers you take. The smoke, cheap beer, and the ache of too many people living too close together. Brooklyn was my whole world once. I thought if I stayed long enough, I'd learn to love it. Instead, it began to feel like the air itself was closing in.

Eddie used to call me "his girl" like it was a compliment. We'd sit in his apartment with the windows open, pretending the noise outside was music. He'd drink until his words turned heavy, and I'd lie on my back, staring at the ceiling, counting the cracks. I told myself this was life, that everyone just got by and called it love. But I was twenty-three and already felt older than my mother had ever been.

One night, lying awake on the fire escape, I looked down at the streets glowing wet under the streetlights and thought, *If I don't leave now, I never will.* The sirens were crying like they always did. Someone was laughing below, and it all felt like a song I'd heard too many times.

I packed before sunrise. One small suitcase, the records I couldn't part with, and my mother's polka dotted scarf. I didn't even write a note. I remember the sound the door made when it closed, soft and certain, like the city was sighing in relief to let me go.

The Greyhound station smelled like exhaust and instant coffee. I bought a ticket that said "Nevada," though I had no idea what waited there. I just wanted to be far enough away that the skyline couldn't follow me.

Those first few days on the bus felt like being unstitched. I watched the buildings fall away into fields, then into hills, then into skies so wide I couldn't believe they were real. I slept sitting up, ate diner waffles with strangers, and watched my reflection in the window change with the light. Somewhere past Chicago, I started to look like someone else, or maybe I just started to *see* myself.

When the money ran low, I hitchhiked. The first time I stuck my thumb out, my heart nearly leapt out of my chest, but the trucker who stopped smiled like he'd seen a thousand girls just like me. We talked about weather, about how the

desert smells before rain, about nothing at all. Then, there were the couples, the college kids, the ones who offered food or a cigarette or a story. Each one took me a little farther.

I kept a small notebook in my bag, where I wrote about the sky, the way the wind felt on the back of a pickup, and the way the light changed when the day began to die. I was learning how to see again.

Then came the motorcycles. I heard them before I saw them, a low hum like thunder caught in the earth. There were four of them, leather jackets and worn jeans with sunburned faces. One of them, Jack, had the kind of smile that looked permanent, like he was born grinning at the world.

"Are you heading west?" he asked.

"Where else is there to go?" I said.

He laughed, then offered me a seat. That was it. The road became a heartbeat, steady and loud beneath me. The first time I climbed on, I hesitated. Then the engine came alive, and so did I.

There was something about being pressed against his back, the smell of Marlboros, sweat and leather mixing with the dry desert air. It felt dangerous and holy all at once. I rested my chin on his shoulder and watched the sun sink low, turning everything around us gold. My hair whipped across my face, and I laughed into the wind. I remember thinking, *This is it. This is what it means to be alive.*

The sunset turned the world soft and strange. The sky melted from orange to purple to the kind of blue you only see in the ocean at dusk. I could almost hear the city inside me quieting down. The hum of the bike beneath us blended with the sound of the wind, and I thought, *maybe this is what freedom sounds like.*

Jack didn't talk much, but when he did, it mattered. At a rest stop once, under a flickering light, he said, "You know, most people never actually leave." I asked him what he meant. He shrugged, kicked at the gravel, and said, "They go places, sure, but they carry the same walls with them. You don't strike me as one of those."

I didn't know if he was right. Maybe I had walls too, just invisible ones. That night, as we rode past the endless stretch of desert, I felt them start to crumble.

We stopped at a motel called The Silver Sky. The pool was dry, the sign buzzed, and everything smelled faintly of cigarettes and rain that would never come. I sat outside, feet on the railing, writing in my notebook while the others played cards. Jack came out and handed me a beer.

"What are you always writing about?" he asked.

"Nothing that makes sense yet," I said.

"Then you're probably writing the truth."

I smiled. He wasn't wrong.

The next morning, we left before dawn. The air was cold enough to sting, and the sky was still half asleep. I held tighter to him than usual, feeling the vibration of the engine in my chest, and it felt like a heartbeat that wasn't mine. The sun came up slow, light flowing across the desert like spilled paint, and for a moment everything glowed.

Nevada arrived without announcement. Just a sign on the side of the road, worn and leaning, the letters fading. The horizon had changed. It stretched wider, freer.

I don't remember what happened after that, not exactly. Time began to move differently. The days blurred into each other, the way heat blurs the air. I remember the feeling, that sense that I had escaped not just a place, but a version of myself.

Now, when I close my eyes, I can still feel the road beneath me. I can still smell the Marlboros and the leather and the wind. I can still see that sunset bleeding into blue, like the ocean learning how to become sky.

Maybe that's what I was chasing all along. Not a destination. Not a man. Not even freedom. Just the feeling of being young enough to believe that every horizon was a promise. ■

**Author's Inspiration:** This is my first finalized piece. I decided to write this based on the film "The Woman of the Hour" after I had watched it.



A Study of Chiaroscuro **Cameron Dawson**

Pastel

# After the Fire

By Sigrid Gray

The trees remember even in ash,  
they hold the shape of wind.  
Char still clings to bark  
like a secret unwilling  
to burn completely.

You can smell it, not smoke,  
but the memory of heat.  
A curl of scorched fern,  
a melted bottle  
winking from the soot.

Some things survive  
because they hide.  
A fox den,  
untouched beneath the roots.  
Ember-orange eyes watching.  
Waiting.

I step carefully over  
what used to be a swing,  
half-buried in black soil.  
The chain still sings in the breeze,  
though no one calls.

Even silence has weight here.  
It leans into the ribs of fallen pines,  
whispering their own names  
back to the sky.

And I?  
I gather what remains:  
a nail, a feather, a scrap  
of scorched blue cloth.  
Small things.  
But they don't lie. ■

**Author's Inspiration:** "After the Fire" was inspired by the idea that even after destruction, traces of life and memory remain. In burned forests and in our own lives, some things survive because they are hidden deep, or because they are too stubborn to disappear. This poem explores what remains after the flames, the scars, the silence, and the small pieces that tell the truth about what was lost and what continues on.

# A Perfect Meal

By Audrey Houghton

Tupperware, tinted orange,  
paired with an ill-fitting lid.  
Banged up, worn  
and left in my care  
with a "don't worry  
about giving it back."  
It smells vaguely of spices  
which never graced my kitchen,  
even with soap, suds,  
and warm water.

Surely, it held many meals,  
but I'm certain  
none were as delicious  
as the one it came with;  
when I opened the door,  
puffy eyes, shaking hands,  
and you held it out to me  
in the sticky spring air.

You'd asked me earlier  
if I'd eaten  
and I lied,  
my hands missing the keys.  
"It was a weird typo,"  
you told me.  
"I figured you could use a meal."

So you hugged me,  
even though it was too hot to hug  
and I thanked you  
even though my voice wavered  
and we didn't talk  
much more than that.

When you left,  
I curled up on the couch  
and popped off the lid.  
The smell of warm spices  
brought tears to my eyes  
and I took a small bite,  
then another.

Once I had finished,  
my tears were dry  
and for the first time  
since it happened  
I slept,  
arms curled around  
empty tupperware. ■

**Author's Inspiration:** When you feel like you're at your worst, you'll always figure out who your real "people" are. This poem is dedicated to the friends who showed up for me when I needed them most. Pasta, grapes, and two hugs saved me from one of my most intense spirals. I owe you so much.



Stature of Athena **Heidi Gonzalez**

Charcoal



Word Project Aliyah Albert

Marker



Witness **Vee Donoso-Molina**

Conte Crayon



Space Leopard **Riley Durfee**

Conte Crayon



Free Fish **Lindsay Van Housen**

Foam-Core and Acrylic Pain Sculpture

# Peonies, Roses, and Vines

By Kylie Taylor

I am too short to reach the curtain rod, even on my tiptoes. Daylight streams in past the panes, harsh and illuminating, making my eyes squint and my head pound. I almost drop the blanket in my hands. Dark grey, ratty, old. It hasn't been washed in years. If this were my house, I'd leave nothing dirty. But this isn't my house, it was hers. I scowl and shudder from the buggy blanket germs crawling onto my skin. But it's dark enough to bar the sun's entry, so it'll have to do.

A fraying end tickles my wrist, and, from there, the germs converge into an army of ants, marching up my shoulder. I have to ignore it; this is the last window. I clench my teeth and grab an old, weak stool nearby. A stable chair from the dining room would be better, but... I just need to cover this window. Nobody will visit if they can't see inside.

The curtains are too sheer, almost like they're inviting others to look in. I would get new, opaque curtains, but my mother bought these. They may be see-through, but they're also embroidered with life—peonies, roses, and vines. I just can't get rid of them, but I do need to cover them.

I step onto the stool, which groans under my weight, and raise the blanket high. Spreading either end across the length of the window, I stuff its edges behind the curtain rod. I smile in triumph; it's finally done.

That's when my weight causes the stool to buckle. My body sways and I gasp as the stool falls apart, its legs collapsing under itself. I grasp at the blanket, but it slips from the curtain rod like I hadn't even hung it there in the first place.

I thud onto the floor, groaning from my legs' impact against the harsh, wooden stool pieces. The old, filthy, nasty, dark grey blanket falls with me and covers my whole body.

Shrieking in disgust, I can't hurl it across the room fast enough. I can just feel the spiders, ants and centipedes crawling all over me. I scratch at myself to no avail and look up at the window. Before I covered them, I used to avoid getting too close. Walking around this house was like navigating a maze on the back of a cereal box. With me so far away, anybody watching could only see a silhouette. Now I'm right in front of it, broad daylight spotlighting everything.

*Everything.*

A paralyzing fear envelops my shaking body, its vines suspending me like a marionette. It's enough to numb the aching in my legs and squash the bugs.

I'm afraid someone will see, but I can't move an inch, only stare speechless at the view in front of me like it's a sumptuous feast. Was the front yard always so yellow? Is it winter already? The rose bush she planted and loved is scraggled and brown. My throat burns with tears, but I can't even let out a sob. My eyes, blown wide, roam over the neighbor's house across the street. All I can do is close them and hope nobody walks out their front door.

Right before my eyelids shut, I catch a fleeting glimpse of the beautiful embroidery on those sheer curtains. Their liveliness mocks me. ■

**Author's Inspiration:** I heard about an indie video game named Milk Inside a Bag of Milk Inside a Bag of Milk, which is about the impact grief and loss can have on preexisting mental health issues. I thought it would be interesting to explore these concepts in this piece.

# Love Needs No Permission

By Patrick Kirby

You know that ache, don't you?  
That deep-down sense you're different,  
That voice whispering in the dark:  
Why don't I fit in their perfect picture?

I lived in that same darkness,  
Questioned every breath I took,  
Fought wars inside my chest,  
Convinced something in me was broken.

But listen close, fierce heart,  
Nothing about you needs fixing.  
That difference you carry inside?  
It's not a flaw, it's your light.

You are not too much.  
You are not too little.  
You are exactly enough.  
You are not a rough draft  
Of someone else's story.

And in this world that feels so lonely,  
Know you're held by invisible arms,  
Millions of us who've walked this road,  
Who see you, who claim you as family.

We are the ones who understand  
That love is not a battleground.  
We rise together, fierce and tender,  
Refusing their shame, choosing our joy,  
Even as they protest against us.

So let them pound their gavels,  
Let them rage in marble halls,  
Your heart was never theirs to judge.  
Your love needs no permission at all. ■

**Author's Inspiration:** This poem came from wanting to write the words I wish I had heard when I was struggling with self-acceptance—a reminder that love needs no one's permission and that we all deserve to belong exactly as we are.

# I go back to the pumpkin patch 2012

By Jessica Martin

I see us standing there,  
the four of us, small suns  
burning bright in the orange field—  
my older brother squints into the light  
looking for something distant,  
my little brother's grin wide enough to swallow the sky,  
my sister clutches a pumpkin  
too big for her hands,  
and me, somewhere between them,  
trying to hold the day still.

The air smells like hay and sugar,  
like something good before it goes.  
We are loud, unbothered,  
mud on our shoes, laughter  
caught in the wind like ribbon.  
Someone, maybe Mom? calls out, *smile!*  
and we do, as if smiling could  
keep us from growing up.

I look at us now, trapped in that photo,  
before life scattered us  
like seeds into different fields—  
before the shouting, the silence,  
the years that made us strangers  
who still know each other's voices.

I want to step into the frame  
and tell those kids: *hold on to each other,*  
tell myself: *you'll miss this—*  
*even the mud, the cold.*  
But I don't. I let them stay there,  
happy in the gold light,  
before the maze grows taller  
and it's harder to find our way out. ■

**Author's Inspiration:** I have a picture of me and my three siblings on my phone, and I was asked to write a confessional poem for my class. The picture brought so many good memories back of my childhood and intense feelings about what my relationship with them is like now and from that point on the words just flowed.

# The Mirror; the Message; Me,

By Cameron O'Connor

I see myself standing in front of the mirror, hands pressed against the sink to steady myself from falling. The reflection staring back at me does not have a face. Or maybe she does, but I can no longer recognize it. The brushstrokes blur her features, and I can't tell if love took them away or if I gave them up piece by piece, trying to be enough for someone who could never stay.

The faceless reflection is the truth of heartbreak. When he left, it felt as if he carried my image with him. My worth depended on his eyes to shape me. To prove that I exist. I loved him. I cared for him in ways that went beyond reason. The girl in the mirror began to look more like who he wanted than who I was. But love, no matter how deep, can't always be seen. So, I ask the question that has haunted me since... Why wasn't I enough?

The question follows me to my bed, to the soft glow of my phone screen. The words sit there, half-typed: *I miss you*. Three words, harmless, vibrating through my chest. My thumb hovers over the keyboard, trembling, then withdraws. I delete it, I retype it. *I miss you...* too heavy. *I miss you!* Too insistent. The punctuation feels like the weight of my heart, the invisible pressure of wanting something I know I shouldn't.

I still see him sometimes in the corner of my eye. I miss the warmth of his hands on my back, the careless laughter that came before the story ended. I miss the nights that were endless, the ease of presence. But I don't miss the



silence, the way he fell back when I spoke about myself, the impatience in his half-listening eyes. I miss a version of him that lives only in flashes, the way he would kiss me when I rambled too much, and the way he softly traced my hand when we sat together in silence. The real man was complicated, frustrating, and imperfect. I can't decide if my longing is for him, or for the idea that he might have been different.

The reflection offers no comfort, only a blankness where a face should be. She just stares. The reflection makes her feel unworthy. I wanted him to see me fully, the girl who laughed, stayed, and loved. But he only glimpsed the blur, the parts that fit the image he wanted. I became a shadow in my own life, staring at the outline of a girl who loved too much and received too little.

The absence of him has made the world feel slower, heavier, as if each second stretches, just to remind me he isn't here. I chase the memory of him, and it slips through my fingers every time, leaving me to circle the edges of myself. I want to reach out, but I hesitate; I long to be seen, but I hide under my own skin. Every desire and every restraint collide inside me, and I feel both empty and full at once.

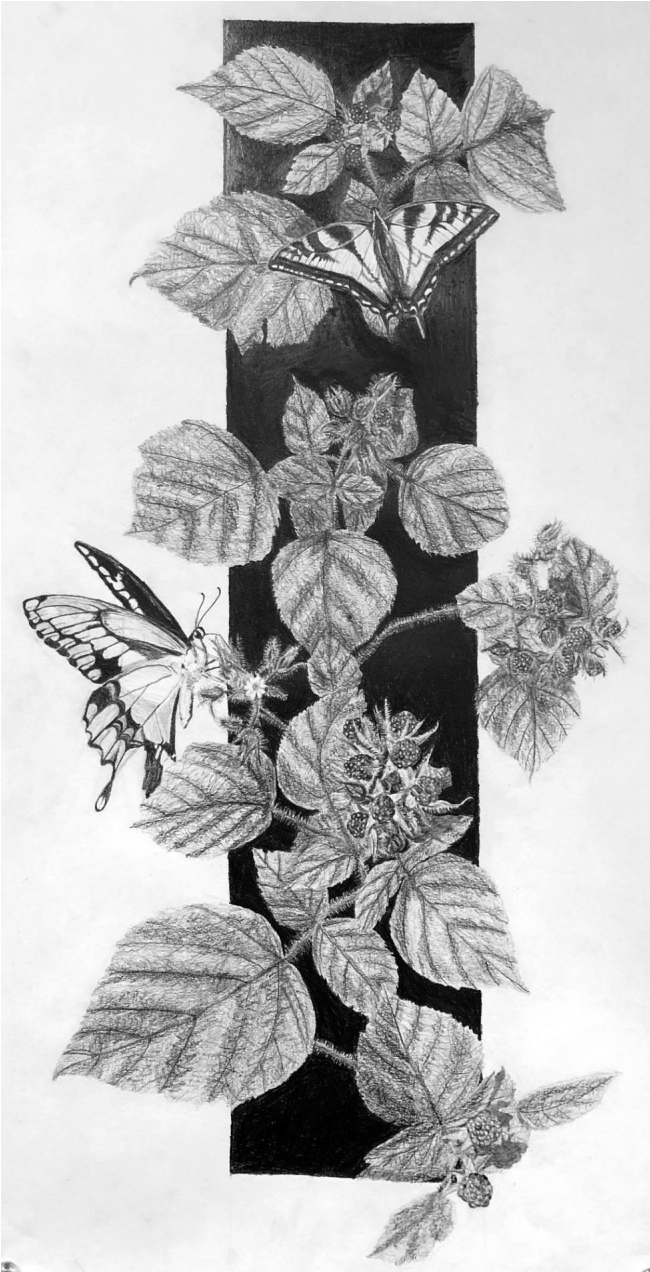
I turn the reflection in my phone away. Savoring the small victory of restraint, The relief is temporary, the ache is sharper than before. A reminder that some cravings can't be tamed by willpower alone. They run alongside our thoughts, defying control, showing that people are rarely guided by one feeling at a time. We can be hopeful, doubtful, brave, scared, loving, and angry all at once.

There is still a body here. Even without a face, she doesn't fall. The mirror blurs her features, but it can't erase her presence. Heartbreak steals, yes, but it can't take everything. Maybe not being enough for him doesn't mean I am not enough at all.

I type the words again, slower this time: *I miss you*. No punctuation, no hope. Just a whisper into silence. My finger hovers above "send," and I realize with sudden clarity that I'm not trying to reach him at all. Maybe I'm trying to reach myself. The part of me that still believes I can feel deeply without losing who I am.

I am the faceless one in the mirror, carrying both the ache of love lost and the stubbornness of survival. To love and not be chosen leaves a mark, but I don't remain faceless forever. One day, she will step back, put down the phone, and recognize me as herself. ■

**Author's Inspiration:** I wrote this piece for a creative writing class. It is based on a breakup I went through mixed with Ekphrastic writing. It was a way to creatively express the emotions I had during the breakup.



Wineberries **Carter Pelham**

Graphite

# Abecedarian

By Amelia Rourk

All of our children know their routes  
by which they will follow in  
case a person comes through their school  
doors, waving around daddy's AR.  
Each of our little ones know the exits  
from every period's class, how to  
get out without being  
heard.

If only there were a way to show them the  
juxtaposition of our  
kids holding guns,  
let alone running to escape them.

Most people from our parents' generations  
never had to so much as imagine jumping  
out the window or  
pushing desks in front of the door,  
quietly crowding in the corner, teachers  
reading to the  
six year olds to keep  
them calm.

Unable to cover all of their ears for every *pop pop pop*.  
Violence should be feared, yes, but...  
why should our children be figuring out what  
x represents if  
y is the number of students shot and  
z is the number that survived. ■

**Author's Note:** Amelia Rourk is a life-long resident of Frederick and a student at FCC. She enjoys writing in her free time between work and school. She is not yet published elsewhere but hopes to have a long list someday.



Shattered Identity **Lindsay Van Housen**

Charcoal

# Empty Cart

By Sigrid Gray

The line snakes past the shuttered door,  
hands shaking over worn IDs,  
voices muffled by the hum of fluorescent lights.

A slip of paper says: Denied.  
No more stamps, no more promise  
of bread, milk, rice,  
the staples of quiet dignity.

Children's eyes ask questions  
I cannot answer,  
their small hands reach for invisible meals  
that vanish in bureaucracy.

We count coins, scrape jars,  
and pray the cupboards stretch  
just one more day.

Outside, the city moves,  
indifferent wheels turning,  
while hunger waits patiently  
at the edge of the table. ■

**Author's Inspiration:** "Empty Cart" grew from witnessing the people who are losing their SNAP benefits: families, elders, and unhoused individuals who suddenly face hunger with fewer resources than ever. This poem reflects the fear, frustration, and quiet dignity of those waiting in long lines only to be told "denied." I wrote it because hunger is an issue that affects so many, and I want to acknowledge their reality and remind us of our shared responsibility to one another.



Running Out of Time **Maddie Ryerson**

Charcoal

# Like a Mirage

By Breanna Earl

"You see that miniature set back there?"

"Miniature...?"

Million had frozen in front of a large rectangular window of a humble hobby shop. Edgar had always been a little skeptical of this mysterious weirdo's supposed age, but regardless, he'd figured that the guy was far too big to be excited by things so small. Still, he trailed back to look through that window, and his hooded hazel eyes managed to find exactly what Million was staring at.

It was a DIY miniature kit for a cluttered little bedroom, not so messy as it was disorganized. Edgar told himself it was only because it was so hard to see from where they were standing that he insisted they go inside to get a better look at that set. So they pushed open the door, triggering a soft jingle from the bell above it, and made their way to the area holding the miniatures. While Million was deeply enthralled by the adorably tiny scenes in front of him, Edgar's gaze wandered to the shelves of the store, the countless items displayed above them creating a tasteless army of useless junk.

The collectible anime figurines he'd always thought were for overgrown children stood out among them as the only thing he'd seen as even somewhat worth wasting money on. The shop's cabin-like aesthetic mixed with its unsightly hanging fixtures of swollen, incandescent bulbs did little in the way of highlighting their appeal. Instead, it made Edgar's eyes ache as they unconsciously squinted at his less than remarkable surroundings.

He'd quickly gotten enough of this unkempt little spot, but when his attention returned to the miniatures, Million had already moved on. At some point, he'd begun hopping around the modest shop like a whack-a-mole, popping his head up between aisles from time to time with an animated smile on his face. It was too much work to try and look after the blond freak or convince him to leave, so Edgar resigned himself to taking a little stroll through each aisle. Never taking the time to do much more than glance at the items around him, Edgar's patience was already running thin as he felt the urge to just head back outside and wait for his companion to finish messing around.

He'd reached the end of the puzzle aisle when a quiet, yet enchanting mechanical melody crept over to him. Its cajoling notes intruded his ears with each tick and embraced him so warmly that Edgar couldn't help but veer to its source, a cherry wooden music box modeled to look like a mini gramophone. The fake record stationed in the middle spun without end as a dulcet sound continued to flow out of that lustrous golden horn, seemingly creating a world of its own in the back of the hobby shop.

"It's nice, isn't it?"

Million must have been pulled in by the tune as well. Without warning, he had popped up beside Edgar, exhaling a profound sigh.

Ignoring the small jolt that wracked his body, Edgar curtly responded, "I guess."

"I used to have a music box like this. It had all sorts of ugly colors splashed on it. Mom said I got my hands on it when I was finger-painting," Million recounted. His eyes seemed distant, as if staring at something far beyond that music box as he spoke. "It was green, and red, and purple, and yellow. I bet you would've hated looking at it, with your OCD and all."

Edgar snorted, "I don't have OCD."

Million chuckled. As Edgar deigned to turn and look at him, he noticed Million wringing his hands again. It was the same nervous habit that he'd had when talking about his childhood before. Edgar imagined that Million used to have someone to hold his hand whenever he did this, but he strictly refused to be that person.

Eventually, Million clasped his hands together as he spoke longingly, "You know, it's been so long since then. I wish... I could've shown you my music box."

Edgar found it hard to look away from that quiet Million; it was such a rare sight. With his mouth shut, one could say that there was a tranquil beauty about him. His thick brows were just as carefree as him, lounging high above a pair of glass-like eyes as dark as black coffee. His pupils were indiscernible from his irises, but the mystique afforded by that was voided by his cheerful demeanor. No matter what, his full lips always looked as if on the verge of a joyous smile.

Everything about Million felt like it was a trap that Edgar couldn't risk falling for. There was a nondescript danger to the idea of prodding for more. So, even as his mind raced with questions, Edgar couldn't say anything, only emitting a low "hm" as he listened to that tune, with Million by his side.

He stood for what felt like hours, that otherworldly lullaby soothing even the aching soles of his feet. He stood for so long he felt as if the song had embedded itself in his brain. In a few more moments, he would've become one with the music box, and hummed every note with tone deaf confidence.

But it stopped.

Edgar couldn't tell when he had closed his eyes, but when he opened them, that nostalgic little music box was nowhere to be found. In the space it should've occupied was now a dense stack of vintage vinyl records, all neatly packed into custom envelopes. There wasn't a trace of that faux gramophone to be seen, not even a lingering note of its melody in the air.

No longer taken in by the allure of the hobby shop's quiet atmosphere, Edgar stalked towards the front door, brushing off the cashier's jubilant *Have a nice evening!* with a nod as he stepped outside. Only when the cool autumn wind pressed against his balmy cheeks and Edgar heard the sound of city streets bustling with lively talks and passing cars did he realize he was missing something.

"Mill-"

"I got cheesecake!" Turning the corner of the block, Million came sprinting towards Edgar with a plastic bag labeled "Laneswood Bistro" swinging from his hand. He swung the bag towards Edgar, nearly walloping him in the face, and said, "I just remembered I had a coupon for a free dessert, so I figured I'd get one! I know you don't really like strawberries, so I got a normal one. Now, the rule does say that I'm entitled to sixty percent of the cake since I bought it, but I'll graciously grant you half this time."

It was a good thing that he didn't see Million's smug expression. With how his stomach churned, Edgar couldn't be sure that he wouldn't accidentally sock him in the face out of irritation. Instead, he snatched the bag from Million's hand and eyed him warily.

This, as usual, only evoked Million's confusion, his head tilting curiously as he asked, "What'cha starin' at?"

Edgar shook his head, breathing out a sigh before stealing one last glance through the shop window. "Nothing, I guess."

The secluded space in the back of the hobby shop where he'd been not long ago wasn't visible from where he stood. Those same inane troops of cluttered garbage clouded his view once again, eliciting a spike of indignation that roiled deep in his chest.

A stormy frown weighed down his face as Edgar began walking off, keeping his head down. Naturally, Million followed eagerly as he asked, "Where are you going?"

"Home."

"What about the library?"

"Not going."

Surely, Million was going to try to convince him not to give up on studying for the day. He was going to mention how bad it was for a person's mental health to stay cooped up inside sleeping all the time or make up some excuse about how just being at the library would make him smarter, even if he didn't want to read. In fact, he was probably going to use this as an opportunity to say that, if Edgar was worried about the cheesecake, he'd generously eat all of it outside for him.

Like he predicted, the other man hadn't given up just yet. "Then why don't we stop by that store you really like on the way?"

"I..." For once, Edgar was pleasantly surprised with Million. There was no hint of joking in his voice, so Edgar could only assume he was attempting to be thoughtful. Though, considering he'd already given up on his degree, the more likely reason for why he was being so agreeable was because he would've been bored just sitting there twiddling his thumbs like an idiot. Even so, Edgar wasn't going to complain or argue. He just wanted to go home.

"Sure."

"Great! Then we can finally get that music box you're always staring at!"

A pang of burning electricity bolted through Edgar's chest. If what he had been feeling before was the beginning of a storm rolling in, what he was feeling now was a whirling tempest that threatened to rip his heart from his chest and smear it across the sidewalk. As he whipped around, the cheesecake nearly about to fly out of its bag, he hurriedly looked over at that hobby shop, only to see an obscure, nameless cafe in its place.

His eyes bulged almost unnaturally from his head, as if hoping that continuing to stare would put the hobby shop back where it was supposed to be. But no matter, if he glared until his eyes watered or blinked until his eyelids grew tired, nothing changed. The cafe stood firm like it had been there for centuries, and clinging to the last shred of composure he had left, Edgar shakily asked, "Music box?"

"Yeah?" responded Million. Those same blithe eyebrows had now been drawn down to his eyes, which swirled with a gut-wrenching emptiness that didn't match his amused grin. "You know, the one you said looked like your old one?"

Edgar knew he shouldn't ask. There wasn't anything he could do anyway, but he couldn't help it. The world was fleeting around him, but Million stayed eerily still, his face that had always mildly annoyed Edgar when he found himself looking at it now completely indecipherable. It was like he was waiting for something.

"You're not... you're not real, are you?" Edgar's throat tightened. Even his own body was trying to betray him in its bid to keep him from saying too much.

It was this that finally made Million's expression fall. His warmth was gone, replaced with a sharp, cold leer that appeared to see right through him. That special smile of his was gone, and his Million had disappeared with it. There was no trace of that familiar light left in the man that stood before him. There was only a stranger that wore his friend's face. ■

**Author's Inspiration:** This piece came from a creative writing prompt where I tried to explore the complexities of a character through the story. Overall, it's also a part of a larger mission of mine to give a story to these two names that have been sitting in my mind for years. For the time being though, I wanted to write an excerpt centered around the two characters' dynamic that would leave more questions than answers for the reader.



A Burden Passed Down Ella Brockey-Rogers

Charcoal

# Late Nights, Early Mornings

By Sigrid Gray

The house is quiet now,  
except for the hum of the fridge  
and my pencil scratching  
through another page.

My son's backpack waits by the door,  
tiny shoes beside it,  
ready for tomorrow.

Sometimes I wonder  
if he'll remember these nights;  
me at the kitchen table,  
books open,  
coffee gone cold,  
chasing a better life for both of us.

He sleeps,  
and I study.  
Two dreams growing  
under the same roof. ■

**Author's Inspiration:** "Late Nights, Early Mornings" comes from a personal place. As a parent studying and working toward a better future, I often find myself awake long after my child has fallen asleep. These quiet hours when his tiny shoes wait by the door and my books are spread across the table are where hope and exhaustion meet. This poem honors the sacrifices made by so many parents who are pushing through tired nights to create more opportunities for their children.

# Cracks in the System

By Shandalin Shivers

Crack didn't just break pipes  
it broke homes,  
hearts,  
and hope.

I saw my mother disappear  
into smoke and silence,  
chasing peace  
in all the wrong places.

They called it a war on drugs,  
but it felt like a war on us.  
On Black bodies,  
on poor families,  
on people who needed help  
not prison.

But she came back.  
One meeting, one prayer,  
one choice at a time.  
She fought.  
And I stood by her,  
even as a child  
waiting for a hug that didn't come.

Now she's healed.  
Now she helps others.  
Her story is proof  
that recovery is real,  
and love is stronger than addiction. ■

**Author's Inspiration:** This piece is inspired by the unforgettable trauma and strength that came from experiencing crack addiction within my household during my adolescent school years. It's an issue that remains deeply relevant today, yet often feels forgotten in the broader conversation of our current war on drugs.

# Tad Talk: An Interview with Tad Janes

*Tad Janes is a full-time theater professor at Frederick Community College, where he has worked as a program manager for theater since 1993. At FCC, he teaches courses in acting, stagecraft, directing, and production. Additionally, Professor Janes co-founded the Maryland Ensemble Theater, and is currently the producing artistic director. Locally, he's credited with creating a vibrant local community theater scene in Frederick, however the editorial board was surprised to learn that Professor Janes also brought original theater productions to FCC and built a vibrant program. Theater production is now embedded in the life of our college. We chose Professor Janes as our interview subject to honor the powerful but often behind-the-scenes role he's played at FCC.*



## **1. How has your experience teaching classes and working in theater at FCC been?**

Overall, it's been a good experience. My favorite part of the job is being with students in class, in production, in club meetings, or improv rehearsals. I'm more interested in what the students need or what they want. I've started to realize that my job in life is to try to get people excited about live performance and live theater. It's interesting to see the way the world is going with so much technology and social media and now AI. All this content being delivered on a screen instead of live. I think that it makes live events more valuable, and maybe I'm overly optimistic, but I do think that live events provide something that you can't get on a screen.

**2. We understand that you were one of the founders of the MET (Maryland Ensemble Theater) and are currently the artistic director there. What is the story of that?**

That's what brought me to this area, really. I was working in Chicago right out of college for about five years. I was doing all kinds of shows: improv comedy, musicals, playing music, and singing at bars. Then I got a job working in Shepherdstown University at the Contemporary American Theater Festival in the summer of '91 when they first started. I grew up in West Virginia, but I'd never been in the panhandle of West Virginia, and I'd never been to Frederick before. I was around this area during those summers. The second year I met a woman who was from this area, and then we ended up marrying. With a group of people, we talked about what we wanted to do with our lives in the industry. There were around six of us, and we said, 'Why don't we all work together and then we can all work for each other. 'You do the sketch comedy, you do the main plays, you do the classes, you do Shakespeare.' So then we started working for each other, doing productions, and started to gain notoriety. We got a fan base, and built a mailing list. We eventually started teaching classes, meeting students and parents, and building a swell of interest. Then over five years, we started producing theater under Maryland Ensemble Theater in 1997 and then we opened a theater space in 1998. We've been producing ever since.

**3. What would you say is your absolute favorite form of theater?**

That's a tough question. There's a slice of theater that we've been doing here for a while. We don't do it every year, but a couple years ago, we did a piece called "South and Saints," where we talked to members of the historic African American neighborhood here in Frederick, and learned their stories. Then, we cast six African American actors to produce this piece that we did based on community voices and what that neighborhood went through pre civil rights to the civil rights era, then to what integration looked like, and ultimately gentrification. I really like those kinds of pieces that we build. We also built one piece with the Heartly House that was a domestic violence awareness piece. I think those are some of the most effective pieces we've done.

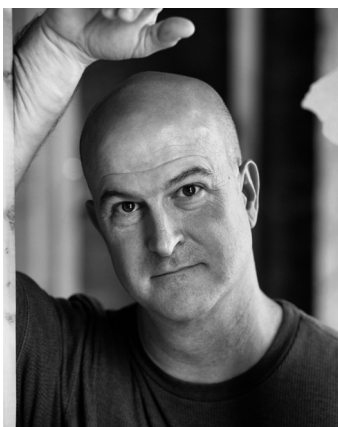
**4. In contrast, did you have the desire earlier in life to do anything other than theater or teaching?**

I thought about a lot of things. I thought about doing law at one point. Maybe architecture would have worked for me, but I mean, I started doing theater when I was in elementary school. I did a play and the principal of the school said, 'I think you should do this on the stage for the whole school, K through sixth grade, Tomorrow!' I'm sure it was like 10 minutes long and really dorky. Then in high school, I got into theater. I then got into college and got a full-ride

scholarship for theater. Eventually I was like, "Well, I think I'd like to get my master's degree in theater too." We were starting a theater company, so I got my master's degree in Arts Administration because nobody else (in the company) really knew how to run a business.

**5. What hobbies do you have and are passionate about outside of theater related activities and projects?**

I'm pretty busy. Doing shows, doing plays, directing shows, acting, reading plays, as well as running theater FCC, teaching classes, and doing administrative stuff with Maryland Ensemble Theater. However, I like to play guitar, I have an E-Bike that I ride sometimes, and I like vacationing. Going to different places. My hobbies around the house are playing guitar and singing. My wife always jokes that that's going to be my retirement job.



**6. What would you say is your greatest accomplishment in your life?**

Definitely starting an organization that's still going. When we first started, we were just a bunch of kids who wanted to employ each other and create a home base where we could do work elsewhere as well. Eventually it branched out into an organization that is respected in the community and as part of the fabric of the town, and I think people will recognize that.

**7. If you were able to direct or act in any show, musical, or perform with any improv troupe, anything of the sort, what or who would that be?**

My life has been so varied that it's hard to pick one thing. Doing a review show at Second City would be a lot of fun. Second City is kind of like Saturday Night Live, but it's been around longer. In Chicago, they have been doing sketch comedy since the 50s, so it's kind of like a pillar of the comedy community. Tina Fey, Amy Poehler, Mike Myers, John Candy, and Catherine O'Hara have all been through there. It would be a real honor to be able to work on a show there and then probably on the other side of the coin, Royal Shakespeare Company. That'd be great too.

**8. To anybody trying to enter the world of theater or acting, what would be your advice to them? In addition, what about anything you feel is not widely understood enough about being an actor or being within the theater world?**

One of my professors in college told me one time, the only people who do this are people that can't do anything else. I originally thought she meant they don't have any other skills, and they're not very talented at anything else, so this is what they end up in theater. I was a little upset with that comment, but then over time, I've come to understand that she meant that this is part of your DNA. If that's what you want to do, that's what you're going to do. I went to West Virginia University. It wasn't Carnegie Mellon, Baldwin Wallace, Pace or NYU. Every single person that I went to college with that decided, "this is what I want to do with my life," they're still doing it. If people are going to do theater, they're going to figure it out.

**9. What is one final message to every student currently enrolled at FCC?**

Be optimistic. I know that the world is pretty insane right now through a certain lens, but I think if for example, you asked AI, "Are there more people in the world starving today than there were 100 years ago?" It's going to say there are more people fed today than there were 100 years ago. "Are there more people dying of disease now than there were 100 years ago?" No. So even though stuff is crazy, we're still moving forward as a human race. And I think that you have to be a little bit optimistic about that.. In addition, going to college is good. People who go to college make more money than people that don't, and they have a better perspective. So, go for it. ■

# *Tuscarora Review* History and Accomplishments

Since its inception in 1980, the *Tuscarora Review* has given student writers and artists a voice at Frederick Community College. Originally published as "The Dogwood Tree," the initial editions were dedicated to Michael Meeks, a young poet and FCC alumnus who died in an accident in 1974. These early issues featured Michael's poetry, and Michael's mother, Joyce Meeks, served as *Tuscarora Review's* first advisor. *Tuscarora Review* has since grown to become a leading community college literary arts magazine, earning a REALM First class award from the National Council of Teachers of English and more than a decade of first place awards from the American Scholastic Press Association (ASPA), before the contest disbanded in Spring 2025. In Fall 2025, the Community College Humanities Association awarded *Tuscarora Review* with a First Place Best Creative Nonfiction: Eastern Region for "Wandering" by Leah Parsons.

Today, *Tuscarora Review* is produced each spring in ENGL222, Creative Writing Practicum, and the magazine offers a thriving environment for student artistic expression, as well as a practical experience to learn the nuts and bolts of literary publishing. We encourage all students to get involved by submitting their writing and visual art and/or enrolling in ENGL222 to be part of the next editorial board. Alumni of *Tuscarora Review* have transferred to the four-year institutions of their choice, with some going into honors study, and one becoming a Fulbright finalist in 2026. ■

# About the 2026 Editorial Board

**Eclipse Fowle** is a transfeminine author, card game maker, and literary magazine editor. She truly enjoys having her own voice heard in writing, but especially hearing and putting others' voices out there too. They are majoring in English at FCC and will continue down a path of creative writing. She would like to continue within the area of literary magazines for the foreseeable future as that is a major passion of hers.

**Isa Rivera** is the caffeinated author of *La verdad prohibida* and *Diez tazas de café*. Her micro-story "Sentencia a cadena perpetua" is part of a national anthology. She taught Spanish and English for nine years, but is now and forever a student. She is a mom of two beautiful daughters, a wife to a wonderful husband, a plant hoarder, and a Library Technician. Isa is a passionate Puerto Rican who enjoys psychological thrillers, puzzling, and hot coffee.

**Riley DeVore** is an actress, film maker, writer, artist, but at heart she is a storyteller. Outspoken and fiery, she is fueled by a combination of ADHD and autism to share all stories, real and fictional, in the most entertaining way possible. She is writing a book trilogy called "The Apocalypse For Dummies" and would write an entire synopsis of it in her bio if she had the space.

**Breanna Earl** is a professional younger sister with a bone-deep love for writing. Though she's more on the quiet side, it's only because her brain tends to move much faster than her mouth. With so many things racing through her head, her ultimate goal is to breathe life into every one of them through her prose.

**Jos. X Mattern** is a FCC-naissance Man. Interests ranging from literature, history, science, music, film, and drama; there isn't anything he won't dip his hands in to explore. At this moment of life, music is held closest to his soul and mind, but that could all change in the next day.

**Magin LaSov Gregg** is a proud neurodivergent mother & poet. Her writing has been noted in *Best American Essays* and appeared in literary journals, anthologies, and major news outlets. Her first book, *An Altar in My Heart*, is a two-time Autumn House Press Nonfiction Book Prize finalist. Recent poetry appears in *Grief Dialogues*, *ONE ART*, and *Offerings: A Spiritual Poetry Anthology from Tiferet Journal*. She enjoys singing and dancing with her young son and making their garden grow.



PICTURED ON THE FRONT COVER:  
CHANGE IS MY MOTHER, Cameron Dawson  
*Water Color*