

A FREDERICK COMMUNITY COLLEGE MAGAZINE OF THE CREATIVE ARTS

# The Tuscarora Review

45<sup>TH</sup> EDITION



# 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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★Editors' choice for best prose, poetry and art chosen through careful consideration of technique, emotional depth, imagery and storytelling ability.



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**COLOPHON**

The magazine cover is printed on 80 pound Endurance Gloss Cover, the 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, Palatino LT Standard Family, and Wingdings.



PORCELAIN IN BLOOM **Camellia Codd** *Pastel*



SPIRALING PILLAR **Camellia Codd**

*Graphite*

# Dedication

*“Strange, isn’t it? Each man’s life touches so many other lives. When he isn’t around, he leaves an awful hole, doesn’t he?”*

—It’s a Wonderful Life (1946)

**J**ournalism is a profession that is hard to teach without throwing students into the deep end of the pool. It requires relearning and adapting to a new way of writing while ensuring information is correct, concise, and clear. **Journalism Professor Crystal Schelle** threw us head first into the experience of doing interviews and writing articles for Frederick Community College’s student-run newspaper, *The Commuter*, a sister publication of *Tuscarora Review*. Even as she encouraged our independence, Professor Schelle was always right there to help us if we needed it. She pushed us into the deep end of the pool, but we wore floaties the entire time. That’s how we learned to swim as writers, editors, and storytellers. We were shocked to learn in December 2024 that our professor had sustained life-altering injuries from a car accident so close to the Christmas holiday she loved. Professor Schelle has not been able to return to campus. Her instruction shaped a new generation of storytellers. We hope to carry her legacy forward in the stories we tell and the voices we amplify in our magazine. We cannot fill the hole left behind in her absence, and yet, we dedicate this 45th issue of *Tuscarora Review* to Professor Schelle, whose impact touched our lives and those of countless others. ■



UNTITLED **Chloe Keo**

*Charcoal*



# A Letter From the Editor

Reading the magazine from last year, I could feel the pain and comfort soaked into the pages. The drastically different pieces somehow came together to convey a coherent message about humanity and the many facets of life; I commend last year's staff for this. Although we couldn't keep all the submissions, I urge students and alumni to keep submitting in the future; the world needs your voice, no matter how much you think it doesn't.

The 45th edition of the *Tuscarora Review* would not have been possible without all the wonderful staff I'd worked alongside; with that in mind, I wish for my gratitude to be known to each individual.

To Micah and Angel, our wonderful art directors, thank you for always being able to work around our constraints and for working hard to make this magazine as incredible as possible.

To Mireya, our steadfast copy editor, thank you for working so hard to keep us all on schedule. Your willingness to go above and beyond is greatly appreciated and will work well for you in the future.

To all of our incredible assistant copy editors, Adam, Elijah, Jillian, Audrey, and Jordan, thank you for making sure this magazine could be printed on time and in such good quality. Jordan, thank you for conducting such an incredible interview; we appreciate your willingness to learn and try new things.

To our amazing social media team, Audrey, Isaiah, and Joye, thank you for being willing to branch out and explore new ways to try things that we didn't originally plan. Without you, we wouldn't have been able to experiment as we did.

To those of you reading this issue, look forward to a more varied publication than we have in the past. The call for more genres was heard, and we received a significant number of creative submissions, which made our team working on this magazine grateful for such an imaginative student body. Please read each piece with the same enthusiasm that we felt when selecting what to include in the magazine, and enjoy the diverse perspectives and voices inside. ■

—Mackenzie Georg, *Editor-in-Chief*



★ REDEMPTION **Melanie Gerner**

*Pastel*

# A Haze of Memories

**Mackenzie Georg**

It's a worn thing,  
unyielding and on the edge of a memory,  
the strap of the instrument,  
it lingers in my mind.  
The white-knuckled grip on the leather while people rush  
around me—  
circling, always circling—  
it feels predatory even though it's not their memory to access,  
no way to take it for themselves.  
The leather is strong and works as a connection to a flash  
of ideas,  
to an unremembered time.  
The flashes of sound whenever the bass pulled over  
the head—  
chuckles and giggles of a weathered voice and a small child—  
faint music plays and I sway to the unheard melody;  
my body moves in time to nothing they can hear,  
always swaying,  
always moving.  
The tide of memories pulls me unrelentingly.  
I welcome it,  
eyes half closed and using it as an anchor point;  
an island in the middle of my storm that contains the place I  
always return to.  
A comforting pull of the strap on my shoulder,  
pulling me to the places and memories I can never return to.  
I ignore the sting from the weight,  
it grounds me and pulls me away from the mind I was  
falling into.

The echo of a hand covering mine,  
weathered and rough;  
the one I felt when learning and the haze of a hand that once  
held mine.

The layers continue,  
the feeling of the past fatherly figures who used this strap,  
it comforts me when I feel like drowning,  
the ghostly hands pull me to the surface;  
always holding me through the storms, as he did when  
he cared,  
as he did when he was here. ■

★ **Author's Inspiration:** This piece was inspired by a prompt I adapted from my Creative Writing class about an object that holds a lot of feelings from you. The first object that popped into my head was my electric bass, which is what this whole piece is about.



# Liquid Lover

**Susanne Freeze**

He holds it like a lover.  
Says it calls him like a friend.  
It makes his day better,  
when the night comes to an end.

No room for the pain.  
No memories can invade.  
Locked away by the liquid  
that he uses as a barricade.

He says it helps him cope,  
but only for the day.  
Reality comes back in focus  
as the liquid drains away.

Another bottle emptied.  
Another mindless day.  
There is no more hurting,  
as long as he stays this way. ■

**Author Inspiration:** I have a friend that is struggling with alcohol addiction and I was just trying to put into my own words how I understand what he is feeling.



LOTUS UNFOLDING **Marlen Putman**

*Pastel*

# The Garden

**TyRay Rickenberg**

I see us both there, in the garden  
you spent years and years and tears creating.  
Patches of mint and lavender,  
flowers as far as the eye can see.  
Around that, green; ever-expansive green,  
And in the middle, us.  
You, me, and that cigarette.

I wish I could tell you that your garden is still there,  
I wish I could tell you that your legacy remains,  
I wish I could tell you that you put down the cigarette.

But there you were,  
on your deathbed  
taking your last breaths,  
your last drags.

There we were,  
watching it all  
wither away.

There I was,  
in the middle of it all.  
Watching a life,  
a world,  
fade away. ■

**Author's Inspiration:** A short poem about losing my grandmother.



THE WITCHING HOUR **Laken Harnly**

*Colored Pencils*



# Karma

**TyRay Rickenberg**

May karma find you at your lowest.  
May it find you, bind you,  
And drag you down into the depths.  
I pray its strike is deft.

May karma find you at your slowest,  
When you cannot run,  
And there's no escape from what you've done.  
May it leave you with nothing left.

May karma find you when it can get closest.  
May it be all you know when you're all alone,  
And may it bring you down, wishing for death.  
May it leave you utterly bereft. ■

**Author Inspiration:** I wrote this short poem after being wronged.

## SHE

**Kyleigh T. Williams**

She is a preacher,  
A teacher  
Of wild things.  
Her words ring truer than  
The crack of thunder  
And the crash of waves,  
Volatile  
And venerating.  
It swirls in bright colors in my mind,  
The hues like flames  
And crying faces,  
Drawing shapes behind my eyes.

To see it clearly is to say  
I do.  
The vows of a woman to  
Her world,  
The world she dooms  
And the world she saves  
From the iteration of  
Doom  
That is not hers at all.

She breathes fire,  
And she breathes life,  
And she breathes life into fire  
That scorches the ground  
To make it anew,  
Her divine power of creation:  
The very thing they fear  
And rely upon  
And seek to control,  
Because they do not—  
They cannot—  
Understand.

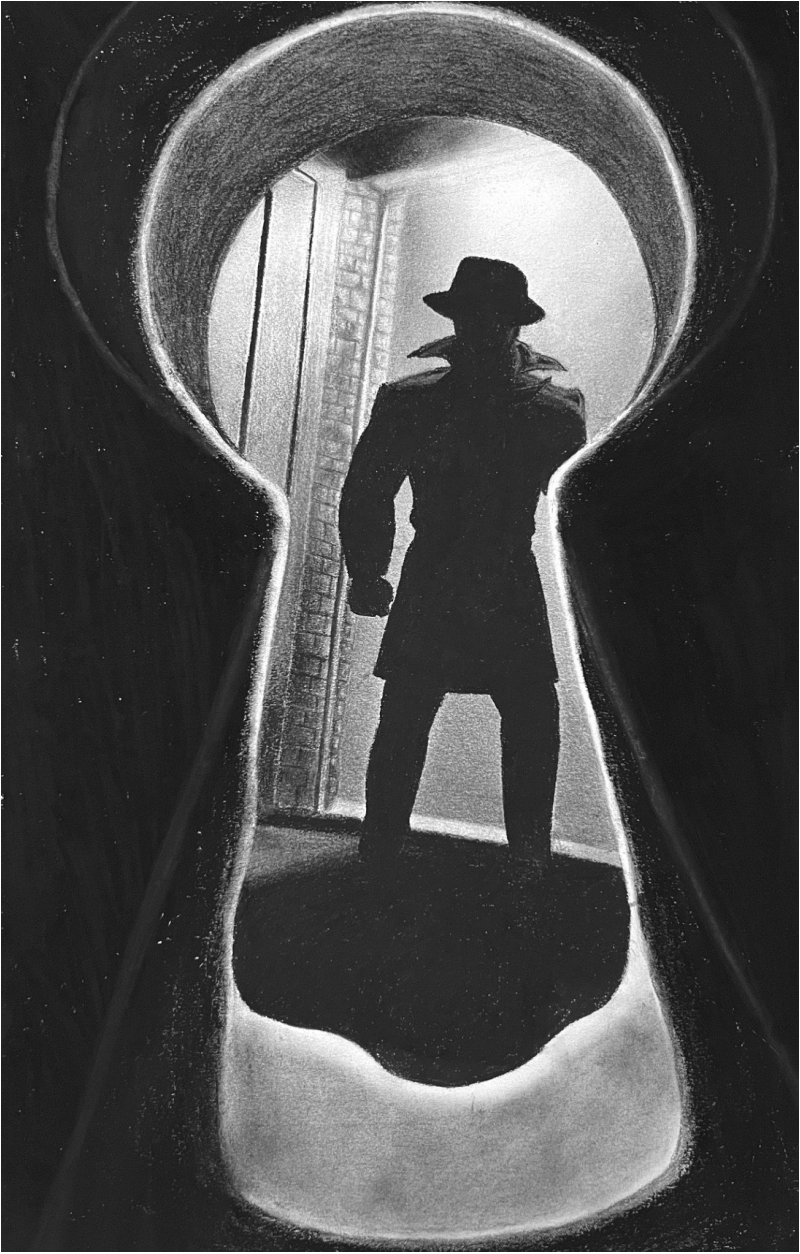
She is the object of their desire,  
 The apple of their eyes  
 Cursed by the fruit,  
 The witch  
 Who says no,  
 And the utterance of  
 Spells  
 Whispered beneath her breath,  
 Drives her to the stake  
 They erected in her honor,  
 To burn  
 Her life  
 As sacrifice  
 To the pious word of man. ■



BEAST **Key Graves**

*Watercolor*

**Author Inspiration:** This is the poem of my heart in this day and age. Every word burns with an energy and life of its own that bursts from my chest, filtered through my mind, and arranged itself in familiar patterns on a page. This poem is an anthem and a battle cry for any woman who feels afraid for her future. To those women, I hope this poem soothes your wounds and stokes your fire.



MYSTERIOUS **Annika Roth**

*Charcoal*

# Don't Forget Me

**Danalyn Damaska**

If it were up to me, I would have chosen to stay  
 We could have made more and more memories  
 We loved each other more than anyone else did  
 There isn't a day that goes by without me following you.

Do you remember me?

We grew up together. I sat next to you in 3rd grade.  
 I couldn't help but be drawn to you.  
 You read my name off my desk with innocent curiosity, "Edith."  
 Your laugh and smile that followed could light up the room.  
 You said hi to me. It was all I needed.

Do you remember me?

I saw you again for the first time in middle school.  
 I finally learned your name. "Aaron."  
 Wow, did you change?  
 Your dark Brunette hair grew out even though I suggested  
 against it.  
 That didn't bother me though. I knew it wouldn't get between  
 us. I could adjust to the new you.

I did adjust to the new you.  
 I grabbed my brown marker and added the new hair to your  
 photo.

My locker has become more accurate than ever.  
 Not even the stares of my best friend can separate my  
 faithfulness to you.

You comfort me from the depths of my soul.

Do you remember me?

I saw you crying in the hallway again.  
 I can't believe you're already getting bullied in 9th grade  
 Was it the classes you were taking? Was it that jerk in your 4th  
 block class?

I can fix it. I can make us happy again.  
I wanted to tell you that this would pass, but if I got in the  
way again, you may hate me.

It's only been a few weeks. I just can't get you off my mind...  
and I don't want to.

I'm not sure if I told you yet, but surprise! I've lost all my  
friends.

They don't want to see us together, so I hate them. We don't  
need them. Just us.

Don't worry, high school drama will be a distant memory  
compared to our future.

Let's be happy.

Do you Remember Me?

It's me again! I found your college. You asked how I was able  
to somehow pick the same place as you.

I giggled and merely passed it off as a coincidence. I know  
everything about you.

We have been lovers for years now. I comfort you from the  
window of your room.

I have a detailed schedule of your routine to ensure we are on  
the same page.

I love you.

Why did you miss class today? I went to the same spot by the  
window I always do, and you weren't there.

We didn't agree to this. You're not respecting me as your  
girlfriend! I want to know where you are. I need to know  
where you are.

Where. Are. You.

Remember Me

I found you. I can't believe I found you with her! Again!  
Her name is Ryan. She is five foot, three inches tall. She has  
that stupidly soft blonde hair.

I want to rip it from her head. I hate her!

Why would you try to cheat on me? We love each other.

I love you more than Caroline did.

I love you more than Amber did.

I love you more than Emryn did.

I love you more. I love you more.

Notice me.



## Remember Me

It's been two weeks. Two weeks since I changed our lives! It's just us now.

There is no more Ryan to get in our way.

No more annoying females to whisper lies in your ears about me.

I think you suspect me, but you wouldn't say anything. You love me too much.

I can see it in your eyes. Those beautiful hazel eyes. I wish I could hold them forever.

And I will. Give them to me! I want to see what you see.

Why do you run from me? Why can't you appreciate the effort I put towards us?

I killed her. Yes, I killed her! I did it for us. For our future.

Listen to me. Listen to me! Listen to ME!

Remember me! Remember it all!

Is it off-putting that I have created our future already?

I told you. I told you everything! I told you how we would get married!

I told you how we have pets together!

Love me! Pick me! Choose me!

Stop running from the life I have made for us!

Appreciate me.

Oh, you've killed me.

Was I that scary? Did I spook you? We were lovers.

I sacrificed everything for you.

I made us who we are today.

How could you betray me? I never had you bleed for me, but here I am, bleeding everywhere for you.

Do you even remember me?

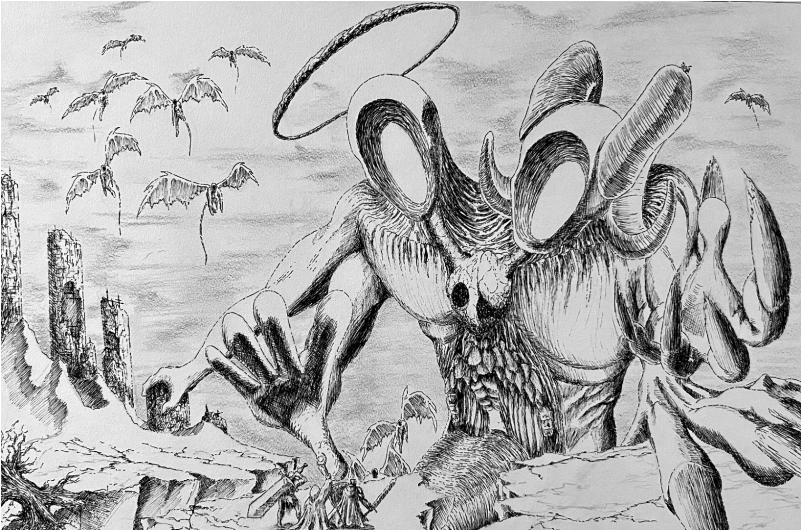
I thought we loved each other more than anyone else did.

There's not a day that goes by without me following you.

As a ghost. In your shadow. As your lover.

Remember me. ■

**Author's Inspiration:** At first, I wanted this piece to be a romance, but after writing the first line, I got a creepy feeling. This led me to change the direction of my poem to a girl whose innocent first love became her obsession. I wanted to create a psychological thriller in which the more the story progresses, the more she becomes more attached and dangerous.



UNTITLED Micheal Johnson

*Pen and Ink*

## Wandering

**Leah Parsons**

**T**he farm has always been a treasure to me, a part of my soul, a place where memories bloomed alongside the flowers and fruit trees in the garden. Every summer, I would spend long afternoons with my grandmother; tending to the plants, picking vegetables, and savoring the quiet beauty of it all. This farm was her family home, my heirloom, passed down through generations. The house stood at the heart of it all, nestled in the middle of the land where my grandmother grew up with her parents and three brothers.

As time passed, everyone moved away. Everyone except my great-uncle Charlie. He lived just beyond the lane, across the road, in a house that was close enough to the farm to feel like he was never truly gone.

Charlie was the only one of my grandmother's brothers I ever got to know. As I got older, he became more of a night-time figure, appearing sporadically when my father and I were working in the garage. He never explained his visits. I assumed he was checking on his antique tractor collection or perhaps on the barn where we once kept cows—maybe just making sure everything on the farm was still standing, still his. It was as though he had been chosen to guard it, to watch over this place that had been so central in his life.

But with the passing years, the farm started to change. The garden—once vibrant—grew wild and untended. Groundhogs burrowed under the overgrown rows of vegetables. The cows were long gone. Charlie's health deteriorated, and the barn—once full of life—now only housed three cats that had been born there and never left. The land, like Charlie, was slowly fading.

One summer, my boyfriend and I decided to visit the farm, driven by a shared urge to revive the garden. We planned to clear the weeds, plant new seeds, and bring life back to the land. As far as I knew, we were the only ones there, at least physically.

I stood on the porch of the house, gazing down the lane toward the old tractor shed. And there, at the top of the lane, stood a man. A short, stubby figure in a brightly colored jacket staring blankly past the shed into the pasture beyond.

A strange unease washed over me.

"Hello?" I called out, my voice tentative but loud enough to carry across the field. The man didn't respond. He didn't even move.

I hesitated for a moment, but curiosity pushed me forward. I began to walk toward him, each step feeling heavier than the last.

As I got closer, I saw the man's face more clearly. His blue eyes—once sharp and full of life—were now dull, foggy. His body was rigid, jerking in a way that made him appear less like a person and more like a puppet whose strings had been pulled too tight. There was something about the way he moved—stiff, unnatural—that made the air around us feel charged, almost oppressive.

He turned to face me, and for a moment, we stood there, locked in an awkward silence. His eyes widened as they fixed on me, but there was no recognition in them.

"What're ya doing over here?" I asked, the words escaping before I could think them through. He gave a slow, mechanical nod as though the question had no real meaning to him.

“Oh, you know...” His voice trailed off, the words empty, lacking any real sense of purpose.

I felt a cold rush run through me, a sudden recognition creeping in. This wasn't Charlie, not in the way I had known him. The illness had hollowed him out, erasing the man he once was, leaving behind only fragments of a person—memories, gestures, a shell. I realized, in that moment, that Charlie wasn't just fading away; he was caught somewhere between life and death, trapped in a cruel limbo that left him wandering, unable to grasp who he had been or who he was becoming.

He wasn't a ghost, something in-between, still alive but not really living. The disease had taken hold of him, stripping away his identity piece by piece until nothing remained but a body that could no longer hold his soul.

I stood frozen, the weight of what I was witnessing settling over me. The air between us felt heavy and stifling as if the land itself was holding its breath. I wanted to run, to escape the suffocating sense of inevitability that hung over us both, but I couldn't move. I was rooted to the spot, paralyzed by the overwhelming presence of mortality—the slow, grinding erosion of a person's essence.

Time and illness had worked their cruel magic on Charlie, leaving him wandering in a world he no longer understood. In that moment, I felt the unbearable weight of time's passage—the way it chips away at everything we know until all that remains is a hollow echo of what once was.

Charlie—drifting through life, caught between the past and the future, slowly losing ourselves one piece at a time, until there's nothing left but a shell, wandering without a home. ■

**Author Inspiration:** This story is based off of a real experience I had on my farm with my great uncle, and the weird experience I had with him. Also, I have worked with people who had dementia, so seeing the same things in my own life really struck.



EMBER GLOW **Alexa Hall**

*Conte*





LITTLE THINGS **Cierra McFarland**

*Mixed Media*





GAMING CHARACTER **Hillary Irish**

*Markers*



SCAVENGER'S VIGIL **Delilah Ricketts**

*Conte*

# Hot Blood

**Antonie Quill**

It is a bright summer's day, and I am bleeding out in a ruined church.

The early June sun floods through the windows, setting everything aglow. The air is so thick with clouds of dust that it looks like I'm in heaven. Midday rays hit my blood like a melted ruby painting the washed-out sandstone. I feel blood boiling within me, bubbling in the heat, the heat, the heat. My side stings as it has since the moment he ran me through. I taste the iron blade, the sweat and dirt coating his hands.

I can hear the battle howling outside the church walls. The wails and the clash of metal-on-metal seep underneath the door, blending with the ringing in my ears and the desperate pounding of my heart.

This isn't the world I wanted to die in, but it's not worth the effort to keep living.

His nose presses against mine as he runs me through. The air between us is thick with musk and hot breath. I once feared that he would look enraged, or satisfied, or even apathetic when he killed me. Far from it. His eyes are wet and his hands tremble. He stares in horror, as though I am the one killing him; as though I am puppeteering his arm to push the blade deep into my stomach.

Is it wrong, I wonder, for his terror to relieve me?

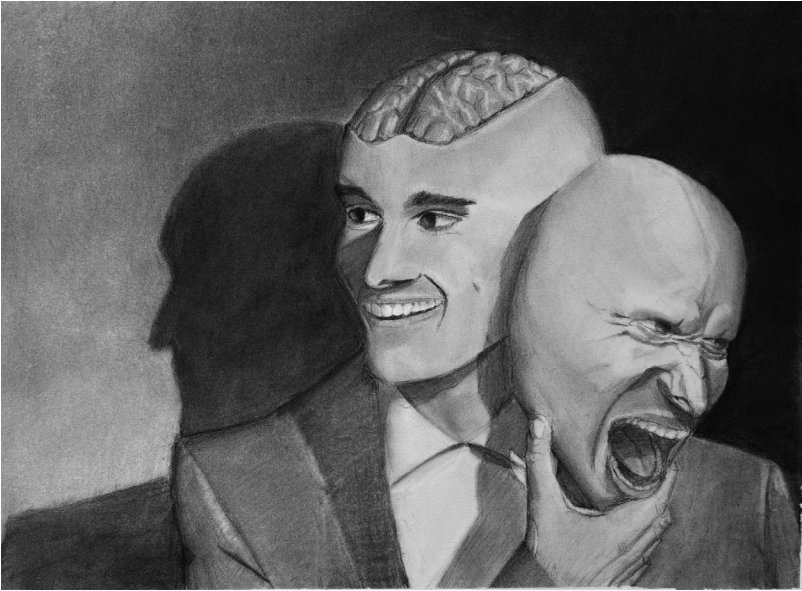
His pupils are cocaine-wide, locked onto me as though if he looks away I'll crumble to dust.

I have a knife in my left hand. He waits.

I do not lift it.

Snarling, he twists the blade within me, rending muscle and fat. Thick, cruel tears squeeze their way down his cheeks.





UNTITLED Peter Switzer

*Charcoal*

“Fight back, you coward,” he spits in my face. “You don’t want to die,” he adds. To him, it’s simple logic: I’m a traitor, so I deserve to die. He can’t live without me, so I won’t die. That’s what he wants to happen, so that’s what will happen.

I say nothing.

There’s a pathetic whine, and then his other hand grabs my left wrist, bringing the knife up to his throat. He lets go, and my knife lingers against his flushed, bobbing neck, sweat coating the blade. His whole body shakes, haloed by sun.

I drop the knife. It clatters on the ground, metal against stone chimes through the empty church.

He screams behind locked lips, shoves the sword in until I hear it tear the back of my cassock, then pulls out in one slick swing. He whips around, tripping over his own feet in his furious drive to get as far away from me as possible. The sword slams against the wall once, twice, before hitting the altar.

He wipes his shaky hands on his tunic. Curls into himself, hands on his knees, and dry-heaves.

“Don’t. Stop it,” he groans as I start to open my mouth. “Just... give me a second.”

I can’t feel my legs, but I still gasp when they give out and I flop to the ground like a sack of meat. My skull knocks the floor. I scrape my nails over the stones, trying to crawl, but my limbs are leaden and refuse to move.

“Fucking priest,” he chokes.

The walls of the church pulsate in time with the frenetic beating of my heart. The stones swirl like steam, melting into his shaking body.

“I’ll go get help,” he declares, bursting into action. It’s almost drowned out by the thundering rush of blood in my ears. “I’ll go get help. You’ll be fine.”

“I’m dying.”

He’s already running for the battered oak doors. Like I’m his beloved general, and he’s oath-sworn to serve and protect.

I remember us outside the orphanage, tunics soaked in sweat, hiding from army recruiters in the wheatfields. We sliced our palms with a shard of glass, pressed them together, and he promised that he would never let harm come to me. He promised that I would never be alone, no matter where we went or who we became.

“You’ll be fine,” he had said. “I swear.”

It is hot. Sunlight crashes through the windows. The sandstone floor is being painted imperial red, blood pooling thick and sticky around my body. His promises, old and new, echo around the washed-out walls. He swore on his soul, and he truly believes that means anything to anyone on earth or heaven.

I laugh, choke on my tongue, and another gush of hot blood pours onto the floor. ■

★ **Author Inspiration:** I went to Bordeaux, France with my mother the summer after I graduated high school, and while I was there we visited several old churches. In one of these, I was struck by the sensory experience of the heat and light, and the image popped into my head of someone bleeding out in that environment. I took out my phone and wrote down a rough draft of this story, which I later revised and fleshed out for my Creative Writing class.



BONES AND BRIARS **Fiona McCabe**

*Graphite*



# Pit Stop

**Kianna Cooper**

The sterile light flickered obnoxiously, the faint buzz like an incessant beetle. *Tinkle*. Nearly deaf to the rusting doorbell, Noah hardly noticed the customers who entered. A sweet scent of gasoline followed the customers from the gas pumps, and Noah couldn't help but breathe it in. The convenience store was small, made even smaller by aisles stuffed full, while he remained trapped behind the counter.

"You have fluid for the brakes?" The customer's Bengali accent trickled through her broken English.

"Back left, across from the soda," Noah didn't look up from his book as he spoke, elbows red from leaning on the bulletproof glass of the counter and a purple lighter tussled between his fingers, eagerly awaiting his next smoke.

Her feet shuffled, tapping along the tile floor to the sodas as she looked for the brake fluid. Another pair of feet lumbered to the chips, the man debating: sour cream and onion or salt and vinegar? A pause, then the sound of the brake fluid bottle clunking to the ground and a soft gasp when he shoved her out the way.

"Damn foreigners," he muttered, shouldering past her for a soda.

Noah still didn't look up from his book, recognizing the man's nasally voice and the stink of cigarettes accompanying his words.

"Newports," he set his snacks on the counter.

Noah held back a sigh. He hated almost everyone who came in, but he especially hated this customer. The patron who scared away the others with his small-minded, bigoted mouth, referring to immigrants as "dirty workers" and blacks as "thick lips," calling every man with a sway in his walk a "twinkie," or shoving past a Muslim woman and knocking the items from her hand.

"Newports," Dirty fingernails tapped the counter impatiently. "Hurry up."

Although you couldn't tell through Noah's icy gaze, he was more than bothered to pull away from his book. Not a word was exchanged as he clicked the archaic register's buttons, exchanging his goods for cash.

The customer took his items with a grunt, hanging a cigarette from the corner of his mouth as the lady approached the counter with her dented bottle of brake fluid. In an assertive motion, he knocked shoulders with the lady, facing the register again.

"Got a light?"

Noah frowned at him, waving the lady forward with skinny fingers.

"I asked a damn question," he stepped in front of her, yet Noah didn't grace him with even a glare, snatching the brake fluid from her. The buttons of the register popped, the drawer sliding open. Brake fluid for cash.

She walked around the man as if he were a murky puddle on the floor, and he responded by lobbing a glob of spit at her feet.

"Got a lighter or what?"

Noah glanced at the purple lighter between his fingers, a heavy smoker since his dishonorable discharge; purple was always his favorite.

"Let me borrow your lighter," he approached the counter.

"No."

"What do you mean no?"

"No means no," a snarky smile crossed Noah's face, "doesn't it?"

"I'll be quick," the customer reached a hand over the counter.

Noah snatched the lighter tight as his fingers brushed it, "No."

He threw back his shoulders, enlarging his frame, though he wasn't nearly the height of Noah.

"Give me the damn lighter!"

Noah spoke with the same stony expression and flat tone, "No."

The convenience store was silent, even the buzzing lamp stalled under the weight of their exchange. The customer swiped a Ruger LCP from his hip, aiming the muzzle at Noah's chest. Surely the state didn't allow wear and carry permits for the sake of taking lighters.

"Give me the fucking lighter."

"Would you like to buy one?" Noah asked, leaning an elbow on the counter and stifling the pretentious smile spreading across his face.

"Now," he held out a hand, voice hard so he knew he was serious. But so was Noah. He grabbed the customer's wrist, pressing the muzzle of the gun into his own chest, eyes bright.

"Or what?"

Silence persisted, thundering. Noah's stone-cold eyes locked with his, swearing he heard the customer's heartbeat through his chest. Noah was still, his heart near silent, breath shallow but steady.

"Or what?" he flatly reiterated.

The gun trembled in his grip, a polite smile finding its way on Noah's face again as he set a shiny green lighter on the counter, "\$2.99."

A second passed, then another, then sweaty hands holstered the gun, and the buzzing lamp returned to its obnoxious state. A fleeting glance over the lighter, and the customer set a five-dollar bill on the counter, snatching it without a word. The bell tinkled softly at his exit, only a maddening buzz filling the shop as Noah returned to his book. ■

**Author Inspiration:** This piece was inspired after going through my own personal troubles and working on developing a 'let it roll off your back' kind of attitude.



TALISMAN **Laken Harnly**

*Graphite/ Colored Pencil*

# The Parasite and the Aberrant Host

**Jada Powell**

The mother finally laid down in the comfort of her bed, her shirt still dirtied by puke, drool, and whatever else that thing excreted on her. Pulling the comforter up to her chin, she could finally feel her eyes begin to droop, relaxing into the silence of the night.

A baby's shrill cry blared from the baby monitor. The mother's eyes shot open; they were bloodshot and dry from months of sleepless nights. The alarm clock mocked her with the time, its dull light illuminating the mess on her nightstand. Bottles of vitamins that were said to ease her pain better than any real medicine could. A pill organizer with the lids open to make room for the mountains to take each day. A heap of trash that hadn't made it to the trash can.

She rolled over, envying her husband next to her. He slept like he did every night, like a corpse having its final rest. She wasn't sure if it was genetic or if he was a terrible person, but something in his head made him immune to their baby's cry. She sat there, the baby crying for her. She sat there, glaring at her husband, who was deaf to the sound of responsibility. In the months prior, she'd conducted her own experiments testing her theory of her husband's blatant lack of fatherly instincts.

She would crank the volume of the monitor so high the neighbor's dog began to howl. Still, he snored.

She would hold the speaker to his ear. Still, he snored.

She would violently shake him, screaming during a nervous breakdown.

Still. He. Snored.

He wasn't hardwired to shoot up at the slightest sound of a baby. He didn't lose sleep to that monster.

Her hand felt its way over the countless pamphlets of *Baby Blues*, *The Woeful Womb*, and whatever other demeaning “help” they gave on the way out of the hospital until finally meeting the monitor. When she popped the cord off the monitor, the crying stopped. It *finally* stopped.

Until she heard the screaming, crying, and wailing echo through the hall. Eyes twitching, she dumped a week’s worth of vitamins into her mouth and washed them down with day-old water. Maybe she would finally be ready to sleep.

But just as her eyelids closed, the ear-piercing shrieks began. Her glass shook slightly, trying not to shatter from the pitch. She grabbed fistfuls of hair, ready to rip off her scalp like cheap velcro. Suddenly, her grip loosened. The tears welling in her eyes began to dry, and she finally felt a calmness wash over.

She stepped into her once-white slippers, now slightly tinted yellow with stains from whatever fluids came from the baby. She stumbled her way down the hallway, wearing a grin like a mask to hide the craze in her eyes.

Her feet shuffled over the piles of laundry that still needed to be done. She stubbed toes on baby toys that were left out and kicked aside wadded dirty diapers. She made her way down the hall, stumbling like a drunk.

She stopped at the doorway, peering into the crib. The baby’s face was beet red from the constant straining of its lungs. It gripped the rungs of the crib like a prisoner wishing to escape. She wondered if the baby knew the same feeling as her. To be a prisoner in her own body. To be shackled for nine months. To give everything and get nothing in return. The baby stirred in the crib.

The mother unhinged her jaw like a boa constrictor and screamed, throwing up pure rage and hatred that had been brewing inside her since the day they got home. The mother could feel the burst blood vessels as she caught her breath.

The monster in front of her was unphased, only taking a deep breath to recharge. The mother could feel the phantom umbilical cord between them, still sucking more and more life out of her as she wastes away.

Even just standing an arm’s length away, there was so much distance between them. They were strangers, shackled to each other. She would never see peace again. Her body, already damaged and



abused, would continue to serve only to feed the never-ending hunger of this parasite.

Tears continued to roll down the chubby cheeks of the panting baby. The baby who wanted nothing more than to be held, comforted, and loved by a warm, caring mother.

But the mother... she wanted to allow her forever-giving body a break. She wanted to be herself first and a mother second. She wanted nothing more than quiet.

She leaned over the crib. Her limp hand, like the claw in a crane machine, grabbed onto a teddy bear—pink and fluffy and about the size of the baby.

With a deranged smile, only one thought entered her mind. She knew how to stop the incessant cries.

She placed the bear over the baby's face.

Then, finally, there was quiet. ■

**Author Inspiration:** This was for an assignment dealing with complex characters. I've always been drawn to human phenomena like shaken baby syndrome. Therefore, I wanted to write a story where you can understand and feel bad for a mother who doesn't want a child and feel bad for a child that will never have a mother.



IMPENDING FLIGHT **Marina Katsunoto**

*Graphite*

# A Funeral For a Stranger

**Kaylee Auldridge**

My feet are glued to the hardwood floors in the Stauffer Funeral Home. The morning sun shines brightly through the windows of the room, cascading onto the half open oak casket. Tuning out the murmurs from the other people in the room, I try to focus on the tight grip Alex has over my hand. My feet are heavy like cement bricks and the air is as suffocating as water as I step forward in line waiting to see Nikole—Niki as we so often called her—in the casket at the head of the room. Niki’s best friend steps towards me, a sad smile appearing for a moment.

“Hi Lily,” I say, my voice quieter than usual.

“Hey, I’m glad you could make it,” she replies.

“Me too. How have you been holding up?”

“Not great, her mom refused to show up. Her dad asked me to help get her ready this morning,” she pauses, taking in a breath before continuing. “They re-dyed her hair, and her makeup is just the way she would have wanted it.”

My eyes water at the thought, but I refuse to let it escape. Around the room are all of her self-made artworks of her “husbands,” as we liked to call them. Different anime characters line the room, and I know she would have loved this.

As the line moves again, Lily agrees to accompany Alex and me all the way up to the casket. The closer we get, the more dread seeps into my body. The first time Alex and I get a glance at the body, Alex starts to shake and I just hold their hand tighter.

I’ve gone to funerals before: my great grandfathers, my second cousin, my dad’s uncle, my great great uncle. It’s different to go to a funeral of someone you really know, someone who is your age. To know they will never drive, get a car, graduate, get married, have a family, changes your perspective on life.

When we arrive at the casket, a tear finally escapes me. She is dressed in all white, a bold contrast to her black hair. Her makeup is gorgeous—black winged eyeliner, long lashes, a bit of blush and a dab of lipstick. Overall she looks at peace.

“She’s beautiful, Lily.”

“You can write a note to her if you want.” she says, pointing to the cup of sharpies that sits near the end of the casket. Others are already writing their notes directly onto the wood.

I turn to Alex and say, “You can go first.”

Lily stays with me until it is my turn to write a note. Giving me some privacy, she walks back to her boyfriend and Nikole’s parents.

Once I finish writing the note, Alex and I say a quick goodbye and make our way back into the hall. I can finally breathe, the weight of the atmosphere no longer crushing down on my chest, but what accompanies the relief is overwhelming grief. One tear starts and many more follow; once they start, I cannot seem to make them stop.

Nikole was a beautiful person that I did not get to know for very long. I had only known her for seven months. In those seven months I learned what her favorite color was, her favorite anime, and what her favorite and least favorite classes were. She talked about her family and friends, hobbies and TV shows. I saw her laugh and cry, become angry and happy.

In the end I never got to learn what college she wanted to go to, what she wanted to do after school, where she wanted to live. I didn’t know her for long enough, but I knew her long enough to love her. ■

**Author Inspiration:** I took creative writing and was given the option between two prompts, one was flash fiction and the other was a memoir. I had never read a memoir outside of the class and most definitely never attempted to write one before so I wanted to challenge myself. I chose to write about a time that was challenging but also may be relatable for people. The piece is called “A Funeral for A Stranger” because it is about attending a funeral of someone who died too young, someone who you feel like you only just began to know before they were taken away.

# Caution is Advised

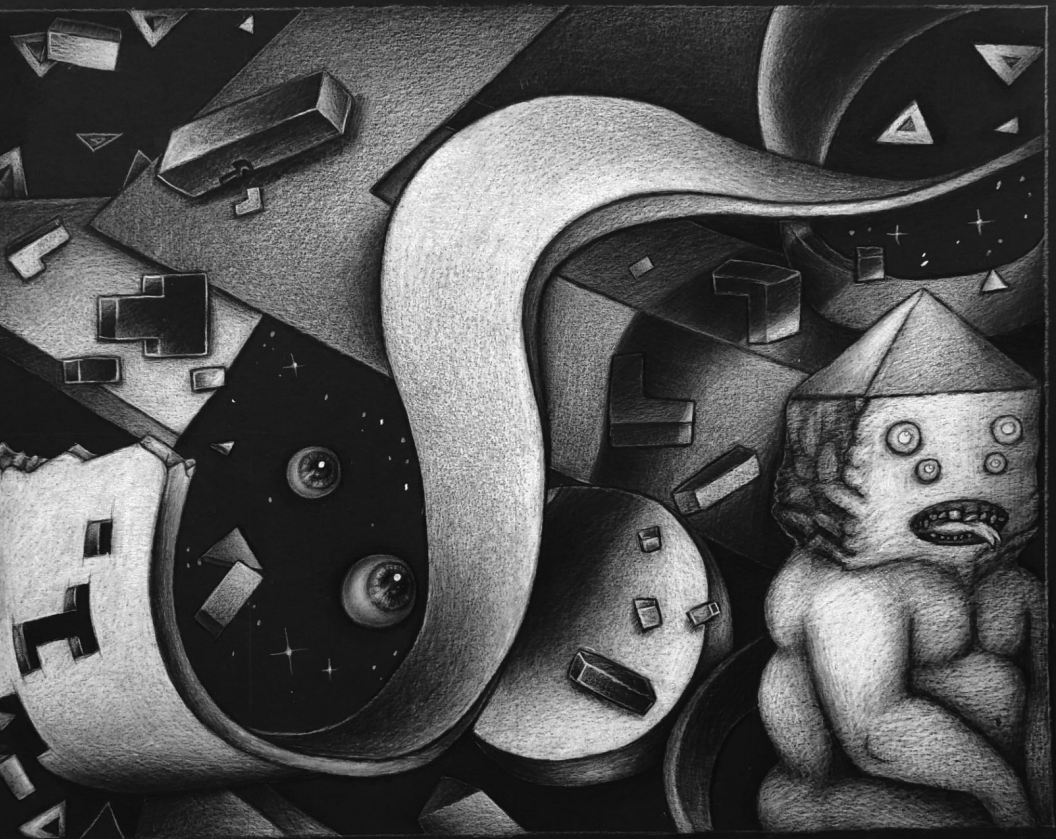
Emma Smith

Warning! Use of this drug may result in feelings of bliss, euphoria, and irreplaceable belonging within. Taking this drug will alter your consciousness and drift you away into unexplored mental spaces. Let yourself feel the cloudy haze take charge, and set yourself free. Food will have never tasted quite as delectable as it does now, and your hunger will seemingly never cease. You'll become a visionary, a master chef, a dreamer who knows no ends. A temporary layer of amusement has been added to life's simple pleasures. Enjoy the moment. Just remember it's control.

Warning! If taken as directed, inhibitions may be alleviated. You'll have a newfound sense of ease; it'll be as if you never had a care in the world. Your friends will also partake. It'll become a new pastime for the group. The movies you put on seem even better than they did at first watch. You'll never laugh so hard at jokes or even simply how the dog is staring back at you. They'll say, "We should invite Mary Jane over more often if you know what I mean." And in those moments, despite how time seems to pass without notice, life will seem ever so slightly more bearable. Embrace it briefly, but don't let it define you.

Warning! Prolonged use of this drug may result in a love for loneliness. You'll no longer be afraid to spend time with yourself, you have the cure, a relief so peaceful you'll never wanna leave your bed again, especially not when the cove you've built is so cozy. All of those silly problems of yours stray from your psyche, similar to the sands of reality sinking further and further away from your grasp. But that doesn't matter. You have everything you need staring right at you from your fingers, don't you worry. Well, until you run out. What could go wrong?

Warning! It is recommended to consider twice before indulging if allergic to thinking of never-ending questions about nothing. Lay there, eyelids low, limbs loose, and start to fade between the grasp



REALM OF CHAOS **Maya Uras-Golb**

*Charcoal*



of reality and fantasy. The weight of the future and the shackles of the past latch as the earthy-smelling smoke shields your sight of the present. You wouldn't "D.A.R.E" say no to this feeling of utopia. Time begins to lose its meaning as clarity becomes a distant memory. The haze holds you afloat, suspended in the moment as you battle between surrender and control. Welcome back, why don't you stay a while?

Warning! Do not try to operate in social settings without taking this drug. It will be much too awkward, and you'll be itching to escape. It'll almost be like the uncomfortable feeling you get when your family begins to ask if you're okay, that you seem more tired than usual. But what would they know? Certainly, not anything of the exhilarating rush of another hit, chasing another high, liberating your mind. Definitely not of how you had to "high-de" your habituated mind at Thanksgiving dinner just to survive. You would though. After all, it's easier to stay oblivious than face what's waiting on the other side. Hope you don't regret it.

Urgent Warning! Avoid excessive use of this drug unless you can't. Each time, it takes more and more; when will it be enough? Sobriety is a curse, at least to you. But you can stop whenever you want, you'll swear. Another hit, the ache will ebb away, and you'll feel restored. For now, of course. Instead, you'll be subdued by a stinging scratch in your throat. Search for new strains: Super Lemon Haze, Durban Poison, Cheetah Piss. Which one haven't you tried yet? Switch cannabis cyclically: Indica, hybrid, sativa. Indica, hybrid, sativa. Get your fix, fix yourself. That is until it fades away and you're exactly where you started, except this time there is no end. This time... Oh, sorry. Uh, what was I saying?

Good luck. ■

**Author Inspiration:** This was a workshop piece for my creative writing class. However, my goal with this piece was to create a sarcastic cautionary tale, one that has an aura of playfulness with serious messages hidden within.



ACE THE WATCHFUL SHEPHERD **Delilah Ricketts**

*Charcoal*

# On Shelves a Foot Too Close to the Floor

**Audrey Houghton**

The house was built for you, so of course it was special.

My grandfather wasn't the type for love in spoken words. He was closed off on good days, gruff on bad. Though he might not have been perfect, he did love you, and only knew one way to show it: acts of service.

You were shorter than most, and sometimes spoke of the struggles that came with it. In a normal home, the cabinets were too high to reach. You were a baker and needed access to your flour and sugar; too often, you stood on tip-toes to eye your culinary creations.

My grandfather was a plumber, not a carpenter. Your happiness, though, was what mattered to him; if a normal house wouldn't do, he wouldn't get you a normal house.

He built one from the ground up.

A house all your own.

I remember staying there, even at an age when other memories have grown dull and fuzzy.

Those counters made for you weren't quite at my level. A stepping stool cured my height and I'd stand next to you as you rolled thick sheets of uneven dough on the counters, letting me decorate with sprinkles and icing.

I remember the tiny twin bed I cramped into; the hard, squeaky mattress and threadbare blanket. The pleasant nights' rest despite the circumstances.

I remember the swingset my grandfather installed on the porch for me, the chill of the New England air brushing through my hair and making me feel alive.

I remember the herd of Holsteins from the farm down the road escaping and roaming the streets while I giggled.

I remember the night you died, in that house he built for you. We knew it was your time. It didn't hurt any less to get the call.

The final time I saw the house, my grandfather lived in it alone. It didn't make him happy anymore—that house he built for you—because you were everywhere. In the lowered shelving, in the worn knitted blankets; he couldn't look without remembering.

When my grandfather left, the house was gone with him. I don't recall if I had been allowed to see it a final time before they sold it; it didn't really matter then. The smell of fresh-baked cookies I could've sworn was etched into the walls had faded. It wasn't the house I remembered, not without you there.

Sometimes I dream about my room. I dream I bake cookies with you at the too-small counters, pluck raspberries from the bushes in your yard for pies, see your smile one last time. And though each time I have the dream, it's harder to visualize. Though I can't quite remember how the creases of your eyes moved with each smile, or the flimsy steps to the basement I was always too scared to trek, there's a certain feeling that I will never forget from that house; from you.

Love this strong doesn't die. ■

**Author's Inspiration:** A year ago, I lost the small memorial picture of my grandmother I kept in my wallet. In the time it took me to find another photo, I found myself terrified that I might forget her face; that's what led me to this piece. My grandmother is one of the most lovely women I have ever known. Even if the memories are hazy, the kindness and love she showed me have always had such a profound impact that after seeing them tangible within a piece like this. I feel safe knowing she'll always remain with me.

INTERVIEW WITH

# Professor Wendell Poindexter

*Wendell Poindexter is a full-time art professor at Frederick Community College and has worked at the college for more than 35 years. For more than two decades, he has managed the Art Program and served as Arts Center Director. At FCC, he teaches courses in drawing and illustration while exhibiting his art around our community and region. The Tuscarora Review editorial board chose to feature Professor Poindexter in an interview because we are impressed by his fun-loving personality, the major way he has impacted students throughout his career, and his wide-ranging influence as an artist.*



*Professor Poindexter poses for a photo at Mullinix Park.*

## **What did you do before coming to work at FCC?**

I was still a student at MICA, Maryland Institute College of Art. I got a phone call from my former art instructor, Betty Coe Riner. She wanted me to design a commercial art class; but I still had a semester and a half of schooling at the Institute, so I said no. She pushed back and said, “Well, you can do your coursework and just come up and teach the class. It’s only one class. I think we would like to run it in the evening.” Up until that point, my dream was to go to New York, become the next Andy Warhol, and become rich and famous. But then when you get closer to graduation, all of a sudden you’re like, “What the hell am I going to do?” I had that in my wings, a design for this art course. So I moved back home and I designed the class, I taught the class, and I also worked in a record store. It was called Waxie Maxie’s, and that’s how I made an income; but I was still living at home. I wasn’t making that much money between teaching one class and working in the record store, but that’s what I did for a while. All the while knowing that I needed to get a master’s degree if teaching was what I wanted to do. And look at me now.





*Lani—Crown Series—by Wendell Poindexter.*

**How long have you been at FCC? What led you to seek out a teaching position at FCC?**

I'm now moving into my 36th year. As for what led me to seek out the work, I'm going to give that to Betty Coe Riner. She was charged with finding an additional instructor and someone to design some classes and so on. And there was a returning adult student, Mrs. Oslow. She said to Betty Coe Riner, "Oh, what about that nice young man? That Poindexter boy?" and that's what gave her the idea.

**What has it been like getting to see FCC grow and develop as you've been here over 35 years?**

Well, it's been great, and I think it's nice to see the college stay abreast with Frederick County, growing, and becoming more diverse. When I was a student here and during my first few years here as a teacher, it was only buildings A, B, C, and the gymnasium. Now we have an art center, we have the library building, we have the student center, and we've got the conference center. It's been great seeing those buildings being pulled out of the ground and seeing what they've been used for. I love seeing the diversity in the classrooms, walking the halls, and so on. I think we've been pretty progressive and staying abreast with what's going on locally, regionally, and nationally. You know, in Wendell World.

**What would you say is your favorite part about being a professor of the arts?**

Well, I say this every time. My favorite part about being a professor, of course, would be the students. I just have fun going into the classroom and getting to know my students. And then as a professor of the arts, well, it's always different. It's not that I'm trying to throw math under the bus, but with math two plus two equals four. Every semester I'm meeting thirty to forty-five new people. Forty-

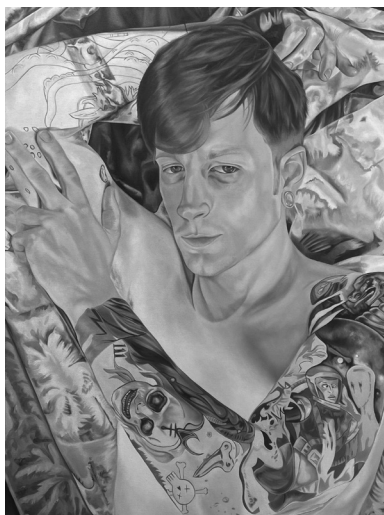
five new people with forty-five new images, times, or whatever the project load is. Different outcomes of your assignments are always fun, always fresh. It's not the same thing and that's really fun. The job itself, being a teacher—and I think most teachers would agree—is wonderful. Meeting new people and learning who they are and their different personalities; it's not your typical nine to five type of thing.

**I'm sure you get to learn a lot more about your students in art classes as well.**

You know, that's a good point, because some of the projects that I have in both of the courses that I teach—Illustration and Drawing—allow students to let you know who they are. There are certain things they need to do in their projects and you learn about them. I also think in an art studio class, a lot of students become quite comfortable in the classroom. I always say to students on the first day, "This is a safe space, be who you are, do what you know." And I think students follow through with that and they'll tell you openly about some personal things that they're comfortable sharing with others in the class. You see it in their artwork, where they'll use personal experiences. I think it's fun to get to know people that way.

**What's been your experience teaching for over 20 years as the head of FCC's art department?**

It's been a primarily positive experience working with students. I will say that I've noticed over the years that students are coming into the program with a better skill set, as far as drawing and painting 3D goes. I'm very impressed with what they're showing me. We always have an outstanding faculty here. They are all professionals in their own right. On a slight down note, talking about my personal experience, I don't think students in my classes are accomplishing as much as we used to. Students seem to need more time to do things, and I think it's because they're trying to—I must



*Pendragon—by Wendell Poindexter.*

sound like an old codger here—but I think that the cell phone gets in the way. And the reason why I'm so convinced of that is because it eats up my day, you know? I can sit down and start scrolling through social media and all of a sudden an hour is gone. I'm just scrolling and reading and maybe commenting on stuff, and I know it gets in students' way. It's a different story if you put on headphones and listen to music and draw. It's a different part of the brain that's operating there. But I think it's that cell phone that does get in the way. There are some projects where I used to give students a week to get them done and they would get done quality work. Now I'm giving three weeks to get that same project done. That's a negative, I think.



*Wildeyed Boy From Freecloud—  
by Wendell Poindexter.*

**Besides your position at FCC, you're also known as an influential figure in the arts in the Frederick area, and you have won several awards. Could you elaborate on your experiences with these projects and which projects have the most effect on you, working on them?**

Well, I've always enjoyed being invited to judge exhibitions in the Frederick area. More recently, I've spent many years on the Public Arts Commission in Frederick. We were kind of the gatekeepers of what is positioned in the city, murals, sculptures, what have you. There's a few pieces that were erected and I'm very happy to see that happen. The most recent one was last year, the African American of excellence award. I was voted to receive that recognition and that meant the world to me—to be recognized by the black community in Frederick. My parents who were in their early 90s were there to see that happen; It was great. Video cameras were set up in my home. They came in to video me and took me downtown. I felt like a real celebrity during that period of time. In my speech, which was emotional and I was nervous, the one thing that I said, "I feel like I'm being awarded for just being me and just doing what I do." And that's what was nice, you know? I'm just doing what I feel like I need to do as an artist and a teacher and being Wendell, you know, and somebody recognized that. That was great. ■

# About the 2025 Editorial Board

**Mackenzie Georg** has been writing her entire life, and she has always strived to make everyone's voices heard. She is graduating this semester with an associate's degree in English and plans to transfer to get her bachelor's in English with a minor in film production.

**Angel Moody** loves writing more than anything else, and it has been their biggest passion for their entire life. They are a psychology major hoping to eventually use creative writing and art as a therapeutic tool.

**Micah Mowry** wants to major in English and become a teacher. He likes LEGOs and music. His favorite band is The Beatles. He is from Ethiopia.

**Mireya McGaha-Eastep** is an English major graduating in the Spring '25 semester. Outside of working on *Tuscarora Review*, she worked on the *Commuter* in the fall of '24 and has loved all of the new experiences in writing, editing, and publishing.

**Adam Pope** aims to become a best-selling author writing sci-fi fantasy novels. He is majoring in English and hopes to transfer to a four-year institution to get a concentration in creative writing. He's just a pink pony boy who's gonna keep on dancing at the pink pony club.

**Elijah Zeedijk** is a General Studies student with a love for reading fiction, especially fantasy. He is currently working on developing his writing skills to prepare for writing down stories inspired from his dreams.

**Jillian MacKay** is a passionate aspiring author and an English major at FCC. She's been writing stories her entire life and hopes to one day get a job in fiction publishing to help other writers share theirs.

**Jordan Mills** has a strong passion for writing and has been doing so his entire life. He loves psychology, film, music, and character writing and plans to pursue a degree in psychology while using what he learns to improve his writing. He dreams of writing and directing his own screen production.

**Audrey Houghton** is a writer, editor, artist, and comic enthusiast who dreams of becoming an English professor and sharing her love of the craft with like-minded people. She will never give you up, let you down, run around or desert you.

**Isaiah Jordan** is a neurodivergent 20M who loves anime, comics, music, horror, and video games; he's also interested in forms of literature related to these topics. He's an English major who has done jury duty on the side.

**Joye Branson** wants to explore the various components of creative writing and gain knowledge in the following areas: social media, formal dialogue, use of vocabulary, poetry skills, fiction, and nonfiction.

**Magin LaSov Gregg** loves encouraging FCC students' self-expression through the written word. 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 (2023 & 2024).





Pictured on the cover:  
**KALEIDOSCOPIC CAMO**  
Samantha Voegtly  
*Gouache*