



Balloons

BALLOONS Lit. Journal

Issue
Two

Aug 2015

Alisha Tamarchenko • Angela Luo • Brandon T. Madden • Chris Wilkensen • Danny P. Barbare • Gerard Sarnat, Elliot Aron & Simon Aron • Hyonju (Karen) Ahn • Izabela Urbaniak • Jacqueline Jules • Jennifer Palmer • Joe Bisicchia • John Foster • Liana Tan • Nicole Romeu • Richa Gupta • Robert Boucheron • Sage Lauren Kullberg • Tammy Ruggles • Z.G. Tomaszewski

“To have great poets, there must be great audiences.”

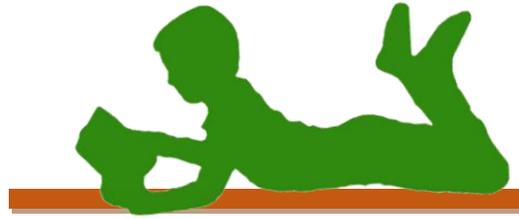
– Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

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BALLOONS Lit. Journal (BLJ) is an independent biannual online literary journal of poetry, fiction and art primarily for school-aged readers from upper elementary school years onwards. BLJ sees it an important mission to bring the art of literature, and the creation of it, to our younger generation. The journal is freely accessible to all electronically. BLJ welcomes submissions from people anywhere in the world and in all walks of life. We love something that is fresh, surprising, unforgettable, extraordinary, mind-blowing, humorous, bold, unique, layered, witty, educational, original...etc. In short, we want something exceptionally good. For the most updated information about the journal, please visit the official website of BLJ:

www.balloons-lit-journal.com

Submissions are welcome year round. Writers are advised to read and follow the guidelines stated on the above website. Enquiries and submissions should be sent to: **editorblj@yahoo.com**

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* Cover & back cover art adapted from a picture in this series





Words from Editor-in-Chief

Thank you for reading BLJ's Issue Two. Again, this issue has a wide range of contributors and genres and I simply love the pleasant surprise each piece gives me in its own unique way.

For Poetry, we have very young poets like Sage Lauren Kullberg and the grandsons of Gerard Sarnat, Elliot and Simon Aron, who give us a simplistic but witty voice. Experienced poets such as Jacqueline Jules entertain us with pieces of children's experience while Joe Bisicchia's verse on animals lets us rethink about the power of self-belief. I am particularly impressed and moved by John Foster's verses on global crises written in contexts that would have an impact on children and adults alike.

For fiction, the five pieces chosen here exercise an advanced level of descriptive language and depth while keeping the words and contexts accessible to young readers. I am especially thrilled with Alisha Tamarchenko and Chris Wilkensen's work for the twists in the end that give the pieces a whole new sense and meaning.

I cannot be more delighted receiving the vibrantly colourful and mesmerizing artwork from Tammy Ruggles and Karen Ahn, and am totally speechless seeing Izabela Urbaniak's poetically monochromatic photography of the beautiful and innocent children defining childhood in the summer.

Last but not least, as a teacher myself, including Nicole Romeu's non-fiction work here is one of my best decisions in the course of editing this magazine. Her vision on what a good teacher should be creates so many ripples inside me.

I enjoy every single piece in this issue and I thank every contributor for making this magazine so beautiful. I thank you, who are reading these words at this very moment, for allowing me to once again take you on a refreshing, new, and kaleidoscopic literary journey across generations.



Ho Cheung LEE, EdD



Foreword

W

Walk into a treasure trove, this cornucopia of a delightful little magazine and be amazed by the variety on offer – short, long, narrative, textual and pictorial that are presented to the reader – of all ages!

I was delighted by the sensations that the individual pieces conjured in me. I could delve in the poems and let the thoughts seep through my mind, be rocked by the lullaby, drenched by the rain and the leaky concert, puzzle through the beastly math exercise, be alerted about environmental issues or stop abruptly at brother's wish! Or, soar through the air and see the world through different perspectives like that of a balloon, a flower, a cloud, a chicken; face the realities of growing up and knowing about love, life and death. Or gaze for long at the multiple images of the photographer's idyllic summer, the colorful world of an aquarium, a bustling city...and much more!

Each piece can be revisited again and again, bringing new sensations, thoughts, images and ideas.

I also invite teachers to use this magazine as well as its Issue One to bring forth to their young readers the wonders and variety of the written texts and pictorial images, for which this magazine has been specially created.

Simon Tham

Former Head of Section,
Native-speaking Teachers Section,
Curriculum Development Institute,
Education Bureau,
Hong Kong SAR



Danny P. Barbare works as a janitor at a local YMCA. He has been writing poetry for 33 years and has been published locally, nationally, and abroad. His poems have recently appeared in *Doxa*, *Blood and Thunder*, *Dewpoint*, *The Watershed*, *Assisi Online Journal*, *The Round*, as well as many other online and print journals.

The Concert

It's
a
rainy
night

I'm
going
to
the
arena

where
the
roof
is
leaking

but
the
music
patches
it
up.

Poet

Danny P. Barbare

Z.G. Tomaszewski is a Michigan. Tomaszewski is a Lakes Commonwealth of Letters Press.

poet, rambler, fisherman, and musician currently living in Grand Rapids, founding producer of Lamp Light Musical Festival and co-founder of Great His book *All Things Dusk*, selected by Li-Young Lee, is forthcoming from HKU

Argument

Stalk of snakegrass in the water swims, serpentine
with waves to another shore.
A boy stirs his feet sending ripples
to carry it towards a thicket of cattails.
The grass coils. Slithering
his tongue the boy insults the snake's mute rattle,
the water hisses back.

Z. G. Tomaszewski

Poet





Rain...

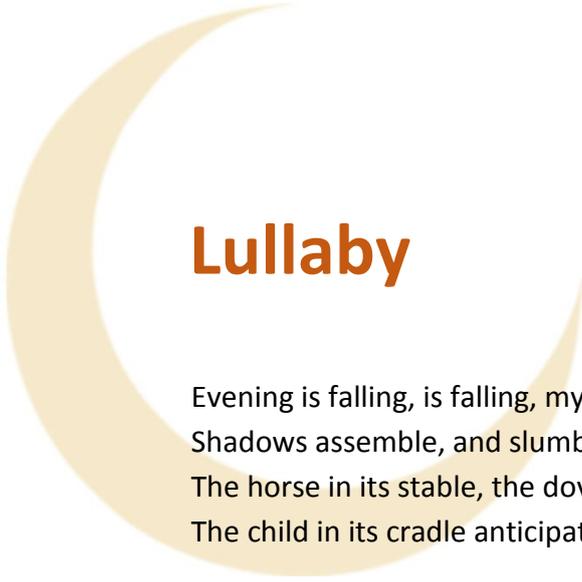
I sit at the window watching raindrops
dance and twirl to the damp streets
like glass shattering on the ground.
Mist fills the blank skies.
Cars woosh through puddles,
making fountains of rain water.
Dark grey clouds blanket the horizon.
A fire crackles from inside.
Street lights shimmer through the crystal droplets.

Sage Lauren Kullberg

Poet

Ten years ago, **Sage Lauren Kullberg** entered the world early Christmas morning, 2004. Daughter of June and Justino, Sage is a poet, artist, Girl Scout, animal lover, and tree hugger. Sage is growing up in San Diego, California with her guinea pig, rabbit, various bugs, and assorted piles of books and art supplies. She keeps an art/poetry journal in her backpack for those unexpected surges of creativity. Sage does poetry readings with her grandmother at The Poetry Bench in Balboa Park, and Rebecca's Coffee House. She loves biking, sandcastles, music, rescuing sad stuffed animals from thrift stores, and making friends with those that believe in her.

Robert Boucheron is an architect in Charlottesville, Virginia. His academic degrees are B. A. 1974, Harvard University, and M. Arch. 1978, Yale University. His writing appears in *Aldus Journal of Translation*, *Bangalore Review*, *Cerise Press*, *Cossack*, *Conclave*, *Construction*, *Digital Americana*, *Gravel*, *Grey Sparrow Journal*, *IthacaLit*, *JMWW*, *Lowestoft Chronicle*, *Milo Review*, *Montreal Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Origami Journal*, *Poydras Review*, *The Rusty Nail*, *Short Fiction*, *Slippage*, and *Virginia Business*.



Lullaby

Evening is falling, is falling, my dear.
 Shadows assemble, and slumber draws near.
 The horse in its stable, the dove in its nest,
 The child in its cradle anticipate rest.

Embers are glowing and ashes are warm,
 Baby is drowsy, protected from harm.
 The wolf in the forest, the thorn on the rose
 Can never endanger my darling's repose.

Long is the winter, and long is the night,
 Long will I watch you and swaddle you tight.
 The mountain is high and the ocean is deep,
 My lullaby's over, my love is asleep.

Robert Boucheron

Poet



Gerard Sarnat & Elliot Aron

Poets

Elliot's Dream

Coachie'n me walked and talked all the way to the Tower of Love bus station.
We rode upstairs in the sun on the Big Blue Bubble double-decker coach.
It had a rainbow restaurant run by two red and green plaid Jersey cows.
They and us baked milk cookies then ate some then I brought the rest home to Mommy.
Back there my big brother Simon will open her baby-safe Tylenol bottle for Gramps.

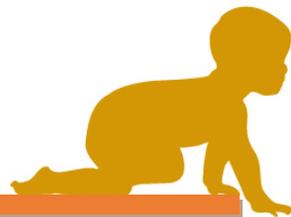


Gerard Sarnat & Simon Aron

Poets

Wishes When My Brother Was Born

1. Give me one beautiful blue blankie
2. Tie a string around my Mommy
3. Grow up to be just like Daddy
4. Another blue blankie or two
5. Let's get rid of the new boy



Gerard Sarnat and his wife of 45 years live in the room above the garage of one of their daughter's family. Gerry is the father of three, grandpa to two and author of three collections, 2010's HOMELESS CHRONICLES from Abraham to Burning Man, 2012's Disputes, and September 2014's 17s. He is now working on Patriarchs. Harvard and Stanford educated, Gerry's set up and staffed clinics for the disenfranchised, been a CEO of healthcare organizations and a Stanford professor. For Huffington Post reviews, future reading dates and more, visit www.gerardsarnat.com. His books are available at select bookstores and on Amazon. Gerry and his 5 year-old grandson, **Elliot Aron**, helped write the piece "Elliot's Dream"; his 9 year-old grandson, **Simon Aron**, helped write the piece "Wishes When My Brother Was Born."



Knight Errant

Author

Alisha Tamarchenko

Alisha Tamarchenko is originally from Montclair, New Jersey but currently lives in Highland, New York, where she attends New Paltz Central High School. She has spent much of her life traveling with her family and spent 5 years living in northern Italy. She hopes to attend a liberal arts college and minor in English.



The Knight came storming into the forest, determined to get to the other side. The Queen herself had sent him, “a perilous mission” she had said, “only for the most valiant of Knights”. The forest was already swarming with the adversary’s army, hours away from conquering the home territory and seizing the castle. The Knight was the kingdom’s last and only hope. This herculean burden along with his bulky white armour weighed heavily upon his shoulders.

Something appeared in the distance and as he got closer the silhouette of a black Tower became visible from behind the trees. They had foreseen his arrival. To his left he noticed another Tower. All of a sudden he heard a battle cry behind him as the enemy troops moved into position to cut off his retreat. He was corralled. He gasped as he saw the enemy Queen appear and glide to him in one smooth continuous motion with her charcoal black cape whipping behind her until she was an arm’s length away. He shook violently with fear as she stood and stared down at him, her black evil eyes filled with revenge and a deep yearning for power. He could feel her breath on his bare neck and it stunk of dry blood and death.

Suddenly, with one brisk movement, she snatched his arm and shoved him off his horse, forcing him onto the ground. The last thing that he saw was the triumphant smile upon the Black Queen’s delicate ebony lips, as a giant hand lifted him off the chessboard.



Izabela



Urbaniak

Photographer

Born in 1973, **Izabela Urbaniak** is a commercial and fine art photographer based in Lodz, Poland. She has an MD in Management Psychology and has graduated with honors from Warsaw Film School. She is the Vice President of ZPAF (Polish Photographers' Association) in Lodz and is well known for characteristic style and lyrical atmosphere of her photos. The main topics of her works are women with their beauty and fragility and surrounding life. She introduces this sophisticated art into commercial part of her work, where she shoots, among others for Dilmah and Bols.

Her main achievements are: Grand Prix of *National Geographic Traveler Magazine* in 2008; Photo of the year of *Photo Art Magazine* in 2008; 1st Place in the Polish edition of EISA Photo Contest 2009; 2nd Place in the Photo Industrial 2009 contest; Honours from Sony World Photography Awards 2011; 1st Place in Viva Photo Awards 2012; 1st Place in Samsung Fotoblog Awards 2012. More of her work can be found at www.izabelaurbaniak.blogspot.com and www.izabelaurbaniak.pl



summertime



Brandon T. Madden has been published in various graduate, and professional journals including *S/tick*, *The River and South Review*, *Flyover Country Review*, *The Write Time at the Write Place*, *Gravel Literary Magazine*, *Empty Sink Publishing*, *Sediments Literary Arts Journal*, *Twisted Vine Literary Arts Journal*, *Arlington Literary Journal*, and *Torrid Literature Journal*. His political theory piece "Do Americans Still Believe in the Principles of the Declaration of Independence" was published by the international journal: *The Transnational* in 2015. He hopes to one day become a competent writer. To view his other works please visit: <https://www.linkedin.com/pub/brandon-t-madden/6b/489/595>

Brandon T. Madden

Author



The child clutched tightly to the red balloon. It bobbed up and down staring at the crowds of people moving around the child flowing towards the nearest rides, attractions, and food stands. The sun was beginning to set as the carnival began to sporadically set off fireworks, signalling its end. The explosions caused the herd of people to momentarily stop, catching glimpses of reds, greens, and blues while the child stood alone.

No one bothered to acknowledge it.

The balloon looked down at its owner, it could feel the fear rising up from the plastic ribbon and into its helium. The child gave a frantic look around, trying to peer above the sea of bodies, in search of something. It could not get a glimpse of what it was looking for, so it attempted to edge its body closer to the current. The steely roar of the rollercoaster nearby startled the child and it gave out a loud gasp, which was drowned out by the screams of the passers-by in the metal cart. It began to sob as the balloon continued to bob up and down from above, not knowing what to do.

Circus music merrily played out from a nearby tent that drew the attention of both the balloon and the child. The balloon, noticing that the child's sobs had turned into a faint whimper at the sound of the music, began to tug towards the red and white striped tent. The child dutifully followed, slicing through the crowds which caused them to abruptly stop. Some yelled at the child while others shook their heads, but the child did



Carnival Ballons

not notice, or at least the balloon did not.

They entered into the tent and the child's face lit up.

Inside were exotic animals that roared or trumpeted while humans performed acrobatics moves and tricks to amuse the crowds. The child laughed and giggled, which made the balloon feel at ease (although it was petrified by a nearby group of clowns and their treatment of its own kind, bending and twisting them into torturous shapes).

The child continued to wander around the tent while the balloon dutifully followed behind, tracking the child's location, until there was nothing left to see. They exited the tent, which relieved the balloon for it was safely away from the clowns.

The sky was now dark and fireworks continued to sporadically burst, colouring it for a brief moment. The balloon looked at awe wishing it could be amongst them with the stars, but it could feel that the child was growing more worried by the minute. It looked down and noticed that the child was beginning to become fainter in the darkness (only the tight clutch of its tiny fingers let it know it was still around).

It began to fear that it was no longer going to be able to track the child and be able to help it find what it needed. Gun powder filled the air, creating a thin haze, as the fireworks began their finale. The ribbon began to shake violently and the balloon could feel the child begin to run away into

the crowd. It lurched back and could no longer see the child as it whizzed past people that attempted to swat it away.

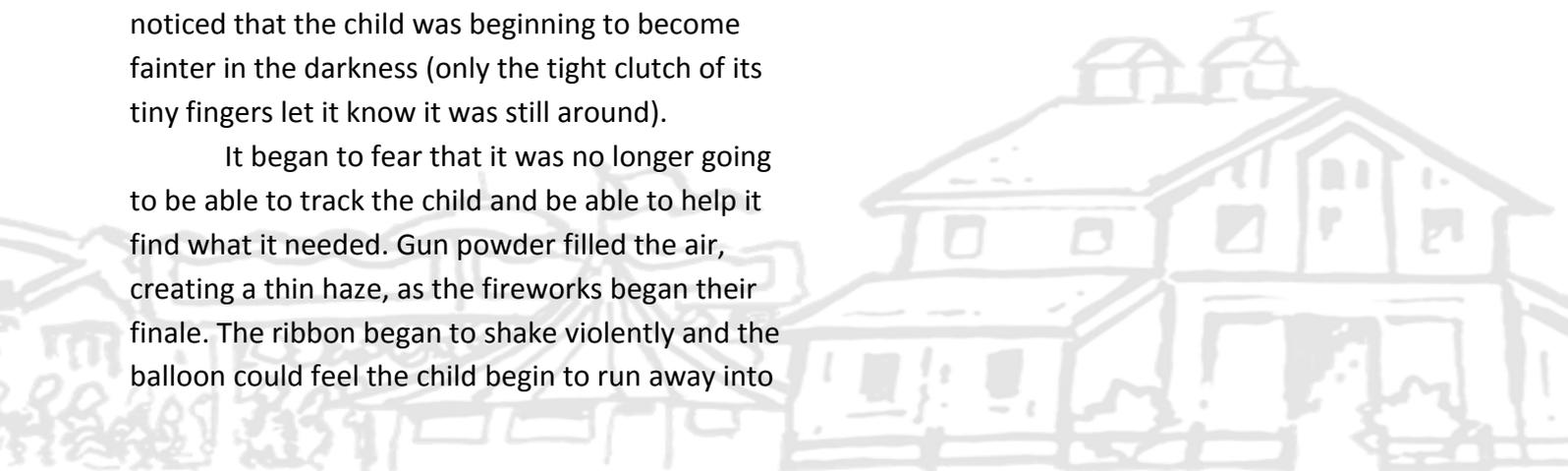
The child abruptly stopped.

Its grip loosened and the balloon began to float higher away from the child until it could no longer feel its little fingers wrapped around its string. Losing sight of the child, the balloon hoped that it had found what it was looking for.

*

A family began to walk back to its car after the carnival had finished for the night. The relieved mother talked to the ashamed father claiming that they needed to be more vigilant and protective of their child. The child, hanging onto its fathers shoulders, realized that its balloon was no longer wrapped around its hand.

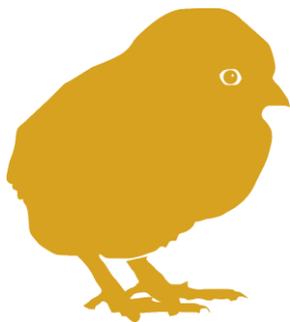
It looked up into the night sky, seeing if it would find it floating above the circus chatting with the stars.



An Honorable Mention recipient for the Fernando Rielo XXXII World Prize for Mystical Poetry, **Joe Bisicchia** has had works appear in various venues. He is a former television host who also taught high school English. He co-invented an award winning family card game and currently writes in marketing and public affairs.

Poet

Joe Bisicchia





The Chicken

Learning about yourself in a world of others

Shell cracked open. New life squinted new eyes. The little one took whiff of stinky coop and scratched furry head.

“What am I?”

With so much curiosity, he wanted to know. Soon he quickly learned to strut, and soon he was wondering how to use those things on his sides, his little wings.

But, then one day, all chickens of the coop scurried with fear.

“I am the fox,” growled a red monster.

And the new life then wondered why feathers were flying. He found himself tossed through the gate and under a bush, his foot aching until he fainted.

Seeing whole sad spectacle, the eagle swooped down, embraced the unconscious chicken and carried him up high, high, high up to the eagle’s nest.

Gallant bird nursed little bird’s wounds until the chicken awakened with hopeful eyes wide.

“I am an eagle,” he boasted.

“No,” came the reply. “You’re a chicken.”

Everyday Chuck would sit from his safe seat in the nest and watch the eagle spread mighty wings to sail to the sun. Chuck dreamed of the day he too would master sky and soar.

“You have mighty wings,” said Chuck.

“And you’re able to strut, prance back and forth, and bob and weave,” said the eagle. “And you’re able to know the closeness of earth, and all the goodness that can come of it. Especially, when being part of a community like yours. Get to know your world, and all who share it with you. And show kindness in what you can do.”

Soon, Chuck’s foot healed and his body became full and he felt a need to strut.

From lofty perch, his wings wanted to spread wide.



"I am an eagle," he boasted.

"No," replied the eagle kindly, "You're a chicken."

"But what are you?"

"I live here in this atmosphere. I am one of you."

"Then I want to soar too!"

"And you will," said the eagle. "In our own way, we all can."

"Then let me."

The eagle looked upon him with understanding eyes.

It was time. The chicken needed freedom.
So, she embraced the bird, and held him close
all the way downward back toward earth.

The amazed chicken cherished the flight. "I AM an eagle!"

They landed softly upon the coop's dust,
amidst startled inhabitants.

"No, my fellow bird," replied the eagle kindly.
"You're a chicken."

The eagle took Chuck from under her wing,
and with hopeful eyes, said goodbye.

All the chickens marveled at the flight of the heavenly bird
and then turned their attention to their long lost friend,
now back home, grounded.

"What am I?" he frightfully asked.

"You know what you are," they responded.

Just then, all the chickens scurried with fear.

"I am the fox," growled the red monster.

Feathers and dust began to fly.
The fox came face to face with Chuck,
who fearlessly welcomed him.



Rest of coop quickly ran to the corners.

“Do you know me?” asked Chuck.

“Yes, I do,” said the fox.

“Sadly, I don’t think you do,” said Chuck. “And sadly, I don’t know much about you. Other than the obvious, which has me prepared to do what I know I can do.”

“And that is?” laughed the fox.

“Get to know you.”

The fox laughed even more. “I know all I need to know.”
And then, excited about this game,
the fox lunged at the foolish fellow.

Chuck reacted with his natural gifts. Turned cheek and bobbed left.

Fox missed.

Chuck bobbed right.

Fox missed again.

The fox wondered how this chicken could be checked.
Gave it one last big lunge and Chuck held his breath.

“Ouch, that had to hurt,” said Chuck.

His beak had poked the fox in the eye.

“No kidding,” said the fox holding his eye all teary.

“But I think I’m alright.”

“Next time,” proposed Chuck,

“hopefully we can have a better way to play.”

All the chickens, seeing Chuck’s bravery circled the fox, all of them bobbing and weaving, their beaks seeming to the fox like pointy points clearly made.

The fox, squinting and trying his best to see straight
looked at the power of this coop.

“If only that could be true, about being able to play. But you folks kind of scare me.”

“Well, try this for a start,” said the chicken.

“Call me Chuck, your neighbor here in this atmosphere.



And you? What's your name?"

The fox paused to think about the oddity of this conversation. He knew how chickens should know his type, if he were them. After all, he was a fox, the enemy.

Wasn't he?

But never before had a chicken asked his name. Never before had a chicken cared to know. And so, he answered, "I'm Jack, and I live here too."

"Good to formally meet you," smiled Chuck.
"That means we're one of you."

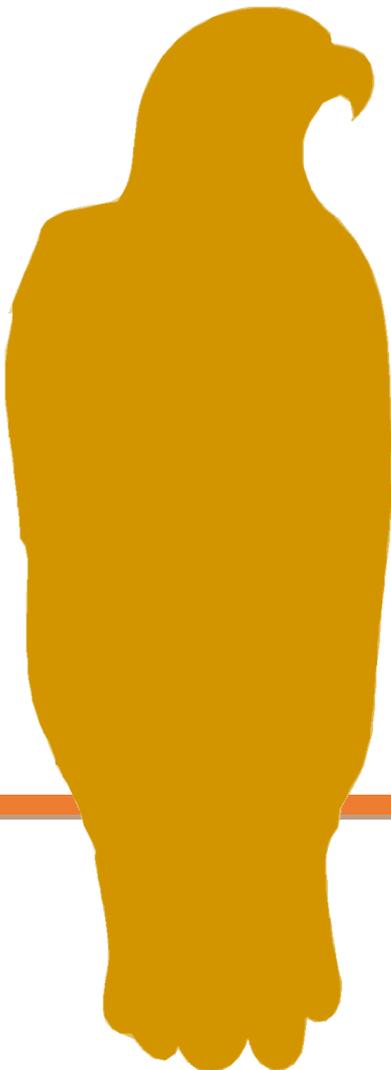
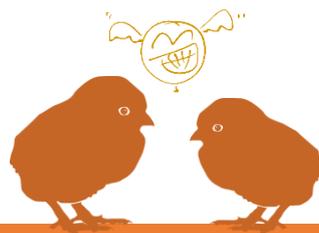
All the chickens circled tighter around the fox, bobbing and weaving, and he shrunk with fear, finding it hard to breathe with all the feathers in his face.

"We're a close knit community," said Chuck. "And very welcoming. With special gifts. Expect it."

"Well, nice to meet you all," answered Jack. "I think it's time I go." And with an uneasy smile, walking backward, he then turned and darted away.

All the chickens of the pen danced and strutted around Chuck.

And high above, the eagle smiled.
Chuck had indeed learned to soar.



The Math Beast

How many days till I have twenty
if Dad says five bucks per week is plenty?

How many cookies for John and Ken
if the box has three times ten?

Every math problem on the page
roars like a tiger in a cage.

And all I've got to tame the beast
is a pencil I sharpened
till it's almost deceased.

How many hours will it take
if I start now without a break?

Could be one or two or eight—
as long as I procrastinate.

Thunder

Why do you have to pound
Like a stampede on the roof?
A thousand heavy bodies
Stamping each and every hoof!

If you're trying to warn me
That I should stay inside.
You can stop your shouting.
I'm already terrified.

Poet

Jacqueline Jules

Jacqueline Jules is the author of 30 books for young readers including the “Zapato Power Series” “Never Say a Mean Word Again”, “Duck for Turkey Day” and the “Sofia Martinez series”. Her poetry has appeared in *Cricket Magazine*, *The Poetry Friday Anthologies*, *Stories for Children*, and dozens of adult journals including *Red Booth Review*. You can visit her online at www.jacquelinejules.com



Liana Tan

Author

As a creative writing minor at Brigham Young University, **Liana Tan** is seeking to help educate youth and raise literary rates globally. She has a passion for fun, simple stories that teach morals to people, no matter what age they are and that provoke thought as one reads deeper into them. She has loved writing ever since she was a young girl making stories for her family and drawing pictures with her little sister. She has had her work featured in Impressions of Youth literary magazine. She was also the creator of her high school literary magazine. She is a Chinese girl with Malaysian heritage who speaks Japanese. She loves drinking soup, playing cards, and she has never lost at a thumb war.

Evening Shadows

They loved the way the sun beat on their backs, the way the stray balloon tickled as it passed through. They liked to catch the birds as they flew past and occasionally rest upon the mountaintops. But this morning was so pleasant and the air was still in the skies.

“Let's rest here and look down at the clear land below us and make shapes of the people,” said one cloud to the other. They swayed before the sun, casting long shadows all around as the people began their day's labor.

“Look, that old man so weary and crooked, what could he be?”

“When he works in the field his shadow is great and strong like an oak.”

“That woman, so plump and round, what could she be?”

“When she turns sideways to enter her home her shadow is slender and gentle like a flower.”

“That child, so wild and mischievous, what could he be?”

“When he plays his shadow is carefree and darting like a puppy.”

The day went on, the gentle breezes blew, and the people passed by. The clouds chuckled and dreamt of life as they lazily gazed and made shapes of the people below. At noon, the sun beat

down high in the sky. One small, weed-like boy crept out his door and into the hot sun, stretching and yawning, having just awoken from a long sleep. His eyelids and shoulders drooped as he dragged himself to the field to labor. He stood in the field under the noonday sun, his shadow a shriveled figure on the ground.

“Look at that boy, so thin and sleepy, what could he be?”

“No matter which way he turns, his shadow is small and fragile like a sprout.”

The boy soon got tired in the sun and scratched his neck where the hot rays beat down. He put down his tools, left the field, and went back into his home to sleep until the next day.

“Why did he return to his home?” pondered one cloud. “Doesn't he want to wait until the evening sun so he can see how tall his shadow can be?”

Days passed and the winds blew the cloud over farms and villages, but every time the winds returned the cloud to that village, the cloud searched for the boy. It seemed that every day the old, crooked man who lived nearby would knock on the boy's window just as the sun peaked over the mountain, but the boy did not wake up and step out of his house until noon. After a few hours in the sun each day, the boy soon returned into his



home. The old neighbour worked tirelessly each day, his crooked back lengthening like a great oak as he stood and admired his growing field. The cloud saw the pride and contentment in the old man's crooked walk as his great shadow followed him. She reflected on the boy's downhearted saunter as he looked down at his shriveled shadow that trailed behind him when he returned to his home each day. She wished the boy could see his great evening shadow too. The cloud had an idea.

The winds had calmed and the cloud settled above the village for a while.

"I will cover the sun for him so he will not be so hot!" said the cloud. The next day when the boy sauntered out into the hot sun, the cloud gently passed in front of the sun and cast a wide shadow over the land. The boy took a deep breath, looked up at the sky, and smiled. He had never felt so comfortable outside away from the heat. The cloud saw the boy's deep brown eyes and crooked smile and felt a love for the boy. She wanted him to see how tall his shadow could be in the evening so she could always see his crooked smile rather than his sulky saunter. The boy put down his tools and laid comfortably on the ground. Then he tucked his knees to his chest and smiled as he fell asleep under the cool sky. When the cloud saw him cease his labor, she became frustrated.

"Why is he sleeping again?" The cloud shouted as great thunder rolled across the sky. "I wish he would labor a little longer, else he will never see his evening shadow." The cloud was sad that her plan had failed. She sniffled and shed tears of disappointment on the boy. The teardrops hit the boy's face and his eyes fluttered open. The tears fell quicker and quicker and began soaking the boy. He jumped up and fled back into his house.

"I don't understand," she said. "He won't

work in the sun. He won't work in the shade. He won't work in the rain." The cloud sat in the sky pondering about the boy. She wanted to see the boy all day and wished the boy could see his evening shadow at least once. The cloud remembered the boy's deep brown eyes and crooked smile.

"I wish the boy could feel the love of all the whole sky," she thought. "Maybe then he would come out all day." The cloud gathered all of her friends and told them her plan. She asked each cloud to blow a kiss to the boy so that maybe he would feel so loved that he would always want to be under the sky.

The next morning the clouds assembled and covered the whole sky, waiting anxiously for the boy to come out. The old neighbor knocked on the window, called out to the boy, then ventured to the field alone to begin the day's work. Noon came and the boy peaked out of his house. All of the clouds began blowing kisses to the boy, but with all of the clouds blowing, the air became frigid and each kiss fell as a fluffy white crystal. The first crystal gently fell and tumbled down, falling lightly on the boy's nose. He looked up and shivered, running back into the home to protect him from the cold. The cloud was so sad to see the boy return to his home and to see her plan fail again that she began crying, but each of her tears turned into crystals as well. The crystals fell all day and all evening. The cloud noticed a dark shape amidst the sheets of white in a field close by. It was the crooked, weary old man. He continued to labor all day, but the frigid air was causing him to slow down. He could barely lift his tools and slowly pulled his feet through the fallen snow. The cloud saw this and cried more. She didn't mean to cause so much trouble; she had only wanted the boy to feel loved.

The old man worked without ceasing through the icy cold weather. Meanwhile, behind

the frosted window, two sleepy eyes peeked above the window pane. The old man worked through the night, shoveling the snow and tending to his crops. Dawn broke and the man fell to his knees. His back was weary and he couldn't work through the snow any longer. The air was cold and still. Soft crystals fell from the gray sky.

Then, through the silence of the falling snow, the door of the little house creaked open and one droopy eyed boy peeked his head out. He opened his eyes, rolled back his shoulders, and picked up the old man's fallen tools. The clouds watched as the old man lifted his feeble hand in gratitude and spent the morning instructing the boy on what to do. The boy worked under the gray sky all day, not stopping to eat or rest. The clouds smiled. The noonday sun began to fall in the sky and the boy put his tools down. The clouds sat still in anticipation. He wrapped his long, bare fingers around the crops of the field and began harvesting the crops that the old man had worked so long to plant. The old man smiled. He continued to work as the sun fell further in the sky.

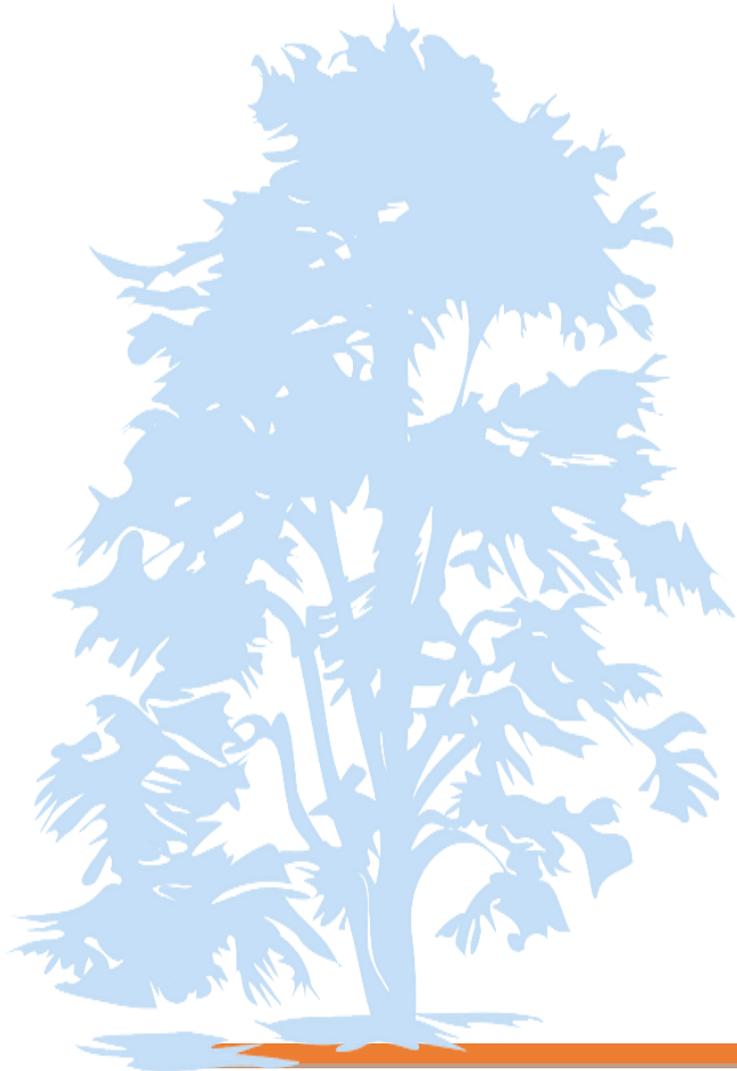
Sweat glistened on the boy's forehead; he panted and looked through his deep brown eyes at the field before him. The day's work was done. The clouds shouted and danced for joy, splitting from their mass in the sky and letting the sun spill through them. The golden evening rays warmed the ground below, melting the last traces of frost and trickling onto the fragile boy. He stood, staring at the cultivated field before him and saw, for the first time, a shadow stretching out on the soil below, taller than he ever imagined it could be. His hands were raw and his body sore, but he raised his droopy eyes and smiled a crooked smile.

It was a pleasant evening and the sun warmed the clouds' backs. They gazed at the people below them.

"Look, that small, weed-like boy, what

could he be?" said one cloud to the other.

"When he lifts his head and rolls back his shoulders he is great and strong like an oak."



Recipe for Disaster

Take one Earth
Fill it with more and more people
Add enough food for everyone
But sprinkle it unevenly
Until some have more than others.

Remove coal, oil and gas
In sufficient quantities
To provide us with power
Even though there won't be enough left
For future generations.

Release greenhouse gases into the air
So that the climate changes,
The temperature rises,
Weather patterns become unpredictable
And floods submerge the land.

Pour industrial waste into rivers and lakes
So that they become polluted.
Then ration clean water
So that you have enough
Even if others go thirsty.

Make sure that you get your share
Regardless of those who have to go without
And whatever the effect might be
On your grandchildren.

Put yourself first
And then you'll have
A recipe for disaster.



John Foster was born in 1941 and grew up in a village outside Carlisle called Scotby. After university, he became a teacher and taught English for twenty years in schools in Oxfordshire, before becoming a full-time writer. He has compiled over 150 poetry anthologies and written twelve books of his own poetry. Today, he lives in an Oxfordshire village with his wife Chris. He has two grown-up sons, Ian and Simon and two grandchildren, Evie and Louis. More information about him is available at www.johnfosterchildrenspoet.co.uk.

Poet

John Foster

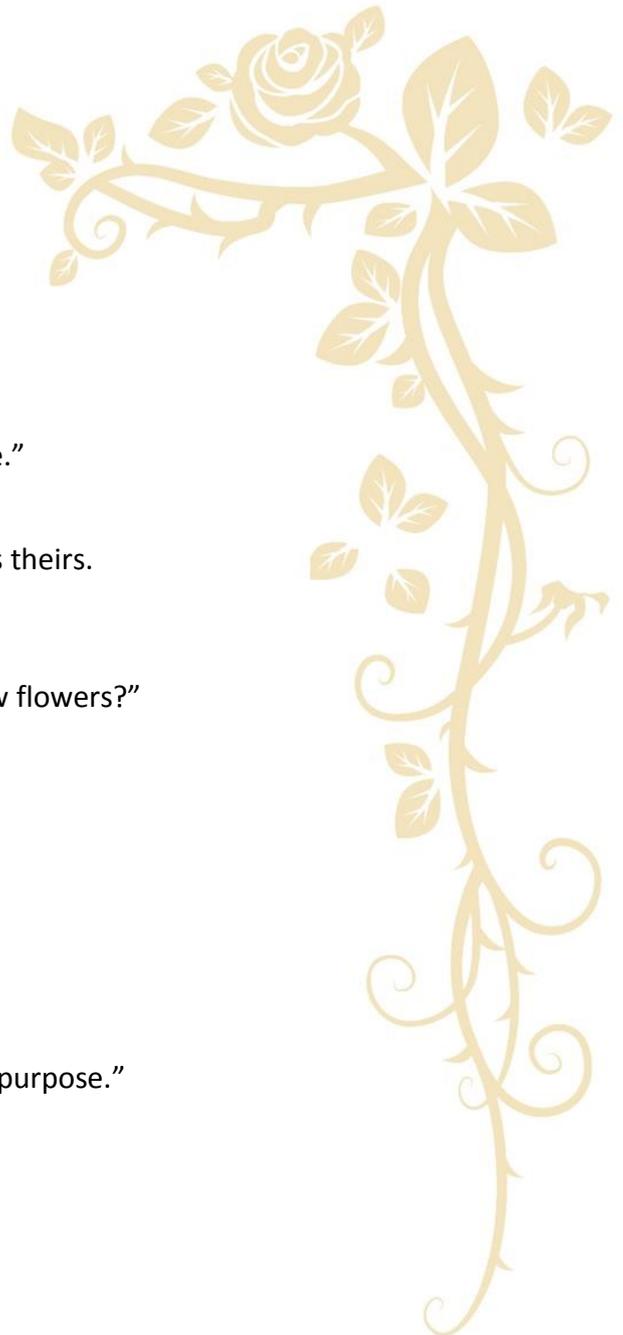


“This room,” said the teacher,
 “was called a conservatory.
 In it you will see The Flower.
 Can you remember what a flower is?”
 “Please, sir, it’s a kind of plant.”
 “Well done, Rose.
 It’s a kind of plant.
 How is it different from the plants
 that we grow today?”
 “Please, sir, you can’t eat it.”
 “Well done, Violet.
 You can’t eat it.
 And where was it grown?”
 “Please, sir, in a garden.”
 “That’s right, Primrose.
 In a garden.
 And what was a garden?”
 “Please, sir, a piece of land beside a house.”
 “That’s right, Iris.
 A piece of land that people
 who lived in a house would claim that was theirs.
 And what did they do in the garden?”
 “Please, sir, they grew flowers.”
 “Well done, Daisy.
 They grew flowers. And why did they grow flowers?”
 “Please sir, to look at.”
 “That’s right, Poppy”
 “Please, sir, and to smell.”
 “Well done, Hyacinth.
 They grew flowers to look at and smell.
 But we don’t grow flowers today.
 Why not?”
 “Please, sir, because they are banned.”
 “That’s right, Marigold.
 And why are they banned?”
 “Please, sir, because they serve no useful purpose.”
 “Exactly. Well done, Lily.
 So look at The Flower.
 As you will see
 It serves no useful purpose.
 It is there only to remind us
 why we no longer grow them.”

“Oh, but it’s pretty,” said Primrose.
 “And its petals are soft,” said Poppy.
 “And it smells so nice,” said Hyacinth.
 “It’s beautiful,” said Rose.

“Do not be deceived,” said the teacher.
 “It serves no useful purpose.”

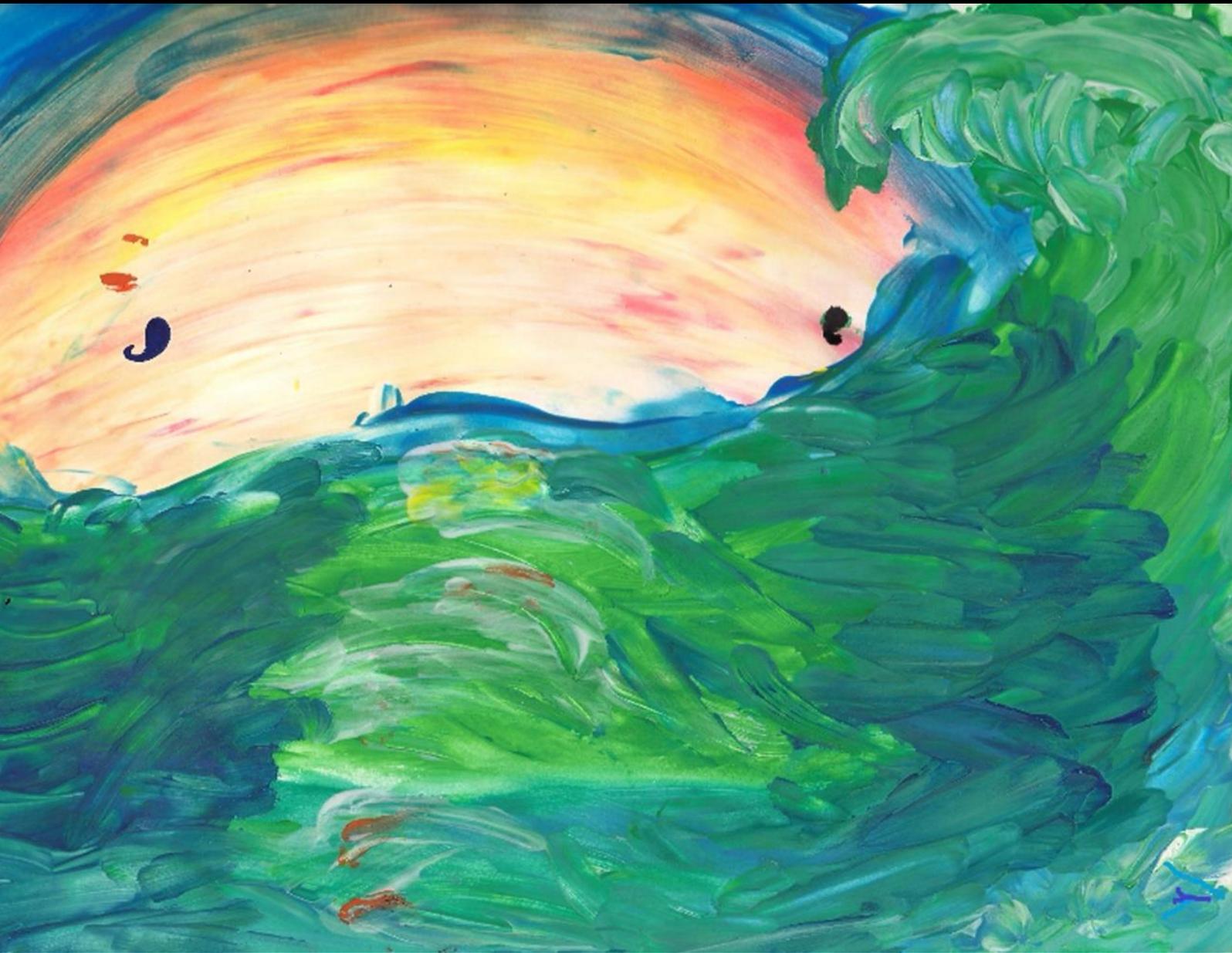
The Flower



Artist

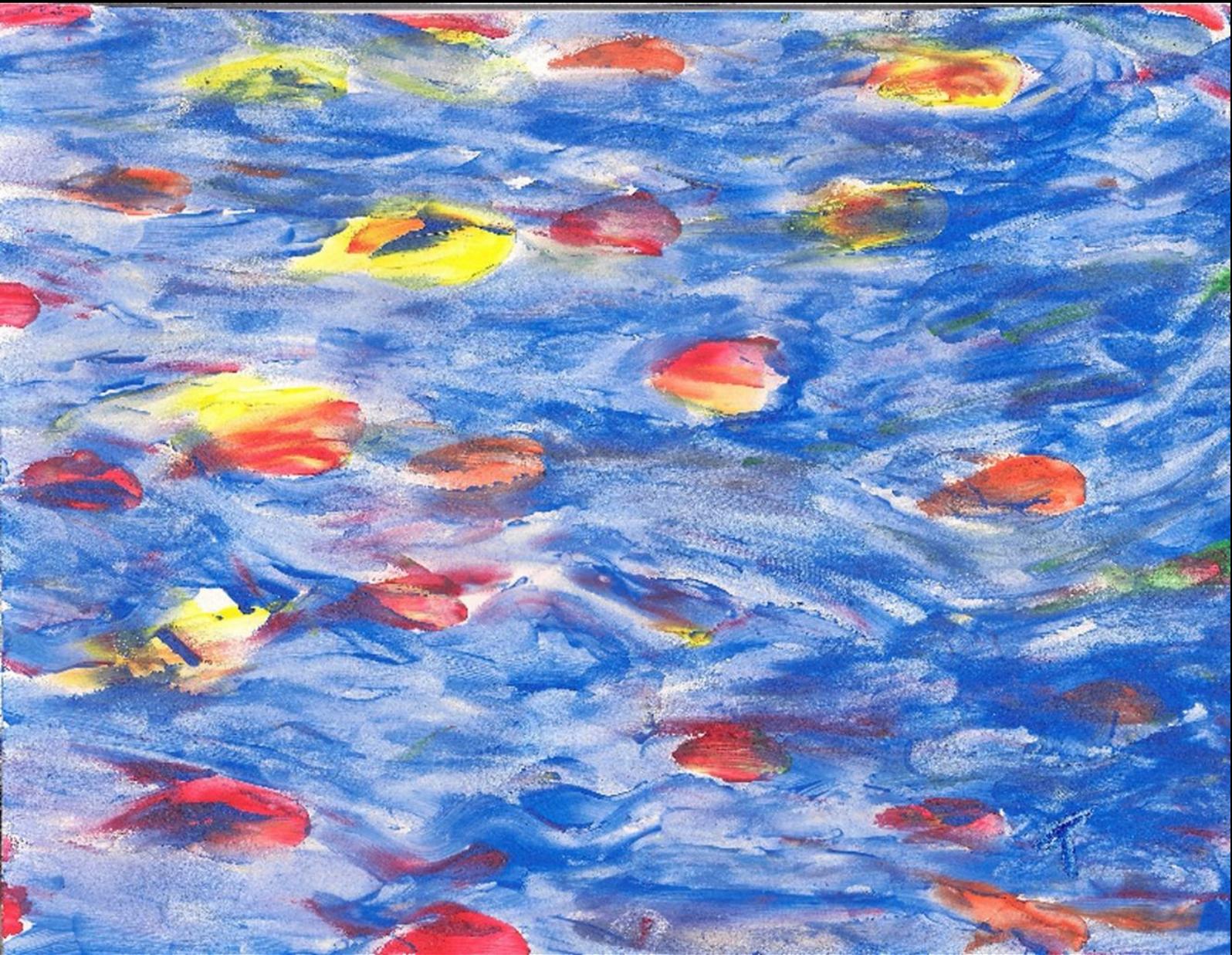
Tammy

Baby Whale



Ruggles

Aquarium 8



Tammy Ruggles is a legally blind finger painter and photographer in Kentucky. For finger painting, she lets her intuition and studies of art do most of the work. Since she can't see to copy the world around her, she relies on memory and past experience as an artist. Some of her art and photos have been published in art magazines and literary journals like *Art Times Journal*, *Whitefish Review*, *Black Bottom Press*, *Briar Cliff Review*, *Blacktop Passages*, *Pentimento*, *Snapping Twig*, *The Notebook*, and others. Her education includes a Bachelor's in Social Work, and a Master's in Adult Ed/Counseling, with over 10 years' experience as a child protection social worker, a hospice social worker, and a mental health social worker.



“Old Enough”



Chris Wilkensen is the editor of the e-journal *Rock Bottom*. Originally from Chicago, he has worked and traveled Asia and the Middle East. He currently lives in Saudi Arabia. His short stories have appeared in *Thoughtsmith*, *eFiction*, *The Story Shack* and others. More of his work can be found at chriswilkensen.com.

Chris Wilkensen

Author

Shelly sat next to her brother, Carl, in the living room. They watched cartoons on their big-screen TV. Their mom came into the room. She held her black designer purse and looked at her watch.

"It's time to go to Grandma's house. Are you ready?" Mom asked.

Carl looked at Shelly, confused. They kept quiet.

"Don't you remember? Yesterday, I said we would visit Grandma today. I think you forgot," Mom said.

The children looked at the TV, pretending not to hear.

"We don't want to go to Grandma's house," Shelly said.

"Why not?" Mom asked.

"It's boring there," Carl said, his eyes fixed on the screen.

"Be nice. It's not boring there. Anyway, we're leaving in five minutes," Mom said.

Mom drove them to Grandma's house, despite the children's sighing and whining. The children walked into the house, hugged Grandma, and disappeared into the living room. Pictures of a younger, more beautiful version of Grandma watched them from every corner.

While Mom and Grandma tidied the kitchen for lunch, Shelly and Carl played on their cell phones in the living room.

"It's really boring here," Carl whispered.

"I know," Shelly said. "No computers, video games or cartoons. It's no fun here."

"I heard that," Grandma said. The children turned to see Grandma standing behind them. She crossed her arms and walked back to the kitchen table. Grandma pretended to cry.

Mom came in with crossed arms.

"What did you two say?" Mom asked.

"We didn't know she was behind us."

Shelly looked at the carpet.

"Kids, you really hurt Grandma's feelings.

You need to apologize now," Mom said.

"Sit down, kids," Grandma said.

The children sat down at the table.

"I'm not boring," Grandma said. "I have so many interesting stories. Did I tell you about the time I saved people from a bad man?"

"You saved people?" the children asked. Their faces perked up. They shifted closer to hear her better.

"Yeah, I stopped a bad guy," Grandma smiled.

"What was the bad guy doing?" Shelly asked.

"Was he stealing?" Carl asked.

"The bad guy was a vampire," Grandma said.

"Really?" the children asked.

"Yes, he was very scary. Everyone was afraid of the vampire," Grandma said.

The children took a deep breath.

"Everyone was slowly walking away from the vampire," Grandma said.

"So, what did you do, Grandma?" Carl asked.

"How did you help?" Shelly asked.

"I just finished shopping," Grandma said. "I took out some garlic from my bag. I showed the garlic to the vampire. The vampire ran away."

The children laughed. The children's chuckles worked better than the pills she threw down her throat daily.

"Wow, you're a hero, Grandma," Carl said. Carl and Shelly clapped.

"Do you kids know about when I stopped a werewolf?" Grandma asked.

"No, what happened, Grandma?" Shelly asked.

"A werewolf was scaring people outside the grocery store," Grandma began.

The children began to fill in the blanks in the story.



“And then a vampire comes out of nowhere to save the good people, because that’s what cool vampires do,” Shelly said.

“But he’s no match for the werewolf, which was actually a zombie in disguise. The werewolf-zombie kills the vampire before he turns into a bat and flies away,” Carl said.

“Yeah, and right after that, the vampire turns into a zombie and kills the werewolf-zombie.”

“A vampire could never kill a zombie, you idiot.”

“How would you know?”

On and on the children continued.

Grandma knew the right cue to make them talk, but their chattering bewildered her. In her time, children were to be seen, not heard.

“Where do they come up with this stuff?” Grandma asked Mom.

Grandma began cooking her famous meatballs, her grandkids in the other room. Mom came up behind her.

“Instead of telling the kids what you’re supposed to say, you start talking about werewolves, of all things,” Mom said.

“They don’t need to hear it. They’re too young. Let ‘em be happy,” Grandma said.

“They’re old enough. They should hear it,” Mom said.

“Stop it!” Grandma threw the spaghetti spoon on the ground. “I’m not mentioning it. If you feel you have to mention it, then you do it. Just give me some peace.”

The children in the other room looked at each other, gulped. They knew to stay out of their way and to be extra polite, extra quiet.

The family ate in silence. After lunch, Grandma broke the quietness with a serious tone.

“On TV, your generation is obsessed with monsters. I was around when people *were* monsters. That’s where I met your granddad, amid

all the monsters. He rescued me from the monsters of war. But I saved his life.”

“I don’t know if this is right for the children,” Mom said.

“They’re old enough. You can’t shield these kids from everything, just like I couldn’t protect you,” Grandma said.

Mom left the room quickly and quietly. The children had no choice but to listen to Grandma’s rants.

“When I first saw him, there was dirt on his face, his teeth hadn’t been brushed in Lord-knows-how-long, and he pissed his pants. He was by no means a handsome man, but I felt so much pity for him, a scared, hurt little kid who thought he was going to die.”

Grandma started the story about how they met in the Vietnam War. She was a nurse, and he was a wounded soldier.

“And then, he came to find me at my house, years later. I had been hoping he would survive. I saw him in a different light. I had no idea he would be that handsome after the war. Some things are better than you can imagine them, children. Remember that.”

Grandma used the bathroom, so the children snuck outside for a little while. They saw Mom sitting on the steps.

“Did she finish?” Mom asked.

“We hope so,” Shelly said.

“I heard that story so many times growing up I could recite it back perfectly. Did she bring up the part when your grandpa lost her phone number and address, but that wasn’t a problem because he looked at it so many times that he memorized everything perfectly? If you knew your grandpa better, you’d laugh at how long that took. He couldn’t tell you what our birthdays or ages were, let alone the day of the week.”

Mom was chewing gum, which she started doing when she quit smoking a few years ago.



When she chewed gum, the children knew to keep out of her way.

Still, Shelly sensed something strange about this visit.

“Mom,” she said. “Is Grandma okay? She never used to talk about stuff like this before.”

“She just misses your grandfather. She’s alone all the time. She needs someone to comfort her. Especially now.”

Mom didn’t answer. Just once, the children wanted a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. *Does Santa exist? Well, if you think he does, then he does. Is there really a God? That’s what you’ll find out for yourself.* The children only sighed.

Mom walked into the car and drove away. The kids went inside, confused. Grandma was onto the story about the first time their grandpa took her out, and about how he was giving her more compliments than she had ever received, that he “overwhelmed” her, but they didn’t know what that word meant. Mom rushed in amid Grandma’s advice to Carl that he should always say flattering things to his future girlfriends.

“Time to go,” Mom interrupted. The kids could hear her crying.

“What’s the rush?” the grandma asked.

“We’ve got a long week in front of us, a lot of stuff to do, chop-chop.”

The children hugged their grandma and got into Mom’s car. Fresh cigarette smoke filled the air.

“Did you two have fun at Grandma’s house today?” Mom asked in the car, fidgeting.

Carl shrugged.

“Mom, what’s going on?” Carl asked.

Mom started to cry.

“I couldn’t stay there much longer. She’s going to die,” Mom said. She slammed on the brakes.



Peaches



Jennifer Palmer *Author*

Jennifer Palmer is currently a junior at Converse College in Spartanburg, South Carolina. She is double majoring in Creative and Professional Writing and German.

She sat on the corner of E. Main and Pine.

“Just stay there,” her dad had said when she had called ten minutes earlier. “You don’t need to get any more lost.”

She sat on the low, natural stone wall boxing in a peach tree held above eye level by a mound of mulch flecked by rogue weeds.

The rumble of traffic scratched at her ears – the whining of motors, the clanking of semis, the squeaking of the Sparta bus brakes. She didn’t want to move, though. The Super Lodge across the street boasted not just daily rates, but weekly rates as well, as did the other motel on the street adjacent. Her dad wouldn’t be thrilled when he discovered just where he was picking her up.

Cars drove by – BMW’s, Camry’s, and a Mustang, but they didn’t pull into the parking lot. A faded Impala with a dented fender pulled into the Super Lodge.

She turned her head and looked at the peach tree. It looked wilted, almost dead despite the shade it received from the drugstore sign. Peaches hung from the tree and some littered the ground, but they looked rock-hard, as if they fell before they were ripe.

Maybe that would make her father feel better. He grew up working on his grandfather’s peach orchard. Of course, her great-grandfather had died before her birth and her grandparents sold the ranch ten years earlier, but he still liked to tell the stories.

She looked at the traffic again, perpetually moving. Even when braked, the cars shivered with energy waiting to be unleashed.

Her father still liked to talk about California though he hadn’t lived there in fifteen years. Though he said it wasn’t the same anymore anyway.

She glanced at the tree again. The peaches looked so... stale. Were they ornamental, the ones not to be eaten, but just for show? Her school had

an ornamental mandarin tree. Did ornamental peach trees exist as well?

A Mazda stopped at the red, its bass vibrating with either dubstep or rap.

A peach sat perched on a rod sticking out of the mulch. How did it land on the rod and stick? And how did a peach exist in April anyway?

She walked around the embankment. A sign stood on the other side of the tree.

“Peach Tree,” it read, “by Berry Bate, 2005. Beautification Project for the Citizens of Spartanburg.”

She stared up at the tree again. Its brownish-gray trunk was dull under the light. When she looked at the peaches on the ground, she saw that each one was staked to the ground – eternally ripe, eternally hard.

A car pulled up alongside her.

“How did you end up here?” her dad asked through the driver’s window. She shook her head as she climbed into the car.

“No idea.”



Under the Surface Deep

No one has ever called me beautiful,
even though I apply three layers of
eyeshadow strokes every morning
in the mirror, and Mama tells me the colors
are uneven just to poke a little fun.

But you called me beautiful today, and
I have to check the mirror three times more
just to make sure you didn't just
happen to missee my aesthetic.

You point to my heart as if to imbue it in me,
and buried like total repression I feel the buzz
of something more intangible than words can be.
It tickles from my soul something free,
for I feel a sort of demon lifting from my chest:
I am beautiful, I am art.



Angela Luo

Poet

Angela Luo is a rising senior at Dougherty Valley High School. In addition to writing, she is a competitive figure skater, a ballerina, a dancer, and an aspiring rapper. Her work has also been featured in *Wilderness House Literary Review* and *Amazing Kids! Magazine*.



Butterfly Wings



Like petals of the sky – delicate, fragile
 pirouetting with the breeze, with distinguished style
 Reflecting golden shards of soft sunlight,
 their presence though often, could never be trite
 They flit between the shades of nature, flutter at a lilt
 emanating beauty, enveloping the world like a quilt
 brightening the pallor of every relinquished field,
 able to rouse the flowers that have dolefully keeled
 Dancers of the air – clad in crimson and lime
 resembling fairies, unheeding of the passage of time
 Frail and vulnerable, with the texture of ice,
 through the air, they purposefully slash and slice
 They latch themselves to the syrup of the flowers
 unencumbered as the sun scorches and glowers
 They flitter instinctively, as though in a trance,
 they create an illusion for the senses, as they whirl and dance
 Yellow like a daffodil, blue like a coral,
 red like a dewy rose, colorations that are floral
 Predictably, the awakening of the sun was too sublime to last,
 as the clouds converged, their temper overcast
 They billowed across, and began to trickle,
 and on the pearly wings, began to pierce and tickle
 As thunder rolled across the sky,
 the beauties retreated, with a disconsolate sigh
 The blithely painted wings moved with the gust,
 gliding to safety with unrelenting trust
 The violent wind whipped through the grass,
 as comeliness vanished, having amassed
 As the storm died down, the butterflies all disappeared,
 leaving the fields looking subdued and austere

Richa Gupta

Poet



Richa Gupta is a fifteen-year old girl living in Bangalore, India, with her parents and sister. She started developing an interest in poetry from a young age, and has been honing her interest by writing and composing. She plans to publish a book of a collection of her poetry and short stories. She is also interested in western classical piano, Hindustani vocal and mathematics.

Artist

Hyonju (Karen) Ahn

Hyonju (Karen) Ahn attends The Hotchkiss School in Interlaken, CT as part of its Class of 2017. She has always had an interest in the arts and has developed her own skills in drawing and painting, focusing on pen & ink combined with watercolor to create detailed creations. Karen has also had the honour of winning several art and writing awards; her most recent accomplishments include 1st place nationally and in Connecticut for the 2015 International Aviation Art Contest, an Honourable Mention for the 2015 Connecticut Scholastic Art Awards, and a Silver Key for the 2015 Connecticut Scholastic Writing Award. Karen also enjoys writing short stories and fantasy fiction, traveling, updating her blog, hyonjune.blogspot.com, playing soccer, participating in humanitarian rights and relief work, and raising awareness for environmental conservation.



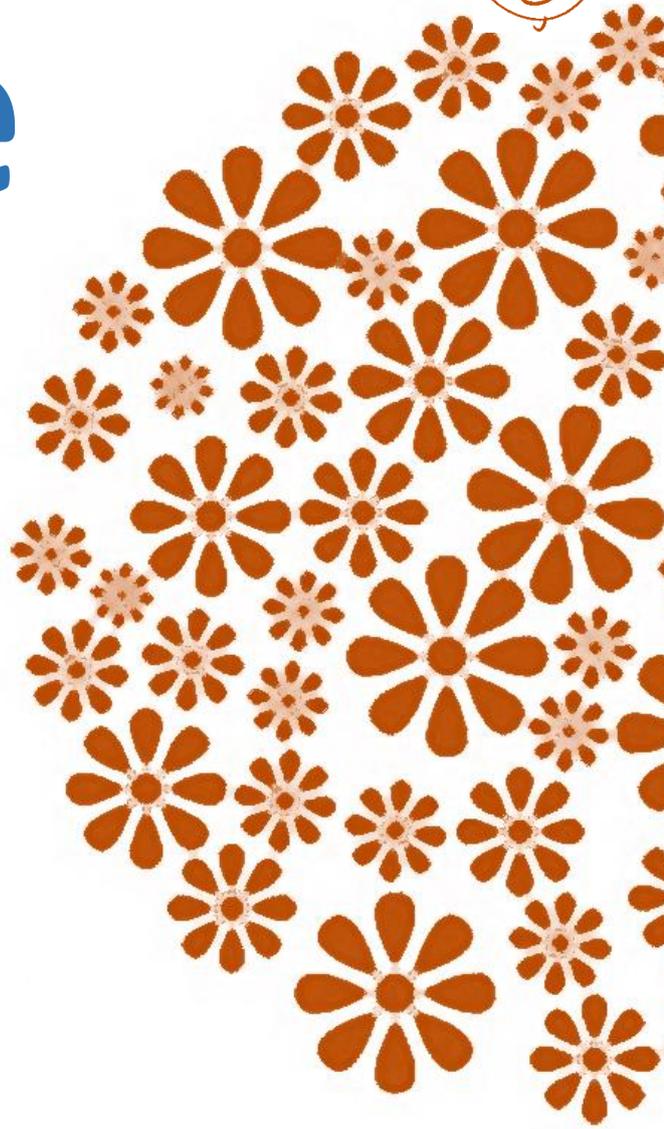
The Earth – A Miracle





City Lights

This I believe



Author

Nicole Romeu

Nicole Romeu is a published writer that enjoys spreading awareness about topics including but not limited to academics, culture, marginalization, and the self. She is currently seventeen years of age and attends high school in Miami, Florida.

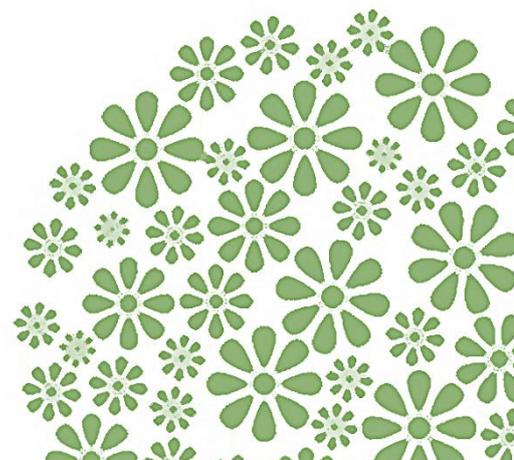
I believe in good teachers. The last time I thoroughly enjoyed a class was in the fifth grade. My teacher was Mr. Gans and he really knew how to make the most boring lectures into the greatest. He let us go outside to play with his two huskies. He took us on a three-day field trip to the Everglades with no showers, authentic campfires and night hikes in which my friends and I discovered our very real hatred of spiders but our love for mystery. Sadly, the year ended very quickly and he retired and lives on his farm in Montana. I never saw him ever again, but his spirit lived on and my expectations for my future instructors were extremely high. He taught me that perfection is really just a concept and how, it's okay to chase after what I wanted, even if it seemed kind of ridiculous to everyone else – if it was what I truly desired, no one should get in the way of it.

After graduating elementary school and delving into middle school, I didn't get the opportunity to have a guiding teacher or someone who cared about anything that was going on in my life. It was worksheet, after worksheet, after worksheet and I was beginning to wonder if school was honestly worth it and if it mattered to learn and mentally grow. Switching schools after sixth grade continued that long sequence of walking into classes and knowing that people were hired to teach, but not to inspire. People were hired to give out assignments, but not to wonder about the capabilities of their students. I lost hope and confidence in my own abilities, which were tediously cultivated by Mr. Gans but did not see their harvest day.

Once high school loomed over me, I already had the notion that I would come to class, sit in there for two hours, and go to my next class as if nothing had happened. My mind began to skip over to other things; I lost the simple joys of reading and writing every day. But that all changed when I hit eleventh grade.

When I saw this teacher's name on my schedule, I was frightened. I heard about the intense workload and I just wanted an easy way out, because I felt like I wasn't strong enough or intelligent for a class of such demanding levels of effort. However, walking into that room, fifth period, third block of the first day back from summer vacation, my life turned around. Here was a woman who wasn't playing any games: she wanted to see us succeed through any hardships and embrace ourselves as individuals with many talents. Through the wall of sarcastic jokes and nonchalance, I saw, for the first time in seven years, a person that wholly put her heart into her work. The assignments she gave, though very challenging, did not require an eighteen ounce drink of coffee: these were small pieces that she gave me to put together to complete a personal puzzle. The pieces, some large and some, quite small, were eventually all figured out to reflect back at me a picture: a picture that encouraged me to be brave, trusting, bold, and above all, myself.

This was not a class that was about studying to pass a test nor was it a class to pass time. She showed me that life is indeed short so I should spend it doing what I hopelessly love, and that, no matter what my dreams and ambitions were, all of them were achievable and beautiful. I believe teachers are the foundation for things like knowing what shape DNA has and calculating the square root of pi. But I believe a *good* teacher, is the key to unlocking your passions and making you realize your worth.



Balloons

BALLOONS Lit. Journal



NOT FOR SALE

BALLOONS Lit. Journal (BLJ) is dedicated to literature and art lovers of all ages around the world. Here, we would like to thank all our readers and contributors for their trust and devotion. In particular, a big thank you must be given to members of our reading team, especially Mr Justin Lee Chun-hei, Ms Lancy Tam and Mr Simon Tham, who have constructively commented on the earlier draft of this issue. An even bigger thank you should go to Mr Tham for his most comprehensive and passionate foreword to this issue.

BLJ wishes all its readers very good health and a very good time reading every piece chosen for you here.

