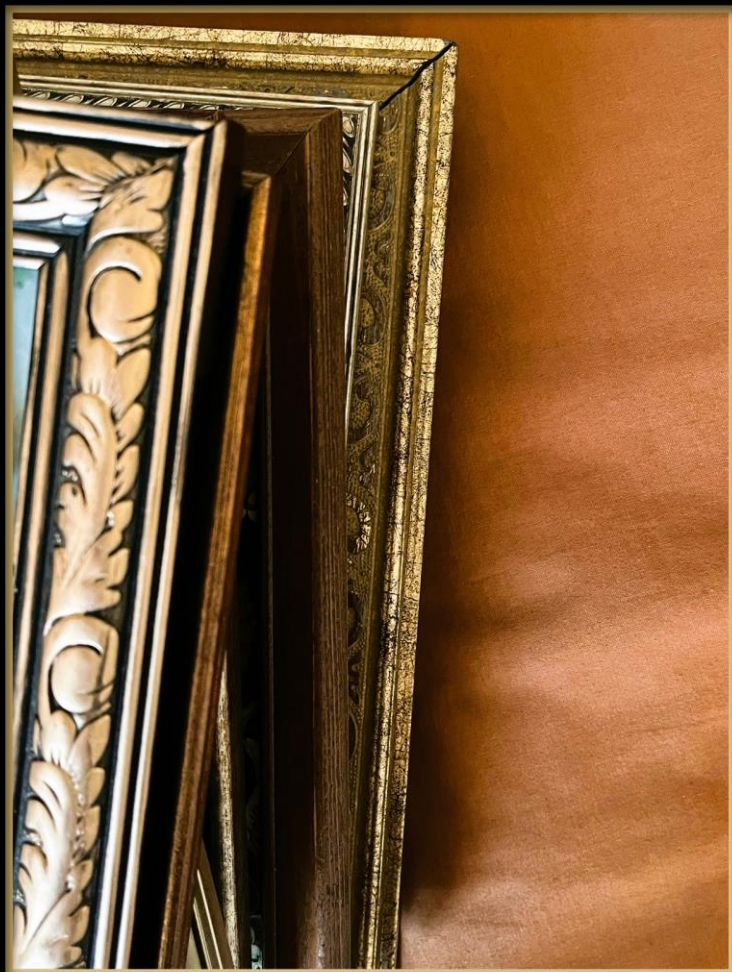


# sandhill review

volume 25



*T*raditions



Sophia Sullivan



**HEIRLOOMS**



# sandhill review

Volume 25 • 2024

Founding Editors	Kurt Wilt Thomas Abrams
Editor-in-Chief	Gianna Russo
Editorial Assistant	Cody Duggan
Design and Layout	Jeff Karon

*With Special Thanks to:*

Dr. Chantelle MacPhee, Chair  
Department of Language Studies and the Arts  
*and*  
Dr. Heather Parker, Dean  
School of Arts and Sciences

sandhill review is produced by the students and faculty of the Saint Leo University Department of Language Studies and the Arts and published annually.

The editors invite electronic submissions only of poetry, prose, artwork, and photography annually. For more information contact [sandhillreview@gmail.com](mailto:sandhillreview@gmail.com).










Cover by Jeff Karon; inset photograph by Sophia Sullivan.

Copyright © 2024 *Sandhill Review*

























## TABLE OF CONTENTS

POETRY        FICTION  
NONFICTION        GRAPHICS

Sophia Sullivan 	ii
Heirlooms	
Gianna Russo 	ix
Foreword: Traditions	
Renee Gould 	1
Why Do We Move On? . . . Tradition	
Anthony Medeiros 	2
United	
Dale Patrick Smrekar 	3
Tradition	
Steven Richardson 	6
Dear Tradition,	
Gyllian Ervin 	8
The Inevitability of Change	
Maeve Kiley 	9
The Family Tradition	
Suzanne Austin-Hill 	12
Not a Cereal	
Sophia Sullivan 	13




The Eldest Daughters' Handbook













Janet Watson 	14
The Young Father	
Benjamin Smith 	15
The Mailbox	
Victoria Dym 	17
Our Ancestors Stand Behind Us	
Suzanne Austin-Hill 	18
Table Talk	
Andrea McBride 	19
My Mother's Hair	
Anna Taylor 	21
Indian Rocks Meditation	
Valerie Eulett 	23
The Long Chain of Iron or Gold	
Elaine Person 	24
Grandpa's Gas Pump	
Caitlyn Loud 	25
Changing of the Seasons	
Lola Haskins 	26
Rite of Passage	
Lola Haskins 	27
The Revenants	
Diane Neff 	28
Reading Obituaries in the Morning Newspaper	

Andrea McBride 	.....30
Aunt Blanche’s Yarn	
Valerie Eulett 	.....31
Chamomile	
Gina Marie Mejias 	.....32
Mom’s Morning Song	
Mish Murphy 	.....33
Mother Poem	
Valerie Eulett 	.....35
<i>Linda Wavita</i>	
Tiffany Anderson 	.....36
Tapestry	
Renee Gould 	.....37
Cement Your Legacy	
Jerry C. Blanton 	.....38
Football and Me	
Michael Moss 	.....41
Summer Slam	
Makayla Bech 	.....42
Ode to my Diary	
D. H. Buxton 	.....44
The Booth	
Peter M. Gordon 	.....47
’80s Weekends	
Michael Moss 	.....48
Ode to My Plastic Friend	

Renee Gould 	49
Kilroy was Here	
Tiran West, II 	50
The Graduation	
Robby Cordes 	51
A New Year of New Traditions	
Paul Vito Vitaliti 	53
Saint Leo Squirrels	
Victoria Dym 	56
The Mechanics of Thunder	
Lola Haskins 	57
Waiting for Idalia	
Gina Marie Mejias 	59
I Fall in Love Every Florida Winter	
Adrianna Astudillo 	60
Words in the Wind	
Tameka Limehouse 	63
Boseong Tea Fields I, South Korea	
Tameka Limehouse 	64
Tea: From the Fields to the Cup	
Tameka Limehouse 	65
Boseong Tea Fields II, South Korea	
Evelyn Romano 	66
Sweet Tradition	
Kore Ramos 	67
Sushi for Thanksgiving	



Andrew Burgess 	69
Soul Food	
Tiffany Anderson 	71
<i>Posole</i> is a Love Language	
Tiffany Anderson 	72
Tamale	
Josie Osborne 	73
Blackberry Muffins	
Amberlyn Wedge 	75
Maple Bacon Cinnamon Rolls	
Suzanne Austin-Hill 	76
The Fast Breaker	
Peter M. Gordon 	77
Immigration	
Kate Sweeney 	78
American Prairie Safaris, early 1870s	
Elaine Person 	80
Welcoming Tradition	
Adrianna Astudillo 	81
Dia De Los Muertos	
Brielle Terry 	83
A Terrygiving in North Carolina	
Gemma Kay 	86
A Tale of Two Holidays	
Mary Gail Russ 	88
Trimming of the Tree	

Cole Washko 	89
A Holiday Tradition	
Parker Surace 	91
Christmas at Home	
Tiffany Anderson 	92
Hymns with Him	
Tiffany Anderson 	93
By a String	
Tiffany Anderson 	94
Beautiful Bellows	
Diane Neff 	95
Another Morning	
Steven Richardson 	96
Red, White, and Black	
Sophia Sullivan 	97
The Girl's Hood	
Madison Whatley 	99
Becoming Somebody	
Carol Ann Moon 	100
Women of the Road: Erasure of "Song of the Open Road"	
Suzanne Austin-Hill 	101
Slice of American Pie	
Our Community 	103
Contributors' Notes	

Gianna Russo



## FOREWORD: TRADITIONS

*Without tradition, art is a flock of sheep without a shepherd.*

—Winston Churchill

When we asked our students last year to propose a theme for this year’s *Sandhill Review*, they considered a slew of options. But “tradition” won out. The idea of tradition is all-encompassing, and the theme makes room for a variety of interpretations and experiences.

Tradition can be as individual as a morning routine, or as communal as certain holiday foods. Tradition can point towards something as sweeping as our national values or towards something as intimate as a pet name. Tradition is music; tradition is prep for a storm. Tradition is that one special thing you always do with that one special person. Tradition is that positive way of doing or thinking that binds us. Tradition is that negative way of doing or thinking that separates us.

The poetry, essays, stories, and artwork in this issue look at tradition through all these differing lenses. Tradition is the shepherd of our commonality and our artistry. We hope you’ll enjoy this year’s “flock” of art and writing.

Gianna Russo, Editor-in-Chief, Spring 2024





Renee Gould



**WHY DO WE MOVE ON? . . . TRADITION**

Anthony Medeiros



**UNITED**

Divided by beliefs of our own, we  
all share this revolving home.

In Judaism, it is *tradition* that one must  
purify the soul in the mikveh and undergo  
kabbalat ol mitzvot.

In Islam, it is *tradition* that one must complete  
the Shahada to become a Muslim.

In Christianity, it is tradition that one must be  
baptized in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

In Buddhism, it is *tradition* to prostrate before the  
statue of the Buddha and meditate.

In Hinduism, it is *tradition* to participate in  
Satsang and visit temples to meditate and pray.

Divided by beliefs we fall,  
But it's *traditions* that unite us all.

Dale Patrick Smrekar



## TRADITION

“Tradition... Tradition... TRADITION!” I sing, a claw raised to emphasize the last word as I stand erect on the front porch of this large cabin.

“Oh, mister human, you startled me. Yes, I’m a grizzly bear... No, I’m not going to eat you... Relax. I just ate. I’m just singing my favorite little ditty, that *Tradition* song from *Fiddler on the Roof*. Great movie! Saw it on these folk’s television,” I say, pointing to their remains littering the yard.

“You no doubt are going to say - but bears don’t watch movies? We do a lot of things when you’re not watching.”

The human starts to move.

“No, stand still, mister human being. You’re safe. I’ve eaten. Remember? Please don’t try to run away. My instincts will force me to chase you down and maul you. Believe me, you don’t want that.”

“I’m glad you showed up. I’ve got questions about human traditions. Like human sacrifice. I don’t get it. You sacrifice your young women to the volcano gods? Why? We grizzly bears don’t do those things. We’re more civilized than that. Bet you thought grizzly bears didn’t know about human sacrifice? It was on the television. I saw it.”

“Lucky girl, the tribal leader said as he pushed the young girl into the volcano. She’s now married to the volcano god... The tribe cheered.”

“Strange tradition. You’re dangerous animals – especially toward your own kind. I mean, we get into territorial fights that end badly, but we don’t sacrifice each other. That’s weird.” I settle back into the huge Adirondack chair upon the cottage porch and yawn. Chasing down humans is tiring.

“You’ve got other strange traditions, too. Like arranged marriages. Grizzly bears don’t do that either,” I say. “In our world, the strongest bear gets his choice. In your world, humans marry their young females off to ancient rich guys. I’ve seen it on your televisions, so I know it’s true. It’s not like being sacrificed. But maybe it is... They don’t die, they just wish they had.”

“But it’s a tradition, you’re going to say. Sure, and if the young human female is lucky - he’s a butcher. You’ll always eat, she’s told. I’ve seen the movie. In the grizzly world, you always eat because your mate is the strongest bear. He’s in his prime. He kills – we eat.” I accent my comments with outstretched claws.

Mister human says nothing in response. He’s a poor conversationalist.

“And your war traditions, what’s with that?” I ask. “Seems every so often your species bands together to kill other humans. Why? It must be an important tradition because you’re celebrating it all the time. It’s all over the TV - documentaries, news reports and movies. We grizzly bears don’t do that to our own kind. We only kill for food or to protect our young. You don’t find us marching across the world to kill other grizzly bears. Who’s more civilized, I ask you?” I lean forward, waiting for the human’s reply.

He’s silent, so I continue. “Now there’s one tradition both we grizzly bears and humans celebrate, the annual family vacation tradition. That’s when you humans convene at the same lake cottage during the last two weeks of August for fun and games to satisfy your family elders. What a noble family tradition! That’s also when we grizzly bears celebrate our own family vacation tradition - eating the last tourists of the summer. Hey, we’re carnivores—we gotta eat,” I say, as I pick my teeth with a shard of human bone.

Mister human slowly backs away and extends his arms outward to make himself look larger. “They broadcast that advice on all the local television stations,” I laugh. “Extending your arms outward to



make you appear larger doesn't frighten us. It just shows us how much meat is on your bones." The human turns and runs.

"You look like a nice meal, mister human being," I holler out as I watch him flee for his life. Unfortunately, I'm too stuffed to chase. I probably shouldn't have eaten all those children. "Next year, bring more of your family. I'll have young with me." I roar.

In the distance, a young grizzly bear, wearing a cap and a vest, standing high upon a rooftop, dances and plays a fine melancholy tune on his violin. I pause to enjoy the magic of his violin.

I sing out, "Tradition... Tradition... Tradition!" What a glorious late August day!

Steven Richardson



**DEAR TRADITION,**

I hate you.  
I love you.  
I don't know anymore.

I want to get rid of you.  
For everything you've done.  
You've put the yoke upon my people's back!  
You've forced them to march with what little you call clothes,  
With barely any socks and shoes on my people's feet,  
Marking their backs with your sharp blade and whips,  
Laughing away at their pain because they have broken,  
Whatever rule you hold so dear!  
You seek to do it again!  
You miss the times when my people liberated themselves  
From your tyranny,  
So, you seek other methods of doing so!  
Oh! Look! You have new toys.  
New whips. New yokes.  
You call them liberty.  
You call it just texts.  
I call them death threats!

Yet, I want to keep you close.  
You've kept my family together,  
When time wants to separate us.  
You've helped me keep connected with my people,  
Even through all the pain and misery of the yesteryears,  
Even through all the distance.  
Even through all the shut-ins.

You've kept me sane.  
You've kept me alive.  
You still do,  
Even during times when I don't feel alive.

I want to get rid of you, Tradition,  
To tear down every fabric of your very being,  
To liberate myself from your clawed grasp!  
But what then after that?  
Wouldn't it be a fool's errand?  
Subtracting one from one makes zero.  
But there's one zero afterward.  
So, to get rid of one zero,  
Would I have to destroy reality?

Gyllian Ervin



## THE INEVITABILITY OF CHANGE

The only thing that is certain in life,  
Is its never-ending change.  
Consistent in a strange kind of way.  
Strong.  
Like the backbone of a mighty dragon.  
Like the scalding heat of a Saharan summer.  
Unwavering.  
Inevitable.  
Chaotically melodic is the beating heart of a knight's steed,  
marching, unrelenting into battle.  
Change always feels the same,  
No matter how long the Pax Romana.  
It comes and it goes,  
In waves of raging frustration.  
A fire,  
Leaving nothing but pain in its wake.  
The inevitability of change  
is that it's always going to hurt.  
Because in the end,  
Even Rome had to burn.

Maeve Kiley



## THE FAMILY TRADITION

It was always our tradition to move every couple of years.

My father says it keeps us safe. My brother says it makes us cowards. My mother doesn't say anything anymore. Not after the last one. My sister is too young to understand. Her boisterous baby babble echoed through the halls of our new home. The house was two stories, a bit of an upgrade from our last home. Unfortunately, that luxury came with a price. Our house was nestled in between the confines of a dense forest, only accessible through a beaten, dusty road. We all knew moving there was a risk, but the cabin was dirt cheap, which clued us that this sudden 'house opening' was *its* doing. *It* wasn't just following us anymore; it was planning where we went.

The constant house hopping has been straining our wallets for years now. But it was a risk we had to take. We weren't even in the new house three weeks before the signs started creeping up again. Meat from our trash started disappearing, the plants in the garden began wilting, dead animals appeared on our windowsill, and spindly hands began crawling around the corners of my sister's crib while she slept. Like a thousand shadows closing in, the night seemed to grow longer and darker with each passing day. I could hear a baby's cries echoing through the forest at night, even though my sister slept in the room with me.

Even the birds realized its presence. They used to scream and flutter about the window, abandoning their nests and flocking together for safety. Now, the birds just showed up dead on our doorsteps. Mangled little heads hanging from thin strands of flesh and feathers. One day, I saw my sister playing with their remains. She had grown so accustomed to death that it became a mere toy to her. I wish we could all be like her.

It took two months before it finally made its grand appearance, ghosting itself outside my bedroom window. It must have thought I was asleep. Its silhouette looked to be mostly bones and rags before the moonlight slipped over its form and the intestinal meat sliding out of the skeletal confines of its ribcage became visible. Its oversized head sat on a stick-thin neck, wobbling back and forth in the wind like a living scarecrow. The face was bleach white and lined with a long snout and horn-like antlers protruding out of its chalky head. The lining and shape reminded me of a deer skull, but the hollowed-out eyes weren't resting on the sides of its head like other normal prey, but facing forward like a predator's.

Its long, spindly finger slowly crept under the crack in the windowsill and delicately turned the knob; whisper-quiet. A quick click signaled its opening.

I dove out of my bed and to my sister's crib, slamming my ribcage against the side as I grabbed her the moment its bony claws wrapped themselves around her chunky baby legs. A chorus of screaming erupted from the three of us. One much more inhuman than the others.

My entire family emptied themselves into my room, my mother in the forefront, screaming that it was back, and it was going to take another one of her children. She flailed her arms about in despair and hysteria as I flailed mine in desperation. Never before had I gripped something so tightly, much less my baby sister. Fear that I was hurting her raced through my veins, but was dwarfed by the ocean of despair that flooded my consciousness.

Finally, its claws lost their grip, but not before three harsh lines scratched the sides of my arm, splintering a gust of blood and fabric. It released a banshee's screech as I slammed the window shut. My brother and I began pushing the bureau, the bookshelf, the armchair, and anything else we could find in front of the window. I collapsed on the floor, baby pressed against my chest, listening to the screams

of my family members as they scampered like rats, all to the choir of the howling creature outside, scratching at the windowsill.

We spent the rest of the night packing, trying not to pay attention to the slams, bangs, and crashes outside as the creature tore apart our front yard. We left in the morning, and I tried to ignore the fact that it would follow and try again. After all, it was a family tradition.



Suzanne Austin-Hill



**NOT A CEREAL**



Sophia Sullivan



## THE ELDEST DAUGHTERS' HANDBOOK

1. Perfection is expected from you. Perfection is your middle name. It dwells in your bones, your blood, your neurons.
2. There is responsibility, and then there is duty. You will choose them both. Then, you will smash them both to pieces, like squeezing two carefully crafted glass vases in each of your angry fists.
3. No one asks to be a role model, especially not those who are still looking for one themselves.
4. You will spend your life avoiding failure at all costs. Failure is inevitable.
5. When the time comes and people say that you need *help*, they don't mean help with the thirty seven responsibilities you've inevitably taken on.
6. If you say you've never heard anything about *eldest son syndrome*, you're lying.
7. When the waters rush in, you will need something to hold on to. It's okay.
8. You treat life like it's your job, which isn't surprising given that everything was your job at some point.
9. If no one told you about this handbook, that's because it doesn't exist.

Janet Watson



## THE YOUNG FATHER

You see him everywhere,  
tossing a stroller into the trunk  
    of his car,  
buckling a toddler into a car-seat.  
He sways to the choir music  
    in church,  
a bit of blanket on his shoulder,  
an infant's milky breath  
    against his ear,  
the star of a small hand  
splayed upon his shirt sleeve.

    It is long before  
the world's first win,  
when angry words will be hurled  
    harder than a fast ball,  
when that child  
    will walk away.

For now, the young father  
    keeps rocking  
and kisses the little round head  
    on his shoulder,  
branding his child with his love.

Benjamin Smith



## THE MAILBOX

My dad and I often worked together on small tasks. I always thought this time was to just teach me about things that he deemed necessary.

It was one of those lazy Sunday afternoons, the kind that seemed to stretch endlessly preparing you for the doom that would be Monday. My father stared out the living room window gazing over to our battered mailbox. Weathered by faithful service, the mailbox had carried toy catalogs, letters to Santa Claus and more.

The scent of metal and fresh paint filled the outdoor air as we unpacked the new mailbox and laid it on the lawn. The old mailbox fell at the slightest bit of pressure, almost as if it was begging to be replaced. As the installation process began, I could tell my dad was eager to try out the new Black and Decker screwdriver set I got him for Christmas.

My father would always make it a duty to see how I was doing when we would do these small tasks. This time, I wanted to try and direct the conversation towards him instead of me. My father was always more of a closed off person who didn't talk about himself much. As our conversation continued to flow, the sun began to fall lower and the air carried the quiet hums of neighbors preparing for Monday.

My dad then told me why he always chose to bring me along on these small tasks. My father told me that when he was a kid, my grandfather always took him to complete small tasks. He reminded me that he was the only boy of three kids and said, "Your grandfather always hoped for a boy." My father explained that because my grandfather spent so much time at work, the time between the two of them was incredibly valuable.

My grandfather ended up passing away due to cancer before I was born. My father wished he could've had more time with his father. It became clear to me that the two of us completing these small tasks was making up for the time that was lost. The mailbox was not just a mailbox to my father, but something that made up for lost time.

With the final twist of the screwdriver, our mailbox stood glistening in the low hanging sun. My father packed the toolbox up and wiped any excess grease on his hands with the old rag he had used from even before I was born.

As we stood to take one final look at our work, I realized that this wasn't just about a mailbox. This is about the time I am able to spend with my father, the moments that would develop in the process, and the stories the two of us share. With the sun fading and street lights turning on, I returned inside thankful for what the mailbox allowed me to learn about my father.

Victoria Dym



**OUR ANCESTORS STAND BEHIND US**

mother, father, grands and greats  
ands on shoulders:

back and back and back

other lands, other languages  
other ways and beliefs

back to the beginning of time  
before there were humans

before there were animals  
on the land and in the sea

from where we all come from  
our cellular family:

water and water and water

gather now at the water's edge  
watch the sun go down

behind a glowing horizon  
we will never reach

baptize ourselves, original skin  
from where we have come

Suzanne Austin-Hill



TABLE TALK

*Her, then...*

a child of the segregated South,  
on a hand-me-down dining room table  
in a dimly lit room  
lay five plates, sharing no visible rhyme or reason;  
each identified a family member.  
When she left home for good,  
her plate was broken in celebration.

*Her, now...*

in the de facto segregated North,  
on a brand new, mahogany dining room table  
room lit by a stunning crystal chandelier  
lay eight complete place settings of  
ecru, gold-encrusted fine Bone China.  
Pieces purchased one. at. a. time.

These *my* inheritance—

each a lesson in purpose, patience, and  
the perseverance on which my mother plated four generations.

Andrea McBride



## MY MOTHER'S HAIR

A flickering home movie  
shows her at the lake, rising  
from the water, tanned, silver  
barrette gathers long dark hair.  
I remember her old, but young  
I was closer, drew milk from her  
breasts, touched my cheek  
to her freckled fleshy arm.

*It's a privilege to grow older.*

she said after several brushes  
with cancer, ones she brushed away,  
or thought she did as colonies  
of diseased cells tangled themselves  
inside of her, like strands wound  
tightly around bristles.

As a child, I watched her  
place the black handled brush  
beside the bathroom sink, ready.  
But I was not ready for her to leave  
even for an evening out, while I lay  
in the black of my room praying to stars.

I did not want her to leave in the end either  
when I drank coffee early morning  
by her bedside trying to unscramble  
her words, nothing made sense  
anymore.

After the priest came, for the last  
time, and Jesus Christ lay  
on her tongue, she mouthed

*Amen.*

Amid the flickering, she shakes her hair,  
starry sprinkles of lake  
baptize the shore.



Anna Taylor



## INDIAN ROCKS MEDITATION

On the weekends my cousin did not sleepover with me at the senior living apartment, my grandmother would wake me up early before the sun rose. I wasn't as headstrong as my cousin, and therefore meekly followed directions despite wanting to sleep in. The sky was always dim or overcast on the ride over to the beach. When I was able to bend my grandma's arm, we got McDonald's breakfast. If not, we'd have toast with jam or Publix glazed donuts with lemon lime Gatorade.

Despite the shocks of pain that lupus caused in her fingers, she would dig a large enough hole to bury the umbrella stabilizer while I fetched a pale of damp sand for reinforcement. The rainbow umbrella eventually screwed in tight between the two of us. I hated the smell of sunscreen spray, and would squirm at the chill whenever it caressed my back. At just 10 years old, my passion for nature was as boundless as the sea that stretched before me. There, my grandmother taught me how to search for the ocean's hidden gems. She showed me what to look for as the waves crashed in; how the tides affected the distribution of shells and what condition they'd arrive in at the sand bank. I made monumental discoveries, like fully intact sand dollars or hermit crabs larger than the size of my small fist. I respected the baby turtles that hatched on protected dunes, and the colonies of black skimmers that nested in the sand. Her connection to the ocean was so strong, she used to say she wanted to be thrown into the Gulf, and naturally return back to the Earth when she died.

A few weeks after my grandma passed, my family and I traveled to the beach with her ashes in order to honor her wish. When the sun set, we cast the only pieces we had left of her into the cascading

waves. As if welcoming my granny with open arms, the sea tasked its nearest helpers to celebrate her arrival. I will never forget the way dolphins jumped from the shallow water, nor how the beach looked while bathed in a golden light.

Valerie Eulett



## THE LONG CHAIN OF IRON OR GOLD

The swing set in the park is littered with more mementos of the past than I'd remembered:

unpainted baseball fields,  
the weathered and climbable boulder,  
fallen leaves of the leaning oak that loomed over the swings—

The train whistle plows through the muggy air.

Yes. There were trains, too. I'd forgotten them, but their shrill cry  
is so loud and obnoxious, I have to set down *Great Expectations* to listen.

I was on the chapter where Pip sits at Abel's deathbed when the wind rattled the chains  
of the swings. I stilled to a stop. They reminded me to sit with my own grandfather

before he passed without knowing that I loved him.  
Did he know my thoughts were still with him? Maybe not.

The train passed. The whistle faded.

The autumn wind nipped at me as I walked across the park,

at the fields I'd played in,  
at the boulder I'd climbed on,  
at the swings I'd spent birthdays swinging from.

It followed me even when I slammed the car door shut and cried inside.



Elaine Person



**GRANDPA'S GAS PUMP**

Caitlyn Loud



## CHANGING OF THE SEASONS

I sit outside against the maple tree,  
The one we planted when I was little.

I watch the dead leaves fall.

I still listen for your voice, even though you're dead.  
The fallen leaves mark another year since you've been gone.

Can you watch the leaves fall from Heaven?

Falling one by one as I wait for the hardest time of the year.

Holidays no longer matter.

Your chair at the table is forever empty.

I'll never let anyone steal your spot.

Everyone that told me time would make this easier is a liar.

They have never lost anyone as good as you.

All our traditions died with you.

I hide our stockings deep in the closet,

Quickly shut off the radio when I hear the songs we used to sing.

It's easier to allow all my memories of us to die with you.

I have tried to remember the good.

Tried to remember your smile.

But I buried my happiness next to you.

Lola Haskins



**RITE OF PASSAGE**

There were more of them before the mowers came. But in the surviving clump so many bees are feeding that the flowers seem to hum. Bless these tiny violet daisies with their complicated centers. Bless their powdery offerings that fly away on the legs of bees. Bless the sweetnesses I pass every day as if they were nothing.

Lola Haskins



## THE REVENANTS

Muddy hoof prints at the foot of a stile  
Clumps of wool, white as angels' fur, scattered  
across grass or caught on rocks  
Slashed skid-marks on dark green steeps  
The reek of slurry that on calm days settles  
gently over the town

where even children know

that when mist veils the moors,  
dotted among the heather and gorse and bracken,  
stepping over the glacial stones, flocks  
of long-dead sheep are feeding.

Diane Neff



## READING OBITUARIES IN THE MORNING NEWSPAPER

Three times a week, I call my mother, celebrating the relative boredom of our lives compared to those who are more social, more active, those who have more friends and adventures, but who also suffer more losses, more disappointments, more troubles. We read the daily obituaries and report to each other which ones we recognized, how we knew them, and how long it has been since we spoke with them.

I had lived decades without reading them, those sad notices that someone had died, with their descriptions of family, career, hobbies, and sometimes a special shared memory. Back in the sixties and seventies, when we were in Nam, every announcement was mourned in community, mourned in sympathy but also in relief that it wasn't our father, our son, our brother or cousin, not this time, not today, but maybe tomorrow.

Forty years later, I started again, opened the newspaper's email to scan names, searched for Czech and Slovak names, for high school friends, for neighbors when I lived in Iowa. I see maybe-familiar names and click, reading on to confirm whether this outdated photo or the list of survivors belonged to someone I knew. There's a website now, to leave memories and condolences, a public display of appreciation for their lives, their kindnesses, that proved they had made a difference in a world.

[cont.]



My mother and I compare notes; she lost another  
from her high school class last week and is now  
the sole remaining member of the class of 1948.  
I've lost dozens of classmates, but it's been uncommon  
to find their names, so many having moved from there,  
the women often changing their last names  
to their husbands' once, twice, their maiden names  
and much history now lost to the price of publication.

Andrea McBride



**AUNT BLANCHE'S YARN**

Tangle of yarn-like hair, white  
as her name, she crocheted  
all our afghans, the ones  
that stifled our fevers.

Our eyes burned as they traced  
herringbone patterns of earthy  
browns, dusky yellows, greens,  
ivories, until our dizzy heads  
settled into the night.

A young Blanche stands unsmiling  
in the old black and white  
framed and displayed  
on the wall, among a row  
of somber sisters.

Each sister has grayed and died  
and Aunt Blanche has crocheted  
her way into stacks of yarn  
in my bedroom closet, draped  
over the white cane rocker  
where I cradle my daughter,  
kiss-test her for fever.

Valerie Eulett



**CHAMOMILE**

Under our quilt knitted of yarn  
spun from honey strands and tea  
bag strings, we sip to the once-was.

On the porch I trace your every rib  
to feel your heart that's mine tonight  
like it was last winter, and maybe next.

If the chamomile's ever too bitter,  
let me trickle brown sugar into you  
from lips full of honey words. I'll boil  
water for us every night, so stay  
with me.

Gina Marie Mejias



## MOM'S MORNING SONG

When your voice fills the air,  
my arms reach for nothing  
in particular. My hands grasp  
for a couple more minutes  
of sleep. You press pause  
on Pachelbel's "Canon  
in D" still playing on repeat  
from the night before.  
I hear my older sisters  
already awake and  
pushing each other  
around in the small bathroom.  
My legs stretch.  
My feet come to a point.  
My mouth moves, but the words  
slide back down my throat.  
My lungs search for oxygen.  
I smell Papa's coffee brewing  
and your attempt at toast, burning.  
*It's time to wake up,  
it's time to wake up,  
it's seven o' clock  
in the morning.*  
My eyes scrunch closed,  
holding on to the last  
whisper of a dream  
already blinked away  
and forgotten  
like smoke in the wind.

Mish Murphy  
  
**MOTHER POEM**

Although  
Mom died  
two years ago,  
I'm still waiting  
  
for her approval.

I frequently hear  
her voice in my head.  
For example, she'd say,  
*You must suffer to be beautiful.*

She also preached,  
*There's a lot more fishes  
in the sea,*  
when a man  
disappoints.

Simple rules,  
really.

Then why can't I follow them?

She creamed off her makeup  
with cotton balls  
every night,  
applied serums  
and creams,

massaging her face  
while staring into the mirror.  
In her book,

I was a hideous sloth  
because my nightly face routine  
took maybe two minutes,

but if I was watching her ritual,  
she'd smile  
and  
sing—

*Hush, little baby, don't say a word  
Mama's gonna buy you a mockingbird...*

Valerie Eulett  
  
**LINDA WAWITA**

We dance. I've never been much good at it, but my mama's been trying to teach me how. I mimic her footsteps on our scratchy blue rug and laugh at each fumble, and Mama laughs too, wiggling my shoulders and hips loose to match the tempo so the rhythm can flow more easily through me. I step on her toes and she sings louder despite it: "*I don't know if you'll remember me,*" as the skirt I wear swirls when she spins me around. "*Or where you may be,*" with every clap and stomp. "*Just know that you'll always be.*" William Luna's guitar strums without mama's voice, for she's stopped dancing for this measure to hold me. "Mi linda wawita." It means my wonderful baby. Our feet sore and the melodies taper out. Mama pops popcorn for our night-time snack. I still don't know the dances. "*Those don't matter.*" She pushes popcorn into my hands. She smiles. "*You'll always be mi linda wawita.*"

[“Wawita” is a Quechua word, one of the indigenous languages of Peru, and it means “baby.” The word itself is *wawa*, but it can also be spelled *guagua*.]

Tiffany Anderson



## TAPESTRY

A tapestry of tales, both rich and pure,  
Woven around us, children of the proud, the strong, the grand-  
Grandparents, great and great and great, so on and forever-  
Back and back and back. Backs weathered by time and sacrifice  
The likes of which we will never truly know.

In the stories of our elders, in the music that they sing,  
Or in the knowing eyes and lines settled deep and wild around them  
We acknowledge that we have been tasked with the pride of the family,  
we children, and our children—  
Generations of plans and progress. Of failure and defeat—  
But not broken. Oh no. Not broken.

The weight of many hidden truths sits squarely on our shoulders  
Yet we do not waver. We can't. We won't. We can't ...  
We gather, young and old, we come together to first unfold  
The tapestry—to get where we are going, we must acknowledge  
Where we've been. And begin again. Again. Again....





Renee Gould



**CEMENT YOUR LEGACY**

Jerry C. Blanton



## FOOTBALL AND ME

The only time I played organized football, I was a 5' 3", 95-pound ninth grader for a small rural school in Alabama. We had eighteen players on the team but only twelve helmets. One helmet was much larger than the others since it was worn by a 300-pound lineman called "Tank." During a game against a town smaller than ours, we led 48-0, so the coach let everyone play. I got one-and-a-quarter tackles playing defense and ran the ball for two yards on offense. On another occasion leading a much smaller school, the coach looked at me and said, "Grab a helmet and go in as running back." I grabbed the only helmet on the bench, but it was Tank's, and when I tried it on, it was so loose that I could spin it around my head. I took it off and said, "Coach, I can't wear this helmet; it'd be more dangerous than not wearing any helmet." He said, "Goddamn Coward, sit down. You can't play."

My family moved to the Space Coast of Florida the next year, and I attended Melbourne High School, which had 5,000 students. In tenth grade I grew an inch and gained twenty pounds. The football team had many large and great players and won the Florida State Championship. My two best friends, David and Donnie, during junior year, wanted to go out for the football team to share in the glory. Their fathers signed the permission slips and they headed to practice. My mother said she wanted to watch a practice before signing the permission slip. One day she drove me in our Chevy, and we sat in the parking lot near the practice field and watched the players. One lineman was 6'6" tall and weighed over 300 pounds. The muscular running backs and linebackers crashed into one another with speed and impact. Mother turned to me and said, "Shay, I'm not going to sign the permission slip. It's time you learned that

if you are going to amount to anything in this life, it will be due to your brains, not your muscles.” I knew she was right. David and Donnie lasted two weeks sweating in uniforms before they gave up.

David, Donnie, and I played sandlot games on the fields of the local elementary school. Our senior year during football season, we hosted Saturday games for all comers. One team played shirtless while the other kept the shirts on. We didn't wear padding of any kind. Most played wearing sneakers, but some played barefoot. Usually, fifteen to twenty teenagers came to play our rough-and-tumble game. Our school was Eau Gallie High School which had been built the previous summer and halved the great MHS population that had produced champions. Our Saturday pickup games grew in popularity until up to thirty boys were playing. One Saturday, some high school football players showed up, but they had to play by our rules: no cleats, no pads, no helmets. A starting lineman from the school team ran into a tree and broke his leg; the school's starting quarterback broke his hand. Next Monday, the football coach declared our sandlot game off limits for his players.

In September the next year, I left for Florida State University. That year FSU had its first great football team. I attended all the home games. Before we played the UF Gators, whom we had never beaten, I drew an alligator on a large sheet of brown paper. The alligator had a screw stuck in its middle. A caption read, “Screw the Gators!” My housemates and I presented it to the team, who ran through the banner as they entered the field of play. They beat the Gators for the first time.

I belonged to the Rotary House scholarship group, and several housemates played flag football on a field across the street. Since I was fast and fearless, members of the intramural flag football team invited me to play with their Junior Civitan team. I played either running back or defensive back. A tall student played quarterback, but his throws were inaccurate. After our first games, our record was 1-1-3. One of the taller students who knew me proposed that I

threw a good spiral and should be quarterback. With me as QB, the team went 4-1-1, so our overall record was 5-2-4 qualifying us for the playoffs, but we played the best team and went out in the first round.

My final moment in the sport was a physical education class called “Flag Football.” On the first day of class, the coach told us, “Be sure to wear your sneakers because if you don’t and break a leg or a foot, I will have to give you an F.” I followed his advice until close to midterm exams; I forgot my sneakers, played barefoot, and broke my left big toe. I had had A’s in all my classes: World History, Math I, English II, Biology I. The injury affected my grades. English II was two blocks away, and I made all its classes, but my other subjects were two miles away across campus. I missed the reviews for all midterm exams. The doctor had fixed me up with crutches and a cast on my left foot that allowed me to walk on an iron brace. Once I started walking, I realized I could also run with the cast on. I returned to flag football and participated while running on the cast. Since I was a history buff, I got an A on that exam, but I got B’s on the midterm exams in Math I and Biology I. My final grades were A’s in History I and English II, B’s in Math I and Biology I. The PE professor had mercy and gave me a C because I had continued to participate with a cast on. Today, that left big toe throbs in cold, wet weather as a reminder that my mother was right.

I got a B.A. from FSU, an M.A. from FAU, worked toward a Ph.D. at FIU, and got a certificate for teacher supervision from the University of Miami. During the Covid-19 Pandemic, in a UM Humanities seminar I read Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and many stories about infectious limitations published in the New Yorker. My mind indeed outshone my muscles. I found my place in football as a fan for all my schools.

Michael Moss



**SUMMER SLAM**

Tension reigned heavily over the crowd—  
I'd never heard Danville fans get so loud.  
The bases were juiced, and the game on the line,  
But I took a deep breath and I felt just fine.  
I stepped in the box. The crowd got louder  
Hoping that I'd hit another no doubter.  
I swung hard and the ball took flight,  
Soaring above the stadium lights.  
As I rounded the bases my doubts fell away  
I knew in that moment everything was okay and  
My life in Danville would never be the same.  
I'd swung hard and I'd won the game.

Makayla Bech



**ODE TO MY DIARY**

My sweet diary,  
with your ripped pages, and glass rim stains,  
your binding coming apart at the seams.  
You represent all of me.  
My beauties, mistakes, blemishes, and dreams.  
My scribbles fill your empty space.  
So many ideas that come to me in fantasies,  
indiscernible handwriting from nights when my eyes lain awake.  
You've heard my screams of heartbroken agonies.  
You've felt my black mascara tears dripping down, staining you.  
And for all of that, I thank you.

My sweet diary,  
Did you know my mother picked you out at the bookstore?  
She chose you because of how many pages you had  
waiting to be drenched in ink. She thought you would last  
forevermore.  
But now I'm here on your last page, and I don't know what to say,  
so, I will thank you for listening to my uproars,  
my endless ranting, the nights and when I would forget about you,  
placing you on a shelf with renowned authors.  
Then finding you weeks later, sitting there.  
with notes sticking out of your rounded corners.  
And for all of that, I thank you.

My sweet diary,  
Soon you'll meet the journals of my past,  
Sitting on the top shelf of my closet. Then some other clone  
of you will take over and must deal with me at long last.  
You'll sit there, with all your new friends, my old friends,  
where they will greet you with long chats  
exposing my secrets from years ago.  
But I hope you know I'm so grateful that you gave me a chance.  
Because you were my safe space in my world of chaos.  
Now a new replica of you will consume all my happenstance.  
My sweet diary, it's you I trust to not let my memories turn to dust.

D. H. Buxton



## THE BOOTH

It was hardly the first time Phil had stepped into the local McDonald's restaurant. He shifted his laptop bag as he propped the door open. He'd entered countless times in the past, but today was different.

Each year for the past thirty-five years on July 23rd, Phil had come in to sit down and enjoy time with his childhood friends. The ritual started back in the summer of 1988 when he, Mark, Jim and Glenn sat down for a late lunch after watching *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* for the fourth time in a row at the local theater. The friends sat and talked about the movie, which segued into other banter as the four bonded over their meal. Every year since, the four would come in and enjoy a meal and an afternoon of organized chaos that young men simply weren't allowed to have in school or other places, much to the chagrin of the employees of the restaurant. Like clockwork, they would sit in the booth in the far back corner by the restroom alcove, present their tickets from the movie as if they were badges to some sort of elite club, and share stories. At the end of the meal, which usually ran a couple of hours long at least, they would leave one French fry on the table to represent themselves as proof of their presence.

Phil looked around the lobby. The place had been remodeled no less than four times since he was a kid. The McDonaldland themed playground, complete with the statues of its characters, had long since been removed. It was now an open patio with extra seating for diners who wished to eat outside if the schizophrenic weather cooperated. Long gone were the pale blue, vinyl covered benches and swivel seats. The glass divider that separated the main dining area from the order counter graced with Ronald McDonald's face was also gone. In its place were neutral-toned benches and faux-retro



decorations trying to invoke the 1950s. No trace of Ronald McDonald or his cast of friends existed, long discarded by the corporation. Phil found the new décor pretentious in the extreme; an attempt to hide the fact that the place was a fast-food restaurant in the most gauche manner possible.

The restaurant was almost empty, save a handful of patrons who minded their own business and ate quietly. The order counter was also unmanned as the employees scrambled to keep up with the drive-thru orders. A pair of giant tablet computers were the main feature on the new ordering kiosks. Phil sighed as he placed his order quietly with the machine, remembering the folly and banter of having his order taken by classmates, then by other teens as years passed. He tapped the pictures on the soulless device that placed his order. The machine quietly printed a receipt, which Phil took and walked to the pick-up counter. A minute later, with only token interaction from the clerk, he received the same thing he had ordered for the past thirty-five years; Chicken McNuggets, large fries and a large cola.

Phil walked to the booth he and his friends shared over the years. It was empty. Phil sat the tray with his lunch down, took his bag off his shoulder, then eased into the booth. Phil then fumbled in his pocket and pulled out a worn, frayed scrap of paper. Faded and nigh illegible, "...Roger Rabbit..." could be made out upon strained scrutiny. Phil placed the old ticket on the table underneath his food tray. He ate his meal quietly and quickly. Although the lunch had been a ritual for decades, Phil knew that no one would show up to join him anymore.

Phil took his laptop out of the bag. As he turned it on, the low battery warning came up on screen. Phil looked around in the bag and cursed in frustration as he realized he had left the AC adapter at home. He did not waste any time as he navigated on the computer to the photo directory. Phil had kept all of the pictures the group had taken over the years and scanned them to preserve the images

in perpetuity. They were organized primarily by year, but each year had a sub-directory dedicated to each of the four friends.

Mark was the first to break the tradition. He married not long after he graduated from college and moved upstate in 1996. He became a successful civil engineer and dedicated his summers to his three children. Phil perused the photos of Mark in his youth with him and the gang. Mark always smiled. The pictures from the late 1990s onward showed Mark smiling less. Stress and fatigue marred Mark's face, as the responsibilities of career and family slowly overtook him.

Jim was always the most enthusiastic about the tradition. However, two years after Mark married, Jim found his own calling; the United States Marine Corps. Jim left and never returned yet he would stay in touch by sending an occasional picture or two once a year. Jim was clearly married to the Corps, despite having a wife of his own. There were far more pictures of just Jim than of her. The pictures became less frequent, with the newest being three years old. Jim lost most of his hair and was now a sergeant major.

Glenn had been diagnosed with leukemia last year and succumbed to it in ten months. Phil did not bother with the older pictures of Glen. He focused upon the pictures of Glen in the hospital, still upbeat despite his diagnosis.

As Phil was looking at Glen's smile, the laptop died. The silence was tangible. He gathered his tray, packed away the laptop, and placed the tray upon the wastebasket. Phil left without pause. Sitting on the booth's table was a soggy, forgotten French fry and an abandoned scrap of paper that read, "...Roger Rabbit..." of one looked at it hard enough.

Peter M. Gordon



**'80s WEEKENDS**

We'd stay up all night  
smoking Marlboros, drinking  
Jack Daniels on stage after  
the play, sprawled on prop sofas,  
ghost lights casting ghastly  
shadows on stained cinder  
block walls. By 4 AM we'd  
planned in detail to transform  
American theatre. Nicotine kept  
synapses firing while planting seeds  
of tumors that killed Jim, Carrie,  
Eddie—lung cancer, too young.

I don't smoke anymore; made peace  
with small triumphs, ambition a faded  
photo on a wall. Tonight I wake at 4AM,  
tiptoe through sleeping house down  
to family room, sure I'll see our old  
crowd, sprawled across furniture and  
floor, hair dark, faces unlined, exhaling  
blue smoke streams, but all I find is a  
tired pack of Marlboros stashed in a desk  
drawer, put the coffin nail in my mouth,  
Eddie lights me up. I take a deep inhale.  
Smoke tastes sour. Why didn't I remember?

Michael Moss



**ODE TO MY PLASTIC FRIEND**

To my fateful fraudulent companion  
A relationship as deep as the Grand Canyon  
You've been with me for years  
Fooling bouncers and gas station cashiers  
You were my tour guide to a world unknown  
Seeing places otherwise I wouldn't have been shown  
I'll never forget that anxious feeling  
As it was my true identity you were concealing  
You granted me passage to grown up life  
You were my partner in crime like a man and his wife  
A true Bonnie and Clyde as we pranced around town  
I always knew you'd never let me down  
Soon I turn 21 and our journey will end  
But I'll remember our good times, my counterfeit friend



Renee Gould



**KILROY WAS HERE**

## Tiran West, II



### THE GRADUATION

In the final weeks, a countdown near,  
No more high school, a new frontier.  
Walking that stage, a moment grand,  
Adults emerging, a shifting sand.  
Excitement and dread, a dual embrace,  
Each one heading towards a different space.  
Routes diverse, dreams in our eyes,  
Yet a common thread, aspirations rise.  
Glamour in the cap and gown,  
Yet thoughts linger, a sobering frown.  
Escaping from a place called school,  
Freedom's allure breaks tradition's rule.  
A prison not of bars and locks,  
But minds confined by rigid blocks.  
Autopilot through those halls we glide,  
High school's chapter, a mental ride.

Lessons learned, both harsh and kind,  
An open heart, a searching mind.  
From easy paths to struggles faced,  
Graduation's glow, a journey traced.

Robby Cordes



## A NEW YEAR OF NEW TRADITIONS

Summer will soon come to an end. As the sun begins to shine less bright, and students rise from their beds, I too will rise, and start my freshman year at college. I finished high school fourth in my class, and have just turned eighteen. I come from a family of five: me, my dad, mom, older brother, and little sister. Neither of my parents graduated from college, and even from a young age they told me and my siblings that we needed to get an education. It is not like they are forcing us to go to college, they just want us to have better opportunities in life and have fun. I may not be the first person in my family to go to college--my brother has that title—but I am still part of our new tradition of going to college.

When I first came to Saint Leo University, I was already feeling my life changing. The first thing was the living situation. I moved in early into Saint Leo because I took part in the freshman retreat hosted by Saint Leo Ministry. After changing rooms due to black mold in the vents, I started to settle in. I did not have a roommate, but this change of scenery still felt different because though I was used to being by myself in my room, it was weird not having my parents in the other room. Though I do enjoy the freedom I have here: I could dance around in my underwear if I wanted without someone walking in on me.

Something else that college changed was that I now needed to be independent and self-reliant. I was now responsible for getting and cooking my own food, getting myself up in the morning, doing my own laundry, getting myself to class, etc. Some of these things I was already used to doing, but I was not used to being financially and physically liable for myself. College is basically a trial run for when you truly start your life as an adult. For example, I became really

aware of the value of money. I never truly understood the amount of money it takes to feed one person let only five. I would be taking trips to Walmart spending over a hundred dollars for food that barely lasted two weeks.

The biggest thing college has changed is how I traditionally deal with school. At the beginning of the semester I thought that only having 2-3 classes a day and assignment deadlines that are weeks or even months apart would make school easier. But over time, I developed a bad habit of procrastination due to the fact I had too much time on my hands, and managed that time unwisely. I had to deal with late night assignments, losing sleep because of those assignments, and rushing to do assignments before class. There have even been times where I have skipped or slept too long and missed classes, mainly morning classes. When school started I thought having this extra time and fewer classes would be easier, but I was surely slapped in the face by reality. Everyone said that college is not as easy as it looks, and I should have listened.

Before starting college, I was an academically achieving student who was able to handle the daily life of school. I have to realize that those were high school classes, and they do not compare to the amount of critical thinking that is required for college classes. College really changed what I traditionally did and, for a while, threw me off my game. But now I'm confident in my new traditions.



Paul Vito Vitaliti



## SAINT LEO SQUIRRELS

Roald Dahl's 1964 classic *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* details the tour of five children within the titular factory, during which one of the five invitational golden ticket-holders is a spoiled brat named Veruca Salt. During the excursion, Veruca meets her untimely demise at the behest of one hundred walnut-shelling squirrels in the Nut Room due to her vehement demands to own one of the trained squirrels as a pet. As Veruca approaches a squirrel she covets, they all collectively grab her and test her to see if she is a crackable walnut. When she fails that test, they promptly drag and drop Veruca (and later her accompanying parents Mr. and Mrs. Salt) into the depths of the garbage chute leading to the unlit incinerator.

These trained squirrels provided only a fraction of the capabilities of the infamous breed of scheming vermin known as the Saint Leo squirrels.

Native to the University in Saint Leo, Florida, these cute and seemingly cuddly squirrels are ironically a vicious, expanding group of rambunctious ravagers, savage scavengers, and feral foragers. I have spotted them holding fried chicken legs, apples, and even a full-length corn on the cob— which was held like the average human would. The disease-ridden furballs continuously find ways to wreak more havoc through their exploits. These year-round residents provoke countless jumpscare, terrorizing the public at large as they leap and flee the scene of trash cans, waste bins, and dumpsters when a person is in mere proximity to them. The miscreant rodents display a guise of famishment despite their never-ceasing, free all-you-can-eat buffet of discarded trash and unfinished food. *One man's trash is another squirrel's reason to dumpster dive.* Some students have

attempted to lure them with food despite the warning signs plastered around campus. They cannot be tamed.

Routinely, the Saint Leo squirrels encroach where they don't belong, including, but certainly not limited to, the Student Community Center. One day over this past summer as I entered the SCC to buy my regular at FUZ—a fiery chicken bacon ranch quesadilla with substituted Caesar (most ingredients weren't available over the summer)—I was stunned as I saw the reflection of a squirrel in the bottom window, but there was no squirrel in sight outside the building to be reflected. I approached the front doors and the reflection sprinted farther inside.

*That was not a reflection.*

The squirrel *was* inside.

After a game of cat and mouse, it vanished. “Good riddance,” I told my favorite employee, nicknamed Ms. Twinkle. The squirrels were her bane, as they would enter through the automatic sliding doors in an attempt to infiltrate the caf and collect food at the source, inevitably becoming trapped. While trying to find rations, these little health hazards indirectly tormented Ms. Twinkle by claiming their own territory at the kiosks and creating a stalemate. The squirrels disrupted the sanctity of the health codes with their irreverent violations.

It was my first time seeing one inside, and though shocking, it was not the last. I called Campus Safety and desperately tried to prove I was not crying wolf. As I left through the back exit to go home as usual, the squirrel leapt from behind the counter at the entrance to the dining hall. It darted up the stair railing and I followed quickly in pursuit. I approached the front and saw it waiting in a lobby window as if wanting to vacate the premises. The squirrel's guard seemed to fall while it stared outside with a calm posture. It seemingly longed to return to the outdoors— into the nature where it belonged. I drew close and opened the door politely, but the squirrel ran away. *Chivalry gets you nowhere these days.* I situated a chair

to prop open the hinged doors so that I could avoid scaring the squirrel, but none of my attempts to rescue it prevailed.

These Saint Leo squirrels remain untrained, unlike Mr. Wonka's walnut-shelling ones. They aren't driven by a nut-cracking method of training. These squirrels have no motives. They aren't domesticated. They breed solely for diabolical chaos, disregarding all offerings of peace. Saint Leo squirrels consistently wage war *despite their free tuition*.

Victoria Dym



## THE MECHANICS OF THUNDER

We sit on a park bench, like we'd never done before—  
I am dressed in my nightgown.      You tell me, you're dead.  
Your face is full of color      your eyes excited to explain.  
You have a new job—no more retail management drudgery—  
a proper promotion.      You are in charge of thunder; you say it just so,  
*in charge of...*      there is pride and calm, love in your voice.

We are laughing, the way we used to, as you detail the mechanics of thunder.  
I reach out to hug you—      my arms fall through you, as sure as fog rising.  
I am chilled.      Yet, somehow, I know that you're okay.      I remember  
you used to tell me      when I was a child      that lightening was the flash  
of God's camera.      I would run to the window      unafraid      say *cheese*  
and pose.      Today, when it storms, I go the window      still—

Lola Haskins



## WAITING FOR IDALIA

Reporters have gathered at Cedar Key  
where no one is making mullet dip today.  
They are waiting to film the wall of water  
that will drown the huts on stilts rebuilt  
from last time, then slam into the line  
of restaurants that lines the docks and  
cross two streets to flood the bar inside  
the rickety hotel where every afternoon  
weather-faced locals sit on stools and  
when they've had a few beers, lie to  
each other. When the storm's passed  
the reporters will stay long enough  
to film what's left, then when the air  
is safe, fly home.

Cedar Key lies at  
the part of the cone you bite off.  
My town's centered on the part that  
widens. So after that, it'll be our turn,  
mine in particular because I live  
surrounded by trees. I go walking  
starting at dawn. There are fewer people  
out than usual, mostly runners, and

[cont.]

most of them plugged in. One who's  
not, a white-haired bare-chested man,  
has paused to scratch his back on  
a lamp-post. My grandfather lives  
a neighborhood from here. On my way  
home, I'll go to him, press my cheek  
against his bark.

Gina Marie Mejias



## I FALL IN LOVE EVERY FLORIDA WINTER

when the humidity gives us  
a little break, when Starbucks releases  
their new holiday cup pattern and I get  
the sudden urge to learn how to bake,  
when my windshield is covered  
with morning frost, and when I can see  
my breath in the air if I look hard enough.  
I fall in love with ugly sweaters  
and office parties, with mall Santas,  
insistent carols, and fake snow  
made out of soap flakes, with family  
dinners and gift exchanges, and with each  
and every Florida winter, I fall in love  
with the snowbirds who come down here  
from colder places, who are all looking  
to fall in love as well.

Adrianna Astudillo



## WORDS IN THE WIND

At late noon, heels clicked against the grey pavement. The light summer breeze met a simple sundress covered by a thick brown wool coat. Local children ran freely around the town square, fabricating war and peace in their childish games. Soft smells of fresh baked goods from the nearby shops pervaded the air, with an undertone of ash and gunpowder unmistakably present.

The café Ausfall, at the end of the main street, had an inviting, bold teal door. At the back corner of the small restaurant, there was a table for two, one chair occupied and one empty. A

small clear glass vase placed neatly on the table held perished daisies. The man who occupied the chair stood up abruptly when the bell on the door rang slightly as it opened. There was sweat on his forehead, and the tie around his neck was too tight, but he noticed that too late because the woman wearing black heels was approaching him.

“Stefan,” her voice was low, yet her tone was stern. The man stood. He towered over her and he craned his neck, looking down at her. His mouth moved to speak, but he couldn't. He was unable to meet her eyes; the weight of an unanswered letter held him back, so he focused on her glossy heels, but he noticed the hem of her dress was burnt and tattered. She pulled out her chair from the table and sat down. Stefan grabbed his chair and pulled it out to sit, embarrassed he had forgotten to pull her chair out for her.

He cleared his throat, “How are you, Amalie?”

She reached towards the middle of the small table, plucked a petal from the limp flower, and flicked it to the floor. “It's been so long, Stefan.”



He didn't know what to say, but his lips moved before his thoughts collected themselves. "I wrote you. Constantly."

Amalie nodded, "I read them."

"And," replied Stefan, "you never wrote back." It had felt like a tradition to Stefan when he was away fighting in the war. He would shut off the camp light and lay underneath his blanket to make a small cave. He had written Amalie every night in this safe warmth as opposed to the duress around him; when his pen hit the paper, every curve of the letters was an unspoken promise. The promise to return to her was sealed when Stefan signed his name at the bottom. He coveted this small tradition. It kept him alive during the war, even though his letters received no answer.

Stefan met her eyes. He had remembered her eyes matching the sea after a storm, but instead, Amalie's eyes were nearly black, the once-beautiful color now lost. Stefan's skin began to feel cold.

Amalie spoke. "I couldn't write back. When I received your first letter, I grabbed the pen immediately, but when my hand hovered over the paper, I realized there was nothing to say to you. And with every letter I received, I followed that pattern." She still kept slowly picking at the daisy's petals as if she were saying something unimportant.

But this moment was important to Stefan, "It wasn't my choice to leave." He looked out the window in front of him. Children were still playing in the streets, but he noticed ash marks on their limbs. The sun shined brightly, yet the town seemed caught in the grey scale.

Stefan heard a loud sound overhead, and the thunderous swoop of a military plane flew by, its green wings cutting through the colorless sky. He frowned when it shot up and disappeared; he thought there shouldn't be any planes out since the war had ended. He looked around the cafe, and none of the customers seemed to acknowledge the plane as he did.

"Did you see that?"

“I’m sorry, Stefan, you don’t deserve any of this. I should have written back, but now it’s too late.”

He frowned at her and noticed that she smelled of fire. Stefan looked around to see if anyone was watching them, but when he turned his head, no one was in Ausfall anymore.

The walls had lost their soft cream color and were now marked by black smudges as if from smoke. There were also holes in the walls; Stefan could see the wood and stone behind the sheetrock. Broken glass covered the floors, and streaks of dry blood covered some of the shards.

Ausfall looked not only like a ghost town, raided of its joy and allure, but also appeared to be kissed by the act of war.

Stefan closed his eyes, anxiety building up inside him. He forced himself to think of a memory, and it came to him quickly. He had met Amalie there at Ausfall for their first date. She had stood outside, in front of the teal door, wearing a sundress with a brown cardigan. He approached her, adjusted his tie, since it was too tight, and handed her yellow daisies. She took the flowers and led him to the back table in the restaurant’s corner. He remembers Amalie pulling a few daisies out of the bouquet and putting them in the small empty vase on the table. He remembers that day as if it’s engraved in his soul. Stefan thought about that day every time he wrote, “I’ll come home soon, Amalie,” at the end of his letters.

Stefan opened his eyes, and Amalie wasn’t there anymore. Instead, he stared up at his camp ceiling and heard the soft snores of the other soldiers around him. He reached to his nightstand to grab a piece of paper to write Amalie of his dream. A tradition he won’t break, even when he knows he will never receive a reply.



Tameka Limehouse



**BOSEONG TEA FIELDS I, SOUTH KOREA**

Tameka Limehouse



## **TEA: FROM THE FIELDS TO THE CUP**

Tea has had a long-standing history within various cultures. Once used for medicinal purposes, tea has flourished beyond that and has become a staple drink for relaxation, spirituality, tradition and pleasure. China, which introduced the world to Tea, has a tea tradition called Cha Dao. Closely related to Daoism, this tradition incorporates tea as a plant and as medicine for your spirit, mind and body. Similar traditions can be found in Japan and South Korea (Green Tea) as well under different names. In countries like Morocco (Mint Tea) or India (Chai Tea), tea is offered to guests and can be viewed as their way of showing hospitality. Lastly, Great Britain has a big tea culture (Earl Grey) dating back to the Victorian era. Each year during certain seasons, tea fields are brimming with leaves waiting to be picked, withered, rolled, oxidized, and dried. Next time you travel outside of the country, grab of cup of tea.

(<https://twinings.co.uk/blogs/news/tea-culture-around-the-world>.)



Tameka Limehouse



**BOSEONG TEA FIELDS II, SOUTH KOREA**

Evelyn Romano



**SWEET TRADITION**

I, a less than confident woman, marry a stargazer. He sees no stars on June Seventeenth. Rain steals the sun on the day of my birth. The burden of clouds a heavy load.

I demand a change.

Perhaps a birthday morning of Breakfast in Bed:  
jelly donuts with raspberry filling, petit-fours with  
pink candles, cards and presents and yellow roses.

Yes!

Now, on my day, for dozens of years, every  
June Seventeenth,  
Breakfast in Bed.

Kore Ramos



## SUSHI FOR THANKSGIVING

I come from a Hispanic background. I've always found Thanksgiving to be such an odd holiday. It never held any significance to me, or the rest of my family. We considered it another American holiday that we use as an excuse to take the day off. But, when we do spend it together, I and my family have always considered turkey to be a rather displeasing choice for the holiday meal.

I and my family are known to have an unhealthy appetite for sushi. So, days before Thanksgiving 2018, I came up with a brilliant pitch. *What if instead of having bland turkey, we had flavorful sushi for Thanksgiving?* I called in for a family meeting. I remember the confused expressions my family at first, and I remember the smiles and laughter that came later. They loved the idea and agreed to eating sushi for Thanksgiving rather than eating dry turkey.

It was the best decision we've ever made. We tried a new sushi bar that was known for their killer California rolls, and their mena wasabi. I think it's safe to say that it was the best Thanksgiving celebration any of us had and I was proven right. The room was filled with laughter, and deeper connections made between family members that didn't always get along. So—after that evening Thanksgiving dinner we all agreed to repeat it every year, making it into one of the very few traditions we hold as a family.

As the next few years went by, we followed the tradition, but added a new twist to it. Every other year, we didn't dine in at a sushi bar. Instead, we met up at my mother's house and make homemade sushi. I taught everybody how to do it, because I learned how through a home-ed class in high school. These are memories that hold a sacred place in our hearts. That is because even when our family faces hefty challenges, we always use these past Thanksgiving

memories to remember the value of family. It also makes us very hungry and we look forward to the next Thanksgiving.



Andrew Burgess



## SOUL FOOD

A few months ago, my mom asked me what to wear for spirit day at her job. I asked, “Well what’s the theme for the day?” and she told me that the theme was tradition. Having a family that has been into African culture as long as I can remember, I told her that she could just wear an African Dashiki and her hair in a different style. I thought she would be excited since she loves wearing African clothes.

Instead, she said, “Yeah, but I don’t want to do that. Our family doesn’t have any traditions. Do you have any other ideas?”

Trying to respond by saying something about some tradition our family has, I drew a blank. Thinking back to our family heritage, there isn’t much to our name. Of course, one may think of channeling the culture or 90s Hip-Hop or going even farther back to the 70s with Afros to embody the energy of Blaxploitation films, but when one tries to go further back than that, there doesn’t seem to be anything.

My Indian friends have their elegant fabrics and saris as well as their traditional holidays like Diwali and Makar Sankranti. My Mexican friends have Dia de los Muertos, where they paint their faces as skulls and wear bright clothing to celebrate their dead passing through the world of the living. But in the midst of all this, it seems as if there’s nothing that my family does.

I asked my mom today if she remembered asking me about the spirit day and the Dashiki and she said “Yeah, of course.” I asked whether she still thought our family had little to no tradition that was both significant and personal to us. She then reminded me of how our family gets together for every holiday and most importantly, my family takes their food extremely seriously. Being a southern black

family, we take pride in our ability to both cook and feast on soul food. Specifically, my grandfather's side has a very high standard of food at each gathering. If there's anything that will be at any holiday, event, or after-church dinner it's candied yams, sweet and sugary, provided by my grandmother and served with a side of gooey mac and cheese baked with a crispy top by my aunt. My Aunt also makes the collard greens; I always avoid them, even though my mom eats plates full of them.

While my family doesn't have any traditions or celebrations where we put on extravagant outfits or acknowledge the triumph of good over evil, what we do have, even if it's simple, is our food and our gatherings. The fact that I can get together with my family as often as I can and experience genuine love from them, as well as eat their food, is something that I should not take for granted.



Tiffany Anderson



***POSOLE IS A LOVE LANGUAGE***

Tiffany Anderson



TAMALE

The *masa* whispers secrets of many who have come before.  
I lean in to hear the *chisme*’ while cradling corn husk in my hands.

Aromatic symphony of spice and *chile*’, a fragrant song,  
Reaches out to meet coffee’s melody, as we hear the kettle keeping cadence.

Now come the stories that unfold like the dough in hand;  
Each precious memory shared adds warmth and fullness to the air.

Generations dance to lively tunes, as his accordion bellows—in time—  
with the aroma that fills the room, like full bellies and full hearts.

Grandpa’s fingers dance across the keys, as he hugs the instrument,  
strong and steady, as the ebb and flow of laughter builds. *Encantar*.

Here in this kitchen, where we have spent so much life,  
today’s menu is *tamales* and tales, coffee and music,  
Strength and glory.

My family.

*Mi familia.*

*Mi gente.*

My love.

Josie Osborne



## BLACKBERRY MUFFINS

The Appalachian Mountains were the only childhood home I cared for. Year after year, my sister and I would sit on the porch cuddled in the valley, waiting for the twin fawns while the wind whistled down the holler. We chased each other through the ticklish wheat fields, getting along every now and then.

I swear, the air smelled different.

Our grandparents would take us up on the hillsides to wade in the blackberry bushes. Scarlet blackberry juice stained my small fingertips, as I accidentally squeezed the berry's cluster in my eagerness to taste the bittersweetness. We would pile the freshly picked berries in empty coffee tins, or at least the ones we did not sneak into our little mouths straight off the vine. Even if our fingers were pricked by the tiny thorns, blackberries grown in the midst of summer were and always will be the most decadent treat.

Once the sun said its peaceful goodbyes and made its way to meet the horizon, we would tumble down the hills, carrying the tins to the porch swing, our short legs tired and sore.

To celebrate the fruitful labors of our childhood, we would pull stools up to the kitchen counter and begin to rinse the blackberries. We'd make an assortment of baked goods—warm, sugary jam that would be poured over the store-bought biscuits, cobbler that enveloped both the tartness of the fresh berries and the crumbly dough—all to unfold in our mouths upon the first bite.

The best of all, though, were the muffins, baked with a sprinkle of brown sugar and nestled in the daintiest paper skirt. With the gentle heat embracing my mouth, the taste brought me back to the youthful summers spent swallowed in berry bushes and the sight of our tiny hands overflowing with blackberries.

In every bakery I enter, I settle for blueberry muffins, as it is always difficult to find my blackberry ones. It's not the same. I yearn for the soft sugar to melt on my tongue and the tart berry to bite my cheek. I wish for the seeds to get stuck between my teeth and to return to the warmth of the sun's rays and the running creek of every childhood summer's song. But fallen trees and distance block the road and I cannot so easily see the rhododendrons bloom. We can no longer climb the steepness of the hill. Both youth and innocence are gone and I long for those blissful moments, but I cannot find them.

I beg, but I know it is impossible.

Instead, I bake blackberry muffins.

Amberlyn Wedge



## MAPLE BACON CINNAMON ROLLS

A shining silver cookie sheet  
sits atop the preheating oven,  
with a blanket of parchment paper  
waiting to finally be used.

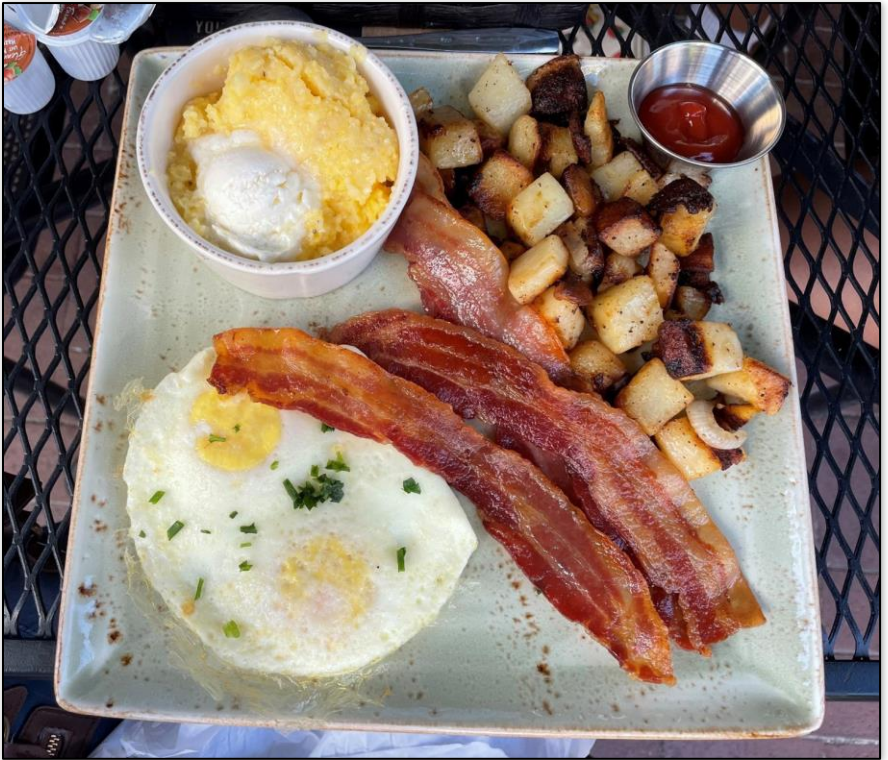
The Pillsbury cinnamon rolls  
are officially being opened. Goosebumps  
adorn my skin when I hear the loud  
'pop.' I place the rolls into the design

of a Christmas tree. They get put on  
the top rack of the oven, beginning  
the baking process. While that does  
it's magic, I chop crispy maple bacon

into tiny pieces. I melt the sugary vanilla  
frosting, mixing in a small bit of maple  
syrup to perfect it. The rolls are golden  
and the cinnamon scent fills the kitchen.

I spread the rolls with confectionery frosting,  
letting it ooze down the sides. I sprinkle  
the top with bacon bits as the cherry  
on top. Every Christmas morning, I'm

more excited to indulge in the sweet, baked  
cinnamon rolls than opening presents  
waiting under the shiny, bright pine tree.



Suzanne Austin-Hill



**THE FAST BREAKER**



Peter M. Gordon



## IMMIGRATION

When Grandpa Harry Gordon fled from Belz,  
he joined with other Jews, Lower East Side.  
Learned the language. Became American.  
He painted slum apartments, dreamed bigger  
for Howard, my Dad, born a citizen.  
Dad fought in World War Two, returned to make  
a life better for him and his children.  
America prospered, along with those  
immigrant families who came for their  
chance to make something of, and for, themselves.  
Today so many say, "Enough, it's time  
to shut the door." But I think of Harry,  
and Dad, and all who sweat to build this land,  
and I say this, "Welcome, everyone!"

Kate Sweeney



**AMERICAN PRAIRIE SAFARIS, EARLY 1870S**

[After David Yorke's painting, *Dark Day on the Plains*, and J. Weston Phippen's article, "Kill Every Buffalo You Can! Every Buffalo Dead Is an Indian Gone," in *The Atlantic*.]

They came to Nebraska  
in wagons with armed escorts  
and iceboxes to chill their wine.  
Smooth-palmed Wall Streeters,  
who didn't need the money,  
chuckled at the math  
behind the bullet:  
25 cents of ammo might pull  
13 times as much  
per bison hide  
for the skinners  
cleaning up after them—

the men who would do the dirty work,  
wading through the waves  
of wheat that had stopped ebbing,  
pushed flat with blood spatter  
and trash thrown from the trains.  
Sometimes, the government,  
unofficially, provided the rounds.

[cont.]

Because these men were cultured,  
the travel companies  
offered two pieces of advice  
to the novice hunters:  
do not lean too far out  
the train car window  
because the locomotive  
does not stop,  
and you may end up  
pink and chummy  
as the mess in your wake.  
Secondly: aim for the lungs,  
for blood-fill beats oxygen  
every time  
in this lethal equation.

Of course, this is just  
a last act of kindness  
to these great beasts,  
the boulders of the plains,  
the survival of the Sioux.  
Wherein lies the problem.

The tribes would later collect  
the skeletons to sell as fertilizer  
when no more herds were found  
and all cutable meat  
was sliced or rotted away.  
Conductors through Indian Territory  
would say it was a shame  
Injuns couldn't eat bones.



Elaine Person



**WELCOMING TRADITION**

Adrianna Astudillo



## DIA DE LOS MUERTOS

At school, our second  
grade teacher discussed  
today's holiday.  
*Dia De Los Muertos,*  
she voiced and stumbled  
over her pronunciation  
of the Spanish words.  
She spoke of tradition:  
Culture. Bright colors. Sugar Skulls.  
She mentioned reuniting  
the living and the dead,  
and a cold feeling  
brushed over me.  
Her words entranced me,  
and there was a pull at my heart.  
The boy sitting next to me in the wooden  
chair abruptly bumped my shoulder.  
He leaned next to me,  
his Cheshire smile calculated.  
He whispered low in only a voice I'd hear, *It's your people.*  
He laughed guiltily  
when he met my eyes.  
I couldn't shake off that comment  
for the rest of the school day.  
When I came home later,  
my mother sat with the  
stained glass window behind her.  
From my viewpoint at the threshold,

the angles on it crowned her.  
She sat across from me and asked me how my day was at school.  
I told her everything, even the things I didn't understand.  
*Why did he say that to me?*  
She stared at me with fury in her eyes, and I could have sworn  
I heard a distant blare of the angel's horns behind her.  
She told me that she's Mexican  
and that I'm Mexican too. We come from a long  
line that traces back to the temples that dawned  
the sky with the Mayan people praying below.  
That day, I understood what the word *proud* means.  
And that night, the stars who overlooked  
my ancestors looked down at me.

Brielle Terry



## A TERRYGIVING IN NORTH CAROLINA

Thursday of the fourth week in November, or Thanksgiving as we all know it, is the day many family traditions start. For my family, it always started days before.

Friday leading up to Thanksgiving was the most important day of them all. This was packing day. Me and my younger brother made sure to have our clothes, toiletries, toys, the 3DS, headphones, movie DVDs, and the portable DVD player. Before going to bed that night, our Mom always ensured we had everything we wanted to bring. I always ended up forgetting something. Ninety percent of the time it was a piece of clothing. My dad would check the car to make sure everything was fixed properly for the long drive awaiting us. Me and brother would go to sleep as instructed, knowing if we didn't we would regret it once we got in the car.

Early Saturday me and my brother would get woken up. Two in the morning, the trunk of the car was fully packed, the gas tank was full, blankets covered me and my brother's legs, my Mom was in the passenger seat, and my dad in the driver's seat. By two-fifteen, the four of us were headed on the road to Lexington from Tampa—nine hours and some change, depending on what the traffic looked like (it was always bad). We only stopped two times after a couple of hours, making sure we got food and gas for the car, used the bathroom, and my parents switched their seats. Me and my brother alternated watching a movie on the DVD player, playing on the 3DS, on our phones, looking out the window of the car, and sleeping.

Saturday afternoon, Charlotte, North Carolina, about an hour away from Lexington, we usually got stuck in traffic. My dad was always in the driver's seat when we arrived in Charlotte. He always complained about the traffic, how it was so backed up, and how

police always monitored the roads. He would suck on his teeth, curse, and hit the dash when someone tried to cut him off in the chaos. I couldn't blame him for being mad. Being that close to family just for a pile-up of cars keeping you from them, I would add shouting to the list of actions if I were him.

After thirty minutes to an hour of getting through traffic, we finally made it to my grandma's house. All of us greeted her at the door. She would offer leftovers which we always ate and afterwards me and my brother placed our things in the bedroom in the back, one for me and one for him. Instead of sleeping away our full stomachs, like our parents, me and my brother looked at the cows that grazed all over the cow pen. Cold breath left my mouth as I fed them pieces of hay. We only recognized one cow from the mix; the only one that had a name. Olivia. Me and my brother would head back inside to watch *Kiki's Delivery Service* and play with the Legos in the basement. My aunts, uncle, and cousins made an appearance at the house throughout the day. I usually smiled awkwardly and gave them hugs. I was shy. At night me, my dad, and my brother would go into town to bring back food to eat. We always went to either Popeye's or Ocean View Seafood, which I always preferred. We arrived back at the house in under an hour and we ate. Then the usual, washing up and going to bed.

Sunday through Wednesday would involve playing with the cows, walking down the long driveway to find sticks and insects, watching movies, scrolling on Instagram, hanging out with my cousins, looking at the properties of land me and my brother owned, and taking in the sweet air of nature. My aunts, uncle, and cousins made sure to stop by every day to see what I was up to. It was nice.

Thanksgiving day finally came and the house would be packed with more family members, relatives that I had known since I was a baby, but barely knew. My relatives also brought food along with them to add to the food my grandma made: mac and cheese, collard greens, cornbread, ham, cranberry sauce, fried chicken, fried fish,



sponge cake, green beans, black-eyed peas, and much more. This was the happiest I would see my dad. Being around his family brought him so much joy. You could see that in the way he interacted with everyone that came. This is the only time of year I saw him talk so much. My mom would converse with my Grandma and my aunts, my brother hung out with our cousins, and I dug into the food. Thanksgiving was the best day out of the week.

We would leave early Saturday morning, around twelve to make sure my grandma got some rest. The drive back to the house was the worst part about leaving. So that's why I ended up sleeping until we got back home. We arrived in the evening and unpacked our things. Me and brother got reminded to prepare for school on Monday. When I went to bed Sunday night, I knew that the tradition was over until next year.

Gemma Kay



## A TALE OF TWO HOLIDAYS

Smell the frasers and firs, debutantes  
raised just to be rehomed by you, circled  
and pinned with ornamentation and lights,  
late night laptop views and clicks  
to grease the wheels of consumerism,  
brown vans placing brown box after brown box  
beside your blue door, as viewed through the office  
window, pausing your mouse over mute  
in case the dog barks while zooming.

*Don't look*, they say about the news shorts  
of children crying, soot smudged cheeks  
and hair dusted with the powdered sugar  
of exploded concrete, the martyred parents  
and the abandoned babies, the babies,  
captions of *Don't look away*.

Their trees lie on the ground, root balls exposed and dangling,  
a Christmas miracle would be cool water and the chance to lay  
down one's head without fireworks  
lighting up the sky then ripping it wide.

Brat pack carols play with commercial interruptions  
and the grocery list rewrites itself;  
flavored coffee, cinnamon rolls, deviled eggs,  
poinsettias for the walkway.

*There's always a conflict somewhere.*

*It won't matter*, they say about the signed petitions  
and miniscule donations. *Just focus on yourself and your family.*  
The dog must be walked and the tasks scheduled so tightly

between clients you won't have to think.  
Falling asleep is easy. But you startle awake before dawn,  
scream silently into your hands so as not wake your snoring spouse.  
In the dark room corners are the boxes  
waiting to empty their promises.

Mary Gail Russ



## TRIMMING OF THE TREE

Conjurers' images of Hallmark-like vignette scenes:

Roaring fire, or was that parents?

*Hang ornaments on the tree  
anywhere you want,*

as long as it's where *I* want them.

When the tree was trimmed perfectly,

Dad had a migraine and we

kids were overwhelmed with defeat.

My children put ornaments in clumps

left gaping holes of tree exposed

and when she told me that it was wrong, *that's not the way,*

*we will fix it when they go to sleep,*

we, I, did not.

The imbalance, the chaos, the delight in their eyes

when they saw the masterpiece they made:

a perfectly trimmed tree.

Trimming the tree with grandkids,

the delight in their eyes, making new masterpieces

brought many sweet memories.

This perhaps is the real Hallmark tree image:

it has clumped ornaments, and chaos.

The real magic is the delight on kids' faces.

The perfectly trimmed tree may not look perfect,

but it feels perfect.

Cole Washko



## A HOLIDAY TRADITION

The night was still young as the sun began to set, and my mother continued to cook her famous Christmas Eve feast. She smiled while she worked her magic in the kitchen, but we all knew she was exhausted. The ham roasted in the oven, leaving a delightful scent of smokiness and cinnamon glaze in the air; the stuffing steamed, causing my mouth to water and my tongue to twitch; crescent rolls baked, piling up in a bowl ready to be devoured; the sweet potatoes warmed, sitting with soft marshmallows melted upon them— my favorite.

My brothers, my dad, and I all watched old family videos, reminiscing on easier times and fond memories. We watched the fuzzy videos of me crying while getting a bath in the sink as a baby, others with my brother Noah watching over me and kissing me on the forehead, and more with my oldest brother Drew acting like a goofball while he played with his toys.

But the whole time we were watching, I could not help that my mind was elsewhere: my presents. I sat on the gray carpet right next to the tree, so I could see my neatly wrapped gifts awaiting my anxious hands to tear them open. I was like a homeless man waiting for his next meal, but not as justified; I was selfish. I grabbed each box, shook it to feel the contents inside, and tried to peek through any slit in the decorative red wrapping to ruin my surprise.

My mom saw me investigating my presents and demanded that I set them where they belonged and wait until after dinner. I reluctantly set the presents back down underneath the tree with frustration towards my mother. I should have realized how good I had it and been grateful for the amazing things I already had right in front of me.

It was time to participate in our unique Christmas Eve tradition. My mom called Drew up to the dinner table to trace his white plate on the red tablecloth and write one thing he was thankful for in the middle. Next, Noah was called to do the same. Then, it was finally my turn. I walked up to the matte red tablecloth, grabbed my big white dinner plate, and traced it on the tablecloth with a marker. I pondered all the different words I could write from “video games” to “lacrosse” to “food.” As I set the marker to the tablecloth, I saw my family laughing at our old tapes on the TV. My mom smiled as she saw my brothers laughing together, and my dad sat back in his chair, proud of what he and my mom made together. I reflected on that moment, realizing how childish I had been and knew exactly what to write on the tablecloth.

I walked back to where my family was, but I sat with my brothers this time. We watched a few more tapes, and then it was time to eat dinner. My brothers and I set the table and helped to prepare the beverages for everyone like we always did. Like the years before, my brothers and I all had cranberry-flavored soda while my mom and dad had glasses of merlot.

We sat down to eat, and my dad said grace, thanking God for the meal we were about to consume. Then, before we ate, we each went around the table and explained what we wrote and why we wrote it. When it was my turn, I read one single word aloud: “Family.”

Parker Surace



## CHRISTMAS AT HOME

Christmas traditions we hold so dear,  
like gathering around the tree with cheer and  
going around the neighborhood,  
Christmas caroling like we should.

On Christmas kids sprint down the stairs  
to open presents without a care.  
From trains, to dolls, to trucks and cars  
that children wish for upon the stars.

This holiday wouldn't be the same,  
without family gathered around the flame.  
But only one thing makes this Christmas day—  
hearing the sound of Santa's sleigh!



Tiffany Anderson



**HYMNS WITH HIM**



Tiffany Anderson



**BY A STRING**

Weathered fingertips dance across taught strings  
A gentle allegory that feels just like a bedtime story  
From when I was just a child.

A rhythmic cadence, his timeless song,  
An oral history, so laced in mystery,  
I hang on every word; beguiled.

Musical notes dancing on air, a narrative,  
Chronicles of adventure, faith, love, and loss  
Lessons to behold.

The TV in the background—silenced—  
Serves as firelight's flickering embrace. Flickers – Flashing -  
Crescendo builds, a smile spreads across his face  
He is young again.

The acoustics whisper throughout the space  
But in my veins, it beats loud and true,  
Of all the yesterdays; the ones I have known, and  
Many that are only mine in syndication.

There is only the rhythm, there is only his voice,  
He has created a moment, a melody of moments,  
That will last me forever and many forevers,  
Until it is my time to sing.



Tiffany Anderson



**BEAUTIFUL BELLOWS**

Diane Neff



**ANOTHER MORNING**

Tuesday she woke to daisies –  
some buds yet to bloom, others  
spreading their faces into smiles,  
their yellow eyes unblinking in the sun.  
She cradled their feathery ferns,  
caressed them like a child stroking  
a golden retriever's neck, his thick hair  
softer than the velvet draped  
under the clear glass vase.  
Tomorrow it might be red roses  
in a painted porcelain bowl,  
set atop rough burlap, and  
the next day lilies in crystal,  
a square tower of carnations  
placed on calico, or the heavy peonies  
that she never liked, their heads drooping  
and sometimes hiding ants  
from the backyard garden.  
Not a word would be said.  
The gesture was the conversation,  
the silence an honor, a prayer in petals—  
their cherished connection in this noisy world.

[Inspired by *Golden Marguerites*, oil on canvas,  
by Martin Johnson Heade, ca. 1883-1895.]

Steven Richardson



RED, WHITE, AND BLACK

In a country  
Of Red, White, and Blue—  
In a country  
That has failed me  
Too often to count,  
With the largest failure being,  
Where I am now:  
Within the catacombs of my own home  
As a disease rages around me—  
I chose to fly the colors  
Of my heritage,  
Red, White, and Black,  
Of Trinidad and Tobago.  
Despite my distance from it,  
Physical and emotional.  
Despite only touching  
The ground of the country once,  
I feel the need to sing the songs of Soca,  
In a language foreign, yet familiar,  
As I watch the glittered feathers bounce  
To the rhythm of the nation's beating heart—  
A faint second heart beats loudly within me,  
Urging my first heart to keep beating,  
To keep dancing,  
Even if it has lost all hope in continuing.

Sophia Sullivan



## THE GIRL'S HOOD

The heavy hood settles over the brow  
where makeup has not yet touched.  
Some call it the girl's hood, but we call it  
girlhood. It doesn't matter which way  
you twist it. She is comfortable  
in her hood, but then again, she has worn it  
from the cradle. Its abrasive texture plays  
with her golden braids as she goes  
about her day. It is so dark, she can't see  
where the other children are playing.  
Not children—boys. The boys are playing.  
They're always playing.  
The hood threatens  
to slip from time to time.  
The girl  
with curves at her breasts doesn't know  
what to make of all this. If she yanks  
the hood back on in desperation, she risks  
permanent blindness. If she allows it  
to fall, she won't be able to pull it back up.  
Ever.  
One day, the wind of the world  
blows the hood from her tear-stained face.  
She looks around to see the other women.  
They have discarded their hoods  
to the dusty, dirty ground.  
The men trample

on them. The little girls pick them up  
and try them on, wondering why  
they didn't take care of their hoods.  
The hoodless women won't  
ever get their hoods back, not now.  
The girl hood, the girl's hood, the girls' hoods,  
girlhood.  
The boys are still playing.

Madison Whatley



## BECOMING SOMEBODY

My grandma was a thirty-eight-year-old waitress when I was born. She never finished high school because she had my mom, and then, she had six more babies.

After their divorce, my grandpa, a restaurant manager, had three more kids, making my mom the first of ten children. Of those ten, about half graduated high school.

My Uncle David got his GED in jail, and, upon getting out, hung the certificate over his bed.

Only one of those kids has a degree: my Aunt Melanie, who got her associate's in Ocala while raising two babies.

My mom and dad both graduated high school and met waiting tables at the Bennigan's on Sheridan.

I was the first grandbaby born in the family and later the first to get a bachelor's degree, which I did while waiting tables.

My grandma, now sixty-one, tells me,  
*I need to live to see you get your PhD.*  
*Then I can go.*

Carol Ann Moon



**WOMEN OF THE ROAD:  
ERASURE OF “SONG OF THE OPEN ROAD”**

[after Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*]

Women of the Road  
Postpone no more  
Women unseen  
Entrances transparent  
And spirits expanding  
Venture undenied  
Love you  
I see freedom  
And undeniable goodness  
Women for you  
Go, scatter and go  
Beautiful hearts  
Float out  
Beautiful yearnings  
Leave  
Do joy  
Always be free be free  
Ache never  
Keep on beautiful words  
Sail up the passage  
The honest call shall spread  
Majestic women  
Reach distant cities  
Travel parts and corners  
Toward whoever you are  
No matter what, nourish yourselves and live





Suzanne Austin-Hill



**SLICE OF AMERICAN PIE**



## Our Community



### CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

**Tiffany Anderson** is a graduate of Saint Leo University, having received her BA Psychology in 2018 and her MS Psychology in 2020 and is also an Assistant Director at Saint Leo University's Tampa Education Center. Tiffany is a *Sandhill Review* contributor from past publications, as well as an Amazon Best-Selling Author for her contribution to *How to Maximize Your Network*. Tiffany attributes her writing to her family and her desire to make an impact with words. She offers special thanks to her husband Justin and her son Israel for their support and love.

**Adrianna Astudillo** is a junior at Saint Leo University studying English, specializing in Creative Writing. Adrianna is an active campus member; she is president of a sorority, Theta Phi Alpha.

For **Suzanne S. Austin-Hill**, photography is a readily available form of expression. Her work has received recognition at shows at the Florida Museum of Photographic Arts, Tampa Museum of Art, the Florida State Fair, the Hillsborough County Fair, and the Strawberry Festival. Suzanne's photograph, Cemetery—St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Haymarket, VA) appeared on the cover of *A Corner Plot With a View: 5 Stories of Lives Past* by Mark T. Sondrini. Other photographs accompanied work published in *The News of Sun City Center* and *Of Poets & Poetry* (published by the Florida State Poets Association, Inc); were exhibited at the SouthShore Regional Library (Ruskin, FL); and have been featured in the *Sandhill Review*. Suzanne was a Sandhill Writers Retreat participant in 2021 and 2022.

**Makayla Bech** is a sophomore student at Saint Leo University studying English with a focus in creative writing and is an active member on the Executive Board of Theta Phi Alpha. She has always

felt a passion for writing and has a strong love of reading. She hopes to be a published novelist and work as a literary agent after graduating.

**Jerry C. Blanton** has a B.A. in English from FSU, an M.A. in English from FAU, 36 hours toward a Ph.D. in educational leadership from FIU, and a Teacher Supervision Certificate from UM. He has been a high school English teacher, a part-time professor of English, a book-store manager, an academic dean, a copywriter/proofreader, and a tutor. He has published poetry (10 books), fiction (@35 books), non-fiction (3 books) plus assorted poems, essays and one screenplay. He lived in Florida from 1961-2023, and is now retired to Colorado.

**Andrew Burgess** is a freshman English major at Saint Leo University. He is an aspiring writer and poet.

**D. H. Buxton** is currently an adjunct instructor of Academic Writing at Saint Leo University. Mr. Buxton is a graduate of Saint Leo University's Master's in Creative Writing program and also possesses a Master's degree in Military History from American Military University, Class of 2014. Mr. Buxton's interests in writing span mystery, suspense, horror, and military nonfiction. "The Booth" is his debut publication.

**Robert Cordes** is completing his first year at Saint Leo.

**Victoria Dym** is a graduate of Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Clown College with a degree in Humility, a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from the University of Pittsburgh, and a Masters of Fine Arts, Creative Writing–Poetry from Carlow University. Her two poetry chapbooks *Class Clown* and *When the Walls Cave In* were published by Finishing Line Press in 2015 and 2018. Victoria's chapbook *Spontaneous* was selected by Northwest Florida Poet Laureate Katherine Nelson-Born as the winner of the 2021 Poem-A-Day Chapbook Challenge Contest, won a cash prize and was published by the West Florida Literary Federation in 2022. Victoria's full-length poetry collection *The Hatchet Sun* was published by Finishing Line Press in 2023.

**Gyllian Ervin** is a student at Saint Leo.

**Valerie Eulett** is a sophomore at Saint Leo studying for her English degree. She's was published in the 2023 edition of the *Sandhill Review* and aspires to be an editor upon graduation.

**Peter M. Gordon** has over 150 poems published by various journals and websites. He's authored three collections: *Two Car Garage*, *Let's Play Two: Poems About Baseball*, and the recently released *Middle Age Spread*. Peter's a founder and past president of Orlando Area Poets. He teaches in Full Sail University's Film Production MFA program and lives in Orlando, Florida.

**Renee Gould** has always had an interest in photography and could always be counted on to have a camera on hand to capture life's most precious moments, even before phones had cameras. The artist's passion lies in photographing animals and nature. Notes on her photographs: "Why Do We Move on? Tradition": It's hard to lose a loved one but it's because of them we have to continue; "Kilroy was Here": Kilroy has been seen since around World War II, making an appearance on many different objects; "Cement Your Legacy": All it takes is a bit of cement and a memory is formed.

**Lola Haskins'** most recent collection *Homelight* (Charlotte Lit Press 2023) was named Poetry Book of the Year by Southern Literary Review. The one before that, *Asylum* (University of Pittsburgh, 2019), was featured in the *The New York Times Magazine*. Past honors include the Iowa Poetry Prize; two NEAs, two Florida Book Awards; narrative poetry prizes from *Southern Poetry Review* and *New England Poetry Review*; a Florida's Eden prize for environmental writing; and the Emily Dickinson prize from the Poetry Society of America.

**Gemma Kay** is an alum of several past Sandhill Writers Retreats and the 2024 M.A. mini-residency. She is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and social activist. She writes poetry to feed her soul. She has been dancing with writing on and off all her life, and at times it

has saved her, led her to true love, and given her peace of mind in a crazy, beautiful, overstimulating world. She believes in the healing power of self-expression, and the sense of belonging writing can provide when we write and read about the universal aspects of humanity. She lives in southwest Florida with her family of five, three of whom are four-legged.

**Maeve Kiley** is a sophomore English major at Saint Leo University. She specializes in professional writing but has always had a passion for creative writing and fantasy stories. A native of Massachusetts, Maeve has traveled across the country and finds much of her inspiration in nature, folklore, and history.

**Tameka Limehouse** is a Florida Native and a Saint Leo alum. She completed her Master's in Theology in 2020. She has a love of teaching, writing, and photography. She has previously submitted photos to *Sandhill Review*, including the cover image of Volume 22.

**Caitlyn Loud** is a senior at Saint Leo University with a Sociology major and a Creative Writing minor. Prior to attending Saint Leo, she focused on research papers. When she transferred to Saint Leo University in 2022, she was introduced to creative writing and is learning to enjoy it.

**Andrea McBride** is a poet and music teacher who lives in Wesley Chapel with her husband and two young adult children. She has attended several Writers Retreats at Saint Leo and was a member of the Writers Circle.

**Anthony Medeiros** was born and raised in Boston, Massachusetts, and recently relocated to central Florida. Passionate for storytelling and dedicated to inspire, Anthony yearns to endeavor and succeed in the world of creative writing, and has self-published a biographical novel of his late grandfather.

**Gina Marie Mejias** is a graduate student at Saint Leo University pursuing her M.A. in Creative Writing. Her hobbies, besides reading

and writing, include makeup artistry; hanging out with her dogs, Ryker and Troi; and going to Disney World with her sister, Elora. Her work has been published in the *Sandhill Review*.

**Carol Ann Moon** is a Florida poet and is in her 23rd year as an academic librarian at Saint Leo University. She has her MFA in Creative Writing from Stetson University, concentrating in Poetry in the Expanded Field. Her work has appeared in *Aquifer*, *The Sandhill Review*, *lipstickparty mag*, *Indiana Voice Journal*, *Muddy River Poetry Review* and at a Miami bus stop, as part of an O, Miami Poetry Festival Haiku Contest.

**Mish Murphy** is Contributing Editor and emeritus Assistant Poetry Editor for Cultural Daily. She teaches English/literature online at Polk State College, Lakeland, Florida. A Pushcart nominee, she has published two poetry collections, *Fortune Written on Wet Grass* (2019) and *Sex & Ketchup* (2021), and a poetry chapbook, *Evil Me* (2020). Mish graduated from New College, Sarasota, and Columbia College of Chicago. She is also an award-winning digital artist, photographer, and book designer.

**Diane Neff** is a former professor, college dean, and US Navy officer, and now serves as an adult program librarian in the Seminole County (FL) Public Library System. Her poetry has appeared in anthologies including *Encore*, *Cadence*, *Revelry*, *We Were Not Alone*, *Proud to Be*, *Writing by American Warriors*, *Florilegium*, and *Sandhill Review*, as well as online and on public display for the City of Orlando and the Orange County (FL) Administration. She is an alum of the Sandhill Writers Retreat.

**Josie Osborne** is a junior at Saint Leo University studying English. She has published articles with the *Lion's Pride Media Group* and is the current secretary of Sigma Tau Delta.

**Elaine Person**—writer, instructor, editor, speaker, performer, and photographer—has her writing included in Random House's *A*

*Century of College Humor*, *Sandhill Review*, Florida Writers Association's collections, *The Florida Writer* magazine, Not Your Mother's Book, Poets of Central Florida, Haikuniverse.com, *Encore*, *The Five-Two* online, Florida State Poets Association's *Cadence* anthologies (which she co-curates and co-edits), The Isolation Challenge, Of Poets and Poetry, Fresh Fish, and two Poetic Visions, the Museum of Art—Deland's exhibits and anthologies. Elaine won the Saturday Evening Post limerick contest. Her photography has appeared in *Sandhill Review*, *Beyond Words Literary Magazine*, *Of Poets and Poetry*, and many photography exhibits. Elaine leads writing workshops for the Maitland Public Library, Crealdé School of Art, Orlando Museum of Art, Rollins Museum of Art, and other locations live and on Zoom. She writes "Person"alized poems and stories for all occasions for gifts. Elaine received the Kaye Coppersmith Award from Florida Writers Association for "Writers Helping Writers."

**Kore Ramos** is a third-year student at Saint Leo University.

**Steven Richardson** is a student at Saint Leo University who majored in Cybersecurity but has a passion for English and creative writing. He thoroughly enjoys writing creative works and wishes to incorporate this passion while progressing through his career. Classes in creative writing and contemporary literature, mentoring from Dr. Barngrover, and participation as an officer for the Sigma Tau Delta honors society have further invigorated this passion for creative writing.

**Evelyn Romano** loves poetry and has been writing poetry for about 15 years, on and off. She has two poetry chapbooks published: *RIPE* in 2018 and *Eve Redeemed: A Woman's Journey* in 2023. She is a Florida transplant from New Jersey and lives in New Tampa with her husband Albert.

**Mary Gail Russ** has been writing poetry over the past 22 years, sometimes a torrent of work and other times a slow trickle. This has



been an unexpected gift that she discovered well into her 40s. What a pleasure it's been unraveling this gift.

**Gianna Russo** (Editor-in-Chief) is Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing. In 2020, she was appointed the City of Tampa's first Wordsmith by Mayor Jane Castor. Professor Russo holds an MFA in Poetry from The University of Tampa and an MA in English Literary Studies from University of South Florida. She is founding director of Saint Leo's Sandhill Writers Retreat; serves as editor-in-chief of the university's literary magazine *Sandhill Review* and formerly for the scholarly journal *REBUS*; and is inaugural Poet-in-Residence for the College of Arts and Sciences. Professor Russo is the author of the poetry collections *All I See is Your Glinting: 90 Days in the Pandemic* (Madville Publishing, 2022); *One House Down* (Madville Publishing, 2019); *Moonflower*, winner of the Florida Book Award Bronze and Florida Publishers Association Silver awards; and two chapbooks, *The Companion of Joy* and *In Late Day Sun*.

**Benjamin Smith** is a senior attending Saint Leo University pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology with a focus on counseling. He is 22 years old and has lived in Tampa, Florida, his entire life. He has had a passion for reading and writing since his early years of elementary school and hopes to bring these passions into his professional career.

**Dale Patrick Smrekar** is a graduate student in the Creative Writing Program at Saint Leo. He resides in Odessa, Florida and is a graduate of the University of South Florida, with a B.A. in Geography. He has previously had nonfiction articles published in trade magazines such as *Radio Ink*, the former American *Agent & Broker Magazine*, and *The Tampa Tribune*.

**Sophia Sullivan** is a sophomore double majoring in English and History here at Saint Leo (because she just cannot pick one!). You can find her performing many writing-centric jobs around campus, as she is the president of the Sigma Tau Delta English Honors Society and

the Arts & Culture Editor for The Lions' Pride Media Group. Her poetry centers on themes of the female experience, words, history, and nature.

**Parker Surace** studies Secondary Education at Saint Leo University with a specialization in English. She is a sophomore and a member of the Saint Leo women's lacrosse team.

**Kate Sweeney** is the author of *Worrisome Creatures* (Madville Publishing, 2022), which won gold in the 2022 Florida Book Awards and *Better Accidents* (YellowJacket Press, 2009). Her work has appeared in many literary magazines, such as *Best New Poets 2009*, *Hayden's Ferry*, *Meridian*, *Tampa Review*, and *Poet Lore*, among others. She holds her Ph.D. in English from Binghamton University, MFA in poetry from the University of Florida, and MA in English from Kansas State University. She is an English professor in Florida.

**Anna Taylor** is a student at Saint Leo.

**Brielle Terry** is currently a sophomore at Saint Leo University. She is studying English with a specialization in Creative Writing. She hopes to inspire others with her works.

**Paul Vito Vitaliti** is a Junior Theatre major with an English minor. He is in the Honors Program and multiple Honor Societies, including Alpha Psi Omega, Omicron Delta Kappa, and Sigma Tau Delta. Paul is also a resident assistant in the Honors Villas, Roderick Hall and Alumni Hall.

**Cole Washko** is a senior at Saint Leo University and is studying English/ professional writing. Cole was in the Air Force for four years and is currently a Public Information Officer. Cole has found a hobby in creative writing and hopes to continue to do it in his free time.

**Janet Watson** has been a frequent contributor to *Sandhill Review* and has been a participant in both the SLU Writers Retreat and the SLU Writers Circle. Her poetry has won many awards and has been

published in various literary journals and anthologies. *Eyes Open, Listening* is a book-length collection of her poems. Current vice-president of New River Poets, a chapter of Florida State Poets (FSPA), she was FSPA's Youth Chair for twelve years. In 2021 Janet published *Sons of the People*, a novel of ancient Florida for young readers.

**Amberlyn Wedge** is a student at Saint Leo.

**Tiran West, II** is a cybersecurity student at Saint Leo University who has never written a short story or poem before. Writing is a new venture that he has been looking into doing more in his free time.

**Madison Whatley** is a South Florida poet and 2023 graduate of Florida International University's MFA program. Her poetry has appeared in *FreezeRay Poetry*, *SoFloPoJo*, and *Cola Literary Review* and is forthcoming in *Saw Palm*. Her poetry manuscript was selected as a Semifinalist for the 2023 Berkshire Prize by Tupelo Press. She earned her BA in English from Saint Leo University in 2020 and is currently a Virtual Alumni Chapter Co-Chair. She is a board member and editor of the recently launched Purple Ink Press.

