Writing From the Tempe Community
Tempe Writers Forum
Writing From the Tempe Community

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Stories have been shared in every culture as a means of entertainment, education and cultural preservation. Individuals become connected through universal experiences and this leads to shared understandings and sparks new and interesting conversations. Not only can storytelling create a narrative, it can also help build a neighborhood, connect the community and strengthen our city.

Again this year, I was inspired that so many individuals entered our community writing contest. Amazingly, more than 140 people submitted non-fiction, fiction or poetry pieces with writings about adolescence, relationships, addiction, our state, paper airplanes and more. Clearly, we have talent in this community.

There were also nearly a dozen works of art submitted in the inaugural book cover design contest. The cover selected is a collage made out of origami paper, and clippings from newspapers and paperback books, which represents the iconic Mill Avenue Bridge.

I would like to offer my special thanks to the Tempe Public Library and Arizona State University’s creative writing community for their efforts in compiling the Tempe Writer’s Forum, Volume 2. This amazing work couldn’t have been done without your hard work.

Mayor Mark Mitchell
City of Tempe
March 14, 2016

Dear Friends,

Arizona State University is pleased to celebrate the second annual Tempe Community Writing and Cover Design Contest and this resulting publication — volume two of the Tempe Writers Forum.

It is thrilling to see how the contest is continuing to build a community of emerging writers. This year’s competition also inspired nine graphic artists to contribute cover designs and attracted even more involvement from ASU faculty. It serves as a wonderful testament to the strong partnership between ASU, the City of Tempe, and the Tempe Public Library.

As partners we all share an abiding commitment to work that is embedded in the social fabric of our communities and, in particular, to helping people access the resources they need to develop their full potential — as individuals and as engaged citizens.

Becoming a more practiced, confident writer is useful in many arenas of life. The process of writing, like any of the arts, can also be an outlet for expression and a lifelong journey that enriches our individual lives and our communities. Many classes and workshops are available at ASU, at the Tempe Public Library and in the community that can help you gain writing practice and feedback from peers.

For those of you reading this who may have sat on the sidelines of the competition the last two years, I urge you to consider sharing your writing or art with us next year.

I thank all those in the Tempe Public Library, the City of Tempe, at
ASU, and in the community who have enthusiastically supported the contest and encouraged and evaluated submissions — I especially thank all the writers and graphic designers who shared their work.

Warm regards,

Duane H. Roen
Dean, College of Letters and Sciences and University College
Vice Provost, ASU’s Polytechnic campus
Your Library is certainly a place to find works of established authors, but it is also the place where emerging authors can find a safe and supportive environment to help them take the leap into publication. The volume you hold in your hands contains the writing of the best local authors for 2016 as selected from the second Tempe Community Writing Contest, a collaborative effort between the Tempe Public Library and Arizona State University.

I am very proud that the Tempe Public Library is a crossroads for local authors — a place where they can critique and learn from each other and discuss the pains and joys of the calling to write. If you, too, are a budding author, please check the Library’s quarterly newsletter for groups and classes that might help you gain the confidence to write and publish your own work. (www.tempe.gov/library)

I think you will find the breadth and depth of talent of this year’s contest winners inspiring as you laugh, cry, learn, and dream through their words.

Congratulations to all the authors and best wishes for future writing success.

Barbara Roberts
Deputy Community Services Director – Library
Fiction
Big Horn Mountain
Carnivores

by Meg Dobson

Adult Fiction
The great elk drops. The sound of my fired round continues, ghost echoing through the deep snow-drifted canyons with an accusing drawn out pa-booo. Pa-booo. Pa-booo. Pa-booo. I wait, in respect, until they fade, and then sigh. He was injured. If I hadn’t taken Magnum, the wolves, grizzlies or mountain lions would. Even if he’d staved them off, the coming sub-arctic winter temps would have killed him.

It’s a trek to his body through deep snow. As I reach the tree line, his herd scatters, bounding into the thick brush without a look back. They’ll find another male, but Magnum won’t see it happen. I spared him the humiliation of a younger elk driving him out.

The patriarch had fallen with his head resting on an outstretched front leg in the peace of death. The small bullet wound on his side hid the shattered heart within—it was a clean kill.

I set my loaded pack and Browning rifle on the ground next to Magnum, and pull out my cell phone. This valley has reliable reception—a fact my wealthy hunting clients appreciate even as I swear at the landscape atrocity of a cell tower on the ridge
overhead.

I punch in the numbers. Dobbs dropped me off from his helicopter on his way to a search and rescue mission based an hour to the west. He runs a small service with three birds, two hired out at present. These days, I stop in for morning coffee whenever my helicopter pilot wife is out on a job. With a predicted monster blizzard barreling down, it was a day to hole up by the fire, not for trekking the high country. But when one of the heli-pilots told me he’d seen Magnum injured and struggling in deep snow, I’d begged for the lift. I had an affinity for the old elk, identifying with his endurance and tenacity.

Dobbs says, “That you, Tom?”

I sigh. I’ve been doing that a lot lately. Sighing that is. I have to yell over the bitter wind whipping into my hooded parka.

“No, it’s the blasted tooth fairy, what do you think?”

He gives that deep-in-his-chest rumbling thing I take for his laugh.

“I had to take Magnum down.”

Silence and then he says, “Ahh, shucks. That elk’s a folk legend around these parts.”

“Yeah.” More silence between us, except for the howling wind warning me to get out of Dodge before the big storm hits.

“Come get me?”

“Still haven’t found that fool hiker, but I’ll send…”

“Not my wife. I’d rather wait the storm out up here.”

“Tom, you gotta sign those divorce papers. You’ve put it off for months. If you don’t, she’ll use your Browning and take you out herself.”
“Just come get me.” I click off and stuff a flare from my pack into my deep coat pocket to signal my location to the returning helicopter later. Why hadn’t I signed those papers? Because I couldn’t let her go—not that I’d tell anyone that.

I rest my gloved hand on Magnum’s neck in respect for his stamina and endurance—evidenced by the years of rutting battle-scarred tissue. Field dressing the big elk is hard work, but it doesn’t free my mind.

I say to the severed head with its giant rack, “No divorce papers in your world, right fella?”

Magnum’s blood freeze-dries to my bare hands as I work, reminding me that time is running out before the blizzard hits. Snow whips off the nearby peak.

Wrapped up in what-could-have-been—or maybe should-have-been—thoughts, the grizzly momma’s huff and ear-blasting roar rips me away from my work. I turn with care. She’s in full battle mode, body ruffled out nightmare huge. She bounces on her front paws with freight train subtlety and the ground quivers beneath my hiking boots. For a second, looking into her midnight black eyes, I see my wife’s eyes, and then I run for my life to the nearest tree.

The locomotive follows.

I grab a pine branch and scrabble. My escape ain’t pretty, but it’s fast. As I scale upward, her claws slice my left leg from mid-thigh to boot. Pain racks my body and I scream in agony, the sound echoing like my rifle shot earlier. My bare hands grip a branch as I dangle. The grizzly’s mouth opens to pull me from the tree, but with that added incentive and the accompanying
adrenalin rush, I manage a one-legged climb to a safe V in the
tree to reassess my situation. Pine tar scent from my frozen
hands punctuates the moment.

The freight train below pounds the tree. It sways. I clutch the
angled branch to my chest and swear at women everywhere. My
leg is a mangled mess and my adrenalin-blocked pain receptors
wake up with a vengeance. Taking in the raked flesh and the
copious river of red streaming from it, I swear again. No arterial
spurting, thank God. The copper odor of my blood mixes with
remnants of Magnum’s on my hands.

It’s hell getting my belt off and setting it as a tourniquet. It
dams the crimson river and I’m satisfied that I’ll live—if Dobbs
gets his butt back here. Below, the grizzly and her young one
feast on Magnum. The mature cub strips off flesh, shredding my
neat cuts; the momma crunches Magnum’s head in her massive
jaws and brains burst out. She licks the creamy delicacy. Darn,
he deserved better than that.

Often, the she-bear turns her predator eyes on me, roaring
and bouncing on those massive paws.

Safe in my tree’s perch, I yell, “Yeah? Well you rail all you
want; I’m not signing those papers! Hell no, I’m not!”

Next to the grotesque picnic below is my pack with my out of
reach Browning and hunting knife. Without them, I’ve no way
to retaliate.

That’s when I hear the other sound. The no-throat-noise-at-
all, but soft foot pad of something big overhead. I look up into
another set of carnivorous eyes.

“Ahh, hell.” It’s a mountain lion up there looking at me. The
women in this valley are darn inhospitable. I’ve woken her from her nap and she’s ticked, but her belly is swollen with a recent meal. Afraid of my man smell, she holds off with claws digging into pine, releasing the scent that cascades unseen but strong.

“You stay where you are, and I’ll stay here—you got that?”

I take her squatting into her tree branch as a sign of community tolerance, but her tail switches with definite displeasure. I shift until I’m firmly wedged and yank out my cell phone and the flare, praying for the whoomp, whoomp, whoomp of helicopter blades.

With one hand, I punch Dobbs’ number and, breathless, say, “Just how far out are you?”

“Still looking for that hiker…”

“Get here now or you’ll be search and rescuing my chewed-up ass from a tree top.”

“Serious?”

“Never more!”

Over the phone, I hear mumbling and then a helicopter roar. Dobbs says, “On our way. Hang in there, Tom.”

That is when momma lion leaps from her perch toward me. I pop the flare, yanking it from my pocket, and the phone drops, clattering against branches. I aim the nose-twisting burning sulfur and hot sparks straight into her eyes. She backs up, loses her grip and falls several feet below me, but manages to hang onto a branch. She rights herself and stares up at me spitting, but that doesn’t stop my hammering heart. Each beat measures the stalemate and confirms that I’m alive. That flare was my last trick, my last resort, and Dobbs is an hour away.
The blood loss does its thing. Shock settles. Painfully, I reach for my hiking boots, remove the long shoelaces, tie myself to the branch and slip into unconsciousness.

“Hey, Tom.” The voice wakes me and I stare into my third set of midnight black eyes today. Heavy clumps of snow fall around us, clinging to her long Cheyenne hair.

“You gonna sign those papers, or do I leave you up here?” Her sleek heli-bird is parked next to Magnum’s chewed up carcass.

The mountain lion is gone. The grizzly and her cub are gone. But the most dangerous carnivore of all, with the sweetest voice in the world, remains sitting in the tree next to me.
Meg Dobson

M (Meg) EVONNE DOBSON’s young-adult crime fiction, *Chaos Theory*, was published by Poisoned Pencil, an imprint of Poisoned Pen Press, in 2015. Her flash fiction has placed twice at Writers’ Police Academy, and two short stories “Politics of Chaos” (2015) and “Elemental Chaos” (2016) have been released in anthologies. Meg is a professional member of Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, Mystery Writers of America, Sisters in Crime, and International Thriller Writers. http://www.mevonnedobson.com/
The Call of the Flying Spaghetti Monster

by Melissa Fulks

College Fiction
Listen, I can’t help it if I’m a jerk. I live next to a freaking ‘Flying Spaghetti Monster’ cult. You expect me not to leave gift baskets of spaghetti noodles and pasta sauce for them? Okay. Maybe adding the notes saying that ‘I the mighty Flying Spaghetti Monster ask you to run around in lobster costumes to satisfy my will’ isn’t the nicest thing, but I can’t let opportunities such as this pass! I mean have you looked outside my window? There’s a dozen lobsters running around in the parking lot and now I am entertained for the next hour! The only thing I did was enhance their belief in the god they worship; I don’t see the wrong in what I’m doing. Come on, Christine, what’s so wrong with sending my neighbors odd requests in the lovely gift baskets I am sending them?”

Steven continued to listen to his friend Christine on the phone as he added garlic bread into the gift basket he was making.

“What? No. I’m not working on another gift basket for them. I’m not a savage!”

Steven stifled back laughter as he wrapped spaghetti noodles around the baskets handle.
“Christine, look it’s just harmless fun, don’t get so worked up over it! Yeah, go play with Katie. Okay, talk to you later.” Steven hung up the phone and put the final touches on the gift basket. He knew everyone was too busy running around in their lobster costumes to pay attention, so he placed the basket by their door. Laughing to himself, he returned to his room where he went to work on an essay he had to write for class. A few hours later, he heard the shriek he had been waiting for and the chants started. Snickering, he knew they saw the gift basket as another gift from their Italian god. When they concluded with their typical “R’amen” he burst into laughter. They went back into their apartment building.

After stifling his laughter, a knock came at his door. He got up and answered it. His large smile disappeared when no one was there. Walking outside of his room, he looked around again. He knew he heard someone knocking at the door. After turning around he discovered the note on the door

It read, *I know what you did.*

Steven’s eyebrows raised. Were they referring to the gift basket? Who could’ve done this? If it had been someone in the cult, why did they follow through with the lobster costumes? Questions littered his brain. He looked around once more. The surrounding apartments were silent and there wasn’t a single person roaming. Shrugging it off, he went back inside his apartment and shut the door.

After finishing the final part of his essay, he hit print and let the printer run while he readied for bed. It didn’t take long before sleep overcame him and he was deep into dreamland.
His dreams were typically simple, if he could even remember them. This time a strange and an eerie sensation came over him. He broke out in a cold sweat, tossing and turning in bed. A voice echoed in his mind. Despite knowing he was dreaming, he couldn’t wake himself.

“Steven,” the voice whispered. “Steven, you have mocked me and for such disrespect, you will SUFFER!”

The emphasis of the word ‘suffer’ was enough to break Steven free of the nightmare. He sat up, trying to restore his breathing to normal. *There’s nothing to be frightened about; it was just the talk of this weird spaghetti god that’s freaked me out and that’s it,* Steven thought, trying to convince himself. Taking deep breaths, Steven settled his heart rate. He got up and washed his face and changed out of the sweat-damp clothes and into something dry. Once relaxed, he laid back to sleep; the rest of his dreams were undisturbed.

His alarm went off at eight that next morning and Steven creased his forehead in discomfort. Both nostrils reacted to the overpowering scent of oregano. Opening his eyes he saw that his entire bed was covered in cooked spaghetti noodles. Jumping out of bed, he looked around and saw a trail of them leading from his bed to the door. The door had remained locked despite the surrounding mess. Checking the windows, he found them secure.

“How is this possible?” Steven thought aloud, standing in disbelief of what he was seeing, his thoughts interrupted when something dripped onto his shoulder. Steven’s head turned to find a splatter of spaghetti sauce. On the ceiling a threatening
The Call of the Flying Spaghetti Monster

message read:

*Don’t mock those who are more powerful than you.*

Steven became livid; he realized that the cult must’ve found out what he did and set it up while he was asleep, figuring they got the apartment manager to give them a key to his room and set it while he was sleeping. Not even bothering to change, he stormed out of his apartment and knocked on the cult’s door hard until someone answered.

“May we help you?” A young man answered the door.

“Yeah, you and your pasta-loving fan club can come clean up my apartment. Look I’m sorry that I messed with you, but what you’ve done is destruction of property!”

“I don’t follow?” the man stated, confused.

“You must’ve found out I’ve been leaving you the gift baskets and so you came and littered my apartment with pasta. Then wrote that stupid message using spaghetti sauce on my ceiling. Ring any bells yet!” Steven scowled.

“Wait. You left us the gift baskets?”

“Don’t act as if you didn’t know!”

“And you’re saying you woke up with your apartment covered in spaghetti and spaghetti sauce?”

“Yes, that’s what I am saying and I know-.”

“Hail thee who received communication by our God, the Flying Spaghetti Monster!” The other members of the group bowed before Steven in respect. In unison they chanted.

Steven’s stomach sank. Not because of the bowing, but because their genuine excitement made him realize they weren’t responsible for the chaos in his room. He walked backwards
until he hit his door. Entering his room he saw noodles littered around his apartment. That’s when he realized there was one other person who could’ve done this. Picking up his phone he dialed Christine’s number.

“Hello?” she answered.

“Christine, look, be honest here, did you do this to my apartment?”

“What do you mean?”

“Did you do this to my apartment?”

“Do what? What’s wrong? Did something happen? I haven’t been to your apartment in over six months.”

“Right,” Steven said, feeling uneasy.

“What happened?”

“I got to go,” he hung up the phone.

“This can’t be happening,” Steven said aloud. A knock came at his door. Opening it, he saw that young man from the cult.

“Can I please see the signs from our God?”

“Fine,” Steven said, defeated.

His neighbor looked around and then read the message on the ceiling. The look of excitement he bared turned to one of fear. Covering his gaped mouth with his hand the boy turned to Steven in disbelief.

“You have angered our God?”

“I guess,” Steven stated, not sure if he believed what was happening himself.

“Oh, I cannot be around those who have angered our God, please stay away from me and the rest of the group. We cannot be around those in which our God doesn’t approve.” The young
boy dashed out. The pasta covered room brought anxiety to Steven, and he tackled the mess, wanting to rid the room of any signs of the Spaghetti Monster.

After filling up ten trash bags with pasta and eliminating the sauce with a towel. Steven sat on his clean sheets and looked around the room hoping to see a sign of forced entry, but nothing stood out.

“I’m just being paranoid. There is no Spaghetti Monster, God, whatever. This is just an elaborate ruse to make me uneasy.” He continued to give himself pep talks until he saw the time.

The clock’s hands showed he was late for school. He grabbed his essay and rushed out. Deciding it was best not to stay for class, he turned in his essay and returned home. Flipping the switch inside his apartment, he gasped when walking in and finding his furniture turned downwards and scattered around the room. Swallowing hard, he proceeded into the room and found on his stove a pot of spaghetti cooking. Turning off the stove, he disposed of the noodles and readjusted his furniture.

Once his apartment was back to normal he grabbed a bottle of water and sat at his computer. He took a deep breath, clearing his head. “It’s only in your head,” he repeated trying to calm himself, but computer beeps distracted him. Turning around he noticed several tabs and windows opening. His heart raced when he realized every article regarded the “Flying Spaghetti Monster.” An empty Word document opened and words appeared.

_Educate yourself mortal and I may forgive your disrespect._
Follow thee and I shall consider your redemption into Heaven upon death. It may not be too late to seek forgiveness from me, but shall you choose the wrong path, there will be no second chances.

Steven knew he had a choice. He could be stubborn and continue to deny the existence of this strange pasta God, or accept that there were way too many clues and occurrences to continue living in denial. Taking a deep breath, he grabbed the mouse and read the information given to him.

The next morning, Steven tore his eyes away from the screen and realized how disrespectful he was being and that he needed to make amends. He crossed over to his neighbors and knocked at their door. At first hesitant about his past, he explained to them the opportunity that presented itself and they agreed to have him sworn into the group. Steven followed them inside where he learned all about being a Pastafarian. He later was seen leaving the apartment wearing a Pastafarian T-shirt and holding his new bible.
“I have always been passionate about writing. I am aspiring to be a novelist and write Fantasy and Romance novels. I was recently accepted into the University of Denver’s Master Degree program for Creative Writing.”
A Folded Friendship

by Olek Piechaczek

High School Fiction
“You know if you fold it like this,” creasing the paper to form a sharply angled wing, “your airplanes won’t suck!” Within seconds the challenger produced an impressive design, built only for perfection.

“Excuse me! I didn’t know you were a paper airplane expert! These things are actually pretty decent and seeing as how I didn’t go on to the Interwebs to watch some guy’s video tutorial, I’d say they’re better than yours!” Alex twisted around and shoved his paper airplane of “exquisite craftsmanship” right in front of Lily’s face. This paper airplane may have been accidentally crumpled in his backpack, but he liked to refer to it as a “design choice”. The whole airplane was just slightly off in all areas: uneven wings, bent nose tip, and not to mention the staple hanging off the left wing (he believed that was another “design choice”). He hated the way Lily believed her design was so much better than his, and even though she probably was right, he was adamant that his design maintained an aerodynamic edge. “You see this! This is mine! I made it — guess what? It’s better than yours!”

And that was when Alex ignited the flames of war within
every part of Lily’s small stature. Her mouth creased as straight and perfect as the folds of her paper airplane and she turned away from Alex. In one rapid ejection, her airplane flew up above the tall trees and slowly descended at a controlled glide. Her airplane, unlike Alex’s, had crisp folds, sharp angles, and even a reinforced nose tip to help alleviate constant straightening of the tip. The glide was composed of a slight swoop upwards followed by a dip; this motion repeated a handful of times before the paper airplane even touched the ground. Lily’s eyes dazzled with admiration and accomplishment as Alex’s burned with intense rage.

During her appreciation of her handiwork, Lily had ignored the total silence of the entire schoolyard. Every futile activity stopped with a focus on the white, triangular butterfly, landing about 20 feet from where it was thrown. Each and every kid cheered as if they had successfully just watched the successful launch of a space shuttle. Lily realized that everyone’s attention was aimed at her and she began to smile. As she gazed upon every one of her spectators, a sudden shout emerged: “Lily! Lily! Lily!—” the bell rang and kids shuffled about to grab their belongings and head to class.

The last one left on the field, Alex kept on twirling his paper airplane in disbelief. He chucked his airplane with all his might and it just fell at his feet. “How could she… I’m the paper airplane guy; guess I’ll be pulling another all-nighter again.” Now aware of the field’s sudden tranquility and emptiness, Alex ran back to his classroom, and to his chagrin Lily was still the school’s idol.
Every classroom was filled with remarks about the outstanding performance of Lily’s folded creation: “Did you see that? It was A-MAZING!” “Never seen anything like that before.” “Who knew a paper airplane could be so...so good.”

The ubiquitous praise of Lily enraged Alex to the fullest degree of jealousy and determination. He definitely was not going to let Lily win this war; she might be smarter than him, which he perfectly accepted, but he could not live with her having a better paper airplane. “Hmm, so step one... beat Lily...uhh, step two? Oh yeah, get everyone’s attention... and...” he scratched his head, thinking of anything else that his plan of action might require. “Better paper, maybe? I dunno, guess I’ll figure that out later.”

Finally, the hours and minutes had passed and with the final school bell, Alex was released to fulfill his plan of action. He began to run through the school and Lily caught sight of him: “Alex! Alex!” He continued on to the school’s exit and immediately vanished into the crowd of restless students. Lily turned to her friends, “I hope I didn’t damage that name he gave himself; wasn’t it something like ‘Paper Airplane Guy’? I don’t know, I just feel... like I stepped on somebody’s sandcastle or something...” Her friends could tell that was not all she wished to say, but had a pretty good idea what had been left out. After many silent moments between them, Lily finally recognized her mom’s black SUV and quickly departed from her friends, with her heavy stack of books clenched between her two arms.

During their drive home, she revealed all the events that transpired that day while maintaining a slight smile. Those
same events were described to Alex’s parents in a more brisk and negative tone. Before any questions could be asked, Alex had already rushed into his room, slamming the door, to devise the perfect paper aircraft.

His hands clawed through every corner of his backpack, stopping with a grasp around the desired scissors. Glancing around his messy room with posters filling every inch of space on his walls and enough collectibles to amass an army, he never managed to find his unobtainable element: thick cardstock paper. But he impressed himself yet again with his unending knowledge, for he was right to believe cardstock hid in his dad’s office.

Just as the blacksmith handles his hammer with extreme finesse, Alex folds and shapes his cardstock to match the imagined form. This time every fold, cut, and crease was measured twice and finished to perfection. This arrow held curved wing tips for added stability, a slender body, and wings that were completely flush with the bottom of the aircraft. But Alex did not stop there, no, he went as far as drawing flames on the wings in red and orange marker and darkening the rest of the design in black. Behold the Air Razor!

“Lily’s gonna love this!” laughing with it in his hands, “this masterpiece… this Lily-ender! I will rightfully reclaim my role as the Paper Airplane Guy!” That shout was a little loud for his parents and immediately he reduced his volume.

Next Day at School
“I heard he’s gonna show it off during lunch or something.”
“No, no, no, he’ll fly that thing after school, you kidding me? He’s gonna make it the sight to see, not to miss.”
“Wait? Why wait? He can show more people at lunch!”
“Well, maybe he doesn’t want to show as many people as she did, but just show a select few. I’m on the inside; I know him too well for him not to do that. He—” The boy stopped as he caught sight of the girl that started it all taking large (but small) steps towards him. His comrade noticed her, too, and they just watched as the missile came closer and closer.

“Ahem, have either of you two seen Alex? I really need to talk to him,” she ended suddenly and cautiously awaited a response.

“Uhhhhh…Yeah? I thought I saw him planning out his ‘demonstration’ on the field, or might still be eating lunch, either of the two…” He shrugged his shoulders and, feeling satisfied with his answer, he pulled his friend’s arm and they walked away.

Lily noticed a familiar looking boy marking out lines on the field by scraping ridges into the dirt with rocks. She continued apace towards him, increasing confusion with every step.

“Hey, don’t step there,” he said, continuing to mark out his measurements without looking up. “It’s taken me most of lunch to get this far and I did it all by myself.”

“Sorry, I…. didn’t mean to…” her crisp voice distracted the boy, and he finally did look up at her (one of the first times where she was the tall one).

“Lily! Just the person I wished to see! Okay notice this marking system; yesterday I approximated how many feet your magnificentlyhorrible aircraft flew. And now I’m just sketching out
about how far I think my Air Razor will go!” Alex jumped up and Lily was dwarfed again. He patted off the dirt on his clothes and then examined the work of the lunch time thus far. “And I’m sorry, but no questions until the demonstration, please. Thank you. Hope to see you here right after school for the flight that will make the Wrights’ Spirit of Saint Louis seem archaic!”

Lily stood speechless and, following Alex’s word, she held her rebuttal in until after school. There was Alex with a small group; she joined them and spectated as he unveiled the Air Razor. Its pristine condition was an uncustomary trait of anything from Alex, but Lily still kept to herself.

The Air Razor caught the wind similarly to Lily’s, but then a gust carried it higher and past the high walls of the school. Alex watched as his flamed form disappeared past the school’s wall; this accomplishment definitely trumped anything of Lily’s.

Alex turned away in grief and sat on a bench, “My masterpiece… it’s gone…”

“You know that was actually pretty cool, Alex.” With a hand on his quivering shoulder, “I’m sorry that I… that I never really helped…you. I mean I only… I am sorry.” She looked again to the field and saw that the crowd had departed. She needed something to make up for Alex’s loss and defeat, when she rushed to her backpack and pulled out a familiar triangular butterfly. “Here, take this. Since you’re the Paper Airplane Guy, you should probably have a working airplane.” She placed her design on his lap, and registering the gift, he looked up again to her face.

“Lily, that’s all I’ve ever wanted someone to call me. Thanks.”
He folded the airplane flat, sliding it into his pocket, and hugged his friend. There was appreciation between the two of them that was unparalleled at their school. They both grabbed their backpacks and exited school with a new friendship.

“You know I never really liked that orange on the wings anyway.” He grimaced at her words but held his tongue, just happy he finally felt respected by Lily.
Olek Piechaczek

Olek Piechaczek has been writing since his fourth grade “writing workshop” class, and used his love of literature to help bolster his writing style. He has performed as a part of the Phoenix Boys Choir for 7 years and last year came back to the choir as tenor in the alumni choir, Masters. While balancing his knack for music and art, he thoroughly enjoys working with his hands on his Robotics Team, The All Knights. He would like to thank his friends, family, and especially Kolby Granville for encouraging him to continue his writing endeavors!
Poetry
In the Belly of the Phoenix

by Sharon Suzuki-Martinez

Adult Poetry
From here, ants look like people and people look like threats.

Over there, toast tastes like patriotism and butter is for chumps.

I walked through the Valley of the Sun one summer and then another and another until my eyes imploded with insight and I heard you call my burrito, “a joke.”

“Them’s fighting words,” I observed but you had already turned to ashes.

Every day is a choice between a rock and a heartbreak.

My phone warns me of excessive heat but offers no alternative.

A turkey vulture circles closer. Its old man’s face blushing with memories of youth.
Sharon Suzuki-Martinez

Sharon Suzuki-Martinez is the author of *The Way of All Flux* (New Rivers Press, 2012). She earned a PhD in English at the University of Arizona where she met her husband David, who is now an ASU American Indian Studies professor. She curates The Poet’s Playlist at poetsplaylist.tumblr.com/ Her favorite place to write in Tempe is Gold Bar Espresso.
Airplane

by Elizabeth Meadows

College Poetry
Hanging upside down -
my brothers became aliens.
I was scared and wanted to show them.

When our airplane bodies crashed to the ground,
we would hold each other down,
and dribble crushed ice on the others’ faces.

Cannon-paulting from bed to bed
with just the strength of our legs -
even if we couldn’t use them to run away.

When a Florida thunderclap jolted,
I hid them, protected in my closet.
I vowed to feed them paper and water forever.
Elizabeth Meadows is currently getting her M.S. in Speech-Language Pathology at ASU, where she also received her undergraduate degree in English Linguistics. She loves reading, writing, and language.
Shadows

by Ryley Sigmon

High School Poetry
As much as most white Americans would like to,
We cannot deny the presence of shadows looming over the country,
Directly casting people of color into isolation,
Shame for their skin and the culture behind it
A culture that Americans constantly demean
Our judgments serve as an indication
Of the changes we must make within the nation
How many black teenagers
Will die this year,
Struck by the prejudices of our police force?
How many white Americans
Will attest that the darker the skin,
The more likely one is to commit sins?
Land of the Free and Home of the Brave
Or rather,
The home of the privileged
The ones who can live without any judgment to their name
While colored people are viewed all the same
During slavery, we spat on their faces as a sign of domination
In 2016, we rub the spit into their skin by using the n word
To use the title humorously with friends,
While those killed for belonging to the word are dead
A tombstone in a field of those lost,
To the hatred of Americans
And at no cost
The policeman that murdered her son,
Without evidence to any evil that the boy’s done,
Still receives his pay,
Sees his wife and kids everyday
There’s a small beam of light
Peeking through the clouds,
Shining down,
Near the faces of those with colored skin,
Allow us to peer in,
I am not one affected by these cruel injustices
Yet I am deeply affected by the horror and reality of our country
The one weapon
We can wield and strengthen
To fight this crushing prejudice that threatens
To choke and strangle
The sound morals of our constitution
Is compassion
Once we learn empathy, the human race can hope to change
Not to eradicate the vileness of what we’ve done,
But to evolve
Into the more understanding,
The kinder creatures,
I know we can become
How can we alter,
This almost genetically-instilled mindset
That Caucasian Americans are superior
To those of color?
It begins with awareness
Social media helps to educate the youth
To really strain our vision,
To squint our eyes and notice
The flaws in our system,
In our police force,
In society’s portrayal of the black community
And it’s happening slowly,
This grand shift in thought
I truly believe the hope in our nation
Lies in the children,
The ones that aren’t yet subject to the racial prejudices
Our grandparents were raised to accept
Allowing children to see that black, white,
Humans are just that,
Human
There is no superior race
We should all face
Equal struggles and obstacles
Let us deface the hatred palpable in our streets,
On our TV screens,
And in the magazines
Let us open the door for black children,
Shadows

To be whatever they choose to be,
That they can blossom in America’s sun,
    Let us show all black people
That they do not have to live
    In the darkness of a shadow
Shadows

Ryley Sigmon

Ryley Sigmon is sixteen years old and a junior at Chaparral High School. Ryley decided to combine her passion for writing poetry with her interest in social injustices (the focus of her poem, Shadows). Ryley lives in Scottsdale, Arizona.
Nonfiction
In Tune Out of Tune

by Hira Ismail

Adult Nonfiction
“Are you wearing a bra?” This seemed to be the central question on the minds of all the girls in sixth grade. Some amongst us had started to wear bras, and would lord it over the others as a status symbol.

I remember fuming over the game of snapping each other’s back strap that the girls would play whenever we had ventured past the watching eyes of teachers or playground aides. Unfortunately, it worked even through everyone’s shirts: the covering made no difference; the bra hooks could still be pulled and sometimes undone. It was like an elitist club; your password was the ‘musical’ twang the strap made when the policing members pulled it, as if to check for identification. Your eligibility for the club was questioned, whether you’d asked for entry or not. It would come out of the blue, this frisking, and it made me so angry. Some of the girls would react with nervous laughter; others would snort delightedly. Did they feel their budding femininity was being strangely validated?

Then the boys started entering in on this bra check.

“Do you think she’s wearing a padded bra? I think she is.” I remember really not knowing what to say when Kit, the tall,
wavy brown-haired kid in my class who looked suspiciously like a surfer dude, asked me this. He had become my friend by then. He had also become one of the bra twangers.

“No!” I said this quickly in defense of my dear friend, Amenah, of the thick bushy brown hair down to her shoulders and long, long straight-lashed eyes. I could tell by the way he’d asked accusingly that padding must be considered a bad thing. I found out later that some students thought of padded underwear as a way of posing, of pretending to be more bodily mature than one is. “I mean, no, I don’t know, don’t ask me…” I gave him a very dirty look, all narrowed eyes and tight-lipped disapproval, and left. What I wish I’d said was, “What is your problem? It’s none of your business! Why does it matter to you? And stop looking at her there, geez. Disgusting. Crazy people.”

I talked to Amenah about this question people had brought up. She was dismayed; I remember her head drooping when she heard.

“I wear it because it’s supposed to be comfortable. Isn’t that why people wear it?” Her eyes creased, cheeks suddenly drawn, making her face look smaller.

“Of course! Why else?” Stupid, stupid people messing with each other’s privacy and hurting my friend. I mean, there’s a reason it’s called underwear.

Growing up in a Muslim household, as a part of a religion in which openly staring at other people’s bodies is disapproved of, where modesty of gaze is to be kept and given, I was shocked. And here, in this land of adolescence that we were all learning to navigate, here people were attacking each other’s bra straps
for goodness sakes, that too without permission. I remember when it happened to me, I was livid.

“You’re not even wearing a bra!” Alix, short and short-blond-haired, seemed delighted when she hadn’t found any strap to pull, as if this had proved a point: I didn’t belong with the Popular People, her group of friends. She was always changing her mind about whether she wanted to be friends or to taunt me. Something in me clanged, my inner instruments out of tune.

“Yes, I am! I mean, no, I’m not, I’m wearing a—But why should I tell her I’m wearing a tank top instead? That’s beside the point—it doesn’t matter! It’s none of your business! Don’t touch me!” I actually yelled at her, something which I was very afraid to do, always worrying about offending people. I bent over into that yell, swiveled around and shouted at her grinning face and she’d taken a step back, I remember, her face still holding that gleeful smile. I didn’t wait around to watch if it would change, and rushed into the classroom, bent over like a wounded animal, all thoughts of the pleasant playground recess gone. In hindsight, I wonder whether my classmates even realized how bad this was. Consent was not something any of them had been thinking about. Is it ok to just walk up and touch each other’s underwear? No, not even if you’re 11 or 12, something, something has got to tell you instinctually it’s wrong to do without permission. Alix never did it again, not to me anyways. God be thanked, the adolescent bra game eventually died down.

Don’t get me started on the sleepover pajamas game.

But there we were still, Alix, Jasmine, Deborah, Amenah and I standing around a tree on the playground during recess, five
girls in varying stages of adolescence, experiencing perhaps our first stabs at socializing rather than playing in the way children do. Jasmine and Alix were too cool for four-square, a game played with a kickball bounced underhand on a court with, surprise surprise, four squares. They were part of the notorious Popular People, a group for which I didn’t qualify, which was at times both sad and satisfying. As a result, the whole group would never be moved to play, and I didn’t feel adventurous enough to approach the court alone, though I loved the whip of the ball and the adrenaline and the rhythm of competition.

It was musical.

I stood awkwardly against a tree, at a loss for what to say or do, pining after four-square still. Someone had brought up a song that I was vaguely familiar with. I’d heard my friends humming it, a few snatches of words here and there. That was how it was with most songs in English: I didn’t listen to them. Urdu was my preferred language; the songs of my heart all came in Urdu. However, I had finally recognized the tune and words of this song. I began to sing the words quietly. Alix was going through her nice phase, but she and Jasmine still made me nervous. I felt unequal to them, and it was hard for me to pull out of that thinking.

But in singing everyone was the same.

“You’re the kind of friend that always bends when I’m broken, like remember when? You took my heart and put it back together again.” We’d just gotten into the song from Freaky Friday when the playground aide blew her whistle and it was time to go back inside. We didn’t stop singing, and moved across
the field and crossed to the stairs, walking in a horizontal line. The breeze was blowing slightly in my hair; I remember being thrilled by it. Typical school-age realization of *it feels like a movie!* We continued to sing even amidst all the surprised looks from the fourth- and fifth-graders, but it was okay because we were at the top of the class; sixth graders in all our glory. Everyone could just think what they wanted, and it didn't matter because they were younger. Yup. The Politics of Age. It was one of the first times I'd felt “cool.” The world was working kindly toward me, allowing me to indulge in that one moment in space. I felt lifted away from the mundane activities of the day, the four-square courts that were slowly emptying of people, cement lined with bits of twigs and dirt that had not been successfully brushed off by the rushing and shouting of students, blending the perfectly painted squares with the rest of the surrounding dirt and trees. The tetherballs had stopped swinging, making their last round around the poles, but we were still going. Our singing had taken us past the confines of the schedule set for us. We got to break the time constraints of recess and to continue the fun. Felt pretty epic.

I'd tried to explain all this to my older sister, whom I call Baji, an Urdu term of respect, tried to describe to her how freeing the feeling of singing without a care was.

“Didn’t you feel silly?”

“No.” *But now I do.* She had given me a sense of what we must have sounded like to the people around us, listening.

Baji and I would sing together. I was very self-conscious and would hide my voice behind a mock-deep one or make comical
contortions of a song in a way that would make her laugh. She was always so good at it, her voice would go up and down and harmonize with the throaty or melodic high notes female singers would hit in our beloved Hindi movie songs.

“Ay dil dil ki duniya mein aisa haal bhi hota hai.” I’d be lying on the maroon carpet with floral designs at home, back on the floor and caught up in admiring how her voice worked, the Urdu floating from her tongue. Not daring to try to hit that mark in front of her, in case my voice caught in my throat, I would wait until I was in a bathroom washing my face or taking a shower (can’t believe I didn’t realize that would echo), and I didn’t have to worry about judging bystanders, bras, or clothes at all for that matter. It was just me and my voice. When I would wait alone for my dad to pick me up from school, I would release my voice, for better or for worse, laughing helplessly when my voice cracked at an attempted high note. I didn’t need a Walkman or an iPod, though I craved one. I had me and my memory, and nobody around. I knew better then how to spend quality time with myself.

So it was rare for me, saving that time on the playground, to sing outside my private, or perceived private, sphere. Baji would always be intrigued by my voice when it came out accidentally. When I let my guard down and just sang. She’d praise it and I would immediately change it back to silly mode. It was a strangely defensive move, and I don’t know why I did it. Was it my little secret that I wasn’t ready to share yet? I think I was afraid to let her see me. Singing meant expressing emotions that go deeper than just your throat.
Later, in my senior year of college, I discovered that singing means more than I thought at first. In October, I went out on a hill behind Rhoads Dorm to learn how to yell. The sky was open and inviting and it was one of those days in which the breeze and sun were perfectly in tune with each other, casting comfort on all the earth. As actors with vibrant characters in a play, we needed to yell without hurting our throats. We had to bring sound from our cores.

“We’re going to start by humming and reaching for our toes. This is supposed to get the sound to vibrate in different parts of your body.” Kat demonstrated, letting herself drop to her toes, hands flopping downwards along with her short brown hair, bangs skimming her cheek, humming with her mouth closed. I watched intently, trying to hear the difference in the sounds. Standing on the hill, we were able to see a pond and its marshes at the base of the hill. Kat rose slowly and deliberately to a standing position, the sound growing more substantive, colliding, waiting to be acknowledged fully, and then, ringing, there it was, her mouth opened, the sound released—mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm—this was a different kind of singing.

“You should be able to hold it for a while; let’s try it, this is just a warm-up.”

We both dropped our heads and hands to our toes then. I rose up along with her, experiencing a fleeting moment of apprehension in my gut, that diaphragm I was supposed to be fearlessly exercising. We were standing in front of a college dorm after all, 2:00 on a Sunday afternoon, well before quiet hours, but still. I released it anyway, and ringing it rose, surpris-
ing me. I pulled it back—mmmmmaaa-ah-a-a.

Kat considered me for a moment. I felt a small burst of apprehension, a sharp click in the stomach that rose to my heart. I’m a little intimidated by her powers of reading people. She is an actor after all, and tuning in to other people is something you have to be good at. Sometimes it seemed my emotions were as plain to her as if I had spoken them out loud. I can read emotions pretty well, too, and I felt like I had met another person who could do the same, or even more so than me. It was disconcerting being read instead of doing the reading.

“It doesn’t have to be pretty, it just needs to be held loudly for a long while. I don’t know how to say this without sounding insulting—(prepare for critique)—but I’ve noticed your yell in rehearsal can be flat, it stays in one place. Try rolling the hum around your mouth.”

I did, feeling the hum roll from my throat to my cheek to my nose, trying to make it reach my forehead. Not insulted at all, I wanted critique, I wanted to improve.

We went through a couple of hums more, and then came the “goat call.”

“So imagine you’re a goat boy trying to communicate with another goat boy on a hill across from us. You’re going to yell ‘hey.’ They needed to be able to communicate across distance without killing their throats too, when it was time to take their herds home.”

“Ooooh, this is great, because we’re actually on a hill!” For a moment I was able to ignore the dorm behind us, the disruption we would be causing.
“Yeah, and it’s easy to imagine another hill over there.” The road across from the pond was at the same level that the imagined partnering hill would have been. Kat demonstrated again, and then I tried it.

“HEEEEYYY-yy-y.” Faltered again at the ending and Kat noticed.

“Hey. I know societally we are constantly told to keep quiet.” You talk so much, Hira. “We push our voices down, lower them and they’re not as loud as they can be.” Shhhh, you’re being too loud, Hira. “But right now, you need to put that all aside and just yell. Let it out, Hira, don’t peter off at the end. Stay strong.” Take up space. Use your voice. Sing, Hira, sing.

I held eye contact with her, letting her see me and my hesitation. It was okay, I was okay with being read, because she was right and this was helping. I nodded and turned away from her to face the hillside road again, hands to my stomach, feeling my muscles move. I closed my eyes for a moment and then opened them. Instead of wishing everything away, I needed to let myself be affected by it, the light which seemed to be moving the weeping willow leaves in front of me, the vine-like stems hanging down, Kat beside me, the pond water ahead.

“Square those shoulders.”

“Chest wide.”

“Feet shoulder-length apart.”

Breathing in through the mouth out through the nose—HEEEEEYYYYY—taking the feelings from the depths of me and pushing them out—HEEEEEEYYYYYY—forcing them out into the open with one long—HEEEEEYYYYYY—one long
clear cry. The voice was no longer surface, no longer from the crevices of the throat, an immediate reaction, a spur of the moment interaction. It was collected, in all its wildness, from deep, deep inside me; it was considered, released, a lengthy, endless HEY, a call to the world that traveled through the falling flaming leaves, the rippling water, the passing cars on that hilltop road. Yes!

“Yes!”

We continued on like this, alternating from analyzing the scripts to practicing voice projection. Finally we decided to do our last heys and to go for lunch.

“You do it first, then me?” I asked.

“Okay.”

“HEEEEEYYYYY—”

“SHUT UUUUUUPPP,” came the call from the window opened behind us for this express purpose. I couldn’t see the person at the window, but her intonation and cadence had matched the “hey” so perfectly it was almost comical. It didn’t take Kat a second to turn and reply, in the same tone—“WE’RE reHEARsinggg.”

She shook her head, unperturbed, but I had turned, too, swayed. Aghhh, there are people and they probably hate us right now. My eyebrows were raised and eyes were wide.

“Should we go yell on the other side of the hill? I—”

“No,” Kat said flatly. “Finish your last hey first, then we’ll go eat.” She looked at me squarely, her mouth set, take up space, use your voice.

Deep breaths—I knew I had to then—HEEEEEYYYYYYY
forever and ever without end—hand reaching out to that hilltop road—a clean cut of the voice the world would have to hear, ending high and strong—HEEEEEYYYYY. This time, I smiled. Took another deep breath and turned grinning to see Kat, who nodded matter-of-factly:

“That was fucking fantastic.”

It was.

***

I’ve realized why the bra-twanging enraged me so much. I have terminology now to name it. Consent is necessary before touching others; people’s privacy shouldn’t be raided; words like harassment and assault ring in my ears when I look back at that time. But that instinctual feeling of being wronged, that was valid, too. I was being forced into something that I didn’t want to be a part of. I was being pulled and pushed in a way that wasn’t welcome, and the singing was medicine for all that. When we sang on that playground, we shared emotions and related to each other through it, in a way that was welcome.

Perhaps that is exactly what my sister wanted to avoid? Why doesn’t she sing in public? Would it lay her too bare? Would it make her vulnerable? Did she see the healing qualities to singing, to yelling on a hill with a friend in the sun, to opening yourself up in that way and allowing people to see you, to hear you?

My sister tells me to lower my voice. We should be modest, keep our thoughts and hearts pure and safe inside.

But at what cost? Does modesty mean preventing your voice from being heard? I don’t think it has to. The world has just got
to deal with me and my emotions.

Maybe we’re both right. Maybe she doesn’t want to lay her heart open. Maybe singing is her secret that she isn’t ready to share yet. Maybe it’s nobody’s business until she wants it to be. Maybe it never will be, and maybe that’s okay.

All I know is I don’t want to hide anymore. I don’t want to worry about offending the world. I want to be me without apologies. I want to be real.

I am here, world. Hear me.

***

I walk the streets of Philadelphia now with friends who know the language my heart sings in and who sing with me. It’s still mostly Urdu, but there is British Boy Band English in there somewhere, along with Disney Channel Songs and Disney Cartoon Anthems. The sentiment in this other music sometimes matches the sentiments so poetically described in my beloved Urdu lyrics. There are pedestrians around who double-take and stare, coffee cups and cell phones in hand. What are they thinking of us?

*Are you drunk?*

No, just happy.

Do we look silly? Ridiculous?

I couldn’t care less.
In Tune Out of Tune

Hira Ismail

Hira Ismail is a graduate in English and Creative Writing from Bryn Mawr College who has been writing most of her life. Two of her plays, *Minute Decision* and *All That Matters*, were staged at the Arizona Women's Theatre Company's Pandora Festival of New Works in 2015. She has also finally completed a draft of her first novel. She is determined to write in all sorts of formats and genres in order to set her writing free.
The Summer of 2015

by Isabella Amparan

College Nonfiction
It starts with a chair.
No one ever tells you this, no one ever talks about it, but it starts with a chair.
Part of you, later, will remember the doctor’s office. You’ll remember your mother’s tears, the fear. But really, for you, it starts with a chair.
You sign your name to the first of many white sheets of paper, and your life is no longer in your hands.
They take you to a back room and they take your clothes and they put you in the chair. There’s a million of them in the room but this one is yours. This chair belongs to you, nameless patient, and so do these blankets, and so do these scrubs, ugly and red and identical to everyone else’s. They sit you in a chair and leave you alone and it starts.
The smart ones sleep. The smart burrow into their subconscious and hide from the bleak, horrible room, if only for a few hours. You’re not one of the smart ones. You stay awake and you watch the terrible movie they play on the TV before you and you don’t speak. No one in there speaks.
Later, you’ll hear about this room all the time. It’s the one
thing we all have in common. They’ll tell you they hated it, that it was torture, that the whole time they were thinking, “god what have I done?” You’ll have those thoughts, too.

And finally the nurse comes and tells you that they have your room and you get up from the chair that’s yours and the blankets, that moments ago were your only possessions in the world, get tossed in the laundry and she takes you out the door and—

There’s sunlight. You had thought that it was night but the sun is shining, afternoon bright and warm.

You always hated the afternoon.

The nurse drops you off and the new keepers come; they poke you and prod you and smile because you’re so small, and so scared, and too young to be in this place. A blonde nurse in blue with a sad smile and pity-kind eyes looks you over, and asks you the same questions you’ve been asked all day, the ones you’ll be asked so often your answers are cookie cutter, washed down to get out faster.

*have you ever tried to kill yourself? how did you do it? do you want to hurt yourself? do you want to hurt others? do you want to kill yourself right now?*

She takes you to your room and you wonder what you’re doing and you wonder what’s going to happen and you breathe. All you can do is breathe.

The room is small, and beige. Your roommate talks to herself, but the nurse tells you she’s not that bad. There’s a desk and closet, and a bathroom with no door on the shower. Distantly, it reminds you of summer camp.
That night you get in bed and you listen to your roommate laugh out loud at the voices in her head and you think, I wonder if I’ll get to sleep tonight.

This is your home now.

The days start and you quickly find out they’re all the same. You get up, you shower, you dress, and you eat. At first you can’t leave the ward but soon the doctor gives you permission and you’re off with the rest. The nurse finds you when you come back and she asks you how you’re doing; she asks you how you’re feeling, and she hands you three little pills in a small paper cup and leaves with a smile.

You sit cross-legged on the couch, far from everyone else, and you go to group therapy. Sometimes it’s helpful. Sometimes it’s not.

They ask you why you’re here. They tell you they’re addicts, they’re bipolar, they’re schizophrenic, they have post-traumatic stress, they’re depressed, they’re anxious, they’re all of the above.

You tell them you tried to kill yourself when you were 12. When you were 17, 18. Just two days before. You tell them you’ve felt this way since the day you were born. That the sadness inside you grew and grew until it became death.

They all nod. They’ve all been there.

You cry in the bathroom and you cry in the hall and you go to the nurse and she sits you in a chair and she hands you more pills.

You sit at tables and swap stories about violence, about
drugs, about movies, about your friends, about death. You color while your friend tells you he can’t come to lunch because he tried to stab someone yesterday. You walk around the yard while your friend tells you how her husband used to hurt her, how he took her kids and how she’s desperate to get them back. You wait in line for dinner while your friend tells you about his addiction, about all the drugs he’s let rot his system. The harsh realities become your normal.

For some reason, Ocean’s Eleven is always playing.

Your roommate leaves and you’re okay with it. Your new roommate comes and she hears voices, too, but she smiles and she talks to you and you feel like you’ve made a friend.

Your mom visits every night. She’s always happy to see you. You’re always happy to see her. Every day the other patients tell you how much she obviously loves you, how great it is that she comes. You’re only one of three who gets visitors. You remember that kind of lonely.

There’s only one clock in the whole place and it’s way at the front, far from you and the other crazies, and time becomes something out of your reach, another unreal in a sea of mixed reality. The hours run together like molasses.

The doctor tells you you’re leaving tomorrow and you don’t really know if you’re ready but you smile, and say the things you need to and when you leave her office you could cry with relief.

That night you go outside and your new roommate does cartwheels, even though you told her it’s against the rules, but you both laugh, breathless and giddy as she does one right after the other. You and five others lay on the fake grass, head to toe,
and look up at the stars. It’s been so long since you felt happy without a disclaimer. You talk, you all talk, about everything, and when you sit up you ask everyone their goal for tomorrow. Someone turns on the radio and suddenly you’re all dancing, wild and free and the rain hits you, fast and small like the summer rain it is, but you feel so good you could burst. You look at these people and you think, family.

And the next day when you’re standing there to leave you hold on for hugs and you worry you forgot something and they promise to call, and the nurse hands you a brown paper bag filled with your things. You take a look back and you smile at them all, and suddenly, you’re out.

You sign the discharge papers and you get into your mom’s car and you stare at the sun because suddenly there’s a world outside the walls and you realize the life you had built for yourself was only four days; the people you’ve grown so close to are practically strangers. You go home and your phone feels different in your hand, your room feels different than before. You sleep and you wait for a call that isn’t coming, for a message from the hospital, for anything.

Life should feel different but it doesn’t; everything is the same except for you, except for your change. You find out you don’t know what to do, what to say. You used to be able to walk up and tell someone that you were sick, that your head was full of heavy black cotton and your heart was poison gas and they would tell you the same; they would agree. You’re supposed to hide it now; you’re supposed to be ashamed of your time in the hospital.
You send a few messages to the woman that came in with you, the woman you felt you can tell anything. After a day or two she stops replying. You understand. Your roommate never contacts you. You don’t even think you remembered to give her your number. You think about your friend still in rehab, trying to repair the damage done to his body. You wonder if he would pick up, if you would try to call.

The days pass quicker and you find yourself at therapy, at home, at a friend’s house, at therapy, and on and on as the cycle continues. You only have a few weeks before college starts. You try not to think about it.

You make progress, a little. Sometimes therapy feels okay, but mostly it feels like pulling teeth. You don’t get that feeling again, the one of family, but you know the new people understand you, and that’s enough.

You’re kind of alright, most days.

You think about the ocean, like you have all summer, but suddenly it’s real; it’s not just a fantasy but a reality. And you’re scared; you’re so scared. You’re afraid of it being nothing like you pictured; you’re afraid it’ll be everything you pictured. You’re afraid of disappointment. You’re afraid of happiness.

But you stand at the beach and you breathe the sea air and maybe it’s not perfect but it’s real and the ocean inside you moves with the waves at your feet and you feel good, you feel so damn good.

The world still waits for you back at home and the death is still heavy in your belly, but right now it fades, a dull ache in the background. The water is cold and the sun is warm and all you
can think is, oh, so this is what it’s like to be okay.

You go back to school and you go back to your mother and to therapy and to books and stress and meds, but the ocean sits there in your head, next to the hospital, right next to the ward, and washes itself over it all.
Isabella Amparan

Isabella has lived her whole life in the valley of the sun and has been writing ever since she learned how to pick up a pencil (pinched between the middle finger and thumb, thanks nana!) She is currently a college freshman at 19 years old, and is studying English.
The idea for the cover actually came to me almost right away when I saw the competition. I thought about how words and stories can bridge our community. I envisioned the words as the bridge.

My design is handmade using origami paper, a paperback book and a magazine. I ran the origami paper through my printer to print the title. I made a stencil of my idea of the Tempe Bridge and then cut out pages from the *New Times* and a paperback book. I layered the individual pieces on my scanner.

I have always loved the colors and feel of origami paper. My father was a Navy pilot on the USS Range in 1963 when I was 3 years old. He was gone for over a year. While in Japan, he learned how to make origami animals and would mail them to me every week.
Freda has lived in the Clark Park Neighborhood of Tempe for over 20 years with her husband Tom and two sons, Jackson and Van. During that time, Freda has been active in the community with Tempe Leadership Class VII, Valley Big Brother Big Sisters, and Tempe Center for the Arts. With a background in Industrial Engineering, Freda worked in manufacturing at Medtronic. After living 5 years in Costa Rica she is glad to be back in Tempe and to have the opportunity to express her creative side through gardening and art projects.
FICTION
Tom Bonfiglio's stories have appeared in two dozen publications, including *Fiction, Lake Effect, Wag's Revue, Evergreen Review, Fringe Magazine, mixer* and *The Literary Review*. He teaches writing at Arizona State University.

Roxanne Doty, PhD, Assoc. Professor, School of Politics and Global Studies Sciences, has published short stories in *Forge*, Phoenix's *Four Chambers Literary Magazine*, and has work that is forthcoming in *I-70 Review* and *Soundings Review*. Another short story was recently selected as a finalist in the *New Letter*’s Alexander Patterson Cappon Prize for Fiction.

Marc Mason lives in Tempe and teaches in the Academic Success Program and in the Masters of Liberal Studies program at Arizona State University. His works include the young adult novels *Schism: Out of the Shadows, Battery: the Arrival* and the forthcoming *Schism: Fearful Symmetry*; non-fiction books *The Joker's Advocate* and *The Aisle Seat: Life on the Edge of Popular Culture*; and comic books *Red Sonja: Raven* and *Red Sonja: Sanctuary*.

POETRY
Andrea Janelle Dickens is originally from Tempe, but spent much of her childhood in Virginia. She currently teaches in the Writing Programs of the ASU English Department. She is the author of *The Female Mystic: Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages* and of several dozen published poems. Her poems have recently appeared in *The New South, streetcake, Found Poetry Review, *82 Review, Of Zoos*, and anthologies by Kind of a Hurricane Press and Silver Birch Press.
Rosemarie Dombrowski, PhD, is a Lecturer of English at Arizona State University’s Downtown campus and the editor of the undergraduate writing journal, Write On, Downtown. She’s also the co-founder and host of the Phoenix Poetry Series, a poetry editor for the literary journal, Four Chambers, and the founder of rinky dink press (a publisher of micropoetry). She has received four Pushcart nominations and was a finalist for the Pangea Poetry Prize in 2015. Her collections include The Book of Emergencies (Five Oaks Press, 2014) and The Philosophy of Unclean Things (Finishing Line Press, forthcoming).

Ryan Holden received his Masters in Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Arizona State University. His poems have been published in Hobble Creek Review, Adirondack Review, and Ampersand Review. He currently teaches at Arizona State University.

Patricia Murphy founded Superstition Review at Arizona State University, where she teaches creative writing and magazine production. She won the 2016 May Swenson Poetry Award judged by Stephen Dunn, and her poetry collection Hemming Flames will be published by University Press of Colorado in summer 2016. Her writing has appeared in many literary journals, including The Iowa Review, Quarterly West, and American Poetry Review, and most recently in such journals as North American Review. Her work has received awards from the Associated Writing Programs and the Academy of American Poets among others. A chapter of her memoir-in-progress was published as a chapbook by New Orleans Review.

Kelly Nelson is the author of the chapbooks Rivers I Don’t Live By and Who Was I to Say I Was Alive. She’s been awarded a grant from the Arizona Commission on the Arts and an artist residency from the Cultural Center in New York Mills, Minnesota. She received a PhD in Anthropology from Brandeis University and teaches Interdisciplinary Studies at Arizona State University.
NON-FICTION (PERSONAL ESSAYS, MEMOIRS)

Rebecca Byrkit is an award-winning author of four books of poetry; her work appears in Ploughshares, Best American Poetry, Crazyhorse, Arizona Highways, Rolling Stone and New Letters, among many other journals and anthologies. She is a founding faculty member of the Masters of Liberal Studies program at ASU, teaching Special Topics and teaches creative writing workshops for the ASU English Department.

Robert Isenberg is a writer, filmmaker, and stage performer. His most recent books are The Green Season and The Mysterious Tongue of Dr. Vermilion. Visit him at robertisenberg.net.

Paul Morris directs the Master of Liberal Studies program at Arizona State University and teaches nonfiction writing. He writes about travel, food and the Greater Phoenix area for the Valley Guide Magazine as writer at large.

Deborah Sussman received an MA in English/Creative Writing from Hollins University and an MFA in Fiction from the University of Virginia. She has taught writing at the University of Virginia, Phoenix College and Arizona State University. Sussman is now the communications and media specialist for ASU’s Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts. Her writing has been published in the Washington Post, the Phoenix New Times and Art in America, among other places.