

Spring 2020

## Legacy Spring 2020

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# LEGACY



# IDENTITY

SPRING 2020



Sierra Correia, Legacy Editor

## DEAR READER,

For the first, the last, and the only time, I greet you. Hi, my name is Sierra Correia. It's been a pleasure to work with all of you. There are many reasons why I picked this year's theme of Identity. But, ultimately, I just knew. I'm a planner by nature, so I had planned to propose Identity as a theme before I had even applied to be Legacy Editor. It's just ironic that I picked a concept that's so hard to know.

Before I came to America, I thought I knew who I was. Now after, not so much. And I think that many people can relate to that feeling of uncontrollable uncertainty. Many of you who submitted probably did. But I've learned that this is the point in our lives when we're allowed to be unsure, to be wrong, to

make mistakes, to change. I hope that you realize this too.

Thank you to everyone who played a part in the making of this magazine—the writers who laid themselves bare on the page; Professor Nixon, who always had the answers to my questions; Lena, who created our incredible promotional materials, our beautiful magazine, and guided the design; Professors Goddard and Gomez and their analyses of the winning pieces; Professor Ruf and his insight into a subject I may never understand; Tierra Hayes and all the hours she listened; and, finally, the readers, who make our annual publication worthwhile.

I hope that you find a reflection of yourself in this.

*Enjoy this year's magazine!*

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## CONTRIBUTIONS

**Clarise Nixon**  
Advisor, Judge

**Kathy Goddard**  
Judge

**Tierra Hayes**  
Judge

**Kahelena Giltner**  
Designer

**Amanda Gomez**  
Judge

**Stephen Ruf**  
Judge

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A blue-tinted close-up photograph of a classical sculpture's face. The sculpture has thick, curly hair and a serene expression. A hand is visible in the lower right, with fingers gently touching the sculpture's cheek. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the stone or marble.

**“we know what we are,**



**but not what we may be.”**

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

## Snow in Summer

### Josue Vega

The faux tile floor squeaked under the tip of his sneakers as he swung his leg back and forth. She should've been here by now. He adjusted in his worn, padded chair and shifted his gaze from the pale gray door to the sleeping woman on the bed next to him. Tubing emerged out of her body like parasites.

"Ok, food's here," the nurse's wide, smiling face finally appeared at the door as she carefully balanced two different trays. "We got some mashed potatoes and toast for the lady and some mac and cheese for the gentleman."

"Thanks, Tasha," he returned her smile wearily. "You didn't have to get me anything, though."

"Hey, you're a growing young man, and I know how you boys like to eat," Tasha winked at him. "Do you need any help, hun?"

"No, I got it, but thanks." He received the trays from her, balancing one on his lap while he set the other on the sleeping woman's side table.

"Alright, but you let me know if you need anything," Tasha began to walk out before stopping in the doorway. "You keep your chin up, ok, hun?"

Normally, her broad, catchy smile would've tickled him to the depths, but lately, all he could do was force a grin and nod. When her blue scrubs disappeared around the corner, he turned to the trays on the table and pried off the covers. Placing a tender hand on the sleeping woman's bony arm, he leaned close to her ear.

"Mama? It's Toto. Mama, wake up. It's time to eat."

He waited a few seconds before he gave her

a gentle shake to which she slowly opened her eyes. "Is the food here?" Her voice was barely above a whisper.

"Yes, ma'am." He spooned some mashed potatoes up and held them to her chapped, quivering lips. "That's it..." He gently pressed the food into her mouth.

She swallowed hard. "How long was I asleep?"

"A couple of hours." Carefully, he brushed some stray hair away from her mouth before sliding the next spoonful between her lips.

"Toto," she choked a bit on the food. "Toto, did you take your test? Please tell me you took your test, Toto." Grasping his arm, she began lifting herself.

"Shhh, Mama, shhh..." He cradled her head as he laid her back down. "Don't worry about it. I took my test."

A visible peace flooded every premature wrinkle in her face. "That's good, baby. That's good. You're gonna be a great doctor someday." She allowed him to place a small piece of toast in her mouth.

A soft tap brought their attention back to the door.

"Hey, Toto. Hey, Mrs. G." He was a tall young man with thick eyebrows and wavy hair pulled back from his tan skin and handsome face. From his hand hung a white plastic bag stretched to its limit by several food containers.

"Diego..." It was the closest thing to an exclamation Mama had made for days. "How nice to see you."

"Thanks, Mrs. G." As Diego walked over to the bed, he met Toto's eyes. Diego blushed, and his eyes darted away as he let out a nervous laugh. "Um, I brought you Olive Garden. I know how much you like it."

"Really?" For the second time, Mama's voice

rose to an exclamation. She reached out trembling hands toward the bag, but Diego placed it softly in her lap. He knelt beside her, opposite of Toto. "There's some of their good lasagna and those little donuts you like with the berry dip."

"Here Mama, let me help you with that." Toto began to pull away the plastic bag from the carryout boxes.

"No," she made a valiant effort to jerk away from him. "No, someone will help me. Go hang out with your friend."

"Mama, I can't do that. You need me." Toto

tried to ignore Diego's pleading look from the other side of the bed.

"No." Before he could stop her, Mama had pressed one of her wiry fingers into the call button for the nurse. "Go."

## "I want to understand. Why won't you let me?"

With a sigh, Toto rose from the chair and began walking out. Diego followed him, allowing him to go first through the door.

They walked together in silence through the hospital halls. Each room had a different TV show playing. It was almost like flipping through the channels.

They both seemed to know where they were going because they somehow ended up sitting on a wooden bench in the garden. The hospital rose up impressively all around them and a glorious fountain splashed in front of them. To the left was a bronze statue of Christ holding a

girl with a bandaged leg.

"You—you didn't have to do that." Toto gazed down at his foot.

"It was nothing. I was going past Olive Garden anyway." Diego attempted a chuckle. "Um, I got you this too. I know you like them." He held out a pack of Starburst, his face reddening as he braved a shy smile.

Toto took it. "It's been months since I've had these, I think," he said.

"I kinda figured. You, uh...you deserve something special," Diego stammered. "I mean, for all the stuff you've had to do and all."

"It's nothing. She's my mother. Anybody else would do the same," Toto shrugged.

"We missed you at the test today," Diego said quietly.

"I was needed here." Toto's answer was curt. There was a heart-thumping silence.

"So is this the way you're going to talk to me now?" Diego looked down at the ground. "I'm only trying to help you, Toto."

"I'm not...no...It's just...Look, I'm sorry. I'm not trying to be rude. It's just been tough." Toto felt a strong pang in his chest when he looked at Diego's downcast face.

"It's ok. I understand. So..." Diego hesitated. "How is she doing?"

Toto inhaled deeply. "She's fighting." Something caught in his voice. "The doctors say it won't be long now."

Slowly, almost painfully, Diego inched his hand closer to Toto's and laid his fingers on top. "I'm sorry, Toto. I know this must be hard."

"Don't!" Toto suddenly jerked his hand away and jumped up. "You don't understand."

"But I want to!" For the first time since he arrived, Diego raised his voice. "I want to understand. Why won't you let me?"



Frigid, icy tears began to spill out of Toto's eyes. He batted them away as the wind chilled them against his cheek. "You wouldn't understand."

"Try me. Just give me a chance. That's all I'm asking."

"It—hurts—too much." Toto was suddenly aware of his sobbing. "Diego, I..." He felt his soul buckle underneath him. He looked up and Diego gently held out his arms.

For the first time in months, he felt safe. Held in those strong, tender arms, Toto felt his whole body relax. He could feel Diego rubbing the back of his neck and his shoulders as the weight of the last year came out in strangled hiccups and bitter tears.

Toto nodded. "It's not right. I can't love you like that. As much as I want to, I can't."

Diego took his arm. "You don't really think He wants you to be in this much pain, do you?"

Toto started to speak, but the words didn't come out.

"He's love, isn't he?" Diego looked back and forth between the statue and Toto. "Wouldn't He want you to be happy? Come on, you don't think you can change this about yourself, do you?"

"Stop," Toto shook his head. "I don't know what I think. But I do know that Mama is dying. That woman gave up everything for me. She stuck by me even after my father left. So I gotta see her again. And if that means that I can't—be

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## "Wouldn't He want you to be happy?"

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"Toto," Diego slowly pulled him away and lifted his chin. Their eyes met, and Toto felt pierced by those wide brown eyes staring back into his. "Toto, I care so much about you. Let me help you." Toto bit his quivering lip. He had never felt so much struggle in his heart. "I can't," he managed to croak. The tears began to slide down his face again.

"Why?" Diego looked like he'd been stabbed in the heart.

"Because," Toto pulled away from the other man's hug. "Because of Him."

Diego followed Toto's gaze to the bronze statue just a few feet away. "Jesus?" he asked.

with you, or anyone...then so be it."

"Toto, no. Anyone who would keep you from seeing your Mama just for finding love..."

"Diego, no."

"Look at Him!" Diego jabbed his finger toward the statue. "Look at the way He looks at her! Is that the face of a man who wants anything but happiness for her? Is that the face of a man who would keep her out of heaven and from her parents because she grew up to be different?"

"I can't risk it."

Diego brushed his sleeve across his face. He plopped down on the wooden bench. "So what

are you gonna do? Who's going to be there for you when she's gone? Who are you going to have Thanksgiving and Christmas with?"

"I got a few relatives in Vermont. I'm sure I can go up there."

"They're a couple of old aunts and uncles. You told me yourself." Diego's nostrils flared with passion. "You need someone to be there for you when they're gone. You deserve that! You deserve someone to come home to and cry to..." he swallowed. "Even...even if it's not me."

The silence that followed was only broken by the two o'clock strike of the nearby church tower.

"I should go," Toto whispered. He turned and began to walk away before stopping dead in his tracks. "You should probably forget about me."

"Never," Diego replied quickly. "I can at least be your friend."

Toto did not reply. He walked silently through the sliding glass doors, past frail, bald women in wheelchairs and men dragging along their oxygen tanks. The odor of cleaner was pungent, even inside the elevator that he took.

When he arrived at the room, Tasha was wiping off Mama's face. "All done, Mary," the nurse said. She gathered the tray and dishes and began to exit. As she passed by Toto, she said, "Who was that nice-looking young man?"

"Just someone I go to college with," Toto brushed it away.

"Well, he's cute, hun," she laughed. "If he asks, give him my number."

Toto forced a chuckle. "I guess so." As Tasha left, Toto sat down next to Mama again. "How are you feeling?"

"Tired," she sighed. "But the food was good—"

she couldn't finish. She began hacking and coughing violently. Toto quickly reached for the call button, but she stopped him. She suppressed the coughs after a few seconds.

"I'm glad you'll have Diego when I'm gone," she said. "He's a good friend. Those are about as rare as snow in summer."

He felt his heart rip in two. "Mama, don't talk like that..."

"Promise me something, Toto," she said. She grabbed his arm and pulled him in.

Toto felt the pain rising in him, up from his stomach, into his heart, and all the way up into his eyes, where it threatened to spill.

"Promise me you won't be alone. Promise me you'll find yourself some nice girl to build your life with when I'm gone," Mama rasped.

Toto looked into her sunken eyes. He leaned into her shoulder as the tears began once again.

## **The Identity Theft**

### **Ashton Janeway McMillen**

*For my grandmother*

**T**he gravel driveway crunched as I shifted into park. Stepping outside, I took a deep breath and looked around the familiar place. The odor of fresh-cut hay that had spent two afternoons drying in the August heat wrapped me up in its warmth. During my four years at college in the city, I could never make anyone completely understand the feeling that unique “farm” smell brought to me. It made me smile.

I crossed to the weathered white farmhouse and scaled the back stoop. The screen door swooshed, clicking shut behind me while I crossed the homey kitchen where I spent a sizable chunk of my childhood. Noticing a used plate on the table, I thoughtlessly picked it up and called, “Gram! I’m here!”

Dirty dishes filled the sink. It was still so strange to come into her home and find things out of place or dirty. When I was little, my grandmother was the homemaker of the century. I was still half-sure she coined the phrase, “a place for everything and everything in its place.” Her house had been spotless.

I moved from the kitchen into the living room, where dozens of Oprah magazines littered the couch and coffee table. Discarded cups and plates sat on every surface, while the TV played a 1950’s western on high volume. Gramps had loved westerns, and when he died seven years ago, Gram started watching them on a constant loop. I think it made her feel a little closer to him in those first, lonely months. Gradually, it became a comforting routine; she may not have even remembered why she did it anymore.

At the end of the hall off the living room, I

tapped on Gram’s bedroom door. There was no answer, so I pushed it open. Gram was sitting in her chair beside the window watching hummingbirds compete for a place at the bird feeder outside. She must not have heard me come in; her hearing had been declining for a while now.

“Gram?”

Gram turned, noticing me with a smile. It was warm, even if a little vacant. “Well hey there, sweetie!”

I crossed the room and gave her a hug, noting the fact that she didn’t call me by name. My brothers and I often wondered if she even knew them anymore. Most of the time, I think she knew she should remember. Although there was very little recognition when she met my eyes, she was still shrewd enough to fake her way through a conversation without having to use my name.

“It’s good to see you, Gram!” I took the seat next to her. “What have you done with yourself today?”

She peered out the window again. “Not too much. My birds are back.”

Together, we watched the bright bursts of movement. I wasn’t sure what she meant by “back,” but I didn’t ask. Absently, she ran a hand through her tired-looking silver hair, making it stand up on end. All the while, she kept her deep-set blue eyes on the birds. Somehow, every time I came to visit, she looked frailer and more breakable to me—so unlike everything she had always been for as long as I could remember.

It was Alzheimer’s.

Our whole family knew it, although we never said it to each other out loud. There was no need to. Gram’s dad had died years ago of the disease and, despite the fact that Gram was never diagnosed, everyone knew what was going on.

She had been declining even before Gramps’ death, but nobody noticed it much. It just

seemed like the natural forgetfulness of the elderly, but as the years passed, it got worse. There wasn't anything we could do after she refused to go to the doctor. She was in denial, so nobody forced her to go. We didn't even question the decision much anymore. Sometimes, I wondered if that made us a bad family.

I hoped not.

"Have you eaten anything yet today?" I asked.

She waved a thin hand at me without looking away from her birds. "Oh, I think so, honey. I'm not real hungry right now."

I nodded, knowing that it was more than likely she hadn't eaten. She could hardly find her way around the kitchen, even on her good days.

"Well, I'm hungry." I stood up. Usually, if we could get her to the kitchen and put a plate in front of her, her appetite would make an appearance. "Why don't you come keep me company while I make something in the kitchen?"

"Ok," she said pliantly. I helped her out of the chair, careful to keep hold of her arm. Her balance hadn't quite bounced back from the latest UTI a couple of weeks ago. Gram stole a last look at her birds before we moved to the other room.

For the next hour, I piddled around the kitchen. Gram sat in her favorite blue armchair, watching me work. Over the course of twenty minutes, she asked at least five times what I had "been up to today." I told her the same thing each time and continued assembling two fried-egg sandwiches and a big recipe of stew to put in the fridge. The leftovers would be easy for my dad and brothers to reheat when they came to check on her throughout the rest of the week.

We never knew for sure if she knew how to use the microwave on her own anymore. Today, I opened it up to find one lone piece of bread she had put in to heat and forgotten about. Unex-

pected tears pricked at the back of my eyes. I swallowed hard and threw the pathetic little slice of Sunbeam in the wastebasket.

Gram had gone silent for a while. I looked over to see her gazing at the wall of family pictures. In the dim light, I couldn't tell how focused her eyes were. I wanted so badly to peek inside her head for a moment and see what she was seeing. Did the picture of the whole family at Thanksgiving ring a bell? What about her wedding picture next to it? Or the one from my high school graduation?

Almost every week, I scanned through online blog posts and journal articles about Alzheimer's disease. Not because it would change anything for Gram, but more for my own benefit—as a way to work through the things I saw when I came to visit Gram. There was a strange comfort in seeing familiar scenarios written about and explained. It almost added a sense of normalcy to our family's experiences.

The latest article I read was titled, "Alzheimer's Disease: The Ultimate Identity Thief." That phrase struck a chord in me. I clicked on it immediately and skimmed the article. The author explained how the disease slowly erased every facet of its host's identity. "Memory is irrevocably linked to identity. Without a working memory, Alzheimer's victims are unable to access their previous experiences and gradually lose who they are."

This crossed my mind while I wiped down the green Formica countertops and watched Gram look at the pictures. A lump rose in my throat. Gram had changed so much over the last few years. She was losing who she was. She was losing us—her family. We were part of her, and she couldn't even remember our names, let alone the memories we shared.

Before I had a chance to slip further into my

thoughts, I rinsed the washrag and crossed to sit beside Gram. Noticing, she smiled and patted my knee. "I'm glad you came all the way out here to see me, dearie."

I replied with more cheer than necessary. "I'm happy to come. You know how much I love spending time at your house and the farm!"

Her eyes lit up. "Yes! The farm! When are we going to go back there?"

My stomach twisted, but I kept the cheery sound in my voice. "What do you mean, Gram?"

"When are we going back to the farm? Isn't it time to go home?" She seemed irritated that I was silly enough to forget such a thing.

"You are home, Gram." I leaned into her line of vision so I could meet her eyes and reached to close my hands over hers, hoping the physical and visual contact might help ground her in reality. Her brow wrinkled, and she looked like she wanted to contradict me, but she didn't. We sat in silence for a moment.

"Do you want to go into the front room? I think it's time for Bonanza to come on," I told her. Interest sparked in her eyes, and she seemed to perk up.

"That sounds good. Let's do that."

I helped her out to a spot on the couch in the living room. Immediately, she was riveted to the TV, making the occasional comment to me about what might happen next on the show. Her good humor seemed to be restored.

For the moment, I was selfishly glad I had avoided talking much about the fact that she wanted to go back to the farm. It unsettled me. She was at the farm where she had spent the last fifty-seven years. This was her home, but she didn't recognize it anymore. Sometimes it felt like she was turning into a stranger. She still looked and sounded vaguely like my grandmother, but when

it came down to it, she just wasn't that person anymore. It seemed like the harder we held onto her, the less she was of herself.

The next couple of hours passed quickly. I alternated between flipping through magazines and watching Bonanza, then later Gunsmoke, on the TV. By now, it was getting late. She sagged with disappointment when I said I had to go, but I knew if I stayed longer, she would stay up too. She had no sense of what time it was anymore. Whoever was staying with her in the evening always had to let her know when it was time to go to sleep. I helped her get ready for bed before collecting my keys.

"I'm so glad you decided to come over! I wish you didn't have to go."

"Me too, Gram," I said as I leaned in for a hug.

"I love you, Olivia. Make sure you come back and see me real soon!"

As I pulled away, tears burned at the back of my eyes. She said my name.

For a moment, I knew that she knew exactly who I was. A million emotions flooded my vision. She patted my cheek, her eyes looking a little misty, too. "Thank you for coming over tonight. I know you're real busy with work these days, and you don't have a lot of extra time for old women."

She smiled a little sarcastically.

Even though I knew, deep down in my heart, that this encounter didn't mean anything had changed, I held onto it. All the way back home, I played the memory we had just made over and over and over in my mind. I didn't want to forget a single detail.

For just a moment, she was back.

She was my Gram again and everything was alright.

**touch**

**Michael Baranda**

*inspired by Michaelangelo's  
"The Creation of Adam"*



*"the endless search for identity will not  
begin without an authentic understanding  
of Him. simply just touch."*

## **Flores Bicolores** **Suny Cardenas-Gomez**

I'm walking home from school on an early spring Wisconsin day, still chilly enough to make me turn up the collar of my winter coat. My grandfather is kneeling in the front garden. He wears a dusty black windbreaker and a floppy cap with woolly ear flaps. I'm climbing the steps to our duplex when he calls me.

"Suny," he says, "ven aquí."

In the garden, he shows me two bulbs.

"Está raíz es de flores blancas," he tells me, "y de esta salen flores rojas. Pero si las planto juntas, saldrán flores bicolors. Cuál quieres que plante?"

I'm surprised that he asks me. We aren't very close, my grandfather and I. Maybe that is why he asks.

"Planta las dos juntas," I tell him.

All summer, the bulbs wait in the sun-warmed earth. Our garden is not idle. The semicircle backyard of our plain brown-siding house is always rugged with ungainly garden plants. The sloping

loams of pebbly soil are hedged in by short red bricks with wavy tops lodged into the soil.

My grandfather grows tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, chiles. In one corner, a red raspberry bramble runs wild, abuzz with bees and hornets. An uneven sidewalk weaves through the wilderness, echoed by the make-shift clotheslines crisscrossing just above my head. Anything from the worn-out rag that we use to mop our tile floors, drying stiff, to carefully washed gallon Ziploc bags could be hanging there.

Proudly, grandfather brings in his bounty – blotchy tomatoes, green-red peppers, eggplants swollen out of all proportion. The harvest is too abundant for my grandparents' needs, and grandma brings us their surplus so that soon our kitchen, too, is full of irregular vegetables.

"Porqué planta tanto?" I ask my mother, exasperated. I have never known want. How different our lives have been.

Fall arrives and two stalky flower bushes, interwoven, are just beginning to unfurl their blooms. The blossoms are deep fuchsia, streaked with white.

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## **Flower Woman** **Yasmin Phillip** *3rd Place Legacy Photography Contest*

**A** self-portrait, this photo expresses not only the quiet confidence of nature but also my personality and my name, which means 'flower' in Arabic. The photo was taken during a time when I was overcoming many personal insecurities and growing into my identity as a young woman.





## The Madman Josue Vega

He was overweight and orange. His yellowing hair dissolved into pale roots above his intense face. His raspy, loud voice didn't seem to match his pressed suit and sky-blue tie as he spoke the crowds into a frenzy from inside the computer screen on the desk. I hunched over Papi on the office chair and rested my chin on his head as we heard the madman speak.

"Que barbaridad." Mami stood behind us, a lit firecracker of Puerto Rican indignation, her arms crossed and one of her red grading pens twiddling between her fingers.

I remember feeling fear. Not for anything that I had done but simply for existing. It was hard to understand that my people, fellow Americans, would actually believe these words. Yet the pale crowd on the computer screen continued to cheer. They thought we were rapists and criminals.

I had seen people think like this before, back when I was twelve and Papi moved us to the mountains of Ellijay, Georgia. The people there dressed as ghosts and marched around the town square. They called black people "lazy" and owned bumper stickers that said, "I hunt black and brown." One time, a large, rugged man with an ugly dog in the back of his pickup followed me and my sister to a neighbor's house. He watched as we ran from him, frantically pounding on the door before he sped off. That was a time of fear. But I thought those days were behind me.

Fall of 2016, I was taking high school American Government with Mrs. Fran. She was a large woman with a bob cut and a voice like Ursula from *The Little Mermaid*. But I remember she was

kind. And she really wanted us to learn about the way our country ran. So she made us watch the madman's debates on TV.

Nobody would've guessed that the madman would have made it this far, opposite one of the most powerful women in the country. My pencil ran fast in each of those debates as I took notes on the unfolding drama. He name-called. He used racist phrases. And in between debates, a video emerged about him harassing women. In spite of this, he made his way into my school. The blazing red hats and shirts began to seep in on the bodies of my classmates. They would walk around the hallways chanting his words, while others would perform so-called impressions of Mexicans by waddling and sticking out their teeth. Whenever I saw this, I felt my heart tighten into a ball. In my head, I could hear the madman's words against my people, and I wondered if my classmates believed me to be a rapist and criminal, something separate from them, because of what I looked like.

I still remember the shock when the madman won against the powerful woman. It seemed like the whole country stopped and closed their eyes, hoping that they would wake up gasping and sweating in their beds.

My high school was whiter than a fresh snow day. There were only a few of us with darker skin who roamed those hallways. I hardly ever talked to any of them since it was a busy school, but when the madman came, I always felt like they all had my back. I wonder if they ever felt the same way about me.

One of those kids was Raph from my algebra class. He was serious, lean, and muscular with a crown of thick black hair and a pointed, Hispanic nose—Columbian, I believe. We only talked a few times, but I remember noticing one day that

# “What had happened to my world, a world where it was no longer safe to look like me among my own people?”

he missed class, and the next day, he was more serious than usual.

That afternoon when Mami came to pick me up from school, I slid into the front seat of the car and kissed her on the cheek. As we pulled out of the school parking lot, she said, “So I was talking to Carmen and her friend was there. Her friend told me her husband and his brother got in trouble here at the airport. Somebody called the cops on them because they looked Hispanic and I guess they thought they were illegal. Don’t you take a class with their son? Raph, or something?” I nodded mutely. What had happened to my world, a world where it was no longer safe to look like me among my own people?

Then the strong gales of a storm blew away my blindness. The storm Maria howled her way across my birthplace of Puerto Rico and shattered it. She left my family scrounging for water and food, left my grandfather sitting on his concrete steps in a panic attack. The tropical trees no longer cooled the citizens. Instead, the lady Maria had exposed them all to the raping heat of the sun. Mothers cried, and children ran naked.

The madman could not understand. All he could do was scream. When he visited my birthplace, he threw paper towel rolls at the citizens. And perhaps that’s when I knew that America had raised me, but Puerto Rico had birthed me—that the saltwater of the Caribbean pumped through my veins, boiled by the sun that cracked

and hardened my skin. Those were my people. When I saw my countryman Lin-Manuel Miranda on Ellen calling for the help of my people, I felt my heart grow strong. When I saw how my people rebuilt on their wreckage, my heart beat to the rhythm of their hammers. Eventually, I graduated from high school and moved to university. In the time that transpired, the news was a whirlwind of ghost-clad marches, swastika-bearing mobs, people getting “canceled” because of racist comments, and minorities staging attacks on themselves. Meanwhile, I joined the Latin American Club on campus and landed the role of the Piraguero in the university’s version of Lin-Manuel Miranda’s musical, *In the Heights*. I still remember the pure ecstasy that electrified every body part as I danced a lively salsa onstage with a crowd of my people. This, this, was something that the madman could not take away. I still close my eyes and feel the warmth of the laughs around me; my toes still tap to the music.

The madman kept marching into my life with news of caged children and caravans, of my brothers and sisters crying for help. Too many of those cries fell on ears that were shut toward them, ears that had already labeled them as “illegal” and therefore irrelevant. But I remember playing with those children when I was growing up.

I remember the sisters Ziarah and Estela with their fat baby brother and their mom’s juicy tamales. I remember Ashley, who loved taking care of children even at the age of nine. I remember Omar, who prayed like an angel. I remember Yolanda, who loved to argue but didn’t know enough English to make her point, and Adiel, her buck-toothed younger brother who called out the thief stealing my sister’s offering at church.

Ashley had told me that they were eventually caught, and their family was scattered to three different locations: the parents to Honduras, Yolanda to Texas, and Adiel to Atlanta, Georgia. They were not criminals. They were children like me. Except they had fewer clothes and toys. And their father worked construction while their mother cleaned bathrooms.

Christmas of my sophomore year, I got a text. It was Emily from high school, inviting me to hang out with her at her church's Thanksgiving banquet. I missed her laugh and smile, so I accepted. She was just like I remembered—beautiful, with flowing blonde hair framing her pale face and lively blue eyes. We talked over plates of macaroni, mashed potatoes, and pie, and she flashed that winning smile and charming laugh I was so fond of.

I was finished helping her clean up the tables when she introduced me to her group of friends. There were five of them, two boys and three girls, and all white. "This is my Puerto Rican friend Josue," Emily said. Then she laughed. "So if I ever get kidnapped, you know who did it."

Even today I can feel the sharp sting of those words. My worst fear was true. In the alleys of Emily's mind, the tan of my skin and the language of my people was equivalent to criminality. It didn't matter that we were high school friends who had battled hardships together. It didn't matter that I had spent most of my life in America and dedicated myself to giving back to the community and being a good citizen—she did not see me as a part of her country.

Perhaps it was that incident that made me realize that no one was going to speak for me or

my people in these situations. That task fell on me. My people were counting on me to defend their dignity and humanity. That's why when my classmate Caroline declared an innocent joke as reverse racism against her white skin, I could not hold my tongue. My stories came out. I told her about Ellijay and the ghost people. I told her about Raph from algebra class. I told her about Emily. And I asked her to consider if the harmless joke she was whining about was real racism or a coping mechanism that afflicted people had to develop over the years. I left Caroline that day feeling triumphant, feeling like I had carved my line in the sand and ordered humanity not to step on my identity anymore.

That night, my parents were talking about the madman. Papi was angry. Mami had a concerned look on her face. The madman was in trouble finally. But it wouldn't make a difference, Papi said. The madman would still keep his job.

I called my friend Stanley. I spoke to him about everything on my mind. I'll never forget his southern drawl as he said, "They've never been able to hold you Hispanics down. No matter how much they try to keep you out, you just keep flooding in and rising. That's what scares them about you." I've never felt prouder. I belonged to a kingdom of warriors. A kingdom whose citizens did not know better than to struggle for their honor and dignity and to demand their place in society. We would not take no for an answer. We staked our claim on this land, and we would fight to the death to keep it, even in the face of a madman. Not because we are political, but because we are people. These are my people. I stand with them.

# untitled-2

## Joshua Perez

Photography Page:  
@jej.fotografi



Since we don't have enough time in our daily lives to self-reflect, the shower is where almost all of our self-reflection happens. When you are alone washing yourself off and you aren't wearing any clothes, that is the only time you are truly and 100% yourself to the core. If we don't take time to self-reflect on our identity and who we are as individuals, then our identities are being shaped by every other voice except our own.

## I Am Here Allison Carbaugh

**D**riving through the gorge always gives me time to think. Thirty minutes of forest, river, and no phone service; twenty-three miles of solace. The Japanese have a term called *shinrin-yoku*, which roughly translates to forest bathing. This time of year, it's all I want to do—lose myself somewhere in the forest, taking in the colors, the existence of the trees, the parts of the world unaltered by the masses. The basin is picturesque. The contrast of the sun-bleached birch trees against the stony grey skies, the yellow treetops rising from the darkness of the river, the mountainside aflame with oranges and reds of the turning leaves. Surrounded by the peak of autumn, a sense of insignificance washes over me; I feel microscopic.

The forest: a collection of bodies, each with its own color, dance, and purpose. From the outside, we may only see an array of trunks, branches, and leaves – a swirl of brown and green. But beneath the bark, beneath the leaves, beneath what is viewed by the naked eye, is another world; a world in which sunlight is transformed into food, a world in which our exhales become their breath.

How can something so tall and magnificent begin as something so small? How can a handful of acorns no bigger than my thumb hold the entire genetic code and growth plan for an army of oak trees? Mama once told me that she'd read about how trees are connected to each other by

their roots in an underground network that can span for miles. The trees send warnings out to the others when sections of the forest are in distress. I wonder if this is how they tell each other it's time for change. Each leaf losing its chlorophyll to expose its true colors, trading in their summer green for something more vibrant, more beautiful, more fragile.

The wind rustles the leaves. They dance to the ground, all the while whispering a reminder to those who listen that, even in decay, this place is very much alive.

To look at a single tree and deny the idea of a divine creator seems impossible. To see the way its roots dig deep, holding itself upright, as its branches reach for the heavens like arms stretched out in praise. To witness the way it cycles through seasons, shedding its leaves to become nutrients for the soil, protecting its branches from the coming ice and snow concealing its buds that peek out through the winter as a promise to return in the spring. There is not

a single ounce of accident in the clockwork of the forest, running like a well-oiled machine, as the lungs of the earth.

There is so much to take in, the thirty-minute drive is not enough time. In this moment, I have no animosity toward the slow drivers ahead of me,

taking their sweet time at every curve against the mountain. It gives me more time to bathe in this sea of orange and red. I roll my windows down, exchanging my breath for that of the trees. If I could close my eyes, I would to solidify this moment.

**“To look at a single tree and deny the idea of a divine creator seems impossible.”**

**“...I cannot help but feel as though we are overlooking the telltale sign of something much bigger than ourselves.”**

Many people feel infinitely small when they look up at the stars, realizing there is a universe out there we may never discover; but in the middle of the forest, surrounded by the most ancient and magnificent life forms on earth, I cannot help but feel as though we are overlooking the telltale sign of something much bigger than ourselves. In these moments, it becomes clear how insignificant the stressors of humanity really are, how the meaning of life encompasses more than just a good education or a well-paying job. It is in these moments that I am reminded that regardless of my place on earth, regardless of my existence, the planet will continue to rotate, the trees will continue to grow, the sun will continue to shine; nature will always take its course. All I can do is

usher up a “thank you” to the one who created it all, one whose intelligent design surpasses all fathomable ideas.

It is beyond humbling to think that even in the midst of a planet that could prosper without my presence, without the presence of humans at all, somebody wanted me here. Somebody wanted humans. How can I neglect the care of a planet designed for my life to be sustained? How can I destroy the very thing created to keep me alive? And how could I ever deny the fact that I am here because this is where I was meant to be. I could be anywhere in the world, anywhere in the universe. I could have never even existed, and yet, I am here.

## More Benya Wilson

I am more than what you think of me, what I think of me.

More than a thousand insults

h u r l e d

in glances and *whispers* and rancorous, mocking laughter.

More than the insecurity

I feel

as I skim

my **swollen**, tearful, **smear**ed raccoon-eyes and **flaw**ed facial cartography.

I am more than my incessant fear and wordless trauma.

More than the anxiety that

possesses my thoughts

to ceaseless, circular pacing,

wearing a hole in the living room carpet of my mind.

More than

the hands and lips and bodies

which thoughtlessly, remorselessly violated

my paralyzed form— frozen in terror, panic, disgust, and dread.

I am more, more than my mistakes and regrets.

More than the times I hurt you

or hurt myself,

spiraling with momentum— self-sabotage, careless destruction.

More than the **anger** and pain

I transferred and projected,

vilifying and attacking

anybody who would come close enough to trust.

I must, I thought: survival.

I am more than my past, more than my present.

More than

the treacherous abuses, or reckless, disastrous poor-judgment—

even tireless effort, everlasting penance,

remorse in **bloodied** hands and knees <sup>begging</sup>,

can't change what has happened.

More than

my present,

a blemished reflection of my full potential,

an unfinished masterpiece that has only just begun,

a butterfly

not yet emerged from my chrysalis.

I am more, defined not just by  
 who I was,  
     or who I am,  
 but also, by who I can become.  
 More—  
     a multifaceted illustration,  
     a multidimensional, 4,000-pixel resolution film— depth.  
 More—  
     an idiosyncratic identity,  
 the symbiosis of  
                                     possibility and history,  
                             heritable pain and chosen victories,  
                     uncontrollable events and the will to overcome,  
             to not be defined by public opinion or intractable circumstance—  
 to learn and accept that—  
 I am More.





**untitled-1**  
**Tyler Whitsett**

*1st Place Legacy  
Photography Contest*

It's in life's quiet moments  
that we drop our guard and  
show our true identity.

## What Grows from My Head

Allison Carbaugh

A long, tangled mess  
falls over my shoulders.  
Brushed out, it is a lion's mane.  
Loose curls follow the patterns of the waves  
my ancestors crossed  
only decades ago.

Mousy brown.  
But red  
when sunlight dances on the coils.  
Blonde at the tips  
when the summer has had its way.

Old photos tell another story.  
A towhead baby.  
Blonde silk threads – straight as a pin  
The odd child out.

When did it all change?  
From gold to bronze?  
Springy coils out of straight wire.

When will it change again?  
When whispers of silver  
Become a roar.

I suppose then,  
This silver will become a blanket  
Or maybe a scarf  
in a single braid falling past my chest.

Wherever time takes it,  
And however it gets there,  
I will know only one thing:  
This mess  
of colors, cultures, and curls  
is mine.

**a rough draft**  
**Aaron Mumu**

much like this  
im a stumbling mess  
needing revisiting  
from a careful  
Editor

**from a distance**  
**luna manuel**

*the waiting game*

two souls  
bound by the glue of love  
fell apart because of confusion  
about who they were.  
maybe one day  
in the near future  
if the universe looks upon us  
with favor  
our stars will realign.  
but for now,  
i will  
love  
you

from a distance.

**step**  
**Michael Baranda**  
*2nd Place Legacy  
Photography Contest*



"your identity will never be truly known until you take the first step."

## The Skin I Am In Essence Bush

In a world where good is unnatural and doing the right thing just seems to be a suggestion  
A place full of Hate...Deception...Evil...  
A place that wakes up the monsters we so desperately try to hide in the darkness  
A place where being at the right place at the wrong time can alter the balance between life and death  
When I was born I was put in a box and someone placed labels on it that they deemed an appropriate description  
Black. Poor. Nappy-headed. Fatherless child.

They wrote these words on my box, sealed me shut, and shipped me off  
With a note saying, "Open with caution!"  
They said, "Poor thing it will only get worse when she gets older. She won't make it through high school without having a fatherless child of her own, how sad."  
They said, "She is too poor to go anywhere or be anything great so she will stay in this city her whole life, How sad."  
Black. Poor. Nappy-headed. Fatherless child.

These words whether spoken in that order or separated echoed in my mind day after day  
Maybe they were right, maybe the skin I'm in is cursed and worthless  
Every day I woke up thinking this skin I'm in if I'm lucky will go away permanently  
Maybe if I pray hard enough it will just disappear  
Maybe while I'm washing my hands or taking a shower if I scrub hard enough it will come off  
Maybe if I change everything else the skin that I am in will change too  
I became determined to speak like them, walk like them, dress like them, and act like them  
I wanted them to give me different labels, ones that didn't paint me as a threat  
Labels that didn't make me feel less than, but instead I received something far worse  
They said, "She is smart for a black girl. She is really well-spoken for a black girl."  
I realized no matter how well I spoke, how well dressed, how straight I did my hair, how calm my behavior, how properly I walked  
I will always be a:  
Black. Poor. Nappy-headed. Fatherless child.

Then I heard a voice say, "My child I am your Father the one who owns a thousand cattle upon a thousand hills. The one who spoke entire universes into existence and yes my child your skin is no ordinary skin. I made it so it will stain the hearts that embrace it, sweeten the very air molecules it comes into contact with, so that its presence will heal the very souls that are hurting. I formed you from the dust of the Earth and coated you with milk and honey. Your skin ain't going nowhere and neither am I."

I am more than the eye can see. More than the brain can fathom. More than words can represent. I am more than the labels the world placed on me so long ago. I am a child of God and the skin I'm in only makes me stronger.

## **Pon De River, Pon De Bank** Bradley Hutchinson

Hear dis nuh!  
 When mi did deh arrive ah foreign, mi neva did tink seh  
 Mi wan woulda find me self alone. See seh mi ah hundred percent Jamaican!  
 Yet unnu cyaan tell me that I was wan.  
 When we did deh pickni, we used to play:  
 "Pon de river! Pon de bank!"  
 Only now, yuh know seh really an truly  
 Being here is like anotha world.  
 If mi chat right, mi fava likkle white people dem.  
 If mi neva did sing Buju or Bob Marley,  
 Mi sound like George Washington.  
 An if mi did act like a yaadie man,  
 Mi neva woulda been civil. Ah what kinda foolishness ah gwaan?  
 Cho! Ting a gwaan like pon de river, pon de bank...

## **In The River, On The Bank** English Translation

Listen to this!  
 When I arrived at America, I never thought I would have found myself alone.  
 You see, I am a hundred percent Jamaican!  
 Yet you couldn't tell me that I was one.  
 When I was a child, we used to play a game:  
 "In the river! On the bank!"  
 Only now, I fully realized  
 That being here is like another world.  
 If I talked right, I was called a white person.  
 If I never sang the songs of Buju Banton or Bob Marley,  
 I sounded like George Washington.  
 And if I acted like a true Jamaican,  
 I never would have been deemed civilized.  
 How crazy is that?  
 Sheesh! Things are just like being in the river and on the bank...

**Thank you  
for reading**

