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CENTENARY UNIVERISTY

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Prose

I AM ALIVE

Cara Muth

It was a Saturday morning in mid-July, a few weeks into my treatment, when I found myself sitting on the back patio with my husband, coffee in hand. Exhaustion and hope were tangled together inside me. My body had been through so much. For months, we hadn't known what was happening, only that I was slipping away. As we sat there, my mind drifted back over the last few long, painful months, pulled toward one memory like a balm on my aching heart.

I graduated from Centenary University in May with my master's degree in Happiness Studies. Traveling to New Jersey for the ceremony was the first time I truly understood how much I had deteriorated. I realized I needed a wheelchair, and I was humbled by how I completely depended on others. Yet I felt held in the loving care of my brother, my classmates, my professors and the generous souls at Centenary. When my professors joined forces with the university staff to adjust the graduation ceremony so they could assist me across the stage to receive my diploma, I felt deeply moved.

“We can wheel you across the stage in the wheelchair, no problem,” my professor, Ashley, assured me.

But I was determined to walk. I declined the wheelchair during the ceremony and asked only for hands to steady me. Even though it was clear that using the wheelchair would have been easier for everyone, my choice was met with nothing but understanding and genuine support.

In that moment, emotion tightened my throat and refused to loosen. It felt essential to finish this journey on my own two feet, as if my life depended on it. With the state of my body, I sensed that these steps might be my last in this life with these people who had become truly important to me.

At the graduation ceremony, my professor, Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar, grasped my arm with steady strength as he guided me onto the stage. He said quietly to me, "I'm so proud of you." That meant so much to me, even as each agonizing step consumed all my focus. Tears filled my eyes.

Centenary University President Dale Caldwell met me on the stage after my sash was draped on my shoulders, kindness in his eyes as he lent me strength to stand to receive my diploma. Gratitude bloomed in my heart and triumph beamed from my face.

Together, they helped me take the final steps of this precious journey. Professor Blenda gently escorted me off the stage and stayed beside me for my graduation photo. Within a moment, my dear classmate settled me back into the wheelchair after crossing the stage behind me to receive her own diploma.

The kindness and care of these dear souls wrapped around me like a blessing, a gift I will carry for the rest of my life.

The kindness and care of these dear souls wrapped around me like a blessing, a gift I will carry for the rest of my life.

Back home, I continued to deteriorate. Speech became so difficult that I begged my family to let me tell them what they meant to me before I lost the ability to speak. *Endure this with me please; I need you to know.* That night, my family and I piled together on my bed, holding each other tightly, speaking words we thought might be our last. We were bracing ourselves for an ending I wasn't ready for. None of us were.

Finally, answers came. Three bacterial infections had been quietly unraveling me, causing my brain to atrophy. Strength had left my body, my mind was dampened and sluggish, and my vision was blurry. I had lost coordination, sensation in my body, and my mobility.

But now, with a diagnosis and a plan, I have begun the slow climb back. It felt like a waltz with treatment, therapy, and faith in my body's astounding ability to heal. Neuroplasticity was already at work, knitting me back together piece by piece. Still, I was fragile, everything felt tenuous. I wanted to pursue a PhD in Happiness Studies, a dream, a calling, and a higher purpose, but I didn't know if my body could bear the weight of that hope. As the memory softened and my thoughts dissolved, I felt myself return to the patio. I felt my warm coffee in my hands, my husband beside me, and exhaustion and hope continuing their delicate dance within me.

Hubby was scrolling through upcoming concerts while I closed my eyes and listened to the birds. “Oh,” he murmured. “Illenium is coming to Red Rocks on August 20th.”

Illenium. My favorite artist. His music has always called to me; his songs layered with emotion and healing. I felt my heart stir, a gentle pulling. Did I dare hope to go?

I turned to my husband and whispered a wild thought.

“What if this is a goal for me? What if I get well enough to see Illenium on August 20th?”

He hesitated, worry etched in his eyes. I could see him calculating the toll a concert would take on me, but before he could answer, a hummingbird appeared. It hovered in front of us for a long, breathless moment. Its tiny body is a flash of color and life. At that moment, I felt my Mimi. She had been my hummingbird since she passed, showing up at pivotal moments like a gentle whisper from beyond. Keep going. You’re on the right path.

I knew then we had to go.

When the night of the concert arrived, I wasn’t “well enough.” Not

really. Climbing the amphitheater stairs left me trembling. My light-filtering glasses stayed firmly on my face, and for much of the night, I had to close my eyes against the flashing lights. It took all my strength to stand during the concert. But I was there. I was alive. And then, in the middle of the show, Illenium began to play “Ur Alive.”

The words of the song washed over me like a benediction:

"Slow it down. Take a breath, it's alright. Look around, don't forget you're alive... All we have is this moment. All we have is right now... If your heart is still beating, it is for a reason."

The stage lit up with a glowing cherry blossom tree, Mimi’s other sign. My breath caught in my throat. This was why I had to come. She was speaking to me. *Live. Your heart beats for a reason.*

That night, shaking but triumphant, I made it back down those stairs with my husband’s steady arm around me. I knew then that my “reason” is this: to follow my heart and be in service to others through authenticity, poetry, and truth. My own healing has always been the map to guide others toward theirs. My life, my studies, my writing, my poetry, my voice... they are all for something bigger.

This is why *Ur Alive* is now my PhD anthem. It reminds me that every breath is a gift, every heartbeat a compass. That I am alive for a reason. That my journey, my story, and my dreams are not just mine; they are

threads in the fabric of collective healing. We see ourselves in each other, and we heal together.

I am here. I am alive. It's PhD season.



Some stories need to be shared because of what they represent: hope, resilience, becoming. These are our birthright as human beings, and each of us carries the potential for flourishing. Though we have seasons when we can't feel that truth inside ourselves, when we rely on the kindness and strength of others.

So I invite you to remember that you know yourself. Beneath the noise, distractions, challenges and expectations lies your clearest compass: your heart. Let it guide you. And remember, you are already enough and you are exactly where you're meant to be.

Somewhere in the space between that quiet moment on the patio and the concert weeks later, a poem came through me. I have come to understand that I am just a vessel for these words that are truth rising from a deeper source within. They are part of me, and yet they often reflect the truths of others too. A connection, a mirror, a healing invitation.

May these words land in you exactly where they're needed.

I Am

I'm not sure why I ever doubted.

It's so clear from here.

Everything broke down so that I could reform in the image I yearned
for.

This was how it was possible.

After I broke, I mended deliberately,

Truly becoming me.

From here I sing.

My voice in perfect harmony,

With all the lessons and blessings life brings.

Heaven is eternity within each breath,

Each moment stretched,

Feeling everything.

This universe was always within me.

I had buried it because I forgot temporarily,

That I am.

I am.

I am love.

I am light.

I am all I'm meant to be, alight,

With creativity, faith, radiance.

My voice is strong, unhindered, free.
My soul is unbound, connected to all, alive, lit on fire,
Climbing the SPIRE,
All I aspire to be,
All I inspire,
All I teach, which I most need to learn.

I am enough.

I am worthy.

I am sacred.

I plant my feet, feel the burn,
All the trauma and hurt,
Knowing I must feel it,
To emerge, to mend it.

I found how to let the light in,
By feeling the pain within.

I am beautiful, and free to be me.
Won't you come on this journey with me?
A guide for the soulful journey,
I'm finally home, finally free.

MEET ME IN DAYTONA

Alexis d'Ambly

When my sister, Bella, was twelve, she won her shark of a goldfish, who she ironically named Duck, at a local carnival. It was expected to last six days, but is still going strong eight years later. I rarely bother with him. He's not my fish, after all. But today, I sat down on our fraying leather sofa to read Jane Wong's memoir, *Meet Me in Atlantic City*. As I read, I come across an anecdote where she mentions a student who puts her pet goldfish in a jar of equal parts water and peanut butter.

I look up and notice Duck swimming around his tank and wonder if he's been fed today. Then, I remember he hasn't, so I feed him. I watch as he gobbles up the food and chases stray bits that float towards the bottom, sucking residue from his rocks. I take a seat on the ottoman and ask if he'd like to swim in a jar of diluted peanut butter. "Might be a nice change of pace," I jokingly add as though he might laugh at my joke.

As he swims about in his twenty-gallon oasis, I wonder if he's satisfied in this monotonous life of eating and swimming, just waiting for half his water to be replaced and the algae to be scrubbed from the sides of the tank.

Or, if he, too, dreams of seascapes and white sandy beaches— a new chapter in life. He's been here longer than we thought. Who knows? Maybe he's picked up a few things. Maybe he dreams of a bigger home to explore with another fish friend to keep him company.

Or maybe he hears us talking about college and dreams of the Hollywood version of dorm life— frat parties, all-night study sessions, and ultimate frisbee on the quad. You just know some jocks will see him and treat him like another friend. Make him their unofficial mascot. *Yo, Duck. What's good, homie? Has anyone fed you yet today? What happens if we feed him Doritos?*

During Spring Break, maybe they take him to Daytona and show him how to party at the beach. Use him as a good luck charm during finals. Then, at graduation, maybe he gets an honorary diploma with a little cap and gown, and a sticker for the side of his tank that reads *The World is Your Oyster!*

Or maybe he's just a simple *carassius auratus* with a five-second attention span and I'm just pushing my own dreams onto him.

I slip out of my imagination long enough to notice Duck attempting to pirate his plastic ship and think maybe we'll never know just how sentient our boy really is.

SPAGHETTIFICATION

Button Graham

Drifting through space, you are pulled infinitely closer in no particular direction, faster than any measurement could be made. You are pulled infinitely further in every direction all at once, painfully slower than you thought possible. Your skin freezes from the cold absence of the Everything you find yourself floating in; A sensation far too much like burning infecting those freezing tissues of yours as they slow and die.

Your skin cooks, melting and boiling as white-hot, raging heat radiates into your very being from the Nothingness which seeks to consume you. The Nothingness is as incapable of seeking and of thought as you are capable of it, you're fully aware, but that does nothing for you. You do not cease falling, and so, to you, the Nothingness seeks to consume.

As you are pulled into the Nothingness, it warps and stretches your body in ways you would never dare consider. The Nothingness' impossible force concentrates on a single pinpoint particle of your anatomy. It starts in your big toe, spreading through your leg and body impossibly fast, yet so torturously slow. You feel it, like hot Jello being forcefully sucked through the eye of a needle by a vacuum. A sensation of overwhelming loneliness washes over your entirety.

Your body unravels like the string of a sweater caught on the thorn of a bush into the Nothingness; A Nothingness, which is now below you, you've decided. If there is no determined up and no down in the vast emptiness of space, as you have come to accept, then you have decided that your feet are down and your head is up.

In your desperate anguish, your head snaps up, towards the Everything, the ever-growing and changing universe, above and around you. You see clouds of light, of colour, of stars warping, just as you are, spiralling into the same Nothingness. Vast quantities of celestial bodies collide, tearing themselves apart as they build themselves anew before you. All the while, they too are consumed by the Nothingness below.

The white-hot pain worms its way up your spine as the warping and stretching spreads up through your body, shooting sparks of fire that radiate throughout your nerves as they are stretched beyond their limits. Through tear-filled eyes, you see. You see, beyond your Everything, others.

Spirals, clouds, expanses of stars and planets beyond your comprehension present themselves to you now. Past the already infinite space around you, there is more.

Each Everything is different from the others; they all appear in different shapes and colours and orientations. Some of these Everythings look as though they are explosions of starlight, colours radiating out from a single point. These Everythings do not yet have a Nothingness, but they will. The point from which they appear to infinitely expand will one day reach a moment when it can no longer create and so must start to devour itself.

Some of these Everythings have paired up with other Everythings. In an endless, spinning marriage of gravitational pull, these Everythings circle around one another and continue to do so, even as the Nothingnesses within each of them continue to do as Nothingnesses do; consume. Most of these Everythings share quite a lot in common with yours. They appear like a spiralling disk of light and colour, centered around a singularity, a Nothingness.

You continue to be pulled apart as you see, for the very first and last time, all that exists around you. In your last fleeting moment of existence, you thought your mind would be filled with the memories of your life, but rather, you find, that the thoughts flooding your head are completely foreign to you. Your Everything is not the only Everything.

You knew this already, you had been taught from a very young age that there are other galaxies within the universe, but the way in which you know it now is something entirely different.

Your singularity isn't a singularity at all. Every Everything is consumed by a Nothingness and there are infinite Everythings. You are not unique in this. All things end as you are now.

You are gone. The Everything which once surrounded you continues to spiral and fall into the Nothingness. The clouds of light and colour continue to shift and change form. Celestial bodies continue to collide, collapse, and build themselves anew. The Nothingnesses continue to consume all that exist within every Everything. Somewhere, someone, something floats, pulled infinitely closer, further, impossibly slow, impossibly fast, warped and stretched beyond belief into a Nothingness.

THE HORROR OF TODAY'S WORLD

Hunter Haskell

Let me just start with how I view our current society and its global issues.

There are a mast of amount of daily issues Americans and myself deal with. From buying over priced grocery items to obeying laws that are questionable, I understand also from a political stand point on to why these valuable firm rules are ingrained. Knowing today and where our economic scale lies. Its truly outstanding to comprehend the changes. My views may be bias compared to yours but this is just my opinion based text.

My first concept I will propose to you is the cost of living. The fairness between low to high income families is non existent. There is no "meeting in the middle." It is nearly black and white. I believe the biggest factor that places into this issue is the wage that is given upon employers. It does not match the necessary requirements of living even modestly. I think for my own opinion that it is dreadful. It is dreadful for myself to work a major amount to afford the cost of living. I cannot say anything for the higher class because I can't relate on their standpoint.

My second idea I will provide to you is the outstanding amount of people dying from addiction. I can't tell you how big this crisis is all

over the US. According to a second party website, there were over 100,000 deaths from illicit drugs in 2024. I believe there needs to be less judgement portrayed from non addicts. This is not a humorous matter, more of a matter of life or death. I believe there should be more resources than just rehabilitation. I think there should be more harm reduction centers. As well as a peer-to-peer support, in which they have both gone through the same issue and don't want to feel alone in the same circumstance.

So now you see what my point of view is. Let me give you my third opinion. All so dandy right, here it is. Homelessness around the country is a leading effect of many potential reasons. You see many men and women holding signs or begging for food or money. I think now since our world is so modernized. There should be more options for homeless people provided. Not just homeless shelters or soup kitchens. I think there should be charitable therapeutic groups or sessions. Their should be more empathy but also more understanding with maybe what caused homelessness. Its a topic of such concern for many years.

My fourth concern in today's world is the leading cause of mental health issues. Some people won't understand what having "Bipolar" or "Depression" feels like. We see a common theme here right. We see judgement and comparison. I can continue with this; mental health is a leading effect of childhood issues and can lead to troublesome addictions. I believe now we are in the 21st century and there should

be more understanding in this problem. I can't say there is no help with this issue. There are so many resources out there that can provide care. I agree with the concept of empathizing with those who suffer from it.

My fifth idea that I came up with is environmental control and weather effects. We see now the US is going through an immense amount of issues with this topic. We see California is one of them; the control of the fires were inevitable. It was impossible to control such an event. I believe there needs to be more of a safety precautionary team. Also I see where they did well in this, but I also see where they lacked. There needs to be more supplies and rescue for these problems. Also how about Florida and their terrible weather couple months ago. There is no control in these events but residents take action. I think the aftermath needs more distinct direction. We cannot control Mother Nature but we can take precautions and know what to do after. I can't say there isn't a total failure with how US handles environmental and weather issues, but it does need work. Knowing our up to date technology we can semi predict what may happen.

So now you see my point right? You may or may not agree with these propositions, but they are valid. These are daily, weekly, monthly, yearly problems that US deals with. I hope when I gave my ideas that it gives more validity to what society needs to improve on. I laugh that we focus on stupidity rather than fixing our main problems. My main point given in this article is to share awareness on what should be focused on. As I said earlier, your point of view may be different and that is normal. I empathize with your stand point.

To conclude, I believe there are more than just these issues right now. But these are some of many. I hope society can value normalizing issues and fix them as they happen versus judge. Comparison and judgement will kill your joy. So if you see a issue you don't agree with, stand on it.

THE INVISIBLE WOMAN

Alexis d'Ambly

Outstretched upon the lush, viridescent field, I hadn't felt as free and painless as I do now, lying in the meadow behind my childhood apartment building, a brick complex of chipped paint, splintered wood, and appliances that never worked.

I couldn't remember how I got there, since I hadn't set foot in New Jersey since my daughter graduated from Rutgers. Nevertheless, I was in a familiar scene from my youth, half-expecting to see a group of wide-eyed neighborhood kids riding their bikes around the dilapidated tennis court or run out of the alcove nestled several feet behind the treeline, screaming about touching a soiled knife someone left between the rocks.

It was like a dream, the warmth of the sun filling the air and its rays peaking through the trees. I turned over and pressed my cheek into the dewy blades of grass, as I noticed my outfit— a pink heart locket, a sleeveless floral summer dress with a sweetheart neckline where the hem of the skirt stopped just above my knee, and a pair of black pumps. It wasn't new. A week before our high school graduation, my roommate, Charlotte Donovan, and I took my dad's brand new Lincoln Continental into the city and bought the necklace, dress, and shoes in Macy's.

I hadn't thought about the outfit in decades. I couldn't even remember where it had ended up, probably in the garbage or donated to Goodwill when my children were still young, and I couldn't fit into a size four dress anymore.

The blissful remembrance of my adolescence didn't last long as the bright sky began to grow darker. The wind howled through the trees and began to whip violently around me. I started wishing I had a coat as the world went black.

Back in my Brooklyn brownstone, I awoke in my own bed at the crack of dawn, chilled by the draft from the open window. Too tired to close it, I pried myself from the bed and trudged into the kitchen. All I could think about was a warm cup of coffee.

Reaching for a clear, glass jar of coffee grounds, I woke up enough to notice we were out. How odd, I wondered, knowing I had just refilled it the past weekend.

So, I slipped out the door and down the front steps. The sun was obnoxiously bright, rays bouncing from cars and metal street signs. I chose to ignore it as I noticed my neighbor, Evelyn Wilkins, getting out of her car.

It must be Tuesday, I thought, remembering how her son, Billy, takes her to the grocery store every week on his day off. I got closer to her Buick and waved, grinning as all got out. "Good morning, Evelyn," I greeted loud enough for her to hear over her hearing aids. "Billy, hope you're doing well. How's your wife? Is she settling into the city okay?" No response.

Neither acknowledged me. I tried again, getting closer and reaching out as Evelyn stepped out onto the curb. She breezed by me as Billy gathered the grocery bags from the back seat.

“Mom, you’re going to have to ask Sara to help you next week,” Billy informed her as he put the key in the door. “I’ll be in meetings in Soho all day.”

“Oh, your daughter doesn’t want to help an old lady. She’s in college.”

“Sara’s only at Brooklyn College, and she gets done with her classes at noon on Tuesdays. She can help you,” Billy insisted.

“And Evelyn,” I interjected. “Sara loves you. She’s always happy to spend the day with you.”

I remembered almost a year ago when Evelyn broke her hip. She confided in me how she didn’t want to be a burden to her family. I reminded her that she raised wonderful children who were more than happy to be there for her. She hated asking Billy and Sara for help, especially since they moved to the Upper East Side in August.

Evelyn and Billy both ignored me and shuffled into the house. Puzzled, I continued down the street, hoping it was just some fluke.

As I neared the intersection, I saw two kids I knew from the neighborhood, Eddie and Julia, having coffee on the front stoop. They were recently married and met working for a publishing company in Midtown just out of college. Julia was from New Jersey, so we bonded over leaving the Garden State for the Big Apple. She was twenty-nine, the same age as both my youngest daughter, Lily, and granddaughter, Violet, who lived in San Francisco. So, I loved having another kid to love. I taught her to cook and showed her the movies I grew up on. I advised her on her marriage and encouraged her to pursue her dreams as an author. She really was another daughter to me.

Eddie and Julia were engrossed in their cell phones and fancy ten dollar Starbucks breakfast milkshakes to notice me. “Good morning!” I called out anyway, hoping they’d even make a groan in my direction. Nothing. No hi, hello, or good morning.

One time— it was a fluke. Twice was strange. In my bewilderment, I forgot to look as I stepped out into the street. A cab sped by, nearly chipping me. I jumped and stumbled back, letting out an audible yelp. Then, I turned back to see if Eddie or Julia had noticed. But nothing had phased them.

Disappointed, I continued on my quest for coffee and headed to the bodega. I could see the door was locked and the owner’s teenage grandson, Nicholas, was sweeping the floors. He had his airpods in and was jamming out to— what I am sure was— rap. He shuffled back towards the door, broom in hand, dancing and mouthing the words. I knocked hard on the glass and waved, hoping he’d hear me.

His father, Gabriel, was an old Navy buddy of my husband's. They enlisted together, worked their way up the ranks together, put in twenty years, and retired together. In the late nineties, Gabe fell in love with Mariah, the bodega owner. She had a preteen daughter, Lucy, who Gabe later adopted. While we raised our kids, Michael and I lived out on Long Island, but Gabe called practically every other week for advice on raising a teenage daughter. We had three, so we knew a little something about what he was going through.

After Lily graduated from Hofstra, Michael and I decided to sell the house and move to Brooklyn. Our sons were still on the island, but our daughters had their own lives elsewhere. Closer to Gabe and Mariah, we were able to have a close relationship with our dearest friends. Lucy had grown up by then and was raising her son with the help of her parents. We had vacationed with them, spent holidays together, and went to church every Sunday as a group.

I tried to chalk it up to the loud music in his ear, but I began to wonder just how invisible I actually was. The street had begun to fill with people walking to work, so I called out, "Can you hear me? Can any of you hear me?" Not a word. Not a nod. Not a glance. I was invisible.

It started in my belly and worked its way up to my throat. I let out a guttural, piercing scream so loud it could be heard from space. But not a single neighbor as phased by the drama. I wanted to cry, but what came out next was an uproarious belly laugh.

It had to be a joke. All I could think was that someone— Michael, Evelyn, Julia, Nicholas, or Gabe, maybe— was playing some hilarious joke they got the neighborhood in on. Everyone must have been messing with me. It had to be it. It had to be.

I headed back to Julia’s stoop. She and Eddie were still scrolling on their phones. “Good one, guys! You really had me!” I called out. “Guys, I said you got me. Great joke. You really had me going.” Neither looked up. “So, now that I’ve figured it out, want some breakfast? I can make waffles,” I offered, hoping they’d respond in delight and prove this wasn’t all some sick dream.

I waited a moment for any response, watching Julia sip her caramel frappuccino and mindlessly doom scroll through TikTok.

A little amused, all I wanted to do was walk home and find my husband. I hurried into my brownstone, shouting “Michael! You won’t believe what just happened.” I headed towards the bedroom to find him sitting at the end of the bed, gripping the side of the newspaper, tears streaming down his face. “Oh, my God. Michael. What’s wrong?”

I rushed to his side as he muttered the words, “Too soon, El. Too soon.”

“What’s too soon?” I questioned, now thinking I should be on the verge of tears myself as I watched his thumb brush over a section of the paper. And, with that, I read the bold, black letters printed across the top of the page that spelled out OBITUARIES. And, the name listed just below it was Elizabeth Sullivan along with my photograph from my fiftieth high school reunion.

Poetry

BAD PENNY

JC Reilly

Lazing in the hammock, Pet Shop Boys on Spotify, I remember that Thursday you reappeared in my back yard. When I saw you, it was for the first time in months—since the fight. We were not sure what to say to each other, kept tongues still, and I felt a low boiling in my chest, as if my heart were being cooked. The look I gave you? Part loathing, part glittering as the sun

on the tin metal roof of the porch. I could have given you a kiss or a slap—I leaned towards slap—but I was sloppy with love and scooted over in the hammock so you could lie beside me like the godlet you were. In your arms, six birds of paradise you probably stole from the neighbor's yard. I wondered how you could just expect to pick up again where we left off. A hot breeze ruffled your hair; I was envious I didn't touch it first. It seemed you planned to ignore your last words that burned

me for weeks after you left, each one crackling as a livewire. A sob clawed its way like a vole into my throat, and the threat of tears lingered at my lashes. I blamed the sun, but of course it was seeing you—to be close after being star-distant rattled my senses, the way windows do at a little thunder. I wanted to ask you why, and how, and why again, the

questions like horses galloping through my mind. Your eyes of sky regarded me—I stared right back at you. But still I was afraid to speak. I felt my cheeks turn splotchy red—

I never learned to blush prettily. You lifted your hand and traced your fingers across my lips, my breath hitching. When you moved to kiss me, how easy it would've been to give in to you—I almost did, my lips curving, defying my will. But it was you who walked out, left my heart for carrion. Crows at school ate it up. How like you to act as if nothing had changed between us. How like me always wanting to give you grace as if I kept a supply in my pocket. When I turned away, you smirked, grabbed my hand instead, said everything I wanted to hear. At least, you did, in my head—

A Golden Shovel after the Pet Shop Boys' "Domino Dancing"
(Introspective, 1988)

CARIAD CLOGYRNACH

JC Reilly

Love clocks you like bricks to the face
when you fall. You fall every place:
in rivers, a ditch,
in a fast ball pitch—
Sudden twitch—
kiss like lace

You keep it in a heart-shaped box—
it's warm and fuzzy as white flocks
of sheep. It don't bleat.
But maybe it bleeds—
Sudden heat—
kiss like fox

This time, you know its truth, its worth—
It twists, burrows like worms in earth,
wrecks velvet waves, far
into night, like scars—
Sudden star—
kiss like mirth

ON MY MIND

Samantha Swayze

looking through albums
seeing your pictures
you look so different
but with all the same features

watching you change
through the years
it's almost
been two years since

I wish I could've said goodbye
or hugged you one last time
not a single day goes by
that you're not on my mind

I'm still waiting
for a call
even though
it's not possible

to see your smile
to hear your voice
nothing will ever
fill the void

I wish I could've said goodbye
or hugged you one last time
not a single day goes by
that you're not on my mind

now that you're gone
everything has changed
I am proud to have
your last name

you'd do anything
to make sure we were okay
even on
your last day

YOU DIDN'T NOTICE, DID YOU?

Howl O'Donnell

The last time you would pretend to be asleep on the car ride home so you could be carried into bed by your dad

The last time your age would ever be single digits and you could hold up your hands when someone asked how old you were instead of just telling them

The last time you would ever see that one friend you were close with growing up (*i wonder if they're okay*)

You didn't notice, did you ?

That last car ride with your parents in your childhood car before it turned into yours

You didn't notice how that one time you were on your dad's shoulders in a thunderstorm would be the most important memory in your life because you didn't care about the memories you were making with him at the time and now all you wish is that you were young and small enough again for him to pick you up instead of him yelling and telling you you're lazy.

You didn't notice, did you ?

the last time your dad would pick you up early from school to go pick up your older siblings from their moms house for the weekend

The last time your dad would drive you to school with his cool truck and honk his horn as he dropped you off and your friends were so impressed

The last time you would bring your Pop Pop cookies and coffee in his room and you would sit in his lap and share them as you two watched cartoons

The last time your dad would put on his rollerblades and hold your childhood dog's leash while pulling you in a wagon on the streets of your childhood house

The last time you got along with your dad

The times when you didn't realize why your dad was always mad and why mom wasn't the best parent in the beginning then decided to get better

The times you went to church and actually enjoyed the experience

You didn't notice, did you ?

when your dad stopped putting your hair in an extra tight ponytail, but not just any tight, the kind of tight that makes your eyebrows stick up and you can't feel your forehead and it leaves you with a headache once you finally take it out

When your mom stopped waking you up for school and now you make 20 alarms to wake you up every 5 minutes just to go back to sleep after the first 10

When your mom stopped making you breakfast that either consisted of cereal or cinnamon toast with sugar, and now you just skip breakfast and barely eat lunch

When your mom stopped getting you dressed for school and picked your outfits for you and now she asks you for your opinion on how her outfit looks

When you and your sister went from fighting every weekend over who got to sleep on the top of the trundle bed and now you fight over who gets what parking spot in the driveway

When you and your sister would fight over the franklin institute statues in wedding dresses and fight over who would be the girl in the wedding dress every time we passed the sculpture in our dads truck and now you wonder if anyone will ever love you enough to put you in a real wedding dress

You didn't notice, did you ?

when your mom stopped putting her arm around you when she slams on her brakes too hard and now she pulls out of the driveway without even asking if you have your seatbelt on

Or when your dad stopped saying goodnight and he stopped asking “we surely do love each other don't we ?”

When you used to call your dad all the time because you hated not being able to live with him and and you finally got to but you moved out during senior year and now you miss seeing him again and it feels like when you were a kid again but this time you barely call him

You didn't notice when you got too big to do ponygirl on your dads lap and you can't even remember the last time you were held by your dad or the last time you were just in his arms

When the white Kia soul went from never getting into accidents to you hitting multiple cars with it because you are addicted to your phone

You didn't notice when you went from buying your childhood dog at a couple months old to putting her down at 18

When you went from listening to music to help you relax to finding other things that help you get relaxed (in a different way)

When you stopped spending your allowance on toys and now you spend it on “*inhalers*”

You didn't notice, did you ?

that last baby tooth you would lose

The last time you would throw puppet shows for your grandma with her teddy bears every time you visited

The last time you would put your hair in pigtails before you decided to cut it all off

The last time you would watch Yo Gabba Gabba, The Wonder Pets, Fosters Home for Imaginary Friends

You didn't notice, did you ?

the last time you didn't have to stress about how bad your grades were

the last time your parents would still somewhat tolerate each other and not talk bad about the other behind each others backs

You didn't notice, did you ?

When you outgrew your bunk bed

When you turned double digits

When you turned 18

You didn't notice did you ?

The last time you didn't care about how you look and enjoyed the body you live in

The last time you thought boys were gross and had cooties

The last time you were protected from the real world experiences

The times when you could be you and not question who you are becoming

The days before depression and anxiety

You didn't notice did you ?

The last time you could just be

A kid.

UNEARTHED

Jaqui Harris

I'd aimed to be
a ME-ist
when He
called me high
 beneath a rise
where strength grows on peony petals
breaking through
The rock

bare; I saw Me in His basket
patently
picked on
purpose

radical love
a shock;
stock ME-istism
rocked —
chinked by pink
and powder

what will
 make the sage
 stand still —
I know that's
 when He speaks;
toppling olympus
wresting Me from isms

ST. DOLLY OF SEVIERVILLE

JC Reilly

The pope would canonize you,
if only you were Catholic, but Heaven
hallows virtue and piety in whatever form,
and you have already secured
your place among the holies.

To catalogue your good deeds would take
a year, but here, I'll list a few:
the Imagination Library to honor your father
who could neither read nor write,
that's brought over 100 million books
to young readers. Your sanctuary
to preserve and repopulate bald eagles.
Your telethon for the victims
of the Great Smoky Mountains wildfires.
Your support of LGBTQ+ folks. Your love
for your fans. And your music that brings
balm to hearts everywhere.

I saw you play once at the Fox,
maybe 2008. In rhinestones and fringe
you sang all your hits—"9 to 5,"
"Coat of Many Colors," "Jolene"
"Here You Come Again,"

and “I Will Always Love You.”

And many more I didn’t know (after all, you’ve something like 49 albums to your name), but that the audience did, belting out lyrics right along with you. You encouraged our voices and our energy, till I wept

and didn’t even know why, except I felt your love surround me, transport me, show me angels, apparitions, and the glory of your face and voice. I knew God at that moment. It was the first miracle I’d ever seen performed live.

Art



Artist: Cheena Kaul

Title: Preparing to Sleep, Preparing to Awaken

Medium: Mixed media, primarily acrylic on canvas

Year: 2024

Dimensions: 16 x 19 in

As it prepares to sleep... it sheds all the unnecessary.
As it prepares to awaken... it creates all the necessary.

Inspired by seasonal cycles, this painting invites a gentle pause. The poem is a whisper about choosing what to keep and what to let go, just like leaves falling and seeds forming.

Abby Frey



Written in sand at sunrise, Trust reflects the quiet strength of surrender and courage, a gentle reminder that even in uncertainty, we are guided and connected to something greater.

Lavina Rivera



Monica Vidal



Bios

Alexis d'Ambly (she/her) is a senior writing major with an English minor. She is the editor-in-chief of The Cyclone Chronicle, your student newspaper, a writing tutor in The Writing Collab in the lower level of the library, and editor of The Hack yearbook. Her favorite authors are Danielle Steel and Nora Roberts. Her dream is to live at the beach and write novels all day. Fun fact: While Alexis is passionate about writing, her elementary, middle, and high school teachers often pushed her towards a career in computer science, and, as much as she respects the field, she claims she's terrible at coding. This is her first year as editor-in-chief of Prism.

Abby Frey is pursuing her Masters in Happiness studies at Centenary University. Abby currently serves as an Upper School counselor and teaches Positive Psychology and Wellbeing in Upper School in South Carolina. She is passionate about integrating emotional intelligence and wellbeing into schools, blending her expertise and love of learning with compassion and creative energy to empower others to navigate challenges, discover strengths, and pursue purpose. A native New Englander, Abby now calls South Carolina home. Abby's greatest love is her family. When she is not working, you will find her running through nature, reading with a highlighter, and soaking up time in the sand.

Cheena Kaul (she/her) is currently pursuing her MA in Happiness Studies. She has a long background in design and creative strategy, and has been painting and art journaling for many years. Her artwork explores themes of mindfulness, renewal, and emotional presence through soft colors, fluid shapes, and layered abstract forms. Cheena brings her knowledge of design thinking and contemplative practices together, helping her create pieces that feel both thoughtful and uplifting. Fun fact: Cheena co-founded a design studio 27 years ago, and although she works with digital tools every day, she loves the simplicity of paint, paper, and color.

Cara Muth is a first-year PhD student in the Happiness Studies program at Centenary University. She is a poet, spiritual guide, and happiness coach whose work often weaves healing, reflection, and remembrance. Cara's writing experience includes publishing essays and poetry on Substack and YouTube, as well as sharing her voice with women's groups and students through talks and readings. She's excited to have recently had an essay and a poem published in a Wonder Anthology. This is her first time submitting to Prism. Fun fact: after spending two decades in the corporate world, Cara realized that wasn't where she was meant to be and is currently proving that it's never too late to transform yourself and your life.

Carmella Vitel (she/her) is a senior majoring in communication. This is her second semester with The Cyclone Chronicle, rising from a staff writer, to managing editor. Carmella enjoys video games, reading, and planning for that D&D campaign she swears she'll start one day. When not in class, Carmella is at home with her two dogs, Luna and Pola. She's always ready to show off pictures of them too.

Holly (Howl) O'Donnell (they/them) is a freshman majoring in technical theater/theater production. They are currently working as an Assistant Stage Manager for the Wizard of Oz musical for centenary. They work at Six Flags as a ride operator. Their dream one day is to work backstage for a famous or small band/singer and help with their sets and travel the world with them one day. Howl writes a lot of short stories (mostly thrillers) and loves writing poems (most of the time the poems they write are about someone but they will never admit who they are about). They used to write for their high school magazine (their sophomore to senior year) and really enjoyed it.

Hunter Haskell is a freshman here at Centenary University. Her major is marketing. She writes in her free time and has been blogging and journaling since she was a child. Writing has become her passion and a source of motivation. A fun fact about her is that she was born outside of the U.S. Her submitted essay is about controversial societal issues. She talks about the importance and value of issues going on in nowadays society.

Jacqui Harris is a first year PhD student in the inaugural cohort of the Happiness Studies Academy (HSA) with Professor Tal Ben-Shahar, and grateful that Centenary has given home to such an exciting field of study. As such, she is a career-seasoned student, a senior technology executive, musician, writer, and lifelong learner. Philadelphian turned South Jerseyan and UPenn alum, having studied stateside as well as Universidad de La Habana and Oxford. She practices daily prayer and bible reading for purpose-enlightenment and direction, and to feel the healing, fortifying love of God.

JC Reilly (she/her) is a first year graduate student in Happiness Studies particularly interested in how writing and happiness intersect. A lover of poetry, tennis, crochet, and learning Italian, she lives in Marietta, Georgia, with three cats. A fun fact is that for three years in a row, her top Spotify artist is Taylor Swift, but she listens to so many oldies Spotify thinks her listening age is 78 (!).

Lavina Rivera (she/her) is a sophomore criminal justice major with a psychology minor. This piece marks Lavina's first time participating in Prism, and she's excited to share her work. Fun Fact: Lavina is always fascinated by solving puzzles, whether it's piecing together a complicated piece in my artwork or trying to figure out “who done it” while binge-watching my favorite crime shows—a habit that fuels her dream of eventually becoming a detective!

Monica Vidal is a student in the third cohort of MA in Happiness Studies. She completed her BA in psychology in the early 90s in Brazil, and attending an American University is a dream come true. She was raised in a very artistic family, but she has only began experimenting with charcoal and pastels later in life, when she has incorporated expressive arts as a tool in her wellness group facilitator work. Her art is born from her feelings and emotions. She just allows her hands to flow free on the paper, as if they had a life of their own. And interesting, very expressive characters are born, like “Betty”, with her enigmatic expression and fiery red hair. Fun fact: growing up, Monica was told she was the only one in the family without any artistic talent, but after years repeating that to everyone, she chose to challenge the belief, and art is now in the center of everything she does.

Samantha “Sami” Swayze (she/her) is a sophomore majoring in writing. She is a staff writer for the Cyclone Chronicle, Centenary's student newspaper, and has had 3 of her poems published throughout middle and high school. Her interests include writing poetry and music, painting, reading, photography, and going to the beach. Fun fact: Sami has lived in Hackettstown her whole life and does not plan on leaving the area. This is her first year as a staff writer and editor of Prism.

