

BLENDED
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Blended

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

IT'S ENOUGH - Olivia McFall	page 4
WHERE I AM FROM - Andre Henderson	page 5-7
ILLUSTRATION - Laura Fillingam	page 7
UNTITLED - Emily Henning	page 8
GOD OF WAR - Daniel Krebs	page 9-10
ILLUSTRATION - Isabella Williams	page 11
WE DANCE - Michael Maddox	page 12
UNTITLED - Emily Henning	page 13
ILLUSTRATION - Isabella Williams	page 14
THE RED WREN AND HOW I SEEK TO UNDERSTAND MYSELF - Lucy Channing	page 15-17
ILLUSTRATION - Rebecca Tumicki	page 18
UNTITLED - Cailyn Baxter-Quinlan	page 19
STORMS OF LIFE - Olivia McFall	page 20
ILLUSTRATION - Taylor Nystrom	page 21
UNTITLED - Cassie Pastori	page 22-23
A SIMPLE LEAF - Eomon Sullivan	page 24
HEARTS HOME - Olivia McFall	page 25
ILLUSTRATION - Taylor Nystrom	page 26
MY WAY IS GOOD WAY - Eomon Sullivan	page 27
A BAD/GOOD TRIP - Michael Maddox	page 28-29
ILLUSTRATION - Jessica Cleaver	page 30

Sometimes it's enough to just hold on
To let the waves of the world rock your boat
To tighten the straps of your life vest and laugh
Enough to sit back for a minute and look up
Look to the blue sky and feel the sun baking your skin
It's enough to know that it burns
To realize that you're not in control
And to be content there, riding in the boat
To lean over the edge, reach out, and feel
The water rushing through your fingers
Flying by faster and faster than you could imagine
Though you squint to see a horizon that remains
So far away
It's enough to enjoy a hot day out on the water
And to trust in a lifetime of unknowns

WHERE I AM FROM

Andre Henderson

I am from Midwestern United States.

I was born and raised in St. Louis Missouri- a city on the Mississippi River, historically known as the gateway to the west.

I am from summertime, which was my favorite season in those days.

I am from the luminescent glow of fireflies as children give chase to capture their magic.

I am from the deafening sound of a thousand cicadas flicking their wings as the males sing their timbral songs.

I am from humidity that clings to me and glistens on my dark skin on a hot and windless night.

I am from light and darkness.

I am from city streets littered with broken glass and shattered dreams.

I am from neighborhoods lined with vacant lots and empty buildings.

I am from gunshots that ring out in the middle of the day and the middle of the night.

The sad thing about it is, you get used to it.

I am from the American Ghetto; it really doesn't matter which one.

They are all built, shaped, and divided by violence and oppression.

They are all marked by historical trauma and the destruction of community and culture.

I am from darkness and light.

I am from mother, grandmother, and great grandmother who had been given the burden and blessing of raising our families and our communities.

I am from the lessons of their hopes and their fears.

Continued

I am from sweet potatoes, collard greens, fried chicken and peach cobbler... Soul Food.

I am from the tunes of Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, Smokey Robinson, and Aretha Franklin to name a few... Soul music.

I am from family get togethers in the park and playing childhood games with my little sister and brother ... and lots of cousins.

We may not have much, but we're all we got and that is enough.

I am from togetherness... Soul healing.

I am from searching for my father who was not in my life and hoping that I can learn to be a man, all on my own.

I am from finding my father only in repeating his same mistakes with my own children.

I was never able to be close to my father, but I now know some of what he must have went through.

I am from intergenerational cycles of struggle and poverty. I am from drug addiction to recovery.

I am from incarceration to higher education.

I am from light that has always guided me

I am also from darkness within

I am from pain that I've caused as well as endured I am from better days are coming in

I am from helplessness and brokenness

A place where I had submitted to defeat

It is from this helplessness and brokenness

That I prayed and was lifted to my feet

Continued

I am from this time I'll do it differently

I am from I'll never hurt you again

I am from a determination to help my children

I am from forgiveness, I am from change, I am a man

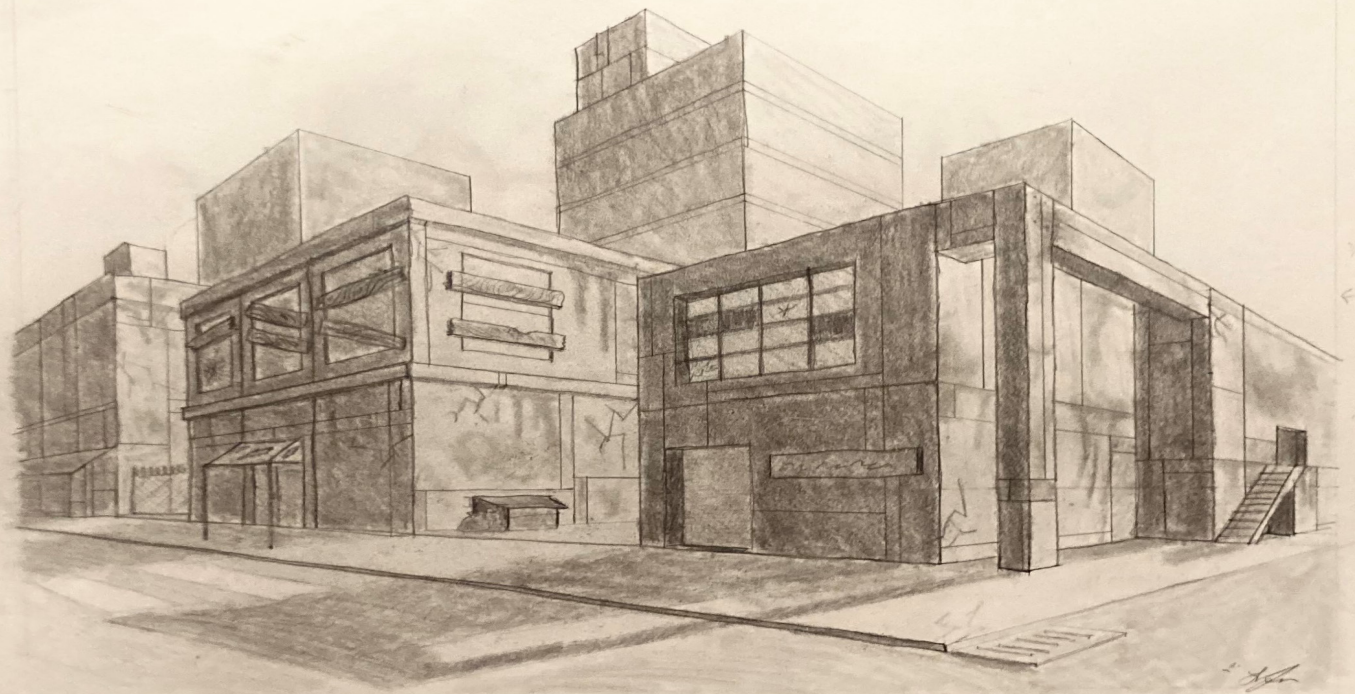


ILLUSTRATION - *Laura Fillingham*

this rabbit hole
(the one I'm digging to nowhere) only goes so deep,
and then it stops far short
of where I am in need.

so i burrow
sideways and for many miles. anywhere that's not
the deep cut of the truth,
the place from which i bleed.

She sits pondering her life, and the decisions she made. With the exception of the drugs and her husband, she's alone. The drugs have destroyed both of them. She is obese, face sucked in, no teeth, looking like she could be sixty years old. He is bald, beer bellied, down to his last viable teeth. His face looks aged, and you'd assume he is at least fifty. He is only thirty- five. Through the years they have used and abused every opportunity thrown their way. She just sits there, allowing his viciousness to fester like a metastasizing cancer. He takes it all out on her son and occasionally her two daughters. She allows it to happen. The choice to stay with him and the decisions he's made have made everyone disassociate themselves from her. The actions we make in life have consequences.

It was 2:45 p.m., and I'd just arrived home from school; it was an early release day. I was eleven years old. I walked through the door. To him it was just a typical Wednesday afternoon, with a bottle of vodka on the table in front of him, and the DualShock Controller in his hand. My mother sat idly next to him on the couch playing on her Blackberry, the screen illuminating her hands, casting them in a blue light. He was already drunk. I could smell the liquor on his breath. He was playing my favorite game God of War. I walked in silently, like a ninja careful not to alert his target. Luckily, he hadn't seen me come in yet; he was to entranced in his game. A sense of sorrow and regret occasionally swept across his face. I walked into the kitchen.

I was looking for an after-school snack. After I opened the refrigerator and found nothing to my satisfaction, I turned around, and there he was; against the beam of the entrance to the kitchen. He stared at me with a sinister look. I knew that he was contemplating picking another fight. I could tell he was waiting for me to say something. To my astonishment he walked back to the living room and continued playing his game.

Later that evening after I finished homework in my room, I went downstairs to watch television with my mother. Little to no surprise he was still wasted; he was still playing that damn game. I asked him if I could watch something. He replied, "You see I'm fucking doing shit." I can say that growing up I wasn't the best child. I dealt with an immense amount of pent up anger. When I got his response, I didn't care for it much. I proceeded to throw myself onto the floor screaming. My mother never dealt with the punishments; she left all the disciplinary actions to Luke. For every minute I refused to listen to what he said, he'd add a day to my punishment.

The days added to weeks, then the weeks to months. When he realized that I wasn't going to stop, he paused his game, and got up from the couch.

The moment he paused the game I knew what was coming. He made his way to me faster than

my eyes could follow. My screams immediately got louder. He began to attempt grabbing me to take me to my room; I struggled. When he realized that his attempts to grasp me were futile, he grabbed me by each of my ankles, and began dragging me down the hallway, up two flights of stairs, down the hall and into my room. Then he threw me on my bed; I pried at every corner and step I could get my hands on, like a murder victim trying to rip themselves from the killer's grasp. In that moment I thought that was it. When he didn't turn, in that second, I knew it wasn't over. He began hitting me with an open palm. Then he was punching me in the back, shoulders, thighs, and anywhere he could reach. He yelled to muffle my screams. "Have you had enough, you fat fuck!" he yelled.

I couldn't respond let alone breathe; I couldn't stop crying. I rolled onto the floor as he left my room. He got halfway down the stairs when I yelled, "You stupid fucking bitch!" He began running back up the stairs and down the hall. I ran to the door, shut it as fast as I could, and barricaded myself in front of it. Boom! With the power of what felt like three men, he slammed his body against the door to get to me. After a few attempts he stooped and said, "I'm not done with ya little shit! Just wait until I get my hands on you again!"

At that point I just wanted to die. How could a mother sit idle while her child was being abused? Why was she still with him? I sat there for probably an hour thinking of everything and anything I could. Nothing was going to get better, I thought to myself.

Years went by, and it was the same almost every day. Every time he hit me, she did nothing. Almost fifteen years have passed since that day. Now she sits with only him in her life. She lives each day the same, like a ghost stuck in a loop. None of her children call or write or want anything to do with her. She will most likely never see her granddaughter again. Her mother disowned her; she has no other family. She now, like a porcupine, lives her life in solitude with everyone she holds dear fearful of getting poked again. The choice to stay with him, has determined her life today.

When I look at her, I see him....



ILLUSTRATION - *Isabella Williams*

WE DANCE

Michael Maddox

We dance—
we live, learn, and love play and cry

Life is a dance—a swirling of people and events
colors and feelings
creating beautiful togetherness

We fall, we rise
sometimes rough, sometimes flair
life's lessons learned

The beat carries laughter and tears
the rhythm flows on, a river to the sea
we spill into eternity.

Be on the floor when the band plays
as songs once sung forever disappear
melodies infusing life into souls.

We journey
with streams of people
circling round the ballroom floor

Till the night is finished
and the quiet forces us
to remove our felt-bottomed shoes

The dance is over
but we were there
we danced—and so we are

the world is so much bigger, boy
than you or i had ever dreamed
its deep and wide and full of light
the dark not quite what it has seemed

yes, the world is so much brighter
and both of us are beaming too
it asks not for our strain, just this
that i be me and you be you

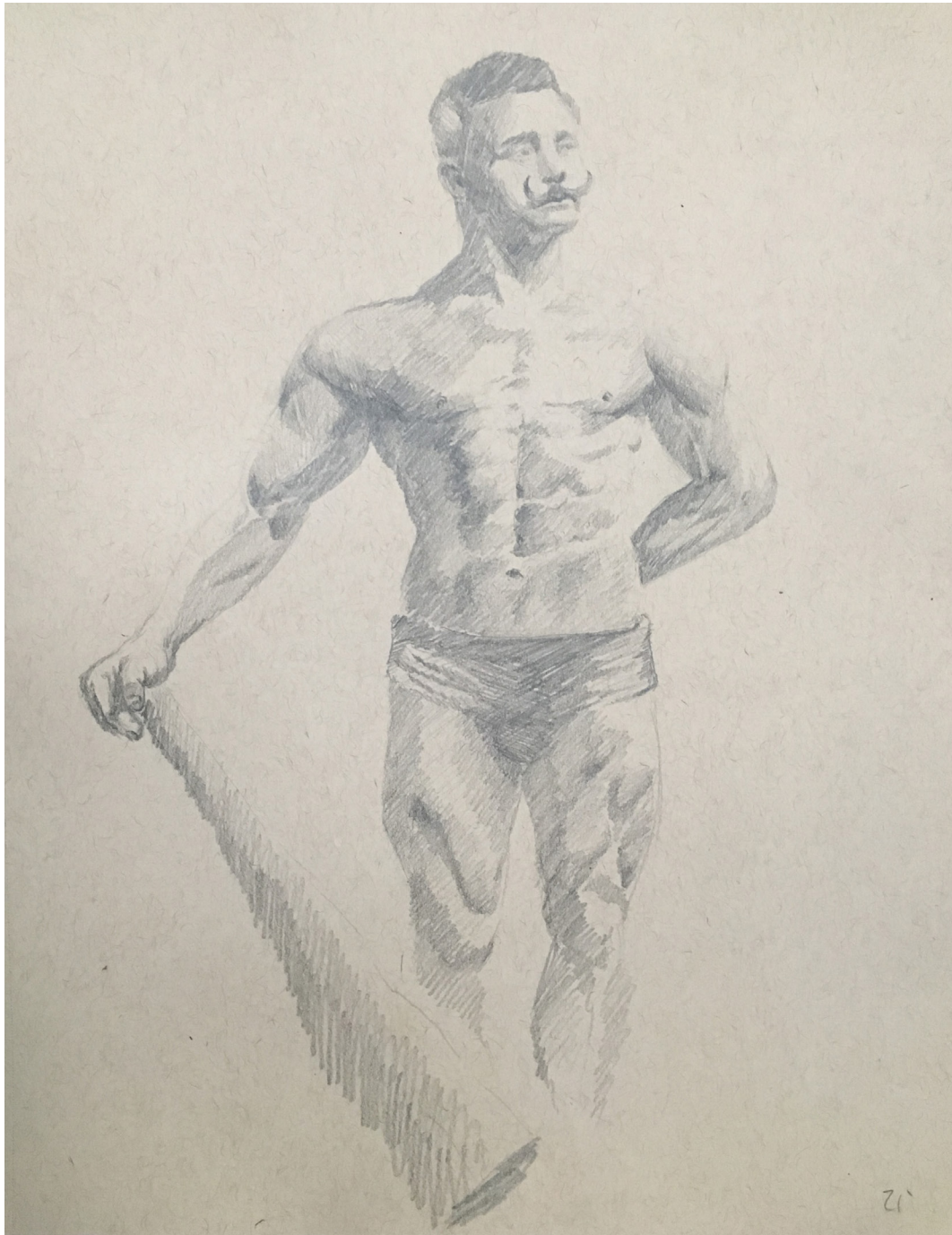


ILLUSTRATION - *Isabella Williams*

THE RED WREN AND HOW I SEEK TO UNDERSTAND MYSELF

Lucy Channing

Oh, red wren,
I confess to you now
I pierced myself gory on a wrought iron cross
And the doves around me cried, but I knew I would greet them again when the light shone in

on the tile,
plastic, blood, sunlight on tile
a major key funeral march
animal bone masks and taxidermy hearts
gifts- like milky daylight, gifts so leisured
a burning package in my burning hands
sunk straight through the wax of my frame
down to my cranberry heart
tender, gushing, sweet, going a million miles an hour
I never enjoyed cranberry sauce when I was younger
I couldn't understand prayer

the weathervane on the church,
the bells in the farmhouse
shaking in the uncanny valley
the eerie canal
the sweet holy chimes
of an illusionist's forest
of a small songstress lost in a forest
a red backed fairy wren
chimes in a forest
of what I'd yet to know

Continued

unknowing bubbles up and up and up
spilling over the surface
in little beads
if you peel away the petals
of a violet
you'll find blood dripping down

The blood is watery and warm and wet- rotted
Like
The too-ripe blackberry Holloway
I can never make my way around
like
how male wrens' mate with many females
So, I suppose my blood ends with me
Bittersweet moments of clarity always cost me
More than I fear I am able to give
Nothing in the forests swollen mouth
Is enough for it to feel full
Nothing
Is enough for the songbird to cease her endless crying
And heal her frail voice

but their voice is honey drenched mahogany
Smooth like the melted sap
Of Aphrodite's distant promises
To me
And hers was too- I still think sometimes

Continued

Of that woodland, cutting voice
My little wings
Fresh with blood
Flittering around the cranberry brambles

Of my heart
Oh, my heart
Oh, her eyes in the sun

the sunlight causes blistering, but the moonlight causes madness
scratched
red flesh like my red belly
the in-betweens are the worst worst part
your longing for limits will hurt you one day
unless you catch up to them first
love in its barbed wire cage
touches before they were touches
my not-desire caught in the seams of your fingers
little birds are so fragile
wake, wake them up in the morning
lucidity has shown them too much

when I awake in the linens, I hear the bleeding-heart doves singing “the end”
they sit and they call me their
“doe-eyed red wren”
blood stained and battered I ask them
“but when?”
they hush me, they shush me
“it’s all just pretend”

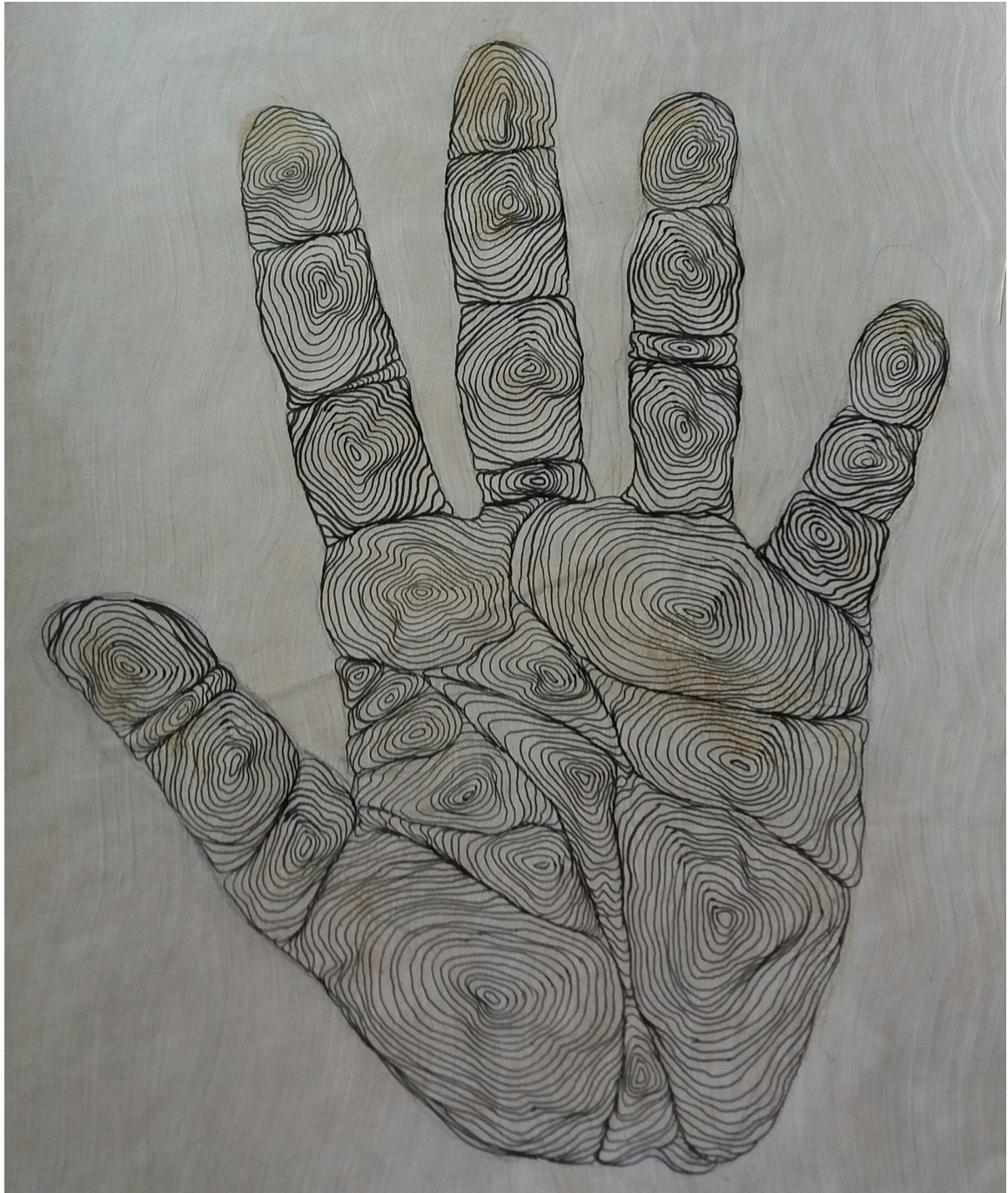


ILLUSTRATION - *Rebecca Tumicki*

I used to believe
that passion
was strong waves crashing down
on my body and lips
Leaving invisible bruises under my skin
and a tired smile.
While the tide pulls me under
ripping off my clothes leaving me breathless.

Drowning

That was not passion
That's called fucking.
A lust so loveless you could go numb.

I have been taught the slowness and the steadiness that passion can be.
I have been brought up from the depths of the sea
And I'm allowed to breathe.

Breathe between kisses
Breathe during the moments
our heart beats touch
when we hold each other
in security and comfort.
And breathe
between the tears
that fall from our cheeks.

STORMS OF LIFE

Olivia McFall

The rain fell faster and faster
Soothing like the press of a warm mug
Against one's ice-cold rosy face
The strange warmth soaked and plastered clothes
And they laughed
Drops rolling off their noses
Hair curling under crowns of raindrops
They kicked off their shoes and let their
Bare feet sink in the rich mud
Let it splash up their legs as they ran
Eyes magnetically drawing back together
Bumping into each other again and again
They tilted their heads towards the heavens
Tongues out to taste the drink of royalty
Reserved for two children's souls
Caught in the middle of a storm
Constructing castles out of rain with their hearts
They played fearlessly
Knowing that they were unprepared
Without a change of clothes
They tossed their cares aside
Their moment would not be stolen by fears of a long drive home
Because together they were set free
This is the kind of innocent, beautiful, and timeless
Love that I seek
A best friend to splash in puddles with me
For the rest of life's storms



ILLUSTRATION - *Taylor Nystrom*

I love the freckles on your nose.
And I love how you stand in the cold.
Just to look up at the stars.

I love how you laugh when you cry.
And I love the twinkle in your eyes,
When you're trying to be mysterious.

You get caught up,
In all of it.
You love,
Like there's never enough.
Because you're perfect,
And worth it.

I love how you try to do right.
And I love the wrinkles when you lie.
When you're trying to be mischievous.

I love the freckles on your nose.
And I love how you stand in the cold.
Just to look up at the stars.

You are lost
In a current,
That has washed
Away everything.

Continued

I love the way you wear your clothes.

And I love how you always know,

To look for the best in people.

I love every time you've smiled.

And all the times you've been wild.

I love what's on the inside,

And I love how hard you try.

To make the most of everything.

I love how you laugh when you cry.

And I love the twinkle in your eyes.

When you're trying to be mysterious.

I love any and every thing,

You've chosen to do.

Because that's what makes up me.

Because I am you.

How you bless me
With your virtue
Of patience
And appreciation
While I wait,
While you steep

How you enchant me
Your aroma
Is lovely,
And deep

How you puzzle me
With your taste
Intricate, subtle,
Rich,
Your flavor,
It speaks

How you nourish me
With your heat
Washing over my tongue
Trickling down my throat
Illuminating the path
To sit in my stomach
And join with my mind
Lifting the chains
Of life left behind

How you curl,
unfurl,
bathe,
Naked, revealing your shape
Releasing your power
Enriching the water
So deep

So deep is your flavor, And virtue, and smell
That after every cup
I know nothing about you
And yet,
I know you so well

At some point the light has to break the darkness
A wave has to crash over our castles of sand
The things we built with mixed intentions
Will crumble in our hands
A sword will pierce through
The stone gates of our hearts
All the excuses we made will come apart
The pretty pictures we painted of meaningless dreams
Incomparable to our undeserved reality
The lies and lust will give way
And we will wear guilt, we will bear pain
But it will be taken making us free of blame
For we have been given the gift of calling His name
Through the heavy silence and the crouching dark
Beneath the clouds in our minds waiting to tear us apart
We may whisper a cry for help
When we finally realize we can't save ourselves
But someone can and has and will forever
Who is constantly making things new
Shattering cages and paying wages
He is the light that breaks through
The end is beautiful because it belongs to Him
It is the victory of love over sin
Though you may sit in darkness feeling lost and alone
He has loved you in your hurting
He will be your heart's home

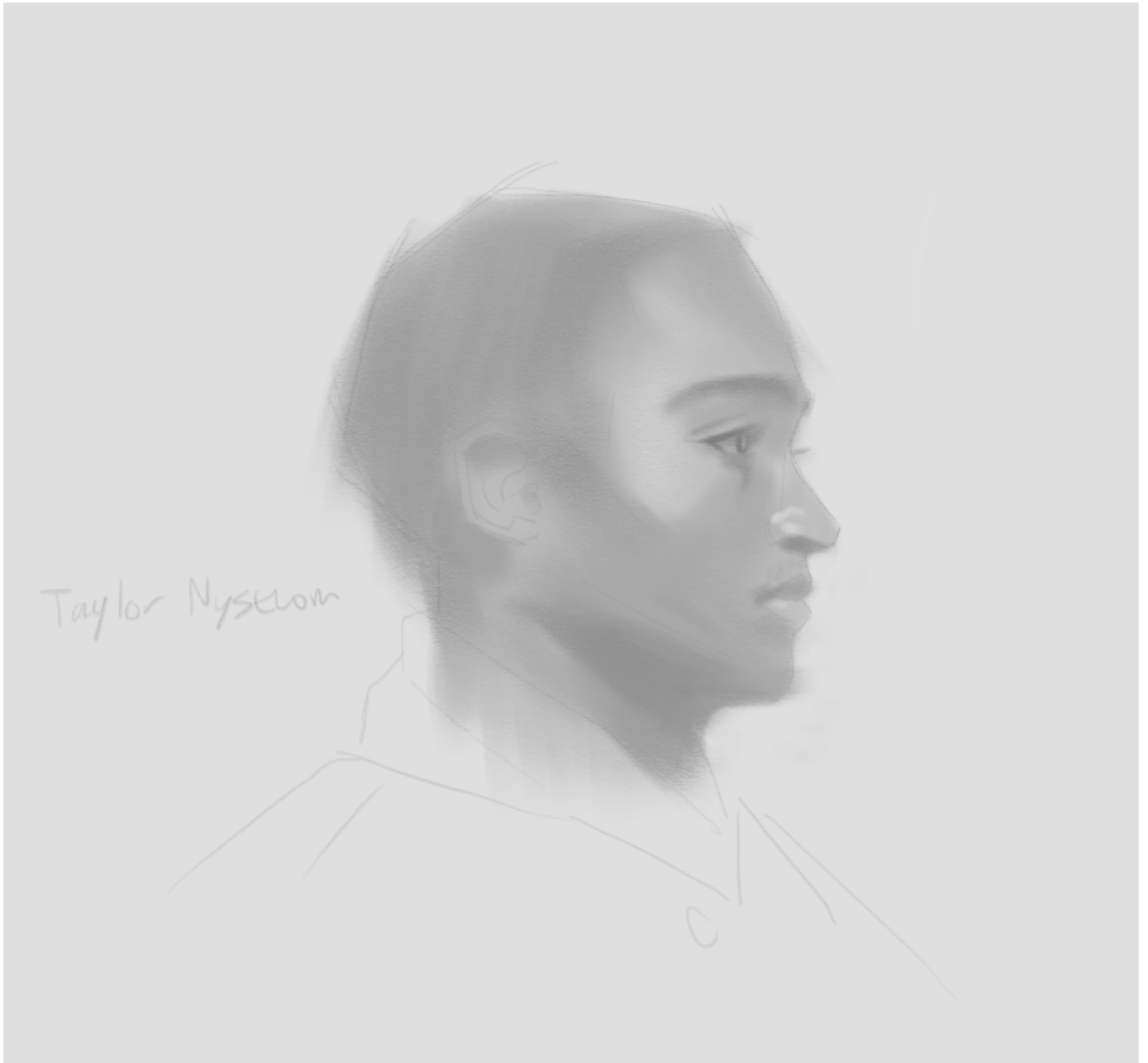


ILLUSTRATION - *Taylor Nystrom*

My way is good way
and i'm happy
i love a girl
she loves me too
the sun is hot
brightness is good
i love my mom
my dad loves me too

life is good
even when bad
i like to write poems
like river like snow
like honey drip or molasses
sweet
my love isn't sour

my way is good way
this much i know
and it makes me smile
i am laughing
at nothing
or something
only my love knows
my love is good love
for i love it all
and it loves me too

that tree is good tree
how does it know
it is a tree
tall and green and oak
that tree is happy
how do i know
it is smiling
and singing
and glows

my way is good way
how do I know
it is my way
and down it i go
Skipping

It was a bad/good trip. I was shot at, which was bad, but I did not burn up, which was good.

In 2008 I was flying over the Iraqi desert in a Marine Corps CH 46 “frog” helicopter. I and 20 Marines and sailors, in desert-tan uniforms, were on mesh seats and packed side-by-side like Vienna sausages in a can.

The can opened at the back because the loading ramp sloped down to allow a lone Marine sitting on a wooden box to man the M-50 machine gun. Like being in a car with its rear half sawed off, making the retreating highway intimately visible and hearable to the passengers, we—in our open-backed helicopter—were spectators to a vast, tan desert below us and a vast, blue sky over us, while the warm desert wind whooshed around us. The Marine on the ramp was kept from falling into that panorama by a safety strap. His small black silhouette backlit by the brightness beyond. A ribbon of bullets draped from his gun onto the ramp beside him.

My ears hurt from the rotor scream—it was so goddamned loud. I had earplugs in, and even though I’d also taken underwear from my backpack and stuffed it under my Kevlar helmet and over my ears, the rotor noise was still so, so loud. My ears rang—a high pitched, from both ears, must-not-be-good-for-you sound that I experienced often in Iraq. Military stuff is noisy: helicopters, jets, generators, Humvees, pistol fire, rifle fire, artillery fire. Tinnitus and hearing loss happen.

Just then—whoomp, whoomp, whoomp, whoomp. The pilot was shooting streamers of chaff in response to the rifle fire we were taking from the ground. My shoulders strained against the shoulder straps and my abdomen strained against my torso as the helicopter dropped suddenly, jerked right, left, and to the right again as the pilot executed evasive maneuvers. Bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam chattered the M-50s, fired by the right- and left- window gunners and by the tail gunner. I didn’t smell fear; I smelled my indifference. “Not a thing I can do,” I thought, “strapped in this sausage can . . . I sure hope we don’t burn up.”

I don't like burns. Burns are black or grey, and they're dry and dead. A fireman whose operation I'd observed as a premed student had stepped on a high-power electrical wire and it had burned/amputated both his legs below the knees. The protruding bones looked like dry, white sticks. Not alive at all.

I'm a surgeon. I don't like burns, and I don't like dead.

Blood is different; blood is red and alive. Even if there's lots of it pulsing out you can stop it and replace it. Pump an ashen, near-dead Marine or sailor full of blood and he or she pinks up and lives. Bloodless, cold limbs transform into warm, pulsating, full-of-life arms and legs. Alive is better than dead.

No burns or bleeding on that flight though—just a noisy, bumpy ride across the desert, which was good.

Now, as I write these words during an early morning, while I look at Douglas Firs and evergreen huckleberries through my window, and knowing that my wife will soon be waking up and joining me, I realize I'm not justified in calling that helicopter flight across the Iraqi desert a bad/good trip, since I'm here and writing about it. Rather, I'll call it "a good trip . . . with some bullets added."



ILLUSTRATION - *Jessica Cleaver*

Those of us who have worked on this edition of *Blended* wish to thank the Student Government of Olympic College (SGOC) for providing the funding that made it possible to keep producing a student arts magazine for Olympic College. We could not have done it without your generosity!

If you are a current student of Olympic College and interested in submitting a story, essay, poetry, or visual art to the 2021-2022 edition of *Blended*, go to the submission page at <https://www.olympic.edu/student-life/blended> and upload your submission.

If you are a current student at Olympic College and interested in helping to edit the next edition of *Blended*, send an email to litmag@olympic.edu and let us know!