



Healing the Heart WITH THE WHEELBARROW

SEMICONDUCTOR DR

2025

Table of Contents

Art

“Alma Mater” By: Lizzy Grafton	8
“Alphin” By: Lee Jacobs	9
“Distorted Bodies” By: Lee Jacobs	10
“Fontana delle Tartarughe” By: Emilee Gerhardt	11
“Borghese Garden” By: Emilee Gerhardt	12
“The Weight of the Universe” By: Taja Showers	13
“The Soldier” By: Jessie Stauffer	14
“Phish” By: Matthew Younger	15
“The Ram” By: Ella Holyfield	16
“Fantasyland Remote Springs” By: Ella Holyfield	17

Poetry

“Cuando Regreso” By: Annie Blevins	19
“Éphémère” By: Emily Berry	20
“The Barbary” By: Jayson Nichols	21
“Sana Sana” By: Bryanna Rosario	22
“My Body is My Worth” By: Cari Meeks	23

Prose

“Speckled Green and Brown” By: Annie Blevins	25
“The Bliss of Ignorance” By: Robert Lee	28
“Seeing Myself Anew” By: Jayden Hughes	31
“Yellow Space” By: Jillian Wood	35
“The American Experience” By: Madeline Hopson	39
“Faith, Family, and Fear” By: Jayden Hughes	42
“Broken Spanish” By: Bryanna Rosario	46
“Leaves” By: Seth Moore	48

The Wheelbarrow

2025 Edition

Madeline Hopson: Executive Editor

Cari Meeks: Communications Liaison

Kelli Meythaler: Social Media Specialist

Ella Holyfield: Submissions Review Specialist

Annie Blevins: Assistant Editor

Zoe Anderson: Design and Layout Specialist

Dr. Melissa Merte: Faculty Advisor

Emilee Gerhardt & Trinity Davis: Cover Artists

Supported by:



SIGMA TAU DELTA
INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH HONOR SOCIETY



Acknowledgements

Faculty Judging Committee:

Mr. Patrick Lynch
Dr. Brandii Peterson
Dr. Terrell Tebbetts
Dr. Kim Crosby
Dr. Stephanie Saunders
Mr. Cody Norton
Dr. Brittany Florkiewicz
Dr. Matthew Lebrato

Wheelbarrow Members:

Madeline Hopson
Cari Meeks
Ella Holyfield
Bryanna Rosario
Kelli Meythaler
Skye Mellor
Cheyenne Anderson
Makenzie Massey
Annie Blevins
Zoe Anderson

Wheelbarrow Art Review Committee:

Madeline Hopson
Bryanna Rosario
Kelli Meythaler
Annie Blevins
McKenna Mayfield

Wheelbarrow Poetry Review Committee:

Makenzie Massey
Isaac Cottle
Skye Mellor
Kelli Meythaler

Wheelbarrow Prose Review Committee:

MK Duffield
Cheyenne Anderson
Luke Bridges
Isaac Cottle
Skye Mellor
Kelli Meythaler

Foreword: From the Editors

Looking Backward: The Wheelbarrow, Lyon College's literary and arts magazine, remains a longstanding, storied institution on our campus. It began in 1970 under the title The Penman, transitioning to its current title in 1995 as Dr. Helen Robbins advocated for a more inclusive name. The magazine published for almost five decades, producing annual issues that can still be found in the Alphin archives. In 2019, The Wheelbarrow went through a five-year hiatus due to the retirement of a faculty member and the subsequent Covid-19 pandemic.

A year after coming to teach in the English department at Lyon College, I decided to relaunch the magazine. These efforts were made possible by two intrepid student Co-Executive editors: alum Havana Santis, and current student Madeline Hopson. In addition to our continued emphasis on literature and art, we placed a new focus on student collaborations and bilingual submissions. Impressive examples of both can be found in our 2025 issue.

The Wheelbarrow truly embodies the spirit of the liberal arts experience. It would not be possible without the dedication of so many student authors, artists, and team members. These students come from all different backgrounds and fields of study, but they have equally poured their hearts into this magazine because they believe in the importance of creative expression through the Humanities. They believe in its boundless capacity to tell stories, evoke emotional experience, and create connections. Through these students, you can see the excellence both inside and outside of the classroom that has always distinguished Lyon College.

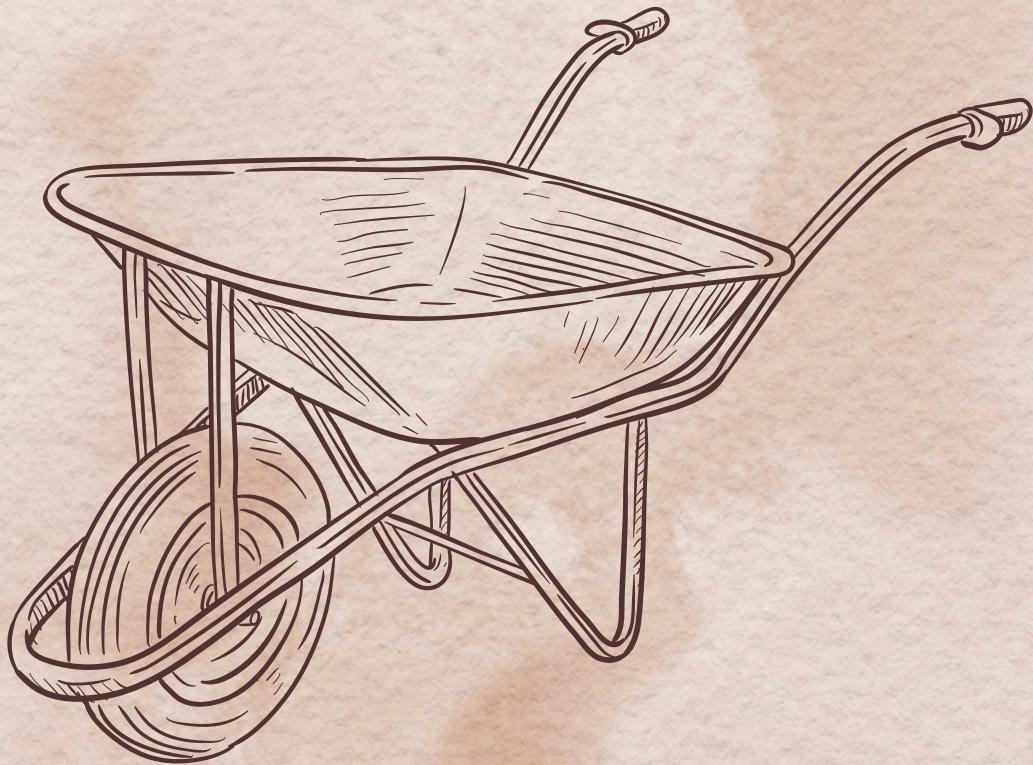
- Dr. Melissa Merte, Assistant Professor of English and *The Wheelbarrow* Faculty Advisor

And Forward: I fell in love with reading and writing in middle school, and, throughout my time here at Lyon, I learned to appreciate the writing process even more. Although I am not an English major, I have been the Writing Center Tutor at Lyon for the last two semesters, and I adore Lyon's English department. If I had a couple more semesters, I would triple major with English! When I was informed of The Wheelbarrow by the English faculty in 2023, I ecstatically submitted prose pieces. However, it was through my World Literature class with Dr. Merte that I learned I could become involved in the publication process of the magazine. Upon discovering it was student-led, I started taking initiative in the editing process. I hoped to draw a lot of attention to The Wheelbarrow and create more opportunities for literary arts to be recognized and acknowledged. Through the tedious editing process, I fell even more in love with reading and writing, and I wished to share those feelings on every page. Lyon students deserve to be celebrated for their wonderful talents!

The 2025 issue is especially close to my heart because I am graduating in Dec 2025 and won't be involved in the next publication. Wanting to expand on last year's issue, we began the recruiting process for members and submissions early in the fall semester. We started by getting students involved in committees and committee head positions, holding member meetings, setting up a booth for Scots Fest, and establishing a social media presence. We accomplished our goal and saw an increase in submissions, which led to a more extensive magazine with 23 accepted pieces, compared to last year's 17. We also included a faculty judging committee to vote on and award the accepted pieces.

I have ambitions to attend law school in August of 2026 and being heavily involved with this magazine gave me the opportunity to hone my writing skills. It also gave me a creative outlet to share with the Lyon community, while leaving a lasting impact on the future of the magazine. I hope The Wheelbarrow continues to allow Lyon students to showcase their hard work by recognizing the importance of the literary arts. I hope you enjoy this issue as much as I do!

- Madeline Hopson, Executive Editor of *The Wheelbarrow*



“THE RED WHEELBARROW”

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

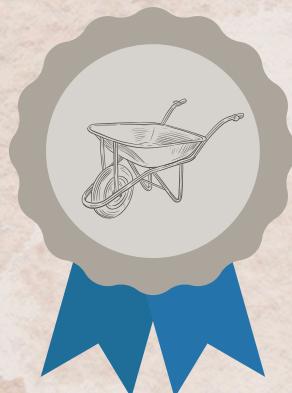
beside the white
chickens

BY: WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

Faculty Awards for Art



First Place
**“THE WEIGHT OF THE
UNIVERSE”**
By: Taja Showers



Honorable Mention
“PHISH”
By: Matthew Younger

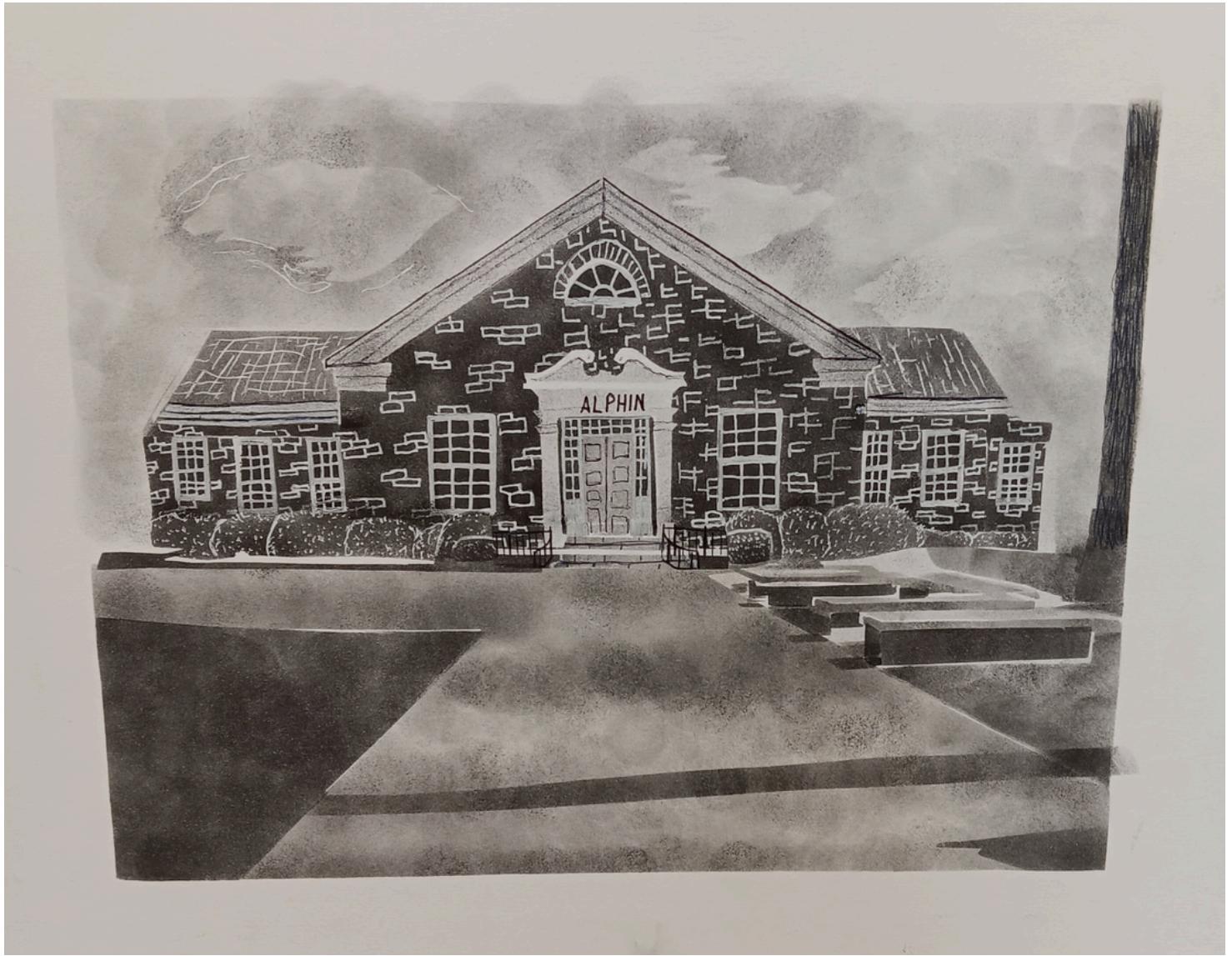
“Alma Mater”



BY: LIZZY GRAFTON

I am a junior Political Science and Mathematics student at Lyon. I enjoy doing art of all mediums in my free time, and while I have been particularly interested in digital art the last few years, you can find my name on several murals across town and campus. I have been painting and drawing for as long as I can remember, so I am excited to share some of my work with others.

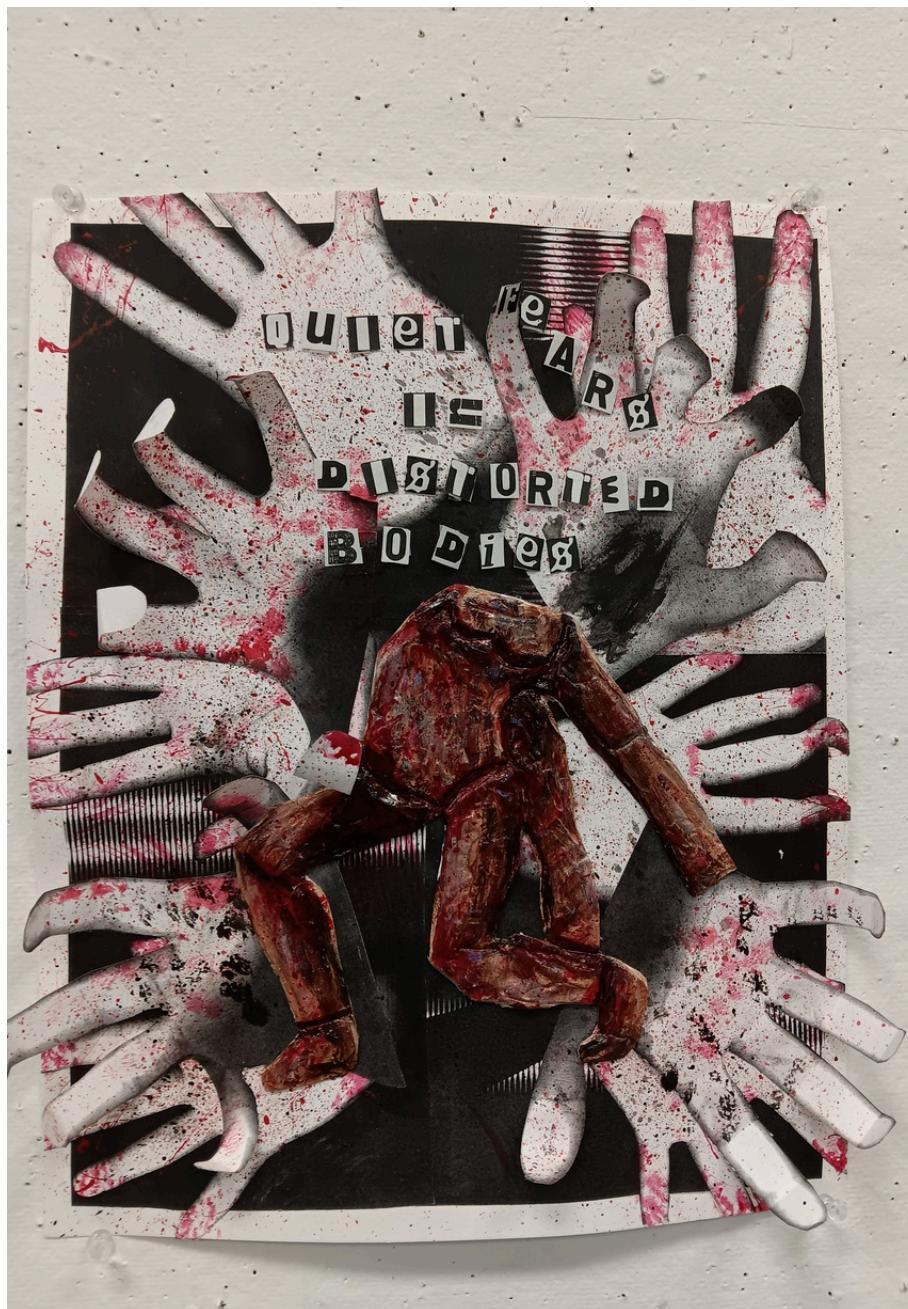
“Alphin”



BY : LEE JACOBS

I am a Communication Studies and Art major. I am a sophomore here at Lyon and, after college, I plan to pursue Journalism. I like experimenting with all kinds of art styles and love learning different techniques I can use in my art. My hobbies include painting, gaming, and listening to music.

“Distorted Bodies”



BY: LEE JACOBS

“Fontana delle Tartarughe”



BY: EMILEE GERHARDT

I am a senior Art major. I spend most of my time learning about Italian art history. I have had the opportunity to study in Rome, Italy where my love for Italian history grew. With my art, I try to find a way to incorporate everything I have learned over the years to express how much art history can influence us today with daily life.



“Borghese Garden”



BY: EMILEE GERHARDT

“The Weight of the Universe”



BY: TAJA SHOWERS

I grew up in Virginia and am a senior Art major at Lyon. I work in ceramics and painting. My work is inspired by personal experiences and explores themes of memory, transformation, and self-discovery.

“The Soldier”



BY: JESSIE STAUFFER

I come from a small farm in Sidney, Arkansas. One of my brothers and I were adopted into the Stauffer family when I was 4 and he was 6. When I was 15, my father called my brother and I into the living room to give us a “talk.” This talk was to tell my brother and I that one of our other brothers, who was older, had contacted him and wanted to meet us! This was a shock to me. Later that same month, we met at my favorite restaurant in Jonesboro, Arkansas (Lazzari). This is where our story begins. Ricky (the brother I met) told me all about himself, and I told him all about myself, as well. Ricky is a Marine in the United States Army. He has served since he was 18. I love my brother, and I love to draw, so I thought about it and found his picture from one of his military balls and drew him.

“Phish”



BY: MATTHEW YOUNGER

I am a Computer Science student who discovered a passion for art at the prompting of a friend. I began with zentangle drawings and gradually transitioned to watercolor painting, finding joy in the balance between structure and spontaneity. Though primarily a hobbyist, my work reflects a curiosity for detail and organic expression. "Phish" (intentionally misspelled; it's a pun since I'm a computer guy)

“The Ram”



BY: ELLA HOLYFIELD

I am a sophomore Psychology major and Art minor. I am a multimedia artist whose favorite techniques are collage, painting, and photography. I take inspiration from anything colorful, vintage, or overall eclectic. My other passions include planning events for my sorority, Alpha Xi Delta, and archery.

“The Ram” is a piece inspired by the astrology sign Aries. It is a collage featuring cut-out components from old picture books that have been manually altered and distorted using a copier machine. Lines were added back in to convey the emotions and traits associated with Aries, such as their impulsive and often erratic nature. Aries display a high sense of self and individuality, which is reflected through the repeating elements of the ram.

“Fantasyland Remote Springs”



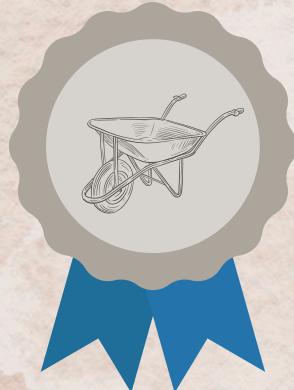
BY: ELLA HOLYFIELD

“Fantasyland Remote Springs” is a collage piece inspired by surrealism, specifically of the 1950s era. Images were selected and cut from *National Geographic* magazines and put back together to create an idyllic scene with just a hint of unease about the piece. Blackout poetry was also used to add more depth and convey more of the story behind the springs pictured.

Faculty Awards for Poetry



First Place
“SANA SANA”
By: Bryanna Rosario



Honorable Mention
“CUANDO REGRESO”
By: Annie Blevins

“CUANDO REGRESO”

Tengo miedo de la colina violeta.
Dentro de la colina están los recuerdos
Que amo pero que me duelen recordar.
Y en la violeta,
Me recuerdan al que extraño.
Pero cuando regreso a casa,
La colina violeta,
En la calma de la brisa,
Oigo crujir mis pies en el suelo
Y por fin veo las hojas de color otoñal.
Siempre te gustaban los colores del otoño.
Y por fin cuando miro al cielo,
Todo lo que veo es a ti.
Y cuando piso esta colina de violeta,
Yo puedo sentir el cielo
Bendecido con tu presencia.
Y por una vez me doy cuenta de que
No necesito tu presencia física,
Pues ya estoy en tu cielo,
La colina violeta.

I am afraid of the violet hill.
Within the hill are the memories
That I love but that hurt me to remember.
And in the violet,
I am reminded of the one I miss.
But when I return home,
To the Violet Hill,
In the calm of the breeze,
I hear my feet crunch on the ground
And finally I see the autumn-colored leaves.
You always loved the colors of fall.
And finally when I look at the sky,
Everything I see is you.
And when I step on this violet hill,
I can feel the sky
Blessed with your presence.
And I finally I realize that
I don't need your physical presence,
Because I am already in your heaven,
Violet Hill.



BY: ANNIE BLEVINS

I am a junior studying English and Spanish. Since I was a child, I have always favored writing as an outlet for my creativity, and I now enjoy writing in Spanish since learning it at Lyon. Like both of my submissions in this issue of *The Wheelbarrow*, most of what I write is inspired by my family and the life they provided me growing up on a small farm in rural Arkansas. This poem is inspired by my grandpa who passed away in August 2024; in his final days, one of his only wishes was to be at home on our farm in Violet Hill, Arkansas. This wish resonated deeply with me, as I now have a better appreciation of what the farm I once viewed as “boring” has done for me and my family. Violet Hill is the one place that will always carry my grandpa with it, and, like Grandpa, I am now grateful for every chance I get to go home.



“ÉPHÉMÈRE”

Pour Neiget:

*Tu es gentil et douce,
N'est pas comme un pamplemousse!
Tu n'es pas mechant,
Mais très plaisant.
Je t'aime, je t'aime, je t'aime.
Tu es mon crème de la crème.*

Pour Neiget:

*You are kind and sweet,
Not like a grapefruit!
You are not mean,
But very pleasant.
I love you, I love you, I love you.
You are my “crème de la crème.”*

Pour Neigette:

*Aussi douce que sucre,
Aussi brillante que des diamants,
Tu es mignonne aussi que souris
Et tu soulages mes soucis.
J'adore la façon dont tes yeux brillent
Et la façon dont tu es gentille.*

Pour Neigette:

*As sweet as sugar,
As brilliant as diamonds,
You are as cute as a mouse
And you assuage my worries.
I love the way your eyes shine
And the way you are kind.*

BY: EMILY BERRY

I am a Biology major with a French minor. I wrote these poems as part of my French short story assignment about two snowpeople in love. Unfortunately, they are made of snow, and thus their love is ephemeral. I hope you adore these poems half as much as I enjoyed writing them.

“THE BARBARY”

Someone told me about the barbary
Its mane so dark, black like a lover's heart.
Gone, punished, desolated by a lost tree,
In his solace, wandering with a wrong start.
Each step towards nothing but the desert sea.
Was he who wandered really to blame?
No! No! The lion's liability
Has nothing much for him to be ashamed.
We are who the sights should carefully scope,
Dirty, sad, and pathetic beasts who destroy
Our blue enormous marble held by rope.
With time we lose again, wrecking joy.
The barbary should heed a call to all:
Keeping this pace will result in our fall.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *The truth behind this sonnet lies within the human race itself. The barbary lion was an African lion that lived in north western parts of Africa in the Sahara desert; it had this darker and beautiful fur that was very attractive to British, French, and American game hunters (more on that in a moment.) Archeologists found bones of the fantastic beast dating all the way back to over a hundred thousand years ago. The reason for this sonnet's existence is solely because of the eradication of the barbary, for the lion no longer exists in the wild, and in fact most domesticated ones in zoos are crossbred so often that they barely even resemble their ancestors. Many speculate that a well-known photo shows the last male barbary of that entire region. Think about the desolation that the lion felt, wandering all alone until his last breath. The saddest part is that humans were the sole cause of their extinction, for the lions were a thriving and dominating species in the area. It was human's greed for furs and trophies that led to their demise and the point of this sonnet is to show just how much impact humans have on the world and the fact that we continue to destroy ecosystems without even batting an eye, for our own personal gain. I crafted this sonnet to be sort of an awareness piece to a sad extinction in history that many do not know about, yet is our own doing; lost to time and lost to the world, so this is why I made this sonnet, for I wanted to remind everyone of what we have done and what we continue to do.*

BY: JAYSON NICHOLS

I am a fiction novelist who writes transgressive and horror novels. I have published one horror novel, *Dead Fashion*, and I am working on a new manuscript titled *To Catch a Predator*, which is set to be released within the next year. I am from Montevideo, Minnesota, and, on most days, I enjoy writing... a lot. I do not do poetry as often, but I have been getting a surge in interest in Shakespearean sonnets and have started to write a collection of sonnets in Shakespearean format. I plan on attending a graduate program when I graduate from Lyon.



“SANA SANA”

There are tender reminders of home
The sizzling of tortillas,
Freshly cut onions and cilantro,
Tickling my nose—
Soft conversations with my mom
Her calloused hands
Showing a lifetime of labor.

The use of Spanglish with my aunt,
Making tamales and masa
Oozing
Out of the corn husk.
With full stomachs and loud laughter,
We play music that sings to my soul—
Passion moving through my body,
I dance.

I watch
The life my family brings to the music,
Two people becoming one,
Moving seamlessly.
Pride fills me
With both cultures I was made from,

What could be more beautiful?



BY: BRYANNA ROSARIO

I am a junior English major with a minor in Communications. I am from Texas and am Puerto Rican and Mexican. I enjoy writing short stories and poems. I also have an interest in journalism and library science. I work for *The Highlander* Newspaper at Lyon too!

“MY BODY IS MY WORTH”

My body is my worth

You see me as a womb
Not just for a babe
You hold me in your tomb
The wind beneath your cape

I hold so much meaning
You will only see my body
Pinch me while I am dreaming
You wonder what I embody

You assume my purpose
Based upon my appearance
You call me your Venus
My name will be a disappearance

I wonder what I would be
If my parts were different than me

Tear apart my anatomy
Pass me around as a souvenir
My meaning is not a tragedy
Every generation I will reappear

My body is my worth

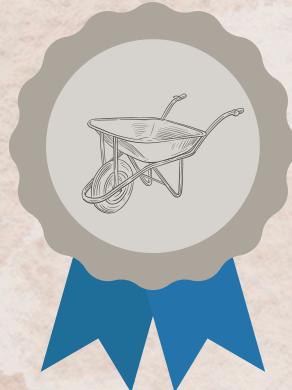
BY: CARI MEEKS

My title “My Body is My Worth” stems from my interest in portraying the innate feminine struggle within society. I have always have a interest in feminism and portraying that interest through my art works. This particular poem was inspired by “The Venus of Willendorf,” a small sculpture found years ago that celebrates beauty, resilience, and the mystery of divine femininity. I am a junior Psychology major with an Art minor at Lyon. I currently serve as the Communications Liaison for *The Wheelbarrow* and co-host of the podcast *Psych'd*. My interests include drawing, gardening, and spending time with my cat, Zeppelin.

Faculty Awards for Prose



First Place
“SEEING MYSELF ANEW”
By: Jayden Hughes



Honorable Mention
“THE BLISS OF IGNORANCE”
By: Robert Lee



“SPECKLED GREEN AND BROWN”

I climbed out of my old lumpy bed, stretching my legs as I stared at the newly laced spider web stretched between one of the room’s corners where the off-white wall meets the popcorn ceiling; I would be sending my dad on a spider hunt very soon. I could already hear his speech: “This is one of them good spiders that eat the bad spiders so we can’t kill it. And don’t kill them crickets that get in here either. Catch ‘em with a napkin or something and throw ‘em back out on the porch. They don’t do any harm. When you live on a farm, you have to get used to the stuff that gets in.” I would not be catching crickets or spiders anytime soon.

I walked from my bedroom to the living room down the hallway, feeling the familiar sting of the rough old carpet scratching my feet as the floorboards creaked and groaned. My parents’ voices became clearer the closer I came to the end of the corridor. “Brooks, can you please do something about the hole in the ceiling?” I heard my mom ask for probably the millionth time that year.

“It’s not a *hole* in the ceiling. It’s just a spot where you can see the shiplap that was there when my grandparents still lived here. Besides, don’t you think it’s modern?” I entered the room just in time for my dad to shoot me a grin, signaling the beginning of our regular game of agreeing with each other about things we knew annoyed my mom.

“Yeah, I don’t know what you’re complaining about, Mom. We’re lucky to have something so unique,” I responded, glancing at my dad to see his pleased expression.

Mom knew this game, and she knew how to end it quickly. “Yeah, that’s not what you say about his truck.”

The topic of Dad’s truck had haunted me since he first started picking me up from school in it. Proudly perched in what little grass thrived in our front yard, the truck unapologetically caught the attention of anyone driving by. It was fine in 1992 when my dad bought it right after graduating from college, but after thirty years, its age showed, quickly becoming the bane of my existence.

I dreaded the days from elementary to high school when my mom warned me that my dad would be picking me up from school. Forced to line up with the rest of the students in front of the giant windows of our student union, I awaited my fate; I always

knew my ride home had arrived when I heard the screeching and humming of a truck not yet in sight. I tried to ignore the awe of everyone around me as the old truck clanked up the smooth gray parking lot, falling in line right between all the newer vehicles. Traipsing toward the eyesore tainting the parking lot, I always met the wide grin of my dad, celebrating another successful embarrassment.

The truck was white with a rusted bumper and giant green and brown speckled dots, my dad having allowed my brother and me to spray paint it years prior. It did not have a working radio or air conditioner so Dad always opened the windows unless it was winter. It only had functioning windshield wipers if the weather was sunny and clear, and it housed endless leaves and dirt, having compiled them over years without proper cleaning. It protected the beloved trinkets Dad gathered from his many adventures in it, including a perfectly round rock resembling a potato, a pair of wire glasses with no lenses, a name tag from his first job in college, and a number of bugs and abandoned wasp nests. The truck sat on the grass in our front yard every day of my life, often becoming the topic of conversation anytime we had guests.

“I have to check the road to see if I can ride my bike on it tomorrow if you want to come,” my dad said to me, interrupting my thoughts. “I also need to make sure the new tire I put on the truck yesterday is working good.”

“If you’re taking the truck, then no,” I retorted. He nodded, seeming to mask a sort of disappointment I chose to ignore, knowing I regularly turned down his truck adventures.

“Brooks, that truck is on the verge of breaking down more every time you drive it,” my mom said, leaving the room. She stuck her head back into sight. “And fix the ceiling, please!” she begged, disappearing into the hallway.

“Okay, but someday you two will realize how cool the truck really is,” he responded, trying to cover up his gloomier mood. Walking toward the back of the house to finish working in his garden, he hefted open the loud back door, its loose metal knob clanking. He trailed off, barely visible through the back window where I suddenly found my eyes following him.

Dad trudged toward the garden, needing to tend to the crops after such a dry summer. Putting one foot in front of the other with a slight limp, he ambled on, having broken his foot a few weeks prior. He stopped just before the entrance, grabbing the old wooden hoe leaning against the mangled fencepost. He tugged at his ragged white garden shirt covered in holes, speckled in large green and brown stains. For a moment I thought I glimpsed the old truck. It rolled on, ushering my parents state to state for the first years of their marriage, carting my brother back to our home in Arkansas at only nine months old, always reliably picking me up from school, never giving up on my dad.

I turned around, walking to the window of the front door to look at it displayed in its usual spot in the front yard, its green and brown dots beginning to blend with the orange sunset. I turned back around, heading for my room before hearing the truck door screech open just out of sight of the window. I heard the engine fail its first two attempts to start, finally steadyng on the third. Realizing my dad had decided to go on his adventure before the sun went down, I found myself running outside to catch him before he left in the truck.

“Change your mind?” he said, climbing out of the truck to open my door on the passenger side. The engine sputtered with every second it sat motionless.

I grinned, watching and learning from his brief lesson on how to open the door. I mimicked my dad’s motions, putting all of my weight against the door, heaving up the handle as soon as it got far enough back, and yanking it open with all of my strength. I celebrated as the door swung wide, an awful screeching noise following.

“All right, now you’re one step closer to being able to have the truck someday,” Dad said, making his way back around the front to the wheel.

I slid in along the rough blue cushion seat, pushing newspapers and feed sacks to the side to clear my way. I jumped at the sight of a small cricket bounding merrily along the dash in front of me. Calling for Dad, I watched him fearlessly grab it, tossing it out the window as I comfortably settled into the truck. In just a moment I smelled the familiar dust and gasoline filling the air as the truck perfected by my dad over the last thirty years took us on a new adventure.

BY: ANNIE BLEVINS

“THE BLISS OF IGNORANCE”

The golden rays of a late May afternoon bathed our backyard in a warm, inviting glow, as a familiar rhythm echoed through the sliding glass doors. That knock, light yet insistent, was a promise to whatever adventure awaited beyond the threshold. Without a second thought, I slid the door open, my heart racing with the eager curiosity that only a child can possess. My friends stood there, teenagers with kind eyes and easy smiles as if they had stepped out of a storybook just for me. In their company, I never once questioned why they chose to spend their time with someone so much younger; the innocence of childhood spared me from such doubts.

The sun’s stifling heat pressed down with a relentless intensity, pushing my friends and me to the shaded sanctuary of the back porch. We lingered there, savoring the cool respite, before starting our usual journey toward the fence that separated our two homes. Despite the stark difference in appearance, their home had an inexplicable charm. Where our home stood fresh and welcoming, the light yellow paint gleaming in the sun, theirs had an aura of faded grandeur. The once vibrant white paint now clung desperately to the warped wooden siding, flaking off in long, curling strips that littered the overgrown lawn like the pages of a forgotten story. The windows were now clouded with age, their frames sagging slightly as if burdened by the weight of time. The roof, once an elegant slate, now bore patches where shingles had slipped away, exposing the dark underbelly of the house to the elements. The porch sagged in the middle, its railings crooked and splintered, leading to a front door that hung slightly askew as if it had given up trying to keep the outside world at bay. Yet, beneath its weathered exterior, the house seemed to breathe, a living entity steeped in history, echoing with the laughter and secrets of those who had called it home long before I was born. There was something about the house that drew me in, its feeling of warmth and acceptance disguising its dilapidated state.

As we reached the chain link fence, my nostrils started to clog and my lungs started to feel heavy. The smell of smoke still seemed to linger from the house fire a few days prior. We never could figure out what caused the house a few doors down to

burst into flames. The only thing enticing my interest that day was the massive fleet of fire trucks that charged past my house. Watching the firefighters rush towards danger and fight the fire as the red lights flashed upon their backs was fantastic. I'd felt no sense of danger as I watched them. My parents must have been stressed, worrying about the fire potentially spreading to our house, but I couldn't have cared less about anything except the fearless action heroes demolishing the fire to protect us.

A sudden jolt pulled me from my thoughts. A pair of strong hands lifted me over the fence. This was probably my favorite part of playing with my friends. It may seem like a simple act, but to me, it wasn't. Repeated countless times, it never ceased to fill me with a sense of belonging, a sense of knowing that the big kids wanted to play with me. It was a gesture that said, *You're one of us*, and it brought a smile to my face every time.

It always baffled me that their backyard was so barren. Unlike mine, which possessed such a grand fortress, their yard had nothing, and that never seemed to bother them. We always found something to do with each other, and like every other day, today was no exception. Today we were entomologists scrounging beneath every rock we could find for roly pollies. Some people call them pill bugs, but the small black-plated insects will always be roly pollies to me.

At an unbelievably fast rate, these small bugs filled my small hands. The bugs overflowed at times as they gathered the courage to unroll themselves and crawl away. I couldn't do anything to keep them there or I would risk losing all of them. Holding them tickled my hands, as I felt the few courageous roly pollies wriggle across my hands trying to escape.

When one of the boys suggested I dump the roly pollies on his sister, I didn't hesitate to set the plan into motion. Perhaps there was a spark of mischief in me, or maybe I simply didn't understand the line between right and wrong just yet. All I knew was that this was a game, and I was eager to play my part. With my heart pounding I slid the patio door open with a whisper, and I darted behind the counter to avoid being seen.

The interior of their house was a world unto itself, a place where time seemed to have slowed, leaving everything in a state of gentle disarray. As I started stalking my

way toward the living room, I tried my best to survey my surroundings to avoid being seen. I focused on each cautious step to keep the floorboards from creaking. The soft filtered light seeping through the heavy patterned drapes dimly lit the living room. They were a deep burgundy, frayed at the edges, and covered with a fine layer of dust that danced in the air whenever the fabric stirred. The wallpaper, once vibrant with intricate floral patterns faded over the years into pale muted colors echoing their former states. My goal, a large overstuffed couch, dominated the center of the room, its once-plush cushions now sagging and tattered. The upholstery, a faded green velvet, was worn smooth in spots, giving it a patchy, almost ghostly appearance. It was the kind of couch that seemed to swallow you whole when you sat on it, the cushions enveloping you in a cocoon of softness.

As quietly as I could manage, I crept behind it. I stood on my tiptoes and peered over the edge. My friends' sister sat there with her blonde hair glinting in the soft light. I didn't think twice as I opened my hands, watching in awe as the roly pollies tumbled down like tiny black raindrops.

For a moment, there was silence. Then, her scream pierced the air, sharp and shrill, as she realized what had happened. Panic surged through me as she turned, her eyes blazing with anger. The boys' laughter echoed from outside, but any amusement transferred from that laughter quickly faded as I saw the hurt and shock in her eyes. Suddenly, the game didn't seem so fun anymore. The realization hit me like a wave. I caused this and turned her moment of peace into one of fear and anger. The thrill of the prank vanished, replaced by a sinking feeling of regret. I stumbled backward, my protests of innocence weak and hollow as I tried to escape the consequences of what I had done. But no matter how fast I ran, the truth clung to me. As I bolted for the door, the weight of my thoughtless actions pressed down on me, leaving me with the harsh but valuable lesson that every choice, no matter how small, carries with it a weight of responsibility, a responsibility I had yet to fully understand.



BY: ROBERT LEE

I am a junior at Lyon College, double majoring in English and Education: 7-12. I have been working on this memoir for about four years, revising and expanding it as I recall new details. If any childhood memory defines me, it would be this one. If not, then it's probably another from my backyard. Writing has become a way for me to explore personal growth, resilience, and the power of reflection.

“SEEING MYSELF ANEW”

My car sat parked in the St. Timothy's Anglican Church parking lot, as it had so many times before. It was just down the street from my high school, where I just left. I waited for his gold Chrysler to pull up beside me. I checked his location on my phone. My heart was racing. He was close. The seconds passing felt like hours as I watched the road ahead like an eagle stalking its prey. Except this time, I was the prey, and he was the eagle.

When I finally saw the specks of his gold car through the trees, I unclicked my seatbelt and braced myself for what was to come. He pulled into the parking spot next to me, exited his car, and stepped into mine. He slammed the door so hard that my entire car shook slightly. I didn't look at him. He didn't look at me. Neither of us spoke immediately. We just sat there silently, staring at the illustrious green of the spring leaves. Finally, I turned my gaze to his face. I could see angry redness flushed in his cheeks, even through his brown skin. I got up the courage to speak, but before the words escaped my lips, I saw a tear trickle down his cheek. I hated seeing him cry. I knew when he cried, it was not from sadness but from anger. This made my chest tighten. I reached out my hand to wipe the tear away, but he grabbed my wrist before my fingers could touch him. He glared at me, deep into the very depths of my soul.

"I'm sorry," I said, looking into his eyes, searching for a tiny glimpse of the guy I once knew. "Don't fucking touch me," he spat, throwing my wrist away from his grasp. I could feel my hands start to shake. Anxiety-ridden, I turned away from him to face the windshield, searching for some form of comfort from the beautiful spring day that was mere inches away from me. "Why don't you love me anymore?" he queried. I paused momentarily, uncertain how to respond in a way that wouldn't provoke him further. "I do love you," I said. The words sounded unconvincing, even to me, as they passed my lips. I think the doubt in my voice induced what was to come.

"You don't love me!" he screamed. "You don't even like me!" Tears began streaming down his face. I stared in horror as the drops became a stream pouring and seeping into his shirt and blue jeans. Snot dripped from his nose, quickly running to his mouth and chin. I can't even remember what he was saying. But I do remember the sporadic movements of his body, the constant look of anguish and hate that overtook

that face. That face. The face that once looked at me with so much love and tenderness now snarled at me with hate and vengeance. Those eyes I had stared into with love for the past three years now glared at me with resentment and hostility. I wanted to look at that old face again. I wanted to peer into those old eyes again. But they were long gone, and this angry shell of a boy was all that was left.

The sudden movement towards me quickly snapped me out of my gaze. He was on my side of the car. He was reaching and grabbing at me, trying to pull me closer to him. Instinctively, I pressed my body against the driver's side door, desperately trying to keep my distance. In a microsecond, I felt both of his hands wrap around my throat, his fingers squeezing me so tightly, like a boa constrictor strangling its next meal. My eyes immediately began to water uncontrollably. He crawled onto his knees and rested them on the center console of my car. He bore all of his body weight into his hands as he gripped my neck tighter and tighter. I started to see small specks of white, like little stars, in the night sky. He pressed his forehead against mine as I struggled to gasp for air. "No one will ever love you the way I do. Don't ever fucking think that you can just leave me. I'm the best you're ever gonna get." His voice was quiet, and his teeth were gritted so tightly that he never seemed to open his mouth. I could feel myself losing my strength as the seconds ticked by. *He's going to kill me*, I thought.

In a panic, I fidgeted with the door, but my body was pressed so firmly against it that I couldn't find the handle. At that moment, I was certain I was going to die. "I love you, Jayden," he whispered so quietly I almost didn't hear him. He began repeating himself over and over again as he started kissing the tears from my cheeks. "I never want to have to hurt you like this." I looked deep into his eyes, and for a singular moment, I thought I saw him. The old him. The one I was so desperately in love with. But as soon as I thought I had him, I lost him again. I managed to adjust myself slightly, revealing the door handle that could free me. I reached for it, and the door finally gave way. The pressure from my body forced it open quickly, and I fell out of my car and onto the hot, hard pavement of the St. Timothy's Anglican Church parking lot.

The impact from the ground knocked my breath away. I struggled to push myself to my hands and knees. The loose rocks of the pavement dug into my skin. I managed to get to my feet, and before I knew it, I was running. Running for my life. I bolted from

the parking lot to the grass and trees. There were houses all around me. I thought if I got to one, someone would offer me help. I screamed at the top of my lungs, "HELP! PLEASE! SOMEONE HELP ME!" Tears clouded my vision as I continued running as fast as my legs would allow. I screamed until my vocal cords couldn't take it anymore. I screamed for my dad. I wanted him to magically appear and catch me in his arms. To hold me while I sob and tell me that everything was going to be okay. Suddenly, I felt a force behind me, and I was tackled to the ground.

My body was done. I couldn't fight him any longer. I slumped into my tormentor's arms and pressed my face against his chest. "I'm sorry, Jayden," he said through gasps of air. "I'm so sorry, baby." I felt the wet tears from his eyes landing on my head as we both sobbed in the grass. "Please just let me go home," I begged. "I want my dad." We sat still for a moment as we caught our breath. After what felt like centuries, he picked me up off the ground and began walking me back to the parking lot. I hugged myself hard, trying to find an ounce of comfort. He continued apologizing, but all I heard was the soft humming of his voice.

When we returned to my car, the driver's side door still open, I crawled onto the seat. He stayed outside, draping his arm over the door. I stared at the ground, refusing to meet his gaze. He planted a delicate kiss on my forehead, so gentle compared to what had just happened. "Go home," he said. "Text me when you make it back." I said nothing. "I love you," he said, rubbing his hand over my thigh. There was a brief, awkward silence. "I love you too," I said as I started my car. He smiled and closed my door.

I drove home in silence that day, completely drained, both physically and emotionally. When I pulled into the driveway of my dad's house, I pulled down the visor and looked at myself in the mirror. My eyes were bloodshot, and the bags under my eyes were swollen and puffy. *Never again*, I thought to myself. *Never again*. I cleaned myself up and walked into my childhood home. The door slammed behind me as my little grey frenchie sprinted towards me. "Hayden Jope!" I heard my dad yell from the kitchen. Walking down the hall, I saw him standing at the island, assembling hotdogs on white bread. "How you doin'?" he asked as he walked over to embrace me. He hugged me, and I smelled the cologne on his shirt. It brought me so much comfort. I felt myself wanting to

to cry again. But I refused. I couldn't let my poor dad know the pain I was in. I couldn't let him know I put myself in a situation he tried so hard to teach me to avoid. "I'm good," I said, lying straight through my teeth. "I need to go take a shower; I stink." I walked to my bathroom and gently closed the door. I turned the water on, removed my clothes, and stepped into the shower. I let the scorching hot water run over my face. I took a deep breath and audibly sighed, "Never again."



BY: JAYDEN HUGHES

I am a native of Jonesboro, AR and am currently a junior Political Science/English major at Lyon College. I plan to attend law school after graduation to become a human rights attorney.

I have a passion for writing, specifically creative nonfiction. These two works chronicle experiences from my life that have helped shape me into the person I am today. When not writing, I enjoy "listening to fire music and eating pizza rolls."



“YELLOW SPACE”

Alpha-743B: Entering Earth’s Atmosphere, begin landing sequence.

Alpha-743B: Exiting Earth’s Atmosphere; New Cargo Acquired:

- 15 unknown plant species
- Human Female (Captured for Reproductive Purposes)

I can’t say how long I’ve been here, only that I’m forgetting my life on Earth. All I know is my room on the ship and the greenhouse I rarely visit. From the little I can understand, it seems my purpose here is to see if humans can bear their offspring.

If I could communicate with them, I’d say they need a better sense of interior decorating. All I have here is paper, which I’m writing on now, and a bed that’s nailed to the floor. The worst part of all? The hideous yellow fluorescent lighting in my room. It gives the room an eerie feeling, and it gives me the worst headache.

I’ve conveyed this to my “doctor,” but he doesn’t care. How typical, men don’t listen to women on Earth, why would space be any different? He probably thinks I’m crazy. Who knows though, if this were a normal situation, he’d probably be most women’s dream husband.

Alpha-743B: Log #1; Dr. Kariv

After many trials, the implant has taken hold. We will soon see if she will successfully bear the offspring of our race. If so, Earth will be our new home. It appears that the only

complication has been the living quarters. She disapproves of the light, but it is as important to the Olkaro as the sun is to humans. It is necessary if the offspring is to survive.

Dr. Kariv, signing out.

I've tried to stay positive, but I really hate space- not to mention there's an *alien* growing in me. I have thought about escaping, but how? Every door is locked, and only the doctor can open them. Death's always an option, but I don't think I'm ready to go down that road. All I can do is write and stare at this yellow light.

I've never liked yellow, but now I loathe it. The light is so strange that I wish I had no lights at all. There's a never-ending swirling, creating strange patterns on anything that basks in it; it's starting to scare me a bit. I've literally been abducted by aliens, yet this is what freaks me out the most? I'm definitely going crazy.

Alpha-743B: Log #2; Dr. Kariv

The lighting is creating the desired effect within the human. The child grows daily and has not troubled her yet. I will have to run more tests, but so far this has been the best attempt at reproduction. The main problem if this works will be the yellow Olkaro fluorescents required for the birthing process, but that will all be figured out in due time.

Dr. Kariv, signing out.

I should probably be more freaked out about the whole alien baby thing, but I can't stop thinking about this light. It's almost as if it is calling me. Don't get me wrong, that eerie feeling is still going strong, but I can't help but watch it. The life-like shadows dancing on the walls seem to be reaching out to me. Perhaps they need my help?

What if this light is trapping them just as it has trapped me? It's a good thing I was placed on this ship. I can help them escape too, even if this plan seems truly crazy.

Alpha-743B: Log #3; Dr. Kariv

The child is to be delivered soon, but something is wrong with the human. I walked into the room to find her lying in the middle of the floor. She had no reaction to the door opening; she was just staring up at the yellow fluorescents. These lights may have more of an effect than I thought.

Dr. Kariv, signing out.

Today is the day! I will free these creatures from their torment! Every day their faces have grown more haunted and more *crazed*. The creatures, myself, and even this baby could have a chance. All that's stopping us now is this yellow light. I feel a connection with these creatures, all of us being held against our will. I must save them, all of us, from this room.

All I need to do is break the lights! To do this, I have stolen rocks from the greenhouse. These lights will not keep me trapped anymore. I refuse to live in another place where I am viewed as nothing but something to bear children. I can hear the aliens coming now. I must act fast, shattering each of these lights until we're free. It's unlikely that anyone will read this, and they may think I'm crazy if they do, but I, Astra Gray, will be a martyr for us all.

Alpha-743B: Log #4; Dr. Kariv

The baby was successfully delivered, but not without casualties. Upon retrieving the human from her room, she was found in distress. She was breaking the yellow

fluorescents in her room in a panicked daze. We are unsure of her motives, but she kept screaming about “freeing them all.” She served her purpose, though she lost her life in the process. The stress was too much for her fragile state. We will begin our descent to Earth and devise a plan for integrating with human society. The baby will remain here to learn the ways of the Olkaro before we all inhabit this new planet. I will find a wife on Earth and see if we can bear more than one child . We have found a place to reside with walls the same color as our lighting. This has proven to be easier than thought.

Dr. Kariv, signing out.

Six Months Later

In this new chapter of life, I've decided to take up journaling. I'm married to Dr. John Kariv, and he's the husband of my dreams. We're expecting our first baby, and he's overjoyed. We even got a home with a nursery! I'm excited to decorate it, but John is being stubborn over the wallpaper. I think that the yellow he has installed is horrendous, but he says I'm being crazy. He assures me that it's a wonderful color for a baby.

BY: JILLIAN WOOD

I am a Communication Studies Major from Bluff Dale, Texas. I am a member of both the Lyon Honors Program and the Lyon Cheer Team. Outside of school, I enjoy reading, making new crafts, and hanging out with friends and family.

“THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE”

“Good afternoon class.” My professor’s voice quickly snapped me out of my daydream. “This week’s lesson is going to focus on the role of the media. Last week we discussed how some freedoms are not absolute. Should the government regulate the media?” Dr. Davis eagerly questioned the class. This was an American Experience class, which is an introductory level course required for all Lyon College students. The class is similar to a civics course and aims to educate students on how the United States government works. Dr. Davis was smaller in size, but he had a passionate personality that captivated students. He usually had a coffee or energy drink in hand, and he lectured with passion and animation. I wished to raise my hand and answer his question; however, I served as a Supplemental Instructor for this class, meaning I was not enrolled in the course. I offered tutoring sessions twice a week for students to prepare for exams and attain additional knowledge. Furthermore, I did not participate in the class; I was only allowed to attend in order to observe and stay refreshed on the material.

“Maybe you all didn’t understand the question. I am asking if you think the government should control what people can post on social media. One could argue that regulation is bad because it limits freedom of speech. One could also argue that regulation could help limit misinformation and hate speech. What do you all think?” The class answered with silence. The class always answered with silence. Every lecture looked the same: Dr. Davis begged for class participation, and the class returned the plea with stone-cold looks and silence. “Anyone feel free to weigh in here.” Again, he was met with no answer. I began to feel frustrated. I started looking around the packed classroom, using my eyes to encourage someone, anyone, to speak up. I saw one student asleep, one student looking out the window, multiple students on their phones, and the rest staring blankly at Dr. Davis, as if he should answer the question for them. These same students were not attending my review sessions.

“Maybe we’re not awake yet. Do I need to do a cartwheel?” Dr. Davis faced silence again, yet he stepped back and showed an impressive cartwheel to the class. I felt emotional. Dr. Davis was practically on his knees begging for these students to participate, begging for them to care, yet none of them met him halfway. None of the students tried to speak up. Dr. Davis moved on with the lesson. He lectured off of slides to the expressionless, zombie-like students. Bewildered, I tried to justify the students’ behavior, but when I thought of their possible excuses, it only infuriated me. The students enrolled in this class without knowing the basic concepts of American

Experience, such as the three branches of government, yet they felt entitled to passing grades. The more I thought about their entitlement, the angrier I became. They should want to understand the American government. These students would be voters some day! Why were they not being responsible citizens? More importantly, why were they not passionate about learning? As Dr. Davis neared the end of his lecture, I tried to control my emotions and move on; however, packing up my supplies and beginning to walk to my Spanish class, I still felt frustrated.

I realized that no one spoke up because those particular students refuse to recognize and capitalize on the opportunity Lyon College gives them to learn. Even if students feel nervous to participate, it is still their responsibility to prepare and engage in lectures, especially when professors ask them questions. Making eye contact, giving head nods, taking notes, and avoiding technology use are all ways for students to show that they are engaging in the lecture. Those actions are the standard; they are necessary for success. Students should actively participate in their own learning process. They should realize that learning is a continuum and concepts build on one another. They should be passionate about the information they could learn from their coursework, and more importantly, they should apply the information they learn. The ability to learn is a sacred gift worth cherishing that is too easily getting taken for granted.

In order to maintain its stellar academic reputation, Lyon College relies on students to create and uphold a community of higher learning. Students must take accountability for their learning experience, as well as their success within higher learning. By not participating in class, not doing the assigned readings, not scheduling meetings with professors, and not taking responsibility for their academic preparedness, students hinder themselves and the rest of the community surrounding them. My academic success is dependent on me, but it is also dependent on the students in my classes. How much could I possibly learn from an in-class discussion with students that didn't read the assigned articles or chapters? College education is a collective action issue that requires the entire community to pull their weight. The ability to absorb and retain information is a privilege that should be recognized and appreciated. Lyon College provides the resources for its students to excel, but success depends on the effort supplied by the community.

Unfortunately, the underappreciation, lack of responsibility, and absence of accountability does not just appear in education. American citizens continuously fail to uphold their civic

duty. Democracy is fragile, and without engaged citizens, is vulnerable to collapse; democracy is facing a collective action problem. Citizens must appreciate the democratic process and remain actively engaged in government. It is our civic duty, our responsibility, to educate ourselves on political affairs and vote accordingly. It is our responsibility, not our parents', peers', professors', or the media's, to stay updated on politics and discern what is true. By not upholding your civic duty, you are affecting and letting down everyone around you.

After my classes ended for the day, I reflected on my feelings and wished the rest of my peers adopted these values about education. As I got dressed for practice, I pulled up my kneepads and thought to myself, *“What would happen if my teammates showed up to practice as unprepared as the students in my classes or the voters casting their ballots?”*

BY: MADELINE HOPSON

I am a Psychology and Political Science double major with a Pre-law concentration. I am a junior and a part of the Lyon Volleyball team. I serve as *The Wheelbarrow*'s Executive Editor, the Writing Center Tutor for Lyon College, and hold several other student leadership positions on campus. After graduating from Lyon, I plan on attending law school. I wrote "The American Experience" to bring awareness to student participation in the classroom. I am hopeful that my piece will serve as a call to action, motivating students to actively engage with their professors and coursework.

“FAITH, FAMILY, AND FEAR: BEING QUEER IN THE BIBLE BELT”

I always knew Griffin was gay. We'd known each other since first grade, and the moment I met him, even in my naive six-year-old brain, I knew he liked boys. It wasn't until we were sixteen and juniors in high school that he told me. Even at that age, we couldn't have had the slightest idea of how difficult his life would become. It wasn't Griffin's sexuality that was the problem, but the misguided religious prejudice from family and friends. This prejudice, deeply ingrained in the Southern Baptist community where we lived, would soon take a devastating toll on Griffin in ways none of us could have anticipated.

It was the summer of 2020. A group of our friends gathered at my house to spend a relaxing day by the pool before we had to go back to school. We all made basic conversation, gossiping about notorious high school couples who broke up for the summer, who had a "glow-up" from rigorous athletic training, which teachers we were excited to see again, and which ones we weren't so excited to see. Underneath the glistening summer sun, we all looked like Abercrombie models lying on various multicolored floaties. As I let the UV rays penetrate my deeply tanned face, I turned my head to face Griffin. He was treading water next to me, his arms sprawling over my floatie's side. His amber hair sparkled in the afternoon sun, and the freckles that covered his nose and cheeks multiplied significantly when we were outside. I smiled at him, and he smiled back at me, his dimples like crescent moons on either side of his face.

The shine from Griffin's wrist diverted my attention from his face. I looked down at his hands and noticed a rainbow-beaded bracelet looped around his pale wrist.

"What's that?" I asked, a sly smirk on my lips. Griffin said nothing, returning the same grin.

"Is it okay for people to know about it now?" I inquired.

"Yes. I think people are finally starting to figure it out," he replied, relief engulfing his expression. "But I have something to tell you. Can we go somewhere more private?" I reluctantly rolled off my floaty into the cool water. We waded through the

pool and walked to the back door of my house. As I stepped into the kitchen, I heard Griffin shut the door behind us.

"What's up?" I asked.

"I told my parents," he said with a defeated look.

"Oh shit. How'd that go?"

"Not great," he sighed.

I knew this was coming. Griffin's parents are devout members of the Southern Baptist Convention, a denomination that has long stood against same-sex relationships, preaching that they are not in line with "Biblical values." Growing up, Griffin had always lived under the weight of those beliefs. They spent Sundays at church, where sermons often warned against sin, and his parents made it clear that their faith guided every decision they made. I had always wondered how Griffin balanced the person he truly was with his family's expectations.

"So, what happened?" I asked, bracing myself.

Griffin sighed, his shoulders slumping as he spoke. "They left a Bible on my bed. Leviticus 18:22 was highlighted. You know, the verse that says, 'Man shall not lie with man.' They didn't say anything to my face—just left it there like that's supposed to tell me everything I need to know."

My heart dropped. I'd heard stories like this before, but hearing it from someone I loved felt different. It wasn't just the rejection—it was the silence—the way his parents chose to communicate their disapproval without even the decency of a conversation. It was as if their religion had become a barrier between them and their own son. Griffin, who was always so full of life, now stood in front of me, defeated.

For many LGBTQ+ youth in the South, Griffin's story is heartbreakingly familiar. While acceptance of queer individuals has been growing across the country, the South remains a much harder place to live authentically. According to a 2023 study by Pew Research, only 44% of Southerners support same-sex marriage, compared to over 60% in other regions like the Northeast and the West (Pew Research, 2023). In deeply religious states like Mississippi and Alabama, opposition to LGBTQ+ rights is even stronger, often fueled by conservative Christian beliefs that continue to dominate public opinion.

But these numbers don't just reflect opinions—they reveal the harsh realities faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, especially those growing up in religious households. A shocking 40% of homeless youth in the U.S. identify as LGBTQ+ and a large portion of them come from Southern states where family rejection is far more common. Griffin had a roof over his head, but emotionally, he was just as isolated. His parents' disapproval hung over him like a storm cloud, constantly threatening to pull him down.

"I just don't get it," he continued, his voice breaking. "How can they say they love me but then reject me for being who I am? It's like I'm living two lives. The one I show them, and the real me."

I didn't know what to say. There wasn't much I could say that would take away the hurt of being rejected by the people who were supposed to love him unconditionally. Griffin had always been such a bright, positive force in my life, and seeing him broken by his parents' silent condemnation hit me hard. It felt as if all the words I wanted to offer weren't enough. How could I truly understand the weight of his experience? I knew that his struggle wasn't just about acceptance—it was about survival in an environment that was anything but forgiving.

Studies show that living in an unaccepting environment has a profound impact on mental health, especially for queer youth. The Trevor Project's 2022 survey revealed that 42% of LGBTQ+ youth in the U.S. seriously considered suicide that year, a number that's even higher in conservative regions like the South (The Trevor Project, 2022). Griffin wasn't just dealing with the pressure of hiding who he was—he was facing the internal struggle that so many queer people experience when they feel like they have to choose between their identity and the love of their family. I knew that for Griffin, every time his parents refused to acknowledge his truth, it reinforced the painful reality that he might never get the acceptance he deserved.

As I stood there in the kitchen, watching my best friend struggle with his emotions, I couldn't help but feel angry. Not at Griffin, but at the world he had to navigate—the expectations, the judgment, the fear. Being queer in the South was more than just an identity. For Griffin, it felt like a battle for survival.

Griffin's story is a painful reminder that, even as we progress toward LGBTQ+ acceptance across the U.S., the South remains a difficult place for many queer

individuals to thrive. Religion, tradition, and deeply ingrained social norms narrow the path to acceptance, often at the cost of personal well-being and family bonds. Yet, for every story like Griffin's, there is hope that the tide is slowly turning. As more people begin to challenge the status quo, there is potential for a future where young people like Griffin won't have to choose between their identity and the love of their families.

But that change isn't happening fast enough. The statistics are clear: LGBTQ+ youth in the South continue to face higher rates of discrimination, homelessness, and mental health struggles than their peers in other regions. As allies and friends, we have the responsibility to be the support system that so many lack, to create spaces where queer individuals don't have to hide who they are for fear of rejection. I may not have had the perfect words for Griffin that day, but I realized that sometimes, just being there—offering a safe space and unconditional love—can be enough to make a world of difference.

Three years later, Griffin's journey has become one of quiet resilience and finding pockets of acceptance close to home. He's now attending college in our hometown and still lives in the same house with his parents. While his family remains a source of tension, he has discovered a supportive community on campus—a group that fully embraces and values him for who he is. This network has given him the strength to navigate the complexities of living in a household that doesn't entirely accept him, proving that acceptance can sometimes be found even where we least expect it.

If Griffin's story teaches us anything, it's that the fight for LGBTQ+ rights and acceptance isn't just about laws or public opinion. It's about the small moments, the personal connections, and the willingness to stand by someone when the world feels like it's against them. And maybe, one day, stories like Griffin's will be the exception, not the rule.

BY: JAYDEN HUGHES

Works Cited

Pew Research Center. "Public Opinion on Same-Sex Marriage." Pew Research Center, 13 June 2023, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2023/06/13/public-opinion-on-same-sex-marriage/. Accessed 14 Oct. 2024.

The Trevor Project. "2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health." The Trevor Project, 2022, www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/. Accessed 14 Oct. 2024.

Williams Institute. "LGBTQ Youth and Homelessness." UCLA School of Law Williams Institute, 13 Jan. 2023, williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbtq-youth-homelessness/. Accessed 14 Oct. 2024.

“BROKEN SPANISH”

Anticipation filled my stomach as Damian and I exited the plane. We gazed at the flurry of people rushing off and followed our grandparents who had taken us to Puerto Rico. My grandma smiled softly at us, her grandchildren whom she loved more than she could express in English. This was my first experience of feeling like a part of me was missing. As we collected our bags and left the airport, the evening air blew softly through the green trees that flourished with *Flor de Magas*. The vibrant flowers contrasted beautifully with the green that seemed to cover the island's hills and winding roads throughout the mountains. I had never seen nature so beautiful before.

My grandparents led my brother and I to an assumed family member's car, and I silently stared outside watching the scenery change from green landscapes to the city full of twinkling lights and electrical wires with shoes hanging limply. The car gently pulled into a suburb with houses identical in build and into the driveway of the small, plain, white house. My grandparents exited the car and we grabbed our luggage. Damian and I stayed close for comfort in the unfamiliar surroundings as we were led through the quiet house. We were introduced to the room we shared with mint green walls and a full sized bed with white covers. When my grandparents left us alone for the night, my grandma, Lillian, departed with a firm hug and kiss on the forehead. My grandfather, Louis, said “I love you guides” with his thick Puerto Rican accent and exited slowly. Damian and I chattered excitedly about being in a different country and how beautiful the island was. We went to sleep after the excitement faded into waiting for the next day.

When we woke, my grandma made us breakfast that we ate quickly, thrilled for the plans of the day. We would be heading to the beach and eating afterwards. Damian and I had made our quick exit with my grandparents to the beach and I was in awe of the shockingly white sand and pale blue water. I played games with Damian for hours on end, swimming and collecting shells throughout the sand. My mom had called after seeing s pictures my grandma insisted on taking of us on the beach and speaking effortlessly in Spanish, unlike the short sentences I had only heard from her in English. The foreign words strung together unintelligibly and the feeling that I was missing something struck again. When my grandma and mom ended their conversation, our happy family went on the journey to find somewhere to eat. As a young child, learning how different food and countries were so exciting- almost as exciting as the pizza cone stand we had found.

“¿Tuquieres?” the stand worker asked innocently.

Her dark brown eyes studied me with a slight impatience. I didn’t understand her and my grandma promptly took over. I felt the heat rising to the back of my neck and a blush creep into my cheeks out of embarrassment. The flicker of disappointment of hers was evident paired with my wide eyed expression.

These were the beginning of moments that led to shame filled silences and a distance separating me from the culture that matters most. Frustration began to fill me as I berated myself for understanding too little or too late. I could feel claws of envy gripping my stomach seeing my grandmother interact so easily with others and the thought of how my mother could know her in a way that I couldn’t comprehend. The way my grandma can make quips to my mother that she found so amusing and cues I seemed to miss in another language that I should inherently know.

My intense longing comes with a need to place blame. I blame my mother for not teaching me her native language. How could she teach us, raising two children herself though? That won’t do. When this interaction and trip to Puerto Rico run their course, my brother and I return home to my mom and stepmom in Texas. I start to notice interactions throughout the years, like older Hispanic people ordering at a restaurant or needing help in stores, speaking imperfect English. The gaze full of judgement and the palpable shame is visible of these people who are trying their best for their new home. I start to blame American culture for emphasizing the importance of English and judging those speaking in their mother tongue. I resent this society that is supposed to celebrate diversity, yet separates people who do not fit their ideal “American.” I am filled to the brim with generations of anger that I can’t express properly. The diversity of Puerto Rican culture makes our traditions, language, and food so unique and vibrant. Why can’t my home country accept that?

I am living with the discontent of my relationship to my culture and language; however, I educate myself every day and will one day be able to talk to my extended family fluently. I will joke theatrically and dance with the rhythm I inherited. I will be full of life and be able to extend this understanding to anyone I meet. My culture will not die with me, for I am always the patient learner and curious spirit.

BY: BRYANNA ROSARIO

“LEAVES”

Turning back, I hollered, “hurry up slow poke, we are going to miss it.” My calves were burning; it seemed as if we had been walking for hours. I was out of water, and my mouth was getting very dry. Why didn’t I bring more water, I thought.

“Hey bro, can I have a drink of your water?”

“Just don’t drink it all,” he replied, grinning. The water was cool, as if it were one of the streams we encountered a few miles back. My four-legged companion looked intently at me as I poured some of the water into a small collapsible bowl and knelt to let her lap up the precious resource. As she raised her long snout, a sort of smile crossed her face as to thank me for the consideration. My feet and calves loosened up a little, but it did not last long—we were going to miss it. We started the climb once more, the leaves falling and crunching beneath our feet and the canopy of the trees hastening the darkening of the forest. “Just a little farther.” My brother was walking next to me now, and we both saw an opening in the trees and quickened our steps.

I did not have to coerce Halo; her four paws welcomed the increase in pace. We came to the edge of a gigantic cliff, and the sky was on fire! It was magnificent; the leaves arrayed in their golden hues seemed to reflect the fading sunlight, making the winding valley shimmer. The valley looked like a snake with shiny golden scales that lit up the sky with its fiery breath. We found a moss-covered log that once stood as a sentinel to the magnificent valley that fell long ago in the wars with the wind. It served us well as we watched the sun fade to its abode beyond the rim of the mountains. The cold air brought occasion for coffee, my brother and I’s favorite cold weather drink. I opened my small pack and collected the necessities to make the brewed cups of deliciousness. My mouth was watering already. I found my small aluminum French press and my single-burner camp stove. I hastily looked through the other compartment of my day bag and asked my brother, “Do you have the coffee?” Halo stared at me blankly. I looked through my bag again, hoping I had not forgot it, and then apparently, a look of horror touched my face because my brother asked, “Are you ok?” Not only did I forget the coffee, but I also forgot the flashlights. The missing pieces of our trip were still sitting on the counter at home. Halo suddenly put her paws over her snout and exhaled dramatically as if to say, “You had one job.” I scooted closer to my brother and whispered, “I forgot the flashlights;” he proceeded by jumping off the moss-covered log and calling me an idiot. We had taken in the view until the snake’s scales stopped shining and fell into a slumber, awaiting the next day it would grace the valley with its sunshine. We didn’t get to enjoy a tasty cup of coffee, and it was time to head back to the vehicle about four miles away. There was a thought

looming over both of us and an eagerness over our companion: “How were we going to get back in the dark?”

The full moon started its trek across the night sky; however, it was not very useful once we began to trace our footsteps back towards the vehicle. The tree canopy choked out the dim light that would have aided us in our predicament. The trail was not well marked to begin with because of the few visitors that took it. The woods seemed lonely, yet tingling with life. The leaves escaping the trees’ grasps covered the forest floor; it was hard to make out what was trail and what was not. Halo’s ears kept perking up and going back down. We were traveling close together to ensure we stayed on the path—it was more difficult than I imagined— nevertheless, we kept going. We could not find the trail markers nailed to the trees. We saw a few as we started back, but it was as if they had all become invisible. The markers were, as I remembered them, dark green—not the color I would have picked—it was no surprise we could not find them. My calves were burning, but I did not pay much attention to them; I was too worried about finding our way back.

Things were starting to look unfamiliar; the spiders were busy making their elegant webs, but I was tired of walking through them!

“Hey, bro, do you want to take the lead?”

As my brother led on, I couldn’t help but chuckle through the worry. We were pushing through scratchy tree limbs and dodging tree roots; Halo had no problem keeping up, but she was still on guard. She did not like where we were going; maybe she sensed that we were slowly getting off trail. We kept walking in the dimness of the forest—for hours we walked— seeming to get nowhere. We all stopped to come up with a better plan. After a few minutes of talking and sharing our worries, we decided to try to find the dirt road we drove in on. We knew it was to the east of us, so we made a straight line to the east—if only it were that easy. We encountered walls of thorns, almost impenetrable; however, we fought our way through the jagged daggers, but not without seething pain. Halo wove through the thorns like a professional, her thick coat acting as armor against the foe’s furious fire blades. The cuts throbbed with a fierce fire, making the rest of the trek miserable.

My hopes faded; we would have to spend the night in the woods. It was then I saw Halo’s ears perk up and her head snap to the left; I was not expecting the instant tug; the next thing I knew, her leash was burning through my hand, and she sprung ahead of us, barking as she went. We blindly sprinted after her. “Woof Woof.” It was like she was trying to say follow me, as if it was some twisted game. The only way we knew where she went was by her constant barking. My body was aching, but I paid no attention to it – my dog was loose! We hurried to where we heard the excited barking. We dreaded the pain

from the thorns, but we had to close the gap between Halo and us because, if we could not, our night would get even worse. My brother and I, both gasping for air and clearing the sticky spider webs from our faces, had caught up with Halo, and suddenly, we heard the low grumble of an engine and saw the glow of headlights. “Good girl,” I said to our new trail guide as I bent down and patted her on the head, her tail wagging. We had made it to the dirt road that led us to this miserable hike, except we were on the upward side of the road, which stretched out for who knows how long. We walked down the mountain along the dusty dirt drive to our vehicle parked in a small rocky parking lot – we were all glad to be back where we started. My brother and I looked at each other shaking our heads; Halo seemed to move her head along with us. “NEVER AGAIN,” we said to each other as we sat our things in the seats behind us. Halo jumped in, and we eased down the mountain, ready for a hot shower and a soft bed.

The leaves had fallen, grown back, and started to turn to their golden hues again; Halo was wagging her tail with her leash in her mouth. My brother shouted, “Do you have the flashlights?”

“Yes, do you have the coffee?”

“Sure do.”

We were off to admire that snake awaiting us in the valley once more.

BY: SETH MOORE

I am a Senior English Education major at Lyon College who enjoys reading and draws inspiration from nature. This short memoir expresses this inspiration. I enjoy spending time in the garden, tending to vegetables and flowers. I also love spending time with my family and friends. I recently took on the challenge of learning fly fishing and enjoy shooting archery at Lyon. My pup, featured in the memoir, my family, and my Lord and Savior fill my life with joy.

