

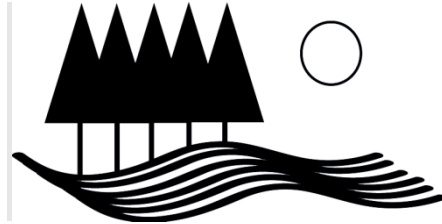


Black River
Review

S P R I N G 2 0 2 2

BLACK RIVER REVIEW

A Journal of Poetry, Prose, and Fine Arts



Jefferson Community College
State University of New York
Watertown, New York

Volume XXXII
Spring 2022

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COVER ART

Emma Corbett
Colors for All Seasons
(oil painting)

Opinions expressed by the authors and artists do not necessarily reflect those of the editors or of Jefferson Community College.

SUBMISSIONS

The editors seek original submissions for the *Black River Review* in the following categories:

Poetry: Up to 7 poems, not to exceed 50 lines each

Fiction: Up to 2 short stories, not to exceed 1500 words each

Non-Fiction: Up to 2 essays, not to exceed 1500 words each

Plays: Up to 2 one-act plays, not to exceed 1500 words each

Artwork: Up to 4 works in the original medium, such as black ink or charcoal drawing, computer graphics, b/w photographs, even if printed from color film

Music: Up to 2 compositions 16 or more measures in length

Only submissions from Jefferson Community College students (full or part time), faculty, staff, and alumni will be considered. Cash awards for outstanding work will be awarded.

The editors also seek original submissions for *North Country Writers* in the following categories:

Poetry: Not to exceed 100 lines

Short Fiction: 1,000-3,000 words

Essay/Non-fiction: 1,000-3,000 words

Open to all who live (or have lived) in the North Country. Entries must be previously unpublished work, in letter quality, double spaced, and should reflect a connection to the North Country. A maximum of 3 submissions will be considered from any one participant. Winners from the previous year will not be considered in the same category.

\$75 first place prize in each category with online publication.

\$25 honorable mention prize in each category with online publication.

Submitting and presenting work:

For both the *Black River Review* and *North Country Writers* submissions, include name, address, and phone number on each submitted work as well as a biographical note of 30 words or fewer when submitting for either publication; remove name from manuscript. See <http://www.sunyjefferson.edu/brr> for submission forms. All submissions become the property of the *Black River Review*; submitted works will not be returned. However, after first publication, all rights revert back to authors.

Award recipients are encouraged to participate in the reading of works and presentation of awards during the *Black River Review* unveiling in May 2022.

Deadline for Volume XXXIII: February 24, 2023

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CREDITS

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Christine Pristash

Introduction

This year's edition is full of great surprises. Part of that, for me, is the surprise of learning someone I know is an artist or writer, including two of my wonderful colleagues. The visuals of Dr. Cynthia Lonsbary's "Fighting Chalk Dragons" are so beautiful and capture the magic and imagination of childhood. Margaret Taylor is clearly a double threat with her photography in "My Country" and writing skills in "The Black Hair Experience."

While I was pleasantly surprised by the choices our contributors made in their works, I was not surprised to see the level of talent represented. Vatressa Teamoh submitted another impressive musical composition with "mollitiam," and you can see the full composition (and listen to the recording) in the online edition of the BRR. Several of our contributors took inspiration from the classics. Ed DeMattia successfully captured the humor and bawdiness of Chaucer in "The Sailor's Tale." Malachi Adkins was able to take creative twists on several writers, including his use of white space in "An Excerpt from the Personal Writings of Eleos and Dice." Artist Anna Snell was able to transfer one of DaVinci's oil paintings into pencil with skill.

Ultimately, I am surprised and honored to find myself the editor of another year of the Black River Review. . . and grateful for the work that my colleagues put into this publication. Happy reading!

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Emma Corbett
Nature's Bounty



Emma King

Map to My Heart

The treasure you are pursuing has been hunted by many a greedy sailor seeking only riches, so you will have to carefully adhere to the following guidelines to distinguish yourself from these men. The island will be paying close attention to your conduct.

Before you set sail, make sure to dress thoughtfully for your trip and maintain good hygiene the whole way.

Head for the Sea of Faith. Once there, locate an archipelago known as the Kindness Islands. It should be a smooth and uncomplicated journey for now, provided you remain in control of your ship and attitude.

Eventually, you'll spot a rocky wind-worn island that the locals call "The Fortress." Nobody has set foot here due to the jagged stones dotting the shallow water by the coastline. Legend has it they were put there to protect the fortune hidden on the island.

Be sure to get off your ship and into a rowboat well away from the island to avoid getting scuttled by those rocks. The humble and honest approach is best.

Don't approach the shore until the time is right. This area is known to have sudden, unpredictable squalls. If you rush, you are likely to get smashed against the cliffs by the waves.

Once you're on the beach, don't simply tie up your rowboat. Bury it halfway, as the island doesn't take kindly to lack of commitment.

Remember to appreciate the wildlife; it is unique to this island. Listen to the unusual birds; they have interesting things to say. Be gentle and take care not to accidentally step on the ants. They are doing their best.

Make your way to the lithic mountain towering on the west side. You will find a springy patch of grass with some roses at the base of the mountain. Pick only one and put it in your lapel. This island isn't *completely* geared against you, even if it may appear to be. It has been waiting for you a long time.

Face the steep rock wall that forms the beginning of the mountain. Tell it your best joke. If the mountain is pleased, a portion of the wall will crumble, revealing a much easier surface to climb.

Scale the mountain. It may be exceedingly difficult at times, but don't give up. Do you want this treasure or not? You're almost there.

Pull yourself up onto the peak of the mountain. The wind up here thunders through the atmosphere as it wraps around you, so be careful not to fall. Reciprocate its embrace; it's just excited to see you.

Sing a song. Serenade the island. Pour the truest parts of your soul into your music. If you have demonstrated respect and care on your journey, the wind will blow away a pit of sand a few paces from where you are standing.

This is the moment you've been waiting for. Everything your heart desires—that missing piece of you—is inside the empty pit. Treat it like the most valuable treasure in the world, and you will be a merry man.

Emma Corbett
Tiny Home



Ed DeMattia
The Sailor's Tale
Chaucer (Reading Version)

A merchant he was, all riches and swag,
And a wife, she wasn't no ugly hag.
No, she was pretty, a pretty little thing,
Only thing she wanted was a little more bling.
So she went to his cousin, a monk they say
But his name Don John was a giveaway.
He's trouble I know, he's trouble you'll see,
When the merchant's away they're going to part-ee.
Don John meets the lady in the garden one day
Says you look unhappy, whatcha gots ta say?
I can't tell you cuzzin, you are famil-ee
He tells her I'm no more family than that yonder tree.
She unloads on the monk all of her woes
How her hubby ignores her, and off he goes
To buy more merch and dice to sell
Why she'd kill herself out of pity if there wasn't no hell
Now my pretty, don't cry, the monk replies
Come, let me dry those big blue eyes
So they nuzzled and petted and maybe said some things
Til she whispered I could use me a little more bling
An even hundred would do it, would put me in style
And if you had the silver I'd make it worth your while
He says why sure my lady a c-note ain't nothin' to me
If it makes you smile, if it makes you happ-ee
So he sees the merchant the very next day
And says cousin my cousin can you front me some hay
I gots ta buy some horses, some cows and sheep
For the abbey you know, they likes ta pile it deep
Why sure says the merchant what's mine is yours never fear
And while I'm gone stay and drink of my beer.
You can eat of my good, you can break my bread
But here's a word of warning, stay outta my bed.
So the merchant leaves town the very next day,
And the monk and the lady commence to play.
Three days of swivin', three days in the hay,
Thanks for the hun I heard her say.

When the merchant returns he looks for his bro
He says cousin I'm broke I need that hundred you know
Don John looks 'im in the eyeballs and smiles a big smile
Says I gave your lady the money ta tide her over a while.
HmMMM says the merchant I wasn't countin' on that
I may be canny, do I smell a rat?
His lady says I bought this fancy, do you like it on me?
The merchant says I like it so much I've got a wood-ee
She says well there now my lord, I'll give you a tumble,
We'll wiggle the bed, we will make it rumble.
So she showed her husband all that he was missin'
And for two more nights they were huggin' and kissin'
Til he told her honey say goodbye to your friend
You can keep the money just don't do it again.

Anna Snell

**Pastiche of Leonardo da Vinci's Lady with an Ermine,
in oils**



Malachi Adkins
Dr. Faustus' Sonnet

I run alone down toward The One I praise
as wives' tales say that hell is full of burn,
and only I receive communiques,
and shove me down that hole that is to learn.

And here I see no Lord of Heaven free.
The Lord of ground will rest forever here,
Sitting amid the world, full seventy
centuries alone in this flaming, clear

abode. In some ways, he does love friendship.
I can have all the wives I need or want.
The angels are not welcome where I trip.
I turn and burn and sign and bleed with blunt,

Old quills whose ink spills from my boiling veins,
and now I go down to my Lord in vain.

Anna Snell
Momentary



Zoe Turtura

Gin

Started out with a baby face
Blue eyes seem to be the catch
Brown has only gotten my attention once
But I haven't gone back since then
Your picture was always my favorite
2013

Friendly waves and loose jeans
I was too afraid to explain the way I felt about you
But your eyes felt like a hole would burn when I stared at the image
of you
2015

There were mixed emotions and your new favorite color was green
But you were still kind and I was still shy
The excitement from seeing your humorous outlines
2017

Drinking and I waited for you by the swings
I always knew you were my teenage dream
But happiness all leads back to one thing
2019

You had completely changed
Long hair no more skateboards
And that girl you were with, I wanted to believe you weren't only
bored

Your frame had dimmed its light
I guess you got lost in the sea
Looking back,
We really grew up
You went down the wrong path while I built my road up
Scarred with the way your eyes lit up
A familiar pain when I hear a plane fly over
A specific mark when I see pink in the sky
There is nothing in my brain more memorable than that night
But I would do it again, waiting for you at those swings
2020

in the yearbook, your face is now missing

Malachi Adkins

An Excerpt From the Personal Writings of Eleos and Dice

<u>The less popular</u>	<u>The less popular</u>
<u>Notion.</u>	<u>Notion?</u>
<u>No one seeks</u>	Quite simply,
<u>me.</u>	She doesn't know
<u>not for their fathers.</u>	the natural order of the world.
<u>The cliché I read in those books</u>	It is only right
<u>"I will seek justice for my father's passing!"</u>	
<u>It often saddens me</u>	
<u>Knowing so many ignore me</u>	
<u>and my benevolent teachings.</u>	
<u>No matter,</u>	
<u>I show them compassion</u>	
<u>Despite the fact they deserve none.</u>	
That the one	<u>"Eli, Eli, lemasabachthani?"</u>
who makes the world	<u>I think that's what one of them said</u>
run smoothly	<u>as they received no justice</u>
gets the Praise	<u>because,</u>
I've always	<u>while I may be beautiful</u>
so,	<u>and I may be merciful</u>
rightfully	<u>They prefer their gods</u>
deserved	<u>blind.</u>

Margaret Taylor
My Country



Cynthia Lonsbary
Fighting Chalk Dragons

A hot, damp August afternoon, a bucket of chalk and a black driveway.

With a few quick strokes, a red and purple dragon looms,
its dusty roar rending the stillness of the dull, sticky day.

The mighty wizard rises, ready to face the foe and cloaked in resolve.
Fountains of cold droplets spray from her magic wand,
Splash! Just like that, the fearsome dragon's snarling head dissolves!

Woosh! The powerful body and vicious claws trickle away down the drive.

The wizard laughs in victory watching the colors swirl,
She may be little, but she is the mightiest wizard alive!

The foe is defeated, and stillness returns to the hot August afternoon.

The girl who battles chalk dragons drips with water and giggles.
She smiles as she heads inside, thinking she should do this again... soon.

Salin Davis
Mangetsu



Wilson Garcia

Blank Stare Effigy

(None shall ever love you as I do.)

There are rooms buried deep inside the mind.
In them, weaving memories of our lives.
Is the machinery of the enchanted loom found inside.
Lighting up when it transcribes.
Exposes the two ghouls,
Who desired nothing better but to hide.
To hide their love ballads from a world unkind.
Now, some rooms are left unkempt,
Abandoned as if something was left behind to die.
Animating my life. I rise to walk,
Down the cobbled steps of time.
I found that underneath the Vatican.
Spiraling downward,
Somewhere inside was a “well kept” catacomb.
There stood a statue shrouded with gold linen,
The Papal Goat.
Engraved with the description.
“The Baphomet. This magnificent creature sought to illustrate the
dark vapor found within us all.”
Drenching the ego in darkness.
Which creeps on us every night.
Here on Earth,
I could feel my celestial kin keeping me company alongside the
heartaches I routinely fester at.
Clasping my hands,
Lurking behind
Are the sounds of a weeping widow.
Simultaneously we both fell to whisper, “There you are.”
Uplifting, her head.
Inching up closer.
We meet in between that shared space,
Of that encompassing darkness found all around us.
And gently she spoke.

“You did it again.”

I nod to agree,

As grief arms us with misery.

Together we transfer much-needed comfort with our company.

Looking away are the angels who frown at our incestuous behavior.

But we being far from the light of God, have long accepted our fate.

Caressing my chest.

We collide as one.

I Smile, She fangs.

Her mouth filled with bees, grief, and raging hate.

Alyssa Van Epps
Scholar of Mortality



Ed DeMattia

Bouquet

Her loving fingers stroked the petals
as she lowered the roses into the stream.
Her newborn son had not survived birth
and in her delirium she saw his tiny face
in the bouquet that took his place in her arms.
The petals, soft as his skin,
haunted her as she held them to her breast
a prayer that they would reanimate,
would somehow become him.
But flowers cannot suckle, not even this armful.
They found her bed empty, they followed the trail of petals
to the water's edge and watched
as she slowly lowered herself into the river.
Her hair mingled with the petals
as the current took them away.

Malachi Adkins

**Macbeth, King of West End, North Carolina, Reflects on
His Life Choices**

Perhaps I shouldn't have listened
to the witches on the corner,
taunting me with my future.

Put your palms out.
Look deep in my crystal ball.
Stir my cauldron.
Pick a card.
Not
that card.

Spiders will divine your death.
Beware those born of a caesarean section.
or those with a knife,
a .22,
the will to live.

Beware those who breathe and eat and drink
Heed my words or pay the price.
How?
That is for you.

Vatressa Teamoh
Excerpt from mollitiam

12

39

B♭ Cl.
F Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
Tba.
Timp.
Timp.
Con. Sn.
Con. BD
C. Toms
Cr. Cym.
Pno.
Hrp.
Vlns.
Vlas.
Vcs.
Vc.

pp
f
f
f

Note: For the full version of this song, along with a recording, please visit the digital version of the Black River Review.

30

B \flat Cl. *f*

F Hn. *f* *dim.* *p*

B \flat Tpt. *f* *dim.* *p*

Tbn. *f* *dim.* *p*

Tba. *f*

Timp.

Timp.

Con. Sn. *f*

Con. BD *f*

C. Toms

Cr. Cym. *fff* *mf* *fff*

Pno. *f*

Hrp.

Vlns. *f* *mf*

Vlas. *f* *mf* *f*

Vcs. *fff*

33

B♭ Cl. *fff* *f dim.----- p*
 F Hn. *f* *f dim.----- p*
 B♭ Tpt. *f* *f dim.----- p*
 Tbn. *f* *f dim.----- p*
 Tba. *f* *f dim.----- p*
 Timp. *f dim.----- mf*
 Timp.
 Con. Sn. *f dim.----- p*
 Con. BD
 C. Toms
 Cr. Cym.
 Pno. *f dim.----- mp*
 Hrp. *f dim.----- mp*
 Vlins.
 Vlas. *f dim. - mf*
 Vcs. *fff*
 Vc.

Anna Snell
The Dance



North Country Writers Contest
Contributors

Michael Keck
Black Creek, Croghan 1962
Winner, Poetry

In April of 1962

it did not matter to anyone if I carried my fish pole on the bus to school or asked the driver to drop me off at the bridge over the Black Creek in Croghan on the way home.

He didn't need a note from my mom,
didn't need permission,
did not have any concerns.

We knew each other, used first names, knew where each lived.

My two brothers and sisters gave me the "look" because of the snow falling, but I had boots on,
had 'em on all day.

It was the first day of trout season.

There were worms in my short sleeve pocket, but I lied to mom, telling her that I would stay right there next to the bridge, instead of walking straight on the Beaver River, running high, where there was an over-cut bank that I could fish from, bouncing a buck tail streamer that my father had tied along the bottom looking for big trout.

With snow falling, I was stripping the fat line into a pool by my feet without paying enough attention to the time as boys like me do.

Boys then did not have watches, we lived by the light.

"Be home by dark" was all that we needed to know better, but it got late and mom couldn't find me.

She stopped into the bar and sent my dad after me, giving him hell again for doing nothing.

I saw him coming down through the pines following my old tracks in the snow.

His face was red. He only wore his old pair of L.L. Bean moccasins, a wooljac shirt, opened. No hat.

"Jesus Christ. Do you know what time it is?"

It was my experience that it is better not to answer a drunk.

He looked up and down the river; at my feet were two large trout, gasping for air

as pretty as the Adirondacks are.

He had come to live here once himself after his father died in a mill accident.

He had been eleven also.

"What are you using?"

"One of your streamers."

I would have to move away that summer. He did, too, after my mother kicked him out.

It was the last time we ever fished together.

Sometimes a life is just how you find it.

There doesn't have to be any blame affixed to it.

James O'Connor

June Hours

Honorable Mention, Poetry

On the wing, a cardinal startles,
Becomes a shadow juking inside the pine tree,
One chirp the clue.

A dragonfly battalion hovers over the lawn,
Held by the precision of glistening wings,
To seek some vantage with prodigious eyes.

I know what I see
But not what they see.

Seeds float by on the golden air.
Little puffs too dodgy to touch.

Of warbling
And other songs,
Duets and solos,
Precise and clear,
Unknowable,
Until the sun
Drops, afire and final.

The sky flares, pales,
And all warmth falls
Away slowly.

We have darkness again.

Shy lightning dances behind a cloud.

The lonely bullfrog moans
For love, for love, for love.

In a long, far salute,
A train whistle caresses the night:

Remember the hard truth of a thousand iron wheels.

Amanda Marshall

Elaine Patterson of Solus Road

Winner, Fiction

A mail carrier was finishing her route on Solus Road. A sigh of relief escaped her chest knowing that she was approaching her last stop. The lake effect snow was taking over the sky, enveloping everything in white, forcing her to drive practically blind. She was grateful that after ten years of delivering mail, she had all the curves and landmarks of the roads memorized. There were four reflectors left on the road. That's how she was able to tell if she was still over the pavement. The little red circles were the only things she could see as she carefully crawled her car through the white abyss. One was on a telephone pole, the next two were on sticks signaling the end of a driveway, and the last one was on Elaine Patterson's mailbox. As the courier deposited the mail, she briefly glanced at the several feet of white fluff that hid Elaine's driveway.

Elaine was completely unaware that the mail had even come. Her old farmhouse sat so far back into the trees that she never heard or saw any happenings beyond her yard. She was sitting in her recliner with her dog's head rested on her leg. He was silently begging for pets which she intermittently gave. The television was on, but it wasn't holding her attention. Her eyes were repeatedly drawn to the window and the blowing white chaos beyond that rattled the old windowpanes. It's been many years since Elaine had to worry about driving in the lake effect snow; her age allowed her to do things at her leisure. This wasn't enough to give her relief though. The longer the snow continued, the tighter her chest felt. Her fridge was practically empty, and she only had two rolls of toilet paper left. Supplies were running low, and she really needed to get to town soon.

If the snow would stop soon, she pondered, I could start clearing the driveway, and then I wouldn't feel so trapped. Elaine looked down at her old Labrador, "Please Wendell, just make it stop if you can." Her short-lived attention prompted the dog to push his black wet nose into her hand, insisting on another pet, which she obliged.

She continued to flip back and forth between two different news stations. Each one had a different opinion of how long the snow would last. She felt the average of the two would give her an answer. Then an old boxy gray phone from the 90s on the table beside her started to ring, prompting the dog into a barking frenzy.

Elaine picked up the phone quickly, trying to stop the barking. “Hell-hello?” she struggled to say over the dog. “Wendell, be quiet!” she yelled, finally silencing him. “Hello sorry about that.”

“Mom, how many times do I have to ask you to stop calling the damn dog that! You and Dad named him Roy!” Elaine’s daughter started, already sounding agitated.

“I’m sorry, Roy. I just can’t help it. It makes me feel like he’s still here,” Elaine defended in a sad tone.

Joy made a loud, audible sigh. “Now I feel like the bad guy. I’m sorry, Mom, it just gives me the creeps. I just called to see how you are doing. Is it snowing hard? Are you going to need any help?”

Elaine briefly looked out the window again; she knew cleaning up this snow was going to be more than she could handle with just her meager shovel. Getting to town was starting to feel like an insurmountable feat. “Oh now, Joy, it’s barely snowing at all. I should be just fine. How are you and the kids?”

“Are you sure because I can arrange a plow for you? It’s not a problem.”

“Oh, no, that’s not necessary,” Elaine insisted. “Please tell me how you are all doing?”

“Everyone is doing great, Mom!” Joy proclaimed. “Johnny is in soccer now and Mira has been painting—oh they are just walking in now—” the background gets loud with voices and Elaine patiently waits for Joy to come back. “Sorry, Mom, I gotta let you go. I told them I’d take them to the beach today, it’s 75 out!” Joy continued in a hurried voice.

“Oh okay. Bye, Joy,” Elaine says quickly.

“Have a good night, Mom!” Joy shouts over the loudness of the background.

“Tell everyone I love—” the phone hangs up before Elaine can finish. She docks the phone, lets out a big sigh, and strokes the dog’s head. Her eyes glance to the window and she noticed that she can see the trees again. The lake effect band must be finally moving south.

“Well, Wend—” Elaine stops herself and starts again. “Well, Roy, we better start shoveling.”

The dog wagged his tail and eagerly pounced alongside Elaine as she made her way to the bench by the door and started to put on her winter layers. Wendell had made the bench early in their marriage, and it was starting to show its age. It had some dents, some spots of unusually thick clear coat matched with areas of almost no

clear coat at all, and the legs were uneven, giving it a slight wobble. Flawed as it was, Elaine could feel admiration for her husband's old creation. She always, after pulling on her boots, caressed it affectionately as if it was Wendell himself.

While finishing up with a scarf, hat, and gloves, Elaine cracked open the door to let Roy outside ahead of her. Roy hesitated at the volume of snow, which had packed a couple of feet up the front door, and then leaped over the stoop steps, fully diving in. Elaine let out a chuckle as she watched him briefly disappear and start to make trails through the white fluff. She grabbed her shovel and cleared off the first stair so she could step outside and close the door behind her.

The horizon already had an orange haze to it, so Elaine knew her time for shoveling in the daylight was waning. Her goal in mind for the evening was simple: clear a path from the front door to the driveway. Unfortunately, though, after she shoveled a foot or two past the front step, she was already losing momentum. She didn't want to give up on her goal, so she took more rests in between bursts of shoveling. At breaks, she would lean some weight into the shovel handle and observe. Aside from Roy's panting and running, the world seemed completely quiet. The wind was gone, and the fresh snow insulated any sounds.

Elaine's eyes trailed down the length of her driveway, then she turned and stared at the little progress she had made. The reality that she was going to need help was starting to sink in, but her thoughts were interrupted by a chattering thrill sound: a squirrel.

"No, Wendell!" Elaine yelled while pointing to her dog, who was growling with his head low. "Don't do it." Elaine continued to raise her voice. "Stay!"

She thought the dog was going to listen, but then the squirrel teased him again with a chatter and he ran for it wildly barking. "Wendell! Come back!" Elaine shouted desperately.

She kept calling for him and even tried to follow his trail, but she knew it was useless. She was no match for the dog's speed, especially with the snow. Squirrels have always been his weakness, especially when they teased him with a chatter. She returned to her shoveled area and helplessly listened as his barks faded into the distance. He always came back, but this had never happened at night before. The outside porch light flickered on as its sensors detected the darkness. Elaine continued to shovel, now using the breaks to alternate calling and listening for the dog.

After another hour, she still hadn't completed her goal, so she gave up shoveling and sat on the steps staring at the pine trees where the dog had disappeared. She hadn't heard or seen any sign of him. The thought of leaving him outside felt unbearable, but the tops of her thighs were starting to feel itchy and numb. The cold was seeping in through her layers, and she had to surrender and go inside. She decided to sleep in her chair so, if he scratched the door, she would hear him.

Once she got all settled with her blankets and the news back on, she immediately noticed the absent space to her right. Elaine repeatedly stroked her right leg, Roy's usual head rest, and began to sob. She threw her head back into the recliner and succumbed to her sadness.

"Please, Wendell, help me," she whispered as tears silently rolled down her cheeks. "Please help. I don't know what I'm going to do."

Elaine stayed up for quite a while longer and every hour or so called for Roy out the front door. Sometime around 3 AM though she finally surrendered to sleep.

Just a few hours later Elaine woke, she immediately looked out the front door and saw nothing. She moved slowly about the kitchen and brewed a pot of coffee; it was the only breakfast option she had. She had no idea what to do next. She had no one to turn for help. Her daughter lived so far away, she hated to be a bother to her. She sat at the kitchen, eyes fixed on the tablecloth floral pattern, when she started to hear a noise. A roaring noise, and a . . . a barking! She immediately flew to the window but couldn't see the end of the driveway where the sounds were coming from. She quickly threw on her winter attire and dashed out the door to confirm what she thought she was hearing. From the end of her shoveled path, she could see it. There was a big white plow truck clearing her driveway, and Roy was happily barking alongside it. Elaine had no idea who was plowing her driveway and could not yet see who it was.

"Roy!" she called. "Get over here!" The dog immediately looked in her direction, perked up his ears, and ran towards her. "Come on," she encouraged as he pranced over.

She hastily grabbed his collar to secure him and embraced him with her other arm. "You dumb dog, don't ever leave me again!"

Still holding the collar, Elaine walked the dog to the house. He seemed more than happy to go inside and rest after a full night of gallivanting. Elaine then returned to the end of her path and could

now see the plow driver's face. Why, it was the mail courier! She briefly stopped plowing to smile, wave, and then continue to push snow. Elaine stood dumbfounded for a moment at this woman's compassionate gesture. She didn't even know her name. After a minute of taking it all in, Elaine's eyes glistened, and she looked up to the sky and said, "Thank you, dearest Wendell, thank you."

Patrick Keck

Work Language

Honorable Mention, Fiction

The new guy would get the worst jobs. That is the way a hierarchy operates. A new person starts at the lowest rung and climbs up from there. Eventually there will be another new guy. The previous new guy was Roberto from somewhere in Mexico. None of the others cared to work with the two newest people. They didn't know much about the new guy, and they knew even less about the Mexican. Everyone figured Roberto knew more English than he let on, but he never said much beyond "sí" and "no." He worked all day at what he was assigned and said nothing. He would visit with the boss and his wife. They were Tex-Mex from El Paso, and they took Roberto in. They spoke Spanish to each other and shared meals on occasion.

The new guy would get this work assignments in each morning and it was left to him to explain to Roberto what had to be done. Sometimes he needed the boss to serve as an interpreter. It was basic work: go to room 210 and empty it out and prep for painting, carry that couch up three flights to room 323, fix or replace the door at room 125. It was okay. There was no problem—it was a job. Both of them were pleased to have work. Robert's accent caused that word to come out as "yob" and it took a while for the new guy to catch on. At first he laughed at Roberto for the way he tried to speak. Then he realized it embarrassed him to seem ignorant. He wasn't a bad sort. He tried to be helpful. Roberto seemed to understand what had to get done.

He didn't need extra instructions. Work was work. He would stay on any task until it was done and done right. He cared about doing a good job. The two young men worked side by side every day. Roberto would stay to work late after everyone had clocked out. There were always extra tasks waiting to get done. The new guy learned to work the same way. They had nothing else waiting for them. Extra work was a better paycheck. For a few weeks, maybe the first month, they didn't say much to each other. Work was work, and they were content with that. No one else bothered them—no one else wanted to find out what difficult task they had to do.

They learned to communicate through their work. Simple drawings on a notepad. Pointing—a warning whistle through their

teeth. A laugh, a grunt. “Oops” became one of their early common words. They would use it and laugh. They had discovered the universal language of work. Work helped them understand each other on a very basic level. There was satisfaction in a job well done. They both understood that sense of achievement. They became work mates. They knew how to work with each other. They both learned to speak the language of work. They were able to build up their work vocabulary. They improved rapidly.

The new guy would get the assignments, but he soon learned to let Roberto take the lead. He knew how to get the job done. The “*job*.” No muss, no fuss. Quick, efficient, clean, precise. No waste of time or effort. They would work together on a job and get it done. Only then would they take a break. Nothing left out of place, nothing to complete. No reason to return later to do something left undone. Pay attention to the job, and don’t get distracted. Don’t get tired, get the task completed, then relax a bit. Think about just the job. Get the job done right. Don’t be stupid. Don’t stand idle; it takes longer to complete the job. Get the next assignment; don’t give them a reason to send them home early. Work late.

They used nods, shrugs, winks, and grins. They would point, raise their eyebrows, and laugh. Give a helping hand, an extra shove, hand over a better tool. Don’t stand back, don’t let the work mate do all the work. Try to help. Don’t leave until both were in agreement. “Good.” “*Sí*.” They used work-words: hammer, nail, crowbar, brush, pail, ladder, and knife. Roberto wanted to learn how to speak English. The new guy learned to speak clearly, slowly, and distinctly. He realized Roberto would watch his mouth speak. He would turn towards him so that he could see. Plain words, building block words. Roberto would practice over and over any new word.

The work words made their workday better, more efficient, more understandable. The new guy noticed Roberto would try to watch his mouth for the words. He would read every word as soon as it was used. He wouldn’t get it right. The new guy would repeat the word. Roberto would try again. Use it later, watch the reaction. Did it come out right? Was it understood? To get a word right was a nod, a grin, a yes, a *sí*. They both said *sí*, both said no. Both would try to get it right—try to make it better—to work at the words. Roberto would practice his new words at night and then try them out the next morning. He would watch for the reaction and adjust the accent. Try again, and again and again.

Every morning before the workday began, the new guy would drink coffee and read *The Oregonian*. It was a way to be connected to the wider world. Roberto would meet up with him to get the day started. Soon, the new guy realized that Roberto would watch him read. Let him read—not disturb him—give him time to finish.

“You wanna read?”

“...*Sí*”

“Sit beside me, man; I will teach you.”

Every morning, they would read the headlines in the paper. The new guy would run his fingers along the word and pronounce it out loud—slowly, distinctly. Roberto would follow his finger across the page closely and intently. He would mouth the word. He would look at the newspaper every day. He would struggle. They would search for news on Mexico, Arizona, and Texas. They searched for local news and any information that helped them understand their place. There was an eruption of news on the activity at Mount St. Helens. Each day, there was more news on the volcano. Roberto could not pronounce the “V.” It would come out as a “W.” Try as he might, the “V” wouldn’t form. “Va-vah-vol-volcano.” The new guy would try each time to help Roberto get it right—“*wolcano*” or as best he could, “*wolcano*.” He would get frustrated. He wanted to get it right. The new guy would laugh. “*Muckin Wolcano*” became their fallback word. “Close enough, man; I know what you mean. Don’t let it bother you. You’re good.” They both would say “*wolcano*” and laugh.

Roberto lived outside town—somewhere, but he never said where. He lived with an American redhead who had a terrible temper and no sense of humor. She made a point to find fault with everything. The new guy would think of the quote by Francis O’ Walsh: “Some people find fault as if it were buried treasure.” That was her. The end of the workday would find them walking out of town. The new guy stopped with his pickup once or twice. “You want a ride, man? I’ll take you home—no problem.”

“No, no thank you, dude. *Gracias*.” She didn’t want anyone to know she was living with a Mexican. She didn’t like the fact that Roberto sent home as much money as he could to his mother, to Quintana Roo, the Yucatán Peninsula. He wasn’t Mexican—he was a Mayan.

Every workday resulted in new words, new meanings, and new phrases. He was even able to talk back to his shrew woman. She

didn't like that either. Roberto became less self-conscious. He would practice his words all day long, knowing the new guy didn't mind and would help him get it right. Pipe wrench, level, sledgehammer, pliers (“*phy-aaes?*”). They worked in the elements: rain, wind, and snow. They watched the Pacific Ocean: whales, seagulls, sand pipers, and crows. The ladies walking on the beach: “Babes, *sí*.” They read the newspaper every morning together, side by side. “*Volcano* will flow,” he said one day.

Roberto had left home when he was sixteen. He never had a chance to go back. He missed his mother. He has ten brothers and sisters—scattered. He knew one brother worked for the Mexican railroad. He thought another brother was in Yuma. He couldn't think about it. He missed his family more than words could say.

The new guy told him, “Ya know, I've always wanted to go to Mexico, 'cept I don't know the language. I don't know what to look out for—wouldn't dare go by myself, but I would take you to your mom. Any time you wanna go, we will head out and go.”

Roberto couldn't think about it. It was too much. It hurt.

“No,” he would say.

“*Sí*, man. Let's go!”

“No.” Then he would look away. He wouldn't show his feelings.

Roberto was a serious worker. He cared about every detail. Skilled, precise, meticulous—he was quick and efficient. He loved to do a good *job*. He showed the new guy all sorts of tricks, shortcuts, and new ways of doing an old task. He could size up any job and know how to get it done. He loved to perform sleight of hand magic tricks, *Juegos de manos*. He was good at distracting someone with one hand while the other was doing the trick. He loved to laugh. Both of them would make each other crack up all day long. When the others were on their lunch break, they would walk on the beach or climb up to the roof of the three-story building to watch for whales, or ships out to sea, disappearing into a swell, to reappear later.

One day, the new guy borrowed the high-powered binoculars from the office and went out to the beach, watching for whales and the ships. Roberto came up and looked at him.

“What is this?” was his unspoken question.

“Here, take a look.”

At first, nothing; then he looked at the binoculars all over. How could this be? He would look again.

“Whales, *sí*.”

“Here, look down the beach, man.”

“...Babes. *Sí*.”

“Checking out da babes, man.”

“...*Sí*, babes. What is this?” he asked.

“Binoculars.”

“...Oh, man, that will be a tough one.”

“Bin-oc-u-lars.”

He smiled. “No, we will work on that one, man.”

“You’ll get it.”

From then on, he would ask if the new guy would get the binoculars to use at lunch time. Feast on sights.

They would go to the roof with the binoculars. It was a better place to watch the whales. They weren’t looking across the surf. They were looking down, past the surf. Seagulls and crows used the roof below to watch for treasures, for food, and for trinkets. They would scatter at first wing then swing back to settle. The crows meant something to Roberto. He called them brothers.

“Smart,” he would say. “They shit on the cowboy. Smart.” Then he would laugh. “Stupid cowboy.”

“*Sí*.” They would watch when the crows would take turns dive bombing the cowboys pick up in the parking lot.

Roberto said, “They will never forget. They will find him wherever he goes. They will always shit on him. They know his hatred—he is bad.”

The cowboy hated Mexicans. He said he “wouldn’t work with no dirty Mexican.” He didn’t like the new guy because he seemed to work well with Roberto. He didn’t like anyone. No one else felt the same way. Roberto was the only illegal anyone knew this far north. He was quiet, kind, and reserved. No one had any reason to hate him. They would talk past him. Talk fast enough so he wasn’t part of the conversation. He was never included in any friendships, never invited home for dinner. He didn’t expect it. “Not many friendly people in the USA,” he would tell the new guy. He would not practice his words in front of the others. He would stay quiet. “*Sí*” and “No” and nothing more. No one knew he understood what they were saying. It was a secret—a strength.

Roberto has been in prison for a while. He didn’t say how long. Robbery—for some food. While there, he had to defend himself against a bully. The bully went to his knees with a knife wound—a shiv. A lawyer got Roberto reported to Nogales. No problem. He was back in Yuma a week later. From there he made his

way north to Apple Valley, Tulelake, Yuba, Klamath, Corvallis, then to the ocean. Away from the border, away from the crowds of illegals. Away from Immigration. He was looking for work and looking for safety. He was sending money home. Roberto started explaining survival to the new guy. He knew his friend was naïve, open, trusting. He showed him how to be wary, to trust no one—to stay on guard and stay alert—to be ready to run and hide.

Roberto showed the new guy how to stand when facing someone, anyone. He warned him every day someone bigger, meaner, stronger would try to take advantage and gain the upper hand. He showed him how to stay on guard, how to hold and carry a knife so it could be reached quick. How to work the sheath and the strap so the knife came out fast with no snags. He showed him how to strike deep and quick, and then run like hell. Don't hesitate—there won't be time. Don't think about it. Run fast. Think later. Look for places to hide. Don't provoke a fight—don't look for trouble. Let the nasty words flow past. Words are nothing. Don't hang around. Don't be seen. Don't get yourself noticed. Don't get drunk. Don't be stupid. Stay safe.

The last day the two friends were together they had walked down the street to go to a bar for lunch. About once a week they would have a meal and a few beers. Dos Equis Beer. Two X's. The two friends. It was an acquired taste. It reminded Roberto of home. The new guy was walking in first, in front of Roberto. Suddenly Roberto grabbed his arm and pulled him back out the door.

“Hey! What the...?”

He didn't understand. They went back down the street at a fast pace. He was wide-eyed and looking straight ahead. When they reached the hedge he turned to look back towards the bar. He looked at the vehicle. He counted quietly. He walked to the office and spoke to the boss in Spanish. They both looked alarmed.

“Stay outta sight, I'll handle it,” the boss said.

The two friends went back to a room they had been painting.

“What's going on?” asked the naïve one.

“Immigration. They are here.”

“You sure? How do you know?”

Two suits—waiting at the bar—no drinks. The new guy never noticed, never gave them a second thought. Someone had

turned him out. Someone felt righteous—“The cowboy.” It didn’t matter. It was done.

“You go now!” Roberto said.

“What? No we’ll figure this out. There’s gotta be something we can do.”

“No, you go now! Go!”

There was no arguing. There was not time. The new guy walked back to the office then saw the dark blue can with yellow lettering pull in the parking lot. Agents with guns drawn. He counted—ten of them. They spread out.

The lead agent was angry with the boss. If they had to search the place each one of them could be arrested for aiding abetting.

“Tell me where he is hiding!”

The new guy couldn’t do it. They pushed him out the door, with a heavy hand on his neck. Each doorway he would call out his friend’s name, fumble with his keys, pretend the door was stuck.

The agents got angry. “Take us to him now.”

Finally to the room they had last worked to completion. By that time he hoped there was enough time for Roberto to run down the beach. He opened the door and he could distinctly smell the pungent smoke from a joint in the freshly painted room.

“A *joint*,” He would call it.

“Dude, what are you doing Man?” He was in disbelief.

Roberto flicked the stub out the window looking at the ocean—the surf, the birds, the whales. He looked at his friend, the new guy and winked. Then he gave him a hug and walked out the door with the agents. He never said a word. He didn’t want them to know he could speak and understand English. All that was left was their tools on the floor.

* * *

It has been years—no, it has been decades. Every time the old guy picks up a tool, he will say out loud, “hammer” or “square” or “level”—clearly, distinctly, sadly. To this day he will complete a job and ask out loud, “Good?”

“...Si”

He always carries binoculars on a walk.

Joshua Kachurak

Moon and Back

Honorable Mention, Fiction

Good evening. I suppose I should start from the beginning. I'm a former astronaut that now, after everything I've seen, fully believes in the unbelievable. When I was a young boy, who couldn't have been older than maybe ten, I was fascinated with the stars, desperate to see what else the universe could show us. The Earth itself never really held interest to me, anyway. It took me time, but I was able to become an astronaut and explore the stars.

I was using one of the more advanced telescopes at our disposal, looking up at the moon shining ever so brightly, studying the finer details. I even took the time to look at the old landing site from the decades past, even noting the condition of a footprint left by a certain Neil Armstrong. During one of these little study sessions, as the moon was waxing, I saw something that both fascinated, yet equally horrified me. About a mile or two away from the old landing site, I kid you not, there was a small, yellow house, complete with living bushes in the front yard and smoke coming from a traditional, brick chimney. The entire complex surrounded by a white picket fence, like it was pulled from some 1950's, small town neighborhood.

I gasped, "What the heck is that...?"

It defied all logic. Several questions flowed through my brain. How could an actual, functional house be on the moon? What kind of plants can thrive on the moon? How did it all get there without any notice? Why is it up there? Biggest of all, who the heck is actually up there? There had to be someone, but there was no rocket and our scanners would pick up a rocket leaving our atmosphere.

I quickly told my superiors about this. They didn't believe me of course, until they saw it with their own eyes. When they saw it, it instantly became an "all hands on deck" situation. We pooled together all our resources to start building a new rocket and trying to figure out how the heck this was even remotely possible. The fact that there is any life on the moon defies all logic as we know it. The fact that smoke was escaping the chimney had all our physicists in a tizzy. The thriving plants in the front yard had the biologists in an uproar. Everyone was trying their hardest to explain it away. But how

could they deny something right in front of them? They just wanted answers. We all did. That wasn't even the most exciting part.

On the second day of close, careful observation, that front door opened and there appeared a man. He wasn't wearing a space suit or any form of protection from the harsh nature of deep space, aside from a regular, black suit and a long, yellow tie. We all stood in awe at the literal man on the moon. He took a deep, dangerous breath and began to walk along the surface. He was acting like he was unaffected by the moon's gravity, treating it like he was right on planet Earth.

It was incredible, baffling, even. Imagine an entire warehouse worth of people staring at the monitors with their jaws wide open and eyes growing dry from refusing to blink. It was like we collectively saw Jesus Christ crawl his way out of some magical hole. We didn't know if we all collectively went mad or if there was a legitimate man walking around up there.

After a few seconds of his stride, he looked up and it was almost like he could see just as clearly as we were staring at him. His eyes widened as he stopped moving. His eyes began welling with tears and near non-existent gravity pulled them down, making them drip off his skin. He smiled and, with a wave of his hand, he gestured for us to come to him in a very calm manner. After a few seconds, it was like he couldn't contain his excitement and began jumping around with genuine glee. If we weren't already working our hardest to get up there, we certainly were after that display.

We all began the stressful, year-long process of rounding up our resources for a round trip to the moon. We had to account for many more things than we normally would for a trip like this. We had to pack even more food than usual, assuming that our new friend needed to eat. We added an extra seat in case he was going to be a new passenger. And had to have a separate area designated to have the void in it, assuming he needed it to breathe. We even began looking for a translator in case he couldn't understand us. God, this was the mission that changed the world and how we viewed outer space.

I was the one specially tasked with keeping an eye on our easily excitable moon man. I was asked to keep tabs on his daily activities, his mannerism, his potential threat level to us upon our arrival, and anything out of the ordinary. Yeah, "Out of the ordinary" he said, as if a man living on the moon was a common occurrence.

The only time I could observe him was in the evening and almost every single night was all the same. He would go outside and look down at us, happily smiling. Every few hours, he would come outside and read part of a book. I didn't know what he was reading, as I just couldn't zoom in. About once a week, he would come outside and tend to his bushes with these remarkably tiny gardening shears. He did so with what looked like a glimmer of pride in his emerald eyes, occasionally stopping to look up at us. It was as if he was keeping tabs on us, just as much as we were on him. For whatever it was worth, it felt like we were bonding.

A couple of the mannerisms I observed from him were that he was absolutely ecstatic at just about everything related to humanity. I'm not sure if he could hear us, but he could certainly see us as easily as we could see him. It was wonderful. He would look down on us in a simple, calm manner. It made me feel like a child again. He made me feel like a child again, blissfully rediscovering the stars.

A year of our back and forths went on and it was finally time to physically meet him. I was so excited, I could've had a heart attack. We packed up my supplies and I headed on my way to the stars. In the end, it was just myself going up there. For this particular mission, my superiors saw fit that I go up alone. I'm the one that found him, I'm the one to introduce us.

It took quite some time, which felt even longer than what it actually was. Much of the staff back on Earth waited with baited breath, patiently awaiting to hear the progress on our venture. Others were scrambling, frantically trying to get things in order, making sure every single detail was being recorded and documented for future generations.

I looked out one of the windows and saw the man on the moon getting closer and closer. I safely landed on the surface of the moon and almost tripped over myself to meet him. I got out there and he was very calm with a smile across his face. We both stood still for what had to be roughly three full minutes. I know it doesn't exactly sound like much, but imagine sitting there doing nothing, counting up almost two-hundred full seconds of nothing, but pure silence.

I went to ask a question, "Hello—"

He shushed me, "Shh. Sh sh. Not yet. Not yet" he peacefully spoke. "Please. Let me relish in this, just for a moment

longer” he continued, closing his eyes and raising his hand, as if to tell me to calm down.

A few more quiet seconds went by between us. A single tear rolled off his pale cheek as a smile formed across his face.

He took a deep breath, “Please, come inside. You must be exhausted from your longer journey.”

“...Thank you...” I said, nearly exploding.

Every word he spoke came off in a very ghostly, yet soft and soothing whisper. He took me by the hand and slowly ushered me inside, giving me a closer look at his home.

I saw no sign of the extraterrestrial: no space equipment, no advanced technology. If anything, it was a perfect time capsule of a much simpler time. The living room and kitchen were conjoined, making the main area wide open. There were little doilies under serving plates set on the table. It all kind of reminded me of my grandmother’s house. Rest her soul.

“How do you do?” he asked.

“I’m doing incredible” I responded to this man’s question.

I looked over and saw smoke rising from an oven. The moon man walked over and put on an oven mitt.

He gently pulled out a roasted chicken and placed it on the table, “Please, forgive me. It didn’t occur to me that you would have to wear your helmet in here.”

“Believe me, it’s perfectly fine. Thank you for even considering...”

He smiled, “So, at long last, what is your name?”

“Charles. Charles Banks. A-and yours?”

“Alright, Charlie. You may call me Ralph.”

We sat at his dining table with the chicken sitting between us. He stared right at me and smiled, loving every second of our encounter.

“Thank you,” he said. He took a deep breath and looked out his glass window and looked down to Earth, “Thank you for going so far out of your way to come and visit me today.”

“What even are you?” I asked.

He chuckled, “I’m the man on the moon, of course. And I’m so happy to see you, up close and in person. I’ve been up here watching for a long time, you know...”

“How long have you even been up here?”

“Far too long. I was there watching the first fish crawl out of the ocean. I watched the first caveman clack rocks together. I saw

the first flicked switched, the first button pushed. I've seen it all and I never get bored of it. And from day one, I've been nothing, but absolutely proud of you."

I was stunned. Whatever Ralph was, he's seen everything. Every mistake, every pitfall, every great historic tragedy, yet he was still proud of us. How the heck was that possible?

I hesitated, "Is it just you up here? All alone?"

"I was. For a long time, I was. Not you're here and I'm not alone anymore. At least, for a little while... All my life, I've been up here watching each of you grow and develop in your own time."

"You said you were proud of us. Why?"

"I remember a sour time in human history. They would attack each other for no real reason. They were animals" he shuttered. "Then something beautiful happened. You learned. You developed. You evolved. I had the privilege to sit and patiently watch you grow from up here. It was at that moment that I loved you. All of you."

I was left speechless. Ralph not only seemed excited over human things, he was beyond enthralled with them, loving all of it.

"You're very lucky, Charlie. Very lucky, indeed. I hope and pray you know that..." Ralph said.

"What do you mean?" I asked, expecting a simple answer.

"You're a human being," Ralph responded with a sweet smile. "I want that more than anything."

"Why do you envy us so much? What makes us so different from you?"

Ralph's eyes began to water, "I want a family, Charlie. A community, a warm hand to hold. I want to have to pay bills and have small talk with neighbors. I want to be able to say, "How do you do?" to every single person I see on the street. I want to experience these things with my own two hands, not just watch others do it from the heavens above. To feel it on my own skin, to feel sensations I've never felt before... I want to live a life worth living, not sitting on a barren planet."

Oh, my God. He didn't just look like us. He was a human being, at least, in every way that actually mattered. I felt bad for him, genuinely. He had been up on the moon his entire life. I could only ever imagine how lonely that must've been. Even worse, being forced to sit and watch the world move on below him, happy people living their lives without him, just outside his gentle grasp.

That's when I made him an offer.

“Ralph, I have another question. This one is a serious ‘yes’ or a ‘no.’ Do you understand?”

“Please, ask me anything, Charlie. Anything.”

“How would you like to leave this floating rock behind? To actually live among the people you love so much, not just observe them in their happy lives?”

Without saying a word, Ralph stood from his end of the table and slowly walked over to me. I stood to meet him at his level and before I could do anything, he hugged me tightly and closely. After a few seconds, I could feel him shaking and quietly sobbing.

“Yes. I want that more than absolutely anything. I don’t even know what to say to such kindness...”

I began crying as well, hugging him in return, “Then don’t say anything. Thank you, Ralph. Thank you...”

I expected to learn more about the stars from him, but in the end, I learned more about people on this venture.

“Pack your things, Ralph. We have a journey to Earth.”

“No need. These are just simple items and I cannot wait to interact with all of you.”

While on the way back, we were in constant communication with the folks down on the surface. They wanted updates every few minutes about how Ralph was doing and how everyone wanted an opportunity to personally speak with him. I would have just cut communication and left it at that, but Ralph took the time to speak with everyone who asked for him. With each new person, he would first ask, “How do you do?” and their conversation would carry from there. Each of them were nothing but bright and happy experiences for him. Some people asked about the moon business and Ralph answered and would ask them about their personal lives, just talking about their days, what their families are up to and simple things of that nature. This process continued all the way back to Earth.

As we were a day off from Earth, he looked out one of the windows and stared at the Earth with the same eyes I stared at the moon.

“More beautiful than I had ever imagined...” he said.

I looked down to Earth with him, “Earth?”

“It’s people... I can’t wait to meet them all.”

“It must be an amazing feeling, Ralph. Everyone ready and waiting to see you.”

Ralph’s eyes began tearing again, a sight that I had grown used to, “All my hopes and dreams are finally coming true... I

couldn't be more excited. Thank you for making them come true, Charlie."

"No. Thank you, Ralph. You're the one that gave me a fresh look at people. You reminded me of just how far we've come. My entire life, I've looked to the stars for happiness and whimsy. Because of you, I see that people are full of both of those things if you know where to look. My only regret is that I didn't realize that sooner. All the time I've wasted just looking up, rather than also looking to my sides..."

Ralph smiled, "You're never too old to learn something new, Charlie. Make up for that time lost by enjoying that feeling in the future."

The day finally came when we arrived back to Earth. I was the first to walk out and there was an ocean's worth of people out practically screaming their heads off to meet Ralph. Ralph slowly emerged from the shuttle, smiling to the general public, ready and excited to greet them all. He stepped down and without saying a word, picked up a small insect off the ground and gently began petting it with his finger, like one would do with a cat.

He took a deep breath and said, "How do you do?" to his captivated audience.

They screamed with joy. It took quite some time for the world to get used to Ralph's very existence. Ralph could have gone anywhere in the world, yet he refused to go anywhere without me by his side. When I finally asked him about it, he gave me a simple answer.

"Because you are my best friend, Charlie. I was left alone, isolated for almost all my life. Now I have my freedom, people that I can confidently call my friends, a place to truly call a home. I am no longer shackled to the surface of the moon. I have you to thank for all that. I refuse to part with the person I owe my life to."

I swear, every word that escaped his lips was ear candy, but then guilt set in that Ralph was actively denying himself part of his dream to stay with me.

"Ralph... If you refuse to part with me, how about I show you the world, personally. You've only ever seen it. I want you to experience it to its fullest and I want to be the one to introduce you to it."

Ralph wiped a single tear away and extended his hand, "I gladly accept these terms."

Emily Levenson

Farming as an Act of Letting Go

Winner, Nonfiction

“Hi. Are you Dave?” I asked the only man already in the tiny airport waiting area when I got off the plane in Watertown. We were standing in the airport’s only gate, amidst a stream of young people in military uniforms heading to the nearby army house. The man gave me a quick nod.

“You must be Emily, right?”

I’ve spent the night alone on an airport bench in London, faced a bombardment of questions at security before a flight to Israel, and gone the wrong way in the customs line at Newark International. Yet, this was my weirdest airport experience. I think I remember my mom warning that I shouldn’t get into cars with strangers I met on the internet once or twice. She may not have specified, “strangers who were driving me into a rural area right next to an international border,” but she probably felt she didn’t have to. Now here I was doing just that: a twenty-year-old girl, 2400 miles from my home in Berkeley, California.

Dave the farmer didn’t seem to think twice, though, before he helped load my suitcase into the back of his van, on top of a jumbled collection of tools.

Just over six months before, in March, I was packing up that suitcase in a rush and leaving school. Admin announced that all 4,500 undergraduates would have to clear campus in the next week. COVID-19 was overtaking the U.S., and it was too dangerous for all of us potential virus-vectors to live in close proximity in the dorms.

Once home in Berkeley, my world closed into four walls. I shifted from bed to desk and back again in the converted garage-turned-cottage where I spent the next six months. My dad took over my childhood bedroom as an office for his remote work with the city, so I was staying in this in-law unit that we typically rented on Airbnb. I could stretch out my arms north and south at any point in the room and touch the furniture that lined either side. Online classes were a slog and a half. My brain was swimming with the pressure to succeed and a thick fog clouded behind my eyes. I snagged passing grades in all of my courses but felt a deep guilt for letting my work fall into mediocrity.

Come summer, I was supposed to be conducting research with my professors. The hours reading housing case studies on my

computer turned to hours avoiding work, then hours berating myself for not being more productive than ever in quarantine. I would lie on the couch, enclosed in a bubble between a floor-to-ceiling cabinet and the end of the bed, scrolling endlessly on my phone.

The work did not happen. I did not do my work. As a college student, who was I if I was not working? I was letting down my team, my parents, my peers who said they'd never been more productive than in shelter-in-place. My only interaction with the research group was a once-a-week Zoom check-in. During those calls, I tried not to crumble under the weight of my inadequacy and half-full progress spreadsheets. Eventually, I quit. The burning hole of failure pulsed under my ribcage and the worries built a nest in my brain.

I quit the research. I got hired back at my childhood summer camp. I spent the next three weeks telling hormonal pre-teens to stay six feet apart from their peers and to pull up their masks. We sang. We ran. We hula hooped and went on scavenger hunts. Not one of my kids got COVID. After that release, those days spent outdoors, the scratching threat of failure in my lungs, I knew I couldn't do another semester of online school.

Rose, a high school friend and classmate, texted me that she was spending the semester on a farm. At first, I brushed the idea off as ridiculous. Something she would do—a free-spirited poet in a continuous state of existential crisis—but not me. I didn't like the feeling of dirt under my fingernails and went into a flurry of stain-removing and washing if I ever got so much as a speck of tomato sauce on a white shirt.

But the image of tending to goats in a meadow somewhere wouldn't go away. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed like the complete opposite of everything I resented about university. The rat race. The endless workdays, when the to-do list always ended longer than it began by bedtime. The constant, unceasing pressure to do more, and be more, and make more money, and pad your resume, and sell out.

I sat my parents down to tell them that I was taking a leave of absence from school. With their half grudging, half optimistic support, I wrote to Dani and Dave of Cross Island Farms through the WWOOF (Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms) website. They ran a 102-acre diverse organic farm on Wellesley Island in Upstate New York. I spoke to Dani on the phone and heard about four dozen different plants and projects waiting for me

just a six-hour plane ride away. After being trapped inside by a shelter-in-place order and the ash-filled air of California fire season, it sounded like heaven.

Come the last week of September, I was discussing vegetarianism with Dave the farmer in his van while driving into the dark. He was against, as a practitioner of animal husbandry. I tried to explain that I wasn't a vegetarian because I worried about the animal's feelings. I was worried about climate change, and meat was expensive anyways. He warned me that more than once WWOOFer left his farm a former vegetarian after seeing how happy the animals were.

We arrived at Cross Island a half hour later, and the first thing I noticed was the quacking of ducks. About a dozen of them were chasing each other around their enclosure in the front yard, squawking like the world was ending. Maybe the world was ending. But hey, at least I'd be riding it out here on an island in the St. Lawrence River, just minutes from the Canadian border. I met Dave's partner Dani, who fed me hearty white bean chili for dinner at the outside table.

In the dark, it was difficult to see much of anything besides the tall, white farmhouse, the plastic picnic table, and the birds. A light blue sign on the duck pen proclaimed their shelter "The Quack Shack" in sideways white brushstrokes. A chicken tractor sat to the side with an electric lamp casting a harsh light over two hens. We were far enough north, and the days were getting short enough that the birds needed artificial sunlight to keep laying eggs. Another volunteer named David came out to chat. He was short with a shaggy half-mullet—perhaps a casualty of pandemic haircut scarcity. After every sentence or so, he'd pause to say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." He was taking off a semester from school and informed me that Zoe, the third volunteer and another student, was already in bed.

After the meal, Dave strapped my small suitcase to the back of a golf cart which bumped and shook when he drove me into the woods. Along the way, we talked about artificial insemination. Of cows. As we talked, I thought: what would I think of a character in a TV show chatting about cow semen with a stranger in the woods? It sure was a far cry from dinner table talk back home, but you know what, if cow semen was an important topic on the farm, why not soak up the knowledge?

He dropped me off at a large tent, promising the half mile walk back would be clear enough in the morning. We confirmed that

I would camp every night until I got a negative COVID test. I was just grateful to have somewhere to be beyond Zoom.

I woke up the first morning, felt a rock in the middle of my back, and remembered I was not in Kansas anymore. Well, farm life might be closer to Kansas than urban shelter-in-place. The sun was rising, pink and orange peeking out between the trees. The air was fresh, and the green leaves were all-encompassing. I walked across the pasture towards the farmhouse, pastel mist blanketing the grass. Cows and goats turned their heads as I passed. It looked like a movie scene. Dozens of acres of gentle slopes of grass spread out on either side of the path. Positively idyllic. Unreal.

At breakfast, back at the plastic table by the front door, Dani brought me oatmeal with raisins and black tea. After some quiet get-to-know-you chit chat, I asked what was on the agenda for today. “Well, you can feed the tomatoes on the ground to Snorty and harvest some squash. Then,” she added with a smile, “I think it’ll be time to dig some potatoes.”

The other volunteers burst into laughter. Zoe and David were both my age and seemed a little shy in the daylight until this moment. Apparently digging for tubers was what passed for an initiation ritual out there. While we finished the meal, I tried to shoo away my self-doubt. The farmers knew that I knew nothing about farming. They would teach me. It would be fine. The morning turned out to be small potatoes in terms of work though. I delivered tomatoes past their prime to the pig Snorty. I collected squash from underneath a long, white row cover using a pair of clippers to separate the gourds from the vine.

After lunch, the real work began: the big potatoes. Dani walked me over to Garden 3 with a pitchfork and a knowing smile. She showed me how to begin, stabbing the pitchfork into the ground, “vertically, not horizontal at all, so you don’t stab the potatoes. If you stab the potatoes, I can’t sell them, and we have to eat them before they rot.” No pressure. She shook the dry soil from her pitchfork and plucked several brown tubers from the loose ground. Just like that—and they looked just like the ones we cooked at home.

She passed me the tool and told me she’d watch for a little while to make sure I was doing it right. No pressure. I stabbed my pitchfork into the soil and wiggled it side to side. The dirt separated in clumps, but my hands felt awkward and no potatoes appeared. I puzzled over Dani’s instructions in my head, “Dig down vertically,

not horizontally. That way you don't stab the potatoes." But how could I get out any dirt if I didn't dig under it? I tried to scoop down below where I guessed the roots would be. Nothing. I pulled out the pitchfork with a heave and inched it forward an inch, holding my breath as the tines broke the ground. Nothing.

Dani grabbed the pitchfork from me and dug it in a half a foot farther down the row, pointing out the leaves of the potato plant above ground. I might as well have been digging a mile away. I grabbed my first potato from the new upturned soil and brushed it off with my brand-new work glove. I could do this.

"Be careful how you handle the potatoes. Even using your glove like that is taking the skin off. See?" Whoops. No pressure. "You'll figure it out," Dani said. Just like that, she left.

So, I dug. And I stabbed a few potatoes. And I tried not to freak out about the ones I might be leaving buried on the sides of the row. Dani had mentioned that any left behind would create potato weeds next spring. No pressure. My back ached from bending over. The sun left my cheeks feeling raw. Sweat collected behind my knees. When I looked behind me, though, the potatoes stretched back in little starchy piles, almost all intact. My potatoes. I dug those with my own hands and muscles and shallow breath.

When Dani came back to collect me, she praised my work and told me I was done for the day (early). "You're not used to this kind of work yet." While a part of me wanted to prove that this city kid could handle plenty more manual labor, I *wasn't* used to it yet. My soft hands hadn't been doing much more than typing on a keyboard and scribbling notes the last two years of college.

I left Garden 3 long before the agreed-upon end to my workday. As I shut the gate and walked back past the pig pen, it struck me that I wasn't being graded here. There was no A+ for unearthing every single tuber. Sure, a weed might come up next year, but I wouldn't be there to see the small failure. I wasn't being paid either—the first time since middle school I wouldn't have some kind of paying job. That took some pressure off, too. This was a simple exchange. I worked. The farmers fed me. I'd get to sleep in a bed in their house (post COVID test) and take the afternoons off for hiking, writing, canoeing, reading, whatever suited my fancy. They knew that I knew nothing about farming. They didn't expect me to just know by osmosis. They'd teach me. No pressure. . . for real this time.

Margaret Taylor

The Black Hair Experience: An Identity Crisis

Honorable Mention, Nonfiction

My father was a humorous man. He often told jokes. I don't know where he got them. I'm not sure if he heard them from comedians, other people, or made them up himself. One of the jokes that I will always remember went like this.

There were three men. One White, one Chinese, and one Black. It was the day that God was giving out hair to the human race.

God told the White man to jump in the water and swim over to get his hair. And he did.

God told the Chinese man to jump in the water and swim over to get his hair. And he did.

God told the Black man to jump in the water and swim over to get his hair. And the Black man said why don't you just ball it up and throw it to me. And that is why Black people have nappy hair.

I first heard this joke from my father when I was a child. As an adult, I have shared the joke with select close friends who thought it was hilarious because it speaks to the trials and tribulations that Black people have with their hair—especially Black women. These women struggle to decide if they should force their hair to look straight with the use of chemicals and other techniques or to allow their hair to be in its natural state. The Black women's journey of taking care of their hair is often a painful and extends into adulthood. It requires a great deal of self-reflection as one learns how to manage and create a loving relationship with their hair. It requires the exploration of one's self-identity. This discussion of black hair refers to the hair of people of African descent. For the purpose of this essay, the use of the term Black is inclusive of anyone of African descent.

Hair Type

In general, hair is categorized in four groups which are Type 1 for straight hair, Type 2 for wavy hair, Type 3 for curly hair, and Type 4 for kinky hair (Ellis-Hervey et al., 2016). Typically, black hair does not fall in the Type 1 category. When black hair is in the Type 2

and Type 3 categories, it is usually due to the mixing of race in which the person's genetics has allowed for this hair type. For the most part, the majority of Blacks have hair that falls within the Type 4 category, and within this category are additional subcategories. For this essay, I will keep this simple and just focus on Type 4 hair.

I remember as a child sitting on the kitchen floor between my mother legs as she hot combed my hair to make it straight. This technique of straightening black hair was commonly referred to as press n curl. The hot comb is a metal comb that is placed on heat to make it hot. My mother used the fire from the gas stove eye to make the comb hot. The heat from the hot comb is what caused the hair to straighten. As she slowly combed through my hair, I could hear the crackling, see the steam, and the smell of scorched hair in the air. On some occasions the hot comb would accidentally touch my ear or the nape of my neck, leaving burnt marks. In my teenage years, I moved to using hair relaxers which are chemicals that forces the hair to be straight. The relaxer is available in a box kit that you can purchase in stores to treat hair at home. There was also the ever so popular Jheri Curl in the 1980s which was prevalent during my teenage years. The Jheri Curl was a chemical treatment that caused the hair to have a wavy and curly look. At one point, everyone in my family had the Jheri Curl, including me.

After graduating from high school in the late 1980s, I was preparing for the workforce in hopes of getting a job in an office environment. I was told by adults that I need to look the part in order to get the part. Not only do I need to focus on my attire but also my hair. My hair needs to be presentable; in other words, no braids or untamed hair styles such as afros. It was important that I presented an overall professional look that was acceptable in the workplace. In other words, I need to maintain a straighten hair style to conform to the Eurocentric look. As my career advanced and I gained more exposure to the culture of various workplaces, I begin to question: Why am I doing all these things to my hair? Why can't I just wear my hair in its natural state in the way God created me? Why is it so difficult for society to accept people for their physical differences including their hair type?

Black Power Movement

It was later in my adulthood when I obtained a better understanding of the complexities of the Black community and hair, and how it relates to the perception of outsiders, and how it may

shape an individual's social identity. In the article by Collins, she explores how the power relations within communities can influence social relations and develop political significance. This caused me to think about the Black Power Movement in the 1960s. The movement advocated for the civil and political rights of African Americans in the United States. The movement also promoted Black pride in which the Black community was encouraged to embrace their natural features. The slogan "Black is Beautiful" became popular during this time. As a result, the afro became a very popular hair style that displayed the natural state of the black hair. Not only was it a symbol of black pride but also a political statement in supporting the Black Power Movement.

Some members of the outer group (White people) interpreted the Black Power Movement to be negative because it went against the cultural norm. As a result, Afrocentric hairstyles such as afros and braids were a symbol of the resistance of Blacks to conforming. In addition, the Black hair in its natural state was viewed as less attractive in comparison to straightened hair. The rise of the Black Panthers during the Black Power Movement era contributed to additional labels such as militant attitudes and radicalism which added more negative connotations to the social identity of Blackness. During the 1960's, the national news media coverage of the Black Panthers helped to spread the radical image of this group which often overshadowed the racial and social concerns of the Black community.

Still today, Afrocentric hairstyles in the workplace are frowned upon because they are viewed as too radical. These hairstyles vary from afros, braids, twists, and dreadlocks. In 2016, I was working at a university in Chicago. A colleague came to me for advice from one African American woman to another. She had already submitted her resignation and was planning to start a new position as an administrator at another university. Before starting her new job, she was taking time to travel to the Bahamas. Because of the trip, she wanted to braid her hair. As a result, she will be arriving to her new job with braided hair. Her mother told her not to do it because of how she may be perceived with braided hair on her first day of work. I completely understood her mother's concerns. Me and my colleague had a candid conversation in which we discussed various factors for making an informed decision. I asked her a series of questions. Were the people that interviewed her Black or White, male or female? Did she see any Black females with Afrocentric hair

styles? Did she feel that the environment was inclusive of diversity? After considering the location of her new workplace, the diversity of the employees, and the role of her position, we decided she could wear braided hair on her first day of work.

Identity Crisis

The concern of black hair starts at a very early age. When my daughter was five years old, she asked me why her hair is not like White people. She went on to say that she didn't like her hair. The hairstyles I did for her were Afrocentric because her hair was natural, and it was within the Type 4 category (very kinky). At her age, she wore braids and afro puffs. I went into my mommy mode to explain that all her features including her hair are beautiful as it is. She seemed doubtful. I wanted to show her images of herself so she could realize that her hair and how she looked extends outside of the family. As I searched through my personal inventory of movies and books, I realized that I didn't have any that reflected her image. No wonder she was so confused. So, I went on a hunt to seek out picture books and movies that would reinforce her confidence in her own natural beauty. The most difficult task was finding an age-appropriate movie. It's the year 2010, this shouldn't be this hard. I finally came across the 1997 movie *Cinderella* featuring Brandy Norwood, Whoopi Goldberg, and Whitney Houston; and the movie also included a multicultural cast of actors. It was perfect. It provided a boost in confidence for my daughter to see African American women such as Brandy Norwood as the character of Cinderella with braided hair, Whoopi Goldberg as the mother of the prince wearing dreadlocks, and Whitney Houston as the fairy god mother with a curly hairstyle. This became her favorite movie.

As my daughter became older, I eventually relaxed her hair. In her teen years, she started to take responsibility of taking care of her own hair. I allowed her the freedom to style it according to her preference. Of course, I provided to her guidance on what to do to keep her hair healthy. A couple of years later, she decided to forego the relaxer and go for a natural look. She has finally come into acknowledging and accepting the beauty of her hair whether natural or not.

Conclusion

This essay is just a glimpse into the struggles of Black women and their hair. I believe the acceptance of Afrocentric

hairstyles is slowly changing mainly due to the public images displayed in media and advertisement. I have noticed an increase in public images of people with natural black hair. It can be seen in various outlets such as TV commercials, news reporters, magazines, and billboards. These images are contributing to the micro level changes in perceptions of natural black hair. These positive public images in media are sending the message that Afrocentric hair styles are acceptable. In addition, these images help to familiarize the public with natural black hair styles. If you see it in everyday imagery as a physical attribute of diversity, it will become part of the norm.

Although more Black women are embracing their natural black hair and displaying its beauty, many still face obstacles especially in workplaces that do not embrace culture diversity. It's an individual choice to wear natural black hair or to straighten it. A Black woman should never be forced to alter her natural hair because others don't like it. Everyone should have the freedom to wear their natural God given hair.

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Contributor's Notes

Malachi Adkins is a Humanities and Social Sciences student at JCC. They plan to transfer to a four-year SUNY school after graduation and study philosophy. They work in Student Activities and bartend in a local restaurant.

Emma Corbett is a Creative Writing major. Her hobbies include reading fantasy novels and making artwork.

Salin Davis is an aspiring artist who is graduating from JCC in May 2022. She plans on transferring to a four-year design program.

Ed DeMattia is an JCC alumnus who has enjoyed writing in the North Country since his graduation.

Wilson Garcia is a proud New Yorker who admires and appreciates the Northern country. He loves his nieces and nephews very much. Wilson is also the writer of the unpublished novel series "GodsLived, The Mythos." He is a senior at JCC, due to receive his associates degree in creative writing this May and plans to transfer to SUNY Cortland in the fall. During his time at JCC, Wilson spent his semesters as part of the Campus Activity Board and helped plan campus activities.

Joshua Kachurak is currently twenty-one years old and working on becoming a teacher. He was raised in Pulaski, a sleepy fisherman's town in New York. He loves to read and write as a hobby and hopes to hopefully get his book ideas published someday. He loves reading, writing, and watching fantasy as well as horror and all things whimsical.

Michael Keck returned to the North Country in 1980 after traveling through much of the eastern half of America, finding out that what he was looking for was actually right here, where he was born and raised. We are shaped by the land. It forges us into being who we become. Because we live in such a rich and diverse location, our lives and experiences can be helpful to others. His writings have appeared in Appalachia, Journeys, and Sporting Classics. He has won or received an honorable mention nine times in the North Country

Writers Contest. He resides in Black River, next to Rutland Hollow, where the crows go.

Patrick Keck has lived in Florida, California, and Oregon and presently lives in Belleville, NY. He is retired, happy, and content.

Emma King is a Creative Writing major in her second semester at JCC. She is unsure of her future path but enjoys English and psychology and plans to become an editor.

Emily Levenson is a senior in Urban Studies and Planning at MIT, soon to be working in environmental policy after graduation. She spent a semester off volunteering at Cross Island Farms on beautiful Wellesley Island. In her free time, she loves to write, read, and explore nature.

Cynthia Lonsbary is a psychology professor, wife, mom, and the devoted sidekick in her daughter's epic adventures. Occasionally she writes poetry.

Amanda Marshall is a JCC alumna (2021) and is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Creative Writing & Literature at SUNY Empire. She is expected to graduate in 2023 and is making plans to attend an MFA program.

James O'Connor is a playwright, and a homeowner in the Thousand Islands. His two novels (*Glomar* and *The Hyphenated Man*) were developed at the Yale Writers Workshop, and he is currently seeking publication of them. When the cold winds blow in the North Country, he resides in New York City, where his theatre reviews can be found in *The Riverdale Press*. He has also coached NCAA Division III softball at the College of Mount Saint Vincent in the Bronx and had a longtime "day job" as an RN at St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital. James is a graduate of John Carroll University, Kent State, and Hunter College.

Anna Snell has dual enrolled at JCC for two semesters. She is a homeschooled senior who plans to major in art and illustration next fall.

Margaret Taylor currently serves as Director of Student Activities & Inclusion at Jefferson Community College where she manages the college's student engagement activities as well as student programs that addresses cultural diversity, inclusion, equity and justice. Her international travels to New Zealand, Peru, Brazil and France have given her the opportunity to engage and explore other cultures firsthand. Ms. Taylor believes that it is beneficial for everyone to seek self-enrichment by learning about other cultures because it increases cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity.

Vatressa Teamoh is an Individual Studies A.S. major in her second year at JCC. She will be graduating this spring and transferring to the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam this fall to major in Music Business. Although her primary focus is percussion, she has recently found a love for composing and writing her own music. The title of Vatressa's piece is a Latin word that in English means "resilience" and was written during a time of her own self-reflection and struggle with change.

Zoe Turtura is currently enrolled in Jefferson Community College with an aspiring degree for Creative Writing. Writing has been her passion for over five years, and she continues to search for any writing opportunities annually and always anticipates creating the best piece she can pull out of herself. As her future has only begun, she is unsure of what she wants to do with this passion but knows that writing is a part of her that she wishes to never give up on.

Alysa Van Epps plans on pursuing a career in graphic design and illustration. She likes working in bright colors. Markers and digital art are her favorite mediums, though she is a fan of colored pencils as well.

Alysa Van Epps
Robot Cat Persona



