LOCH NORSE MAGAZINE

ISSUE X
This year has been different from prior years. We have delved into times of racial disparities, quarantines, political anguish, loss of loved ones, and loss of self. Despite the chaos encircling our individual lives, we have made beautiful melodies out of fearful screams. As a creative community, we have amplified the voices and words of diverse storytellers. We rose above hate.

Looking back to April 2020, we never thought Issue X would be constructed entirely online. Although unconventional, it was assembled by passionate creators and thinkers. As Editor-in-Chiefs, there was never a worry about leadership. We knew we had amazing editors, staff, and creative writers on campus submitting their work to the magazine. Our job gave us the privilege to see the impressive people who edit, people who submit, and people who create to change the world around us.

So from the bottom of our hearts, thank you to everyone who has shared their talents and their time to create Issue X. Cheers to 10 years and many, many more.

With Love,
Anna Leach and Chloe Cook
Loch Norse Magazine
Issue X 2021

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Loch Norse Magazine accepts submissions of poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and artwork annually November through February.

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the mission of Northern Kentucky University and its affiliates.
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Every other day I read my grandmother’s obituary.
I do not have a copy.
I can find it on the internet,
my name three fourths of the way down,
survived by.
My other grandmother had too many grandchildren for me to be included. I had forgotten her middle name. Even years later, 4 or 9, there is the option to send flowers.
Send flowers to a long dead mother. Send a donation to the Alzheimer’s association.
Mandy Reinmuller

Every bang I hear sends a shockwave through my chest

I feel his hand tighten on my heart,
Squeezing my lifeforce.
Is this it?
Has the last mental strand of your sanity finally snapped?
I know.
you would never
hurt her.
But do I?
Oh? It was just work stressing you out?
The shards of the emerald turtle I loved so much,
The lamp she says “broke” in a clipped tone that implies it was your
handiwork.
It’s better not to argue,
It’s better to agree with my silence.
She says I have to forgive.
He says never again;
But there’s always another crash,
Another bang that couldn’t just be an accident.
Every Time: He wipes the cluttered table clean to clear his head.
Every Time: His voice demands to be heard despite his paranoia the
neighbors will hear.
Every Time: He.
Every Time;

Illustration by RJ Corley
Andrew Evans

The Last Page

There is a moment
When the cover closes
And this new, old life
Is unfamiliar

A novel thing

Where after leaping
From skin to skin
You cannot place your finger
On how to live in this one again

Illustration by Evey Cooper
The stench of rotting corpses permeated our nostrils and sank into every pore of our bodies. The stench was a constant reminder to us; an inescapable, desperate plea for us to stay away. Our feet drug on. In worn out sneakers and boots. Those of us who thought ahead wore our most comfortable shoes. Now we could feel the pavement beneath them. Those of us who had really thought ahead had worn our most practical shoes. We too could feel the pavement. It was a silent enemy. It affected the lucky ones quickly. The rest it left to rot. They had a name for it once. We no longer cared. All we knew was it had taken those dearest to us.

The weather had changed too. The sky shielded the sun behind rows of clouds – another cruel reminder of God’s abandonment. There were five of us. We had set out to find others. But something bizarre happened then. We found no more. Only piles of corpses.

They littered the streets. Kept us company. Reminded us of our humanity. Because in those small moments when we would see a new pile, a flicker of hope would wash over us. It was a bird, kept captive for so long it had almost forgotten how to fly. And we realized once again – we were the last.

Putrid piles of flesh. There was no one person, no individual. The people condensed, blended, and melded into one mound of flesh. Only piles.

Sometimes we would excavate them, the five of us clambering over them, desperately separating the sacks of meat, praying, looking for those we knew. Finding none. For we were far from home. Maybe we will repopulate the earth. We joked. Maybe we are the only ones immune. But we didn’t laugh. We pressed on. Wondering. Perhaps it would’ve been better to wade through blood and carnage rather than the piles of whole corpses.

#

Once, we climbed a pile. The most peculiar thing happened. A boy no older than eight… worms dug pits into his face. His eyes had sunken in. God didn’t seem to care. But there was a break, a singular moment in time where the sun broke through the clouds and
shone upon his marred face. The five of us lifted the boy, we cradled his delicate head in our hands, and we began singing. It was not a wail, but a pleasant sound. Soon the others joined with songs of their own, raising their voices in diverse unison to the heavens for this blessed boy and the sun he brought.

I have no idea of how long this went on, but when the clouds closed and the light receded, all that was left was us, our arms spread, and faces lifted. We set the boy down and, without looking back, went on.

#

It wasn't long after that the disease began to affect us. The piles grew thicker, and we knew we were near a great city of old. We never saw it. We simply lay atop a pile. Accepted our fate.

The sky was grey. It always was. I felt the first raindrops. The sky was spitting on me. One last reminder of my pitiful existence. The others tried to comfort me. They too were near the end. The light is coming. A man who had been with us said. I glanced over. Eyes wide and finger pointing from where he lay, he looked upon the sky.

There is no light. I insisted.

No, it is here! And oh, how lovely it is! It is here and will save us! Then his hand fell, and his body crumpled.

I looked up at the sky and wondered if I might see the same light as him. What was his name? I don't believe we had exchanged such nonsense – we simply were. I told myself as they crumpled that I would remember them so their legacy may live on but a few more minutes.

I strained to see that light. All I saw was the darkness. It receded and I was alone. Atop a pile of corpses. The sky kept spitting on me.
Caitlin Kemme

*happy things*

line after line of delicately chosen words
sucking you into a world better than your own
unlocking an adventure
with souls only reachable in your mind

a delicate bud peeking through the damp, soft, soil
rushing to catch the beams of energy
that pour through the sky
filled with cotton candy clouds

a Saturday evening spent on yourself
relaxing in a tub of bubbles
holding a glass of cheap wine
the only light radiating from a dozen vanilla scented tea light candles

early mornings woken up to wet kisses from my golden retriever
stepping outside to be greeted with crisp autumn breezes
the familiar aroma of the changing season
earthy, musky, pinecones

Friday night high school football games
chanting our pride of another winning season
that turns into singing 2000s pop songs at the top of our lungs
on a 3 am drive around town in a car full of friendly faces

the forgiving moonlight dances through my room
watching me as I write out my feelings
edging me to dig deeper
helping me become more authentic

weeklong trips to different locations
tasting new foods and cultures
fulfilling the desire to explore
yet still sleeping under the same stars
watching a new series on Netflix
cuddled with my spouse
wrapped in blankets
and warmth

finding myself amongst the darkness
learning who I am
testing myself
and discovering what makes me happy
Alex Fischer

Habitable Shadow

My projections mirror my perceptions,
Rotting my heart to tin.
Bursting the bust of my bleeding lung,
Smoldering my cricked bones,
Loneliness feeds my perished soul.

Victim to consciousness,
Empathy my kryptonite,
I construct words at the fear of my own rejection,
To find the secret enemy is me.
It’s always been me.
Every Tuesday I get in my car and drive to the nearest cemetery to my childhood home. It’s so strange to think of myself as a child. What I must have been like, all the things I didn’t know. When I think back to those years, my memories are always soft around the edges, filled with colors. Now, everything seems duller. It’s as if someone has turned the vibrancy and contrast down in my brain.

I think I stopped being a child sometime in 2018, maybe even before then. I can never remember what life was like before. Not fully. All I have are the colors.

I’ve had my license ever since I was 16, but after the wreck, I barely used it. I couldn’t get behind a wheel without thinking I was going to crash, without telling myself I wanted to crash. I don’t know if he wanted to or not. That’s what hurts the most.

Now, I hardly ever even think about what it would feel like for the metal of my car to bend and mold around my body. I think that’s some kind of growth.

I drive past the homes of people I knew. I drive past a lonely church. I drive past my old elementary school. They are all haunted, even if they don’t know it yet. I have to remind myself that the roadkill scattered along the bypass is not my friend. Even if I catch a glimpse of his face in every dead deer I pass.

I get out of my car, put on the same playlist, and I run. I run like someone is chasing me, but really, I’m chasing him.

A ghost. I swear I’m just a ghost looking for another.

The people around me are alive. The mom visiting her son on the far-right side of the cemetery, the heedless cat that lingers around us all, brushing against tombstones, the old man who comes to read poetry to his wife; they have heart. They are alive.

I don’t know where he is, though. I never visited the first year, I was too scared to. Too dumb to. It’s silly, honestly; to be afraid of a dead person. Especially one that I still call by their nickname. Now, I just look. I look everywhere for him.

I know he isn’t here, not physically, at least. Being here, though, it makes me feel closer to him, somehow.
I remember that strange feeling of when I crossed the state lines after he first left us. I cried and cried like I wasn’t even in my own body. That’s when I realized that I might have departed with him.

I’m making my third lap around the trail of the dead, when the ridiculously ignorant cemetery cat that I’ve named ‘Church’ crosses my path. He stills and lets out the most pathetic meow I have ever heard. I mean, it’s really something, even for him.

“Church, boy,” I lean down to pet behind his ears, “what’s got you down today?”

He looks at me as if to say, “I reside in a cemetery by choice, what do you think’s got me down?”

“You’re pathetic.”

Meoooowwww.

I roll my eyes and continue to pet him. I think about taking him home with me sometimes, but it feels wrong. It’s like excavating a 20 year-old corpse, you just shouldn’t. He’s a healthy cat. He’s never hungry or skittish like some alley cats I’ve encountered in my day. I think someone watches out for him out here, brings him food and loves on him.

Shadows start to surround the two of us, and the air is getting a bit cooler. The sun is setting.

I stand up and brush off my pants, “I gotta go, boy. I’ll see you next week.”

He looks as unimpressed with me as ever and gives me one last look-over.

Meow.

He agrees. I should leave.

I begin making my way to my car, my eyes cast down as I’m wrapping up my earbuds. I don’t know why I bother with it; they always end up in a knot, anyways. That’s when something very odd happens. I hear a meow from behind me and a few paws slamming against the pavement.

I whip around to see the little devil running after me, eagerly. I slow my walk down so he can catch up, and he takes the offer. He quickly cuts me off and plops down on his back in the very middle of the pathway.
I laugh at him but lean down, anyways. I think I might just end up in Hell if I deny a cemetery cat of his pets.

As I go back to petting him, I hear a set of footsteps coming from behind me. I try to pick up Church and move him out of the pathway, but he protests and swings his paw at me, almost scratching me with his long nails.

There’s a gasp, but it’s not my own, “George! Leave her alone!” I look at Church and then turn around, seeing an older man carrying a few books with him, approaching us quickly.

He looks at me with kind, melancholic eyes, “I’m so sorry about that. George can be such a pain in the ass, but he’s really a sweet boy.”

I look at the grumpy kitty and smile. I think George fits him a lot better.

“Oh, it’s okay. He’s never caused me any problems before.” The old man smiles, and somehow it registers with me, “I was just rounding up the old guy to take him home.”

Home? George does have a home. That makes my heart feel a little warmer.

“He’s never seemed to have any problems with you before,” he says, “must just be in one of his moods.”

That’s when it clicks, the smile, the books, the eyes. He’s the old man that comes to read to his wife.

I’m a bit shocked, I don’t know what to say. What’s the appropriate way to talk to someone you’ve just met at a cemetery? How’s your wife? Dead? Oh, alright. So is my best friend.

He seems to know what to say, though, and I’m so grateful for that, “You’re here every Tuesday, aren’t you?”

I nod, “Yeah, I am.”

“Well, me and George are here every other Tuesday if you ever want company. I know it can get lonely out here, especially on weekdays. I don’t know who decided that we only visit the dead on weekends. I mean, they aren’t doing anything, ya’ know?”

I laugh at the strange man. He’s got a point. Not like the dead are out working a 9-5 desk job. They’re just…here.

“Thank you for that. I’d really appreciate the company.”

He smiles at me and picks up George, I’m amazed when he
doesn’t lift a paw in protest. He looks sleepy, his eyes dropping a little bit. It’s the most at peace I’ve ever seen the cat.

“We better get going. Looks like this guy is about to knock out,” he laughs a little. “It was so nice to talk to you.”

I smile at him and feel a strong prickling feeling behind my eyes and nose, “You too. I’ll see you around.”

He turns to walk away, then stops and looks back at me, “I’m sorry, what was your name?”

“Bella,” I feel a few tears sitting on my waterline, trying to break past my lashes. “What’s yours?

“It’s James,” he pauses, “and, if you don’t mind me asking, what was their name? The person you’re always here for?”

“Connor,” I shudder a little, a stray tear slipping down my cheek. “His name was Connor.”

He nods at me, like he already knew what I was going to say. “You’ll find him again. One day.”

I’ve never been one to trust the word of strangers, but for some reason, I believe him.

“Now, you have a good night and please stay safe.”

And, just like that, he turns around and sets back on his path, George and a few books clad in his arms.

I let myself breathe, I feel my heart beating in my chest, and I feel tears streaming down my face, relentlessly. It’s the first time I have felt alive in so, so long.
Skyler Smith

Rewind

Our teacher rolls in the television as the class chatters and settles in, napkins with chips and brownies scattered about long plastic tables, no one thinking of cleaning the mess.

I’m closest to it, static crackling in my ears, sipping from a plastic cup full of flat orange soda, knowing that we would soon vote on a Bill Nye episode to watch and inevitably pick one about disasters.

I know this one already, so, I focus on the thin paperback I had on my lap, discovered beneath a row of dusty bookshelves, taking it without asking since nobody else in the room seemed to care.

It’s about Zach, an eccentric boy whose life is documented from his carefree childhood through his stress as a student unable to be enough for the system, until abruptly ending when he gets lost in the city, freezing to death alone.

I feel a migraine on the last page, looking up only to find the room now vacant, the tables moved and the chairs
stacked save for mine, the sunset and I sitting in silence, knowing class is over.
A young girl carries a roughly worn spiral notebook in her left hand and a smartphone in her right. Behind her is a sleek navy-blue casket, adorned with flowers. Next to that, a portrait of a teenage boy. At the dais, her hands shake as she flips through the notebook, eyes scanning rapidly. She thanks the assembly meekly, and takes a deep breath, before beginning her speech. Her voice quivers as she speaks:

“When Will died, I was reading Highlights magazine. I’m not sure how much time you’ve spent at a hospital, but the reading material is lacking. Once you’ve exhausted the jokes section of Reader’s Digest, there’s not really going to be many slam dunks left. So on that day, Goofus and Gallant became my grief counselors, because I surely couldn’t be expected to find comfort elsewhere. It felt selfish to cry…I wasn’t even his family, y’know? No, in that moment, as his extended family wept, and his sister clutched her mother’s leg, and his parents struggled to give the news through sobs, I stifled my reaction by tearing out a spot-the-difference puzzle. The first boy I’d ever loved was gone. Just…gone.”

#

I remember meeting him, all those years ago. Sixth grade was looking to be a tough year. Aside from the turmoil of adolescence, I had just gone through a move. When Mom got deployed, Dad couldn’t handle raising four kids on top of work, so we went to live with Grandma and Grandpa. Plus, I’m sure Dad would have taken any opportunity to get us out of a Catholic school. So there I found myself, uprooted and grafted upon another plant’s vine, cloaked in the overwhelming stigma that a life in private school gives you. That year was almost disastrous. But I’m lucky to have taken Ms. Yates’ choir class. Not only was she a great teacher, with the commanding yet reassuring presence needed for a middle-school educator and theatre director, but through the class, I found Carly, a smiley ginger-haired energy ball, and my soon-to-be best friend. That first day, the second I sat down next to her, she gave me a hug and an introduction, her voice, and her presence vibrant and bubbly. Though hyper, she listened to me talk about myself intently, her light-up Sketcher-
bound feet fidgeting in place. She was always just the sweetest girl, the rare child that was always willing to share with anyone. In tough times, not unlike that very first day, that included her little circle of friends, whom she eagerly introduced me to during lunch: a pair of tall, lanky girls with freckle-dotted faces named Sara and Kayleigh, as well as a round faced joker by the name of Tyler. But amongst them was one more: a quiet little boy who always stayed at their sides, if a bit quietly. He rarely spoke up that first year, but if you saw the other four, you’d find that curly-headed, bespectacled, blonde ball of awkwardness nearby, no doubt. They all called him Stewart (but he did prefer his first name, not that he quite yet had the courage to speak up). The words he would say have clung to me since like brambles on a sweater sleeve. After everything that’s happened, there’s no way I could ever forget that day. He smiled at me for the first time before extending a hand.

“I’m Will,” he said.

“Hi Will. I’m Hannah.”

She pauses for a beat too long as a lump forms in her throat, gulping. Her eyes scan across the church, meeting eyes with many. Will’s parents are front row, with his little sister. Her friends are clustered nearby; Carly gives a knowing glance. She sees her own family towards the back. The air is tense, her person doused in judging glances. Hannah closes her eyes and takes a deep breath, before looking back down at her notebook.

“In prep for today, I wrote down just about my entire history with him. I didn’t know where to start, so I started there.”

She looks up at the crowd.

“I hope you don’t mind if I skip around a bit. There’s a lot to cover.”

Will went into the hospital again in March. It didn’t feel like a major trip when he went in, and it certainly didn’t show that it would be at the time. Though things had looked rough at the end of last year, he was showing, just amazing progress. His O2 stats were low that day, but only enough to make breaths a small labor. Though each heave of his chest was deliberate, there was a calm in his eyes, an
unmistakably him assuredness. The same tendency for calmness and collection that I loved in him.

I rode with his parents and his sister as he was admitted, which they decided they should do, as a precautionary measure. I tried to maintain a composure as we sat quietly in the backseat of the family minivan. I stared out the window, watching the hills roll up and down, keeping my mind off the situation. The gentle lull of undeveloped land looked serene at twilight, the sun turning the sky candy-colored hues, light glinting off the edge of tree branches. Into the woods, I could see a deer walking slowly, scanning its surroundings, stopping only to look back, meeting gaze with a doe following close behind.

I must’ve seemed tense, as Will was compelled to grab my hand. With his other, he gently pushed my chin so I would have to look him in the eye. He brushed tight golden curls out of his face, clearing the path to gentle green eyes, kind as they ever were.

“I’m fine, you know. Nothing major is going on. I can feel it.” His voice was hushed, but spoken with a comforting confidence, a far cry from the meek boy he once was. The sun struck his glasses intermittently as we passed through clusters of trees, but I knew under them there were those same calm eyes. I nodded quietly, squeezing his hand, which signaled him to squeeze back. We always did that when one of us was nervous, pulses of hand squeezes increasing in speed until we were just holding as tight as we could. I smiled as we did, my fears assuaged by his steadfast presence.

He would be there for two and a half months. He never left.

#

New Year’s Eve that first year of middle school was the first time we had one of our trademark sleepovers, the gang and I. Carly had this huge basement, and the parents let us commandeer it as their own boozy shindig went on upstairs. For a couple of us, myself included, this was the first time we had ever been allowed to stay up past midnight. We played Mario Kart and WiiSports well into the night, and when we lost, we drowned our catharsis in pounds of Gushers and Mountain Dew Voltage. We did hide-and-seek, Twister, and got to know each other through rounds of truth or dare. But even despite all the excitement, caffeine, and sugar, most of us were out
by 2. All but me and Will. I had never spoken one-on-one with him by this point and that was deliberate. His tendency to be so freaking quiet... Even throughout this night of extensive group bonding he eluded conversation, by and large. Thumbs were quite literally twiddled. But eventually, the perpetually quiet William spoke.

“Let’s go outside.”

Frankly, I was unwilling. It was easily in the single digits and I hadn’t brought a heavy coat. I looked back at him, dumbfounded at his brazenness. “No way, man.”

When I said this, however, he grabbed a heavy quilt in one hand and my wrist in the other. In a bolt, we zipped out the sliding glass door to the backyard, and in a sprint, he led me to a playset at the top of a very steep hill in the back yard. I complained all the way, but when we got to the swing set, I was very suddenly and instantly swayed. In the distance, you could see the city, lights twinkling. There was that sort of hum you hear at night on holidays, of parties raging on towards the horizon, homemade fireworks shows going off. He motioned for me to sit next to him on a bench swing, quietly draping us in the blanket when I obliged.

“How’d ya know to come here? It’s like... really pretty,” I asked, dazzled at the view. Though his gaze on the skyline was unbroken, I didn’t feel any less certain that he was really, truly listening to me.

“Carly and I have had playdates at this house since well before kindergarten. I would never forget the first time I saw this view. She barely reacted to it, but I guess I wouldn’t if I had lived here my whole life. I wanted to see that same reaction on you.” He spoke with a conviction of that last point, something I had never expected out of the veritable mute prior to that. His Cheshire smile shimmered.

“Will, can I ask you something?” He broke his gaze from the skyline and the starry sky, meeting eyes with me. “Why are you so quiet all the time?” He seems to think on this for a moment, intently.

“I guess that I don’t feel like most things aren’t worth talking about... and most people aren’t worth talking to.” I couldn’t help but feel a bit slighted at that.
“Does that mean me? That I’m not worth talk-”
“No,” he interjected. “I actually really like talking to you Hannah, and I’m glad you’re one of our friends. You really fit in nicely, y’know?” I smiled back at him.

We talked and talked, sharing until the sun rose the next day.

#

It spread to his lymph nodes in November, and he broke the news to me the day before Thanksgiving. I wept in his car as he held me. Against my back, his hands felt slimmer than they ever had. The gentle pudge that had always characterized his body was replaced with a harsh gauntness; unlike anything I had felt of him prior.

When I was able to stop my crying, I spoke. “I don’t want to say goodbye to you,” I said, my snotty face pressed against his sweater-bound chest.

“Then let’s not say goodbye then, y’know?” I looked up at him, eyes wet and shimmering. His eyes, just as damp, still managed to hold calm. “My story is not that simple. If we took everything in my life at face value, then I would still be the silent kid, too afraid to speak up to the pretty brown-haired girl sitting in front of him in choir.” I scoffed, weakly chuckling at his remark.

“Oh shut up, we both know that I liked you first.” At this, his energy picked up.

“No, no, I distinctly remember staring at you for all those rehearsals. You were kind of a catch, babe.”

“Alright then, creep.” We both laughed. He brushed my bangs away and kissed my forehead reassuringly.

“I don’t plan on leaving anytime soon,” he said, as much to himself as it was to me.

We leaned our heads back, staring upwards together. The stars shone through the sunroof, bright as they’d ever been.

#

For the first time that day, a smile crept across Hannah’s face. Her posture changes, straightening upward as she lightly rubs her eyes. She flips ahead to a page marked with a red post-it. Her speed hastens as she continues.

#
I knew I loved him when I was 14. We were at the lake in July, the six of us on a muggy, blisteringly hot day. While attempting to get out of the water amidst a heated round of marco polo, I slipped on a mossy rock, my weight collapsing down hard into the drink. Immediately, in full junior lifeguard mode, the boys dove towards me, pulling me out of the water to examine my tender ankle. Tyler was certain I had broken it, but Will wasn’t convinced, instead diagnosing it as a sprain. They bickered while the girls looked on from the edge of the lake. Eventually, Tyler conceded that it was likely only a minor injury, and he walked back to the water. Will alerted the group that he’d “be there in a minute” as he sat in the sand next to me.

I looked at him puzzled. ‘Will, you looked at it and decided, it’s probably a sprain. You can go back to the water.’

“I think I’ll stay with you for a minute, just to make sure you’re alright,” he responded, without the slightest bit of hesitation. A ray of sun ricocheted off aviator sunglasses as he turned to face me, blinding me for a brief moment.

But even though I couldn’t see him, I just knew he was smiling at me, and my heart felt warm. He cared so deeply and so consistently about me that he’d rather spend the afternoon making sure I was ok, that I wasn’t lonely, rather than swimming with his friends. He made me feel cherished…and safe. Whenever I had a bad day, he was always the first to comfort me. When I got a cell phone, his was the first number I put in my contacts, because I loved our conversations. He was the most important person in my life, a friend who I couldn’t live without. He was a constant for me, in a way few friends or family had ever proven to be in my entire life. He was just about the most important person in my life. And I knew if he were the one injured at the beach, I wouldn’t hesitate to spend the rest of a sunny day not in the water, but sitting at his side, making sure he didn’t feel lonely or left out. I would do it in a heartbeat.

My silence had grown too long to seem a natural, innocuous pause. He pulled down the shades and turned to me with a concerned look in those typically unfazed jade eyes.

“You alright?”
I beamed back at him. “As long as you’re here, I’m alright.”

Our sophomore year, the drama club did West Side Story. Though we had all done choir together for years by that point, only Sara and Kayleigh had become drama nerds. Carly and I weren’t convinced, and the boys were not necessarily eager to sing and dance in costumes and whatnot. But after significant prodding, we agreed to do this one show, for them. Rehearsal after rehearsal, we gradually grew to enjoy the process. It was fun, doing an activity with all of them, every day after school. This would eventually grow to be one of the most cherished group undertaking we had.

The day came to choreograph the mid-show dream ballet, and as Ms. Yates paired members of the ensemble off, it became clear that Will and I would be paired together. Compatible heights for slow dancing and all, as we stood eye-to-eye with each other. Carly found this hilarious to no end, as my secret crush on Will had become quite the incentive for me to avoid potentially intimate situations. And a tender dance sequence sound tracked by a haunting serenade...wasn’t exactly ideal. He and I of course joked about how ridiculous it is pairing us up together, we were nothing like a couple. “How ridiculous,” we assured each other. But, things soon began to change as we rehearsed. Each detail of the dance brought us closer and closer together. Our hands intertwined. Then, his were on my waist. Then we stood face to face, with my head resting on his chest, as we swayed in time. As our bodies moved to the music, I felt a warmth in my chest, and a crackling electricity between us. This felt so true, so beautiful, so right, being together like this.

I suppose my mind couldn’t help itself, keeping its thoughts concealed in that moment, as I suddenly and involuntary felt a too-tender-to-be-platonic sigh let out. And he clearly noticed. And I felt myself cringe. We simply did not dare speak for the rest of the number, nor the remainder of the long, intimate rehearsal that succeeded that sigh.

After we were dismissed for the evening, and every other member of the friend group was individually taken home, we waited for our rides outside of school on a bench, too far apart to be natural. Though he had opened up significantly over the years, Will still had
the tendency to go as quiet as once remained constantly, albeit only in the most awkward of scenarios. Finally, when the tension grew simply too agonizing, I broke the silence.

“Hey…sorry about that earlier.” He looked at me, questioningly.

“About what?”

“When we were slow dancing, that sound I made, the- “

“Moan?” I scoffed at this, becoming defensive.

“Not quite a moan, no, I wouldn’t call it a moan, it was more just…”

“I didn’t mind, y’know.” I looked at him as he scooted down the bench towards me, his eyes gazing straight into mine. There was a seriousness in the air, and I felt my heart begin to race. “I’ve liked you for a really long time, Hannah.” I stayed silent. “And in that moment, I felt so close to you, and it felt so nice. I felt cherished…and safe.”

A beat went by. Eventually he broke my glance and turned forward, eyes squinted tautly shut.

I scooted close, so our bodies touched. I grabbed his hand. He exhaled. He squeezed back. We smiled.

#

Hannah wipes a tear off her cheek as she glances at the portrait of Will near the casket.

“It became a habit during his hospital stays for us to have long phone calls. We’d often not even speak much, but he was comforted by my presence through the phone.

Because of his treatment, he missed most of the tech rehearsals before our production of Hairspray, where he was set to portray Link Larkin. One night, he called me at 3 am, fretting. It was his first lead and he didn’t want to mess up. We talked through his anxieties, and then just talked about life. He couldn’t see the stars from his downtown hospital suite, and asked me to describe them. I told him the truth. The sky was just as dazzling as the night on the swings on the hilltop. And eventually we grew quiet, nothing more to talk about.

When I would be quiet for too long, he’d always ask me, with an uncharacteristic twinge of worry in his voice, ‘you there?’ And I’d speak back through the receiver. ‘I’m here.’
“You there?”
“I’m here.”

Hannah’s voice catches on the last word. The room is still. She soon collects herself.

#

The last night we spent together was after prom, the weekend before he died. It wasn’t the last time I saw him, or even our last conversation. It was the last conversation about something real though.

He had convinced me to go to the dance, insisting that I not skip my senior prom “just because he’s sick.” So instead Carly was my date. And I had fun. But the minute the dance was over, I drove to the hospital. It was past visiting hours, but his nurse, a kind woman named Samantha who I had grown to know and appreciate, let me in and guided me quietly down the corridor to his room. He was watching a Friends rerun on the small mounted TV when I came in, in full prom get-up, high heels and makeup and all. We chuckled as I pinned a boutonniere to his hospital gown. Samantha grinned and closed the door quietly behind her, leaving us alone.

“I requested our song in your honor tonight,” I told him. He beamed at that.

That night, we talked like we had never spoken before, and we covered everything. We talked about our past. About our future. We covered hopes, and we discussed our fears.

“Dying alone for me.” That’s what I told him was my greatest fear. “You?”

“If I’m being honest, when I’m with you, I don’t fear much.” He paused for a long moment, contemplating something deeply.

“I’ve been thinking about when I go-”

“If you go,” I was quick to correct him. He paused once more.

“Do you remember the night at the cabin?” I assured him that yes, for many reasons, I did, which made him chuckle. “We talked about me dying. Before I even got sick at all.” I looked at him, a bit puzzled as to why he brings this up.

“What’re you thinking of that night for?” He squeezed my hand and looked straight at me; eyes sharply focused.

“I don’t want to be mourned, y’know? I want my life to be celebrated. I got to spend it with lovely friends, a lovely family, and a
lovely, lovely, lovely girlfriend.”

“Well, yes, you have certainly lived a great life so far, but of course we’ll miss you if you die.” He perked up at the word “miss.”

“But missing is different from mourning. You mourn a wasted life, so don’t mourn me. Celebrate me! Throw a party! Sing, dance, get trashed, set off fireworks! Don’t be dower.” His eyes drifted off into space. “Y’know, Janis Joplin put it in her will for some money to be set aside so that her friends and family could throw a party in her honor. She had the right idea.” He flashed that Cheshire grin once more.

We slept hand in hand on that hospital bed.

#

The day before he got a diagnosis we had rehearsal. Neither of us were needed much, so we retreated to the choir room and situated ourselves at the piano. Will had played piano since he was three, but didn’t really play for fun. So when he said he learned a song, it was always a nice little surprise.

“You’re gonna make fun of me,” he said.

“I promise I won’t.” At that, he Laughed at me, unconvinced.

“It’s cheesy, I know it is, but this song reminds me of you.”

“Why would I make fun of you for that?” I wrapped my arms around him.

“Because when you hear the song, you’ll think…God it’s so cheesy.” He cracked his knuckles. “No. Making. Fun.”

He began to play the intro of what I recognized as a classic ABBA power ballad, the song that would become “our song.” We had danced to it at homecoming that year, an affectionately 70s themed event, sharing our first dance as a couple. When it clicked, I exhaled hard through my nose. He stopped playing.

“I knew you’d laugh.” He shut the lid over the keys.

“I just think it’s cute, it’s sweet,” I told him. It took some convincing, but I got him to continue, and as he sang and played away, I danced along.

#

“I don’t care if it’s cheesy. That boy made me cry with an ABBA song that day.” This remark elicits a playful laughter from the assembled. She continues.
“I felt transported every time I heard him play for me. It was so simple, yet so meaningful. Each press on ivory was warm and open, the wavelengths blanketed in a shimmering, halcyon glow, the notes falling into close congress, into intimate chords, inviting me into his heart.”

At this, Hannah shuts the spiral notebook and steps down from the dais.

#

Hannah drives from the church cemetery, through winding roads and rolling hills. As the sun sets, it strikes the windshield, refracting golden beams through its surface like the lens on a pair of glasses. As she drives, she thinks… she thinks of what could have been.

She thinks of what he would have wanted. She should have told them all, that this wasn’t what he wanted. That his life could not be defined by his death. She should have shared how, every time she looked at that casket, she thought to herself, “You there? You there? You there?” But even though she heard no response, she did not wallow, because he would want nothing of the sort; most of all, she knew that that dower demonstration should not have been allowed to continue in any capacity.

There should have been dancing. Music! His friends and family should have leapt to their feet, in song! A mobile choir, a raging band! The energy would have been palpable. Rapturous. That room would have been truly, truly, alive.

Her thoughts are broken, however, by the sound of a DJ on the radio.

“It is now 7 o’clock here on the east coast, which means it’s time for the 70s at 7! Tonight, we kick things off with an old classic. This is ABBA with Fernando.”

Quietly, through blown out car speakers, the tinny sounds of flutes flood in. Hannah laughs, shaking her head in jubilant disbelief. The voice of Anni-Frid Lyngstad asks “can you hear the drums Fernando,” as she turns the volume all the way up. She rolls down the windows to feel the air blow through her hair, speeding around familiar bends joyously.

She looks up at the sky, the one she shared with him many
times before, and as she does, she wipes a tear from her eye. She smiles.
Savanna Innes: Destiny
Photography
Savanna Innes: *Bundled Beauty*
Photography
Savanna Innes: *Helena*
Photography
Nemo: *Gray Skull*
Painting
Nemo: What’s going on in there?
Digital Photoshop
Caitlin Kemme: Pink Roses
Photography
Caitlin Kemme: Sunflowers
Photography
Destiny Ca’Mel: *Masquerade*
Acrylic paint, Paint pen, Prismacolor pencils
Destiny Ca’Mel: *Double Take*
Acrylic paint, Paint pen, Prismacolor pencils
Hallie Fogarty

Stinkbugs

I stare at the stinkbugs, 
waiting for them to fuck
or to kill each other.
A life as short as theirs must
be worth living,
six months of pain and pleasure
not mixing together.
But they just sit there,
unmoving, unsettling.

I killed a stinkbug at work
the other day.
I had seen it on the ceiling,
looking down at a toddler
as I changed his diaper.
A starring contest,
with his large, dark unblinking eyes,
and his mouth parted open,
following the bug’s
journey on the dirty ceiling.
They just redid the floors in my room,
but I guess they still leave the doors open
long enough to let the bugs in.
Alone was Matt Spillone.
With no home to go
and no success to show,
Matt Spillone sat in the snow, alone.
Matt Spillone, cold and feeling old,
ran his crimson hands along the snow.
He looked to his left
at the mess he had left
and wondered
“Why so alone is Matt Spillone?”
Matt Spillone wiped off his glasses
and retrieved his matches.
He knew he was the lowest of classes.
He sent the pile to ashes.
Matt Spillone watched the ashes drift away
and thought of his dear mother.
A mother like no other
…and wondered
“Why dear mother?”
“Why come out in the snow when I was alone?”
Kaitlyn Meyer

*Growth*

I used to be a little green sprout, barely poking out of the dirt, never making a sound. I would bend and twist whichever way the wind took me, and I always kept my head down.

Down, down, down I looked, a little sprout for so long. I never looked at me, never looked above the dirt just kept bending and twisting, the roaring wind the only sound.

Well, there was another sound—the other flowers telling me not to look down. To bend and twist my head up, to stop being a little sprout, to grow away from the ugly dirt and look at me.

I didn’t like to look at me. I didn’t like the sound of my voice, and the dirt was comfortable to me, a little sprout. I didn’t want to twist.

But I started to. I started to grow and twist all on my own, out of my control, me, no longer a little green sprout. The wind was not the only sound and I didn’t have to look down at the, fine I’ll admit it, ugly brown dirt.
The dirt
became so far away, I had to twist
to see it, so far down.
Can you believe it? Me,
a soft pink bud, finally the one making a sound.
I don’t miss being a little sprout.
I look up now, not down into the dirt.
My petals are starting to sprout and twist,
and I am more me than I ever have been. I have found my sound.
I never meant to let that little boy take over my painting. It started on a firefly evening in June. I had an iced tea and a mess of paint on my small table in the harsh garage light. The shadowy form of the solitary tree in spongy grass stood sentry among dancing lights, and the summer night was mine.

I had a rumpled, paint stained polo that had been my father’s, a fancy art degree that would never pay for itself, and the most beautiful images bursting in my mind’s eye. I pulled the thick bristles across the smooth canvas, and the broad curve of an ocean swell took form. No practical, grown-up considerations like a crumbling one-story house and a demanding electricity bill were going to stop me from painting.

The first time the boy appeared in my world, he didn’t touch anything. He stood at the very edge of the garage, on the border between the stacked cardboard boxes and cement floor, and frolicking firefly freedom on a summer’s eve, and he watched. And he seemed to belong there, with his dirt-stained skin, wide eyes, and tousled hair that reminded me of that free spirited Shakespearean imp.

The second time he came, I watched him from the corner of my eye. He stepped fully inside the garage, inside my quiet evening routine of light and boxes and art. My delicate, soft brush traced brilliant sunsets and muted graveyards. The sky was my favorite thing to paint, but a sky didn’t do much good with nothing underneath it. The sky needed the earth. The boy watched with hushed wonder as whole worlds dripped from my brush onto the canvas. But he did not touch, and he did not speak.

The third time he came, he came near without hesitation. I did not turn around, but I heard the scrape of a dusty cardboard box becoming a chair for a boy in awe. Leaves in the wind took shape under the bristly point of my careful brush. A strong oak, towering in an empty field. A small, tentative finger touched the swirls of green in the bottom corner of my canvas. It left a smudge of imperfection in an otherwise beautiful landscape. I left it there, and the boy left a smile with me when he vanished to fly with the fireflies.
When he came the next evening, a quick grin tugged at his lips at the sight of an extra stool. It had needed to come down from the living room, anyway. He eased himself down to sit beside me, separated by a few feet of distance and safety, all ragged clothes and knobby knees and elbows. The canvas in front of me portrayed a vast, barren cavern. Wobbly stalactites and stalagmites dripped and cracks webbed the stone floor.

I returned a wide, flat paintbrush to the table in search of a smaller one and spied a grubby hand wrapped around a brush. He froze, but I only picked up the tool I was after and turned back to the painting. When I allowed myself to peek again, I spied a bright yellow flower emerging from a dark crevice. It was simple—a child’s doodle, really. The vivid cheerfulness was out of place in the dreary, colorless picture I’d created. I hadn’t put it there. The corner of my mouth pulled upwards, and I watched the boy as he ducked back into the summer air.

The following night was a Sunday, and he did not come. I pretended to ignore the emptiness in my chest. I was okay on my own. The boy could come or go as he pleased; I didn’t need him. He probably had better places to be, anyway.

The sound of the boy’s bare feet on rough cement eased my shoulders the following Monday eve. I hadn’t moved the set of small brushes that had waited on the table since the flower, or the child-sized stool that was companion to mine. The smallest of the brushes narrowed to a point and I touched small, blazing sparks of white paint in an otherwise dark night sky. I glanced at the boy, and the attention of my gaze froze him in place. Deliberately, I moved my eyes past his features and the paintbrush in his hand and the carefulness of his posture and moved back to my own palette of colors. Dark greens and dim browns depicted a windy bluff in the empty sky over a sleeping town.

The frozen boy relaxed as I remembered that a few boxes in the back of the garage desperately needed to be rearranged. When I returned, a lone silhouette stood centerstage on the bluff, arms out and body leaning forward. It wasn’t quite a stick figure, but not fully formed, either. I could not tell whether the figure was about to plummet below to crash in the town or soar above to dance with the stars.
And the boy was gone again.

The next night changed from June to July, but the fireflies danced, and the shadows were warm and the summer still belonged to me and a muse in the form of a boy. I couldn’t decide if he was unwilling or unable to talk, but I found myself asking for his opinion as I worked.

“Pink or orange?” I asked softly, describing a sprawling homeless village across my canvas. He would point, and I obeyed, and the picture took shape. I painted leaning shanties and haphazard tents occupied by desperate and homeless people, inspired by the slum district of the city outside my garage. I painted families, mostly, clustered in tents or around small fires in old metal barrels. When the image was finished, I passed the smallest brush to the boy. His shoulders hunched when I didn’t turn away, but a small boy took shape towards the back of the shantytown. He was separate from all of the families, huddling alone in a dark alleyway I had left unoccupied.

The harsh garage light lit up each of the boy’s features as I examined him. The same green, torn t-shirt and raggedy brown pants. The same thin body and tangled hair. The boy next to me cringed away under my scrutiny and ran off once again. I thought of the figure on the bluff and wondered if this boy crashed or flew when he left my garage.

When the boy came back, the stool and brushes were waiting for him. I filled the blank space with a quiet forest, gray slabs of memory under a gray sky, and a yawning, empty hole in the ground that waited to be filled. I watched carefully to see what he would do, and the boy picked up a brush and dipped it carefully in the dollops of color on my palette. He appeared again, bit by bit, standing by the chasm in the earth. Alone. I nodded softly, a quiet tear of understanding tracing a silver trail down my cheek. The paintbrush was returned home with a soft rustle, and the boy fled again into the summer breeze.

The next night, the last night and the first, fireflies danced with the stars and a small boy crept back into my haven of art. On the table, on top of the paint supplies, balanced a small tray. It held the second serving I’d made of tonight’s dinner. I gestured to it, and the boy’s eyes widened as he sat down. I waited patiently, not looking
at him as the food disappeared. When he finished, I handed him a brush and waved to the palette. All my colors lay spread out, and the portrait was open and empty and inviting. He met my eyes for a fleeting second and touched brush to canvas.

A small, quiet door blossomed in the middle of the space. It was wooden, and cracked open just a bit, somewhere between an invitation and a plea. He set the paintbrush down and scraped his stool backwards, folding into himself. I lifted a brush, steady and sure in my hand, and a sturdy castle spread around the door. The heavy stones fit together like puzzle pieces, and the fortress was the promise to answer the plea. Fireflies spun through the summer night sky beyond the garage door and two brushes spun on canvas. The landscape was a fortress and a wilderness, safety and freedom, a garage and a summer night, an artist and a little boy.

And when it was finished, my gaze rested on his face, and I whispered.

“You can stay here tonight.”
Andrew Evans

Paperweight

He needed me there
as a heavy object
to occupy a space
so that nothing would blow away

The shape of my feelings
was immaterial
even more so
than the color of my mind

My function
was to reassure
and fit into a life
where I was needed

Without my weight
upon his bed and brain
things might have scattered
had a wind-blown!

Illustration by Evey Cooper
Cameron Wells  
*The Dance of Love*

_Longing... and knowing...
Longing to brush hair behind your ear and
confess my love under the pale moon
And
Knowing the distance between my vision and
yours are as far as earth from moon._

_Reachin... and withholding...
Reaching out to the future of possibility and
endless joy between us
And
Withholding from entering a fleeting
illusion of a future for us

_Yet
‘Neath this chest of mine the heart cannot
refrain from the hopeless dance of love._
Megan Taylor

Midwinter in Montparnasse

Timid dove seduced me with pleasantries. How I scoff the whispers of your tongue. You flirt by affair, you wing The night, converse with ghostly wrung

Hands that molest my eyes. A hundred arms snatch to soothe, Flung snow seeps my eyes Then condenses those lids to soot.

To bathe in lulled waters Thick of oil and chilled of ice, Midwinter, I imagine altars Where I can forgive a promise thrice

Branded in my ribs and seared by memory sung. Seal my letter wrote by ash, trill fan to flame. Wipe nostalgia of future hung By ambition and cycle blaze.

How do you to I, Of earth-borne flame and cloud-cried dew, Lift sky with staple wings? Pacify My teeth that gnash night to gums. I chew

My lips to worship you livid, dove. I cannot bleed then plead for timid blood?
Hallie Fogarty

Green

Her eyes are so sweet
I could scoop them out
and keep them for myself.
I’d put them in a
small drawstring bag,
just sheer enough
to see what’s inside.

I’d shelve them
next to the love letters,
and soak them in saline
when the fluid rain out,
only to discard them when
I could no longer see
myself in their reflection.
Levi Pertuset
Mindful Hydration

I usually take
a drink of water
after a long summer’s nap,
but when I don’t,
the grogginess sets in like a pound of butter
on a pile of homemade smashed potatoes.
The water tends to moisten my roots
and leave my leaves hydrated throughout the day,
which, in turn,
promotes healthy thinking
like cold canned tuna on saltine crackers.
I never think about things more than most people,
until I feel a little uneasy or bored.
But, without that water,
I’m a zombie, inside and out.
Could it be that H2O has healing properties?
Or does your internal water bottle just need to be refilled?
My internal water bottle is a humidifier,
which needs to be filled at least three times a day,
unless the air is dry.
CONTRIBUTORS

Destiny Ca’Mel, a student in NKU’s Visual Communication Design program, had never fully understood what dark times she was living in. Today, she has had her eyes open to the ideas about the real world as a black woman. In this generation, there are so many unseen evils and devastations that occur on a day-to-day basis that we try to not think about, or even concern ourselves with. From here, Destiny decided that she would incorporate the topics that are hard to swallow, such as, sexual assault, racism, sex trafficking, etc., as the foundation of her artwork.

Andrew Evans is a Secondary English Education major at NKU. He can usually be found in his room reading a book, writing a book, or playing video games. Andrew is a proud member of NKU’s Honors College, and also has a minor in Theatre. After NKU, he plans to pursue grad school in English Literature and eventually aim for his PhD.

Alex Fischer grew up in Fort Thomas, Kentucky. She graduated from Highlands High School and is currently receiving a bachelor’s degree in English from Northern Kentucky University. She started writing at the age of 10 when she learned how to play her first guitar. She would make up lyrics that turned into poetry when she went to high school. Her passion for writing lives in poetry.

Hallie Fogarty is a junior Integrative Studies major studying creative writing, studio art, and psychology, and is also part of the Honors college. On campus, she is the current chapter president of Alpha Phi Omega and is also in the Lavender Society. Her work has been published in multiple literary journals, including Tealight Press, Juven, and Tipping the Scales. Her writing can be found on twitter @halfogarty and her art can be found on Instagram @afterlanguage.
**Savanna Innes** is a Junior Visual Communication Design Student at Northern Kentucky University, with a minor in International Studies. Innes grew up in San Francisco, California before moving to the Midwest. Innes loves Screenprinting, Painting, and Film Photography alongside Graphic Design. Her favorite artists and inspirations in her work are Frida Kahlo, Soey Milk, and Helen Van Meene. Savanna is strongly influenced by female artists and more specifically women of color. She’s currently very interested in Fashion Photography and is working this year on creating her own Fashion Magazine Publication with photography and design work by her.

**Caitlin Kemme** was born and raised in a small town in Cincinnati, Ohio. She’s 20 years old and attending college at Northern Kentucky University. She is currently a junior and majoring in Integrative Studies with minors in creative writing, history, and evolutionary studies. Her passion for writing and photography has grown over the years, especially with taking creative writing classes in college. She hopes to publish more photography and writing in the coming years. She currently has one published photograph in issue nine of the *Loch Norse Magazine*.

**Kaitlyn Meyer** is a junior at NKU double majoring in Spanish and Secondary Education. Although she wants to be a Spanish teacher, poetry has always been one of her favorite things. She loves the way she can express herself with words on a page better than any other way. She thinks it’s a really beautiful thing, and she never wants to stop creating poetry. Other than teaching and writing, she also enjoys singing and traveling, and she hopes to spend a year in Spain teaching English after she graduates.

**Luciano Montazemi** is a Freshman at NKU. Though undeclared in major, his interests lay in the creative and performing arts (particularly writing and theatre) as well as film and left-wing political activism. He dearly thanks his family, friends, editor, dog, and significant other for support in his creative endeavors, and particularly for pushing him to distribute his writing for the first time in his life.
Special thanks go to his mother, who always advised him to “leave it on the floor” before performances; in life of a stage, he resolved to the leave it on the page.

**Nemo** is a non-binary artist in their third semester at Northern Kentucky University (NKU). A former high school dropout, Nemo now has a high school diploma and associates degree and is currently working towards a bachelor’s degree. Nemo has had many struggles including but not limited to addiction, poverty, abuse, coming to terms with gender identity and being a single parent. Over the years Nemo has progressed from an outsider artist with no direction to learning to create, form, and harness craft through the school of the arts (SOTA) program. Their work reflects on each obstacle and how they impact Nemo’s perception of reality.

**Levi Pertuset** is a Senior English Creative Writing major with a focus in Education. He is a musician at heart and an inventor of imagination. He thoroughly loves writing music and doing anything that requires creativity, especially if it involves world design. He live in Adams County, Ohio with his family and currently has no pets, yet.

**Rachel Petri** is an award-winning author focusing on young people, disabilities, and hope. Her own visual impairment makes Petri a passionate advocate for all disabilities, and her love for reading and stories have led her to approach this task through writing. Petri has a variety of experiences speaking and writing about disabilities. Petri studies child life, psychology, and counseling to encourage others with similar struggles. She has attended several multidisciplinary conferences to learn and develop these skills. Petri is a member of Word Weavers International and can be found on Facebook.

**Mandy Reinmuller** has recently discovered the cathartic nature of confession poetry and intends to continue writing it. A senior Anthropology major and English minor, her only regret is not being able to major in English. She currently resides in her not so quaint (or grand) hometown of Grand Junction, Michigan. When she’s not writing, Mandy enjoys attempting to keep plants alive, reading,
baking, searching for interior design inspiration that she will never follow through on and fawning over people’s cats on TikTok. She developed a love for reading at a young age and has thought about becoming a writer for a long time.

**Skyler Smith** is a second-year art student at Northern Kentucky University with a passion for writing poetry. While artistic endeavors are her primary focus in school, writing poetry has always been a source of relief when her emotions get too tangled to just draw away. She prefers a more casual, freeform style of writing, as it better suits her subjects, which often center around memory and intense sensory experience. A foundational source of inspiration is Wendy Cope’s “The Orange”, citing its ability to maintain emotional depth through a simplistic narrative.

**Megan Taylor** hails from the small town of Mount Vernon, Kentucky. She is an NKU Undergraduate student specializing in languages and studio arts. When she is not fueling her coffee addiction in cafes, she spends her time playing video games, re-watching *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, and hugging her cat, Char. She employs her creativity by gathering music collections for her weekly radio broadcast Mage Noise Radio, spiritually manifesting the *Phantom of the Opera* soundtrack on repeat, and attending dance classes. Megan is currently combining her passions of literature, design, and illustration a series of zine publications in 2021.

**Bella Tuck** is a second year at Northern Kentucky University, studying English with a Creative Writing Focus and an Art History Minor. She is originally from Bowling Green, KY where she attended Greenwood High School. Her current writing ranges in Poetry to Creative Nonfiction. She explores topics such as death, love, and personal growth.

**Cameron Wells** is a third year English Education major. I love reading and writing and would love to become a published author. I write a lot of poetry, but I am working on a fantasy story which is really exciting! C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien are my favorite authors.
and inspire me to write amazing stories. When I graduate, I plan to teach high school English and hopefully publish novels.

**Shelby Whitt** is a senior at Northern Kentucky University studying Creative Writing. She hopes to go on to graduate school and study Fiction. She enjoys writing of all kinds, though mostly focuses on Fantasy. She is inspired by the differing psychological states of the individual mind and how this affects a person. She loves exploring mental illness in her writing and uses it as a platform to promote a healthier view of those with these illnesses. Outside of her studies she is a black belt in Taekwondo, enjoys horseback riding, and lifeguarding. Whitt is a former swimmer for DePauw University where she was all-conference in the 400 IM.
Thank You to everyone who has made ten issues of *Loch Norse Magazine* possible. Whether you are/were a staff member, author, artist, continued supporter, or even a one-time guest, you got us here. Thank you.