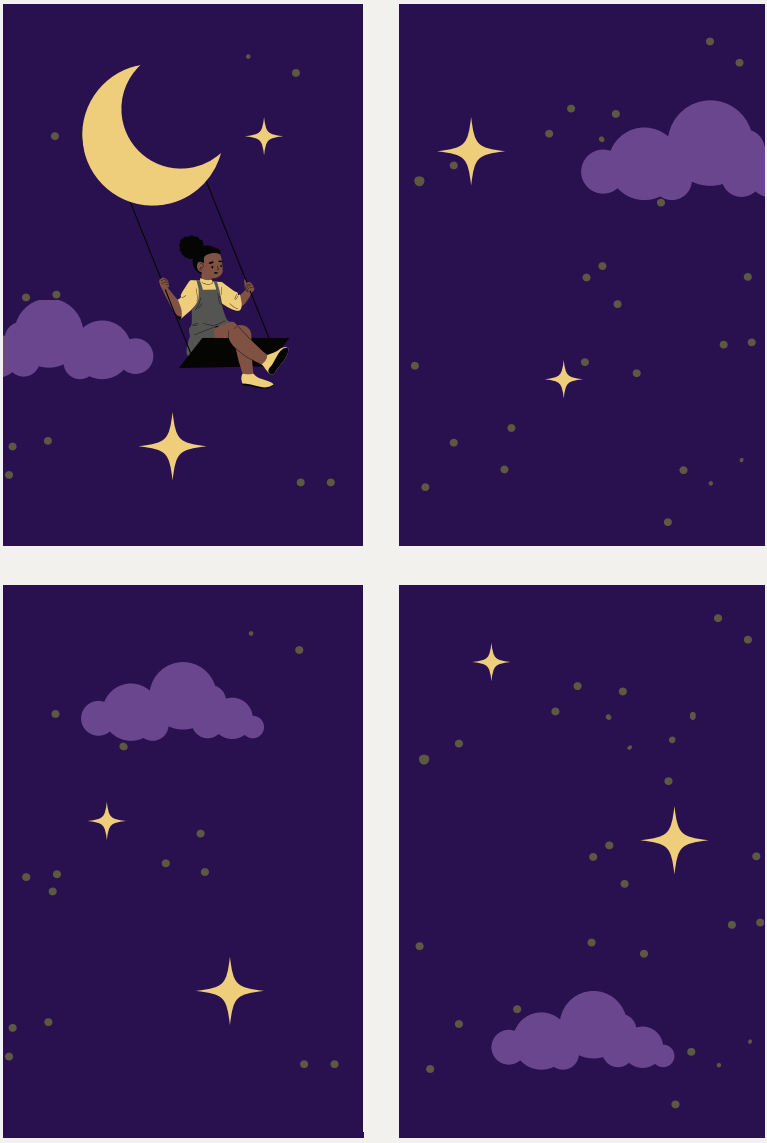
Childhood Dreams *and* Aspirations

REFLECTIONS AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT ✦ QUARTER 3



International Human Rights Art Movement 2024

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ART MOVEMENT

LITERARY MAGAZINE

THIRD QUARTERLY EDITION 2024

INTERNATIONAL
HUMAN
RIGHTS ART
MOVEMENT

Curated & edited by Bridget Reaume & Lisa Zammit

A publication of the International Human Rights Art Movement (IHRAM)

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ART MOVEMENT LITERARY MAGAZINE
Third Quarterly Edition 2024

Curated by IHRAM in the United States of America.
IHRAM, New York City, USA
www.humanrightsartmovement.org

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INTRODUCTION

LISA ZAMMIT | EDITOR & DESIGNER

WITH IHRAM'S THIRD Literary Magazine Edition coming to completion, I am honoured to have worked closely with authors from all over the globe, uplifting them to express their firsthand experiences, allowing them to reflect on their childhood dreams and youthful aspirations.

We should sit with these passionate stories that our authors have so deeply written about, from core memories that shaped their life to the sheer value in the voices of our global youth. This is our motivation to be better role-models to our children and give every growing teen the education they deserve. Another quarter has now closed and I do hope you can find inspiration from these unique themes.

The authors featured in *Childhood Dreams and Aspirations* boldly share their firsthand accounts and reflect upon their youthful experience. The IHRAM Magazine proudly celebrates authors, from England to Africa, providing readers with their raw perspectives on issues of human rights

Lisa Zammit
Production Editor
International Human Rights Art Movement
Glasgow, UK

TEACHER

MUHAMMAD AHMAD | PAKISTAN

A mentor belongs to a world,
Where only words are understood.
Where he weaves the dreams of his learners.
Making jewels for the nations he planned.
Righteous knowledge, his trusted guides,
Through wisdom's valleys his thoughts fly.
His pen carves the heroes of nations,

Strong commitments which are never shaken.
He encourages them to narrate their goals,
To shine in the world like diamond souls.
He is a strength, where flaws may rest,
A calm fellow, a comfort for their best.
His quotes are prosperous and forever alive,
Shedding ignorance of the world, with wisdom light.
An unseen and an indelible impression,
He is always loyal with his passion.
He is an architect of nation, a helping hand
Creating the souls for a peaceful land.

This piece is dedicated to teachers all around the world, and the love and respect that they deserve.

Being from a family of teachers, I was taught from an early age to be driven by curiosity and was equipped with the tools and passion to gain a deeper understanding of the world around me.

My mother, in particular, used to teach mathematics at the school where I studied during the early years of my life. She used to quote the saying, "A mathematician is like a blind man in a dark room searching for a black cat, which isn't even there."

Even the teachers I met in junior and senior highschool have imbued me with not only the drive to learn, but they were always there to support me during the worst times of my life.

That is why I wish to become a teacher. To impart knowledge upon the next generations and to nurture the same drive to not only learn facts about the world we live in, but also how to live in it and change it for the better.

FREE

E. KRAFT | UNITED STATES

Alone
Once something to be feared;
Searched frantically in the crowd
But your quick steps disappeared;
I looked high above me,
Still no familiar face;
Just one gentle uniform
Escorting me to the desk;
The intercom yelled and yelled;
You slowly reappeared,
A smirk behind your motherly mask;
Many times this act replayed.

My sister mirrored your game;
You vomited out in full mirth:
Look at that motherless child
No care even for your grandbabe.

Alone
Now I have flown
Just freedom in the air
No more smirks to care.

I am inspired by my mother's childhood and life lessons, and I seek to help others heal through the love of writing. I hope everyone attains self-love and appreciation for all of life's twists and turns, even if they did not have the most ideal childhood.

LITTLE WAR VICTIMS

GINGER STRIVELLI | UNITED STATES

Kids are sleeping in bombed schools
In Palestine out of sight
They are hiding from bombs
That rain down every night

Their lucky parents lay hurt
In hospitals that are also targeted
Their unlucky family are
Already gone, unfairly dead.

Fourteen thousand of their little
Palestinian friends
Died this year from the war
That never ends.

In the Ukraine far from Palestine
Children suffer tonight also
Russia wants their lands and homes,
even as they cry no.

Five million little war victims
Cry tonight in Ukraine.
They all are facing trauma
That is totally inhumane.

They don't care
How many Ukrainian kids cry
Anymore than they care
how many Palestinians kids die.

Far away from besieged Ukraine and
From the Palestinians under fire
The children of Sudan
Are under attacks even more dire.

In Sudan the weapons aren't
Just bombs and gunshots that kill
There the weapons of rape and torture
Hurt worse than dying ever will.

The little war victims
Across Mother Earth's face
Don't care about greed, religious bigotry
Or the differences of race

Those are the causes of the wars
Those children are trapped in
They don't care why or how
They just want it to end.

Watching the news of late is heartbreaking for all the people in wartorn areas around the world. The orphaned, wounded and murdered children are so pitiful. I have to limit the news I watch because it is so depressing. I wrote this piece out of those emotions the news stirs up in us compassionate souls.

ANTI-SEMITE

CHRISTIAN MAGGS | UNITED STATES

I see eyes deprived of childhood—tragic and crayon red. They bear witness to war-induced famine in a sacred Strip of Holy Land. Farms and orchards razed to dust, fish lines cut, empty plates, blockades.

I see bones in Gaza—child bones protruding from malnourished flesh. I gasp at the dangling of emaciated limbs; at the gauntness of cheeks; at skin stretched horrid and tight over vertebrae and ribs.

I see the whole of you, dear child, blistering bare beneath burning sun—the rooftops, the canopies, the make-shift coverings, the cars used as shelters have all been bombed. You stand alone among countless others, shell-shocked.

I see only a child in need and offer my green American dollars. Then, I hear a peculiar voice advancing by force of political winds. A disdainful voice. A thunderous voice, mimicking God's, calling me, "anti-Semite, anti-Semite."

The inspiration for this poem, Anti-Semite*, came to me when I was thinking of an easy way to keep my credit cards active. I decided that using them to make small monthly donations to humanitarian causes would be the best thing to do. In talking with a friend about providing aid to help alleviate the famine in war-torn Gaza, my friend immediately replied that doing such a thing would label me an anti-Semite, and possibly, a terrorist sympathizer. "How tragic," I thought.*

GREEN DOOR

KATHLEEN HELLEN | UNITED STATES

she thinks she is like flashes of the sun in yellow shorts. a yellow summer halter. the river gushes up the smell of rust. aunt flo, they joke. the boys who gave up pinball for Harleys. barges run the coal to Baltimore. Lake Erie.

i remember, and every time i do it changes. it stays the same. green door. black label. the jukebox on repeat … *born to be* … it was *wild*. it was 1968. she was dancing in a miniskirt for tips. white go-go boots and yellowjackets. dexies. goofballs, reds.

he kept a baseball bat behind the bar. drove her running from the dealer to the Greyhound. she ripped him off for meth, for cash he had on stash. i humped the tracks. chicory and ironweed. i found a dead crow in the drift along the river. she's never coming back.

green door. open it. shaft of light, the sour smell of drafts gone flat. it's 1968. he's hauling up the cases. in the parking lot, behind the bowling alley, boys cooked sticky spoons of heroin. they nodded off. black opium from Vietnam. Cambodia. the Mon's a rusty river in the iron dusk. it changes.

The air some days was choked with smoke and soot that settled on the Buicks and the Chevys, on window ledges, that ringed the collar of your shirt, it stank of rotting eggs. At 11 p.m., when shifts changed over, furnaces lit up the sky, they set the night on fire.

South of Pittsburgh, Monongahela in 1968 was not unlike other mill towns that banked the north-flowing river. Every day barges humped coal from mines in West Virginia, trains hauled finished steel to Baltimore, Lake Erie. Kids like me, who played near tracks, threw rocks at rail cars rattling windows, who lived under the hulking shadow of slag dumps, were witness to what happened. When you turned 18, if you didn't get married, didn't quarterback or go to state college, you went to Vietnam. The TET Offensive. You signed up, and if you made it back, you were like an unexploded bomb, waiting to go off in Cambodia. In 1968 there was Jimi Hendrix. Purple Haze. Kids like me were popping speed, smoking hash, tripping out to black-light posters. Vinnie's diner was the place to score bennies or a bag, Rocky's pad was where you crashed. On Star Trek William Shatner kissed a black woman. Two black athletes bowed heads and raised their fists during the Olympics. The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy were assassinated. The next year, you saw it all in context, what had happened, why you were so goddamn sad. On the cover of Life Magazine: The picture of a soldier with the words: "The Faces of the American Dead in Vietnam: One Week's Toll." Inside, picture after picture, 242 young men killed in seven days in Vietnam.

SUNSET

SERENA PAVER | SOUTH AFRICA

In an evening of a weekend
in that part of the year when summer turns to autumn
but it is not too cold to put on shoes outside
The sun begins to set on my father
pushing me on the swing.
A series of glittered butterflies, attached by wire springs,
float above my hair.
A bobbling lid over a head filled with fairies and monsters
and the promise of good conquering evil.
Each a sparkling reminder of the petite power of magic
that adults tell me isn't real.
All glory and wonder
I lie my head back and feel the featherlight weight of the universe
as it communicates itself to itself around my mind
Watching over us, and the sky, as it turns pink,
then purple, then dark blue
my mother smiles a quiet smile.
So quiet, it brings on the night with its silence.
And soon it will be time to go back inside.

Let me begin again
The evening gets darker but the play cannot stop, the house
cannot be stepped into.
Strapped into a freedom that isn't mine, the swing
provides safety walls cannot
From the glass doors of the front room, my mother watches
with a smile that sleeps with sorrow
Perhaps she is jealous of my freedom or my father's ability to give it.

Or that the day will rest for the hours between 8 and 5, and she will not.
The sky's colours tease the darkness that will soon descend
The shoes that will soon need to be put on
The swing that will soon fill with winter rains
The roles that I will one day be
big enough
strong enough
afraid enough to fill.

This poem depicts my childhood memory of being pushed on a swing by my father. This happened often and was something I very much enjoyed. It uses this image of childhood joy and intimacy to juxtapose my then innocence with my now understanding of the pressing issues that were weighing on my family at the time, and how this created an unconscious pressure on me to act and grow up in a certain way. It muses on how adulthood, as we know it, may be in part created by fear, and hints that the childhood imagination and play we discard as 'silly' when we 'grow up', may actually need to be nurtured and cultivated.

GHOSTS FROM THE PAST

ZEENATH SHIFFANI | SRI LANKA

I COULDN'T BE SURE what woke me up—probably the sudden flash of lightning or the rumbling of thunder. The rain was rampaging mercilessly, and so were the memories from the past. I often wondered if there was some sort of bond between the rain and my past, because every time the cold drops descend from the heavens and wet the brown earth, like the warm dust that surfaces from the depths, all the memories bundled up and thrust into the deep end of my soul slowly, but steadily, flow up and illuminate without any mercy.

It was a bright, beautiful morning. The "Karutha Kolomban" mango tree proudly swayed its branches, and beneath its shade stood the bright orange Kubota tractor, beaming. I stormed out of the house and perched on the shining leather seat, my tiny hands clutching the massive wheels as my imaginary journey began, my mouth imitating the rumbling noise of the tractor. Suddenly, I noticed two men hurrying through the gate into our compound. One was an old, haggard-looking man with a few white lines drawn on his wrinkled forehead; the other was a hefty man, probably in his 50s. They both looked anxious, their eyes filled with terror. "Chairman?" I heard them inquire. I vaguely remember my mom calling for my dad, and the men sobbing, almost begging. Dad looked worried too, and within seconds, I remember him yelling for his driver, and then the jeep racing out. The men sat on the white bench, praying frantically. It was obvious that one was a Tamil and the other a Muslim.

As a little girl of five, I couldn't understand what was happening, but I knew that something grave had occurred and that my dad was the knight in shining armor, who raced on a metal horse to save someone. People kept coming in and out of my house.

For some reason, like pieces of a missing puzzle, I fail to recall the incidents that followed. It could have been a day, or maybe just a few hours. I was seated at a table, eating raw mangoes dipped in salt and chilli powder, my all-time favorite.

The house was filled with people coming and going, anxious faces, muffled voices. The whole atmosphere was tense, and nobody seemed to notice that I was eating my third mango with loads of chilli powder. When the jeep rumbled back, almost everyone stormed out of the house. I ran out, hoping to see my dad smiling with pride, but his face—it was gray, his eyes puffed. Suddenly, he looked old. With his head hung down, he walked lifelessly, like a war hero who had lost the battle. I ran towards him and held his hands. The two men walked up to Dad, one of them muttering in a trembling voice, "Sir?..." His words seemed to hang in the air. Dad looked up helplessly, tried to say something, but failed—his voice broke down even before he could break the news. "They have killed them both, they used a tire…" What followed was complete chaos: the howling and wailing of both men. "Enda pitcha pottikulla kai vechutaanuhale" (They've laid hands on my begging pot), the old man repeatedly cried out, beating his forehead. I shut my ears, unable to bear the weeping and howling that followed. The old man tumbled down unconscious, and a few people ran towards him to hold him. The other hefty man screamed, "Naan eppidi ida oota poi sollura ya Allah!" (How am I going to break the news at home?). Everything seemed to happen in slow motion, and like a movie with an abrupt ending, my memory stops there. But the voices and the image of the old man tumbling down are something that could never be erased.

It was during the late '80s when the east and north of the island were controlled by the so-called Indian Peacekeeping Forces (IPKF). Bearing a Tamil name was enough evidence for them to label Tamil youths as Tiger terrorists. Their end would often be a cruel death. On that fateful day, two young lads—one a Muslim from a fairly comfortable family, and the other a Tamil, born into extreme poverty—had been studying together for the upcoming advanced-level examination. They knew no caste nor creed; it was pure friendship. That was an era when my village could proudly display the unity among Tamils and Muslims. The youths, in need of a well-deserved break, set out together on a bicycle to the main road. At the sight of the main road packed with IPKF armed men, the two youngsters panicked and tried to turn the bicycle back into the narrow lane. Spotting them from afar, one of the armed men raced towards them and pushed the bicycle down. Fear-struck, both lads stood frozen. The IPKF, who did not understand a single word of Tamil or English, muttered something in their native tongue, which obviously made the youths shudder in fear. Finally, when the Tamil youth reluctantly revealed his name, the Muslim—unfortunately a stammerer from birth—could not utter his name out

of fear. They were both pulled and shoved into a truck. The howling of the boys was not heard by many, except for a few witnesses who hid in fear for their lives. When the truck disappeared, they ran to inform their homes.

The men came to my father, who was the chairman of our village at the time. But even before Dad could race after the vehicle and explain that they were innocent students, the armed men had taken them to Ampara Army Camp to "interrogate" them. By the time Dad reached the camp, they had already been killed.

The rain seemed to cease all of a sudden, and the noise of droplets gliding from the roof was the only sound that filled the eerie night. I turned around to stare at my children, who were in a deep sleep. I got back into bed and tried closing my eyes. The last thing I heard before I fell asleep was "Enda pitcha pottikulla kai vechutaanuhale" (They've laid hands on my begging pot), and I knew it would never stop, like the midnight rain.

I was born in a tiny village situated in the eastern province of Sri Lanka. It is a village abundant with lush green paddy fields, countless trees, and plenty of streams gurgling merrily across the landscape. A true feast of nature for the eyes indeed.

I spent most of my childhood at my maternal grandparents' home, popularly known as the "walawu." The walawu was enveloped by fruiting trees and was a paradise for birds. My passion for writing was ignited through witnessing this boundless nature. Unfortunately, the internal war between the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) and the armed forces wrecked my village. It went from bad to worse when the Sri Lankan government sought assistance from the IPKF (Indian Peacekeeping Forces) to end the war, which without any doubt, was the worst political move into which my paradise island was dragged. The IPKF, neither speaking English nor Tamil, went on a killing spree, murdering many Tamil youths and labeling them as members of the Tamil Tigers.

The incident I have narrated is true, one that I witnessed as a child and that continues to haunt me to this day.

QUAKING

KIMBERLY W. HEINMAN | UNITED STATES

5:46 AM, Tuesday, January 17, 1995

THE SOUND OF A MOTORCYCLE engine revving right outside my window woke me to the dimness of Osaka's morning. Turning, I gazed out my second-floor bedroom window groggily and wondered why the motorcycle sounded so close. Nothing was there except for our tiny backyard, bamboo trees, and our neighbor's blue-tiled roof illuminated by the city's light pollution and fading moonlight.

The world rolled.

Time slows when the world writhes, but nothing freezes. Your mind screams, your heart pounds, you shout, and the world moans like a sick machine. We drilled about finding a doorway and getting under heavy furniture, but when the world seizures, you can't move. The ground becomes water, and there is no way to walk on water. Pictures and paintings jerked from my walls. Trophies and books flung from my shelves. Something crashed and shattered. I gripped my mattress and prayed that our house would withstand the quake, that I would not be buried under a crumbled ceiling, that I would know stability again.

The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake lasted for twenty seconds. Its epicenter was off the northern part of Awaji Island in Osaka Bay, 20 km off the coast of Kobe, and 13.2 kilometers underground. The quake moved bilaterally along the fault line, hitting Japan's most populated harbor town, not far from where we used to live in Ashiya. In Ibaraki, we were 72 kilometers from the quake's beginning. We felt the reeling earth 13 seconds after it released its tension and rebounded three meters in the deadliest quake to hit Japan since the 1920s. Seismometers reported the quake as a 7.3 on the Richter scale.

When the world stopped shaking, my siblings and I ran to our doorways, heads peeking into the hallway, arms braced against the doorframe. One, two, three, my mother counted her kids. Our house was intact. Sirens sounded in the distance,

but no smoke met our noses, no fumes, and no collapsing sounds from nearby homes. At 5:47 AM on January 17, 1995, we had no idea how bad things were.

My mother rushed us downstairs. In her mind, the ground floor was safer than upstairs. The logic of panic defies explanation and often logic. My father was crawling out from under the dining room table, the only one of us to follow guidance and hide under a solid object. He was muttering something about a lost banana. A bowl of half-prepared fruit salad sat on the kitchen counter. We never found that banana.

On the TV that morning, a clip from security cameras at a news station showed filing cabinets tipped onto news staff. A man teetered and yelled as he tried to move along the rippling floor. The building shook in the footage, like a swaying tree on a windy day. But nothing broke; no walls collapsed, and no ceiling caved in to show a smoke-filled dawn.

We went to school.

The roads were unobstructed, and the traffic light. Osaka International School was largely intact except for cracks running up one side. It was mostly deserted. The greatest devastation occurred in the library, where every bookshelf toppled, catching one another at 45-degree angles, like cards stacked to make a doorway. Books, spines open, lay in mounds between the shelves' triangles. The headmaster made the call and sent everyone home. The school wouldn't reopen for a week.

It took days for the full scope of the destruction to trickle into the world's news broadcasts. By Friday, local groups organized aid walks. My mother planned to participate in one, and I insisted on joining her. We stuffed supplies we thought would be helpful or appreciated (diapers, feminine pads, cigarettes, and dried food) into our largest packs and boarded a crammed train heading southwest.

The train halted at the last undamaged station. We climbed out and followed the crowd along the railway tracks, the only unblocked way into the Kobe disaster zone. In places, the train rails snaked, forming large S-shapes. I tried to comprehend the force needed to bend railroad ties.

We walked for two hours, our heavy backpacks cutting into our shoulders.

Mounds of wood and tatami mats, broken tiles, and smashed paper walls marked where homes once stood. Many older apartment buildings were missing their sixth floor, smashed flat between the fifth and seventh, like a magician ripping a tablecloth out, leaving wine glasses standing above and the table below. Bodies were in that thin space marked only by crumpled struts and rebar. On the street where we once lived, our Ashiya house still stood, a wide crack running up the front wall from the ground to the middle of the second story. On either side, our neighbors' houses had collapsed in rubble piles. We would have survived if this had happened while we lived here, but the neighbor who brought us sushi our first week in Japan likely didn't.

Down at the end of the street, the middle strips of the elevated Hanshin Expressway ran parallel to the sky. The pillars supporting the road broke, toppling the expressway onto its side, and I was looking at both highway lanes. Vertigo spun the world.

We offloaded our supplies at a local elementary school turned refugee center for hundreds of homeless people. A woman grabbed what we had to offer, her eyes filled with something dark. I remember feeling accused by her eyes, accused of surviving, accused of being a foreigner gawking at her loss, accused of not bringing more. Then she turned and rushed away, arms filled with our supplies. She hadn't even muttered a thank you or bowed. Not that I needed thanks, but in a culture where people often bow ten times before departing, and "thank you" and "excuse me" drip from everyone's lips as frequently as American biker gangs might curse, her unceremonial departure was striking, and confusing.

As we walked back along the railroad tracks, I felt enormous survivor's guilt. That feeling would haunt me for years, as would a deep discomfort and unsettlement anytime the ground moved under me. I hate suspension bridges to this day.

One of my classmates lived in Kobe and talked about how he had clambered onto his motorcycle, weaving between the debris piles, pulling his neighbors from the rubble. More than 35,000 people were pulled from beneath collapsed buildings, over 20,000 were injured, and 6,400 died, mostly the elderly who lived in older homes. A year later, the trailer park on Rokko Island still housed thousands of the 300,000 people made homeless in those twenty seconds. Clotheslines stretched between rows and rows of white boxy temporary houses, each smaller than a

shipping container, each home to a family. I could see the refugee camp from the monorail on my way to sporting events at our rival school, Canadian Academy.

Another earthquake struck off the Tōhoku region of Japan on March 11, 2011, this time, a 9.0 megathrust undersea quake 120 km offshore and lasting for six minutes. The resulting quake damage, followed by a forty-meter tsunami that traveled ten kilometers inland, decimated the area and destabilized the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. The meltdown of three of the plant's reactors and the death of nearly 20,000 people, excluding the 2,500 missing and presumed swept out to sea, led an American classmate from high school still living in Japan to comment that he felt like he needed to leave the country. The Triple Disaster was a Japanese painful wound; even his status as a television personality and award-winning documentary film director who had lived in Japan for decades didn't permit him to claim. He moved to New York City.

I wrote my college application essay about the Hanshin quake, still trying to understand my reaction to the destruction and that woman's eyes. Later that year, my mother won International Teacher of the Year. Someone nominated her, and she attributed her hollow victory to the quake. Neither of us wanted to profit from that day's horror, yet here we were. The world felt that awarding those of us on the periphery of the devastation was a means of appeasing its own survivor's guilt.

I got into every college I applied to.

The haunting of living through an earthquake reverberates in me to this day. It is not just the Earth's unexpected movement but also the reaction both I and others had to the devastation. I wrote this essay to try to understand the emotional weight I felt as a teenager and American living in Japan following the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. In this piece, I'm not only reporting on the destruction I saw but how I felt as a witness, participant, and outsider to Japan's national pain of the quake.

SAVIO

RIGEL PORTALES | PHILIPPINES

Dear God,

In every chapter of my textbook was the profile of a saint. It just so happened we were on St. Dominic Savio, the youngest saint at the time. In 1849, he wrote a little book of promises: the last of which was *Death rather than sin*. Though no textbooks mention this fact, I half-remember my teacher telling me a story of how he created the shortest prayer in the world. It goes: *One day, John Bosco overheard him repeating the phrase, Lord, here is Dominic*. Just the Lord and Dominic over and over. *Dominic here*, as if he was just handed the phone by an angel. Before he died at 14, he practiced *The Exercise of a Happy Death* wherein he proclaimed that he would be the first to die among his peers. *Oh, what wonderful things I see* were his last words. He died happy. He happily died. Lord, my life will be a longer prayer if you let me live.

SAVIO *is based on my Christian Living and Values Education class in high school which is still mandatory here. It's about St. Dominic Savio, the youngest saint at the time and a story reflecting how I hallucinated about him, which for the longest time, I believed was true.*

Like any depiction of masculinity, adolescent or otherwise, SAVIO *reckons with its own dissolution: myth and moral. Masculinity, I think, is always in a state of transition from boy to man and to the consequences of being a man. UN Women reports that "women and girls are most likely to be killed by those closest to them." This entails romantic partners, uncles, fathers, and brothers.*

Within this paradigm, the questions I reflect on are those within and beyond manhood (which has thankfully been explored by many feminists and queer theorists). Are boys doomed by their gender? Can their actions be attributed to criminal desires, poor upbringing, or an inherited, innate sin as Catholicism posits? What does it mean to worship a God whose language is radiant but patriarchal and punitive? I'm still trying to work through the answers, trying to find the "king inside the king that the king / does not acknowledge" as Frank Bidart once wrote.

LESSONS IN DIVERSITY

PAMELA JO GUSTAFSON | UNITED STATES

My mother taught me about diversity
Years later a student showed me its complexity
My mother provided strict boundaries over time
Censoring my use of common childhood rhyme
I loved to chant familiar rhymes and songs
Found out later other people were wronged
And the rhymes did not accurately portray
Groups of people who lived their own way
Eenie, minie, miney mo I would exclaim
A way to take turns, a fun little game
My mom knew they were offensive just the same
Correcting me, teaching me to avoid hate her aim
So I learned to catch the tiger by the toe
She was quiet about the Ten Little Indians Boys
A favorite that brought me a joy each day
But why count in such an offensive way?
She didn't hear, "Japanese, Chinese, what are these?'
But I am very certain she would not be pleased
Overtly offensive to make fun of physical attribute
To low esteem of minorities I used to contribute
Other children absorbed the rhyme, hate internalized
Racism cutting their culture down to a small size
Always listened to my mom, thought she was smart
But her guidance of my actions was only a small part
Mom chopped off weeds of hate but roots stayed intact
Came back as an adult and it took a student to extract
The weeds which had formed in my privileged mind
Listening to a middle schooler, my systemic bias I did find
To be politically correct I called Hispanic a group
Until a student taught me they are not one troop
Cuban, Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Guatemalan
A lesson from her young and diverse mind calling
Privilege uses bias to homogenize with a label
So many generic terms that we are not able

To respect, to honor or to precisely describe
Labels the unique groups within, learn to despise
A student mad at another teacher expressed
"She doesn't like me because I am Latina"
I replied, "You look white with your patina"
I told her she treats you like any other
She doesn't know you are of Mexican descent
Try to talk to her and explain what you meant
You have conflict, to her you should vent
Then her anger was directed at me.
"I am not Mexican! I'm Puerto Rican!"
And I had to apologize that day
It was a lesson to teach the teacher the way
A lesson that groups have national pride
The label of Hispanic is just too wide
To accurately describe, honor diversity
People relate to their personal ancestry.

My inspiration for this poem came from my mother and a former student in my middle school classroom. My mother did not talk about diversity, but limited my actions and speech when they conveyed hate. I ended up teaching in an inner city classroom, interacting with many cultures.

The particular student in the poem was an intelligent young woman who did not smile a lot. Her mother is white and her father is Puerto Rican. She was upset with a new teacher who corrected her behavior and was venting to me. I thought I was defusing the situation using the word 'Mexican'. She took me beyond my book learning to hands-on learning. I learned that it is important to ask people who they are and what they like to be called. Hispanic is a broad label used by the dominant culture and does not always identify where people are from. I realize that knowledge is not only gained from the books I read on diversity, and interacting with others from different countries and cultures is the best kind of learning.

THE PATH TO SALVATION

MUHAMMAD IZAAN SOHAIL | REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

They live in a tent in a far away land
this is not at all what they had planned

At nine pm on a regular night
they were told the news that would change their life

They had to flee their worn down home
All that they had ever known

The war had escalated at an alarming rate
and it became apparent it wasn't safe

The bombs fell like rain everyday
the rain that could take your life away

They walked for miles through the agonizing heat
living off little water and rotten meat

After days of wandering through the blood red sand
they had found it, the promise land

The gate to freedom stood tall and wide
the only thing in the way of a new life

A life without torment, war and disease
where people can roam and do as they please

Along the gate was a tiny opening
a clear path to a new beginning

They started running to their salvation
they had made it, they had reached a great nation

Where the trees stood tall and the flowers bloomed
"We made it" the father boomed

"What is that" a petite child inquired
"it is a bed where people go when they are tired"

The father knew for he had seen one before
in an old newspaper on the floor

But then he hears it and is filled with despair
The sound of a missile whizzing through the air

He disgruntledly awakes from his deep snooze
It was all a dream, a fantasy a ruse

A petite child as young as the night
asks if everything will be alright

My piece is intended to make readers aware of the struggles of seeking refuge and asylum from war-torn areas. It highlights the fact that not everybody can escape and shows what people from that area dream and fantasize about and makes the reader reflect on their dreams in contrast to the fathers in the poem.

THE MAN WITH TWO HEADS

PENNY NEWCOMBE | UNITED KINGDOM

TEN YEARS AGO, I had a dream.

I don't usually take lessons made by my subconscious while I sleep, but this dream felt mystical, divine almost.

Like many, I get sucked into what my mum calls fads. When I was a teenager, Rockport shoes and Burberry scarves were fashionable. I battered my single mum's mind with that whining vocabulary I knew worked, and because she was ruled by guilt, (which I, too, am governed by since becoming a mum myself), she eventually gave in. I walked around school with a head that was difficult to fit through doors because I did it; I socially conformed, I fit in (even if the shoes were too heavy to walk in.) Having those ugly, unnecessarily expensive, "trendy" items of the times feels ridiculous to me looking back, especially after learning the brands' target audience is fishermen, not teenage girls.

When I had my first child, the fads among mums were Bugaboo pushchairs. Which I naturally couldn't afford as a 22-year-old unemployed nursing student. I settled for a sale item in Mother Care and was proud of my newly mature self for not being lured by consumerism.

Until social media influencers appeared.

I didn't get sucked in with keeping up with the Kardashians or feel the urge to decorate myself with Mac makeup. I got consumed with the idea of "health." My Instagram was saturated with flowery, glowing, alluring, and ethereal goddess-seeming women who bathed naked in Icelandic mineral-enriched waterfalls. This was how I was enraptured by the Raw Food movement. With the guise of plant medicine texts and videos, they marketed me and my low finances into a world of need for superfood powders with exceptional nutrient density.

I became a fully raw vegan, fooled that my hair would thicken, my energy

would accelerate, and I would hardly age. I would spend hundreds on whole food vitamins and saw all the food I grew up on as poison. Even my dying northern Nana's final traditionally cooked roast dinner. Which I regret not eating to this day.

I imagined myself, when I became an elder, alone in a forest as an herbal medicine woman. With a crown of bark and moss in my hair, growing my own food and foraging from the land. The epiphany of health. I forced myself away from what I called "public ignorance" by watching videos of animals being manufactured and the agricultural capitalistic values that are damaging the land. It was during this time that I had that spiritual and supernatural dream.

The dream started with me queuing in a long line, full of shoppers waiting to buy whatever this large factory was selling. A man opened crimson-brown doors so tall a giant could walk through them comfortably. He was wearing a blood-stained apron. I followed the excited crowd, who behaved as though they were at a black Friday event. We walked down dirty walled corridors with 1970-style flooring, an eroded mustered colour. I remember the scent of blood. I've worked as a theatre nurse and recognised the smell of flesh as it gets cut into, but this place was not sterile; it was stale, and I can still smell the scent of cut up animal flesh as though the dream was a real memory. In surgery, we cover patients in organised aseptic sheets, but it wasn't like that there. The forced manufactured animals were cramped in filthy cages, exposed and scared. Their barnyard noises desperate. I remember looking into the frightened eyes of a beautiful brown cow. Its begging gaze locked with mine as it was brutally zapped in the head by a man wearing clothes so saturated in rancid blood; the colour was brown. Its leg got hacked off by his machete before it hit the floor dead, spraying fresh red on the man's elated face.

After ensuring my childhood teddy was safe from exudate splatters, I remember running from the scene. I went down a maze of the same dirty, long corridors until I found a pair of clean white doors. It led me into a busy shopping centre.

I didn't slow down.

I ran through the sea of consumers, erratic and distressed. They stared at me as though I was crazy. I remember checking my clothing for blood splatters as I ran, still keeping my childhood teddy safe, desperately searching for anywhere I

could stop and wouldn't be seen bursting out the anguish I was holding in. It was when I saw a small corner to hide in that I spotted the arguing two-headed man. The one man who was leading his grouchy other half was a Rastafarian. He was smoking like a shaman and wore the colours of the Jamaican flag. His dreadlocks were decorated with beads of the same colours, and he waved at me as though he saw who they were coming to meet. The second head was a white man with short, neat blond hair and blue eyes. He wore a classic business-style suit. His tie was silver and patterned in triangular shapes. The heads debated with each other but were obviously content to be one. They stood next to me and spoke.

I wish I remembered what was said, but despite the visual being clear, even today, the conversation is hazed. All I know is it was something about seeing truth.

My interpretation of the dream, when I had it, was that they gave me a spiritual nod for my path of awakened enlightenment. At the time, I didn't notice how the white half tried to pull the black half away. The white half was disinterested in talking to me.

Two years after being a fully raw vegan, my BMI dropped to an unhealthy low, my periods stopped, my teeth went brittle, and I was, to be perfectly frank… hungry! And tired of my entire life purpose being focused on only that. I went back to "normal eating habits."

Despite being back in love with food, that dream continued to haunt me, and back then, I wondered if it was because I needed to get back to the path of enlightenment, I thought I'd found.

Who I am now knows that whatever lifestyle I choose is unhealthy in one way or another. To quote the 1997 song by The Verve: "That is the bitter-sweet symphony of life." Who I am now is simply sick of people trying to sell me stuff.

Is it our responsibility as consumers to carry that guilt? To give up the culinary traditions handed to you by your grandparents when one day it's all you'll have left of them. Or should the manufacturers wake up to the truth? Should it not be the people in power who sees?

In Leicester Square, a fountain shows a statue and a quote by William Shake-

speare. It says: "There is no darkness. Only ignorance." Each time I see this statue, it reminds me of that dream. The dream that holds many different meanings to who I once was, to who I am now and to who I will one day be. Right now, I just want to live guilt free because I recognise that I have no control over the culture in which I was born. Ignorance is the only way to live in this space because when you look too close at the truth, it hurts. Pain debilitates, and I choose to be able to get out of bed in the morning.

Perhaps the two-headed man was Yin and Yang. I wonder if that was why the white half didn't want to speak to me.

I wasn't balanced then.

I'm certainly not balanced now, and I'm yet to meet anyone in this Westernised world who is. Who has the time or resources for that? Health and sanity are expensive on this land at this time. It takes money, but if you have good morals that is hard to get, unless you're born into it. To get decent funds means joining the amoral. It's a lose lose. Maybe I'll try again one day. If I win some.

The Man with Two Heads was about a dream I had during my two years following a vegan lifestyle and the lessons I learned from that stage of my life. It contains themes of consumerism, past, present and future selves, balance and spirituality, socioeconomic situations and health. I grew up poor. So when I graduated nursing and had an OK salary, I believed the lifestyle I was on, the one I was just about affording, was my saving grace.

The people I cared for at the hospital were usually unwell because of their lifestyle choices. Despite being professional at work and nursing without judgment, inside, I was judging in a way that said, "I don't want to be sick like them." This is how I got sucked in. I still feel like this now, but nowadays, I feel a kinship with my patients because I recognise they're just like me, born into a culture they have no control over. We will never have access to decent health because we can't afford it. Every area of health has a price on it. When we think we've finally found it, we look at our bank balance, we realise, and then we crumble.

ODYSSEY

BUSHRA HAQ | PAKISTAN

A shadow of my past spears through the window's pane,
The memories of my childhood showers like the rain.
I felt a symphony of love surround me.
A tender touch of my mom to wake me up.
My dad engulfed me in his arms
Started a bright day with new charms.
The roads were familiar the paths were mine.
My dreams were big my hopes are on shine.
The world was like a garden
Where I sow the seeds of my aspirations.
I watched them grow daily, in my imagination.
I fought with the clouds and flew so far
I met with the skies to conquer the stars.
I forged a realm with the strength of mine
The synergy spark comes to help me from divine.
Childhood embarks on an odyssey of dreams,
Gradually it meets the elucidation of supreme.

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CHAMELEMOM

NATHANIEL SPENCER-CROSS | CANADA

MY MOM WASN'T HUMAN. And this is not to say my mom was a super hero, or that she was my guardian angel, no. Just like you or me, my mom was born from an egg, fertilized with sperm, where the fastest and strongest swimmer conquered the special race only to be rewarded with the unyielding monotony of life. A fool's race to be sure. Her egg was not one contained within the body… well, again, I suppose I should clarify. The egg was in a body, for a time, but it did not stay within the body for its entire gestation. You see, certain species work with certain special traits or components that make them special (in this case special is read special not special). Insects have six legs, birds have feathers, felines have retractable claws and reptiles are cold blooded. Humans have… smarts I suppose? Fire? Tools? Although other animals have been known to use tools, and if you trace our *intelligence* through history, that very intelligence seems more akin to Freudian ego. But humans have something, let's just agree that I (or others) haven't quite narrowed it down. Surely, we have something? My mother was fertilized in an egg, from a sperm, ejaculated from a hemipenis into a cloaca. Her egg eventually expelled from her mother before her six weeks after copulation for a whole six-month incubation with a grand total of sixty-five brothers and sisters in the clutch. Marking my mother the sixty-sixth. You see, my mom wasn't human. She had googly eyes and an extendable tongue. She moved slow and favoured hiding over running. A trait not so easily passed onto a bipedal primate whose sole existence in the evolutionary chain of inferior and superior beings is hinged on its ability to run. My mother would hide from the world before facing it. There was something very special about my mother that way.

My father was a drunk, and yes, he was indeed human. Before you get any crazy ideas, I am human too. I don't have a retractable tongue, or a sunlamp above my bed. I'm just your run of the mill diabetic boy hatched from an egg. I mean what did you expect? My mom was a chameleon. Obviously, I hatched from something you freak. I was born the shape and size of a cigarette, but quickly grew to the dimensions of a normal human boy in a matter of months or years…. Who can

remember? My father was an alcoholic. He was nice, jolly even. He never laid a hand on me or my mother, but the sauce has a funny way of leaking its way into the lives of those around it. It permeated our every conversation, me and my mother's conversations that is. The clear vodka managed to conduct our behaviours and emotions, string sections and brass kept silent at the flimsy whim of a drunk baton brandishing hand. The smell of the colourless liquid on father's collar shifted mom's skin a sickly green. Reminders of bad hangovers or the countless fortunes lost to the bottom of a bottle. Father would barge in, smiles and teeth, and ask had I seen mom. If he was sober, maybe he would have realized she was next to me, silent and still on the pleather armrest where my hand lay. Hiding in the browns of the loveseat where I sat. Eventually though, me and mom stopped speaking, started hiding from my father's sixth-sense-esque knack for interruption. It simply became a bother to speak around him, so we didn't.

"Well, if you see her lemmeknow," he would say stumbling away, tripping over words and laces. The loveseat became mom's preferred hiding spot. It was easy for her to turn brown. After all, she grew up in the forests of Madagascar, so tree trunks were a common source of camouflage. But the years away from the jungle had proven tough for mama. She never remembered to close her eyes while hiding anymore. Father never seemed to notice, but even when she hid from me, I could scan the room and inevitably find her big shifting eyes looking one way or the other (or both). She migrated towards other brown things as well, cardboard art projects, or wicker chairs felt familiar, but nowhere was she more comfortable than on the armrest of our brown loveseat. Her shifty eyes taking in her surroundings mid-camouflage. Sometimes when father would leave, I would call to her, pretending not to see. Just to let her know it was safe, and that she could come out. Sometimes she would, sometimes she wouldn't. Sometimes she didn't feel safe around me either.

Mom always had a way with words. When I got in trouble at school, she gave the principle a tongue lashing (literally) before giving me my licks back home. She wasn't the strongest, or the meanest, but it burned when her fiery disappointment flared. Worse than any thrown bottle or back of the hand. When mum was angry, she'd see red. She'd turn red too.

I never met my aunts or uncles. Mom always said a lot of them never hatched,

their clutch raided before the bodies in the eggs could mature. Only her and a handful of others were spared by the snakes or birds or ants that found them in their pre-infancy. Cam is a doctor, Elle a mechanic, and Leon's in prison. I always wondered how a chameleon could hold a wrench or kill a man. I wasn't aware medical schools accepted reptiles until mom pulled a photo from her purse of Cam in a cap and gown, shaking hands with some old stuffy guy. I always forgot, about the rest of her family that is, and would inevitably ask if there were any others who made it out of the clutch. She'd lower her eyes and close them, feeling blue. Dark Navys, Royals, deep Indigos would wrap her body to the emotions before she would walk away. Shaking slowly and swaying, one leg in front of the other, almost like father after the bottle. This was of course just how chameleons walked I was taught, but I always wondered if there were alcoholic lizards. Maybe that's how father and mum met, at a bar after class, or on a date doing the tango. I wondered if they danced. If they even could dance? But I would inevitably think of Cam, or Elle, or Leon, and the things they were able to do despite their size. Mechanic, doctor, murderer. Surely, they made smaller tools for them. Little chameleon sized pliers, scalpels and switchblades. So why couldn't they make little chameleon sized whiskeys or chardonnays? Why couldn't my little old mother be hiding something equally devious from me? She didn't know everything about my life, so what made me think I knew everything about hers?

I remember bringing Hayley home in high school. She was so curious about meeting my mom the chameleon, that she forgot to ask if I really hatched from an egg. Mom was sweet, but embarrassing. I mean, I was a teenager, all I wanted was to take Hayley upstairs and make out, try to round second base on my way to home. But they were both too sweet for that. My mom offered tea, and Hayley smiled. The two of them sat gabbing away while I counted the minutes on each finger, until all ten were outstretched and I lost track after the third or fourth repetition. Chameleons don't have hands, but they do have fingers. I was never too sure what to call mine. It was nice though. I remember mom turning pink when Hayley said how sweet I was, and how good of a job mom did raising me.

"A true gentleman," she said. I'd never forget. My mom started crying for Christ's sake. It was so embarrassing, but again, sweet. They talked about how I would always take the dangerous side of the sidewalk closest to traffic. Mom took credit for that. They talked about how I didn't like authority and mom took credit

for that too. It wasn't often that I saw mum flash pink. Maybe once or twice after that. Nothing candied her up like bringing a girl home, or reminiscing about my love life over dinner.

It wasn't too long ago I walked in on mom and dad having a talk. Dad's red eyes the only colour between the two of them. For once she wasn't hiding herself in the browns she so often frequented. There was a dossier on the table. Dad excused himself from the room, and then the house. He left his keys on the hook and slung his jacket over his shoulder. Never a good sign when an alcoholic leaves the car behind. Mom sat me down, perched on my shoulder and played with my hair. She held my ear lobe close in her zygodactyls and gave my cheek a blep before humming and singing the song she sang to me as a baby.

Hmmm hm hmmmm my Lord, Kumbaya…

Someone's sleeping my Lord, Kumbaya…

Someone's laughing my Lord, Kumbaya…

Someone's crying my Lord, Kumbaya…

Oh Lord, Kumbaya…

She told me about her visits to the doctor, a first I'd heard of this. She told me about her stage fright. Again, another first. She wasn't much of an actor (well, at all for that matter), so when I questioned her about it and she answered, I couldn't help but chuckle. Mom always had a sense of humour, and good comedic timing.

✶

Stage four.

Mom slowly stopped coming out. She would hide in her browns, and when the growth spread from her telencephalon into her optic tectum, creeping towards the cerebellum, she stopped moving. She stopped speaking and changing colours for the most part, besides her comfy browns. When I would call to her in those later years, she would stay hidden. Not in fear of her son though. She hid like prey from a predator. Her bulbous eyes open and still. Watching a monster call a name unrecognizable.

Here I stand now, sixty-six years after my mother's great escape from the clutch and thirty-four years after my birth. Mom lies wilted on the floor. My father's arm around my waist while he cries. Mom's been dead for ten minutes he tells me. Most chameleons don't live to be ten, but my mom lived to be sixty-six. Her siblings had all died a few years back. One at sixty-five, the other at sixty-four, and Leon was stabbed in prison at sixty-three. Karmic justice I suppose. I tell dad she looks alive, but he assures me she isn't, just nerves firing off in spasm and electrical release. Her body flashes colours like a television being flipped through too fast. No cohesion to the folly overtaking her skin. Greens and reds, blues and pinks, dancing pigments tripping over one another. Father tells me her life was flashing before her eyes. Memories encased in a body no longer accessible to the dying mind. Her life flashing before our eyes.

This is a story about the need to feel invisible in an abusive relationship, and how relationships dependent on mental manipulation affects both the victim, and those around them. People's lives are complicated, and often more secretive and deeper than outsiders can comprehend. Chamelemom *is an attempt to breach this veneer, and to express the inner turmoil experienced by those adjacent to victims of abuse.*

TO MY FUTURE DAUGHTER

YUKYUNG KATIE KIM | SOUTH KOREA | USA EXCHANGE STUDENT

The world is yours. Even though
you couldn't solve 2+3
in front of your crush, even though you stained
your favorite white shirt
with ketchup droplets, everyone
will love you even more for it. Even
your own mother. If you happen to have
a little brother, perhaps even
a spark of a little sister, let them
comb your Barbie's hair, even if they do
smear fingerprints across her sheen. If
you have no siblings at all, comb her hair
with your best friends. Nothing could hurt
more than the turned backs and giggles, other girls
shielding their Barbie's from you. Never
be that girl, Daughter. Your lips
possess the magic of speech—of sharing
and delivering your flower beds and fireworks, even
doves circling on top of you, shaping a halo. Don't worry, your mother
will help you knock on others' doors if you need help.
(Your mother had trouble, too.)

To My Future Daughter *is a poem about what I would say to my daughter when she is struggling with whatever comes up in life. Some lines that are mentioned in the piece are actual quotes that my mom had said to me when I was young.*

CRACKED SIDEWALKS

MONA MEHAS | UNITED STATES

Our childhood was littered with cracked sidewalks
broken asphalt with weeds pushing through
crumbled concrete for rain to puddle
neighborhood blighted by poverty

Broken asphalt with weeds pushing through
led to falls with scraped and bloodied knees
bent bicycle rims for careless riders

Crumbled concrete for rain to puddle
toy boats and cars we pulled with string
through makeshift rivers flooding the walk

Neighborhood blighted by poverty
we grew like weeds with what we had
flourished despite the cracked sidewalks

I originally wrote Cracked Sidewalks *for a national contest. Out of thousands of entries, my poem earned an honorable mention for the category. I grew up very poor in a depressed neighborhood. As a child I tied strings to cars and pulled them along the sidewalk. On days there were puddles after a rain, I imagined the cars plunging through rivers. I made the best of things, in spite of my raw upbringing, or perhaps because of it.*

NOSTALGIA

SALLY SIHYEON LEE | SOUTH KOREA

This is where the adventures were made
Where little girls went up and down slides
Grounds into lava and the sky into space

This is where my favorite meals were cooked
The sight of my mother's back with an apron
The scent of eggs and spices filling the room

This is where everyone would shop for their groceries
A small market with a warm lady
Greeting each customer under the yellowish light

This is where all the kids would run to after school
A tiny shop filled with cheap toys and rainbow notebooks
Children running to get their hands on the newest snacks

This is where all the big kids with big backpacks go
Big rooms and aligned desks
Whiteboards with numbers and shapes
This is where we would hide on a sunny day
Fresh watermelon cut into cubes
Grandma brushing her fingers through my hair

This is where we jumped ropes
The ground covered with chalk
The sun caressing our backs

Growing up in an academically competitive country that values outcome over process and conformity over individuality, I have come to appreciate the simpler times in life—something that we only seem to grasp its value only after it has passed. Through cherishing these somewhat mundane activities of a little girl, I wish for the reader to reflect upon their childhood, the value of the moment, and further explore one's purpose. Childhood remains in the past, yet by reflecting on these moments we are able to be knowledgeable of the present and mold our future.

These nostalgic moments have elicited both a feeling of warmth and a sense of disappointment in the 'grown-up world' which seems much greyer than our childhoods minds have imagined. Where did the colors of the innocence go? Does our stubborn bravery yet reside within us? Through the process of writing this poem, I have learned, and I hope that you readers will likely be reminded to once in a while, to view this world with the innocence of a child, be stubbornly brave of success, and absorb the present with all your senses.

As a final note: Nostalgia *is a message from above to remind us of the beauty we have left behind, urging us to cherish the present and shape the future with the warmth of those memories.*

MEET THE GLOBAL AUTHORS

OF THE QUARTER THREE IHRAM 2024 LITERARY MAGAZINE

MUHAMMAD AHMAD

…is currently a student enrolled in 6th-form A-levels. He loves to write about his interests and the causes he supports, including but not limited to: playing the violin, mathematical physics, history and equal rights for all humans.

E. KRAFT

…is a poetry editor whose poems have been published by *The Inlandia Institute*, *The Hanging Loose Press*, *The National Poetry Quarterly*, and others. She is grateful for everyone who has read her poems or attended her readings including her favorite dog from the local shelter.

ZEENATH SHIFFANI

…is a revolutionary female writer from Sri Lanka. She pens the burning global issues with regards to human rights violation, gender-based violence and of children's rights. She voices out for the voiceless, oppressed people of the world while exposing unwitnessed trauma of the many displaced and disappeared persons.

GINGER STRIVELLI

...is an artist and writer from North Carolina. She has written for *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine*, *Circle Magazine*, *Third Flatiron*, *Autism Parenting Magazine*, *Silver Blade*, *Solarpunk Magazine*, *The New Accelerator*, various other magazines and several anthology books. She loves to travel the world and make arts and crafts. She considers herself a storyteller entertaining and educating through her writing.

CHRISTIAN MAGGS

…resides in Michigan, U.S.A., and has been writing poetry his entire life for his own personal fulfillment. Now, in his mid-fifties, he wishes to share his voice. He believes that one of the most dangerous things to a free people is censorship. In any form, it destroys the essence of critical thinking, and seeks to control political and social narratives in order for those in power to propagate as they will. In other words, censorship is a form of propaganda.

KATHLEEN HELLEN

…is the author of three full-length collections, including *Meet Me at the Bottom*, *The Only Country Was the Color of My Skin*, and *Umberto's Night*, which won the poetry prize from Washington Writers' Publishing House, and two chapbooks. She is the recipient of the James Still Award, the Thomas Merton prize for Poetry of the Sacred, and poetry prizes from the *H.O.W. Journal* and *Washington Square Review*. Hellen's poems have been featured on *Poetry Daily* and *Verse Daily* and have appeared in such journals as *Arts & Letters*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Colorado Review*, *Evergreen Review*, *jubilat*, *Massachusetts Review*, *New Letters*, *North American Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Salamander*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Subtropics*, *Witness*, and *World Literature Today*, among others.

NATHAN SPENCER-CROSS

…is a 31-year-old Montreal based writer, author of *Drinking in Public: Rules to the Game*, content curator for numero810.ca, a Concordia University graduate, and currently pursuing his M.A. in English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Windsor.

SERENA PAVER

…is a queer dance/movement psychotherapist, writer, and embodied creator. Born and raised in Cape Town, South Africa, and currently based in London, Serena has received degrees in Theatre and Psychology from Rhodes University (Makhanda, South Africa) and the University of Roehampton (London, England). Serena's work centres on the body, mental health, (mis)communication, and human connection, and has been published in *IHRAM Publishes*, *Doek!*, *Transnationalism*, *Foreign Literary* and more.

KIMBERLY W. HEINMAN

…is a Senior Lecturer of Biology at Muhlenberg College, where she teaches courses in biology and sustainability studies, emphasizing human impacts on the environment. She loved the oceans from a young age, and she pursued her passion by earning a B.A. in Biology from New College of Florida and a Ph.D. from Stanford University with an emphasis on marine biology. As a pandemic response coping strategy, she took up creative writing in 2021 and is currently enrolled in the Wilkes University Maslow Family Graduate Program in Creative Writing. She lives in Allentown, PA, USA, with her two teenage kids, husband, and three cats that are aggressively snuggly at 2 AM.

MUHAMMAD IZAAN SOHAIL

…is a 13-year-old aspiring writer from Pakistan living in Ireland. He is trying to broaden his horizons and try new things such as poetry. The piece he has submitted is his first ever attempt at poetry.

RIGEL PORTALES

…is a 22-year-old Filipino poet afraid of disappearing. Fortunately, his works have appeared in *Kritika Kultura*, *Nat. Brut Magazine*, *The Drift*, and *Cha* among others. He is the author of *DEAD BOYS MAKE THE BEST MEN* (FlowerSong Press, 2023), his debut poetry chapbook. He previously served as poetry editor for the Malate Literary Folio and as a reader for Palette Poetry.

MONA MEHAS

…writes poetry and prose from the perspective of a retired disabled teacher in Indiana USA. Her work has appeared in over 70 journals, anthologies, and online museums. Mona's poetry chapbooks, *Questions I Didn't Know I'd Asked* and *Hand-Me-Downs* available from LJMcD Communications and Amazon. She is querying her first novel.

PAMELA JO GUSTAFSON

...is a retired teacher and grandmother, volunteering at her grandson's school. She is a volunteer with two prison ministries, Project Return and Breaking the Chains. She used poetry to keep her mind active during the pandemic. *Dying from Covid Is Not Pretty* was published by Wisconsin Public Radio and *Still Blind, Do We Really See?* won first place in s contest sponsored by the Lutheran Descent Ministry of The ELCA.

PENNY NEWCOMBE

… is a creative writing M.A. student at City University London. When not working long hours in hospitals as a registered nurse or taking care of her two children, she can be found reading and writing in any quiet place that doesn't throw her out for overstaying her welcome. Penny was diagnosed with dyspraxia and dyslexia during her nurse training. Since then, she decided to stop the mantra that she is too stupid to be who she wants to be. She has been writing ever since.

BUSHRA HAQ

…is from Lahore, Pakistan, and has taught in various institutions across the country. As a poet, she describes the beauty of nature in her words, believing in the magical power of words that never die. Bushra has faith in the power of words and pens down everything she feels. Her poem *Odyssey of Dreams* is about the innocent period of childhood, a time everyone experiences. She believes in creating a peaceful world for children, where they can dream big and strive to make their dreams come true.

YUKYUNG KATIE KIM

…is a student attending Deerfield Academy in Deerfield, Massachusetts. As a writer, she is particularly interested in poetry and realistic fiction. Her work has previously appeared in *Altered Reality*, *Backwards Trajectory*, and *Avant Appalachia*. She is an alumna of the Sewanee Young Writers Conference, the Juniper Institute for Young Writers, and the Ellipsis Writing Workshop.

SALLY SIHYEON LEE

Sally first acquired her passion for writing through self-reflection and exploration as a South Korean student who is an advocate for stepping towards solutions of global issues such as human rights, girls' education, gender equality, and environmental challenges. She is an active journalist at her school and aims to gain an understanding of not only herself, but also obtain a broader perspective of the world and its history. Through her writing, she seeks to amplify voices and spark conversations that inspire change.

International Human Rights Art Movement

The International Human Rights Art Movement (IHRAM) offers creative programs promoting freedom of expression, human rights, and social justice around the world. We envision a world where artist activism is honored as a human right, and a source of social change.

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LITERARY **MAGAZINE**

REFLECTIONS AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT ✦ QUARTER 3

A child's *experiences* will shape their entire life, from their dreams to their aspirations, all the way into adulthood. The authors and artists featured in *Childhood Dreams and Aspirations* boldly share their firsthand accounts and reflect upon their youth experience: tales of childhood memories transformed into life lessons, challenges faced by teachers, war-affected youths, and advice to our future children. IHRAM Magazine proudly creates a space for authors to spread their voices through poetry and prose, championing for youth empowerment and childhood dreams.

The IHRAM magazine was created with a simple goal: to celebrate and uplift up-and-coming authors from all over the world; each of the authors in this anthology contend with their identities in the context of their environments, providing readers with their unique perspectives on issues of human rights.

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Curated & Edited by Bridget Reaume & Lisa Zammit

A publication of the International Human Rights Art Movement (IHRAM)

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