

# dime

**The Arts and Literary Journal  
of Donnelly College**



**VOLUME 12, SPRING 2024**

## Foreword

Welcome to **dime** 12: the arts and literary journal of Donnelly College. It was an adventure and an honor for me to help with this year's issue of *dime*. Among art's many triumphs is how it encourages us to pause and look at things we might not ordinarily notice; in doing so, it sometimes alters our perspective. This year's polyphony features student as well as faculty voices, directing us to pause and focus on new aspects of the world, to see things in new ways.

Four pieces from Donnelly's Lansing students shine especially bright in this year's issue, among many other works of beauty, depth, and imagination. Herein you'll find nature in abundance, love, loss, and big questions, as well as one particularly saucy cat.

I hope you enjoy it as much as we enjoyed working on it together. It is only a sample of the creativity and courage we see each day at Donnelly College.

- Amanda Davison

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# Sister Mary Faith Schuster Award Winners:

## **How the Nursing Shortage Has Impacted Models of Care**

Devin Carter  
Academic Essay

## **La Neblina y el Mysterio; The Mist and the Mystery**

Evelin Adame  
Poetry

## **Ballerina (Cover Art)**

Lilly Cox  
Visual Arts

## **Day One of the Rest of My Life**

Ayleen Grijalva-Pizzaro  
Creative Nonfiction

## Table of Contents:

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <b>How the Nursing Shortage Has Impacted Models of Care</b> - Devin Carter.... | 4  |
| <b>La Neblina y el Mysterio</b> - Evelin Adame.....                            | 6  |
| <b>Day One of the Rest of My Life</b> - Ayleen Grijalva-Pizzaro .....          | 8  |
| <b>Dangerous Love</b> - Dominic Ramirez.....                                   | 11 |
| <b>Señorita</b> - Ashley Hernandez Torrez.....                                 | 12 |
| <b>My Journey</b> - Arely Rey.....   | 13 |
| <b>Jaime</b> - Patricia Madison .....  | 15 |
| <b>No Pasa Nada</b> - Adriana Sabado.....                                      | 16 |
| <b>Untitled</b> - Carolina Rosales .....                                       | 17 |
| <b>My New Addiction</b> - Simon Angilda .....                                  | 18 |
| <b>North Memorial Pool</b> - Kevin Johnson .....                               | 19 |
| <b>Democracy Versus Totalitarianism</b> - Amuri Justin .....                   | 20 |
| <b>What My Eyes Can See</b> - Josue Rosas .....                                | 25 |

**Solace in the Unknown Land** - Fabiola Sanchez Corona..... 26

**Insight Tones** - Elizabeth Torrealba ..... 27

**This is Where I am From** - Laurance Elnicki ..... 28

**The 99% Percent Literacy Rate in Cuba** - Anthony Torres Carrillo ..... 29

**Corn and Sky** - Richard Esvang..... 34

**The Beauty** - Sandra Pacheco ..... 35

**Beach Dream** - Michelle Meade ..... 36

**How my Family Has Shaped my Perspective of Education** - Citlalic Gomez ... 37

**Reflection** - Quortez Brown ..... 39

**It's Me** - Jose Penate ..... 40

**Sunset** - Justine Ushindi ..... 41

**Those Damn Bars** - Danny Clark..... 42

**The Flight** - Jezreel Doume ..... 43

**Charon's Lost Currency at the Luray Caverns** - John A. Vargas..... 49

**Serendipitous Dandelion** - Gretchen Moffet ..... 50

**Demons** - Arthur Gonzalez ..... 51

**My Dragon** - Karla Aguirre ..... 52

**First Love** - Vanessa Arevalo ..... 53

**Veins** - Sarah Hebel ..... 54

**Wild Desert Plant** - Carmelita Vargas ..... 55

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**Submit YOUR work**  
for the next issue of dime  
**and**

The Sister Mary Faith Schuster Awards

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## ***Sister Mary Faith Schuster Award Winner***

# **How the Nursing Shortage Impacted Models of Nursing Care**

Devin Carter

Nursing is a profession that is long based on history, statistics, and community. The Nursing profession is a masterpiece. However, the nursing shortage has impacted the very models of nursing care. The Nursing shortage is a result of nurse burnout, long hours, mandatory overtime, safety, and stress. Perhaps it started during Covid-19 or even before that.

My twin sister graduated from Nursing school and went right into working as a burn nurse in pediatrics and on the night shift. As a new graduate, one of the things that she was tasked with was doing painful burn treatments on her pediatric patients by herself. She was also the one to make the decision if a child in the ER needed to be admitted or go home and come back the next day. While it was an incredible experience, it was stressful and sad overall. When she had the chance to escape, she took it. After almost ten years on the unit, she was burnt out and left.

I am currently enrolled in a nursing program and set to get my LPN degree come May of 2024. I am in my fourth and final semester and have started doing clinicals. Clinical rotations in nursing allow students like myself to work on practical nursing skills in various healthcare settings. It is hands-on learning at its very best in the local community. The nurses that I have shadowed are motivated, knowledgeable, and compassionate. However, they are also stressed and on the verge of burnout. They are assigned to unsafe nurse-to-patient ratios as a result of being short-staffed and doing up to 16-hour shifts. Yet the nurses are also resilient, forgiving, kind, and empathetic. My experience there so far has already proved to be a positive influence to continue to further my career in the field of Nursing.

When nurses get burnt out from being short-staffed, taking on more patients than they should, and working long hours with overtime, they find themselves in stressful conditions and work environments. I was recently at the pharmacy to pick up a prescription and I did not have a good experience. As I approached the counter the Pharmacist yelled at me from across the room for all my information. I had a flashback about

HIPPA and patient rights. I felt like all of these rules were being broken. She went on to say things that weren't very kind or necessary. However, I remained calm and felt empathy for her as I could feel and hear her stress.

As a result of the nursing shortage, there has been an impact on the models of nursing care. I do not know when it will end, nor do I know how to fix it. However, I do know that sometimes when you have hit rock bottom the only way to go is up. To do this we must go back to our roots and remember. In honor of Eleanor C. Lambertsen, let's all work together. This allows nurses as a team to operate on a larger scale. It includes multitasking, delegation, and collectiveness. It allowed new nurses and experienced nurses to work together as a team and improved efficacy with training and learning. This Nursing Care Delivery model is already used widely in hospitals, we just need to remember where it came from and follow it.

I sincerely believe that each person has a mission in life, and nursing is mine. I know this because helping others gives me a sense of fulfillment and purpose in my life. I have discovered my passion and feel fortunate to do so as some never do. I am optimistic about the future of nursing. I am excited for all the things that I will learn about myself and the profession of Nursing. When I go into the field of Nursing and am a new grad on the pediatric floor on the night shift, I will also take care of myself. It is important to put your oxygen mask on a plane before you put one on someone else. We need to breathe and know too that this shall pass and that it will all work out in the end. To do this we must go back to our roots and remember.

***Sister Mary Faith Schuster Award Winner***

# **La Neblina y el Misterio; The Mist and the Mystery**

Evelin Adame

La neblina y el misterio, como el amor que no fue.

El amor que fue arrebatado y nuestro final quedo en blanco.

Misterioso porque el destino y Dios así lo decidió.

Aunque no fuera nuestra opción.

Al contrario, el sentimiento del amor que sucedió en nuestra época fue como y tan refrescante como la neblina.

La neblina que refresca mi piel y alegra mi ser.

Como un día lo hiciste tu.

El misterio de no saber que paso se afrenta en mi camino

Y me recuerda al sentimiento que siento cada cuando me pregunto que final hubiéramos tenido.

En un universo paralelo, si hubiera sucedido.

Pero Dios hizo el camino de nuestro destino.

Tal como el sendero, la neblina y el misterio.

PERFECTO como Dios lo quiso.

**English Translation:**

The mist and the mystery, like the love that never was.

The love that was taken away and our ending left in blank.

Mysterious due to destiny and because God decided.

Even if it wasn't our option.

On the contrary, the feeling of love that happened in our time was like being refreshed by the fog and mist.

The mist that refreshes my skin and brightens my being.

Like you did one day.

The mystery of not knowing what happened stands in my way

And it reminds me of the feeling I get every time I wonder what ending we would have had.

In a parallel universe, if it had happened.

But God made the path of our destiny.

Just like the path, the fog, and the mystery.

PERFECT as God intended.

## ***Sister Mary Faith Schuster Award Winner***

# **Day One of the Rest of My Life**

Ayleen Grijalva-Pizzaro

It is September 21st, 2017 and I have been woken up at around 6:15 am by my tia, Lili. I had been staying at my tia and tio Carlos' house for most of the summer due to my parents spending all the time with my sister at Children's Mercy Hospital. My tia shakes me, eager to get me up, but she does not have to do it for too long because before I know it, my feet are hurrying across the cold concrete floor of the basement; I get to the bathroom and start getting ready for the day. I did wonder: Why is my tia waking me up this early? It definitely was not so I could get ready for school since she did not wake up my sleeping cousin next to me, who also goes to the same school as me. I suddenly feel a weird sensation of knowing what had happened. I do not even shower. I wash my face, put my hair up into a messy ponytail, get dressed, and put my shoes on.

My tio Carlos is already in the jeep as my tia joins him in the passenger seat. The weather feels humid with a chill breeze along with it. I hop into the back seat. The inside of the jeep feels warm, and the cold seats give me chills as soon as my skin touches them. The truck starts moving and the sensation of knowing what happened settles in even more. I know what happened. The traffic light turns red on 18th street. This is when everything starts moving in slow motion. Four eternal seconds go by as my aunt opens the door, gets out the truck, and quickly jumps into the seat next to me in the back. She holds my hand. Her hand feels cold in my warm ones, and she uses her thumb to rub them. I know what happened. She puts her left arm around, leans in, and whispers: "el corazon de tu hermana ya paro de latir," your sister's heart has stopped beating. My heart stops, drops down to my stomach, and a deep void grows into my chest. All I can do is stare ahead while warm tears start to roll down my dry, cold, cracked skin. My aunt hugs me as I weep; after a couple of seconds of sniffing, I just stop crying. My aunt stays in the back with her arm around me and I do not say a single thing.

We arrive at Children's Mercy Hospital and head towards the security guard's desk.

"Sorry guys, visiting hours do not start until 9 am," he tells us. There's a moment of silence that feels like an eternity until I finally speak up after

that long car ride.

“My sister passed away,” I whisper while avoiding eye contact. He nods and lets us go through. I go back to not saying a word. My brain turns to white noise and my lips are sealed shut. We are in the elevator going up until we stop at the fourth floor. My aunt and uncle greet the nurses as we walk down the long, quiet hallway and walk into room 21.

I have never seen an unconscious body before, much less have had a close family member pass away. I stand in front of my parents and look right into their eyes. We do not say a word to each other, but we hug. I then hurry to the bed and give my sister the biggest hug. Only this time, I cannot feel her heartbeat. I cannot feel her breath. I cannot feel the natural warmth of her body. It almost feels like I am giving a hug to a lifeless, cool doll. This almost feels numb; like there is no reciprocation of emotions. Matter of fact, there are no emotions at all; not from me or her. My sister, my best friend, my person who was supposed to be with me for life—is dead.

After a couple of minutes of sitting in awkward, sorrowful silence, more of my tios, tias, primos, and primas, all start coming in. Every time I thought I had finished crying, a new family member would come in, hug me, and I would start sobbing all over again. Every hug, every “lo siento”, every tear shed was like a sharp knife stabbing me in my back. I need space. I need to breathe.

A nurse comes in to take me and my primos into the room next door. I grab my sister’s iPad before I leave and follow her there. I just sit on the bed with my cousins chattering around me. I unlock the iPad and immediately search for my sister’s camera roll and just as I thought, most of it was filled with content of both me and her, and occasionally my brother. I start to reminisce every memory on that camera roll. Hundreds of selfies, videos, and texts over the course of three to four years. I start showing my cousins some of these whilst also keeping some memories to myself. These are some of the last memories I will have of her... forever.

My sister is—was—nine years old. She did not deserve this. The brain tumor has completely taken over her small body. After a week in a coma, she finally is able to let go and rest. This was a very rough week. I could not help but feel guilty, although I am not sure why. I also felt numb. What else could I, a thirteen-year-old girl, do? This is my first time suffering from grief.



Hours later we are all still in that same hospital room, I am still on that same hospital bed, and I am still looking at all those photos, videos, and text messages. My cousins really do try to help. They make me laugh but it did not feel like I was the one who was laughing. My mind and body were two different things. I feel as if I am watching myself and everyone around me have a good time from the corner of the room. The numbness is still very much prominent. My tia Lili and tío Carlos walk in the room.

“We are going to start looking into preparations for the funeral,” they tell me in Spanish. “Te quieres quedar?” Do you want to stay?

“Yes, I’ll stay,” I respond.

Shortly after, my parents and I leave the hospital. Silence is drowning us. Everything went from moving in slow motion to fast forward. We get home and after a short while all my tias, tios, primos, and primas all flood into our home. They bring food and alcohol. I am actually having a good time. I still feel numb. This does not feel real yet. I decide to just let myself enjoy this time with my family as we all act like nothing has changed; like we all did not just lose a piece of us. My parents look happy, I feel happy, we all look happy. We are not.

Everyone starts leaving little by little, and little by little the emptiness starts to settle in. I realize all the adults were drinking the pain away; I realize my parents are not happy. Everyone leaves except my tia Lili and tío Carlos.

“Venganse con nosotros, come with us,” they tell me and my brother, “dejen a sus papas descansar, let your parents rest”. Me and my brother leave with them and leave my parents alone. We get to their house and me and my cousin get in bed. She puts on a movie about a cancer patient. The main character describes her brain as “being on fire.” I wonder if that’s how my sister felt.

I still feel numb. Day one of the rest of my life...

# Dangerous Love

*A Work of Short Fiction*

Dominic Ramirez

It feels as if the air has been ripped from my lungs. I can feel the ache from the pieces of my heart that have shattered.

“I really was falling for you. I just can’t. I’m sorry.”

The only light in my dark bedroom emitting from my phone reads those world-altering texts. Those three messages are burned into my head. He may as well have pulled out my heart and stomped on it. It may have hurt less at least.

My world has come to a stop, and I do not know what to do anymore. I feel my breath quicken, everything around me is fuzzy. The blankets on my bed no longer provide comfort like before.

The mid-afternoon sun lingers just behind my curtains, but I do not have the energy to open them. I truly believed he was the one and thought the feelings were mutual.

He says he believes I am the one for him, but it is the wrong time.

How can he say that and still want to live apart? I am beginning to think I feel more deeply for him than he ever did for me because I could never have ended things with him.

He says he is in pain, but he has done it to himself.

He cannot even fathom the feelings that I feel and have felt since the moment he broke me. I was broken before and am even more so now. All the feelings I have course through me every second fighting to figure out which I feel more.

I would rather feel nothing than feel this way. I never knew that I could feel this way about anyone, but he was everything I ever wanted.

He would always compliment me and make me feel secure in my insecurities, open the door for me and hold it for strangers, tell me to drive safely, walk me to my car on cold nights, listen to me rant about my

day, and give me his full attention. His presence alone filled me with happiness and warmth. The way his jokes would draw out my goofiness and fill the room with our laughter. His smile could make me smile on my gloomiest days. His curly hair which I ran my fingers through while staring into his deep brown eyes always brought me comfort. His body which towered over mine, always made me feel safe.

He was the man of my dreams, so I gave him my whole heart and he told me he gave me his. It was all a lie, a story he wove to keep me near until he was done with me.

All he left me with is memories and a lesson that love can be dangerous.



## **Señorita**

Ashley Hernandez Torrez

# My Journey

## Arely Rey

I remember the day my mom and dad started getting everything ready for us to move here. We watched my mother sort through our clothes, picking the best in condition. The clothes we could only wear for special occasions were the ones she gathered in the green suitcase my sisters and I shared. We had to make sure everything could fit there because we were flying. My brothers shared a suitcase and my parents shared another. It was exciting because it was our first time flying! I was anxious about seeing the airplanes closer and finding out what it felt like to fly. Our destination was Newark, California. I was only eleven years old and never thought about the challenges behind it like the language variance and the culture, leaving behind friends, the house I grew up in, and my dog Oso. Oso was the cutest puppy; I was sad to leave him, but I was glad one of my aunts kept him.

Coming to this country and learning the language was a challenge. I had just a couple of courses with the kids in my fifth grade. The rest of them were done separately because I had to take ESL classes, and I felt that it was one of the things that kept me away from making friends. I was the one kid they did not want in the groups when we were doing something in class because I was not going to contribute much to any of the activities being done since I did not know how to communicate in English. I felt lonely and on top of that going home and seeing how my parents struggled having to work two jobs or double shifts. This meant I was not the only one adjusting to our new lives here. My parents barely had time to spend with my siblings and me. Both of my parents worked at the Ross distribution center placing price tags on clothes and at least once a month they would have sales for the employees to buy clothes for a discount price, which was nice because we got new clothes for a better price.

They had no time for me to complain about anything going on with me at school. They were more concerned about providing for us. Many times, I went to bed crying hoping things would change for us dreaming about going back to Chihuahua, our hometown. But that was something my parents would not consider. Going back to the small village I was born in was nothing but an illusion. I have two sisters and three brothers. I talked to both of my sisters, and they also felt the same way.

One day while in recess one of the teachers in charge of the playground at the time came to me. She started asking me questions like what my name was, if I liked to play rope, and some of the games they had. It turned out she spoke a bit of Spanish. That made me feel more comfortable talking to her. Since that day I always looked for her to have someone to talk to even though many other kids spoke Spanish but for some reason, they did not want to hang around with me. Later, the teacher started involving other kids in activities during recess and I think it was because of me. Through those activities, I finally made a friend named Juliana. She introduced me to her group of friends. Now I had more friends to play with. I was very happy. Things improved with time. With my English skills, I was able to understand more and feel more comfortable in class.

It was not until middle school that I was able to communicate better in English. It was up to some of my friends to help me translate when I did not know how to say something. Another thing that helped me was that I stopped holding myself back. I stopped thinking whether I was pronouncing things correctly and spoke louder so people could hear me. This way I did not have to listen to them asking me, "What? What did you say?" I talked to whoever talked to me. I tried to respond if I knew how to but sometimes, I just said "Sorry."

Today, I am a college student. After debating for years about retaking my education, I finally did it. I am happy and grateful to be here because I now understand Ecclesiastes 3:11 which says, "He has made everything beautiful in its time." I have worked hard in my past years in many jobs. I was not happy working because I never understood the purpose of "Why work there?" I was there with certain negative people, and it was not healthy for me. Now I understand it was part of the process. That is why I believe I deserve to be here. We all deserve to improve ourselves in every aspect of life.

I have always had a small social circle due to my shyness. I do have friends, do not get me wrong, it is just that I have been so busy working and taking care of my family that I do not always make time for myself and my friends. One of my goals this year is to work on managing my time better and being more productive. With more time I can read and practice my English to become a better reader and writer. By improving my English, I can make more friends and enjoy my life more. There is only one life, a single opportunity, so why not live it to the fullest with what makes us happy and fight for what we desire in life?



**Jaime**  
Patricia Madison

# **No Pasa Nada**

Adriana Sabado

My beloved amiga  
You always said no Pasa nada  
Well, Si paso algo  
Ya no estás aquí con nosotros  
Not a day goes by que no peñeso en ti  
In mi sueños lloro por ti  
I see your familia llorar por ti y tus hermanos que fallecieron  
Now I see mariposa hermosa en la calles  
And I know que estas conmigo  
Cuando suena nuestra canción favorita  
Peñeso en ti  
Until again, I'll see you en mi sueños  
Te amo y Te extraño mucho  
And every day yo penso en ti amiga  
Descansa en pas alma hermosa





**Untitled**

Carolina Rosales



# **My New Addiction**

## Simon Angilda

I've submitted repented & committed my life to Jesus  
Forgiven, and I admit it forever I am addicted

I'm a new creature existing on this same planet  
I had surgery for the spiritual not physical like the Jacksons  
I'm learning from the Bible like a kid hooked on phonics  
God's word is reliable I believe in every promise  
A real servant who's saved to serve living by the word  
Devoted to my savior, and those ears who've never heard  
This new addiction got me sober, and aware of any hoax  
I'm on a spiritual high that's more potent than any dope  
Spiritually rejuvenated, because Jesus provides hope  
I got this sixth sense that goes off from evil spirits

A withdrawal from Christ's love would be worse than any drug  
The essence of affection through perfection of His love  
Honestly this addiction is positively influenced  
I'm unashamed to be an addict, because my life is to be ruined  
Now I'm blessed in the kingdom of God for feigning for Jesus  
I never would've made it without Him because he's the reason



## **North Memorial Pool**

Kevin Johnson

*Serving as a placeholder for the North Tower of the World Trade Center, the North Memorial Pool represents the “absence made visible” of those who perished in the North Tower of the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001. The names etched into the pool’s steel edges provide a sober reminder of a generation’s tragedy.*

# Democracy Versus Totalitarianism

Amuri Justin

It is a good idea to examine the definitions of the two groups of leadership. Democracy is a type of government in which power is held by the people. Citizens can participate in political matters. According to Schmitter and Karl, "In modern political democracies, citizens hold elected officials responsible for their public actions by means of the competition and collaboration of their elected representatives" (76). This quote illustrates how citizens participate in political issues. Citizens do nominate candidates who will present their interest in the government. It also indicates how competition and collaboration ensure elected representatives do their best for citizens. This is because if they don't meet the needs of the public, they will lack supporters in the upcoming elections. Based on this principle having a voice is really the best feature of governing a nation.

Totalitarianism, on the other hand, is described as a form of leadership whereby all the power is held by a single ruler or a small group of people who rule as they wish. Citizens in this system are completely under the control of their leaders. As claimed by Bhoi and Adwani, "Totalitarianism is an extreme form of authoritarianism where autocrats, dictators, or absolute monarchs hold political power, denying individual opposition and claims against the state and limiting individual freedom in both public and private life" (181). The totalitarian system has complete control over all aspects of a person's life. This is the reason why citizens living under this regime are likely to struggle, as they are not enjoying their rights and freedom.

In addition to the definitions, it is useful to consider the various characteristics of both political systems when comparing which government is the most suitable. Voting is one of the best features of being a citizen in a democratic country. Schmitter and Karl emphasize that "elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon" (81). The above quote points out how people make use of their rights through voting. Citizens can vote for an official whom they believe will do better for the public. They are not forced to choose a particular candidate like other regimes do. This administration holds regular and unbiased elections.

Whereas, in a totalitarian system, the people have no say over what the government should do. All power belongs to the rulers, and they choose how to use it without considering public safety. As mentioned by Bhoi and Adwani, "Mussolini, concerned with totalitarianism, has used power on people because he was aware that 'power' is something through which he can control the masses. His knowledge regarding power made his mentality stronger about how to use power. He controls the masses as he considers himself more superior to the masses" (181). This indicates that citizens in totalitarian countries cannot tell the government what they think or what is best for them. This is because citizens have no power; all the power is concentrated on their leader. Leaders are often ruled by their minds. They do only what is best for them, not for the community.

As all other leaders do, totalitarian leaders also promise to do better things for the public before taking power. However, they change after holding authority. Raza and Awan report, "All the totalitarian dictators assured to create a perfect public state, but they destroyed the government by brutal overthrow. They killed millions, exploited other millions, and banished the rest" (30). This shows totalitarian leaders do not fulfill their promise of creating a perfect public state. Instead, they brutally overthrow governments while taking advantage of their power. They use their minds to create a new government that is suitable for themselves. They control society in a way that can impact the lives of individuals because they can remove or kill anyone who is against them. They are able to stay in power for a long time because they instill fear in people and force them to obey.

Everyone is free to speak about whatever they believe in a democratic nation. Schmitter and Karl remark, "Citizens have a right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined" (81). The quote indicates how powerful the general population is under this leadership. It emphasizes the fact that citizens are kept safe from the harm of their rulers when they express themselves, which is completely different from how people under totalitarian governments are treated.

As long as you are living under totalitarian leadership, you just have to follow your leader's instructions, whether you like it or not. As indicated by Raza and Awan, "A totalitarian dictator rules over everything. He utterly dominates the whole society and its values. A totalitarian dictator alters each and every rule according to his personal motives. He who goes against it will be brutally punished" (30). This is clear evidence of how

totalitarian leaders govern the country. It shows that citizens are forced to obey their leaders; if not, anything bad can happen to them. As a result, people who live under this government tend to be more obedient to their ruler in order to save their lives from terrible penalties.

Citizens in a democratic society are free to utilize social media. Schmitter and Karl interpret that "citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exist and are protected by law" (81). The above passage shows how people in this government have the freedom to get information from various alternative sources, which are authorized by the government to be protected. People are able to access a range of perspectives and make informed decisions as a result of this.

The totalitarian leadership restricts the sources of information available to its citizens, in contrast to the democratic nation, where press freedom is provided. Bhoi and Adwani write, "In the present situation, as well as the use of force, fearful obedience, the use of execution, and imprisonment, even citizens are restricted from having communication with the outside world. The government has reduced all the basic liberties, and even during COVID-19, North Korea became more isolated than ever because too many restrictions were imposed on people and communication with outside countries has been banned" (183). This report demonstrates that limited communication with the outside world is still part of North Korea's current situation. Because of this, greater isolation and a reduction in fundamental liberties happened during COVID. It's not like the decisions made by the ruler are funny to the population; rather, as the quotations demonstrate, the ruler intimidates the public through the use of force, obedient fear, the threat of execution, and imprisonment. This is the reason why the majority of people living under this regime have no power.

Furthermore, the above paragraphs describe only the pros of democracies. It was kind of hard to find sources that demonstrate how good the totalitarian system is. As a result, I decided to use a YouTube video to get some. The totalitarian benefit is characterized as one that "establishes strong government" in a YouTube video. This leadership has a powerful governing structure due to its ability to provide quick and efficient information because of the simplicity of the chain of command. Additionally, decisions are quicker to make when similar-minded individuals work together to create these choices. This is the reason totalitarian leaders are capable of enforcing laws and maintaining order

over their people and country. However, citizens are always hurt by their fast choices because leaders don't consider citizens' safety when deciding what to do.

People in a democratic nation have the freedom of expression, which makes it possible for them to continue to disagree over new laws and regulations. Because of this, countries that are democratic may not seem any more orderly, stable, or governable than the autocracies they replace. (Schmitter and Karl 85). Some people might criticize democracy because it takes time to make laws, and the leaders can't make their own decisions at any time. In accordance with Schmitter and Karl, "Second, democracies are not necessarily more efficient administratively. Their capacity to make decisions may even be slower than that of the autocratic regimes they replace, if only because more actors must be consulted" (85). This statement explains why decisions are not made easily. It is because the opinions and consent of different government parties are needed to make decisions that do not negatively affect the population, which is good.

To wrap it up, this article describes why democracy is better than totalitarian government. It is because it places more value on individual freedoms. In a democratic society, power is held by the people, meaning that people can tell the government what to do. This prevents the concentration of power on a single ruler, as citizens can oppose any bad decisions their leader is about to make. It makes leaders take into account the safety of citizens when determining what to do. As a result, people in this government can express themselves without fear, have fair and regular elections, and access alternative information sources. People criticize this form of government for not making fast decisions and for not being a more orderly and stable government. It does not matter, as they do that for the benefit of the public.

On the other hand, totalitarianism is a political system where the ruler has absolute power. In this system, leaders control everything. They control the media and the economy. Such leaders only make the best decisions for themselves, as there is no one to question them. They also instill fear in the masses. As a result, individuals who live under this regime tend to obey their rulers and do not exercise human rights and freedoms such as freedom of the press, speech, and many more. This form has a solid governing structure that maintains law and order as well. It has a more efficient administration, meaning decisions are made quickly in this government. Still, the citizens are always hurt by their

choices.

Today, the issue of choosing the best type of government is important. The war that is occurring now in Russia has a negative impact on citizens because they have nothing to say about their leader. The same thing applies to North Korea, where citizens are not really enjoying their freedom of expression due to a lack of power in the government. This paper highlights the need for a better government to safeguard citizens' rights and freedom in the modern world.

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## **What My Eyes Can See**

Josue Rosas



# Solace in the Unknown Land

## Fabiola Sanchez Corona

In the land of dreams, a little girl named Hope,  
Left Mexico for the U.S., trying to cope.  
With parents by her side, she took a chance,  
Hoping for a better life, a new dance.

Young and brave, she journeyed far,  
Leaving behind her familiar star.  
In search of a future, a brighter gleam,  
Her heart carried a silent dream.

Hope, a girl adrift in the realm of the free,  
Lost in translation, seeking her decree.  
Yet within this nation's expanse so wide,  
Opportunity for education did abide.  
A roof above, and food to provide,  
In this land, her dreams could truly reside.

May Hope find solace, in the unknown land,  
With courage in her heart, she'll take a stand.  
A bittersweet tale, with tears unseen,  
A little girl called Hope, in a world so keen.

In unseen tears, she found her worth,  
Lost in a gaze of blond hair and blue eyes,  
Navigating the language of hope on this earth,  
Accepting differences is where the strength lies.



**Insight Tones**  
Elizabeth Torrealba

# This is Where I am From

Laurance Elnicki

I am from grey hair, cigarette smoke,  
apple pie and food stamps.  
I am from Huffy, GT, Diamondback  
and creek beds.  
I am from Lake Perry,  
sleeping bags, lighting bugs and crickets.  
I am from NO SHELTER!

I am from letters,  
KU Medical Center, steel rods,  
and surgical scars.  
Justin.

I am from home after home after home,  
foster this foster that.  
I am from salt and liquid, Kleenex.

I am from Pro Wing,  
Fat laces and bright palettes.  
I am from Atari, leapfrog, and duck duck goose.  
I am from canoes, bow and arrows and camp leaders.

I am from Jan.  
I am from the Oldies,  
beer, loud pipes, hydraulics and triple back gold's.  
I am from cell doors, walkie talkie squawks and concrete.  
I am from Bobby Hernandez.

I am from we will have to see,  
robbery, kidnapping and burglaries.  
I am from drug addiction,  
and I did the best I could

# **The 99% Percent Literacy Rate in Cuba: How Is It Possible and Why Is It Better Than The United States?**

Anthony Torres Carrillo

On the first day of my Cuban study abroad class we were shown a general overview of the country. We were informed about national heroes, their free health care system, and education. What was most surprising that day was when we were told that Cuba has a 99% literacy rate which is higher than the United States and all of Latin America. I wondered how they maintained a high literacy rate given that in America at least, we are told that Cuba is a poor third world country under communism. Therefore, I wanted to know how it was possible that Cuba was able to attain a 99% literacy Rate given that it is a country that lacks democracy and has been known to have struggling citizens. How is it higher than the education in the United States?

When I first got to Cuba, I could not help but compare and contrast Cuba to the United States as anyone else does when they visit any other country. Upon my return to the United States, clueless about what was happening within the country due to a lack of internet connection in Cuba, there was controversy all across the nation involving banning certain books in schools. My initial reaction was: Why? America is supposed to be the land of the free and was founded on the principles of less government interaction which is ironic because I had recently just traveled to a country where it is seen as the complete opposite to the United States. Therefore, it got me wondering what would happen if it was Cuba who had to deal with this. It seems like American education has turned political and is starting to get shaped to fit a certain ideology. Cuba is already seen as political because of the government taking control of every aspect of the country, including education. But if the United States continued a similar path with education, would it improve our education and literacy rate like Cuba or what else is there that makes Cuban education unique? However, since I am already a college student, the news about K-12 education did not necessarily affect me because I was more worried about the cost of school and other college related priorities.

The high price tag of college in the United States has made many consider opting out of college and finding alternatives. Some common reasons are that it is too expensive, and it does not guarantee a good paying job mostly because some jobs are not in demand as others. It is often heard that Cuba has the same issue with the lack of well-paying jobs but many do end up attending a university either way. If university education was free, would it change the attitude of pursuing an education especially for Americans? How do Cubans view and value secondary education and how has their education system affected their society today?

In 1961, Fidel Castro introduced a literacy campaign which was the first significant step into creating an impactful education system. It is hard to believe that in just a short time, the literacy rate increased heavily because “The movement began with 23.6 percent illiteracy across the country in January, a total of 979,207 illiterate individuals. When the campaign ended on December 22, slightly less than a year later, illiteracy had dropped to a mere 3.9 percent across the country” (Klein). According to the same article, during the campaign schools in general closed but allowed those who were already literate, apart from teachers, to teach their family members, friends, employees, and even neighbors, which consisted of “a total of 105,664 young people, ages 7 to 22, [who] participated as teachers under the almost military title of brigadistas (brigadiers)” (Klein).

The literacy campaign invested in a slightly different system to help neglected rural areas. According to Deborah Klein, the rural areas of Cuba started with fierce resistance towards the campaign mostly because they viewed it as an interruption of their work in the fields (Klein). In order to combat the opposition, there was also access to math and business classes to people in rural areas and teachers who traveled to the rural areas would help build schools in the area after the literacy campaign. (Klein). It is often assumed that people who grew up in rural areas are often less educated because of limited resources and because many are too busy working in the fields from a young age. Yet the program was thoughtfully planned out because it was wise to encourage education in farmers without hurting Cuba's economy. It is like saying being literate helped owners have the ability to manage their own lands and improve their businesses. It also seems like one of the reasons for educating the rural community was because the production sector was important to the country's image which was one of the goals of the revolution and would

later be more important to support because the embargo would devastate the economy in the following years with an embargo.

After the 1961 campaign, reforms were responsible for modernizing the education system. In 1962, the government then passed the University Reform and later “The guiding ideology and content of the Cuban education [which] has been clearly defined since the constitution of 1976 as ‘a patriotic communist education and training of future generations...’” (Quintana Nedelcu 209). It comes to show that education in Cuba does have a heavy concentration in biased thinking and a set agenda which could mean that education does seem to be a little bit misleading. But looking back in time, post-secondary education was different. In the 1980’s it was seen that universities produced inequalities because those who had at least one educated parent were able to enter compared to those who grew up poor and the working class. Therefore, they passed some policies where “selection mechanisms that apply to higher education with the purpose to reduce the rates of the intelligentsia and counter the growing mismatch between training, research, and contribution to production (210). To me, this reminds me a lot of the United States’ affirmative action policy and although it may seem unconstitutional in the United States, Cuba seems to have it in place in order to make education accessible to as many as possible. Perhaps if the United States kept the policy, then the country could follow a similar path like Cuba. Additionally, they structured the universities to prioritize and offer classes that were in demand like production (210). It is interesting to say the least that the Cuban government thinks about the production sector constantly as a way of saying that education affects the production sector which is valid because in general if people do not study for a professional career then most likely they work in hard labor. Due to the reforms and careful planning, at the turn of the century it resulted that “80 percent of university students had at least one professional parent, doubling the proportion in relation to the 1980s” (211).

Due to rough times and negligence of public schools, Cuba increased the number of private schools. Fast forward to the 1990’s, and the Soviet Union collapses. Apart from having tough economic times, according to our tour guide in Cuba, education then struggles. Therefore, this prompts the government to pass reforms and other things necessary. I think this is where we are now familiar with the reality of Cuba in which tourism earns more than professionals including professors. According to news site Al Jazeera, what was once an effective education system provided by

the Cuban government, is now not as effective as it once was due to a rough economy during the turn of the century (Gonzalez & Velasquez). When education was handed to Fidel's Government, private education was prohibited. But now, they are allowing more people to be educated privately mostly through private tutors beginning in 2013 (Havana Times). This comes to show that when the Soviet Union collapsed, Cuba suffered severely as it was its friend because of having the same type of economic system. Additionally, since the government had no money, investments to the education sector diminished and explains why the government could not keep up. In this case outside help would be the most obvious and humane solution which could be solved with those who have money whether foreign or not could help open schools and operate and teach them. I did see that when in Cuba, I saw many foreigners invest in properties which may be a sign that Cuba is more open to other solutions than in the past.

However, free post-secondary education in Cuba is not completely free. According to one of the tour guides Alex, if students after high school want to go to college, they must go serve in the military and/or work for the government. After working for about two years, they are allowed to attend a university. Compared to that of the United States where no military service is required but may help with scholarships, access to post-secondary education has been diminishing. According to the U.S News website, due to the great recession and falling birthrate of the United States has severely impacted the number of applicants applying to college (Camera). Many people are in debt and college tuition is becoming more expensive. Now if colleges seem like they will suffer due to low enrollment because of the student's tuition that pays for the schools' maintenance and programs, it may be more likely that the government could cover the tuition of those who still want to attend but it can also be risky to make American colleges free and let the government pay.

How has the Cuban education system affected their society? According to an article, since the revolution, education has been considered a priority because it was seen as the country's development (Quintana Nedelcu 2009). However, I see a flaw in this because when the government sets out what should be taught, they can dangerously control education with propaganda which would be the worst-case scenario. But that is just the government. The ordinary Cuban citizen does not have bad intentions as could probably infer that a generation that was

educated under the literacy campaign of 1961 would appreciate the efforts and become inspired or have a favorable view that education is valuable and important and passing that idea to the next generation. However, “the challenges that Cuban education faces today are many: from the point of view of the state it is required to be ‘productive’ and cost effective and meet its political and ideological function (216). Yet within the average Cuban citizen, many are becoming disappointed to see that being educated from a university does not help with social mobility as it once was and that working for the state as a professional will get them less money (216). This reminds me of the United States as many are opting out for alternatives like trade jobs or entrepreneurship whereas in Cuba, tourism seems to be the easiest way. Today, the purpose of the policies of universities is to have an efficient education while also maintaining the revolutionary ideology and values (216). “Social transformation has occurred, but not just because of education...transformation is in itself educational” (217).

In conclusion, there are a few things to learn from Cuba's education system. According to the UNESCO department of education, Cuba spends up to 13% of its GDP compared to the United States' 7.3 % (Lamrani 157). It feels like in Cuba, they always place the children first whereas in the United States, we put freedom first and that attitude in the society of the nation affects the outcome and future of their society.

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## **Corn and Sky**

Richard Esvang

# The Beauty

## Sandra Pacheco

In Portugal's embrace, where the sun meets the sea,  
Lies a land of warmth and hospitality, so free.  
With cobblestone streets and colors so bright,  
The culture here dances all day and night.

From Lisbon's hills to Porto's ancient walls,  
Each corner whispers tales that enthrall.  
In the soulful fado and the rhythm of love,  
Portuguese hearts beat with passion, undreamed of.

With smiles as warm as the Algarve's sun,  
People gather, friendships begun.  
In quaint cafes and bustling markets' throng,  
Connections deepen through laughter and song.

Oh, how food here is more than mere fare,  
It's a language of love that we all share.  
From bacalhau to pastéis de nata so sweet,  
Every bite is a story, a memory complete.

So let's raise a glass of Vinho Verde in cheer,  
For Portugal's beauty, so vivid and clear.  
In its culture, its people, and food's delicious art,  
We find unity and joy that warms the heart.



**Beach Dream**  
Michelle Meade

# How my Family Has Shaped my Perspective of Education

Citlalic Gomez

For as long as I can remember, my parents have always stressed how important education is. I am so fortunate to have such loving and caring parents, who have always told me I can do anything I set my mind to. They have always told me, “The one thing no one can take away from you is your education.” The downside to this is the amount of pressure I put on myself. My parents did not have it as easy as I have had it or even the slightest amount of support that I have been so fortunate to receive.

As I sit here and think of the years of my education, I cannot think of a significant moment in my school life that altered how I feel about education. I was taught how important education is from the start of a very young age. My mother comes from immigrant parents who came to America to give their family a better life. My stepdad was born at a time when his race was looked down on in all aspects of life. My parents have had to face so many obstacles to be where they are today.

The earliest memory I have of my education is the daily journal entries my class and I would do in first grade. They were made of those huge colored papers that we would fold in half, then fill with lined paper and staple together at the folded indent. Every morning, we would walk in, grab our journals, sit at our desks, and then look at the whiteboard to see our prompt. The prompt that I will never forget writing/drawing about is the first page that had us introduce ourselves. I drew my brother, mother, sister, stepdad, and dog. I can still picture how big I made my dog even though he was just a corgi. At that age he was huge to me. When I think of it today, I like to believe that I drew him that big because of how much I loved him, and I wanted to show how much he meant to me and my family. It’s such a silly thing when I think of it now, but it is one of the fondest memories I have of the start of my education. I feel as if this story shows just how different my upbringing in education was to the generations before me in my family.

My mother grew up in a predominantly white town where her teachers didn’t care to pay attention to her. She had to learn everything on her own, while also having to help my grandparents gauge their way in a new

country. I've heard the stories of how hard it was for her to go from an all-Spanish-speaking household to go to a school where everyone spoke English, how her parents were unable to help her when she needed assistance with homework since they had barely attended school themselves.

Growing up my grandfather would tell me about the horrific times he went through when he first came to America. He used to work for the railroad company, where he would do manual labor all day to make ends meet. He would then go back to the housing for the workers to be sprayed down with pesticide. While they would spray him down, he could hear his coworkers yelling slurs at him. Although it bothered him, he never really let it get to him and never quit because he knew he had a family to support. My grandmother was never able to attend school as a child. As she grew up, she was angry that people looked down on her. They believed she wasn't smart, so she took it upon herself to teach herself how to read and write.

My stepdad grew up in a time when they were still putting "colored" under race on birth certificates. While he was in medical school his professors would tell him to drop out because he would never make it as a doctor or surgeon. They would tell him that he would just end up as a statistic, "just another black man that would drop out and turn to the streets." All throughout his life, people have judged him based on the color of his skin. He is very thickheaded and never wanted to prove them right, so he persevered and proved them wrong. He became the first African American to graduate from the Obstetrics program at OU. He now has a degree in almost everything I can think of and became an OBGYN.

Growing up hearing these stories always made me appreciate the education my family has been able to provide me with so that I would never have to go through what they did. Of course, a lot of it is due to the passing of time. Unfortunately, these stories have also made it impossible for me not to beat myself up after I receive a bad grade. I do not like to fail things because I feel as if I am letting down everyone who has sacrificed or persevered to give me the life I live. As if I fail, all the sacrifices they have made were for nothing. I believe that I am my harshest critic. I can never congratulate myself on my achievements, because I always believe I can do and can be better. While having what seems to be all the support in the world is great, I am constantly reminded of all the struggles my family has gone through. I am reminded of how differently my life could have turned out if my family never gave up

the countless times they were told to.

Although I have never had a significant moment stemming from my years of education that shaped me to become a better student. I believe that the stories of the generations that came before me have pushed me to continue to further pursue my education.

## **Reflection**

Quortez Brown

To be seen as more than an assigned number or uniform. I am more than the 13th Amendment. Hold me close to the heavens and you'll see me a true reflection of who you are, if it were you, you'll be the reflection I am. No better than you nor you than me despite wrong or right, rich or poor, the mirror where roles can be switched you could be me or I you.

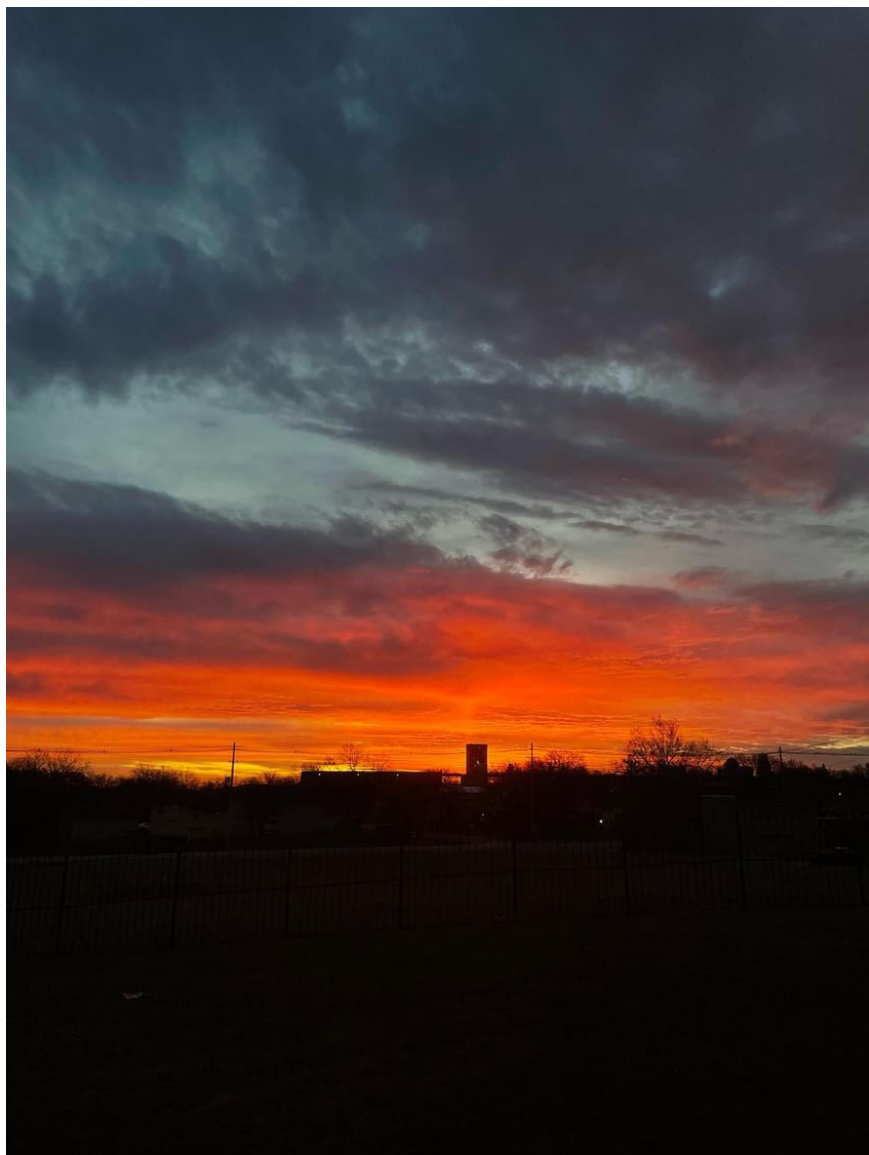
The division has caused a world divided, face it, where there's a line to be crossed its place is not united. What's the cause of war? What comes from war? The demise of yours, the demise of mine, the family member that causes more space a sense of loss or emptiness more things in common. No! More realization of you being me in that reflection, the divided states taking with illusions of a better life to blind you of the truth.

You are me, a ward of the Divided States. . . .

# **It's Me**

## **Jose Penate**

It's me, the child who was always different from the others.  
While the mother worked, the food was not enough.  
The child came down from the deepest world of his mind,  
where there were only toys and a song or two.  
To wake up and have a reason to help his mother with such devotion  
to eat a tasty dinner prepared with love.  
The child grew with the time and his mother never abandoned him.  
They faced difficulties, without a father to guide him the boy just kept  
going.  
He explored things that did not exist in that imagination, more bad than  
good  
and then to his mother, he did not arrive.  
He was on muddy roads and as expected he slipped,  
while this was happening, he fell into an abyss and slept.  
He did not know where he was; he thought it was normal  
to be in that place for eternity. Then he heard a voice echoing,  
“At home, they are waiting for you,  
to give you a mother's love that you will not find anywhere else.”  
That's how the boy came back and assured that he had arrived again  
to never leave his mother and receive the love that will be there forever.



**Sunset**  
Justine Ushindi



# Those Damn Bars

Danny Clark

Have you ever wondered what it feels like to be frozen in time.

Yeah, well I do. The worst minute of my life, 25 years ago, I committed a crime.

I hope to live long enough and be able to watch as the steel bars start to decay.

I don't know how long I've got left. I came in young, now I'm old and gray.

The damn bars on the doors and windows have not budged an inch.

Am I dreaming? Stuck in a nightmare? Please wake me up, somebody give me a pinch.

It is my hope and dream to watch those damn bars rust and decay

But as life goes by and time passes, it is me who is rotting away

Damn steel bars! Rust! Become a pile of rotting junk

Ah damn its morning again and I creak and groan getting out my bunk

Rot! Chip! Fall away!

I want to see this happen today!

Oh damn, I'm an old man and I don't know what part of my body I can trust

Oh please bar, dont be made of steel, maybe perhaps they are made of lead.

Don't know if I'll get to see it, someday soon, I'm pretty sure I'll be dead

Fall! Drop! Crumble into a pile!

Start doing that, and I will do my best to hang on for awhile

I was young, but that was so long ago, those damn bars have outlasted me

It looks like I will be the first one to go.

Those. Damn. Bars.

# The Flight

## Jezreel Doume

It is called Africa in miniature, with 26 million people (about the population of Texas) and over 200 languages. It is rich in minerals such as bauxite, iron ore, rubies, diamonds, gold, natural gas and is the home of the highest mountain in west Africa (Mount Fako). In the northeast, it is bordered by Chad, in east by the Central African Republic, in the south by Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and in the west by Nigeria and the Atlantic Ocean. This is my motherland, Cameroon. I was born in a small village called Nguti, located in the southwest region of Cameroon. Soon after I was born, my mom moved to a town called Bonaberi, located in the heart of the economic capital of Cameroon. Living there meant everything was fast paced. "This is where my journey began".

I lived in a house two miles west of the Bonaberi market with my mom, my aunt, and my older brother. My little sister lived in the village while my dad lived somewhere in Bonaberi. My dad drove a taxi and he was involved in our lives up until I was about seven when he and my mom had a falling out, leaving my mom to raise all three of her children by herself. My mom was a buyam-selam (women who bought food crops and sold in the market). As she tells the story, she was just thirteen when her mom passed away. With the many challenges that came with been a woman, she had to fight hard for the life she now has. My brother and I went to Catholic schools both in primary and secondary school. During the school week, after school, we would sit with my mom watching her sell, sometimes till seven at night. When we got back home, my mom would make dinner while we showered then go on to help us with any assignments we had. On weekends and holidays, my mom would give us food crops to sell, and she would tell us to hawk in the market until everything was sold. Sometimes I did, other times I did not. I did not understand the business as well as my brother. He was good at it. Everyone called him "papa," (even till this day, which ought to tell you something) but his actual name was Fidelis. He was the golden child, always obeying the rules and doing the right things. I was not. I was the mischievous one, always breaking the rules, causing trouble, and causing my mom so much pain.

One time I led her to believe I was kidnapped! For everyone else, it was

just a regular day with temperatures in the 80s and people going about their business as usual but for me it was not. I do not recall exactly what I did, but I knew that day if I stepped foot in school my life would be over. By this time, my mom had moved from the place we used to live with my aunt to another part of town. My older brother Fidelis had gone to live with one of my uncles in Buea. I was maybe seven or so and it was just me and my mom in her new place. As always, my mom went to the market early and trusted I would go to school. But at about midday, she received a call from my school letting her know I had missed school again and they wanted to see me in school immediately. I was at home then, and I could not tell for sure what I was doing when suddenly, I heard loud footsteps approaching and keys rattling as someone was trying to open the front door. Quickly, I hid myself and that is when I heard my mom yell out.

“Junior, where are you? You better come out before I get angry. Junior! Junior,” She had this voice that made the house shake when she yelled in anger and whenever I heard that I knew there was trouble.

I replied, “yes mama I'm coming out.”

When I got out of hiding, my face was welcomed with a slap and she went on to say, “You have started again na, do not play with me,oh. You think I am spending all this money for you to sit at home?” And before I could say anything she told me to put on my shoes and follow her to school.

My mom held my hand as we walked under the scourging hot afternoon sun. I was trembling and sweating profusely and could not help but think of the kind of beating I was going to get in front of the whole school. Determined not to let that happen I began thinking of ways to escape. But my mom's grip on my hand made it impossible and as we got closer to school fear crept in. My heart started beating faster. I felt like my fate was sealed. And then unexpectedly my mom left my hand. From walking to her side, I started slowing down my steps so I could walk behind her and when the opportunity came for me to escape, I disappeared. I do not know but I can only imagine what my mom must have felt when she turned around and did not see me. She spent the entire afternoon looking for me with some of the other teachers. When she got back home, I was just sitting there.

Too tired to beat me, she settled for yelling and when she was calmed, she pulled me close to herself and went on to say something like, “You

know my mom died when I was thirteen and I did not have anyone to send me to school or take care of me. I had to struggle to get the life I now have. Why can't you just focus? I am spending all this money on you so you can have a better life. I have no one to help me. No one." Whenever we had conversations like this, I almost never had a response for her. Sometimes it was just "I'm sorry mama" but most times I would just cry and feel bad about myself.

I noticed whenever I came back with good grades, all my trespasses were forgiven. But if I came back with poor grades, it would be hell on earth (honestly). I was unique in a way because unlike other mischievous kids I always passed school and never once did I repeat a class. And whenever someone tried to say something bad about me, my mom would be quick to say, "Yes my child is stubborn, but he passes his exams." In a way she always felt proud saying that. Neither my brother nor I ever failed at school, primarily because of my mom. No matter how tired she was, she made sure she always created time to help us with our assignments and she regularly checked our books to be sure we had all our notes. One time I brought home a math assignment I did not understand. When we were done with dinner later in the evening, she sat down with me to help me. And after explaining it to me about four times, I still did not get it. First, she sighed, then gave me an angry look and then she said, "I'm going to beat you if I explain this to you one more time and you don't get it." Magically, I got it. I do not know how but I did. Assignments were always like that. It was either you understood, or you got a beating. And you could not go to sleep until you finished your assignments. Despite my not fully appreciating the struggles she had to go through and the work she had to do to send me to school, my mom was bent on making sure she laid in me the strong foundations needed for me to succeed in life.

It was September 28 of 2018, the biggest day of my life. There was so much commotion going on. We were doing the final preparations and getting everything ready for my flight later that evening. My mom was cooking food with some other women in the kitchen. My brother and my cousins were setting up the tables, chairs, and drinks. There was music and one could feel the joy in the air. I was somewhere around helping with whatever I could. In the afternoon, a party was thrown for me and everyone including the neighbors were invited. Everyone ate, drank, and was satisfied.

At about four in the afternoon, it was time for me to leave for the airport. I said my goodbyes to the neighbors and then my family and I took a taxi

headed for the airport. When we got to the airport, I was overwhelmed with excitement. I could hear the loud engines of the planes as they took off and landed. My family and I stood outside the airport in the cold breezy evening, chit chatting and waiting for the hour of my departure. When it came time for me to get checked in, I hugged my brother and my aunt, shook hands with my uncle and of course I saved the best for last.

When my mom and I hugged each other, it felt as if in that moment, the wind stopped blowing, the planes stopped flying, people stopped talking. Everything went completely silent, and the world came to an instant halt. We lived in this surreal moment for about a minute, never uttering a single word. There was a certain calm I felt in my mother's arms, as though she was telling me everything will be ok. And suddenly I snapped back into reality when I heard my mom saying the words "Junior my child, as you go, do not forget where you came from. You know what life has been for us. Do not go joining gangs or bad friends and always remember we have no one but God."

"Yes Mama, I will not forget," was my reply.

She then squeezed me tightly. I said goodbye one last time to everyone who came to drop me off at the airport and then dashed into the airport building.

I was standing in the building looking very confused and trying to find my way when one of the TSA agents said to me, "Hurry, don't just stand there, hand over your bags to me." He helped me with my bags and got me checked in. As I walked about in this gigantic building, I was surprised and amused at the number of people I saw sleeping by the plane gates (in less than 24 hours I soon came to understand why). After about forty minutes of wandering around, it was time for me to board the plane. As the plane took off, I thought to myself, so this is really happening, I am going to the United States. I was so filled with excitement. But little did I know this was the flight that would change the course of my life.

It was a 24-hour flight with a connecting flight in Belgium. During our flight, the flight attendants served us two meals. One of them was something that looked like flour with a creamy, buttery, fluffy texture with some green seeds, carrots, green beans, and some fish. I did not eat that. (I found out a few months later that I was served mashed potatoes, with peas, and salmon.) The wait in Belgium was five hours, during which I

decided to get some food. I tried to rest but I could not, because I was scared that I might miss my flight or that someone was going to steal my bags. I didn't even have a phone and I had only sixty dollars in my pocket. So, I was very vigilant. But soon enough the five hours passed by, and I was on my second flight to Kansas City. When I landed, I was so tired and exhausted, my body was so dry and itchy, and I think I was smelly. I was picked up by a family friend living in Kansas with his family.

They were so happy to see me, but I think they were most happy for the spices and food I brought from Cameroon. After talking for a little bit, we drove off to their little suburban home in Olathe, where we unpacked all the bags I brought until about eleven at night before finally heading to bed. We lived in a three-bedroom, two-bathroom house with two living rooms, a spacious kitchen, a basement and a garage. My aunt gave me the pink room. When I got in, I thought of all the rooms, the pink room. Seriously? But anyway. My bed lay in the middle of the room. Above my bed on the wall hung a painting of a child ballet dancer. (That painting creeped me out. It always gave me the illusion that I was being watched.) On the left side of my bed stood a light brown dresser with a massive mirror on it. On the right side of my bed in the corner of my room stood my reading table. It was an old black computer desk that looked like something out of a horror movie and on it stood a single lamp.

This was my safe place. The place where I communicated with my best friends, all of whom were dead. While in my safe place, it always started with a knock on my room door, or some loud yelling and the conversation always went something like, "Jezreel, what are you doing?" my aunt would ask.

"I am studying" was my reply.

"You and this you're studying, studying, what are you studying for? Are you preparing for an exam to write" she would say to me. Then she would go on to tell me the real reason for the knock or the yelling, which was usually a task she wanted accomplished.

She did not understand. That was their attitude towards education. Kind and loving people but they lacked understanding.

The first few weeks seemed good. I got my first job working in McDonald's. Seeing all the opportunities I had in front of me, I was excited and ready to take over the world. But after about a few months of

living in the United States, I began drowning in confusion and disbelief, trying to understand all that was going on around me. Externally the first thing I noticed was the level of disrespect kids had toward their parents and how teenagers had no respect for elders. Looking at teenagers and young adults I felt sorry at how little they knew or understood. I heard the words “I love you” thrown out every single day, but my daily observations showed that those were just words without substance. I noticed people living above their means and constantly putting themselves in self-imposed dilemmas. Despite being one of the richest countries in the world, there was a sense in which one could say the government was primarily responsible for the self-imposed dilemmas of its citizens. Every day on the news, there were people arguing about simple things which I thought were set in stone like whether human life was sacred or if a parent has a right to discipline their children or if in middle school, teachers should be teaching kids about sex to the point of showing pornographic videos. What a shock this was! The more I listened to things like this the more I was filled with anger and there was an urgency that grew within me to disperse the darkness with light.

Internally I was battling with a sense of self and identity. I was lost and lonely. I did not know what to call myself or who I was anymore. Given the many different identities, I wondered if I am African American or just African. If I am a black Republican or a black Democrat, a conservative or a progressive. If I am Christian or just Catholic, or if I am Catholic Christian. Better yet if I am a black African American Catholic Christian? Heck I might as well be an alien. I was confused! Also, I was confused about my faith and would wonder if I believed in God. When I began questioning my belief in whether there was a God and if I believed in this God, I knew there and then I was completely lost, and it was time for a renaissance in self-education.

Seven thousand, one hundred eighty-two miles from home and with no support I decided to make new friends. Some of whom are dead and others still alive. And in the quiet of the night, with the lights off and everyone asleep, there in my safe place with my table lamp, I began my intellectual journey. Some books I read online and others I got from Amazon. It was in *Understanding Your Purpose* that I began to understand why I was on Earth and what role I played, in *Stolen Legacy* I found out that what is known as Greek philosophy was really African philosophy that was borrowed from the Egyptian mystery schools. In the *Gulag Archipelago* I was informed of the horrors prisoners faced in the

gulag camps of Russia; I was struck by the human will of the survivors. It was in Power Up Your Mind that I learned about the importance of learning to learn and discovering my own unique learning abilities. In The Ecclesiastical History of the Church by Eusebius, I studied Church History. And it was in The Mis-Education of the Negro that led me to understand some of the problems faced by the Black community.

What is this feeling inside of me, this feeling I cannot shake off? No matter how much I try I just cannot go back. This is the man I now was. You all know what I am talking about. It may have happened during a conversation or at an event, after which you did not feel the same anymore. Where the “old you” was gone and the “new you” took its place. I can feel a throbbing ache in my head, my body tired from work and my eyes half open. There are just a few pages left and I am fighting to stay awake. Eventually I get subdued by the forces of rest and so I close my book. Long after I left my uncle’s house, in my little one-bedroom apartment, with no mattress in my room and books scattered all over the floor. I lay down on the carpet floor. And as I closed my eyes, all I could think about was Bonaberi.



## **Charon's Lost Currency at the Luray Caverns**

John A. Vargas





## **Serendipitous Dandelion**

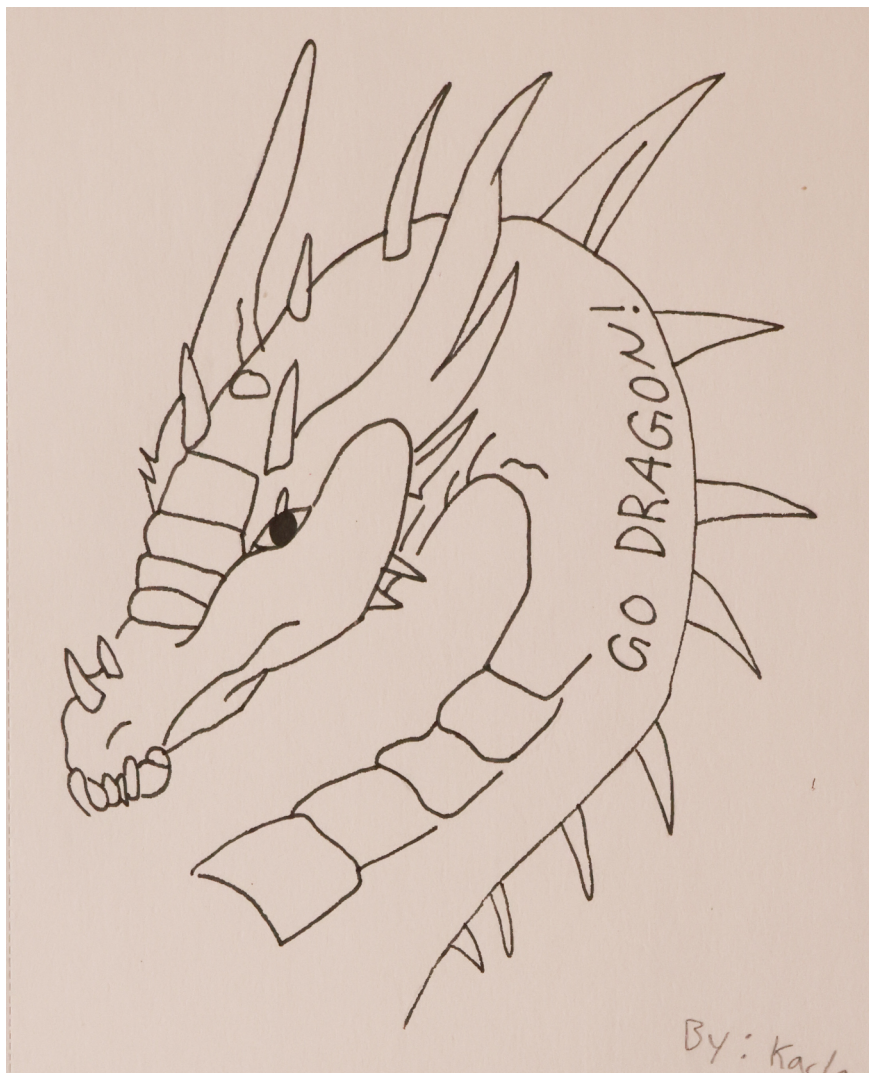
Gretchen Moffet

*This photo is a detail of an untitled sculpture by Harry Bertoia, on display at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas. The sculpture is an 11-foot-tall dandelion, originally displayed at the Hilton Hotel, Denver, Colorado in 1961. I remember seeing this sculpture as a child growing up in Colorado and was pleasantly surprised to encounter the sculpture again when I visited Crystal Bridges. It felt like bumping into an old friend.*

# **Demons**

Arthur Gonzalez

It's hard to breath it's hard to think  
Half the time I can't even sleep  
Am I going mad or am I going crazy  
with all this rage that burns inside me  
I got know where to run  
Know where to go  
All this rage is going to blow  
This monster inside my head has to go  
I close my eyes and try to dream  
then look in the mirror and see  
The monster is looking right back at me



**My Dragon**  
Karla Aguirre

# First Love

Vanessa Arevalo

In youth's tender grasp, love found its start,  
A fluttering heart, a stirring of the soul,  
Eyes meeting in that enchanted hour,  
Where innocence and passion intertwine.

Though seasons change and time may fly,  
The memory of first love never dies,  
Forever engraved in the expression of our being,  
A timeless ode to love's beginning.

With every touch, a symphony plays,  
In the rhythm of love's gentle ways.  
A shy smile, a nervous glance,  
Beginnings of a tender dance,

In each other's arms, they find consolation,  
In the embrace of love's sweet sensation.  
Through our stormy seas and calmest nights,  
Our love burns with undying light.

A love story that hearts believe.  
So let this poem be a testament,  
To the power of love's firmament.

In every beat of a loving heart,  
True love's beauty shall never depart.

# Veins

Sarah Hebel

There was poetry  
In my veins  
My heart was pierced  
And first  
The jet black ink  
Of death released  
With its wretched stink  
Misery

But slowly the flow  
Gave way to beauty  
And the sweet perfume  
Of redemptive hymns  
Lyrics for healing  
A low rhythmic hum  
Slow, patient whispers  
Not a frenzied soap box  
But a caress of suggestion  
Of rest

Finding the beauty  
In the resting place  
Oxygen returns  
And the rich red of love  
Is the pulsing rhythm of the river  
Flowing

No longer sparse drops  
But a gentle pour  
That promises a spring bloom  
Wildflowers upon the tomb  
Watered by  
The poetry  
Written by  
A bleeding heart  
For love





**Wild Desert Plant**  
Carmelita Vargas

## **Thank you**

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