ABOUT
The journal accepts poetry, artwork, photography, creative writing, including short fiction, dramatic writing, and creative non-fiction. Rune accepts submissions from the Robert Morris University community as well as artists and writers from the surrounding Pittsburgh area and beyond.

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RUNE 2021
poetry & prose
Breathe
By Wayne Amtiz

Breathe
Where the wind stills
Breathe
Where the skull borders two inward seas
Breathe
Where the eyes open to the world
Breathe
Where the lips part
Breathe
Into the gums, into the teeth roots
Breathe
Straddling the skull, straddling the ear
Breathe
Without speaking, speaking her name
Breathe
Without breath, without breathing
Breathe
Into the bones where the fingers part
Breathe
Into the toes where the toes part
Breathe
Along the length of the arms into the shoulders
Breathe
Along the length of the legs into the thighs
Breathe
Vertebrae by vertebrae
Breathe
Along the length of the spine
Breathe

With Breath long past, with the body entire
Breathe
With eyes open with closed eyes open
Breathe
Breathe your heart out breathe your tears dry
Breathe
As if nothing else matters
Breathe
Deep in the marrow trawling the blood
For one last breath
With the life that’s yours
With all that’s past and for all that remains
For all that remain
Breathe
For breath and breath only
Breathe
Mr/Nice

By Keyshawn Andress

Mr/Nice

I let my ambition blind my direction
Tangle words
Forming circles

They say
“Sounds nice”
And let me be

Speak false claim of progress
“Sounds nice”
They let me be

Rejoice in newfound hope for life
“Sounds nice”
They let me be

Shaking, I lay with tears down my face
“Sounds nice”
They let me be

I grip them by there throats and squeeze
“Sounds nic…”
They let me be

I feed them knowledge from the forbidden tree
“Sounds nice”
They let me

Behind closed doors they conceal hatred

I take action of my life
“I think you need to reconsider”
They refuse my peace.
The Summit
By Keyshawn Andress

It was a hell of a trip wasn’t it?
I climbed the mountain
Hurdled the fallen trees
Escaped ferocious beasts
Was struck down by God’s misery
To be saved by nature’s grace
I reached heights that men only dream of
To look down and feel alone

Oh, how many sleepless nights?
No bed
No comfort
Just hard ground
It was consistent
It was cold
Unwelcoming

When we began the end was already in sight
A voyage
A journey
We were all headed to the same place
Where did we all go wrong?

Now I stand here
Looking up at heaven’s gates
Do you see me?

So I let go
It was a hell of a trip wasn't it? To think I believed I could enter the garden without the trials of those who passed. Now look where I stand, a man with a hollow shell, an embodiment of the villains I feared as a child. How many years until you realize you fucked up? How many years? How many fucking years? I remember staring up and seeing the summit: it was so far; now look where I stand 13,000 ft above sea level. It was more than a trip: it was a journey, a voyage with no plan of return. The four of us wanted it more than we could breathe, we wanted to feel the power course through our veins. We wanted everything they told us we needed, so we took that step forward. Now look at us, or better yet look at me, a man of no substance. Every day was a trial of its own; the journey up the crooked path was unwelcoming. Every corner greeted with despair, then you wake up one day and you're all alone. To find that you're not just not around the company you desire. Those damn ravaged beasts. They watch you all day, stalking your every move, and you know the whole time. There's nothing you can do but wait and wait. Just stuck waiting in suspense until they decide it's time to strike, and there you stand, looking into the eyes of death, and in that moment there's no thinking, no help, nothing, it's just live or die, eat or be eaten. That's the moment you realize the real extent of your humanity. How barbaric we are and how easy it is to take a life. The only thing you feel in that moment is that pounding in your chest as your heart races. You never know how alive you are before you are about to die. Then it's over; there's no dramatic moment like in the movies when something dies. It's just silence, nothing but silence as blood leaks out and you look down to a lifeless body. You feel nothing; you just sit and watch until eventually you become numb. No longer feeling guilt or loss. Just numb. At first you're scared you lost your humanity. Then you come to realize there was no humanity, just a word we use to separate ourselves from those beasts. Yet, we are the most ferocious beast, aren't we? Viewing our species as superior, we think we play God in this world. To find we are everything but what we believe; resulting in the destruction of our own environment. Just animals who shit where they sleep and sleep where they shit. It's pathetic, our narcissistic behavior; only valuing our own, we forget we are part of the whole. So I decided to climb a mountain with no hope of returning. I wanted to become one with where I am from.
I wear a hat these days, nothing
Fancy, just to hide quarantined
Hair, wavy and gray, curling out
Like my shaggy junior-high
Mop of the 1970s, with
Coordinating leisure suits.

I didn't fit in then, and I feel
No more fashionable today
Sniffling silently behind surgical
Mask and latex gloves, stoic as I
Shop among zombies shuffling
Straight ahead, six feet of

Separation, one-way arrows
Screaming 'wrong way' again
Defying well-trained aisle habits.
I smile – or am I just wincing?
Angry, even, behind a veil of
Practiced blank stares following

Toilet paper hoarders, possibly
Doomsday preppers filling
Carts with Lysol wipes, eggs,
Quarantine-ground chuck. And
Soup. Always toilet paper and soup.
And panty-liners and bread. Oh, and

Land-O-Lakes Cheese suddenly with
No Native American on the logo –
Political correctness in a pandemic.
I’m glad Pop-Tarts aren’t
Prepper pastries. Or the mask
Might have to come off with the

Distancing as I cross that
Line in the aisle on my way to
Another backed-up register.
Call it a Covid rage, as I
Breathe in my own exhale. Again.
Believe me, it’s real.
A Thirst for Justice
By Joan E. Bauer

A Thirst for Justice

for Martin Gugino

A warm June day in Buffalo.
80 degrees. Mr. Gugino, age 75, takes off
his helmet as he approaches the police
at the George Floyd / Black Lives Matter protest
in Niagara Square.

Maybe he wants them to have a clear view
of his lined face, his white hair.

He’s made some notes:
The cops should not have clubs
and should not be in riot gear.
The National Guard should arrest the police.

Veteran activist, Catholic worker, pacifist.
Four arrests over some years.
U.S. Capitol, White House twice. No convictions.

Retired IT guy, bachelor, devoted son.
He’s a regular at ‘Burning Books’ Bookstore.
His last name from ‘cousin’ in Southern Italian.

Tall & lanky. Taller than the police.
Don’t tell me they’re afraid of him.

He’s a bit frail, friends say. He would never resist.

He is dressed in blue: jeans, shirt, mask.
Then shoved to the ground. Then bleeding from his ear.
Then on the way to the hospital.

As Dorothy Day reminds us:

We can only lay one brick at a time; we can only
be responsible for one action in the present moment.
**Wind**

By Victoria Beuchat

---

**Wind**

You played with my hair
Twisting and turning it into innumerable tangles;
As my hairbrush yanks your handiwork,
I watch
Caramel colored clusters
Drifting, drifting,
To the floor
In the midafternoon glow.

You made the grasses dance
And tickle my face
As I laid within your grasp,
Under the piercing hot sun
Of a June afternoon.

And when I was shaking,
My eyes squinting,
My world spinning,
It was you who saved me
You whose very breath
Encircled me,
Enticed me,
Filled me,
And carried me away to
Where I was sane,
To where I felt your
Cooling embrace
Was meant for me alone.

And, yet, you leave with the same
Swiftness in which you come.

And when you are gone
I am
Shocked by the
Ringing in my ears,
The emptiness in my lungs,
The stark silence of life,
That creates a mirage,
Before my eyes.

I glance at the grass so still
And tired

---

The sun beating down and I miss you,
Your embrace,
I call to you,
But you never come
I am collapsing,
My sea colored eyes burning,
Please, come
And save me

You who can make the grass dance,
You who make the piercing heat of sun
Feel much less suffocating,
You who carries me forward and propels me
Towards some point
That I trust you know.

Yet you do not come
Until coldness beats inside my veins
And grasses no longer dance.
Now the world is a dead arrangement
Of lifeless branches
That try to wave
In their stiff way.

You bombard with a force that tips me over
I cannot walk, cannot breathe without remembering
You.

Cannot think, cannot smell,
Cannot open my mouth to exhale without
Thoughts of you, without your presence
Blustering bluntly upon me.

I know there is no escaping you:
For no mechanism, no
Manmade device
Restains your force.

My ears are numb forms,
My face and hands frozen, red,
And I know it is you,
In your mirth,
That makes me raw.

I try to hide
Behind friends
Whose crackle and light
Is warmth itself.

Yet you slink into my mind
Through cracks and windows
And open doors

Tempting me, reminding me
Of your power.

I crave you
And your welcoming embrace,
Your cool touch
That saved me.

But your slightest graze now burns me
With its intensity
And I know

No matter where I go
You will always find me
Never the same,
But with the same intensity;

The same force
That trips me, blows me backwards,
Yet, saves me from burning, melting,
Collapsing, falling.

The same force that gently twirls my hair
Will freeze me
And make it so I cannot catch my breath,
Cannot feel my very limbs.

Yet I never forget
Your embrace in the sun
That held me tight

Always I yearn for you,
Live because of you,
Even when you leave,
Even when your coldness
Shocks me.

Drifting in and out,
To and fro,
Unpredictable.
Always a part of me. ' 
Your Best Friend’s Legacy

When your best friend dies you find water green and the grass blue. You want to walk, but you end up crawling. Every honorable person you see on television reminds you of him. Your most prized possession is a hat he gave you for your 12th birthday. It hangs high in your basement as a reminder of what used to be. You may say that the clothes of the dead have no future, but I say spend a day in my shoes and then we can talk. Sometimes you feel your best friend in the silence: nothing moves, no hinges creak, no lights flicker. Just his silence. You were wrong, Stephen Spielberg; death has no special effects. There is no possession, just possessions. To take your mind off the silence you reach for what once was both of your favorite CDs. CDs in horizontal stacks; vertical rows of plastic jewel boxes, songs with melodies, lyrics, choruses, verses, movements. Songs you can’t live without. Songs you’ll never listen to again. Songs you know by heart. Songs you want to forget. Songs you can’t forget. Songs for dinner, for reading, for playing sports. Songs to break the silence. Songs against eternal darkness. You search through all his hockey cards, throwing away the ones of the players he didn’t like. Flyers’ players cards. Capitals’ players cards. Ovechkin cards.

They say everyone has a voice, but you hear silence whenever anyone else talks. But, one day (perhaps), you’ll make a deal with the silence. You’ll sit in his grandparents’ chair and it will only be a chair. Or you could give it away. All of it. Everything. Everything except the pogs. He was forever (or so it seemed) gathering pogs and slammers. He’d return from the store with his coat pockets sagging, doing his best Santa Claus expression. Round pogs, disk-shaped pogs, pogs of all shapes and sizes and colors and textures. Pogs from England, Canada, Atlantic City, New Jersey, Ocean City, Maryland. Pogs and slammers stored in shoe boxes, in plastic bags, in bowls; clusters of pogs distributed around the house like incense to resemble how he was not even a teen when he was taken away from the world. He liked the look of them, the feel of them, rattling in his palm. You could get rid of it all, but not the pogs. You could walk on them, sleep on them, sit on them. Your house would be silent, filled with pogs. You would have solitude. You would not be alone. You would have pogs. Even if the water surrounding you was green and the grass beneath you was blue.
Night in the Time of Plague
By Jay Carson

Night in the Time of the Plague

My salty sweat stings like an astringent on finger-picked nail quick.
My mind-hunt for foolish foods (the sex of the old) sings like an endless mosquito choir.
Do I have enough meat? Tums? Apples? Will she love me at arm's length?

Hope: the last glass of honeyed vinegar I drank before bed, a month ago.

In the weak humidifier light, I try to meditate, on what? God’s test?
My last inhales?

This breath, excellent breath
This moment, the guru says, Excellent moment.
3 Wishes

By Corinne Casey

3 Wishes

GENIE: Could be male/female. Early 30's. Grants up to 3 wishes. Background is unknown
ALLY: Young girl. Lost and looking for love.
Setting: A beach in San Diego

3 wishes that’s all you get. You can’t ask for any more.

But Genie, my first two wishes were total wastes.

This is your last one so you better make it count.

I have no idea what to do Genie. I want him to fall in love with me. But if I make that my wish how will I ever know if it’s true love or if it’s just a crazy love spell.

Well my dear, that is up to you to decide. People always ask me to grant this wish. It’s always ended in a happy ending.

But is it real? How will I ever know if it’s real?

As far as I’m concerned there are two ways to look at this. 1. You either wait around wondering if he’ll ever pursue you or 2. You make the wish and spend forever together.

I know he’s the love of my life but I’m not the love of his.

How can you be so sure? You’re so young my darling. Why you have your entire life ahead of you. What if you just haven’t met your soulmate yet.

Look Genie, I don’t want anyone else. He’s just caught up right now with someone new. He’s distracted. But maybe with your guidance and my wish he’ll come running back.

I can’t tell you what to wish for. I only make it happen. I can tell you that everyone has been
happy with their love wishes so far. But I have a strict return policy. No returns or exchanges on wishes whatsoever. The wish can never be undone.

ALLY

I’m ready.

GENIE

Go ahead....

ALLY

Genie, Genie, grant my wish make his love for me forever rich

***GENIE SPINS AROUND AND AROUND BRINGING WISH TO LIFE***

ALLY

Now what?

GENIE

Well now it’s time for you to go find your guy! He’ll be madly in love with you the second he lays eyes on you.

ALLY

Take it back! That’s not real! I’m freaking out! Take it back!

GENIE

Sorry darling. My returns policy is rather strict.

ALLY

How do I reverse it? I knew I shouldn’t have done this

*** ALLY FALLS TO THE GROUND AND PASSES OUT FOR A FEW SECONDS***

GENIE

Ally! Are you okay?!? Wake up! Wake up! It’s not that big of a deal. Shouldn’t you be rejoicing right now.

*** ALLY FINALLY STANDS UP****

ALLY

Genie, what if he never sees me, will he not be able to fall in love?

GENIE

He can fall in love with anyone, be in love with anyone but the moment he sees you it’s game over.

ALLY

I regret my wish. I’ll have to avoid him forever.

GENIE

I mean at this rate he’s been avoiding you it shouldn’t be that hard.
ALLY

GENIE!!!

GENIE

I hope that works out for you but I’ve got to move on to my next customers.

ALLY

You ruined my life and now you’re going to walk away?

GENIE

I gave you 3 wishes, You could have really helped a lot of people but your first two were meaningless. You decided to make your last one count and now it’s not good enough? Careful what you wish for. I know so many people who would be dying for 3 wishes right now. Goodbye.

***GENIE BEGINS TO EXIT STAGE LEFT***

ALLY

Genie, wait that's not what I meant!! I'm sorry, you're right!

***GENIE LOOKS BACK AT ALLY***

GENIE

Until next time kiddo

***GENIE WANDERS OFF UNTIL WE CAN'T SEE HER ANYMORE***

END SCENE
A Friendship
By Sabine Cherenfant

A Friendship

It starts small:
A seed planted.
A candle lit.

A warmth in your heart—
But still,
Be on guard.

Hold its hands.
Walk with it
Until it finds
Its own balance.

Moments turn into weeks,
Months, and even years.
Then, one day,
You see the big picture.

Your humanity,
Bare and simple.

Your dreams worth dreaming.

And the simple words you’ve said,
Collected like seashells.

Life tilts sideways.
Your shield slips into the abyss,
And still, all they see is you.
An Unfitting End
By Danielle Connors

An Unfitting End

I’ll tell you a story;
One with a beginning,
And a premature end.

He was raging wild.
I’d like to imagine
It happened battling pirates,
Trekking through the desert –
Even those nights out till 7 AM.

You’d think it was his wild
That did him in.
But there were also those moments –
Those quiet in-betweens.
“I want to help people,” he said.
“You did,” I wish I’d said.

Out of all his adventures
Crashing on friends’ couches,
Dancing on that stage,
Out at a club,
Or travelling to a faraway country.
I would have preferred any one
Over the way it was.

So show me a fitting end.
Because spoiler alert:
He dies – Minus the adventure.
And it was nothing more than a loose tire.
He Meant

By Danielle Connors

He Meant

When he told me I read too much, he meant "I don’t want you to miss the world around you."
When he yelled at me for swimming in the deep end, he meant “What if you can’t swim and I’m not here to help you.”
When he chastised me for going outside without a coat on, he meant “You could get sick from the cold.”
When I got my driver’s license, and he was quiet, he meant “You won’t need me to pick you up from school anymore.”
When he asked me not to go out by myself, he meant “There are people out there who could hurt you.”
When he told me I should stay home, he meant “The roads are slick. It’s safer if you wait till tomorrow.”
When he said that I didn’t practice the piano enough, he meant “I want you to succeed at everything you try.”
When he told me he wouldn’t always be there to watch out for me, he meant “I love you. What would I do if anything happened to you?”

The worry and the warnings – I know what they meant now.
Questions
By Monique Davis

QUESTIONS
Can I take you on a journey? Will you be mad if you end up where you started? Progress is beautiful, but not everyone is so lucky to concern themselves with it. Some hold the burden of concerning themselves with survival. Reflect on your situation. Are you concerned with survival or progression? If your answer is progression, be humble.

QUESTIONS
Can we secretly conform to society for a minute? Can I appreciate your experience and mine? Will I still be the same human being that my consciousness tells me I am? What if I acknowledge the popular sentimentality? Should I make my normality secret? Is it too cliché if I try to reinvent philosophical grandeur? What if I ask for your help but then I deny your help? How dare you. How dare me.

QUESTIONS
The audacity…How can I enjoy existing when so many people’s existence is bleak. Existence makes no sense. I feel too much, and it hurts. I feel too little, and I cringe at my empathetic deficit. Destiney has written itself, and it says that we will exist as a futile subsistence.
The First Snowfall
By Shaheen Dil

The First Snowfall

The dogs are wild with joy,
they make dog-angels on the white lawn,
drag branches heavy with wet fall to the ground.

My boots are too short for these drifts.
I throw two red balls to the happy pups,
but this Holiday postcard is not for me.

Dress me in summer, and a hard breeze,
heat crackling through shimmering muslin,
glistening under a torpid sun.

Give me a monsoon rain,
artillery pounding drops,
water hanging like sheets, persistent.

Take me to a winter wind, dusty and dry,
a Harmattan blowing
these silver drifts to smithereens.
Orpheus, You Impatient Bastard
By Jonah Hoy

Orpheus, You Impatient Bastard

Orpheus, you beautiful and bountiful oaf
your talent and skills are unmatched.
Yet, you chase this girl's lost soul?

Hades the king of Hell grants you a one time chance
to take your love and walk away.
You did what most only try and fail, time and time again.
You cheated death,
and won.

It had three of a kind and you laid down a full house,
paradise was fingertips away.
Then you just had to fuck everything up, didnt you?

You turned your head,
you turned your fucking head
and like clockwork,
at the snap of a finger,
the drop of a hat,
Without hesitation,
Poof.

Just like that,
it's all over.
You had death right by the balls
quivering with fear
nothing but seconds to spare.

It's over?
Everyone blames Orpheus for fucking up.

Moral of the story?
Orpheus ruined it, didn't he?

No.

Hades knew right from the start.
No matter how much he begged,
no matter how loud he cried,
and how sweet the sound,
his fate was sealed.

Orpheus’s only crime was being an impatient dipshit
for not facing the facts.
Being too stubborn,
too young
and too narrow minded.

Whether you believe in an afterlife or not
what's dead is dead.
Take it from the pretty boy flute player,

Cry,
Suck it up
And get over it.
Or It'll make it that much harder to move on, trust me.
Boy With a Ball
By Carolyn J. Fairweather Hughes

Boy With a Ball
The little boy with a ball stood
on the very edge of his driveway
and watched four other little boys playing
with their father across the street.
He did not call to them
or cross the street.
He did not bounce the ball
the way small boys
with a ball in their hands do.
He just watched and watched and watched.
They did not look at him or call
him to come over.
They just played and played and played
together with their dad.
After a long time, the boy with
the ball quietly turned
and walked back up the driveway
to his house.
Monsters

By Peyton Jackson

Monsters

When I was young,
I believed in monsters.
They hid in my closet
And under my bed.
But when I met you,
I realized monsters
Aren’t fiction at all
And they don’t even bother to hide.
Natural
By Kiley King

Natural

Is in my mind not
A scenery of nature
Expressed in haiku?

Do we not explain
The shifts and changes of mood
With natural states?

As my sadness grows,
Cold, pelting rain on the mind.
Oh, my weeping tears

And I could have rage
My inferno a rival
Of the burning sun

Now think of hunger
It is also a fire
A slow growing pain

The guilt of my heart
Runs like a babbling brook
And it knows no end

Jealousy and greed
Are they not unyielding vines?
A loveless bondage?

But see, I do think
The most beautiful of moods
Is the ripe fruit joy

A bite through her skin
My vivid ego; full bloom
Bright, mischievous

Wind blowing through leaves
My cherry blossom laughter
I see and breathe joy
How to Weigh Yourself
By Mary Soon Lee

How to Weigh Yourself

Not on the bathroom scales, not in ounces nor in grams.

Consider your protons, so small yet positive.

Consider how you outweigh each constituent proton
by more than ten thousand trillion trillion times.

Consider how the Milky Way in his turn outweighs you
by more than ten thousand trillion trillion trillion times.

Between those two extremes, consider yourself, your works.

Consider the breadth of time: billions of years elapsed,
billions left before the Sun burns out. All things end.

Yet every act, every decision inscribed immutably in spacetime.

No kindness too small to mark. Reach out to those nearby.
Love and Fear
By Grace McClain

Love and Fear

What I love about night is that there are not a lot of cars.
What I fear about cars is they can hit me.
What I love about me is that I am motivated like a lion after prey.
What I fear about a lion is that it can break into my house.
What I love about a house is that I have a safe place to sleep.
What I fear about sleep is what I might dream.
What I love about dream is I can go hiking on a cool autumn day.
What I fear about the day is the unexpected.
The Invisibility of the Damned Thing
By Randy Minnich

The Invisibility of the Damned Thing

If it were only blue, or even beige, something we could see without a microscope. A sign that screams *Achtung!* The germ!

Not this horror movie garrote gas that seeps unseen between us: a smiling face might morph to skull, the friendly handshake not let go, grip ever tighter, drag me gasping down.

It has me gloved and masked, skulking down the produce aisle. Peering nervously around the corners. Grim and anxious with the checkout girl. Obsessive with the Handi-Wipes.

It separates. It isolates. The body counts creep closer. Yesterday five thousand. Today it’s ten, yet nothing to be seen but sunshine in the park and children laughing.
Portrait of You
By Antoine Mosley

They're images of you still in my head
But with it, are all the things that I said
And although, there's no apologies for the things that I did
I'd like to think, this is more than "it is what it is"
All the places you'll go and the people you'll meet
I hope not a single one, reminds you of me
I know you'll feel shackled and can never be free
But there are pieces around you, that'll create a beautiful peace
I know you hate these images, all things that I drew
But this final image, shall be a portrait of you
May it remind you of sunshine and better days
Fields full of lilies enlightened by the sun's rays
The dreams you told me about, the things that you love
All that you wanted, but could never be us
Maybe I should give an explanation, at least something to hold
Sometimes my words do lie, but my heart is of gold
I told you some things, and all of them you believed
But my greatest image, was that of deceit
You hated my images, for they took me from you
Gone and broke with nothing to lose
Yes, there was an obsession, the thing I regret
But now I'll lose my greatest, the one I thought best
I hope you'll move on, and find someone better than me
Because my love for you, my most sacred theme
The Absence of Color
By Sydney Nelson

The Absence of Color

She wears a long white dress, hand-stitched with white lace flowers. Her brown hair, streaked with gold and woven with white roses curls elegantly and cascades like a waterfall down her back. A veil covers her face. White heels tap softly down the wood floor of the aisle and echo through the otherwise space as she walks down the center of the old church. Oak pews sit empty. The woman reaches the man who stands alone at the altar. He reaches for the veil and raises it slowly, smiling, eyes brimming with happy tears poised to spill down his cheeks. When he lifts the sheer curtain of white fabric from her face, there is no smile, there are no tears. There is nothing but inky black emptiness, and the man jolts awake to a room as dark as the void under the veil. There was no one there, and there is no one here. And there is nothing at all, not here, not there, nothing at all anymore because the woman is asleep, enclosed in sturdy oak walls, six feet under a slab of carved white granite.
Parenting
By John Parks

A mother and father standing side by side
The mother is loud and affectionate while the father hides
The mother is looking out for your heart
While your father your head
Being hard does not mean they don’t love you
So quit thinking that laying in bed
Though their actions are very different
They are striving for the same goal
Nobody said these acts were magnificent
They just want to help you take control
The Burning Yearn
By Judith R. Robinson

The Burning Yearn

to be the singular self
not another identical
clam shell or duck that walks, talks,
and is a duck, no hardworking worker ant,
sly city mouse, or other pretty face;
not cow in a herd nor drop in an ocean trough:
Bonnie Lynn,
ho, whole, single, separate,
gaging at the blooming moon
with unpuzzled eyes,
guarding memories
of other summer moons,
a thrilling bike race won,
fireflies and a porch swing,
brother Dan and cousin Ann,
Teddy next door yet so far away,
Uncle Al, in from Buffalo,
his big bald sweating head,
his happiness cooling off
in the family's plastic pool,
those many summers ago.
Insurrection

By Mike Schneider

Insurrection

I feel an insurrection coming on, Wait. Maybe it’s indigestion. I feel a storming & takeover of the system, a bad smell, a swarm of something coming up. Maybe it’s a passing problem — like a kidney stone, a messing with my constitution, a gastrointestinal parade of red hats & billowing flags, as if 76 trombones cut loose & bellow from deep down darkness. It feels shamanic, but maybe it’s just a big nothing, un gros rien, as my friend likes to say — a mighty wind, divine afflatus, as Whitman put it, when he found words for his gassy insurrection. Pardon me, he’d say & go on. Plenty of that goes around, not divine, but afflatus? — definitely. You have to take it seriously, a warning sign for affliction. Maybe it’s time for a colonoscopy. You might find a boink in the apparatus, a hairball in the drain pipe of the body politic, a nightmare groan of insurrection.
The Children Remind Us

By Micah Josiah Thompson

The Children Remind Us

The children remind us
that life is a gift
to unwrap at dawn;
ripping up the covers
we lie beneath.

We wake to sleep;
they wake to rise —
as the true suns
and dawners
they are.

In our haze,
we struggle to see
the approaching light;
the shadows before us
disguise the day.

But the children remind us
that time gives
like the present;
and the day lends
more than enough,
if we let it.
**Uncorked**

By Natalie Thompson

**Uncorked**

Just you and me  
In quarantine  
Pandemic pals  
On evening prowls

Swipe left, swipe right  
Another meaningless plight  
Dating is dead  
Like victims of the virus

Never mind  
You look desirous  
Smooth on my lips  
Warm on my tongue

Can I give you  
Just one kiss?  
I wrap my hands  
Around your neck  
And pour until  
There’s nothing left

My Pinot Noir, my Chardonnay  
My Sauvignon Blanc, and Cabernet  
I love you all  
Just the same  
For keeping my sober  
Thoughts at bay

My confidant  
My friend, my boo  
I owe this pleasure  
All to you
Last Supper

By Girard Tournesol

Last Supper

We prepped for the end breaking
bread at a café where street lamps
bowed to the moon  Spoke softly of
the plague like pockets full of posies
Went home to nude linens swaying
like limbs in the wind  Loved one another
until we lived again in the dawn chorus
scents of musk and aromatic coffee
dripping the end all over again
The Mystical Theater
By Brenna Wandel

The Mystical Theater

“Something I can help you find, dear?”
A short, plump woman ambled to the front of the circulation desk. Her gray curls were pinned back on the right side with a turquoise-lined gemstone clip, and she wore a coral stone on her pointer finger. These were the only pops of color to her otherwise all-black attire.

“Not unless you keep novels here,” I mumbled, “but it’s a University library, so I’m guessing you don’t.”
She tilted her head to the side as she eyed me curiously. “Well which novel are you looking for?”
I was starting to feel silly being here, but then I thought back to the dream I had last night of my dad silently setting a book down before walking away. This was the third night in a row that he showed up in my dreams, and I was getting frustrated that he wouldn’t say anything to me.

I shook my head. **Why in the world would I think a book in a dream had anything to do with a message my dad was trying to send me from beyond the grave?**

“Dear?” The woman’s eyes were still on me.

“It’s… I don’t even think it’s a real book. I’m gonna go, but thank you.” I turned to leave but then thought why not just ask? Daddy always taught me to ask questions, to investigate. That’s one thing I do remember about him.

“Well actually…” I began as she started to make her way back behind the desk. “I’m wondering if you’ve ever heard of a book called *M is for Mystical*. I know it sounds like one of those Sue Grafton novels, but I couldn’t find anything about it online.”

The woman hesitated before slowly turning to face me. There it was again: the head tilt, the curious look on her face. This time, though, her eyes sparkled.

“What’s your name, dear?”
“Maddie. Maddie Zurago.”
Her eyebrows raised slightly at my response. She nodded her head slowly. “Okay Maddie Zurago, follow me.”
While her movement was slow, she now walked with purpose. She led me around the stacks, through two separate hallways, and down a set of steep concrete steps to what felt like the library dungeon. She stopped at the bottom of the stairs and pointed to a darkened hall. “Go that way. Once you get to the maroon door, knock twice, and then say the name of the book you’re looking for.”

She trudged back up the stairs and disappeared.

Knock twice and say the name of the book? What is this, a secret society for Sue Grafton sympathizers?
I shook my head at the woman’s directions. Well I’m here now, so I might as well knock.

I walked down the long hallway and found the maroon door. I knocked twice.

A young brunette who was sitting a few yards away glanced up from her book with feigned interest. “You know they make stud finders, right? And anyway, we’re not allowed to nail anything to walls on campus.”

Clearly my puzzled expression and furrowed eyebrows were not enough to encourage further explanation as she dropped her head back down and continued reading. I’m knocking on a door, not a wall.

I looked again at the door and then back down to the brunette without saying anything.

“Go ahead,” I heard a muffled voice call from behind the door.

“*M is for Mystical*,” I responded, my attention again drawn to the maroon paint.

The girl looked up at me again, this time making it clear that I was bothering her. She rolled her eyes, and then proceeded to read the text in her lap.
The maroon door cracked open an inch, and a set of eyes surveyed me. The door then widened just enough for me to squeeze through. Once on the other side, my surroundings took me by surprise.

“Right this way,” said a portly man in a red and yellow usher uniform. He gestured with his left hand. I looked at him amusedly as I glanced around what appeared to be a vintage movie theater.

“There’s a theater in the basement of the University library?” I asked him.

“Mmmm,” he breathed noncommittally, his eyes looking straight ahead.

“I’m here for a book. M is for Mystical? Have you heard of it?”

He smiled at me and gestured towards Theater 3. “You’ll find everything you’re looking for if you head in there, miss.”

The theater was empty, and the screen was dark. As I made my way to a middle seat about ten rows back, the lights dimmed, and the screen began to flicker. The gray and black countdown started from five as the circle around each number faded in a clockwise rotation.

“Go ahead, Sweetie. Go grab Sorry! and set it up. We’ll play in a few minutes.”

An odd sensation came over me. My throat tightened and my arms felt tingly. A tear threatened to spring as my face became increasingly warm. That voice.

“Okay, Daddy!” a seven-year-old me exclaimed before thundering up the stairs to the game closet. I was dressed in my favorite yellow striped shirt and a pair of blue jean overalls.

By the time I watched myself run back down the stairs, game in hand, I could hear that same recognizable voice speaking in a hushed tone.

“I know you didn’t want me to pick up another shift this weekend, honey, but it’s overtime. I’ll be getting paid really well to be there, and soon enough, we’ll have the house paid off.”

“But Randy, you work three to eleven nearly every weekday evening. Maddie hardly gets to see you as it is, and now on one of the two days she can spend time with you this weekend, you won’t be home,” Mom pleaded.

“I’ll make it up to her. I’ll take her on a daddy-daughter date later this month,” he promised.

Mom sighed. “I appreciate you working so hard to provide for us, but sometimes I worry that Maddie will feel gypped. You were home a lot more when the other girls were younger. I just don’t want her to feel like she’s not important to you. Not to mention that I miss seeing you, too.”

“She’ll get it one day. She’ll understand that I’m putting in these long days so that you can stay home with her. So that you can help her with homework and drive her to and from basketball practice every night and so we can buy her new school clothes and anything else she needs. When I’m home, we spend time together. We have our game days. I know she looks forward to those,” he assured Mom.

Little me continued setting up the game as they talked, oblivious of their conversation.

“I know. You’re right, she does love playing games with you. I just don’t want her to look back one day and feel like you weren’t ever around.”

Tears threatened to spill as I looked around the theater confusedly. Where did this film come from? Who’s playing this? How did anyone know that I was going to be here? My attention was redirected when I heard his voice again.

“Alright Sweetie, you ready? I’m guessing that you’ll be yellow again? I’m gonna be green,” Dad sang as he plopped down on the couch across from me.

Long-forgotten memories played out before my eyes. I relived days filled with games, daddy-daughter dates, birthday parties, basketball games, and normal, run-of-the-mill things, and they all made me miss my dad even more. Seeing his face, though, and hearing his voice soothed some of the pain and grief I had been feeling.

But what is he trying to tell me?

As grateful as I was for these memories, my mind couldn’t help but turn this question over and over. And with it, I began to wonder what exactly this theater was and how it worked.

Is this even real? I pinched myself and immediately felt like the disbelieving, skeptical girl in every movie and television show I’ve seen. A brief stab of pain shot through my arm as I watched a tiny section of my skin turn red.

Looking around the theater, I tried to pick out anything that looked out of place or impractical. I wanted to point to something and say, “Aha! Well that couldn’t possibly be real,” but nothing caught my attention.

I stood to leave, and my foot tripped over something I hadn’t noticed before. I picked up the forest green leatherbound book titled M is for Mystical and noticed a slip of paper sticking out from the top. My eyes widened.

No way I thought as I slowly opened the book.
Shade of Blue
By Rachel Ward

Shade of Blue

I thought I’d feel blue,
After you.
The sad part is,
In the back of my brain I always knew there would be an end,
To the security of having someone to go home from the bar with,
To the comfort of falling asleep to your soft snores and waking up to my drool dried on your chest,
And luxury of having someone to share my deepest darkest thoughts with
That is if you were listening.
I always hoped there’d be an end,
To the petty arguments
stemming from the insecurities that distorted your view.
In between passion and pleasure there was a hidden pain
A hurt that you projected onto me.
You dug daggers deep within my soul that left scars that will never heal.
I thought I’d feel blue,
After you
But I feel free.
Free from the hold you had on me
Free from the anxiety you added to my existing daily dose
I feel thankful more than ever
That I had the strength to break away from the control of a man who hurt me more than he helped me.
I thought I’d feel blue,
After you
But I feel angry with myself for staying as long as I did
I was blinded by what presented as mystery and turned out to be misery.
I took comfort in the protection your broad figure and strong build provided,
I admired the quiet confidence you radiated, as you roped me in and brainwashed me to believe that you had my best interest at heart,
When were always your number one priority.
I thought I’d be blue,
After you
But I found myself on my knees, praying for your heart to be healed and for the distance between us to be kept
Because I spent the last three years catering to a person who dimmed down my personality and disregarded my dreams
It took me awhile,
but I finally mustered up enough self respect to prioritize my wants and needs
I thought I’d be blue,
After you
But if found a profound sense of purpose in your absence.
Masks
By John Werthman

Masks

My name is COVID, and I am unstoppable. Compare me to the CSX #8888 runaway train, also known as the Crazy Eights. It was an incident that inspired an action thriller movie in 2010. Two tanker cars in that train were filled with thousands of gallons of Phenol, a chemical compound that can bring on severe respiratory distress when inhaled. That story ended on a positive note. A railroad crew caught the runaway and coupled to the rear, stopping the train.

This story is more than equal to that incident and may not have a happy ending. My virus is like Phenol, and it can infiltrate the lungs and potentially kill. There is no heroic train engineer nor track switches to throw that would alter my course. I have nurtured the 2020 Corona Virus to the best of my meager ability and utilized the animal kingdom again to come up with the best formula.

Man has sought ingenious methods to counter my attack. His approach has included herd immunity, rapid testing, and social distancing. He has employed the medical field to pursue a vaccine, but the topic bantered about the most has been the use of masks. I love it. The more the issue is discussed and argued, the fewer people want to wear them. I couldn't ask for a better diversion.

People resist and say they should have the freedom to choose whether or not to wear a mask. They have rights guaranteed by their constitution. I welcome that strategy. The longer I stay around, people will grow weary, and mask use will diminish.

Masks are not new. Man has used them for thousands of years during ceremonies, and he has unearthed archaeological evidence at burial sites and found murals depicting them. Wearers of these shrouds have always thought the device would ward off evil spirits.

I'm no evil spirit. I'm real. My virus today has brought on a new legion of mask wearers. I am confident people never envisioned that anyone could walk into a bank today wearing a mask, but that is the path mandated. I love to see that the worldwide medical field advice has been stretched like a rubber band before breaking.

Humans do not like to be told what they can or cannot do. I guess it's not in their genetic make-up. Are they doubting science and becoming submissive to me.? Keep debating, people. The talk is cheap. Their actions or inaction speak louder than words.
When Did the Adventure Begin?
By Christine Aikens Wolfe

When Did the Adventure Begin?

Perhaps at the lake, the shining lake
whose granite underbelly reflects brightness
and dazzle to the surface.
We take hands, step into the light

or the day we slip out of bed early
in our Nova Scotia Bnb
walk in predawn darkness
(as our host told us)

to a knoll some 1000 feet down the road.
We face east
   red/pink       the sun leaps
like a single eye
over the horizon.

Lately, when I lie moody & morose
no travel plans in any remote future

you slide to my side
your hot belly
against my cool back

you reach your arm around
to enclose –
Rings
By Luke Yost

Rings

The armies are quiet,
Too nervous to talk.
One foot on the field of battle,
Then the other.
Adrenaline shoots through the veins.
It's go time.

Cool and calm on the outside,
A line of poker faces,
Deadpan.
But it's just a mask.
Because Deep down they are wound tight,
So tight that if they were touched,
They'd snap.

The drums start thumping,
In rhythm with the heart.
The armies face each other.
Most are still wearing their masks.
Some now have half confident smiles.

Both sides know the rules of engagement.
There will be no killing,
No prisoners of war.
But there will be violence,
Strategy and maybe blood.

The only certainty is that there will be pain.
Pain for both the victors, but even more for the losers.
For they carry the pain of being not good enough

Cynics just looking in will always question the reasoning
Call it childish
And will never support.

Maybe they have a point.
Because at the end of the day,
These are just men playing for rings.
Desiderium

By John Zedolik

Desiderium

Wouldn’t the white
of winter’s fresh-fallen
snow be the preferred coat

if we could remain in its
innocence, immaculate grasp,
untouched by the responsibility

to get and do instead
of stay and watch the cover
of imagined clean cotton

erase the sins and scars
of memory and earth as it falls
and sits heavily like a new age

of ablution and pristine chance
—that we must strip as soon
as we are able with our scoops

and mechanized scythes—for we
may only dream upon these clouds
for an idyll under measured time

by a clock desired to be ignored,
muffled beneath our sugared minds
but ticking, carving true cuts, nevertheless
RUNE 2021
art & photography
“PUFFIN BIRD”
Jordan Conner
THE BLANKET
Nick Romeo
“HONOLULU HAWAII POSTER”
Ryan Hickey
“SICILY POSTER”
Nico Scalise
“BALI, HAWAII, & CANCUN POSTER”
Patricia Bash
“ARIZONA POSTER”
Hannah Kerber

ARIZONA
The land of cacti.

Hannah Kerber
“NEON PITT POSTER”
Harrison Klehm
“STAPLES CENTER POSTER”
Keshaun Rice
3 CONNECTING STARS
Emma Crites
“LITTLETON NEW HAMPSHIRE POSTER”
T.J. Vercek
DON'T BE SO ANXIOUS
Antoine Mosley
RUNE

2021 biographies
Wayne Amtzis

Though Wayne Amtzis lived most of my adult life in the Himalayas, since his 70th year he’s lived in Pittsburgh. His work includes: City on his back: poems and photos from the streets of Kathmandu, Sandcastle City/Quicksand Nation, and four works of translation from Nepali and Nepal Bhasa.

Keyshawn Andress

Keyshawn Andress is from West Mifflin, Pennsylvania and is currently an integrated masters student at Robert Morris University studying accounting and taxation. Post-graduation he plans on pursuing a PhD within the field of business.

Renee Augustine

Renee Augustine practices photography as a hobby in her spare time. She has expanded her love for photography over the past several years and enjoys taking pictures of landscapes, nature scenes, and abandoned structures. Her camera is a staple piece of equipment in her vehicle as one never knows when a photo opportunity may arise. She has photographed all over the country and is excited to continue her journey in photography.

Patricia Bash

Trish is a senior who is planning to graduate at the end of the Fall 2021 semester. She is a wife, mother, full-time graphic designer, and part-time student.

Daniel Bates

Daniel Bates is a Pittsburgh-based poet, writer, and artist who attempts to provoke as he imagines and captures life’s layered underside as art…and often from his Harley.

Joan E. Bauer

Joan E. Bauer is the author of two full-length poetry collections, The Almost Sound of Drowning (Main Street Rag, 2008) and The Camera Artist (Turning Point, 2021). Her poems have been published widely and three have
been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. For some years, she worked as a teacher and counselor and now lives mostly in Pittsburgh, PA where she co-hosts and curates the Hemingway's Summer Poetry Series with Kristofer Collins. She can be found on Twitter @Joan_E_Bauer.

Victoria Beuchat

Victoria Beuchat is a sophomore Business Management student, and she enjoys reading in her free time.

Nicole Brautigam

Nicole Brautigam is currently a junior at RMU and is majoring in Early Childhood and Special Education. Nicole always had a love for being outside, taking pictures, reading, writing, drawing, and painting! As a future teacher, Nicole is always finding more ways to be creative!

Brian Carr

Brian Carr is a senior English major at Robert Morris University. Brian is originally from Imperial, Pennsylvania, but now resides in Moon Township. Brian is a transfer student from Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC) and intends to have an internship set up in the next few months so he can get started with his future career.

Jay Carson

Jay Carson holds a doctorate in rhetoric from Carnegie-Mellon University. He taught for many years at Robert Morris University where he was a founding advisor to the literary magazine, Rune. He has published more than 100 poems in local and national journals, magazines, and collections. He is also the author of Irish Coffee (Coal Hill Press) and The Cinnamon of Desire (Main Street Rag). Jay considers his poetry Appalachian, accessible, the ongoing problem-solving of a turbulent youth, and just what you might need.

Corinne Casey

Corinne is a Communication student at Robert Morris University. She graduated in December of 2020 and is looking forward to using the writing techniques she’s learned at Robert Morris University in her career.

Sabine Cherenfant

Sabine Cherenfant is a Robert Morris University Alumna. Sabine currently works as a compiling editor for Greenhaven Publishing. Sabine’s work has previously appeared in Rune, The Collegiate Scholar, Thoughts on Journalism, and Quartz.
Jordan Conner

Jordan Conner was born and raised in The South Hills of Pittsburgh. Jordan discovered a passion for photography at a young age and has continued to work on their craft. Jordan looks forward to graduating this year with a degree in Business Administration.

Danielle Connors

Danielle Connors is studying at Robert Morris University. She is a junior year English major with a history minor. She is president of the English Honor Society Sigma Tau Delta and is an officer of the Italian club on campus. Danielle is also an editor of Rune.

Emma Crites

Emma Crites is an Interaction Design major, and plans on graduating in 2023. After college she plans on working for Disney, Blizzard Entertainment, or Respawn Games. Emma’s favorite hobbies include streaming and watching movies and tv shows. If you want to see more of her work you can follow her Instagram @ta.today.

Monique Davis

Monique Davis is a mid-career professional working in the behavioral health/criminal justice field. She is the clinical supervisor of a drug and alcohol outpatient clinic and is enrolled in RMU’s PhD Instructional management and Leadership program. She utilizes poetry as a mean of exploration and expression.

Shaheen Dil

Shaheen Dil was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh and has led a peripatetic life. She has spent time in many parts of the United States and traveled throughout the world. Shaheen has worked in both Academia and Business, but poetry has always been her avocation. She currently resides in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Manhattan, New York. She is a member of the Pittsburgh Poetry Exchange Workshop. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals, including, among others, The Critical Quarterly, Four Quarters, The Journal of South Asian Literature, The Pittsburgh Quarterly, and Golden Streetcar. Her work has appeared in two anthologies: Poetry Chain: An Anthology of New Verse and Waiting for you to Speak. Shaheen’s first book of Poetry, Acts of Deference, was published recently by Fakel Publishing House in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Ryan Hickey

Ryan Hickey is a 19-year-old sophomore at Robert Morris University studying Media Arts with a concentration in Graphic Design.
Jonah Hoy

Jonah Hoy is the managing editor of Rune and is a senior history major who is also head editor of RMU Sentry Media’s A/E department.

Carolyn J. Fairweather Hughes

Carolyn J. Fairweather Hughes has appeared in the anthologies: For She is the Tree of Life, Pittsburgh and Tri-State Area Poets, Pennsylvania Seasons, and When I Am an Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple. Her chapbook Enough, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2019. She resides in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with her husband Richard.

Peyton Jackson

Peyton Jackson is a sophomore at Robert Morris University studying English. She enjoys reading literature of all sorts in her free time and hopes to be a book publisher in the future.

Hannah Kerber

Hannah Kerber (class of 2021) is a Graphic Design student who loves traveling, writing, and being outside in nature.

Kiley King

Kiley King is a Statistics and Data Science major at RMU with a minor in Data Analytics and Mathematics. Though her passion resides in numbers, she loves to sit down and write in her free time as a way to decompress.

Harrison Klehm

Harrison Klehm (Class of 2022) is a Graphic Design student who loves to illustrate fantasy settings and creatures, delving into the world of illustrated storytelling.

Mary Soon Lee

Mary Soon Lee was born and raised in London, but has lived in Pittsburgh for over twenty years. Her two latest books are from opposite ends of the poetry spectrum: Elemental Haiku, containing haiku for each element of the periodic table (Ten Speed Press, 2019) and The Sign of the Dragon, an epic fantasy with Chinese elements (JABberwocky Literary Agency, 2020). After twenty-five years, her website has finally been updated: marysoonlee.com.
Grace McClain

Grace McClain is a sophomore at Robert Morris University majoring in English Secondary Education. She is a member of Kappa Delta Pi International Honor Society in Education.

Randy Minnich

Randy Minnich is a retired chemistry professor and researcher. He’s now reading, writing, and daydreaming of the defeat of the virus so he can be more active and see the grandchildren. He has written and published a number of poems and two books, one about cats and the other about sitting quietly in Pittsburgh’s North Park woods.

Antoine Mosley

Antoine Mosley is an accounting major at Robert Morris University and has always liked to write on the side.

Sydney Nelson

Sydney Nelson is a senior psychology major at Robert Morris University. Though most of her work consists of writing academic papers, she enjoys the creative outlet of writing fiction. She also loves making music and spending time with her dog, Tank.

John Parks

John Parks is a son, brother, and boyfriend. His first passion was ice hockey as he participated in an above average level. His mind is always going 100 miles an hour just thinking of new, creative ideas. His favorite pieces of writing are fictional scenarios with an unpredictable end. His original college was the University of Akron where his life was a mess and he was doing the wrong things and hanging out with the wrong crowd. He transferred to Robert Morris University to try to fix his situation. It has been a battle to correct the wrongs he put on himself. He fought back in 2020, and even though it was a bad year for most, it was the first time John didn't feel anxiety ridden since 2017.

Keshau Rice

Keshau Rice (Class of 2024) is a Graphic Design major at Robert Morris University. He highly enjoys writing and playing video games. He would love to go further as a graphic designer and also have his own show one day.
Judith R. Robinson

Judith R. Robinson is an editor, teacher, fiction writer, poet and visual artist. A 1980 summa cum laude graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, she is listed in the Directory of American Poets and Writers. She has published 85+ poems, five poetry collections, one fiction collection; one novel; edited or co-edited eleven poetry collections. Teacher: Osher at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh. Her newest edited collection is “Speak, Speak,” poetry of Gene Hirsch, Cyberwit.com 2020. Her latest gallery exhibit was “The Numbers Keep Changing,” at The Pittsburgh Holocaust Center, April-June, 2019. Her publication info & credits, art exhibitions, awards, including Pushcart nomination, on request or at: www.judithrobinson.com website
alongtheserivers@gmail.com

Nick Romeo

Nick Romeo is a multidisciplinary artist, musician and writer. Nick lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with his wife and his cat named Megatron.

Nico Scalise

Nico Scalise is a graphic design major in his junior year. Nico helps out at Colonial Catholic Ministry and also does graphic design work for the student run organization Sentry Media. Overall, Nico loves all types of creative work and is always excited to try a new idea or medium!

Mike Schneider

Mike Schneider has published poems in many literary journals, including Hunger Mountain, New Ohio Review, Notre Dame Review and Poetry. Three times nominated for the Pushcart Prize, he received the 2012 Editors Award in Poetry from The Florida Review, and won the 2016 Robert Phillips Prize (selected by Richard Foerster) from Texas Review Press, which in 2017 published his second chapbook, How Many Faces Do You Have?

Micah Thompson

Micah Josiah Thompson is a committed father and husband; a poet and novice quant. He has a background in business management, teaching, and advising. Currently, he works at Robert Morris University as the Engaged Learning & Community Involvement Advisor where he earned his MBA and certificate in Business Analytics. He writes to transform lives and change narratives. His writings are mostly inspired by nature, conversations, and interactions with the people around him. Read more of his poems, stories and essays at micahjosiah.medium.com

Natalie Thompson

Natalie graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Pittsburgh in 2015. She’s currently a graduate student enrolled in Robert Morris University’s Master of Business Administration program. She works full-time at
Duncan Financial Group in their insurance division. Natalie resides in Indiana, PA with her boyfriend and her Australian Shepherd.

Girard Tournesol


Anthony Vercek

T.J. Vercek is a senior Media Arts major with a concentration in Interaction Design and a minor in Political Science. Anthony’s submission is a travel poster depicting a place Anthony visited via a road trip in his 1981 Pontiac Bonneville Safari, a great example of the land yachts past generations used in voyages across the country. On one adventure, Anthony drove over 4,000 miles in 6 days across 10 states and Canada. Anthony is a great believer in the mystique of the classic American Road Trip and encourages everyone to, every once in a while, skip the flight and simply drive to your destination.

Brenna Wandel

Brenna Wandel is a 2013 graduate of Robert Morris University who now has the daunting, albeit mostly entertaining, task of molding the minds of middle school English students. While an avid reader, she has only recently delved into the world of creative writing.

Rachel Ward

Rachel Ward is a senior communication major at Robert Morris University. She has a focus in advertising as well as a certificate of sales. Rachel is a member of Hope Happens Here, Ad Club, as well as being a player assistant for the women’s lacrosse team.

John Werthman

John Werthman is a 74-year-old retiree. Writing is a new passion. John has attended a few writing classes at CCAC that fueled his interest in the written word.

Christine Aikens Wolfe

Christine Aikens Wolfe mainly studies her craft with the Madwomen at Carlow, but is also a fellow of the Western PA Writing Project, so Christine has been privileged to work with Pitt faculty like Nick Coles, Tony Petrosky, Toi Derricotte and more.
Luke Yost

Luke Yost is a senior sport communication major. He discovered a love of writing while working with RMU Sentry Media. He plans to continue to write after graduation.

John Zedolik

For the past five years, John has been an adjunct English instructor at a number of universities in and around Pittsburgh. John has published poems in such journals as Aries, The Bangalore Review (IND), Commonweal, FreeXpresSion (AUS), Orbis (UK), Paperplates (CAN), Poem, Poetry Salzburg Review (AUT), Third Wednesday, Transom, and in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. In 2019, John published a full-length collection, entitled Salient Points and Sharp Angles (CW Books), which is available through Amazon. John’s iPhone continues to be his primary poetry notebook, and John hopes that his use of technology to craft this ancient art remains fruitful.
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- President Chris Howard