

# **The Blue Route**

**Issue 13**



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Widener University's online journal of **undergraduate writing** takes its name from the Blue Route (I-476), a north-south highway running through the suburbs of Philadelphia.

The Blue Route is where we are located (less than a mile from Exit 1). The Blue Route is a metaphor. The Blue Route connotes a certain mood and a certain direction. The Blue Route suggests one possible path to where you might want to go. The Blue Route is an alias. *The Blue Route* is a place to which talented undergraduate writers should submit.

*Cover image by Taylor Blum*

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# The Color of Memory

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*Morgan Blalock – Hollins University*

I realize that one day my father  
will turn into his father,  
will be swallowed by disease, swallowed  
whole in his work clothes  
suddenly and without notice:

One day he will forget how to turn  
the key in the door, will stand  
on the porch until my mother  
comes home from shopping,  
sees him from down the street,  
knows somewhere deep inside of herself  
what is happening, what will continue to happen.

We know that my father will turn  
into his father, will smash all the mirrors  
because the face he sees  
is that of a stranger, will walk  
bare-footed through the shards  
because his mind plays tricks with pain.

He will not be my father, and it comes  
each day sooner, each day sooner,  
each sunrise looking like something  
he cannot quite place, each orange sky  
over the lake becoming a moment  
he has no name for, no language to describe.

He will not be my father, and one day  
he will wake up and not know my face,  
will not see himself there,  
and I will want to crucify myself on the limb  
of the old walnut tree in the front yard,

Will want to offer my mind instead,  
entirely and earnestly able to give up  
the orange of every sunset  
so that my father can have a word for love  
and words for everything else.

# Dog Food or Glue

---

*David R. Langdon, Western Kentucky University*

If I were a racehorse  
I wouldn't bet on me,  
for I am starting the race  
ass-to-the-gate  
with no jockey's colors.  
my old poetry professor  
sits in the stands,  
mint julep in full stride,  
and says,  
"that horse is facing the wrong way.  
I don't get it.  
I don't know where he's going  
with that.  
he needs to make his intentions a little more clear."  
I huff and stomp  
to ramrod this constant banality  
of jobs, weather, and newspapers.

The gate opens  
and flash, they're off.  
once I back out of the gate  
turn around and see  
the other horses' asses  
tearing out  
Hell for leather  
spurred and whipped to a froth,  
I'm definitely going to the glue house for this,  
but lost in a heavy-hearted solace,  
I muse I'm the first horse to choose  
not to run in the face  
of the heavy-handed jackbootedness  
of jobs, weather, and newspapers.  
but in the tradition of those  
who can't jumping and running  
with no comprehension of fences,  
but now I can tell the tale to  
dogs' gut,  
and wont it be just like the little terriers to  
run and jump and bark  
and pee on the world.  
bless them.race, I become another of the

hidden horses in dog food bags  
speaking nibble to kibble  
about days of foaling

# our hunting cabin up north

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*Justin Groppuso-Cook, Michigan State University*

*“Violence is part of the dynamic of change, springing from a lack of proportion with the multiplicity of things. It is this violence, this wrath, that is divine.” —William Everson*

they’ve kept the same *Playboy* calendar  
sitting above the toilet  
for years, watching the latest football replays  
in their underwear  
as they sip Bud Light, waiting  
for a prize buck in the window. i cannot stop

remembering my first witness  
of gutting the deer: stomach split, flooding  
organs and the stench of intestine,  
eyes marble, moon in pupil. they said  
one day it would be my duty

& pleasure. last night after failing  
to locate their kill,  
flashlight capturing smoke  
searching for blood on petals, they sped  
to the local bar, hit on  
“crazy Indian bitches,” and ended up  
in a ditch. i roam

these trails alone, kicking puddles  
that detain the moon.  
our man-made lake rippling  
in the distance; i watch a deer lick every crest,  
antlers like lightning  
that cradle the canopy and hold  
every leaf to her limb. in the morning,

they piece together all they can  
of their drunken escapade. a deer hangs  
behind them, hollowed out.  
we start a fire with wet wood  
and a healthy amount of gasoline, empty cans  
littering the pit.

# Lights in Motion

---

*Evan Turissini, Bucknell University*

*You've got to be the most curious patron we've ever had*, she said, as we sat, gazing into the tiled ceiling. We watched the stars above flicker on and off as the cosmic visitors to Grand Central Station cascaded above us with laser-like intent. We whispered broken Italian chants into the deep night and fell into love with the echoic responses: Narcissuses (Narcissi?) on speed and ecstasy and self-loathing because that's the default setting of a tortured artist in his torture chamber. And to that end, we popped pills at even

intervals. We took the blue and red and green and pink pills and the ones that make you larger and the ones that make you small and the ones that don't do anything at all because Mother told us to take two a day, two a day, everyday until we finally get the balls to move out. And the cosmic figures raced faster and faster with a deistic depravity that excited our genitals. We cried for more and more as they unknowingly danced above our heads, shining an incognizant light of sensuality on our faces, crisping our skin. We toasted in effigy—a simulacrum of Romeo & Cleopatra, two mismatched lovers ripped from two different stories sharing three special kisses: one rising, one breaking, one falling.



# Masterpiece

---

*Evan Turissini, Bucknell University*

The splattered brain and blood  
cover the window and floor  
like a classic Pollock.

*A tortured artist*, the fan girls giggled,  
as they scooped and bottled his fluids  
to sell as souvenirs and hang at  
the new Hard Rock Cafe in Santa Fe.  
A few of them boldly took a lock of hair  
or a tooth for their own collection.

The notes carved into the walls  
were supposed to be his magnum opus;  
he would have been wounded  
when they used it as a jingle  
for a cereal commercial.

# a poem about oranges

---

*Maxwell Bicking, Ursinus College*

if i could feel the touch of your  
skin, layers of  
phospholipid phosphorescence sending  
scents  
(senses split like infinitives)  
layers like pages, i could  
read and parse thru  
the depths into the valleys  
of your citric  
acid and sugar.

you are cold, untouched  
untampered by herds of hungry  
who gnash their teeth  
(piano keys  
hit air from broken strings)

ten times today i searched the wooden crates  
where you sit,  
curving dermis  
like Schrödinger—you are not now  
what you once were;  
you are hard.

you are soft  
like a matrix of silicon  
valleys and ridges  
(where you grew, the Supermarket in California  
sticks you in aisles of cells)

and when i peel you back,  
enter into your skin with every extremity  
i  
feel you dripping,  
feel your atoms in mine  
uncovering electromagnetic semicolons  
thru navel and spine  
you  
send energy, inspiration  
into the dominoes of my neurons  
semicircling round

deep into my mouth  
as i yell *more*,  
into the fragmented pieces of  
ecstasy that once held you together.

# Growing Pains

---

*Joshua J. Hines, Stephen F. Austin State University*

*Beep.*

You feel them, rather than hear them: the beeps of the crosswalk light, as it flashes a crimson palm meant to hinder your progress. So you stand, panting, tense, and waiting, with your headphones thumping some quick-paced rhythmic drumbeat that drowns out the world. You feel them though, the beeps, each one intensifying the need for movement, for speed, and most of all for freedom.

*Beep.*

Still, you stand, shaking out your legs one at a time. You have to keep the blood flowing, the muscles from getting stiff. You look down at your favorite running shoes, the ones with the hole in the pinky toe and the brown stains from the countless runs through mud and rain.

*Walk.*

You feel it before you see it, the blazing hand transforming into the still figure of a luminescent man, telling you to walk. You're not here to walk though, you're here to run. Your body bursts into movement, as you sprint across the white stripes leading you forward, down the concrete slabs of the sidewalk. Each breath powered, in and out, through the billows of your lungs, propelling oxygen through your veins, lightning breathing life into the freedom born from the movement of your legs.

The rhythmic music in your ears, the speeding earth beneath your feet, and the star lit sky above your head send your mind wandering the recesses of memories.

---

Inside a government building, in downtown Dallas, a twenty-three year old child puts pen to paper then raises hand to God, swearing to a life of loyalty, brotherhood, and defense.

On a bus, a child is given a hotel room to wait out the night before being shipped to California for training.

Inside a hotel room, a child lies awake contemplating the abandonment of all possessions, friends, and family.

In contemplation, a child cries.

---

*Beep.*

You stop at the cross walk, then you feel it, the tinge of pain in your left ankle. The one all of the doctors said, “If you hurt it one more time, we’ll have to put a screw in it.”

*Beep.*

*Walk.*

---

Under the blazing afternoon sun, in California, a twenty-three year old boy plays Marine, dressed in deep green camouflage, donned with body armor, and armed with his M16 A-1 rifle. The boy crawls, face down in the dust, beneath the razor-wire obstacle, to rise triumphant on the other side, before charging the four-foot barrier that lies ahead. Sprinting with the speed of a two-ton turtle, the boy lumbers to the concrete hurdle and throws himself over the wall to find no purchase for his foot on the five-foot fall to the other side.

Luckily, the boy’s weighted decent to the dust-covered stone below is placed solely on the boy’s booted bent left ankle. The boy lies stunned, but gathers himself and tries to stand, only to cry out in agony and topple to the ground screaming in pain. The boy cries out for help and is dragged to the medical tent then placed on a bench.

The boy’s boot is slowly removed, accompanied by the sound of anguished grunts, seeping from the boy’s gritted teeth. Unable to look anywhere, but the roof of the tent, thanks to the heavily-plated jacket pressing down on his chest, the boy asks, “Is it broken?” The medic’s look of uncertainty tells the boy everything, and knowing a broken ankle would see him dropped from the platoon, the boy’s tears begin to fall.

The boy’s Gunnery Sergeant strides into the tent yelling, “What the fuck happened to you?” Stumbling to explain, the boy tells the Gunnery Sergeant everything.

The Gunnery Sergeant rages, screaming, “God damn it, you little bastard. Go ahead and cry. I swear to God I’m going to drop your ass for this.” Turning to leave the tent, he stops at the exit and looks back at the boy and swears, “I hope it’s fucking snapped!”

Then the Gunnery Sergeant exits the tent, followed by the medic, leaving the boy alone with nothing, but his tears.

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Your stride opens with the quickening of your pulse and your body devours the distance to the next light, fueled by the steam rising from the blood boiling in your veins. Your breath burns in your chest with every swing of your arms fanning the billows.

*Beep.*

You blaze past the crosswalk's red warning, without a second look for oncoming cars. The world is seared from your mind, but the sting in your ankle still bites.

---

The boy waits in the barracks with the other rejected children, awaiting the decision to be let go or held on to. The pain is nothing compared to the agony of the wait. Two weeks pass and the boy's ankle is still a black and purple cantaloupe, too large to fit inside his boot. He hobbles here and there, until the Gunnery Sergeant makes his decision.

---

*Walk.*

*Walk.*

The light says walk, walk, walk, but you lean forward violently and convulse. Your hand snaps to your side and you fight the urge to loose your stomach across the pavement. Doubled over, legs shaking, struggling to think of anything except the idea of painting the sidewalk with the remnants of the ham sandwich you had for lunch, you force your mind back to memories of even greater pains.

---

The boy fights to keep up with the rest of his platoon. He has made it to the final challenge of his training: The Crucible, A three-day field exercise, during which he is to be deprived of sleep and food. Exhausted and hungry, he trails behind his platoon in the blackness of a moonless night, struggling under the weight of his pack.

Hours and miles later, unexpectedly, he stumbles into the boy ahead of him, as the entire platoon halts to the cries of the platoon leaders. The boy feels a slap on his arm, as the Gunnery Sergeant passes by, counting the number of recruits; no one's missing. Everyone is told to drink water and to get ready for what's next.

The boy's attention is grabbed by the cries of people yelling, "Vehicle to the rear."

The boy steps out of the way with the rest of the platoon to let the brilliant beams of light pass by in the blanket of darkness. His eyes continue to follow the light as it moves further and further away, until suddenly, the lights begin to curve upward. Steadily, they continue to rise ahead of the platoon, revealing the sheer cliff side of a scarcely sloped hill, more akin to a mountain.

Still, the lights continue to rise, until they stop sharply and the distant sounds of tires spinning and an engine revving, frantically make their way to the boy's ears. With wide

eyes, the boy watches the vehicle miraculously make it over the edge of the hill and drive on.

“Forward March!” The words echo down the platoon lines and with them begins the climb.

Five hours, eight miles, and four more agonizingly tall hills later, on the black asphalt of a parade deck, the boy finds himself fighting tooth and nail, just to stand at attention in formation without passing out. Out of the sixty-eight who made it through, three collapse to the ground and are dragged away to be looked after.

The boy is placed in the front of the formation, specifically chosen by the Gunnery Sergeant. The boy’s eyelids threaten to shut again and again, only through sheer force of will do his legs keep from buckling, but still he sways and wobbles.

The Gunnery Sergeant steps in front of the boy at attention and stares him dead in the eye. The Gunnery Sergeant’s intense quiet stare sends shivers down the spine of the boy, whose own eyes bore scorched daggers into the forehead of the Gunnery Sergeant.

Without warning, the Gunnery Sergeant says, “You’ve overcome more than most and fought hard to get here. I knew you could do it, I’m proud of you.” With the steady movement of his hand, he places a solid black eagle, globe, and anchor into the boy’s hand and says, “Congratulations Marine.”

Tears slide from the eyes of the man, the Marine.

---

The memory fades, your legs no longer shake and your stomach becomes solid. You compose yourself before the bloodshot palm of the crosswalk light that mocks you.

*Beep.*

*Beep.*

You feel it, rather than see it.

*Walk.*

*You run.*

# Gypsy Sister

---

*Kristina Shue, Capital University*

Gypsy sister, you kick off your shoes and lift  
your skirts to see them billow in the wind.  
You make a fool of me, dragging me along—  
I who cannot keep up your thought-speed pace,  
who lacks your ruby-studded shell of confidence—  
to dance across lawns of people who never knew  
a caravan, your restlessness driving you to drive me  
to make a scene if nothing else. You adorn me: tie ropes  
of glassy beads around my neck, put thick jangling  
bracelets on my wrists as your own clank over sun-tanned  
skin, and you cast cards for me, reading them as you will,  
asking me only if you've forgotten a symbol  
or a step. And nights, you make me lie with you  
below winking constellations and a pregnant moon  
to sing passion to the sky, shrieking our hearts out  
to each other.



# Contributors

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**Maxwell Bicking** was born in Southeastern Pennsylvania in 1994. He is currently a junior at Ursinus College, where he studies mathematics and creative writing. His work focuses on contrasts between art and science; peace and violence; and darkness and light. He feels that there are no true distinctions between creativity in art and creativity in mathematics and the sciences, and his work tries to break down the perceived differences between them. After graduating from Ursinus, Maxwell wishes to pursue a service fellowship and obtain a teaching certification.

**Morgan Blalock** is a junior at Hollins University in Roanoke, VA who writes mainly poetry and short fiction. She edits the nationally recognized journal *Cargoes*.

**Justin Groppuso-Cook** is a poet working on his undergraduate at Michigan State University. His studies include: English with a concentration in Creative Writing, the American Indian Studies Program (AISP), and the Residential College in the Arts & Humanities (RCAH). He is also a contributing writer for the blog Bonus Cut, which focuses on art, education, and activism within Michigan's hip-hop community. In his free time, Justin enjoys strolling through campus, shredding the synthesizer, and painting.

**Joshua J. Hines** is an undergraduate attending Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas, where he is a sophomore, majoring in creative writing, while minoring in literature and marketing. Following receiving his Creative Writing BFA, Joshua plans to continue on in his academic career and attend Graduate School for Creative Writing. Joshua began attending Stephen F. Austin after being Honorably Discharged as a Sergeant from the U.S. Marine Corps. Joshua was stationed in Camp Lejeune, N.C. and was deployed twice, while in the Marines where he worked as a military journalist and photojournalist.

**David Langdon** is an undergrad in creative writing at Western Kentucky University. His poems have appeared in WKU's literary journal *Zephyrus* as well as *The Whiskey Traveler*. David was born at a very young age in Elizabethtown, KY which is a place where people are from. He is praised among his peers as "average" and "well-meaning." Some have gone so far as to call him "tolerable." Once a professor suggested he stop writing and maybe even stop living. To which David replied, "What's the difference?"

**Kristina Shue** is a 22-year-old Ohio college student waiting for the real world to come crashing down on her in beautiful and painful yet livable ways. She writes, teaches, reads, draws, sings, performs, and hopes to one day combine all of these with a teacher's license and several puppets, and do some slice of good in this world.

**Evan Turissini** is a junior at Bucknell University. He was last seen in England ruling the country Weekend-at-Bernie's-style with David Cameron's comatose body. He has been published in *Right Hand Pointing*, *My Favorite Bullet*, *The Light Ekphrastic*, and *The First Day*, among others.