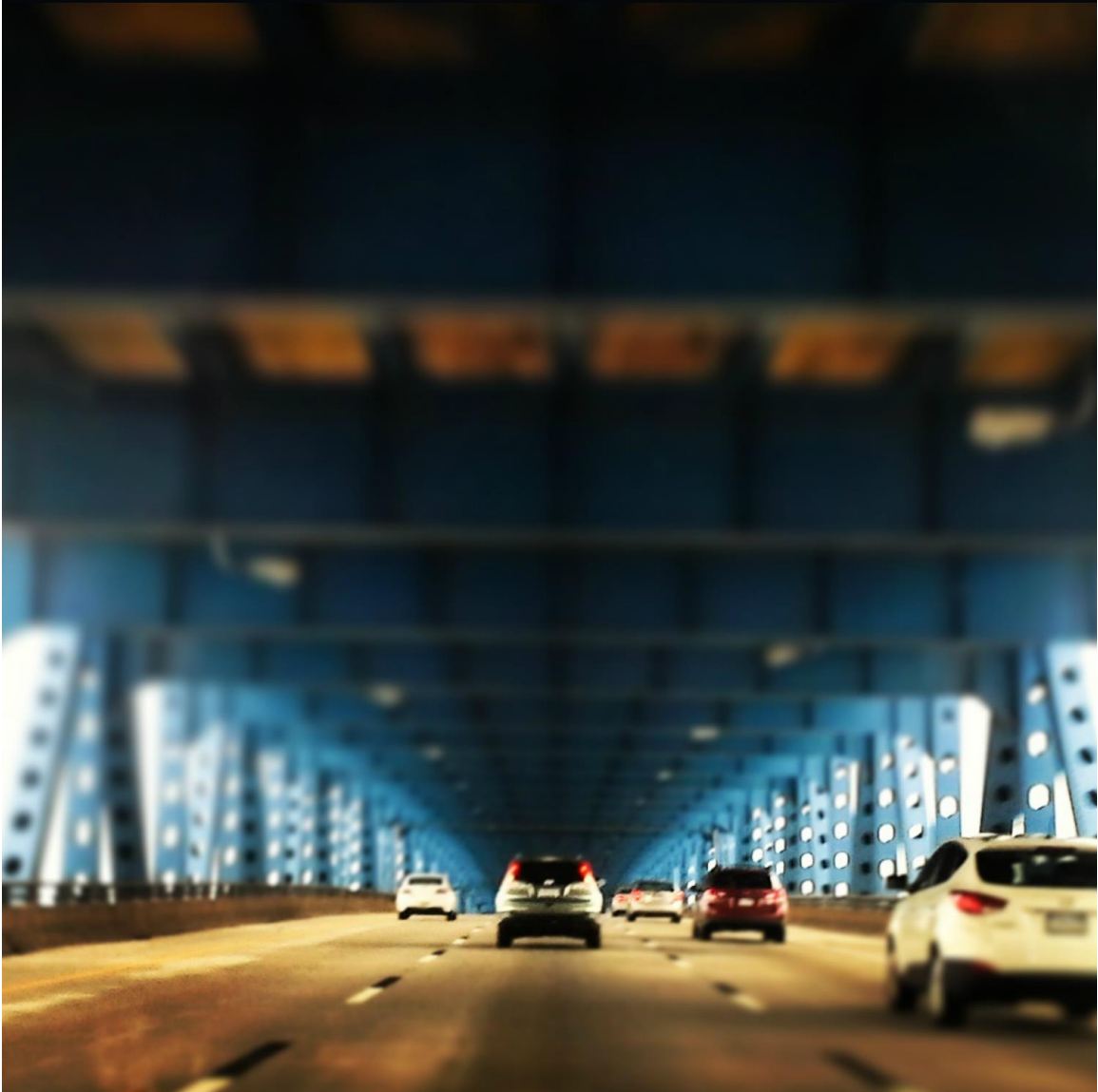


# **The Blue Route**

**Issue 14**



## **Spring 2015**

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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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# For Emma, Forever Ago

---

*Sarah Forner – John Carroll University*

You, maker of Magic Marker Masterpieces,  
Made beige hallways and the heirloom white piano  
Canvas for your distorted doodles.

In the prized robin's egg Cinderella uniform  
Stained with the syrup of banana pancakes,  
You spoke in syntactical butchering of words –  
Pasghetti, bashick, brapes, hossdable.  
To this day, echoes of your eternal creations  
Hum in the home on Parkview Boulevard.

You, speaker of spectrums, drew  
Divides amongst blues and greens.  
Proudly right in your *turquoise* shorts,  
Offering eggs-over-easy and mango fruits.

You looked perfect there with your  
Sleepless arms, widow's peak, faint freckles,  
Charm bracelet, and berry chapstick,  
Kissing calls to our panting dog.

You, worshiper of the sun, stretched  
In the glowing summer, blowing  
Wishes on wilted dandelions.  
Iridescent rays of sun brushed your  
Carefully crafted curls. It was  
So beautiful, the way your  
Crisped cheeks morphed into whispers  
Of the promises and secrets of sisters.

Somewhere between giving salutations  
To the sun and jarring lightning bugs,  
You crawled out into a little woman.

# I Confess to Enjoying the Shame of our Brother, Mr. Nip

---

*Zachary Weber, University of Houston*

I watched Joseph sell catnip to some skater-boy freshman  
who asked for pot in between stutters.

And he smoked it.

I was seventeen and riding shotgun  
in the Honda Fit that scooped up this young client  
at the promised time, for a slow business-lap  
through the neighborhood, while children performed  
rain dances around lawn sprinklers  
and responsible adults melted slowly into the distance.

I still have trouble  
pinpointing what I enjoyed so much about this— it wasn't  
his reflection wavering on Joseph's aviator sunglasses,  
as he ad-libbed a salespitch for the master strain  
which was essentially a vial of dehydrated leaves  
and plantmatter from Petland,  
nor was it the steaming mound of stir-fry we ordered at Khan's  
Mongolian Grill on 2<sup>nd</sup> and Nolana, as two  
Swiss Army Knives of hustling, now  
a whopping 40 dollars wealthier—

and it certainly wasn't the fact that our entire student body  
was consumed by the wildfire this story ignited—  
one that spread through the congested hallways like a fever  
between the outlines of teenage boys crippled with laughter  
as Joseph, now at the center of the universe, pointed  
the kid out and shouted 'nip!'— a nickname  
that forced him to transfer to another school,  
one that foamed at the mouth to receive him,  
though some say he was lucky  
to be remembered at all.

# Etiquette for Life

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*Cassandra Konz, Concordia College*

Learning etiquette must begin early, in order to create the habit of polite and considerate behavior. If you come from a good family, these habits should have begun in the home, with members of the older, wiser generation being your initial mentors. They have much to teach you, no matter your age, and it is your obligation to learn.

For example, three years old may seem quite young, but you really should have learned by now to hide your baby blanket from your grandmother. In her home, do not suck on the satin-edged corners, or use it as a trampoline to save your stuffed animals from imaginary fires. Do not tie the blanket around your neck and turn yourself into a superhero. When her friends with the hard metal jewelry and tweed pencil skirts stop by, it is not appropriate to hide behind the couch, sucking on your blanket and refusing to come out until they've left.

Do not cry when she pulls your blanket away from you, and talks sternly at your mother about how you are too old to be emotionally dependent on a blanket. Let your mother pick you up and then bury your head into the soft cotton of her sweater as you are held against the hollow of her waist. Let her take the blanket back for you. She won't hand it to you until you are back in the car seat. You will learn to leave your blanket at home when you visit. You will notice that your parents have found other people to watch you when they are at work.

You don't need to know what "improper," "embarrassment," or "emotionally dependent" mean yet, but tuck those words away. A good vocabulary is a powerful tool, and your grandmother knows many big and powerful words. Although she doubts it, you are a clever girl. You learn quickly.

For example:

By age seven you will learn how to sit in a skirt: you keep your knees clamped together and your ankles crossed, while you watch for the moment when she isn't paying attention so you can run off to climb trees with the boys. If you destroy the dress, apologize and keep your eyes down. Do not kick dirt at the boys even if they are laughing at you. Do not make a sound when she grabs your upper arm too hard and drags you to your parents.

By age ten you will learn to stay quiet at dinner, elbows off the table, and holding the knife with your left hand even though it feels unnatural. Any food you do not like will have to be eaten anyway. A young lady must not waste food. If you refuse, you will sit at that table for six hours, until the milk you refuse to drink gets warm and the whipped potatoes start to stiffen on your plate. You will learn that although you are stubborn, she is even more so. Do not tell your parents about these moments. It only makes them worry.

By age thirteen you will learn that no grade less than an A is worth telling her about. Even As are not worth mentioning unless you are prepared to discuss the idea of college. Ivy League is encouraged. Small private schools are acceptable. You should simply smile when your

grandmother puts a hand on your cheek, and reminds you that it is never too early to build up your college applications.

### *Dining with Relatives*

Family dinners are an important part of sustaining relationships with your relatives, especially those who live out of town. If you cannot host it at home, due to the precarious stacks of ungraded papers, the pile of unwashed plates and coffee mugs in the sink, or the light your father broke jumping up and down during the last football game, be sure to pick a nice restaurant. Pick one that is not so expensive that your grandmother will comment that your parents must have earned a raise, nor so inexpensive that the word “quaint” is used, as she tucks her beige leather purse closer to her leg. An upper-level chain restaurant with unlimited breadsticks and wine samples is a safe bet.

Remember, good conversation makes for good dinners. If your grandmother mentions, deliberately, suddenly, that every young girl wants to be a debutante, you must refrain from gagging, snorting Coca-Cola out of your nose, or disagreeing out loud. It is uncouth, and will only reinforce the idea, sixteen years in the making, that you are not ladylike. A short nod followed by a shared look with your mother is not recommended, but acceptable.

If your grandmother notices, sit back as your mother explains that you are already so busy with soft ball, guitar practice, and confirmation classes. It is impolite to discuss money, so keep silent the fact that the cotton ball dresses and gemstone tiaras cost more than your teacher parents are able to pay. Your grandmother already knows these things anyway. Your grandmother will of course offer to pay, and you may notice your mother clench her teeth before refraining as politely as possible.

These are the necessary motions. Allow the adults to discuss the matter. Be thankful you are still a teenager and don't have to deal with this alone. Above all, keep quiet as you imagine drowning in tulle. It is a soft, but inadvisable way to die, and voicing those concerns will only lead to a quarrel in public.

Wait to groan until her pearl white E-class Mercedes has pulled away, and you can collapse into the cracked leather of your parents' Subaru. Avoid the stains on the dashboard as you repeatedly hit your head against it, punctuating each word as you say “Are. You. Freaking. Kidding. Me.” Enunciation is important.

Over the following weeks, she will call to ask if your mother has thought this through yet. She will hint at times she would be free to look for dresses. She may hint that there would be plenty of time to drop a dress size or two.

You are not obligated to answer the telephone, even if you know it is her. This is what answering machines were invented for. You can sit in your worn-in blue armchair, in an oversized Packers sweatshirt and yoga pants. You can press your thighs to your chest, press your nose in the space between your knees, and wrap your hands around your ankles while you stare at the phone. Make sure to watch the red number on the answering machine so you know what the number was before she called. It would be impolite to delete any of your parents' other messages.

Eventually, she will understand that you will never be a debutante without the need for a distasteful confrontation. Eventually you'll be too old for a coming out party anyway.

### *Rites of Passage*

Graduating from college is an important step for a modern young woman, and you should be proud of your accomplishment. A party to commemorate this achievement is expected. To be properly prepared you must have sent your invitations well in advance, have thank-you cards ready to be filled out, and have practiced your speech about what you are going to do with an English degree. Invite friends, professors, colleagues, and, of course, your family. Expect your grandmother to make the long drive to campus for the event.

Thank your grandmother for the pearls she gives you as your graduation gift, and be sure to tell her that they are beautiful, because they are. It is best not to tell her that you don't know when you would ever wear them since you refuse to go to the country club dinners anymore, and you own only one dress as nice as this necklace. This would seem ungrateful. Let her tell you how important it is for a young woman to have a string of pearls.

When the inevitable question of what you plan to do now comes up, be sure to smile. Explain that you want to be a school librarian and to work with teenagers, and keep smiling when she drops her voice to ask if you are aware of how little librarians are paid. She is only trying to help. Do not try to explain how much you love the work. Simply nod and try to steer the conversation towards neutral topics. Say something like "Yes, I was aware. Thank you though. Have you tried the shrimp puffs yet?"

Do not comment when you overhear her telling your mother that she hopes you can manage to find a decent husband who can support you.

### *Gentleman Suitors*

It is mandatory that your family be well acquainted with any gentlemen that you could consider marrying. Six months into your relationship with a twelfth grade English teacher would be a good time. Bring him home for the next holiday to properly meet your parents. They will approve because they will recognize how he makes you happy. He will make you smile when he tells bad jokes about classic novels, when he leaves fresh coffee on your desk for you, and when he whispers, at unexpected moments, that he loves you.

Arrange a dinner to introduce him to the rest of the family. If you lack the necessary culinary skills to make an impressive dinner, pick a restaurant quiet enough to facilitate conversation. You may hope that a public setting will diminish the risk for embarrassing questions, but do not rely on this assumption.

Be sure to warn him of what to expect.

Do not cringe when your grandmother's first question is what his father does for a living. Allow him to explain, with pride, that he comes from a long line of farmers. She will only say "ah" or "I see." You will notice that she tilts her chin up half an inch and smiles with only one side of her mouth. Let her ask what he does for a living. Let her ask if it pays well, even though



she knows it doesn't. Let her ask if he ever considered going back to school to become a lawyer or a professor. There will be a line of questioning that will last the entire evening, ranging from his weekend hobbies to when his family immigrated, and it will be exhausting if you try to deflect every question. Hold his hand under the table and squeeze it every time she asks another. Although this gesture is more for you than for him, it will seem supportive.

Remember, the first meeting is the most difficult. Thank him for being so patient with her, and apologize no less than seven times on the drive back, even when he tells you that there is no reason to apologize.

### *The Next Step*

When you become engaged, your family should be the first ones told. Your parents should not be expected to tell your grandmother no matter how much you wish they would. You are an adult and it is your responsibility. You should not put it off for over a month, picking up the phone and setting it back down at least once a day. You should not decide to tell the collected family weeks later, at Christmas, under the excuse that it is more convenient.

If you choose to do this, make sure to pay attention to the timing of the announcement. It may be difficult to do it early as people arrive at different times of the evening. When you see your grandmother, quickly turn your ring around so the diamond isn't showing. When your fiancé shows up half an hour later, tell him that this is to keep it a surprise. He does not need to know that your grandmother was hoping to set you up with her doctor's son. He does not need to know that she told you she was glad to see you come up the driveway alone.

Making the announcement at dinner may distract from your mother's meal, and there is plenty of conversation as your grandmother asks if your fiancé is still working at a public school and comments on how to improve Christmas dinner for next year. Better to wait until after dinner, when everyone is relaxing in the living room, talking and complimenting the meal and generally content.

Remember to turn your ring back around.

Let your fiancé take your hand and ask for everyone's attention. Be sure to hold up your hand so they can see the ring when he makes the announcement. Keep smiling as your grandmother's mouth becomes a straight, tight line. Her face may be pale and you may be able to see a thick vein pulsing in her neck. She will not come over to offer congratulations, but it is not your obligation to point out her misstep.

Later that night she may pull you aside, clutching your upper arm until it hurts. She will ask if you are sure about this, if you don't want to just live with him instead of marrying him. She will say "don't you dare settle" as you extract your arm from her grip. It is best to realize that nothing you say or do will bring an amicable end to this conversation. She will never see what you see in him. Find the most polite way to get out of the situation. If you are lucky, someone will want you to help with some festive activity, or want to give you their opinion on veils. If not, feign that you hear your mother calling, or that you promised to help her with dessert. Once you have made your excuses, avoid your grandmother as much as possible for the rest of the evening.

There is no need to tell your fiancé what happened, even though he can tell something is wrong. It is unladylike to spoil the holidays by making a fuss.

### *Planning the Wedding*

When the time comes to plan your wedding, the guest list is both vital and treacherous. These are the people you are sharing the most important day with. It is advisable to draft multiple guest lists.

The first draft will have three hundred people, including every third cousin whose name you can still remember. The second will have only four, including yourself and the groom. Your fiancé will laugh when he sees this one, and kiss you on the head before reminding you that you don't believe in eloping. Be grateful that he knows you so well. Write another guest list, and this one will have exactly one hundred and seventeen people on it.

It may be useful to buy a book dedicated entirely to wedding etiquette as the process is full of unspoken rules and little-known traditions. They can be found at any well-stocked bookstore. When you find one that you like, open it to the chapter on guest lists. See where it lists close family as the first people to go onto the list – parents, siblings, grandparents.

Close the book if that chapter makes you want to reconsider your stance on elopement. Do not leave the book on top of the shelf in the wrong section or you will get a look of exhausted annoyance from the shop girl with the green-framed glasses.

Draft a final guest list with your mother and fiancé. Say nothing as you leave your grandmother's name off the list. Discretion is paramount.

# Reason No. 37 I'm Not A Dentist

---

*Ashton Nicole Allen, Stephen F. Austin State University*

They say if you put coconut oil in your mouth  
and spit it out before you brush your teeth,  
It eradicates bacteria, leaving a sterile smile.

I wish you would do that so your words  
weren't so gingivital when you speak  
    Or better yet  
let me pull out your teeth  
    root by root  
with pliers so you can only say soft gummy things,  
    blood dribbling down your jaw.

# Every Poem Used To Be a Love Letter

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*Ainslie Campbell, University of Wisconsin-Madison*

No, not tonight. Tonight feels  
too lonely, and the streetlights  
are too orange. Too much dirty laundry  
lies in crumpled heaps,  
her cotton underwear  
with the elastic poking out.  
A three day old coffee cup  
leaves a sticky dark ring  
on the bedside table.  
Cracked dishes stack precariously  
upon each other like small piles  
of bird bones.  
Everything feels too thick tonight.  
She is like old molasses,  
slow and hesitant.

Her spine curves away from him  
like a parenthesis. The salted waves  
of winter have made her skin  
into dry paper, and she  
hopes he's afraid to touch her  
for fear of watching her disintegrate.  
She can taste stale artificial banana  
in her mouth. A yellow LaffyTaffy melts  
inelegantly in its shiny wrapper,  
next to the coffee cup.

She says maybe tomorrow.  
Tomorrow her peach hips may smirk  
at his aching please please please grace,  
but tonight, the alarm clock blinks red over  
and over again, and canyons bloom  
like wounds between their bodies.

# A Scooter Named Desire

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*Carly Szabo, Rowan University*

Beads of sweat glued strands of umber hair to his forehead, effectively increasing his discomfort. Why had he allowed Brody to persuade him into this disaster? Brody. That great brute of a fifth-grader. Gerald could almost feel the pinpricks of anger climbing the walls of his gut as they did each time Brody gave that leering smile. It was a smile complicated by intimidation and gleeful sadism. A look only true peer-pressurers could master.

“Just *do* it!” he laughed, his massive stomach protruding slightly as his shirt strained to cover him. “If you don’t do it, I’m gonna tell everyone you’re chicken. Bock, bock, bock!”

“Shut up,” Gerald pushed Brody’s freckled arm back which he then folded into two clumsy wings.

“Bock, bock! Gerry the chicken! Hear that, world? Gerry’s afraid of Wittle Pewcy Hawvawd! Bock, bock, bock!”

“Shut up!” Gerald spat, anger mixing with his saliva like homemade venom. “Keep your freaking voice down! He lives on this street, I think...” Gerald cast a furtive glance in either direction, searching for any sign that Percy Harvard had heard Brody’s antics.

“Ooooh! Look at you droppin’ ‘freak’ bombs. Is Gerry gonna stop bein’ such a FUCKING CHICKEN?!” Brody burst out in laughter, freeing his bouncing belly up to his naval as Gerald cowered at the curse word.

“Shhhh!” Again, Gerald looked around making sure no one had heard—especially no adults.

“Fuck, fuck, fuckity, FUCK!” Brody danced circles around Gerald’s tiny frame, bearing his chicken arms and “clucking” between “fuck”-ing. Gerald felt smaller and smaller with each foul word that pierced the air like gunshots. And the smaller he felt, the more his temples pulsed, his face flushed bright red, tears burned ferociously behind his eyes until finally an explosion:

“ALRIGHT YOU FAT IDIOT! I’LL DO IT! NOW SHUT THE HECK UP!!!”

“Hey!” an old woman waved her cane from across the street, “Watch your mouth, young man!”

And now here he was. Immobilized in the Harvards’ backyard, hunched over the trash can he had just disturbed, facing Percy in the darkness. Although, his situation would have been much the same had it been daylight. Percy’s blindness still would have hidden

Gerald safely in the shadows. But Percy may as well have had 20/20 vision and a spotlight on Gerald for all the raucous he had caused. Even a person less adjusted to a life without sight would have been able to detect the stranger in the shadows.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Harvards had recently moved to town, causing an uproar of confusion from all of the kids at school. When they heard the word “disability,” the foreign concept quickly blanketed their confusion with fear and rejection.

“Can’t he go to a special school or something?” asked Carmella, a particularly snobbish girl for whom Gerald had no patience.

“Now, class,” Mrs. Porter interjected, “Percy is no different from you or me. He is a bright young man and you should feel privileged to share a class with him. We should all view this as a learning experience!”

Groans emanated from the class as Mrs. Porter waddled her stoutly figure around the classroom to pass out blindfolds.

“Let’s all try to put ourselves in Percy’s shoes before his arrival,” she smiled, trying to make the activity seem fun and engaging to her reluctant students.

“I guess you won’t be the school freak anymore,” Carmella sneered at Gerald. Retorts gathered in clumps at the back of his throat—their usual hiding place. Luckily, Brody stepped in.

“Shut the fuck up, Carm,” he hissed, “No one’s talking to you.” It was moments like this that reminded Gerald of why he was friends with Brody in the first place and, incidentally, why Brody was able to effortlessly influence him.

Carmella rolled her eyes and turned back towards the front of the classroom.

“Don’t worry, buddy. I’ve always got your back,” Brody dropped a hefty arm across Gerald’s meek shoulders, causing him to slouch a little. He thought of what Carmella said, and wondered if it could be true. Would the tables turn with the arrival of the blind boy from who-knows-where? Shamelessly, his heart became weightless with the thought of a scapegoat for his torment. Finally, the relentless teasing about his fragile composition, his glasses, his intelligence—all of it would come to an end. He tried to suppress his excitement, focusing instead on helping the blindfolded Brody feel his way around the classroom. The oaf fumbled over his feet with every step, unable to balance himself without sight. It was hard for Gerald to keep from giggling as his friend made an ass of himself in front of the entire class.

“Oh if it’s so easy why don’t you try it?” Brody tore the blindfold from his face as Gerald failed to stifle his laughter after Brody had almost landed himself in a trashcan. Gerald fastened the blindfold tightly around his head, and found the complete darkness more disorienting than he had anticipated. Sounds became too loud to focus on; a

muddled collection of voices, machines, and nature combining into one indiscernible entity. He reached out to the emptiness before him, trying to feel for a wall or a familiar table in the classroom. He leaned forward, took one careful step, and fell to the ground almost instantly as he stepped onto what Brody explained was a book which felt oddly like a foot to Gerald. It was evident that the life of blindness was not suitable for him.

When Percy Harvard finally came to school, the teasing was instantaneous. Echoes of “Bat Boy” and “Dead Eyes” reverberated off the walls of the school like evil ricochets flying through the air. At first, Gerald felt sympathetic towards the blind boy. He knew the painful life of an outcast and wanted to let Percy know that they were one and the same. But as he observed Percy’s behavior more closely, he found his strength in enduring the bullying to be condescending and offensive. Gerald hated that this stranger was able to maintain his composure in the face of ignorance like he never could. He patiently waited for the day when Percy would break. But the day never came.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the Harvard’s backyard, Gerald’s heart was a construction worker pounding relentlessly like a hammer to a wall. Sweat pooled in great puddles across his brow, leaking continuously over his eyes which made it particularly difficult to stay still. Had he been an illogical person, he would have thought it impossible for Percy to find him over the steady crescendo of his heartbeat.

Moments turned to ages as the pair stood motionless in the night, each perfectly aware of the other yet too afraid to speak. Gerald thought of how juvenile the whole plan was.

“He keeps it by the shed in his yard—what an idiot!” Brody coached Gerald mere minutes before the stand-off. “Just sneak in and grab it!”

He could see the scooter from his current position. Bright orange body accompanied by fluorescent yellow handlebars. It reminded Gerald of the vest worn by the crossing guard at school. As he gazed at the toy that lay inches from his grasp, he was afflicted by the torturous churning of guilt and desire in his stomach. Before, all he had wanted was to shut Brody up. Go along with his games. But now, he was mesmerized by the plaything; caught in the clutches of its mystical allure. And it spoke to him, as clear as the autumn sky that hung above him.

*Do it, it urged. Steal me.*

Gerald’s fingers twitched involuntarily towards the scooter aching to wrap themselves around the grip of the handlebars. As if this imperceptible gesture had caused a cacophony of sound to erupt from his direction, Percy’s head darted towards the trash can so that his milky, dead eyes bore directly into Gerald’s.

“Hey!” Percy spoke. “I know what you’re doing out here, kid. You should go. You’ll be better off.”

The caution in Percy's voice almost fooled Gerald into turning back the way he had come and forgetting the whole stupid idea. But his eyes fixated themselves on that beautiful scooter, the orange and yellow resting firmly in his retinas until the whole world glowed like the sun despite the black night sky. He needed to steal it. He had come too far.

Percy remained in his spot at the foot of the concrete steps that descended from the back door of his home. He waited, desperate to know the impact of his words. Hearing nothing but the gentle lullaby of crickets and passing cars, he sighed. He, too, had once known the irresistible call of the scooter...

Defeated, and slightly annoyed by the stranger's reluctance to heed his warning, Percy reached out his arm to the railing and climbed the stairs to his home. Gerald waited long past the final click of the lock securing the back door before making his move. He crossed the two feet that stood between him and the scooter, grabbed the lemon-colored handlebars, flung the metal contraption over his right shoulder and ran. Hard.

Brody sat on the sidewalk a little way down the street from the Harvards' home, stuffing a Twinkie into his gullet when he saw Gerald. He stood up, smiling his signature smile, watching the spectacle of his best friend sprinting from the scene of the crime.

"Gerry! You did it! Good job, buddy! Now, let me see that thing," he reached his arms out to his friend from the scooter, but was knocked down by the blow of the runner at full speed.

"What the fuck, man?!" Brody yelled at Gerald's quickly disappearing back.

"Oh, that's nice. I'm only the one who FUCKING THOUGHT OF IT!" Brody pounded his fist into the pavement, bloodying his knuckles and worsening his pain.

Gerald ran all the way home, never once considering stopping to ride his newly acquired vehicle. He carried the load on his back, a stallion galloping through the darkness with his jockey dictating his every move. Gerald flung open the gate to his backyard, anticipation weighing down his chest and throwing off the tempo of his breathing. Once safely in his own yard, he gently placed the scooter on the patio.

There it was.

A radiant symbol of his guilty conscience, the scooter beamed with majesty and mystery. And though it glowed brightly with the promise of hours of entertainment, beneath its façade burned a more sinister intimation like the slow-burning coals of a fire about to go out.

Gerald mounted the scooter, resting the full weight of his left leg on the deck, his hands gripping the handlebars fervently. His blood swarmed through his body so quickly he was sure he would float off the ground from its velocity. Instinctively, he kicked off with his right foot. The cool, fall air rushed past his cheeks as he formed figure-eights on the small bit of patio in his backyard. The world seemed to glow with his growing joy,



the bright orange and yellow colors flooding his vision. He couldn't wait to show the kids at school his prized possession. He thought of all their envious faces focused on him and the scooter.

And then it started.

A smoldering pain grew deep within the sockets of his eyes; at first a dull ache and then an insufferable stabbing. He screamed horrifically, paying no attention to the sleeping world around him. He blinked ferociously, trying to rid himself of the searing pain building in his retinas. But it was no use. The terror had a mind of its own. Hot lava boiled over in the back of his eyes until he was sure it was blood instead of tears streaming down his face. As quickly as it had come, it stopped; and yet his eyes remained tightly shut beneath his hands.

Awakened by his shrill screams, his sister Deborah came rushing to his aid.

"Gerry! What happened?!"

But when he looked up to meet her worried gaze, he found the whole world had gone dark.

# Astronomy

---

*Zachary Riddle, Central Michigan University*

I am stoneskinned in the wake of you—infested, nightmared,  
a scarecrow in a barren field, sunsore and crucified, nails pierced

through hayweed veins. At dawn, tasked with creation,  
I leave the city lightless

and blindly run my fingers across the bridge of your nose,  
slowly skim the thin of your upper lip, the small of your thumb,

the whole of your lower back. I sew myself into your treeborn  
body, make seams between our myths and merge—

one fractured cosmos with another. You trace the fire  
between fjord and shipdeck and tell me:

*The sun rises and sets within two hours in Antarctica.*  
Under swollen red stars, I explain that I've lived

below Orion's Belt my entire life, that I've only  
seen the Southern sky in photographs.

# Literacy Test

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*Alec Johnsson, Haverford College*

I started with a white page on which black is written  
And the man told me, if you don't want to be in the margins, get rid of the margins, shove  
    them off the page as you would a sleigh, it's that simple  
Fill in the empty lines, the empty spaces next to the lines at which words shudder in  
    temerity, the empty spaces between the lines  
Fill in the vacancies between words, after periods, before commas, colons, semicolons,  
    the pauses between parentheses, brackets, braces, pipes  
If you can still read this, you're failing, you're doing it wrong, you're wasting all the  
    white  
Books have too many pages in them today, too much white, so use it until there's no  
    more left  
Fill in the enigmas below the quotes, above and below the hyphens, on both sides of the  
    slashes, the slender crevasses between the lines  
Conserve paper, write and color as much as you can on this one page until it's used up  
    and whatever's written there is unreadable  
Fill in the tents, breasts, concavities, convexities, stories, scaffolds, swirls, headquarters,  
    phalanxes, hooks, prisms, scissors, mazes, nooks, orifices, flags, swimming pools,  
    rims, sinews, lean-tos, tubs, goose wings, craters, crosses, ambiguities and zebra  
    stripes  
Vary the inks, include white, fill in the white, the black, all the inks  
Fill in the corridor of air above the page  
So I created a fractal of language, used all the words I know  
Wrote all that needs to be said, must be said, wanted to be said  
But I also left room to breathe

# Contributors

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**Ashton Nicole Allen** is currently a senior undergraduate student in the Creative Writing Program at Stephen F. Austin State University. Her minor is Literature and she is developing her thesis in Poetry. A native to the Nacogdoches/Lufkin community, she lives and works in the East Texas area.

**Ainslie Campbell** is a fourth year university student at University of Wisconsin-Madison. Graduating in May 2015, Ainslie hopes to move to the east coast and either get involved in women's rights groups, or become a book editor at a publishing company. She loves gardening, World War I memoirs, and cooking, working in three different restaurants and bakeries in the last 5 years. Growing up in small-town Minnesota allowed Ainslie to experience her youth in ways that have since then translated into her poetry, through her experiences with relationships, friendships, and struggling for validation.

**Sarah Forner** is a Junior English major at John Carroll University (JCU) in University Heights, Ohio. She strives to create poems that awaken the sense and touch the heart. In much of her writing, she meditates on the theme of the movement from innocence to experience. Upon graduation, she plans to work toward a PhD, and teach English at the college level. In her time, Sarah also hopes to publish a collection of her poems. "For Emma, Forever Ago" is inspired by, and dedicated to, her younger sister and very best friend, Emma.

**Alec Johnsson**, a native of White Plains, NY, is a member of the Class of 2015 at Haverford College (PA), where he majors in English and minors in Anthropology. He works for the Lambda Literary Foundation and writes film reviews and other stuff on his blog, *Hydroplaning to Byzantium*.

**Cassandra Konz** is a senior attending Concordia College in Moorhead, MN. She is majoring in English Writing and Classical Studies, and has a minor in History. She has published poetry and fiction in Concordia's in-house journal *Afterwork*, and has had an academic essay published in *Inquiry Matters*. She is also the associate editor for the 2015 edition of *Afterwork*. After graduation, she intends to move halfway across the country, and become a librarian so she can be around the books she loves and continue to write.

**Zachary Riddle** is a senior at Central Michigan University. He is the President of The Poets' Collective, the Editor-in-Chief of *The Central Review*, and a soon-to-be graduate student in the creative writing program at CMU. He was accepted for publication in the spring 2013 edition of *The Central Review* (preceding employment), as well as the fall 2014 edition of *Temenos*. He loves all things related to literature, and presented a paper at a conference in Utah at the end of March 2015. He appreciates the time you spend reading these poems, and hopes, more than anything, that you enjoy

them.

**Carly Szabo** is a Writing Arts student at Rowan University. With her degree, she hopes to become an editor at a book publishing company. She hopes to continue to inspire others with her writing both in her everyday life and with her chosen career path. She aspires to publish her first book shortly after graduation.

**Zach Weber** is a writer and musician attending the University of Houston, where he studies creative writing. He is currently the Reviews editor for *Glass Mountain*, and his work has appeared in *The Aletheia*, and *Silver Birch Press*.