



THE POSITIVE PAGES

Little stories for a lot of Joy



By Room 206

Room 206 (PTY) Ltd
A writing and media hub of joy

Unit 1 Laura Court
Cnr 4th Ave and 13th street, Parkhurst Johannesburg
South Africa

www.room206.co.za / room206.blog.co.za



Original publication in English, ebook format
August 2020 © Room 206

Published by Room 206 (PTY) Ltd

Room 206 (PTY) Ltd asserts the moral right to be identified as the publisher and curator of this ebook. Contributors assert the moral right to be the authors of their own original stories in this ebook.

ISBN 978-0-620-88249-1

Designed by Lunar Gypsy Design
www.lunargypsy.co.za

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means in any form, electronic, photocopying or shared social media spaces without the prior written consent of the publishers and authors.



For the Joy Seekers. And, the Universe.

Gratitudes

To our team of dedicated, courageous women. Kaylin, Leanne and Tayla. Without your dedication, perseverance and unstoppable joy-seeking nature, this book would not have been possible. The year is 2020, the time is now. My gratitude to Kaylin for the magic in your pen, and for teaching us that Joy is the end goal, always; to Leanne for your focus and drive towards the debut launch and for showing us resilience through a mother's eyes; to Tayla for ensuring that every story carried its own illustrative weight in gold. You three are the lanterns of Room 206.

Preface

It started around 3am. Maybe 3:10am. Somewhere around there – the words ‘Positive Pages’ catapulted through my mind. Families were mourning the loss of loved ones, businesses were closing their cash registers, streets were laden with, well, nobody really – except Hopelessness. The world shut its doors from everything and everyone, and my eyes were wide open, staring at a 3am ceiling – with the words ‘Positive Pages’ bouncing between my ears. Some might call it a sign from the gods, others may deem it utter madness – ‘insomnia’ – during an unprecedented time that called for fear and panic and anything but, “positivity”. Where would it come from? This deep optimism in the time of Corona; where would the people find their will to smile, to rejoice, to share stories of joy when their sanitised hearts were breaking to the beats of a curve that no one could see and rising statistics that everyone could feel. It felt an impossible journey, and a feeble one too.

But the tapping wouldn’t stop, and the ceiling wouldn’t crumble. And so, against the very nature of social expectation in a time of the modern world’s most devastating virus – this ebook was born.

Over 170 little stories of joy, written by strangers and friends and communities and teachers and sinners and mothers and fathers and daughters that miss their grannies every day, and wanderers – oh the wanderers and their seeking hearts – and 16-year olds dreaming of the ocean waves behind their locked door. Stories of family, and gratitude and seeking, and tea. Watch out for the Wind and the Light and the elephants and many many miracles here; and unexpected celebrities that turn up at your fingers, and a yellow door – and a loaf of bread shared on a corner. In this book you will not find a beginning nor an end; what exists here is a raw, honest start from who we are and from where we are. Here you will find the pen, the paper, the soul reaching out to touch a hand, to wipe a tear to laugh out loudly at the silly significant memories we make; and to let us know through every broken wing – there is still the will to fly. And all will be better, in the morning.

Natasha

The Positive Pages is a compilation of original vignettes, one page each, that have been kept as close to their original format as possible to preserve the authentic nature of this project. These precious and deeply moving joy stories have travelled to be here, with you, in your hands, at your eyes from as far out as South Africa, Cape Town, Kwa Zulu Natal, Free State and upstate New York. There are messages in every one. My hope is that you find them.



PART ONE



Wind

by Jamie Conway

Do you appreciate the little things? Maybe you do and you don't want another person preaching about how important the little things are, because you already know and you're tired of hearing about it.

Maybe you don't care, or you try to care but life just gets so busy, you know? Well, let me tell

you a little story about when I learned how to appreciate those little things; It was in the wind.

I was sitting outside, drinking a glass of apple juice and it felt like I was the only person left in the entire world. I felt alone. It was late and it was cold; the wind was howling and rudely trying to tear the beanie off of my head. It was quiet, though.

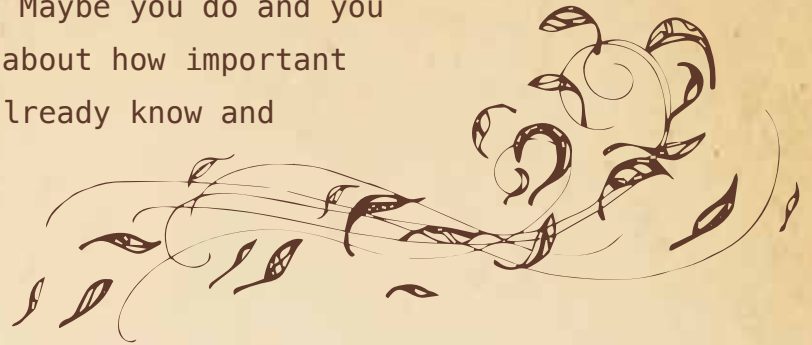
Until it wasn't.

I lifted my head at the sound, and felt the wind rush through my hair, successfully tearing my beanie off. It wasn't the sound of any one thing, but a merging of everything. It started soft, but the more I paid attention to it, the louder it became. It was the sound of Freddie Mercury's voice, performing in front of a roaring crowd at Live Aid. It was the sound of my mother crying with happiness when I first entered the world. It was the sound of my father's deep voice telling me to look for meaning in everything. It was the sound of Beethoven having a lover's quarrel through the keys of the piano. It was the sound of my neighbour's infant tripping on the carpet in the living room as he learned how to walk. It was the sound of hundreds of eager fingers clicking on entertaining websites. It was the sound of the pyramids being built, every grunt, every sigh. It was the sound of the Willow Trees shifting in the parks of Eden. It was the sound of despair and the sound of joy over thousands of years. It was the sound of infinite voices and infinite memories. The sound of infinity.

All being carried by the wind.

In the days that your soul is filled with noise, you will hear my voice. It's always right there, in the wind caressing your hair.

Never underestimate the power of the little things.



Baby

by Kirsten Deane

My little cousin, baby cousin, wraps his little hand over my thumb. He pinches a little but it doesn't hurt. He doesn't mean to anyway, he's focusing on my necklace in his mouth. I know it will be full of spit when he's done but I don't mind, I'm focusing on his eyes, they're taking a stroll all around the room.

He shouts a little and then a lot and then he cries and I think he sounds beautiful. His voice is loud and small and honest. He's crying and I'm bouncing him on my lap. He stops and looks at his mother on the other couch. He smiles when he sees her seeing him. They're in love.

I hold him and his head slips under my neck. He likes it there, he almost falls asleep. He cries again and his mother tells me to give him his bottle. She hands it to me and I give it to him. He falls back into the corner of my folded arm and drinks the milk. He rubs his head with his left hand and holds his bottle with the right. He's falling asleep.

He's crying again

And I laugh,

I love the sound of his life.



Plan

by Natasha Fracc

I had a plan 5 years ago. I planned to move to another city; to thrive in a position at a big international corporate; to get married; to publish my first book; to have a baby and to drive a banging new car. None of that happened. A lot else happened, but none of that.

Today, 7 years and some weeks later, I'm a pile of knots. I'm twisted inside and loathing myself for failing at my 5-year plan. What went wrong? How far off-track could I have veered to have missed the cues? Questions without answers spin round and round in my head. I lament a lot. I distract myself with late nights at the office, bags of potato chips and alcohol. I'm a self-confessed mess most of the time, owning my faults publically – because when you're single, you do that – you own shit publically – but everyone knows, I'll never actually do anything about it. Secretly, I know this too. I'll just keep complaining about what went wrong in the world (my world) and how unjust the system is and that there are no good men left out there and that I'll probably die alone, with my potato chips – and on the off chance, if anyone might know where I could get a Hexagon Pastry Cutter I'd be grateful.

When you miss your shot at The 5-year Plan, life becomes a series of random rants and inner disturbances. Because primarily you're looking for something to blame, always. Including the lack of response you may get for the Hexagon Pastry Cutter request in which case you'll blame social media for making a fool of you and/or everyone out there for being absolute ignorant a-holes.

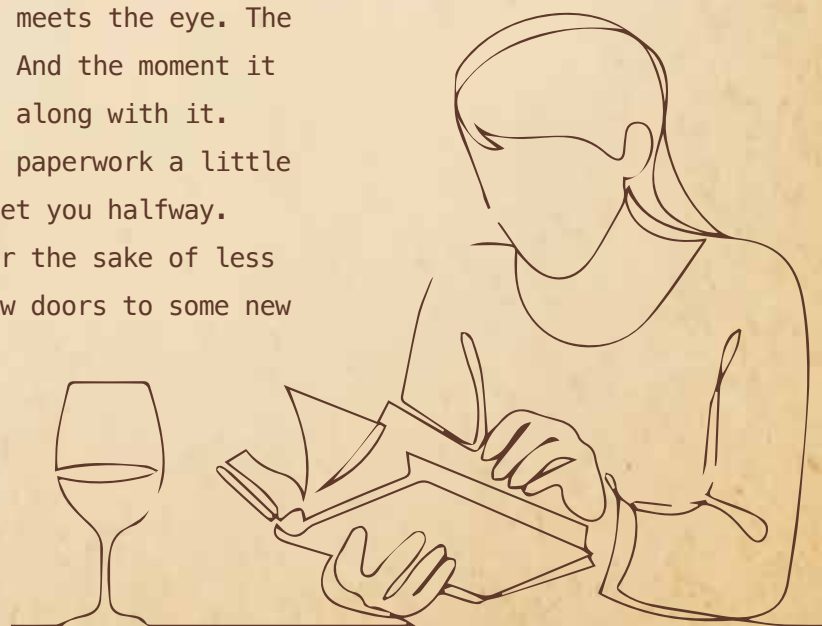
But here's the rub – that plan was never a plan at all. It was a control chart of perfection; an ideal timeline of events that your dreams held ransom. I realised one inconceivable night, somewhere between a face mask, tears and Biral™, that life just doesn't work this way. When so many things happen outside of "The Grand Plan", you're bound to be disappointed; but you're also bound to be gifted with reflection, evolution and a depth of

field that holds more substance than what meets the eye. The plan will change. I can promise you this. And the moment it changes, the conversation needs to change along with it.

Imagine the possibilities of shifting the paperwork a little to the left or deleting it entirely to meet you halfway.

Imagine redesigning your Life Contract for the sake of less loathing; for the sake of opening some new doors to some new plans; for the sake of love,

partnership or even a new career to come find you? It's all in the swing I realised. The ability to be fluid against the clauses of your own creation, is what will ultimately keep the pastry cutters from your door.



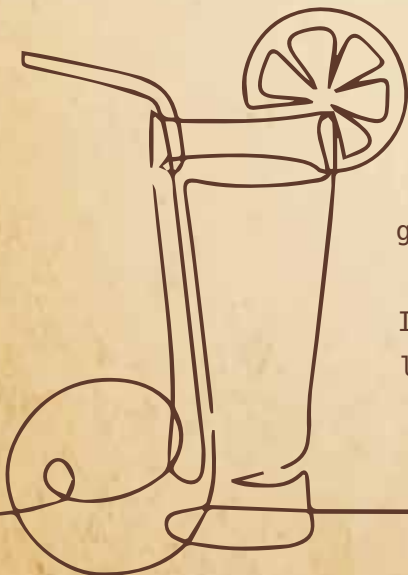
Lemonade

by Josie Roux

Most mornings, I gulp down my coffee, maybe singeing my tongue as I do and then rush out of the house, inevitably late for a class or meeting or appointment. As I speed off, I run through my to-do list in my head, my schedule for the day, making a mental note of the emails I have yet to read and the messages I have yet to respond to. My eyes are turned inwards to my mental filing cabinet. I'm on autopilot. The days are fulfilling but they are full. They rush by me. "How was your week?" I get asked on a Friday and I have to stop and pause... "Wow, I don't even remember... I've been so busy!"

And then, suddenly, it all changed. Everything slowed down, as if someone had switched the video speed of life to 0,75.

Now, in the mornings, I drink my coffee outside. A few Summers ago, we made a bird feeder out of an empty coke bottle and hung it from a tree in the garden. I've always known that the birds (and some cheeky squirrels) use it because I have to refill it every few weeks. But before the world slowed down, I never knew that one of the birds has a little red chest and his mate a green one. They come every morning around the same time and take turns having breakfast. I've always known, of course, that there is a little church down the road. But before the world slowed down, I never heard the bells chiming at noon because by noon I'm usually in my fourth meeting of the day, far from the little church. While driving to the grocery store, I've always seen the flash of shocking pink that is the Bougainvillea on the corner. Now that the world's slowed down, though, I get to stroll to the grocery store and I get to stop at the corner and take in the beauty of that Bougainvillea. I even have a small cutting of the lovely flowers sitting on my coffee table. In the past, I used to smile at my neighbour if we happened to arrive back to our semi-detached homes at the same time. But I didn't know her name, or her cat's for that matter. I've always known that she has a lemon tree in her backyard but before the world slowed down, she'd never put a few of them on the little wall separating our worlds.



Now that we're living at 0.75 speed, my eyes are turned outwards to the birds, I taste my coffee, I breathe in the morning. And I take the time to be very grateful. Even though things are scary and uncertain and strange, I take the time to be grateful that I am safe and healthy, because it is a privilege.

I call a friend; "How was your week?" she asks. "I made lemonade!" I reply.

Blessed

by Chantel De Beer

Father Tom's prayer flows through the air with the breeze, creating a sad harmony. Their song adds to her chills while the coffin descends into the earth. Her tears feel cold against her cheeks. The weather matches her mood, grey, overcast and damp. Family and friends walk off silently, leaving her to her tears, thoughts and loneliness. What is she going to do now? She just buried her soul mate and best friend. Who is she without him? She wonders as she, too, decides to leave him behind in the earth. She feels hollow like an empty shell.

She reaches the end of the bricked path in the cemetery and just before she is about to walk through the rusty gates, she gets the urge to turn around. Turning around, the clouds slowly disappear, exposing the sun, shining its comfort onto her face. Desperate for it, she closes her eyes, turning her face upwards towards its welcoming heat.

Bringing warm, fresh tears to her eyes, the now hot breeze wraps her in a loving embrace as God whispers in her ears...

"Blessed be, my child, embrace the second chance I've given you. Just be you, my beautifully and wonderfully made creation."



Detour

by Denise Richards

Way back in 1974, a teenage boy met a teenage girl and they dated for a while. They met at the park across the road from her school, and at the movies on Saturday afternoons. They sat in the back row, holding hands, and he would walk with her to the train station afterwards. She wrote him love letters that she never gave to him, and he wrote her name all over his bedside lampshade. Life got in the way, her parents left the area, and she had to change schools. They lost contact but never forgot.

One night, in September 2016, she was playing music and a song from that time triggered the memories of those days, prompting her to look for him. She found his Facebook profile, and sent him a message, not really expecting a reply but, the following day, he responded.

He remembered every little detail about her. He remembered where she had lived and the names of her friends. He remembered riding his yellow Chopper to visit her at night, and how her Dad paced up and down the passage outside her bedroom while he was there. They swapped endless stories of the detours that life had taken each of them on, and soon decided it was time to meet up again. She booked a flight and they counted down the days until it was finally time to make that flight.

He was waiting at arrivals, watching for that familiar face, and as she walked through the doors, their eyes met. Without realising it, she started running- running into the arms of the past, but also running towards the arms of her future.

From that moment on, all the years that had passed just disappeared and they picked up from where they left off all those years before. They've been together and inseparable ever since. He was her first love, he will be her last. After a 42 year detour, the circle is complete.



Alive

by Lyn Mansour

The majestic mountains stood to attention and welcomed my return. The cold breeze embraced me with its warmth. Its pureness engulfed every part of me. My senses were infused with an indescribable sense of peace and serenity. It was in that instant that I knew, I could finally exhale in this Valley that one day, I would call home.

The low-hanging puffs of pink and white moved with God's paint brush against the canvas of blue. They frolicked in the wind, caressing the mountain peaks as the sun came out to play amongst the wetness of the day. The Valley was in full bloom. The mood was pure joy. I feasted my eyes on the vibrant colours, this hypnotic kaleidoscope that lay before me. My spirit exploded. I was alive and exhaled once more! A new season had come to spawn. The flora and fauna in all their magnificence were celebrating and dancing to the rhythm of the crisp air that flowed in between. Nature knew that this was the start of magical new beginnings.

As the sounds of rustling leaves continued to crescendo amongst the bushes and the tall trees, in the silence I stood, feasting my eyes and ears on the symphony of life before me. My spirit was now free to soar, to create, to dream, to rise once more. I raised my hands to the heavens and touched the future that lay ahead, learning from all that was lived yesterday, yesteryear and long before. A new day had dawned.



Breakfast

by Manuela Roos

A crisp breeze gently blows. Sitting on my patio, smelling the fresh clean air after a night of gentle down pour.

The sunlight casting her beautiful rays through the trees, catching the glass dream catcher creating a kaleidoscope of magical colours.

The flowers are boasting with their magnificent colours of white,

magenta and orange. The trees seem taller and luminous green today, and so they should, thriving after the rain. They seem so alive, I can feel their energy. I smile, a big warm heartfelt smile. I pray "Thank you, for this day".



Before me on a tray, the aroma of my brewed Jasmine tea, of course, in my favourite Chinese tea pot. Somehow, the tea just tastes better in these small cups. On the side a freshly baked almond croissant with a touch of butter and a drizzle of honey.

I am surrounded by God's Grace. Simplicity. Clarity. Gratitude. Serenity. "Breakfast with the Universe" as I like to call it. One does not have to go very far to feel the Divine presence of all that is. One just has to be aware and present. One does not have to travel very far to get that feeling of peace and calm, it is all within. The gift of another day, the gift of the rising sun, the gift of rain, the gift of life. The gift of all my five senses, to be able to see, hear, smell, touch and feel. Then of course, there is the sixth sense. One only needs to tap into that and a new world opens and waits.

What does the Universe have in store for me today? I wonder! I will send love ahead of me today, blessing everyone in my path. Yes, with Grace, in Love and Light, I will enter my new day.

Water

by EB Maphumulo

Water is the most essential part of nature. Without water, all the living things would collapse. It is the pillar of every human being. I remember when I grew up in the village we used to wake up in the morning and travel a long distance to fetch water from a small stream. It was an enjoyable chore to do outside the house. But the washing itself- was tough. We went to the river repeatedly because there was a lot of washing. Water is everyone's relative, younger or old, literate or illiterate. I remember when mother was very sick, she kept on asking for water.

"Nana, I need water to drink my tablets." She would shout at me.

I was glad when she recovered from the illness. She had gone to work and she bought us a Jojo tank. During summer season we stored a lot of water in our tank and we didn't encounter any problems. Winter came and our vegetable garden demanded water. The spinach and cabbage plants were dying. Our councilor came to our rescue. He organized the water lorry to fill our tank. We started to irrigate our garden and the plants were pleased. I felt sorry for the people who didn't have jojo tanks. They had to wake up early in the morning to queue for the water lorry. Our stream had long dried up and it was bad.

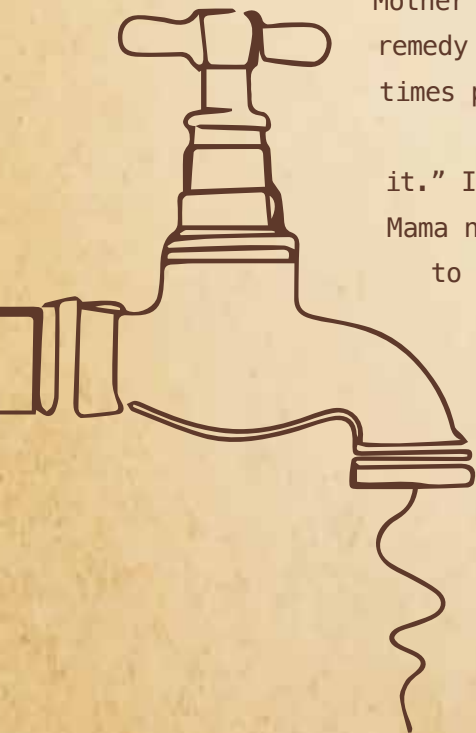
What I missed most is how we spent our leisure time in the river. On Saturdays we used to go swimming. I enjoyed how we splashed water with my youngest sister Mpho. My mother didn't like it but we sneaked in when she had gone to town to buy groceries. I prayed that our river did not dry up like our stream. Water cooled our bodies, especially in summer. One day mother informed us that a disease called corona virus had attacked the country. We were extremely worried when she told us that there was no vaccination for the virus. My sister cried, she was scared.

"Mama, does it mean we are going to die? I am afraid."

Mother was a brave woman. She smiled wildly. "Don't worry my girls, the remedy is simple. Just wash your hands with soap and water every day, many times per day, for twenty seconds, and you won't be affected."

"Really Mama? Nothing else, just soap and water? I can't believe it." I exclaimed.

Mama nodded her tiny head. That was our shield of safety. We all started to use soap and water to stay away from the virus. From that day we refrained from going to swim because we were afraid of being contaminated by diseases. Many village children swam in the river. We stayed at home. Mama sold vegetables and she managed to buy us a small television. We were very happy and for the whole day we stayed indoors and watched TV. To our surprise Mama installed a tap in our yard and we never ran short of water again.

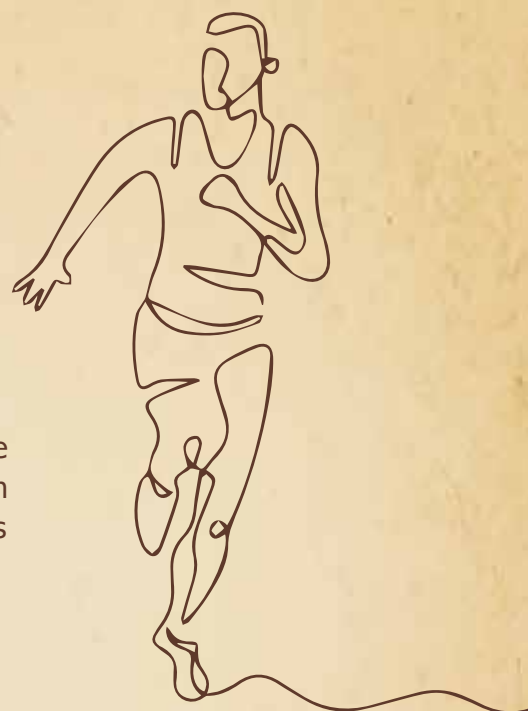


Determination

by John Kruger

The year was 1995. Comrades Marathon down run. This one was special for two reasons: how and why, I had run a few before and each one had a special place in my heart and this one was to become a classic.

The world I realised was not a cut and dry place. My training programme buckled into frivolous uncertainty. An injury early into the training programme required a few weeks rest. Then a bad dose of flu. It was like trying to walk up the down escalator. Then came the crunch... "Hell hath no fury like a tog bag stolen!" On the eve of the Bergville/Ladysmith ultramarathon my tog bag was nicked out my vehicle. This would have been a good test of my preparedness. I was not meant to do the Comrades this year. I started collecting stamps. That was until the phone call...



Although I belonged to a registered club, I had joined a social running group 10 years earlier which had elevated me from fun runner to fanatical runner. The springboard to better things. I had been keeping in touch with them and a few weeks had passed since I had left the circus so that even if I didn't do a training run with them, I would at least pop in for a drink afterwards.

After the first round of drinks, Eric, the road captain, leaned over the counter and retrieved a parcel which he handed to me. I looked inside but could not see a thing – my eyes were blurred with tears. The guys had chipped in and bought me a tog bag loaded with running gear. Shoes, the works! "Kroggels" he said. (My runners nick name) "We'll see you at the start." That was the message. I had to adopt an "I can" attitude. I was going to do it. Not for me but for the guys.

On the morning of the race I took a large tub of Vaseline and rubbed some into all the crevices. I then took the rest of it and massaged it into my brain because I knew that part of me was going to need all the help it could get, I was determined to finish.

10 hours and 42 minutes later "only the fittest shall survive" became a misnomer. Reasonable fitness, sound of limb, will power, the correct mindset can get you through Comrades in the required time. I had just proved it. But it was something I would not want to do again. I hurt in places I didn't know I had places. The best part of the run was the few seconds it took me to cross the finish line. With a smile as big as Kingsmead itself, my medal in hand, I walked slowly and painfully to my waiting family.

My body was broken, but my spirit wasn't.

Dolce

by Kaylin Michelle

“Il dolce far niente,” I let the words gush from my tongue like sweet, holy water. They taste delicious as they dance, and fall. I always had an aversion to sweetness. Didn’t like sweet things. It always felt like an unnecessary coating. Trying to make up for something. Missing something.

But here, in Italy, sweetness is something else. Sweetness has depth. It’s something inside rather than on top. It’s more like a handmade truffle than a jelly tot. The Italians– they know this sweetness–with–depth, this heavenly hedonism. It sways in the lifestyle and tumbles through the language.

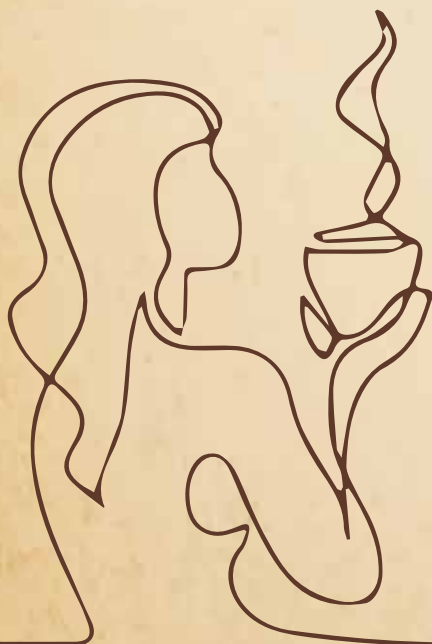
“La dolce vita”– the sweet life.

“Dolce stil novo”– “the sweet new style”, a name given to an important literary movement in the 13th century that was centred around love.

And my favourite: “Il dolce far niente”– the sweetness of doing nothing.

In doing nothing, in stillness, there is depth. There is wisdom. In doing nothing, there is enough quiet to hear the truth of our deepest desires. In doing nothing, there is enough clarity to see all the love that is before us. In doing nothing, we can be everything. In doing nothing there is freedom, there is richness, there is healing, there is peace. In doing nothing we find deeper satisfaction in the things we do when we do them.

And this is pretty sweet. That kind of rich truffle sweetness.



“Il dolce far niente,” these words dance on my tongue. I think I have acquired a taste for the Italian kind of sweetness. I think I like the love-and-red-wine-drenched kind of sweetness, the kind that moves gently in rolling mountains and behind black and white films. The sweetness beneath all things heavenly.

Illuminate

by Rowena Claudia Fortuin

The sun, the moon and the stars. Every day, they shine their light for us. Beautiful spectacles that illuminate from billions of miles away. Even when there's no one witnessing the way they shine, they shine still. She used to think that she needed an audience to flourish. They would cheer her on and applaud her. Standing ovations and applause can be addictive. They released endorphins that fueled her to do more. She sought validation for her deeds. She craved an encore.



Little did she realise that external validation can crush as much as it uplifts. It can make you doubt your own ability to illuminate the world. In her hours of solitude, when the praises ceased, she was forced to reflect. She pondered how she could still radiate light when there was no one watching.

One night, she stared at the moon. She admired the way it lit up the night. People were asleep. They weren't there to appreciate the moon in its splendour. Yet, it shone.

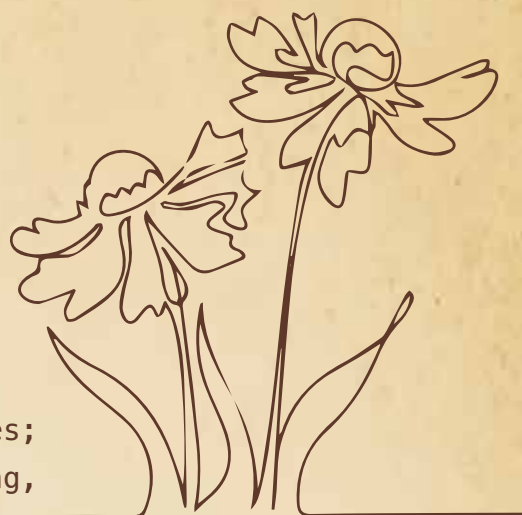
An epiphany dawned on her. The sun, the moon and the stars don't need an audience. They simply light the way for us. Regardless of the shortage of applause. She faced the mirror and began to clap for herself. Like the moon, unfazed by the lack of praise, she shone still.



Glimpse

by Carla Guedes

There is a beautiful simplicity in the colourful happiness of flowers that makes spotting them during my “lockdown walks” an absolute gift and an instant moment of joy, a glimpse of happiness. Even though it is technically Autumn, and not really the peak of flower season, there are still enough flowers and enough variety to make for amazing photo opportunities; smiling opportunities. In the era of social distancing, smiling eyes above masks, and limited trips into the world outside of our homes, it is nice to rely on the presence of flowers for a semblance of normality, a semblance of consistency.



Please do not get me wrong. My passion for the beauty of flowers is not a newfound interest. From the very earliest memories that I have, flowers have added color and interest to my various life events. Celebrations were planned with the season’s flowers in mind, just to make sure that we could make centerpieces that looked their absolute best (along with being the cheapest flowers on the market at any given time but that is a story for another piece of writing). Even when in high school, in preparing for the annual competitive flower show, I would plan my entries based on what I could find in our home’s garden – which generally amounted to miniature roses in a precious, baby pink. These little works of art smelled sweet, folded their petals perfectly, and would reliably bloom around the same time as the flower show. There truly is something powerfully creative in using what is readily available, rather than what you can buy at the local mall or store.

Back to my flower walks; my moments of solitude during designated hours of freedom, an incredible gift in and of themselves. These walks filled with nature’s beautiful mandalas present me with choices and it is up to me to be decisive. I have chosen to hunt out these examples of nature’s intricate complexity, its delicate simplicity, and to photograph them all for the simple purpose of sharing them on social media. This is my contribution to hopefully making a difference to other people’s realities, other people’s lockdown experiences. If one person feels a little better for seeing the reds, purples and oranges that I post, and experiences a little of the joy that I feel upon finding them in my mornings, then it has all been worth it.

Insurance

by Jamie Conway

Yesterday, my best friend told me that she's afraid to fall in love, because love gives birth to sorrow. Maybe that's true, a truth we're all desperately trying to escape. We've all been burned by love in some way; I've been burned in such a way that it sometimes feels like my own flame will never shine again, never dance with another's again.

But we still dream in kaleidoscopes. Our dreams of happiness are so colourful that we cover our eyes and go into love blind, hoping it will protect us. We think that putting a mask up will stop vulnerability and keep us safe, but you shouldn't want to feel safe. Hoping for love is like daring the universe to show you its dangers, but if you want to feel alive you need to take the risk of pain.

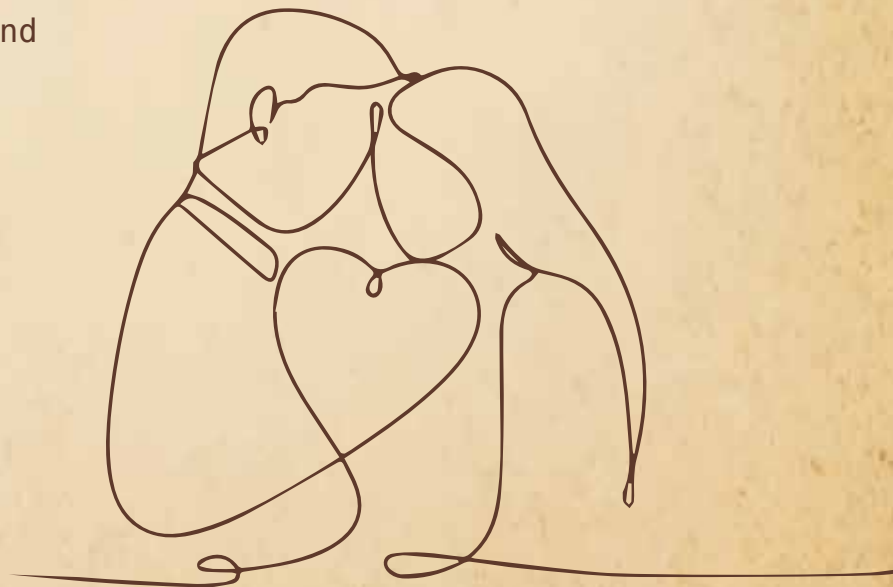
Love is not safe, but we live for it and we live because of it. It gives us something to live for, it ensures that we live our lives completely, and that is its own kind of safety;

love is life insurance.

And by the end of it, we sit alone in the waiting room. It's messy. Everything is messy.

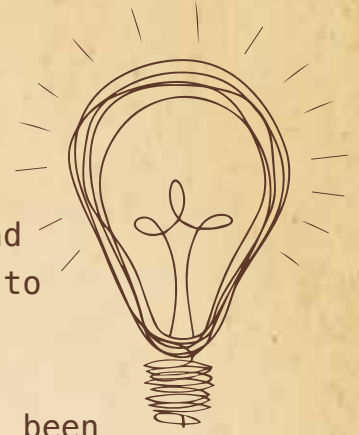
But when the operation is over and we stand with shaking hands, expecting the worst,

we fall in love with new eyes.



Light

by Dr Diane Preddy



In my work as a psychologist, I have noticed how the word `light` can shift a person`s perspective in a positive and joyful way. It can create a shift (albeit subconsciously) to increased optimism, self-esteem and personal power:

For example, I am working with an overweight lady who has been battling to `lighten` her weight and mood for a long time. She lives alone and is not working at present. She lost her job and her cat died. She has a love-hate relationship with food and the world in general, and it became obvious to me that a huge shift in focus and perspective was necessary.

Hence I introduced the word, concept and value of `light` as a project and goal in our sessions and as homework exercises. The results were amazing! 3 things happened:

1. Through visualisation of her lighter body she started losing weight;
2. Through having a different focus and goal her mood and self-awareness improved
3. Through repeating the word `light` throughout the day, she gained control over her thoughts, feelings and actions.

She was asked to look for light in its natural and man-made forms, to think and write about the meaning of the word `light` in different cultures and individuals and to choose it repeatedly.

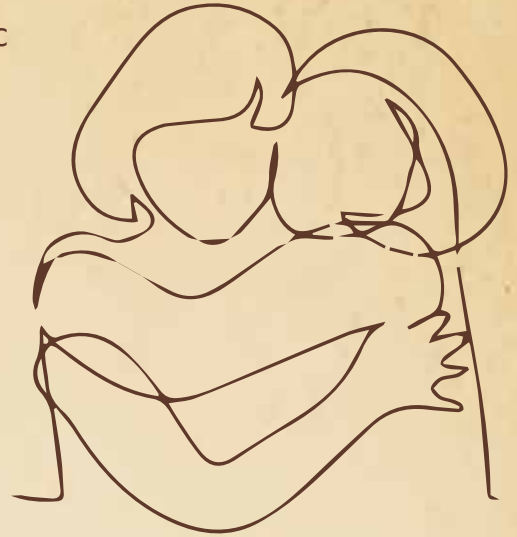
This concept of free-will or choice gained significance for her and, in my opinion, was the most powerful shift in her subconscious, conscious and superconscious awareness.

So please remember that you become what you think and concentrate on! You are your choices, and have greater personal power and self-determination than you know!

Maya

by Natasha Fracc

I've come to know a little girl named Maya. She's the daughter of a brave and beautiful woman. Maya is 7. She just started Grade 1. She told me that she is the leader of a Kind Club at school. It's her club, The Kind Club, she started it. No one asked her to do it, she said. She did it because she really wanted to. And it's a fun club, she said. And also, it's only for kind children, and for children who want to be kind to others. And she started it because of the bullies at school, she said. The ones who shout names at her, and push her around, and tell her to 'stop hugging people Maya'. "I mean, I'm just hugging I'm not doing anything wrong," she says to me with her twinkle eyes and shrugging shoulders. When did hugging become a fault in our stars, I thought.



Maya's Kind Club is not a club. It's an answer to a cry; it's a lamp switch in a dark room. It's a revolution on the playground, in the classroom, even the office. And so I decided I wanted to be part of Maya's Kind Club too. "But you're too big," she says. "It's only for children." But I love to hug people too, I tell her." Little Maya pauses in our conversation for a brief minute and searches her little mind for a big response. "Okay," she says, "you can join us!"

I promised Maya I would be kinder to everyone I met, and that I wouldn't let her down and that I would hug people because it matters. But really, I was promising myself all this – because somewhere between being a little person and a big person, I forgot that Kindness is not an innate human quality inside us. It's a learned action, a feeling word that sits deep beneath a pile of pain, responsibilities, losses and failures. It's delicate, Kindness – like a string of silk waving in the wind – which is why no doubt it needs a Club of its own. Kindness is also a weapon of mass compassion that can overcome fear and loneliness and angry boys that have never been hugged. Maya knows this at 7 years old. Our teachers, our parents and our world leaders could take some notes.*

** Mother of Maya, your daughter is going to change the world.*

Pandemic

by Tasneem Ebrahim

I have always imagined a pandemic to arrive like everything destructive always does. With strikes of lightening, booming thunder and merciless torrents of rain. The Pandemic of 2020 didn't arrive with all that pomp and glory; in fact it slipped into countries, scaled borders and invaded lives silently. Maybe that itself was the destruction: the silence that shattered lives, smashed away livelihoods and obliterated the idea of "normal" for the human race.

Covid -19- there isn't anyone who lives that doesn't know this name. Perhaps, because of the personal nature of this pandemic I should refer to it as 'Corona'. This moniker conjures up an image of a spectre with goddess-like features bathed in an aura of green. She slips in and takes over, claiming souls as her bounty.

Is she evil? Many would think so but I have an impression of her as a symbol of reflection. She came in sans a sound but she made us take notice. She claimed one soul-people sympathised. Then she claimed another-people sympathised yet again. She went about slowly encroaching the personal space of humans-and suddenly she had claimed masses of people. Then we were forced to take notice.

The world stopped spinning in its crazy spiral and all that once was came crashing to the ground. We had to do something. Governments sent people back into their homes. For the first time in forever for most of us, we only had each other. We had to make sacrifices to survive. We sacrificed nights out with friends for board games with our families. We sacrificed holidays abroad for camping in the back yard. We looked to our spouses and children for comfort. We were forced to know the true meaning of survival. Survival wasn't going out and making money, survival was staying home and rediscovering love.

Restaurants and bars stand closed with wind-swept leaves as the only patrons, strewn in the doorway. Kitchen tables are filled to capacity, food once bought simply for sustenance is now something more-meals shared between families. Dad no longer wines and dines clients while his children eat spaghetti and meatballs in front of the television. Mom doesn't use the children's supper time to do the laundry. Meal times are now family times.

Old paints and palettes are dusted off as art is reborn. Words dance on pages of books long forgotten. Pandemic, did destroy. It destroyed the notion of 'normal' and it resurrected the idea of life, love and living.

Corona- The goddess of destruction with her silent warfare invaded and cleared the earth. Grounding now meant staying home, animals roamed the earth with joyful abandon. Venice fell silent to the chug of gondolas and plumes of smoke. Sediment rested at the bottom of canals whilst dolphins frolicked in waters previously denied to them. All creatures moved with no fear because the greatest Pandemic was contained, which is man and his want to control everything.



Kostas

by Kaylin Michelle

Kostas lived off the land. Kostas and his cherry tomatoes, and his almonds, and his zucchinis, his figs, his goats, the vineyard and the terrible organic wine; Kostas and the crystalline Aegean sea all around this beautiful, lost, tiny, secret island. Kostas lived off the land and made just a few euros a day- selling bags of almonds.

Kostas lived off the land and bought only eggs and cigarettes. He apparently also had a side hustle of selling domain names. He said he had millions in the bank. But he lived off the land for now.



It was the summer; Kostas and I made sun-dried figs. I sweated and burned under the Greek sun; I was chased by goats and poisoned by fig juice. And Kostas, lived off the land. He napped on the porch and bathed in the sea. He was friends with the fancy people from England and France who had summer homes and yachts on the island. We went to their parties. We'd whiz through the mountains on the motorbike, drunk, I'd be balancing a salad on the back and he'd yell eccentricates to me like "you know I met Bowie once, Kaylin?"

Kostas lived off the land and had an endless stream of visitors on the farm. There was the French painter who was working on a portrait of Kostas, and who stole lemons from us every day. There was the owner of the bakery- a local- who wanted to marry me and brought an offering of baklava every afternoon. There was Jean-Pierre- a 75 year old Parisian who was never seen without his pipe. He shipped his Ferrari from Paris every summer to the island as he wasn't really one for walking around under that hot sun. The Ferrari didn't fair well amongst the community of donkey carts.

God only knows who Kostas had really been before. But now, he lives off the land and he's the closest thing to freedom I've ever known.

Smile

by Daniel Tomur

We leave our homes, and brave a virus.

That breath of fresh air fills the lungs with hope.

Empty streets and empty roads but nature reclaimed.

We pass community members.

Families enjoying their morning allowance.

Our smiles of acknowledgment radiate through the sheltering masks.

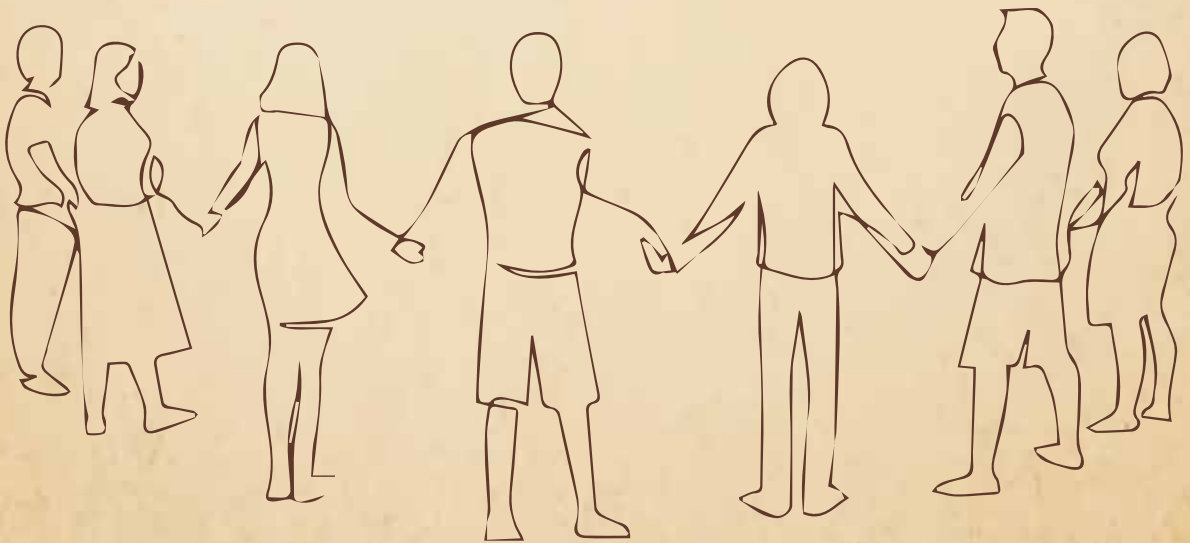
The masks are temporary, we smile with our eyes.

Human connection not lost, just changed.

Remembering that collective perseverance and positivity is also contagious.

We return to our homes, happier, lighter.

We hope. We listen. We question. We love. We wait.



Warmth

by Kirsten Deane

It's been a few weeks of quarantine now, the days aren't really important anymore. I just woke up, my eyes are still closed and the duvet is still up to my chin. I'm wondering if I should get up today, if I have to. I hope the answer's no. I'm warm under here, I forget that the world has stopped when I'm under here. I stretch my bones by reaching for the wall behind my head. I touch it and it's cold with little bumps. The touch of concrete always did something to my skin, something like shrivel up and feel shy. I rub my fingers along the wall for a bit.

I've decided to open my eyes now. I'm being brave, facing the same ceiling that looks down at me every day. There's nothing new there besides a little fly, and he's moving slowly, he's frustrating me. He feels safe up there, though. He knows I'm not tall enough to reach up there, not strong enough to jump until I get him. I really don't want to get up today.

I can hear my dog next to the far right side of the bed. I'm on the left. I hear her ruffle the green carpet she sleeps on. I hear her panting and her walk up and down, she's expecting the world to move today. She's expecting me to get out of bed and get ready to leave the house. Her routine is spending the day without me, she doesn't understand why I'm always here in my pyjamas, with her. She walks over to the middle of the room (I still haven't left my warm bed, I like the warmth here) and I know because I hear her long nails scratching the newspaper that I laid down for her to pee on.

My dog decides to come over to my side of the bed. I look down over the side and she's panting, wagging her tail. She really wants to go outside, I think that's admirable. "okaaay, let's get you outside," I say to her as I lift the duvet off me and throw it to the right of the bed. She's excited, she's jumping up my leg and going back and forth between me and the patio door.

I unlock the patio door and open it and she runs outside. The sun is bright and it shocks my eyes, so I squint. I feel the sun on my arms and my forehead. I feel the sun warming up the top of my head. I stand there, focusing on every part of my body that is catching this warmth. I'm feeling grateful for the sun now.

The sun
That has found its way all around the world and back to me in the morning.

The sun
That has touched you and them and the others.

The sun
That has kept us together.
The sun that brought a warm life to me, to us in quarantine.



Acceptance

by Taskeen Salajee

Acceptance—one word, yet so many meanings to it. It could mean acceptance of yourself or acceptance of another; acceptance that you sometimes can't change something no matter how hard you try or even acceptance that you're not the right one and you never will be. It doesn't come easily either. It fights and pulls your hair, it hits you and tells you that you don't deserve it and for a long time, you believe it. You believe that you are not worth Acceptance, for it means letting go of yourself and surrendering to the unknown.

So you trudge on with your day, with your life. You try to find solace in this world without Acceptance but it gnaws at your insides until you're just skin and bones walking around. You convince yourself that you don't need it, that you can live without it, when in your heart you know you can't even go one minute without thinking about it.

And then one day you wake up and the world looks just a tiny bit brighter, the colors on your coffee mug look a tiny bit livelier and your step has a tiny bounce in it. The doorbell rings and you can't help the smile that spreads across your face. And when you fling the door open, you can't help but launch yourself into the arms of Acceptance and breathe in deeply, loving the smell of it. You can't help but bury your face in its shoulder and grin at the fact that it's finally here and it hasn't abandoned you.



Bliss

by Skylar Darrigan

In my eyes, our South African soil is the most fruitful. Our cultures are the richest and most beautiful and our people are timeless, self made and built from the ground up. Currently flourishing in resilience.

Now, in my thirties when people ask me what I wish for or what I want for my birthday, I say; give me the gift of kindness, understanding, moral support and freedom to express my individuality.

Please; send me hugs. Sing me happy birthday in Afrikaans. Take photos for me when you braai or send me a boomerang of everyone in the backyard or at the beach. Share with me the good, the better and the best that is yet to come.

These are the things you value more when you are an expat or when you have lived abroad for some time and have not been home in a while.

I am blessed to be home right now. I was lucky enough to have met new additions in the family, attend a wedding, met new spouses, bonded with my friends' children, visited our natural landscapes, fed the squirrels in Cape Town Gardens, played piano again after so many years, and got behind the wheel to take a drive to clear my head and practice gratitude for my picturesque surroundings. I did all of this and more before lock-down commenced.

My birthday was toward the end of lock-down, so no big gathering was possible. I went to visit my god mother the day before my birthday. As soon as I entered the house, she packed my bag with their huge granadillas, sweet nectarines and some pink lady apples. She knows how much I love fruit. And her knowing me so well, is one of the most meaningful treasures I carry with me wherever I go.

She said: Ma's child, tomorrow is your big day. What would you like for your birthday this year? To which I excitedly replied: A banana bread please! Ma's banana bread!

One of my aunts Whatsapped me the day before as well and sent me a voice-note saying: Hey where are you? This is the first birthday in so many years that you get to celebrate at home. Tomorrow is a big day! Go to bed early. Sweet dreams.

I realised then that both of my elders called my birthday, My Big Day. The term "big day" is usually reserved for couples about to get married, more specifically the blushing bride. And most people get married only once. I am blessed enough to celebrate my birthday every year. We all are.

Right now, every day is a Big Day and tastes as sweet as a warm slice of freshly baked banana bread!



Change

by Jo-Beth St Haskins

Life is forever flowing like a river,
it is our job to flow with it.

Resisting the changes life brings
upon us, is only harmful to us.

Change is a part of life, it is a
part of growth.

By willingly accepting the changes life presents
us we allow ourselves to blossom to our fullest capacity.

Choose to always see the bright side and trust that CHANGE IS GOOD.

Trust that what happens in life is happening for a reason, be it
good or bad it is happening for a reason.

Instead of resisting and avoiding obstacles, embrace them and
discover what you're truly capable of.

Listen to the universe—it is trying to teach you something valuable.

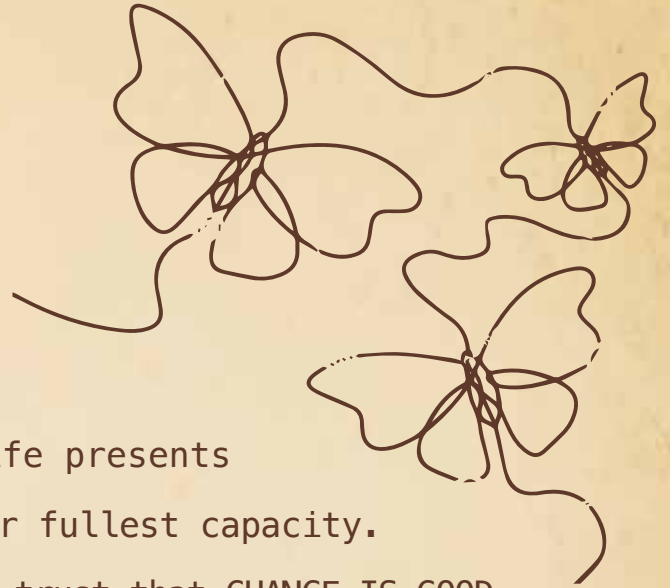
Pay attention, class is always in session.

Trust in yourself and in your capabilities of change.

Understand that evolution is part of life and that it is good.

Embrace change, like the caterpillar and become a butterfly.

Trust in the process of CHANGE.



Shower

by Kirsten Deane

The days have been tough lately. Mostly the ones from Monday 'til Sunday. I've been feeling sad again. I think you all know what I mean, right? The kind of sad that makes moving feel unnecessary. Anyway, I'm struggling to look forward to anything, it all seems to be dressed up as a brick wall the days, the nights, the in-betweens.

I still allow the day to move through me. I do the dishes, do some work, play with my dogs. I remind myself that a huge part of being human is often just pushing through. That brick wall can bruise my hands all it wants. I don't mind a few broken bones.

Sometimes I don't recognize my writing, too. I put the words on the page but once I take a second look, I'm not sure where they came from. And I get angry and I crumple it up. I don't throw it away though, because even when I'm lost, a part of me still knows that I can come back to the writing. And then I just get tired again and a nap becomes the next logical step in patience.

The day gets colder the closer it comes to the end. Not the type of cold on my skin but the cold in my bones. I feel sick, nauseous. I drink some water and feel the anxiety in my throat washing down. There's something about water, you know?

At about six forty-five (normally), I decide to take a shower. I undress myself a few seconds before I open the hot tap to steam up the bathroom. I like to feel the cold air on my bare body. There's something about the air, you know?

I open the taps, wait until the temperature is just right. I check it every few seconds by putting my hand under the running water. My fingers move freely under there, there's something about it, you know?



Finally I get into the shower and let the water cover me my hair, my chest, my back, my legs. I'm not afraid of the waters intimacy with me. I close my eyes and let the water run over my face. It touches my lips and I've never had a kiss quite like that before. I'm not nervous.

I spend some time in there, just feeling the water dress itself around my limbs. We're naked but we're modest. There's something about the shower, you know?

It washes away the scent of the day from your skin,

It takes that sadness with it down the drain.

There's something about the water. It rinses the doubt off your skin and reminds you who you are.

Happy

by Karlien Cillié

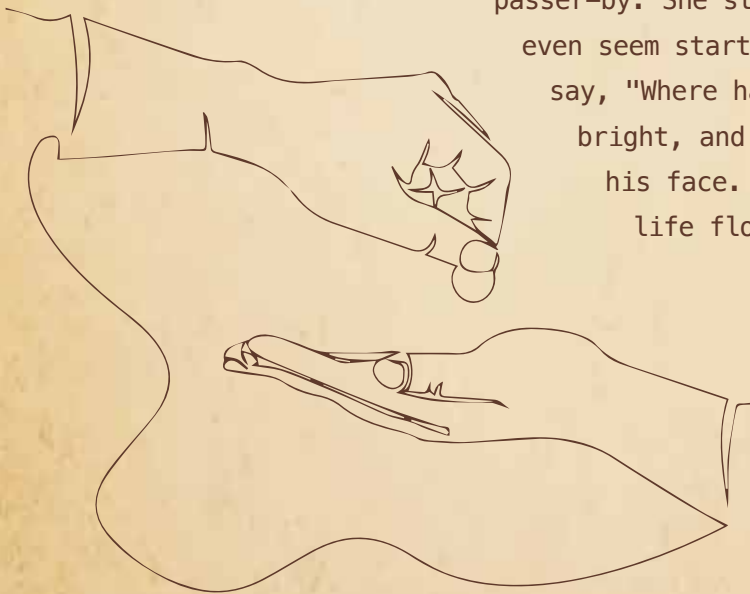
She sees him every day as she makes her day trip to the park. He sits there with his big brown eyes, tangled clothes, bare feet, and an overcoat that has more holes in it than the wool itself. She is one of many who walks past the squatting figure on his Checkers box, looking another way when he holds out his little hands for a bit of money he can throw in the old milk container or just something to eat. Because if you give once, you are a target, and they want more and more every day.

Yet, every time she walks by and doesn't look at him, it breaks her heart. She does not want to look at him. She can't look at him. Guilt? No. Is she ashamed that someone will see her feed this soul? No. Heartbroken? Yes. Lots. Bernard was around the same age when a drunk driver hit him in this same street. Twenty three years later, but it feels like yesterday. Her heart is just as broken. She would never be able to look into her boy's big brown eyes again.

She can't sleep that night. Tosses and turns. Her heart and head are fighting constantly. Wouldn't I take something for the child? It's so cold outside. He doesn't even have a place to stay. Nothing. Does he have parents? Does he even have a mother? This question shoots into her chest like flames. As if her heart is pounding like an athlete on the track. She decides she must run. She knows what to do.

It was only 4:00 in the morning when she reaches the bundle of human on his box. Sleeping like a baby. Now she can look at him. She becomes a mother again. She is no longer a passer-by. She strokes his head and wakes him softly. He doesn't even seem startled when he opens his big brown eyes. As if to say, "Where have you been all this time?" His eyes shine bright, and his teeth glitter as the smile spreads across his face. Her heart beats with excitement. She can feel life flowing into her— a fulfillment.

She holds out her hand. "What's your name?" she asks softly. "I am Happy", the boy says in a proud voice. She nods and says: "That makes two of us".



Smile

by Zohra Abdul Hamid

People use a yardstick when they smile.
Depending on the situation and the person,
The smile goes a quarter way, sometimes half way
And occasionally-
if they're feeling gracious, it may just accidentally
reach its brim.

Human beings are selfish with their smiles.
Feeling happiness is a treasure they have to guard.
Not so with special needs learners.

There is no yardstick, no selfishness, no holding back.
It's just one broad brimmed smile.

You see, with the special needs child there are no stages of acceptance.
There is no critical overview of the situation, no analysis of the
temperature in the environment, no detailed
view of the reaction they will receive.

It's a simple case of what you see is what you get.

Let's try this exercise:

The muscles around the mouth area are fairly flexible.

So if each day we could experiment just by greeting ourselves.

Mondays exercise - move mouth to quarter way

Tuesdays exercise - move mouth to half way

Wednesdays exercise - move mouth to three quarter way

Thursdays exercise - move mouth to full length

So by Friday we should be able to greet the first person we meet with a
broad brimmed fully toothed smile.

Don't even wait to see the response.

You will get it.

It will definitely be a positive one.

(This is not an advertisement for any toothpaste, promise)

Have a great smiley day.



You

by Thameshree Moodley

So, you do all the things that you're supposed to do, be all the things that you're supposed to be but you still feel out of place. You're as good as you can possibly be, saying yes and going that extra mile, trying to fit in wherever it feels right but you very seldom feel like you belong.

Actually, there's a truth about belonging that I've come to realise. You can pretend to blend in, or act like you fit in and hide those special, outrageous bits of you but you will lose that special something that makes you YOU!

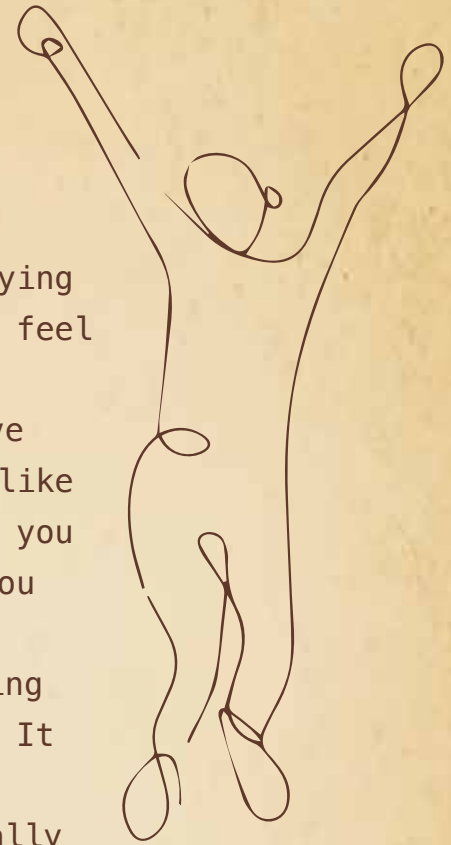
You need to understand that feeling different, being different and looking different is not your weakness. It is your absolute strength!

Do you know that by being different, YOU can actually make a difference? New ideas, different thought perspectives, unique actions, are all very much needed. You can use your differences to teach the people who actually appreciate your different take on life or your various unique interests. So, maybe stop trying so hard to be a part of the masses. YOU deserve to be who you truly are and be accepted for that alone. Think about the many successful people that you know. Do they live their lives like most people, or do they go against the grain and make choices that are very different from the norm? Think about it...these people actually embrace being different and are willing to use it and take risks to move forward.

Remember, there is no greater gift than that of being different. So embrace it with all of your might!

YOU know where YOU belong, go home to YOU. Stand out and be proud! Those who truly understand you, will love and accept you for YOU. As long as you have YOUR people supporting you, the rest don't matter at all.

No matter what your life looks like, or what you wish it could be, do your best to embrace the fullness of who YOU already are today. Because there is no one else exactly like YOU and that is a gift worth celebrating.



Flopsy

by Rachel Ferriman

A kindle of meowing kittens tumbled to the side of the cage, where I knelt. I had just turned seven, an age my mother considered significant. She had brought me by bus to the SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) and I, supposing it to be another bleak and featureless place like the solemnly silent bank or the detergent-soaked hospital, was delighted to discover there, these captivating creatures, the cutest of baby animals.

So enthralled that I hardly heard my mother say I could take one home with me, I did understand that she was giving me much more than I'd expected, yet I could not have them all. They were lively and noisy, in a miniature way, with tiny teeth and pink petal tongues in panting mouths; five tabbies, with slightly different facial features and proportions, and coats patterned in a variety of greys, browns, white and black, stripes and patches.

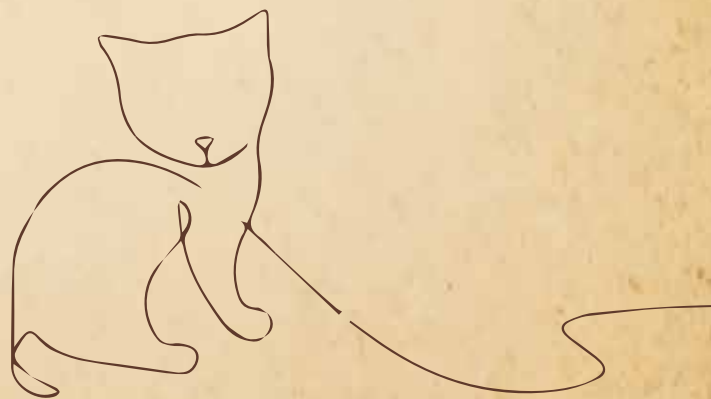
Pushing my fingers (which had recently started writing and sorting, in my first year at school) as far as they would go through the small square holes of the wire mesh, I tried to stroke the furry bodies. They were drawn towards me for comfort and by curiosity but they were cautious and restless, demanding but distracted. I deeply desired to gather them into my arms and hold them close, to touch their velvety heads, their oversized pointed ears, tightly convex backs and stiff tails.

I anticipated that if it was too difficult to make a choice between them, I might miss the opportunity. A shiny, plump kitten who would not be enticed for closer inspection or interaction and was suddenly obscured by a less attractive sister who stretched up at me, crying keenly and emphatically.

I was immediately devoted, convinced that she wanted me to take care of her. She soon dropped to all fours again, turning away, but I would not take my eyes off of her until she was removed from the cage lest I should confuse her with her almost identical siblings. She had chosen me: she was not the most distinctive of the litter but had been most determined and had communicated most clearly.

Carrying my kitten in a big box with a perforated lid, my mother and I retraced our steps to the bus stop. We stood the box in the aisle, at the front of the slow and rumbling vehicle, its hidden occupant making herself loudly heard all the way back to Brixton.

Then it was a short walk to our house and there, after nervously exploring her new surroundings and settling into my lap for a nap, she seemed truly mine. Excited, I marvelled at her existence, examining her fascinating detail from whisker to paw.



Lasso

by Isabel de Oliveira

Tony has a very loud voice. We are always telling him that he is shouting, but he just looks baffled, saying he is not. One day, we were out with friends visiting the Kouga Dam in the Cape. Our youngsters were with us, and everyone was looking at the magnificent view and enjoying the scenery.

The kids were running around, all except the littlest one, who had climbed onto the parapet of the dam and was curiously inspecting the steep wall. Tony suddenly noticed where the little boy was and roared out his name. The little guy calmly looked up and climbed down to safety; we will never forget how Tony's loud voice 'lassoed' him and prevented him from falling over the edge.



Sparkle

by Marilyn Mills

When Lockdown was announced we planned our forced home sojourn down to a tee! Stocked with groceries, toiletries, medications, alcohol and project and craft material, we were gung-ho! We would comply with the rules. We were 100% behind Mr C and the reasons why he was doing this to the country. We were ahead of the pack as far as Dr M was concerned. We knew why we were doing it and we were all in it together.

So we established a routine. Very important to have a routine!

Up early-ish, the man went exercising while I languished over my coffee. Breakfast together. Healthy and abundant!

Housework, washing, vacuuming, changing sheets when needed, washing floors, cleaning cupboards then meeting in our special spot for morning tea.

Exercise again in the afternoon. Sundowners and then watch the news before dinner! I should have faded away as the news always left me feeling like I did not want to eat. Yet eat I did! Cook and eat! Bake and eat! Braai and eat!

First project was completed in two days, painting the main bedroom and bathroom. Almost ran out of paint! Drat! The paint should have lasted for the other two bedrooms and bathroom. Knitting jerseys for my granddaughters was my big project. The first jersey finished in the first week the second is taking much longer. Making masks became very important. The sewing machine had been in mothballs for too long. Stopped dead!

Some projects had to be put on hold as hardware and wood ran out. We weren't put out as we knew we could replenish stock in another week or two.

We started looking for projects. The photographs of 45 years together had accumulated in a rather large kist and needed to be sorted. What a trip down memory lane!

We catalogued them and scanned them onto the computer then shared them with our children. This sparked a wonderful conversation as we shared stories and memories. Every Sunday morning we meet to chat on Zoom and watch a slide show. It is very special.

Our garden basks in the beautiful weather and the tender care the man gives to it. We find it surreal that we live in such a wonderful place with such beautiful weather and yet we are fighting an unseen enemy that keeps us cowering in our houses only daring to venture out on the very odd occasion and with much angst.

Then our alcohol began to wane. Not to worry I would make Ginger Beer!

The man warned of impending disaster but I knew better. Needless to say our back porch smells like a brewery and the ceiling needs painting but we have no paint. Had a good laugh though!

All this has added much sparkle to my soul literally and figuratively. Now, all I wish for is more sparkle in my glass and to see the sparkle in the eyes of my grandchildren.



Happening

by Anja Campbell

We were driving on his motorcycle; the one he got from his grandfather. I felt free, as I held out my arms to feel the wind on that hot summer night. The helmet was too big on my head and it kept moving around, but I felt safe because I was holding onto him. I knew that if I died on that motorcycle, the last thing I would've thought about was him. We were a bit out of town when he yelled over his shoulder that we were going to head back home. I wanted to tell him that I was already home and he should keep driving. But I didn't and our night was cut short.

We had a lot of nights like that. Some nights we would be cold and get some coffee. Other nights we would just drive to go home again. We had fire within us that we just needed to let go of. We didn't know how to though, so we would spit that fire onto each other. We ended up crying most of those nights, but we couldn't let go. We worked too hard to do that. We needed to have each other to see how far we have both come.

We were going to get married; a runaway type of marriage without any family with us. I had my dress and he chose his suit. We were going to spend forever together. It was going to be amazing. We would've said our vows and I would've wiped a tear from his eye as he would see me in my dress for the first time. I dreamt about that day so many times. I dreamt about kissing him after saying "I do" and I dreamt about driving off to our honeymoon. We could've been together every day.

But that day hasn't happened yet. We are quarantined and are kept away from each other. I can't see him on my birthday as I planned to. I couldn't kiss him in the morning in our bed. We were now separated by something nobody saw coming. I wish that I could just see his smile again or feel his arms around me or hold onto him when he goes too fast on that motorcycle. The world is dying and our fires wouldn't touch in so long that it would decide to burn out on its own.

One day though, we would still runaway together. One day we would wake up next to each other again. We would dance barefoot in the kitchen and be happy. We would see our flowers blooming again and have hope for a new day. Everything would be perfect just as we had planned. We would see the sunrise in the early mornings as we sit in the car and wait for it to bring us a new day. For now, all we know is, that day is coming.



Rediscovery

by Jamila Janna

"It feels a bit normal now." Adam said.

"What?" I had asked.

"Feeling lost."

Within the nanoseconds of silence that lingered between us an image of a raven, peculiar yet oozing with beauty, appeared in my mind. Perched upon a branch, its talons were an ugly, thin holdfast. Its beady eyes – glazed with a mockery I was unsure of – probed at something in the sky above it and where my minds eye could not reach.

"It was such a foreign feeling."

The muscles between his eyebrows inched closer to form a hollow frown. His eyes were hidden behind lashes no man needed and his gaze was fixed on the magical dance between cream and coffee. Steam drew spirals as it crawled up the air, carrying with it the aromatic smell. Then he looked at me, smiling as if whatever misery that had hung over him evaporated.

"I blame it on the solitude, Celeste." he continued, "I have not mastered it. Ever since I lost my job."

I remember that over two years back he had dreams that were grand like the Tsistikamma. Now –

"You've lost faith, haven't you?"

He had laughed then. I empathized, for what escaped his ribcage was so raw.

"You're right." He said sighing.

He then took a sip of his coffee, momentarily lost in thought. I wanted to slip my fingers into his mind and attempt to heal some of him.

And there, again, in my mind the image of the raven appeared. Its wings unfurled with a tenderness that seemed to make the black of its feathers pour out as each was unravelled. Its beady eyes still mocking.

My attention was now on the swaying trees in the park. Protruding from the sidewalks were vengeful roots; challenging lifeless bricks and demonstrating its strength – much like the strength Adam did find in his journey.

"It's scary, Celeste." He admitted.

The wind proceeded to caress the trees, sidewalk, benches and all that its perverted hands could touch. And the most vulnerable quivered under its touch, their movements erotic and raw.

"But I have accepted that life is cyclic. Nothing lasts."

His attitude was much like vulnerable leaves in the wake of a probing wind. But, I sensed that he was undergoing a brutal internal fight – desperation holding onto something – and he was winning. He just did not know it.

Ultimately, the roots of change were growing in his vulnerability. It was in his acceptance of his situation that hope stemmed. And Adam did rediscover peace.

I saw the raven in my minds eye for the last time, ready to take off. Its dark wings flapping vigorously. It finally flew into the sky and towards freedom, taking with it its weight and mockery. All that was left where it was perched was room for something grandeur to happen– rediscovery.



Today

by Shannon Kerry Tollman

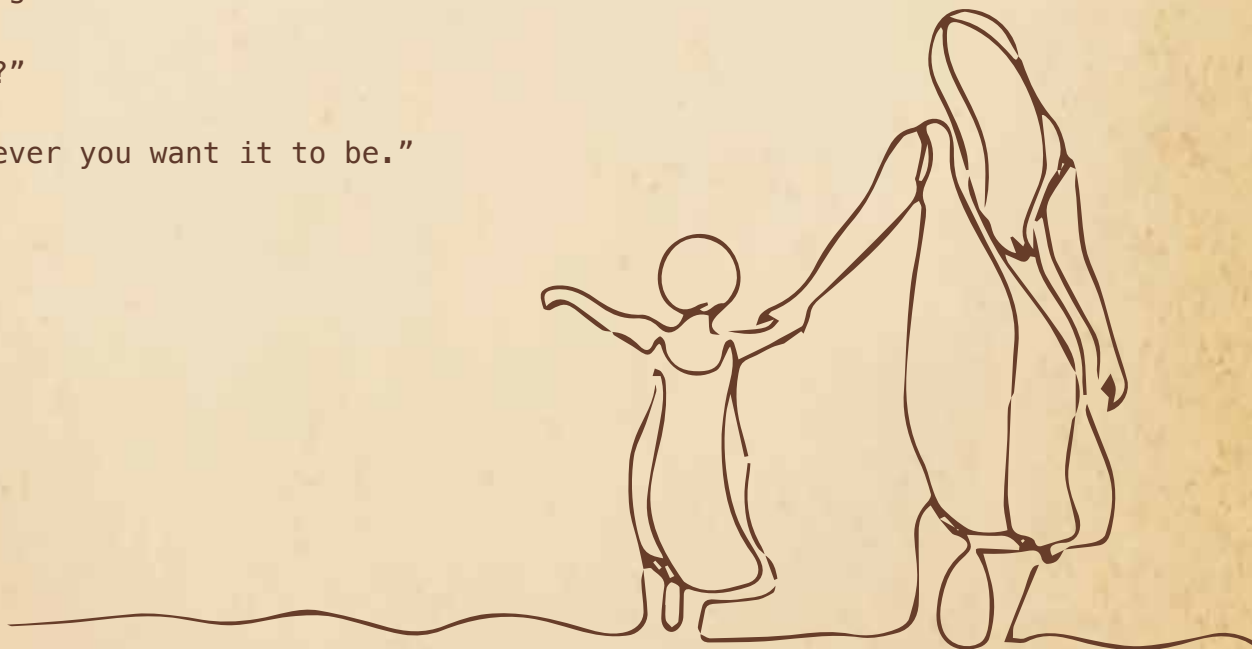
As the years age my mind, I find myself either living in the future or the past. Both places have very different feelings, and no two people will describe them the same. The past is either reminisced upon, recalling the warm sunshine of childhood, where the sweets are sweeter, the days are longer, and laughter reverberates through your body. Some will tell you, the horrors of their past as a tear runs down their face trying to escape the pain that continues to whip their mind with flashbacks and memories. The future, too, has conflicting stories, some say it is bright, a place where the grass is greener, the people richer and the bird's sweet lullaby sings the town goodnight. Others rejecting this painting of the future, foreseeing instead doom and gloom. However, they do have a commonality, in both places time flies, runs away with you, and before you know it, you can't recall having lived in either.

I decided to visit the past one last time, but instead of just watching, I decided to interrupt carefree playing of my younger self, to ask, "Why are the days so long for you but so short for me?" Smiling she touched my cheek and said "You are living in the wrong place, you see, the past is for me, today is for you". Confused I continued, "But there's nothing there, sure nothing has gone wrong but nothing has gone right, there's nothing there that I know?" She simply smiled sheepishly and said...

"Because today's"

"Today is what?"

"Today is whatever you want it to be."



Dew

by Kaylin Michelle

The lovers sat on a cliff and looked out at the ocean.

"What am I going to do?" He asked.

"Be water," she said.

He looked at her. "Why? How?"

She continued to gaze out, "In the Toa de Ting, Lao Tzu says, 'Water is fluid, soft and yielding. But water will wear away rock, which is rigid and cannot yield. As a rule, whatever is fluid soft and yielding will overcome whatever is rigid and hard. What is soft is strong.'" She paused.

"Don't fight your circumstances."

Her words struck his heart.

She kissed him and he melted. He became a drop of dew on the grassy cliff, and he tumbled down into the ocean. There, he became the ocean. He knew that he was still a drop, but now he saw that he was the ocean inside the drop and not the drop itself. And then the sun changed him, and he was light. He was a cloud, and he looked down at the ocean— still knowing, that he was in fact the ocean and not the cloud. And soon, he fell again to earth and he was a puddle on the street and he was stepped in and he was muddy—still he knew, that he was in fact the ocean.



She moved her lips away from his and he opened his eyes. He could not tell how much time had passed, but he was sure he was in a different one.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

He saw the ocean in her.

"I'm going to swim. I'm going to kiss you. I'm going to cook, dance and sleep."

They laughed. She saw the ocean in him.

Amazonia

by Chris Hall

Up in the tall, tall tree, the little spider monkey hugged her infant to her chest. The air was thick and yellow-brown. The bright burning was coming. Clutching her baby she descended. It was time.

The creatures of the forest, predator and prey together, were gathering, deep in the mystical heart of the jungle. Silently they formed a circle around Her Sacred Place, wingtip to paw, talon to claw. The huge black jaguar turned his head and gazed amber-eyed at the little spider monkey, but she wasn't afraid.

The people of the forest emerged from the trees. They lay down their bows and quietly joined the circle. The little spider monkey looked up. High in the canopy, the spirits of the forest shimmered.

They waited. And prayed.

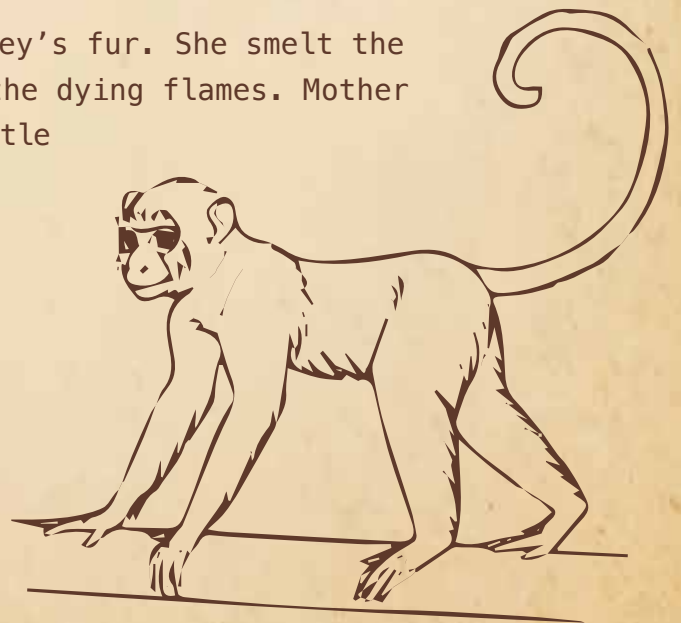
Mother Gaia rose from the earth. She threw back her head and opened her mouth wide. Her ululation filled the air. The lament grew. The creatures of the forest joined in. The air vibrated.

On the other side of the ocean, the Powerful People were chomping their way through a lavish lunch, while discussing the iniquity of inequality and admiring the ocean view.

The crystal glasses began to rattle. Then a wave, shaped like a monstrous hand, rose up from the ocean. Huge watery fingers plucked the Powerful People from their table and dropped them into the sea one by one where they bobbed and floundered.

The hand closed into a fist and rose skyward, speeding away and disappearing over the western horizon. As it neared opposite continent the fist unclenched and scooped up a massive handful of ocean.

Cool air ruffled the little spider monkey's fur. She smelt the moisture in the air and heard the hiss of the dying flames. Mother Gaia began to sing the sweetest song the little spider monkey had ever heard. And the forest breathed again.



Rebirthed

by Lerato Primroset

I was sitting alone on my Shadow's doorstep, drenched in sweat from the exhaustion of yelling out her name, asking her to let me in, to let me into her secrets of how she serenades me into obeying her every command.

I had been sitting on her doorstep for quite some time, knuckles clothed in blood from all the door banging I had done, banging on the doors of society, asking them to validate me because I did not know how to do it for myself, banging on the doors of lost love that I'd always shove to the side every chance I got, banging on the doors I had slammed shut, the doors of acknowledging my self-worth, finding that self-love, admitting that my father physically and emotionally abused me, and that my confidence was a facade.

It was only after I had stopped knocking that she opened her door slightly, peeping out only her head, looking at me like she had been waiting for me to get myself together and finally calm down. I guess it was because she knew that she had nothing to teach me if I kept thinking I knew it all, if I kept thinking I knew the answers, if I kept thinking I had all the right questions to ask.

She looked at me with dead eyes which seemed to carry a whole lot of light. She reached out her hand and held me by the wrist, softly, breathing life into my skin. She had been waiting for me to see her, she was waiting for me to finally see the scars she had kept hidden safe for me while I was too busy chasing norms and status quos. She was waiting for me to see all the pain I had felt but never knew that I had felt because somehow I had become too good at not making mountains out of molehills, which is a bit dangerous when the molehills attack your mind, body and soul.

Under her bed she had a jewellery box with all the notes she had kept for me, of everything I saw but never wanted to see, of everything I was told not to see, and as she read these notes out loud for me, every inch of my being wept for the first time, acknowledging all the hurt for the first time, and it was in this weeping that the dirt that had built up began being washed out of my system, making room for rebirth, for me to be reborn.



In that moment I felt more broken than I had ever been, but now the broken pieces had been brought to the light where they were washed clean, cleansed and rebirthed into healing through acceptance. Shadow showed me my power in that moment.

Books

by Amy Khusial

I'm awake reading the last chapter of Pride and Prejudice, suddenly I hear a knock on my door, "Get ready for school BELLA!" I hear my mother shouting. It's morning already. I think to myself; how did the time go by so fast?

Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy are to blame.

I freshen up and then pack my bag, not forgetting to carry my book. I walk through the busy hallway of the school. I move my brown curl from my hazel eyes and look at the floor. I'm a shy girl and I don't have many friends. It's probably because I'm always reading a book and don't have time to socialize. I don't like to talk to people, because deep down I'm scared I'll say something wrong. Break time has started and I take my bag and rush towards the library avoiding the gaze of everyone. I open the library door, but it's not opening. I try about 10 times until I realize it's locked. I walked through the empty hallways and then sit down there, opening my lunch and taking out my Pride and Prejudice book. I take another bite of my sandwich and never take my sight off the book. I wish I could be as brave and strong as Elizabeth, she refused marriage proposals, but I wish I could refuse to be this shy girl I am, it gets lonely, and I wish I had friends. The bell rings and I quickly compose myself and determine to get the courage of Elizabeth, but of course, I'm not her and I didn't realize it.

I decide to go and make friends during the second break. The time has come. I have my book in hand, and press it as close as I can to myself, hoping some Elizabeth Bennet rubs off on me. I go to a group that looks friendly and once they see me approaching, they laugh. "Hi fatty" they all laugh and point at me. I stand in embarrassment for about 2 minutes and then just run away. I go into the toilet and cry.

Once I finish crying, I realize my book isn't with me anymore. I storm out of the toilet and frantically search through the hallways for my book. I finally see it, but the group of mean girls reaches my book first. They give me a sly smirk and kick my book into a classmate.

After they left, I go in and there are the group of people I have been searching for all along. They all had classic books—and a girl picked up my book, smiled, and pulled out a chair for me. We all instantly became friends and spoke for many hours after that about our favorite topic, BOOKS!

Not only did I find my book I also found myself real friends, who loved to read as much as I do.



Flames

by Gayle Bekker

The flame on the candle burns gentle and bright
Giving us light.

Flames in the hearth are happy and free
Jumping and dancing for us to see.

But the flames on the mountain are angry and red
Roaring with rage and determined to spread
Giving no thought to what's in their path
Or the dire results of the aftermath.
Fuelled by the wind they rush ahead
Until all is consumed and seemingly dead.

The night sky reflects their fiery glow
Are the flames proud of their nightly show?

With endless water the firemen fight
Through many long days and longer nights
Until no brave flame has dared to rise
And only darkness and smoke now fills the skies.

While the path of the flames has been firmly cast
Those devil flames are gone at last.



Healing

by Lucinda Naledi Nuba

The process of bringing together aspects of one's self.
Healing reminds me of all the road trips going home
How the roads can be uneven but worth the ride, the final destination.
Healing reminds me of road trips going home
How we take these trips in hunger for rest,
In hopes of rejuvenating our beings
How these trips are taken to find stillness within ourselves
How these trips are taken to beautiful destinations despite all the
agony of the rough roads in between.
The bumpy streets are the days healing seems a little messy
The beauty and magnificence of Mother Nature must be the days the
process of healing makes sense,
The days healing feels like this is the right direction.

Healing

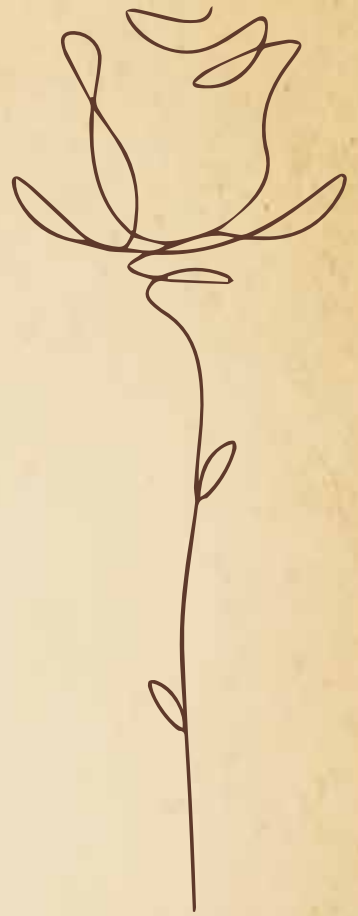
Reminds me of all the road trips going home
How the roads can be so bumpy, that the time seems to be passing a
little slower than it should!
The roads to our homes have too many turns
Too many curves
High mountains
Deep rivers
A lot of narrow and empty roads that make the trip dreadful and
tiring
Roads that demand your being to forget the peaceful atmosphere you
will walk into once you reach your destination-home.
The imperfections of this trip will have you forgetting
The warmth of the walls you are to walk into
The breath of fresh air
The love
Oh dear darling the safety of being home!

Healing

Healing reminds me so much of going home
How they can be a mixture of a beautiful mess but with a guarantee that home-your
destination, is to be filled with peace that surpasses all understanding
Warm hugs
Love without conditions
Freedom
Sunsets that remind you of what beauty feels like
Joy
And confidence that reeks peace!

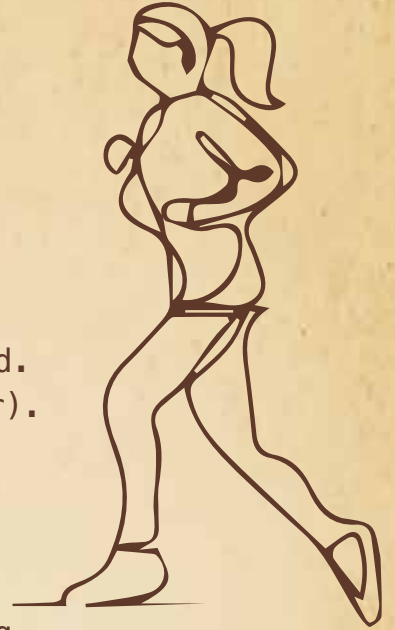
Healing

Healing reminds me so much of going home
How it can be a bumpy ride but worth the peace you find in-between and at the end.
Healing.
Healing is like going home, things are not always smooth sometimes a little messy but the
beauty of the healing process is in its imperfection
The beauty of healing is the beautiful human being you, yourself meet during the journey
and at the end.
Embrace your journey, you are a landmark of miracles.
Heal.



Message

by Chrislyn Robinson



So, I've got the weight of the world on my shoulders and a WhatsApp message that just added another ton. I just knew I simply had to run.

Distracted, anxious thoughts, make me drive past the turnoff I'm supposed to take to my usual stretch of road. (Timing is what it was all about, I was to find out later).

With a heavy heart, forcing one foot in front of the other is a real challenge. Jogging – a different ball game altogether.

A couple metres on, I hear a cell phone ringing. Now I know for a fact that I left mine in the car. The ringing however persists. I frantically start looking around for the source. Wait...ringing in the ears, accelerated heartbeat, breathing hard and fast...No! Could it be?

The ringing continues. I look around in the ditch beside the road. Ahead of me, behind me but there's absolutely no one around to whom this ringing could belong.

A stronger, fitter (and yes, much faster) runner approaches from behind to whom I was forced to affirm my sanity with the question: "Excuse me but do you hear a ringing cell phone too?"

"Yes, it's from a car – speaker phone," he says while gesturing in the direction of the vehicle. With a touch of embarrassment and a huge sense of relief I say, "Thank goodness I thought I was losing my mind!" as he ran ahead.

Snail paced, peak hour traffic and a down turned window with a speaker phone on blast adjacent to me was the culprit. I could hear it clearly despite being a couple of metres off.

I continue jogging and walking intermittently. The faster and fitter runner on his way back already (from my distant destination). He spares another few words for the crazy-cell phone-searching lady: "Keep going," he tells me as he passes, "Don't give up!"

Now, was he referring to my attempt at jogging right? Was the ringing cell phone and running messenger perhaps drawing my attention to my state of heart and mind?

"Keep going, don't give up!"

Dare I say, God called and left a message?

Moment

by Zikhona Mataka

People are now pouring in. My heart starts to annoyingly race, seemingly out of my chest as I silently sit and wish to the universe, crossing fingers that nobody approaches her.

As if the universe is testing my annoyance radar, a fella tries his luck. It's obvious he's cracking jokes he thinks are amusing (only in his head obviously).

I begin to be anxious again.

I realised that I could not come to understand what is it about her that is so complex and hard to decipher. Was it her mind? Which clearly cannot be impressed with mundane talks? Or was it her still unreadable face?

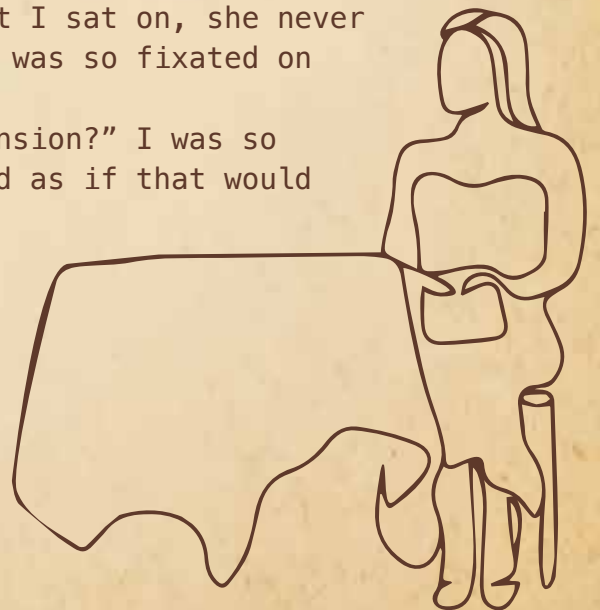
I could not come up with an answer and so for a while, I drifted my intrigued mind from her, to the fella who approached her now squimmering his way awkwardly along with his rejected jokes back to his table at such an instant. I could not help but crack a laugh to myself because the circumstance made me think of a sly tiny church mouse that quickly retreats to its hole at the sound of the saint's footsteps. I collected myself immediately after realising that my eyes had crinkled a little because of the visible smirk on my face. My self composure was so intensely felt that, a friend next to me rhetorically asked if I had just jumped almost off my seat because of the cold beer?

Before I could answer him though, he had already drifted back to the rowdy side of the group's conversation, which I haven't been a part of since investing my mind on her.

That's when it hit me, I thought: "how dare I allow mystery to swallow my thoughts and how dare she make me shake in my boots at the thought of me asking her name and how dare she amuse me and make me laugh without her even aware of my presence!"

She never looked up to the side of the restaurant I sat on, she never looked at any side of the restaurant really. She was so fixated on her meal that it made me curiously wonder:

"does her plate contain elements of another dimension?" I was so oddly curious that I found myself raising my head as if that would have gotten me a better view of what was in her plate. She radiated such grace that it appeared she was one with the ambience of the restaurant. When my friends signalled to me that our order was ready, I knew I would probably never see her again. My heart did not feel any sense of loss or sadness regardless. For I knew, I had met her for a lifetime.



Carlisle

by Charlotte Manda

Carlisle Montgomery looks at me through the fogged windows. It isn't really me he is looking at, but rather the way the sky above us whispers little white crisps from its clouds, so soft, yet I don't touch them. I know he can't see me, but I look at him anyway. I study the way he angles his head looking through the glass, contemplative, lost in thought. I wonder if he feels that I am here. I haven't seen him in a while; I definitely haven't seen him look so...normal.

Carlisle was sent to the one place that makes a person feel out of control, rehab. Oh you don't think rehab does that? Well how many times have you been forced to get out of your own head and be like everyone else? He spent the majority of his life staring at the calm wallpaper, baby blue, baby pink, pastel colours that triggered the mind in no possible way. Carlisle doesn't know me, but I know him. He used to be different, not like this. Carlisle isn't crazy if that's what you're thinking, we don't call our weaknesses crazy.

Carlisle picks at his sleeves; I know what's beneath them. If he was to lift them for you, there you'd find faded slit marks, healed. I study the way Carlisle grins to himself, a ghost of a smile across his lips. His skin has a warm hue to it, and his cheeks? Oh boy how round they look. I smile back at him, I've never said a word to Carlisle, but each day since his return, I've visited him through windows. He reaches for his paintbrush to adorn the white canvas in front of him, but I don't need to see that, the only painting I want to see is Carlisle. A masterpiece. A combination of flaws and depression and yet, he looks so happy. He doesn't know it, but I respect the hell out of him. He found within himself a dark hole that he filled with his own unique buried treasure.

He's laughing now, I laugh too. Carlisle takes a step back to admire his work, and with a deep breath he closes his eyes. With one last touch of his wrist, he pulls back the sleeve and brings it to his lips, the spot that brought him pain. I feel a peace that I've never felt before. I move back from the window, lower my own sleeves and in Carlisle fashion, I kiss the raw bruised skin on my wrist. I'm glad that I see you Carlisle, your strength will be my strength, and every breath that I take, I will savour it, because watching you live has made me want to live again. I'll never tell you though, never tell you how much I really am glad to see you Carlisle Montgomery.



Moment

by Zikhona Mataka

People are now pouring in in numbers. My heart starts to annoyingly race, seemingly out of my chest as I silently sit and wish to the universe, crossing fingers that nobody approaches her.

As if the universe is testing my annoyance radar, A fella tries his luck. It's obvious he's cracking jokes he thinks are amusing (only in his head obviously).

I begin to be anxious again.

I realised that I could not come to understand what is it about her that is so complex and hard to decipher. Was it her mind? Which clearly can not be impressed with mundane talks? Or was it her still unreadable face?

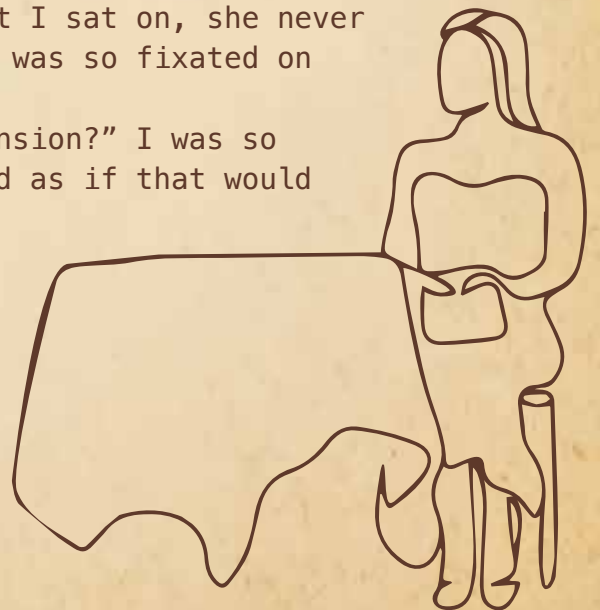
I could not come up with an answer and so for a while, I drifted my intrigued mind from her, to the fella who approached her now squimmering his way awkwardly along with his rejected jokes back to his table at such an instant. I could not help but crack a laugh to myself because the circumstance made me think of a sly tiny church mouse that quickly retreats to its hole at the sound of the saint's footsteps. I collected myself immediately after realising that my eyes had crinkled a little because of the visible smirk on my face. My self composure was so intensely felt that, a friend next to me rhetorically asked if I had just jumped almost off my seat because of the cold beer?

Before I could answer him though, he had already drifted back to the rowdy side of the group's conversation, which I haven't been a part of since investing my mind on her.

That's when it hit me, I thought: "how dare I allow mystery to swallow my thoughts and how dare she makes me shake in my boots at the thought of me asking her name & how dare she amuses me and make me laugh without her even aware of my presence!!"

She never looked up to the side of the restaurant I sat on, she never looked at any side of the restaurant really. She was so fixated on her meal that it made me curiously wonder:

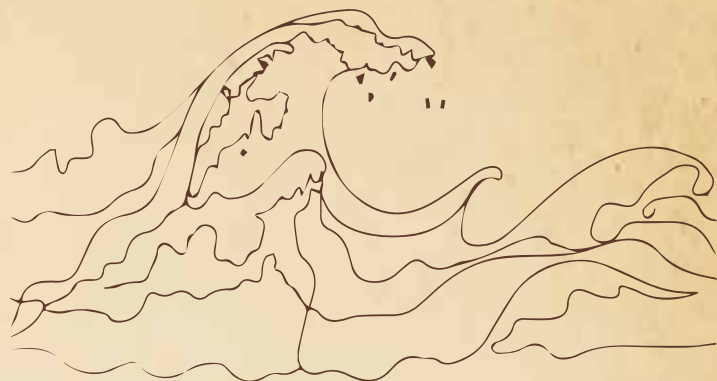
"does her plate contain elements of another dimension?" I was so oddly curious that I found myself raising my head as if that would have gotten me a better view of what was in her plate. She radiated such grace that it appeared she was one with the ambience of the restaurant. When my friends signalled to me that our order was ready, I knew I would probably never see her again. My heart did not feel any sense of loss or sadness regardless. For I knew, I had met her for a lifetime.



Respect

by Robyn Fox

The wind whips up from the heaving blue mass, sending fine grains of sand swirling through the warm air, stinging my face and body with their force. I count the waves: eight per set, evenly spaced and each one dotted with surfers in varying stages of their activity. The blue sky is speckled with puffs of white cloud, shape-shifters in a timeless space. It's a perfect day.



The beach is full of life; sunbathers, swimmers, children building sandcastles, a lone treasure hunter waving his metal detector routinely across the yellow expanse, hoping for that one treasure that will change his life. A bell sounds out behind me, signalling the approach of an ice cream vendor. A peal of laughter, an angry mother, a barking dog. The sounds mingle into one endless noise, creating a vortex of confusion within me. The feeling is blurred and I shake my head for clarity.

My board lies on the sand next to me and I glance at it apprehensively. It's been a year since I was last in the water and the memory is still very real: the rush of the swell underneath, the black of the kelp as it passes by, the distant sound of the siren, and suddenly the emptiness of the wave as I realise the kelp has taken a sinister form...

The ocean scares me but amazes me. Its size and power are frightening yet impressive, the secrets that it holds as alarming as they are fascinating. The murky depths hide a multitude of life, some visible but some remaining unseen, yet all having more claim to the ocean than the humans who blur the boundaries between "ours" and "theirs". This is it, time to face my fear.

I focus on the sunlight glinting off the deep blue of the sea, the purple haze of the mountains on the horizon and the feeling of anticipation and apprehension rushing through me. A deep breath and I pick up my board and charge into battle. The paddling soothes me, its rhythm giving me strength and the exertion giving me life. I hoist myself to sit on my board, facing the horizon, waiting for the perfect wave, my heart beating ferociously and my nerves jingling. I try not to look around, preferring to look into the distance, waiting...

The swell comes and goes. I see my wave approaching. It's time. I swing around towards the beach and begin to paddle, arm over arm, forcing my board forward until I feel the subtle rise indicating the power of the swell under me. My body takes over, all the movements falling into place like a well-oiled machine and suddenly I'm up, flying, on top of the world. I'm not scared. I'm exhilarated. I'm a warrior, a conqueror of my fear! There is nothing but me and the ocean, moving fluidly as one body. No fear, just respect. Respect for my fear, respect for the ocean and respect for myself.

Surrender

by Bianca Brits

This was my word for 2020. Little did I know just how much weight this simple word will carry.

I am a routine person. I like planning and feeling that I have some measure of control. But with this year starting out with a funeral, a break-in, anniversary plans being cancelled and finding ourselves locked up at home, I realised just how little control we actually have.

I thought surrendering means to let go of the things that are not good for my soul. Not letting go of every idea I had planned for this year.

I thought surrendering means to trust that those things that I dream about will happen in its right time. Not trusting that things will eventually just turn back to normal again.

Surrendering meant leaving the past behind so that I can enjoy the future I am hoping for.

However, sitting here I am realising that true surrender doesn't lie in the waiting for the perfect things to happen. Or even trusting that things will turn out as planned.

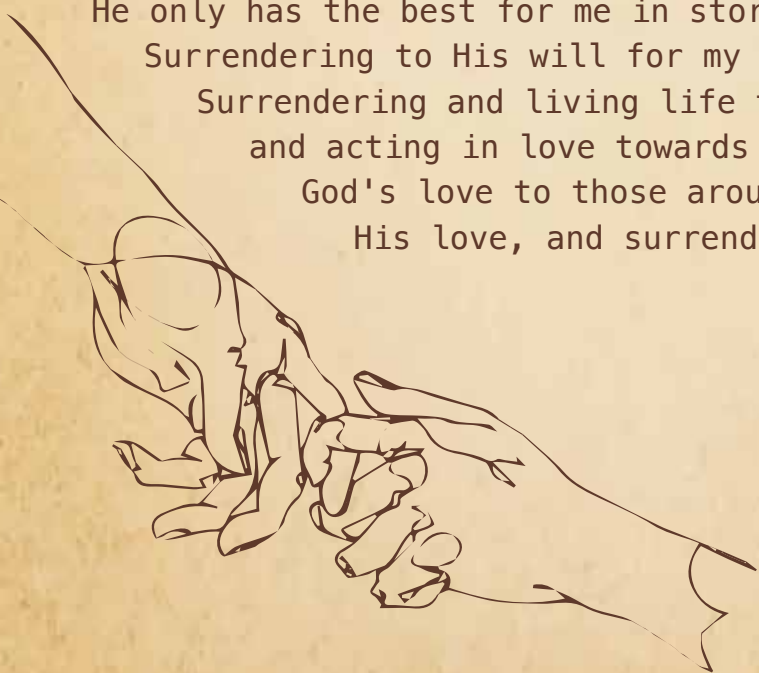
True surrender is tucked in the comforting warmth of love. Love for myself. Love for others. Love for my Creator.

I'm learning to love myself for the person I am and to stop comparing myself to others and their lives. Surrendering to be who I was created to be. Loving others is to forgive, to want the best for them and treating them the way you would like to be treated. Surrendering my expectations of how I believe others should behave.

And loving my Creator is to know that He loves me wholeheartedly and that He only has the best for me in store, whether my plans work out or not.

Surrendering to His will for my life.

Surrendering and living life truly is a daily routine of speaking and acting in love towards ourselves and others. And reflecting God's love to those around us so in time all will experience His love, and surrender their lives and will over to Him.



2020

by Tracey Johnson

And the distance has brought us closer together.
Time has created space
for us to be with one another,
although not face to face.

Our separateness but connectedness
has brought solidarity at this time
We are all in this together
each and every one.

Is it possible the fear and chaos
Will create in us a healing?

A healing just in time?

Will we look at one another
with kindness
once this contagion is gone?

Will we choose to learn this lesson –
of beauty –
in the stillness and simplicity of the earth?

Will we take the time to learn the
wholeness
we each contain in our depth?

The earth has many facets
of which we are just one.
But all her facets need to work –
in harmony –
to ensure a place in the sun.



Curation

by Nomathamsanqa Ntombezinhle Mathembisa

Chatter of the latest art trends fill the room, Louboutin heels click across the floor on their way to a prominent art dealer and rehearsed small talk has gathered crowds into corners. There's a celebratory mood in the air, everyone is quite excited, 'high on life' you'd call it – an unwavering atmosphere of drive, information and 'the world is your oyster'. I loved it.

I catch a glimpse of two suits making hand gestures towards one of my paintings. My heart contracts.

I pick up a glass of wine from the serving table next to me.

'You've got this', I reassure myself in an attempt to suppress the loitering anxiety in my heart.

I flash a smile for a photograph.

Excitement and pride are in order, but an uninvited guest has showed up to join anxiety, blatantly taking up their space.

Tonight is my debut as an artist and my mind doesn't belong to me.

Fear, who pops in on important days, crippling my speech and confidence, has cosied up with anxiety. There was nothing to be afraid of, but there She was making herself comfortable.

'Why are you here?', I ask them, 'what exactly do you want?', I follow up.

Silence.

'What if they don't like my pieces? What if they don't like the curation? What if they see where anxiety lifted my hand to lay his strokes? What if they hear from the blank spaces that Fear demanded to be seen?'

There's a tap on my shoulder and a voice whispers in my ear. They're ready for me.

I knew it wasn't going to be perfect, but it had to be done.

I hear an applause.

I expose my pearly whites again and make my way to the podium.



Delight

by Sonja Moorcroft

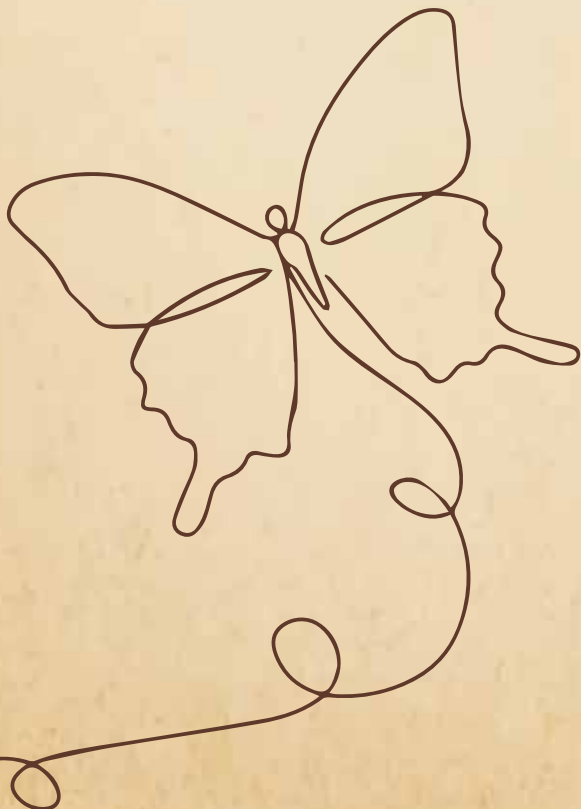
Even (and maybe especially) on an ordinary day, the most extraordinary event can unexpectedly explode right before your eyes.

It was a hot day, I was walking to the shop nearby, passing houses and trees and then I suddenly stopped in my tracks and cautiously tiptoed a bit closer. What I saw was very commonplace indeed, drab grey cobblestones in a driveway, but just off centre there was a brightly coloured orange butterfly hovering just above the greyness. It must have barely been a few seconds, but the image, in its simplicity and majesty was imprinted on my soul and elementary as it may sound, my mind sometimes wanders off to that day and moment in time.

Many days may be plain and simple with no exceptional occurrences and they are important too. Each day has value and must be treasured and lived to the full.

Only in comparison though, can we truly appreciate the orange butterfly-moments amidst the greyness life sometimes presents us with. So, keep a lookout for your own elusive orange butterfly-moments. If you don't look, you most certainly will never experience the joy in seeing or experiencing moments of true, pristine beauty.

Treasure it when you find it, linger, feel and live every second thereof. It will put a smile in your heart and a sparkling joy in your soul.



Imperfections

by Emily Khushal

As I stand here in front of the mirror, I think back to six years ago and I remember seeing this skinny ugly girl with thick-framed glasses, with curly hair that can't seem to be tamed and to top it off her forehead made the elephant's forehead look small.

It was a week into High School and it seemed like everyone changed during that summer vacation, even my best friend was not the same person anymore, she has cut and dyed her hair, not only did she change her appearance but she changed her entire character. Before we entered that horrid place the two of us were inseparable, we could just lounge around in jumpers and messy buns all day, but something changed: she looked at me differently like I was a leach that just won't let go.

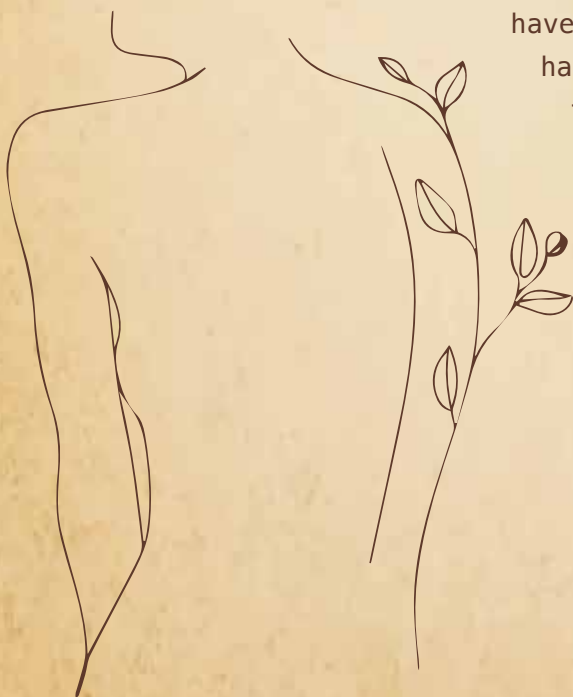
I remember second-guessing all the choices I made, maybe I should have spent the vacation getting a tan or hitting the gym, maybe I could've got contact lenses or I should've got some hair treatment done. I thought about all the things that would've changed if I looked pretty, all the bullying, name-calling and sarcastic remarks would finally stop, if I looked different, they would've stopped calling me Ugly Betty.

None of the adults, teachers, counselors or therapists could answer the question of "How to survive High School?" and they expected us to go to them with our problems, but if we had to ask them "Am I pretty?" were they going to answer us "No, you are not" If only they knew the struggle of getting up and going to a place where you can hear everyone gossip about how if bigfoot had a daughter it would be me. Their 'words of wisdom' is that everyone is beautiful in their own way and it's your personality that matters.

I remember thinking they're insane, but now I know they are right. Looking back at my painful High School experience. Do I wish I could change it? Definitely. But if I changed myself then, I wouldn't be the woman I am today. All those negative comments and trash talking proves diamonds are made under pressure.

Today when I look into the mirror, I see a beautiful, strong and confident female, who did not let her past define her, I'm still skinny although now I have these gold thin frame nerd glasses, my brown curly hair has grown and it falls on my face just enough for it to cover my forehead when it's pushed to the side. I have a minimum amount of make-up with this gorgeous strapless silver dress and silver stiletto heels as I prepare myself to walk down the runway, to take a bow for my first fashion line.

As I stand on this stage; I am so happy I didn't change anything about myself and I hope I can be an inspiration to all those who felt like me. Our imperfections are what make us beautiful.



Dreamers

by Lunga Khumalo

In schools, we are taught about the five senses a human possesses, but in these senses, there's one sense that's not mentioned as often as it should. Even when it's mentioned they mention it as the result of sight and that is Vision. For me, vision is more than what we see. For me vision, it's that predetermined success story we all have in our minds, that ideal identity of perspective we hold. Vision is what drives us and keeps us up at night with hopes to find direction to obtain it as a destination one day.



So we talk about “having a vision” we speak of something bigger than just sight, others are still waking up in the morning because of the drive they get from seeing their vision come to pass before them. A vision is the only thing that calls you to go all out, it tests your patience, consistency, capacity, and most of all your management. If today you're reading this and you hold a vision beyond your sight, then you're crazy enough to be one of those who can change the world, your vision was given to you by God, he trusts you with it. So go out and change the world using it. Have you ever felt like this vision you have is too big to be tasked to you, or the people around you don't see the capacity in you to be able to accomplish it? If so here's what I have to say to you: You're good enough for this vision in fact you're perfect, there's no coincidence in any of the visions you have. You're the right candidate, it has been proven that most visions we have now were shaped by the background we grew up in or the idea that was instilled in us in our early stage of life, so you were born for this, be the one to validate yourself, if you're the first one not to believe in yourself we will simply reflect it for, as you think so are you, and also the reality you live in. Dreamers don't give up and dreamers dream beyond the limit of their sight.

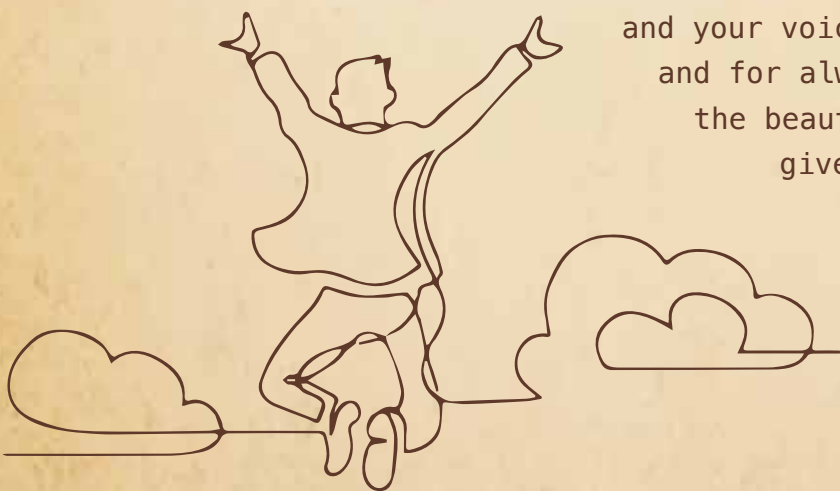
Gratitude

by Kyle Weedman

Joy,
How are you?
Where are you?
Who are you?
What are you?
What the hell are you? And why... why have you been so damn difficult to write about? In all honesty, I have struggled to write something about you Joy. I just cannot seem to find the right words to describe you in all your grace – you are a god. I wonder if everyone else struggles to write about you. Probably not. I mean I know you, but I do not at the same time – you are a wonderful mystery to me. I see you in the morning when I wake up to the beautiful golden sun rising from the horizon – you are a gift. I feel you deep in my soul when I am with my loved ones – you are divine. I hear you in the whispers of the world as I chart my adventures through it – you are eternal. I sense you lingering around the corner in difficult times of necessary harshness and despair – you are a pursuit. You see. Joy. You are so much in this world, too much to try to understand. I know that if I follow you then I will live a life worth living. If I get lost along the way I know that all I must do, is hold out my hand and you will take it gently and bring me back on my path. I know I must listen to you and when I don't you will send your messengers to deliver subtle reminders of wisdom. I know that when I do not feel you then all I must do is dive into my heart and I will find you. You see Joy, it is not you who leaves me. No, I always seem to leave you but sometimes I must. However, I know that you are always with me – you are a blessing. Joy, I do not know what else to say but I will say one last thing. Thank you. Thank you for allowing me to feel you in all the many ways you exist. Thank you

for your beauty, your smile, your laugh, your eyes and your voice. Thank you for believing in me and for always staying with me. You are all the beautiful wonders of this world and it gives me peace knowing that you are always with me.

Thank you.



Boxes

by Natasha Fracc

So I put my life in storage. Somewhere between on-hold and unopened. It's the kind of thing you ought to do when everything is lost and you're alone in the world trying to make sense of silly things. It was the Spring of 2002 when The Sadness became too much to bear. So I listened to some people – friends maybe – and I chose to press pause.

“Put it in storage,” they said, “‘til you're ready. Take the box called ‘Marriage’ and wrap it up tight. Close the air on it and tape it ‘til you can look at it again. Bubble wrap the resentment and the shame and the crystal from Aunty Hilde that you never liked anyway. Put all the pics from high school prom in Box Number 3 and the ones of your wedding day, and mark it ‘General’.”

“And what about that day I weighed 76 instead of 56 and my naked thighs were sticking to each other on the bus?”

“You can seal that up too,” they said. “So you never have to feel unworthy again.”

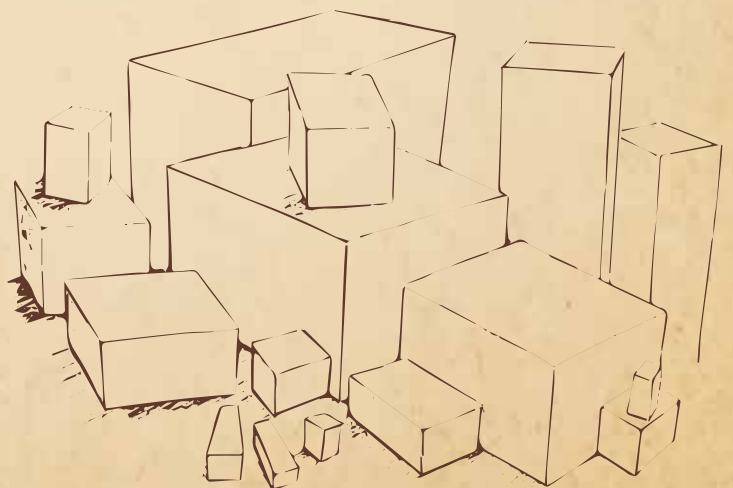
“And the day my Mom died? Where do I put my pieces for that?”

“How much longing is left over?” they asked.

“Too much,” I said. “There's a whole collection of grief for that part of my life.”

“Keep them in the empty boxes – label them ‘Fragile’.”

And that's what I did. I rolled up the last 20 years of my life into tiny tufts of masking tape and paper roll and bubble wrap, and I shoved it into its own cardboard darkness – where the pain belonged. Putting the past in storage is not a bad thing. It's merely a place for the agony to go, when the heart runs out of space.



Growth

by Shaakira Rahiman-Saleh

She had to let go of all she knew before, shrug off the grasp of mediocrity and delve into the great unknown. As she filled her lungs with air, closed her eyes and mustered up the strength to shut out the noise of whirling uncertainty in her mind. One thing was known for sure: everything had led her to this point.

All the vivid memories and fleeting moments; the warmth of the sun on her skin, and the soothing breeze on her sweat-clad brow, the comfort she looked for in his arms; dare she also submit to the memories of a hollowed chest, the emptiness, loss and cold, creeping loneliness. She consciously willed it so, to eliminate the darkness enveloping the skies from within, forsaking looming clouds of fear and uncertainty.

She could not. By intentionally burying past wounds, they would but only find her again and again, a pattern of unexpected abduction on her good days. She knew what she had to do. As she exhaled, she allowed the light to enter the wound, embracing both the love and bearing the pain of days gone by, accepting her fate.

She knew it was always between her and God. An inner voice had always whispered a truth her heart had known all along, seasons of light and dark were both gifts, preparing her for the warrior she was about to become. Taking the lessons, with incubated thoughts bundled up in a cocoon, she spun the silk of her growth. As she fearlessly faced all the truths exposed, she chose to no longer mask the pain. When she was ready, in her own time she would transcend into the great unknown fully aware and ready for what's to come.



Hope

by Washiela Ryklief

There was a time when we could hear the wind blowing and the church bells ringing. It was a time when, as God spoke, man could hear the letters falling onto the Earth as words of hope and relief. There was such a time, very long ago.



But then man started speaking and his limited thinking left no room for the natural intelligence of God. And so, man began conjuring a reality of his own. For man had forgotten that he was meant to help shape the world in such a way that he would continue to live off its natural abundance.

But God still believed in the goodness of man, so He brought man back to a place of hope. This time, hope of a different kind. A hope for mankind to see that we are part of God's eternal plan for this world. A hope for mankind to help Him repair this world.

In return, God restored the many utterances of His name. He restored the ringing church bells. And He restored the idea of everlasting hope.

For hope is such an important thing.

Hope brings humanity together. And when humanity is brought together, there is the power of forgiveness. Forgiveness gives rise to good character. A good character that can bring peace into our homes and repair relationships amongst the different nations of the world.

Hope opens our heart which is the door to the future.

Restart

by Kerenha Maghoma

"Mommy can I ask a question?" the little girl whispered to her mother

"Of course plumcakes."

"Is the world a bad place?" the little girl asked her mother while her mother was reading the daily newspaper with the headlines reading 'DIFFERENCE IN COLOUR LEADS TO ANOTHER YOUNG MANS DEATH'.

The mother saw the little girl looking at the newspaper, this is one of the reasons she doesn't watch the news in front of her. Kids are innocent flowers that should not be exposed to toxins, tainted with the mistakes of the world. They should be free to dream and proud to be human. Her daughter was sitting there looking at her with warm tears filling up her eyes.

Her mother got off the couch and crouched in front of her.

"Lola, can mommy tell you something?" she whispered to her daughter

Lola nodded at her mother with her head bent down.

"Remember when you used to get angry with mommy, because mommy never let you read the newspaper or watch the news? You said you wanted to watch them, because your teacher said the news is educational"

"Is it not?" Lola asked her mother softly.

"The news is good for you honey, but it is also bad for you if you don't know how to handle it. How old are you?"

"Six and a half mommy"

"Do you think you are able to take in everything you see on the news?"

"I think so."

"But I know you can't and that is why mommy never lets you watch it, because you are not strong enough to know how to process every bit of information you are going to hear and see. It could change the way you see things."

"Does mommy know?"

"Yes, I do." The mother giggled at her daughter.

"Now back to your question, your bedtime stories always had a villain and a hero right?"

"Mmmhum" Lola responded.

"The world is like that, the world has its villains and heroes. Right now the world is having a rough time, it is not making the best decisions. The villains are winning and heroes losing. The world is not like it was before, more bad things happen than good. The world is not a bad place, it is the people on the earth that make it a bad place."

"Who gave us this world Lola?"

"God did mommy"

"And could God ever give his children something bad?"

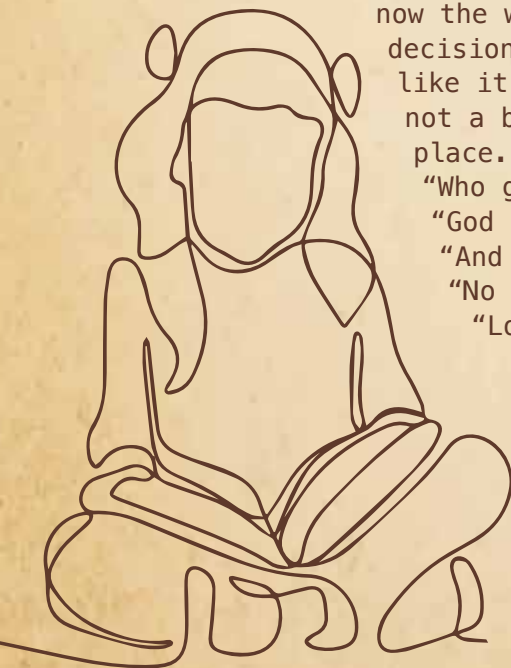
"No mommy."

"Lola, the world is not a bad place my angel, right now the people on it are simply being ignorant, making wrong decisions that have tragic ends. Right now the villains are lost, but God will make them found again, he will let us restart and this time, the humans will do it right, the way it was supposed to be in the first place. This time we won't be human beings, but we will be human to each other."

"Because we are all equal."

Lola nodded and smiled at her mother

"Yes we are mommy."



Knysna

by Ilonka Louw

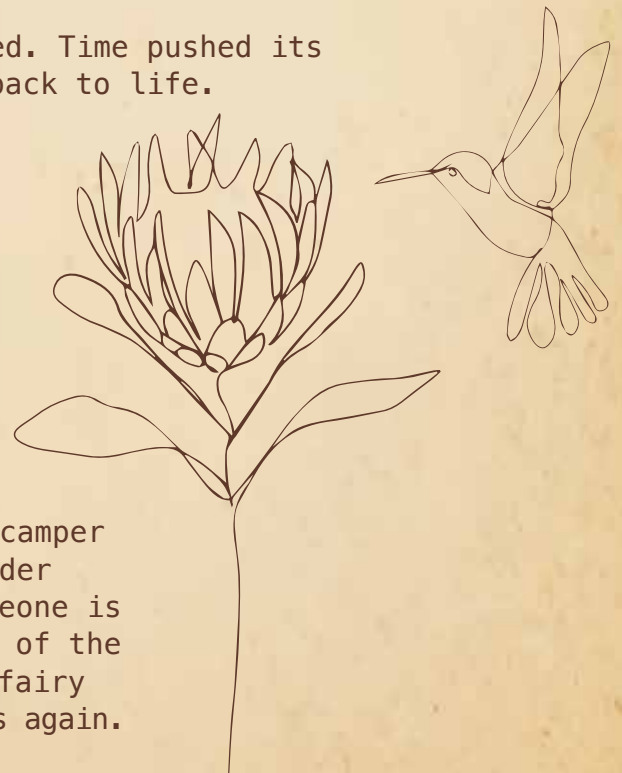
The fires came like flaming wildebeest, charging through the mountain pass. The wind let out a lion-roar: it chased the beasts to the top of the hill, and nipped at their fiery tails. No tree, no house, no beehive nor car stood a chance to survive the sweltering stampede. On the ridge of the valley that ran down to the sea the flames pawed and huffed hotly at the fynbos. Another roar scattered the wildfire. The flames became springboks, leaping into the air, haphazardly trying to escape. Fiery wildebeest and springboks burned down to the sea, trampling the bushes and homes in their path. No bird, no snake, no butterfly nor doe survived.

Vultures of smoke circled the town, dropping their ash feathers to the ground. The charred remains of a snake coiled beneath the sand. A singed tortoise shell hid behind a rock. An exposed toilet stood, lost, in a pile of collapsed bathroom tiles. Some blackened teaspoons lay fallen in the dirt.

Time came gently, and slowly, to ease the hurt. It stretched its ancient fingers over the burns, and wiped away the blood and tears. It reached out over the sea, and pulled curtains of mist around the aching town: cooling, soothing, and caring. Time hung clouds above, and opened the rains softly, rinsing off the grime and soot. Water slid down the black, bony trees and streets 'til the dust washed into the ground. Droplets softened the grasses, clinging to their singed strands 'til it seeped through the crisp, cracked skin of the land. And the earth trembled.

Then silently, magically, a green tinge appeared. Time pushed its hands deep into the soot-sand, and brought it back to life. A hummingbird sips at the pink lips of a protea, kissing the sweet nectar droplets before it pulls away. It glitters as it dances, happily. Overhead, some seagulls laugh at the periwinkle reflection of the sea in the sky. The waves join in, booming as they fall on the beach.

The green valley grows thick now, full with fynbos leaves and Erica bushes. Lemony finches sit on the burnt fingers of the old trees, chatting and chirping about the sun. A tiny tortoise tiptoes on the sand, as striped mice scamper across the grass. In a shaded burrow, a puff adder sleeps. There's a buzzing in the air today: someone is pushing a lawnmower, while bees take their fill of the flowers. Two children chink cups of imaginary, fairy tea, and somewhere a doe strides through the trees again.



Recalibration

by Shaina Naidoo

So often we all get caught up in the rigours of life. We get caught up in the everyday, the rat-race, the stresses and the hum-drum. Life becomes about work, money, eat, sleep, repeat. We call this normal. I read a quote once that said “We race to get up at 6am and go to work, to earn money to buy things we think we need to live life, and end up living the same day 75 times and calling it life; that is not LIFE”. It is so easy to lose track of the very things that make us human. This global pause has been much-needed and should be so welcomed. I encourage you to see this as a time to re-set, re-align, re-adjust, re-focus and to BLOOM!

As esoteric as it sounds, it is no coincidence that even the three planets going retrograde are doing so in THIS time. The only reason for all of this, I surmise, is to raise and recalibrate the global consciousness. We are given this occasion to go back to the basics of human existence and define for ourselves what is truly important. We would be remiss if we did not see this as a time to redefine our parameters. Where are we holding onto negativity and judgment? Where and why are we holding onto sadness and hurt? What needs healing? Where do we feel stuck? The entire world has gone quiet, and as Mother Earth is healing, so too should we. Take advantage of this stillness and go within, to emerge as the best possible versions of ourselves. I can almost guarantee this opportunity is probably not going to come around again.

In taking time to do so, may we never forget to be absolutely grateful for the little things...shared jokes and laughter with friends, shared grief, the smell of the outdoors, simply being in the sunshine, the endless ebb and flow of the waves, real and authentic connection, the variety of our animal kingdom, hugs, kisses and human contact. When the world returns to “normal” we will have the opportunity to live the same life we lived before the pause, or we will have the chance to live our lives embracing a renewed sense of community, hope, appreciation, love, kindness, humanity and joy. Let’s all choose to live in boundless gratitude for the very gifts we have everyday in all the simple things, the treasures that are our friends and family, the love that we share, and the fact that we only have this one planet, and boy!, does she take good care of us.

Let us think of living with purpose and consciously creating a better, kinder society going forward. Let us appreciate and love the people we share our lives with and the moments with them that take our breath away. Let’s live the life of our dreams. The highest vibration is LOVE, envision every aspect of your life simply bursting with it.



Sunflowers

by Brittani Daye Matthews

This is not merely the story of heartbreak, but one of growth, pain and enduring love in all its shapes and forms.

It started with friendship, with blue heart messages and sunflower emojis. It blossomed you see, into all the makings of the perfect couple, the perfect life of a fairytale romance. I got flowers and sweet messages, a love note each day, reminders of his devotion, unwavering love and support from his family and I could not imagine that things could get any better than they were. But love is a fickle thing, and everything I thought I knew began to rapidly unravel.

The end of my rope and the rude awakening to the reality of my situation became apparent when I gave my perfect love an ultimatum; it's me or him. And he stuttered. It was as though all my suspicions were confirmed as my heart crumpled like the tinfoil after a dissatisfying sandwich at lunch. I swallowed the pain as this was not the end of us. Although he would rather spend time with my best friend than with me, I waited it out because I knew my love could not bring himself to the apparent realizations yet. The wait was long and turbulent, spanning months of crying myself to sleep and wondering why I was not good enough.

Then it happened, after a quick morning shopping trip where his hand never left mine, he sat me down and before a word could leave his lips we were in tears. He was ready to face himself, and I was happy for him somewhere deep beneath the ache in my chest. He called me every day for three days after that, to see how I was doing. These calls served as a dagger to the void he had left in my chest, and I told him to give us time.

Months passed and his mother and I mourned the loss of a life we would no longer live, where I was married to her son and his sister became mine. Yet we healed and we learned and we grew because we realized we didn't need that for us to still be family to each other. That's when my perfect love became my enduring love, now in a different form and stronger than I imagined. Our love, in that form, was never made to last, it was made to teach us and allow us the space to blossom into who we were meant to be within ourselves and to each other.

I now look to the sunflower as a symbol of all the growth I have endured and the love I am able to give and receive as a result. It serves as a reminder to trust that you will prevail, through all the pain and the uncertainty; the darkness will turn to light and allow you to blossom once again.



Tomorrow

by Kirsten Deane

There's a tomorrow, tomorrow.

You may leave your heavy head and fast-beating heart here in this today.

It will turn into a yesterday tomorrow.

There's another chance tomorrow when the moon heads back home and the sun gets dressed for another day.

And you can try again in your flesh that had a night to rest and crawl back together again. You can forgive yourself and try again on tomorrow's today.

There's a time tomorrow that will forget about today.

And you will be able to put your hands in your pockets and feel the change from yesterday mattering much more today.

And the rusty parts won't break off but will stay to remind you that you're in a time that has moved away from yesterday.

There's a day tomorrow that will fit you better than this today,

it will dance with you and hold your waist when you

need it to, when you need to know that falling won't necessarily mean you'll hit the ground.

There's another morning after midnight and you won't be afraid of your mistakes crawling through your window.

Because this today will forget about the ones before.

And you'll be new and great.

And fearless.

Because there's a tomorrow, tomorrow waiting for you.



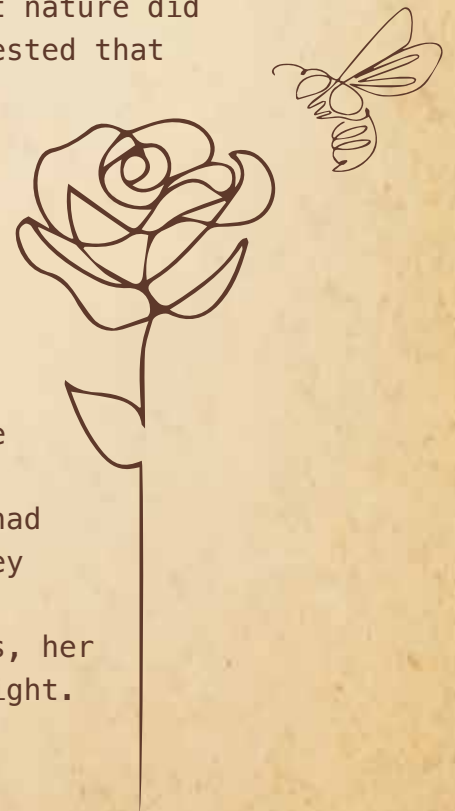
Roses

by Zohra Abdul Hamid

Rahima lived a secluded life with her granny on the outskirts of Andalusia. Although her granny allowed her a fair amount of freedom she was very protective of her. Rahima had a problem. She was born with an eye defect since birth thus causing her to have no vision in either eye. Repeated consultations with the eye specialists had proved to be futile. This, however did not deter the eleven year old from being a lively, pleasant and adventurous child. As a result of her adventurous and sometimes reckless spirit granny had to employ the services of a caregiver Anna. One of the highlights of Rahima's day was being allowed to roam in their huge garden. Rahima loved to smell the beautiful roses and on a number of occasions Anna had to reprimand her. "Rahima, please stop going so close to the roses, there are a number of bees around" said Anna. Rahima used to just laugh it off and say "what will be, will be ke sera sera" in a sing song fashion.

Well the unthinkable happened. On a beautiful summer morning whilst smelling the beautiful roses Rahima was stung by a bee. The sting was so sharp that it immediately brought tears to her eyes and she screamed for Anna. Within a short period her whole face swelled up and she had to be rushed to hospital. A number of specialists consulted with each other as to the best form of treatment for her because of her existing condition.

Everyday gran and Anna visited her in hospital. They would ask her what specials they could bring for her. During this time Anna's pleasant nature did not change. She had an unusual request for them. She requested that they bring her one rose each day. Anna teased her and said the bees, may even follow it to the hospital. Every day as soon as they left Rahima would rush to take the rose in her hand, smell it and make a wish. As days progressed in the hospital something strange was happening to Rahima. She would see flashes of light, just flashes nothing tangible. She did not reveal this to anyone, just kept the information like a heavy guarded secret. On day seven when she brought the rose to her nose to smell it she clearly saw "Red". She screamed out in delight causing the nurse to rush to her side. A miracle had occurred. The specialists were baffled. Scientifically they attributed it to the bee sting and the antibodies. Rahima, however, thought differently. The sweet smell of the roses, her prayers and her daily wishes had helped to rekindle her sight.



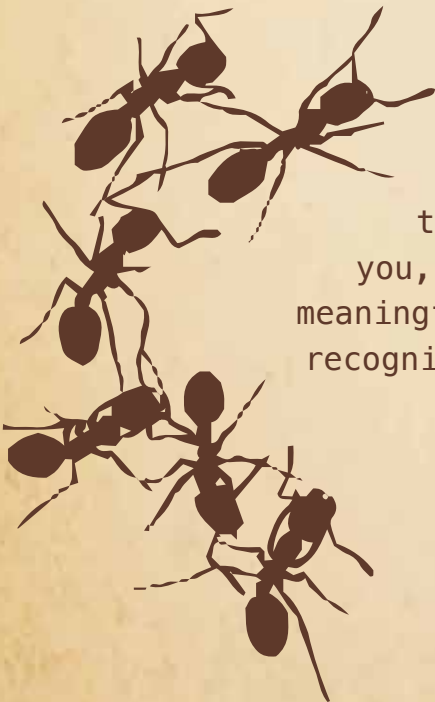
Ants

by Raffaella Migliore

Hello, Ant. I see you and I'm pleased to meet you, crawling on my arm. Is it audacity? That lets you roam around on someone else's skin? I don't think so. I don't think that at all. I know you're lost. Mandibles to the ground – you can't find their scent anymore, and so you've found me instead. Maybe smelling like an ant home. There are worse things to smell like than a home.

I'm not going to flick you, leaving you barely alive with your little black legs crumbled beneath you. I wouldn't do that, Ant. Not to you and not to any of your friends. You may not get told this enough – but you matter, Ant. And while any of the creatures like me could squish you flat if they wanted, it would say more about them than it would about you. Just because you're little doesn't mean you don't mean something.

Today, in particular, you mean a lot to me. My day was worse before you came here and I'm grateful to have met you, soldier. I'm happy to learn from you – your team commitment and unwavering hope for your next crumb. You don't begrudge the world for having made a creature so small and delicate, like yourself. And I love that about you. In fact, I aspire to be just like you. Determined and grateful for what I find myself to be. If you're happy to be you, I think I can find happiness in being me, as small and delicate as I sometimes feel.

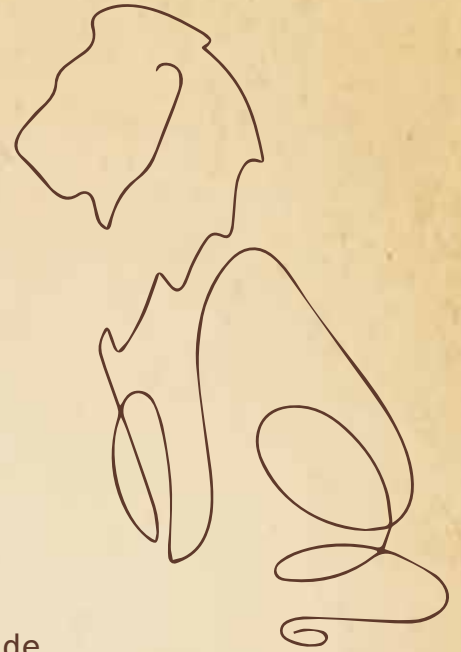


And when I'm struggling to find happiness in that, I can find happiness in you, being. A little Ant with a big heart (probably), who came to visit me. And I'll tell my friends to be kinder to you, to take heed of your life. It is both precious and meaningful. And how much happier our lives will be, when we recognize life's beauty in ants.

Courage

by Linda Montgomery

Nelson Mandela once said that courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. For more than a decade I hid away from opportunities, because of fear of failure, the fear of not being good enough and probably my own perfectionism. I was sprinting through life with my eyes closed, almost like being on a rollercoaster, hardly noticing the beauty around me. I became detached from the life around me, but the thing I least recognised, was the tiny spark that was left in my soul.



By one touch, that little spark ignited a fire inside me. A fire of passion, love, hope and peace. This was the beginning of a new journey to learn once again how to live, forgive, love unconditionally and to hope for a better future. Slowly I opened my eyes to a world of possibilities and adventures. Once more I can dream dreams of climbing Mount Everest, exploring volcanoes, photographing tornadoes, and inspiring others.

Do not allow pain to imprison you. Perhaps you are already set free, but maybe you are still holding on to the ropes which once were the symbol of your captivity. When we are broken to a point where we feel we can't go on, that's the moment we can decide to stand up from the rock beneath our feet and to start new with the tiny spark of life within us.

Let us recognise that spark so we may burn inside with life, love, compassion, and truth.

Emotions

by Celia Swanepoel

We all experience different emotions throughout the day. Happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise, and disgust are but a few basic emotions. During this lockdown period, with the panic sparked by COVID-19, more and more people are becoming depressed, mistrustful, anxious, and disconnected as time passes and the virus spreads globally.

I suffer from bipolar depression II, and I have learned that emotions can be a rollercoaster ride throughout the whole day. A therapist once asked me what I was feeling during a very challenging time in my life, and my natural response was that I was experiencing all the “bad” emotions. The therapist asked me to explain what a “bad” emotion is. Sad and depressed, insecure about what life holds for me, shame at my past, hurt and bitter that life had thrown me so many curveballs. I’m sure you can add a whole lot more “negative” emotions to this list.

My therapist asked me what I considered as “good” emotions. Feeling cheerful and loved, being brave enough to face the world every day, being able to enjoy a film or music. There are so many “positive” emotions that can be added that each one of us experiences each day in our lives.

Of course, after therapy, I always get “homework”. I was asked to forget the idea of “good” and “bad” emotions; to rather practise mindfulness, to see and experience an emotion as it is, and classify it as “constructive” or “destructive”.

Over the years I have practised this method and I have learnt to see an emotion for what it is, accept that the emotion is real and I have a valid reason for feeling it, but then to let it go and allow a new emotion to take its place. Yes, even the “good” emotions need to pass or it can become stale.

If I were to tell you a funny joke, you would laugh, right? And if I tell you the same joke again, maybe you would chuckle a bit or smile, but it’s not as funny as it was the first time. The third time I tell it you would probably roll your eyes at me. The same joke over and over has become stale.

For this reason, I love the Persian adage “this too shall pass” (it may pass like a kidney stone, but it will pass). Our emotions are as temporary as hand sanitiser and toilet paper nowadays. Let’s experience each emotion during this time, and allow ourselves to be shaped into better versions of ourselves.



Giant

by Kia Cordeiro



Dawn broke over a serene road, far enough away from the city to not hear the droning hum of daily life.

Covered in dew, Daisy awoke. Stretching with a shiver, she looked around at the damp morning grass. Reluctantly Daisy tilted her head skyward, breathing in the painful blue morning air, unable to tolerate the sun. The drone of the distant city shifted her attention back to the lonely patch of grass next to the quiet road. Daisy sighed. She

couldn't find the energy to lift her petals into their brilliance unlike the other flowers who stood proud in surviving the winter. Since winter began, all Daisy's petals were drooping. Every day, drooping closer to the dewy ground she so wished she could sink and vanish into.

Daisy, fixating on her droopiness noticed that she was cast into shade. Confused at how much time had passed whilst contemplating her gloom. Daisy realized it was not the sun that had cast a shadow on her but a Giant.

Daisy absorbed the size and beauty of Giant, not in awe but in envy.

Daisy had always felt undeserving of the attention humans gave lavish flora like Giant. Daisy was now conscious of her wilting appearance. Daisy was startled when she noticed Giant facing her. Giant's brilliant yellow mane and midnight-black face were enough to silence Daisy's dukkha.

"Hello" said Giant. Daisy taken aback blushed. "You're a beautiful little floret" he said. Startled and embarrassed Daisy looked to the ground with a heavy heart, one petal falling to the floor. Puzzled at how joyful Giant seemed, Daisy exclaimed "You're always smiling! I can't smile. The world feels cold and lonely." Giant felt Daisy's melancholy deep in his belly, sorrow was a feeling Giant was all too familiar with. Giant looked at Daisy with kindness, beaming with a childish glee, Giant raised his golden mane towards the sun. "Look at the sun Daisy" Giant said. Daisy, head still drooped towards the floor, another petal falling asked "Why?".

Silence. Curious, Daisy looked at Giant and then towards the sun. She felt the rays warm her body, no longer shivering, eyes closed she basked in the sunlight. "What is this feeling?" exclaimed Daisy. "Gratitude" replied Giant.

Giant explained to Daisy that as a sunflower, his purpose in life was to follow the sun. To follow the light. No matter how many storms he endured or heavy rains he survived he always knew that he could look to the sun for his happiness. All the harsh winter nights Giant felt alone or scared, he knew the sun would always rise and he was grateful. Feeling grateful made him feel happy. "All you have to do is look to the sun Daisy. Seek gratitude and happiness will follow."

Daisy beamed as they both turned their petals towards the sun. For the first time Daisy appreciated the rays of sunshine and in turn felt genuine joy. From that day on Daisy would always happily face and follow the sun.

Sunset

by Gayle Bekker

I sit beside the lake each night when
daily chores are done
With water lapping round my feet I
watch the setting sun
What colourful wonders will be seen
tonight?
As the blazing orange sun bids
the world "Goodnight"



Each sunset provides a special
show
With colours so many and the sky
aglow
From pink to orange and then to red
As the bright orange ball puts itself to bed.

The sky is now no longer blue
But filled with colours of every hue
And puffy pink clouds drift lazily by
While birds flying home shout their own "Goodbye"

But tomorrow the sun will rise again
Its scorching rays may bring the rain
With thunder clouds above the lake
What a picture that same sun will make
Not with colours of pink, orange and red,
But mauve and black and grey instead

Give praise the world is here to see
These magical sunsets 'til eternity.

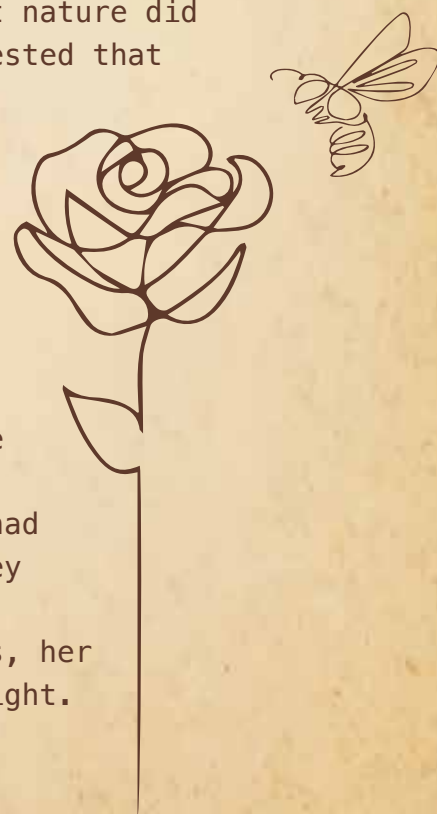
Roses

by Zohra Abdul Hamid

Rahima lived a secluded life with her granny on the outskirts of Andalusia. Although her granny allowed her a fair amount of freedom she was very protective of her. Rahima had a problem. She was born with an eye defect since birth thus causing her to have no vision in either eye. Repeated consultations with the eye specialists had proved to be futile. This, however did not deter the eleven year old from being a lively, pleasant and adventurous child. As a result of her adventurous and sometimes reckless spirit granny had to employ the services of a caregiver Anna. One of the highlights of Rahima's day was being allowed to roam in their huge garden. Rahima loved to smell the beautiful roses and on a number of occasions Anna had to reprimand her. "Rahima, please stop going so close to the roses, there are a number of bees around" said Anna. Rahima used to just laugh it off and say "what will be, will be ke sera sera" in a sing song fashion.

Well the unthinkable happened. On a beautiful summer morning whilst smelling the beautiful roses Rahima was stung by a bee. The sting was so sharp that it immediately brought tears to her eyes and she screamed for Anna. Within a short period her whole face swelled up and she had to be rushed to hospital. A number of specialists consulted with each other as to the best form of treatment for her because of her existing condition.

Everyday gran and Anna visited her in hospital. They would ask her what specials they could bring for her. During this time Anna's pleasant nature did not change. She had an unusual request for them. She requested that they bring her one rose each day. Anna teased her and said the bees, may even follow it to the hospital. Every day as soon as they left Rahima would rush to take the rose in her hand, smell it and make a wish. As days progressed in the hospital something strange was happening to Rahima. She would see flashes of light, just flashes nothing tangible. She did not reveal this to anyone, just kept the information like a heavy guarded secret. On day seven when she brought the rose to her nose to smell it she clearly saw "Red". She screamed out in delight causing the nurse to rush to her side. A miracle had occurred. The specialists were baffled. Scientifically they attributed it to the bee sting and the antibodies. Rahima, however, thought differently. The sweet smell of the roses, her prayers and her daily wishes had helped to rekindle her sight.



Celebrity

by Hazel Jean Woodward

My friend Bobbi is a bookseller. A few years ago she was helping out in a bookshop in Johannesburg – Exclusive Books in Braamfontein to be exact. It was a well-known celebrity's book launch and the shop was packed. His books were selling like hot cakes and she was busy with one of those old credit card machines – you know, the sort where you had to put the card in first, then the slip with all its copies and then you whipped the slider from left to right, and back again. Well, Bobbi was busy serving the last customer and the room was really quiet, waiting for the speeches to begin. She tried to hurry, to quickly accept payment with the customer's credit card. Nearly dropping the card in her haste, she shoved it into the machine. I watched as she slid the slider and ouch! She practically sliced the tip of her finger off. Blood everywhere.

"FUCK!" she yelled really loudly in the silence. Everyone turned to look at her and as I watched, she slowly slid under the desk, purple with embarrassment.

After the launch, the celebrity approached her as she stood at the counter behind his books.

"So sorry," she gabbled before he could speak. "It's just that I caught my finger," and she held it up for him to see.

"Do you know what we do in our culture to make it feel better?" he asked her with a smile.

Bobbi shook her head no, and then he said: "The same as in your culture," and taking her finger to his lips, he kissed it all better.

Who was the celebrity? Nelson Mandela at the launch of his wonderful book 'Long Walk to Freedom'.



September

by Marco Fracchiolla

Change and in the stillness,
Still

It was a day before the unseen storm.
Before they decided to lock the world down.

There is a knowing that I recognize, it's a
feeling to a question I've had before.

Why are we here?

A changing.

A simple day like every other.

A day with and without expectation.

A beautiful African watercolor.

Because nothing comes close to the freedom of new
and nothing is closer than the first time.

Why are we all hiding from an unknown fear?

Are we living in a spell?

Are we testing the question of heaven and hell?

Is there art in God, the idea of a million lit candles ,each a flame holding on to
burn brighter than the next, a dance where words are whispers, a breath a journey in
time, to another time and another place.

Human,

We are all one and the same here.

Protect our Earth Mother.

Touch don't touch, close too close, talk don't talk, walk don't walk, see don't see,
breathe don't breathe.

The cities can call off their search for there is no King nor Queen, no royalty or
peasantry here.

Awake, asleep, are you having a bad dream, a bad trip?

But it's alright the whole world is here.

If only I could tune in to the station it all sounds right and wrong, I folded the
news to the table and all the lies fell from its pages to the floor.

She turned a glance at me.

Her eyes a beautiful September morning.

Tea she asked?

A cup of tea, it's fine china, translucent from all the years of washing, art deco
was a modern movement then.

Today it's perfectly hand painted brush strokes slightly faded yet still precise, alive,
a collector's pride.

Who were the lives that sipped, what were the conversations at the tip of their lips,
if this teacup had listened what was said?

Today like every other day, a tea cup, a beautiful September morning, a full floor of
words, and a sense of knowing.

Alive,

Still and in the stillness, Human.

I cannot see your lips move,

I said to the eyes behind the mask.

My eyes are actually smiling a perfect September morning.



Hero

by Mari van Rensburg

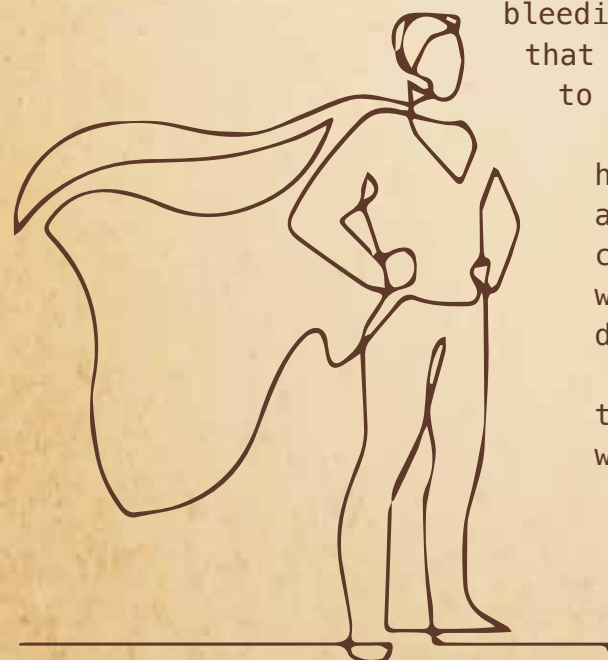
On the edge of the small town of Baileyville lived a scared and weary old man. The people of the town walked circles around him. All of them gossiped about the strange, scary old man that moved to the small town four months ago. The middle aged trophy wives sit around drinking their glasses of wine and when old man, Elias Wells, becomes the topic each has a different theory. They've listed them all from recently divorced to serial killer on the prowl. Nobody has had the courage to walk up to him and engage in conversation. The kids all believe that he's a monster hiding in human skin and the scars on his face is where he rips off his disguise.

Elias Wells was a war hero but no one in the town knew that and he preferred it that way. The less he let people in, the smaller the chance of him getting hurt. This has been his motto since that dreaded day in 1965 where he lost his best friend, his confidant, his eye, his unscarred face and his will to form a relationship with anyone.

He lived on the edge of the small town in a little cottage and never really made his way into town. The only reason that he made his way into town on this day was, because he ran out of toilet paper. He was walking along the sidewalk when he heard a loud screech, screams and a bark. He watched as the car flew past him and crashed into the wall of the local supermarket. The mother and son were both unconscious and a dog's hind legs were stuck between the car and the wall. Elias' war medic instincts kicked in and he rushed forward. He forced the driver's door open and checked on the mom. She had no visible injuries and it looked like she only hit her head. He helped her out just as she started to wake up. She was disoriented and screaming for her son. Elias ran to the son. The door wouldn't open but the window was smashed in. The son's head was bleeding and his arm was in an odd angle. He lifted the kid out of the car and ripped up his own shirt to tie around the kid's head. He managed to slow the bleeding down and carried the boy to the crowd of people that formed around the mom. He directed one young man to keep pressure on the boy's head.

The whine of the dog caught his attention and he rushed over to the mixed breed dog. The ambulance arrived and helped the mom and kid. A man came over and helped Elias get the dog out of the wreckage. Elias took off in a sprint as he carried the dog to the vet.

The people of Baileyville watched and realized that they were wrong about the old man, he wasn't a weirdo, he was a hero.



Hoping

by Gilda Galvad

Sitting on the only tiny patch of lawn on the side of the driveway, I marvel at the softness and rich greenness of the unmowed grass. It is long and inviting.

The leaves of the trees that line the driveway are different shapes, and so many hues of gold, green, red, rust and brown. The sun filters through their still living foliage. The sky as the backdrop is that impossible blue of the South African autumn and winter canopy.



All is good in the world, or so it would seem. In reality, the world is in turmoil. Typically, caught off guard by a treacherous foe. A new virus, not unexpected, but totally unprepared for. Chaos, confusion, anger, hopelessness, anxiety...and more and more negative emotions flood our consciousness, fuelled by the media's relentless onslaught of "information", some of it contrived and a lot of it fake.

Wondrously, as in every disastrous situation, the shining stars show themselves. There they are, giving solo operatic recitals on their balcony for all to enjoy, join in, or simply applaud. The theatrical companies, left high and dry, suddenly dismissed, not allowed to gather people to entertain, creating theatre apart, in singular roles as part of a whole, for people to enjoy. As do the orchestras around the world, drawing on artists, sometimes even from different countries, to contribute singly to the whole. What an achievement. Singers offering the public their latest songs for free, while we all pull together to try and weather this storm in totally uncharted waters.

People although isolated, some completely alone, some with a partner or family, reaching out, giving support, checking up on each other, sharing jokes to keep spirits up, telling stories, sending out helpful information, demonstrating wonderful creations of cooking food, baking, art, handwork, decorating, and more. Sharing, caring and simply being there for others.

Unfortunately not everyone is caught up in the tide of pleasantness, and as is always the case, there are them – that can't keep control of their rage, frustration and anger. They lash out, hurting those closest to them, creating ripples of hurt and damage that will be felt for a very long time, if not forever.

People, love them or hate them, you can never categorize them without failing. There will always be those who bring out the dark clouds, and thankfully, there will always be those that bring out the sun! It's known that behaviour is largely reactive, so can we collect the pearls of our ponderings during this unusual time and string them together, at a later date, when we resume our social lives, to make a necklace to remind us of the good and new ideas we planned to action, when freedom of movement is once again the normal course of life. Here's hoping.

Metrics

by Tracey Johnson

2002 was an important year.
The year that you arrived.
A blessing in the lives of many
Who have watched and loved you
As you have thrived

Fast forward 18 years and juggle
Those digits around.
You get 2020.
Another important year we have found



It's supposed to be your time of freedom
-of completing your final school year
But instead you find yourselves in lockdown
Trying to make sense of the loneliness and fear

It's difficult to study in the solitude of your bedroom,
Without the company of your peers.
It's far easier in a classroom
Where the teacher insists you listen with both ears

Amidst all of this chaos
And the experience of death
Something seems to be whispering,
Whispering under its breath

What if you are the ones to pioneer
A new way of being in this world?
A coming of age that values tenderness and tolerance
Instead of the hostility of old

What if you are the ones to teach us
Things can be done differently to before
And the practice of measuring people
Should be a practice no more

Instead, the mastering of
compassion, grace and nurture
Could become the attributes most welcomed
in the future.

Tenacity

by Stella Gonot

After completing school at 17, I fizzled. I should rehash at school, lamentably I fell pregnant and I got hitched yet the family did not acknowledge me, particularly his folks. The night I delivered my baby my mother in law would not take me to the clinic. I rested alone in my room attempting to deliver this baby by myself, yet the child did not come out until the next morning and afterwards I was rushed to the emergency clinic. My baby girl a down syndrome child.

My husband was an essential educator in rustic regions which was a very long way from home, so I stayed with him, yet he was not intrigued. I was beaten often, and he used to call me half-witted. Each time I was offended by him, he named me a pointless housewife who is uneducated.

My husband was an intense man.

On top of this my infant was not developing like a typical child, she only began strolling when she was three. After three years, I fell pregnant with my second child and he was a boy. Having two children with my husband did not transform anything about the manner in which he was treating me.

My husband did not change his conduct of mishandling and offending me, however I continued persevering with our marriage. After five years, I understood that he was going to slaughter me as a result of misuse and that's when I chose to return home to my folks to continue with my education, at that point we separated.

My folks consented to return me to secondary school. I walked three kilometres every day to and from school. It was hard to deal with the children and examinations but my outcome was unimaginably acceptable. I continued to University where I graduated with a Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Information Systems after four years.

I am currently studying Masters in Information Systems, and I will graduate soon. My ex-husband is still an essential educator – he did not redesign himself scholastically. Web development is my profession now, and I consider myself to be an uncommonly solid and decided lady who do not surrender easily.

I am tenacity.



Astros

by Altar Musodza

Ma is driving too slowly. And she's holding the steering wheel so tightly the skin over her knuckles looks all yellow.

I want to ask why but I think she might get angry and shout if I do so I'll just keep my questions to myself. Besides, I'm happy to be in the car right now. We're going to get Astros! The best chocolate sweets in the world.

Ever since school was cancelled, Ma buys a lot more snacks. At first I thought she felt bad for me because I don't get to go to school and play with my friends anymore but then I noticed how many sweets Ma has been eating herself. I had to ask her at some point, "whose sweets are these anyway?". I thought she would laugh like she always does when I use my angry but not really angry voice. But she only sighed and said it was time for us to go out again anyway.

Ma hardly ever laughs at my jokes anymore. She's too nervous about something all the time.

"Ma! It's green!" I shout to get her attention back on the green robot.

She shakes her head and snaps out of it. "I was just making sure you were paying attention," she fibs.

"I'm not the one driving," I argue.

"But you're in the car and you're responsible for your own wellbeing, mtanam. You have to take care of yourself no matter where you are. You know..."

"'God helps those who help themselves', I knowww Ma" I say for the millionth time.

"Well if you're not paying attention to what the driver is doing then that's not helping yourself. We must pray but we must show God that we're trying to help him keep us safe. And you're going to be in many cars my baby, always pay attention to what's happening around you and take good care of yourself..."

"Ma...it's GREEN," I say again.

This time she just speeds off silently.

Finally, we arrive. She puts her mask over her face then she turns to me. She tucks mine tightly under my chin and over my nose, even though I did it properly myself the first time, just like she taught me.

Eventually we step out of the car. Ma looks at a passing coughing man so angrily that he apologises and looks away quickly.

"How many are we getting?" I ask once we're inside.

"You only need one pump every month, sweetie. The doctor says there's no point in stock piling them because they expire and that will only make your asthma worse.

"No Maaaa," I sigh "I mean, how many Astros are we getting?"

She pauses for a moment. She looks down at me curiously and I wonder if I've said the wrong thing again and I hope she won't get angry.

But then she laughs a big loud laugh like she used to do. "As many as you want, mtanam," she finally says.



Jessy

by Elbri Viviers

We named it Jessy. We didn't know what it was – boy or girl...finch or sparrow. When we found it, it had a cold, nude body covered in tender pink skin and bulgy, blind eyes. Its featherless wings were flapping helplessly and its yellow beak was stretched open, chirping hungrily. We had to do something, and do it fast.

What would we feed it? How? When? Where would we keep it? How would we keep it warm? We tapped into three generations of knowledge, we Googled, we watched YouTube clips...we squabbled non-stop.

We almost had everything ready – a little cage with a heated pad, baby bird formula and a feeder. Then the little thing got sick – it stopped chirping and it stopped flapping its wings. It wouldn't open its mouth. It broke our hearts. Somebody had to take it to the vet. We also had to give it a name. The vet card cannot simply state "little bird". It meant too much to us. It deserved a name. We squabbled about the name. By some miracle we agreed on Jessy. We squabbled about what could have caused Jessy's sudden weakening.

Recent circumstances had drawn three households together under one roof, and we were squabbling constantly – bathroom rosters, the grocery list, pool maintenance...seven people. Seven ideas. But when Jessy had to be rushed to the vet, there was no time to squabble about who should go. We rushed to the vet in two separate cars with Jessy in a tiny box on my mom's lap, her hands wrapped around it protectively. We filled the vet's reception room – three generations, three households, seven people forced to function as one to resolve a vitally important problem.

At that moment, we no longer stood apart as seven people, but came together with one heartbeat, one purpose, one life we needed to save.

Jessy, who barely filled the palm of a hand, filled our hearts with love and united us as a family.



HomeLand

by Zakkiyah Y Hajaj

The land was deeply loved by all. Not because they considered it superior to any other land. But simply because it was their land, a tiny place in the world they called home. Their deep ties to the land were clear to me from the tales they told. Both young and old alike seemed to have a unique story of their homeland. From the stories children told of the abandoned house two streets away from school, where they would do their homework and then gather together to play hide and seek. To the corner tree where they would anchor old tyres to use as swings. Their eyes would light up as they told tales of their bravery on Valentine's Day when they would sneakily pluck red roses from the garden of the grumpiest man on the street. And he would chase them all the way down the street with his wooden broom in his underpants. And all the neighbourhood children would laugh and cheer. The older people told grand stories of each significant landmark in the town accompanied by the name of a saviour. Stories that tour guides and Google knew nothing about. Stories that would brighten up their wrinkled faces.



Wine

by Ompha Malima

Waking up to the lovely breeze of the morning wind felt so peaceful. It was like the angels were in our presence and life had no worries. We were out there thinking of the present and the future. Nothing else mattered.

She had found love and I had found peace but I was still in disbelief. Our worlds were now in harmony yet they were born of confusion, reluctance and pain. The past never mattered anymore. The diamond necklace I bought her was a symbol of renewal. It was beautiful but not more than she was. Her face, light like caramel gazed at me and I became speechless. I could not resist her seductive eyes.



That is why I could never say no. I could never resist her when she came back. Even though I asked her not to. The pain in my eyes found its voice in my tears as I went on my knees. Holding her waist. My hands felt the warmth of her curves and it went to my heart. Maybe even my head. I needed to have her but I could not. She was not a dinner plate to be had. So I let her go while the pain of unrequited love painted me with resentment. I could not see the light, all I could see was my intense dislike for her. She left me and I still loved her. I could never hate her. Taking her back was bound to happen, she had always been the girl.

The beautiful vineyard at the farm reminded me of how we see beauty as perfect. Like wine, it does not come from perfection. It needs to be nurtured and preserved. When she touched my hand I felt her refined love born of pain. It was beautiful. Like the bottles of wine in our cellar.

As I put the corkscrew on a bottle of pinotage I had a crazy thought. That if I was a mad scientist or an extraordinary artist I would mingle her beauty with wine and create something magical. Some artistic beauty. I did not know how, all I wanted was to live in the moment.

I never wanted that moment to end. Nothing mattered more than her being in my arms and running my fingers through her hair. While we both indulged in the bottle of pinotage. With endless stories which continued into the night. It felt as if time never existed.

Moon

by Yamkelani Sopapaza

While every other 16 year old was having the time of their lives enjoying high school drama and starting the journey of becoming a young adult I was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukaemia. This type of cancer which includes a group of blood cancers that begin in the bone marrow and result in high numbers of abnormal blood cells.

This was the darkest time of my life, what had started as constant bleeding and tiredness resulted in this life-threatening condition. I had to drop out of school because the cancer had spread and I needed to start treatment soon. My doctor told my mom and I that I had less than a year to live and I cannot begin to describe how I felt at that time.

Knowing that your days are numbered and that you'll soon be dead and forgotten is the worst feeling and I do not wish that on anyone. There was not much I could do to create nostalgic memories before I died because I was stuck in the hospital. Three months after my diagnosis I was diagnosed with depression. I honestly had given up on life and I thought that suicide would be the best option for me at that point because I would be free from all the pain and suffering.

My mother still had hope, she always told me that God is with us and He would not let us live in vain. I no longer believed in God because I wondered why He did not answer our prayers and what had I done to deserve such pain? I was always kind to people, I did not litter, never kissed a boy and I followed his 10 commandments yet still, here I was lying in bed staring at the hospital ceiling with my eyes burning and having no motivation to close them.

I am now in my 2nd year of studying Astronomy and free of cancer. I came to the point whereby I decided to fight back and not lose hope and so I did. I am so proud to call myself a cancer survivor. My journey showed me that if I could go through something so tragic then I could conquer anything.

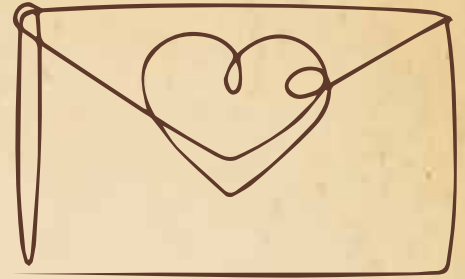
One of the reasons why I chose to study Astronomy is because I want to reach for the moon and the stars. Whenever there was a full moon I'd look out from my hospital room and watch it. I learnt so many lessons from the moon; the moon is not always full, this taught me that I should always stick to my purpose. The moon is generous, he revolves around us providing light but does not expect anything from us, and this showed me that I should always show kindness and love. Lastly, the moon does not change to impress anyone for only the oceans respond to the moon's gravity, this taught me that I should never change who I am for anyone.



Awesome

by Pat Pienaar

It was the perfect gift. Spotted on Saturday at an incidental craft market stall, it associated itself with her quite logically. Deftly dropped into a tastefully floral envelope, its allure as a token of homage to an extraordinary being, was irresistible.



On Monday morning she found it in her post box.

She removed it from its delicate wrapping with a little thrill of anticipation. She read its statement as a validation of her self-declared and unequivocal conviction that she was a model teacher and a paragon of admin.

After school, she triumphantly showed it to her family before affixing it to the fridge door like a badge of distinction. Its message, "I love to be awesome," told her that some obscure admirer had been moved to show veneration for her exceptional talents as an educator of note.

Settling on the sofa, she sipped her tea and congratulated herself on achieving a most satisfactory school Monday. She was awesome and she loved the feeling.

The identity of her anonymous fan teased her. Was it a colleague? It couldn't be someone in her subject group. She had tried often to demonstrate to those colleagues that her way of teaching was the most effective but they were obdurate and chose to remain unenlightened.

A chilly suspicion dimmed the glow of her radiant mood. The word "irony" made its unwelcome presence felt. Someone was being playful! Or worse. This little surprise in her pigeon-hole was a jibe. Oh Damascus! Her tea went cold. Her saliva receded and her mouth dried. Tears welled. Her daughters closed their bedroom doors. Her husband withdrew to his workshop.

On Monday morning she paused at the rack of post boxes at the door of the staffroom. She decided not to put that fridge magnet into her post-box.

In her classroom later, she plonked it onto the side of a filing cabinet. She could see it when she was seated at her table. Her students thought it was really cool as the cabinet housed their portfolios.

A week later it disappeared. "Thieves love to be awesome too," She bitterly remarked to her classes. Her irritating colleague could just as well have received this lovingly selected gift, she thought darkly.

Weeks later, the boy came to speak privately to her. In his class group, he resembled a runt in a litter of all-alpha pups. His peers were self-assured and secure; he drifted and gazed around, vaguely aware that he was hopelessly omega.

"You know," he confided. "I took this." He handed her the magnet.

"Thanks," She replied, surprised. "Keep it. You are awesome; I mean it."

I meant it.

Family

by Shane Rajah

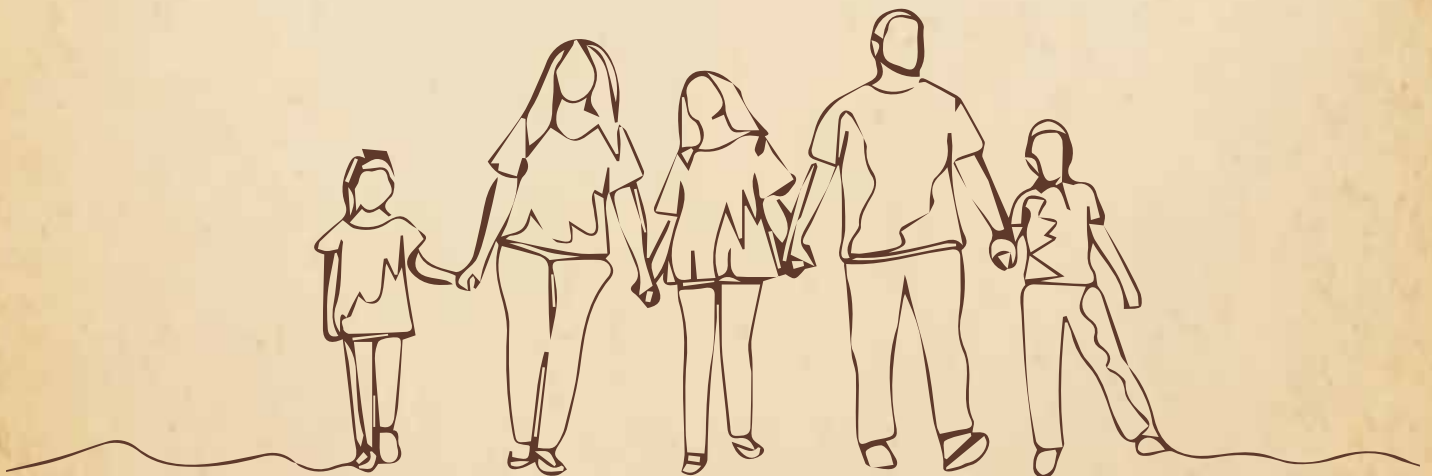
When the road has too many obstacles and you are in fear
Who is there but Family, to clear your obstacles?

When there is sickness, sadness and pain
Who is there but Family, to make you feel better again?

When you see no hope and direction for yourself
Who is there but family, to make you whole again?

In our darkest times we look up- for our Divine Family
And below- for those who hold our hands.

Family is not defined by blood but by love and caring for each other.
Thank you for being my Family.



Ocean

by Shannon Francesca Roos

The salty fresh air that blows in my hair while I curl my toes in the squishy sand. This fills my heart with absolute happiness! The waters are blending in shades of turquoise and the darkest of blues. Sprinkles of brown lie in these waters which are known as the seaside rocks. The sound of the waves roaring and crashing upon the shore give me great satisfaction and peace. The tide comes in and out like a little boy with his slingshot. The crabs dance on the sand with their pincers high up in the air, shaking them like they just don't care. They play hide and seek with the waves.

Under the sea is a whole different world, a world of mystery, beauty and wonder. The coral reefs are unbelievable. They have splashes of every colour you could ever imagine with fish of different kinds swimming and swerving in joy. The dolphins jump up and down like a spring over the horizon. The whales sing to one another with lots of love and bliss.

The best part is when the colours burst- flavourful like candyfloss during dawn and noon with shades of pink, orange, red and yellow just shining everywhere. The ocean has been touched by God's hand with beauty and calmness.



Fire

by Robyn Fox

The watery rays leaked slowly across the mountain as the sun began its ascent over the distant horizon, giving form to each lump of rock and highlighting the many cracks and crevices. Slowly the shadows shortened and the vista appeared before me, barren and brown as it had been for many weeks.

It had been 40 days since the fire. Days during which the fire crews had tirelessly cleared away the burnt structures and fallen branches, dampened down the earth and prepared the area for reopening. Days during which we had mourned the loss of much wildlife and the beauty of our mountain, things that we had arrogantly taken for granted for so long, but that we now realised were not much different to us, here to be respected, cherished and loved.

I cycled up to the mountaintop each day before work, in part for exercise but also for perspective. The world was a crazy place and in the course of the working day it was all too easy to lose track of what was important: family, friends, health. Every day was a fresh start, an opportunity to reset the clock and refocus the mind, and there was no better place to do it than surrounded by nature. The bareness of the mountain amazed me. It was life, pared back to expose the bare bones of existence: the plain, the ugly and the basic.

I gazed around me, taking in the landscape while my breathing returned to normal after the hard uphill climb. I felt at peace on the mountain, inspired by the beauty of the barrenness and calmed by the quiet surrounding me. But today was different. I felt a stirring of motivation, and with my eyes closed I focused on this feeling, willing it to grow and to give me a new purpose for the day ahead. Minutes ticked by and with a last deep, cleansing breath I opened my eyes again, energised and excited. As I prepared to retreat back down the mountain, my vision was caught by a hint of colour, a splash of something that was not a shade of brown. In amongst the charred remains of previously lush bushes was a small plant, a green seedling that had forced its way through the burnt ground determined to grow and enhance the barren space. Looking around, I noticed many more of these tiny signs of life, scattered about the charred earth. The mountain was being revived, nature was working its miracle and I was feeling more alive than I had for ages. I wanted to jump up and down, shout with joy and laugh to the heavens. I wanted to sing and dance, kiss and love with abandon.

I jumped back onto my bicycle and hit the downhill, ready to take on the day with vigour. It wasn't just the mountain being reborn, my own rebirth had begun.



Words

by David Mann

I am sitting at my desk, searching for better words. Less than a decade ago I was doing this sort of thing for free. I still do, here and there, most often when I have the time, and when I am so moved by the sustained results of mark-making or the body in motion that I find it nearly impossible to keep quiet about what I have just seen. I am told that this is a sign that I am in the right line of work. Also, that I have found something that makes me happy.

When I was a child (a long time ago, now) something ruptured and my whole world was split in two. I remember very little, mind you, only that there was a black rubbish bag of fruit and vegetable cuttings that sat softly decomposing in the corner of the garden – a hot, damp kind of sweetness – and that for a very long time, nothing made much sense. Years later my whole family fell apart and I suppose the silver-lining here (if we are searching for such things) is that I was likely one of the more well-prepared amongst us.

Apparently, when you're in the habit of outrunning certain things – people, places, emotions – dwelling on (and yearning for) a life viewed in retrospect is quite common. It is a means of making sense of everything you moved past at such great speed. The other problem, then, is not being able to appreciate the present very well. Often, I am struck by the heavy weight of time. What to do with all of this history? And how to go about separating the good from the bad, the sad from the joyful, so that we can begin to make better sense of it all in the long-term? Words are a useful starting point – writing it all down.

I keep a small notebook filled with things I am grateful for or, if you like, things that bring me a certain kind of joy. Jotting these fragmented and often incongruous moments or thoughts down in the short-form helps me to focus on what is taking place in my life on a more immediate level:

- The first cup of coffee
- Incredulous maps
- The enduring note
- Making one's mark
- The sleepily told dream
- The second cup of coffee
- 15 minutes of a good book
- 4 minutes of piano music
- The shape of stories
- The smell of ink
- Time to one's self
- The sun on my hands
- A warm body
- Words, words, words



Lately, I've taken to throwing all of these words together, haphazardly at first and then with a more considered approach. It is an analogue exercise in collaging words and thoughts – an attempt at better pinning down those moments that might pass me by, in order to see what kind of story they'll tell. I am always surprised at how well this story ends.

Princess

by Jacqueline Munro

Her name was Princess. And we set sail on her on 04 March 2020. Back in November I promised my sister that I'd make it to the Princess in time for her 50th birthday. This was the cruise ship she worked on for years. Carol is my 'baby' sister, and we'd been apart for some time. I was not going to miss her special birthday. I would be there no matter what it took.

I start collecting magazines, presents and I even decide to throw in a few Easter eggs for Carol. I've missed her so much. Christmas comes and goes – and we anticipate our big 12 day cruise. Then, COVID 19 hit – and starts claiming lives. I have a bad feeling about this, and my anxiety grows as I think about Carol. Staff members at work start getting sick around me. I panic, because I couldn't risk getting sick – I really needed to get on the Princess – I promised my sister I'd be there.

I made it to the ship – but making it off the ship was perhaps another story for another time. My heart leapt with joy when I saw my 'little' sister (almost 50) at the door of my cabin, that March morning. We laughed and joked and spoke a lot about this thing called 'Corona'. The world could've broken apart, and all that mattered for us was to be together.

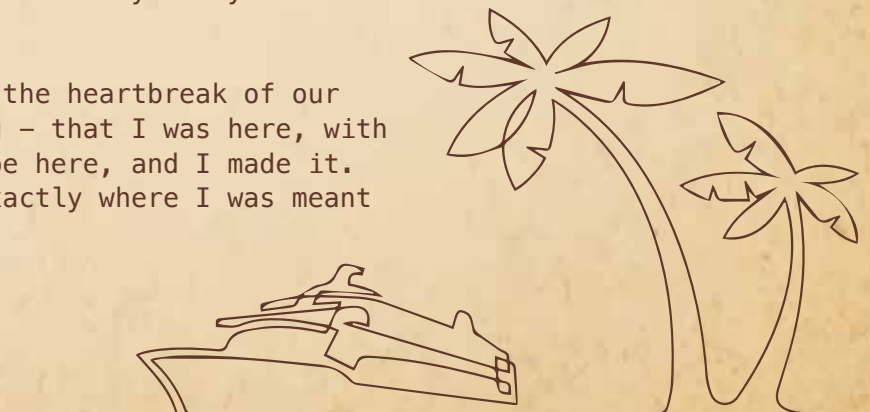
We celebrated Carol's 50th with so much love and spirit. We also spent a lot of days watching the news about the Corona Virus – flights stopping, countries going into lockdown, things out of control, death doubling every day. We were worried. We needed to be back home by 20th March 2020.

But we never got there.

Little did we know that the world as we knew it, was ending – and our ship was set to keep sailing, indefinitely.

We sailed the Princess for approximately 32 days. 32 long days. Days turned into night, night turned into conversations about the pandemic. Eventually we didn't know what day it was anymore – and landed up playing 'spot the dolphin' on the decks. The worry set in. It was real. None of us knew if we'd ever get home, as ports shut us out and the Princess kept circling the seas. I thought what if we died here; what if we never got home to our loved ones; what if we lost our friends to this virus. While the waves continued to knock up against our shaking hearts, I looked over at my sister one night, across the table: her curly dark hair blowing in the breeze, and her wide silky smile catching everyone's eye, and her pretty laugh that rang out in a room – and took me back 50 years ago, when she was just a baby in my Mother's arms. She was my princess.

I reminded myself that night, amidst the heartbreak of our planet and that empty faraway feeling – that I was here, with my sister. I travelled for miles to be here, and I made it. No matter the journey's end, I was exactly where I was meant to be – and, where I wanted to be.



Unicorn

by Alison Garstang

If only we could find a thing like this in lockdown to sparkle up the fact that we can't see all our best friends and the people we love. But if you feel like you need some happiness in your life, then close your eyes and head to a place for a drink with your friends and some Unicorn Fries.

Not McDonald's again

That's the kind of food I despise

Well, except for the unicorn fries

Their taste, so amazing

Their colours, so grand

Their sparkly wrapper, shinier than the sun on the sand

Oh, it's so sad that it was only a dream

But a magnificent one that made my heart gleam!



Faith

by Zaheeda Dockrat

The light breeze is soft and comforting... a warm embrace, gently whispering, as i walk briskly towards the sunset prayer. The drooping sun paints the sky a myriad of marigold hues, stretching itself lazily across the horizon. Hundreds of worshipers hastily make their way towards the HOLY MOSQUE. I hear the muffled voices of indistinct chatter around me. A diverse mix of every age, race, colour, culture, ethnicity. I look around curiously. I see faces and dress that resemble the people of a remote village somewhere far away. Others flamboyant, some stoic and humble, and some brash and relentless. Most are busy on their phones, video calls, Skype, or just talking excitedly to who is probably a loved one back home. The excitement is palpable. Everyone needs to find a comfortable space, a sanctuary for that moment or the next few hours, some until, they eventually succumb to a deep sleep right there, oblivious to the masses of other worshipers around them.



Agitated parents anxiously try to control energetic kids, jumping around ecstatically watching the birds swoop by. Others carefully manoeuvre a wheelchair carrying his old, fragile, bent over parent, protectively navigating his way through the rush of people who stubbornly refuse to make way. I get lost in thought for a moment as the reality of life's ultimate reversal of roles in the relationship between parent and child dawns on me....

The call to prayer reverberates through the air, sending a shiver down my spine. The beauty, the clarity, the power it holds, lilting, melodic, sonorous, too great to aptly describe. Everyone hastens their pace.

I whisper a prayer of gratitude, as my heart soars when I realise once again the loftiness, the eminence and the greatness of where I am.

Men and women part, as the guards separate the two, pointing out the correct entrances impatiently, shouting loudly as the crowds disperse in different directions. I acknowledge the masked woman in her uniform, one of many. I can only see her tired eyes, a resigned acceptance softening the starkness of her gloved hands, cleaning up dutifully, uncomplaining. She stares at me blankly. The unsung heroes I think, as our eyes meet briefly, but to her, I'm just another face in the thousands she will never remember following that moment.

The buzzing background noise quiets down as the Imaam starts the prayer. I scramble for a place to lay down my prayer mat. The woman beside me glares at me as she mutters to herself, unwilling to relinquish her place.

I apologize in a language as foreign to her as hers is to me.

Another woman smiles, moves slightly and gestures for me to stand beside her. I thank her silently. I look around one more time. Every one of us, there with the same purpose. To pray, beg, find answers, seek peace and to be heard. The prayer begins.

A beautiful breath-taking silence. In that moment, everything is perfect.

Rise

by VaL Smit

A very good friend of mine has the Life Philosophy: 'We rise by lifting others.' What a profound philosophy and approach to Life. After careful consideration and months of scrutiny, I have realised that she is right. Once again. Significant positive energy is generated by assisting others in the most insignificant way.

A word of care;

The touch on an arm;

A generous hug;

The promise to listen.

Sometimes, no matter what your current situation, gentle care for Your Neighbour can have a profound effect on your perception of reality. Your own reality will change once you know that there are so many other human beings in more adverse situations than yourself. We have so much to be thankful for, but we get so consumed by our daily lives, that we lose sight of our real Life goal.

We rise by Lifting Others.

It is the most empowering, invigorating experience known to man, I think.

Try it!



Life

by Remano Govender

Hysterically searching for clarity, behind the mystery of life.
The unease of this uncertainty feels as unreal as the predictability of certainty.
Tell me what have we been failing to see?
Why do we replace fantasy with reality?
Why do we feed fuel into our own anxieties?
If reality is really what we manifest it to be,
Will you smile and wave at crowds of known foes?
Will you give to strangers just as you'd give to your own?
Will you take the time out and invest it to grow?
Will you be able to cherish the amount of smiles you've sown?
Remember a positive mind can only be derived from a person who loves to smile,
One genuine smile can redirect a lost life,
The negativity in life can only subside with time if we put strength behind our smile.
The past haunts those who choose to drown with its negativity instead of embracing the one true secret of life,
That is every question we may have boils down to one answer which is that we all deserve to smile.



Love

by Sonja Moorcroft

Such a multi-faceted word, used broadly and abused by many. Still there it is – love – aching to be defined. There has been a myriad of definitions and attempts to contain and explain this small and powerful word, but it remains a challenge throughout generations and as humanity, we will endeavour to box or contain it, but its supremacy lies in it being irresistibly limitless.

In its basic pure form, love from a parent to a child might begin to model the complexities of this small and powerful word in all of its hugeness. Giving and caring when there might not necessarily be reciprocation – already a barrier for most humans. Yet the secret to life is this kind of caring, it is altogether freeing.

When working late one night my husband took a pillow and slept on the floor next to me, despite being seconds away from our comfortable bed. Still he chose to do what he did – to me that translates into love – pure and solid. This kind of love is not cheap, it will cost you – be it comfort, time, money, but you are willing to give, since it comes from a place of truth. Even the greatest love story cannot trump this kind of real giving and sacrifice.

Is love to be found in bearing gifts, companionship, in “doing”? To a degree I would deem it part of love and loving. It is just so much deeper, in that the attitude with which we give or do, makes all the difference.

Love can never make me feel indebted, then it has lost its power. Thankfulness and true joy should rather be the end result where true love is at work.

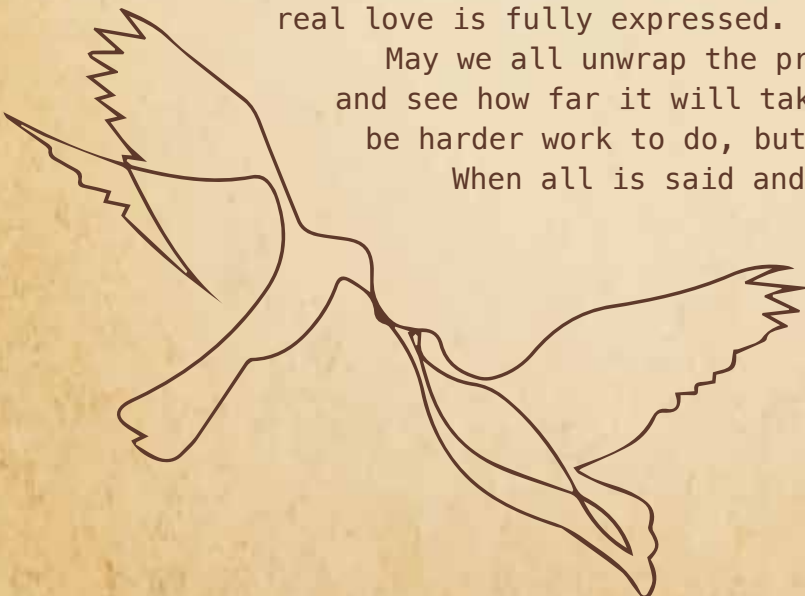
Love is also not trying to perfect another or to point out weakness, but getting dirty myself and jumping into your pool of confusion or fear and standing alongside you, being with you amidst your doubt, helping to steer you ashore.

Is the mystery of love not rather found in a person sitting next to another, who might be sick or out of sorts, staying up late at night with one another, just being there in stillness?

The greatest love of all time and eternity took place 2000 years ago on a horrid hill called Golgotha, where Jesus laid down His life for us, despite us not deserving any of His grace, favour or forgiveness. What an example for all of us to take something from, to realise it is in giving oneself that real love is fully expressed.

May we all unwrap the precious gift of love with confidence and see how far it will take us on our journeys in life. It may be harder work to do, but the returns are truly incalculable.

When all is said and done though, I agree wholeheartedly with gospel singer Don Francisco “Love is not a feeling, it’s an act of your will”.



Flowers

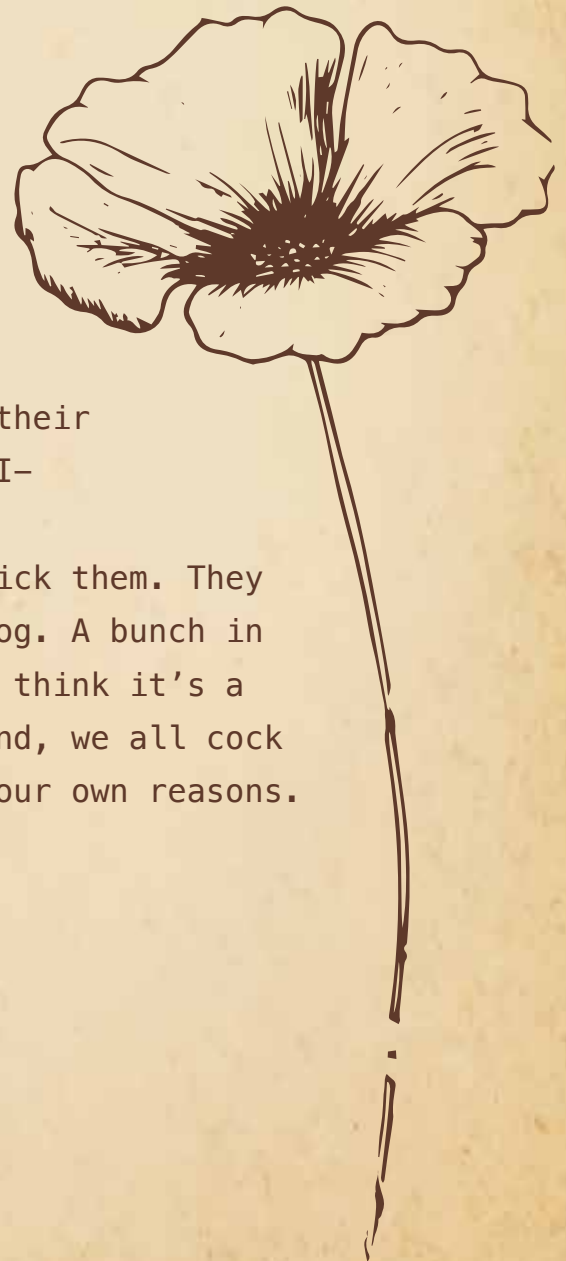
by Kaylin Michelle

It's the day before the apocalypse, and I'm running. In the park. It's much more lively than usual. People are getting their last bit of nature in. There are dogs and joggers, cyclists, walkers, sitters, standers, photographers, yogis. There's chatter everywhere (of the upcoming apocalypse) but it's gentle, light. It's accepting and curious. People just want to be by the river, the weepy willows, the hills and the old park benches.

It's a shame that the apocalypse has to happen tomorrow though, because it's March and there is cosmos everywhere: thousands of purple and white flowers standing tall above our heads, a sea, asking us to swim. They must be appreciated before time is up. They simply must. This is all they exist for. So we rise to the occasion: children get tangled in their long stems, lovers take pictures in them, and I-

I ask a few of the flowers if they'll let me pick them. They don't mind. So I take some with me, along my jog. A bunch in hand. It's not a common sportswear look, but I think it's a pretty one. I see some friends and we laugh, and, we all cock our heads to the flowers. In our own way, for our own reasons. We hug goodbye, the day before the apocalypse.

"See you in another time," we say.



Joy

by Claire Gibson

Is a three letter word.
Sibling to Yes. Ink. Fly.
That feeling
An ancient bird
An open heart
Taking to the sky.

Deliverance. Dharma. Destiny.
Intestinal laughter
Roof off, naked rafter
Planes missed
For lovers kissed
For knowing there is life beyond happily ever after.

A hibiscus tucked behind the left ear
Callings answered beyond fear
Old friends in new skin
Joy-
That sacred space
The soul within.



Postponement

by Natasha Fracc

The Princess waved the envelope at her servant. "Here," she stretched out her arm, "take it to the King at once and tell him we are postponing Gratitude."

"Postponing Gratitude?" the servant repeated in shock. "But Milady, we cannot do such a thing. Gratitude is the event of the year, everyone looks so forward to it."

"There is no time Alice!" the Princess snapped and raised herself up from the chair, "between all this paperwork and walking the hounds and bathing the children and counting the wage slips and collecting land rent and sewing my supper gowns and arranging the Duke's funeral...it is just impossible to have Gratitude this year. I've made up my mind, call it off."

"Milady, please don't do this. The good people of our lives need to feel that they matter and Gratitude does this for everyone; even the sick, lame and lazy rise up to Gratitude when it comes around. People dress up. It makes the city happy. Postponing it would only mean regret."

"Oh? And what might you know of regret Alice?" she quizzed her servant. "I know the regret of a missed opportunity. It befalls harder than the plague Milady. It rots inside the soul but never lets you die. I know that we can postpone Gratitude, but we can never postpone regret that follows," she said.

The room went deadly still. The two women alone, stared feverishly through each other, at the unnamed consequences of their lives. And the children were bathed that night. And the wage slips were counted.

And the King's letter, was never delivered.



Mother

by Raffaella Migliore

Life can be so hard sometimes
And nothing goes right, and nobody understands, and nowhere feels like home
I don't want to talk, don't call me, don't ask
The ocean has set out to drown me today
The world has gone dark

She can't tell me because these days I don't speak
But I boil the kettle. I have a cup of tea

Thank God I have my Mother in me.

Life can get me down sometimes
And nothing is good, and things won't get better, and I will never come home
My life isn't much, put my skin up for hire
The sun has set out to burn me today
The world is on fire

She can't tell me because I won't let her speak
But I boil the kettle. I have a cup of tea.

Thank God I have my Mother in me.

At night I lay my head to rest
And I pray tomorrow is better
I text goodnight, I send a kiss
In my heart I write her a letter

She can't tell me because I can be hard to keep
But I count my blessings before I sleep

Thank God I have my Mother in me.



Earth

by Lynette Schultz

They caged the people in their homes with neither chain, nor lock.
With fear they drove them from the streets – this voiceless, spineless
flock.

On creatures in a gilded cage the birds would
come to spy.

The doves, who left their hidden nests, in
abandonment did fly.

They sent the children home from school for
thirty days – then more.

A picture box the children watched with empty
minds – full score.

In the blue light through the window's glass
the creatures came to dance
in the quiet of the dead of night – the foxes
lighty pranced.

They stopped the planes from taking off, they grounded every fleet.
The bustle of the airports ceased and the joy of people's greet.
The metal birds in thousands cast their eyes to the plumeless sky, and
from the clear and vivid blue they heard the eagles cry.

They stopped the factories, cars and trains – the workers sent away.
Pubs and shops and malls were locked, except from feline strays.
And from the concrete rooftop tips the mountains could be seen
without the mist of engine fumes, the caps of snow they gleaned.

And in the annuals they would write:

"Nature once broke free, 't was but for a pause, an hour (two or maybe three)."



Road

by Jade Kirkel

There is a bond that exists between the tar and the runner. An unspoken respect. Running shoes. Sunblock. Garmin. Earphones. Look out onto the empty street. Just the two of us. The road and the runner. Will it be kind to me today? Press start. I cannot let the road down. Not today. It's never let me down. My breathing getting louder. Harder. A hill. My playlist has gifted me with one of my favorites. Pass the gardener, in his blue overalls, walking his two huskies. A welcomed sight. Tomorrow I will stop and ask his name. I promise myself again. Pass the houses. All too familiar. Wave at the faces guarding the streets. They know them better than me. Pass the decaying bird corpse. It looks worse than a few days ago. My breathing has settled with just enough room for my conscience to kick in. Use this time to think. Think about your career. Your life goals. Short lived. A traffic light. Cars pass. You wonder where they're heading. Glance at my watch. Catch a glimpse of my pace. Slower. Much slower than yesterday. Why. I'm a terrible runner. My watch knows it and the road knows it. A burst of inspiration. Catch someone's eye driving in a car. Locked for a few seconds. Who are you? I should be listening to a podcast. You're wasting precious time to learn. The street vendor waves. He knows me now. I'm relieved he has a customer.

Side step to avoid the uncovered man hole. Fuck someone needs to cover that. I should just do it? But I don't. Another runner. Will he wave? He puts his head down. He's probably a serious runner. Probably thinks I'm an amateur. Am I an amateur? Look, your favorite stretch is coming up. Where the path is peaceful and shady. Stop. Stretch my legs. I love the road. But I know what's coming. Mike. The beggar with his cowboy hat and prosthetic leg.

The man that calls the road his home. Not his outlet. He's sitting today. It's early for Mike to be sitting. I hand him the sweaty R20 note I've been holding onto. Pass the building site that never gets built. The workmen outside in their droves. Our time together is getting easier. My breathing lighter. My thinking clearer. Home is near. I feel good. The air pumping in and out of my lungs. I feel every breath. My legs are strong. My heart is in it.

Every step feels like a victory.

Turn the corner. Exhale. Inhale.

Hello home. Exhale.

What does the road think of me now? Respect is earned. Sole to tar.

You trust me.

Today, we're equal.



Tree

by Kaylin Michelle

We forget the power of neutrality. We chase the Big Thing, the life-changing, the elation, the falling in love – and sometimes we fall down into the dust, the dark chaos, we cry, we become limp and then we claw our way back to the sun. But real magic, power, strength lies in the neutral.

Take a tree. She is planted and she never moves herself. She sinks her roots in and she waits. She is weathered. But she is grounded, and she grows. She is shaken and she does not fight back; she simply stays connected to her roots, she pushes them deeper into the ground, wider around her, creating a solid foundation.

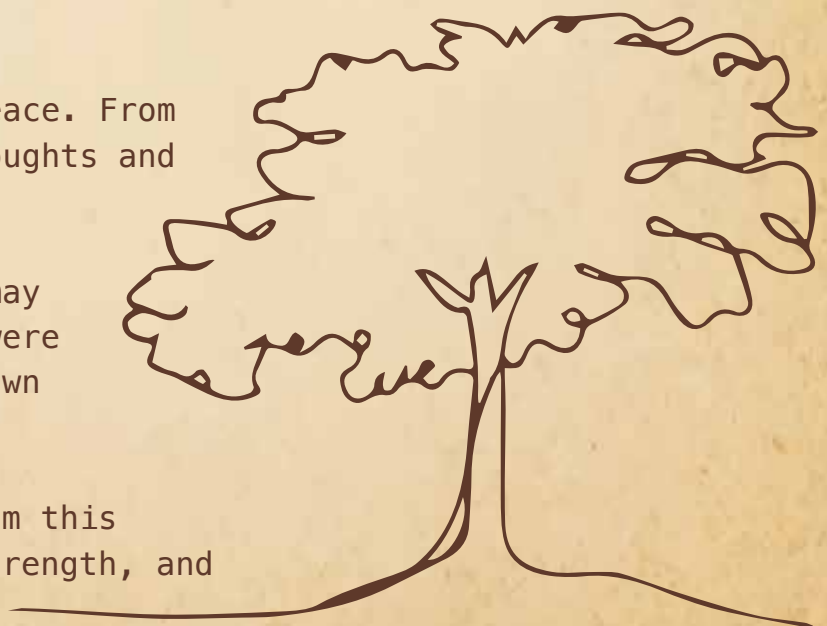
And she builds strength. She does not curse the storms, and she does not praise the sun. She quietly remains grateful for each of their gifts; she accepts them, and she grows. She allows her dead leaves to drop without mourning them. And when people marvel at her spring blossoms and fresh green shoots, she does not say “why yes, look how good I am,” but rather thinks “this is the process. This is me. This is life.”

And when she has grown large, from that exact place she was first planted; from the same place she dropped leaves and perhaps some branches, she resonates a unique beauty, a wisdom. We stand in awe of her magnitude.

We are at peace with her summer, winter, spring and fall.

Neutrality is this – a place of peace. From a neutral space, our emotions, thoughts and judgements are eased and open to creativity; open to recognize perspectives and small graces we may not have noticed before, when we were swept away on a high or dragged down by a low.

Neutrality is acceptance – and from this place we are grounded, we build strength, and we grow.

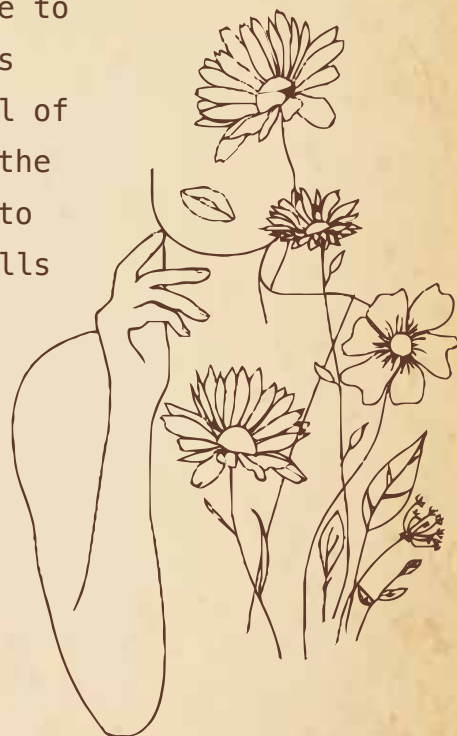


Bodies

by Josie Roux

It can be very easy to be mean to your body. You look in the mirror and say, “Why are you so jiggly?”; “Why don’t you look like the body of that famous singer that I love?”; “How come your knees are so knobbly and your nose looks like a ski slope and your chin sticks out that way and your fingers aren’t long and dainty and delicate?” It comes naturally.

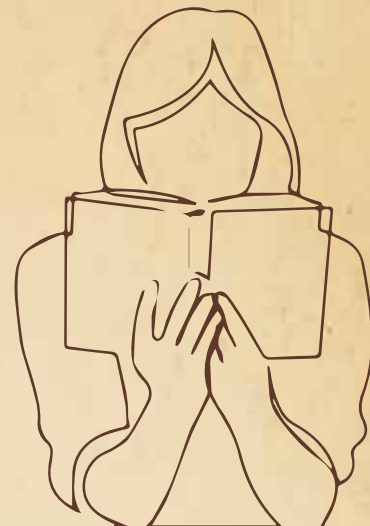
What isn’t always easy is remembering the remarkable things that your body does, every single second. So, here, let me take a minute to remind you. Maybe your body doesn’t look like that famous singer’s but how amazing that your brain can remember all of those beautiful lyrics so that you can belt them out in the shower! And you know when you put on a jersey belonging to someone you love? And it smells like home because it smells like them and you feel like you’re getting a big hug? That’s all thanks to the amazing smelling-skills of your ski slope nose! You may think that all it takes to make you smile is a funny cat video, but actually it’s a whole 17 muscles in your face doing the work for you and you don’t even know it. Another thing I can promise you without a shadow of a doubt is that every dog you’ve ever patted has not cared an inch about whether or not your fingers are sufficiently dainty. Without those dainty-or-not fingers, you wouldn’t have been able to make their day when you crouched down and gave them the best belly rub ever! Surely that’s way more important than a pair of knobbly knees could ever be?



Your body deserves your love. It is the reason you’ve seen a shooting star and a handful of really extraordinary sunsets and cookies rise in the oven. It’s the reason you can hear that wonderfully rewarding sound of your best friend laugh when you say something that you know she’ll find funny. Your body deserves your love because every minute of every hour of every day, your heart beats around 80 times, your eyes blink about 20 times, and your lungs take a breath about 15 times, without you even noticing. That’s one big miracle if you think about it. Keep it in mind next time you look in the mirror.

Books

by Taliah Goorahoo



I sat for what felt like hours, but I hardly noticed. Nothing mattered anymore – not my problems, not home, not the world. Nothing.

Having my legs up on the chair, I exhaled a breath as I watched the characters come alive and look at each other, stepping closer each second and falling further into disaster.

I was so engulfed I didn't hear the chair opposite me get pulled out.

"First time, huh?"

I looked up, having all of my senses leave me questioning where I was.

It was reality.

"Sorry?"

"The book. Your facial expressions tell me it's your first time reading it."

I stared into the face of an extremely cute guy with mysterious brown eyes and a strand of dark hair in his face. A soft touch of freckles spread from the bridge of his nose, dispersed and disappeared.

"Yeah." I gave him a small smile.

"It's my favourite, and considering how long you were sitting in that position, I guess it would be yours too."

My head cocked slightly to the side. "I've never seen you around before."

"I moved here about a week ago."

"How're you finding it?"

I took note of how easily his fingers glided through his hair and ruffled it even more.

"It's really nice."

He leaned forward and stretched out his arm. "May I?" he referred to my book.

I put my leg down and handed him the book.

"Ah, I remember this part." He chuckled lightly but I barely heard.

It was getting late and I'd have to return home sometime.

"Hey, are you okay?"

I looked up and met his eyes.

"My parents. I think they're going to get a divorce. They complain every night and I can't take it anymore. I feel so alone"

Tears threatened to overflow and I felt a warm hand over mine.

"It's okay. I'm here for you."

I looked at his face and saw so much sincerity and kindness.

I felt my head nod at his words as a security guard came up to us and mentioned they were closing.

Feeling embarrassed, I packed my books and headed for the door but stopped shortly.

"You're really nice. Thank you." I couldn't ignore the fluttering in my stomach.

"I'll always be here if you need someone."

I saw that cute smile spread across his face as I blushed and headed out the doors.

I got back home and heard insults shouted once again. I snuck up to my room, closed the door and sat by my window.

I pulled out the book I was reading in the library and turned to my current page.

A slip of paper sat between the pages and I opened it.

'After this page, things are gonna get quite rough. I'm here if you need to rant. I'll always be there for you. 617-555-3738 – Ben x'

My heart started to beat faster. I smiled.

I didn't feel so alone anymore. I had hope.

Eden

by Lyn Mansour

The magnificence of my sanctuary seemed different this time. The sun felt a little warmer as Autumn had come to sweep across the fields at play. The vibrant kaleidoscope of colours washed across the landscape more radiant than before. Dusk held its last breath, then began to fall.



My sanctuary was different this time. The ripened fruits tasted sweeter and the captivating aromas from the herb gardens filled the crisp air, engulfing my senses as I drew on my every breath. The days were gentler. The colder nights were so much warmer. The crackling fire burnt stronger, fueled by the abundance of tender love which emanated from our togetherness.

In this sanctuary, my Eden, in this beautiful place, I succumbed. Peace found me once again. My senses flourished, they were nurtured and nourished. I was replenished with motherly love and the symphony orchestrated by Mother nature herself. This love fed my soul. A love that lives in my heart, a love that is the hearth, my home. My mom spoke and I listened. She shared and I was intrigued. She spoke of yesteryear as if it were the here and now. She taught me in this short while, that time and distance had no place, what really matters, is the now.

We honoured time, this special time, our time, as I have always honoured her. The days were filled with deep gratitude. I was filled with grace, knowing how blessed I was to be sharing this Eden, my soul's sanctuary, with a pure and beautiful heart. My mom and I, together in this special place. I treasured every moment of our time away, our time together and long to do it all over again someday soon. For now, my Eden continues to blossom in her abundance of a Mother's love, so does my gratitude. My gratitude for our time then, our time now and our time together, when this time has come to pass.

Home

by Kaylin Michelle

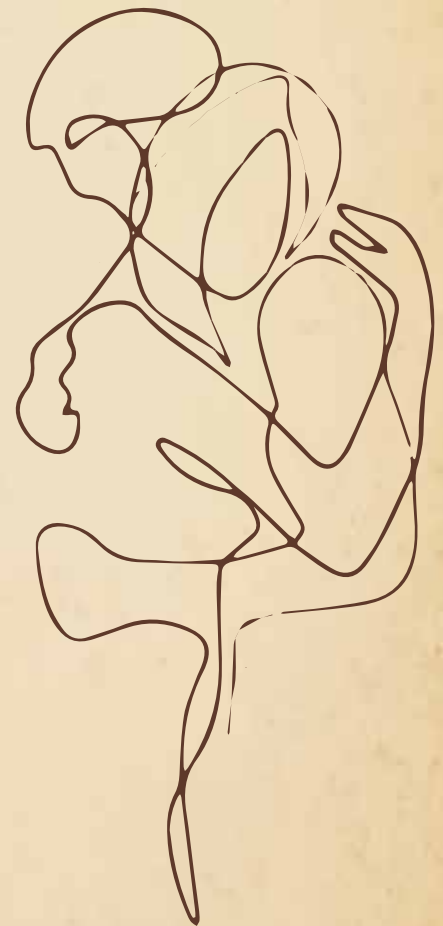
I've yet to find home in any physical place. I have never, ever lived in a place and felt like I could really call it home. I have lived everywhere from communes to castles. I've lived in cottages by myself, I've lived on a farm with a strange Greek man and a kooky Australian on a tiny island in the middle of the Aegean sea; I've lived in a wildly expensive box in central Hong Kong with a fashion photographer, many cockroaches and even more stairs; I've lived in university digs and grown-ups' house-shares. I've lived in the homes of lovers' parents, and parents' lovers, and yes – I really lived in a castle for three months. I have never called a place home.

Yet, I have found home in many hearts. I have found home after spending a week with another human and finally finding myself alone, in that space where I am with me – just pure unfiltered me. I have found home when I am bent and crying in the arms of a lover and I say "I'm sorry," (for my crying) and he says, "please don't be, tell me everything." I have found home when I visit a friend I've known for too long, and start making myself tea and putting stuff in the fridge the moment I walk in. I find home in a phone call with my grandmother, and a glass of wine at my favourite spot after a bloody long day.

I find home in my favourite bar, where all of my friends are; and in my favourite lipstick.

I find home in a cat I meet on the street who lets me stroke her; and in the wisdom of my favourite author. I find home in my yoga practice and cooking curry on quiet Saturdays. I find it in poems, paintings, rooibos tea and Zambuck™.

I have yet to find a home in a physical place – I remain in anticipation of this wonderful gift. But damn – am I blessed to have found home in so many hearts, in the arts, and parts of abstract spaces.



Light

by NtombiFuthi Mtshali

My daughter has brought so much joy, awakening and light to my life. When I look at her it is a reminder of all the joy and light that she came with. Her name is ZanokuKhanya which can be translated as Bringing Light and oh boy she did, or should I say oh girl she did.

I was very much asleep before I had my daughter, “living life to the fullest” so I thought, I remember when I was pregnant with her, we (her father and I) had a couple of names in mind, but one afternoon when I was taking a nap, I looked at my life, did an introspection and saw how much I yearned for change and enlightenment. Her name came to my mind and I knew right there that my life will never be the same again. The beautiful things that I am seeing now never existed before her birth. I can literally wake up in the morning, walk to the garden and smell the flowers, it is so amazing, I am smiling.

I am very grateful for the joyful feeling I have inside of me, I am filled with love, my daughter has help me find myself, and become conscious.

She definitely lights the fire inside me, what makes me even more joyous is the fact that I will have this joyful feeling for the rest of my life.



Nostalgia

by Motlalepula Twala

Going on road trips to visit family was our grandmother Winifred's language of love – nurturing and keeping family bonds strong.

We departed before sunrise, the night was a buzz of food preparation and hair braiding. The early rise for porridge and washing up was achieved in a slow wave state while the underlying excitement of eventually piling into the blue Cressida was the propeller.

The road was mostly boring fields of dry weeds and scattered thorn trees on our way to Thaba-Nchu or Taung. We applauded the refreshing sight of the pretty and postured rows of cornfields. We often imagined boundless, hide and go seek games with our friends where we could run freely through the passages with great laughter.

Our aunt Maria was a delight to be with, she swayed and grooved to her own world of romance. Her rhythm and blues music filled up the car with musings of a love lost and found. Her eyes were dreamy with a sly smile as she formed the sweet lyrics with her lips. The roundness of the music felt like a warm hug around a happy or longing heart. I would look back out the window and count the windmills while humming along to the promise of an emotion that seemed so elusive.

My favourite windmills were the rusty brown ones, they stood tall and grounded while the newer silver ones blindingly loved the attention of the sun. I compared them to our two drivers my grandmother who drove steadily and knew exactly how to get there. My uncle on the other hand to be reminded repeatedly to slow down and turn at the right place.

Uncle Tebs was a colourful contrast to his romantic sister. He was either tipsy or needing smoke breaks most of the way. He told long tales of musicians from Havana, a girlfriend in Washington or the juicy steaks of Buenos Aires. I was never convinced that he had travelled much, but he certainly opened our eyes to places far beyond the mirages on the long roads.

The rest of us were three girls with tight braids rushed through by my mother, the tension on our heads caused by the hair was why we couldn't ever lean back on the car seats. Our drooling baby cousin whom we all doted over was the life of the trip. He hummed, giggled, pointed restlessly and played musical chairs on our laps all the way there.

We stopped to dig into the steamed bread, fried chicken and sweet tea under a good tree. This was when our dear granny would remind us of our basic manners and helping with the chores once we arrive at our relative's home.

Then my aunt still dreaming into the distance with her baby on her lap would sing softly into his ear as she burped him

"...Because it's looove, because it's really love ..."

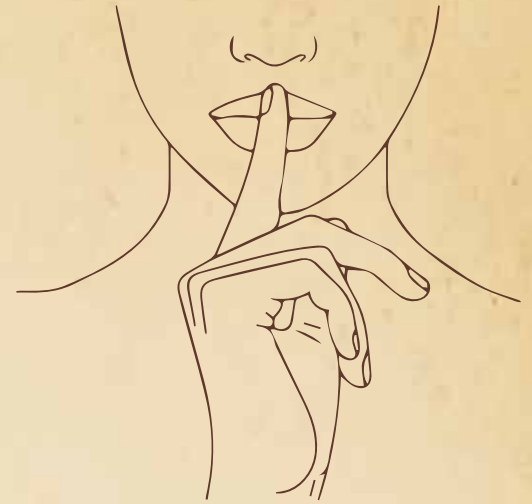
Every time some love song comes on, it throws me back to those warm trips, nostalgia!



Secrets

by Natasha Fracc

Grant and Jenny Benison were married in July 2008. They were rich, really rich. Grant came from old money and Jenny bought everything new. They loved kite surfing, yacht sailing and walking their retrievers on the sandy shores of Tulum. They had no kids. Jenny didn't want any and Grant knew he already had one (living somewhere in Mexico). Jenny didn't know. Her best friend Kiara knew, but swore to Calista, Jenny's other best friend in California that she would never tell.



One balmy June night, Grant and Jenny threw a boat party for all their friends, and their friends that wished they were friends but would never be. The glass bottom boat sailed across choppy seas to the beat of tropical sounds blaring across the dance floor. Grant was drunk. Jenny was high, on something, but couldn't remember what. They lost each other through the bustle of shoulders and board shorts – and also Jenny's old flame, Don Kellerman, who happened to arrive at the party. It was 'really such a surprise' for Jenny, and Grant.

That night Don told Jenny a secret about a wealthy married man from America who came to the island and got a Mexican girl pregnant, and then ran away. Jenny was horrified that with all the money in the world that asshole would've still chosen to sleep around. She then giggled, burped a little and licked the cherry from her cosmo.

Grant was dancing with Lebo from South Africa, but kept his eye on Jenny and Don at the bar. He tried not to feel jealous, but Don had a mop of dark curly hair that any 60 year old male would kill for. Jenny excused herself from Don. Grant excused himself from Lebo. Grant went to his bedroom to try find the gun. He wanted to kill Don. Jenny headed for the bedroom to grab her cover stick.

Grant got there first and rummaged through the side draws in a rage and panic to find his revolver. He came across a large pile of hidden letters, bound together in an elastic band. He flipped his finger through the envelopes; each letter was hand written and addressed to Jenny. Don that fucker, he thought.

In his mania he tore open all the letters. He read one, and it said: Thank you for the money Jennifer, your kindness is seen. With love, Salma. He read another and it said: Thank you for the money Jennifer, your kindness is seen, Salma. And another that read: Thank you for the money Jennifer, your kindness is seen, Salma.

Grant fell back on his footing, breathless. He felt he was having a heart attack. Jenny barged into the room. She saw the letters lying on the floor. She felt she was having a heart attack. There was no air between them.

"How...do...you...know Salma?" her husband choked with tears in his eyes.

"She's your son's mother," Jenny said. With tears in her eyes.

Days

by Kaylin Michelle

Not all days are good. It's hard, but we should love these ones too. Even though we can't seem to make them better no matter what we do. Sometimes all we can do is believe in better days. Sometimes today is just not your day. A lot of the time, your time is still coming.

In the meantime, you can dream about your day, your good bright shiny time. Think of it here and there. Imagine what you'll wear. But try to pack it away in a safe place and seal those visions tightly with belief. And in the meantime, show up to these grey days with a bright colour, and a glittery goal so that when your day does come it can spot you easily.

And you'll say "oh hey, I forgot you were coming; let's sit down, have tea. What do you have in store for me?" And your day will take your hand and lead you down a road full of adventure and magic, and you'll never look back.

And those other days, before these better ones, will be lost in the movement of time.



Vignette

by Elizabeth Smith

She was the beautiful child of the family. Her four brothers and sisters were dark-haired; Marie was blonde, blue-eyed. They were attractive; she was truly beautiful. Looking at her pensively, her mother often wondered what life would hold for this child.

Each year, Christmas holidays were eagerly awaited. Tightly bundled into the 1930 Ford, the family journeyed to the village of Napier, where, for six weeks, the children played happily in the orchards and irrigation furrows. In her grandparents' small cottage, each person had their own allocated space. Marie's bed was in the hallway, shared willingly with the grandfather clock, an oval mirror and the ancestral photographs. Behind her were bedrooms; the kitchen adjoined the hallway.

She loved her bed on the small wooden settee; loved the feeling of being special – she slept on Ouma's very own eiderdown which had been puffed up and smelled of lavender and sunshine. Beneath the settee her small suitcase just fitted. She revelled in her tiny space; sharing in the heartbeat of the family with every tick of the grandfather clock.

Every morning, Oupa rose before daybreak. Muted rustlings as he coaxed heat from the coal stove woke her, and she would snuggle deeper into her bedclothes. Eyes closed, she identified each familiar sound of the morning ritual: the gurgle and swish as he filled the copper kettle; coffee bubbling on the stove; Oupa tiptoeing past. She heard the small squeak of the tiny door in the grandfather clock; the clink as he took the special key from its hook and inserted it; then the metallic purr as he wound the clockwork.

Tiptoeing past her bed again, he'd pat her head, and she'd wriggle contentedly with the familiarity of it all.

She heard coffee and milk being poured into Ouma's blue cup. As he passed her, the hot-coffee fragrance mingled with Oupa's familiar clean soap smell. She heard the bedstead creak, and the plop of her grandparents' early morning kiss. Back in the kitchen, Oupa poured two cups. Children were not allowed coffee – her tiny early-morning cup was their shared secret.

Oupa carried his mug to the table, hefting the leather-bound Bible from its place on the dresser. Seated at the table, he chose the morning text. Softly at first; then louder, the soft High Dutch rolled off his tongue as he read from the Book which formed the mainstay of their lives.

A soft thud as the Bible closed. She waited expectantly for her favourite part of the morning's devotions. Oupa's baritone filled the kitchen, hallway and bedrooms with his chosen hymn. And then from their bedroom, Ouma's alto took it up, harmonising in a way made possible only by their contented union of many years.

Marie lay there, snug in her blankets in the cool of the small-town morning, knowing complete contentment. Her sense of self, her sense of family and above all, her sense of security were grounded and strengthened by the simple faith and love which flowed around her.



Her

by Amy Walker

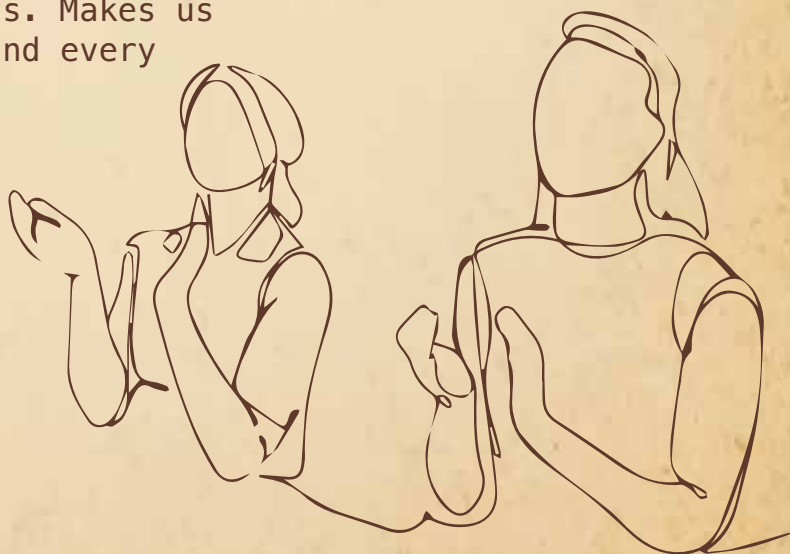
The video is from Seville. Filtered light, weary white, land of flamenco. A van in front of an apartment block, cars street-parked, barren side-walks. The driver, PPE from head to toe, comes 'round to release the latch.

She emerges then, from the underworld. While the ghost hovers, for a moment, above her shoulder. And she moves, painstakingly, forward. One foot in front of the other, no turning back. Finality, it makes us shudder, white upon white, doors sliding shut.

Laboured triumph, laboured breath, hers is a humble second act. This ode to living unfolds, in slow-mo. Face masked, hands covered, gown floats green, then stills. Adjusting senses, attempts at balance, solitary figure, aching noble. Plastic we recognize, all that mattered then. Maybe gold, maybe leather, faded photos, life mementos. Maybe medicine or discharge orders, what matters now, stuck inside and newly precious.

Neighbour, stranger, a cloud of witnesses, their phones and lenses. For her, the volume swells. Silence, isolation, we rail against the tethers. Hands as weapons, hands as instruments, both we know, contagious. And she is there, looking up. She cannot help it. Attention, never sought, completely unexpected. Made small by camera angle, made small by insidious infection. Look at what we can become, essential, even celebrated.

So we clap, we clap, we clap. We cannot help it. Dogs bark, in circles jump, bone marrow becomes a rattle. Human will, the truest mettle. Feet that touched the bottom, the strength it took. Six under. Six apart. We marvel at her comeback, a language universal, clapping louder than the hurt, louder than our bursting hearts. Makes us believe, she alone does, with each and every step, in bullfights, in matadors, in blinding luck.



Happiness

by Dean Geel

Happiness – we are all in search of it, one way or the other. What is it? Where is it found? Does it REALLY even exist? Maybe it is not meant for me. These have been my thoughts and feelings about Happiness and perhaps they have been yours too, and that is the thing about Happiness, it really makes you question and look...

To truly understand Happiness, one would almost have to understand each and every single individual that walks this earth today, which is approximately 7.6 billion give or take a couple of hundred million. Why do I say this? Because Happiness means something different for each and every one of us, because we all have different goals, obstacles, abilities, likes, dislikes, but most importantly we are all unique, and believe it or not, we don't only have our own unique weaknesses, but we also have our own unique Strengths.

To some it might mean a lot of money, to some it might mean being in love, for others it might mean inspiring, educating, uplifting and helping those around them to rise to greater heights, and that – is just the start of the list.

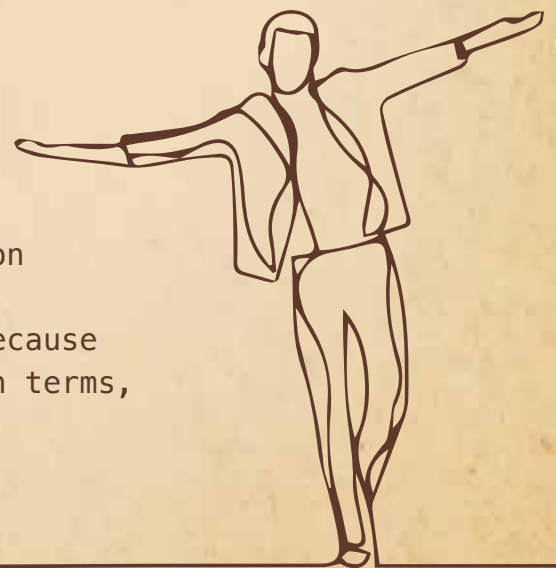
But this is what I know, Happiness does exist and what it means for you is up to You to decide. You have heard it said – “only you will know what will truly make you happy”. Though it might sound like a cliché – it is true.

You determine your outcome and what will ultimately make you Happy and give you the ultimate sense of Joy and Purpose throughout your life.

A suggestion on how you might find this; take a look inside and be honest with the one person you will always have to live with – YOU, through all the triumphs, failures, choices and regrets.

When you truly find that one thing that will do this for you, by you being honest with yourself on who you are, what you want and where you want to go, despite the odds, hardships and even the haters, when you truly find this – you will be on your way to success – on your own terms, and Happiness, you won't have to look any further, because each day you will be living your life on your own terms, doing what you want, achieving your dreams.

And after all – isn't that the Goal?



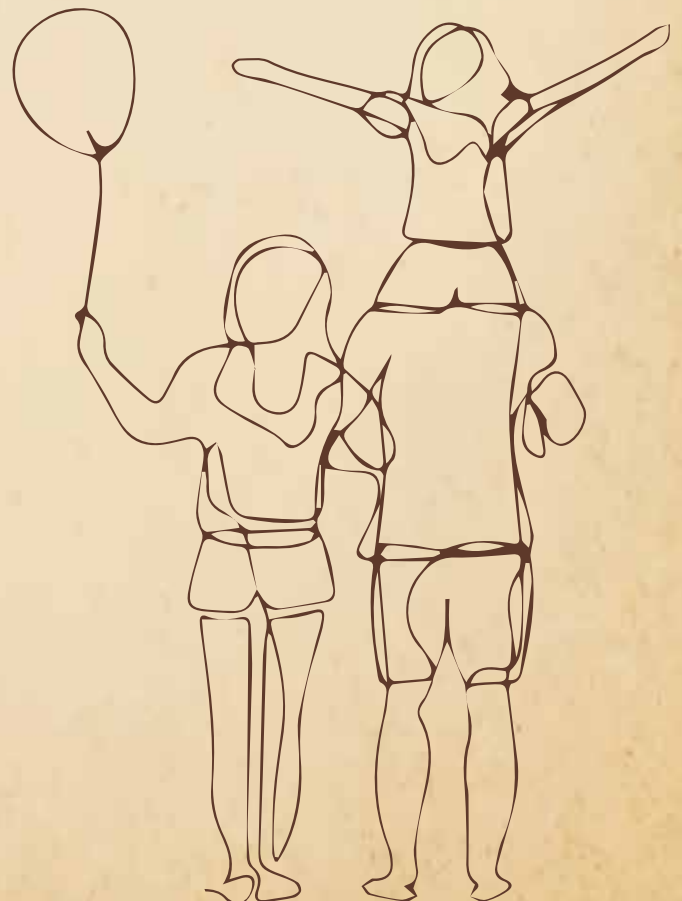
Evelyn

by Nur Jehan Richards

I stood in my large office staring out into the busy street. I watched closely as the cars rushed by, trying to avoid rush hour. It was then that I found myself questioning everything. Where were these people rushing off to? Why was everyone so desperate to miss the traffic? Perhaps they had families to go home to. I glanced around my office, suddenly feeling too small for the room. I had spent years, working and working, never stopping to appreciate the small things.

I could not remember the last time I had taken a vacation to see my parents. My grandfather always told me, "Evelyn darlin', life will go on with or without you and it's your choice whether you want to be left behind or not". I had just started my career then and I thought that joy was in the work I did. I never stopped to think that maybe joy was not only in the work I loved but was in the moments just after work, rushing to see your family.

Maybe you had a daughter who wanted to show you her new dance routine or a wife, preparing your favourite meal. The real joy was in people, in rushing home to see them. The real joy was stopping just for a moment to admire the flowers on the sidewalk as you walked down to your car. Joy was in everything around us and I finally understood what grandpa meant that day.



M̀hgòì

by Kaylin Michelle

It was a Hong Kong rainy day. Note the “Hong Kong”: this is a very specific brand of rainy. Wild, tropical jungle rain beat down in sheets against concrete and trains, as if Mother Nature was raging against her city for replacing her jungle. Or perhaps she was so impressed with Her masterpiece that she wept down on it with fervent pride. I liked looking at it that way.



I stood outside the entrance to my apartment building, which was sheltered by a bridge that ran over the street. It was just a few seconds dash to the bus stop and then a few more seconds waiting in the rain, if timed well. It was still my first week – I was not yet fully equipped with the proper plastic precaution needed to shield against this kind of weather– so I knew that just one minute in this rain would be a challenge. My only option was to embrace it, and get soaked. So I walked to the bus stop.

I waited next to an old man in a dry mac. I could not help but scowl and splutter and feel jealous of his jacket.

“M̀hgòì” I heard him say – which I learned means ‘excuse me’ in Cantonese. I looked over to find him handing me a tissue. The thing was already melting under violent drops of rain. I accepted it through the wall of wetness between us anyway, not convinced as to how this tissue was going to guard me from the burst sky. The man made a dabbing gesture at his face, showing me the intention. And so, I politely dabbed my face in return, fruitlessly. Perhaps the only difference made was a tiny bit of the tissue now stuck to my forehead. We both laughed – in the Hong Kong rain that day. Perhaps that was the difference. He shrugged. I shrugged. And I said, “M̀hgòì,” which incidentally also means ‘thank you’ in Cantonese.

Thankful

by Fana Khosa

Gratitude is a feeling that brings warmth to one's heart. I have so many things to be thankful for like my friends, family, my home and even food. Sometimes I forget how privileged I am to have all of these things.

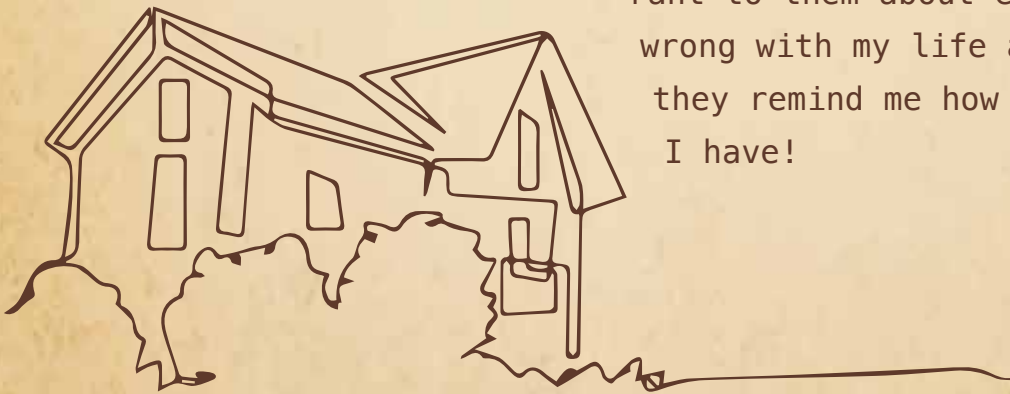
I am thankful for my family because they are always there for me even when I don't deserve it. I am thankful for my siblings because even though they tease me and say I'm spoiled because I'm the last born, I know they are very protective of me and will always have my back.

I am thankful that I have a nice home to go to everyday. So many people are homeless or don't have everything they want in their house. I am thankful that my house meets all of mine and my family's needs and that it is very homey and I am very relaxed in it.

I am thankful that I have a warm bed to sleep in every night because some people don't have a bed to sleep in. I am thankful for all of the technology I have. Technology isn't a necessity but I use it every day.

I am thankful that I never go to bed hungry and I always have food in my house. I have always had enough food so I don't know what it's like to not be able to get food whenever you like.

I am thankful for my friends because I can tell them the things that I don't feel like I can tell my family, they know me better than my own family. I tell them everything, whenever I'm mad at someone in my family I rant to them about everything I think is wrong with my life and whenever I forget, they remind me how lucky I am to have what I have!



Waits

by Sarah Cohen

Joy is the friend that
I'm not always quite able to see
but she's always there
waiting for me.

She waits for me
in the soft grass under the oak tree
in the quiet early mornings sipping tea
she waits for me
in simplicity.

She's always there
with her untamed, unruly hair
laughing and dancing through the woods.
Like a child
she waits for me
in the wild.

She whispers my name
when all has gone quiet;
and when I need guidance,
she waits for me
in silence.

She's with me
through times of uncertainty.
She sings to me,
casting sunbeams on my mood
in loneliness of great magnitude.
She waits for me
in solitude.

She's a kindred spirit,
a free-spirited spirit guide
that sometimes seems to hide
in the night
but she waits for me
patiently
to notice the glowing force
of her light.

Joy is the friend that
I don't always feel,
but if there's one thing for certain-
her love is real,
her love is pure
and if there's one thing for sure
however long we're apart
she waits for me,
always
in my heart.



Unity

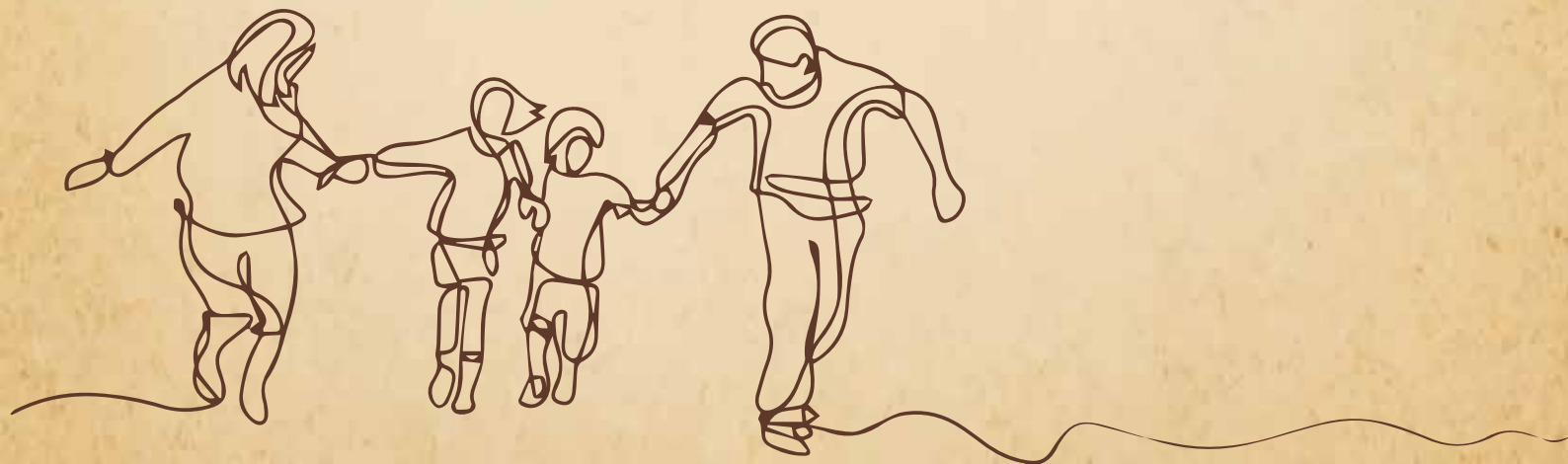
by Susan Marageni

Family where I belong – my place of comfort where I lay my head after a hard day's work. My sanctuary where I can be no one else but the real me, I do not have to wear a fake smile, nor do I need to follow structure, this is where I can be as raw as I was when I was in my mother's womb. Isn't it ironic? That we can have arguments, scream at each other, but still make statements such as "that's my blood", I will move mountains for them. Like the branches of a tree we are forever connected, we have a support system that cannot diminish because it is at our core, it is in our genetics rooted in our veins.

Family, the engine that pumps the fuel that keeps me going, even when I feel like the odds are against me or when I am going through heartbreak, they are always there with open arms to comfort me, lend an ear, to listen to my irrational comments driven by emotions, not forgetting a box of tissues to wipe my tears away and tell me "This too shall pass."

Family is the laughter I get to share with my mother in the kitchen, sharing gossip over a cup of tea. Singing our lungs out with my daughter, while giving her a bath. Catching up with my sister about married life – who would have guessed I'll be getting advice from my younger sister about relationships. The drive to the mall with my two brothers and witnessing them bonding over which song is "killing the charts" as they would put it.

Family is Love, Family is Respect, Family is Caring and most of all Family is what you make it to be – as long as there is Unity that is Family. I am grateful I have people I call My Family.



Homeless

by Candice Manuel

As I was walking to the supermarket one cold morning to get me and my siblings a loaf of bread, the only thoughts that were running through my head were get to the market as fast as possible because we have not eaten since the previous evening due to lack of funds in the household.

As I arrived at the market, which is two blocks away from where I live, I notice that I don't have the money in my pocket anymore. I am distraught, I turn around in the market and approach the door to take my miserable journey back home.

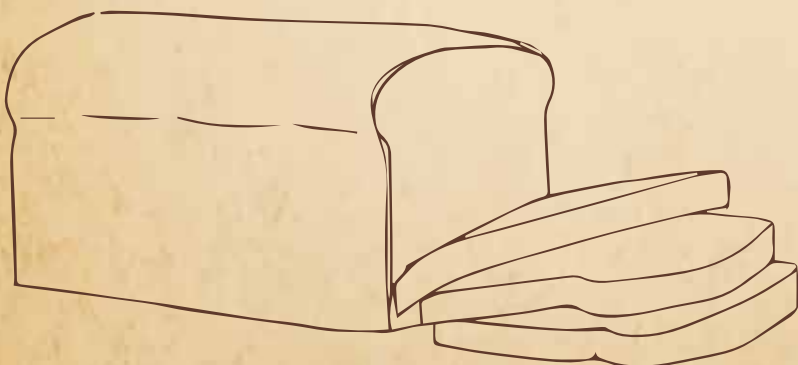
Then this homeless guy approaches me and says, "Excuse me ma'am, you dropped your money on your way to the market."

Without even realising it this man was shouting for me all the way from the second block where I lost the money; he was afraid to stop so I just kept walking.

I felt ashamed as this homeless man was calling me, trying to return my money, He shouted but I was too afraid to listen. The man turned around and walked out, I called him back to share the bread with him.

I have never seen anyone as grateful as this guy was for those few slices of bread that I gave him.


When I was walking home and realised that blessings often come in disguise, and everything that happened this morning was faith.





PART TWO





Creating something from the heart, and from joyful inspiration is an experience that knows no limits. We learnt this when our three-core 206 members facilitated a virtual writing workshop for over 100 learners living with disability. On this day we spoke of love, and we spoke of longing and we spoke of freedom...and we spoke of a place called Joyburg. On this day, our Positive Pages were rebirthed in a new, boundless way that brimmed our souls with fullness; we received stories that unshackled the disadvantages of the body and mind, and set the soul free. What we learned this day, was that we are not our circumstances – and that this project has nothing to do with writing – and everything to do with the boundlessness of the human heart, from where it's born and towards where it will journey. In these pages to follow, you too will learn this – and you will soar beyond circumstance, language, ability, creed and culture.

Our gratitude to these writers for your courage with the pen – and for carrying us through your passageways of joy.

You are leaders, without limits.



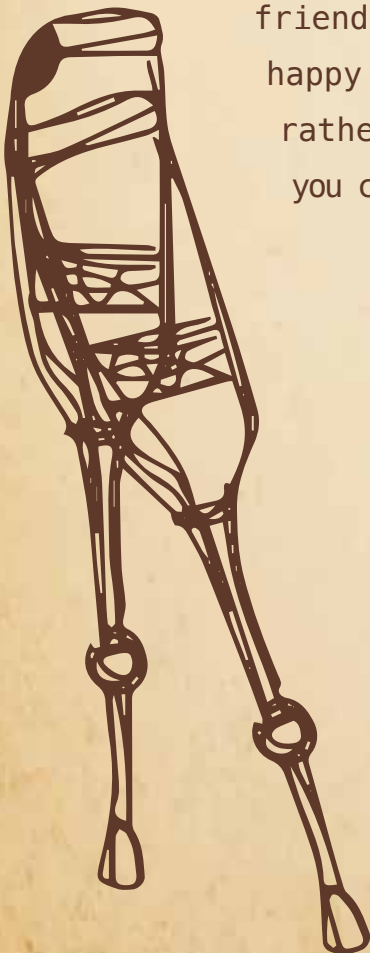
Accept

by Nompilo Thobile

Sharing ideas helps you gain knowledge because you get a chance to learn new things that you did not know about. If you accept yourself as you are I have learned that even if you have a disability, you have the right to study and gain more knowledge about life and meet colleagues that are the same as you so that you can see that life goes on even if you are disabled.

The only thing that you need to tell yourself is that you are able, so that you will have that mentality and make things happen. Other learners are living with disability but they can make things happen too and it can become a reality because you don't have to be shy about what you are, the only thing that you need to do is you have to make sure that you excel in what you are doing and don't let people feel sorry for you. Make things happen in a good way and be in a good position.

It is a very good to share ideas with your colleagues or friends and also make sure that even if you are disabled be happy as you are and don't blame God for being disabled but rather accept the situation and move on with life so that you can achieve great and good things.



Changing

by Ndumiso Sphephelo

There was a three year old boy, his name was Thato. He lived with his father Brian and stepmother Amanda; they lived in Chatsworth for six years, they were not married because Brian divorced Thato's late mother.

This boy was being abused by his stepmother, ever since he moved in she was so angry that her boyfriend Brian was no longer paying attention to her because of this baby. When they are together Amanda pretended to love the baby but when Brian leaves the abuse starts. Amanda kept on abusing Thato until Thato was 17 years old—that's when he decided to leave home. He became a street kid and that's where he met two guys who became his friends. They bonded together and started using drugs, until they got addicted.

Thato and his friends started robbing people, even the police were up and down looking for them because people were complaining about them. One day they went to rob a tuckshop but it didn't work because the boy got shot and fell on the floor, he went to hospital with the police after him; because he was arrested his parents started to panic. They knew life in jail is never easy.

Thato stayed a year inside jail, because of his good behaviour they let him go. He came out with a qualification of being a pastor and he went back home. He started attending Church and even his parents forgave him for what he did. They lived a happy life. Thato studied Art and he graduated and then worked at a graphic design company. Thato got married and had two beautiful children.



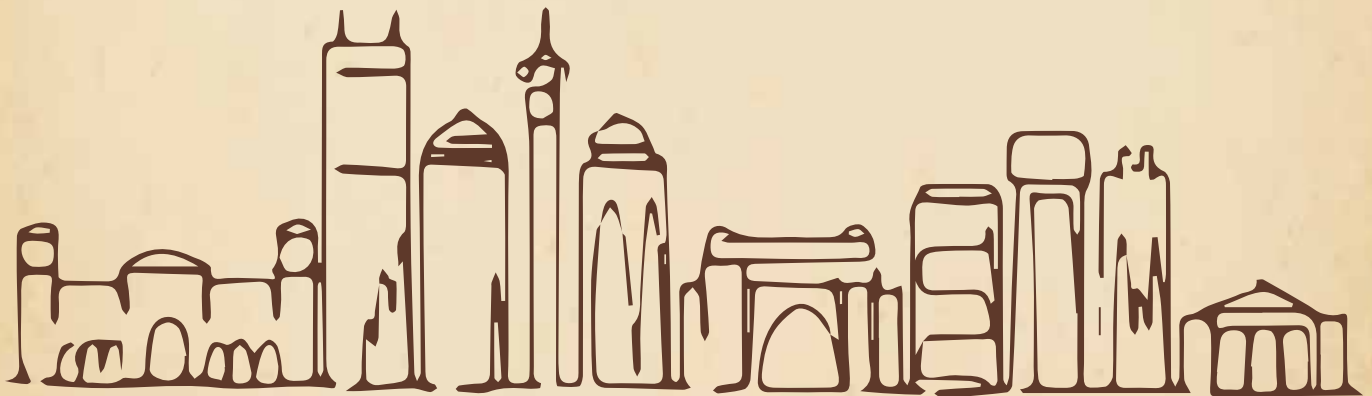
Johannesburg

by Karabo Mofokeng

My city whereby the abantu still exist, whereby happiness matters and people still care about each other. Whereby women respect each other enough to fix each other's crown and not laugh at each other.

A city that's so beautiful and filled with beautiful people and souls that aren't ruined by the betrayal of the world. Nonetheless we still smile and continue loving each other.

When Covid-19 has passed we shall continue smiling and celebrate with our fellow sisters and brothers. Johannesburg – a city of love and happiness.



Learnership

by Thato Mohlomi

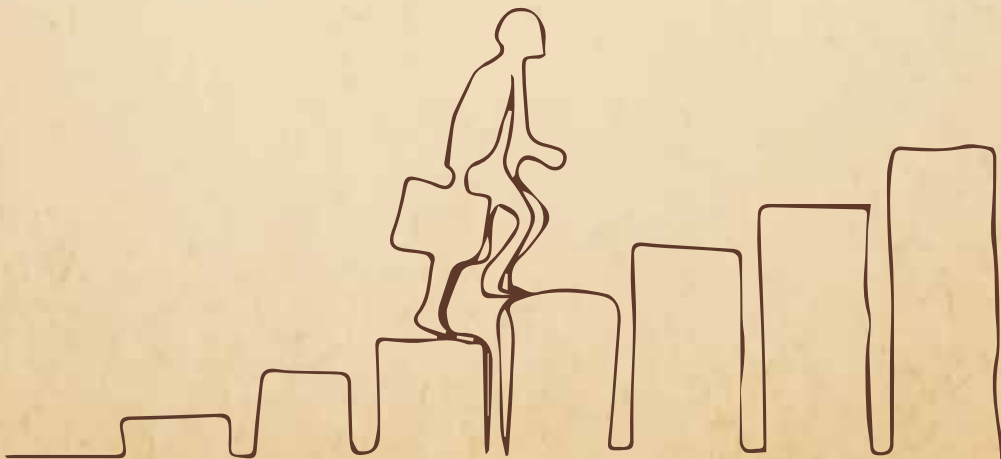
I'm a 29 year old guy living with albinism. I grew up in a rural area in the Eastern Cape. I'm the only child to my mother, who passed away in 2006. She never took care of me while I was young, maybe it was my condition, I still don't know or maybe there were other reasons. I was raised by my granny who also passed away in 2006. Indeed 2006 was the worst year of my life. My life wasn't easy but I thank God because I believe that he had his reasons for giving me this condition.

I went to study in a special school where I participated in different school activities; soccer, school choir, athletics and I was then elected by the students to be the deputy president because of my behaviour and good leadership.

I passed my matric and by that time my life was much easier. I applied for a disability grant so that I could take care of myself. In 2015 I went to study at the University of Limpopo, I was then elected by students to help other students with disabilities with their studies and other related problems.

I couldn't complete my course because my other granny who was taking care of me passed away in 2018. Then I had to leave school because no one was supporting me. I then decided to seek a job so that I can be employed.

In 2019 I got a Project Management learnership. Since I started this programme my life has changed, I have learnt so many skills. I now know how to work with a group, solve problems and I can effectively make plans. I have a good attitude and I know that I always complete my tasks in time.



Time

by Natasha Govender

It was a very trying time for me when my grandmother was ill. People I've never met before coming to visit, offering their support and well wishes. It was comforting knowing my family had so many people to support us, but nothing in the world could have prepared us for that dreadful morning that changed our lives forever.

I woke up that morning as usual to go about my daily routine but as I checked on my grandmother as I did each day, I noticed something was not right. I tried calling her but never got a response. Instead I saw that she was battling to breathe. I woke up my mum and dad and they decided to bring her out for some air. I remember her walking to the lounge and even taking a bite of her favourite bread and tea and the next thing we knew she slowly fell to the sofa and her life was gone. We already knew before the paramedics arrived that it was too late. Sometimes the heart knows what the eyes can't see.

I keep thinking there are so many things I could have done differently while she was alive, but I know in my heart that I did everything I could to make her happy and to take care of her in her last moments. Deep down I knew it was her time so I tried to guard my heart as best I could. I really miss her a lot and think about her every day and in everything that I do. My grandmother was such a beautiful soul. She always told us stories and taught us whatever she knew. She was someone I could talk to whenever I felt I had no one. Life was so much easier with her around. She had so much love to give that whoever found themselves amidst her became better versions of themselves. Her memories, yet not all peachy, are what stay with us and keep us strong without her.

If there was anything I learnt from her death, it's that life is so uncertain. You'll never know what tomorrow holds so it's best to make the most of every day that you are given. It is a gift. Love one another, tell your loved ones how much you love them and care for them while they are still here. It still hurts me to my soul but I realised after time that everything was the same and everything was different, and I was going to be okay. God woke me up this morning for a reason and I'm going to make every day count. I have an angel up in heaven, watching and guiding me and I plan to make her proud.



Perseverance

by Leigh Clapper

Living in a small town, limited by opportunity and poverty. Over town is overwhelmed with gluttony and power-hungry individuals. The only way to make it out of this place is through some God given talent. I was born into a broken family, father left when I was only an infant, mother was addicted to drugs. Naturally I had to develop a fighting spirit in order to survive. Growing up in this town was a rigorous experience, gang affiliation was the only means of safety.



As my consciousness increased, I started noticing mom entertaining many different strangers, this could be a means of generating income or feeding her bad habit. The only escape I had was a small broken-down gym around the corner. I would constantly skip school, to find solace in the gym. School was always condescending making me feel stupid and inadequate. School also increased my desire for more flashy things, such as nice car, nice clothes maybe then the pretty girls could finally acknowledge me.

Over at the Gym an old coach named Louie started teaching me boxing techniques, I was instantly drawn to this art form, due to all the built-up rage I had inside. Alongside boxing I enjoyed bodybuilding although poverty halted my progress in this field. I began robbing people, in order to feed my hunger and purchase all the things the other kids had, finally people started acknowledging me. Constant painstaking hours in the gym allowed my boxing to become unparalleled. Nobody could spar with me at the gym, out of fear, my hands became like stone. It was around this time that Louie, the only person that made me feel valued, came up to me and suggested that I start competing. It was September, my first match as a boxer. Only thing going through my mind is "win this fight, do not disappoint Louie". Within 3 rounds I knocked my opponent out with my left hook. As fate would have it, Louie organised a boxing scout, finally the opportunity to become professional was within bounds. I began racking up the wins, knockout after knockout, my record was 8-0 (Wins-losses).

Undefeated this was my shot at a title match. On my boxing journey I was blessed to meet a beautiful woman responsible for public relations name Victoria, I was instantly attracted to her. The day of my title shot March 17, my birthday. Everything flashed before my eyes, my horrific past and promising future. I must win this fight, I cannot go back to poverty. This was the toughest fight to date, my opponent's fists felt like iron pounding my flesh. Knocking him out would not be possible, I must score points with the judges. Round 12, final round, I've been fighting on the back foot, my opponent is fatigued. My chance finally came, I gave a right hook, an indication of my pain. He fell on his back; the fight was over. I was world champ. This is what happiness feels like.

Room

by Andrea Adams

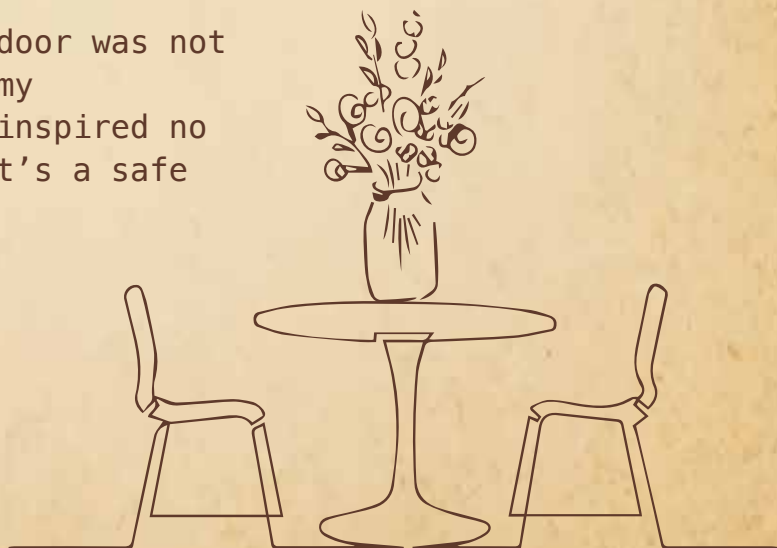
I walked up the stairs and I see a door I've never seen before and wondered what was behind that bright yellow door. I asked myself what will I find or better yet what will I see, will I like what I find or will I be horrified and be consumed by whatever is behind that door. Thinking to myself I say "what really do I want to see because in all honesty I don't know, I guess you see I'm just curious".

In the end curiosity gets the better of me. In that moment my hand lifted and touched the shiny golden handle of that yellow door. So here goes curiosity, as I open the yellow door of this room. OH! I gasped as low and behold that magnificent looking room was empty. Yes! The room was empty, I blinked to see if my eyes were deceiving me, but when I stepped into the room it began to fill up with so many things that I did not see there a minute ago, when I first opened my eyes to what could be.

It started to take shape, I looked at the floor and there was a bed of white rose petals that looked like a carpet to match the walls and a sofa. There were pillows of different colours to match the rainbow outside and to brighten up the furniture. The curtains were a pretty shade, there were paintings hanging on the wall and magazines on the side table and in the corner stood an antique table with chairs to match; all very cozy and next to the table was a food trolley with every meal imagined.

In the center of the table stood a beautiful vase with exquisite roses, all so romantic. Beyond that was a garden, with fragrances of Jasmine and Gardenia; melodic chirps of the hummingbird and the whistle of the wind in the trees. A river of chocolate and along it every kind of sweet treat. Further on was a carnival with every ride imaginable all at my fingertips.

You see, the room behind the yellow door was not empty anymore, it was a place where my imagination could run wild and stay inspired no matter the cards I had been dealt. It's a safe haven right behind "My Yellow Door".



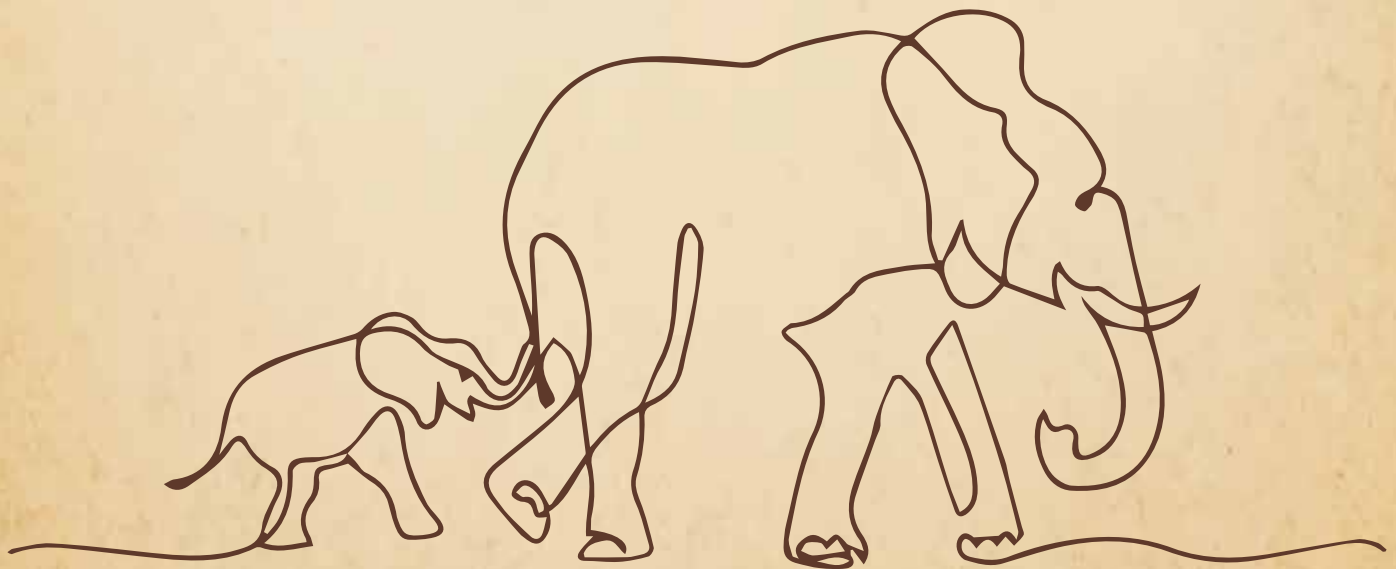
Rope

by Vinco Mokwena

My father once told me a very interesting story about the elephant rope; As a man was passing by some elephants, he suddenly stopped, confused by the fact that these huge creatures were being held by only a small rope tied to their front leg. No chains, no cages. It was obvious that the elephants could, at any time, break away from their bonds but for some reason, they did not.

He saw a trainer nearby and asked why these animals just stood there and made no attempt to get away. "Well," the trainer said, "when they are very young and much smaller we used the same size rope to tie them and, at that age, it's enough to hold them. As they grow up, they are conditioned to believe they cannot break away. They believe the rope can still hold them, so they never try to break free." The man was amazed. These animals could at any time break free from their bonds but because they believed they couldn't, they were stuck right where they were.

Like these elephants, how many of us go through life hanging onto a belief that we cannot do something, simply because we failed at it once before? Failure is part of learning; we should never give up the struggle in life.



Life

by Mannoï Monaune

Life my breath, life my heartbeat, life my moves. Yesterday has passed and today came, today came and brought us back together again. Life my spirit, life my soul. Life my sadness, life my smile. Yesterday we were together! Yes, we were, indeed, we are still one even today, you could have chosen to usurp me, take me out of this world, but here you are with me. Life my breath.

Through the hardship, easy moments you are here life my breath, life my smile. You could have chosen to wipe me off, but here you are, life my laughter. Day by day, you give me hope, night by night you support my sleep. Life, my light in the dark. As a lion is the king of animal domain, and eagle is king of bird's kingdom, Life you give me hope.

Sorrow may at times cover me with tears. But Life brings me tears of joy. Bitterness may dress my face with anger, but you dress my face with a smile of appreciation for life. The clock ticks, ticks and ticks, counting down the days.

With a family I'm still in union, on earth I'm still here Life my lesson, my coach, life my teacher. Day by day I get encouraged to move on, look up and push forward. Life my teacher, life my coach, life my lessons. Whenever I cry you give me words of encouragement, "Yes girl, come on, get up! Yes you can! You were able yesterday, you can still do it even today! Get up and face the world!." Life my breath, Life my heartbeat.



Understood

by Thabang Segone

Life can't be understood no matter how you try look at it, some life situations just don't make sense. That should be a valuable lesson to everyone that if we just stopped focusing on trying to understand it and just live it the best way we know how.

I have a lot to be grateful for, on the 22nd of May I turned 23. In a world full of virus and disease I am blessed to have made it this far. Instead of complaining about how the lockdown is affecting me I think about those who aren't blessed with the opportunity of living and having to complain.

I'm grateful I still have my family, they have been keeping my mind afloat during these uncertain times. Words cannot explain how much I love and appreciate my family. The deepest need in human nature is to be appreciated and as long as the appreciation between my family and I is mutual I am all good.

It's a blessing to have something to be grateful for in these times because it is impossible to feel grateful and depressed in the same moment.



Breath

by Jade Sujee

How Blessed are we to have life, completely blessed! I can be a witness for myself and many others around me. Some of us forget the beautiful moments in life and all the small things we take for granted, for one, the air we breathe and to still be strong and healthy after this huge pandemic our country is facing. To take care of ourselves and appreciate the fact that we are still alive and breathing today.

The most wonderful part of life is waking up to a new day, a new beginning, no complaining about the weather because many other people may not have the special privilege to see Winter, Autumn, Summer and Spring.

We can be anything we want to be in this world, we can do our best or our worst but the most important thing to do is appreciate your life, appreciate the lives of others and don't take the small things for granted.

Everything is a blessing. You are life and life is you!



Employment

by Glen Phaswana

It was November 2011. It was a time that I consider one of the worst in my life. There are many reasons why but the main reason was that I was unemployed. I had just graduated the previous year from university and I was now looking to make a way for myself in the world. Unfortunately, this was not as easy as I thought it would be. I had been looking for work for 8 months with little to no success.

I was informed by a friend about the concept of learnerships. I was skeptical at first but soon convinced myself to apply as I had no other options. I applied online for a learnership in call center work and I waited patiently. I was anxious and depressed as I waited patiently for the call back.

Finally! I received a call back from the company and I was overjoyed. I was finally going to have a job and money to spend. After a short process, I was finally employed. I was now a learner and employee. I was gaining experience and a qualification.

I am so thankful for the opportunity and I have never looked back since.



Curtains

by Thenjiswa Khumalo

I'm slowly trying to get out of bed, but my alarm is not allowing me, as my phone keeps ringing under the bed. Finally, I'm able to reach it and turn the alarm off and get ready to start the day. I draw the curtains and make the bed while continuously peering through the lace curtains, hoping to see something interesting or someone walk by.



One may wonder why I'm so obsessed with this section of the room, how could I not be? To many it may seem as a screen with a piece of material suspended at the top on a rail, but to me, it is the center stage of the world as well as the neighborhood. This is where my days begin, with the early morning sun rays piercing through the heavy cloth material, reminding me that it is a new day and that there are stories awaiting to unfold and nobody knows what may happen as these events are never planned.

From watching the little kids play hopscotch on the streets and listening to the sweet sounds of their laughter, to the old-timers reminiscing about the days before the internet, not forgetting the cat-callers who are always trying to make a pass at the young ladies, to eavesdropping on the old ladies who always seem to have the latest gossip about everyone on the block, you just never know what to expect while looking through your window. And so I hide behind the lace curtains; listening and silently spectating on what these characters act out every day, wishing I could openly object or contribute to some of their discussions, but also reminding myself of how rude it is to interrupt a play.

This could go on for an entire day, especially on a Saturday, and never gets old for me. I snuggle myself in the corner of the bed with my head against the wall, my cup of Rooibos tea resting on the windowpane to cool for the first sip, thinking about the people both in and out of my life, struggling to count my blessings without the mentions of my struggles. It's crazy to say, I honestly find peace in watching other people, it helps me reflect more on my own life and learn to appreciate the little that I have.

The day is almost over, the sun is setting and the streets lights are already flickering. This is when the show is about to come to end, the small gatherings slowly disappearing, people making their way to their homes, sharing their last bits of small talk and plans for tomorrow. This when my day also comes to an end, I draw my curtains for the last time and turn on the lights, this is my time now and I don't want my privacy to be on display. I enjoy watching people from the inside, I still prefer being the audience and not in center stage.

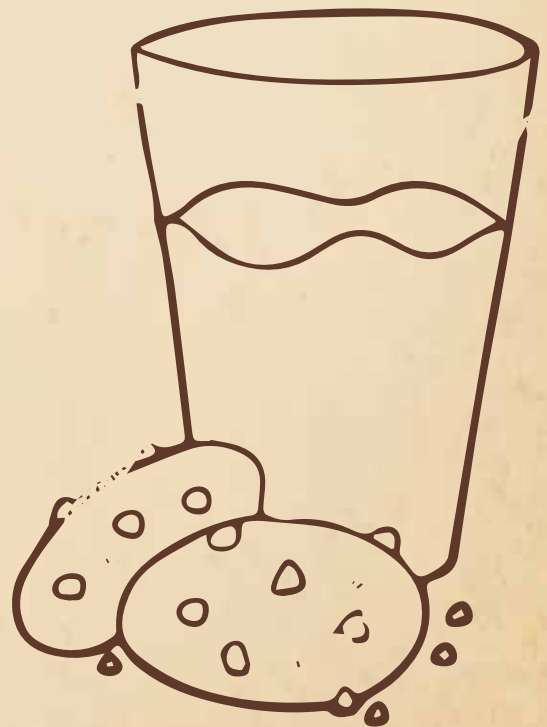
Puddles

by Philisiwe Nzama

I grew up in Umlazi where the air was clean, the grass was plentiful and trees were worthy to be climbed. My childhood memories consist of stamping through mud puddles with my older brother, meeting my dad for picnic lunches at the beach in summertime, baking cookies with my mother and helping my grandma wash the dishes (when I was small enough that standing on a chair still made it difficult to reach the sink). Listening to my big sister read me stories of princesses and dragons before bedtime, and having root beer floats and popcorn with my grandma. These are the memories I treasure with my family that I love.

In Umlazi, all children's memories may not include baking cookies or having root beer floats but I have witnessed the joy that comes from sharing life within a family, there are still mud puddles to be splashed with brothers and sisters. There are dads working in the rice fields whose lunches are being delivered by their children. There are grandmothers taking their daughters to the market and teaching them to pick the freshest produce. There are stories and laughter being shared.

Regardless of where you are the beauty of a family cannot be manufactured in any institution.



Grace

by Gift Motsamai

I was about to give up, but I realised yesterday I was wearing that gown. This is my story of failure and greater things to come. A 3 year degree completed in 4 years, I guess this is where my story of patience begins. A year doesn't seem like much, until in that year all your friends are graduating and all you can be is the camera man to celebrate their achievements.

Let me back track, I grew up in a small township of Soweto, I looked up to my sister because she was the only one who has worn that gown in the family. I was inspired to also do the same. The problem is, my sister has placed a very high bar by not failing a single module and completing all her semesters in record time, she understood the shifts my parents had to put in, in order for her to be in school and that motivated her to not only be the first graduate in the family but also finish it in record time.

In grade 12 I was the class clown, throwing my life away for the entertainment of friends. A 30% for physics was a pass so I didn't bother much, yet I was the same person giving speeches about being a doctor.

Have you ever waited at the gate of a University with a motivational letter about why you should be accepted? This was me, the first year after matric, leaving home at 3AM to be the first in line for the late applicants at the University of Johannesburg. What to apply for, I didn't even know? I found Grace, literally her name was Grace and it was at that moment I understood what that name meant, a second chance to life and an opportunity to start over again.



Grace graced me by helping me become who I am today, I didn't even know what to study but I did know I want to be in university. She became my psychologist and mentor, even though Grace works as a resident administrator, it was not within her job scope to be what she was to me when I was at my lowest.

I started my story with a 3 year degree done in 4 years, I had to do a bridging course to prove my worth as a student. This was my opportunity to be the best version of myself. In the first year of the bridging course I did beyond and extra, sleepless nights and early morning to a point where when I began my first year officially after the bridging course, I was called in to be a tutor for the same bridging course I just passed. Not only did I wear that gown, but I wore it twice.

Today I am Masters Student in Computer Science. To you Grace, I am grateful!

Love

by Innocent Nqosile

Love, what a heavy word!

Some confine it to feelings, some to things, and some to flowers. But flowers lack the articulation of how one makes us feel, me thinking with my little mind what is love?

Mhmm hard to define right? It's deeply rooted in us, our composition. It's what makes the sun shine, it knits us together ,it brings hope ,it's long suffering ,it forgives ,it covers ,it unifies our diversities ,it knows no colour, it transcends all, it turns a house into a home, a stranger into a friend, a colleague into a brother and an elderly person into a parent.

How would I even define it by my words? Too short or too insufficient to define, perhaps I can express it, I heard a preacher say you can give without loving but you can't love without giving, food for thought right? Maybe I can't define it, I looked at the dictionary trying to find the definition of love all it told me is that "it's a strong affection for someone".

I think it goes beyond that, I think Love is active, Love is powerful, it conquers every unfavourable circumstance, it is the reason behind our newly found freedom, it liberates, it opposes fear, it is the reason behind the meaning of life, it is deep, it is high, it is wide, it is majestic, it is powerful. Above all it is simply...Love.



Humble

by Moleboheng Hliso

It's amazing what you can achieve as a human being if you don't care who gets the credit, there is more to life than what meets the eye, and we often seek greener pastures and forget about the trenches that lead to them.

I used to have restless nights, fears of not amounting to anything in life. Words from high school mates haunted me as they would often remind me of how academically declined I was. I was just a good hearted, innocent yet disabled soul and I was in the midst of smart successful, evil hearted people, I guess no one is perfect.

Every day in the morning I would silently pray before taking the morning test, and my friends would make a mockery of me, claiming God doesn't hear prayers from stupid kids who fail in class. Every day was the same routine in the morning, and at the end of every term marks would come out and I would be the lowest. Maintaining the same routine I kept failing and getting mocked. At the end of the year when graduation came I barely made it and everyone else was just flourishing with distinctions.

The following year I made a prayer and said thank you Lord for answering my prayers, every morning I prayed for my friends to succeed and they all succeeded, I knew I was academically disabled but spiritually powerful, now that every one of my friends made it it's my time to shine. My uncle was involved in an accident a year before, I prayed for him in hospital he recovered and got funds from the road accident fund and decided to give me a portion of the money. I built a construction firm and hired my high school friends as they were qualified architects and engineers.

Moral of the story, what you do in private will be awarded in public, stay humble, it is amazing what you can achieve when you don't care who gets the credit.



Turtle

by Bongane Sithole

Every Sunday morning I take a light jog around a park near my home. There's a lake located in one corner of the park. Each time I jog by this lake, I see the same elderly woman sitting at the water's edge with a small metal cage sitting beside her.

This past Sunday my curiosity got the better of me, so I stopped jogging and walked over to her. As I got closer, I realised that the metal cage was in fact a small trap. There were three turtles, unharmed, slowly walking around the base of the trap. She had a fourth turtle in her lap that she was carefully scrubbing with a spongy brush.

'Hello,' I said. "I see you here every Sunday morning. If you don't mind my nosiness, I'd love to know what you're doing with these turtles." She smiled. "I'm cleaning off their shells," she replied. "Anything on a turtle's shell like algae or scum, reduces the turtle's ability to absorb heat and impedes its ability to swim. It can also corrode and weaken the shell over time".

"Wow! That's really nice of you!" I exclaimed. She went on, "I spend a couple of hours each Sunday morning, relaxing by this lake and helping these little guys out. It's my own strange way of making a difference."

"But don't most freshwater turtles live their whole lives with algae and scum hanging from their shells?" I asked. "Yep, sadly, they do," she replied.

I scratched my head "well then, don't you think your time could be better spent? I mean, I think your efforts are kind and all, but there are fresh water turtles living in lakes all around the world. 99% of these turtles don't have kind people like you to help them clean off their shells. So, no offense... but how exactly are your localised efforts here truly making a difference?"

The woman giggled aloud. She then looked down at the turtle in her lap, scrubbed off the last piece of algae from its shell, and said, "Sweetie, if this little guy could talk, he'd tell you I just made all the difference in the world."



Glass

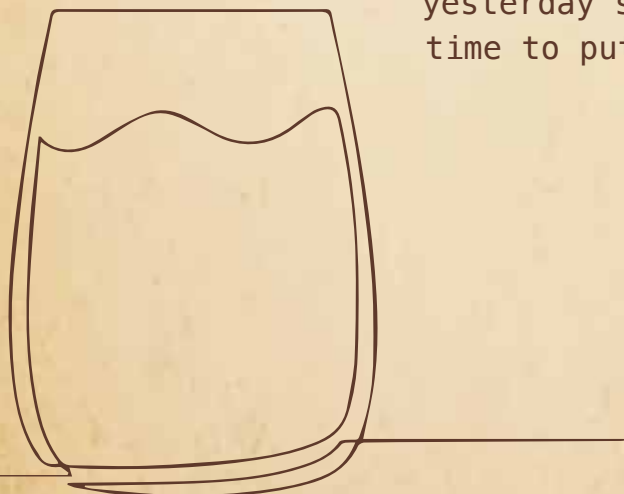
by Karabelo Morake

Back when I was doing my 1st year at University our former professor walked around on a stage, while teaching stress management principles to an auditorium filled with students. As she raised a glass of water with a smile on her face, the professor asked, "How heavy is this glass of water I'm holding?" We shouted out answers ranging from 250ml to 750ml.

She replied, "From my perspective, the absolute weight of this glass doesn't matter. It all depends on how long I hold it. If I hold it for a minute or two, it's fairly light. If I hold it for an hour straight, its weight might make my arm ache a little. If I hold it for a day straight, my arm will likely cramp up and feel completely numb and paralyzed, forcing me to drop the glass to the floor. In each case, the weight of the glass doesn't change, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it feels to me."

As the class nodded their heads in agreement, she continued, "Your stresses and worries in life are very much like this glass of water. Think about them for a while and nothing happens. Think about them a bit longer and you begin to ache a little. Think about them all day long, and you will feel completely numb and paralyzed – incapable of doing anything else until you drop them."

What's the lesson in all of this? Let go of your stresses and worries. No matter what happens during the day, as early in the evening as you can, put all your burdens down. Don't carry them through the night and into the next day with you. If you still feel the weight of yesterday's stress, it's a strong sign that it's time to put the glass down.



Grateful

by Dane Swartz

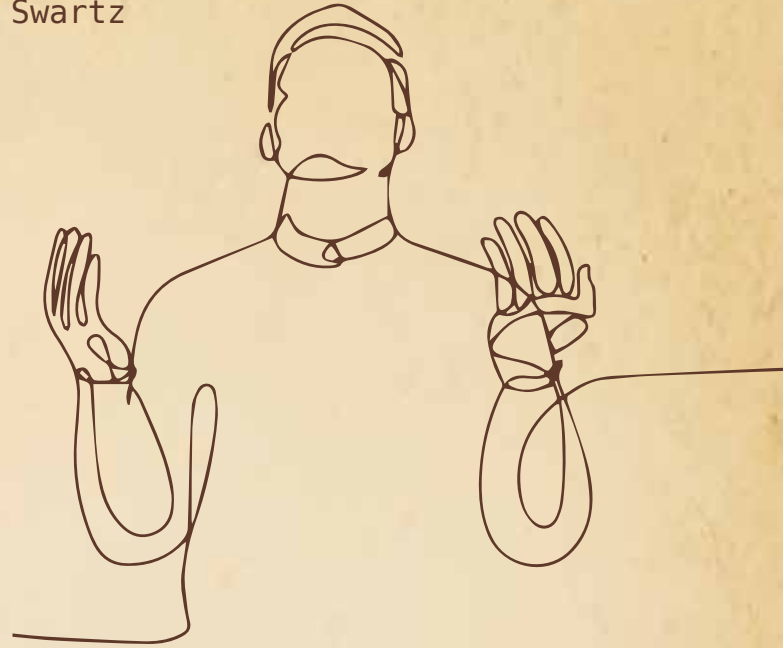
I have so much to be grateful for, the life I was given is one of the greatest gifts. I am blessed to have been given so many obstacles to learn from and ones which still lie ahead, these make me stronger and wiser.

I'm thankful for everyone I met in my life, family, friends, co-workers, teachers and so many more, they all influenced who I turned out to be as a person. I

value what God has given me with all my heart, and to think I haven't seen close to even half of it. I am thankful for my health and the state that I am in now, it makes a person appreciate what you have more than anything. I can't believe I'm turning 24 and with so much still ahead of me.

It's funny how you can have bad days and good days and that's just how life is, highs and lows. I'm glad I've made it this far, I've lost friends but made even better ones and I've gained knowledge, knowledge to be able to separate the good from the bad, right from wrong.

I'm not where I pictured I would be but I have learnt so much about success, to know how it feels to be at the bottom so when all is shining you can look back and appreciate the things that helped you get to where you are. These are all the reasons why I wouldn't want anything to be different because each of us has our purpose and path we walk in life and so far mine has been the best and at the same time dark but how will I appreciate my light without there being any darkness.



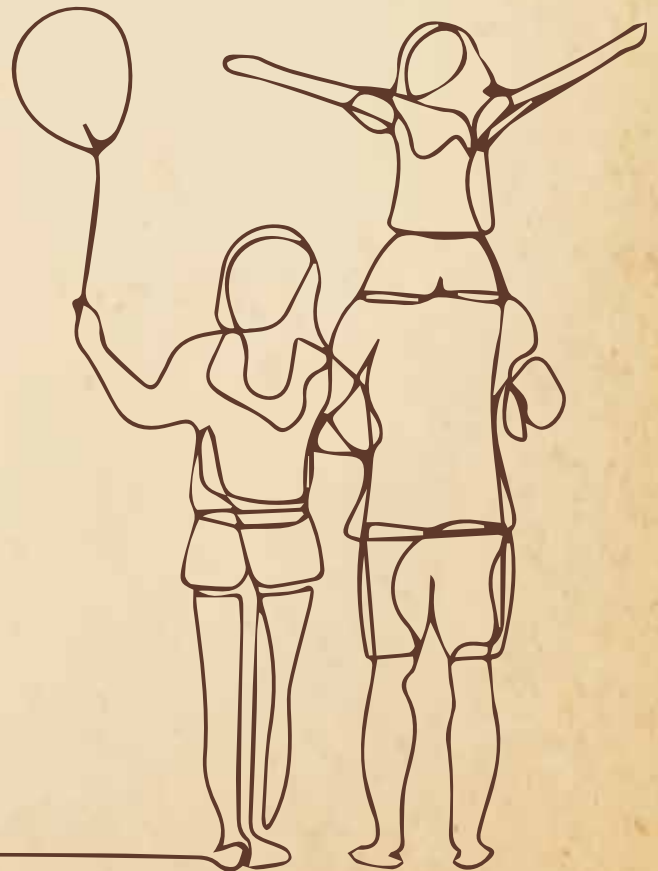
Inspiration

by Shanice Padiachy

We cannot choose our family as we can choose our friends. I am blessed with a wonderful family. My family is very small with 3 members, me, my husband and my daughter. My family is middle class and we don't have it all. We may not have much money or wealth but what my family has in abundance is love for each other which cannot be replaced by anything else in this world.

My father and my mother abandoned me when I was a 3 month old baby, they gave me to people in Johannesburg. I faced many heartaches and challenges while growing up amongst this unknown family. To me every sign of abuse and torture I used to ask myself why...until at the age of 14 I was told the truth and all my questions got answered. I then left home in Johannesburg which was the year of 2012, my biological mom and dad were still not prepared to keep me. This is where my journey began. All on my own, I stayed for two years in a place of safety and luck was on my side as a Pastor adopted me. My aim was to complete my schooling and build myself up and create a family of my own.

Now, I cannot ask anything more from God as he has provided me with the one wish I asked for. I have my own small, perfect family that is always going to be there for me.



Imagine

by Tracey Ludidi

Imagine a peaceful and blissful place where money grows on trees and grass, the people never get sick because the city is full of healthy organic fruits and vegetables. The people get fresh water that tastes like pure berry juice. The air is so fresh and good for your health, it smells like vanilla.

The females have gold skin and the males have silver skin, the sun is a source of moisture for their skin. The women apply milk to their hair which makes it grow and gives it strength and glow.

Everyone is accepted here, there is no poverty and people are encouraged to be themselves. Education is free and children from as young as 4 years can read and write. Everyone is smart and inventive and they have everything they need.

Life is so good! This is more than just my imagination, it's an experience and I hope whoever is reading this enjoys my story.



Introspect

by Leticia Plaatjies

23 years of living and I`m yet to come across a manual for life or at the very least it`s definition. We live and we learn: that for me is the beauty and tragedy of life. Learning from our mistakes and those of others is in my opinion the best possible way of going about a journey not known to everyone.

The best way to describe a journey so beautiful and diverse in words is through music: "more than one kind of love" by Joan Armatrading just captures the very essence of love and life. It explains that there are more ways to love and be loved than just being in a romantic relationship. This is the most underrated and untapped advice to give to any person in life. The love of good friends, family, colleagues and above all God`s love for us. Recognise the love and support you are surrounded by.

Another important aspect to life is: knowing who you are, find that person, be them and the world will gladly adjust. If we take the time to find ourselves and be ourselves, we make it easier for ourselves because we are not acting but simply being who we are. At the end of the day you are not tired of being that person because it`s not an act, it`s who you are and you make decisions that make you happy because you acted in your nature.

Education, whether formal or informal is important to continue improving yourself. We are a generation that moved from the idea of just using education as a means to get a job. Education is used as a tool for being better people, better communicators, better thinkers, problem solvers and innovators. Don`t stop upgrading yourself. Work on you, introspect (even if it is just when you`re in the bathroom) just take some time to listen to yourself.

Life is too beautiful to put into words or even comprehend, we have different ideas of what life is and that too is the beauty of life. Laugh more, enjoy your own company, appreciate others, recognise that blessing, drink that glass of wine or gin, go to that party or date, spend that money (save some of it) and never let what you don`t have make you forget the things that you do have.

We are learning every day. Make sure you enjoy the class!



Laughter

by Colette Boitumelo Mahlangu

Laughter is a very curious thing. It seems some people lack the ability to do so while others can't control that same ability; laughing in the most awkward and inappropriate situations. Xoli was one of the former. Approaching the age of 16, no one had seen her laugh since she was a child, even as a child she would barely muster up a smile while everyone would be in tears from all the laughing. If people told her jokes she wouldn't understand the punchline, comedy didn't even get a response from her and even tickling her would get you slapped quick! She was a very angry person prone to outbursts and self-isolation. Having exhausted all avenues, her family gave up and accepted that their daughter would forever be angry.



As her 16th birthday was coming up soon, she had been a bit of a tyrant, demanding a whole lot from her parents whom she bullied. "I want a cake as big as I am, I want it big enough for me to jump in! Annnnd I want it to be lowered from the sky, I dunno get a helicopter to deliver it or something!" she yelled at them when asked what kind of cake she had wanted.

Her parents wanted nothing more than to make their daughter happy, they made all the necessary arrangements, not sparing any expense. The big day arrived, all the guests were having fun, Xoli was mostly watching the guests and adding gifts to the ever-growing pile. The cake, which was a huge 4-layer cake, was set to be lowered with a harness to land right next to the huge throne Xoli was seated on. Unfortunately, this was something that had not been done before and the cake, being as big as it was, became too heavy for the harness. Almost 30 seconds after its descent one of the straps tore and the cake was sent hurtling down to the ground. It landed almost exclusively on Xoli, after which a stunned silence overtook the horrified party goers, some even reaching for their jackets not wanting to stick around for her reaction. Xoli on the other hand, wiped the cream from her eyes, opened them, looked at all the stunned guests and let out an all mighty laugh. Some say she hasn't stopped laughing since.

Rainbow

by Farmina Khan

Life, get busy living or busy dying. The value of life is not in its duration, but in its donation. You are not important because of how long you live, you are important and known due to how you live and love.

Life is about loving yourself and loving everything you do, loving the way you are and the person you want to become.

Life is about love, family, friends, moments, memories, we often get so busy trying to live up to expectations thrown to us that we forget to live life and really enjoy the moment that may never return again.

Life is family, where life begins and love never ends, we get so busy with life we forget the most important part. Family is everything and by everything I mean life itself, when in difficult situations we remember how much someone means to us and to what extent we will fight for our loved ones and their lives.

The way I see it if you want the rainbow you got to put up with the rain, life is a bumpy road full of hardships and trials and our current situation has taught us to be humble, our country is going through the biggest possible trial. Our lives and the life we lead is nothing more than a luxury, most people are getting to feel what the poor feel, what the needy feel. This pandemic is the greatest lesson to us all to show us how to value life, we need to be so grateful for everything that we have and the people that we have.

Life teaches you and I both that happiness is not the absence of problems, it's the ability to deal with them. The best time for new beginnings is now. Every end is a new beginning.



Lessons

by Tshwarelo Mohlakoana

As a teenager, in my early high school years I always looked forward to growing older and reaching that stage of self-awareness and independence. I would sit in my room and ponder, wondering what my future holds and what would become of me after high school and tertiary.

Life in high school went on as per usual and of course it came with a few hurdles here and there, but it was my life and I was determined to write my own rule book. The inner feistiness in me, coupled with a healthy dose of rebellion, led to a stage that I thought was self-actualization. Oh, how wrong I was!

I basically became the delinquent child in the family and chose to be in complete oblivion to what I perceived as the external noises coming from family and loved ones. I was living my best life, right? Or so I thought.

Years later, I got to matric and suddenly life became very serious because as we all know everything that happens and comes our way in our lives is very consequential. What you put in is what you get out, the law of cause-and-effect is a definite guarantee. I am not going to lie and say that a catastrophic or traumatic event changed me, but I will say that being a matriculate did play a part in my complete mind shift and transformation.

It became apparent to me that all my actions as a delinquent young teenager were all so futile and boy, did I feel like the biggest idiot.

Looking back now, I absolutely would not change anything about my past because those lessons that I learnt continue to shape the person I have become and the individual I aspire to be. If I did not go through my redemption phase, I would have never really known the true value of introspection.



Liberation

by Lesego Etsane

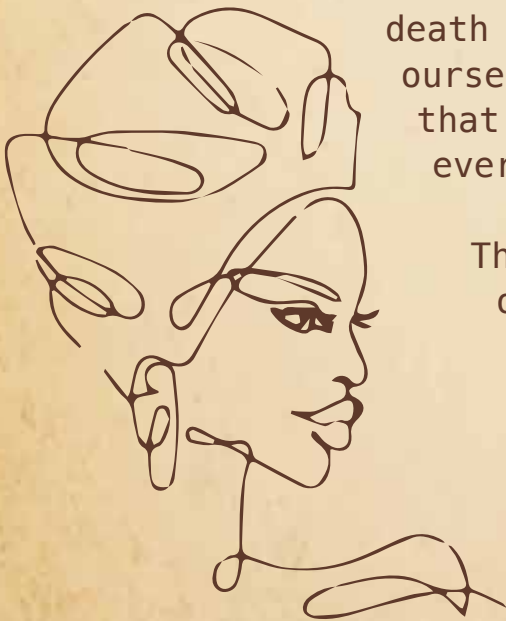
As a pre-teen, I was very shy, introverted and forced a 'nice girl' persona. Being that way never fell short of sometimes being dubbed as "the teacher's pet" in some classes. I went well out of my way to be a people pleaser and in most instances loved nothing more than the adoration of my peers and adults. Compliancy was a way of life and no compromises were to be made.

A compliant personality or nature of course came at a very high price – a lot of bullying and shaming. As we know, this life is not for the faint hearted. Trying to please everyone sometimes created the perfect opposite of the desired outcome for my life. I had zero social standing and was generally associated with the unpopular crew. I would be publicly humiliated too often to recount, I was laughed at for frivolous reasons and I was ignored by those I wanted to befriend. Basically, humiliation became the order of the day.

Finally, one day it dawned on me that in this world and life-time, in an effort to forge the future that I dreamt of and was so excited for, growth in all facets of my life was an absolute necessity.

Growth and liberation from the dissatisfied groups of people I had longed to accommodate for so long was needed. I concluded that a coward dies a thousand times before their actual death and that in this life we all need to liberate ourselves from striving to please people because that isn't in our nature and over and above everything, it is highly unattainable.

This experience has since liberated me from my own mental shackles, and I continue to live by the principles that I learned from my pre-teen years to this day.

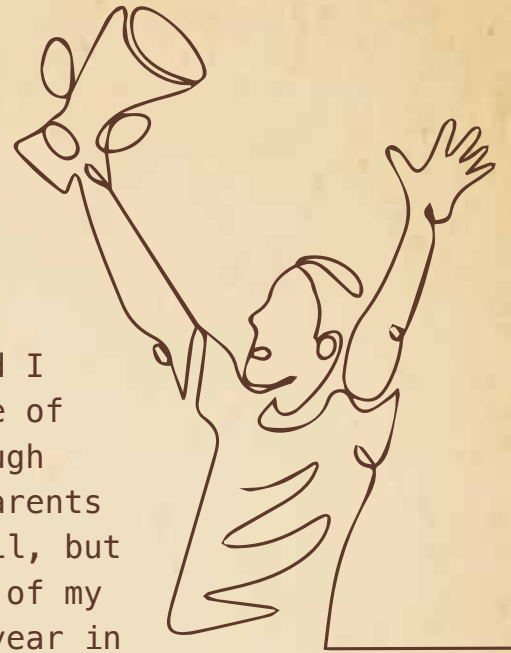


Me

by Dlhamini Motshidisi

This is my story. I guess I have to start by describing myself in a nice and positive way. I'm a BSc IT Graduate from the dusty streets of the Northern Free State, in a small township called Senekal. I was raised by my late grandparents. I truly believe that they are very proud of me.

My father passed away when I was 5 days old and I have been well and taken care of in the absence of my mother. I won't lie and say that I had a tough childhood, I was the happiest child. My grandparents provided everything for me. I didn't have it all, but I had what I needed. I didn't feel the absence of my mother, until my grandmother passed away last year in February.



I thought it was the end of me, but God's grace kept me going. I was in my final year and everything seemed blurry, I was struggling financially, academically, emotionally and mentally. I attended a psychology session at school and that made me see things in a much more positive way. I always had faith that things would work out hence I made sure to attend those sessions so that I could get help. I have to say God made a way.

I told myself that I was going to make it through, against all odds. I was accepted into University when no one believed in me and I didn't have funding. I did not come from a rich family but I didn't let that stand in my way. I made it. I am a winner.

Mother

by Promise Ntobeko

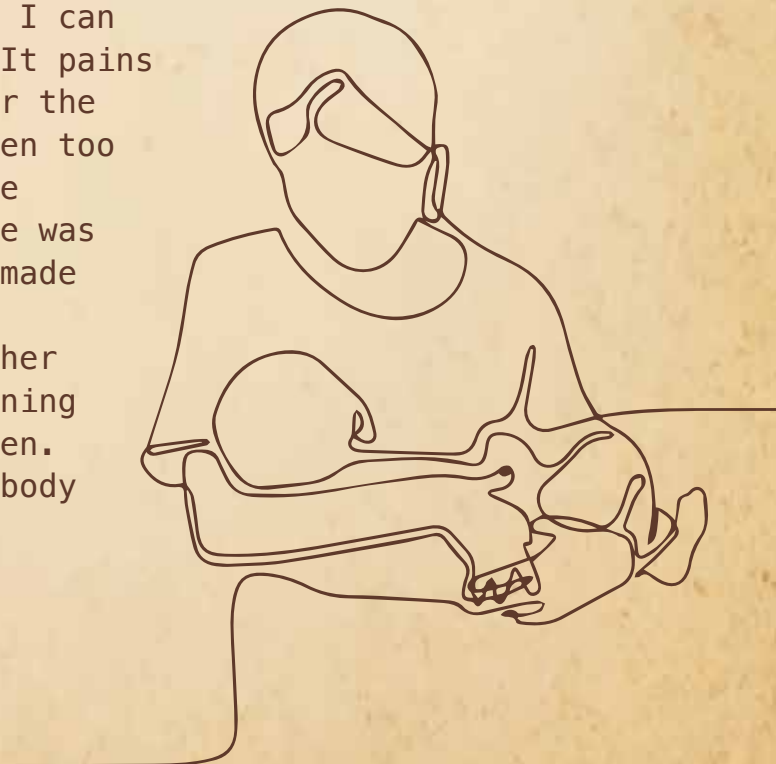
My mother meant the world to me and I am haunted by the thought that I perhaps never conveyed to her just how much I loved her. I miss her every single day and I hope I can tell her that.

The day I lost my mother I was 6 years old, I will never forget. I remember each and every moment of that day with such clarity that I can't erase it from my memory even if I tried, she was such a phenomenal woman who spread joy and comfort to all those who crossed her path. Although I've often been told that I look just like her that's where similarities end, I can only hope to be even half the woman she was.

The last day I saw her was on Saturday morning but only after my siblings snuck me in the hospital at the time, children under 18 years were not allowed to visit patients. There she lay in bed, tubes and wires everywhere noticeably thinner but still smiling when she saw me. Although I wasn't aware of the details surrounding her condition, she was dying of breast cancer and only had a few days left to live.

My mom was spontaneous and quick-witted, her greatest pleasure was making other people laugh. She worked hard as a domestic worker, always on her feet, working long hours to provide for her two daughters.

I think of my mother quite often especially on the Mother's day, when I close my eyes I can still see her bright and cheery face. It pains me to say this but I can no longer hear the sound of her voice in my head. It's been too many years. Thankfully I also have some wonderful memories of the days when she was beautiful and fun-loving and when she made me feel like I was the most important person in the world. My mom expressed her love for me countless times in the morning and at bedtime and everywhere in between. I never get tired of that reminder. Nobody can take those memories away from me I treasure each and every one of them.



Opportunity

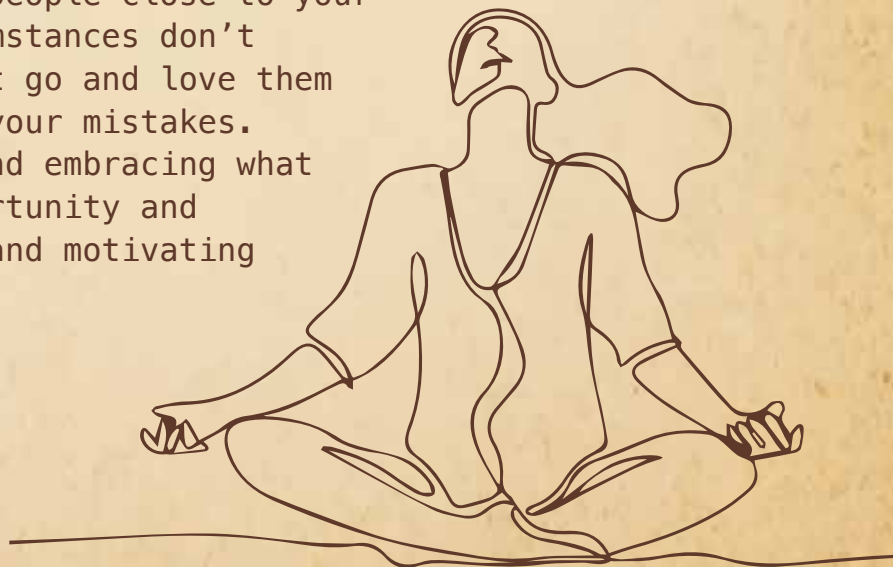
by Tammy Mahlangu

Opportunity is a time or set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something. Coming from a home of five with two pensioner parents, I always witnessed love and joy in its purest form and that made it easier for me to seek greatness in every opportunity I was presented with. Opportunity to me means doing the task at hand to the best of my ability and achieving greatness at the end of the day.

I've always just had nothing but love and time to give to people who needed it and it always used to make me happy to put a smile on people's faces like when I used to do volunteer work at a local old age home, that opportunity used to lighten up my day.

Now that the world is going through a pandemic, and everyone is in a panic and is frantic about the new world we're going to live in which requires us to social distance and self quarantine for safety; I think back to myself, I realise that I've been on voluntary lockdown due to unemployment and the only thing that wasn't normal about being on lockdown now was that there was no longer freedom of movement, freedom of socialising and just freedom to be free; but this pandemic has also given many the opportunity to find themselves, to realise their mindfulness and enhance their quality of life because of the restrictions set by the government. It's amazing how opportunity is always there, it just depends on how you want to see it and use it.

Taking full accountability and responsibility for my actions is one of the things I have learnt through opportunity. The opportunity to apologise when I've wronged someone before they decide to leave my life is not an easy thing to do. To let go of people close to your heart when situations and circumstances don't favour you, you just have to let go and love them from a distance and learn from your mistakes. This means accepting what was and embracing what will be. Life is all about opportunity and embracing change in a positive and motivating manner.



Positive

by Siphelo Mastermind Ndlovu

People around you may ask you to be on the safer side and stop trying to take risks. However there is no gain without pain. Try hard to achieve success in life despite what life offers you. It's common for people to run away from their problems and obstacles. The importance of seeing an opportunity in every obstacle will improve your condition. Learn to let go of your stresses and never sleep with them. If you can do something about it, just do it. Otherwise leave it and just keep on working towards your goals.



Being

by Anita Phiri

Life, is beautiful like a flower, it blossoms like a sunflower in summer,
so precious like a wrapped gift,
sweet like candy.

Life, it is a gift so flawless like a new born baby.
God's gift to people on earth.

Life, The joy of seeing another day of fresh new things.

Beautiful sounds of birds singing, waves flowing and the nature of life.

In Life we learn, we live, we love.

It's God's gift. God's plan.



Stranger

by Sandile Ntuli

The tall, dark and handsome young man with bushy eyebrows sat next to me by the river bank pretending to be on his phone. I know you are asking yourself how did I know, right? Well, I do that sometimes and he was on the same window for over 5 minutes, surely you can't stare at a picture for that long.

It was my first time seeing him around, but he did not really look like someone from outside my village. He had a small sling bag and a mask on. I couldn't get a full proper view, but I assumed he had a beautiful smile and I had to come up with a plan to firstly, see his smile, and secondly hear his voice.

As I offered him water, he coughed up a "oh thank you" and I replied "CORONA!" jokingly. He moved closer to me and asked what I was listening to, he had not even greeted me. "We start by greeting first here. Hey, I am Sandile" I tried to reach out to him by hand and he looked at my hand and said "CORONA! Remember?" he smiled, and we greeted each other with our elbows.

We continued talking and I found out that his name is Ntokozo. He's 23 years old and from Johannesburg and yes, he had a beautiful smile. It did not take me long to notice he was an academic, just like me and loved all things art. It has been slightly over six weeks of seeing each other every day, and I am so happy we met.

I fell in love with a stranger and I think he is the one.



Struggle

by Kwanele Mbatsana

When having a baby, you can't really tell if it's going to be a blessing or a struggle, but it's something that one has to overcome. Jolene and Liam went through a lot, especially when the walls felt like they were closing in and there were little or no choices or options given to them. The only people that truly make it through tough times like this are the people that think outside of the box that they have been trapped in.

Jolene and Liam understood that in order to move forward and grow, they needed to move out from the house that was so toxic and depriving, they needed to move from a guardian that was selfish and sending them into a downward spiral.

Liam's father was a successful banker, in one of the largest bank firms but failed at parenting 'How does one take advice from a person that was a terrible parent', Liam thought. He had no role models to speak of. Only a selfish hypocrite that had a love for money. Liam not only knew but understood that money could not build great characteristics. He also knew not to confuse movement with progress.

The couple became self-directed with no influence on how to raise their child and raise themselves in the process, even though at times they doubted their decisions, they wished decision-making came with a sign to assure them that they were making the right one.

Every obstacle we come across in life gives us challenges but it also gives us the opportunity to improve our circumstances to better ourselves and our lives. We tend to focus on the negative and not see all the positives we have. Acknowledge that things don't always turn out how we would like them to, but they turn out how they should be. Just like Liam and Jolene, learn from your mistakes and make better choices to benefit you on this journey. Become a greater version of yourself.



Unforgettable

by Avela Mthembu

That was the happiest day when I received a call from my Mom, telling me that I have to come and visit her in Johannesburg. On that day I didn't sleep, I was busy thinking and planning my first trip and imagining what Johannesburg looked like.

The day finally came, I woke up early in the morning, my heart was beating so fast and I had this unexplainable smile on my face. I went to the bus stop with my Aunt. When we arrived at the station we went to buy a ticket and I got in the bus. The bus trip was 6 hours, I couldn't believe what I saw along the way. The beauty of nature, mountains, big farms and rivers. In the bus it was quiet, everybody was doing their thing. You know what I noticed, is that nobody cares if you sleep, even if you snore because they understand that the journey is very long.

Finally the bus arrived in Johannesburg and it was like I was day dreaming – a lot of people with big luggage talking different languages. I called Mom but her cell phone was switched off. I waited 2 hours but my Mom wasn't showing up. I started to become afraid and panic and it was like all the people were looking at me – then at last she came walking fast, searching for me. I waved at her.



Dime

by Nhlaka Morgan Khuzwayo

I'm driving a sedan at night from my professional job, the job I love and pays me at least reasonable if not good. Driving home to my two kids as it is a Friday, since I don't work weekends my kids love to be with their gogo, Khulu and their aunt. My sister has her own business running well. We have a great relationship with my sister; I give good advice, we share ideas and she's getting married soon. On the flip side (reality) my mom passed away. I miss her, I wish she was still here. I'm her Son, the only Son. I'm a Son of a queen. I'm golden, I am the change. I appreciate my life I was raised by my grandma, me and my sister. She is very supportive.

I miss her.

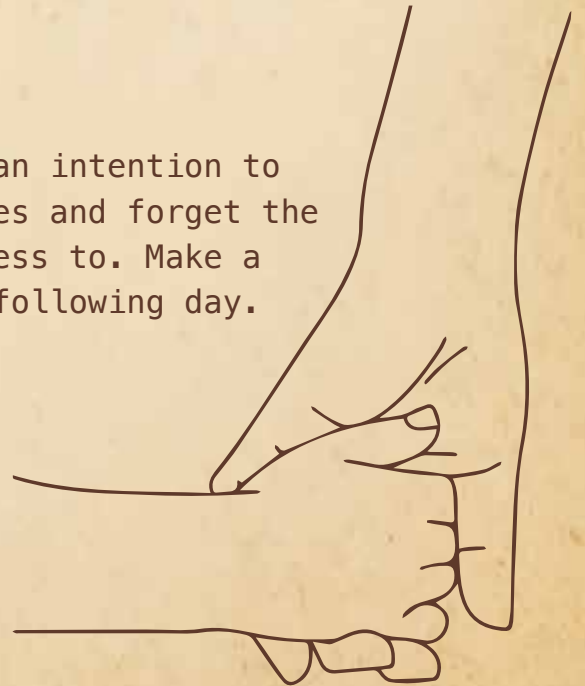
Thinking about my mother made me realise I never stopped hurting from the thought of not being with her anymore. She made my world. Greatness always came from our team and my sister was young when she passed away so she never really knew her, she never experienced asking what to do right in a certain situation. She needs her.

I am the change.

My granny wants us to be something in life, she raised us and believes in us. I want her to feel assured that she has someone to take care of her family and her dream of a good and comfortable home.

I appreciate my life.

We often focus on the mistakes we make with an intention to better it. We dream mostly of greener pastures and forget the things we possess that others don't have access to. Make a dime today, and then strive to make two the following day.



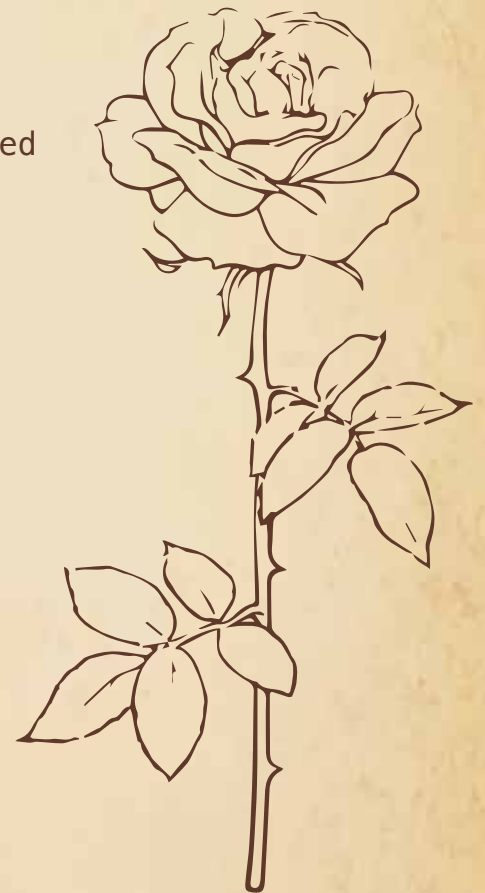
Author

by Tashiyana Eliziah

Life is beautiful but not always easy. It's riddled with problems as well, however the challenge lies in facing them with courage, allowing the beauty of life to penetrate like a fragrant ointment which makes the pain bearable during trying times, by providing hope.

Happiness, sorrow, victory, defeat, day and night are the two sides of the coin. Those who are under the impression that life is a bed of roses are disillusioned and will become victims of depression and frustration. Life may be beautiful, just like a bed of roses, but it has challenges and thorns. Those who accept these challenges and succeed are the ones who know how to truly live life.

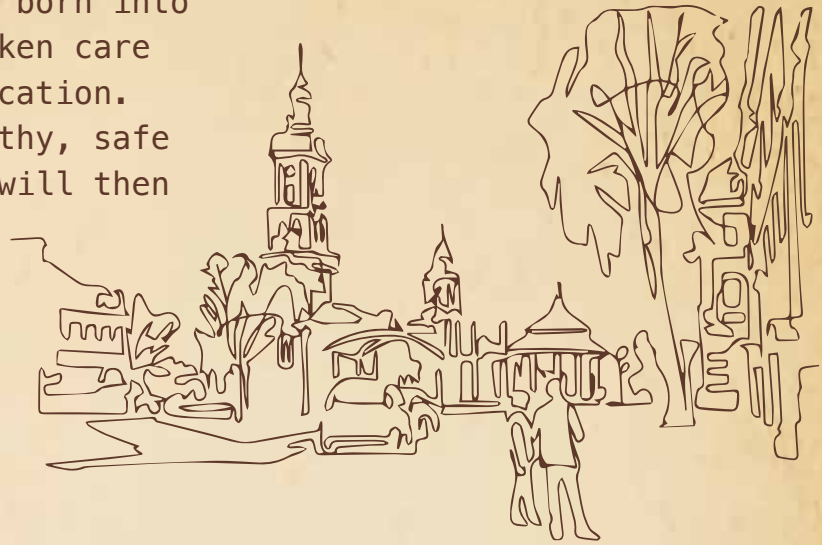
You are the author of your own life story.



Perfect

by Nikita Sampson

In my perfect world, each child is born into a household where everything is taken care of including food, shelter and education. Each child is brought up in a healthy, safe and secure environment. The child will then begin his/her education, which will be fully paid for. The child will complete a tertiary education and will be qualified to pursue any career.



When the child finishes school, he/she will only have to work in their career to get extras in life like luxuries and additional comforts, they will not have to work for their survival (like our current world) because the law of the world will have taken care of their basic needs from birth till death. This means that people will also work because they enjoy what they are doing and they don't just do it to merely survive.

When he/she decides to settle down and start a family, they will have no difficulty in finding the perfect spouse. There will be no need for them to live in a house with an electric fence and their own personal security guards as there will be no crime. People will be more interested in enjoying their lives rather than committing crime because their needs will be taken care of.

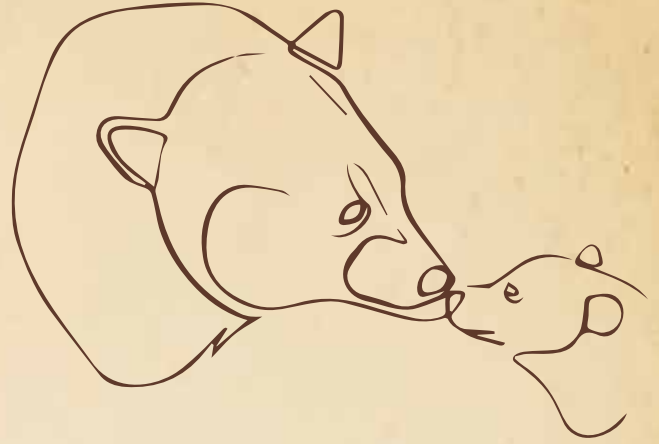
In my perfect world there will only be joy and pleasure all the time and in everyone's life. Technology will make everyone's lives simpler and easier and people will not have to fear that they might not survive the next day due to a lack of money, drug abuse or alcohol abuse. Those things will not exist in this perfect world because nobody would need them to fill the void or to forget about their problems because there will be no problems and heartache...there will be no need to do them as we will be in a constant state of happiness!

Strength

by Niscaya Ebrahim

My family has been my pillar of strength through all the ups and downs that I have faced as an Individual. My family consists of one sibling and my parents.

Within each family member, lies my strength. My mother is my motivation as I can always count on her when I need someone to lift up my hopes when something turns out the opposite way as I had planned it to be. She believes in me more than I believe in myself. My father is my advisor as I can always count on him to give me the best advice when I have no solution to the problems that I may face. He taught me to always keep my head held up high as well as to fight for the right things. My sibling is my best friend. She is someone that I can always count on having my back always.



Family is something that no one can live without, be it a bound of blood or a bound of love. They are the ones that shape and mould you into the person that you are today with values, traditions and love. Always respect your elders as well as shower them with much love and affection.

Soul

by Tylo Koetaan

"An emotional or intellectual energy or intensity."

To me, one's soul is an immortal essence of a living being.

We often find ourselves contemplating how society wants us to appear.

Society outweighs the soul and I am not okay with that flow.

Made great from the pain that it endures.

The tears that come with one's pain are used to cleanse the canvas before the show.

Here is where I kneel.

Here is where I heal.

Here is where I allow my flesh to tarnish.

Here is where I let my wisdom overflow.

Here is where the higher power provides the glow.

But above all here is where the love is as beautiful as snow.

Allow your soul to shine and don't let society dim it's light.

Let your soul overpower society's flow

And you will continue to glow.



Unborn

by Chantal Tivane Moyane

A letter to my seed of life;

Every day I pray for you and in my heart there will always a permanent place for you. I am gifted to bring life into this world. A priceless gift it is. Oh baby, you're the treasure I have been waiting for and I can't wait to see you.

As I carry you my unborn seed, every day I pray for you. You are the gift of life I have been waiting for. I can't wait to call you my own Do you know how much I've planned for your arrival, I can't wait to hold and kiss you for the first time.

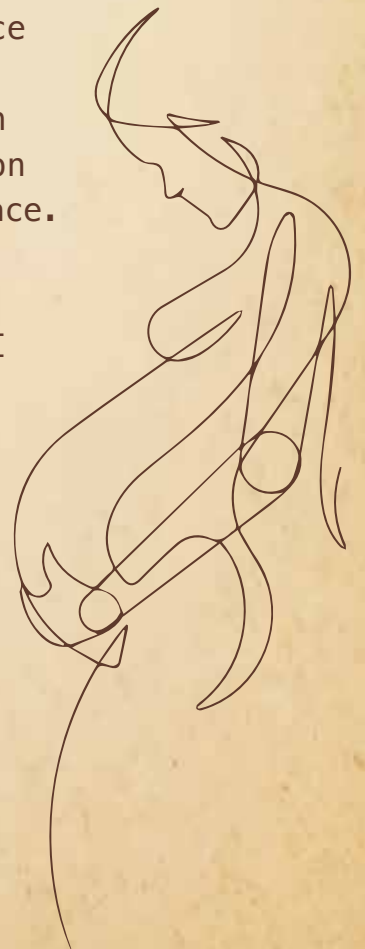
Oh baby, every heartbeat, I feel it in my bones. In my heart there's a permanent place for you. I pray you grow strong each day. I pray for the day I will finally kiss you for the first time, I can't promise you the world but I can promise you my endless love.

When you cry I will cry with you whilst wiping your tears away, may your laughter remind me of the happiness I once possessed as a child too.

I fear for you when I think of the challenges this earth has against the innocent but I promise to sing for you on your darkest days and fight beside you in every war you face.

Oh baby, I'm already imagining what your eyes will look like. On my weakest days may you sing me all the songs I sing to you. It's so amazing how much impact you have already had on me just by growing inside me.

I'm beyond blessed to be amongst those to be given the opportunity to experience motherhood. My heart will forever be a permanent place for you, I can't promise you the world but I promise to give you all I have and all that I am. Oh baby, I am so happy to be growing you inside me.



Unveiling

by Josephine Mphasha

I remember the time I could not even bring myself to look at the reflection of the girl in the mirror, eyes red from the countless times I tried to pour out the hurt that had deeply rooted itself within the depths of my heart. The times when happiness had eluded my life and light had slowly lost its brightness with only shadows of what once was keeping me company.

I was coming undone and breaking apart, something in me fighting to break out. Countless nights spent tossing and turning feeling restless listening to the aching that has now called my heart home.

My heart ached every single day for you and it blinded me from noticing the blossoming that was slowly taking place. A beautiful unveiling was taking place, the cocoon was breaking to reveal a beautiful butterfly. A stronger, wiser and self-loving human has unveiled to walk out of the darkness and into the light which is shining brighter than it ever was.

The reflection I see today when I look into the mirror is that of a fierce strong being. "Look at you now, look at the radiance that pierces through your skin. Your heart pours out an abundance of joy and happiness"



The one thing in life we can always be sure about is change. The process of change is not easy and can be disguised in any form, one of them being heartbreak. Embrace the process, accept the change and enjoy the unveiling.

"You are beautiful, you are strong, you are it, I appreciate and love you."

Blissful

by Advice Malope

Tuesday morning, the 19th of May. Sitting in my room with a hot cup of tea, oh my word, looking outside, even though it's winter and cold my heart is filled with gratitude. My heart is filled with joy.

After sunset, a new light will shine again the next day. I'm so grateful for the skills I have, my growth has come through these waves of change.

Happiness is the tone I set through the morning of waking up and embracing life with a smile.

My heart that has visions for greatness, a mind wired for intelligence, for not one, but many accomplishments.



Focus

by Silva Mabhedla

Focus comes to life whenever we are tested, whenever we face hardship and challenges, life changing decisions. Focus is key, especially in this “Instagram and selfie world”, with so many distractions and pleasures of the eye and food for the heart. We are living in the time where many are discouraged and are in the gutter with the pandemic of COVID-19, people are selling all their possessions and giving away all hope to despair and the fear of an unknown future. No hope and no direction.

We can't afford to lose our focus, we can't let this pandemic drift us away from our hopes and goals, discipline and morals purpose and destiny, yes we may be affected and bruised, lost a loved one or a job, this year may have not been what we ordered, it may not be what we had anticipated, however we still have life and ought to be grateful and use it to the fullest. Sanitise your hands and change the way you think to live a better life regardless of the current situation.

‘Focus and simplicity...once you get there you can move mountains’ said Steve Jobs. There is nothing that can withstand the power of a focused mind and heart, these two can move mountains and weather any storm. I come from nothing, no matriculant or graduate in the family, however my mission is to be someone of value and have something of value ,yes there are tons of distractions out there...but my focus is key, this will keep me grounded and disciplined.

Focus is key, I am the first matriculant in my family and I have also graduated with a qualification in project management and information technology. If we focus our eyes to the stars we shall navigate out of any storm and eat the fruits of our labour and sacrifices.

Ignore the things that shake your faith, be deaf to negativity, focus on what you believe and you will achieve it, you don't need connections in high places, you just need to be a hard worker and keep your focus.



Grandmother

by Celine Ramterath

My grandmother has inspired me to be the best person I can be, to not only push for my goals but to achieve them. She makes me proud of who I am and where I came from. She has never let me down and I will never let her down. I grew up learning her morals and values. I watched her grow old and sick, while I started becoming the woman she was in her younger days – strong.

Sadly she passed on two years ago, she left and shattered my world, the feeling was bitter. I felt as if I had a knife pierced into my heart. It was a torturous moment in my life, watching her leave forever. It felt like life would never be the same again.

When she left, she left me with all the lessons she taught me over the years. These lessons are my daily motivation.



Whistle

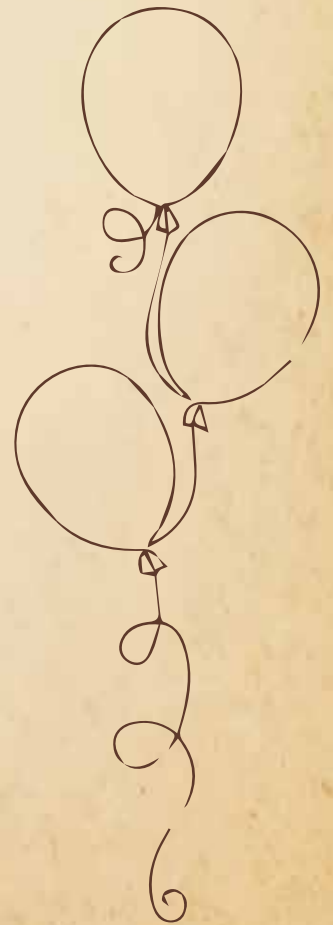
by Xoliswa Queen Macuphu

Every morning I decide that I want to be happy and make everyone around me Happy.

I remember my childhood; my siblings and I would play a game with balloons. Each person took a balloon and wrote their name on it with a marking pen. We would then take the balloons to my mothers' bedroom and throw them in there and close the door. After a few minutes or an hour, my mom would blow a whistle and everyone would have to leave what they were doing and run to my mother's bedroom to grab the balloon with your own name on it, however no one ever picked the balloon with their own name on it. The moral of the game was to always remember our happiness but also the happiness of others.

Another joyful moment was every Sunday of the month we had a family gathering, my cousins would come over with games like monopoly, snakes and ladders and 30 seconds. The house would be filled with so much Joy, Happiness and unity. I realised happiness has had a huge impact on our family.

From these experiences I learnt to deposit the happiness I get into my bank account of memories, each day I remind myself that to live a healthy life you must free yourself from hate.

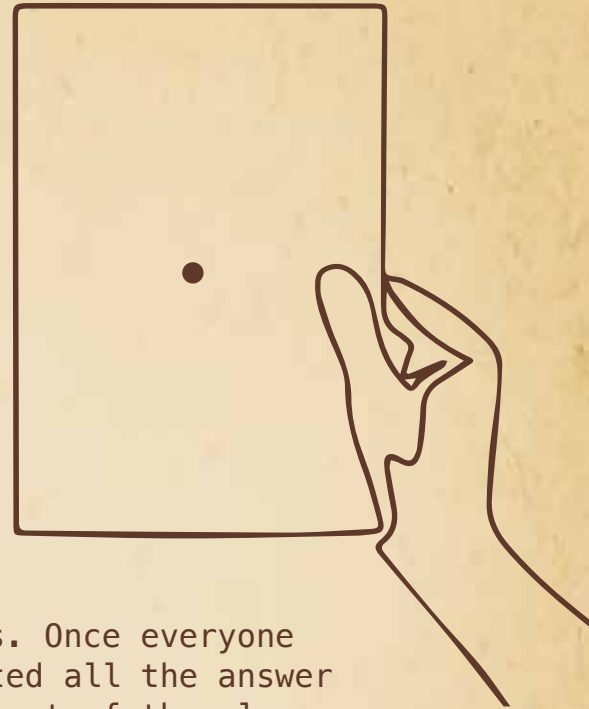


Dot

by Mzwandile Maziya

One day a professor entered the classroom and announced a surprise test. Hearing this, all the students got anxious and started thinking about what would come up in the test. The professor distributed the question paper, with the front side facing down. After handing over the papers to all the students, he asked them to turn the page and start the test.

There was a black dot in the centre of the page. Everyone was startled and looked at the professor in awe. The professor told the students; "I want you to write a few lines about what you see on the paper" all the students were stupefied but since they didn't have a choice they started writing their answers. Once everyone was through with the test, the professor collected all the answer sheets and started reading out each answer in front of the class.



The students wrote about the black dot, mentioning its position, its size, etc. After reading out all the answers the professor addressed the students and told them, none of you will be graded on this test, I just wanted you to ponder something. All of you wrote about the black dot, nobody wrote about the white part of paper. The same thing happens in our lives too. We all have a white paper to observe and learn from yet we always focus on the dark spots, we have so many reasons to celebrate our parents, co-workers, friends, good health and the miracles we witness every day.

We limit our horizons by focusing on just the dark spots, our disappointments, our frustrations, our fears and anxieties, things that bother us, people that wronged us, etc. In our day to day lives we tend to take so many things for granted, and focus our energy on things like failures and disappointments.

Although these dark spots are quite small when compared to the good things that we have in our lives, our minds do not let us think positively.

Take your eyes away from the black dots of your life. Try and focus on the brighter side of life and let positivity govern your thoughts.

Journey

by Ethene Buqwana

Life cannot be described by only one or two words. It is the mixture of everything. The mixture of happiness and sadness, success and failure, comfort and pain, encouragement and frustration, opportunities and frustrations, love and hate, relief and sorrow and struggle and giving up. Life is not perfect, but it is beautiful.

Life is a journey, not a destination. Everyone takes every step in a unique way. This journey may take you down by great storms and bumpy roads, but it does not matter, what matters the most is how many times you stand up to continue. Each moment on your journey of your life you are presented with an opportunity to react differently. You may even make the same choices repeatedly because you do not know how to choose otherwise. You have the power to change things and not walk around in a circle.

Life is mixture of happiness and sadness; nobody grew up with constant emotions. Many situations will test our emotions. It will make us happy, sad, or angry but one thing we must remember it is just a test given to us to make us stronger.

Life is a game and the only rule is there are no mistakes, only lessons to learn. You won't always be a winner. Life is not all about lying down in bed of roses. There are points in our life that we will be wounded by the thorns of life.

We will feel the pain of loss, loneliness, failure, and rejection but one thing is clear, there is peace after everything. There is sweet a sweat remembrance.

There is a rainbow after the rain, life is a journey not a destination.



Lockdown

by Megan Govender

I am a person who tries their best to be positive in any situation and as much as it hurts me to see the amount of people who have suffered due to this pandemic I am also grateful for the amount of lost time I've finally caught up on with my family during this lockdown.

We tend to live our lives so fast that we actually don't take time to stop and appreciate the important things. Being an only child, this lockdown has made me realise how grateful I am to have parents that are willing to sacrifice daily for my happiness and to give me a better life which they never had.

No family is perfect, and every family has its ups and downs but no matter what happens I know we'll always stick together because amongst all that chaos comes love and the best memories. I will forever be grateful for the amount of memories we've made during this time and the amount of joy experienced together.



Graduation

by Nomvula Zulu

I will not forget the day that I received the call to say that our graduation will be in Johannesburg. I was so excited I could not sleep, it was my first time going to Johannesburg and my first time flying.

I used my lunch time break to do some shopping so that I could dress smartly for my graduation. The last night I spent at home I was preparing for my trip and receiving graduation gifts from my friends.

I made sure that I set an alarm on my phone so I could wake up early. When we got to Ushaka Airport I was so excited, although I was scared I really enjoyed the flight.

Johannesburg is a big city with many different people. The day of my graduation was wonderful, the event was so smart. I got to meet different students and I even ended up making new friends. My graduation reminded me that having a good qualification and skills will change people's lives.



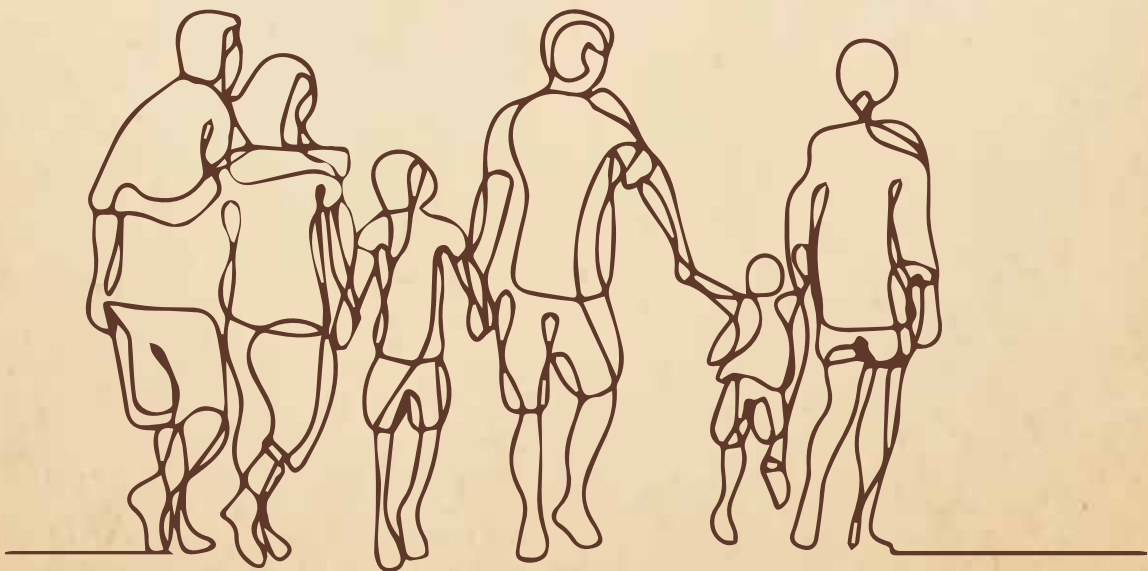
Ohana

by Luqmaan Francis

Family, a six letter word, without it we are incomplete. On the day before lock down my life was, quite normal, happy go lucky if you wish but the next day everything took a turn for the worst and if there's anything that I'm tremendously grateful for is that my family is always there.

I'm due to get married this year, and with being away at work, overtime, homework and assignments and let's face it social media also consumes you and makes you feel like you have become somewhat detached or disconnected with family. If there is any good that came from this pandemic it was that I got to spend more time with my family, enjoy their company and catch up on lost times before I leave them to start my married life.

I'm grateful for what this pandemic has given me and I want to spread awareness and bring to light that everything cannot be a constant high, but if we make the effort to help each other and look out for each other we can most certainly maintain that high and keep our heads up high. 'Ohana', means family and family means nobody gets left behind or forgotten.



Purpose

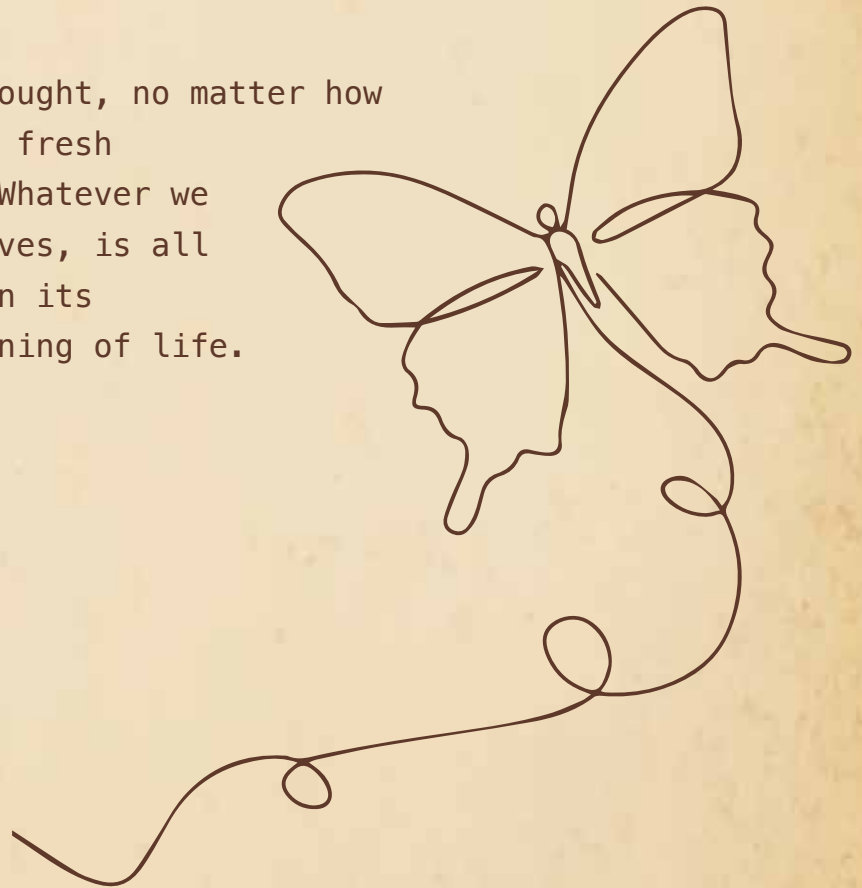
by Khumbulani Mkhize

Finding meaning in your life is not a difficult thing, but it is harder than living a numb, fast paced superficial life. In a world full of ups and downs, it's hard to define the true meaning of life. Some people define the true meaning of life by having a successful career, getting married and raising a family.

Open your eyes to see life's beauty and understand its true essence. Think positively and flush out negative thoughts because difficulties in your life don't come to destroy you but rather to help you realise your hidden potential.

End each day with a positive thought, no matter how hard things were, tomorrow is a fresh opportunity to make it better. Whatever we are, whatever we make of ourselves, is all we will ever have – and that, in its profound simplicity, is the meaning of life.

Life is beautiful.



Sister

by Mamello Moutang

Watching you grow has been a wonder and absolute pleasure my baby brother, I was alone with mom and the 18th year you joined us. I was so fascinated by your wrinkly skin and little feet, I went from being an only child to having a little person to keep me company, wiping noses and kissing bruises became part of my life.

I cannot even remember what my life was like before you came along. You have taught me so much about myself, I am much more gentle, caring and understanding. All the times we argue and end up laughing at the end, those moments are where I am at my happiest.

I love how you mimic everything I do; it is beautiful to see how you see me from your perspective. You were not an easy child growing up and mom and I went in and out of hospital with you but you showed me how strong you are when you kept on fighting, that's why I call you my little soldier. I cannot believe how much you have grown in these five years.

You push me to do better and be better because I know someone is watching and that someone calls me 'Sister.'



Tomorrow

by Asipe Flepu

Live the life you want to live, be a happy person and appreciate what God gives you every day.

Don't compare yourself to others.

People around you may progress in life but enjoy their success together, your turn is coming in its own time.

In the Bible God said "when the time is right, I the Lord will make it happen".

Now we are facing a very difficult time but that must not stop us from looking ahead to tomorrow.

Everything will come back to normal.



Together

by Mickayla Singh

On some days we are one of many,
On some days we are many of one,
But every day we are family.

Family is not defined by blood, it constantly expands as we discover
people with whom we exchange unwavering love and support from.

Where I always return, my centre, my beginning & end.
Family is where meaning originates.

Love is what brought you here,
Love is what keeps you here,
Love is what keeps family together through it all.



Joyburg

by Tshepang Mamasedi

Wow! What a city
They call it Lavender City
I call it a city of Free Will
Characterized by trees carrying
Love, peace, positivity and more Life

Oh my Lavender City!
A city with Uniform People
A nation made in my image

Do you want me to tell you about
the bakery of this precious city?
It smells like Lavender, serving its
People with free food.
The lavender city does not have rich
nor poor, black or white, but peace and happiness



Happiness Street is the place to be
I see people worshipping their Gods
I see people drinking beer
I see love and peace in this city.

Oh Lavender City, I long for you.

Perspective

by Ashley Naidoo

I am grateful for my Mom and Dad. Thank you for giving me life, for taking care of me and keeping me safe, for your wisdom and direction, for your motivation and for always believing in me. I would not be the young man I am today without you guys.

I am grateful for my brother, for always taking the blame when we got into trouble, and for my young nephew that you have brought into our family.

I am grateful for my family because through the tough times we are always there for each other. Last year November my dad had a minor heart attack, he was rushed to the hospital, the next day the doctor said he had to go for a triple bypass heart operation. It was a difficult and frightening time for us, the thought of losing him was devastating. Thankfully with God's blessing the operation was successful and he has fully recovered. It's moments like this that truly make you appreciate the people that have been there for your whole life.

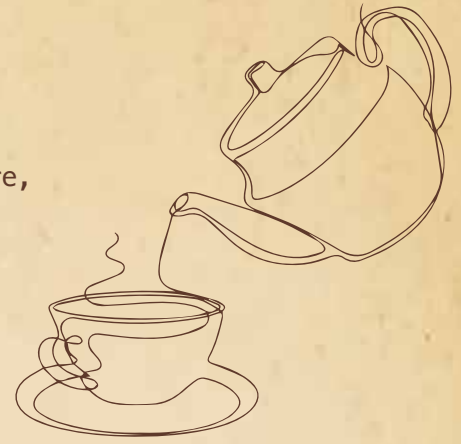
If you stop for a second and think about the present state of the world, now more than ever we need to be thankful for the people in our lives. Go out there and tell your family members how much you appreciate them.

To the people reading this that know me, I am thankful for you being in my life, and to those reading this message without a family, welcome to mine!



Tea

by Natasha Fracc



"You do it like this," Ja'far said. His back in perfect posture, his shoes pointy and red.

He took his time, and poured the minty tea high from the air.

Show off, I thought. The long gurgle of liquid moss cascading into glass whipped hold of my eyes. The fresh aroma of mint oscillating my senses, like a ping pong ball.

"Taste," he said, and handed me the little cup; proud to be my host while the cry of temples shook all the colours of Marrakech. I sipped with my lashes shut, and a strange thing occurred. Unicorns. Honestly, unicorns. And Lipizzaner's too, showjumping through the hula hoops of my heart. A burst of life broke into my sad days, held me at knife point and stole away all the pain. Just like that. On the first swallow, the warm water held sweet Christmas Carols at the back of my mouth, and every taste bud stood to say it's first Hail Mary, in years. Maybe even, in forever. I must've stopped breathing.

"It is good, yes?" Ja'far's voice gentled my return to the kitchen, where we sat, alone between the baked wall tiles. I opened my eyes and stared at him. I couldn't find my "yes", because it was piled under so many other nonsensical words like "booyah" and "omygodalmighty" and "yougottabekiddingme" – and also, something the Unicorns said.

So I nodded slowly, like a kid obeying the rules of the house. Ja'far's smile was knowing.

"What is it?" I asked him, holding the little cup inside all my fingers like a treasure chest of hope that was now mine alone. "Is it the mint? Is it the way you brew the water? Wait I know...it's the sugar; what type of sugar did you use in here Ja'far?" I was pretty certain I'd nailed my own game of trivia.

But my turbaned companion kept his head low and chuckled with coyness at my insistence, and my obvious oblivion.

"It's none of that," he said.

"Then what?" I demanded. Silence.

"Tell me please Ja'far. What is this recipe?"

He leaned in to whisper, "it's not a recipe," he said. "It's just love."

I winced and cocked my head in confusion.

"It's all love habibty," he continued. His smile captivating and beautiful. "That's the true secret."

I paused for a long moment.

"When we make tea, we are picking the tea leaves of our own souls and brewing the love inside us, so that my soul meets your soul with only love at the tip of the cup."


"Love," I repeated the word as though a foreign concept and I looked at the treasure in my hands, curious but cautious. It was too simple, and too exquisite to grasp.

"Take another sip," he said.

"But I might cry, it's so good..."

"Do not be afraid of the joy," he assured me, "It's good for you."

And so, I raised the glass to my lips, and I sipped some more.



We are all just Joy. And we are necessary.

Acknowledgements

~ Leanne Crighton for curation, production, co-ordination and proof setting ~

~ Kaylin Sullivan for curation, production, writing and proof setting ~

~ Natasha Fracchiolla for concept, curation and writing ~

~ Tayla Schroeder for bringing each story to life with her beautiful designs ~

~ KLM Empowered for opening the way for a Positive Page workshop ~

~ Each writer who contributed to this ebook. Thank you for believing in

the magic and for making this a reality ~

~ Marco Fracchiolla for supporting our vision and believing in us ~

~ Thank you to our followers for every like, comment and share –

your support is everything, we see you ~

~ The Room 206 team, for lighting the way for something special and joyful ~



ROOM 206

Targeted Writing & Media Services

www.room206.co.za