

Idiom & Image

A hand is visible on the left side, holding onto a dark metal railing that runs horizontally across the frame. The railing is composed of several vertical bars. In the background, a vast expanse of greenish-blue ocean stretches to the horizon under a cloudy sky. A small, dark, rocky island with a white lighthouse is visible in the distance. The overall mood is contemplative and artistic.

2016

The Arts Magazine of Sussex County Community College



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First Printing, 2016

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Idiom & Image



“deliberation.discretion.expression”



“This is how to live-
keep what you love most
two or so brushstrokes away.”

It is an honor to dedicate this issue of *Idiom + Image Magazine* to our beloved Poet and Professor, Jean LeBlanc. Jean devotes her life to the arts of language, the written word, photography and teaching. She enriches the college community with her generous spirit and creates an environment in which those around her cannot help but to flourish. Jean is always within “two or so brushstrokes” of our hearts.

Excerpt from "Two or so Brushstrokes" ©Jean LeBlanc 2010
Image of Jean LeBlanc by Joe Guerriero, SCCC

1.

Dogs and the Moon

You and I are like dogs and the moon.
Wilder, I stretched my cry out to tether me to you.
I swung on that string as a child in starry lust,
my lips clinging to your collarbone.

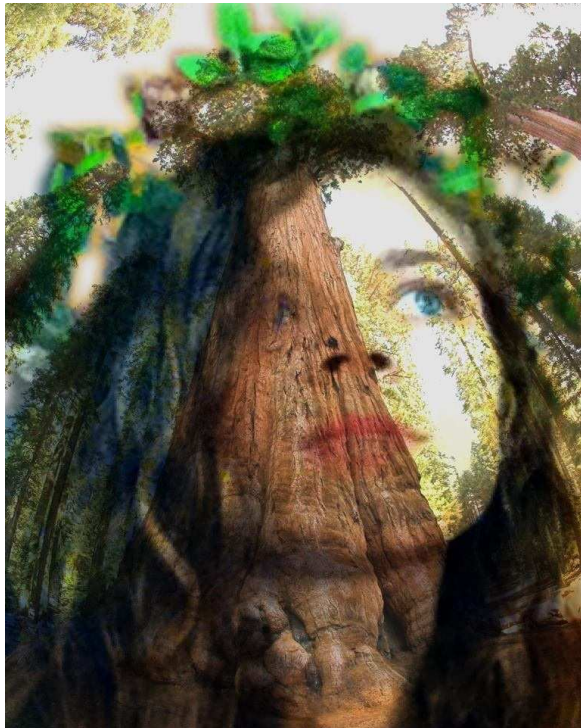
Now you're no more the moon than the cosmic
disc that's nearer. Though your surface is craterous,
and your grace in that anguish earned.

You swell and contract like summer pavement
that cracks under driving fingertips.

Whose howls do you hear over his panting?



2.



3.

4. The All-knowing Beast

Shielded behind secrets
Deep within
I lie in wait
As life does, I rise and fall until the end
A concealed beast
I can be cold
So cold I seem to be nonexistent
A mythical being
That lives only in stories
I can be ruthless
So much so I even scare myself
Though I can be dead and sordid
Sick and twisted
Passion is what swells inside of me
Though love does not pierce my secluded sanctuary easily
When it does it is a majestic thing
Many have tried to steal me away
Trying various fruitless attempts
Only few surpass my fortress of will

Though I can be kind and joyous
I am tough and hard to conquer
I am both a lover and a fighter
And I love to fight
I fight every day to continue this whimsical existence
I live to a beat
Constant
Steady
Reliable
Until I am not
Though I try I cannot conquer all demons
And eventually
I will fall
So I say to you live passionately
Dream wildly
Do not dwell in darkness my child
Because the light
Is so much more fun....





6.

Twenty Years

Twenty years. Twenty years I have been on this planet, and yet I, like most of my peers, must manage this arrogant inner-voice of supposedly higher intelligence. For the average adolescent, time hasn't begun its stealthy and gradual degradations of my life. I still have my hair, most of it the same color. My jump shot is still on point, as is my ability to perform basic functions that I often take for granted.

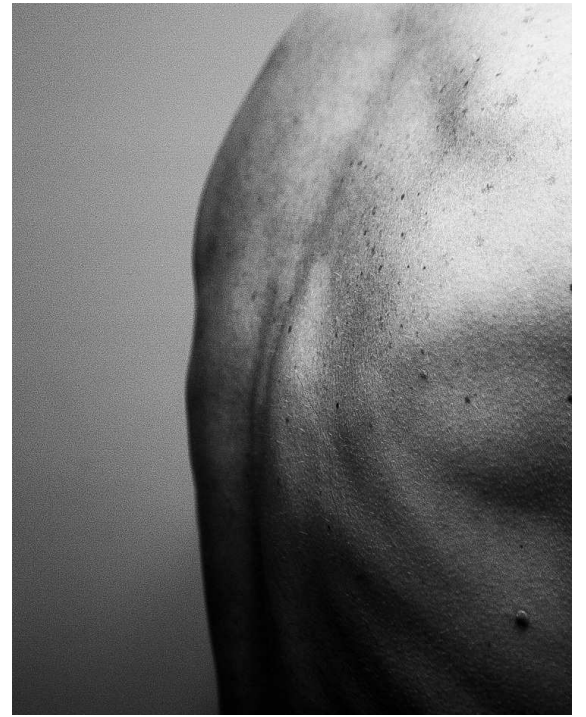
Pains and obstacles to these various abilities may have visited along the way in the form of injuries and various health issues, but in adolescence, the hope of recovery is dependable. At twenty years old, one's ability to recover quickly can be cited as half of the reason we do all the dangerous and stupid things we do. The other half is partly to see if we can do it, partly for the thrill. Because of our healthy bodies and knack for maneuvering through danger, we think we are nearly invincible. Thus, we assume that what we have learned and presumably know about the world, is pretty much all there is to it.

Conversely to the things that time has not yet taken away from us as individuals, we must acknowledge what it has not yet bestowed upon us at the ripe age of 20 - enlightenment. Nearly 4 billion years of life in the waters of Earth, 500 million years of somewhat intelligent life on its land, 10,000 years of human civilization across 6 continents and millions of cultures, billions of lives that have been lived and 7 billion more that are currently being lived on a planet that, relative to the rest of the universe, is an infinitesimally small rock in a solar system that is just one of many in a cluster of millions of stars that is in turn just one small part of the vast Milky Way Galaxy it belongs to, which is evidently merely one of billions of galaxies that eventually form a network of cosmos believed to be 14 billion years old and so large and expansive that we can't even fathom the size of it, and beyond. The end of space, the beginning of time, dimensions yet unknown.

Despite all of this, we think that the five years we spent relying on others to take care of us in the beginning of life, the ten years of learning how to take care of ourselves and function civilly in society that followed, and the final five years we spent actually applying our new-found skills of math and language to learning a few things about select aspects of the world *somehow* add up to us knowing everything. I guess we didn't learn how to apply math very well in those last five years.

To become intelligent, we must first accept the fact that we know nothing. That will make us all the wiser; that will open the door to true enlightenment.

7.



8.



9.

Daddy Forgot

“Doctor, how long will he be in a coma?”

I said, as I looked intently through the window of the hospital room. I turned around to face him, but the doctor had already left.

Good thing, he’s gone, I thought, as the tears quietly formed rivulets on my face. I sat down on the blue recliner that matched the curtains, which matched the carpet of this five-star private room. “Only the best for Daddy,” Mommy kept saying. But it was his money, not hers. But, she couldn’t stay, since Maxim was late for his hair appointment. Why couldn’t she just say “the dog groomer” like everyone else?

I know Mommy loves Daddy, but not the love that I wished she had for him. After the divorce, the backward girl from Tennessee still remained a friend to the wealthy banker. Daddy gave her the world and even more. When I was born, the sixty-year-old man finally had a child of his dreams. I was so much like my father that no degree of separation could part us. He loved me. I was another image of the woman he adored and married. Even the numerous affairs that my mother had couldn’t stop his love for her as he shamelessly begged for her admiration and respect. My mother, hot and sensual, full of life, dared to be defiant. What idiot would marry such a dumb and ignorant seventeen-year-old girl?

But even I was drawn to her. She was beautiful and sexy and everything that I wanted to look like. She played the part of a rich socialite but her heart was dark. “Maybe she didn’t know any better,” I’d tell myself. She had such a brick house figure and I barely had breasts at 16. Her famous words, still singing in my ears – “And you too shall have boobs, in time.”

She was a boob but I loved her and I despised her. Just two more years, and I’ll be on my way to college. **Oh Daddy...Just think about Daddy...think about our good times together.** It was Daddy who gave me my first training bra. I was so embarrassed when he pulled out that pretty lacey covering from the brown paper bag. I think he was more embarrassed than I was, but he smiled and simply said, “You know what this is for.” It was Daddy who taught me how to ride a bike and I would meet him at the park for a picnic every Sunday after church. It was Daddy who would tell the goofiest jokes such as “Why was six scared of seven? – Because seven ate nine.” **Oh, Daddy...**

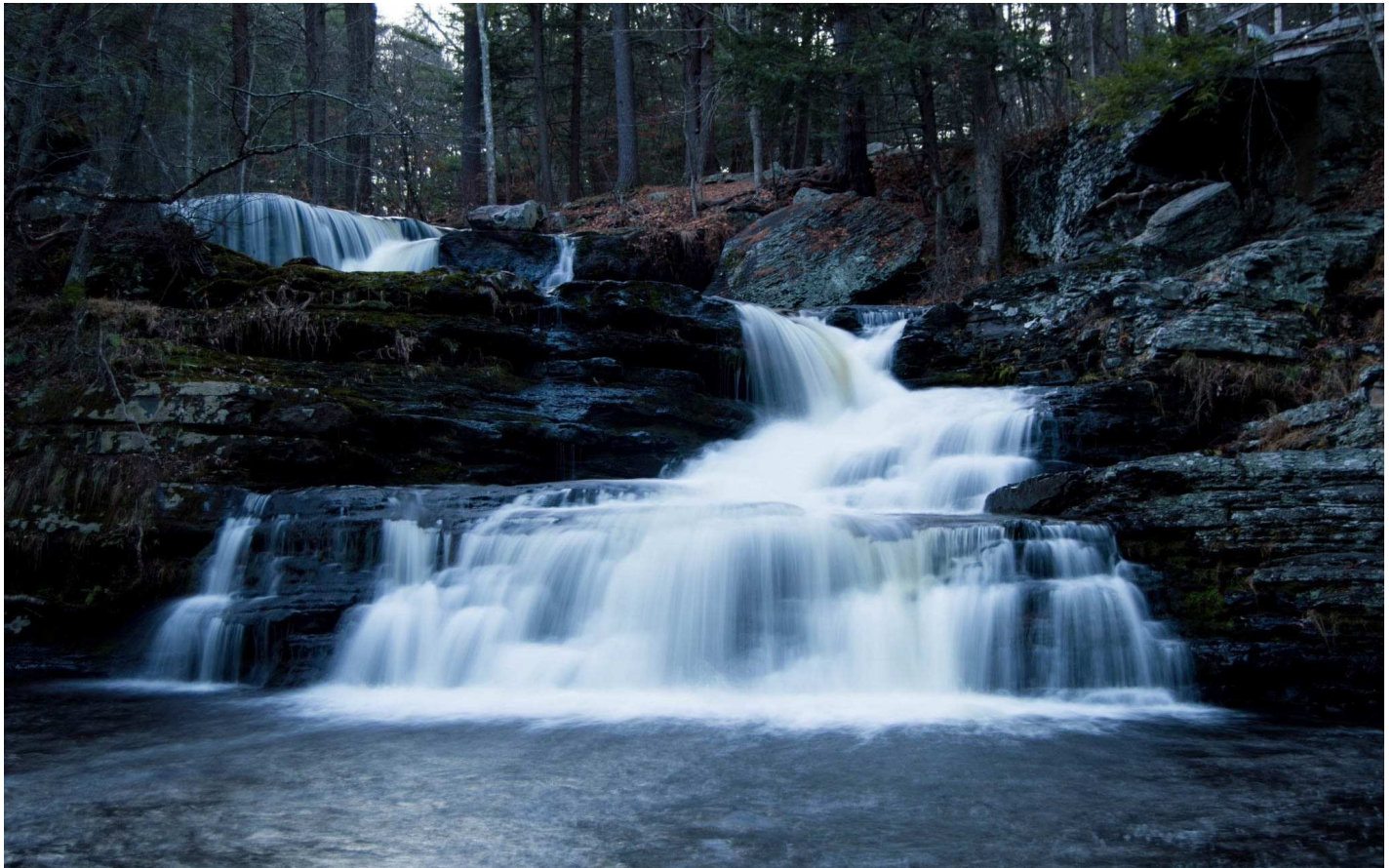
Daddy, please wake up. Daddy was with me when I had the accident with the Mercedes and I thought he would yell at me but he hugged me so tight, that I cried and cried and cried for having misjudged him. Where was my mother? ... with Ramon, of course in Barbados.

“My dear Emma, I will never take anything from you and I will always be with you. You are my princess and I thank God that you are my child.”

Sometimes I wondered about my conception. Was I really my father's child? I looked so much like my mother and even I couldn't see any visible resemblance to Daddy, until I saw his hands and feet. Just like mine. A smile came to my heart as I watched him and then unexpectedly he stared right back at me. His whispered words were, “Who are you?”

The eyes of my heart opened and I cried.

10.





12. The Origin of Birds of Different Colors

A very long time ago, there were only white birds. All birds looked the same because of their color. One day one of the white birds which was a very young bird, was going around a field and looking at flowers and trees that had beautiful, elegant, and charming colors. The young bird asked an older bird why they were only white colored, while flowers and trees had different colors. No bird could answer the question. The young bird really wanted to have different colors. So the young bird prayed to God asking to give him different colors. God answered him and told that bird that when a rainbow appeared in the heavens, birds could get any colors they wanted from the rainbow. But they should move quickly because the rainbow would only appear for a short time. The young bird announced this amazing news. Some of birds did not want any colors on them so they remained as white birds. The other birds were waiting for the rainbow. As soon as the rainbow appeared they flew as quickly as they could. When they arrived at the rainbow, they started flying into the colors they wanted. After being colored, they went back to the land. Some birds were so excited to see all the wonderful colors, so they went through them all. They did not know what would happen when they went through all the colors, and curiously enough, they turned black. This is why there are birds of different colors.



I have always stood up for things that I believe in strongly, such as people who needed help, and any time that there was an injustice. Don Quixote had nothing on me. Even as a young child, I stood against bullies in school. When I saw someone being picked on, I jumped in. There was never a time that I can recall when I did something that left me with any regret or feeling guilty for having taken some action. I do not believe in holding on to regrets because I believed that it is only a waste of energy in the long run. We cannot go back and change our decisions. If we allow them to gnaw at us, we only waste time, our present moments, which cannot be reclaimed, and that can be spent positively on other matters that may be far more important.

The question then is, how does one write an assignment about regret when she believes that she has always done the right thing by standing up to (and for) others by protecting weaker people and trying to right the wrongs of the world? At first, I thought that I would have nothing to write about. In reality, after all the years of standing up for others, I neglected to stand up for myself when my husband Sergeant First Class Scott R. Smith was *Killed In Action* on July 17, 2006 in Iskandariyah, Iraq. In essence, I had failed to take the opportunity to stand up for Scott as well.

I was at work during what was seemingly a routine afternoon. I logged into an Army- based instant messenger system designed for use by service members to communicate with their families back home. Scott and I chatted nearly every day on this system. While I finished up some invoices for work, I noted that it was getting to be past our normal chat time frame and I was beginning to think he was out on an incident. Scott was a Bomb Technician, which is an extremely specialized and skilled position in the military. It was also a highly selective job, with only 843 Bomb Technicians in the U. S. Army worldwide in 2006. Because he may have been in the field dealing with an incident, it was possible that I would not hear from him soon or I could expect a call later from his satellite phone.

Earlier that morning, I had awakened suddenly with an unusual feeling in my stomach reaching frantically for my cell phone. I thought that I had missed a call from Scott. I grabbed my phone, feeling certain that I would see a missed call status appear on my screen. I was wrong. It must have been a bad dream, I thought, as I lay there trying to catch my breath and feeling uncomfortable. For a military spouse, there is nothing worse than missing a call from your spouse who is serving overseas. The feeling it leaves is indescribable, combining copious amounts of guilt, pain, anxiety, and sheer terror that you might have missed the last call that you will ever receive from your loved one.

As I sat at my desk expectantly waiting for Scott's name to appear in a chat box with his usual greeting, "Ciao Bella," I noticed some military personnel and civilians walking into my building. Because I worked on a military base, this was not uncommon to see. I knew these individuals, however, and it was uncommon to see these particular individuals in my particular building. They stopped near me, seeming to search the room for something or someone. I asked them, "What are you guys doing in this building? Who are you looking for?"

Felicia, a civilian, responded, "I will be right back."

I shrugged off the non-response, thinking to myself, "Okay, weirdo."

When Felicia returned, she was with Micah, some other individuals I didn't know, and the Sergeant Major of the installation. Behind the Sergeant Major was the Chaplain.

Suddenly, I knew that this was not going to be a social call. I was unaware however, just how bad this conversation would be.

"What happened, what happened to Scott, tell me what happened!"

Believing Scott was just injured, perhaps hoping it was just an injury, refusing to believe it could be worse, not wanting to even think that it could be worse -- their silence was deafening. I began to experience the same feeling that I had felt earlier that morning - the anxiety, the frantic searching for my phone, the uncertainty. I looked at my computer screen. I was looking for Scott's name, for a "Ciao Bella" from Scott, for answers from Scott. I said, "Tell me he's not dead. I know he didn't die. Tell me he didn't die, right now!" There was only silence from Felicia, Micah, and the Sergeant Major. And then, in one breath, one millisecond of time, my entire life was changed with the utterance of such simple words by the Sergeant Major, "I'm sorry Lynn, I wish I could, but Scott was killed this morning." It was at that moment that I went from someone who had always stood up to others, to a person who needed someone to help me stand. Unfortunately, that person was not available, would not be available, anymore.

I arrived at Scott's funeral and fell to the floor upon seeing his casket. It was so final - seeing it there - in a funeral home. I had seen it removed from the plane as he arrived back in the States. I had driven to Dover Air Force Mortuary for his dignified transfer. It hadn't seemed real, though. Seeing his casket in the funeral home, where I was now able to touch it, was all too real. I was told in the days prior to his arrival at the funeral home that the incident which had killed him caused the recommendation for a closed casket. I was also told that I would be able to see him if I decided to do that. There wasn't a doubt in my mind that I had to see him to say goodbye and to make sure that someone who loved him was the last person to touch him.

As the first part of the wake drew to an end, my Casualty Assistance Officer, Gaylord, approached me and told me, "You won't be able to open the casket. I know that you had mentioned that you wanted to do that, however it is not possible. They locked the casket at Dover and did not send a key." I was devastated. I didn't understand why that had happened. Gaylord went on, "Do not even request it. It is a sign of complete and utter disrespect to the entire military burial process and if you ask for it to be opened you will be disrespecting your husband." Where was this coming from? I was too devastated, too emotional, too confused to battle the rules on this.

I never asked anyone to open the casket. I never asked anyone about this alleged key to unlock it. I had items that I wanted to bury with Scott, but I wasn't able to if they couldn't unlock the casket. I asked no questions about the rules, the process, or the procedures. The last thing I wanted to do was disrespect such a sacred military tradition. At the time I needed the warrior inside of me to battle, but

she was nowhere to be found.

Because of my failure to question authority, Scott was buried having been last touched by strangers from the Dover Mortuary, but not by his loved ones. I took some solace believing, at least, that he had been handled with care by those who walk the halls with our heroes who had only made it home in a pine box. The men and women at Dover must, above all others, understand the honor due these men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice. Right?

My solace and comfort were short-lived. After I had buried Scott and had begun to return to my daily life, I had questions and I thought it might be time to start seeking answers to those questions. I requested the autopsy report from Dover Mortuary in 2006, a few months after Scott had been killed. Reading about the injuries Scott sustained left me with even more questions. I began asking these questions of a Chief Medical Examiner at Dover. One of the most vital questions I asked was, "What happened to the additionally recovered remains of Scott?" No answer was sent to me. It took several years for this question to be answered. The apparent stonewalling only increased my resolve. I was persistent and continued asking. In 2011, the answer, on official letterhead from Dover, finally came. Additionally recovered remains were being disposed of in a landfill in King George County, Virginia.

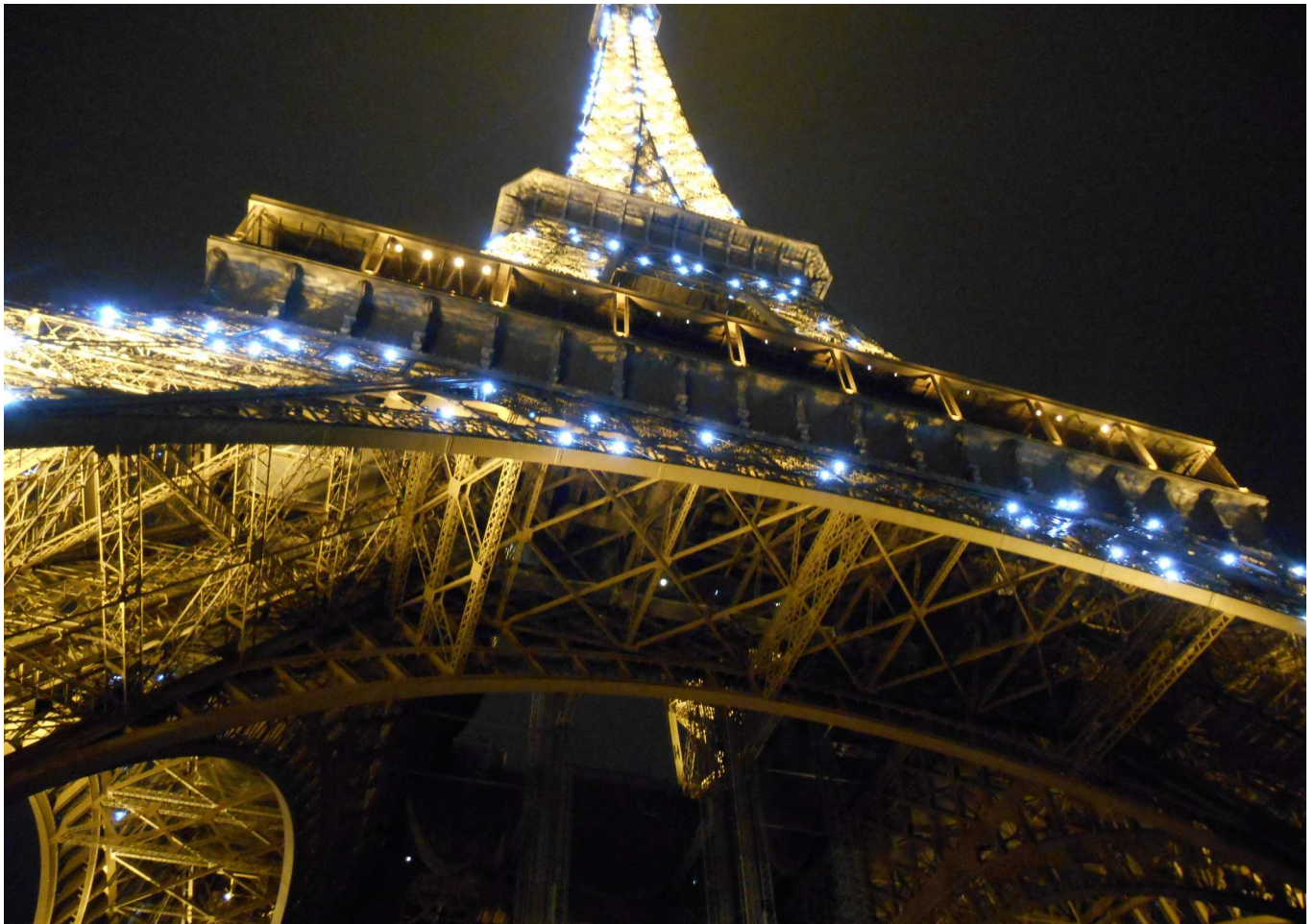
I was devastated. How could the government, that my husband gave his life to, throw him into a trash pile with last week's leftover meatloaf? I persisted with my questions. What ensued was stonewalling, incomplete answers, more questions, ever-digging for more details, more questions, probing for details, contacting my Congressman and having his office probe for answers as well. The persistent search for information proved successful. Not only had remains of our service members been disposed of since at least 1996 in the manner described previously, but the remains of victims from the 911 attacks on the Pentagon were also disposed of in the landfill, along with the remains of the hijackers who crashed the plane into the Pentagon. With those remains were also fetal remains from miscarriages. My thought in 2006 that those who handled Scott's remains at Dover treated him with respect, dignity, and honor was now stripped away from me.

Standing at Scott's casket, I had regretted not demanding it be opened. Regret is something I do not quite understand. I believe it mostly to be a waste of one's time. We can never go back and change decisions we've made. We can apologize for some misdeeds that we have done. We can try to right the wrongs, but we can never really change them. I have chosen to replace regrets with lessons learned. If we can learn from our regrets, it makes them worthwhile and manageable. While I regret not standing up for myself at that moment, I am, in a way, thankful that I didn't. Because I had been denied my right to see Scott, I had begun to ask questions. It was, in essence, the genesis of a worthwhile and meaningful action. I had ordered the autopsy report only because I wasn't able to see him. Had I not ordered that report, I would not have had the questions that I had which, in turn, led to the Dover Mortuary scandal of mishandling remains. I was able to cause significant changes at the Dover Mortuary and, as a result, other families' loved ones did not meet the same disrespectful disposition as the remains of Scott and thousands of others' remains. I am proud that I was able to battle something so large and for that I have no regrets.

Note from the author: The article below, while it was not a mainstream media article was my most cherished article about Dover. It should be noted that Dover admitted to disposing of at least 2000 remains that were not identified. The 274 remains were those they can put a name to.

[<http://journalpress.com/index.php/king-george-and-dahlgren/king-george-news/177-bittersweet-and-emotional-tribute-at-kg-landfill-draws-large-crowds-national-media>]





17.

Stars that do not blink
flicker in my eyes. I long
for a night not near.

With morning, sunrise.
The cold is paired with light.
Now
it is light to bear.

18.

Dawn dancing over shadowed hill
A rising *sum mer*, night to kill
Broken *light* and *filter-through*,
Shining *glass* to *cast askew*.

Mem *ory* and *tim e* to bend
Earth *to m ove*, the sun *to send*
Shadows dancing, dancing *to*
A newer world of *m orning* dew.

Where *to go*?
The world *is bright*
So *m any things*,
No *time* for sight.

Listen, *laughter* journeys here,
To the world of *far less fear*
Where we *will run*, and we *will cry*,
When *daylight splits the starry sky*.

15.
&
16.

19.

We Are All Artists

We are all born artists.

As children, we are actors and actresses, dancers and renowned masters of Crayola wall art. Playing house, starring in our own shows and being praised for our creativity. But, as we grow older, our actions are questioned.

Our stories are no longer displays of imagination, they are lies we shouldn't tell. Our songs are no longer adorably off-key, they are annoying and disruptive. Our dances, inappropriate. Over time, the artist within is choked out, or locked in - repressed deep within before they are even given a chance to fight for their survival.

Those who oppose art do so as they do not see its purpose. They often ask "What do you need to learn that for? Why would you want to learn an instrument? What is that good for? Art is as pointless as sandcastles, nice to look at but quickly washed away by the waves, gone to leave you with nothing. So, what for? What for?"

The answer is simple.

Art is not for anything. Art itself is the ultimate goal. It is what saves our souls and makes us happy. The creativity of the artist harnesses the ability to dive into the realms of the subconscious and resurface into the conscious mind with unique thoughts and expressions of our life experiences, often giving the artist a firmer grasp of reality. It is this balance of the unconscious and the conscious, the logical and the imaginative, the real and unreal that keep our lives in check. It gives us a recess from the stresses of reality whilst also allowing us to better interpret and understand the lives that we lead.

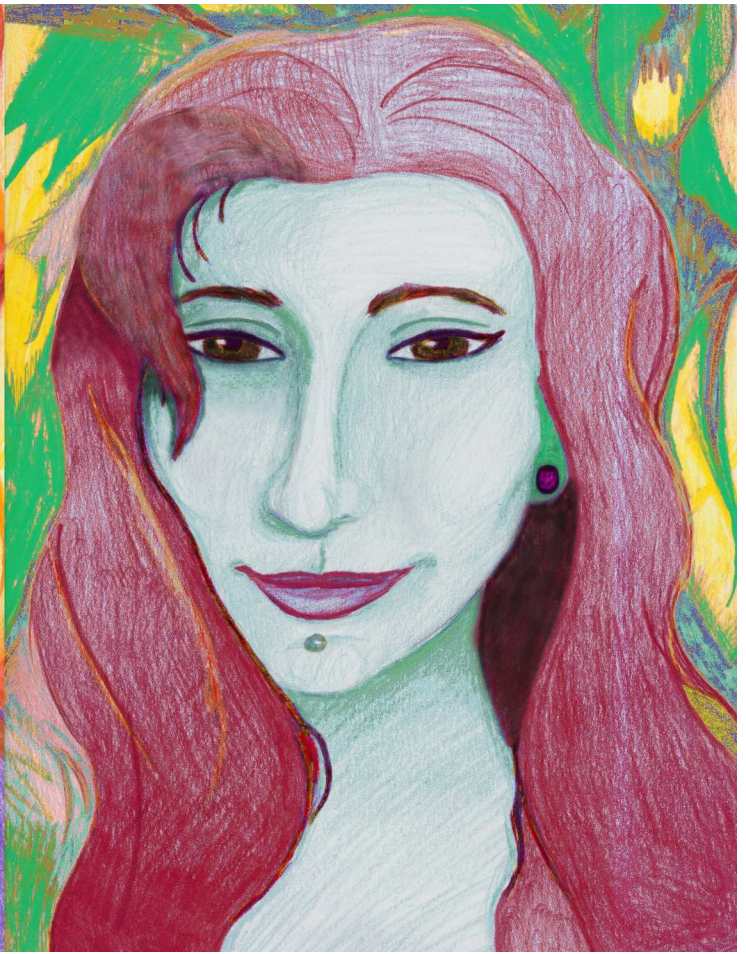
We are all meant to be artists; the businessman who comes home to paint portraits of his many clients, the cab driver taking center stage every weekend as King Leon, the mechanic who plays guitar at his local pub when the mood catches him. We all need art, so that we may satisfy our inherent thirst for joy.

The waves may wash away the sandcastles, but the absence of those constructs are not to be lamented, but rather appreciated. Without them there would be nothing to improve from; if they were never swept away, we would never have room on the beach for new castles.

Art isn't a pointless exercise, but rather a cyclical representation of our lives and the emotions that we experience through it all.

20.





21.

22.

23.





INDEX

- Cover & Title Page: Hannah Levin
1. Nicholas D'Allesandro: "Dogs and the Moon"
 2. Nadine Stevens: *december 2015 240*
 3. Stephanie Penna: *One With Nature*
 4. Stephanie Forte: "The All-knowing Beast"
 5. Luke Tarlowe: mixed media, 8.5"x11"
 6. Daniel Goncalves: "Twenty Years"
 7. Nadine Stevens: *portrait 845*
 8. Nadine Stevens: *rowgowski, vincent, vernon 1410*
 9. Mary Ingrassia: "Daddy Forgot"
 10. Christopher Sommer
 11. Hannah Levin
 12. Scholastica Jung: "The Origin of Birds of Different Colors"
 13. Garilynn Smith: "Journal Entry"
 14. Danny Day
 15. Nadine Stevens: *portrait 848*
 16. Mary Ingrassia: *Underneath the Eiffel Tower*
 17. Neal Punsal
 18. Hannah Levin
 19. Daniel Goncalves: "We Are All Artists"
 20. Lonie Joyce
 21. Lonie Joyce
 22. Jessica Fiess: *Self Portrait*
 23. Jade Riker
 24. Luke Tarlowe: mixed media, 8.5"x11"



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