

# iPa'lante!



Issue 1 • Spring 2020  
Cerritos College



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*Anthony González*

## **I TRIED WALKING STRAIGHT HOME, MOM.**

Stumbling through Alameda after  
three in the morning  
the people I'm most afraid of  
are sleeping.  
Friend says he's got a bed to crash on  
if I don't mind the piled clothes, trash in bunches,  
the friendly roaches.  
No fuckin' thanks... Walk me to the door.  
A man blinks both eyes at me  
Like he's trying to figure out which eye  
is his good eye when asking for a dollar.  
"They don't even let me buy beer here anymore,"  
he says.  
"Well, then, where's my dollar going towards?"  
The dirt and dark blends his facial  
features so much his own mother wouldn't be able to make  
him out.  
"Life's about where you find relief..."  
He splits with my bus money.  
A woman, almost naked, compensates for her cellulite.  
Working her night job to make ends meet, I  
wonder, would she still want diamonds if the city sky cleared  
enough  
for her to see the stars?  
Hissing diamondback from a spray can, rattling  
as if tempted to strike. A dark figure pisses his gang abbreviations  
on a wall  
and tells me it's for his dead comrade.  
This guy knew before I did,  
you can get into heaven from anywhere.

*J. Xiang*

## **CRYPTOBIOTIC SOIL CRUST**

Snow never melts on orange  
rock in the right color. Like a  
creamsicle, or Mars terraformed,  
out five-hundred-ish years from now,  
built-up and make to rain, saturating  
dirt, dry chalk on your feet. Grow odd  
weeds in any cracks you've made,  
yellowed out of force, hidden  
clumps aboveground. Burn long  
with nothing to destroy, no  
trees to spread, the ground caked  
in your anger. Tell it to cliffs, ones you  
want to scale, footholds sliding down  
where you stand. Tell it to the land,  
freed up to sell, the dirt path you  
forced your way to make. Tire-marked  
crust screaming up at you, rushing  
to escape your force, receding into  
the basin. Pickaxed caves dripping  
onto your roof, the wind's multiplicity,  
stealing gloves and socks and  
ice, land bent low out of its path.  
Flintstone anachronisms and the  
such. Deserted wood planks, nailed to  
bacterial hosts, drilled so you can walk  
over with eyes closed. Not to hurt them but  
to hurt them less. They will grow back  
when you're gone, take you in and then  
take you over, take your things  
downstream, plateaus giving way to  
grass and water and the such, usual  
greenery, usual growing soil, usual  
things.

*Willie Robert Heredia*

## **CROSSFADING NIGHT**

*--After John Murillo's "Ode to the Crossfader"*

Late night sweats late,  
late night drips I got this  
itch for a good good  
night's sleep But these  
minutes eluding me my mind over  
thinking What I just seen  
It was a fist fist a rounded  
armadillo *no me digas!*  
Don't tell me! See my eyes  
were open unlike your hand  
that landed that landed  
that land...ed  
Words stuck in my mouth  
I done chewed up  
my whole tongue  
The bruises speak for  
themselves and justice  
will not evade us  
We out to catch you  
Run dad run like hell  
run like you went on a

milk run never came back  
run like you got two  
side chicks about to run  
into mom at the grocery store  
run like you did in the war  
the war in your head  
dishonorably  
discharged  
dis disgrace  
disagree with your *machismo*  
ways  
I can still see the fist  
the blood the ice pack  
the bruises the tears  
the grin

*Donny Duran*

## **RAZON IN C++**

I overhear Gente  
De Razon speaking  
in c++.

They say most exploits are  
made there, that this language  
is the easiest to speak.

They say the  
history of the world  
must be written in this  
code, a universal language  
that binds us.

Treacherous tongue!  
to have compelled Columbus  
to El Nuevo Mundo.

To have written the conquest  
of Quisqueya, the fall of Tenochtitlan,  
the inquisition of the Incas,  
in ones and zeros.

## **WHEN LAS PRIMAS FELT BAD VIBES IN THE OFFICE.**

When las primas felt bad vibes in the office, they came in there with fire extinguishers filled with Agua Florida so they could set the bad vibes out.

They wore mint berets and pale pink trench coats. Wielded rosaries blessed not by a priest, but by their abuela and also a curandera their grandma happened to be friends with.

"You're sacrilegious!" One of their coworkers screamed at them while they sprayed her office.

"This is true," said her neighbor. So they sprayed her too.

The person in charge called security on them. Security showed up with crosses reciting Hail Mary and told them their superstitious witchcraft was a crime against all that is good.

The primas sprayed them too.

The building called the police so the primas sprayed them double until the entire LAPD was reformed under their Agua Florida's touch. The pigs issued apologies and reparations and soon primas all over the country were reforming corrupt police forces with Agua Florida and rosaries blessed by their abuelas.

They felt empowered, and soon, they decided to dispel the bad vibes on a larger scale. Primas flooded outside the White House and Univision had a field day covering their march. Fox called them brujas (but in English); CNN was super confused. Guerrilla groups stood outside the White House spraying for weeks. The air was heavy with Agua Florida. But they were running out.

Primos made daily trips to the closest Botanicas so the primas wouldn't have to abandon their posts. Botanicas across the country donated their agua, their beads, their sage, their candles, their anger, their hope to help the cause. But the bad vibes outside the White House were so thick, nothing seemed to be working.

Las primas hired an exorcist to exorcise the President but the President turned out to be immune to every prayer and holy water and chant and protest and march and every sort of bead and candle, so they found out he was too powerful a demon himself.

Every prima in the whole wide nation was there. They brought their own primas. Their prima's primas. Their neighbors who they thought of as primas. Their comadre's primas.

Every prima in the whole ass nation was there.

The demon in the White House wouldn't leave. He kept some of their younger primos and primas in cages. Everyone cared but some people didn't. They doubled down but nothing was changing. The news stopped covering it.

Las primas were disillusioned.

But still they stood outside the White House in their mint berets and multicolored trench coats. Still they sprayed their Agua Florida and performed every act to get rid of evil they'd ever learned from their abuelas and tias, who all joined the fight too. So did their primos and tios and abuelos and soon, even the deadbeat dads were marching.

Everyone was trying at this point. Everyone was marching outside with every remedy unique to their culture, with every peaceful weapon they knew how to wield. The air was heavy with medicinal chants and aromas. But nothing worked.

Things were tense.

Some primas were going home. It was hopeless. The revolution seemed stagnant.

Las original primas from Los Angeles cried when they ran out of Agua Florida. There was none left, no beads, no hope, no nothing. They wondered if they should've stuck to ridding the office of bad vibes. If they were in over their heads. If it was possible that their coworkers were right and they were sacrilegious and that's why none of this was working.

One of them prayed to God, she'd found his number in an ancient scroll one of the primos brought her. She dialed the number on her cellphone and waited while it rang. It went to voicemail.

So she left a voicemail: "Diosito please, look at this shit. Please look at this fucking place. Help us. We have failed you. Please. Every god and every deity please. We need you."

The next day, she left another voicemail. And the next. She passed on the number so the other primas started calling God and leaving him voicemails too. Soon everyone in the nation had called their deity until heaven's mailbox was full.

The day after the mailbox became full, there was thunder. The sky opened up. Every diosito and goddess and santo in existence descended from their heavenly home and looked down at the disgrace the world had become.

"These bad vibes," one of them said.

"It stinks," another responded.

They gathered humanity up and sprayed them all with a heavenly batch of Agua Florida.



*Bruce Bagnell*

## **PLASTIC PONY TOY CAR**

Fences lean, boards drop grounded like the houses,  
the people, out here where the rents are dirt cheap  
cause the shacks are dirt dusty fall-a-parts,  
like the fences, the pocked roads made of old dust,  
smatterings of asphalt, gravel and trash  
on the wavering edges of the bare dry land  
or the ag fields full of moist green plants  
drinking the canal water stolen from elsewhere;  
everyone has to be a thief to live here,  
no different from the city,  
the water sucked from somewhere,  
every building stolen from a forest or the earth.  
The land taken from those originally here,  
where the people came to claim  
what little they couldn't get somewhere else.  
Even if their sentence is serfdom and sweat  
in this hot sunshine there is community  
and neighbors, paychecks, rice and beans,  
tortillas and beer, pickup trucks and cars  
with every home the graveyard for one or six  
out of work machines, windshields tan-gray with dust,  
but what best tells the tale  
can be found at the entrance to a driveway  
not far off six and a-half road,  
where sits a pink plastic Mustang convertible in one-fifth size,  
an empty bottle of Bombay Sapphire gin perched on its hood  
surrounded by sculpted figures —  
all athletes in motion —  
the award plaques on their wooden bases unreadable in the dirt.

*Suzan Ramírez*

## **NINA**

Nina is the soil that feeds the garden  
my mother now tends.

Nina is the seed  
that feeds the bird that sings  
out my window every day at dawning  
I still remember summer breaks  
with Her.

The smell of sweet naranja-limas  
hanging from her tree,  
the singing of the yellow canaries,  
chirps of the finches,  
soft coos of the doves she kept.  
When washing my own dishes,  
and clothes by hand was exciting,  
instead of a common sink, the pila  
full of fresh cold water, the stone  
of the chamber keeping it cool  
on a hot, humid Mexican summer day.  
Sitting on the wooden chair with the straw seat  
in the middle of her garden of begonias  
and wild ferns.

Eating naranjas, pepinos y jícama  
sprinkled with rock salt,  
listening to her speak  
about all these things she loved.  
The images, the scents,  
memory of her home  
come to me as I fall to my knees  
on my kitchen floor, crying,  
wiping the tiles, tossing thawed  
Meat, spoiled in the trash,  
Her house so far and now empty  
Nina's garden in full summer blooms.

*Stanley Delgado*

## **DIASPORA DREAM 2**

Details of it, where my grandmother is fifty feet tall,  
and her tongue rolls down / pink into the ground like a waterfall. I  
can see up her skirt and there is nothing  
    There, ken-doll nude / plastic shell rubbed shiny and  
    smooth.

I grab her tongue and loop it in my beltloops  
strain it / tight to a side.

and she whips her head back and I go flying perfect  
    arc overhead / grandma smiling.

    Our surprise, at clouds being wet.

        What I see: Niagara as a faucet / Rio

        Grande thinner than a needle—

        my grandmother, taller than a mountain.

When I wake up I am soaked, bed squishy in the dark,

    I imagine it's the clouds grandma was rolling me through /  
    beating me through—it

is the water vapor / so much and so thick / that has made my  
    pants slick

    Wet: the dark stains of my lap and my bed, I  
    can translate them to you like language.

*Marilyn Ramírez*

## **THE POPE STAYS SILENT, EVEN WHEN HE BUMPS HIS KNEE ON THE COFFEE TABLE**

Father Dave comes to Companion Care every Sunday at 10:00AM to pray with those who've made it through the week. He parks the church van in the parking lot, and I help unload the chalice and candlesticks and holy water urn into the living room of the hospice service, placing the items on the folding table. The chalice is gold, and the candlesticks are a gift to the church from the Pope, he's told me.

He sets up the religious objects while I gather the patients from their rooms. I begin work at five in the morning, usually unlocking the doors before the sun has a chance to wake me up. I'm groggy. Many patients have visitors today. I stop in Marisol's room first, Marisol who didn't notice the lump on her breast until a lover slid off of her chest at midnight, saying he had a fetish for eating food off a bare body. She was in her fifties, maybe her sixties, but her skin played tricks on the eyes. Marisol watched her body in the mirror for months; she liked to pick the flaking skin near her areola that reminded her of the snake that her daughter hid in her shoebox when she was six. That same daughter brought her in three months ago, filling out the paperwork in silence while Marisol dropped her bags in her room.

"How are you feeling today, Marisol?" I ask.

"Is my daughter here? I'm feeling better today," she says. I tell her I'll go check for her. Her room is the closest to the living room. I walk down the short hallway, four doors on my right, and three on my left, most of them closed with voices slipping out the cracks. There's a table with yellow roses. There's a dusty green rug spilling from the end of the hallway into the living room. There's a front desk with the receptionist and the physical therapist sitting behind it, the two of them talking about the episode where the wife never saw it coming, her husband found in bed with another man who looked like Moses.

"Hey, do you know if Marisol's daughter came in yet? You know how she gets when she misses a week," I say.

“She went to the bathroom,” the receptionist says.  
“Maybe today’s the day, Juls. How long has it been since she talked to Marisol? Three months?”

“Just about.”

I stand by the desk and wait. I check the time on the receptionist’s watch, which was a gift from his wife, the physical therapist. They continue the conversation without me, evaluating the coarseness of Moses’ beard when Marisol’s daughter makes her way toward us. Her hair is curled, her realtor pantsuit is ironed, and her chartreuse eyes are surrounded by red, thin veins creeping toward her irises. Her hand grips the white cup of coffee that shakes when she speaks.

“Morning, Julissa.” She never uses my nickname.

“Father Dave just came by a few minutes ago. You ready?”

I ask.

She nods. We make our way back to Marisol’s room where we find Father Dave. The other patients aren’t aware of his presence yet, so he makes a visit to her room first. Father Dave is sitting on the velvet reclining chair at the edge of her bed, his thin arms hiding underneath the white chasuble, the one with the green stripe down the middle. I wonder if priests share the same church garments the way children do, fighting and whining over the clean one or the one with the gold cross on the front. His glasses make him look younger than he already is, but that comes with being 28 and spending his Sundays praying with the sick. He looks over at the both of us when we walk in — I want to leave, so I think of making an excuse that I have other patients to monitor, but I don’t because maybe today will be the day.

“Good morning,” Father Dave says.

“Hey, Father.” I’m the only one who speaks.

“Let’s begin, shall we?”

He stands, takes out his rosary, and grabs Marisol’s hand from the side of her bed. Her daughter takes his place on the velvet chair. I look on the windowsill at the three candles with images of Jesus, the Pope, and the Lady of Guadalupe illuminated by the flickering glow. It’s a race to the bottom, and Jesus is winning. All of their faces are tilted up and to the right, but the Pope is the only one smiling, the only one waving, all the prayers coming at him thrown into the fire.

“Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death...” Marisol picks at her age spots while looking at her daughter. Their eyes meet once or twice, but her daughter’s mouth never moves; instead, she watches Father Dave spew the rhythmic chant over and over, his hand hiding some of Marisol’s spots, Marisol prays louder. I mouth the words that I can remember, but it’s not much, so I listen. I want to turn on the TV.

The TV on the wall is on mute. The frequencies pierce my ears, and the man and woman on the screen are oblivious to the prayers in the room. The novela is the same that my own mom and I used to watch, the plot never changing but the actors cycling in and out as if we wouldn’t notice. The shows would end late, maybe around midnight, but that was okay. My mom needed me to stay with her and wait for my dad to finish his two, sometimes three, day shift at San Martin De Porres Medical Center. Wrapped up with my mom in her robe, I always wondered how he did it. How he could spend days on end saving other people’s lives and if I could do the same. We’d pray for the people he was helping, thinking about their families who were stuck in a waiting room hoping their own pleas would be heard by some higher power.

Now, it’s time to wait again.

Father Dave is making his way to the fourth, maybe fifth, “Our Father,” and Marisol’s sobs are slowing. Her small gasps for air are the only sound in the room. The candles on the windowsill haven’t stopped burning, and the glowing faces of Jesus, the Pope, and La Virgen are turned towards Marisol’s daughter. She might be finished with her coffee. If not, it’s cold by now, and she doesn’t seem to care. She still hasn’t spoken to Marisol.

I can hear the quiet conversation of two nurses walking outside the room. The sound of their footsteps disappears, and I try to map out the hospice center in my head to see how many steps it would take to make it to the front doors.

“Let us close our eyes for the final ‘Hail, Holy Queen,’” Father Dave says, still standing next to Marisol’s bed.

He’s the only one who listens.

Marisol is staring at her daughter. Her daughter shifts in the velvet chair, coffee in hand, staring at nothing. Maybe she’s praying too. But I doubt it. At the end of the Glorious Mystery,

she scratched her nose to cover an eye roll. I imagine the ghost of the Pope in the room, shaking his head. He's trying to figure out what went wrong, why Marisol's cancer is eating what's left behind her daughter's chest, too.

I bring a chair next to Marisol and offer her some tissues, but she shakes her head. Her tears are hanging on her cheeks and lips. Her gaze hasn't shifted. I notice her bed is too big for her now. She's sitting up on too many pillows, but she doesn't move. The bed is swallowing her up, the pink and purple sheets adding to the gray in her skin.

The table next to her only has one lamp and a picture of the two of them. She told me once that when her daughter was ten, they took a trip to Juárez, and the nuns of the town tried to kidnap her. They'd teach her songs and dances, hoping she'd join them. There's another picture in the frame, but I can only see an outline.

A few more minutes pass, and Father Dave finally looks up. His arms bring the rosary underneath his chasuble. I imagine God must've been speaking to him. Maybe He feeds Father Dave with Holy Secrets every time he closes his eyes, only to be interrupted by the priest's duty to help the rest of us figure them out on our own. Father Dave notices Marisol is still crying. He closes his eyes again. Maybe she didn't hear the part where the Holy Mother rejoiced in Heaven for birthing a child of God. Maybe she just needs a little more time to forgive her daughter.

The green carpet doesn't match the bedding, and I want to bring that up. I notice the imprint of constant walking around the bed. There couldn't have been many people in this room, but the carpet is much darker in some areas than others. Someone should really clean it.

"Hail Holy Queen, our life, our sweetness, and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve...."

It's ending. Marisol stops picking at her hands and sighs. Her daughter waits for the priest to finish and drinks what's left of her coffee. I'm waiting, waiting for her to speak to Marisol, Marisol with the flaking skin and growing spots that never stop, but she doesn't.

*Jared Pearce*

## **QUICK FLIGHT TO CALIFORNIA**

Dad keeps retreating  
to his bastion garage,  
his keep where the tide  
of my mother flows  
then ebbs and rips

life's accouterments,  
the paraphernalia, the detritus.  
He can't find what he recalls  
and gives up his job,  
his short purpose.

We walk down the pier, and he  
says, Write about gain: Calm  
sea under a waning moon, a parent  
on each arm, heavy as wings.



*Sherre Vernon*

## **A YEAR IN FAMILY HOUSING**

I.

We pulled our bicycles  
tangled and scratching  
out of the rain  
the bag of oranges,  
raw from the wheel tread,  
tumbling just ahead of us  
into the mattress  
on the studio floor

2.

A bridesmaid dress, so cobalt  
my shoulders hold up  
the parking lot behind me, you  
from the door  
snap the shot

3.

I sanded down the end  
table from the community  
exchange, breathing  
in the dust, alone, without  
a mask, offering it  
to the Massachusetts sun,  
for three days  
the other students  
nodded as they passed  
with their young children,  
small wives glancing down  
and away

4.

Spring, and so many blossoms I never  
understood how I managed  
to pull you from the bed, wheezing,

spattering twenty minutes  
a block to the bus stop  
empty streets we needed  
just one, just one hand  
how we climbed the hill, stumbling  
every step, I carried you  
dear god don't let him die

5.

More than the crunch of  
your boots, heel-to-toe  
shaping out my name  
in the snow, and the low lamps  
catching the back of a raccoon,  
I remember wearing nothing  
but a long coat in the moonlight  
digging out the Toyota, our rent  
spent on this

6.

We awoke, the greyhound two  
hours out, boxes taped and stacked  
your arm draped over me  
one last time, I'd see you  
like this for years  
framed by the window  
as the breaks released and the bus  
rolled away, your hand still  
reaching toward your own face  
as if to cup mine, there

7.

The bangle bracelets were a gift  
from the couple before us:  
for my kindness, she said,  
for your beauty  
and in our turn, only  
a bit of aquarium: a bowl,  
some rocks, a pair

of shimmery and silent swimmers—  
we gave all that was left

*Dan Anthony Cardoza*

## **SAWMILL BOYS**

I will die a happy sawmill worker. They'll bury me with my palms shoaled in slivers. The mill town mortician will place my hands, grasp down, lapped as smooth as salt-water taffy over my Giorgio Armani lapel. The Mrs. will see to it that I look my Sunday best, even though I've yet to plant a boot in a church.

Our fathers were World War II Veterans, loggers, stackers, green-chain workers and sawyers, who sported Popeye forearms stuffed tight in blue denim shirts. They all married stay-at-home moms with names like Rita, Dorothy and Shirley. They lived in Lumber Mill cookie-cutter houses, built by the Long-Bell Paper Company: two bedrooms, one bath, and four burner gas stoves. The children would multiply. It's something that happens in a rabbit hutch, bucks, does and kits.

As boys, we'd settle heated arguments with bloody knuckles. Our someday girls wouldn't have it any other way. There would be skinny-dipping under the SP Railroad trestle, and the joy of getting lost in the snowy woods. As far as we knew, there was no other living, no maps with directions leading anywhere. Back then no one cared.

In thick leather brogan's, we'd stumble into high schools. Our mill town hands thick and rough, good for holding baseball bats and after school axe handles for cutting cords of hickory, pine and oak. Our balloon modeled fingers were stout, but nimble enough to unlock bra clasps cinched as tight as the locks in Fort Knox. Lord, there was something inherently appealing in that snapping sound. It infected my senses, all five and portended what it would be like to be a lumber town man.

We all looked like Paul Anka back then: green-eyed, "good-lookers," destined for dead end tomorrows. After football games, in the back of our daddy's cars, we drank Coors and Cold 45, and messing with the junk of the bad side of town girls. If we were lucky, they'd free their tits like caged animals, sharing their best rehearsed "ooh's" and "aah's." Enticing us into their estrogen jungles and swamps. I can still feel their shivers.

Life was good then, the best. No college prep, no weekends studying or preparing for S.A.T's. After all, we were sawmill boys, as hedonistic as Pan. We lived like there was no tomorrow, and for some there wouldn't be, as the Viet Cong would make sure of that. We were destined to go nowhere, and fast.

~~~

At our ten-year class reunion, Buddy refused to make eye contact. His face appeared bloated and fatigued; his head balding. His speech was hurried and defiant as he attempted to cover up the tracks of his life's story: the littered short cuts and dead ends, all the self-destructive detours, the obvious failures at making dimes by rubbing two nickels together. Some said he was a full-blown alcoholic, been through two scrap-wood failed marriages. That he was still spiking winning footballs in the end zone, at both home and away games and at different locations of Burney's sawmill dive bars. I imagined him much too young to be at the beginning of the end. He'd grown reclusive, and hostile, too comfortable that way.

~~~

The twenty-year class reunion wasn't much better. There were fewer of us of course. By the end of the night, it became clear why. Some of us were dead. I was black-balled. After all, I was a sawmill boy who struggled to get an education and a master's degree, and way the hell out of town. You'd think I committed treason. Drunk and tired of reminiscing, one of my close friends challenged me to a fight one day, baiting, "When I shook your hand, I noticed they were soft— they'd changed." By now, Buddy was gone, so someone else had to break us up.

~~~

There will be no more class reunions, at least for me. The past doesn't seem like such a good fit after all these years. Yet I wouldn't change a thing. In fact, it's the peace and quiet of those years that help me when I can't sleep. All I have to do is open my bedroom window and inhale the smell of the freshly cut Douglas.

And if I listen hard enough, I can hear the tick tacks of wood chips flying through the sheet metal vacuum pipes. It's so peaceful to listen to the background whir of the night shift saw blades that never cease, and the click-clack mechanics of the roller links on the green chain as it rolls along.

I'm old enough now, that when I hear the quiet sound of the sawmill whistle, I'll be more prepared for the end of the late shift.

*Lake Angela*

## **DANCE THERAPY FOR THE PATIENTS AT OSAWATMIE STATE HOSPITAL**

Exempt from the trapdoors, the traps, the trapeze, the sentenced, I am allowed to return to the cottage of strange burials. In the grotto, the sun lowers weapons like colors. Test the feet upon falling in; corridors open into frozen fields with white, hawkless trees. One ward in disuse awaits action from dancing dust particles or the ghosts of birds who fly in and become trapped, imprisoned a wall away from the men who have raped young children and thrown money upon their naked forms—except the birds do not commit crimes and should not be kept in solitary this way. The patients' favorite dance is *flying like a bird*. They like to measure the weight of their bellies and test the possibility now of flying off—through the highest window, triple-paned, soundproof, and untouchable.

*Kristina Rivera*

## **FIND ME WHERE THE GROUND IS SOLID**

The trappings of youth  
    seem to always follow a similar pattern  
    of unattainable goals and fallacious nightmares.

And I fall  
    down  
        down  
            down  
    holes, pitfalls of memories  
wherein I am lost  
    in mazes of seeking hands  
        on illusive walls.

Where are the sturdy brick paths  
    and marbled accents to  
        vast  
    open  
        windows?

What voices  
    line my walls?  
        What choices speak  
            of me  
        of my ineptitude?

Unsteady  
    uncertain  
        but confidently reckless  
    - or is it recklessly confident? –  
    in the uniformity of change.

I am no more found  
    than the answers to the  
misguided path  
    I seem intent on  
        meandering.



## **DON'T YOU KNOW ME?**

A girl who is pretty in a boyish way, her name is Megan, hits me at lacrosse practice. She whacks my stick with hers, crushing my fingers. A knife-hot pain cracks me open and spills me out.

“Keep up, Julie,” Megan says, trotting down the field, her green eyes flashing, her gold ponytail bouncing.

I find a circle between my legs; it's a gasping curtain near a window, open to the sea, like something I've always known, like coming home. I discover it in bed after school. I'm thirteen the first time, sweating, with my sheets soaking wet. I'm thinking of Megan.

Fuck, I think to myself, realizing what this must mean.

In the van on the way home from practice Megan reclines her seat so she's practically in my lap and kicks up her Adidas cleats onto the back of Jane's mom's seat, getting mud everywhere. She tilts her head back and looks up at me, seeing me upside down.

Jane is tall and chubby and bad at lacrosse; Megan and I are small and fast and good. Megan spends the car ride ranting about how she isn't getting enough playing time, which feels weird since Jane hasn't played in a game all season and just today, after coming in last, then last, and last again, cried hysterically during suicides, claiming hurt ankles.

“I'm faster than Maria, don't you think?” Megan says now, in the van. I'm looking out the window, watching the trees in new bloom, the wildflowers spurting up beside the road. I look away, look back at Megan, she's looking gorgeous, staring at me upside down like that. I imagine there are lips on her forehead. She looks like an alien, but a pretty one.

“Hello? Julie?” Megan is pretending Jane and her chubby mother are not there. Her green eyes glint like knives.

“Yes,” I say, obsequious, acquiescing. “Yes, you're faster than her.”

After gym class I hear Megan talking to Lindsey in the locker room:

“I couldn't believe when she was wearing Hollister jeans, I didn't know they made them big enough for her ass.”

My face burns and my armpits release a fresh wave of sweat. I look down at my jeans: American Eagle. I look over at Jane and see the familiar Hollister stitching on her back pockets.

“She’s so fucking fat,” Megan says. “Did you see her uniform stretch when she put it on?”

I watch Jane’s face grow blotchy red and she runs into a toilet stall and closes the door. I want to grab Jane by the shoulders, shake her, say, Don’t you know not to run away like that?

The second time Megan hits me is in gym class later that week. We’re on different teams for flag football. We both jump up to catch the ball and collide midair. Megan’s elbow rams my stomach and I feel it in my throat, the longed-for touch, her sharp elbow, the cold air, my love, my shame, it all crackles and surges inside me. I stand up, blurt, “Watch it fool!”

Later, on Xanga, I’ll log on anonymously and write to Megan: Did you get in a fight?

“Yeah,” she’ll write, publicly, for our middle school to see. That loser called me a pussy.

Megan springs up and hits me in the face, pain rains through me hard and fast. She hits me again in the stomach. I fight to breathe, collapse to my knees. I roll over to protect my stomach and she kicks me in the shoulder. I press my face into the cold grass; it smells like mud and rain, and all I can think is Finally. Megan’s friends rush over to hold her back.

“She’s not worth it!” Lindsay yells. I sit up and pull my knees to my chest. Lindsey wraps two hands around each of Megan’s arms and holds her still. Maria edges her body between me and Megan, puts hands on Megan’s shoulders, helps Lindsey move her back. Megan thrashes against her friends to get back to me like a true insane person, like she’s been overtaken by a rage larger than her body. Her hair is half out of her ponytail and her eyes are wild. My face burns despite the cold. I’m covered in mud and humiliated, but Megan’s persistence astounds. She thrashes against her friends to get to me, to get to me, to get to me.

She grows skinnier as the months slide away. One day after practice we find ourselves in the locker room alone. She sees me looking and meets my eyes, my heart pounds so hard in my chest I wonder if Megan might kill me.

She takes off her blue shirt and stands in just her bra. It's white and new, her hip bones, abs, and ribs jut out against her skin. She moves towards me and takes my hand and brings it to her lips.

"I always wanted to kiss you," she says, "But I'm not a lesbian."

The heater thrumming, the weak sunlight through the window, somewhere, water rushing through a pipe. The moment rushes up to meet me, almost knocks me over.

"What did you do?" I say, turning her wrist over, a sob welling in my chest. Long gashes scab her arm. I feel so tender towards her right now that I'm dizzy, that I have to sit down on a bench, still holding Megan's wrist, feeling like a star exploded.

Megan pulls her arm back, clears her throat, searches for words.

"The draw hurts," She says, regaining her composure. She straightens, her green eyes closed doors when they meet mine. "You'll never know. You're not fast enough to be a center." She puts her blue shirt back on, slings her backpack, hits my shoulder with hers as she walks past me. When the door slams I drop my head against my thighs and catch my breath, my sadness like an ocean pulsing.

In the fall her face shrinks until it's gaunt. You can see the white skeleton of her cheekbone and wrists; she looks like all the Jews in concentration camps from videos in Hebrew school. When Megan faints in the middle of a field hockey game they kick her off the team. Outside the homecoming dance she marches up to me and kisses me so all the stars can see. I become a river and flow fast, fast, fast. She takes my hand and hers is a pile of bones. She leads me beneath the bleachers and finds the circle between my legs. I shudder like an ocean when I come and she presses her bony hands to my lips, my heart whacks itself against my chest. I'm tempted to say this was the third time she hit me, but she just knotted her fingers in my hair and pulled my head back, exposing my neck, and wrapped her fingers around my throat.

"I thought you said you weren't a lesbian," I manage, and she smiles at me, but the skin is stretched tight around her eyes and she looks so tired. She releases her grip on my hair.

For the rest of the fall she pretends not to see me. When we pass each other in the hallway she looks through me, like a ghost.

By the winter she's gone, like a bird who took flight, like a bird who could not stay. The halls shiver in her absence. I flock to the library, reading every book I can find, I go to bed early, I can't pay attention in class, I start to fail in math. It feels like the fourth time she hit me, the one that hurt the worst.

I find out from Lindsey that Megan's in in-patient therapy for anorexia. I write her long and sprawling letters, describing the glittering frost on the grass and the snow piled in mountains in my neighborhood. I write about my basketball team and how the ball feels like hope beneath my fingers. I write about the birds and how beautiful it is when they sing beneath my window in the morning. I write her letters like this, like pleas or prayers or birdsongs, hoping she'd know me, that she'd remember me.

When Megan finally writes me back it's a Wednesday, a chilly afternoon, my breath gathers in waves before me. I can see it's just one sentence but while I unfold it my heart still pounds, my fingers still shake. Her letter says, "Stop writing me letters, Julie, you were always such a fucking dyke."

## **PÁJARO**

Even though there was a call for rain, the congregation crowded the church, still weary-eyed. Romero, however, stood alone on the marble steps, hands tucked into the pockets of his worn-out black trench coat. The large building loomed, casting a shadow over him. He stepped away and into a courtyard where a large fountain spewed glistening water, and a light breeze swayed a nearby cluster of trees, echoing the sounds of waves crashing on the shore. Romero immersed himself into the soothing music of nature.

The sudden jolt of a cough brought Romero back to reality. The sharp pain in his chest made it impossible to take in a breath. After a few seconds, Romero sat up and tasted the iron that coated the inside of his mouth. The church bells rang, and as the doors closed, Romero thought it was best for another time.

Off in the distance, storm clouds now consumed the light blue sky. Romero lumbered along the streets in the Colonia Zona Centro of Tijuana. The chronic cough that plagued him alternated between mild and severe. He made a stop at an OXXO—Mexico’s version of 7-Eleven—where his mother would send money from the United States. He filled out a form and handed over his identification card to the cashier. The cashier glanced from the picture to Romero, who wore a gray beard and shaggy hair. After being handed the money, he used some of it to add minutes to his flip phone. As he walked along, he dialed his mother but received no answer.

Romero struggled to reach the top of a hill, forced to stop to catch his breath, and ease discomfort in his chest. He turned into the first dirt road and entered through a wooden gate of an abandoned-looking house with boarded-up windows. The house’s yellow tint was barely visible after years of weathering. Inside, a thin layer of dust coated the walls and cobwebs hung in the corners. A lone table with two chairs stood against the far left wall with a stack of sketchpads sitting in one chair. In the kitchen, Romero poured himself a cup of water and took a pill from a prescription bottle. After, he walked out through the backdoor and reached for a birdcage hanging a few feet from the door. He glanced out at the

backyard decorated with various flower pots and a brick walkway that led to a fence at the edge of the hill.

#

When Romero was eight, he stood by the fence with a bruised right eye. He admired the lights from buildings and homes which mirrored the night sky. The crash of plates brought Romero's attention to the house behind where he could hear the muffled argument of his parents. After a while, Romero's father flung the backdoor open, beer in hand. He drank the last of its contents before tossing it a few feet to the side. He stumbled along the uneven walkway towards Romero, whose anxiety raised with every step. The fence creaked as his father rested his elbows and lit a cigarette which masked the stench of alcohol. They stood a few feet from each other. Romero never looked at his father.

#

Romero placed the birdcage atop the kitchen counter. The songbird, light brown with a white underbelly, chirped and whistled with delight. Romero wagged his finger along the cage, "*Hola, Chiquita.*"

In the bedroom, a single-sized bed lay in the far corner of the room with a single blanket neatly folded. Romero removed his coat, revealing a dressing and bandage on his right arm. Exhausted, he jumped into bed face-up, resting his feet atop the folded covers and rested his hands behind his head. He stared off into the cracked ceiling as the echoes of rain pattering on the roof lulled him to sleep.

In his dream, Romero admired the San Gabriel Mountains from within a dimly lit hospital room. He found beauty in how the mountains glowed from the morning sunlight. In his arms, he held his newborn daughter, Marisol, tightly wrapped in a pink blanket. Romero loved how her nostrils flared with every soft breath she took. His wife, Anya, laid in the hospital bed with tired eyes. Romero handed the little bundle of joy over to Anya.

The crackle of thunder startled Romero awake. The now pouring rain echoed throughout the empty house. He sat up and

glanced down at his arms, imagining he still held his daughter in them. The feeling of warmth slowly faded.

A faint knocking at the door disrupted Romero's moment of thought. He answered and was surprised to see his longtime friend, Arturo.

"Romero, *cómo estás?*"

"*Bien.*" Romero kept the door open where only his face was visible. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to check on you." Arturo glanced behind him at the curtain of rain draining off the roof. "You going to let me in?"

"Yeah, sorry," Romero stepped back, quickly removing the wrappings from his arm and tucking it into his back pocket. They both took a seat at the table as Romero moved the stack of sketchpads from the chair.

"So, what did you want to talk about?" asked Romero.

"I came to see what the doctor said about the cough. You did go see your doctor?"

"Yeah, I did. I went last week," said Romero, never meeting Arturo's eyes.

"And?" Arturo leaned in closer.

"Doctors found a little shadow in my lung." Romero paused, allowing Arturo to process the information. Arturo looked on with worry, yet waited for Romero to finish. "I have lung cancer."

Arturo leaned back into his seat, thoughts swirling in his mind like a tornado.

Romero fought back his tears. "I've been doing chemo, but it feels worse. Somedays, I feel too tired to get out of bed, others too tired to eat. I feel my time is coming."

"You don't mean that?"

"I do."

"What about Anya?"

Romero bowed his head. "No."

"Why not tell her?"

"I'm the last person she wants to talk to."

"But this is different. I mean, this would affect Marisol?"

"No!" Romero stood, using the table as leverage. "I had my chance with them. Now, I'm paying the price for it."

"You never told me what happened between you two."

Romero hesitated but described the fateful night. He arrived home late at night, drunk. Romero stumbled into the living room, knocking over a lamp. Awakened from the commotion, Anya found Romero on the floor, barely able to stand.

“*Chingando!*” Anya ran her hand through her hair in exhaustion. “I have dealt with this for too long, Romero. I need you to leave, or I will call the cops.”

Romero used the sofa as leverage to push himself up. “This is my house too. I have every right to be here.”

“Not in this condition. I don’t want Marisol seeing you like this anymore.”

Romero didn’t listen. Instead, he started walking for the garage, but Anya stepped into his path. Frustrated, he grabbed her arm and pulled her aside. Anya berated him and grabbed his arm. Romero, enraged, ripped his arm from her grasp and slapped her with the back of his hand. Anya fell back onto the floor. From the corner of his eye, Romero noticed Marisol standing in the hallway with fear written on her face. Romero sat out on the porch as police sirens wailed in the distance.

Arturo couldn’t believe the story but now understood why Romero wouldn’t want to make contact. Arturo stepped out into the pouring rain but glanced back at Romero standing on the porch before turning away.

#

Three years ago, Romero stood in the brightened living room of the house. He was released from prison a few days ago and decided it was best to live out here, away from his family. Inside, Romero could hear the anger embedded within the walls. He didn’t want to be back but knew it was the only place he had. Romero’s mother, Leticia, entered the house.

“I have a surprise for you,” Leticia gestured for Romero to follow her into the kitchen. Leticia stepped out into the backyard for a moment. Romero stood in front of the sink and looked out at the garden. Leticia brought in a birdcage with a small little songbird chirping.

“What’s this?” Romero asked.

“*Es tú pájaro.*”



“You didn’t have to do this.”

“It was Marisol’s idea.”

Romero gazed back out at the backyard full of color from the flourishing flowers. The beauty entranced him. The garden was the only thing he loved from this place.

“You should talk to her. She asks about you,” urged Leticia.

“No, it’s better this way.”

“*Porque Hijo*, it’s been years since you’ve seen her. She’s a grown woman now. You can’t put yourself down over a mistake.”

“But, it wasn’t a mistake to me. I hurt Anya. I saw the fear of Marisol’s face. It’s the same face I had when Dad would go on his drunken rage. It happened once, but I’m not letting it happen again.”

Leticia comforted Romero, “Forgiveness is not impossible to attain, *Hijo*.”

Romero looked out the window once more but stared at a thin prison window.

## LA AFLICCIÓN

It's 12:45 in the afternoon, and I can already see the afternoon students coming inside to school. I really wish *mi mamá* would switch me back to the afternoon session of school. I hate waking up at six in the morning every day and having to shine my shoes, iron my faded school uniform that had little holes here and there, and force myself to eat something...if there's anything to eat. At least when I was in the afternoon session, I had my friends, and my before-school ritual because I liked it when Oscar and Elmer would say I was the best dressed one.

"*Ey, que chivo!*" Oscar would say as he'd point down at my shiny my old, partially ripped dress shoes. I struggled to know whether he was honestly did think my shoes were cool or if he was making fun of them.

"*Juela! Miralo, ve. Que guapo!*" Elmer would mockingly add in the flattery. Since I couldn't tell their intentions, I would just laugh along. I still liked the attention nonetheless, and it was my favorite time of the day. But now that's been gone ever since I was moved to the morning session, where everyone looks equally as tired as me; with droopy eyes, mostly quiet, and walking slow. A different energy overall.

The afternoon students bring their energy as they walk past by me, all smiles, having loud and funny conversations about yesterday's episode of *Bob Esponja* while they push each other with their shoulders. Everyone had their own Oscar and Elmer. I haven't seen or heard from either of them since I was moved from the afternoon session of school. My mom said that it was safer to go to school in the mornings.

"*Menos peligro de la pandilla,*" she says along with all the other moms who don't want to expose their kids to gang members that also go to school, but for some reason only go during the afternoon session.

The last thing I heard about Elmer was that he had contracted dengue, which was weird because his house was always clean. There were no puddles where mosquitoes could be born and so anyone contract the disease. Maybe he missed a spot somewhere

or got it from someone else. I can't imagine how much my bones would hurt or how bad my fever would get if I got it too, or even died from it.

As for Oscar, I remember noticing him starting to frequently ditch school while it was lunch time. I once saw him jumping over the old brick wall that's behind a classroom in a corner. There was an older kid waiting for him on the other side.

I start walking home as the afternoon kids walked past me, following the highway that takes me there. It becomes eerily quiet, except for the cars that are passing by me really close and really fast. A train of cars puff out tons of black smoke towards my face, so I take the long way through a dusty path with the little houses made of thin *lamina galvanizada* that make pitter-patter sounds from the occasional rain. The car sounds are replaced by rocky footsteps, but now I hear more footsteps at a distance.

I notice two faces approaching me, two guys, one of them taller and older than the other. The taller, older one has tattoos on his bony face; a teardrop beneath the eye, a devil on one of his cheeks, and the number "13" on the forehead. "13" stares back at me, but I just look down. *Never look at their eyes.* I walk by them, and I can feel his skinny and tall presence looking down at me, unsure of what his left hand is holding behind his back. I just hear him hack and spit, then his footsteps walking my opposite direction away from me.

I feel a lot happier if I was taking this path with Oscar and Elmer. Usually, we'd always come through here and say hi to a nice old lady, who gave us some small, warm homemade bread. I hadn't seen her in a while, and her house now looked empty and without a door or any light anywhere inside. Her round, wrinkled face and her gentle smile made her eyes look closed, which reminded me of my Abuelita Tere. I miss my *abuelita*, but I can't remember too much about her. I used to live in the United States, but my dad brought me and my mom back to El Salvador when he heard Abuelita Tere had passed away. My dad says he feels guilty because he feels leaving her behind caused her to feel sad and become ill. He spent quite a bit of money on her funeral and paid off a lot of her debt, but he ended up without enough money to take me and my mom back to the United States.

It's been almost five years, but he comes to see us at least

once a year for about week. I hope he can come to my 9th birthday next week, and tell us we can go back to the United States. My feet start to hurt from my long walk, and I just want to go home.

*Daniel Orona*

**EVERY MORNING,**

I remember

the smell of

mother's

singed hair,

forced into springs,

as she curled

her mouth

to smile,

at me

through

the broken

bathroom

mirror.

*Robert Weibezahl*

## **PROCESS**

if this were a movie  
it would begin with a man alone in a  
room  
at a desk  
(one of those old metal office desks) and  
maybe it would be  
an overhead shot  
(or whatever the technical term is) shot  
from the ceiling  
gazing down on the man's bald head and he  
would be in shirtsleeves (sleeves rolled to  
just below the elbow) or maybe just a t-shirt  
(cause it's hot in the room) and  
there would be no sound at least  
at first  
and then maybe just the scratching sound a  
cheap pen makes on cheap paper  
and maybe it would all be in black and white (or  
maybe not)  
if this were a movie  
something might happen  
someone would come in  
or the man would do something startling but  
this is a poem  
so all bets are off

*Christopher Glock*

## **RED HAIR ANGEL IN N. LAS VEGAS**

another year in los angeles  
its growing colder

and the young korean  
delivery girl is still  
coming over.

miss gamgi questions  
why i keep ordering  
the same amount of  
bulgogi and tofu soup.

have friends over  
i usually tell her but  
she knows im a loner,  
who still pictures my  
name coming from your lips.

*Jessi Jarrin*

## **A SOUTHERN BREAKUP**

I remember the smell  
of your brown and blue flannel.  
How the shirt fit me  
perfectly. How it covered my body  
enough so I could wear it  
out on the porch. I admit  
the fabric was rough,  
but I loved how the rough  
went soft at the sleeves.  
All the tears I wiped on them  
softened them, I think.  
It's a shame we didn't soften.  
We just went stiff.

When I left--I mean,  
really left you--  
I remember driving  
for a long time.  
I thought of how we spent  
so much time in the truck,  
the whole time  
we were together  
was for a long drive.

Back home, off the 91 west  
where the freeway stops,  
is, for some reason, where  
I remember you most:  
a fluorescent Krispy Kreme,  
a reminder of how far I am  
from you  
in that shirt, your warm  
hands holding me when  
you needed me most.



The night I left, the radio  
crooned: Cowgirls don't cry.  
But, I drove a truck not  
a fucking horse,  
and I cried for years after that.  
I was done  
being teased by the breeze  
between the barley  
outside your house.  
It whispered to me  
winter was coming,  
that seasons change,  
that it wanted  
to blow me away.

*Mike Boyett*

## **THE TREASURES OF SEWING**

My uncle Leslie died in December 2007, at the age of 93. He had been a farmer all his life on the same piece of land where he was born. He never did retire. Up until the last year of his life, he kept chickens and had a large garden. He lived just down the road from me and even past ninety, I often heard him running his chainsaw or plowing with his tractor. He had married Aunt Grace as a young man in 1940. They never had any children, and she died in 1969. Uncle Leslie was a religious man. He read his bible every day and prayed out loud before every meal. Every Wednesday night and Sunday morning, he drove his rusty pickup truck to church. A few years after Aunt Grace died, Uncle Leslie starting courting and eventually married a widow-lady from his church named Irene. Aunt Irene was a short plumpish woman with a wide face and short grey hair.

I had never met her before she and Uncle Leslie got married. I later heard from Uncle Leslie that her first husband was an abusive drunk who died in an automobile accident. He had left Aunt Irene to raise their only son, Norman, on her own. Aunt Irene knew what hard times and being poor was all about.

“He drunk up every last penny he ever made, and he badly mistreated Irene and Norman,” Uncle Leslie told me one day, speaking of Aunt Irene’s first husband and son, as I was welding a broken plow shank on his tractor. “Irene had to take in sewing and washing so they could eat, and she could put clothes on Norman to go to school.”

“Yeah?” I said. “She seems like she’s pretty happy now she is married to a man who don’t beat her.” Uncle Leslie kind of grinned and looked at the ground and then looked away. “Best day’s work I ever did, marrying her. I mean that’s not taking anything away from your Aunt Gracie. It was just different the second time. Irene just deserved a lot better than she had and...” he stopped. “It was so lonesome around here after Gracie died. I needed Irene and, Lord knows, she needed me. Her whole life was built around Norman.” He was all she had.

Norman was nine when his daddy was killed while off drinking with another woman. After that, Aunt Irene had struggled to make ends meet by washing and sewing. As soon as he could, Norman ran off and joined the Navy but was soon kicked out for doing drugs. Then he robbed a store and spent a few years in prison in West Virginia. From prison, he wrote Aunt Irene long letters about how he had found the Lord and was going to come home and start a family. "You'll have grandbabies. You can sew for mama," he had written. On his way home at a bus station in Galax, Virginia, just shy of his 26th birthday, Norman had a cerebral hemorrhage and died.

Over the years, I got to know Aunt Irene and I liked her real well. I would stop by the house sometimes when I was fixing something for Uncle Leslie and she would be cooking or sewing or, most of the times, both. She did seem content and even happy sometimes, but often there was a tired sadness seeping from her eyes. It was like they had just seen too much and had her heart broken one time too many. You did not spend long with Aunt Irene before the conversation got around to sewing. Aunt Irene loved to sew, and she was very, very skilled at it. She made beautiful quilts. I once asked her to repair a seam in one of my good dress shirts. "Leave it sometime and I'll fix it," she said, and so I did, and she did. It was better than new.

Uncle Leslie and Aunt Irene lived in a small two-bedroom house he had built on the farm fifty years ago. The back bedroom was set off from the kitchen. Aunt Irene had turned into a sewing room. She would take me in there sometime to show me something she was working on. On a table against the window was her Kenmore sewing machine. "I used to have my mother's old pedal Singer, but it finally wore out. I bought this one from Sears in 1962 with my own money," she said proudly. Everything was so neat and in its place. The windows in her sewing room had light blue café curtains with pull down shades when the sunlight got too bright.

"This is where I keep my treasures," she said, pointing to a large brown steamer trunk sitting on the floor beside the sewing machine table. She reached down to open it as she looked back at me, smiling. The inside of the trunk was covered with a pale-yellow print cloth with small blue and red flowers. There was a top section that lifted out with handles on each side. It too was covered with

the same yellow print material. She removed a small ragged quilt she had carefully folded from a brown paper bag. "This was my granny's quilt," she said. "She made it when my mama was a baby and then mama wrapped me in it when I was little."

There were also little shirts and little dresses. Each one she carefully unfolded and held up for me to see. They were all very pretty. "I made these for when I'd ever have grandchildren, so they would have something nice to wear." She looked up at me, but I looked away. "And this is my box of buttons. I have saved buttons all my life. I never threw a button away. Nice buttons add so much to a piece of clothing, don't you think? And good buttons are so expensive. Sometimes, the cost of the buttons can be more than the cost of the material. I so love nice buttons."

In late 2006, Aunt Irene had a stroke. She was in the hospital for about a week and never regained consciousness. I was at the hospital with Uncle Leslie when she died. He bent forward in a brown chair looking at the floor as two orderlies quietly wheeled her out. For a man that had looked so vigorous even into his 90's, he now seemed small and frail. On the way home, I offered to help him make the arrangements. He had very little to say. "She didn't have any family left. I was it. There are not many arrangements to be made." I remember thinking when we came into his cold dark house that afternoon that this probably would not end well.

After the funeral, I started checking on him every day. I offered to buy groceries and run errands for him. I'm sure he appreciated it, but he said he could still take care of himself. "I've been alone before and I can do it again." But he couldn't. A few months later, he fell at the barn and broke his hip. I just happened to find him late that afternoon on my way home from work. I called 911. On this cool late fall afternoon, we could hear the ambulance siren start up as it left town, two miles away. He looked so frail.

"Please don't let them take me away from here. If I leave, I will never come back. Everything I have is here." He broke down. I had never seen him cry. "Oh, they will take you and fix you right up and you will be back here in time to plant a garden."

Even as the words were forming in my head, I knew he was right. He knew it too. After a few days in the hospital getting a new hip, he was sent off to a rehabilitation facility. I visited him every day. After about a week there, he died peacefully in his sleep one

night. Pneumonia, they said.

Uncle Leslie was the oldest and last of five siblings. His four sisters, including my mother, had all passed in the preceding four years. Because he had no heirs, my five cousins and I, inherited everything he had, including the farm. We decided we would eventually sell the farm because none of us had the money to buy out the others. We also decided we needed to go through Uncle Leslie's house and barns and divide up his things as equitably as possible.

Now on this airy April Saturday morning, we all gathered to take our shares. This was the first time I had ever heard the term "house breaking" used in the opposite sense to the phrase "setting up housekeeping." We took our turns taking things. One cousin wanted Uncle Leslie's old tractor, another wanted his tools, and another cousin wanted his shotgun. I decided to take his old pickup truck. After all, I had been keeping it running for the last few years. The only household items anybody wanted were a recliner and a nice set of Sunday dishes.

"How about the things in Aunt Irene's sewing room," I asked? We all moved as a group in that direction. "I don't have any need for that old sewing machine. Even if I had, I wouldn't know what to do with it," said my youngest cousin, tilting her head back with a chuckle. Several others nodded in agreement. I eyed the steamer trunk. Just as I was about to speak, another cousin piped up, "I kind of like that steamer trunk, I'll take it and whatever is in it." She reached down and opened it up and began laying the contents on the floor. "There are just rags and baby clothes and more rags in a paper sack and here is a box of buttons. I know just what I can do with all this stuff." I wanted to speak up and explain what all those things meant to Aunt Irene but by that time, it was too late. "So, what are we going to do with all the things left," I asked? My oldest cousin volunteered, "I can get Goodwill to come and get what they can use and the rest we can take to the dump."

And that is pretty much what happened in the next few days. A few weeks later, I stopped by Uncle Leslie's just to check on things. I saw that the back door had been left open as I stepped up on the back porch. The inside of the house had been about cleaned out. The rooms were bare except for scattered papers, wire coat hangers and two broken teacups on the kitchen floor. I remembered

what the house had looked like when people lived there. What it was like when two people who had seen their share of worldly pain tried to make a life together there. Now they were gone forever, along with their pain, hopes, fears, and the love they shared. In time, it would be as if they never lived. But they did. I still remember.

Later, I asked my cousin with the steamer trunk what she did with the things in the trunk. “Oh, I dropped all that stuff off at the dump before I got home” she said. “And the box of buttons,” I asked? “Those too,” she replied plainly. “Who needs buttons anymore?”

*Ally Whiting*

## **MY DAD WANTED THIS ONE TO RHYME**

I never forgave you for the gophers  
what nine-year-old could?  
you drove them out like a  
severely depressed widow sweeping  
dust outside in that old cartoon  
and I watched, wishing I could sink  
into the drowning holes too

can you forgive me for this poem?  
I know you think this isn't real poetry but  
rhyme schemes confuse me and  
interfere with my voice.  
you might like the way it sounds if  
I say my dad is rad but the image falls  
flat and so the real problem becomes  
how nothing rhymes with gophers

I can't convey the water  
gushing into the holes with  
meter and assonance because  
nothing echoes the way your laugh  
pours through my memory like  
a water bill I can't afford to pay.  
I understand now that your crusades  
were never about the gophers  
or even poetry. they were about  
the garden and what you were planting

*Ivan Hernández*

## **TRAVELER**

I see images of civilizations  
burn into cinders, one by one.  
You stare into my eyes, ask,  
“What’s on your mind?”  
Visions of jingoists  
portraying their best impressions  
of ravenous wolves as they prey  
on the forceless mammals.  
Binary relations take hold—  
physical interactions become  
a perishing art, like my hope—  
depleted like a sand  
in an hourglass,  
the urgency to protect the homeland: gone.  
But when I look into your eyes,  
I don’t want to run and hide.  
No! I want to stand tall, fight,  
hope. In your eyes, scorched earth  
is cultivated like the birth of a new star.



## SAFETY OF DOMESTICATION

Recently, I've missed the incessant chirpings of summer grasshoppers, which I always thought sounded like the high string of a violin being plucked repeatedly by a toddler child. The musicians used to burrow and hide in the rocks surrounding my childhood home, jumping and fleeing as I would dance and skip with my sisters. Those were the days before I knew not to hang upside down from the trees in my yard, allowing my cotton dress to unfold and balloon around my body, my little bare feet kicking and knocking together as I laughed with my chest.

My mother would pull me off the tree, dust off the scrapes on my arms, and reprimand me. *Act like a lady*, she would remind me almost daily, the creases on her forehead getting deeper as she continued. *What were you thinking hanging upside down from the tree the whole neighborhood can see your underwear and no one wants to see your naked body what will the neighbors across the street think of you I bet you didn't think of that now go inside and wash off your scratches so you don't get an infection.*

In my youthful naivety, I couldn't see that she was scared—desperate to instill in her daughters a sense of self-preservation in a world set out to swallow us. No matter the amount of lessons I would receive from her, something in me insisted that I would never become a lady. The neighbor boys across the street engaged in all sorts of tomfoolery, and I longed to be a part of it. Once, I begged my mom into allowing me to join in on a BB pellet gun fight. I was thrilled to finally hold one of the plastic war-machines in my own delicate hands, never mind the fact that I had no knowledge of how to play or shoot. As we all ran around the hills in the collective backyard of our neighborhood, I quickly realized that I never stood a chance against the boys, who took immense pleasure in an easy target. Despite my loss, I returned home smiling, red welts covering my upper arms and calves. After my mother saw the aftermath on my body, she immediately banned me from any further participation in gun fights, followed by a ferocious phone call to the mothers of the boys.

This pattern of fighting and matching my mother toe-to-toe continued well into my teen years all through high school. We

would bicker about my choice of clothing—why in her mind, wearing leggings to school made me “slutty” and I would argue back that they were ideal for comfort; or how wearing shirts that revealed the caps of my shoulders was immodest and invited men to disrespect me—there was almost no aspect of me that we agreed on. It seemed to me that she was severely absolute; determined to mold me into something I never could be—a mild-mannered, virtuous young woman who built herself like an empty house for a man to make a home in.

I found ways to rebel in high school, believing that I had learned the secrets to individuality and control. I went through an evolution of behavior and learned how to flirt with boys that had bad intentions, sneaking them in and out of my parents’ houses in the late and early hours. I learned how to skinny-dip in empty, moonlit reservoirs in rural southern Idaho, and how to properly shotgun Bud Light cans without dripping beer on yourself. I learned the “freedom” of promiscuity and making yourself beautiful to those who would harm you either way, and found that no matter what step I took to take control of my life and people’s perceptions of me, I would only fall further into trying to please others. I made myself sick with the time and effort I spent nurturing the curls on my head, carefully learning and applying new trends of eyeliner and contouring my face shape into something conventional. I would put on a demure voice, like a frilly blouse, to ask a boy what he thought of me.

Despite my efforts, I felt doomed that I was only proving right both my mother and the institutions that sought to have me become a woman. Coming to terms with this realization at age seventeen, I decided to radically lean in the other direction and discarded my gender, refusing any labels and physically appearing as ambivalent as possible. I sheared off my hair, wore loosely fitting men’s shirts and sweatpants, and omitted any makeup—finally, I had escaped the expectations of others and had thrown off the smothering shell of femininity.

The next spring, I moved away from my hometown and started a new chapter in southern Utah. Determined to make a change, I wanted to establish myself as a responsible, capable being. Hopelessly, I fell back into my old habits as I drew to the raucous crowds at college parties. The scene was too enticing and familiar to

me; the same boys who shouted, laughed, and spoke crudely about women were there, but had different faces and didn't know or care about my past. I fell into a cycle of Johns, Masons, Omars, and Bens. After a while, I stopped listening or asking for their names—it made no difference. To me, they were no longer people; they had become entertainment. I got caught in a pattern of meaningless hookups and casual sex, supplemented by alcohol and drugs that the boys seemed to have in endless supply. Sometimes, I would show up already drunk to parties, just to find a nameless boy—or two—to go home with. I would wake up in a daze on couches in unfamiliar apartments, my memory either hazy or completely blank. With no one to look after me or question my judgements, I felt freer and lonelier than ever before.

Two mornings after I ended another messy whirlwind of a fling, I skipped my classes and drove my broken navy Impala up to the green-feathered peaks of Pine Valley for a needed breath of air. Winding around curvy roads full of potholes and questionable paving quality, the road delivered me at last to a secluded spot near a stream where I parked my car. I rummaged in the trunk of my car where I kept spare clothing and slid on the oversized grey flannel that used to be my grandfather's. Wandering for a while up the creek, I strayed off nature's path and meandered for a couple hours through the evergreen trees surrounding me, breathing in the crisp October air. I stopped as I heard something snorting and shuffling near me. Something in my mind whispered *bear*, and I should have felt fear. Yet, that part of me had been burnt out and faded away; I had no sense of self-preservation. Anything could happen to me.

Ten yards away, three mule deer broke out from behind a shrub of yellow rabbitbrush, gracefully bending their heads to graze on the florets. They moved together almost silently except for the soft clapping of their hooves. The does hadn't seen me, and I wanted to break our quiet barrier, to reach out and feel their gentle, long ears—to look into their stern pairs of glinting black eyes and find some answer to why they were allowed to be wild, and I was not.

The delicate moment between us—the does as a family, and me, an accidental predatory bystander—was fleeting. I wondered if I had hallucinated their presence, whether they really were there at all. Nudging each other softly with their foreheads, they seemed

innocently blissful in their element. *We are here*, they sniffed and chuffed. *We are vulnerable*.

I did not make myself known to them. I couldn't have, even if I wanted to—the thick tension in the air closed my throat and seized the muscles in my legs and back. I couldn't move or speak. A part of me wanted to cry out, to shriek, to follow the mule deer, to weepily beg them to stay and guide me, to shape me into something else. Instead, I remained frozen to my spot, and the does uniformly drifted away deeper into the trees, as silent and graceful as they had come.

Some piece of me felt I was given some of my soul back. I can't explain why I had that understanding, nor why it was linked to the does. They gave me the piece of my heart that had been broken and chipped away: the strength to break away from my past, to build myself anew. I no longer wished to be wild, to prove anyone right or wrong. I felt exhausted. For the first time in a while, I wanted safety. I wanted to be with my mother.

Dusk began to fall, and I knew it was time to leave. Following the musical crickets under the trees, the stream led me to my car and drove away from the mountain. I no longer mourned what I could have become, or what lost opportunities slipped away from me while I was wasted or high. I could only start to heal today, and tomorrow, and then on.

*Cooper Young*

## CHATTER

The bluebirds would not  
stop calling this morning.  
For food, or for a lover,  
I couldn't tell. Past the birds,  
my neighbors are shouting  
at something on their T.V.,  
and a hum of engines spreads  
from the bottom of the mountain.

There is no silence in this world.  
And I can only recognize  
a fraction of what I hear.  
A thousand prayers  
slip past my ears  
because I can't understand them.  
Like the wind's hymn  
that carries away  
the words of men,  
or the choir of birds  
outside my window.

There is little worth saying,  
but that shouldn't stop  
something from speaking.  
I cut several grapes in half  
and place them on my porch  
for the bluebirds, as if to say  
*eat, and catch your breath  
before you sing again.*

*Allen Jones*

## **THE HUSTLE**

Autumn in the prison of youth means Top Ramen afternoons spent between cartoons and a stained pool table, strutting slit-eyed like Technicolor tough guys with gangster accents, one leg always outweighing the other, covertly searching for designer labels on our hand-me-downs, awakening to rhyme when my new brother says, “Slob my nob,” rubbing chalk on his cue. When winter comes like a broken promise, howling through the breezeway, shifting every shot, destroying the truth of angles, and the money for ramen runs out, and even the animated world of obscenely rich ducks cannot pacify us, we shove our acned bodies into the yard, pulverize concrete blocks with sledge hammers, pin each other in the mud to fully convey the beauty of captivity, and think nothing of muscles that will not bruise. And then, because this is California, the sun comes out, someone buys us noodles, every shot is a slow-motion miracle, the warped table gulps down the balls like water, and the cellophane poetry of the television reassures us, you will find the girl, you will grab the gold, and ramen like manna will fall from a cloudless sky.

## INTERVIEW WITH ANGELA MORALES



Angela Morales, author of the personal essay collection *The Girls in My Town*, visited the Cerritos College campus in November to kick off the English department's Visiting Writer Series. We had the chance to ask her a few questions.

***For our students here at Cerritos who are just discovering the many twists and turns in forging a writing career, what was your own evolution as a writer like? Was writing something you were always interested in?***

I did not consciously aspire to be a writer until the beginning of my sophomore year as an undergraduate at U.C. Davis. By the end of my freshman year, I had failed all my pre-med science courses; I was feeling depressed and lost—a hopeless case. My G.P.A. was taking a nosedive, and I was headed for the drop-out crash.

Then, something magical happened. I recall this moment very vividly because it changed the course of my life: I was sitting at my desk in the dorms one night, avoiding my massive chemistry textbook that sat like a hulking beast at the corner of my desk. I was procrastinating by reading *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. It was the best book I had ever read, and in between reading chapters, I would write for hours in my notebooks—my pen refused to quit. My roommate Dana turned to me and said, “Hey! I have an idea. Why don’t you switch your major to English? All you ever do is read and write. It’d be so easy for you!”

It was a lightbulb moment. As a first-generation college student, it had never dawned on me that I might study literature or writing. Nobody had ever talked to me about my options or

supposed strengths, and I was not self-aware enough to realize that I had any strengths as a student. The next day, I filed for a change of major from Biology/Pre-Med to English and American Literature, and I felt lighter and happier immediately. The classes were wonderful! Now I was required to read novels, and I could luxuriate into my homework. My grades improved and I was learning about writers and writing. The more I read—George Orwell, Virginia Woolf, the romantic poets, Thoreau, Eudora Welty, the more I began to wonder what my own voice sounded like. After I read Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, another light bulb sparked in my head. I began to hear my own stories and little by little, I would write them down, playing around with different forms—some as poems, some as short stories, some as true stories or essays—most of them very bad! But I was learning, little by little. And the voices in my head became more insistent, those voices that made me decide that maybe I, too, could be writer.

***During your talk to Cerritos College students last fall, you were asked a question about whether MFA writing programs were supportive of writers of color. What was your experience at Iowa?***

When I was admitted to the nonfiction program at the University of Iowa back in 1993, I was the only Latino student in the program, and there were only a few other students of color. Over the next year or two, I believe the department was making a concerted effort to improve those numbers, as they admitted a handful more students of color, offering scholarships and financial support. Overall, I enjoyed my time there and I felt my classmates were supportive of my work. At times I felt self-conscious about my writing, being that I was writing about a dysfunctional Mexican American family, but my professors and peers never made me feel as if my writing was inferior in any way. In this respect, I was lucky. I have heard plenty of stories of writers of color who left their MFA programs feeling discouraged and disregarded. Back in those days, however, the term “micro aggression” had not been invented, thank goodness, otherwise I might have obsessed over every little misinterpretation of my work, or I might have found more to get offended about. I wonder, sometimes, if my predominantly white



peers cut me too much slack because they simply did not know how to critique my work and had my peers been more diverse, we could have called each other out more often for leaning too heavily on stereotypes or writing for a white audience rather than for our own people. It took me years after my time at Iowa to figure out that I was not writing for my white peers (though I admired them and valued their work), but I was really supposed to be writing for family—my grandma, my mom, my aunts, my cousins. If they couldn't understand what I was trying to say, then maybe it wasn't worth saying.

***Since some of the stories have to do with the conflict between your parents when you were growing up, did you worry in any way about your family's reaction to the book?***

I worried a little about what my mother would think, how I'd portrayed her as a character and whether she would feel that her privacy had been invaded or whether she would feel that I was criticizing her choices to stay in an abusive marriage. I did not worry so much about my father's reactions because he and I had become estranged by the time I started writing *The Girls in My Town* and he's not much of a reader, so I didn't think that he'd ever read it anyway (he still hasn't read it, as far as I know). But here's the thing: If you write about people in conflict with a positive goal—in my case the goal was to better understand my parents—then you are writing with empathy and towards a deeper understanding of why people behave the way they do. Even when I'm writing about my father being an abusive man, I'm trying to understand why and how he came to be that way. And because I'm human and I still feel anger and resentment, I try to write such a personal story until I can make peace with the memory or until I can find the affirmation behind it. What strengths did I take away? What good can I find? Maybe because I don't aim to make fun of anybody or harm anyone's reputation. That's the goal, anyway!

***In the opening story in your collection, "Chief Little Feather, Where are You?"; bowling seemed to have saved you during a difficult time in your childhood. In the story, the level of discipline and the fortuitous mentorship it took learning to***

***bowling provided an escape for you from the chaos at home. Do you see any similarity between bowling and writing? Do you still bowl?***

That's an interesting question! I had never thought about whether there might be a similarity between bowling and writing, but I think there is definitely a similarity. Even though mostly people think bowling is silly and when they go bowling, they are typically goofing around with friends, but there's a whole other side to the sport. I love watching pro bowling tournaments on television—those people are athletes and take the sport VERY seriously. Bowling, like writing, requires that you allow yourself to sink into the moment, to throw the ball from your core, from your belly, just like you would when writing and you find your stories from your center. As with writing, bowling requires that you pay attention to form and that you don't get sloppy. Mostly, bowling, like writing, like anything we care about, requires faith—that we believe that we can do that thing and then do it with gusto.

***In your title story, "The Girls in My Town," which comes at the end of the collection, you describe the lives of mostly young Latinas who became pregnant, some even students of yours. You were able to describe those lives without judgment, but instead present the story as a meditation about the difficult but hopeful lives of these young women and how interconnected they are with the lives of previous generations of women, people like your grandmother, who you write about in another story. For those younger readers who may read your work and see their lives reflected, what do you want them to take away?***

I hope those young readers will understand that their lives are part of a continuum, as well as works-in-progress. I would hope that they would learn more about their family history, about the women who came before them and to try to understand those women's mistakes and strengths. We are all riding on the backs of our ancestors, in a way, and this is especially true for us when we become parents. This essay was a meditation about motherhood, and what I discovered in writing it, is that motherhood (and

parenthood) is really, really hard, and everyone needs help, especially single mothers who are struggling to hold their lives together.

***Our last question, of course, is this: How have you and your family been coping with the Covid-19 crisis and the stay-at-home order? How have you been coping as teacher and a writer?***

Wow, life has taken a bizarre turn, hasn't it? As for now, I am working each day at home with my husband and two children. We are trying to give each other space and trying not get on each other's nerves! But also, we are rather enjoying each other's company and enjoying family dinners and taking walks together. It's weird to think that, for the first time, we are able to sit outside under the trees in our backyard and listen to the birds and watch the lizards climbing the fence. Why hadn't we done that before? These days feel like a strange gift, so long as we are all healthy, of course, and we are realizing how temporary and precious life is. Luckily, I am on sabbatical this year, so I've avoided having to deal with teaching online and giving Zoom lectures. As for my writing, I am working on a memoir about early childhood. My writing feels a bit stalled for now, but what can we do? Living is more important, and I think we are all just trying to figure out how to do that now.

**Angela Morales** is the author of *The Girls in My Town*, a collection of personal essays. Her work has appeared in *Best American Essays 2013*, *Harvard Review*, *The Southern Review*, *The Southwest Review*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Arts and Letters*, *The Baltimore Review*, *The Pinch*, *Hobart*, *River Teeth*, *Under the Sun*, and *Puerto del Sol*, and *The Indianola Review*. She is the winner of the River Teeth Book Prize, 2014, and has received fellowships from Yaddo and MacDowell Colony. Her book is the 2017 winner of the PEN Diamonstein-Spielvogel Award for the Art of the Essay. Currently she teaches composition and creative writing at Glendale Community College and is working on her second collection of essays. She lives in Pasadena, CA with her husband Patrick.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Lake Angela** is a poet, translator, and dancer-choreographer who develops her work at the confluence of verbal language and movement. She holds a PhD for her intersemiotic translations and has her MFA in poetry. Her poems explore the possibilities in darkneses and silences and the expressions of colors, waters, and suffering. Her first full-length book of poetry, *Organblooms*, was published by FutureCycle Press, and her poetry-dance may be found on her website: [www.lakeangeladance.com](http://www.lakeangeladance.com). Lake resides in Cypress, California.

**Bruce Bagnell** has worked as a cook, mechanic, and college professor; held various management positions including running a car dealership; and was a USAF captain in Vietnam. Now retired, along with writing he is a Poetry Express Berkeley host and editor of their magazine, *Poetry Expressed*. He has been published in many literary magazines. His full-length poetry book, *The Self-Expression Spa* was published in 2017. He is currently editing a novel and writing short stories.

**Mike Boyette** visited Sacramento, Bakersfield, and Davis, California almost 40 years ago. It was all very nice and much different from the poor dirt farm in North Carolina he was born on. His parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents were all farmers, and he expected to be one too but got a decent education and a job where he is around books every day. His life has been good even if much of it has been inside his own head.

**Dan Anthony Cardoza** has family roots in the Los Angeles Basin. However, he grew up in a lumber mill town near Mt. Shasta, California. He currently resides in Sacramento, where he received a two years Master of Science degree in rehabilitation counseling from California State University, Sacramento. He loves him some fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. His work has been, or will soon be featured in the *45th Parallel*, *Bull*, *Cleaver*, *Entropy*, *Five on the Fifth*, *Gravel*, *Literary Heist*, *Montana Mouthful*, *New Flash Fiction Review*, and *Spelk*, UK.

**Ignacio Carrasco** never believed in the reality of being a creative writer. It wasn't until his senior year of high school where his English teacher, Magdalena Saucedo, gave him the courage to pursue writing. He enrolled at Cerritos College as an automotive student before switching to English. Ignacio currently resides in the small city of Bell Gardens, California.

**Alexandra Culp** is a writer and illustrator attending Cerritos College. She will be graduating with honors in Spring 2020 with two AAs in studio arts and art history and a certificate in creative writing. After graduation, she will be pursuing her bachelor's in illustration and English. She would like to thank the outstanding Cerritos College English faculty for cultivating her passion for creative writing, and for their endless support and encouragement.

**Vanessa Bernice De La Cruz** is a self-taught artist and writer from Los Angeles, CA. She has been scribbling and doodling for as long as she can remember but has only recently decided to share those things and infuse them with sense. You can find her hanging out with her cat Bubbles, whining on social media @alienraynedrop, or you can visit her not fully constructed website [www.vbdelacruz.com](http://www.vbdelacruz.com).

**Stanley Delgado** is a recent graduate of Cerritos College. His other work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Glimmer Train*, *Gulf Coast*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Paper Darts*, the *Los Angeles Review*, *Mud Season Review*, and elsewhere. He lives and works in Southern California, where he is finishing his bachelor's at Cal State Long Beach.

**Donny Duran** is a first-generation Dominican American poet. He is currently a student at UC Santa Cruz where he attends the creative writing program and edits for the student run literary magazine, *Chinquapin*. He has transferred from Cerritos College in Spring 2018.

**Anthony González** grew up in Compton, California and is now an English major student at Cerritos College. He grew up in a family who made their living by any means possible even if they were not legal. It may seem like he does not talk, that's because he is

listening. It's never been his life exactly that he writes about, rather the lives of the stories he's been told or overheard simply walking around others.

**Christopher Glock** is a part-time meat clerk at Stater Bros. Market and a part-time, English student at Cerritos College. He may come off as a cold person but he tries to show his loved ones what it means to be cared for and admired.

**Willie Robert Heredia** is a Cerritos College alumnus. He is a dog person who only happens to live with two cats. He has been writing for about ten years, always looking to experiment and improve his style. His writings are inspired by the everyday life that goes on around him. He is honored to be represented in Cerritos' *¡Pa'lante!* and sends his best wishes to everyone who submitted their work.

**Ivan Hernández** is a lover of the arts from the city of South Gate. As a part-time musician and writer, Ivan is constantly working on new ideas either through music or writing. Despite graduating from Long Beach State with a bachelor's degree in English, Ivan's love for English and poetry started at Cerritos College as a student. With each English course taken, Ivan could feel the inspiration flowing all around him, ready to come alive.

**Jessi Jarrin** received an Associate Degree for Transfer in English and the Creative Writing Certificate from Cerritos College in May 2016. While attending Cerritos College, she worked as an English tutor in the Success Center. She also served as Creative Writing Club president. After graduating from California State University Long Beach with her bachelor's degree in creative writing, Jessi plans to pursue a Master of Fine Arts in poetry.

**Allen Jones** was born in the servants' quarters on the south side of the Cohn Vineyard in Sonoma. You can see it from highway 12. Very picturesque, though he hopes there were less pesticides back then. He lives in dark but otherwise comfortable exile in Norway. He dreams nightly of eucalyptus, a destructive tree native only to the California of his youth. His novel *Her Dreams Were Also Water* is forthcoming from MidnightSun in 2021.

**Isaac Lopez** was born in Whittier, California but raised in El Salvador for his entire childhood. He came back to California in 2008 and closely lives with his family. He is now an aspiring English professor that graduated from Cerritos College with honors and is currently studying at California State University, Long Beach. He has been published in *Hedera Helix*.

**Julie Martin** was born and raised in Walnut Creek, California near San Francisco. She enjoys writing both nonfiction and poetry, and has been previously published in *The Merrimack Review*.

**Daniel Orona** received his Associates from Cerritos College, where he found and was guided toward his passion for writing. He is currently working on his B.A. at the University of California Berkeley. His work can be found in the *Pomona Valley Review* and in the depths of his Google Docs.

**Jared Pearce** spent the first eighteen years of his life edging away from Anaheim, California, and now that he's buttoned in the States, he'd love to get back to that cuff. Read more at:  
<https://jaredpearcepoetry.weebly.com>.

**Marilyn Ramírez** is a writer based in Pico Rivera, CA. She received her B.A. in creative writing and B.A. in rhetoric and composition from Cal State Long Beach. A year later, she attended Cerritos College to develop her short stories in Ja'net Danielo's Advanced Creative Writing Portfolio class. After late nights of reading and writing, Marilyn spends her days working for a correctional technology company that brings educational and communication tools to inmates across the country.

**Suzan Ramírez** is a first-generation Mexican American living in the city of Norwalk, California. As a single mother of four, she attended Cerritos College where she dabbled and fell into deep appreciation of the art of creative writing, poetry especially, and where she obtained an Associates of Arts Degree in English. She is currently attending CSU Long Beach where she is working on a Bachelor of Arts in English: Composition and Rhetoric.

**Kristina Rivera** lives in California, though she is very rarely seen outside of her home. If not for the need for an actual career, which is currently being pursued at Cerritos College, her preferred occupation would be: hermit. She is the author of an indeterminate, unpublished number of stories. When hermitism becomes tedious, Kristina is often found overdosed on caffeine at her establishment of choice, wondering which existential crises to explore next.

**Sara Sherr** is an English teacher who currently lives in Brooklyn, though she misses the beaches and mountains of California, where she travelled during her youth at the height of her explorative prowess, and has never recovered. She's been published in *blunthly*, *Apiary*, *2Leaf Press*, *Corvus*, and *The Lantern*, and she has an MFA from Adelphi University. Read more at <https://sara-sherr.webnode.com/>.

**Sherre Vernon** has spent much of her life in Southern California, and currently lives in Lake Elsinore, with her family. She is an educator, a seeker of a mystical grammar, and was a Parent-Writer Fellow at MVICW. She has two chapbooks: *Green Ink Wings* (postmodern fiction) and *The Name is Perilous* (poetry). Readers describe Sherre's work as heartbreaking, layered, and lyrical. To read more, visit [www.sherrevernon.com/publications](http://www.sherrevernon.com/publications).

**Robert Weibezahl's** poems have appeared in *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Long Island Quarterly*, *The Five-Two*, *Enjambéd*, *Brushfire*, and *The Caterpillar* (Ireland). He is also the author of numerous plays, which have been performed in the U.S. and Australia, two novels, and a number of short stories. He has been a finalist for the Short Mystery Fiction Society's Derringer Award. Originally from New York, he has lived in California for thirty-five years.

**Ally Whiting** spent her most formative childhood years between Thousand Oaks and VAFB, California. As a military kid, she moved 12 times before starting her undergraduate studies at Lipscomb University in Nashville. Ally graduates in May 2020 and she plans to pursue an MA in Digital Media and Rhet/Comp at NOVA Southeastern University.



**J. Xiang** attends Mission San Jose High School in Fremont, CA. Their work has been previously published in *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, *Impossible Archetype*, *Name and None*, *SOFTBLOW*, and others.

**Cooper Young** is a mathematician and poet who was born and raised in Santa Cruz, California. His most recent work has appeared in the *Wayfarer*, *Lucky Jefferson*, *The Albion Review*, *Miramar*, and *Blueline*. His new chapbook, *Sacred Grounds*, was published by Finishing Line Press in May.

# *¡Pa'lante!*

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Published annually, *¡Pa'lante!* is dedicated to supporting California writers and artists. Its mission is to engage and promote underrepresented voices in the literary landscape, so writers and artists from all communities and identities are encouraged to submit.

For full submission guidelines and deadlines for the next issue of *¡Pa'lante!*, please visit our website at [https://www.cerritos.edu/english/Literary\\_Journal.htm](https://www.cerritos.edu/english/Literary_Journal.htm).



# *iPa'lante!*

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## INTERVIEW

Angela Morales

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