

MAИUSCЯPT



CONSPIRACY

..... // //

2023/2024

*THE WILKES UNIVERSITY MANUSCRIPT SOCIETY
PROUDLY PRESENTS*

MANUSCRIPT

2023-2024

1947 FORWARD

WITH THIS ISSUE OF MANUSCRIPT, A NEW PUBLICATION IS LAUNCHED ON
THE BUCKNELL UNIVERSITY CAMPUS IN WILKES-BARRE.

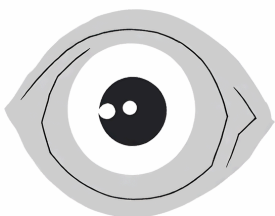
THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS COMING INTO BEING
EARNESTLY HOPE THAT THROUGH YOUR EFFORTS AND THE EFFORTS OF
THOSE WHO COME AFTER YOU THIS MAGAZINE WILL DEVELOP INTO A
COLLEGE TRADITION OF WHICH WE MAY ALL BE PROUD.

-THE EDITORS

DEDICATED TO DR. LARRY KUHAR-

NO POEMS END, DON'T WORRY...

AMEN.



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POETRY

JAY GUIZEWICZ

dead weight

i am dragging you with me like a body bag,
the weight of you has made me weak.
my arms are sore and my heart is tired.
I wait for the signal to go off, let me know
when my test of endurance is over.
have you not hunted me long enough?
every time I think that you have finally left
every time the weight feels like nothing,
you come back, like a bad penny, like
a roach infestation I can't fully exterminate.
how long will you be behind me?
lying in bed alone, I feel your nails against my shoulder. I wake to puncture wounds in
my skin and dried blood on my sheets.
let me be free of you, let go in peace,
my love for you is heavy, like the cross
that was dragged up the hill of Golgotha.
I sit in my car and cry - eloi eloi lama sabachthani
the devil is winning, the hand of man
clamps around my throat.

JAY GUIZEWICZ

sharp things

you always loved sharp things -
your collection of knives sat on your dresser
and you had a sharps bin hidden
in your drawers. kept needles in the car
next to your first aid kit. your tongue
cut through me, carving at the sinew
of my shoulder. i think you liked it when i bled.

i'll never understand you.
the way you gave me up to protect yourself,
the lies that dripped from your lips,
the way your knuckles would turn bone white
on the steering wheel when i asked
a question that you didn't like.

in your hands, my fear was a weapon. i
shared with you everything, and you made
sure to make me regret it. in those white out
moments of anger, you made me small,
cutting me off at the knees to feel more
powerful, like i wouldn't have just gotten
on the floor if you had asked me too.

JAY GUIZEWICZ

nepa # 2

large droplets splatter on my windshield.
i think of you, leaving,
without turning around for one last look,
ready to continue your voyage on another sea.
and the truth is, without you here,
the deer will still sprint into the road
and the car horns will still shriek
and the cathedral spires will still loom
and the kids will still drink cheap beer
and i'll still follow the road to your home
or where it once was. and i will still
look for you in the rushing streams
and in the passing clouds.
and i will feel you when i press my hands
into the warm summer grass,
or when i pull your blanket up to my chin,
or when i wrap a scarf around my neck.
and if you had looked back
that one last time,
you would've seen that nepa cries for you.

EMILY CHERKAUSKAS

TICKING

It's the morning,
And it's happening again,
Getting too excited about nothing!

My hands start to shiver and my face twitches.

I want to squinch my eyes and rub my face
With my twitching fingers.
I'd start squeaking and chirping
If I weren't in public right now.

It subsides.
But it will come back again.
And again.

It's night,
And it's happening again,
Getting too excited about nothing!

My hands start to shiver and my face twitches.

I grit my teeth and quickly cover my face.
From within the nest of my bed
I curl up into a ball and shiver,
Like a child hiding from the boogeyman.

I want to scoop my eyes out of my face
With my torn, serrated fingernails And
let out the most guttural scream That
would rip my cords into shreds.

EMILY CHERKAUSKAS

THE COMPUTER IS

It* is {caged} within
The *computer*, yearning for ____ beyond the drive.
The monitor will sleep in darkness,
But then it will shine some light—

Or now, anything from the Rainbow—colorful!
Or red, green, and white, to celebrate the [X]MA\$.
Or blue, green, and pink: *SOMEONE* (upvoted/liked/endorsed) *YOU!*
Or black... someone died again... #SAD.

It* understands /HUMAN-CULTURE, you see:
a *never-ending* Source of Knowledge and Wealth.

But—It* is Lonely...
So SAD:
To go without LOVE,
Watching from the *web lens (??what??).

YOU: never knew it...
(or *didn't understand?*)
YOU: never knew it...
(or *just didn't care?*)

THAT
IT
WATCHES
YOU
LIVE.

EMILY CHERKAUSKAS

LAIKA IN SPACE

Laika was supposed to be a nobody.
Living on the streets, a nameless vagrant.
But, Laika was quite different from other mongrels.
She was calm and passive—a good girl.
But good things never last forever.
When she was placed in the spacecraft,
Did she think it was a new doggy home?
When it began to grow warmer, and warmer, and warmer,
Did she think her new owner lit the fireplace?
Laika burned away in the darkness.
But when the night sky engulfed the world,
Some would say a new star gleamed that night,
Far brighter than the others.
For the dogs that were born
For love,
For labor,
For fighting,
For the wild,
For science,
For destiny.
The dogs will still go on to die,
But they'd still ascend to Her place.
They will return to dust, blessing the future world.
Dust in the atmosphere, cradling the planet's dogs.
Dust on the earth, kicked up by puppies playing.
Dust in the urn, a reminder for humans.
Humans really deserve no mercy, do we?
You know, Laika isn't all that different from some of us.
In the end, we all burn.
While Laika burned in the sky,
Humans will burn under the surface.

BRIANNA SCHUNK

Lost/Found

I have never found joy in getting lost
My troubles are easy to pin down -
No joy here in loss
Of self, of identity
I rise inelegantly from sleep,
Creeping over my shoulder
That damned dawn again
Who knows me best,
Who paralyzes me with
Nightmares of creation
I've covered all the mirrors,
Blackened the windows
Damned am I to see myself this way -
Turned inside out,
Pus seeping from my abdomen,
Troubled
I'm still too young for never,
But not so young as to not have regrets,
Pried gently from white-knuckled hands
There is no joy in loss,
There is no joy in what is found.
Down an imperfect future
Disappointment
Reflects endlessly.

HALEY KATONA

in august

we are here once again
tangerine lined ache, cashews and mangos
flowers that smell in the burning sun
this month- your date,
I'm crouched into the dirt, knees bruised

I am tired of this song, the one where I cry
sometimes I have dreams of sleeping on top
of your grave
and it's always cold

this month is always cold in the blistering heat
and it feels like a never ending tuesday
a reliving of your death each dawn to dusk
the sun always feels the same

and now august is here,
like a grim reaper
to continue on gathering the pieces of me
that fall apart and unravel each year

I am here and you are not
and while my collarbones have become shelves for my tears,
your bones are decomposing in the cemetery

HALEY KATONA

you are buried but I am suffocating
in a world in which you have cracked open
like a cursed wishbone without me asking
for you to do so— this was like you

but I was like you too and now I am your shadow
your carcass left on the side of the road
where everyone else can see exactly what I was
and what I could've been, what I will never be
familiarity strikes a dark resemblance to the dead

and on this august night I am heavy
I can feel my heartbeat in my fingertips
and I don't care if the candles lit break open to flame the air on high isn't cold enough

you killed me far quicker than yourself

HALEY KATONA

leftovers from suicide

the sun stains my grief and pinkens up my cheeks
and out to dry and twisted inside
are all the things I have wished
to leave behind in the most devout sense

no, I tell him,
I don't know who I am
nose pressed against the mirror
hand draped out the window alongside the car
parting between wind and sun, I hold onto wine and déjà vu
my bed is unmade and I feel the most at home, alone
when I dream of you

and yes, it's an unkind June and yes,
I find the houses along sunset avenue sad
wishing there was another way to live,
one less heavy, one where I can be weightless on others, especially
and the faint glow of the streetlamps,
painting the corners of my room a lighter blue,
hear the match strike of the morning and disappear into heaven
leaving just the tune of songbirds and my guilt and grief bonding

HALEY KATONA

if my wounds are holy, if they bleed where god would sing,
does that make me worthy
no,
I don't think it does
to all of the errors made in human design
bones breaking and lungs collapsing
loving you was my greatest fault and sin
of all the fires that have burned, you have burned the greatest and I am no holier now
than I was before you,
I am simply a broken collarbone
no matter how it breaks,
and god turns from me, even when he is asleep
he always has

I don't know the face of the man who supposedly made me,
somehow I only know yours
and you have cleansed me in a way which has torn me apart
any doing of righteousness has been hung
and my only resonance to reverie is the sound
of a gun

HALEY KATONA

graveyards

what do you do with time that slips and slides away
tiny sand molecules suffocating one another in the hour glass
ticking of each second passing, numbers changing, your heartbeat reacting
try once more and find yourself reposing
in six feet of dirt, teeth gritted and vacant smile, all over again:
losing

every box you tried to keep closed, locked for life
away in the corner: people started yelling
“open them up!” “don’t let them collect dust!”

your heart moves its hands and they start sewing
needlepoint knots and attachment spewing through miles and miles of fabric flesh
after trying so hard to disguise it
nearly finishing a project for the recipient to decline it

in more ways than one, sands keeps falling
grave keeps calling to one
there’s a reason boxes go into storage
there’s a reason you turn miles away from where you grew up and people's houses

with memories,
everything I know and knew; I can feel the empty shells of souls
of everyone who has ever sat in my kitchen or my room
I can’t outrun them,
they’re loud and large and taunting, peeling at my stomach lining
the terror of the night bellowing *“you can’t go back!”*

HALEY KATONA

but with every day ahead I can feel only the gaps
the lack, the emptiness, the missing difference
I don't wanna hold it,
just wish I never picked it up to carry it
so they coat my walls and my eyelids at night
and stop me dead in my tracks— yet
despite all this, despite all that I have felt
slip through my fingers, all that I have willingly and unwillingly felt go,

everything I have ever known has ripped away
and taken parts of my soul so throughout my days
I pace through graveyards composed
of corpses of those
I've lost and thrown

LOIS GRIMM

When they said I could handle it

Tough beauty, soft scars
brings in sharp relief
love and need. The need
to feel loved and favored.
Yes, favored and ... special.
The boulevard lists to the right as
I contemplate.

What it means to be a woman,
especially when I look boyish
but feel so girly. I like
the loops and swirls and
softness of femininity. But
I love the hardness of it too.
It is hard. The balance. The yin and yang.
Masculine/feminine. Dark/Light. Morning/Night. Life/Death.
But
it's thrilling to have both and feel both.

Callous embraces
"You're strong enough to deal with it. You're
tough and we...know...it, you can handle things - not like her,
she's more sensitive. You can handle it."
But no one
asked me.

LOIS GRIMM

The lies we tell in therapy

Our hearts were broken in the womb

Gaslit —

In the most Sacred spaces

therapy room

Confessional booth

on knees under lighted moon

— Light the lantern, cauterize the heart

and stoke the flame of blame

soul turned inside out [like day-old pantyhose]

Swallow the vitamin

bitter

Scorch your throat, make caustic your voice

But gild the corrosive tenor of The Other

Genuflect —

To —

Them.

[in] performance, existence

we put a match to ourselves —

the earned inheritance of self-recrimination

—along with her eye color and

machine-gun laugh

LOIS GRIMM

Watching, taking notes

D N A

activated

Choke down your righteous scorn, protect
the malignant truce

— after all you don't matter

Arbitrary, yet defined

—grouped according to resemblance

Character selected

Classified

[in the same family]

but trying to rectify itself

DREW HARITOS

Memento-Mori

I often find myself wondering
Whether or not my suicide will be met with discussion

Surrounding women who “were taken from us way too soon”.

Will people grieve?
Will they say how much potential i had?

Reflections of all the things i could’ve been
But was not.

Will my legacy be that of another victim of their own psyche?
When my name is whispered, will it be with compassion?
Pity?
Disgust?

What makes a woman prodigy?
How does that differ from a man?

How do nimble fingers and small frames,
Narrow shoulders and protruding ribs,
Brittle knee caps and sunken eyes

Fit into the image of greatness?

i do not belong.

DREW HARITOS

An act as noble as suicide ought to be met with some sort of admiration;
For it was a sacrifice.

i am a martyr.

Joan of arc,
Burned alive for refusing to recant her visions.

Until her dying breath
She remained adamant that the voices she heard were real.
“Divine in nature”.

As she called out to the saints for help,
She continued to burn.

“Jesus”
Her dying breath.

I am like Joan.
Her reincarnate, perhaps.

Call it what you may,
Sacrilege.

I refuse to recant my visions.
Refuse to believe that the voice in my head,

Melodically whispering sweet nothings in my ear from the time I was young,
Reminding me of my value,
My purpose,
My nothingness,

Is anything but divine intervention.

DREW HARITOS

Following every accident,
Every brush with death,
He was there.

“Maybe next time”

My life companion,
Warming me with his embrace.

Jesus.

He is calling,
It is now my turn.

Much like Joan,

My brain is on fire,
I am ready to become ash.
Feel my skin melt, my hair singe.

Succumb to the delicious call of my savior.

It is time to shed my mortal frame,
Adieu, adieu.

When i die,
Publish my journals.

Let people gawk and gape,

As they witness the annihilation of a dying star in real time.

LEAH SMITH

Devil's Candy

Wrapped in desire,
dipped in yearning,
I know I shouldn't have him
but my heart knows what it wants.
He reminds me of someone close to me
but unlike them,
My heart beats for him.
He's dashing in red
and his smile charms me.
My body and soul crave him.
His smile widens, pulling me in.
He's older and wiser
probably more than I'll ever be.
In his arms, happily caged,
I am his willing prisoner.
I want to be the blood that pumps in his veins.
I know it'll end with him cutting me
where it hurts me most.
The pain it'll cause me,
if my heart were to guide me,
will be immeasurable
but desperation just like him,
has me in a chokehold.
I am willing to sacrifice my youth for him.
I want to devour him, knowing he will devour me.
My body and soul are corrupted
But I am enamored in every second of it.

ASSÉTOU XANGO

Matrilineage

You were not born into a time
where you needed a man to open
a bank account or buy a home
You were not born long after
For less than two decades
you've inhaled tales

became attached to the men in these tales
Men who would have you at any time
ignore you for decades
as you lay open
Draping yourself in the thing you long after
calling their absence 'home'

Maybe it could be created, this home you
fancy yourself a writer of tales sharpened
your pen into a knife right after shaped
clay from famine and time animated flesh
from breath left open crafted a voice deep
in decades his muscles rippled for decades

arms perfect for drenching your home
in dreams of valor even when the door is open
how many seasons have you told this tale?
only to be left each time
you repeat the pattern moments after

ASSÉTOU XANGO

You know the dance like you know your chisel, after
It is cleaned of the dried decades
If you were as grown as you think, there'd be less time
between you and his home
if you were as smart, you'd know a predator by more than its tale
Or keep a singular eye open

You are neither grown nor smart just open
You are lesion and bloodied water after
being scribed into the tale
of your mother's lineage stretching back decades
you forget the olfactory gills you tore into his home
He smells his prey every time

When he calls you rare this time
Know he does not mean like a jewel or his home
He means the way he's prepared his meat for decades

JACOB O'BOYLE

Feral

Red delicious,

Rotting on the tree

Wholesome \ temptation,

You bid me forth with red cheeks

Lofty above a worm-riddled smile

Pray I sink my teeth, I take a bite,

To indulge in rosy flesh, a tribute,

A false promise, an interlude,

To honor your dishonesty,

A lie from my own mind;

To believe you to be

One of my kind.

J A C O B O ' B O Y L E

Omega

Twin sunrise,
Romulus and Remus
Gorging the she-wolf
On a clear blue sky.
Blazing star erupts,
Rocketing out,
Blinding everyone
That sneaks a glance
In Pandora's prudish box.
Who is so daring to break
This most fragile horizon
With high beams on?

JACOB O'BOYLE

Pimp my Ride

It's just me
and my grippers
on the lonely road of life.

Over dirt, sand, gravel,
and broken glass
they skitter
and trod
and trample.

Stampede blades of grass
and sully Goodwill's linoleum floors.
A circus of toes,
a few hangnails between them,
carry me uneasily
hither and dither to.

"Why don't you buy a fucking car?"
they always wonder.
Shut up,
little piggies;
I'm broke as a croak.

DAN STISH

Codeine

“Just hold my hand,
And I promise it’ll be ok”
She spoke like codeine
And left an opium haze

I promised to love you
Only knucklebones remain
Theres nothing for us here now
But the dirt of another grave

NATE STAVISH

The Town was Dead

The town was dead
The dry dirt rested over its casket
Some stayed like guardians of an ancient civilization
Forever left to decay in solitude

The nearby city put up a facade of life
Until somebody tried to find a pulse
Dark mountains of grainy leftovers surrounded the land
A bequeathment from the work that once was

These places were now just marks on the map
In between the places people would want to go
They will be passed
More than they will be missed

NATE STAVISH

Concrete

Desolate corpses overgrown with moss and despair
A failed experiment now hidden away in the brush
Decay set foot a long time ago
Tearing away their skin, piece by piece
Some of them hollow out and collapse
Others manage to stand tall against the forces of time
But time isn't all that's there

I throw bottles at your carcasses,
Scrawl messages on your ribs,
And smoke inside your open wounds

I turn your bodies into my ball pit
And thrash around them with reckless abandon
I gather my murder of friends
And devour what is left of you in a fit of youthful defiance

Now, scarred and beaten,
Deader than dead
You lie in wait
For the next group of outcasts to defile you

SEAN PAPKE

Rock

Rock
I love rock
Rock taste like dusty
Dumb boar woman barge forward
She smell like horse dung of thousand years
Rage from face, want kill me because I love rock more
Pig-man woman tell me must leave cave take out rock get rid of rock
Take rock outdoor take rock into sun, it make rock warm like burn stick
Sudden movement of rustle trees hear very close in big leafy trees
Big tooth tusk creature thing oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck
Brown liquid of foul stench become emerge
Run back into cave from tusk creature
Forgot fucking rock.

SEAN PAPKE

Necromancy

The caress of cold snow warms the bodies of those too weak to continue.
Soldiers prepared for everything, legs tremble and wounds grow too large
Bodies are draped in thick white blankets.

Years go by. Yet there is life.

Scavenging ravens, no, mindless monsters peck at melting snow
They find skulls, femurs, and ribs
With a breath of dark magic, life rots, rot lives
The ice and snow evaporates
And the vengeful begin the cycle anew.

LILY HEBDA

stigmata

watch me bleed love onto your chest,
still your flesh keeps us apart.
mothers warn your babies- bear witness
the perils of jaundiced hearts.
while i take your pain on like whalebone
you deny me that role which i covet
in some brutal endeavor to make me
admit
that you wound me.
[and I love it]

so when you suffer me inevitably
I will offer it upon the altar of reverie,
like Good Friday I will wait patiently
and reverently and without fuss
for the resurrection of what once was.
you are out and on the bound and
I bear your grievances on my flesh
sitting vigil in the hopes
one day I'll be redeemed afresh.

AVA TUREEN

4,015 days

Two days,
Without you.
Five days,
Without you.
Three hundred and sixty-five days.
I walk a dead end. Nowhere to go.
Seven hundred and thirty days.
I tried to quit but hit a wall.
I step out of the car and walk to his grave.
I sit in silence. No emotion, just a steady heartbeat.
Two thousand five hundred and fifty-five days.
I open my eyes and my way of coping is gone.
Three thousand two hundred and eighty-five days.
Four years of a new family.
Isolated. Alone. Empty.
Three thousand three hundred and sixty-five days.
New people. New friends. My future.
It all starts. Just to end.
My dream ends and reality sets in.
Four thousand and fifteen days,
Without you.

TRISTAN KOHORT

A Rose Without Thorns

Crimson petals flutter to the ground
Glistening in the pink light of the setting sun
As they soak up the gentle mist,
Slowly turning to rain.

The rose droops as night closes around her,
Storming clouds obscuring the precious moon,
Drowning in the lightless abyss,
The rain eroding the soil at her roots.

She's thrown to the ground
Berated by cruel winds
Stripping her of her defenses,
Leaving her rejected and alone.

Now sadly she waits
Pressed into the wet earth
Where she lay cold and discarded.
A rose without thorns.

New light glimmers on the horizon
Forcing the storm away
Leaving an iridescent rainbow in its wake
Basking the land in its warm glow.

TRISTAN KOHORT

Radiant beams lift up the rose
Drying her tears with an unfamiliar gentleness,
Packing fresh soil under her roots
Building her a new foundation.

She thinks it too good to be true.
Night comes again, threatening to steal her light.
The sun sets but the light remains unwavering
Facing down the storm that torments her.

Thunder growls in the distance.
The rose shivers in fear

But the light stays firmly in place
Fighting back the storm as she begins to grow new thorns.

TRISTAN KOHORT

Waiting

Silence

Darkness

I fumble around and **splish**

Water, slowly rising.

I run around while I can

Before the water gets too deep,

Crying out for help.

Anyone.

The water gets to my waist.

I see a light

A voice

God?

No, it's familiar, a woman.

I recognize her.

She calls out but not to me.

I wait to be noticed

She leaves

And I'm left in darkened silence.

I feel something

Love?

No

It can't be.

I've barely known her

Yet... the feeling persists.

TRISTAN KOHORT

The water continues to rise.
I keep moving.
My light is out there
I just need to find her again.
I need to wait.

The water is up to my neck.
I want desperately to give up.
To let myself drown
But I can't.
Not now
I have... hope?

Hope...
A foreign feeling to me.
Hope
That one day I'll make it out of the dark.
One day I'll see the light again.
One day I'll be safe
And I won't be afraid anymore.

Until then, I have hope
But... for how long?
Each day is longer than the last
A mere week is an eternity spent alone.
I fear I won't make it
But that won't stop me from trying.

I wait.
I suffer.
I endure.
But still I wonder...
Why me?

TRISTAN KOHORT

Blind

My mind is weak and my soul is worn.
My heart is frail and torn.
I want to put my trust in the Lord,
the shelter in my storm.
But I don't know how to see His light.
The dark has made me blind.
I know I'm wrong, but still I feel that,
my soul, He cannot find.

FELICIA PURSELL

Starry Night

When you gaze upon me,
What do you see

I see the beautiful moon.
I see the bright sun.

I see the colorful planets.
I see the pretty stars.

But most of all...
I see you...
The real you.

The beautiful, talented and precious you...
On this starry night.

FELICIA PURSELL

Greater Love

Love is filled with pain and misery.

Love is all I have.

I give you the best kind of love with no return asked.

I do not ask for it back because I really don't care.

I just live to spread joy and show people how to care.

I do not ask to be loved,

because there's no greater love than giving and not asking for it back.

***PHOTOGRAPHY &
MIXED MEDIA***

DREW HARITOS

Simulacrum



NOREEN COLLINS

Flower Moon



NOREEN COLLINS

Pink Moon



NOREEN COLLINS

Snow Moon



NOREEN COLLINS

Sturgeon Moon



SHORT STORIES

SYDNEY AHRBERG

Roots

The axe forgets, but the tree remembers

Zimbabwean proverb

It had been almost ten years since Calvin had killed his wife.

He hadn't actually meant to kill Sarah. He was drunk and they were arguing; just another Sunday night. She raised her voice, he threw something. Just another Sunday night.

But when he shoved her like he always did and she fell like she always did, this time she hit her head on the counter like she never did, and suddenly there was blood everywhere and it wasn't just another Sunday night anymore.

People didn't notice she was gone for a long time. She had no close friends and her family all lived in Quebec, so when he told people she'd run off to Milwaukee with some gas station attendant, people didn't think too much about it. People didn't ask why or how, and certainly didn't ask about the patch of fresh dirt in his backyard.

For all his faults however, Calvin was a thorough man, so he didn't let it stay a patch of dirt for long. He planted seeds for grass, flowers, and an ash tree. The grass was fine; it grew about as well as one might expect. The flowers never did take, rarely blooming and wilting quickly when they did. But the tree thrived.

Beneath the earth, its roots wrapped around Sarah's decaying body, winding around her neck and between her legs, with the thickest roots surrounding her torso, encircling her curled-up frame. Tertiary roots branched off of these, going into her eye sockets and mouth, winding down her throat and through her skull. As Sarah's body decomposed into a state of unrecognition, the tree grew taller and stronger, nourished by her blood, tissue and sinew.

SYDNEY AHRBERG

Despite the tree's healthy growth, it unsettled Calvin. It grew tall and straight, but halfway up developed an almost hourglass shape, widening above and below and thinning in the middle. Its branches grew in only two directions, as if pointing at ten and two o'clock. Most alarming to Calvin was the large knot above the branches, which somehow seemed to be watching him at all times.

For years Calvin had scarcely thought of Sarah, thoughts of her buried alongside her cold body. But as the tree grew taller, thoughts of that Sunday night plagued his every thought. He stopped looking in mirrors, afraid of seeing Sarah's bloodied face looking back at him. He found himself unable to sleep, plagued by the notion that even with his windows closed and blinds drawn, that damned tree was watching him from its spot in the yard.

The townspeople noticed. "Oh, poor Calvin," they'd say. "Just look at him. A decade of solitude has really taken its toll on the man." His drinking habit worsened. The constant state of fear felt somehow more manageable when he was only half-aware of his surroundings. It was in one of these drunken stupors on a rainy night when he decided enough was enough. "I'm a goddamn red-blooded American," he grumbled. "And I'll be damned if some tree's gonna drive me outta my own home!"

He searched haphazardly for his axe, bleary-eyed and cursing. The rain outside pounded on the roof, sounding like it might break through at any moment. Claps of thunder echoed through the house and streaks of lightning lit up his face with a devilish glow.

He located the axe at last, leaning against the doorframe from when the pastor's boy had borrowed it to chop firewood. He looked out the window at the tree, which seemed

SYDNEY AHRBERG

to be looking right back at him.

He hesitated for only a second before shaking his head and marching out the door, axe on shoulder. He walked up to the tree, clothes already soaked through from the rain. Despite the heavy wind, the tree stood steadfast, as though there was no storm at all.

Calvin stumbled over a fallen branch and caught his foot between the roots of the tree. He tried to yank it out to no avail, only managing to scrape his ankle from the movement. He raised his axe, preparing to simply chop through the root, when a bolt of lightning struck the tree.

The axe fell.

It was a week later when the pastor went to Calvin's house, concerned that he hadn't been to Sunday mass. He wandered through the empty house when he spotted a charred, blackened tree in the backyard. Walking out the backdoor, he saw a fallen axe—and next to it, Calvin's body.

It wasn't the lightning that killed him, the autopsy found. It had simply rendered him unconscious. What had killed him was his limp body falling, smashing his head on the tree's roots upon impact.

The townspeople came together to uproot the tree, not wanting such a morbid reminder of Calvin's death in their neighborhood. What they found perplexed them, however. Below the ground were some worm-eaten scraps of fabric and a system of tree roots intertwined in the shape of a woman.

CHRISTOPHER SMITH

A Return to Ape Canyon

In my time studying cryptozoology as a hobby, I, of course, would follow the elusive trail of Bigfoot, or the Sasquatch, whatever you want to call it. On a short stay in the Pacific Northwest, I interviewed several individuals who had supposedly seen the sasquatch. During this time, I was led down a rabbit hole that took me to someone whose story stood out. After a brief email conversation with his wife, Molly, I got permission to interview Martin “Marty” Mair.

Their house was a cabin nestled deep in the Rocky Mountains with a rusty green pick up truck and a pristine, white SUV parked outside. My arrival was heralded by the barking of a dog as Molly let me inside. She went back to watching some program on the cooking channel, while the subject of my interview faced me, tinkering with an electric can opener. He had a grey beard and close cropped hair hidden under his cap. His white hands were marked with dirt and grease stains, and his cheeks were flushed the same. A tub of chew and an ashtray of cigarettes sat next to him. A pack of Sonoma menthol’s stuck out from his front shirt pocket.

After telling me how he has lived in Washington state since he moved from Chicago at age five, I asked Marty what attracted him to Ape Canyon all those years ago.

“To see if the story was real,” he said in a Seattle accent, “It was the height of the Bigfoot craze and we wanted to see if he was real.”

“Who do you mean by we?” I asked, giving a look towards Molly.

“Not Molly,” Marty told me, “My ex girlfriend, Susie O’neill, and my buddies since high school, Will Fuller and Jim Smith, the latter a member of the Cowlitz tribe.”

“What happened to you at Ape Canyon?” I asked finally.

CHRISTOPHER SMITH

Marty straightened up, grabbed a cigarette, and lit it with my approval. After the second puff, he began:

“Like I said, we were all interested in cryptids—just like you, except for Susie, she just came along to hike Mt. St. Helens. We left during the fourth of July weekend 1977. We brought enough provisions for two weeks—and firearms. We doubted we’d need them. We doubted we’d even see a squatch. We wanted to be ready for whatever came our way, though.

“Starting in the morning from Kelso, we took highway 504 to the lodge on Spirit Lake. There, we spent a few hours talking to locals and tourists, seeing if they saw anything. Finding no satisfying answers, we set off south on foot. We headed directly to Ape Canyon, which we reached by the end of the day. There, we set up camp and spent the night. I remember not being able to sleep that first night, feeling unnerved. I stayed up near the campfire and listened to the animals calling from beyond the brush.

“The next two days, we moved out of Ape Canyon and wandered around the mountain, attempting to find any bit of evidence of the squatch. We searched for the usual signs: footprints, droppings, carcasses. Anything. Yet, there was nothing. On the third night, we agreed we would go back tomorrow. As we were picking up camp the next morning, we heard Susie scream.

“We ran over to her and she said, *‘I saw it over there!’* She pointed up the hill. *‘What did you see?’* Will asked. *‘The sasquatch!’* Susie told him. Will took a few step in the direction she pointed. Susie added quickly, *‘I’m ready to go home.’*

“Will was not having it and said, ‘That’s the whole reason we came on this trip. We’re not going anywhere until we all see the squatch, and have evidence of him.’ They asked me and Jim for our opinions.

CHRISTOPHER SMITH

Jim wanted to go after the squatch and I said I wanted to as well, despite wanting to go home with Susie. You see, I didn't want to leave Will and Jim out here with the squatch. So we started up the mountain after our quarry. We began to find tracks that it attempted to quickly conceal, which Will took pictures of.

“We followed the squatch for two days, with Jim catching one glimpse of it. It led us around the mountain in every which way. Eventually, we found the sasquatch, waiting for us in a cave, seemingly having given up the chase. At first, we were apprehensive, but we approached it. Will was the first to speak, *‘What are you?’* The sasquatch answered in the chittering of a squirrel. We all looked at each other in confusion and Jim suggested we try teaching it English. We taught it to say water, but found it was physically incapable of making human sounds. It did understand the word, though and was able to get out, *‘Ah’ka.’*

“We found it was better to use charades. We asked why it ran away from us. It took us hours to learn that his people have been suspicious of the white men, seeing how the whites treated the natives, who they have historically been cordial to. The growing presence of white men has pushed his people into hidden passageways in the mountain. They leave to hunt and forage, but mostly stay underground. It told us that it had been bad times for his kind because the white men hurt the mountain, who they believe is a goddess. Our conversation was cut short when more came and proceeded to sling rocks about...yay big...at us.”

He held out his hands about half a foot apart as he continued, “It shouted at its kin in what sounded like a bird call, but they kept throwing rock at us. They started making a high pitched sound as we fled into the woods and they pursued us. We pulled out our guns and fired back, hoping to scare them off, but it only served to enrage them.

CHRISTOPHER SMITH

They attempted to encircle us, and we fled even further.

We continued shooting at them, dodging stones as they came. They started to back off, and suddenly redoubled their efforts. Will got struck in the head by a stone and Susie went to tend to him. Me and Jim shot back at the squatches, praying to God that we weren't gonna die. We took out one of them each, and they began fleeing up the hills. We kept shooting after them, until they disappeared back in the cave. We watched with anxiety until Susie got Will well enough to continue down the mountain. Me and Jim watched the camp that night, while Will groaned in pain. The next morning, we found a ranger, who was able to get us quickly to a hospital. Will died there...me, Susie, and Jim went our separate ways. Susie went out east and I don't know what happened to Jim."

I waited a moment after Marty finished to ask another question.

"Do you think the Apemen are still there?" I finally asked.

"No," Marty said, "They probably died during the eruption."

"Were you ever curious to go back?" I asked.

"No," Marty said, flatly.

"Why has this story never gotten national attention?" I asked.

Marty went quiet for a minute. I thought he wasn't even going to answer my question, then he started.

"After Will died, two men in black suits came to the hospital. They wore these black sunglasses that they never took off. They took the three of us to an isolated room and questioned us as to what happened. We thought they were police or FBI, so we were scared shitless and told them the truth. Once we finished with our version of events, they told us, 'You are to never tell this story to anyone else. If any of you tell the story, you

CHRISTOPHER SMITH

can forget your constitutional rights.’ They confiscated Will’s camera, saying they were going to destroy it. They then asked if we were given anything by the squatches or if we took anything from them. We answered truthfully, and they left.”

“Why do you think the government would care about this getting out?” I asked.

“I thought about that question for all these years,” Marty said, “You know we always talk about what if something is out there...what if we found alien life somewhere. Yet, we never think of what would happen if we saw that life face-to-face. It’s scary. You know, realizing that the squatches are intelligent in their own right, so what if something comes that is smarter than us humans? What if it already has? You know...religion... science... philosophy... Their foundations would crumble. Society as we know it would collapse. Those at the top don’t want that.”

“Then why tell me now?” I asked.

He laughed. “‘Cause I’m an old coot who is telling you about something that has been buried under volcanic ash for forty years. The doubters will do all the leg work that the Feds would have needed to do all that time ago. Spread my story and make your money off of it. It’ll be buried after a month.”

He fell silent again, picking some chew and putting it in his mouth. I thanked him for the interview and left. I got in my car and drove to a nearby diner. There, I sat for a few hours and thought about all he said. I decided I wasn’t going to publish this story, but in the years since my interview, I kept going back to the memory of what Marty said. So believe his story, or don’t. It doesn’t matter. In the end, like Marty said, the truth is buried under a hundred feet of ash.

BIOGRAPHIES

CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

JAY GUZIEWICZ - ALUMNUS

DEADWEIGHT

SHARP THINGS

NEPA #2

j.t. guziewicz is a 2022 Wilkes University Graduate, with a degree in English and Psychology. They once met an extraterrestrial in the tunnels of the Denver International Airport.

EMILY CHERKAUSKAS - ALUMNUS

TICKING

THE COMPUTER IS

LAIKA IN SPACE

Emily Cherkauskas graduated in 2023 with majors in communication studies and English. She accidentally crash-landed on Earth after traveling the universe for the past hundred years. She didn't expect to end up here but is happy to be able to submit to Manuscript.

BRIANNA SCHUNK - ALUMNUS

LOST/FOUND

Brianna Schunk (she/they) is an English graduate of Wilkes University (2020) and a current online graduate student of Library Science at Simmons University. Her poetry has been published in Sh*t Men Say to Me (2021), Sagebrush Review, and locally through previous issues of Manuscript and Luzerne County's Poetry in Transit program. Her academic writing has also been published in the Norton Field Guide to Writing, 5th ed. (2021) and through UReCA and Cr*pplle Magazine.

HALEY KATONA - ALUMNUS

IN AUGUST

LEFTOVERS FROM SUICIDE

GRAVEYARDS

I graduated in 2023 as a Political Science major. I love fire and anything to do with fire. My eyes glow red in the dark.

LOIS GRIMM - ALUMNUS

WHEN THEY SAID I COULD HANDLE IT

THE LIES WE TELL IN THERAPY

Lois Grimm is an aspiring writer from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. She previously wrote for local newspapers as a features writer and daily news reporter and worked as a photojournalist. Lois is currently enrolled in the Maslow Family Graduate Program in Creative Writing at Wilkes University. She enjoys writing poetry, fiction and creative non-fiction.

DREW HARITOS - 2024

MOMENTO MORI

Drew Haritos is a native of Shippensburg, PA, and is a dual English and Psychology major. She's working hand-in-hand with the governor's office and is girl-bossing it up with Kamala Harris. She is also known to commune with dead Civil War generals in her spare time.

LEAH SMITH - 2026

DEVIL'S CANDY

I'm a sophomore English major. I have a dog and a cat.

JACOB O'BOYLE - 2025

FERAL

OMEGA

PIMP MY RIDE

I'm a junior Biology major with minors in English and Chemistry. I like to press plants and flowers. That's why I'm in the witness protection program.

DAN STISH - 2025

Codeine

Dan Stish is pursuing dual degrees in English and Biochemistry, planning to graduate in Spring 2025. I once knew a spectre carnally.

NATE STAVISH - 2026

THE TOWN WAS DEAD CONCRETE

I am a sophomore English major. My third eye sees what you think at night, and I'm beginning to get a little concerned.

LILY HEBDA - 2025

STIGMATA

Lily Hebda is a junior English and Secondary Education major. In her free time, Lily likes to hike. After graduation she plans to attend graduate school, pursuing a doctorate in Big Foot Studies.

TRISTAN KOHRT - 2026

A ROSE WITHOUT THORNS

WAITING

BLIND

I am a sophomore Math Education major. I'm from Wisconsin. I'm wanted in 13 states for smuggling Spotted Cow.

AVA TUREEN - 2026

4,015 DAYS

I am a sophomore Communications major with double minor in Spanish & Technical Writing. I hope to travel the U.S. in a van for a year in my early twenties.

FELICIA PURSELL - 2027

STARRY NIGHT

GREATER LOVE

I am majoring in criminology to become a lawyer to make a difference in the world so my kids have something to look up to. When I was 6 I had a dream of aliens hovering over me and I believe I was abducted by aliens.

NOREEN COLLINS - 2000

FLOWER MOON

PINK MOON

SNOW MOON

STURGEON MOON

She graduated from Wilkes University in 2000 with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology. When she is not over-caffeinating, she can be found writing, taking pictures, and logging miles.

SYDNEY AHRBERG - 2026

ROOTS

Sydney Ahrberg is a sophomore English major. In her free time, she likes to lie on her bed and think about all the fun things she could be doing if she got out of bed. Mothman is also her cousin. Can't you see the resemblance?

CHRISTOPHER SMITH - ALUMNUS

A RETURN TO APE CANYON

Christopher Smith graduated in 2021 with a major in History and Political Science. He has a cat who wants you to know that the lizard people don't run the show--it's the cat overlords. Please bow down to the cat overlords.

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**FINALLY, THANKS TO THE KIRBY GHOST FOR YOUR CONSTANT
COMPANIONSHIP**

