

HABLAMOS JUNTOS SERIES

PICTURES & WORDS

NARRATIVES ON LIFE BY
Costanoa High School Students



INSPIRED BY ARTWORK
CURATED BY MUSEO
EDUARDO CARRILLO

Pictures & Words

NARRATIVES ON LIFE BY
Costanoa High School Students

INSPIRED BY ARTWORK CURATED BY
Museo Eduardo Carrillo

Published April 2018

Copyright © 2018 Young Writers Program and Museo Eduardo Carrillo in partnership with the Santa Cruz County Office of Education. All rights reserved by the Young Writers Program and the authors. All image rights reserved by the artists.

All rights reserved by the Young Writers Program and the authors.

All image rights reserved by the artists.

TEACHER: Sharon Mallowney

SCHOOL: Costanoa High School

WRITING PROJECT ASSISTANTS: Andrea Alarcon, Miriam Campos, Maureen Davidson, Mara Palmieri, Leslie Reyes, Reyna Ruiz, and Claire Swanstrom

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MUSEO EDUARDO CARRILLO: Betsy Andersen

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, YOUNG WRITERS PROGRAM: Julia Chiapella

PUBLICATIONS COORDINATOR: Stuart Rodriguez

VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR: Yareli Arreola

EDITOR: Susie Riley

COVER AND BOOK DESIGN: Justin Carder



To the fabulous Latinx artists who inspired us
with their dynamic and beautiful art.

Table of Contents

Foreword • vii

Introduction • ix

Garrett Blanton • 1

K.C. • 3

Michaela Carr • 6

Angel Carrasco • 11

Ruben Del Carmen De La Pena • 14

Martin Diaz • 19

Jade Fuhrman • 23

Kalela Hatfield • 27

Isaiah Hernandez • 29

Lalo Michicol • 32

Annie Monroe • 37

Anahi Navarette • 40

Alphonso Payne • 45

Brian Pieratt • 49

Melanie Rodriguez • 52

Vi Salas • 56

Dulce Zuniga • 59

Writing Project Assistants

Miriam Campos • 64

Mara Palmieri • 67

Leslie Reyes • 68

Claire Swanstrom • 71

Author Bios • 72

Writing Project Assistant Bios • 74

Artist bios • 75

Acknowledgments • 77

Foreword

OUR YOUNG WRITERS are discovering ways to reach their audience by writing about their unique lived experiences. The brilliance that these young writers share through their writing lets us imagine and embrace the histories each of them carry.

Visual art is the language of joy, laughter, hardship, social injustice, and sorrow. It immortalizes moments that reach our soul and mind without making a sound. Visual art captures moments where creativity and self-expression arise. These moments cause impact. They awaken memories, experiences, questions, yearnings, fears, dreams and hope. They bring memories from childhood, the kitchen, the family, and sometimes the pain of having lost a loved one.

Writing creates a space for these young writers where, in a few lines, they can express sentiments that are usually guarded. This brings me to words written by Argentinian poet Pedro Bonifacio Palacios, better known by his pseudonym: Almafuerte.

Piú Avanti!

*No te des por vencido, ni aun vencido,
no te sientas esclavo, ni aun esclavo;*

*trémulo de pavor, piénsate bravo,
y arremete feroz, ya mal herido.*

Piú Avanti!

*Don't embrace defeat, even defeated,
don't feel yourself a slave, even enslaved;
trembling in terror, think yourself fearless,
and charge with fury, badly wounded.*

Translation by Irene Rodriguez Lopez

Life takes our youth through different experiences and challenges that can be pleasant or unpleasant. Young people should embrace and cherish the pleasant days and learn from the hardships that arise. Our country is experiencing challenging times and our youth must prepare themselves to face these challenges. They must meet these challenges with the knowledge they are acquiring in the classroom.

For our young writers, the present is filled with struggle but the future is all theirs. Using their voices in a positive manner, they can be the change they want to see.

**—Fe Silva, Senderos Program Director and
School Community Coordinator**

Introduction

IN 2002 I WALKED INTO an art exhibit called “Chicano Visions, American Painters on the Verge” featuring paintings from Cheech Marin’s incredible collection of Chicano art. Immediately, I felt a rush of excitement as I took in the energetic paintings, stroked in bursts of colors that were irresistible! Potent content, often provocative, the artists’ voices were fresh, current, and passionate. I have since enthusiastically followed contemporary Latinx art, so when the Young Writers Program approached me about participating in *Hablamos Juntos*, I immediately said yes.

Art inspiring art, and art imitating life. Seventeen Costanoa students each adopted a Latinx art piece that evoked personal memories, familiar struggles, or important relationships. Building a connection with their chosen piece, they crafted stories. Most of the students who participated were reluctant writers with few positive writing experiences.

With the help of six Writing Project Assistants, students were guided to find their story and voice. The results reflect the unique perspective of a group of young people who have often been marginalized and not heard. Like the Latinx artists, these students write about potent subject matter with a raw and honest outlook. Most of these stories are autobiographical and some could be called autobiographical fiction, but all are drawn from contemporary cultural experiences and observations.

Our hope is that the artists, who generously entrusted us with their art, will be surprised and energized by these stories. And for everyone else reading this anthology, enjoy the outcomes of this unique collaboration.

—**Sharon Mallowney**
Instructor, Costanoa High



Ayotzinapa- Ya me Canse by Sandy Rodriguez. 16 x 20", oil on canvas, 2014,
from the collection of the artist. Photo by J6 Creative.

AYOTZINAPA- YA ME CANSE reminds me of a chaotic situation where people are fueled by anger to do what they want and follow through with their beliefs. They demonstrated by destroying buildings, rioting, flipping cars, and starting fires. The title of this painting means “I am tired,” and I relate this to my life because sometimes, when everything is wrong and I feel like giving up, it’s the best time to keep trying and not give in.

This reminds me of skateboarding in particular because I usually skateboard better when I’m angry. I think of skating when I see this painting because I use anger to stoke me up like a fire to manipulate my feet to move my skateboard the way I want, and then hold on for the ride. It can be hard to commit, even when you’re so close to landing a trick, because the fear of falling holds you back.

One thing I should mention is that there is a difference between being mad at yourself for not being able to land a trick and already being pissed off from some other factor. When you channel both of these angers into the same goal of landing a trick, it sets you on fire and gives you an emotional edge. Not to say that trying a trick a million times doesn’t piss you off, because it does. But when you finally land, it’s the best feeling in the world.

I also feel this has a lot to do with style. Style is putting your own little spin or steez on something—just a way of positioning your body while

doing the trick or the amount of emotion expressed.

It’s funny, though, because anger can go both ways. It can either focus you or crush your confidence. I compare this to falling. Sometimes I fall and it pushes me to get up and try harder. Other times, it infuriates me and I give up. Another thing I’ve noticed is how much I commit depends on how badly I want to learn the trick. Sometimes you just gotta say screw it and get some! Every time I drop in, I think about what line I’m gonna take and what tricks I’m gonna do.

I like to skate pools because I like to go fast, catch air, and do grinds. Skating the deep end gives you a feeling of weightlessness. This is a good rush and I crave it often. To learn new tricks, you gotta pay to play. Nothing worth doing comes easy, which means falling every once in a while. Another thing that pushes me is wasting energy on a run by not landing the trick. An important thing to know how to do is running out or bailing from a trick. If you don’t know how to do this, you will get more hurt than necessary.

Skateboarding is fun because from session to session I get different vibes—everything from my mood to where my mind’s at and the people I’m with. It’s good to not get too wrapped or stuck trying a trick. Sometimes I just gotta take a breather and try something else to get myself prepared.

Another comparison I can make between the

painting and skating is learning backsmith grinds. When I do this grind, I feel like I'm floating. This trick is when you lock in your back truck on coping and dip your front truck back into the bowl while balancing on your toes. This trick took me a while to learn, but after a while I got comfortable and started trying it in the wave bowl with pool coping. I fell many times learning this, but I knew I could do it, and this infuriated me. I took a breather and just kept trying until I got it. I was really stoked when I landed this trick. I'm glad I didn't give in and instead kept pushing, fueled by anger to get the result I wanted.

Ayotzinapa, Ya me Canse, I am tired. Although I can't imagine what it must be like for the 43 families of the Ayotzinapa students, Sandy Rodriguez's painting connects me to the anger felt by the people of Mexico. That anger awakened people's awareness and gave them power. Channeling anger in the right way can help people achieve beyond what they thought they were capable of. It can also push you to keep trying and not give up on yourself.

I REMEMBER WAKING UP around five in the morning. I tossed and turned for about five minutes, trying to find a comfortable position, but I just couldn't get back to sleep. Since it was early and everyone was still asleep, I decided to go on a drive, knowing the streets would be somewhat empty.

I checked the time to see when the sun would come up and saw I had around an hour to kill. I decided to go get breakfast, so I first went to The Bagelry and then to Westside Coffee. I then drove further into the Westside and found a bench to sit on where I could see the Boardwalk, the wharf, and the lighthouse. I sat in silence and listened to waves crashing on the ocean.

I was halfway through eating my bagel when the sun finally decided to come up. I remember being in awe of the sunrise. It felt like everything going on in life, good or bad, didn't matter. The only thing that mattered was how I felt looking at the beauty of the earth and how at peace I was in that moment. I was so in my head that I forgot where I was until I heard footsteps approaching. I looked up to see a woman running. Soon after, my peacefulness was ruined because I could hear cars start up and drive past me as people began their day.

I started noticing people as they walked by. There were those in a rush and those who were going on walks and just enjoying the sun. Multiple

individuals caught my attention—some more than others.

First, there was a man who looked like he was in his mid-twenties. He sat down on the bench next to mine and started to hum a song. As he finished his song, he got up and walked to the ledge, grasping the railing of the barricade that keeps people from falling over the cliff. He stared out at the ocean with a distressed look on his face. I believe he felt me looking at him because he turned around and looked straight at me. I don't know why, but when our eyes locked, I felt a sudden urge to smile. So I did exactly that—I smiled. He continued to stare at me, his expression blank, which made me slightly uncomfortable. After a few more seconds, he turned back around and continued to stare out at the ocean.

In my head, I immediately went over what had just happened and felt sadness. No one had ever done that to me—no one had ever not returned a smile. The man then turned on his heels and walked away.

The next person who caught my attention was a woman who looked like she had been through hell. She was walking with three kids who looked to be six, four, and two years of age. The eldest ran ahead while the woman held the hand of the second oldest and steered the stroller with her other hand, trying to keep up with the oldest. The kids



Pay Me No Mind by Fabian Debora. Acrylic on canvas, 2010.

looked clean and well-dressed with their hair done to perfection while the woman's hair was a messy bun, and she wore a shirt that looked like it had been through a lot, with puke stains on the shoulders.

The little boy stopped in front of me, looked at the ocean, and let out a shriek. "Mommy! Mommy! Look, it's a sea otter!" he said. A smile slowly formed on his mother's face from seeing her child excited about the sea creature. For a second, she had a peaceful look as she looked at her son. But the look soon vanished because her two-year-old began to throw a hissy fit. The eldest son ran in front of the two-year-old and began dancing, which made the little two-year-old girl stop her fit and laugh with joy. I could tell the mom was touched by the gesture of her eldest son, because tears welled up in her eyes. She shook her head to make the tears go away and gathered her children to go on with their day.

As more and more people walked by, they just looked like blurred lines. I wandered off into my own head until I heard a lady who was complain-

ing her husband was giving all his attention to their kids and how they haven't had a decent conversation in days. Her friend agreed with her and started talking about how she was going through a similar situation. I didn't feel like listening more to their conversation because it seemed too personal, even though they were talking about it in public. When they eventually walked off, I focused back in front of me.

I stood up, walked towards the railing and stared out at the ocean. The noise of people walking and talking soon faded and all I could hear was the waves crashing and the thoughts in my head. I started drifting off, thinking about everyone I saw today.

I thought about the saying that God gives you a path He knows you can handle. Everyone has problems, some bigger than others, but each person is given only the problems they can handle. To me, at the end of the day, if God believes in you, then you should believe in yourself. I was sad leaving, because to me, that bench represented understanding.

AT THE GATEWAY TRAIN STATION, where everyone always seems to be, there is a hummingbird. Her name is Sky. The train station is where she always is—it's basically her home. She can't talk or anything crazy like that, but she can understand people and sees everything. Sky likes to help people and look out for them, and she follows certain people around.

There are some she has been following for a while: that's how she knows things about people who come to the station. She knows the two ladies who are workers and always in a rush. They normally have a crazy day, but they are both very nice and love to help families. She knows the man with the crutches was in the war. Sky used to follow him around all the time, until he left on a mission. He returned using crutches and missing part of his leg. Rarely does anyone see Sky flying around, but when they do, they become very happy. She doesn't know why, but she likes how just the sight of her makes people happy.

There was a mother and father and their son who would come to the station often. They were very close to each other. Sky always followed them because she loved the bond they had with each other. One day when they came to the station, they got on the train to go to the zoo and Sky followed along. She had never followed the family outside the station, but she thought it would be fun to go with them to the zoo. Upon arriving there, the family walked through the many exhibits and

loved all the animals. The mother especially loved the swans. She thought they were the most beautiful animals she had ever seen. Sky was happy she had gone on such an amazing trip with this wonderful family. They came back to the station the next day to go somewhere else. This time the boy had something in his hands: a paper swan. The mom had made it for him the night before.

The boy loved the swan so much, he brought it everywhere with him. A couple of weeks went by and every time Sky saw the little boy, he had the swan with him. One day, Sky overheard the mother and father talking. The mother had cancer and did not have much longer to live. The son did not know yet. They had to decide who would tell him. The mother said she thought the father should tell him because she was the one who was sick. The father agreed, but didn't know how he was going to do it.

A couple of weeks flew by and the son still did not know. The dad kept thinking, "No one can tell him, it'll break his heart. He has such a strong connection with his mother." A few more weeks went by and the boy still had no clue, but now the mother was in the hospital.

As the dad and son entered the station that day, Sky heard the boy ask his father, "Where's mommy?" The dad didn't know how to respond. He couldn't just tell him his mother was in the hospital.

When the father and boy had come to the sta-

tion by themselves, Sky was confused, suspecting something wasn't right. "Where is the mother? Is she okay?" she thought to herself. The father looked like a wreck, as if he had been crying.

The boy was also curious about why his father looked the way he did. He asked, "What's wrong daddy, are you okay?"

The father didn't respond; he just kept quiet and looked sad. The boy started to grow sad also. He knew something was wrong, but he didn't know what. "Is it about mommy? Is she okay?" he asked.

But then the train arrived and the father ignored his son's question and said, "Our train is here. Let's see where it takes us today."

A month later, the mother passed away. The father finally told his son. The boy was so confused. He couldn't understand what happened. The father tried to explain it in different ways. He first told his son that mommy was in a better place now, but the son didn't understand that.

Then the father said, "Mommy was very sick and was gone for a while in the hospital, but now... she is okay up in heaven." Finally, it hit the boy, and he was very sad. He couldn't believe she was gone.

Since the boy was so sad, the father said he could pick what train to go on the next time. When the boy picked the train and it arrived, he was so distracted with sadness that right before he got onto the train, he dropped his swan. He couldn't

grab it in time and the door was already closed when he turned around to get it. He grew very unhappy and mad at himself. The last thing his mother gave him was gone.

Sky swooped down and grabbed the swan before all the rushing people smashed it. The man with crutches near the train had seen how sad the boy was and felt really bad. He wanted to cheer him up when he got back, but didn't know how. Sky understood the man wanted to help and flew down to give him the boy's swan. The man was confused because a hummingbird was giving him a paper swan. But he thanked Sky, who then nodded her head and flew away.

The father and the boy ended up at the beach, and although they had a great time, the boy was still very sad because he couldn't stop thinking about the swan. They got back on the train to go back home. When they got off, the man with crutches called out to them. They turned around curious, wondering what he wanted.

The man with the crutches asked, "Why do you look so sad?"

The little boy responded, "My mom gave me a paper swan before she passed, but now it's gone and I'm never getting it back."

"Never say never," said the man, who had something behind his back.

The little boy was confused and said, "Why would you say that?"



“Close your eyes,” said the man, “and put out your hands.”

The little boy did what he was told. When he opened his eyes, he was so happy and couldn't believe what he was seeing. He had his swan back, and not just any paper swan—It was the swan his mother gave him. He knew it was the same because the one his mother had given him had a little note on its wing. The little boy didn't know what to think anymore. This whole month had been confusing, but at least he had his swan back.

He thanked the man, who then said, “Don't thank me, thank Sky.”

The little boy asked, “Who is Sky?”

The man said, “Well, you should meet someone. Sky, come here.”

Sky flew down from her spot where she always stayed, and greeted them.

The man said, “This hummingbird right here is the one that saved your swan from getting smashed by all the people in a rush. I know it sounds weird, but it's true. She saw you drop it and she grabbed



Gateway Arch 01 by Abel Alejandra. 8 x 28.7", graphite and ink on paper, 2013.

it, almost getting hurt in the process.”

The little boy thanked Sky and the hurt man and was so happy, he couldn't stop smiling. Even though he still missed his mom, at least he had the swan she gave him.

The boy looked up at Sky and asked her, “Where do you live?” She looked behind her and pointed with her beak from where she had flown down. The little boy asked, “Do you have a family or a home that loves you?” Sky nodded her

head no. The boy had an idea and asked his father, “Daddy she needs a loving home and people to love her and we could do that for her. She shouldn't live at the train station by herself. She should live with a family.” The father agreed, so they both asked Sky if she would like to go home with them. She started to flutter around all crazy out of excitement. Of course she would love a new home with two loving people.

It was getting late, so the father and little boy went home, and Sky did too.



Spirit of Los Angeles: Dusk by Raoul de la Sota. 24 x 24", acrylic on canvas, 1997.

Angel Carrasco

WE PULLED UP TO PUMP'S HOUSE with 10 racks each and a suitcase full of clothes. It was going to be Rich, Pump, and me in the car. Before we started the drive to L.A., we decided to eat first, so we went to iHop and got some fat mack. When we finally got on the road, it was hot the whole way and everyone was over being in the car, so we tried to get to L.A. as fast as we could. We were going to visit my friend Jay, who moved there two years ago. He was about 5'10", a light-skinned Mexican, and always had a clean fit.

When we got to L.A., we headed straight to Jay's house. It was a nice house with five rooms and three bathrooms, a pool out back, and a view of L.A. As everyone was getting settled in, we kept hearing what seemed to be someone whispering. We asked Jay about it, and he glanced up to the sky and said, "It's a star dragon that always gives good advice." We were all kind of weirded out at first, but then we looked up and talked to the dragon.

A couple of minutes later Jay said, "Alright, what you guys should do is get settled in, then we'll go get some things for the party tomorrow."

"You're paying for this, right?" I said, looking at Jay.

"Obviously. You guys just got here and I've been planning this for weeks. I just need you to come with me to get everything."

Everyone was down, so we got settled in and went to Jay's garage to get the blacked-out Cadi. It

was about 10:30 p.m. I wondered why we left this late to get things for a party.

After getting out of Beverly Hills, we pulled over and Jay opened the trunk and gave everyone a ski mask. "Alright, this is what is about to go down. We're going to go to Jolly Jug Liquors and we're going to do a bottle run, right? I say Dex drives and the rest of us are going to go in and get everything. It's not going to be around here, 'cause you can't sh** where you sleep, ya dig."

No one asked any questions because it kinda wasn't new to anyone. When we were younger, it was just the four of us trying to get money. But we didn't like jobs, so we just hit stains. Except this one was a store and the only one with experience in stores was Jay. He had everything planned out, including an escape route. So, at this point everyone knew their job. We started driving to Northridge.

It was about 11:30 p.m. when we drove around the Jolly Jug Liquor Store on Reseda Boulevard to see where the cameras were situated. I pulled up across the street and everyone else got out of the car. I had a clear view of the store and there was no one around, so everything seemed good. The moment they walked in, I was ready to drive out of there as soon as possible.

I saw Rich and Pump grabbing as many bottles as they could, but Jay was talking to the cashier who looked really scared and was staring at

something Jay had in his hand. Jay turned a little bit and I saw the gun. The cashier didn't move, so Jay hopped over the counter and took the money himself. I couldn't believe what he was doing. This was not the same as lifting some bottles for a party.

It had been two minutes at this point and I saw them running out of the store with three filled backpacks. They got in the car and we drove off, avoiding the main streets. I wasn't down with the fact that the clerk probably called the cops and described the car. For a few bottles, the cops might not try too hard to find us, but an armed robbery was different. I wanted to say something, but Jay and the guys were all hyped on what just went down, so I didn't.

We got to Jay's house about 12:30 a.m. and checked what we got. In total, we had 16 bottles. I later went to talk to Jay alone.

"So, how much did you end up getting?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You know what I'm talking about," I said. "How much money did you get?"

He stayed quiet for a bit, then said, "I only got \$1,500.00."

"What kind of pistol do you have?"

He handed me a Glock 19.

"How long have you been doing this?"

"Since I moved out here, Bruh. How do you think I have all this stuff? I work for Garda, the ar-

mored truck company, so that's how I know which stores have money."

"Yeah, I feel you. One more question—how do you know if the cops are coming or not?"

"The dragon. He watches the area I'm in and tells me everything I need to know. If the cops are coming, I know within five seconds of them calling it in."

Suddenly my discomfort about the robbery lifted and the thought of easy money was too tempting. "I see," I said. "If I'm ever in town and you need help with any jobs, let me know. I'm always down."

"For sure, G."

The next morning, we prepared for the party. We had Rich and Pump go get the food and drinks while Jay and I set up. After about an hour we had everything done and the food laid out. The first person to pull up was Sour Matt, one of the major players in L.A. If there were any major moves in L.A., you could 100 percent guarantee he'd be there. Then came Adam Ill, Bare Woods, Ahood, 100 Packs, Supreme Patty, and some of the Glock Team. It was a dream come true—I never thought I'd ever be in the same room as them. I had the best time of my life.

The next day, I was still pumped on the party and wanted to stay in L.A. I did not want to go back to my unglamorous life in Northern California. This was the life and I wanted it. Rich and

Pump had annoying, low-wage jobs, so they were down to stay, too. We decided to stay in L.A. with Jay, and we joined him hittin' stains with the help of the dragon.

Everything was going great until one night when I looked up at the dragon and heard him say, "Misuse of sacred power will end badly." I decided I was hearing things, because this life was too good. But it kept happening, night after night. I refused to believe this meant anything, although my gut was telling me to get out. Tempting the powers that try to hold the universe to a higher order is foolish. It's bound to go bad at some point—and as the law of the universe would have it, my day of reckoning came.

Jay had some expenses piling up and wanted us to do a job in a rich neighborhood nearby—Bel Air, to be exact. This was against his own rule about not doing a job near where you live. So, instead of driving over the Santa Monica Mountains into the Valley, we drove into the hills of Bel Air. This was going to be a house, not a business. I wasn't down, but when I complained to Jay, he told me to chill because the dragon never failed us.

When we arrived at our destination, I realized we were going to be breaking into someone's home. I could rationalize stealing from businesses, but someone's home was just not right.

"Jay, I don't like this. People live here," I said.

"What are you talking about? These people are rich as f***. They don't need all of this sh**."

Jay was determined. As we got out of the car, I swear the dragon was spewing fire out of his mouth. I tried one last protest. "The dragon told me we should not do this."

"Oh, since when are you the dragon authority? I am the one who speaks to the dragon, not you. You can just get your sorry ass out of here! I don't need this bullsh**. I do everything for you guys."

Jay was edgy and wasn't being careful. I could feel it, but I guess I wasn't going to leave Pump and Rich. Jay had scoped out the house ahead of time, but as our luck had run out, there was a silent alarm and cameras everywhere. We got in, and within minutes the cops were at the house and we were all under arrest. Stupid Jay tried to pull his gun out and the cops fired, hitting him. He left by ambulance and we left in the back of a cop car.

Turns out that Jay did not really own the house where we were staying, and he did not have that much money. It was all a lie. He was house sitting for a rich family who were in Europe on business. They had entrusted him with their house and their mystic dragon. Obviously, he misused the power and the dragon tried to warn me. I was a fool and now I was going to pay dearly, and for what?

Ruben Del Carmen De La Pena

A YOUNG BOY NAMED RONAN was a junior in high school. He was the kid who always ditched. You never found him on the school grounds. Ronan tended to keep to himself at times, but when he didn't, he hung out with the only two friends he wanted, Mark and Ruben. They had been friends since they all started Reno High and had become as close as brothers.

Reno was full of old people and hard drugs. Ronan had been a drug user before he came to high school. His dad didn't know how to handle a kid, so he basically let him do whatever he wanted. One day Ruben came up to Ronan and asked him if he wanted to smoke a little weed, because Ruben was tired of smoking alone. Ronan stood there trying to decide if he should or not. He had the devil on one side and the angel on the other. He missed being high, so Ronan let it take him over. Ronan wasn't expecting his life to change with one little plant. So, he said yes.

If you knew that your life could change with a choice you're going to make, would you still make that choice?

On this musty day, the two were on their way to the park just down the street from the school. They smoked and then went to the 7-Eleven next to the park. Later, Ruben went on his way because he had to catch the school bus home. Ronan was walking home when everything came back to

him—the craving of the one thing he didn't want to use anymore. He had allowed the temptation to take him over.

A few weeks after they had gone their separate ways, Ruben said to himself, "It's been two weeks since Ronan was at school. Where is he?"

Meanwhile, Ronan was ditching at the park down the street from the school. Eventually, Ronan showed up, but he was hiding from everyone because he had gotten back into using and abusing to the max. When Ruben saw him for the first time after he went missing, Ronan looked as if he had become a 40-year-old homeless man who got jumped by the whole school. Ruben didn't care—it was Ronan's choice. He could have said no—but he was a lost cause.

The one mistake people make is not realizing that the past is something you can never run away from. Your past will affect you no matter what; it will just affect you in different ways. Some people handle past mistakes well and learn from them. But others don't learn, and then try to run from their mistakes when they take over. Ronan tended to think he could both run from his past and also learn from it.

One day, Ronan was on his way to 7-Eleven to get some things for the house. On his way to the store, David, who he owed money to, stopped him. David was a scumbag, a 5'9" white boy who



Brick Mansion by Fabian Debora. Acrylic on canvas.

thought he was black (one of the most annoying things in the world). He had no personality and was hard to get along with.

David pulled up to Ronan in an all-black 4x4 truck and asked him, “Do you have my money?” Ronan stood there without knowing who David was, and then remembered—he was a drug dealer. There’s no way this would go well. Ronan owed David money because he was always saying he was going to pay him back for all the coke and meth David gave him.

David asked again, but had a different tone of voice, as though he demanded it. “Ronan! Where’s my money at? I ain’t playing with you no more! If you ain’t got my money, I’m a have to kill you right here and right now!” David wasn’t really someone you wanted to piss off. He had a scar on his eyebrow and he always had a gun on him, no matter what.

Ronan started to shake and said in a worried voice, “I’ll have your money by the end of the week.” David let him have until then and went on his way.

Ronan ran as fast as he could to Mark’s house, praying Mark could help him out.

He knocked on the door as loud as he could. When Mark came to the door, he said, “What’s up? Why you banging on my door?”

Ronan said anxiously, “Yo, I need money so I

can pay David back.”

Mark replied, “I ain’t gonna give you no more money. You still owe me from the last time.”

Ronan promised, “I will pay you back. I just need some money to pay him off.”

Mark said, “I can’t.”

Ronan then ran to Ruben, the next person he thought he could trust. He asked Ruben the same thing he asked Mark, and Ruben said, “You lucky I just got paid. How much you need?”

Ronan replied, “As much as you can. Anything works.”

Ronan and Ruben walked down to the bank. On their way back, they met up with Mark, who lived close to the bank. All three of them walked towards Ronan’s house. On the way, Ronan asked Ruben, “Can I talk to you?” They went around the corner and Ruben gave him money to pay back Mark. They made it to Ronan’s house, and his mom, who was like a mom Ruben and Mark never really had, made something that looked like some sort of sandwich. It was good.

After a couple days went by, Ronan began to worry because even with the money Ruben gave him, he did not have enough money to pay Mark. And by now, he had spent some of it. With two days left, he had to get more and had no way of doing that. Ronan was on his way home when he got a call. Pulling his phone out, he saw it was his

mom. Curious as to why his mom was calling, he answered. His mom said, “You need to hurry up and come home!”

Ronan thought it had something to do with David, so he hurried home. He was almost out of breath from non-stop running and because of his tar-filled lungs from smoking.

When he made it home, he saw his mom crying. He ran up to her and asked, “What happened, did anyone hurt you?”

She answered, “No, we won \$25,000!” They started to jump in joy. Ronan asked his mom if he could have some of the money to pay back Ruben and Mark. She agreed. Ronan called Ruben and Mark, “You both need to come over.”

Ten minutes later, Mark and Ruben arrived. Ronan told them to sit down. He went to his room and returned with two small boxes. He gave one to Ruben and the other to Mark. When they opened their boxes and saw all the money Ronan owed them, plus more, they all got happy. Ronan tried to think of all the people who he owed money to, but he was so full of joy he forgot he still owed money to David.

Two days later, Ronan and Ruben were in downtown Reno when Ronan got a call from a random number. He was about to let it go to voice-mail, but something in his head told him to pick up the phone. It was David. As Ronan said hello,

David said, “Time’s up! Do you have my money or not?”

“Nah,” Ronan replied.

Little did Ronan and Ruben know, but David and Mark had become close friends. They had kept it from both Ronan and Ruben, but even so, what was Mark going to do? He would never do anything to hurt Ronan or Ruben because he was like a brother to them.

David told Ronan, “I have been told you were able to pay back two other people, but you weren’t able to pay me back. Alright, well, there are other ways you can pay me back. I guess I have to take a little visit to your house.”

Ronan ended the call and told Ruben everything. They ran as fast as they could to Ronan’s house. On their way, they called Mark and told him to meet them at Ronan’s house.

Mark asked, “Why?”

“Because David is going there and my mom is home,” Ronan said.

“Alright,” Mark said. “I’ll meet you there. I got my strap on me.”

Ronan and Ruben made it to Ronan’s house when Mark texted Ronan saying, *Yo! I’ll be there in two minutes.* As Ronan approached his house, he saw the door had been broken open. They had no time to wait for Mark, so Ruben told Ronan he would go around back.

Ronan ran up to the front door as fast as he could, trying to move stealthy. As he opened the door, he heard his mom crying. “Why are you doing this?” she said.

Ronan was scared for his mom and rushed in to see a gun to his mom’s head. He could not see the man’s face because the man was wearing a mask loosely tied around his head. As sweat dripped down Ronan’s head, he was able to get behind the man with the gun. He rushed at him, but it was like this person already knew Ronan was there.

Ruben got in through the back door and saw Ronan and his mom at gunpoint. Ruben rushed the person with the gun and pushed him as hard as he could against wall. The man dropped the gun, and Ruben and Ronan pinned him to the ground.

When Ronan took off the man’s mask, he and Ruben were shocked to see who it was. It was Mark, someone they thought would never do anything like this to them! They called the police, and Mark is still in jail.

Mark gets out next year, but this experience showed me that no matter how close I am to a person or what I may have done for them, they can still stab me in the back. To this day, I don’t know what Ronan is doing. All I know is that he lives somewhere in California. The last time he texted me was about four months ago, and that was the last time we ever spoke to each other. Even though he put me through all this bad stuff, I still wish the best for him.

IT WAS JUST LIKE any other winter night in Santa Cruz, cold and dark, but the sky was the clearest I'd seen in a long time, with no clouds in sight. The stars were bright and the night sky was full of color. All I could think about was getting home to the maguey fields.

Ever since I was little, I enjoyed lying in the maguey fields and staring at the stars. It was always so relaxing. I could escape my life and let my imagination run wild, creating figures in the sky out of the stars and trying to find new stars to make new figures.

But tonight was different—very different. When I got home, I saw that neither of my parent's cars was parked outside. I was rushed by my dog, Cloud, in excitement, tail wagging and all. As I entered my house, I noticed no one was home. *Strange*, I thought, since it was 11 p.m. and usually everyone would be home already, getting ready to go to bed. I tried to call my mom, but got no answer—it went straight to voicemail. I tried calling my dad and brother and the same thing happened—straight to voicemail. At this point, I started getting really confused and a little bit worried.

Accompanied by my dog, I went around the house to see if I could find any clue as to where my family had gone. First, I went to my parents' room. Every light was off except for the dimly lit bathroom light. As I entered the bathroom, my senses were bombarded with a heavy aroma of what smelled like a lawn being mowed. I was very

confused because the bathroom looked perfectly normal. Then I noticed the smell was coming from outside through an open window.

As I was going around the back of the house to see what the smell was, my dog bolted to the maguey fields. There was a dim light coming from the fields. I chased after my dog, calling his name and trying to get him to stop chasing whatever he was going after. As we got closer and closer to the maguey fields, the dim light started to get brighter, and the aroma of cut grass was more noticeable.

When we entered the fields, my dog dashed toward a maguey plant that appeared to be glowing. I was in awe because I'd never seen a plant glow at all, especially as bright as this one was. I wanted to take a picture of it, but when I tried using my phone, it just glitched out and completely shut off. Soon after, I started getting really dizzy and felt extremely weak. My vision was starting to tunnel and darken. Suddenly, I dropped to the floor and passed out.

I woke up inside a concrete room with a major headache. I was cuffed to a pole and everything that was in my pockets had been emptied out. The only things I still had were my shirt and my pants. The room was very dark and cold, with a lamp in the corner of the room and a wooden stair set that went upstairs. I could occasionally hear the ceiling above me crack and squeak. Suddenly, I heard footsteps coming towards the top of the stairs.

“You think he'd be awake by now?”



*Magüey and Cosmos by
Raoul de la Sota. 47x36”,
acrylic on canvas, 2009*

“I don’t know, but be quiet, we don’t want him to hear us.”

I heard someone jiggle a key into the door. I started to panic. I closed my eyes and acted like I was still passed out, my heartbeat racing. I had no idea what was going to happen.

There I lay on the floor as the mysterious men walked down the wooden stair set.

“Is he awake?”

“Shut up, no he’s not.”

“Should I just leave it here, then? Or should I...”

“Yeah, leave it here, you idiot.”

“Okay, I’ll just put it right here.”

I could hear one of the men walk towards me

and hear a key dangling on his pants. As he entered my presence, I could smell a strong scent of horrible body odor.

“Should I put it here or here?”

I heard one of the men whisper loudly, “Why does it matter, just put it next to him!”

“Okay, man, chill.”

As I heard the men turn away from me and walk back up the stairs, I couldn’t help but take a little peek. One of the guys, who was really short with super long bushy black hair, looked like he wasn’t the smartest guy. But the second was a tall buff guy with all sorts of tattoos on his arms and face and all over his shaved head. Both of them looked like they were homeless. They wore ripped, stained clothes with no shoes and had dirty hands and feet.

As soon as the door closed behind them, I sat up and looked at what they brought me. It was a sandwich on a plate. Of course, I took the sandwich apart, piece by piece, to see if they had slipped anything into the ingredients. I didn’t trust it one bit and I was too paranoid to take a bite.

I tried my hardest to not make any noise, but every time I moved, the cuffs on my wrist would scratch and bang against the metal pole I was connected to. Not a clear thought went through my head—every thought I had raced through my mind. Where am I? Where is my family? Are they here? How am I going to get out? What’s going to

happen to me? Will they kill me? I was terrified of not knowing what was going to happen. I had to leave. I had to find a way out. I looked around the room to see if I could find an escape route. There was nothing except the door and a small window that looked like it was painted over with black. Seconds felt like minutes and minutes felt like hours.

I could still hear footsteps and muffled speech upstairs. The muffled speech turned into muffled yelling. I heard a door slam and a car start and then leave. I could still hear footsteps, but not as often, and every time I heard them, I could also hear keys jingle. I was convinced the man with the shaved head had left. It felt like an hour went by. I was so hungry.

I stared at the sandwich they left me and felt defeated. It felt like I was never going to leave this place. Then I got an idea on how I could escape. I would break the plate the sandwich was on, grab a broken piece of plate and stab the short guy with it. I would then get his keys and make my escape. It was risky and I had never been the violent type, but I felt it was the only way I could leave.

I picked up the plate and was prepared to break it. I was so anxious, because I knew as soon as I broke the plate, the man would come downstairs. I lifted the plate, shielded my eyes and threw it on the floor next to me. As soon as the plate broke, my heart started racing. I tried to find any sharp piece of plate before the man came downstairs. When I

found a sharp piece, I quickly sat on it. I took the sandwich and gently tossed it behind me.

The door opened, but the man stayed upstairs next to the door, out of view.

“Hello? You awake yet?”

“...Yeah. I dropped my sandwich,” I said anxiously.

“Oh, do you want another one?” I could tell the man didn’t want to come near me for whatever reason.

“Sure, I would like another one.”

“Okay, I’ll be back.”

I heard the man walk away from the door. A few minutes later, he came down the stairs with another sandwich on a plate. He stopped a few feet away from me and slid the plate next to my feet.

“Here you go, another one,” the man said with a dumb smirk on his face.

“Uh... thank you.”

“You’re welcome, need anything else?”

“Yeah, could you get me the sandwich behind me?”

When he came close to me to get the sandwich, at the right moment, I gathered all of my nerve and frantically thrust the plate piece into any part of his body I could reach. I didn’t know what I was doing, but just kept hitting him as hard as I could where I saw skin, feeling the plate piece pierce his flesh. He was surprised and in an instant, I grabbed the keys off of his belt loop. Before

he could respond, I freed myself and fled. I didn’t look back, but heard him moan.

I ran with all of my strength, pumped by adrenalin, up the stairs, slamming the door and shoving a nearby cabinet against the door.

My first thought was to find my phone and call the police. My second thought was, “Where is my family? Are they here? Are they okay?” As I stumbled out the door, I was immediately greeted by my dog’s frantic barks. Thankfully, he was not harmed, but was tied to a fence post, frustrated with his inability to help. We were happy to see each other and I immediately freed him. “Cloud, good boy!” I shouted, as he jumped all over me. He then bolted right for the maguery fields. I chased after him shouting, “Wait, Cloud, no don’t go there!” I noticed the maguery plants were still glowing, but even brighter, so I was afraid. “Stop, Cloud, stop!” But he wouldn’t listen, and I thought, *No, not again!*

As I ran towards the maguery fields, I saw figures sitting among the plants, looking at the stars. As I got closer, I realized it was my mom, dad, and brother. Cloud was jumping with joy to see them, licking their faces.

Still in shock, I ran faster towards my family and started to stutter, “W-what just h-ap-pend? Where w-were you guys?” Out of breath, I fell to my knees and gasped for air.

My mom came up from behind me and grabbed my shoulder, “It’s okay, Mijo, it’s all okay.”

Jade Fuhrman

IT IS JUST BEFORE sunrise on Easter morning in Los Angeles. I open my eyes and see an egg basket at the end of the bed. I hop up, grab the basket, and run down the hall towards the sliding glass door. Once I get outside, the cool breeze makes me shiver and I run out into the damp grass, searching for eggs. My mom is the one who hid the eggs, so I know where they all are, and which ones have money in them. As I run around looking for the golden egg, my older brother, Tosch, is doing the same. “I must find it before him,” I think to myself.

I round a corner when, all of a sudden, I am in the air, and then slam into the pebbles below me. I look up and see my brother’s head poking through the swirling stars. His mouth starts moving, trying to tell me something, but I cannot hear him over the ringing in my ears. Next thing I know, my brother is picking me up and running me off to the car.

I must have passed out because when I come to, my head is throbbing and all I can hear is my heartbeat pounding in my ears. The pain is too much, so I put my head between my knees as we inch through traffic. Blood covers my hands and arms, like I had dipped them in red paint. Tosch turns around from the front seat and says something I can’t understand. Then he starts climbing into the back with me. Once he gets in the back and buckles up next to me, he turns and says, “We are almost there.”

I don’t even know where “there” is, but any-

where is better than the cigarette-smelling car I am in. I look out the window and see a minivan pull up to the stop light. In the front seat, there is a soccer mom and behind her is the rest of the team. One little girl looks over at me and starts screaming and pointing. The mom looks over with a shocked face. I start uncontrollably crying, so my brother leans over and squeezes me back into comfort. Tosch is always doing nice things for me. Out of all my siblings, Tosch and I get along the best. I sit across the back seat from Tosch, just looking at him thinking about how safe he makes me feel, even though my head is cracked open. The thing I will remember most about the car ride are all the red lights.

Once we get to the hospital, nurses storm me. All of them talk to me in calm voices, asking, “Are you okay, sweetie? How are you feeling? Do you need anything, honey?” I hate it! One nurse notices I am getting overwhelmed, so she tells me to just pretend I am asleep when they come in the room.

Her advice works on all the nurses, but when the doctor comes in, he doesn’t care if I am sleeping or not. The doctor has hands like ice and he asks me too many questions—questions the nurses already asked me. Right before I can tell the doctor to shut up and ask the nurses, the door swings open and my mom comes stomping in with her boyfriend, Andy, behind her. She is yelling at him about how I could have died and she wouldn’t have even known. As she keeps yelling at Andy, I take the chance to start telling the doctor to back off



with those icy hands of his. My mom then turns away from Andy and tells the doctor to get out of the room.

The door closes slowly. My mom waits for the *click* of the door before she turns around to me and starts yelling again. When she finally calms down, I explain what actually happened and Tosch fills in the parts I forget. I also tell her with excitement how the doctor had to shave a part of my hair so he could give me stitches. I show her the area where the stitches are, just to gross her out. I also tell her how the doctor wouldn't stop talking about how I shouldn't sleep too much or something, be-

cause I have a concussion. My mom says that isn't good and I shouldn't joke about it.

"Can we leave yet? I feel fine and I hate hospitals." My mom sends Andy to get the doctor. He comes back with the doctor, who is holding some papers.

"Sign these and you can go," the doctor says.

My mom grabs all the papers and quickly starts filling them out. A little later, a nurse comes into the room with a wheelchair and takes the paperwork. She tells me I have to use the wheelchair until I leave the hospital because of their dumb policy. It doesn't matter to me. I don't want to walk



Ancient Skies: Los Angeles by Raoul de la Sota. 18 x 46", acrylic on velveteen.

anyway because the hospital is way too big and filled with people who ask too many questions.

By the time we leave the hospital, the sun is going down and the stars are starting to pop out, one by one. In-n-Out Burger is the next stop before going back to the house. We missed all the Easter traditions except for my favorite one. Once we get back to the house, everyone in Andy's family is in the backyard around the big fire pit, roasting marshmallows. Every face I look at has a fat smile going from ear to ear. I sit by the fire on a big log, while my brother grabs marshmallows and sticks

for himself and me. As we roast marshmallows, we all start to talk about the exciting event of the day. The family goes around the circle asking me questions about what happened and everything.

Eventually everyone, except my brother, goes inside. Tosch and I sit in silence, watching the fire crackle and looking at the beautiful stars. I don't know any of the constellations we are looking at, but Tosch can name hundreds. The stars have always been able to calm me down, so after a day like this, looking at the stars is the best way to end Easter.



Testament of the Holy Spirit by Eduardo Carrillo.
4 x 6', oil on panel, 1972.

Kalela Hatfield

MY GRANDMA HAS three rules: Be polite and respectful to every adult in the house, use your manners, and be home by dinner or don't come home at all. The last one mainly applied to my brothers, because they came home late every day. They'd pay me five dollars to open the door and keep the non-stop yapping Chihuahuas, Lady and Badu, quiet long enough for them to sneak in. I have three older brothers and they always got into trouble, so I understood why my grandpa slept with his car keys under his pillow.

I would be playing outside when my grandma called, "Dinner's ready!" through the kitchen window. I didn't have to ask what was for dinner when I could smell the sweet tang of the red beans and rice, which was one of my favorite meals. I'd say bye to my cousins Kiki and Amari and they'd bolt down the street to Uncle Bruh's house.

I was always playing in the mud when I wasn't supposed to, so my sisters would lecture me while they hosed me down outside. "Kalela, what did we tell you about playing in the mud? If grandma sees you, we're all gonna get it." The hose water was ice cold and my sisters showed no mercy, spraying me off 'til my teeth chattered from the cold. I'd have to sneak, soaking wet, through the sliding glass door, careful not to step on the living room's ancient rug. I would wash up and bury my wet muddy clothes on the bottom of the dirty clothes hamper and walk down to the kitchen.

The table was big and square with a glass mid-

dle. My grandma always made up the plates and put down the tablemats she'd had since before my mom was born. They were made of soft fabrics, decorated with themes of Christmas, spring, or fall. Some even had words stitched on them, always with the same prayer we used to bless our food. "God is good, God is great, thank you for the food on my plate." Seating wasn't important to my sisters, but it was to me. I sat in the same spot every day for every meal. It was the seat with my back to the window because I liked how the sun made my silverware sparkle like diamonds.

At dinner, my sisters and I mostly talked about what we saw on TV that day, like *Crocodile Hunter*, *That's So Raven*, *The Proud Family*, and if my grandparents were in the living room, the news. If not TV, we talked about anything slightly interesting that happened at school, like my sister attempting to master her handstand and falling flat on her back every time. I'd usually end up laughing so loud my grandma would take my dinner away and I'd have to go to sleep early.

Even though the living room was the center of the house, it felt like our lives revolved around the kitchen. We ate at the table, we talked at the table, we fought at the table, and occasionally slept at the table for not finishing our food. We were not allowed to leave until the plate was clean. I was always in the kitchen, which was weird, because the kitchen reeked of Pinesol and it was always blazing hot, because my grandma was constantly

cooking. She made plates to give out at church gatherings, like dirty rice and cornbread with collard greens or desserts like sweet potato pie, lemon pound cake, and peach cobbler. No matter how much we begged, she never gave us a slice.

I used to hide under the table when I wanted to be alone, but mostly because, being the youngest of seven kids, you got last pick on everything unless you got there first. So, I always had to be first. This was especially important at dinner, because if my brothers finished their food and were still hungry, they'd devour your plate and dessert. We always fought over the corner pieces of cornbread.

All my siblings went to different schools, so every time we came together, we had story after story about what happened at school that day. I never told a story, but I would always listen to theirs. The kitchen table to my family was way more than just a place to eat. It was the one place where we could be mad going to the table and smiling and laughing leaving it. It was a place where great food and family all came together. I can't even begin to think of a place, or anything in the world, which can bring people together like a hot meal at the dinner table does.

Isaiah Hernandez

HE LIFTS HER FROM the waves as her body relaxes into his arms, confident he will take her to safety. The painting, *River Rescue*, by John Valadez, brings me back to a time when I was a kid and saved my younger sister, Sophia, from drowning.

My family and I were up in Sonora, visiting my grandparents, a pleasant trip which happened every couple months. As a kid, I loved driving up the scenic roads, winding and spiraling from trees all around, to an opening where you could look down on cities or see more of the green valley below. My grandparents had a house on one of the bigger mountains, a gated community surrounded by nature with trails around most every corner. The paths surrounding their house all lead to different areas of the community. You could head north through their backyard and continue going up the mountain, take a hike to the top, or you could go down southeast and hit the reservoir at the base of the mountain.

On this particular sunny Saturday, we all decided to go swimming in one of the many nearby rivers. We headed out towards Tuolumne, venturing into miles of running river. We followed the moving water until we found a pull out on the road where the water ran off, creating cascades falling into a riverbed. It looked like something out of one of those, “Travel here!” commercials. The water was clear, surrounded by oak and aspen trees. It was a nice day outside, so my parents and grandparents set up food and seats on shore while my

brother, sister, and I started swimming.

At this time in my life, I was probably around nine and my sister Sophia was around four. We were all having fun hanging out in the water for about an hour, until my parents said lunch was ready. Everyone had decided to get out and eat, but Sophia and I continued swimming. Being young and not all that skilled of a swimmer, she was wearing a lifejacket to keep her afloat. She was floating around and having fun, but slowly she started flipping over. I was twenty feet away on the opposite end of the waterbed and had to act fast.

Before I even realized it, I dove towards her. The only thing between Sophia and I was a rock about six feet up. It was too long to swim around, and I had to clamber above it. Slipping and sliding with every move, it was a challenge to climb, but I wouldn't let it stop me from getting to her. Just making it over, I slid down the other side only to land in rocks as sharp as razors. With one final leap, I finally had her in my reach. Sophia was still freaking out when I picked her up out of the water, but managed to calm down as she realized she was okay. Taking her to shore, my family was nearly hysterical, but glad she was safe. Once everyone collected their thoughts, we ate in silence, still in shock of what just happened. Everyone was kind of over being in the water, so we cut our trip to the river short.

Some years later, as I reflect on the family trip which could have changed our family forev-



River Rescue by John M. Valdez, 10 x 14', acrylic on aluminum panel, 2016.

er, I am aware I have learned a lot of important things about life. Life has taught me you could lose a loved one in just a couple seconds. A precious life you could've known for all your life or maybe someone you recently met could be lost. Moreover, there are things I've noticed about myself, like, I usually respond well in emergency situations. I've had a few other experiences. For example, I pulled a friend out of the road when a car was speeding down and almost hit her. I've also had to perform the Heimlich on my dad because he was choking on food.

From years ago to today, my younger sister and I have stayed pretty close. I often find myself being the one to take care of her and being there for her through whatever comes up in her life. A big part of what I do with her at home is spend time watching her and hanging out. She and I will usually

watch TV together, play video games, or I'll take her with me on drives, or to get food if I'm bored. I think part of why we are so close is because of the time we spend with each other and because of the fact I saved her life.

As Sophia grows older, stepping into her teenage years, I find myself back at the Tuolumne River. I will always look at her with an innocence which can only be found in youth. But she will soon be floating around in the pool of life and have experiences which will continue to define the woman she will become. I find myself somewhat responsible in raising her, and I'm always looking out for her. I realize there is a lot in store for her and myself, as we find ourselves in unfamiliar water. No matter what happens, I know that should she ever begin to flip or spiral over, I will be there to pick her up.

Lalo Michicol

I WAS SITTING DOWN, enjoying a burger at a graduation party, but I felt uneasy, out of place, and bored. My mom's friend was throwing the party for her son.

When I looked around, I saw the blank faces of people I didn't know. Earlier in the day it had been foggy, but now it was sunny with a faint ocean breeze. I had been back for three days, and it was the perfect start to summer in Santa Cruz. I could already tell I would not miss the 110-degree Fresno heat waves. Our family had moved to Fresno so I could stay out of trouble, but instead, I made more trouble, just so I could get back home. I was finally back and enjoying the pleasant smell of the smoky grilled meat and the juicy burgers. With no one to talk to, all I had were my thoughts and my burger. Time is a funny thing—one minute I'm eating my burger and the next minute I'm caught up in old memories.

A year before I left for Fresno, it seemed like it was always Isaiah, Santiago, and I. We spent our time gaming, watching movies, and just chillin'. Isaiah and Santiago were my uncles. At the time, Isaiah was the funny, over-protective one. He was well respected among his friends and by my family. Santiago was the quiet one, and I was the active, talkative one. I looked up to my Uncle Isaiah, and I liked hanging out with him because he was always so exciting and fun. I felt really safe when I was around him. We had an 'at home' relationship, and did not hang out socially outside of the

family. I think it was because Isaiah was older, more mature, and was living 'the lifestyle.' On the other hand, Santiago and I were young and probably annoying.

"Lalo, do you want another burger?" my mom asked. Lost in my thoughts, I did not immediately hear her.

"Lalo. Lalo!" Finally, hearing my name, I realized my mom had been talking to me and I hadn't been paying attention. No, I didn't want more food, and I didn't really want to be here anymore. In fact, I needed to be somewhere else.

Anxious to get out of this party, I asked my mom and grandma where Isaiah was. It had been awhile since I had seen him and was curious about what he was up to. My grandma said, "He's at his friend's house. Call him."

I called him, and he answered, "What's up?" the way he usually did.

"It's Lalo. Do you want to hang out with me and Santiago? I just got back from Fresno." I was really excited to hear his voice, but downplayed my nervousness and tried to play it cool.

I thought he was going to say, "No, you can't come over," because when I was younger, he wouldn't really let me hang around with him and his friends. I assumed it was because he couldn't trust me. I understood though, because I would have done the same. After all, who would want some youngsters tagging along? So, it surprised

me when he said, “If you want, get dropped off, come over. I’m over here at Gordo’s pad. We are just kickin’ it.”

My mom dropped me off at Gordo’s, and as I stepped out of the car, I saw my Uncle Isaiah and his friends sitting down in a circle, just chilling and hanging out. This party was already looking up. Gangster rap was playing on a loudspeaker, and I immediately felt like I belonged. As my Uncle Santiago and I walked towards my Uncle Isaiah, he stood up, smiled, and gave us the handshake.

He then introduced us to his friends, who all said “What’s up?” and offered us food. We were already full by then because we had eaten one too many burgers at the other party.

I finally sat down as my Uncle Isaiah and his friends continued to converse amongst themselves. At first, it seemed like they were watching what they were talking about and considering whether they would share their conversation. But, after they got to know me better, and asked me some questions, they made me feel comfortable. I think they felt more at ease with me too.

That BBQ was just the beginning of Isaiah’s and my ‘not-just-family’ relationship. After that day, I felt like I was Uncle Isaiah’s friend. Truth be told, I always looked up to my Uncle Isaiah. My dad would come and go but mostly was out of the picture. Uncle Isaiah was our male head of the family.

As the days and months passed, I got to hang

out with my Uncle Isaiah more often. I remember one time waking up and going over to his house early in the day. There was a soccer game between Manchester United and Chelsea we were planning to bet on. This was nothing new. We were very competitive about a lot of things and often placed bets against each other. The team I bet on, Manchester United, won. Just as promised, Isaiah paid me \$20; he always kept his word. I was in no hurry to go home. So later when he went to work, I stayed at his house.

Around 7 p.m., bored and wanting to do something, I called Santiago to see what he was up to, but he was not home. I called my Uncle Isaiah next, and asked if I could go to a party he was going to. He said yes, but I would have to go with my Aunt Lucia, who was about 20 years old. I called her and she agreed to take me, but before she hung up she warned me by saying, “I’m gonna pick you up in 30 minutes, you better be ready!” I knew her, she was kind of a hard head. She meant business. I rushed to get in the shower and be ready.

When she got to my house she honked impatiently, and I ran out, fully knowing she would leave me if I wasn’t out in two seconds flat. I was happy to see Santiago was already in the car and I wasn’t going to be all alone at this party. Just as fast as she arrived is how fast we got to the party. Lucia knew the girl who was throwing the birthday party, so she knocked on the door and shouted out, “Hey girl, Happy Birthday!”



Brotherhood by Fabian Debora. Acrylic on canvas, 2013.

I stood at the door feeling awkward because I didn't know the birthday girl, so I just said flatly, "Happy Birthday." She welcomed me and Santiago in, and just like that, the birthday girl and Lucia left us there, and we had to make our way around the place. There were a lot of people. I quickly looked around and tried to find Isaiah. When I found him, Santiago and I rushed to the kitchen table where he was sitting with four of his friends. The music was blasting, there were girls everywhere, and everyone was drinking. Santiago

and I were the youngest people there, so I believe I can speak for both of us when I say, we were really nervous, but wanted to have a good time. It was our first real party, but definitely not our last. It seemed like the more we hung out, the more real everything got.

That fall, Santiago, our close homie, Jimmy, and I were excited to go trick-or-treating on Halloween. We were a trio and always together. We planned on trick-or-treating around the neighborhood where we grew up. Both our families had

lived in the same complex since we were kids.

Halloween day, we did what we normally do—hung out and went to see what was good around the neighborhood. At around 5 p.m., we decided to head home and get our costumes ready. Santiago and I wore masks, and Jimmy dressed as a “gangster.” I thought it was funny and really paid no attention to why it might not be a good costume to wear in the neighborhood.

We went all around our neighborhood and each filled up a pillowcase full of candy. Once it got dark, we went back to the complex to hang out and trade candy. Then we each went home.

I planned on staying at my grandma’s that night and “game it” with my uncles, but Isaiah surprised me and asked us if we wanted to go downtown with him later. Of course, I immediately responded, “Yes!”

He told us, “Be ready. Jose is picking us up in a little.”

Isaiah didn’t wear a costume because he had given his masks to Santiago and me. Jose picked us up at 10 p.m. in his nice black BMW. Isaiah sat in the front passenger seat, and Santiago and I sat in the back. I remember Jose blasting “Bounce Out” by Mozzy so loud I felt like my ear drums were going to pop. Once we got downtown, it took us half an hour to find parking because it was so crowded. It was my first time going downtown on Halloween and I really liked seeing the variety of people in their different costumes. But, of course, with so

many people in one spot at a time, there was going to be trouble.

It was Halloween and without a mask, it was strange to see how many people recognized my Uncle Isaiah. It was good to run into some friends, but kinda sketchy when we saw some people my uncle had problems with in the past. All I can say is things got real too quick. One moment we were having fun people watching—the next, my uncle was calling my aunt to come pick Santiago and me up. It was around midnight by then. Once he knew we were okay, he left us and I hoped he was going to be fine.

At around 4 a.m., my mom woke me up from a deep sleep. We had received a phone call from my grandma. She had called my mom, crying and saying Isaiah had been arrested and the cops had just left her door. At first when my mom broke the news to my sisters and me, I just put my head down trying not to laugh. I thought of it as a joke and assumed he was going to be out later that day, like the rest of his arrests.

Our whole family attended his court date early Monday morning. He barely looked at us, maybe thinking if he saw the sad faces of the ladies in our family, he would break down. All I could wonder, while I looked at him in the orange attire, was why everyone was so sad. I didn’t understand. Maybe I just didn’t want to accept the version of what the police alleged happened.

I must admit that for a while I didn’t accept

it. I couldn't understand much of what the judge said. All I remember hearing was the judge talking about so many years. It scared me. When court ended I remember rushing to Isaiah's attorney. I was so confused and I wanted to know exactly what to expect. One thing I will never forget was the attorney telling me, "Isaiah could be in a lot of trouble if found guilty." It was a sobering thought.

That same night, Isaiah called us. Everyone wanted to talk to him. It felt like forever before the phone was passed to me. I only got to talk to him for about a minute because the phone calls from the County were only 15 minutes. Time seemed to go so fast. He did tell me, "Lalo, do me a favor. Be strong and help the family get through this." I ended the conversation the same way I have ended every conversation we've had since then, simply saying, "Stay up, call soon."

The following weekend, we were able to visit him at the County Jail, and it sucked. Our visit was through glass and over the phone, but something was always better than nothing. Visits were an hour, so we had to take turns to see him. I got a good 20 minutes to talk to him. Not once did I bring anything up to him about what happened, because the cops monitored everything we talked

about and I wanted to make sure he was okay.

At one visit, before he talked to anyone else, he said to my grandma, "Put Lalo on the phone." I walked up to the seat, and he told me, "It sucks all this had to happen, but I need you to stay strong and out of trouble. Stop hanging out with the homies. I don't want you to go down the same path I did. Go to school. Do good and take care of all the females in our family. You and Santiago are the only guys around, so if you're not there for them, no one will be." I could hear regret in his voice, and I hoped I could step up to take care of our family.

It is hard not having Uncle Isaiah around. When I was around him, I had seen glimpses of the possibility of prison, but didn't ever really expect it to happen to him. Everything happened so fast. Life changed so fast. Now that he's been transferred to prison, I don't take for granted the minutes we have over the phone, or the months we have to wait for the possibility of seeing him, even if it is just through glass. For now, I do all I can to help out, and do the things he would have done for the family if he was around. Sometimes I reminisce about all the good times we had together, and hope we can be together soon.

Annie Monroe

THE BLARING FLUORESCENT beams of white light in the so-called ‘nurse’s’ office, along with the stale scent of popsicle sticks and rubbing alcohol, was just the cherry on top of a wondrous week I had. At least I would be able to go home and get some sleep. My parents had been in a screaming match for hours the night before. How could I sleep through that?

As I wait in the office for my tired mother to pick me up, my school nurse crouches down near my chair to explain my parents weren’t picking up the phone. They had both picked up extra shifts at the offices where they work—to avoid coming home sooner, or being home at all. The only other person who could even legally pick me up from school was my distant sister, Becky. When her dad ran off and when mine came into the picture, she did the same. As I wait for her to show up to my tiny middle school, I try to think about conversations which won’t aggravate her, such as, “Nice weather, huh?”

The screeching tires I hear out front are a signal that it is time to leave. As I step into the blazing sun, walking towards the beat up Cadillac Cimarron, I can almost *see* fire pour from her ears, while she waits for me to get in.

As I buckle my seatbelt, I hear a faint “sssup” coming through Becky’s gritted teeth. Can you tell we don’t talk much?

“Oh, hi,” I say in an equally bitter tone. As the

words leave my mouth, I realize I am being just as difficult, so I weakly try to lighten the situation by saying “N-nice weather, eh?”

“Deb, it’s hotter than the gates of hell,” she responds briskly.

As I hear the conversation falling apart before it has even begun, all I can think of to say is, “Well, some people like hot weather and I was just wondering...” I say it under my breath, because honestly, I don’t really think the weather is a topic of interest. After our messy interaction, we roll up to Becky’s dingy, shared apartment with some low-life college kids. As we step outside of her car, the heat hits me like a ton of bricks, and the bricks are on fire. I can only pray the complex she rents has air conditioning. When we finally rush into her surprisingly clean home, the air conditioning I am yearning for has almost a lukewarm ‘used air’ sort of smell. It’s the best I can get at this point.

I walk around to explore the place, but am stopped by a tall, lanky-yet-built figure standing in front of me. Everyone, meet the world’s biggest moron, Becky’s boyfriend, Brock. The thing which catches my eye is the new, slightly infected tattoo just under his black undershirt which reads “No Ragrets.” *Please be a joke.*

Brock is a tall white guy with sandy blonde, wavy hair, which would look better if he washed it every once in a while. He is wearing black skinny jeans and socks which were once white, but now

have a grey/brown hue to them with holes in the big toes and heels of his feet. I also notice he is wearing a vintage Polaroid around his somewhat sweaty neck, snapping pictures of random crap around the house. Before I can get a word out, he suggests we all go to the complex pool with their muddy dog, C-Mark.

“I’m not getting in a pool with a dog with *that* many diseases on it. Have you ever washed him?” I say with more attitude than needed.

“Good idea. You can wash him. There’s a hose outside, have fun.” Becky says in a petty monotone.

You know the feeling when you wait a while for the weather to cool down, but then, when you head outside, it’s still horrifically hot? That is exactly the weather here. When we get to the pool, I can only think about having to clean their nasty dog for them. Maybe it’ll live longer if I clean it.

As I’m washing C-Mark, I can feel his dirty fur go from crunchy and grainy, to soft and shiny with blonde highlights.

Becky and I have both changed our clothes into pool wear, and it is a good thing we are swimming in gym class today because I have my striped two-piece suit. Becky is wearing her yellow high-waisted shorts along with a red and white striped cropped shirt. Her hair is tied back.

I can’t help but notice Becky and Brock are having a very loud discussion. Something about

him not paying rent and being ‘too good for a job at 7-Eleven,’ but I can’t hear it very well. If I even look up at her, I know I will just end up feeding the flame, so I might as well keep to myself. Suddenly I see a defeated Becky sit on the wine-colored concrete stairs. It is sort of an odd sight to see her look even the least bit inferior.

“I’m sorry, Deb. I know you’d rather be anywhere but here, but I’m trying.” Becky says in a tone low enough to mumble, but loud enough for me to make out what she means. It is almost hard to believe she’s cooling down. To be honest, she hasn’t been there for me. Like ever. I’m all alone, and she knows it.

“I know things with mom and dad are crap. Bu-”

“Oh you do, is that right?” I say as I cut her off. *Why in the hell would I start something with her?* I think to myself.

“You know what? It’s whatever now, so let’s stop whining about it, yeah?” I say in a phony tone. As my sentence comes to an end, I see her face quickly drop and go from optimistic to numb. A few seconds go by in a comfortable silence, and it kind of sinks in that Becky’s fire has perished.

Becky lifts herself off of the crimson painted stairs and doesn’t dare show me her face. Just hearing Brock snap his obnoxious camera makes steam practically spew out of her ears. Seems good ol’ Becky is back. In a subtle fit of rage she grabs the



Pool Party by John M. Valdez. 69 x 107", oil on paper, 1986.

hose and turns it on to full blast while gripping it hard enough to kill a man. In Brock's tiny mind, he can't tell she is going to ruin his life later.

As he is taking probably the worst pictures out there, he decides to take a picture of Becky hosing

the pool. Little do I know I will be in the background washing their dog.

"Aaalriiiiight guys, smiiiiile in three... two... one..."

Click

WHEN I LOOK AT THE CARDBOARD SCULPTURE of Neveria, it reminds me of family and friends. I remember my mom always took us there. I used to hate when there was a long snake-like line outside Neveria because of how popular it was, especially on a hot summer day. I would sometimes get impatient because the line was so slow. My mom would get impatient too, so she and I would make my brothers stand in line while we waited in the car. When we finally got to the front and it was our turn to order, a man with a funny colorful hat and long black beard would tell us which new ice cream flavors had just come out and take our order. Of course, I always chose the flavor ‘fresas con crema’ (strawberries with cream).

When it was so crowded inside, it was hard sometimes to find a place to sit. We liked to sit at a table near a window because we liked to watch cars drive by, mothers push their kids in strollers, men take boxes out of their business trucks, and birds flying high everywhere.

My mom had this thing with sharing and she always wanted to have a taste of each of our deserts. This irritated me sometimes because I’m not really the biggest fan of sharing, especially if it’s something I enjoy dearly.

I remember the time I ordered my fresas con crema and my mom got her corn in a cup, extra spicy. My oldest brother Jorge got an Oreo ice cream with actual Oreos inside of it, and my little brother Adrian got Hot Cheetos with melt-

ed cheese. To top it all off, he got strawberry ice cream with actual strawberries in it. A woman with a big yellow dress and a big sun hat was yelling obnoxiously about the line moving so slowly. She wouldn’t stop pushing because she wanted the line to move faster. Didn’t we all? But she was a little too dramatic when she said she was going to cut off her arm if it didn’t move at least every minute. I felt as if she was about to flip a chair, and in my mind I laughed.

Not only would I go with my family to the Neveria, but I would show up with my friends half of the time because it was like a little kick-it spot for us girls and boys. We never knew what to expect. At times, there would be the weirdest people at the ice cream shop. I remember once these two girls got into a fight when I went with my friends. It just happened out of nowhere. My friends and I were in line and I felt somebody drop behind me. When we all turned around, these two girls were rolling on the floor and just going at it. Funny thing was, while one of the girls was getting beat up, two other girls jumped in. Entertainment for everyone inside the Neveria!

Another time, my friends and I were sitting at the table talking about the party that was going to happen on Friday night. The boy throwing the party called himself “Brian Too Turnt” from his Instagram name and he threw the biggest parties on the block. He was on the dance team back home at my old school and was pretty popular. My



Neveria by Ana Serrano. 13 x 13 x 12", cardboard paper, 2012.

friend Kim asked us what she should wear to this party since she wanted to look attractive for some cute boy named Willard who was going to be there.

“Kim, seriously, relax a little bit, you’re gonna look great, as usual,” my friend Shirley said.

“Yeah, Kim! You got the looks, the body, you’re set! We can go shopping later to pick an outfit out for the party.”

“Coolness!”

“I’ll show up with Anahi, and Kim can show up with Sheyla. We’ll go from there.” Kim agreed with the plan, so we went with it.

My friend Shirley was my closest friend besides Kim. We all had great looks, so we seemed to get a lot of guys’ attention every time we stepped out somewhere. Shirley, Kim, and I liked a certain type of boy. Sheyla liked the gangbanger type of boys and would listen to oldies and Chicano rap songs. She had her first kid when she was 14 years old (a girl) and recently had a baby boy by some gangbanger. She had a gangster girl look; she had a tattoo of her first kid blasted on her chest and her second baby’s name on her arm.

“Are they going to have old-school rap at the party?” she asked.

“I don’t know, Babes, you know this new generation now.” ‘Babes’ was my and Sheyla’s nickname for each other.

After talking about the party, I mentioned

a boy’s name and suddenly the conversation dropped.

“ANAHI, NO!” The whole ice cream shop turned their heads towards us and stared.

“Sheyla, be quiet, you’re causing a scene,” Shirley and Kim said.

“Dude, Anahi, Abraham is a buster dude. He probably can’t even afford to buy you fresas con crema.” A ‘buster dude’ usually meant a no-good drop out with nothing going on in his life for himself, practically a lame.

“He’ll probably even make you pay on the first date,” Kim said with a strawberry in her mouth.

“Well, I don’t know,” I said. “He seems different.”

“Anahi, we’re not trying to kill it for you, but you’re our friend and we care about you like a sister. Don’t date this fool, he’s a playboy.” A playboy meant he was always going around with different girls.

“Alright, whatever guys.” I waved my ice cream in a circle around in the air, signaling I didn’t really care. I had everything under control.

“He only wants one thing. What is he going to do with a little girl like you, huh?” Shirley was a year or two older than me, and though we were all close, she always seemed to care the most.

“I’m not that young. I’m 14, turning 15 in a few days.”

“Yeah, but he’s 17. The hell is he going to want to do? Play checkers?” We all began to laugh at Sheyla’s comment.

“Yeah, well, I just think it’s different, you know?”

“I guess so,” my friends all said in a sarcastic yet bummed out way, while rolling their eyes back in their heads.

I remember meeting up at the Neveria again that Friday night and we stayed for a bit to chill. This one girl was mad dogging me. I would look away, ask my friends if she was still staring at me, and she was.

“Why is she staring so hard?”

“I don’t know, but she’s about to get slapped,” I said, annoyed.

“Don’t do it in here, Anahi, you’ll get us kicked out. Handle it outside if she says anything,” Shirley said, grabbing my arm.

“I know. You know I have a temper, but I can handle it,” I said, cracking my knuckles.

As soon as we started eating our desserts, the girl walked up to us with four of her friends. They looked skanky with their dresses almost showing their behinds. I prepared myself for whatever was going to happen and so did my friends.

“So, you’re talking to Abraham Hu?” the girl said, chewing pink bubble gum. I had never been so confused. This girl seemed about the same age

as my so-called boyfriend.

“Yeah, and? He’s practically like my boyfriend.”

Suddenly, this girl’s face looked familiar. I’d seen her around school a couple times, hanging around with the boys who were more into graffiti than school. The girl smiled at her friends, then turned back to face me.

“Oh, yeah? I was with him and his friends and my girls yesterday.”

My expression changed to anger and confusion.

“Yeah,” she said. “I was sitting on his lap on the couch, so tell me, are you really his girlfriend?”

My friends’ faces said *I told you so*. I was trying to think of something to say to this girl. Shirley and I glanced at each other.

“Well, I’m over at his house almost every day,” I said. “He walks me to school and back sometimes, and I even go to his house after school. So yeah—your point?”

The girl laughed. “I’m just letting you know he’s not the type of guy to have one girl—he needs multiple.” Her friends began to laugh.

“Yeah, only the trashy ones who don’t respect themselves,” I said. “You see every day that he obviously likes this girl and has her around almost all the time, but you still want to go do trashy hoodrat things with him. You hear me?”

The girl became angry, but I really didn't care—I was angry myself. She took off her hoop earrings and tied her hair up. My friends looked at me and all moved closer. I took my jacket off and my friends passed me a couple of their rings under the table.

“Oh, so I'm a hoe, huh?” The girl said, spitting out her gum.

“Technically, she didn't call you that. She called you trashy—but if the shoe fits, wear it,” Sheyla said, sucking on her watermelon ice cream pop.

“Tell your friend to come outside so we can handle it!”

“Okay, so what's up?” My heart was racing. I was so angry, I couldn't control myself. Then the girl threw a vanilla milkshake at my shirt and everything became a blur.

“ANAHI! GET HER!” My friends all shouted. We tossed and twirled on the floor, and the fight ended after the employees broke it up. My friends lifted me up while the girl's friends picked her up. I could smell the vanilla milkshake on my shirt and the tips of my hair. My friends cleaned me up a bit.

“Anahi, that was crazy, you kicked her a**,”

Sheyla said excitedly. She always got hyped whenever someone got into a fight.

“Whatever. It happened. Let's just get out of here.” Shirley said. We all fled from the Neveria, but the girls were outside. I was preparing myself again for whatever was going to happen, but my friends held me back.

“Bet that felt good, huh? Tell Abraham I said ‘Hi girl!’”

“Why don't you shut the freak up!” I said, jumping and trying to break loose from my friends.

“Anahi, calm down, it's over! You won anyways!” My friends said.

I still talked to Abraham afterwards, but that's a different story. After the fight, every time I stepped foot into the Neveria, the employees would say, “No fighting today, right, Anahi?” I would just smile and giggle and nod my head. Ever since that day, the employees knew who I was. They saw me practically every day after school and on the weekends with my friends or family. Not only was it a place that sold dairy treats and other sweets, but it was a place to hang out with friends and bond with family. The people at Neveria knew me and my stories, which is why it will always have a good place in my heart.

Alphonso Payne

IN 2005, I WAS FIVE YEARS OLD and everything was going swell. The year had almost come to an end, and it was the holiday everyone waited for year-round: Christmas. It was the day every little kid in my neighborhood—including me—contemplated.

I arose from my comfy, distorted bed early in the morning and had to realign myself after my deep slumber. I'm known to be a very crazy sleeper, and I somehow end up on the edge of the other side of the bed.

When I stepped out of my room, there was a weird sort of ambience, as if the house and I were the only ones living there. I looked into the kitchen—there was no one there. I went into the living room and saw no one there, either. I felt as if everyone forgot today was Christmas.

I finally saw the family gathered together in the good ol' entertainment room. There was my mom, grandparents, older brother, and my three beloved dogs, Max, Mikey, and Buddy. Everyone seemed jubilant to see me when I stepped foot into the room. Jolly Christmas music echoed off the walls. Being the youngest and a little bratty, I wanted to be the first one to unwrap a gift. My eagerness pulsed. The sound of the wrapping paper being torn away was so satisfying to me, and even better was unveiling a gift I had been dying for all those months.

But I had to wait my turn like everyone else in the family, and much to my dismay, I was last.

Eventually, we all got to open our beloved gifts.

Some were anonymously given to each other and just signed “Santa Claus.” Some members of my family were ecstatic to receive the gift they asked for; other had odd smiles which said they weren't too excited about their gift. But we were taught to say “thank you” whether we liked our gift or not, or to just hug the relative and say nothing. I noticed each person's expression as they unwrapped their gift, which was either happiness, confusion, or plain surprise.

On this specific Christmas morning, I was relaxing by the fire with my older brother Nathaniel, the lanky athletic, Grinch-smiling teenager who I loved and hated at the same time. I was very confused as to why he only got cheap socks for his first gift. But I got very envious when he slowly unraveled another gift—the infamous voice changer which had a little walker man-like box and a mic to speak through. It contained different buttons that you pushed which changed your voice to a very deep, high, or mellow tone. My initial reaction was, “Man, I forgot to put that on my list to Santa Claus!” In that moment, the pouty, jealous, and annoying child came raging out of me. Envy was all I felt as soon as he started using the voice changer.

When my turn came to open my gift, I stared deep into the black wrapping paper. Many things ran through my head. Had I gotten into trouble recently? Was I cleaning my room on time? What could this gift possibly be? It did not look promis-



ing. As I studied the gift more, I came to realize this Christmas may be a bust. I reached my finger into the bag. It felt very rough and rugged, like the edges of an outdoor pool. My whole family was staring eerily at me while I unwrapped it, as if it were something special for me. The whole process felt like days. Eventually, I realized I had been gifted dark, immaculate coal. I felt quite disturbed. I knew I hadn't done anything wrong recently.

My mom, grandparents, and my brother were all peering into my little helpless, soulful eyes, waiting patiently for my reaction to this so-called gift. Maybe all the gifts I had asked for were put

into this bag of coal. It felt like some kind of low-budget Christmas horror movie. I began to rustle through the coal, looking for any hope of the gifts I had asked for. But there were none. Maybe this is some kind of joke, because I realized they forgot to prank me on April Fool's day. There was a feeling inside of me which said this was no joke at all, but a message being sent to me mentally and emotionally. I was lost for words as my family continued opening their presents, as if my gift was normal.

Suddenly, I felt nauseous and the whole room spun around like a carousel. The gravity went to zero, blank faces filled the room, and all the old-



Gateway Arch 03 by Abel Alejandre. 8 x 28.7", graphite and ink on paper, 2013.

fashioned decorated walls peeled off into the air. My beloved grandparents' house, which held so many memories, began to collapse on me.

Before it collapsed completely, I woke up abruptly in a shopping cart at the Victor Valley Mall. I was with my mom at the checkout in the Macy's store, and there was a smorgasbord of just-purchased Christmas gifts for my family. Dazed and confused from my nightmare, I looked around at the adults, who weren't even aware of my engulfing fear. I had a paper sailor's hat in my hand,

which surprisingly hadn't fallen out while I slept.

I then asked my mom, "I'm good, aren't I?"

She replied, "Why of course, what kind of question is that, son?"

The following night when all the gifts were wrapped and put under the holy Christmas tree, I wasn't fully convinced I had not received coal. When everyone went to sleep, I crept out of my room to shake all the gifts which were mine. When I was satisfied they probably did not contain coal, I pattered off to bed.



Echo Parque by Sandy Rodriguez, 24 x 36", oil on canvas, 2014 private collection. Photo by Sean Shim Boyle.

ECHO PARQUE, watching the sun go down, revisiting her day and all the grief in her life. Anxious, not knowing where to go with her numb feelings and confused mind. Trying to discover what kind of person she is without worrying what other people think of her.

Watching the sun go down completely, she gets ready to go home. Thoughts run through her head faster than she can comprehend. She sees other people walking home after a long day at work in suits and with stale faces. When she gets home, Sandra grabs an old set of paintbrushes and some paint. Painting for hours, putting all of her thoughts into watercolor, each little image connected to her life in some way. She pulls apart each feeling and puts it into its own intricate image, and after some time passes, she has a beautiful painting of Echo Parque. While looking at the painting, she realizes there are other ideas she has to get down, and starts to paint flames on the top of one of the palm trees to represent the burning emotion inside of her, emotions which nobody can see or understand. She carries the warm color scheme onto the sunset, making the sky represent how her life is going all wrong. Everything she thinks should happen, everything she wants to say—all it takes is some imagination and some strokes with a brush. Each new portion of the painting she adds makes her feel slightly better.

As Sandra paints, she reflects on all the things which have been making her upset and stressed:

job, money, and friends. She begins to understand being stressed and depressed won't change anything. Sandra is 35, living alone, working for minimum wage at a local grocery store, earning just enough money to pay rent at the end of the month, and is under constant stress. As she paints, she gets the idea that since she loves to paint pictures of nature, she should move away from L.A. and get a house up in the mountains and start fresh.

Two weeks later, she meets a guy named Chad as she is checking him out at the grocery store. Chad brings up that he is an art publisher and, of course, Sandra mentions she paints in her free time. As Chad is walking out the door, he lets her know about a competition. The winner gets to have their art published by "Artworks." The thought of winning the competition runs through Sandra's head throughout her day at work.

As soon as she gets off work, she quickly goes home, picks up her painting of Echo Parque, and submits it in the competition. She keeps painting pictures of sunsets, street perspectives, and nature pieces. Sandra constantly thinks about what she will do if she wins. She barely sleeps, and continues creating and coming up with new ideas for paintings. The day of the competition, she makes her way down to the gallery. There are hundreds of people there, looking at art, eating food, and conversing. Across the room she sees Chad at the buffet. She walks over and taps him on the shoulder. "Chad, right?"

He responds with a resounding, “Yeah, that’s me,” as if he is happy to see her.

They talk and take a seat next to each other. Sandra starts to worry, as she sees five to six paintings displayed, but not hers. She loses all hope of winning the prize. Then, out of the corner of her eye, she sees her painting carried out.

The host starts to thank everyone for coming, and then goes on to talk about the prizes.

“The lucky winner of first place will get their artwork published by Artworks Publishing Services. As for the second-place winner, you will receive \$2,000, and the third-place winner will receive \$1,000. Good luck to you all.”

Sandra is nervous thinking about not winning and going back to her boring job, living alone, and having no money. Chad holds her hand and comforts her as the judges look at all the art. Sandra starts to squeeze Chad’s hand harder as all the judges sit down and get ready to pick the winner.

The host comes up with three pieces of paper in his hand. “Thank you everyone who submitted their work, and if it was my decision, I would have made you all winners. But, as we know, there can only be one. The winner of the third-place prize is...” the room goes silent. “Henry Johnson!” The crowd claps as he comes up on stage and collects his check for \$1,000.

The host reads off the second card, “And the winner of the second-place prize is...” the room

goes silent again. “Janice Kundo!” The crowd claps once again, and Janice goes up and collects her check.

Finally, the first-place winner is announced. “And finally, the first-place winner, congratulations...” again, silence, until he says, “Sandra Riveira!” Sandra slowly brings her head up as everyone is clapping and looking around for the winner. She stands up and walks slowly to the stage while people congratulate her on the way. Once she reaches the stage, she receives a golden plaque. The local news takes pictures.

After the event is over, she starts to exit the complex. Chad approaches her outside the front doors. He congratulates her and then asks her out to dinner. Sandra responds with a flattered, “Yes, I would love that.” Sandra goes home and picks out what she is going to wear for dinner. When 8 p.m. rolls around, she hears a knock on the door as she finishes her makeup. She answers and is greeted by Chad, who is holding a big bouquet of flowers. She takes the flowers as he escorts her to his car. They arrive at a fancy Italian restaurant called Bestia. Once they are seated, they hit it off almost instantly. They talk about their favorite TV shows, what kind of music they listen to, and after their food is delivered, they talk for a little bit longer before they leave. Chad drives Sandra home, walks her to the door, and tells her what a good time he had. He wants to do it again sometime.

Two years later, Sandra and Chad get married,

move away from L.A., and get a small house in the Sierras. Sandra now makes money off of her paintings and Chad is still publishing art and doing general contracting as a primary job.

Although Sandra makes money from her art,

her life is too easy, the struggle is gone, and so is the passion she felt. Her life is no longer boring, but her paintings are.

Melanie Rodriguez

My brother Ruby and I were going to Mexico and we didn't know what to expect. When my parents told me I was leaving for the summer on a plane, I didn't care about the destination. I was only looking forward to going on an airplane and experiencing the turbulence. By the time we arrived at the airport, I thought Mexico would just be a big city like Los Angeles. I soon realized I was wrong about comparing L.A. to Mexico.

My uncle picked us up in his red pickup truck which only sat two, only leaving room for him and my Granny Concha. I wondered how Ruby and I would wear seatbelts or if another relative was going to pick us up in another car. As I stood there wondering about the seat belt situation, Uncle Bones said, "Romona, get in the back with your brother." I looked at this man like he was crazy. How was I going to ride in the back of a truck with no seat or seatbelt? It was against the law. Even though I was nine, and I didn't know many laws, I knew seatbelt laws were important, because my parents wouldn't even start the car if my brother and I didn't have our seat belt on. I was scared for my life; first of all, I wasn't trying to get arrested, I was just a kid, and secondly, I wasn't trying to fall off the truck and die.

Granny Concha calmed my nerves by telling me, "It's alright, riding without a seatbelt is normal out here." When I heard that, I wondered what other things were considered normal in Mexico.

We loaded our luggage and it was time for me

and Ruby to get ourselves onto the truck. I could tell by the look on Ruby's face that he was relieved to be off the plane and happy to get into a truck. I didn't understand how he could be happy about riding in these conditions.

Driving down an unpaved road, we arrived at Granny Concha's house. My family is from the town of San Juan Cosala, and it isn't big, so everyone basically knows each other by name. In a way, it felt like being back home, because everyone in my apartment building knew each other either by name or nickname. But here, because almost everyone knew each other, it was easy for the people to point out foreigners.

My parents arranged for me and my brother to stay for two weeks and I am sure my mom wasn't trying to risk putting us in danger. However, at the time of our visit, there were reports of people going missing, so my brother and I were only able to be outside for a limited amount of time. The year was 2009, and it was at the height of all the cartel kidnappings and killings. My mom told me before leaving that I was going to have to be more careful with my surroundings and I shouldn't ever be alone. "Romona," she said, "You're going to have to blend in with your cousins."

I said, "How? I have lighter skin than most my cousins and I dress differently."

She said, "It's not just about the way you dress. You're going to have to use as little English as you can so no one finds out you're from the U.S."

I asked, “Why can’t anyone know I’m foreign?”

“If anyone finds out you’re from the other end of the border, they’re going to want to take you.” I then asked why anyone would ever want to take me, and she proceeded to tell me about a group of people known as the cartel. Mom told me these were very bad guys and they even kill people to get ransom. Although this was terrifying news, she told me not to worry because my grandma was under protection.

I didn’t mind because the less I had to go outside, the less I had to interact with people and speak Spanish. It wasn’t a surprise to my family that my Spanish wasn’t fluent, so they made sure to point out my mistakes and bad pronunciation. Although I knew they were trying to help me out with their language, it frustrated me because I was already having trouble with stuttering in English.

Despite the language and cartel issues, I was able to really appreciate my Mexican family because they welcomed me and Ruby with open arms. We stayed half the time with Granny Concha and the rest of our time with Granny Teresa, my dad’s mom. Granny Teresa lived on the other side of town, which was only about a 25-minute walk, but my uncle gave us a ride there because of our luggage. He said it would be safer than walking alone or attracting attention with our luggage. Granny Concha didn’t want me to go to the other side of town at all, because she wouldn’t be able to keep an eye on us. She didn’t think it would be safe

for us to stay there, because she knew my other grandma would just let us do whatever we wanted without supervision.

More than a week went by, and I still had not seen even half of the town. I’d wanted to explore since the day I arrived, but wasn’t able to because it wasn’t safe for me to be outside for very long. I hated being treated like a little kid and I wanted to know more about this cartel my mom talked about. I wanted to know why Granny Concha didn’t allow me to cross the main road. I soon realized that the other side of the main road was cartel territory, and from Granny Teresa’s roof, I could see their nice cars pulling in and out of the road. It was my goal to get on that side, not just because I was more curious about who the cartel were, but because my Aunt Ana lived on that side and I hadn’t seen her the whole time I’d been here.

I knew my time to explore was coming to an end, because the parties were soon to begin. The parties were a week of festivities and fireworks. When the parties begin, the cartel makes their presence more known, meaning it would no longer be safe for me. I told my cousin Ralph about my situation and he told me we should go sell bread to make money. I agreed because I saw this as the perfect opportunity to go around town. Also, I spent the money my mom had given me and I needed more to buy souvenirs.

Ralph said, “I’ll wake you up early in the morning, wear comfortable shoes and go to sleep early.”



I reacted by saying, “Don’t tell me what to do!”

He said, “Alright then, I’m not taking you anywhere tomorrow, and you’ll stay here for the rest of the trip.”

I desperately wanted to go around town, so I agreed to go to sleep early. Before actually falling asleep, I started to think about what my mom had been telling me, that I shouldn’t ever be alone. I had a spine-tingling sensation when I began to remember how much danger I could put myself in if I was not careful.

Ralph and I went door to door around the town and the bread wasn’t selling like we thought

it would. I told Ralph we should just give the remaining pieces of bread to the homeless people in town. He looked at me sideways and told me, “In the time I’ve been living here I haven’t seen or met a single homeless person.” He then asked me, “Are there a lot of homeless people back in Los Angeles?”

I said, “Too many to keep track.”

My stay in Mexico had come to an end, and it was now time to say goodbye to my family. Although I was sad about leaving, I was happy to say hello to the plane. My brother was scared again by thoughts of crashing. After an uneventful plane



Leeds Shoes by John M. Valadez. 38.75 x 100", pastel on paper, 2004.

trip, Ruby and I landed safely at the LAX airport, and soon found our parents waiting for us near baggage claim.

I not only missed my parents but also my city, cruising through the avenues, and roaming downtown. What I didn't miss about L.A. was seeing the homeless and people begging for food. It was starting to get late and we still weren't home because the traffic held us back for about another hour. My parents decided to drive through downtown because it was the quicker way to go. As I looked out the car window, I saw people sleeping on sidewalks like the stray dogs back in Mexico. I saw a

couple window shopping and ignoring the homeless people sitting on the ground, as if they weren't even there. How could this couple stand there with food in their bag, and not give any to the people who were lying on the floor and clearly starving, I thought to myself. I couldn't quite fathom how a city as big and wealthy as Los Angeles hadn't found a way to house their people, yet my parent's home town, San Juan, had figured out they needed to put their people first. Although San Juan isn't perfect, or even the safest place to be, that community is able to provide housing for all of its people, unlike many cities in the United States.

OLD SHOES SLAMMED on the ground with every step, plunging into the small puddles of water and sloshing out. Untied shoelaces trailed behind her sneakers like ceremonial streamers chasing her through the water as fast and as curvy as a northern water snake. She sprinted past the point where she had to sprint, going even further—not only because she had to run, but also because it felt right to run. It felt natural. The forest-green circles in her optics produced tears which streamed to the sides of her pale cheeks and fell behind her in a mess of makeup and mascara.

None of the houses on the sides of the street flicked their lights on in concern for the stranded girl. None of the customers in donut shops, restaurants, or gas stations turned their heads to the single-human stampede bashing through the walls of foggy haze and the barricades of emotions. A small and low-effort “free” sign stood out on the side of the street. It didn’t stop her run, but it stopped her mind for a brief moment. It was a wooden dresser covered in scrapes and discolorations. The specific cedar wood sparked recollections of a certain big wooden lounge chair from her memories. It lived in her house and usually stood over her, with long quilt edges hanging down, acting as curtains, to further hide the child.

A very long honk snapped the daydream out of her head and instinctively, she dived towards the opposite half of the road, pushing her hands

in front of her to counter a face full of asphalt. A cursing old man yelled as the car passed, but it was silenced as the girl marveled at a syringe, inches from her face in the same puddle she had fallen into. It was a very vague reminder of the reason she didn’t have enough money to stop for food, even as she hungered so eagerly. She plunged back into her mind.

A doorknob swung into the already-existing hole in the wall, created by the constant and sudden movement of the door’s hinges. A wife-beater and loose-fitting boxers decorated a sleazy old man who slammed the door open with a rugged and scarred shoulder. Only an “Mmph” escaped the man’s jaw, which was full of microwaved egg and sausage sandwich. He gestured with his hand, which was burdened with a deep brown bottle half-full with liquid. His hand movement was rather vague, but to the girl in the bed, who was rudely awakened by the loud door, it was clear the bedside table wouldn’t hide her wallet for long. She reached to pull open the drawer from the comfort of her bed, but before she could slither her hand there, the same man stood even closer. He forcefully snatched the weathered black rectangle and slipped almost all of the currency in between his hand and his bottle of alcohol. He smirked a tiny smile as he handed back the item and pulled two dollars out from the money he had taken, placing it in the same hand as the empty wallet. It was ob-

*Tear Gas No. 1
Ferguson by Sandy
Rodriguez. 16 x
20", oil on canvas,
2014, private collec-
tion. Photo by Sean
Shim Boyle.*



vious he was showing off this extremely genuine act of kindness, and even more obvious, when he demanded to hear grateful words from the girl, who replied with a mumble. The monster leaned the bottle upside down, with the opening resting on his lips, then tossed it towards the room's garbage bin and watched it bounce off the wall and onto the matted carpet, before he shuffled out of the bedroom.

Suddenly cognizant that rainwater was pooled around her face, the world outside the puddle was frozen, and she was in every moment of time ex-

cept the future. Her hands pushed into the muddy puddle, extending her arms until she could get on to her feet and stand up. She pushed her damaged hands against each other, feeling their rough texture after their concrete encounter. Reflective jade eyes slowly dashed about the scene, her body pivoting when her eyes reached their peripheral edges. The scene was as she had been expecting, after her flashback scenario, but not what she had hoped for. No knight in shining armor, not even a light turned on through a nearby window.

She almost surprised herself with her own

light knock on a back door. Another teenager opened the door to find her standing on his porch. His rugged black hair shined in the bright fluorescent light of the connected bathroom, making it clear he hadn't showered recently. She walked past him and through the oddly placed restroom which was clearly only used by him, slumped onto his bed, avoiding his welcome kiss as usual. He lay down next to her and touched her body under the sheets as she tried to sleep and hide her tears in the blanket. His oversized flannel covered his hands, scraping bare parts of her skin with the buttoned cuffs. Eventually, she realized her kissing him for a small bit would sate his hunger. A disgusting mix of dull flavors and booze lingered in her mouth after swapping saliva.

Light poured into the room between the break in the curtains. She sat up in the bed and glanced about the room, noticing the small changes from the last time she had to be here, and last night. Her hands trailed under the various bed sheets and blankets until they came across her three-sizes-too-large concert shirt. It flowed down her arms and over her head. She searched for her wet sneakers before she realized they were on her feet the entire night. Without searching for the boy, she left through the same back door. While following the road she took to get here, she didn't worry about any cars, as the sun was just rising and these suburbs were poorly inhabited. All of the puddles

from last night had dried up, making it even more difficult to find the puddle she had temporarily passed out in.

She would return home that day and her parents wouldn't yell at her at this recurrence. They were fighting anyway. Being careful to make no noise, she sneaked up the carpeted stairs, and lightly closed her room door, slipping her sneakers off by her door. It was a weekday, but she stayed home, because there was no way she could bring herself to school.

She stripped the blankets off of her bed, tucking the corners of a certain blanket into the upper corners of her blinds on the window. She struggled between the mattress and the wall, blindly finding the wall sockets with her deeply submerged hand and unplugging one of the cords and plugging in another one hanging close by. She flicked on the light switch, and then hurried back over to her pile of pillows and blankets. After lying on her back, she stared at the painted ceiling in awe. Little space men were hopping from LED star to star, tiny aliens prancing about the cosmos. The various creatures and myths danced and celebrated far from home and far from restriction. Even evil dragons left their princesses at their castles and their caves unattended. The stars would drift into her dreams and her eyelids would become heavier by the second. The process would happen again soon, but for now it was a distant future.

AS I GLANCED OUT THE WINDOW from my sister's room, my mind drifted back to the last time my old friends and I were in this neighborhood. I can clearly remember my whole neighborhood as it was. We were living in a tight space with nosey people and kids everywhere. About four years ago, I remember having a big group of friends who all knew each other very well. We were tight with one another, and also crazy, noisy teens at the time. No one in the neighborhood liked us—not the manager who lived there, not the lady who lived up in front, not the old creepy guy who walked his dog and stared at me and my friends every time we walked by, and not even my next-door neighbor! We were just not liked in this neighborhood.

There were five girls in my group and we had become really close to each other. There was Vicky, who I met through my old friends from elementary school. She was 15, the oldest out of all of us. She was loud and always yelling. If you put her in a bad mood, then everybody would be in a bad mood. It would just mess up everybody's vibe. Once Vicky started yelling, everything was just awkward and silent until she left. She would usually walk up her stairs and slam the door as hard as she could. Ada was Vicky's cousin, and they lived together. I also met her through my old friend. Ada was more serious and quiet and always had a straight face, but she was funny too, and could be a b**** if she wanted. Other than that, she was the nicest person

on earth. There was Valeria who was cool to be around, but she always tried to act like someone she wasn't. There was her cousin, Alejandra, who was a little sassy with a smart mouth and an attitude all the time. And then there was me. I was the baby of the group and always nice to everybody. We were all around the same age, but I was always the last one with a birthday to come up.

There were also our guy friends. Enrique was short and all of us made fun of him because everyone was much taller. Of all the guys, he was the shy one except when he was around us. Then he wasn't shy at all. He was funny and would always take us out to eat or buy us munchies from the store. He always shared his food. He was a good kid with good intentions, never bad. But he was like a little follower around his "Big Homie," doing whatever he was told to do or say. The girls and me never liked that because we knew Enrique only acted this way when he was around "Big Homie." Then there was Diego, who was Enrique's friend. He was nice when he wanted to be, but he was often rude and mean. He thought he was the boss of everything, so sometimes he was disrespectful. There was Carlos, who was the funniest one in the group and would always make jokes, weird noises, and mess around with us. Sometimes we would have laugh attacks for the longest time ever. Two of the other guys were Julian and Andy, who were cousins. They were together all the time—

they showed up together and left together. They were both nice, funny, and simple, cool guys. We got along pretty well as a group.

My friends and I hung out everywhere around the neighborhood. But we had a few favorite hang-out spots, some of which were forbidden by our parents. When we got home from school, we'd hang outside my friend's apartment on her steps. We would usually wait for the guys to come back from Pride. Pride was a youth program run by the police department and the guys would go two to three times a week. Not every guy from our group was in Pride, but most of them were.

Every day before my mom's friend would leave for work, she would tell us girls, "I don't want nobody in my damn house today while I'm not present!" We didn't listen. That was the first thing we did when she was out of sight. When the guys got there, we would all run up the steps into the apartment, making a rumbling sound, screaming and shouting out for the spot we'd called 'first' to sit on.

"I call the middle corner on the couch!"

"I get the far-right corner!"

"I get the left corner, then. Move!"

"You guys know I always sit there!"

"Chill, there is enough room for everybody. We all fill up the couches."

"Oh yeah, then I get the little couch."

"ALRIGHT! Everybody shut up! Be quiet before I kick every single one of you out right now!"

Everyone remained silent for a while. But in less than ten minutes, the apartment was full of noise. Inside my friend's apartment, we would have our own little party. We would blast music on the speaker, play truth or dare, run up and down the stairs, go from room to room—basically doing whatever we wanted while together in the apartment. We would vape in my friend's room and drink when we were not supposed to. We seriously thought we were the sh** and so cool.

I remember the last time we were all together.

"Pass me the vape, I wanna hit it."

"Nah, I said I was after. You drink out of the bottle. Come on, a sip won't hurt," said Julian.

It was a round bottle with dark liquor in it. When I looked at it, it made me feel like I was going to gag.

"Uhhh, I don't know about that, Julian. I'm scared, I don't know what it tastes like. What if I spit it out? What if I throw up?" I sniffed the bottle. "Ewww, that smells weird. It smells too strong."

"Just drink it!" said Diego.

It took me a while to drink, because I was overthinking it, until about three minutes later—which felt like an hour—when I finally did. As I was swallowing it, I made the weirdest facial expression because the taste of the drink was not what I expected. I could feel it running down into my stomach, giving me this stinging, burning feeling.

"Ew, that was gross. Never again!"



Cartonlandia by Ana Serrano. 62 x 62 x 64", cardboard paper, 2007.

The room was smoky and everyone was conversing with each other. It was already getting dark and we had to be out of the house before my friend's mom got home. The music was playing and we were still using our outside voices. We had to clean up our mess and make it look like we were never there. Eventually, we all got up and did what we needed to do, but we were still messing around with each other at the same time.

I was the one closest to the window and door,

so I was first to hear the footsteps.

"SOMEONE IS COMING UP THE STAIRS!" I yelled.

We freaked out and did not keep calm, making more noise than before. Some of us were trying to hide so it would look like there weren't as many people as there actually were.

"Everyone shut up! Someone is literally coming up, what should we say?" I was in a panic.

I looked over at Vicky and Ada, and before they

could answer my question, the footsteps stopped. We didn't hear them anymore. We waited to see if the doorknob would move or if anyone was going to knock. There was 30 seconds of silence.

“Ohhh my god! Are you serious? That was the next-door neighbor! We seriously need to leave before my mom gets here, like ASAP.”

Once we finished cleaning up, we all finally decided to leave the house. But before we could even get up, the doorknob started to move and the door opened. Right then and there was Irma, my friend's mom. Standing in silence, we all looked at each other, trying not to laugh or be disrespectful.

“Well, look what we have here,” said Irma.

We smiled. She walked in with her grocery bags, one in each hand. We were standing awkwardly without saying a word. She said, “Who let you guys in my house? I said very clearly I didn't want anybody in my home, and all of you just come and disrespect my house. Who are you guys?”

We all stayed very silent. No one answered her or spoke back. I turned and looked at Vicky. She was the first to speak, and as she spoke, she pointed at the door saying in a stern voice, “Get out!” So we did. Once we walked out, we let out our laughter.

We sat down and waited for Vicky. When she finally came out, Vicky rolled her eyes, obviously mad. “Oh my God, she is so annoying! She al-

ways does this. We're going to do what we want anyway.” Of course, being Vicky's friends, we all agreed with her. We would never think to side with someone's mom, no matter how outrageous our behavior was.

It was way past dark and most of us wanted to go home. Us girls and Diego lived in the same apartment complex, so we really never needed to leave. Most of the other guys lived nearby. Andy and Julian left together. Carlos got picked up by his mom. We all liked to say hi to her and talk. Enrique walked home because he lived just across from my apartments, past the soccer field and across the train tracks by the police station.

That day is the last time I remember we were all together. Everybody went their separate ways to their homes and lives. Most of those people are not in my life anymore. When I think back during this time of my growing up, I realize I can never recreate those moments we shared together. When I see one of them now, sometimes we make eye contact, maybe smile, but we don't really talk. When I remember those times, living in our crowded little apartment complex, the memory always surprises me and I feel a longing for that lost world. I wonder if maybe those moments we shared are part of what makes us who we are now, even if at the time, we didn't think of it as anything special or important.

Writing Project Assistants

Miriam Campos

“MIJA PORFA CÚBREME EL PIE, LO SIENTO FRÍO.”

Until then, I had been in a cold hospital room, observing the pain reflected in my dad’s eyes. My body trembled. Not from the cold, but from feeling powerless to relieve his pain, and fear. The fear of realizing that my dad’s leg felt warm and knowing the risk of his becoming paraplegic. After covering his leg with a blanket, I sat again in the lonely chair in the corner of that room, wanting to cry...

My dad had injured himself carrying a watering pipe. Like my Bracero grandpa, my dad was a farmworker. During the years of pain, I felt that those fields, where I grew and ran freely, had taken away a lot. Seeing my mom’s fatigue from working in the fields to support my family, my siblings’

childhoods were cut short, and my father’s physical pain was too much. I waited until the night fell to cry, under my blankets, so no one would see and so I wouldn’t lose my sanity.

When I saw *Value King* by Eduardo Carrillo, I realized that my wounds have not yet healed—and that while those fields took away some things, they gifted me with many more. They gifted me strength, determination, unity, and love over time. Those fields I see reflected in this painting, no matter the crop, are part of my essence, of my past that returns to my present, part of who I am today.



Value King by Eduardo Carrillo. 32.75 x 54", oil on canvas, 1987.



Iglesia La Luz del Mundo by Ana Serrano. 10 x 13 x 10", cardboard paper, 2012.

Mara Palmieri

IN THE BOTTOM of a pink box, under piles of keepsake papers, old photos, and special string, there is an envelope with the name Mara in careful, round, purple marker letters. Inside the envelope is a tan piece of paper folded in half twice. The paper, too, has purple handwriting. It reads:

Dear Mare,

You are so nice.

You are my best friend. There is a saint name Mare.

I want to tell you becus how you are name Mare.

From,

Ruby

In Ms. Gold's kindergarten room P7, Ruby and I were the same. She was Hispanic, I was white. She grew up believing in God, I didn't. She spoke Spanish at home, I spoke English. But we were the same. We both cried the first day of kindergarten

after saying goodbye to our moms. We spoke so softly sometimes that the teacher had to lean forward to hear us. With the unbiased, magical decision-making that only a six-year-old can have, we became friends and pen pals in the classroom not long after the first day of kindergarten.

For whatever reason, our friendship existed only in school. In my memory, we never visited each other's houses or went on play dates to the park. And yet, with a change in the spelling of my name, she gave my friendship the same importance as she gave to something else dear to her heart—her religion.

I don't know where Ruby is now, but I don't need to. Though being a kindergartener was just a small segment of her life, for me, that version of her self lives forever in my memory. To me, she will always be the quiet, kind, six-year-old girl who wrote me a letter.

Leslie Reyes

ON THIS SHIP, I see my pops and his many facets. I see him carrying his own weight in the form of cannon balls across the ship, with sharp eyes and working hands, loading each cannon. He aims.

On the right, I see the expression Dad has after a long day, reflecting and contemplating.

My pops worked hard all his life, even when he didn't like his job. He used his hands to build chicken coops, maneuver through the soil, and prepare it for seeding. Dad sustained his life and planted the seeds; la milpa. He used the heavily engrained logic of his boyhood to guide his arms and legs; all the while, a swift demon watched him.

When the demon presented itself, Dad was already middle aged. He gave up on everything, even

himself, and became a prisoner to that demon. His calloused hands smoothed over and Death swallowed la milpa that fed his chickens.

Dad, with his many facets, realized he had the demon outnumbered. Using the last drops of energy he had left, he overcame this demon, and when he did, Dad still took mercy on it.

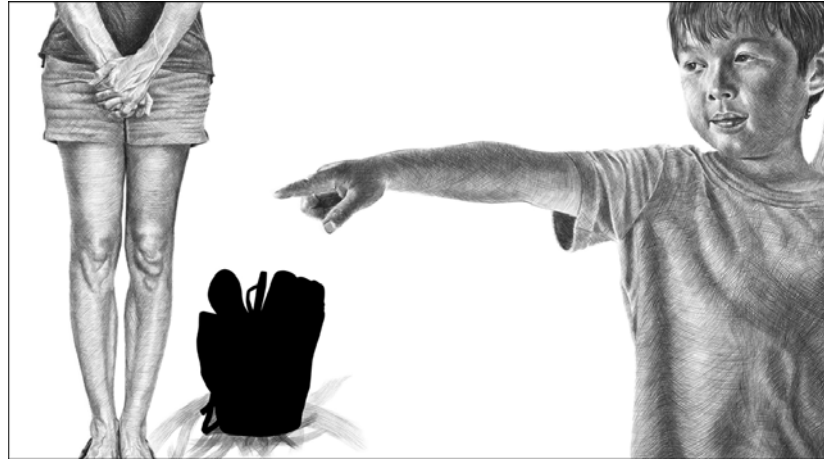
“You’ll have to sail along with me,” Dad told the demon. “But we must recognize that you are only a part of this journey. I run it.”

The demon, in its pointed hat, agreed, camouflaged itself against the ship’s deck, watching.

Dad continues to work, resisting, harvesting, and sailing. And no matter what, he keeps going.



Los Bucaneros by Eduardo Carrillo. 60.75 x 60.75", oil on panel, 1974.



Gateway Arch 04 by Abel Alejandre. 8 x 28.7", graphite and ink on paper, 2013.



I WAS SIX YEARS OLD. It was a warm, still morning in Studio City. The sun was shining at 86 degrees in the middle of September; Los Angeles always made me feel as though my skin were stuck to my bones. There was no wind, but the Earth was breathing deeply, and I felt her rumbling beneath me.

I was sitting at the top of the staircase of my childhood home, hiding from what I believed was a nightmare. Downstairs, I heard my mother's strong voice turn into sounds of weeping sorrow and fear. Her quivering vocals made my ears bleed and heart combust.

Seeking answers, I asked myself, "Why is she crying? Screaming! Who is she on the phone with?"

"Help me," I heard, as my mind was on the verge of explosion. "How could you do this?" She screamed into the phone, as if the thing on the other side was hard of hearing.

"How could WHO do this?" I desperately asked myself, digging deep into my memory, searching for what could possibly have gone wrong.

I heard her scream my father's name.

My soul escaped me.

I can still hear those syllables hanging in the air, their weight so heavy it almost feels tangible.

That was the moment my father left my mother for the first time: a train which departed from our Studio City station, only to chug right back around.

Author Bios

Garrett Blanton lives in Santa Cruz, California and is 16 years old. In the future, he hopes to have free time and money to do the things he enjoys. He is excited to be a part of the Young Writers Program.

K.C. loves to live by the ocean. She is 17 years old and grew up in Santa Cruz, California. She loves to read, be with family, and enjoys the outdoors. K.C. spends all of her money on concerts, and unlike most of her peers, likes all kinds of music.

Michaela Carr lives in Santa Cruz, California and is 15 years old. She loves to hang out with friends, go to the beach, visit her hometown, and skate around. In the future, Michaela hopes to graduate early and get a job and a car by the age of 16. She is excited to have her story appear in this Young Writers Program publication.

Angel Carrasco is a junior at Costanoa High School and likes to spend his time skateboarding.

Ruben Del Carmen De La Pena lives in Santa Cruz, California and is 17 years old. He loves to longboard and spend time with his puppy. In the future, Ruben hopes he can change the path he is on to a better one. He is excited to have his story appear in this Young Writers Program publication.

Martin Diaz lives in Santa Cruz, California and is 17 years old. He loves to skateboard and hang out with his friends. In the future, he hopes to fol-

low his dream of becoming a graphic designer. He is excited to have his story appear in this Young Writers Program publication.

Jade Fuhrman is a 16-year-old girl from Santa Cruz, California. She spends her free time adventuring, and also loves time to herself. In the future, she hopes to be very successful in life. Jade is extremely appreciative to have her story published in this Young Writers Program publication.

Kalela Hatfield lives in Santa Cruz, California and is 16 years old.

Isaiah Hernandez lives in Santa Cruz, California and is 17 years old. He loves to spend his time with friends, listen to music, or be on the road. In the future, Isaiah hopes to be a pilot of some sort. He is excited to have his story appear in this Young Writers Program publication.

Gerardo (Lalo) Michicol is a senior at Costanoa High School. In his spare time, he likes to hang out with his friends and play video games and sports.

Annie Monroe lives in Santa Cruz, California and is 15 years old. She loves to spend her time going to the movie theater. In the future, she hopes to get more into writing. Annie is excited to have her story appear in this Young Writers Program publication.

Anahi Navarette was born in Los Angeles, California. She now lives in Santa Cruz and is 17 years old. She loves to spend time with her family. In the future, she hopes to be a nurse and to help her family out. Anahi is excited to have her story appear in this Young Writers Program publication.

Alphonso Payne is a senior at Costanoa High School who lives in Santa Cruz, California. He moved to Santa Cruz from Los Angeles. He enjoys soccer, working out, and hip-hop music.

Brian Pieratt is a senior at Costanoa High School. He lives in Santa Cruz, California and loves to surf and travel to places with good waves.

Melanie Rodriguez is a 17-year-old Chicana who was born in Los Angeles, California but now lives in Santa Cruz. She loves to explore scenic places with friends and spend time with her family. In the future, Melanie hopes to devote most of her time to helping others. She's thrilled to have

her story appear in this Young Writers Program publication.

Vi Salas is a human who has existed for 16 Earth years and resides in Santa Cruz, California. He enjoys activities like hiking in the redwood forests, writing surreal and/or strange stories, sketching Lovecraftian creatures, writing poems that don't rhyme, and roleplaying—although Vi usually gets caught up playing video games instead. He hopes to have a career in music, writing, or almost any other form of art. He is quite excited to participate in the Young Writers Program.

Dulce Zuniga is 16 years old and lives in Santa Cruz, California. She loves to spend time with her two-year-old sister. She has much love for her sister and hopes that in the future, she will be able to chase her dreams and do whatever she loves. Dulce is excited to have her story appear in this Young Writers Program publication. She hopes that whoever reads it enjoys it.

Miriam Campos is a School/Community Coordinator and Bilingual Learning Assistant at Branciforte Small Schools, and teaches a weekend citizenship class. In her spare time, she likes to draw and write personal poetry that focuses on social justice. Her future plans are to become a teacher and a therapist.

Mara Palmieri is a senior at UC Santa Cruz, majoring in Literature and minoring in Education. She hopes to become a teacher one day, but is not yet sure what grade she would like to teach. Mara loves to read and write as well as act, sing, and dance.

Leslie Reyes is a senior at UC Santa Cruz. She is majoring in Literature with a concentration in Creative Fiction Writing and minoring in Education. She was born and raised in Los Angeles, California and hopes to pursue teaching while remaining involved in the creative writing community.

Claire Swanstrom is a senior at UC Santa Cruz, majoring in Art and minoring in Education. Art is her hobby, but education is her purpose. Her goals are to open her own tutoring practice for students with learning disabilities, and to research special-needs education and become a published author in that field.

Abel Alejandro spent the first seven years of his life in a remote rural part of Michoacán called Tierra Caliente where he had no running water or electricity. His family immigrated to Los Angeles in 1975 and eventually settled in the city's Wilmington neighborhood, near Long Beach. The old Spanish-style apartment building in which they lived was nicknamed The Standing Dead. To Abel, Wilmington, which he fondly considers to be his hometown, was America. His little community was made up of several cultures. Some were welcoming while others remained indifferent. While spending time at the Boys' Club of America, he would doodle, read, and shoot pool. It was perhaps there where his mark-making path began. His attraction to drawing was as transformative to his development as coming to the United States.

Sandy Rodriguez is an artist and independent educator. Her paintings capture moments of transformation in the social and cultural landscape of Los Angeles, with a focus on themes of the persistence of place, activism, and physical and cultural regeneration. She was raised in San Diego, Tijuana, and Los Angeles and earned her BFA from the California Institute of the Arts. Rodriguez has exhibited at institutions such as the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, Art+Practice in Los Angeles, and Self Help Graphics & Art, also in Los Angeles. Echo Parque, included in this book, was featured on the cover of the Fall 2017 issue of

Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies, published by the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

John M. Valadez has made significant artwork for over 40 years in the Southern California region. His work has come to define an iconography of Chicano experience in the city, engaging changing dynamics and reconstructing a mythical allegory that conveys a unique vision through numerous federal and state mural commissions in California and Texas. Mr. Valadez had a critically acclaimed 35-year retrospective at the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art in La Jolla in 2011. His most recent accomplishment was a residency in Bordeaux, France in the spring of 2014 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Los Angeles/Bordeaux sister city art exchange.

Born and raised in Los Angeles by Mexican parents in a bilingual household, **Raoul de la Sota** studied art at Los Angeles City College and then at UCLA where he earned his Master of Arts degree. Soon after graduation, he received the first Fulbright Fellowship ever awarded to a Chicano artist for a year study in Peru. His explorations for a better understanding of Hispanic and Pre-Hispanic sites and their sacred cosmological value have shaped his life and artistic sensibilities. His paintings, whether on canvas, paper, or walls, express his love of the earth. Raoul de la Sota is Professor Emeritus in Mexican American History at Los

Artist Bios

Angeles City College. He has exhibited throughout the United States and Mexico.

Ana Serrano was born in Los Angeles, California in 1983. She attended Pasadena City College immediately after high school after which she was admitted to ArtCenter College of Design in Pasadena, California, where she graduated in 2008 with a degree in Illustration. Ana has since exhibited in galleries and museums all over the country, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), the National Museum of Mexican Art, and the Museum of Latin American Art. She has also had solo exhibitions at the Vincent Price Art Museum and the Rice Gallery.

Eduardo Carrillo was a graduate of UCLA, where he earned his Bachelor ('62) and Master of Arts ('64) degrees. In 1978, he completed his commission from the city of Los Angeles by designing, fabricating, and installing "El Grito," a monumental, hand-crafted tile mural at Placita de Dolores which depicts the Mexican uprising led by Father Hidalgo. He taught at the University of California, Santa Cruz from 1972 until his death in 1997.

He was considered a pioneering artist, mentor, and colleague. His traveling retrospective, "Testament of the Spirit: Paintings by Eduardo Carrillo," organized by the Crocker Art Museum, will travel across the country from 2018 to 2019, beginning in Pasadena and traveling to Sacramento and Santa Clara before concluding in Washington, D.C.

Fabian Debora has been creating art since he was a child. In 1995, he joined the East Los Angeles Streetscapers and was mentored by many leading Chicano artists and muralists. His creative expression ranges from graffiti and murals to sketching and fine art painting. He has created murals throughout East Los Angeles and maintains a studio practice. His work has been showcased in solo and group exhibitions throughout the United States. Mr. Debora is also a counselor and mentor at Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, and works in collaboration with OTIS College of Design as a liaison between community artists in Boyle Heights and students in the classroom. He continues to use art as a vehicle to communicate, educate, and touch people.

Acknowledgments

This is the fourth book in the *Hablamos Juntos* Series, a collaboration between Museo Eduardo Carrillo and the Young Writers Program. This collaboration continues to bring the work of Latinx California artists to students to use as the inspiration for their writing.

For this project, teacher Sharon Mallowney at Costanoa High School brought all her verve and enthusiasm to the class. She even wrote her own piece inspired by a work of art and modeled the process for her students. Sharon also acted as the prototype project for the curriculum *Creating Bridges: Personal Journeys into Art and Writing*, developed in collaboration with Museo Eduardo Carrillo. This curriculum is available on the Museo website. Thanks for your willingness to act as our guinea pig, Sharon!

As Executive Director of Museo Eduardo Carrillo, Betsy Andersen is a visionary and a connector. Her integrity, generosity, and all-around hutzpah help the Young Writers Program grow and develop in extraordinary ways. Our gratitude is immense.

Muchísimas gracias y de todo corazón to the artists who generously contributed their work to make this book the gorgeous publication it is: Abel Alejandro, Eduardo Carrillo, Fabian Debora, Sandy Rodriguez, Raoul de la Sota, Ana Serrano, and John Valadez.

Our foreword this year was written by Fe Silva. Fe is School Community Coordinator at Branciforte Middle School and Program Director at Senderos, a non-profit organization that works to keep native cultures and languages alive. We appreciate her insightful and encouraging words.

That this book looks as stunning as it does is due to the talent and skill of Justin Carder. The Young Writers Program is fortunate in having Justin create the look and feel of our books. His work on the *Hablamos Juntos* series has made it a standout.

Our volunteers, or Writing Project Assistants, make the Young Writers Program what it is. This project was fortunate to have the contributions of Andrea Alarcon, Miriam Campos, Maureen Davidson, Mara Palmieri, Leslie Reyes, Reyna Ruiz, and Claire Swanstrom. They worked graciously and generously with students to support their writing. Thank you.

And to the Costanoa students who worked hard to understand the artwork and their connection to it and then capture their thoughts on paper, an enormous thank you. This is your book. We hope writing it has made you proud.

Julia Chiapella
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
YOUNG WRITERS PROGRAM

About Young Writers Program

The Young Writers Program is a public/private organization, supported by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education. Dedicated to students in grades 4-12 and their teachers in building students' writing skills and confidence, the Young Writers Program brings trained volunteers into public school classrooms. These volunteers then work in small groups of students to support their writing.

OUR PROJECTS INCLUDE:

- an In-Classroom project that brings volunteers into the classroom to work a couple hours a week on teacher-initiated writing projects.
- a Dedicated Writing Room Project at Branciforte Middle School serving all eighth graders.

- the *Hablamos Juntos* Project that collaborate with Museo Eduardo Carrillo to bring contemporary Latinx artwork to students to use as inspiration for personal narratives.
- the Word Lab at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History, serving Santa Cruz City School students in an after-school setting.
- an annual Personal Statement Workshop that matches community writers and officials with junior and senior high school students to assist them in writing personal statements for their college applications.

We publish student writing in professionally designed books. Each student receives a copy of the book containing their writing and books are also offered for purchase to the public at local bookstores.

Help us out!

BECOME A WRITING PROJECT ASSISTANT

Our Writing Project Assistants are the backbone of the Young Writers Program! Working with small groups of students, WPAs focus on the elements of good writing, encouraging the writer's voice to flourish. Working as a Writing Project Assistant is a rewarding opportunity to encourage students to define their thinking through writing. Here are the essential bits about Writing Project Assistants (WPAs) and projects:

- Writing Project Assistants work in the classroom on projects directed by the teacher.
- Projects generally run from four to eight weeks.
- WPAs are fingerprinted and trained prior to being in the classroom.
- Training sessions are held throughout the year and provide strategies and skills for many aspects of writing, student behaviors, and skills.
- We ask for a commitment of at least 2 hours

a week for the duration of a classroom project. Establishing trust and consistency with students is important to their success!

OTHER WAYS TO VOLUNTEER

But being in the classroom isn't the only way you can volunteer. If you have any of the following skills or interests, we'd love your help with the program.

- EDITING
- GRAPHIC DESIGN
- FUNDRAISING
- EVENT PLANNING

VISIT

youngwritersprogram.santacruzwrites.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION
OR TO PURCHASE BOOKS

About Museo Eduardo Carrillo

Museo Eduardo Carrillo is one of only a handful of on line museums worldwide.

As an American artist, Eduardo Carrillo (1937-1997) mined his Mexican cultural heritage to inspire bold and authentic paintings.

TO FULFILL OUR MISSION AS A MUSEUM:

- we curate exhibitions of under-represented mid-career artists.
- we develop and offer original educational materials and curricula free of charge.
- we partner with other organizations to further mutual goals.

We consistently look to Eduardo Carrillo for inspiration. He destroyed barriers and dispelled misconceptions through his pioneering legacy as artist, professor and community activist. Eduardo continues to inspire our programs as we commit to filling the gaps in art history and inspire the next generation of viewers.

We welcome your comments.

Please contact us!

information@museoeduardocarrillo.org

The *Hablamos Juntos* project was made possible by a grant from **The Arts Council Santa Cruz County.**





FROM THE FOREWORD

Visual art is the language of joy, laughter, hardship, social injustice, and sorrow. It immortalizes moments that reach our soul and mind without making a sound.

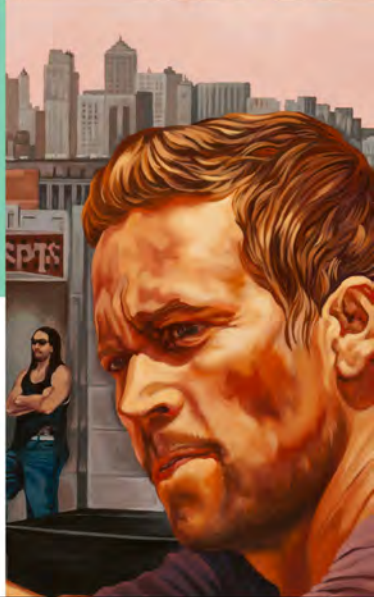
– Fe Silva, Program Director and School Coordinator



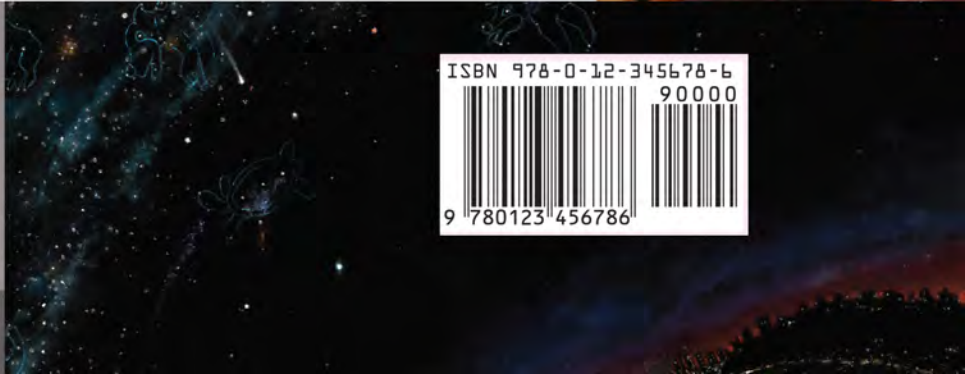
FROM THE INTRODUCTION

Most of these stories are autobiographical and some could be called autobiographical fiction, but all are drawn from contemporary cultural experiences and observations.

– Sharon Mallowney, Costanoa High Instructor



Young Writers Program



ISBN 978-0-12-345678-6
90000



9 780123 456786