

SPRING 2023

VOLUME I

SOLE MAGAZINE



Brown University's Creative Nonfiction Publication

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Editor's Note

Learning to Tie Our Shoes

Illustrations by Sole Magazine's Illustrious Illustrators

Words by Nicholas Miller

Beginning with seven members of Professor Jon Readey's Travel Writing class, Sole Magazine published its first piece in January 2022. It's taken us 16 months to make it into print but here we are finally, converting into physical form seven of the 53 creative nonfiction essays we've posted online. In that time, we've acquired an illustration team, gathered a devoted audience slightly more numerous than just our mothers, and commissioned a new (ad-free!) website to be launched later this month. In other words, we've learned to tie our shoes and are now praying they stay knotted.

In the week leading up to Christmas in 2021, I opened a page on my Notes app and started brainstorming.

There were 30 potential names for Brown's new creative nonfiction publication by the time I gave up. Most were atrocious.

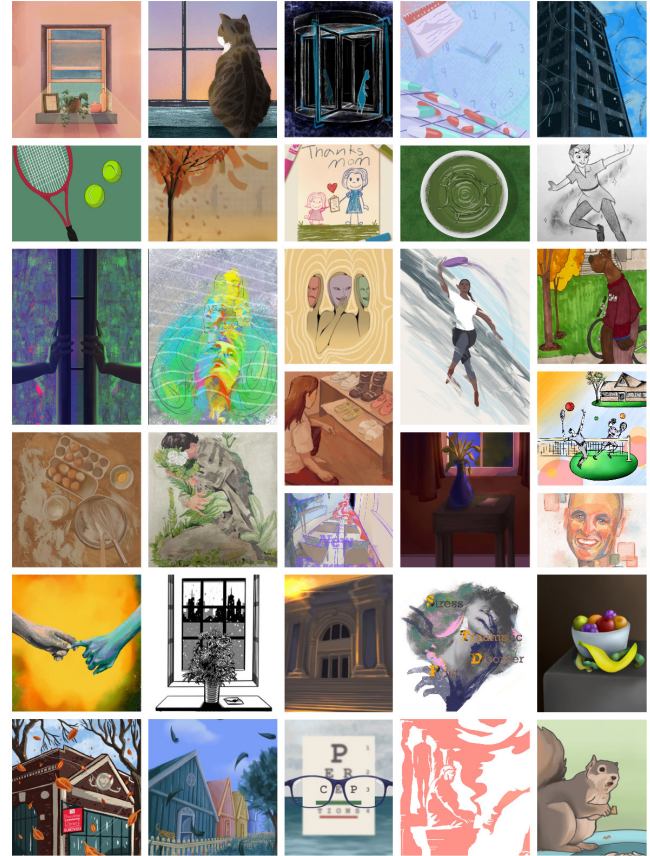
There was the corporate "Van Wickle Magazine," the pretentious "Ellipsis," the corny "Brown Paper Mag," and the wtf-was-I-thinking "Sundry." And then came "Sole."

If you haven't heard our spiel yet, "Sole" came from the term "shoe leather journalism." It's a phrase associated with the reporter you imagine in black-and-white who has a cigarette and an old-timey hat and a notepad that opens ver-

tically. It means reporting that involves walking from source to source, from scene to scene, observing things and speaking to people, and in doing so, wearing down one's shoe leather.

Creative nonfiction extends far beyond journalism, but the principle of building a piece of writing on real life experience is central to our mission. Everybody has gone places and done things and met other people and lost other people and developed weird interests and chuckled and cringed and sobbed. We have broken in our metaphorical soles, and to some degree, I suppose, also our souls.

Because of that, we all have stories to tell. Over this past year-and-a-half, Lily Lustig recounted the seven years she spent learning to put in contact lenses, Alex Waxman examined the Providence flea market as a symbol of Rhode Island's strangeness, and Deeya Prakash told us what it's like to walk through a revolving door and through tragedy.



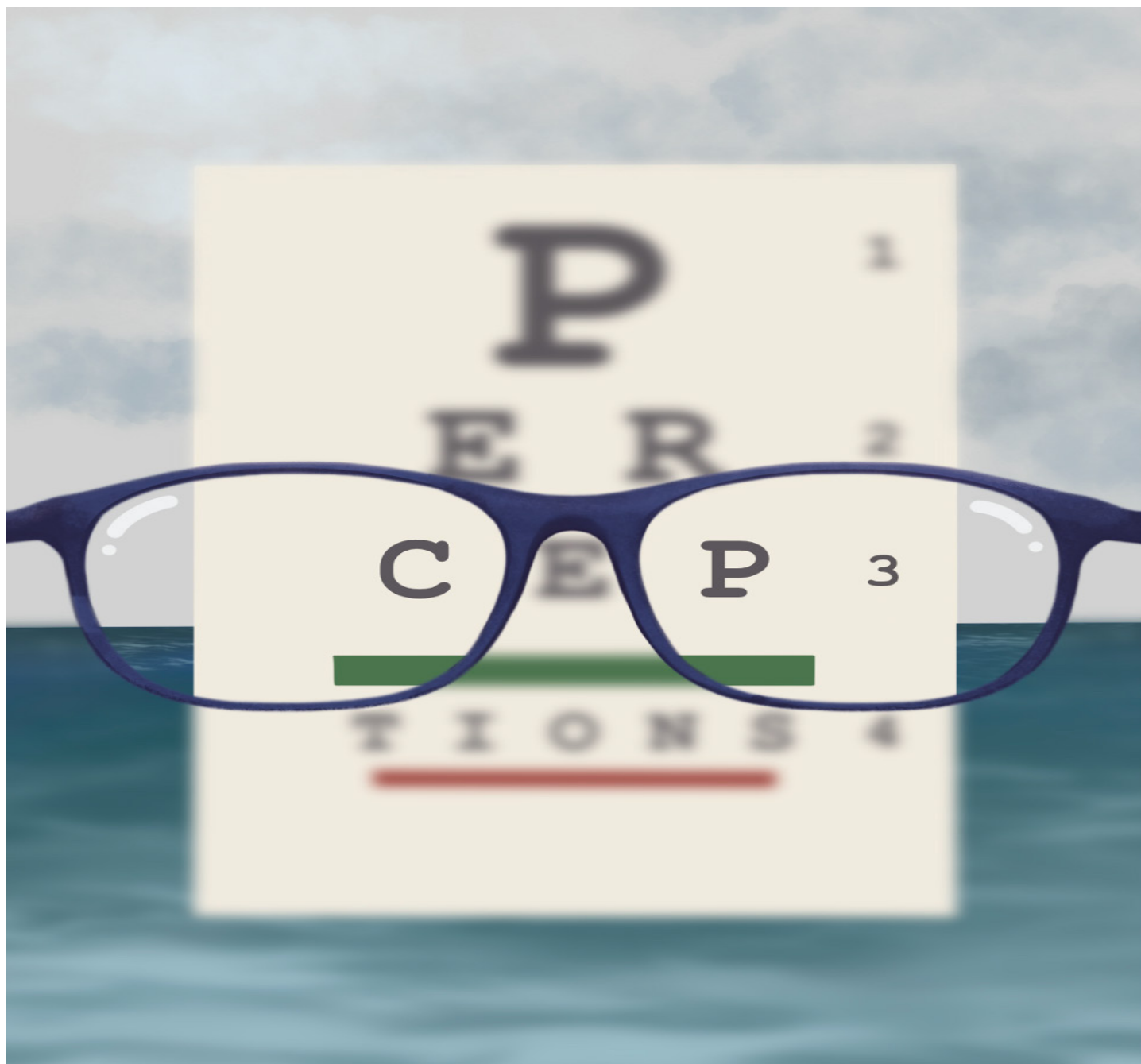
We're grateful to all those who shared stories with us, and if you haven't yet, please do! Go someplace cool and write about it, or go someplace boring and write about it. Either way, your shoes will get worn and our illustrators will draw something pretty.

And to those who have supplied our 114 followers on Instagram, the 29 website views from South Korea, and the clicks that finally made us the top result on the Google search "sole magazine" (until an unfortunate recent decline), we want to thank you for reading—from the bottom of our soles. •

Eyewitness Accounts
Perceptions

Illustration by Hi'ilei Dikilato

Words by Lily Lustig



Prologue: Blur

I am a pair of slender, purple-rimmed spectacles. I make for simple mornings and effortless evenings. I offer color and clues. I

am a sight and I am sight itself.

(More literally, here in 2011, I am a 10-year-old girl with glasses and the author of this piece. But the first part is more important.)

**March 8, 2021: The Appointment
(Part 2) (Gold Aviators)**

In the words of *Les Misérables*,
“The time is now / The day is

here.” My new optometrist has just returned to this bleak, gray-cloaked examination room. Dr. Joseph Isik defies everything that I’ve come to expect of an eye specialist: He can hold a conversation, trusts my judgment, and has the dimensions and radiance of a fluorescent lamp. He has revealed that I have a nevus on my left eye. He has gone so far as to compliment my irises, despite seeing dozens of them each day. (“They’re just hazel,” I mean to say, but his praise has transfixed me.)

“Alrighty, the moment of truth,” he sings. Opening his palms like the magician he surely is, Isik reveals two teeny plastic cartons. I have spent months pining for their contents. I have spent a decade fearing them.

Do I fare well with any entities or substances coming even remotely close to my eyes? No. No. In fact, I react quite poorly in such situations. But it’s decided. I have committed to joining the mainstream. No more clouded vision. In order to turn over a new leaf, I must cast aside my anxieties and embrace the subtle art of jabbing my fingers into my eye sockets.

Passing me my first lens, Isik gives a brief demonstration of the task at hand. Appears easy enough. Perhaps, the doctor ponders, we can begin with a simple exercise: touching my index finger to my naked cornea. Sounds somewhat doable. I give it a shot. I nearly throw up.

My squeamishness, it would seem, has not faded away as gracefully as I had hoped. But before I can apologize for being so shamefully sen-

sitive, Isik has begun prying open my lids in an attempt to insert the contacts himself. It is a *Clockwork Orange* waking nightmare; it is the sincerest act of care. And though I lightly squeal and squirm, I certainly handle myself better this time around. Blinking profusely, I come to, glance around the room, and realize that I can see.

September 16, 2014: Practice (Part 1) (Black Ray-Bans)

They noticed that I was pretty good with my feet, so they made me field hockey goalie for the season. The whole thing reeks of desperation: their star keeper’s in high school now, whereas two years ago, after completing 21 shuttles of the PACER test (out of, like, 150), I started hacking like the victim of chronic asbestos exposure. I’m no athlete, and they know it.

But they need a goalie on their roster. I’ve signed my name, and—to be honest—I’m more than a little jazzed to be part of a team. Today’s our first practice and here in the claustrophobic girls’ locker room, I’ve donned all the fetid, chunky, garish orange gear. (There are pads, quite literally, everywhere.) Only one component remains: the brain barrier herself, my helmet.

And here she comes! She’s jet black, she’s heavier than a newborn baby, she carries the aroma of a dead squirrel. Oh, she’s just grand. *Coronate me, coach!*

And as the crown descends upon my head, I wish my former self well, knowing that a new epoch has begun. Goodbye, horribly-cliché-13-year-old sob story, and

hello—

“You’ll need to take off your glasses.”

Cue panic.

“Oh. Um. But then I won’t be able to ... see.”

Nice one.

“You have contacts, don’t you?”

I do not.

“I do not.”

“Well for God’s sake, kid, how did you think this was gonna go?”

Ahem, you came to me, remember? And if you don’t let me play, you’re screwed, lady.

“I’m so, so, so, so, so sorry! I promise I can make it work! Can we loosen this? I’ll just cram the glasses underneath. See?”

Breathing labored and frames askew, I have sealed my fate for the next two months. “Look, as long as your vision’s intact, you can do whatever you want.”

Alright, I’ll take it. But just know that I will never, under any circumstances, get contacts.

March 9, 2021: Practice (Part 2)

Day 2 with contacts.

Well, let’s not get ahead of ourselves.

Yesterday, you wore them for five minutes, and you neither put them in nor took them out yourself.

Today, you have yet to attempt insertion. Because you're absolutely mortified by the prospect of it.

But that's why you've set aside 30 whole minutes before class! You cannot possibly take half an hour to do that which a normal person does in 10 seconds!! That would be downright ludicrous!!!

Crack open the first case. Scrub your hands until they sparkle. Now dry them until they burn. Place the lens on the very tip of your index finger. Look in the mirror, but for the love of God, do not look yourself in the eye. Align your missile with your target. Ignore the faint ringing in your ears that suggests you're losing consciousness. Ignore the faint taps of your housemate at the door—yes, you've overtaken the one shared bathroom, but dammit, she can wait. Allow your soul to leave your body. Aim. Fire.

AND BAM! You've failed in the most pathetic fashion imaginable. Not only did your manic blinking block the contact from your cornea—it has also caused the lens to drop directly down the drain. And somehow, your unscathed eye still stings like an alcohol-dabbed wound.

It's fine. You have dozens more. Repeat the process. Repeat the process. Repeat the process and praise every otherworldly being for preserving this lens, no matter how averse it is to suctioning to your face. Repeat the process and WAIT, something's happening here, blink blink blink, the contact's not on your finger anymore, and now there's a new kind of stinging, as if your eye has

developed a tumorous growth, and you want nothing more than to expel this foreign object from your person but you fight the urge to perform the "Out, vile jelly!" scene from *King Lear* and would you look at that! Praise be! You've done it!

Equipped with 20/15 vision, you have officially defied all odds. Revel in this moment for as long as it takes to regain your sense of awareness. Now use this mediocre eyesight to check the time, and thank yourself again for factoring in that healthy half-hour cushion.

Squint. Let the clock come into focus. Class started six minutes ago.

May 24, 2018: The Appointment (Part 1) (Tortoise Frames)

In the words of *Les Misérables*, "The time is now / The day is here." I've mustered up the courage to tell my optometrist—Martin Newman, whose patients praise him online as "an older, relatively obese man who has absolutely no personality"—that I want contacts. I suppose "want" is an overstatement. But I'm ready for my big reveal, my Velma moment; the time when everyone who's seen my face almost every day for the past seven years will finally, truly, *see my face*.

Newman's making sure that my prescription hasn't changed. The alarming proximity of our faces is made even more distressing by his severe breaths. They're more a thunder than a wheeze; they resound straight through to my retinas. As he rolls away on his miniscule, one-moment-from-imploding-under-his-intense-and-highly-concentrated-weight stool,

I make my own shuddering exhalation. Here goes nothing.

"Dr. Newman, I was wondering if I might be able to get contacts today."

The word "contacts" precludes him—in every possible irony—from meeting my gaze. "...Do you think that would be possible?"

And suddenly two bratwursts (later recognized as Newman's fingers) are tugging at my eyelids, while two more squeeze a chartreuse fluid into my now-gaping sockets. I go berserk.

"EEEEEEEEEEEEERRRRGHGGG-GGGGGGRGGGGGGGGGRGGG-GGGGGGHHHH," squawks the incapacitated girl to her merciless assailant, flailing slightly and causing the liquid to fall like tainted, toxic tears.

"If you cannot handle that, young lady, you cannot handle contacts."

Ah, how swell. I suppose now's as fitting a time as ever to hit rock bottom.

March 13, 2021: Driving Lesson

This is My Year. I relinquished my "minor" status two years ago, but Today I am an Adult. Because I have Contacts. And before long, I'm going to get my Driver's License. And right now, I'm Driving, training for my Road Test, while wearing—you guessed it—the Contacts that I put into my Eyes this morning with Relative Ease. Life is going So Well. So Well! Am I...the Best Driver Ever? The Most Independent Person?

Whocaresthatmydadislegallyobligatedtobeinthepassengerseatrightnow? I have Matured.

Kind of funky that my head is ... Pounding right now. That the street sign a few feet away is ... Illegible. That, upon closer consideration, my distance vision has ... Gone Completely to Shit.

Okay. It's Totally Fine. Maybe if I just rub my eyes a little ... here at this red light ...

Rubrubrubrubrubrub.

Fuck.

It appears that my Left Lens. Which is decidedly the wrong prescription. Has dislodged itself from my cornea. And found a home under the gas pedal.

I Abhor Contacts.

March 29, 2020: Fog (Part 2) (Blue Translucent Frames)

To step outside is to be blinded. To take one breath is to envelop yourself in a weighty, pervasive cloud. To live through a pandemic is to become your most melodramatic diarist.

What I mean is that glasses and KN95s do a great job of prohibiting each other from carrying out their basic functions. Even more simply: mask + glasses = major condensation. And yes, I'll take foggy vision over risk of infection any day. And yes, this minor inconvenience is even more insignificant in the context of a global health crisis. And yes, there's an easy fix to this minute hindrance. I've been rethinking my vendetta

against contacts.

November 15, 2018: Fog (Part 1) (Blue Translucent Frames)

A passage from the first book of *The Aeneid*, translated today in class:

"Venus surrounds the walking men [Aeneas and his friend Achates] with a dark cloud, and the goddess enveloped them with a great cloak of fog, so that no one was able to discern them, nor to touch them, nor to construct a delay, nor to ask the causes of their coming."

"Discern" is a potent word, states my Latin instructor. It means to see someone for who they truly are. It goes beyond mere sight.

I would like to be seen.

December 8, 2021: In My Eyes

A planet drifts within each pool of milk. Their crusts are a stormy cerulean, their mantle a soft chartreuse. Their outer core is a rusty brown, their inner core an impossible black hole.

I couldn't distinguish such subtleties before; perhaps I hadn't even tried. But no longer must I gaze through window panes, with their smudges and cobwebs and—figurative—bird droppings. Never have I observed life with such ease.

Staring at a mirror, into my own pupils, I can discern a faint reflection. She's hardly abstracted. She's distant, yet she couldn't be closer. I think she looks rather lovely.

Epilogue: Blur

It's terribly odd to be recognized. Does my current image not differ from the one that exists within your memory? Have I not, in turn, transcended perception? In this choice, did I seek conspicuousness or invisibility? And what does it mean if I see differently and see myself differently and yet am (seen) just the same?

Defining yourself by a flimsy pair of frames is a mistake. Electing to abandon those frames is psychotic. It leaves you with no choice but to build from scratch—to redesign and reconstruct your entire person. It's the self-inflicted identity crisis that you thought you could hold off for at least a few more years.

But what, then, does it mean to find comfort in this current state? And balance, knowing that you have not completely cast aside that other way of life and may switch between your two modes whenever you see fit?

At my bedside, the gold aviators sit neatly in their case.

Oh, please. With each metaphor, you dig yourself deeper into the world's most shallow abyss. Sure, you switched to contacts at age 20. But when were you planning to tell them that you

still

can't

ride

a bike?

•

Rhode Island Dispatch

Cool As Quahog

Illustration by Cara Kaminski

Words and Photograph by Alex Waxman

The operation was set up with one white regatta tent outside the main mail office on the university campus. From a distance, it seemed as if it were another school-board sanctioned activity, like a food-truck festival, or any of the other bread-and-circus acts they allotted the undergraduates over the course of the year. Upon further inspection, however, the ragtag, hastily put together construction, coupled with the man carrying a clipboard on the lookout for campus security, told a very different story. The tent was loaded with clothing: black and turquoise snapback hats, chuck tees, and all manner of jackets both appropriate and otherwise for the tepid mid-autumn climate. Students milled in and out, a crack of laughter rising from pairs trying on clothes. They had no thoughts of purchasing, and serious fashion collectors pawed through hangers as if they were handling gemstone necklaces in a jewelry store. I went up to the man serving as lookout and took note of the clean sweat-shirt he was wearing from Tyler the Creator's designer line, *GOLF*, his Nike sports cap, and the fanny pack he had repurposed over his shoulder as a cash bag.

Once it became clear my intention was not to turn the operation over to the administration, he visibly relaxed, telling me that his name was JP. He couldn't answer



questions while handling the mock-register, so he called over his business partner, JC, another young man wearing faded blue jeans and a NASCAR branded long sleeve white tee-shirt. He told me that they hit up universities across the northeast with their moving thrift store. I asked

him what he liked about thrifting, which made him laugh. "I don't thrift," he said, beaming, "I curate." I considered the pop-up scene for a while and wondered how this meant for Providence's secondhand clothing market, including the Providence flea market I had attended a week prior.

I had been excited to learn that Providence, Rhode Island was home to a Sunday flea market. Better yet, it was one described to me by the liquor store owner as “very weird.” Providence as a city actually was first described to me as “weird.” This quirkiness is in part an artificial operation. There are local campaign slogans which read “Keep Providence Weird” and “Don’t Let Normal In.” Regardless, I was very excited for the Providence Flea. I adore thrifting.

I should be clear. I love the *idea* of thrifting. When I look in awe at torn jean jackets and collared shirts with pearl buttons, I can no longer admire it with the same certainty I once had that the indie (usually bearded) person wearing the attire got their look from a tiny speakeasy in Brooklyn. The aesthetic of “thrift” has become an antithesis to itself. What once existed as a pragmatic solution for finding cheap and good-looking clothing has become idealized and copied. Though people want to look as if they had taken those sweet jeans off a secondhand dealer, they don’t really want to smell like it. And sure, it was a nice enough idea that you were going to go to that little shop downtown someone tipped you off for, *buuut*, that Urban Outfitters is much closer, isn’t it?

Admittedly, I am guilty of faux thrifting myself. I have a propensity for buying jackets with pre-worn qualities: green fabric frayed, but in the softest most manufacturable way. But still—in the wake of questionable authenticity—a flea market then is the ultimate thrifters’ pleasure. The crafty

coupon-collector pinches savings from hand-me-down booths. The voracious haggler gets to demonstrate their business acumen. The environmentalist is filled with the pride of upcycling. The antiquarian finally gets the missing piece to their private museum of eccentricities. Truly, flea markets are bug traps for the weirdos, oddballs, and edge residents. That’s not even mentioning the sellers!

The Sunday flea market officially begins at the start of a pedestrian bridge in a neighborhood called Fox Point. In actuality, it languishes out before and after its intended area. Whether this happens by logistical error or by the addition of unregistered tents is hard to say. As if they were a line of ants determining the best way to cut up and carry off a leaf, potential customers and window shoppers enclosed the perimeter of the market. When the ants move around their quarry, it gives the impression that the market were in motion—always marching towards you.

The bazaar took up a small patch of grass, which separated asphalt road from one of Providence’s brackish canals. Most of the tents were white with the odd black or beige colored tarp. While clothing sellers took up the majority of the stalls, another joy of the flea market was the endless supply of knickknacks also on display. Necklaces, candles, furniture, records—the flea is a nostalgic love-letter to the renaissance of yard sales before the economy of random item-selling was swallowed by Facebook Marketplace.

One of the most important things

I had learned in going to markets is to never buy anything the first time around. As with farmers’ markets, many people feel uncomfortable passing through stands, picking up this, sampling that, while at the same time knowing that they will not be dropping a dime as they do so. However, the buyer’s remorse that one feels after committing to three pints of mediocre cherry tomatoes, only to find a pallet of in-season heirlooms, feels far worse and is a quickly correcting force. Anyways, touring the stalls with an air of indifference can be a powerful thing once you’re past shame.

The large open markets of New York City that I am familiar with are apathetic to your existence while you peruse. While preparing to match a similar energy, I was surprised when the proprietor of each stand in the Providence Flea smiled happily at my gaze. Some even went so far to answer questions I didn’t ask: “They’re made from real cast iron,” or, “The deal is for everything on the shelf.” I noticed that the visual uniform of the different stalls tended to lean into the idea of progressive, dark rebellion. That is to say, a majority of the hobbyists’ tents boasted tarot cards, books on wicca, and plenty of “I’m a witch and a democrat” pins. It was unclear if the ouija boards were representative of the approaching October holiday or whether Providence was just simply a spooky town. What I didn’t fail to notice, however, was the diverse array of patrons who perused the aisles of the different haunted figure sets.

As is often the case, there was my expected mix of goths, style

icons, and neighborhood residents making up the general crowd. However, at most flea markets, there tends to be something of a code for these groups. The goths get the occult stands. New couples get the scented candle outlets. Environmentalists lug their bucket of mystery compost into the drop off point, then they leave without doing anything else. These archetypes keep to themselves, and when they pass each other, they do so quickly and quietly with the purpose of people with places far better to be than near each other. The status quo is preserved.

In the flea market by the waterfront of Providence, this couldn't have been more untrue. Grandparents picked up crow skulls, admiring their weight. Record junkies smiled at stamp collectors. Pastel colors embraced a shadow, and I realized a goth was being hugged! By someone in tie-dye! I tried to express my concerns to one of the more niche store owners: a man selling antique travel booklets and maps. He laughed. "There's so many weird people here," he told me. "They just like each other." And they were weird. It was impossible to explain. Small mannerisms and ticks, clashing color combinations, and off-mainstream greetings exchanged.

Even the layout of the event itself was weird in retrospect. Although the outermost parts of the tents faced the adjacent canal, the middle section followed no pattern at all. It appeared that they had been thrown in haphazardly with only as many walls as they felt like putting up. I realized that this effectively created the rotating movement of bodies that I had observed



before. There were no straight paths or roads to get from tent to tent; one moved by their interest and their fancies. There were no cordoned sections for this thing or that. In a way, you were forced to explore and to meander beyond your interest. It was more than mob psychology which moved the people around the tents cyclically. The strange phenomenon was, in fact, promoted by the venue. It was strange. No, it was weird.

Why belittle the "weird?" The weird is just the authentic unrecognized. I don't mean weird in the

"quirky" sense. I mean it in the bizarre sense, the lifestyle decisions which turn heads. Weirdness is tenacity. It's spontaneity. It's a man selling records, but he's a photographer, so he's transposed images of his black and white photos over the records, rendering them useless and unplayable. I passed by the photographer and asked him for his prices. He didn't have any. I don't think he sold anything that day; he was just there for the ambience.

Rhode Island itself is a weird state, I suppose. It's 1/173rd of a Texas. It

was the last state to ratify the constitution. Just living in Providence is to be a part of an inside joke. While they maintained a certain tackiness, there was also an unabashed genuineness to these stalls. They hosted images of the Providence-born H.P. Lovecraft and road signs pointed to the fictional town of Quahog, Rhode Island from *Family Guy*, named after a species of clam plentiful in the waters of the Ocean State. I viewed them first as tourist magnets: something like an “I <3 NY” shirt. I hung out near one of the booths selling particularly egregious Rhode Island swag and asked anyone who bought anything where they were from. Every one of them said somewhere nearby.

Here in Providence, the peas and carrots mixed. The grown-up versions of middle school cliques somehow came to terms and ignored ancient and unwritten laws of separation. Furthermore, the concept that you do not buy your city’s tacky souvenirs was disregarded. The flea market did not restrict itself to selling items with necessary value. Really, many of the crafters didn’t even intend to sell! They came out for the crowds and the weirdness of them, offering their own little corner of abnormalities to the curious.

Despite an aura of a niche and frugal market, research shows that second-hand sellers are on the rise. According to a survey conducted by GlobalData, 33 million more people purchased clothing from second-hand vendors in 2020 than the prior year. Besides the economic incentive of purchasing used goods, environmentalists have long praised the beneficial

impact of thrifting. By buying previously owned clothing, consumers are able to keep excess fabric out of landfills and reduce the carbon footprint of the fashion industry, a notoriously large contributor to CO₂ emissions worldwide. There are many factors that could have contributed to the rise in second-hand consumerism—notably the COVID-19 pandemic forced many indoor retailers to be shuttered and caused buyers to search for alternative shopping options. However, many predict that the second-hand market will continue to grow post-pandemic. Data shows that thrifting is more popular with Millennials and Gen Z than older generations, and thredUP’s (an online second-hand clothing distributor) 2021 Fashion Resale Market and Trend Report expects secondhand clothing sales to more than double in the next five years. In numbers, that would mean going from \$36 billion in 2020 to \$77 billion in 2025. Remember, this is only in garment sales.

Clearly, there’s real money to be made in thrifting. JC told me that he used to be a construction worker doing 40-hour shifts. He met JP in a thrift store (of course), and having quickly hatched a plot to sell to college students, they set up shop and split the profits. JC made more in one day than in a week of construction. Upon hearing this, I also noticed that there was a distinct difference between the price tag of their goods and those of the flea market. Whereas a jacket at the flea would cost \$10 on the pricier side, JC and JP were selling hats for \$35 a piece. Yes, all their stuff was pristine, but I wondered if something was lost in that. They didn’t have weird

little pins, and the student cliques that moved through the merchandise kept a wide berth. The only real difference between their tent and a fashion retailer was brick and mortar. Theirs was a pop-up situation, soon to move on to the next college and then onwards to another city. Maybe JC was right. Maybe it was a different kind of thrifting; maybe it wasn’t thrifting at all.

On my way out of the market, I noticed that I had yet to purchase anything from the vendors. I had spent so much time looking at the different people and taking in their foreign personalities, I had made a full four circles through the place without taking a single item to the counter. I looked over at a flag and handkerchief tent. While mainly centered around feline prints, the store showed off the same pride of weirdness that I’d come to expect from the location. I walked into the interior of the store and checked if there was anything I might want for any reason. My eyes passed over a flag, nearly flush with the ground, showcasing a goofy clam wearing sunglasses with the absolute cringe-worthy slogan “Rhode Island: Cool as Quahog.” The flag was stained and a bit wrinkled. I laughed, turning away from it. I thought about how utterly outside the item was from the design of my room, before slowly turning back. There was a quality of strangeness to the thing—an outlandish essence of ridiculousness and shameless local love that I felt a newfound attraction to by the end of my trip. I paid the man at the front of the tent for my clam flag, and to this day it hangs above my bed. •

The Brown University All-Star Team

Illustration by Nan Dickerson

Words by Gabby Sartori

Now, if you thought I was going to begin this piece by gushing over John Krasinski and Emma Watson, you're sadly mistaken (though they do have responsibility for resurrecting Gen Z). Am I about to honor my favorite teacher? Lunch lady? Well, sadly Gale has left her Blue Room legacy behind. No, none of that. I'm talking about the unsung heroes here at Brown University. Whether you yourself have encountered them or not, allow me to introduce you to the all-star roster of people that make sure students around here really get the full college experience.

The Bracelet Guy

Listen, I'm sure he has a name, but we ALL know who I'm talking about. I like to think this guy owns the tiny spot in front of the bookstore on Thayer Street. No sir, I don't want your jewelry. He asked me that yesterday, the day before that, the day before that, a year before that, oh and the year before that one. Honestly, I think he even asked my dad on my visit four years back. There he is perched on the street like he owns it. Some may mistake him for the town mayor if you didn't know ours. Wait—I don't even know ours.

What's really weird about this guy is that he probably knows more about your life than you think. I

mean, he was there the day you purchased your first shirt from the bookstore and he's always there when you're in a rush because you're late for class. I'm almost positive he's had the honor of being your first "good morning" greeting on your walk of shame after a Friday night (apologies for any personal PTSD I may have caused you). He eavesdrops on your conversation while you catch up with your mom on the phone, and waves to you when you're trying to say hey to your friend behind him on the walk by. He patiently waits for you to cross ongoing traffic at the intersection where cars have the right-of-way but you try playing your own rendition of Crossy Road anyways. He's the only obstacle on campus, but what's most important to know is that he's always there and always will be.

Carl

Carl is honestly one of those people you remember from a party the night before, and when you see them in broad daylight, it seems so out of place that you almost feel like you're dreaming. The only thing different is that Carl is very real. Carl is extremely unpredictable and a one-of-a-kind breed. Now, what do I mean by this? Well, have you ever been encountered by an old man in the middle of a sporting event, ser-



enading you with a guitar solo? Yea—didn't think so. Standing at a generous 5'6" with his New Balance grandpa shoes to compliment his platinum white hair, he is wandering all around this campus and I hope to God you're lucky enough to encounter him for yourself.

Carl might be the hidden gem this school has to offer. If I were ever tasked with giving a campus tour, I would play the biggest game of "Where's Waldo" in order to find him and help advertise Brown to the group. Carl is famous for his presence at any Brown home sporting event, flaunting his rugby shirt he claims was the "original" jersey he sported during his time at Brown. For context, Carl is a proud, and I mean PROUD class of '76 member. He leads the student section, heckles referees, and rallies the troops regardless of what the scoreboard says. I highly

recommend going to a sporting event to find Carl. If you're lucky enough, he may offer up one of his beers in a 12-pack from Metro Mart.

The Airsoft Snipers

If you go to Brown, the Department of Public Safety has definitely slid into your email inbox to tell you of the sniper sightings. And if you have no idea what or whom I'm talking about, consider me your DPS notification. Late night walks around campus on a weekday almost feel like you're in a warzone. I know campus safety walk exists, but would you rather have Mommy hold your hand and take you from class to class or take the bullet like a champ and show off your battle wounds? You know what they say: No guts, no glory.

At least I can say that all the stranger danger talks at school warning you about the creepy van slowly driving next to you are finally being put to good use. That damn walk past Benevolent Street is where the car lurks in the shadows. If you have headphones in, are walking at a slow pace, or just simply look like a vulnerable target, you my friend are the next one on the chopping block. I think it's safe to say I fit these qualifications pretty easily, considering I'm three for three when walking to and from the east side of campus. Twice I've been struck in the thigh, and once they fired a money shot at my head, but luckily I was wearing a hat.

You're probably wondering why the snipers made this list. Though no positive impacts spur from their existence, they long to hum-

ble the students who may very well need to be knocked down a couple notches. Maybe I'm one of them?

Naked. Donut. Runners.

To put it plainly, it's one of those "damned if you do, damned if you don't" type situations. Should I whip my phone out and take a video? Well, if your friends from home ask what it's like to attend an Ivy League school, how on Earth are you going to have proof without video evidence? But on the other hand, if your camera is out for too long I guarantee you you're gonna be deemed a "pervert."

So what exactly is the naked donut run? Well, it starts during the long-feared late nights of Reading Period, triggering the mass movement of stressed future leaders of our world to campus libraries. This of course would involve students who lug multiple textbooks to their carrels for all-nighters and early morning cram sessions. But the libraries also draw the naked lurkers of the night to offer a sweet treat to those in need.

Secret until moments before it occurs, the Naked Donut Run has long been a source of excitement, intrigue and mystique for stressed students in libraries across campus. The special day is usually on the last night of Reading Period. During the run, participants deliver donuts all over campus, from the Rockefeller Library to the Sciences Library to the Center for Information Technology. Once inside the libraries, all chaos ensues. A couple hundred or so runners disrobe and hand out donuts in

the nude. Best part about it? They literally will go up to you offering a donut, and stay there until you take one. Thanks to the Naked Donut Runners, Brown is a place where nudity isn't stigmatized or judged, and there is always a positive reaction from viewers of the "student body" (both literally and figuratively).

Honorable Mentions

V-Dub Backdoor: Don't lie, if you run out of meal swipes or need to food shop off meal plan, this door is your best friend.

"Mike": He is the "Mr. Monopoly" of Thayer Street. To clear all misconceptions, he DOES NOT own Mike's Calzones. However, he is the one behind your drunchies and hangover resurrections courtesy of Chinatown, East Side Pockets, and Baja's.

Archibald Basement: There's nothing better than getting an indoor swimming pool from a natural disaster, right? Say that to the 37 displaced first-years whose rooms flooded this year.

MoChamp Deer: I really do think this was God's way of punishing the procrastinators trying to study the night before exams. Leave it to the MoChamp Deer to barge into the coziest study room on campus and wreak havoc as it trapped itself in the main vestibule. No animals were hurt, don't worry.

Hazeltine: I know in the way beginning I said I wouldn't mention teachers, but when you see the 90 year old legend on a bicycle beating you to class, you know you're at Brown. •

Lyricisms

October in Triple Meter

Illustration by Cara Kaminski

Words by Caroline Sassan



I.

I'm starting to see why some things matter more than others, the reasons why that is allowed. Somebody told me so. Maybe that was G. and he was talking about freedom or that was J. and he was talking about the Phillies or you were my mother and you were talking about love, in which case you were standing in the kitchen with that one burnt-out lightbulb and your hands on the granite countertop. Maybe you were me and I was sorry, or you were somewhere else entirely and my heart was still beating in my teeth.

And there were the birds flying south right behind us, and each year at least one would fly into the

glass back door, and some of those times you didn't even flinch. There was the dew dripping slow out beyond us. Maybe we were talking about selective attention.

II.

So I left and said I was going to Providence. Actually, I was getting to the heart of the matter. Like that conversation with R. this summer about all these books that have at least one scene at a chapel—and just last week, your gold flecking face looking like the strongest feeling I've ever known to travel in a straight line. I'm learning that maybe there is a place for holiness after all, and maybe it's just the word others have been using for conviction, which you know I've

always liked.

But what did I know about filling space when I was thinking that was a question of architecture? About shoes' left heel to toe on the ground when I was thinking that was evidence of removal? Or sheet music with its verses and chorus—verses we were asking about just this morning, crossing the street after breakfast time. Under the curving sycamores, past those red wax leaves strewn like so many thumbprints on the brick.

Also the vertigo—and what did I know about how to break a fall?

III.

I'm learning what it is to think, in a constellated year, that all of this is becoming more likely all the time. That I can be so far from the summer, when all the day long I passed over the bridge with something blonde caught in my eye. I'm left with a brand new impulse to write in the past tense. I'm left closing my eyes and thinking I know something about narrative arcs, something about fabulation.

It would probably look like you on the ferry or you on the sidewalk or you, dodging allegory until the day you die. You, reading the words off my wall. Head turned sideways, reading real slow. Peeling them off one by one. •

Writing the Mind

Around and Around and Around

Illustration by Autumn Tilley

Words by Deeya Prakash

TW: Mental health, suicide

When I was 13, the golden girl and I used to paint each other's nails in the closet next to her bed. Squished up against old comforters and nestled underneath a baby blue fitted sheet was our salon, bottles neatly arranged like the balls on a pool table. Our laughter echoed off the walls. Her shoulders pushed against mine. It was my favorite place to be.

I was at a mock trial competition once and I had to step out of the elevator because it felt too tight. I was 17 and the bodies of our teammates and advisors and parents who had hauled ass to the courthouse at 6:30 am were pressing into every part of me and I couldn't think about anything except for how many floors remained. The elevator climbed. It opened four floors too early. Someone was trying to get on.

I pushed my way out and ran towards the stairs.

It's the same with porta-potties. Tunnels. Those fitting rooms where there's no crack of space at the bottom. Revolving doors too.

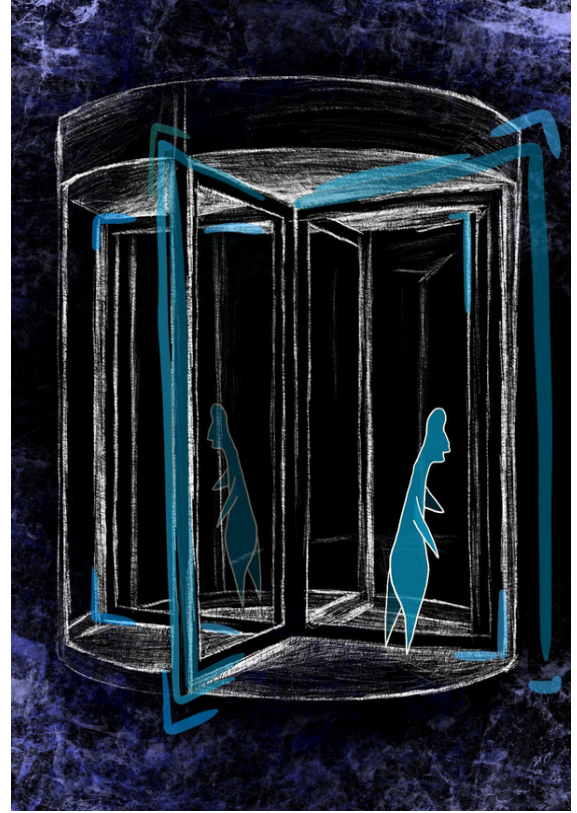
It is easy to think that walking is a practice that is done intuitively, but ethnographers across the

country analyze the way that throngs of people move in tandem, footsteps synchronized as a horde of individuals move in the same direction. Revolving doors have been a gift for researchers studying walking cultures. Who goes in? Who goes out? How many people go in at once? What if you don't get out in time?

What if you just keep going around and around and around?

ok see but what if i got stuck in there like there would be no possible way i could but what if i mean there's always a way there's a way for anything to happen so what if i just go in and it doesn't do the spinny thing anymore and i'm trapped what then what do i do then how would i get out and what if someone else was in there with me and we were both trapped in the quarter slice and what if our breath fogged up the sides and we ran out of oxygen and then what if we

revolving door: *n.* a door having usually four partitions set at right angles radiating out from, and revolving on, a central vertical axis, allowing large numbers of people to pass through while eliminating draughts.



We are sitting in my senior psychology class and I am 18 and there is a breeze coming from the window on the wall. I am talking to my seat neighbor. Her name is Cleo. We have been good friends for a few years, her English accent a velvet fabric covering the bright light of the classroom. She is excited because her cross country meet is tonight, and she has a chance of taking home some hardware.

When I was 14, I noticed Cleo in the hallway and told myself that I would be friends with that girl. She had on a wool cap and wore a satchel instead of a backpack.

She had one of those smiles that makes you feel like the inside of a snowglobe. Hazy.

We learn about a principle called the revolving door syndrome. Cleo lets out a soft “oh” when she hears the name and smiles. “I love revolving doors,” she says but it really sounds like she’s saying, “I luv revourving durs.”

revolving door syndrome: *n.* refers to the status of a mental health patient and their tendency to relapse. They will get better for a while, and then as soon as it seems they have cleared their illness, will fall back into it again.

We learn that more than half of all psychiatric patients are readmitted after being discharged. They have intense repeat crisis episodes and find themselves back where they started, all progress eradicated because of a lack of follow-up, inadequate medical monitoring, or just bad luck.

“Oh,” she says softly. “Well I don’t luv that.”

When I am 13 the golden girl kills herself. I find out because my mother is on the phone with her mom and is terrible at keeping her voice down. Time presses against the sides of my skull and I do everything in my power to jump out of my skin but it holds me fast, clinging close, pulling tight. I feel like a prisoner, tears and snot running down my face as I scream *let me out let me out let me out*. The world stops spinning for a second and I am caught in between

here and there in a strange place of now-what. I pull myself out by the rims of my fingernails, blood crusting the sides like the paint she used to keep in her bedside closet.

One year later, I lock the swiss army knife my father gave me as a gift in the drawer beneath the bar. I toss the key in the trash disposal and get yelled at when the pipe tears.

Two years later Cleo’s older sister is yanked out of the middle of the road by someone and sobs on the curb in front of the only Kroger in town. Cleo gets a call and drives so fast she gets pulled over, the blue lights shining in her rearview mirror. The police car escorts her to the only Kroger in town. She picks up her sister and drops her off at home. They don’t speak. The car door still open, Cleo drives to my house, opens the front door, and collapses in my arms. “I can’t believe she would do that,” she screams but it really sounds like muffled tears and snot blended with terror and anguish because that’s what it is. I hold her tight and pull her close because I know how.

When I’m 19 my boyfriend tells me that he hasn’t felt this dismal in years. We are laying on a couch in his basement, and I’m threading the soft locks of his hair between my fingers, my ear pressed to his heartbeat. His sweater sleeves are pulled over his hands, and he is quiet for several minutes. We breathe together. He tells me it’s hard to want to be alive. His beat quickens, and I blink slowly, listening to the world we’ve created in his chest. I can only

whisper, and he moves his head to hear me better. I ask him if he will do anything reckless. He says no, brushing a piece of my hair from my cheek. My eyes close. We breathe together. I do not believe him. How can I?

We break up fitfully, neither one of us wanting to let go.

Who goes in? Who goes out? How many people go in at once? What if you don’t get out in time? What if you just keep going around and around and around?

claustrophobia: *n.* The irrational fear of confined spaces. People affected by claustrophobia will often go out of their way to avoid said spaces, such as elevators, revolving doors, tunnels, tube trains and public restrooms. However, they also state that avoiding these places may reinforce the fear, and cause an individual to fall into an even deeper fear of small spaces, scared they may get trapped and stuck *and imprisoned in a place they can’t get out of because even though it doesn’t happen all that often what if it did you never know you literally never know you have absolutely no way of knowing at all you*

I am 17 in an elevator in the courthouse. Cleo is my co-counsel in our mock trial. We will win the trial and she will come over and we will watch shitty rom-coms and talk about boys and paint each other’s nails. Now, I ask Cleo what she thinks of revolving doors.

“I dunno, ther quite fun I suppose. A noice break from the noise of the wuld.” ●

Shoes

Illustration by Stella Tsogtjargal

Words by Stella Kleinman

Ballet shoes are made to be destroyed. Professional dancers go through hundreds of pairs a season. After purchasing each new pair, they take an entire toolbox to them: stomping, slicing and stabbing. This process softens the shoes, making them easier to dance in.

Mine are pale pink and rough canvas, ribbons and rips and tape. When I force my feet into them, they flush and peel, like sweet, ripe fruit. Blisters spring up and flower. The perfect fit.

I'm 4 years old and can finally touch the kitchen counters. I decide it's the best idea in the world to hang off of one, sliding my socks across the tile floor. My mom sits at the table, watching me and her crossword puzzle with a wary eye. When I trip over the air and fall on my face, my mom sighs, laughs and scoops me up into her arms.

"That's it. You're going to ballet lessons next week!"

In class, every girl wears a pink leotard with a white skirt. I could rip the ensemble apart with a hangnail. I'm wearing my first pair of ballet shoes and two Band-Aids. I feel like I could flutter away, or be swept up in a gust of wind.

Years later, I audition for *The*

Nutcracker, a ballet about Christmas, magic and candy. For my part, I have to dye my ballet shoes green. They look wrong in my hands, but perfect on stage. My mom does my makeup for the first time and my skin glows under the stage lights. The older dancers, none of whom I know the names of, hug me after the performance, chattering on and on about how beautiful it was. The Sugar Plum Fairy compliments my pointed toes, saying they stood out in my green shoes.

I sit in the basement, smashing my next pair of shoes against a cinderblock to mold them to my feet. After ten hits, they are soft. After twenty, they are flimsy. After thirty, they are broken. So much destruction in the pursuit of perfection.

Ski boots connect the skier to their skis, translating body movement to speed, turns, and crashes. My ski boots are black with white buckles and usually covered in snow. Putting them on is like digging a grave and jumping into it, but taking them off is like seeing the sun for the first time. Walking in them requires relearning how to walk. The boots lock my ankles



and I must hobble around the lodge like a zombie, ominously clicking *heel-toe, heel-toe* against the worn carpet. But once I clip them into my skis, I don't need to relearn anything.

My dad is a lifelong competitive skier and takes me to Bristol Mountain for the first time when I am 3 years old. I don't remember much about learning how to ski, other than being on a leash for the first few years and falling off the chairlift two or seven times.

My ski boots are rigid and supportive. The tighter they are, the harder I can "crank" my turns. Downhill skiers lean forward in

their boots, pressing their shins against the padded tongue. If a skier exerts enough pressure, their boots will rip the hairs out of their legs. My shins don't grow hairs anymore.

I ski my first black diamond only so I can tell my older brother I did it at a younger age than he did. I don't fall once. Afterwards, in the lodge, my mom watches my dad skeptically from behind a newspaper, wondering why he let me do it. He laughs, triumphantly throwing his boots into our family ski bag.

It's with my dad's attitude that I've gotten myself and many others into some sticky situations. Creating new trails, trying new tricks in the terrain park, getting stuck in between two trees, and running out of snow. Sunset Lodge hot chocolate always tastes better after attempting something questionable.

Most of the ski boots I've owned were hand-me-downs from my older brother and became hand-me-downs to my younger brother. The buckles on the front of my most recent pair are old and require teeth-gritting and calluses to secure, but my dad thinks this builds character. When I start racing, all of my competitors have the same blue racing boots, which certainly look cooler, but don't provide their wearers with a free pre-race workout. My dad asks me if I want a pair, but I prefer the hand-me-downs.

Track spikes, or just spikes, are lightweight running shoes with metal points protruding from the

sole. There are different kinds of spikes for different events. Since I typically run shorter distances, my blue and yellow spikes have all their points towards the front. They rip a hole in my drawstring bag on the way to our meet, so I know they're sharp enough to race on.

The upperclassmen on my track team give their extra metal points to the younger racers and guide them through their races. Turns out there is a strategy for running specific distances; it's not just "try to run faster than the other kids." For the 400m dash, the key is to start with an all-out sprint, "float" slightly slower than top speed for the second hundred meters, stride as if running uphill for the third hundred meters, and "kick" as fast as possible for the finish. Before every race, this strategy stands with me at the starting line, but usually, it false-starts, sprinting away from my head before the gun goes off. It's just me, my empty skull and my spikes for 400m around the track.

Ninth grade. The 11th hour of a 10-hour track meet. Our coach realizes he forgot to enter a team for the 4x800m relay, the last event of the night. He looks at the four girls sitting closest to him in the tent. "Stella, Gemma, Maddy and Chloe! Perfect! Start warming up!"

As I am notoriously terrible at rock-paper-scissors, I will be running the anchor leg. The anchor leg is typically for the fastest runner, and it's the most intense part of the race. However, since none of us run this distance, we are destined to be out of the competition. "It'll be funny, guys!"

I watch my teammates run their hardest, spikes flying around the track. By the time Maddy hands me the baton, we're about 150 meters behind the closest team. I take off, ponytail flying, stadium lights glaring down upon my face. My makeshift relay team yells at me, most of their cheers sounding like catcalls. By the time I make it back to the start line, everyone else has finished. I am alone on the track.

The bad thing about the 800m is that it's two laps. For the final lap of the race, I could do anything. I could walk, cartwheel, somersault, or turn away from the track and disqualify my team. I look down at my spikes and dig them into the rubber, picking up my pace for the kick. My feet are weightless and my bones are hollow. I clock in at the finish line with a personal record (PR) 800m split. My team gets last in the race and we buy pizza bagels to celebrate.

My mom likes my colorful spikes because she can always pick me out on the track. Tonight, she didn't need to work too hard.

Slippers confuse me. Why make a shoe and tell people not to wear it outside? Why do people buy these? When I get a pair of white, fuzzy ones for Christmas, I understand the enthusiasm. I am walking on clouds.

Perhaps, as a teenage girl, the greatest benefit of slippers is the silence. I'm clumsy, as we know. If I come home past my curfew, my whole family will wake up to creaks in the floorboards. But if I leave my slippers by the back door and immediately put them

on upon entering the house, they won't hear a thing.

I am not a cozy person. Typically, I seek speed, adrenaline rushes, discomfort, exhaustion, fear. I crave the chase. I want medals, crashes, and victories.

Fuzzy slippers slow the world down. They give me the chance to read the books on my never-ending list, to light a fire and to bake lemon tarts.

I can think inward. I can create.

My cat likes to sleep on soft surfaces, and my slippers are her favorite. When I write at my desk, she curls up on my feet. I can't stop writing until she wakes up.

Over quarantine, I keep my slippers on, from my first steps on my bedroom carpet to the rolling credits at the end of whatever show my dad wants to watch each night. *Tiger King*, *Freaks and Geeks*, and every nature documentary we have access to. When we watch lion documentaries, we root for the lions to kill and eat the zebras. When we watch zebra documentaries, we root for the zebras to get away. When we watch the news, in the early days, we root for two weeks off from school. In the later months, we root for a return to school. I take my slippers off for family walks at sunrise and sunset. I used to hate Sundays, but now every day feels like a Sunday and I can't hate every day.

My slippers are not clean and crisp anymore. They are embroidered with cat hair and bejeweled with dirt from my mom's plants. Thankfully, the outside world will

never know.

White Air Force 1 sneakers go with every single outfit. I've pushed this idea, wearing them with a bikini, a black minidress, and a superhero costume. I thrift a pair of these shoes the summer before college. I think they were probably made for tweenage boys, but hey—if they fit, they fit. I don't ever untie them, I just slip them on and off whenever duty calls.

Upperclassmen tell me that for my first semester of college, I need a pair of designated "frat shoes." Shoes for falling, getting stepped on, and wading through puddles of rainwater and sweat and alcohol. Shoes for being okay after falling, getting stepped on, and wading through puddles of rainwater and sweat and alcohol.

When my friend Mary and I go to New York City, it rains the entire weekend. The only thing I hate about rain is getting my socks wet. But there's so much dirt (and other mysterious matter) caked into these shoes that they've actually become water resistant. The laces are permanently knotted by Sunday. It's an awesome trip.

My first Spring Weekend at college and I'm jumping up and down along with hundreds of other people in a confined space to a song that's been remixed so many times it's unrecognizable. Right as the beat drops, another student comes down from his jump and lands directly on my ankle. My sneaker doesn't move, but the joint does. I hear a lovely crack and start to fall, but my friends catch me. 10 hours later, the five

of us are leaving Health Services with my brand new crutches. Five hours later, we're on our way to the second concert. I can't fit the sneakers over my swollen ankle, but my roommate lets me borrow her Vans. My X-ray results come in during the third song—severe sprain! No break!

Shoes for comparing with friends and debating whose are the dirtiest. Shoes for traveling. Shoes for walking under sunsets, fireworks, and street lamps.

Going barefoot is an interesting sensation. It's grounding and perplexing at the same time.

Walking barefoot on rocks requires gentleness, patience and careful distribution of weight. Walking barefoot on sand requires cleaning the grains out from between toes. Walking barefoot in the campus library requires fried brain cells and a complete lack of care about what other patrons will think.

At the age of 4, I run barefoot through wet cement, selectively blind to the caution tape around the new sidewalk square. My family moves towns, but my tiny footprint is a permanent resident. At the age of eighteen, I take my sandals off and accidentally step in spilled white paint from a mural, tracking it all over a parking lot. I wonder if my prints are still there.

The same bare feet under pink ribbons, forceful buckles, silver spikes, and dirty knots. The same footprints growing farther and farther apart over the years. •

Collections

The Favorite Words of Sole Magazine

Illustration by Yuqi Sun

Words by Deeya Prakash, Libby Dakers, Pooja Kalyan, Navya Sahay, and Riley Stevenson



We asked some of our staff writers to each write a short blurb in response to a prompt: "Write about your favorite word." We received a wide range of responses, about words that were silly, graceful, violent, sophisticated, imaginary. Take a stroll through these mini word exhibits, starting with Deeya Prakash's "diaphanous," and seeing where you end up.

Diaphanous

Deeya Prakash

Diaphanous. It sounds like the name of an eternal goddess, her body slim and sleek, eyes drawn closed, skin glowing in the evening air. It sounds like a clear breath at high altitude, open sky and streaming sunlight, and "Mom can we please go..." It sounds like the meadow. It sounds like my sister.

Say it. Whisper it. It feels like something you shouldn't know.

It means delicate, light, the way the wind blows raindrops off the side of our moving minivan, tears streaming down cheeks until you've cried so much that all there is is silence, a gaping mouth and a beating heart and no sound but the echo of what once was.

It means sheer. Transparent. Cover it up and we'll see right through.

It means that you know I can't stand living at home anymore but I come back to school and cry because there will be a time in my life when our parents are no longer alive.

Diaphanous. -ous. *us*. You and me. Do you miss when it was just you and me? Jack and Jill bathrooms and sidewalk chalk smiles and pajama pants too short? Let's go watch the stars together. Nobody braids my hair like you do.

Diaphanous. -phan. *phone*. I'm sorry I sometimes don't pick up the phone. Tell me about your day. How was school? How's dad?

Diaphanous. Di-. *Die*. Unthinkable. It's a little scary how diaphanous this life can be. It feels like something you shouldn't know.

Bleeding

Libby Dakers

Everyone knows the drama of bleeding. Rich red, morbidity, beating hearts. What about the bleeding that means settling into a new position? The bleeding that describes how one thought, one sliver of wind, one bold spot of ink, runs into its next opportunity?

Bleeding demonstrates the unity of two becoming one, as my time bleeds into yours, and yours into mine when we walk side by side down the street. Bleeding describes life, though not in the way of warm blood running thinly. An unmistakable feeling; I bleed when you cry.

Bleeding is the word that pulled me closer, urging me to place words where they may not typically go. In my first poems, the wind would not tousle the leaves and the tension in the air would not throw pebbles at my window

if the blue sky did not bleed to dusk. Bleeding pushes me through boundaries, like blood pours through open skin. Think beyond the heart, because so much pulses around you.

Ube

Pooja Kalyan

Ube. Not pronounced how you might think at first glance, but rather, "OOH-BAY."

U, for unexplainably delicious.

B, for beautifully purple.

E, for exquisitely flavorful.

Say it out loud and you'll experience the wonderful way the word bounces off your lips. Feel your mouth open for the "Ooh," quickly close for the "Beh," and open again, but a little less this time, for the "ay." It's kinda like bouncing on a trampoline—how the lips quickly bounce together, then apart to say the word.

It's wonderful.

Almost as wonderful as the taste of the starchy root vegetable itself. I remember the first time I tasted ube. A sweet, nutty flavor blended perfectly into a naturally purple ice cream. My taste buds came alive for a brief moment, as if the ube was begging me to try another spoonful. I couldn't resist.

I still can't.

Ube. Picture purple yam. Still sweet like plain sweet potatoes, yet

even more moist. Coco-nutty, with a hint of vanilla. Soft and moist when boiled. Creamy and smooth in a scoop of ice cream.

Delicate and light as a pot de crème.

Yes, ube is a word. But it is also an experience:

An experience to say it.

An experience to eat it.

An experience to see its beautiful purple color.

You won't resist.

Elusive

Navya Sahay

Elusive. Roll it down your tongue, lingering on the “l” like it’s your true love but playing hard to get—which fits in well with the word’s meaning: a thing that’s there briefly, fleetingly, before escaping to somewhere beyond your reach. It’s ice melting in your hands. A deer you glimpse in a quiet forest that bolts as soon as you try to get a better view of it. A shimmering reflection in a pool of shifting water that vanishes with the slightest change of angle. It’s something that is never fully there, but which makes its presence felt, becoming all the more valuable because of its infrequency. It’s a rarity, a word that exists in abstract realms of hypothetical thought, a word to quantify the unknown that one can’t catch. As a word, it is subtle just like what it describes—it is sleek, sophisticated, and myste-

rious. It isn’t like those chunky, obvious words like *happy*, *delicious*, *magnificent*, *horrible*, or *splendid*. It calls to mind clouds or mists in the moors that one can never quite touch or dreams one can never fully remember. It’s an introspective word, something that makes you stop and think, “Wait a minute, what is in there?” A secret that no one knows but everyone longs to find out.

BEEBAHBOO

Riley Stevenson

My favorite word is not exactly a word. Rather, it is a nonsense collection of sounds, which came to me straight from the mouth and mind of a 6-year-old. It’s not a word but a memory, really, forever ingrained in my mind.

It was the second-to-last day of summer camp. I was on the water with two 6-year-old boys, facilitating their now-typical routine of jump, splash, climb. Floating in the water, I waited as the boys launched off the dock and into my arms, then flung them back toward the dock, where my co-counselor sat, helping them in and out of the water. Time and time again we repeated this routine, all splashing and giggles and bright sunlight reflected in flying water droplets.

In one of these cycles, B, on his way into the water, gazed at me with a wide-eyed, big smile, and said, in his little-kid manner of never-ending monologue: “I can’t wait to be alive!” I instantly cataloged this, recognizing the way it

so perfectly described his ethos: Each moment was more exciting than the last, each instant one to be savored before galloping onto the next, even more breathtaking second. Moments later, he shouted, of all things, “BEEBAH-BOOOOO!”

A series of nonsense sounds, exclaimed into a glorious summer day, all yellow and green and blue, warmth and noise and sunshine. He could have said anything at that moment, but when he said it, these two ideas—B’s zest for life, and the phrase itself—were instantly and eternally linked in my mind.

In that moment I thought, unexpectedly, of every second I’ve ever spent on a trail, all of the miles I’ve walked on my own two feet, the trees I’ve seen, the mountains I’ve climbed. I felt a moment of intense, blinding gratitude—I can pull myself up hard trails and howl at the sunrise from rocky outcroppings, and I get to be here, present in this moment of slinging a child onto a paddleboard while he shrieks with delight.

Now, when I am on mountain summits, approaching tumbling rapids, at the top of ski runs, and skating on frozen ponds, it is my favorite thing to scream, to remind me that I am alive and lucky: “Beebahboo.” This is it. I think of B each time, of how well he knew that nothing has ever mattered more than this single moment, and the next one, too. I think often of those two blue, waterlogged eyes staring straight at me, and my two feet strong beneath me as I stand atop the world. Beebahboo. I can’t wait to be alive. •

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