

flow

OPEN

WINTER 2022



RYERSON



*Cause this is it for all we know.
So say goodnight to me.
And lose no more time, no time.
Resisting the flow.*

-Ohm, Yo La Tengo



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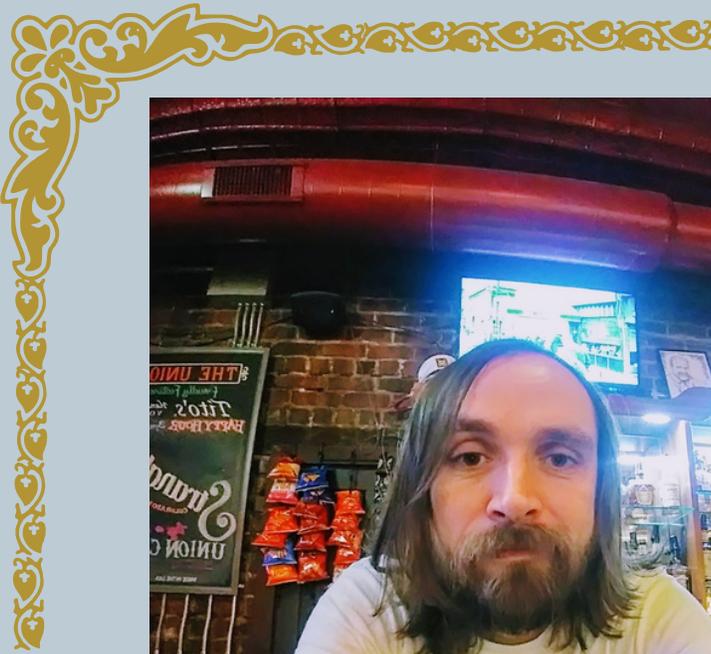
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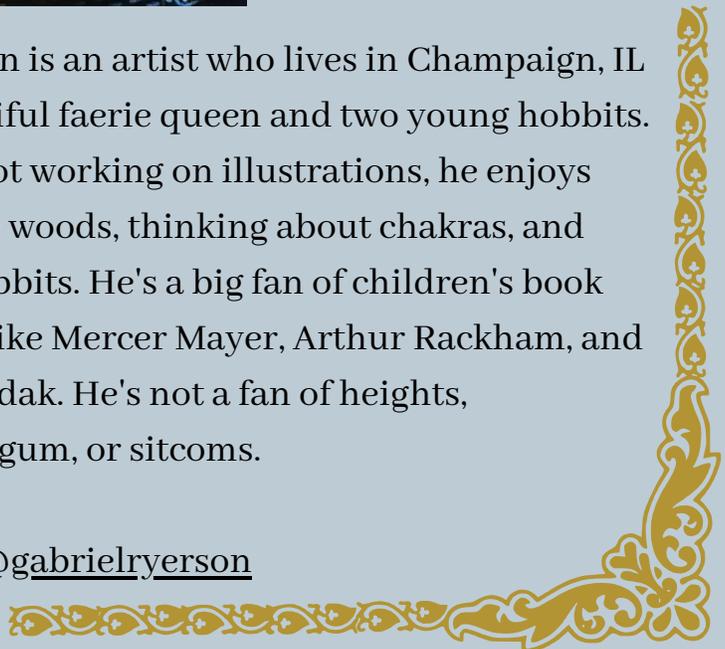


Gabe Ryerson



Gabe Ryerson is an artist who lives in Champaign, IL with a beautiful faerie queen and two young hobbits. When he's not working on illustrations, he enjoys hiking in the woods, thinking about chakras, and talking to rabbits. He's a big fan of children's book illustrators like Mercer Mayer, Arthur Rackham, and Maurice Sendak. He's not a fan of heights, old chewing gum, or sitcoms.

Instagram: [@gabrielryerson](https://www.instagram.com/gabrielryerson)



Flow is a project made as a result of the curiosity and predicament of living in a human body, the stories that they hold and how they unfold. It's a digital publication made to share stories, art and interaction surrounding the ebbs and flows of the human experience.

www.patreon.com/azinecalledflow



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Ways you can support:

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Each collaborating artist is paid for their contributions.

10% of all proceeds this season will be donated to BEAM (a non-profit organization committed to the mental health of Black communities)

Thank you all who share, give and support this project and beyond!

Letter from the Editor



Erin Pfahler

As the year 2021 came to a close, I was reminded by a friend that setting resolutions for the new year can be much more rewarding if you let go of striving for something far off in the distance. Rather, *open to what is right in front of you*. This friend has lived at least twice as long as I have, so I find myself clinging to his words in the same way that I cling onto the poetry of Mary Oliver or the philosophies of Thich Nhat Hanh. I respect his experience, his wisdom of all he has seen, heard and done.

These words: *Open to what is right in front of you*, have echoed in my mind again and again as I get lost in researching far away places or feel drawn to completely changing the course of my life. *Open to what is right in front of you*, I tell myself in these moments when I'm pulled away. My mind often wants to travel to the longing and nostalgia of the past or the anxieties and excitements of the future, but what happens when I open? when I open to what is right in front of me?

I was sitting in meditation this past weekend on the floor in the room I was assigned. I was at a retreat. My Aunt, who is a Catholic nun, reached out to me at the beginning of the year to invite me to this retreat she was leading at a parish center in Charleston, West Virginia. The short hour and a half drive from where I live in Athens, Ohio and the topic of the retreat – *compassion* – led me to say yes. *Open to what is right in front of you* rang through my ears, too.

I signed myself up and just a few weeks later found myself sitting cross legged on the floor between two beds while the others attending the retreat were at mass.

As I sat, I noticed how much was right in front of me; the sensations in my left hip from the drive the night before (a little bit of pain), the restful feeling in my body from the great night of sleep I needed (gratitude), thoughts of anxiety about how others at the retreat (all Catholic women) were perceiving me, worry and stress over the violence all over the world (seen in the media and unseen) and the pieces of my life that felt unattended to.

To notice all of this without needing to fix it made me feel alright.
I didn't feel incredible, blissful or even at peace.

But I didn't feel my body tense up as it does sometimes or feel the need to scream at the top of my lungs. At ease, might be the word I'd use to describe it. I held this moment, what was right in front of me, with compassion instead of trying to change what was going on out there with my mind (no matter how hard I try, this just never quite seems to work) or reach for something different as I often do. But when my mind went there, into fix-it mode, I held that with compassion too. Open to it and aware of it, but not giving in to judging myself for what came through.

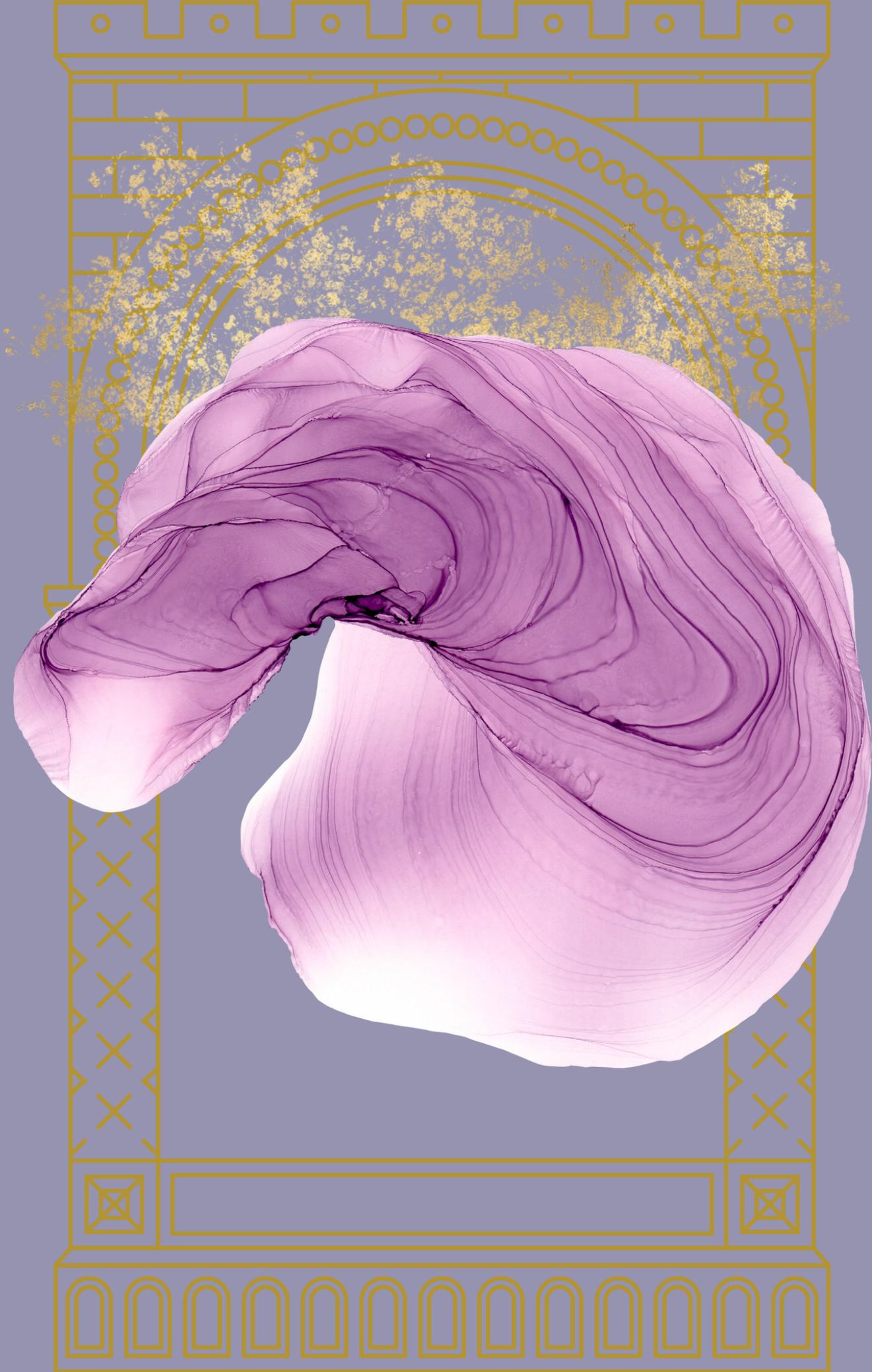
Later that afternoon, my Aunt, Sister Mary Dean, shared some information to the whole group about the science backing up this attitude of compassion. How our brains can actually rewire with practice. It's called neuroplasticity. Our brain's ability to adapt and change how it functions, how it reacts and thinks about our experiences, how we view the world and our interactions in it. She also brought up photons, the energy particles in and between all living beings; carriers of electromagnetic radiation that give off a certain energy. So, I started to think... the compassion I had felt for myself moments before in meditation could have possibly been felt beyond my someone beyond me. This compassionate energy could have been pouring out into the surrounding space, where others might have felt it too. My aunt closed this topic with a comment on the beauty of this thought in times of social distancing. Being able to "touch" or be in contact with others 6ft or even farther apart. A FELT sense of connection.

Open to what is right in front of you.

Saying yes to this retreat led me to making more connections to a group of people I had removed myself from for years. I grew up in a Catholic family. We went to church every Sunday and had many close relatives on the path of religious life; two aunts who are nuns, a great uncle who was a bishop and everyone else, devout practitioners. While my spiritual practices look a bit different than my family's and the women I was surrounded by at the retreat, the practice of compassion was shared, is shared, has been shared for centuries and really, all of time. It's a way we, as humans, have come together to connect rather than fulfill the "need" to be right. To see someone else's experience as 'not so different' than mine.

Although *opening to what is right in front of me* revealed some discomfort, approaching whatever came my way with a sprinkling of compassion for myself, for others, for the world around me lead to a feeling of interconnectivity that threads together you, me and every living being in between. *Open to what is right in front of you* and see what hitches a ride. You might just be surprised, like me!

Love, *Erin*



Turning the lens



reflection prompts for writing and thinking

Write "Open to what is write in front of you..." on a blank page and write from there for 5, 10, 15 or more minutes

What does being "open" mean to you?

Think of a moment in your life when you were open to what is right in front of you. What was the situation? What happened? How did it make you feel?

Write 'OPEN' at the center of a page and create a word web for that word. Include words, phrases and anything that draws a connection to that word.

What is the opposite of being open?



Keep an Open Mouth

by Jacq Guyton

Right now my friend's picking up olives and oranges from the store for me. I'm passing by anyway, they said, so I wouldn't try to talk them out of doing me a sweet favor.

The store is out of the rye flour I need; my friend reads off the names of others the co-op has: "*chickpea, buckwheat, some paleo shit...*" I ask them to get me buckwheat flour because it tickles a faint recollection of eating buckwheat crepes years ago. In my mind, I'm already building pancake castles, stacking them five stories high, with a fried egg on top shooting out golden rays of thick, jammy sunshine.

My friend picking up the olives hates olives. Hates most things salty and submerged. Once, because I asked, they tried a slice of carrot I had pickled. They will probably never eat anything I've pickled again, but I will never expect them to. They tried it once, for me and my happiness, and that meant as much to me, if not more, as a pickle-loving friend eating the entire jar.

Earlier today, I didn't know how to express what it all meant, being open, so I opened a cookbook I got for Christmas to a random page and read.

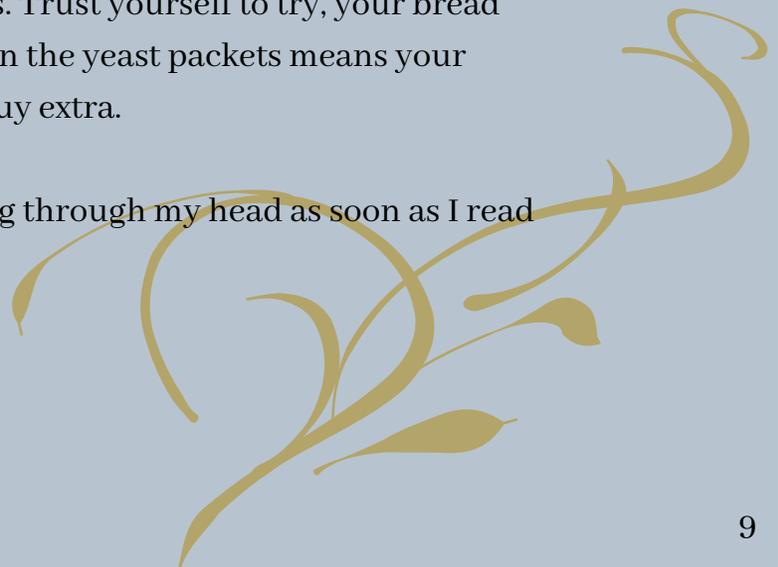
Focaccia. OK, book says I'm making focaccia, I'm making focaccia.

Trust others and you'll start to see in new colors. Trust yourself to try, your bread will always rise. Trust that the expiration date on the yeast packets means your little ant-sized friends are still alive. Actually, buy extra.

There's a million questions that come swimming through my head as soon as I read the recipe. Cooking is all variable.

Questions that have answers.

Usually too many to count.



While I'm cooking: It calls for olives, what about olive salad? Could I use buckwheat flour? (Nope, doesn't have gluten.) Why isn't my yeast water frothing? Is my water not warm enough? (Google says 110-115 degrees, my finger's 98 degrees so if I stick it in the water it should feel almost too hot to touch, right? But not boiling, that'd kill the yeast for sure...) Does the yeast really fart out bubbles like my dad told me as a kid? Who do I want to help me eat this?

I cooked the foccacia, fed my loved ones, felt happy it turned out. Sometimes it doesn't. But today it did. Mi casa, focaccia.

Food is my favorite little door to peek through, one you can walk through only to find another door, and another and another, clouds of different smells and colors in each room, until you're licking the walls like Charlie in the chocolate factory. One thing leads to another. All of a sudden you're reading about how boodog is made in Mongolia and your stomach's lowing at you. (Imagine Panera's bread bowl but with a butchered goat.)

My friend from Georgia told me he used to buy packaged dill pickles from the gas station, crush up a bag of doritos, and dip them in the cheesy, red dust. I thought about it all day.

Now, remembering the name of a man on the greyhound bus who offered me his last can of potted meat and half-sleeve of saltines when I admitted to him that I was hungry. (Rex.)

And once, organizing a book collection for a Greek friend of my uncle's, he thanked me by roasting a cow's head and putting the different meats on my plate one by one. You say holy cow? This is what it means. Now, you try the eye, it's very good.

What does it mean to keep yourself open to food? Is anything an acquired taste? What's something you wouldn't eat? Is there something you'd try cooking even if you didn't necessarily crave eating it, because it's a challenge? What turns your stomach? How personally do you take it if somebody doesn't like your favorite food? How many ways can you eat a fresh spring pea? If a lover presented you with a sparkling, freshly scrubbed celery root upon first meeting, would your face flush? Would you eat a cow brain? Anchovies? Black radish? The biggest question of all: pointing to any plant or animal, anything at all, and asking, Can you eat that? Babies put everything in their mouths. Why are people so picky?

An old partner of mine and I would play a game we called Chopped while we were bored and waiting for our meal at a restaurant. There was no time limit, no judges, no losers.

“Ok. I’m giving you a banana leaf, some spam, and a shiny penny in a box.”

“I’d mince up the spam into little bits, mix in cilantro and some kind of sweet sauce, make a little cake and tie the banana leaf around it and put a stick through it like a bundle. Start a fire and eat it with fried rice.”

“What about the penny?”

“I’ll stick it in the middle of the spam and if it’s lucky I won’t bite into it.”

“How you gonna fry the rice?”

“Cook it on the spam can.”

“I’d eat it.”

And I would. Penny and all.





Jacq Guyton (or as they were known in Athens, Kara Guyton) tried their first corndog at the age of twenty-three. Everything's been uphill since.

They live in Knoxville, Tennessee, and their favorite food right now is Laotian Nam Khao.



OPEN

by Melissa Barragan





Melissa Barragan is a 25 year old Athens native comic artist. Filled with gratitude from the support her friends have given her along the way, she started making small memories into reality in her vibrant cartoon style. Many fridges across Athens County can be seen hanging such comics as mementos to the small but impactful moments she and her friends have shared.

Essay



The Space Between

by Rachael Ryerson

I watched Gabe draw the beautiful cover for this month's issue of a zine called Flow, and at first, I saw that open door to the heart as accepting and receiving so many things.

Pain. Love. Heartache. Peace. Hope.

But upon second glance, I started to see how an open door creates a space between here and there, a transitional limbo that we must occupy before we leave one place for the next. And what an apt metaphor for my life of late.

I've been in a state of transition for months now. Last May, we sold our house that we loved so dearly and left our friends who we love even more dearly to live with Gabe's parents over the summer (we love them dearly too). The entire summer was spent in transition as we waited until August to move to Illinois for my new job at Eastern Illinois University. Yet, in walking through that door, we created space to make memories we will carry with us always. But it wasn't all popsicles, swimming, camping, and fourth of July parades. Transitions are difficult because they are unsettling and disruptive, because they often mean growth and growing pains.

These growing pains have carried forward, as we moved to an unfamiliar place among unfamiliar people. Meeting new people and making new friends is never a comfortable process, or at best, one incurs only a handful of awkward missteps or conversational pauses that last too long. But, trying to get close to people is made even more difficult when you inevitably have to say that your son has terminal cancer. And "poof," like a magic trick I never intended, we instantly become characters in a Shakespearean tragedy, unable to escape the roles we have been assigned.

And I do feel like our life has become a spectacle, but not necessarily in a negative way. Rather, I think we best process tragedy and learn how to empathize with one another by getting close to the tragic, by trying it on for size. Aristotle once said that "a tragedy is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself...with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions."

Opening ourselves to the terror and grief of tragedy helps us process it and make sense of the nonsensical.

And I'm doing the same, opening the door to someone else's tragedy to better understand my own. I've been reading *The Still Point of the Turning World* by Emily Rapp, a mother's tale of her son's Tay Sachs diagnosis and demise. Before he can say mama, before he can take his first steps, before he can lick the brownie batter from the spoon, he will start to decline. And I don't know what's worse—that her child will never do these things or that mine did? Of course, Bear will have plenty of "nevers" as well. He will never ride a bike. He will never know the butterflies of a first date or the thrill of falling in love. He will never hope. But, he has made many memories in the time he's been here, and it's hard to accept that some of those moments will be lasts for him. Will he splash around in a pool this summer? Will we go for hikes in the woods next Fall as the leaves brighten and eventually take flight? Will he blow out seven candles next January?

How do I watch my child lose all that he is? I've seen him struggling to talk lately and he wears the struggle on his face. He feels the words and tries to express them, but sometimes they come out as nonsense. He is in a state of transition as he moves through a door that I wish wasn't open for him. Yet, as he transitions, he transforms. We tend to think that transformation means moving from one form to a better form, but that's not it at all. Transformation simply means to change form. More importantly, as my yoga teacher says, transition is a place of transformation. It is in the spaces between and betwixt that true change occurs.

To become butterflies, to transform into something new, caterpillars must first devolve into a primordial soup, and it is from this nebulous ooze they gain wings. But the butterfly is only the evidence of the transformation. The real change occurs in that transition space when it is neither caterpillar nor butterfly—it simply is. Accepting Bear as he is and knowing that he will eventually have his own wings helps me better receive the discomfort, the horror, and the fear of his current transition.

Perhaps the hardest part of Bear's transition/transformation is bearing witness to it. Instead of watching for the progress, the success, the growth that many attach to the transformation of a child to an adult, I'm watching for signs of regression, failure, and deterioration. When will he forget a favorite movie? A favorite food? A treasured toy? When will he stop laughing? When will he no longer be able to ask for a "huggy?" The question of "when" is ever present and makes discomfort a constant companion.

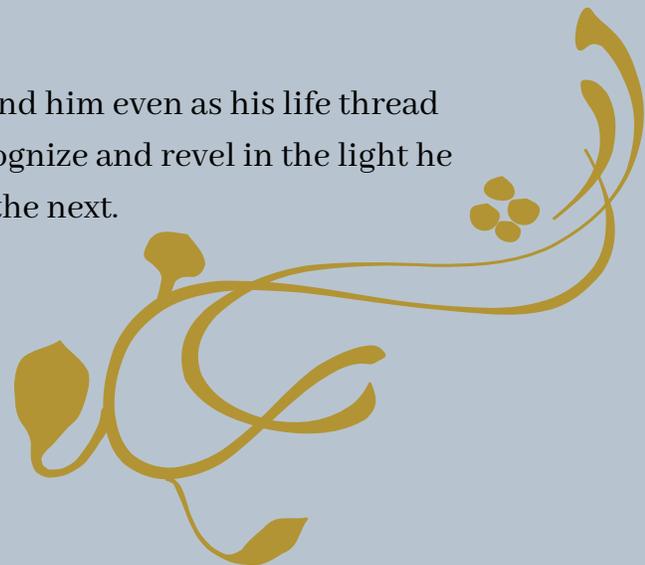
I must continually rein in these thoughts of what was or what won't be, that I might be present now, to bear witness as he transitions from being here to being gone. And it's important to be present because light and love are always there amid the dark, if we only know to look. To quote Dumbledore, "Happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light."

We recently traveled to Memphis to start a clinical trial for his cancer only to find out this past week that he does not qualify for it. While we were there, our days were filled with doctor appointments and pokes and prods, and through it all, Bear hugged everyone. Happiness can be found in the darkest of times. He hugged the doctor who explained how they would insert a port in his chest. He hugged a newly walking child in one of the waiting rooms. He hugged a social worker as she described the "Make a Wish Foundation" to us, and as I started to apologize for the physical contact (alas, Covid restrictions), she stopped me and said she loved it. She couldn't remember the last time a patient had hugged her. And those are the moments of light and love I want to be present for because they show me that even as Bear is being transformed by his cancer, he is transforming the lives of those around him too.

In Robert Jordan's Wheel of Time saga, he has three characters described as ta'veren, or people who are such significant threads in the great Pattern that all other life threads weave around them. In Jordan's words,

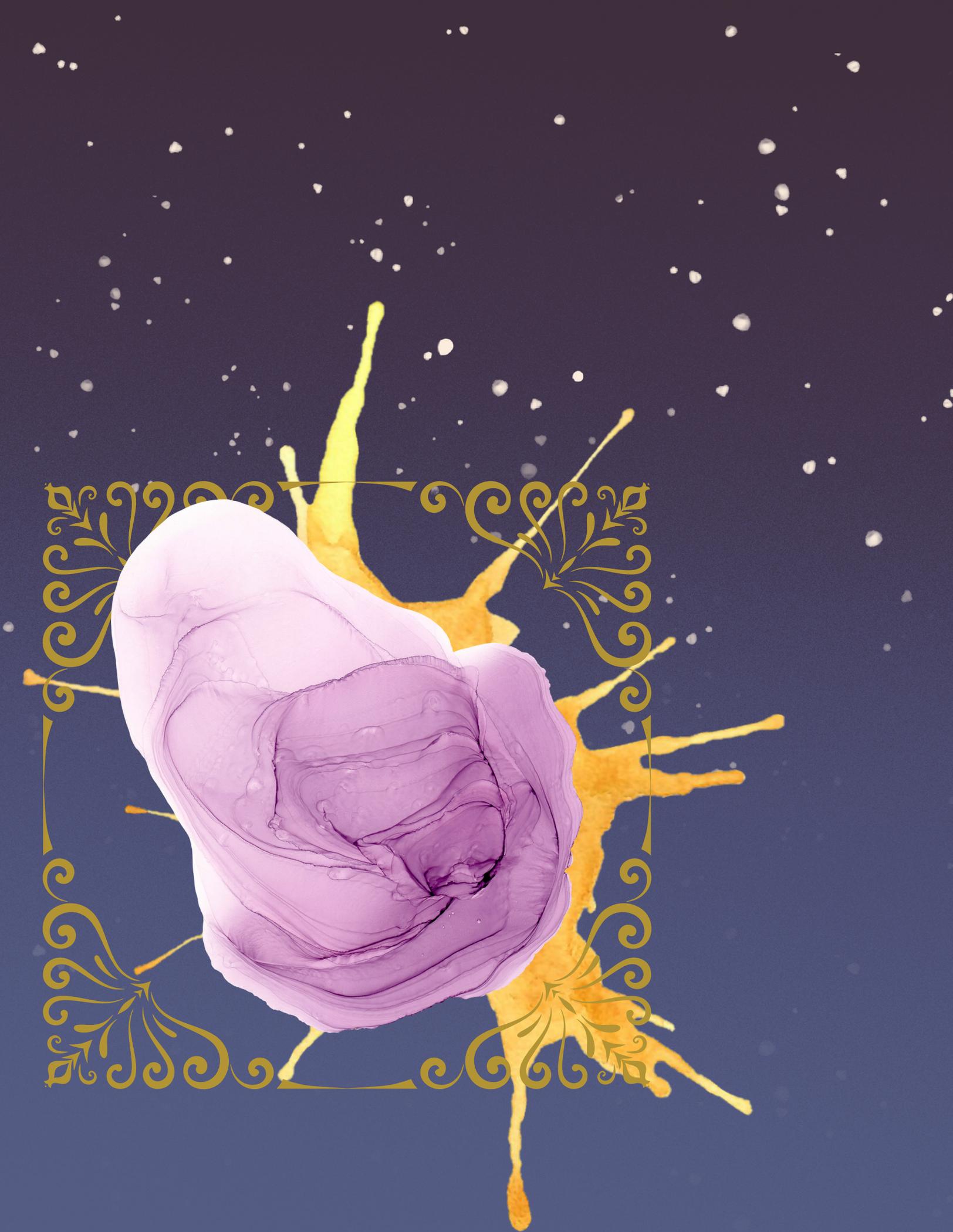
All of us, all of our lives, affect the lives of others...as the Wheel of Time weaves us into the Pattern, the life-thread of each of us pulls and tugs at the life threads around us. Ta'veren are the same, only much, much more so. They tug at the entire Pattern—for a time at least—forcing it to shape around them. The closer you are to them, the more you are affected personally."

Bear is ta'veren, shaping and transforming the lives around him even as his life thread unravels along the way. It is up to me, to you, to us to recognize and revel in the light he creates as he occupies the space between this plane and the next.





Rachael Ryerson is an Assistant Professor of English at Eastern Illinois University where she teaches writing, rhetoric, and pedagogy courses. In her free time, she enjoys being in the woods, running trails, reading (for fun), eating excellent vegan grub, and playing guitar.



What else about your childhood that shaped you as a human today?

I started drag racing around seven, and my dad was really into motorcycles. Alternating weekends between parents, I'd either be drag racing or riding dirt bikes every weekend in the summer until I was thirteen.

Do you still ride or race?

No. I didn't choose either hobby. Rather, I felt like I was choosing what family I wanted to hang out with. At least it felt like choosing.

Do you feel like you chose music?

Yeah. It was sort of taking over my life. I was in a band. My family saw that it made me happy and they always wanted me to be happy, and further on they wanted me to go to college, and they had faith in me. I don't know if I made the choice, but no one else made it for me. I wasn't even pushed to sing. I mean, I don't know of any second-graders that asked for Rod Stewart tickets for their birthday, and I got to see Paul McCartney as a little kid.

How did you get started with music?

The big swing for me, I was lucky to have grandparents that loved filming everything we did. There's a lot of footage of me and my cousins as children, and I was always walking around singing, making meatballs with my family, writing songs about meatballs with my grandma.

Did it feel like a natural inclination to be singing back then?

Yeah, but later I realized that music just exists, and I just got to be blessed to be a vessel that can encapsulate it and give it to the people. Maybe?

Was there a point in your life when you knew being a musician was going to be your main gig?

I switched schools in fourth grade and there was a talent show. And these kids had a group and I was excited to join it, but one of the moms wouldn't let me in their group. So my mom got pissed and she said, "We're gonna find something so good they're gonna regret not letting you in."

So you made up your own act?

Well, my mom made suggestions like doing magic tricks or telling jokes, and I didn't like those ideas. So mom suggested I just sing, and I thought that would be kind of weird, me just up there singing, ya know? And my mom encouraged me to do it. So I did.

So the talent show was a pivotal point for you?

Well, I was like, "Wow, this is a thing." There was certainly a feeling like a rush, ya know? I was just a kid, but I knew that singing was part of who I was then. It became part of my identity.

My great grandfather's brother was the tour manager for Allison Kraus and Union Station and I got to tour with them and sang in this kids choir, and from then on it snowballed. I sang in that talent show, then started taking voice lessons at OU, then started doing theater productions, then background kids choir and Ronnie Bowman and before long everyone just knew me as "the kid who sang."

I'm not a fan of cliches but I just lucked out and am able to tune into whatever frequency that music is, and while we're having this conversation, there's still a symphony being orchestrated in the back of my head. That's the part of my brain I can never shut off is that "inner-symphony."

Do you ever want to shut off that part of your brain?

At times, yeah.

Is there something you've found that helps quiet your mind?

Um...music.

A certain style of music?

Well I write songs all day and I feel like I'm sort of like a jukebox. I take notes all day on my phone, always writing music. I feel like it's always up here (he points to his head) and I feel like I just have to get it out. So I get tired of hearing what's in my head, so writing helps me quiet my mind, get the songs out.

Besides writing music, what else do you do all day?

I'll go four to five days without writing anything at all, then come home and explode onto paper. I read and write and travel a lot. I like to ski.

It sounds like you appreciate adventure and risk in some sense.

I'd say so, partially with drag racing. But I didn't have to be as independent as I was, but I realized much later in life how lucky I was. When I was young I wanted to run from it. Having split parents, the back and forth, ya know. When I got my license I wouldn't come home as much. I wanted to stay put, like at a friend's house. I stayed on the road and it made it easier for me to be alone, and early adulthood helped me realize how much I liked being alone and taking risks.

Do you ever feel lonely?

Yeah, I do.

Everything is about checks and balances.

I guess everything's sort of a blessing and a curse.

I think I'm an extroverted introvert. I love my friends, I love going on skiing trips with my buddies, but it also exhausts me. I need to be alone when I come home from playing shows or socializing. I do feel like there are times when I want to be alone. There are also times when I wish I had connections, but then when you have that connection, people can be negligent with it; they don't appreciate it.

What other ways do you find connection or feel whole or connected to the world?

Music

I'm starting to recognize a theme here...interview over? Music is the answer to everything?

The best way I can describe it is...I knew that the first day I sang this is what I was supposed to do. But because of that, it's been a blessing and a curse. I have full faith in music but I've sacrificed a lot more than most for it. It comes with a price, but it's what I want, but then there's also times when I think I don't want to do this anymore, but then I realize, I know what I'm supposed to do.

There's a quote I like butchering, "by having something to say and remaining silent is a lie..."



I googled it. Here's the quote: "When you have something to say, silence is a lie."

- Jordan B Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*.

He was close and I got the gist.

Do you feel like you have something to say?

I do. I feel like I'm a medium and a vessel of which I'm supposed to deliver to people, and if it brings forth some sort of emotion, then I've done my job. I kind of feel like singing is my due diligence as a human. The best thing possible is to find something that brings meaning into your everyday existence. No matter how reckless and crazy the world is, whatever it is sort of eradicates that, and I found that meaning, and luckily early on and no matter what else happens, it's going to be OK.

What does it mean to you to make meaningful music and/or art?

One of my favorite songwriters is the same age as me. I've seen him on every single tour since I was sixteen years old. His name's Noah Gundersen, and he's got a song called Selfish Art, and he says, "by looking in the mirror there's nothing more sincere than selfish art."

I think with music and art, music is one of those art forms that you can't really take a lot of pride in your own work without it seeming selfish, and without it seeming cocky or arrogant. You can hang your own paintings in your house, but if you listen to your own music in your house, then you get judged.

Do you feel judged like that?

From my experience, yeah. But I think in that, a lot of people say my songs are so personal and sad, but that's all I know and for me to write about anything else would be a lie. The only thing I can write about is myself, and I don't think that's selfish to do that. It's honest.

Have you ever felt inauthentic or dishonest about your work?

I didn't play music for a while. I was a musical theater major, music fell away and I tried to write again but it felt forced. I think I lost the connection somewhere, and I guess I didn't really know who I was, so it felt inauthentic. When I worked for Disney, or Six Flags, or cruise lines. They felt cookie-cutter and inauthentic, and I don't want to be a part of that.

What do you want to be a part of?

I do a lot of writing down in Nashville. I've written for a couple artists, I want to be a part of something that's authentic in general. I'd really like to write scores for films. I've done a couple for student films. There's a lot of things on my to-do list. I just got into voice-over work and I'm really liking that. That's my gift is my voice above everything else. I grew up just imitating things.

Do you have a go-to imitation?

When I'm on a ski-lift, I like to do elephant noises or monkey sounds really loud and be incognito.

The theme for this zine is "Open". I'm wondering, what does it mean to you to be open?

At an early age I wasn't open at all. I wasn't closed off, but at an early age I learned it was easy to tell people what they wanted to hear, so I would lie about what I did, and I just learned that it was easy to play. I was trying to make life easier to avoid arguments, but it caught up to me, and during that time I lost some friends because of that behavior. I grew out of it.

Because of musical theater that's where I found that openness. I thought of how I grew up, my mom only listened to country, and there's some that I still like, but it just seemed simple and plain and at that time it meant it wasn't good. But then I saw how simple and plain could be eloquent, ya know, just how beautiful and profound something can be in its simplest form. It could even be more powerful than a long rambling-on monologue like I tend to do.

Do you feel you've simplified your work into something more honest and open now?

In 2011 I started listening to a lot of singer-songwriters, John Prine, Iron & Wine. Everything after that was a constant outpouring. That just became my therapy.

I think open is an open term. I think it means to allow yourself to be available to an opportunity, to allow yourself to be present. To remove preconceived notions and to remove the world's dialogue and dichotomy of what things are supposed to be. At some point in time, I wrote a couple songs and I felt like, "yeah this is it, these are good." And I think I liked them because they were simple and honest.

I was trying to write songs and they all sucked according to me. The problem was I was *trying* to write a song. If I didn't approve it, I didn't want anyone else's approval.

How important is approval to you?

My own is important. Everyone else's not so much.

Is there anyone that you try to run songs by?

Yeah. I have friends who I ask like, "Hey, I have this verse and that verse," and I'll ask them which one is better. There are people I look up to, like colleagues and comrades, but really the biggest person I'm trying to appease and prove anything to is me.

Do you find it difficult to appease yourself?

Yeah, it's difficult, but it's also a good thing.

Would you say you have high standards?

Yeah, but also, why not? I only get one chance to do this, so I'm going to do it right, or try my best. I had privileges as a kid that a lot of people didn't, especially growing up in southeastern Ohio, but I also gave up all of those things, like any family goals and relationships to specifically do the one thing.

My senior year of high school I got a full ride scholarship for music. I was watching my best friend's sister who was a ballroom dancer. I was watching a production of this show called Title Show, and I remember one of the songs was quoted, "I'd rather be nine people's favorite thing than a hundred people's ninth favorite thing."

I want to make something that makes me a fan of it. I read the liner notes and look at the back of the album to see who all worked on it. I want to be that to someone. I want someone to be interested in me the way I am about my favorite musicians.



Did your parents like the music you were making when you were making it?

Yeah, but I don't think they liked the bands that opened up for us. It was southeastern Ohio and it was metal-core-thrash bands. They once asked me to just play country music so they could listen to it. My grandparents weren't too keen on going to my shows either, but it was cool to watch grandpa get caught in a circle pit.

Your family sounds supportive, especially getting your grandpa out to a metal show.

My grandparents are my two favorite people on the face of the earth. Sorry to my parents and anyone else that reads this, but my parents already know this.

Are they still in your life?

Yeah, they are. I'm lucky. I'm going to eat dinner with them tomorrow before I head to Nashville. I talk to them on the phone everyday. Hands down, my grandpa is my best friend. He's the smartest, best human I've ever met in my entire life. He's the pinnacle of what living the right way looks like.

Tell me about your experience with composition.

I just love harmonies. I love writing choral parts and background vocal choral parts. That's what I do in Nashville, background vocal work and studio work. I was in an acapella choir in college in the men's choir back at Bowling Green and I wrote parts for them. I wrote for collegiate choirs, and then got into doing the writing for friends, and then I went to this show-choir camp that was awesome and that just opened up pretty much every door for me. It sort of felt like the right time and right place. Networking is so crucial for everything in life.

When I was around twenty I released my first solo album. Around 2011, I started listening to Amos Lee, John Prine, a lot of Iron & Wine, a lot of what I found to be honest songs, so I started writing honest stuff.

How do you get people to believe in your work?

You have to be honest. If you're truthful and honest with yourself you don't have to worry about the future. You have to ask yourself, where do you want to put your energy?

You seem so focused and passionate about your work. Does anything distract you from it?

I'd consider bad distractions to be technology like TV, and I don't really have the internet where I live, so I stay off of it as much as possible.

What about good distractions or habits?

I read a lot and write a lot. I get up to do a writing prompt every morning for about 30 minutes. I also write for work.

How would you describe the structure of your writing?

I've taught songwriting classes, and we talked about the pyramid or the rule of threes, but I got really into dream journaling around 2013 and I really like it.

Say more about dream journaling.

Well, it started because I wanted to learn how to astral project. I started to experience sleep paralysis and it was horrible, so I stuck with dream journaling. I still have pretty good control over things in my dreams and this is my kick (Dallas shows me both his hands and is gesturing in a way where his thumb of one hand is pressing into the palm of his other hand): if my thumb goes through my hand, that's how I know I'm asleep.

I've always been pretty obsessed with dreams. I published an article on them. I wanted to get better at writing so I read somewhere that dream journaling would help.

Has it been helpful?

Yeah, absolutely. Within a few months I was writing pages and pages in the morning about my dreams. I think this also led me to more open and honest writing because you have to get it down as fast as possible and get it out of my head.

Can you tell me about a dream you remember?

Well, I will say that I can't eat onions before bed, they give me nightmares. It's one where I'm in a house and I'm getting attacked by a group of people. I eat a lot of onions. An onion a day keeps the doctor away for me.

Are there any other foods you avoid before bed?

Caffeine. I've been caffeine-free for about three years. And alcohol.

If you were to throw a party, what would the theme be?

I'd like to get everyone I know possible and do a base-jumping-rager off Angel Falls. For a house party, I just like bonfires and gathering people around a fire with good music.

What is a snapshot of an ordinary everyday moment of your life that feels good to you?

A sunrise. There's nothing better than greeting the day with the sunrise. And sunsets. What a cliché, right?

But also, one of my favorite things is in the winter when you get in the shower when your toes are really cold and the water is really hot and it's this weird tingly sensation. I enjoy that. Oh and, fresh-popped popcorn. My mom bought me an R2D2 popcorn popper for Christmas and that's one of my favorite snacks to have at the house.

So you're a Star Wars fan?

That was the rule in the house, if I did more chores every week, mom would take me to the store and buy me a Star Wars action figure.

What kind of movies do you prefer to watch?

Favorite directors in no particular order, Wes Anderson and Taika Waititi, Coen Brothers, Mark and Jay Duplass, irreverent deadpan comedies and independent films. If horror is done right and good suspense thrillers, too. I love Momento.

It sounds like you value humor and absurdity in the world?

I have a dark sense of humor. I love stand-up comedy. I've seen a lot of shows this year and I've also seen more stand-up comedians. The Funny Bone in Columbus has a lot of good people coming in. I like to be the only one laughing and making everyone else feel uncomfortable.

Can humor help you connect with people?

I think humor is an easy coping mechanism. It's good to be able to laugh something off in the moment and then deal with what you're handed later. I also think laughter is amazing medicine, laughter is harmonious music by itself. It's hard to laugh at things these days without feeling like you're going to upset someone, but I feel like if you can't laugh at things and see why they're funny, then maybe you're looking at it in the wrong way, take a step back.

It sounds like you accept a paradoxical sense of the world. Seeing there's chaos but also trying to make some sense of it?

Yeah, that's the only way that makes sense to me. There's no reason to fight it, or deny what it is. The world is crazy, and it's relentless, and it's sinister at times, but it's also beautiful, all encompassing and it's a crazy mysterious, mystical masterpiece in a way, but it also feels chaotic. It's like a wave, you gotta surf it, and if you wanna ride it, you gotta catch it, and if you don't, it'll tumble you.

That was a very nice cliché.

I'm the dad without the kids. I have all the clichés and puns and dad jokes.

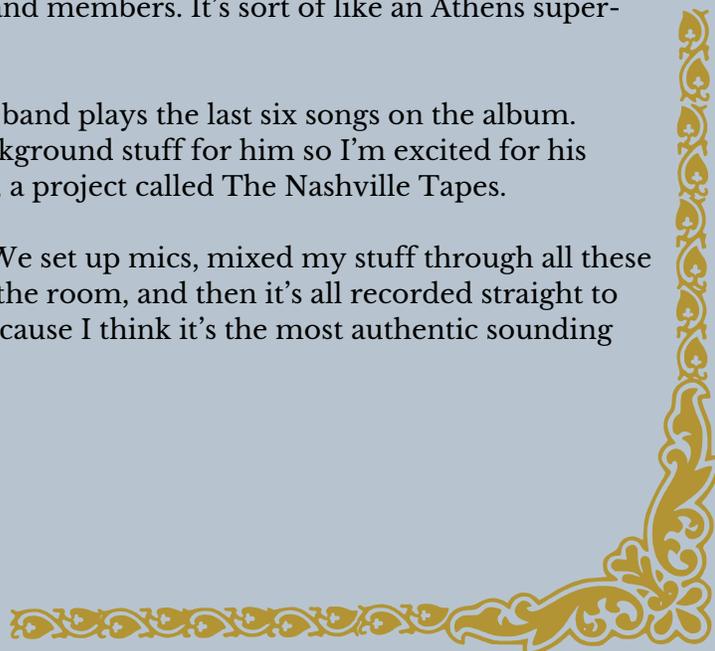
So what is your latest project you're working on, or something you're excited about?

I have a few different projects. This full-length we started before COVID, a lot of things happened, I broke my left wrist and then broke my right hand and then was hospitalized for carbon monoxide poisoning, and then COVID happened.

But we started working on this album last year and then I broke my leg, so I took the years off to recover and I postponed all my projects. So we are finally finishing up, all the recording is done on the full-length. There's no release date for that yet. It's an assortment of band members. It's sort of like an Athens super-group-collab, all my friends play on it here and there.

I started working with Tyler Childers through this, and his band plays the last six songs on the album. I started doing some writing for him and singing some background stuff for him so I'm excited for his project to come out. We recorded two albums in Nashville, a project called The Nashville Tapes.

We just recorded all this stuff in a big building in a room. We set up mics, mixed my stuff through all these reverb pedals through an amp, let all that just play and fill the room, and then it's all recorded straight to tape. I've never been more excited to release something because I think it's the most authentic sounding thing I've released.



Recording on tape sounds like it could be nostalgic for you?

Yeah, it's funny how it comes full circle. I just wanted something to sound real. I don't like how I sound recorded, so I'd give people recordings on my phone, and we found a way to sound like we're just in the living room and I'm sitting on the couch playing. It doesn't sound forced. Tape's expensive, too, and I didn't want to record anything over. You get one try on each side. That also sort of put the pressure on for a live show, to get that recording done in one go.

Adam Spanky is working with me on the Nashville Tapes to get them recorded. Adam is an insane keys and organ player. He's a studio pianist, and he's a really great friend of mine. I met him through this show choir camp. I'm headed down there tomorrow to finish up the organ stuff.

Any strange or interesting hobbies you have that no one would ever guess you have?

Yeah, I'm a Star Wars mega-nerd. I challenge anyone who reads this to challenge my Star Wars knowledge. All I ever wanted in my life since I was a kid was more Star Wars and to not have to wait years at a time for one to come out, and now I have that. So my collection was from doing my chores. And I never opened any of them up, ever. My younger cousin opened one of them up, which is this one (**Dallas pulls a necklace out from under his shirt and reveals a military tag of Jedi Master Mace Windu, Samuel L. Jackson's character from The Phantom Menace**).

I keep it around my neck because nothing makes you feel more powerful than Samuel L. Jackson.

Where can people find your work?

On Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon, Rhapsody, Pandora, dallascraftmusic.com. My old albums are on [my website](#) for free to stream.



To learn more about Dallas visit his website dallascraftmusic.com





Academically trained in mental health counseling, Abby Miller approaches her interviews with empathy and curiosity, meeting people where they are. She'll ask the hard questions, but she's committed to respecting the dignity and integrity of humans.

Her interview style is more like a conversation that might happen on a back porch over a cold drink on a hot summer day. By uncovering and documenting the unique experiences of others, Abby seeks to connect with humans of the planet and share their story, perhaps revealing some truth about the human condition.



Remember

by Jax Walter

Remember how we used to sit
behind that couch
wearing grandpa's old hats,
holding that periscope and peeping out into the living room?

Staring at the space
before half of us had died
or became disconnected
or grown

Remember that green light
that hung over grandma's piano
that she'd play and sing
while we raced around on all fours in the dining room?

Giggles and warmth punctured the air
While we were just discovering play
and all the ways the imagination went

Remember that smaller tv
that played basic cable
and held our attention
in those plush green chairs?

When Grandma had hair
and mom was still married.

When problems hung to the clothes in our closets
but I was too young to notice them



Remember when Grandpa was happy?
before he withered away and crumpled
into a cranky death.

When his tomatoes bloomed
and he built swings in the basement for us

When the real reals weren't talked about
much and my ignorance seemed to
wrap around me and mine
like a blanket sewn by old hands

And now with the chill of deaths come to pass
and paths come to last
I'm left with a new blanket
weaved by new hands and new hearts

With it's new threads
being sewn by new knowings
and a whole different fam

But my feet still feel the old earth
and that old family way
as ignorant and untrue as the traditions
may lay

So maybe not all the strings from the past
are bad and based on lies

Help me to weave them into my new fold
As much as I'm able, as much as I'm told

Form a more true and more brave way of life
Away from the unknowing that brought so much strife.



Jax Walter is an Asheville, NC resident living in the spaces of nuance and creativity. They make comics and other types of art and find joy in working with children and helping others. And as a white genderqueer person they strive to challenge the status quo and interrogate injustice in themselves and in the larger society. Check out some of their other work at freakmirrorcomics.com.

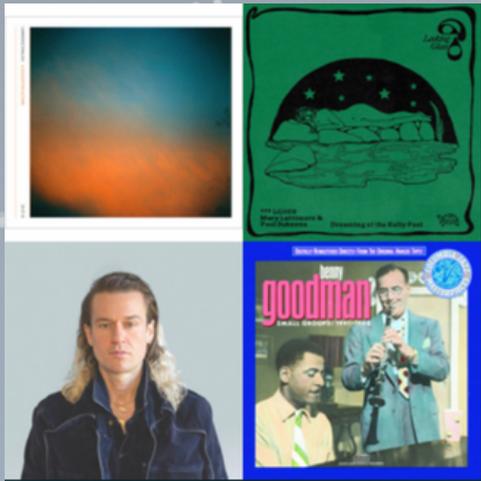
Some music for your heart



playlists curated for certain moods



For movin' and groovin' // dance mix



a "don't know what I'm feeling" mix from January



February Love Mix



items of inspiration

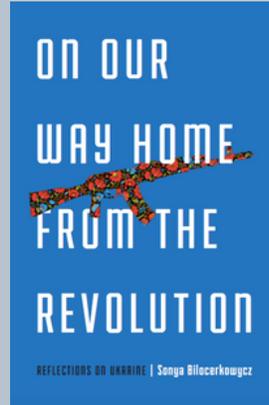


list curated by Erin Pfahler

reading list:



Ten Love Letters to the Earth, written by Thich Nhat Hanh



Creative nonfiction writer, Sonya Bilocerkowycz ties the personal and political in On Our Way Home From the Revolution: Reflections on Ukraine

watch list:

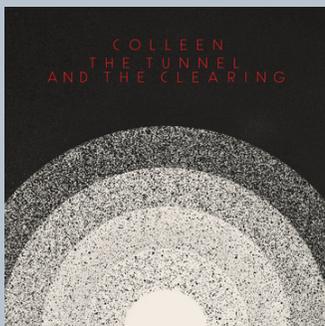


The Tunnel and the Clearing, mini-documentary by ambient artist, Colleen



Films directed by Hayao Miyazaki: Princess Mononoke, Whisper of the Heart, Ponyo, Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind and more

listen list:



The Tunnel and the Clearing, an album by ambient artist, Colleen



Borders are Liminal Spaces: episode of the On Being Podcast with Krista Tippett: Interview with Luis Alberto Urrea



Change, a song written by the band Big Thief

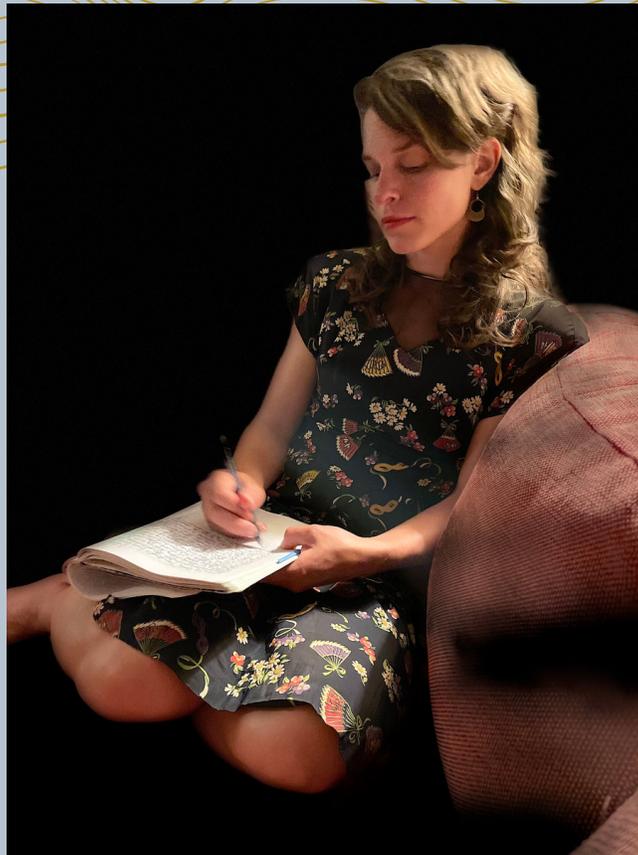
flow

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Each artist is paid for their contributions.

10% of all proceeds this season will be donated to BEAM (a non-profit organization committed to the mental health of Black communities)

Thank you all who share, give and support this project and beyond!



Erin, editor and designer of a zine called FLOW,
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erinpfahler.com