

Rugged Spring 2026



Monarch
Drawing by Lynelle Cantero

Emptiness

Poem by Ian Morgan

Before I loved you, Love, nothing was my own: I walked through the streets, among objects: nothing mattered or had a name: the world was made up of air, which waited.

I knew rooms full of ashes, tunnels where the moon lived, rough warehouses that growled Get lost, questions that insisted in the sand.

Everything was empty, dead, mute, fallen, abandoned, and decayed: inconceivably alien, it all belonged to someone else—to no one: till your beauty and poetry filled the summer air plentiful with gifts.





[untitled]

Photograph by Ashlyn Carter





[untitled]

Painting by Carys Carlisle

Waiting

Poem by Gracyn Silkiner

Just a can of soda waiting to be cracked open and spilt over stones laid flat. Flowing over the people who settle for less instead of reaching for the stars. Just a can of soda waiting, sparkling, sharing what seems to be notes on a page or lines on lined paper where each word gets stolen and taken and then misread and thought as something other than what they meant. Still just a soda can spilt over stones, laid flat, sitting losing all sparkle, all shine, everything that's left getting trapped in places it doesn't want to be, being kicked and trampled by the people it trusted most, so at the end of the day I ask, "What am I? Am I more than just a soda can waiting?" and I sit and wait for something that won't come. Maybe I should just leave. After all I'm just a soda can—what more than that.

Ash

Poem by Kristen Clifford

I am a book in the middle of a raging fire.
Pages worn and crumbled,
Ink spilled but the story true.

A life of a burning candle,
In a dark room.

The fear right before the fall.
The noisless ringing in a silent room.

That fire burned too close to the book,
Turned the clean pages to ash,
Ruined the meaning of escape.
Of hope.

But sparked the renewal.

The life from the ink bleeding like blood
As the fresh chapter flipped the page
swirling like a breeze
A clean start yet the darkness still sparked
But like a star
The darkness of our eternity
Is needed for the brightness we find beneath.



[untitled]

by Carys Carlisle




[untitled]

Painting by Rosemary Keglovits

In my own world

Poem by Kinsley Jackson

I'm in my own world, something nobody can see
The shining star that understands me
Something that sees my potential and doesn't judge
But knows when something is wrong that my kinda luck
A secret layer I found on my own
Somewhere I can play all alone
An only child can't wait and see
My own kinda self that loves me
Trust me when I say
I'm in my own world that my way
I have my friends, the ones I trust
3 girls just my luck
Not alone anymore
The world I had disappeared
It's all gone



Papa

Creative Nonfiction by Ethan Garrett

My dad was a drunk, and my mom didn't listen to me. I ran away with my friend, Jerry. There was no yelling or screaming in the house like there usually was, but I stole Dad's car and left home that night. The feeling of the leather steering wheel made me feel like a man for the first time. I didn't know where to go, but anywhere was better. Grandma was the only one I'd miss. It was like I could smell the cherry pies that she made for me calling me back. The air made me think twice about what I was doing. I didn't want to think about it. If I had looked over my shoulder at my bed and clothes, I would've probably gone back. I stayed headstrong and left, my parents' voices echoing in my ears. I told myself that I was finally going to be free. At a fresh eighteen, I thought I was an eagle finally let out of its cage.

For a minute, it seemed like I got away from them until I remembered that I needed money. I scraped all that I had, and that only lasted us two months. From town to town, I took work anywhere I could find. I learned how to hide from my relatives who were still looking for me. I felt like I was winning over fate and finally free to handle my own destiny. But karma knows how to bite you back. I got a knock at the door, and they didn't ask me about anything, just a form and a uniform. I was no longer free, but green.

[untitled]

Painting by Dawson Burns



There was this girl who I fancied that lived in the town over before Jerry and I got shipped out to Vietnam. She looked at me like I was a successful man, even though I was living in a car for the past three months. She wrote me letters after I left. Each one of those letters held a lot of details about me that I hadn't even realized. I did read each letter and was grateful for her, but I told myself that I would come back and give her the reply in person and not through writing. I had a stutter, but I would think about what I had to say and give her a good reply to all that writing.

When I got off the boat in Vietnam, that jungle, it was like a beast waiting to swallow me up. Everything was too green; it was too quiet for comfort as well. I really started to notice the little sounds that filled the scenery, though the birds and weird foreign animals creeped me out for sure. After getting forced to settle, I discovered the tunnel. I did not volunteer for this. There were no such things as volunteers in the tunnels in Nam.

Sarge took one look at me, my size, my movements, and he decided for me: "You're what, a buck twenty?" I replied with a sudden nod so as not show the nerves that I had yet to harden into steel. "You're gonna be with the other skinny kids, now go play." They handed me a pistol and a flashlight and nudged me towards the tunnels that looked like they went straight into the jaws of that great green beast.

The first time I crawled in, I understood something that I hadn't before: the ground doesn't sit under you; it closes in. The walls of dirt pressed against my shoulders, back, and chest. There was no room to turn around. The air was so thick that it felt like a hot shower after you're done with it. There was no satisfaction of being clean and comfortable, though, just dirt and darkness. My flashlight shook just enough to make the shadows move like they had a life of their own. I didn't think of bravery, I thought about what's in front of me. What could pop out? What's waiting for me?

Jerry, he was my closest friend. He ran away with me when I wasn't sure how to leave this ball of yarn I was caught in. One moment, he was there. The next time, he wasn't. There was no big funeral or any loud noise, no warning or anything. Just the sudden realization that things are still real, they don't slow down or give you time to prepare. I remember hearing the news after making my routes in the tunnels. I was frozen for what felt like hours. I was trying to make sense of something that didn't make sense. After that, I felt closer to the world, and everything felt more real.

The tunnels got worse after that, or maybe I just noticed more. Every sound and feeling felt sharper. Every shadow felt like it meant something. I stopped thinking about what was happening, the next breath I took. I was just a man in a dirt catacomb. There was this one tunnel that I was ordered to go into that I never forgot. The entrance was hidden in leaves so dense it looked like just another grassy patch.

After my Viet Nam deployment, when things had settled, I was shipped to Panama. And I met her. Panama felt like a mix of what I've known and the unknown. It was like stepping out of the war and into something warm and cozy. She didn't know me before this; she was already arranged to be married, but she still chose me. She didn't know the boy from Albuquerque. She knew the man I am now. With her, I wasn't the kid in the tunnels; I wasn't the one carrying everything. I didn't tell her about the letters and the lady waiting for me back home. And I didn't stop writing back, either. Two different lives, and neither one is fully true on its own.

When I came home, nobody knew what to do with me. They wanted stories or something meaningful, but I didn't have that. I had pieces to go off of. The letters stopped eventually; some things don't survive the distance, or time, or the truth. And that girl from Panama? I eventually married that woman and had two kids with that foreign beauty.

Sometimes I think about that boy at eighteen, how I thought I understood everything back then. I just thought I could choose my own destiny by leaving the people I thought were holding me back. I see it differently now. I see someone who was scared. Someone who was trying to outrun something that was always going to come back to him.

If you ask me if I was a brave soldier, I'll tell you no. Bravery was a choice that got my comrades shot. I was just trying to make it to the next moment. My comrades chased bravery, women, and medals; I just wanted to get back to what I missed. Fear doesn't fully leave you, though. I still get dreams about it. The tunnels were always quiet, but the farther back I went, the louder they really were.



[Editor's note: Ethan Garrett here recounts his grandfather's story of leaving home and being drafted to fight in Viet Nam as a "tunnel rat." Ethan wanted to be true to what his Papa and his tía have told him about that time. He was also responding to an assignment in Ms. Victoria Thomas's ENG III AP class, where students read Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*.]



[untitled]

by Carys Carlisle





[untitled]

by Carys Carlisle



Paula

Creative Nonfiction by Camila Rivera

Paula still remembers the cold. The tingling in the tips of her fingers and the puffiness of her pink cheeks. Not the kind of cold that you notice at first, but the kind that settles into your bones and stays there. The kind that makes your hands blue and your teeth chatter.

“Nunca me ha sentido así,” she had said. When she arrived in Chicago, it was winter. She did not speak English. Not a little. Not enough to get by. None. She carried what she could. A pair of clothes, the only picture frames she had of her mom, and her newly wedded husband.

“Are we making the right decision?” she would tell her husband laughing a little, like it's a joke now. Like it didn't once feel like the world was rejecting her.

She listens but it means nothing.

Everything sounds the same.

Everything sounds like noise.

She learns silence first. That is how she survives.

[untitled]

Painting by Giana Errisuriz



Paula nods when people talk, even when she doesn't understand. Smiles when they expect it. Watches their faces carefully, like maybe meaning will reveal itself in the curve of an eyebrow or in a twinkle of an eye.

She did not speak English. Not imperfect. Not haltingly. Not at all.

The city, however, did not pause to notice this. Paula was shy, learning the shape of agreement without understanding its substance and the city took advantage of that. Chicago spoke in a language she couldn't decode. Doors opened and closed with indifference. Voices rose and fell in a cadence she could not enter. Even laughter seemed foreign.

Paula was stubborn and she wanted a family. The best for her family. She hated feeling like she couldn't do something just because of an invisible barrier. She was a "try hard person" when she wanted something. And when she got it, she wrapped her hands around it and held on. And never let go.

At the tour of the apartment, she stood behind her husband while he sorted things out with the landlord. It was clear that he was having a difficult time translating between them. The look on her husband's face said everything.

The landlord let them inside without much ceremony. He spoke quickly pointing at corners, at windows, and at a heater that rattled when it turned on. Paula caught only pieces of his voice; none of them were complete enough to hold meaning. Her husband tried to follow, tried to respond, but he always bit back, always hesitated.

Paula stayed quiet. She always stayed quiet at first.

There was a smell in the hallway she could not name. The smell was so foul it made her face twist in disgust. Something damp, something older than the building wanted to admit. When they stepped into the bathroom, she saw it immediately. There were dark marks near the ceiling, faint at first, but upon inspection, she realized that the paint had begun to swell. As though the walls were breathing.

The landlord said something and laughed quietly, waving his hands around in dismissal. Paula did not understand his words, but she understood the tone. This was not something important.

Her husband nodded slowly. Not agreement exactly but not accepting it either. More like surrender to not knowing what else to do.

Paula stepped closer to the wall.

She touched it once.



[untitled]

Painting by Giana Errisuriz

The surface was cold and slightly damp, and for a moment she imagined it was alive, not in motion, but in endurance. She said something in Spanish before she could stop herself.

“No quiero vivir aqui.” Her voice was careful but urgent.

Her husband turned to her, confused, then tried to translate loosely, his words breaking out as they crossed into English. Something about the smell. Something about the wall. Something about whether it was safe.

The landlord’s face shifted. Not sharp. Slowly, like he was choosing emotions. He answered in English again, but this time more distant, more final. He gestured vaguely, as if the problem was small, as if it could be ignored.

Paula did not understand the sentence. But she understood the refusal inside it. The reasoning. The way his eyes were blank and full of disinterest. How it made her feel inside. How it made her heart swell up from being looked down upon.

Her husband tried again, softer now. “The pipes. Don't. Uh. Water. Dirty.” His English was broken as he tried to explain that the pipes had been leaking, that there was dampness, that they were worried.

The landlord shook his head. A small motion. Patient, almost bored. As if their concern was something he had already seen before and already decided not to feel.

Paula felt something tighten in her chest. Not anger. Not yet. But she swallowed back the lump in her throat, threatening to draw tears. She stood firm and puffed her chest. She spoke again in Spanish, more firm this time, more like a demand than a statement.

But the landlord was already looking past them, already stepping toward the door, already ending the conversation without agreement.

Paula listened to the uneven pipes, somewhere behind the wall, like water moving through it. She had the sudden thought that this apartment was not new at all. That it had been waiting. Not for them specifically, but for someone who could not fully understand it until it was too late to leave easily.

That night, they slept there for the first time. Afraid and unprepared. When the building settled and then pipes began their uneven murmuring again, Paula lay awake staring at the ceiling, thinking not of home exactly, but a version of herself that would never belong anywhere the way it once had.



[Editor's note: Camila Rivera tells the story of her grandmother, who immigrated from Mexico to Chicago, Illinois. Camila said she tried her best to inhabit her grandmother's character, trying to see the world as she would have. Camila interviewed her grandmother, who couldn't remember much but did remember this specific event in her life. Camila said she wanted the story to be memorable.]





[untitled]

Photograph by Ashlyn Carter

Pompeii

Poem by Anonymous

Ashes raining down from above
These are the two things we lost in the fire
The city crumbled so soundly
It was like it was never there at all
Ashes raining down
Leaving nothing behind
Except our silhouette and nothing more
Vesuvius
You burned taking us with you
Ash rained down from the sky
“But if you closed your eyes
It seemed like nothing changed at all.”
Pompeii

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Mission Statement

Bishop Dunne Catholic School empowers each student to explore, inquire, lead, and serve through a college preparatory education in a joyful community of faith.



Bishop Dunne Library: A Message from the Librarian



The Bishop Dunne Library is a place for students to explore and discover the joys of reading, as well as a place to learn the skills to navigate a constantly changing, technologically sophisticated environment.

My mission as the librarian is to help students become lifelong learners, equipped with the tools to navigate, evaluate, analyze, and understand the information they will encounter throughout their lives.

Rugged is a platform for students to share their creative work. Like many of the books that are available

to students in the library, these works often explore life beyond the classroom.

But learning is not confined to the school walls. Reading, writing, and creating are joyful enterprises that we encourage in every part of our students' lives.

I hope you enjoy *Rugged*.

Melanie M. Gibson
School Librarian
Editor of *Rugged*

