

MORPHEUS

LITERARY MAGAZINE

SPRING 2026



Morpheus Literary Magazine

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Editor's Note

Dear Reader:

I am pleased to share the Spring 2026 issue of the *Morpheus Literary Magazine*! We have a collection of poetry and personal stories for readers to peruse, including some works from our poetry competition. There are some sensitive topics within these works, including death, environmental concerns, guns, vomiting, and gore. Please read with care.

I wanted to say, as a senior, that I have had the pleasure of working with *Morpheus Literary Magazine* for four years, and I have greatly enjoyed being editor-in-chief for these past two years. My time in *Morpheus* has shown me a lot of what I want in the future, and I will always appreciate what I have learned in this experience. I will miss *Morpheus* dearly, and cannot wait to see how it grows and thrives in years to come. Thank you for allowing me the honor of sharing your works with Heidelberg.

To our contributors, thank you for entrusting us with your words and allowing us to share them. Your stories enrich our pages and inspire us, and we are grateful that you trust us to publish your works. And to our readers, thank you for embarking on this literary journey with us. We hope this may inspire you to publish in the future.

We thank you for your support throughout this school year as we've celebrated over sixty years of participation, and we hope you enjoy the Spring 2026 Edition of the *Morpheus Literary Magazine*. Enjoy your stay.

Sincerely,

Rowan Gill
Editor-in-Chief

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POETRY WRITING COMPETITION

Prompt: Write a poem about nature from the perspective of something alive but not human.

First Place: Plucking Flowers

Mia Puente

Here I live

Here with sisters I share

A warm sun glow

A cool breeze of air

A buzzing bee

Kisses me soft

Holds my hand

Then runs off.

Days pass

In these woods

I truly feel whole

Flirting with butterflies

Dancing with trees

My home is mine

A light with the breeze

But slowly new shadows

Start to form

Of ugly faces

I've never seen before

They stomp my sisters

They pluck and they prod

And one face comes forward

So ugly and odd

He yanks me up

Stealing me from my home

And I know there's no going back anymore.

But stuck in his hand

I'll wither and fade

Crying forever for my sweet summerglade.

Second Place: Untitled

Hazel Stone

I have seen many of you
Turning my world a different hue
Making the air sting
As it touches me, ruining.

I have seen the sun rise
As well as your demise
My leaves turn colors
Just like the face of angered mother.

I have seen you in youth
Falling down and losing your tooth
Hanging your swing on my branch
while looking over ants.

I have seen your teenage dreams
your being lost in the between
Scraping my bark with that letter
God only knows you haven't got better.

I have seen your mother, grandmother
and your granny and other
Touch my dry bark
You made a mark.

I have seen the chainsaw cut deep
scaring away the long-gone sheep
To make way for something monstrous
For we know will be the end of us.

Now I see myself in piles
The world turning to desert for miles
But now you have room for more data
You are happy now, ain't ya?

Third Place: My Old Angel Sycamore

Kambell Fleck

It's quiet now as winter falls

The North Wind coming, the familiar chill as my every leaf falls

Each tree silent, no person's ears to hear it as it falls

Makes me remember the days of the king's old Southern drawl

Most who come from away, they call invaders

Not him, his gentle sway in the breeze

Those Southerly howls, they reminded him of home

He told stories of heat and meadows and swarms of honey bees

Told the story, once, of himself

Uprooted, replanted, that was during the war

We asked him how many rings he had

He laughed in a hum and said no more

Now winter does fall

One by one, as always, my leaves fall

Everyone has been quiet, since his fall

Makes me remember the days of his old Southern drawl

POETRY

Seasons

Anonymous

The night we met still plays in my head
like the first strum of a song I didn't know I'd been waiting for.
A college bar buzzing with bad karaoke.

Then him...
pulling me into his orbit with the same quiet pull
as a chord that hangs in the air a second too long.

Infatuated, gentle.

That *I just want to know you* tone,
like he was already writing me into the melody.

He pulled me into laughter, into plans,
into rooms. He'd already made lines for me..
before I even knew the tune.

Then the seasons shifted.
He moved hours away,
and suddenly love sounded different,
a distant song,
a note he kept returning to.
Tiffin became his chorus,

steady and familiar,
a place he kept replaying just to reach me.

We learned distance the way you learn a difficult riff:
Slowly & honestly,
with faith that your fingers will eventually find the shape.

He continued showing up
in calls, in texts,
in the way he said my name..
like it was a lyric worth traveling for.

Somewhere between the miles and the quiet,
he changed the way I understood love.
He taught me gentleness without fear,
independence without drifting,
ambition without loneliness.

Held my emotions like a fragile instrument,
never rushing, never muting.

Kissed my forehead like a vow,
looked at me like he was learning a language
that only the two of us could play.

I love the way he presses close,
consoles without trying to fix our song,

supports my future with a willingness to rewrite his own.

as if my future is a place he's already tuned himself to.

And when he plays the guitar,

it feels almost holy

a reminder that tenderness can be a sound,

that love can be a melody

played by someone who keeps choosing me.

through every season.

Hopes and Dreams

Brooke Barnes

Where did my hopes and dreams go?

The ones that filled all my journals

The ones that painted the walls of my room

With pictures of places I will see

With friends I will never forget

With colors of the life I had ahead of me.

My journals are empty now

My walls are bare

And,

I like it this way.

Where have I gone?

1366

Ryleigh Gorman

Basement full of mud

White house between two hills

wooden stairs creaked underfoot leading to the attic

A once gym mat, now rug, we cover with pillows to sit upon

Our CRT Tv flickers and shivers while playing a rented version of minecraft

In the summer my parents would smoke on the little cement block in front of our house

I could smell the faint

tobacco waft through the window

It never bothered me

because that's what adults did

Out the window the sun

looked like a bag of blood

Drenching the room

with bright orange streaks

Our sheer pink and green

curtains did nothing to stop the glare

So we shifted our bodies

to block the sun from the TV

It worked for a little while

but eventually we got bored

And went outside to bother

our parents on the porch

Behind us lay a forest too

dark to explore at night

Surrounded by fields of

golden corn and coyotes

The wind picked up, and for a second, the end of my mom's cigarette burned like a star

Before Play

Ryleigh Gorman

The understandable enemies

1. The World
2. The Flesh

But you are not understandable

In fact, as sin creeps in, filling its mouth with the name of killers

The heart builds up enough pressure to squirt blood thirty feet

Copper stench accompanied by wet, gurgling breath

As brain matter leaks like cottage cheese

Nails retch toward an inevitable collapse

Trembling in sweet release

Squire

Ryleigh Gorman

My Father rests his palm on my shoulder

“The moment of death begins when you aim”

His jacket was sour, like lost breaths or cigarettes

The rifle slipped between my fingers

Aim

My Father always faces an exit

Because someday, something is going to kill you

The morning dew has soaked my knees

Focus

Both born with a terrible need for affection

And a terrible need to give it

Violence for violence is the rule of beasts

Shoot.

The Last Remaining Freedom

Ryleigh Gorman

His ribs spasmed, convulsing in a desperate attempt to reject seven seltzers

He couldn't check his phone as he hovered over the toilet

Long strands of saliva inched past his lips

Collectively they giggled as his friend brushed his hair away and another rubbed his back

He tried to swallow, but it surged past his teeth.

In between breaths his mouth propped open,

Each twitch a wet retch escaped him, followed by a harsh splash.

Red.

Like the first color a newborn is able to recognize

Red.

Like the sun before it explodes

Red.

Like seven seltzers

He slumped over, shivering as his face lay on the rim,

The sour taste of bile in his mouth and his eyes streaming with tears of joy

Hide & Seek in the Graveyard

Kelseigh Holman

Do you think if I play dead he will lose interest?

If I turn myself into something as interesting as
the grey of a headstone,
would he lay the idea he has of me to rest?
Or would he dig up my grave?

Drag me around like some kind of keepsake—
Tear through my flesh, and gnaw on my bones,
until they are nothing but dust.

Can I hide in the graveyard?
Bury myself in the backyard, like all the good women do,
let him, and the world forget
me.

But, if I remove every piece of evidence that I ever
existed,
would I be complicit in my own murder?

Lady Lover

Kelseigh Holman

You are my lady lover.

My lady, my lover,

who has labored her life away.

Your calloused hands are rugged rocks,

that rack across my body.

The stone smooths, then crumbles and cracks,

as it releases the soul.

I am your lady lover.

Your lady, your lover,

who has locked her life away.

My hands are cold blooded,

against your warm body.

The snakes shiver and slither.

The shape of your soul sees mine.

I want to see myself though you.

My lady, my lover,

the way we change each other and co-become.

I love what's wrong with you,

because it is what's wrong with me too.

My lady, my lover,

I love you forever.

My Lady Death

Kelseigh Holman

When I felt the boot on the back of my neck, I knew it was life, again.

Kicking me when I am down.

My lady Death would never be so cruel.

My lady is one so kind.

Her attendants doll me up.

I'm in my Sunday best.

They hold my body.

Clean me up for the viewing.

My lady Death held me through it.

When my lungs stopped expanding.

The worst pain life has given me yet.

My lady Death would never be so cruel.

My lady Death lets me rest in peace.

Salvation

Kelseigh Holman

I will let you live in my wasteland,
in all of its desolation.

We can carve the carcass of the world by hand.

Oh, what the world will become unmanned.

When we rebuild the foundation,
I will let you live in my wasteland.

I will be the field hand,
that tends to every work station.

We can carve the carcass of the world by hand.

I'll work the farmland,
the one that grows from my damnation.

I will let you live in my wasteland.

It's a some sort of dreamland,
let the quiet become a sedation.

We can carve the carcass of the world by hand.

We will make a new homeland,
one for our salvation.

I will let you live in my wasteland.

We can carve the carcass of the world by hand.

How I Treat Love

Maddisen Mikkelsen

I treat love like Gymnastics.

I was never trained to play,

saluting invisible judges,

before sprinting toward people

as if they are vault tables,

convinced that

this time

I will stick the landing.

I run fast,

confidence stitched together

from late-night playlists

and group chat encouragement.

I hit the springboard of maybe they like me,

launch myself upward,

already

twisting

through

future

plans,

shared jokes,

soft, imaginary mornings

that have not learned my name.

Halfway through the flip,

it hits me.

I never stopped to ask

if they were even watching.

I land hard,

knees first,

a smile pulled tight

like athletic tape across a fracture.

I nod to the crowd that isn't there,

convince myself

it was always part of the routine.

Still,

I return to the gym of possibility.

Still,

I dust my palms with chalk and hope,

step back onto the mat

like muscle memory is stronger

than disappointment.

Because somewhere inside the routine,

between missed catches

and crooked landings,

I keep believing

my body will learn

the quiet balance

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Eat Your Vegetables Before You Leave the Table

Trey Pitzer

I don't like vegetables

But I love mushrooms.

Soaring in realms unthinkable to sober minds,

Swirling about in a candyland of visions.

I embark on this trip, and

I'm free from judgement.

Conversations and laughter with my brothers

Take me to a time where nothing really mattered.

If nothing matters, how-

ever, then everything does.

Deep into night, a new mind formed.

I see now how small I am, how we are.

How we always have been

And always will be.

So, eat your vegetables before you leave the table.

You can't get up until they're gone.

Once you're finished, you'll see what I mean.

You'll get up and never sit down.

A Bridge of Glass

Kade Rowe

Cat goes woof,
dog says meow—
the world makes no sense now.

When I see your face,
I don't break or smile—
just stare,
like a ship with no sail,
a balloon with no air.

And I don't know why.
You make me want to cry,
to die,
to run—
to beg you to say hi.
But you just pass me by.
"I hate you!" I scream.
But the sound drowns inside my dream.

I wish you'd disappear—
my heart hurts when you are near.

Yet, I want you to stay.
Women like you make me wish I were gay.

I wanted to be your mister—

but you became my sister.

Platonic chains,

in romantic flames.

You were part of my world—

but I lit the match.

I burned it all down.

I blamed you.

You lied.

We built a bridge of glass,

and we watched it shatter,

piece by piece,

like it never mattered.

I should've known it wouldn't last.

Now you're just

a ghost in my past.

Still...

my heart aches for closure.

Like a drunken hangover.

Your love was liquor —

sweet, then bitter.

And the pain?

It couldn't cut any thicker.

If I Had Stayed

Kade Rowe

Not a single day has passed,
where you haven't crossed my mind.
Your death: the place of my questions,
and the divine collide.

Not just that you were taken,
but Heaven stayed quiet too:
I searched for Jesus' comfort,
but it never came through.

I didn't feel God's embrace
but the absence of His voice;
and somewhere in that silence,
my faith dissolved by choice.

I wonder where you are now.
I wonder how you died.
Was it sickness? Was it sorrow?
Was it something hidden inside?

Are you standing in Heaven,
or is Heaven just a tale
we tell ourselves so death won't
make our living seem frail?

A promise to see loved ones,
to believe this isn't the end,
but through your death, I learned
what the Bible couldn't mend.

A part of me went with you:
something quiet, something deep.
Yet, I know you're somehow okay now,
wherever souls may keep.

I don't know where that place is—
only that it feels afar.
But I trust you'll find your comfort
for the man you truly are.

Your faith burned like a star,
steady, brave, and clear.
Your life is a living lesson
of who a Christian is meant to be.

Sometimes, I wonder softly
if you'd already won,
nothing left to learn or lose,
nothing left to overcome.

Maybe God called you home
because your work was thorough,

because greatness doesn't linger
once it's done what it must do.

Your death taught me the shape of pain,
the weight of silent blame.
I carry shame for not being there,
for wondering if I could've changed the endgame.

I can't escape the thought
that if I'd stayed, you'd live.
It's a burden grief insists
on never letting go.

But know this truth, unbroken—
no doubt can tear it apart:
I loved you like a brother,
with my whole and fractured heart.

Little Mine, Clementine

Hazel Stone

My bitten nails sink into flesh

Cuticles burn and I wince

Citrus fills the air and skin left sticky,

“What do you have there?”

Continuing to peel with no answer

Accidentally bruising the fruit underneath

Placing the mangled and gored bits on a small saucer,

“Can I have some?”

I look at her blankly

And hand her the plate

Small hands pick up the clementine,

“Smells yummy!”

While taking a bite

The fruit squelches between her teeth

Juice dribbles into the cracks of her lips,

“It burns.”

Love is Fresh

Hazel Stone

I look at my partner of that night,
So marvelous and filled with fright.

I kiss their lips without haste,
Biting them to savor taste.

Boiling, broiling, frying, crying,
Tearing at the flesh I am prying,

How else to be loved,
Than to be bitten, chopped and chewed.
Floating around in my stew.

Juicy tender lips and thighs,
And the grappling out thee eye.

Oh, how they are so divine
filling my mouth and mind.

Tearing, ripping, bleeding, gushing,
Feeling that my blood is rushing.

My belly aches for seconds
it continues on and beckons.
I let the feeling heed my call,
To devour my partner all.

**CREATIVE
NONFICTION**

A Dream Come True

Jayson Argerter

My shoes quickly — lightly — tap against the stone floor. I'm a drummer, waiting my turn to perform at the Chicago Field Museum. I had wanted to go since I first saw a documentary about Sue the Tyrannosaur in 2015. In the nine years since, I had never gotten a chance. My family was never financially able to go to Chicago. On the occasions my aunt brought me to Chicago with her family, she was more interested in shopping, walking through parks, and trying to ride a duck boat (we never went on the duck boat; it had begun raining the day we would have gone). After the performance, we had thirty minutes to explore the museum. I had already been allowed to run around for two hours with some other band members, but for some reason, none of them wanted to see Sue (or the rest of the paleontology section).

I was starving for my chance to see the magnificent specimen. I was dehydrating in the rain. I was in the museum. *I was **right there**.* I just needed to get through this performance, then I could satiate my dream—if only fleetingly.

Finally it was my turn to perform, and I stood to play. We, the band, played a few songs from *Toy Story*, and a few other classical pieces that elude my memory. After our performance, we were greeted by the sound of applause. I was already putting my snare drum away as the applause subsided. I rushed up three flights of stairs, and finally, I was there. The region of my fossilized obsession. I walked through the Precambrian, the Cambrian, the Ordovician, the

Silurian, the Devonian, the Carboniferous, the Permian, the Triassic, the Jurassic, and, finally, the coveted Cretaceous section, where Sue would stand tall above the eager children and fascinated adults. Except she wasn't in the Cretaceous section. I was confused. I had seen an Iguanodon, some Ceratopsian I can't recall, and an Allosaurus already on display. Why wasn't Sue inside the hall of geologic time?

I rushed through the Paleogene, the Neogene, and the Quaternary. I passed the Mastodon skeleton, the Giant Ground Sloth, the Smilodon, and the Megalodon jaw: all fossils I had also been dying to see. I came to a stop when I noticed the climate change message at the very end of the Quaternary section. It stated that we, humans, are currently causing a mass extinction. I inhaled my exasperation as I remembered that, ironically, the industrialists (who funded 1800s paleontology) ravaged the climate—contributing to another mass extinction. The study of mass extinctions was funded by a mass extinction.

I forced myself to focus. The reality of paleontology could wait until I saw the mythical Sue. I needed to see Sue today. It didn't matter how long I saw her—only that I saw her. I checked my phone.

Ten minutes.

My eyes darted between the signs that lined the hall in a frantic search for the pinnacle of my pilgrimage. Finally, I saw it: the Sue exhibit. It branched off from the end of the climate change section. I forced myself past the slow-moving museum-goers, and yelled to my bandmate who was trailing behind me. I turned into the Sue exhibit, and was surprised at the

first thing I saw: her skull at the level of my hips. As I passed the skull, taking note of the bludgeoned left-hand side (Sue's right side), I finally witnessed the entirety of the theropod of my dreams.

I looked into the eyes of Sue's replica skull. Sue was... disappointingly small. In her hunched posture, she was only slightly more than twice my height (Sue is thirteen feet tall; I was six feet and two inches). I missed the opportunity to view Sue when she would have been most terrifying and immense to me: in my childhood.

Nevertheless, I took a picture with Sue. It is still one of my favorite pictures of myself. In the background of that picture, you can see families taking their time to relish the glory of Sue. I never even got within ten feet of the dinosaur. As I left, I bought a book and a pin at the Sue gift shop. Looking back, I should've gotten the Sue stuffed animal as well (my wallet would have cried, but it would have been worth it).

As I returned to the bus, the realities of paleontology began to settle in. I put the Sue pin on my hat and vowed to return to the Field Museum. I didn't have time to revel in the sublimity of seeing Sue for long enough, and there were so many other exhibits I had merely glanced at. In the minute I was in the same room as the Tyrannosaur, I had been exposed to a new, different, sterile understanding of natural science.

Next time I see Sue, I want to take notes.

The Game That Changed It All

Sydney Hewer

On October 26, 2022 it was a cold night in Bexley, Ohio. We were at Capital University for a soccer game. It was my third start as a freshman playing against high end players who had more college experience. I remember running around all of the chaos trying to control it. Our team couldn't keep up with the high end Comets and they were tearing us apart on the field. Ultimately, this led us to lose, five to zero. I remember heading home after that game, sitting on the bus not talking to anyone while others were shouting and joking around like the game that we just played didn't happen. It was the same routine for every game that season. But who would have thought that four years later it would be completely different?

It was October 8th, 2025, and my teammates and I were back on the same old bus heading right back to the place I dreaded four years ago. The majority of our teammates did not experience what our senior class had experienced on this field four years ago. This year I was hoping it was going to be different, that I would not have to feel that dread on the same exact field. On the bus ride to Capital I had my Cosmic Stardust Alani energy drink in my hand listening to "Like Him" by Tyler, The Creator. I was locked in and ready to go. I wanted to achieve a more positive outcome this time around. I knew that I had the team around me to do so.

We get to warmups and stretch and knock a ball around. We go through our normal routine and our team is pumped and ready to go. But something felt different in me. I don't think I have ever felt this feeling before. It felt like I had a wall of resilience built inside of me. No matter what, I wasn't losing today. The history of four years ago would not be repeated. My coach came over to me before the game and asked me how I was feeling and if I was ready to go. I told her right away that I wasn't losing today. No matter what, *I wasn't losing*. I was set in stone with this feeling. My body knew that this was going to happen today.

We go through the same pregame routine of the National Anthem and player introductions. I am on the end of the line staring at the stadium seats where all the players' families sat ready for my name to be announced. This other team knew me. They knew how I play and they knew what I am capable of. They have seen my statistics, they know that I am a top scoring player on the team making me a threat. And a threat is exactly what I am going to be in these next ninety minutes.

Both teams get set up on the field and I am at the center circle getting ready to kick off the game. I get the first touch of the ball, the game starts with me and it is going to end with me as well. The whistle that I have heard hundreds of times still sends chills down my spine. I kick off the ball and the game begins. Capital is the same team they have always been: they moved the ball around causing us to chase them like a cat chasing a mouse. After eight and a half minutes into the game Capital had a lucky break putting in the first goal. I told our team to

keep our heads up. It was not the first time that we have been down a goal and came back. All we had to do was keep fighting. We went back and forth with them for a while. Our team developed chances, they just unfortunately couldn't put them away. The goals were coming, I could feel it. We just needed them to actually go in the back of the net.

Now almost thirty three minutes into the game Capital scores another goal. Now making it two to zero. Our team is starting to slug around a bit more. I try to keep them going and to keep their heads high. We finish out the half with the two to zero score.

We go into half time and sit as a team. We all talk about things we can do better and how we can keep our heads high and push through. Our coach walks over to us with a formation change. Our normal three-five-two formation is getting changed to a three-four-three. We have never played this formation before, so we were kind of worried on how this would help us in our losing situation. We were going to press high on their defensive line hoping for turnovers and having a higher attack rate. All of our girls asked questions to make sure they got their positioning right. We were ready to go and we were confident that this new formation would help us be more successful.

We lined up on the field for the second half and waited for the whistle. It felt like forever until the high pitched noise went through the air. The chase was on. We were stronger in this formation and the Comets were not ready for it. The two teams went back and forth until Capital had another breakthrough in our new formation. It was now three to zero. Thoughts

came back into my head of playing this team years ago. About how we gave up and hung our heads like scared dogs. That is when the resilience in me broke through. Not even a minute later, I had a run on a long ball down the left side of the field. I dribbled down for a bit looking for a pass to my teammate which got blocked. I took it upon myself to get the deflected ball. I got the ball, took another touch and rocketed a shot at the goal with my left foot. I picked my head up and saw the ball in the back of the net past the keeper. That's when I heard the screams of cheers and felt my teammates hugging me in celebration. My goal was the pick up that we needed. I had just started the game once again.

Time goes by of both teams playing when ten minutes later we get a corner kick. We all get set up in our positions. My teammate sends a ball into the box and one of our girls runs right through it and sends it into the back of the net. We erupted into cheers as we ran over to her to celebrate knowing that we just made this an interesting game with it being three to two. Our team really started to believe in ourselves - - we had the fight in ourselves.

Ten more minutes go by under the lights of the stadium and one of our forwards gets fouled thirty yards away from goal. Our teammate who took the corner kick set up for a shot on net. The anticipation made everyone antsy. She sent the ball towards the net and we all crashed at the goal to get a rebound if needed. The Capital goalkeeper wasn't so lucky as it hit off her hand and went into the back of the net. That was the game-tying goal, making the official score three to three. Our coaches couldn't believe their eyes as we had actually done it.

We had come back and tied the game. The team who everyone thought would hang their heads and accept defeat proved everyone wrong. I remember feeling so excited at that moment.

Seeing the shocked faces of the Capital players who couldn't believe that we had come back.

This was going to be the start of a whole new game for the last fifteen minutes.

Some would say the hardest thing anyone can do in their life would be stepping outside their comfort zone or chasing a goal that is out of reach. Mine in this exact moment was those last fifteen minutes of that game. I was moved from my forward position to defense to help protect the goal. I have never seen a team fight so hard to stay alive like our team did. Our whole team felt the resilience I felt since the beginning of the game. Screaming, cheering, emotions, we were all hearing and feeling it in those moments. Who was going to be the first one to let up? Who was going to make that one mistake that would give the other team the game? Capital was one of the top teams in the league at this time. They were expected to win and beat us.

Until the last fifty seconds. There was a foul called for us in our favor. One of the Capital defenders grabbed one of our girls for a dirty play and we got a free kick. It was around thirty yards out but more on the side closer to our bench. I walked over to take the kick, confident in my ability to create a chance for our team. I asked my coach if she wanted me to shoot or wanted a chip back post. She was so overwhelmed with her emotions that she just told me to do whatever I wanted and she went to take a seat. So, I made my decision. I was going for

a goal. I have done it before and I believed that I could do it again. I set the ball up and got set to take the kick. In those seconds of myself getting ready to take the kick I have never heard the field so quiet. No one wanted to make a sound. The same whistle pierced through the air. I stepped forwards and made contact with the ball. I sent it over the wall made of Capital players whose faces followed the ball through the air. The ball carried through the air just above the Capital goalkeeper where it found the back upper ninety of the goal. I had done it, I had just got us another goal that could win us the game. Players had shocked looks on their faces and our families were jumping and screaming. No one could believe it. Little did we know that the goal I just scored made history for our soccer program. This game started with me and I just ended it.

The Comets had fifty seconds to try and get a goal to tie with us. They tried getting the ball up the field but ended up kicking it to our keeper who could waste a few seconds with the ball. She punted the ball with twenty four seconds left. We headed the ball out of bounds and the Comets were scrambling trying to get the ball in bounds. They threw it in and it got jumbled up and it went out of bounds with it being our ball and six seconds left on the clock. The clock ticked down to zero and I pumped my arms in celebration as my teammates ran to surround me. Coaches and players from the bench ran onto the field and surrounded the players on the field. My coach wrapped me in a hug and told me how proud she was of me. We all broke apart to give high fives to the opposing team. Everyone felt so relieved and full of

happiness that we were able to pull this off. Little did we know that our team had just made history in our program. Our team winning that game against Capital on October 8th, 2026 marked the first game against Capital we have ever won since 2001. After that game I was overloaded with happiness. Knowing that I was about to head back on that bus feeling so good about what just happened meant everything and was the biggest highlight of my senior campaign. With time still ticking, that memory will always live in the back of my head and in Heidelberg Women's Soccer history. Everyone will remember our team's resilience and our comeback. And they will remember how number thirty nine put the game away with her last goal of the match.

I have learned that resilience isn't about never losing, it is about never quitting.

Finding My Voice

Rylan Riffle

Growing up, I have always played at least one sport. Being an athlete was always who I was, so imagining a “me” without sports was nearly impossible. Throughout my childhood, I tried almost every sport, but as I grew older, I stuck to a few that I found the most fun in. Through high school, I was a four-sport athlete, competing in wrestling, softball, track, and soccer. I never thought there would be a day that I would no longer be playing a sport.

Softball had always been “my” sport. From the time I was around four years old until I was seventeen, I was always playing softball. I grew up on the field, and with a glove in my hand. My family, along with everyone around me, always thought softball was my future, and so did I. I became more serious about playing at a higher level during middle school, when I started travel softball year-round. Doing this meant balancing my other sports seasons with a softball season that was going all year.

I started off on a travel team that was just starting, and wasn't the best in any way, but we thought it would be the best way to start because it wasn't going to be extremely demanding of my time. I ended up staying with that team for two years, then tried out for another team before starting my third season. I made the new team and ended up staying with them for the remainder of my travel ball career. My first year with this new team was a lot better

than my old team, and I had really high hopes for my future in softball. The season finished, August came around, and we held tryouts for the future team. Through this, we gained a lot of new players, while also losing the majority of the team. By the second year, we had pretty much a whole new team, and it was going really well. At the beginning of this season, everyone was having a lot of fun doing what we all loved. However, as the season went on, problems began to occur with our head coach. From the outside, we just looked like any other team; winning games, doing the sport we loved, but from the inside, it was a chaos of manipulation and harshness.

One of the first moments I recall from this situation was when I was a pitcher for our team. I had been pitching since I was probably around twelve years old, and at the time, I would have been sixteen. Originally, I came onto the team to be one of the pitchers; while I played other positions as well, I had put a lot of time into pitching, and it was my main position. My head coach would always belittle us in any way he could, but the first time I remember experiencing it was anytime I would pitch. He wouldn't put me in until the last moment he could, when we were losing, then critique me and put the blame of a loss on me, after already being down too much for me to "save the game". Anytime a mistake was made, we would get scolded for it and a lot of the time pulled from the game; when in reality, a good coach would help us regain our composure and confidence, allowing us to not make another dumb mistake. But it was a cycle with him; make a mistake, get pulled from the game and

scolded, get put back in later, terrified to make another mistake, psych yourself out, make another mistake, cycle repeats.

Every game, every practice, every tournament, every interaction made each player lose any confidence we had in ourselves. The team was falling apart mentally, while still being expected to play our best and win. Flash forward to nearing the end of the season, everyone knew that we couldn't continue with this coach being in charge of our team, so the parents began figuring out what to do for the next season, as all of the girls wanted to stay together. Hoping for a healthier environment for young girls to be developed in, we started thinking of solutions. Eventually, we decided that two of my teammates' dads would create their own team for the next season and take the players who wanted to leave but stay together.

Come the time of our last tournament of the season, the coach at the time had somehow found out our plans of leaving. The thing is, it was never a plan that was meant to be secretive or to blind side anyone; we were pretty open about the fact that most of us wanted to leave and that we weren't happy being coached by him. He didn't take this very well at all, but we had no idea what was to come for our final tournament. The week of our last tournament, all of the girls who were leaving had a sleepover, which we did a lot anyway, but this was special for the reason that one of the girls we were all close with was going to a completely different team for the next season. We had planned this to be all of our "lasts" with her, and told

ourselves that we would make the most out of the last tournament with each other, regardless of our coach.

I vividly remember the day before the tournament. We were all texting in a team group chat asking about what uniforms we were wearing, what time to be there for warmups, etc., but hours went by with no responses from our coach. We had all decided to go to the mall later in the day, when one of my teammates got a text from her dad that our team wasn't listed in the tournament. Obviously, we were all extremely confused and wondered if a mistake had occurred. Through one of the parents calling the tournament director, we found out that our coach had pulled us from the tournament, one of which we paid to play in with our preseason funds. This caused chaos in multiple group chats, with parents blowing up, players going at each other, and so on. We were completely blindsided by this and felt robbed of our last tournament together. My coach at the time was extremely unprofessional in how he responded to simple questions as to why we were no longer in the tournament, which showed his true colors that we had all been anticipating throughout the season.

We were all devastated and felt betrayed. The coach who had put us through so much mental stress had stripped away our last tournament together, and we couldn't do anything about it. Reflecting on the situation, I feel for my past self. We were all just young girls being belittled by a fully grown man because of what? An ego? His self-satisfaction? What did we do

to deserve what we went through at such a young age? Did I really let a miserable person take away my love and drive for the sport I thought would be with me forever?

I am a completely different person after that than I was starting out. I was so shy, introverted, scared to speak up, scared to know what others thought about me; he turned me into someone who was angry all the time, someone who now dreaded doing something they once loved, but someone who realized they had a voice, someone who is no longer scared to speak up. If I had never stood up to him, how much more of a mental toll would he have taken on me?

Late for Dinner

Rayce Septer

6:00 p.m.

At the end of our first full day on the Amalfi Coast, after getting there around two a.m. the night before. We all still had to be up to catch the bus for the day trip to expensive shops and sea-sickness on the “*Quick trip*” to Positano. Extremely exhausted and hungry, I had sat down in bed on my side of the room, ready and resting before dinner. Thinking about what tonight would bring, where we would be going, and what we would be doing. Just the start of the evening.

6:15 p.m.

My roommates had just started to get ready for the dinner reservations we had at 7:00 p.m. As any sane person would tell you, it's perfectly natural to start getting ready for reservations forty-five minutes before. Lucky, I was the only insane one who got ready and knew we were going to be late already, so why even go? Why can't we get some take-out from somewhere close or downstairs at the hotel restaurant? I was the minority opinion, though; they all insisted and had already called the ride, which said they would be late, and with the twenty-minute drive, the walk that would take at least fifteen minutes. I had confirmed my beliefs silently that we were already late. *Don't say anything, don't bring down the group.*

6:30 p.m.

All the way down, we go from our hotel on the hill, descending to the long-awaited chariot. Making sure the seating is right, because one called the ride, so they have to sit up front, and another can't climb all the way into the back, and those two have to sit next to each other as they need to talk. Did I forget that the one who called the ride actually didn't want to sit up front, and now the one in the very back forgot their wallet, so they need to have people climb out so they can run back upstairs to grab it. I am already looking up different places to go silently, and *where we can just eat*.

6:50 p.m.

The trip finally got us downtown, which was apparently walking only in this area after a certain point, just dangling our meals in front of us. To just start the walk, *the fifteen-minute walk*. And with so many people in a group, it's hard to keep pace, especially if it's a hurried one, I want, no need. I hear behind me, "That place looks interesting," or "We need to go to that shop there," or "Our tour guide mentioned this place." Occasionally, "Is this where we're eating?" The answer is always no, that's not where we're supposed to be eating. Losing time, direction, and slowly losing my patience. I feel I am in an endless maze designed to just torture me.

6:55 p.m.

The GPS said we were still twelve minutes away, the clock ticking in my head as those I am with can't even read analog. We stumbled through a stopped crowd, and we had no time to see what they were looking at, and *I didn't care*. I have to keep going, have to try and keep moving, have to descend some stairs, if you can call them that, they are just some stone slabs, another obstacle to overcome. I had no idea where dinner could be; I thought I knew where it wasn't going to be at least.

7:02 p.m.

It's official, we're late, and we still have a ways to go. We're late for our reservations, they are gonna give away our table, we would have to find a new place which would be packed, having to wait another hour at least, and start this process all over again. I can't do it; even more, I am not even paying attention, just a walking calculator waiting to be used. We get closer and closer. A smell came over me, then the thought came, *was the restaurant on the water?*

I hear the whisper of waves, too calming and rhythmic to be real. I looked out to the slowly placid, pale blue water as the sun was leaving and taking away the life it held on it. Following my gaze goes upward to the mountains and hills surrounding me. *We are in a perfect cove*, the welcoming isolation the mountains have, the gentle reminder that they're holding the

sky for us. The hazy clouds coating the hills make them soft, almost gentle, and the falling mist illuminated for moments as the light continues to pull down.

The blend of yellow to orange to red to pink, looking endless, mixing together as they are truly meant to be. The yellow nucleus of the dying sun I can't even gaze upon, that fades out in the warm orange hue lighting the sky, with accent colors of red interspersed throughout, while pink slowly hangs over them all, holding back violet, the first force of the night. They are all retreating farther and farther back behind the mountains, getting pulled down and away, hiding them till the next day.

Night fall.

We all waited till our personal painting of an oasis went away, and a new sky would surround us, *the reminder of what we had*.

We got to the restaurant sometime after seven. There was no other table there. I got one of the local Italian pasta dishes and the house wine. We spent hours there together, dining and laughing, but most importantly, living, *being present*.

I still think a lot about my time in Italy studying abroad for a summer. Many moments and memories that I hold deeply to myself. But something about that coast, being there in that moment, I almost felt like it was for me, *my gentle reminder*. I look back on photos of it, but

no picture can do an experience justice, bringing it all back to life, so I do with my mind instead. Whenever I need or can, I think back to that reminder in my head, smell the coastal breeze around me, hear the push of the water attempting to get closer to me, colors dancing around the sky one last time for the day, feel the warmth of the sun slowly fading, and say goodbye. All of this reminds me not to be mad when you're late for dinner.

Nature Therapy

Sidney Troesch

It's a brisk morning in November around 4:00 a.m. in the morning. The night before going to sleep I was so ecstatic I could not fall asleep for hours. I was tossing and turning beneath my blankets but could not let my body relax. My mind raced with excitement about waking up in the morning to go hunting with my dad. The sound of my alarm goes off and you can hear it throughout the whole house. I see the light come into my room as my dad opens the door to make sure I am awake.

“You up, hunny?” my dad says in his tired voice. At this time he is all ready to go and I am not even close. I have just opened my eyes and have not even had a single thought.

“Yes, Dad, I am up, my feet are on the floor,” I say rolling out of bed, still with my eyes half closed. I go to the end of my bed to get some of my underlayers that I have put out to wear. I put on a pair of leggings, sweatpants, and two shirts. Since it is twenty degrees out and I will be sitting in a tree for about ten hours, I need to layer up. After putting my base layers on, I walk to the garage to get my camos. I get them off of our four wheeler where we laid them the night before. They are cold, rough to the touch and smell like dirt. We do not wash them because then they will smell clean and the deer will notice that and not come near us. I get my bag ready with my snacks. My dad and I call “troeschie treats.” Then I have some water, handwarmers, facemasks and my bow rope. I grab my boots and double check that I have

everything. My dad always said the worst feeling is forgetting something when you go hunting because then the sunrise will beat you to your own stand.

After getting everything all ready my dad and I load everything we need into the truck and hit the road. It's still pitch black and cold out so we know we are on time. Our first stop before hitting the stand is the gas station to get coffee and our breakfast. It's not the healthiest but it's a small tradition we do. I pick out the same donut filled with chocolate and cream while my dad gets his extra large coffee. Then we head back to the truck since the sun is coming up soon. You can see the sky getting a little lighter than it was before when we woke up. We try to beat the sunrise so we are in our stand before it's too bright outside.

"Are you excited?" my dad says while we are blasting his rock music and he is smiling ear to ear.

"Of course I am excited dad," I say as I eat and almost jump in my seat because I am ready to be out there. We pull up to the property and get out very quietly, not slamming the doors and not talking much. We change into our mud boots, put our hats on, more jackets, head lamps and sling our bows over our backs. It's about a mile to our stand so we walk into the field, almost tripping over the taken down corn.

We get to our stand, finally in the back corner of the woods. It's still a little bit dark so I carefully make sure I have everything I need then walk up to my ladder. I climb the ladder about twelve feet up in the tree and we pull my bow up with a rope. My dad smiles, takes his

picture of us together like we have done since I was seven and then he heads off to his stand.

From this point I just sit until I see a deer. I will be on my phone and just watch what is all around me. The wind is blowing as I feel the coldness through layers, you hear every little sound, every leaf falling and stick breaking. The squirrels running up and down the trees make so much noise it sounds like someone is walking. From my stand I see the beautiful orange and yellow sunrise. The woods are glowing from the sun peaking through. I look all around me and I see the birds flying and hear them chirping. It's so quiet I can hear cars from miles away just like they are right next to me.

Many hours go by and we have not seen any good deer. There have been some babies that have walked by but we never will shoot those. My dad and I have been texting all day about what we see and sending each other stuff on our phones to keep us entertained. As me and my dad are texting on the phone, I hear something beyond the woodline. I put my phone down and get my bow lined up with my shoulder resting on the tree stand. I got my range finder out of my bag to see what it was. I see the trees moving and hear leaves crunching. There is movement but I still can't see what it is. I look closely by a bush and there is a little white tail. As I wait in excitement, there is the tiniest deer I have ever seen. It's a little buck and its rack has only two antlers. When I notice, I put my bow back into its hook in the tree and just watch the buck eat his corn we have out and some berries off of the trees below. I texted my dad that it was a false alarm. I was sad that he was not older. I was still happy that I got to see the buck

walk through the woods and know they are still around my stand. With a small one here, there are bigger ones close.

After seeing that very tiny buck, the sun is setting and the woods are getting quiet again. So my dad and I met up at the woodline and started heading back to the truck. The wind is blowing right into our faces as we walk and the light is very minimal. The moon is starting to brighten the field as we get closer to the truck. I can barely see where I am walking in the field, trying to keep up with my dad. I can see the truck in the distance as we get closer. My dad and I are finally back to the truck after being in the woods for what feels like forever. We take our bows off our backs and throw our boots in the bed of the truck. We get in the truck starving, so we start digging into the leftover snacks.

“Well, did you have a good hunt, hunny?” my dad says.

“Yeah I did, I just wish I would have gotten something, not just seen,” I say as we cruise down the back roads to our house and get warm again.

“Well, hunting is not always about getting a deer. It's about being outside in nature, seeing the woods wake up and not being around anything else. I use this as my getaway and you know I call this my nature therapy,” my dad asks.

After my dad and I talk in the truck, we pull into the driveway and get all of our camos off. I am sweaty, cold and hot all at the same time. All I want to do is take a shower and curl up with my dogs and a blanket. As we walk into the door, my mom hugs us even though we smell

like dirt and doe piss. The house smelled like spaghetti and meatballs my mom had made. I eat dinner and take a shower. Then I wandered into the living room to find my dad passed out on our couch. I cover him up with a blanket then go to bed. I am so exhausted. As soon as I lay down, I can feel my body relax, my eyes shut and I fall asleep.

Hunting to me has always had a special place in my heart. It's what I will remember for the rest of my life. The endless memories with my dad and some of our other family members. The crazy early mornings and late nights when we do get a deer. Sitting in the woods, hearing the wind swirl between the branches of the trees, the animals running all around you, and hearing dogs howl is one of the most peaceful things to me. It's so quiet you can hear a pin drop and hear people for miles. Being in the stand has always been my getaway when my life can get crazy and I just need a breath. Your mind does not race with things you have to do, issues you may have, and no one is around you. It's just you and nature. Nature therapy is what I turn to and it will be something I forever hold in my heart.

ART

My Puppy Bear

Julia Peariso



Author Biographies

Jayson Agerter

Jayson Agerter is a Sophomore double major focusing in Computer Science and English (conc. Writing). His writing focuses on critical reflection upon his life experiences.

Brooke Barnes

Brooke Barnes is a Sophomore A/YA English Education major here at Heidelberg University. She is also a member of the women's golf team, as well as a Brand Ambassador for the University.

Kambell Fleck

Kambell Fleck is from Sandusky, Ohio and started going to Heidelberg this year. She has a double major in English Writing and Primary Education, and plans to become an elementary school teacher.

Ryleigh Gorman

Ryleigh Gorman is a human skeleton wrapped in muscle, fat, and flesh. This has given him the stunning ability to not only disguise his true form but also be able to write his ABCs.

Sydney Hewer

Sydney Hewer is a senior sports management and business administration double major. She is a member of Nu Sigma Alpha, and a part of the women's soccer team. Her goals are to graduate this spring and get her masters next year.

Kelseigh Holman

Kelseigh Holman is a sophomore at Heidelberg University. She is a double major in Communications and English with a concentration in Writing. She works on campus, and is involved in Berg Allies. Her writing focuses on superstitions and supernatural elements.

Maddisen Mikkelsen

Maddisen Mikkelsen is an aspiring book editor and author studying at Heidelberg University, where she is building a strong foundation in literature, writing, and editorial practice while

earning recognition for her creative work. She is actively involved in campus life through CRU, the Stunt and Cheer teams, and frequent writing sessions at the Heidelbean coffee shop, all while working on The Rock Creek Review as an editor.

Julia Peariso

When Julia Peariso and her family went to the Indianapolis Humane Society to adopt a dog, which would be the pitbull-boxer mix named Carmen (who is the subject of the titled artwork “My Puppy Bear”), Julia forgot to put on her shoes that day but she still got to go inside the building to look at the dogs that were available for adoption. “My Puppy Bear” was created for an assignment in her Digital Design class in tenth grade. Its style of art is in the category of low poly art.

Trey Pitzer

Trey Pitzer is a third year student here at Heidelberg. Trey is currently a double major in English and Media with a Communications and Business double minor. Trey has a primary focus on writing with aspirations to be a screenwriter.

Mia Puente

Mia Puente is a Musical Theater Major and Writing Minor. She loves writing poems and playwriting!

Rylan Riffle

Rylan Riffle is currently a Freshman, majoring in nursing at Heidelberg. Her goals after college include moving to Florida, and becoming a travel nurse; as well as possibly creating her own business within nursing someday.

Kade Rowe

Kade Rowe, a political science and communication double major, is an active presence on campus, involved in Student Senate, the Rho Eta Delta fraternity, and the Student Alumni Association (SAA). His writing is shaped by his experiences with grief, identity, and faith, often exploring the tension between belief and doubt. Kade’s interest in storytelling and human connection began through his work in education at the YMCA, where he supported young learners and developed a deeper understanding of people and emotion. A graduate of Tiffin

Columbian High School and Sentinel Career and Technology Center, where he studied Careers in Education, he has remained committed to both community involvement and creative expression. Through his writing, Kade seeks to give voice to complex emotions that are often left unspoken.

Rayce Septer

Rayce Septer is a senior graduating in May with a Criminology and Psychology degrees with a Business Administration minor. During his time he was involved in many organizations he had major involvement in being a brother of Nu Sigma Alpha, Student Alumni Association, and GLC. Other organizations were Delt Guy, Kappa Lil Bro, and chem club. He was also a four year student athlete playing lacrosse, and was named captain twice. He plans on staying in Tiffin completing his Masters in Business Administration.

Hazel Stone

Hazel Stone is a third-year English student wishing to pursue a career in grant writing or to be an author in creative nonfiction and poetry. Hazel is a Traditional member of Zeta Theta Psi and is a Euglo and Sig Hon. In their freetime, Hazel enjoys napping with her dog, Winnifred, as well as sewing, writing, and listening to music.

Sidney Troesch

Sidney Troesch is currently a sophomore and majoring in criminology and psychology with a minor in sociology. She is a part of the Berg Events Council, Student leader for club volleyball and a part of the Aurora Yearbook. After Heidelberg she will be pursuing a career in law enforcement.

Editor Biographies.

Makenzie Bowling

Makenzie Bowling is a senior English major at Heidelberg University. She also dabbles in art as a hobby, and has recently added a minor in Art, alongside her English studies.

Rowan Gill

Rowan Gill is a senior English and Media double major with a concentration in Writing and a minor in Literature. In the fall, they will be attending the University of Baltimore for an M.F.A. in Creative Writing and Publishing Arts.

Cecilia Groth

Cecilia Groth is a junior Environmental Science and English Writing major. She is editor-in-chief of the *Rock Creek Review*, plays oboe for the symphonic band, and is a corollary member of both Zeta Theta Psi and the Euglossian Society. Most of her work sparks from the sights around her, whether it be an abandoned church or a local park.

Ryleigh Gorman

Ryleigh Gorman is a human skeleton wrapped in muscle, fat, and flesh. This has given him the stunning ability to not only disguise his true form but also be able to write his ABCs.

Kelseigh Holman

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Desirae Matherly

Desirae Matherly is in her fourth year at Heidelberg where she teaches writing. Her essays and fiction appear in several literary magazines and she is the author of *Echo's Fugue*, a collection of personal essays published in 2019.

Trinity Quaintance

Trinity Quaintance joined a month ago and is the current *Morpheus* jester. She's here now.