Through poetry and stories, photographs and drawings, Spark showcases the talent and spirit of students at North Shore Community College. This third issue of Spark is dedicated to the persistence of vision, forward movement, and the knowledge that creativity is its own reward.

Enjoy.
"I especially liked the piece called Beachgirl. I loved how the artist painted the picture and the colors they used. It took me to the beach since I’m from Gloucester and could relate to this piece. I feel like I’ve been this girl and seen this girl."
Meg Asaro, Radiology, 2012

"It was an exciting experience to be able to take part in choosing what went into the magazine."
Amanda Frost, Liberal Arts, Women in Transition Program

"I thought the photographic submittals... were quite varied in theme and technical approach, and had a strong balance of experimental/approaches."
Lloyd Holmes, Ph.D., NSCC Digital Graphic Design Program Coordinator, NSCC Business Science Division

"It was great to see such an interesting and varied set of student submittals."
Lisa Altomari, Professor, NSCC English Department

"I found this experience to be both open and very fulfilling."
Ingrid Silliman, Liberal Arts, 2012
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32. The Intake | Wendy Walker-Casal

on the cover:
Personal Maze | Jake Bartolomeo
My Art  
by Christina Siebertz

Once with me in human form,  
You are now the stroke  
Of my brush,  
The colors offsetting the words  
Streaming down a page,  
The mold with a shadow  
Next to the window,  
My collage with random  
Shapes and photos,  
My story;  
An intricate beginning, middle,  
and end,  
My rising action,  
My dance in the moonlight  
Where no one watches;  
Passionate twists and turns.  
My film;  
With laughter and mystery,  
Grabbing audience attention,  
My musical masterpiece;  
Touching every soul in the room,  
My minor and major;  
My minor detail on the earth,  
My major piece of my heart.  
My song.  
My creation!  
The beginning of color.  
You are art!  
My art.

Nothing more as of late. ■

Kirsten  
by Sabrina Markham

Her eyes  
Blue, electrified  
Leave me paralyzed

Her lips  
Pressed against mine  
Stop time

Her face  
Like an angel  
When gone leaves me in hell

Her beauty  
Surrounds her  
Captures my attention

Her love  
Soft and pure  
Beautiful, like her ■
Shine
by Jessica Toomey

I have this feeling that when the sun shines on me, that it’s someone’s way of telling me to be happy. I feel like I need to shine like the sun. To share my shine and make other people happy as well as myself. I have felt dark and cold lately, but something has changed. I feel bright and strong on the inside as well as the outside. Like not even a cloud could stop me from shining. I feel like I have a little more bounce in my walk, a little more shine in my smile and a little more chuckle in my laugh. I have realized that no matter what happens in my life or who leaves it, I know that I will always have me. That I can always make it through the harshest storm, or the coldest day at the top of a mountain. That if I fall I can always get back up. And if I close my eyes they will always reopen. That life never stops, people do. That I will never stop, and neither will my life.

Leave-taking
by Wendy Walker-Casal

Uninvited tears before the plane leaves. The window is a misted crack, a rabbit hole, a mirror. I hold my entrails. I miss holding your leash, your hair. Waves – unsalted bile and saline tears tear at my hair. Knotted like anacondas, my hair invites a steward’s pity, my unleashed chignon. Red or white wine? No. I miss the oldest plane tree, caged next the Thames by iron and assaulted by whining tourist children, their cotton candy cries unleashing bile. Iron on the tarmac turns to sulphur. The engines whine. Stewards hop like rabbits holding trails of seat belts, uninvited cages. Holding my eyes in my hands, I cry. My hands feel tomorrow, the day I shall miss the mirror of your white canvas. Friday I shall swallow a black anaconda and grasp the stew of intravenous lines. Swallows fly through mist along the runway. Rabbits scurry down red trails to galleys. I crack, and hold the candy of your skin, Warm like a ’57 Chevy engine. Here, wound in my innermost trails, The oldest of serrated plane leaves.
Colors and Patterns at the Zoo

THE SAN DIEGO ZOO
clockwise

Zoo | Scott Schiavo
Eyes Sea Depth | Scott Schiavo
Bird Photograph | Yvonne Ellis
Several Winter Trees | Karen Spear
Boothbay Harbor Sunset | Joanne Graham-Troy
Lesson
by Andrew D. Woods

I was following wildlife tracks in a State Forest during stormy weather. The snow of the night before and that morning had become freezing rain, and clumps of snow falling from the trees and icy sleet splattering down probably masked the sounds I made crunching up the hill. The fresh tracks in front of me were somehow unusual and, as I was concentrating on them rather than looking ahead, it was a surprise when I saw the deer in front of me. It was crouched under some brush, leaning forward and preparing to bolt. My first thought was that it was as surprised as I was. I didn’t want to scare it off so my instinctive reaction was to drop to the ground and avoid eye contact. Lying with my back to the deer, I didn’t hear the expected sound of its flight. After a few minutes I slowly turned my head towards it.

There was obviously something wrong with the animal. Her not running off when I’d shown up was a bad sign. I looked her over from three feet away. She had curled up with her eyes closed. Her coat was matted with rain and she was expelling mucus and liquid from her muzzle. Her breathing was harsh, labored and uneven. Whenever she opened her eyes they appeared cloudy and glazed. I lay there watching for a while, trying not to disturb her any further.

I knew I there wasn’t much I could do for this deer. Slowly, I offered her some water cupped in my hand, which she rejected. She did take a small piece from a Clif bar, but that was all. I expected that she just wanted to be left alone. I thought about the dogs and coyote whose tracks I’d followed that morning, and about the fisher sign I’d seen nearby.

This deer was ailing, probably dying, and about to become something else’s meal. What bothered me, though, was that she was suffering. From her struggle to breathe to how her ears constantly twitched as the rain ran into them, she just radiated pain. I wanted to do something but I didn’t know what—or whether doing nothing was what the situation required. It occurred to me that I might end her suffering.

I consider myself a caretaker of the land, but this was beyond trail maintenance and picking up trash. I had a responsibility to the doe, but I wasn’t sure what it was. My role wasn’t clear to me and I didn’t have much on which to base a decision. My ideals include respecting living things and not interfering with them. I’d watched animals eating and being eaten and I’d followed tracks to and from kill sites and feeding sites, where I’d been fascinated by trying to decipher the marks telling what had happened. But something was different that afternoon. I wasn’t a dispassionate observer. The deer and I lay in the slush. It was getting dark and there weren’t many options. Get up and walk away from her, kill her and walk away, or carry her out on my back and find an animal hospital. Picking her up and carrying her four miles to my truck seemed ridiculous and would only disturb her more. I doubted my ability to kill her cleanly and quickly. I had a sharp knife and a big, cop-style flashlight in my pack, but I didn’t know where or how to cut her throat, and I imagined bludgeoning her to death would be neither quick nor clean. Leaving her to the dogs was unacceptable. I didn’t know what to do.

My primary rule when observing nature is to not...
interfere. Modern man is at best an interloper, and influencing the flow of life in the woods more than we already do is simply wrong. The balance of nature has its own morality, and it is folly to try and impose our values and desires on something we barely understand. The constant, essential drives to stay fed, defend territory and to reproduce determine most of what happens between creatures in the wild; the appropriate role for man is to stay out of the way and try to repair the damage we’ve already done. The dogs and coyote play more important roles. They maintain the health of the herd by eliminating the sick and weak—only man takes the trophies. Without predators, the herd grows beyond what its range can support, becomes sickly, and eventually starves. The predators are vital to a healthy ecosystem, no less important than their prey.

I knew all this. I’d learned it from books and other trackers, and I’d been fortunate enough to see some of it for myself. I was able to reflect on what I’d seen and learned over the years, all that crawling in the mud or sitting against trees late at night, hoping I was in the right place to witness something amazing. Often I had been; I’d seen wonderful things and been taught some valuable lessons. When I saw the resolution of my dilemma it was more of an affirmation than a revelation. Sitting there in the rain, watching the deer die, the knowledge passed with finality from the academic to experience.

I remembered my role. I crouched over my sketchbook to make a quick drawing of her, and then I got up and walked away.

Since that day I’ve talked and emailed about this with other naturalists, especially some instructors I’d met at a tracking school. All of them told me that I’d done the right thing, and for the right reasons. Some even considered me fortunate to have had the encounter. Killing the deer would have been a gross intrusion in her final moments, and just offering her a little comfort was the best thing to do. John Muir once said, “In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks.” I often recall his words, and what I received from that deer.
The Siren’s Call

Listen ye travelers to the Sirens’ calls
How mortal man she enthralles
In the shadows lying
With satirical claws always prying
Never the same, same old game
Mixed up system of rules
Pointing to the real fools
Beauty only skin deep
Lyrical songs start to creep
Desperate to allure
Coy touch, ever so demure
Not belonging to their realm
Always steady at the helm
Pristine oceans blue
Truth set askew
Never feel remorse
steady on your course
Drink it up, those sweet, sweet drinks
Go on and laugh, laugh as their ship sinks
To you, a picturesque scene
To others, only obscene
Save your speech for the so-called wise
Lead them to their demise
Many fatalities
Forsaken realities
Dashed on the rocky shore
Vessels crashed here before
Oh! Mourn! Mourn for the remains
Hidden by the rains
Tears for souls lost
Their bodies carelessly tossed
Gone forever by the wave
Resting in their watery grave.
Prehyscopic
by Stephanie Buonaugurio

I’m your little…

prehyscopic/leave/myopic
Dinotopic
Lice and relay
Instant decay
   I’m scared of the think
I’m scared of the think

Drown your sorrow –
In tomorrow, and leave your visions
astray,   Decombing stack
   I’m getting back
At all that backwards passion play

I’m triple stack, I’m out of whack, and
Here’s the game that we delayed
   I’m turning back
You’re earning sap
   As the clouds just
Blow away…■

You Stay With Me
by Christina Siebertz

You are far away
In that land,
Vastly different from my own,
Where natural parts of life flourish
And progress out of reach.
Yet progress toward me, I say…
Since you are already with me
All the time.
I mimic how you react
To things.
I think of words
And the way you might say them.
I love how we amble together
On a clear day;
All things possible.
Your spirit so gentle;
Our energies as one.

Now we walk alone;
Equally, but in opposite lands.
In our freedom lands.
Yours with your ways
And mine with my ways.
But our energies still reach
Beyond borders.
Somehow you won’t leave me,
Even though the world
Gets so busy sometimes.
You always manage to
Stay with me; walking.
Even when it’s raining.■
24 hours since the end of time
Came out of habit
Loneliness
Principle
Denial
Curiosity
Regular drill
An instant ghost town
Alone on the sidewalk
Standing by the door
Looking in
Shelves still stalked
Carts still lined up in the usual way

Lights on
Never realized how well one could see it
Register 4 from the doorway
Sitting in the doorway
Remembering the distant
And not so distant
Past
Ghost of me reappears
Young again
With my grandparents
Shopping
Watching myself grow
Disappearing
Returning
An employee
Shooting rubber bands
Sanitizer War!!!!
Flashlight tag/relay
Shoveling out during snowstorms
CJ’s pen
Deli samples
Memories interrupted
Woman on the side walk, “May I help you?!?”
“No”
Not welcome anymore
Precious past
Turned futile history
It faded into the void of the night
My Sweet Baby Brother
by Krystina Tejeda

Why can’t I stop thinking of you? Months have passed since that fateful day. It still seems so surreal. Tears still flow from my eyes each day. No matter how hard I try to make sense of it all, I just can’t. The pain I feel is tremendous and unlike anything I have ever experienced. There is only one thought that brings me solace - that you will never again feel an ounce of pain. But on the contrary, I am full of discord knowing that I will never hear your voice again, see your smile, or witness your goofy demeanor. I will never be granted the opportunity to see you be married or become a father. You never even got the chance to learn how to drive. On Christmas morning, your presence will be sorely missed. No matter what we are doing, your spot will always be empty and its difficult to comprehend.

On the day of your accident, I was working at the hospital. It was a hot, sunny Friday. I wasn’t feeling well and almost called out, but decided against it because I had the weekend off. Thinking back, I am glad that I went because I was there for you. When I arrived at 7:25am, I was in for a shock. I logged onto my computer and had learned that you had suffered a severe trauma. Seeing your name in my computer left me speechless. My heart began to beat at an incredible pace. My hands started trembling. I could feel my eyes begin to fill with tears. Words cannot begin to express the level of emotion that I was experiencing at that moment. I closed my eyes for just a moment and hoped that it was all just an abominable nightmare from which I would soon awaken. Thoughts were racing through my mind. Perhaps, I was hallucinating from the medication I took, but I wasn’t. It was not a figment of my imagination, nor was it a nightmare. You were there in the emergency room, where I work everyday, suffering from life-threatening injuries as a result of a hit and run.

As tears trickled down my cheeks from my eyes, I knew I needed to tell someone at work. It took every ounce of strength that I could muster to be able to speak and still, I could not make any intelligible word. All I could do was sob and point at the computer to your name. A nurse walked over to me and asked if I was okay, but I wasn’t even remotely close to alright. Once again, words escaped me. At this point, I was sobbing uncontrollably. Somehow I managed to spit out the word “brother”. She understood what I was trying to say and calmly explained that there was an accident. The nurse then asked if I would make a positive identification and, of course, I agreed.

While walking through the ER, I felt like
everything was moving through slow motion. All
eyes seemed to be on me as a walked through the
room, teary-eyed and being escorted by a nurse.
From the threshold of the doorway, I could easily
identify you even though your face was not visible
from my location. I wanted to run right over to
you as if you would just laugh and say, “Gotcha!”
But this was no practical joke. My tears were no
longer trickling and began to gush from my blue
eyes. This was all too real. Your perfectly spiked
brown hair was tinged with red. As I walked closer
to your bed, I could see your face covered with
blood. A tube was in your mouth and helping you
breathe. There were many people in the room,
doctors and nurses, but for that moment I felt
as though it were just you and I. “Michael,” I
said, “stay with me, please.” I gently kissed your
forehead without any concern of blood and held
your hand tightly. The nurses were extraordinarily
empathetic and one brought me a chair so I could
sit in the room with you while we were waiting
for Med-Flight to arrive to transport you to Mass
General in Boston. In that chair, I stayed until
they arrived to take you.
The family met me at MGH. We were guided
to a small family room in the emergency area
of the hospital. Once we were there, a surgeon
entered the room and advised us that you had
suffered a critical head injury along with several
other injuries. The largest area of concern was
the head injury. He explained that your brain
was swelling and that a life-saving procedure was
needed to alleviate the pressure. The doctor also
explained that there was no guarantee, however,
that you would survive, but we were trying to
remain positive.
The family went to the surgical waiting room
because we were advised that you would be in
surgery for several hours. While there, we saw
your story on the news. The reporter showed a
surveillance tape of the accident and I must say it
was one of the most disturbing things I have ever
seen. Its one thing to learn your brother has been
involved in a hit-and-run and quite another to
actually see a video of it. We could clearly see you
in the crosswalk looking both ways just moments
before you were struck. Poor Michael, I hope
that you never saw it coming or felt the impact. It
seemed like seconds after we saw the news that a
police sergeant entered the waiting room to speak
with us. He was pleasant and told us that all of
the police in our city are looking for the driver.
The state police were also assisting in their search.
He asked us to call him in the event of changes
in your status and we agreed to do so. Several of
your close friends even came up to the hospital as
soon as they heard the tragic news. Everyone tried
continued on page 14
to sit patiently and just wait for you to come out of surgery.

After several hours of waiting, the surgeon had good news for us. You had survived the surgery. She was not all positive though; you were still in critical condition, the extent of your brain injury was not yet known, and you were in a coma. She told us that there was a possibility that you might die, but, for the moment, we were ecstatic that you made it so far. One at a time, we were allowed into the ICU for a brief visit with you.

When I went in, I saw a lot of machines and tubes connected to you. The lights in the room were off because of your status and injuries. I whispered your name and grabbed your hand. The machine monitoring your heart-rate would indicate an increase in your pulse. I was curious if you knew I was there so I asked you. Your fingers moved for a moment. To this day, I still think that you knew. The nurse told me there is no definitive way of knowing for certain; but every time I would ask you if you knew I was there, your heart-rate would increase and your right hand would move.

You were in the ICU for 12 days and seemed
to be making progress. Your eyes would open when someone would talk to you. It seemed like you were making eye contact and looking around a lot. Everyone was hopeful and knew that your recovery would be a long extensive process. Then it happened. That phone call from the hospital that the entire family needed to come to the ICU immediately. No information would be given over the phone. 

After rushing to get to the hospital, our worst fears were brought to reality. The doctor told us that you suffered from a stroke caused by all of your injuries. Your brain was so severely damaged from the accident that there was no way of fighting it. He had performed several tests to confirm and all results showed that you, my baby brother, were brain dead. They had not officially declared you because they wanted us there. The nurse asked Mom and Dad if they wanted to be alone with you and clean you up once last time, but neither of them was emotionally capable. I would not let you die alone so I went in. It was just you and I, plus a nurse and doctor. I washed you up for the last time and helped the nurse put a new gown on your body. I covered you with a blue fleece blanket and kissed your forehead just as I did the day of your accident. Your time of death was 11:34pm.

Although hard to do, we donated your heart, lungs and kidneys. In your death, you were able to save some lives. A part of you still lives on inside of someone, beating in someone’s chest, breathing fresh air, and helping someone have kidney function. You had a heart of gold and I know you would have wanted to help anyone that you could.

The local newspaper announced your death on the front page. You would have gotten a kick out of knowing that you made the front page. A candlelight vigil was even held at the place where you were hit and so many people attended. The news even covered it. We had a beautiful funeral service for you as well. You were dressed in your new concert T-shirt that you purchased the night before the accident. You looked so peaceful, like you were sleeping. Hundreds of people came to honor you. Your niece, Mariah, even wrote something to read but she started crying and couldn’t read it. Your best friend, Brandon, said something beautiful. He said that we were all family now and it was sad that we had to lose one amazing man to gain a big family. 

We decided to have you cremated and placed in a black marble urn that you would have loved. I have a small keepsake urn with some of your ashes in it that sits on my fireplace mantle. Since I can’t have you back, I am glad to have a piece of you. Forever in my heart, you will remain and the hurt hasn’t gotten any easier; but I know in time, my grief will become less painful. The driver who took your life has not yet been caught, but the investigation is still active. I hope that he will forever be haunted by the thought of taking a wonderful young man’s life. I’ll always miss you, Mike. At 22 years old, you had much more living and growing to do, so I am left here to wonder what kind of amazing man you would have been.

Rest in Peace, baby brother. Michael Scott Zarba 10/14/86-05/20/09.

Love Always,  
Your Big Sister
SPARK 2011 volume 3
Infinite Sidewalk
by Debbie Scarfo

I stumble on my never ending sidewalk, no matter how many steps I take. It moves me place to place, with turns and twists, left corner to right, blind spots I cannot heed. Once I reached a brick wall, but my sidewalk revealed itself again, bringing me down this road and that. I stop sometimes to smell a flower but the concrete burns my soles, urging me beyond. My sidewalk has drifted me to busy streets and seductive facades of outside lights, inside dwellings, hidden reality, transforming into a speeding highway, dodging bullets in a terrifying blur. One dreadful night it swayed me to a dirty alleyway. Evil lurked as I crept along, cold with gut fear. On wondrous days I march forward, strong and determined. Occasionally I skip, delirious with laughter, contentment filling my shoes, then run, feet pounding pavement as I make my way onto a new hairpin turn. Sometimes I cannot trudge one more step, mud-stuck, desolation-fog hindering me. I’ve dared to ask, “Why are you taking me this way? There are sharp rocks hurting my feet.” Paralyzed, too exhausted to crawl, my perplexing sidewalk carries me on. I arrived one fateful day at a fork in its path, confusion filling each ambivalent step. Today, I still do not know if I chose the right road. People have joined me on my sidewalk, weaving in and out. I never can catch the ones ahead, yet always forget the many behind. Some I have pushed to my curbside, while a chosen few walk with me, guides to the next plateau. Deep crevices arrive by surprise. I jump over or slither around, careful not to fall in or I may be lost, forever. Searching horizon’s end, impelled to follow the path of my sidewalk’s infinity.

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Color Rings | E. Nicole Ferro
Fading at Dawn
by Tanya Green

Sunrise not yet appeared
Dawn’s light fighting toward the horizon
Flickering, sputtering
Fading
Back to night
Slowly
Then faster
A song barely sung
Innocence losing ground
Smile still present
Radiance intermittent
Energy fading
Eyes heavy
Weight lost
Pain begins to over come her
Morphine now added to the IV drip
She hangs on for one last Christmas
Family surrounds her
Friends pray
Hope dying
Happiness leaves with her
Leaving us too soon
A young life
Ending
Trying so hard to make her 13th birthday
She falls short
Long road ends
In the valley
Sun shining
Time
Now hers
Angels come
Peacefully
To take her home

Creative Endeavors
by Stephanie Buonaugurio

Creative Endeavors
Push on my levers
Assuming position of stride –

I’m not waiting ‘til later
To jump off the equator
Just to land on the other side

Illuminated Night | E. Nicole Ferro
Lula Mae  
*Cala Elder*

Tree Sunset Water  
*David Dougwill*
A Night’s Soliloquy
by Audrey Rose Sullivan

Upon the night that swindles so
with the bourgeoises and their jealousy, their greed,
Well, that won’t get me down.
No, that won’t get me down.

Hope, my quiet interlude
of a system so ordered and right
comes forth a stabbing sensation of righteousness,
of stemming belief.
Of something, just blossoming, among reeds of insolence,
among nothing.

And down the river that roars
the kinds of things that make your heart pour out,
well, there’s no hesitation, hence
knowing these things have their own time,
and they all make their own sense.

Hope, my friend of knowingness,
for my past, present, and future.
I have belonged to you for some time
and would have it no other way.

Upon the mountain I climb,
whose rocks are like demons,
the stars look brightly, and pat each other on the back.
And because well, time can vex you,
I climb.
But no, that won’t get me down.
That will never get me down.

With little to prepare you
except for yourself and life’s bait,
you keep the flame alit,
to endure for a time well deserved.

Because the voice is an echo to your valley.
Because the voice is an echo to your ear.
Because the captain is my very soul itself,
and this captain will not be spared.

And to the winds,
their far reaching breaths revive,
I’ve been upon that mountain, and felt my gleaming eyes,
run down that river parallel,
into the soft spoken night.
And to the winds who listen greatly,
I’ve been upon that flow, and swam in its constant tides
and sewed all there is to sew.

But all to learn that nothing,
nothing, will keep me as frank,
as life itself, the many,
the journey’s that we take.

You listen to the sharks,
despite their grilling teeth,
and see what there is to see,
even beyond that.
And upon those eyes that look at me of crisping make believes, or dreams deferred, or rubbles flared, I’ve always thought this moment, this moment, it was shared. For no one is alone, and you always have your fears.

Hope, you are the forefront runner of this land, upon the shores that trouble me, upon the sea that swelters me, and upon time, that takes me away with it. ■

Seascape | Joanne Graham-Troy
**Lies**

by Sabrina Markham

Your so called love
Proclaimed undying
Couldn’t you tell me then
You were lying

The thought of her
With you
Makes me sick
Causes physical harm

I loved you so much
I gave you everything
But now I feel nothing
You killed all my feeling

The day you left
You didn’t hear my heart break
But it shattered
No way to remake

It would have been better
If you never met me
Now I’m here alone
Carrying your baby

**Slime**

by Stephanie Buonaugurio

I’m your little …

Miss-demeanor
  - calmer, sweeter -
      Wake you up at nine -

Momentous freight trains
  obnoxious tax claims
And it’s nothing close to what
  God designed.

Waiting, Freaking
  Slightly Sleeping
While the waste is eating up your
time.

I’ll be dragging
  I’ll be nagging
leave you a trail of yellow
  Slime.
in twenty cigarettes time
I am back and forth
watching my friends losing their minds
Ana
introduces me
to the guy
in the monkey hat
and he touches me

on
the
small
of
my
back.

he has to be around
40
that’s two times my age
two times my age.
Wedding Day
by Shannon Horgan

I arrived at this church with the purest of intentions; to set her free. For four years I’ve saved a place for her in my heart. I’ve carried her with me through my accomplishments and I’ve kept her with me for my failures as well. The space was constantly present, a void in my heart that never left but was occupied by hope instead. She looks simply breathtaking, as I always imagined she would. I picture myself standing up at the altar waiting for her and I try unsuccessfully to push this particular image to a dark corner in my head. I’m just torturing myself by being here and I know it. She looks so happy without me; it hurts to associate that happiness with anyone but me. It was supposed to be us. She has made her way down the aisle to stand beside her very soon-to-be husband. Sunlight filters in through the stain glass windows and illuminates the bride in all her beauty. Each curl of her hair sparkled in the warmth the sun was bathing her in. I can still remember the scent of her hair when it was spread out over my pillow. I could even smell it now in this spacious church as if I were standing right next to her. Her hair smelled of a mixture of fresh strawberries and roses intertwined. Memories start to play themselves like a home movie; the day I laid eyes on her, the day we moved in together, the day I failed her and the day I failed myself.

I was studying my class schedule to make sure I was in the right classroom, when a girl walked by me into the room. I took the seat next to her and smiled at her. She politely smiled back and went about getting out her notebooks. It was this moment that I knew I could love her. Her eyes crinkled around the corners when she smiled and it was the cutest thing I had ever seen. The professor walked in, and to my embarrassment, never called my name during attendance because I was indeed in the wrong room. She giggled a little as I left the room after realizing my mistake. I didn’t even care I couldn’t find my own class because I knew I had just found the girl I could spend my life with. I eventually waited outside of her class one day and found the courage to ask her out.

My first apartment was with her. We had so much fun painting the rooms. Outfitted in some of my old clothes, she looked amazing. Even the paint smudges on her face just seemed to add to her natural beauty. We spent two wonderful years in that apartment. I’ve spent the last year living with a ghost in that same apartment. I used to come home to her studying in my old jersey or sitting, curled up on the couch, reading and waiting for me. Now I come home to a ghost; her ghost, her presence that I can still feel there. The ghost of what we used to be. I didn’t change a thing. The only difference now is that her stuff doesn’t live there anymore. Her heart doesn’t live there anymore.

I hid the ring in my section of the closet the day I brought it home. In a small satin-lined box, it glittered with a promise. It was a promise of forever with each other. A promise that had somehow gotten broken beyond repair. I was waiting for the perfect moment to ask for her hand in marriage. I wanted her to have the picture perfect proposal every girl dreams about. The kind of romantic moment that gets passed on in stories to our children. We never got to have that moment; we never made it that far.

She said I was never home. She said she didn’t even believe I loved her anymore. Lies. All of it was lies. I worked extra hours to hide away money for the wedding I had hoped we would plan together. A wedding fit for a princess, because
that’s what she was to me; a precious, beautiful woman who deserved to be adored like a princess. I had loved her more than anything in this world. I still do. It was the worst to be away from her but I figured I could afford to sacrifice some time when we were going to have forever together. The fights only got worse after that night. I tried everything in my power to make her stay so I could get down on one knee, but I knew better. Everyone hears tales of love surviving anything that blocks its path; don’t let these tales fool you. I am a walking example that love doesn’t always survive anything. Sometimes love takes you places that you never navigate your way home from and it is in those places that love is lost. I could see it in her eyes, I had done irreversible damage. I could tell that our love, which once was a powerful compass in our lives, was now lost. My heart broke that night. It broke the instant I saw the hurt that seemed to reside in every last piece of her. The hurt that I had caused. My intentions were never to hurt her; my intentions were to love her with every part of my being. Forever.

She left after that of course. The part of her that I killed was gone for good; the part of her that loved me. I must have apologized a thousand times and begged for her to stay. It was no use. She packed her stuff, left, and took a piece of me with her on her way out. The ring is still in the place I left it. I have never had it in me to get rid of it. I guess I was still saving it for our picture perfect story. I was saving it for the only hand it was meant to be worn on. I can still see the look on her face on the day that she left. I’ve tried for years to erase that look but I can’t rid myself of the memory.

My little version of a home movie stops and I’m still in the back of the church. I look up and once again admire her beauty in that wedding dress. I admire the man staring into her eyes, the same man who will share his life with her forever, till death do them part. With each promise and vow they make to each other, my heart breaks a little. I sit on this church bench and it takes all of my being to refrain from shouting my feelings through the masses of people. I would stand up and step out into the isle. I would shout her name across the church to catch her attention. I would give a brilliant speech to profess my love for her. I would make my way to her and take her face in my hands before leaning in to kiss her. I would win her heart in that moment and whisk her away in my arms. Instead I keep silent and listen to them say “I do”. I watched her marry him and everyone watched a piece of me fade away. A piece of me that would most definitely be lost for good. They turned toward the crowd and walked hand in hand out of the church towards their future. She passed my pew and I took a mental photograph of every feature on her face. This is how I wanted to remember her face; happy and excited, not hurt and sad. For a second, I could have sworn she made eye contact and if so, she showed no sign of it. I made my way out of the church and felt free. I understand a piece of me is gone but somehow that doesn’t matter anymore. What matters now was the miraculous strength I seem to possess on this day. I had the strength to let her go, the strength to let her be happy, and the strength to watch all of this with my own eyes. Now, I can move on and know this is what she truly wanted. I took a deep breath and made my way to my car. I think I’m going to find a new apartment, maybe something more small and cozy. Yes, definitely a new apartment. I’m sick of living with a ghost.
Addiction
by Sabrina Markham

She exhales
Plumes of blue smoke

Someone else
She no longer can

Blood shot eyes
Take another toke

Still alive
Through all the lies

She’s not herself
Hates herself for being there

Addicted again
No more friends

Lost herself
Everyone else

Dies alone
Overdosed on oxycodone

Saved herself
Lost her soul
You asked about my lower knuckles, red and raw from bile my stomach empties out at my command. (I crave control.) I’m dead within my skin. I seek the living clout of WASPy waist; the power of my bones to map perfection; piercing ribs and eyes; demuscled arms and thighs. I have redone creation. Heaven failed my height and size. If I could live in Hudson Bay, I’d yearn for sleek wide hips of seals and emerald gills of Arctic charr. Rolls of fat, perhaps. I’d learn to love white skin and wrinkles, dying krills. And lest you think my mind has given way, I only covet what I see each day.