#keepmuncieweird....and whimsical!

Edited by Darolyn “Lyn” Jones, C.W. Cain, and Eileen Porzuczek

Photo Art by Angie Hedman

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#keepmuncieweird...and whimsical!

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Editor Letters ........................................................................................................... V

SECTION 1:#keepmuncieweird ................................................................. 1
The Purple Hippo- Dennis Everette ................................................................. 2
Old Pizza- Anonymous ...................................................................................... 4
The Great Barbeque Incident- Lauren Muzzarelli ........................................... 6
Taquito Shake- Anonymous ............................................................................. 8
Stolen Hearts and Fountains Amanda Rammeel ............................................ 9
Co-axe Cables and Helpful Friends- Michelle Husman ................................. 10
A Peaceful Protest- Elizabeth ........................................................................ 12
Bathtub Adventures- Anonymous .................................................................. 14
Ghost Hunters: Three Cases of Paranormal Activity in Muncie- Shelly Gage 16
Pumpkin Pulp- Angie Hedman ...................................................................... 21
Gladys Encounter- Gemar Townsend ............................................................ 24
Less Ghost, More Town- Lauren Lowe ........................................................... 25
The Bike Bartender- Debbie ........................................................................... 27
Not a Romantic Story- Casey Simmons ......................................................... 29
A Light in the Community: A Shot in the Dark- Margaret Mckibbin .......... 31
Brick by Brick- Zach ..................................................................................... 32
Coming Closer- Jessie Fisher .......................................................................... 34

SECTION II:#keepmuncieweirdandwhimsical ...................................... 38
dogs made of paper and staying dry- Martin George ................................. 39
Collecting Muncie- Brently Holloway ............................................................ 41
The Students That Came Before Us- Cathy Jarrett ...................................... 46
The Evil Leprechaun- Jared Green ................................................................ 49
Ball Stores- K. Atkinson ............................................................................... 52
Ron’s Barber Shop- Geoffrey S. Mearns ....................................................... 55
The Garage Narrative- Linda Beard ............................................................... 57
Back in ‘78- Anonymous .............................................................................. 59
Pies for Peace- Sadie Berg ............................................................................ 61
People of Walmart: Muncie Edition- Amanda ............................................. 63
Finally Able To Breathe- Rhianna Patton ..................................................... 65
November 5, 2017- Anonymous ................................................................. 69
Falling in Love- Brandon Holloway & Montana Ogden ............................... 71
A Muncie Organic Zone- Micayla Jones ...................................................... 78
SECTION III: #keepmunciewhimsical ....................................................... 80
The Best Kind of Vacation- Vena Douglas ................................................. 81
Muncie’s Food Not Bombs- Jayme Klisonage ............................................. 83
Something to Give- Leslie ........................................................................... 85
Kids Will Be Kids- Georgia Berg ................................................................. 87
Cheeky and Charming- Mark Pike ............................................................... 88
The Good Samaritan- Paul J .......................................................................... 90
The Secret Santa- Lori Mansfield ................................................................. 91
Unexpected Connections ............................................................................ 93
Finding Warmth- Rivers Waggoner ............................................................. 97
Grace in the Midst of a Storm- Rebecca J. Phipps ........................................ 98
When Wonder Is Right in Front of You- Mikaela Shipley ......................... 100
Whimsical Enough- Nancy .......................................................................... 104
Dear Michaela- Michaela Upchurch ............................................................ 107
Dancing Together- Anonymous ................................................................ 109
Sweet Reminiscence- Joshua Rush .............................................................. 114
Home of Hardworking Women- Lucille Privett ......................................... 116
Meaningful Encounters- Mrs. Mearns ......................................................... 118
She Leaves a Sparkle Wherever She Goes: A Renga Poem- Betty Kendall 122
Pastel Houses- B. Fitzgerald ........................................................................ 125
Staying in the Magical Place- Amber Main .................................................. 127
Comic Books and Palazzo Pants- Dr. Christina Blanch ............................... 131
32 ounces- Angie Hedman .......................................................................... 134
Muncie Fairytale- Anonymous .................................................................. 136
Smooth Landings and Batten Down the Hatches- Todd W. Shoup .............. 138
Made in Muncie- Ali Kline ......................................................................... 141
Coming and Going- Kim True ...................................................................... 143
Curtains, Coats and the Circus- Laura Williamson ...................................... 146
Grains of Sand- Gladys Shaw ...................................................................... 149
Stars in Muncie- Quintin Bowen ................................................................. 152
Muncie Music Scene- Jeremy ....................................................................... 154
Tweet and You Shall Receive- Brittney .......................................................... 156
Remembering Muncie Gras- Phillip .............................................................. 157
Becoming Part of Something- Alejandro ...................................................... 159
A Letter to the Community of Muncie- Elanor ............................................. 164
Roots of Muncie- Paige A. Boysaw ............................................................... 166
Fullhart Drive- Susan Parsons ..................................................................... 168
#keepmuncieweirdandwhimsical: Tell us your story! ............................... 170
Editor, Artist, and Student Bios ................................................................. 171
Darolyn “Lyn” Jones, Teacher Editor Letter

#keepmuncieweird

I’m actually on a quest to find the big, purple hippo.

We wanted to see if we could stir up activity from our giggling ghost.

All I can think of is soft hands petting papier mache dogs into their sturdy shells.

#keepmunciewhimsical

I can’t say I’ve ever seen a sky as blue as the one that hangs above my street, Fullhart Drive.

A handyman and a girl just wanting to have fun...

In this community, no matter what we are going through, we don’t have to dance alone.

The above are examples of lines of weird and whims—wisdom— from our Muncie community partner stories that you will find in this collection of stories.

English 409, Creative Writing in the Community, is a course at Ball State University in the Department of English. An immersive, service learning opportunity, English 409 students meet with community members to write and create a collaborative story.

In the past, the course has worked primarily with young writers, but inspired by our new Ball State University President Geoff Mearns, commitment to the community, I wanted to take on a larger and more aggressive project that included a more diverse audience.
Noting that Muncie locals would sometimes use the hashtag, #keepmuncieweird, on social media sites inspired the two story-telling prompts for the story gathering process:

- Tell us a story about what happened to you when something really weird or strange happened to you in Muncie, Indiana.
- Tell us a story about what happened to you when something really whimsical or wonderful happened to you in Muncie, Indiana.

This semester, we discovered our community partners and their stories in rehabilitation centers, riding city busses, resourcing at the public libraries, eating at local restaurants, exercising and creating art in community centers, and shopping in local stores. We uncovered their stories by asking the two prompts above and then listening, taking notes, and collaboratively writing the stories with them. Trusting and generous with their stories and time, our partners range in age from 10 to 102.

The objectives of the project and course include the enrichment of the creative writing major through:

- Engagement in the local community;
- The scholarly study of a creative genre (creative narrative nonfiction or memoir);
- Relevant essays about creative narrative nonfiction writing pedagogy;
- Scholarly study about community engagement models; and
- The use of critical and creative examinations of the student’s own and collaborative work created for the class.

The end product of these objectives results in a published anthology and celebration of the writing generated by Ball State University students with their Muncie community writers. This semester, Ball State University students also engaged in a hybrid magazine/book publishing process, where they learned design, layout, and editing with our established independent 409 Press
Our essential and guiding mantra is that it is an honor to be trusted with someone’s story. And our role was to in turn, to honor those Muncie voices by making sure they were heard.

The task of composing, editing, and publishing our partner stories allows the reader to hear the hilariously weird, sweetly whimsical, and always wisely poignant stories that only the people of Muncie can share.

In this collection, you will find three sections titled:

- #keepmuncieweird
- #keepmuncieweirdandwhimsical
- #keepmunciewhimsical

On the cover, we wanted to capture the weird and whimsy by showcasing Muncie’s iconic 25-foot Paul Bunyan statue. Based upon my research, I learned that Muncie’s Paul Bunyan was created in fiberglass by a local firm, Art Forms, in 1964 for the Kirby Wood Lumber Company by artist Richard Kishel. The statue was moved to its current location in front of the Timbers Lounge in the 1990’s. On the back cover, find a merry go round at Westside Park. This image recalls earlier summer days spent running, jumping, and spinning. And it reminds us to not forget, nor lose that childhood whimsy.

At the end of this collection, you will find an invitation to compose and share your own weird and whimsical stories on our social media sites. We hope you feel inspired to do so.

*Serendipitously*, you will find beautiful images from local resident and artist Angie Ridge Hedman. I say serendipitously, because my first full time K-12 teaching position started in 1992 in Modoc, Indiana at Union School Corporation. I was only in that position for three semesters before I moved to another position in another part of the state. But, Angie Hedman, Angie Ridge then, was in both my German 2 class and my English 11 class. My best friend and now Godmother to my son, Fonda Mullins Wilds, was Angie’s art teacher at that same school. Angie was an excellent writer and a gifted artist. Of course, once I left Modoc in 1994 and Fonda left the year after, before cell phones or social media, Angie and I lost touch. I never even knew if or where
she went to college. Even though I have been teaching at Ball State now for seven years, we discovered each other last summer at a writing conference. She’s 43, and I’m almost 49 now. No longer my student, but a respected Muncie resident, Ball State Alum, and gifted teacher and artist in the greater Muncie community. I was so proud to have had her as a student and now to have her as our community artist for this publication.

**Special Thanks:**
A university semester (15-weeks) is a very short amount of time to study, write, teach, and publish a book. Many thanks need to go out to everyone who helped move this project from a #hashtag to a published anthology.

First and most important to the community writers who trusted us with their stories. Next, to my Ball State students in the course, many busy and gifted juniors and seniors, who worked overtime to make sure that this book was a success.

To my two student editors, Charlie Cain, for his keen editing eye, and Eileen Porzuczek for her design eye. Of course, to our local artist and Ball State Alum, Angie Hedman for her inspirational photos that marry the stories with imagery.

To President Geoff Mearns and Mrs. Jennnifer Mearns for sharing their time and their stories of community whimsy with us, and for introducing us to some wonderful community partners.

To the English department at Ball State who has been incredibly supportive, particularly, Matt Mullins, my area chair, and my colleague, Sean Lovelace for believing in my work and allowing me to teach this course, to Dean Maureen McCarthy, for continuing to fund and encourage the project.

To Bracken University Libraries Assistant Dean for Digital Scholarship and Special Collections, Michael Szajewski for helping us locate and secure some rare and historical images of Muncie.
And finally, to Marjorie Hiner, an English Alumna from Ball State University, and her husband, Homer, who started this project and continue to fund the publication of this collection and support events associated with the project. Their vision for taking creative writing out of the classroom and into the community is what made this book possible.

_Cheers to Muncie! Muncie—it’s a great place to live._
Student Editor Letter: C.W. Cain

As a full-time student of language, I think, and talk, and write a lot about stories. In the classroom, it’s easy to say that stories can change the world. But that sentiment can seem pretty obscure, almost condescending in a “pat ourselves on the back” sort of way. It can be hard to see how stories can manifest anything in the real world. The most important lesson that this experience has taught me is that communities are concrete; they are not abstractions; they are places one can go and see and smell and hear and touch, and persons from whom one can learn. I’ve learned a lot from our community partners this year. I’ve learned that art can change lives even when it’s local. I’ve learned that grand emotions are valid and that they occur in ordinary places (if there is such a thing). I’ve learned that you need not go far for nature to be awe-inspiring. I’ve also made a lot of friends.

I took this course last year. That was a really formative experience for me because it taught me that what I had learned as an English major was, indeed, applicable to the real world. I am overwhelmed with gratitude to Dr. Jones for asking me to come back as editor. (You’ve really helped this dummy figure out how to apply his skills.) I would also like to thank Eileen Porzuczek for really stepping up to the plate and leading the way in terms of design, we really couldn’t have done this without you. A big thank you also to Angie Hedman, who really blew us away with her wonderful photography and writing. All of our student writers also did excellent work. This class was pretty experimental, and it really could have gone off the rails if it weren’t for them.

Much thanks to our community partners and to the Muncie community at large,

I hope we’ve done you proud.
Student Editor Letter: Eileen Porzuczek
It all started with a community,
it all started with people.
My eyes became opened
when I started to listen.
As I listened, my heart
and mind began to understand.
My heart wasn’t just touched,
but set ablaze.
I could feel the pride and love
taken in calling Muncie home.
Experiences of weird,
whimsy,
and both alike,
intimate snapshots of moments.
It all ended with a community,
it all ended with people.
Telling stories of Muncie,
painted in love.
Artist Statement: Angie Hedman

Art has always been a warm and integral part of my internal wiring. My earliest art memories stem from observations that eventually evolved into artworks and writings. Rain tapping on windshields, reflections in puddles, deteriorating architecture, transitioning colors of an Indiana sky, and the shadows that would glide and flow along pavement and walls were just a few of the things that fascinated me as a young child. Appreciation for art also came from my parents, neither of which are “artists,” but both effortlessly creative and resourceful in the way they lived, loved, and raised a family. Observing the way my parents navigated life with four kids in tow was an art form all in itself. Their continual support and encouragement along with the experiences and opportunities they provided throughout childhood, high school, and beyond are the foundation of my creative ethic.

While at Ball State University (1993-1998), I focused on learning and exploring as many art mediums and techniques as possible. During my sophomore year I registered for a Metals class with Pat Nelson. Metals was a medium I had never explored and was therefore intimidating. I didn’t know it then, but that class became a major game changer for me in regard to how my art would evolve. Everything about the metals room/studio fueled and inspired me. I couldn’t get enough of the smells, sounds, tools, and equipment. The satisfaction gained from manipulating metal with fire, saws, drills, and hammers was beyond invigorating. I quickly discovered I could build and create interesting, functional, and beautiful objects and wearables from nearly nothing. Craftsmanship and problem solving were a priority, and I took great pride in finding ways to utilize scrap metal in my daily work. The incorporation of found objects, recycled, and repurposed materials became an important structural, narrative, and decorative staple in my work. Although I still continued with drawing, painting, and printmaking, I spent most of my time in the Metals and Sculpture studios, earning a BFA in Metals, a BS in Art Education, and nearly ten years later, a MA in Studio Arts (Metals).

Upon graduation in 1998, I immediately accepted my first art teaching position at Lincoln Junior/Senior High School in Cambridge City, IN. I taught there until 2016, then moved to my current position at Monroe Central Junior/Senior High School in Parker City, IN. A couple years into teaching, I began missing the process of creating my own work, feeling almost as if I had lost my art identity somewhere in the shuffle of my students. Without having access to a metals studio, I focused on cold connected metalwork, assemblage sculpture, and acrylic painting. Bodies of work started happening without any sign of stopping, and group, juried, and solo shows were
occurring on a regular basis. As an art educator, I became more effective because I was finding art fulfillment outside of the classroom. Before I knew it, having my own studio space was not just a want, but a vital need. In May of 2015, I moved into my third-floor studio space in the historic Murray Building in downtown Muncie.

With the new studio space, or as I like to call it “The Hole in the Sky,” I was able to create larger and more varied work. Geography, vintage dress patterns, and birdcage imagery started to mingle with one another on canvases. As I painted, I oftentimes caught myself gazing out the large arched window at the city below. The view inspired me to venture out onto the streets of downtown Muncie. The details of the historic buildings and all their deteriorating imperfections were incredibly beautiful to me. I’ve never considered myself to be a photographer, but I began taking endless photos with my phone. The history, intrigue, and raw street essence captured my heart. Before I knew it, I had my first solo photography exhibit, a mix of black and white photos from both my studio and street observations. I was hooked on photography as an art form and have since moved on to using a “real” camera.

When I was invited to contribute artistically to Keep Muncie Weird...and Whimsical at first, I was intimidated. Muncie is a complex little nugget that is loaded with all kinds of weird and whimsical truth and lore. How could I begin to capture even the smallest slice of that goodness? When I started thinking about it, I quickly realized I am, like so many others, an important part of the weird and whimsical that lives and breathes in Muncie. Everything major in my life has happened here, and with that realization, all intimidation diminished.

My approach to taking these photos was to simply retrace my steps and to ask the locals. There are many stories, landmarks, treasures, and oddities that I already knew about, but the locals sent me to areas and nooks I hadn’t yet discovered. While photographing, I focused on sections and details of the subject matter. By doing so, the images are open to interpretation. The areas that extend beyond the photo borders can be continued and filled with familiar memory or spontaneous imagination. Be it sweet, dark, creepy, quirky, emotional, or nostalgic, my hope is that the images from this visual journey resonate in some way with all who read this book. Thank you, Muncie!
Section I
#keepmuncieweird

(Photo: Scarevania Haunted Attraction, taken by Angie Hedman)
The Purple Hippo
Dennis Everette as written by Kayln Reyer

“I’m actually on a quest to find the big, purple hippo,” he replied. I was surprised by how quickly he was able to answer a question that had taken me a class period and two drafts to fully respond to. “It’s turned into something that I do, I guess.”

Dennis moved to Muncie from Arizona. He is a traveler at heart and has a passion for finding landmarks off the beaten track. Pulling up his Facebook page to display the photos of himself standing proudly with an array of stone animals, it was clear that this hobby was more than just a running joke for his followers. The concrete creatures offer a sense of charm that isn’t always present in bigger cities.

“It’s these little fun places,” he said. “Little towns like this one are begging people to come here and do good.”

The hippo originally sat in front of a pet shop near a strip mall along East McAlliard Road. When the store eventually closed, the giant hippo that had become a Muncie statement was removed too, leaving adventurists like Dennis on the hunt for the things that keep small towns cool. Since he arrived in Muncie years ago, Dennis has devoted his time to calling city officials, tracking down the owners of the terminated pet shop, and venturing out to find the statue himself. Although no one is sure of the location, the hippo has a social media following, and has been known to switch locations occasionally.

“Muncie is ‘Muncie’ because of its bad reputation,” he said. “I’m always curious about why more people don’t get involved.”

For Dennis, getting involved extends further than his search for the landmark. He is a dedicated librarian, film festival judge, and small-town enthusiast. When he finds the purple hippo, however, he plans to keep up with the trend and take a picture riding it. Some traditions die hard. This time, unlike the others, though, Dennis wants to share the things that make Muncie weird and whimsical with others.

“I would love to place it in front of the library for the kids.”
***We wanted to include a photo of the Purple Hippo and include it here, but because no one claims to know where it is, the images found online could not be secured with permission, despite our many attempts to reach individuals.

Please note that Dennis wants to provide Purple Hippo Amnesty. If you have the purple hippo, please consider contacting Dennis at the Kennedy Public Library in Muncie and donating the hippo to the library so the people of Muncie can once again enjoy her whimsy.
Old Pizza
Anonymous as written by Kate Fletcher

The moral of this story is so important that I’m going to tell it to you right here at the beginning: If you are ever in a situation where something completely ridiculous is happening, do not leave! I don’t care how awkward you think it is to stay and observe; it is absolutely something you will regret one day.

Alright, now that we’ve got that out of the way. I can say what I have to say...what I stayed for anyway. Well, for starters, back in high school, I wasn’t exactly the best kid. Honestly, I skipped school way more than I ever should have, but I got some great stories out of it.

This one day, my friends and I were just really not having it. We decided to skip out right before lunch and head over to Greek’s for some pizza. Greek’s was one of our big hangout spots back in high school. Honestly, it was everyone’s hangout spot. That place has been in this town for I couldn’t even tell you how long. All I know is that it has been here as long as I can remember. It’s a part of us, and it always will be. Now, on that day in particular, there wasn’t anything special about our meal. I mean, the pizza was delicious, and we always had that slight fear that they would remember that we were still in high school and call the school or something, (which actually never happened, thank god) but it wasn’t until we were about to leave that the real story began.

This woman comes waltzing in carrying a pizza box, and she heads straight up to the register. The cashier looks at her slightly confused but says her typical, How may I help you?

“Yeah. I need to return this pizza,” the woman says matter-of-factly. “We ordered it yesterday, but we never ended up eating any of it, so I just wanted to get my money back for it.”

My friends and I are all exchanging glances and half-giggling to ourselves as the cashier tries to keep a straight face. “Was there anything wrong with the pizza?”

“No. We just didn’t eat it. See?” She asks while opening the box to show the contents.
“Well, um, I don’t really know if I can do that for you. Did you talk to anyone about this yesterday?”

“Yeah. Yeah. I called and talked to someone...I don’t remember their name though.”

At this point we were feeling very awkward. It was that weird moment where we needed to pay, but we didn’t want to interrupt. The cashier saw us being awkward and waiting, though, so she told the lady that she had to get her manager, and she motioned us up to pay.

As we paid and worked our way out, we tried to piece together the rest of the story, but we also didn’t want to linger. I guess I’ll never know how that played out. Right in that moment I made the decision to never again leave what could make a good story due to awkwardness.

(Photo: Greeks Pizzeria in Muncie’s “Village”, taken by Angie Hedman)
The Great Barbeque Incident
Lauren Muzzarelli as written by Alyssa Clemento

Sometimes you get yourself into a sticky situation, both figuratively and literally. They can be hard to clean up. The sticky feeling doesn’t go away until you wash your hands of it, and even then, sometimes it still sticks around.

I knew I was in a sticky situation when I had to peel myself off of the wooden floor of Amazing Joe’s. My hands, clothes and hair were covered in it, sticky, brown-red barbecue sauce. Slabs of ribs now lay askew on the floor. Corn on the cob had rolled under another party’s table. Baked beans stuck to my shirt and mushed in my hair. Following the corn under the table felt like the best option. At least that would get me away from all of the eyes watching me, especially the eyes of the guests whose food I had just catapulted to the ground.

I was trying to bring this table their food; they weren’t even my table, but I took their heavy tray of summer cookout food and made my way over to them. I approached them smiling, but when I lost my footing, my smile disappeared. The next thing I knew I was on the ground, and they were staring at me. They looked both mortified and amused. I didn’t know what to say or do.

When you fall down you have to get back up, whether you want to or not. I had to get up and fix everything that my one little slip had so easily destroyed. I tried to ignore how my sneakers slightly stuck and pulled on the ground. I tried to ignore the eyes. I had been working here for years and nothing like this had ever happened to me before.

“I am so sorry. I’ll fix this right away” I say frantically to the table, hoping my face isn’t too red.

The table lies and tells me it’s okay, which does little to make me feel better. Next, I turn to the busser nearby.

“I need you to clean all of this up,” I yelled before running down to the kitchen.
I spit the order back at the cooks and tried to explain the situation without giving away how embarrassed I was, but I’m sure my red cheeks didn’t keep my secret very well.

I wasn’t supposed to be there, but I woke up and the universe decided that I was going to bathe in a pool of barbeque sauce. All I could do was roll with the punches and hope that I could wash the scent off of my body and clothes when I get home.

Later as I walked past the table, I could see their smiling faces chowing down on some barbecue ribs. I could smell them too, but that has little to do with how close I was to their table and more to do with the fact that there was sauce in my hair that I just couldn’t get out. I tried to forget about them as I dealt with my own tables.

I didn’t see them get up to leave, but they came up to me before they walked out the door and handed me a $20 bill without saying much. They must have enjoyed the show.
Taquito Shake
Anonymous as written by Janie Obrochta

Dear Diary,

Today my family and I went out to one of our favorite fast food burger restaurants in Muncie. Most people would have told us there are way better fast food places than going to this common diner. I remember I was so hungry I couldn’t wait to chow down on a juicy hamburger and wash it down with a cold delicious milkshake. I remember walking in and admiring the atmosphere around the place, hearing upbeat music and absorbing the positive vibes from everyone around.

The hostess walked toward us asking, “how many?” and we responded, “three”. When we were finally seated and handed the menu I had to decide which hamburger would get the cruel fate of being in my stomach. When we all finally decided on our orders, the server came to write it down. Of course, my parents were the first ones to order. When saying their orders, their heavy Mexican accents were obvious, so they did the best they could to speak fluently. I could tell from her tight-lipped expression that she was annoyed.

She stared right at my brother, signaling he was next. He said, “I will like a cookie dough shake with a plain hamburger and fries.” (please keep in mind that he spoke fluent English). But in the middle of his order the server had a blank expression and asked him with a smirking tone, “a taquito shake?” I just looked at her and wondered how she even got “taquito shake” from “cookie dough shake”. I was so dumbfounded from this whole moment I looked straight at my brother and I could tell he was as confused as I was. I just didn’t get it, why would she smirk? It made me annoyed, but why would I let this get to me and ruin my time with my family? I knew at that moment, when she smirked, that she was an ignorant person, and I just didn’t want to deal with it. I would rather use my energy to chow down on my meal and enjoy the time I had with my family. But, in due honesty, my family did disregard her. We didn’t leave her a tip at the end of our meal maybe next time she shouldn’t be ignorant.

Signed a proud Muncie Latina

***Out of the 70,000 plus people in the Muncie community, there are almost 1,600 members who identify as Hispanic or Latino.
Stolen Hearts and Fountains  
Amanda Rammel as written by Kayln Reyer

Dear Diary,

I have the best news! Recently we made it official. I am now dating a guy that goes to BSU! He’s beyond dreamy, complete with baby blue eyes and a fake ID. He says he can get me into the coolest parties on campus thanks to his fraternity. I’m only a high schooler, so my friends are super jealous. We’ve hung out a lot over the past few weekends, and I can’t believe some of the things they do. As a prank, he and his friends stole one of those giant heavy cement bird baths from somewhere around Muncie, I think out by the mall. I went over to their off-campus apartment after it happened, and they had carried it upstairs and set it up in the middle of their living room! How they managed to get it up there is another mystery to me. It had to weigh a ton. Anyway, it had a plug-in pump, so they had a water fountain in their living room. THE LIVING ROOM! They eventually got tired of it, and when I went back, it was already gone. It took about 5 of them to load it back into the truck and they returned it to where they stole it from. They had to make 2 trips because it was 2 or 3 pieces and it wouldn't all fit in the back of a truck. I don't think they were even caught! I didn’t ask, but I'm pretty sure they are the same people I heard about in the news. The people who put all the real estate signs in the front yard at the Mayor's house! Maybe I’ll ask him the next time we hang out.

Xoxo  
Amanda
Co-axe Cables and Helpful Friends
Michelle Husman as written by Audrey Bowers

The weather keeps changing. One minute it is bright and sunny, the next it is practically blizzard-like, even though it is 60 degrees outside. It’s the Spring of 2016, and I have never seen anything like this in my entire life. The winds are crazier than normal. It wouldn’t surprise me if the house fell down. Maybe it will; I hope that it won’t.

-Sometimes life can surprise us, even in the most bizarre ways.

- The storm is calming down. One of our trees got broken from the top down. How did that happen? My husband and his friend don’t want to leave it there. I don’t really want to deal with it either, but I suppose we’re going to have to deal with it. They’re right, we can’t leave the tree there forever. The tree is wedged between two other trees. I don’t know how we’re going to move it.

They don’t have rope with them and they’re deciding to use the co-axe cable to move the tree. The winds are still ridiculous outside. They are pulling and tugging at the tree outside. Meanwhile, my anxiety pulls and tugs at me in the inside. The tree is going nowhere fast and I realize it’s time to stop this operation. “Just stop trying already,” I tell them. The tree can wait another day, I don’t want either of them getting hurt. It’ll have to get taken care of when it gets taken care of.

-Sometimes life gives us challenges that need to be faced head on, rather than avoided forever, even though it’s something that we would prefer to not deal with.

- The tree weighed a massive 1,000 pounds. I don’t know why they tried moving it with a co-axe cable? That’s wild. Who would’ve thought of that? Maybe we’ll get the neighbor to come over and help, maybe they’ll know what to do.

-Sometimes in life we try to make things work even though we know they won’t. Maybe it’s sheer determination or something else, I’m not sure.

- The tree had lodged itself a good six feet into the ground; there was a hole in the front yard. This whole fiasco was crazy, but the hole was inevitably filled back in with dirt.
Sometimes things happen, and we can't fathom why they did; maybe there doesn't have to be a reason.

(Photo Taken by Matthew Swain)
A Peaceful Protest
Elizabeth as written by Alyssa Clemento

Is it a Peaceful Protest, when these images have been scarred into the back of my eyelids?

Is it a Peaceful Protest, if I feel like a Bad Person, despite not doing anything wrong?

I feel Small, but not as Small as a Quarter.

How would they feel? The ones who’ve had abortions? Seeing all these signs Dedicated to the cause On a cold and windy day. Long skirts and hair to match Children who don’t Understand what’s happening Stand among the crowd

Is it wrong to feel Uncomfortable About a peaceful protest? What if it was the Other side?

I turn the music down, I can’t think with it on anyway. Is it possible to get culture shock, Even in somewhere as small as Muncie?

Grocery shopping, a normal Sunday. apples, rice, chicken, crackers. I recite my list in my head. A song I don’t know the words to,
plays in the background,
coming softly from the radio

I don’t pay much attention to it
or the road, but the beat is catchy.
I feel like I’m on autopilot.
until I glance to my side.

A peaceful protest:
Abortion
is Murder, God is
Pro-life,
Planned Parenthood
kills Children.
pictures of
Bloody fetuses

The protesters guard both sides of McGalliard,
Almost all the way down to Wheeling,
They barricade themselves from the street,
With their vulgar gory signs
A song I don’t know the words to
Plays in the background
I can hardly make out the beat.

Abortion stops a
beating Heart,
we’ll Pray for you,
Pro-adoption,
there are other Options.
A fetus next to a quarter,
shows just how Small they are
The Bathtub Adventures
Anonymous as written by Alyssa Clemento

*Bang, bang bang!* There goes the door, but who could it be? Doug’s at his friend’s house. Blake’s in Ohio for the weekend. Kate’s in the living room watching television, I think. I’m in the bathtub, so I can’t see who it is. Kate will get the door, maybe she’s expecting someone.

*Stomp, stomp, stomp!* They’re still out there. It sounds like they’re having a party, and I’m glad I wasn’t invited. Whoever they are; I wish they would shut up. It’s like ten p.m. There’s no reason to be so loud in the hallway. I wonder why Kate hasn’t gone to shoo them away yet. Maybe I should text her.

*Click, click, click.* Let me ask her if she heard the banging.

    ME: Kate, did you hear that banging noise??
    KATE: Yes! But I’m in the bath and unable to investigate.
    ME: Was that the door? LMAO I’m in the bathtub too!!

*Haha.* I can hear her laugh from the bathroom on the other side of the apartment. It makes me laugh too. What are the chances?

    KATE: No way!! It sounded like the door
    ME: YES. I can still hear people talking outside.
    KATE: I know, I’m naked and afraid
    ME: SAME. I’m about to put on my robe and go look.
    KATE: I’ll pray for you.

*Slush.* I get out of the bathtub and struggle to put my robe over my damp skin. I grab my glasses from the counter and put them on before walking into the living room and to the door. I look out the peephole and see nothing. All the stomping, yelling and banging has stopped too. I lock the door for good measure. I walk over to the window to see if there’s anything going on out there, but all I see are the street lamps that illuminate the parking lot and the other buildings that surround ours.

    ME: I think they went away. I looked out the peephole and no one was there.
    KATE: Yikes
    ME: Also, I locked the door
    KATE: You’re a hero for investigating the scene
ME: Thank you. I still hear people talking though. I’m about to text Doug and ask him when he’s coming home, but I think he’s at the Chug.
KATE: Good idea! I’m officially out of the bath, so I’ll keep an eye out for anything.
ME: Can you hear the fucking conga line going on in the hallway? There’s a guy and a girl talking, but I don’t know about what.
KATE: I’m so confused by everything that has happened in the past ten minutes.
ME: Right? I want to know why they’re standing outside our apartment chanting.
KATE: We don’t deserve this.

_Crash!_ Ugh. Not this again.

KATE: Don’t be alarmed, that was me dropping my phone. I wouldn’t make a good spy.
ME: LMAO KATE, you’d be good at other things. Maybe not sneaking.
KATE: Now that I’m in the living room it sounds like they’re upstairs being hooligans.
ME: Lord, I hope it’s just our upstairs neighbors being obnoxious.
KATE: I’m going to ignore it and got to bed with my pepper spray.
ME: lol the only acceptable bed partner on a night like this.

Zzz. Another night in Muncie, another adventure for the books. I don’t know why these things even surprise me anymore. After living here my whole life, I’ve experienced more weird encounters than I’d wish to admit.
It all started because she told her husband to get a hobby. “I should have known he’d want to start a ghost hunting group. All the books he read pertained to paranormal activity.” Inevitably, the history major in Shelly grew interested in the topic as well. After her day job at the John Kennedy Library, she’d hit the books to find any information on ghost activity in Muncie. Through her research she found that a woman named Rebeccah Hackley and her family owned the land that sat south of the White River. The Hackleys never did anything with the land because they thought it was haunted by a not very nice energy. Eventually, the Hackley’s decided to sell the land to Goldsmith Gilbert, who is generally regarded as the founder of Muncie.

Shelly and her husband now run a ghost hunting organization called the East Central Indiana Paranormal Investigators (ECIPI) and have embarked on many investigations throughout Muncie. She’s also worked with sensitives, more frequently known as psychics, though she dislikes using that term. These sensitives say they have felt this presence hovering throughout the entirety of downtown Muncie. Nothing that was ever human. Shelly believes this may have been what Rebeccah Hackley and her family picked up on many years ago. She also described the energy downtown as an earth spirit. A powerful elemental that allows other paranormal entities in Muncie to feed from.

Case I: The Old Roberts Hotel
January of 1943 - the night Florence Bly, librarian at the Grace Marian Branch of the Muncie Public Library, was found dead on the sidewalk outside of the Roberts Hotel. With a coat on, purse around her shoulder, and note in her pocket that read, “If found dead, please contact Meeks Mortuary” a night watchman tripped over her lifeless body on High Street. She died during a blackout test around the time of World War II. The door was locked from the inside of room 619, but her death was not recorded as a suicide and there were no obvious signs of foul play.

Prior to our investigation the staff told us there were many accounts of disturbances in Florence’s room. On multiple occasions the staff would make up the room, and when they re-entered, the closet doors would be open, and hangers would be thrown across the bed. From time to time, the faucets in the bathroom sink would turn themselves on. With that in mind, my husband, myself, and our team went into the investigation eagerly. Along for
the ride was one of our sensitive friends. She relayed that she did, in fact, feel Florence’s presence in the room. She was not able to hold a conversation nor was she able to find the truth of what really happened to Florence on the night of her death. However, she was able to find out that Florence had a thing for my husband.

Florence isn’t the only ghost that haunts the Old Roberts Hotel. Though I always say she is my favorite because I know the story of the real person. It was on the front page of the newspaper therefore I’ve got dates, names, and facts. The history major in me likes that. They say if you walk down the street on a foggy night and look up you can see her in the window. Every time I go by, I look up to the corner room on the 6th floor. Though I’ve never spotted her, I haven’t lost hope.

Case II: The Carnegie Library
Two years ago, our team did an investigation at the Carnegie Branch in Downtown Muncie. Our plan was to hold a reveal gathering of our findings at the John Kennedy Branch after our walkthrough.

The library felt empty during the investigation and we were afraid that there wasn’t going to be anything to reveal at our conference. That wouldn’t make for a very inviting or interesting talk. With the number of cameras we use and the long process of our investigation, our team can be glued to computer screen for days. Five hours of film from eight cameras calls for at least forty hours of review. Anyway, I digress. With our hopeful minds running dry and eyelids falling low, at last, we found activity. The time was 12:45 AM and we heard on the monitor what sounded like a child giggling. Now, there aren’t many children running around downtown Muncie at this hour, so we were fairly certain it was paranormal. With this footage we were elated to share our findings during the reveal talk.

We revisited the Carnegie Branch during April of 2017 to see if we could stir up anymore activity from our giggling ghost. This time was different. We felt the presence of something non-human, unlike our first visit. One of our most trusted devices is known as Boo Buddy. Boo Buddy is a trigger object that detects electromagnetic fields. He looks like a teddy bear, detects vibrations, temperature changes, and can also talk. I yell at Boo Buddy on a regular basis because he’s annoying, but he does seem to generate responses. He’s gotten activity every single time we’ve ever used him and even though I threaten to drop kick him, I’m not going to do that because he’s actually very useful. In
this case I believe it helped stir up some emotion with this particular ghost because we believe it to be a child.

We were standing on the first floor, not far from where the camera was set that picked up the giggling in our last investigation. We heard the same giggle as before, but this time with our own ears. After this occurred, my husband went outside and walked the entire perimeter of the building screaming as loud as he could.

We try to debunk, we try to find any reason at all these events could have occurred. If there was a kid outside laughing, they would have had to been laughing loud enough to penetrate those library walls. As we wandered the rest of the building the feeling of something around us refused to dissipate. Specifically, around the stacks we really felt an energy and saw shadows from the corners of our eyes. There was definitely something messing with us and we’ve got the footage to back it.

Our footage from this investigation showed multiple orbs falling from the ceiling in a manner unlike dust. The way they moved suggested something paranormal. We also saw one singular orb come out from the reference desk at a right angle into the stacks. About a minute later you could hear one of us in the recording say, “it feels like there’s someone running around over here.”

Another investigator spotted an orb floating around on the carpet and then making a turn at the end of the stack. We took that footage and played it in slow motion. Thanks to our team member with pristine eyes who spotted the orb, we were able to see that the orb was actually a pair of feet walking.

Ghosts attach to a person, a place, or an object. The Carnegie Branch was built in 1902. It contains old court records, along with marriage records and death records, which are all written by hand. This creates a strong emotional component for an entity to attach. Maybe there was a kid who had fun at the library and didn’t want to leave. Or maybe the entity running around the stacks had an attachment to one of the documents. A person doesn’t have to die in a place for it to be haunted. There are a number of reasons that can cause a ghost to attach to something or somewhere, and sometimes we can’t be sure why. We can be sure that the Carnegie Library does, to the best of our knowledge, house one or more paranormal entities.

Case III: Private Residence
A woman who never felt comfortable enough to move into a house she had owned for fifteen months reached out to our team. Prior to calling, she said she felt a negative male presence floating throughout the house and heard soft footsteps on the second floor. Maybe a remodel would help dissolve this energy, the woman thought. She had multiple contractors visit the property in hopes they would be willing to remove one of the walls. However, none of the contractors ever got back to her with a quote... Perhaps it was because the wall was load-bearing, but one can’t help but think that a paranormal presence may have had something to do with the lack of response.

After a meet and greet with the homeowner, we hit the books at, you guessed it, Carnegie Library. We were able to find the history of every single family that had ever lived in this house. Built in 1903, this property had a lot of history. It was constructed by a man named John. His time in the home with his family was a sad past to revisit. His oldest son died from an infection in the lining of his heart, his wife died of cancer, and his sister died of a heart disease two years later. All these deaths occurred in the house. In 1994 John eventually died alone in the house.

The woman said the footsteps sounded as if it were someone wearing work boots but trying to step very quietly. It would have made sense for John, who worked in a factory, to have light footing during his time alive because his house was overwhelmed with sickness.

While we sat in the living room with the homeowner we heard the footsteps she had explained to us. We knew then that there was a paranormal entity in that house. We took out a device called a Ghost Box, which skips through radio frequencies. Sometimes you can hear ghosts who want to communicate with the living through the white noise. That’s exactly what this entity wanted. Repeatedly, the same male voice came through the Ghost Box. It was very strange for me, even as a ghost hunter to hear that voice. The voice of the ghost that haunted this house, we believe, belonged to John. He felt comfortable enough to express to us that he did not want anything done to the house, which makes complete sense. His attachment to this property ran deep, and the memories he held there were sacred to him. He was strong willed and not interested in letting anyone remodel what he had built for his family.

I think coming to this house with the information we gathered on John and his family helped with the communication process. This approach could possibly have made the ghost feel more comfortable with our being there.
We were coming from an angle of sympathy and not hostility. I hope that by communicating between the past homeowner and new homeowner brought some solidarity between the two and make their coexisting process easier. John was far from hateful. He just loves his house the way he built it and has no plans on leaving.

***The East Central Indiana Paranormal Investigators is a team based out of Muncie, IN. The organization was founded in 2007 and is led by Shelly Gage and her husband. The team provides free professional investigations of haunted locations throughout the East Central Area. They can be contacted via email at ecipi@comcast.net or through their Facebook page, East Central Indiana Paranormal Investigators.
Pumpkin Pulp
Written by Artist Angie Hedman

When it comes to weird and creepy, Muncie has its fair share of both. One person, however, stands out as the king of creepy, that being Brian Blair, owner and creator of Pumpkin Pulp and Scarevania Haunted Attraction. Brian is a local artist, Ball State University art graduate, local businessman, horror enthusiast, and all around good guy. I jumped in giddy excitement at the opportunity to tour the Pumpkin Pulp production room and walk the haunted halls of Scarevania taking pictures...with the lights ON!

The directions that I had been given led me to a quietly hidden structure nestled at the end of a bumpy drive off Granville Avenue. Before entering the building, my eyes were fixated on multiple outdoor curiosities, including a hearse, gypsy wagon house, larger than life decomposing rocking horse, and outdoor stage filled with props, signs, and carved creations. I later learned that various acts perform on that stage during the witching season. Such performers include local bands, burlesque entertainers, and human suspension artists.

The front entrance room was filled with dust layered oddities that looked like they came straight from a Hollywood horror prop closet. I now know where all the doll heads with rolling eyes, vintage typewriters, broken Victorian chairs, Ouija boards, antique medical bottles, and clown toys go to die. As I was getting ready to take the first picture of the day, a voice from another room shouted “Hey, we’re back here.” I followed the voice, pushed through a door, and there it was, the Pumpkin Pulp production room. It wasn’t just beautiful, it was hauntingly beautiful!

Along with Brian was his brother David, a skilled craftsman and artist who was constructing a wooden contraption. Sitting at a sewing machine stitching a fabric collar for the newest clown mask was none other than Margot Lugosi, a burlesque entertainer and the founder of The Fabulous Funcie Femmes burlesque troupe (established in 2015). As I took pictures, Brian began discussing aspects of his work, including the frustrations and thrills of preparing for the upcoming weekend TransWorld’s Halloween & Attractions Show in St. Louis, MO. He even spilled some secrets concerning the ingredients that go into a few of his most popular works. I of course was sworn to secrecy on that information.
Near the front was an assortment of Forevermore Dolls (creepy distressed dolls wearing even creepier masks) that were filed neatly on a rack waiting to be shipped to excited parents from all over the world. One of the largest walls was covered in framed horror movie posters. The opposite wall and a large section of the center room was adorned with several latex masks hanging on display hooks. From the mask line, I was drawn to a pig named “Pork Chop,” and a rabbit named “Lucky Rabbid.” If ever I were asked to define the word “nightmare,” my acidic gut reaction would be to hand over a picture of that rabbit. He’s the kind of nightmare that inspires hot sweats, ugly cries, and paranoid twitches for years. In simpler words, he’s perfection! Other interesting mask names included Creeping Willow, Peeping Tom (complete with bloody dangling eyeball), Plague, and Rancid Bacon.

Before leaving, I took a brief tour through the halls and walls of Scarevania, paying close attention to the details of the themes and props. With the lights on, there was a chilling ease that flowed from room to room, an ease that most likely doesn’t exist when the lights are off. Walking back to the entrance, we stopped in the front room that housed the vintage typewriter that caught my eye early on. It was going to be my first photograph. My cold fingers rested on the dusty keys, and an overwhelming surge of nostalgic warmth ran through my body. Before any words could exit my mouth, the following came from Brian’s, “What can I say, I just like weird and creepy things. I always have.” I thanked him again for the VIP treatment, took a quick picture of that beautiful typewriter, then proceeded out the door. Muncie is indeed a “Lucky Rabbid” for having the creepiest playground ever right here in our backyard.
(Photo, Scarevania Haunted Attraction, taken by Angie Hedman)
Gladys Encounter
Gemar Townsend as written by Janie Obrochta

It had been three months since I started working in Muncie Civic Theater and there was a lot of chatter about weird and ominous happenings throughout the building. My coworkers told me stories of ghostly sightings and unknown voices being heard throughout the theater around closing time. They say this ghost has a long history of haunting the theater. From what I heard, its name is Gladys the friendly ghost.

I never believed in these supernatural entities, until one night, when I was closing the theater I experienced something abnormal. It happened in the middle of my first week on the job. In the beginning of the week, my supervisor taught me how to close up the theatre. In a few days I got the hang of doing everything on my own. When it was time for closing, I was alone in the theater. In this moment I had my encounter. It was the normal night routine of shutting off the many fluorescent stage and auditorium lights that were around the inner performance area near the stage and waiting area for the performers. After turning off all of the lights, I moved forward toward the lobby, checking to see if all the office doors were locked. My closing routine complete, I gathered my belongings and headed over to lock the front entrance doors I switched off the remainder of the lobby lights, then locked the doors.

This is when I noticed a shimmer of light peering through the crack of the auditorium doors. I had an unsettling feeling. I stood there frozen, then, suddenly, I remembered the tales about the theater, which made my unsettling feeling grow with unpleasantness when I went back to the auditorium to shut everything off again.

When coming in the next morning, I told my co-workers what happened the night before and asked if this was normal, but they just told me Gladys just wanted to say hello to the new member of the Civic Theater.
Less Ghost, More Town
Lauren Lowe, as written by Matthew Swain

“You couldn’t pay me enough money to go there,” Lauren concluded, a bit matter-of-fact. I couldn’t quite say I agreed—I grew up watching *Ghost Hunters* and trying to work up the courage to say *Bloody Mary* in the mirror (it helps if you actually turn the lights off, and open your eyes, and do it without your mom standing next to you). But she seemed serious enough, and likely for good reason. I know I wouldn’t want anyone messing with my afterlife. I suppose I’ve gotten ahead of myself.

Lauren and I work in a sort of boring place, a generic chain clothing and home store. Think of your personal definition of plain. Okay, I’ll tell you mine: someone in their late thirties, early forties. Likely white, upper middle-class. May-I-speak-to-your-manager haircuts or male-pattern baldness. Doesn’t “get” kale. That’s our clientele. So, over the past few months, Lauren and I have come up with more wholesome forms of entertainment than making fun of customers (“It’s not their fault they’re boring!”) or actually working. My personal favorite is telling ghost stories.

As you may have gathered, I have very few. Once, I heard scratching at my window, and another time somebody in the hallway called my name. But those were both quickly explained away by the bush right outside my room, and the fact that Dad sleepwalks every now and then. I’m always keen, then, on hearing other peoples’ brushes with the supernatural. My girlfriend saw a pale hand pull her friend’s attic curtain back. My grandpa was once terrorized by moaning and rattling chains from his childhood neighbor’s deck. Oh, and my brother, he claims to have been chased down a set of cemetery stairs by a shadow person, which, knowing him, was probably somehow his fault.

Every now and then I feel bummed out, as though my lack of supernatural experiences sets me back as a person. And, though I swear the whispers I’ve heard from my basement and the fact that my cat is always staring at the door are irrevocable facts pointing towards an *Amityville Horror*-style haunting under my own roof, I can’t help but side often with the skeptics. But, getting back to where we started, when Lauren told me her story, I couldn’t help but believe her.
“It’s actually kinda simple,” she said, sliding some shirts into place on the rack we’d been organizing. “There’s a haunted house in Muncie. I sat outside it with my sister, in her car.”

It is simple. When I dug for details, she just couldn’t remember. “I know next door, there’s like, a fake haunted house attraction that they open around Halloween. But as for the actual property, they don’t let anyone in. The windows are all boarded up and it just looks old.” When they sat outside, just taking in the house, Lauren told me they felt pure apprehension. “It was like, every negative feeling you can think of, all rolled up into one thing. And I got a headache, and I just felt so unwelcome.”

I’ve never felt anything like that before—at least, not in any way that I hadn’t earned. Then she added something else I didn’t expect. “I just felt, like, small. Like something could just crush me without a thought.”

I guess that’s the Amityville Horror vibe I find myself looking for in dusty basements and places where I’m totally one hundred percent not trespassing. But if Lauren’s story is true, then now I find myself wondering if it’s really worth looking for. What if I find myself face to face with unadulterated hatred in some burnt-out factory? Will I be ready to fully grasp just how small and incidental I am?

Maybe I’m not emotionally (or spatially) intelligent enough to wrap my head around it all in the first place. But I know that the world we live in is big, and the space around it is infinitely bigger. And somewhere in there, we’re along for the ride, living and studying and idling our cars outside haunted houses in Muncie. That infinite space, to me, is actually more encouraging than frightening.

I think—and it’s cheesy and not really ghostly, so skip ahead if you want to end it on a spooky note—that in that giant space, or even the smaller one of Muncie, there’s a lot of good to be done. And if we’re the ones doing good, then maybe it’ll be far more likely that more good will come our way. Of course, we’ll interact with some horrible things no matter what. I can’t offer a reason as to why we will, but it’s a fact of life (maybe a fact of the afterlife, as well). The best we can do is our best, and deal with whatever comes our way in the process.

One thing is absolutely for sure, though: I would definitely try to get into that house if I knew where it was. I’ll find my damn ghost someday.
The Bike Bartender
Debbie as written by Kayln Reyer

“Can it be about a bum with a keg on his bike?”

Debbie got her first taste of Muncie when she moved here for college in 2001 and has vivid memories to show for it.

“While I was in college, I met the bike bartender. Well, that’s what I call him,” she said. “My friend and I pulled up to the gas station on University across from White Spot Laundry. We went to get snacks, but clearly met a Muncie celebrity.”

Under the fluorescent lights of the Phillips 66 carport, she caught a glimpse of a weird figure heading toward her. It only took a few minutes to register the image, but once she realized what she was looking at, it was burned into her memory as a night that would stay with her.

“The bike bartender can only be described as extremely prepared, carrying a keg on a radio flyer wagon equipped with a tap behind an aged ten-speed bike,” she said. “Of course, for the avid drinker he had a brown bag of specialty tequila. Not really specialty, but the bike bartender aims to please all patrons.”

Noticing her gaze, the man approached Debbie and her friend with the hopes of company. Holding out the liquor, he waited for their response. As they hesitated, he took back a few shots from his brown bagged tequila, then gave a toothy smile.

“While it was a hard offer to refuse, we politely passed on drinks. We offered to buy the bike bartender a sandwich and some chips and wished him well for the night. He had clearly been tapping into his supply.”

These days, Debbie has settled into the quieter part of the community, working and raising her son and small dog. What was once a quirky story about her college experience has become a charming anecdote about the community she loves and lives in. For her, it’s these stories that make Muncie unique.

“Cheers to Muncie.”
(Photo, Phillips 66 Station, taken by Angie Hedman)
Not a Romantic Story
Casey Simmons, as written by Matthew Swain

Casey is sort of my boss, but one thing we have in common is a failure to take anything seriously. Often, neglected work, weird glances from customers, and glares from our managers ensue.

Also, it’s a sort of unlikely friendship to begin with. The general buffoonery is basically all we have in common, other than being white guys in our twenties. Casey can skate like a pro, and he was in the marines for four years. He also has two kids. Meanwhile, I’ve had some poems published and went to Seattle once. What’s more, we don’t line up politically at all; he’s far more conservative than I am, and I’m almost intolerably liberal (and correct, at all times, no matter what). But we still laugh, and blow off work, and generally screw around while we wait to close up shop (I won’t say which shop, because Casey and I do like having jobs).

Our conversations usually take place in the back room of the store, whenever our fifteen minutes of freedom line up. This time, we had claimed the most comfortable chairs in the room, two shallow red armchairs covered in dust and old bits of food nobody’s brave enough to touch. As the fluorescent lights hummed above, we sat in their pale green and chatted about our weird city.

Having lived in Muncie his entire life, I knew Casey was far more likely to have a weird Muncie story than I was, and when I asked him, he delivered. “Oh, man, I’ve got one that’ll freak you out,” he said. “Okay. I was ringing this lady up, and I was just trying to have like, a normal day at work. I was making conversation with her. She was probably thirty years old, thirty-five at most, and I remember she was with her mom.” That’s a pretty average customer for our place of work, but knowing Casey, this is bound to go in an extreme direction at some point.

“So, the first thing I’d noticed about her was that she was covered in tattoos. And like, I love tattoos, so it was a pretty good conversation. She said she’d gotten them done in Indy, and around then I felt the conversation tapering off. We said our goodbyes and stuff, and I think the last thing I said was that I’d have to look up the artist or something, you know. Just small talk. And then, I shit you not,” Over the small table between us, Casey leaned in close, the old break room sofa creaking under him. “She like, yells out from the front door, ‘if you like these ones, you should see the ones I got down here’ and she made a very… obscene gesture.”
I’ve had some weird stuff happen at work. People tell us their whole life stories, or they act weird when they’re trying to shoplift. I had one guy come in high and talk to me about the best snack foods for about twenty minutes. But I’ve never had anybody... _proposition_ me like that.

“It’s not a very romantic story, but I guess it’s a story,” I say.
A Light in the Community: A Shot in the Dark

Margaret Mckibbin as written by Pam Fancher

Urban Light Community Development Corporation (CDC) in Muncie exists to bring hope and strength to under-resourced communities in the name of Jesus. Their programs are designed to give people hope by addressing their most urgent needs and strength by equipping them with the ability to live a healthy life. Among these programs are housing renovations, community gardens, addictions recovery, and transitional housing for women.

I recently met Margaret, a woman helped by Urban Light CDC, at IHOP where she is a server. I explained that I am a writing student at ball state University and I am collecting weird and whimsical stories for a book my class is making. She was eager to tell me a story about an incident that happened while she was staying in the transitional house for women.

After hours, the doors at the women’s facility are locked. No one can enter or leave until the next morning. Margaret sits talking with another resident when she is startled by the sound of two gunshots. They sound like they are close.

She gets up and looks out the window. There is a man on the lawn who has been shot. His hip is badly wounded and bleeding profusely. If he doesn’t receive medical attention quickly, he might bleed to death.

Margaret knows that if she opens the door, an alarm will sound alerting the administrator of the facility. She might be asked to leave for breaking the rules. But she thinks, “How can I stay in here and watch this man as he bleeds to death?”

Margaret opens the door and runs to the man. She has had first aid training in the past and knows what she needs to do. Ripping her shirt into strips, she ties a tunicate above his wound and applies pressure with her hand until paramedics arrive. She was covered in this man’s blood, but she didn’t stop to think about that, all she thought about was saving his life.

She was excused for breaking the rules under the circumstances.

Sometime later, while attending a service at the Urban Light Church, she got to meet the man whose life she saved. They greeted each other with a warm hug. He thanked her and told her that it was because of her quick action that he is alive today and he was forever grateful.
Brick by Brick
Zach as written by Alyssa Clemento

We were loading 500 landscaping bricks into their tan Ford pickup truck one by one. The large, tan bricks scraped the palm of my hand every time I picked one up. I don’t like the way their jagged edges felt against my skin. It felt like by the end of this my hands will be bloody and sore. Sometimes I can still feel the dull pain in my hands from that day.

This couple approached me and told me they needed landscaping bricks, and a lot of them. I guess Walmart is a good place for that, but I couldn’t help but wish they had gone to Home Depot. They said something about outlining their garden, but I couldn’t get over how many bricks they wanted. I don’t know a lot about gardening, my family never had one growing up, but that seemed like a lot. They must want a big garden. The couple was nice enough. Nothing I haven’t seen before. A gray-haired couple, maybe in their fifties, probably about my parent’s age. They looked kind of hippy-dippy. Both of them were wearing only lightweight cotton. I wasn’t surprised to see them in the garden section. They probably started outlining their garden with the bricks as soon as they got home. I wonder if he unloaded them all by himself? The wife sat in the passenger seat with the air conditioner on, while we loaded the bricks in the heat. I wished I could join her, at least she was out of the sun. A typical Muncie summer day.

We didn’t talk much, but it didn’t feel uncomfortable. We made small talk about the weather even though there was no need to. It had been the same sun and sweaty heat all week. He was wearing a hat. He had a little bit of protection from the harsh sun, a little bit of shade. I could feel the sun pierce into the back of my neck as we loaded the bricks into the truck.

Thirty minutes and five-hundred bricks later, he handed me a twenty-dollar bill without saying much. At least all this manual labor wasn’t for nothing.

“Hey thanks, man,” I didn’t tell him that I’m not supposed to accept tips.

He nodded his head towards me and I took the money in my sweaty, callused hand. I’m not going to turn down money. What Walmart doesn’t know, won’t hurt them. I slide the money into the pocket of my blue jeans to spend at the gas station later,
I said thanks and told them to have a good day, like I’m supposed to, and the couple drove away. I wonder what they’re growing in their garden? I guess that could have been something we talked about while we loaded the bricks.

(Photo: Muncie, Indiana, taken by Angie Hedman)
Coming Closer
Jessie Fisher, as written by Matthew Swain

Sitting across from me, behind her desk, Jessie seems both laid-back and a little nervous. As one of the community event organizers at Cornerstone Center for the Arts, she’s a busy woman—papers and files litter the room around us. “I hate these walls,” she says, gesturing to the blue and green tapestry behind her. “The only reason I have this big tapestry thing is to match the paint.” The walls around us, a dark, almost shadowy lavender, actually do feel a bit off. Jessie deserves something more energetic and vivacious.

“I guess we ought to get into it,” she chuckles, leaning forward. “I want to start this off by saying there’s not a lot of random crime in Muncie. There’s crime, sure, but there’s crime everywhere you go. Nothing really happens to you in Muncie, unless you’re already sort of a part of the shady stuff.” She rests her hands on her swivel chair, fidgeting, and there’s that nervous look again. “What happened, just shouldn’t have. It was horrible. But it did, and I guess all we can do is learn from it. My next-door neighbor was murdered.”

That statement bore a lot of weight. It still does. “That’s so wild. There’s something so inscrutable about murder” I say to Jessie, and she nods.

“Yeah, a lot of people say that. It still feels weird to say, even, god, almost three years later.”

“Well, it’s still good that we can learn from it,” I say. Jessie nods, takes a sip from her water bottle, and begins.

About a year before, Jessie and her wife had moved into their first house together, a small one-story home on the southside of Muncie. The house next door was vacant, but still maintained by the owner’s parents. Every week or so, they would come mow the lawn, make sure the house wasn’t too dusty, and generally keep things up. The parents sort of faded into the background, and for a year, Jessie and her wife just lived their lives. But a year later, just after the schools let out for summer, the owner of the house next door’s son graduated, and moved in for a fresh start to adulthood.

Their neighbor, barely eighteen, was a polite young man, living with a few of his friends. But Jessie and her wife still noticed a few strange things. Things would get loud every now and then— “Nothing too out of control,” she tells
me. “We actually had his number, so we could call if things ever got out of hand.” What really caught their attention was the steady flow of people coming and going from the house next door. “We knew what was going on,” she says. “And he was a young guy, so it wasn’t too out of the ordinary. But we wished it would stop. Nobody really wants that going on next door to them.”

And then, July rolled around. It happened on what Jessie assumed would be a pleasant summer day. Her wife was painting the kitchen in the house, and Jessie was at roller derby practice. Eventually, finished for the day, Jessie’s wife got in the shower. When she eventually got out, there was a police officer at her door asking if she’d heard anything suspicious; specifically, asking if she’d heard gunshots.

“And, of course, she didn’t hear anything,” Jessie says. “We figured it out after, she was in the shower when everything happened.” She’s a bit more animated now, her hands moving as she tells me her story.

That afternoon, somebody came by their neighbor’s house. “I’m not sure what the reason or anything was, but there was an altercation,” Jessie explains. “It was at the front section of the house, like, the living room. Our neighbor, he ran to the back of the house, and was shot as he tried to get away.” She shakes her head.

“So, the whole street was blocked off by the time I got back from practice. My wife and I, we stayed outside for a while, talked to the police, just sort of surveyed things. That night, we slept on the couch. Well, slept as much as we could.” They were obviously scared. Nobody really knew what was going on, or if the killer would come back. “That uncertainty can really kinda mess you up,” she tells me. They both called off work the next day.

“And, so, the next night, there was this candlelight vigil for him outside his house.” I imagine the sight of this—crowds of young people, just out of high school or getting ready to start their last year, huddled together in the hot July night, holding their candles tight and remembering their friend. But things wound up getting out of hand.” Eventually, it all kind of turned into a big party, people were drinking and smoking weed out on the front lawn, playing loud music. We wound up having to call the police.”

Despite the police presence, the house next door stayed a bit chaotic. “Oh, and on the Fourth of July, I was getting ready to go to a parade with my
parents, when I saw these two kids circling around the house. While I was calling the police, they pulled the AC unit from one of the windows and crawled into the house. I was mortified.” It turns out that these two kids knew Jessie’s neighbor, and were looking for “mementos” of their “friend.” “I don’t think anybody pressed charges, but, god, that scared me.”

Jessie, now leaning on her elbows, furrows her brow, trying to think of something to say. “I think...” she trails off, then fully collects her thoughts. “I don’t want people to think that this is Muncie,” she says. “A lot of my neighbors take pride in living on the south side, and just living in Muncie, and they really work hard to make it a good place.” She smiles, and for a moment, we both take in the office around us. Papers, files, cabinets, all of it clutters around us. But still, all part of Cornerstone, all in some way working towards maintaining a space for the arts in the community of Muncie. Kids, adults, artists, beginners, people of all walks of life come to Cornerstone to create. That’s something in Muncie that just can’t be taken away.

“And the killer, well, it wasn’t for our neighbor’s murder, but he was arrested. There was justice, maybe in a sort of roundabout way, but, in the end, we got him. And the streets and houses and everywhere, it’s all safer now.” Jessie leans back again, smiling, I think satisfied with her story. “I really hope this helps,” she says. “I know it’s sort of a dark story, but I choose to focus on how everyone came together that night, even though it got a little wild.”

Resting her head on her hand, Jessie muses on one final thought: “Muncie has such a great environment for arts and culture, and honestly, it’s a great place to live. I’ll probably live here for a long, long time, if not forever.”
(Photo: Cornerstone Center For The Arts, Taken by Angie Hedman)
Section II
#keepmuncieweirdandwhimsical

(Photo: Washington St. Bridge, taken by Angie Hedman)
dogs made of paper and staying dry
Martin George, as written by Matthew Swain

when he tells me his story, 
a smile warms his face.

when it rains all i can think of is 
the white river overflowing and 
soft hands petting papier mache 
dogs into their sturdy shells 
sculpting in the old 
factory, a former gentlemen’s club:
think less topless bar, more 
sipping brandy and scotch, he tells me

it’s not raining now, in our 
dark wood booth. my soda 
sweats a darker ring onto 
the table. he misses

all the artists in one place, 
the place itself, 
windowless and brimming with 
laughter, almost overflowing

i’d guess he misses the papier mache 
and blank gallery walls and brandy glass 
he could perhaps fill until brimming, 
ready to burst with color and frames.

your next door neighbor, your mailman, 
anyone could be huge in 
the community, anyone could be an 
artistic genius, and nobody would

know. i’m not sure anyone would care. 
i feel myself caring. right now, 
the river is low, the sun is high 
i’m sitting on the porch i rent.
looking over my cracked street, like
gray broken skin, i daydream
dark booths and sweating bottles
into lines and stanzas

and from somewhere close to me
i hear rain, and steadily, i care

***Please note that while the company that made these papier mache dogs, FB FOGG: House of Fog, does not exist anymore, their former website is still online. Learn more about their history and the animals they used to manufacture: http://fbfogg.itishosting.com

Interestingly, Angie Hedman, the artist for this anthology, worked for FB FOGG when she was in High School. It was the only job that she was ever fired from.

(Photo credit: FB Fogg website)
Collecting Muncie
Brently Holloway as written by Eileen Porzuczek

Not long after I married my wife, I began working at Yorktown Tool and Die making diaper machines. At the time, the company had a lot of jobs with opportunities to make good money. In 1990, three years after I began working there, I became interested in collecting Muncie Pottery. The pottery sparked my interest because of how historical it was to Muncie. I had grown up in Muncie all my life and never even known this historical wonder was right under my nose.

Muncie Pottery dates back to the 1920’s when the company first began producing wholesale pottery. One of their first lines, which began in 1924, was the Artistic Pottery Line. It featured some of their Rainbow Pottery. These pieces were left unmarked because the company didn’t begin marking their pottery until 1926.

At the time I began collecting pottery, there was a heavy swarm of collectors interested in it. This collectors’ frenzy was not just local, but countrywide. Going to auctions and collecting Muncie Pottery gave me a rush of adrenaline because it felt like a competition between me and the other collectors. Some of my favorite memories of collecting Muncie Pottery are from when I outbid my competitors and when I found rare pieces.

During the prime of Muncie Pottery production, there were three lines of pottery. The Figural Line, the Spanish Line, and the Rombic Line. The Figural Line composed mostly of vases portraying animals such as, goldfish, lovebirds, and katydids. If I remember correctly there may have even been pieces in this line with shapes of some kind of dog. The Spanish Line composed mostly of vases too, but with a more southwestern look, coming in matte and glazed pieces. The Rombic Line displaying a cubist style with various angles. Each line was distinctly unique in its own way.

In the 1990’s I had been buying most of my pottery from Mark Eckelmann, one of the bigger collectors at the time. I knew Mark was buying the majority of his pottery from someone, but I just wasn’t sure who. Until, I ran into Richard Bosworth, Dick, at the Ronald Cox’s antique show at the Indiana State Fairgrounds. I found out that he had previously sold Muncie Pottery to Mark for cheaper than what I was paying.
“If you’re willing to sell, I’d be interested in buying Muncie Pottery from you.” I said.

“Let me get back to you.” He replied.

Eventually, we made a deal for me to buy some of his Muncie Pottery. However, our deal went into limbo when Richard died. It saddened me to hear about his passing, and I couldn’t help but wonder if our deal would still be honored. Despite my doubts, his family honored the deal he had previously made with me. So, Nick Ridgeway, my brother-in-law, and I went to Kansas City, Missouri to pick up the Muncie Pottery. My brother-in-law and I enjoyed doing these things together, he collected his pottery and I collected mine.

When we met with Richard’s family to get the pottery they told my brother-in-law and I about a pottery auction going on while we were there. Since we were already there, we thought we might as well go and check it out. By the time we got to the auction it had already started, but that didn’t bother us. Going to the auction on our trip there was just an extra little adventure for us. My brother-in-law and I were always close because of our shared interest in pottery.

In 2005 I was at an auction in Hartford City, Indiana with Mark Eckelmann. He was there to bid on a particular piece of pottery that he had his eyes on. It was a Muncie Pottery creamer and sugar set. Both pieces were perfectly glazed and beautiful. I looked at them and knew I had to have them. When the auctioneer brought the set of pottery up for bidding, we both began going back and forth. Our back and forth struggle over the pieces went on for a while, until I ended up outbidding him. I couldn’t believe I had outbid him. But hey, the pieces were mine now! I could hardly wait to add them to my collection. Although, the car ride home with Mark may have been a little awkward.

By 1927, almost all Muncie Pottery produced was die marked on the bottom with a Muncie Stamp, sometimes still accompanied capital letters, numbers, or roman numerals.

I always kept my Muncie Pottery on display in the house. Some would be in glass display cabinets and some would just be out for all to see. Although once my kids were born, I had to be more careful about where I put my pottery collection on display. I remember putting some pieces behind closed
doors and securing some with packing materials, that way if they got knocked down they wouldn’t shatter.

When the Great Depression hit, the company almost went bankrupt and just barely made it out alive. After the Great Depression in 1931, the company was known as Muncie Potteries Inc.

A few times I went to try and find Muncie Pottery at a pottery showcase in Zanesville, Ohio. The showcase was held around the Fourth of July each year and collectors would set up pieces they were selling in their hotel rooms. It was like a giant gallery shop from hotel room to hotel room. This was definitely a place where pottery collectors would go to try and find some rarer pieces. One year, when I arrived I spoke to one of the dealers about a Muncie Pottery Salamander Wall Pocket, in perfect condition that he had sold. The salamander wall pocket, was a very rare piece that some people even regarded as the rarest piece of all. Only five of these wall pockets have ever been known, and all of them were damaged except for one. The individual selling the salamander wall pocket there was selling it for $1,500. He said a collector tried to play the game where they acted like something was worth less than it really was. Despite their attempt, the individual seller refused to budge on the price, leaving the collector who, had offered only $300, to walk away. Once they had walked away he said that a woman, who had been eavesdropping on their conversation the entire time, walked up to the table. Without hesitation she paid $1,500 for the salamander wall pocket and walked away with it. I remember the dealer telling me the story in complete shock of how it all went down. When I told him I was interested in seeing if the woman would sell it to me, he was so excited to help.

Once I knew who she was it didn’t take me long to reach out to her and ask if she was selling the piece. Whether she was planning to sell it or not, she offered me the piece for $1,500. When she offered to give it to me for $1,500 I knew it was a steal, because at the time there was only one salamander wall pocket in perfect condition that was known about by collectors and damaged salamander wall pockets were going for $1,000. I just had to have it to add to my collection. I remember being so thrilled to have such a rare piece in my collection, it was good for me that the woman who had bought it had no idea what Muncie Pottery was.

After decreasing sales in 1939 the company was forced to shut down and liquidate all of their assets. By 1942, they had done just that and there was no longer any Muncie Pottery being produced.
Over the years, as I continued to collect Muncie Pottery, my collection grew to be around two hundred pieces at a time, and as I bought and sold over those years it was composed of six hundred different pieces. I even had some slides of how the pottery was made. These slides were something I had that even the big collectors envied. Although I took immense pride in my Muncie Pottery collection, I ended up selling all six hundred pieces I owned in 2008 or 2009 to help support my family. It was around the time of the recession. I had taken a buy out and was out of a job. On top of that, we had a lot of medical bills to pay off from my wife’s chemotherapy treatments. After having spent decades collecting Muncie Pottery, I was not sad to see my collection go because my family was far more important to me. Taking care of my family, whom I love and care for, was and will always be more important to me.

Collectors and Muncie Pottery connoisseurs say that the pottery can be identified by its distinct shape, markings, and glaze patterns.

I now work at Magna and have been there for about eight years. My wife is healthy again and both of our children are all grown up. Our son is in college and our daughter is currently a third-grade teacher. I’ve begun collecting Muncie Pottery again recently. I am also one of the administrators of the Muncie Pottery Collectors Facebook page. However, I’ve found that my interests this time around are different. I am more focused on trying to collect what I didn’t get to last time. Nevertheless, my love and admiration for Muncie Pottery lives on.
(Photo: Muncie Pottery Wall Salamander, taken by Brently Holloway)
The Students That Came Before Us
Cathy Jarrett as written by Claire Bauserman

When interviewing Cathy Jarrett, I didn’t know what she had planned, story-wise. Her favorite stores to shop at when she was a twenty-something? How the campus residence hall buildings have changed? However, I got sort of a flipped sense of Deja vu. She’s currently the administrative assistant and women’s ministry leader of the Christian Campus House, but when she was my age, she was goofing off with her friends there like I do with my friends today. Unlike me, however, she lived in the apartments in the loft (her junior year and both of her senior years, to be precise) so she had even more opportunities to make some whimsical memories.

Cathy learned how to short sheet a bed and pranked Carrie, among other girls in the apartments. She didn’t always get away with it though—once, Shantelle, her best friend, and Carrie started pulling her mattress out of her apartment to hide it somewhere. They didn’t quite time it right, though, and Cathy caught them in the act.

Her junior year, one girl living there was dating Brian, the CCH president (who was also living there). She knew when he’d be out, so while he was gone a bunch of them snuck in and flipped all his furniture! Later on that year, not to be outdone, some of the kids moved her car in the grass and put it on blocks.

Her senior year especially, she and Shantelle took it up a notch. They almost got caught the time they pranked Matt, one of the campus ministers. The girls’ apartment had a key, so they snuck in and stringed Matt’s office. (It was at that point I interjected, “Oh, Silly String?” But no…) They created an intricate web of string connecting all his stuff, then removed the scissors or anything else from the office that could cut the string. Now, that was Mark’s (the current pastor’s) first year; he’d only been there five months. He was preparing to go into Matt’s office to use the computer. The girls thought they were dead meat… however, Mark simply crawled through the string and got right to work.

They stacked empty cans from the recycling in front of the other campus minister, Charlie’s, office and stuck one under his chair cushion. He didn’t notice it for weeks. Lois, (the CCH secretary) was like a mom to them, so they didn’t prank her. They had already gotten Matt and Charlie though, and thought it was unfair to leave Mark out of the fun! Lois recommended they
not mess with his computer or his books. So they simply turned some of the jackets and books upside down.

***

Cathy and other CCH students were going to go on some trip, but they cancelled it because the roads were icy. Only the pizza place was open. They called and asked if someone would be able to deliver pizza in this weather, and they said yes. They felt bad making the poor guy drive out there, so in addition to the $5.99 large pizza, they gave him a really, really good tip.

***

Joe Modlen, one of the guys in the boys’ CCH apartments, was coming downstairs to wait for a ride to Anderson for his dance class. At the same time, Cathy was leaving for student teaching at the elementary school. They’d never crossed paths in the morning all year, but because his ride hadn’t come yet, it happened. Cathy was coming around the corner, minding her own business, when out of nowhere a six-foot eight silhouette burst out in front of her.

He hopped backward with a gasp as she almost dropped her purse.

“Ooh, you scared me!” she chuckled.

They were very careful to keep an eye out for each other after that day!

***

One of the boys created a potato launcher— the kind made with PVC pipe, aerosol hairspray and had to be lit with a match or a lighter. The group was having fun shooting potatoes across the street. Then Cathy decided to give it a try... it streaked through the air beautifully, then started veering off to one side... it’s like they could see it in slow motion, heading for a window in the First Presbyterian Church.

“No-no-no-no-no!” she panicked. They all watched it breathlessly.

Luckily for them, the rogue spud didn’t break anything.

“We were like, ‘That was way too close!’” Cathy laughed.

The way she lit up reminiscing was just like the way I did when I came home and told my family all about winning ‘Most Detailed’ for my Marty McFly costume at the Halloween party, or the time we spent half an hour fanning smoke out of my friend’s apartment after she burned the brats, or speed
walking to my roommate’s car across campus to rescue it just as the tow truck was pulling up.

One of the best things about living in a town like Muncie is learning about its history. It may not be what you’d find in a textbook or a museum, but hearing stories of the generations before you, and realizing they’re not that different from your own, can really bring people together and make things a little more whimsical than expected. And as I’ve learned, nothing creates more whimsy than a good story.
The Evil Leprechaun

Jared Green as written by Kate Fletcher

You know that small-town stereotype where you can’t go anywhere without seeing someone you know? Well, while it might be true, there are still some people that you just never really run into. I guess I can’t speak for everybody, but this has proved true in my case. For me, I never ran into former teachers too much. I mean, I might have seen them at Walmart or Applebee’s on occasion, but I never saw them where I really didn’t want to. And, what is the number one place where it would be awkward to run into your former high school teachers?

The bar.

I made it years without doing so, until that one fateful night, the night where I not only ran into a teacher, but I ran into that teacher who absolutely hated me in high school.

There I was, standing in the middle of the Heorot, beer in hand, when I saw him. Now, I’m not sure what came over me in that moment, but for some reason, I thought the best possible choice I could make was to call out his name. He kind of just stared at me for a moment. He muttered, *Who the fuck are you?* While I stood there second guessing every life choice I had ever made. It was almost worse when that changed into *Jared fucking Green! You know I hated you when you were in high school, right?*

I had no idea what I had gotten myself into. I know I mentioned that he hated me in high school, but I don’t think you can understand just how evil this man was.

It wasn’t just that he sent me to the principal’s office so much that the principal would just look at the slip, laugh, tell me to go back to class, and just ignore that teacher the rest of the day...he literally looked evil. He looked like I could have just pulled him out of some sort of fairy tale.

He honestly looked like a leprechaun. I always thought that too; it wasn’t just the beer talking that night. But, it wasn’t just that he looked like a leprechaun. There was something else about him. It was like what a leprechaun would look like if you had just stolen his pot of gold. He didn’t even have red hair like you would want to typically envision...it was black...almost like he really was a leprechaun who had turned evil.
So, there I stood as he waddled over to me, wondering if it was too late for me to sneak away. *What are you drinking?* He asked.

I glanced down at my beer because I was so focused on not wanting to deal with this that I couldn’t remember off the top of my head.

*Spaten Oktoberfest,* I finally grumbled, *you?* He didn’t even answer my question. He just started laughing as he corrected my pronunciation. I was irritated, but I should have known better than to try and pronounce something like that around him. After all, I knew he was fluent in multiple languages….and a dick, which is not a good combination.

Surprisingly though, after that moment, the rest of the time spent talking to him wasn’t too bad. He had been fired my senior year, so he just started asking what I knew about the goings on at the school after that time since no one had talked to him since. The rest of the evening then just turned into us shit-talking the school, the administration, and some of the other students we had known.

This is the part where I bet you would love to hear about all the people we shit-talked that night, but I’m not that stupid. It is a small town after all, and I am not about to burn more bridges than I have to. I will say that we both learned a lot about a lot of people that night though, and I found out I was definitely not the only person in that high school he had hated. *It’s okay,* I told him, *you weren’t the only person I hated either, although you were at the top of my list.*

Even though the evening was far from my ideal night, it did wind up being more fun than I would have imagined. There is just something unique about drinking with a teacher you hated and who hated you. I am glad that I have never had the misfortune of running into him again though. As interesting as that night was, I will always despise that evil leprechaun.
(Photo: The Chug in Muncie’s “Village”, taken by Angie Hedman)
Ball Stores

K. Atkinson as written by Eileen Porzuczek

When you think of your childhood you will remember running free through your family’s land in the country, on the Southside of Muncie. You’ll remember being able to run two fields over and be at your grandparents’ house. Your mother shouting to you, “Don’t get hurt and be home for dinner.” All of the memories made playing basketball in the hayloft, building tree houses, fishing, catching crawdads in the creek, having bonfires, running through the cornfields and woods will stay imprinted in your mind like antique film reels. You’ll remember the safety and security you felt living in such a tightly knit community.

You will remember the lasting memories you keep of Ball Stores, a department store chain founded in Muncie in 1934. You’ll remember all the times your mother took you there to buy shoes. The feeling of walking into the 1950’s every time you went in the store, will stick in your recollections. How your face lit up with pure childhood joy and wonder. When you think of it, in your mind, you will see the large jewelry display cases that lied on the main floor and the grand staircase that could’ve been straight out of Gone with the Wind grabbing attention all that entered the store, the intricate designs engraved on the grand twisting and turning staircase inviting you into another world entirely. You’ll also remember the antique-looking elevator that made you feel like you were traveling into the past. You will never forget how these magical wonders in Ball Stores mesmerized you as a kid.

You’ll remember how your grandmother told you she worked there in her youth. All the stories she told you of her time there will flood your head and remind you of how much you admire her. The one story she told you that you’d never forget was how she stood up for what was right, even when the right thing was unpopular. How she told you that part of her time working in Ball Stores was during segregation and how the other clerks at the time wouldn’t serve African Americans. Their eyes just staring them down until your grandmother would serve them. She was the only one who would check them out or help them if they needed to find something. She’d tell you that doing the right thing is what you should do even if it’s not popular. That guidance will stay with you for the rest of your life and lead you to step out for what’s right in your own life. You’ll always look back and think, “I can’t imagine the amount of courage it took her to do that. To have the courage to do the unpopular thing because it’s what’s right.”
You’ll remember taking swim lessons as a kid at Ball State. Going on Saturday mornings to gymnastics and swimming classes. The truckloads of kids flooding into Ball State’s Recreation Center will stay in your mind as a whimsical wonder, kind of just like the birthday parties you had downtown at the Muncie Children’s Museum. Memories of more innocent times will sit in your mind as a reminder for your love of Muncie as a child.

At one point in your life you’ll leave Muncie, and when you come back you will realize how special Muncie really is. You’ll realize that in Muncie, relationships aren’t temporary and that the people in the community really care for each other. Friends from grade school will still be your friends today. You’ll know that there are so many people always willing to help you, because that’s just what your Muncie community does.

***Ball Stores was a Muncie-based department store founded in November 1934. The original downtown store was located at the corner of Charles and Walnut Street. The store operated as an independent department store specializing in high quality merchandise. In 1968, Ball Stores acquired Collegienne Shops, a retail outlet on University Avenue near Ball State University. In 1978 Ball Stores opened an additional outlet in the Muncie Mall. However, by the 1980s, the company started to experience financial difficulties. These difficulties led to the stores closing between 1986 and 1990.

To learn more about Ball Stores’s history, read the blog written by Minnetrista Director of Collections, Karen M. Vincent at

http://minnetrista.net/blog/2014/12/23/ball-family-history/the-magical-christmas-decorations-of-ball-stores/
Ron’s Barber Shop
Geoffrey S. Mearns as written by C.W. Cain

I was driving west on State Road 32 through Yorktown when I saw an old-fashioned barber pole with a sign attached that said “Haircuts: $9.” I had recently moved to Muncie, and I was looking for a barber. So, I turned left into the spartan shopping strip and then entered the little shop. Nature programs were playing on a small television in the corner of the room. The wood-paneled walls were adorned with Indiana basketball memorabilia. A tall, elderly gentleman with fair skin and thinning hair was busy cutting somebody else’s hair. He turned to me and said, “I’ll be with you in just a second.”

“No problem,” I said. Then I sat down in one of the green faux-leather chairs that lined the wall next to the front door and flipped through an old copy of “Sports Illustrated.” After a few minutes, the gentleman said, “Alrighty-sir, we’re ready to get started. What are you in for today? Just a haircut?”

“Just a haircut should be fine for today,” I said and walked over to the barber chair. It must have been as old as he was, and equally strong for its age.

We got to talking. He told me that his name was Ron, and that he owned the place. He must have been at least 6’3”. He gestured toward the old black and white photographs on the wall. “Those were some good old days,” he said. He told me about his impressive career playing high school and college basketball.

After Ron had finished cutting my hair, I took one look and decided that I would come back for all of my haircuts. I paid my $20 - $9 plus a tip, walked outside, then got in my car and drove back to Muncie.

The next time I needed a haircut, I returned to Ron’s. I pushed the door open and heard the bell jingle overhead. This time Ron was nowhere to be seen. Instead, I was greeted by a fit, clean-cut African-American gentleman in his early forties. He was wearing a leather apron with all of his scissors and combs in one large front pocket. There were no other costumers in that day, so I didn’t have to wait. “Just a haircut today?” he said with proud, eager eyes.
“Yes sir, that should do it,” I said, sitting down once again in that old barber chair. The gentleman told me his name was Anthony.

“How did you get into this business, Anthony?” I asked.

“Well, I’ve been cutting hair since I was a little kid,” he said. “I started giving haircuts to the other kids in my neighborhood back in Chicago, and I guess it just seemed natural to do it for my living.”

“How long have you been in the area?”

“Not very long. I moved here with my family about a year ago.” I was taken slightly aback. It seemed odd that Anthony hadn’t been there forever. That also meant that Anthony and I had moved to Delaware County at around the same time.

“Do you have a family?”

“I guess you could say that I do.” Anthony said, “I have six children. We moved to Muncie because it’s a safe place to raise a family. It’s sort of a funny story actually. We searched on the internet for the best cities to raise a family. Muncie was the third name that we saw. I didn’t want my kids getting mixed up in drugs or violence, and that seems less likely here than back in Chicago.”

“My wife and I just moved here too, but all of our kids are grown.”

I reflected on how different our stories are, how much more privileged my life has been. I never had to worry much about my children getting into dangerous situations. That is the magic of a community like Muncie – the life journeys of two men on parallel paths merge in Muncie.
The Garage Narrative
Linda Beard as written by Audrey Bowers

Linda sat and smoked as she told me her story on that cold winter day as we sat in her garage. She had asked me if it was okay for her to smoke and I told her it was okay and that it didn’t bother me. As a child I didn’t like smoke, but now I don’t mind it as much. I grew up around it, but more importantly, I wanted Linda to feel comfortable sharing her story with me.

“I need to take you somewhere.”

“I don’t want to go,” Linda said flatly. I could imagine a seventeen-year-old Linda saying this and resisting the inevitable, having to leave her home and learn the truth.

They went to Maples hotel and stayed for a while, maybe it was a day, maybe it was a few days, maybe it was a few weeks, I’m not sure.

I tried to keep up with the plot of the story as I furiously wrote down what Linda was telling me in my spiral bound reporters’ notebook. Her garage is filled to the brim with I don’t know what.

Linda’s eyes practically burst with tears when she told me about the type of man that her father was. “My father taught me how to shoot a gun,” she told me. Not a second goes by before she boasted about her skills, saying: “I could shoot clay pigeons as well as a man.” Her father taught her how to drive at 14 years old. She described her mother as “a good Christian woman who didn’t believe in divorce” and who had also bought her father an Indian motorcycle, “We can lay that baby down “, Linda said energetically, “and she even bought him an airplane.” Her father taught her how to fly that plane as well as drive a car. It was hard for me to imagine the woman sitting across from me flying an airplane.

Her parents lived together for 50 years, yet that didn’t stop her father from cheating on her mother during the weekends. “It broke my heart,” she said more than once. Her heart was broken because she looked up to her father, or it seemed that way from what she told me about him. I had to ask her what exactly what happened to her dad. When she talked about his adultery, it seemed as though she was talking about him dying, she was so vulnerable and human when she talked about his glory and destruction. He was no longer this ideal figure in her life; he was a real human being with flaws.
Their wedding vows, Linda’s parents’, included the ten commandments. After learning about her father’s unfaithfulness, Linda said that she got “wilder than a buck” and “felt bitter.” I think I would feel bitter too. Actually, I know I would feel bitter. As she told me her story, I tried to not look at her with judgment. If anything, I wanted her to know that her pain and response to this time in her life was valid and I hoped she felt heard while telling me her story. I was genuinely compelled by her story and I would’ve sat there all afternoon if time had permitted.

Linda has lived in Muncie for 75 years, 20 of which have been spent in her current house. She laughed and talked about smoking, drinking, and cussing, and I laughed right along with her.
Back in ‘78
Anonymous as written by Kate Fletcher

Waking up to black stuff coming out of her toilet turned out to be the least of her concerns that morning; she just didn’t know it yet. If she would have taken a quick glance out the window as she hurried downstairs to call the plumber, she might have been a little less shocked by the laughter on the other end. I’m sorry miss, but there is no way we are going to be able to get to you today. Have you not seen?

For the first time that morning, she looked up, and she nearly dropped the phone. Outside the living room window was pure white: mountains of snow blocked her view of anything else in the neighborhood. Too embarrassed to utter another word, she hung up the phone and hollered for her roommates. While she waited for those two girls to meander downstairs, she decided to take a look outside, which proved to be an impossible task. As she opened the main door, the cold from outside chilled her to the bone, and she regretted not throwing her robe on that morning. She then tried to push open the screen door, but it wouldn’t budge. That plumber was right for laughing at me, she muttered under her breath. He must have thought I was crazy.

So, here she was, trapped in a house with two other girls, black sludge in the toilet, and no way out. This had to be a dream. Finally, she heard a voice saying, What? It’s like 9 in the morning, and we don’t have anything to do today.... holy shit. Is that snow? Fighting back the desire to reply with sarcasm, she just nodded.

I also don’t recommend using the bathroom. And, we can’t get a plumber out here right now. She sounded irritated. which she felt bad for because she had just acquired all of this information herself. Sorry. Rough morning.

The next few days were pure torture. You just can’t trap three girls in a house like that. Finally, the plows had moved enough of the snow that people were able to get out of their houses. A plumber was going to be able to make it out to them the next morning, but their cabin fever was kicking in, and they decided to get out that night.

Actually, it seemed as though the entire town of Muncie had decided they needed to get out that night. As the girls made their way to the bar, she was a little iffy about the entire situation. But, I’ve never been to a bar...she kept saying. I just don’t really drink. The girls just stared. They knew she hadn’t made it out to a bar yet, but this was just the perfect time to do so.
It’s okay. One of them muttered. *We’re just going to go to The Chug. It’ll be fun. I promise.* The Chug has been a staple of Muncie for ages, and in all honesty, it hasn’t changed TOO much. She had no idea what she was getting herself into that night. Not only were drunk people rowdier than she anticipated, these weren’t just any drunk people, they were drunk people who had been trapped in their houses for days.

After just a couple of delicious pink drinks, she didn’t remember much of the night. It all kind of happened in flashes -- almost like a montage in a movie. As everything flashed by around her, she did remember seeing one particularly loaded young man getting on top of a table, removing his belt, and swinging it around.

Although she never made it back to The Chug, the memory of that night always stayed with her. She had no idea whether they always acted like this or if it was just because that blizzard had messed everyone up, but looking back, she knows that was the moment she fell in love with this town. Living in a place where everything and everyone just came together like that, that was where she wanted to spend her life.
Pies for Peace
Sadie Berg, as written by Whitney Kendall

The nip of fall fills the air.
Leaves shine in brilliant hues,
Red, and orange, and yellow,
Before drifting to the ground
Of Canon Commons
As their light drains away.

The air dances with the crisp tang
Of grass’ final growths
From their earthy beds,
And then weaves among a sweetness
Of sugar, of pie, of people’s happiness
At this community event.

Families, couples, the young and old,
Laugh as they dance merry jigs,
Throwing colored powder in the air
For the breezes to catch,
Stomping their feet in time to music,
A celebration from the land of diversity.

And on one section of the green, a girl,
blonde-haired, serious,
yet still full of youth,
Is offered a picture shoot with a man
Dressed in a Berenstein Bears suit,
Painted with a smile that is not meant to be creepy, but is.
The girl runs back to her family,
Tells her parents, who laugh
And joke about it,
Locking it away for a good story
For another day.

And then they join the others
In their merriment,
Adding to the sweetness in the air
With their own pies,
Cherry, topped with puff pastry stars,
Bliss filling every bite,

Worth all the creepy bear-suits in the world.

***Pies for Peace is an event to unify the community and to celebrate life, diversity, and glorious pie. Learn more on their Facebook page [https://www.facebook.com/events/115756455704114/](https://www.facebook.com/events/115756455704114/)

(Photo taken by Angie Hedman)
People of Walmart: Muncie Edition

Amanda as written by Kate Fletcher

Sitting there, jamming out to Beyoncé, at a stoplight on McGalliard, I watched smoke begin pouring from my car. Furious and terrified, I quickly decided to turn into Walmart, unsure of what else to do in that moment. Even I thought it was an odd decision, but what else was there to do? I knew they at least had a car part of the store.

As I pulled in, I found myself thinking back to just the day before when I had dropped $500 on an out-of-town mechanic. I had been driving towards Indy on I-69, when my car overheated. It just started dinging at me, and I wasn’t even sure what was going on at first. Stressed, I turned into the next exit, which lucky for me, I just happened to be coming up on, and also lucky for me, there was a mechanic immediately off the interstate.

At least, I thought it was luck.

I waited there for hours, and I had to cancel plans for the evening. After what felt like an entire day, the mechanic came back and told me everything was taken care of. Although I was irritated at the loss of time and money spent on the repair, I was thankful my car was running okay again.

So, my mind was flashing through all the possibilities of what else could be going wrong. I mean, I didn’t know much about cars, but I knew that smoke pouring out of a car was not a good sign, and it definitely was not something I wanted to deal with after working a long shift, but yet, there I was.

Flustered, I walked into the car area of Walmart and explained the situation. The man working told me that he was very sorry but that wasn’t something they could take care of. Apparently, all they did were minor things like oil changes. Standing there, fighting back tears, I said, *do you know where I can go to get it fixed? For real this time.*?

I watched pity spread over his face as he looked at me. *How about this,* he said, *I honestly can’t do anything about it here, but I know quite a bit about cars. I get off of work at seven. Can you come back around then, and I will take a look?*
Even though meeting up with this strange man made me nervous, I really needed my car taken care of, and I didn’t know how else to take care of it. Since I lived within walking distance, I walked home for the time being and got a friend to bring me back later that night. I considered going back alone, but I didn’t really feel like pressing my luck too much that night. I didn’t think he would be a serial killer, but I figured I couldn’t be too careful, after all, I had watched a lot of Criminal Minds recently.

As we arrived back at Walmart, I saw him sitting next to the car. Once my friend and I got there, it didn’t take him long to locate the problem. He told us that I just needed to replace something (the actual car words went over my head), and that it would only cost about $20 at Auto Zone. I would easily be able to replace it myself too, according to him at least.

I just stared at him. *I honestly know nothing about cars. I would have no idea what I’m doing.* My mind began racing with who else I could call to help and thoughts of what would happen if I attempted to fix it alone. Neither of these thoughts were making me feel any better. I didn’t really know anyone who knew anything about cars.

I could tell he was exhausted. He had probably had a long day at work as well, but he just nodded and said, *If you go and get the part, I can fix it for you. I would offer to go and get it, but I told my ride not to come for a bit, so it would be awhile before I could.*

Then I uttered the words that could have been my death wish. *What if you just rode with us?* My friend glared at me for a moment, thinking the same thing I had been iffy about all day. But, even she had to admit that he didn’t seem like a serial killer.

So, he went with us to the store and helped to pick out what we needed for the car. And, thank goodness he did because it would have taken us much longer to find it alone. Once we finally got back to Walmart, it took him maybe 20 minutes to fix the car. When I asked him what I owed him for his help, he told me nothing.

For the second time that day, I cried. Overwhelmed by his helpfulness, I slipped him $20, but wished I could have given him more. Never in my life had I seen such kindness, and in the parking lot of a Walmart in Muncie, Indiana of all places.
Finally Able to Breathe  
Rhianna Patton, as written by Whitney Kendall

There are times in a person’s life when they should be scared, and then there are times in their life when they should be scared for others.

I had one of the latter not too long ago. I first walked into work to ask if my manager had a story he’d like to share, and just before we started the interview, my coworker mentioned casually that she had a story about the time Ball Memorial saved her daughter’s life. My eyebrows shot up, my head cracking the air with how quickly it turned, and my next words just burst out.

“Oh my gosh, I have to have that story!”

In the end, my copious pleading worked. After finishing the last few minutes of her shift, she sat down into the chair across from me with a warning “I might cry while telling this.”

I was sitting forward in my own chair, computer in my lap, listening intently, fingers poised at the ready, completely focused. Then, when she started speaking, all background noise--music, talking, the hum of life--faded into non-existence. Similarly, all peripheral sights--the cluttered managers’ office, the work computers and industrial filing cabinets, our manager listening in from his desk--fell away to reveal only Rhianna and the images she was creating with her words.

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Shortly after Rhianna’s daughter, Addilyn Liberty Bell, turned one, she woke up with a fever. Since she was teething, Rhianna didn’t think anything of it, until Addilyn continued to act lackluster, sluggish, in a daze, not wanting to play. It turned out the baby had a fever of 102.6°, at which point Rhianna decided to take her to the doctor. In the ten-minute drive it took to get there, her fever had spiked to 103.4°.

The sweet little girl was checked for the flu, strep throat, everything the doctor could think of, but all tests came back negative. Finally, after a day of fruitless testing, the doctor sent Addilyn home with nothing more than the advice that her mother not worry unless her fever hit 105°.
Upon arriving back home, Michael, the baby’s father, dropped Rhianna and Addilynn off before leaving again to pick up medicine to help with Addilynn’s fever. Meanwhile, Rhianna carried her daughter, exhausted from a day of being poked and prodded, upstairs to her crib. However, as Rhianna was lowering her, before even letting go, Addilynn started going into convulsions. This is where scenes started presenting themselves to me in flashes.

*Rhianna, hysterically running to the stairs to shout for her roommate to call Michael and for her mother to call 911, holding Addilyn on her side so she doesn’t swallow her tongue as she jerks uncontrollably.*

*The baby with cherubic features, complete with the blonde hair and her mother’s blue eyes, seizing for about 40 seconds before going limp, then turning blue.*

*Rhianna cradling her child like the most delicate crystal as she rushes downstairs, then into the car when Michael arrives back to the house.*

*Michael’s hands clenched tight to the steering wheel as he floors the gas. The car running three red lights to a cacophony of honking horns on the outside, but pure, panic-muted silence on the inside. Rhianna’s shouts of “She’s not moving, she’s not moving, nothing!” and Michael’s sane response of “You have to calm down or I can’t drive.”*

*The baby making a choked gasp for air just once during the four-minute drive.*

At this point in the story, had my laptop not been in the way, I would have been leaning forward in my seat, hands clenched together in my lap or on the edges of the seat, barely breathing. As it was, my ears strained, being careful not to miss even one syllable Rhianna was speaking as my fingers flew over the keys in frenzied taps, transcribing the words as closely as possible. And when Rhianna told the next part of the story, I was amazed at the details the mind can remember at certain moments in our lives.

Rhianna recalled that there were seven doctors waiting at the emergency entrance of the hospital when the car came to a screeching stop. Rhianna ran straight into the hospital with Addilynn and followed the doctors to a room, where they wasted no time hooking her up to saline and various machines. Addilynn’s parents just held on to each other at the foot of the hospital bed, feeling terrified and helpless. The baby’s heartbeat was dangerously low by
then, and it took about a minute that felt like an eternity before she started crying again, finally able to breathe.

Even though I already knew that Addilynn was going to be fine, I was almost as relieved as Rhianna would have been at that moment, and had I been in her shoes, I might have hugged one of the doctors tightly and sobbed when he said the sweet words, “Welcome back, Princess.” Like Rhianna, these words would have stuck in my mind for years to come.

When Addilyn woke up, she was at first scared of the strangers surrounding her and kept trying to pull her oxygen tubes from her nose and the IV from under the splint holding her arm straight. She didn’t settle down until copious amounts of hugs and cuddling from her parents, and then they kept her calm with endless SpongeBob reruns.

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After a negative test for epilepsy, the doctors determined Addilynn had had a febrile seizure, something one out of every ten children have when their temperature spikes too high, too fast. Yet the other doctor had just sent her home. Had Rhianna not been with her at the time, Addilynn could have died from the silent seizure as many others had.

It was not until many hours later, after yet more testing, that a bit of levity at last struck. During the testing, Addilynn had not been allowed any food or drink, so when they finally gave her some juice, the little angel chugged it like it was the single most important thing in the world. She chugged it so fast that she wasn’t even breathing, causing her oxygen monitor to go off, and for the first time that day, Rhianna laughed.

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When Rhianna described this part of the story, I had to smile, too. Up until this point, I’d felt Rhianna’s fear right along with her, even knowing everything was going to be alright. But with this, some of the tension finally dissipated. And then Rhianna went on to describe the good things that came of the hospital visit, and my heart melted.

They gave little Addilynn three things: pajamas, a book, and mandarin oranges. The oranges, of course, had a very short lifespan, though they did teach Rhianna another type of food her daughter liked. But the other two
gifts—they lasted longer. Even now, a year later, Rhianna still has the pajamas covered in “creepy stick people,” and the book, *when a Duckling Gets a Cookie*, has been read many times and come to mean a lot to her. These two objects have become some of her most treasured possessions.

But the negatives made a reappearance before long. The doctors kept Addilyn overnight, during which Rhianna and Michael caught only fitful sleep on the uncomfortable beds provided and woke up in fear every time a monitor went off. After Addilynn was finally released, Rhianna made a follow-up appointment with her doctor, the same one who had sent them home that fateful day. This same doctor dismissed Rhianna’s concern yet again, saying it was just a “simple febrile seizure,” sparking the angry retort of: “Stop saying it was simple, she stopped breathing, they had to bring her back!” The child’s heart rate had been so low, she was almost dead.

I wanted to punch the doctor for Rhianna, or somehow travel back in time and shake some sympathy into him.

The doctors never found what had caused Addilynn’s sudden spike in temperature. Even now, after over a year, Rhianna is scared of fevers, and she wouldn’t let the child sleep in her crib for a full four months; the child now prefers to sleep with her mom. But Rhianna’s fears were unfounded—Addilynn continues to be a healthy, happy baby.
It was an ordinary day, but I was assigned an extraordinary task -- collecting the stories of Muncie locals. So, I did what any person scrambling to find human connection would do, I went to the local coffee shop, the Caffeinery, to be exact. I sat there for two hours, my face probably white with introvert panic. Most people were already busy socializing. It would have been easy to just get up and leave, but I needed a story. I approached this slightly older man who didn’t seem harmful or occupied and gave him the “I need a weird or whimsical story” spiel. My words tangled together before they left my mouth, but they functioned in the way I needed them to. I got a story about a storm.

The Star Press had written about that storm. I imagine this man reading the story that day or the day after.

MUNCIE, Ind. — Local authorities speculated a tornado might have touched down near the Muncie Fieldhouse in downtown Muncie on Sunday afternoon...substantial damage...which resulted in massive amounts of water pouring into the storied structure.”

When he told me about the storm, I remembered walking through that storm. I would tell him about it after he ran out of details to tell me and as my follow up questions failed. “

“Nothing whimsical has happened in Muncie,” he says, and it occurs to me that this is an easy assumption to make, but I don’t challenge him even though I don’t agree with him. Weird things do happen here, I know it from personal experience. Whimsical things do happen here too.

This man told me about the storm and I couldn’t help but ask when it happened, and, strangely enough, I was here when that storm hit and I remember it too. It wouldn’t be the first thing to come to my mind when asked about the weird and the whimsical in Muncie, but it’s definitely on the list. He could see the damage done to the fieldhouse from his apartment, since it was down the road from the school, where he worked.

When the conversation almost flat lines, I bring up the fact that I remembered the storm too. “Yeah I was actually at work and I walked home in it. It was not whimsical at all.”
I personally remember the storm vividly, remembering standing in the foyer of Lafollette Square, the dining hall in the freshman dorm where I worked at the time. The sky poured out rain angrily, the winds threatened to sweep you off your feet. There was lightning in the distance, and to my dismay, there was no power to be had outside of Ball State campus, yet, for whatever reason I walked home like I would any other day. It took me twenty minutes to get back to my apartment, and by the time that I did, I was completely drenched in cold rain. The gas station and Dollar general on Wheeling were not lit up like they usually were; if there’s ever an apocalypse in Muncie, it would look something like this since power wasn’t restored for hours.

For whatever reason, I think it’s kind of good to know that I wasn’t going through this terrifying experience alone, even though I felt very alone in the moment. It’s good to know that in the midst of all the chaos, that you aren’t the only one wondering how something so strange could happen to you. To me, that’s the whimsical in life. It’s about knowing that you aren’t alone.

(Photo: Westside Park, taken by Angie Hedman)
I Can’t Help Falling in Love with You
Brandon Holloway & Montana Ogden as written by Eileen Porzuczek

Brandon

It was the summer of 2009 when I met her during marching band. She was the most beautiful girl that I had ever laid my eyes on. Her beauty was striking. I knew I had to talk to this girl. I had known her from our time at Wilson Middle School; we were both in band there too. However, I had never been close enough to her to get the chance to talk to her. Now was my chance. “Here goes nothing,” I thought to myself.

To my surprise, I somehow managed to come out of the conversation with her number. I felt like I was on top of the world. Immediately I wanted to burst and shout out loud with happiness. I had to text her tonight. I have to tell her how I feel. I have to tell her how beautiful, amazing, and perfect she is. So, later that night I pulled out my phone and began to text her.

Me: I love you.

Me: You’re perfect.

This was back before you could see when someone was typing back to you on your phone, which meant waiting for her response left me in grueling despair.

Montana: Oh...thanks, that’s really nice. It’s just I just met you and you’re coming on a little strong. Don’t be my stalker or anything.

Crushed by her reaction, I knew that I had to find another way to show her that I really did love her. Despite how cheesy and unrealistic love at first sight sounds, I knew she was the most beautiful girl in my eyes and I wanted to be with her.

Montana

I had always seen Brandon in middle school band, but never talked to him. It just seemed as though our paths never crossed until our marching band practices in the summer of 2009. I remember exchanging numbers after the first time we talked and getting texts that night from him calling me perfect. He even said he loved me. “We literally just met,” I thought to myself. I was
a little freaked out by how overbearing he was being and it kind of put me off from being interested in him like that. But at the same time I thought it was really sweet and cute how he thought so highly of me after only talking to me once.

During my time at Wilson Middle School, I was still in my emo phase. I wore a lot of black, skinny jeans, and converse. It was kind of my thing at the time. I found it interesting that, not long after meeting me, Brandon began wearing converse, more black, and occasionally a Panic at the Disco! t-shirt. I couldn’t help but wonder if this subtle change in his wardrobe had something to do with me. I remember sitting on the band bus and talking to him about music.

“What kind of music do you like? Or is there a particular song you like?” I asked him.

A giant pause ensued as he sat there in silence. I couldn’t tell if he was conflicted on what was his favorite or whether he was trying to find the answer I wanted to hear.

“Uh… Purple…” He replied

“Oh Purple Haze by Jimi Hendrix. That’s a good song.” I nodded in approval.

His face looked flushed with relief after my response.

Both of us being musically inclined and involved, I think he believed that impressing me with music was the way to unlocking my heart. My realization of this came after he texted me a video of him playing “The River Flows in You,” from Twilight on the piano. I didn’t even know he played piano and I felt like if he did that would’ve been something that came up in conversation. The idea that he had learned the piano, just so he could play that song for me crossed my mind, but the thought of it was so over the top I couldn’t bring myself to believe it. I mean yeah, I thought it was cool that an attractive guy in band was sending me videos of him playing the piano for me, but at the same time I thought he was trying way too hard.

I even remember one night we were chatting on Facebook and I was going to go to bed soon. So, I told him I was going to bed and ended our chat. He eventually saw that my green chat dot was still active on Facebook and messaged me.
Brandon: You said you were going to sleep but you’re still online.

I was a little freaked out when I read the message, like dude chill. Yet somewhere inside of me I always thought it was sweet how he was so interested in talking to me. I knew I would never be without a friend in band as long as Brandon was there.

Brandon

I was so in love with her from the moment I laid eyes on her. No other woman could ever strike me with beauty like she did. I also thought it was cool that we were both involved in music. I remember telling my parents I wanted to learn piano, just so I could play for her. I remember even changing some aspects of my wardrobe to seem more interesting to her. I felt so accomplished when I got her to customize my MySpace page. This was huge, considering MySpace was the hot thing at the time. Nothing could stop me from pursuing her. I loved her.

However, after years of pursuing her, 2008 to 2011, I had begun to give up hope and on the idea of us ever being more than good friends. I even started dating another girl. Ironically towards the one-year anniversary of our relationship Montana began to show interest in me. Montana and I had begun texting and hanging out more. I’m not proud of it but we even went on a few dates together with her parents while I was still dating my girlfriend. I remember her, her parents, and I went to a drive-in movie theatre in Winchester. I know it doesn’t sound romantic, but it felt just right. Inevitably the falling out between my girlfriend and I didn’t take long. Needless to say we broke up and Montana was once again my main focus. Her showing interest in me though was just the first step of many. I had continued to ask her out more, but she always answered with a vague “maybe.” But I was determined this time around.

My parents let me have Montana over for a movie night with our mutual friend Jacob, one of Brandon’s best friends who always talked me up to Montana. He sat in the corner of the room on the floor while we sat on the futon. I’m not sure if you could third-wheel any harder. Insidious was playing on the T.V. that hung from my bedroom wall, but we were half watching the movie because we were talking at the same time. I can’t imagine how we sat through what I’m sure was an AXE body spray cloud in my room, but we did. For the majority of the night things were super casual and we all just hung
out as friends. But as the night started to come to an end, knowing that her parents were picking her up in the next fifteen minutes, I knew I had to make my move. I didn’t want to freak her out, so I started by simply laying my open hand near hers and it seemed as though instantly we were holding hands. “Okay check,” I thought in my head as I moved to the next move. I began kissing her up her arm until our lips met. This was the first time I kissed the beautiful girl whose beauty had struck my heart so many years ago. Completely overwhelmed with happiness I may or may not have briefly passed out. When it was time for her to leave I told her that I had a really good time hanging out with her and you guessed it, I asked her out again. To my surprise this time she didn’t respond with just, “Maybe.” Instead she told me she’d get back to me. Whatever that meant in that moment was unclear, but all I knew was that I was one step closer to being with the beautiful woman I loved.

Montana

After Brandon and his high school girlfriend had broken up, it seemed as though he was constantly asking me out. I was genuinely interested in him; I just felt like I needed some more time. So, I continued to say, “Maybe.” Until the night when we first kissed, I don’t know what it was, but something sparked for me in that moment. He asked me out again that night before I left, but I needed some time to think things over. So, I told him I’d get back to him with an answer. The next morning, I realized that I wanted to be with him. After countless years of saying, “No.” I finally said, “Yes.”

I remember it being so fun going out together with friends after band practice. Our main hang out spot was the Madison Street Taco Bell. We’d all go there and get food and just talk. It was great. We were even there so much that at a certain point most of the workers knew who we were and would always greet us with a smile when we walked in. Some nights we would even stay ‘til 1:00 or 2:00am when they closed. The Taco Bell on Madison Street was just the place to be if you were in band at Southside High School, which is ironic because my parents said they would hangout on Madison Street with their friends in high school at Southside. I guess some things never change.

Brandon

In high school we went to prom together our junior and senior year. Although if I have to pick which prom I liked better it would have to be our junior year.
prom by far. I know Montana would agree with me too. Our senior year prom was fun, but we went with friends and so it was more of a group thing. As opposed to when we went just the two of us, our junior year, and it felt like a love interest story coming to life.

I vividly remember how amazing we looked together for our junior prom, it could’ve been right out of the movies. Montana wore a sparkly blue bedazzled dress and I wore a charcoal gray suit with a blue bow tie to match her dress. To top off our look, my car at the time was a 1996 blue convertible with charcoal gray seats. I thought it was really cool how we matched my car. I still think it was cool. The whole night felt so magical. It felt like Cornerstone in downtown Muncie was our castle and we were the princess and prince in a Disney movie. I’ll never forget that night and how beautiful she looked.

After dating Montana for a little over six years, I knew that she was the woman I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. We hung out with her parents a lot so it was sometimes hard to find a moment to ask them for their permission without Montana being there. So, I decided to be bold and ask her parents for their permission one night when we were all out to dinner at Bob Evans. To this day I still don’t know how I managed to do it without her noticing, considering she was sitting at the table with us. I guess I was just sneaky enough.

Once her parents had given me their permission, I wasted no time getting the perfect ring for her and letting some of our close friends in on the big surprise. Thankfully, all of them kept the proposal a secret and the proposal wasn’t spoiled. Since we were both huge Dave Matthews Band fans, I figured that proposing to her at the concert in the summer of 2016 would be perfect. I knew exactly when I wanted to pop the question, too. Usually at their concerts when they play the song “The Stone,” they improvise with “I Can’t Help Falling In Love With You” at the end. I knew that moment would be perfect, because at Southside High School I dedicated it to her in front of everyone at one of my jazz concerts.

The concert came sooner than I thought it would and I was full of anxious excitement. This was the big day, the big day when I would ask the woman I loved to marry me. It was Montana, her parents, and I. When we entered the concert venue we were greeted with the aromas of alcohol, weed, and human sweat, a familiar concert smell. As we settled in and the concert began I kept waiting for them to play that song, but it never happened. The
concert was almost over and I was beginning to freak out and search for another cute way to propose to her.

Montana

In the summer of 2016 my parents, Brandon, and I went to see Dave Matthews in concert. When we were there, Brandon had decided to buy a poster as a keepsake but didn’t want to hold onto it the entire concert. Instead he left it at the poster tent and told me to remind him to pick it up before we left the concert venue. The concert was amazing. Seeing Dave Matthews live with my parents and boyfriend was an experience I knew I would never forget.

Once the concert was over, we made our way to the poster tent so Brandon could pick up the poster he had bought earlier in the night. As we approached the tent, I could feel all the female workers’ tear glazed eyes fixate on me. I wondered why they were looking at me like that but shrugged it off as whatever. After the ladies had given Brandon the poster holder with the poster he bought, he told me to check it out. Swiftly I removed the lid and opened the palm of my other hand for the poster to slide out onto. To my surprise a Dave Matthews Band poster did not meet my palm. Instead a beautifully sculpted glimmering ring clunked down into my hand. Stunned by the ring I turned to my mother.

“Well, what do you say?” My mother said.

“I do! I do!” I joyfully said.

By now the women working the poster tent were all choked up at what they just witnessed. I looked into Brandon’s eyes as we embraced and in that moment, I knew he was the man I wanted to spend the rest of my life with.

Brandon

I think a powerful point in our love story is how persistent I was in pursuing Montana. I don’t think I would’ve believed it if I told my thirteen-year-old self that I’d be engaged to her by age twenty-one. Looking back, yeah, I might have come off kind of strong in the beginning. Nevertheless, I am happy with the way things turned out because now I will be with the woman of my dreams for the rest of my life.
Brandon & Montana

We have been living together for two years now. I, Montana, will be heading to graduate school at Purdue University for the Doctor of Pharmacy program next year. I am excited to see where this path will lead me in the future and allow me the chance to help people. I, Brandon, will be staying in Muncie and finishing up my Music Education Degree at Ball State University. My goal is to hopefully be a band director at one of the Muncie schools one day and get more kids interested in music. This will be the first time we’ve been apart since 2011, but we are going to make it work.

Besides our love story in Muncie, we always remember is our time at Southside High School. One thing we loved about Southside High School was that there weren’t any stereotypes that boxed people in. The school was very wholesome and had a cool culture of inclusiveness. It’s funny too because in a lot of movies and television shows they show sports being the cool thing to be a part of in high school. But at Southside band was the cool thing to be a part of. Unfortunately, both of us were in the last graduating class of Southside High School. It was so sad to see a place with so many of our memories gone forever.

Both of us believe that we owe it to Muncie for being such a great community to us in our youth to stay here after we finish our degrees. We want to give back to the community that has been so good to us, a community that is very active and supports each other.

(Photo used with permission from Brandon and Montana)
A Muncie Organic Zone
Micayla Jones as written by Aidan Sacks

The world was beginning to thrive again. Wildflowers were still out and the trees were starting to bud. The canopies had yet to cover the sky, but the understory was lifting off during this transitional period of early spring. The forest was a shrub zone and the smell of winter faintly flew through the air when Red Tail employee, Micayla, went to Fall Creek Woods for a monitoring visit. The 26-year-old environmentalist often collects litter and hunts invasive species, not only because they are part of her job, but because sustainable living is a major theme in her life. Nature is an ideology that heals and guides her, along with being “super fucking magical.”

Binoculars swinging by her side, waterproof bogs on her feet, and hopes high to see a spotted Salamander, she was ready for a beautiful hike. She approached a small body of water, not a river or a creek, but a stream that took two average steps or one big leap to cross. She often appreciates streams by stopping to observe newly emergent Harbinger of Spring or Bullfrogs. Though Garlic Mustard is an invasive species that outcompetes the native ones, she sometimes hopes to find it, which she often does. Garlic Mustard is surplus in this area and luckily, “it’s yummy to cook with and makes a really good vegan alfredo sauce.”

After admiring the simplicity of the stream and its inhabitants, she hopped over to continue her adventure. In the distance she saw a deer. Advancing slowly, so that she wouldn’t scare it, she noticed something odd about its demeanor. Undisturbed deer are usually calm, gallivanting about or grazing on something green. This deer, which she described as “not Bambi and not Bambi’s mom,” was stiff as a statue, which struck her as rather odd. Gradually moving closer she noticed that the hind end of “not Bambi” was darker than the rest of her body. It’s early spring so maybe it was “shedding weird or had a nice nap in a mud hole.” It did not occur to her that there might be a snapping turtle with its teeth sunken in “not Bambi’s” butt, which was in fact what was happening.

In the waist high greenery both Micayla and the deer stood in disbelief. “Is there a protocol I should be following here,” she had thought to herself. What exactly does one do in a situation like this? She suffered a moment of panic and contemplation until deciding that there wasn’t much that could be done.
We don’t know everything about nature, but that is exactly what we do know. The fact that we don’t know everything is concrete. Red Tail preserves Muncie land and the creatures who inhabit it. Preserves like this give community members the opportunity to experience the wonderful and at times the not so wonderful aspects of nature. Take a step into a softly flowing stream, pick a wild berry and hope it isn’t poisonous, and visit public land preserves to clear your thoughts because you never know what you might find. It may even be a hungry snapping turtle hanging from “not Bambi’s” butt.
Section III
#keepmunciewhimsical

(Photo: Wishbone Gifts, taken by Angie Hedman)
The Best Kind of Vacation
Vena Douglas as written by Pam Fancher

One week out of the summer, my parents packed up our family for a trip to my mother’s parents’ home in a small town in the hills of Kentucky. For me, it was the best vacation a young girl could wish for. I suppose most kids these days would think it was a week of torture. In the mid ’70’s early ‘80’s there was no internet, cell phones, or video games; we didn’t even watch T.V. I spent the week visiting relatives and enjoying country life.

I can still remember the smell of strong coffee brewing on the stove first thing in the morning, and bacon and eggs for breakfast in my Granny’s kitchen. I can hear the screen door slamming as my Pa got up and dressed early to go out and feed his barn cats and farm dogs.

There was no air conditioning in the house; so on hot July afternoons, me and my cousins would sit on the porch swing. My Pa made the swing from Sycamore wood. It hung on the porch by big, rusty chains. The way the chains creaked when we swing back and forth was like they were singing in their own secret language.

After supper we would play horseshoes and hide-and-seek. We played outside every day until bedtime. When everyone was settled in for the night, I would lie in bed and listen to the voices of my Granny and Pa as they talked about the events of the day. I felt safe and loved in that farm house.

We always went to church with my Grandparents. They enjoyed showing off their grandchildren to their friends and neighbors. I was so proud to be their granddaughter.

I have no children of my own, but I think about my niece and three nephews, that they will never know the joys of my Grandparent’s house. Our family vacations now are trips to Disney World, amusement parks, and houses on the beach. Fake places in artificial worlds. Our family time is either rushed, or interrupted by texts, Facebook, and news feeds.

I hope that they will have childhood memories that hold a good place for them to revisit when they are older like my memories of my Grandparent’s little farm house in the country.
Vena’s parents became part of the northern migration movement from Kentucky to Indiana. Many Indiana family’s roots are traced by the same migration story. In 1810, Historians claim that more than 400,000 Kentucky residents migrated to north to Indiana looking for farmland. By the 1840’s the number has doubled. Indiana offered rich soil for a modest price if people are willing to build homes and clear the land themselves. (Moment of Indiana History, 2012).
Muncie’s Food Not Bomb’s
Jayme Klisonage as written by Janie Obrochta

Muncie a place of community
Unifying together and achieving a sense of opportunity.
Noticing the homeless on the edge of the street
Continuously begging for something to eat.
I’ve wanted to help construct a place without food formalities
Even if that piece of food doesn’t set well with this world’s reality.

Sometimes no one shows it but it something you gotta do.

Feeling that sense of pride, I assist by excavate through dumpsters
Obtaining food that’s imperfect for some, but worthy for us.
Offering to those who need it and cherish it as our bounty we
Demonstrate a new understanding of food.

Narrow mindsets may judge this community, but with our
Objective in mind
Teaches outsiders food is a right, not a privilege.

Benefiting the Muncie community by
Offering our assistance in helping shelters
Maintain a low costing food supply
Bettering our world and ourselves.

Solidarity is not charity.

***Learn more about Local Muncie Food Pantries
Muncie’s Food Not Bomb’s -
https://www.facebook.com/MuncieFoodNotBombs/
Cure Hunger - http://curehunger.org/
Soup Kitchen of Muncie - https://soupkitchenofmuncie.org/
(Photo: Muncie Second Harvest Food bank, Photo by Angie Hedman)
Something to Give
Lesile as written by Audrey Bowers

I met Leslie as I walked through her front door while following a friend Vanessa into her house. Vanessa knew Leslie better than I did, so she naturally talked more than I did. I listened and took notes so that I could write about it later. Leslie told us about how she had moved to Florida and moved back to Muncie. How she found purpose in volunteering in the community, even while unemployed and not knowing anyone other than her mom in the community.

Moving someplace new is difficult. Moving to Muncie, a land once known for its factories and is often pitied, mocked, and ridiculed is no exception. Not knowing a single familiar, smiling can be tough, leaving you alone and overwhelmed and lost in the unfamiliarity of it all.

There’s good to be had in Muncie, a town trying to redefine itself and rise up from the ashes of what it once was. There’s more than Ball State University and mason jar crafts here and I hope you will realize that. That good won’t be found in dwelling on hardships and missed opportunities, it can only be found through giving back something to this community, planting seeds in hope that something will grow once more because it can and will with a little work.

There is purpose to be found while strolling down the evergreen trails of the Cardinal Greenway with a mentee. There is purpose to be found when an organization fills people not only with food, but with hope. There is purpose to be found when one thinks about the needs of someone else for a change, whether they live on Ball State campus, in historic Whitely, downtown, in Yorktown, or somewhere in between. We all have a place in this and something to give.
The Beginning of a Muncie Business Woman  
Juania Ardizzone as written by Janie Obrochta

Because I moved back to Muncie to be closer with my parents, I reconnected with old friends who would lead me to uncover a new future that awaited me. One friend knew of my skills in spray tanning and eyelash extensions. She was determined to create a tanning/eyelash party, inviting friends and relatives who were interested in getting these features done.

Because I accepted her idea, I had the chance to hone my skills and make these women feel a new sense of beauty. A few days after the party, my friend called me up and explained how much everyone at the party appreciated my skills and spread the word to others in the community. I was so baffled from all the great comments I was receiving from them that it made me realize there was a possibility that I could grow a strong clientele and make my own shop here in Muncie.

So, I created Sun Spray International. This was a grand step into becoming a part of a new and active community. As I progressed in my business I had an array of clients that became apart of my everyday life. These people made me feel like a part of a larger family, which I knew I could not find in California.

Because I own Sun Spray International I had many fun and entertaining experiences, like the time I tanned Muncie police officers for their seasonal charity calendar photoshoot. I also found a new opportunity to give women in the community a chance to make their own tanning and eyelash businesses, giving advice and helping these women find some affordable and great products that I even feel confident using. This then leads me to my new journey of expanding my business in the California crowd.
Kids Will Be Kids

Georgia Berg, as written by Whitney Kendall

In a sleep-quieted house, in a darkened room, four-year-old Georgia lies on her polka-dotted green comforter, on the bottom bunk of the bunk bed she shares with her older sister. She is silent, remembering a day of playing family with her sister, where Sadie would pretend to be Georgia’s mother, “feeding” her and administering her daily “medicine,” presented as coins. It is as Georgia lies there that she realizes she forgot to take said medicine. She slips out of bed and rummages around for a penny and sticks it in her mouth with every intention of spitting it back out.

Minutes later, she is in her father’s room, shaking him awake, waiting until he blinks open his eyes to murmur, “Daddy, I swallowed a penny.”

His look of sleepy confusion turns to one of surprise and exasperation, before the inevitable question, “Why would you do that?” closely followed by “What type of coin was it?” and “Did you actually swallow a coin?”

After Georgia relays the story of small copper pennies and medicine and games of family, and a quick call to the family physician, Georgia’s sister is left in the trusty hands of their neighbor while she and her father are off to Ball Memorial Hospital, just to make sure everything’s fine.

At the hospital, the doctors do not seem worried, and neither is Georgia as she is made to change into a thin gown with tiny bears decorating it, a design meant to be interesting to little kids but that fails the test. Between switching rooms and an x-ray, Georgia, dressed in her kid-gown, happily wanders the bright white halls of unknown territory. Following the x-ray, the doctors confirm that she did, in fact, swallow a penny, but that it is not stuck anywhere and will pass on its own.

Georgia is then sent skipping home with nothing more than the knowledge that everything is fine, and the memory of silly kid act that at the time made sense, but now no longer does.
Cheeky and Charming
Mark Pike as written by Claire Bauserman

For my first meeting gathering Muncie stories, I decided to talk with my pastor at the Christian Campus House. I entered his office, sunlight streaming in through the blinds and bookshelves covering the walls. Greeting me warmly, he pulled up a chair and began to tell me his earliest memories of his wife.

Around the time Mark Pike had began working as the Associate Campus Minister, he and Lynn Harris had been seriously dating for about a year, starting in April or May of 1986.

Mark was doing laundry at a laundromat in Muncie. While waiting on his clothes to dry, a Vanilla Bun from the vending machine caught his eye. He paid for it, pulled the lever to drop the candy, and prepared to grab it from the machine.

At the same time, Lynn was coming by on her bike ride to school and was popping in to give him a message. She noticed he was getting a candy bar, and being some dietetics major, she did not approve at all! It was at that moment she strode over and swiped it out of his hand.

“Mark, Mark, Mark.” she clicked her tongue. “You are without a doubt my worst client.”

And with that, she plopped the Vanilla Bun in her backpack and rode away. I can imagine it was the adorably spunky moments like this that led to him falling for her. Mark made several attempts to work up the nerve to ask Lynn to marry him. Once, they were on a walk by the White River discussing rings and getting married, but he hadn’t formally asked yet.

Not too much later, they went to the Acropolis, a Greek restaurant in Broad Ripple for a nice meal, then they went to Reis Nichols to look at rings. As this was a place where you could design your own ring, they looked at different diamonds and settings. Lynn chose a single square-ish diamond and planned to use her grandmother’s gold wedding band. Mark put down a deposit to pick up the ring they designed later.

Once they walked out, Mark said, “I guess we’re getting married!”
“You haven’t really asked me yet, now have you?” Lynn reminded him with a smile.

“Well, will you marry me?” he asked.

“You can’t ask me here in the alley!” she replied. “It doesn’t count!” Nevertheless, today they are happily married with four kids later, but she still harasses him about his proposal!

I grinned at the finish of the story. I couldn’t help but think of other sweet couples I know in Muncie: some dating, some engaged, some even spending their precious first moments in the campus house, just like our pastor and his wife. Maybe I’m biased, but I believe Muncie has a sort of charm to it. A community as tightly knit as this one is bound to have sparks flying sooner or later.
The Good Samaritan
Paul J. as written by Janie Obrochta

A good Samaritan is a person who is helpful to others. This is what I’ve heard all my life and I try to live by this motto. It might be why I stopped my car in the freezing winter weather, to help a total stranger off the curb of the Good Will.

I try to live by this motto that I’ve been taught my whole life. Watching this woman running with a handful of bags out in the cold. Seeing that total stranger now stranded waiting off of the curb. If only the bus waited one more second she wouldn’t have been freezing.

Just watching this lady running as fast as time will give her brings me an uncontrollable urge to assist her. If only time stopped for one more second she could have made it? But in the now, if I help she could catch it at the next stop.

With this uncontrollable feeling I went and drove up to her. It was when I asked, “Can I give you a lift to the next stop.” She freaked. In a few seconds I explained how I saw her and couldn’t standby. She handed me her blanket of trust helping me beat the bus safely getting her to the next stop with spare time. This makes me wonder if I’m staying true to what I’ve been taught all these years?
The Secret Santa

Lori Mansfield as written by Pam Fancher

Lori Mansfield, an employee at Walmart, participates in the Secret Santa Event every year. She tells the story with a gleam in her eyes, “It is the Best Day of the Year! It is so heartwarming to see all of those people gathered together, over a thousand, to make a special Christmas for families in need right here in our community.”

Lori joyfully explains, “Everyone meets on the first week of December at 6am at Meijer. Coffee for the event is donated by Coffee Junkies, and donuts are donated by Concannon’s Bakery. We get a list for a family and $500 to spend. We shop for everything on the list, then we go to Toyota and all the presents get wrapped. Toyota stays open for business as usual as the event is going on. They are happy to be a part of giving back to the community.

Chicken and noodles lunch is provided by MCL Cafeteria for all who participate. After the wrapping is finished, we deliver the gifts to the families. The families are overcome with gratefulness and usually bawl their eyes out.

It is so wonderful to see so many people give up their time to make others Christmas better. It brings the whole community together.”

It all started with Al and Chris Holdren. In 2004, the couple decided not to buy gifts for each other, but instead they would use the money to provide a family in need with a Christmas tree and presents. They set up two tables in the garage, with the help of their two daughters, Katie and Maddie and some Santa hats, they wrapped presents for a family in need.

Al’s brother-in-law stopped by and decided to get in on this, so he grabbed his credit card and took the girls back to Meijer to buy a second family some presents.

It has grown from there to what it is today. God is Good! So many people are involved now, and it is expanding out from Muncie to neighboring areas.

Local school principals help by recommending families that are in the greatest need.

Lori loves delivering the gifts. Each family gets a Christmas tree with decorations, a $50 Meijer gift card for food, and a Bible, along with the gifts. Lori loves to meet the families and pray with them. She said, “I want people
to know that they are loved.” What a wonderful way to spend the Christmas holidays.

(Tea Cookies from Concannons, Photo by Angie Hedman)
Unexpected Connections
As written by Eileen Porzuczek

Tree(s)
Noun
1. A woody perennial plant, typically having a single stem or trunk growing to a considerable height and bearing lateral branches at some distance from the ground.
2. A wooden structure or part of a structure.

Muncie, Indiana has been a Certified Tree City USA since 1998. The Tree City USA Program was created to celebrate trees and their importance in relation to our daily lives. The city of Muncie is also a part of the Urban Forestry Program, which promotes and supports healthy forest growth in urban environments. Being a part of these two programs has allowed Muncie to create a safe, beautiful, enjoyable environment for its residents. Whether you’re driving or walking in Muncie, you will never fail to find whimsically wonderful trees.

I am currently taking a class on nature writing. In the class we are required to keep nature journals on whatever we decide to observe in Muncie. From the moment my professor told us about the journals, I knew that I was going to focus mine on the trees of Muncie. My plan was to not only observe the structure of the trees, but also the images and lines that could be found on their bark.

Throughout my observations, none of the trees I had previously observed compared to the trio of trees I found on Rex Street. They were unlike any trees I had ever laid my eyes on before. Their kale-like leaves lied uniformly in a skyrocketing cone formation. I wondered if this uniformity was from the natural growth of the tree or if the tree was just really well kept and groomed. After a moment of deliberation, my eyes began to creep down to their trunks and bark. “How are these trees real,” I thought to myself. Each tree’s trunk curved like the Leaning Tower of Pisa, a little slice of Italy right here in Muncie. The longer I gazed at the trees I began to feel whimsical like I had suddenly entered a Dr. Seuss book and the trees in front of me were a more modern less colorful version of Truffula Trees. I could’ve stared at them for hours with admiration, but I didn’t want to linger in front of the stranger’s house. So, instead I took a picture to remember them and drove away after having finished my journal entry.
Days after my observation of the unique trees I wondered if they would even be there if Muncie wasn’t so environmental conscious when it comes to trees. Then I got a little sad thinking about the possibility of them being gone. They were so beautiful, unique, whimsical, the list goes on and on. These trees are lucky to have the support of a community like Muncie valuing their environmental worth and maintaining them, so they can live their healthiest life.

**Community Member(s)**

Noun
1. A group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a particular area.
2. An interacting population of various kinds of individuals in a common location.

In the 2018 spring semester of my journey through college, I took a course called Creative Writing in the Community. By registering for this class, I knew that I would be actively working with community partners to tell their whimsical and unique experiences in Muncie. However, I never thought I would’ve been touched by so many of my community partners’ stories and experiences. I never thought that their stories would lead me to have a greater appreciation for the Muncie community.

Before I began gathering stories from community partners, I had no idea how strong, supportive, and closely knit the Muncie community was. That was the one thing that shined through with every community partner I met with. All of their faces, in their own unique ways, lit up with the love and appreciation they have for their Muncie community. Sighs like weights were lifted when they mentioned how they always knew there was at least one or two people in the community who would help them if they were in need.

It was interesting to talk to some of my community partners who had left Muncie for short periods of time.. Ironically, every single one of them came back missing the strong, unique, wonderful community they had left behind. I remember one of my community partners talking about how there is no place quite like Muncie. When my community partner said this to me, it reminded me of the *Wizard of OZ*. It takes Dorothy leaving Kansas in her dreams for her to really appreciate how amazing her home is. I feel like the same thing happened to some of my community partners when they moved away and then decided to return.
Seeing their enthusiasm and love for Muncie made me realize how special the Muncie community is. It made me realize how rich Muncie’s historical culture is and how active its community members are. It also made me come to the realization that in some respects, I had been living in a Ball State bubble. A bubble that blinded me from a lot of the unique things the Muncie community has to offer like its history, community events, etc. To my community partners, Muncie was more than just a location on a map.

Connection(s)
Noun
1. A relationship in which a person, thing, or idea is linked or associated with something else.
2. The act or state of connection between two things.

Muncie has given trees a chance to be preserved, well kept, safe, and the ability to create an enjoyable environment for all of its inhabitants. Muncie is more than just a home, it is a place full of everlasting whimsical experiences. But most of all, Muncie has given both its trees and community members a strong support system. Neither the community members, nor the trees, have to worry about nobody being there to catch them when they fall. When I say support system, I do not mean just a security blanket. I mean a strong backing of people who will always be there to help you. Both the community members and trees of Muncie have been withered by the stressors of daily life, just like any person is. Each of them have faced hard challenges, whether it was a community member falling on hard times or a Muncie tree just trying to survive a major storm. The Muncie community takes pride in taking care of its own. The community is full of people who will never give up on you and always have your back. That’s just what Muncie does.

Please note that you can learn more about the trees of Muncie with the Urban Forestry of Muncie organization
http://www.cityofmuncie.com/urban-forestry-office-muncie.htm
(Photo: Christie Woods, taken by Angie Hedman)
Finding Warmth
Rivers Waggoner as written by Vanessa Haro-Miracle

She watches outside, clusters of snow keep adding to the pile accumulating on the sidewalk; adding more problems to her situation. She snugs her child tightly, the only warmth being her body heat as she tries to keep her newborn baby warm. The snow storm knocked out the power in her home, as with the rest of her neighborhood. This means she can’t turn on the heat, she can’t keep the bottled milk warm enough, she can’t keep her family warm. Maybe she should go to a friend’s house, someone who still has power. She risks the dangerous drive in the snow for any hope.

They safely arrive, security and safety is felt throughout the home. Just as they are about to settle, though, the power goes out and they are in the same cold situation. She might have resembled Mary, constantly moving to keep herself and her family safe from the elements that God has placed in their path.

Melody decides to go to Delta High School, where other Muncie residents without power are residing. The high school is crowded with people, some familiar, others not. She shares a alcove with the baby. Even though there is still power, she still struggles to keep her family warm. It’s difficult to keep the milk the perfect temperature for the baby. The storm has even affected Kokomo’s power. Still, she decides to visit her parents. At least they have a fireplace.

Off they go again. On the road, the sky is dark with flurries of snow attacking Melody’s family, covering Muncie’s potholes. All the lights on the road are out so all they can see is with their headlights, not that there was much to see anyway. No one else was as dedicated to drive in the unbearable weather as they are. They finally arrive to Melody’s parents’ home. They may be powerless but at least they’re finally warm.
Grace in the Midst of a Storm

Rebecca J. Phipps as written by Pam Fancher

Even though it has been forty years, many Hoosiers have memories of the Blizzard of 1978. Beginning on Jan. 25th and continuing for two more days, heavy snowfall and high whipping winds heaping drifts from 10 to 20 feet high. Many were left stranded in cars who would eventually be rescued by the National Guard. Roads impassable, snowmobiles and tanks were used to rescue and serve those in need of medical care or supplies.

During those three days, Indiana was a quiet, snowy tundra. Some areas had a total of 40 inches of snow. There are many benevolent stories, of how people pulled together to help one another.

Rebecca Phipps remembers the drive between Muncie and Newcastle was one lane. The drifts on both sides of the road were so high it felt like driving through a tunnel.

Soon, she and twelve others would be stranded for the next three days at the Tower Lounge where she worked. Looking out a window, the only vehicles were snowmobiles, or a tank that the National Guard used to rescue stranded motorists who didn’t realize how much snow would fall in such a short amount of time.

There was a bowling alley in the adjoining building to the lounge. The owners opened the lanes for the grateful, stranded people and gave them food until the storm passed. The generosity of the bowling alley owners is heartwarming. In an emergency, it is inspiring to see how people pull together to care for other’s needs. “Even though it was forty years ago, I will never forget that experience,” Rebecca recalls as she tells me her story.

Another tragic storm hit the north-central area of Indiana Jan. 6, 2005. Rain fell to the south, while snow blustered to the north, generating a concentration of ice that was one-inch thick. Barely able to take a step outside without slipping, the trees creaked and crackled, sparkling as if made of glass.

Howling winds gusting 20 to 30 miles per hour, sent frozen, brittle limbs and whole trees falling from the weight of the thick accumulation of ice. About 109,600 Indiana Michigan Power customers were without power stretching over Delaware, Grant, and Randolph counties with the greatest number in Muncie. It would take approximately a week to restore all fix all of the downed power lines.
Rebecca Phipps was at this time, an employee at Ball Hospital working in the kitchen, where she remains currently employed. The whole city was so dark and quiet, no street lights, nothing. All you could hear were the sounds of the crackling ice.

After the power had been out for some time, trucks were brought in to put the refrigerated food. Conveyors were set in place and all of the employees worked together to get the food packed into the trucks. The power would come back on and we’d unload the trucks and put all the food back into the kitchen, then the power would go out again and we would have to load it back into the trucks. This went on for a few days, working extra-long shifts, 5am until 9:30pm, until the storm passed.

Every evening when it was time to go home, they used flashlights to find their way through the pitch darkness in the parking garage. They walked up the ramps because it was too scary to climb the icy stairs in the dark.

After hearing these stories, the most compelling thread of these memories of weather emergencies in Muncie is the way people seem to pull together and work hard; no one is complaining but seem more encouraged to do whatever they can to help one another. It leaves me with a real sense of pride for the kindness of the people in our community.
When Wonder Is Right in Front of You
Mikaela Shipley as written by Claire Bauserman

I was excited as I headed over to the Christian Campus House to meet up with Mikaela Shipley. I heard she had some great stories involving dating in Muncie. I had heard right, but what I didn’t expect was how well everything fit together, leading her to where she is today.

The whole thing starts with the opposite of dating, actually. In her sophomore year at Ball State University, she decided to commit to a No-Boy Semester. This would not only involve saying no to any guy to ask her out, but to avoid needlessly crushing or letting noncommittal guys lead her on by “just talking” via text as well. She’d gotten into a rut with guys like that, and she wasn’t in a good place. Her mom once gave up on guys, then met her father.

“God works like that; once you give up he takes over,” she added.

If it was good enough for her mom, it was good enough for her.

She wanted to get closer to God and she felt that the relationships she’d had beforehand weren’t very helpful with that. The last one before her No-Boy Semester was Chico from CCH. After they went to Friday Night Filmworks together, he promised future dates, stargazing, a chicken dinner... none of those things came true. He met her at the studio where she was working, said she liked him more than he liked her and asked if they could just be friends.

“...Are you gonna cry?” he asked.

“No,” she responded.

“Oh. Okay.”

Later, she went to a conference with Cru, another Christian organization, that Christmas. She felt God was asking her to give him her heart and let him take control; it was then that she felt led to travel to Jamaica for a mission trip. Soon after, she started Appointment with the King: a half-hour quiet time in the morning with God that you definitely don’t want to miss — after all, it’s an appointment with the King! This and the start of the No-Boy Semester was incredibly helpful with her faith; it skyrocketed.
Funnily enough, although she was pretty public about her No-Boy Semester, she was amazed: she’d never asked out so many times! However, she did like the aspect that it was a good excuse to gently turn down guys she wasn’t interested in dating.

On the night of her student art show, she won the Dean’s Purchase Award; one of her paintings is in the College of Fine Arts Dean’s office. She had invited a bunch of friends, but Derrick was the one who came; he even met her parents there. He was very gentlemanly and complimented her art. (Beforehand, he was meeting some of his guy friends for dinner and they were asking why he had to turn down hanging out afterwards to go to Mikaela’s art show. One of them guessed he liked her; his closer friends had no idea!) Mikaela’s mother noticed how sweet he was and asked if she’d considered dating him.

“No!” she replied. “No, he’s just a good friend.”

However, it became apparent that thought wasn’t mutual on his side of things. While on their Spring Break mission trip at New Orleans, he followed her around like a puppy dog!

Later, Derrick decided to ask her out. He had heard about her No-Boy Semester, but he figured as he wasn’t a boy, he was a man, things might work out for him. But Mikaela was going to stick to her guns no matter what. She turned him down, but they still ended up getting lunch together sometimes and became much closer friends.

At one point, Mikaela went home for a visit and brought a friend from Ball State with her. They were sitting on her futon, and her friend asked about a little canvas she noticed. It was a painting Mikaela made her sophomore year of high school four years earlier. She’d painted adjectives and descriptions she’d like to see in her future husband in different colors. Trusting, puts God first, big hands, no tattoos, can play soccer but not too competitive, a man after God’s heart, puts others before himself...

“Oh, my goodness. Derrick matches everything perfect, almost scarily perfect... I’m not attracted to him, but he’s so sweet and perfect!” she gaped. Then she flipped the canvas over. On the back was a slightly different, penciled-in list— he matched everything on that list, too!
Her friend mentioned her lack of attraction worked out; she thought she heard a rumor somewhere that he and some other girl were interested in each other.

“No, that can’t be right. I just can’t see him dating anyone, really, no one’s good enough for him. Not even me. He’s too good.”

When asked why she thought this, Mikaela paused. “I think that’s probably because I’m starting to like him…”

At the end of the semester, around finals (marking the end of the waiting period), Derrick decided to do this right. He asked if she wanted to go down to the river and see the flowers in bloom, take some pictures, and Mikaela agreed. They sat on the river bank, talking and talking.

“I know you said no to me once, but I was wondering if you’d give me a chance to take you out on a date…” he asked.

At this point she really liked him and was attracted to him, so she was so glad he asked. “Yes, I’d love to!” she smiled.

He also offered to give her some financial support for her upcoming mission trip to Jamaica, although he made it clear that this wasn’t a bribe!

The end of that week, the day before graduation, he took her to Texas Roadhouse. Now, she knew about his infamous love for ketchup, everyone joked about it, but what happened next still came as a surprise—she recommended the delicious cinnamon butter that comes with the rolls, he dipped his roll in the butter, then a dollop of ketchup, and into his mouth it went. She almost gagged and gave him a judgmental look.

“Hey, this is what I do!” he laughed.

She was pretty grossed out, but nevertheless the date continued. They went back to his dorm and watched Frozen, which at that point was still pretty new on DVD. During the movie, she noticed that their hands were pretty close together and internally debated if she should reach out further. Would that be too forward? Should I grab his hand?

Wanting to keep the date going, they got on Spotify and started swapping music artists. She realized how much he loved Hillsong and Bethel worship
music; she loved Francesca Battistelli, Casting Crowns, Skillet, and Chris Tomlin. Quite literally, they chatted the night away: it was three o’clock in the morning! They parted ways and went to bed, happy with how well it had gone.

After graduation, they went to a grad party together, taking things a step further and holding hands. The next day, at her parent’s house, he asked if they could be official. Of course, she super-happily said yes.

“After that, the rest is history! We got married!” Mikaela finished, glowing with reminiscence.

I finished typing my notes, pleased. Not only would this make for a great story, but I couldn’t help but smile. Starting out with this project, I was a little unsure with how to proceed. Muncie’s no bustling metropolis or faraway land... but a great story can still come from it. Like Mikaela needing to take some time to reflect and grow before she could recognize the wonderful guy in front of her, I’ve spent almost four years in Muncie, but only now am I looking at it with fondness, not ready to leave. It’s just one of those towns. You have to get comfortable there, make some memories, and all of a sudden, it’s one of the most beautiful places in the world.
**Whimsical Enough**  
Nancy as written by Audrey Bowers

My lungs felt as if they were on fire.  
I was sick like the plague  
participating in Zumba still  
sounded like a worthy endeavor.  
This lady caught my eye  
She had dark hair and purple leggings  
seemed interesting from first glance.  
So I walked over to her,  
Asked her to tell me her story,  
Weird. Whimsical. Whatever.  
Any story of hers would do  
They belonged to her.

A solar eclipse is something like magic,  
to be marveled at, beautiful,  
created by God himself.

 Wonderful, whimsical, a privilege to see,  
something that brought us all together,  
whether we be college students  
or a former elementary school teacher.  
Nancy was that teacher.  
I was that college student.  
We both saw that eclipse, the most recent one  
and so did most people here I would say.  
I watched from the comfort of my laptop  
while she saw it with eyes guarded by glasses.

In Muncie, we had caught mere glimpses  
of this phenomenon,  
most of the 70,000 of us dwelling in Middletown  
I imagine, even the ones  
who were supposed to be working saw it.  
When are you ever going to see this again?  

We expected more than what we received  
but we saw enough to keep our curiosity satisfied  
Muncie is not a busy place nor is it a boring,
but a little weird and whimsical are welcome here in this humble home.

The moon did not completely cover the sun
“It wasn’t a total eclipse”
Nancy declared as she spoke to me still enamored by this event.
“I don’t know if this is whimsical enough” she tells me, doubt apparent in her voice.
“It’s whimsical enough,” I say, and it was, truly.

Whether sitting by the bell tower
or on university green
or outside of an apartment complex
or on the front porch
in Downtown
in Yorktown
or somewhere in between,
most us us gazed
at the wonder above us.

So the special glasses
were a commodity
because the naked eye
could not handle it.
People sat in the grass
or on blankets,
stared up at the sky
in absolute awe,
most with glasses
some dared to look
without them,
didn’t care about the consequences,
would do anything for some beauty.

The world works in mysterious ways
some would say it was the doing
Of our creator, who like the world,
can be difficult to understand.
The moon blocked the sun,  
if only for a moment.  
Complete darkness  
in the middle of the day,  
almost unheard of.  
The light was hidden,  
but not for long.
Dear Michaela
Michaela Upchurch as written by Eileen Porzuczek

In your childhood when your parents take you to Muncie you won’t think about being away from your home in New Castle, Indiana. Instead you’ll be soaking in every magical childhood memory Muncie gives you.

Years later you’ll remember the movie theatre with Baskin Robbins. The memories of going there with your family will flood your mind with nostalgia, memories of sitting in the soft maroon seats and smelling the warm aroma of buttery popcorn. Stopping after the movie to get rich decadent ice cream with your family before the magic is over. You’ll remember being overjoyed whenever your parents took you to Muncie as a special treat.

The drive home from the magical movie theatre and ice cream shop, the one where your parents hit a deer, will stay imprinted in your mind. Not because the impact you felt in the car has left you shaken, but because you have endless empathy for the deer who died that night, an unexpected moment of terror that threw you out of the Muncie magic and back into reality.

You’ll remember running around and playing at Escapades, behind the Walmart off of McGalliard in Muncie. It’ll stick in your mind as a jungle gym focused Chuck-E-Cheese or a McDonald’s Playplace on steroids. All of the tubes and nets and slides twisting and turning throughout the building like a maze. The large glass windows that your mother and father would watch you and your siblings through while you played, a space of their own in a childhood playhouse. You’ll vividly remember the year you were able to have your birthday party there and how cool that made you among your childhood peers. The nostalgia of these adventures will stay with you forever.

If you knew what I know now, you’d know that Muncie would become your home one day. You will want to give back to the magical community of your childhood and you would know working at Apple Tree Child Development Center would allow you the opportunity to do that. You would see all of the young children, mostly two-year olds, learning through play in the magical natural wonders surrounding them. Seeing them play in the mud kitchens, sitting on the logs in the learning/reading forest, and experimenting with growing plants and produce. You and your colleagues working vigorously to hold fundraisers to provide financial aid scholarships for families and toy drives around the holidays for families in need.
In your adulthood you will look back on when your parents used to take you to Muncie and how you didn’t think about being away from your home in New Castle. Instead you’ll be soaking in every unique memory Muncie gives you. Memories that will lead you to Muncie in your adulthood and make you feel like you have found your home. A home where you have a sense of place in the community you loved as a child.

(Downtown Muncie, Photo by Angie Hedman)
Dancing Together
Anonymous as written by Vanessa Miracle-Haro

I accept the invitation to attend a free Zumba class which is held in a church that looks like it may have been a school at one point based on its size. They even have a gym, and this is where the class is held. The fact that the class is free for all Muncie community members is astonishing to me because I have never been in a class for free. While everyone else is in this class to work out, I am in search of someone to interview. After sitting against the wall by the exit for what feels like too long, I decide to join the group and dance.

I used to go to Zumba classes with my mom and I remember the first time we attended a class. After half the class was over, my mom and I were sweating and out of breath while everyone else around us was still smiling and dancing and having a great time. My mom whispered her frustration that the older white women, these *viejitas*, knew how to dance to reggaetón and cumbia better than us—an embarrassing admission since we thought we were supposed to be good at this, with our Latin blood and hips. Instead we just pour out our Latin sweat. Nevertheless, my mom and I continued going to our expensive Zumba classes since we already paid, and it was a great way to trick our body into thinking that working out is fun. It was also a great bonding moment for my mom and I. Eventually, we became like the *viejitas* we were envious of our first time; smiling, having fun, and keeping up.

It’s been years since I danced Zumba, so I was lost in the steps when I went to the free class offered in this church. I forgot to bring a water bottle. My throat is burning, begging for something to drink while the rest of my body begs for a break from the workout. I hog the only water fountain for a good five minutes, and I finally decide to cut my losses and look for anyone who is willing to talk to me. That is when I spot my R. She is sitting down on a brown foldable chair and is wearing her sturdy green jacket. I’m sweating but sit on the floor next to her. I try to ask her if I can interview her but I’m still out of breath and my throat is still burning, so I sit by her in silence and wait and we watch the dancers together.

I finally get my voice back and my breath is back to normal, so I try again, to ask her about her experiences on the weird and whimsical of Muncie. I don’t want her to know how much of an amateur I am right away, that she is the first person I’m interviewing and that the sweat is no longer from the workout but now from my nerves. I decide to try the “fake- it- til- I- make- it” method but it’s hard to hide my stuttering questions and my shaky hands.
She is a bit intimidating, she mainly sits still, not looking at me. She stares at the group of Zumba dancers and only faces me when I pause, scrambling for another question. Since faking it doesn’t work, I finally admit my incompetence and try to laugh it off, saying “I’m a Ball State student” and hoping that it will help thaw her out a bit so that she can take some type of pity on me. It works a bit. She turns a little in her chair and although she is still watching the dancers, she also scooches her body lower to floor where I’m sitting, closer to me.

R talks a little about her childhood passion for fishing and how it grew into an adult passion for camping and hiking and other outdoor pursuits I would normally find to be torturous. I am going camping for the first time for my honeymoon and I’m pretty sure my fiancé threatened to take me fishing. I don’t know much about fishing, but I do know that patience and expectation for disappointment are some traits fishers need—traits I don’t hold. I respect R for her love for fishing, but I don’t understand her frustration with Muncie not allowing people to fish anymore.

I see one of the Zumba dancers move fluidly, she clearly has some type of ballet background. Maybe she was in ballet as a kid and still remembers the lesson that each limb is an extension of the core, not separate entities. Or maybe she was self-taught and was able to grasp the elegant and prestigious dance effortlessly. She is mostly on her toes, never putting weight on her heels, ready to spring to the next step. She looks like one of those puppets held by fish string, all the movements are happening from above and her arms and legs tug against the string, creating tension the puppeteer can’t handle, like a novice fisher accidently catching too big a fish and unable to reel it in. I try to wonder who she is outside of the Zumba class. Ballet dancers tend to be dedicated and hardworking. They tend to be leaders in their field and highly competitive. Maybe she is a business owner, constantly working to get the most sales against big corporations like Walmart. Maybe she is constantly worrying about her finances and what happens to her and her family if she has to close her store. What would bankruptcy do to her credit score? Will she lose her childhood home? Maybe that’s why she is so dang competitive.

R perks up a bit when she talks about her high school days. She was a star softball and basketball player for the high school, and she had fun playing. She wasn’t the most popular in high school, but she also wasn’t an outcast. In fact, since she was good at sports, she was popular among her teammates.
and often invited to parties. She put in many hours into practice, but was there anything practical to do with these sports after school?

Past the ballet dancers, I see a possible tap dancer among the crowd. I used to be a folkloric dancer and I see how she focus more on their feet, making more sound despite wearing sneaker, possibly the quietest shoe. The squeaks are meant to replace the clicks of heels and tap shoes. The muscles on her legs and glutes protrude against her leggings, showing that she doesn’t just dance in Zumba, she does squats, too. she doesn’t just rely on dancing to keep her in shape, she knows there needs to be additional conditioning and constant movement. The tap dancer adds more steps, making a simple jazz step into a more intricate movement where an amateur may trip on if they’re not careful. Can she be a police officer? It would make sense that she would need to work out more since her career demands her to be in pique shape. Or maybe she is mom who takes care of her child with a physical disability. Maybe she has to carry and dress her 150-pound child for school every morning. Maybe she has to push the wheelchair up a steep slope. Maybe that’s why she has such strong legs.

I ask R if she thought about joining a recreational sport of some type, or a league since she enjoyed playing softball and basketball for Muncie Central High School. She looks tired as she turns to me, one of the few times she does. I can see the annoyance in her eyes and is probably trying to imagine the kind of spoiled lifestyle I grew up having, but she is too kind to say these hurtful things to me. Instead she asks me practical questions: who would pay for this league? When will she have time to play? What happens if she hurts herself playing? How is she going to work and make money? Who will take care of her aging parents?

If R was dancing with the other women, she would resemble the dancer who focus on getting the most out of her workouts. She takes the class because she understands the importance of a fit body but doesn’t have time for too much fun. She asks the instructor how each movement helps give her a full body workout because she can’t do cardio and strength workouts at different times. She probably has a meal already ready for after the workout so that she can go home, shower, eat, and prepare for another work day before going to bed. She is practical, responsible. She and R are “real” adults and maybe always were. Like R, she may work at a temp agency, going wherever they need her. Or maybe she works in a retail store or a restaurant where her hours are inconsistent. She probably gets looked down on, treated poorly
because society doesn’t think her job is important, even though customers rely on her constantly.

My privilege seeps out in the interview. Of course, she can’t just go and play in a league for fun after work. Leagues cost money. If injuries occur, there isn’t an insurance that can cover her, she doesn’t have the privilege of working in an office wear she can just sit with a cast on from a bad game of softball. At Ball State, on the other hand, students are encouraged to join recreational sports and clubs. If we are injured, we can count on the health center to fix us up and Charlie Charter or the disability van to take us from one class to the next. Most of us don’t have to work to survive. We may want money for fun and gas, but we don’t need it. R and I live different lives and have different opportunities. She used to love playing sports, but once high school ended, she was forced into adulthood. College students are given more time to be kids and to get involved in activities that interest us. Both are legally adults, but college students rarely act like adults.

While R is like the practical dancers who try to get the most out of their workout, I’m one of the dancers who is there for fun. I laugh when I trip over my feet and when the steps get too complicated, I stop and try to figure out how to catch up by watching the instructor. I listen to the music and try to recognize the singers and even sing along and dance like I am at a club, just having a good time and feeling the vibe of the music. I don’t have the same worries as the other women. I am privileged to not have the same struggles but like the other women, I am also burdened. I am a student who has been in college way too long, unsure of what I want to do. I just know I want to help improve the world. I don’t have enough money to see my parents and my sisters, and my relationship with them is strained. I take my antidepressants ceremoniously, taking it before bed, with tea, with a prayer, and yet I still have days where I can’t get out of bed and get my homework done. I am constantly worried about the safety of me and my partner because although Muncie is a great community, there are still people who don’t think we belong together and I worry about them forcibly separating us, maybe even with weapons.

We all have our own daily challenges. Everyone in the community is going through hardships that differ and are sometimes hard to understand. But in this church gym, when we dance together, we get a break from life for a moment and get a chance to enjoy the class. We get to make real connections with real people who are different from us but are still overfilled with compassion and love for our neighbor. This place is a home away from
home and gets people a chance to confess to others their nightly worries. It reassures them that no matter what we are going through, we don’t have to dance alone.

(Photo: College Avenue United Methodist Church, taken by Angie Hedman)
Sweet Reminiscence
Joshua Rush, as written by Whitney Kendall

When I was young, before middle school, before I started playing football, before I learned life can be messy and at times painful enough to almost tear us apart, my mom would take me and my brother and my sister out for an evening of fun a couple of times a month. She’d take us to Prairie Creek Reservoir just outside of town shortly before sunset, where we’d first go to Hunnicutt’s for ice cream. My mom would get an Oreo or chocolate swirl, my brother whichever our mom got, and my sister blue moon. I was the odd one out. I would always get a blue slushie. I didn’t like ice cream then, or at least I thought I didn’t.

After we finished our treats, we’d all pile in our red Dodge minivan and hit the hills of the reservoir. They were massive and never seemed to end. Our mom would speed over one hill after the next, just going wherever the roads would take us. We were going about 70 miles per hour. As she started up each hill, she’d hit the gas, then slow down right at the top so we’d hang there suspended for a moment. It was like riding a rollercoaster. And in the moment before we fell back to the ground, it felt almost like flying. It was kind of like the feeling I’d one day get when playing football, the rush between running at the opposing quarterback and opening my eyes to find the quarterback on the ground. I didn’t yet have a care in the world, and I felt like I could do anything.

With the sunset playing in the sky, it was beautiful, perfect.

We’d stay out ramping hills for a while, and then we’d go to our grandparents’ house. Our grandparents had a massive garden and a small orchard. There were two grape vines, a few apple and walnut trees, tomatoes, corn, strawberries, cabbage, green beans, and other plants I can’t remember anymore. We even had a plum tree for a while; our grandpa eventually cut it down, and we were sad, but it was time for that tree to be in peace.

But we’d go to our grandparents’ house and since our family was filled with competitive athletes, we’d set up a volleyball net. Everyone would play and hang out with the smells of the garden and trees around us—earthy, tangy, but also sweet. And every time, my sister would challenge our mother to a game, trash-talking her, telling her she was going to beat her, but every time,
our mother whooped my sister. Getting older didn’t mean she’d forgotten all those years of playing volleyball in high school and college.

We’d stay there for hours before finally going home.
This was a great time. A truly magical time.
One of the best parts of my childhood.

*And I wouldn’t have traded it for anything.*

(Heekin Park Swings, photo by Angie Hedman)
Home of Hardworking Women
Lucille Privett as written by Claire Bauserman

Upon arriving at Bethel Pointe Health Rehabilitation Center, I was lucky to be introduced to Lucille Privett. She had some great memories to share with me. I found her stories about living as a young working woman particularly fascinating. Perhaps that is because I will be starting my own career soon.

I sat in a folding chair across from her with my laptop on my lap, eagerly typing her every word.

“So, are there any jobs you had you’d like to talk about?” I asked, preparing another bullet point on the list of notes.

Lucille thought carefully. “I worked at a packing place— Kuhner’s…? Marhoefer’s…? For bacon and ham. It was Kuhner’s, then Marhoefer’s.” She nodded. “It’s on the corner of McGalliard, and I want to say Elm. It’s just an old building they should tear down, the old packing place. But I enjoyed working there! I wrapped hams and—” She shook her head with a smile. “Cold, it was really cold. I had a nice group of people to work with. I worked with Ruth Stone, that’s about the only one I remember, and we roomed together in an apartment for about three years when our husbands were in the service. She had a little boy.”

“Did you have kids at that time, too?” I asked.

“I didn’t have kids then,” she replied. “One was born in ’45, the other in ’46; I had them eleven months apart. I went back to work when my kids were well, one was three, and the other four, I think. My husband and I worked at the same place, Goodyear. He’d work daytimes, I went in at the same time he got off, and the girls at the office would watch Judy and Gene. That was during the war and they made tank— something, those big tanks that has the round wheels on them, I guess. We made the tank tracks.”

I glanced up from my laptop, imagining real life Rosie-the-Riveters.

“There was usually about six or eight girls on this track and the maybe three on one side, three on the other. They were heavy; we made the tank tracks. They would come down on this belt and we would put the end pieces on and it’d take both of us to lift it, then we’d put it on a cart. Then, I worked at Ball Hospital for fourteen years. I worked up in the lab at the hospital. It was
pretty nice, I enjoyed it. I retired at the day I was sixty-two. I retired, and my husband retired the day after I did. That’s when we started traveling.”

I smiled. “My grandparents love to travel. I bet that was exciting!”

“Yes, I think so, excited to start traveling and take a break.” She chuckled as another memory came to her. “We started a trip right away; we were going to see my sister in Phoenix. We got out on the bypass, it was blocked off, and my husband got too close to the side. It just ripped the awning off and we had to turn around and go back!”

After thanking her for taking the time to speak with me, it occurred to me that we’ve both had our start with our careers in Muncie, whether that be through college courses or jumping straight into the workforce. Considering how much things have changed since her stories, it makes me wonder what Muncie will look like seventy or so years from now. However, from what I’ve gathered, Muncie natives (like Lucille herself) are the industrious type, and I think that’s one thing that’s staying the same.
Meaningful Encounters
Jennifer Mearns as written by Claire Bauserman, Vanessa Haro – Miracle, Eileen Porzuczek, and Janie Obrochta

And a Muncie retirement home

Contains its own hidden marvel,

The spriteliest of souls,

102 going on 20,

Replete with daily high heels

And an excellent fashion sense,

A love of hearty steaks and wine,

And more energy

Than the Energizer Bunny himself.

A cookie said it all:

“She leaves a little sparkle

Everywhere she goes.”

—Excerpt from Small Town Wonders by Whitney Nicole Kendall

I talked to my father about aging today. Until recently, I have considered him the most optimistic person I know. At 90 years old, with eyes and ears failing and shuffling with the aid of a walker, he lives by the Serenity Prayer and focuses on the things he can do rather than the things he can’t. But I recently met his match. My new friend, Betty Kendall, a youthful and spunky 102-year old, whom I aspire to be like when I grow older. She amazes me with how she moves and holds herself together. It’s like she should be younger than her actual age, bringing rays of sunshine to everyone she meets. Going on about her to my father, he suggests, “Maybe she’s a robot?” I started laughing at the thought, but knowing her, I knew for a fact she could never be a robot with such a genuine personality.
I met Betty Kendall while enjoying the football kickoff dinner in Worthen Arena at Ball State University.

As the wife of the Ball State University President, I am introduced to many people, so I was surprised when Betty walked right up to me and introduced herself.

“I’m so glad to meet you!” I exclaimed.

“Actually, I was coming to see who was wearing the cute houndstooth pencil skirt—

and it was you!” She replied with a smile.

We were fast friends. Every time we meet, I am enchanted by her optimism. Betty’s not what you’d expect from a woman her age. She lives in independent care at Westminster Village a retirement community in Muncie.

My husband and I invited her to see a live production of Cinderella at Ball State. She came to our home for dinner before the show. Betty ate a full meal of salad, steak, fish, and —wine. She left enough room for a rich chocolate dessert and was ready for a late night. I was tired and afraid I might fall asleep during the play, but not Betty.

When Betty was a teenager, she and her parents moved to Muncie in a horse and buggy. Can you imagine seeing a town transition from horse and buggies to mechanical cars? Everything would change and never be the same— it’d be like the shock of going from wall phones to smartphones times a billion.

At one point, Betty told me that her birthday was coming up on Valentine’s Day. Her husband, who was an executive for GM, had passed in the 1970s, but for her birthday, a gentlemen friend would be picking her up to go to the country club.

“Oh, is this a romantic thing?” I asked.

“Oh, no! It’s not a date. He used to always take his mother to visit the country club, but now that she’s passed on, I’m going to be his mother for the day!”

In the beginning of February, I went to Cleveland to visit my daughter. While out walking one morning, we came across this little café where I spotted these mesmerizing quotes on the Valentine’s Day cookies. The one that
caught my eye said, “She leaves a little sparkle everywhere she goes.” I couldn't help but think about Betty when I read the cookie. In that moment, I remembered her birthday was on February 14, so I called her up and asked,

“Can I come in and visit you when I get back from Ohio?”

She said “Oh, yes. I would like that.” in her soft yet tenacious voice.

After she agreed, I bought her one of those cookies. I couldn’t wait to give it to her when I got back.

I’m interested in getting more involved with visiting and chatting with senior citizens, especially the ones in assisted living. It’s been said many times that children are the future, but we should never forget the value of wisdom from the generations before us. With someone as kind and cheerful as Betty Kendall ready to tell a tale or lend an ear, we would all do well to learn from her, and how she goes about leaving a little sparkle everywhere she goes.
(Betty Kendall, Photo by by Eileen Porzuczek)
She Leaves a Sparkle Wherever She Goes: A Renga Poem
Betty Kendall as written by Eileen Porzuczek

Ever-smiling eyes
tell the story of a
long well-lived life in Muncie.

Horseback riding adventures
with younger brother in tow,

packed peanut butter sandwiches
and adventures
unknown.

Sometimes riding bareback too
roaming all over the land.

Country living wasn’t that bad,
but she still felt
the absence of playmates.

Going to high school in town
surrounding herself with friends

Dancing, Dancing, Dancing
time away
with the Violet Girl’s Club

Listening to wonderful
music at the Hotel Robert

Getting her
elementary education degree
from Ball State

Going out west one summer
stopping a lot on route 66

But the trip had to end,
a job was waiting for her
where she met Tom
A wedding on Thanksgiving, all her students attended

Six months later
Tom was taken away into service with the army

Teaching no longer once Sally was born awaiting their move

Living in Oklahoma City with Tom near base was family life

Mary Ann born in July, added to the hanging diapers

The wind moving them with it’s harsh blows it was time to go back home

Tom was gone again, this time in the service overseas

Living in Muncie alone until 1945 by Ball State

Tom came back, they moved to Detroit for his GM job

Learning new ways to be there for her neighbors gave fresh perspective

Retirement crept up fast and Muncie was always home

Settling in a small farmhouse on Wheeling
and ideal place for home

Widowed fifty years long,  
her joy is now her grandsons

Ever-smiling eyes  
and a vibrant soul  
keep her living life fully

Betty leaves her sparkle  
With everyone who meets her.

***A Renga is a poem with a distinct alternating pattern. It begins with a three line stanza consisting of seventeen syllables, followed by a couplet consisting of seven syllables on each line. This pattern is then repeated until the author feels the poem is complete. Students in the classroom contributed to the Betty Kendall Renga.
Pastel Houses
B. Fitzgerald as written by Vanessa Haro-Miracle

Muncie isn’t tropical or colorful like Colombia or Mexico with houses painted in pastel colors. These Latin American countries are home to tropical forests, a blend of indigenous and Spanish cultures, and, of course, color. Betsy has traveled to different countries but always returns home and always will. To her, the beauty of Muncie is in her community and the care she feels in her hometown, but she does see an economic divide forming and disrupting the peace and love she is familiar with.

With one of the schools closed already, Betsey is worried about her job security as a high school Spanish teacher. There is also a safety concern with her career as a public-school teacher in this country, a country that allows 1.5 school shootings a week. Does she have to offer her life in exchange for her students one day? What if she can’t save all of her students one day?

Besides gun safety, there are children who sometimes have to spend their weekends concerned about how they’re going to eat. Muncie has the highest child poverty rate in Indiana which can affect Betsey’s students’ focus in her class. It’s no secret that the city of Muncie has plenty of deficits to resolve so Betsey relies on her faith to give her strength to continue to help her students and community. Still, she is overwhelmed in despair from the current state of Muncie, and often asks other members of the church pray with her, for her. So that she isn’t alone taking care of her students, her community. She can be seen volunteering in the church’s “Go Saturday” activity where they go to different organizations and volunteer.

Betsy also helps communities in other countries when she travels to them by planting coffee trees and distributing water filters. Maybe Betsy feels at home wherever she goes because she sees hers in them. When she looks at tropical forests, she can maybe imagine the assortment of trees that cover Muncie. When she sees the blend of different cultures in these countries, she may be able to remember how all of her students are a blend of different cultures and environments that make each individual memorable. When she looks at the pastel homes of the citizens in these countries, does she remember the colorful houses on Jackson Street? And just like Muncie, these different communities are in need of help from other compassionate people.

Maybe she can hope that other people will help make Muncie a united home for everyone like she has for other towns. There are already wonderful
scholarships in place to invite both residents and Ball State students to help solve some of Muncie’s issues. We just need to keep fighting and solving the problems that Muncie faces and provide a shoulder when hope seems lost.

(Muncie Community, Photo by Angie Hedman)
Staying in the Magical Place
Amber Main as written by Eileen Porzuczek

Growing up in Muncie was full of whimsical wonders and childlike paradises. I have so many rich and vivid memories of my favorite places in Muncie as a kid. Unfortunately, some no longer exist, but the ones that still stand make me feel nostalgic for my youth whenever I pass them by.

I remember playing with the other kids in my neighborhood. We would always find something to do or some adventure to entertain ourselves. Once we got a little older our parents let us to walk to Walmart and Lowe’s by ourselves because they were close to our house. We would walk in together through the large enchanted sliding doors with of Lowe’s and pretend that we were adults. We’d pretend that we had a house of our own. I remember feeling so adult walking through the long industrial aisles. If we went to Walmart we would pretend the same thing and act like we were shopping for groceries. In some ways we yearned to be older, to be adults doing adult things. Decisions, Decisions, Decisions. Adults make a lot of decisions, maybe stay here in my childhood for a little while longer.

***

My family would occasionally go to Burkies, a drive-in restaurant built in 1954, and feast on ginormous decadent sandwiches. Whenever we went there, we would order a combination of their burgers and tenderloins. Their burgers towered high and dripping with loads of melted cheese. Thick patties of beef completely smothered and accompanied by whatever other condiments you could dream of. Crispy thick cut bacon, tomato slices, lettuce, onions, pickles, the list goes on and on. The tenderloins they served made the burgers look like a kid’s menu item. They were thin, juicy, crispy, and inches bigger than the bun sandwiching them. Then pile on some toppings and condiments, you have an amazing sandwich. I remember every time we went their none of us could even finish a sandwich by ourselves. This meant we usually got three and split them between the four of us. They were enormous, but man, were they good.

***

Going to the grocery store was always a special treat as a kid, especially if we were going to Meijer or Ross Grocery. At the time there was still a McDonalds in the Meijer, I remember the enchanted sliding doors opening to reveal the
smell of fast food. Almost immediately its tempting scent filled my nostrils. If I was good my mother would get me and my sister McDonald’s before we left the store. Whenever we got McDonalds there I thought it was so funny to be eating it inside the grocery store. I would always think to myself how silly it was, but at the same time I absolutely loved it. Although not even the whimsical McDonalds could compare to the spectacle that was Ross Grocery. I remember walking through the grand doors to see a giant aquarium tank. No, not like little tanks you see in a grocery store where people can buy fish. I’m talking about an actual industrial sized aquarium tank with an assortment of beautifully colored fish. Striped fish, yellow fish, big fish, the combinations could go on forever. Each of the fish glistened with beauty in the tank against the reflection of the fluorescent lights. I would stand there in complete astonishment as they all swam around, flinging their little fins. It was so stimulating as a child to look into the tank and see fish of all kinds mingling together. I could’ve sat there and watched them swim around for hours, wondering what they were thinking or doing. The fish and the aquarium tank never ceased to entertain me. If that wasn’t enough wonder for one grocery store, they also had a drive-thru donut window. Yes, a drive-thru donut window where you could get donuts handed to you without getting out of your car. Hmmm, just thinking about it makes my mouth water for the fluffy fried frosted dough.

***

My grandma would take me to all the cheap movies at the movie theatre perpendicular to Hobby Lobby with a Baskin Robbins right there, but it’s closed now. One time we got there over an hour early. Shocked by our mistake and misconception of time we weighed our options, to go home and come back or just to stay. We ended up deciding to stay and stuff our faces with the movie theatres warm fluffy buttery popcorn. During the countless annoying movie theatre ads during that hour, I was still content eating popcorn, sitting in the comfy cushioned seats, and enjoying my time with my grandma.

(P.S. We even snuck in some candy too!)

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“Back in Muncie again.” I thought when I returned home after completing my degree at Purdue University. At first I was bummed about coming home, but it didn’t take long for the city I loved to remind me why I loved it so much whenever I was there. I knew I would never be able to find another place so special to me. So, I decided that settling in Muncie as an adult was a perfect
option for me. Although I knew this would be a challenge because I didn’t stay close with any of my childhood friends, but in a place like Muncie, where the community is so supportive of each other it is not a difficult task to make friends if you just put in an ounce of effort.

I now live downtown with my girlfriend Michaela and we go out to the bars downtown all the time. I mean Muncie was fun as a kid, but my experience in Muncie has been even better as an adult. It’s so comforting to feel like you have a sense of place and Muncie gives me that sense of place. A place where I can feel comfortable in my own skin and be myself, knowing that there are so many people who have my back and will help me. I guess that’s why when I came back I from college I chose to stay here. I couldn’t be happier with my decision to do so. To me Muncie will always be that magical place from my childhood. Now, it’s just a little more grown up and I am too.
(Photo: Burkie’s Drive In, taken by Angie Hedman)
When Christina arrived for our meeting at her office in the Burkhardt Building on Ball State’s campus, the first thing I noticed was her purse. It had the Star Wars symbol of the Rebellion on it. I complimented her on it, and when we stepped into her office, I couldn’t help but be reminded of my own bookshelf, also covered with pop culture doodads. I expected nothing less from the owner of Muncie’s Aw Yeah Comics shop, a whimsical place where I’d met her a couple times before.

Once I took a seat and we got to talking, she started with a story about a fellow professor. When teaching at Ball State in grad school, Christina started using comics as course material. Dr. Cailin Murray was her instructor; they were friends. Then she found out Christina was using comics in class. To say she was skeptical of the use of “Y: The Last Man” when teaching about anthropological culture change would be an understatement. Dr. Murray pointed in her face: “I’m watching this.” Luckily, it was a huge success. Dr. Murray started wanting to use comics for her own classes and learn more about them, and who better to learn from than a comic shop owner? The two professors hung out more and started talking. Eventually, she moved in above the shop and is now one of her two very best friends.

“The other one,” Christina continued, “I met when I was invited to give a keynote speech for Ball State graduate school.” It was the day of the speech, and she walked into Hayloft downtown. Debbe Caine, who she’d seen a few times before in the shop, came up to her and asked if she could help her with anything.

“Yes, I have to get an outfit to wear for my speech,” Christina said.

“We’re low on stock, but we’re getting more Tuesday. When do you need it?” Debbe asked.

Christina checked her watch. “Ten minutes.”

“Oh, my gosh!” Debbe exclaimed. She scrounged around, scrounged around and finally found something: a black top with black and tan palazzo pants with a tan scarf.
It was at this point that I had to ask what palazzo pants were— they’re those long, flowing pants that look like skirts.

“Oh, right, I used to have a pair of those. Sorry to interrupt— and then what happened?” I asked.

Christina bought the outfit, and Debbe told her to come back sometime and let her know how the speech went. Eventually they talked some more; they had a lot in common both being women business owners in a small town.

“Which isn’t that weird in Muncie. There are a lot of women business owners, but it’s nice to have a sounding board... but yeah, Debbe still tells that story all the time!” Christina paused with a smile. “Muncie gave me my two best friends.”

As I headed back to my dorm room and my comic-stuffed shelf, I realized Christina and I had even more in common— I’d met some of my best friends here, too. And while four years seems short compared to the span of a lifetime, I don’t doubt that, like hers, these are friendships that will last. There’s something about a small town like Muncie that has a funny way of bringing people together.

***Aw Yeah Comics is located in beautiful downtown Muncie. Aw Yeah! can’t wait to meet you and talk comics. Come visit them at 107 N. High Street located between Dan’s Downtown Records and Savage’s. Learn more about them and check out upcoming events on their webpage https://awyeahcomics.com/muncie-indiana/
Loose gravel gently shifted beneath my shoes as I approached the rain stained entrance. The door was heavier than I had anticipated, and a sturdy pull was necessary to release it from the frame. Greeted with an aromatic mix of bleach, incense, and cigarette smoke, I didn’t know if I should inhale deeply, or exhale immediately. After a moment of brief processing, I chose to inhale. My goal was to get a cherry coke with ice and nothing else.

To the left was a five-foot-tall display of porn magazines, and to the right was motor oil, gloves, and funnels. From the speakers above, the familiar sound of Nirvana was playing loudly. Tightly lined aisles of shelves were filled with food, beauty products, socks, and any other basic essentials you could possibly want or need. The place was packed, but I couldn’t determine if anyone worked there. A cash register, and a 32-ounce styrofoam cup sitting on the front counter were the only clues that pointed to an employee existing...somewhere.

What caught my eye during the quick scan was an area of tall bins that were ahead and to the left. I don’t have proof, but firmly believe a golden light was emitted from those bins that day, a light that pulled me in and refused to let me look away. At 17 years of age, I discovered the USED music section at The Discount Den! My little brain and heart nearly exploded in front of a dozen strangers on that dirty rain smeared floor. Before my eyes were hundreds of used cd’s, some from bands I knew well, and others from bands that were a complete mystery. My hands shook as my fingers glided along the worn and cracked cases of those beautiful jewels, stopping occasionally to pick one up for closer inspection.

At some point during my life changing moment, a black curtain from the back wall swung open and spit out an employee wearing a Nine Inch Nails t-shirt. He asked if I needed help, and I mumbled back an incoherent line of word ramble. After selecting a cd (Depeche Mode), I continued exploring the random contents of that tiny room. The drink machine was located in the back corner, with rolled posters in a tall box on the floor to its right. Without hesitation, I treated myself to my very first 32-ounce cherry coke from “The Den.” My cup was an identical match to the one I spotted earlier on the front
counter that belonged to Mr. Nine Inch Nails. He worked his register magic, handed me my change, and told me to have a good day.

The number of cd’s I bought from The Den during my days of young adulthood cannot be counted or listed, and I fear to know the total number of cherry cokes I consumed during that span of time. What I do know is that The Den was a peculiar slice of convenience store magic that sat on a busy stretch of concrete in the BSU village during the 1990’s. In that room, new music was discovered, friendships were built, and endless ounces of caffeinated liquid pleasure were enjoyed. As I walked away from those rain stained doors, I clearly remember feeling an odd sense of joy that I’m certain countless others felt before me. Yes Mr. Nine Inch Nails, it was indeed a good day.

(Photo taken by Angie Hedman)
A Muncie Fairytale
Anonymous as written by Aidan Sacks

So, my mother, the most preppy child that ever existed, and my father, a hippie Indiana kid fell in love. I am a product of them therefore; I feel I have the rights to relay, quite possibly, the cutest love story ever to have occurred in the small city of Muncie. I also think this should be made into a film, so I tell it to anyone when I have the chance.

As you may have gathered, my parents are complete opposites. My mom was a creative, dedicated, and always present during class kinda gal. Dad on the other hand, slept his way through school when he had the opportunity. They had a class together in college and everyday dad would go to the front of the class, kick back, relax, and nap. My mom would make fun of him like clockwork. Classes completed, and time progressed until eventually they became accidental neighbors.

Dad wasn’t big on the whole cooking thing during the accidental neighbor’s phase of their relationship. So, he made friends with the neighbor gals who thought, “this guy needs hot home cooked meals.” A person can’t live off frozen burritos for all of college. I mean he was always over taking their food anyways, so why not just make it specifically for him? After sharing many meals, soon their romance began. Well, the romance everyone could see besides my parents. The sweet southern bell home cooking’ roommates eventually spelled it out to the two oblivious lovers as they were licking opposite sides of the same ice cream cone. And so began a relationship. You may be thinking, wow, yea, what a love story. They were accidentally neighbors and blind to an inevitable love. How dreamy. Well, hang tight.

On my mom’s 21st birthday, the plan was for them to road trip to Cincinnati and spend her birthday with her brother. They started the night off with a romantic dinner, laughs, and legal drinks. When dinner time was coming to a close a small private plane landed outside of the restaurant. Surprise! My dad rented a plane to fly them both to their road trip destination. How he managed to do this is beyond me. My dad is utterly terrified of flying, but I guess love can make you do crazy things.

They took off into the night sky when my dad did the unimaginable. He looked at my mom and said, it’s because he didn’t want their love to be marked by any piece of land that could be destroyed, but the air will always be there and asked my mom to marry him. As you could have guessed, mom
said yes and dad was overjoyed. The scariest part was over and now they just had to do the easiest part, which was to spend the rest of their lives together.

The rain was heavy as they touched down in Cincinnati, but that didn’t stop them because their hearts were as well. Realizing their ride was probably nowhere close to being in the area they weren’t sure what to do. They could have grabbed a taxi or found somewhere dry to hold up. Instead they walked to the closest picnic table they could spot and waltzed on top of it, in the rain, until their friends arrived. My parents are the cutest. I freaking hate them.

This story might not have ended in Muncie, but it did start here. I think that’s what I love most about Muncie, it’s where my parents met and fell in love. It’s where they decided to raise my two siblings and me. Even though I don’t plan on staying here for college I’ll always have a connection to this place, and I owe that to them.
Smooth Landings and Batten Down the Hatches
Todd W. Shoup as written by Pam Fancher

We had flown to Western Tennessee, made one stop, then departed for Muncie in the mid-afternoon. There was a very strong storm system moving through Indiana all the way to Tennessee. If we were going to beat it back, it wouldn’t be by much. As we came north, we made a stop in Southern Indiana at Madison to drop off one of his family members.

The radar was showing lightning strikes that were lit up like a Christmas tree. It was clear that we would not be able to beat the storm. Cincinnati air traffic control was not permitting any aircraft in the area.

Mr. Fisher was a type-A personality and had a famous temper. He was the President and Chairman of the Ball Corporation. He took one look at the radar and said, “Oh, that’s not too bad. We can make it in there.”

I had already made up my mind that it wasn’t worth the risk to try to get to Muncie. So without saying anything to Mr. Fisher, I transmitted to the Cincinnati Approach Control that we were going to divert into Cincinnati, and they reluctantly allowed us to land. I reached over to the autopilot controller, took the heading selector, and spun it to the East. Mr. Fisher turned and glared at me, but didn’t say anything.

When we landed, I said that we should take a look at the radar to see if we can figure out how to proceed. I could tell he was not pleased, but he still didn’t say anything. We walked in and he was right on my heels. We looked at the weather on the computer and there was a bright yellow/orange band of weather running right through Muncie and extending almost to Buffalo, NY. as far South as Texas. He took a look at it over my shoulder, patted my on the back and said, “Good call. Let’s go to dinner.”

When we finally arrived in Muncie the next day, we found that there had been tornados. If we had flown through we would probably not have survived.

The Fishers spent the Winters in Florida. Once, another pilot and I were tasked with picking up Mr. and Mrs. Fisher from their property and flying them back to Muncie. I had never met them before that day. We met on the
ramp. We were taking four of us on a plane that seats eight. The Fisher’s rolled up with two vehicles, one for them and the other was full of their stuff.

It took some time to load all of their baggage onto the plane. One of the last things they loaded was Mrs. Fisher’s prized potted plant. She was very clear that she wanted that plant taken care of. We didn’t have any kind of tie down straps or anything, so we decided that a spot between a couple of the rear seats was the safest place for the plant. The flight would have one stop in Knoxville, Tennessee.

I knew that I might have my work cut out for me with Mr. Fisher when we took off in Naples Florida. The runway is relatively short there. Mr. Fisher had not applied full power on the take-off run, he had not flown in a while, and we were not picking up as much speed as we needed. So I reached over and pulled the throttle to the proper setting. I got a little bit of a look from him, but he didn’t say anything.

We were getting ready to land in Knoxville. Mr. Fisher said that he could see the airport from his seat. I reported to air traffic control that we were coming in. They cleared us to land. Nothing unusual. But as we closed in on the airport, we were still very high. As he made his turn to parallel the runway, I physically could not see the runway from my side of the airplane. I had no indication of where we were in relation to the runway. He turned 90 degrees, then he made his final approach, but we were still at too high an altitude.

I found out later that it is common for Mr. Fisher to land the plane this way. He comes in then pulls the throttle all the way back and the plane quickly decelerates.

He reached over and put the landing gear down and the landing flaps to full. Then he put the nose down. We had a very fast, nose down, approach to the runway.

Of course, this made Mrs. Fisher’s plant topple over, along with some golf clubs. The first indication I had that that stuff was flying around was when a golf club flew forward and hit the instrument console.

His approach was a little unorthodox, nothing I had ever been taught, but it worked for him. He had the smoothest landing. You would never expect it from such a non-conventional approach.
Mrs. Fisher was so mad that her plant had toppled over she hit the other pilot in the leg and yelled, “I told you this would happen, I told you!”

Over time, we developed a personal style of working the cockpit. I rarely had to tell him to do something.

We flew together many years until he passed away. He never yelled or anything like I was warned about. We learned to work together just fine. He was a brilliant man, very knowledgeable. We could go anywhere in the United States and he could look down and say- Oh that’s such and such town. He had an amazing memory and knowledge of history. He was in his late 80’s when we met, and I believe he was 95 or 96 when he died.

(Photo used with permission from Todd Shoup)
**Made in Muncie**
Ali Kline as written by Kayln Reyer

At the front of the corner shop were three women sculpting their newest creations, and they turned warmly to welcome customers in. Ali was the first to speak. She wore a pink Made in Muncie shirt and floral flowy pants despite the February weather conditions and her dark hair fell on her shoulder in a natural wave.

“Welcome to Made in Muncie,” she said. “Have you guys been here before?” The red door closed behind us as we shook our heads. “Are you interested in painting pottery?”

The room was bright and colorful. There were shelves surrounding every corner of the room with an array of homemade clay items. Each of the tables were topped with snowmen placemats and a couple dozen paint swatches awaiting future customers. It seemed like there was something for everyone.

“I’ll talk to you, but I don’t have a story,” she admitted, looking to the other women for advice.

“Talk about the woman in Walmart!” One of them urged her. The other murmured agreement and they all began to laugh before any words had rolled off of Ali’s tongue. It was immediately obvious that these women were not only coworkers, but friends.

“I was there a while back and we saw this woman. She looked absolutely obscene with blood-red lipstick that was off her lips and makeup all over her face,” Ali began. “She starts playing this trashy rap music from a boombox in her cart. Everyone was staring at her. It was really something.”

Her hands molded the clay, turning what was originally a lump into something resembling the beautiful pottery lining the shelves. “I wouldn’t expect anything else from Muncie.”

Considering the question longer, Ali tells us, “This place is magical. There’s a lot of learning involved.”

She explains how they are each trained to work with the products. As Ali talks about her job, it doesn’t sound like work. It sounds like she’s returning each
day to a place that she cares about, with people that want to sit around a table and swap stories. The store is more than Ali’s place of work; it’s where she can bond over funny moments and connect with the people in her community that she cares about most.

***Made in Muncie is a locally owned pottery shop located in downtown Muncie. Often called “paint your own pottery,” the store is known for its friendliness and offering a wide variety in workshops, parties, camps, and private lessons. Made in Muncie strives to enable everyone to enjoy making memories that last. Learn more about their website: http://www.madeinmuncie.com
Coming and Going
Kim True, as written by Matthew Swain

At Cornerstone Center for the Arts, people are always coming and going. It’s how things have always been in the old building, a former Masonic temple rumored (and confirmed by several employees, including my girlfriend) to be haunted by up to twenty different ghosts. Whether or not the spirits are coming and going is, sadly, not up to me to decide.

Instead, I’m simply there to talk to community organizer, Kim True. Having lived in Muncie for most of her life, Kim tells me she has several stories about just how weird of a place Muncie is; “I should probably warn you, I don’t know if everything I’m gonna tell you is safe for work. Or school,” she says. Sitting behind her desk, surrounded by stacks of paper and filing cabinets, everything around us looks strangely peaceful. I wouldn’t describe the room itself as organized, but I get the impression from her that she could reach out and find anything she might need without much work.

Leaning back, Kim starts. “Well, after graduating from Ball State, which, if you’re from Muncie and you go to college, that’s pretty much where you’re gonna go, I worked up to three jobs at a time. I would sell people water pipes and stuff at a local smoke shop, then I’d serve them drinks at Doc’s that same night, then in the morning when they were hungover, I’d be serving them coffee.” It’s strange to hear, because I can’t imagine a time where Kim didn’t have a desk.

“Oh, so, when Muncie Gras was still sort of a new thing, I would work some of the radio tents for it, just keeping things organized, helping the bands that came through, the usual. It was the end of February, and I remember it was pouring outside, just non-stop rain, and I was dressed like a pink flamingo.” She chuckles at this, and seeing the professional before me, I can’t help but laugh with her. “It was really great, because people were just coming and going, and our band had brought in a really good crowd, but the last band’s drummer had a little too much to drink and couldn’t physically tear his set down. So while the rest of the band got him into the van, I had to take apart his set.” Between both of our laughter, when I ask her if the crowd found this strange, she just shook her head. “Nope. He matched the environment pretty well.”

The conversation shifts to Doc’s, a bar and music venue that has since closed (now, the space is called Valhalla, which, admittedly, caters pretty well to my
testosterone). Immediately, her eyes lit up. “Oh, man,” she says, “I could talk forever about Doc’s.” The story goes to another night, another Muncie Gras. “It was like, midnight, and we were having a normal Friday, but suddenly people just started pouring through our doors. It just didn’t end, I wound up staying way late just to keep things running smoothly.” That night, they made 26,000 dollars at the bar. “I remember the three of us, the people who sort of ran things that night—I was a manager at that point—we sat in the booze closet and passed around a bottle of Jim Beam. The owner, Mike, he just looked at me and said, ‘Welp, we did it.’ And I walked home about seven the next morning. Oh, I was in a tutu that time.”

We start to talk a bit more generally about things, Muncie in particular. “How do you feel now?” I ask. “Like, has it changed a ton in your time here?”

She chews her lip a bit, thinking. “Well, yeah, I mean, the businesses have closed or changed hands and names and branding, all that. Where Doc’s used to be, I mean, twenty years ago nobody would set foot on that street. Things have changed a lot.” Many of the people Kim worked with, partied with, or otherwise knew have left town, working as professional musicians, promoters, and entrepreneurs. “That’s all part of growing up, though,” she says warmly. “We were all just drunk hippies who didn’t know how we made it through those five years, but we all just stuck with our guts and now we’re making differences in the community and around the country.”

I think of those differences in Kim’s life now, how much she’s done. At Cornerstone, she’s put together weddings, galas, community fundraisers, and countless other events for the sole purpose of bringing people together. I look at Kim, and I see someone who lives for the relationships we build and nurture together as a community, through music, drinking, hangovers, and even matrimony. Knowing her story, and just knowing her, it’s safe to say that the community is in good hands.

“Muncie is a place that’s full of passion,” she says. “When I was in college, the big joke around Muncie was that we’re like, ‘just getting there.’ And I know it was supposed to be funny, but at the same time, that’s us. We’re always growing. I guess I just want people to know that Muncie’s got a lot of heart. And just because people are a little weird, doesn’t mean they don’t have big ideas.”
It’s the people with big ideas—people like Kim—that Muncie seems so good at inspiring and gathering. And even as they come and go, we’re lucky to keep some of them, especially Kim.

(Photo, Cornerstone Center for the Arts, taken by Angie Hedman)
Curtains, Coats and the Circus
Laura Williamson as told by Alyssa Clemento

2001 - the year our first son, Peter, was born. We were living in St. Louis, Missouri for Mike’s residency at the time. It was right before 9/11.

2003 - the year our second son, Tristan, was born. Also, the year that Peter was diagnosed with autism. He was losing language and social skills. In the next few years we did everything to help Peter, but nothing was working. Around Christmas time, we received a card from a family friend. She also had a son with autism. She told us how her son was craving milk like crazy, so they took it away from him and his symptoms lessened. We decided to make some dietary changes for Peter. We got rid of dairy and gluten. He had these heroin withdrawal-like symptoms. His eyes looked like he had been beaten up, he had the shakes, he was sweaty. It was hard to watch, but worth it to see him gain language. The doctors didn’t believe us when we told them, but this holistic approach is what did it. Though there are still some leftovers, Peter has no diagnosis today.

In the next couple of years, Peter’s health was our number one priority. Though younger, Tristan had taken on the role of the older brother. He had a way of bringing Peter back to our world and keeping him connected to us.

2007 - the year we moved back to Muncie, and the year Tristan passed away. It was a hot summer but come November it had cooled down. We had moved into this beautiful farmhouse. We knew we would live here forever. One day Tristan had a cold, nothing more than a fever and a runny nose, but I decided to keep him home from preschool. I kept Peter home too just in case. The kids spent all day playing, and Tritan napped around 3. He woke up lethargic; he just wasn’t himself. I called Mike and the doctor and waited for Mike to get home from work. We ate dinner, and Tristan had fallen asleep in my lap at around 7. That seemed odd to me, but I put him to sleep and went back downstairs to go about my night. We were watching t.v. when Mike went to go check on Tristan. He wasn’t breathing. Mike tried to do CPR. He told me not to come upstairs. He screamed for me not to come upstairs. Peter wasn’t awakened by our screaming, which I’m grateful for. We called for the ambulance, and they took an hour to get to us; it had something to do with the county we were living in. I had this vision that they would take those paddles, shock him and everything would be okay. Tristan passed away that night. His death certificate says respiratory failure, but I still don’t know what killed him.
Peter has almost no recollection of this night; we think it’s because of his autism. We are so grateful that he doesn’t hold the same grief that we do. We were hanging on for survival, but Peter’s autism was his life preserver.

We moved Peter out of that room and shut the door. It was decorated like the circus. At this time, I was a stay at home mom, so I had a lot of time to decorate it. The room had these long windows that covered the walls. I bought curtains that made the room look like a tent when the sun shined in. They were almost iridescent.

2008 - the year we reclaimed the room. We took all the circus stuff and got rid of it. After we moved Peter out, we shut the door and we stayed out of that room. It reminded us of Tristan’s death. It reminded us that we failed at our only job, keeping our son alive, but we couldn’t keep the door closed forever.

I thought about burning the curtains in some grand gesture of grief, but that felt like such a waste. They were beautiful. Instead I decided to box them up and put them in the closet of the theater I had started volunteering at. I threw myself into the theater to distract myself from the grief. The anniversary of his death was hard but having the theater to think about made it easier.

2011 - the year the theater did “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.” The whole family had a role. The theater had become something we could all do together. We felt like we were where we were supposed to be. Peter was picked to be one of the eight kids in the kid’s choir, Mike had a role and I was playing Mrs. Potiphar, the temptress. One day during tech week, we were rehearsing; I was wearing my sexy costume, a black dress with a high slit, long dark gloves and a gold pair of high heels; I was feeling good about life.

While we were practicing, Joseph struts out wearing a coat made out of my old curtains. They would be completely unrecognizable to anyone except me. I looked at them, and I felt like someone had punched me in the gut. I couldn’t take in any air. The way the stage lights bounced off of the curtains transported me back to the circus themed room I had created for my boys. It felt like Tristan was still there with us; he was still part of this new life the theater had built for us. All the loss and failure had been turned into something beautiful.
2016 - the year I directed “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.” I used the coat again, and I told this story in the program. I wanted everyone to know that you can take the dark and bring it back into the light.

Now it’s 2018, and I continue to tell this story. I tell you this story in the comfort of Two Cat’s Cafe. I don’t usually cry when I tell it, but something about today was different. I think I just haven’t told it in a while.

We adopted a daughter from China and plan on adopting another. She’s interested in the theater too. We’re going to see Cinderella tonight at Emens Auditorium.

(Photo: Wizards Keep, taken by Angie Hedman)
Grains of Sand
Gladys Shaw, as written by Whitney Kendall

Sands shift in time.
The hourglass fills, grows,
With each year.
91 years.
The world changes,
And she bears witness to it all,
Has watched as 10-cent stores disappeared,
As other stores came and went,
As Walgreens moved from Walnut St.
To W. Jackson, and McGalliard,
And other streets.

She is a collage,
A symbol of humanity,
Built up on pain, and grief, and love,
And everything in between,
Her sands shining multi-colored hues,
Each hue telling a different story

Of a survivor of life.

The greenish-yellow grains tell of sickness,
Of sharing whooping cough
And measles
And chicken pox
With all the other third-graders.
Of being unable to hold
Her precious baby sister,
One of ten children,
Who was so fragile,
So beautiful,
So innocent.

The black tells of grief,
Of losing her son,
Only thirteen years of life,
Snuffed out with an accidental
Pull of a trigger.
And the pain that ensued,
The insanity,
Resulting in a room
In a psychiatric ward, completely bare,
With nothing but a mattress
And bittersweet memories,
And the pills to dull the pain.
Until a fire lit, and the grains burned,
Changed,
Still there but now allowing light
To shine through,
And healing to begin.

The glowing grains,
Almost too bright to look at,
tell of love,
Of 63 years,
Beginning at a square dance,
A handyman
And a girl just wanting to have fun,
Coming together in an
Eternal bond
Surviving even past death.

The flickering shadows
Tell of memories lost,
Of having a father who drifted
Slowly from reality,
And her own memories
Sifting through her fingers,
No matter how careful the touch,
Showing only in brief flashes
Before fading away.

And finally, the gradient blue tells
Of reversal,
Of going from dependent
On her parents,
To having her own children
And leading her own life,
To living in a nursing home
And again needing help
At unexpected times.

But still strong.
Still proud.
Still unbroken.
She took the hand she was dealt
And forged on, owning it,
Owning her pain and sorrow
And love,
Filling and smoothing
Cracks in the glass
So she can continue to collect
her grains of sand.
Stars in Muncie
Quintin Bowen as written by Vanessa Haro-Miracle

When I ask Quintin, a 15-year-old with shaggy brown hair and a pure heart, what he thinks is unique and cool about Muncie, I see him trying to find something, anything, that can fit that description. The interview is taking place at our church, during our Mardi Gras celebration; the adults get to relax and enjoy good company while children serve mouth-watering, perfectly circular pancakes amidst the energizing background of jazz music. The final song of the event starts playing, the conga dance. The pastor carries her toddler and they lead the dance toward the pancakes, moving in high speed to the point where people have trouble holding on to their partners’ hips to keep the line formed. Around them, the hall where service is usually held is covered in bead necklaces, and people of every age pair their regular clothes with dazzling Mardi Gras masks. It’s great to see everyone involved and having fun; it adds another layer of excitement to the atmosphere.

While I’m taking all of this in, Quintin is still trying to figure out what makes Muncie “cool”. His trouble thinking of a story could be because he was raised here, therefore immune to all that Muncie has to offer, or it could be childhood forgetfulness. To give him a little help thinking of a story, I ask him about one of his favorite field trips, and he tells me about how he once went to a planetarium in Indianapolis, or maybe in Evansville. He loved looking at the stars and admiring the vastness of space. But he hasn’t visited a planetarium since his field trip and when I ask him why, he complains about the distance from Muncie. “You know Ball State has a free planetarium right on campus, right?” I ask. The dumbstruck confusion on his face is answer enough. I am constantly getting emails about the current exhibit and I frequently forget that people outside of Ball State don’t get these emails. I do hope that since I introduced him to a planetarium within walking distance, he will take advantage of the free planetarium and its wonders soon.

I remember my own experience visiting the planetarium for the first time; I had already been a Ball State student for a couple years, so I’m not much better than Quintin when it comes to taking advantage of the wonderful activities Muncie holds, but the planetarium gave me the opportunity to connect with my little brother, Dre, in a way I was never able to, and him to the world outside of his devices. When we visited the planetarium, I expected him to keep his face either in his phone or his DS, but I was pleasantly surprised when I looked over and saw his eyes open wide, staring at all the stars. After the show was over, Dre wanted to ask the person running the
show questions about how the machine worked. He wanted to know if he could see the stars on the day he was born and was thrilled to find that the answer was yes. After we left, he was talking nonstop about how great the show was, and for the rest of the evening, he forgot about his devices. Just like it had with Dre, the planetarium could provide Quintin with an opportunity to just take in the stars and connect with his community, and his world, in a way he hasn’t before.

Towards the end of the interview, Quintin finally recalls something he enjoys about Muncie: Kennedy Library. This perfect example of modern architecture is both eco-friendly, as evidenced by the solar panels framing the parking lot, and a great place for people of all ages to have a good time or just unwind. Here, Quintin gets to explore his options of PS4 games to borrow and he and his friends sometimes take advantage of the library’s back computers (probably powered by the solar panels in the parking lot) to compete in MMORPGs. Other times, they just hang out, chatting at one of the library’s many tables. Also, when he isn’t there with friends, Quintin visits Kennedy for some alone time. He always heads to the kid’s section, where they have the most comfortable chairs in the library. There, he is able to catch up on his favorite books without interruption.

I hope that as he grows older and maybe has a family of his own, Quintin can show his kids all the wonderful places that make Muncie home. I hope he can take them to the planetarium or Kennedy Library and help give them a place to hang out with friends, like he currently does with his own friends. There are lots of great places in Muncie, if people could only take the time to find them.
Muncie Music Scene
Jeremy as written by Aidan Sacks

I used to see
whole notes,
half notes,
quarter notes,
and sixteenth notes.
They’d soar through the air,
playing in the wind like
fallen leaves
and spiral into my ears.
Working their way through my head,
Down my throat, and straight to my heart.
They’d tug
and they’d strum, leading me
straight to Doc’s Music Hall. Too see Captain Wa Wah
in all his glory and fame.
They’d lead me to the water bowl.
Where the vibrations of the speakers lifted above the trees
and we’d float in the lake on our backs in
serenity.

Wishing each time that the festival could live
forever
and in it we could live
forever.

Until one day
those notes evaporated mid air,
Doc’s called last call for the last time,
and the music scene w on tour to a different town.

Still I sit and wait in Wishbone
listening
to The Grateful Dead with patience because
I know it’ll be back.
And when it comes back,
oh man, it comes back so good.

***Doc’s Music Hall was owned and run by John Charles Peterson, also
known as Captain Wa Wah. The venue, located at 215 S. Walnut Street, was
open for twenty years, offering live entertainment from local and regional
talent. Though Doc’s doors have closed, its spirit lives on in Muncie through
the love, music, and memories shared within its walls. Captain Wa Wah,
more recently known as Dr. John Peterson, wrote the novel, The True-Life
Adventures of Captain Wa Wah: Fifty years of Music, Meditation, and Politics.
In it includes every musician/comedian that performed in the venue during
its time open and his life before owning the business. And even though the
business is closed, the website highlighting local events is still available to
followers. Check it out at http://docsmusichall.com/

This image is used with permission from Robert Mugge and is from Giving
Up the Ghosts: Closing Time at Doc’s at Music Hall, a film documentary,
produced by Robert Mugge and Diana Zelman for Mug-Shot Productions,
and features (left to right) musicians Dr. John Peterson, Phil Dunn, Doug
Hunt, and Kyle Ivy. This documentary film is available on Blu-ray from
Amazon and other online sellers.
“To be honest, I’m terrible at directions,” I breathlessly mumbled. “Thank you so much for meeting me.”

Easy-going, and far too kind, Brittney laughed at my lateness and offered the Peppermint Mocha she had ordered for us while she waited. Once settled, the conversation flowed effortlessly. Most of her time since moving to Muncie has been devoted to various local organizations, but her job at A Better Way armed her with more compassion and spirit for the city than ever. I knew that if anyone would have a story about the true wonder that Muncie can be, it would be her.

“When was a time that something really odd or really cool happened to you in Muncie?”

“One time a group of friends and I decided to go visit the dumpster behind Concannon’s Bakery,” she replied. “The employees had left a huge trash bag full of fresh donuts there, just as I had heard.”

Like Brittney, I had heard rumors of Concannon’s after hours and the rewards it could bring. The building’s exterior was always enchanting, more fancy than the average bakery. The lines of sweet treats seemed endless. Brittney’s haul happened to take place around Easter, so the shelves were filled with bright blues, yellows, marshmallow ducklings, and varying pastel frosted donuts.

“There were way too many donuts for the four of us, so we began to drop them off on the porch at random houses,” she explained. “We turned it into a way to give strangers gifts.”

What began as a series of random acts eventually became a Twitter campaign to decide where the rest of the baked goods went.

“Our Twitter page gained so much attention and we were able to give away all of the donuts.”

Brittney took a sip of her coffee and laughed again, remembering her short-lived taste of the celebrity life.
Remembering Muncie Gras
Phillip As written by Kate Fletcher

2018: The final Muncie Gras. I’ve been asked so many times how I feel about it all being over that I am growing tired of the question. I find it amusing that so many people are upset about its ending, and I know there is no way they understand its importance to the Muncie community. Honestly, I think that’s a good thing though. That just means that we did our job, right? Which is why it’s time for it to be over. It ran its course, and it did what we needed it to do. Why do I get to say this?

Because I was there when it all began.

I think it was around the year 2001. Our goal wasn’t necessarily to throw some crazy party, but at the same time it kind of was. We wanted to draw people into downtown. Back then there was a stigma around the downtown area. Everyone was afraid to go there, the buildings were old and falling apart, and we wanted to put an end to that. We wanted to show that it wasn’t really scary.

A few of us had been to cities that had thrown parties, and we didn’t see any reason why Muncie couldn’t do the same. And, that’s where the idea for the Muncie Mardi Gras, later shortened to Muncie Gras, came from. Now, this was before downtown was as developed as it is today. Honestly, Muncie Gras pushed the development we all see now. During this time, most of the stores, bars, and restaurants we see now were non-existent.

At the time, we had no idea how everything was going to play out. Several bars agreed to be a part of the event, including the old ‘gentlemen’s club,’ Joker’s Wild, which doesn’t even exist anymore. Some of the dancers from Joker’s danced on the few cars that were parked on the road that night in order to motivate the crowd. While it definitely worked, it also succeeded in damaging the roofs of said cars.

We really did have no idea what to expect from the night though. I remember us sitting in our meetings saying that we would be happy if 500 or 600 people showed up. In our minds, a thousand would have been amazing, but we thought that might be a little out of reach.

We didn’t even know the final count that night. It wasn’t until the next morning when we were told.

5,000!
That’s how many people were packed into downtown that night, and we were not prepared. We didn’t have enough police, we didn’t have enough crowd control, but more importantly, we didn’t have enough beer. The bars had all initially brought cans, but those quickly ran out, so they went out to get bottles.

And everyone just drank into oblivion.

When my brain flashes those memories back to me, it all plays like how I imagined a Gatsby party going. Assuming you switched out flappers for strippers and businessmen for well, whoever showed up that night, that is.

I honestly don’t remember much from the rest of the night. People have tried to fill in the gaps over the years. Supposedly at one point there was a shirtless woman riding through the crowd on a horse, but I am not really sure. The next thing I knew, it was five in the morning. As I looked around me, I saw broken glass from the beer bottles covering the road and drunk people stumbling home. The night may have not gone quite according to plan, but I know we had a damn good time...

2018: And we did what we set out to do. We pulled people into downtown, showed them what Muncie was all about. After partying somewhere all night, it makes it a little more difficult to be afraid of it. All of that has gone away now though, there is no need to tell people to go downtown, that’s where they go to drink, to eat, and just to hangout. So, yes, Muncie Gras was an important part of breathing a new life into the death of a failing downtown. I was happy to be a part of the beginnings but also yes, it is time for it to be over.

Please note that for 17 years, Muncie hosted the largest street party in Muncie, called Muncie Gras. The event started as a way to draw the community to what was a vacant downtown to enjoy food, drinks, music, art, and other events.
**Becoming Part of Something**  
Alejandro (Alex) as written by Eileen Porzuczek

My mother and I sat in the darkness. Suspense filled the Fieldhouse and community as they waited to see their boys run out onto the court. 1. 2. 3. BOOM! Flashing spotlights zoomed through the Fieldhouse; everyone growing with excitement knowing the big moment had arrived.

“Everybody give a warm welcome to your Muncie Central Bearcats!” The announcer shouted over the cheering crowd.

The players ran onto the court glistening in the spotlights, taking in the strong community support they had backing them. I knew this was something I had to be a part of.

“There’s nothing like this. This is amazing. Imagine being a part of something so special.” I turned and said to my mother.

“That could be you if you work hard Alejandro.” My mother said to me with a nod of encouragement.

***

Most of my childhood was spent in a small town just outside of Muncie called Cowan. My sister and I lived with primarily lived with our mother, since our father was in the military.

School was never easy for me as a kid. Finding the right fit for me in a special education program felt like a constant struggle. I started school at Cowan Elementary, I only went there for 1st grade. Part of the reason why I left Cowan Elementary was because they didn’t have a special education program at the time, and for me that meant I wasn’t being given the resources I need. So, it was off to Morsen Mock Elementary. Unfortunately, the school closed after my 2nd grade year. I remember my mother, along with the community, being upset about this closing. Suddenly all the kids who went to school there were being shipped to different schools in the community, I was being separated from the friends I had just made. This was also around the time of my parent’s divorce. After they split I primarily lived with my mother. For 3rd grade, my mother ended up transferring me to Store Elementary, a Muncie Community School. When the shoe didn’t fit there, I moved to Blue River Valley Elementary for 4th grade. Surprisingly things were even worse for me there, so back to Store Elementary I went for 5th grade.
My years in middle school were significantly better. For 6th, 7th, and 8th grade I went to Wilson Middle School. Overall my experience there was good, the special education program just wasn’t a helpful or comfortable environment for me. The only negative memory from middle school I have is towards the end of my time at Wilson. Some of my peers decided it would be funny to start pulling the fire alarms during school. This recurring act began to grow irritating not only to us students who wanted to learn, but to the school administrators too. When I say irritating I mean like seriously, how old are we? All of these “hysterical” antics led to the principal mandated silent lunches. Silent lunches? Really? I mean come on, that’s our time to relax during the school day and visit with our friends. But nevertheless, the silent lunches became a grueling prison like reality. Munching on our food in silent fear we sat while the school security officers sat in the lunchroom, sometimes lunch felt like more of a prison than a school cafeteria. Ironically when the school closed due to low enrollment they almost turned the building into a prison. Oh if only my principal at the time could’ve seen the future irony in his silent lunches.

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My mother had decided to move to a small town in Illinois, this meant I would be moving too. I remember being so mad and locking myself in my room to hide my anger. As my anger grew, I began fighting more and more with my mother. I didn’t like my high school in Illinois or it’s special education program. I missed my friends back in Muncie. Muncie was my home, not this small town in Illinois.

After about half a year of living in that small town my mother decided that we should move back to our home in Muncie. My insides fluttered with joy when she told me the news. I was going to be able to see all my friends again and be home in the community I loved growing up. I couldn’t wait to pick up high school at Muncie Central when we got back.

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My first day of school at Muncie Central was like a reunion. I got to see all my friends from middle school and elementary. It was so nice to feel like I already had a place when I started high school, even if it simply meant seeing one friendly face smile at me in the hallway.
One of the first weekends we were back, my mother took me to one of the Muncie Central Basketball games. It was unlike anything I had ever experienced before. A celebration of community support, flashing spotlights, loud attention-grabbing announcers, and a team of players dedicated to winning the game. Like a fish in the sea they hooked me; almost every game from that night on I was in the stands of the Fieldhouse cheering my peer players on.

Game after game, I wondered how I could be a part of all of this excitement. Then it hit me. What if I could be a manager for the basketball team? It was my senior year and I wanted to be a part of something special. I hadn’t been a part of anything so far in my high school career and was tired of sitting at home. Adrenaline rushed through my body as I approached the basketball coach.

“I want to be a team manager.”

The words slipped out of my mouth like butter. The coach looked at me straight faced and gave me an acknowledging nod. Unsure of what this meant, I waited to hear back from the coach. Although it had been a few weeks since I approached him, and my nerves were starting to get the best of me. Just when I thought the waiting was going to swallow me alive I heard back from the coach... YES! I was now a manager for the basketball team. The excitement of the news left me breathless and feeling unreal. I felt like nothing in the world could stop me or hold me down.

It was our first “game” of the season, a scrimmage against Homestead, a fun practice game to see which team could score the most points. Community members from all over came out to support the team, even if they didn’t have any affiliation with the team or the high school. Community members swarmed into the fieldhouse to fill the stands. Community members of all walks of life walking in and leaving everything else at the door and coming in to support their Muncie Central Bearcats.

Before every game we would make sure to have water ready for the team to go for the team. It was very important for us to make sure there was enough water as managers to keep the them hydrated during the game. My fellow managers and I would also have all of their jerseys clean and ready for them to slide on their backs. This was one of my favorite parts of being a basketball manager. The jerseys were such a huge part of the team and community moral. The jerseys were stark white with hints of purple. The starkness of the
white background made the purple writing and other hints of purple more eye catching to the crowd. They loved it and so did we.

When it came time for the games to start we would all get ready to run on the court in front of the loving community that had our backs. I remember always being so full of adrenaline before running onto the court. My heart beating faster with the realization that in moments I would be running through the flashing spotlights, hearing the announcer's voice, and being a part of the reason why the crowd is going wild. It felt like being in the spotlight and in that moment, just that moment, I felt empowered and important. Running onto the court always reminded me that I was a part of something great and so special. It’s hard for me to believe anything could ever make me feel like that again.

No matter how big the stakes of the game, they would cheer whenever Central scored and go wild like it was March Madness in Muncie. When I say they would cheer like it was March Madness I mean that they would go wild like the stakes of each game were life or death. It was no secret that the Muncie community had a profound love and pride for basketball. When watching the games, you could feel the motivation of the players and see the salty sweat dripping from their skin. Sometimes during the games when I looked around it felt like everything was in slow motion around me. I don’t know what it was, but there was something historic about watching my peers play in the Fieldhouse. Seeing the community come together and support each other made me never want to leave this place. All the anger I once harbored was gone, my soul was at peace and I was finally genuinely happy. I wished for my moments on the fieldhouse court to never end.

The fun didn’t just end with the games though, I remember loving traveling for the away games and stopping for food with the team after. Sometimes we’d even go out for food together after the home games too. We always had so much fun bonding over food after the games, especially when we won. The team and my fellow managers felt like another family to me and I loved that feeling. I was a part of a family, and by being a team manager I was taking care of that family.

Over the course of the season I became close friends with one of the other team managers, Conner. It was funny because Conner and I had actually gone to the same elementary school at one point, but our paths never crossed. What a small world, am I right? I mean how crazy is that, who would’ve
known that one of my friends later in life had been there towards the beginning of my academic career.

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1.2.3
BOOM!

I am sitting in the light behind the counter waiting for people to come needing assistance. I can see the flashing spotlights from the Fieldhouse in my head, like a burning memory never to be lost. My big moment is now here. Here at the Marriott Hotel in Downtown Muncie. Here with my coworkers and long-life friend Conner. Here in Muncie, where I know a community has my back. A place where I feel I belong. This is my home.

***The Courtyard by Marriott Hotel in downtown Muncie opened on December 22nd, 2015. The hotel was designed to provide individuals with disabilities opportunities for job training and employment. Participants of this thirty-two million dollar project intern at the hotel, in the hotel restaurant, or nearby hospital. While participating in this program run by Erskine Green Training Institute, the students stay in the hotel as residents. http://www.downtownmuncie.org/news/2016/1/8/courtyard-by-mariott-hotel-erskine-green-training-institute-opens
Dear Muncie,

Do you remember Mary Eleanor?
Maybe you recall
the name, have a vision of a woman
full of spunk, demanding that
“you’re going to work”
but seeing her sit alone tells me
you don’t.

She’s still in Muncie,
where
she’s always been;
where
her parents raised her;
where
she raised you.
Do you remember how much she loved you?
Took care of you? Did you assume she died?

She is still around, and at 93 she still thinks of you.
Did you know that people can live
up to age 93
in our little town of Muncie?
She sits in her room —alone, devouring
chocolates in the Rehabilitation Center
on Bethel.
She’s down the street
and she loves chocolate
but prefers to share.

Maybe you don’t remember
how she helped you, Muncie.
That should put you to shame.
During the war she was there,
head lady, taking care of 19 kids
who may have been dead
without her tough love and care—
How can you not remember?
She does.
She still cries
about how she just tried her best,
Still talks about how much
she loved you—
loves you.

She taught you her song—
The song her mom sang to her
to get ready for every day,
early in the morning—
Clean! Clean! Clean! From the tippy toes
to the top of your head.
She still wakes up in the morning and sings
her song to stay clean
because it helps her
remember her mom— another woman you forgot.

Oh, Muncie. How can you forget Mary Eleanor?
She still sings in her church, although
it’s less frequent now.
Did you forget what she sounds like?
Age hasn’t made her forget her pitch
and she would love to perform for you.

While you sit in home, in your class- divided community
Just remember that Mary Eleanor
still cries for you and your grandparents that she helped.
Know that she still wakes up in the morning
to clean herself, to remember her parents.
Know that she still has a powerful voice
and still loves to sing and dance.
Know that she is still has spunk; that she’s still alive.
Don’t you dare forget about her.
Roots of Muncie
Paige A. Boysaw as written by Aidan Sacks

After her eyes set on 715 East Washington Street, Paige’s fingers couldn’t move quick enough across the keypad on her phone. A red brick house that today stands high in the Delaware County sky. On the first and second level there are two porches that are symmetrically perfect, along with a plethora of windows, two chimneys, and four white columns. It was a structure just asking to be researched. Paige found that the owner of this house belonged to author and journalist Emily Kimbrough who passed away in 1989. A small part of the East Central Neighborhood District in Muncie is named in remembrance of her.

Emily may not have spent her adult years in Muncie, but she was recognized for her time here and the beautiful home she grew up in. She saw the beauty here and in return the city named the district after her. This part of town may have been for the social elites, but it keeps the history of this place alive. That’s what Paige finds most whimsical about Muncie. The history and how it’s played in to what’s happened today. There’s been all these profound people that did all these real cool things. It’s all kind of burned down and she feels like it’s just waiting for people to revive it.

Prairie Creek Reservoir, where they say that an entire town lies beneath the surface of the man-made lake. Apparently, you can see rooftops when you stand at certain parts of the lake. Paige has never seen this with her own eyes and just can’t be so sure how true that legend actually is. What she does know is that the toads that hangout there are the coolest amphibians in Muncie. On an overnight trip with some friends, Paige came across a gigantic toad. While poking around the lake, soaking in the sun and warmth, and, boom! there it was. The thickest toad she’d ever seen. The width of it had to have been as dense and wide as a red brick. When she picked it up she realized that it must have been at least 12 inches long.

She decided their new toad friend would make a great addition in the front yard of the tiny wooden cabin they were staying in. Shortly after, they found the toad did too. He hopped from chair to chair acting like he didn’t want to return to his private underwater town. The experience itself of the toad just
wanting to be around was cool. When nature just wants to be around humans it’s an incredible experience. In the morning it came back to check up on them. Though torn between taking that big toad home as their departure approached, Paige decided it was living the best life out there. No one can really be certain of how a toad lives at Prairie Creek Reservoir, but that mystery adds a little bit more magic and beauty to the place.

Muncie isn’t like the rest, which is a big reason why she wants to open her own Apothecary shop downtown. This place has made Paige become really content with being who she is and knowing that she’ll get to the places she wants to see one day, but she has to work to get there and just be happy where she’s at in the moment. She’s learned a lot and has become a really good person since being here.

She swears Muncie is the guinea pig of America. This is the place to be if a person wants to make a business or an idea come alive and thrive. In big cities people are trying to hustle or one up each other. This city is filled with wisdom, influence, and partnership. If the community works together and builds together, they can go out and teach other cities that. Students come here to learn for four years and leave, but she believes there’s a lot that people can take away from this place. Like taking the time to learn about the roots that built the city, appreciate the magic it holds, and to create a beautiful home. Even if you’re only here for a little while.
"It’s always something," she tells me.
Under Christmas lights, dog whining in
his corner kennel, Sue tells me a love story.
“They got married,” she says, “pretty young,
and he promised he would build her a castle.”
Bob and Barb Logan, the same names as my grandparents.
“But then they just lived their lives together,
for twenty-four years, actually. And they had eight kids!”
All this in the same town where they grew up,
surrounded by a growing family and childhood friends.

“But he had a heart attack,” she says, looking
down at the hardwood floor. “A bad one.”
I know the type. For two years, Bob recovered.
“But then, he made good on his promise.
He started with the foundation, these great big bricks
dug deep into the ground, I think two feet high.”
And eventually they stretched up, and from their old
plot of land came a cement castle.
Sue smiles. “There’s nothing like it in Muncie.”
She’s contagious; I find myself smiling, too.

This is where we fall in love,
our hearts popped open and shredded
like our tires, dragged behind us
ready to dig into every pothole
if it means reaching out and being touched.

This is where, stepping over
asymmetries in the sidewalk,
we hold hands and share bubble tea
and hide from the sun under the impossible
trees and their bike tires.

I can’t say I’ve ever seen a sky as blue
as the one that hangs above my street,
except maybe for the one above
a castle made of love and concrete;
inexplicably rising, solid, from the grass.

III
“I think it’s really easy,” Emma says, “to find hardship in Muncie, but it can also be really easy to find these beautiful, quirky parts of life there. I repeatedly enjoyed writing about the loving, sometimes peculiar and unusually caring people who unapologetically chose to build their lives there.”

I type a thank-you email,
pour another cup of coffee and wonder
how to tell such a story,
and if I could even fit into it.

The writer would like to thank The Indianapolis Star for inspiration and information on Muncie's only castle—-a truly breathtaking place.
#keepmuncieweirdandwhimsical by telling us your story!

Tell us a story about what happened to you when something really weird or strange happened to you in Muncie, Indiana.

Tell us a story about what happened to you when something really whimsical or wonderful happened to you in Muncie, Indiana.

Join our Facebook Group #keepmuncieweirdandwhimsical and post your own weird and whimsical story there OR email your story to Dr. Darolyn "Lyn" Jones at Ball State.

Our hope is to grow this project and keep this anthology as an ongoing publication. Look for more information about potential future projects and future additional social media outlets on the FB page or again by emailing Dr. Jones at ljones2@bsu.edu.
Editor’s Bios:

Teacher Editor, Dr. Darolyn “Lyn” Jones is an assistant teaching professor in the Department of English at Ball State University. Lyn is passionate about literacy, story, and social and educational justice and has committed her twenty-seven years of professional life to those topics. She is the educational author of a top selling series book titled, Painless Reading Comprehension, co-author of Memory Workshop, the editor for a digital literary magazine, Rethinking Children’s & YA Lit: Read for Change, the editor for the children’s book series, the Neon Tiki Tribe, and an editor of the independent press for the Indiana Writers Center, INwords Publications. Lyn has edited and published multiple essays and memoir collections including Monday Coffee and Other Stories of Mothering Children with Special Needs, Where Mercy and Truth Meet: Homeless Women of Wheeler Speak, “Sitting at the Feet of my Flanner House Elders: A Lesson After Dying,” and seven volumes of I Remember: Indianapolis Youth Write about Their Lives. Lyn also publishes scholarly narrative research in disability studies and community and collaborative writing. Besides teaching at Ball State University, Lyn also serves as the Education Outreach Director of the public Memoir Project at the Indiana Writers Center. Read more about Lyn’s work and follow her blog at: www.thelynjones.com. Learn more about the Rethinking magazine at www.rethinkingkidlit.com
C.W. Cain is a Senior at Ball State University. He is studying Creative Writing, Professional Writing, and French. After he graduates he hopes to pursue a career working with international non-profits. This is his second year working with Dr. Lyn Jones collecting stories from the Muncie community. C.W is also a published author of Creative Narrative Nonfiction whose work has appeared in *The Broken Plate*.

Eileen Porzuczek is currently a junior at Ball State University studying Creative Writing, Professional Writing, & Emerging Media. Eileen writes a blog, Healthy Free Love, about educating on intimate partner violence and promoting healthy relationships. She has also done some motivational speaking sharing her story to school groups around Indiana. Eileen worked as a writer for Rethinking Children's & Young Adult Literature's Digital Magazine, her original children's book *I Vow to Make a Difference* is published in the #blacklivesmatter edition. She has presented her work at research symposiums, national literary conferences, and peace conferences. Eileen has interned with, and continues to intern with, the Indiana Writers Center working on their *I Remember Indianapolis Youth Write About Their Lives* series. She also does freelance writing and graphic design work in her free time. Eileen is a passionate writer who wants to share stories with the world.
Angie Hedman is an artist, writer, gallery director, and high school art educator who resides in Muncie, IN with her husband, two kids, and geriatric dog. She holds degrees from Ball State University in the areas of Fine Arts (MA and BFA-Metals), and Art Education (BS). As an artist, she works in many mediums including metals, sculpture, painting and photography. She often incorporates found, discarded, and recycled objects in her work, and is drawn to the natural wear and details of architectural structures. Most of her art and writing is created from her third floor studio in downtown Muncie. Her artwork has been exhibited both locally and nationally, and has appeared most recently in Gravel, The Broken Plate, and Soapbox (local Muncie zine). She was awarded a high school art educator fellowship with Skidmore College in 2016, and has received several art grants for her classroom. Her poetry has been published in Ink to Paper, and Three Line Poetry.
Student Writers Bios:

Claire Bauserman is a senior advertising major and a creative writing minor. Frkiwi orchard slogans to werewolf fairytales, Spotify campaign concepts to Christian/sci-fi/rom coms (a hybrid genre of her own invention), she’s loved experiencing new ways to sharpen her skills at Ball State.

Audrey Bowers is a junior English Education major and Creative Writing minor at Ball State University. She spends her time reading and writing a little bit of everything - memoirs, essays, blog posts, articles, poems, flash fiction, and even news stories. When she isn’t writing or reading a good book, she is most likely drinking iced coffee or making art of some type.
Alyssa Clemento is a junior majoring in English Education with a Creative Writing minor. She’s been writing since high school, but this was her first serious attempt at Creative Nonfiction. She thinks weird and whimsical things happen in Muncie often, but when the two come together they form something magical.

Kate Fletcher is a senior Creative Writing major at Ball State University. She is mainly a fiction writer, focusing on mental illnesses. However, she has enjoyed the challenge of meeting various people from the community and getting the opportunity to tell their stories. After graduation, she plans to move to the East Coast and finish writing her first novel.

Whitney “Nikki” Kendall is a senior Creative Writing major at Ball State University. She loves reading, writing, and drawing, as well as anything cute and cuddly. She is much more awkward introvert than confident extrovert, and her idea of a date involves a bed and at least ten hours of uninterrupted sleep.
Matthew Swain is a poet and Ball State senior from Columbia City, Indiana. He’s published with The Broken Plate, Z Publishing, and A Feminist Thread. When he’s not writing, he’s probably playing Dungeons and Dragons with his dad, snoozing with his cat, or pretending to know things about craft beer. Follow him on Twitter: @coffeecuppoetry

Janie Obrochta is a senior creative writing major and linguistic minor at Ball State University. After graduation she wants to go back to Chicago and start on my journey to become a TESOL/TEFL educator abroad, while working on my creative writing. This project on Muncie’s weird and whimsical stories is helping me grow as an up in coming writer.
Kayln Reyer is a senior Creative Writing major at Ball State University. She is passionate about storytelling, social media, and continued education. She believes in community and the power of empathy. After graduation she hopes to work for a nonprofit, and move to Indianapolis with her future dog, Noelle.

Aidan Sacks is a senior Creative Writing major and Linguistics minor at Ball State University. Though he is typically reading and writing fiction, he is grateful to have had the opportunity to preserve Muncie’s weirdness through a creative nonfiction lens.

Vanessa Haro-Miracle is majoring in creative writing and minoring in fashion and Spanish. She loves writing poetry and activism. She also loves cats and if you see her at the local pet store, you will see her cry about cats she cannot adopt.