

# LIBRARY ZINE!

VOICES ACROSS  
THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY



VOLUME 8  
2024

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THANK YOU



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# **Dear Reader:**

Dear Reader,

As New Yorkers, we often mistake busyness for moving forward. It's not our fault; we're fast moving and engaged with the world around us. But what does it mean to really make progress? This year's theme, Progress is a Process, invited contributors to deeply think about what it means to inch towards a goal and enjoy the work it takes to get there.

We would like to acknowledge all of the creators who submitted their work to our zine this year. There would not be a Library Zine without the brilliance and passion of the writers, poets, and artists who make it the dynamic anthology that it is. We would also like to thank you, reader, for taking the time to connect with us and your community through reading and experiencing the works in our zine. You are also part of what makes the Library Zine special.

As you browse our Zine, we invite you to reflect on the ways you have made progress in the past year. Maybe you will be inspired to find joy in the process.

Sincerely,

**Library Zine! Committee**

# POETRY

Here you will find interpretations of this year's theme where poets give readers a glimpse of themselves, their loved ones, their communities, nature, and more.

# You Are Here

Alice Fung

You are here  
under covers  
eyes closed  
waiting for sleep  
2 AM and you have two jobs tomorrow  
you decide to wear the peach sweater over your collared T-shirt, black pants  
a line comes to mind

The elevator to success is broken. You'll have to use the stairs...  
one  
step  
at  
a  
time.

You smile,  
even tougher when you have to wear a boot because  
you missed a step and  
ouch, now you have to take the stairs...

one  
step  
at  
a  
time.

You are here  
in a brightly lit windowless classroom  
going over student papers  
but you were once there  
seated as the student  
studying stories  
under the pursuit of a degree in English  
taking math classes because you thought you had to  
once upon a time

you wanted to be a teacher  
when really  
you loved being a learner.

You are here  
at your desk for the afternoon  
in the office where all the desks had been repurposed  
much like the rest of New York.

You are coloring and cutting,  
other days you were folding flowers or gallery guides.  
Crafting is not exactly art but there's an art to  
making it work.

I am here  
cutting and pasting  
playing with paper  
pen on paper  
playing with words  
because once  
a kid  
had a deluxe crayon set, a stack of recycled take out menus, scissor, a stapler, and  
afternoons to myself.

From Joe Girard:

"The elevator to success is broken. You'll have to use the stairs...one step at a time."

# Birdhouse

Angelica Aranda

I've been painting birdhouses.

They are for a garden I do not own  
For a tree that is not mine.

They'll hang in the low branches  
Off ropes tied to their roofs  
So that passersby will see them.

Some are the same green of the leaves,  
Others bright red, some solid black.  
They will all sway the same.

I used to climb that tree.  
I can remember the first time,  
I can't remember the last.

Some beer bottle chimes  
Still hang off the branches  
At the very top of the tree.

The glass has fractured for most.  
They no longer sing with the  
Movement of the wind.

The birdhouses will hang much lower  
over some recently sown seed  
Mine of which never sprouted.

Will the birdhouses outlive me?  
I hope so.  
Who will live inside?

Will it be a bird,  
Some termites,  
Cockroaches?

Their ropes are sure to go  
before their bodies do.  
A garden floor will be littered with fallen houses.

Maybe then they will house someone.  
The wood will rot, the paint will disintegrate,  
And nutrients returned to the very tree that hung  
them.

Or will someone replace their ropes,  
And rehang them,  
Or will they remove them altogether?

They will not be hung from a once climbed tree  
Under the graveyard of broken bottle chimes,  
For all of eternity.

I make this promise to them  
As I fasten their knots.  
I take a step back.

A canopy of ornaments  
Hang from the bottom most branches  
Of the hanging tree.

# A Street with an Irish Pub

Anna Amatuzio

This sounds random, but do you remember  
being on a street with an Irish pub  
around July, August or September?  
A corner deli sold sodas and subs.

Flags fluttered around The Chrysalis Center  
where children came to recover upstairs.  
What was the code you needed to enter?  
Caregivers with kids cast their sidelong stares

as if we were delivering havoc  
alongside Christian to their cocoon.  
That hour. Window seats, magazine stacks,  
temporary untangled emotion.

The wave of the flags floated like a wish  
looking ahead of metamorphosis.

# Falling Stars

A. Blaine

It fell from the sky like many a rock  
I'd learned about them in school  
It crushed our apple orchard  
On the west side  
And dad said we'd have to borrow money  
From the company  
And hire out my brother to the foreman  
So we'd last the ashwinter  
But it was so beautiful falling from the sky  
And I knew why our ancestors called them  
Falling stars  
And I couldn't believe such a  
Beautiful thing  
Could cause such uncertainty for us  
One night I snuck out and chipped off a piece  
Of yellow rock  
Fool's gold, they called it, but not  
Pyrite  
I tried to make something cool with it  
But all I made was a rugged mass  
I used it as a paperweight.

# Electric Ghosts

A. Blaine

Only a face in neon knew  
The meaning of the turning screw  
The dripping of the purple neon  
The kind of drip you once could see on  
Broadway, or Gary, Indiana  
Red as apple, yellow as banana  
A theater, unheard of, never known  
At last defeated from its throne  
And streets no longer see the feet  
Of humans tramping down the street  
For folk stay in and ne'er go out  
A world without a sun, never doubt  
And in the places caked in dust  
Pooling with droppings, lint and must  
There sits a light, a falsehood day  
Fighting still to keep away  
The ghosts that linger on the boards  
Their minds awhirl with lines in hoards  
And notes and tapping tipping feet  
That once did roam without the street  
On stages played to orchestra's swell  
Marching to timpani and to the bell  
Here stands Sinatra, blue-eyed framed  
Mae West, callipygian, who once reigned,  
Jones and Bojangles, Blind Thomas Wiggins  
Lea Michel and Joel Higgins,  
Staring out of the theater's murk

In the ghost light's shadow, here they lurk  
Wondering where the audiences are  
That once raised even higher their bar  
And whisper in tones no living ear hears  
How long it has been, how many years  
Since ever a child squeezed in a suit  
Saw their first show, watched as their boots  
Trampled the stage, their voices vibrated  
Their talent with booze once celebrated  
No longer, no more, the nightlife is gone  
Every household a tower in this Babylon  
For babble it is—this talk of show biz  
Cabaret, Cats, Chicago, The Wiz,  
All long and forgotten, with them librettos  
And knee high boots and heels and stilettos  
Folk live in their playpens, all needs delivered  
Contact unknown, humanity severed  
Living eternally in ignorant night  
Never seeing the glory of a stage's ghost light.

# Cosmic Numerology

## Hannah Coleman

I read the words "accept responsibility"  
I breathed the meaning into myself  
And tried to channel my energy  
On the floor of my room  
I sat with the tomb and meditated  
Using my hands to draw my feelings  
I listened to a song that made me  
think of myself  
One that turned my emotion inward  
And I began to write :

To my mother I give thanks  
From my father I have fire  
Given to my brothers was strength  
Born within me was beauty  
We are whole

To have fear is to have compassion  
Strengthen your love  
Attempt demanding feats  
Learn from everything

The water may look shallow  
Do not be fooled  
The man that survives  
Is the man that has tools  
Use your mind for good  
And your fate will be sealed  
Forgive who has hurt you  
And you shall be healed

# Returning Home

## Hannah Coleman

There once was a darkness that hovered over  
my small town  
Silent, and potent  
To this darkness we presented ignorance  
This weakened the people  
And from within the rubble came a voice  
The voice of many resounding into one  
Chanting and exclaiming  
"Life, life, life!"  
Spurring from the heavens came a hurricane  
Rain, whipping and lashing through the air  
Crouched together in the corner of our shed  
We laughed to our youth  
Grievances evaporated  
Into one another's hands we trusted our lives  
And then the rain calmed  
The sun rose in the west for the first time  
The birds flew backwards  
And from under our feet the moles and spiders  
came to the surface  
Seeking sunlight

# Processing...

## Harvey Hamer

Processing...

Trust the process

They say,

But history repeats itself.

A blindfolded man rowing in a circle,

Clasping the oar so tightly when he  
should look at the horizon,

Water and air.

Processing...

A Greenpeace boat,

Rainbow and dove on the ocean.

The sea which soaks up carbon  
dioxide,

Produced especially by the burning of  
fossil fuels,

A process known since the eighteen  
hundreds.

Högbom and Ekhholm, astronomical,  
physical and meteorological

Conditions that could have brought  
about Ice Ages and their absence.

Stockholm syndrome?

Inspiration.

Processing...

In 1896, Arrhenius made his model of  
the Greenhouse Effect,

The influence of carbon dioxide in the  
air on the temperature on the ground

"Unbelievable that so trifling a matter  
has cost me a full year."

Talk of light and dark rays,

Geometric and arithmetic  
progression,

A simple equation,

A table,

Not something cooked up, some fear-fantasy.

A hundred and thirty years ago.

An idea,

Processing...

Just as blind then as now.

"Allow our descendants,

"Even if they only be those of a distant future,  
"To live under a warmer sky and in a less harsh  
environment

"Than we were granted."

Take nothing for granted.

How could they not see it then?

The scientists.

How can they not listen to them now?

The scientists.

I see,

I listen,

Since those primary school days most forget.

Processing...

Food processing, packaging,

Clean the plastic before recycling,

But some still can't be recycled.

Recycle with bags at supermarkets.

Super,

Market.

A strange term.

Processing...

Computers all over the world.

While I strain to keep cartons,  
Rinsed and squashed,  
Folded,  
In the shed,  
Ready for a trip to the one nearby  
town that recycles them,  
My friend can create tens of AI images  
with machines  
That steal from countless artists and  
Guzzle more water than could fill all  
the cartons  
I've ever emptied.  
Oat and soya milk.  
Alternatives.  
And what alternative is there?  
When you've seen,  
In footage or in person,  
The animals in pens,  
On assembly lines.  
Processing...  
My process has been gradual,  
Progressing by cutting out a meat at a  
time.  
Beef,  
Pork,  
Chicken,  
Fish.  
Ticked them off one by one.  
I could do more.  
We could all do more.  
Why don't they do more?  
Hopelessness is a baseline,  
But humanity's greatest process,

Greatest progress?  
(In the countless twists and chemical miracles  
of brain evolution.)  
Is hope.  
The rainbow, the dove,  
Hope for the future.  
Processing...

# A Red Rose Reality

Beatrice Bradshaw



As I enter into this new reality, I realize  
there are unfamiliar faces  
New ways, new dreams, new drive, new  
places  
I shut out the world and delve deep into  
fazes  
From hot to cold, dark to light, the  
medium and  
changes

I use my breath to believe my grounding  
is imagination  
I soar above the dimension that this ego  
mind is chasing  
To be one with source is the truth of  
existence

and relation

To use the color red for passion and black for the dead  
To see love in everything is a task ahead  
Requiring patience and understanding while on a balance  
beam  
To let go and reshape in order to experience a dream  
To reinvent and surrender to the light  
The quest can seem farfetched, yet its close in sight  
To wonder, imagine and create a tool is considered  
essential  
To embrace oneself, resolve of the mental  
To discover a path that you are sure of  
To trust your intuition and surrender to authentic Love  
Oh, the color red with passion and sacrifice  
The beauty of that red rose of love, with black thorns of  
knives  
To love it in its entirety and not separate because of its  
pain  
To rebuild its core structure and be called another name

# grain by grain

Indira D. Martinez Pamias

her laughter: not available at this register, unlike the

saltwater lapping at the edges of his  
property.

might it ease his humiliation ?

oh mother, may he feel the eternal tug to leach his wounds in the water

as you will it, he'll crave the cool waves on his sunburnt shoulders  
should you grant it, he'll ease his way in, dig his toes in the sand  
if it pleases you, he'll lean back to float for a while and the waves will be so gentle  
and,

when he goes to right himself he'll realize he's floated a bit too far he'll  
twist those sunburnt shoulders and turn to make his way back to the shore.

but the tide is going out  
and the current is ripping at his limbs  
and the water is in his ears  
and now it's in his throat  
and now he is one  
with the sea forever,  
amen.

I'll

wave, then turn towards that big house on the beach.

fling the doors wide make my way to the counter eat a banana imported from  
Guatemala on a ship that  
stopped in Miami first.

leave the doors open to float on coqui song as  
the sun dips below the horizon, be coaxed to sleep by the sound of the waves slowly  
consuming the shoreline,

grain by grain.

# trickle down economics

Indira D. Martinez Pamias

runny white, solid black  
running down my sodden back

don't you know, it's good luck!  
omen of a snag unsnug

but this bird makes her own fortune  
a burrowed beak, a feather plucked

a few more now, and I'll just fit  
through the scuttle, up up I'll flit

the cage below is wide, capacious  
but there, the fellows are far less  
gracious

and furthermore, a danger looms  
with every descension, renewed  
subjugation

to the asses above you, raining their  
waste  
fluff, seeds, and shit in a pulverant  
paste

better to rise, quick as you can  
the slighter the frame, the less you'll  
withstand

# what once was

Indira D. Martinez Pamias

the plastic net drags along her surfaces,  
making them new again.  
disturbance  
ripples through her molecules and her skin turns inside out.

where flesh meets air, exalted exhalation  
ascension into a

wide                    clear                    sky

the vinyl basin is impermeable, at least for now, so her only chance at  
freedom  
belongs to this  
small death

but she will have her way.

where there is a path, it will be found  
where there is none, it shall be made

the antithesis of stillness,  
time will confine her  
again.

# Emergence

Megha Sood

The syncopated pitter-patter of rain on my tin ceiling  
is weaving a symphony, like the fleeting touch of a thrumming harp wire;

a constant reminder of the scattered memories making their way  
through the thin sluices of my corrugated roof.

My window frame getting battered by the gale is an unbroken reminder  
that there is a dream birthing in the black of my eye,

the surreal shimmering as they dazzle contesting the festive lights  
decorated throughout my sepia tinged room

in a world birthing orphans by the second, blazing forests and raging seas  
engulfing the definition of a home in a split second, trying feverishly to satiate  
endless greed of mankind.

And yet these little blurs of serenity and incomparable joys have taught me  
that

nothing stays forever; even the boisterous gale battering the pain in my  
windows.

An assurance that these sullen memories will stop and die down eventually.  
Beautiful dawn will birth in the crimson folds of the horizon with hopes and  
desires

seeded in our black eyes and arms wide open to welcome this new world.  
And we will inhale the breath of fresh beginnings emerging on our doorstep.

# A Bridge Needs To Be Built

Megha Sood

Not every thought stirs me up. Not every flicker brightens my heart  
It takes a thousand steps in my heart to take one little step towards you.

Not every morning brightens my soul, not every rain washes my sins.  
I have knelt on so many pews seeking absolution.

Not every prayer absolves my sins. Not every scar sings songs of my  
glory.

Not every wrinkle is chiseled with experience.

I'm a fleck of mortality riding the winds of time.  
Not every moment of history carves me.

Not every sin I commit defines me. Not every blank space in my heart  
can be filled.

Not every thought of mine can be aligned.

But every day in me I find myself a bridge that needs to be built.  
A dark corner that needs to be lit.

# It's All Yours

Rahimah Adan

I walk the streets  
and abandoned roads  
They've been empty since  
we left them alone  
So I grabbed windows and colours  
stardust too  
Found some curtains to hang  
and lamp-posts to use  
They've been telling us the present  
is a present too

Who wants to join me  
and start a world brand new  
I garnered three stop signs  
some gold  
and a storm drain too

This new way of life  
I haven't lived through anything greater  
So I plucked the star-lit sky  
to save for later

The world's what you make of it  
so if you don't get your share  
The present is yours  
it's here and there

# SHORT STORIES & ESSAYS

The Essayists and Storytellers in this section truly captured this year's theme by sharing their thoughts, feelings, inspirations, and sometimes books that have left an impact on them.

# Ramblings of a Bronxite

Mario Castillo

The Bronx is my home, but I'm not from the Bronx. I'm a New Yorker by heart, raised in brick weather and baptized in dollar Arizona from the local bodega. I am also Mexican by birthright, my childhood left back in a distant memory of rugrats pinatas and sparkler accidents. Both are part of my identity, as seamless as breathing or feeling your toes in your socks in your shoes. But sometimes, it's difficult to keep track of when and where these identities matter. I speak Spanish, but I've started to forget the words. I once hated doing las posadas with my folks, going to stranger's homes and singing songs about Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Now I can't wait to participate in that family tradition. I actually look forward to cutting la rosca de reyes and getting a little plastic baby which seals my fate as the designated tamalero for the next holy gathering.

If anything, I have my sister to thank for waking me up to the reality of identity. She's been an inspiration to me for a while now, but she wouldn't believe it. Her tenacity and stubbornness is impressive. She keeps herself busy and organized in ways that I could only hope to achieve. Her extroverted and positive attitude is a belita lit up on the ofrenda of our home. My other sibling has made massive changes to their life as well: moving out and living on their own with their partner, finding work, becoming themselves a little more. When I look back at my own life and my situation at home, I feel like I have stagnated for too long, growing comfortable with my routine and not striving for anything more, unlike my womb-mates. But, seeing them move on with their lives has inspired me to get on with it, look inward and ask myself, *what do I want? What do I need?*

The big question brings on an existential dread the likes of which I haven't seen since 7th grade science class when I first learned of the sun exploding in a billion or so years. There are too many things to consider, too many options and not enough time to consider what is really important anymore. At least, that's how I used to think. I used to over-analyze situations and bring myself down with the daunting pressure of planning ahead. However, After seeing my family find success in multiple fields, I now see the light at the end of the tunnel. It's impossible to plan for every contingency, especially in today's growing political hellscape. Immigrant policy,

holy wars overseas, cartels and gangs running rampant, it's become all too common. It's easy to become disillusioned when there are a million things to be worried about in today's day and age.

With everything going on in the world, it makes me think about my community here in the Bronx. Our neck of the woods, Norwood, is about as calm as it gets when you're thinking about the boogie-down borough. Things rarely get out of hand here, as opposed to other parts of town. Even so, I think that as New Yorkers it is our obligation to take part in our communities and cultivate a culture of tolerance, acceptance, and open-mindedness. It's strange to think about the Bronx as "inclusive" and "loving", when all we see on social media is "dead-ass, its brick out here" this, or "canIgetabaconeggandcheesesaltpeppaketchup" that. I think that we have our own love language.

It comes off a bit rough around the edges, but everyone in the Bronx means well. At least, most people from here do. Maybe it's the tone or the way we speak to each other. I think that for the most part, if we are to make progress towards a more wholesome community where we each engage with one another in positive and fruitful ways, it takes effort from all peoples to accomplish this collective obligation. I look at the education system here in the city, the public libraries, and the community centers as key parts of our community that can help foster a progressive New York City.

I appreciate the NYPL for engaging in the community as often as they do, especially with how rapid today's lifestyle is: Short attention spans, less reasons to go to the library, and even less reasons to pick up physical books. My mom has benefited immensely from going every week to learn how to speak the language of the world, English. It has been her decade-long goal to become an English speaker and she is making progress every day. I could not be more proud of her. Here was the woman that taught me Spanish since I was a literal zygote, and now here I am teaching her how to conjugate verbs and when to ignore all the rules of English grammar because "it depends on what you want to say." I think that also counts as a process of progress since it is entirely dependent on how motivated one is to learn a new language, especially as a fully grown adult. In a way, that is something that she wanted to do for a long time, and it became a need over time.

There is a necessity to learn in our day and age. Knowledge is overwhelming at times, though, and with too much information we tend to forget what the purpose of that pursuit really is.

# The Good Fortune I Took Away From Books like The Joy Luck Club – a novel by Amy Tan

## Debbi Dolan

I have always been drawn to books that give insights into other cultures that we can learn from. The Joy Luck Club is a story about mothers and daughters, and it has inspired me in several ways. One way was in understanding the parallel with the four Chinese immigrant mothers who had met to play mahjong, eat dim sum and talk with my mother's craving for sisterhood. My mom was an only child whose mother was an Irish immigrant who died giving birth to my mother. Her father was an immigrant from Scotland who suffered greatly from the loss of his wife. Mom was raised by her grandmother, grandfather, aunts and uncles. When my mother heard of the Red Hat Society, she didn't lose any time founding a chapter called The Crimson Belles, and she became the Queen Mother. Her sisterhood was drawn from ladies she played cards with at her senior center. Mom arranged for luncheons at restaurants where they could talk and make a splash in their red and purple regalia.

In The Joy Luck Club, the author examines relationships between mothers and daughters, and it helped me explore my own relationship with my mother. When I turned 50, mom asked me to join the Red Hat Society. "That's your thing mom", I told her. I did not mean for that to be a rejection of her vehicle for fun and connection at all. I was blessed with 3 sisters and didn't have the same yearning she had, but I did join book clubs that have enriched my life.

I was a rebellious teen and early adult, and my mother's strict Irish Catholic upbringing became too much for me. In later life my mother gave me a book entitled Will You Still Be My Daughter? By Carol Lynn Pearson. She inscribed the end paper in her beautiful hand, admitting that as the first-born daughter I bore the brunt of her mistakes, and she expressed hope for getting past that and to cherish each other's friendship. She expressed her love through a book and that is a keepsake I hold dear. Being Irish, mom was a raconteur, and I am glad I recorded some of them and copied down others. I also collected her Irish sayings in a homemade book. I have inherited my mother's penchant for savings. In the Joy Luck Club, interest free loans were offered to the players in time of need. I too was able to use my savings to offer interest free loans to family members and a close friend.

My mother did not understand my desire to travel internationally at an early age. "Save your money for the future, you will need it" she advised me. She had put my savings in trust so it could not be touched until I was an adult.

So no high school class trip to Spain with my Spanish class, or flying to India to meet my best friend's family in Tamil Nadu. Travel would have to wait. Books like the Joy Luck Club sparked my wanderlust. After reading the novel in 1990, I did an oil painting depicting a scene I conjured while reading of the ghost that hovered over a floating pavilion in Guilin with its dramatic limestone karsts. Just this year I was able to experience for myself this type of spectacular scenery on Halong Bay, Vietnam, and I was reminded of that mystic landscape in the Joy Luck Club. I did a water color painting as a remembrance of that special experience.

Books are an essential conduit for better understanding relationships in our lives and the lives of others. I am grateful to authors like Amy Tan who take risks, exposing family secrets as an endeavor to bring about empathy, change, hope and inspiration.

# The Yellow Sky

Emily Petit

The sky began to change, and Lina hardly noticed.

It was her wife Christine who was the first to frown and offer, "Why the heck is the sky turning yellow?"

"Sunset," Lina replied immediately, because many hours had passed since they had opened the bookstore that morning and she could only assume that she'd lost track of time.

"No," Christine protested, and tugged Lina away from the checkout counter to the window. The sill needed dusting and the pane spritzing, Lina thought, tucking a lock of hair behind her ear. She wondered if any customers had noticed, and whether they had already logged into their Yelp accounts to leave a scathing review that would result in she and Christine finally having to shut their doors even after a decade selling books frosted yellow with the wear and tear of fingers that had sought them out in an era before the internet. She could remember those days, much more clearly than she could remember the names of half the customers that stepped foot in -

"Look," Christine insisted, disrupting the rhythm of her partner's thoughts. Christine's hair was long, but had gone entirely gray over the previous five years. Lina, whose hair was cropped short but equally colorless (although she had never taken time, as Christine had, to cover its slow snowy changes), peered upward, past the dusty pane and into the sky.

The crimped, craggy cloudcover was indeed a warm, flushed shade of yellow that reminded Lina of a funeral parlor.

*Getting old, she thought, shaking her head at the needless drama of the stratosphere. Old and morbid.*

"You think it's an omen, dear?" asked Christine.

"Probably not." Lina reached over and removed a cobweb from the corner of the windowsill with her fingers. "Nature is as nature does. Climate change, maybe. Who knows what the billionaires are up to these days, anyway? Could be they've finally trained those creepy drones to urinate en route."

Christine cast her a scathing look. Crows' feet crested on either outer corner of her dark, serious eyes.

"What?" Lina pressed. "Makes more sense than whatever rapture business you seem to think is going on."

"I didn't say it was the rapture," Christina protested, and sighed. "I don't know, Li. Maybe I've finally lost my last handful of marbles."

"No, no, I see it too. The sky is definitely jaundiced. And hey," she added, not wanting Christine's feelings to be hurt, "They do say 'red sky at morning' is a sign of impending doom, don't they? If blue means happiness and red means danger, maybe the one other primary color carries its own meaning."

"Like what?" Christine asked. She looked suddenly quite small and fragile, as if hoping for a genuine answer – hoping that her partner in love and business of so many tumultuous years might have wisdom to impart.

*Little does she know, even after all this time. I'm dumber than a sack of crabs. "Midlife, maybe. Look, see? It's our lives, written in the sky just like the pages of these hand-me-down books."* Lina picked up one of the paperbacks lounging on the checkout counter, a book that one of them had probably meant to examine for significant damage or perhaps discard altogether. *Getting harder and harder to remember these things.* "But I can at least still read these pages. It's falling apart, but at least there's still a story to tell, eh?"

Christina played idly with a lock of gray hair, contemplating. "Yeah. You could be right about that."

"I usually am. Now," Lina said briskly, turning away from the window to ignore the dandelion-flushed heavens and retrieve the feather duster. "Move aside. Those darn cobwebs are going to keep customers away."

*Author's note: This piece is inspired by the beauty of aging and the stories that women have to tell by the time they reach midlife – a period of growth during which all of us begin to reflect deeply on how we have changed or remained the same over the years in a world that, especially in an age of unprecedented technological development, continually shifts in character. Love, in all of its forms, is one of the surest determinants of whether we age with confidence and feel that we are growing toward something new, rather than away from our youth.*

# BACK TO THE FUTURE?

## Suzanne Cogan

In the 1960s I was a clarinet major at The Juilliard School. I played first position in the Juilliard Orchestra. My teacher, who'd played under Toscanini, encouraged me to become a professional musician. I won a Fulbright Scholarship for a year's advanced study at the Conservatory of Music in Paris, France. My future looked promising!

Then I tried to find employment. And tried. And tried again. I called everyone my teacher recommended in New York City. Several months passed. Nobody was willing to meet me, much less hear me play. My teacher was astonished. He'd always been able to make a few phone calls and find work for his best student. Eventually he "called in a favor." An irascible and squinty-eyed music contractor agreed to audition me.

"You play good," he said, after a few minutes. "You don't sound like a girl!"

I wanted to ask him what he meant, but I said nothing. I needed a job.

"I'm gonna give you a break," he continued. "I'll hire you to play second clarinet for the Russian ballet company that's coming here next month. I hope you're worth my taking a chance on you."

A real job with professional musicians! I was thrilled!

The first rehearsal was a shock. None of the men (the only other females were two violinists and the harpist) would talk to me. They seemed to look through me, as if I wasn't even

there. When I tried to make conversation, they'd act annoyed and turn away. I don't care, I thought. I have a job to do. Maybe, when they hear me play, they'll change their attitude.

Nothing worked. They were either indifferent or overtly hostile. One heavyset guy blocked the door to the orchestra pit with his body.

"Excuse me," I said. "I have to get to my chair."

"We don't want no girls in our orchestra," he snarled, refusing to move.

I walked up to him and gestured, as if to shove him out of my way.

"He muttered something that sounded ominous, then backed off.

Another day one of the musicians asked if I could play a famously difficult passage from a well-known work by Richard Straus.

Sure," I said. I played the difficult music with panache.

"Whaddaya know," he said, amazed. "We all thought you was here because you was doing--you know--with the contractor!"

I was disgusted. But it got worse.

The Russians were performing Swan Lake and Sleeping Beauty, two classic ballets by Tchaikovsky. Whenever I wasn't playing, I twisted around to admire the incredible artistry of the dancers onstage. This particular evening featured Galina Ulanova, the world-renowned prima ballerina. I never tired of watching her.

One of the nearby musicians turned to my neighbor and, while staring at me, hissed at the ballerina, "Hey, baby, spread those legs. Give us a better view!"

"You can't say that," I protested. "That dancer is..."

"Does it bother you?" he interrupted. "Then get the hell out of the music business!"

That, and a few other unpleasant and sickening incidents, convinced me that he was correct. If this was how women were treated, I wanted no part of it.

I had been studying ballet, modern, and jazz dance for a few years. Even though I'd started late and had some technical limitations, I loved the feeling of moving to music. I thought long and hard. If they wanted a "girl dancer," my being female wouldn't be a problem. In fact, it would be what they wanted!

I began going to dance auditions. In less than a year I'd earned my Equity (union) card and was working as a dancer. Later I took singing lessons and found jobs as both a dancer and a singer. And I never had to worry about being female.

It is now 2024. Over a half century has passed since I was exposed to serious and painful anti-woman discrimination. Everything has changed over the years.

Or--has it?

(End)

# Beyond Isolation: How the Matsutake Teaches Us to Thrive

## Paul King

Humans are pack animals. The modern era has sold us a story of rugged individualism, or strong cowboy types that need nothing and no one. As alluring as the thought is, that is not us. We are evolutionarily closer to the cave people huddled around a campfire, sharing stories in the dark to make the world seem less terrifying; these stories are where the lone wolf image comes from. The saying goes that, "No man is an island" and this essay will show by way of a mushroom that community is the common fix to many of our played out tropes. That we all get through hard times together as a group rather than the lonely, isolated islands that we have been forcing ourselves into throughout American history but certainly in the last handful of decades.

It feels like we as a society have fallen short of the goals that we set for ourselves and will continue handing the problems to every future generation. Once-in-a-lifetime storms now happen yearly, fueled by warming oceans and shifting jet streams. Tennessee, a landlocked state, is now hit by hurricanes. Global conflicts and climate-induced disasters loom larger every year. We've been told that these catastrophes are the price of progress—that suburban single family homes, vast lawns, and individual vehicles are the ultimate goals toward which we've all been laboring. Lawns of grasses that are not native to our area to choke out indigenous flora and car dependent infrastructure have kept us isolated to ourselves for decades. If this is progress, why does it feel like we're losing something essential? Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to build and maintain adult friendships? Our modern lives, with their single driver cars and long commutes, have isolated us. It can feel like the world is unraveling, but maybe the problem lies in how we've been taught to see progress. What if progress isn't linear—what if it's messy, unpredictable, and emerging in places we never would have thought to look?

In *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing introduces us to the matsutake mushroom, a symbol of resilience and regrowth. In Japan, matsutake are prized

for their pungent aroma and nostalgic associations with autumn, but they grow in places that most people would consider ruined—after forest fires, or alongside pine trees that take root in the aftermath of logging. These mushrooms thrive in neglected landscapes; places abandoned by "progress." To find them, you have to leave behind the comfort of the city, venture beyond the range of Wi-Fi networks, and go into the wild.

In the Pacific Northwest, where matsutake are also found, a strange community has formed around this elusive mushroom. You might expect bearded mountain men rejecting the grind of modern life to be the ones scouring these forests. And yet, Tsing shows us something surprising: instead of isolation, the hunt for matsutake brings together people from all walks of life. Immigrants, itinerant laborers, foragers—these are the ones who gather in the mountains, connected not by conventional progress but by something deeper. Their lives intersect in pursuit of this fragile, fleeting mushroom as a community grows in the aftermath of disaster. It's a community born not of escape, but of connection in the face of ruin. Tsing uses this as a way to bring precarity into her work and draw our attention to it. Precarity is the thought that we are all vulnerable to each other, if the forest fire had not knocked down the taller trees than the shorter pines would not get the sunlight they need and the matsutake would not be able to grow. This story challenges our idea of progress. What if progress isn't about leaving behind the old and moving toward some shiny new future? What if it's about finding meaning and connection in the margins, in the places where traditional forms of progress have failed? The matsutake thrives in places of destruction, reminding us that life can emerge where we least expect it and that precarity is not decline, it is just a different form of progress.

Building from precarity and vulnerability, Tsing shows us the idea of assemblages. She called them “open ended gatherings” in the book but she asks us to see the gatherings and connections between items that we would not always see with the modern world view. Groups of matsutake pickers would not normally come together with international shippers but the precarity of their relationship has built the assemblage where they need each other. From the lumberjacks cutting the forest, to the pickers, to the shippers they form a sense of community through the different layers of their involvement with the matsutake. An assemblage of people and conditions that lead to a common goal and a new network where before there was only destruction and fire.

Just as the matsutake grows after disaster, communities can form in the wake of climate crises. After hurricanes, wildfires, or derechos like the one that struck Iowa in 2020, we see people coming together—not in the sleek, isolated suburbs we've been told are the pinnacle of progress, but in messy, unpredictable ways. In the disaster's aftermath, neighbors check on each other, share resources, and rebuild together. These moments of connection remind us that resistance to climate change—and to the loneliness that comes with modern life—might not look like we expect. This is the precarity of modern life: we cannot be a community if we are always isolated and we cannot come together without the willingness to be vulnerable to each other,

like some trees moving aside for the pines to grow. Assemblages like these cannot be forced: just as the matsutake refuses to be cultivated at scale, they have to arise organically where the conditions are right. Urban planners can add parks and common areas but without an assemblage of people vulnerable to each other there will never be a bloom of community.

Maybe resistance to climate change and loneliness isn't about grand gestures. Maybe it's about small, everyday actions. In a world increasingly disconnected, planting a garden can be an act of revolution. A garden represents more than a personal project; it symbolizes the possibility of regrowth in spaces where life seems unlikely. It is a way of reclaiming agency, of creating something sustainable and shared.

The community that forms around the matsutake, like the community that emerges after a storm, shows us that progress isn't a straight path. It's not about constant forward motion or technological innovation. Instead, it's a process of adapting, connecting, and finding resilience in unexpected places. Progress, like the matsutake, can grow in the ruins of what came before.

# WAITING CHILDREN

## Laraine Pearson

After four years in the travel industry, I was let go and needed to find another job. Although working in travel had its perks, after dealing with privileged people who complained about everything that did not meet their expectations of comfort and pleasure, I was done. I asked myself "What do you really want to do?" Ever since I was a child the answer had always been to be a writer, but after spending a year trying to with no success, I gave up.

I was now faced with this decision again. What do I really care about? I knew my heart was

always with children. Although I didn't have children of my own, I was always fascinated with them, their ideas, their sense of wonder and of play. So, I decided I would find a job that would be supportive of children. The Children in Need Organization had advertised an opening for a secretary and I applied for it. My interviewer said: "It pays a lot less than you were earning and requires fewer of the skills you possess." I think he was impressed with my fervor to be of service to children, so I was offered the position and took it.

The department I worked for was in charge of political issues that would impact children. My job was to send emails and make phone calls to members, who were then to call or write to their representatives concerning policies that were coming up for a vote. A more impactful yet boring job, I could not name. But life at the agency was wonderful. I never met a person I didn't like and on Friday nights a few of us would go out for drinks at a local bar.

Across from my cubicle was a woman my age whose name was Carol. Carol wrote Waiting Children, a newsletter that listed children in foster care across the country for whom agencies were seeking permanent homes. These children were either older or more seriously challenged, and therefore harder to place. Carol and I became friends, often going out to lunch together. I liked her sense of humor and I told her how much I admired her writing about these children. Our department had social workers who would work with anyone who responded to a child in Waiting Children. Whenever a child was placed, the social worker would blow a shofar and we'd all run over to the social worker to see who was adopted and to celebrate.

One day, Carol announced she was leaving for another job. Shortly after the announcement, employees from other departments, with writing backgrounds,

showed up to take the test. I was really sad Carol was leaving. One lunch hour Carol tried to encourage me to take the test for her job. "Impossible," I said. I'd seen people from our publishing department coming to take the test, how could I compete? Carol was very persuasive and handed me the actual test one afternoon, saying, "take this home and try it." So, I did just for the fun of it, never thinking I was actually applying for the job. At the end of the week the candidate to fill Carol's position was announced. It was ME! A writing job! WOW, I didn't imagine I would ever have one! "How did I qualify?" I asked Carol. "Well, I didn't tell the boss I let you take it home. Everyone else had an hour to complete it," she responded.

"How was I going to do this?" Carol told me to go through the files of children referred to us and pick 5 or 6 to be featured in next month's issue. She said: "Just read about them and then contact the agency who had placed them in foster care for information that you can write to encourage their adoption." After Carol left I must have looked through 10-15 files before my heart sank. I had no experience with children who were so challenged, or the maturity to see beyond their disabilities. Who would adopt them? How would I write about them in a positive way? I started to call the agencies and was shocked that some of their social workers had similar opinions. They would tell me: "Pick someone else" or "Don't feature Timmy, he is too old," or "can barely speak," or "can't walk," etc. I went to my supervisor in dismay. I will never forget what I learned from her. "Call everyone that has any contact with this child and you'll find someone who sees their worth." So, I began tracking down their social worker, then their nurses, etc. One child seemed impossible, until I found the night nurse. "Oh, Johnny is a dear. He loves making the other children laugh." Eureka! That was my opening line and from there on I found one beautiful child after another to feature each month.

Several stories stay with me. There were two brothers and a sister, who should not be separated. A home was found for them. Then there was Nicholas, a black teenager, whose foster parents were clearly racist, as was the neighborhood where he lived. I knew there was a man of color in NYC, Mr. Foster, who had a beautiful family of 5 adopted children, whom I asked to consider Nicholas. He was adamant that he could not adopt another child. I begged him to come in and read Nicholas's file, explaining the racist environment he was in. Mr. Foster came and adopted Nicholas.

After a few months, with some successes, I asked my supervisor to let me write about the families who adopted these children. I was in awe of them. She said "ok" and I began my interviews. There was one woman whose husband left because he could not cope with their biological handicapped child. She realized there were other children like her boy who needed a loving parent and therefore adopted another special- needs child. There was a scientist who really astounded me. She started with a similar marital situation as the first woman yet proceeded to adopt three children! She had to work a 9-5 job to support them, and I asked how she managed to do that. She said: "Easy. The one that can walk sets the table and the one that can't walk sweeps the floor. All of the children have their chores to do." Another story that I will never forget was about the time a woman and her husband were sitting on the couch watching TV with their adopted son. When they needed to change the channel both husband and wife were bickering about who should get up and do it. Then she saw her son jump up and hobble to the TV to do it for them. "When I saw what it took for him to walk across the room, I was humbled," she said.

Unfortunately, at the end of three years the newsletter was awarded to another agency outside of New York and our last issue was never published. I found a day job pretty quickly and volunteered evenings at the Foundling Home. I had a section that was for abandoned children with severe disabilities. I now saw them as the individuals they were. I attached balloons to their wheel chairs so they could interact with each other in a fun way. They loved it, as did I.

Everything we deeply desire comes with a price. For me the price for having a writing job was to grow as a human being and see the preciousness of every human being no matter their differences or disabilities. It has enriched my life enormously, allowing me to know these children, to love more deeply and to recognize the need and right of all human beings to receive kindness and consideration. So, it was not a price but a bonus to work for "Waiting Children."

# ONE PERSON CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

## Karen M. Resnick

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit with its unexpected lockdown, I realized too late that I had left myself vulnerable because I did not have any internet access. The New York Public Library was, unfortunately, closed at that time so I could not continue to rely on their computers. As soon as I was able, I purchased a laptop and a hotspot from a brick and mortar store (although from time to time, I still utilize the New York Public Library's computers and printer).

Shortly upon utilizing my laptop, I discovered Zoom and webinars. It turned out that a number of organizations and institutions kept themselves afloat during the pandemic by offering Zoom presentations at a time when public, in-person live programming was off-limits. Now that the Covid-19 pandemic is over I am overjoyed that some of those organizations are still utilizing Zoom—offering totally virtual or hybrid Zoom programs

One such recent webinar interviewed the author of a new book entitled *When Women Ran Fifth Avenue: Glamour and Power at the Dawn of American Fashion* written by Julie Satow. As a woman and as a former adult business educator and computer instructor who had coordinated and moderated annual school-wide Women's History Month Conferences, I knew that this book and topic would be of particular interest to me. Within the webinar, it was mentioned that this was Julie Satow's second book (both non-fiction)—her first one was *The Plaza: The Secret Life of America's Most Famous Hotel*.

After listening to the webinar, I took a chance and searched the New York Public Library's catalog on its website to see if the library might have Julie Satow's latest book. To my delight, the New York Public Library had both of her books! I decided to put both of them on hold and realized that due to the amount of holds on each book, I would most likely obtain *The Plaza* first.

Upon picking up *The Plaza* book from my branch library, I realized that I knew very little about The Plaza although I had passed the hotel on the express bus weekday mornings for about 30 years on my way to work. I recalled having read years ago newspaper articles when Donald J. Trump had become one of its owners (prior to becoming president), as well as articles having discussed later owners changing the hotel by adding and selling condos in addition to offering hotel rooms. However, as a lifelong New Yorker, I must admit that I had never actually stayed at The Plaza nor even been inside. As a result, this book piqued my interest.

I discovered that Julie Satow's book included background information of the various hotel owners over the years, the changes they had implemented, as well as some pertinent historical data. She managed to present what could have been very dry, detailed information in a very interesting manner. This book also surprisingly managed to remind me that the way things are presently is not necessarily how they have always been. Here are some examples of this:

It was fascinating for me to learn that the land where the hotel presently sits was originally the home of the New York Skating Club, a former ice skating pond utilized by the wealthy, and the present hotel building is actually The Plaza's second building—the first Plaza opened its door in 1890 and was demolished in 1905. The present Plaza building (which is located on the same site as the original Plaza) opened its doors on October 1, 1907.

To me, a hotel is a place that one temporarily resides in while on vacation or on a business trip. It was eye opening to me to learn that my experiences differed from the actual hotel history. It turned out in its heyday, the wealthy who had lived in enormous mansions in Manhattan moved to live permanently in The Plaza because the cost of living in the hotel was cheaper than the upkeep of their mansions, and it eliminated the cost and the problems of having their own large staffs (finding and keeping affordable, well-trained servants). Hotel living allowed the wealthy to continue the lifestyle they were accustomed to. Interestingly enough, in those days the terms "hotel" and "apartment" were used interchangeably.

Julie Satow mentioned that on the opening day of the second Plaza building (on October 1, 1907) the modern taxicab was "debuted." A fleet of twenty-five bright red cars imported from France were lined up outside the Fifth Avenue side of the hotel to offer free rides to the guests of The Plaza. At that time, if people did not own their own carriages, they normally utilized horse-drawn hansom cabs (not cars, which were known as horseless carriages).

This discussion and a picture displaying the modern taxicabs lined up by the hotel were absolutely fascinating to me personally because my father (let him rest in peace) was a well-known, famous New York City medallion taxicab owner/driver and those facts that appeared in the book managed to jog my memory. My father's first two taxicabs were two-toned (red and yellow and then aqua and white). His third taxicab, a 1967 Plymouth, was all yellow—the color that was decreed that all New York City medallion taxicabs had to be. At the time, I presumed that the change to a one-color taxicab was a completely new phenomenon for New York City taxicabs. Now I discovered that the first New York City taxicabs (cars) were, in fact, all one color—not yellow though, but red—

so we actually went backwards rather than forwards in the color change. The old saying regarding that the more things change, the more they remain the same, appears to hold true in this case. Due to the fact that all the cabs looked alike (because every cab was now yellow), my father cleverly began to decorate his taxicab to make it stand out from the rest so that passengers would recognize his cab and hail him over the other available taxicabs. He decorated his antenna according to the season or approaching holidays.

The book's discussion of The Plaza being located on Fifth Avenue, as well as mentioning the existence of horse-drawn hansom cabs, reminded me of one of the times when my father managed to make improvements that benefited the taxicab riding public and the taxicab industry itself. My father could not understand why New York City medallion taxicabs were not allowed to cruise empty along Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. After all, many shoppers loaded down with packages would appreciate being able to hail a cab from the various stores along Fifth Avenue. The law allowed a New York City medallion taxicab to drop off passengers on Fifth Avenue, but then immediately the driver would have to leave Fifth Avenue. One day my father was stopped by a New York City police officer who thought my father was disobeying the law and was cruising along Fifth Avenue empty, without a passenger. It turned out my father did, in fact, have a passenger but the passenger was sitting low in the back seat so the officer had not originally noticed the passenger. Later on, my father discussed the incident and the law with one of his taxi organizations, and they brought the matter to the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) Commissioner at the time, Henry Barnes (who interestingly enough had previously been a taxicab driver in another state). The law was researched, and it was discovered that the law dated back to the days of the horse-drawn taxicab. Because Fifth Avenue was a prestigious street and horses left manure on streets, it was felt that cutting down on horse-drawn traffic on Fifth Avenue would help alleviate the horse-manure problem. That could be accomplished by eliminating the practice of allowing horse-drawn taxicabs from cruising empty on that street. Once the reasoning for the law was uncovered, it became obvious that it was an outdated law. From that point on until the present day, taxicabs can freely cruise on Fifth Avenue without having any passengers. Most New Yorkers, I am sure, do not know or remember that New York City medallion taxicabs were not allowed to cruise empty on Fifth Avenue nor would they know that an ordinary citizen named Eli Resnick was responsible for the change so that taxicabs could be available for hire by the riding public on Fifth Avenue!

Throughout my father's life, he continued to make changes that improved conditions for the riding public and the taxi industry. I remember typing up his suggestions for street changes that from his driving knowledge and experience he felt would improve the flow of traffic in the city. The DOT had made some of those changes and/or tweaked his ideas before they implemented them.

One day while driving, my father was feeling nauseous from the fumes from the traffic. He knew that a cure was to suck hard candy; my father being a kind, generous person also offered candy to his passenger as well. It was a hit with his passenger; my father then continued giving out candy to all his passengers, and as a result, he became known as "The Candy Man." In return, passengers gave him and sent him buttons with various sayings that he displayed on the inner roof of his taxicab. They sent letters of praise to the New York City Taxi & Limousine Commission regarding his honesty, the upkeep of his cab, etc. My father wound up appearing on television shows such as Candid Camera, the Stanley Siegel Show, the 10 O'Clock News, and Real People. Woody Allen saw my father on Real People, and he gave my father a cameo in the movie Zelig (playing "The Man in the Park"). My father was an invited guest at Mayor John Lindsay's Citizens' Luncheon. Stories about my father appeared in various newspapers and magazines such as The New York Times, The New York Daily News, and taxicab industry newspapers. A staff member from Johnny Carson's show had called my father twice about possibly appearing on the show. Unfortunately, it was before cell phones and with the time difference, they never managed to get in touch with my father because he was out working when they called. My father was interviewed on a radio broadcast. My father had celebrities as passengers such as Jackie Gleason (who then wanted my father to be his private chauffeur) and Dinah Shore (who talked about her taxicab ride with my father on her radio program). Over the years, my father received numerous awards, some of which were first-time awards. Amongst the awards, he was presented with three awards from the New York City Taxi & Limousine Commission that included a Lifetime Achievement Award, Honorary Lifetime Hack Driver plaque, and a plaque honoring his "53 years of dedication to the New York City Taxicab Industry." In addition, like baseball players, his taxicab number was retired. He was named a Big Apple Diplomat for the transportation industry by The New York Daily News and the League of Mutual Taxi Owners, Inc. (LOMTO) presented my father with the first Eli Resnick Driver Award which was to be presented annually to exemplary taxicab drivers. My father enjoyed his unexpected celebrity, but I think he would have been one of the first to admit that one cannot always predict what can lead to one's popularity or celebrity.

My father underwent open heart surgery at the age of 89 and, at that time, became the oldest patient in Montefiore Hospital history to have such surgery performed. He was in bed so long that he lost his ability to walk. He was asked if he wanted to relearn to walk.

He was asked if he wanted to relearn to walk. He agreed; however no one told him or the family that it would take two years. With his drive and determination, my father learned to walk in six months! This successful surgery gave my father six more years of life (making him a great grandfather three times), and one of my brothers was told by another patient at the rehabilitation facility that my father was an inspiration to him. While my father was in a nursing home, he suggested improvements for the patients' care that were successfully implemented.

It became apparent to me recently that without realizing it, I wound up following in my father's footsteps. As he loved driving a cab, I loved teaching. I unexpectedly received many letters, cards, and emails from former students thanking me and praising me for my efforts on their behalf. I, too, appeared on several television programs, and I was videotaped teaching my students. In addition, I had published articles (including the honor of being published in *Library Zine!*), had been an acknowledged book reviewer, had received awards from my employer (i.e. Honor Roll Award of Excellence, Quarter Century Plus Club), as well as having suggested and implemented changes that improved instruction. I appeared with Regis Philbin and my students on the Times Square PR Newswire.

My father's positive attitude and inspiration makes me feel hopeful that I will be able to overcome whatever challenges may come my way.

# ARTWORK

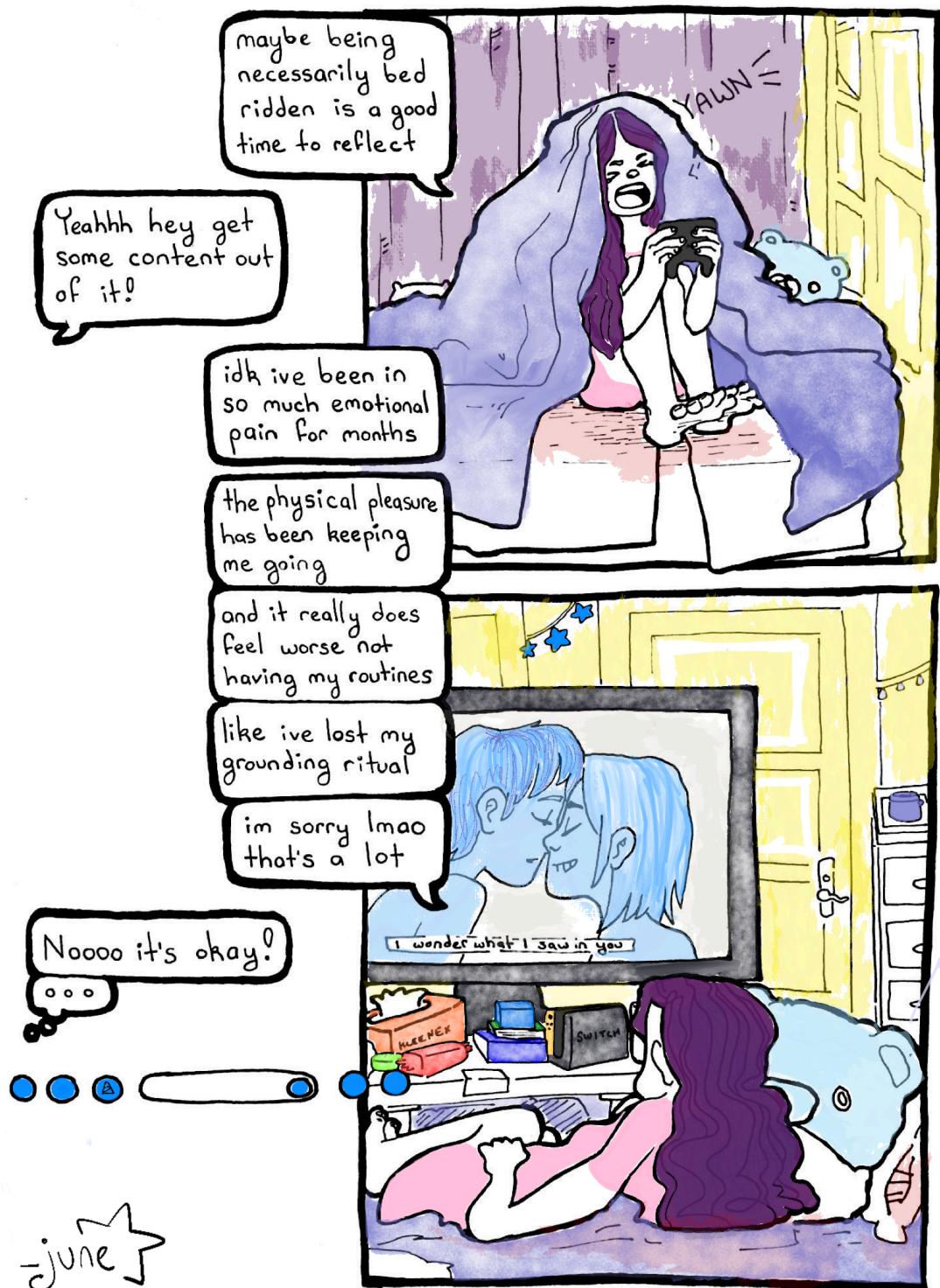
This last section contains the visual representation of the theme and no two interpretations are alike.

While the Artists included a statement about their work, we still invite our Readers to use their own interpretation.

# June Bendich

## Melancholy as Comfort

No matter where I go, guilt follows me. Guilt for an unending list of transgressions I've already been assured I shouldn't worry about. I spend most of my time working to assuage that guilt, but it always returns when I have a quiet moment. How can I run away from that which is inside of me? And what happens when I stop running from it, when I spend my days inside instead? Of course we all found out during the pandemic. It felt like comfortable melancholy, and an underlying yearning to do something. It was all very familiar.



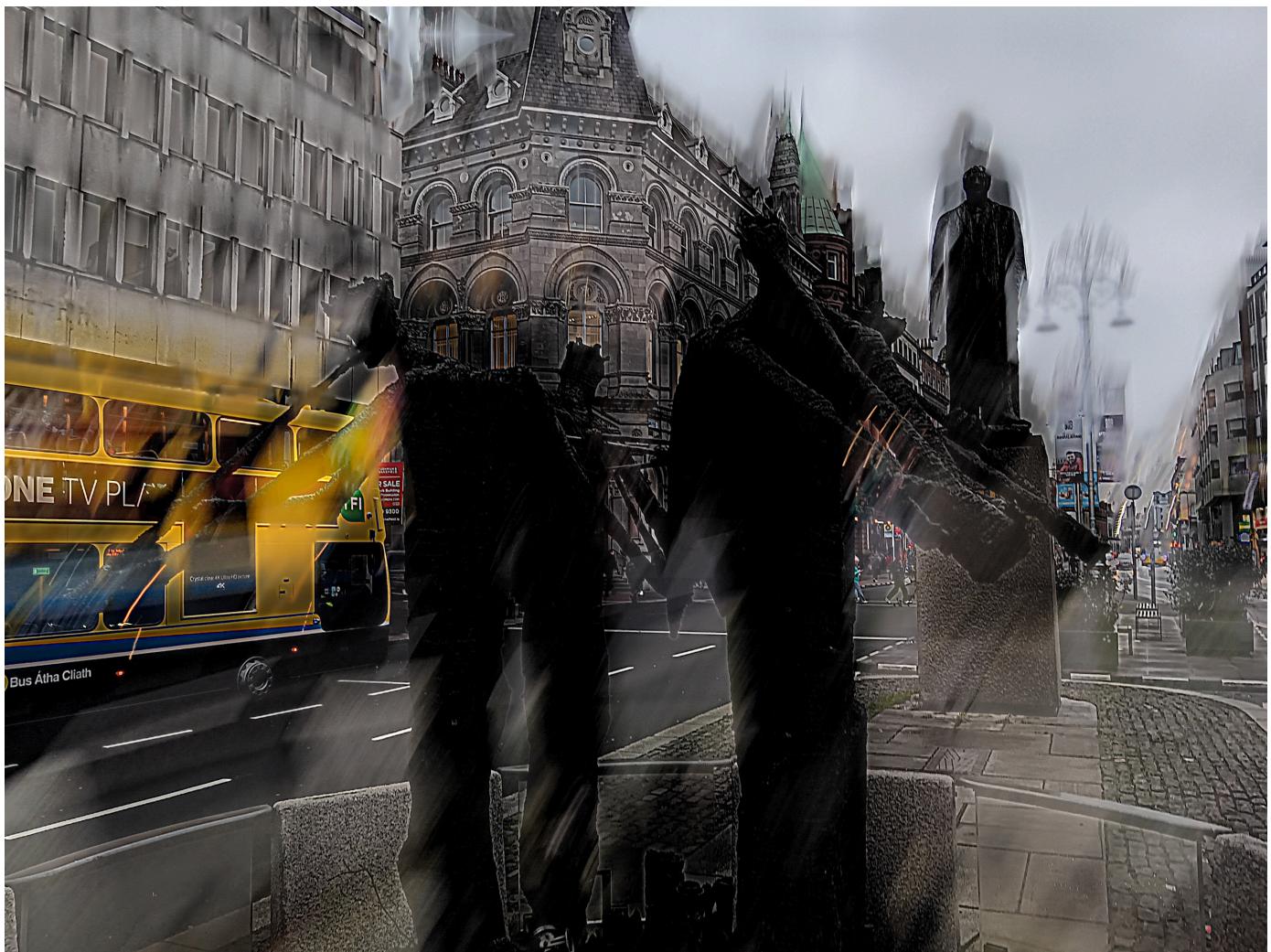
“People are not taking care of our earth and all we can do is wonder”



Anika  
THE LAST POLAR BEAR

## "The Four Provinces of Dublin, in a Mirror, Darkly"

This photograph of the Thomas Davis Statue and Memorial Fountain in Dublin, Ireland, was a total accident, and a trick of the light and a raindrop on the lens gave it its psychedelic appearance with no editing or filtering on my part. The statue depicts angels trumpeting to awaken the four provinces of Dublin, yet this image is blurry, shaky, and incomplete, a reference to the tumultuous past of Ireland and its incomplete nature that exists to this day.



*Melancholy as Comfort*

Something that we have always been passionate about is reading. From when we were young children, reading short picture and chapter books, to now as high school and college students, reading full-fledged novels and works of academia, we still have the desire to continue reading. However, as the years have progressed, we have watched the variety of content we can consume diminish drastically. Books that were once readily available, from the classics to the recents, are now harder than ever before to find on the shelves of libraries. This isn't just a regional change—in libraries across the nation, the amount of censorship in libraries increased by 90 percent in 2023 compared to 2022—there is a targeted attack on ethnically diverse and LGBTQ+ content, furthered by the increasing polarization of the country.

Seeing this injustice, a group of us decided to form a local chapter of the NYPL's Teen Banned Book Club in which we read banned books and respond to them with creative art. Our goal as a club is to combat this injustice by spreading awareness and actively practicing freedom of expression.

The first book that we read together was *Flamer*, a graphic novel by Mike Curato which highlights the kind of diverse themes that are being targeted by book bans. In the illustrations of the book, Curato uses the color red to serve as a call to attention and to elicit an emotional response. We were inspired by this motif and used the flame to emphasize our central concepts: the seriousness of banning books and the importance of coming together to put a stop to this destructive blaze.

The first picture showcases a girl reading a book in secrecy, being scared of the risk of being caught but choosing to do it anyway. The second one shows the girl outside instead, alone while books burn behind her. However, her direct gaze at the viewer offers a chance of hope, challenging us not to turn away, and inviting us to join in dousing the wildfire. The final image, like our group, is still in process. The sketch that is forming shows a group of diverse people, a hopeful flame igniting them, as they read the books they used to cherish together and create art to express themselves freely. Instead of being in solitude, watching our childhood wither away, we need to bring ourselves together to take an unified stand against these targeted attacks.



*Beginning to gather*

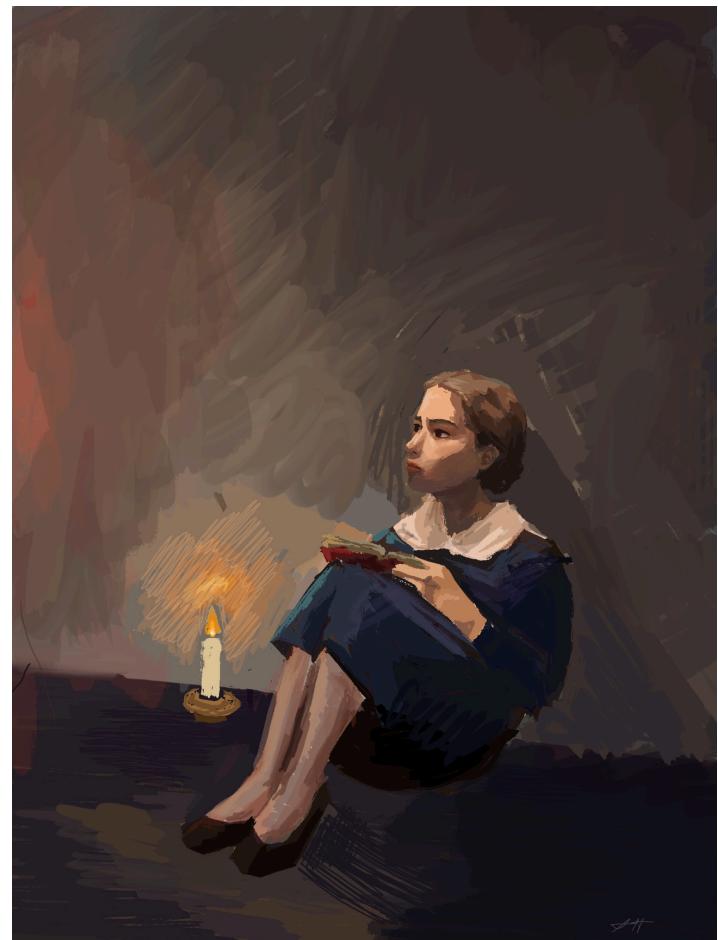
# Serafina Houtas | *Artist Statement by Anna Rams*

As always, getting to that point is a process. We initially read Flamer in the fall, and created a separate art piece based on that to submit to a different contest. However, as the bright flame of our club flourished, so did our knowledge and fervor for our topic. We realized the expansiveness of banned books, and how unity truly makes us stronger. Our ongoing reflections led us to create these new pieces of art. This comes from the continuing process of unification among ourselves, and discussing the literature we have read. We hope to keep exploring and learning through this process as we grow as a club in the coming months and years.

***Artist Statement: Written by Anna Rams***



**DO YOU SEE**



**LONE READER**

# ABOUT LIBRARY ZINE: VOICES FROM ACROSS NYPL

Meet the Editors, learn about the next theme and how to keep up to date with Library Zine: Voices from Across NYPL!

Four librarians—**Whitney Davidson-Rhodes, Adena Gruskin, Tabrizia Jones, and Karen Loder**—came together with the idea to start a publication that celebrates the artistry of the New Yorkers. They applied for and won The New York Public Library's 2017 Innovation Project, which is made possible by a generous grant from the Charles H. Revson Foundation. **Liz Baldwin** and **Farhan Islam** have since joined this initiative to form what is now the New York Public Library Zine Committee. Meet the editor's for The New York Public Library's literary magazine, Library Zine!

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**Liz Baldwin** is an Adult Services Librarian at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library. They love Zines and have been reading Zines, writing Zines, and attending Zine fests for over ten years. They love how Zines allow people to tell their own stories like so few other mediums can. They're very excited to see what the patrons of the New York Public Library can create and how those pieces can come together in a collaboration.

**Whitney Davidson-Rhodes** (they/them) is an Associate Manager in the Young Adult Programs and Services Department. Though an upstate transplant, they found a home in this bustling big city and calls The Bronx home. Whitney was previously on an art gallery committee that showcased original work from LGBTQ artists from the tri-state area. With a background and passion in art and literature, they've always wanted to produce work that showed off the talents of the people in their community. Whitney's lucky to have found other people who shared the same goals.

**Adena Gruskin** is an Adult Librarian in Manhattan. While she has been published before, this is her first time working on a Zine and she is very excited to get to see her fellow New Yorkers' creativity firsthand. An avid reader and writer, Adena is thrilled to have the opportunity to work on this zine with colleagues who share her passions. She is particularly excited about this project because it provides a showcase for our talented patrons and beautiful city.

**Farhan Islam** (he/him) is an Information Assistant from the far away lands of Staten Island, and has yet to run into some vampires out for world domination. He likes to read, love, laugh Sci-Fi and Spec fic. Loves a good time loop film(Groundhog day, Palm springs etc.); and vintage, Slice-of-life anime. Although he's never been part of a publication community, he's an admirer of the arts, music and literary creations; and is excited to tag along with our patrons in their pursuit of their awesome creative endeavors.

**Tabrizia Jones** is a Young Adult Librarian in the Bronx. As someone who was born and raised in the Bronx, she has seen the great things that make New York a creative and vibrant city. What better way to display that creativity than in a magazine that celebrates New York! Tabrizia has participated with literary magazines and newspapers in high school, both working on them and submitting to them. In her spare time, she loves to write short stories and poems, do art, and of course, read!

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## ABOUT LIBRARY ZINE

The Innovation Project's mission is to expand our horizons by surfacing and supporting staff ideas and creativity throughout NYPL. We aim to break down barriers, to imagine the impossible, to support and encourage each other, and to create a culture of "Yes! Let's try that!"

The Innovation Project is part of an innovation landscape at NYPL which, along with the Innovation Communities, provides pathways for exploration and experimentation with the aim of improving our programs, services, and processes in ways that advance our mission and strategic priorities. NYPL staff bring smart, creative expertise to their roles in every corner of our organization and are often closest to understanding what innovative ideas might align with that aim. If you are a staff member with an innovative idea, this project can help bring it to life.

The Innovation Project Team is made up of staff from across the Library, including past awardees, to ensure representation of the entire system. All staff will have a voice in the process, by submitting their ideas, voting, or both. Also importantly, this process will expose staff to each other's projects, which we hope will in turn spark more ideas and conversation across the system.



How do you bring light to others? What lights you? What inspires you to do good in the world in less than ideal conditions? How do you embody “a rose growing out of concrete”? How do you make something out of a method? We want work that expresses positivity, optimism and just general good vibes.

Answer these questions and more in our 2025 Zine theme: Good Vibes Only. This theme is centered around the good things that we find in our world and within ourselves. The Zine Committee is looking for creative and unique takes on what inspires you and keeps you moving.

**Submission Deadline: January 5, 2026**

## Written Works

All written works must be typed in 12-point font with one-inch margins, and checked for spelling and grammar. At the top of your submission, please include your name, address, primary phone number, and email.

Poetry should be single-spaced and not exceed 1,000 words.  
Short stories can be 500-2,250 words, about 2-8 pages double-spaced.

Essays should not exceed 2,250 words, about 8 pages double-spaced. We encourage essays to be about a book you have read that impacted your life.

Written submissions must be in .doc or .docx format, and/or readable in Google Drive and/or Microsoft Word. At the end of the document, include a paragraph of what inspired the work.

Submissions can be written in any language.

***Written Works exceeding 8 pages will not be accepted.***

## Artwork and Photography

Physical copies of artwork (e.g. paintings, sculptures, etc.) or photos will not be accepted. We prefer a scan of your work in one of the following formats: .JPG/JPEG, .TIFF, and .PNG. Images must be 300 pixels per inch (PPI). If you are unable to scan, a photo taken in ample lighting will also be accepted.

Images containing nudity will not be accepted. Images made majorly from AI (Artificial Intelligence) generators will not be considered.

Along with your image, attach a separate Word document with a description of your work and a paragraph of what inspired the work. Any images included in the artwork must be the artist's original work and not under copyright of another party or entity.

***Do not submit your entire portfolio or submit art in a word document.***

## Please Be Aware

Library Zine! is an all-ages publication for anyone inside and outside of NYC. There is no prize other than the prestige of being published.

While Library Zine does not want to limit our patrons' creativity, be aware that this publication is intended for all audiences. Submissions must be mindful of language, the use of graphic violence and abuse, and the depiction of harmful stereotypes based on age, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and mental/physical disabilities.

**Limit of 5 submissions for review per person, no guarantee that any or all will be selected.**

# THANK YOU FOR READING!



Visit Our Website To Read Past Issues,  
Find Our Current Submissions, Up to  
Date Programs and So Much More!

**[www.bit.ly/LibraryZine](http://www.bit.ly/LibraryZine)**

