

La Frontera

Dos Lenguas. Dos Culturas.



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2021 Issue

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



In 1977, the Voyager 1 space probe was launched into space on a mission to gather information about the solar system. Included on the Voyager 1 probe are two “Golden Albums,” records containing a collection of sounds and images meant to represent life on earth. The albums were added in case the probe is discovered by an alien intelligence.

Selection 14 on record two, right before Beethoven, is a short but powerful song by little-known artist Blind Willie Johnson. The song is entitled “Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground.” The song contains no lyrics. It is just Johnson wailing and moaning to the sound of him playing bottleneck slide guitar.

I happened across the song one day completely by accident. Since then, I often think about the dichotomy of the image: Voyager 1, the pinnacle of human technology (in its day) carrying Blind Willie’s haunting sounds inspired by his poverty and struggles. He was often destitute and died poor and while largely unknown during his lifetime, his music is now sailing through the stars to distant planets.

The probe is a testament to human ingenuity and our need to reach out, to peer into the darkness looking for answers, or a connection, or both. Similarly, “Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground” is a testament to creativity and an attempt to reach out and share the existential pain of being human. Though they are from very different places and even time periods, both have a similar mission.

Today, the Voyager 1 probe and Blind Willie’s song continue their journey through space. The probe has even left our solar system and ventured out into interstellar space. It is now the furthest man-made object from earth speeding through the dark to places or habitats or maybe even alien ears previously unimagined.

Just like Voyager 1 and Blind Willie, the selections in this magazine, whether poetry or fiction or even artwork, are also reaching out to make a connection or share a pain.

Thank you for reading and a special thank you to those who contributed.

Alan Webb

UNTITLED by Alejandra Quintanilla



On the cover
Photograph

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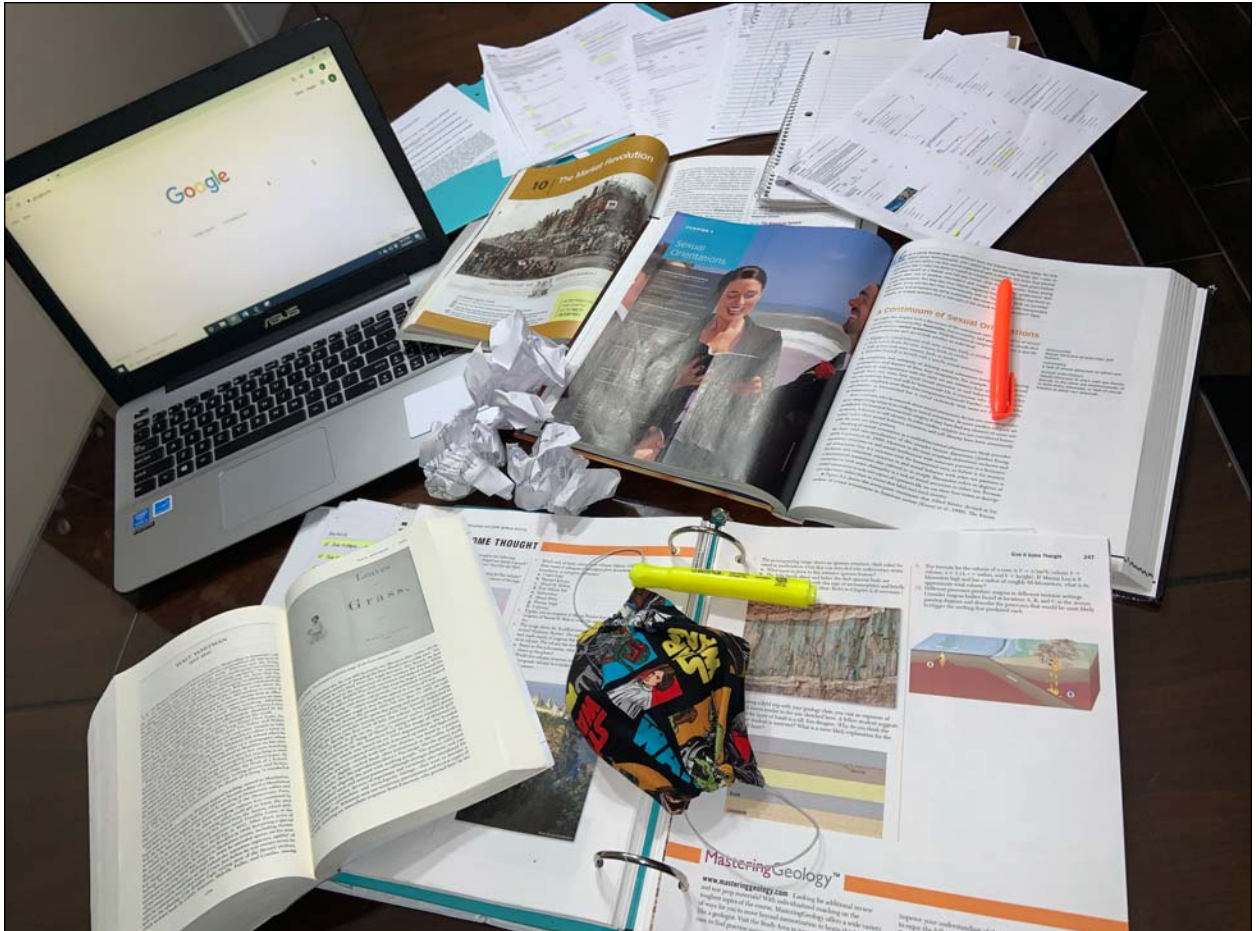
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It's a quiet place within my psyche;
He comes at a crawl to gain a foothold.
Dropped in my recesses, I lie nightly;
Fire sim'ring down inside my soot-hold.

He comes at a walk and then a canter,
Careful to avoid the sharpened edges.
So I stand before him with a lantern.
Up behind me grow, on fire, hedges.

You will not break down the soul inside me,
You will not evade this blazing arrow.
You do not have pow'r to hurt or chide me;
I am His who made each little sparrow.

Who are you, except a vile deceiver?
You'll stand down, for I am a believer. 

I rise from the fury of hell,
And cast my wicked spell.
This spell will make him insane,
And he will die in vain.
Off to his house,
To meet dear Lenore's spouse.
I'll flap to his door,
From my home in the earth's core.
I start by tapping,
He starts his yapping.
I hear the yapping of his voice
And he opens the door with no choice.
Staring at the pathetic soul,
In my mind I have but one goal.
I will fill his heart with fear,
And this shall make me cheer.
I am a beast,
And that is the least.
He longs for dear Lenore,
But she is... NEVERMORE! 




Photograph


Dear intuition,

It's been a heavy season
Lost consciousness while smiling a few times
Even made some decisions without reason
Still I protrude on this test of time
With a sober heart but an absurd mind
I've felt the romance of disappointment
Much to the despair of success

I did manage to enrobe myself in knowledge
It suits me, quite fitting
Threaded by the seams of never quitting
I just don't know when to give up do I?
Yet this battle it goes on and on
I fight without knowing who or what I'm up against
I battle my own will that's for sure
I conquer the eminence of fear and the obscure
Mine eyes hath set tabloids on pavilions
Mine heart, mine heart hath crossed bridges of oblivion
Still my intuition doeth reckon
That first, I should never settle for second


So I pen you with plethoras of ambition
Peace be with you,


My dear Intuition. 

They're not in my closet,
Not under my bed.
These Monsters I fear
Live inside my head.
They use my voice
When speaking to me.
They tell me things
Like I'll never be free
Or "It's just a matter of time
Before you fall off the wagon again."
So, I scream, I scream so loud!
But nobody hears me.
These monsters, man!
Always, In my ear.
Trying to tear me down.
I'm fighting for air!
I can't seem to breathe
And slowly I drown.
Giving way to the thunder again,
The waves Wisk me away
Then my spirit is found.
Stay strong! Are my go-to words.
Repeat and repeat
Till it somehow imprints
And I can finally breathe
Cause I know I'm worth it
And Recovery is my gift. 




Photograph


There was once a time of happiness and comfort of which I knew.
A time where great ambitions might have been pursued.
Now, hopes and dreams are cast away.
And my family has gone astray.
So much fighting and confusion.
My life consumed in disillusion.
Strolling down memory lane all alone.
Memories of what was once my family and my home. 

Their hugs and laughter I truly treasure.
Their mere existence is such a pleasure,
But lately I've been having a bit of pressure.
My face and lips have turned blue,
So I have confined myself in complete solitude.
I'm not like them; I'm not courageous,
But I suspect I might be contagious.
So, for them I shall fight
And simply pray for everything to be alright. 




Photograph

In my head,
Love runs through his veins.
Yet he wants to see me in flames.
He loves to see his friends succeed,
But he is full of greed.
He seems to be an angel
without his halo.
Yet, from the top of his head
To the tips of his toes,
His darkness shows.
A dream is what I envisioned,
When in reality he is a demon.
He is a demon,
I tell myself.
Yet, all I see is an angel without a halo. 

I think I'm feeling humble.
Keep my head low, so low
I might stumble.
Speak so low,
People think I mumble.
Listen closely, imma start a rumble.
I don't fumble, keep it humble.
Think I'm getting hungry cuz my stomach starts to grumble
and my anger starts to bubble.
No team,
I rock solo; call me trouble.
Deep inside me, I begin to crumble.
Like a Jenga tower, I might tumble.
Now I'm feeling double humble.
Kill my pride,
Take my ego,
All to keep it humble. 



Mixed media

Are you there?
Can you see me cry?
Can you please answer my prayers?
Can you tell me why?
Can you do it God?
Can you do it for me!
Can you show me the memories,
Of my brother and me?
Can you?
It will only be once!
Can you promise me I'll see him once I'm up
above?
And if you can't,
Tell me why it can't be!
Why can't I just see what was taken from me?
Show me now,
Can't you see I'm in despair?!
God, once again, just answer my prayers! 



Mixed media on canvas

ESSAY WINNER #1 by Patrick Delgadillo

THE FOLLOWING TWO SELECTIONS ARE WINNERS OF A STUDENT LIFE SPONSORED
WRITING CONTEST HELD IN THE SPRING OF 2020.


Hello there stranger, come forth, there is no need to worry. I shall not bring harm to you. What is my name, you ask? Just call me Sherman, my friend. Step on in and hear the tale of my life.

My life began when I was created long ago, in a land where a banner of stars and stripes flew freely in the sky. I believe they called it Old Glory. I have always enjoyed the way it fluttered in the breeze. It was a beautiful sight to behold. My skin was as green as the grass. I could outrun others of my kind with ease, and I could pass through mud, sand, and forests with ease. Yet, the purpose of my kind was as a tool of war. As we were being given life, my creators made my skin from the strongest of steel and gave me the ability to destroy. But I always made my crew proud; they always complemented me on getting the job done.

But it was during my creation that evil men sought to conquer the world. Everyone could only stare in horror as they destroyed, tore down and defiled everything that was good in this world, turning the green earth into a scorched land. Wherever they invaded, their blitzkrieg annihilated anyone that dared oppose them, and brought to their knees all before them. Their unending tide of darkness seemed almost unstoppable, all to the sound of marching jackboots. Almost unstoppable, that is.

It was during these troubled times that those under Old Glory dared to defy the rule of these power-hungry madmen. I still remember that day, when me and others like me were sent to fight these evil men, and I saw lands that I never thought existed. You should have seen what your kind have built, beautiful cities made from brick and marble, and my crew and I even saw a tower made from pure iron. My crew and I fought in many places, in deserts, forests, flatlands, towns, and jungles. Anywhere the enemy was, we struck them down with ease like you wouldn't believe!

We even encountered Tigers and Panthers, titans made from blackened metal who brought fear and dread into the hearts of everyone that dared to face them. These monsters were the stuff of nightmares I tell you; they spewed black smoke from their lungs, spit hellish fire from their mouths, and they roared like the Devil himself. But me and my crew weren't afraid of these demons. No sir, we faced these iron-clad devils head on! Even if they came up close, we gave those jackbooted thugs a whooping they won't ever forget!

That was long ago, the sounds of explosions and memories of glory are now in the past, replaced by the tranquil sounds of birds chirping. My crew has long gone retired from battle, just like me, but I still get visits from them from time to time. So here I am, in this grassy field, staring once again at Old Glory fluttering in the wind. I enjoy staring at this banner, and I know I did a good job in the war. But even during this peace I shall remain vigilant, for if in the near future, darkness dares to rear its ugly head, I'll be there to stem its tide. For if evil dares to bring harm to those who cannot defend themselves, I shall be their shield. For if would-be tyrants try to enslave the free, I shall break their chains with my thunder. This is my promise, good friend. As a proud member of the United States Armed Corps. 

Playing in my backyard, I saw my two speckled baby chicks scurrying near the pool. I got closer to them, tried to grab them; they both jumped into the water. I did not know what to do. I could not swim. They drowned. I woke up helpless at not being able to help them. The incidents and lies I made myself believe made me feel powerless: there exists no greater impotence than being blinded by your own wave of denial.


This new addition turned my lavender-filled home into a twelve-year-old's paradise: two baby chicks. Yet, what made my home blissful would cascade into pandemonium. I walked downtown with my mom one Sunday afternoon and fell in love with a couple of baby chicks a man carried. I begged my mom to buy these for me, and after a couple of minutes, she agreed to let me keep two speckled chicks and take them home where they would be safe and happy. They became my responsibility, and I even knew I needed to keep them from my playful puppy Harley. The very next morning after buying the chicks, I awoke bawling over a night terror. In this vision, my simple-minded pets drowned under my supervision. Once awakened, my parents comforted me by checking in on my sleeping chicks. Mom and Dad found my new pets vanished and did not hesitate to tell me Harley's recent alleged behavior made her accountable for their disappearance. Her actions turned my heaven into hell: my terror into reality.

Alertness spread through my house as more events began to occur. Many nights, objects placed around the house would find their way onto different sites. One Friday morning, my brother woke up concerned about seeing the black scissors he used the night before and left in the kitchen table downstairs lying next to me. Our initial suspicions pointed to Harley, but she spent that weekend at my grandmother's house. That night, I dreamt again. This time, not a nightmare; in fact, quite the opposite. In my dream, my brother did my school work because both of my arms broke; I became hamstrung. Although him doing my job seemed like a pleasant fantasy, I did not feel pleased with the situation. I wondered why powerlessness recurred in my dreams. These happenings became more frequent; they almost started feeling normal. My parents raised questions and thought of burglaries as reasonable solutions, but never found signs of forced entry, nor anything possibly getting stolen. Moreover, something within me believed the answer to our problems dwelled closer to us than we imagined. Gradually, that sense of alertness at home turned into wariness, suspicion, and distrust.

Dad answered our questions by installing security cameras occupying every corner of the house. I dreaded the process of installing them, but I wanted my paranoia to go away. I did not sleep; every situation I encountered stressed me. Nighttime finally arrived, and everyone got a goodnight's sleep, although no one truly prepared themselves for the harsh reality that awaited us at sunrise.


I kept my puppy, Harley, wrapped around my arms to belittle my angst at night. Nonetheless, when the sun arose, my nightmares returned. I found Harley, my sweet, loving puppy, lifeless in the middle of my room. She seemed terrorized like an angel falling from the sky. The answer was right under our noses. We could not believe the cameras installed in my room showed no intruder. They just pictured me. Instantly, I remembered the dreams

from the night before my chicks disappeared, objects relocated, and Harley passed away. I realized my visions were not dreams; they were my reality, my subconsciousness acting up when I came off as vulnerable. Everything led to me. I caused the terror in my home that kept me up at night. I provoked Harley's loss. I knew I had done it; the raw truth I kept hidden from myself made me feel vulnerable.

Today my room is empty, except for fear, my constant companion, and I. We are locked from the outside every night to prevent another mishap. Those moments created fear and exposed the reality of my inner thoughts to myself and those around me. That moment. That instant. That person uncovered a deep sense of ineptitude within me. Merely washing my hands cannot absolve me from my evil; I cleanse myself by surrendering to my immoral self: my new self. 




Photograph

Green and purple leaves,
In the midnight breeze,
Fading into you.
Inhale, exhale, breathe.
I'm gone underneath,
Fading into you.
Laying down I freeze,
Go to sleep at ease,
Fading into you. 

Just yesterday we were playing outside,
With the howling wind under the luminous sun.
But today we've lost our happiness guide,
Every ounce of gratitude we've ever had has
come undone.


They said it was Lou Gehrig's disease,
But how can something so deadly come in a
breeze?


We wept the equivalency of a rainstorm,
As we awaited the infection to conform.
He lives motionlessly on his hospital bed,
Yet present in heart and soul.

We hope one day a cure reverses the spread,
So that our family may once again feel whole. 




Photograph


I never cared for this town,
And always wore a frown,
Did not like being here everyday,
And planned to leave right away.
But since I've been gone, I miss what I left behind.
Laredo's music, food and culture is now what comes to my mind.
The community fits me like a glove,
This city has become a place I love. 

Depressed and Obsessed,
Can't seem to get you out of my head.
Pound on my porcelain heart,
Make sure it doesn't crack and part.
Scars radiate from under my sleeves.
Can't seem to stop them from growing itchy.
Farewell, my lover, goodbye.
But I know it's just an awful lie.
Lover mine, please don't go.
Forgiveness I give, redemption you show.
Take me up into your arms.
Tell me your love will always stay strong.
Stare deeply into my eyes.
Paralyzed and numb, trapped under my sky
Toxins flowing through your veins once more
When you take me in I'll never ever go. 



Photograph

The waves of the ocean flow with tranquility,
They make me forget about the battles that linger within me.
I know what happened was not my liability.
The waves of the ocean flow with tranquility.
To forgive and forget that is a possibility,
But to be free of the pain is not a guarantee.
The waves of the ocean flow with tranquility,
They make me forget about the battles that linger within me. 

It takes a house to build a family,
but it takes a family to build a home.
Craving for foundation,
But reaching for what I've known.
Breaking bad habits and building family ties.
A house is where you live, a home is where love lies.
What you find in a house is tangible, but what you find in a home is memorable. 



Photograph

It wasn't news
She was used to the abuse
She was all too familiar with disappointments
Broken heart and failed appointments
For what's loving without the pain
If it never makes you wonder if you're insane
But she never learned the consequences of going back
It's all because he left her broken and feeling like she lacked

So years go by and she feels the same
Every guy knows her yet no one knows her name
She never does it for love she never does it for fame
She just wants one soul to remember her name
Cause it seems that finding ways to hurt her is all a game

She's addicted to the wounds he inflicted
She's connected to people she should've rejected
She's void of love cause she was once neglected
But the pain only leaves at night when she's injected

It wasn't news
She was used to the abuse
She was all too familiar with disappointments
Broken heart and failed appointments

So she closed her eyes and shed a tear
This time waking up to reality was all she feared

Next morning she wakes up to his face
Another night of running
But running to the same old familiar place



Oh, how I love a late Winter's Day,
When that cold chill has just gone away.
White dandelions have begun to bloom,
And while young the day, I can see the moon.
Birds sing a song, and God do they please,
And I hear the whisper of a soft breeze;
It is the sound of new beginnings,
and the voice of new awakenings.
All truth be told, the beauty that it holds,
Is all more than I can say, for it is a late Winter's Day.





Watercolor

You look at me with a faint smile. I watch carefully as you slowly step in a river of frosty green blades, dressed in your best clothes. You hold an enclosed letter and my favorite flowers. Delight softens the wrinkles under your hairline as tears escape the youthful innocence in your eyes. You open your mouth to speak but not a whimper escapes. You hastily close it, clenching your eyes to catch your breath. A pool of tears rolls down your cheeks as you place the flowers on the ground. You carefully unfold the paper in your hands. I instantly recognize it.

"The sands have yet to take me," I begin. Your already frosted cheeks burn red as your smile falters. The countless tears linger down, soaking my words with worry and grief. You run your hand through your hair, letting your vulnerability show slightly.

"How I long to feel your curls and read the brail that appears as chills dance across your skin..." I continue. Complex emotions run along your spine as you give a shuddering breath in an attempt to conceal your sorrow, "...how I long to hear your voice..."

You hug yourself momentarily. You clutch yourself as if you clutch me. You reach to touch me, but I cannot feel your warmth. I see your breath, but I cannot wallow in its comfort. "I understand there are still words to be exchanged before I can feel your touch again," I say, "however, I must finish what I started." You look longingly to me as if these familiar words will bring me back to life... I guess in a way they do.

"Your touch is the sole thing I can confide in during this struggle for peace, yet your touch is the only thing I cannot have!" Your tears are then joined with a haughty, noiseless laugh. It's wonderful to see that my words of longing are still humorous to you; nonetheless, I'm glad they make you happy in some sense.

Your mouth moves soundlessly as you breathe silk. I sadly cannot hear your gentle words. I can scarcely bear the sight. The words I think you cannot hear as well... nor could you ever bear the sight. Only predetermined words may bring comfort to your untimely visit. The reemergence of my words may induce pain, my love, but I promise that the light will rise once more and set on our inevitable reunion.

You descend to the grass, crossing your legs to lean forwards comfortably. "The lasting scars of our unconditional love shall never fade for they're locked away, carefully protected from the flying malevolent shots." And they haven't, my love, not from me. Please realize I'm always with you, comforting you, caressing you with my icy fingertips. I may not feel your comfort, but I pray you can feel mine.

You beam and speak once more, instantly reminding me of this irritating eternal silence. I can vaguely make out my name escape from your sensuous lips. I observe the words, "why" and "home" and "immortalized?" Perhaps you're speaking of undying love? I'd like to assume that's what you speak of... A grin reappears on your face as you bow your head. It's the same look you get when I reveal the final line, "My thoughts are always of you as I trudge through the dreadful sandstorms. I love you..." I'm here my beloved. I always have been. I'll never leave... I promise...

"Sincerely, Yours. From Afghanistan" 



Photograph

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