

AWAKENED VOICES  
LITERARY MAGAZINE

ISSUE 10

**INTENTION  
FOR  
CHANGE**



MAY 2020





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## Introduction

An Editorial Note

Awakenings' tenth anniversary examines how the internal landscape of an individual signals change. In the tenth magazine issue, *Intention for Change*, writers create community in solidarity for themselves, for each other, and for the past. Through intentions that manifest in change, individual writers create art and community as a mode of healing and activism in the present day.

Intentions are most effective when they are personal and grounded. As writers and readers, a personal and grounded approach is frequently upheld as "good" writing because it can make art accessible; the intention of reading and sharing someone's story and the intention of sharing a story builds bridges. These connections become points of strength across a page and through this strength, healing, and creativity can pass back and forth from writer to reader even if we are unable to gather in one physical space. The intention grows from an internal landscape and still changes the world.

As an editorial team, we often discuss how words have shifted meaning even over just a decade. How do we feel about the word victim? What about when someone doesn't want to hear victim or survivor but still wants to be identified in some way? We as an editorial team participate in the change we want to see in the conversation

around sexual violence and healing through the pieces we work to share with the readers. Language is a powerful vehicle and we use it intentionally even in how we discuss writing as a team. We get to speak the truth and so change the power of certain words. We get to be part of this community with the writers who offer bridges for us to cross over and say, yes, to change.

Our hope is for readers to be drawn in by the different styles from each writer, to witness the intentions of people deciding to change themselves, people changing how they view past actions, how they view people's choices, how they view their body, how they view the possibilities before them. From Cherie Lee's blend of the literary with the fragile in "Holding it Together" to the sounds of a quiet moment in "Grocery Store Tenderness" by Abigail Swoboda to the tension of time expanding and contracting in Max Rumpus' "Barista" each writer draws us into the conversation with their style and sets us a challenge to cross over, to change.

In partnership with the Chicagoland organization KAN-WIN, our gallery at Awakenings will be exhibiting reproductions of artwork created by Korean survivors who were euphemistically referred to as "comfort women" after enduring violence at the hands of the Imperial Japanese Military leading up to and

during WWII. These *survivors* show how the word survival can change after decades of silence. As part of this collaboration, we have a special section of the magazine, curated by Guest Editor Dr. Elizabeth W. Son who has brought together writers inspired by the advocacy and testimonies of the survivors. These writers have been inspired to change in solidarity, and to call us to also stand in demonstration and to be part of the redress.

Readers are part of this community. As you read this issue, what are you called to change? This change may feel silent or it may be raucous. Please join us in change for yourself, for all of us as survivors of these harmful systems, for our community at large – we hope you will be part of continuing the work of so many, to making visible this call for redress, and creating this place of survivor-led change.

The Editorial Team is Jeri Frederickson, Creative Director, Megan Otto, Literary Associate, Emma Dempsey and Gillian Marwood, Literary Interns.

### **Content Warning**

The following writing contains material including one or more of the following: Rape, Incest, and Sexual Assault, Abuse, Self-Injurious Behavior, Suicide, Blood, Military violence.

The intention behind this content warning is to prepare a reader so they feel safe, even if safety doesn't always feel comfortable, to take in this writing. May it also serve as a reminder that a reader can pause and take a break from reading. The stories will be here, waiting for the reader to return.

**red balloons for my bitches  
covered in blood**

mo Santiago

When a girl tells you she loves you, you'll listen.  
When a girl tells you she's scared, you'll listen.  
When a girl tells you she was raped, you will listen.  
Take your taut skin and moisturize, there is no room  
for uncomfortability in this world. Not when we are  
dying, not when they are taking us and burying us  
underneath court cases and gaslights and dirt and dirt  
and dirt.

Then why the fuck do you get so uncomfortable when  
someone says the word rape? Why do you get so  
squeamish when someone starts talking about assault?  
You know, it's natural for a body to convulse when  
you see another one in rot but not while she is still  
alive and trying to ask you for help.

You see, women don't die they get murdered. The  
bodies of us are being taken, raped and killed. They  
are picking us off one by one, they are punishing us  
for being magical, for being alive, for being women.  
We need your help, we need your ears first. Are you  
listening?

Can you hear me? Can you hear me? I don't want to  
scream in a room alone, please don't let me die in this  
room alone. Someone sing my name and breathe life  
in my mouth, someone call my name, someone come  
looking for me. Someone else say it first, tell them I  
was raped and look them in the eyes. Do not strike  
fear into a room full of people, strike my story. Tell  
them my name, say it like this—say it like

mo Santiago was raped, she's alive. She got to live.  
But so many other beautiful people did not. So many  
of them are buried in trash cans. Under subways.  
Left in the side of the road, in a ditch, in a pool of  
mud, in a  
pool of their own blood. Someone took their clothes,  
their eyes, their first times, their names—someone took their lives.

These are red balloons for my bitches covered in blood,  
saturated in their own skin and mud. Little girls with lost  
names. You ever seen a body on the side of the road? You  
ever seen a body beg not to be seen? You ever seen a dead  
girl beg for some peace and quiet, for a grave?

Give her a grave. With her name on it. Put her name on it.

## Tell

Taylor Brazzill

“Do you like them? In China they mean healing and good fortune,” the licensed college therapist says when she catches me staring.

There are frogs sitting on the bookshelf. Stuffed frogs, wind chime frogs, paper frogs. Frogs with tongues lolling out the side of their mouths. Frogs with sewed-on smiles and friendly eyes. They’re littered among psychology books that have been on the New York Times Bestsellers list, among a stack of business cards with crisis numbers scrawled upon them in thick ink.

“They’re... something,” I say. I don’t tell her frogs also symbolize a lack of understanding in China. That the fable of a frog in a well is meant to be a warning of ignorance.

“So tell me,” the middle-aged woman says, stationed in a big, cushioned chair across from me. The silver of her stud earrings matches that of her hair, and she wears a fraudulent smile, her eyes casually kind. “What are you doing here?”

*What am I doing here?*

“Well,” my voice cracks and I have to swallow so I can get the words to come out. I blame the tightness of my throat on the fact that I woke up less than an hour ago, at two p.m. “I have

depressive episodes—I mean, I’m not officially diagnosed or anything—but I think that’s what they are. They come and go. I’m fine now. I just figured I should come while I’m doing okay because I know there will be a time when I’m not...”

There’s a small pause, but it’s not necessarily awkward. The setting feels too casual for anything to be awkward, I think, and then glance away from the counselor and look at the carpet.

The two dim lamps throw shadows across it in various sizes and shapes, some overlapping each other in a kaleidoscope of darkness. They reach for me in sadistic ways and remind me that night is coming in a few hours, and while I’ll be awake, almost everyone else will be asleep. To clarify, it’s not the darkness itself that I’m afraid of, but rather the things that can happen in the dark. The things that can happen when I’m unguarded in my sleep.

The questioning begins and I’m not able to look her in the eyes. I direct all of my responses to the frog on the bookshelf. I tell this frog sitting on a glass lily pad about my parents’ divorce, how when I was training for my on-campus job I had a depressive episode that lasted for two weeks, how I have obsessive compulsive

disorder, how I'm able to fall asleep at night just by closing my eyes—but for some reason, I still force myself to stay awake.

I tell the frog about my uncle who's an alcoholic, how I've been missing important meetings because I always wake up late when I finally do manage to get sleep, how my brother is one of my favorite people in the entire world, how I get so angry sometimes for no reason, how my parents are my best friends, and how I feel guilty about everything.

I tell her, while looking at the frogs, that I feel guilty and ungrateful for telling her all of these things because it might come across as complaining.

I tell her I don't have a plan to kill myself when she asks, but that I've thought about it before.

I tell her this casually, like every person thinks about taking their own life.

"I haven't drawn it out," I say and wave one hand in the air while the other scratches at my neck. I've been scratching at it for the last three minutes, and I know there must be red marks staggered down the length of it. "I mean, I've thought of pills, but you know, nothing more

than that."

She scribbles this down on her clipboard then looks up at me. Our eyes meet for the first time in the past fifteen minutes.

I think about all the other students who have been here before me, who have sat in this very same spot and casually talked about their mental health like it wasn't a big deal.

I think about this woman in front of me who had to listen to all of them.

I think about whether she's really listening to me.

"Have you ever been sexually assaulted?"

I blink.

She already knows the answer—it was on the questionnaire sheet I had to fill out before coming here. She knows, but she is still willing me to say it. To casually say it.

"Yes."

Her facial expression doesn't change when she asks, "Would you like to talk about it—explain it?"

The initial answer in my head is no, I don't want to talk about it. And no, I couldn't explain it if I tried. "Sure," I say anyway.

I tell her the basic story of how I was lying on the ugliest red couch at my best friend's house, watching a movie. How all four of us were there that night—my best friend, my best friend's husband, his brother, their sister. Some of us, myself included, were sitting on the sofa, while everyone else sat on the floor.

I tell her I fell asleep during the movie and woke up hours later when no one else was in the room other than me and my best friend's brother-in-law.

I tell her I considered him a friend and that he was a year younger than me.

I tell her I woke up because he was touching me.

"It wasn't anything more than touching," I say as if I'm defending him. I hate it because I'm not trying to excuse what he did, but it comes across that way. Somehow, my words always get twisted and my heart feels heavy with guilt that shouldn't be my own. "I'm not sure if you would consider that sexual assault..."

But I do. I do consider it sexual assault. But I don't tell her this.

Several moments pass and then she asks, "What was your response?"

*Did you say no?*

"I froze," I say and turn away from her once more. The dozens of frogs stare at me again. Their sewed-on smiles and lifeless eyes don't look friendly anymore, but rather sinister. Like if they could speak to me, if they could understand what I was saying—truly understand—they still wouldn't do anything about it. "I pretended to be asleep."

Five more minutes pass and then I'm walking out of the room with those same business cards in my hands and the image of bright green frogs stuck inside my head.

I make my way out to my car, unlock the driver's side, and slide in like I've done dozens of times before. I close the door and click the lock. And I don't start the car. I just sit.

Hands ice cold, I pick at my nails even though they're already down to the seashell colored base. She recommended chamomile tea, for the anxiety that comes with the memories of

sexual assault, but I don't think it'll be enough.

Maybe I should have told her more. Would she have understood then? Would it make a difference?

Here is everything I didn't tell her:

I didn't tell her that I can't remember the movie we were watching when I fell asleep, but that I remember Tarzan 2 playing in the background on Netflix when I woke up to him touching me. A movie for kids. A movie I can no longer watch without getting sick.

I didn't tell her that his leg was in between mine, his foot and hand rubbing back and forth against my clothed genitalia, at certain points digging in, inserting the own cloth of my leggings and underwear into my vagina.

I didn't tell her I tried to force myself to enjoy it, because wasn't that what all girls wanted? A guy touching them? A guy wanting to touch them?

I didn't tell her I couldn't breathe, that I felt suffocated and confused and absolutely terrified.

I didn't tell her it lasted for thirty minutes, with this eighteen-year-old who groped me and fondled me in the dark.

I didn't tell her I had my eyes closed the entire time, hoping it would all go away on its own.

I didn't tell her the word 'stop' was stuck in my throat from the fear of what he would do if he knew I was awake.

I didn't tell her that when I told my best friend about it the next day, she asked me if I enjoyed it.

I didn't tell her I was no longer best friends with my best friend because of this.

I didn't tell her he told all of our friends that I was spreading rumors about him when I told a total of two people.

I didn't tell her that those two people reminded me that he was adopted, as if that was some sort of excuse.

I didn't tell her that the thought of me telling people now, because of those initial times of nonchalance and judgment, now makes bile claw at my throat, close it up. Turns my hands to ice with anxiety.

I didn't tell her I had a breakdown about it a year later during Thanksgiving, sobbing into my mother's lap as I finally confessed what happened to me.

I didn't tell her I didn't tell my dad because I don't want him to look at me differently, and I fear he will because he worships Trump.

I didn't tell her I'm scared of losing another relationship because of this thing that happened to me.

I didn't tell her I feel separated from this experience while at the same time too close to it.

I didn't tell her that sometimes I still feel like I cannot breathe.

I didn't tell her I startle when someone tries to wake me up.

I didn't tell her I sleep with the light on.

I didn't tell her his name makes me sick.

I didn't tell her I feel ashamed.

I didn't tell her I'm angry.

I didn't tell her I'm sad.

I didn't tell her any of these things.

And I don't know if I ever could've.

But I know I'm trying.

I'm really, *really* trying.

I know I'm telling you.

Tell

**Taylor Brazzill** is a writer and graduate of the University of North Carolina at Asheville with a BA in English–Creative Writing.

## **The Exorcism Of A Boy**

Phil Goldstein

I am the only Jewish exorcist there is, except  
I don't know the ritual.

All I know is I want to cast this demon out like  
a flock of sparrows fleeing in November.

Can you who are witness to this eerie ceremony help me?  
If I say the words in precise order  
will the black ink dissolve from my pupils like watercolor?

I create my own liturgy,  
my odes to the power of nature, my pleas to grace:

Burn this rot out of me, the way sun melts fog  
as the morning unspools itself.

Give me the strength to crush mountains  
and grind the rubble to dust.

Let my voice resound like a hurricane of birdsong  
to drown out the chorus of sinners.

Break the hands of all those who shackle me  
so that they cannot grasp anything soft or tender.

## The Testaments

Phil Goldstein

Buried deep in the haunting of our bones  
lies, soft and still, the boy we once were and knew and feared for  
in foreign beds and hollow, hungry houses.  
We sometimes wonder how he got out alive at all.

In a hall of mirrors in a tiny dressing room that  
extends out into infinity,  
he stares back with eyes that long to be believed, but there is  
no one but himself to knowingly catch his gaze.

He tries on corduroy pants that will wind up  
twisted on the carpet like a doll's costume,  
the creases long ago transformed into stubborn wrinkles.  
No amount of ironing can ever hammer them fully out.

We know, of course, that there can be a murder scene without blood.  
Those are the tricky cases, the ones that  
confound hard-boiled detectives for decades.  
They rot in the sun like forgotten meat.

We know all of this. We are the  
connoisseurs of such a delicacy.  
We have felt it become an immutable part of our being,  
like a hernia scar or broken tibia that aches in October rainstorms.

We have carried him through all the seasons of  
our misshapen youth and dilapidated manhood  
as he made our footfalls deeper in the mud of memory.  
But we are so much more than what we buried.

We are the testaments to the fact that gates can rust and not break.  
Valleys can yield good earth following avalanches.  
Kisses can be reclaimed for ourselves.  
Hollowed out hearts can be refilled, remade, renewed.

## **The Aftertaste Of The Wind**

Phil Goldstein

The taste of the past is rotten in my mouth, like  
chalk and turned milk suffused with sulfur.

My desire to expel it finally welled up like the water balloons  
I used to fill with my friends by the tiny faucet  
in the Co-Op courtyard as we engaged in epic water-gun fights —  
they could never know —  
and then it burst forth with a terrible shudder, as if  
the crust of the earth cracked and split,  
and every lie I told to breathe and breathed like air  
flowed out into the moonlit sky above the sea.

I cried as if for the first time  
and wished for a moment  
I hadn't said a word, but now  
there is no going back to  
a world that protects monsters and devours boys  
like a second dessert, gooey and nauseating.

I open my mouth and wonder at what comes out,  
a voice I never truly had: foreign, like a birdsong in a blizzard,  
strong and piercing like an ageless wind,  
blowing away illusions spread like tattered cardboard boxes  
inside an empty house that is no longer my home.

**Phil Goldstein** is a writer and poet who has been living in the Washington, D.C., area for more than a decade. His poetry has been published in *In Parentheses* and *The Ideate Review*. By day, he works as a senior editor for Manifest, a content marketing agency.

**Survivor**

Desiree Middleton

Survivor

What did that mean?

Double check the doors and windows,

Stay inside after dark,

Sleep with a knife under my pillow.

What does it mean?

Hike alone.

Go out after midnight in whatever I want to wear.

Smile and laugh in public,

Dance with strangers,

Flirt with the barista,

Freedom.

It means fucking freedom.

Survivor

**Desiree Middleton** is an award winning screenwriter and author of several works of fiction.



I don't know how to make it any clearer.

I – we had sex, but it was against my will.

I wasn't planning on having sex with him.

So he was like – we were standing in the kitchen  
and he pulled my pants down, and that's what happened.

Right.

## Femicide

Madison Baranoski

Eyvi Ágreða was doused in gasoline and lit on fire by a colleague that followed her onto a public bus holding a yogurt container concealing the liquid. More than half of her body was burned. His lawyer explained that he had become infatuated with her and was upset she was not paying attention to him.

A congresswoman explained,  
*an aggressor will act normally until  
the woman makes him flip out by telling him  
"I'm leaving you" or "I'm cheating on you."* She said,  
*those phrases should never be said by a woman.*  
The congresswoman was forced to resign  
after saying, *women sometimes give men  
the opportunity to kill them*

Arlette Contreras' boyfriend told her,  
*I'm going to make love to you* and when she  
refused he said, *then I will rape you.* Pushing  
her to the floor, he choked her and threatened  
to kill her. She managed to escape, but he  
followed her, naked, dragging her by her hair  
as someone tried to intervene. His lawyer  
told the court, *this is a domestic matter  
involving infidelity, the details of which  
I cannot reveal for reasons of gentlemanliness*  
*Dragging her doesn't mean he's going to kill her,  
punching her doesn't mean he's going to kill her.*  
She was threatened with three years in jail  
for allegedly providing a fraudulent document  
regarding her employment status.

Jennifer Villena entered his house.  
He told her, *it's been a while since  
I've been with a woman.* He told reporters,  
*she would have screamed if it had been  
against her will.* He was sentenced  
six years in prison for rape. Her boyfriend  
at the time left her. Accused her of cheating.

**Madison Baranoski** works as an Administrative Coordinator for a nonprofit organization that works with children that come from backgrounds of trauma. In her writing, she is interested in the ways we inherit and pass on trauma. To contact her, please email her at [madibaranoski@gmail.com](mailto:madibaranoski@gmail.com).

## Grocery Store Tenderness

Abigail Swoboda

I check an invisible watch before I thrust my hands into the vat of red beans,  
stationed between aisles six and seven,  
bridging the gap between the cans of corn and the boxes of breakfast cereal.  
I relish the sensation of a thousand tiny touches.  
I stir gently, and their whispered words reach my ears in a flurry:  
"I won't hurt you! I won't hurt you! I won't hurt you!"  
They bracelet my forearms, bright like blood.  
Canned Muzak crackles through the speakers above us and floats down like a hymn.  
I tilt my head back,  
searching nose pointed toward the fluorescent sun.  
This is the oldest brightness I know.  
A forgotten shopping list haunts my back pocket.  
When I leave, I walk leaned against the wind, even though there is no wind.

**Abigail Swoboda** is a writer based in Philadelphia, PA, where they are pursuing their MA in English at Temple University. There, they also teach French, eat too much oatmeal, and seek out small moments of everyday tenderness.

## **Black Pearl**

Lisa M. Kendrick

I could never make peace with fallacy—  
I could not cover for him my whole life  
even though I had buried his secret,  
an angry grit of sand I had polished until  
the discomfort became bearable.

But that pearl swelled, dark and iridescent,  
a constant reminder of ugliness—  
my being yearning for its release  
until, no matter the sheen of its coating,  
I ejected the malignance  
I had been forced to succor.

For that I was deemed the enemy  
who had dared purge herself of injustice—  
I became the black sheep—  
the whore who shattered implicit silence.

I was labelled a pariah  
because it would have been just fine  
with them if I had kept his secret—  
carried the night a family member  
pillaged my innocence,  
harboring the betrayal  
I had wrestled with my entire life.

That pearl of wisdom, as dark as the crime,  
the color I had made into my mantle  
the day I spoke the truth—  
the day my family disowned me  
for the crime of having been a child  
who didn't want to rock the boat,  
then becoming an adult who released a tsunami.

**Lisa M. Kendrick** lives in the heart of Norfolk, Virginia with her twin daughters. She has been teaching high school English for twenty-five years, publishes a high school literary magazine, writes curriculum, young adult fiction and poetry, and performs spoken word in her spare time.

## Permission To Change Your Mind

Brandi Schmeling

In recent years, we've heard so much more about the idea of "consent" as it relates to our bodies and our sexual experiences. What do we really know about consent? What messages have we been given and internalized about what it means to consent? I don't think, as a woman, I fully understood consent until I was in my 30s.

I was out with friends. We were dancing and having a few drinks. I was eyeing the bass player of this band I'd seen play weeks before. The first experience watching this band play, that same bass player took a liking to another gal and I was made to feel invisible. I recalled feeling rejected because I hadn't even gotten "my shot at him." So naturally, this time, I made the decision that he wasn't going to ignore me. I was on a mission.

My friends went on home and I approached him after his gig ended with some bold statement about his choice to ignore me. He seemed startled by my brash approach but offered to buy me a drink. I thought to myself "I'm bringing this guy home." Sure enough, he offered me a ride home and we engaged in some silly banter and small talk in the car. When we pulled on my street and he put his car in park, he told me that he wanted to come in. I agreed he could come in and I showed him upstairs to my bedroom.

We began making out and in my mind I thought, "I'm going to sleep with him." We fumbled to get undressed and I felt around in my nightstand and handed him a condom. All signs pointed to my consent.

He became a little rough with his touch and I playfully said "easy there buddy" and "whoa, be gentle." I said these statements with a laugh to accompany them and soften the blow so as not to appear uptight or to annoy or anger him. He didn't seem to hear me, or if he did, he didn't oblige. He continued being rough and with a little more firmness I said "Hey. Be gentle." He just smiled at me and continued on. There was a moment where I turned my head to the side, likely beginning to dissociate, where I had the thought "I'm better than this." I continued to lay there, almost lifeless and didn't voice this revelation of my worth. He would tell me to touch him, appearing frustrated with my lack of enthusiasm. This didn't stop him from continuing on. Perplexed he asked "why are you laying like this?" while continuing to thrust into me, demonstrating with his own arms how mine lay flat against the bed above my head. My body's way of signaling "I give up, I surrender, make it stop" when my words were not able to. At a certain point in the evening, the condom drying up, I finally managed to say "can we please be done? I'm done with this." He replied with "fine, but I'm sleeping here tonight."

I only knew his first name and that I wanted him out of my bed. I turned away from him and uttered "that's fine." I struggled to settle into sleep over the next few hours. I got up early. He was still there. Still taking up space in my bed. I showered, returned to my bedroom and began to loudly move about my room. He laid there, not seeming to notice my presence. When was he going to leave? He finally awoke and sounding annoyed asked "you have somewhere to be?" I told him I had an appointment. That wasn't even a lie. I had a 9am brazilian wax appointment that I was feeling ashamed to go to after last night. I ushered him out of my house and drove to my appointment, nauseated with flashes of the previous night invading my mind.

I proceeded to feel disgusted with myself for days after without really understanding why. A close friend I had shared the experience with kept asking me if it was consensual. Of course it was. I invited him up. I gave him the condom. "Why do you keep asking me that?" I wondered, frustrated and defensive with the repetitive questioning. I noticed the following day, multiple bruises all over my thighs. Which ignited more intrusions of sensations and images and feelings of nausea. I spent time the following week talking with my therapist about this incident, annoyed with myself and my feelings. Why did this casual, consensual sex experience leave me feeling so

dirty and disgusting? My therapist reflected back to me how I wanted to sleep with this man, invited him up, and then I changed my mind. Yes. That all happened. So what? She seemed a bit surprised, "Oh," with a long, gentle but overwhelming pause, "you don't think you're allowed to change your mind?" She was right. My belief was that since I had initially consented, invited him up, handed him the condom that I somehow asked for this. The fact is, however, that I did change my mind. The other fact is, I did not consent to those bruises. It is one thing to consent to rough play in the bedroom. When you're continually asking for someone to be gentle and take it easy and you end up with bruises, that is not consent. It is sexual assault. Even if he does it with a smile on his face.

I've finally learned that you can consent to something and you can also change your mind. Once you change your mind, you no longer consent. Thinking back over many of my sexual experiences, I may have initially consented but at some point during the interaction, I changed my mind but did not believe I had the right to do so. I believed I owed it to the person I invited in and expressed an interest in, to follow through. Most often, even when my mind changed, I didn't speak up, I didn't voice that change. Instead, I retreated into my own mind. I dissociated. I waited for it to be over. Then I felt disgusting and

internalized that disgust into something being wrong with me. It's taken me until I was in my 30s to truly understand and respect my own sexuality and my own body, by in large, because up until now no one else did either. From now on, I give myself permission to change my mind. I am allowed to change my mind, and you are too.

**Brandi Schmeling** is a licensed clinical psychologist who specializes in treating substance use and trauma related issues. She strives to guide others on their healing journey as she continues on her own.

## **Fairy Tales**

Amanda Held

Sometimes the prince wears a mask  
to hide his hellish howls and his true  
monster form, with flames ready to lick  
at every tender, vulnerable place;

and the princess holds onto appearances,  
carries her head high, laughs and smiles  
as she burns, until she falls to ashes,  
only to find that all along she was a phoenix:

gloriously indestructible in her truth,  
succumbing to no hell hound tooth.



## Barista

Max Rumpus

“Your father raped me.”

The text came with its usual cheerful catcall.

My feet filled with sand, heavy, stuck to the rubber matted floor. Vision narrowed. All I could see was my diagonally stretched and stain-obscured reflection in the stainless steel of the espresso machine.

Not possible. She lived next door. I saw her all the time.

Double espresso. My fingers moved with muscle memory. All pressure, all heat, every-fucking day of my life seemed to compress into my forehead.

“Your father raped me. I’m sorry to tell you this way, but we haven’t spoken in years and I can’t hold it in anymore.”

She was a nut. She was my friend. Her family was nuts. Jesus, we hooked-up once.

Coffee grounds from the grinder. 18 grams of lovingly roasted espresso ground fine into the portafilter. Evenly spaced, Mound gently brushed flat. 18 grams of coffee and one fraction of a tear.

“Your father raped me. I’m sorry to tell you this way, but we haven’t spoken in years and I can’t hold it in anymore. Remember those times you would get home and I was in your house hanging out waiting for you.”

Images of her in my house flood my vision. Was she there before me? After me? We played ringalevio. We smoked cigarettes behind the above-ground pool. We hooked up.

“Your father raped me. I’m sorry to tell you this way, but we haven’t spoken in years and I can’t hold it in anymore. Remember those times you would get home and I was in your house hanging out waiting for you. I was there because he had convinced me the sex was my idea.”

The tamper- oiled zebra wood. Lack of shine highlights the wear. The ball of the handle fits deep into my palm, espresso compressed.

She was so fast. “All in, All in, free, free, free” as she let loose the jailed from the stoop. She was uncatchable.

“Your father raped me. I’m sorry to tell you this way, but we haven’t spoken in years and I can’t hold it in anymore. Remember those times you would get home and I was in your house hanging out waiting for you. I was there because he had convinced me the sex was my idea. I was 12.” He caught her.

Portafilter to brew head. Lift the handle for pressure. 11 bar. Pressure.

She was 12 when I was 14. She was 14 when we . . .

Pressure to brew the espresso. Pressure to compress my brain. My temples pound outward rhythmically.

“Your father raped me. I’m sorry to tell you this way, but we haven’t spoken in years and I can’t hold it in anymore. Remember those times you would get home and I was in your house hanging out waiting for you. I was there because he had convinced me the sex was my idea. I was 12. He threatened to tell my mom if I did not come back. The fear kept me quiet.”

Have I ever left him alone with Vivian? Has he touched my little girl? The drumming continues. The volume ratchets up while the beat speeds. The heat, the pressure, the water all focused, all forced down and onto the compacted grounds.

“Your father raped me. I’m sorry to tell you this way, but we haven’t spoken in years and I can’t hold it in anymore. Remember those times you would get home and I was in your house hanging out waiting for you. I was there because he had convinced me the sex was my idea. I was 12. He threatened to tell my mom if I did not come back. The fear kept me quiet. I was in the hospital and they were not sure I would make it. I thought of you and the pics you post of your daughter. I thought you needed to know. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”

The water and grounds combine into the brown syrupy elixir and fill the shot glass. What they were before is gone, replaced with bittersweet tones of chocolate and caffeine enough to make the heart race.

I am fatherless. She is sorry. Jesus, she is sorry?

Poured into the double walled stainless-steel cup the espresso is perfect. The crema lingers on the top, licking the edges of the cup. Waiting to be savored.

The cold sweat is over, though the drops still work their way down my back. No more “I love you” or alone time with grandkids. He can savor the lingering crema of the pressure he abused.

**Max Rumpus** is Angsty New York street kid turned Marine turned college poet aged to curmudgeonly lawyer at the tail end of a career making angst a professional persona. Unflappable. Unaffected. Apparently unimpeded by pressure or adversity. A walking talking human pressure cooker.

**Good Fortune**

Isabella Scott



**Good Fortune**

8.5 x 11"

Ball Point

**Magnolia**  
Isabella Scott



**Magnolia**  
8.5 x 11"  
Ball point

**Isabella Scott** was born in Winnebago, Illinois. She currently lives in Chicago, Illinois. Isabella works in a wide range of mediums. Her primary focus is pen and ink. Isabella is heavily influenced by the surreal. She loves creating a world where she combines fact and fantasy

Magnolias came to her in a dream. She was entangled in magnolia branches. She was intertwined with something so natural, feminine, and free and it inspired her to make these unique drawings to illustrate new beginnings.

**October 28, 2017 · July 28, 2019**

Dana Christy

21 months. 639 days.

Bleeding yet bloodless.

I am a gaping wound, torn open to barren marrow. I smile, I glow, I sparkle with the crackling flames that consume the dry branches of my bones. They look at the fire in my eyes and see joy, passion, zeal.

They can't tell I'm slowly turning to ash.

My body has been invaded by a deadly pathogen:  
shame.

Every cell now contains its own cold, hard pebble of self-loathing.

I am diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder. My body is attacking itself.

I can't kill my rapist, so I kill my own cells instead.

Every month I pray for rain.

For the crimson flow to return to my body, to cleanse me of this venom that is poisoning me from the inside out.

Maybe I don't pray hard enough.

No, that's not it.

Maybe I don't eat the right things. Best to eat less,  
and even less.

Maybe if I shrink, the cavernous emptiness inside me won't feel so big.

My depleted body presents pathogens with an irresistible opportunity.

Fever after fever burns through me, kindled  
by my self-disgust.

I get a chronic yeast infection. It ebbs and flows, like the blood I used to have,  
but never truly leaves.

My vagina is a battleground. My shame

is the deadliest disease of all. It drinks my blood until I'm barren as sand,  
staking its claim on my uterus.

I dry up like a shed snakeskin.  
I am a shell,  
a whisper,  
an echo  
of the girl I once was. But oh,  
how beautiful I am.  
That gleaming white light that shines out of me is the glow of a carcass  
picked clean and bleached in the desert sun.  
Eventually, I stop praying for blood. I stop praying for healing, for wisdom, for  
life.

Instead, I start to swim. I swim in the pool. When summer comes, I swim in  
the lake.  
At first I dive deep and hold my breath just a moment longer than my body  
wants.  
The burning in my lungs feel safe; a brush with death I can control.  
But as time passes, I begin to swim laps.  
The rhythm of my stroke and my breath is a lullaby. The inferno inside me  
starts to cool.  
Sometimes, I even let myself float.

21 months pass.  
639 days.

I have been dreaming of water.

I dream my body is the Earth after a storm,  
rivers and creeks and streams  
flowing lushly through my veins.

One morning I wake up to a cool wetness between my legs.  
Is this really happening?  
My fingers come away, dark and dripping. I cup the blood in my palms,  
a sacred offering.

I am still alive.

Tiny buds of possibility  
Push up through the carpet of ash.  
I have burned to the ground, but my charred remains have fertilized  
new growth.

Slowly,  
Hesitantly,  
I turn my face towards the warmth of the sun.



**Dana Christy** (she/her/hers) is a teacher, dancer, martial artist and healing artist from Chicago. She is the founder of WellSpring Healing Arts, where she uses shiatsu and yoga to support survivors of sexual violence as they navigate their healing journey.

**A Bath**

Akira Mattingly

Mosaics cling to the wall like teeth  
crooked and loose in a jaw. The dying

bulb flickers, drenches air in a foul,  
jaundice glow. The faucet spits

cacophonies, litters glass shards over  
her body. She lies still, lets bone

protrude out from skin, her spine  
frigid against porcelain.

She has come here to entomb  
the girl who lingers, pressed

between those bedsheets like dried flowers,  
who still feels the crawl of greedy fingertips,

the bite of nails burrowing, blood oozing  
between legs, slick yet sticky like syrup,

who can't forget hands fashioned  
around neck and wrists like nooses.

She scrubs at her skin, lets it redden.  
She scrubs, lets it go raw, then peels,

floats away in graceful pirouettes.  
Water pools around her hips. It blushes,

ripens like cherries. She scrubs.  
Rose buds bloom along the surface,

envelops her in crudely shaped petals.  
Ribbons of tendons unravel in delicate swirls

to expose the bone, all that remains untouched.

**Akira Mattingly** is a poet based in Louisville, KY. She is a graduate of University of Louisville with a bachelor's of arts in English with minors in creative writing and philosophy. Her poem "Diet" has been published in Rouge Agent and she is a winner of the Kentucky Poetry Derby.

**Seeds**

H. D. Weidemann

In the holes of my trauma  
he planted the seeds of grace with no selfish motives.  
He showered me in love  
and prayed that self-forgiveness could blossom

even here. He fought to show me that  
this body is more than ruins,  
that with the right care  
anything can foster life again.

## **I'm Sorry**

H. D. Weidemann

Please, fight off my fears.

Please, hold me closer.

Please, let no distance fill the space between us.

Please, hold me.

Please, don't fall quiet.

Please, love me.

Please, don't make me flinch the way he did.

Please, forgive me for my inability to trust fully.

Please, hold me.

Please, forgive me when my brain pushes me to lose my will to live.

Please, know that I love you more than I knew was possible.

Please, hold me.

Please, don't abandon me when I am so afraid.

Please, hold me closer.

Please, hold me.

Please, hold me.

Please, hold me.

Please.

I'm Sorry

**H. D. Weidemann** is from York, Pennsylvania. She is currently a student at Penn State University as an English major. She seeks to bring awareness to issues of social justice through her social medias and writing.

## Holding It Together

Cherie Lee

I'm not frail, I'm  
*"Holding It Together"*

You tell me I am less than you,  
a fraction: nothing better.  
I'm telling you: I'm strong and true,  
and *'Holding It Together'*.



You say that I am just so-so,  
lashing out with words like "bitch".  
I mend the wounds that you bestow,  
without *'Slipping a Stitch'*.

You try to break me down each day,  
hatching words and lies untrue.  
Real *'Safety'* feels so far away,  
when I commence believing you. ...





... I know now that it's not me,  
who's "*Broken*" and full of cracks.  
I'll make myself more than before,  
conquering setbacks.



The inescapable conclusion from Lee's work is an uncomplicated but penetrating equation: *Large ≠ Strong; Small ≠ Weak.*

Philadelphia native **Cherie Lee's** work is marginal, at best. That is, the margins are where her best work is from. Focusing on such topics as disability, poverty, mental illness and homelessness, her subjects appear at first glance as fragile as her medium...until the resilience is recognized. "I'm studying what falls between the cracks, and finding out it's not as broken as it looks."

This self-taught, interdisciplinary artist enjoys international recognition and exhibition, and her work has been a part of the United States White House Permanent Collection since 2003.

Lee uses genuine eggshells as conduit to emphasize her subjects strength. Small but mighty, representing powerful symbolism for millennia worldwide, the simple egg organically serves as metaphor for both physical and metaphysical human conditions.

Painstakingly sculpted with high-speed engraving equipment, each piece is no larger than 10 inches diameter, and instantly stresses the boundaries of matter and substance, questioning, "how far?" before strength succumbs to its weakness. "Whether my subject matter be ecological, sociological or anthropological, I'm exploring the limits of faculty and frailty, from a worm's eye view. The closer we look, the less our preconceived notions remain. With honest evaluation, judgments cease to stand firm. Separate-ness falls away."

## The Broom: A True Story

C. Christine Fair

**Supreme Court of Indiana. 553 N.E.2d 825 (Ind. 1990)  
ARTHUR WAYNE THOMAS, APPELLANT, V. STATE OF  
INDIANA, APPELLEE.**

“The facts are: On July 5, 1987, Carol Thomas and her children returned home unexpectedly and observed appellant engaging in sexual intercourse with one of the family dogs. Two days later Carol consulted with her attorney, and the next day a dissolution of marriage petition was filed and a restraining order was obtained against appellant.”

“Evidence was introduced at trial that appellant had beaten Carol on several occasions and had threatened to kill her. On the day of her death, she told the manager and another employee of the Pizza Hut where she worked that her husband had called her the night before and had stated that he would kill her before he would let her get a divorce. Roger Bailey, a neighbor, testified that appellant told him that he would kill his wife if she did not drop her dissolution of marriage proceeding.”

“Appellant contends the trial court erred when it allowed Sandy Thomas [his daughter, my cousin] to testify that she had...observed appellant naked in the dog pen having sexual intercourse with one of the dogs. It was this incident which led to the filing of the dissolution action.”

“When no one came to pick up the Thomases' children, they were driven home from school by a teacher about 4:00 p.m. At that time, they discovered Carol's body, nude except for a brassiere, in the dog pen behind the Thomases' mobile home.”

“Shortly thereafter, while the police were there investigating, the telephone rang and was answered by appellant's son, Jack. Jack testified that the party calling was appellant and that he stated, ‘She deserved to die.’”

*This is when my Aunt Carol finally asked me “What did Art do to you.” She knew what he did to their children, Sandy and Jack.  
This is when my mother believed me—a decade too late to save her sister, her niece, nephew or even her own daughter.  
We were already disappearing.*

*Uncle Art's lawyer argued that his previous threats to kill her were **hearsay**, and thus inadmissible as evidence.  
Two of the five justices concurred.  
Brett Kavanaugh graduated from Yale Law School in 1990.*

*This is why judges matter.*

*This is why your votes matter.*

*Art's lawyer dismissed this as “**inadmissible hearsay**” too.  
Sandy was **ELEVEN** when she saw her naked fathermonster raping her pet dog.*

*Sandy and Jack found their mother's **mAnGLed** body  
In the **dog pen** where he raped their dog.*

*When Jack was barely 21, he murdered himself.  
Sandy, now a homeless schizophrenic, lives in nearby forest.*

*The other hobos call her their **Queen** because she can kill, skin and cook the rabbits she catches with her hands in their sylvan redoubt.*

"The State Police then contacted appellant by telephone, and when told that his wife was dead, he stated he had heard about it, and it was for the best. He then questioned the trooper as to whether he was in fact a state police officer and stated, "You ain't no state cop or you'd be up here to pick me up."

*Art's lawyer also called this police officer's testimony "**inadmissible hearsay.**"*

"...when police took appellant into custody, they observed scratches on his face, forearm, and collarbone area, as well as smaller scratches and abrasions elsewhere on his body."

*Carol died, fighting to survive.*

"Appellant claims the trial court erred in permitting hearsay evidence that Carol had expressed fear that appellant would kill her. Several witnesses testified to statements made by Carol after she had discovered appellant having sexual intercourse with one of the dogs. Some of the witnesses testified as to Carol's physical condition and her statement that her injuries were inflicted by appellant. This precipitated the criminal charge against appellant, which was pending at the time of Carol's death."

*Don't ask me why I'm so **aNgRy.** I WILL tell you.*

*Don't ask me why I want to **Shrink** and*

*f  
a  
I  
I*

*into the heating vent on the floor where no one will bother looking for me.*

*Art "expressed satisfaction" that his wife was beaten to death with a broomstick.*

"In the case at bar, we have a highly emotional situation in which a divorce action was filed following the incident between appellant and the dog. There is ample evidence in this record, aside from the hearsay testimony, that appellant in fact did threaten to kill his wife and that following the killing he expressed satisfaction that it had occurred"

***Y***

***L***

*I wish I were a witch so I could **F** away on that broomstick before he killed her with it.*

"Appellant claims the trial court erred in admitting evidence that the victim had instituted a charge of sexual battery against him, which charge was pending at the time of her death. Appellant takes the position that it is error to show a criminal charge which did not result in a conviction"

*His lawyer asserted her claim of assault is inadmissible because he murdered her before the rape case went to trial.*

Three of five judges concluded "It is true that no one witnessed the beating which caused the victim's death nor was there any other direct evidence to connect appellant with the attack. However, a guilty verdict may be supported by circumstantial evidence alone."

*In 1990, two of the five justices wanted to vacate the conviction.*

*If I were a witch, I'd set Art and these "justices" on fire, then fly into the night on that **blood-stained** broom.*



**flame keeper**

Amanda Held

now when i look in the mirror,  
i am not ashamed.  
the eyes staring back at me

have a lightness,  
a certain spark.  
remember, survivor,

only you control your actions.  
no man or woman holds  
your match.

you are the flame keeper.  
i am the flame keeper.  
we are the flame keepers.

**Amanda Held** is a Midwest native poet. She earned her BA in writing from Carroll University in 2014. Some of her published works have appeared in Carroll University's Century Magazine. In her free time, Amanda enjoys board gaming, spending time in nature, and playing with her tiny cat son.

## It's Not Your Fault

Michelle Boyd Waters

I listen as you sit on the side  
Of the tub with a mirror in one hand  
And a makeup brush in your other, and  
I wonder what is going through your mind  
As you spread a layer of foundation  
Across your face like the shield  
That we should have been  
When he first saw your freckled, child  
Face and decided then that  
He would make you his.

Just a little contour and highlighte  
Sharpen your cheekbones and hide  
The reminders of your childhood  
That should have set you off limits  
From the man you trusted  
With your innocence  
Now, with your grown up face  
Our society judges you  
And claims you could not have been  
One of the innocents.

I listen as you load your brush—  
Brightest, blinding colors,  
Explaining proper application,  
Techniques for long term wearability—  
As you apply another layer of glitter  
To your rose-gold eyelids  
As if you're creating armor  
And I wonder if you realize  
It is not your fault  
That a fault line runs through your soul.

I listen as you carefully outline your mouth  
Explaining the importance of liner  
And I try to read between the lines  
And wonder if you realize that  
What he did does not define you,  
What he did does not limit you,  
But that the borders you've traced  
Protect your heart from bleeding,  
That his possession of you does not mean  
You are only valuable as a possession.

I understand you know that  
Just like you know your own face  
When you look in the scarred mirror  
At the glittering mask you just painted  
But I wonder: Do you really KNOW —  
Deep down in your broken soul  
Where the mask can't touch  
That the fissures he ripped  
Into your very core:  
It's not your fault?

**Michelle Boyd Waters** is a former award-winning journalist and web hosting company owner. She now works as a secondary level English teacher to inspire students to develop their writing voices and share their stories. She hopes to one day inspire pre-service teachers and write a novel.

## **Recovery Is**

Roz Weaver

Recovery is:  
relearning what safety feels like,  
responding to a lover's touch with rational reaction  
and not in response to a trauma relived,  
understanding it is still okay to seek refuge at times,  
reimagining the pleasure my body is capable of,  
a mouth between my legs;  
the relief  
when I begin to reclaim  
this body as my own.

**Roz Weaver** is a spoken word performer and internationally published poet. She has been published most recently with *One Hundred Memories*, *Poetica Review* and *Token Magazine*. Her work has been on exhibit with *London Design Festival* and performed at *Leeds International Festival* and *Edinburgh Fringe Festival*.

## **Gone Fishing**

Bianca Thompson

This one's for those without concrete, textbook,  
opened-shut-legs cases, cases where they  
took bait from worms with words tied on their hooks  
and swallowed, feeling obligated to stay.  
This one's for those reeled in, peeled off, and caught  
with snares tugging back "no's" clenched in their throats.  
You shake your head when they ask if you fought,  
but you did all you could to stay afloat.  
For those society just loves to blame:  
for flirts, short skirts, lovers, too many drinks—  
their failure to respect you is their shame.  
It's not your fault you couldn't speak or think.  
Consent should not feel like a wrestling match;  
know that you're way more than a fucking catch.

**Bianca Thompson** is a writer, musician, and theatre artist from Belmont, Massachusetts. She graduated from Skidmore College with a B.S. in Theatre and moved to Chicago to pursue the arts. In October 2019, she participated as a writer and performer in *Me Too Monologues* produced by Awakenings and Connective Theatre Company.

**eat the rot too**

mo Santiago

they're gonna drag your name across your body and look for mud. They will do anything to paint you tarnish and mold a crack in you. And when they talk to you,

when they try to tell you what happened and they skew your story for their own – yell. At the top of your lungs. Little you sing to them, to the whole crowd and say it out loud.

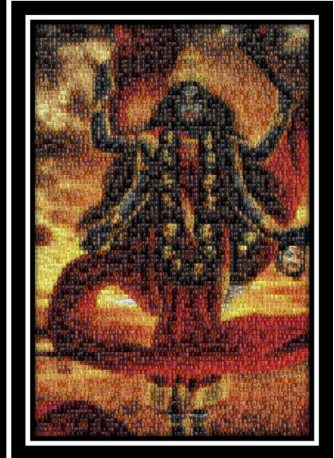
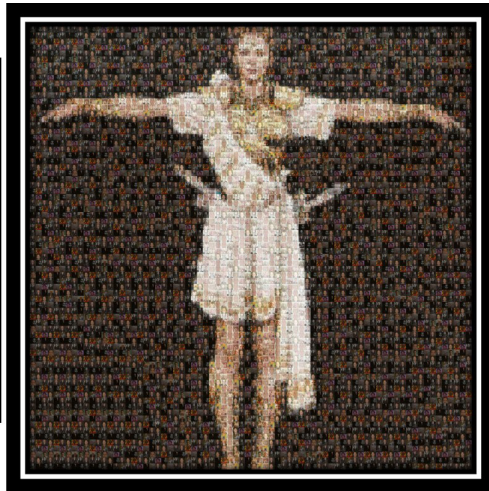
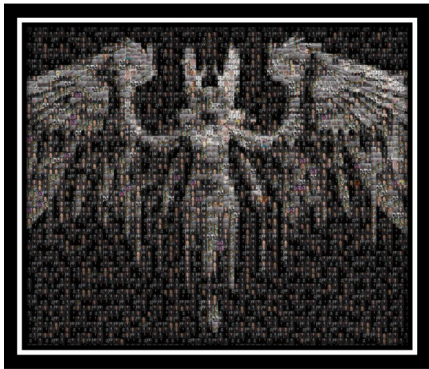
Say it,

i was raped. I got to grow up. I am alive.  
what about all the other girls you keep forgetting about?

**mo Santiago** is a writer and artist by way of nature and study of craft. Currently, she is concentrating on poetry at Columbia College Chicago and dabbling in the other worlds of creative writing. Her work centers on the conversations around sexual assault, the body, sex and intimacy. As a self-studied photographer, her heart and focus are portraiture and nature. She loves embalming people in time, living in their naturalness; she appreciates accidental blurs and dig smallness. Her work has been published in Sobotka Literary Magazine, Motley Mag, Ransack Press and forthcoming in RESPECTING THE MIC, an anthology from Peter Kahn, Dan Sullivan, Franny Choi and Hanif Abdurraqib.

She's homegrown right here in the city of Chicago and in her free time, she drinks coffee and travels as often as financially possible.

**A Series Of Self Portraits**  
**The Valkyrie, Athena & Kali**  
C. Christine Fair



This is a triptych of three self-portraits. The first image is a mosaic of a Valkyrie. In Norse mythology, the female Valkyries served Odin, the God of War. The Valkyries went into the battlefields to select those among the slain who are worthy of a place in Valhalla. The mosaic is comprised of photos of a variety of persons whose cruelty, misogyny and even outright assault during my childhood and young adulthood have had enduring impacts well into my middle age. Some of the photos are those who were complicit in these acts by doing nothing. The piece speaks to survivorship but also the ways in which these experiences transform you. The second composite is Athena, the Greek God of War. Like the first, this composite represents the resilience of survivorship at the expense of a serenity denied us. We become warriors forced to wage a war to protect ourselves that we did not start or want. The third is a composite in the guise of Kali, a goddess in Hindu Mythology who prevents her consort, Shiva, from destroying the world in a vengeful rage. As survivors, like Kali, we must put an end to the destructive nonsense.

**C. Christine Fair** is a professor of security studies at Georgetown University. Her most recent book is *In Their Own Words: Understanding the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba* (OUP, 2019). She tweets at CChristineFair & blogs at <https://shortbustoparadise.wordpress.com/>. Her scholarly website is [christinefair.net](http://christinefair.net). She has published in *The Bark*, *Clementine Unbound*, *The Dime Show Review*, and *Awakenings* among other venues.

## **Fantasies/Intentions/Realities**

Christina Joly

### **Solidarity Prologue:**

This piece was inspired by an article I read about Chrystul Kizer, a teenager who faces life in prison for killing her abuser, a man who was also a child sex trafficker and serial child rapist. The article triggered memories of thoughts I had during my abuse. While violence is not the answer, I believe it is important to recognize how survivors of trauma can be pushed to unimaginable limits, just to survive.

### **Fantasies/Intentions/Realities**

I had fantasies of  
    killing you.  
You, the second husband of  
    my mother.  
You, who extinguished the light  
    in everyone around you  
    so you would seem the brightest.  
You, a 35-year-old man who ruled your  
    kingdom with fists and a gun.

I had fantasies of  
    killing you,  
Each and every time you were on top of me,  
    inside of me.  
I imagined a knife hidden  
    at my side.  
It would slip easily into your back  
    I thought.  
You tortured a 12-year-old girl into  
    envisioning such a thing.

I had fantasies of  
    killing you,  
After I broke free of  
    your chains.  
How would I defend myself  
    when you hunted me down?  
You drove a 15-year-old girl to  
    consider such an action.

I had fantasies of  
    killing you,  
Even when you were wasting away  
    in prison.  
In seven years you would  
    be released  
And I would be behind bars  
    constructed of fear.  
You forced a 16-year-old girl  
    to exist in terror.

I had fantasies of  
    killing you,  
When two years later I heard of  
    your death.  
You taught me monsters do  
    not die.  
You gave an 18-year-old girl  
    enduring nightmares.

I had fantasies of  
    killing you,  
Because I believed the only way I  
    could survive,  
Was to take your life  
    with my own hand.  
Only then would I know I was safe,  
Only then would I know I was free,  
Only then would I know you were  
    truly gone.

But I realized you would  
    never *really* be gone.  
My fantasies created a  
    state of vigilance.  
It is I who kept you alive  
    in my mind;  
In the disgust I felt for  
    my body,  
In the distrust of my  
    own emotions,  
In the constant doubt of  
    my self-worth,  
In the wasted energy spent numbing  
    body and soul.

But I have come to understand  
    this is the version of you that  
    I can control;  
That the way to freedom  
    is through healing.  
I can remind myself you were just a man  
    not an immortal beast.  
I can remind myself that I am no longer  
    a helpless child.  
I can remind myself that anger, shame, fear and guilt  
    are but whispers from the past.  
*This is my choice.*  
*This is where I find my strength.*

Now I have fantasies that the  
    damage you caused  
Will finally give way to a life  
    where light eclipses dark.  
I have fantasies that my  
    body is not my enemy.  
That I do not have to live looking through  
    a veil of trauma.  
That pain will not be my normal.

Today this 46-year-old woman  
    has the truth;  
I have always been fighting  
    my way toward this;  
To being whole, content, awake,  
    alive, able to love and be loved.

And now I am here.

No more fantasies.

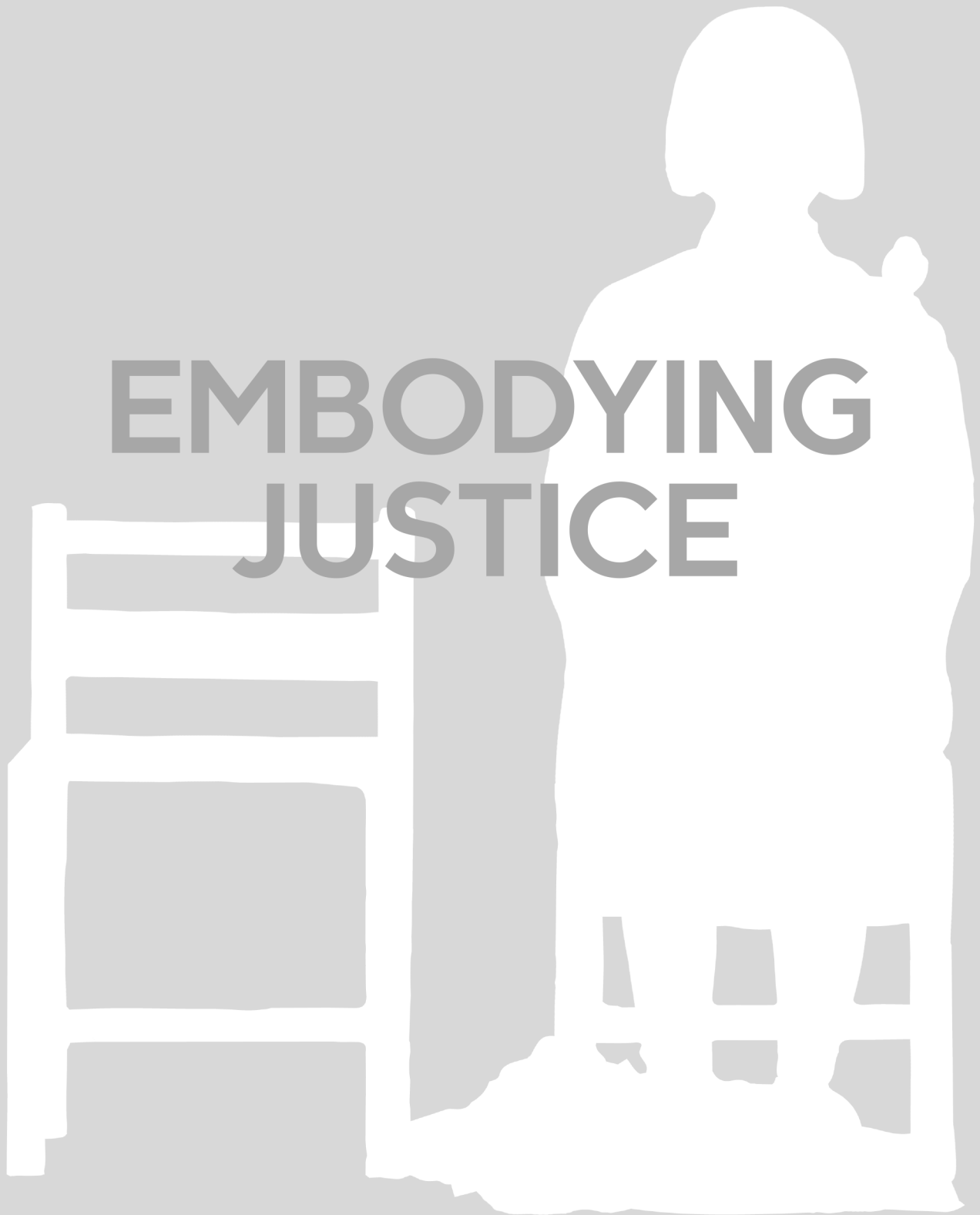
I have created a place of peace  
    where you are banished.  
I have created a space to restore  
    what was taken.  
I have created a reality of  
    healing and hope.  
*This is my power.*  
*This is where I choose to exist.*

**Christina Joly** is a runner, biker, vegetarian, cat mom and mental health therapist living in Chicago. She holds a BA in Fiction Writing & Photography from Columbia College and a Masters in Counseling from National Louis University. She works in a non-profit agency providing therapy and support to folks who have experienced various traumas. Christina has been living with HIV for 31 years, diagnosed at age 15. The virus was transmitted by her abuser.



A SPECIAL COLLABORATION  
WITH KAN-WIN

# EMBODYING JUSTICE



MAY 2020

## Editorial Note

Dr. Elizabeth W. Son

Facing the vast blue ocean, the girls line up on the bow of a large ship. They are wearing hanboks, traditional Korean dresses, in the chromatic style of what schoolgirls commonly wore in the 1940s: a white blouse with a flowing black skirt. A towering figure that resembles a soldier stands guard behind them on the ship adorned with a Japanese flag. “There are three girls in this picture,” recounts survivor Lee Yong-Nyeo,<sup>1</sup> “one is me, and the other two are my friends from my hometown.”<sup>2</sup> In this painting titled “Chosun Maidens Stolen Away” (1995), Lee depicts her memory of being taken away at age 15 with two of her friends as sex slaves for the Japanese military in 1941. In the years leading up to and during World War II, an estimated 200,000 girls and young women euphemistically called “comfort women” were coerced into sexually serving Japanese troops across the growing Japanese Empire. When describing this painting, Lee recounted that she did not know what happened to one of the girls and expressed her desire for accountability for what she, her friends, and countless other women endured.<sup>3</sup> Art therapy classes, which started in 1992, taught by Lee Kyeong Sin at the House of Sharing in South Korea have offered survivors like Lee opportunities to give visual expression to difficult memories of wartime violence and to their hope for reclamation.

Survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery have testified not only through their artwork but also through their public activism. They have traveled the world to speak out against their perpetrators and participated in the Wednesday Demonstrations, weekly protests held across from the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. Their paintings have been displayed on banners at the Wednesday Demonstrations and in posters at solidarity protests organized globally. On the 1000th Wednesday Demonstration, a life-size bronze statue of an adolescent girl officially known as the “Peace Monument” (Pyeonghwabi in Korean) but colloquially called the “Girl Statue” (Sonyeosang in Korean) was revealed. The statue sits next to an empty chair that evokes those who passed away. In explaining the choice of a hanbok for the statue, the creators Kim Seo Kyung and Kim Eun Sung recall seeing images of girls wearing black and white hanboks in the paintings of Kang Duk-Kyung, another survivor who took art therapy classes at the House of Sharing.<sup>4</sup> The bronze statue can now be found across the world. Countless communities have installed this memorial in parks and plazas to honor the survivors and to claim space for their history. Synthetic resin versions of the statue in color have also appeared in museum exhibits, on buses as public art, and at protests. Supporters have chosen to sit next to the statue in an act of solidarity.

<sup>1</sup> Following Korean convention, surnames precede given names.

<sup>2</sup> N.A., “Dialogue for the Preparation of Collected Paintings Book,” in *The Painting Edition of Japanese Military Sexual Slaves*, ed. Monk Wonhaeng (Gwangju-si: Nanumui Jip/The Museum of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery, 2004), 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth W. Son, *Embodied Reckonings: “Comfort Women,” Performance, and Transpacific Redress* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 155.

In this special section, local Chicagoland artists and advocates discuss the impact of the survivors' history on their own artistic practice and advocacy. Visual artist Rose Camastro Pritchett, KAN-WIN Executive Director Ji Hye Kim, youth advocate Isabella Cho, and poet Emily Jungmin Yoon show us how the bravery of "comfort women" survivors travels across oceans and generations. Their testimony and activism remind us of the power of the individual who speaks out and the collective that gathers around them in solidarity. These four contributors heard the voices of survivors and took up the call to engage and witness.

In *The Comfort Women Project*, Camastro Pritchett sewed maps of "comfort stations," which were essentially rape camps, and testimonial accounts onto quilt patches made out of handmade paper—which grew into community installations, sewing circles, and panel discussions. In her essay, she recounts how working on this project made her "keenly aware of similarities between statements made by the 'comfort women' survivors and present survivors of sexual violence."<sup>5</sup> In "Come Sit with Sonyeo," Kim articulates how the "comfort women" survivors' have inspired survivors of domestic abuse and sexual assault with their courageous example of survivor leadership. Her essay illuminates the importance of a local

domestic violence and sexual assault services agency like KAN-WIN in joining the "comfort women" survivors' global quest for justice. "When we lift up their rights, we ultimately lift up the rights of all survivors," reminds Kim.<sup>6</sup> A member of ELEVATE, the youth leadership group of KAN-WIN, Cho shares her journey of learning about the "comfort women" history and its impact on her life. "When I engage in creative writing, the issue of the 'comfort women' often occupies my thoughts," writes Cho. "It serves as a testament to how meaningful that moment in history is to me, to my sense of self as well as my ethnic and cultural inheritance."<sup>7</sup> Lastly, in her poetry Yoon returns to the testimony of four survivors and opens up space for their voices to echo even louder. She explains, "I'd like my poetry to remind readers that even if a part of history may not seem to be relevant to their lives, it is—it is their reality too."<sup>8</sup>

Inspired by the power of survivors' storytelling and the interconnectedness between art and justice, Awakenings and KAN-WIN will partner this summer to showcase select artwork by survivors and the statue in the upcoming exhibit "Embodying Justice" from June 2020-August 2020. The acrylic paintings and colored pencil drawings of survivors Kang Duk-Kyung, Kim Bok-Dong, Kim Soon-Duk, and Lee Yong-Nyeo are a powerful testimony to their resilience and ongoing fight for official redress.

<sup>5</sup> Rose Camastro Pritchett, "The Comfort Women Project," pg. 82

<sup>6</sup> Ji Hye Kim "Come Sit with Sonyeo," pg. 82

<sup>7</sup> Isabella Cho, "Exploring the Self and the Nation Through the 'Comfort Women' Issue," pg. 82

<sup>8</sup> Emily Jungmin Yoon, "Author's Note," *A Cruelty Special to Our Species* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2018), xi.

This art not only gives material form to survivors' desires for justice, but the very act of creating and interacting with the art becomes another form of justice.<sup>9</sup> The exhibit seeks to celebrate the bravery of these women in speaking out and promote awareness of the ongoing activism of the women and their supporters and to make connections to contemporary sexual violence in relation to state violence. Awakenings and KAN-WIN join the contributors in this section in envisioning a local movement of artists and advocates in Chicagoland in solidarity with survivors' ongoing fight for justice.

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<sup>9</sup> For more on the redressive power of art and activism in support of "comfort women" survivors, see Son, *Embodied Reckonings*.

**Dr. Elizabeth W. Son** is an associate professor in the Department of Theatre at Northwestern University. Her research focuses on the interplay between histories of gender-based violence and transnational Asian American performance-based art and activism. She is the author of the award-winning book *Embodied Reckonings: "Comfort Women," Performance, and Transpacific Redress* (2018) and a scholar-in-residence at KAN-WIN.

## Come Sit With The Sonyeo

Ji Hye Kim

Under the blistering August sun, a *sonyeos*<sup>1</sup> sits barefoot in front of Chicago's famous Wrigley Building next to an empty chair, inviting people to sit with her. In the beginning, passersby take a quick glance at her and quicken their steps to get on with their days on a bustling Michigan Avenue. Then, one by one, people stop to inquire what this is about. Eventually, one by one, they go towards her and sit down next to her.

Every year, on the first Wednesday of August, KAN-WIN joins survivors and advocates around the world for the Global Action Day for "Comfort Women" to demand justice long overdue. "Comfort women" is a euphemism for women and girls forced into being sex slaves by the Imperial Japanese military in occupied territories before and during World War II. For this day, we engage in a performance entitled #ComeSitWithHer that features a replica of the *Sonyeosang* ("Girl Statue" aka the "Peace Monument") and invites Chicagoans to learn about who she is and who she represents.

The original bronze *Sonyeosang* was created by a husband and wife duo, Korean sculptors Kim Eun Sung and Kim Seo Kyung. The *sonyeo* is barefoot and wears a simple traditional Korean garb, a hanbok, for school girls. Across her face is a look of complexity--anguish, discomfort, yet dignity too. In her story lies the suffering of hundreds and thousands of women and girls, the deep agony over the

seemingly unattainable apology, as well as the universality of the impact of gender-based violence on people across the globe.

Some may wonder why KAN-WIN, a domestic violence and sexual assault victim service provider in the Chicagoland area, engages in the work of advocating on behalf of "comfort women" survivors. After all, we are located in the United States, a place that did not directly experience the atrocities of World War II. Some may ask why KAN-WIN is getting involved in international politics, as the discussion of the "comfort women" issue is often tied to the push and pull relationship between the Korean and Japanese governments. How is this related to KAN-WIN's day-to-day work of supporting survivors of gender-based violence?

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<sup>1</sup>A little girl in Korean

To these questions, I would like to point to our mission, which is to eradicate gender-based violence, including domestic violence and sexual assault, especially for women and children across Asian American communities and beyond through culturally competent services, community engagement, and advocacy. I believe that in participating in the quest for justice on behalf of “comfort women” survivors, KAN-WIN is helping to achieve its mission in several ways.

First, “comfort women” survivor activism has inspired advocates around the world, including those at KAN-WIN, to demand justice and raise awareness about sexual violence, especially in conflict zones. Before there ever was a #MeToo movement, survivor Kim Hak-soon spoke out in 1991 to share her experience of military rape and torture, and to demand an apology from the Japanese government. Since then, she and others have led a truly *survivor-centered* anti-violence mobilization on an unprecedented scale. Survivor leadership is imperative in cultivating a meaningful movement to eradicate gender-based violence. These activists have demonstrated the transformative power of survivor leadership as they have taken a multi-faceted approach to address their experiences of trauma on political, legal, social, cultural, artistic, and psychological levels. It is an honor for me as an advocate to join and learn from them,

and to replicate their efforts to break the cycle of violence that, to this day, affects people across the globe at interpersonal, political, and cultural levels.

Eradicating gender-based violence also requires grappling with the patriarchal past that bred and continues to breed gender oppression. Be it carried out by individuals or by institutional forces, systemized gender oppression brings about violence against women and children. The injuries sustained by the victim are thus intimately personal yet universal at the same time. These shared experiences of oppression generate solidarity among survivors, advocates, and allies, including KAN-WIN, to remember the history of gender-based violence and keep on breaking the silence and taboo that surround it.

Finally, KAN-WIN’s survivor-centered approach transcends politics, because regardless of who the harm-doers are in terms of nationalities, ethnicities, etc., we support all survivors in their pursuit for justice at courts and beyond. This pursuit is an arduous and painstaking process for the vast majority of sexual violence survivors. It resembles what’s happening on the international stage with the Japanese government continuing to deny the truth and refusing to issue an official apology, despite the overwhelming evidence of the

crime. Many harm-doers in the present day avoid accountability because our courts and communities too often fail to believe in or listen to survivors. The “comfort women” survivors’ fight for justice is symbolic of the fight that KAN-WIN’s clients engage in for the restoration of their human dignity. When we lift up their rights, we ultimately lift up the rights of all survivors.

Advocacy for “comfort women” survivors has thus been integral to KAN-WIN’s own history of survivor-centered work, and much of the actions we took utilized arts as a means for story-telling and movement building. For our 10th anniversary, for example, KAN-WIN organized with other advocacy agencies an exhibition called “Quest for Justice: The Story of Korean ‘Comfort Women’ as Told Through Their Art,” which was held at the Daley Center in Chicago. It featured paintings that “comfort women” survivors created through art therapy sessions--reproductions of which are now to be displayed at Awakenings Gallery during the summer of 2020. In the later years, we engaged in a variety of ways to raise awareness about this issue, including two community forums with a survivor activist Kim Bok-Dong, screenings of documentaries like *The Apology* and *My Name is Kim Bok-Dong*, and the Global Action Day performance and rallies. At all of these events, we featured reproductions of the survivor artwork.

So, on a hot summer day each year, KAN-WIN advocates, allies, friends, and families come out to downtown Chicago to put on the #ComeSitWithHer performance. In the beginning, we performed it with a human replica of the *Sonyeosang*—an actual woman dressed in white and black hanbok, barefoot, sitting next to an empty chair. In 2019, the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan gave us a resin replica of the bronze statue, which we used for that year’s performance. During #ComeSitWithHer, we simply tell the story of victims and survivors and invite people to come, listen, and ultimately show support and solidarity by sitting next to the *sonyeo*.

#ComeSitWithHer showcases the power of art to convey stories and experiences that are often inexpressible through words. I have observed personally how the *sonyeo* statue transfixes allies and even complete strangers with her stoic expression, compelling them to empathize and grapple with the depth of her anguish and grief. I have seen people moved to tears, some sobbing as they were shaken by this art that represents the hundreds of thousands of women and girls who went on to live with experiences of violence and trauma without a resolution or apology.

For me personally, the #ComeSitWithHer performance brought about new experiences every year. When I observed it for the very first time, the sonyeo triggered for me an uncontrollable sobbing. As an advocate for survivors, I often have had to contain my emotions to help facilitate survivors' action plans for safety and stability. As soon as the performance began, however, all those guards came tumbling down. I felt as if the sonyeo was beckoning me to just be still with her and her story for that moment. I did not dare go near her that day and sit next to her. I was afraid of breaking down completely. The year after, I was 4-months pregnant with my second child when I stood in a semi-circle surrounding the sonyeo. The blistering sun was making me dizzy, and I had to step aside to a shaded area to catch my breath. At that moment, I could not help but think of the pregnant woman who appears in a rare photo of "comfort women" survivors in which she is seen barefoot holding her swollen belly, barely able to stand up straight. Remembering her, I felt stricken with a mix of guilt, grief, and anger. And last year, seeing the sonyeo reminded me of Kim Bok-Dong *halmoni*<sup>2</sup>--a fierce survivor leader in the "comfort women" movement and advocate for others who experienced sexual violence. She had passed away at the end of 2018 at the age 93. While the sonyeo statue's look of a young girl represents the victims at the time when the

violence occurred, the actual survivors had lived on, created their own lives which were marked by trauma but were not defined by it. The sonyeo reminded me of their strength and resilience, as well as their continuing quest for resolution, justice, accountability, and apology from the harm-doer.

Last year, we followed #ComeSitWithHer with a march toward the Japanese Consulate with our calls for justice ringing across Michigan Avenue. The sonyeo inspired people-- from teens to octogenarians--to take this fiery action. Afterwards, participants began sharing their stories, one of whom was 89-year-old Yong Yae Kim, a Chicago resident. She spoke about how her father changed her official birthday from June 1930 to December 1932 to lower her age and protect her from being taken away to the rape camps. Her friend was not as fortunate--she was lured off with a fake job offer. Yong Yae marched with us that day, remembering her father and her friend. These are the stories of our grandparents and great-grandparents; the younger generations inherit their memories and are entrusted with the responsibility to continue remembering the survivors and seek restoration of their human rights. This intergenerational connection galvanized participants during the Global Action Day to march together.

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<sup>2</sup>A grandmother in Korean.

Through KAN-WIN and Awakenings Gallery's "Embodying Justice" exhibit, I hope Chicagoans and other visitors will experience for themselves the transformative power of *Sonyeosang* and survivor artwork that embody the survivors' expressions of personal anger, bitterness, lost innocence, and quest for justice. And, in doing so, I hope they are galvanized to seek gender-based justice for all survivors and join the movement to eradicate gender-based violence across the greater Chicagoland area and beyond.

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**About KAN-WIN**

**KAN-WIN** is a domestic violence and sexual assault services agency with an expertise in the provision of culturally competent and linguistically appropriate support for Asian American and immigrant survivors. Services include, but are not limited to, a multilingual 24-hour hotline, medical and legal advocacy, transitional housing services, children's programs, individual and group counseling as well as community engagement through leadership development, education, outreach and advocacy. [www.kanwin.org](http://www.kanwin.org)

**Ji Hye Kim** is a 1.5 generation Korean immigrant who has spent the past 10 years advocating for survivors of gender-based violence via her work at KAN-WIN. She currently serves as the Executive Director at KAN-WIN.

## Exploring The Self And The Nation Through The “Comfort Women” Issue

Isabella Cho

Whenever I confront a challenging period in my life, my mother always says, “Remember that this moment, the now, is just a single star in the constellation that is your life.”

Though her words are meant to serve as solace during times of personal difficulty, I can't help but apply her axiom to the way in which I perceive and position myself, a single individual, in the sweeping course of history at large. As I grew older, absorbing more information about my identity and heritage as a young Korean American woman, I could not help but identify underlying resonance with the star-constellation analogy. I, a single individual, did not act or exist independently. Rather, I was one of many stars, stars that coalesced to form constellations of broader, sweeping transnational legacies.

In recent years, partially thanks to my perception of my singular identity as a product of multiple intersecting traditions or “constellations,” I grew deeply curious about the people and place that I descended from. Though I was vaguely aware of the violent, politically complex, and war-torn story of Korea, I yearned to attain a more dimensional, informed perspective of my ancestral homeland.

Enter KAN-WIN's 29th Benefit Gala. Occurring over the span of a few hours, the event enabled KAN-WIN to raise money that went toward furthering critical services for Asian American Pacific Islander immigrant survivors of sexual violence. During the Gala, through a multitude of speakers I learned more about “comfort women,” a euphemism for young girls and women who were coerced or tricked into sexual slavery by the Japanese Imperial Military during World War II. As I sat in my seat, enraptured by the insistent gravity of speakers' messages, I could not help but think again of my mother's words. Gender-based violence in today's world did not emerge from nothing. Rather, it grew as a pernicious and iterative extension of previous wounds, crimes and traumas, ones grounded in patriarchy, militarism, misogyny, sexism, and cultural myopia. The “comfort women” issue was not merely a vestige of a concluded past. The cultural and psychological ramifications of those periods of deep hurt and violence rippled into the present, heavily shaping perceptions of selfhood and nationhood. The “comfort women” issue was my issue, a grave story that I inherited by virtue of who I was and the people from whom I descended. I felt a deep-seated urgency, a conviction to learn more about the history and narratives of this violence.

A few months following the Benefit Gala, I became a Youth Peer Advocate Leadership (YPAL) Intern at KAN-WIN. Through the few weeks that I immersed myself in the KAN-WIN community, I was able to learn more about sexual violence, particularly about additional cultural, linguistic, and legal difficulties that immigrant survivors face in the United States. The more knowledge I equipped myself with, the more passionate I became about attaining a deeper understanding of the subtleties, underlying forces, and human impacts of sexual violence.

I saw my experience as a YPAL Intern not as an end in itself but, rather, as a pathway to a sustained commitment to resisting domestic and sexual violence in my community and the American landscape at large. I returned to my passion about the “comfort women” issue, ultimately choosing to pursue a semester-long Independent Study in Korean History for my senior year of high school. Throughout the course of the semester, I studied oral testimonies, academic journal articles, books, and even a short film to ground myself in an involved and extensive understanding of the era.

After the completion of the semester, one thing is clear: I still have much to learn. That, I believe, remains the beauty and burden of committing oneself to a cause. The more that is done, the more that needs to be done. It seems paradoxical, but, upon further reflection, it makes sense that sustainable, systemic change is iterative.

As someone who loves creative writing, I often observe motifs of political partition and historical trauma emerge in my poems, essays, and fiction. After my Independent Study, an analytical, academic endeavor, I found myself gravitating toward creative expression as a means of reconciling the brutal history of “comfort women” in Korea. Deeply personal, creative writing has the potential to elucidate emotional vulnerability as a means of introspection and redemption, a way of emphasizing shared humanity, in a way that academic writing cannot. When I engage in creative writing, the issue of the “comfort women” often occupies my thoughts. It serves as a testament to how meaningful that moment in history is to me, to my sense of self as well as my ethnic and cultural inheritance.

Whenever I ruminate on the “comfort women” issue, more specifically the practice of using the written word to examine and make sense of the brutality that the era engendered, I think back to some thoughts that Vietnamese-American writer Ocean Vuong shared in an interview with *Tricycle*, a Buddhist journal. When prompted to reflect on his creative process, Vuong speaks to the dichotomy between fear and compassion. These dual forces, he contends, each provide a reservoir of energy that creators, thinkers, and activists alike may draw from to fuel their practice: “We see bombs being dropped. We see bullets put into bodies, all from fear. It is a powerful energy. But compassion is an energy, too ... Every day when we wake up, we have a choice. Will we choose fear or will we choose compassion and love?”

Much has been done in the name of “comfort women” in my local community and the global community at large. Much still needs to be done. The largest gift of being part of the movement of individuals who resist the systemic erasure of this historical trauma has undoubtedly been learning from and being inspired by fellow fighters. There are a multitude of stories and values that mobilize these individuals. Rage and frustration at government inaction, at the dismissal of these wronged bodies and lives, pervade dialogue surrounding the era. However, underlying all these efforts is compassion, that core emotive impetus that Vuong and so many

others place such unwavering trust in. I stand in solidarity with “comfort women,” and continue fighting, knowing that our work is never done, knowing that this story must persist.

**Isabella "Izzy" Cho** is a high school senior at North Shore Country Day School in Winnetka. She served as a YPAL Intern at KAN-WIN this past summer and continues to remain a part of the KAN-WIN community through her involvement with its youth leadership group ELEVATE.

## Testimonies

Emily Jungmin Yoon

*Kang Duk-kyung*

my school teacher      asked me      if I wanted  
    to go to Japan    do something good for the Emperor  
we were led to a harbor  
a cargo ship    a train  
    to a factory in Doyamaki      where  
Food was so scarce    we pulled grass, roots    anything we could eat  
girls died of hunger    some went crazy  
I ran away    was found    by a Japanese soldier  
    Kobayashi  
    took me  
    to a hut      Every evening  
    soldiers  
countless soldiers      on the wild mountainside  
    Kobayashi  
An unusually quiet day  
    I found Japan had lost the war  
I sailed to Korea  
jumped from the crates    hit my stomach with fists  
I failed      I named him Young-ju  
    left him at an orphanage  
met him every Sunday  
    one Sunday  
I saw another boy in his clothes  
Young-ju had died of pneumonia  
    already buried  
I thought of Kobayashi    bringing me rice  
    in his drunken stupor      I thought of the piece of steel  
    I took    at the factory  
I found some of the steel      so attractive  
I still believe    he is alive  
somewhere      I want to believe  
that all was just a terrible      fate  
But then,  
    But then



Kim Yoon-shim

An automobile drove up the road, something I had never seen  
before. The driver let me climb up and the truck rolled on  
then kept on going  
and going and I begged them  
to take me back but I was thrown  
into a cargo train a cargo ship Harbin  
a comfort station where three truckloads  
of soldiers arrived One by one they raped all  
night long with filthy wordless bodies  
my child's body  
they impregnated girls and still forced sex  
When a child was born  
a blue-uniformed woman put the body  
in a sack and carried it away  
soldiers used the "sack": saku  
reused condoms girls got sick  
When a girl got too sick  
a guard wrapped her body  
in a blanket and carried her away  
Such was our life  
look at my fingers  
when I ran away the police smashed my hands  
weaving a stiff pen between my fingers  
like this.  
Another year passed  
like this.  
In June 1945  
when the camp seemed deserted  
I escaped and ran all night  
in a month I reached Korean shores  
In Harbin, I saw at a stream a hand  
of a sick girl  
who had been buried alive.  
In my dreams, she is still reaching  
toward wider waters  
my hands with their crooked fingers  
cannot help her

*Pak Kyung-soon*

There was a man about 45 years of age with a mustache  
 who told me to work for Japan  
 and meet my brother in Hiroshima  
 The man said my refusal might not be good for my parents  
 The man and his men took me to Shimonoseki  
 I was led into a room I was told to take a bath I was told  
 to take off my clothes  
 I only begged that I meet my brother  
 When they finally took me to Hiroshima, my brother was alone  
 in a big, empty room he asked if I came  
 as a "comfort woman" and I promised  
 I would return  
 to see him again  
 When flower buds were about to appear  
 I was taken to Osaka In its room  
 I was Number 10 I was then  
 a "comfort woman"  
 I became so sick with syphilis I could not walk  
 One night an officer came and told me to get ready  
 I was in such great pain the next thing I remember  
 is arriving in Seoul It was June 1945  
 Immediately I had a miscarriage  
 The mustached man learned of my return  
 told me to return to the "comfort station"  
 To avoid the draft again I got married  
 our new life a rented room  
 I could smell the odor of my weekly "#606"  
 arsenic for syphilis  
 My baby discharged pus from his ears  
 was called crazy  
 My brother returned home with burns and lumps  
 all over his body from radiation  
 discharged disintegrated bone  
 the size of teeth near his wounds  
 The Japanese soldiers discharged  
 discharge out of charge into  
 every room

Kim Soon-duk

there was "girl delivery" just like  
farmers' mandatory delivery  
of harvested rice  
to the government. I wanted to hide  
but what if my mother was captured  
in my place  
My mother was needed at home Mother  
Mother I decided to go  
they promised a job as a military nurse in Japan  
Mother a man gathered us near the county office  
and took us to Pusan to Nagasaki  
That night the girl next to me went missing  
Each night they sent several virgin girls to military officers  
a military officer came to me and said  
every young girl experiences sex in her lifetime  
that I might as well do it now  
they took us they took us to Shanghai to a ruined village  
my body a ruined village a damaged house  
our manager gave me packets of black powder  
to reduce my bleeding from the vagina  
He then told me it was made  
from a leg  
of a Chinese soldier's corpse  
I dream of human legs rolling around I dream it to this day  
I scream to wake myself up Mother Izumi  
he was kind to me I told him about my thoughts of suicide  
He was surprised so surprised  
he sent me home sent me letters  
I did not reply. I had my new life to live:  
as a washerwoman, a street peddler and I did other things too  
but Mother, the hardest time was when I was dreaming of suicide  
while soldiers were standing in line to satisfy their lust  
in the ruined village  
when I was dreaming of legs that could not go anywhere.

**Emily Jungmin Yoon** is the author of *A Cruelty Special to Our Species* (Ecco, 2018) and a PhD candidate in Korean literature at the University of Chicago.

Acknowledgements for “Testimonies”

This is a reprint. Originally published by Harper Collins in *A Cruelty Special to Our Species*.

The sections in “Testimonies” draw upon documentary materials in

*Comfort Women Speak: Testimony by Sex Slaves of the Japanese Military*, edited by Sangmie Choi Schellstede (Holmes & Meier, 2000), in *True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women*, edited by Keith Howard (Cassell, 1996), and in *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women* by Dai Sil Kim-Gibson (Mid-Prairie Books, 1999), used in combination with my own language. The testimonies by Hwang Keum-ju, Jin Kyung-paeng, Kang Duk-kyung, Kim Soon-duk, and Pak Kyung-soon were recorded in Seoul, November 2, 1994; that by Kim Sang-hi, in Seoul, October 29, 1994; that by Kim Yoon-shim, in Washington, D.C., September 30, 1996. The transcribed, translated, and transliterated testimonies are all from *Comfort Women Speak*.

## The “Comfort Women” Project

Rose Camastro Pritchett

In 2013, I was invited to participate in the 85 Years 85 Artists exhibit at Menlo College in Atherton, California. Menlo College was celebrating its 85th year with an art exhibition and invited 85 artists to create an artwork to respond to a year during that 85-year time period. We were given a year to make the art for the 2014 exhibition at the college. The topic and medium were the artist's choice. The year was arbitrarily given.

Jesse Pritchett, our son, had been a university lecturer at Jiujiang University in Jiujiang, China since 2007. In both 2008 and 2009 Jesse facilitated an artist residency for me to work with 20 college freshmen at the university. Each year the students and I worked together to create and perform a performance-art piece. In the fall of 2010, my husband David and I, accepted faculty positions at the university for the fall semester. David taught English language classes and I papermaking and artists books. My 20 art students and I worked in a studio we devised in the faculty housing block where we lived. I spoke little Chinese but my students who knew basic English could understand me. I had a Chinese co- teacher who helped me with the language and the navigation of the university system. My husband and I lived off of the economy, shopped in local markets and ate in the numerous restaurants lining the streets immediately off campus. We made many friends; Chinese colleagues, artists, students and locals.

When Menlo College gave me the year 1940, I focused on China.

During that time, “comfort stations” (brothels) had been set up in China by the Japanese military after the Nanking Massacre in 1938 and were in continual, widespread operation. The military expanded and moved these comfort stations to follow the areas of combat in other countries extending to the end of WWII. “Comfort women” was the Japanese euphemism describing the women rounded up with violence and coercion to become sex slaves to Japanese forces. One of these bases was in Jiujiang, where we lived and taught. By war's end, there were over 2,000 comfort stations and over 200,000 women from Japan, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Korea and Indochina, including Dutch colonialists who had been forced to become comfort women. Japanese military commanders were fully complicit in procuring women and developing and operating comfort stations. They kept detailed records. This is a story I wanted to tell.

Making art about horrific subjects requires distance. Being too literal would repel viewers rather than engage them. I approached the art work conceptually looking at all of the elements; the euphemistic “comfort” to describe the women and the comfort that is provided from a quilt:

hand sewing and embroidery as women's work; the robes that the women wore when they were raped, a garment covering a horror; handmade paper, a craft that goes back to the Han Dynasty, 100 BC. The result was a 20"x 18" quilt on handmade paper with hand stitching, and pulp painting.

The research on the "comfort women" expanded. How were the women taken? What went on in the "comfort stations"? How long were the women there? How were they treated? What happened to them after they returned home? I read more books, saw documentaries, read newspaper accounts. Xuemei Wu PhD, professor of history at Zhon University of Economics and Law in Wuhan, Hubei province, China, was particularly helpful in discussing the conditions and culture of the Chinese during the war; her grandparents lived in the mountain hills above Wuhan at that time. I was particularly interested in the negative attitude of the Chinese local governments and citizens toward the "comfort women" once they were released. Commonly they were ostracized and, in some cases, sent to labor camps as a punishment for what the government considered to be consorting with the enemy. As I was invited to participate in other exhibitions; HMS Studios England and Art on Armitage Chicago for their exhibitions in Athens, Greece, Prairie State College in Chicago, Reflect

Space in Glendale California, I made work that addressed the trail of the "comfort stations" in China, the "comfort women's" abduction, coercion, rape, and their lives once they returned home. The medium remained the same; handmade paper, pulp painting, hand sewing and embroidery.

While doing the work I became aware of similarities between statements made by "comfort women" survivors and present survivors of sexual violence. It was hard to escape the common thread of shame and silence about sexual abuse, whether it is as highly organized and brutal as in the case of the "comfort women" in China; perpetrated by men of power in Hollywood, the American news media, and the White House; or secretly done by a father to his daughter in Evanston, Illinois. It needed to be talked about, exposed, and not forgotten.

And talk about it we did. I returned to Menlo College for an artist residency in the fall of 2018. To accompany my "Comfort Women" Project exhibition at the college, a group of students and I created an interactive installation for the student body, faculty and staff to participate in the at the library. Message Board held comments about feelings about sexual violation. This might be about themselves "My heart aches with shame." "It set up a system to keep myself from seeing

the truth.” “I don’t want anyone to know.” “I wake up with nightmares.” It might have been about others. “This didn’t just happen to her, it killed my mother and father.” “I want to hurt whoever did this to him.” “My husband blames me.” The notes were folded and thumb tacked inside so that they could be opened to read. This large bulletin board had accompanying boards where students posted newspaper and magazine articles about rape, sexual violence toward men women as well as the #Metoo movement. The librarians filled a large table with books about sexual abuse and violence.

Students organized an evening of conversation for the college and community. They had experts talk about the history of the comfort women and the trauma resulting from sexual violence. A student spoke about the #Metoo movement, a Menlo professor read her poetry, a student presented a spoken word piece. Before we started a sound piece by students reading comments from the installation was played. We ended with an open discussion.

I returned home to complete the artwork that I started during the residency. It focused on statements made by individual “comfort women” and has been added to the body of work. The “Comfort Women” Project has moved on to other venues, more art making, more discussions. Yes, there is the common thread of shame and silence about sexual abuse. Scars remain but

healing is possible.

Rose Camastro Pritchett

[www.thecomfortwomenproject.com](http://www.thecomfortwomenproject.com)

[www.rosecamastropritchett.com](http://www.rosecamastropritchett.com)

The "Comfort Women" Project



**"Comfort Women" Quilt 2014**

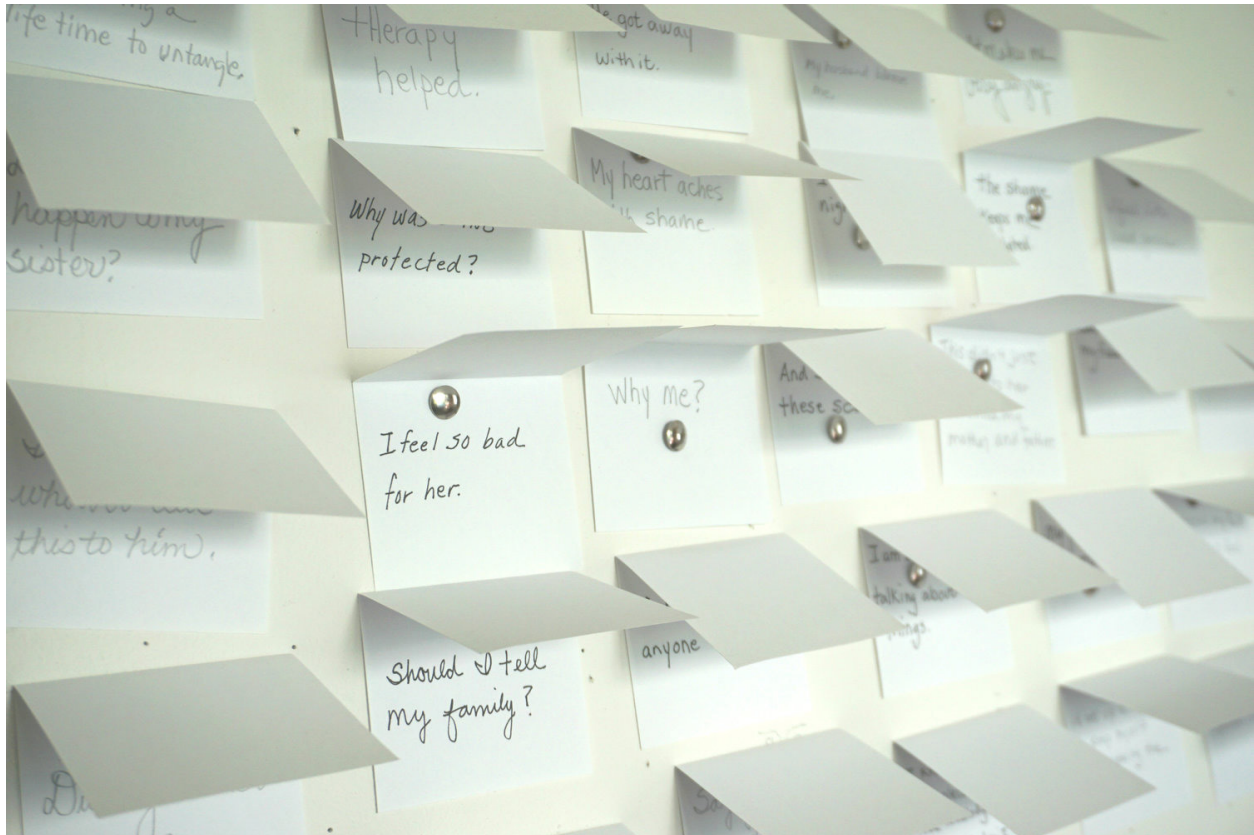
20" x 18" Handmade paper, pulp painting, hand stitching, silk thread. Made for the 85 Years, 85 Artists exhibition, Menlo College. The "Comfort Women" Quilt was sold at that exhibition and not part of the current "Comfort Women" Project exhibitions.



**Ghost Girls: Wan Aihua** completed 2019

11" x 8 3/4" Handmade paper, pulp painting, hand stitching, photocopy of original 1937 map of China. Quote: Wan Aihua, "comfort woman". This is part of the series that started at the Menlo Residency, October, 2018. These pieces focus on original quotes from "comfort women" survivors.

## The "Comfort Women" Project



### Message Board: Menlo College 2018

Installation on 4'x 8' bulletin board. Students wrote their feelings on blank index cards about sexual violence, sexual harassment, or sexual abuse they experienced or to a relative or someone they know. The cards are folded and thumb-nailed inside the card so that they can be lifted up to be read. No names are included.

The students titled the board *Break the Silence*.

**Rose Camastro Pritchett** has had her own art school, conducted workshops abroad, exhibited internationally, received grants, awards and residencies for her work, run community art projects, and taught in schools and colleges in the US, Saudi Arabia and China. She holds an MS Ed in Counselor Education and an MFA in Interdisciplinary Book & Paper Arts. [www.rosecamastropritchett.com](http://www.rosecamastropritchett.com)

## Web Of Justice

Interview with Dr. Elizabeth W. Son

On a bright morning in March at Awakenings' gallery, Dr. Elizabeth Son sat down with Emma Dempsey from the *Awakened Voices* team to discuss Dr. Son's book, *Embodied Reckonings: "Comfort Women," Performance, and Transpacific Redress (2018)*, and the global and intergenerational web created by the movement seeking justice for "comfort women" survivors.

**Embodied Reckonings looks at activism and performance in terms of both what is being said and how it's being said. Some may overlook the "how" in favor of the "what," but can you tell us why it's important to consider both as we evaluate activist art and performance?**

It's important when we're looking at the social movement that emerged in support of these survivors to look at both the what and the how, because if we're looking at the methods and techniques that activists, artists and survivors have used, then 1) we begin to see ways in which they are working in partnership with each other, and 2) we get to see more closely how they are opening up what we mean by redress. The how is absolutely integral, and my approach is through the lens of performance. That is the big how. How are people using embodied means? How are they using their body as the main mode of expression?

For example, it's critical that we look at a space like the Wednesday Demonstrations and how survivors and their supporters use the techniques of street protest, because when we do that we become aware of the importance of the space. This is a space that's in central Seoul, which is the capital of South Korea, across from the Japanese Embassy, and we begin to understand why it's important that in the beginning the protesting bodies are across from the Japanese Embassy, facing the embassy, and positioning first the embassy, which stands in for the Japanese government, as the main audience, but as more people come into the space, a circle of bodies forms, and the embassy becomes displaced. It's the survivors who are the main audience. If we're attentive to the how—the placement of bodies in the space; how people are relating to each other—then we understand part of the power of the Wednesday Demonstrations in which protesters are displacing the sole power of the agency to enact redress from the government to the people.

There's a way in which the how and why are intricately connected and important to understanding the ways in which these women and their supporters have been opening up what we mean by justice. It's not just justice defined in strict legal and political parameters, but it's justice that is also social and cultural—that manifests in ways that people make connections with each other; that manifests in the street education of history; and that manifests in the building of a transnational community of memory.

**While some may say that efforts like the Wednesday Demonstrations have failed, in terms of getting the Japanese government to acknowledge its role in and offer redress for the horrors the “comfort women” faced, *Embodied Reckonings* considers the educational value in art and activism. How do you think considering educational value changes the way we evaluate art and activism?**

One of the remarkable things about these women, the survivors, and their supporters are the ways in which they are getting us to think about redress more expansively. How are we rethinking who gets to tell and narrate history? How are we rethinking knowledge?

Education is a big part of the power of the Wednesday Demonstrations, but it's kind of even opening up what we mean by education. Not simply raising awareness, but also getting people to rethink: How will we tell these women's stories with them, in partnership with them? How do we honor their stories? And how do we do the work of remembrance? How do we do the work of connecting their struggle to other ongoing structures of violence against women and ongoing struggles to support survivors?

And I think about how art such as theater—because that's my area of specialty—how does theater become a space for educating the public? And what I've noticed about the stage productions that have emerged in relation to this history is that oftentimes theater becomes a space where we can talk about issues that don't get discussed in public arenas like the Wednesday Demonstrations.

In my book the productions that I focus on are thinking about intergenerational trauma and what it means for family members to deal with this, but also what it means for communities who do not have biological ties to survivors. And that's another interesting way to think about intergenerational trauma when it's not directly through some kind of biological connection, but it's simply through a cultural or social connection.

It's fascinating to consider what is possible through something like theater. How can we create a space where we're presenting nuanced representations of these women's experience, but also inviting audiences to reflect on how they can engage in an act of witnessing that doesn't simply end when they leave the theater?

**How do you think that educational value factors into the work done by KAN-WIN and here at Awakenings?**

It's been wonderful to witness the ways in which education is an important part of the work that KAN-WIN does, and education is an important part of the work that Awakenings does for a lot of similar reasons. It's important that we think about what it means to educate and to open up not only the circles of witnessing but also the circles of responsibility for people to understand that even if they are not directly impacted, if they don't directly know a survivor or they themselves have not experienced violence, it's still important that we open up that circle of responsibility so that people know this is something that all of us have a responsibility to wrestle with. I see that happening through art exhibits.

At KAN-WIN there's an emphasis on direct services, but they also do a lot of outreach and community education. It's getting people to think about, for example, the following questions: How do we build healthy relationships? How do we

maintain healthy boundaries? How do we think about ways in which gender-based violence permeates society? And then do we even begin to change cultural attitudes and social attitudes towards gender-based violence and towards survivors? Education is a critical part of the work of organizations like KAN-WIN and Awakenings, and I'm excited about ways in which, with this summer exhibit, we're going to partner with each other.

**You mentioned the intergenerational effects of trauma, not just in terms of biological connections but also for communities in general. As survivors continue to pass away, the movement is important in continuing to educate about the history of the "comfort women" and connect it to contemporary issues. Could you talk about the involvement of younger generations of students in this movement?**

One thing I noticed when I looked at hundreds of photographs of the Wednesday Demonstrations is that in the beginning, it was women of a certain generation and generally women who were middle-aged. Of course, there were younger women involved in the early years, but as the movement grew, more and more university students got involved, and then starting in the 2000s, I started seeing more students in high

school coming—because they were strikingly noticeable by their uniforms.

In Korea I saw a resurgence in the participation of the younger generation, primarily university students, after the 2015 agreement between South Korea and Japan. This was an attempt by the governments to “finally resolve the issue,” and as part of that deal the Japanese government had called for the removal of the bronze girl statue across from the Japanese Embassy. What happened is a number of Korean university students decided: we have to go out and protect the statue so they don’t come out in the middle of the night and remove it. This agreement was made in December 2015 and soon after they were out there taking shifts trying to protect the statue, and while they were out there teaching other people about the issue.

I was shocked when I went to Korea in summer of 2018 and some of the students were still out there guarding the statue. The numbers were small, but they still had something set up. People were still taking turns keeping watch. Not only were they keeping watch over the statue, but then they started organizing throughout the country and raising money and hosting film screenings and bringing the activists and inviting survivors to come and give testimony. The youth have been a big part of this movement, and they are the

future and, like I said, it’s not just in Korea but it’s global.

**In your book you discuss how survivors, supporters, and activists redefine redress. Can you explain what it means to redefine redress, and how that ability to do so gives survivors greater agency in their art and activism?**

I started this project as my dissertation. I went on my first research trip to Korea in summer of 2007, and I had been reading about the Wednesday Demonstrations and I thought this is fascinating. I needed to experience this for myself. When I was out there protesting with the women and experiencing this movement of bodies—displacing the Japanese Embassy and facing the survivors with our backs to the embassy—I realized that this is not only a space where they’re calling for redress, they are actually practicing redress and in many different ways.

That got me thinking about the street education of history, but also the building of a different kind of kinship structure. Many of the survivors in Korea were not able to have their own children, and some of them decided not to get married, but some of them did actually end up adopting children. When I met with some of the women and I talked to them about the protesters,

they always referred to the protesters as their children. They used the word “descendants.” There’s a way in which the women felt like these are my descendants. They were able to connect and see each other repeatedly at protests. The survivors also have a very strong bond with the activists and advocates who are supporting them. This was their new family, and this is a powerful example of social redress.

But at the same time I realized that there’s always an awareness that any form of redress will never be complete, because there can never be a complete reckoning for something like this. And yet, there’s still a continued effort to try again. This is where I might become a little bit more theoretical, but in performance studies there’s this idea of the importance of repetition in performance. Every performance is always repeated whether it’s a weekly demonstration or a family gathering, but every iteration is different.

The Wednesday Demonstrations happen every week, rain or shine. Even in Korea right now, with the coronavirus, they are still having Wednesday Demonstrations, but you can participate via YouTube or Facebook. It’s the advocates, just a handful of them, across from the Japanese Embassy. They film it, and other people can participate in the comfort of their own home.

The protests have also created opportunities for survivors to exercise agency because they could decide, this week I’m going to get up and grab the microphone. I’m going to have some words to say, and sometimes they do talk about their past, and sometimes they talk about current political events. The Wednesday Demonstrations become a space where they can speak about all sorts of things.

Another kind of redress is related to the statue. With the original bronze girl statue in Korea, when it becomes cold, people come by, and they dress the statue. They bring the statue food and leave the statue flowers. It’s become kind of like a shrine, but something different is happening there, which I describe as “performances of care” in my book. There are different ways in which people, by caring for the statue, are caring for the issue and showing their respect and their desire to somehow become part of the movement in support of these women.

**What has been most rewarding in your work on *Embodied Reckonings*?**

The most rewarding aspect of working on the book was meeting the survivors. I'm lucky that I was able to start this research in 2007, where I got to witness the peak of the Wednesday Demonstrations and got to see the women out there on the streets. I was lucky to be in the audience when some of these women came to the United States to give their testimony. That was the most rewarding, being able to witness the women giving testimony, but I'm also grateful that they invited me into their homes. I was able to just sit with them and hear their stories and share a meal with some of them.

During my research trips, I got to meet activists from the main Korean organization that's been at the forefront of the social movement. It just kind of opened up. Then I started meeting different theater artists. I got to meet and interview the sculptors who created the beautiful bronze girl statue. I got to meet so many community members who were part of efforts to install the memorial in their respective communities. And through the process of writing my book, I found out about KAN-WIN because they're the local organization in Chicago that supports the survivors in Korea, and then I got to meet you guys.

It's this kind of web with people that I met through my book when I was doing the research. And now, on the other side, I get to meet people who have read my book. It's alive in the community, and my book will be able to continue to tell the history of activism and what the women have endured, but also somehow help with ongoing activist work. That too is part of that web; it's just like a community that I got a chance to become a part of through writing this book. When I look at my book, I see that web, all those people I had a chance to meet and get to know. It's been pretty awesome. I feel like I'm still on the journey.

**How does your work on *Embodied Reckonings* relate to the work you are doing with Kan-Win?**

At KAN-WIN one of the main things that I'm focusing on is the issue of "comfort women" advocacy. That has mainly been in relation to community outreach and education. KAN-WIN had this film screening of "My Name is Kim Bok-Dong," a documentary film about one of the survivors, and I had a chance to give remarks and moderate the Q&A. I've also had a chance to lead workshops at KAN-WIN and then to lead a teach-in in January. That's been an important part of continuing the work of education. Along with that we are also thinking about how we partner with other organizations to do the work of both supporting the survivors in their ongoing

quest for official redress, but also figuring out ways in which we can practice redress. This is why I love the title of the exhibit *Embodying Justice*. It's exactly what we're doing simply by being in the gallery space together. That's an area I'm really excited to be working on. The other area we're working on is thinking about an advocacy plan for Illinois. How do we build a multi-generational, cross-ethnic coalition across different sectors? So, the question is what do we do here in Chicago? Do we do a little bit of everything, or do we put all of our effort into something specific?

Also, I'm writing my next book on local Asian American art and advocacy in support of survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, and thinking about KAN-WIN's place in that kind of advocacy, but also placing their work in a longer history of movements that are in support of survivors. It's a book that also explores the #MeToo movement and discusses the particular challenges that Asian and Asian American survivors face. My time at KAN-WIN is integral to this project.

## **Call For Submissions**

*Awakened Voices*

Our Fall 2020 Issue will be on the theme of  
**LEGACY.**

If you are an artist, writer, musician, or any other type of creative truth-teller, you can submit examples of your work online for inclusion in our exhibits, our magazine, and our events. Find our visual and literary art calls at Submittable:

<https://theawakeningsfoundation.submittable.com/submit>

## **Awakenings**

A certified 501-c3 organization

Awakenings is the parent organization of Awakened Voices. Awakenings exists to make visible the artistic expression of survivors of sexual violence. By showcasing stories of survival, we are helping survivors find peace while simultaneously challenging the cultural taboos that prevent an honest discussion of sexual violence. Awakenings is a certified 501-c3 organization with a small art gallery space in Chicago, IL.

We hold a wide variety of year-round programming that includes rotating art exhibits, monthly art making nights, musical concerts, dance and theater performances, poetry readings and open mic nights, live painting events, and much more. We also publish an online literary magazine twice a year and hold writing workshops to help survivors heal through literary arts.

We partner with rape crisis centers, counselors, art therapists, local activists, and like-minded nonprofits to collaborate on events and share our audiences. We are growing rapidly and want to spread the word, expand our community, and widen the resources we are able to offer survivors. We shine a light on the truth. We are upfront and dead-center about the prevalence of rape and sexual abuse in our culture. We are

here to tell the truth and share the stories of the survivors who want to tell them.

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