

# Curtain Call: See You Later

AWAKENED VOICES | ISSUE 14 | FALL 2022

Fathers Making Metrical Erasure The Body Speaks  
Forgive, Forget or Fuck Off Day in the Life of a Survivor Intention for Change  
Mothers Memoirs Legacy Unthemed  
Those Who Help



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# AWAKENED VOICES

LITERARY MAGAZINE

see. hear. heal.





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## INTRODUCTION

A curtain call is a time for closure. Both the audience and the storytellers acknowledge each other's participation in the creation of art and community. In the following pages, some of the writers, artists, and editors who make up Awakened Voices have chosen to come forward for a curtain call.

After this issue, *Awakened Voices* is saying See You Later and going on hiatus. Awakenings will continue to provide survivors of sexual violence with a trauma-informed, inclusive art-making experience that encourages healing. Thank you to everyone who shared their art and writing over these fourteen issues. Thank you to every reader who has witnessed these survivors' stories.

All of the following pieces come from an invitation to previously published writers and artists to return to Awakened Voices for this issue. Some pieces are new. Some pieces were originally published in previous Awakened Voices Issues in the same or a slightly different form:

"Distractions" by Trish L. Rodriguez was originally published in Issue 6: A Day in the Life of a Survivor

"May I Help You?" by Barbara Edema was originally published in Issue 8: Those Who Help

"LILAC | *Syringa vulgaris*" by Thea Matthews was originally published in Issue 11: Legacy

"Let Them Not Be Your Ten!" by Ada Cheng was originally published in Issue 13: The Body Speaks

"After Being Abused: The Overturn of Roe V Wade" by Laurie Kuntz was originally published in Issue 13: The Body Speaks

## SPECIAL THANKS TO:



Our entire Literary Review Team, our Founder Jean Cozier, Laura Kinter, Jackie Valdez, Megan Otto, Awakenings' Board of Directors

**All of our writers and artists**

## CONTENT WARNING

The following issue contains material including one or more of the following: rape, incest, sexual assault, abuse, child abuse, sex, medical trauma, racism, gun violence, animal harm, colonialism, gender-based violence.

The intention behind this content warning is to prepare a reader so they can choose to bravely engage with potentially activating material, even if this doesn't always feel comfortable. May it also serve as a reminder that a reader can pause and take a break from reading. The stories will be here, ready when the reader returns.





## Body Recovered at the Scene of a Crime

Natalie Benson-Greer



I spent most of the year running wild trying to find a way back to my body. I took baths, threw back bottles, put fists into walls, swallowed pills, lit candles, slathered on face masks, took blades out and put them back. I tried it all: acupuncture, yoga, running, screaming, scratching my way in every direction to pick up the pieces. And still, some days I get out of the shower and while I'm rubbing lotion into the skin on my legs, I'm not sure they're my own. But I'm getting there.

After being assaulted, I felt that something had been taken from me. Worse than that, I wasn't even sure I wanted it back. I was so numb and when I wasn't, I was being smothered in the same horrible memory over and over and over again. The memory wasn't even intact, just flashes of grabbing or the dull sticky feeling of unwanted hands. I used to love and celebrate my body and I suddenly felt betrayed by it. I was the scene of the crime, every moment of every day stuck in my worst fear come true. I was so afraid to sit still and breathe and listen to my body. I didn't want to hear the ways I didn't fight back or remember the morning rage of trying to piece it together. It felt safer to be outside of myself.

I've had a list on my phone since I was a teenager of potential tattoo ideas. I got my first

professional tattoos when I was nineteen and I was so sure of myself. At the time, I could've given an entire thesis about why those words were on my arms and everything it meant to me. Now I know sureness is a luxury. It took me days to talk about my last assault. I didn't want to admit to myself that it had happened, not again, not so soon. I had just returned to myself, and I was nothing but angry and disappointed that I was back to the haunting disconnect.

I was lying in bed hungover on a Monday afternoon, scrolling Instagram and lunged at an impulse. A friend had landed a tattoo apprenticeship and was offering up a tattoo that day. Without much thought I told him I'd be there in an hour. Just a week earlier, I had the lowest breakdown of my life; alone in the dark in my bathtub with a fifth of whiskey thinking I may never get out. I'd been a little afraid of being alone since then, knowing I couldn't really trust myself to stay safe. I needed to do something, anything that reestablished my sense of control.

I hear the buzzing from the tattoo gun and the pulsating anticipation in the air. I'm lying down on the table under the fluorescent white light, waiting. The needle hits my skin with a sharp pain and I exhale. Suddenly, I'm there all the way






in my body. The vibrations from the gun run up from my ankle all the way to my palm where I'm digging my nails in to offset the pain. I chose this. This moment is all mine. For the rest of my life I'll have this pointless drawing on my ankle of a skull with a cowboy hat to symbolize absolutely nothing but being alive.

It is so hard not to hate your body when it is the crash site. Yellow caution tape wrapped around my muscles, sirens blaring through my blood, forensics teams scouring my hips and I can't escape. The more I run, the less I recognize anything about myself. But when I look in the mirror with ink all over my skin I know I am my own person. With each butterfly and rose and bird I get further away from all the damage and return to myself. This body is mine. I allowed someone to put art on my body because that's what I deserve; beauty and meaning. I don't want to be numb or lost or scared of the present. I want to be right there, under the needle, asking for more lines, more color, *more, more, more*.

Some days I can't escape the feeling of wanting to run out of my skin; so what if I run into new skin? What if I let the buzzing of the tattoo gun carve into my skin until I'm covered in who I am and not what's been done to me? What if I look at

myself in the mirror and all I see is my dumb beating heart that keeps pushing me back off the ground every single time?



**Natalie Benson-Greer** is a Chicago based writer with a BA in Creative Writing from Columbia College Chicago. Her short stories “Backwoods” and “We Can’t Drown Like Them” are published in Hair Trigger, where she previously worked as an acquisition editor. She has volunteered at Awakenings as an Associate Board member and as a reader for Awakened Voices. When she’s not writing you can find her around the city working as a bartender.



ISSUE 14: CURTAIN CALL

## The [Un]salvaged Body, Biotic and Broken

*Donny Winter*

Tonight, lover, you're a cyberneticist—  
these cogs have grown brittle from disuse  
and the chemicals in these vessels  
are no substitute for the blood  
that once flowed.

Tonight, lover, you're a curator—  
this body is a museum  
with rusted gears forged long ago,  
with soldered computer chips  
bereft of lithium-ion heft.

Tonight, lover, you're my alchemist—  
I'm a steampunk automaton  
splayed across this bed and I regret  
that you're charged with my maintenance,  
but I know you'll salvage me.

I know you'll raise me from the dead.

**Donny Winter** is a LGBTQIA+ activist, YouTube blogger, and poet residing in Midland, Michigan. He currently teaches poetry at Delta College and has publications in numerous lit magazines and journals. His two poem collections, *Carbon Footprint* (2020) and *Feats Of Alchemy* (2021) garnered two Pushcart Prize nominations and a Best of the Net Nomination. When he's not writing, Winter always finds himself in the garden.



**The Hope**

Clara Fourcade  
digital oil painting  
2048px x 2748px



I haven't been able to communicate much around the subject of sexual assault lately, so I set out without a vision for this piece. I started with the fire, which I really enjoy painting. As the strokes got thicker I started to find a shape within the mix of blues at the base of the fire. Slowly, a person came up, facing the fire, seemingly born from it. I highlighted the roots, and then focused on uncovering the blues within. My thinking is: maybe hope is born from the fire we've endured. Not in spite of, nor because of, our suffering. It just is. Like the byproduct of a chemical reaction. The byproduct of surviving. And it is not always easy to live, and especially to want to live, so the hope is not always front and center, not always clear. But I do believe it is an ongoing chemical reaction, always within me, and always visible eventually.

**Clara** is a queer artist based in Chicago.





**Birthday Song***Emory Rose*

It is February, month of my birth, and also month of rape.  
I test that word, "rape," on my fingers to feel the change—  
know that sunken into the sea some long-lost body of fear,  
untouched by scavengers, lingers at the edge of the word.

It is February, month of my birth, and warmer than predicted.  
The weather is perfect. My jacket is light. Still,  
I cannot think past the shock of warm rain  
and the wet scratch of gravel kicking in the street.

Down low in the black sea of my rage  
I hide the things I most hope to protect.  
The bleeding edge of adulthood bites my heel  
then dulls to a soft bruise underfoot.  
It aches—strange and familiar, dark and  
warm—and I know each word that haunts  
me in its wake, singing *nothing can ever*  
*really*  
*be let go.*

**Emory Rose** (they/them) is a graduate student and perpetual wanderer currently living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Their poetry has appeared in *Third Point Press*, *Half Mystic*, *Inklette*, *Counterclock*, *Passengers Journal*, and *CAROUSEL*, among other publications (although much of that poetry was published under their deadname).



## Distractions

Trish L. Rodriguez

A.

One Friday after school, my mother entered my bedroom. She had a look on her face like when she had to tell me that my pet hamster died. I was twelve years old and impatiently waiting for puberty to knock on my door. She sat down on my bed and took my hand. “We have to talk about your boobs, Diane. They’re adjustable.”

If she had approached me to have another sex talk, I would have vomited up my lunch. When we had the sex talk, Mom walked into my room and told me all the anatomical names. She also used the word penetration a lot. Despite her bluntness, the only way I could tell she was nervous was because she did that rapid eye blink thing.

“My boobs?” Part of me feared that she was joking, but my mother didn’t have much of a sense of humor. She didn’t dress up her language or introduce unrelated nonsequiturs like I would have. If I had to tell my daughter about her adjustable boob power, I would have used dolls and props and possibly an analogy about a rare bird. But Mom, she just came right out and said it—I could change the size of my breasts.

“Yes. You will be able to change the size of your breasts over the next thirty years of your life.”

One of my classmates in the seventh grade, Loreen, was the first girl in class to sprout breasts. All the other girls were jealous, though none of us understood why.

Loreen said that “larger breasts look best in dresses.” All I knew was that I didn’t want to be called “so flat that my chest could be a cutting board” or “One Dimensional Diane.”

I had been looking forward to being a woman. Those women who had big boobs, tiny waists and slim, delicate wrists always looked like the epitome of femininity to me. They always seemed to have tiny feet. I felt awkward and clunky with my long flipper-like feet and no waist.

Once, while we watched a movie, my parents commented on how beautiful one of the actresses was. I sat on the floor reading while my parents cuddled on the sofa.

“She is gorgeous. Her skin looks so smooth,” my mom said. She poked my dad in the side.

“Yeah, I didn’t notice her skin. Her boobs are amazing,” my dad said.

“Phil!” My mom swatted my dad’s arm and laughed. I went back to reading but stayed on the same page for the rest of the movie.

I had so many questions about my adjustable boobs.

“How? When? How big can I get them? Are they going to sag if I go too big?” I asked.

“This ability is hereditary. Very few other women have it. There is a button that I have to show you how to use. But beware. If you use the button too much, it will break and you will be stuck at whatever size you’re at,” my mother said.

Learning about adjustable boobs was a conversation for which I would have preferred a book, or the internet, over my mother’s lecture. I was nervous to research “adjustable boobs” on my computer. Didn’t they track those searches? Would I be identified as a boob-adjuster and targeted by some pervert?


My arms wrapped around my presently nonexistent chest as I rocked back and forth. No more training bras or those awkward, preteen, multicolored, overly padded holsters.

The rest of my mother’s instructions barely registered. Mom said something about keeping a variety of bra sizes in my drawer and to always make sure I had the right support. She showed me where on my body the button was and how to control it.

The button was in a hard to reach spot that required some contortions to adjust. I didn’t care. I would become more flexible.

“There is another thing that you should know,” my mother said, “you can try different sizes, but you have to choose by the time you are 40, or the choice will be made for you. The button stops working.”

Forty seemed such a long way off. I had plenty of time to find the right size for me. I would try all the different sizes I could. I wouldn’t worry about boys or their attention. I just wanted to look older. I wanted strangers to stop talking to me



like I was a kid lost in the playground looking for her mother.

After my mother left my room, I jumped on my bed and stuck out my chest pretending I was busty like that actress in the movie with the robot and that guy from the boy band. I spent the rest of the afternoon learning how to use the button and playing around with different sizes in front of the mirror. Mom called in every few minutes to make sure I didn't need help.

I dragged my best friend, Vera, to the mall the next day, letting her in on my secret. We spent that entire Saturday trying to find the perfect bras for me. I wanted them to be lacy, floral, delicate, and make me look curvy. D cups were desirable, but none of the size D bras were lacy. They were industrial looking and either black, beige, or white. I didn't care. I wanted to be a D cup. The sales lady offered to help, and I politely told her that I was fine. My first bra was labeled "nude" though it was several shades lighter than my skin tone. The band was too loose for my small frame, but I didn't know any better. I just knew that I had a size D bra, and (in my twelve-year old mind) this meant I was a woman. I

wanted to be accepted as a woman and a woman had an ample bosom.

When I walked through the dressing room's heavy maroon curtains, Vera giggled and held her hand over her mouth. She pointed to my blouse buttons that popped open in the middle. No matter how much I slouched or sucked in, I burst out of that blouse. Vera begged me to try a different size but asking for help meant accepting an endless childhood. I bought the bra anyway. I bought a pullover.

That Monday, I dressed for school in my new bra and my new pullover. In the kitchen, my mother fed my baby sister, and my father read the news while hunched over the breakfast counter sipping his coffee. He looked up and dribbled his coffee a little.

"Did you tell her?" my father asked in a poor attempt at whispering.

"We talked about the button, so no need for you to say anything." My mother didn't look up from my sister's oatmeal-smeared face. She didn't even look at what I wore. She must have signaled

my father to be quiet. I grabbed a boiled egg and ran for the school bus.

The second I started running for the bus my new boobs hurt and my back hurt and my shoulders hurt. I could have adjusted at school in the girls' bathroom, but my pride kept me from acknowledging those Ds were too oversized for my body and that the bra didn't fit.

The boys in school stared at my chest. Mouths dropped. Necks craned. Eyes bulged. Before class even started, I eyed the nurse's office to hide out.

In advisory, everyone kept passing notes and giggling. My advisor, Mr. Abbott, sent me to the principal with a note. That note read, "Please talk to Diane." The principal called the nurse to join us.

The principal sat behind his desk. The nurse leaned against the window, tapping her foot. "I understand at this age you might be encouraged to alter your size with tissue or socks or whatever, but your size is a little...how do we say...um."

I was embarrassed by all the attention, but I didn't understand what I had done wrong. I wanted to climb on top of that messy desk and scream out, "I have a button that gives me adjustable boobs!" How dare they think these are socks. This is Grade A, pure me—with the help of a button.

"Such a large chest area can be distracting in a school environment, dear," the principal stammered while looking at the nurse.

"Distracting?" I asked. How distracting is it for me to be teased for not having boobs? The principal chewed on a pen.

"The boys and the male teachers might find it distracting, dear," the nurse said.

My cheeks flushed, and my hands shook a little. I wiped the sweat off my palms on the side of my pants. I thought about storming out of the school and never returning. I just wanted to look less gangly and awkward. I wanted to be dainty and curvy.

They gave me the option of either having my mother pick me up, or "emptying my stuffing in



I the ladies' room." I couldn't bear to tell them that I was one of the rare girls who had a button. I called my mother. The rest of the year I kept my boobs at As and my face sullen. Instead of One Dimensional Diane, kids would ask me, "Do you have a tissue?" I wanted to slap everyone.

B.

When I reached high school, some kids still joked about the day I showed up in school with my bra stuffed. I chose to adjust to Bs. Most of the other girls seemed to be about that same size. With Bs, my tops didn't stretch or gap at the bust line. My Bs seemed to not be distracting. The bras weren't too expensive or look grandmotherly like the Ds. My body still felt gangly and awkward.

The girls with larger boobs were harassed constantly. Boys would mimic them walking around by sticking their chests out. Girls would call them fat, or worse, slutty.

Junior year, my crush since freshman year, Bobby, invited me to the prom. Bobby was a lacrosse player with strong legs, long curly hair, and a broad smile. To buy my gown, my mother

and I drove to Jane's Prom and Bridal. I couldn't bring myself to ask my seamstress mother to sew me a dress, and she didn't offer.

While I didn't want to look like a model, I wanted to fit in with what everyone else wore. Those days everyone wore strapless, so I chose several dresses that I had seen in magazines.

"How's it looking in there, Diane?" my mom called in through the curtain. I adjusted my button to Ds in the dressing room and tried on a platinum grey, strapless, silk gown with satiny buttons down the back. My cleavage looked amazing. I glided out of the dressing room feeling comfortable in my body. I twirled and shook my hair like I was a model on a runway. I posed at all angles. My dress slid down a little, but I could fix that with the right bra and some double stick tape. In my mind I was nominated for an Academy Award, and every designer wrangled to style me. I remembered seventh grade Loreen's comment about big boobs looking great in dresses.

My mother took one look at me and sighed. Her eye twitched. "You look beautiful, but I'm



worried,” my mom said.

“Worried?”

“People might get the wrong message.” “Because it’s strapless?” I asked.

My mother never stopped being blunt and direct. When she had to tell me about using deodorant, she took me to the aisle and said, “Choose one.” When I pulled my unruly hair into a messy ponytail, she gave me lessons on natural hair care, and the LOC method, (apply in leave-in conditioner, oil, then styling cream.) When I failed algebra because I wasn’t doing the homework, she told me to work harder. When I told her that I wanted to be an actress, she told me the statistics that less than ten percent make it, but she would stand behind me if I wanted to try.


But as I stood in that dressing room, my mom paused before she spoke. “No, honey. I mean with all that cleavage. People might think that you’re easy.” My mom stammered and wouldn’t make eye contact. She sighed and kept lightly trying to pull the top of the dress up. My mother, the

woman who stared down angry bridezillas every day, who would have taken on a bull to protect her children, couldn’t look me in the eye.

“What people?” I asked. I remembered my middle school principal and his messy desk. I remembered the nurse calling me dear. I remembered all the snickering in school. Was I choosing my breast size to avoid the teasing or to look like everyone else? All those actresses and models, when they wore dresses with cleavage showing, did people think they were easy? How much cleavage makes one look easy? What about all the women with Ds that didn’t come from a button? Were they forced to forever wear turtlenecks? Of course I didn’t ask my mother any of these questions. I chose a dress with long sleeves and a high neckline and adjusted my boobs to Bs.

C.

When I was a freshman in college, I felt less gangly, and my breast size was more a matter of convenience. I chose As for exercising and Cs for walking around. With my mother’s voice in my head, I was still afraid to try Ds again.



One night after some late night studying, a guy walked me home. Several times before, we had met to study for a chemistry class. We didn't really study, more like talked about the class, Bob Marley, and Young and the Restless. We chatted so easily. He would listen without interrupting me. I always felt like the only person in the world. He would maintain eye contact in a way that I had never seen before—a gaze so intense I would have to look away. When we parted, he would brush my cheek with a soft kiss and held my elbow for a second after.

"Here we are, Adams Hall," I said. My dorm, stuck in ancient times, was all girls. The groundskeepers pulled the ivy off the sides so boys wouldn't climb the walls and sneak in through the windows. The building was surrounded by a ditch that everyone called The Moat.

"Let me see your room. You told me it was awesome," he said. I had never invited him to my room. My father's voice, admonishing me about having a boy in my room, kept repeating in my head. Dad's voice would deepen whenever he was giving me safety advice. I checked the boy into

my dorm. The normally bustling hallways were empty. I opened my door, which I always kept unlocked. My neighbors would help themselves to my fridge and watch television in my room. My walls had string lights and posters of Klimt's "The Kiss" and Audrey Hepburn as Holly Golightly. I poured us each a glass of orange juice and sat on the bed. The pulp stuck in my throat. I wished it had been beer or wine. He remained standing, leaning against the wall that jutted into the room.

I talked about a soap opera plot line, and he just stood there. He broke eye contact, and I stopped talking.

"Your breasts are amazing," he said. As he turned back to me, I was in the room with a stranger. His eyes shadowed and his shoulders squared. The smell of his cologne, like citrus wrapped in leather, filled my nose.

"Well, it is getting late," I said.

He lunged at me with the strength of a silverback gorilla, attacking me in a frenzy. Hands wrapped around my neck and squeezed. There was no screaming "No," only "Please, stop." I begged for

my life. My ears clogged as if I had a cold.

He released my neck and ripped my blouse off and pulled down my pants in one swift moment as I choked and coughed, hoping to breathe. I was crushed by his weight on top of me, smothered as he penetrated me. My mind left my body.

My eyes locked on my Klimt poster. The man is clutching the woman in an embrace. I used to think it was romantic, that she is swept away by his touch. But on that day, she pushed him away, turning her head. He was faceless and formless, enveloping her.


He forced me over onto my stomach, shoving my face into my bed, and pulled my hips to him. My button remained hidden as he groped and held me. What if he found the button? Was he searching for it? Would I be frozen in that moment like that woman in *The Kiss*?

He backed away from me, and sticky wetness glopped onto my leg. He pulled me up. His eyes calmed as if his soul returned. He smiled and walked out of my room, closing the door behind him.

The leathery, orange smell from his cologne consumed the room. Curled up in a ball on the floor, I wrapped my arms around chest. My throat was raw. When the sun came up, I went to the bathroom and showered. I pulled the sheets off my bed and laid down on the bare mattress.

Weeks. Years. I was numb to time. I lost myself in darkness—disconnected from the world, sleepwalking through life. In retrospect, I don't know how I managed to finish college. After graduation, I worked waiting on tables while I pursued an acting career. I got auditions and even some minor roles. I assumed casting agents rejected me because I was damaged. I kept my boobs set at As for years after that, barely looking or touching my body, except to bathe. I didn't discuss what happened to me. I didn't even admit it to myself. I didn't know what I felt. I was numb.

There was a period when I was twenty-five, I stopped bathing. I stopped going to auditions. I spent most of the time watching nothing but home improvement shows about remodeling and house flipping. Getting out of bed felt like dragging an elephant across the highway. Every



night, I relived my assault in my sleep. His face loomed over me. His hands grabbed my throat. I cried and wrapped my arms around my chest. Snot poured down my face. After I didn't answer the phone or the door for two weeks, Vera, my oldest and dearest friend, dragged me to a therapist. She didn't ask what was wrong with me, and I couldn't tell her. After I spent months in therapy saying I was just depressed, I finally admitted what I never told anyone. I felt as if I relived that night.

A week later, my therapist managed to convince me to seek rape counseling. I sat alone in the waiting room of the rape crisis center. It had Pepto Bismol pink wallpaper, muted floral upholstered armchairs, and no waiting room music. One fluorescent bulb flickered, casting a shadow and a slight smoke trail that smelled of ozone around the room. I walked into the counselor's office dragging my feet across the carpet, my hair standing on end.

I sat across from my counselor with my feet planted flat on the floor, back straight against the saggy leather chair.

"Start from the beginning," she said.

"I let a boy up to my room in college and grabbed me and forced himself on me." I reported what happened. I couldn't use the word "rape."

"How could I trust him? Why didn't I know that he was a monster? Why did I let him in my room?"

"It wasn't your fault," My counselor said, but I didn't believe her.

After I started getting counseling for my rape, I was able to return to acting. I auditioned for a deodorant commercial. The casting agent commented that I would look perfect for the role if I had bigger boobs. He whispered loudly and pointed at my chest. I laughed.

At home, after my shower, I stood before the bathroom mirror instead of running from it. Why had I thought that my femininity was stored in my boobs? The water evaporated off my skin, and I slathered on coconut oil. My legs pushed against the earth; my back held my body upright.

I tried to adjust the button. What size did I try? I don't remember. The button was frozen into place, and I smiled. It was one month before my twenty-sixth birthday.


D.

One day as I walked to get to a foot powder audition, I watched a woman. She wore one of those body contour dresses in blood red with gold stilettos. She was not the tiniest woman, and her make-up was a little too thick, but her shoulders were straight and her ankles dainty. She tossed her curly black hair down her back as she strutted passed everyone. My hair goes to my ears. Her boobs bounced rhythmically as she walked. This woman had skin that begged to be touched. I walked behind her, my huge feet clapping along the sidewalk. My idea of femininity had been wrapped up in body image, but watching this woman reminded me that femininity had nothing to do with the actual body but with the way that a woman carried it. I was mesmerized, not by her body, but by her confidence.

DD.

I gave birth to my daughter on a rainy Friday. Everything happened so quickly. She was almost delivered on the highway. My husband drove faster than a NASCAR driver in the final lap. When we got to the emergency room, the doctor sent us to the delivery room right away.

My contractions rushed in. Every six minutes, every two minutes, every thirty seconds. It's not like on TV with all the screaming and swearing. I didn't have the energy. My body just took over on instinct, bearing down with each contraction as the baby inched out. That big head burned as it slid out. I held my daughter to my chest and then we both became still. I worried that my milk wouldn't let down. All the pain in my body turned off. She snuggled up against me and began to nurse as if she would never eat again; the sound of her feeding was like a waitress smacking gum. Her baby skin was so soft, and she smelled like heaven. The rain stopped, and the sun came out. I kept touching her, afraid that she might disappear. I worried about my daughter being in this world.



Raised in Philadelphia, **Trish L. Rodriguez** now resides in Media, PA. She graduated from Rosemont College MFA in Creative Writing Program. Fiction writing is her dream.

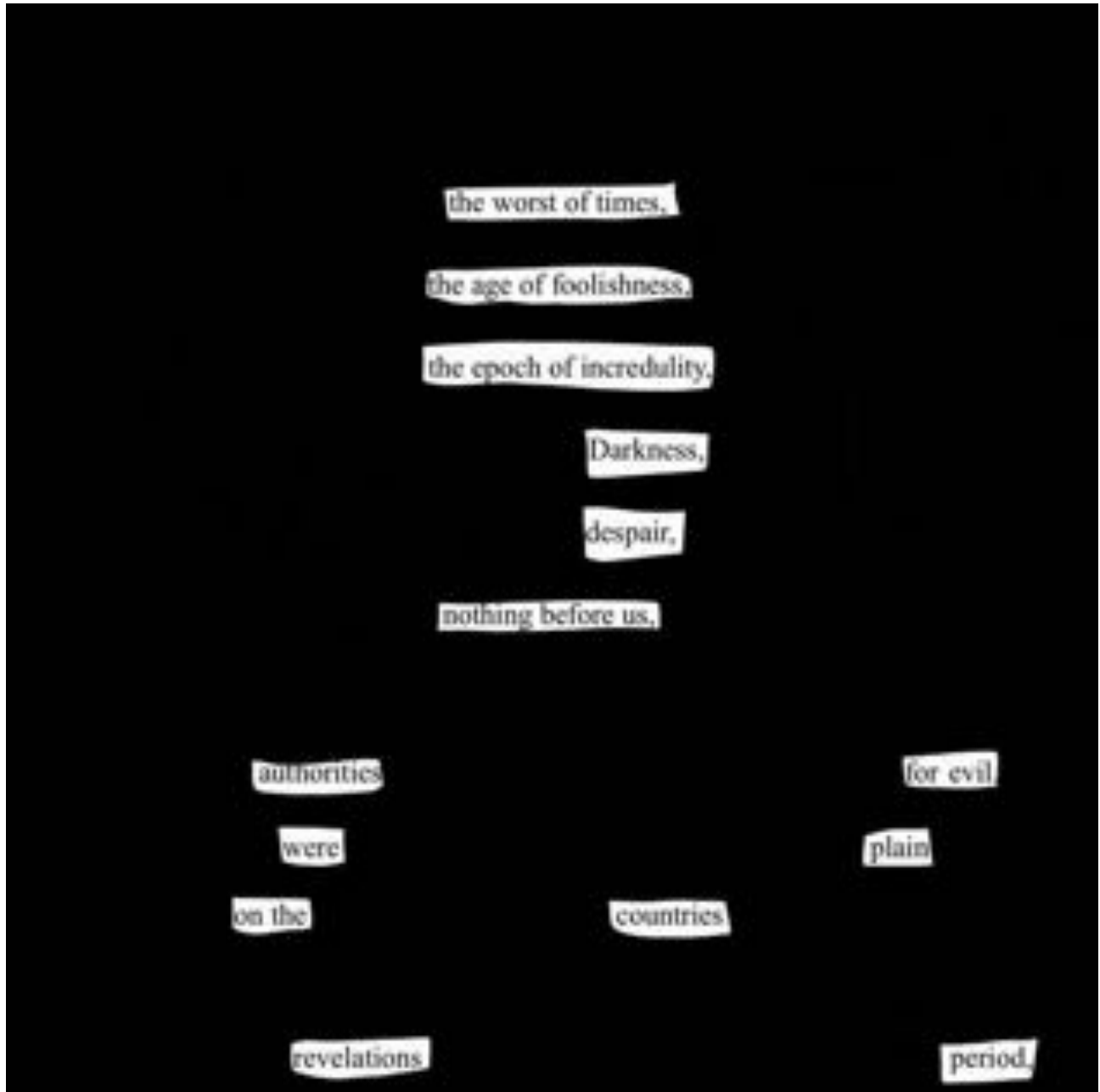


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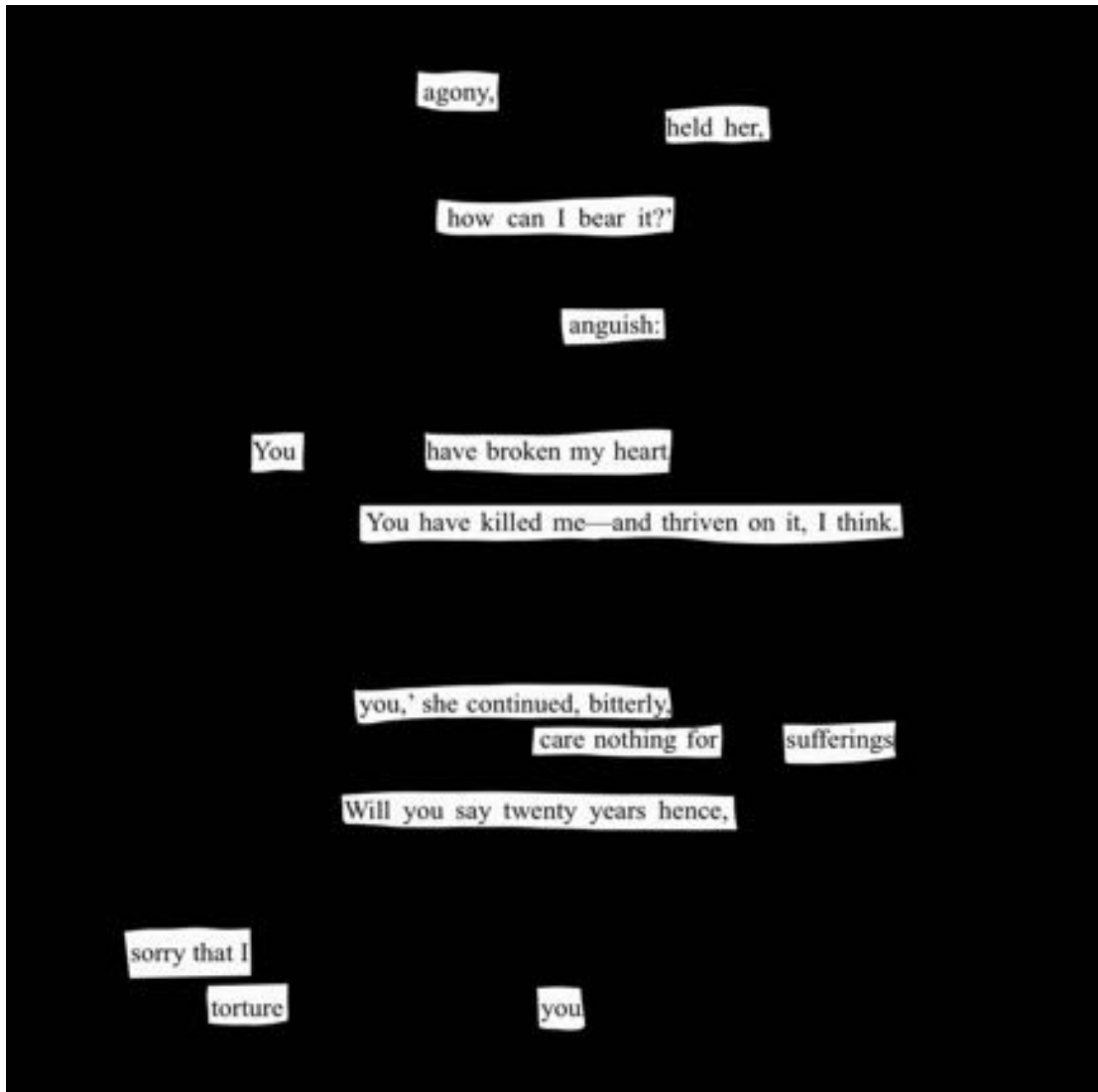


**Change It**  
Jorie Rao

ISSUE 14: CURTAIN CALL



**Change It**  
Jorie Rao



## Change It

Jorie Rao

I wish this

were different.

more

love

but

there is so much

creeping about

heavy as

thick fog

there is so much pain in this story.

change it.

**Jorie Rao** is an English Literature professor with a passion for reading and writing. She has an MFA in Creative Writing and Composition Theory and won the Toni Libro Award for excellence in writing.



## Let Them Not Be Your Ten!

Ada Cheng

It took me ten years.

In February 2020, I was invited by a faculty member from the Global Asian Studies Program at UIC to do presentations for his Asian American courses. The presentation was entitled “Sexual Assault on College Campus and Asian American Experiences.”

This presentation was different for me for one major reason. It was the first time that I had presented for college classes with predominantly Asian American students. Staring at faces similar to mine hit me viscerally.

I started my talk with the following major topics:

- The American colonization in Asia, their military/political interventions in the Asian region, and the United States’ racist and imperialist legacies in Asia;
- The constructed images of Asian women as docile, submissive, exotic, sensual, and sexually willing and the sexual fetishization of Asian/Asian American women;
- The historical symbolic/cultural emasculation and de-sexualization of Asian/Asian American men;
- The necessity to center race in sexual assault discourse.

Why are race or racialized images central to our understanding of sexual assault? If you are perceived to be submissive, docile, sensual, exotic, and fetishized, is it possible that your rejections, even if they are firm, can be disregarded over and over? Is it possible that, if you are perceived to be sexually willing and available, your rejections, even if they are clear and persistent, can be fantasized in a twisted way to mean affirmations?

Immediately after the class, a student approached me and said, “Thank you for your presentation. I really appreciate the way you approached this topic. You made this material relevant to me and my experiences.” I knew what she meant. She didn’t mean that my presentation was relevant to her as a woman. She meant it was relevant to her as an Asian woman in this country.

Her remark shook me to my core, not only in terms of how I should do gender-based violence training in the future, but also how I had to re-examine my own sexual assault. I had to ask myself: Why did I tell the story the way I did? Why did I leave out certain details? And most importantly, why was my identity as an Asian woman never given a proper place in my own

public account of the story?

My sexual assault took place in 2010. He was a colleague of mine in the department at a well-known university in Chicago. He was a friend, a progressive faculty member, and a comrade: one who would march with women and speak up for us.

Yet he sexually assaulted me despite my repeated rejections. I couldn't even name it as rape until another close colleague of mine named it for me. I could not reconcile his good man image in public with the violence he committed in private.

I have told this story in public a few times since 2016. I left out something important.

I decided not to discuss race in the story to mitigate the stereotyping that might ensue. My colleague is an immigrant man of color, a member of a marginalized community. I left out that detail because of the larger political climate of our time.

In 2015, when Donald Trump came out running for presidency, his campaign relied on demonizing immigrants, particularly immigrant men of color, constructing them as drug dealers, traffickers, criminals, and rapists. I didn't want this to become another statistic contributing to the portrayal of immigrant men of color as the

villain in our larger cultural and political landscapes.

Since I didn't name his race, I didn't explore how my own race might have played a part in my own victimization. I have been troubled by my own omission since my racial identity as an Asian woman has been central to my existence as an immigrant woman of color in this country and my experiences as an immigrant woman of color faculty in academia: in the way my colleagues have dismissed my presence, appropriated my intellectual labor, and discounted my contributions; in the way my students have disregarded my authority as a tenured faculty member; and in the way I have been told to go back to my country and consistently asked where I am from "originally", even after I became a citizen in 2015.

How could race be so salient in all my experiences as an immigrant woman of color, yet so absent at this moment of intimate violation? What other pernicious effects can this erasure of race have?

What I didn't say to students in 2020 is this: Is it possible that, because of these images, developed and constructed out of the American racist, colonial, and imperialist legacies, you will



be perceived as a complicitous collaborator in your own sexual assault, not only by others, but also by yourself? Is it possible that we also come to see ourselves as complicit in the violence against us?

I did, questioning myself in terms of the legitimacy of the rape because there was no brute force, because it was not in the dark alley, because he was no stranger but someone I trusted, because I didn't fight back and yell, because I thought I was trying to salvage a friendship, and because I stayed quiet and let it go afterwards, pretending nothing had happened.

Exactly the same way I dealt with anti-Asian racism early on in my life in this country.

On March 16 2021, a White man murdered eight people in Atlanta, among them six Asian women. In the press conference, the sheriff minimized the violence against these Asian women by labeling it as the shooter's trouble with sexual addictions.

Within one month of my arrival in this country in 1991, I learned a particular form of racial profiling, unique to me as an Asian woman, via this phrase: "I like Asian women."

This phrase has been said to me millions of times throughout decades, by men of all races,

particularly White men.

The key word here is Asian, not women. Men are looking for a particular set of titillating images and stereotypes in me. I am not important; the collective "we" that they have been fantasizing is what satisfies their sexual desire.

I am never just a woman; I have always been an Asian woman.

In an effort to protect my perpetrator, I never once asked how my identity as an Asian woman as well as the images based on the racist misogyny in his fantasies might have played a role in his repeated refusals to accept my rejections. I obscured the fact that I had consistently experienced racialized misogyny and sexism from men of color.

Even until this day, I still do not know how to address the harm done to one another within marginalized communities.

I wrote myself, the inseparable Asian woman, out of my own narratives.

When you write yourself out of your own stories, there is no story to tell about you or for you.

It took me ten years.

Let them not be your ten!



An educator-turned artist, storyteller, and creator, **Dr. Ada Cheng** has utilized storytelling to illustrate structural inequities, raise critical awareness, and build intimate communities. Committed to amplifying and uplifting marginalized voices, she has created several storytelling platforms for BIPOC and LGBTQIA communities to tell difficult and vulnerable stories. She was named 2021 Educator of the Year by the 7th Congressional District's Multi-Ethnic Task Force and the American Multi-Ethnic Coalition. She was a tenured professor in sociology at DePaul University from 2001-2016 when she resigned to pursue performance and storytelling. Since then, she has delivered numerous keynotes for academic conferences, universities, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies using storytelling and performance arts. Dr. Cheng is a speaker for Illinois Humanities Road Scholars Speakers Bureau and an adjunct faculty at Dominican University. Her interests encompass academia, storytelling/performance, and advocacy.



## After Being Abused: The Overturn of Roe v. Wade

Laurie Kuntz

I heard the sirens in the distance  
coming closer, and I knew  
who they were keening for.

Before the call,  
the knock on the door,  
the wail closing in,

women captured bird song,  
the sky's teal cover,  
the dandelion's parachute of bristles,  
the air rife with motion and choice.

Now our bodies light before us,  
bruised in voiceless times  
stymied by the rugged hills and curves,  
of unwanted laws.

After 50 years of weaving our voices to a life of choice  
a void seeps into the borders of our promises  
and leaves an armor as we stand guard  
on a precipice and look down  
at our remaining journey of steep and rocky paths.

\*

*June 24, 2022 is a dark day in American history. The numbing of women's spirits and ability to make informed choices about their lives is a devastating and horrific act by our justice system. This poem is the stymied voice rising up to resist.*



**Laurie Kuntz** is a widely published and award winning poet. She has been nominated for a Pushcart and Best of the Net prize. She has published two poetry collections (*The Moon Over My Mother's House*, Finishing Line Press, *Somewhere in the Telling*, Mellen Press), two chapbooks (*Simple Gestures*, Texas Review, *Women at the Onsen*, Blue Light Press). Her 5th poetry collection, *Talking Me off the Roof*, is forthcoming from Kelsay Press in late 2022. Recently retired, she lives in an endless summer state of mind. Visit her at:

<https://lauriekuntz.myportfolio.com>



**Sorry, this wasn't for us.**

Laura Kinter



It was late – way past working hours. Jean and I had spent the entire evening pouring over pieces of writing that survivors of sexual violence had submitted to be published in our relatively new magazine, *Awakened Voices*. Despite the emotional difficulty of combing through dozens of memoirs that often depicted the worst experiences in the writers' lives, we were buzzing with excitement. People had sent us their stories.

We'd published a few issues already that close friends seemed to enjoy. Our first two issues were filled with wonderful writers and writing – the first, *Mothers*, featured four pieces that explored the complicated relationships survivors might have with their mothers. Our second issue, *Fathers*, continued that exploration. They touched on aspects of survivorship I'd rarely seen elsewhere, and contributed to our growing collection of survivor art in which we hoped, one day, every survivor could see themselves represented.

Despite the encouraging feedback, I felt disappointed. I know Jean did too, but we never admitted it to one another. Numerous people expressed interest in a magazine, and we thought if we built it, they would come. But they didn't. No matter how much we loved those first two

issues, one fact remained: we had asked for every single piece of writing. We knew that would be the case in the beginning. But by the time the third and fourth issues rolled around, I'd started to consider the possibility that things would remain that way. I would always have to solicit; no one would submit; maybe most survivors weren't ready to share their story so intimately and publicly.

But then, like a beam of light shattering our dark clouds, we found Submittable. We had no clue that a submission software would change things so drastically, but it did (no, they are not paying me for this, but Submittable, if you're reading this – don't be shy ☺). We published a prompt for our next issue and submissions flooded our inbox.

Jean and I met on the night of the submission deadline and devoured the writing, with a festering concern about how we could possibly decline any of it. After tedious deliberation, we chose the winners. I decided to send the rejections first and planned out a few sentences of warm encouragement and specific feedback for each. I opened the first piece to decline and clicked a button. Rather than allow me to write my own message to the survivor, that button


sent an automated email saying “Sorry, this wasn’t for us.” My stomach dropped to the floor. The survivor wrote a long, detailed account of their assault and we replied with “Sorry, this wasn’t for us.” I swirled around in dark thought for several minutes until a “ding” brought me back to consciousness – the survivor had responded. They read us the riot act, and rightfully so. My heart broke as I read the email and I sent back an apology longer than their essay. I learned very quickly after that how to send customized responses.

I wanted to share this story because it’s important to remember our humble beginnings. I look at *Awakened Voices* now and marvel. It features writers from all over the world. An entire team of volunteer readers help us with sorting submissions. We use a trauma-informed editing process. And, if I might add, the magazine looks incredible. Respect, care, and compassion permeate every step of the process.

I have to laugh, after all these years – here we are, having solicited every single piece of writing in this issue. But the requests did not come from a place of scarcity. We asked because we wanted to celebrate the writers and the stories that have grown alongside us after all these years. I am

grateful for every single person who is featured in this issue and all that came before it—for writing their stories, for sharing them with us, and, most importantly, for sticking with us despite our mistakes.





**Laura Kinter** serves as the Executive Director of Awakenings. She holds a BA in Film and English from Vassar College and is currently pursuing an MBA from The University of Chicago Booth School of Business as a Neubauer Civic Scholar. Laura is passionate about finding innovative ways to help underserved and overlooked communities in need of support and compassion. She is certified in Human Resources, Trauma-Informed Supervision, and Post-Crisis Leadership, and serves on the board of the Greater Ravenswood Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Certified Death Midwives. In her limited but precious free time, she enjoys watching horror movies, cooking, and nurturing her various plants and animals.



ISSUE 14: CURTAIN CALL



**Prance**

*Jae Green*

# PRANCE

THEY'VE LIVED ENOUGH MONTHS TO CREATE YEARS.  
AND HAVE FLED FROM SO MANY MOUTHS.  
BEARS, COUGARS, THE DOUBLE MAW OF MEN WITH  
GUNS.


BUT SOMETHING DEEP WITHIN REMINDS THEM THAT  
FIRE HAS A DIFFERENT TYPE OF TOOTH.  
THERE ARE NO FANGS TO FIGHT BACK WITH, NO THORNY  
CROWN OF ANTLERS LIKE THEIR BROTHERS AND COUSINS.  
BUT, THEY HAVE THEIR FEET, DAINTY AS HIGH HEELS THAT  
LEAVE PRINTS AS TINY AS ALMONDS.  
THEIR TAILS A TORCH OF WHITE FUR IN THE SMOKE.  
THEY'RE BUILT FOR ESCAPE.  
THEY STICK TOGETHER AND IN THE DESTRUCTION LOOK  
READY TO LAUGH AND SHARE SECRETS.

-JAE GREEN

**Prance**

*Jae Green*





**Jae Green** is a writer, second generation artist, mother and cancer survivor originally from the South side of Chicago. Her poetry can be found in anthologies such as Tia Chucha's "Open Fist", "Smithsonian Magazine", "Hand Over Hand Magazine" "Antirhinnium" and "Voices from the Heartland". She has performed at The Green Mill, Randolph Street Gallery, Uncommon Ground, The Chicago Cultural Center, WomanMade Gallery, The Chicago Poetry Fest, Metro, Around the Coyote, and The Catherine Edelman Gallery. She recently participated in BodyPassages, a year-long collaboration between the Chicago Danztheatre Ensemble and The Chicago Poetry Center. She made it to the \$16,000 question on "Who Wants to Be A Millionaire?" before she gave her final answer.

## LILAC | *Syringa vulgaris*

*Thea Matthews*

*to Grandfather*

Take your filthy hands off me.

I SAID-Take your scarred wounded  
hands off me.

Your weight has no  
power over  
my wobbly toddler knees.

Your old construction hands calloused  
with generations of incest  
beatings children screaming pulverized  
these amethyst flowers. How could YOU?

I remember choking on the size  
of your retired labor-union  
tongue when my gums were getting ready  
to release their first set of baby  
teeth.

I remember you stretching my legs  
after kindergarten graduation  
I stopped liking school then my tights stained  
a rite of passage to the first grade.

I remember you spreading my legs  
at night when Grandma went to take a  
l o n g  
bath. Your oldest son pulled the same move  
like father like son two years later.



extinguishing fires still your son  
this firefighter used his hands to  
burn the lips between my thighs      yet I

survived. A field of Lilacs who  
run with the four directions  
Great Spirit oversees this field. I

clear out my throat  
each time I taste your mucoid saliva. I

lose my appetite      when I feel  
your fingers circling my soft areolas. I

smudge my body      with sage sweetgrass rose petals  
transmuting your residual sweat  
into tears leading me to the Ocean.

I scream into waves.  
Yemaya holds me      the shore  
line's salty foam releases my prayers.

I dive deep soar high  
I unwind on the spine of a humpback whale.

Her oscillating muffled words travel miles.  
Her cryptic tones swirl violet within my aura.

I DECLARE—



you  
have NO  
POWER over me!

You have NO POWER  
over  
me!


YOU  
HAVE  
NO  
POWER  
OVER  
ME!

When dawn breaks I rise  
in the direction  
of the East I pick  
up shovel and seeds

I sow I weep  
I sow I weep I sow I weep  
for many moons I renew  
an ethereal field of Lilacs!

Swallowtail butterflies rest  
on petals pulsating purpureal shades  
leaves dance while oak trees wave their arms  
in celebration. At last

I return to where I first saw her  
where I first see me as a little girl



and where I tell her  
I love you

I've always loved you  
and I never left you

I never will leave you.  
She roams in this field.

She   Rests   In   Power.

Originally from San Francisco, California, **Thea Matthews** is  
a poet, author, and educator based in Brooklyn.  
[www.theamatthews.com](http://www.theamatthews.com)



## unearth

Jackie Valdez

collage, handmade recycled paper, handwritten text  
12 x 15in



**unearth**

Jackie Valdez



visuals are landmarks

in the word-scape

of these pages

guiding through passages of

time, memory, emotion

grounded in the visual plane

taking form in collage, sculpture,

painting, drawing & beyond

the merge of text and image

unearths another sense

of understanding

**Jackie Valdez** is a visual artist and staff member at Awakenings. Handmade paper is a medium she utilizes in her work to talk about memory, accessibility to art, and repetitive art-making practices as a way of meditating on trauma, through a healing lens. The handmade paper included in her work “unearth” was created in community with others at the Awakenings gallery.

**Clarity is Healing**  
Megan Otto



When I edit a piece for *Awakened Voices*, I look for what the author is doing well. I look at where the piece really shines, where the story comes together. This illuminates whether another element of the story needs to be tweaked or polished to match the core of what the author is trying to say.

I'm lucky to be a part of a literary team that approaches editing with such kindness, generosity, and grace. We emphasize that our edits are just suggestions, not demands, and the author should take what serves them and leave what doesn't. The best outcome of these edits, for me, is when authors send positive feedback back to us.

Over my years working on the magazine, I've read a few notes from authors that said something along the lines of, "You helped me better understand what I was trying to say." In the context of survivors writing about sexual trauma, that felt like everything to me. If a writer could go through our publication process and, through our edits, come away with greater clarity on their own story—about their experience with sexual violence, their emotions within and after that experience, and their personal healing—that's the greatest sign of success I could ever

hope for.

Moments like those proved to me that art is healing. Editing is about clarifying a piece of writing, because clear writing has a stronger voice. That process of clarifying—of strengthening one's own voice—is inherently healing.

When edits help writers clarify their art, writers can reimagine or gain a new perspective on their own experience of trauma.


To me, this is what art is for—to more deeply understand our own hearts and to build better windows into the hearts of others. *Awakened Voices* is a pillar of that value.

This growing sense of understanding through writing was also happening while I was running *The Nightingale*, the companion blog to *Awakened Voices* that ran from 2018 to 2020 and published pieces every other week.

This blog was a joyful experiment in advancing the conversation on sexual violence through shared ideas on a common platform. It widened the scope of what we could publish—in addition to fiction and poetry, we explored more nonfiction, essays, and reviews.

Through monthly prompts, the blog occasionally took on a kind of collaborative





imagination—these prompts were part healing exercise, part advancement of the narrative arc of the blog's message. This collaboration, too, proved the healing powers of art to me. Through art in community, we could collectively ask and answer questions like: What works well in the way we tell stories about sexual violence? How do we tell them better? How do we tell them in a way that will be the most helpful to ourselves and to others?

These questions are, of course, only facets of Awakened Voices as I see it. So many others have had their own experiences, and there are probably dozens of ways in which this magazine has been healing to its contributors and audience that I'll never know. From my own editorial corner, I'm endlessly grateful to our contributors and my fellow editors for teaching me to ask these questions and to find my own answers. They've become pillars of how I see the world.

I know these ideas will carry forward in future work with Awakenings as well as the way in which I approach art and life. We are all always telling stories—as human beings, we can hardly help it. When we listen to one another's stories, we can lift up others' strengths. Then, we gain a better sense of where healing can lead us.

**Megan Otto** has worked with Awakenings since 2018 as a literary intern, volunteer, and freelance editor. She's honored to be part of this team supporting survivor storytelling. When not collecting new blends of tea or reading a good book, she is a professional copy editor in Denver, Colorado.



## My Little Love

Serafina Valenzuela

I could write poems for years,  
Fantasize about how I was born in the wrong century.  
How I was meant for the romantic chases and love letters.  
But if I'm honest, I think this time was meant for you.  
I think I love you most.  
Your ambition is contagious,  
Your passion mesmerizing.  
Your empathy grows everyday,  
And your fiery nature cannot be extinguished.  
I know I have picked you apart.  
Criticized every inch of you.  
But if you are anything, you are resilient.  
I have critiqued, even belittled your beauty.  
Your body has been torn to pieces by my words.  
But it brought you here, didn't it?  
Perhaps not as small as I would have liked.  
Or maybe a little more crooked than preferred.  
But it has carried you through many battles.  
It is expected to have scars.  
Your mind is battered by my insults.  
I feel as though you speak too much, and sometimes what you say never feels like enough.  
You rarely behave and you rarely follow the rules.  
Your reckless abandon is both what draws others to you and what sometimes turns them away.  
But you try your best to dry tears, to comfort.  
You fight injustice with the same fire that is embedded in your DNA.  
I'm afraid I have been much too hard on you.  
Twisting and contorting you so you look like them.  
Taping your mouth shut and altering your perspectives —  
All to fit in with a crowd who is nothing like you.



I could romanticize your path, but my dear, it has been so rocky.  
But you have weathered every storm,  
and with each battle conquered - scars and all - my love for you has grown.  
And now, when I look in my reflection,  
My pride has increased when I see you.  
The shame for you is fading, not entirely, but with every resilient rise,  
I become more proud to call you mine.  
My little love, it is an honor to share a body, a brain, and a brutal existence with you.  
Even if it is only for this life.

**Serafina Valenzuela** is a writer and poet. Her writings center around her own traumas, in which she reveals the realities of her pain while instilling hope into her works. She is also the founder of Serafina Blog ([serafinablog.com](http://serafinablog.com)), a blog that centers on justice, mental health, sex, and poetry. Through that forum, she created Mindful Minds Podcast, a podcast that focuses on being intentional and mindful about different important and diverse topics. New episodes release every other Friday on all streaming platforms.





ISSUE 14: CURTAIN CALL

## **A Trapped Piece of Love I**

Miguel Barros

Oil on canvas, gold leaf, plastic bag

11 x 16.5 in



**A Trapped Piece of Love II**

Miguel Barros

Oil on canvas, gold leaf, plastic bag

11 x 16.5 in




### **A Trapped Piece of Love III**

Miguel Barros

Oil on canvas, gold leaf, plastic bag

11 x 16.5 in





I started to paint the canvas using mixed techniques, like gold leaf, oil on canvas. Then I cut everything and rebuilt the pieces, winged it, and put it all together as a new piece that suffered a lot of changes during the process.

When I finished the painting it seemed to me that the canvas should not be like a canvas in a frame but something else, something different from the usual shape to hang on the wall in some frame, so, I've decided to crumple the canvas like if it was something that we use and dispose...

After that crumple act I thought that I should have gone further and I put it inside of a plastic bag closed by under pressure, and squeezed in vacuum, and I've found such beautiful in this that just did this kind of a parallel about life, about people, about suffering, about all the victims of all cruel circumstances, that sometimes in life we all live under the pressure, in such hard suffering that could be similar of something closed and squeezed like there is no air to breathe, no space

to move on, and trapped by someone, somewhere, suffocated and alone...

The paintings closed inside the plastic bags are like a metaphor that talks about the silence of the victims, but a helping hand can always to relieve that pain when you take each of those paintings trapped and give them a hug, a lap, love!

**Miguel Barros** was born in Lisbon, 1962. He's a citizen of Canada, Portugal, and Angola. In 2014, he moved from Africa to Canada. His art is between harmony & conflict. His work is his soul handwriting a letter in a message of emotions that materialize into colours and shapeless forms!



## **May I Help You?**

*Barbara Edema*

### **May I Help You?**

Some may have suggestions.

Even if you didn't ask.

Some may say you must be strong! You must be fierce! You must fight! You are tough!

But you didn't ask.

They don't know you have fought far too long. You are tired of wars.

Some may say, "Forget your sad story and move on with your life."

Nope, you didn't ask. Some people need to believe they know all the answers even when they know nothing about you.

Some people talk so they don't have to listen.

Some may ignore you. This can hurt. But it is their own insecurity. Perhaps their own immaturity. This is not a reflection on you. You are beautiful. They are uncomfortable.

### **So, may I help you?**

Take your time.

I might not have any answers. I probably won't.

Personally, every survivor has their own distinct horror story. I respect you and your story.

Would you like to talk about it?

Is it easier to whisper? Or shout? Or let your tears do the talking?

What would comfort you?

You may ask for what you need. Always.

You may tip-toe or stomp or curl up on the couch.


Your answers are the right answers. Take all the time you need.

If you need to fight, I'll go to war with you.

For now, I'll sit with you. I'll make the tea. I'll be present. I will listen.

### **May I help you, dear one?**





The **Rev. Dr. Barbara Edema** has been a pastor for over twenty-eight years. She has served churches in the RCA, UCC, and PCUSA. She is a graduate of Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, where she earned her Master of Divinity degree (1994), and her Doctor of Ministry degree (2005). She loves serving the church.

Barb is also the author of The Pastor Maggie Series; the fifth book of this series was released in September 2021. The series is about a young female pastor stepping into her first church. Many of the stories come from Barb's own poignant, holy, and crazy experiences in ministerial life.

Her greatest passion during the last few years has been working in the food pantry of The First Presbyterian Church, Lansing, MI, which is part of the Greater Lansing Food Bank. She worked at the pantry as part of a skeleton crew throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, making sure hungry families and individuals had food during such a difficult time in our country.

She is excited to be serving the dear people of First Congregational Church of Chelsea, Michigan (for the second time)! She is eager to continue carrying out the Good News ministry of Jesus Christ with this incredible congregation.

Barb is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse and is thankful to the Awakenings staff for the opportunity to publish her writings about abuse and recovery.



## Lights To Guide Me Through Closure

Jeri Frederickson



When Awakenings' Executive Director and Founder passed the responsibility of helming *Awakened Voices* to me, I was honored and also oh-so-very afraid. How would I read trauma story after trauma story without burning out? How would I be able to say no to the submissions we couldn't publish carefully and compassionately without feeling overwhelmed? I asked survivors, allies, and advocates who are themselves editors, readers, and writers if they would help me. And so the incredible group of folks who we call the Literary Reviewers came together.

These folks, who often decided to remain unnamed, gave immeasurable support through their compassionate, skillful, and reliable reading of our submissions. I have grown as a writer and editor, and I feel more confident in sharing my own survival story because they honor survivor stories.

This has been the hardest writing I've done in a long time—how to express *thank you* and *see you later* to these folks who honored my own survival needs with helping take on the huge project of reading and responding to every submission? After many attempts, I'm still missing the words, which usually happens to me when it's time for closure. So, thank you, for making this a healing space for others and for making it a healing space for me too. Thank you for bringing light and resiliency and support to each moment. It's been an honor to guide this project with you. I'll see you later.

The stories and artwork I've held over the past issues have all walked with me as a light in my own survival. Even after years of healing, sometimes it does feel like I'm in a deep night. And yet, even those nights are not endless, and I find a sense of peace. These lights, these stories and poems and paintings and creative expressions show me that I'm not alone, and I don't have to say or share it all to be believed or find healing. This found poem reflects some of the lights that guide me. Thank you, survivors, for sharing.

I got stuck at the beginning, came back to it later

("Heavy Metal" by Jean Cozier. Issue 1: Mothers)

This forgiveness has come after the necessary years of expressing all those things.

("Victor" by Veronica Wanchena. Issue 2: Fathers)

But even if I do manage to stop being angry, should I also just forget?

("Fuck Off" by Leah Zeiger. Issue 3: Forgive, Forget, or Fuck Off)

On days like this every day actually I tend to shake too much  
& the mascara smears.

("Putting On Eyeliner With PTSD" by Rene Ostberg. Issue 4: Making Metrical)

No, it is not the right word  
But neither is rape. Not  
for this. Not for me.

("Filler Words" by Sophie Mindes. Issue 5: Memoirs)

Someone, please, pull me to shore.

("Back To School The Day After" by Margaret DeRitter. Issue 6: A Day in the Life of a Survivor)

Sometimes just a cup of lemon tea and sitting in the balcony  
with clouds  
is enough

("The Same Story" by Sarabrisi Kaur. Issue 7: Here, There, and Everywhere)



you want to get lost in a galaxy  
where illness is pins and needles in your feet, half asleep

("Andromeda" by Michael Russell. Issue 8: Those Who Help)

I resume.  
Total change.

("Receipts from my Car" by Kimberly Vargas Agnese. Issue 9: Erasures)

Can you who are witness to this eerie ceremony help me?

("The Exorcism of a Boy" by Phil Goldstein. Issue 10: Intention for Change)

I chose to expand on the theme of releasing one's self from agonizing and destructive forced silence  
to light the way for other survivors

("Psalms" by Kacey Arnold. Issue 11: Legacy)

Evil. Shift a letter. Lift a veil. Pull it back. Live, live.

("Bad Anagram" by Elisa Albo. Issue 12: Unthemed)

Remove all footwear before entering  
at your own risk

("For My Mother's Postcard Collection" by Troi Speaks. Issue 13: The Body Speaks)

See You Later.

(Issue 14)



**Jeri** (she/hers) leads Awakened Voices and is on staff at Awakenings. Her book *You Are Not Lost* is published by Finishing Line Press.



ISSUE 14: CURTAIN CALL

## FRIENDS OF AWAKENED VOICES

We are not the only literary space centering healing, and we are so encouraged by our literary friends. We hope you will check out their work!

Jade Plant Project is our oldest literary friend organization, and physical copies of the first issues of Jade Plant Project are on our bookshelves at Awakenings (free to anyone to borrow or take home). We had a zoom reading night with Jade Plant Project and are so thankful for their survivor-centered work.

Persephone's Daughters first connected with us through their Editor in Chief; you can read Meggie Royer's essay and interview in The Nightingale archives on our website.

Persephone's Daughters brought us and Cordella Press together for a live and recorded panel about Safe Literary Spaces, and we've felt aligned with the folks at Cordella Press ever since.

Contextos is local to our city, and we love the work they are doing to heal our Chicago community after violence. We've been fans of Contextos's work for a long time and encourage even non-local folks to check them out!

### The Jade Plant Project

<http://www.danielle-deo-owensby.com/the-jade-plant-project>



### Persephone's Daughters

<http://www.persephonesdaughters.tk/>



### Cordella Press

<https://www.cordella.org>



### Contextos Chicago

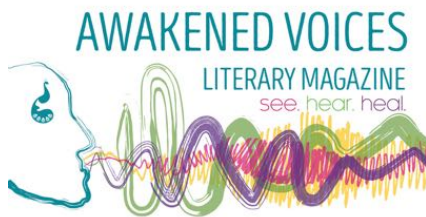
<http://www.contextos.org>



## AWAKENINGS

*Awakened Voices* is a literary program of Awakenings, a non-profit organization dedicated to creating a physical and virtual artistic space in which to promote the healing of survivors through the arts and engage in an open dialogue that furthers awareness and understanding of sexual violence. Please consider helping us spread our message of healing by sharing and supporting Awakenings.

Awakenings' mission is to provide survivors of sexual violence with a trauma informed, inclusive art-making experience that encourages healing.



## CONNECT WITH US:

Youtube | [Awakenings Art](#)  
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## INTERESTED IN SUPPORTING OUR WORK?

Join our core squad of Awakenings' supporters and join Judith's Circle. By committing to making a monthly donation of any amount, you are directly impacting a survivor's healing process. Your contribution directly supports our artists and Awakenings' ability to provide trauma-informed, professional arts experiences like this for our survivor artists. Join the Circle at [www.awakeningsart.org/donate](http://www.awakeningsart.org/donate)

