

Writing Place 2022

Front Cover Image

Matt Ottley

1964

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of Redfern Art Gallery,
Sydney NSW

Back Cover Image

Meagan Pelham, Honeymoon,
2022

Watercolour, watercolour
marker and ink on paper

46.5cm x 64.0cm

Courtesy of the artist
and Studio A

studio A

Editor

Liel K. Bridgford

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A Message From the Board

Welcome to Writing Place, this magazine is a collection of selected writings contributed by d/Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse writers. Produced by Arts Access Australia and launched as part of Meeting Place forum, Arts Access Australia hopes to provide through this magazine, as well as their new mentorship writing program, a space that encourages emerging writers to steer their craft and share their stories so that they may flourish as individuals, as creators and as humans.

Our editor Liel K. Bridgford has had the daunting task of selecting the 14 pieces from the many submissions made. Thank you to all of the writers and poets that have contributed, I encourage those that didn't make it to this edition to continue to write because your voices are as equally important. I can't stress enough how important it is to have a diversity of voices telling the narrative.



We have been fortunate enough to work alongside Writing NSW, Poetry Australia, Australian Society of Authors, Australia Council for the Arts and Copyright Agency. Their ongoing support is appreciated and we are thrilled to be working together in the near future in the development and growth of Writing Place.

Thank you to the hard working staff at Arts Access Australia, CEO Matthew Hall, Communications Manager Yvette Tulloch, Finance Manager Jo-Anne Jenkins, Meeting Place Project Manager Lefa Singelton Norton and Writing Place Project Manager Phillip Jenkins. To the artists for contributing and to Liel Bridgford for her leadership and dedication in curating this journal.

Martin Sawtell

Chair of Arts Access Australia






A Message From the Editor

Reading the works of Disabled, d/Deaf and neurodivergent writers is one of the most enriching experiences one can have. Our perspectives allow for critical and honest examination of the world.

This year's theme is the rights of the individual – as human, creator and worker. Although all pieces reflect on this theme, each writer approached it through a unique understanding, voice, and style. The result is a beautiful collection of pieces that move, admonish, enrage, entertain, and charm.



As a whole, Writing Place uncovers the deep and diverse reality of Disabled, d/Deaf and neurodivergent lives, which like any other human experience, is filled with joys, sorrows and triumphs. Each piece in its own way reveals a striking interrelationship between our mind-bodies, and our environment, and meditates individual rights in the process.

This tuning inwards and honouring one's own reality, is a prime example of how each writer practices radical pride and celebration of who they are.

By being truthful to themselves, the writers defy social expectations and misconceptions, claiming back autonomy.

It was an honour to read the works of many diverse and creative people. Although only fourteen pieces were selected, there were many that moved and excited us. I encourage all Disabled, d/Deaf and neurodivergent writers to keep writing, and keep sending out your work. Your voice and your stories are invaluable.

Liel K. Bridgford

Editor, Writing Place 2022



Content Note

The pieces in this document include content which may be distressing or triggering for some people, including ableism, internalised ableism, discrimination, violence, assault, suicide ideation, self harm, colonialism, racism and transphobia. Please take care as you read, and reach out for support if you need it.

Support options

- The National Counselling and Referral Service - Disability: **1800 421 468** (9am-6pm AEST Mon-Fri and 9am-5pm AEST Sat, Sun & Public Holidays)
- Lifeline **13 11 14** (24/7) or <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>
- Suicide Call Back Service: **1300 659 467** (24/7) or <https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/>
- Outside of Australia, you can find support here: <https://www.befrienders.org/>

There's no disabled girls with style like mine

By Esther Ottaway

A woman wearing makeup must be fine.
They tell me *there is nothing wrong with you*.
Disabled girls cannot have style like mine.

Good-looking girls are not supposed to whine
or carry on about what they can't do.

A woman wearing makeup must be fine

and healthy, strong, except when her waistline
is big: then the first thing she needs to do
is lose that weight. No girls with style like mine

have hidden disabilities, or climb
up mountains of distress. From birth, we knew
that little girls in dresses must be fine

and happy. When I talk about decline,
my sobbing, shattered meltdowns, self-harm, blue
nights, they fail to see, through style like mine,

my terrors, my self-medicating wine.

I dress well and it helps my grip stay true
on mental health. My fault for looking fine.

You're clearly well, don't waste the doctor's time.

Autistics do not look the way you do.

A woman wearing makeup must be fine.

There's no disabled girls with style like mine.



About the Author

Esther Ottaway is an autistic, disabled, award-winning woman poet who is widely published in Australia and overseas. She is currently writing a book of poetry about the experiences of autistic women and girls, titled *She Doesn't Seem Autistic*.

Esther was shortlisted in the global poetry prizes, the Montreal International and the Bridport Prize, in 2020. Her book *Blood Universe: poems on pregnancy* is recognised as an important exploration of women's experience, and has been republished in national and international anthologies and listed as further reading in *60 Classic Australian Poems*.

Esther lives in Tasmania/lutruwita with her autistic daughter.

More Years Than I Expected

By Rebecca Egan

My grandmother used to watch my breathing
at night. I choked my mother
in an attempt to tell her about the
touching. The unwanted
hands. The head
of a hen
offered to the dogs
to suck on the tendons.
Oh to be rendered so purposeful in death.

As a child you are
without rights, flightless
wings yet grown. The touch.
Fingers. Wrists. Palms
pressed together in prayer.
Psalms without a
saviour. I grip my
baby blanket. Fists
closed. Grasping for
something close to hope.

Adulthood creeps up on me,
more years than I expected.
I tried to make death of a
life, yet here I am. I still
feel the touch. To be
human, here with the
dahlias. Growing into
myself. Away from the
fingertips. The fists
unfurling. Upward
toward the sun. I have

Created survivorship scratch
by scratch. Gritted nail against
the madness of a
childhood. I can stand now
in the light. I think there is
something close to justice
brewing. I am turning towards
the sun. Screaming I am here,
here, here.





I AM HERE,
HERE,
HERE!

About the Author

Rebecca Egan is a psychology student from Melbourne, Australia. She also works as a Peer Researcher at a community mental health organisation. Her work is published or forthcoming in *3Elements*, *Bones*, *34th Parallel*, *Amphora*, *Peeking Cat* and *Persephone's Daughters*.

From Dishonesty to Diversity: Integrity Comes to Recruitment

By Baz Axelrod

3 December 2022

Statement by Billy-Bob Bollard-Blueberry, the new CEO of Safeways Grocery Group Limited, at the launch of their Disability Action Plan 'Seeking and Keeping Disabled Employees'.

We apologize unreservedly to the disabled Australians we cheated out of work. We are deeply ashamed of how our irrelevant and ableist hiring practices contribute to the unacceptably high rate of unemployment amongst disabled people.

We fully accept responsibility for our failure to treat disabled candidates fairly. We will not scapegoat barriers, unconscious stigma, a lack of 'disability-confidence', or other abstract concepts for our failure to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act.

We commit to taking disabled candidates seriously. We will listen to, and value, the wisdom of disabled people with a quiet humility. Each of the twenty-two actions in our new Disability Action Plan, *Seeking and Keeping Disabled Employees*, are built upon the principles of respect and integrity.

Speaking personally, I've never understood leaders who congratulate themselves for inclusion initiatives while avoiding responsibility for the failures that made them necessary in the first place. It's like refusing to wash your hands and awarding yourself a 'hygiene-confident' medal when you finally hit the soap. Nobody deserves an award for fixing a problem they caused. Disability inclusion is a moral obligation, not a marketing opportunity.

An apology may be the last thing you expected to hear from your CEO on the launch of our new plan. You probably expected me to assert that we run an inclusive workforce, before admitting how far behind we really are. For me to boast about contemplating strategies to deal with our failures and to insincerely mouth corporate platitudes. But never an apology.

I actually wrote that speech last night. It was stirring, innovative, agile, absolutely brimming with leadership and all those other words we say instead of saying something.

While typing it up, I clicked through our DEI page and remembered a conversation I had with my brother last Christmas. My niece, who has a Masters degree and a disability I have no right to disclose here, has spent four years looking for full-time work. Why should she believe anything we say about disability inclusion? She knows that only one percent of our employees are disabled. When we say that we are an inclusive business that welcomes all candidates, regardless of disability, how is that any better than resume fraud?

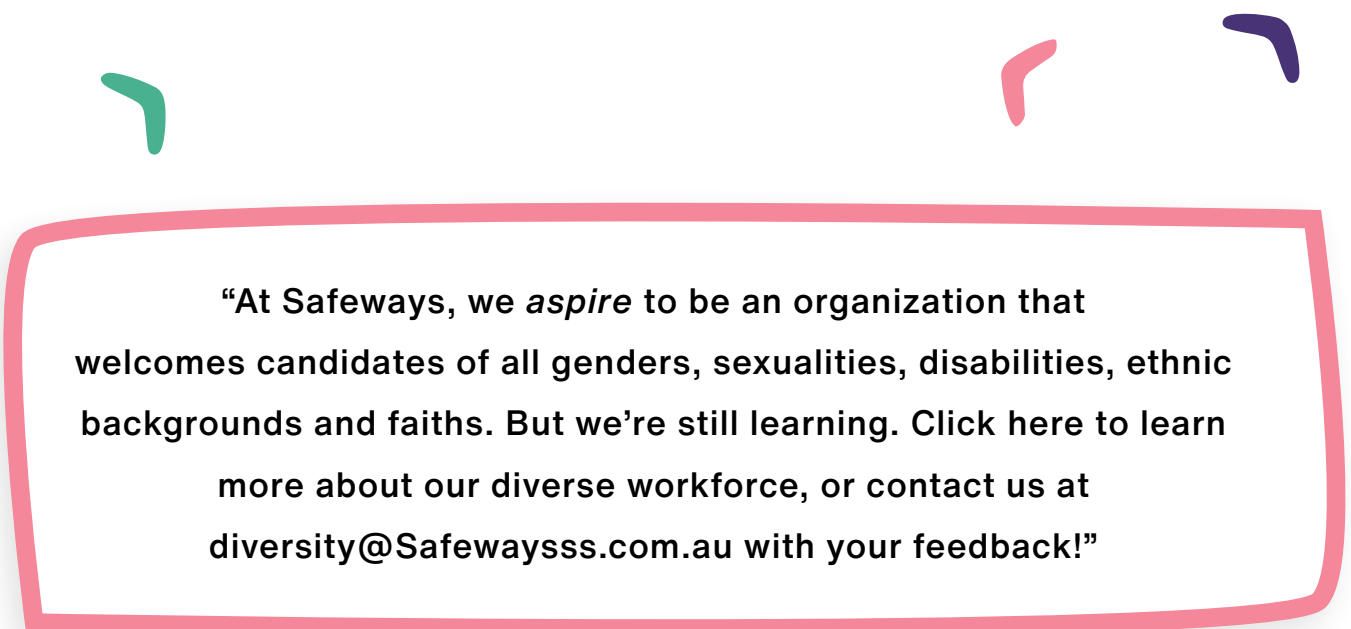
Australia has one of the worst disability employment rates in the OECD, hovering around fifty percent for the last thirty years. For a company to claim they are disability-inclusive, without offering convincing evidence, is an insulting microaggression bordering on gaslighting. Other ways we harm disabled people when we lie about our hiring intentions include:

- Attracting disabled people to unsafe workplaces.
- Tricking them into disclosing to ableist recruiters.
- Making them hesitant to disclose to employers who hire fairly.
- Causing them to be doubted when they complain about discrimination.
- Misleading abled people into thinking that they have special privileges.

Imagine you're an able-bodied, neurotypical graduate. You read about initiatives like RecruitAbility, or a fantastic internship program run by a disability charity. As your job hunt drags on you begin to resent disabled people and their extra opportunities, and I have to wonder, how much of this resentment feeds into ableist dole-bludger myths? Such jealousy may be inevitable as long as special programs are necessary to correct structural ableism, but we owe it to disabled jobseekers to ensure that they are effective.

Transparency is at the heart of our new action plan. That's why we've injected integrity into our rewritten equal opportunity statement - I'll read it to you now.






“At Safeways, we *aspire* to be an organization that welcomes candidates of all genders, sexualities, disabilities, ethnic backgrounds and faiths. But we’re still learning. Click here to learn more about our diverse workforce, or contact us at diversity@Safewaysss.com.au with your feedback!”

That statement will link to a webpage providing thorough statistics on the state of disability inclusion, racial diversity, queer representation and gender equality in our workforce. It will be updated often. The same site will host an online database, where our disabled employees will be encouraged to anonymously share information about the adjustments we provide them. Hopefully these resources will demonstrate that we are acting in good faith, and that we take accessibility seriously.

Our commitment to fair recruitment means that we will not rely on any new hiring technologies until we are certain that they are not ableist. We know that automated interviewing platforms like HireVue discriminate against disabled applicants. There is also the growing consensus that psychometric tests like Revelian filter out neurodivergent applicants. Instead of outsourcing our judgment to black boxes, we promise to take responsibility for our decisions.

The centerpiece of our plan is a quota. Disabled employees will represent twenty percent of our workforce by 2030, proportionate to the number of disabled people in Australia. Some might feel that quotas result in tokenism, and to them I’d like to point out that tokenism is as far as most employers get on disability inclusion. Quota is not a dirty word.



The rest of our continually-developing strategies are explained in *Seeking and Keeping Disabled Employees*. Others include appointing an Inclusion Ombudsman, real consequences for hiring staff engaged in ableist conduct, and courses to teach them about fair recruitment.

You'd be amazed at the amount of people who honestly believe that the ability to perform a neurotypical persona during a job interview is an inherent requirement of every role, ever.

I've just outlined these particular details to show that my apology has some substance to it, that my apology is not a performance. Our aim is to build a future where we can look back at the disingenuous ableism that too often passes for professionalism in recruitment, and view it with the same baffled horror we regard corporal punishment or phrenology.

Again, I would like to reiterate that I am profoundly sorry for our failure to treat our disabled applicants fairly.

Eight years from now, I hope that we earn the right to say "At Safeways, we are genuinely proud to be an inclusive organization that welcomes candidates of all genders, sexualities, disabilities, ethnic backgrounds and faiths."

Or even better, that a disabled person will say it.



About the Author

Baz Axelrod is a perpetually-emerging writer.

He's got a Masters degree, he's got an autism diagnosis, he's got a NaNoWriMo manuscript clogging up his Google drive.

Baz Axelrod reckons that predictability robs fiction of its interest, thus his tendency to write in an eclectically freewheeling style that teeters enticingly between profundity and incoherence.

He regrets nothing.





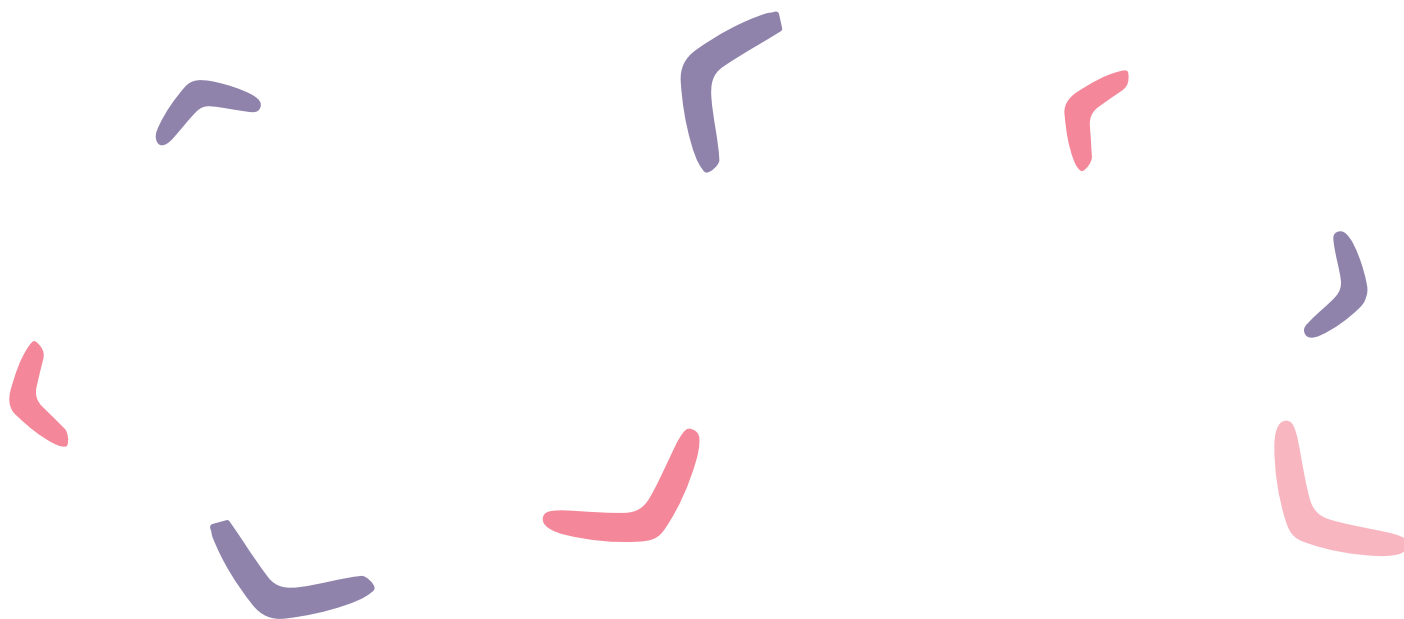
Meagan Pelham, *Romance is LOVE*, 2022

watercolour, gouache and acrylic on paper, 111.5 x 78 cm

Exhibited, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Archibald Prize 2022, Sydney, 2022

Courtesy of the artist and Studio A

studio A



Fine This Way

By Ric Webster

There are devices underneath this paper skin aching and blasting, huffing

And whistling, cogs clicking, turning copper rings of steampunk

They know the un-wandering arrow of time, the sordid entropy and blanked

Verse o'er rhythm and rhyme. These verses and rehearsals are all signifying
Of all this too, too nothing, stanzas stand in the pocket of a lonely poet: loneliness and poetry

Are a particularly longing kind of hell that only but the sickest cells of a brain

Tracking its own extended blasphemies

And even longer goodbyes.

In the epoch before I met you, I rode my motorbike at speeds

I felt in ghostly unison with the dry Adelaide wind. Riding faster into

Increasing outback gusts, sitting and waiting to pass through

Ritual fires. This mind burned kaleidoscopic light and summer heat

Sweat slipping down my pained cowhide back, and tickling my nausea, coming

To rest between my numb buttocks as the bullocks of the Lord's prayer

Came fearing and trembling from my weak throat

Riding my motorcycle just too fast. It was all rushing all too

Fast. I just wanted the blood (that hurtful flow)

To stop. For someone to know what I mean when I said I didn't mean what I said, certainly I mean...

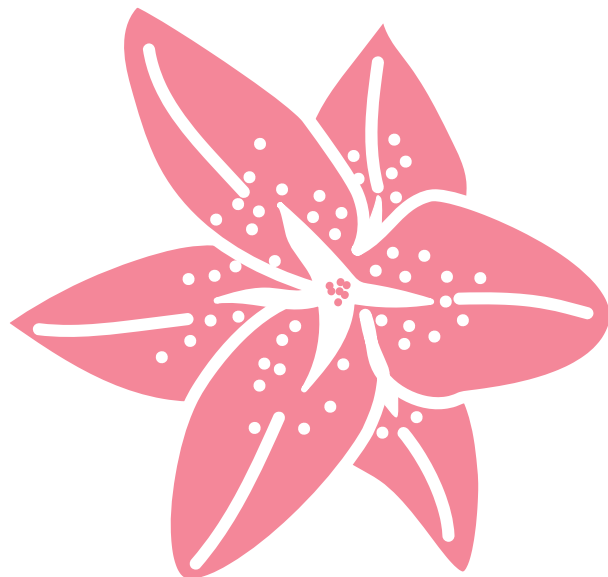
To. Just. Let. Me.

Catch.

My.

Breath. That luster that takes one over. That lush

Treat of a full gallon of air. The heat cooling. The noise retracting
The fury subsiding. The nothing that is always so wrong. Except now. A stay of gallows,
I'm not dead today. I don't want to be
Dead. Today.
And that remainder of the day when my cats need feeding and attention. When
I find in them and in you, flower of denial, a taste for a moment from the stained glass of dimensions
I had never known existed. Flower of pure simplicity
You open your disease to me. I bow in pain my Parkinson's disease to you
Those times before we knew each other before I became a twitching, twisted freak
Before you'd ever heard of Ankylosing Spondylitis we gathered the darkness of forgotten
Healers and all their tricks and tinctures (Silly little tricksters) and blowhard public displays of doctors
Of futile test results. Together we know
Better. Together. We.
Are. Tiger.
Lillies.
Forgotten and
Fine that way.



Liminal

By Miguela Considine

Four walls line this room. It takes twenty two steps to walk from one to another.

The only light comes from two windows, set too high to comfortably see through.

A single door, heavy and locked from without.

I have paced these twenty two by twenty two by twenty two by twenty two steps so often that the floor has grown smooth under my bare feet.

Each corner has its own patch of moss. I spend time with each, running my fingers across the cool damp.

Some days I find myself sitting against that plinth in the centre of the room. I stare at the door. Someone will come one day. Someone will poke their head in, a familiar smile spreading across their face as my name slips from their lips.

Someone will remember.

Other days, I see a flicker of something by the windows, an echo of life. I stand on the tips of my toes.

The glass is too clouded with mould.

I hear voices sometimes. Crying. Whispers. Stilted laughter.

I press myself against the cold wrought iron door.

Hand hovering on the handle, waiting for it to slowly tilt.

Waiting for someone to remember.

She is always there, on that plinth in the centre of the room. On cold nights, her breath mists the stale air.

It takes eleven steps to reach her. The dried petals scattered around her have long since lost their fragrance.

Her skin is pale in the darkness. Under the fragile lace shroud, her features were familiar, once, a mirror to my own. But over the years they've spread and smeared, like a thumbprint on glass.

I remember a time when those limbs were plump and strong. They danced and they lifted and they spun, blood pulsing high as laughter bubbled on her lips.

I remember what we used to be, and a rage fills me. I want to yank her off that cold plinth. I scream and I wail, trying to rouse her, trying to get her to stand, to do something, anything.

Still she lies.

I sink to the floor and sob. Tears never fall.

How is this what she's become? She, who always seemed bursting with vitality? She, whose voice was the bright spot at any party?

I want to fling her boneless body at the door. I want to press her featureless face to a window until it splinters, just so she can feel a sliver of sunlight between the piercing shards of glass.

Can't she see what she's missing out there?

I pace, the soles of my feet no longer feeling the icy cold of the stone beneath.

Layers of dust gather. A fine veil of it falls across that forgotten body, those ancient wreaths.

One day, the rise and fall of her chest will cease.

One day, I'll finally be able to float away.

For now, I am here.

Tethered to a body that won't die.

Waiting for this life that isn't a life to end.

About the Author


Miguela Considine (she/her) is a queer Filipino-Australian writer based in Sydney, Australia, whose stories always end up darker than she initially intends. With a Master's in Public Relations and a background in the technology and video games industries, she likes to explore her own experiences with mental health and chronic illness through speculative fiction. She has had short stories published in Monash University's *VERGE 2020: RITUAL*, and Things in the Well's *BURNING LOVE AND BLEEDING HEARTS*.



The Right to Family Life

By Anna Jacobson

Her psychiatrist discourages her from having a family of her own – having a child is risky, says he’d hate for her to have a relapse. She emails him at 3am with an article on *discrimination in relation to parenthood reported by community psychiatric service users*. She knows he won’t read it, so highlights the takeaway messages: that people with mental health problems *should not be discriminated against because parenthood is a key life role*. That the right to family life is *part of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, including those with mental illness*. She waits for the repercussions of her email. For his response. She expects he will ask her to leave his practice. How often her life has been ruled by others in the medical world: her memory and mind from forced electroconvulsive therapy, and now her body, her future family. She buys a ticket to an event: ‘We’ve Got This: Stories by Disabled Parents’.



Note:

'The Right to Family Life' refers to the following article:

Jeffery, D., Clement, S., Corker, E. et al. *Discrimination in relation to parenthood reported by community psychiatric service users in the UK: a framework analysis*. BMC Psychiatry 13, 120 (2013).

<https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-244X-13-120>

About the Author

Anna Jacobson is a writer and artist from Brisbane. *Amnesia Findings* (UQP, 2019) is her first full-length poetry collection, which won the 2018 Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize. In 2020 Anna won the Nillumbik Prize for Contemporary Writing (Open Creative Nonfiction), was awarded a Queensland Writers Fellowship, and was shortlisted in the Spark Prize. In 2018 she won the Queensland Premier's Young Publishers and Writers Award. Her poetry chapbook *The Last Postman* was published with Vagabond Press (2018) as part of the decibel 3 series. Her website is www.annajacobson.com.au



Walk Beside Me

By Laura Pettenuzzo

*“Don’t walk in front of me – I may not follow;
don’t walk behind – I may not lead; walk beside
me and just be my friend.”*

Albert Camus

My year 12 English teacher told me about The Shoelace Test. He said it was when you’re in a group and you stop to tie your shoelaces, but you don’t tell the people you’re walking with. You’re testing them to see if they think of you and wait or go on without you.

My version of the shoelace test was slightly different: If they wait, they’ve passed the test. If they don’t, then I have failed at being worth waiting for. Life as an ambulant person with cerebral palsy is one big unintentional shoelace test, and until recently, I didn’t think anyone would pass.

My closest friend from high school was able bodied and much taller than me. I was grateful, back then, for every minute she or anyone spent in my presence. I saw my anxiety, fatigue and spasms as a burden, something few people could or would ever tolerate.





**“If they wait,
they’ve passed the test.**

**If they don’t, then I have failed at
being worth waiting for.”**

So, I told myself it didn’t matter that she would share inside jokes with her childhood best friend while I sat between them and pretended to laugh at humour I didn’t understand. I told myself it didn’t matter that she, with her long legs and swift strides, would always walk many meters ahead while I, with shorter legs and a painful, uneven gait, fell behind.

I told myself it didn’t matter that this friend felt she had the right to tell me she could only handle me in small doses. I started to believe that everyone else must feel the same, that I ought to distance myself from them so that they, too, only had to deal with me in small doses.

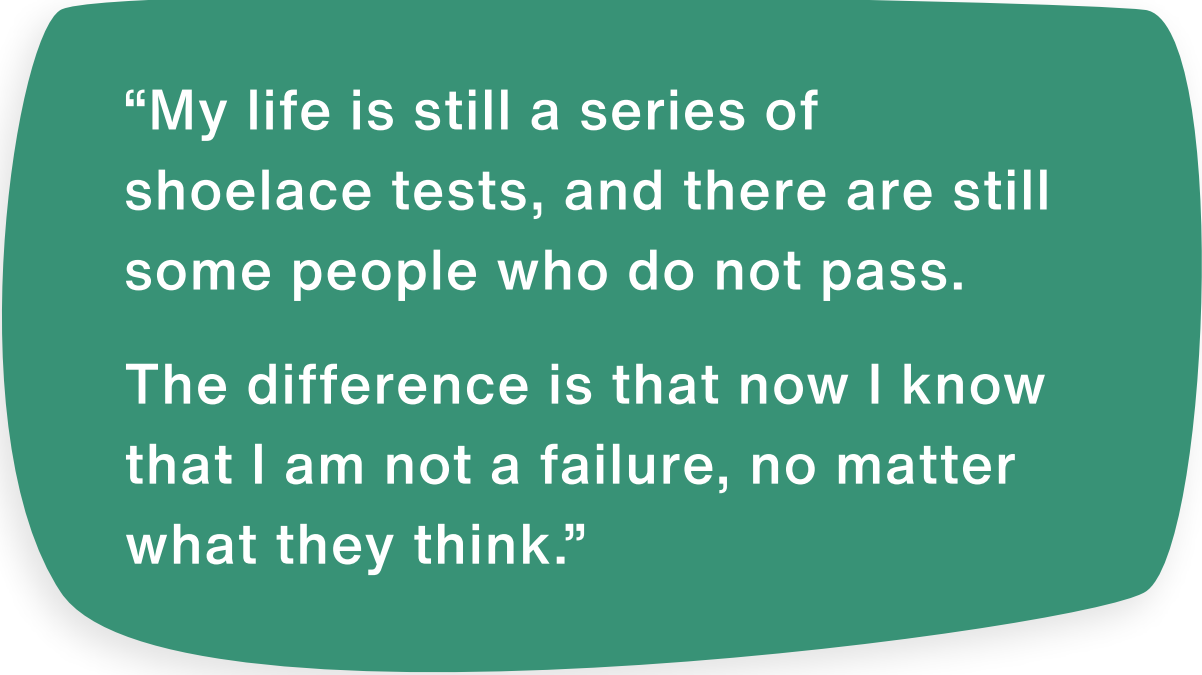
No matter how often or how fiercely and cruelly I told myself it didn’t matter – that I didn’t matter – it still hurt. And that hurt was huge and all-encompassing and more disabling than my spasms had ever been.

Emotion regulation has never been my strong suit. At times I would cry and sometimes snap at my friend or anyone else in the vicinity. I was not, I admit, the easiest person to be around. Other times, I would default to quiet, to silence and invisibility. I would hide in toilet cubicles or other small spaces as I attempted to regain my composure. In times of stress and fear, I still do.

When I started working for a youth organisation, in those carefree months before the pandemic, those of us in the metro office started playing dodgeball once a week.

Our first match was in December. The dodgeball court wasn't far from the office, just a few minutes' walk, so we all set off together. As usual, I fell behind. But this time, my friend and supervisor stayed with me. She could have zoomed ahead in her power chair, but she modified its speed to match mine and assured me that it was okay if I needed to stop and rest.

She actually *apologised* to me on behalf of everyone else who had gone ahead. She said she wished they'd remembered me. I wasn't upset that they'd forgotten. I was far too busy trying to process the marvel of her presence, the immense and unutterable joy of being not alone. By the time we made it to the dodgeball courts the game was well under way, and so was a change in me.



“My life is still a series of shoelace tests, and there are still some people who do not pass.

The difference is that now I know that I am not a failure, no matter what they think.”

From that moment on, I didn't try to hide or minimize my disability. I requested to use the elevator or ramp instead of the stairs and took rests when walking long distances. I started listening to my body and resting when it was hurt or fatigued instead of persevering.

Every decision affirmed my right to ask for and be granted the supports I needed. Those decisions were scary at first, but from the beginning they felt right. For the most part, the people around me were respectful and supportive.

I have a wheelchair now. But I also have friends who walk beside me. Some of them are the same height as me and some of them are even taller than my former friend was, but somehow, they manage to match their pace with mine and it's not an imposition, it's just part of who and how we are.

At the same time, if ever I end up in front of the person or people I am with, I deliberately slow my pace so that I end up beside them. There is something exposing about taking the lead on foot. It happens so rarely when I walk and I usually pay for it later with pain and spasms, but there's a psychological challenge too. It's much easier to take the lead in my wheelchair, both because of its speed and because its bulk feels like a statement of my presence, a refusal to be unseen or to conform to able-bodied expectations. Walking in front and taking the lead requires self-confidence that I'm still learning how to cultivate, but I'm working on it.

My life is still a series of shoelace tests, and there are still some people who do not pass. The difference is that now I know that I am not a failure, no matter what they think.

I deserve better than being left behind and I am still learning how to lead.

Albert Camus said it best, and I don't think either of us is asking too much.

So, could you walk beside me?

About the Author

Laura Pettenuzzo is a writer and disability advocate living on Wurundjeri country. Her words have been published in various places including *The Age* and *Link Disability Magazine*. She is a member of the Victorian Disability Advisory Committee.

Masquerading

By Sera Jonas Jakob

I'm putting on my cloak of likeability

no, acceptability

no, tolerability

no, invisibility

no, unbelievability

Mask is

chafing

brittle

cracked

patched

smudged

like old glasses, out of prescription

Discourse is

mocking

dressed up in

enquiring

Spider webs to get stuck in

I am foolish

but not fooled

I hold the smile

I am practiced enough

I keep the acid

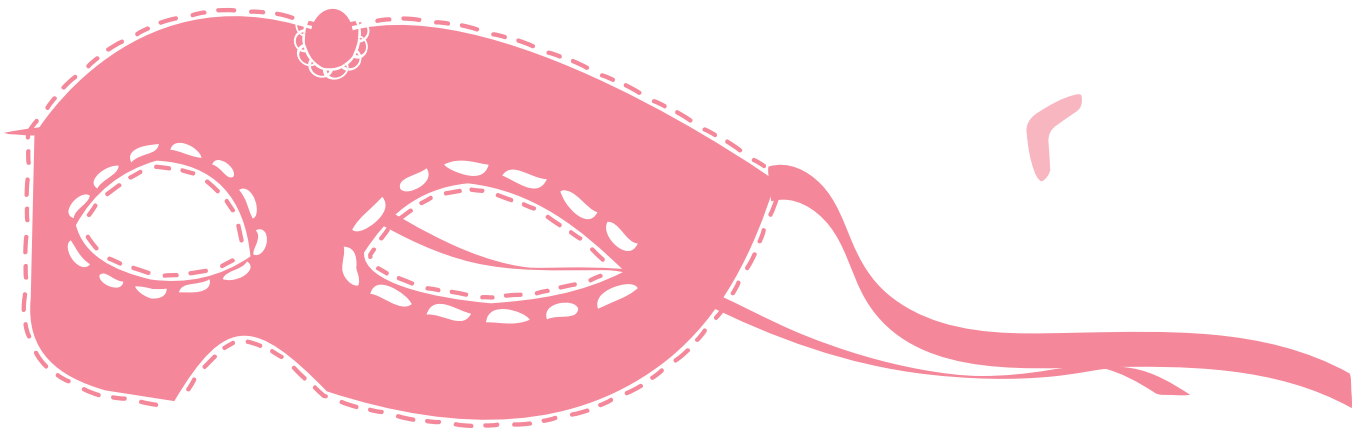
in my

mouth

I wait for seclusion

I let the costume fall

with sweet brine



About the Author

Sera Jonas Jakob is a writer and composer. She draws on her experiences as a neurodivergent woman and her background in conservation science and journalism in her creative works, examining life from the hyper-personal to the universal. She especially likes to peer into uncomfortable and unspoken spaces between interpersonal exchanges, offering the perspective of a social outsider.





On God's own Soil

By Sophia. N. Ashley

The Union Jack sweeps past rooftop. my arm—light-struck
into at ease. lips, blended with a chorus for whatever
chased us down here: my dear relatives, spilled everywhere
across another man's land. the repercussion keep defying
newer ways we rehearse, to get past it.

banner laid still, hawking God's own phrase.
I lavish each taxi-drive, trying to mouth the alphabets.
my age grade calls me a misfit,
for my inability to voice their lingo in bone-clean accent.

I indulge their ignorance with both hands clasped—as if to say
'pardon me, beloved rival'. white skinned mulatto of rough grace:
all the terror to scare me down mournful alley, screaming:

'black boys are in danger of going extinct'. tell me, where between
luxury & survival does my presence pose a threat? each march-past
in honor of this state, breaks us into a foreign queue—as we encroach
the stadium in our numbers, wielding flutes & rustful tambourine.
the boy scout, fashioning trumpets from their lung.

remembrance holds a longing that is ripe. in a company of four,
I identify as mouth-organ—troubling the front teeth.
my mood sieves the awful notes.

an officer weigh Ma's necklace in his hand, debone silver from
the pendant hanging across her sternum & brands it exhibit.
Ma clinches the leftover trinket, orbiting it round her neck.
the Union Jack—on swaying past the ruffled prairie,
discharge its vibrant limb effortless against the warm bright cloud.

I squander each penny I could afford at a toy store, shopping for
surprise packs. once, I ran into a fishbone locket, circle it round Ma's neck.
& while she belabours the rickety truck, a country's banner
swallow us whole on God's own soil.



About the Author

Sophia. N. Ashley (they) are disabled poet and sophomore student of English & Literature. They have their works previously published in *Wondrous Real Magazine*, *The Capilano Review* & elsewhere. They are the author of “*Dumb Mandate*” (unpublished).





Thom Roberts, *Rachey in the mirror*, 2022

gouache, acrylic and resin on ceramic,
38 cm (diameter)

Exhibited, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Archibald Prize 2022, Sydney, 2022

Courtesy of the artist and Studio A

studio A

Milk Teeth

Alex Creece

firsts.

it hurts the moment we breathe
we suffer
as we episiotomy into existence
before all else
with
no teen movie summer fling
no tragic backstory
to teach us
how
delicate heartstrings sever
by the yelp of
a dog
its paw accidentally trodden on
the first and only
crying missile
of a glass cannon
that echoes somewhere,
in forever.

befores.

a contortionist of time and space
agonises the acrobatics of
pancreatitis and family violence
twisting her gut
until, soon,
she bruises the earth right back, at last.

nexts.

the desert is undiagnosed
maybe this is just
how deserts are
eroding into their own dunes
with supervised lunchtimes
in case of violence or vomit
and the two weeks it took before
forcibly, foreseeably
your bare feet singed
to a blister turned singsong bully
psycho dyko
you're a crazy bitch
a stone's throw from here,
you'd be stoned to death.



sure, maybe.
we can only hope.

afters.

my ingenue is dead
I know it
as I shed
words,
naturally as skin cells,
and she flakes away like

the shell of a sunburn

infinitesimal in infinity

the dustsceawung

of the fact that I am here
my voice no longer shaking
I look him in the eye, even
my brow more creased
than his suit has ever been
my ingenue died impatient
but still,
I smile for her
when I welcome the fate
that comes with the words

“go fuck yourself.”

evers.

to talk in circles would bring me

to where it all began

but

in spirals

a single line never
reaches

back into itself

to say

how devastating it is to hear

you have promise

knowing that promises

inherently

will become fulfilled

but humans

are,

more often,

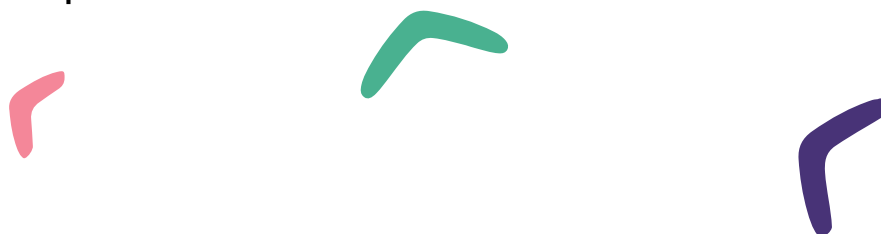
not.





About the Author

Alex Creece is a writer, poet, and collage artist living on Wadawurrung land. She also works as the Online Editor for Archer Magazine, and the Production Editor for Cordite Poetry Review. Alex was awarded a Write-ability Fellowship in 2019 and a Wheeler Centre Hot Desk Fellowship in 2020. A sample of Alex's work was Highly Commended in the 2019 Next Chapter Scheme, and she was shortlisted for the Kat Muscat Fellowship in 2021.





“If We Treated Drs Like Musicians”

By The Emerald Ruby

Picture this: We live in a world where Dr’s start their training young, like between the ages of 5 and 10 sort of young. These kids train through their childhood and as teenagers decide to dedicate their lives to the craft. The adults around them encourage this with their guidance and support, telling them if they work hard they’ll become a GP one day. They go to uni and train some more, putting all their time, money and identity into this career path.

Suddenly the message shifts, “wait, you thought you could live off being a GP?”, “There’s no money in medicine”, “If you love being a GP you’ll do it on the side while working a day job” and most destructively “you can always teach medicine to others! That way you get to practice all day” failing to explain the teaching jobs you’ll have access to are teaching basic first aid to apathetic people who would rather not be there, and those teaching jobs will rarely pay an appropriate wage, will expect you to do lesson prep/admin outside of your designated hours and leaving you with little time or energy to pursue your practice outside of class.

In this world, if you want to practice as a GP you need to run your practice practically unpaid on the side for 10 - 15 years and hope you'll get a lucky break allowing you to actually pursue this career in a meaningful way.

Now, replace Dr with musician and you've got a tiny glimpse into my career and creative practice over the last decade or so. The professional pathway I consciously pursued as a child, which was presented as an attainable profession has morphed into this impossible dream I have no hope of achieving, particularly during a pandemic when even established performers can't make ends meet.

Teaching isn't part of "living the musician dream" for me. Performing/ Writing and Teaching music do not scratch the same itch, are not equally satisfying and do not allow for artistic growth in the same ways. They are different skill sets, and I'm so tired of the "well if you can't make enough performing/writing there's ALWAYS TEACHING" as if it's the same thing.

From what I've seen of the music industry, it's set up to keep as many people as possible out, even when they're trained (formally or informally) and skilled. During my education, the path to a music career in performance/composition was presented as a meritocracy - work hard and you'll find a path. I supposed meritocracy leading to a financially sound music career does exist at a certain economic level, but one needs significant family and or personal wealth to access the "meritocracy" in the first place.

"Since I graduated University I have watched as my unbelievably accomplished and skilled peers slowly leave the music industry... for decent pay, increased stability and decent workers rights."

Since I graduated University I have watched as my unbelievably accomplished and skilled peers slowly leave the music industry (not just performers and composers, but also as instrumental teachers) for decent pay, increased stability and decent workers rights. They didn't see a way to be musicians and not give up every semblance of building a normal and fulfilling life.

I'm tired of having this conversation with literally every musician I know but never seeing it discussed in a meaningful way by those in positions of power. I'm tired of finding out I've aged out of YET ANOTHER paid and or prestigious pathway out of obscurity. I'm tired of yelling into the void and fighting with the only promotional tools available to me.

About the Author

The Emerald Ruby weaves a delicate musical tapestry from an on-stage forest of flutes and ukuleles. Voice like a siren, intricate melodies sprout from her classical training, gently manicured by her love of Folk music and Jazz. Outside music, she writes, paints, sews and practices camera arts.

A rich musical history accompanies The Emerald Ruby through every performance. Her first musical home was the Orchestra, where Shostakovich and Stravinsky informed her understanding of structure and texture. In her teens, she fell for alt metal band System of Down, which combined with her study at University of Newcastle, saw her make the transition from pure classical musician to multi-genre powerhouse. She has toured and recorded extensively with The Button collective and experimental folk/jazz band Vanishing Shapes. She regularly performs with jazz-rock band Othrship, and Psyc rock band Lachlan X Morris.

Verses From The Other Side

By Estelle Helene Borrey

You see us from a distance

Different, awkward, constrained...

Bodies that don't, won't conform to the slim, able, elastic norm.

You wonder, make assumptions more or less incorrect or maybe... horribly wrong about us.

You grope in the dark because no one has peeled back the difficulty, diversity, strangeness, specificity, complexity. That calm, softly spoken voice that whispers in your ear and mine from time to time

that we can forget all those tricky, sticky perspectives. We're too tired, why reach a hand out?

"Too much for us" whispers Mr. indifference.

Indifference exits stage right and Ignorance comes to extinguish the guttering candles of our collective conscience.

The lift can be used to store the bin because everyone takes the stairs, right?

Who cares?

Who indeed?

We, the ghosts who haunt the edges of your realm.

We bang on the glass for admittance.

Some hear the call and do something because they can.

Others can but don't.

What do we clamour for, we hungry ghosts?

To go into the same shops as you, to visit a friend, to know simple pleasures there for your taking.

Paper tigers swallow up our right to cross over...but we will not be denied.

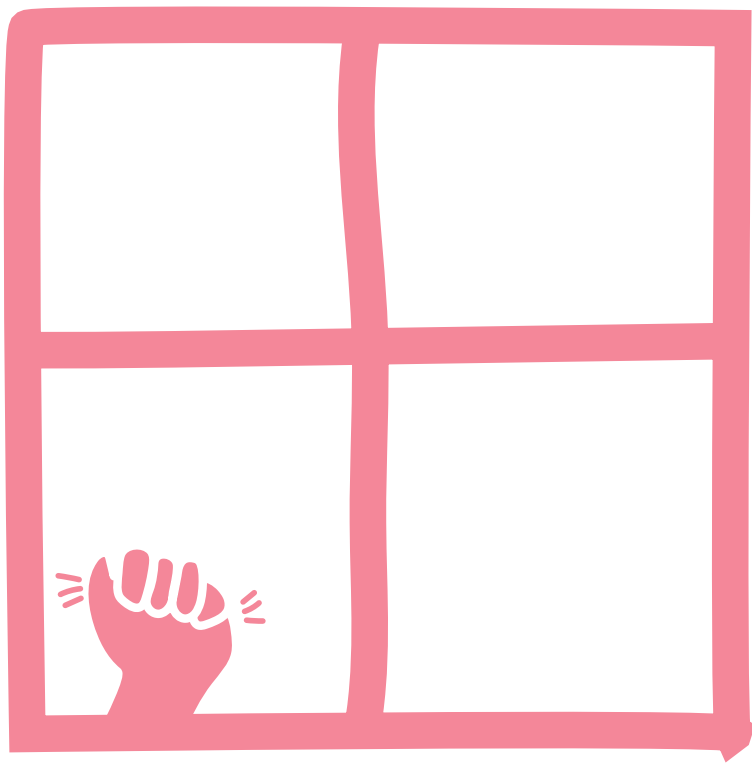
To be heard over the din of existence is exhausting.

Be receptive, for you can become us. Take the time to know us, for when our worlds collide, we are all strengthened.

Our ghostly breath forms letters on the glass,

We take up the cry of Cathy Linton and wail:

"Let me in! Let me in! Let me in!"



About the Author

What Ho! Estelle Borrey here. I live with cerebral palsy, a wacky companion at the best of times, and Millie, my fur bestie. Most of my writing belongs in the non-fiction section, so I thought why not try something new? When not writing I enjoy visiting the world of Wodehouse, the Brontës, Philippa Gregory, Karen Brooks, Elena Ferrante and Alexandre Dumas among others. In my spare time, you'll find me rocking out to Jimi Hendrix, Queen, Django Reinhardt, and The Beatles.



Catherine McGuinness, *Rosary with the seagull*, 2022

acrylic on canvas 121.8 x 91.5cm

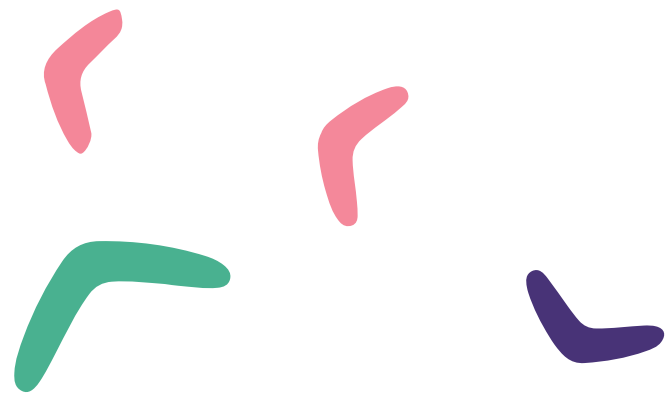
Exhibited, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Archibald Prize 2022, Sydney, 2022

Courtesy of the artist and Studio A

studio A

Seagulls

By Karen Lethlean



In my teenage years summertime meant heat and boredom. Laid out like an offering to Sun Gods on a blanket of stagnant damp, because towels soaked up sweat, Le Tan, or coconut oil products. Advised by a skin specialist in a plush Subiaco office, to rectify teenage acne by, 'get as much sun as you can.'

Obedient out of respect for sums my parents paid, a row of framed degrees, and innocent of how men could manipulate. A time long before I learnt about worldly complexities.

Dead mussels lined shores, rotting in glare, and seagulls pecked and cawed, white-winged sociopaths, scavenging. How much worse since they've achieved *Finding Nemo*, film talent status.

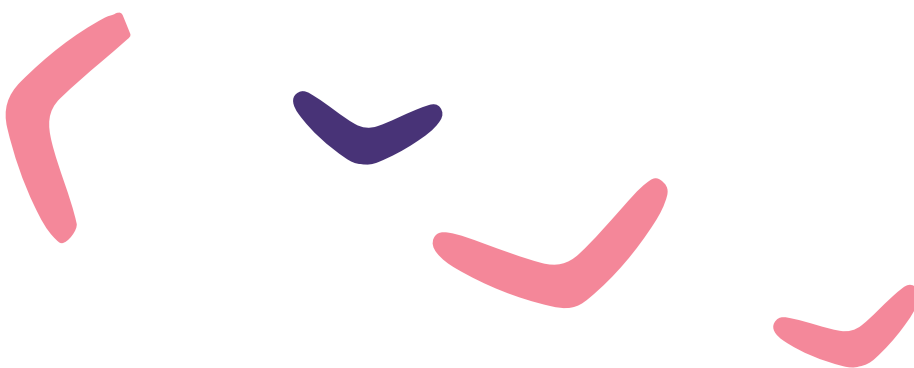
Trying to shift hunger by thinking about oceanic creatures. Whales. Why is whale talk assumed to be soothing and blissful when nobody knew what the hell they were saying? Surely whales fight like other intelligent species, maybe they are actually yelling at each other. *You miserable humpback bastard, that's the last plankton you're ever gonna get from me. Oh, get a life, go blow some air. Do that again and I'll smash you...* Not helping.

So I watch him instead. One employed to watch. Radio crackling at his hip, whistle between lips. Pity no one guards helpless, ill-informed, trusting individuals inside supposedly comfortable homes. What if you forget, get sidetracked thinking about vast, unknowable oceanic macrocosm.

A lifeguard could forget to look for signs of drowning. Which are? Floating face down – too late then. Putting your hand up, how difficult to do so when you can barely tread water and are being swamped with angry waves? Even I have trouble. Little kids mucking about with epic splashing games, water in faces, coughing and sputtering. Not being able to find your footing on uneven ground. Being underwater too long. Throwing up in the ocean, like what happened one time things got a tad out of control with Ben and his pals. Bit of summer holiday, beach day fun. Tall, skinny lifeguard on duty pushing into our circle grabbing him by the hair, swearing at us.

Foul smells close to waterline. Not quite pristine out here. Do they still pump sewage out into the sea? Is there a sheep-ship loading in Fremantle? Or a tanker letting off fuel out in Gage Roads. Maybe I can smell decaying seaweed, pity environmentalists won't let councils rake sand, make it all pretty, and take away shore dumped crap like back when I was a kid. Suppose you can't always hide nasty stuff.

If I swim, possible to escape heat, sun and smells. A dip equals worth the risk of bikini-top loss, worth bothering to duck every three seconds to avoid being smashed by a wave. Know what face hits feel like. Not always possible to go out far enough past where waves break, nor avoid a slap, sometimes it's my fault. Besides further out is not an option because of greater shark potential.



But instead of relaxing on wide shores of opportunities, I detect my lips pressing together, I swallow and blink, once again my stomach cringes in pain.



Most man-eating sharks in history are from these waters. Un-netted waters. Not even slight, hint of protection, out there. My beach has a well-documented history of attacks. Matching statistics about women killed by partners, family members, those who supposedly love them. Offshore monsters honing in on currents relevant to lobster fishing and whale oil production. Apex carnivores didn't get a memo informing the latter ceased back in mid-1970s. Just like some people didn't sign white-ribbon agreements. Even if die-hards attempt to say, biting humans merely cases of mistaken identity. Or snivel, they didn't mean to hurt her.

Not so long ago I asked a group of dedicated swimmers once, 'which is safest place to swim.'

'Along shore line, parallel, keep inside reefs.' I am told.

Gazing out, I cannot see designated secure location.

'What's your worry?' A concerned stranger asks.

'Sharks.'

'Oh, come on, it's been ten years since our last fatality!'

Suppose that's long enough. Especially when even I see posts on Facebook about how long since a woman died. You know, it's been a whole two months since he hit me.

Pity there is no-one to ask about safety when it comes to who shares your bed.

Water's chill removes heat-haze-nausea, but my brain is sticky still. I thought I'd be free. But my head wanders back over, I hear again...
you fucken cunt!

Isn't oceanic immersion about floating? Drifting away. One day I will leave. Read once it takes up to eight attempts to end an abusive relationship.

Made a first step, fixed things so now he can't control my money, I could board a jet, buy/rent a van and drive it to Sydney, 5-6 hours, or 2-3 days, options to cross a continent. Finally get to swim in another ocean. A wide country is my mussel, and am its seagull. Not sure if I like placing myself into this allusion. Seagulls are plagued with too many problems thanks to their human planet earth co-habitants. Broken wings, swallowing plastic, missing legs. But I do feel kindred for those little feathered ones who are getting their own back though, spreading flesh eating and antibiotic resistant bacteria.

Probably don't need to go to such cross-continental extremes. Rather be sitting watching, not burdened with responsibility like a lifesaver. Instead become a spectator on a beachside.

But instead of relaxing on wide shores of opportunities, I detect my lips pressing together, I swallow and blink, once again my stomach cringes in pain. This time not from his weight, his energy stabbing between my legs.



Except I am noticing sensations just before my legs cramp, and my back aches. *Too late to say, stop, don't do that, it hurts, you should never...*

Constrained even more so now I finally detect choices. Possible to go away, change jobs, leave him. People always say, *why don't you leave...?* When really they should ask him, *why do you do it? Why do you think things you do, swearing, yelling, hitting, are okay?*

What if I get out but nothing changes? What if the whole world is filled with people laughing at foolish jokes I never think funny?

Why do seagulls have wings?

To beat scavengers to rubbish dumps.

What kind of shark is always gambling?

Card shark.

What is a shark's favorite sci-fi show?

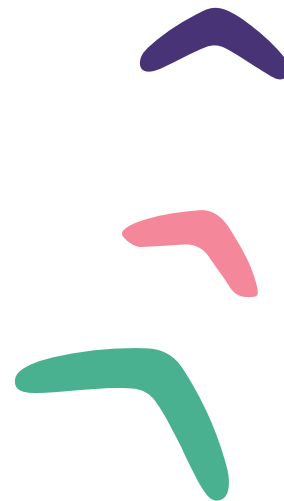
Shark Trek.

Is my world really so full of picking over trinkets, looking for something of value?

What if new situations, posing as escapes, envelope me into sameness? Don't abuse things work in cycles? I don't think I could handle disappointments. Imagining another person swearing, spitting, and raising their hand to slap. What if my son grew up like his father?

Instead, I stay here, caught in summertime's ritual of freedom.

Remembering how my mother tried to get Dad to share a pay packet, instead of drinking it away. Dwelling on how a schoolteacher threw a duster across our room, slapped blackboards, yelled and swore, even though he didn't think we could hear curses. How high school boys dipped tampons in tomato sauce and threw them into our bags.



'You will never make squad, unless you swim harder,' screamed our swim coach.

Even I noticed how he looked at girls, floundering to complete programs. Put us behind faster, stronger boys. Almost dribbled over our new club costumes.

'Hurry up, you useless article. How long does it take you to do 50m backstroke.'

'I will to get in the water and show you a correct tumble turn!?' He's already pulled off his t-shirt, flashing chest hair and muscles at a cowering group of pre-teens.

'Don't let him touch you,' whispered little Jenny. I remember her race start dive lessons, his hand behind her. Other girls told me to hide, go under water. When I resurfaced, he was almost blue in the face. Heard him tell mum, 'if she won't listen to my instructions, no point in being part of our swimming club.'

Rip currents keep dragging me close to rocks, and I grow tired of fighting, learnt responses of self-protection. Cringe, cry silently, close, but don't lock doors. I've heard Lifeguards go ape-shit about kids jumping off rocks. Despite risks of getting caught up with fishermen's rods, lines and tackle. Radio crackling with requests for assistance, blowing their whistle, shaking their heads about swimming outside the flags. Don't want to draw their admonishment.



So I go back to my towel, collect things and head up toward nearby cafes for an ice cream. Impossible to handle pre-sea-breeze heat without some sort of mediator. I struggle to maintain balance of controlling cone side-drip while still eating delicately enough not to smear my cheeks or lick in a way which doesn't give creepy boys quivers. I am just going to suck on my ice cream, stop trying to behave in ways meant to protect me. Such things aren't helping. Time to do something different, run away from here.

About the Author

Karen Lethlean is a trying to be retired English teacher at a Senior College. *Ever Present Predator* is being published by Pareidolia Volume 2. San Antonio Review published *In Isolation*. She is writing of military services 1972-76, titled *Army Girl*. In another life she is a triathlete and has competed at Hawaii Ironman world championships twice.

Several triathlon piece are published including *Different Humanity* by The Creatives Journal. *Good Sports* published by Human Writers.



D is for Doritos

By Ruby Conolan Barrett

In the aisle of the shopping centre,
I buy Doritos, cinnamon Oreos, three lamb cutlets at a reduced price.
Depressed shopping is sort of freeing, what will strike my fancy next?
I allow myself all sorts of things I would never normally buy, wouldn't buy
Except I need some stimulation
Anything to stop the rising panic in the meat section.
Lettuces are \$12 each and Roe V Wade has been overturned
A is for Apple Pay and we're living in the Future.

At home,
I crack open (the Doritos), BBQ-fucking-Cheese, no wonder they were on special.
Y is for You choose and P is for Pad Thai take-out
which I get on Uber eats (even though I can't afford it).

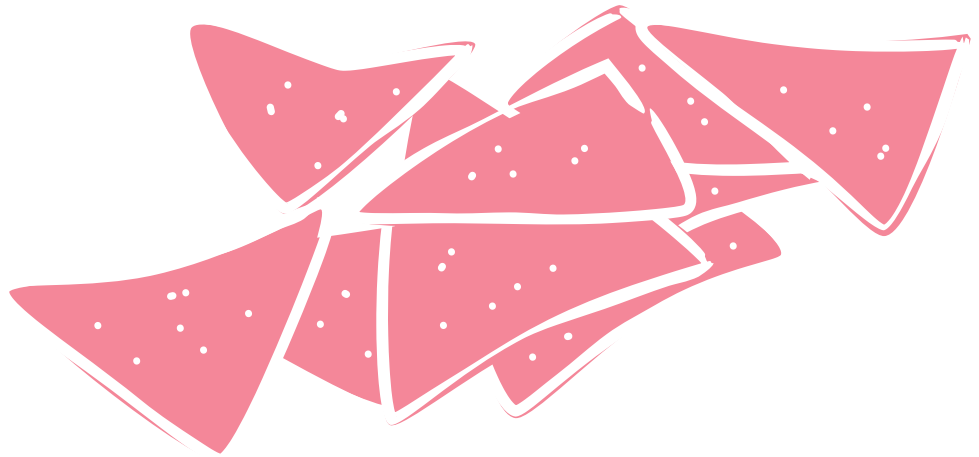
In the shower,
I shave my legs and think about Feminism
and why feminists are always stereotyped as Lesbians
because only women can love, support, or be in the corner of other women,
Apparently.

At work,
we watch a video where someone on some American alt-news channel suggests they made
Abortion illegal so white women would have more babies to vote Republican
the volume is turned down very low
I tell them my grandmother's friend died of a backyard abortion
A is for Acquiescence.

In the line for coffee,
I think about swimming in the ocean,
About how you can swim perfectly happily until a bit of seaweed touches your leg and
Suddenly
It's all around you, you can't be in the water anymore because you think it's a shark.
M is for Monsters, lurking in the deep.

Listen up girl and listen close,
We all know it's more powerful to keep swimming, to find the monsters and fight them
But girl, I know all you want to do is run screaming from the water
To you, choosing to fight means being dragged down,
because you can't fight and swim at the same time.
S is for Shame.

In the car,
I turn on the radio
They're talking about The Debate on every channel.
I turn the dial to Classic FM
And I count from A-Z.



About the Author

Ruby (She/Her) is a theatre-maker, creative and sometimes writer who currently resides in Meanjin/Brisbane. She is the Co-Artistic Director of Arbour Theatre Company and is committed to creating spaces for diverse young people to breath into believing in themselves through the work they create.



Emily Crockford, *The pattern in the mountains of Studio A, best friends Emma and Gabrielle*, 2022

acrylic on canvas, 122 x 91.3cm

Exhibited, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Archibald Prize 2022, Sydney, 2022

Courtesy of the artist and Studio A

studio A

Invisible: The Disappearance of Cass Priam

By Jamal Hassan

This is the story of Cass, an office worker with an unusual curse.

On the first day of Cass' new job at the offices of Prophecy Ltd., they introduced themselves at the reception desk.

“Hi, I'm Cass Priam, I'm here to collect my badge and my roster?”

“We don't seem to have a Cass on record“, the receptionist, whose name tag read Hamish, said with a frown.

“Really? You might need to check under Cassandra, but it should have been cleared up with HR”, said Cass, recalling a series of complex and frustrating emails about legal obligations.

“Ah yes, you're the new one on floor 3!” said Hamish the Receptionist, handing over a clipboard, and a badge, with a simple “CASS” written in all caps, across a small brass plate, and Cass thanked him.

“Have a wonderful day, Chris!”

Now, Cass frowned at the immediate mistake, but moved along to the elevator.

Once on the third floor, Cass made their way to their cubicle. As Cass placed their things on the desk, they looked up to see a man in a blue tie approaching them.

“Hi, my name is Mike, I’m the manager on this floor, you must be our new employee?”

“Pleased to meet you Mike, yes that’s me, I’m Cass”

“Great! Caleb!”

Cass frowned “Sorry, my name is Cass”

“Oh! Sorry Charlotte! I must have a case of the Mondays!” Mike apologised with a smile, and before Cass could say anything, Mike began to show them around the office.

Over the next few days, as Cass settled into the office, the same strange thing kept happening every time they met a new co-worker.

“Hey, nice to meet you, I’m Cass”, they said to Mary, the woman who wore the patterned dresses.

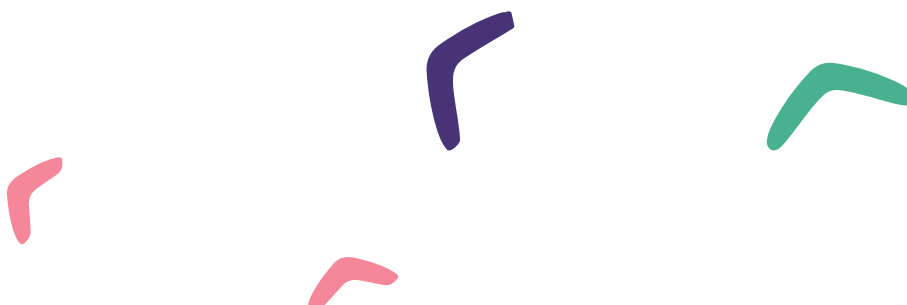
“Nice to meet you Caelen!” she replied

“Hi, I’m Cass” they said to Alex, the person with the thick glasses by the phones.

“Welcome Case!”, they said, between calls.

Cass tried to correct people, but it never seemed to stick. They were frustrated, but they needed the job, so politeness kept their mask of calm in place.

But one day, they started noticing a strange feeling that started to accompany the misnomers. It began as a tingle in their right pinky finger, when Mike the Manager referred to them as Chelsea. When they looked down, they had to hide a yelp - their pinky had disappeared!



As soon as they could, Cass excused themselves to the bathroom. With urgency, they grasped at their hand, and felt where their pinky should be. In relief and confusion, they found that the finger was still there... it was just invisible?

“It turned out Mike the Manager had an offer. A highly rewarding, but incredibly complex and stressful offer, involving organising Prophecy Ltd.’s prestigious Interdepartmental Dinner.”

After work, Cass made their way to see their doctor, Doctor Set.

“So what seems to be the problem Cassandra” said Doctor Set.

“I actually prefer Cass these days but -” And Cass began to explain the situation, showing the missing digit in question, but the doctor interrupted.

“Stop lying for attention Charlotte, now get out of my office”, snapped Doctor Set.

Cass left quickly, nearly in tears. On the way home, they stopped to pick up a pair of gloves.

The next morning, Cass entered the building, with their head down, hoping to get through the day with minimal interaction.

As soon as Cass sat down, Mike the Manager popped up.

“Claudia! Just the woman I was looking for!”



“What’s the problem Sir?”

It turned out Mike the Manager had an offer. A highly rewarding, but incredibly complex and stressful offer, involving organising Prophecy Ltd.’s prestigious Interdepartmental Dinner.

With a spinning head, Cass told Mike they’d think about It, but news of Cass’s offer spread quickly around the office.

“No one says no to the Managers at Prophecy Ltd.!” said Hamish the Receptionist

“And stays for very long” Mary in the Patterned Dresses added warningly

Cass was just about ready to take the offer, when Alex with the Thick Glasses approached them and invited Cass to lunch.

“My advice? Don’t take the offer...” Alex paused for a second “I want to say Cassander?”

Cass braced themselves for the tingles, but surprisingly they didn’t come.


“Cass, my name is Cass”, they said, no longer hiding the weariness in their voice.

Alex grimaced, “sorry, I can’t seem to make it stick in my mind, as hard as I try”

“At least you try”, Said Cass

“That’s actually why I wanted to talk to you.” Said Alex

Alex laid out to Cass the mistreatment they had seen and experienced while working at Prophecy Ltd., and how it meant that they were thinking of quitting soon. Cass tried to argue that Prophecy Ltd. was a major global company, and besides, their co-workers were nice.



Naturally, everyone was here to hear about the Offer, and all Cass could say, with every eye on them was,

“Of course. Yes. I’d Love to take the offer”

“Nice doesn’t mean good or respectful. It’s your choice of course, I know respect doesn’t put bread on the table, but in the end you’re the only one who’ll suffer the consequences.”, Said Alex.

Cass was still thinking about their conversation with Alex well into the next day, when they were called into the Head Manager’s Office.

Inside was Mike the Floor Manager, and a few other managers.

“Connie, just the man I wanted to see. Please, take a seat.” Said the Head Manager, their low voice heavy with the weight of authority.

Cass sat as they felt a part of their upper thigh tingle and disappear. Naturally, everyone was here to hear about the Offer, and all Cass could say, with every eye on them was,

“Of course. Yes. I’d Love to take the offer”

“Wonderful!” The Head Manager said, with a clap.

Over the next few days and nights, Cass got to work on organising the Interdepartmental Dinner. Of course, they did not get a break from their regular assignments either, so Cass was spending more and more time at the office, and sleeping less and less.

“Why would you take on something so big when you haven’t even been here a year?”, said Hamish, scribbling something on a notepad.

“You’re so brave,” Said Mary, wiping her eyes with a patterned handkerchief.

Cass was wondering if anyone who’d ever had to be brave had ever felt any comfort in that phrase before, when they were once again pulled into the Manager’s office. This time, thankfully, it was only Mike.

“Collette, hi. I’m sorry about the sudden meeting so close to your big event,” Mike chuckled.

Mike informed Cass that their recently missing pay checks, and subsequent empty stomach, were due to an error in accounting. He gave Cass a set of notes on documents accounting needed from them, and reminded Cass that the finalised plans of the Dinner were due today.

“Remember, on my desk! 5pm sharp”, Said Mike, waving Cass out of the office.

Cass pulled their hungry, tired body to their desk, and worked robotically, until at precisely 5pm sharp, they handed in the last of the documents for the Dinner.

Cass clocked out for the day, but they couldn’t go home yet. They’d have to stop by their mother’s house and pick up their birth certificate, according to the notes.

Cass steeled themselves as they knocked on the door of their mother’s small brick house.

“Cassandra! What a surprise!”

“It’s Cass now, you know that, mother”

“Oh you’ll always be my little girl Cyra”, Cass’s mother replied with dismissive affection

The tingling in Cass’s body was almost painful at this point, as was their confusion, but the emptiness in their stomach reminded them of their mission.

“I just need to collect my birth certificate, work needs some papers”

Cass’s mother questioned this, and Cass tried to explain.

“You always do something, Carmen; you must’ve mixed them up with that name of yours”

“My name is Cass, it’s simple”

“You’re being difficult again. Let me get your birth certificate, then we’ll see. Just use what’s there and it’ll be easier”, said Cass’s mother, leaving the room before Cass could protest.

Cass’s Mother returned to the room and handed the document to Cass.

Cass scanned the document, only to find that every field was blank. Before they could even react in surprise, they doubled over as they felt a pain in their chest, around their heart, the tingles growing to stabbing pains.

“Princess? What’s wrong?” Said their mother.

But Cass didn’t say a word, as they ran out the door, back into their car. They sat and tore off layers of clothing. The pain began to fade, only for Cass to realise with dawning horror that they could no longer feel their fingers or toes.



Worse, the invisibility was spreading to what little was left of them. Cass no longer had legs to run. All they could do was watch their own face in the rear view mirror, as their face faded, and finally, as their own eyes finally blinked out of existence.

(The following Friday, the Interdepartmental Dinner went perfectly. Mike the Manager was praised for all of his work, and was given a raise and a promotion.)

About the Author

Jamal is a 22-year-old creative from Adelaide, South Australia. Jamal utilises all forms of art and creative expression. Writing, visual art, theatre performance and more. Jamal is currently completing a Bachelor of Digital Media University of South Australia where they have created short films, magazines, and animation.

Jamal currently has visual art showcased at Headspace (using mediums of charcoal and water colour while they are also in rehearsals of end of year theatre production *Amplify December 2022* with No Strings theatre.

Jamal says the world is very big, they just take it and remix it, to create their art.



Once upon a time in Ireland there was a beautiful
top model princess with red hair like little mermaid called
Katie who fell in love with a beautiful prince
Charming bearded man named Dan. Katie was
studying in her homeland of Dublin and dreaming of
a beautiful
a far off beachland prince when she met a handsome prince from
New Zealand came
into her life.

When they first met
everything was just airy and sparkles
danced in the air!
Princess Katie and Prince Dan

Love to do good looking romantic
cooking together on
Mondays. They love to
cook salmon and huddles and drink beautiful
champagne forever, enjoying romantic times.

After dinner they cuddle on the
In front of the fire watching British murder mystery shows.
They love going out to dinners of times - eating KFC
They go to the cinema on Wednesday night and eat

popcorn and have a popcorn fight that boy chippies
crunch crunch crunching away
They love a beautiful drive away
to the beach. They take a picnic bag and eat chips.

Princess Katie and Prince Dan are getting married
in an old church in Ireland and having a party
in a magical castle.

They eat their passionate moon in
Love hearts and enjoy their
romantic life together forever!

Love from top model Artist
MAGAN Polmann
+ In the Bell #ART With cocktails ++

