

OC ORACIONES

Volume I, Issue III

Nostalgia

Sigma Kappa Delta

Odessa College

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OC Oraciones

Volume 1, Issue III

Theme: Nostalgia

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“What we call nostalgia is just time asking to be remembered.”

—*E. St. Claire*

oración

1. nombre femenino

Acción y efecto de orar.

«Llevó una vida de oración».

(Action and effect of praying. "He led a life of prayer.")

2. nombre femenino

Palabras con que se ora, generalmente sujetas a una fórmula establecida por la liturgia o el culto.

(Words with which one prays, generally subject to a formula established by the liturgy or worship.)

3. nombre femenino

Discurso o razonamiento pronunciado en público con el fin de persuadir, conmover o expresar una idea.

(A spoken discourse intended to persuade, move, or express an idea.)

4. nombre femenino (gramática)

Enunciado con sentido completo, formado por la unión de un sujeto y un predicado.

(A complete statement formed by the union of a subject and a predicate.)

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Note from Dr. Ashok Karra

***OC Oraciones* Senior Advisor**

It is an incredible privilege to be an advisor. I simply watch students and staff help the community realize their vision in that curious way art creates life. Art does not just mimic or represent. You will turn these pages and see how each contributor has fashioned a memorable line, documented their changing thoughts, or brought a visual detail into especial focus. I know you will appreciate the care and concern they have brought to their experiences and craft. People want to do more than survive. They want to thrive, and their expressions are explorations and declarations of what constitutes thriving.

With that said, I want to give thanks to the editorial board. The behind the scenes work they do has been a treat to witness. They created organization and procedures, delegated tasks, reached out to the community, set up enjoyable and productive meetings, and most of all, have given everyone and everything in their purview the attention needed. As a teacher, it is fun to know that there are recommendations I can write for each of them testifying to their efforts and drive. A huge thank you to Brianna Dunston, Sylvia Medrano, Valerie Gonzalez, Aranelly Ramos, and Dylan Garcia. I continually learn from each of you as you do this work. A special mention to Irlanda and Abisue Ramos, who did amazing work for the previous issue of *OC Oraciones*. They exemplify the spirit of the present issue.

This is an issue centered on the loose theme of nostalgia. Honestly, I am nostalgic for Odessa College's Fall Semester 2025. Sigma Kappa Delta, Psi Alpha chapter, the parent organization of *OC Oraciones*, held multiple writing workshops, book discussions, a poetry and storytelling night, and an item drive for the Wrangler food pantry which was a spectacular success. In addition to all that, there is the publication before you, which speaks to the greater task

we all share. I believe nostalgia is ultimately a product of a community, not just an individual. We want to know where we were accepted and loved, where we can show acceptance and love.

Ashok Karra

December 5, 2025

Editor's Notes

– Brianna Dunston

I'm more on the logistical end of publication rather than the artistic/creative one, so I will leave the artistic praise and thanks to my fellow editors. I joined the editorial board hoping to use my student publication experience to help streamline and improve the board's processes. I hope my efforts made other editors' jobs easier; ensured contributors received useful feedback/revisions and gained experience that gives them extra confidence to submit for publication in the future; and allowed us editors and contributors alike to offer you, readers, an accessible and enjoyable literary experience. Thank you for reading our publication.

– Dylan Garcia

It has been a great experience to be involved with the *OC Oraciones* editorial board for three issues now. The experience of learning how to revise and edit text for printing has been invaluable. More importantly, however, is the fact that we have this book as a platform for writers and artists to lend their voices to. Issue III's theme was nostalgia and involved a lot of looking back at things that shaped authors, fallen family members, and memories for those who submitted. These various elements are part of what makes us who we are as people, and this issue was a good look at how many voices within the community were shaped by their pasts.

– Valerie Gonzalez

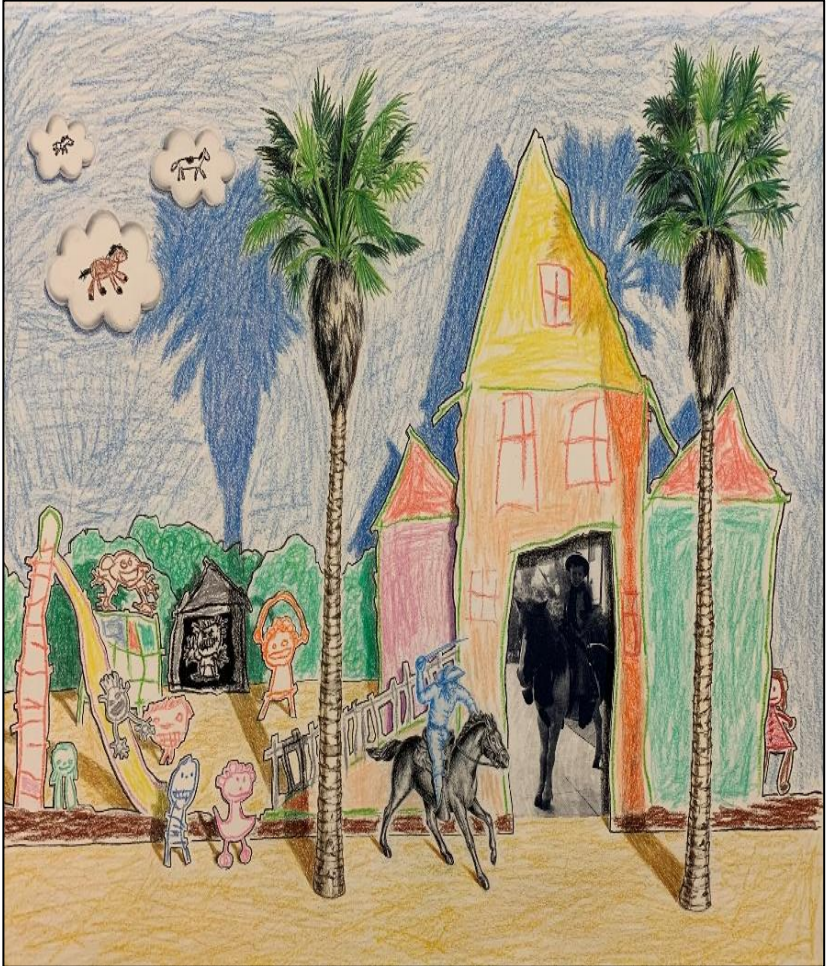
This is my first year being a part of an editorial board, and I am super blessed that this was my first team to experience it, seeing how a book is created and feeling the authors' emotions in their pieces and what it meant for them. I am proud of everyone being a part of Oraciones. Being able to express a feeling of nostalgia and reopening those moments can become bittersweet. When going through the process of creating this book, I noticed how much organization needs to be acquired. It has taught me to be a player in the team, whether it's me submitting a poem or sending constant emails to make sure we have their correct information. I will take this experience into the next journey and make sure I have fun along the way.

– Sylvia Medrano

Putting this issue together taught me that nostalgia isn't just about looking back. It's about realizing how far we've come and how much those moments shaped us. Reading everyone's work felt like walking through a living scrapbook: different memories, different lives, but all connected by the same human feeling. Through this process, I realized how much I learned by working behind the scenes, shaping the structure, editing, and formatting so every piece had space to breathe. Even the small, technical parts of the work made me appreciate how much heart everyone put into this issue. I'm thankful to help create something that belongs to all of us, not just the editors. I hope these pages make you remember something you didn't know you missed.

Kindergarten Cowboy

Barry Phillips III



Recipes Remembered

Nicole Roberts

Grandma's sugar cookies
circles with scalloped edges
the soft ones with cream cheese frosting
the ones that made all other sugar cookies
unworthy of a bite

Grandma's Christmas 'crack'
the most addictive Chex mix ever made
she always told me it was so good
because it used a whole pound of butter

Crepes filled with cinnamon sugar
rolled up like skinny burritos
that she tediously baked one at a time
for a crowd
and never fussed when she had to
make another batch

Loaves upon loaves of bread
kneaded in her extra-large KitchenAid
tops rubbed in butter

sliced and slathered
in homemade strawberry freezer jam
gone before the next batch finished rising

Alzheimer's has taken her now
...she can't remember her way around the kitchen
...she can't remember the recipes she knew by heart
...she can't remember me

But I remember
and I read her recipes like stories
and I use my oven to keep telling them
and I keep her memory alive with
cream cheese, butter and cinnamon

A Middle Eastern Journey

Bonnie Resley

In the dimly lit room

She found herself traveling to a distant place

She found herself partaking of a Middle Eastern feast.

Not just a feast of Persian rice

Delicately laced with saffron and turmeric

Or the shish kebab painstakingly grilled

Over the red glowing embers

She found so much more there

The flickering candle before her

Transported her on a journey deep within her soul

As she glanced around her, she was mesmerized

By the handsome, dark-haired people around her.

She perceived in their dark brown, soul-filled eyes,

Reminders of the past

A great love for their gentle families in that strife-torn land

A cherished history rich with treasures and gifts of world renown

The intense beat of the music tugged at her heart

As she could hear the romantic strains, feel the love of the culture,

The deep yearning to see their families and friends,

And feel the agony of their struggles in that far away land.

Just Say “No”
to “stalgia”

Kat Copeland

Memories of running barefoot
in west Texas sands
How many and who
before me
covered the same ground?
Horned toads, terrapins,
badgers, prairie dogs, red ants
Indigenous Americans
The wind shouting, touching
The sun scorching, burning
Running, running, running
Pure delight for me
Neither running to nor from
Running joyfully!

Note: “stalgia”= sad

.

The Mayan Medicine Man & the Professor from Bermuda

Lawrence Sticca

In early 2008, I arrived in Belize from Bermuda to pursue a career teaching tourism. Not long after, I was invited on a field trip to meet an old Mayan medicine man and spiritual healer named Don Beto in his herbal garden.

The journey took me through unfamiliar parts of the country, along a bumpy dirt road beside a river winding through dense jungle. It had been raining, and the road was muddy and treacherous, but my little four-wheel-drive Sidekick handled it with determination.

When I finally arrived at the Masewal Forest Garden, the sky was still overcast and the rain came and went, giving the place a mysterious, almost sacred atmosphere. I crossed a narrow wooden board spanning a gully and followed a muddy path until I reached a palapa covered in palm fronds. Beneath it sat an elderly man named Don Beto. His baseball cap covered a head of graying hair, his brown skin was sun-beaten, and his eyes, behind thick glasses, radiated peace. He had a small mustache; a wide, genuine smile; and the calm presence of someone deeply rooted in the earth.

Heriberto “Don Beto” Cocom guided me through his incredible garden, home to more than 500 medicinal herbs. It was a cultivated jungle, lush and organized, with labeled plants lining manicured pathways. He knew every leaf and root by name and use. For him, healing was about balance, about restoring the life force within the body. He explained that prayer guided this energy to where it was needed. To Don Beto, everything was interwoven: the

physical and the spiritual were simply two ends of the same thread. Medicine, he believed, was all around us.

While others carried laptops, his tools were simple: a small machete, a gunny sack, and a water bottle. Yet, with those, he healed thousands who could not afford a doctor. People would line up before sunrise to see him. When they tried to pay, he would smile and say, “Give me what you think is required.” He once told me, “Real healers don’t quote a price. They have a gift from God, and they use it for God’s work.”

In June 2011, as I prepared to leave for Singapore, I realized it was time to say goodbye to my mentor. I gave him a ride to the market. When we arrived, we shared a warm hug and a firm handshake. “Adios, amigo,” I said, quickly driving off before he could see me cry, but I did cry anyway as I drove away.

A year later, in December 2012, ironically just before the date tied to the Mayan calendar’s prophecy, Don Beto passed away.

Tony Robbins once said, “It is in your moments of decision that your destiny is shaped.” Meeting Don Beto shaped mine. He inspired me to teach authentic, meaningful tourism, something I now share with my students at Odessa College. There’s always one person who opens the door to who you are meant to become. For me, that person was Don Beto.

Writing At the Center of Your Heart

Dylan Garcia

That room

It was home for a while

Always lights down low

Relaxing vibes to any who would stop by

The vocals of “Amber” by 311 playing

It was...serene

A serenity many hope for

With images of rainy towns

Animated coffee shops

Or just Kirby vibing to *Undertale* music

It was...ever so inviting

Inviting always was the couch in the back

I still see the images of people sitting there

During the Poetry and Storytelling Night events

Still remember seeing people sleep on it

And thinking, “that looks so...calming”

Calming was the environment there

Almost separate from the busy hallways outside

The Writing Center was its own little world

Its own atmosphere that was an escape

It had charm to those who would visit

The charm is now gone

From the lamps to the quirky walls where posters wouldn't stick

To the three whiteboards

Useful for separate sessions with students

No longer can unconfident students feel comfortable

Such that they can learn and grow without embarrassment

The Writing Center was a room free of embarrassment

It was serene, inviting, calming, and charming

A world of all of this cultivated by those who put it together

Visitors can no longer enjoy that world

Though the room still stands

The Writing Center does not

Nostalgia

Cynthia Cray Hill

We've no nostalgia for bitter things, for hard to swallow pills, for sadness beyond words. We have no nostalgia for the aches and pains that built us in ways joy could never know. Are not the solemn moments as sure and necessary a memory as the sweet?

Terrible and frightening thunderstorms shook the very pavement and obscured visibility on the road, on the way, past the fields, on the dark, dark morning of my mother's funeral. Was this the hardest day of my life? Probably not, but it was hard enough. The rain came, and with it, thunder and lightning so great that it startled me as I sat behind the wheel, white knuckles holding back the tumult of feeling that threatened to sweep me off the road.

I drove on, past pastures, and fences, the many ramblings of oaks, and hay, all ghostly in the storm drenched morn. And I said, yes. I will take this drear. I will take this rain. I will bury my mother under the biggest storm in years and I will one day look through a rainy day from a porch, with strong arms around me, or with silent contemplations as my companion, and I will remember the fury of passing that washed me toward a grave I knew would come, but never thought so soon.

Is this nostalgia? No. It bears no resemblance of longing; it brings no spark of joy I wish to rekindle. It rings only with the elegy of sad passings, of life departing this age to the next, through seasons born upon the inklings of god.

Scrapbook

Valerie Gonzalez



Skimming through the pages of core memories
Burnt yellow walls adorning with Western art on Blake Road
Watching *Merlin* with my siblings
Climbing an abandoned tree house behind our land
Fishing near a ditch with a family of snails
Hiding in the barn while journaling
Hearing coyotes in the night
Chasing the sun before the horizon
Having picnics in the Sandia Mountains
Harvesting our vegetables and fruit
Seeing Jocelyn was the highlight of my day
Vivi swerving in her Kia on Central as we listen to 1901 by
Phoenix—
Let me sink into the pages and reminisce my childhood.
Time has stolen from me:
Where is my pause?
Where's the mother tree?
Where am I now?
Please, let me be part of a moment that punctured my heart;
I could go on and on...
Maybe I am caged to what was once a rush.

Souvenir

Nicole Roberts

There is an intersection

Where nostalgia turns to grief

Where memories run out

And we are left with

All the dreams that cannot be

Though we want to leave this ache behind

We find that love and loss are intertwined

So, we make a souvenir of grief

To prove that we knew love, however brief

Ah, I Imagined Those Days...

Luis Prieto

When did it stop being fun

Frantic dramatics, jump from last rung
It felt dangerous but was only just fun

Do you remember the last ran run before dinner time, as Gramma
wrung the laundry dry, hollered out for you and I and how we clung
and begged for sweets and tea only to receive water and PB

no J that time, jar clear and streaked, remnants we would've taken,
if offered, yet not oh well the butter hits just as swell

This of course being before I hated you and you, me, when we were
both only kids trying the hardest to be kings
of hills

and playgrounds too

should've laid the groundwork for better blues but competition
struck us once then again for good measure too

Too simple an ending for us though, an easy enough blame, 'cause
you were fast and I was slow, at least that's how I recall those days
No I don't think that was so, those never happened, they were
could've-beens, based on the ships with those remained in skin.

No it was more-so a distance placed there by HIM and Him and all
of them who sought to turn us away from the other

That's all I think that happened Brother, yet I wonder what
would've

been if it couldn't have been anything but that and maybe we'd've
had a chance and been close enough to weather all of HIM and

Him And you reached those gates first though I wanted them more.
You would trade places if I asked, no? Better things should you
have stayed and I the one to go or at least I've come to believe so

Oh well, I say, what's done is burned and gone with wind See you
sometime don't know when

The taste of J never felt sweet again

Dancing Flowers

Kat Copeland



A Love Story in Cars

Mallory Sanchez

Today, I come across that box again, the one with photos from my childhood and teenage years. In it, I find that picture of us in your pickup truck. Two young high school kids, faces pressed together, looking into the camera with big smiles. You are wearing that necklace that you always wore. I can't see it in the photo, but I know the dumbbell charm from your powerlifting meet is there, tucked beneath your shirt. I'm wearing the top that you picked for me at the mall. You said it would look good and it did. I wore it on many of our dates together. One snapshot, taken with a digital camera, sets off a chain of memories. The cars you drove and the miles they carried us tell the story of our love.

Hey There Delilah (The Pickup, 2006–2007)

Lunch period began and I headed to the parking lot behind the band hall. Butterflies fluttered as you pulled up in your truck. I climbed in, slid across the bench seat, and you kissed my cheek. You put the truck in drive but I didn't notice where we were going. All I could think about was our fingers entwined and your leg next to mine. We ended up at Sonic—crinkling takeout bags, salty fries, and “Hey There Delilah” by the Plain White T's on the radio.

I'm Already There (The Firebird, 2008–2010)

I waited anxiously in my room for our Friday night date. Any minute now you'd be here. My cellphone rang, an early touch screen with a stylus, and your name popped up. When I answered, you started singing “I'm Already There” by Lonestar in your off-key voice. I blushed and smiled shyly with the phone pressed to my ear. We hung up, and then I heard it: the Firebird's engine roaring down

the street. I rushed to the front door, waiting for you to ring the doorbell.

Home (The Wrangler, 2012–2013)

We climbed into the Jeep, which I lovingly called my pumpkin carriage, and got on the interstate to IKEA in Frisco. Our first apartment looked bare and we needed furniture. We walked the aisles hand in hand, imagining tables and chairs in our new space. We laughed as we sat in display couches and tested out lamps. At checkout, we made our choices and paid. Only then did we realize that our “pumpkin carriage” was too small to fit the iconic flat-pack boxes. We drove back down the interstate with the soft top down, wind in our hair, and boxes sticking out at odd angles all the way to our apartment.

Carrying Your Love With Me (The Tacoma, 2018–2019)

Wanderlust took us to Wimberly, our first road trip with our dog Zeus. We bought a seat cover for him to sit in the back, ears flapping in the wind. The Hill Country roads twisted and turned, and before long he got carsick. We pulled over again and again, letting him rest before driving on. A year later, the backseat changed again. The dog cover was folded away, replaced by a car seat for our first child.

What It Sounds Like (The Gladiator, 2025)

After years with the Tacoma, you decide it’s time for an upgrade and choose a Gladiator with a diesel engine to last you many years. Our little family has finally settled into a rhythm. Our daughter’s car seat has grown with her over five years: rear facing, forward facing, and booster. Our soundtrack shifts from “Baby Shark” to *KPop Demon Hunters*. She sings at the top of her lungs, I harmonize, and you sing the boy parts. In a few months we will start the car seat cycle all over again when a new voice joins the chorus.

Remember When

That old photo in my box reminds me how much time has passed and how many miles we've driven together. I remember young love, roaring engines, mountain trails, and the mellow rhythms of family life. Each of these cars tells the story of our love, each holding a special place in my heart.

The Towel

Alexa Rangel

How do you know your youth is slipping away?
It's not as sudden as the harsh sound of a silver spoon
Falling and thundering on a marble floor
Rather, like a salty beach towel slowly absorbing the sun
Evaporating the water
Until all that's left is sand, sea salt, and faint memories
Of summer

My towel is drying up
It feels like just yesterday it was soaking wet
I even tried squeezing it to make it dry faster
I was so eager to be dry
We all are

Now, I realize that it won't be long
Until the sun has stolen all the water
I have begun to panic
The only reminder of summer I had
Is slowly dying in my arms
I never realized, but it is
Now I try to shield the sun with my hands
In a foolish attempt to save summer
To savor it just a moment more

O stupid sun
You thief, you coward full of gluttony
You go by many names, don't you?

You
never stop,

never pause,
never give
 You
 Take
 Take
 Take
Take

When all that's left is a dry beach towel
You'll know your youth has slipped away
You will wrap yourself in it and feel only one thing
Thick, gold-embroidered letters on soft cotton that read
"Nostalgia"

Cloudcroft

Valerie Gonzalez



Where the mountains touch the clouds and hummed a lullaby
Surrounded by trees covered in snow and dark foggy skies,
We arrived at our place and had a snowball fight.

We walked around town,
My Converse drenched from the snow
We entered a gas station that I've never been to before.

I felt so foreign, finally on my own
Being surrounded by friends,
We never wanted this night to end.

I looked outside and felt a tear stream down my eye
This is exactly what I wanted, a place that won't leave my mind.
I went on a walk with my hot tea,
It was past twelve and there was no one around me.

Grey hazy sky that caused the trees to slowly fade
I remember taking it all in, knowing that this won't happen again.
Walking in silence as I sip my tea
There's no better place than with the trees.

“Nostalgia: Memories of Childhood in the Basin”

Julie Lyon



Creature: Werewolf

Mayah Ritter

Sometimes I feel like a werewolf
Where I transform into the man
Masked in a world too modern urbanly;
Unused, rurally; but claimed,
Colonially, by all.

As I stand in the wind I feel my hair flow
Farther behind me, no more styled
Slavishly to the products I bought-
Bringing no nutrients,
Not for living naturally,
Never giving it the chance to grow
Gruesomely wild,
Werewolf-like.

Sometimes I feel like a werewolf
Wishing I was away,
Answering to nature,
Naturally giving myself
Mercilessly to its contents,
Conceiving a natural flow

Flourishing in my body,
Bringing happiness,
Happening away from people,
Purposefully alone.
Alongside the dog-
Devilishly crazy but not owned
Overtly by me but
By nature-
Naming him would be difficult
Dawning that his trade in wares
Werewolf-like

Sometimes I feel like a werewolf
Where I started climbing trees,
Trespassing lands,
Leaving marks on my hands,
Honoring my spirit,
Selfishly taking from the city
Civically uncivil, as I know
Knocking and handshakes
Harbor honor in capitalistic humanity,
Humming no more tunes,
Tuned into wildness,
Werewolf-like in the city.

A Personal Reflection on *The Lord of the Rings* and Nostalgia

Anthony Buenning

An old friend and I used to have a passionate, but friendly, disagreement about the film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. He argued that Peter Jackson's decision to exclude "The Scouring of the Shire" chapter was a massive mistake while I argued that it was necessary. In my view, film audiences wouldn't have had the patience for the scene in an already long film. This is a view I still hold today to some extent, but during my most recent reread of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, I started to see that my friend was right, but not because he wanted a more complete adaptation of the books he loves. No, he realized that not including the events of the Scouring of the Shire severely undercuts J.R.R. Tolkien's message on the dangers of overindulging in nostalgic wish-fulfillment.

I have never truly understood why some people look back on their high school years with longing, with a desire of returning to those days. Maybe it's because of my own experiences in high school. Even though I don't remember as much as I'd like, I remember enough to know that much of high school was good, but a lot of it wasn't. The friends I made and the artistic outlet I'd found in theatre were good. Feeling pressure to hide (to remain unnoticed, like a ghost), fearing vulnerability, fearing being seen as "weird" isn't something I'd like to revisit. To this day, I struggle with untangling those fears, and it's been over twenty-five years since I haunted the rooms and halls of Odessa High School.

Looking back is seductive. The greater the distance, the better the past looks. For many, nostalgia seduces us into believing that the past was better than it actually was. Nostalgia accomplishes

this by coloring the past through the lens of simplicity. As the world around us grows more and more complicated, the past lurks in the back of our minds, gaslighting and seducing us with its seeming anti-complexity.

Unfortunately, the simplicity presented to us through nostalgia is a mental and emotional illusion. The pain of the past is still there, distorted maybe, but it's like Saruman and Denethor becoming too intimate with the Palantirs in their possession. Although Saruman and Denethor are intelligent and mentally resilient, spending too much time gazing into a distorted picture of reality eventually leads to their downfall, the former murdered by his companion and the latter burned alive.

Nostalgia is a coping mechanism we employ when our world becomes too much. It can be a source of joy and peace, even if it's tinged with a bit of sorrow for a past we no longer have access to. Yet, if we aren't careful, nostalgia can be a pitfall, an abyss that can swallow us as easily as an unguarded Palantir. Or, to bring us back to mine and my friend's argument, nostalgia can blind us from the dangers of our present because we become lost in an isolated, idyllic paradise, like the Shire.

The Shire in Jackson's films is a fantasy. The Shire in Tolkien's books is England, or rather, home. England did not escape the violence of two world wars. People faced economic hardships and the terror of bombing raids. Although Tolkien consistently stated that *The Lord of the Rings* isn't an allegory of his time as a soldier during World War I, the traces of his wartime experiences permeate every single word. Tolkien knew that the violence of war does not leave a countryside and its people alone, no matter how beautiful and peaceful it is, no matter how simple and pure its people. War affects everyone, and Tolkien ensures that those effects are included in *Lord of the Rings*. And that's where Jackson's trilogy flounders. Jackson takes the Shire and transforms it into a fantasy, a place of peace and tranquility that waits to

welcome back its heroes with open arms and a pint of the Gaffer's home brew. Jackson misses the true tragedy of the Scouring of the Shire: The hobbits were unprepared for the violence of the outside world, and that left them vulnerable to subjugation and tyranny.

From the start of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the hobbits are staunchly isolationist and anti-intellectual (with the exception of a couple of "cracked" hobbits, of course). For most hobbits, if it doesn't involve their local affairs, their families and friends, or their gardens, they don't think it's worth knowing. As the hobbit Ted tells Sam, "'you do [hear strange things], if you listen'" (*Fellowship* 43). Avoiding news of the world, especially anything that troubles or overcomplicates their simple lives, is a valued characteristic for most hobbits. Actively rejecting the perceived chaos of the outside world helps maintain their sense of peace, and it is comforting. By ignoring the world, they don't have to feel anxious about it. However, it's this avoidance that makes the hobbits especially vulnerable to Saruman's takeover of the Shire in *The Return of the King*.

Peter Jackson's adaptation of *The Return of the King* falls into the same trap I imagine Tolkien saw when he read *Beowulf*. In his seminal essay, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," Tolkien struggles to categorize the poem. He argues that *Beowulf* is not an epic in the traditional sense, but a "heroic-elegiac poem" ("The Monsters and the Critics" 127). In other words, the *Beowulf* poet laments a time and a culture that is dead, when "men were men" and loyalty to one's lord carried an honorable weight. By labeling *Beowulf* an elegy, Tolkien draws our attention to the mournful quality of the poem. And since the *Beowulf* poet could not have possibly been alive when the events of *Beowulf* took place, that mournful quality is based on a nostalgia that is even more blind than if the poet had lived in that world and at that time. The poet's nostalgia is doubly blinded by an imagined history, an imagined cultural landscape that did not exist.

Like the *Beowulf* poet, Jackson's *Return of the King* imagines war as something that cannot possibly touch the purity of the Shire and its inhabitants. Jackson transforms Tolkien's unintentional allegory of war into an escapist fantasy that plays at war. In that vein, I'm reminded of a behind-the-scenes story. When Jackson attempted to direct Christopher Lee on how a man sounds when stabbed in the back, Lee replies, "Have you any idea what kind of noise happens when somebody's stabbed in the back? Because I do" (Woerner). Lee forcibly reminded Jackson that Lee was a World War II veteran who intimately knew the violence of war. I can only imagine how Jackson felt, but it might have felt like the embarrassment a child experiences when they learn what they'd imagined is nothing compared to the real thing.

As comforting as nostalgia can be in its various forms, whether we're seeking the comfort of the past or the comfort of a past that exists only in fantasy, nostalgia's seductive qualities are dangerous. It prevents us from existing in and appreciating the present. Worse, overindulging in nostalgia prevents us from addressing the present's very real problems. We cannot return to the Shire because the Shire in Jackson's *Return of the King* doesn't exist, and if we confuse nostalgia with reality, we may find that our homes, our lives could be burned beyond all recognition, leaving us to wonder "How could this have happened here?" I never want to have first-hand knowledge of how a man sounds when he is stabbed in the back. We should listen to those who have had to suffer that kind of trauma so no one else has to experience it. Avoiding, denying, and rejecting the horrors of the world is easy; it's harder to learn about, recognize, and face them. The horrors of the world won't fall back simply because we hide within our blanket forts. No, they will roll over our makeshift defensive shields and crush us if we don't see the danger and learn how to deal with it.

Cutting the Scouring of the Shire from *The Return of the King* gives audiences a pass, an escape from reality that blinds us to

cruelty and violence, both the cruelty and violence that can be perpetrated against us *and* the cruelty and violence that we can perpetuate onto others. Some of the hobbits participate in and endorse Saruman's brutal takeover of the Shire, in part to bolster their own sense of importance and in part to save themselves. Jackson gives audiences an idyllic fantasy to escape to, a safe space, but Tolkien knew that safe spaces only exist if we are willing to protect them. To protect them, we have to remove the blinders of nostalgic wish-fulfillment and recognize the vulnerability of those spaces. Learning about the complex world outside our perspective is one method for saving places like the Shire.

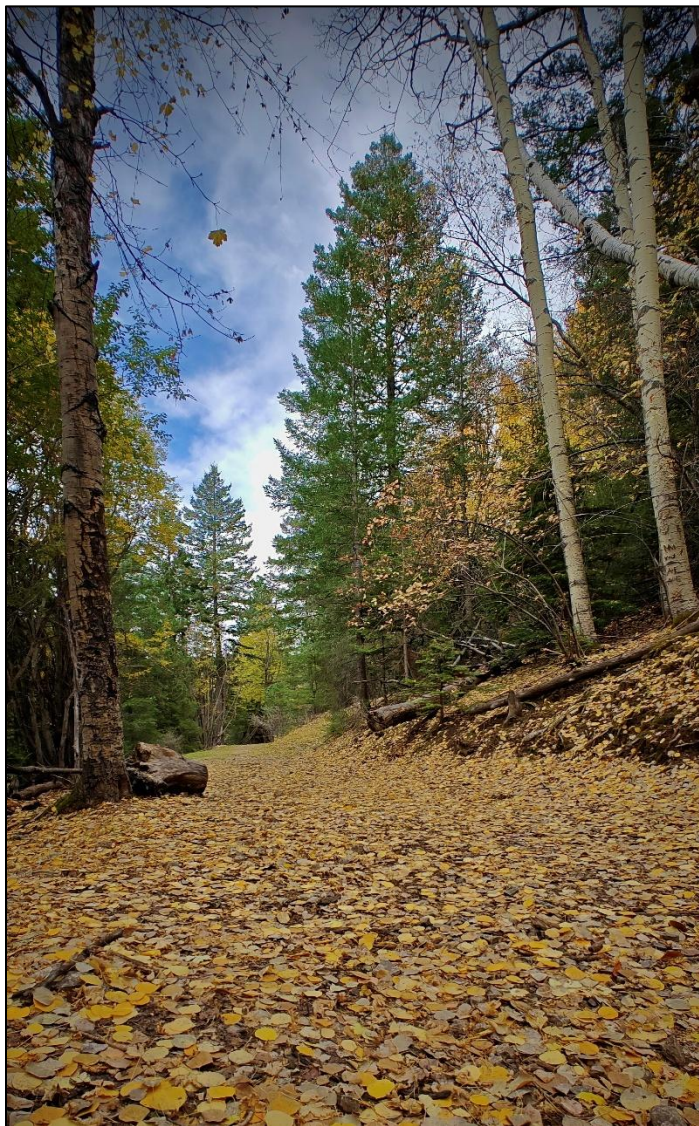
Escaping and shielding ourselves from the world is necessary from time to time as a rest from overwhelming realities, but completely ignoring or rejecting the outside world breeds more trouble down the road. My friend was right. "The Scouring of the Shire" should have been included in Jackson's adaptation. Sacrificing an important plot point for convenience, because including it would make audiences uncomfortable, misses the point of why Tolkien did not end *The Lord of the Rings* with Aragorn being crowned king of Gondor. To work through the problems of the world, sometimes we have to sit with discomfort rather than bask in the insubstantially sweet glow of nostalgia. Repairing harm requires a kind of work that nostalgia prevents, and being comfortable with discomfort is a necessary step away from the false light that nostalgia offers. Mistaking a nostalgic mirage for safety can result in us being lost in the Dead Marshes to light little candles of our own.

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Season of Changing

Dante Garcia



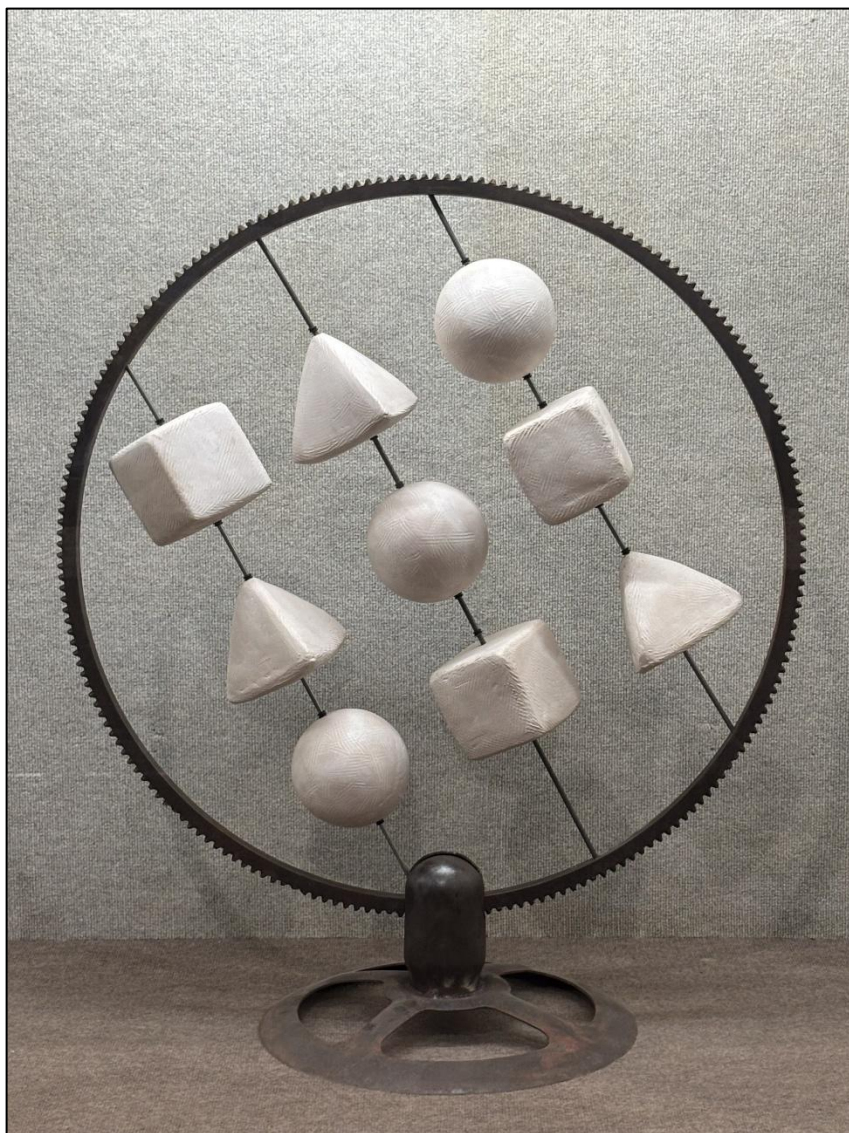
Walking with a Flower

Wendy Cervantes

Flowers brown like the wood,
sitting on earth, trying to break its root,
to walk through the dark night in sadness,
while the bear and the coyote lay dead in the rain.
And on its arms, she holds the moon,
and the emptiness it possesses.
It is quite heavy;
She has no space for anything else.
She wonders if the universe is as small as she is.
Trying to embrace herself with a song
Without trying to cry,
She walks and walks
Through the dark rainy night,
She slows down,
And starts closing its petals
One by one.

ODee Odd Ode to Oden

Daiken Asakawa



Flowers and Memories

John Herrington

The following is a haibun, a Japanese writing style that intersperses prose with haiku. While the style was established by Bashō in the 17th century, this work is more properly inspired by Ikkyū's "Skeletons," the haiku of Kobayashi Issa, and Ryōkan's poetry.

I can't remember when the flowers appeared dull for the first time, when the menagerie of colors I once treasured escaped into the background—never completely gone, but never truly there. Nor do I know when the music that once routinely moved me to tears became mere ambience. I don't know when my daily walks transformed into a burden to overcome.

Will you return soon
and illuminate the way?

I'm lost without you

Obscured by the fog
tears flow into the river—
Moon's bright reflection

Yet, I remember all too well how I longed for the past, for the days when everything was simple and joyous and perfect; the days when the sheer abundance of splendor deflected tragedy and sorrow that everyday living presented.

Rising and setting...

The Sun, unbothered by the
passing days and nights

Like a flash of lightning, it struck me suddenly that my happiness never arose in shirking the past altogether, but in reinvigorating it. In days gone by, I reminisced not to passively yearn for what used to be, but to allow old memories to infuse my present experience with new meaning, to experience the past as something living in the present. The flowers of the field were at their most colorful when I remembered the millions of years of birth and death that brought them to me in the present moment.

What a fool I've been!

This whole world contained within
one blooming flower

A final acceptance of what I had suddenly come to realize: the past is always being born in the present. To reminisce is more than to indulge in a bittersweet nostalgia, more than to simply keep the past alive; to reminisce is to produce something altogether new in the present moment. No longer hiding from my memories, nor averting my eyes from what lay before me, I could finally wander freely between past and present. Emerging from this unity within me—within all of us, perhaps—is a wellspring of novelty, of beauty, of joy.

Free from distinction

Past joys and present beauty

captivate my heart

This world, like a dream;

Void, empty, without root, yet...

flowers bloom and sway

The Ghost of Me

E. St. Claire

It begins in my chest,
a hollow ache
that swells when I remember
the girl I used to be.

I tell myself that only then,
I was beautiful, younger, happier,
full of something I mistook for joy.
And for a second, I almost believe it.
I keep telling myself, that was the version of me
Where only beauty ever lived.

I keep telling myself that back then,
the leaves, the nights,
the days, the photographs.
Everything was beautiful.
And I can almost feel it.

But the truth whispers louder,
and crueler:
when I was there,
I was crying.
When I was there,

I wasn't happy.

So what am I missing?

Not the moment,
and definitely, not the pain.

I miss the way memory softens it all,
the way it turns survival
into something that seems to shine.

Nostalgia is a liar
with kind hands.

It drapes the past in gold,
sands the sharp edges,
turns sorrow into something
worth aching for.

Sanded memories whisper
that I was happy before,
but the whisper lies...
That's just how memory survives,
by rewriting pain
into something easier to hold.

Still,
when the moon rises,
when autumn burns the air with memory,
and the world feels smaller,

I let myself believe.

I close my eyes,
ache for what never truly existed,
and ache for her,
the girl I've reimagined,
the one who looked like joy
even when she wasn't.

Maybe that's what nostalgia means:
It's not the time I want to go back,
not faces, not places,
but the impossible wish
to step into the version of the past
I've painted brighter than it ever was.

Because sometimes the lie
is softer than the truth.
And yet, the hollow pain returns.
I long for the ghost of me,
for golden shadows,
for the self I've already outgrown.

And nostalgia, disguised as memory,
tries to hold up its mirror of deceit,
but this time, in my reflection,
I can finally see

that I'm no longer the girl I used to be.

Remembering

Bonnie Resley

There had been rumors for quite awhile that they might tear down that wonderful old dance hall. It held memories for so many. Marcy had been planning a trip to her old stomping grounds to visit her Aunt Virginia. While in the area, she had hoped to visit that old landmark before its demise. She requested her niece run her by the old dance hall once before she left town.

She carefully made her way up the concrete steps. As she entered that old treasure, she heard the music playing. Why, there was the fiddle player, fiddling away; the drummer keeping the rhythm in the back; the two familiar guitar players on either side of the fiddler. That fiddler had grown up on that stage, and now he was playing one last time.

Her eyes scanned the room for any familiarities. With the music playing in the background, she noticed what was left of some old posters. There was some crepe paper on the two by fours on the walls. She noticed some of her old neighbors sitting around visiting with each other. She smiled at them and they returned friendly nods. She continued traveling across the wooden floor, listening to the music, when she looked up to see him before her.

Could it really be him? He hadn't changed a bit, just a bit more handsome than she remembered. He stared, speechless for a while. He still had that auburn hair with striking Irish green eyes that melted her heart as she stood in awe.

Good evening, Marcy. You look as beautiful as ever, he said admiringly.

Would you like to dance? he queried.

She was speechless and nervous, but smiled and replied, “With you, always.”

He took both of her small hands in his large comforting ones and gently led her onto the dance floor. With her left hand resting on his right shoulder and his right hand supporting the back of her left side, he guided her across the memories of many wonderful years. They waltzed through the many hand-in-hand walks along the river, then gently side-stepped through moonlight drives through the country, under the stars. Her heart raced as he pulled her in close for an ever-so-gentle kiss.

“Come along, Aunt Marcy. It’s getting late and we need to get you back to the Nursing Home. It’s about your dinner time. You need to eat before the food gets cold.”

Marcy faintly heard her niece and turned around to acknowledge her.

“Oh dear!” she responded, as though a bit disoriented.

When she turned back around to tell Jim goodbye, he was nowhere to be found! Where was the band? Where were her old neighbors?

“Here is your coat Aunt Marcy. It’s getting chilly in this dilapidated old building and will be even chillier outside. Watch your step now, Dear.”

As she slowly made her way down the old stairs, she had tears in her eyes. Was it all a dream... her imagination... or was she remembering?

Reflect

Bernadette Perez

I've come to a crossroad in life

I take a step back

Give an image of power of conception

I barely understand

Learning to process

Therefore retain

I just want no interference

Wistfully needing someone

Share my journey

Open my library

Read through the pages

Travel beside me

Write the story

Live with purpose

Clarity

Passion

Discover inner peace

Appreciate

Know my soul without explanation

Come back to me

Return to evidence of character

Trust no one

Thoughtfully bounce back

Light seeping in all directions

Darkness exasperated

For I will not let it be

Creating this image

Overtime growing gracefully

Glass shattered

Into a thousand pieces

Removing obstacles

An end to a new

Yearning to be revisited

Spiral

Christina Ramirez



When I drive home.

Maya Galvan

When I drive, I roll down my windows.

To hear it once again—

The soft swish of cars rushing by,

The lullaby that once comforted me to sleep.

With the murmur of a flashing TV

From my parent's room, glowing through the night.

After a long shift buried by books,

I'd listen to you on the stage.

Brighter than the lights above you,

A voice that brought me comfort

Never knowing me, but you always brought the rainfall.

She used to be by my side.

We'd stroll beneath the streetlights.

Her happiness was shown outwardly in an endearing manner.

A pearl unaware of her glow,

A treasure I had to dive deep to find,

And I am eternally grateful because of her.

Life was lighter

With the pearl above the sea.

Mornings are blurring into dreams that I refuse to wake up from.
Back when I lived in a house with a bitter man,
A lone girl who would sleep with animals,
The animals stayed silent.
As she drifted to sleep,
Their eyes kept watch.

Now, the low rumbling of a car engine greets me.
But it carries a sliver of fear.
A fear of others missing a swing of the wheel.
One distracted second--
And then the piercing screech,
The metal's scream,
Pieces of metal and plastic scattered across the floor.

Anatomy of a Memory

E. St. Claire

We miss a time that's already gone,
the small moments that we never thought
would matter this much.

We miss the little hours that folded into years
and the sound of laughter echoing through old rooms.

We miss the way we once believed
life would always stay the same,
only to learn that place no longer remains.

We miss the little things
we became obsessed with:
the chipped mug, the smell of rain,
the song we kept playing on repeat.

We miss the golden shine
that memory paints across the past,
how it smooths everything out
and makes it look softer than it was.

Our mind protects us that way.
It blurs the hurt

and keeps the picture, not the pain.

When we look back,
we don't remember the crying,
only what the tears became:
a lesson, a story we tell ourselves
to survive the years between now and then.

Old photographs make it worse.
We look at the smiles,
forgetting it might've been
a bad day behind that frame.
We call it beautiful anyway.
We keep polishing old memories
until they shine like gold,
a luster they may have never held.

We miss our children being little,
forgetting how tired we were
or how hard those days really felt.
Time makes saints of our yesterdays;
we remember the warmth, not the weight.

That's what nostalgia does.

It's not a time machine
but a little lying filter,
a soft lie that turns the ordinary into myth
and the struggle into victory,
something just soft enough to hold.

And maybe that's the whole point.
We look back to understand,
to open every memory again
and dissect them into pieces,
trying to see what's still alive inside.

And somehow, even when it hurts,
we find fragments of ourselves
still beating there,
still learning how to love
what we survived before.

The Nostalgic Smell of Morning Dew

Dylan Garcia

It takes me back to Andrews

To waking up early to watch Saturday morning cartoons

Shaman King, Yu-Gi-Oh!, Pokémon, I remember it all

Just watching tv for three or more hours

Playing with toys and enjoying life

That nostalgic smell reminds me of dawn

Waking up to head to school

With my brother accompanying me

We would make the long trek

With jokes and shenanigans a plenty

I can remember the smell of dew

This one time me and my mother walked to our new house

Early but exciting

At that point, the idea of a new place still held wonder

We would stay and wait for people to come

To turn on the utilities and ready us for a new abode

There is nothing like the smell of dew

And the feel of a tennis ball on your back

Thrown by one of your peers in middle school
The right amount of fun and energy to start a day
A rousing game of wall ball before we would shamble back into the
classrooms

The smell of dew is like the smell of new
Back then, the smell of new meant a new video game
Or a new pack of Yu-Gi-Oh cards
Now, new isn't so fun
Back then...I didn't fear the smell of new

I much prefer the smell of dew though

The smell of dew in the morning holds so much nostalgia
Reminders of simpler times, peaceful moments, and preparing for
days ahead
I'd love to sprinkle a bit of morning dew
On everything I do and every moment I live

Contributors & Editors

Daiken Asakawa *Contributor*

Daiken Asakawa is an art instructor at Odessa College with an MFA in Sculpture from Washington State University (WSU). He has been teaching in various schools and at different levels for more than 20 years. Daiken's work has been exhibited in multiple states. Him and his students have been showing their work locally every month for the past year and a half.

Anthony Buenning *Contributor*

Born and raised in Odessa, Anthony Buenning was reading and writing even before he knew how to decipher the black marks on pages. That love of reading, writing, and the deciphering of symbols propelled him into earning a PhD in English from the University of North Texas and becoming a Professor of English at OC. Anthony's favorite writers include Virginia Woolf, Adam Silvera, Toni Morrison, Gillian Flynn, and James Baldwin. With only the slightest provocation, he will gladly infodump on movies, Shakespeare, and psychological trauma.

Wendy Cervantes *Contributor*

Wendy Cervantes is currently a student at the University of Texas Permian Basin (UTPB), pursuing a double major in English and Communication. Her academic journey has been shaped by a deep interest in language, storytelling, and the ways we connect through words. It wasn't until she enrolled in a creative writing class that she truly found her voice — and unexpectedly fell in love with writing poetry.

What began as an assignment quickly turned into a passion, as she discovered how poetry could capture emotions, experiences, and

ideas in ways that felt both powerful and personal. Since then, poetry has become more than just a creative outlet — it's a way for her to explore the world, reflect on her own experiences, and connect with others on a deeper level.

As she continues her studies, she's excited to keep growing as a writer, communicator, and student of language, always looking for new ways to express herself and share meaningful stories.

Kat Copeland *Contributor*

Kat Copeland. Published visual and written word artist. Professional photographer. Organizer of family friendly arts events and open mics. Member of Permian Basin Poetry Society, Chapter of Poetry Society of Texas.

Cynthia Cray Hill *Contributor*

Cynthia Cray Hill lives in west Texas with her family. She writes short stories, essays, and poetry.

Brianna Dunston *Editor*

Brianna Dunston is a writing and tech literacy tutor at Odessa College with a BFA in Creative Writing from Stephen F. Austin State University (SFASU). Her work has been published in three editions of SFASU's undergraduate literary journal *HUMID* and three editions of *The Piney Dark*, an East Texas horror contest anthology series. She was also involved in the editing and publication of the Subplots (SFASU's Creative Writing Club) *Surviving the Storm* chapbook.

Maya Galvan *Contributor*

Maya Galvan was born and raised in Odessa, Texas. She is currently working on her degree and planning to transfer to the University of

North Texas. She currently works part-time as a hostess at the Shrimp Boat. Her family consists of her mom, dad, three brothers, and their dog.

Dante Garcia *Contributor*

Dante Garcia enjoys the quiet and simple things in life but somehow ends up in all his wife's creative projects. He contributed a landscape photo to this issue after being dragged to yet another location with a camera in hand. He works hard, supports his wife's wild ideas, and takes pictures of whatever she points at. He prefers nature, calm places, and letting her take the lead while he enjoys the view.

Dylan Garcia *Editor/Contributor/SKD Advisor*

Dylan Garcia is a poet from Odessa, Texas who has lived in West Texas his whole life. Through highs and lows he has found a passion in poetry and sharing his experiences with others through it. He hopes people can be inspired to be vulnerable and express themselves through the emotions and relatable experiences he shares with his writing and performing.

Valerie Gonzalez *Editor/Contributor*

Valerie Gonzalez is a student at Odessa College. She is majoring in Psychology to become a clinical psychologist. Valerie was doing research and reading one of Jung's books. There was a section that said poets and philosophers played a huge part in acknowledging what psychology is. Poetry for expressing emotions and philosophy for diving deeper into the unknown with unanswered questions. So, learning to be creative with her words is something she wants to get better at and continue to do. Valerie believes that we are made to create, not consume! Nostalgia was a reminder of where she comes from and how much she loves winter.

John Herrington *Contributor*

John Herrington teaches history at Odessa College. He is originally from Galveston County, Texas. He's a big fan of black metal, *Attack on Titan*, and old video games.

Ashok Karra *Editor*

Dr. Ashok Karra is an Associate Professor of Government at Odessa College and the Senior Advisor of Sigma Kappa Delta, Psi Alpha chapter. He is currently listening to Huntrix's "Golden." He writes semi-regularly at <http://www.ashokkarra.blog>

Julie Lyon *Contributor*

Julie Lyon is a student of Ceramics and an educator of Instructional Technology & Business Computer Applications at Odessa College. She describes herself as having a bit of an odd sense of humor, and has learned that most people are not nearly as entertained by that sense of humor as she is. This is usually evident in her ceramic creations. Julie has a son, Zac, who lives in Sweden where he is an engineer currently focusing on engineering prosthetics and orthotics.

Sylvia Medrano *Editor*

Sylvia Medrano is a student, tutor, and officer of Sigma Kappa Delta's Psi Alpha Chapter at Odessa College. An emerging artist majoring in Art, she gravitates toward surrealism and the deeper parts of the mind. Sylvia expresses herself through visual art and poetry, and she values any space where creativity helps others find their voice.

Barry Phillips III *Contributor*

Barry Phillips the Younger has been a member of the Odessa College art faculty since 1987 and is a former member of the board of directors for the Texas Association of Schools of Art. Professor Phillips holds a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy from Texas Tech University and a Master's degree in Fine Art from Texas A&M - Commerce. His studio work has been exhibited in over 100 shows nationwide. He is the past recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Regional Fellowship in Drawing and Printmaking as well as a Kimbrough Award from the Dallas Museum of Art. In 2012, he was named Community Statesman for the Arts by the Heritage of Odessa Foundation.

Bernadette Perez *Contributor*

Bernadette Perez's work has appeared in *The Wishing Well*; *Musings*, *Poems 4 Peace*. Contribution to *La Familia: La Casa de Colores*. Included in the mega-unity poem by Juan Felipe, and *The Americans Museum Inscription* by Shinpei Takeda. Published in over 100 publications between 2015-2025.

Luis Prieto *Contributor*

Luis Prieto is a Latino author from Midland, Texas. He graduated from Midland High School and... well, that's about it education-wise. He is the author of the novels *The Smallest of Mercies*, *Hermanos: The Whole Story*, as well as the novella *Ternura*. He currently lives in a trailer out in the country and hopes to eventually move to a trailer in a nicer part of town.

Christina Ramirez *Contributor*

Christina Ramirez is a longtime resident of Odessa, and she takes ceramics at OC. This piece of work was inspired by her long ago love of geology and love of fossils.

Abisue Ramos *Editor*

Aranelly Ramos *Editor*

Aranelly is a Psychology and English tutor at Odessa College, where she is a dedicated member of the editorial group. With a sharp eye for detail and commitment to help shape content that uplifts voices and supports team leadership missions. She is driven by the desire to create meaningful, high-impact work where everyone's voice is heard, and every work is seen to be published.

Irlanda Ramos *Editor*

Alexa Rangel *Contributor*

Alexa is a passionate, multidisciplinary artist currently enrolled as a dual credit student at OCTECHS. She is interested in sharing her art with the world and making an impact. She strives to break norms and make a name for herself as an artist, one piece at a time.

Bonnie Resley *Contributor*

Bonnie Resley grew up in the Houston area. She taught school for 30 years. She appeared in three local theater productions. She also performed in MTC singing and dancing groups. She was cast as Mary Poppins in a locally filmed independent movie. She is recent past president of the Permian Basin Dance Club. She has shared her poetry through open mics as well as hosting several of them. She recently judged a poetry slam.

Mayah Ritter *Contributor*

While traditionally a fine artist, Mayah Ritter tends to use writing and poetry in a manner to decipher internal dialogue. Her physical mediums in art tend to focus on experience, thought, and objects of emotion. While her writings become more of a direct connection to those emotions, and often, her first reaction to them. She finds art not just an expression of self, but her true life force in this world. Without it she cannot experience it, without it she cannot learn, and without it she cannot create. These are the three principles of her art, and the basis of all her writings.

Nicole Roberts *Contributor*

Nicole B. Roberts is an award-winning artist and author who geeks out on symbolism and extracting meaning from ordinary life. Her recent art and poetry book, *Whispers of Womb & Wilderness*, was the recipient of the International Impact award for Female Empowerment. She is the founder of Girls Who Write, whose mission is to reclaim the power of the collective female voice one word, one woman, one writer at a time.

Mallory Sanchez *Contributor*

Mallory Sanchez is a librarian at Odessa College. She loves reading, observing nature, and spending time with her loving husband and sassy daughter. Her nature photos have been featured in previous editions of *OC Oraciones*, and has contributed wildlife blog posts to the Coastal Prairie Conservancy.

E. St. Claire *Contributor*

E. St. Claire is Mexican writer based in Texas and an Art student at Odessa College. She enjoys exploring the vast landscape of emotions, grief, love, and the deepest, darkest places of the mind.

She finds inspiration in nature, the universe, the moon's quiet pull; an imagery that is woven into the bones of her writing. Her poems are passionate, introspective, bold, and often have a cosmic tone. She balances life as a mother, wife, student, and tutor, and is constantly intertwining her everyday world into art and creation.

Lawrence Sticca *Contributor*

Just prior to joining Odessa College, Lawrence Sticca was accepted to present workshops at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, School of Hotel & Tourism Management on Micro Credentials in THM in October 2024, when he was also elected to the board of the Society of Travel & Tourism Educators. He taught Tourism & Hospitality Management at Raffles College, Singapore, Galen University, the University of Belize & also for the Bermuda Tourism Authority.

His recent work experience in the industry was with the Bermuda National Trust as Museum & Gift Shop Operator & Airbnb Super host. These experiences provided him with insights to keep current with the trends & opportunities in THM. As a former Lecturer at Bermuda College for the past 25 years, he's been a Certified Hospitality Educator, since 2015.

He enjoys developing courses, seminars and externships to ensure qualified students are equipped to join the Tourism & Hospitality industry, here in West Texas or worldwide, to improve the industry's professionalism & obtain fulfilling careers.

About Sigma Kappa Delta

Sigma Kappa Delta is the National English Honor Society for two-year colleges. The Odessa College Psi Alpha chapter celebrates student creativity through writing, literature, and the arts. *OC Oraciones* is our annual literary journal dedicated to honoring the voices and stories of our campus and community.

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A special thanks goes to Dr. Karra, our chapter advisor, for his guidance, encouragement, and unwavering commitment to the growth of our writers and artists. Your passion makes *OC Oraciones* possible.