



A University of Houston-Clear Lake Community Publication

Acknowledgements

Lead Editor: Colin Brock

Logo: Russell Zakes

Submission Selection: Emma Beasley, Angela Pennington, Matt Smith

Formatting: Regan Joswiak, Angela Pennington, Russell Zakes

The individuals whose work made this possible

To those who carry on

and continue

to persevere

Table of Contents

Written Works

<i>Giant Squid Spunk</i> – Janice Bethany	4
<i>Digna (You Are Worthy)</i> – Karolyne Galdamez	5
<i>Failure</i> – William Trask	6
<i>Another Day’s Grace</i> – Nellin N. McIntosh	7
<i>Please Continue</i> – Oscar Gamboa	8
<i>Deer Hunter</i> – Michael Scroggins	9
<i>Through the Void</i> – Eileen Celeste Burnett	10
<i>Pressure</i> – Viera Aracely	11
<i>Warfare of Fire</i> – Anonymous	12
<i>Overcome</i> – Andrew Bennett	13
<i>An Allegory</i> – S.R Moffit	14
<i>Last Month, 2020</i> – Anne Ngo	15
<i>Dead Children’s Playground</i> – Megan Sovine	16
<i>Soledad</i> – Sarai Argüelles	17
<i>To Fly</i> – Evrin Baykal	18
<i>Our Time to Shine</i> – Joan Pedro	19

Visual Works

<i>Next Gen; Rest Read; Africa Day</i> – Anjola Coker	20–22
<i>Lost in Anxiety but Hope is Always Near</i> – Joshua Collins	23

Multimedia

<i>A Text From Me to You</i> – Tammy Tran	24
--	----

Written Works

Giant Squid Spunk
Janice Bethany

Watch her, the Kraken, on camera:
shape-shifter, color-changer, bulbous
head over a moving circumference.

Sensing prey, she caresses a decoy
with one arm in a dexterous loop.
Quickly she rejects it, and the gangling
octet shoots off.

She cannot be tamed.
She knows nothing of disco,
but with aplomb dances
a giant-squid boogie,
eight tentacles an orgy of one.

Never think you are too complex.
All eight arms lay eggs and squirt ink.
All have their own brains and networks,
eight sovereign powers under one.
What her top brain does—
you tire to think.

One-brained and frazzled,
you note she never stops.
Even in sleep she treads, she treads.
If an arm is lost, she grows it back.
Such spunk, such muscle in the Giant Squid.
Get over yourself. Get out of bed.

###

© 2021 Janice Bethany

Digna (You are Worthy)
Karolyne Galdamez

I can tell you a million times:
Morning, noon, and night,
You are resplendent!
You are ingenious!
You are worthy!

I can repeat these verses:
Until the wind bows with envy,
And the flowers wilt in gloom,
And the stars twinkle fades.

I can carve your name upon every stone:
While mother earth cries,
And the moon hides behind the sun,
And the oceans pout in rage.

I can beat your beauty into existence:
And Menelaus will begin the war for you,
And poets shall deem you their muse,
For you name shall be their battle cry!

For truth wields power,
And your power dwells within your essence.
Your very being reverberates with It!

But you must repeat these stanzas:
Until your mind annihilates the shame that clings to you,
And your heart eradicates the guilt that haunts you,
And you soul shall be reborn.

Failure
William Trask

Failure.

Defined as “lack of success.”

Success.

Defined as “the accomplishment of an aim or purpose.”

Purpose.

Defined as...well I suppose it depends on who you ask.

Some find purpose in life by giving back to others, some find purpose in life by following religion or spirituality, some find purpose by achieving material wealth, and some find purpose in just being who they are, some find purpose by finding a reason to get out of bed the next day.

The point being: would one who finds purpose in one of the listed ways consider someone who finds purpose in another as a failure?

Everyone has struggles. We all fight battles we never let the world see. Many people lose those battles each and every year.

Yet here you are.

“So far you’ve survived 100% of your worst days.” – unknown

Find a purpose, find a reason, find an idea, a thought, a spark, a cinder, a glimmer,
 Find something that makes you want to be you for just one more day.

Then do it again.

And again.

And again.

To discover, to learn, to experience, to design, to create, to exist

Find your purpose.

And if someone says “No! You can’t do that!” ask them

“But, why?”

Why should I let you, someone who doesn’t know my struggle, my story, my purpose,

Tell me that I can’t do the thing that makes me want to be alive.

© 2021 William Trask

Another Day's Grace
Nellin N. McIntosh

So I see myself in the Spirit
 Down on one knee – head bowed
 Sword on my side just waiting,
 Waiting ... for His Word right now
 As I wait I begin to wonder....
 Was He at all, by this Knight
 Well pleased?
 With my walk in His Word today
 Before bowing now...
 To my knees?

I'm feeling a bit heavy laden ...
 So very easily I genuflect
 My heart throbs
 Not solely from its beating
 But pulsates thumps
 With pains and regrets
 But though scathed and even a bit tattered
 Very weary and somewhat bruised
 I'm ready to continue in this battle
 For this fight I know I can't lose

So I wait ...
 Quietly in His presence
 Pondering His very next command
 But then He gently reaches forward

Upon my shoulders and places His hand
 He speaks words of rest and comforts...
 Words that so quickly restore
 So there He begins to heal me
 As I kneel before His Poise
 And with feeling a surge of energy,
 At last! – To my feet I rose!

Inviting was His presence...
 A face of sweet delight
 A smile which shone like the sun
 And His eyes... they looked ever so bright
 He looked deep into my Soul
 I felt His warm love and care
 And I knew in that very moment...
 That I AM His precious Dear
 No more pains, no tears, no worries...
 They all have vanished away
 Just His love, His peace and merry
 So my heart will gladly stay

Until the next day's journey
 I'll stand still before His face
 Continually basking in His presence
 Gaining strength...
 For another day's grace

Please Continue
Oscar Gamboa

I've lost track as to how many times I've opened this notebook. How many times I've picked up this pencil and thought to myself: '*Just draw something, practice*'. At how I would always leave, discouraged that nothing has changed. Nothing has improved.

It was always a rare sight for me to finish a drawing. I could never see the point, so I never bothered. Once I noticed that the drawing on my book didn't match the image on the screen, thoughts of quitting came erupting all at once, I would then immediately close out of the screen and spend the rest of the time I made for drawing doing (things) to distract myself just to help forget what I was doing a few minutes ago.

Often whenever I was done distracting myself, I would normally lay on my bed and stare up at the ceiling, losing myself in thought. I'd often wonder to myself why was I bothering to learn to do something like drawing? Was I just wasting my time? Is it too late to quit now and just forget about all the time I've spent so far?

If I were to be honest, I haven't been doing this for that long. Compared to the stories you read online about how most were relatively young when they gave drawing a shot, I started as an adult. Yet I, still, wanted to give it a go, at the very least. How did I even get here?

That's right, it was those words: "Just give it a try". Instead of adhering to what I was told, maybe I should've just ignored them. Shrug it off entirely.

I didn't.

And I still haven't.

I've tried quitting. Many times, as a matter of fact. Somehow, though, I just kept coming back to my desk, pencil in hand. I kept sitting down and seeing it all the way through, time after time until, it happened. It wasn't perfect, far from it. Nevertheless, after constantly struggling, constantly beating myself up for it, constantly threatening to just pack it, I started seeing those glimmers of light for the first time.

Suffice to say, yes, I still have moments where my final product doesn't turn out how I want it to but that's not the point. Had I not continued, I doubt that moment would ever see the light of day. Drawing or anything that requires even a lick of skill can be difficult, challenging or downright frustrating at times. That can't be denied. Many of us are constantly struggling through our own battles but the point of the matter is that we need to push through it. No matter how much we beg for it, nothing will come and make our lives easier.

Whatever it is you're doing, keep going. It may take you a while and you may feel like that moment will never come. Rest assured, your moment will come and it'll be a sight to behold.

So...Please continue.

© 2021 Oscar Gamboa

Deer Hunter
Michael Scroggins

His father pointed and the boy brought the deer in his sights. For weeks they hadn't found a single buck or doe. But here it was, and it was his to take. His first kill.

He lined the crosshair down and behind the front joint of its legs, right where the heart was. He was thankful he wouldn't see its eyes when it happened. His finger moved on its own and his father's words whispered through his head: exhale and let the kick surprise you.

The rifle roared and the buck fell. His father's cheerful shout was drowned out by the other screams around him.

They were quickly escorted out of the petting zoo.

© 2021 Michael Scroggins

Through the Void
Eileen Celeste Burnett

I watch them
 Passing in the hallways
 Little universes swirling all around me
 Shining bright and happy,
 Full of expectation and purpose.
 I see their shoes, clean and neat,
 Their hair cut in the latest styles
 And wonder what their lives must be like
 As they go about their day
 As I stand in the void
 Created in a time when
 Hearts were cauterized
 Foundations were shaken
 And tears gouged valleys through my soul.
 I watched them
 Then saw them,
 Indifference forged by calendars
 Sweeping them to the next event
 The next rush
 The next high that would still prove
 Empty and void of reason
 Endlessly updating a status that might
 One day reflect
 A human.
 How could they understand?
 How could they know?
 They could not see beyond this
 Oversized chest
 Matronly and awkward
 Thighs thick with the weight
 Of a thousand books read.
 They can't see the mountains and volcanoes

Or the ruins in the evening light,
 Or the lovers turned to husbands
 (Failures and triumphs can look alike
 To the inexperienced heart.)
 And yet I wonder
 As their eyes shift uncomfortably away
 Why they cannot see the beauty
 Of a woman whose heart is bigger than her clothes?
 She ate to fill the void
 Wept to quell the pressure
 Slept to pass the time
 Waiting for when life would
 Feel like living once again.
 But here I am!
 Sentient and free
 Released from the void that
 Threatened to engulf
 My children's potential
 By rite of a weeping angel.
 Now I am a swirling universe
 Racing from room to room
 Revelation to revelation
 Hurdling through the void
 To places yet unknown.
 And though I carry
 The weight of the previous state,
 As oxygen gains hydrogen
 To become water,
 I am more than just the sum of my parts.
 Rich and powerful, I am
 Sated in a presence
 That says Go! Learn! Live!

© 2021 Eileen Celeste Burnett

Pressure
Viera Aracely

Pressure.

It's never easy to deal with.

Even harder to face it alone.

It boils and festers in the pit of your stomach
until you feel the tension all over your body.

Hands shaking, your breath quickens, and worst still, you know what's coming, but can't focus
on anything but the terrible buzzing in your ears.

"Breathe," you tell yourself. "Calm down."

Breathe before you say something you'll regret.

Breathe before you scream in frustration and self-doubt.

Breathe before you let the tears come

to cool down your flushed cheeks.

Breathe...

and walk away.

This will pass just like everything else.

You just have to remember to breathe.

Warfare of Fire
Anonymous

Sitting in the living room in the house on Hackleburg Lane, my father on one side of the room, resting in his worn leather recliner, the familiar smell of tobacco escaping from his pipe; my mother softly humming in the kitchen...*It is well, it is well with my soul...*I sit on the couch Momma just bought for the new house. It's a red leather couch that sticks to my legs anytime I move, making a sound that makes my brother giggle. The sights, smells and sounds are all very familiar and normal in our home. Yet, this evening, I sit in petrified silence watching the bombs drop on the people; smoke pluming above their heads. My mind is consumed with the images of the war as the enemy unexpectedly drops from the sky, opening fire on the people...the people running. Fear racing through their veins as they watch the carnage occurring and the pouring out of blood on the field on which they played...strolled. The carnage surrounding them resembles the war in my home – the massacre of confidence and hope.

My father was a man's man – strong, stout, always smelling of tobacco and sweat. He was THE Chief and trained the probies of the fire department to work hard without getting themselves killed. He would say to them, "You couldn't pour piss outta a boot if the directions was written on the heel!" He would spend his four days off at the fishing house at Matagorda Bay; four days on – four days off – four days on – four days off. The four days on were the most difficult in our home. He would come home tired and strained from the warfare of fire he fought all day. He would collapse into his recliner, pipe gripped between his teeth, and heave a sigh of anticipation for the battle yet to begin.

The GIRL is the youngest of four. Girl, boy, boy, GIRL. Unplanned. Loud. Whiney. Unwanted. In the years between the two girls, eighteen years to be exact, the boys deviled the home with skipped school, fast cars, girlfriends...drugs...jail. A first memory of the GIRL is a late night drive, sitting in a car seat looking for boy #2 as he had gone missing again. Memories such as this riddle the mind of the GIRL. The GIRL resigns that this is why she was unwanted. Too many wars had already taken place.

The battle starts. It's a first but also an echo of clashes past. Screaming. Shouting. Shattering. The sweet smell of tobacco now fades to the scent of the drug. A new drug not smelled before. Momma still singing – *when peace like a river attendeth my way* – I hear her move away from the battle. I move quickly down the red, leather couch away from the struggle, but my brother doesn't giggle at the sound my legs make as the leather sticks to the sweaty flesh. He, instead, hurls the insults driven by the drug. Insults dropped like bombs. There is no protection as the bombs fall without warning upon my ears; the blood pouring from a broken heart. The beginning of the massacre.

*OVERCOME***Andrew Bennett**

You may think the wall is too high to climb
And shrink away in fear from leap of faith
But listen in your soul for heaven's chime
That can be heard through despair's blackest swathe

You have scaled mountains and valleys before
And every time you've overcome it all
You are on a journey to something more
Beyond this life's dance of triumph and squall

The higher built the wall against your might
The higher you are destined to soon fly
Believe that when you fight to scale great height
A greater glory will someday be nigh

There will be falls, disappointments, and loss
But never stop to bury head in sand
Though they add weight upon your earthly cross
Your scars are passports to the promised land

an allegory
S.R. Moffit

-january-

bursting into being,
 a swollen soap bubble,
 glowing high above,
 a house meek and humble.
 loup-garou stumbles into being,
 stares up with almost-human eyes,
 he ambles forth,
 his wool a thin disguise.

-february-

born again is she,
 lower in the sky,
 closer to the house,
 where the bean-sidhe cry.
 loup-garou is her twin,
 he surges where she yields,
 her loving sin,
 tracking blood across the field.

-march-

she weeps as she swells,
 full of unforgiving light,
 illuminating all,
 that has come this night.
 loup-garou led by her hand,
 tonight he took a mother.
 and on the morrow,
 he comes to take another.

-april-

she takes a breath as the house cries,
 basks in its emerging light,
 its fire rivaling her own,
 far too late to win the fight alone.
 loup-garou wears a sheep-skin face,
 soft and warm, in every loving embrace,
 cold as ice on a frozen lake.

-may-

she shines for them every night,
 even as they bar their doors,
 hiding from foe and friend alike,
 afraid to hold one another tight.

loup-garou sleeps soundly at their door,
 yet with every knob's click,
 he will awake,
 licking his lips for more.

-june-

she watches them wander,
 slipping away,
 when they can no longer withstand the
 silence,
 and she cries when she sees their violence.

loup-garou slips between them,
 baring fangs at their feet,
 for he does not care,
 which life he reaps.

-july-

she listens to the promises,
 of an end to the pain,
 yet she knows without justice,
 there is little to be gained.
 loup-garou harms,
 they know his face by now,
 they run towards him with blunt arms,
 but they run inside of his own.

-august-

she tries to guide them,
 even as their forests burn,
 and their numbers dwindle,
 yet some say it will never be their turn.
 loup-garou hears all,
 who speak his name,
 he smiles,
 and blows out each flame.

-september-

she lights the night,
 for those who cannot sleep,
 for those who sit and hold tired hands,
 listening for every beep.

loup-garou is always startled,
 by *them*,
 the ones who come dressed in white,
 who know they must somehow win this
 fight.

-october-

she is afraid,
 but the children go out,
 waving at neighbors,
 little blue squares bouncing about.

loup-garou is tired,
 he slowly follows behind,
 until he sees the distance between them,
 and a chill creeps up his spine.

-november-

she swells,
 the house is awash with light,
 the family's laptop glowing bright,
 nothing comes this night.

loup-garou watches,
 he does not follow,
 he looks up,
 but he is hollow.

-december-

she does not know what will come,
 as snowflakes fall,
 but the house behind her,
 is warm and safe through hallowed halls.
 loup-garou waits,
 and he may always,
 just a few steps behind
 waiting in the doorway.

Last Month, 2020

Anne Ngo

We are living in a dystopia,

The kind people read in long chapter books.

The novels were not familiar, the

way the stories and plots appeared and looked.

It wasn't until we experienced it,

Everyone, you and me.

The trauma, pain, and hurt,

Its similarities were uncanny.

But there, across my window, marks a shift:

Clouds a haze, light and airy, float and drift,

And birds are heard singing, heading down south;

The sun and moon are here, dancing about.

Worries and anxieties carry me,

But I lift my head up, wary yet free.

© 2021 Anne Ngo

First Flight, February 2021, Issue 1

Dead Children's Playground
Megan Sovine

Come, gentle listener. Can I lend you a tale?
 It's not for the craven, too daunting if frail.
 Prepare and bear witness, for a myth quite profound,
 As I unfold the lore
 Of Dead Children's Playground.

In the hushed, tender foothills of old Alabama,
 Once lived a beldam, a witch named Johanna.
 Her small wooden cabin, aside a cliff made of flint,
 Was engulfed with thick hemp weed,
 Dead ivy and mint.

Passerby would evade, and hush whispers of caution
 Detailing the hearsay that was all but forgotten.
 Legend would have it, that one balmy morning,
 The hag slayed two babes, their souls for
 her hoarding.

Take heed, timid listener, for this crime sought
 damnation.

The witch named Johanna endured wide tribulation.
 Her ashes fell swiftly from the stake set ablaze,
 And the townsfolk took comfort

In the thick, squalid haze.

Time passed and time healed, in this slight Southern
 town,
 And in place of old barn houses, new buildings abound.
 The cliff made of flint with a knoll just below,
 Was adorned with a playground,
 And a sleepy willow.

At night, you can see them, the slain babes of past,
 As they jovially scamper on the hillside of grass.
 They hang from the willow, push swings, and give
 chase,
 To fulfill a lost childhood,
 unfairly displaced.

So be wary, earnest listeners. If you venture down
 South,
 And pass by a play yard with a cliff at its mouth,
 You'll witness lost souls, unsettled, and bound
 To the witch's old land, christened
 Dead Children's Playground.

Soledad
Sarai Argüelles

I want to be alone so bad.
Why didn't my mother
just name me Soledad?
How hard could it have been
to just gift me solitude in my own name?
Not to say that I don't love my name.
I'm just saying that with a name like Soledad,
maybe I would've been better prepared
for what was to come,
maybe I'd know when
to stick around or run,
maybe I could actually keep to myself
and let no harm be done.
But, the world is full of a bunch
of "Maybes" and "What ifs",
not to mention so many arguments,
a lot of pain, suffering, and happiness.
And, I know better than to say
that I want to be absolved from all of it.
Because all of it?
I can't get enough of it.
Can't live apart from it.
That's the human experience.
Somehow we're still here,
and I wanna make the most of it
with you.

To Fly
Evrin Baykal

Lean in

Rest peacefully

On a powerful, imperceptible force

Dip, twirl, leap

Under, over, higher

Until unseen to those you once kept at steady gaze. Boundless

Or forever bound?

Infinitely cradled, perpetually fed by endless ribbons of

breath. Somehow satiated by that thing that both empties and fills.

Freedom.

Our Time to Shine
Joan Pedro

As we stay in isolation
let us not be fearful
We are apart to be together
So let us do the needful

There is a greater good for us
And lessons that we need
On all the grace and love to share
To those we did not heed

Be mindful now, be prayerful too
And give to those in need
A six feet hug, a virtual word
And the hope to believe

This too will pass in time to come
And the memory may stay
Of a time we stood together
Shining forth to a new day

Visual Works

Next Gen
Anjola Coker



© 2021 Anjola Coker

Rest Read
Anjola Coker



© 2021 Anjola Coker

Africa Day
Anjola Coker



© 2021 Anjola Coker

Lost in Anxiety but Hope is Always Near

Joshua Collins

From the artist:

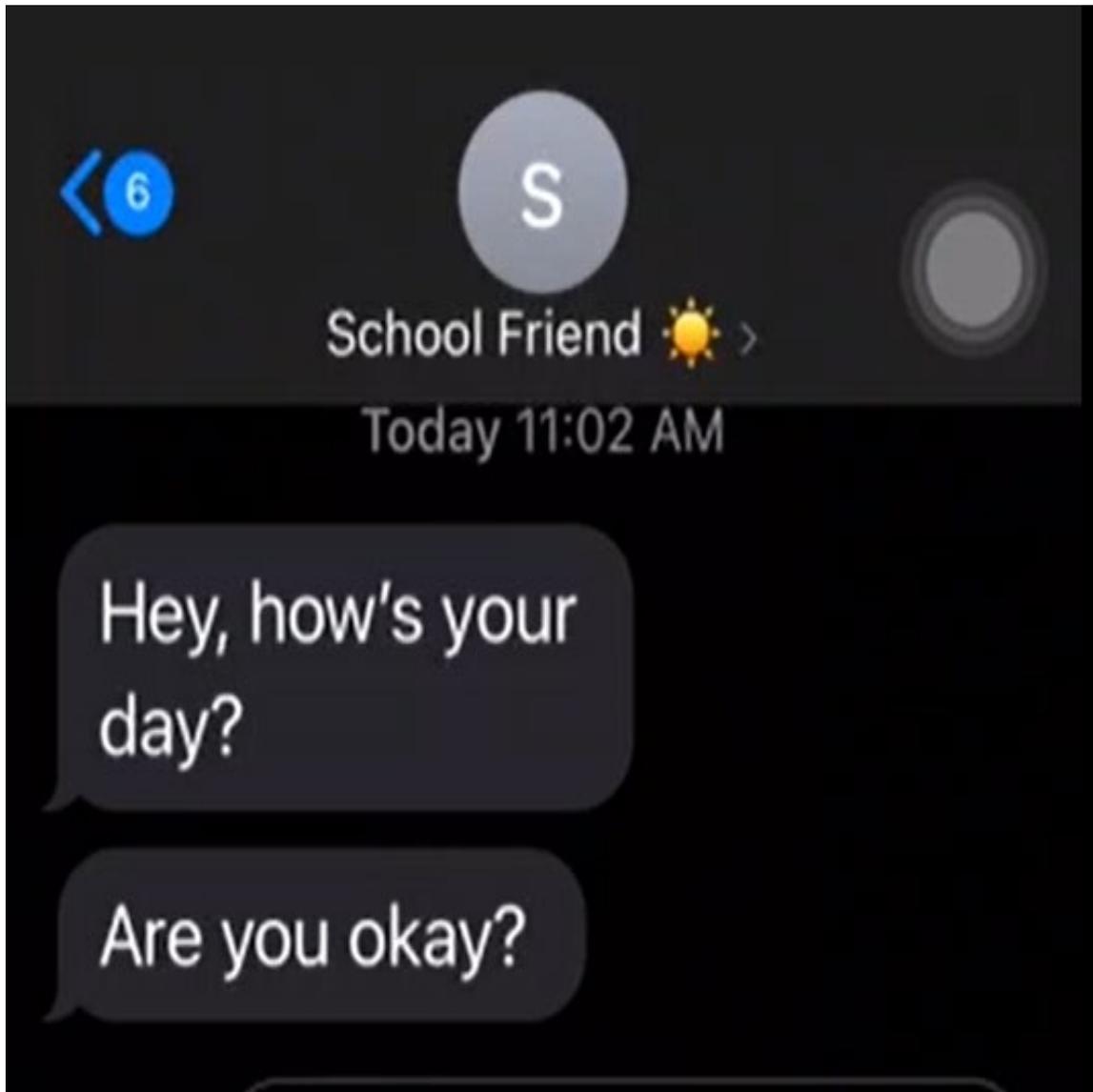
I used warm colors for representation purposes for Hope. Red is a strong color representing the theme perseverance. Orange is an energetic color that usually represents good health. Yellow is a calming color that helps with happiness and cheerfulness. The mask painted in these colors helps these emotions stay strong and give us hope in the uncertainty or how I like to call it the anxiety. The background and cool colors I used help demonstrate that feeling. Blue is usually a representation of sadness. Purple represents mystery and the uncertainty of the future.



© 2021 Joshua Collins

Multimedia

A Text from Me to You
Tammy Tran





First Flight is an annual UHCL Community Publication in conjunction with the UHCL Writing Center, which serves to highlight the short works of burgeoning authors. Written submissions are a maximum of 500 words. Submissions are accepted between November 1st and December 23rd every year, and a theme for each year's publication will be announced in October. For additional information concerning submission or involvement in *First Flight* contact the UHCL Writing Center at WritingCenter@uhcl.edu.