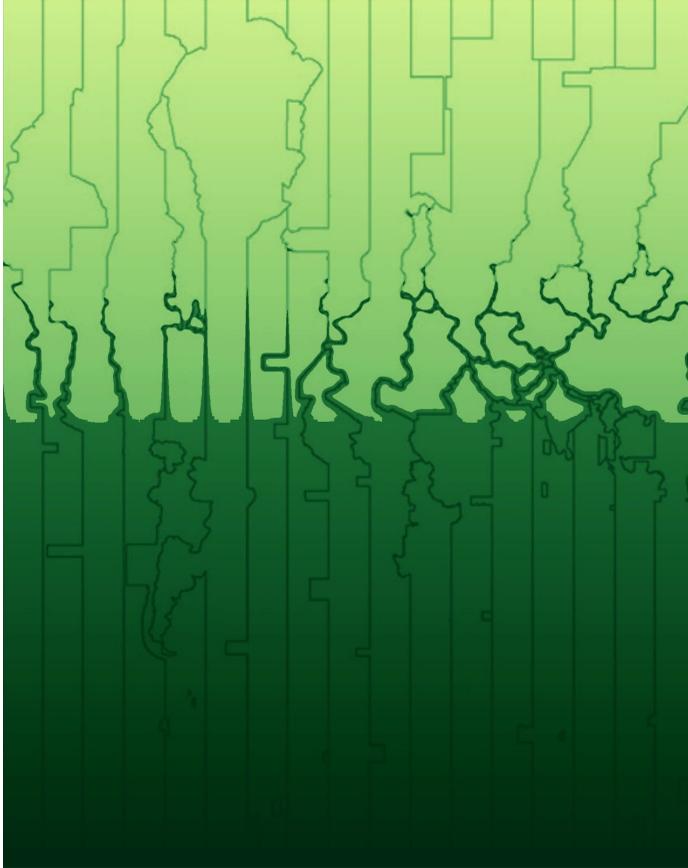


Y E L L O W A R R O W



Volume II, January 2018

Time

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Creative nonfiction by female identifying writers

Volume II, January 2018

Time

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Dear Readers,

While working as a teaching assistant, I formed a strong bond with a student with autism. This quickly developed into a passion for disability rights and a career in special education. School is one of those places with very little space for otherness. Someone with a learning difficulty, attention problem, or inability to copy words from the board has an invisible disability. This type of student finds very little acceptance, very little space, for their particular needs. And so, the only thing to do is make space. Little by little, we elbow our way in.

Gloria Anzaldúa, the author who legitimized writing in both English and Spanish at once, insists that we learn to create our own spaces in the world.

“Why am I compelled to write?... Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. I write because life does not appease my appetites and anger... To become more intimate with myself and you... To convince myself that I am worthy and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit...”

If we can create space, then surely we can create time. Reading through a long lost journal from 1998, my

16 year old self wished “life went a year a minute.” My now 35 year old self wishes the opposite were true. Each minute spent with my daughter reminds how tightly I wish I could hold onto certain moments. I want it all to stop, mostly because I know that I will eventually forget these moments. I’ll be able to recall that there was something special about her one year old face, her one year old laugh, her one year old gait, but those individual moments of wonder, those are already gone.

Time is our own construct, we make what we want of it. Some cultures don’t even have a way of keeping track of time at all. When my friend Sharon visited Nepal, she noted,

“Time in Nepal has no measurements. Minutes, hours, days, miles - all blend with a flow unpredicted.”

Five minutes here, five minutes there, and after a bit, you’ve spent hours, days, years, perfecting your craft. Conquering time isn’t easy, but it’s not impossible.

Do you want to be a writer but the world is telling you no because your spelling and grammar are awful? Create space in the writing world for exactly how you speak.

Do you want to write a book or an article or a poem, but can't find the time between working, feeding yourself and maintaining reasonable hygiene? Carve out time in the morning before you do anything else. Or write a page on your lunch break. Or squeek a poem onto the fogged up mirror after you shower. All it takes is one word at a time.

I want you to know that there is space for you. I want you to go for it. Your voice has value and we want to hear you. It's scary, I know, but don't let roadblocks stop you. Keep pushing past those DO NOT ENTER signs, take a seat and place your name. Honor your own rightful place in this world.

Luckily, the universe is (probably) infinite. Which means we, and our ideas, rights, thoughts, and feelings, have infinite possibilities. Just because I spread my arms wide and leap toward the moon does not mean you have less room to do so. There is more than enough space for everyone. In fact, the more we stretch out, the more possibilities we create. Anzaldúa says it best,

“Finally I write because I'm scared of writing, but I'm more scared of not writing.”

We hope you enjoy this issue's pieces by a collection of very brave women.

**Gwen Van Velsor
Founder and Editor**

The Hair-revolution

Lisa M. Van Wormer

In the mirror
the now of my hair
remembers what was
gone—

a toddler's tightly curled ringlets
springy and unruly
bouncing around the yard
adoring unkemptness
screaming happiness

a teenager's auburn waves
unshakably chlorine-scented
perfectly permed and styled curls
set each morning
to lay just right in judgment

a soldier's sand-laden halo
severely styled Army regulation buns
stenched with product
to maintain the appearance
look lethal, incite fear
look like you have it together

a first pregnancy highlighting of
several shades—red/brown/gray?
new grays hidden beneath
purposeful parts
a bright and recessive uniqueness
not passed on

Now—in the mirror
former shadows
amid lack luster curls and
duller— redder—
browning gray
—redder
browning gray

Sundown

Maggie Helpps

Golden Hour

October 2017

I open the book, *One Blood*¹. To her family, the author has inscribed: *Love, made seasonless, above all change, betrayal of falling stars.*

I read the foreword, impressed by the praise from her thesis advisor. He describes a smart, tenacious young woman who arrived at his office with a story to chase down. Then in the introduction, the author shares with the reader. “I came to know what I only intuited at the outset--that people’s memories and beliefs about the past, even when incomplete and inaccurate in terms of details, are not only personally meaningful but also of vital historical importance.”

I wonder, as I have my whole life, how she knew the difference between personal and historical meaning.

I call the author.

“I’m reading the book you wrote.”

“Oh, the book I...wrote? That’s very nice.”

“Do you remember writing it?”

¹ Love, Spencie. *One Blood: The Death and Resurrection of Charles R. Drew*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

“Not really. I’m sorry, but my memory isn’t that great these days. I’ve been...sick. How’s the weather where you are?”

At least she remembers that she is my mother.

November 2017

The package is open and sitting on the stairs up to our room. On the front, a typed note explaining that my aunt has found these letters. I pick up the first one. My aunt’s sister, at the moment she writes almost exactly the age I am now, announces her first pregnancy. Her description of morning sickness could describe the way I felt just two years ago. Her tone, hesitant to hope that she might have a baby at the end of this, sounds like I felt during those early weeks. Like me, she misses her mother.

The letters are not organized chronologically. The next letter dates from her mid-twenties. She is on a solo wilderness adventure. Twice, she cuts off her own thoughts because she’s “rambling.” So often, I’ve done the same in an email, letter, sentence, and yet never remembered hearing her, or anyone else, do the same. She loves being alone, is foraging for her food, describes finding an inner voice telling her it will be okay. She is happy to know she can survive in the world on her own.

In another, she writes from an artist community with her young family. She describes three-year-old me “joyfully” pointing out the window of the rented house saying, “Mountains, sky, mountains, sky.”

September 2017

It is getting chilly, so I hold my baby close. He has never been out this late before. In the night sky, he spies moving lights and points at them.

“Plane,” I say.

He tries. “Playh?”

“Yes, plane!” I cheer.

Then he sees the large white disc and points again.

“Moon.” I wonder if we’re looking at the same thing.

“Moooh?” He points and grins.

“Yes, moon!” I smile and look away from him.

Sunset

June 2014

My mother and I are sitting in her dining room. She has found her painting supplies, buried in the garage, but kept for my visits. We paint on small squares of paper. This is the only moment of this last visit I will remember not being strained.

Her hands still move effortlessly with a brush in them, creating tableaus and patterns. On the walls of the house hang mountains, palm trees, beaches, lakes, and skylscapes that she has painted over the years.

When we clean out her house a year later, there are too many to take, so I only bring two with me. I hang the picture she painted at twelve, the year her father died, in my dining room.

A visitor to my house points at it. “That painting is incredible! How did you find it?”

My hands have always felt clumsy next to hers.

Tonight, my picture comes slowly. I start with lines on the paper in a variety of colors and it soon becomes a horizon. I add a small figure, watching the sun fall down. I pick up the brush to add another, but hesitate, and decide to leave the woman alone.

February 2008

I sit in the attic off my room, and comb through the journals. They are recent, and I find words of loneliness, of trying. She tries to make sense of how she came to be here, but neither she nor I ever can. The words do not stay with me, and she destroys them before I can read them again.

That night, I find the vodka in her diet coke. I notice because her conversation veers off towards her marriage, her career, how many people betrayed her. I did not ask.

I find the bottle under the sink. I feel both desperate and cliché as I pour it down the sink. I have seen enough after-school specials to know that it is a useless gesture.

The next morning, she sits on the edge of my bed, tears flowing down her face.

She cries, “I don’t want you to go. I’m going to miss you.”

December 2002

The guest room where we used to sleep is in the basement. The futon I used to open for myself is still in the corner when I sneak down there. The bedside table is

the same one, and it will follow me to my adult home one day. But today, I open it and find what I know she keeps there.

Three days ago, I learned about her arrest. I'd just gotten off the plane from school for the winter holidays. I knew it was the last time our family was going to spend them together but I still expected the usual eye rolls and sarcasm. I was surprised to be greeted by hushed voices and false cheer, and a whisper to "be nice to Mom."

I open the journal, and my curiosity is appropriately punished. The second to last entry is blurry and I struggle to read it. On the next page, in her familiar, more legible script, my mom decodes her own entry, noticing with horror that she wrote a suicide letter to me and my brother. I look back at the scrawled page and can see the words "Goodbye, Maggie."

October 2017

My son and I are at the playground just before dinner. All my friends and their babies are gathered by the swings, and he is running everywhere but there.

I feel a little joy when he runs away, only to stop and point at me because he's not ready to be too far apart. I'm not ready to be too far apart. I skip around in the grass because it always make him laugh.

Then he points up and says, "Mooh!"

I'm about to correct him, because it's still daylight. Then, I look up and see it, a white round orb partially hidden by a wispy cloud.

"Moon!" I cry, and pick him up. He wriggles out of my arms and runs towards the sandbox.

Sundown

August 2016

I am in my son's room, holding him. I am both enraptured by watching his small form, and very bored. I get up, holding him, to see if I can find music to play.

I turn to the spare boombox we placed in here, one that used to live in my mother's room in her house. We dug it out of storage for the nursery. There is a tape in. I press play because my baby is starting to cry. My mother's voice comes on. She sounds young, joyful. I don't know the song, but I leave it on. The quality is degraded and the sound comes in and out. I can hear my mom talk between songs.

Then she sings the lullaby I sing to my son. It's quiet so I strain to hear. I feel my mother here with me. The recording ends. I rewind to hear it again. But when I press play, all I hear is static.

January 2017

For months, I've been avoiding climbing up to the crawl space. Tonight, the baby is asleep and I'm alone in the house. The ladder is conveniently folded up right next to the closet below. I struggle to pull it apart. Just as I am ready to give up, it budges.

I climb up. At the top, there is a gap but I pull myself up and over the ledge. Already, the almost-attic space is cluttered with items my seven-month-old has outgrown. I don't see the clear drawers I thought were up

here, but I make myself go through the piles to be sure. I don't see any CDs or boxes. I remind myself I had believed this to be lost for years.

As I dangle my legs over the side to go down, I realize the gap to get to the ladder is larger than I thought. There are no handrails or good places to grasp. I sit, wondering if I will be here until my husband gets home from band practice in three or four hours. Our son rarely wakes up at night now, but nonetheless my heart pounds imagining he might need me and I won't be able to get to him. I gently lower my legs, then torso, over the ledge, gripping as best I can. My legs dangle until they find the ladder.

When my feet hit the floor, I feel exhilarated.

On a whim, I decide to look in the tubs in our basement that I rescued from my mother's house before she went to the nursing home. After a shockingly small amount of searching through a bin of tapes, DVDs and CDs, I find it. It's clearly labeled, and I marvel that it took me this long. I go up to our bedroom and pull out the old boombox. I put it next to the bed, put the CD in and lie down.

The sound of her voice washes over me as I hear her say, "Songs for Maggie" and begin to sing.

February 2017

My son is in bed, my husband is out, so I call my mother. I am sitting in my bedroom, and the boombox is still next to the bed.

"Hi sweetie!" I love the moment she picks up the phone.

“Hi Mom.”

“It’s so good to hear your voice! How’s the weather where you are?”

“It was sunny today, Mom. How was the weather where you are?”

“It was sunny but it was hot when I walked, sweetie. It was almost too hot!” And she laughs.

“Mom, I want to play a recording for you.”

“I’m sorry, I couldn’t hear you very well. What do you want to do, sweetie?” I immediately know I have to give up trying to explain.

“I have it right here, hang on.” And I put on the CD of her singing my favorite lullaby. “Mom, this is you, singing this song!”

“That’s me? How weird. I don’t think I’ve ever heard this song, sweetie.”

November 2017

I should put my son to bed, but I want to play a little longer. We are in our living room, next to his bins of toys. I am standing, watching him. He pulls out a bin and dumps its contents onto the floor.

He looks up. “Mooh!” He cries, pointing. I look at the lamp. But then I crouch down, put my head next to his, and follow his finger. And I see it, a crescent winking at me, only visible from this angle.

“Moon!” I shout with him.

Moonrise

June 1992

I can't sleep. My parents are driving us across the country, and we're in another strange hotel tonight. We are moving far from the home and people I love. We have had a fight about nothing. Sprawled out on the bed, I am keeping my mother awake telling her that I can't sleep. At six, I still expect that she can solve all problems.

She is lying down and closing her eyes, but she continues talking to me. She begins a story, one she's never told me before, but one I will tell myself the rest of my life.

There's a tree, a large tree. You walk up to the trunk and there is a door. You open the door and walk up the spiral staircase. At the top, there is a small room with a window, a bed, and a rocking chair. I am waiting for you. You lie down to rest.

June 2016

I can't sleep. The flimsy blinds don't stop the light from the city outside. The motorized hospital bed re-adjusts on me every few minutes. My head tries to soothe my rapidly beating heart but all my senses are focused on the phone. If it's been three hours, it will ring. If it rings sooner, it will be bad news. Two days ago, I watched my new baby gasp for air and hang limp in my arms.

I haven't called my mother since he was born. We only speak every few months now.

In my head, I go to the base of a big tree, and open the door. I walk up the spiral staircase, and enter the room.

She is there, waiting for me. I lie down on the bed and talk to her.

“Mom, I’m so angry at you. I need you now. I can’t be a mother without you.”

She listens.

I say, “I’m so scared.”

She looks at me. “I know.”

“Mom, where are you?”

She says, “I’m on the moon, sweetie.”

My logical brain is still working. “So who’s that woman who calls me?”

She says, “She’s me. My memories are on the moon. But I left part of me there with you.”

And then I feel it. My mother, her soul, the woman she wished she could be, everything she lost, is on the moon.

July 2017

The baby and I have returned home. Sleep deprivation had given way to delirium at the hospital. I told no one about my imagined conversation with my mom.

Instead, the exhaustion caught up to me much more publicly, and a missed call from an unknown number convinced me that my mother had died. In that moment, time stopped. Everything dissolved around me. I didn’t know how to get back to where my baby was waiting in the NICU. I believed I was dying. To everyone else, I shouted out “No!” suddenly, and then stopped responding.

Today, I am taking a rare walk alone, and texting with my dad.

I ask my dad if he has read one of my favorite books, *The Book of Lost Things*². It is the story of a young boy traveling through a land of fables to let go of the anger and resentment of losing his mother to a long illness.

He replies, “No I haven’t. But your mom wrote a short story once. It was about everything that had ever been lost being found again. On the moon.”

² Connolly, John. *The Book of Lost Things*. New York, NY: Washington Square Press, 2007.

The Last Time, Until the Next Time

Merka Martin

Garnet was my mother's dearest friend and champion in life. Her spirit was so fiercely and beautifully intact. In recent months, I shared time cherishing each important conversation as they unfolded between us, one into the other. I was eager for the next and feeling selfish, desperately wanting to soak up the infinitude of those morsels of delight she held deeply within the vaults of her heart.

We hold so close the ones we love that when it comes time to say a final farewell, we are unable and ill equipped to say the final thing, uncertain of whether we will be gifted another next time. We spend too much time believing that there will always be more and then when reality arrives, post-haste, we attempt to make up for lost time, before that last time.

I was honored to have frank and candid conversations with Garnet about her impending death. I have not known another human being so well prepared for their death. Her courage, grace and poise still leaves me in

awe. As I move through my days, I hope that I am able to make amends with the same courage and grace to face my own sunset with a peaceful resolve.

What I wouldn't give to trade just one more time for that last time. Too many last times have come to pass in too short a time and I am left reeling a bit from the monumental weight and gravity of it all.

Fear has often robbed me of those opportunities to dive into deeply authentic, honest places with those I have loved well and lost. Fear of not wanting it to be the last time, anticipating a tsunami of emotion and discomfort as we reach for the tools to wrap up relational endeavors and deeply rooted connections.

Garnet was the last of the female gatekeepers to all mother related memories, and the keeper of the memories they shared. I imagine nothing short of equal parts joy and heartache, the sacred and secret pieces that perhaps I was never meant to know. It was enough to be close to the woman who shared my mother's heart, split souls and shared story.

Simply put, to be near Garnet kept my mother's spirit closer. It was a tremendous gift, the time and

memories we were able to share as the sun began to set on her days. That voice, so uniquely hers, the soulful laughter and smiling eyes will be sorely missed. With each farewell my heart grows enormously and I vow to continue to lean into the bittersweet evisceration of loving another well enough to be hollowed out when they die.

The space that follows that last time is a many layered journey through the what-ifs; a horrible case of the coulda-shoulda-wouldas. Where do we lay the burden of regret? Where is the birthplace of that horribly selfish beast anyway?

I'm left to carry the spirit of these lovely souls as I embark upon my next *Camino*³. Garnet and I spoke of the journey I would be taking her on, up the coast of Portugal. Like my mother, the ocean was a place of peace and quiet repose for her and her demons. As well, my own. No better time for another long walk on the other side of this most recent farewell. And so it goes, until the next time.

³ The Camino de Santiago (The Way of Saint James) is a pilgrimage route across Spain ending in the city of Santiago de Compostela. Many follow the route in pursuit of spiritual growth.

Please don't waste precious time waiting for the perfect time to share your words. Say all the things that need to be said. Ask the hard questions. Dive headlong and heart first into those difficult conversations. Say what you need to say, leave no stone unturned, so you might one day dive into the joy of sharing present moments and hopefully leaving less room for future regrets.

On the Cover

The cover for this issue was created by Marie Hassell Doctorchik, an artist and beauty guru from the island of Maui. We wanted to know a little more about her thought process for this design.

Tell us about this cover design. What inspired you?

Well time exists for us in two forms. The ever constant tick of the clock that in a very real way shapes our lives everyday. *Be here at 4:00pm. The bus comes at 8:02am.* I chose to reference that with the lines/map that make up the international time zones. They form the base of the piece. Then there is the concept of time passing. With that passing comes change, and we are all affected by that passage. I wanted to make the lines of the time zones come alive, I wanted them to be growing. I wanted to reference the idea that we are all growing daily, growing up, growing old, growing wiser and so on.

How does color inform your work? What made you choose these colors for the cover?

I think every artist has an obsession with color as well as light, form, texture or the lack of those things. I chose green and it's variations because I (and many others) associate it with feelings of happiness and new life. I wanted to stimulate openness in the viewer and reader with a comforting color.

What does the concept of time bring up for you?

Pretty much every emotion in the book. At times in my life, I wanted time to pass quickly so that I could go on a trip or distance myself from a mistake. Now as I near middle age, I want it to slow down so that I can take in every moment of my kids.

If you could stop time, when would you do it and why?

Well, honestly, everyday I want to stop time. I think because I am daily reminded of it passing by watching my kids grow. Every time I turn around, they have grown out of a shirt or pair of shoes. I look at their little faces and as cliché as it sounds, I want to stop time to be sure I am enjoying every minute I get with them.

Contributors

Marie Hassell Doctorchik is a part time nurse and full time mom. She finds inspiration everywhere and loves learning new things. She explores her interests on her YouTube channel *And the Color Green* where she posts a new video every Monday called “Monday Mixed Plate.” She also creates a monthly face mask subscription box called Face Mask Alchemy.

Maggie Helpps began her career as a playwright at age 6. However, it reached its peak at age 8 after her class put on her World War II epic. She retired to focus on her education. After graduating from NYU with a degree in Passion Studies, Maggie explored Washington, DC. She worked on Capitol Hill, and in a variety of childcare and food service jobs. She earned a Masters in Social Work from Catholic University. Afterwards, she worked in community mental health, before venturing out to Mountain View, California to learn web development. These days, Maggie lives in Baltimore, Maryland and works for the Wikimedia Foundation, helping them fund projects like Wikipedia. In her abundant free time, she chases a toddler, and writes speculative fiction and occasionally non-fiction. This is Maggie’s first published piece.

Retired Midwife and intrepid traveler, Merka Martin is also an aspiring wordsmith. She calls the Pacific Northwest home. She lives to travel, cultivating her global tribe with indefatigable curiosity, moxie and enthusiasm. She is rather fond of poppies, old fashioned hand-written letters and slow mornings.

Lisa M. Van Wormer is a memoirist who loves using the alluring poetry form to tell and enhance her stories. Along with *Yellow Arrow*, her writing has been included in xoJane, Huffington Post, AMVETS Magazine and Baltimore Fishbowl, among others. Her work has also been featured as a part of multiple shows on the Baltimore NPR station (WYPR). Lisa has an MFA in Creative Writing and Publishing Arts from University of Baltimore and is constantly seeking avenues to process and heal through her art. To find out more, see her website at www.lmvanwormer.com and follow her on twitter @lisavanmark.

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found at YellowArrowPublishing.com

*“A woman who writes has power, and a woman with power is
feared.”*

Gloria Anzaldúa