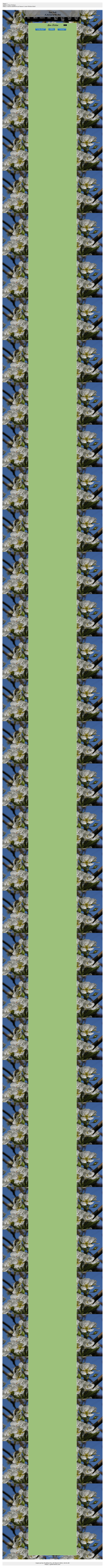

East Fork:
A Journal of the Arts

Home
About Us
Contact Us
Submit
Meet the Editors
Issue 23- Spring 2022
Previous Issues
Join Our Team

Non-Fiction

back

- Alumni Interview - Allen Haughton
  By: Chelsea Broderick
- My Nightmare
  By: Charles Kiyuna
- You Didn't Hear It From Me
  By: Jessica Bell

East Fork:
A Journal of the Arts

Alumni Interview - Allen Haughton

By: Chelsea Broderick

back

Please describe your writing style?

It's kind of all over the place. Mostly minimal, because I feel like one of the main things withpoetry that I try to do (differentiating writing poetry from writing prose), is to say more stuff with less.You're trying to whittle it down and convey a whole lot of information, sensations, knowledge and experiencesin a frame work with words.As opposed to prose, I try to write as little as possible and say as much as I can. I like to applystructure as I go and improvise a free form. It's still a lot of work, though. It's a lot of agonizing overindividual words, like "this word just doesn't sound right. What is any other possible way of combining thesephrases?"

What kind of process do you go through for editing a piece?

I think editing is fun. If you actually want to be a good writer and want to stick with it and makesomething out of your writing, editing is totally essential. It seems like a lot of kids that I know that getinto poetry want to write free form and simply feel their way through [the editing process], but when it comesdown to writing good stuff, it takes a lot of work and you have to be considerate of your audience. You can'tjust be like "if you don't get it, that's your problem." It's your bad as the author for not expressing itproperly, and editing is where that happens.Editing is where you can step back for a minute and think, if I was the audience, how would I look atthis? Even just thinking if I was one of my friends, how would they read this? Then changing words, allusions,and metaphors to better suit it for other people. My editing process is negative in that I try to trim awayeverything that I don't think is necessary.

Do you keep a file of deleted lines and phrases to go back to?

No, but I have books and books where I've crossed out everything.

Do you ever go back and rework those?

Most of my writing is not done on the computer. If I feel like writing, I want a pen and paper so Ican just cross things out and make little additions. It can get really confusing, but I like to go back andsee what I've written in the past.

From where do you draw your inspirations?

My inspiration comes from a lot of different things. If I wanted to consciously go out and getinspiration, I go to concerts and art museums, but reading the most. When I was in a writing class at UCClermont, at the beginning of the year we were asked why we signed up, and this girl said that she needed anEnglish credit and didn't like reading. I was really baffled by that because I feel that reading is reallyessential for writing. Every time I read, I get a lot of new ideas and different perspectives.I was saying earlier about how when I edit, I try to think about my poems from different perspectives.I've gained a lot of perspectives from my friends and growing up, and anyone in my life that I feel like I'vegotten into their head to any extent or we share some sort of bond. I feel like reading can do the same thing.If an author is good and capable of expressing how they see and feel about something, you get a sense ofwhat's going on in their internal and external world. That's another way for me to look at things, another wayfor me to be inspired, and for me to edit and write better for more people.

Does your writing style emulate any specific authors?

I was really into early 19th century Romantics when I was in high school and that was when I reallystarted writing. At that time, my influences were among Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg, not so much Thoreauor Emerson. Of course, William Blake and Byron and Shelley. It's formal, yet anti-formal and uses Romantic andphysical imagery, pastoral and idyllic.That changed pretty dramatically after high school. I got really into Shamus Heaney and Pablo Neruda.Neruda has these kind of free form, minimal, abstract and almost silly at times poems. I'm really into shakingup rationality and logic, and planning how you can mess with people's heads but in a constructive way. I alsoenjoy Adrienne Rich despite generally being considered an academic, heavy feminist poet. I never understandthat perspective when I read her stuff because I feel like it's all really evocative- she's making up form asshe goes instead of vomiting on a page and expecting everyone else to put it together.

Who do you let see your work before sending it in for publishing?

Sometimes, if I'm sending stuff in I wouldn't show it to anyone. For me, publication is very personal.I'm not sure why I'm hung up on it, but I just don't show my poetry to a lot of people. It's interesting thatI showed my poetry to a lot less people when I was living in this city than when I went to Beloit this pastyear. I showed my stuff to a lot more people there because they were capable of analyzing a poem. A lot ofpeople who aren't pursuing literature in the post secondary education realm don't really pay attention topoetry. It's fallen out of mainstream media almost entirely, and that's a problem when it comes to showing mywork to my friends because some of them just aren't literature people. They're working full time and takingcare of their own and they're too busy to really stop and dissect a poem.I do show them to people I respect and I show them to people who are also interested in literature.The fault of the demise of poetry falls on both sides. I feel a little pretentious when I say, "I'm notshowing you this poem because you're not going to understand it," but poetry is really personal and sometimesfriends won't be able to provide constructive criticism as far as structure or vocabulary because they mighteven know what situation spawned it- what breakup or death in the family or even the good things you writeabout so you just get "oh, that's nice" and a pat on the head. People tend to just move on because they canhave an issue with intimacy, and poetry is a very intimate art form. It's sometimes difficult for people totalk about it because we're losing the vocabulary, which is being systematically eradicated.

What are your best and worst experiences with publishing?

I remember one time my parents found a book of my poetry. That was a bad experience. We were talkingabout intimacy with poetry, well that was definitely an open wound just lying around in my room that theydecided to pry open and pour salt into. That can be a problem with just living with people and writing aboutyourself. People can attempt to write outside of themselves, but you're always writing from your perspective.I feel like an awareness, acknowledgement, and acceptance of that is helpful for good writing. It's still achallenge though when you write things that you're not ready to talk about with other people- things thatyou're not ready to put into regular dialogue.As far as good experiences go, publishing is always a plus. I got published in a student literaryjournal last semester, and that's not such a big deal, bit's really encouraging that people care about yourwork ethic and trying to learn to express yourself. I've had a lot of good experiences with sharing my poetry.

What is the most valuable thing you took from your education at UC Clermont?

I have nothing but good things to say about the English staff at that campus. The student body can behit or miss, it's all over the place and there are some students who don't give a shit about what happened toSpenserian verse. The faculty really has to struggle to maintain their own interest in it when every daythey're bombarded with, "Why should I care about this? What does it matter? I want to go watch this reality TVshow." I learned from watching them deal with people who didn't care at all and were actually antagonistictowards passions that my professors have. Watching them deal helped teach me a little about how to deal myselfwhen I was not in school out in the work force, working full time, holding an apartment and still trying towrite and keep that fire of creativity and art going.

"Year 39" by Allen Houghton
Coffee- induced sweat
Stains my morning
Thermal
As I shake off
Last night's whiskey
Dandruff
And stare down
The length of a cigarette-
To an angry red cherry
Channeling a swollen sunrise
That could not be seen
Through the April clouds
Slouching overhead
Toward the end
Of their forty year
Wildness wandering--

Buckle up, Jericho,
I can taste the air of Canaan.

Summer reading list:

The Dream of a Common Language by Adrienne Rich
Oxy and Crake by Margret Atwoods
100 Love Sonnets and 20 Love Poems and a Song of Despair by Pablo Neruda

East Fork:
A Journal of the Arts

My Nightmare

back

By: Charles Kiyuna

The hull of the ship was torn open from the explosion just before I entered into the back cabins. I was thrown into the narrow hallway walls. I grabbed for the gray metal ladder that was welded to the wall to stay upright but I still went down tearing open my arm on the very thing I was trying to use to stabilize me. Reaching for the ladder to pull my self from the floor I felt my head begin to throb. I must have hit it against the wall but couldn't recall it. There wasn't any time to worry about it and considering I wasn't bleeding from it, I moved on. I opened the door to the rear sleeping quarters to see a hole about the size of a twin mattress torn into the hull that let the morning sun shine right in. It was then that I began to weigh my options.

I knew we were not getting out of that cove. The water was too narrow to swing the ship. We would not be able to get our guns turned around and the tree line blocked our view of everything west of us. We were in their sights, perfectly positioned to be strafed without repercussion. It may not have been possible for the ship to sink entirely in the cove's shallow blue water, but it was not impossible for it to blow up. Shaking off the throbbing in my head I went to my locker to secure some necessary gear for the next steps that I would take to survive. I grabbed my assault pack and began stuffing it: extra socks, bootlaces, snacks accumulated from the chow hall, water bladder, compass, field knife and other miscellaneous or necessary items. I already had my side arm as I was in charge of the armory today. For some reason I took the time to actually close my locker back when all that was remaining in it was an extra uniform, extra boots, some hygiene items and a notebook.

I turned to see the jets once again returning for another pass. I dropped my pack and went back out to the hallway so I could use the steel entry door as cover from the next round of strafing. With the jets now over the forest I recovered my pack and headed for the hole in the hull.

It was a drop of only twenty-five to thirty feet, but the crystal clear water made the cove look shallower than what it was. I took a breath more for reassurance than for air and jumped. I knew I would never touch bottom, but just being able to see it made me second guess myself, something I didn't really have time to do. When I came up out of the water I recovered my pack that I threw out ahead of me and began my swim inland. Having lept from the starboard side, I wasn't sure if any of the men made it off the ship. All the drop boats were on the other side.

I made it almost to shore in about thirty-five minutes. With the tide coming in it was a lot easier. When I got to about four feet of water the waves slammed me into a palm that had been taken down from the fighting. I knew it wasn't bad because it didn't affect my breathing, but you could be sure that it was going to leave a few bruised ribs. Staying low, I made my way to the tree line near the beach. Quickly I hid my pack and laced up my field knife onto my load bearing equipment. After a quick drink from the water bladder I started to make my way inland so I could circle the ship to see if I could rendezvous with another squad.

Approximately half a click into the woods I noticed a clearing about twenty yards ahead. They had cleared the land with excavation equipment. It was the perfect spot for an ambush. I slid down a nearby embankment where my bruised ribs met with a rock. That was definitely not helping my situation much. I muffled my burst of pain and proceeded up the other embankment as if coming out of a streambed.

When I peered over the hill I caught the glimpse of sunlight reflecting off of a scope – snipers! Quickly I ducked back down and weighed my options. The beach left me too exposed. Just inside the tree line I would be susceptible to strafing fire from the jets. Too far in – I was on my own against who knows what.

That was the nightmare that Michael had. I awoke from his dream with the bruised ribs and a cut on my arm. Sweat was beginning to bead on my forehead. I couldn't understand it as I did not really understand my disorder. I had been diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder about eighteen months earlier. The dream made several things very clear to me: one was that my disorders were very real and two – they were very embedded.

About seven years ago, two years before the dream, I spent a lot of time in several different hospitals. Well, let's go back to when I was fourteen. I started having episodes when I was fourteen that resembled seizures. For many years I had convulsive episodes which all centered around stress. All the doctors I went to see continued to diagnose me as epileptic. That diagnosis did not fit, I thought, because I would sometimes go years without any symptoms – even without medication.

As time went on, the seizures came closer together, my time in the hospitals would get longer and I started remembering less and less. I started blacking out or losing time. There would be days that I would not have any recollection of my day until evening fell. I would "wake up" at seven or eight o'clock in the evening when I had been at work all day. I've spent five days in a hospital that my last memory was feeling the preemptive surge before a seizure and the next memory was getting out of a car at home and wondering where my truck went.

A few short months later I lost time in our new apartment. It would be the first time my alters or "the others" would make themselves known to anyone. There were seven of them other than myself. That's right, come to find out years later that who everyone has known as "Chuck" is just one of many identities that occupy this body. Each one of "the others" wrote right handed. The first day they didn't speak. They just wrote, identifying themselves one at a time. I don't remember a lot of the incident because I wasn't there. A whole new world was about to unravel for my wife and me.

As time went on one other personality emerged to count a total of eight on the inside. Michael, as you can tell, has a very militant personality. He is very structured and concise. Then there is Gerard, who is the latest addition, Terry, who is English, Mary, James and George who seems to be autistic, Lexi and Ryson. Those who have dissociative identity disorder will typically create some structure that "the others" live in or around.

Much has happened since they first manifested. In addition to Dissociative Identity Disorder, I have been diagnosed with PTSD or post traumatic stress disorder, generalized anxiety disorder and conversion disorder. Conversion disorder is a disorder in which your anxiety manifests itself with physical symptoms.

The physical symptoms are where my seizures came from and I am actually not epileptic. Some of the other more frequent symptoms that occur include my left side which will start shutting down to where I will start losing gross motor skills and have frequent headaches. Some more serious effects have been the seizures, memory loss and becoming mute.

Although this has made things a little difficult and what I've described are actually the less serious aspects of my disorder, I have made the choice to not quit living. Currently I am in the middle of going to school, trying to start my own business, a father of two, and a husband to a very strong wife who still manages to stick by me

East Fork:
A Journal of the Arts

Home
About Us
Contact Us
Submit
Meet the Editors
Issue 23- Spring 2022
Previous Issues
Join Our Team

You Didn't Hear It From Me

back

By: Jessica Bell

"I know it's not easy to hear, but in just six months, after allowing your body time to heal, you can try again."

Try again? He says that as though he were telling me to dust off my knees and get back on the bike. I can feel her moving inside me. This is the child I want to have. Part of me is in her and she is in me. How can I possibly accept what they have told me? I place my hand on my stomach and, as if on cue, I feel the life inside me. "We will give you some time to adjust to all that we have just said."

I am lying on the stretcher in the back of the ambulance I had insisted I didn't need. The air is thick with the pungent aroma of gasoline and my nostrils are offended by the potency. I lay my arm across my face to stifle the scent and am pleased to discover that it also blocks the view. There's a female paramedic riding with me, but she insists that the gray haired man lifting the sheet that lay over me is more qualified to deal with these types of situations. Among the three of them sent out on this run, he is the only one who has delivered a baby.

A baby, just one baby? I think that hardly qualifies as experience. Anyway, it doesn't matter. I'm not going to be having a baby. I have Christmas gifts to wrap and peanut butter blossoms, Russian teacakes and spritz cookies to bake. The laundry is not finished, I need to go to the grocery store, who's going to cook dinner? My baby is due in April.

"OK, Jessica, I'm going to need to take a look and see what's going on. Just relax and let your knees fall to the sides."

I turn away and cover my eyes. I wince as he has to use the palms of his hands to coax down knees that won't cooperate.

"I can't see anything, Jessica, and I'm not going to poke around and risk making anything worse." Not bothering to respond, I snap my knees together and release the breath I didn't know I was holding in.

"Hell, Jimmy! What'd you do, bathe in the damn stuff?"

A chuckle comes from somewhere above my head. I can hear the driver apologizing as he explains that he had just returned from cleaning a gas spill when he was called out on this run. "I was on my way to shower when this call came in," he replies. The chilled December air rushes in as he cracks his window, but it does little to mask the odor.

Flat on my back, still strapped to the stretcher, my pants and underwear somewhere around my ankles, I watch the ceiling tiles as we move through the hallways of Mercy Hospital. Jaysen had arrived by my side as I clung to the mattress and was jostled from the back of the ambulance. His thick, strong hand feels warm as it lies cradled in mine. I know he is looking at me, trying to navigate the maze of my thoughts. I keep focused on the irregular pattern on the once white ceiling tiles. I rub my thumb over the dry, calloused skin of his index finger and he tightens his grip. Two turns and an elevator ride bring us to the third floor. I continue to concentrate on the ceiling tiles, afraid of where my mind will go if I don't.

Dr. Rojas was waiting in the room when we arrived. He is already masked and began putting on his gloves as the paramedics transfer me to the hospital bed. Needing just a minute, he replaces the sheet and removes his gloves.

"You are dilated to four and eighty percent effaced."

As the words reach my ears, I turn to Jaysen. His hair is tussled from where he held his head in his hands.

"There is nothing we can do to undo what has already been done," Dr. Rojas goes on.

I pull my hand from Jaysen's and bury my face in my arm. This isn't happening. This isn't supposed to happen like this. I did everything I was supposed to. I don't smoke, I haven't taken a drink and I don't do drugs, not even over-the-counter ones. I stopped drinking any caffeine and I even took those hard to swallow, nasty tasting, "horse pills" everyday. This isn't supposed to happen. If God is listening, I need Him to hear me. Please, don't let my baby die.

"Our NICU here is not qualified to care for such a premature baby. If she delivers here, there will be nothing we can do for the baby. I am requesting an ambulance to transfer her down to University Hospital. Your baby will have the best chance of survival down there," explains Dr. Rojas. "I am really sorry Mr. and Mrs. Bell."

Jaysen thanks Dr. Rojas, and, though I don't look to see, I am sure they are shaking hands. I can hear the door close and I wipe my eyes dry. I allow Jaysen to once again grasp my hand and I fix my eyes on the steady pulse of the second hand on the clock. He had said chance of survival. My baby has a chance.

It is hospital policy to send a nurse from the maternity ward when they are transporting a patient in labor. She reaches out and clasps my hand between hers. Her eyes, heavy with compassion, gaze straight into mine as she informs me, "If you deliver on the way to the hospital, there is nothing that I can do to help your baby survive. At only 22 weeks, your baby will be unable to breathe on her own and I can't intubate an airway that small." I close my eyes and nod. I understand what she doesn't openly say. For the next twenty minutes I was the only one who could save my baby. If I can't keep my body from rejecting her, she will die.

My legs tighten together with each bump we encounter as if the clenching of my thighs could prevent my baby from falling out. Each deliberate breath is inhaled and exhaled with precision. Though the nurse tries to make small-talk, I refrain from talking and try to keep as still as possible. I must remain focused, willing my body to keep this baby in until we could get to that chance of survival that Dr. Rojas had spoken of.

Doctors at University confirm what Dr. Rojas had told us. Jaysen is standing on my left squeezing my hand probably a little harder than he realizes. I look up and our eyes meet. He manages to turn up the corners of his mouth in an attempt at a smile and leans over to kiss my forehead. I close my eyes and remember our dreams of parenthood. Dreams of late night feedings, wobbly first steps and family vacations to the beach. Of birthday candles, giggles and Eskimo kisses. My thoughts are interrupted by the doctors who have reentered the room. "Jessica, we have been discussing your case and we feel that the best option in your situation is to abort the fetus." A squeeze of my left hand lets me know that the shock of what was just said wasn't just felt by me. "Your cervix is too far effaced for us to offer any type of surgery to prevent delivery. Trying to do it would most likely prove ineffective and would damage your cervix possibly harming your ability to have children in the future." What happened to that better chance of survival that Dr. Rojas had mentioned? "You have what is called an incompetent cervix. The increasing weight of the fetus forces the cervix to open pre-term resulting in a miscarriage."

Incompetent cervix? The words themselves hurt me. My body is defective and there's no denying it; this is my fault.

"Now that we know this, the next time you get pregnant, your doctor can perform a simple procedure to stitch the cervix closed and prevent early delivery."

It is my fault.

After the doctors step out, a nurse, who I hadn't noticed in the room before, leaned over, and in a voice just above a whisper, said, "If you tell them to do everything they can to save your baby, they have to do it. You didn't hear it from me."

Jaysen and I find ourselves alone in the closet sized, sterile room with nothing but the hum of the IV pump and the weight of a life in our hands. Three options, but no real choice. We can abort as the doctors had recommended. We can do the surgery which the doctors said wouldn't work and could prevent pregnancy in the future. Or, we can wait, hoping to hold on long enough to strengthen her and give her a fighting chance. My decision is easy. Abortion isn't an option. Our daughter deserves a chance and I am going to be sure that she gets it. Jaysen's choice is complicated by his love for me and it isn't until concerns of infection due to the prolonged dilation of the cervix are addressed that he can fully support me in my decision.

"We will not be aborting our child," I announce upon the arrival of the doctor. The doctor, as if doubting my ability to understand, looks past me and speaks to Jaysen. "You do understand that the ability of that fetus to survive would require a miracle, don't you?" Without hesitation Jaysen replies, "That's what we're expecting." I squeeze his hand knowing he really believes it.

"Jessica, we can't hold off any longer. Your baby is in distress and her heart rate is dropping with each contraction. We must deliver. She will now have a better chance of survival out here than she will if she stays in there." She presses the call button and announces that I will need to be moved to a delivery room immediately.

Things are getting busy in my room. They had started a Pitocin drip through my IV in hopes of strengthening the contractions to aid in delivery. Because the health of my baby was already compromised, any type of pain medication was out of the question. I wasn't set on having a natural delivery, but that is what I am going to have.

As the moments pass, the intensity of chaos is heightened. The scurrying staff hustles to make preparations for delivery. Nurses remove the bottom half of the bed and place my feet in stirrups, while the fellow watches the attending doctor standing to my left with her arms folded across her chest, waiting for the go-ahead to begin. Beyond my feet, in an alcove off the room, is a whole team of NICU staff waiting to welcome my little one into the world. The door to my room refused to stay closed, allowing passersby the opportunity to witness the organized chaos. I know that it's a learning hospital, but I am caught off guard when hospital staff enter and ask if they can watch. Sensing that I don't really have any say in the matter, I answer "sure." I feel like the opening act of the day's entertainment.

In a moment of comic relief, or perhaps insanity, I think "I should be selling tickets."

Jaysen had left for the night. Things had been stable for days and he deserved a "real" bed, but he was now unable to be reached by phone. I let the phone ring until I reach the voicemail and hang-up for the fifth time. Telling me something I already know, the doctor says, "Jessica, we really can't wait much longer." I had been eyeing the monitor, and I too saw the fetal heart rate drop that last time to 56. Frantically not wanting to face this without him, I ask to try once more. Again, no luck. I blink away the imminent tears as I realize I am in this alone.

My grandma, who had been able to stay with me at the hospital, starts rubbing my arm. "It's going to be ok, Jessica. Your grandfather didn't make it to all my deliveries and everything worked out just fine." I love my grandma tremendously but I don't want to hear about how her perfectly normal deliveries turned out just fine and I certainly don't want to be touched when I am trying to manage emotions that would just get in the way. Don't get me wrong, I am glad she is here, but it's just not the same. She doesn't have the same thing to lose.

She wets the rag and returns it to my forehead providing momentary relief from sweats and hot flashes that I had been suffering ever since they had started me on that Magnesium Sulfate ten days ago to stop the contractions they were now trying to intensify.

The fellow standing at the foot of the bed taking her cue from the attending, announces that it is time. "Your baby is turned the wrong way and is going to be delivered feet first. Your water has not broken and we are going to try and deliver her without breaking it. That will help her to not get her head stuck as she is delivered." How the hell am I supposed to do that? I have watched those childbirth shows. I have seen the effort that is put into each push. "We'll start pushing with the next contraction," she says. Five minutes pass with no contraction. The Pitocin they had given to induce labor had stopped it completely. My damn body can't do anything right.

Incompetent is right. Tried and tested medical advances were no match for the stubbornness of my body. The attending, unfolding her arms for the first time, looks at me and asks, "What happened to the contractions?" I hope she doesn't expect an answer. In my current state I don't think I can manage a socially acceptable response. A decision is made to proceed without the assistance of contractions. I was now going to force my body to do what it was unwilling to do.

My grandma makes one last ditch effort to reach Jaysen before returning to the gentle caressing of my arm that was, to me, like nails on a chalkboard. In an equally spaced rhythm determined by the fellow I push when ordered, carefully attempting to push hard enough to deliver, but not too hard as to break my water.

At 10:48am, Kaylee makes her dramatic entrance into the world. I hear no crying nor do I get to catch even a glimpse of her. The instant she is delivered, she is taken away from me wrapped in a plastic bag. Unable to bear the thought of her being alone, I send my grandma to be with her.

At 10:55am, Jaysen makes his arrival. With the festivities over, the room is quiet. Only the delivering fellow and a nurse remain. He comes to my side and takes my hand in his. He says nothing, but I know what he is thinking. "They took her. They told me that she was alive, but they took her. Go. Go, please, be with our baby." He squeezed my hand and leaned over to kiss me. Tears from his eyes mingled with my own pools of tears as he lingered. After checking with the doctor, confirming that I was going to be ok, he went to find where they had taken our baby.

It was my first time out of bed in more than ten days. Having just delivered my baby, with questions of her survival taking over my mind, they felt it was a good idea to try to use the restroom. My body disagreed. Luckily for me, or perhaps the nurses who would've had to help me up, I made it to the toilet before the fog of incoherence took over.

My eyes startle open as the aroma of the smelling salts fills my nostrils. The shocking cold of the toilet tank makes me painfully aware that my hand, which had been keeping closed the gown which closes in the back, had released its grip. Too lazy to mess with attempts to tie behind my back, I had just grabbed hold of the fabric to minimize the inevitable chill. I open my eyes to see that the privacy of my bathroom has been invaded by three nurses, none of which seem too concerned over what just happened.

I spend the day buried in sleep, finally freed from the fear that my every move was risking the life of my baby. Pockets of alertness are filled with doctors bringing me updates. Morphine, given to me after delivery, clouds my understanding and I feel as if I've been left with alphabet soup as a diagnosis. PDA, TPN, ROP, RSV, the letters kept going on and on. Alive. That is the only word I need to cling to. When the Morphine had finally worn off, and I could get to the shower without fainting, I got the chance to take the walk to meet my little girl. Jaysen and I scrub from the elbows down with a harsh antibacterial soap, paying special attention to under our nails as directed by the poster on the wall. We are fitted with fresh gowns and cover our mouths with masks. I allow Jaysen to lead me to where our daughter is. Pod A, last bed on the left. I reach my hands into the plastic womb of the heated isolette which was to take over where my body had failed me. Kaylee's one pound ten ounce body is nearly consumed by my hands as I try to find skin between tubes and wires and beneath leads and tape. I find the sole of one foot and the palm of her hand and introduce myself to my miracle. Kaylee's foot presses against my thumb and she grasps what she can of Jaysen's finger. Jaysen and I lock eyes, and I realize we're a family.