2. TRIPOD
ABOUT TRIPOD: PEOPLE, PLACES, PORTRAITS

During the 2017-2018 school year, six groups of three writers—drawn from the community, Drexel University, and local high schools—have been working together to create projects of their own design. Using writing and photography together, these intergenerational triads have been documenting West Philadelphia and other parts of the city to tell collaborative stories about the ongoing changes in their neighborhoods.

THE PARTICIPANTS

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Photographic images are omnipresent in our everyday lives. From the television shows and movies we watch to the advertisements that punctuate our morning commute or the seemingly infinite number of posts on social media, photographs are intimately connected to our sense of self and the environments in which we live.

The photographs made by the members of Tripod reflect the myriad point of views that comprise this multigenerational group of individuals who call Philadelphia home. Their acute observations of their neighborhoods, filled with textures, memories, and stories evoke a community in constant flux. Whether they have been here for a few years or are longtime residents, their words and images reveal the idiosyncrasies of a changing city.
Amir Curry, Alicia DeSimone, Jordan McCullough, and Carol Richardson McCullough

(IN)VISIBLE EXPOSURE: A SECURITY CAMERA, OR A LIGHT SWITCH.
INTRODUCTION,
A GROUP HISTORY—

When we were first exposed to the cameras in the fall, several people in the different groups were fascinated by the chunky, expensive cameras. I, on the other hand was nervous, and insecure. The camera was heavy. – AC

It’s bigger than me and you.
History in relief – it is a relief.
Leave the past where it lies.

Yesterday, a bird died on my front steps.
Today, she’s gone.
Now, that memory rests in the stop bath—
red from darkroom’s hush—
she is pressed into my timeline forever.

Carol looks away—
what is beyond the history on the wall?
what have we got to show for it?
Amir looks in—
what can we learn from our societal ancestors?
what have we got to show for it?

It’s bigger than you and me.
We are the film:
always exposed,
always developing. – AD
A wall made in white
People are out of the wall
Feels like a civil war  – JM

Predators galloping in the light  – AC
Sometimes the road gets
   Rocky and rough but you still
      Got to keep steppin’  – CM
PORTRAITS
(SELF AND OTHER)—

Red  Yellow  Blue  Green
Indigo  Violet  White
Black  Technicolor  – CM

Her brown skin’s calling for the lights—she doesn’t miss a beat, it’s about to be a mystical night, you can stamp your feet. Unfaltering steps, she uses her thighs, the crowd looks in her eyes. Unfazed, they rise.  – AC

Boldly Muted Tones
Complementary contrast
Shade. Hue. Vibrancy  – CM
I see a black guy but he’s not an actual person. It’s the shadow of a person, a silhouette. He’s a person of color—I mean seriously there is literally color inside of him. These colorful lines make it look like he’s glowing in the dark. He also looks like Oogey Boogey where he had a loose piece of thread and Jack ripped off his entire sack and all that was left of him were bugs. It’s fascinating and artistic. It looks creepy but underneath that, it’s a person and a work of art. – JM
“Above All Else Make It Look Effortless” (drawing) by Toyin Ojih Odutola, 2012
The curtains were sheer and the city could be viewed through them, through the gap. It appeared to be late in the night, the lights from nearby buildings illuminating the darkness.  –AC

Philadelphia feels heavy
in my mouth
and someone tells me I’ve bitten off more
than I can chew.
But I always keep chewing.
I am stuffed
and swollen with love.
My tongue sits thick in my mouth
with the weight of “home.”
It’s sticky and bitter and new.
Home sweet home.  – AD
FOR RENT/FOR SALE signs
Pop up in spring like flowers
In my neighborhood

A neighborhood’s face
Begins to change once others
Assess its value – CM

Rent Signs and Red Lines
Deferred Dreams we must leave
Cash comes not for us – AC

We will always keep
Moving and making.
Loving and leaving.
The holes left behind
Let in the light— – AD
sturdy from bricks yet
tired from movement, that
house is still home. while

not all ignorance
is intentional, its bliss
is a disease. I

stroll these streets. I am
young, rigid, and weak with need.
Me, a diseased house. – AD
All I see is an abandoned building, the same one we pass by every once in awhile and it’s still abandoned. It’s a brick building covered in red and blue paint which makes purple by the way. The door is gone and replaced by plastic wrap so people can easily see through it, with coffee spilled on the sidewalk, which doesn't even look too close to being finished. Next to it is probably a new building, a gated community perhaps where the sign says for rent. I’m sure people are living in it by now. Someone’s water is standing by the gate, half full. What’s above is either a security camera or a light switch. Either way it looks like bug eyes. – JM
My tears are a part of my humanity! Can’t you see?
(No don’t lament to me)
Fix your face, don’t fall prey to this infirmity, you’re a boy—those tears are an idiosyncrasy
Don’t tell me not to weep! – AC

Dilapidation
Dreams decay and fade away
But light still shines – AC
For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in...
There is a hierarchy. A scale. I thought we had already figured out that bigger isn’t better. My moments are small and warrant little attention, but they’re mine nonetheless. They are small and mighty and filled with learning. Like me. – AD

Illumination
Show us the way to live free
From our own darkness – CM
We bonded over the idea of (corrections, revisions, perfection). Until (Carol) said: (“They’re probably just slicing and dicing with their red pens.” I don’t like the color red anymore).  – AD
Look up and you might see Love standing right in front of you on these city streets, looking quite different than you'd ever imagined.
– CM
FROM THE ARTISTS—

AC – Amir Curry

In the beginning I was nervous, I felt directionless and out of my element when I initially encountered the cameras. But as I began to take pictures, I realized the most important part of capturing a photo is recognizing the nuances. I’m passionate about exposing details. But I’m even more passionate about highlighting and exposing the details that would be overlooked.
AD – Alicia DeSimone

For the last 6 months, I’ve been working with Carol, Jordan, and Amir. These three are brilliant, unique, and some of the most thoughtful people I’ve ever met. Carol and Jordan are my neighbors and Amir is a local high school student. We’ve been working on a photo essay, using photography as a means to inspire and strengthen our writing. I’ve learned so much from them about writing, but also about friendship, strength, and the human condition.
JM – Jordan McCullough

I was just standing there not perfectly straight but I was trying to make myself fit in the picture. The way I smile doesn't matter, sometimes I use my teeth, sometimes I don’t. I was thinking, “What am I doing here?” At first I was confused. I didn’t know what to expect. But honestly I was glad to be there. So now I feel pride.

CM – Carol Richardson McCullough

Photography offers a way of viewing a world that is constantly changing while preserving a slice of it, pressed within the pages of time. It offers a chance to glimpse what is and what has come before, taking me out of my confines and transporting me into another space. Walking along the street, passing the familiar, I stop now, and look through my lens to get a sharper view of the small detail against the broad backdrop. In this way I partake of the infinite and connect with the Divine.
Victoria Huggins Peurifoy, Kyle Howey, Dahmeme Town
I see competition between lines that I often wish I wouldn’t – it’s just that differences to me have always seemed to say that one of two is out of place. But this is never only the case. There’s special meaning in the uncommonness of things. I have to remind myself to take them more holistically. It can be marvelous. Recognizing color in histories that can’t be taught. But we can always use more color, under this shared ceiling of blue. To which the towers all point with us and simply marvel too.
[Victoria]

Five buildings exposed their brilliance while one building hides in the shadows. One building with an old design reveals fabulously ornate stylings. But the building on the left... a newer style... is unimpressive. The general hospital-looking building to the right is dingy in comparison to the others, but she's holding her own. 197 windows are revealed and yet 29 of those windows hide in the shadows. I imagine some folks are looking out, while some with shades, hide what's inside. Those 29 windows in the shadows hide from the lenses that stare. So many lines, many to count. But these structures all have an angle... that one has to study to figure out.
[Kyle]

I am bound to chance’s whim. Progress, if only taken. Here, every seat I’ve taken for longer than I realize becomes shadowed in, unenthralled, eventually. Emotionless, a motionless disdain. Wrought out of lonesomeness, the sick irregularity, a still curiously undamnable refrain. But upon this seat remains a waiting light. Progress, if only taken. Here, chance is all that’s left, but not as long left as I’d hoped. Imperative, enrapturing, essentially.

[Victoria]

Once again, I find myself alone, in the dark, in a corner, with shadows all around me. On stage, I’m preparing to go be a part of an act that folks are growing tired of hearing. This space holds the coldness outside, within these bricks that surround me. This rail, that rail, I wish would lead to a better place... So I could be folded and taken to brightness.
[Kyle]

And where’s your imaginary date this evening? Still imaginary, I guess.
But you’re so nicely dressed for one. Why even come?
Why not? I still like to dance.
Well I’m real. And I like dancing.
But where’s your date?
Let’s just call them imaginary too.

[Victoria]

Chandeliers so high, the illumination is limitless. Balconies allow for shadowed kisses. When the tables are adorned with ivory cloth, floor arrangements, and candles, a little wine thrown in sets the mood for sure.
[Kyle]

I am drawn last to light,
As much as it fulfills itself,
Commanding me.
The red eye offsets life,
Corrective, keeping mine in line.
The world behind is gorgeous,
Artistic, unobtrusive, unaligned,
So vibrantly undefined.

[Victoria]

Windows of the mind,
Imagine mirrors instead.
Towers of power or
Perception thereof. But the
Red light continues to say:
Stop, don’t come here.
Stop, we’re full.
Stop, you’re not wanted here.
Stop, I don’t want to be
renewed.
Stop, I’m fine the way I am.
Stop, stop, stop.
[Kyle]

Years ago, I would have told you I was comfortable here. Alone with my own thoughts. Worries, more often. But now I’m terrified of stillness. Surrounded by fears, I never realized where I was amidst the worst of them. Knee deep in a sewer, drenched in a bad parody of living. It felt safe. Riskless. Familiar. Wretchedly subsumed. Wombed. Unendangered, but all the more dangerously still. Fetal. Slumbering. Always waiting to be born.
[Victoria]

The lake is beckoning my spirit:
Come hither child. As I walk the
Dock to see the water’s depth,
The quietness is comforting.
As I sit wondering about life,
The water rustles over my
Toes. The sun goes down and
Paints a horizontal rainbow.
Choosing shades all of its own.
The fragrance of a day’s ending,
Tries to make me think of tomorrow;
But the trees sing a song in the
Breeze that distracts worry.
I should lay on this dock all night
And wake up to a beautiful
Sunrise and chirping birds.
I don’t know where “Nor” came from, but I do know that I blew in from the East, west, north, and south. I left an imprint... yes, I did. With 12” of powder I did blanket an entire City. I made all of the Trees and the bushes and even The budding flowers yield to My fury. Nothing In my way stood a chance. Yes, I even helped Trees move away from the homes That they had known for years. Yes, I exposed their roots And in uncommon ways, I Made them spread themselves Long and wide. Sitting on a Bench was impossible with Me around. I covered Its seat, its armrest, and its Legs. The only thing That shielded my fury was The well-laid storm windows and Secure oakwood doors. No room for safe Passage Through sidewalks, streets, Or breezeways. I was determined to have My way. 105 degrees anyone?
What I see and what you see is always different.
We have different eyes,
Different manners, and different intentions.
We live a world of differences
And cannot be the same
Because pure sameness is a neoliberal fault.
A harmful negligent canopy
Over these natural inconsistencies between us,
Despite a mutual respect
Acknowledging it does not forego
Any moral contingency
Of who you are compared to me.
Your different body,
Different youth,
Different heart,
Different path,
Is beautiful.
Just different from mine.
[Victoria]

**MY TEETH ARE SHOWING**

Life has worn on me.
In the mist, I’m suffering.
Everyone sees my struggle but
Ignores my pain.

Water flows through me like
Blood from a wounded soldier.

My tears freeze as soon as
The air can create icicles.
Disrepair is my chronic lament.
My teeth are showing decay
But the breakdown has been
Glaring for years.

Not until my teeth fall from place
Will the neglect be realized.
But the damage will be so
Severe, only then will my battle be won.

[Dahmere]

Cold, yet long, history is what I see in this image. Aging overtime as the relentless cold consumes and corrupts, leaving nothing but frost and ice, covering its vulnerable wounds. And its surroundings falling by the same fate, to end up decorated in snow, to please its frozen queen.

[Kyle]

What does it mean?
And where does it begin?
Perhaps without an end.
Tracing something, telling something else.
And is it human? Is it no one?
Angles, shapes, and outlines of the world.
All of the borders, figures, designations.
Tracing something, telling something else.
But how was it applied?
The texture, essence, measure, means?
For whom it was meant or would matter to?
Tracing something, telling something else.
Accidents, maybe,
Turned into celebrations.
Subtle candles in a fog
Not even time can extinguish.
And surely the lines will fade,
But new eyes recreate them.
Tracing something, telling something else.
WHAT DO I SEE IN YOU?

You are so colorful so vibrant so ornate so different so peculiar so square so glorious so intense so creative so purple and turquoise so vulnerable so confusing so bridge-building so confident so aerodynamic so bubbling so rainbowish so Brickyard so international so cultural so non-generic so eye-opening so troubling so vivid so in-your-face so Wakanda forever.
[Victoria]

I wish I was tall and shiny like that building next door. I’ve been here a long, long time and when I look over there, I can even see the clouds reflected in the glass of that building. No matter which direction people come, East or West on the Schuylkill Expressway, they can see her shining brightly. But they don’t see me. I wish they could see me from so far away. I wish I could shine like her.

[Dahmere]

The sky is clear
Like a salmon blue
The clouds, barely visible
Having nothing to do,
As the buildings nest,
Sitting, waiting for today’s due,
And when the city rests
You’ll be able to see it too
[Kyle]

OMNIPOTENCE

No matter whether power is taken or granted, strict or unrestrained, designated or peripheral, weak are those who take the hill and smile.
[Kyle]

Manifest feelings, tucked in corners, further pacified in frame. Just for onlookers to name. A slow resurfacing, inflected, never accidental, understood by everyone the same.

[Kyle]

We evolve at different steps and different paces, Verses that never have to rhyme. But some will live by selfish metaphors, Eluding one for all to climb.
[Victoria]

Darkness with a spot
Of Hope gives a feeling of
Rescue and mercy

[Dahmere]

An endless rabbit hole that some people just can’t climb out. With only very few escapes to be shown through decrepit cracks of light. Some fall so far that they can never return which divides people between race, class, wealth, status. And all to reach the top where they believe the light is, but it’s there, because from the beginning it was nothing more than a delusion.
Telling stories beneath a storm.  
Blanketed in comfortable promises.  
Making adventures on overcast days.  
Your eyes that meet me halfway.  
Our elbows on marble, and smiles as random.  
Pillow forts and Gameboy Colors.  
The days that end too soon.  
Some of the moments that remind me  
I’m here.
[Victoria]

There were five letters. Letters from a loved one. Letters that were written in the sixties. Letters that told a story of ravage and pain. Letters that a soldier had written from the place where he was in Vietnam; from a place where he was in Greenland; from a place where he wasn't home.

Five letters that told the story of survival and a desire to come home. A story of not wanting to be where he was. Because the people that he was fighting could be vicious at times. The people that he was fighting didn't want us over there anyway. The people that he was fighting were trying to kill him.

Five historical letters that told it all. Letters that said that even children could be dangerous. Now all we see is the imprint of where they used to be. All we see is a reflection of what used to be. Gone are the words that used to be, faded into cement where feet trample and care not.

[Dahmere]

Fractured light and faded squares. A path into alternate dimensions. 90 degree angles that form a gateway to another. Stained on the ground are past failed attempts. But take notice to the movement of these squares as it shows progress. And though this gateway might have failed and been destroyed, it was a necessary sacrifice in order to progress forward.
I’m reminded of the town I grew up in. They all look the same to me in winter. Several vacant hotel buildings, overlooking trim and recreated fields. Printer paper white skies, canvas for a dormant sketch of what is left.
[Dahmere]

Question everything!
Why is the grass green?
Where is everyone?
Who lives in those buildings?
Where are the clouds?
Where is the sun?
Where were those buildings made?
Does a team play here?
What’s on that billboard?
Would you have a picnic here?
I see change, it’s not the same as I remember it. The layout is still somewhat similar but a little more polished.

I hear occasional cars driving by familiar, yet unfamiliar voices. I don’t hear the creaks and cracks anymore. But I can still hear my past.

I see the old faces of my youth but I can see vague new faces that I don’t recognize. And they have taken my place here, in doing what I did here every day.

Where I lost my first tooth.

Where I would watch TV.

Where I would play video games.

Where I would eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Where I would go to sleep at night.

Where I would spend time with my family.

What it meant to me, was home. I used to live here before I moved. I could never see living anywhere else but here. This is where I grew up.

I only wish I could remember the first time I saw it.
In the stairway I see me and my friends hanging out, skipping class, laughing and stopping to hear if the principal coming. That stairway is a place where for some odd reason, only me and my friends linger around.

As I think about that place, I hear my annoying laugh and my best friend laugh. I hear her telling me stuff that I can’t believe she did, and I hear Newman telling us, “Get to class now.”

I mainly see my best friend and other close friends there. Oh yeah, and I can’t forget the other students that walk past us in the middle of our conversation.

There was a lot that happened in that stairway. Photo shoot, best friends fighting, being chased by friends, laughing, hiding from the teacher, skipping class, crying, and petty arguments. I want to remember all the good time I had in that stairway because in life you need good things to outweigh the bad.
The bond that was formed in 2014 grows each and every day so many different personalities but each one compliments each other. When I’m with my friends I know something fun will happen no matter where we are or what situation we may be in. The bond we have will forever be strong our love, motivation and our pride will never let it weaken. My friendship with them is: headaches, petty fights, being late to class, playing hide and seek in the school, sitting in the stairwell laughing, going into other classrooms being loud, going over each other house to dance and hangout, crying with each other when one of us is hurt or mad, and teaching Azi how to twerk. My friendship with them is: crazy, hard to understand at time, emotional, fun, weird, amazing and heartfulling.
“Stand tall and never fold.” When all odds seem like they’re against me I never let that hold me back. As the obstacles get harder I will get stronger, no matter the hardship I will always stand tall and never fold. “No honor, no glory.” My mindset was formed as the year went by. When I was little I always thought things were so easy; as I got older I realized that I have to face a lot of obstacles in order to get what I strive for and that is to be successful.
Writers Room oh Writers Room
Where do I start? As I look
At this picture I can see
Writing not only writing but
somebody else’s thoughts.
That’s the thing about Writers
Room the people here motivate
me to write my thoughts down.
I have to admit when I
first started out as a Writers
Room member I was scared
to write my thoughts down because
I thought that I would be judged
on what I wrote. That feeling
soon disappeared as I became more
confident in my writing and more
comfortable around the people
that motivated me and helped me.
Don’t get me wrong I’m still
shy about writing and reading out
loud but that gets easier and easier
every time I come
and meet up at
Drexel.
As I look at this picture I see a young lady ready for anything, she seems like she got everything figured out, she knows what she wants to be in life, she knows how to make it happen, and she's ready to take that one extra step to make it all happen. Although this is what I see in the picture this is not actually true.

This young lady in this picture is me and let me tell you something, I don't have everything figured out even though it may look like it, I don't. I'm still trying to figure out what I want to be in life. I been trying to figure out that since I was little, I am now in high school and I still don't know. Many people have ask what I plan on doing after high school and am I ready for college and I tell them I don't know, because I really don't, and I honestly don't think I'm ready to move onto the next chapter in my life. But hey, that's life and life waits for nobody. I just have to keep fighting through obstacles and keep trying different things until I find that one thing that's perfect for me.
Where am I from?

Well that’s kinda hard for me to answer. Some people would say they’re from Philly or New York but I can’t just say that. Yes I’m from Philly, West Philly to be exact. A place where almost everybody smoke or sell drugs but I’m not just from there I came from generations and generations of strong black women who never gave up in what they believe in.

I came from love that is still together even after 30 years, I came from years of slavery even though I wasn’t born during that time my ancestors was. As I look at this picture a lot of questions run through my head and one of the questions is why when somebody asks, “Where are you from?” people respond with their hometown but not with their origin.
I took this picture in my school. Devin was being shown around by me and I ended up taking this picture when he turned around.

Some lines in this picture is the lines on the window. The shadows coming from the lines are perfect.

What is missing from this photo is Kyle, Dahmere, and Mark. I didn't get the chance to get them in this picture because they was off somewhere else.

The light is coming from the window giving this mysterious look to the picture.

Far off in the distance there is gates. They are the same gates that me and Azi leave out of to go get food from Stacy’s.
The most clearest thing in this picture is Devin but he is also the most shadowy.

Some questions:

How did I get it to come out like this?

What was Devin doing?
I also took this picture in the school. I was trying to re-capture the picture I took of Zah with Devin in his place instead.

The lines in this picture are the lines on the lockers, the walls, and the lines of the zipper on Devin’s jacket.

Just outside the picture are kids at their lockers talking and playing around.

The light in this picture is coming from the light on the ceiling. This light is perfectly reflected on the doors and the floor.
Q: How did photography change you?

A: Photography changed the way I look at things. It also gave me something to look forward to in the future. Before photography I didn’t really see the beauty in things in a way, yeah I have noticed that some things were cute but it’s much more than that. When I got into photography I started looking at the history of the objects and how I could make that picture better. Photography gave me the chance to learn and make photos better. It also gave me a career to look forward to.

When I first started this project I expected that we would just be writing, and reading what we wrote out loud to other people every time we met up, but it turns out that we ended up doing more than that. As the months went by the project had exceeded my expectations. Instead of just writing we got introduced to photography and got the chance to take amazing photos.

I have noticed that I have taken a liking to photography and been introduced to this art form. Before I knew about Writers Room I didn’t have a clue about what type of art form I wanted to pursue, I just knew that I wanted to get into art, I felt like that’s something I could be good at. When I started the project all that changed, I began to realize that photography was something that I can really take serious. Each day I learn more about photography and I love it. I like that I get to capture moments and show them to people and I get to see their reaction. That really makes me want to do more with photography. I believe that this change was good for me it gave me the opportunity to experience photography.
I have noticed that my work as a photographer is much stronger than my work as a writer. When I write there is flaws, flaws that I may not see but other people do see, so I need to start writing more so I can learn where my flaws are at and how I can fix them.

It’s been pretty exciting and nerve-wracking being a part of Writers Room. There a lot of people with strong mindsets and different ways of thinking. I say its nerve-wracking because when it’s time for me to read what I write I be nervous and a little shy but that is where the exciting part come in. After I get done with reading I get to hear their opinion on what I wrote and that gives me the chance to become better, so next time when I write I can apply what I learned. This is also the same with photography: I get to hear different opinions on what I could do to make it better.

Photography is definitely something I would like to continue I believe I can make a career out of it. I have had a lot of people tell me that I’m very good at it so that leads me to thinking that I should do what I’m good at and get paid for it. Some things I would like to do differently is come to school on time and get more of my work done and also turn in my work for Writers Room on time.
A wise man once said that history is written through the eyes of the Victor, the Hunter so to speak. But man is not a solitary animal and since we are all intricately connected, writing a true historical account that includes the contribution and value that all cultures have to offer would be most beneficial to us all. It is in that spirit of inclusion that leads and necessitates a true understanding. In my limited scholarly attempt to unfold truths not commonly known, I am perceiving the African American contribution found in that tapestry. A wonderful tapestry of life that includes many colors, all interwoven, inter-connected, yet still vibrant and strong in its own right.

We are all familiar with the limited civic education that we receive throughout our schooling. What I’m interested in sharing and exploring is akin to finding the true story of many unseen heroes who paved the way and broke down barriers while making invaluable contributions to the history of this country even while being persecuted by it and in spite of it. If America were to live up to her true ideals of equal rights and justice for all, decent housing and living wages would be a reality for everyone, eliminating the need for mass incarceration, police brutality and poverty.

Philadelphia has the highest percentage of homeless veterans. Philadelphia is the poorest big city in America. How can that be? The birthplace of the nation? Home of the first capital of the US? But its dark underbelly reveals a history of contradictions...
and hypocrisy that persists even to this day. A spirit of elitism and entitlement continues to subjugate and control the masses who struggle mightily to survive on a daily basis. Penn’s Landing once was the auction block that sold and separated families until it was finally outlawed. Meanwhile George Washington shuttled his slaves back and forth every six months to avoid capture.

Free Africans lived in Philadelphia and with the help of abolitionists fought against the institution of slavery. Many prominent families made valuable contributions to the history of this nation. It was not without its struggles, but families were united whenever they managed to escape north during the UGRR. William Still’s here in Philadelphia was responsible for shuttling folks further north once the Fugitive Slave Act was enacted in 1831, which gave slave catchers jurisdiction to kidnap folks back to slavery.

Many live in low income neighborhoods with marginal resources from the city. Schools are sub-standard, with antiquated books, and libraries, and limited enrichment and sports, computers. Today, descendants of those African Americans here in Philadelphia still struggle with many of the same issues their ancestors did, ie. bigotry, violence, discrimination, and poverty. During the Great Migration from 1910-1960 when 6 million blacks left the south to head north to escape violence and lack of opportunity only to find much of the same happening here and a cool reception. They were in competition with other immigrants from Europe and etc. who were arriving to America just as the Industrial Revolution
was beginning. Changes were coming for sure...but nobody had no idea how massive it would be.

In 1899 W.E.B. DuBois wrote his famous novel, The Philadelphia Negro which expelled a lot of myths and stereotypes about African Americans. He presented scientific evidence, scholarly proof that disputed the current sociological writings of the day that created statistics to prove the inferiority of the African. DuBois notably provided historical documentation, but history itself was being written by the likes of Octavius Catto, Paul Robeson, etc.

This year we are celebrating the 150th anniversary of the novel through a year long celebration of his writings.

(2)

Memory is part of the patchwork that shapes, molds and creates who you are now and are capable of becoming.

Like fabric squares assembled on a quilt sewn together by family, friends and culture creating community. If love is the foundation, then memory is the glue that sustains generations of connections; all stitched together to create elaborate patterns, designs and even more connections. And memory is always there waiting. It could surface as innocuously as a smell or taste that could evoke memories that seem a whole lifetime away.

My life growing up in Philadelphia has been a lot like that. I grew up during the early 50s and 60s, while America was experiencing its
most turbulent times in its history. But looking back with a sense of wonder through a child’s eyes, all I remember was the beginning of TV in 1954 and watching “Bertie the Bunnyip” a character similar to Sesame Street. We went swimming at the Y at Broad/Jeff. And we went to the Pearl Movie Theater for only 10¢!

Back then, the Thanksgiving Day Parade used to come all the way up Broad St to Lehigh, so we would stand outside my grandmother’s house at York St and watch it as it proceeded north on Broad St. Every Friday my father would pick us up from foster care for weekend visitation. I remember consuming belly-busting mounds of potato salad, greens and fried chicken on Sundays at Father Divine’s Hotel, a historic landmark at Broad/Fairmount. Saturdays we’d go bowling at the bowling alley at Broad/Glenwood. Now 60 years later I can still bowl a couple of strikes...lol. Once I get warmed up.

Later on during my teenage years after we came home from foster care, was the beginning of Motown in the early 60s. We would go to American Bandstand at 46th/Market to the Dick Clark Show and go to the Steel Pier in AC for the Jerry Blavat show. But the memories I cherish the most are times spent at the Uptown Theater at Broad/Dauphin. Teens and even gang members would call a truce] from all over the city, to come and witness some of Motown’s greatest, ie. Temptations, James Brown, 4 Tops, Smokey Robinson, Gladys Knight, just to name a few. Philadelphia has always been a music mecca dating all the way back to the 40s with its abundance of jazz clubs.

At the height of the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King was assassinated and the riots came. While all the fire, fury and rage
exploded out into the streets, communities, families and dreams were destroyed. Neighborhoods once vibrant and self-sustaining, years later remain shuttered, monuments to a time when politics and racial inequality collided in an ongoing struggle. Very little reconstruction was ever done in these neighborhoods and gentrification has claimed the ashes. Generations of families continue to be forced out by developers with politicians in their pockets.

(3)

On Sunday, February 4, 2018 the Eagles, Philadelphia’s football team, won the football championship Super Bowl for the first time since 1960. After years of dormancy, the city of Philadelphia erupted like a mighty volcano, its thousands of fans pouring out into the streets like molten lava. Except for a few minor incidents, the Eagles Parade offered the city of Philadelphia the potentiality of entering a new era in her history. She seems to be living up to her image as the City of Brotherly Love. As fans of all ages, races and religions converged on the streets to celebrate their long awaited Championship, the feeling throughout the city was electrifying! Some fans traveled from as far away as Florida, Detroit, California, and Germany. Many stood up to 12 hours and even overnight in sub-freezing temperatures with the look of ecstasy on their faces and joy in reaching a community goal. It was then that I saw the possibility of all races uniting on a common goal. Over one million people gathered peacefully in the Spirit of Brotherhood. I’m sure the Founding Fathers would be amazed and pleased at the camaraderie amongst the people.
Oftentimes during early American history, discussions and debates got very heated and outright raucous as legislators struggled to build a Union while exerting independence from Great Britain. Battles ensued daily over ideologies that struggled to find consensus regarding the direction of their newly found republic.

But, Philadelphia has always been like “A Tale of Two Cities.” The seen and the unseen. The part that’s displayed to the world, and the part that’s hidden. Like looking through a kaleidoscope, the images are portrayed and interpolated according to how we control and manipulate the apparatus, through race, culture, economics and law. Policies have been created that have led to generations of poverty, crime, lack of housing and education, which perpetuates a system of exploitation and mass incarceration. Families have been decimated, communities disrupted and destroyed and our children continue to suffer. So while we celebrate this great victory, let the mighty Eagle spread forth its wings to cover up and bless all of Philadelphia.
Devin Welsh

THE SHEARS

They looked brand new when they belonged to you – their silver sheen giving a mirror’s appearance – despite having first belonged to your mother, and now you’ve passed them on to mine. The black case they’re in still smells like the sewing room at the Grant Avenue house. Every time I hear the hum of her sewing machine I can’t help but think of you; Dad too. The new machine you got her for her birthday is a bit faster but the hum is still similar. Somehow we’ll both find ourselves downstairs idling around the table; not talking, just listening to the hum. Once, Dad told me about how as a kid he would sit with you in the sewing room while you worked on someone’s prom dress, or another woman’s wedding dress. He told me how he would hold the pins sometimes, and other times he was in charge of the money; he still thinks you didn’t charge nearly enough for those dresses, but generosity was always sort of your thing.

I still remember sitting in the sewing room in North Carolina during that summer I came to visit. I remember waiting up for midnight for you to start your shift at Aetna, and how I’d run in to your sewing room/office while you were working. I remember how you were working on Harry Potter book seven and how you’d read that to me in between calls, and how it was funny to me when you’d switch from your reading voice to your phone voice and back again. I remember that almost being like a game, but maybe I was just an easily entertained 9-year-old. I remember that break-time was at 3 a.m. and how we only had so much time to get downstairs to make our late-night snack before we had to get back up to work (a habit that has returned to me in college). Sometimes, when I’m reading to myself, I can almost hear your voice reading to me in my head; it makes cultural anthropology a bit more palatable.
I had been talking with Aunt Leslie about missing your voice right around the time the ALS took it from you – from us – indefinitely. While that never stopped you from telling us you loved us with three pats on the heart, and eventually just a nod of the head, I was terrified that I’d someday forget what your voice sounded like. The memories are stored away somewhere, triggered by almost anything, but a voice is more elusive; yours was made up of certain tell-tale tones and qualities – the sing song-iness that you’d bring to anything and everything; the warmth; the way you would read; the way it could calm a crying me without fail – it was scary to think that those things could just atrophy from my memories of you. I remembered that while you were in North Carolina you had
recorded “Hank Zipzer” books on little tapes that I’d play in my blue Olympus recorder, and I told Leslie how I’d lost track of them when we moved a few years back. I’m still torn up that I’d taken something so precious for granted when I thought I had so many more years with you. But that was when she told me about a few books you had recorded for her daughter, Ji’Mia, and that I could borrow them. She had given them to me shortly after you had passed, and I couldn’t wait to hear your voice again. When I opened “Goodnight Moon” and your voice started playing – your reading voice – I lost it. It was the closest I had been to being curled up on the couch or sitting in the sewing room with you; part of me was happy to have heard your voice and to know that I’d never lose it again, but that didn’t make it any easier. I haven’t listened to the recordings since; we gave the books to Lance and he’s going to record them digitally and he’ll have them for me when I’m ready again. I think it tears Lance up knowing that his son won’t get the chance to get to know the woman you were, the woman who raised us- shaped us, or how much you loved him. But you have given us a lifetime of stories and memories that we’ll tell to Miles with smiles stretched across our faces. He will know you, Mom-Mom. He may not remember the first time you held him, but the look on your face alone is enough for him to know that he has, and will always have, your love. You should see him now, he looks so much like Lance, and he makes all the funny faces in the world; his eyes are so expressive and warm like yours, and he’s even got your smirk down. I know you’re watching over him and he may not know it yet, but he’s the luckiest little boy in the world to have someone like you in his corner. It makes all the difference in the world.
THE DOG TAG

The dictionary on my laptop defines a dog tag as “North American informal: a soldier’s metal identity tag, worn on a chain around the neck.” If this woman was anything, she was a soldier. I’m not sure “dog tag” totally fits this piece, but “soldier” doesn’t fully capture my Mom-Mom either, so I suppose it’ll work.

This dog tag is a metallic medallion, if you will, with a laser-etched image of Juanita on the front, with her fingerprint reproduced on the back, so that when worn, it would hang somewhere over our hearts. My dad, my uncle Lance, and I each have one to remember the woman who shaped our lives, though each one of us has a different picture of her. Each picture is meant to capture the image of the woman we remember; my image was taken from a picture she and I took at the tail-end of my senior year of high school. Her face just sort of communicates the feeling she had given me my whole life, whether she was physically with me or not: “I’m proud of you, I’m in your corner, and there’s nowhere else I’d rather be.” That sounds a bit presumptuous, but I think it’s true. She had been particularly proud that day, because it was the awards ceremony the day before my graduation, and I was the first of her boys to be walking at graduation from North Penn, despite both my father and uncle having been through its halls.

On the flip side of this medallion is her fingerprint. We were asked to choose between having her fingerprint and her face on each of our medallions, but if you’re lucky enough to have known this woman, you know she wouldn’t be stopped by something as simple as a protocol, so we got both. The fingerprint represents the clear and visible mark she has made on each of our lives; it represents the years she spent taking care of us, looking out for us, working for our sake, enduring physical and mental pain, and all the while, loving us unconditionally.
I wore this medallion for the first time at her celebration of life, which was held at the church/facility that also housed my first daycare after being primarily in her care. She had gotten a second job there when I started at the daycare, and some of my earliest memories were there with her. Members of our family from all over the states came to celebrate her life; she was the glue that held our big messy family together and afloat. I, for the first time in my memory, met her brother and my great uncle, Sumner, from Boston. Growing up, they lived in Boston for a time where he decided to stay, and he shared her faint Boston accent; I stood in the rain talking to Sumner because he shared her accent and her calm demeanor and warm eyes, and because he had stories about her that I’d never heard. At one point, Sumner saw my medallion and asked to see it, initially enthralled by her picture on the face of it. I took it off and let him hold it, and it was then that he saw her finger print on the back and took a moment, pressing his own finger against it, “that’s my big sister,” he murmured in disbelief, “I can’t believe she’s gone.”

I spent almost the entirety of that family gathering with my eyes on the door, waiting for her to make her entrance into the hall; she would make a fuss about her picture being everywhere while holding a camera of her own. She would make sure that she spoke to every person, making sure everyone had enough to eat, wiping away the tears caused by her absence. But the whole time I had my eyes on that door, I had this medallion around my neck and in my hand, knowing very well that encased within it were her ashes. She wasn’t there, here, or anywhere, but at the same time, she is. She’s with each of us, always, in (and on) our hearts.
If I’m having a particularly hard day, or if I’m missing her extra that day, I’ll run my fingers over her fingerprint and look at her picture, and for that moment she is here, she is tangible. When the light hits her portrait a certain way, her face lights up and it’s like she’s coming up off the cold metal, inside of which is her ashes, but also, with them, is all of our memories—the times we’ve shared, the things I miss about her.
Fridays at Writers Room are what allow me to feel comfortable calling myself a writer. I get to be in a creative space with wildly intelligent and thoughtful people that never fail to teach me something. Working with my new friend Kaliyah has shown me how important it can be to have a genuine passion for the project at hand, but also that placing a crazy amount of pressure on anything can be discouraging. At the same time, she has shown me that a degree of fun can go a long way, even if she has some misguided opinions on the miracle of coffee. Kaliyah is one of the most thoughtful people I’ve ever met, and working with Miss Patricia has taught me that you could have a world’s worth of knowledge, but it does you no good if you’re too shy to share it! I don’t think I could’ve helped Kaliyah at all or grow myself in the way that I have, had I not had the opportunity to work in my Tripod group.

Sometimes, though, when I’m sitting down to write, I find myself falling into the same traps that I tried to help Kaliyah avoid. I’d find myself scratching out sentences or ripping out entire pages for fear that I have nothing to say or no place saying what I have already. All it takes, though, is some time to re-realize that writing is a process, and not one that is easily done, especially not alone. Writing isn’t inherently profound if you use big SAT words or write for the sake of sounding important. Writers Room has re-trained me to love writing for the sake of writing.

From the moment I found out I was going to be a part of Tripod, I’d told Rachel about the project I wanted to create/curate, one that I’ve been mulling over in my brain since July. In a way, I was asking Rachel for permission, but it wasn’t her permission that I needed. It was permission from myself. It was as though I commissioned
myself to do a project that I thought I wasn’t qualified to do. I felt an immense pressure to capture the most amazing qualities of the most amazing woman, and it wasn’t until Rachel sat me down and helped me realize that I was the only thing stopping myself from creating, that I was doing my grandmother, the project group, and myself a disservice by being too scared to write.

This experience, the people I’ve had the opportunity to work with on the project that I was lucky enough to be part of, has helped me grow leaps and bounds from where I was to where I am, both as a writer and as a person. Working with Kaliyah and Pat has shown me a world I always wished existed, one where we learn and share and teach and grow and write, a place where I feel comfortable enough to share my thoughts and form new ones, a place I wasn’t sure I’d ever see, but coming up on these final few weeks of this project, I realized that I’m a part of that world.
THE BOY WITH THE BALL
Kaliyah

In this frame there is a playground, somewhere kids can run around and be kids. Somewhere to meet new friends at or just play around with their family. It might just be me but when I was younger I used to hate just sitting on the bench watching my cousins play, but now that bench seems like the perfect spot to sit and relax while I watch kids play.

Just outside of it there are people rushing to work, just hanging around conversing with they friends, kids playing basketball, cars beeping their horns because some driver decided to stop at a green light and people walking round taking photos, which was us.

Patricia

I remember the joy of playing ball. Any kind would do, I remember. Dodgeball, king ball, baby in the air, oldy mommy witch...all the street games we played well in the evening as warm summer breezes carried our laughter through open windows and rooftop patios where folks gathered to catch the smallest promise of a breeze.

Children bring a carefree, joyful exuberance to life. They see possibilities not limitations. As the little guy in the photo shows they wait expectantly as the ball approaches confident that they will catch it, or maybe the bounce is part of the joy? To experience the up and down of the ball was our preparation for life...and sometimes we totally missed the catch and we were “out of the game.” But that didn’t dampen our enthusiasm in the least, because we knew that we could always put our dibs in for next game.
Devin

What’s in the frame:

The boy and his boots are walking with a purpose, a destination in mind: that ball. Where’s it gonna end up, he doesn’t care, that isn’t his concern. He doesn’t see the bright red stop sign a few feet above his grey-hatted head, nor does he care what it has to say. That’s not his concern. His eyes fixed on the ball bounce with it as it tries to escape him, but it won’t, you can tell by the way he’s steppin’, that ball is his one and only concern.

Just outside the frame/what happens after:

“Boy, don’t you go in that street.” A nice stranger scoops the ball up off the black concrete and bounces it back to the boy, putting both him and his mama back at ease. “Don’t just take it and run—whaddya say?” But that boy didn’t hear her; he was just happy to have his ball back, and the stranger could feel the gratitude in the way that boy bounded back for the court. Words weren’t his concern.

Maybe the stranger remembers chasing his ball into the street, catching heat from his mama, and the stranger who helped him. He smiled and saw the boy chasing his ball up and down the court.

Now that the stranger can relate to, the feeling of chasing that ball as it bounces toward a dream that he’s had since before the stranger helped him. He smiled again.
Brenda Bailey

MABEL TAYLOR’S SPEAKEASY

There was a time, not so long ago, when on Sundays the bars, liquor stores, grocery stores as a matter of fact most of the stores, were closed. Sunday was a sacred day. People went to church and rested to prepare for work on Monday. However, some found a way to make money from home. They sold soul food, liquor and a good time. It was called the speakeasy. The one in my community was Mabel Taylor’s. She was quite the entrepreneur. You could play cards for money and the house got a cut. You could enjoy a meal and have a cocktail all at a price. Liquor was sold in shots, half pints, and pints. You would receive a set up with your drink order (ice, cups and soda). Living on Ludwick Street, we were in walking distance from Mabel’s. I can hear my mother asking my father where he was going. Around the corner to Mabel’s was his response. My mother would smile and say he was going to see his girlfriend. When his brother/friends came looking for him she would tell them he is over his girlfriend’s house and they knew exactly where to go. Selling liquor on Sunday was against the law. You had to use code words. Sometimes if my dad had too much to drink and went to sleep, Mabel’s husband Goldie would come and tell my mother. She would go and wake him up. No one wanted to get punched out trying to wake him up. She knew the secret: throw cold water in his face and move out of the way fast. I do not remember there being any fighting but there were plenty of people hooking up. Speakeasy love affairs.

Today, liquor stores, bars, and grocery stores--just about everything is open on Sunday. And most restaurants serve alcohol. The speakeasy is a thing of the past. The house on 41st
Street is still there with many memories within the walls. Looking at the house I can hear the sweet sounds of music coming out of the front door. See the women in their dresses looking beautiful, the men in their suits and ties some coming from church, others coming from home. Ms. Mabel and Goldie are gone but the memories linger. I guess you could say those were the good old days.
I loved living on Ludwick Street. It was not the suburbs, but I had a giant backyard. This is where I first felt grass under my feet and fell in love with the fresh cut smell of it. Whenever I ride through the parks and smell it I remember Ludwick Street. Laying in the grass, watching my mother hang clothes on an umbrella clothesline, watching the caretaker remove the garbage and put it out for trash day. I hear the greetings from the neighbors passing by, and those hanging out their own clothes. I see her smiling and the sun shining on her face.

The house was a small two bedroom with an eat-in kitchen and a living room. We sat at the table as a family. In the summer we left the door open to cool the house. The screen door kept the flies out. Sitting on the steps after dinner, watching the cars go by was how many a summer’s night was spent.

The memories are so vivid. I can smell the grass and feel the love. I shared the terrace with families that lived on Budd Street and Haverford Avenue. I walked to Martha Washington elementary school with my mother three times a day. We came home for lunch.

Greetings came from those we knew and those we did not. People spoke as they passed by in that time. Playing with friends in the terrace, we were the envy of those who did not live there. Playing double dutch with clothesline rope, shooting dead man’s bluff with bottle caps. My favorite was wall ball. I could really slam that ball.

Went to visit Ludwick Street. The terrace is gone, but the church we use to peek in to see the ladies shouting is still there. I have been told that when you get older short term memory begins to fade and long term memory pushes its way forward.
REMEMBERING THE SONGS OF CHILDHOOD

I’ve been told when a boy kiss a girl, they take a trip around the world

Yea, Yea

Shopa doo wop one

Shopa doo wop two

All the way to ten.

Body rotating around

Smiling at the boy you want to go around the world with as you take off running.

Lewis would always catch me, put his arm around my neck and smile.

We would walk through the terrace together and he would always say, right after he kissed me, “You going around the world with me?”

“Yeah,” was my response.

But his mama was not having it, her vanilla baby was not having anything to do with dark chocolate.

No mocha babies coming from me.

Then one day he moved. Looked for him. Was heart-broken. Cried, but that passed.

No worries. Never went around the world with vanilla, only dark chocolate.
ME TOO

Such a beautiful baby.

Look at the legs on that girl

Your booty is damn, girl

Look at your subtle breast

Better not tell

Who gone believe you
Every community needs a superhero, a sign of hope that there is someone to protect them from dangers real and unreal. Just like our graff world superhero. He provides hope for the nodder. Hope for those lost in the dark. A beacon of light in the darkness.
HOW MANY TIMES

How many times have I died in this lifetime?
Was it when the trumpet played the sweet melody of my blues?
That bass guitar, strumming my sorrow
How many times have I died in this lifetime?
The hands of locs that caressed my body and smelled of musk.
The lion of Judah.
At the hands of the gunga that made me shake in gigantic hands, the size of me.
How many times have I died in this lifetime?
White lines on the mirror reflecting the zebra lines for European streets.
Psychedelic walks in the park, the sun rays pouring like rain.
How many times have I died in this lifetime?
Only my Savior knows
How many times death comes in a lifetime.
BAGGAGE

Memories come and go like clouds on a windy day
Dwelling and being down about it, what a waste of time.
Old baggage weighing me down.

I chose to say “Thank you,” for leaving me in a foreign land.
I was shown hospitality even though I was a stranger
Negative baggage weighing me down.

I received the education the haters said I would not get.
Friends who love me still, just as I am
Baggage weighing me down.

Thank you for trying to break me down.
I grew stronger, smarter. Learned to do for myself.
Baggage has become light as the clouds floating in the sky.
Dear Kayla,

Working on this project with you these past months has given my heart joy. Your youthful outlook has given me a different point of view on many things. You are a camera genius. You have opened my eyes to see things that I thought eyesores in the community. I see them now as assets. Great things are waiting for you. Keep looking through the lens.

Kind

Amazing

Youthful

Lovely

Accepting

Peace,

Ms. Brenda
Writers Room has encouraged me beyond my expectations. I liked to write but I would look at something I had written and just leave it and move on. People at Writers Room have encouraged me to keep trying, to dig deep. I really appreciate the encouragement because “practice does make progress.” Working on the projects with young people, seeing them blossom and become the best writers they can, is inspiring. They are not waiting until they are retired. But all flowers don’t bloom at the same time. I want to thank Ms. Kirsten, Ms. Rachel and Ms. Valerie for their encouragement and words of wisdom and love. Thank U.

Peace,

Brenda Bailey
Kayla Watson

MY SPRING BREAK

I met this girl full of wonder,
Thursday afternoon after being hit on by a couple dudes
*shivers*

Different was she,
I fought her best friend and she still vibes with me.
Something about her set me on fire,
I don’t know what it was,
Maybe the way she walked,
The way she talked,
Or was it was the way you can tell she’s in her own world.

Somebody dared me to kiss her,
Looking at her I saw a light blush creep up on her cheek;
not too visible,
Unless you just focus on her,
Asking wasn’t an option,
Especially while standing on a shuttle bus full of passengers,
Soft and tender she was,
And that was that.

She was my spring and I was her break.
TRY ME

I lost you once
I’m not losing you again
You left me for a year
and probably didn’t care
Tried calling
Tried fake calling, acting like I butt dialed you
It didn’t work
I tried texting you to catch up on live
No answers
I even tried “accidentally” texting
Still no reply
That hurt and put a dark spot on my heart
But as soon as I was over you
I felt better
Then that very same day you called and texted
Dear Kayla,

I’ve most enjoyed my time working with you because of your photography skills. Your face really lights up when explaining something we don’t know. You're passionate about it and that’s really nice to see. I’ve also admired people who were able to find something they’re passionate about in high school, because that definitely wasn’t me. At times it seemed like with writing it was a little harder to find your groove with; but when you sat down, were given a topic and space and time to create, you can up with some amazing pieces! You very much work through your emotions about a situation on the page; I remember you telling Ms. Brenda and I that we needed to loosen up more with our writing. I was confused initially because I abhor structure and find it very hard to be confined to a single set of rules, especially as it applies to my poetry. But I definitely took in your comments and reflected on my writing. I usually am trying to make a point with what my finished project has to say, and this may look as though I’m trying too hard or too structured. In actuality, it’s far from it, however, I definitely feel that my prose could use more of me within it. I write, of course, how I think; it’s a reflection of the way my mind
works. But in the past few years, I’ve been trying to change the way I think and maybe it’s time my writing has reflected more of that evolution. Thank you for always being frank, and sharing stories of your mother. The light in you attitude and expressions about your mother remind me of my relationship with my own mother. Full of life and very tight. We’ve been close since I was young and I pray that your relationship will remain the same as well. It has been a wonderful experience working with you again, from Mighty Writers to here.

I hope you continue to search for ways to capture your own light in the same way you capture the varied light of the world behind your lens.

Best,

Jazz
Dear Jasmine,

I want to thank you for the great experience of writing and creating with you. You are doing great things and I see you in great places. The theme we decided on as a group was a good match for the team. Thank you for your patience and kindness; I will not look at your generation the same because of you. You have great ideas and I see you doing great things in your life.

Jewel

Awesome

Smile

Mellow

Insightful

Nice

Encourages

Peace,

Ms. Brenda
Jasmine James

NOT DOING GREAT THINGS

Everybody’s off doing great things
I’m not

I sit in my bed
Resting my head
Hoping they’ll leave
The demons unsheathe
To stab at my will
of power until

I give in

I don’t want to be a statistic
Used by big business
To pull us down anymore than we have drowned
A constant reminder, our futures can’t get brighter
“Because all you’ll ever be” if you do this
“All you’ll ever achieve” if you do that
You can’t tell what I’m gonna do
So they tell me that I got something to prove
But it's hard

So like Brooks said back in tenth
Under that tent of assumption
“You'll never do that because you can't get down pat....abc, xyz, 123, alkaline metals to allotropy. Thermal conductivity and the electromagnetic spectrum”
And I'm supposed to puff up my chest to spite him
Invite him, entice him
Brush off the negativity
Embrace the toxicity
Understand the malice, the biting venom of his words
And build a palace out of determination and hard work.

But fast forward to now and it's true
I can't
or won't
or don't know the true meaning of determination
I become the embodiment of extermination
Of this nation
Even with patience
I’m a patient to this life
Just be patient, it’ll work out
Just be patient, you’ll get there
Just be patient, stop with the doubt
Just be patient, life’s not always fair
Now I chose stability over creativity

A plan in hand, over uncertainty
Assertiveness and blurting facts
Over quiet, sit back, relax, go with the flow
And the happiness will show
I hope
But to ensure, be sure of the cure
Undeterred by the lack of spurs
I had to roll up and show up
Can’t get any lower, so I chose to float above.
LOSS

Sometimes I am it

I feel loss in my home

Loss at a banquet

Thundering through the existential dome

I become stormy weather.
It's a baby forest. There are branches stretching every which way; it reminds of the opening scene to a Disney movie. You know how it goes...

Someone's parents just died, odds are it's the mother. In a sorrowful but majestic way.

There's not much else in the frame besides branches and leaves. This is the way I like it.
Her front locks are splayed by the wind
Increasing in momentum as we stand admiring the changes
And recognizing the losses
Proud in her stance and unshakeable frequency
She remembers
her neighborhood
There's distress, in face and heart
Of a memory eclipsing the present
In Womanhood, a pheasant might be plucked free
of its spirit and hastened in its life expectancy
Drowning in unrecognition
Lowering the partition to be freed, only by her imagination,
But this pheasant lets no one impede her vision
She tells stories of aberration
In her own life and others, countless brothers in this city
Fighting for a committee of understanding
All this grasped from her uneasy smile, parceled with confidence
The continuance of her spiritual bounty
Found with the grapes of staff, working for a
more inclusive and immersive future
She writes the tales told through tainted tears and teeth
So sheer
Her spirit is incomparable
In awe, we watch her continue to be great.
She wanted a picture by the bus stop. We initially went outside just to look at shrubbery, even in though this cold weather would definitely prevent us from getting anything lively or colorful. We hung around the sign in front of the short brick walkway connecting Penn and Drexel. We moved towards 32nd St. and she began getting into character, breaking out into short jobs back and forth as she pretended to be chasing after a bus. I asked her to stand still for moment and took this photo. I was moved; unhinged at how movie-like it appeared to be. A still from film about the 60’s in Philly. I wanted to write that film just from what she’d told me about Ludwick St. and her childhood; I could already hear the cacophony of children’s voices mimicking the anecdote Brenda shared not too long ago. She used to sing some song and get paired up with another young soul, destined to be soulmates. “We were fresh.”
“If you love anything, you should love your mother, Jehovah and your dog.”
I remember helping my mother pick out this address plate, although I can't remember if we chose it before or after we moved. It makes me think of jaded summers, lying inside on the couch and watching tv. It makes me nostalgic for our art museum trips and the nights where we'd relish in the gems we found at the Odunde festival. The address plate isn't our home, you could replace it in minutes if cracked or broken by rambunctious kids. But somehow when I look at it, a whole timelines of my childhood runs like those suspenseful movie scenes where a character is viewing the old timey reel of their life, trying to figure out where exactly everything changed. In a way, I am that character. Things definitely didn't change for the worse, but I did feel like a sense of self died when I left 711A. When I realized we would have to move, I didn't think I would be so attached. In general, the hassle of packaging everything up and trying to figure out how to find comfort in a new house was daunting. But the actuality of leaving, of possibly forgetting when my mother redid my entire room for my birthday, or taking home the caterpillars to watch blossom during my time in preschool, or screaming in terror as some dude in a green Dipsy suit tried to bring the Teletubbies to life at my three-year-old birthday party; I still feel the reverberations of the incident,
as the horror movie noir film elements of my memory color my traumatizing perspective of a man simply trying to get paid for wearing a smelly suit in a stuffy backyard. All of these things, however, I carried with me. I was concerned about forgetting me, myself as a child, but these memories became more vibrant than ever. Even visiting the house eleven years after I left it still fills me with the melancholic sanguine attitude of someone who'll never replace or truly lose 711A.

This used to be a salon owned by the mother of one of my best friends. I don't know if our mothers knew each other prior to them owning the shop there, but they became close and she ended up doing my mom's makeup for her wedding. This place used to shout
orange and yellow bursts, Jill Scott and Floetry in the background as you passed by. The door would be propped open, the smell of essential oils was strong, and they reached for you with foundation smudged hands. Nicholas and his mother would come over occasionally and Nicholas and I would find our way to my room to play with Barbies and other toys. He seemed to take after his mother; a sense of fashion and style dripping from his speech about how I should dress and braid their hair. He liked to call me his princess, and I wasn’t sure if it was because my name is Jasmine or because I actually had some allure. Or because I was just always around. I never quite believe people when they says things like, “I like you”. It always seems kind of fake. Nonetheless, I like spending time with him. Once, for my birthday, we went somewhere together. I don’t really remember exactly what we did, but it might have been arcade or carnival themed because I remember we came away from the experience with lots of candy. I was wearing one of those candy necklaces and just touching it, licking the powdered sugar from my fingers. We were in the backseat chatting, my social tolerance was definitely depleted for the day. I remember already being kind of annoyed; even at a young age, my introverted personality was strong and my aptitude for being around people for extended periods of time not yet developed. I also am the type of person that likes to wear a particular outfit on a special day, save a good sandwich as a reward for finishing my homework, or in this case, preserve a candy necklace until I was ready to eat it. Anyway, at some point he reached over and asked when I was going to start eating my necklace. Then suddenly he leaned in towards my neck and took a bite from it. I don’t remember seeing much of him after that.
My mom used to have neighborhood watch meetings here occasionally. That was how I first remember visiting this recreation center. Eventually, thanks to my stepfather, I ended up playing soccer here. I don’t remember what it was like getting started, just that I enjoyed the liberty of challenging people on the field (or basketball court for the indoor season). You obviously weren’t outright allowed to knock people down, but pushing up against and kicking the ball away was so satisfying to me. I wasn’t much concerned with analyzing or developing the skill of the sport until I was at least eleven. I stopped playing soccer right before I started high school because after starting tryouts for the team, I didn’t think I was good enough. I was nervous and doubtful, and even though I would have very likely just ended up on the bench, I felt my connection to the sport dissipated after I left the Monarchs and moved to Ardmore.

This center was everything for me though; it was the site of the first team I joined, a mecca for cultural events, there was a boxing league that would train on the first floor, bake sales and energetic kids running around on the second. The pool in the summertime was fun as well. Everybody would come and bring their own pool toys but end up losing them before they left. Kids would come in
droves from blocks over to get relief from the heat. I remember the chipped paint, the rusted parts of the pool area. The overcrowded lines to get in, tired parents sipping sugary drinks and hoping their kids would tire out. As far as they were concerned, this was their camp.

On the playground, you found kids of all ages interacting and messing with each other. You'd see tweens looking out for the little ones but indoctrinating those two or three years their junior of the rules of the playground. What you should or shouldn't try, where you should stand, who to pester for food.

This is where I first met Andrew. I think my mother expressed the idea that she was dating him to me, but I don’t know if I actually
processed it until we came here. He was friendly and nice but laid back. I do remember him saying you can get anything you want. I liked to test people normally, but I didn’t exactly mean to run the bill up like I did. I genuinely wanted to try a few different breakfast dishes. And my mother and I did not exactly brunch before she dated Andrew. So once the line died down and we got a table, I was prepared for a feast. I got pancakes and sausage, eggs, toast, fruit, some kind of pudding I think, orange juice and a muffin. I definitely drawled but I didn’t realize it until much later in their relationship because his poke face was on point. My mom didn’t really say too much other than her coded glances and nudges under the table as I kept listing off my breakfast order. Andrew didn’t even bat an eye and I only ate about 30% of what I ordered.

I decided I liked him then.
Dear Ms. Brenda,

You’re full of life and wear the evolution of your surroundings on the sleeve of your writing. Your stories speak volumes about how you interpret the world and it’s inspiring. I’ve collected some stories of my own, but the way I choose to explain and rationalize them is by tiptoeing through the memory. You power through with your creative sails at full mast and I admire the way you try to express yourself to others. I could really feel how Ludwick St. used to be; you know those flashback scenes in movies, where the whole frame shudders into another era? The physical reality melting into a daintier time, or the bellows of now meshing with the scratchy record of yesterday? That’s what happened to me walking along your neighborhood taking pictures. You describing the speakeasy scene and us collectively explaining what a speakeasy was to Kayla, it was nice. I had only known a speakeasy through movies and text, mostly painted as a place for Italian gangsters and other mob-like people. You peeled back the mystery and I respect your analysis! That’s the way you do things, simple and easy, but vibrant and unwavering. It had been a pleasure creating this collection of stories, poems and other writing with you!

Best,

Jazz
The image on the front of the postcard would be a vase full of pennies. It shows that something beautiful can be filled for almost nothing.

I would send the postcard to my friends and the name of our block would be on the back.

One thing people don’t notice about my neighborhood is the lack of unity, it is very divided, there are mini neighborhoods in one big one and not a lot of people notice it.

My neighborhood influenced me a lot and made me who I am. How I talk, walk, and carry myself is all because of my neighborhood and my parents. A true product of my environment.

I impact my neighborhood in a good way. They like the positive things I’m doing and I will continue to set an example.

*From LL workshop at Robeson.
*From Carol's First Tuesday Workshop: “Love, Letters and Otherwise.”

**Step 1.** Look back on your life from where you are now, as though your life is a book that you are living, and break it down into chapters. (Write the table of contents for your life.)

- Trouble
- Trappin with love
- Passion
- My side
- Time wasted
- Thoughts

**Step 2.** What stands out in your mind as a notable memory from some of your chapters? List out a couple of ideas.

The decisions stand out most to me...

I call it the hole, where I’m from not many people make it to 18, because of the decisions they made.

It’s easy to fall in, the system is made for black men to remain stagnant. When all you see is bad it’s easy to become that.
Step 3. Then zoom in—write a ‘love’ letter to the memory, the subject of the memory, or the version of you that experienced the memory.

Love, love is what I have for my city. A great deal of it, but this does not mean this is the place for me. Memories good and bad flood my brain when I think about my life, never shaking the fact that I am a product of my environment. My neighborhood. How different would my life be if I grew up in a different city, a different state? Would I still have the same love for this place, are the memories worth it? I will never know, what I do know is that I will never forget my love, as I begin to paint a picture that will last forever.
DEAR BASKETBALL

You have taken all my energy, you have drained me mentally, you taught me discipline and focus, but also how to smile. The game has become fun again, less pressure, and time is winding down. I’ve just played my last regular season game, wishing I could reverse time and do it again. Although we are done here our journey is just starting. Leaving the neighborhood that taught me the game to play at the next level and continue my education won’t be easy, because just like you, my neighborhood raised me. The lessons I learned won’t be replaced or forgotten. The love I have for the things that taught me lessons are unbreakable, think you can tell by the look on my face.
Nothing is groundbreaking in my neighborhood, nothing but the ground breaking. Cracked streets and sidewalks are concealed by yellow tape. Cracked skulls on sidewalks, escalated due to the streets, concealed by yellow tape. Some things might never get fixed.

Why does this stop us? Why does this stop us if the person we care about is lying on the ground, if the streets and buildings we love are injured? Because the tape reads do not enter? Somebody has to do something, or maybe something is too much.

From the outside looking in you see what everyone else sees: a community, houses that stand in a row with little difference on the exterior, a school that stands sturdy but has its bruises. And a park that tells a story, a story from the inside. Now dirt hills arise sturdy like the metal structures that stand in the middle of the field. Fields that I used to play in are now in the hands of the future. The park that raised me will soon become secondary to a gym exactly 15 steps away from it. The 15 steps will be 15 minutes of memories.

A long walk.

The swings in the park don’t screech but are not played on. My prints in the grass cannot be traced, because they are covered. Voices cannot be heard because of construction.

I feel empty, because my park is. As I grow old it ages with me. My thoughts are like the writing on the wall, scrambled full of pain but can never be erased.
SHELLS

Treating all my days the same knowing each one will be different.

Wake up, school, home, wake up, school home. Never paying much detail to the things in between, but on this day I had to.

The air felt no different, it’s winter, but not the coldest, hoodie and a jacket was all I wore. The laces hung from my shoes, as I showed they weren’t made for running, just walking. Would you care? Would you notice my shoes?

The shooter didn’t.

Hoping he didn’t notice me, too quick to see, turning shell tops into Nike sprinters. Actually hearing the shell drop after the BOOM almost made me shell shock, but I couldn’t be. With everything spinning my legs seemed to take me straight, making quick turns to get away, not stopping until I was blocks away. My senses became stronger but everything felt still, quiet, numb, like I was all alone.

Reality is that you are.

Our way is different, the culture makes us static, each decision we make determines who we are, and the environment shapes us.

Philly, am I crazy to say this is normal?
46TH

The movement is different. When I’m around you my energy changes, I feel free, I think about now instead of tomorrow. The air I breathe is light, while my mind levels, our bond is unbreakable. For now at least. I treat you as if you have feelings, but mine are to care about. Saying “I will neva change” is just a clouded mind. Do you care? Of course you don’t you’re just a place. But you’re my place. I stayed through the winter love, and the summer madness. It was fun to me, but not to mamma, but my loyalty lied with you. Do you care? If I left how would you feel? Would you change on me? If I came back would everything be different? I’m doing it again. Maybe change is good for both of us. Anyways I found some new friends. I like them, they seem to care about me and my future. Look at their faces. “Your neighborhood is not a person it can’t see.” I feel crazy sometimes but you mean a lot to me, and I know you see them just like me.

The place I love most will soon be behind me as I move on in life, wondering will it still be a part of me as I take many steps towards my future. Could I forget this place, the hate, the love, the excitement. I don’t think so, but will it forget me?
My project experience—TRIPOD at Writers Room: people, places, portraits—has been more joyful than anything. The job is serious, but fun as well. During this project I’ve become an artist, not just a writer, not just a photographer, but I have learned how to merge the two while widening my thoughts.

During this project I have come together with the Writers Room team to create a photo-documentary of the city of Philadelphia and my neighborhood. Throughout this time I have learned how to use a Canon camera to capture life as it is in the city of Philadelphia. I take the photos and relate as I write my story through the lens of a camera.

From the start, I pictured me and my partners working together to make a wonderful project. I’ve been working with Tash Hajo, who is an artist at Writers Room and a junior at Drexel University. I’ve also been working with Norman Cain, who is a senior who lives in the community. We share the same goals. For me it’s more about learning so I can be able to teach. I feel like the people in this program have been willing to help me understand and complete this project rather than let me go through the motions. This is a very important time in my life and this program/project slows things down and is helping me become a better person.

The space I was in during my project was always calm and relaxing. It elevated my performance. I grew as a writer, a photographer, and person. The Writers Room studio on Drexel’s campus is where I write and meet with students, professors, and writers like Lauren, Tash, Rachel Wenrick, and Norman. We talk about writing, which clears my head and allows me to think.
Once I entered Writers Room I felt a different energy. I felt like the people there had a task at hand but wanted me to be comfortable, they cared. This made me care. I took this serious, I felt like I would be letting them down. The change that was made was good. It made us closer, it made the work easier; the things that I didn’t see in photos, in life, I see now, things are coming naturally. The people I had around me made me feel welcome. More than a team of writers, with one goal in mind we grew a bond to accomplish it. I felt comfortable expressing myself and it made the writing easier. I took it serious and in a short amount of time I learned that my writing can touch people and make a difference.

Taking in all the things I learned during this time took some time to process. But the one thing that stands out is being yourself. Expressing yourself through your writing will help you become one with yourself. You will be at peace and you will have a story to tell one of your own. Everyone has their own story, how will you tell it? My expectations coming into this project was not this. My thoughts were little and my view was small. In the beginning my writing was just words, a photo was just a photo, there was no difference to me in what I saw or what I wrote. As the project moved forward it opened my eyes and made me think. This changed me as an artist, as a person.

I am happy I made this change. The work I’m doing is growing. It is mature, myself as well. I need help, I get it; if I need space, I get it, this allows me to grow not just with my work but with my thoughts. My thoughts are key and the people I work with during this project understands that. It helps me grow. The art I seen surprised me the most, it was very different, I felt like each picture meant something deeper. Getting the chance to create my own made me very
excited. I want to be able to capture something in my community and tell a story that is deeper than the surface.

There are many moments that stick out to me when I think about my project. The laughs, the fun, the crying, the work, and the coffee. Everything I’ve been doing during this time has made my experience great. The way that I’m treated is most important to me. I have a base when I am at Writers Room. When I’m there I am a part of that team. A team that is serious about what they do, a team that works together very well. A team that has each other’s back. There is always great energy that puts me in the mood to tell a story.

I would do the project again. Everything I got out of this has helped me, it kept me focused. The people I worked with made it easy for me. The experience was great and I would recommend this for other students. During this project everything has been unexpected. I never thought I would be writing with a purpose—the project, the environment, the people around me changed me and how I think.

When I’m there I’m in a different space, a different zone, I feel at home, just like my writing the lights can be bright or dim. Even when I leave my thoughts are still racing feeling like I can write a book, things continue, just like life my view is the same as the pictures I take. The movement is just different.
“You never close your eyes anymore; I don’t find the red line. Don’t you worry *whose story it is to tell.*

TURN A-ROUND, TURN A-ROUND, TURN A-ROUND

It should be a story told.”
February. Outside is gray and wet with a bitter wind, serving as a reminder that Spring is still out of reach. I follow just a few steps behind the others, taking note of what they notice and counting the adornments of the neighborhood. A single sneaker, empty bottles of liquor, a doll smushed into the mud. We reach Wallie’s corner store and I laugh, thinking about the fluctuating prices of groceries inside—nothing in this city is static. Soon we pass Brandywine, Haverford, and stop on Mount Vernon. I’ve memorized the name of the streets but I can never pinpoint where they are in relation to one another. We stop at a playground with a jungle gym made up of yellows, blues, and reds. Somehow the colors still don’t stand out, even with the bleached sky as the backdrop. We stand on the outside of the fence looking in on the desolate playground for a few silent moments. I hear, for what feels like the first time, the steady rhythm of the city. I hum along to a song that wasn’t written for me.

We press forward in the neighborhood, focusing our cameras on the preservable and the powerful.
REMEMORY

Lots of silent nodding made up for with written words

Photo wars

Stickers (mark)

Listening and laughing

Having my B.S. called out in a skillful, guiding way

I am in the writing studio with Mark and Lauren. It’s 1:00 in the afternoon but I still don’t feel fully awake— the dim lighting doesn’t help, and yet I’m thankful for it. I ask Mark if he’d join me in grabbing a cup of coffee before we shoot photos in Mantua. Lauren has yet to have her first cup either, so the three of us saunter on over to Joe. For the first time I feel like I am a part of something, but not in a grand, revelational manner. More like a “this is cool and I’d like it to keep going,” sort of way. The experience has been slowly trickling and engulfing all at once. We each get coffee and leave before Mark acknowledges that his is too bitter. All three of us turn around and head back to determine the right amount of sugar.
It is early in the morning and I am in the only bedroom at my grandmother's house. I always preferred sleeping closest to the wall even though it made getting up difficult. I lie awake trying to think of how to climb over five of my cousins’ bodies without waking them and wonder at the same time how they could sleep through the call to prayer that vibrated throughout the entire city. I crawl over the bed's railing, careful not to step on the two sleeping on the floor, and tiptoe to the bathroom. My morning routine here is different than it is at home. I head downstairs in my pajamas and ragged flip-flops, using all my might to yank open the steel door at the bottom. The unforgettable heat greets me and wraps around my body just to strike me. I ring the bell of my aunt’s house next door, rubbing my eyes as the rest of Damascus heads to the mosque. This version of myself is one I have lost all touch with.
II

I only hear the call to prayer at my relatives’ homes now. This is because some of my aunts and uncles have apps on their phones that sound off when it’s time for worship. The call is hard to notice over small talk. I must have been 11 or 12 years old the last time I visited Syria.

III

I remember the jealousy I felt of my brother, who was able to stay with my dad while I had to branch off to the women’s section of the mosque by myself. My only memories of going into the local mosque with my mother are related to funerals.

I struggled adjusting the pale headscarf brought from home as the service started and darted out of the washroom to find any open space. I’d kneel, anchoring myself, to repeat the only prayers
I knew. I always kept my attention on how to breathe through the motions while the words lost their meaning with repetition.

IV

My family found a religion teacher to come to our house shortly after we made the pilgrimage to Mecca. We had a group of other young Muslims join us every week. The woman focused more on teaching stories and morals than she did on prayers, which I liked. My favorite part of the lesson was jumping on the trampoline with my friends before their parents picked them up.
In 2012 I paid a visit to Best Buy because Channel Orange had been released. I heard the line “if it brings me to my knees, it’s a bad religion” right around the same time I began to question Islam. Even though the song is about unrequited love, it made me confident in my doubting. I committed every other song on the album to memory.

The opening prayer in the Quran is the only one I can recite. I recently found a website called MuslimInc.com and according to one of its articles, I am six prayers short of the “7 [Prayers] Every Muslim Should Memorize.”
I think back to walking towards a cafe with a one-worded name indifferent to the plethora of eateries flooding the city. The weather isn’t unpleasant but still unsuitable for the month of May. Everything I pass appears unprocessed while the air bears a concoction true to Philadelphia: trash, gasoline, and the petrichor from earlier in the morning. I hear, at the same capacity of sound, the fleeting cars and my troubled breathing. A woman wearing a hijab comes my way while pushing a baby stroller. I smile at her in hopes of some recognition, some form of participation in an undisclosed language indicating that she sees me and grasps that we may be similar in ways more than one. I begin to question what my traces look like and wonder how the unrefined form still exists. She hesitates before the corners of her lips curl up into a fleeting smile and she passes me by.
Writers Room/Tripod
as seen by Mark:

Joyful

Serious, but fun

A team that has each other’s back   – MD

This past fall, Writers Room released a book with LoLa 38 called “Words like Love + Light.” I remember thinking the title was perfect because words like love and light are all that come to mind when I think of the people I’ve met and experiences I’ve had through Writers Room. I think I picked up on the descriptions of Writers Room in your reflection because it’s been very similar for me, especially in terms of the Tripod project. Joyful is how I feel hearing Mr. Cain’s stories and your “byeee you guys” send-off. It’s also how I feel every time I read any of your pieces, even though that joy is usually overshadowed by awe. The things you notice, the questions you ask, and the ability you have to put them into writing makes me admire your movement and rethink mine. Serious but fun is how I would describe our photo-outings and writing workshops. We’re always cracking jokes and laughing in the process, but I think seriousness takes shape in both our photos and writing.

When I hear “a team that has each other’s back,” a few things come to mind. I first think of saying I would fight for Norman Cain and the chance to work in a Tripod group with him. He responded by saying he would fight for me too. I think of Rachel and Lauren who not only have our backs, but are always willing and able to help fix our posture. You offering me your jacket while taking pictures in the cold was a small instance that, in addition to past events, let me
know you also have my back. The last thing I think is to make sure you know that I have your back too.

This description of a team resonated with me because I feel, for what might be the first time, a part of something bigger than me. I think what allowed me to feel this in the first place was knowing you and Mr. Cain are in it just as much as I am and that you are both willing to teach me the things I do not know. This recurring realization took its final form when we went to Olive Street and passed your old house on Markoe to take pictures. I watched Mr. Cain point to nearly every site, explain what it was, and tell his firsthand account of it. I watched you do a similar thing. From the Bethel Highway Church to James Shuler Memorial Gym, I found I felt a closeness to my Tripod group that I couldn’t have felt unless I experienced these places too. I tried to stay in the background and just observe before realizing I was with people way more attentive than I am.

This is a note I scribbled down from that day on 3/27:

Just finished shooting in West Philly with Norman and Mark. I feel equal parts heavy and much lighter than before. Light because of these people and the traces they’re willing to bare and show me. Heavy because my heart is full.
While the Tripod deadline date was engraved in my brain, I didn’t realize how close it really was until that day. I thought about how you said “I don’t want it to end, I’m going to miss it.” The entire experience has been joyful, serious, fun, and has felt a lot like the words love and light. I’d like to believe our legs are all tied together—yours, mine, Norman’s, and everyone else’s involved—as a result of our experiences together with this project. That being said, I’m going to miss working on Tripod but I don’t know that I see an end in sight.
Dear Mr. Cain,

Hearing about the park you and Mark have shared was amazing for me. To picture you both moving, running, playing, going through all the motions in the same place, you then and Mark now, resulted in a series of flashing images in my mind. There didn’t seem to be any space for me, though, no matter how I tried to picture it. I felt frustrated for intruding on the moment, frustrated for feeling left out, and most importantly, frustrated about being frustrated while this beautiful thing was unfolding in front of all of us.

How can I get in there from out here?

This always seems to be the question for me.

What I’m asking from you, Mr. Cain, is not for any answer, but maybe to just bear with me while I try to figure out what it means for me as the other, the outsider, and perhaps the reason, in part, for the Then becoming the Now. I’m looking forward to, and feeling very lucky for, the ability to write together, grow together, and fight for one another should we need to.

Sincerely,

Natasha
It was a typical Sunday. Dressed for church, my two younger sisters, younger brother and I left our respective bedrooms, and descended the stairs in unison at 7:30 am. Upon arriving in the kitchen, under the watchful eye of our God-fearing mother, we each in accordance to age took to our knees and rendered a prayer. After grace we partook of our traditional Sunday breakfast: buttered grits, scrambled eggs crisp, bacon—which we ate to the sound of gospel songs rendered by groups like the Soul Stirrers and The Dixie Hummingbirds.

After breakfast we walked around the corner to our church. Upon arriving we went to our respective classes. At the completion of our classes I took advantage of the agreement my mother and I had. She told me that I had to attend Sunday school each Sunday, but I would be required to only go to church twice a month.

I rushed home, changed my clothes, grabbed my tattered basketball glove and rushed to the corner where all the guys gathered before going to the Mill Creek playground for our annual Sunday baseball game.

Shortly after we arrived, teams were chosen. I was picked to be the lead batter by my team. However, before any of us could take our positions we heard a desperate cry for help coming from a guy from our crew named Lonnie. Two guys were beating him, one was an older guy and the other was his cousin. My crew was stunned. We could not believe that outsiders had the audacity to come into our turf and attack a member of our crew. I had the bat in my hand and the rest of the guys were behind me.
The guys that were attacking Lonnie were from an area of West Philadelphia called The Top. In fact, the oldest attacker was named Toppy in deference to his status in his crew. Actually, he was too old to be gang-banging with guys in our age range. He was definably defying the rules of gang warfare. The other culprit was Lonnie’s cousin.

He was angry with Lonnie because the night before Lonnie chastised him for attempting to fight with a younger guy over a girl. Lonnie’s cousin was also from The Top. Because he had a relative in our neighborhood, he was granted permission by the senior crew, known as the Fabulous Kings to be there.

The incident in question took place the night before at a Catholic parish dance. In order to not have a full gang fight between the two neighborhoods, an agreement was reached and carried out. The three junior members of the top crew came into our neighborhood and gave “Fair Ones,” which were fair fights, to three members of our crew. After the completion of the ritual, all, was forgotten. However, it was not forgotten by at least two members of the top crew. Toppy stopped punching Lonnie long enough to look at us defiantly and proclaimed, “Y’all just have to smash me.”

I had the bat in my hand. Maybe I thought I should smash the two guys with it. After all they brokered the truce. But I was no gang banger; I was the secretary treasurer of the Sunday school. What would my parents say if I carried out my thoughts? Then I thought of what would happen to us if we allowed the travesty unfolding in front of us to go unpunished. Our seniors would descend upon us with a decapitating fury. We would not be able to hold our heads up. Our cowardice would be known throughout the city.
Lonnie was still pleading for help. I clutched the bat tightly and led the crew towards the culprits. Toppy had a change of heart and said “Okay,” and ran across the field with Lonnie’s cousin behind him. After we finished the game, two of the older guys in our crew asked me to accompany them to the leader of our neighborhood gang to tell what had transpired. When we spoke to him, he said that Toppy had already come to him with an apology. I had earned my bones. In hindsight, I do not think I would have used the bat. I think I would have allowed the boys to take care of the situation.
One pleasant afternoon in the spring of 1953 when I was 13 years old, my crew and I, at the suggestion of this guy, Bunny, who was our senior by two or three years, decided to leave our neighborhood and walk ten blocks to the father Divine Mission to play basketball in the mission’s gym. The idea was not a good one because it would mean traveling through hostile territory and the older guy, Bunny, was always leading us into detrimental situations. We nonetheless decided to do what he had suggested.

We apprehensively embarked upon our journey, and after rapidly walking, sometimes trotting, and constantly looking over our shoulders for would be marauders, we finally reached our destination. However, the gym was closed. We had to take the long walk back to our neighborhood. On the way back we had to pass across an overpass that overlooked a railroad yard.

There were several crates of 1 quart milk bottles at the edge of the overpass—remember this story took place in 1953—years before the advent of plastic containers housing liquids. This guy, Bunny, our know-it-all, self-appointed head honcho began to posture. He could not resist demonstrating how (in his mind) intelligent he was. He started counting the milk bottles. He was always doing stuff like that. I recall how he would supposedly solve equations on the street via chalk. Did he know anything about higher math? I doubt it.

Before Bunny finished counting the bottles and gave us a mathematics lecture (he was always inflating his ego) we notice a police car turning the corner. We ran. Being a slow runner, I trailed the pack. After we had run ¾ of a block all of the guys except me jumped under a car. How clever. I kept running, I was apprehended a few seconds later.
We were all placed in the police car. Our adventure had turned into a nightmare. We did not know why we were arrested, and our illustrious leader was visibly more shook-up than the other members of our crew. For once he was silent.

“Why were you handling the milk bottles?” one of the policemen asked Bunny.

“You know how boys are,” Bunny replied.

The police glanced at each other and slowly shook their heads in unison. In hindsight, I think Bunny had been influenced by the sitcom “Father Knows Best,” “Leave it to Beaver,” and the characters and situations found in “Archie Comic Books.”

His response to the officer’s question clearly did not reflect the reality of our crew. We were not white kids from suburbia; we were, rather, poor black kids from the ghetto who were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

We did not bother to ask why we were in custody. We huddled in the back of the car. We knew we were on our way to the 39th Police district, at 39th and Lancaster Avenue in West Philadelphia. When the police car cruised past the border of our neighborhood, we tried to become invisible, because we would have never been able to eliminate the stigma of being in police custody. Our neighbors would not forget such a transgression.
When we reached the 39th district, we were placed in a cell. We still did not know what we had done wrong. Incidentally, we had been jokingly placed, by the police, in the exact cell a year earlier—at the precinct’s inaugural opening. Being placed in the cell this time, of course was different; however we did not panic. All of us—except Bunny—found our situation humorous. Bunny was silent.

After fifteen minutes, one of the arresting Officers entered the cell, glanced at each Young Jail Bird and asked in a stern voice, “Who is turning on the fire plug around your way?”

Our reply was a simultaneous, “I don’t know.”

Why tell on yourself? We were already in jail. Why make things worse?

The officer smirked, looked at us for a moment and said that we were placed in jail because we had been suspected of throwing milk bottle at trains from the overpass where we were spotted. We assured him that we would never do something like that. And that was the truth. We were allowed to go. On the way back to our neighborhood we vowed to never tell what had transpired. Our leader, Bunny, had not shown courage during our ordeal; he stopped hanging out with us.
THINGS MY MOTHER SAID TO ME

My mother was a short giant of an "absolutely no nonsense..."
woman whose self-proclaimed position of boss was never challenged. She would tell anyone (no matter the time and place) to do something, and what she demanded was done without resistance. For instance, I’ve seen her break up many corner crap games; likewise, I can recall several instances when she actually went into the streets’ gambling den and told the hardened card players to curtail the vile noise that the entire the street could hear. And they complied.

She did not waste words on idle gossip, trivial matters or to hear herself talk; to the contrary, when she spoke it was for a relevant reason, and those who were within hearing range definitely listened. Including myself. I listened to her—partly, because I did not want to encounter her anger, but mainly because of my respect for her and her information, advice, guidance, dictates, etc. that she dispensed.

Over the years, in her discussions that she has conducted with me, she has issued, mandatory mandates, rendered perceptions, engaged in serious discussions and has given me tons of well needed counseling. I will never forget those sessions. She could be quite the disciplinarian. I can remember coming into the house after a pleasant day of playing and immediately being the recipient of the whipping that I was promised earlier, a whipping that had escaped my mind...

Between the painful licks from the belt and my pronouncements of I-ain’t-gonna-do-it no-more my mother would say Didn’t-I-tell-you-not-to. Those whippings hurt, but there was something called a “Good Talking To” that would have me sobbing from the soul. “The Good Talking To” would consist of phrases like, “I’m Ashamed of you,” and “You know better.”

I remember my mother religiously lining each of my four siblings up and saying in a stern voice, “What do you say when you speak
to a grown person?” We would chime “Yes Sir” and “Yes Ma'am.” And during the holidays when children were required to say poems (which were called pieces) in church she would line us up and urge us to use our hands, eyes, hesitation, pronunciation and enunciation for the best presentation effect.

My mother also had a humorous side. When I received the award for being the top student in my sixth grade special education class, she said, “If Norman is the smartest kid in the class, God help the rest.” Before breaking out into a prolonged, uncontrollable laugh. Whenever she had to inform me about something she knew would be disappointing news for me, she used a love filled gentle voice. “Sissy’s house caught fire last night. Sissy is dead.” Sissy was the first girl that I had ever been romantically interested in I have never forgotten her untimely death; however, there were more romantic interests.

Once, when I was a teenager, she looked me in the eyes and said, “I know what your problem is—girls.” And she was correct. A few years later, when a serious heartbreak had me in a state of depression, she said, “There will be other girls.” She was right. When I became older and seemingly a veteran of heartbreaks, my mother adamantly said, “Get your own place.” She was right.

When I left my parents’ home on the morning of July 5, 1965 to report to the army, she urged me to hold my head up and a year and a half later when I came home on leave, she touched me and said with a tone of relief in her voice, “You came Home.” During what I surmise was my mid-life crisis era, my mom constantly told me to not throw away my gifts.
And when I told her about a dream I had about her father, mother, and uncle she said that they were urging me to keep the faith. During a period in my life when nothing was going right and I was making wrong decisions my mother would constantly tell me to not discard my gifts. When I told her that I had had a dream about her parents and her father’s brother she said, “They are telling you that you can do it.”

If one did a wonderful deed my mother would not necessarily congratulate them, as she felt that they were doing what was expected of them. My mother once told me to be careful around police, because they will not hesitate to kill you.

So whenever she told me “You did a good job,” it meant a lot to me and encouraged me to strive as hard as I possibly could. There are of course many other things that my mother said to me, and everything she said to me was said in love, and if the tone of her deliveries were sometimes harsh, it was merely to display “Tough Love” and to leave an everlasting message.
Dear Natasha,

When Rachel told me that you would fight to be in my tripod group, I was both startled and elated. My verbal response to you at that magical time, was that I would also fight for us to be to be in the same group. Before that incident, I think that we had only acknowledged each other by nodding our heads or by rendering a brief greeting. When I heard that you would fight to be in a Tripod group with me, my mind begin to click. I surmised that you saw something in me that caught your inner eye, and I concluded that our inner eyes had connected, and ordained that we would be on the same team. And what a team. You, the Drexel student; Mark, the high school student; and me, the elderly community member who was happy to be in such a pleasant and challenging situation.

Several weeks after our exchange I received a letter from you that addressed your attempt to figure out how you could mesh with me and Mark. Again I was startled, for I assumed that you had already realized that you were a part of our sector of the Tripod Experience. But after reading your letter several times, I could sympathize with your position.

You felt that you could only imagine—not relate to—my past and Mark's present memories of the Belmont and Mill Creek neighborhoods. In your letter to me you stated that you felt left out, that you considered yourself the other, and that you were frustrated. You asked, “How can I get in there from here?”

While I wanted to answer your letter immediately after receiving it, I was unable to comply with my wishes, because the words that I needed to convince you, that you were not an outsider, evaded
me. Several months have passed since I received your letter. Now, the words that I searched for have manifested themselves in several ways: the way that you have embraced the Tripod experience, your constant presence in the Writers Room studio, the ease I sensed in you during our field trip in the Belmont/Mill Creek neighborhoods—the neighborhoods that you initially felt would render you an outsider. I remember, that at one juncture during that trip, Lauren had to encourage you to rejoin the group. You were more than a few yards away taking a picture. You were so engrossed. I smiled. While you were not raised where Mark and I were raised, you definitely have a facet of it in your mental fabric; and you definitely have a host of photographs of the Belmont/Mill Creek neighborhoods. I remembered you asking me in your letter: “How can I get in there from here?” My answer is that you have always been in the crew. And the scribes of eternity know that to be a fact, for they have already entered your contributions to the Tripod Project on the papyruses of time, with an emphasis on your being an honorary member of the Belmont/Mill Creek neighborhoods.

I want to say much more, but I do not want to miss my deadline. You know how it is with writers. I will end by saying that it has been a pleasure working with you, and that I would fight to work with you again.

Yours Truly,

Norman
To: Mark Dawkins

After reading your two pieces: “46th” and your mid-project reflection, that were submitted to writers room on 2/16/2018 and 2/22/2018 respectively, I was able to see, I believe, at least a snippet of the intuitiveness that is a major part of your personality. Several weeks ago when I hastily read your letter entitled “46th,” I was certain that you were writing a love letter; however, upon carefully reading it several weeks later, I was captivated by the way you utilized personification to metaphorically assimilate a neighborhood into an object of love. You did not hesitate to let your feeling flow. You spoke of love, wanting to be accepted, and the ease that you felt when you were in the confines of your neighborhood.

Your exuberant mid-project reflection, which you referred to as the Tripod experience, enabled me to ascertain the immense level of your dedication to both the project and the members that are a part of the project. You wrote of how words and photos were just were words and photos to you initially, but became the elements that eventually—after the project moved forward—had you open your eyes, think, and change you as an artist and a person. Again you wrote of how you relished the camaraderie you experienced of the Writer Room group, how being with the members of the group made you feel at ease. I can relate to both of your papers.

When I took the field trip with you, Natasha, and Lauren a few weeks ago, I recognized, through your dialogue with them and your teasing of them, that you were a gregarious soul in your own right. Your reticence and reluctance to read your wonderful writings is just a facet of your being. I also could visualize how you
responded to our working as a team when we took pictures of the various sites. I must say that in retrospect, our outing in the streets Belmont/Mill Creek was a crossroad where the past and present met. By that I mean that we both were from the same area. I represented the past and you the present. And Natasha and Lauren were able to take the trip with us. It was if we were inside of a Time Machine. You attend the Ward AME Church, located at 43rd and Aspen Street, the same church that I was raised in. You trained in the boxing gym that was up the street from where I was raised. The dilapidated building that you knew as the Bottom of The Sea Food Restaurant, and which was located at 43rd and Fairmount Avenue, was a drug store back in the day. Me and my crew hung out in front of that bygone establishment, drank milk floats at its counter. Memories of my crew flooded my mind when I reminisced in front of the wire fence that enclosed the weed strewn, Olive Street, the street where I was raised for the first sixteen years of my life.

Our time traveling took us to my elementary school, Martha Washington, the Mill Creek Playground where I played softball and basketball, to the hind side of Sulzberger Junior High, where I was a student from 1954 through 57. I witnessed the ongoing construction projects that was conducted behind the school. When I was being raised in the area, I never imagined that one day a recreation center would stand beside the playground and that the modernized houses in your neighborhood would stand where the projects once stood. I understand your love for the neighborhood. I was blessed to be born and raised there.
Lastly, I want to address your righteous fixation with team effort, something that endeared you to our wonderful project. Being a basketball player, you recognize the importance of a team functioning together. You definitely bought that concept to our project. I could not help smiling when I saw the pictures of your basketball team. Evidently you could not help smiling when those pictures where taken.

I read your letter to basketball. You said to basketball that it taught you how to smile, as well as discipline and how to focus. Those are my sentiments exactly. I’m a former basketball player. You saw the YMCA on 43rd street where I learned the game. We played on a long, narrow, outside court. My love for the game kept me out of trouble and helped to lead me on the path that I transverse today, a path of contentment, a path that has taken me to our beloved project. I sincerely believe that you, Lauren, Natasha and I are traveling the same path. We are a team. If you keep doing what you are doing you will always be the winner that you are.

Yours Truly,

Norman
A key is anything that unlocks anything else...
  a word, a smell, a taste, a prayer

I have my keys, I should say my key— it’s singular because it opens both locks to the door. It’s on a key ring that I like so much; for one it’s sleek, silver, and it has a light, one that I can use in those dark places at night.
Growing up, my bedroom window overlooked the alleyway between my house and the neighbors. With my lights turned off, the blue glow from their TV would shine into my room, so I almost always had the blinds closed. One didn’t open, either, because they were about 30-years old and my mother would always complain that it was a fire hazard. In college, my dorm rooms overlooked Buckley field or the Sheraton Hotel. It wasn’t until my junior year that I got the view—sparkling towers framed by white window frames (both open properly) and white lace curtains that used to filter the TV light. Through my bedroom window I’ve seen the world turn cold and gray only to warm itself up again until we can’t take the heat anymore.

In the past, most of us didn’t even lock our doors, and if we left our bikes or any other possessions outside overnight, they were there the next morning untouched. The houses on my block had porches, and everybody had porch furniture, lounge chair,
a glider which was a three-seater that you could swing back and forth, and an armchair. So on those nice summer nights I would lay outside on the glider enjoying the summer breeze looking at the stars in the sky... Oh yea, we use to have a sky full of stars. And I would try and count them, and watch them as I talked to God, I didn’t know him that well at the time, but we kept company until I’d fall asleep and would find myself waking up the next morning on the porch.

Religion was a source of conflict as confusion throughout my childhood. Growing up in a split household meant that I had many expectations from the different sides of the family: different politics, food preferences and traditions, rites of passage, and identity. For the longest time I avoided making a decision because there was very much an atmosphere—not from my parents, who never sent me to Hebrew school or attended church—that I had to choose one or the other.

And as an adult you get to make those decisions. And those decisions are predicated on your emotions, sparked by a taste, and the memory of how good something was, which creates a craving to try and recreate that feeling in
time. Or simply by the aroma that permeates the air.

My mom and I went to the Farmer's market that was set up on the perimeter of a small park. There, my mom bought chicken eggs the color of sea glass, kale before it was cool, and sunset-dipped Swiss chard. I grew up between two worlds: my father's Jewish family, and my mother's Lutheran family. The only disappointing meals I have eaten in my life have been during the holidays.

I like clean, citrusy smells, they take me back on my trip to San Diego years ago... Let me tell you
how the days started every morning—it was as if God would cleanse the earth, and the air before we would start our day. The air was so clean you just wanted to stand in the yard and take deep breaths of air in and out, and as you did that, it was like breathing new life, strength, and power to address the day. As my friend and I walked around getting a tour of their place, we ended in their yard which was large and fenced in. Their neighbor had a couple of large trees that hung over into their yard, one was a lemon tree and the other was an orange tree they were so bright and beautiful that they looked artificial. So my friend reached up and picked a couple of oranges and lemons. Then we went back into the house, to wash off the fruit. And upon cutting it open, you have never smelled anything like it, nor have you tasted anything like it.
Last year, my dad prepared a rack of lamb with a cherry sauce, green beans, and a cheese board. This past year, we had a Cuban style Christmas dinner with rice, beans, and roast pork. These dinners are always my favorite part of the holiday... the three of us are able to be ourselves and do things our own way. It was always clear to me that food and our way of eating was our religion; more important than Saints or Maccabees.

We knew the only way up from that table was to clean our plate. Food was a big part of our family tradition—you were welcome to eat as much as you please, accompanied by Just Don’t Waste Any.
Easter will be easy this year. We will sit around my grandparents’ kitchen table, passing around about five pounds of potato salad (served at every get together), they will make comments about how great Donald Trump is without mentioning him directly, and declare that there was too much food and next year we should only make two items. Everyone will talk about how full they are and that they “don’t eat like that anymore.”

My family was the first love in my life. We were such a close knit family. Back then we lived within a block or two from each other. I grew up with all of my Aunts, Uncles and cousins. We did everything together, we would play together, get in trouble together, pray together, picnics, camping, go to the Y— you name it we did it. Our parents were close and they kept us close. There were seven in the Hatten clan, four boys & three girls, plus there were two sets of first cousins: the older set which I was a part of and the younger set totaling 22. One of my cousins, Floyd, who we called Ja bo’ would make his rounds coming from school. He’d stop over my Aunt Irene’s house first, eat a little something, then over to our house to see what my mom had cooked, eat. And then go around the corner where he lived and eat again.
When I was 14, one of my cousins had a necklace with a key charm. Her boyfriend had a longer chain with a lock on the end. The symbolism wasn’t lost on me. Seeing my cousin with her boyfriend was the first time I saw someone close to my age be “in love.”

There comes a time in a person’s life when you know you need more, and I wanted more. I remember telling a young man that I was seeing at the time, that there was nothing wrong with him, but that I decided to follow after Jesus. And I knew it was God calling me to Himself. Because I thought the sun rose and set in that brother and the sex was phenomenal, but it wasn’t going anywhere. And I needed more. There were a lots of things I wanted to know and things I wanted to understand.
I wasn’t Jewish enough for Jewish people and I wasn’t Christian when I’m in a group of Christians. I knew this too when my cousin’s grandfather told me how much I looked like Barbara Streisand (way more like Jennifer Grey, thank you very much). It was meant to be a compliment. My boyfriend’s sister had her confirmation in a Lutheran church in South Jersey. The service was pretty tame until the pastor began ranting about how the Jews are damned because they didn’t only not accept Jesus, they murdered him! Lucky for me, every time she would bring up the Jews, Tyler’s family would either cheer for me or giggle.

Oh Sarah, I’m so sorry they took you through all of that, when it is so simple. I remember a time I was reading the Bible and came across a scripture that talked about The Simplicity of God. I remember getting angry, because at that time, my life was anything but simple and I began to express myself in a semi-mild irritated rage, “Talking about this thing being simple—it’s not simple!” But as you continue to walk with Him and get self and finite wisdom out of the way you’ll find it is simple... and the statement about the Jews is all a lie. You see, religious people can be so busy reading the letter that they miss the Spiritual Truth of the matter. And God’s up there just shaking his head...
You know, I lose my keys a lot. If I don’t leave them in a different purse sometimes I’ll leave them in the door.

Because you know nothing is ever where you put it (smile). I guess you can call it my help, and the key gives me the freedom to come and go as I please...

A key is anything that unlocks anything else... a word, a smell, a taste, a prayer
ARTISTS’ NOTES

Sarah Wagner-Bloom on Rosalyn Cliett:

Roz is the kind of person I never thought I would have a relationship with. We don't think things have the same explanation or reason for happening, but Ros has showed me how you can see the light in every situation. Ros has seen many ups and downs and experienced more life and death than I. She could have seen the emptiness, the part that makes everyone give up, but she sees the part of it that taught her something or helped her grow. She calls what she sees God. She is the only person who says that who I believe when she tells me she saw Him or He tapped her on the shoulder. She does not use Him to justify evils or the hatred in the world, the way I grew up seeing people use God.
Rosalyn Cliett on Sarah Wagner-Bloom:

The pairing with Sarah turned out to be a blessing to me. Because I didn't know how things were going to turn out—me being a Senior Black woman, in a real time relationship with God, and Sarah being a young Drexel Senior, born between a Jewish and Lutheran background. But the moment I met Sarah she was like a breath of fresh air. Not only was she young, energetic, but open and without prejudice. There was such a warmth of friendship and goodwill that exuded from her. She made me feel accepted, as an equal and as a partner. Sarah is someone I could easy talk to, and as we shared some things we experienced with one another, we found we had more in common then we ever would have imagined. Sarah is a very wise young lady, wise beyond her years. She smart and quick, and well-grounded. Sarah is silly, funny, and very photogenic. It was a pleasure to work with her. And I learned a lot from Sarah. She's a real techie and fast reader. I'm glad we had this time together, and I will miss her, she's that kind of person. But I know that as Sarah embarks on the next part of her destiny, she will succeed.

My prayers are always with you

From The Tribe of Judah,
Your Sister

Roz
“West Philadelphia born and raised on the playground where I spent most of my days.” For many of us this is not just a song it is reality. Many days outside of the house is the reality of kids our age, raised by & if fortunate you learn from your parents. If not you are forced to learn by the streets. Long blocks and skinny alleys, orange skies. And the noise of everything is something we have all experienced.

The sounds on the inside affects us as if we live by a standard, a code that almost seems amusing because we can't escape, knowing and embracing how we have become one with our city. We see it through a lens like we are not here, and the picture is always vivid, a slideshow of our memories, paints a picture of ever play we've been and how we portray it.

Trap blocks and parks aren’t the least of my worries. School and libraries are avoided by many. Corner stores are just as crowded as abandoned buildings, outside and in. Small buildings, tall buildings, old cars, new cars, broken streets, or broken hearts, our memories create the image just as much as our eyes.

How do you see it?
Dahmere Town
FIELD AND STUDIO PORTRAITS

Jasmine James, Kayla Watson

Jasmine James, Brenda Bailey
Devin Welsh, Kaliyah Pitts, Kyle Howey

Devin Welsh, Dahmere Town, Mark Dawkins, Kyle Howey
Sarah Bloom, Rosalyn Cliett

Devin Welsh, Dahmere Town, Kyle Howey, Mark Dawkins
Carol + Jordan McCullough

Kyle Howey, Dahmere Town