

"POPS," Janna Rae Nieto

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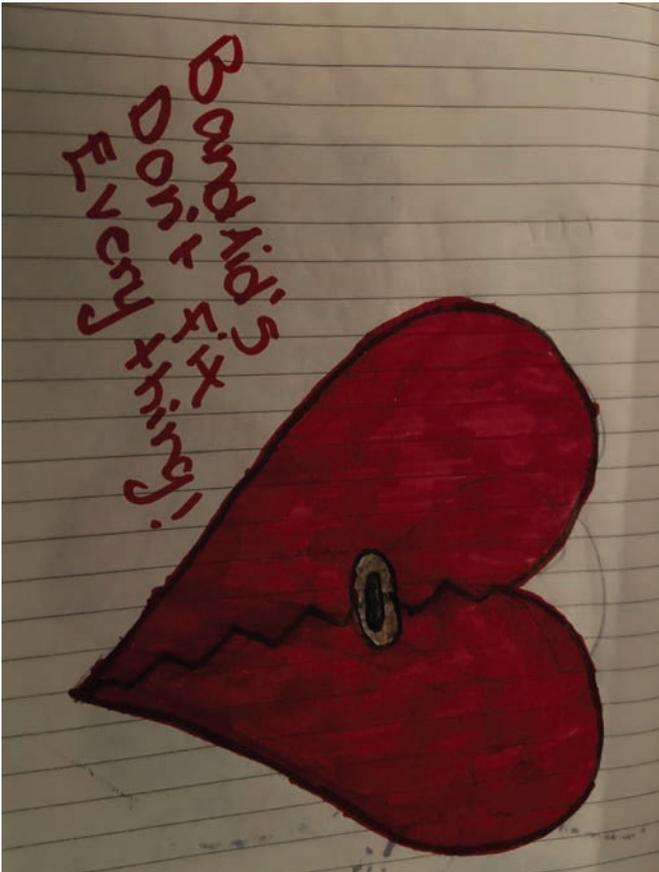
Day In, Day Out



Who I Am

Imari Stevenson

Stressed and depressed
But I ALWAYS
keep a smile on my face
so that they only see me when I'm at my best.



"Band-Aids Don't Fix Everything," Reagan King



Never Give Up

Ahidsa Mateo

Never give up
Because you're telling yourself that you are worthless
Keep trying harder

Never give up
Because you're setting yourself up for failure
Give it your best shot

Never give up
Because you're making a big mistake
Believe in yourself, never fear

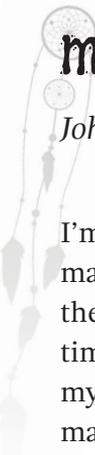
Never give up
Don't let your dreams down
Whatever you started, finish it



Scribbled Thoughts

Jazmin Joseph

Stop acting like you don't care
I'm ignoring the past ignores
Scribbled thoughts in my head
But don't even bother to color them in
See, look, I was doing just fine
Until you came up
And wasted my time
Trying to figure out what I did wrong
It all made no sense
Listening to my friends
Knowing I'm hardheaded
I stay wrapped in my head
And they wonder why I'm on mute
Quit acting like you got no clue
So I can let loose



Mind, Body, and Paint

John Rodriguez

I'm relaxing my mind, sitting on my bed, letting the music massage my ears. I'm looking out the window, watching the sun's every move, waiting for it to set. The whole time I'm in my room writing, killing time waiting for my parents to fall asleep. I'm practicing different styles, making sure to get them stuck in my head. I peek out my bedroom door. It looks as if the coast is clear. I slide my closet door open, slip on my black Levis, a black t-shirt, and the dirtiest black shoes I can find. I open up the top drawer of my dresser and gather my tips. I pick out the finest colors of paint. I unzip my backpack and stuff all my needs toward the bottom. Now I'm off.

I slowly open my front door. I hold my breath and take light steps. Now I'm outside. The cold air hits my face and wakes me right up. It has me eager to get there. I walk through this mellow city, Inglewood, California. The streets are quiet. Walking down each block, I can hear my every footstep. The cans in my backpack rattle. I glance left, right. All I see are light poles and parked cars. No people. I'm near. I look around to see if there are any cops or people who might call the cops while I'm jumping in.



"Lights," Alba Navas

I'm in! My feet hit the dirt. It smells as if I landed in a nursery. The floor is covered with branches. The gigantic gray walls that surround me are covered with tagging. My heart is pounding. I look to the heavens and all I see are the blurred clouds. I make my way down the hill. The branches are constantly causing me to lose my balance. I take every step carefully. I'm at the bottom of the hill. I glance toward my right. Cars speeding at 70, 80 mph. I take a deep breath. I make my run for it across the 405 Freeway. The headlights coming my way are blinding me. My ears are crying from the cars' obnoxious honking.

Thank God I make it across the freeway safely. I'm now near the exit on Manchester Boulevard. I can see the wall staring at me. It's the wall I've been wanting to hit. It's beautiful. I love the way the wall is positioned so that when people are driving by, it clearly stands out.



"Art of the Ghetto," Julian Izaguirre

I approach the wall. I take a breather and rip my backpack open. I pull out my spray cans. My hand immediately bonds with it. I feel the coldness of its skin. I can hear it screaming my name. I put my "New York Fat" tip on the can because in my eyes it's perfect. The way the tip flares the paint out and the thickness of the lines is just right, not too wide, not too skinny.

I'm spraying away, letting my hand guide itself, letting it go free. The paint comes out, getting a right grip on the wall, leaving a trace of fine lines. I'm rotating the can as I write, getting the perfect flare and thickness of the line. While I'm writing, my body purifies itself—relieving itself of my stress and helping me forget my worries. No more getting screamed at by my mother. No one is telling

me what to do. There is no better feeling than this. I'm in another world. Nothing bothers me. It's just me, the wall, and the can, doing what I do best.

This is my home.



Sleepless Nights

Jazmin Joseph

My thoughts pile up,
My heart speeds up,
My body heats up,
My covers tighten up,
I am stuck.

I am lost inside my thoughts, thinking the worst.
I do not know why I overthink so much.
I question so much that I scare myself.
Is it because I don't want to come up with an answer?
Or am I preparing myself?
But what would I be preparing myself for?
There I go again.
I snap myself out of those wild thoughts.
My heart slows down,
My body cools down,
My covers loosen up,
And I am free.



"In the Well," Janna Rae Nieto



My Kind

P.J. Swanson

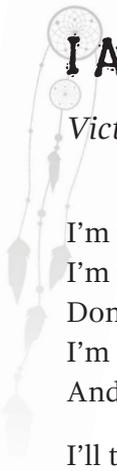
Recently, I've been pretending a lot, faking, lying, not necessarily to others, mostly to myself.

I have been trying to think of ways to try and conform to the rules of "society" and such. Growing up, it had always been pretty straightforward, and I always knew what to expect. Maybe that was because I had an older sibling to guide me through it, or maybe it was because I was made to believe that I always had a net beneath me, a safety net, one that was tight and would never let me fall. Said net was made up of many people I was taught to trust and rely upon. But nothing is indestructible.

Nets rip. Life goes on. Years go by, time tends to fly, but my head will never end, the spinning will never come to a halt. And forever in the back of my mind there sits a tiny bubble, a bubble of thoughts, if you will. . . . Sometimes this bubble resurfaces, sometimes it just sits there in the shadows, waiting in the dark for the perfect moment to pounce.

There is no going away. There are ways of lessening it. But both parties seem to just try and "leave well enough alone." Little do they know that "well enough" still causes pain, still tears apart, still confuses and shocks. That bubble will never be popped.

I don't need you here with me. I am not requesting for you to respond or even fully acknowledge me. I don't want redemption. I don't want a name or place in your life. I just want the time of day, just a moment for you to take a breath, breathe, and maybe, just maybe, you can put in the effort to recognize my kind.



I Am

Victor Zapata

I'm a liar
I'm a cheater
Don't trust me
I'm selfish
And I'll deceive you.

I'll take the knife behind my back and stick it in yours
And I'll laugh until I can't breathe anymore
Then ask if you're okay
and stick the knife in some more
I'll deceive you.

And if you need me I won't be there
I'm at home watching a movie
You can call and ask for help
I'll look at my phone until it stops ringing
And in the morning I'll say, "Sorry, I was sleeping."
I'm a liar.

I have no money
I'm broke
I just paid rent and my phone bill
But on Snapchat I'm out at the club posting my drinks
and taking shots with the people I'm with
I'm selfish.

I don't love you
I said it because you said it
I lock my phone and delete my texts

DREAM CATCHERS

Sometimes I text you good night
And go out with some people I never met
I'm a cheater.

I'm a liar
I'm a cheater
Don't trust me
I'm selfish
And I'll deceive you.



The Paint

Julian Izaquirre

What am I to you, another news article? Or am I a statistic? Are you calculating my grades to see if I qualify for prison? Or do you want to give me a fair chance and qualify me for food stamps?

I don't know that struggle of surviving off of stamps, but I know what it's like to be called that bean who sits in the back. Tell me, why is it that growing up without a father is the norm for a lot of us? 'Cause we all grow up to be equal in some way. Why is it that we can't have what other people have? Why do the minorities have to be the ones to stay sad? Why can't we strive like they do without straying from our cultures? Why do we gotta apply to this world built for the white ones? Why is it that I need the stellar grades and a test made for the college kids to get accepted to a school of art? Why do I have to be the one to bust my ass to end up living like the next guy when the next guy looks me in the eye and says I've had this since I was knee high? Why do I have to struggle with family in 'n out just for them to feel like they're helping us out by slangin' rocks? Why do I have to sit here and tell you my life story? Because my life story is the one that helps me build to what I want to be.

Here's the breakdown: I grew up with a broken father going in 'n out. I had a brother who constantly got stereotyped and with cousins who followed the role model. To them the streets were all they needed, because that's all they saw. With them in prison it was just me, my bro, and my momma who I've got all the love in the world for.

You want the paint? Take this for the paint. You look at me and see broken, and you see a kid who's hopeless, but if you were in my shoes you'd know that hopeless leads to homeless and homeless is what I've seen growing up 'cause my aunt is there now, yet it all boils down to me.

Take the canvas: an apartment filled to the brim with people sleeping on the floors, people showering in the wee hours of the morning just to make it to school on time. A block being gentrified to run our people out of it so the other ones can live there while we're all on the run.

What? You still want more? I'll help you like Bob Ross once told me, and I'll apply the liquid white. A kid going to school with hopes being crushed by people telling him he wasn't shit, but he keeps his hopes high so he can make it out of that ditch.

Then you want me to tell you where everyone is? Lemme break it down again. My cousins are living happy lives, same goes for me and my brother. Living happily with a nephew who brings me joy, with a grandmother whose face lights up every time she sees us, and a mom who gets happy every time she hears us. My aunt, may God have mercy on her soul, who I pray for every day to wake up and hear the birds chirping. . . .

There's your paint, sir. I gave you all the tools and you want me to tell you more? Use what I gave you and do me a favor . . . paint the f'ing picture.



"Portrait of Julian," Chris Wright