

CREATOPIA®

ISSUE 6

Inspiration for Everyday Creativity

Papercrafting

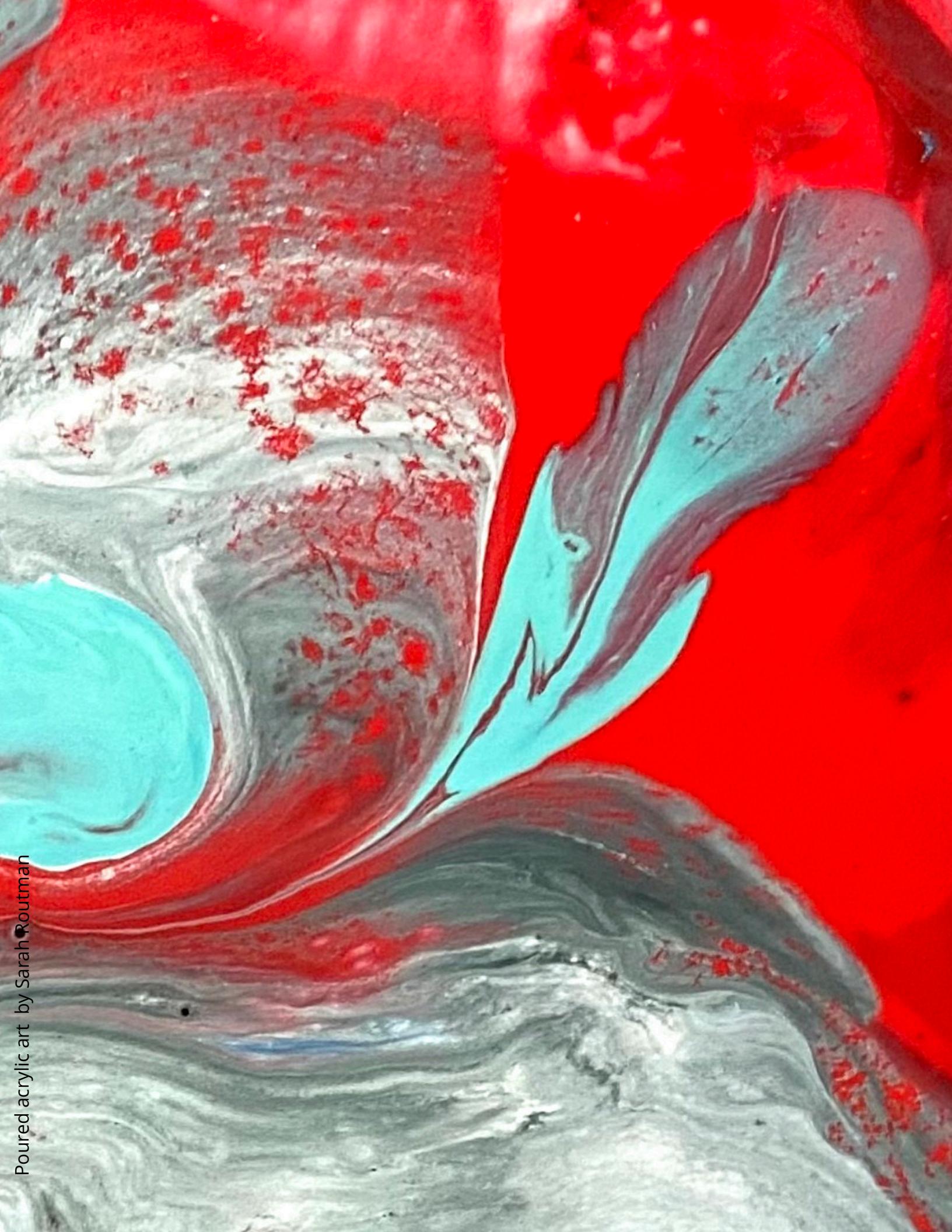
Summer
Reading Issue

Creator
Spotlight



Retro Summer 2022

STUDIO
Olanis



Poured acrylic art by Sarah Routman

INSPIRATION



“One benefit of Summer was that each day we had more light to read by.”

- Jeannette Walls



Retro Style Bright Summer Poster

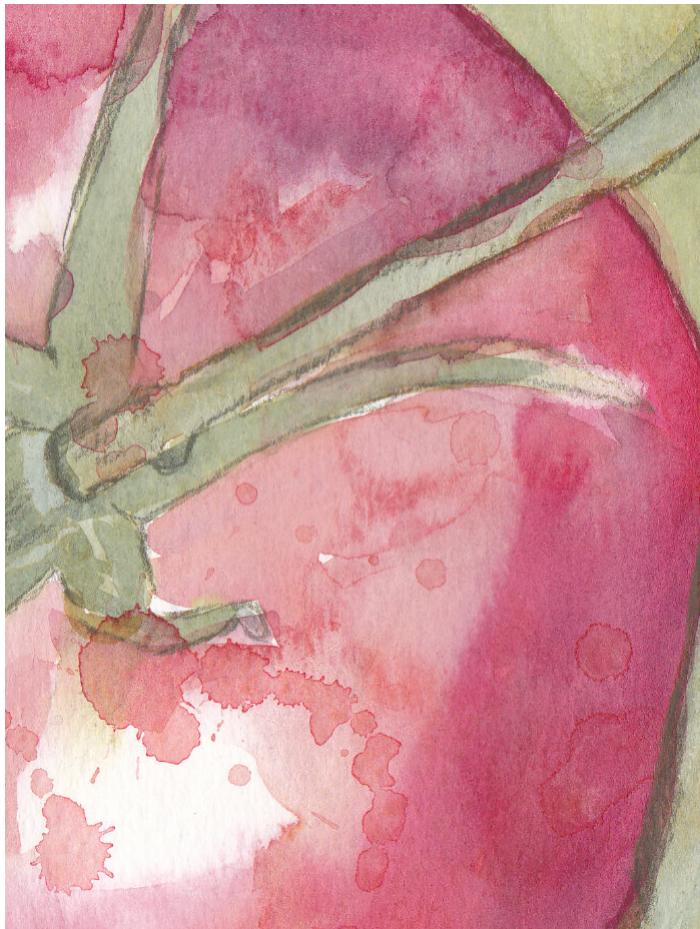
Limited Time Creatopia Exclusive Design

Spice up your space with this stylish retro-inspired graphic poster. It has the pop and free-wheeling fun of the summer carnival. It has a semi-matte finish and will add a touch of sophistication to any room and is 20 x 16 inches. To Buy:

<https://creatopia.studio/shop/accessories/retro-bright-summer-poster/>

EDITOR'S NOTE

Hello Summer!



Summer days always seem to bring a sense of timelessness and gentle nostalgia that lend a sweetness to the long sunny days. Our theme for this issue is "Retro" to capture a touch of that feeling.

In this issue, you'll find our special Summer Reading section with a wide variety of short stories and poems from our vibrant community of creatives to sample in the lazy days of summer with a tall glass of something good to drink. Don't miss the fabulous journal pages created especially for this issue's theme by Terri Dudash in our Creator Spotlight. And, if you're in the Asheville, North Carolina area, be sure to stop into the fabulous Morgan's Comics from our Interview feature.

Our open submission process is a hit! If you're even thinking about seeing your work in print, go to www.Creatopia.Studio under "Get Published" and give it a whirl! We're especially interested in visual artists of all types and first-time submissions. I'd love to see your work! Cheers!

Monette Satterfield

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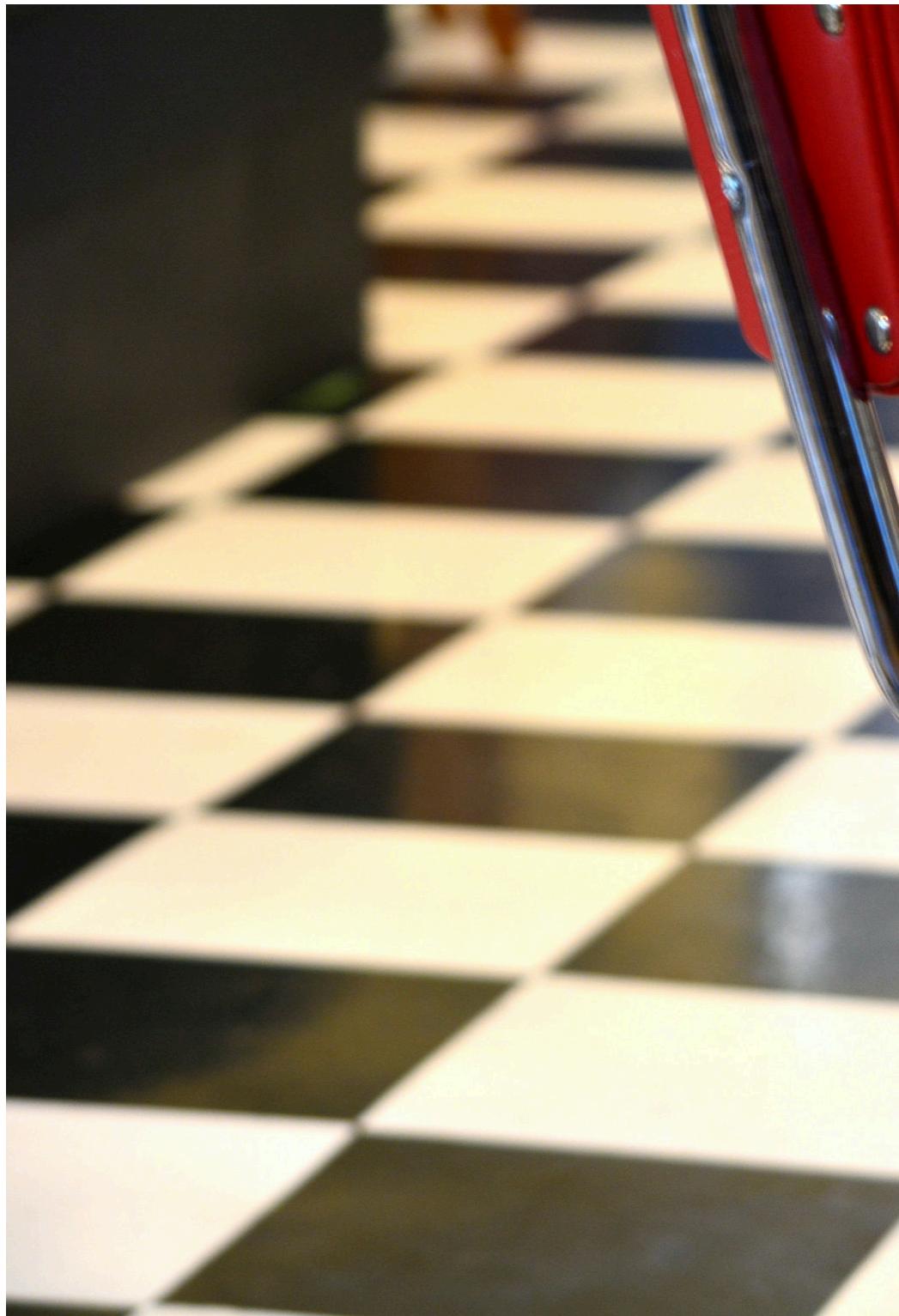
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SUMMER READING SPECIAL



INSPIRATION FOR EVERYDAY CREATIVITY



Photograph: R Mac Wheeler

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LAST PAGE - BRIGHT CARNIVAL POSTER



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Issue Information

Cover Photograph by Natalie Chaney, Unsplash; Back Cover Photograph by Michele Bitetto

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Creatopia® Collections (ISSN 2767-4096), is published periodically by Tesseray Publishing, LLC. Principal Office: 7635 148th Street West, #329, Apple Valley, MN 55124

Our Contributors



Ann Aubitz appreciates art & books and is the co-owner and publisher of Kirk House Publishers. After years of reading everything she could get her hands on, she decided to help others achieve their dream of becoming an author. www.kirkhousepublishers.com



DC Diamondopolous is an award-winning short story, and flash fiction writer with hundreds of stories published internationally in print and online magazines, literary journals, and anthologies. DC's short story collection *Stepping Up* is published by Impspired. She lives on the California coast with her wife and animals. www.dcdiamondopolous.com



Salvatore Difalco is a Sicilian-Canadian author of five books including the story collection *BLACK RABBIT* (Anvil Press).



Minneapolis-based Phyllis Dozier is a poet, screenwriter and memoirist who is finding her creative voice after thirty years as an HR executive at Fortune 20 companies. Phyllis draws inspiration from nature's changing of the seasons, when she sometimes encounters thin spaces.



Terri Dudash is a Mixed Media artist & Interior Designer. Creating is her happy place! She usually uses a "prompt" to create even if it's just one word it helps her stay on track. Art is her entire life!



Nicole Fende, aka The Numbers Whisperer®, helps coaches and creative entrepreneurs achieve sustainable prosperity. Nicole is the author of two books, designer of the card game *Body Be Gone™*, and the Ringmaster of Creatopia®. <https://thenumberswhisperer.com/>



Jim Finch is on a personal journey of ornamental engraving requiring thousands of hours to master. His journey has just begun, and he understands the importance of proper technique, discipline, and practice. He strives to create designs with balance and harmony and are visually pleasing when executed in steel with precious metals. Instagram: @finch_engraving_in_the_gap

Our Contributors



Julie Finch is a copyright and trademark attorney that enjoys quilting and handwork. When not at the office, you'll find her in her studio or at the barn.



Ralph Greco, Jr. is a professional writer and musician living in the wilds of suburban NJ, on the east coast of the North America.



Whether on the page or the stage, biographer, author, and speaker Lily Clayton Hansen is praised for her ability to communicate in an engaging, relatable, and witty way. Hansen, who has written four books, has a portfolio of over 1,000 biographies and articles.
www.biographyexpert.com/



Carolyn Hawkins enjoys discovering new information and sharing it with others. She loves to encourage people to nurture their positive qualities. A native Floridian, she provides wildlife friendly spaces around her pond.



Rose Menyon Heflin's poetry has appeared in numerous journals. It won a Merit Award from Arts for All Wisconsin in both 2021 and 2022, one of her poems was choreographed and performed by a local dance troupe, and she had a CNF piece in the Chazen Museum's Companion Species exhibit.



Leslie Jackson has learned to embrace challenges and feels they are learning experiences that have ultimately molded her into a better person. As a retired race car driver she spends her leisure time driving her Corvette or motorcycle on winding country roads, reading books and hanging out with her beloved grandkids, family, and friends.



Milton Jordan lives with Anne in Georgetown, Texas. His collection, "A Forest for the Trees," is forthcoming from Backroom Window Press. He is editing an anthology from "Texas Poetry Assignment."

Our Contributors



Larry Lefkowitz's story collection "Enigmatic Tales" is published by Fomite Press.



Joanie Lewis has a Ph.D. in Natural Health, believes in eating nature in its purest form, relying on foods for medicine, and living your life as far from the world's influences as possible. She loves garment sewing, quilting, knitting, and planting whatever will grow in her backyard.



Don Magin, husband, father of 5, grandfather of 15, great-grandfather (of 1, so far) retired chemist (reborn as science and math teacher), Santa-Claus-look-alike, lives Bon Air, Virginia with his wife of 53 years. He has had stories and poems published in numerous online and print publications and anthologies.



Zach Murphy is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. His stories appear in Reed Magazine, The Coachella Review, Maudlin House, B O D Y, Ruminante, Wilderness House Literary Review, and Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine. His chapbook Tiny Universes (Selcouth Station Press) is available in paperback and ebook.



Maggie Nerz Iribarne is 52, living her writing dream in a yellow house in Syracuse, New York. She writes about teenagers, witches, the very old, bats, cats, priests/nuns, cleaning ladies, runaways, struggling teachers, and neighborhood ghosts, among many other things. She keeps a portfolio of her published work at www.maggienerziribarne.com.



Don Noel is retired from four decades' prizewinning print and broadcast journalism in Hartford CT. He took his MFA in Creative Writing from Fairfield University in 2013, and has since published more than five dozen short stories. www.dononoel.com



Sarah Routman unravels the mysteries of life by writing, doodling, peering through a camera lens, splattering color on canvas, or reimagining found objects for creative expression with a touch of Japanese Kintsugi for healing. www.throughsarahseyes.com

Our Contributors



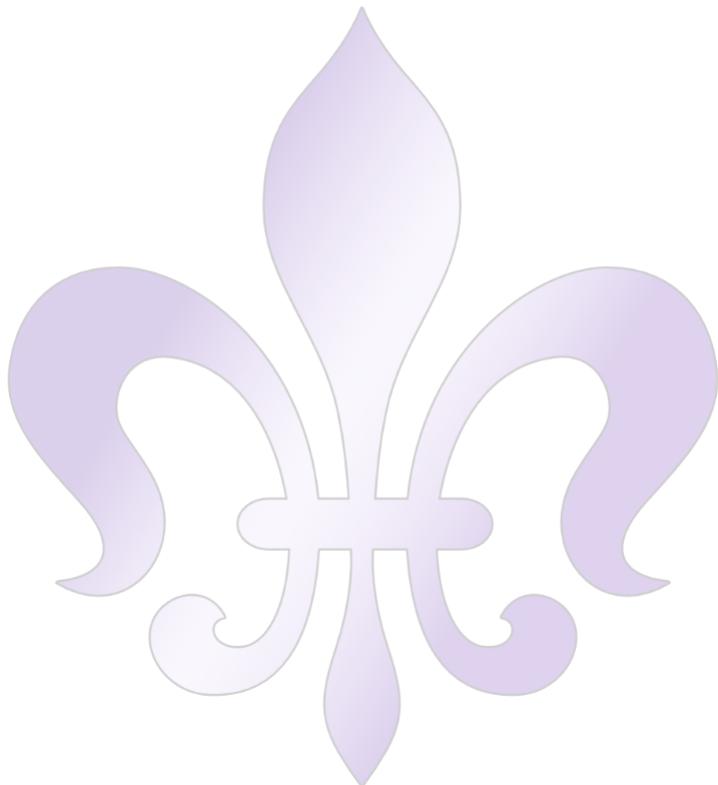
Kathryn Sadakierski is an old-school cool writer whose work has appeared in magazines and literary journals internationally, including Critical Read, Literature Today, New Jersey English Journal, and NewPages Blog. Kathryn holds a B.A. and M.S. from Bay Path University. She collects vinyl records, vintage books, and memories that inspire her.



Janice Strootman has been writing since she was a young girl in elementary school and gravitates toward poetry. She travels extensively with her husband. She has taught preschool through college-level classes both in Minnesota, and overseas in Hong Kong, Minsk, Belarus and Liptovsky Mikulas, Slovakia.



Gloria VanDemmeltraadt is an award-winning author with nine published books; one in every genre, as she says. Short stories are major fun, but her passion is legacy writing. Find out more on her webpage, www.GloriaVan.com.



EVERYDAY CREATIVITY

Locally Owned

By Milton Jordan

On bench backs left behind by our defunct city bus system, the glare green titles on generic book spines announcing Backlot Books Open Daily are no longer readable a few steps off the curb and once bright bronze letters declaring Rinehardt Grill's slogan, We Never Close, have faded a barely visible gray.

Salinas and Mueller's children, though, still keep their grocery open on Eighteenth and send a few grandkids, now and then down to the corner at Riverside to repaint their ad's multi-colored letters Locally Owned Since 1957.



EVERYDAY CREATIVITY

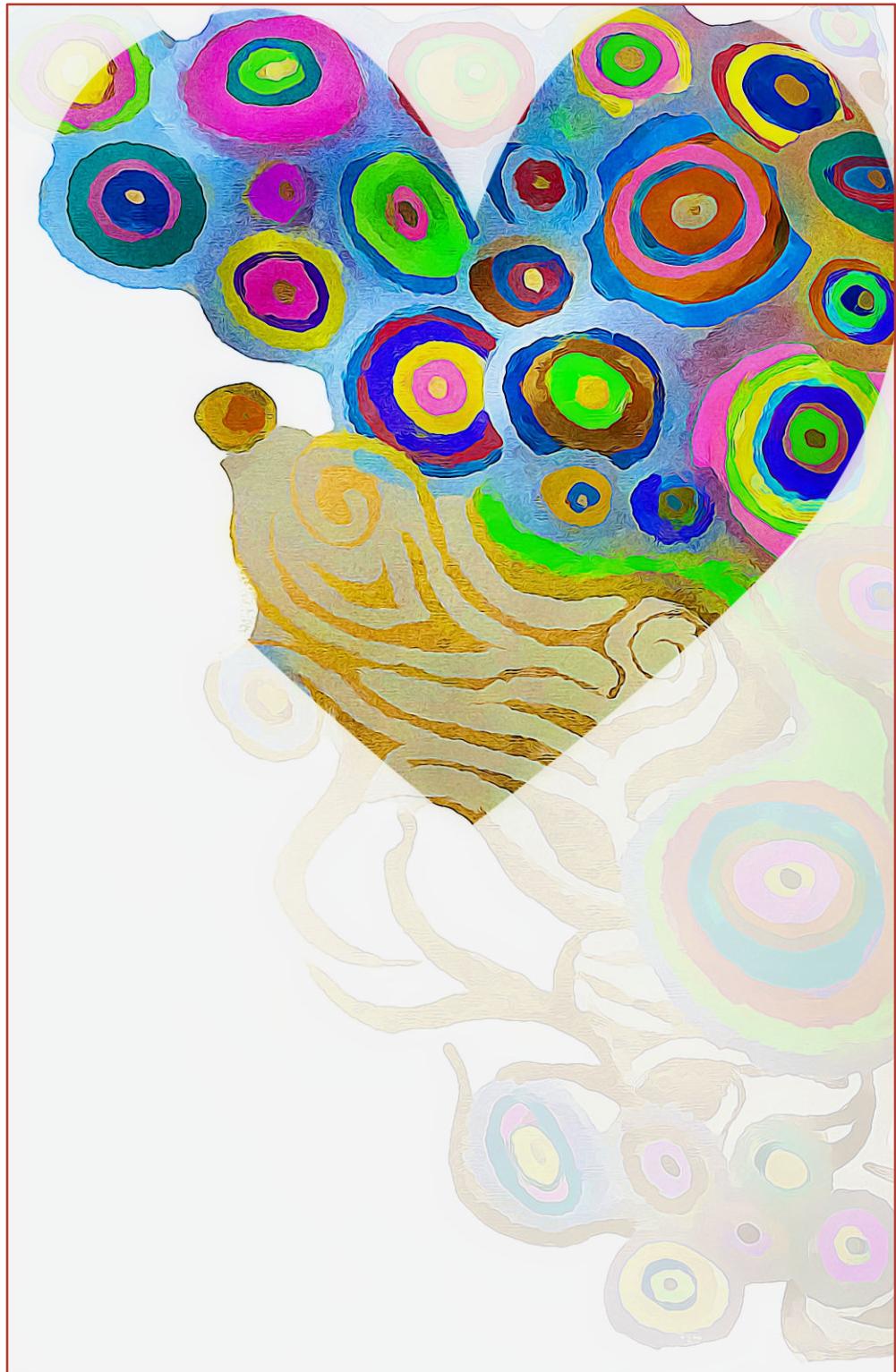
Artist at Work



EVERYDAY CREATIVITY

Artist at Work

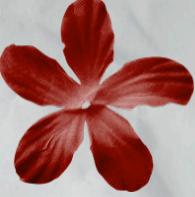
Ann Aubitz is an author and artist. These works were created with acrylic paint pens.



EVERYDAY CREATIVITY

Flower Child

By Rose Menyon Heflin



flower child,
daisies in your hair,
dancing about fleet-footedly
through those militant police lines,
happy in the sun,



You watched the flowers blossom,
vibrant as your brightly colored frock,
with curiosity and appreciation,
down with that whole aesthetic
and with peace and love -

Two concepts you thought would flower
with little time and little care
but that shriveled up and wilted
and died quickly, yet painfully,
right before your disbelieving eyes
as the glorious springtime of your youth

ended all too soon.



EVERYDAY CREATIVITY

Bespoke Engraving

By Jim Finch



"I strive to create designs with balance and harmony that are visually pleasing when executed in steel with precious metals."



EVERYDAY CREATIVITY

Bespoke Engraving



Photographs by the artist

EVERYDAY CREATIVITY

Quilted Art

Photographs Courtesy of the Artist



Contemporary wall hanging. Cotton and bamboo fabrics. Machine quilted.
Created by Julie Finch

POETRY

Turntable

On the drizzly days
In the humid summer months,
When rain hisses at the window,
I tune out the world
Clawing and clamoring to be heard,
And listen, instead,
To the song of yesterday's light,
Sun spreading its arms around all,
Fireworks of sound that won't fizz out,
My records whirling like wheels on the turntable
Spilling out melodies sweet
As just-right chilled lemonade,
Elton John's greatest hits, Billy Joel
(An innocent man, you know).

My heart is woven into the scars and the shine,
Happiness' bright polish
Like the smile of just-risen stars
Rolled out welcomingly as a picnic blanket
On the ink-like threads the needle spins,



By Kathryn Sadakierski

POETRY

Turntable



Tunes heard over and over again
I know better than the back of my hand,
Singing along to all the words that ring true
As much now as then,
Even where the vinyl's scratched,
And the music flickers a bit like heat lightning,
Or a lantern on the porch, glowing just comfortably
enough
To fill your soul
With the luminosity you seek.

Golden oldies turn the tables,
Redeeming a rainy day,
So that inside,
You might as well be
On a wind-tousled open road,
Streaming before you like hair through the sunroof,
The radio lilting,
Lifting your voice up to the sky,
No hope lost you can't still find.

CREATE PROSPERITY

When You Reach - and Fall



By Nicole Fende

I'm contemplating moving to a remote location, preferably warm. Somewhere completely isolated. No internet. No people. Just me. Me, the extreme extrovert, wants to disconnect from the world. Not to meditate, reflect or get in touch with my inner self.

I want to hide.

I want to hide from my embarrassment, my feelings of failure, my fear of being judged, and even from those I love. Most of all I want to hide from myself.

Why?

I went after a goal, a challenging one, and fell on my face. Imagine a tree branch that appears tantalizingly close. I thought if I jumped using all my willpower, determination, and strength, I would be able to grab hold and pull myself up. Achieving this goal would be a stepping stone to even bigger things.

Unfortunately, the branch seemed closer than it was. I jumped, missed, and fell hard. Laying on my back, staring up at the goal which now seemed impossibly far away, negative feelings overwhelmed me.

When You Reach - and Fall

In a usual *you got this* column, I'd talk about standing up, charging forward and then succeeding in a glorious fashion. Like a fairy tale, you know everything turns out well. The dip provides contrast to the finale. A place to say I'm just like you, touching briefly on the struggle before rushing forward to dwell on the happy ending.

Life isn't a fairy tale. When we fall, we have no assurance our ending will be a happy one. We face a tsunami of feelings. In that moment I desperately wished to hear about living through the fall, how to process it, and how to move forward. I couldn't find it, so I'm creating it. I am living this right now, and I don't know the ending.

After the fall, I felt sick to my stomach, the air knocked out of me. Insidious blooms of doubt unfurled while dark thoughts of failure flourished. I felt uncertain and scared. I wanted to hide from my fears. I still do, yet I know I need to face them to move forward.

My loved ones will think I'm a failure and judge me for it.

I feel nauseous as I type this, my throat clogged as my stomach roils. My deepest fear is to lose the love and respect of those I hold dear. Would this setback change their view of me? Would they see me as a failure? Would their love for me diminish, or even fade away?

This fear isn't really fair to them, the idea that they'd bolt at the first sign of trouble. Or so my rational brain informed me. Nevertheless, feelings are rarely rational. There's only one solution for this, start telling people about it.

The first call was the hardest. The first time I told someone the goal I was reaching for slipped away, perhaps forever, I wondered if I would ever feel 100% again. Imagine my relief as words of support, comfort, and yes love, poured out. While these words couldn't erase the sting, they soothed my soul and lightened my heart.

The more I talked, the less scary this felt. While you may be tempted to hide, the best thing you can do is reach out to those closest to you for support. You'll need it when the next emotional beast raises its ugly head.

CREATE PROSPERITY

When You Reach - and Fall

If only I would have _____.

The could'a, should'a, woulda's come fast and furious. I started to list every little thing I could have done differently. Every decision, large or small, I wondered if it was the one which led me here. I second guessed how hard I worked, how smart I was, even my suitability to be in business.

My ego is the one yelling I alone could have prevented something. I alone could have saved the day. I alone could have predicted how the world around me was going to behave.

Oh boy, that sounds pompous. Ridiculous in fact. No one can predict the future. No one can be sure all their decisions are the right ones. All we can do is acknowledge what didn't work and learn from it. Document lessons learned, as well as early warning signs of trouble. Commit to improve using what you've learned. Then let go.

My colleagues won't trust me anymore.

Everyone, even the most successful people on the planet, make mistakes. Your colleagues

won't turn away because you don't succeed 100% of the time. They're going to be looking to see how you handle the fallout. Do you own your part in what happened? Do you follow through on what you committed? Do you do the right thing when it doesn't benefit you? Do you do the right thing even when it may cost you?

How someone handles adversity demonstrates their true character. Your colleagues aren't watching closely because you made a mistake, they're watching to see how you handle it.

Value the wins.

Even when we fall short of a goal, we still experience successes. Find them and celebrate them. I have struggled for years to accept when something truly isn't working. I believe in helping others, I believe in hard work, and yes, I do wear a pair of rose-colored glasses. I believe even the most difficult things can be overcome – if I just work harder.

In the real world when we reach and fall there isn't a physical blow to tell us something didn't work. We have to acknowledge it. Only then

CREATE PROSPERITY

When You Reach - and Fall

do we feel all the pain and doubts. It's so tempting to avoid this and keep "trying", spinning our wheels to simply delay the inevitable. I've been guilty of this countless times.

My success today is acknowledging the fall *quickly* and taking action. A huge win for me, and a big step forward in personal growth.

I don't know what the future holds. I don't know if the next time I reach I will grasp the branch or fall again. I do know that I can only fail if I quit trying. I'm not a quitter.

Stand up. Dust off the fall. Reach again.



Warm your creative soul with this perfectly sized quality ceramic mug sporting the Creatopia® royal purple Fleur de Lys. It's microwave and dishwasher safe and made of white, durable ceramic to hold a generous 11 ounces of your beverage of choice: coffee, tea or hot chocolate.

To Buy: www.Creatopia.Studio/Shop

CREATOR SPOTLIGHT

Terri Dudash

Meet Terri Dudash our guest artist in the Creator Spotlight. Terri is a journal artist who makes highly detailed journal pages with her own unique handwritten wording. She created the pages here especially for this issue of Creatopia and the theme of Retro. Listen in as she talks about her art and process.

When I start a piece, I start with the ephemera. I add the stamps, washi tape, dictionary pieces or any other paper cut outs that I'll use. I almost never have a real plan for the finished piece. For pages, the colors and the summery style for the Retro theme were fun to work with. I looked at the inspiration board for the issue and the colors just spoke to me and told me what to draw before I even started.

I chose the old car and Airstream first because the colors remind me of the 50's and summer and travel. The car pulling the Airstream made me romanticize the whole "trip" I was planning in my mind by thinking about what the trip would consist of: diners, pies, photographic opportunities and stopping at gas stations to get fuel for the car and snacks. Traveling all of Route 66 is definitely a dream of mine.



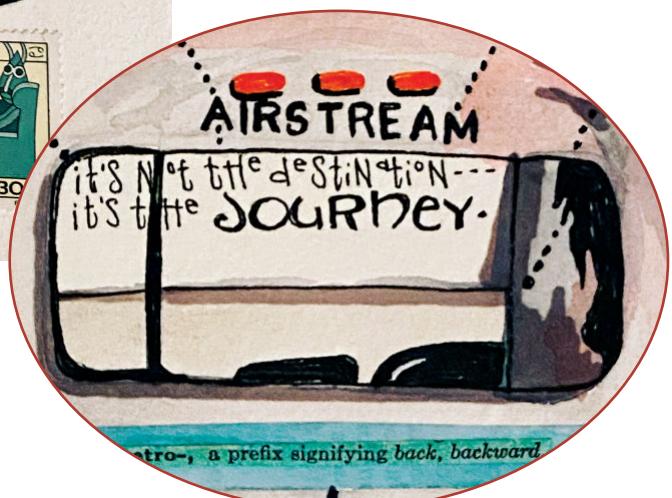
CREATOR SPOTLIGHT

Terri Dudash



The car and Airstream are made with Sennelier Watercolor paint, Sharpie and Jelly Roll pens. I used the stamps to add a little more of the beautiful green and red. I feel like the stamps add a different artistic element to the page and they also allow me to add something from my grandparents into my art. They had these in a dresser when we cleaned out their home. I was delighted to have them!

After I draw the piece in pencil then add color, I add light lines to the unlined page and do the writing. It's my favorite part!

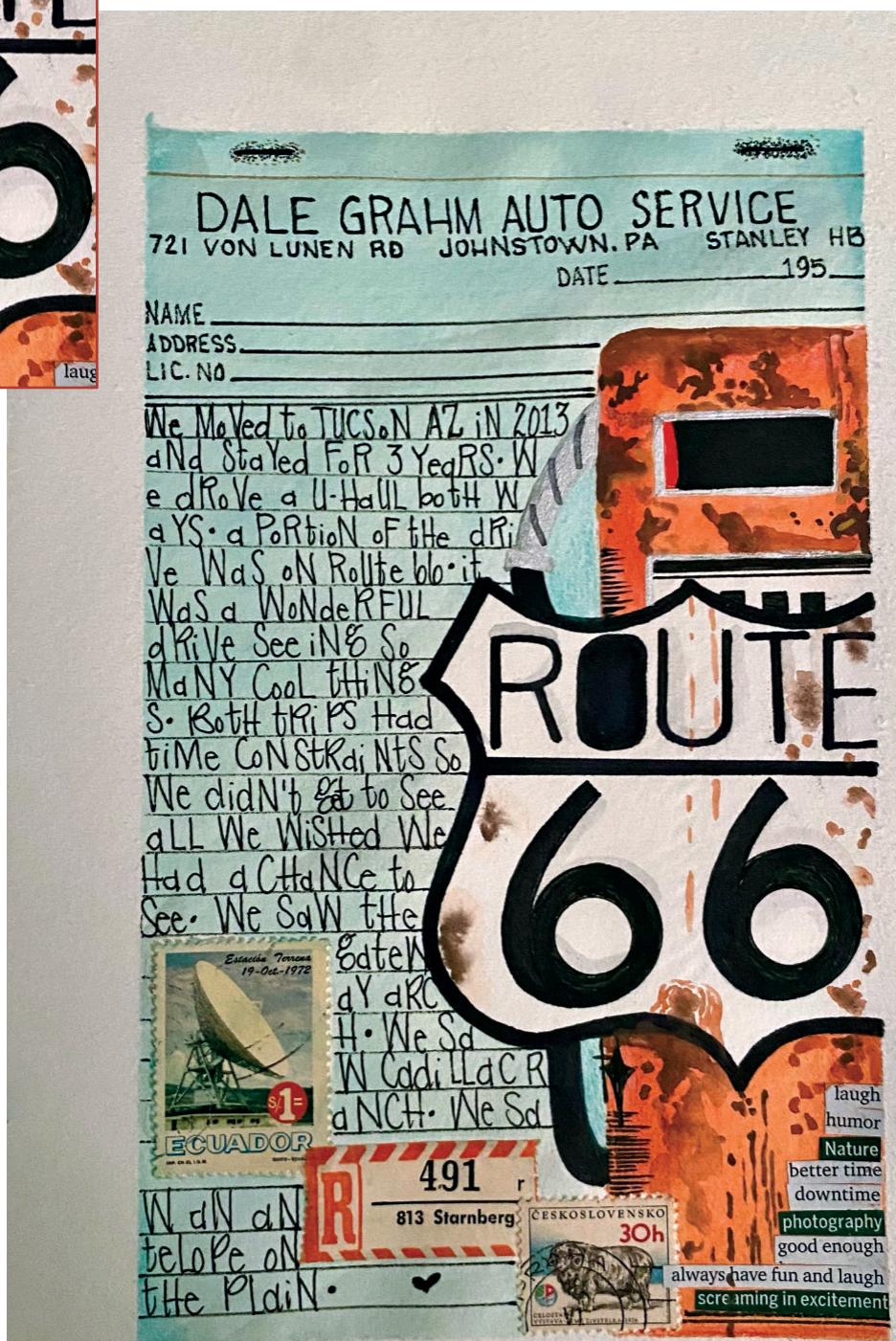


CREATOR SPOTLIGHT

Terri Dudash



I drew the pump and Route 66 then added the form and text behind it. The name Graham is also one of my cats. He's the sweetest cat ever. Adding stamps and clippings of words is one of my signature moves on a page. I love adding in different things that can elevate the page.

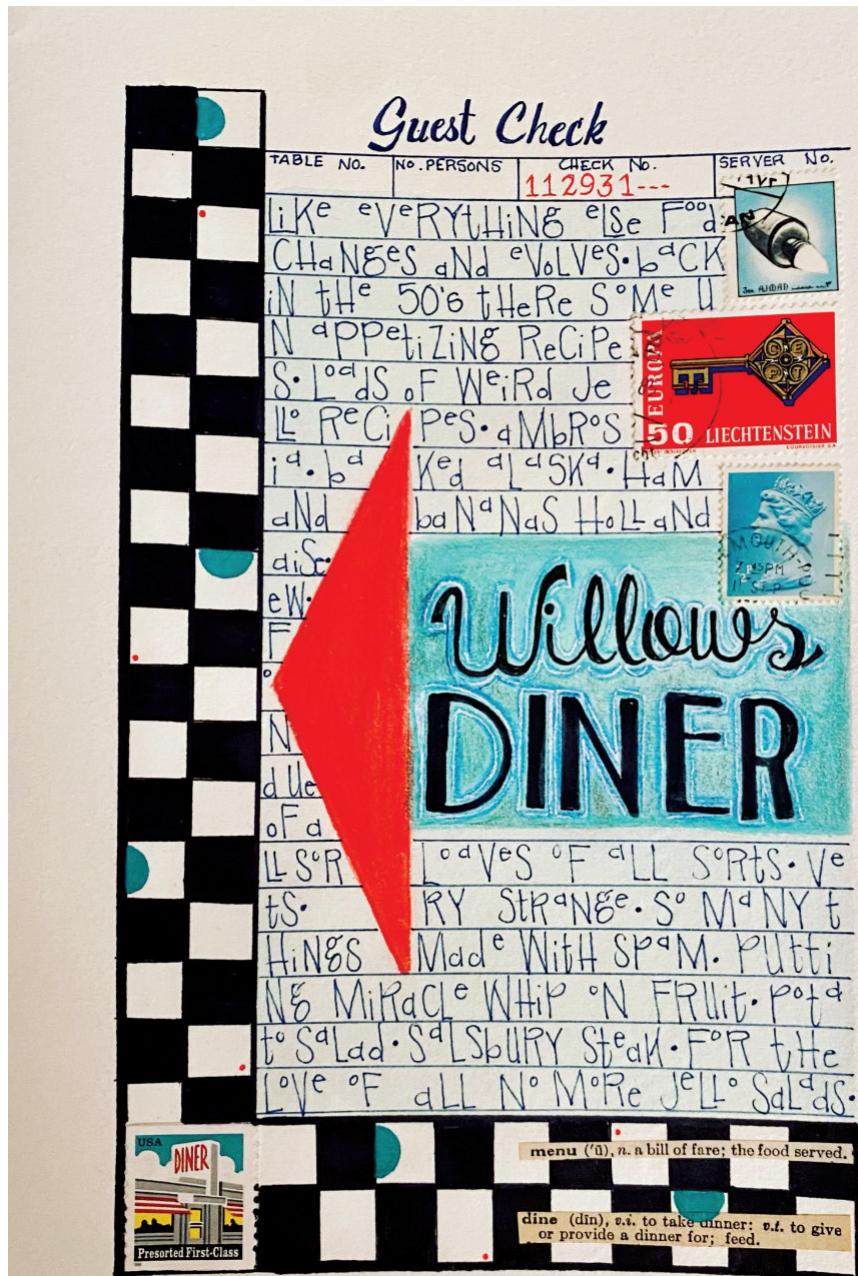


CREATOR SPOTLIGHT

Terri Dudash

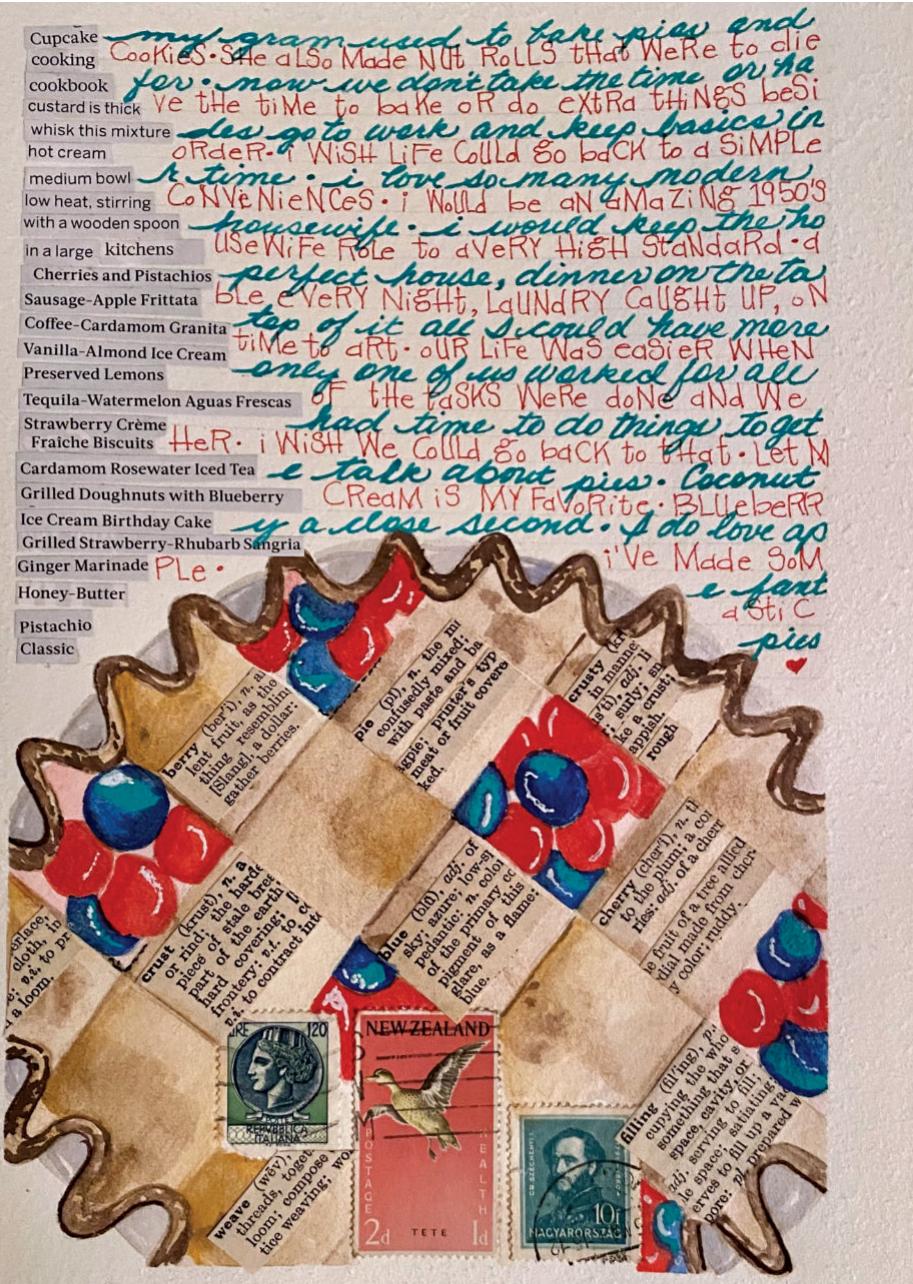
The Diner sign is fun! I loved making the checker pattern around the two sides. I used a ruler and Sharpie marker. That I found a stamp that has a diner on it is just plain good luck! I love creating the guest checks on pages. They are cute, simple and an unexpected element.

The name of the diner is Willow's Diner because our 13-year-old cat is Willow and I wanted to honor her on a page because she is my little baby. The guest check number in 112931 because it is my Gram's Birthday. I like to add family details when I can. It makes the pieces more special to me.



CREATOR SPOTLIGHT

Terri Dudash



Sennelier Watercolor is honey based, easy to use and very vibrant. I enjoy layering jelly roll pens or markers over it to create depth.

The pie was a ton of fun to make - I love to paint pie! It's almost as good as eating pie...almost. I used dictionary clippings that match the piece in the woven crust. I love what the words add to the crust. Again, the stamps are there! I cut words out of a magazine that added meaning as well.

I just use a glue stick to adhere the pieces to the paper and used the same supplies as the car to create this.

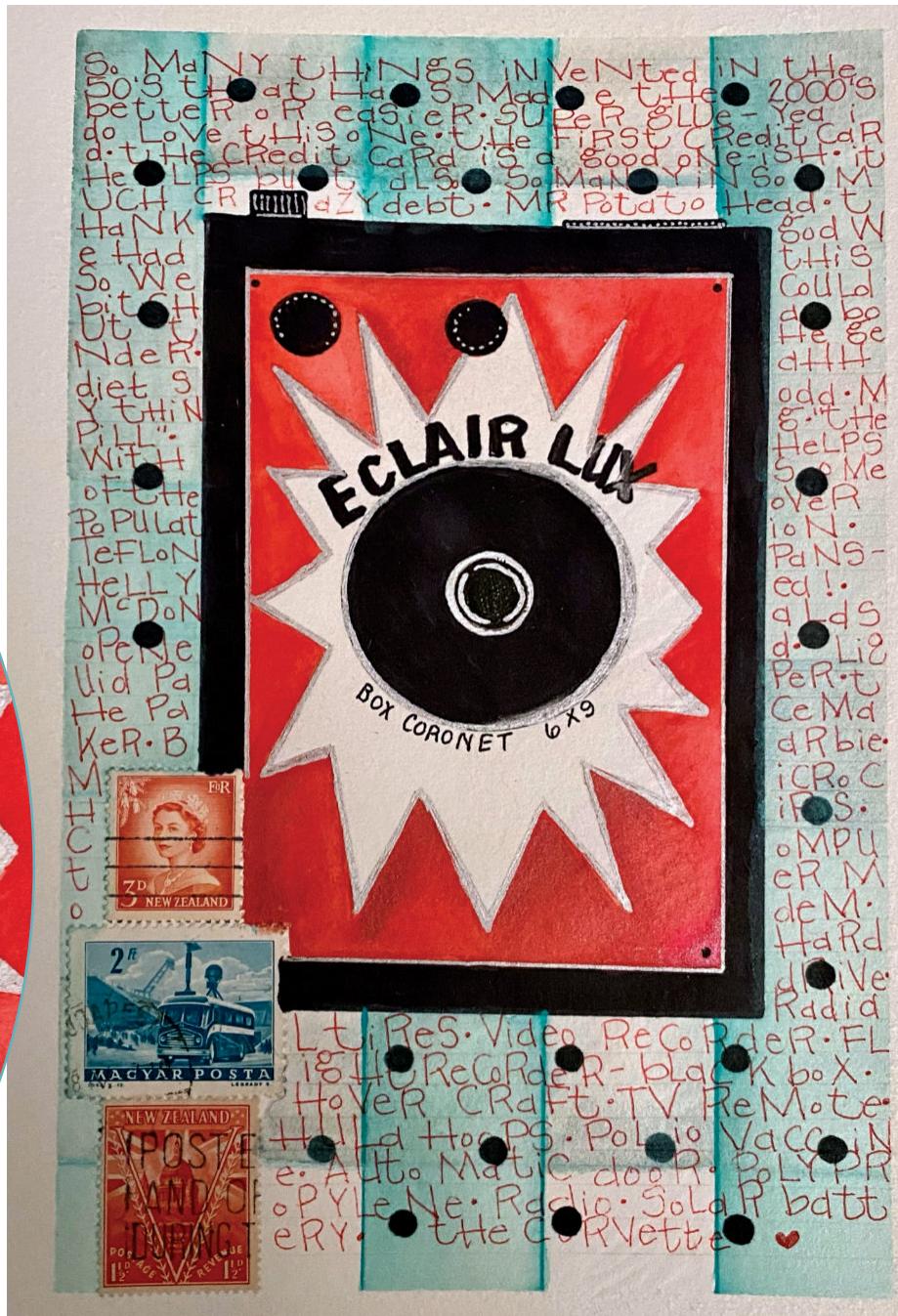


CREATOR SPOTLIGHT

Terri Dudash

Of course, I had to have a camera in the mix. I collect cameras so every trip I take is about taking loads of pictures. I enjoy documenting the trip as well as using my artistic eye. The camera is a real camera – even though I don't have this one, I wish I did!

The plaid background adds to the collection's cohesiveness, mirroring the pie weave. I think these five pages are a cool little collection, and I'm considering blowing them up and putting them in my kitchen - I just moved into a home that was built in the 50's.



WELL BEING

Fresh Cut Grass - Summer Air



Summer is backyard barbeques, running through sprinklers, lazy Saturday mornings...



Fresh Cut Grass Bath Salts

Bring summer relaxation into your bath with these European spa bath salts. To buy: EclecticLady.com IG@eclecticladyinc

www.eclecticlady.com/collections/bath-and-body-products/products/fresh-cut-grass-bath-salts



Sweet Clover & Alfalfa Scented Candle

Hand poured farmhouse Soy Candles are made with phthalate free oils for a clean, soothing burn. To buy: kansasearthandskycandle.com, IG@kansasearthandskycandle.com www.kansasearthandskycandle.com/product/sweet-clover-alfalfa-soy-candles-wax-melts/

Fabric

Set your creativity free with this crisp, breezy design. Pattern: Lemonade in the Grass by Sarah Gilpin (Whimsymint). To buy: Spoonflower.com

www.spoonflower.com/en/fabric/4337565-lemonade-grass-by-whimsymint

WELL BEING

Fresh Cut Grass - Summer Air



and the scent of fresh cut
grass.



Whipped Body Butter

Nourish your skin after a day in the sun with this luxurious handcrafted, all natural, lotion.

To buy: [Etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com)
[IG@sunbasilsoap](https://www.instagram.com/sunbasilsoap)

www.etsy.com/listing/59295605

Home on the Range Bodywash

Evoking perfect summer days with scents of cut grass, clean laundry, and freshly picked blackberries.

To buy: [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)
[IG@outlawsoaps](https://www.instagram.com/outlawsoaps)
www.amazon.com/Home-Range-Natural-Body-Wash/dp/B074TVZS4Q/



Home Reed Diffuser Set - Morning Dew

Unique fragrance free, alcohol-free formula of plant origin for a pure, fresh cut grass, fragrance.

To buy: [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)
www.amazon.com/BAGO-home-Fragrance-Reed-Diffuser/dp/B07ZHGCW5D/

PLAYLIST

What to Listen to Now



Jungle

Good Times / Problemz, Problemz

Leave your troubles behind. 70's funk with a modern twist, this song will get you on your feet.

To Buy: [Amazon.com](#)

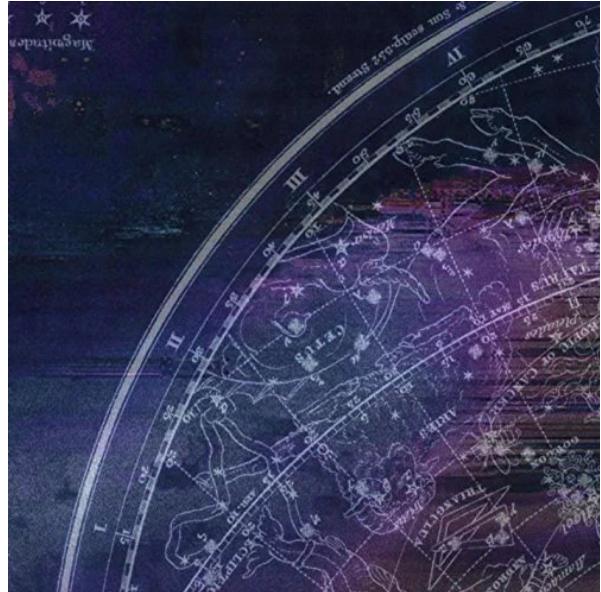


Retro Burn

Follow the Light, The Light is Your Guide, The Floater

Close your eyes and enjoy this old time, dance hall interlude.

To Buy: [Amazon.com](#)



PLAYLIST

What to Listen to Now



Retro Kid feat. L.A. Byrne

Released as a single, The Room

Funky jazz, smooth as butter male vocals accented by a female vocalist, creates a powerful yet mellow energy.

To Buy: [Amazon.com](#)



Gardens & Villa

Gordon Von Zilla Presents, Disco Kitchen

80's synth driven by addictive drum patterns and a chorus you can't resist.

To Buy: [Amazon.com](#)



PLAYLIST

What to Listen to Now

Sylvan Esso

Released as a single, Your Reality



YOUR REALITY
SYLVAN ESSO

Less is more on this track. Using only vocals, electro beats, and violins, this song speaks to your soul.

To Buy: [Amazon.com](#)



Sweatson Klank

Postcards, Ballad of a Sleepless Traveler

Sip your favorite beverage on a lazy Saturday morning while this instrumental tells you a story.

To Buy: [Amazon.com](#)



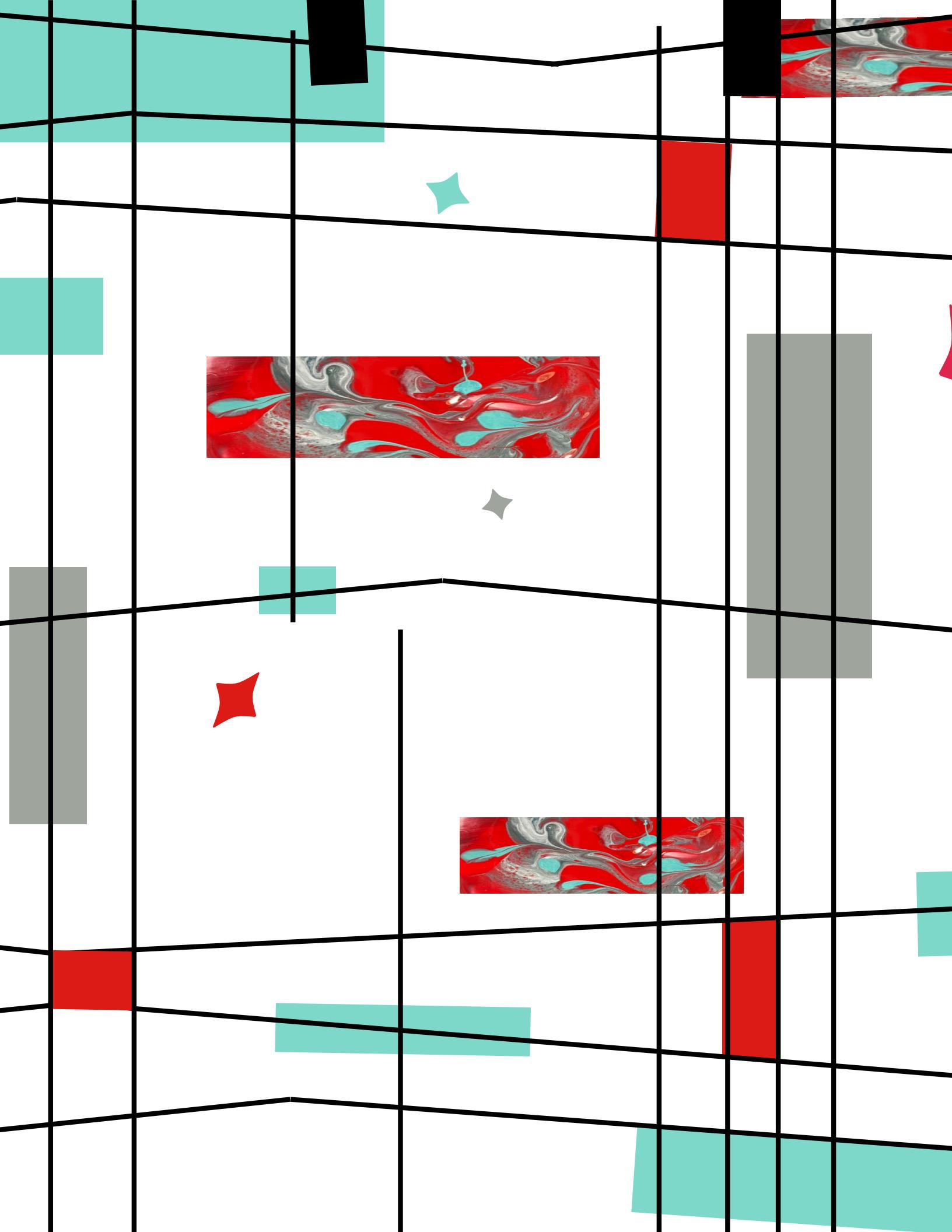
PAPERCRAFTING

Retro Summer Collage Elements

Use these fun summer images and pattern papers to add spice to your summer vacation photo book.

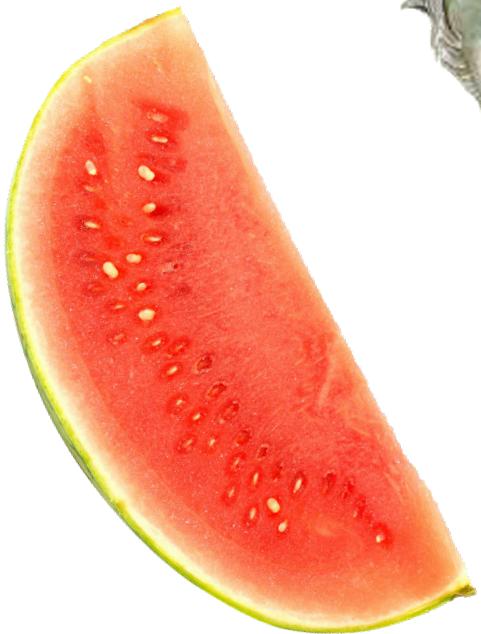
The retro pattern paper was specially designed for this issue by [Sarah Routman](#)

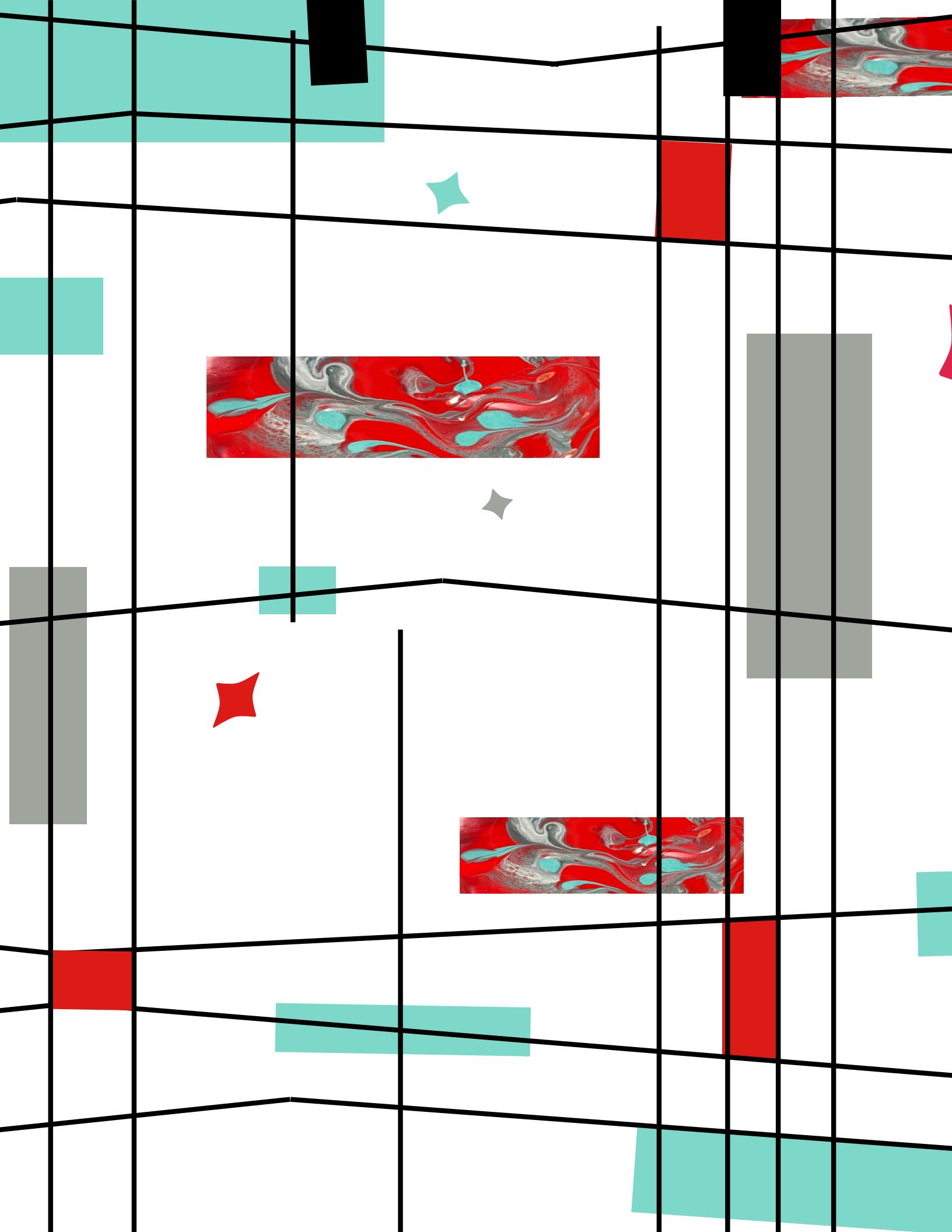




PAPERCRAFTING

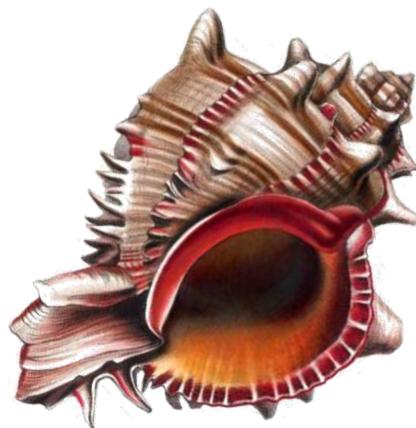
Retro Summer Collage Elements

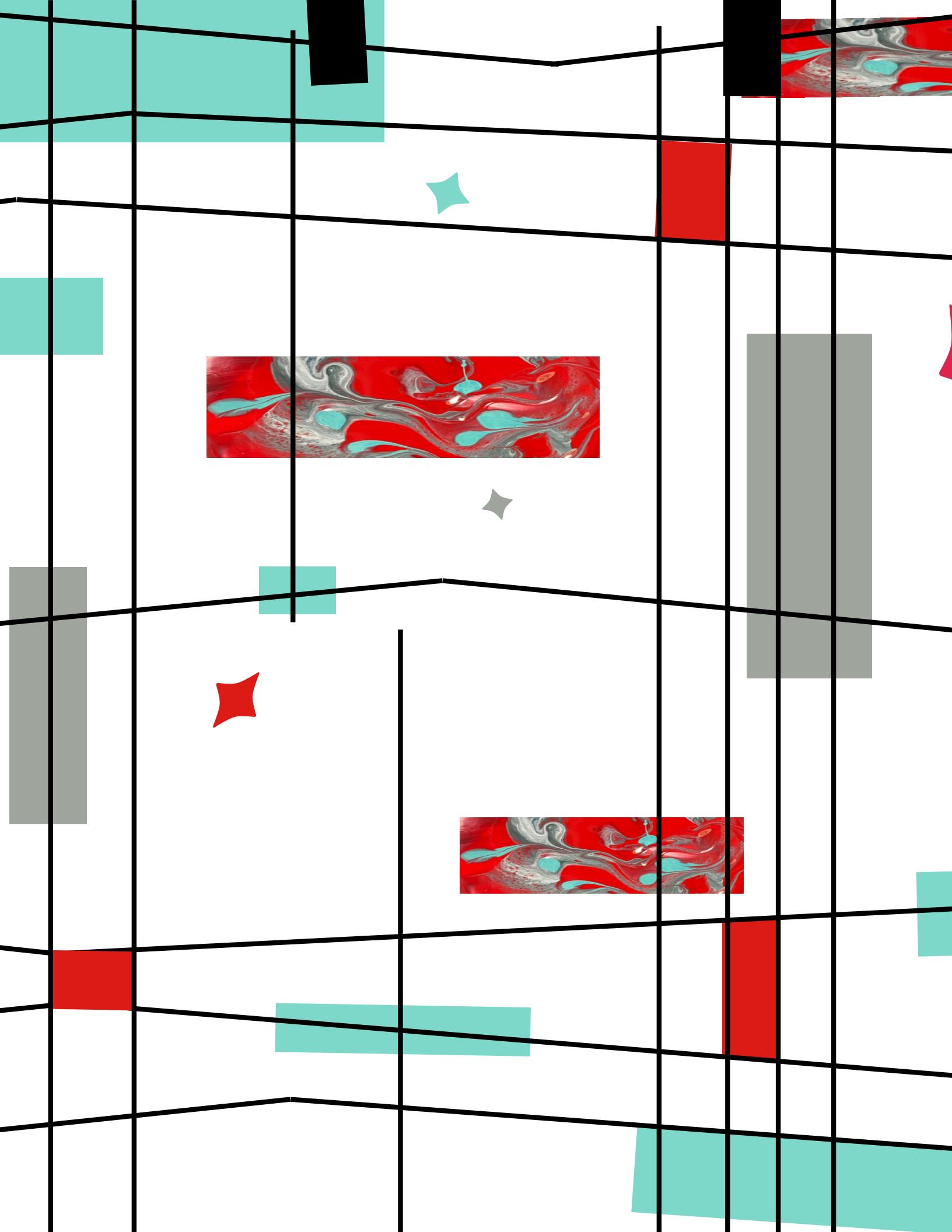


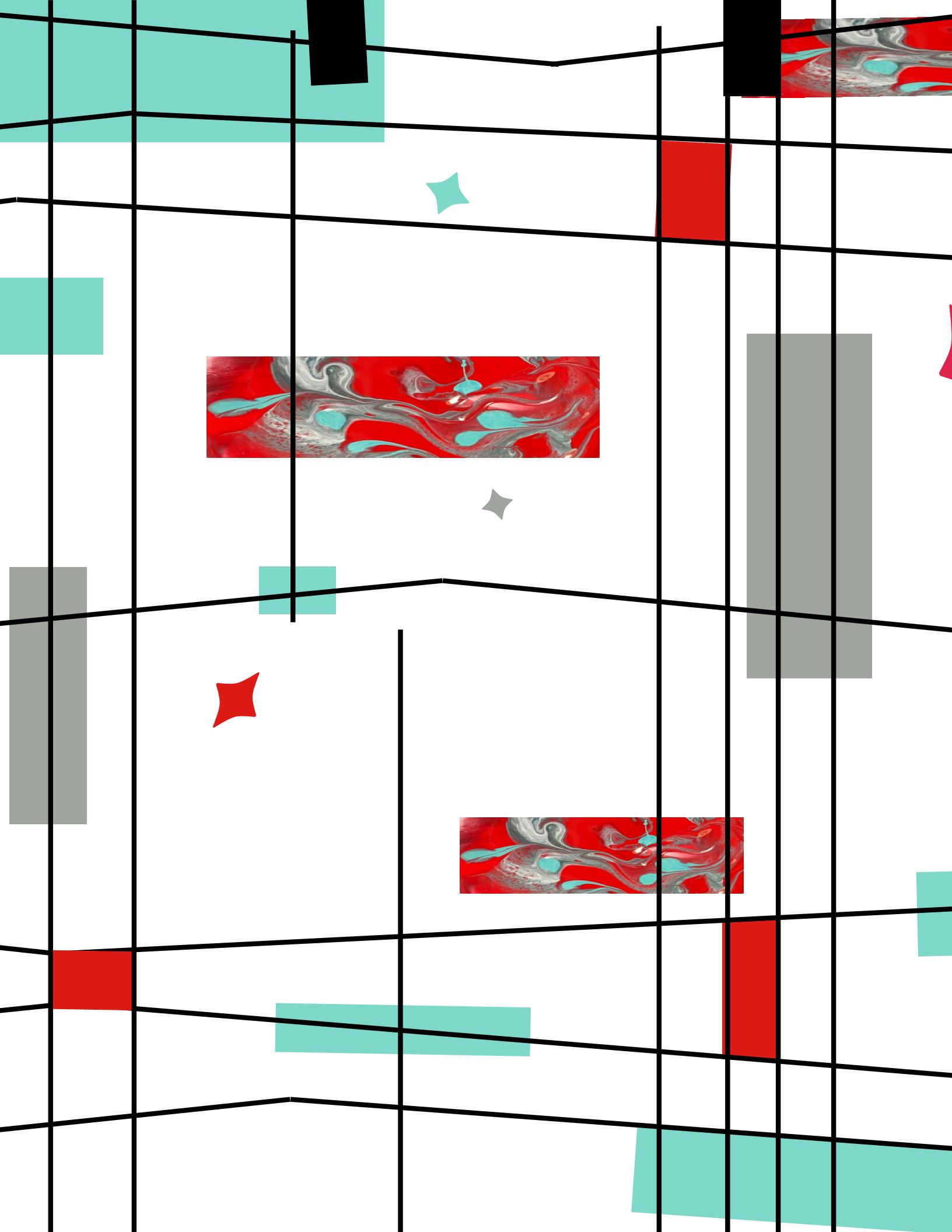


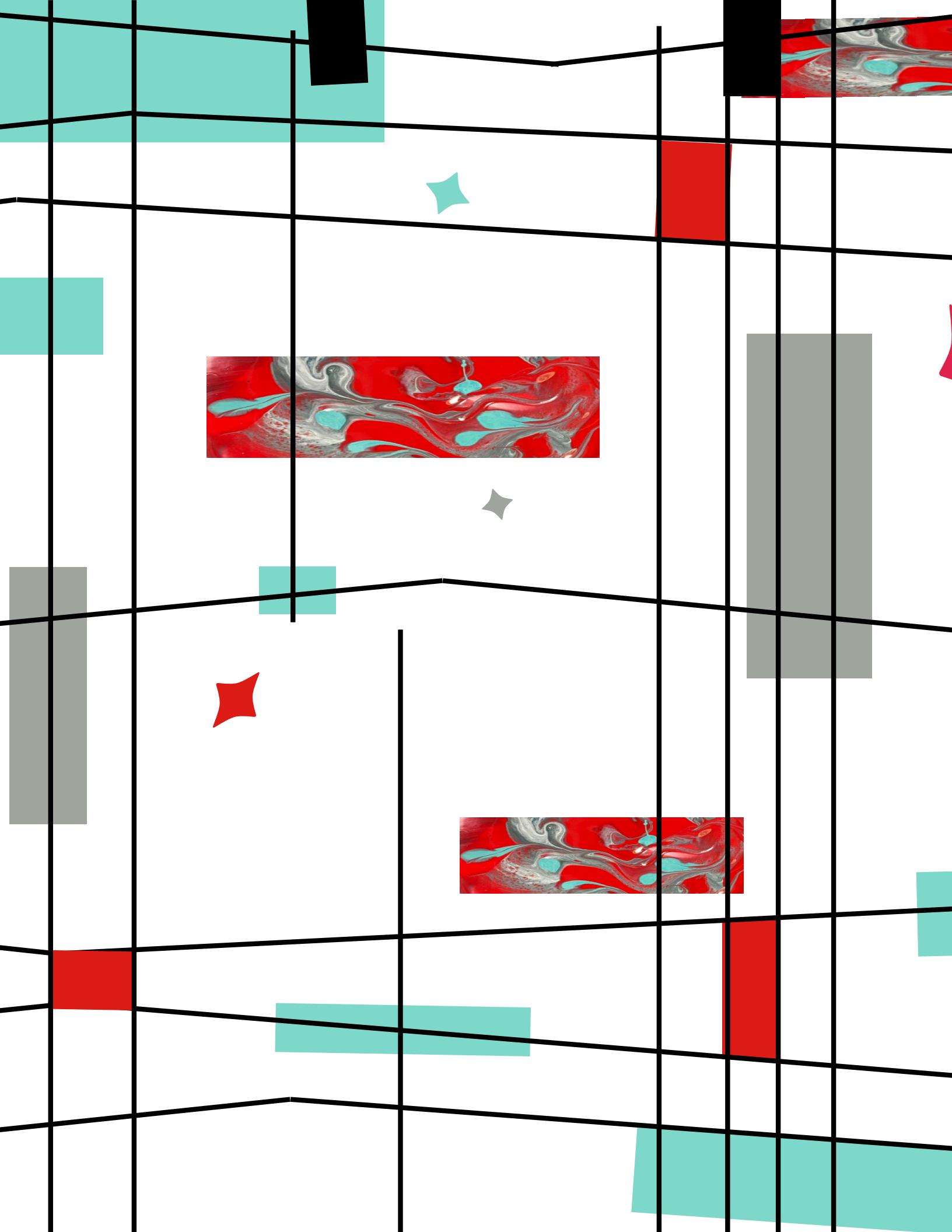
PAPERCRAFTING

Retro Summer Collage Elements



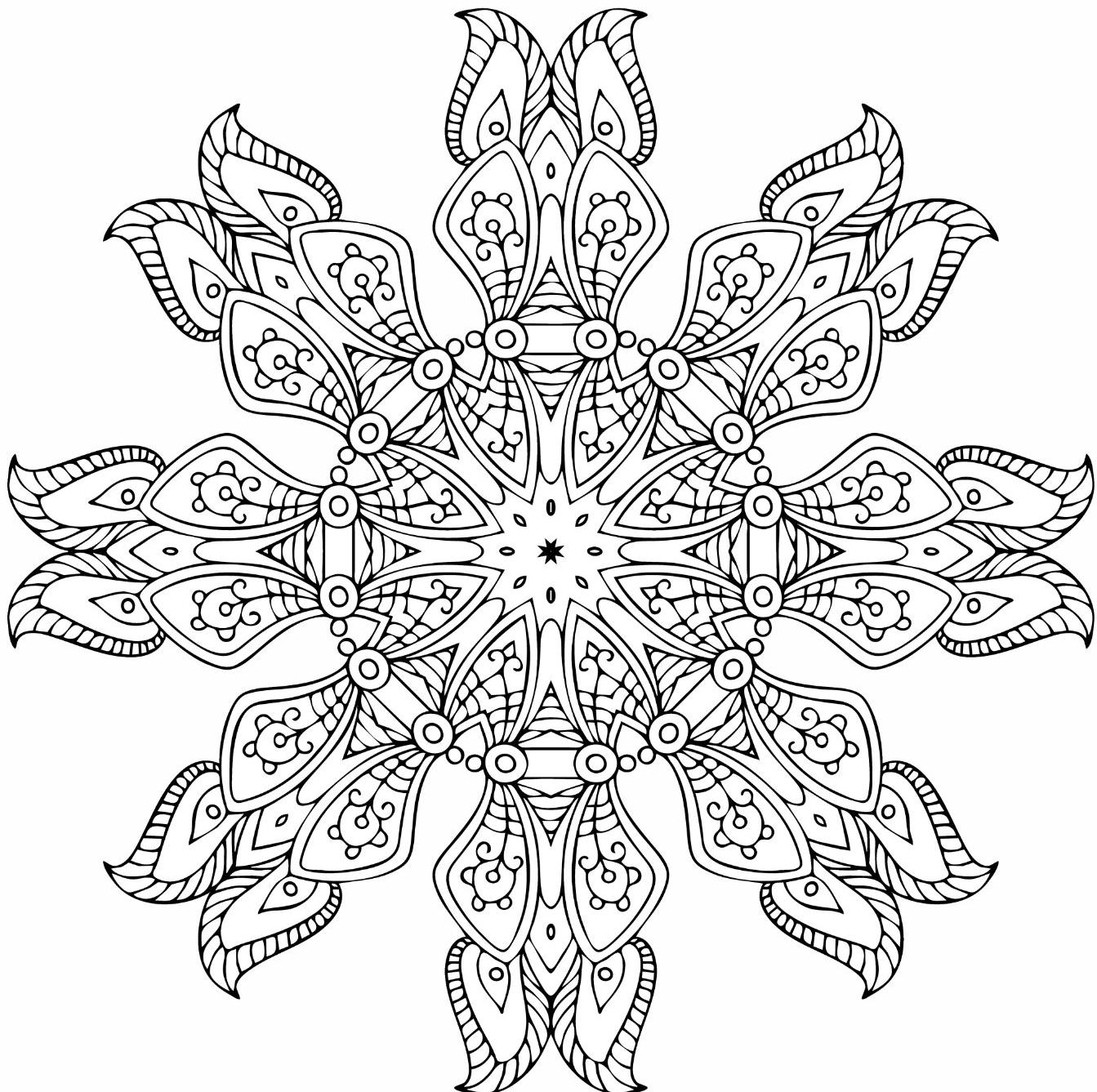






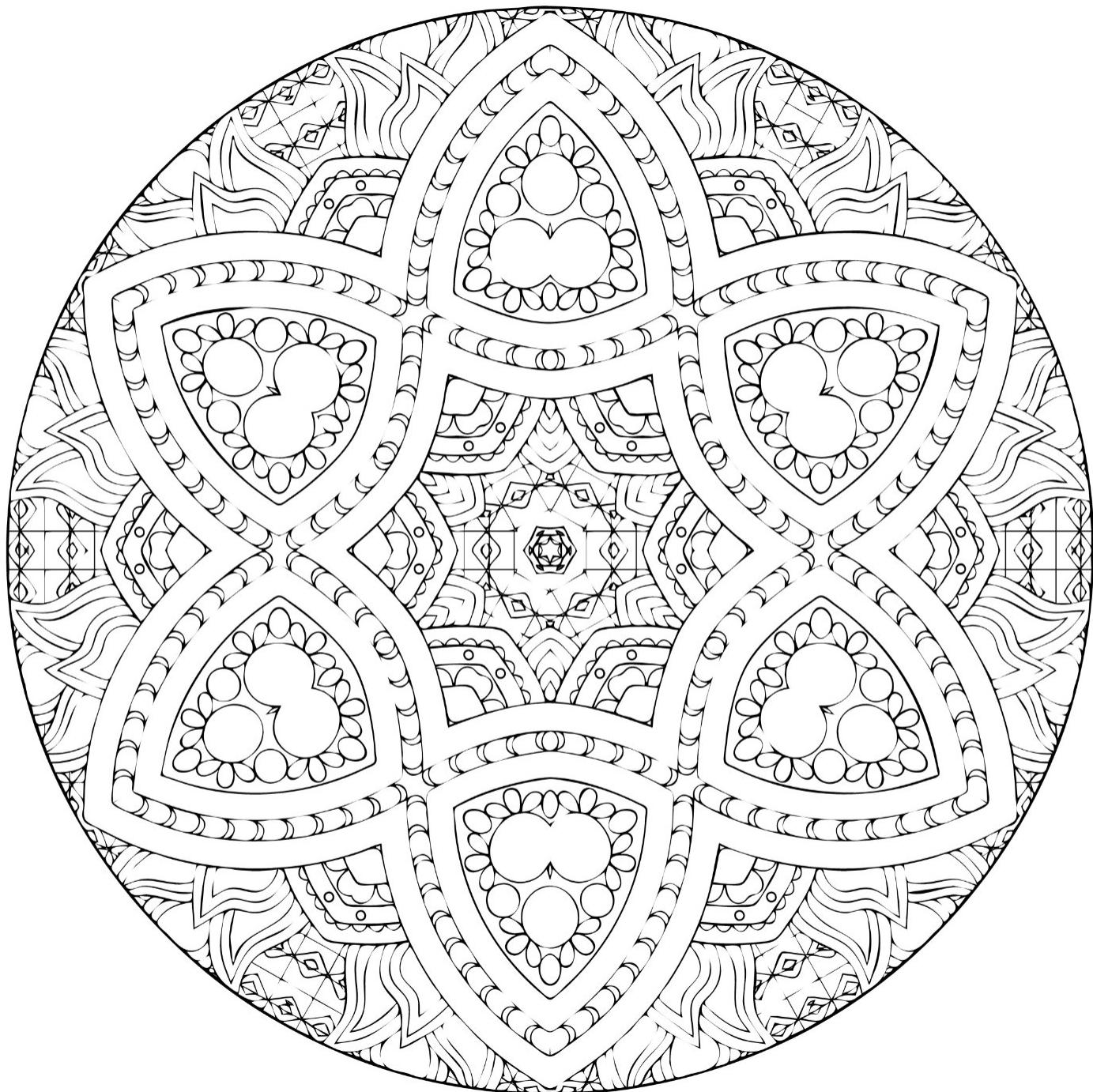
EVERYDAY CREATIVITY

Coloring Pages



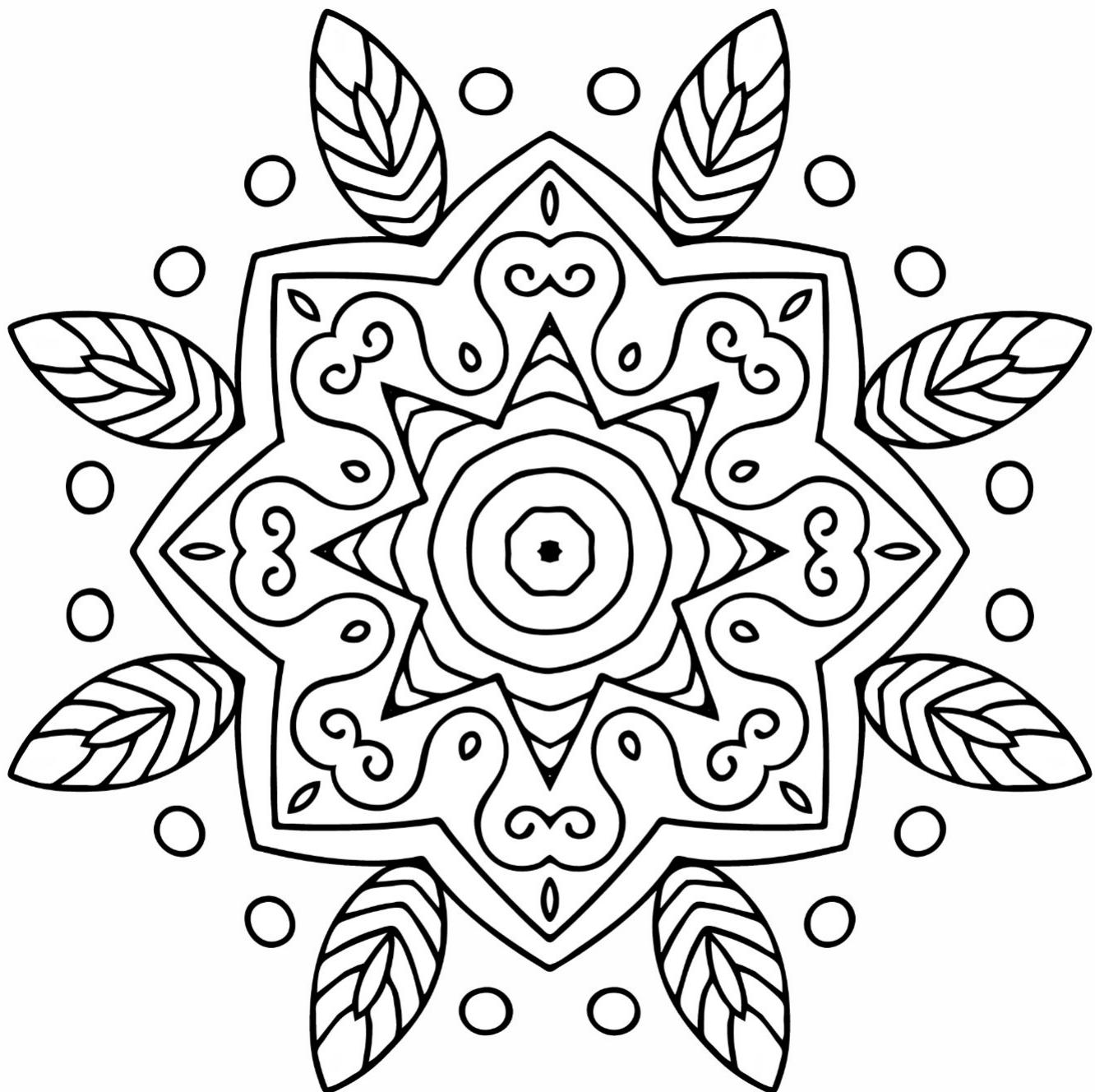
EVERYDAY CREATIVITY

Coloring Pages



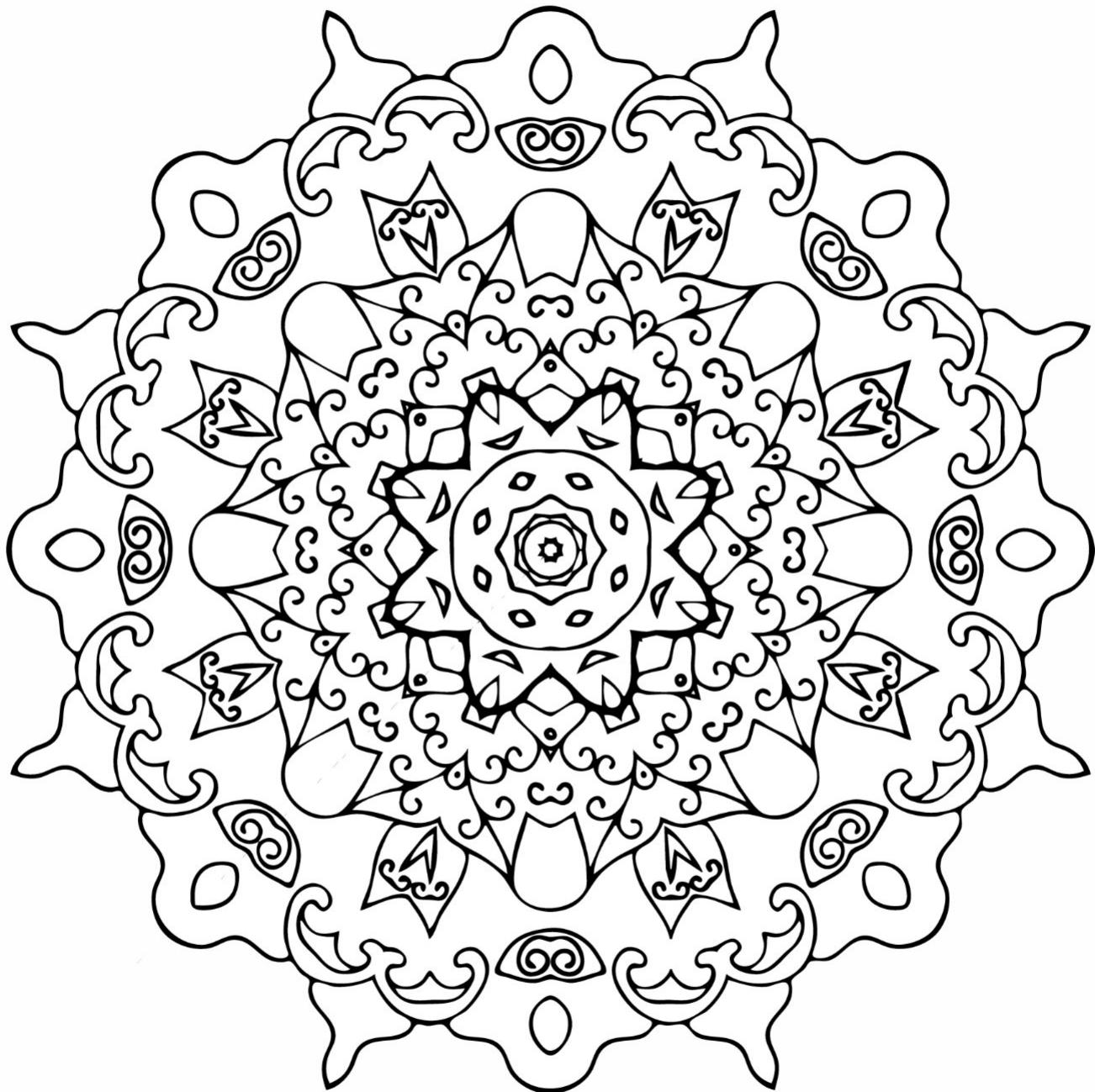
EVERYDAY CREATIVITY

Coloring Pages



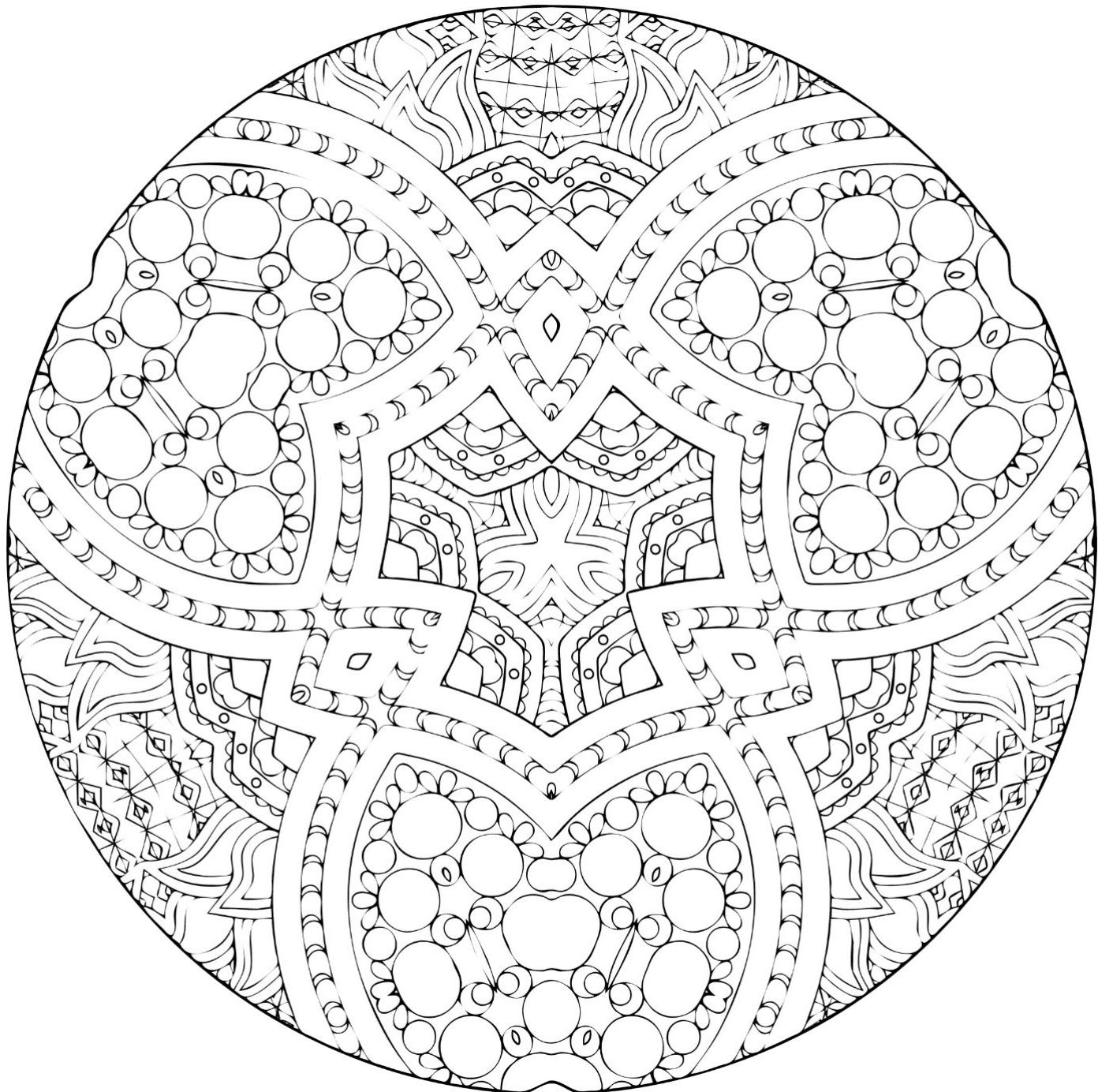
EVERYDAY CREATIVITY

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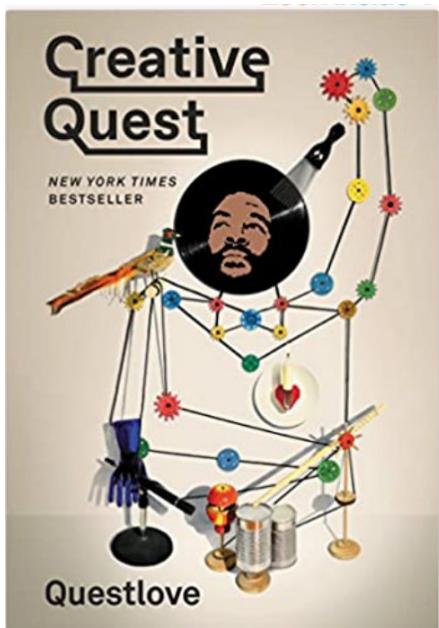
EVERYDAY CREATIVITY

Coloring Pages



BOOKSHELF

What to Read Next



Creative Quest

By Questlove

From the Publisher:

"Questlove—musician, bandleader, designer, producer, culinary entrepreneur, professor, and all-around cultural omnivore—shares his wisdom on the topics of inspiration and originality in a one-of-a-kind guide to living your best creative life."

To Buy: [Amazon.com](#)

Mid-Century Modern: Interiors, Furniture, Design Details

By Bradley Quinn

From the Publisher:

"Never had homes been so thoroughly contemporary, with antiques and period styles entirely banished. *Mid-Century Modern* explores the interior decor of this seminal decade [1950's], concentrating on all aspects of a home's decoration—walls, flooring, surfaces, lighting, and, of course, furniture."

To Buy: [Amazon.com](#)



BOOKSHELF

What to Read Next

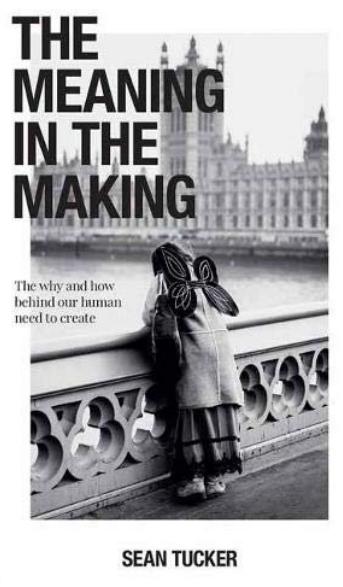
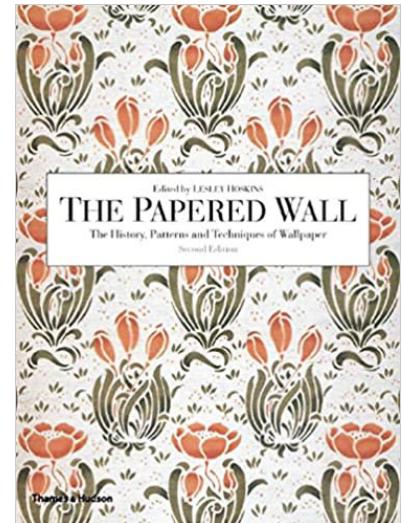
The Papered Wall: The History, Patterns and Techniques of Wallpaper, Second Edition

By Lesley Hoskins (Editor)

From the Publisher:

"The definitive international history of wallpaper from its origins to today's digital and laser printing, now brought completely up to date. Complete with a guide to care and conservation, this is a timely, informative, and stimulating record of wallpapers for every use and taste."

To Buy: [Amazon.com](#)



The Meaning in the Making: The Why and How Behind Our Human Need to Create

By Sean Tucker

From the Publisher:

"Become inspired, find your voice, and create work that matters."

To Buy: [Amazon.com](#)

BOOKSHELF

What to Read Next

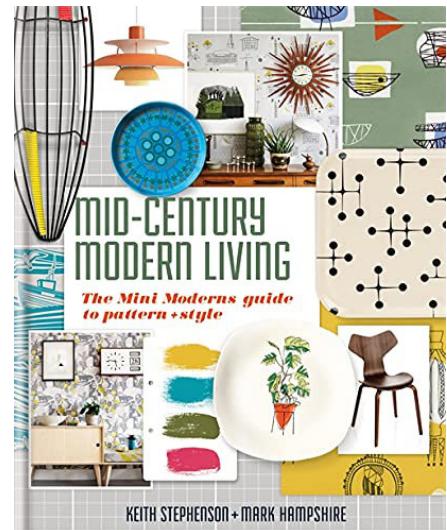
Mid-Century Modern Living: The Mini Modern's guide to pattern and style

By Keith Stephenson and Mark Hampshire

From the Publisher:

"Keith and Mark refer to their design ethos as 'pattern with a story'. In this beautifully photographed book, they bring you the stories behind their designs and show you how you can use pattern and mid-century style to tell a story in your own home."

To Buy: [Amazon.com](#)



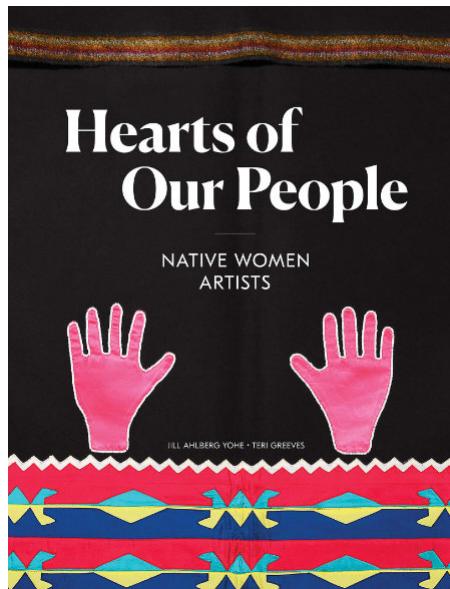
Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists

By Jill Ahlberg Yohe (Editor) and Teri Greeves (Editor)

From the Publisher:

"Beautifully illustrated and enriched by the personal reflections, historical research, and artistic insights of leading scholars and artists in the field, *Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists* pays tribute to the vital role and creative force of Native women artists, now and throughout time."

To Buy: [Amazon.com](#)



CREATIVE QUESTIONS

How do You Get Unstuck?



By: Carolyn Hawkins

What do you do when you feel stuck?

Do you ...

Take a nap?

Call a friend?

Start a new project?

Journal about it?

Here are a few things that might help:

A change of location. Simply shifting to another seat or looking in another direction may help you refocus and move forward. Where is your favorite place to sit? If you can't be there, do you have a photo of the view so you can see it even whenever you want to?

Aromatherapy. A hint of peppermint, lemon, or cinnamon could refresh you and energize your thinking, making it easier to come up with creative solutions. Which scents are your favorites? Do you keep them on hand?

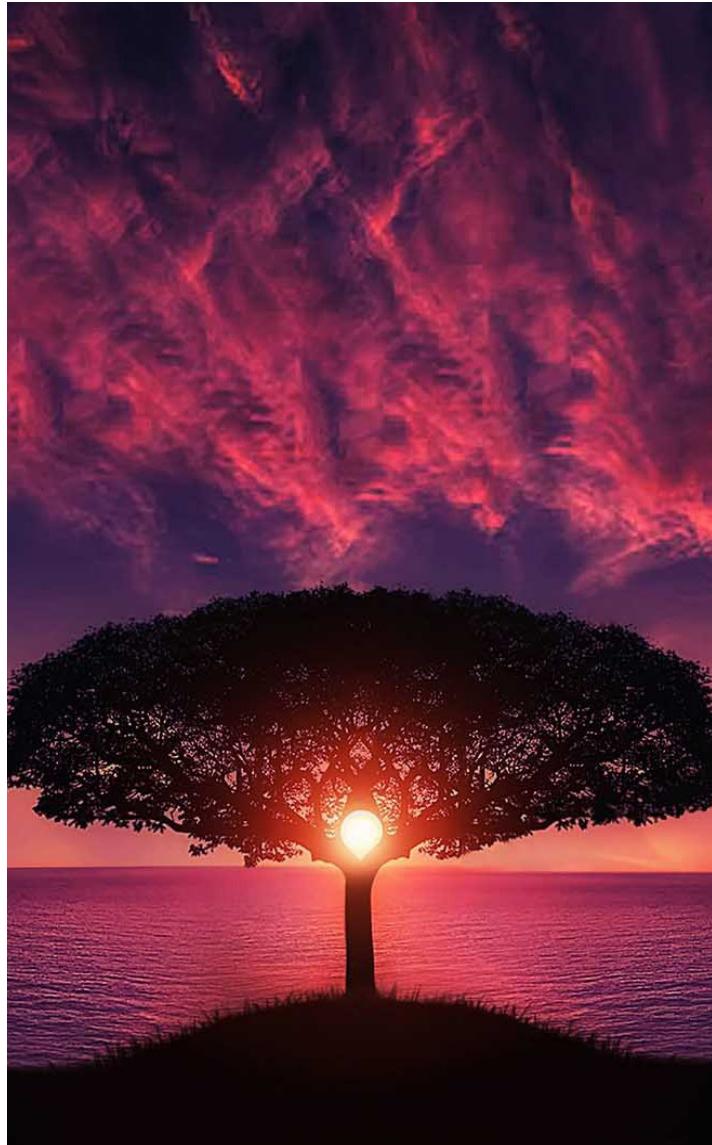
Music. Listening to upbeat music will often lift your mood, making it easier to get back on track. What kind of songs do you enjoy as the soundtrack of your life? How often do you listen to them?

Perhaps you could combine all three and set up a space that provides a view, scents and sounds that inspire you. Would that help you? Where could you do that? When will you do it?

Do you have a tried-and-true technique that is sure to snap you out of a sticky batch of stuckness? Please share!

POETRY

New Directions



I look to the future.
Beautiful fragments of light lay on my path.
Leading me in my new direction to go.
Stillness is my companion along my way.
I breathe in peace.
I am grateful for the bridge of Love.
That creates a way for my soul to go.
Sweet spirit of life.
I pour myself open amongst humanity.
Sweet spirit of love that endures time.
You will be my legacy.
Plant a tree for me.
Watch it take root.
Learn from its roots.
Plant yourself in Love and Joy.
Peace for all.
Never doubt your strength.
Your unique beauty.
Grow toward what speaks to your spirit.
Become strong in your message of love.
Sweet spirit of life.

By: Barb Lager

INTERVIEW

A Sparkly Heart: Morgan's Comics

Morgan Albritton, owner of Morgan's Comics in West Asheville, is honored to be the keeper of stories. While growing up in Gainesville, Florida, a city known for alligators, oppressive heat, and gigantic mosquitos, Albritton found her escape in comic books. Albritton's father is a minister and after a strict religious upbringing she found herself at a crossroads with God. While sorting out her beef with him, graphic novels, science fiction, and video games consoled her. They allowed her to mentally detach for a bit and hit the reset button. After relocating to Asheville and losing her job in the event planning world, Albritton was shown a new path. Through a series of comic book worthy-circumstances she inherited her store, which has since become the kryptonite that keeps her young. She is currently the only female comic bookstore

owner in North Carolina, a title that drives her to make it cool for other women to come out about their love for the genre. Following the saying, "Write what you know" Albritton took a chance as a first-time storeowner trusting that her passion would translate to profits.

Morgan's has since become a community favorite, offering neighbors, young and old, a space where geekdom is celebration. Despite the crazy hours, battles fought, and minimum wage income that it took to maintain Morgan's, it was worth it. Albritton will keep on connecting the dots and doing all that she can to bring joy to the community. To be able to run a store that sells nerd swag—and have customers who openly appreciate it, reminds her why the store exists: to provide a hang spot and healthy escape.

Interview By: Lily Hansen



INTERVIEW

A Sparkly Heart: Morgan's Comics

What was your first career?

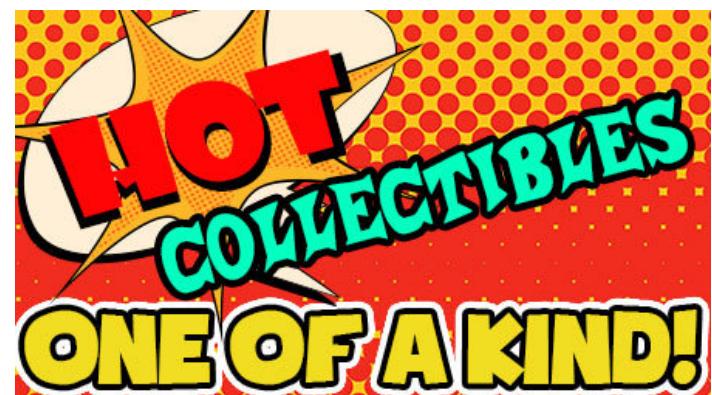
I was an events planner for years, which I enjoyed for the theatrical element and the fact that you can go from crazy nerves to celebrating in seconds. It also taught me that the only consistency in life is change so you have to be malleable. Weddings taught me to how to roll with the punches. Just like a bride doesn't want to remember that it rained on her wedding day, the industry taught me to focus on the good. I've applied that same mentality to our store. I have been learning how to do everything on the spot, from day one, and we're still here. (Laughs)

How did you find Asheville and make it your adopted home?

When I was in college, my best friend moved to Asheville after graduating from massage school. She heard this was "the place" to go. I came to visit and ironically, ending up staying whereas she moved to the West Coast. West Asheville, in particular, felt like home right away. It isn't abnormal to see someone walking down the street in a Pikachu onesie.

You mentioned that Morgan's was inherited. How did this happen, exactly?

After I arrived in Asheville, I built a successful business as a wedding events planner. Out of



INTERVIEW

A Sparkly Heart: Morgan's Comics

nowhere, the person I was working for decided to eliminate my job at the exact same time I was remodeling my house. The loan people said to me, "You have to get a full-time position somewhere, or else!" I took my daughter to day camp every day and went immediately to the unemployment office to fill out applications. Finally, someone tipped me off to the fact that a comic bookstore, run by someone in the video game business, was opening in West Asheville. It was a shot in the dark however, the original owner asked me to take a "nerd test," which I aced. I even included a quote on it from TKTK that said, "Being a nerd means never having to play it cool about

how much you love something." They immediately offered me the job.

Yet, it wasn't all smooth sailing I am guessing if he ended up giving you ownership?

Right. The original owner's staff warned me that he was creepy and weird and over time, he became more and more manipulative. He also flew helicopters and rode Harley Davidsons and didn't care about comic books at all. In short, his mission was inauthentic. After a falling out with his business partner, he agreed to give me partial ownership and changed the LLC to "Morgan's Comics" without asking me if I was okay with the name. I had to roll with it and also work my butt off to learn the business side of comic books. Fortunately, loyal customers taught me how to operate Quickbooks in exchange for Zelda comics. Shortly after, I met an amazing woman who became my silent business partner and gave me the money to gain full ownership.

When did you realize that it was unique to be a female comic bookstore owner in the States?



INTERVIEW

A Sparkly Heart: Morgan's Comics

One of my customers whose kid had been collecting My Little Pony's came in one day. She said, "Through my research I am proud to share that you are the first female-owned comic bookstore owner in North Carolina." She knew that I loved Mr. Rogers and compared the selfless work I was doing to him. I got a tattoo of Mr. Rogers and Wonder Woman shortly after to remind me of why I will keep on fighting for this space: so, my customers can immerse themselves in a colorful Nerdom environment that hopefully gives them a break from reality.

What is it like to offer people a refuge where they can bond over a mutual love for comics?

I have been in snooty, elitist comic bookstores and wanted to make Morgan's the exact opposite. That is why our tagline is, "Welcome to the nerd sanctuary." I used to say it to people as they walked into the store to which some would say, "I'm home!" From the t-shirts to the sign on the façade I made sure that slogan was everywhere. I also was always uncomfortable with having the store named after myself, which is why I made the "Morgan's" smaller and "Comics" bigger on our sign; less about me and more about offering a fun, safe sanctuary.

How have comic books helped you to get through more troubling times?



INTERVIEW

A Sparkly Heart: Morgan's Comics

It brings me a huge amount of joy to me to read comic books and also to hear my customer's perspectives on why they enjoyed a particular one. The feel of an author's work is so different depending on what artist they are working with. When you find that right pairing, you can emotionally connect with their characters. I just love becoming invested in a story and being able to absorb the crisp, clear artwork. That experience makes my heart really sparkly, and I am so happy that I can offer it to others. I just love learning vicariously through tales.

I also think it is very noble to offer adults a place where they can be childlike and play.

Exactly. Comic books allow me to take a step away from whatever situation is taxing me. It's similar to the refreshing effect of a good night's sleep. Too much focus is placed on being a grown up and worrying about money or the size of your house. Small or significant, I hope this store brings people joy and reminds them of what is important.

What about Asheville do you think has made your store successful?

The more colors there are, the more interesting the palate. Asheville is a city filled with different people, artists, and business owners, which makes it feel like a rainbow. That variety also attracts a crowd of people who appreciate diversity. If you keep making a city intriguing, versus generic with McMansions and Walmarts everywhere, then it will retain its character. If there were more cities like Asheville, with tons of different art and unique businesses, then maybe people would feel younger, lighter, and brighter. I feel so lucky and grateful to own a business in a city that I love in the middle of my favorite neighborhood. How did this happen? (Laughs)



Find Morgan and The Nerd Sanctuary at 600 Haywood Road, Asheville NC or online at www.Morganscomics.com

A Summer Garden of “Farmaceuticals”



By: Joanie Lewis

“True medication comes from the ground on which I walk daily.”

Anonymous

Let's take a moment to think with a very different medical mindset— one that believes as Hippocrates taught in 440 BC that food is medicine.

We are busy enjoying our favorite craft, when we notice that our hands are aching and very stiff. We feel extremely lethargic and when we take our blood pressure, the monitor reads 150/80 which is a little higher than normal. We are also experiencing migraine headaches, are frequently constipated, have occasional urinary tract infections, heartburn, excessive appetite, still coughing from COVID, and we are also having trouble sleeping because of hot flashes and a whole lot of mind chatter.

So, we call our Primary Care doctor just to rule out anything serious. She answers the phone. We give her the list of our symptoms. She listens very intently to our concerns and is very empathetic. She tells us she knows exactly what is causing our ailments and as soon as we hang up, she will call in a prescription to our local Farmer's Market.

A Summer Garden of “Farmaceuticals”

When we get to the Farmer’s Market, a big white bag is waiting for us. Inside it contains; Swiss chard, beets, vine-ripened tomatoes, potatoes, purple onions, mustard greens, Japanese eggplant, several bulbs of garlic, and parsley.

The directions read:

Chew your prescription daily with water.

Is there even a remote possibility that this would ever happen? Only if we care primarily for our own health.

Summer truly is the most wonderful time of the year to completely heal our body from every ailment we may be suffering from because true medication can be found in abundance at every local Farmer’s Market across America. It is there we will find powerful but inexpensive pharmaceuticals that will heal everything that ails us. From our bones to our brain to our breath to our blood, there is healing to be found. And if nothing is ailing us, just consider all that “colorful-produce-preventive-medicine” that will strengthen and restore our immune system, repairing our

bodies for whatever physical or mental attack comes at us.

Every fruit and vegetable, no matter which one we eat, are all nutrient-rich powerhouses of healing to help our body maintain great health, restore great health, or prevent disease. What we put into our mouths has a huge impact on our body’s ability to heal, our energy level, how we feel physically, and the length and quality of our life.

How we prepare vegetables is also key to how much nourishment we will receive from them. The rule of thumb is to prepare them with as little cooking as possible. Rapid boil, simple steam, or simply raw. And always add as many spices to your food as you have in your kitchen cabinet. There is healing in spices as well.

A Summer Garden of “Farmaceuticals”

The Prescription for Healing

Swiss chard – Promotes digestive health particularly helpful for any malfunction of the colon or kidneys. Excellent source of dietary fiber. Contains nutrients which can bind to cancer-causing chemicals, keeping them away from the cells in the lining the colon. Swiss Chard is an excellent non-dairy source of calcium, a mineral essential for optimal bone health. Swiss Chard is also an excellent source of magnesium, also helping give bones their physical structure and strength.

Swiss chard is filled with nutrients that are excellent for our hearts. Magnesium and potassium are excellent sources promoting healthy blood pressure.

Additional benefits include an excellent source of iron, which is a mineral found in every human cell. Iron enhances oxygen distribution throughout our body, keeping our immune system healthy and promotes high levels of energy. And at only 35 calories for an entire cup, it is an ideal food for weight loss.

Beets strengthen the heart, improve circulation, balance hormones, and prevent constipation. Chop, grate, and add them raw to salads. Simply steam in a little water or bake for 30 minutes at 400 degrees.

Vine ripened tomatoes detoxify the body, encourage digestion, lower high blood pressure, and relieve headaches. Chop and add to salads or sandwiches.

Onions clean the arteries, stop the growth of viruses, remove heavy metals and parasites, and promote energy to move freely through the body. Chop, slice and add to salads and soups.

Potatoes reduce all inflammation. Potatoes lower blood pressure and treat stomach ulcers. Potatoes neutralize body acids which helps to relieve arthritis and rheumatism. Bake at 400 degrees for 30 - 45 minutes, steam, or boil. Forgo the sour cream and butter. Eat the peeling for added health benefits.

Garlic eliminates toxins from the body, relieves sore throats, sinus infections, and

WELLBEING

A Summer Garden of “Farmaceuticals”

sinus headaches. Garlic helps inhibit the duration of viruses. Add to everything.

Parsley is very cleansing and is effective for nearly all kidney and urinary difficulties. It strengthens the adrenal glands which results in more energy. Chop and put in salads.

Eggplant clears stagnant blood especially around the uterus to balance hormones. Bake at 400 degrees for 30 - 40 minutes. Add to dips or soups.

Mustard greens clear chest congestion, improve our energy levels, and reduces cold mucus associated with lung infections. Eat raw in salads along with a variety of lettuces.

Whenever it's time to eat, we must ask ourselves if what we are about to put in our body is harmful or beneficial. Our body will respond by giving us either health or ailments. We just have to learn how our body talks to us.



Photography by Pixabay

A Summer Garden of “Farmaceuticals”

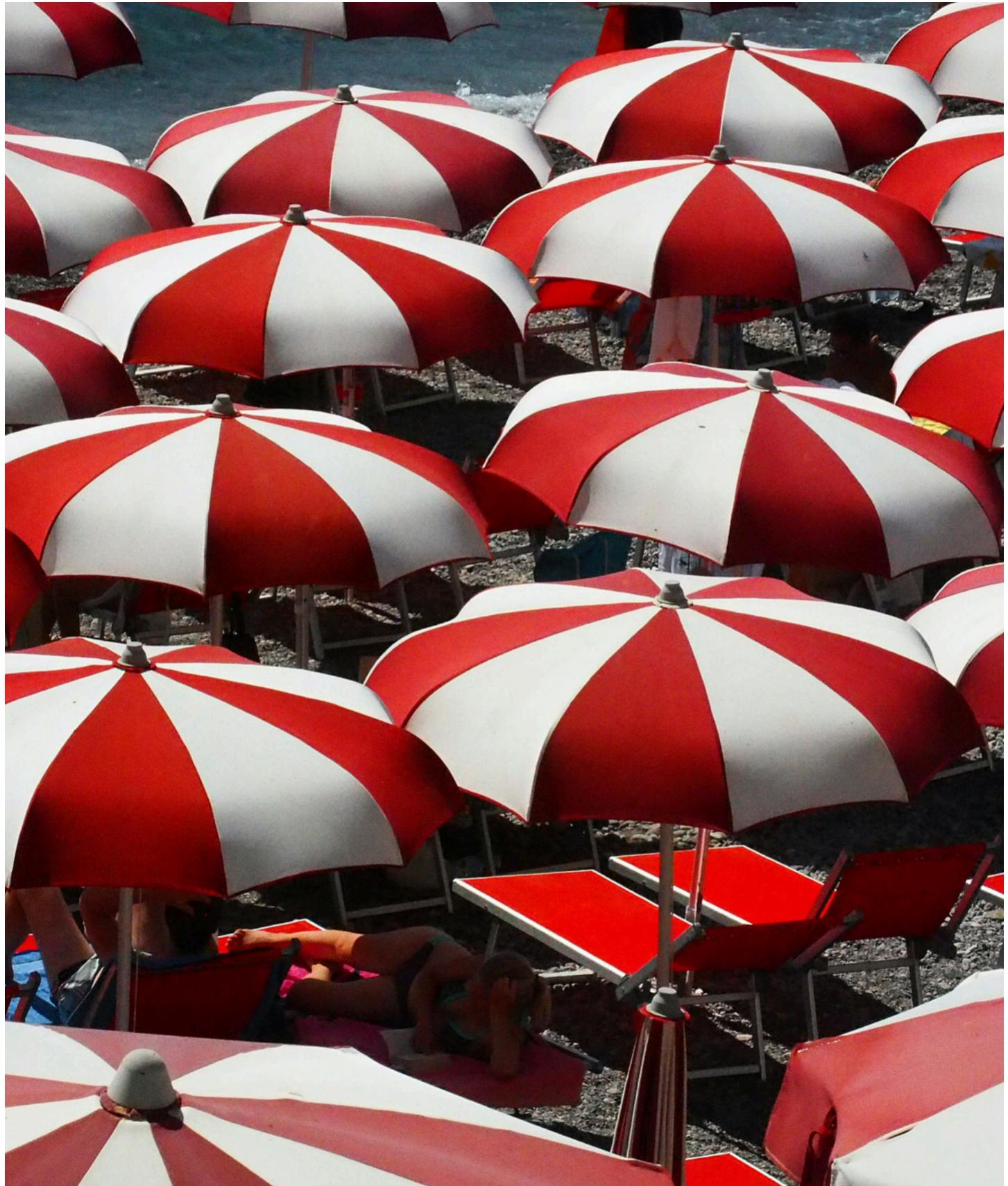
Two Minutes and No More Recipe for Cooking Swiss chard

- Bring a small skillet of water to a rapid boil.
- While it is coming to a boil, stack several chard leaves and stems (1 pound) on top of each other.
- Slice leaves and stems into 1-inch slices.
- When the water is at a full boil, place Swiss chard into the pot. Do not cover. Cook ONLY 2 minutes; begin timing as soon as you drop the Swiss chard into the boiling water.
- After 2 minutes, pour the chard into a strainer. Use a fork to push any excess water from the chard. Do not consume the drained water for it contains unwanted acids.
- Pour chard into a serving bowl and add a little Himalayan pink salt, ground pepper, 1 tsp lemon juice or 1 TBS extra virgin olive oil.
- Add the steamed chard to a bowl filled with lettuces and lots of other raw vegetables. Don't hesitate to add peaches, strawberries, apples, or any fruit for added nutrients.

Questions for Joanie? Send them to [Editor@Creatopia.Studio!](mailto:Editor@Creatopia.Studio)

Disclaimer: Nothing here is intended as medical advice. Please consult your doctor.

SUMMER READING



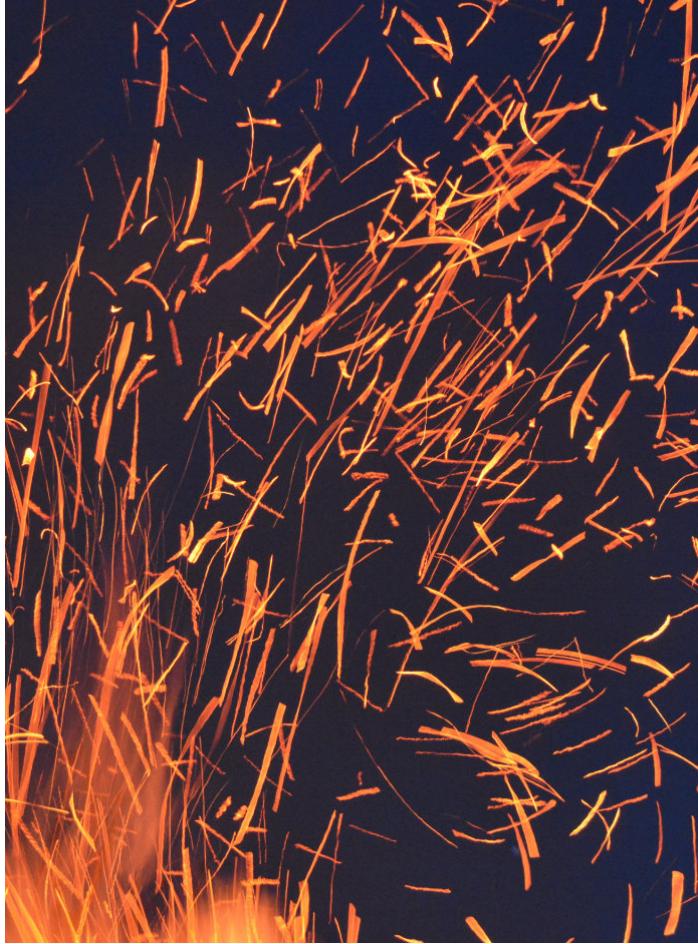
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The Mouse	70	Love Land	92
Villanelle of the Hammock	74	Pakicetus	99
1984 (strong content)	75	'77	100
The World's Craziest Ride	79	Book Excerpt; Change Course, Racing Toward Joy	102



SUMMER READING

Kindling Desire



By: Don Noel

(Strong Content)

The maintenance crew took down that dead sycamore today and bucked it up into fireplace-length logs. They would probably be back tomorrow to split and stack it.

There was plenty of time tonight, though, Caleb thought as he sat on the hard wooden bench. Slanting sunlight washed his chest with late-day warmth; it wasn't even suppertime yet, and the July sky wouldn't darken for hours. A tree this size shouldn't need more than a few hours for a man who knew how to do it.

Caleb tried to visualize the basement storeroom they'd been allotted when they came to Harmony Acres. There was a lot of stuff down there that Mabel had yammered at him not to bother bringing. You live in the same three-story house for four decades, raise a bunch of kids and marry them off from it, and the accumulation is awesome. You sell some and offer some to Goodwill and to others that will get stuff into hands that need it, and just throw some away.

But you kept some things that just might prove useful, even though the retirement

SUMMER READING

Kindling Desire, Cont.

community salespeople assured you all your needs would be met. Had he kept the axe?

Early on in their marriage he'd bought a splitting maul, like a sledgehammer but with one face tapered into a fat wedge. He'd given that one up – a tool of brute force, demanding no art – and surely hadn't brought it. But his splitting axe might be down in the basement, an oversized head whose broad edge he'd kept sharp, the instrument of a craftsman. It would feel good to have that in his hands again.

Some men are big and heavy enough to bring an axe down hard without a lot of effort. He'd been a skinny wretch when Mabel married him, and despite her culinary talent he'd gained only a few pounds until retirement, and not much even since. Lacking heft, he'd learned to bring the axe up behind his head and shoulder and then back over, his whole body applied to the task. The skill lay in bringing that sharp edge down on exactly the vulnerable seam of a log, despite the long arc. It felt good, just thinking he might do that again this evening.

Mabel would complain, of course, calling him a silly old man more likely to split his foot than one of those logs. She'd been skeptical when he began splitting wood in his twenties. But as he learned his craft and got better at it, she'd turned into an admiring, loving wife who knew when her husband needed the reward of solace – and learned how to deliver it.

Once he found the axe, he would invite her out to watch him turn the giant round logs of sycamore into halves and quarters, and some into kindling. When he'd finished, she would escort him up for a hot shower, and then massage a healing ointment into his aching limbs the way she did long ago.

After a time, the massaging would turn mutual, and at last, as desire became irresistible to both, she would guide him deeper into oblivion. At last, they would drift off to sleep, curled up like kittens, the pang of rarely used muscles fading into unbroken slumber. Perhaps rouse at first light, still hip-to-groin, Mabel wakening to turn toward him and make love again.

Caleb closed his eyes, savoring memory, almost dozing in contentment.

SUMMER READING

Kindling Desire, Cont.

The sun must be setting; the warmth was off his chest. Reality struck him like an epiphany: Mabel had been gone three years now, and he knew that axe was long gone, too.

Never mind. Let some workman split those logs tomorrow; they'd served their purpose this evening.



SUMMER READING

The Mouse



By: Gloria VanDemmeltraadt

Late summer in Minnesota is wasp and hornet season. Earlier in the summer you hardly notice these pesky insects droning about the plants and flowers, but I think they get lazy in late summer. When it's hot and muggy, the nasty things learn that it's easier to hang around civilization than to trek into nature for food. That's when they buzz around the hummingbird feeder in search of sweet water.

Noisy and fierce, with daggers primed to stab anything that gets in their way, they scare off the timid little hummers as well as the orioles and other pretty songbirds. "I'll show them," I scowl with a vengeance. "Where's my wasp-catcher?"

There's an open shed behind my house for garden tools and the like, and in it is a closed metal cabinet where I keep special tools. With murder in my heart, I go there to retrieve the wasp-catcher.

The wasp-catcher is a plastic jar about six inches high and wide, with small openings, specifically designed to catch – and kill – wasps, hornets, and a wayward bee or two. I bought it last year and remember my glee in trapping piles of wasp bodies. How clever was

SUMMER READING

The Mouse, Cont.

someone to design this thing that lures the unsuspecting creatures with simple fruit juice, and then traps them forever as they try in vain to get out of it. Seeing the jar on the shelf, I ignore the nagging memory of someone telling me that honeybees could be endangered this year and maybe we should do what we can to encourage them.

Grabbing the jar, I am surprised and annoyed to see my treasured wasp-prison full of grass and shredded fabric. Mice! Thoughts of the creepy pests hiding away in my shed and making themselves at home through the winter start to intrude. "My metal cabinet isn't varmint-proof after all," I muse.

I think about the potential of getting mice in the house and remember with a shudder how creepy it feels to see a tiny dark shadow scurry across the floor. One time I was reading in a quiet room when suddenly a furry little form made a mad dash to hide under the couch. "Eeek!" I squealed, and involuntarily jerked my feet up off the floor. This sort of thing has happened to me more than once, but the feelings of disgust and revulsion don't seem to

lessen no matter how many times a mouse runs by.

Mice were never a problem when we had cats in the house. For years we had a great mouser who confidently licked his chops when fall came and the mice searched for basement heat. Piewacket was a huge seal-point Siamese cat, with startling blue eyes. His meow was like a baby's piercing cry, and the whole household knew when he prowled the basement and caught a hapless mouse. All of our pets are gone now, and poisons and traps just aren't the same.

Musing aside, I explode: "Blasted things!" Anger overcomes fear and I unscrew the cap of the wasp-catcher and peer inside.

It's quiet and the jar looks empty of life. I give it a little shake. No movement. Relieved, but still bothered by thoughts of sinister filthy creatures most likely trying to get into my house, I carry the jar to the brushy hillside and dump the contents out on the ground.

To my surprise, along with shredded bits and pieces of packed nesting material, out tumbles a tightly wound group of very tiny, very pink,

SUMMER READING

The Mouse, Cont.

baby mice. Unexpected as this is, curiosity overcomes fright. I lean closer. The squirming babies are firmly attached to the underside of a furry, gray, well-camouflaged, but very astonished mother mouse.

One of the babies falls to the ground while mother mouse tries to right the assembly, and it is distressingly still. Mother mouse and I gape at each other in stunned alarm. Her round black eyes are glued to mine as we measure each other's state of mind. My fear is gone as I recognize hers. Is it because I am a mother, too? We continue to stare.

Suddenly, as though convinced that I will not stop her, mother mouse twitches her nose, turns away, and picks up the fallen baby in her mouth. She nuzzles it until movement starts. When the baby begins to squirm, she gently lays it on the ground while looking intently to make sure that I am still with her. To my amazement, she then begins to search for a safe haven for her brood. Looking back occasionally to confirm that I am not a threat, she roots around and finally finds a hole in the ground that is covered by grass

and leaves. I can almost hear her anxious thinking, "This will have to do for now."

By this time several other babies have become unglued, and panic is setting in. I watch in frozen fascination as the helpless little ones scramble over each other in search of maternal warmth. Mother mouse, however, does not panic. She calmly and purposefully carries her children to their temporary home, taking the time to settle each of them quietly before going for another. With each retrieval, mother mouse and I make firm eye contact in unspoken confidence and growing camaraderie.

In curious wonder I reflect, "I never thought I'd bond with a mouse. This tiny creature, so feared and misunderstood, is warm and alive. She has a heart and a mind, and certainly a sense of responsibility that is hardly different from my own."

My reflective mood continues as I sit on the grass and think about the little miracle of life I just saw. Will this change my reaction the next time I am startled by the sudden

SUMMER READING

The Mouse, Cont.

movement of a mouse as it scampers by my feet? Most likely not. Perhaps it will instead be a lasting lesson in acceptance. It seems that all of us, people and animals alike, are simply trying to live our lives in purpose and comfort and raise our young in safety.

I sigh, "Mice and honeybees and even those nasty wasps are alive, too. What right have I to change the laws of nature?"

Mother mouse's task accomplished and mine altered, I head for the trash with the wasp catcher.



SUMMER READING

Villanelle of the Hammock

A tug on the rope makes the hammock swing.
Leaves shimmer above from each golden ray.
With ease, I let go of most everything.

I gather my notebook for journaling.
Our kids are gone now; they left yesterday.
A tug on the rope makes the hammock swing.

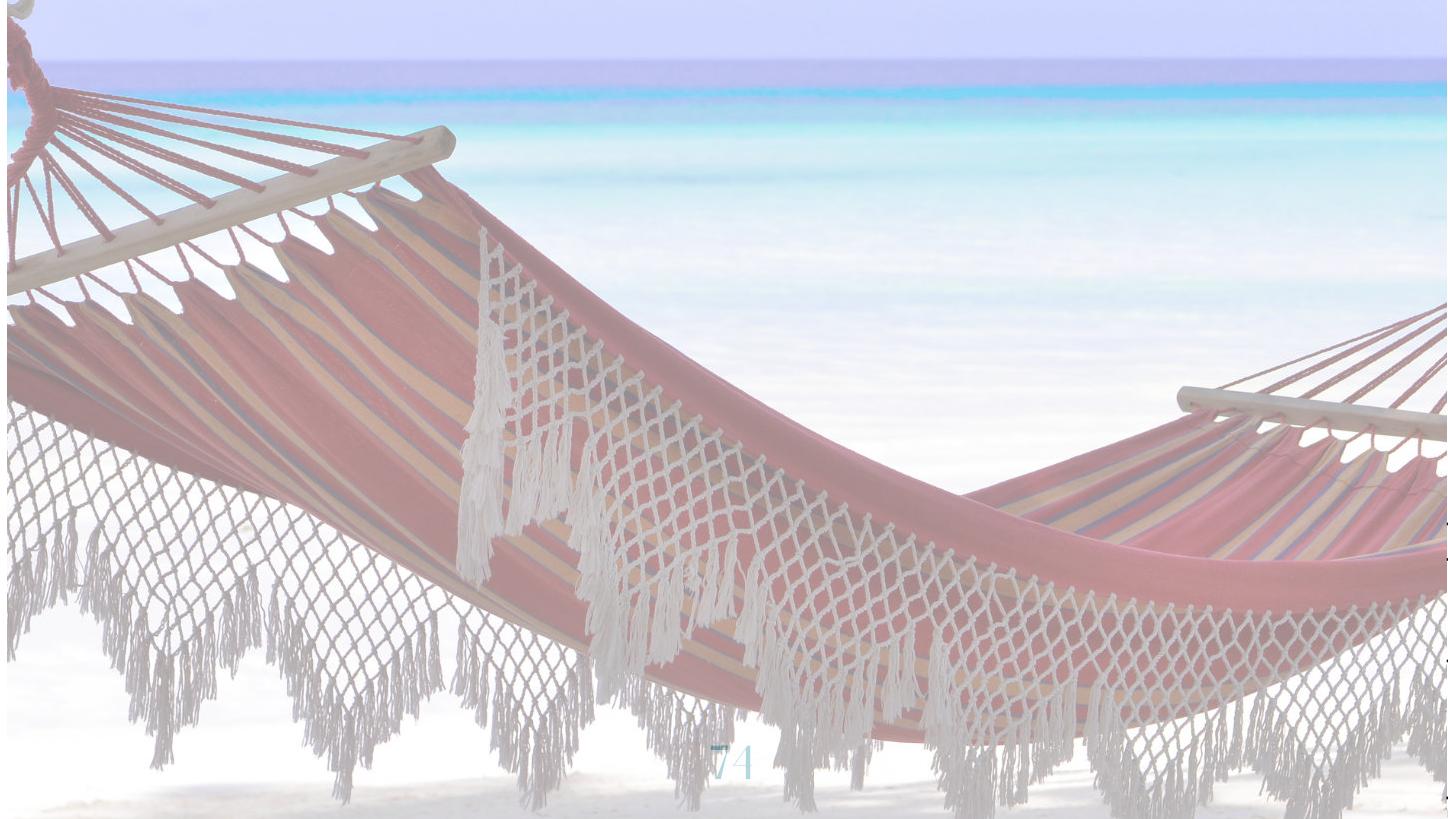
My husband asks if I need anything.
I've got all I want, just a kiss, I say.
With ease, I let go of most everything.

The day is sunny; I quietly sing
and push my "to do" list far, far away.
A tug on the rope makes the hammock swing.

A cold front tomorrow likely will bring
rain showers and wind and a dark, gray day.
For now, I let go of most everything.

To memories of good times, I fiercely cling;
the laughter, board games and good old
horseplay.
A tug on the rope makes the hammock swing.
With ease, I remember every last thing.

By: Janice Strootman



SUMMER READING

1984



By: D.C. Diamonopolous

(Strong Content)

James, as the doctors and staff at St. Mark's Regional Hospital in San Diego insisted on calling him, applied pancake make-up over the band-aid camouflaging the skin lesion on his chin. He was glad to be home, surrounded by his Nippon figurines, the ornate lampshades with exotic scarves draped over the top, and his trunk of overflowing satin and silk costumes, boas, several strands of pearls, and oodles of costume jewelry. His move to San Diego had been a windfall—the most money he'd ever made doing drag. He lived to entertain. On stage, he was Jasmine and loved. Standing room only. Now he was sick. How long would he be able to afford his apartment in Hillcrest?

The obituaries from three newspapers spread across the coffee table. Circled in black were the names of seven young men.

Jasmine wanted to live, to work again at Glitter Glam Drag. But James didn't.

No can do, James. You're not going to pull me down today. It's Pride. I'm going to party.

Donna was coming.

SUMMER READING

1984, Cont.

At St. Mark's, the only person who bathed and dressed him, changed his sheets and consoled him, was Donna, the pretty dyke nurse who was now his source for food, medication, and shots—his entire life.

It was Sunday, her day off, and she promised to take him to Pride. Jasmine had never missed a parade, but James's taunts of looking butt-ugly opened more scabs than he had on his body.

Jasmine dressed in black sweatpants and a gold lámay blouse, brushed her long stringy hair, pulled it into a ponytail, and clipped it with a rhinestone barrette. She applied red lip gloss and blue eyeshadow.

When James fell ill and admitted himself to St. Mark's Regional, the doctor asked how many men he had slept with. Was he kidding? "Honey, how many stars are there in the heavens?" Hundreds, thousands, in parks, bath houses, clubs, from San Francisco to LA and San Diego. The doctor had kept a straight face when James answered. The nurse turned her back on him.

Gay liberation tore the hinges off closet doors. Men like him left the Midwest for the coasts and found a bacchanal of men, a confectionery of sex and drugs, a feast for the starving who thought they were alone in the world.

James's life had been about dick and where to get the next fuck. Jasmine's life was drag, antique stores, and Vogue Magazine.

When his conservative, homophobic, fundamental Christian parents caught him in his mother's dress and high heels, they demanded, "Get out now and don't you ever come back." He promised them, "I'll live up to your expectations. I'll make the most of a trashy life."

Jasmine grabbed a green boa from the trunk and wrapped it around her neck. You think that'll hide your Kaposi's Sarcoma, James baited. Jasmine tugged at the feathers that made her neck feel on fire.

Grace Jones's, "Pull up to the Bumper" boomed from the ghetto blaster. Jasmine

SUMMER READING

1984, Cont.

wanted to dance, but her legs ached. You can't even walk, sucker.

"Shut-up, James." Jasmine said, pulling herself up and moving to the window.

When he heard a car, he backed out of view. James never wanted Donna to know what she meant to Jasmine.

He held onto furniture as he made his way to the red velvet couch and sat, poised, waiting.

Donna knocked and opened the door.

"Well, don't you look jazzy," she said, pushing a wheelchair inside with a rainbow flag attached.

You'll look like a sick bastard in that baby buggy, James bullied. Everyone will know you have AIDS.

"I can't go."

"It's up to you."

"Are we so pathetic we need a parade?"

"Yes." Donna pinned a button that read, Gay by birth, fabulous by choice, on his blouse. "We need to pump ourselves up. If we don't, who will?"

"They want all queers dead. Looks like they'll get their way."

"Not everyone. The Blood Sisters keep donating blood, and they're delivering food and medicine."

"Thank God for lesbians," he said and wondered if gay men would do the same if lesbians were dying.

Donna released the footrests on the wheelchair.

"I'm not going. Everyone will know I have AIDS."

"You do, James."

He looked away, not wanting to disappoint the woman who showed him so much compassion and strength.

"What if I run into someone I know?"

SUMMER READING

1984, Cont.

"You'll know what to say."

"Like I'm dying of pneumonia. Like all those fake obituaries," he said, kicking the coffee table. "Fucking closet cases. Even in death." Jasmine felt the weepies coming on. James scolded, Be a man. Only sissies cry. But Jasmine was female, too. "In my obit, I want you to put that I died of AIDS. I want everyone to know."

He held onto the seat of the wheelchair and winced as he pulled himself up. The smell of barbecue wafting in from the open door reminded him of summers back in Kansas City, his mom cooking the catfish that he and his dad caught in the Missouri River, his dog Corky—was she still alive?—joyful memories that always left a wake of loneliness.

Today was supposed to be happy, floats with dancing bare-chested boys, banners, dykes on bikes.

Donna shoved the wheelchair forward. "I've brought water and trail mix."

"Poor substitute for poppers and quaaludes."

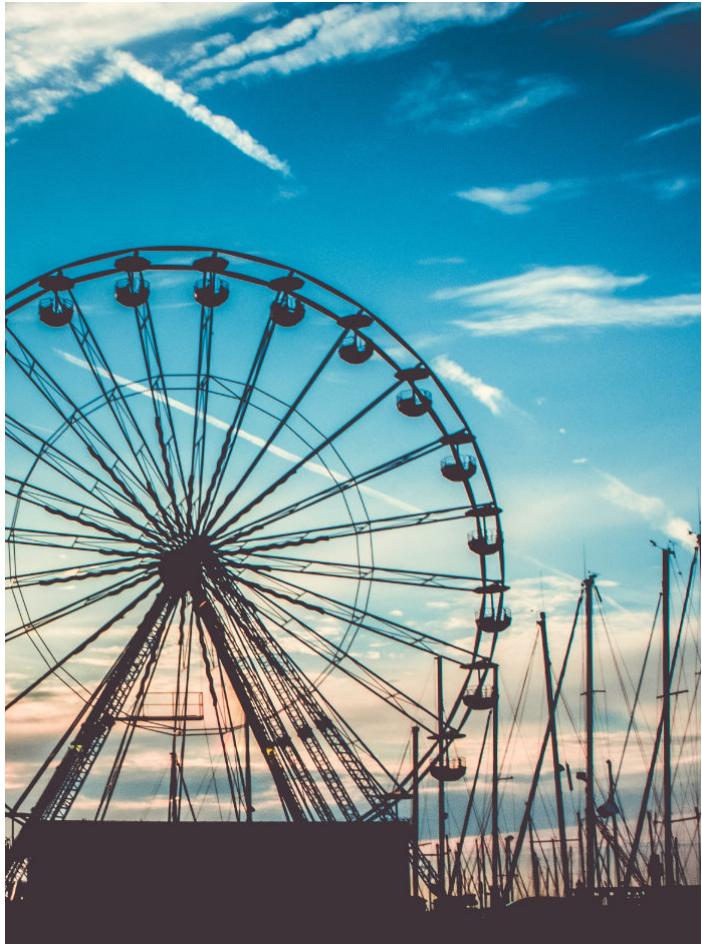
Donna laughed, pushed him outside, and shut the door.

The ocean air breathed vitality into his frail body. He raised his face to the sun and began to gather life like flowers. A bouquet of drifting purple and orange balloons floated high toward the swirling white splashes in a blue background. He heard applause and whistles as he watched a float pass by on Park Boulevard. "Go faster, Donna. I don't want to miss anything." For just one afternoon he wanted to wave the rainbow flag and cheer the parade on and forget about himself and all the dying young men.



SUMMER READING

The World's Craziest Ride



By: Maggie Nerz Iribarne

The rain poured down. A pisser, as Jackie would have said, when they were teens. Jackie. Cheryl pushed the memory of her sister from her mind. Jackie remained stuck (She called it imprisoned) at Franklin House. Apparently, as long as she “resisted stabilization,” living independently stayed off the table. Sometimes they called it early-onset dementia. But come on, at age forty? Whatever.

Yes, the rain pissed heavily, yet Cheryl drove Sam to Sylvan Beach anyway. He loved it there, they’d been coming since he was a baby, and even more since Reggie died. Cheryl found it comforting, too. Her family owned a small house at Sylvan in the eighties. All summer, every summer Cheryl and Jackie swam in the lake, got ice cream cones, and rode the wooden roller coaster. To Cheryl, Sylvan Beach shimmered and exuded something special, something lost in time. She felt at home there, and she thought Sam did, too

The rain. Back to the rain. Sam held her hand as they bought an ice cream and split it under the protective eaves of the stand. Their inadequate clothes dripped with water, even

SUMMER READING

The World's Craziest Ride, Cont.

though they had been there for just a few minutes. After discarding their paper cups and plastic spoons, they walked the deserted beach of Lake Oneida. Empty boats bobbed in the water, moored to their slips. Cheryl and Sam envied the houses right on the beach, with their doused tiki torches and signs pointing to Margaritaville. They noticed the usually packed Sunset Grill's patio, slick with rainwater, its Irish and Italian and American flags hung soaked and limp from their poles. "Daddy loved it here, too," she reminded her son.

"Tell me more," Sam said. At eight years old, memories of his father existed only through his mother's stories. Reggie died of cancer when Sam was just two.

"Well, we met here. We went on our first dates here. Daddy and I ate dinner at the Sunset, and we sat on the beach, and we swam and we rode a bunch of rides."

"Tell me about the roller coaster."

"See? It's right there. It's really old-wooden—very unique. Daddy and I rode it even though we're both scared of roller coasters. We were both pretending to be cool."

Sam laughed. "You are not cool."
"Daddy was. Right?"

"I think so. What about your sunglasses?"
"Oh, right. I lost them that night. They flew right off, never to be seen again! Bwahahaha!" Cheryl turned toward Sam and twisted her mouth into a freakish expression. He faked terror and ran away, up the beach. They finished walking by the water and continued around through the amusement rides. Everything was shut. They passed the Rock-o-plane, the Galaxi Coaster (the wooden one), the Tilt-a-whirl, the Tip-top, and Crazy Dazy. They ended up at Cheryl's most favorite, most avoided ride, Laffland.

"Tell me about Laffland," Sam asked as they stood outside its closed doors, the ticket booth inaccessible through a barred gate. Cheryl looked at her wet, wide-eyed son.
"Oh. You know all about it," she said.
"I know, but I like to hear it all again."
"Ok," Cheryl sighed, affected boredom. This was precisely where she wanted to be, exactly what she wanted to talk about.

SUMMER READING

The World's Craziest Ride, Cont.

"Well, it's a dark ride. Which means that all the lights are out, it's as dark as can be. Your eyes can't see anything and you're not even sure how big the room is or where you're going. You ride a little wagon, and it twists and turns through a tunnel and there are loud noises and devils and witches and other scary things popping out. But the best part is...is...something else." Cheryl gazed at her son, water running down her cheeks. She never told him this part before.

"What, Mom?" he asked.

"The best part is the thoughts you have, or that I had, have, when I ride Laffland."

"Like what? Tell me."

"When I was about your age, I finally convinced Grandma to let me ride it. When I got on, first it just felt just like anything else, no big deal, but then, I started to feel different."

"Like how?" Sam focused on his mother, oblivious to his sopping hair and clothes.

"Warm. I felt warm. I could remember being held as a baby by Grandma. It's a strange thing because I didn't even know I had those memories. And when Daddy and I rode it, I felt the same way again. Warm. And with Jackie, I was laughing, laughing so hard with such,

such, joy, but I am not even sure what I was laughing about. But..."

"But then Daddy got sick," Sam said, his tone confused, uneasy.

"And Aunt Jackie, too," Cheryl said.

"Well, it's closed anyway." Sam said. Always so sensible.

"That's right, honey. It's getting late, let's go to Canal View for supper," Cheryl said.

"Not the Crazy Clam," Sam smiled. One of their private jokes.

"No, too crazy."

They walked away, turned their backs on the entrance to Laffland, the clowns hovered over the letters spelling out the ride's name, smiled down on them, watched them as they moved on.

Cheryl and Jackie approached Laffland, when they were 26 and 25, wondering as they walked through the park, why Jackie never rode it before.

"How could you go to Sylvan Beach, live here every summer, with me, without going to Laffland?" Cheryl said. Jackie didn't respond. It seemed many people Cheryl asked hadn't ridden Laffland, some didn't even know about it. In contrast, Cheryl longed for, obsessed

SUMMER READING

The World's Craziest Ride, Cont.

about the ride. Laffland scared and attracted Cheryl, lured her, lingered in the back of her mind, always.

"Come on! Let's do this!" Cheryl grabbed Jackie's hand and pulled her up to the counter. They handed over their two raffle-type tickets to a young boy working at the stand, an innocent looking high school student chewing gum, and jumped in the small cart with the Pretzel Amusement Ride Company logo on the side, their slender thighs touching as they fit perfectly together. Before they knew it, the cart swayed and pitched into the darkness, squeaking down the old tracks into the inky space ahead.

Was it right away? When did it begin again? The warmth. The exhilaration. Cheryl couldn't remember, but as the car pulled deeper in the darkness and her eyes surveyed the 1952-era witches and devils and old timey visual tricks her insides glowed. An almost sexual feeling shivered up her body. She felt cocooned, secure, perfectly warm, but not, not ever hot. Cheryl experienced her mother's chest rising and falling. Was she inside her? Was she lying on her chest? Her father hovered above,

holding and kissing her over and over. She was a baby. It was magnificent. Dreamy hugs and kisses smothered her, and she began to laugh. Her face glistened with tears as they pulled into the light. Overcome with a rush of self-consciousness, Cheryl blinked, aware of young ride operator's critical gaze. She turned to Jackie, also startled by the light, but frozen in a different look. She appeared unhappy, confused, even alarmed. A mask of fear enshrouded Jackie's expression. The sisters looked at each other in silence for a moment and then cracked up laughing.

"Jeez. I'm sweating like a pig. I need a drink," Jackie said, snapping out of it, and they headed off to the Sunset for a beer.

"Reggie, have you ever had a perfect moment of faith?"

Half asleep, Reggie exhaled, "What?" he said, slightly annoyed.

"I mean it. Like have you ever had a moment where everything made sense?"

Reggie rolled from his side to his back, took her hand, "Wasn't that the other night?"

Cheryl shifted to her side, faced his profile, "Ha ha, no, I'm serious," she said.

SUMMER READING

The World's Craziest Ride, Cont.

"Well, I guess when we found out about the baby."

"You guess?" Cheryl said, miffed at her husband but also at herself. She never compared the feeling at Laffland with the feeling about the baby. A darkness crept into her brain. The feeling at Laffland was better than the baby.

"So, when did you have this perfect feeling?" "Of course, when we took the pregnancy test," Cheryl said, ashamed, rubbing her belly. Laffland. She wanted to get there, before the baby. Something was urging, surging inside her. She would suggest it to Reggie. After all, they had a history there. Reggie held Cheryl in his arms in the lake while she felt light as a feather. She vividly recalled the electricity between them that first time their bodies touched. Cold beers and burgers out on the porch of the Sunset. Reggie sang softly to her as her eyes drooped on the 45-minute drive home. That night existed in her life story as the one date that "sealed the deal." They intentionally did not ride Laffland that day. Cheryl didn't want anything to overpower that moment with Reggie.

"Wouldn't it be fun to go back to Sylvan Beach?" Cheryl asked the next morning over coffee.

"Um...you cannot ride a roller coaster," Reggie said.

"No. No way. Or drink beer. I just think it would be nice before I get too huge. Go for a swim?" she winked at him, and he smiled.

"How 'bout Saturday?" Reggie said, always easily convinced.

They retraced their steps from that first time. The beach. The water. Getting showered and changed in the public bath houses. Feeling sunned and tanned and clean and refreshed. It was a good idea, a nice treat before the baby. They veered from tradition and went to the Crazy Clam (Seltzer for Cheryl), enjoyed watching other people get drunk and loud. Afterwards, avoiding the roller coaster, they went to Carello's Carousel - Cheryl thought it was bad luck for the baby to consult Zoltar the gypsy for a fortune - and the Playland and Fascination arcades and to the Bonanza shooting gallery. Cheryl kept quiet about Laffland, but led her husband toward it, hoping it would become his suggestion.

SUMMER READING

The World's Craziest Ride, Cont.

Finally, they stood in front of its peeling, clowned structure. Laffland. The World's Craziest Ride. Cheryl's breath became uneven, stuck between what felt like extreme excitement and a minor panic attack.

"This is a weird old place, huh? For little kids I guess," Reggie said.

"It's not scary. Jackie and I went on it once." She resisted the urge to give more information, reveal the extent of her knowledge, her over-interest. Reggie looked at his wife, worried the mention of her sister would be sad.

"Really? Do you want to ride it, honey?"

"Yeah, I think I do. Why not?"

Reggie passed the ticket to the kid before they forced themselves into the little wagon, barely fitting this time. Cheryl's hand slid down to feel the pretzel side of the cart. Her breath smoothed in a sigh of relief as she squeezed her husband's hand and they jerked and lurched forward. The baby inside Cheryl moved slightly. She positioned her hands over her belly, forming a kind of arc of love, or protection.

Cheryl tried to go see her sister about once a month. This was a struggle, and if she was honest with herself, Cheryl dreaded it. Each visit began with Jackie's constant rehashing of the same anxiety-producing topics. She repeated her litany of complaints: She wished she could have a drink, she wanted to see Sam, she grieved for Reggie, Cheryl did not visit enough, she was so lonely. She inevitably started to cry, wail, sob, finally talking about fire. Fire, Cher, Fire. All I can see when I close my eyes. Fire. At this, Cheryl immediately rushed into the hall to find a nurse and then kept going, out the door, to the car. After each visit with Jackie at Franklin House, Cheryl cried all the way home and felt depressed the rest of the day.

Everyone was gone, everyone except Sam. Cheryl grieved the loss of her sister and husband. She wished she could talk to Jackie about Reggie and to Reggie about Jackie. She wanted to reminisce about Mom and Dad. Cheryl ached with gratitude for her son, although she felt sorry for him, having to grow up without a father, grandparents, and aunt.

SUMMER READING

The World's Craziest Ride, Cont.

She knew she was inadequate, spaced out, not enough for this little boy who lost so much.

When did Jackie start falling apart? Cheryl surmised it was in their thirties, after Mom and Dad, before Reggie. Jackie liked her drinks, that was for sure. She started with that "Wine all the time" business a lot of women get into. It's all jokey-jokey until it's not, Cheryl knew. Then, she and her husband broke up, she was calling him late at night, chasing him around. Cheryl told her, the night Jackie crashed the car, that she was turning into a big cliché. Jackie got so angry and started throwing things. Cheryl figured it was the booze, nothing else. Jackie so often repeated, "I'm just so hot all the time, Cher. I am not comfortable in my skin. I am boiling, Suffocating."

Things just got worse from there. Next, Jackie got into the opioids. She was caught stealing from a workmate. Then, after Reggie got sick, she called Cheryl at all hours, picking fights. She showed up late at night, early in the morning. Reggie was on his last legs and had to say, "Look, Jack, you need some kind of help." He could barely breathe, was on oxygen, when he told her that. Cheryl stood in the background and cried and shook, fearing for Jackie's life. Not understanding how things

could be so bad. During those horrible, dark days, Cheryl guiltily wished for and dreamed of Laffland.

Before Cheryl went back to Sylvan Beach, rode Laffland with Sam, she wanted to talk to Jackie about it. Did she remember? What did she remember? A nervous feeling sloshed around in her gut when she envisioned the conversation. What would she say? What did she want? Understanding? Shared memories? Healing? Absolution? Permission? She wanted to know there was no connection, that the bad luck that befell her family could not be some payment for the joy and elation she felt at Laffland. She wanted to ride Laffland again, without guilt. After all, she had Sam. He was beautiful and healthy and as happy as any boy who lost his father as a baby could possibly be. That is the one thing Cheryl knew for sure: Sam was a happy boy. Nothing could change that.

"Jackie?" Cheryl said, sitting beside the comfy chair in her sister's room at Franklin House. The floral chair came from Ikea all folded up in a box and then popped up — surprise! — into a full-sized chair. They both jumped when it

SUMMER READING

The World's Craziest Ride, Cont.

popped. Cheryl bought it to cheer them up. Jackie slumped in it, a faded petal in the bouquet, her old pink velour bathrobe stained and threadbare. Cheryl looked into her sister's eyes, reached for her clammy hand.

"Jack, what do you remember that is good?" Jackie stared at her. "You know. You know what's been good. Lots of things. Booze," she laughed a little.

Cheryl smiled, pretended to change the subject. "I'm going to take Sam to Sylvan tomorrow."

Jackie's faced immediately shifted, growing darker, crimson. Cheryl dropped Jackie's hand, reacting to its sudden fiery heat.

"Jack, Jack, calm down, Calm," she soothed, rubbing the sagging pink shoulder. Cheryl's body prepared to spring from the chair, but she hung on. She desperately wanted to be strong enough for this, to bear down, bear through it, push through to the truth, hear her sister say the words, make it all come together. Instead, Jackie's breath became short and choppy; her chest bounced up and down, hyperventilating. She began gasping and pulling on Cheryl, scratching her arms and

grasping at her sleeve. Cheryl pulled herself away and ran out to the hall, shouted to the nurse, "My sister! My sister! There's a problem!" And just as always, Cheryl fled the scene, unable to shake the sight of her sister's state of mind, state of life.

Sam begged Cheryl about Laffland for years. Today was finally the day. Plus, she needed something, this one thing, to put her mind back in the right place, to feel happy, more than happy, perfect, for just a few moments. Is that so wrong? She would have said this to Jackie at one time. It might be wrong, be very wrong. She touched her son's smiling face, sandy hair, just like Reggie's. She took Sam's hand, his long, graceful fingers, like Jackie's. They were finally here.

Sam acted like the big grownup, handed the ticket person, this time an elderly man, the old-school ticket. Cheryl let Sam step in first, after pointing out the Pretzel logo on the side. Their mutually skinny bodies allowed extra room in the car. Cheryl first relaxed and then tensed, her mind expanded and then contracted, crowded with memories, dark

SUMMER READING

The World's Craziest Ride, Cont.

ones, fearful ones. She wanted this too badly to walk away. She hoped Sam would get what she got from it. Maybe he will feel Reggie? Maybe she will? Maybe she will at last be able to speak honestly about this, this drug, this dream? Maybe they will be able to come every week, or all the time? Maybe. Cheryl smiled at her son and put her arm around him. She once again formed her mother-arc of love, protection over Sam as they heaved forward, into Laffland.



SUMMER READING

Uncle Arnold



By: Larry Lefkowitz

His cigar is the image I associate most with my uncle Arnold – and its aroma. For me it was a heady aroma and not a smell, an unpleasant one which it was for the women in the family. His cigar went with his expansiveness. He would wave it when he spoke. And his lighting it and puffing on it to a young boy of seven or so was an impressive ceremony.

My uncle Arnold was the sports announcer for the local radio station WTTM in Trenton, New Jersey. A role epitomized in a photograph of him – Fulton Arnold (his nom de radio) debonair in a derby hat sitting behind the microphone. The same radio station from where Ernie Kovacs, also of Hungarian descent, like my family, would go on to television fame. Ernie offered to host on his radio program my father, a lawyer who also acted as a joke-telling master-of- ceremonies at bar association and other affairs. My father declined, perhaps because he decided the humor of such an appearance might detract from the seriousness of his legal profession.

Being a sports announcer was a position with prestige. And benefits. My uncle Arnold

SUMMER READING

Uncle Arnold, Cont.

received complimentary tickets to a lot of sports events. I was sometimes the beneficiary. My father would take me to see the home games of the Princeton University football team, the Tigers. We would climb the iron stairs rising alongside the outer wall of the stadium, me first, my father behind me, as potential catcher or encourager of me, who feared heights. I reluctantly agreed to mount the stairs (never looking down), but I refused to descend them after the game which would require looking down. My father was forced to accompany me in the time-consuming descent via the stadium's concrete stands, whose gradual decline and width didn't invoke my fear of heights. Equally pleasant in my eyes with looking down from the press box on the game were the free sandwiches given to "members of the press."

When I was older, in high school, I received from my uncle complimentary passes to the Roller Derby, then in its infancy. Me and my friend, Michael Roth, would go to the sports arena where the derby was held. Being in high school, Michael and I were attracted more to the women's contests, which contained a

certain exotic element. In those days, the prime female (non-erotic) attraction was "Toughie" Barzun (if memory serves me right as to her name), a compact woman whose fighting capacity with rival players equaled her roller-skating skill. She was the principal jammer for, I believe, the Brooklyn Red Devils. Woe be it to any rival who stopped her from scoring the maximum points by passing the rival pack, especially if she was unceremoniously dumped on her ample rump. She would jump on the offender and fists (mainly hers) would go flying. We loved to hate her.

Uncle Arnold was not one for hiding his opinions. Once he attended a trade fair in the Dominican Republic. There he criticized the then reigning dictator, Trujillo for such ostentatious 'big brother' displays as manifested in, for example, a fountain proclaiming 'Trujillo Gives Water.' After he returned home, my uncle claimed he sometimes heard late at night somebody rattling the keyhole of his door, which he construed as a warning from the Dominican regime to stop criticizing Trujillo. The same

SUMMER READING

Uncle Arnold, Cont.

regime had arranged for a Dominican critic to be thrown live into the furnace of a ship for his opposition to the regime.

My uncle Arnold was tough. If somebody made an antisemitic mark in his presence, he was ready to fight him. I remember him asking me "if I could take care of myself in a fight." I answered something evasive, since I wasn't a fighter in my makeup, rarely risking a physical confrontation.

My uncle Arnold was smart. And stupid. Smart as reflected in a lot of good ideas from which he made money as, for instance, renting advertising space on benches, an innovation in those days. But he was stupid or, let us say, overly generous. A guy that liked to buy the drinks, to be the center of attention, to hold sway. When I was older, I remember him borrowing money from my father, which my mother reluctantly put up with. Now and then some questionable device would suddenly appear in the house, a doubtful quid pro quo for my uncle's 'borrowing' money from my father. I enjoyed a wire recorder which was

always getting jammed because of knots in the wire. A violin concerto – Paganini? —I heard in starts and stops.

Years later, on a visit to Trenton, my uncle called, complimented me on a humor article I had written ("Pretty good" I believe his words) and invited me out to dinner. I declined politely, fearing it might be a financial burden for him. Now I'm sorry I didn't go, since it was the last time, I was in contact with him.

But I liked to remember Uncle Arnold from the days of my childhood, before I learned of his negative traits, when he was still bigger than life. For instance, at my grandparent's apartment, whose living room window looked out on the Roebling & Sons factory which produced cable for, among other projects, the Brooklyn Bridge. I liked to watch the little engines pulling loads of giant wooden wire spools. I watched for hours, leaning on the sofa facing the window. The same sofa on which I sat next to my uncle Arnold who, when I was looking the other way, would knock on

SUMMER READING

Uncle Arnold, Cont.

the wall making believe the sounds were made by an imp who lived behind the wall.

Snapshot images remain from him. I remember, after his wife passed away, raising a glass at a family dinner and toasting her memory, "To Mary."

Some years after, my father, who by then lived in Florida, returned to Trenton to be the master-of-ceremonies at an annual bar association dinner. He went earlier in the day

to visit his brother. He found him dead. My father didn't know whether to cancel his master-of-ceremonies appearance, but decided that his brother, who had a good sense of humor and liked to tell jokes, would have wanted him to go on. My uncle Arnold, no doubt about it, would have been angry if he didn't.



SUMMER READING

Love Land



By: Salvatore Difalco

Donatella's toes looked like a family of red-faced moles wriggling in the hot sand, now and then ducking out from the piercing rays of the sun or bobbing to the echoey beat of Crimson and Clover on cousin Rocco's aqua Panasonic transistor radio. He must've had it on an oldies station, but it was a good tune. Donatella was Uncle Johnny's blond and bosomy new girlfriend. She hailed from Poughkeepsie and maintained the charmingly nasal twang of that region's inhabitants. Her long pale legs stretched like the limbs of a strange tree from her feet to her fuchsia bikini bottom. She wore an enormous floppy orange hat that threw shade on her bulging breasts, and that in turn threw shade on her taut, pinking belly. She sipped pineapple juice and vodka from a red plastic cup that matched her red-framed boy-watchers. That's what they called those sunglasses. You couldn't tell where she was looking.

Everyone said that Uncle Johnny looked like Johnny Weissmuller, the Tarzan guy, especially when he wore his tiger print bathing trunks, and he had muscular build and a full head of black hair with a snazzy cowlick, but stood

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only five foot two or so. That didn't stop him from dating pretty ladies. My mother said he had the gift of gab and that he'd always been a charmer. When he'd cruise around in his candy apple red convertible Mustang GT with the ragtop down and his arm hanging out the window—the sleeve of his T-shirt rolled up and a pack of Marlboros tucked in it—he cut quite a figure. Dudes thought he was as cool as a Sicilian Steve McQueen, and the girls lined up to ride with him.

"Johnny," Donatella said, her fuchsia-painted lips pimpled with sweat, "I need another drink, hon. I need it before I die of thirst. You didn't say it would be this hot. I wish you had said. I would've said no fricken way to the beach. This is harmful to me, hon. Can't you see it's harmful to me? I don't tan like you Sicilians. My family's from Friuli, that's closer to Austria than Sicily, okay? Can you get me that drink right quick?"

Uncle Johnny sprang up like a gymnast from the blue-and-orange striped beach towel he and Donatella shared, wearing a black Speedo that looked like a polyethylene sack of

Cardinal grapes. Others on the beach lifted their heads and adjusted their sunglasses as he jogged over to the Tiki beach hut selling drinks. Arms and legs pumping, chest hair glistening, bare feet kicking up sand, Uncle Johnny looked—if possible—even shorter than he was. Rocco glanced at me and smiled. We'd grown up together so we understood each other without saying a word. Our mothers were sisters, and Uncle Johnny was their twice-divorced but childless brother who liked to boast about living large but seemed a rather lonely and dispirited man when all was said and done. My mother said he needed to find a simple girl—not like these bimbos he'd been dating—and settle down, maybe have some kids.

"Do you think he's going to marry Donatella?" Rocco had asked me earlier. I told him I had no idea, but now that I'd spent some time in Donatella's company, I thought Uncle Johnny might very well marry her, but that the marriage would probably go the way of the other two.

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"What are you boys smiling about?" Donatella asked us.

"Nothing," Rocco said, brushing sand off his thighs.

"You're just being silly," she said in a singsong.
"How old are you?"

"I'm twelve," Rocco said, holding the panasonic to his ear.

"I'm eleven," I said. "But I turn twelve in August."

"That's right around the corner," she said, pursing her smeared lips. "Just think, next year you'll be teenagers. You know what that means! How about that?"

We didn't know what she meant. Nevertheless, Rocco glanced at me and put his hand over his grinning mouth. I also had to hold back a titter, though I had no idea what was amusing.

Uncle Johnny returned with Donatella's drink. He had invited my cousin and me to come to Sugar Beach with him and his new girl; and as we loved to cruise around in his Mustang, we jumped at the chance. Sugar Beach was okay, but there weren't many kids there. They called it Sugar Beach because the sand looked kind of pink. Uncle Johnny really took care of that car, washing and polishing it every few days, buffing the chrome with a special cleaner from California, and rubbing Armor All on the tires until they gleamed like wet black paint.

"You boys okay?" he asked. "Need anything—more sodas?"

I still had some Orange Crush left in my can, though it was warm as pee by now. "I'm good," I said.

"Me too," Rocco said, jiggling his half-full RC Cola can.

"We'll stop for burgers later at Hutch's okay?" Uncle Johnny said.

SUMMER READING

Love Land, Cont.

"You know I can't eat burgers," Donatella said with a massive pout that pulled down her sunglasses from her large green eyes.

"You can get something else," Uncle Johnny said from the side of his mouth. He reminded me of the woodpecker on the Thrush muffler decal affixed to his windshield. That's what gave the Mustang its growl. Donatella gave Uncle Johnny his growl.

"Oh really?" she said, sitting up, her breasts almost spilling out of their fuchsia cups. "Like what? Do they have salads? I can eat a salad. Tell me they have salads."

"I'm not sure they have salads, sweetie. Maybe you can eat some fries or whatnot, you know. It's for the boys. They love Hutch's burgers. You grew up on them, right, guys? Uncle Johnny used to bring them there all the time when they were little groovers, ain't that right?"

Rocco and I nodded. We used to see a lot more of Uncle Johnny when he drove a silver

Cadillac convertible and was married to his first wife, Marisa, a Greek lady with jet black hair who called him Zonny. We would crack up every time she said it. "Zonny, don't be late for dinner. Do you hear me, Zonny? I'm talking to you. Don't be late, Zonny." Rocco said she pronounced it that way because the Greeks had trouble with J names. This cracked me up even more, not because it sounded true, but because Rocco had said it with such conviction it should've been true. Marisa may have been born in Greece, but she came to America when she was a child and her accent, if she had one, barely registered. Aunt Marisa—and she was our aunty for about four years—was actually a very nice lady, and took good care of Uncle Johnny. But he was a gambling man back then, staying out all hours of the night playing poker and dice, and the act got old eventually. Aunt Marisa packed her things and left one day and we never heard about her again.

"Anyway, I don't have to eat anything," Donatella said, patting her flat pink belly. "I'm feeling bloated as it is. Do I look bloated,

SUMMER READING

Love Land, Cont.

Johnny? Do I look bloated, boys?" She whipped off her hat theatrically, stood up on her endlessly long legs, and with her elbows pointing inward, she leaned forward like Marilyn Monroe.

Rocco audibly gasped and his eyebrows disappeared into his scalp. I didn't quite know how to react, whether to screen my eyes or run to the latrines. I had flipped through Playboy magazines and always thought them silly. And magazines like Penthouse and Hustler horrified me. But I found Donatella's little performance neither silly nor horrifying. I felt something stirring in my stomach I'd never felt before; it puzzled me. I wondered if I was coming down with a little summer flu or something.

"That's enough," Uncle Johnny said, staring hard at Donatella.

"You're no fun," she said. "Your uncle's no fun, guys. And I'm bored. Turn the music up, Rocco. You're hogging that little radio."

Rocco obliged: Mungo Jerry, In The Summertime was playing. My cousin smiled and nodded to me. We liked this tune. Donatella scowled. She didn't.

"Aw, find another station," she said. "I wanna hear something groovy. You can't dance to this. Maybe some Sly and the Family Stone. That'll wake everyone up! Yeah, can you find another station, Rocco? Pretty please."

"Leave the boys alone, Donna," Uncle Johnny said.

"I told you not to call me Donna! It's Donatella!"

"Your mother and your sister call you Donna."

"Are you my fricken mother or my sister? No, you are not."

Sing along with us, dee-dee-dee, dee-dee, dah-dah-dah, dah-dah.

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Love Land, Cont.

How could she not like that tune? I thought. I glanced at my cousin, now frowning with annoyance. She was just being difficult. She was one of those people. Uncle Johnny's second wife, Nancy was like that. Nancy the redhead, who left him after only nine months of marriage. We never called her Aunt Nancy, it didn't seem right and she never warmed up to us anyway. But she liked bossing Uncle Johnny around and never hesitated jumping all over him in front of the family for any little thing. She once yelled at him during Sunday pranzo at my mother's house for not grating fresh parmesan on her spaghetti, like she had no hands. He could never make her happy, and I could tell he didn't like it.

After she'd caught him cheating—in their bed with the young receptionist from his body shop—as payback she cheated on him with one of his best friends, Tony Pinto. He wanted to kill Tony Pinto for this, but he wasn't in a position to be pointing fingers or acting out his jealousy. My mother and Aunt Teresa, Rocco's mother, convinced him Nancy wasn't worth a criminal record or possible jail time,

and that now he knew for certain Tony Pinto wasn't a good friend. Nancy split, and we never heard about her again. Anyway, Donatella was a whole other ball game. If Sly and The Family Stone had been playing, she'd probably want to hear Mungo Jerry.

Rocco turned the little knob on his radio and fiddled to find another station, but except for a religious program, he kept getting static. "We're a bit out of range," he said, like he knew what he was talking about.

"Let me see that radio," Donatella demanded.

My cousin hesitated. He didn't want to give it to her.

"Come on," she said, reaching out her hand. "Don't be a stubborn chooch like your uncle. What is it with you guys?"

"Hey," Uncle Johnny said, "the kid doesn't want to give it to you, so back off."

SUMMER READING

Love Land, Cont.

Donatella shot a thin look at Uncle Johnny, put on her floppy orange hat and rested her hands on the swells of her hips.

"It's okay," Rocco said, handing her the radio and sensing, like me, that something ugly was about to happen. We'd witnessed such scenarios in the past and weren't up for it. Moreover, all eyes on the beach now stared at us with expectations of a show. No, what Rocco did was a noble thing. It was like a soldier jumping on a grenade to save his platoon.

Donatella played with all the knobs on the little radio as Rocco watched with his eyes moistening and his teeth gnashing. At one point I thought she'd hurl it into the waves in frustration. Uncle Johnny made a move to take it from her when she hit, by fluke, a station playing a rhythmic, funky beat I'd never heard before.

"It's Love Land!" Donatella cried. "It's Love Land!" She shut her eyes, swiveled her hips and snaked her arms over her head in a

writhing sort of dance then started singing along with the song: "I'd love to go to Love Land with you, pretty baby ..."

I felt myself blushing beyond the light sunburn I had going as I watched Donatella dance. She'd stopped singing but stared at me and then at Rocco as she moved in the sand, hips swaying, thighs flexing, breasts joggling, and her sweating lips now mouthing the words to the song. Oh, I'd love to go to Love Land, Love Land with you ... My ears burned and a prickly sensation radiated outward from the pit of my stomach, tingling my hands and feet and groin, and tightening my throat—at once both pleasant and alarming. I glanced at Rocco and immediately understood he was feeling the same thing. This was new. I glanced at Uncle Johnny, kneeling on his beach blanket, and the look he gave me told me that we probably weren't going to Hutch's for burgers after all.



SUMMER READING

Pakicetus

I wonder why you went
back to sea.

I wonder if you miss
being on land.

When you surface to breathe,
do you ever steal
a glance at the shore?

Is that a sigh I hear
from your blow hole?

Maybe you were playing
on the beach, splashing water
at your brothers but when the sun started
to set, the air cooled and you felt
the keen warmth of the ocean.

When your mom called you in,
you lingered under the sea
a bit longer.

Later, your children did, too.

Or maybe you found tastier plants,
meatier critters along the shoreline
and didn't notice the tide coming in
and didn't cry when it swept you out.

Or maybe you escaped from a predator
who chased you but couldn't swim
so you swam out as far as you could
but you weren't scared:
the moonlight shimmering

on the gently rolling waves,
the stars hanging deep and low.
For a long while you forgot about
your struggle to survive on land,
to scrounge for food,
to obey the alpha male's orders.
You even forgot your family.
Here, floating on open water,
the sky enveloping you and
fish to catch within paws' reach,
you rejoiced.

I wonder if leaving this life
is like what you did.
Maybe we go back to a world
we came from
A world where existing is easier,
playful, void of danger.
This is what I wonder when I see
your fluke, vestiges of your legs,
flip up in the air and then slip seamlessly
below the horizon.

*A four-footed land mammal who straddled the world of land and sea 50 million years ago, Pakicetus is known as the "first whale".

SUMMER READING

"77



By: Ralph Greco

I'm going to be sixteen forever.

"It's so cool that John drives," Marsha says, painting on yet another coat of cherry lip-gloss.

"He'll be here in a sec," she adds, flipping her feathered hair. A couple of strands always get stuck to her sticky lips. If she didn't always flip it...

I'm going to be sixteen forever.

John pulls up and I walk Marsha down to his car. All right, so he is pretty cool. He's got these new eight-tracks. Marsha likes Billy Joel's "The Stranger," so he plays it for her, but last night I saw Queen's "A Night at The Opera" on his backseat. Tom plays Queen and Aerosmith all the time, so if Tom is listening to it, I know it's got to be cool.

"You guys look like one big happy family," wise-ass, son-of-a-bitch Judy says.

John ignores her. Everybody usually ignores Judy; that's why she's so loud, my mom explained it to me. Still, I hear Judy.

Marsha and John don't hold hands or anything, but they lean into each other, the

SUMMER READING

"77, Cont.

way Tom and Barb did at the movies last week. And when Marsha cracks a joke, John laughs too loud.

And Marsha's jokes always suck.

"You comin' or what?" John asks, holding the car door open so Marsha can scoot into the low passenger seat. We both look hard and long at her tan legs. How can we not, her tight jeans shorts really ride up high, man.

This isn't the first time I've stood here, looking down at her sitting in the Barracuda's deep green seats, but this will be the first time I won't be going to 'Garden State Farms' with them.

"Come on, get in," John says and walks around the back of the car. I don't dare look at Marsha. I don't need to see her pleading no with her eyes.

"T's cool," I say. "Tom's gettin' offa work at nine. He said he'd bring me an egg roll."

Tom really isn't, but I know they'll fall for the egg-roll excuse with me.

"Okay," John whistles now from back inside the driver's seat. He leans over Marsha, and

her broad face runs scarlet. His pooka-beads are so tight across his big neck, I could just reach in, grab him and pull his face into Marsha's lap...

"Bye," she says as John sits up to throw the car into reverse.

As he screeches backward down the street, Tom is coming up.

He's not holding any bags, but I know they don't notice.

"Hey," Tom says, stopping his bike at the same time he jumps off it.

"How was work?"

"Sucked," he says, and we walk up into the park together.

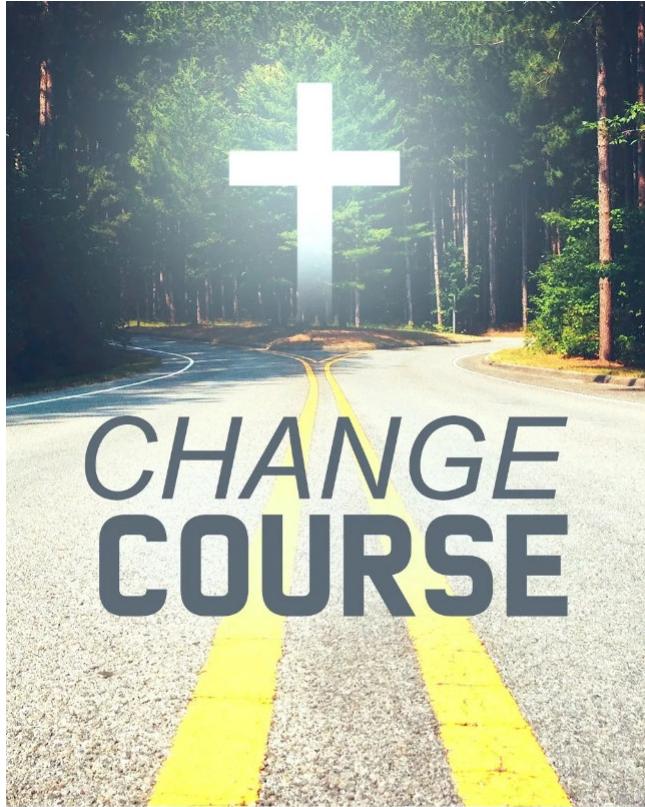
"Hey, what's it, another week to your birthday?" he asks as we pass the open gate, and I hear Hotel California again blaring out of Barb's radio.

"Ten days," I say, for the first time feeling like those ten days might get here.



BOOK EXCERPT

Racing Toward Joy



One Lady's Race from Acceptance to Adventure

LESLIE JACKSON

By: Leslie Jackson

Excerpt from *Change Course; One Lady's Race from Acceptance to Adventure*

Get your copy: <https://lesliejackson.org>

"I did it!" I'm screaming in my head when I cross the finish line first and the checkered flag is waving!

Years ago, I dreamed of being a racecar driver. NASCAR would have been great, but I am fine with the local dirt track where I have been racing. About seven years ago, one of our friends let me drive his racecar, and I enjoyed it so much that my husband surprised me with my very own red Dodge Neon racecar.

Racing is a wonderful outlet for me where I can go crazy fast and learn to trust myself and the car through lots of practice time on the racetrack.

In the beginning I was apprehensive about driving a car fast on the oval dirt track. My first time racing I was not concerned with winning the race, I just wanted to finish the race. Embarrassing as it was, I was lapped—passed by all the other cars. As I drove around the track with the other cars, I was not sure how fast I could go without tipping the car over on the corners. I drove slowly and did not tip over, drove faster, did not tip over, so I kept going faster and faster until I caught up with the other cars and no longer was being

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Racing Toward Joy, Cont.

lapped. I did not come in last place my first-time racing. One of the other cars had engine trouble and could not finish the race, so on the posted results I finished the race second to last.

Now, getting my car on the trailer to head out to the racetrack gets my excitement going. I can't eat any food hours before the race because my whole body is on high alert. Once at the track it's important to draw the right number for determining the car's position in the line-up. I always hope for the lowest number so I will be in pole position and start the race.



As I watch the class of cars race before me, I excitedly put on my fire-retardant pants, jacket and shoes. I turn on my RACEceiver and put my earbuds in so I can hear what the control tower is saying.

"You better get into your car and get in line," my husband says.

"Yep, I don't want to miss the race!"

I grab my helmet, neck brace, and gloves and head for my car. I slide through the space where the window has been removed and adjust my bottom into the tight-fitted seat. I try to find all of my five harnesses and get them untwisted and adjusted. My husband reaches in and helps me line them up in proper position and correct tightness. Once lined up, I securely latch them together at my crotch. I put my neck brace, helmet, and gloves on and start the car's engine. I also push down the pedal a few times to make some noise and listen to her roar.

I push in the clutch, shift into first gear, give it some gas and head out to our lineup at the track entrance. My heart begins to beat a little faster, and my whole body starts to shake with

BOOK EXCERPT

Racing Toward Joy, Cont.

excitement. We are staring at the traffic light waiting for it to turn green so we can enter the track. I give the guy next to me a thumbs up and he gives me one back. We rev up our engines to show we are ready. The green light illuminates, and taking turns, we head out in single file to the bumpy, wet, dirt track. We get in our starting position line-up, pull up behind the pace car and stop. The pace car slowly starts out and we do a warm-up lap; then the pace car exits, and we keep rolling around the track until the green flag is waved—and then it is PEDAL to the METAL!

It's all-out war! I want to be on the inside track and will do anything to keep that position. Going as fast as possible on the straight-aways, only slightly slowing down for the corner, then I gun it again halfway through the corner to come out fast and furious.

I did it! I am screaming in my head when the checkered flag is waving as I cross the finish line first in my red Dodge Neon racecar. Woo-hoo! I thought, satisfaction as its finest!

The announcer said: "And the winner is...Leslie Jackson."

I drove to victory lane, stopped, unbuckled, slid out of my car window, took off my helmet, shook my long mane of hair, and stood next to my car waiting for my trophy. The announcer did a double take and looked at me with shock and disbelief because I was a woman, saying, "And she even has blonde hair." Everyone cracked up laughing.

Now a few years later, while looking at my new white Monte Carlo race car I wondered: why had it been a good idea to sell my red Dodge



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Racing Toward Joy, Cont.

Neon that I had won races with—and buy a different class car that I have no clue how to race? When I look at my white racecar as it sits on the trailer in our driveway, it has the required sponsor stickers on the rear side panels and the big number 12 proudly displayed on the doors, like it was important. The car has a dent in the front left fender from my last race because a few of us were trying to get ahead in the pack and had a minor altercation.

My first race with the Monte Carlo I admitted to the women in registration that I had bought a new car and would be jumping up two classes from the Hornets to the Street Stocks—and I had absolutely no idea how to race this car. I wanted them to put me at the back of the pack, so I could practice, get to know my new car, and not slow others down or get in their way and cause an accident.

When Jim and I unloaded the car at my first race, I felt awkward. What was the tire pressure of these bigger tires supposed to be? Where was that sheet of paper where I had my notes telling us what the psi should be? Finally, we got everything figured out and the car was

ready for the race. Was I ready? That was entirely a different question. I felt like everyone was staring at me, a lady, who was going to race with all of those men who could get their cars ready with their eyes closed. They skillfully drove their Street Stock cars. They knew what they were doing...I did not.

When it was our turn to race, we slowly rolled onto the dirt track, and I was last, safely out of the men's way. We kept rolling around the track at a slow speed, making sure everyone was in their proper starting position, and waiting for the voice in our ear to tell us we would be making the final lap before the race would begin. My body tingled with excitement at the anticipation of the first race. When the pole setter, which is the car at the inside front row, reached the orange cone, the flagman waved his green flag, and the stoplight turned green, and the race began. As we all put the pedal to the metal and started racing, I was scared and thrilled all at the same time to be on the track driving a car I had no clue how to race. This car was rear-wheel drive, and my Neon had been front-wheel drive, so it was not cornering the same at all. I started to spin in corner #3, I let my foot off the gas, quickly

BOOK EXCERPT

Racing Toward Joy, Cont.

adjusted for the spin by turning the steering wheel and came out of it okay. I gave it gas and shot forward along the stretch in front of the fans, thinking, At least I am giving them something to watch, and hopefully I don't crash.

My love for driving fast and maneuvering the curves began the first day I received my driver's license. The thrill of racing, making split-second decisions, and the roar of the engines all bring me excitement that can only be fueled on the racetrack. I know the smell, dirt and noise is not for everyone, and that's okay. We are all unique, and I do not try and push my passion on others, except for my

husband. He doesn't enjoy racing like I do, but I need him to be my pit crew. Racing is very much a team sport. I need a mechanic for the endless repairs, and I am also thankful for everyone that helped by giving guidance on what to do on the track. And without the fans the track would not be sustainable, so many thanks to them.

I am pleased to have been able to take first place twice in the Hornets division and have two trophies to show for it. Both times I won, the other drivers were all men, which gives me a great feeling of self-worth since it is rare for a lady to race cars, let alone win. It can be hard living and working in arenas that are male



BOOK EXCERPT

Racing Toward Joy, Cont.

dominated. I know this from my roofing company as well as from racing. It's true that initially women do not always get treated the same as men. When thoughts of unfairness pop into my head, I do not let it control me, but rather it pushes me to be even better. In the places I show up, I do my best, hold others accountable as well as myself, and demand respect.

Thinking back to my childhood days of itchy red spots, to now being able to race cars, it just goes to prove adversity doesn't have to keep you in the back seat of your life. You can take control and make your dreams come true no matter what life throws at you.

For my 50th birthday in 2015 I wanted to do something even bigger than when I went skydiving—so I decided to drive a real NASCAR vehicle. "Chicagoland" in Joliet, Illinois, offered a 28-lap Richard Petty driving experience in an authentic NASCAR vehicle. I asked a few people if they wanted to go with me. No one did, so I went by myself.

Going on this adventure solo made it even more fun. No one was there to consult with on how the weekend would play out. I decided

when to leave, when to stop, what to eat, what music to listen to, when to go to bed, and when to get up. I decided to drive down the day before the big event so I could relax and enjoy my stay. I rented a hotel room close by the track because I did not want to be late for the experience of a lifetime.

The day of the race was bright, clear, with lots of sunshine. We had a class before we were allowed out on the track. Once the class was finished, we had to wait for our turn. As I watched others go around the track, I started to get excited. Finally, it was my turn. I signed up to have my picture taken with the car, so we did that first while my hair still looked good, and I didn't yet have helmet head. I got comfortable in my seat and my instructor sat in the passenger seat next to me.

"Are you ready?" the instructor asked routinely. "I've been ready for this all my life!" I declared, my face beaming with excitement.

"Okay then, slowly go straight and safely merge onto the track, there are others on the track, and we don't want any collisions," he warned.

BOOK EXCERPT

Racing Toward Joy, Cont.

I let the clutch out and began the “race.” I quickly adjusted to driving this car rather than my dirt track car and was over 100 mph in no time.

“Looks like you know what you are doing,” he noticed, grinning.

“I drive dirt track, so this is familiar to me,” I said proudly.

“You shouldn’t have any problems then.”

He gave me pointers about when to drop down from the high side to the lower portion of the track as we entered the corner so I could still maintain a fast speed—yet keep control of the car. I better listen to him, or I will roll this sucker, I thought to myself.

The instructor wore a headset and communicated with the other instructors on the track.

“Number 30, we are closing in, please move down a lane,” he warned the car in front of us.



I was running at speeds close to 170 mph, so they let me have the run of the track, and had the slower cars move out of my way as I approached. Nothing better than going full throttle!

That once-in-a-lifetime experience was truly a dream come true for me, making me feel that

I could do whatever I set my mind to do. My past, my present, all of my experiences have shaped me into the person I have become. Fearless? Brave? Basically, my experiences have given me the confidence to trust my decisions and know that if I make a wrong turn, it’s still okay, I can make changes, adjust my course, and still finish the race.

Even though it’s been challenging writing this book, it also has been a time of great healing as I have worked through all that has happened to me over the years. Repressed feelings surfaced when I started to write about the different events of my hidden shame. It’s amazing how talking and writing about my past has actually been freeing. I thought my

BOOK EXCERPT

Racing Toward Joy, Cont.

shame and guilt needed to be hidden, but the opposite has actually been true.

I see authors becoming speakers and feel that might be a good next step for me too. I was so excited to receive my first email asking me to speak at a women's monthly gathering. I started to think: What will I wear? What should I say? Then, I started second guessing myself and feeling inadequate. Why do I think my story is worth sharing? "No one will care about your story," I heard in my head. But then I pushed the negative thoughts out of my mind and countered, "I will tell my story, share my struggles, so others can know they are not alone, they too can change course, and drive into the victory lane."

Trying to decide what would be the most powerful, meaningful words for these women to hear I wrote out two different speeches, but I crumpled up and threw both away. I thought back to Psalm 81:10 Open wide your mouth and I will fill it. And I decided to stand in front of the women without a written speech, talk from my heart as the Holy Spirit directs me and let the chips fall where they may.

Driving to the event, I did think over a few words to start my talk with. Coming up with an opening did help me so I did not feel nervous about the event. When I arrived, I was warmly greeted and hugged by a friend who was also presenting, and this gave me the final boost of confidence I needed to walk into the room—and I knew I was there for a reason.

Someone needed to hear my story so she can be assured she is not alone, and that she can heal and move on to be the best version of herself.

As I spoke to the women that night about my past and what I had overcome, not one of them was looking down at their phone bored or yawning. They cared about me and wanted to know where I had been and where I was going. They clapped when I finished, thanked me for sharing my story and made me feel worthy and whole, deserving of love and acceptance.

I am going to make a difference in the world one person at a time with God's help. The dreams God has written on my heart are inspiring me to shine on; I move forward enjoying the ride!





Acrylic Pour Art by Sarah Routman

LAST PAGE

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