





**APPLY NOW!**

## CHAPEL THEATRE PRESENTS OUR INAUGURAL SHORT PLAY FESTIVAL!

This play festival will showcase local writers and their short plays by matching them up with directors and actors to carry out their work. Playwrights will submit their short plays to be considered while local directors and actors audition to take part in the festival.

Chapel Theatre Co. will connect plays with actors & directors, allowing two weeks to rehearse before presenting the finished product.

### / HOW IT WILL BE PRESENTED /

We will pre-record each play and release 4 plays each night for 3 nights. Audiences and a panel of judges will be given one week to watch each play, at which point they will vote on a multitude of preferences. The winner of the audience choice award will receive an opportunity to perform for new audiences and open for a CTC season production. The judges will also choose a writer, director, and actors to be a part of a play development during the following theatre season.

### / STIPEND /

A small stipend will be provided to all participants.

### / TIMELINE /

#### JAN 15:

*All applications due*

#### JAN 28-FEB 2:

*Casting*

#### FEB 3-6:

*Scheduling*

#### FEB 6-19:

*Rehearsals*

*(based on cast's agreed upon schedule)*

#### FEB 20-25:

*Tech and filming*

#### MARCH 5-7:

*Videos released to the public*

#### WEEK OF MAR 15:

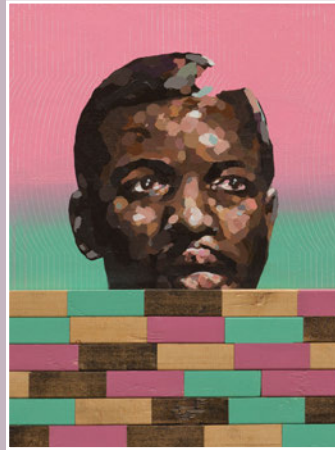
*Awards*

### ISSUE 12 COVER ARTIST:

Jeremy Okai Davis

*See opposite page for bio and contact info.*

### ORNETTE (2019) Acrylic on panel



### FOUST (2019) Acrylic on panel



### Hamid Shibata Bennett's The Wild Blue

*Stories of love and redemption leading into the times of Covid-19. Homespun music of the Pacific Northwest*

*Also available*

*Impermanence & Crashworthy Chronicles*

*Available for streaming and download everywhere you find music*

[HamidShibataBennett.Bandcamp.com](https://HamidShibataBennett.Bandcamp.com)

[www.CompassionArtsPDX.com](https://www.CompassionArtsPDX.com)



Are you an artist, writer, budding journalist or community resident in the Milwaukie, Oregon area? Is there something you'd like to contribute to 99E Magazine in the future?

Please contact us using the email below to be considered for upcoming issues:

[illyadetorres@gmail.com](mailto:illyadetorres@gmail.com)

Send us your poems, stories, and wackiest play synopses.

Send us your funniest personal stories, gripping fiction, captivating non-fiction, and your art.

Send us your social commentary, your perspective... your take on this crazy little thing called life.

There's lot's happening in the world — near and far — and we want to hear from you. Yes... you!

/ PLEASE NOTE / No age restriction for submission. However, submission does not guarantee publication. All submissions are vetted for appropriateness and we reserve the right to not to publish articles/ content which do not meet 99E Magazine's current ethos, standards, or direction. No hateful propaganda or equally offensive material will be published.

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Magazine Design: Diane Stankard  
Cover Art: Jeremy Okai Davis

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First Issue: 2019

Current Issue: 2021

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COVER ARTIST BIO



Jeremy's work feels really light at first glance, but on closer examination of text and posture, the work is full of conflict, an exploration of the contrast between the shiny, smiling exterior that is frequently presented on the surface and the inner, self-conscious, status obsessed mind state that so many of us endure beneath it all.

# Jeremy Okai Davis

Jeremy Okai Davis (b. Charlotte, NC) received a BFA in painting from the University of North Carolina in Charlotte, NC. Davis relocated to Portland, Oregon in 2007 where he has continued his studio practice in addition to working as a graphic designer and illustrator.

His work has been shown nationally at the Studio Museum of Harlem (New York, NY), THIS Los Angeles (Los Angeles, CA), Wa Na Wari (Seattle, WA) and The Rotating Art Program at Portland International Airport (Portland, OR). Davis's work resides in the Lonnie B. Harris Black Cultural Center at Oregon State University and the University of Oregon's permanent collection. Elizabeth Leach Gallery began representing Jeremy Okai Davis in 2019.



The Shirley Card (2019)  
Acrylic on canvas



[work.jeremyokaidavis.com](http://work.jeremyokaidavis.com)



[@jeremyokaiart](https://www.instagram.com/jeremyokaiart)



CHapel THEATRE AUDIO SERIES

# MAKING SOUNDS IN LOCKDOWN

A 2020 STORY

WRITTEN BY  
CO-DIRECTOR/CO-PRODUCER  
DIANA SCHULTZ

This fall, we produced an audio series from October 30 to December 18. Each Friday, a new episode of the series was released to our subscribers. (Subscriptions can be found at our website: [chapeltheatremilwaukie.com](http://chapeltheatremilwaukie.com))

The series was written by Ellen Margolis and produced and directed by Illya deTorres and Diana Schultz with sound design and engineering by Benjamin Cleek.

*Performed by:* Maria Mogavero, Ellen Margolis, Chad Dickerson, Beth Thompson, Diana Schultz, Illya deTorres, Gabie Mbenza-Ngoma, and Jenna Cady.



### The repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic caught us all by surprise.

Most of us saw loss or changes to our employment situations and went through several stages of trying to find our “new normal” or maintain some familiar habits in our daily/weekly schedules. Unfortunately it didn’t take long to realize that there was no true way to have control over the situation. Changes were happening constantly and the only way to get through was to roll with the most relevant information.

I identify as a creative. I simply must have a piece of my life that is devising and cultivating new ideas to feel whole. Illya and I were set to produce, direct and act in a show in the Spring. Just as we decided on a cast and crew the lockdown orders began. In the beginning we were all so optimistic, weren’t we? It felt like we would take a two week pause and then get back to it. Then the repetitive changing the plan, the vision and the timeline a dozen times and we were stumped as how to move forward.

Early on I had suggested an audio “radio play” style idea to very dismal response, but fast forward a few more months — after we were all lacking social interactions, confined to our homes and desperate to CREATE (!) — and everyone was very keen to attempt the idea. I had never really dabbled in any kind of audio. Hardly

even used microphones! So it was a fun challenge to retrain the brain. Overall this process has been so positive and fun.

This crew were the only humans I interacted with, and it made my heart warm to discuss otherworldly fantasies and wonder how we can give the audience that full experience using only voices and sounds. We also decided to make it ultimately challenging by having quick deadlines and a writer scribbling out scripts as fast as we could record. Thank goodness for the Marvelous Ms. Margolis and her wholeheartedly embracing the “exquisite pressure” of the project.

For safety we recorded in small groups, meaning you wouldn’t always get to read with your scene partner. As an actor my favorite thing is getting to vibe with the whole cast and hear everyone’s ideas, but there was something lovely about this process that felt like sending a letter and awaiting the reply.

I hope the listeners choose to go on this journey with us and for each episode, fully commit to our fictional world and let all the somber pieces of reality melt away. I hope we find our art supporting community wanting more theatre in any and every form. My creative appetite has been satiated... for now! But I’m already thinking about my next snack.

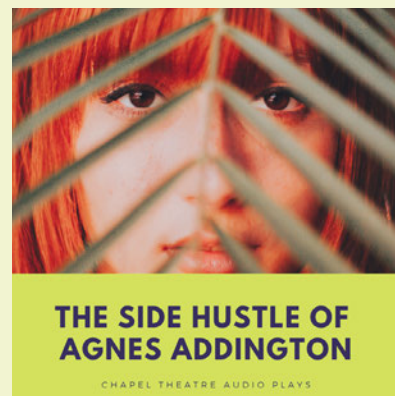
#### SUBSCRIPTION SERIES:

### The Side Hustle of Agnes Addington

BY ELLEN MARGOLIS

*Agnes is on a mission, tripping through time to pick up a certain something. It's worth a lot of money, but that may not be what she's after. Risking life, limb, and her relationship, she visits times long forgotten, times not yet imagined, and Oregon. What the hell is she up to?*

VISIT [CHAPELTHEATREMILWAUKIE.COM](http://CHAPELTHEATREMILWAUKIE.COM)  
AND CLICK ON “EVENTS”







**Art in Oregon is thrilled to introduce to Chapel Theatre's 99E readers the incredible Selena Jones.**

Selena Jones wears many hats, including Director of the Lake Oswego Festival of the Arts and volunteering as the Coordinator for Art in Oregon's Stevens-Crawford Heritage House Artist in Residency Program in Oregon City, OR. Selena is also an incredible artist.

An Oregon native with a BFA from Knox College and an MFA from the Art Institute of Chicago, her work explores unbiased loving human connection, communication, adoration, and respect through any medium her compassion-driven concepts require.

Her most recent series, *Sleepers*, was featured in a solo exhibition at the One River School of Art and Design in Lake Oswego (March 14 - April 28, 2020). Unfortunately, the opening was nine days before Oregon Governor Kate Brown announced the first Stay Home Executive Order.

Many Oregonians were already wearing masks or staying home by the 14th. This remarkable body of work, and surely incredible installation, went nearly unseen by the public and therefore, it is with great pleasure to present to you... Selena Jones!

S E R I E S

## *The Sleepers*



**I sleep and I dream, I dream and I wonder: is this not also reality? The Sleepers Series uses the language of sleep to explore ideas of personal identity, relationships, and security.**

Acknowledging the processes used to create **The Sleepers** Series is essential in understanding the evolution and meaning behind the work.

Each of **The Sleepers** started as a digital collage. In several instances, I used my own image alongside those of my idols. I loved imagining being close to my idols, or using that time to remember and safely explore past relationships, or taking time to see myself as I'd like and with all the good qualities of my idols. These ideas and more were explored. Our bodies were dismembered and remade together.

The collages were projected and translated into life-sized linear drawings, departing drastically from their original forms and most figurative recognizability. New shapes were created during this drawing process. Overlapping lines formed shapes that I filled with materials and colors, helping

to describe the volume of new bodies I was discovering or morphing within the drawing.

As I introduced more abstraction and mark-making into the work, I felt I was more accurately describing the complexity of the relationships I continued to imagine between any figures. After a long process of visually defining the figures and much of the environment I had come to imagine, I thought I had finished. Instead, I began covering the artworks. It was an instinct I didn't understand, and a big risk. It started as a block or two of color covering a few body parts, but it continued and spread. The urge evolved and I found myself wanting to 'protect' the bodies I had created, using these blocks.

I wanted to protect the figures, and I wanted to communicate care and respect for the intimate moments they were having. I realized I kept thinking of quilts. I admire my quilting friends and the care and love that they put into making quilts for their loved ones. I wanted to make quilts for my found bodies, and wrap them safely in them as they lived out their lives within these artworks.

I covered the figures with an array of materials and colors, wrapping them in colorful blankets of marks and pastels and paints and my own bedding. I found myself putting them to bed. Bed became a safe place for them. They looked to me like they were sleeping. They became my sleepers, and I was their guardian. Suddenly all the diverse materials and marks and processes used to find these forms made more sense—it was as if I was looking into a dream world. The language was familiar: thoughts, in dreams, come from so many directions, and come together more freely than my waking mind typically allows. In dreams, I see so many things that I don't usually let myself see.

The complex sensual language of **The Sleepers** allowed me to explore, in a safe place, a variety of intimate relationships. The final form of the work was unknowable throughout the making process, and, much like a dream, created for me an unrepeatable and invaluable experience.



To see more of Selena's work, visit:

[selenajones.com/the-sleepers-series/](https://selenajones.com/the-sleepers-series/)

and [lakeoswego.oneriverschool.com/events/](https://lakeoswego.oneriverschool.com/events/)



# 1/2 HALF / THE STATE OF ART

**Pappy was born in 1921. He was in the Army Air Corps, re-enlisting days after Pearl Harbor. He flew small prop fighters in World War II; his favorite was always the P-51 Mustang.**



**A**fter his flying days, he was in communications and cryptography with top secret clearance. All his brothers served in various branches of the military in the war. They all saw direct action and they all came home. My upbringing was filled with family stories of military life.

Momma was Japanese. Our family was descended from Samurai, though they were not high class. They were farmers. Yet, I still feel the honor of my family line in my bones.

And, yeah... I never learned much Japanese. The story goes, my father wanted mom to teach me Japanese at home. But, she would start speaking Japanese to me and I would laugh. She gave up because I was a little stinker. Bygones.

My parents had met at the tail end of my father's Air Force career. It was Pappy's second marriage. In 1973, I popped out into the world on the air base hospital in Tachikawa, Japan and was granted U.S. citizenship, born out of the peace in the years following the war.

Our family moved to Arizona when I was one, California the following year, and settled in Oregon in 1976. I grew up in a quiet cul-de-sac in Gresham, Oregon from the age of three.

Both my parents passed away a few years back. I eventually sold the family home and moved to the Island Station neighborhood of Milwaukie.

From a young age I considered myself half-Japanese. The half-Vulcan Mister Spock from Star Trek had been a hero of mine, always in struggle with his logical Vulcan mind and his emotional human side. There is a certain isolation in not quite fitting into any one group. I'm Asian and I'm white. Mixed race. A hybridized human, of sorts. It's taken me decades to find a measure of peace in being myself.

If I had a FAQ, the most frequently asked question I get when folk meet me, is... "Where do you come from?" Some sort of awkward yet kind of sweet query asking about my heritage. I do appreciate the curiosity and am happy to share. It's also

an indicator of being different or difficult to categorize.

Well into my teen years, I would occasionally hear some old white fella use the term "Jap" in casual conversation. Being mixed race, I likely didn't receive much overt racism. I understand that many Asian men feel invisible, unseen in our culture. I'm never going to know what it's like for a Black man to be walking down the sidewalk and see a white woman clutch her purse tight and cross the street. Or, know what it is to be a Native American man and called racial slurs by a group of young, white men walking through Milwaukie Bay Park. This stuff happens, quite close to home at times. These days, we must begin listening to stories of folk with different amounts of melanin in their skin. We've got a long way to go for racial equality, but I feel we're off to a good start.

These days, I don't feel so invisible, but it was a struggle growing up in the dominantly white suburbs of Oregon. I was bullied some in my early years, of smaller stature than most of my comrades. I learned to stand up for myself. Yep, I was a bit of a scrapper in my early days.

Pappy told me a story once about his younger days. He was standing up for one of his older brothers, to give you an idea of his character. The bully came at him swinging, and my father hit him and the bully went down. The fella got up and took another swing, only to be knocked down a second time. The third time being knocked down, the bully got up, only to shake my father's hand. It's good to acknowledge when one is bested.

Academically, I was far from a straight A student, but recognized early for my potential. In the third grade I had an eighth grade reading level. In eighth grade I began going to high school for the first couple classes. And, I was in the talented and gifted program in high school. So, here I am... a TAG kid all grown up, using my giftedness and mixed raced heritage to be a bridge in the community.

A friend once quipped that I get good at whatever I set my mind towards. That's really not quite true. I am



rubbish at so many things. However, I have studied the multi-potential of the creative brain for many years and learned to hone my craft in a few directions that bring me joy, purpose, and meaning.

I'm a licensed massage therapist with a level 2 certification in Advanced-Myofascial Techniques. I work with cancer survivorship, trauma, chronic pain, and injury recovery. It's been a challenge practicing in these times of a worldwide pandemic, but the field is adapting with sensible science-based precautions to reduce transmission vectors. I am continually inspired by the work, facilitating awareness, ease, and function, working one on one with folk dedicated to their healing path. We've all got a story woven in our bodies. It's a practice requiring continual learning and growth, exploring the amazing, resilient human experience.

I got my first electric guitar on my fifteenth birthday. I took six months of lessons and then set out on my own. I tend to be quite good with plucked or strummed instruments. I play guitar, sitar, longneck dulcimer, dramyin, which is a Tibetan lute traditionally used for storytelling, plus hand percussion, like the djembe, cajon, and Tibetan singing bowls. I use my voice and sing and I'm a recording artist who has found an appreciation for the spontaneity of home based recording over the confines of studio work.

I've had the joy to use music in sound therapy applications. I used to run a non-profit called Taking Care Portland. We would gather a hall full of massage therapists and acupuncturists and play live, improvised sound therapy for cancer survivors. That led to an invitation three years in a row to offer presentations on sound therapy during National Cancer Survivor's Day at the Portland Veteran's Affairs. That was fun playing a Tibetan singing bowl and getting folk to chant OM, presenting alongside the doctors and researchers.

What's the deal with all this cancer stuff? Oh, did I mention that I'm a rare lymphoma survivor? There were nine diagnosed cases before mine; I was the first to live beyond 72 months. By the time this article is out, I will have celebrated twenty nine years since my last chemotherapy treatment. Cancer has shaped my life in beautiful ways. Heck, I'm just happy to be lively. Treatment left me a little old man for a whole lot of years. It's only been the past decade or so that I've had a measure of good health. Handy, dandy reminder: Life is precious, dear friend.

It took me a few years after moving to Milwaukie to start getting involved in our community, where I've found such a welcoming, open-hearted response. I was appointed to the Milwaukie Arts Committee, going from Secretary, to Vice-Chair, and bumped up to Chair near the top of the pandemic. I understand I am the first BIPOC chair of our arts committee. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. It's an acronym I am only really beginning to understand. I am so tickled that my friend

Desi Nicodemus was elected the first Black member of City Council. And, Milwaukie has recently hired Jon Hennington, the city's first Equity Program Manager. Welcome, ya'll! Let's make some lovely change!

I'm also a contract photographer for both the City of Milwaukie, Oregon and North Clackamas Parks & Rec District. Yep, my life does feel a bit like a sitcom some days. I so enjoy documenting the events and people of our region, leaving tidbits of who we were in these times for future generations.

I've done photography since I was wee. To make part of my living doing what I love, is pure happy making. The thirteenth century mystic, Rumi once said... "Let the beauty we love be what we do; there are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground." It's a coda that guides my life.

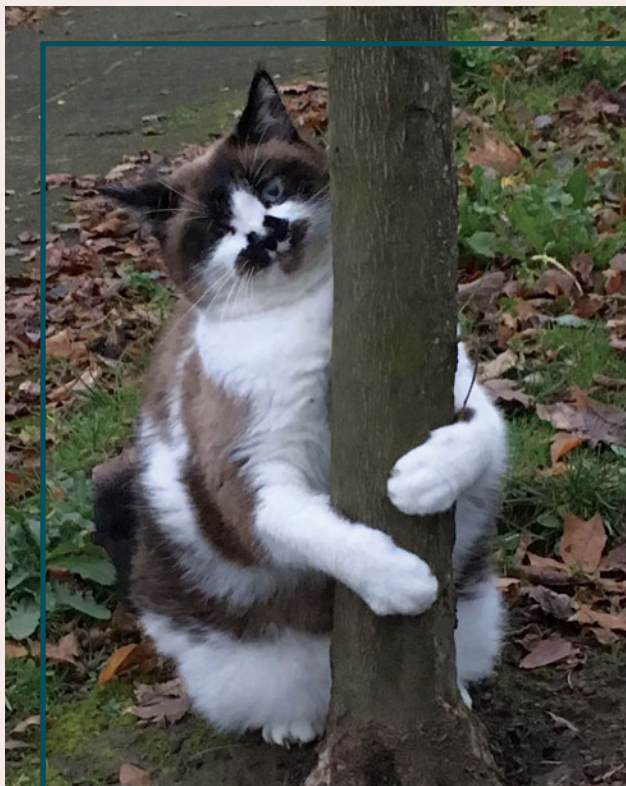
In a historical, worldwide pandemic, the Milwaukie Arts Committee has been working to connect us all through art, creativity, and culture. In the year of 2020, we completed two murals. Joe Riso's artwork features the splendor and diversity of our local habitat on three sides of Chan's Steakery. Jeremy Okai Davis's Welcome to Milwaukie mural near Water Tower Park features Milwaukie's BIPOC history with Dorothy and Hurtis Hadley, owner's of the first Black owned bakery in Oregon. Also featured is Ah Bing, a man of Chinese descent, who developed the Bing Cherry.

The Milwaukie Arts Committee continued collaborations in 2020. Our friends at Chapel Theatre took our postponed due to Covid-19 Winter Performance Series to online performances. We collaborated with Hidden Hearts Milwaukie to bring Milwaukie Love Rocks. Folk from the community scattered painted rocks all around City Hall. We held Milwaukie Porchfest, a city wide, socially distanced music festival, bringing music to our neighborhoods over four weeks. We did have to postpone the last one due to the wildfire season. Once the smoke cleared, we held the last one on a Sunday afternoon. Milwaukie Porchfest was such a success that we are planning a spring series, as we are ready to come out again after the chilly dank of the winter months.

We've got plans for more murals when we get back to painting season in 2021. In the works is a street mural on Rainbow Lane representing inclusion and diversity, and a community mural, getting students involved in the artistic process. And, we'll look for other ways to get our community sharing art. We are always looking for volunteers, hint, hint, nudge, nudge...

Our goal is to showcase diverse, creative talents, inspiring and connecting us through art, through music, through dance, through the spirit of community thriving here in our fair city of Milwaukie, Oregon.

Stay creative, dear chums... I'm out. ■



# Pigeon.

*The cat I never got growing up, yet was promised...  
I got cat bowls for food and water, collars even,  
but no cat. This is not about that.*

*Just throwing it out there that I haven't forgotten  
I was lied to as a child.*

## INTRODUCTION

**All deep readz start with a good quote that pulls you in.**

Maybz you normally just skip over the quote because it just seems like extra work and you came to the book, or whatever, to read the story-the actual story — and not some random quote at the top of Chapter 1. If I, I mean you, had time for that then you probz wouldn't skip every introduction ever written ever, and I mean ever. Forever ever? Forever ever. But, adding quotes in the middle of an article tricks the reader into actually reading it. It also tricks your professor into thinking that the essay you

waited until the night before/morning of to write really has some meat on its paper thin bones while subsequently, most assuredly, giving it the boost it needs to meet the dangus word length requirement, therefore allowing you to pass the class and graduate with your undergrad degree in theatre and then eventch yer masterz in edyucaytion. Because I want this article to be taken seriously, and held with high esteem, I am going to begin this article with a quote. Without further ado...

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Beginning of the Article.

*"A soulmate is someone who  
has locks that fit our keys,  
and keys to fit our locks."*

— Richard Bach.

*"A soulmate is someone who  
you carry with you forever. It's  
the one person who knew you  
and accepted you and believed  
in you before anyone else did  
or when no one else would."*

— Dawson Leery,  
Dawson's Creek.

*"A soulmate is a great place  
to go for a walk with a great  
friend to me and I am so  
so much I am not sure."*

— My iPhone (Not A Garbage  
Android That Can't Receive  
Clear Videos And Is All  
Around Basically A Trash  
Phone) 11's Predictive Text

*This goes out to the lock to my  
key, the Dawson Pacey  
to my Joey, the great  
place for my walk...*

— my s o u l m a t e.  
<3

**Here's to Pigeon, my sweet baby girl.**





Pigeon is the kind of cat that can bring you to your knees. She has people swooning from the sight of her beautiful blue eyes, the sound of her coo (hence the name), and her loud purring motor. She has literally brought my friends to their knees, some might say from love, others might tell you some sob story about the viciousness of her attacks and how she's scary and they hate her and how there might have been a little bloodshed in some cases, and complain that if you pet her below her neck more than an inch, as you would any other cat, she might straight up murder you. Pigeon is more than a cat to me. From years of poop fiascos and cat biker gangz, to deep conversations and lots of loves, Pigeon is and will always be my dangus soulmate for life.

Besides her mustache that makes her look like she fur sure has dangus buck teeth, and her chubby belly that sways side to side when she runs, Pigeon's most memorable feature will always be her dingleberries. To be honest, most people find Pigeon to be a garbage cat. She's gross AF. Always oily. Most of her life suffered from fleaz cuz she taste AF. Her fur, when it's not shedding is matting. She's a hot mess. But, I can't complain. Even in my grossest moments she has always been by my side, and she follows me into the bathroom so just put two and two togethz. (Everyone poops, OKEE?!) I will always be there for her...skidmarks on my pillow and all. No amount of intentional poops outside of a freshly clean litter box that I have to make Pigeon pick up with her bare paws, and force her to bury in the litter, and wash her hands in the sink with soap and water, could make me love her any less. This is the first home out of seven that she's lived in with me that she hasn't constantly shit on the floor, leaving little turd mines around the house. Basically, I'm sorry to all of my past roommates, and also shoutout to whoever invented the cat door! The cat door cuts back on indoor poop by 99% (100% if you don't have a dingleberry for a cat.) Also, it's free if you just cut a hole in your door! I suggest trying it out during quarantine if yer lookin fur a fun DIY project. I mean, might as well, yer cats are probz ripping yer screens to shredz anyways, what's a hole in yer door? When you finish that, you can mask up and come finish the holes in my bathroom wall that \*someone\* (not naming any names, JR) put in while making DIY built in shelves like a week into quarantine lyfe. But yeah. Cat doorz.

Pigeon in her prime would have killed fur a cat door to come and go instead of having to meow and beg outside of the window when she wanted in or out, and she wouldn't have had to sneak out past curf (short for curfew). I can't be sure, but I suspect that she used to run with a gang of cats and at night they'd go joy riding around the hood on motorcycles. They'd gather with booze and cigarettes and party it up on my roof. The

only proof I have of this is sometimes she would be out late at night, only Jengus knows where, and a few times I busted Pigeon up on the roof with all her friends. Just like a guilty gang of cats would do, they'd all take off in different directions as soon as they saw me, except Pidgey. She could never figure out how to get down. I suspect her rebellious behavior had something to do with the fact she used to be a human in a past life (I'm not making this up, she literally told me. Well, one day I looked into her eyes and said "I know you used to be a human. I know. It's okay. I love you. You're my best friend." She didn't deny it. So...) and being trapped in her cat body was just too frustrating for her. I could feel her struggle. Soulmates don't need words. I mean. We have full on conversations, like, FULL on. We speak the same langje, (language fer short), but we can also speak telepathically. It's science. You might have heard of Doctor Doolittle before...

There will never be another like Pigeon. Sometimes we argue and she chases me out of the house and I stand outside of the door terrified and wait until she calms down before I come back in. Sometimes she begs for me to pick her up and carry her around like a parrot on my shoulder. Sometimes, or maybzs only once, we played hide and go seek and it was epic. She found me every time. Sometimes she rubs her wet nose all over my lips and then licks up the snot and wet goo she got all over me. Then she circles around, over and over, until she finds the perf position where her butt is in my face, ready to lay down and make biscuits on my leg with her razor sharp claws. As the blood slowly starts pouring out of every little puncture mark, her engine warms up and the soothing sounds of her purr fill me with everything I could ever need out of life.

Pigeon is my best friend. My baby girl. My sweet thing. She knows. I tell her every day, multiple times a day. She's getting older and each day is more precious than the last. Pigeon, if you read this, I love you. I promise I won't get you stuffed when you die, no matter how much I kinda want to.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The End.



# *The Body Tapestry*

BY OLIVER JOY VILLMANN

## ***Heart, Lungs:***

You were born into this world violently and covered in blood, heart stopped, lungs deflated. "Distress," they called over a loudspeaker as they ripped you out of your mother's belly. For years to come, you will feel your heart somersault inside of your chest and remember that you are here.

## ***Eyes, Ears:***

They pumped your mother so full of medicines they burned right through your ears. It took them four years to recognize the scorched earth in there--you, tiny and staring at a lawn mower that backfired like a gunshot, unmoving. For years, your mother would talk about you in rooms full of people and she would write about you in the newspapers, god's greatest test and his greatest gift. You just wanted to be a child. The prophets in church would lay their hands on you and pray for redemption, "your ears were scarred by the devil," they'd say! "A holy warrior," they'd shout! You just wanted to be a child. So many nights, you would run into your parents' bedroom, hearing aids out, screaming about the devil whispering into the cavern of your silence. Your mother was so tired. You were just another reminder that she was a survivor, always surviving. You just wanted to be a child.

## ***Nose:***

You wear a \$6 travel size bottle of Sensual Amber scented perfume from Bath and Body Works in your junior year of high school and you become best friends with the girl in your youth group who does too. You lie in the springtime grass next to each other and she gets a rash down the backs of her bare arms. Years later, a boyfriend's friend who is a sex educator gifts you your first vibrator and a sample of lube that smells like amber. When you're lying in bed with him and his dogs, you feel less empty than you have in years. Months later, a boy you would come to love more than you've ever loved anyone would dab amber essential oils on his wrists and tell you that amber is the scent of remembering. You lie across his bed and you don't say anything. You remember everything.

## ***Mouth:***

The first girl you ever want to kiss sits across the firepit from you, smoking a joint, big teeth gleaming through her sleepy smile. You could watch her talk forever, grateful for the excuse that you read lips. The first girl you do kiss is your best friend because you're both curious. She tastes like cigarettes and the tequila shots you both just finished taking. The first girl you love kisses you for the first time in a dirty bar bathroom while her boyfriend sits outside on the patio. Kissing becomes your prayer, your mouth charting new territories. You'll remember how people taste years after they leave, like Camel 99s or Mezcal or cinnamon toothpicks or salt. You don't listen for god anymore, mouth full of the wild.

## ***Skin:***

You, fleshy knit of scars and abrasions, heart in full bloom like a peony splitting open. Sometimes you will lie in bed, search your body for the seams that connect your past to your present, the fingerprints of all of the people you've loved and some, you didn't, and sometimes you will think you find them.



**My father lives in the middle of a cemetery. Large trees and civil-war era gravestones in all directions. A two-lane road curves through the grounds and past his front door. “I guess it’s weird,” he says, “but at least you know a McDonald’s is never gonna pop up across the street.”**



The first day of our visit we’re all nervous. He repeats vague statements like, “Boy, is it good to see you two,” then laughs to himself and reaches out to touch one of our knees. The last time my sister and I saw him was around twenty-five years ago. We were four and five years old.

My father likes to talk about his tennis career. He played against Arthur Ashe, even made it to Wimbledon. They were using little wooden rackets in those days, Bjorn Borg had not yet changed the game forever, and the small prize money—my parents’ source of income—was coming less often. By the time my sister and I were born, sleeping in the car was not uncommon, we’d travel around the country from one tournament to the next. When they fought, my father would leave some money and stay away longer than he said. My mother had a habit of writing bad checks so we could sleep in four-star hotels and order room service.

xxx

After a few days, my father’s brother and three sisters show up. It’s his 60th birthday and they were planning on coming anyway. We knew this beforehand. We knew it would be overwhelming. We haven’t seen any of these people since we were four or five years old.

They show up with tennis rackets. They can’t wait to go to the nearest court and hit some balls. Most of them played on the pro-circuit. Their father, my grandfather, decided that Tennis would bring them out of

poverty. Having no tennis courts in the snowy town of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, he built two. He opened a sporting goods shop there, taught his kids to play early on. They all got college scholarships because of it, toured the country and parts of Europe. They planned to pass this trade on to my sister and I.

It’s an early memory I have, standing in what felt like a gigantic court, a big man, maybe my father or my uncle, handing me a racket, softly tossing me balls, letting me whack them into the sky.

xxx

Our aunts and uncle ask us many questions, what are we doing, what do we like? There’s a quiet moment where they all blush and one finally says, “Play any tennis?”

It’s not stated outright, but they all harbor guilt. Some of them were too young or financially insecure to adopt us. Our grandmother tried, but the state said she was too old. If the state had never been involved, things would have been easier. But they all knew, if any of them took us in, at some point our mother would show up. And who could refuse a mother her children?

I ask if anyone has any idea where she might be. They get quiet, some look at us with sad eyes. “It was a crazy



time then. Your mother was a beautiful, strong-minded person. She was always going to do things her own way.”

x x x

The last time I saw my mother is a blurry memory. My sister was three, I was four. We were in an empty, well-lit hall, like something you’d walk through from an underground parking garage to the elevators of a shopping mall. We didn’t know it at the time, but the two-week adventure we were having with her was about to end.

It had started in the Bay Area, when she abducted us from our foster home. Having lost all visitation rights, she pulled up one afternoon in a friend’s car and called to us through the screen door. Evidently we ran out to her and, before the babysitter knew what was happening, we were tucked in the back seat and driving off.

Two weeks later, the police found us in Venice Beach. My guess is she was driving a stolen car.

In my memory we’re all in this bright hallway, my mother is screaming, manic. Men in suits are trying to tackle her. My sister is crying. I’m jumping on the men, hitting them with my little fists.

I’m told that I’ve blocked all memories before that. But if I sit quietly, a few moments flicker by. Walking up a steep road. A cat running under a parked car. Cold mud applied to a bee sting. Sirens at night, not making a sound, just twirling. Thin, feminine wrists struggling inside handcuffs.

Six months later we were adopted, our names changed, our birth certificates altered. There’s a photo of my sister and I with our new family in front of a glittering pool at Hearst Castle. We’re standing up straight, wearing nice clothes, smiling for the camera. Something about us seems to be saying, “We’ll be good. We’ll be good.”

x x x

On the last day we all go out to the courts together. Everyone pairs off. My father shows me how to hold a racket, how to swing correctly. We rally for a bit. Then I yell, “Let’s see one of those Wimbledon serves.”

He sighs, “Oh, I don’t know, it’s been awhile...” He stretches, tosses the ball up, slams it straight at me. At first I feel scared, then angry. I swing blind, send the ball down the line, just inside the corner opposite him.

He blushes, says, “Whoo, just about the best return you coulda done.”

x x x

My girlfriend is home with our newborn. He’s got a cold, phlegm rattles when he breathes. He percolates like a coffee pot.

I’m at work, scrawling the last few changes on another galley. I pass it to the editor, then gaze out the window at the many tall cranes swaying along Amsterdam’s waterfront. The city is changing. After years of struggling, I don’t think we’ll be able to make the life we want here. My prospects for gaining a work permit are growing dimmer. This newspaper looks the other way, but they don’t pay enough to live on. I’ll have to arrange a green card for my girlfriend. Will we be happy in the States? So much to think about. I check my email.

More gibberish from my father. He sends regular emails with content that range from a stoned guy’s sense of humor, to aggravating nonsense. Sometimes it looks like he fell on the keyboard and pressed “send.”

This time there’s a real memory. He thinks I was about three. John Lennon had just been killed. My father made a huge bonfire. I tried to jump off a chair or a box or something, hit my head pretty bad. My mother screamed. There was blood all over, I wouldn’t stop crying, I must’ve cried for thirty minutes and anyway, he’s wondering if I have a

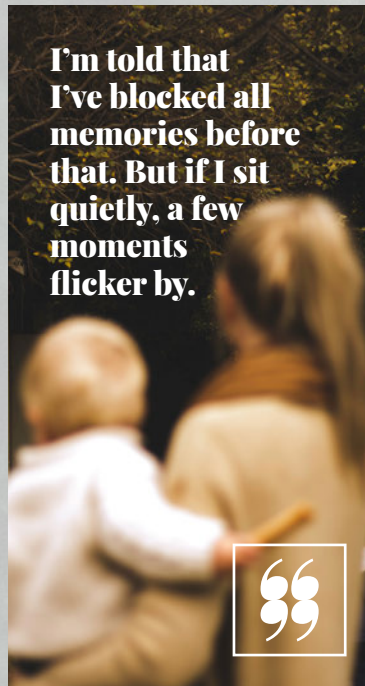
scar from it? It would’ve been somewhere near the top of my forehead.

I look up from the screen. Everyone in the office is quietly editing text or placing photos. I interrupt them all, blurting, “I just found out where my scar came from! I thought I’d never know.”

x x x

It’s so warm here. San Francisco in January allows for short pants. When we left the Netherlands, people were skating on the frozen canals. I’m carrying our suitcases out to the rental car. Obama’s inaugural address plays live on the speakers in the hostel’s lobby. The girl at the front desk is weeping. My wife is breast feeding our son in the backseat of the car. I toss our bags in, speed off to the expensive and small in-law we’re renting month-to-month.

We have no prospect for jobs. The economy is shit.





We should not be attempting a fresh start in a place like San Francisco. I forced it to happen.

Between job searches, I find an old article by Herb Caen. My birth father talked about this article with pride, using it as testament to how famous he thinks he was as a tennis player. He couldn't produce it for me, but after several visits to the library archives, flipping through dusty tomes, I find it in the July 21, 1978 issue of the San Francisco Chronicle. The article spells my father's name wrong, and never would have mentioned him if my mother had not been breastfeeding me in the stands, making for an easy joke to explain his win.

According to the Sheriff's office in nearby Contra Costa County, my mother still has a criminal record, dating back to our "kidnapping." But the records are not public, there's no way I can see them. We spend the rest of the afternoon wheeling our one-year-old around, looking at old clothes and furniture in antique shops.

I don't visit the BART station in Walnut Creek. My mother had planned to spend a night there with us, until someone called the police on her for breast feeding in public. That's when social services got involved.

xxx

My father flies out. He wants to take us to Chinese food. My wife says I should go alone with him. He orders tea and egg rolls. He wants me to try the duck. "It's so good and tender."

I ask him if we went to many Chinese restaurants when I was small.

"I don't, well... We must've, right?"

"I had these recurring dreams after I got adopted. About being in a Chinese restaurant. I remember looking up at these big Chinese lamps."

"Oh really?"

"Yeah, I mean, they were nightmares."

"Yeah, I don't remember, we must've gone to some."

"There were men inside the lamps, watching us. Everyone was afraid of them, but no one would acknowledge it."

"Oh, yeah, that's..."

"I had a lot of nightmares after I got adopted. For a couple years, sleepwalking, troubles at night."

"Did you go to therapy?"

"No, my family was pretty easy going about that. I have a vague memory of a, I must've gone to a child psychologist when I was in foster care. I remember this nice man, he had puppets in his office. It felt good there."

"Yeah, you were so full of energy back then." He sips his tea. "So, you've got a scar?"

"Yeah, you can see it if I pull my hair back, I—"

"I can't really..."

"Here, try this, maybe if I..."

"Oh yeah, look at that."

xxx

On New Year's Eve my sister calls. She's giddy, standing outside a bar in New York. Talk turns to the letter she had sent the previous night to our father. In it she explains why she no longer wants contact with him.

"It feels great," she says under a din of drunken cheering. "I'm tired of making excuses for not talking to him, I'm tired of saying I'm busy. I'm not busy. Well, I am, but not that busy. We have nothing in common. He's not going to tell me anything about myself that I don't already know. There's no hard feelings. I just don't care, I don't care about him."

She sounds happy to let these things out. I understand where she's coming from, but I'm not ready to close that door.

xxx

Everything I know about my mother ends in the Autumn of 1984. My sister and I had been adopted two months before, making the ten-hour drive with our new family to our new home, our new life. My sister sings the whole way down. I am sick, feverish.

My mother is released from a hospital in the Bay Area. She had been held there for psychiatric evaluations. She finds my uncle at the courts where he gives lessons.

They talk for ten or fifteen minutes. Then she shows him her new car. "Where'd you get that?" he asks. She tells him she got it from an auto dealer, took it for a test drive. Blankets are laid out in the back. The blankets are for us. She's looking for us.

That's where the trail ends.

xxx

At 3am I wake up, my son is giggling in the black night. It's a bubbly, infectious laugh—as if he's being tickled. I sit up in bed, my body coursing with adrenaline. Who's here? Is there someone in the house?

For years as a child I was afraid of being kidnapped. When cars drove by slowly, my sister and I would freeze.

I get up, pad quickly to my son's room. He's in bed, dreaming, I guess of something funny. I pull the blanket over him and go to the kitchen, turn on the bright light, stare at the linoleum floor.

My son is five, he just started kindergarten. My wife and I have jobs. Everything is stable. The fear I had been carrying since the news of our pregnancy, fear that I would repeat the mistakes of my parents, has become fodder for fiction, rather than memoir. A constricting feeling, like a sodden wetsuit, seems to evaporate from my skin. I pour myself a bowl of cereal, open a beer, and wait for dawn. ■



## / s o f t /

*What you want is forever and that's the thing you can't have.*

The memorial for my dead friend is on a Wednesday night, four of us in a garage with the door open and the cold all around us because we can't be in closed rooms with anyone now. There's a wooden table with a mix of animal bones and feathers and funeral papers and a leaking candle and a handle of old crow whiskey and a can of very cheap chili, and all those items make sense, but don't ask me to explain it. He's dead a year, a dumb year where time has no meaning. It's so hard to fathom that memorial now, all packed into the Alleyway on Alberta, crying into glasses, hugging strangers, pictures of him everywhere. Loss somehow strips away anything extra you have. It makes you hungry, makes your heart lean and focused. And the different types of loss compound — funerals and friends moving on and the hand you used to hold no longer squeezing back. Things that felt dependable shifting beneath you.

And bad news happens all the time. Loss will hit you, it is gutting, it will fill up the hollow places you never wanted to fill, quiet shoe boxes in closets with photos of dead kids, funeral handouts, futures that weren't, fingers crossed hopes canceled. We are drowning in bad news this year. Businesses don't always re-open. Buildings don't always stay standing. With closed eyes we are all in our own dark rooms with all of our fears and anxieties and strange ideas of what "forever" means. And forever is nothing. We don't have it. We aren't meant to. And at the end of a heartbreak of a year, when the loss and the grief and the abandonment and the isolation and the distance and the risk and the missing and the doing without is all we ever talk about — when we might feel like the proper answer is to steel ourselves against what comes

next — when we're buckling down for a dark winter, when we're bracing ourselves for the next bad thing — what i'm asking for you to do is stay tender.

I'm asking you to stay soft. Hard-hearted people don't care. They don't get overcome by sunrises. Their chests don't get flooded with the bittersweetness of nostalgia. They don't stop to look at the lights in the industrial area by the bluffs because it's still overwhelming after 20 years. They don't feel a lump in their throat at closed theaters with dark marquees. They don't cry at fucking Etsy commercials. Stop. Relax your shoulders. Unclench your jaw. Keep breathing. Things don't always work out. But sometimes they do and that's the fuck of it. We are all alone and also not at all.

We honor, acknowledge, tell stories, get commemorative tattoos, toast to the absence of things or people or places on a special calendar day. We drink their favorite drink, or eat their favorite food, or listen to the mix they made us, after years of not being able to listen to those songs at all. The possibility of loss is everywhere. Nobody is immune.

You aren't special in your fear of rejection. We are all afraid of losing, of being left, of not being the right fit, of it being our fault. We're all like this. It's no excuse. Get softer.

It doesn't matter that this year is crushing. You have to stay soft, leave the option of being overcome. Sometimes he calls back. Sometimes they stay. The unknown of it is okay. Sometimes the phone call is bad news. You can't control it. It's all crossed fingers. Sometimes they call to say you won. Sometimes they call to say he's gone. You can't know. You shouldn't know. It's all precarious. Right time/wrong time, right place/wrong place. We drive through parts of the city gone

quiet now and think of hometowns and younger versions of ourselves. Everything you think about feels like a love letter to something long gone. The candle at the memorial burns to nothing and they light a new one.

You have to stay soft. You have to let every dog that walks by distract you. You have to allow for the option that the new person in your life is going to stay. You have to press your hand against your chest when a murmuration of starlings goes by and it feels like church. Sometimes the bread rises perfectly and you wake up five minutes before your alarm. Drop your shoulders, unclench your jaw, you're doing it again.

We get all stoic and quiet. We get independent and we resist and we fight and we try to increase our resilience and we assume the worst but god, it's tiring. When do we get to be soft. When do we get to be defenseless? When do we relax our shoulders and unclench our jaws and stop protecting ourselves? Your love is not finite. You didn't spend it all yet. It can bloom, it can multiply, It is infinite. Your loss is not endless. Your grief is not special. Are you still breathing? Can you bend and stretch your spine until it pops and you see spots? Are you unbearably alive and present right now, does everything feel like pressing on a bruise? Yes, me too, and it's okay.

You have to be soft to be easily overcome by the right song coming on in the car when you're on a particular street and the windows are down and you think of things that used to be and aren't anymore. You have to be soft to stay grounded in your body when a scary thing is happening and you decide to stay present anyway. You have to be soft to let anyone really see you, and to spend your love properly. You have to be soft to allow space for



joy and it's going to come with pain, it's going to come with sadness, it's inevitable.

He's been dead a year and it's hard to picture all those days passing. When people are gone, we find ways to honor the blank spaces where they used to be. When businesses close, we pause in front of empty storefronts and press our faces to dirty windows to commemorate what's gone. "Remember that time here when we — " Yeah. Of course he does.

Driving through the city is strange now, a mouth with increasing missing teeth. I rest my forehead on the cold glass of the windows and think of being on the bus again. Remember the city when you first got here? They were already mourning the changes then. Drop your shoulders, you're doing it again. Stop holding your breath.

You have to be soft to feel emotional at the most impressive christmas lights. You have to be soft to feel sad

and walk down the street to let them go in a dry spot, to grow up afraid that if you didn't cuddle with every stuffed animal at the same time, they'd feel left out, and to still, in your 30's, have to say out loud "that isn't real, that's fake, nothing bad is actually happening" when something bad is clearly happening to the family dog in a scary movie. You have to be soft to be able to give yourself goosebumps when you read the best sentences out loud, even if you're the one that wrote them. You have to be soft to stay up all night baking mini-cupcakes for a child's birthday party he won't remember.

We think getting stronger is the answer. Bucking up, shoulders set, no tears. We think steeling ourselves against whatever comes will protect us and it won't. There will always be things that haunt you.

And there are going to be so many days where it doesn't feel worth it. Where it feels safer to cross your arms

Forever doesn't exist. The song will end. The needle will lift. Someone will say "it's getting late" and you'll have to say "yes, okay, of course" and they'll look a little sorry and gather their coat and leave and it'll be the last time — eventually. Drop your shoulders. Relax your jaw.

How are you letting it all in? how are you keeping all the possibilities for joy out? You're not supposed to be like this. Please cry on the bus. Say thank you and mean it. Remember when he kissed you on the mouth at the holiday party and you laughed into your cupped hands with pink cheeks? Remember when he let you punch his palms outside in the cold when you were so angry, his jacket smelling like smoke? Remember when he'd order for you at the bar and it felt like "i love you"?

It's all heartbreak eventually. Who would you be without it? You'll find old pictures that make your belly flip. A song will come on the radio and your eyes will suddenly be wet. You're so beautiful when you're softening, your heart swollen and messy, your dumb feelings spilling and awful, your love unbearable, your missing and missing and missing getting bigger, just pressing on the bruise all the time. Remember standing in the middle of the road until the car was gone? You aren't too grown up for this. You aren't too old. Stay sweet. Stay soft. .

After the memorial, we walk towards home with a pocket full of feathers and a plastic luchador-which again, i can't explain, but it does make sense. Halfway there we stop and stand in the street, up later than we meant it to be. The fog is rolling in and softens the edges of the landscape and makes all the street lamps diffuse their rotten yellow light. Somewhere the industrial sounds on Columbia ratchet and thrust and shudder. If you stand real still, sometimes nothing bad happens. But also nothing good. So we keep moving. We go home. We eat cheese and tortillas, a little drunk, a little sad, and walk the dog in the rain. We stay soft.

Drop your shoulders. Unclench your jaw. Release your breath. Please keep your heart tender. It's how we fight back. ■

**You have to be tender.**

**You have to be breakable.**

**You have to let all that grief move in**

**and let it put it's sad pictures on the walls**

**and hang it's lights and say its prayers**

**and if you do it right,**

**that's how you make space**

**for all the love too.**

and still wrap presents. Drop your shoulders. Unclench your jaw. You aren't always fighting. It's supposed to be easier. We make it harder than it needs to be. We don't have to be clenched fists. In the summer at the river, she tells me that Condors can fly for hours without flapping their wings. It doesn't have to be this hard. There's softness to be found everywhere. We're always looking for the ways it'll fall apart but condors only flap 1% of the time they're in flight. What are we doing? Why did we set it all up like this? We feel so alone and we aren't. There has to be more to talk about.

You have to be soft to catch spiders

and say "it's time to grow up" and just sit on the sideline and make yourself seem tough. So independent. And there's a time and a place for that. Being tough has probably gotten you through some really bad times. It's going to feel good for a minute. But your fear isn't special. We need you back. Get soft. You have to be tender. You have to be breakable. You have to let all that grief move in and let it put it's sad pictures on the walls and hang it's lights and say its prayers and if you do it right, that's how you make space for all the love too.

It won't work out, ultimately. Not on the sort of timeline you're looking for.



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ISSUE 12 | 01/02 2021 |

99E: A MILWAUKIE-BASED ARTS & CULTURE MAGAZINE

Produced by Chapel Theatre:  
4107 SE Harrison St., Milwaukie, OR 97222  
[chapeltheatremilwaukie.com](http://chapeltheatremilwaukie.com)