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Survivors to Superheroes Presents

Songs of Survival



Cover Art by Julia Tortorello-Allen

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

In troubled times, I always turn to literature. This has been the case since I was young, and I suspect it will continue to be the case well into my adulthood. As we usher in the spring, I return to my literary roots with our newest issue of *Songs of Survival*. Everyone who has contributed to this journal does the same—we create this out of love, and out of the belief that words have a healing power rivaled by nothing else. We share this in the hope that these words will do the same for you.

I'm writing this at the start of my second year with Survivors. During my time here, I've been lucky to work with talented writers both inside and outside the organization, all of whom have deeply personal stories to share—and deeply personal voices in which to share them. The written word often shapes our ability to express ourselves; if you're like me, nothing is truly processed until it can be articulated. Our writers in this issue embrace literary power and harness it to create raw, truthful accounts that revel in the beauty of language, even as they confront difficult subjects.

Across the journal, metaphor suggests the complex, many-faceted experience of survival and offers the reader an abstract image of everything that comes with it. Memory, pain, confusion, voicelessness—these feelings are difficult to understand, and even harder to make tangible. The pieces featured in this issue span many different styles of writing and literary devices. A playground, a summer night, a muted symphony: each piece reverberates with layers of meaning. I studied English and so am partial to a good metaphor. As you read, I'm confident that you will fall in love with these like I did. They're not always easy or kind, but they beautifully parse that which is difficult to say plainly.

An academic approach to writing often serves to stifle its creative merit. It was not until later in my life that I found freedom in the finer points of literary analysis. I began to parse the question of meaning differently—not what *does* it say, but what *might* it say. A reader isn't looking for a correct answer so much as a possibility. As you read through our journal, you may be confronted with ambiguity in some of our pieces. I invite you to embrace it—to consider, alongside what a symbol or metaphor might mean to an author, what it means to you.

As always, read with caution. We have provided content warnings for each individual piece; make sure to heed them and to take care of yourself while reading. What is healing for one reader or writer may be triggering for another. As there is no single path of survival, we publish a broad range of content, some

of which may not be right for you. I hope every one of you can find something within our pages that speaks to your own journey and can help you find healing.

On behalf of myself and the entire *Songs of Survival* team, we hope you enjoy our third edition. Please share it with your loved ones and help us to elevate survivors' voices. If you would like to be featured in our journal, you can submit your work on our website. We appreciate your support in our mission, and we're grateful to each and every person who sees the value of our work.

All the best,

Anna Schwartz (she/her)

Editor-in-Chief of *Songs of Survival*

Content Warning

Our journal, *Songs of Survival*, explores many topics that may be triggering for you. Before every piece of writing, we have identified major triggers, such as rape, incest, abuse, self harm, and suicide. You can find these warnings at the top of the page, before the title of each piece. If there are no content warnings before a piece, that means that the Survivors to Superheroes board and staff members who produce *Songs of Survival* did not flag any common or seemingly obvious triggers. This does not mean that you won't find the piece triggering, and we invite you to take your time and take breaks when you need it while exploring the journal.

All of the writing in this journal is centered around the theme of survival after sexual violence. Trauma is often all-encompassing, hard to contain, and triggers can come out of nowhere. Every person has their own triggers that are individual and unique. It is sadly impossible for us to be able to flag all of them for you, but we have tried to provide some guides to help you as you read through the journal.

If you are triggered, make sure to take care of yourself! Take a breath, get some water or tea, grab a snack, and take the time you need. If you are able to return to reading, that's wonderful. But if you can't, that is completely okay as well! Taking care of yourself, your recovery, and your own well-being is always what is most important.

Thank you for taking the time to read *Songs of Survival* and sharing a part of yourself with us and our contributors. We hope that this collection of work helps you in whatever way you need.

CW: Rape, Injury, Victim Blaming

my body is a playground.

my body is a playground
scored with razors in
the wood chips
they've called the city
and the rangers
and the teachers
and the parents
they will comb every last inch
of me
to extract
the violence
they will turn bags
and bags
of blades
from the chips;

from my ~~legs~~ swingset
my ~~cervix~~ twisting, tunneled slide
my ~~breasts~~ latticed set of stairs
my ~~back~~
the monkey bars
my ~~hips~~
the carousel
my ~~mouth~~
the highest tower
to lord above it all

my body is an iliad
bespoken by euripides
four hundred years an afterthought
for second-class casualties
of ~~his~~ entitlement, and
~~his~~ arrogance
~~his~~ self-interest, and
~~his greedy groin~~
~~his~~ drunken hands
besieging the women
crowded all together
inside

as it's written
i watch it come for me
i plead
my case, i am
a lunatic, i am
a liar

i am helen now, and
i am coveted
they call it power
they call it divine
they ascribe a thousand ships
to me, a war
to me
the fault
to me;
i am pawn, prize and whore
i am the center of all my strife
i am
the one
who did this

i am homer now, and the war
is lost, the war
is won
the toll — inconsequential
the silence — uprooted women
who cannot speak
(how can we count them
if they do not speak?)
a story
a record
the rape, consumed
a tale
to be told

my body is a playground
sown with burning walls and razor blades
i turn the chips
i clean the slides
i play again
i look for razors
beneath my skin
i marry the scars on my feet

with the joy that
i seek
with the joy that
they ask
of me

By Jeanne Mele (she/they)

my name is Jeanne, and I usually write books. a lot of them are about survivors. the paradox of the social class we occupy encourages silence like few other things, and knowing this, I am twice as loud for the sake of the stigma and fear that grip all of us. after my rape I found that a lot of my processing came in fragments of thoughts: metaphors and laments and flashbacks, ad nauseam; so I wrote these into a poem, as artists might do. to create from such violence is, for me, both survival and conquest. I cannot spite an indifferent rapist with my success. but I will wring every drop of significance from the filth he left with me.

CW: Rape, Victim Blaming

haunting questions

“didn’t you want it?”
you ask this,
panting,
on top of me.
my wrists still pinned,
my hair knotted,
a body that is not mine
still inside me.
did i want this?
does it matter?
we can’t take it back.

my walls are coated with you,
could be years of scrubbing
and the water still won’t run clear.
it’s my fault though.
i laid there,
legs open,
eyes closed,
being your little actress,
letting you do it.

smoke scorched my lungs,
making my vision blur,
yet i still felt every scratch,
every pump,
every sizzling bead of sweat.
i suddenly realize that
for every “no” i attempted,
you would occupy my mouth.
so, i guess i never actually said it.

did i want this?

By Claire Brousseau (she/her)

Claire Brousseau is known as a storyteller and poet. She is excited for someone to read her work besides her cat, Gus.

CW: Rape, Graphic Sexual Content

My body is a summer night.

Sometimes I can remember everything. And sometimes not enough. Sometimes more than I'd like. Sometimes nothing. And sometimes just enough to feel everything and nothing all at once.

This is one of those times.

My therapist told me I can't skip the details. That I can't hide behind metaphors and similes and flowing poetry disguised as prose. I can't hide like those other times. I can't hide from him. She's right. I have to stop hiding and take back my power—the power he's holding too tightly onto still.

So here I am. Here I was.

I remember his name.

That night, from the bits I can remember, was so mundane, so stupid. He had a problem called Bachelor Disease that you'd think a wealthy, thirty-year-old engineer would be able to bypass. But instead, I, a naïve nineteen-year-old, decided to help him clean his place. That was the second time I'd been to his hovel of a two-bedroom apartment.

The first time I'd cruised down was when he'd invited me for a second date. A lousy dinner led to a triggering movie led to me, hopped up on too many anxiety meds and curious, initiating a sexual encounter. Don't worry. I didn't have sex with him. Even though I strangely wanted to. I'd told him I hadn't in the days leading up to it and he was completely cool with it. That night, after the weird movie, I'd rubbed myself up against him as we spooned on his couch until he led me to his bedroom. Which was a class act altogether. It was a wreck: clothes were strewn everywhere, and a huge glass case of JoJo figures lined the back wall. The blue backlight covered the room in the hue. A mattress (no box spring, just a mattress) lay tossed on the ground with rugged white sheets and a few lumpy pillows. And this man had how much money? I didn't want him to see me naked, so instead I'd sported the topless look while he stripped down. We kissed and humped and I suddenly, strangely, and embarrassedly wanted to fuck him. But, ever the gentleman, he turned me down, quoting how I'd already told him no and how *this is the hardest thing I've ever had to do* as if his willpower was a Christ-like act. Looking back into the waters of my memory, I want him to shut the fuck up. I'll never forget that.

So we didn't fuck. Instead I got on top of him, gave my first ever blow job, and made him cum in my mouth so fast I almost threw up. But I swallowed like a good girl. *Because that's what good girls do*, I'd thought. He was impressed and laughed and smiled, and in that moment I felt good. Great. After we hung out a bit longer, I put on my clothes and left, kissing him on his doorstep on my tippy toes. I rolled my windows down, blasting my music as I laughed, so proud of myself, all the way home. I even called my mom, embarrassing as that is now, and told her how grown up I was, only to have her lecture me about going to a man's house after one date. But fuck that, I was a big girl now!

I'm stalling . . . or maybe just setting up the stage? Either way, I'll part the curtains. And step into my spotlight, blue as a moonlit sea.

That second night I told him I'd clean, so I went over there. Anxiety pill count: 3. I picked up his living room, straightened his bedroom up, and cleaned the hell out of his two bathrooms. They were filthy. Just filthy. As a nice gesture to help cure him of his Bachelor Disease, I'd bought two bars of soap from LUSH just for him. Sea Vegetable, because he smelled fresh like the ocean, and Outback Mate, blue to remind him of me. Blue. He was very impressed and happy to have a clean home, which filled me with pride. I asked if it was okay if I showered before we hung out. He said yes. I thanked him and stepped into his guest bathroom, now sparkling clean. Anxiety pill count: 6. I showered, leaving the door creaked open playfully. My naïve younger self thought it'd be fun if he came and joined me.

Getting out, I changed into some comfy clothes—my heather gray NASA tee shirt and black cotton shorts, paired with a sexy little black bra and matching panties—and stepped out. He was waiting for me on the couch, smiling that goofy smile I was coming to adore. I sat with him on the couch and we talked, watching shows on YouTube that we happened to like. I remember specifically that we watched *Steven Universe* because he'd never seen it. We got all the way to the Cheeseburger Backpack episode; I told him excitedly that they'd just released a real one you could buy, but it was too expensive. Was it dumb of me to secretly hope he'd get me one? I went to the bathroom before coming back. Anxiety pill count: 9. We talked a bit more before he leaned down and kissed me, kissed and kissed and kissed me. Pushed me down onto the couch and left me breathless. I felt how hard he was against my thigh. He came up for air and took my arm, pulling me off the couch to lead me to his bedroom. My brain had started to fog by then, spinning in and out like a revolving door. Pieces floated around me, my thoughts meshing into melting messes. I felt like mist over the water, cool and hazy and tingling to the touch.

We went inside and he laid me down. Gently, like a glass figurine. He kissed me urgently and took off my shirt; I could feel his massive hands everywhere. In a few swift moves, he'd taken off everything of his own and looked at me, backlit by the blue of his display case. "It's your turn. Let me take care of you." I swooned, partially from my pills and partially from how sweet he was. How lucky was I to meet such a gentleman? He trailed kisses down my neck, to my stomach, to my shorts that he carefully tugged off. My face was hot, burning from embarrassment. No man had ever seen me like that. So exposed, even if I still wore my bra. He called me beautiful. He called me stunning. The words swam in the blue of the room before diving into my mind where they would stay, cool on my back, drops slipping down from the water. My mind whirled and pulled me to stand on the deck of my pond, the evening breeze of summer in my face instead of his breath. No more heat from the searing sun. Only the cool, refreshing water of the summer evening blues.

He leaned down, putting his tongue inside me. I didn't know how to feel. It felt good in a way, the way I thought you were meant to feel from what I've read and seen, but it wasn't really anything to me. *Maybe those pills had been too much?* I'd thought at the time. Then it started. God, it fucking started. He took two fingers and jammed them inside, making me jolt. I hadn't expected them. Not like that. They were big and long, but I figured it would be better than his massive dick in me. I knew that would tear me up. Only that wasn't what tore me up. He started fucking me with his hand, his mouth on me again. My body shook and I stared at him, trying to figure out what was happening. I didn't know it was supposed to be like that. To feel that way. "Harder," I told him, almost a question, "Do it harder." I thought if he did, I'd feel something. Because I didn't feel anything.

And I shouldn't have done that.

He shoved his fingers deeper, harder, faster, and I clenched my eyes shut from the pain. It was tight, tearing, slicing. His fingernails were sharp and long and they tore me as they went. That wasn't right. It hurt and hurt. "Okay, that's good," I said, voice catching. "That's enough. You can stop." But I must not have been loud enough. Because he didn't stop. I peeked an eye through the pain to see him still busy, still fucking me with his dagger hands. "Thanks, but I said you can stop. I'm good," I said again. It was like I was in another room. Like he couldn't hear me as he went harder. "Stop," I begged, falling back on the bed as my body shook. "Stop!" My mind swirled—pain and fear and regret and confusion a tornado that threatened to rip away my consciousness. I looked down at him again and caught his eye as he glanced up before turning his gaze downward again. Was I wrong? Could he not hear me? Is this how it's supposed to go?

I stared up at his ceiling.

It was blue from the lights of his display case. The room, bathed in blue. My rooms always seem to be frosted with color. First red and now blue. If I'm lucky, I'll get the whole rainbow.

So I stared up at that blue-hued ceiling, and as I shook I pretended to be underwater. I was sinking and floating at the same time. My tongue lay heavy and thick in my mouth, bubbles overflowing from the pills, unable to match the volume of the words I wanted out. I felt like I was drowning. I couldn't breathe and I was drowning. My pleas dying down as they sank with me.

I closed my eyes, and for a moment I wasn't in his room but at home again. I remember thinking of my childhood home. Of my family playing in the twilight. Of my father rocking on the swing. Home. *What should I do?*

My body became a summer night. My head and thoughts filled with cicadas. Screaming. Screaming. Screaming in my head as he fucked me with his knives and I wondered why I was doing things wrong.

I thought about what I'd read. About how women would fake orgasms to satisfy their men. In that instant, I wanted to seem satisfied. I wanted to satisfy him. I wanted him to think he'd made me cum, and then he could stop. Stop. Stop. Stop.

So I made myself tremble and gasp with awe and shake and say, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you," as I squeezed myself around those knives. And it worked. He stopped. He stopped. At that time, I didn't know why I was so relieved. So. Relieved.

He pulled out his fingers and I watched him wipe them on his discarded shirt. They looked a little red, but I thought my mind was playing tricks. He seemed happy he'd made me cum, and I couldn't help but feel glad for him, even if I was in a lot of pain. God, I was so naïve. I asked if I could give him head and he said sure. I tried to, but I trembled too much to do it right. He said it was okay: "Got excited doing that." We stopped, just lying on the sheets. I remember how I squeezed my legs together, feeling torn. That's how you're supposed to feel, right? We got up, and he got mad. Apparently, he thought he'd told me to put his glasses on the nightstand. I hadn't, so they were in bed. For the record, I hadn't been told to, but he was sure and angry; he claimed his glasses could've been crushed. I gathered my clothes, apologizing, and he seemed to still be mad even after he'd told me it was okay. It hurt to walk as I fumbled to get my things. In an attempt to rescue the night, I left my beloved

NASA shirt in the hall. I thought if he saw it he'd think of me and call like in the movies. And you know what? I never saw that shirt again.

He saw me out and I didn't hear from him in three days, which was fine. How could I forget him with blood leaking into my underwear for days after? I finally shot him a text, telling him I assumed it was over since he hadn't spoken to me. He said it was: *You're really immature*. I wish I could tell you what I texted back, but I couldn't. My memory isn't that kind.

I went through life after that making plenty more mistakes. Many fears and regrets following me because I was ashamed for dicking around with a dumbass like him. Until I met someone else. Until he asked how far I'd gone with another man and I, laughing, told him about my shitty experience, only for him to wreck me. "That's not okay," he said. "That's honestly really fucked up. I'm so sorry that happened to you. Are you okay?"

And there it was. I wasn't okay. There was that clarity I didn't have before. The clarity I wish I'd had that I could've used to push him away, to tell him *no*. And with it came the water. The fear. The blue. The warbling of my memory from too many pills. The tightness in my chest I feel knowing I won't remember it all. The hatred that I've already lost so much to my mind and you took, took, took, more. So fuck you for raping me in such a way that I didn't realize you had for three years. In a way that I couldn't remember you'd done me wrong.

Fuck you like you did me.

By Katherine Wanderer (she/her)

Katherine Wanderer is a poet, a novelist, and, most importantly, a survivor who wishes for everyone to know they are not alone. When she is not writing, she spends her time reading, doing creative projects, or enjoying the outdoors. She lives snugly in Indiana with her boyfriend Logan and little hedgehog Monty, surrounded by friends who always support her.

When your body is no longer

a body.
not brave enough
to wear a bandaid stretched
across septum, deviated
morality. i was the pettable girl with pettable

skin, called
myself selkie so i stayed
magical.
the only tolerable fight is with the tulips,
roots sprouted inside pores,
pleasure derived

from the tiny black
holes creating artificial
blackheads
on the ball of an attention seeking
nose, bridge

arched with the curve
of my spine, a vine, or branch so bent
it snapped like a finger. i didn't
notice.
neither did she, i was wrapped
so nicely after practice with tape

that agitated and tore.
reject the title of seal, i'll be a tissue
paper sea shell instead.

By Julia Tortorello-Allen (she/her)

In 2021, Julia Tortorello-Allen graduated from SUNY Purchase with a BA in Creative Writing. At Purchase, Julia dual concentrated in fiction and poetry, and studied a great deal of playwriting as well. She was the inaugural poet for the SUNY system's first Latina president and served as a poetry editor for the literary journal 'Italics Mine'. Her work has been published in 'Submissions Magazine' and by the Union for Reform Judaism. She will be pursuing a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing come autumn.

How Do I Support Others When I Still Need Support?

Originally published on the Survivors to Superheroes website

I am a twenty-four-year-old special education teacher at a charter high school in Boston, Massachusetts. This piece was written about my first year as a teacher in a live school setting due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In college I had been active in protests and student-led discussions about social issues, and I have always been open to hearing people's stories about gendered violence. I was my students' age—a mere fourteen years old—when I was first sexually assaulted. The story that is about to unfold impacted me ten years later more than I could imagine. This is the story of a survivor's non-linear healing process.

We received an email at eight a.m. titled "Altercation Yesterday." It detailed a bathroom brawl in which a group of various grade-level male students ganged up on one senior boy, resulting in bloody injuries. The motivation? This senior boy had allegedly been sending unsolicited sexual messages to and making advances at young female students. The fight was filmed and circulating on social media. The school administration acknowledged that students would be talking about this and instructed us to direct them to the Dean's office if they were not concentrating on school work. Around noon, another email came through, saying that female students had come to the Deans and the school principal to say "enough is enough" and demanded a discussion space to reveal the patterns of sexual harassment and violence that had been happening in the school. I was incredibly proud of and impressed by the resilience and bravery of those students. When I was fourteen, I didn't really know what sexual harassment and violence was. At the same age, they were demanding systemic change at their school. By the end of the day, students had decided that a demonstration was needed to spark this change. They chose a peaceful, walk-out style protest that would occur at the very end of the last period of the day. Only female-identifying and non-binary students and staff were invited to participate in the protest. As a female teacher and survivor, of course I would be walking out with my students.

The next day, students were on edge, whispering about the protest that was about to ensue. Some male students expressed confusion, frustration, and defiance leading up to the protest. Their sentiments included mocking the female and non-binary students, misinterpreting the walk-out as a reason to go home early, and simply not understanding the gravity of sexual harassment. Trying to explain this gravity was incredibly difficult—it's been my experience since I was a little girl. Although we were told to direct students with questions and opposition to the Deans' office, I still felt an obligation as an educator and a survivor to help them understand that their mocking and joking actually made this a bigger problem.

The protest itself was powerful. Students created poignant posters with red handprints and phrases like "No means No," "Our Body Should Not be Sexualized," and "Consent Matters." Since it was all



student-driven, there was expected disorganization and the cohesion of the demonstration itself was not clear. Regardless, it was a beautiful display of students and staff who care so much about making a difference and raising awareness about sexual violence. I was immensely proud.

The formation of the demonstration did bring up an issue that I personally still have conflicting feelings about. The student leaders guided us to line up on both sides of the sidewalk, thus forcing the male students to walk through us as they were dismissed from school. It could be seen from two different viewpoints. The first: male students could visibly see the number of non-male students and staff at our school and conceptualize our value and presence. The second: male students had to experience a “walk of shame,” which could be interpreted as a form of blaming or finger-pointing. We can never say that men are the only perpetrators of sexual violence. People who speak and do things without another person’s consent are perpetrators of sexual violence. In our society, gender does play a significant role in power dynamics and women are disproportionately affected by sexual violence. At the same time, however, men also experience sexual violence and harassment, and pointing fingers at an entire group of students is not the answer. We cannot and should not have excluded the male students from the protest and discussion about sexual violence. Sexual education, consent training, and open dialogue about gender, sexuality, and respect should involve all students.

There were numerous mandatory staff meetings after and before school as these events were unfolding. There were no content warnings or processing spaces to ensure the safety of the staff. Even though the sexual harassment was happening amongst students and not staff, it doesn’t mean that these conversations do not impact us. Being a survivor isn’t something you can visibly know about a person, and thus it is essential to preview and ask for the consent of people to participate in a discussion before it begins. A staff member had to request a processing space for employees, displaying the impact that this was having on myself and others.

When we came in from the walk-out, there were two boards covered with student accounts of catcalling, harassment, and experiences of sexual violence. At the time, these notes were incredibly powerful and vulnerable. They displayed the range of experiences that students have had. It was interesting to witness the other staff members and some older students who stuck around to read them. They were sometimes shocked, and sometimes nodded their heads as it resonated, and sometimes shook their heads in disappointment. It definitely opened my eyes to see that my students, the precious people whom I am caring for and raising in a way, experience this sexual violence too. It broke my heart and simultaneously helped me see that I am not alone in my experience. I thought the boards were a very important and moving aspect of the demonstration.

Yet the boards were not removed after the demonstration was done. They remained in the main foyer for two full weeks after the event. Every day at work, I was triggered again and again from the explicit nature of the notes hung up. I fell into a bout of panic, discomfort, and worry. One afternoon after work, I cried uncontrollably and couldn't figure out what was wrong. After getting support from my partner and my friends, I realized how much the boards and the constant reminders of my own experiences were impacting me. I advocated for the boards to be removed; it took a total of ten days for the administration to take them down. My manager at first recommended that I take an alternate route to my classroom so I wouldn't have to see them. I felt so invalidated in my experience. I told her that I could not possibly be the only person experiencing these intense emotions, and that something needs to happen about it. She proceeded to ask me what I would recommend we do with the messages. They were relying on my own emotional labor to figure out the best way to support students. It felt disrespectful and very inconsiderate of the immense work I do to heal from my sexual violence experiences. When the boards finally came down, my manager and I walked by, and she remarked, "Oh! The boards are down!" with a big smile on her face. I couldn't really say anything. It was too late. The lack of understanding and compassion for survivors when discussing sexual violence was too much to bear.

I did provide a detailed amount of feedback to the administration of the school in the hope that they will handle future situations and events that could trigger their staff and students differently. My first recommendation was to preview content of meetings with an option to not attend if it is a topic that may be unsafe to engage with. By previewing this information, people are better able to make informed decisions about their involvement and to take steps to care for themselves. Next, they should never display explicit and possibly triggering content in a main area of a school for more than the length of an actual event. From a social justice and impact standpoint, the purpose of displaying difficult images and sentiments is to inform and open minds. When this content is displayed for a longer amount of time, the impact begins to morph into a normalizing and often triggering one that moves away from a learning moment. Lastly, they need to check in with staff more consistently and compassionately during the time of the event and not after. We are not only teachers—we are complex human beings with emotions and experiences that do impact our quality of life and work. By checking in with each individual in the school (even via text or email), people can get the resources and time they need to process these difficult situations.

There's a lot to learn from this experience. For me, I've learned that my triggers are complex and lifelong. I've also learned that I am far from alone in my experience, and although this scares me, it also gives me hope. For my school and workplace, I hope that they recognize the importance of being meticulous in their decision-making and approach to talking about difficult topics. The ways in which we talk about, teach, and guide young people in regard to healthy and consensual relationships will have an impact forever.

By Julia Kopala (she/her)

My name is Julia, and I am currently working in Boston as a special education teacher. I joined Survivors to Superheroes because I am a survivor myself who did not have any support or resources to understand the gravity of the situation I was in. I want my writing to empower and validate the diversity of experiences and identities that survivors hold, amplifying the idea that healing is possible. Outside of the organization, I find joy in hiking, reading, and mentoring students!

CW: Sexual Assault

Muted Symphony

My truth is one that took years to unfold,
Amnesia wiping away the memories before my tenth birthday
The day where they say you see wonders untold,
Where you go to bed with a smile so bold
That's before I saw through the haze
And realized

Smiles don't last

Mental scars of that day still haunt me.
The vile, bitter smell of red-bull assaulting my nostrils,
His maniacal laughter sounding violently as if it were
Tinnitus frizzling away at my eardrums.
Him reaching my bed and etching a nightmare into my mind,
That was the night my innocence was taken...

Hatred turns into self hatred
And self hatred turns into self doubt
And self doubt turns into a muted symphony
A muted symphony
Created when "boys will be boys" takes over a victim's life
Convincing them to forget their pain because no one really cares
Who would care about a muted symphony?

The pain of the past can't shrivel away
Attitudes of society can't just sway
I'm not asking for my pain to be relieved
I just want to be believed
I want people to see me as a human
Rather than taking a glance at me and deciding
That I now identify as an object
That dignity shouldn't be thrown lower than the ground itself
That victims aren't survivors if they don't talk about their experiences

They can't...

There's no time
There's no place
There's no place for people like us
There's no platform for people like us
There's no platform for useless freaks

I'm done being weak
There's only one thing I seek
To let people learn
"no" doesn't mean go
No means no!

Muted symphonies
sounding loudly
Only a tune to deaf ears
Till the day society makes changes
And the unmute button
Of our muted symphonies
Can be repaired

By Harpy

CW: Sexual Assault, Injury

Dear Mr. K,

Thank you for teaching me to love

the lemon in the sky, tangy and burnt on my skin
and the plump hot mess of an arm
even after the bees sting, at least the bee landed

on me.

I poke bruises now. Dig deep

into the skin and pretend the blood is
black and blueberry colored

even when it hits the light
just so I can watercolor my bedroom walls with it.

Thank you

for visiting me in dreamless dreamland so I remember to kiss myself once I wake—after clawing at my
eyes and crawling away from you. After chanting the shema,

your fingers, sweaty and panting and curled around mine, I had to learn to live
a godless life. So thank you
for showing me that I can craft my own divinity.

Thank you,

because I learned the first aid skills needed to be a mother. How to run a cut under
water until all the dark red has swirled and twirled into the sewers how to ice and plaster and

kiss away aches and salty cheeks.

I'm smarter for having to learn
terms like *non-union right transverse process at L1* and *post traumatic stress disorder*

with a emphasis on stockholm and

even if the non-union never decides to reunite,
four years later I've learned that

diastasis at S4 and S5 and

watching whipped cream clouds and
ink that sits in my skin and changing
diapers and the smell of chlorine and
even sex

can heal.

By Julia Tortorello-Allen (she/her)

In 2021, Julia Tortorello-Allen graduated from SUNY Purchase with a BA in Creative Writing. At Purchase, Julia dual concentrated in fiction and poetry, and studied a great deal of playwriting as well. She was the inaugural poet for the SUNY system's first Latina president and served as a poetry editor for the literary journal 'Italics Mine'. Her work has been published in 'Submissions Magazine' and by the Union for Reform Judaism. She will be pursuing a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing come autumn.

 Songs of Survival 