

Survivors to Superheroes Presents

Songs of Survival

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Cover Art by Julia Tortorello-Allen

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

As we close out the year, I'm delighted to return to you with another edition of *Songs of Survival*. For us here at Survivors to Superheroes, this year has been a momentous one. We have officially incorporated as a nonprofit, and our journal's fourth edition—and first-ever second issue—includes a host of voices that are entirely new to the organization. We continue to grow, and I can see more clearly every day the concrete ways in which we have carved out a corner for ourselves and for the work that we do. I find myself thinking now about what to do with the space that we create.

This issue, we deal in emotion. All writing, of course, possesses varying degrees of emotion, and as I write this I recognize how broad a theme I'm claiming. However, upon reviewing the pieces in this issue, I was struck by the honesty with which our creators confront the feelings that drive their art. The work in this issue is raw and uncensored, refusing to shy away from the truth. So often, social custom dictates that we must conceal certain feelings for fear of offending or confusing those around us—never mind how true those feelings may be. Here, we reject this notion. There is power in the expression of any emotion, and we celebrate our firm belief that no feeling is wrong, or too much, or unfit for that expression. We present to you art that displays anger, fear, shame—things that we are told not to feel, things that we are told not to tell anyone we feel. By centering these uncomfortable, unspoken feelings, our artists explore their restorative potential. They find fortitude in their anger, resolve in their fear, certainty in their shame. This issue puts the reader face to face with negative emotion and asks them to take it for what it is—honest and undeniably cathartic.

I hope that this can be our legacy. If *Songs of Survival* stands as a platform for embracing difficult and painful authenticity, issue after issue, for many years to come, I will consider it a job well done. I hope that our journal continues to be safe, free, and expressive, and I hope that our artists continue to share their raw truths in whichever ways best serve them. Because, ultimately, it is not for us to decide what we do with the space that we've created. It is enough simply to create it and to let it stand open for whoever may need a place to speak or listen.

Our journal is challenging to read at times. By design, we publish work that can be triggering, and we have done our best to provide you with appropriate content warnings. Nevertheless, please take care of yourself as you read. Peruse at your own pace, and don't push yourself to engage with content that may

be harmful to you. The road to survival looks different for everyone; we hope that something in our journal can help you along yours.

I'm proud beyond words to present to you our latest issue of *Songs of Survival*. It's a milestone for many people. As is always the case, I owe a debt of gratitude to my team; their hard work and dedication make this and every issue possible. If you or someone you love is interested in submitting written or visual art for our next issue, please visit our website. We appreciate your readership, your support, and your faith in the power of honesty. Thank you.

All my 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, then 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 work 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 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

When words do not exist:

as a child I used to believe that there was a word for each and every thing
I knew sometimes there were several things for one word
but I was convinced that there was at least one
one word for each thing.



when D. told me what she lived with her boyfriend
I couldn't help but think: I am lucky

lucky that my boyfriend asks for my approval before having sex
lucky that he stops when I'm fed up with it

she was told while feeling queasy during intercourse:
you are just a hole, let me finish my job
tu n'es qu'un trou, laisse-moi terminer

lucky that he lets me have him wear a condom
lucky that he's not forcing me to do it without contraception

she was also told:
it's so much better, and you can always take the morning-after pill
*c'est tellement meilleur, tu pourrais faire un effort et puis tu peux toujours prendre
la pilule du lendemain*

I am lucky I thought.



when B. told me she'd dared to denounce to the police the man
who'd sexually aggressed her
I answered: (I found nothing else) I am happy for you

happy that you dared to wait at the station five hours on your chair
happy that you stayed there biting your nails and fixing the screen of your iPhone
like sailors the reddish, twinkling gaze of lighthouses hoping someone would
write to you:

I think about you I'm with you

je pense à toi je suis avec toi

I am happy I said.

happy that you had to file a complaint
happy that you shared with uniformed strangers that a man one evening nailed
you on a bed just like a poster for a modern art exhibit on a wall



I am happy I said. I am lucky I thought.



or am I?

By Agathe (she/her)

CW: Rape, Violence, Suicidal Ideation

For Fear That

It is in quiet moments that I recall,
the way it felt to be loved by You.

I call it love because I know nothing else.

There is a weight to being loved so violently
that does not lift, a soon identifiable fatigue

in the face, shoulders, eyes, minds
of young girls who are cursed

with the knowledge of what Man can do.
Those of us who know one fundamental secret:

There comes a point when abuse
becomes sweet. Like sticky sap

from a tree in the middle of a dry spell, and
its resulting resounding ache in your jaw.

Riddled with cravings of trying to
fix it – the interruption of a good week

with a much needed reminder,
of what, exactly, I'm not sure.

That there is good in the world, but
that it is not for me?

That love can be real and it can be beautiful, but
that is not what our children will see?

That if I told anyone how it really was,
I would have to leave.

They would make me leave. Right?

Or simply, possibly, the ever-present reminder
that the power is, and will seemingly always be, in Your hands.

After one thousand, one hundred, and nine days,
it becomes routine.

Yes, I fell asleep when I was supposed to go home and so

You're pinning me down and
You're calling me cunt and
You're ripping my necklaces because

You were reaching for my collar.

Why were you reaching for my collar?

You were reaching for my neck.

I'll forfeit, for a while, maybe for a lifetime,
the ability to let my thoughts wander

For fear that they might come back to
You – Or, really, the fact that I know they will.

There is no thought that I cannot find a
way to trace back to You. Every question

I will never have answered, the whys and
hows that are too many to name –

Did You cringe when You hit bone?
or was there a sweet satisfaction to it,
an incessant itch you had to keep scratching:

Cunt, cunt, cunt, cunt, cunt

Did it ever get old?
If it did, I guess You would've stopped.

Yes, abuse turns sweet and sticky
and it suffocates you as you try to drink it,
it fills your lungs so it hurts to breathe until

we're sat in the car and I'm wishing
for once You would actually drive us

into the tree rather than just
joke and taunt about it so that

we both could be taken out of
our misery. But instead all that

comes out are tears and more tears
and You berate me for crying,
calling me child, calling me cunt.

I read a friend of a friend's story
of their very own You and was
reminded of just how many of You that there are.

You told me You felt so alone in this world,
You called me My like I was Yours.

You saved a bird once and
I think that made You think
that You were a good person.

I think that it convinced me too,
and that You never stopped for fear that
I would figure out that You weren't.

But *We* find each other, our heavy shoulders,
tired eyes, that undeniable and inimitable fatigue

and We crowd the empty space that once
was filled with daydreams of

innocent crushes or other silly things
before You violated and defiled our minds.

We tell the stories, for fear that

We might forget them otherwise.

Because to forget them feels
Too close to forgiveness,
as much as it hurts to remember.

We make a culture out of it.
We make a family –

It sticks to us, and so it will for years to come.
It wears us down and it rips and
It stings and it likely won't stop.

We just have to leave, if We haven't already,
muster up the impossible courage to go and
then all there's left to do is live, and spend
every day thinking about it and every day
learning from it.

That it is real and it happened.

And in some sort of twisted faith,
steep in the glorious knowledge that

To know You once is to know You
forever. And that alone can guarantee

only one thing - that is
to never know another
You, again.

By Diana Morley (she/they)

Diana Morley is a senior English & Adolescent Education major at SUNY Geneseo. This poem was written for a project as a part of the Block III course "Methods & Materials" required for the Education major at Geneseo. The project, titled the "Daydream Project," pushes teacher candidates to fit themselves into the shoes of students whose minds wander during class. It details an abusive relationship, specifically one experienced partially while in high school. The purpose behind writing this poem was to make the point that to daydream is a luxury that comes easily only to those who have yet to be touched by cruelty, which is far from limited to the experiences of adulthood. "For Fear That" is dedicated to the many friends and family that made it possible to leave the situation that formed the basis of its story, and to Kelly Keegan, the professor whose support made it possible for it to be written. Thank you for reading.

CW: Victim Blaming

Wronged But Not Wrong

“I knew something was wrong with you, but
I didn’t know what,” said my relatives

Blame ignites shame
fueling the flame of ignorance into
a brilliant blaze of confusion
wadded-up personhood shrinks as
smirking, victorious perpetrators
ride out of town

Their condemning eyes penetrate fault lines
along hydrostatic pressure points
beneath murky depths of misunderstanding
flinging vain judgments at the feet of
our brave and tenacious courage in
birth, death, and resurrection

Pawing for logic through
an inverted hourglass of
snared feet in claw traps
survivors crawl out of
vile enemy camps
and limp into life
shaking off the shackles

Wrong choices made by others
committed against others
can never be right.

There is nothing wrong with us.
What’s wrong with you?

By Leigh-Anne Burley (she/her)

CW: Suicidal Ideation

Dispose



By Levi Latocha (he/him)

Levi Latocha is a young, autistic, nonbinary cartoonist who communicates through art. His characters from his own webcomic, DECEPTION, represent moments in his life. Mystery Rios, the main protagonist of the series, is represented here.

CW: Discussion of Death

I'm Sorry, But I Want You to Die

I'm sorry, but I want you to die.

It's very personal; I refuse to lie about that. Don't get me wrong—I don't want to kill you. I just personally don't think you should be alive. Your actions revoked any reason you should be left alive. You scare more people than you probably know, or maybe you do know. I know being a scary person isn't enough to warrant death, but you know that's not what you're guilty of.

You don't think your actions warrant such a punishment? Oh, really? Do you think the punishment you originally got was enough?

No, let me guess: you're the victim in this. You made one mistake, something not worth punishing. You know you confessed, in one way or another. You're just happy the people you're close to never heard you. Sure, there are paper confessions, but as long as they never hear your voice, you can lie as much as you want. You better pray they never hear your tape.

Even after the punishment you got, you continued. You have this self-deluded idea that you were wronged. You were wronged by someone decades your junior, someone who could barely think for themself on the matter. None of this is your fault, right?

That's why you look over your shoulder, judging everyone before they can judge you. Even when your victims are nowhere nearby, you live in fear. You live in a fear I wish was greater than anything I could think of. I want it to paralyze you. I want it to isolate you like it did me.

I want you to die, internally. I want you to give up, like I almost did.

Unfortunately, I know I can't wish for it. I know we're both spiteful creatures, and I know I am weaker.

This isn't a battle to win, or even to see who loses first. It's a stalemate. What will happen first: will people find the truth, or will the threat of it cause drastic actions? I fear the reaction of either, which makes me weak.

But I will succeed, in spite of you living. If you felt any guilt, like you tried to admit, you would die. There would be peace, happiness, and probably me, with a cake.

By H.E.S. (she/her)

When she isn't working in a research lab with her biology MS, H.E.S. can be found writing creative pieces, playing indie video games she helped fund, or trying new foods in Philadelphia, PA. She has previously been published by The Shallot, (in parenthesis), Livina Press, and 365Tomorrows.

CW: Assault, Victim Blaming

High School Morals

I sat down next to you on the bus
You called me your French field trip buddy
I was a senior in high school.

The whole trip we stick like glue
I have a boyfriend
But your hand brushes mine often

“Netflix?”
“Sure, this show okay?”
You place an earbud delicately into my ear, whisper, “Dork.”

At the arena, you pull me close
Pick me up, grab my hand, steal a touch to my waist
I feel wanted for once!

You buy me snacks
We let our hands meet for brief
Seconds, and I blush

I can't focus on the game
My body is focused on you
You don't bat an eye; it's a game

We cheer, shout, and laugh
Our friends are oblivious to us
My pulse is faster than the puck

My phone flashes with texts from my boyfriend
The hearts around his name don't matter right now
This is way more exciting than him

We watch the Wolves get demolished
It's too loud, I can't hear you, but your eyes
Are yelling over the crowd

We trudge back onto the bus
You put the show back on
But you didn't care that I was watching

It started with my hand, a little squeeze
I smiled, but then you moved...
My thigh

Up my shirt
Played with the elastic of my sweatpants
Forcing down

Stop.
I said it again
Stop!

"Dork," replayed in my ear
Stop!
You looked through me

I suddenly see you, a wolf.
My boyfriend's text floats up to my phone screen
My lungs are empty; I'm not like this!

I needed an inhaler
You needed morals
I wanted to leave.

My stomach burned, the heat rising
To my cheeks, I wanted to puke
You have turned into a shadow

You texted me that night, that you
Wanted me.
All I desire is to feel wanted.

Trembling all over
We rolled our eyes around the fact
That I never said yes

Praying for this bus ride to stop
I babble, trying to fill the silence
“Do you want to get coffee after?”

“I don’t feel good,”
You answered
Later you told me

It was because you
Would’ve taken
My virginity.

When I told my boyfriend, his lips didn't move
Tears flourished on my end of the call
You ruined this relationship.

Before this, I was happy
But then you offered me the apple
I wasn’t supposed to be Adam

You signed the contract of sin for me
Everyone said to file a report
Even my mother told me

But you knew I was weak
I still am, you shoved the apple
In my mouth and forced me to bite

I refused to report you; I didn't want
To ruin your future, so instead I ruined mine
I'm not Christ, yet I harbor your sin

You didn't need to blend in
I was a mindless sheep, you sank
Your teeth in, I let myself take the blame.

Victim is a role I am unwilling to play
And I am just waiting for the day
To pay you back.

By Hope Melody Powell (she/her)

CW: Violence

Broken Doll: A Poem to the Bullied

Look at her
Broken, ugly
We tore her limbs for fun
And watched her bleed and bleed
A doll nobody wanted
With too big of a mouth
And now look at what's left
A corpse waiting to die.

Except I never died
Like they wanted me to.

Dear Death visited me,
Confessed that even she
Would loathe my company
And I shattered into
Half a million glass shards

I tried for ceaseless years
To melt myself back
Into a clear condensed form
But I was too jumbled
Too distorted, monstrous
Nothing could piece me back
Together.

I tried for countless years
To grind myself to dust
To end once and for all
But the shards were too small
Much too great in number
To be crushed any further

So I stayed and survived
And endured and endured
Until I realized
That there was nothing left
On this earth in those seas
Or in these blinding skies
That could still destroy me

And I became unbreakable.

By Agathe (she/her)

