

From the Executive Editor:

Once we've selected the work we're publishing, everything is formatted, and we've chosen the images for the folio and the cover, I set aside about a week to ruminate on the theme(s) and the subtitle. It's a pretty organic process, usually, that involves reading through things again, especially the piece from which the title was pulled, and just allowing the letter to unfold with that line at its center. This year, that week got pushed a bit, just by general mundane speed bumps, and then suddenly, it was the week it was due to our copy editor, and life went . . . not exactly sideways, but rather all the ways a life can go.

Maybe it started when I arrived late, delayed by the funeral of a good friend's mother, to my in-laws' annual reunion. Several generations thick, this reunion got me feeling the weight of time. My people are getting older. I am getting older. The reunion is also held in the place where my wife and I were married twenty-five years ago; for the first time, that beaming couple in those pictures look like our children.

Two days after our return home, the ceiling in our son's room collapsed. A complete disaster he was lucky enough to pull out of unscathed. Old age was the autopsy report. The ceiling is over a hundred years old, part of a kit home from a Sears catalog at the time. Is anything meant to last forever?

And then three more deaths just this week: a university community member, an extended in-law, and one of my own beloved uncles.

All of this life and death and celebrating and rebuilding, while *Water~Stone* Volume 27 hangs from the joists above it all. Witness to all of the ways we love and we live.

Some of the pieces here stand as witness to the abandonment of that love. After a death, after a divorce, even the news some days, most days ... we can feel abandoned by love. The living left behind. We feel it in the images of crying, bloodied children, families victim to missile strikes, and buttons being pushed from political and actual bunkers. Our neurons fire to fill in the blanks of what was. Here, there was a building. Here, there was a body. Here, there was a life. A breakfast. A wedding. Here, there was love.

Perceptual completion is when the brain uses prior knowledge and context to fill in missing information. It allows us to perceive a complete, coherent image, including colors, even when those elements are missing.

It's not unlike the visceral feeling we have even after a body is gone. Sure, there is the physical evidence; the indentation in the mattress, the shoes unworn, the quiet. But there is also this shadow life that follows the living. The smells that color a kitchen with your grandmother, or the click of your own knee as you climb the stairs that has you hearing your mother's tricky ankle.

And like that, the photograph, the memory, the person is there, is alive, in color. Perceptual completion.

This collection provides many, many pieces demonstrating this kind of abandonment of love and life lost.

But this collection also contains pieces and moments of love *by* abandonment. The phrase comes from Bill Marsh's essay, "Water Striders," and suggests that our best way forward in love and in life is "to forfeit all plans, attachments, expectations. Love by abandonment and relinquishment. Love by surrendering to the twists and turns up ahead." As Marsh writes (and borrows from bell hooks), "the practice of love 'offers no place of safety.' To live and love fully ... we would need 'to let go of our fear of dying.' In its place, a love of living."

From that practice, we cannot lean on our perceptual completion. In fact, we must let go of what we know, or *believe* we know, to be true. Here, where memory serves no function, we follow curiosity and bliss, invention, exploration, and joy.

The beauty of this volume and, one could argue, with every issue of *Water~Stone*, is that its contents reflect that expression of both abandonment

and love, as noun and verb, in every piece. As always, it is a reflection of the human spirit, the human condition, and our exploration of what it all means in big ways and tiny moments.

Thank you to our editorial team this year, our contributing editors, Kathryn Savage, Juan Carlos Reyes, and Joan Naviyuk Kane, along with our assistant editors, Elizabeth Carls, Kayla Knoll, M.L. Schultz, and managing editor, Jenn Sisko, who worked so diligently to create another stellar collection of voices, story, and landscape: all of it dynamic, visceral, intimate, and grounding.

Thank you to the production team: Parker Sprout, Logan Myers, and Anne Kelley Conklin. *Water~Stone* just doesn't happen without these three generous (and flexible) souls.

Meghan Maloney-Vinz