

The  
Empty Hourglass  
Project

A stylized hourglass icon is positioned in the center of the text. The hourglass is rendered in a dark grey color. A thick, textured purple brushstroke is applied horizontally across the middle of the hourglass, partially obscuring it. The text "The Empty Hourglass Project" is arranged around the icon. "The" is on the top line, "Empty" is on the second line, and "Hourglass Project" is on the third line, with "Hourglass" and "Project" stacked vertically.



## Our Mission:

The Empty Hourglass Project is an ongoing community art project and safe space for people of all ages who've been affected by trauma, mental illness, abuse, addiction, suicide, and grief to share their stories, their art, and to experience healing through creative expression.

## Our Inspiration:

Growing up, I struggled an awful lot with mental illness and the effects of trauma. Whether it be my own demons, or those of a family member's or friend's, "unwellness" and survival mode wasn't just a terrible event that you eventually move on from and forget about. It was and always has been a recurring theme in my life and in many of the lives of those around me.

Art and self-expression are medicine just as much as psychotherapy and prescriptions scribbled on a notepad. Through every struggle, every downward spiral, and every moment of chaos, art has always been there to help me process, to rewrite, to take control, and to imagine and create a reality that is safer, kinder, and sometimes just simply easier to handle.

Although each chapter of my life has inspired or influenced the creation of the Empty Hourglass Project to some degree, it was the grief of losing my niece that was the ultimate catalyst. I hope as you walk through and read each story, you're reminded that you are understood by someone, somewhere; that what you've been through matters, and that your words, your life, and what you create in this world has value.

In your honor, Maddie. Love you always.

--Samantha Trionfo

## The Book:

Our original plan was to simply create a book retelling people's true stories through conceptual photography. While Empty Hourglass has grown into something so much larger, we haven't lost sight of our original goal.

Check back on our website for updates on publishing, release dates, and where to purchase volume 1 of *50 Lives. 50 Truths. Reimagined Through Art*. If you're interested in sharing your story for volume 2, you can do so either directly on our website or you can email us!

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# Thank You:

To all who've shared their stories and the most vulnerable moments of their lives with us, this project has been made more powerful and more poignant because of your courage. We thank you for your patience and for trusting us.

It's taken a village to get this far. I am tremendously grateful for those who have been supportive not only of the installation, but the project in its entirety. We have built something truly amazing, and it couldn't have happened without all of those listed.

*\*Extra\* Special Thanks:*

Much gratitude to the Community College of Baltimore County for their belief and support of the Empty Hourglass Project and the opportunity to showcase our art and raise awareness about the importance of mental health.

Special thanks to my dear friend Kiati Plooks (Kikibird!). I'm so glad you're a part of my life. You've helped me with so much, with different aspects of this project, and you simply make life better. You're wonderful. Thank you for being here.

Last, but certainly not least...The Nogginators. To the concept crew, the creative powerhouses, the big, beautiful brains that have stuck it out through thick and thin for the past 3 years who are always willing to whip up a new concept every Friday night, who don't mind getting themselves in unusual circumstances for the sake of a compelling shot, and who have probably fed me more home-cooked meals than I've made for myself. Thank you will never be enough. Your dedication means everything.

Andrew Key  
Rebecca Ellis  
Tim Brosius  
Go Go Nogginators!

## Photographers:

David Rohrbach  
Dave Schaible  
James Phelps  
Josh Triggs  
Kiati Plooks  
Mark Robert Rogers  
Michael Virts  
Scott Church  
Tim Brosius  
Todd Gardner

## Models:

Adam G.  
Amanda Y.  
Catrina Rae  
Dave Schaible  
Donald Dodson  
Donald Truong  
Jade Marie  
Jesse Fresco  
Joe Cabrera  
John Forman  
Liana Marie  
Lorna Darling  
Mandari Noir  
Rachel Berkey  
Rebecca Ellis  
Rebecca Sanicola  
Sarah Bentman  
Scott Thompson  
Tim Brosius  
Tracy Natasha  
Tylor Heagy  
Vivienne Rose

## Exhibit:

Alex Blackburn  
Allyson Trionfo  
Anne Lefter  
Ben McCusker  
Ben Pierce  
Bradley Norris  
Carlos Guillen  
Damon Krometis  
Emilyann Craighead  
Freddie Graves  
Gurpreet Singh  
Hninn Yee  
Jason Randolph  
Jennifer Casagrande  
Jennifer Heffner  
Johanna Lawrence  
Kiati Plooks  
Melinda Blomquist  
Nick Van Horn  
Nicole Buckingham Kern  
Paris Trionfo  
Rebecca Ellis  
Terri Raulie  
Terri Raulie's Fine &  
Performing Arts Class  
Tim Brosius  
Tolu Tijani  
Toni Oliver  
William Watson  
Xenel Islam  
Zykira Hill

## Too Loud in Here: Heroin Detox

Syd

Detoxing. My body aches everywhere like if you work out one day excessively, then the next day you're sore. I was tired, but couldn't sleep and when I tried, I was tossing and turning and my legs kept aching and were restless with bad muscle spasms. Standing up was the only way the legs didn't feel like that, but standing made me ache all over.

My mind kept racing with thoughts and memories of things that were really depressing me and I started having episodes of being maniacally happy and smiling and sitting alone and laughing out loud at my thoughts, and kept thinking of murder and ways to take control of the jail and start a riot and basically incite a cult like following.

Photographer: Scott Church  
Model: Donald Dodson  
Sketch: Syd

## Running in Circles: Gambling Addiction

L. Walsh

There's so much hope of a better life. Won't have to work anymore, will have all the finer things. "Just have to stay disciplined and follow your system. But that first \$100 is gone so you have to get that back and then it'll be smooth sailing from there on out."

And that's how the cycle builds and continues. Get that dopamine hit, just add a little more money, this time it's different. This time you won't let it get out of control. Round and round you go. Sometimes you're up and flying high, other times you're panicking and trying to claw your way out of the hole.

It's easy to say at least it's not drugs, at least it's not alcohol. The compulsive behavior and need to keep going is always the same

Photographer: Tim Brosius  
Model: Joe Cabrera

# Me, Myself, & I: Bipolar & BPD

Anonymous

"Living with Bipolar Disorder and BPD is like living with several versions of yourself in your head all at once. There's the calm, cool, and collected you. There's the raging angry you. There's even the "I need to be a baby today" version of you. It's hard waking up in the morning and not knowing which version wants to come out to play today. Even with medication, things are sometimes hard to manage.

Antidepressants caused my brain to fall even further off of the polar scale. They were upping me so much that I was flipping into mania. I was impulsive and I was having an incredibly hard time sitting still and focusing in my classes.

It can be so frustrating when I finally have the energy to positively interact and someone asks me "hey, are you manic?" It makes me feel like my happiness is invalid because of my mental illness. It can be really easy to forget who I am outside of my bipolar disorder. Sometimes I go through really long periods of depression and when the fog lifts, it can feel like I've missed an entire year of my life. Sometimes I go through long periods of hypomania and feel on top of the world. I recently graduated college Summa Cum Laude.

I'd love to say that it was all in part to my intelligence, but really I know that I owe part of that honor to my hypomania. I aced that semester with an A and a B.

I have come to a place now where I always tell people that I \*have\* bipolar disorder-- I am NOT bipolar. I refuse to let it gain control of my life.

I also live with Borderline Personality Disorder. While my BD mood swings tend to happen slowly over time, with BPD my mood swings can range from day to day, hour to hour, or even minute to minute. They are incredibly exhausting and painful because with BPD comes intense emotions. We are some of the most empathetic people on the planet. In my case, and in many other cases, my BPD came as a result of years of narcissistic abuse. Many people complain that people who suffer from BPD are narcissistic and attention-seeking. But we are far from it. We simply struggle with maintaining stable moods or control of ourselves. We don't set out to hurt people. In fact, when we do, we ruminate on it for days and weeks. We get urges to self-harm because the pain of our actions can be too much even for us. It's like constantly losing a battle with yourself. Even though you

don't want to do any of these things, it can be so incredibly hard not to.

One of the hardest things about having BPD is splitting. If I'm in a happy place with someone, I get attached rather quickly as a result of this. The second they let me down, even for the simplest of things, I immediately split and hate that person. I only think negative things about them and want them out of my life forever. After the episode is over, it's like repairing the damage to your house after a tornado. Sometimes, if you're lucky, you can recover a lot. However, sometimes you're not so lucky and you damage that relationship forever.

The stigma around both of these has always made it hard for me to openly discuss what I go through. I tend to retreat and become a hermit when I recognize episodes or moody periods coming on simply to avoid other people and the terrible things that they say. I hope that one day people will become more educated and stop shying away from learning how to be friends with people who suffer from mental illnesses."

# Escape Plan: Suicide

Samantha Trionfo

I've never felt like I belonged here. On this earth, in this body. A feeling of homesickness for a place that may not even exist has followed me every day of my life, and it only grows stronger as I grow older.

From a medical perspective, it's depression. A good dose of trauma. Definitely anxiety, some ADHD, and a number of other diagnoses I've collected along the way and stacked on my mental shelf. My teens and twenties were littered with turbulent relationships, self-harm, suicide attempts, and ambulance rides to the crisis unit with their beige walls, paper scrubs, and mirrorless, lockless bathroom. I was gifted an amazing mother who would move heaven and earth for her kids, but as a child, I still felt so desperately lonely, out of place, and starving for connection. As if I lived on the other side of a great, glass wall; never being able to fully interact with the world around me.

That dull ache of emptiness has never subsided. In fact, dare I say he's become an old friend. As twisted as it may seem, he's the one constant in my life. A toxic, roller-coaster ride of a relationship that's also strangely reliable.

His looming yet comforting presence is always there, sometimes hiding behind moments of contentment or joy, but I know his patterns when he begins to fully emerge once again.

The languid movements, the sinking weight that sits on my chest, the racing thoughts that cradle my mind. Those silent cries at 3 am where your body caves in and you struggle to breathe; rocking ever so slowly, limbs wrapped tightly around your pillow.

I want to run from him, but he's also the only one that can comfort me. I can look to him for a way out. He knows all sorts of ways.

There's solace in knowing that I can escape at any time.

Just follow through with that plan, purchase those tools, find that isolated location. I've researched it enough.

For now, I choose to stay.

But the option to leave is always there.

# God's Lion: Child Loss

Laura Austin

The name Arielle is a girl's name of French origin meaning "lion of God."

I saw that on Jeopardy one night while pregnant with her.

Her due date was poetic, 8-8-2018. Her astrological sign, Leo. My husband and I met at a university where Leo the Lion was the mascot. We met in the month of August 2005, were engaged in August 2011, and wed in August 2012. August 8th is my best friend's birthday. My husband and I felt blessed and saw signs everywhere that our years of infertility struggles were over and our dream of starting a family was coming true after 6 years of trying!

At the 10 week ultrasound, the doctor told me they could not get a good look at the baby's legs. It seemed innocent enough, but I sensed their hesitation to say much to me when they asked me to come back the following week. I went crazy with worry over what it could be. I asked another doctor who mentioned it could just be Clubfoot. I

remember looking in the mirror, sobbing, as I pounded my fists on the bathroom counter, enraged at the thought that my lil miracle might have something wrong. I knew I was getting the runaround.

After more testing, we learned that our baby had a rare genetic mutation called Fatal Skeletal Dysplasia and could not survive. Even if it went full term, it wouldn't be able to breathe once born. And we had to decide whether to continue the pregnancy.

I will never forget how that doctor hugged me and cried with us and how she broke the news that our baby was a girl.

For 5 weeks I had to wait and continue working. I don't remember much. My memory goes dark there. I was a zombie as I scheduled time off for the procedure and bereavement.

I was told that while it was an actual abortion that I needed, I should tell everyone I had a miscarriage. That really stung. I was told to lie to people, because our society is so messed

up that I would inevitably be judged for this decision, which I really had no choice but to make.

Sometimes women don't learn of these genetic mutations until much later in their pregnancy. I was actually lucky to find out early on, yet 10 weeks was the earliest they could have found it and it took another 2 weeks to complete testing and another few weeks to get scheduled at the hospital.

At 15 weeks gestation, the size of an apple, we said goodbye.

When I awoke in the hospital afterward, I sobbed uncontrollably with my husband. The doctor's asked if I was suicidal before putting me under anesthesia, and although I wasn't, it was the closest I had ever felt to it. I wasn't pregnant anymore, just hollow and empty.

I said to my husband that it felt trite to refer to her as "the baby we lost", so I asked if we could name her Arielle, since she was now God's lion.



# Breaking Free: Anxiety Acceptance

Kirk

We all have anxious moments in our lives. It's human nature, but some of us struggle with it (or have struggled with it) more than others. I suffer from anxiety and insomnia, so please let me tell you my story.

Allow me to begin by telling you about panic attacks. As the name suggests it's a sudden feeling of extreme anxiety. Your palms may begin to sweat, your hands may begin to tremble, your heart starts beating out of your chest. The worst part is that they often happen suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere and create a sense that you are losing control. Nothing bad is physically happening to you but your brain is telling you that something terrible is. You are essentially engaged in a battle with your own mind. It can be downright terrifying. Over the years I have learned to control it by using some specific techniques and mental exercises.

My other issue is at times horrible insomnia. This too is a lifelong struggle for me but it seems to get worse with age. Many a night I find myself struggling to shut off my mind. All kinds of thoughts race through and before I know it, I can hear the birds chirping and the sun's early light peeking through my curtains. I have tried every remedy known to man. Nothing seems to help. I have had nights where I literally can't sleep all night and then had to forcefully reset my circadian rhythm for the following week or so. Eventually I even out.

As a kid, I had to walk around with a pill bottle in my pocket with a few pills for anxiety. I would always put cotton balls or tissue paper in the bottle because I didn't want other kids to hear the pills clacking in my pocket...I was always afraid of the other kids finding out and thinking there was something wrong with me. Being an immigrant (I am from the former Soviet Union), I already had one stigma attached to it and as cruel as kids can be I didn't need another one. I remember one time going to a teen nightclub when I was about 16 only to see that security was patting people down. I got scared of my friends finding out about my bottle that I went outside and hid the contents in my sock. There was absolutely nothing illegal about it; it was prescribed to me by my doctor, but I was so scared of the stigma that I wanted to just hide it.

I've had to deal with that kind of stuff my whole life really. As an adult, I encountered certain things that later caused my anxiety issues to spike, but after some medical treatment and some introspective thinking with the help of therapy, I have managed to control it for the most part but it's still something I deal with and probably will for the rest of my life.

I am done hiding! There are millions of people who have these kinds of issues. More than you may know. Much more. And you what? We are all normal! Like I said before, we all get anxious, we all have weak moments, but most importantly we are all human.



# The Spread of Poison: Domestic Violence

Amanda

Every little girl wants to be daddy's little girl. In my world, daddy's little girl was a twisted dark nightmare for me. My nightmare was filled with physical abuse, verbal abuse, and mental. If I didn't do something to his standard, he would drag me through the house by my long hair and make me start over. He would beat me with a belt and dare to me to tell someone. He would even threaten to kill all of us so nobody could ever know. One night my nightmare turned for the worse. My dad took advantage of his little girl when she had a stomachache. I had a stomachache and he used that as a time to touch my private area and continued to proceed until he completely sexually violated me in every way at 14. He made me promise to never tell anyone or I would regret it. For years I was sexually and mentally abused by my father.

When I was older, I thought I found the man of my dreams only to find out it was another nightmare. This man made me feel like a queen and that is how he had me. Once I was head over heels in love with him that's when the abuse started. He choked me with a hair dryer cord, he pushed

me downstairs, he choked me with his bare hands, he hit me, and he shot me with a bb gun right in the chest. He stabbed my private area telling me that no other man will ever have me or love me. He forced me to get an abortion alone. He would isolate me and make me feel unloved and then tell me it's my fault. He would make me feel all alone and that he was the only one I needed but yet he continued to give silent treatments and abuse me if I didn't do something he liked.

He busted my ear drum one night and fought me to the ground and told me I was nothing and would never be loved again.

Somehow, I got the courage to finally walk away and turn back, but the damage is done and I'm not sure I will ever recover from both these men who were supposed to be people that loved and cared for me.

## Battle Scars: Self-Harm

Catrina Rae

I tried to stop cutting myself a couple of times through the years, but every time I felt overwhelmed, I found myself going right back to it. I stopped at 16, at 17, I had to stop myself again at 19, and I was starting to feel like I was healing, finally, around age 20. Then, after what had to have been 2 years of successfully not harming myself, I found myself overwhelmed again. The worst of my scars, to this day, are on each of my forearms. Both arms tell different stories with similar themes. Both sets of scars I have lied about more times than I've ever told the truth about. Both sets of scars are the freshest scars I have, both done within the last five years.

For years, I've never wanted people to know how weak I once was, and better yet, how weak I still think I am. It took watching others, who are much stronger than me, share their stories for me to start to understand; that part of the recovery process is having the strength to admit to all of the ways I've hated myself, my body, and my mind. That part of stopping the tunnel vision is recognizing that it's something I may actively need to fight again one day. Lastly, that the strength I need to find in myself

comes from admitting I was once so weak. I can't take it back, and now, as a model, I hate the scars that cover my body. I regret them; my scars display my weakness.

I'm sure I'll never love them, but I find solace in knowing that my scars are a physical representation of the eleven-year journey that made me strong. I still feel the pangs of embarrassment and shame when someone asks me about them. I still feel offended when people try to tell me "don't do that, you're beautiful." Because, yea, yea, so I've heard. But now go tell my younger self.

My only hope from this is that telling my story, and letting it out there, helps me get past that embarrassment. Or, just maybe, makes someone else get help a little quicker than I did. If there is one myth I wish I could dispel, it's that getting help makes you weak. It doesn't. Getting help is brave, and trying to hide your flaws makes you incapable of evolving past them.

# What's Left Behind: Alcohol Addiction

Anonymous

My dad died about thirty years ago.

When I was growing up, he had what I would call a well-managed relationship with alcohol. He got drunk, but never at times or places where it would interfere with work or family. He generally had a highball or a beer after work, maybe one or two watching football. He wasn't the kind of guy who got mean or sloppy when drunk. He was fairly typical of dads of that era, I think. Not a monster, nor a saint. Just a guy getting along.

Dad had not done well after he and my mom divorced. He did not do well living alone, and his second wife...had issues. She didn't stick around after he was diagnosed with cancer.

He lost a leg due to side effects from chemotherapy, and the whole experience put him into a tailspin that he never recovered from. The deterioration of his mental health made it harder to take care of his physical health, and the decline of his physical health made his mental health problems worse. In the end, it killed him after ten years of slow decline.

My sister and I had to clean out his apartment. It was a sad job, made sadder by the evidence of what his life had been like laid out around us.

The apartment was FULL of junk, the sort of junk advertised on late-night TV and QVC. A fair amount had never been taken out of the boxes. There was a path from the bedroom, to the recliner in the living room in front of the big screen TV, to the kitchen. If you were to do this scene in modern times, it would be junk from Amazon.

Junk, and liquor bottles – the plastic ones cheap whiskey came in, and 7Up bottles. He evidently never lost his taste in cocktails.

This being the days of videotape, a significant part of the junk was VHS tapes. Some of it was popular movies, but a lot of it was porn, and about half of it gay porn. If my dad was bisexual, I had no idea of it growing up, though his generation never would have let on, and I don't think he was any different

## Eat Your Heart Out: OCD

Carlye Fenner

I was 17 years old at the time in 2005 & living in El Cajon, CA. I was a healthy 117 lbs. Shockingly, I wasn't content with my weight. I felt the need to lose a bit to be happy. So, when I started my junior year in high school, I joined an aerobics class in P.E.

After a few weeks, I noticed that I was losing some unnecessary weight, which I was thrilled! However, I got to a certain point where I was losing TOO much TOO soon. I was restricting my food intake. I was limiting myself to drinking less fluids. On top of me joining aerobics, I also joined the track & field team. Each day was getting worse & worse. I started to become very irritable, tired, & weak.

Unfortunately, I couldn't stop doing what I was doing. 3 Months later, my family & I moved from El Cajon, CA to Maryland, & by that time in August 2005, I was a dangerous 69 lbs! I was terrified. I didn't know what else to do? When I started my senior year at my new high school, I reached a breaking point. I've had enough. I wanted to end my life. So I wrote a suicidal note & gave it to my teacher. Not 30 minutes later, I was sent to my counselor & she immediately had me sent to the crisis center with my mom. Once we arrived, I got a VERY stern reprimand. The doctor I saw at the crisis center basically told me, "you need to eat your heart out!"

So.....I took that literally & seriously. Within a matter of a few weeks, I put all my healthy weight back on & was feeling better! I've been struggling with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder since 2005 & I continue to do so today. However, I've been trying to manage my OCD very carefully & in a healthier manner. I never want to go down that dangerous path again! My heart could've easily given out. Thankfully, my family rescued me just in the nick of time.

Photographer: Mark Robert Rogers  
Model: Sarah Bentman

## Master & Servant: Crack Cocaine

Adam G.

I was 28. Working for one of the biggest brokerage houses on Wall Street making good money. The problem was I was addicted to crack cocaine. She was my Master and I Her servant. There were many times when I didn't want to get high, but at the fork in the road, I took the wrong turn. AGAIN!!

One night I found myself in an abandoned building in East NY, Brooklyn. I was no stranger to this place, but tonight was going to be different and I had no idea.

When I had previously gone there I would get \$30 - \$50 worth. That night I had \$300. They said no problem, just come this way - I went. I walked into a small room with a card table, 2 chairs, 1 VERY SCARY man, a loaded gun, and a full crack pipe. He told me he thinks I'm a cop and if I didn't pick up the pipe and do the full hit, my brains would be on the wall, too.

I looked - there was blood on the wall. I did the hit. At first, it felt good. Then I realized that there was a loaded gun on the table and if I refused I would be dead. I got what I wanted and left.

It took 6 months of agony but I haven't and will never smoke crack again.

Photographer: Scott Church  
Models: Adam G. & Rebecca Ellis

# The Nightmare: Post Infidelity Stress Disorder

## Mandari Noir

I fell in love. Years had been spent building a friendship and relationship. We had ups and downs, we learned and grew. We had built a life together. We experienced firsts, loss, and celebrations together. That was my person. I could tell him anything, trust him with anything, and rely on him to be there no matter what. Relationships aren't easy, but I felt so happy, so at peace, so whole. I saw other people struggling and breaking up. I believed what we had was rare. We did everything together. Over eight years we truly knew each other. We were relationship goals to many other people.

In a moment, the life I thought I had, had been shattered and turned upside down. The person that I trusted the most and expected to protect and care for me was the very person that hurt me, leaving me in a state of incomprehension.

We had gotten engaged six months earlier. We were planning our wedding. We booked the venue, a beach wedding like I always wanted. I had asked my friends to be my bridesmaids and sent out save the date cards. My heart sunk when I saw that message notification at the top of my phone. "Are you engaged to be married to him? He's been meeting me at hotels". I responded that it was sick to try and sabotage what we had together, I couldn't believe this to be true. But then she described exactly what he had on.

He was my best friend. I was the happiest I had ever been...we had ever been, right? How could he do this to me? I looped

everything back in my head. Where did I go wrong? How didn't I know? What is wrong with me? Why wasn't I good enough? As if it's not bad enough that my mind wouldn't shut off replaying this nightmare, I tried to sleep to escape just to be awoken with night terrors.

I was losing control. I started drinking every day just to numb myself and feel nothing. But when I woke up I would just feel ten times worse. I remember leaving the bar one faded night. Driving back to my new, empty apartment I wailed like my soul was leaving my body. I lost track of time. I couldn't escape the pain that I was reliving every day. Being sober meant facing the pain, not numbing to avoid it.

Months had passed. People were showing interest in me. I missed companionship but I didn't trust anyone. I over-analyzed and question everything. I didn't know how to identify a real threat anymore. I pushed them away. I couldn't stop even if I wanted to because my brain had physically changed the way it reacted to situations and was always on edge, fight, or flight. The way it learned to protect itself was to its very detriment.

The trauma response I was suffering from, similar to PTSD, was called Post Infidelity Stress Disorder.

## Rise of the Phoenix: Self-Love

Rebecca Ellis

The saying, "You are your own worst critic" is an understatement. I'll take it up a notch and then some. It's exhausting and sometimes it feels like a full-time job. What if I told others out there who are like me that we didn't have to do this?

The flood gates open with just a single glance of someone else's highlight reel on social media. That's all it takes to be ridden with insecurity, inadequacy, and insufficiency. "She's way prettier..." "There's no point in doing that, she's clearly better than me..." "Why would you waste your time? She clearly has you beat in all regards. You are so stupid for even trying."

Lies. Lies I surrender to on a daily basis.

I will fight. I will keep fighting. Because for even just those few seconds of telling myself these things are not true and for that fleeting moment of possibly believing it, it's worth fighting to transform into a permanent feeling. For the sake of my sanity and all I have to give in this world, I will fight.

Photographer: Tim Brosius  
Model: Rebecca Ellis

## Detached: Abortion

Kaia Celine

I could've been a mother

"I didn't squeeze it out of him"

Pros and Cons but what did he think?

"It's up to me"

Betrayed and abandoned, how would I have protected my child?

I shut it all out and couldn't function the same.

"I didn't realize it still bothered you"

I could've been a mother by circumstance

How would I have protected my child, when I was shutting down?

I'm missing my baby that could've been

Thankful to not be connected to him

Photographer and Editor: Tim Brosius

# Mirror, Mirror: Breaking Generational Trauma

John Forman

My parents met in a mental institution, and although they both loved me dearly, neither were fit to have children. My mother has numerous mental illnesses, including severe schizophrenia. When I was around two years old my mother had a psychotic breakdown where she intended on taking both our lives. Since then, she has not been a big part of my life. My father had an addictive personality which led him to alcoholism. I really was his favorite thing in the entire world, but when he drank he would become physically violent toward me. Eventually, I was the reason he became clean from everything. He meant well.

When I turned nine my father's mental health rapidly deteriorated. He was diagnosed with drug-induced psychosis due to severe medication abuse. After a year and a half of struggling with different medications and hospital stays, he tragically decided to take his own life. After he passed things only got worse. I felt so alone. I had this overwhelming emptiness and numbness. I was now a continuance 'of the cycle'. I would use drugs, steal alcohol, steal cigarettes, lash out at people, be promiscuous,

get arrested, hated everyone, ect. I moved from family member to family member even changing states. I was too much to handle. I went from a college-level education in a private school in seventh grade to flunking in special education classes for no other reason than my emotional distress. For many years I was a monster and blamed my upbringing. I hated the world and especially myself. I didn't see myself living past high school.

After many difficult years, I have learned to break 'the cycle'. I am not my trauma and my trauma must stop with me. I used to hate looking in the mirror because all I saw was this monster I allowed my traumas to turn me into. I had to break free from my demons and the intrusive thoughts that held me hostage.

Photographer: Todd Gardner  
Editor: Tim Brosius  
Model: John Forman.



# Monsters in the Machine: The Trauma of Suicide

Jesse Fresco

Last September, I went through a bad breakup with the woman I loved (remaining nameless for privacy, if you know you know). It was a terrible breakup because Covid drove a wedge between us. We couldn't see each other and so I ended it figuring, whatever, it's fine, I'll find someone else. I drove myself into my work in order to distract myself and figured if I made a lot of money, I would be happy regardless of whether I was with someone or not.

Only now am I realizing my terrible mistake. Society in America tends to view men struggling with mental health issues as something that must be endured in silence so I never addressed it or brought it up. I just buried my feelings and threw myself deeper into my job in the film business. But when the work in Richmond finally ended, I realized how much of a mistake I'd made and how much I missed her, and still miss her.

For the past month, I've been in a deep depression which I thought would pass, but a few nights ago, I had a nightmare that shook me. I dreamed of my ex hanging from a noose dead and I woke up sweating and crying. At that moment, I knew I needed help. I spoke to my closest friends and they all agreed that this isn't just my September break up. I'm still carrying the guilt and PTSD of Jinx Wintersteen's death. It's been buried for so long and my mind merged the two, telling me that I needed to talk to someone about this.

I've been crying for four days straight, I've barely eaten, and sleep maybe three hours a night. I've attempted to reach out to my ex but she has restricted her social media from me. Not blocked or deleted, just restricted, which gives me hope that we can someday make amends because I made a terrible mistake. I put money ahead of the ones I loved and now I'm paying for it.

Were it not for the encouragement of my close friends, Seth, Erin, Charles, Melissa, and Rebecca, as well as my own mother, I wouldn't be seeking counseling. I will be getting a counselor soon to help work out my mental issues and straighten myself out. I've carried this pain for so long and the flood gates just opened all at once. My ex has since moved on to someone else and that's okay. She's happy and I want her to be happy. I just hope that someday we can make amends because no matter what I will always love her with every fiber of my being. But I made a mistake based on poor judgment and I'm now paying for it. That nightmare of her dead swinging from a rope broke something in me and I now know that the trauma I've been holding on to hasn't receded.

If you're a man, it's okay to discuss your feelings. You don't have to carry your burdens alone. Talk to your friends and family. Take time for them. Don't work yourself to death. Force yourself to stop and settle for a moment. I've made a new

work rule for myself. From now on, in the film business, I no longer work weekends. That is my rule. I will never work a sixth day again. If me not working a sixth day is too much for a best boy to handle, then I'd rather be fired. I'm at a point where I'd rather be happy than rich. The film business is built to break people, and for the last ten years it's taken so much from me. So many lost relationships and broken promises all for a paycheck.

I know Covid was the main culprit of my break up. My case in that regard isn't special. But I could have been more patient and just waited for her. I could have just held out a little longer and things might have turned a corner. But at the time I was rash and abrasive and just tired. I will regret that choice for the rest of my life. I don't know if she will read this post, or if she even thinks about me, but I just hope she is happy with the man she is with now. I will finally be getting help to achieve the mental clarity I desperately need.

And if you are reading this, just know that I'm so sorry for the pain I caused. You were the best thing that ever came into my life and I miss you.

# The Intruders: Cyber-Bullying

Melanie Soule

He wanted something I wasn't willing to give.

It's MY body. My 'no' should be enough.

It wasn't.

First, it was a pleading email, followed by an email full of insults and death wishes when I declined. That fast. Minutes after rejection, it became "I hope you die" and a string of expletives. Then he sent an email with apologies an hour later. He just didn't understand why I treated him this way when he was nice!

All I said was no. I even explained my answer, and I wished him luck in finding what he desired. He acted as though I were gatekeeping something he had every right to take at will.

Many more emails came, under different names, always using the same pattern and verbiage. Then the social media stalking began. He sent multiple direct messages daily and commented on dozens of photos on every social platform I used for weeks, under his name at first. Each comment was some sort of guilt attempt, insult, or request.

He created new emails, new Instagram accounts, and new Twitter accounts. Always the same pattern. Each time I blocked him, he popped up as a different account name, but still related to his original name. When I blocked a media account, an email would show up in my inbox asking why I was being this way, followed by more insults. Each time I shoved him away, he crawled in another opening!

Throughout all of this, I worried other followers would see his comments and believe the things he accused me of or called me. I developed this fear that everything I built as a social media presence would be destroyed. Years of energy, effort, sharing, and love, all soiled & toppled by one entitled penis who didn't take no for an answer. He forced his way in, ignoring my anger, ignoring my denial, ignoring my right to choose.

One night, I had this dream. Chatting away with my sister in my beautiful home, I heard a noise. Someone was at my front door. I walked through the decorated hall with framed pictures and art thoughtfully placed, into the living room. The door had been forced open, and 2 dark figures slithered in there as if they had every right to be! I yelled and pushed and shoved and threatened! I finally forced them out of my home, but not before they swore I would regret it. I turned and leaned against the triple locked door, my back feeling the vibrations of their pounding protest, only to notice my home was ruined. The walls were cardboard. The pictures were flimsy paper blowing away through the torn roof.

The years long harassment was entitled and downright invasive. I hadn't realized just how much it shook me until I had that dream. The worst part of it is I have no recourse. It's a game to him, and as of today it continues, though intermittently.

It no longer has power over me.

Photographer: James Phelps  
Edits: Tim Brosius  
Model: Melanie Soule (known as Vivienne Rose)

# The Empty Hourglass Project

The logo features a grey outline of an hourglass. A thick, textured purple brushstroke is applied across the center of the hourglass, partially obscuring it.

The Gallery at CCBC Essex

Exhibition Dates: October 10 - December 2, 2022

Reception Date: October 28, 6-8pm

Curator: Samantha Trionfo



visit [thegalleriesatccbc.com/empty-hourglass-project](https://thegalleriesatccbc.com/empty-hourglass-project)

