



Valerie Ward (Anthony) about six years old, 1984

Valerie Anthony
Senior Capstone
English Studies - Creative Writing & Social Action
Creative Project
Dr. Jennifer Fletcher
School of Humanities and Communication
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Out Of A Darkness:

A Collection of Ramblings, Short Stories and Poetry

V. Anthony

Dedication

To my three boys, Clifton DeShaun, Caiden Pierre, and Collin Jayce. Thank You for choosing me, and riding this roller coaster with me; we are 4TeamAnthony always and forever.

To Delilah and Soon for your friendship, love, and unwavering acceptance.

To Rebekah and Leorance - Thank you for letting me be your big sister.

To Johnnie...for being a Father.

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Senior Capstone Creative Project Proposal

1. Name and Area of Concentration:

Valerie Anthony

English Studies - Creative Writing & Social Action

2. Project Description:

The work will be a collection of short stories, poetry and ramblings. Ramblings are those works that are not in short story or poetic form, but thoughts I feel and experience then put down in written artistic form. My style of rambling will also be found throughout my poems or short stories, as I enjoy the mindlessness of rambling as a way to express deep thoughts in my work. The pieces chosen will utilize both my imagination and personal experiences to convey this part of myself to the audience.

4. Purpose:

The purpose of my project is to express my life's experiences in written word, from a young child to now in full circle; much like the theme of Capstone, "Change, Transition, & Transformation"

5. Format Rationale:

To format my creative project in a multitude of ways, I am able to better flow with my own creative process and imagination. When I write, or begin to write, it is after an idea or thought has come to me or piqued my curiosity; that inspiration takes on many forms in my mind. I may see a timeline of characters playing out in a short story, like the

stories I read in books, or it plays across my mind in the form of a movie, which I will then translate into a screenplay. The better connected to how my writing flows, and the truer I stay to the process guarantees the success and authenticity of the end product.

6. Capstone Title:

“Out Of A Darkness” A Collection of Ramblings, Short Stories and Poetry”

7. Working Summary:

Daily writing and reflection will be necessary to shape the overall theme of the project. It will also be necessary to do multiple drafts and edits of each piece chosen/written in order to ensure reader understanding and technical difficulty such as in the poems.

8. Expectations:

My project will show some of my own progress from childhood to adulthood, in step with our Capstone theme, “Change, Transition, & Transformation”. The first project proposal due on Oct 4, won’t be very detailed as I am still feeling my way around what exact inspiration per piece will look like and unfold as. I will need to try and connect with progress reports 1 and two, to include creating a resume to add to the final portfolio.

9. Specific Skills and Tools Required:

While I enjoy the process of research, it took me a few weeks into Capstone to realize that I am better suited for the creative process. It comes naturally to me, and I have established particular skills that I have been crafting since childhood really. It wasn’t until attending courses here at CSUMB that these skills were really able to be understood and expressed. I won’t need much to write and document my ideas, a laptop/device, pen/paper when I’m out and about and an idea strikes. A necessary tool I

do believe is to try and walk daily. I have found that walking for about 45 minutes to an hour really pushes ideas and inspiration through.

10. Next Steps:

I will need to try and be aware of upcoming deadlines, such as the progress reports and final deliverables. The biggest issue I see arising is that writing creativity may not flow on a daily or regular timeline. I may have an idea, but it may be a week or two, or even longer before the process fully unfolds to complete work. I will have to allow the creative process, while still keeping myself on a realistic timeline.



“My First Day”

I wasn't rich growing up, but my mother only drove a Benz, and we were the only black family in the black neighborhood to have a swimming pool in the backyard that everyone else in the neighborhood talked about. We were not a poor family, but my parents kept books of food stamps that they had traded to those in the project apartments where my stepfather was the maintenance guy. Those families needed the food, but preferred the money. She wasn't a movie star, but my mom looked like Claire Huxtable, on her worst day. She wasn't a doctor or nurse, but our mother worked with sick children on the night shift at All Children's Hospital. I was her daughter, but she didn't seem to notice me, and we were a family living in the same home, but I only knew her in passing.

I was still fumbling with the latch lock on the screen door when she approached me from behind. Sensing her presence and feeling her agitation, I tried fumbling faster, which only kept me trapped inside the house with her. “Move girl!” I heeded her demand, standing motionless to the side while she took on the task of clicking and unhinging the lock latch I had failed at. I moved quickly back into motion to hurry out as she pushed the screen door forward, stepping onto the front porch and letting the

rubber-band like force of it spring closed, behind her. The music of the radio station was blaring from the already running car, warming the engine up, as Luther Vandross belted out...

“Oh, my love

A thousand kisses from you is never too much

I just don’t wanna stop

Oh, my love

A million days in your arms is never too much

I just don’t wanna stop

Too much, never too much

Never too much, never too much”

It was my first day of Kindergarten. I opened the passenger side of the two door car, carefully, knowing better than to get water on my new clothes on the first day of school. The jet stream of water my stepfather had used to hose off the diesel engine classic was still trickling down, rinsing away the vale of fog and condensation that greets you on a Florida morning. Reaching down at the floor, I pulled up on the lever, to spring the seat forward, then helped with a final push so I could climb into the backseat, stopping briefly to untangle myself and my brand new blue Care Bear backpack I was wearing, from the dangling seatbelt contraption. Once free, I sat down to buckle myself in, backpack still on, just in time to look up as my stepfather went to kiss my mother, but I quickly looked away again. I never watched. I hated watching. I didn’t like seeing their affection; it made me uncomfortable, and confused, at a time I was still too young to put it into words.

My mother got into the car, her “baby” she liked to call it, carefully positioning the mug containing her second or maybe third dose of coffee, where she wanted it, put the car in gear and we were off;, she didn’t buckle up, she never buckled up back then. As we turned onto the busy street, she nodded her head along to the beating of the music playing from the only radio station her car was ever tuned to, 98.3, The Oldies. She increased the volume not so loud to disturb other drivers as we drove, but loud enough I knew not to speak; windows cracked, allowing the warm air to power dry the car for us as we sailed along the sea of concrete, the wind acting like a chorus to Chakka Khan, Aretha Franklin, or whatever singer from back in the day was up next with something to tell us. Singers, so old to me, so out of sync with the times I watched passing me by out the window.

She drove with her left arm propped in the window, and her right elbow resting on her thigh, while just her wrist and fingers turned the wheel where she wanted us to go. It was almost as if the car drove itself, she just had to be in it. I sat in the back, listening to her sing, imagining what she must really be like to people that knew her. I thought she was a real talent, and maybe she even used to be someone famous because she looked so much like the Cosby kids’ mom; men of all types, shapes and sizes would stop to stare, agreeing with me.

I didn’t mind anymore when she walked past me, leaving her scent to linger as I tried to follow, she didn’t mind at all when I finally got the hint to no longer try. I would hold that scent for years, I could smell it on her now as the breeze brought it to me, floating on the the circulated wind, perfume mingling with the smell of coffee in her mouth as she sang her duet with Anita Baker...

“Ooh-ooh-ooh. Ooh-ooh. Ooh-ooh-ooh.

If I could I’d give you the world

Wrap it all around you

Won’t be satisfied

With just a piece of his heart

My angel

Oh, angel”

That scent from Christmas morning was on the first doll I remember unwrapping from Santa. I think she liked the smell too and asked Santa for some, because she always smelled like my dolls after that.

We drove a while, past the streets I knew, past parts of the city I had only seen a few times, then to unfamiliar signs, buildings, complexes and shopping centers I had never seen. I sat quietly, listening, looking out and smelling, wondering what school would be like. So many shiny new backpacks, everyone in their clean-for-now, first day of school shoes. Kids my age, older ones too, walked up and into the building with the big sign above, as we pulled into the car drop off zone of “Bear Creek Elementary School”.

The brakes of yellow school buses mingled with the morning drop off sounds to add more beats to the already thumping footsteps bustling to classrooms. Moms and dads, pulling up, stepping out, waving goodbye, walking alongside overwhelmed newcomers. Hugs given, kisses blown, hands held to comfort and accompany nervous new arrivals to the new system of life that is school. Littles like me turning to give one

more wave, or receive one more smiling nod of assurance from a parent or grandma. Without hesitation, I unbuckled and proceeded to get out of the car.

She was happy, for the moment, riding in her “baby” with her coffee and her love songs. I knew better than to shift her morning peace into an evening rage by making her late for work. She never looked back, remaining uninterested in the jitters happening inside me, yet another emotion, or experience, which I had never been given the tools or the freedom to express to her. I reached down at the floor, pulled up on the lever, to spring the seat forward. With a final push, reaching for the door handle, pushing it open while climbing out of the backseat - stopping briefly to untangle myself from the seat belt, dangling there like a contraption trapeze.

Free now, I closed the car door behind me, stepped onto the walkway, and clumsily moved forward into the first day of school that had suddenly become confusion and chaos swelling up as tears in my eyes.

“Hi sweetie, is this your first day?” I hadn’t seen her approach me, but I nodded a yes to the kindness in her voice, and quietly answered “Valerie” when she responded “Okay, what’s your name?”

She had a clipboard in her left hand and with her right hand she gently touched my shoulder as she searched for my name on her list of names.

“Valerie Ward” she asked, in what also felt like a statement, finding me there at the bottom, “Yes” I said with another simultaneous nod. “Alright sweetie, you’re in Mrs. Winter’s Class, let’s go this way, I’ll take you.” She gestured, maintaining her grip on the clipboard with her left hand, while guiding me along with her right hand to Mrs. Winter’s class.

It was my first day of school, and I didn't know it then, but what felt like the beginning, was really the end and the start of something else. The beginning of books, stories, places in the pictures of the pages of geography class I would imagine myself to go, I could imagine my life to be. Like strings unraveling, pulling me away from home, away from my mother. It was the end of me looking to see myself and be seen in my mothers eyes, to seeing and holding myself through my own.

As we headed off, I didn't look back at my mother. The Diesel engine roaring back to life with her foot on the pedal, told me she wasn't waiting for me to; even now, I can still hear the lyrics of Stevie Wonder singing to me as she drove away...

" I just called to say how much I care

I just called to say I love you

And I mean it from the bottom of my heart

No summer's high, no warm July

No harvest moon to light one tender August night

No autumn breeze, no falling leaves

Not even time for birds to fly to southern skies

No Libra sun, no Halloween

No giving thanks to all the Christmas joy you bring

But what it is, though, oh, so new

To fill your heart like no three words could ever do".

“Twenty Steps”

They were seated by age in the front pew of the Pentecostal Church of Christ on 1st and 10th in St. Petersburg’s south side. He sat beside his sister Noa, sandwiched between her and their baby sister Beckett; the eldest of the four, Valerie sat beside their mother. Blocks from his home at the corner of 19th and 22nd, just a walk from the neighborhood pool and city park where he and his cousins planned to dedicate their summer days in just one week. He was grateful for the break of waking earlier than the white kids on the north side of the burg whose travel to school didn’t include greeting the school bus an hour before the bell rang to fulfill a bus quota only south siders seemed to fill.

He looked around the church, turning his head slowly, stiffly, trying to get a glimpse of all the people he knew and study those he didn’t, all of them here to say goodbye to his father, Rodrick Ethan Mayers Sr. His Aunts Licia and Diane were there, his Uncle Irvin, Uncle Van and his wife Annette, and Uncle James, who everyone in the family called “Uncle Bobo” was just walking in with his serious “for now” girlfriend, Linda. Ms. Lynell, his weekend girl, who came to the occasional family barbecue when Linda was out of town had already arrived, placed upstairs in the balcony with the children by mean old Miss Dela, one of the ushers, who knew she wasn’t there to show only her respects.

All the cousins were there. Bruce, Tonya, Bryan, Van Leer, Shawn, Rebekah, the twins Clifton and Caiden and their younger brother Collin, and cousin Christa with her brother and his best friend, Christopher. His mother’s parents were sitting in the pew behind them, Grandma Isabell and Grandpa Lee and their oldest daughter, his mother’s

only sibling, Aunt Michelle and her daughters, Jennifer and Stephanie. The neighbors had come, Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins from next door, the Anthony's from across the street, the Clarkson family, who owned the neighborhood store at the end of the block. Mrs. Winter, his fifth grade teacher and Mr. Jones, his 4th grade teacher, both having taught his eldest sisters and cousins. The teachers had grown up with his father in the same St. Pete streets, and were only two of a handful of Black teachers in the school. Co-workers from the Sun Coast Credit Union, where his father had been a loan Officer for 15 years. He had met them a few times, but couldn't remember their names.

As a family, the six of them did not attend church often, his parents were not deeply religious. They attended the ritual Easter Service every year in brand new suits for he and his father, and sparkly new dresses for the girls. God was never a real topic of discussion in their home, but there was not the need to challenge an existence either. His Father had believed that God was a part of a man, always with you; and being in church every time the doors opened wasn't going to change that, make you better, or worse. Nonetheless, the church had always been open to them as a family and they always maintained a "member" status; and today was no different than if they had attended each early morning Sunday school, Sunday morning Sermon, Wednesday night Bible study and the occasional revival. Pastor Willus Brown and his First Lady, Mrs. Demetra Brown welcomed them with love, open arms, and a song from the church choir, led by Mrs. Brown herself.

"A loving husband and father," Pastor Brown praised, *"active in his community, raised as a boy within the walls of this very same church, Rodrick Sr., will never be forgotten. I baptized him myself with his mother and father as witness, God rest their*

souls, they are together again, as we all will be together again, in the presence of the Lord, for this life is only temporary and this body is just a home for the spirit man, the spirit man lives forever. Genie, David, your baby is coming home”.

Heads nodded and the church said “Amen” and “Thank You Jesus” and the piano sounded as a hymn began. “Junior”, his mother whispered from somewhere beneath her tears and red face, expressing a broken heart on her yellow - redbone skin, “it’s time to say goodbye to daddy baby”. Say goodbye. Goodbye to daddy, echoed in his mind, the ushers were waiting at the end of his row, he had stalled with his taking in of the service and its attendees, his older sisters Valerie and Noa were already making their passes in front of the coffin; Beckett the youngest, was not phased by his non-movement. She seemed just as dazed, but even more confused than he was, understanding nothing and everything at the same time, her younger age saving her from feeling the worst of it.

Despite the doctor's wishes, his father refused to live out the remainder of his life in the hospital, and so they brought him home. The whole family pitched in to help out; cooking, cleaning, sitting with him, talking to him, waiting with him. Rodrick Sr, was weak, but still smiling, watching Jr. do homework on the living room floor. His father had been there with him, and for him, until the end. Time to say goodbye to dad. He hadn’t seen his dad in over a week now, the cancer had taken over, it had gone unawares and unchecked for so long. His parents decided on aggressive treatment, but doctors warned it may not be enough.

He moved slowly, stiffly, the same way he had looked around the big old church, seated in the pew, taking it all in. He thought how normal his life had been just two years

before, and how normal it became after his father's diagnosis, then the new normalcy of their lives after the failed treatment and when the next normal became waiting for his father to die. He wondered what normal would look like tomorrow and the next day and the next day after that and what normal would ever look like for him the rest of his life. He had never seen a dead body, but this was not a dead body, it was his dad, and he had just seen his dad, but that was a week ago, and his dad was dead now.

One step. He was not afraid, but still something gripped him as he shuffled closer. Two steps. The choir was singing louder than before. Louder, three steps. His two older sisters had done it, so yes he could do it too, his eldest sister was crying, sobbing, she never cried, Val never cried, Dad never cried. Four steps. Crying...his aunts, his cousins, his uncles, Mrs. Winter, everyone was crying, sobbing, someone screaming, "Help Me Jesus, no Jesus!" Five steps. He had not cried yet. Six steps. Not when his parents sat him down and told him and his sisters the news. Not once the chemo treatments started and his father became weaker and weaker.

He hadn't cried in that last week when his father lacked the energy to speak to him, but could only watch him from the medical bed set up in the makeshift hospital space of their home, along with the nurse that insurance and hospice had provided. Seven steps. Not one tear fell two days later when his father could no longer watch him remain faithful to the ritual of sitting on the living room floor doing his homework. And he didn't even cry Thursday afternoon, after being released early from school when his Uncle picked him up, arriving home with only enough time to watch the ambulance leave with his father's body inside. Eight steps.

Even Pastor Brown's dark face drowned in tears at the loss. Nine steps. Still Jr. had not cried and he hadn't felt like crying, but now, something was lumping in his throat, tightening his chest. Ten steps. He wanted his mother, turned for his mother, but she was no longer behind him, she had not made it, she had stopped, broken, sobbing; trying to make it with the help of her family, to say goodbye to him, his father, her husband, her love. Eleven steps.

"I am Free

Praise the Lord, I'm free

No longer bound

No more chains holding me

Souls is resting

And it's another blessing

Praise the Lord

Hallelujah, I'm free"

Pastor Brown choked and sobbed out the words, and the choir was still singing, they were sobbing and singing. Why were they still singing and preaching? Jr. thought, didn't they know his father had died, didn't they know his father didn't go to church but on Easter Sunday and it was not Easter? Twelve steps. And why were they singing of his being free of chains? His father was not bound, they couldn't know that he had lived a great life with him, his sisters and his mother. They wouldn't sing those words, if they knew Rodrick Mayers Sr. truly. Thirteen steps. The man they sang about, his father, had not asked to be free of his life and his family, Jr. knew that, he would always know that.

Fourteen steps. Almost there. Fifteen steps. Under the gaze and outward prayer of Pastor Brown, *“Lord help this child, be with him in his grief, Lord, you are his father now”*. Sixteen steps. The thumping was deafening, and as he neared his father’s casket, Jr. was unable to tell if the thumping came from the drums as he glanced their way, or the pounding of his own heart, keeping beat with the wildness of the choir, the music, and the closeness of death that once was life just a few more paces in front of him. Seventeen steps. Eighteen. Nineteen steps. Gazing, he walked past the picture of Jesus, blond hair and blue eyes looking down at him. The eyes seemed to follow him and willingly Jr. locked on the gaze, wanting to question the man in the larger than life sized copy photo, ask him if it was all real, and to let it all be a dream.

Twenty steps, put him in front of his father, where for a moment, it was only the two of them. No choir, no drum beat, no sobbing, no Pastor Brown and his prayer, no Jesus staring at him. It was just him and his dad, a normal afternoon, less like a year ago, but just like a week ago, Rodrick Sr. 's last day with them. It was quiet in the house, his mother and sisters gone, to Ms. Sherrain’s for their weekly hair appointments, the nurse sat outside on the front porch texting. He had overheard his mother tell her sister on the phone his Dad had had a good day, an extra spout of energy, the nurse had gotten the meds just right that morning without it making him feel groggy.

Jr. had spent the entire afternoon with him, happy for the time together talking about sports, and the best way to approach his final science project of the year. He soaked it all in, not knowing when he would get another day like today with his daddy. “I love you champ,” his dad had said to him, “Remember I’m always with you. Help your mother, and find a girl just like her someday. Be patient with your younger sisters, and

listen to Val, she's a good big sister and she loves you; learn from her, you'll be the man of the house when she and Noa leave for college. Don't let your mistakes define you, learn from them and be man enough to admit when you are wrong. Understand that God is in you because you are God, and God is Love; you don't need to be in church every time the doors are open to know that. And follow your dreams, if you can think it you can have it..." Rodrick Sr, paused, "I dreamt of you, you know, you, your sisters and your mother. Remember everything I taught you, and you'll be just as lucky as I am."

Rodrick Sr., seemed to try to say it all in one big breath, Jr. couldn't tell, but he felt it the way he thought he heard it. " I love you too Dad", Jr. replied, he hadn't noticed his mother holding him, or the warm release of tears streaming down his face, as "*Amazing Grace*" drifted from the house to his thoughts where he had just been with his father, and flowed out of the church doors of Pentecostal Church of Christ on 1st and 10th in St.Petersburg's south side, he was ten years old.



“Thank You”

One day the weight of your insecurities and lack of self love will wrap themselves around your neck so tightly it becomes inescapable, and you will drown, the way you almost drowned me.

The bruises you left on me will become a legion on your own soul, decaying slowly for eternity; unwilling and unable to heal, like mine did. When you finally come to see, it will be too late for you. Your light will diminish from the world, the darkness closing in around you as you shut your eyes for the last time; but I promise to be there, to show my gratitude.

In that moment, you will wish you had saved yourself from you. Like I did. You will beg for another chance at living again, like I am now. You will vow to love yourself, like your abuse forced me to love myself.

I will not think of you often, or allow your memory to come up in even the briefest of conversation. You did not love me, but because of you, I now love me, truly, deeply.

Thank You for not loving me...

“Ode to Johnnie”

You were Father, but not biological
Great philosopher of laughter
Church goer, sometimes
Worshiper of random conversations with strangers you, always made a friend
You were jet black, just shy of anyway
Panicked by blood, terrified of cats
Enraged by alcohol
What spinach was to Popeye, alcohol was to your domestic violence
Father but not biological
Rebuffing my beliefs, I challenged your system
Teaching me to cook you started with fried chicken, your favorite
Changing flat tires mowing the grass washing the car managing my money
because you said I should never have to ask a man
Bible thumper, you insisted on King James' version
Now I read Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Maya, Baldwin, Paulo Coelho, Kahlil Gibran
Just to name a few
Down the feminine products aisle purchasing tampax tampons
no swerve whatsoever to the cruise control of your manhood
Ode to Lucille I'll recite to my own sons
Lessons missed many more given so much taken but not all lost
Abandoned by your woman comforted by a stranger
It is not the AIDS that defined you
In the End
he was biological, but never a father his poem not worth writing
You were Father but not biological
Father, but not biological
Father
You were my Father

“Out of a Darkness”

There is something transcendent about a beautiful day

Blue skies

Mixing with the bright hues of spring and the crisp of winter still holding on -

Lingering

The cast spell nearly unbreakable

I move worry free, head raised high

The breeze cooling my body from sun blown kisses

That have melted and refined this brown skin I'm in

Sweeping over, around, and through my hair

Dancing with my curls

A tango of centuries old beauty, might, and will

I close my eyes

And soar for a moment through all time and space

Arms stretched - Heart open wide - I take it all in

It is not the last glimpse of magic headed my way

Screenplays

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qXRb4TIIInRJXrB5y5WbvBNKXz2hnpjsi/view?usp=sharing>

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zuxiY0ZYDAgcyqzEhgjhzKZWwww9UxL3/view?usp=sharing>

Artist Highlights

“La Chicana” - Delilah Flores

I first met Petty Officer Delilah Waldrip at a military deployment processing center in 2017, at Pope Army Airfield in Raleigh North Carolina. I distinctly remember seeing her standing out in a crowd of experienced deployers, catching my eye because she was so different from the other women in the room. Not that there were many, there never were; any woman stood out really in operations like this, which are male dominated and white occupied. Those that were present, were even fewer women of color heading to do the job we had all been tasked to do within our respective fields.

Her physique was tall and confident, she held herself with a strength that is unapologetic and unbending. She had perfectly natural tanned brown skin, (I thought she was Samoan or Hawaiian) black hair pinned up in the classic military bun, not a hair strand out of place, makeup and uniform flawless, just as a future Naval Intelligence Chief should be. My interest in her began the same way it begins with all meaningful and lasting connections in my life. It was natural, instinctual; the way spirits recognize one another across universes, and maybe multiple past lives, who knows. Maybe it's the unspoken bond of color, being women born with it painted on our skin living among the blank canvas that is White America, or maybe it goes even deeper and it's both.

Wanting to follow this natural curiosity, I was elated when by chance, being divided into groups of where we would be sent across the country and the world on our mission, she and I both would be departing around the same time from our homes and current duty stations to the same classified deployment location. Our small group, maybe 4 or so out of the almost 100 processing through at the time, exchanged

numbers and decided to meet up for dinner that night to talk, and get to know each other a little before meeting up again in a few weeks for our stay and work expected of us for the next six months or longer at our deployment site.

Plans fell through that night, but we kept in touch via text from our first encounter in February. By April, she had already made the drive east from San Diego where she lived her life with her then husband Steve at the time and their 12 year old son Gabriel. For me, it was time to leave the south where I was stationed at Warner Robins Air Force Base in Georgia to head north, and she had been kind enough to share where she lived and the accommodations she found, to help my transition upon arrival.

It is over the course of those six months, working and being separated from our families, our children, and the everyday work as moms and wives that we were able to finally connect as friends, reinforcing the connection that drew me to her at the beginning of this journey while processing for duty less than two months prior. In those six months we worked our butts off, we gossiped about co-workers, we talked about the white male ego that surrounds us every day at work.

We took weekend trips to New York and Baltimore on our time off and I made a new connection through her in the sweet soul of Soon Kim, a beautiful Korean woman, but we'll talk about that in another paper. We ate at fancy restaurants and amazing hole in the walls. We danced the night away at music-filled night clubs, took the train to watch baseball games, wandered the local museum halls, and we spent hours recuperating on Sundays by having brunch at Freddy's. Our favorite spot where the best drag shows kicked off every Saturday at 7pm and you could do Karaoke until three in the morning on Friday nights.

We talked about everything. Race, sex, family, religion, marriage, our children, our mothers, our lives in the military. There was nothing to be ashamed of, and everything could be shared. Aside from serving the Intelligence community in the United States Navy Reserves, Delilah was an artist, having graduated San Diego State University in 20..... with a Bachelor of Arts inthen later returning to school to pursue her degree in her current occupation as a Mechanical Engineer.

I learned that Delilah is an atheist, has a beautiful story behind her stunning sleeve tattoo, she loves musicals and is a Die Hard Lakers Fan. She is a feminist, liberal in her politics, an avid LGBTQ supporter, she has a better mind than any man I have ever encountered in my lifetime and her belief in science will convert us all. She is a social butterfly, a crossfit beast, has absolutely no tolerance for injustice of any kind, and I learned that Delilah is Mexican.

The term *Chicana* was coined during “*El Movimiento*,” The Chicano Movement was a continuation of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement from the 1940’s. During the 60’s and 70’s the movement sought to challenge ethnic stereotypes about Mexican culture and heritage in America; from this emerged *La Chicana*.

As a Mexican-American woman raised in the United States, *La Chicana* “has minority status in her own land even though she is, in part, Indigenous to the Americas and a member of one of the largest (majority) ethnic groups in the United States. She is a woman whose life is too often characterized by poverty, racism, and sexism not only in the dominant culture, but also within her own culture”. 1

Born Delilah Jean Flores to Robert Joseph Flores and Julia Enriquez Garcia in December 1980, Delilah was raised in California’s Orange County. Her parents divorced

when Delilah was three years old. Her mother Julia raised her, leaning on the strong familial roots and support of her own mother and sisters within her traditional Mexican family, but almost worlds away from aspects she believed should separate and not distinguish her in the predominantly white community of Orange County.

Remembering herself the teasing of the adolescent white girls from her youth, the bullying and the bruises at the hands of white teenage terrorism because of her brown skin, Spanish language, and strong accent; Julia wanted more for her daughter. To achieve that she decided not to pass on her Spanish language to her, she needed Delilah to fit in. She wanted her to be seen as just another American girl. Understanding that education played a major role in her daughter's success, she moved within the best neighborhoods with the best schools on a single mother's low income in OC.

Growing up poor in a middle to upper class county and being the minority in the predominantly white schools she attended, Delilah was anything but normal; and despite her mother's best efforts and intentions, she was still singled out, she was still not afforded entry into the advanced and AP courses she deserved over her white classmates, the brain she had for science and mathematics would overlooked and unrecognized intentionally. She was still the Mexican girl.

It was being that Mexican girl however that kept her grounded, it was those roots and traditions of bonding she had within her family unit. When her mom worked long hours it was the love and structure of her Tia's that guided and shaped her. It is her Tia Lily who taught her how to be a mother, and who she credits her own mothering style to. Later in her life, keeping with her own expressions as an artist herself, she would show

her affection and admiration for these strong and fierce women by tattooing her entire left arm in tribute to them.

Just as the beautiful garden they were bringing her to life, nurturing her and watching her grow, she depicted them as such: The Rose, for her Tia Dolores, for always being dependable, doing anything for anybody in need. The Lily, for her Tia Lisa, for being a motherly example to her when she was a child growing up and for Lily's desire for knowledge. The Lotus, for her Nina (Godmother) Espie, for being the toughest broad she has ever met, reminding us that the Lotus grows through very tough conditions. The Butterfly, for her Grandmother Amelia, because she loved butterflies. For her Tia Connie, who was obsessed with ladybugs, The Ladybug. And for her beautiful mother Julia, she captures all the sacrifice, dignity, loyalty and love in a portrait, sealing her mother forever young, and forever with her.



Delilah Flores Waldrip poses next to a painting she did of her mother Julia. The Artist says the painting is about her mother going through breast cancer and losing her breast, a part of her that helped give life to her child.

Grounded by love, family, her strict conservative Christian values at the time, and artistic influences like Frida Kahlo, Delilah set out to see the world. Enlisting in the Navy at 18 years old, she has traveled the world and back again. Visiting Korea, Hong Kong, Guam, Saipan, and Dubai. Japan being her favorite of all her travels, because of its contrasts. She appreciated the country's extreme between minimalism and extravagance. Falling in love with their customs, food, and way of living, she viewed the entire country as a work of art. She has explored Italy, and Poland, taking in one of mankind's darkest memories there; visiting the former concentration camp at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Museum.

With all the travel and new experiences that dawned on her, it was pursuing a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Art Education at Sandiego State University, 2005 to 2007 that would shed the most light on who she really was. Courses like Greek Mythology and Biological Anthropology began challenging what she had been told as the truth, but revealing what she recognized to be truth on her own.

It was the plagiarizing of the biblical saints, seeing mankind through the sometimes repetitive lens that it lives through. Was Jesus really the Son of God, born from a Virgin? Or was colonialism and the sins it left behind just another wheel in human history reinventing itself so that a selected few could persecute and control the rest of us. Biological Anthropology introduced her to science, opposing most every indoctrination she had learned in church as "truth". Making us both laugh during our Covid era FaceTime interview session, she told me how sitting in Anthropology class, she had silently believed that men actually had one less rib because God took one to make women.

As funny as that was, it was no laughing matter. How could a book define a beloved cousin, being born gay, as wrong, destined to burn in the depths of hell for love? How could men be the heads, dictated by the word of God when every pillar she had been able to stand and build upon, and been women. Demonstrating the same love and sacrifice of self to the men in her family and their children? Her mother, grandmother, her Tia's and her Nina? How could they be the tail, when she only ever seen them take the lead, teach her to lead?

It was one thing to face herself and the beliefs she had held, realizing they did not explain or even examine human life and experience honestly. It was another thing entirely, to tell your deeply religious mother and family you would no longer attend church, because maybe you believed there was something out there, but you didn't believe in the church's explanation of it anymore. Then to declare you no longer believe in any higher being or God, but announce yourself an Atheist.

Even if these beautiful women did not see their divine separateness, Delilah did, and she saw it in herself. It's what drives her passions as a mother, her loyalty as a wife, the deep devotion she has for family, her service before self in honor of her country. It's the art she puts on her body, and the stories she tells in her own canvas masterpieces. It pushes her to embrace change, returning to school and graduating in 2017 with a second Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering, and choosing the "road less traveled" even if the beginning of that road is hard and painful, leaving her husband Steve after 17 years, having married him when she was just 22 years old. Putting herself first, and the happiness of their son.

It is this woman, the millions like her and the women who raised her that we should honor, that we must cherish. Look around you, because she is everywhere, the existence of her is literally weaved in the very fabric that is America. She is a voice, a powerful contender. She takes on the role of mother, daughter, niece, sister, Tia, Nina, grandmother someday, and my friend. She is a movement, and as Beyoncé would say, “A Whole Mood”. She is Delilah. She is *La Chicana*.

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Reflective Essay

My capstone project concludes in theme, and work, as a reflection of how my CSUMB education started. My time here has truly evolved me both personally and academically, making this semester's capstone theme, Change, Transition, and Transformation fitting. I have been educated, challenged, and the end result is finding a voice that is my own. To explore myself, and my own curiosities and interests has been a privilege I know everyone does not have. Being in capstone this semester, sees my writing go to another level, thanks to HCOM 330, Introduction to Creative Writing.

One of the hardest things for me in writing was to get from beginning to end, and how to do that. My first screenwriting course in Fall 2019, the professor said to “write what you know”, but watching the documentary “Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am (2019)”, the author directed her students at Yale to forget what they know and create something new, something imagined. I have found, and solidified this semester that my craft lies between what I know and what I don't, my experiences and my imagination, together they create something new.

I also found, without expecting to, what the process of inspiration looks like for me in particular. I find morning walks for an hour or more, between 8:30 and 10:00, before any errands are run, or any meals eaten allows my mind to imagine freely, and wildly. This process helps the most when I struggle with particular pieces. Sometimes it takes me days, or weeks, contemplating on the same topic to come up with a form. Some of the work in my capstone project, like “Thank You” was started with just a few sentences in 2019, but it finally became a finished piece only recently. “Ode to Johnnie” started out as a book I planned to write titled, “Blues for Johnnie”, but presented itself as

a poem instead. I started out my time here at CSUMB somewhere between the English world and the Film world, experimenting with screenwriting, to see if I could be a writer. I walk away today, not wondering, but knowing that I am a writer, I walk away a writer. All of my work took on at least three drafts, before being finalized at the fourth or fifth draft point. As a writer, I thoroughly enjoy the process of writing about others and their lives as well. In this work, I feature an “Artist Highlight” of a close artist and friend, who provided and shared both her personal story and art for this project. I will be forever grateful at the truths learned and the growth that has come about for me from my education at CSUMB. This has truly been a time of Change, Transition, and Transformation.