

Some Very Small Times

written by Guest Contributor | December 6, 2019



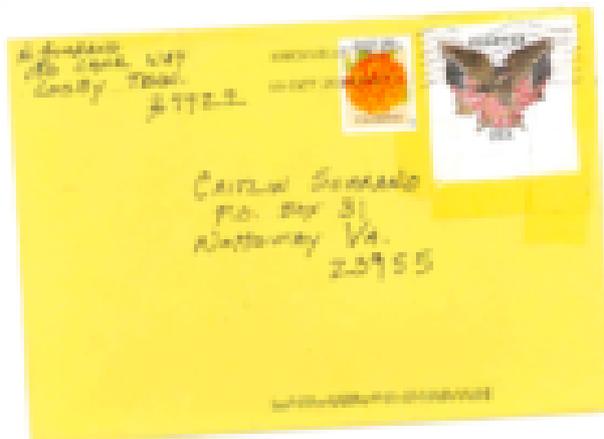
Image Credit: [Megan Perra](#)

You've probably heard this one before.

DEFENDANT SCARANO, NICOLA V TRANSIENT

When I was six years old, my father left our family. He left Virginia for Florida, weaved in and out of prison for possession and DUIs, traveled across the country with the Rainbow Family, and finally settled in Cosby, Tennessee.

During those two decades, he sent my two sisters and I sporadic postcards and



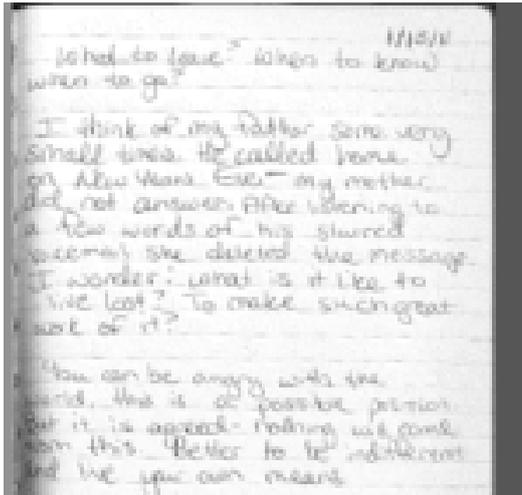
birthday cards.

I have kept a dozen journals since 2007. I rarely open them. I can't stand to

read most of the entries, especially the earlier ones. I find the girl there vain and predictable. At times, she is even abhorrent. But, over the years, her handwriting becomes smaller and smaller, her circle of concern expands, and I can tolerate her more.

Sitting on the hardwood floor of my apartment, I flip through the journals. I scan them for the word *father*, hoping to find any entry or artifact that might be relevant to this particular piecing together.

This entry is dated January 13, 2011, nine days before my father's 53rd birthday:



It reads: *What to leave? When to know when to go?*

I think of my father some very small times. He called home on New Years [sic] Eve—my mother did not answer. After listening to a few words of his slurred voice mail, she deleted the message. I wonder: what is it like to live lost? To make such great work of it?

You can be angry with the world, this is a possible position. But it is agreed—nothing will come from this. Better to be indifferent and live your own means.

One way to think of all this is in terms of numbers and dates. An accumulation of data. There is math to any life as there is math to any leaving.

I was twenty-three when I wrote this entry.

Just four years after (three years, eleven months, and twenty-one days) my father will die.

My parents separated when I was five but never divorced. My mother, sisters, and I still have his last name.

When my parents separated, he stayed around our hometown for a year or so and then moved away. I saw him two times after he left Virginia—one afternoon when I was sixteen and on his deathbed in Tennessee on Christmas Eve Day in 2014.

Despite disliking those past versions of myself, I learned long ago to save fragments and pieces. I became a habitual creature in this way, chronicling as practice. Chronicling as a stay against self-destruction.

Case Type:	FELONY - CRIMINAL COURT
Date Filed:	06/27/2012
Location:	Criminal
Judicial Officer:	JUDGE SPENCER
Case Number History:	CR01-12-0001-AMC

ATTORNEY INFORMATION

Main White
Date: 06/27/2012
17:00:00

Attorneys

I think about sickness, the cycles of sickness.

In June 2015, six months after my father dies, I finally work my way out of a four-year relationship with X, a relationship that had been defined by his diagnosis of Harm Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD).

During a psychotic break in September of 2012, X throws a hatchet into the woods because he is convinced that he is going to kill me with it.



Eight months after my father dies, I go in and out of the hospital for a quarter-sized lump on my left breast, right above one of my ribs. I wait with a group of women in various stages of wellness in a room without windows. We're all wearing white robes and flipping through Hollywood magazines. I go into a room for an ultrasound. The technician and radiologist seem disinterested.

It's probably harmless, they say. But they tell me to return in six months.

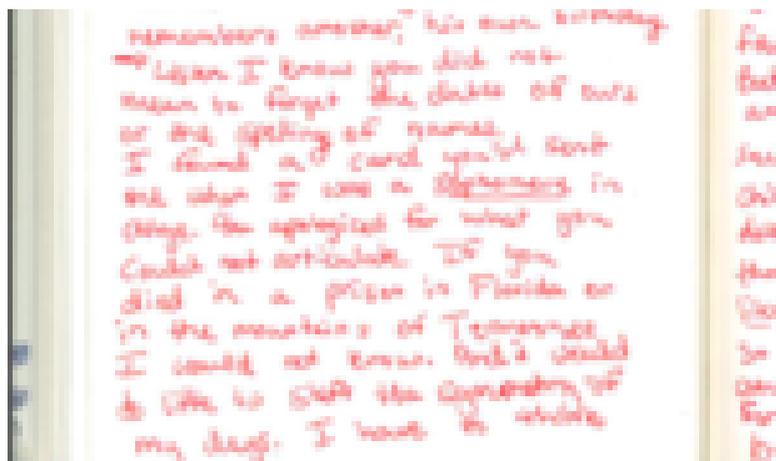
I am writing this in the present tense because it is who I am in this moment and all of it is still happening within me.

My father often had no address. In many of the court documents I found, he is labeled as *transient*. I have come to view the word as beautiful in a way. I like how the letters arrange themselves. I think of a train, specifically the Amtrak Southwest Chief, which runs daily from Chicago to Los Angeles. I like to think that we can make ourselves believe we are able to leave—places, lovers, our own bodies. That we can shake off the history of these like a fine layer of snow. I like to think of lives as things that intersect and branch as opposed to things that run parallel or as links in a chain. Networks. Rhizomes.

I think of myself, how many times I've driven across this country alone, leaving behind a lover or a city or some other sorrow, earmarking hours with cigarettes and scratched Iron and Wine CDs. I like to think that I'll take any opportunity to go anywhere, and that, though I often worried, I am rarely afraid.

I think of my father the night before he leaves town for the last time. He's watching the sun come up; he thinks he's got a fresh start with daybreak. And, even if it isn't true, he believes it for *that* moment, feels it for *that* moment, and isn't there something pure there—a man who has fucked up since he was a boy just wanting a clean break?

I can't be angry at him very long because I understand him.



This entry is not dated but was probably written in late November 2011. It reads: . . . *remember another, his own birthday. Listen. I know you did not mean to forget the dates of ours or the spelling of names. I found a card you'd sent me when I was a sophomore in college. You apologized for what you could not articulate. If you died in a prison in Florida or in the mountains of Tennessee I would not know. And it would do little to shift the symmetry of my days. I have to think . . .*

In some of these entries, I wasn't so much lying to myself but rehearsing or trying on various attitudes (*some very small times*) toward the areas of my life that were unraveling, the areas of his life that were unraveling. Save fragments. Live in fragments. Arrange a narrative around your guilt. Finally find your face in someone else's.

Nicola (Nick the Pic) Vincenzo Sciarano was born January 22, 1958 and lost his battle with liver cancer on January 2, 2015, surrounded by loved ones at his home in Cosby. He was a legend in his own time and will be sorely missed. He was a master



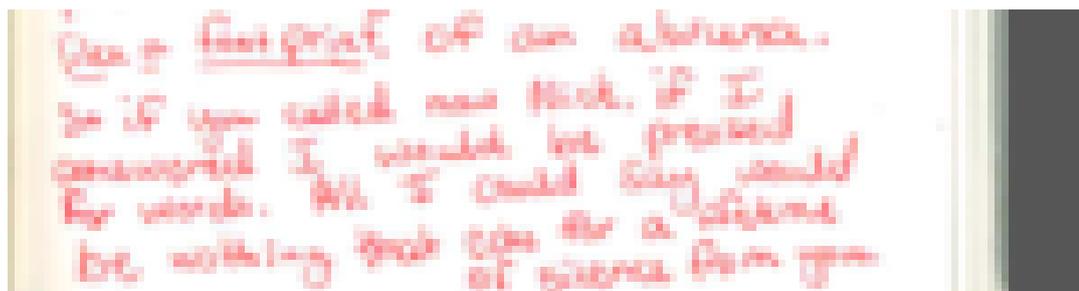
His obituary, written by his girlfriend Dawn, was sprinkled with idioms and misspellings (*a ledged* for *a legend*). I met her only once.

Christmas Eve, 2014: On the phone my father asks if I'll come see him before he dies. X and I drive to Cosby, Tennessee. Dawn meets us at the door. Her voice was like a bucket of gravel someone shook. She seemed exhausted, but was trying to hide it.

I know this attitude toward life, I thought, I know exactly what you mean.

I recognized the approach one has to take to survive when born into a certain set of circumstances that are very hard to change.

She smoked on the porch and pushed their eager pack of dogs away with her right foot. She seemed exasperated by my presence and soon left to pick up his medication at the pharmacy. I realized later that part of why she seemed so eager to leave may have been because she was picking up his morphine. They were decades-long addicts—Dawn, my father, and a lot of the people in that holler, which was largely made up of Rainbow Family members who followed my father out there. They lived among addicts, ran with addicts, loved other addicts. Addiction gave structure to their days. This isn't criticism, it's identification. I grew up among it. This way of life, this cycle of (systemic) struggle and cope, is as familiar to me as how Virginia fields start to break into foothills as you travel west on Route 460.



. . . like a footprint, of an absence. So if you called now Nick, if I answered I would be pressed for words. All I could say would be nothing, that echo for a lifetime of silence from you.

Notice the pantomime of indifference here. And always a strain for the lyrical.

Also, it wasn't a lifetime of silence from him. He called and sent these cards. I was the one who was silent.

Maybe I couldn't imagine him shifting the symmetry of my days because he and his leaving had already shaped my life. After his death, I can't help but

think of us in fractal terms or as nested systems. How he was an ever-repeating unit within me and I beyond him. Both a building block and an extension. This man I both never knew yet knew internally, innately. I am of him.

As I work my way through the entries, I discover common themes in them against my will.

Theme: rage, constrained and constant, in all of the journals.

Again waking up with so much anger. I want to let everything unfold without an initial reaction. I want to feel okay with whatever challenge the day has offered up. Really, I want to be alone.



Again waking up with so much anger. I want to let everything unfold without an initial reaction. I want to feel okay with whatever challenge the day has offered up. Really, I want to be alone.

Here I am most struck by how *feel* looks like *feed*. Anger and hunger become bound.

October 2012: X's doctors and counselors explain the specifics of his OCD diagnosis, and reassure him that he is not a violent person. He's not a threat to me or anyone (this was always true). They tell him that he will get better (neither of us ever fully do). As long as we're together, he'll deal with anxiety and I will struggle with anger.

X walks through the snow and brings the hatchet back to our house because we need it to split wood. But in my memory, that myth, I am the one who reclaims the weapon and leaves the relationship then, not years after.

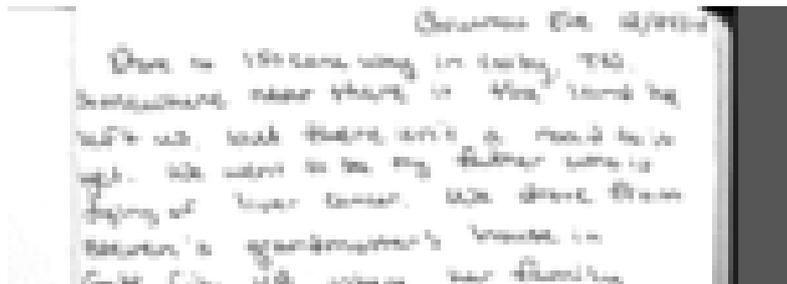
- 1. **passing** especially quickly into and out of existence
- 2. **passing** through or by a place with only a brief stay or contact
- 3. **passing** something or producing results beyond itself

Fractals are self-similar and can describe seemingly chaotic phenomena. The whole can be more than the sum of its parts. Think of cells multiplying, mimicking—the same geometric patterns over and over, just in smaller and smaller ratios. When we were very little, my father read Shel Silverstein books to us. Our favorite was *The Giving Tree*. To help us fall asleep, he sung Harry Chapin's "The Cat and the Cradle."

Jesus Christ, I tell my mother on the phone, the fucking irony.

I imagine there is a chorus to this whole thing. They will laugh and cry with me. They will stand very still when I do.

You make plans, he said on Christmas Eve 2014. But it almost always happens in a different way. Then you're in an expensive hotel in a Midwestern city fucking a married man you feel remote toward. Or you live near a river. Or you're twenty-seven looking between floorboards for a different dimension.



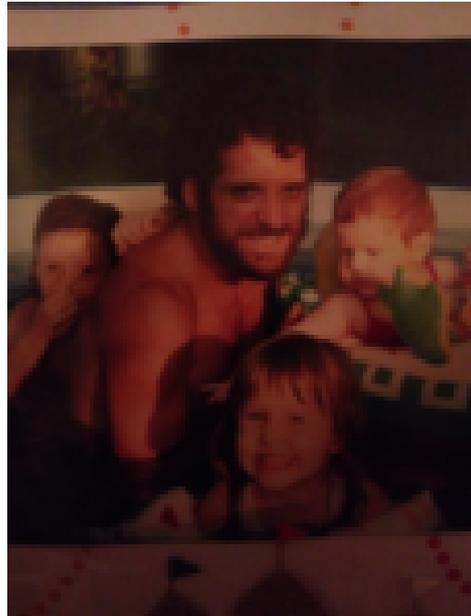
In a last gesture of panic (*I've done nothing for you*), he leaves my sisters and I (jointly) 1.08 acres of land, inaccessible by road, on a mountain near Cosby, not far from where he is buried. On that last day I saw him, the date this entry is from, I swear he told me that he taught his friends how to make his coffin and that it was all ready and waiting.



The language of property is that of the language of marriage: *to be my wedded Wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer,*

in sickness and in health

Here, at least metaphorically, the roles invert or collapse altogether. Repeat on an infinite loop. Daughter becomes bride becomes mother. Father becomes lover becomes infant. My mother's father molested his daughters, his granddaughters. My maternal grandmother's father was cold to his daughters *distancing himself from them so that he would not molest them*, my aunt writes me. My father lived like a teenage boy for decades, twilight life, a never-never land. *He beat me so bad with a belt one time*, my father said of his father, *I couldn't sit down for a week*. And then he laughed and laughed. My little sister's daughter is confused. This family free of men. She calls my mother her mother. She calls her half-sisters her children. Her face is more like mine than anyone. I can mistake her for myself as a child or the daughter I did not have. At three years old, she grins in photos as if she is

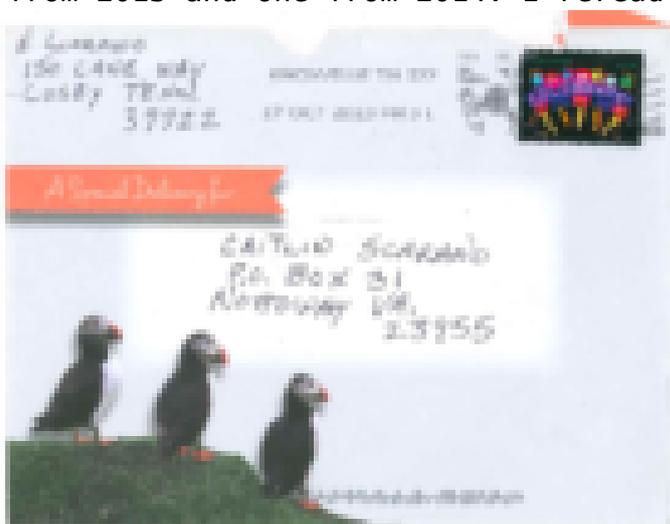


baring her teeth. I do this. He did this.

A few nights, I end up in Milwaukee bars alone. I drink until I can't see straight. Recognition. I wait for someone to talk to me. I tell strangers (men) about my father or I tell them nothing. Sometimes they laugh. Sometimes they go home with me. Sometimes we are just still. I break a glass in the bathroom of a dark bar and put the pieces in a pile behind the toilet. My father was a carpenter by trade.

I return to the hospital for a second ultrasound. *By our records*, the radiologist says, *this lump has grown*. The nurse tells me it is still likely benign, but she schedules me for a biopsy. She asks me if my family has a history of cancer. My father had testicular cancer and died of liver cancer. My maternal grandmother had breast cancer; her daughter (my aunt) had breast cancer in her early 20s. I could almost laugh. I exit through revolving doors.

While I am looking through the journals, I find two birthday cards he sent me—one from 2013 and one from 2014. I reread the inside of the card from



2013.

Continued,
I hope you can find a way, if you can,
that may give me the ability to
do away with my... I'm not
at all... Please don't be like
my dad and mother. Don't do,
Love, always
you know what I do,
1/5.
Oh, I hope you can find a way,
to do it, in a way that I can
to do it, in a way that I can
to do it, in a way that I can

I've read this over and over until I have it memorized. I believe this card has its own life, that when I read it I glimpse into a crack of a sadness so deep I can't breathe. A sadness so deep I believe it killed him. To be riddled with shame at what you cannot undo. To come face to face with how you've failed. It's like looking over a ledge. Intoxicating, dizzying. *I know exactly what you mean.* There was a time in my life when I was convinced I would kill myself. I still do not believe this is the same as being suicidal.

Most recently, I see this letter in a new light. I see this letter for his selfishness—how he packaged up his shame in a little envelope and burdened me with it, even after he's gone.

In her 2014 *VICE* article, "The Dark Side of the Rainbow Gathering," Grace Wyler quotes one of the Rainbow Family members, Rob Savoye:

"People are tolerant, accepting of different stuff," Savoye added. "A lot of us have had rough family lives, and the Rainbow has sort of filled that void for us."



Theme: a fixation on violence, a fetishization of violence. I'm two months

old in this picture. *Your father's father*, my mother tells me when I'm twenty, *tried to kill your father's mother by hitting her in the head with a hammer*. His mother, Betty LaMae, survived the hammer, but she was later institutionalized (this was also a theme—my mother's parents tried to have her institutionalized twice before she was eighteen). My father's father, Antonio (Tony Sr.), sent off to Italy for a new wife, Rosa, and had two more children her—seven children total. His friends buried my father holding a hammer.

Transience: a fixation on, an embrace of the death drive.

tapping from above —
handwritten coffin. I cannot
make this up. I masturbated
for an hour. I don't want
to let all human bodies
and minds. I am drowning
by them. And then I run
by the lake. A foreign man
asked where the best boats.
I am afraid to write about
wanting violence to be done
to me. When I moved I



When I find this one all I can think: they were children. And how beautiful. Such small, contained units. The daughters from the second marriage, Lucia and Sofia, will be born after this. I never met any of his siblings. Of the seven children, at least three of them (Tony Jr., Nick, and Angie) are dead. It is not that I've been thinking about killing myself. It is that recently I have been imagining what it would be like if I did not exist. One night, I lay on the rug by my bed, my body curled and still under the orange lamplight falling through the wall of windows of my apartment, and I try to count the number of days it would take someone to find my body if I never got up. And

then I feel disgusted with the self-indulgence of it.



This is the exterior of the card from October 2014, the last one he ever sent me.

My mother finds a Polaroid, perhaps 20 or 30 years old, that she thinks might be a photo of Teresa. In the image, Teresa sits on the bumper of an old Ford truck. She is androgynous, buff, attractive. She has a large silver chain around her neck with some heavy item attached to it, like military dog tags. Her jeans are rolled up once or twice above heavy construction boots. A German Shepherd sits between her legs. I handle and look at this picture several times before I see that beside her, almost fully in shadow, is a man. My mother cannot identify him. For some reason, this picture bothers me deeply.



On the back of the Polaroid, I write: *One of Nicola's Sisters? -Caitlin Scarano – Winter (Jan) 2016*. But I don't know who I write this for. I keep the Polaroid as a bookmark.

I'm not sure about Teresa, if she is alive or not, my mother tells me.

Mario was not well. He was mentally off somehow. They wouldn't let him drive, so he rode a bike everywhere. I think he lives with his mother.

I ask her to tell me the one story I remember of Mario, of him and the biscuits.

We'd just moved to Virginia. You were very little, two or three. It was Thanksgiving. Mario took a bus out to us. He looked different, you know. I don't know if he was born that way or something happened to him when he was little. But he also looked like a Scarano. And he was nice. But your dad said he used to get angry. I think he had some trouble with the law. People made fun of him, you know, and then he'd get mad. This story might upset you. One time, he was riding his bike and someone threw a beer bottle at him and it hit his face. They hurt him bad and didn't stop to help. Anyway, he used to work at Hardee's or someplace like that. He wanted to bring something for Thanksgiving. He handed me this greasy bag of Hardee's biscuits when he got there. They were all crumbs. I thought it was gross. But I made stuffing with them. It was the best stuffing I ever made.

I can picture him on the side of the road holding his face, bleeding. A Scarano. My uncle. My father, myself. No car stops to help. By the end of the conversation I could tell she was almost crying. *I wish I'd treated him differently, she said. I wasn't nice to him. I judged him. It was like a lesson. He carried that bag of biscuits all that way on the bus.*

No one asked him to do that.

In 2014, the year my father is diagnosed, he learns, and we learn, that Betty LaMae, his mother, my grandmother, is still alive. She will outlive him. I never meet her or call her, but my mother gives me his stepmother Rosa's number. *Grandma Rosa*, she calls her. I think she was born in Italy, but I don't know. Rosa and my mother had a good relationship. I am too afraid to use the number though, too afraid to add even more to this. I know so little but already know more than I can manage.

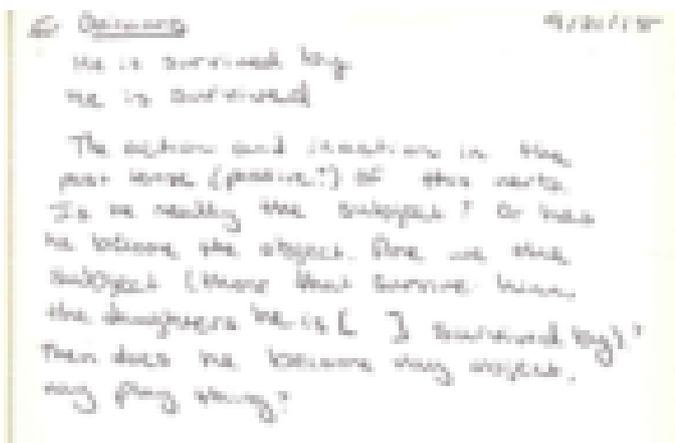
Much of this is about control. I will write and piecemeal until the balance of power tips back in my favor.



In this one, he is in the foreground, in front of the Christmas tree. He is perhaps fourteen here. Do I find him more interesting because he was attractive? Of course. I am struck by his masculinity and sexuality. Not aggressive but certain. He never hit us. He struck my mother once that I know of—the night she left him. My older sister was in the bathtub. Red and blue exploding the dark living room in light. My little sister and I watched from the hallway. When she is pregnant with my niece, her boyfriend pins her to the bed and tries to choke her. I write about it over and over, but she and I never directly talk about that night.

Theme: hatchets and hammers, especially claw hammers.

I think it would take at least a week before anyone even came to my place to check. I have an extra set of keys to my apartment. X had them, but then he moved back to Alaska after I asked him to leave. I give them to a new man and a few weeks later he gives them back. They sit shiny in my desk drawer, waiting.



Here again the roles invert and pervert, the self-indulgence of writing about this takes on a sexual tone.

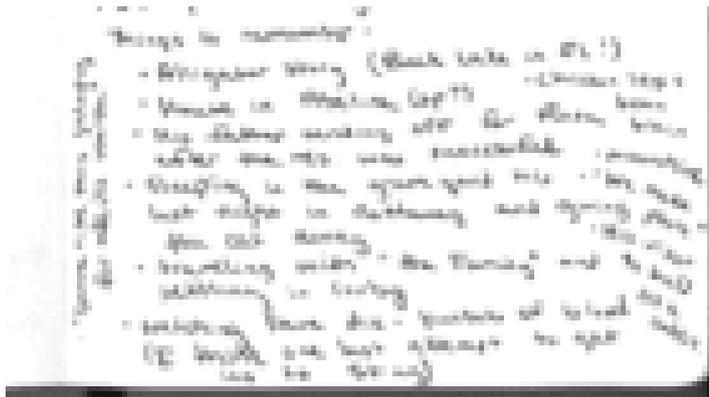
What is it like to live lost? To make such great work of it? Who is the

audience to this?

I know I'm telling the same stories over and over; you've probably heard this one before. I know it isn't that complicated to be poor or to be a drunk. I know you think I should transcend this. I know most of this, and I to him, is repetition, echo, and it may have become uninteresting to you. But I don't have anything else. I'm not sure who I am without this history.

I'm afraid that I'll come to the end of my grief and it will be worse. Like finding yourself in a field of snow and no one waits for you there.

When I saw him on Christmas Eve day, he told me many stories. On the ride home, I made a list of everything I wanted to remember. I even titled it.



On this list are two nicknames my mother had for him: *Chicken Legs*, and, in less kind moments, *Bean Brain*. When my father told us this, I remember looking at my partner. I'd had similar names for him—boyish, infantile, mean names. I realized then how I'd worn him down, bullied, and tried to control him because I was not able to forgive.



How bright blue everything was, at least for a time.

I see now how much of my anger at him sprang from the fact that the relationship wasn't a progression, but one-day-at-a-time kind of survival. We never got to build something. Instead, it was a four year process of losing him. A painful, daily wrenching of wanting someone I was unable to help.

One story on the list was about when my father finally left Nottoway, Virginia for Florida. I was probably six or seven years old at the time. It

was the night before. He'd moved out of his apartment. All of his belongings, along with his cat and his German Shepherd puppy, were in the pickup truck with him. He was going to start driving in the morning. *That night, he said, I wasn't sure where to sleep. So I parked in the cemetery on the edge of town and spent the night there.* He started laughing, *That cat pissed all over the truck. So I left her with a friend in the morning and hit the road.*

Just like that, he was done with her.

He told me his vision for the land he'd left us: *I wanted to build you and your sisters a cabin, a place you could escape to.*

Twice while he was telling these stories men came in to buy weed from him. *This is my daughter,* he boasted. He offered us homemade moonshine from the freezer. My partner drank a shot. I refused.

My father told me so much in the space of an hour (what will be, I see now, one of the most marked hours of my life). What else might he have told me? This lifetime of stories and lessons I missed.

be sadly missed. He was a master carpenter. There are beautiful homes in this area that are reminders of his skill. He was also a talented and unique musician of good times music and many loved to gather around him as he shared his songs. He was remembered in death by his father



Something about this photo—the way his individual curls fall, the angle of his elbow, the easy way he holds his thumb and forefinger—everytime I see it, I think of my older sister. We inherited gestures we cannot name, yet they comprise us.

I didn't ask him about his prognosis. He offered up that information: *My doctor says I've got eight months to live. But I'm planning to ride this jalopy for all its worth.*

Jalopy. He laughed when he said it. He caught me off guard. He was sharp, vivacious (even at the end) and trying to put me at ease. *My god, I thought, I could have loved this person.*

But maybe not. Who can say? His choices were so often selfish. The more I've forgiven myself the harder it is for me to love those who don't forgive themselves.

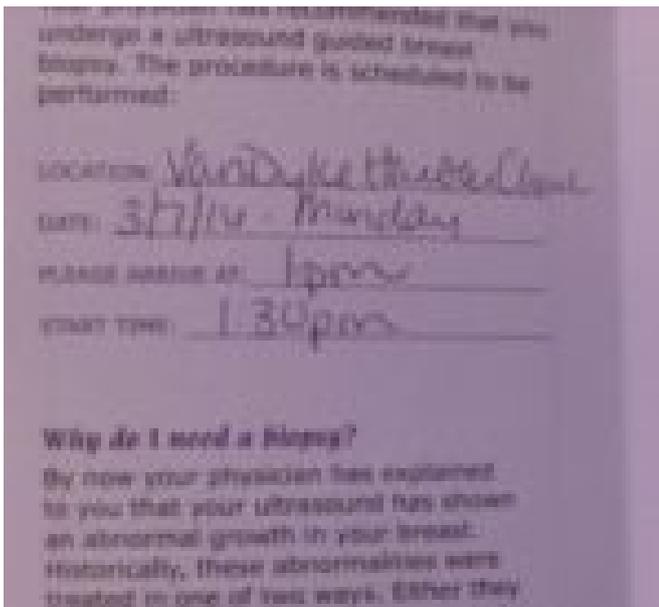
When I saw him, he was so sick, so fucking sick. There is no other way to say it. Jaundice, distention, tremors, lesions, water retention, glaucoma. Body hard and soft in the wrong places. Bones protruding from the skin at strange, sharp angles. Tumors in the liver. Tumors in the lymph nodes. Organsick, brainsick—so many of the men in my life. The morphine made him reflective and edged as a sheet of glass. His pupils were tiny. Unblinking and shaking his head, he told me how his sister Angie crawled across this floor at the end of her life. How his best friend Steve (from what I can gather, another lifelong

alcoholic) was puking up “buckets of blood” in this room before he died.

He couldn't afford hospice. We just had to take care of him. It was bad, he said, really bad. I could tell he was rattled by these realizations, piecing together the patterns of his life. Overwhelmed as a child suddenly recognizing loss. He was too late and I was too late.

This is the part I can't put down, that still closes my throat when I try to name it. This is the part that keeps me up writing this, biting the skin off the edge of my fingers, obsessing over these pieces. This: he felt so bad, he was so distraught. He wanted to change it, to have done it differently (*and ashamed at myself*). I really believe he wanted to take it back, that he wasn't just telling me what I (or he) needed to hear. But it was too late, he didn't understand. He was fumbling. He couldn't face it. His helplessness, the awkward display of it. He wandered from room to room when we first got there. He was so excited, like a little boy, he didn't know what to do with himself. He kept trying to find something to give me (all these broken items—a busted amp, a guitar missing strings, warped records, old photos, a magazine with the Beatles on the cover). Stop, please just sit down, I wanted to say. He kept trying to lift these things. We just watched. I didn't know what to do. What can I give you? What can I give you? he kept asking. He hurt himself lifting the amp. He nearly passed out. We propped him up. I need to lie down, he whispered. I believe that day he shouldn't have been up and he hurt himself and in that little way among all the other little ways I helped him die. This is what I can't put down.

Now I swear the lump is the size of a chicken egg and that it aches, and that a new pain branches out from it into my left armpit. But I recognize this as paranoia; I know the taste. I imagine slicing open my chest, a little incision with a precise tool, and squeezing out the lump like a stone. I imagine giving to someone, an offering.



You can be angry with the world, this is a possible position.

Theme: my own relationship with alcohol. *What can't I quit drinking?* I write. *What do I want?* There was a point when I hadn't fucked sober in years.

Here, Wyler describes the roots of the Family and what they're trying to

Started in the late 1980s as an outgrowth of the anti-war and hippy movements, the Rainbow Family of Living Light describes itself as "the largest best coordinated nonpolitical noncommercial nonorganization of like-minded individuals on the planet." The ongoing Rainbow Family Gatherings, which have occurred every July since 1982 in a different US national forest, are like larger more authentically weird versions of Burning Man, bringing together upsets of 10,000 "Rainbowers" from a cross section of fringe culture: bikers, Jesus freaks, computer programmers, naked yoga, and gutter punks looking to escape "Reality," the Rainbow shorthand for the various evils of modern life. The gatherings are free and open to anyone. No one is in charge, and nobody control anyone else what to do.

escape:

The blur. A weightlessness. Communion. To turn off this anger, if just for a night.

In December, a year after he died, I spend two weeks in Minnesota. A few days before Christmas, I leave a party of strangers. I've had two beers, a glass of white wine, and several cups full of champagne. In all of the pictures posted on Facebook the next day, I'm grinning like an animal baring its teeth. My cheeks are full and flushed. My eyes look gray not blue (when he was dying the morphine, I swear, changed his eyes from brown to a greenish-blue) and are just slightly unfocused. I drive back the mile back to where I am staying that night. On the way I stop and buy cigarettes. I don't remember the cashier or what I say to him. I do remember lighting the cigarette in my parked car outside the gas station. I crack my window and inhale hungrily. It is my first smoke in weeks. A couple walks by and looks in at me. I realize I'm a sitting duck for cops. That is what I think: *sitting duck for cops*. I start the car and drive the rest of the way to where I am staying. The next day when I go outside, my car is parked beyond the edge of the parking lot several feet into the snow of the field nearby. The tracks of the tires are angled in a C. I am nauseous. I right the car.

Although former members that reports of violence at the Rainbow Gatherings have been confirmed, he concluded that as attendance has fallen off, the events have started to attract other artists and vagrants who may not have come for the crystal smoking and talking circles. "There's been a crystal-meth problem, a crack problem, a homeless problem," he said. "You'll start seeing kids from nearby cities—they have no place else to go, so they'll show up at the Rainbow Gatherings."

Again, Wyler:

A year after he dies, I try to pay the property taxes on the acre of land he left us I. My name and my little sister's name are spelled wrong on the deed.

COCKE COUNTY, TENNESSEE
COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE
COURT HOUSE
COLUMBIANA, TENNESSEE 37032

[Signature]
COUNTY CLERK
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THIS INSTRUMENT was on 15th day of September, 2014 between JEFFREY
BOWLING, Single, of Cocke County, Tennessee, party of the first part, and ANNE WILKINS,
of Cocke County, Tennessee, a Legally Married only, with residence for single at Co-
Egal Towers in Florence in Elizabeth West Square, Collier Court Square and Executive
Mills Square, of Florence, Virginia, parties of the second part.

WITNESSETH that the said party of the first part, for and in consideration of the sum of

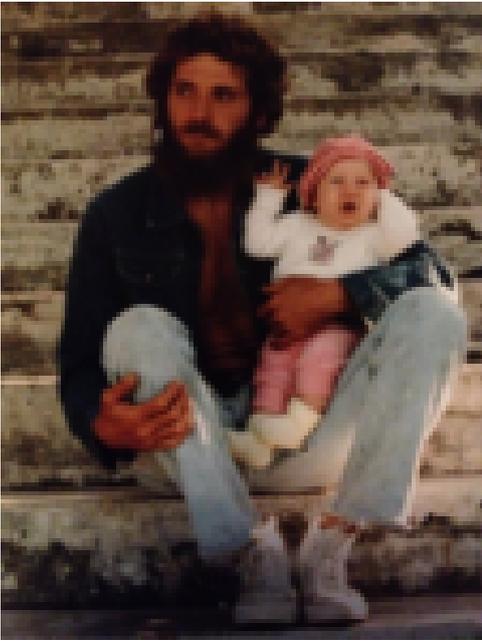
I call the Cocke County Assessor's office. They transfer me to the Trustee's office and vice versa. I call both of these offices half a dozen times over two months. At first they don't believe me when I explain the situation or they can't find the land based on the address I give them. The map and parcel numbers on the deed don't show the necessary decimal. The clerks are quick to exasperation. Finally, a woman looks up my last name after I suggest we search for it that way. She finds the land under his name in their system. They won't let me pay over the phone. They won't let me change the address that the bill is being sent to (his dead sister's house, the house he and she both died in). They tell me it's too late for that. They take down my address in case the bill comes back. A month later, I call to check the status. The bill was sent to me over three weeks ago. *It should be there by now*, the woman sighs, as if I have prevented it from arriving. I ask her if she can resend it. No, that is the Trustee's office. They are closed today for snow. I call anyway and listen to the line ring and ring.

When I scanned the birthday card he sent me in 2014, I realized that he wrote in it the exact same thing. literally the same plea, that he wrote in the one from 2013.

2013: *Would love to talk with you, and your sisters, call me.*

2014: *Give me a call sometime, would love to talk with you.*

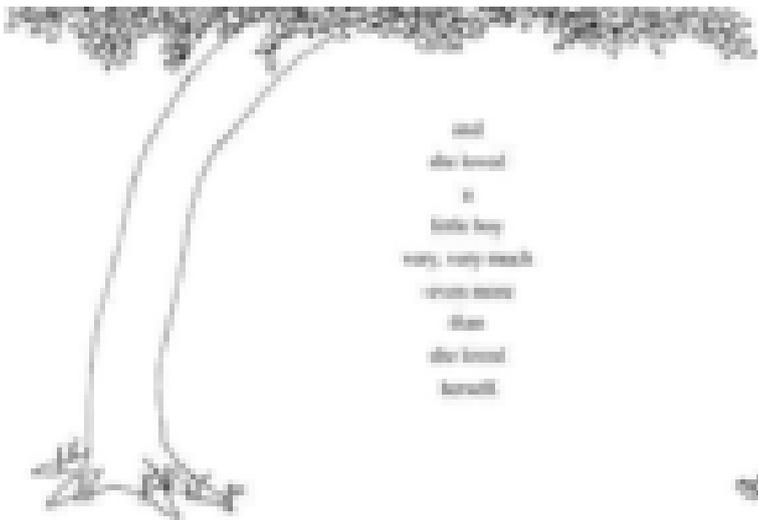
I never called him. I can't even remember why.



Yes, some very small times.



Instead of eight months later, he died ten days after that Christmas Eve day visit.



I've tried to stop

drinking

but even drinking other things
more and feeling exposed

the light gets brighter this way

I was asked to remember 10

On Christmas Eve visit, after he crawled back into bed and finally caught his breath, we found ourselves just watching each other, at a sudden loss as to what to talk about.

So I asked him to tell me a story.

He said, *I knew this girl back then when I lived in Florida. This was before your mother. She was the tough type of girl. I remember we were hanging out by Buck Lake and she said, 'I can do anything a man can do.'*

I will never know this woman. I didn't even ask her name. But I immediately identified with her and wanted her to be the victor in the story he was telling. In response to her claim, he said that he dared her to swim the

width of Buck Lake with him. So they stripped down to their underwear and raced out into the warm brackish water lusting after their skin. I can imagine her smooth, overly confident strokes as he effortlessly treads water, quietly allowing her to catch up with him every few minutes.

Halfway across the lake, he noticed that two full-grown alligators were following them, steadily gaining ground. He saw their armored backs like cracked asphalt in the drunk summer sun. They weren't necessarily acting aggressive but definitely seemed interested in these two foreign creatures flailing through the water, their undisputed domain. The girl had not yet noticed them.

He whispered to her (here, I can imagine his soothing voice, musicality of intonations I remember from childhood), *Don't panic, don't splash, and do not scream. Just stay with me and go slow.*

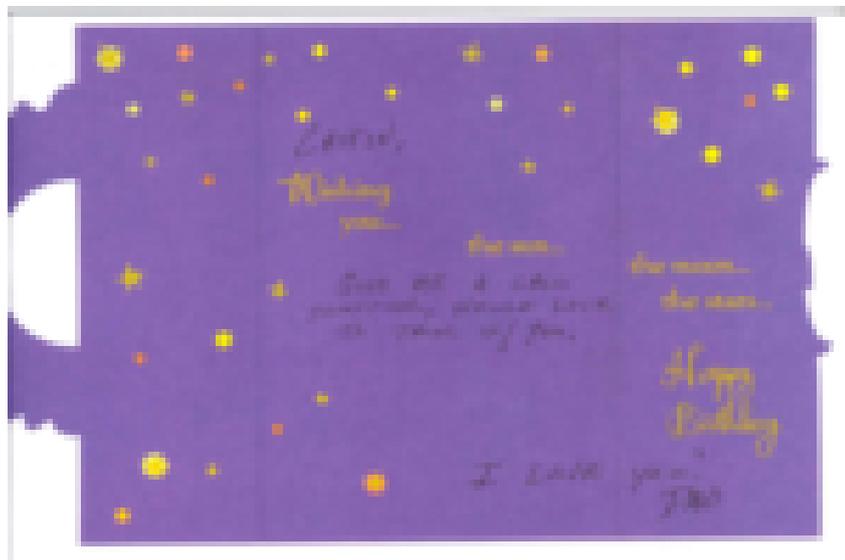
So they tried to move without upsetting the water, the balance of the bayou around them.

But I could see she was starting to freak out, and I didn't know how we were going to get across. We were too far to turn back.

What happened? How did you keep her calm?

How did you ever make it?

He laughed as if it were the most obvious thing: *I started to sing to her.*



Somewhere I'm in a bar bathroom with black walls breaking a pint glass over and over. The self-similarity of fractals. I'm telling a story from a barstool about him telling a story from a barstool. Mirror within my mirror, would love to talk with you. I'm in a waiting room. I'm fucking or driving with my eyes closed. I'm not glancing back. He's lifting heavy things, looking over a ledge. Someone's throwing a beer bottle at a man on the side of the road, a hatchet into the woods. One of sisters is being struck in the head by an ashtray, choked on a mattress. Red and blue lights. My grandfather's got one of us cornered in the bathroom. I'm on my bedroom

floor. Swimming across a lake. Someone is sick, spinning, sorry—perpetually sorry. Someone is survived. Baring their teeth, ready for another round. Somewhere the last night in town is always happening, an infinite loop. He's sleeping in the cemetery, making ready to leave, about to escape. Just wait for daybreak.

It is always the night before.



Caitlin Scarano is a writer based in the North Cascades. She holds a PhD in English (creative writing) from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and an MFA in Poetry from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. She was selected as a participant in the National Science Foundation's Antarctic Artists & Writers Program, and is currently working on a project from that experience. She recently released a chapbook, *Tending Fire*, with visual artist, Megan Perra. Her next chapbook, *The Hatchet and the Hammer*, is forthcoming (Spring 2020) from Ricochet Editions. Her debut collection of poems, *Do Not Bring Him Water*, was released in Fall 2017 by Write Bloody. Her work has appeared in *Granta*, *Best New Poets*, *Best Small Fictions*, *Carve*, and *Colorado Review*. You can find her at caitlinscarano.com