

# Two Years in WOVEN

written by Sylvia Chan | June 24, 2020



*WOVEN is an Entropy series and dedicated safe space for essays by persons who engage with #MeToo, sexual assault and harassment, and #DomesticViolence, as well as their intersections with mental illness, substance addiction, and legal failures and remedies. We believe you. If selected for the series, we want to provide the editorial and human support such that our conversation continues long after the stories and names have changed. You can view submission guidelines for WOVEN [here](#).*

Reread the [archives](#), always.

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In the months leading up to WOVEN's second anniversary, I had plans to publish follow-ups with contributors from the last year. I had lists, questions, success, pitfalls, and everything in between stories from many of the writers who continue to follow me, and likewise—what we most understand about WOVEN is that it is a lifelong community. It is a space that does not go away, even when I thought it would because I have thought, some day, I might need to stop. It is a returning space: we write, publish, share; we move onto living our lives, but we know WOVEN is there.

Before the pandemic; before shelter-in-place; before facing anti-Chinese xenophobia from my community; before losing financial security, healthcare, and a sense of volition in doing better when I am not doing well in my dailiness at all—there was the act of saying their names, an elegy. The activism is simple and powerful: if we pare what happened to a single name, to a single image, action, reaction, or universality, the question of what makes their names different is harder to answer. You can exercise your right to breathe, the right to play cops and robbers, the right to celebrate New Year's Eve with your loved ones, the right to stand in your own home. If we look deeper, the histories in killing Black people have always been there, just like names we hear, read, and look away from when we survive one more day.

In the spirit of saying less and honoring more, "Two Years in WOVEN" is a list of names, stories, refrains, and publication dates. Read them for the first time; reread them. Read the beginnings, the ends, the images, the tactile sense of being hunted by a loved one, or an authority, or as if the

demon itself is in your head, and only you see it. Read how much is hidden, remade, and remembered long after what happened. Do not forget, that like many “modern” American social actions, the need for WOVEN—for uplifting #MeToo and domestic violence voices—is not new, nor will it go away: alongside Black Lives Matter, we must recognize the intersectionality of our national and global problems. It is not a 2020 thing; it is forever. The moment we think we’re doing enough is precisely when we have much more to pursue.

A safe space does not disappear when you’re unable to write or plan to write weeks later or just can’t do anything until you can fathom a stillness that allows you to keep going. WOVEN is still here—open for submissions, whenever you feel ready to let your story go.

### 1. Shirley Harshenin, [“The Wait,”](#) July 3, 2019



It doesn't matter how long you wait, whether five minutes, ten or thirty, the same shame and fear drops your gaze to the ground, assaults your skin like a thousand smashed mirror shards. Dad and daughter. Dad and daughter. Dad and daughter.

### 2. Sam Juric, [“I'd Like to Order an Abortion, Please,”](#) July 10, 2019



When I arrive back to the waiting room I

wonder how much of him has remained the same. I am rearranged somehow. There he is, his hand at the small of my back, his breath in my ear, I focus in on it. I rely on it to tether me.

3. Adrienne Beer, "[This Skin; And All the Shame That Comes With It,](#)" July 17, 2019

She told me one day I would sit on a panel and talk about my experiences, that I would write essays that might save someone. She gave me this little sliver of future where I could proud of my



past. I hold tight to this.

4. Sam Heaps, "[Only Afterwards Don't Anyone Stand Close to An](#)



[Open Window,](#)" July 24, 2019

Maybe just sick. When I see this image I see someone younger than her age. How odd and wrong it seems in memory and how commonplace it might have been—my naked legs resting on one of your thighs.

5. Meera Vijayann, "[Touch Me, Touch Me Not,](#)" July 31, 2019



I thought of Dan's simple advice "You can always say no" – yet, there it was, the uncertainty if situations allowed for it. *But what if . . . ?*

## 6. Heather Siegel, "[We Pay](#)," August 7, 2019

I will do it for myself, and for my sisters. I will do it for Elena's daughters and their daughters. I will do it



for Elena.

*Lo golpeé porque te amo.*

*I beat him because I love you.*

## 7. Arya Samuelsson, "[Where the Sound Lives](#)," August 14, 2019



Some days you wake up missing Amy, as if you knew her. When you exhaust Amy's discography, you listen to covers of

her songs on YouTube. But all you can find are a host of performers attempting to imitate her husky voice, her bad girl attitude, her silver-white vocal runs like trails of cigarette smoke. Everyone seems to you a cheap impersonator. You want to breathe new life into her songs. But how do you revive a woman from the dead?

## 8. Dionne Custer Edwards, "[Light in the Well](#)," August 21, 2019

I learned that from the elders, who knew how to stay in their own peril for long periods of time. The elders did not approve of some of my choices but did not leave me alone squeezed into shapes and forms that I did not yet fit into. The elders did not give me glitter or teach me how to say *no*. They passed down security, trauma, work ethic, discipline, and submission. They gave me what



they knew.

## 9. Joy Wright, "[The Why](#)," August 28, 2019



"It must have happened to you so many times because you're beautiful," he said, his fingers touching the side of my face lightly. As if he'd figured it out. The why. Why men rape women, rape children. A brutality like this makes no sense; it happening to the same person more than once, less sense. What was it about me that caused men to rape me?

**10. Chelsea Dingman, "[In Defense of Sound](#)," September 4, 2019**

These "heartbeat bills" in Alabama and Georgia have generated fear that even miscarriage after the sixth week of pregnancy will be deemed a jailable offense in that women will be responsible for proving the presence of a miscarriage.

Essentially, women will have to prove the existence of something that does not exist.



This is how war enters a woman.

**11. Alison Berglom Johnson, "[A Self That Doesn't Stay on Brand](#)," September 18, 2019**

To assert identity meant I might be judged for that identity. And



in a small town where judgment felt dangerous, it could mean being cut off socially or worse, gossiped about. Gossip isn't idle; gossip is designed to punish those who mar the status quo.

12. Rachel Laverdiere, "[Because](#)," September 25, 2019



Because if I stay my independence—my sense of humour and my accomplishments—might crumble away while I sleep. If I get too comfortable, maybe I'll disappear. Because the stoic mask I've perfected throughout the years might come loose—and what if I discover I'm still that little girl who was petrified of the world?

13. Dakota Dracon, "[How To Become a Runner—A Braided Essay](#)," October 9, 2019



The mother's hand on the child's head, holding it under water. The child desperately kicking and flailing her limbs. Thrashing around. Fighting for her life. Until she runs out of air, stops moving. The child is at peace. The mother's hands, beating on the child's chest. Bringing the child back to life. Water spewing from the child's lungs.

14. Kristin Wagner, "[Ocean Poetics: A Mother Study in Waves](#)," October 16, 2019

I have carried my mother-story across decades from paragraphs to fragments to scribbled shapes left in journals and on walls and on my own skin; I have painted on old photographs of her; I have made cut-ups from print outs of our text conversations; I have written her name on stones I collected at the beach and laid on the floor

of my room and placed the stones on my body and waited for the language to rise; I have swum in the ocean thousands of miles from the one she grew up in and tried to feel all the stories curling around the waves; all the mothers and daughters and coastlines and floods; I have stared at my mother across dinner tables and hospital beds and watched the architecture of her body become more



and more diaphanous.

15. Jocelyn M. Ulevicus, "[A Map of Survival](#)," October 23, 2019



What I remember most about that day was the light: It is mid-afternoon, and there are tiny specks of dust undulating in the yellow-white light filtering in through the curtains. I climbed onto the couch and before moving my face toward the heap of pink flesh, I notice the tiny pot of purple flowers on the window sill. I think they were violets.

*(Between you and me: I sometimes wonder about the memories I cannot recover, and whether or not I should be grateful for that.)*

16. Marianna Nash, "[The Fleabag Priest Needs Therapy](#)," October 30, 2019

When the panic attacks began, they seemed like more of a strange nuisance than a physiological fire alarm. *Butterflies*, I told myself. I resented those butterflies. My self-image was so poor, it had never occurred to me that I was being hurt, but only that I was too closed-off, too guarded, too stubbornly, irrationally unwilling to trust this person who was trying so hard to be my friend.



**17. Brooke Knisley, "[My Statutory Rapist and Me](#)," November 13, 2019**

It starts insidiously slow, "she'll be a looker when she's older" and moves to "you have a beautiful body" when the public eye is removed or willfully ignorant. And when men are caught or called out for this behavior, we give them a slap on the wrist and condemn the girl for being too immature with her maturity.



**18. Melanie Chartoff, "[Greeks Bearing Gifts](#)," November 20, 2019**



No-not yet baby-this thing. I can't personalize, can't think about its feelings. I must call it "it." We haven't met. It doesn't know me yet. It doesn't know my face or voice. It can't blame me. I did not invite its life. He did. We were forced together like a blind date, mismatched by an enemy in an arranged rape.

**19. Anonymous, "[Rebuilding in the Wake of Hurricane R](#)," November 27, 2019**

The sad truth is that perhaps we cannot fully blame such people, because they're incapable of simulating the deep upheaval that it causes to the psyche, not having experienced it themselves. What they don't realize is that kindness paramount importance to the victim. Nothing burns more than telling your story to an unsympathetic or even apathetic ear; to have your vulnerability trampled upon and yourself ripped open and exposed to scorn. I hope what I wrote demonstrates that sexual assault causes longstanding



invidious effects.

**20. Erika Gallion, "[Grace](#)," December 4, 2019**



Grace in the way she plucked her eyebrows, wincing in a slow, measured metric; grace in the smell of her perfume, which I'd seek when she wasn't home, opening her closet door and inhaling; grace in the black wool robe she wore on Christmas morning, and how compatible a coffee cup looked in her hand; grace, even, in the box I once found in our bathroom closet, a douche, never opened, the box covered with dust.

**21. Hannah Anderson Harris, "[I Ruined His Weekend](#)," December 11, 2019**



I tell this judge the truth, even though I know I'm not the right kind of victim. I know chances are high that the man looming above me will listen to me say "drinking" and "dancing" and "festival" and hear "careless", "frivolous", "slut." I tell him what actually happened even though he'd probably like it better if I said something like "stayed late at work" or "walking to my car from a self-defense class" or "parking garage with my keys between my fingers."

22. Kim Dressler, "[The Soft, Blue Blanket](#)," December 18, 2019



I fell into an abyss and didn't want anyone to extend a rope. Kimmy, was an innocent liaison, often whispering in my ear, *he shows you love; he loves you; it's okay.*

I loved Nick. At least I thought I did with zero love for myself. I couldn't, well, wouldn't leave him. Being with him filled the emotional hole left in the wake of my childhood, feeling unloved by my dad, silencing any lingering doubt.

23. Lishani Ramanayake, "[The Softest Parts](#)," January 8, 2020



I didn't know any of their names, but I knew how they died. How they hung themselves with ropes attached to ceiling beams, how they threw themselves on to train tracks, how they choked themselves with their school ties in the girls' bathroom. How alone they were, in the end, weighed down by the purpled, bruised burden of their grief.

24. Eugene Massey, "[<3 Twins at Wedding <3](#)," January 15, 2020



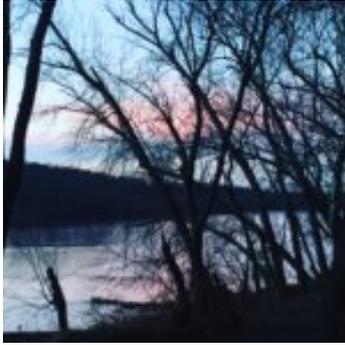
I am not taking pictures with him anymore. I can't. No pictures means no evidence to incriminate me. No evidence means safe from what viewers might see. Photos say, *I love him, and we're cute side by side, and we are great and not rapists*. Photos lie, and I am an honest person. Photos say, *I love you, and I excuse your deeds*. Photos pretend *oh, I had no idea he did that*. Photos pretend: *Do you really think he would do that?*

25. Rory, "[Invited](#)," January 22, 2020



I felt like not a single person in my family valued my feelings over preserving their relationship with this family. The worst part of this whole thing is not the abuse; it's that my family didn't stand up for me.

26. Chelsea Bock, "[The Cruelty is the Point](#)," January 29, 2020



In a small town this means acting like one of the boys while aggressively letting them know you're still a girl, watching rifles go off at bonfires and breaking into the quarry after midnight to swim. It entails forcing laughter when someone makes a rape joke or is thrown out of a bar for shoving his hand between a girl's legs. Everything is a game.

## 27. Sarah Millar, "[The Flesh](#)," February 7, 2020

I am told my story is too generic, by my own team's angry mob. Our collective primal screams have become the noise over which other people debate body politics and shifting sexual paradigms, autonomy and affirmative consent. Silenced by a hashtag, made ordinary by the ubiquity of performative outrage. What were whispers, once hushed, are now the songs of last year's summer; at once recognized



and unsung.

## 28. Vivian Cadbury, "[Say Uncle](#)," February 12, 2020



And wouldn't it be terrific if the fairy tale could end there? If *happily ever after* meant that Snow White didn't ever dream she was back in the coffin, or Harvey's hotel room, or her uncle's kitchen? But even now the memories can punch her in the

gut, cut her like a knife, hurl her to the ground. Even so many years later, blessed with family and friends, fulfilled by her work, she can be undone by a single word or by the glimpse of a shadow behind her.

**29. Rachel Swatzell, "[Don't Speak: Hush in the Heat of Thrush](#)," February 19, 2020**



All I can say is "this is what happened" and "this is how I feel," hoping there is someone out there that feels the same, but compelled to get help and work past their fears. I want to help the lives of the women I know and cherish, the women I don't, the women who are gone, to be a catalyst of light in their remembrance, and the women in the dark, reminding them we are simply not defined by our pasts.

**30. Emily Van Duyne, "[A \(Rape\) Culture of Respect](#)," February 26, 2020**

I have had colleagues tell me I'm on a suicide mission by speaking out like this about sexual assault. Like the aforementioned example, it's a potent metaphor. After all, I am still junior faculty. It would be relatively simple to find a reason to get rid of me.

But if I, if someone, doesn't talk, who is silenced? Whose life is



ruined?

31. Jim Ross, "[Witness to Sexual Assault](#)," March 11, 2020



The bottom line: when any observant bystander crosses a line and assumes the risks attendant to being a witness, no matter what the ostensible offense, there can be a price to pay. Therefore, it is important to provide all reasonable protections to witnesses, who can pay a bloody price for speaking up, especially when the accused is hostile.

32. Azaria Brown, "[An Architectural Salvage](#)," March 18, 2020

VOICEOVER



So, I do it. I stare at the floor the entire time. Holding my breath, counting the seconds. Wishing I didn't exist, knowing I will exist more than before. He will become an unwanted nuisance. I will begin to hate the person he is. And the person I am. My skin begins to peel from my hands as if I'd dipped them in glue. I think my body was attacking itself. Punishing me for letting him sit on my mom's blue couch.

33. Danielle DeTiberus, "[An Inciting Incident: Memory as Blank Space](#)," April 8, 2020



The light behind him casts  
the silhouette of his body like the profiles  
my kindergarten teacher traced of each

child's head. I am drawing flowers  
on my sleeping mother's back with my finger  
when he orders, *Get your mommy up.*

**34. Maggie Morris, "[Hyena](#)," April 15, 2020**



But I keep Googling because I want to  
find a different answer, something I can live with. I don't want to  
accept the news that there are more victims. I don't want to accept  
that money is offered to me to keep quiet, to change the narrative  
for J, and for the women in HR. I don't want to accept that in  
2019, the HR ladies had to fire me because their job security  
requires them to protect the men at the top who misbehave.

**35. Andrea Bianchi, "[The Taking](#)," April 22, 2020**



And I see the irony: I, who once  
underlined thick feminist college texts on Men, Women, and Rape,  
now defending the act against the position of my friend, who has

argued, between long drags for countless hours, against me, against women's equality, against abortion.

**36. Stephanie Sellars, "[Purging the Archives of My Mind](#)," April 29, 2020**

I repeated my command. His behavior stopped for a while. Then he started up again. For the second round I was stronger and better able to fight him. But the damage was done. A few months later I found myself flirting with him, perhaps because I was trying to make sense of what happened. Or perhaps because he was cute, and I convinced myself that negative attention from him was preferable to no attention from boys at all. No wonder I spent so many years of my adult life struggling with the word "no."



**37. Victoria Lewis, "[In the Locker Room](#)," May 6, 2020**

Even after four decades I still believed I was in control that night, and even if I wasn't asking for it, I'd made a dumb choice. Maybe I wasn't to blame but, after all, I was responsible for my actions. No wonder I never felt safe telling my story. I still



felt complicit in his violence.

**38. Jennifer New, "[My Monster](#)," May 13, 2020**



As some monsters need the eclipse or the midnight hour, the trick of my monster is to appear in the guise of a trusted person—a classmate, colleague, or person of stature. Or, perhaps, a husband. Looking like Trust itself, you feel foolish to ever doubt him. But once he turns around and you see the matted, coarse fur and the tail, it is too late. You've already been devoured.

**39. Bonivon Loy, "[Springtime](#)," May 20, 2020**



I can't feel your touch, yet I know it's there like skin still warm from a recently moved hand. I see how it changed me as a little girl even though I don't know the inciting date. I see how it affects me as a woman even though the knowledge has only been confirmed for the past three springs.

**40. Annabelle C. Lee, "[Two Truths and a Lie](#)," May 27, 2020**

This issue is not the result of one gender.

This issue is not solved when stuffed under a rug.

This issue will not get better if children are not taught Truth in their young and impressionable childhood.

This is not an issue the legal system can solve.



This is a heart issue.

**41. Rebecca Jamieson, "[Leaving Shambhala](#)," June 10, 2020**

Will it ever truly end? Will Lodro be held accountable, along with the Sakyong and all the other abusers? Or will this all be covered up by the thick silt of time, like so many stories before mine? Years from now, will a new Shambhala teacher be abusing their students, and will the revelations come with just as much



disbelief?

**42. Carol S. Jeffers, "[Shellac](#)," June 17, 2020**



She runs her hand over the big root, more of a knee, feels the flat place where the actor must plant his foot. I notice the care she takes in spreading the sand in the wet shellac. She waits for it to dry before painting a top coat to match the shine of the tree. She takes a last look at the set, eyes widening again, lips parting as if she is about to whisper "How beautiful." The illusion. This transcendental moment.