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ISSUE #16: GOLDEN HOUR

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ISSUE #16: GOLDEN HOUR

and now a word from the editor



Wow! I'm overwhelmed at the positive reception *Handbasket* has received these past few months. This issue and the last have received more submissions than any other issues. I'm honored so many LGBTQ+ creatives have found this zine a worthy platform to showcase their work and voices.

Because of this increased popularity, at a friend's suggestion, *Handbasket* now has a Board of Directors to help review submissions and page layouts for new issues going forward. I've enlisted the help of three past contributors and incredible friends: Carlos Frank-Estrada, Christopher Sommer, and Hollis Zepp. Their unique perspectives and styles compliment how I envision this zine to be. I'm grateful to each of them for volunteering their time and energy towards this project.

Additionally, we're now distributing to two (2) new places in the West Coast and Southwest, respectively: Charlie's Queer Books in Seattle, Washington and Wasted Ink Zine Distro in Phoenix, Arizona. Charlie's is a new LGBTQ+ centric bookstore that Seattleites are lucky to have. Wasted Ink Zine Distro is famously one of the premier zine distro places in the US. It's an honor and privilege for *Handbasket* to be in those places. I'm also honored by all of the locally-owned small businesses that continue to hold space for the zine. Thank you for believing in this.

In this last issue of 2023, I asked contributors to "*discuss/describe/depict one of the best moments of your life so far. What made it that way?*" The responses were varied, all with exceptional approaches to what could've been a mundane prompt. Our community is anything but ordinary. The Board and I are proud to share these perspectives and hope you'll enjoy them too.

Forever yours, - Taylor B.

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Handbasket is a free bimonthly literary zine dedicated to sharing LGBTQ+ narratives. Content is accepted from LGBTQ+ writers of various backgrounds and intersections. POC submissions are encouraged. Anonymous contributions are welcomed. This publication may contain mature material some readers may not find suitable. Don't take this zine too seriously; nobody involved does.

This zine is not endorsed by, and does not reflect the opinions of, Ellensburg Community Radio.

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FRUITS

by Kristan Saint-Preux

for gay love, which is too often policed by law, and especially for Alan Turing, whose love was punished

we are two women, and we lie in bed together, slack mouthed. i hear trumpets when i taste your very soft suede skin: prickly pear, soursop & Galician moonshine flood my tongue;

under the covers, you press silk colored rice grains into your palms, and little dimples form in the pinkness there; you tell me this is your beauty secret, and you press rice into my cheeks

you place your hand on the mounds under my shirt. your flesh is colored with Crème de banane, slushing white rain on rough terracotta tile, and almond;

your thick hair is the color of a dark yell and peach kernels; souging violets, African boxwood, and sour cherry colors your deep crushed satin eyes;

can i place *Drosera rotundifolia* in your hair? you have hair follicles of pineapple fiber weave and raw hemp silk;

can i leave 99 bananas & Saint-Barthélemy-d'Anjou Cointreau as a drink offering for you at your susurrous altar? you are a god, and you keep me like a held breath; you keep the dried peel of the bitter orange laraha behind your Crème hand woven cotton ears, and you hear me there;

i leave a trail of bhat at your smooth pale feet, and i hear the long plaintive whistle of a fleeting train, and know my heart is pierced with your sharp Buffalo bone;

i watch you wash your long hair in hazelnut Frangelico and guavaberry every day; in the shower, you have custard apple breasts, delicate flemish glass nipples, a finger lime navel;

everyday this week i've had a lump in my throat when i look at you; if you wear that rabbit fur like that, if you wear yellow ranunculus, medium course leather, and White Saxaul, my heart, the Cramer's eighty-eight butterfly, will be your worshipper.

we have to go. you get up, beautiful in no clothes and rumpled hair. when we leave the house, the car is covered in a film of fresh rain. at the airport, we walk the longest blue mile. we get coffee and see the glowing terminals. we talk story.

damn, everyone in the airport is staring because i'm falling apart. i don't want to say goodbye to you, ever. some people here think i'm you're sloppy best friend. so i kiss you deeply right on the mouth. you're so beautiful that my fiberglass tears won't stop. i'm being cut up, and i'm silent as you take one last look back at me before you go through your departure gate.

it's a lonely walk to my gate. i wish we could go back to bed where we were ripe fruit all tangled up.



WHEN THEY CALLED ME DADDY:

A PARENT'S TALE

by **Christopher Sommer**

Have kids, they said. It'll be fun, they said. Nobody ever prepares you for what it is like to experience becoming a father and learning all that comes with being a daddy in the truest sense. I don't mind the daddy status associated with being in my mid-30s, but that's for another issue of your favorite Zine. When my lovely wife and I found out we were expecting for the first time, it almost didn't feel real. There are just two little lines on a stick, and suddenly you're looking down a one-way train ride you can't get off.

But as the months went by and seeing the alien images from the ultrasounds, nothing ever compares to seeing your first child enter the world. At that moment, everything changes forever.

I would be remiss to not mention what an incredible wife I have. Witnessing her innate strength and ability to grow and sustain another human with her body will forever make me feel that women should be in charge of everything, and that we are but feeble men-folk who cry over the smallest things such the life-threatening common cold. But there I was, shoveling ice chips as best I could. I'm very brave like that.

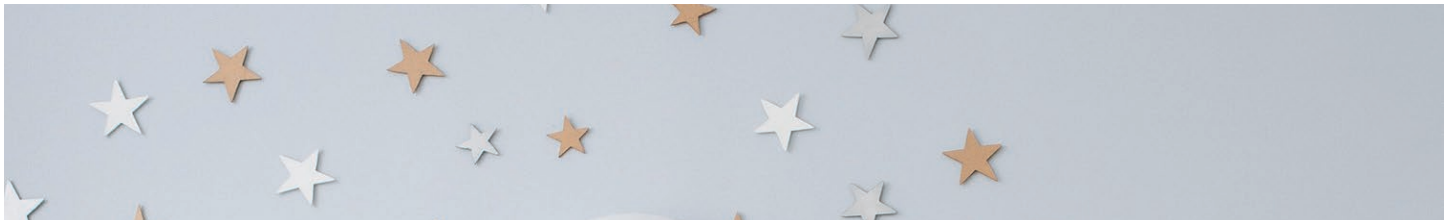
She was determined and I was terrified. I thought perhaps we should just take a nap and not push a baby out, since once it comes, we have to be responsible for it. But these things do not care about how tired you are, or how long your poor wife had been laboring in the bathtub at home, while you could do nothing but wait to rush to the hospital for the second time in the night.

But in that hospital room in the early hours—sparing the graphic details—I watched through flooded eyes my son being born and screaming his arrival. There he was. There was the face we had only seen glimpses of. He was real. He was ours.

It was a moment that I had only imagined or seen in movies or shows. It was nothing like any of that. It was the most beautiful moment I had ever seen in my life, as my wife held our son against her chest and transformed into the highest level of humanity. And then it was my turn to hold this child and to stare into those steely blue eyes glaring at me, as if we had the audacity to disturb his world.

And in that dark, quiet room that has just moments before been like a disturbed ant hill with doctors and nurses and equipment, he and I met upon my chest. My entire hand almost engulfed his tiny body. In that moment I imagine every new father begins to make a covenant with their baby and promises to love and protect them. To be a hero and picture everything we want for them. And in a way, to see yourself and who you aren't, and hope they will be a better version of yourself.

So much happens in that moment and it doesn't end in that room. It comes home with you. It keeps you up for months on end with no sleep. It explodes your heart with the capacity to love more than you could and begins a sacred journey in which we hope to raise up a young boy in this world full of wonder and strife. It's the most challenging thing we've ever done, but I would not trade it for anything. Well, maybe more sleep. But that is the small price to pay for being called Daddy.



Christopher Sommer is a tired dad and works in the dubious world of marketing and comms and *RuPaul's Drag Race* memes because he hasn't actually seen a full episode yet. For lukewarm takes and fun times: [@mister_sommer](#) on Twitter, and for max dad vibes, the same on IG.

I've only had my fortune told once, and it wasn't on purpose. See, in the city of Kyoto, there's a temple up so high in a mountain that you can only reach by climbing a hundred steps on foot and then another hundred to get to the very top. I climbed it during the hottest August I can remember two years ago. I wore flip flops because my sneakers were still soggy from falling into the Takase river the previous night, and enormous sunglasses that were so dark that I tripped several times on my way up, cutting my knee on the stone of the steps. Up at the top of that Kyoto mountain that one summer's day is where I'd go because when I reached the top, knees bloody, the thick smell of burning incense drifting out of the temple in thin spirals, I noticed something by my feet.

At first I thought it was some animal, but upon closer inspection, I could see it was a small ceramic koi dropped or perhaps left behind in the tall grass. The strangest part, however, was that the fish was sculpted with an open mouth perfect for hiding small knick knacks. Hidden inside the koi's mouth was a scroll of paper.

I might just be the nosiest person on the planet, so of course, I rolled out the piece of paper and read what was inside. It seemed someone had purchased it at one of the artisan souvenir shops at the bottom of the mountain.



It contained a fortune for its buyer, in Japanese on one side and English on the other. Whoever's it was perhaps did not like what they read and left it behind.

I'm not a spiritual believer in the slightest. I'm married to science and science alone, but nonetheless, I read it, and that is the moment to which I'd like to return, right there, reading that fortune that had somehow found its way in my path. Because I have no recollection in the slightest of what it said, only that it made me completely and utterly happy.

That's all I can remember now: just the joy I felt reading that fortune and whatever foretellings it gave of a future that wasn't mine. I wish I knew what it was that made me so happy because every year as I get older, it's getting harder and harder to find that feeling again. I wish I had kept it with me, but I didn't. I rolled up the paper again and carefully put it back in the ceramic koi's mouth and hid it in the grass where I'd found it high up in the mountain's somewhere.

I went into the temple, motioned at my bloody, scraped up knees and mustered up some terrible Japanese. Thankfully I was understood well enough to be given some bandages. I continued on the path and stopped by a thin stream of water trailing down a rock, to splash my face and cool down from the heat. It was starting to get dark then; just before trekking down the steep mountain steps, I stopped and went back just for a moment to see if the koi fish and its fortune was still there. And it wasn't. And soon enough I forgot whatever it was that it said. I went back down the mountain to sleep in a bed that wasn't mine, with the window open, and the warm summer night's breeze blowing in my face, and the crickets chirping quietly.

Perhaps if I could time travel, I would go back and wait to see who picked up the fortune, if they read it or read it again. If they decided to come back for it, as I did. I would want to know if it made them happy too. Perhaps it is better this way though, not knowing what it said, just remembering it as a feeling, or a smell, or a sound. It could be a million things, and now I can wonder which one of those million things it is.



Steph Prizhitomsky is a playwright/screenwriter, co-founder of the White Rabbit Film Festival, and editor in chief of *Suits and Sage* Magazine. Her plays have been featured at Off Broadway theaters the Chain Theater and the Player's Theater and published in magazines *3elements Review* and *Fleas on the Dog*. She is a sophomore studying film at New York University.

THE **HANDBASKET** INTERVIEW



name - a/s/l – pronouns

Hollis Zepp - She/they

what are three words that summarize you?

Caring, Silly, Creative

how would your friends describe you?

Loyal, a good listener, and funny.

what is a big goal you're working towards (or have already achieved)?

I recently got a job that I really enjoy at The Mule cocktail bar in Ellensburg. Additionally, getting my poem accepted in Issue #15 of this wonderful zine is something I'm very proud of.

do you collect anything?

One of my favorite things I've been collecting are Funko Pops! Specifically Marvel, along with some *Golden Girls* and other various ones that catch my eye. I also really enjoy Legos.

your idea of happiness is?

Curling up with my girlfriend and watching a movie and getting to talk about our days and the movie. It's the little things in life. :)

describe your aesthetic.

I've been told that I give off golden retriever tortured artist vibes hehe

what is a topic you're always up to talk about?

Football, specifically the NFL, or Marvel, specifically the movies.

what is a pet peeve of yours?

When people interrupt someone mid sentence

recommend three songs.

"Tradition" by Halsey, "Stick Season" by Noah Kahan, and "Labour" by Paris Paloma.

good advice to give?

Do whatever makes you happy! Life is about the little things. Do what makes you happy, even if it's not something everyone else is doing.

PAINTING A HORSE

by Bruce E. Whitacre

Together we painted a horse in oil,
Grandmother and I at ten.
We primed the canvas,
mixed colors on a palette
of an old board. Linseed oil, turpentine,
lots of rags and the paint tubes arrayed across
the newspaper-covered dining table
like toothpaste, only magical:
ultramarine, burnt sienna, cadmium,
raw or burnt umber, titanium white, ivory black.

A wheezing asthmatic at his chalkboard
all evening while the TV kept the family at bay
I chose my totem, a horse's head in profile it would be.
Grandmother's teacher-baker-crafter hands guided,
mixing, loading the brush, the first stroke of black
gentle curve ascending, a practiced
arch of neck. Then up for an ear and down
the flat head, filling the fur, tracking
the light. The titanium spark of
life in the eye. A Methodist mane: necessary but not showy.

She instructed, corrected, but what I needed
most was to be admired, encouraged.
The forgiveness of oil—mistake? paint over it—
echoed how she anchored me.
primed and framed
she gazed upon me with sometimes misplaced
satisfaction.



Bruce E. Whitacre | *The Elk in the Glade: The World of Pioneer and Painter Jennie Hicks* is a 2022 Publishers Weekly Editors Pick, won 2nd Place at TheBookFest 23, and was a finalist for the American BookFest 2023 Best Book Award. *Good Housekeeping* is forthcoming in 2024 from Poets Wear Prada. Publications: *The American Journal of Poetry*, *World Literature Today* and more. Anthologies: *I Wanna be Loved by You: Poems on Marilyn Monroe* (Eric Hoffer Honorable Mention), *The Wonders of Winter*, and *The Strategic Poet* craft book. More at brucewhitacre.com.

THE CABIN by Cuba Jimenez

I remember the creek running backwards

Like the Nile towards lower Egypt
Which is actually upper

Up towards the cabin
Time flows differently there too

Cradled by the whispers
of the smoky mountains

Just me and a house
Me and the cottonmouths

Who kindly informed me that winter was coming
Asking to share my shoes for a night or two

The wood burning stove
Plumes of hickory smoke creating my own ash and incense

Embalming my soul
Entombing me here in these woods

The thirty minutes to reach my coffee
Makes it all the sweeter

No one is around to see the Christmas lights on the roof
But they are for the spiders and the snakes and for my dad

I live in the city now
But my body is in those mountains

Sometimes I try to run backwards
Up towards that cabin

My river flows forwards now



Cuba Jimenez is a non-binary poet and writer from the Seattle area. They currently live in Los Angeles with their partner where their writing focuses on the natural environment, religion, and queer identity. Recent and upcoming publications can be found in *LitBreak Mag*, *Crook and Folly*, and *Westwind*.

IM KRIEG MIT MIR SELBST

by Taylor B.

War always wages in my mind, unrelenting and ruthless. From the minute I wake up to the moment I'm allowed to sleep, mental grenades, mortars, and bullets of various irrational feelings and thoughts try knocking me unstable. I normally do well enough to mask my symptoms throughout the day (which would mark me as "high functioning"). Other days, the battles are too heavy and a ceasefire won't come. This war took years to be named before it could be properly fought.

The internal assault first became noticeable sometime during sophomore year of college (it could've be earlier; my memory of that time is hazy). I'd begun dating someone I thought was the best and it made me feel **good**. Not the usual "make you smile" good, but *euphoria*. Everything was incredible and *nothing* hurt. The sun felt a little bit brighter. People were delightful. I hadn't dated in high school (thank you, early '00s homophobia) so I believed this was what romantic love felt like. **BOOM**.

He lived in California but had family in my area, so it was rare when we'd actually get together. The first time I flew out to SoCal, I literally emptied my checking account to afford the airfare. I'd never felt such a rush before. The world spun. I moved and spoke faster than normal. I could've been mistaken for Sonic the Hedgehog leaving that travel agency. Once that high wore off, the consequences hit *hard*. I had to rely on friends until the next paycheque came. **THUD**.

Then there were the moments where *nothing* felt good because nothing was good. Reasons for getting out of bed were few and far between. I'd stay home and make up excuses to keep it that way. I'd stare out the window at nothing in particular. My mind would give me countless reasons everything should end, because life would *always* be like this, so why go on? Everything was dark, literally, with every light off in my apartment and my mind devoid of joy. **Radio silence**.

In my early twenties post-graduation, I dated another guy, J. J was as sweet as he was snarky, but he was always good to me. We'd talk about the arts, current events, and our passion projects. When I called J, he'd be there. We'd go out of our way to see films not playing in our town (like *The Grand Budapest Hotel*). I supported him in his photography career. Of course I sabotaged everything by panicking after he brought me flowers one



January night. I completely flipped out on J and we broke up almost immediately. We didn't talk for years afterward; no apology sufficed. Thankfully, we were able to reconnect and make our peace earlier this year before cancer took him. **Pow.**

Episodes like these have ebbed and flowed throughout the years. The warning signs were as subtle as a car dealership American flag: long depressive periods, dangerous hypersexuality, reckless spending, delusions of grandeur, starting multiple projects that would never be seen through, and countless nights of insomnia. Everything was chalked up to being a depressed but wild slut. **BLAM.**

The breaking point came when my grandmother passed away in 2020. Her loss devastated our family and broke me. I had a breakdown so heavy I couldn't get off the floor from crying, my mind a cacophony of grief, internal screaming, anger, bewilderment, and agony. I was so far from Texas (where she lived) that I couldn't be with my family to grieve given the hell that was 2020. Everyone understood the situation but that didn't make things hurt any less. **Game over.**

I sought and was able to receive counseling trying to reconcile the grief, along with discussing the other mental health issues I'd lived through. Soon enough, I was diagnosed with bipolar II disorder. While it made literally *everything* about my early adulthood make sense, I feared it, believing all of the stereotypes surrounding those with mental illnesses like this. If your only source of information on this was sensationalised crime stories or *Law & Order*, you'd think people like me were criminally insane, dangerous, unfit for polite society, menaces, and shouldn't be anywhere near good, upstanding people.

Living with a mental illness doesn't make one inherently wrong or evil. Of course, a diagnosis is also not an excuse for bad behaviour, neither does it make that acceptable. I'm an adult and I'm responsible for my actions. I've tried my best to rectify wrongdoing and recover from the collateral damage after I've come out from episodes. Consequences from moments of weakness and insecurity alongside bravado and ego may balance themselves out on paper, but are more complicated to handle between yourself and other people.

I hesitated telling anyone outside of my family about living with bipolar II for the longest time, fearing the people I cared about would stop caring about me. Hell, sharing this publicly is terrifying. The support and reassurance I've received along the way has assuaged those fears, at least as much as they'll be allowed. My husband has held me as I've spiraled and assured me everything will be OK. My best friends have been patient and understanding; whether manic or depressed, they've let me know they'll always be there and nothing will change between us.

The people who care, my inner circle, all know when I'm stable and when I'm in an episode. They're patient with me through everything. I try my best to keep that love and compassion in the forefront of my mind, through the frontlines, foxholes, and everywhere between—a silver lining on the battlefield, hope on the horizon. My golden hours, when the violence stops and I remember I'm loved.



Taylor B. is the Editor of *Handbasket*.

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do you want your story in *Handbasket*?
submissions are always welcome!

Handbasket Zine is for LGBTQ+ writers/poets/
journalists/artists in Ellensburg, Kittitas County, + central
Washington State (*and beyond!*) to share their stories.
POC submissions are encouraged.

Anonymous contributions are welcomed.

Pursuant to the Supreme Court's ruling in *303 Creative LLC v. Elenis*, Republicans need not apply.

Essays: Preferred. Please no greater than 700 words.

Poetry: check the size of these pages & gauge your
length accordingly.

Journalism: depends on the story; let's talk.

Art: PNG or PDF. Absolutely **nothing** AI-generated.

Submissions are limited to one (1) per person per issue.

For more info, reach out via email

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