



Purpose: To provide students at Imperial Valley College with opportunities to share their work with a wide audience. It will allow students to submit entries in a variety of categories and to be recognized for excellence.

There has been no such campus-wide opportunity for honoring and publishing student academic work.

A project of the Spencer Library faculty and staff, EL CORAZÓN will allow students to present their work, and have selected submissions published and displayed on the library webpage and in the library.

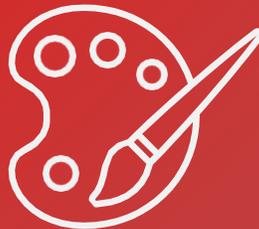
## CATEGORIES PRESENTED:



Essays



Poetry



Painting



Music



Drawing



Speech



Photography



Creative  
Writing

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As I embark on preserving the legacy of my predecessor, Betsy Lane, I am proud to offer this publication as a tribute to the Arts at Imperial Valley College. Here you will enjoy the work of our students as they get an opportunity to share their work and talent. Art is a marker of a healthy society. Here you will see that our students are poised to represent our community and our school. I am proud to share their work here.

Dr. Hector Garza, PhD, MFA  
Dean Arts, Letters & Learning Services



# Creative Writing

## Expiry

By Daniel Gomez

L. Daniel Gomez

### Expiry

"It took me a long moment to understand what I was seeing, yet even if I could comprehend, my conscious wouldn't allow it" said his 20 year old self.  
"I stood there, immobile."

People are stories wanting to be heard, waiting for someone to listen. This one begins with sirens; wailing from a distance — A cry from an unnatural beast... or maybe the city's inner demons.

Fighting against Peace, in the eyes of the cynic — that tired cliché...  
"Seeing is believin'."

That sound carried like a wind-chill from the season --- through alleys and open windows, where the poor and the fortunate fear...  
each for their own reasons.

Red and Blue lights, a dark silhouette — a friendship that will never end  
how could one forget — space encompassed with a fleeting feeling...

Once known as regret.

The undetected shadow, walking in lock-step; swelling and impending...  
emerging from the depths.

... This is the moment, don't let it pass unnoticed...

A path to decide, each in separate directions; experienced in a long line of mindless violence; acts of desperation — a simple objective:

fill the silence, refusing alternative explorations.

A victim of relentless mistakes, causing isolation.

The second path unknown, for the path was decided; beset with —  
unhesitating, strong-willed and obtrusive quietness...

"Yea, though I walk through the valley in the shadow of death,  
I shall not fear..."



# Creative Writing

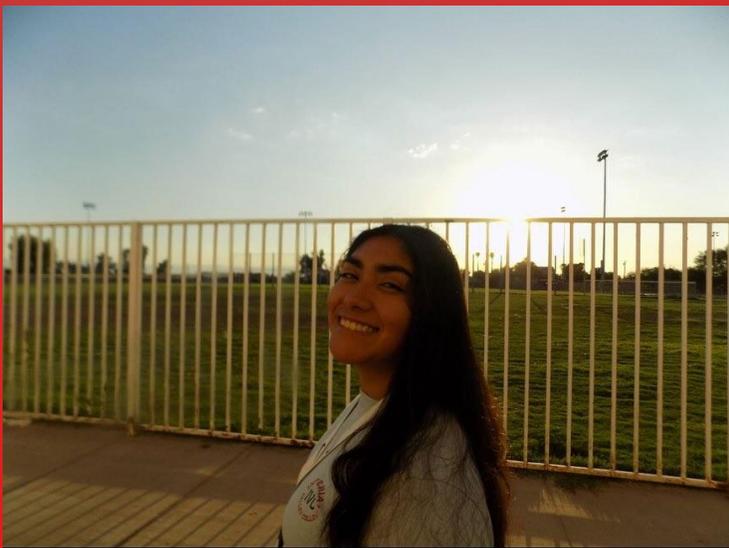
## A Researcher's Dedication to the Dead

By Desiree Samaniego

The creaking silence of age echoes through the walls, broken only by the soft rustle of turning pages and the rhythmic tapping of a keyboard. Yet, the researcher pays no mind to these faint sounds. Instead, she immerses herself in old records, uncovering the stories hidden within human remains. With every turning page, she reveals fragments of lives once lived—traces of history preserved in bone. Intrigued, she spends her time at home researching their life and death. She spends hours examining public autopsies of victims whose untimely demise has yet to be solved.

She gives her attention to the skeletal abnormalities of the victim, longing to know more about them. Weekend after weekend, she devours detailed reports by forensic anthropologists. Inspired by their precision and expertise, she shapes a routine dedicated to unraveling the silent narratives of the deceased. When she first stepped into her kinesiology class for the first time, she was ecstatic. Learning that she would soon dissect a specimen, she saw an opportunity to deepen her understanding of anatomy. Every lesson became a chance to learn more about anatomy and utilize her developing knowledge to help fuel her mind. She immersed herself in case studies given to her in class. The researcher looked deeply into the text for clues and analyzed the information provided to her. Using her knowledge, she writes a report about her victim, telling a story about their life and death using statements given by forensic anthropologists as a reference.

Now two years older, her passion has only intensified. With each new case, she sharpens her ability to read the language of bones, continuing her pursuit of knowledge. For her, forensic anthropology is more than just a field of study—it is a way to give the past a voice and tell the story of someone's life.



Desiree Samaniego is from El Centro, California, and was born in Brawley. She is currently majoring in Fire Technology and Fire Administration and plans to continue her education at Columbia Southern University. Her original interest in forensic anthropology stemmed from a deep desire to help others tell their stories, even after death. That same interest inspired her to transition to a career in the fire service, where she can preserve life and make a difference.



# Creative Writing

## Child in Chains

The sound of chains echo through the passageway. As heads turn the image of a monster is expected. However, the sight of a child is all they will see.

But let the opposition speak, and with arrogant conviction, the predator shall be falsely portrayed.

The echo of the chains seize as the child in chains makes way through the narrow corridor... Upon the chambers still more eyes stop and stare, by those who await with accusation and judgment.

Guilty by association is the child in chains. Without sinister intent, still, what awaits are the words practiced like a common melody upon the lips of every soul condemned in purgatory, \*"todo dia"

A "Super Predator" he is called and forever remembered as... Grimson life never once been shed by those hands now chained, but a predator all the same.

For he is guilty by association... Adherent to a lost misguided cause. Only in the eyes of a mother's love does a child in chains stand here... And never the predator.

By the debts of desperation the child in chains only desire is to alter the time of past. The tears of a mother be discard no more...

But to alter time of past will never be. For in the past a child that began as bright as all the stars may be allowed to fade before the touch of manhood, for the cosmic force is never stable. And a star may render a Super Nova.

Long forgotten are the curious eyes of the child; the innocent touch that inspires the tales of far off lands and happy endings.

Long forgotten is the innocence of yesterday, nevermore will childhood be measured by smiles, play, and genuin imagination. For it is no game which harbor the child in chains, and those who stand before and scrutinize is no imagination. For in the gallows he would hang if it rendered just.

A child in chains no more, \*"todo dia" is the verdict. And the **tear that falls** is not the **tear of a child**. For it shall be the first tear of the man who has been forced to grow the dark thoughts of reason.

\*"todo dia" translates to all day in spanish; a term used meaning life in prison or (life sentence).

Written by Julio C. Sanchez

Hello, first and foremost, I am honored to have been chosen to be published by El Corazon. This is my first time I have ever submitted anything I have written, and the feeling of it being published is a great one.

My name is Julio C. Sanchez. I am a student enrolled at the Imperial Valley College program offered here in Centinela State Prison. The inspiration of the poem I submitted is from being a person that was incarcerated back in 1996 when I was seventeen years old. I was charged, tried, and convicted as an adult. I am currently serving a twenty-five-to-life sentence.

I am now forty-six years old. When I wrote this poem, I must have been twenty-nine or thirty years old. It was at a dark and turmoil-filled time in my life. I was being housed at the Pelican Bay Prison SHU (Security Housing Unit) not knowing if I, along with many others, would ever have any real human contact again, or even see sunlight.

There have been a lot of changes though the prison system, many good ones. In particular, the college program has been offering so much to us. IT has allowed us to become something more in this life, even defined as beautiful. We are growing as people, as individuals, and giving us an opportunity by truly finding something unique within ourselves.

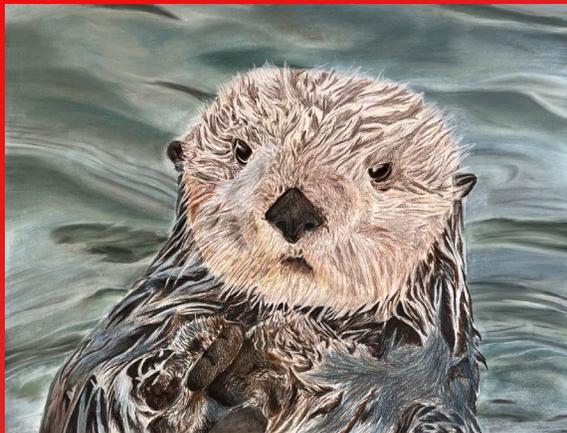
I give thanks to those who have chosen to publish these words from my heart and even tears. Opportunities like this that are offered and given help to demonstrate and provide that something so many of us never knew and/or have taken for granted. I cannot wait to share this with my wife, I know she will be just as joyful and proud as I have been made today. Thank you.

# Drawing



## Extra Furry Friend

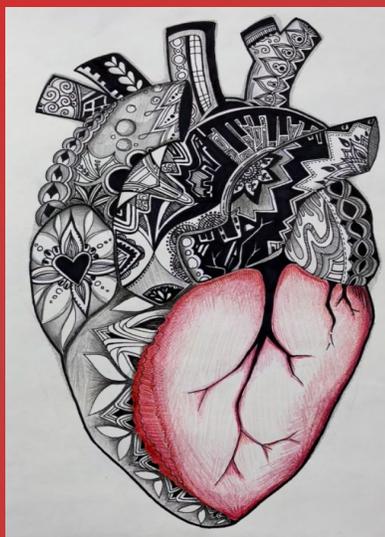
By Alyssa Diaz



Alysa Diaz was born and raised in the Imperial Valley. She is currently finishing her associates in studio arts and will be continuing her studies at SDSU. She keeps herself busy by trying out new mediums of art and dabbles in different crafts such as crocheting, embroidering, and sewing. She loves nature and music, which often are the motivators behind her art pieces. Her favorite subjects to portray are animals, especially her beagle!



Galya Lopez was born in El Centro, CA. She is currently majoring in Studio Arts for transfer and is trying to figure out where she wants to go after IVC. She gets inspiration from her personal experiences and the world around her. She loves playing with color and texture in her paintings and uses that to evoke different emotions.



## No Es Solo Un Corazon

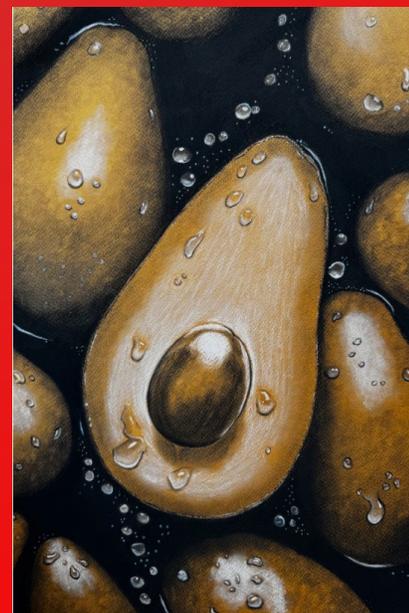
By Galya Lopez



## Avocados on water

By Julissa Mascareño

Julissa Mascareño (born January 1st, 1998, Mexicali, B.C), an IVC student seeking an arts for transfer major and who dreams to become a great artist, a passionate dreamer who expresses her creativity through music, drawing, and painting. She found a way to connect with the world and with herself in art. Her style is wild with no rules, just following the heart, always inspired by her unique love for avocados.





# Essays

Addiction

By Christopher Flores

## Addiction

In my NA/AA classes they encourage us "Only in working the First Step do we truly come to realize that we are addicts, that we have hit bottom, and that we must surrender." They try to redefine the term "surrender," but I'll be damned if I ever admit to such an act. This may be my pride talking, or it may be my "Higher Power" telling me never to succumb. I suspect that these meetings do not understand my addiction; however, I see myself when I gaze at the members.

Time has passed. Fighting my addiction has been a struggle, a struggle against myself. Nevertheless, I've been able to resist. I can finally comprehend what I was doing was not only wrong to myself but to others as well. I warn you all, addiction maximizes when you're oblivious to the disease. Addiction destroyed my family, and my self-destruction was so damaging I felt I was at a point of no return. I remember when common sense was not so common in my life. A tenuous grip on reality was useful to commit my malicious behavior. As a consequence my memories haunted me for years. I've gained the fortitude to replace those memories with John Dewey's words: "The good man is the man who, no matter how morally unworthy he has been, is moving to become better."

It was easy to overcome my marijuana

and alcohol habit, but this addiction was something different, a wicked outlier. This substance cannot be smoked, injected, or consumed to get high. The worst part about this substance is that it can come in many forms, which I now perceive as tools of evil. This substance is uncanny because I had to inflict it on others so that I may get my desired effects of euphoria, alertness, and relief of pain. A few times I was close to overdosing on this substance, from a blade and a bullet.

As a child I was unaware that my neighbors were carriers of this disease. Did I get infected through them? My environment was the perfect setting for my addiction to spiral out of control. Out of guilt I started to count the problems that ignited from my addiction, but the count was endless. Obsession, compulsion, and progression are the motivating forces of my addiction. Selfishness, greed, and anti-socialism are the common symptoms. How can I forget aggression; self-denial would still be at its peak if I refuted that aggression didn't feel so good. With divine strength, I have prohibited myself from using aggression for self-medication against my self-pity. I am sick and tired of being a criminal addict!

Education is the cure to my criminal addiction. As I take a dose of the cure every semester, I realize now that I come from a world where nothing made sense. Although, locked inside Pandora's Box I managed to

still see hope. I'm trying new things without being bashful. College courses, Criminal Gang Anonymous, Prison Arts Collective, exercise, and more helps me subside my emotional eruption.

My greatest enlightenment, aggression feels good, but altruism feels better!

My name is Christopher Flores, and I was born and raised in Fallbrook, California. I am attending IVC cares from Centinela State Prison. On My 31, 2025, I will be incarcerated for exactly twelve years. However, these twelve year have not been wasted or fruitless. With the help of and encouragement from my family and friends, CDCR staff, IVC professors, and my fellow incarnated individuals, I have accomplished many thing throughout my concrete journey. This year I will earn my AA in Psychology, and I will be starting the San Diego State Bachelors' degree program. I enjoy facilitating programs like the Prison Art Collective and Self-Control Program. Because of my downfall, caused emotion illiteracy, I have a desire to study emotions. I am going to use my knowledge and wisdom to become an instrument to combat the spread of criminal and gang mentalities. My favorite book is Emotion Intelligence by Danial Goleman; he stresses: "Those who are at the mercy o impulse—who lack self-control—suffer a moral deficiency: The ability to control impulse is the base of will and character."

Abstract: This essay explains my virtues of criminal and gang violence, and contemplates the psychological arguments of Nature vs Nurture. I'm discussing it in a more abstract and subjective manner.



## Essays

Project Semicolon and Mental Health:  
The Great Impact and Legacy of a  
Mental Health Activist  
By Brian Garcia



Brian Dominick Garcia was born in El Centro, California but was grown and raised in Brawley, California. Currently working towards his nursing degree, he aspires to be a hardworking and exceptional Doctor, able to help anyone in need. With his hopes and dreams residing within the walls of the ER, his passion and love for people stems from his friends and family, the people who lift him to heights beyond the stars.



*Fig 1. Semicolon tattoo replacing the letter "I" in the words "Be Still"- (B. Garcia).*

At a normal glance, my mother's bright and bubbly personality would make any normal passerby believe she's as normal as you can get. No one stops to think what a person has gone through. My mother did not become the way she is overnight. I'd even argue this is not who she is at all, as it is a mask to hide years of struggling and hardships, trauma and pain. At the young age of 7, my mother, like any other kid, simply wanted to play and live as a child does.

However, what no one anticipates is the evil that hides in the dark places, the evil that seeks to take the innocence away from children living out their childhood. My mother was molested by a family member. One who you'd believe is the cool and caring type. What followed after is a never ending pathway of torment, ones that I only hear about in the stories my mother shares with me. Whether it'd be about how my grandparents were in and out of a jail cell, about how my tio had to sell drugs to make ends meet, or even the one about how my mother got pregnant with me at 18, just before her life had truly begun. A human being can only endure so much, and my mom spiraled into a deep depression. She was filled with anxiety and suicidal thoughts. But even after all was said and done, my mom persevered. She raised a beautiful family, one that I am happy to say I am a part of. My mom's story is one that I hold close to my heart. One that left me in tears for many nights. That is why I believe it is important to share my mom's incredible tale. One that I believe can inspire others to pull themselves out of a dark place. One that is enough to earn the tattoo of a semicolon on her wrist.

What is the major idea for the semicolon on a person's wrist? The tattoo holds significance, as it is the central idea of Project Semicolon, an organization dedicated to helping those who struggle with mental health issues. Founded by Amy Bleuel, a mental health activist, the semicolon tattoo is a symbol of strength. The strength to keep going (Itkowitz). It is important to always let people know they are not alone, especially when it comes to mental health. My mom fought hard against depression and anxiety for many years, and Project Semicolon showed her she was not fighting this battle alone. It showed her as well as many others that there is light at the end of the tunnel, and that their story is not over. Although many of those who suffer with mental health feel as though all hope is lost, those who have a semicolon on their wrist choose not to let their story end - for like a semicolon, they choose to continue and move forward.

Colby Itkowitz's article "Remembering Amy Bleuel" tells the story of Project Semicolon founder Amy Bleuel. She has dedicated her organization to helping those with mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, etc. She created the project in April 2013, and to this day, 11 years later, Project Semicolon has amassed a following of millions online and around the world. Amy Bleuel died on March 24, 2017. Although the article doesn't explicitly state the cause of death, it was later confirmed that Amy lost her own battles with mental health and committed suicide. When Amy took to the internet with an idea that anyone who had struggled with mental illness should draw a semicolon on their wrist, it was a massive success. The tagline was as follows, "Your story isn't over." Much like how a semicolon is used to continue a sentence, the semicolon would represent that you will continue your life. Towards the end of the article, Itkowitz shows some of the responses to Amy's death, further showing just how impactful Amy and her work really was to people. One example included was, "Your infectious quest to inspire positivity will live on. Thanks for changing lives. RIP Amy Bleuel" (Itkowitz). The article also tells about how Amy Bleuel had mentioned how hard it was for her being the face of the project, but also how healing it was. Amy felt strongly about her work and the legacy she left behind. She wanted people to know they weren't suffering in silence, and that someone was always there, even when it felt like no one was. As a result, society as a whole was starting to realize how important mental health really is, and Amy's work had truly opened the eyes of many to the situation.



Fig. 2. Founder of Project Semicolon Amy Bleuel (thestar.com)

Amy Bleuel, the founder of Project Semicolon, passed away due to suicide in March of 2017. Amy Bleuel founded Project Semicolon in 2013 for people suffering from mental illness and to help bring awareness to the growing issue. In 2013 alone, people ages 15-24, died due to suicide. It was the second leading cause of death for people within that age range. Even now, suicide continues to plague people all over the world. Many people are afraid to speak out about their battles with mental health due to the negative stigma surrounding mental illness. Amy once stated in an interview, "People want to know they're not suffering in silence" (Itkowitz). It is here that Amy Bleuel explains how severe mental health can be, especially to people who are afraid to speak out. As she was someone who dealt with many mental health issues of her own, she knows what it's like to be in the shoes of someone who is suffering. She knows people don't want to feel alone when they're going through everything it is that they go through. It is this crucial piece of information that could save a life. Reach out and let people know you're always there and that they're not alone. Hence, the founding of Project Semicolon.

Strength is the ability that allows us to push through many difficult obstacles and overcome many of the challenges presented to us throughout our lives. People who suffer from mental illness require this ability sixfold, as they must possess the strength required to overcome their biggest hurdle and most difficult obstacle; themselves. These individuals may not be inherently strong in the sense that they can lift a car, but they are strong enough to lift themselves when no one else is there to lend a hand and pick them back up. The people of Project Semicolon excel in this regard, as they are able to push past thoughts of suicide and self-harm, or as their main idea puts it, they choose to continue their stories rather than end them. They are the writers of their own tale, the captains of their soul. This is not something that is easily accomplished or done. These people who suffer constant agony with the thoughts of their own making must have the strength to rise above it all, to escape the suffocating pressure of a mind that won't stop racing. This overwhelming sense of the inability to act or do something to change their lifestyle for the better may prove to be too much for some, resulting in self-harm or even suicide. That is why those who have the courage and most importantly, the strength to take the first step towards self recovery possess an extraordinary amount of perseverance and mental fortitude. A strength of the mind that is not present in even those who have no struggle with mental illness. This is a strength that not even I possess at times, which is why it is so inspiring to see those who do inevitably overcome these difficulties make a difference in not only their lives, but those around them.

It was a regular night at the Garcia household. However, something was different. My mother wasn't present. In fact, she was in San Diego doing a special training for a new type of brain procedure involving stimulating the mind to help individuals who suffer with depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and PTSD. Her reputation as a reliable and hard working nurse had preceded her in the Imperial Valley to the point where it caught the attention of the prestigious Dr. Ahmed, a doctor who founded Kaizen Brain Center with the goal of treating patients who suffer from different mental disorders. After she had gotten off of one of her training day's, we video called to talk about how she got to where she is today and what her two semicolon tattoos mean to her; something that patients constantly recognized and took note of almost immediately. "It's a daily reminder for me of how strong I am and all the obstacles I've overcome," my mother explained. "I didn't quit, I kept going."

My mom knew she could either lay in bed all day and think about suicide, or get up, get out there, and get to making a difference in lives that needed to be saved. This is what ultimately led to her becoming the nurse she is today. She casted aside all her dark and traumatic memories and decided to be a person who wasn't held back by something that happened in her past that she couldn't control. My mom remembers vividly what happened to her that day. The man who got away with child molestation. After all, it was his word against hers. "Ashamed, embarrassed, scared, confused." My mother slowly recalled the feelings that swarmed her around the time that it happened.

As the conversation continued, I could get the sense that my mom was deeply troubled by the thought of what had happened. What surprised me however, was the look of resolve that filled her eyes. One that was sure to climb mountains and exceed limits. To go beyond what was expected of her, or of any person who may have been in her situation. "It made me angry, everyone put him on a pedestal and didn't see the monster of a man that was hiding inside," she proclaimed. She was afraid of saying anything, yet the rage that boiled inside for the man that committed the act was burning deep within. Despite that, she didn't let that prohibit her from living the life she wanted. After countless nights of tossing and turning, my mom decided this would not be her end. Her story would continue being written. The only difference is, she would be the one holding the pen.

Looking down at the semicolon tattoos on her wrist and arm, she explained, "I was searching up symptoms of depression and had come across Project Semicolon's website. It was there that I read about the founder of the project, and her story completely resonated with me." My mother describes it as a testament of all that she had been through. She was inspired. She wanted to keep going. She didn't want her life to end. My mom had always had those two semicolon tattoos on her body. Even though she did not get them until long after she discovered Project Semicolon, they had become a part of her and her character. Where a scared, broken, and angry person once stood now stood a woman of strength, one who now stood for what she wanted and what she had always believed in, a person of resilience.

My mother has always been the type to strike a conversation with anybody if she was given the chance. A social butterfly, my mom always knows how to brighten the room with her happy-go-lucky disposition. Her light always shines bright, especially onto those who seem trapped in a darkness they can't escape. Her ability to do this stems from her roots of having to be in a constant battle with herself. One that she claims victory over again and again. Through her personal troubles and traumatic experiences, she gained the ability to sympathize and comfort the people who need a shred of hope. A shred of hope like the semicolon permanently engraved on my mother's body. Her very character captures the strength and courage represented through the ideas of Project Semicolon. Even though things always seem to go wrong in life, it has been proven time and time again that staying alive and never losing the light at the end of the tunnel will undoubtedly lead to a better way forward. One filled with peace, happiness, and contentment. Those strong enough to put their mind to rest get to choose how they want their story to go, and how it may be written. When a mind refuses to stop running, it can fill us with thoughts that slowly torment us, and can ultimately prove to be the unsuspecting danger that leads us to an early grave. That is why it is important to never lose the light, to always search for a way out, and always grasp onto our lives with all the strength we have to give. Our lives belong to us. Not to our thoughts, not to our emotions, nor to our pasts. We can seize the future and carve our way forward. Our stories are not over.

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## My IVC Experience By: Jesse Torres

The true shackles that hold any man in prison are not those of steel-bars & concrete walls, but those of our own ignorance. If you are really serious about being found suitable at Board. Job number one is learning. And the key to learning is study. IVC's classes, courses, & curriculum is not like the beans, rice, & soups (you buy at cantina) that is, an **ADD-WATER-and-STIR-PROPOSITION!** IVC Professors help us to realize that the answers we seek are within. Professionals, therapists, self-help groups, & books are all mechanisms. Which can produce solid results. If intentions are aligned properly. IVC, is the most significant with major implications than all others. Primarily because everyone incarcerated seeks to be free. What does that mean? To go into the parole board & present one-self as an IVC student educated & articulated as a change individual, is a detriment to ones future success. So while at IVC, I had to calibrate the moment & do a heart-check. And reevaluate my understanding of life, and ask myself if I am "minimizing?" Assuming "full responsibility." Am I free from remorse. Am I living empathy. There's no prescription for this, and the best way to learn how to succeed is to practice! When I go into my parole hearing I will enter the Boardroom with an attitude of responsibility, of humility. Of confidence in my transformation of indebtedness for the wrongs I've committed and a desire to make amends. Time and age have diminished my impulsivity. IVC's renewing of my mind and restoration of my heart, unfolds with an expanding point of reference I experience by degree just how precious life truly is. Even as my criminal past is magnified in-contrast to life's ever-increasing beauty. Therein lies the dichotomy of one's transformation. My new found joys will forever be directly proportionate to the depth of sorrow beneath my remorse. I have a lot of issues I'm dealing with, but all them issues are in a car. And the car is moving forward. It is well in IVC. This affords a healthier internal balance that maintains perspective and fortifies my humanity with a heightened sense of empathy. A man/woman can survive 40 days without food, 3 days without water, 8 minutes without Air but not 1 second without Hope! Hope is a medicine I use

more than any other I can't go a day without!  
HOPE means Helping Ourselves Pursue Excellence,  
Keep your mind right, heart strong and spirit solid,  
Ex-gang-member, thug & Drug Addict Dealing  
Hope not dope. IVC Student  
#HOPE Dealers

# Essays



Jesse Torres is in his second year at IVC with a hope of majoring in Psychology @ Cintela B Yard. Born and raised in Ontario, California. I value faith, family, friends. I enjoy exercising, playing and watching sports. Las Vegas Raider fanatic. I also like eating, TV, movies, music. But my passion is reading and writing. To be published in El Corazon two years in a row is distinguishingly amazing and unbelievable! Thank you so much to all IVC staff, professors, education coordinators, for this once in a lifetime opportunity. It is the attitude of learning that lets us find wisdom everywhere, every time, and everywhere. I am a seeker who believes the purpose of life is to serve humanity with unconditional love.

## El fuego es mi elemento favorito By Astrid Ruelas



## Music



My name is Astrid Ruelas. I am originally from Mexicali B.C, but I migrated to the United States in 2015. My plans are to continue working on my music career and develop more music compositions. I create my music based on what I experienced what I see, and what I stand for.

# Music



Tessa Leon is a singer/songwriter from Yuma, AZ, with a passion for music in all genres, especially pop. As an 18-year-old senior in high school, she also attends Arizona Western College in Yuma and Imperial Valley College part-time. In addition to singing and writing music, Tess has become certified as an Avid ProTools Professional and spends her free time learning about music production in the hopes of releasing her own album. She plans to attend a university in San Diego and major in English and Music.

## Summer Love By Tessa Leon



SCAN ME



## Northwest By Leonardo Ojeda

Leonardo Daniel Guillén Ojeda, also known as "Leo Guillen," is from Imperial; even though he was born in Los Angeles, he was raised in Mexicali, Baja California. He is majoring in Water treatment and hopes to transfer to San Diego State University to continue his studies.

He is inspired by hip-hop and Mexican culture and tries to reflect that in his music. One of the things that he likes most about music is live performance on a stage. His artistic background includes festivals such as Ensenada, Beer Fest 2024, and Fiestas del Sol.

Instagram: @leoguillenmusic  
Facebook: @leoguillenmusic  
Youtube: @leoguillenmusic



# Painting



Mexico

By Rosario Ramos Aragon



Rosario Ramos Aragón was born and raised in Bakersfield, California. She spent her adolescence in Imperial Valley. She hopes she can use her art to inspire and help people to express themselves better. Creativity and passion are all part of being artistic. Artists like Mary Blair, Artemisia Gentileschi, Gustaf Tenggren, Tatsuki Fujimoto, and Sydney Collings have shaped Rosario's art style and solidified her choice to continue drawing. She enjoys watercolors, sketching, and scribbling. She believes that anyone can draw, anyone is capable of drawing, you just need the confidence.

Younghoon  
By Keith Serrano



Keith Serrano was born in Mexicali, BC, but moved to Calexico to pursue better education opportunities. She is a Pre-Nursing Major and hopes to join the SDSU nursing program. She specializes in portraits and loves to capture people she admires in her pieces. Although she doesn't do art as often, she enjoys every moment of creating her pieces.

The Sweat, Sun, and Soil  
By Dalia Cerritos



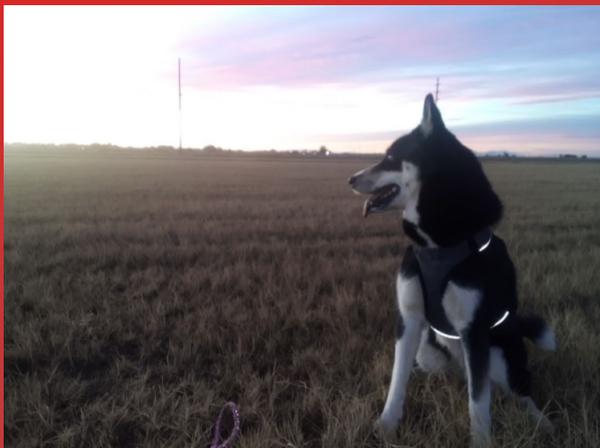


# Photography

A rose is a rose is a rose  
By Angela Leyva



A nontraditional student from Brawley, Angela has earned her A.S. in Digital Design and Production and recently earned her A.A. in Studio Arts. As she continues to explore concepts of herself, she is inspired by Liz and Jinx. Angela's quest remains to find the beauty in the unconventional.

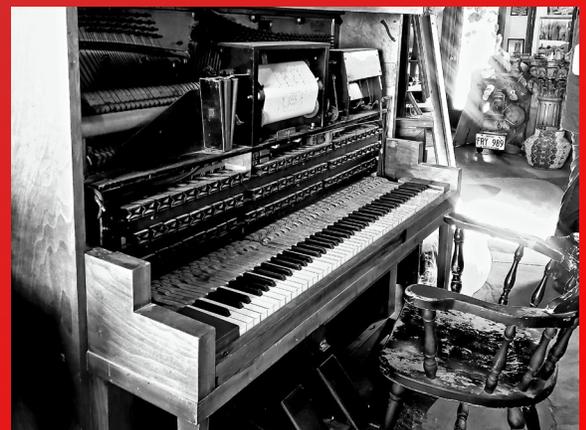


Beautiful skies  
By Frances Muñoz

Hello! My name is Frances Muñoz. I'm from Brawley, born and raised. My major is American Sign Language, but I plan on becoming a veterinarian. I know I will continue my studies I am just not sure were yet. I am inspired by many things in life and people that are in my surroundings, I enjoy the moment in time as shown in my pictures. I love animals and being able to express myself in many ways like throughout my fashion style or art!



Beatriz Ramirez is from Imperial Valley but was born in Mexicali, B.C. She is pursuing Psychology, and her goal is to work with Behavioral Health Services, where she can help young adults and adults to reach their goals and have a better tomorrow. Beatriz is driven by her children and family, and that motivation is evident in everything she does. In her free time, she enjoys creating beautiful pictures that tell a story, and she finds great joy in singing.



Remembered Whispers in Black  
and White  
By Beatriz Ramirez



# Your Haven

By Crystal Mercado

## Poetry



Twenty-six more days until I'm destined to meet you  
I have not seen your face  
I have not heard your first cry  
But I know your spirit  
I know you're strong and powerful  
I know you'll be a blessing to this Earth  
Everyone you encounter will be filled with bliss  
I don't see darkness in you  
You'll be the few who genuinely care  
I'd like to take the credit, but this character will be created without my help  
I can't wait to see your smile that'll tear me into pieces for the better  
I can't wait to see those curious eyes staring back at me  
To look at you, and be in disbelief that you are mine  
That my body created yours  
Part of you is part of me  
I'm not afraid of changing my life  
I'm not afraid for all that is about to come  
I'm ready for the agony that'll finally bring you here  
I'm ready to become your mother  
Yes, I fear the world you'll be apart of  
I cannot shield you from every tragedy  
But I can make sure you always have a safe place with me  
You will cry, you will feel pain  
But I'll be your escape  
I'll be your haven  
One of the few things that I can actually promise  
Twenty-six more days  
I'll see you soon, my boy



My name is Crystal Rain Mercado, I was born and raised in the Imperial Valley, and lived here most of my life. I am currently majoring in American Sign Language, & hope to travel to Africa one day, to a city where the language is used most. I love working on many different types of artistic projects. Whether it's poetry, photography, painting, I'm always looking for something new and love adding a unique twist to my work.



“Poetry, I feel, is a tyrannical discipline. You’ve got to go so far so fast in such a small space; you’ve got to burn away all the peripherals.” —Sylvia Plath

# Poetry

## Questioning my existence

By Cornelius Byers

Im confused IF my life really matter  
IF my voice was heard  
the sound would callapse  
this whisper of mute  
lost in my mind but clouds  
It's room

Do my life matter !?!  
I thought this answer  
could only come from  
you, them and others  
since what was life  
you've stole it's breath  
and changed it's mold  
as time seem to fill  
and spill into the day  
day into weeks  
weeks into months  
months into years  
yesterday fades  
and feels as present as today  
you evaporated  
with them as well as others  
opinion perishing  
leaving like  
shade when the sun looks over  
the answer to a question

big as a elephant  
lost quitly  
crowding the room  
was solid, natural  
as the ground  
and it's roots  
firm held tenacity  
couldn't compare  
why it's true  
my life matter  
given feeling  
more meaning  
to any letter  
to form a word!

Hi, my name is Cornelius Byers

I find poetry a positive outlet  
to relieve what I keep bottled up,  
In hopes I empty the bottle, and  
become confident enough to throw  
away the bottle. so it want be  
recyeted.

## Surreal

## Attachments

By Claudia Lucas



Is this feeling surreal?  
I'm not sure how to feel  
Everything feels absurd  
chilly nights, late night talks  
your words burn into my tongue  
We keep talking until we see the sun

This shouldn't feel like a guilty pleasure,  
but it gets me writing all these letters  
same topics, over and over again  
How much longer can I hold this feeling?  
I don't want to cause a scene,  
I've done this before

The touch of the moon light  
is all i need  
I want to overwrite my thoughts  
start anew  
I hate the way I am perceived  
but maybe that's untrue

Unforgettable whispers,  
linger in the back of my head  
The reassurance I've been craving  
has finally been fulfilled  
So why do I feel so guilty  
for receiving this much attention?

I don't want to push you away  
Where have my manners gone?  
i'm scared of losing you,  
so please  
stay  
and keep asking if I'm okay

Claudia Lucas is from Calexico. She is majoring in Studio Arts and has received her associate degree in Digital Design and Production and Art History last fall semester. She will be transferring to SDSU this fall to continue her studies. She loves writing poetry, painting, and overall, anything that involves creating art.



# Speech

## Your Path

By Tahjah Fortune

It's no understatement to say that college is hard. Countless sleepless nights spent staying up to finish homework, eyes bloodshot from staring at a screen for eight hours straight and turning down invitations to hang out, party, or any other thing that is 100 percent more fun all in lieu of studying for the rest of the day. But the question I ask you is: why did you start in the first place? What was the reason you decided to press the submit button on the IVC application? Was it the hope for a better life, higher pay, or even the fact to prove to yourself that you could and would finish something you set your mind to. We all have different reasons on why we choose community college out of an infinite amount of possibilities where our lives could have diverged, but the one thing that we all have in common is we made the commitment to say yes. Yes to the group discussions, yes to the 7 a.m. or 9 p.m. classes, and yes to the omnipresent question of, "Do you have a pencil I can borrow?"

Regardless if you're straight out of highschool or have a head full of grey hair, remember: the 'why' will always outweigh the hard. There will be days where the moment you wake up you don't want to go to class, do the presentation, or turn in the homework. But I insist if nothing else you keep pushing through. There will always be naysayers who comment, "It's just one assignment", "One day of attendance missed", or you're lame for not being down for whatever's going on. But let me reiterate: the blood, sweat and tears you put in now, will pay off. The hard work, dedication, and devotion to get up each and every day and be a go-getter will be the reason, when it's all said and done and you're walking across the stage onto the next chapter in your life, you can laugh and say "I did it. I survived."

The choices we make in our lives to elevate and uplift ourselves won't always be something to be understood by those around us, but sometimes the life you're called to live is yours and yours alone. The journey filled with the most pitfalls and obstacles is often the most rewarding. Lead by example and show everyone around you the things you can achieve if you set your mind and heart to it. There's a quote that I love to live by: "If we all walked the same path in life, the road would be too crowded." I believe there's an inner strength within us all, a resilience to be called upon when you want to give up. The moment your resolve breaks and you feel you can go no further, go back to the 'why' again and again because quitting was never an option and every single hope, wish, or dream that you decided to bring to life the moment you hit submit on your application, is a reality you can make yours. I believe in you.



Tahjah Fortune is a proud student at Imperial Valley College, known for her ability to uplift and inspire others through both words and action. As a full-time student, cheer captain, and passionate writer, she leads with authenticity — uniting vision and voice with a deep commitment to empowering others. Double majoring in Political Science and Communications, she is dedicated to excellence, resilience, and creating spaces where people feel seen, heard, and valued. Whether through her motivational speeches, community impact, or creative pursuits, she believes in transforming pain into purpose and showing that the most authentic path is always the most powerful one.

# Philanthropy through Adversity

By Jazz LedBetter

“Hello everyone. Thank you for joining us on this special celebration of National Philanthropy Day. It is an honor to stand before you all. A group of not only compassionate, but dedicated individuals who embody the spirit of giving through community service.

Today we get to acknowledge and celebrate the incredible individuals that make us an amazing place to live. I want to give a special thanks to the Imperial Valley Community Foundation. I commend you on reaching your 15th annual. Each year it is more amazing than the last. It is beautiful here; I mean look at the keynote speaker.

Seriously, I would like to congratulate all the people being recognized today, your contributions to the valley are undeniably what makes it so great. Also, I would like to acknowledge the past recipients and future winners that are here today. I see a few of the nonprofit board leadership attendees here. I am so proud of all of you, including myself. Especially everyone who received their certificate. The applied knowledge we received during all 4 sessions is extremely influential to our journeys in the nonprofit world. Thank you, Catalyst, for teaming up with the I.V community foundation and making that opportunity possible.

Some of you already know me whether it be as an author, artist, or advocate. Maybe you have been to one of the many events that I have participated in. There is a few of you that are thinking, “**who is this black girl?**” laugh *I mean come on I am going to keep it real.*

When Bobby presented the opportunity to speak to you all this year, I was almost flabbergasted. I would not say I was nervous or even intimidated. I do not feel as though that is the right emotion. I spoke to large crowds more times than I can count. But the **National Philanthropy Day Awards, Me a Philanthropist?** No matter what your confidence level is we all have a little bit of Mr/Mrs Doubtfire in the back of our minds. I literally heard a scoff, YOU. But you see I live by the phrase “believe thyself. In direct response I said, *who better.*

See when you think of the term philanthropy you instantly think of wealthy people like Oprah Winfrey, Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, and so forth. Huge organizations such as the American Red Cross, Salvation Army, St Jude’s children’s hospital. Large nationwide charities. But today I want everyone to know that philanthropic endeavors are not limited to just financial support. Yes of course, money is what makes the world go round. Without grants, scholarships, sponsors, and other forms of monetary support a lot of people, places, and dreams would not be possible. But realize that offering your time, mind, and heart are just as valuable. The word Philanthropy comes from the Greek roots ‘philos” meaning love, and the “anthropos” meaning humanity. Thus.

Philanthropy is the love of humanity. The willingness to invest talents, resources, and volunteer support is what truly builds greater, loving, vibrant communities.

Ironically this year's theme is "Changing the world through a giving heart. I want to tell you all how I gained the title of philanthropist through adversity. Over the years I've seen a lot. Witnessing things that are unimaginable to most people. I remember the first person in my life that taught me generosity was my father. He and my mother split when I was around two years of age. Throughout my adolescent years he would retrieve me from her custody, and I would spend the summer with him in Hartford Connecticut.

One of my fondest memories is when he would return home from work and every kid in the neighborhood would run up to him excitedly anticipating for him to pull out a large stack of money, and hand each one a dollar.

***This was in the mid to late 90s, so a dollar went pretty far. Back then you could get a drink, a bag of chips, a little Debbie snack, and 10 pieces of candy. Now at 34 I cannot believe how much things have changed.*** Nonetheless, I remember him giving sometimes 100 \$1 bills out a day. At that time, I was under the impression my father was a head chef at a fancy restaurant in NY. It was not until he became the property of the federal prison system that I was made aware of the fact that my father was one of the biggest narcotic distributors in Connecticut. The life I was accustomed to at 10 and half years old was stripped from me. He was sentenced to 10 years. Left in the sole custody of my mother and new stepfather was not picture perfect. Without getting too deep I was subjected to every form of abuse. I was the shell of a child. Suffering through suicidal ideation I had attempted to end my life at least 17 times before I reached my 17th birthday.

By this time, I had started to date. I entered my first toxic relationship. In which not only did he constantly physically, mentally, and emotionally abuse me. He, an adult in his mid 20s, manipulated me then a 17-year-old minor into human trafficking. In that life I have seen things that are unspeakable. But I have made the intentional decision to speak about them. Thus, where Harlot Heart was born. Our mission is to combat this heinous social injustice through awareness, prevention, and empowerment. We educate communities, support survivors, and advocate for policy change. Striving for a world where everyone lives free from exploitation and abuse. Together, we amplify voices, inspire action, and create safe spaces for healing and restoration.

After serving his time and paying his debt to society. Today my father is a free man. Who owns a restaurant now. Called "Always on 10" because anyone who knows the LedBetter's knows we usually are on a 20 and even at our lowest the minimum is always a 10.

**He is actually a chef now.** Creating the entire menu with his own recipes. On my most recent visit back to my hometown we sat together in the place he dreamed of and asked me with tears in his eyes, “why didn’t you just come back home? Once it got that bad in California? Even if I was in prison, you could have lived with your grandmother, aunts, stepmom, anyone” he cried out. I bluntly told him. “I had to go through what I went through, so I can do what I do. Now I can thoroughly speak from my heart. All the trials and tribulations I survived were not in vain. The work I am actively doing not just here in Imperial Valley, but throughout California is fundamental in the necessary change our state is in dire need of.’ I truly believe that one day soon my message will be heard not just in the entire United States of America, but internationally as well. In the words of my late mentor Ermias Ashgedom better known as his stage name Nipsey Hussle, he raps, “Regardless of what you are into. Regardless of what you have been through. I feel like I got to tell you. You got something to contribute.”

Some people want me to be ashamed of my past, but I will never give any of those people the satisfaction. Because it does not matter where you’ve been, it doesn’t matter what you’ve done. What matters most is who you become; from what you experience. What really matters is right now and how you impact the world for the betterment of all. So, what I want to say before I leave you all is what is something you had to overcome that you would not want anyone else to fight through? That is where you can make an impact that could outlive your actual life here on earth. At this time I would like gift the Imperial Valley community foundation with a token of appreciation of this very moment in history. I believe one day any of my artwork will be as renowned as Picasso, Bob Ross, and Basquiat. Once that occurs this will be worth a huge sum of money that can be used to continue to support your mission. Thank you for highlighting Harlot Heart this year.



Jazz ShaMari Mikeda LedBetter is an artist, author, and passionate advocate against many social injustices. Born in Hartford, Connecticut, and of Jamaican, Cuban, and Indian descent, Jazz grew up in the Cayman Islands, where she discovered her love for art in all its forms—fashion, music, dance, and visual arts. Her bold, abstract, and up-cycled creations reflect her unique perspective and the strength of her journey.

Jazz’s lived experience as a trauma survivor drives her mission to raise awareness and support others through her nonprofit, Harlot Heart. She has shared her story in her book, using her voice to educate and inspire those facing similar struggles. Since moving to Imperial Valley in 2018, Jazz’s art has been showcased in galleries, colleges, museums, and public projects, including a community mural that highlights resilience and hope.

Jazz continues to be a force for change as a mother, artist, and community leader. She uses her talents to create, advocate, and empower others, showing that even in the face of adversity, there is always a path to healing and hope.

Many thanks to the faculty and staff in the Arts, Letters & Learning Services Division who put much time and effort into scoring student work and producing this publication and the Artists' Reception.

We are grateful to have the support of the Imperial Community College District Board of Trustees and Dr. Lennor Johnson, Superintendent/President, and a final THANK YOU to all of the talented students who submitted their work!

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"Art is the perpetual motion of illusion. The highest purpose of art is to inspire. What else can you do? What else can you do for any one but inspire them?"—Bob Dylan



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