

ECHO

A JOURNAL OF CREATIVE NONFICTION



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JOURNAL OF CREATIVE NONFICTION

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Echo

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About Echo:

A heart echo test, or echocardiography exam, is a painless test that examines the structure and function of the heart, according to the National Institute of Health. This test may involve the injection of saline or a specific dye into the patient's veins to showcase the heart.

We choose the name "Echo" because we expect the work to come from the heart. We want to publish the greatest creative nonfiction that we can find in our quarterly issues.

We are accepting creative nonfiction all year around, and would love to read the work that you have for us.



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CITY KIDS

WRITTEN
BY **KIM BOND**

We were city kids. Our world was made of sidewalks decorated with wads of colorful gum and narrow patches of grass. The summer was ours—our brilliant mornings, our lightning bug evenings, and also the sweltering heat of the midday. It was then we sought refuge in the galvanized steel pool.

Refreshing as it was, there was only one thing you could really do in a two-foot deep pool, and that was march in a circle until you and your friend felt nauseated. My friend's name was Darcy. She was my kindergarten partner in crime. Well, that was true when we played the Escape from Alcatraz game. In the pool, she was my fellow swoosh.

The circular rapids must have been at top speed when she sprang her story. I listened intently as she told me a shark had once come up through the bottom of her steel pool. According to her, it snapped and then went back down through the bottom of the pool. Then the pool miraculously returned to its normal flat bottom.

No! No way! I was not a stupid child. I confronted her, and she stood firm on her story. Why would she lie to me, her best friend?

I could not understand until one day at the YMCA. It was a lock-in, of sorts, a spend-the-night fun camp that wasn't that fun—especially after I pulled my stunt. As Darcy bent over, I felt my foot lift up and give her a swift kick in the rear. It was as if my foot had a mind of its own. I regretted it immediately, wishing I could go back in time. She was angry and could not understand why I would hurt her. In that moment, I understood. We were impulsive. Kids are like that.

Over the years, she moved miles away to a rural town. Then one day I received a letter from Darcy. I opened it and learned she had become a teen mom. I knew nothing about motherhood, but I did know one thing. She had crossed some chasm of maturity that I would be unable to comprehend for many years to come. Suddenly it was not only miles that separated us but something more intangible. I placed the letter inside the envelope with the only trace of her new address. Then I walked to the trashcan and promptly threw it away without any thought of a reply. I regretted it only after trash day. Then I realized I was still impulsive.

I wish I could go back in time and write to her and tell her I was so proud of her for handling her situation with such grace. I wish I had asked my mother to drive me to wherever she lived so I could hug her and present her baby with a gift. I wish I had realized the connection between two city kids could have transformed into a lifetime bond. Instead, I let our friendship flit away like a butterfly from my hand on a sweltering summer day in the city.

A CREEPY OLD MAN OR FUTURE HUSBAND?

WRITTEN
BY **MEGAN SMOULDER**

I first watched the red and white flame of the Tinder icon grow brighter while I was at a college golf tournament my freshman year. Surrounding Tinder were the stories of hundreds of hookups, bad first dates, and the fear of meeting someone online who was not who they appeared to be in their profile. I never saw Tinder as something where you would find a lasting relationship, but all of my friends on my golf team were using it as a game rather than an actual dating app, so I thought it might pull me out of another boring night at a hotel and end my two-year streak of not talking to a boy.

I was also intrigued by the aspect that I might meet a handsome man my age who played golf. I would then always have a golf partner who I could enjoy the summer evenings or weekends with on the glistening green fairways.

Using Tinder away from my home also gave me the security of not being able to match with someone who I would then see the next day at my college's cafeteria or the store. The thought of that awkward encounter always sent icy waves cascading through every vein.

With the dream of finding a boyfriend who golfs, having the security of being alone, and needing a little more excitement in my life, I decided to try it out with the idea in my head that I would not meet anyone, it would just be for fun. My closest friend, Courtney, helped me create an account and choose the perfect pictures. Soon I was swiping left or right, giving myself the choice of a future boyfriend with just the flick of a finger. When I found a golfer or any other attractive guy, I swiped right and held my breath to see if it was a match. Messages soon started popping up in my inbox saying *Hey ;)* or *You're beautiful*.

One blonde man from another college golf team messaged me and asked me if I golfed. His amazing detective skills helped him piece that together from my photo of me holding a golf club. I was too afraid to answer, so instead I just laughed with my friend over the prospects of me actually dating him and ignored it along with all the other messages. He sent another message awhile later asking me how I did at the tournament that day. I silently freaked out inside as I stared hard at my screen for minutes, contemplating what I should do. This boy was showing interest in me, but I could not bring myself to answer. The thought that he was doing the same thing I was- in a room full of his golf buddies, laughing over who can get a girl to talk to him- scared me away. Tinder relationships could not go somewhere unless it was down the hookup lane, right?

Early next morning, I woke up and walked with my team down to the hotel breakfast. There sitting with his team, was the blonde man from Tinder. Seeing him in person, knowing that we both swiped right and thought each other were attractive, sent me through a rush to grab my breakfast, run back up to my room to eat, and tell myself I was not going to use Tinder again.

Well, I continued using it at a few other golf tournaments, but never brought myself to reply back to anyone and quickly deleted it again. I found out from the rhythmic thumps on the hotel wall one evening that my teammate had better luck on Tinder than I did and was searching for something different.

When I decided to download Tinder again, shorts and tank top weather was just beginning. I was golfing on my grandma's golf course, Chautauqua Golf Club in New York, when she told me about the NJCAA Men's Division III National Championships taking place at her course over the next few days. This ignited my curiosity of finding a man my age who played golf, so I started my swiping again.

As my luck would have it, I did start talking to someone on Tinder that day, but Kyle was not a golfer. In hindsight, this saved me more than I can realize. I was liberated from the troubles of long talks about golf swings, techniques, and even more hours on the course.

Although he was not a golfer, he saw through my photos that I was and sent me a golf joke as our first message:

Two Mexican detectives were investigating the murder of Juan Gonzalez.

"How was he killed?" asked one detective.

"With a golf gun," the other detective replied.

"A golf gun? What's a golf gun?"

"I don't know, but it sure made a hole in Juan."

Someone put a backbone in me that day, or maybe it was the thought of another boring summer and the two-year gap of not talking to any boys that gave me it. Whatever it was sent a flirty response back: *Hahaha good one! Copy and paste it from Google? ;)*

This was one of the first times I responded to someone on Tinder. All of the other messages men sent me were compliments, heys, winky faces, or memes. To me, Kyle's message was not a sly hint to get into my pants, but rather one that showed that he took his time crafting a message that he would not have used with anyone else.

From then on, we continued to write messages back and forth, always figuring out more about each other by asking a question after each response, which kept this growing relationship alive.

After about just about 30 messages back and forth, I asked him: *what are your interests?*

A message popped up on my screen a little while later. *Prisons, guns, sasquatch, inflatable Christmas decorations, kitten play toys, weirdly placed tattoos, and African tribal music. That's about it.*

My eyes lost their ability to move as my environment around me disappeared. I read over and analyzed this message more than any Shakespeare scholar has ever scrutinized any line in *Macbeth*. Should I laugh or immediately delete my Tinder and hide my face for the rest of my life? I did not want to end this small relationship off of one joke that was taken wrong, so I decided to go with a message that was joking but would not hurt his feelings if he was serious because then my life might be in danger.

My reply: *Sasquatch? That's so weird that you mention him because I actually saw him one day out hiking!*

Luckily, he was joking, or at least that is what he claims today.

About two weeks later, Kyle sent an even more terrifying message: he asked me to go out on a date. I never expected to talk to someone on Tinder, let alone meet someone. The horror stories of people meeting someone online and being murdered always plagued me. I did not

know if he actually looked like his pictures or whether or not he was going to kidnap me and keep me in his basement for the next 20 years.

I put on my detective uniform and got to work. With the date offer, he also sent me his phone number and with that, the access to becoming friends on Snapchat and me learning his last name from his username on Snapchat. I did not become friends with him on Snapchat, but I searched his name on Facebook to find him. There were a few people others with his same name, but by using his pictures, I was able to find his Facebook profile. I looked through pictures, friends, and his timeline to glean some clues to see if he was really a 21-year-old. Everything he said on Tinder matched with his Facebook profile and his friends and family seemed like real people.

This gave me the ability to say yes to the date, but it was not enough for me to leave the pepper spray at home on our first date of miniature golf and ice cream.

On the day of our first date, nerves and adrenaline fired up their tanks and shot missiles at my stomach's walls. I was excited to meet him and go on my first actual date with someone who I was trying to get to know, but fear was also a sloshing, cold puddle in my stomach. Continuous doubts rained down into this puddle. Is he a 40-year-old man who's going to kidnap or stalk me for the rest of my life? What's he actually like in person?

So, I put the precautions in place. I forced myself to tell my family. After carefully picking out my outfit, I asked my mom to iron my shirt. I wear shorts and a t-shirt every day in the summer with my hair up in a bun, being as lazy as possible. My mom immediately knew something was up.

As I reached to grab my shirt she asked, "What're you doing? Why are you wearing a nice shirt?"

I picked the shirt up and smiled. "I have a date," I said and then immediately turned and walked out of her room and down the hallway, trying to make an escape to my room before she recovered.

"A date? With who?" she said as she ran after me.

"A guy I met up at the lake," I said. "Don't tell dad, I'll tell him. I'm leaving now, so bye!"

"Megan! You have a date? What's he like? Is he a good kid?"

I grabbed my things and headed down the stairs and out the door. "Yes, he is! I have to leave to go golfing. Bye!"

"Be safe and have fun. I love you!" she said as I shut the door and went outside to meet my father.

I drove to the golf course and my dad followed behind me in his truck. After golf I was going to my grandparents' lake house to stay for a few days because Kyle lived near them.

My dad and I played nine holes with his friends. I was distracted the whole time thinking about what lay ahead. As we drove the cart up to the navy minivan I was driving, I fought back my nerves and finally blurted it out after bouncing it around on my tongue multiple times.

"So, you will probably hear from everyone at the lake, but I have a date tonight," I said as I quickly grabbed my things and got out of the cart to put my clubs in the van.

“What?” His big brown eyes caught mine and latched me onto his web, so he could analyze me.

I turned back toward the van. “Yep, so just wanted to warn you before you heard from everyone else. See ya!”

“Megan!” he said with a stunned look on his face. He paused and shook his head, “Well...okay... have fun. Maybe I’ll come up to the lake tonight.”

“Don’t you dare,” I said with a little bit of a glare in my eyes. As I closed the door, I felt relief. I finally told my parents and they let me go. Now I just have to go on the date. Nerves joined me in the passenger seat as I drove the 45 minutes to my grandparents’ lake house and then got ready for my date.

My grandma is one of the cooler old ladies who can work technology and knows what is going on, although like most mothers, she worries a lot. I knew there was no way I was getting out of telling her, so I described my story of meeting Kyle and told her I was going to meet him tonight. She was worried and asked me many questions.

“That’s why I’m having him pick me up here, so that before I go with him, we can figure out if he really is who he says,” I said as we sat on the couch. “If he isn’t, I’ll just stay in the house and you can tell him I don’t live here.”

“Okay, I’ll do it, but be careful! You know there are people out there who are on those sites and waiting to murder you.”

“That’s why I brought my pepper spray,” I said with a grin as I held it up to show her.

I sat on the couch looking out the window with my nerves who thought it was a good idea to throw a rager in my stomach. A red car pulled into the driveway. I jumped up and my grandma and I looked through the window by the door. A young fit man with curly brown hair stepped out of the car. My grandpa, who was strategically gardening out front, greeted him. I looked him over and made my decision that he was not lying about who he was. He looked exactly like the pictures.

“We are good, grandma,” I said as I took a deep breath and then walked outside.

“Hello,” I said looking into his sapphire gems that sparkled in the summer sun.

He smiled as he looked me over and gave me a hug.

“Are you ready to get beaten in putt putt?” I asked with a smirk on my face.

He laughed. “Oh no. You’re never going to beat me,” he said with a grin as we walked toward his car.

I did not need the pepper spray after all.

ON TOP OF THE WORLD

WRITTEN
BY **MARINA FONSECA**

She was standing on top of the world. On top of a hill overlooking the most beautiful beach scenery, to be more precise. Tourists passed by in streams, taking pictures of this impressively romantic view. She was unimpressed; she had been here before, seen this before. Taking pictures seemed redundant. She could come here whenever she wanted to; it was a mere stroll for her. She could be on top of the world any day of the week.

She wondered how breathtaking something can really be when she has to see it through her own eyes, instead of reflected in the eyes of the person she loves, in which it would flipped upside down, just like her stomach. Everything that he'd look at, mirrored in the gaze of his soul's window – it would carry part of him. This reflection, if it were the scenery of a beautiful beach or if it be anything else in the world, would instantly become familiar, become home. But she had no such person in her life. No one to share this with, share the world with. How much could she really appreciate something when she was doing it alone?

Still, she liked coming here. Maybe it was the panoramic view that kept her coming back. Maybe it was the fresh air that filled her lungs after inhaling the city for too long. Or maybe it was seeing the joy and the laughter of the cute Asian tourist couples who, breathless, asked her to take a picture of them; a picture that will land on their Facebook and be the envy of all of their friends. They made her smile. Obligated, she took out her phone and snapped a picture for herself at last.

She turned around, ready to leave. She had breathed in all the fresh air she could, she had taken in all of the beauty there was to be seen. Or that's what she thought. Until she laid eyes on him.

He was wearing beige Capri shorts, a white T-shirt and flip-flops. His hair was short, yet long enough for the wind to get caught in; long enough to tousle and create an irresistible charm. A boyish charm that seemed to ooze out of every pore of his body. His skin was covered in color. Ink crawled up his right arm and slithered under his shirt, seducing her to follow it. He had the most laid back demeanor and a barely noticeable, cocky grin on his lips. He knew. He knew she wanted to rip out her heart and throw it at him, beg him to take it.

His grin turned into a bewitching smile, and there they were. Dimples, turning his smile into magic, putting a spell on her. And his eyes. She wondered how much more breathtaking the world would look reflected these pale blue eyes. The sun hit him, brilliantly. Tanning his skin, it bounced off of him, blinding her as she stared. She was mesmerized; addicted.

She watched him, in awe, for what seemed like eternal seconds until he moved, barely two inches, adjusting his head to have a perfect view of her. For the first time in a long time, maybe ever, she became self-aware. As if his gaze carried some sort of validation, she only

started to exist after this one look he gave her. Many looks followed since then, powerful ones. But this initial look, the moment they both became aware of each other's existence and forgot everyone else's, this look of wonder, this look of happiness, this look of lust; this look of love? It couldn't have been described by the greatest poets nor the most eloquent novelists.

The wind had moved on from tousling his hair, it was tangling hers now. The heat was dropping down on her and a chill moved from her shoulders all the way down her back. As he was warmed by the sun, it was her body that was boiling. The sun could only try to cool her down. Goosebumps covered her skin and she realized she hadn't breathed in over a minute, in fear that if she would, the moment would pass. She never wanted it to end; she wanted to freeze that moment and stay in it forever. She only found out later that, had she stayed in that moment, she would have missed out on the world. The world that he conquered. The world that he opened up for her.

They are on top of the world. On top of a hill overlooking the most beautiful beach scenery, to be more precise. Tourists pass by in streams, taking pictures of this impressively romantic view. They are unimpressed; they can see all the beauty in the world just by looking into each other's eyes. Taking pictures seems redundant; they carry a feeling inside. They are on top of the world whenever they are together.

BLINK *(FOR DAD)*

**WRITTEN
BY SHAWN ANTO**

I know if I blink, my eyes will adjust to every blurry image of who I am and who my parents want me to be. & Sometimes when I argue or talk-back against my parents, I remind myself it's for the best. Defiance against rule. Just like the world pulling itself from dictators or bad presidents. I swear I love them. But the fear of committing to something I don't truly want to do sticks to the mind. I don't want to be unwillingly ruled, censored for the way I want to live. I'm expected to become a doctor, live the life they want me to live. But no one sees the web that's overtaken the city, the bad side of each decision. The webs are thick & sticky and if I move around too much, I'm stuck. Sometimes I come into the dark and leave bigger darkness in the wake, as if we were to call a spade a spade and blink and losing consciousness, and just go with what others choose us to do.

That's the practical joke, the humor & I think back to something my father would say: "equating life in terms of profit and loss, adhere to certain standards, just make sure you can take care of your family."

My eyes are now attuning to what he meant. I just want to start living my life. I don't want the darkness to keep my eyes from adjusting, I want new light, in this place. In this new space I find myself in. There are memories, blinding me, life is passing by, I'm failing to appreciate what I have right now, I don't want to blink and miss it, I must savor it because I won't get another chance at being who I want to be, again.

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