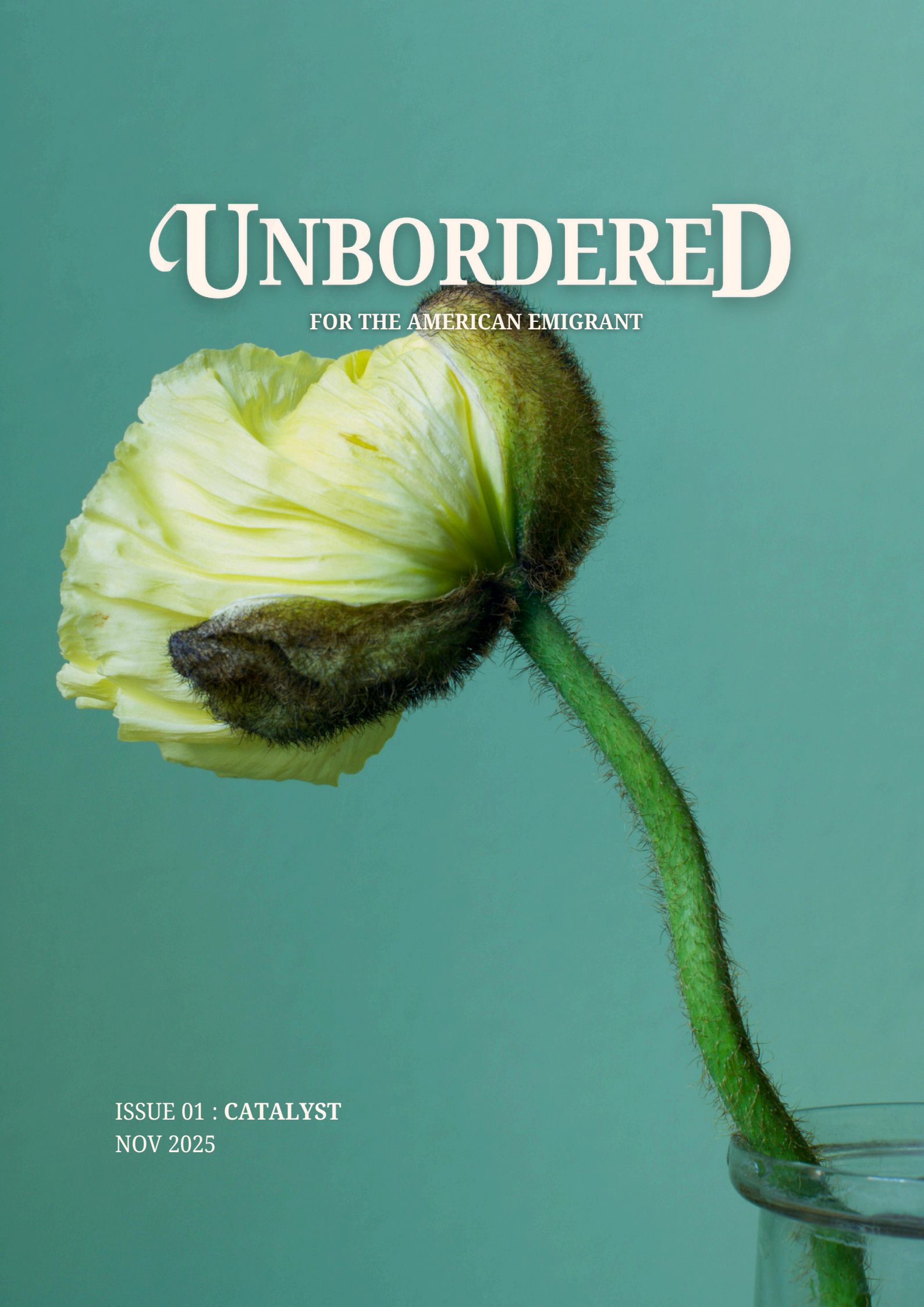
# UNBORDERED

FOR THE AMERICAN EMIGRANT



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# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



Right now, we are seeing the first big wave of Americans leaving the United States. Until this point, the U.S. has been a place where people arrive looking for freedom, looking for the expansion of civil rights, looking for an opportunity. At least, that's the story we've told ourselves.

For the first time in the American imagination–and in the global imagination–the United States is becoming a place that people run from.

And that's a story I'm interested in telling.

In ten, twenty, fifty years, I want to be able to look back and see: what were we thinking? What were we feeling? What were we doing to help ourselves feel more at home? How were we grieving? What kind of art were we making?.

That's how this project started. Around June, as I began to watch the numbers of Americans moving to my small, adopted country steadily increase, I knew that this political moment needed to be documented.

The theme of this first issue is "Catalyst," or, as I like to think of it, "the thing that started it all." In it, we hear from Laura Skov who tells us about the warning signs that led her to leave the U.S., C. Daniel Foster writes about the kitchen table conversations where families weigh the decision to leave, Ché Williams compares leaving the U.S. to leaving an abusive spouse, and Tamlin Day reflects on spirit and form and trans identity.

In poetry, Margaret Suffich makes an offering to the Montevideo sunrise, and Tyger Girard learns that sometimes to live your dreams, you have to wake up.

And in art, Emily Nostro shows us how quilting can be an act of protest, Rae's watercolor reminds us of the view from the plane as we fly away, and Kate Allen shares both her process and pages of a children's book meant to help young readers cope with moving far away.

During the process of putting together this first issue, I have been increasingly surprised at the ways people have shown up for it. From those who have volunteered their time as editors to those who have trusted us with their writing and artwork to all of our subscribers on Substack and social media, this whole project has been a community undertaking that I could not have managed alone. I am incredibly moved every day by the creativity and talent that emigrants from the U.S. I have put into these pieces–not only as ways to express themselves, but as a sort of roadmap for others who might be considering their own emigration.

The American Experiment has, in a lot of ways, failed. While living in the U.S., we know it is folly to dream of what could be and settle, instead, for survival. But we, as immigrants, persist in dreaming. As creators, we persist. We create against a backdrop of abandonment with hope lighting our way. We ground ourselves in the values we cultivated in the States: freedom, diversity, and gumption, and explore what we are learning from our adopted homes: how to uphold community over individualism, how to take care of each other, and how to be humble.

As Americans abroad, as Americans who are becoming immigrants, we are asked to decenter ourselves, and to instead center the culture we are attempting to join. And this is right and good. As people who are from a nation with a sticky history of meddling in the affairs of sovereign nations and a country that has also fed our propaganda to the rest of the world, we not only have a lot to learn, but also a lot of myths to dispel. We are, by and large, not expats seeking retirement on a beach. We're not only here for the adventure. We're seeking safety and stability. We're looking for places to raise families and to create our own chosen ones. We're looking for work. We are redefining what it means to be an American abroad, which is to say, not very American at all.

It is my hope that, by allowing American immigrants to tell our own stories, we will not only understand and remember ourselves better, but we will also help the world to reimagine who we are. I hope that you'll appreciate these works with that lens in mind. If you are inspired to share your own story, please consider submitting to our next issue. The theme will be Rebuilding.

With love and gratitude,

Amber Stewart

Amber Stewart,
Founder, *Unbordered Mag*
Montevideo, Uruguay
November, 2025



Unbordered is more than a magazine. It's a record of those who are choosing to build a life beyond empire. Subscribe on Substack to stay connected as we document what comes after leaving.

# RIVER OF SUN



*By Margaret Suffich*

tell me boldly, Montevideo
palms raised
beating at the sun, i ask you– will
you ever be my home?

it is winter where i come from but
now
the heat of your summer
is drying my wet clothes

i lay them before you,
a burnt offering, just
as i once presented my naked skin
to the last clasping chill of
my country's fall

now i will bleach my bones
in the bare light–
scatter them into
the mouth of the Río

i will reduce myself
in humility, so that
one day

i may be worthy of you



# SOCRATES DOESN'T LAY EGGS

**by Tamlin Day**

After work one evening, Dad rescued an abandoned baby squirrel from the parking lot of IBM. He found it on the ground near his car, so small that he almost stepped on it with his brown suede loafers. He didn't even think about rabies. He took out his handkerchief, scooped the baby up, and put it in his left breast pocket.

Dad told Esther that baby squirrels who were separated from their mothers wouldn't survive. But he consulted a News Net forum devoted to wild animal rehabilitation because it was better to try and fail than to do nothing. Whether the squirrel lived or died, caring for something smaller than us was a teachable moment.

"Feed it with milk from an eyedropper every two hours," wrote one user in answer to Dad's post. "Keep it warm and dry. If it makes it through the night, then you've got yourselves a baby squirrel!"

Being an amateur photographer, Dad had many spare eye droppers in his darkroom. He cleaned one of them thoroughly and administered the first meal. The baby refused to take the milk. Esther and I were concerned. We wanted the squirrel to live through the night.

Esther named him Socrates.

"I'm going to take him on walks," I said, leaning over Dad's arm to try and see our baby.

"You should teach it tricks," Esther said. She leaned on our parents' bed, watching Dad from the other side of the shoebox repurposed for the baby's crib. We filled the box with scraps of cloth from Mom's rag bag.

"It might not live," Dad reminded us. "Socrates," Esther corrected him. She had entered her correcting phase.

"I don't think it's a good idea to name it," Dad said. He tried adjusting the angle of the eyedropper, coming in with the precision of a tailor threading the needle.

"Socrates," Esther and I said together. I climbed up onto the bed and sat on my knees.

"I bet Socrates will climb my blocks," I said. Every year, Mom hatched a brood of baby chickens for her first graders. After school, I would go to Mom's classroom to play with the chicks. I liked building obstacle courses for the birds.



ESSAY



“That’s a great idea; squirrels are good climbers,” Esther said wisely. “They’re mammals. Do you know what that means?” Esther was always asking me what things meant. She tried to teach me algebra the summer before. Now, she was trying to teach me science.

“They don’t lay eggs,” I said. My third-grade teacher had taught us all about mammals. Our pet rabbits were mammals. We were mammals. Our baby squirrel was a mammal. And, unlike Mom’s chicks, Socrates did not hatch from an egg.

“We are of a kind with squirrels,” Dad said. The baby squirrel still would not take the milk. “Like Noah and the Ark, the animals boarded the Ark in pairs, but God created them in kinds. A mammal is one kind, and reptiles are another kind. That means that we share some traits in common with this little guy.”

“In Biology,” Esther said. She stopped talking when Dad looked at her. “Never mind.”

Dad tried putting a drop of milk on the squirrel’s muzzle. Socrates didn’t move.

“In my class, we hatched butterflies,” I said. “They hatch like birds, but they have a lot of legs, so they’re insects. Is that their kind?”

“That’s right,” Dad said.

Socrates was Plato’s teacher. We don’t have any written records of Socrates’ teachings. We know him only through the anecdotes of his students, such as Plato. Another student of Socrates, Antisthenes, was himself a teacher of Diogenes.

Famously, Plato and Diogenes argued over Plato’s Theory of Forms. The theory postulates that the physical world is made up of objects that are immutable. ‘A girl cannot become a boy,’ Plato might say, ‘or a boy a girl.’

A squirrel is a squirrel and cannot be a chicken. Diogenes, on the other hand, was a cynic. He questioned everything and believed that truth could only be found through skepticism. Why can’t a squirrel be a chicken? What does it mean to be a bird? A mammal? A girl?

A daughter and her father only exist in that relationship because they are in agreement: ‘He is my father, and I am his daughter.’

If one of the parties ever decides that they do not want to be in that arrangement anymore, they can leave: ‘I am a father, but that child is no longer my child.’

Plato would say that a child is always a child, a parent is always a parent, whereas Diogenes might say that a child becomes a parent. That a parent becomes an ancestor. Nothing is fixed. We are always in transition.

This was the core of the argument on the day that Diogenes asked Plato to define the form of a man, to which Plato replied,

“A featherless biped.”

Diogenes left, and the audience declared that Plato won the debate.

“I think we should let him get some sleep,” Dad said, after several attempts at feeding the baby.

“I want him to sleep in my bed,” I begged.

“No, he needs to stay in his box where he’s safe. We’ll see him in the morning.”

Esther went to her room, and I went to mine. I opened my closet and pulled out the bin containing my dolls. I began sorting through the clothes, looking for outfits that would fit Socrates.

In the morning, Dad told us that Socrates had died. “He was very small,” Dad explained, “And babies who are that small need a mother to survive.”

A year prior, one of our pet rabbits had been eaten by a dog, so I knew what dead meant. Gone. A fixed form. Immutable.

Animals don’t have souls, so they can’t meet us in Heaven when we die. When an animal dies, they are gone forever– dead means falling asleep and never waking up.

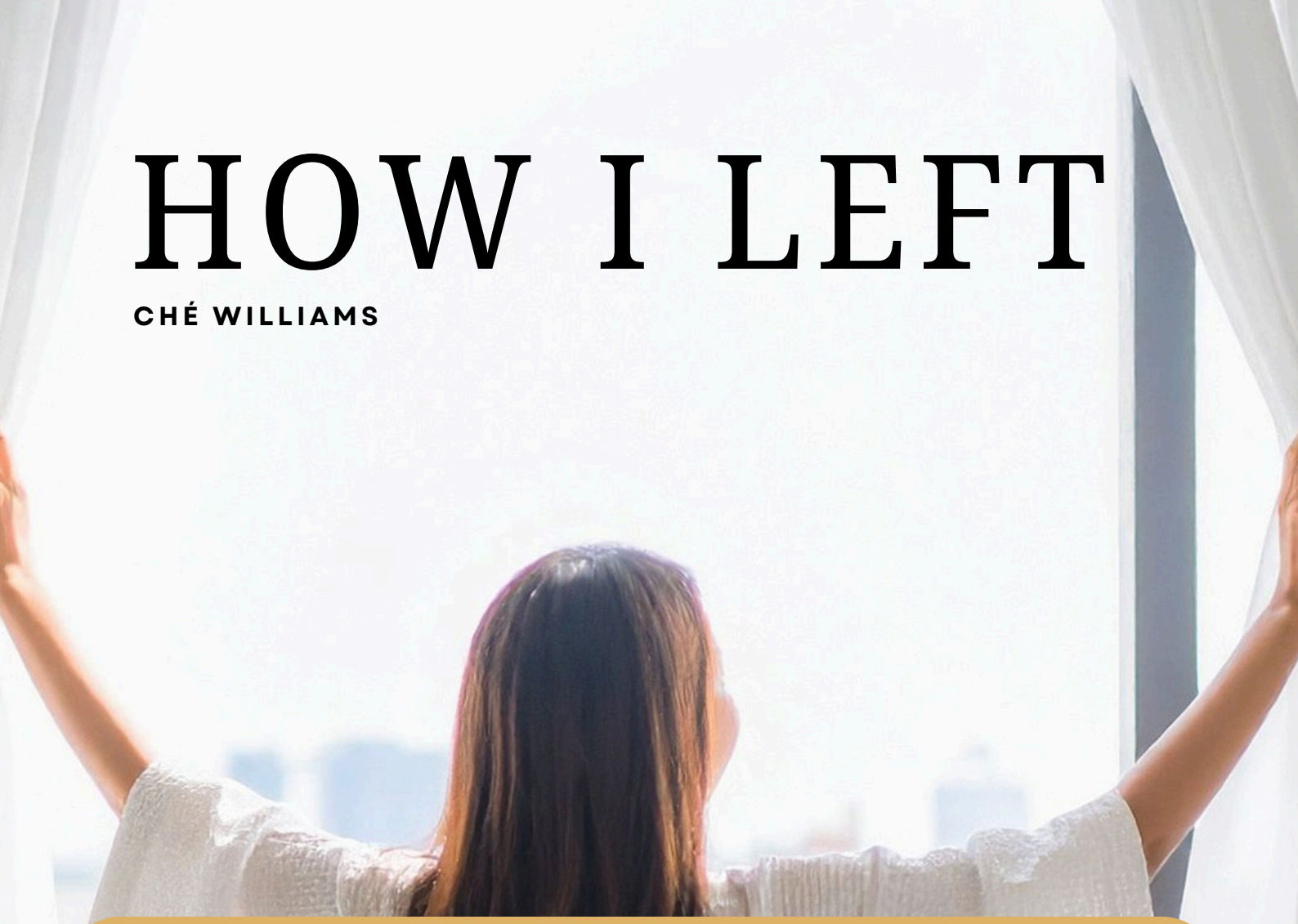
Shortly after Plato was declared the winner for defining man as a featherless biped, Diogenes returned with a plucked chicken. He presented the chicken to Plato and cried, “Behold, I’ve brought you a man.”

If a man is simply a featherless biped, then a featherless chicken is easily a man. If the form is fixed, then a girl who becomes a boy has always been fixed as a boy who was once a girl. The child’s form is fixed in their state of transition.

No matter how you adjust the definitions, a bird is not a mammal, and Socrates doesn’t lay eggs. But if form follows the spirit, instead of the spirit following the form, then everything is always on the way to becoming something else.

# HOW I LEFT

CHÉ WILLIAMS



The barrenness of my new studio apartment in Uruguay feels like a new start and freedom from my past. I glance around, soaking in the crisp white of the walls and sharp lines of the modern kitchen with clean plank flooring that my two tuxedo cats are eagerly exploring. I am the first to live here. The first tenant in the apartment of a brand new building, but also the first of my lineage to leave the United States since they sailed up the James River in Virginia a century before the country was even established. All I brought with me was my two cats, two suitcases, and a desire for safety.

Ten years ago, a much larger pile of bags containing half of my belongings surrounded me as I sat on the floor of my sister's living room. For two hours, the only thought I had was: what the hell just happened? I escaped my marriage to an abusive spouse. Leaving anything is hard enough, and leaving out of survival is even more so. It was not a conscious decision I made, a list of pros and cons carefully constructed and mulled over until the best choice clarifies.

Two weeks before I left my ex, I spoke with a representative at the National Domestic Violence Hotline via chat. The light from my laptop consumed my vision until my inner world condensed to a single point on the horizon, a singularity in the definition of my experience as domestic violence. When the person asked me about creating a safety plan, I immediately declined and closed the chat. I could not fathom that leaving my spouse was even an option.

What I rarely disclose to others is how badly I wanted to stay married to him. But once the words were said, once I had a framework from which to understand my experiences, I was never the same. I was seeing reality clearly for the first time after years of living in a fabricated one that my abuser had created for me– a false reality of safety and so-called misunderstandings.



Once I was living in reality again, I tumbled headfirst into a steep ravine of collecting evidence that supported the chat representative's conclusion. My world was upside down. Looking back, I can't say it was any one thing that made me leave. No, it was all of it. Every seemingly small thing that I chose to ignore, to get used to, to bite my tongue over, or to occasionally risk voicing my disagreement with. An ultimately futile endeavor in a relationship in which one person held power and the other was under the illusion that they mattered.

It began with packing a bag to stay a few nights with my sibling, and then one bag became two. I thought to myself, "I wonder how long before anyone will notice I'm gone?" Only when the trunk of my car was full did I notice the deafening sound of my heart beating in my ears from the terror of what would happen to me if I got caught trying to leave. And only then did I stop trying to bring my things with me and finally got into the driver seat to extricate myself from that life. I didn't bother looking in the rearview mirror, but I also didn't know I wouldn't be going back.

Immigrating to a new country and leaving the US behind felt familiar in a way other survivors of domestic violence might recognize. These experiences felt the same to me in many ways. It was the looming threat of what could happen. Neither staying nor leaving was a desirable option, as both entailed great risks. It was in the late nights of tossing and turning as the dread grew inside my gut. It was in knowing that something awful would happen if I didn't leave while I still could. It was in the primal response of fight-or-flight as the fear of staying becomes greater than the fear of leaving. Ultimately, under it all, was the existential question of whether or not my presence mattered, if I would be missed, if anyone would wonder what happened to me or care enough to ask for my side of the story.

Back then, no one asked me what happened. Leaving with my trunk full that day was the end of my marriage. There was no single incident that triggered my departure. No argument with raised voices nor pleas for reconciliation. I simply–or not so simply–walked away from it all. While I tried to let my actions speak for me, I had hoped that someone would be curious what happened to cause me to leave or at least care enough to check in with me, but no one from that past life ever reached out. I coped by telling myself that my truth was enough.

Looking back, I was ashamed to acknowledge my reality. It took years to stop blaming myself for walking away because, deep down, I believed the abuse was my fault. A ridiculous notion in retrospect, but a fantastic coping skill to believe we have control over something we are powerless to change. In blaming myself, I convinced myself things would be different if I tried harder. Because if it was my fault, I could still fix it. Only once I accepted the feeling of powerlessness could I consider leaving as a viable option.

This time around was different. I readily saw the option to leave the US because there is only so much any individual can do to effect change on the national level. I feel good knowing that I have done and am doing what I can without sacrificing my well-being.

After a decade of healing, I see more value in choosing to tell my story to others. Even when it's hard and embarrassing and my voice shakes as I fight the tears of anger and grief. The sense of betrayal feels familiar too. Whereas before I had to try everything I possibly could before I walked away, and only once the threat of death was present, this time I gave myself permission to walk away when I felt it was no longer worth it. Perhaps I could have tried harder to make things work in the US, but if walking away from my marriage taught me anything, it is that I am under no obligation to sacrifice myself for anyone or anything.

I left because I chose myself. I choose my well-being and my hopes for the future. As I seek a place of safety to start afresh, I know now that I matter.





**ARTIST STATEMENT FROM MELISSA RAE**

This is a piece that represents convoluted feelings about my country of origin.

"Flying from Freedom" calls upon memories of flight paths, coastlines, oceans, and clouds. I have always been fascinated with the winding paths of rivers, the constant motion of clouds, and the stark borders of land and sea.

I have come to see the color palette of red, white, and blue as too strong; as too hot and cold. These colors are so lively that they're uncomfortable to touch.

# OUT OF REACH

**BY TYGER PLISKA GIRARD**



i have the bad habit of losing track of when
i dream a turn and then it happens
i answer a question before it's asked
i wake up like a time traveler, asking people what day is it? Yes but what year?

When i was young, there were dreams i treasured, i knew they pointed at the moon
One in which i found love and finally understood family, time made it true
One in which i ran from the bloody chessboard and tried to free the burning trees,
i never understood that one until it had already happened

One dream, i had it again and again, and i found myself eagerly waiting for it

i ran through the woods, and could hear them shouting my name

i ran through the woods knowing i only need make it to the edge and i would be free
i heard them shout warnings, and lies, and my name over and over. i ran faster.
And when i burst through the screen of trees and found myself on the edge of a towering cliff

i did not hesitate
And the voices shouting my name became whispers of disbelief, of realization
And i threw myself from the cliff, reveling in my freedom as i fell, as i flew to the waters below

i always woke still in the air, if i want to know what happens here, i need to wake up and live it.








# EMILY

*Save Our Sanity: Scenes of a crazy quilt, 2025 (Work In Progress).* Crazy Quilt patched with hand embroidered panels.

While waiting on her employment permit to work abroad, Emily spent the summer making this crazy quilt to cope with the disintegration of collective American democratic values and the construction of a literal concentration camp in her backyard. The panels include her collection of political tees, tarps, American flags, and the hand embroidery. She took this crazy quilt to mid-week, mid-day protests outside of the Alligator Alcatraz facility. She sent it off to a federal clerk in Southern District of Florida and then burned his Yale Law School Federalist Society hat in the hopes that someone, anyone would hear her pleas to close the concentration camp.

From left to right: Polaroid taken inside of Everglades National Park, Polaroid taken outside of Alligator Alcatraz., Polaroid taken across the street from the Miccosukee Casino.

*Now That's What I Call Political Art: VI-Vi-MMXXV, 2025.* Hand embroidery and beadwork on screen printed linen.

An homage to those protesting the inhumane conditions inside of Krome Detention Center in Miami-Dade County, Florida. A wrapped cybertruck is aflame. The Miami Freedom Tower, once the site of where many Cuban refugees completed bureaucratic paperwork to ensure their freedom in America, is also on fire. Nice City mocks the city's infamous nickname.

ART


Miami Daily News Tower, Miami, Florida
NICE CITY



# THE PATTERNS IN THE NOISE:

## HOW I KNEW IT WAS TIME TO LEAVE THE U.S.

**BY LAURA SKOV**

When I was in my '20s, I lived in Budapest for five years. We were young, so we went out every night and every night, we talked about the war. In that part of the world, history has a certain weight. You can still feel the pain. It's in the cobblestones, in the wrought iron. That terrible war is still alive there. Every night, I listened to the stories of those who had gotten out, those who didn't and what happened next.

I got to know an older woman who lived in my building. Her name was Erzsébet and she would make us coffee using a complicated iron contraption that looked like it was from the 1800s. We would sit out in the courtyard and chat. Later, she would join us out in the evenings sometimes, even though she was much older than we were. I thought she was brave to do that. Now, I do it myself.

Erzsébet lost her entire family during the war. "Everybody died," she said. She herself had survived only because of a fluke involving a tram hitting a bicycle, delaying her from an appointment with fate. It was only that tram that saved her, because she hadn't yet made a plan to save herself. She'd thought things weren't that bad yet. She'd been waiting and seeing. But while she was waiting, she had felt an overwhelming sense of panic, which she ignored.

"Don't go by what your intellect tells you," she said one night, tapping her temple. "Go by what you feel."

There were lots of stories about flukes like Erzsébet's tram accident that turned out to be salvation. But probably the dominant trope of these evening war stories was the close call. I heard it again and again. It's hauntingly described in Nobel laureate Wislawa Szymborska's poem, ***"Could Have"***:

*It could have happened.*
*It had to happen.*
*It happened earlier.*
*Later.*
*Nearer. Farther off.*
*It happened, but not to you.*
*You were saved because you were the first.*
*You were saved because you were the last.*
*Alone. With others.*
*On the right. The left.*
*Because it was raining.*
*Because of the shade.*
*Because the day was sunny.*
*You were in luck -- there was a forest.*
*You were in luck -- there were no trees.*
*You were in luck -- a rake, a hook, a beam, a brake,*
*A jamb, a turn, a quarter-inch, an instant*
*. . .*

My unconscious absorbed the lessons of those nights: Life is killing and eating. You should always be scanning your environs for safety. Pay attention when things start to change. Always have a plan to get out. And when you get the signal to leave, do it immediately. Do not delay. Lots of the stories concerned those who left it too late.

Too late is too late.

For years, those stories and their warnings lived in my head. I always had a plan, just in case, but I never needed it. Things in the U.S. were pretty good for a long time and then, suddenly, they weren't.

It will take time to come to terms with the results of the 2024 election and its aftermath. Many people I know are struggling to respond. Some of them are considering leaving the U.S. and I spend a lot of time and effort trying to help. But one thing I don't have to do is respond myself. I already did, five years ago, when I got on a plane with my family and left.

When I moved to Sweden in 2019, I was certain the U.S. was heading for civil war, a democratic collapse, or both. There was no shortage of reasons to believe this, but at that time, not many people seemed to see what I did. It was crystal clear that what was happening to the country wasn't going to get better. But in the time it took to prepare our move, my friends said they didn't understand why I leaving. Wasn't this a sweeping overreaction, they asked? Was I maybe allowing my feelings about Trump to warp my brain? I wondered the same thing. But every time I checked, my intuition said it louder: Get out.

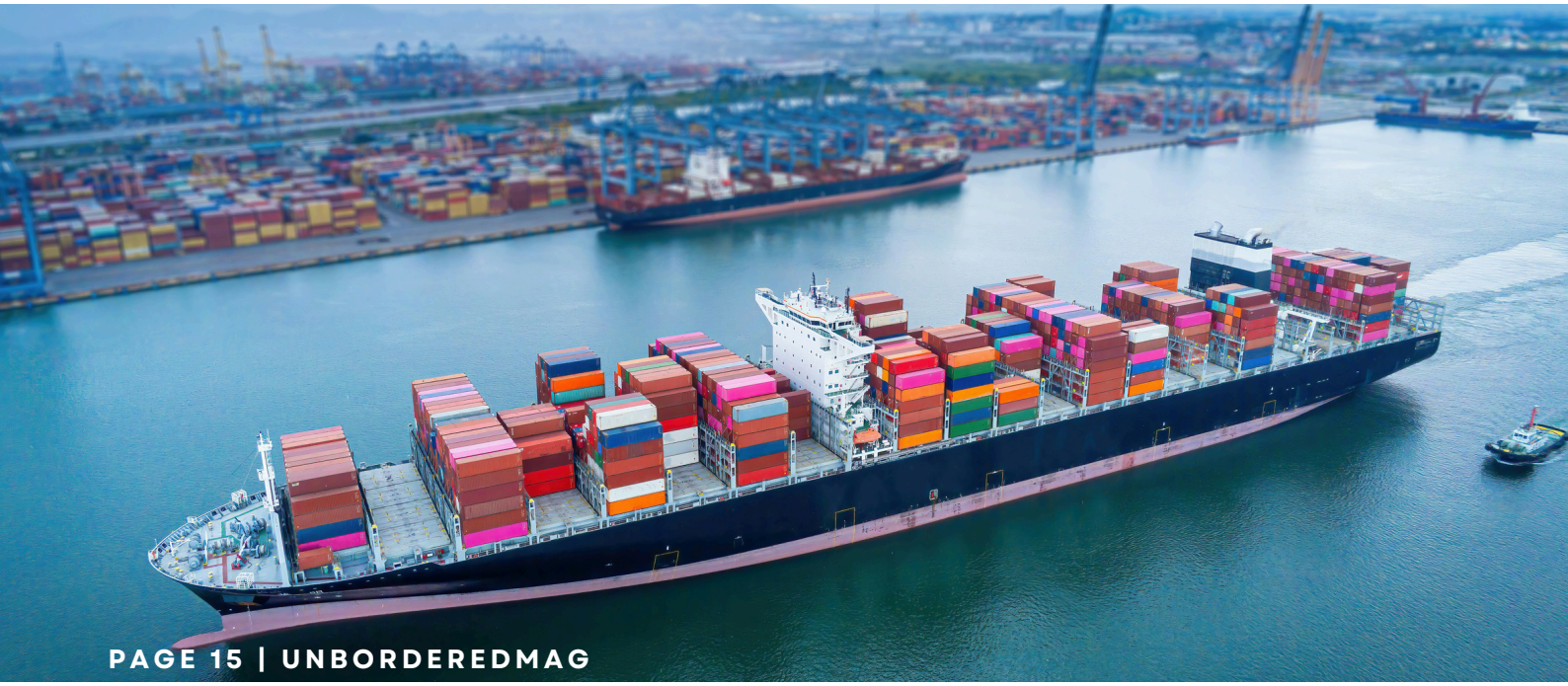
The day after the election, I called my mother. "You were right to leave," she said. "I don't know how you knew, but you knew."

A lot of other people have also asked me how I knew. This is how.

I'll preface what follows by saying I've got something of a track record with these things. Let me explain. Back when I worked as an editor at the Wall Street Journal, I had a dream one August night. I saw people flinging themselves off buildings near our office and cops and firemen rushing around frantically as sirens screamed. I saw myself getting into some kind of company van along with my colleagues. A dream voice said, Pack up your desk. Something is coming. I felt profound fear.

As I wrote down the dream in my journal the next morning, as I often do, the hair stood up on my arm. When I showed up at work with a bag to empty my desk, my colleagues laughed riotously at this ethereal message and my dimwitted compliance. Ha ha! Soon afterward, a Boeing 767 traveling at 590 miles per hour and carrying 9,717 gallons of jet fuel hit the World Trade Center. Its force was equal to 480,000 pounds of TNT. We were in our newsroom across the street, watching people leap from towers and cops and firemen rush around frantically as sirens screamed and no one was laughing then. A few days later, my colleagues and I were commuting to the paper's backup facility in South Brunswick, New Jersey. We travelled there by company van.

Fast forward a bit and my husband and I were living in Mamaroneck, N.Y. in a little yellow cottage not far from the beach. Our two-year old was in pre-K and life was good. Then, one day in July 2007, two Bear Stearns hedge funds collapsed, weighed down by investments in subprime loans. When I read about it, the hair stood up on my arm. I knew enough to know it was a very bad indication. My husband was self-employed in an industry sensitive to economic shifts and I was freelancing. We were nowhere near safe. A voice said, Get a real job. Something is coming. Later that summer, when losses from subprime loan investments sparked a panic that froze the global lending system, I was well into interviewing. In the fall, I began my new job at a fancy investment bank. It was hands-down the weirdest job I ever had and was in no way what interested me. But it saved our bacon.



Bear Stearns folded the following March. In September, on one incredible Monday, Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy, Merrill Lynch sold itself to Bank of America, and the Dow Jones Industrial Average plunged 4.4%. The next day, the Reserve Primary Fund broke the buck when its net asset value fell below $1 per share, sending shockwaves through the financial services industry. By Friday, the share price of my fancy investment bank had slid 57% to about the price of a sandwich.

It didn't take long for all of this to trickle down. Through no fault of his own, my husband's business evaporated into thin air. News of layoffs started circulating around the neighborhood. The playgrounds were suddenly emptied of nannies but full of dads. Our neighbor couldn't make the rent and had to go back home to mom and dad, baby in tow. Our gardener quit to go back to Mexico to make some money. Rumor had it that a guy around the corner was burning his furniture for heat. As the crisis entered its acute phase, prominent banks failed, stock markets plummeted worldwide, and the global financial system almost collapsed. But my stupid job held steady.

The next one was 2018. Trump was in the White House, and my life kind of sucked. I worked remotely for a big consulting firm with a workday that routinely stretched from 8:00 AM to 10:00 PM. In between meetings and deadlines, I popped in and out of my car to drive the kids around our suburban Connecticut town. I was burning out, but no one cared. In fact, I didn't even care myself, because I had no choice but to keep going. Something seemed to have shifted in the compact between capital and labor, and it for sure wasn't in my favor. I was making good money, but this seemed to do nothing but position me for still more work. I felt trapped in some kind of weird servitude that I never consented to. Was I doing this wrong somehow, I wondered?

All around me, no one was talking about it.
I'd been tracking an alarming new indicator for a while. It hovered on the edge of my peripheral vision, like a shadow. I checked it all the time: Middle-aged white people in Appalachia were dying, lots of them. The spike in deaths had begun in 2010 and was attributed to the triad of drug overdoses, suicide, and alcoholism. The phenomenon was labeled "deaths of despair" by Princeton economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton and later elaborated in their 2021 book, ***Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism***.
The introduction reads:






As the college educated become healthier and wealthier, adults without a degree are literally dying from pain and despair. Case and Deaton tie the crisis to the weakening position of labor, the growing power of corporations, and a rapacious health-care sector that redistributes working-class wages into the pockets of the wealthy.
I knew this was a symptom of a failing state. I knew it was systemic. I'd seen it before.

The Russian mortality crisis hit in 1990, after the Soviet collapse. For five years, people there were dying in unprecedented numbers. In fact, it was the most precipitous decline in national life expectancy ever recorded in the absence of war, oppression, famine, or major disease. It seemed obvious that the mortality crisis stemmed from Russia's transition to a market economy and the associated job insecurity, poverty, rising income inequality, and deep uncertainty about the future. All of that had added up to psychosocial stress. And that had added up to suicide and vodka. Now, the U.S. was going through a similar transition, but silently.

Pay attention when things start to change. Everywhere I looked, I saw a country that no longer functioned as it should. The decline was obvious. It wasn't a good place to live. I fought myself for a time because moving a family of four and a large dog overseas is no small undertaking, but I knew it was time to go. During the summer of 2018, on a sailing trip in Sweden's beautiful West Coast, I saw how different our lives could be. We made the decision to leave the U.S. then.

At the height of that stressful final period in the U.S., I had a recurrent dream. When I say "recurrent," I mean that sometimes I had it three times in a single week. I was in a hotel on a business trip and I had to get to the airport to catch a flight home. In the dream, I was running out of time. I would pack one suitcase and then realize I had a second one to pack, as well. I would fill the second suitcase but be unable to close it, and then understand that I needed a third. I would pack everything and then observe that I'd forgotten an entire closet stuffed full of clothes. I would pack everything and then find I had nothing to wear myself. I would pack everything and then discover that I had more luggage than I could manage. I would get my bags to the door of my room, but I couldn't unlock it. I would get my bags into the hall, but the elevator would be broken. I would get my bags into the lobby, but the taxi would cancel. For the years that I had the dream, I never made it home, not once. When I got to Sweden, though, the dream stopped, starting the minute I got off the plane. I think it's because here, in Europe, I'm finally home.

**Originally published by Laura Skov in her Substack publication, Notes on Exile.**

STAFF COLLAGE PIECES

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MADE
GREAT BRITAIN

# IN CONVERSATION WITH KATE ALLEN



Kate Allen's children's book, *Letters from Far Away*, helps young readers understand what it means to leave one home and begin again in another. Through gentle storytelling and textured, handmade illustrations, Allen's story captures the love, fear, and wonder that come with change.

In this conversation, she speaks with *Unbordered* about the move that is inspiring the book and how art can help us build bridges across oceans and identities.

*This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.*

**UN:** Thank you for joining me today. I really appreciate it. We love your book. The whole team absolutely loves it.

**KA:** Well, thank you. That means a lot.

**UN:** To get started, tell us a little bit about yourself.

**KA:** So I have two girls. Their names are Rory and Addie, just like the girls in the book. My husband's British, and we met in New York City like 10 years ago. And we lived in Virginia and New York City. And we're heading to the UK in the spring. So we've listed our house. We've sold most of our stuff already. And my big sister lives over there. She's been over there for probably 20 years and also has two kids, so she's excited that we're going over there.

But a lot of conversations are happening in this house, similar to the ones in the book. And we've told our girls. One of them is one, so she doesn't quite understand what's happening, but the other one is noticing. She's listening to the conversations that we're having, and she's seeing all of her stuff being packed away or sold. And I'm anticipating the conversations that we're going to have once we go over there.

And she has friends and family who are here. So, I've started collecting stationery. We're going to have her write letters and take pictures and stuff to send over here, which is kind of what gave me the idea for the book. But it's sort of my just way of expressing, you know, what I anticipate will happen when she gets over there.

**UN:** Is it a difficult decision to leave?

**KA:** Yeah, definitely, because all of our family is here, even my husband's family. They came over post-COVID when we first had our kids. And so his parents are here, his sisters, and they don't want us to go. Obviously, my parents are sad. I have four sisters. They're sad. Except for the one over there, she's excited, the British one. It was difficult.

My oldest is getting ready to go to kindergarten, and so I just couldn't [stay]. They're both in school full-time. They go to daycare and preschool, and every time we drop them off at school, it's just like, "Well, I hope we see you after school." And my older sister in England has never, ever had to think that way. And she's like, "That's wild. I send my kids to school, and I know that they're going to have a great day, and then I'll see them at the end of the day." And I want that for them. I want them to have the childhood that I had in the '90s growing up, where I didn't think about anything but what was going to be for lunch or playing at recess with my friends, and I didn't have the anxiety of constantly thinking about an intruder coming into the classroom or other things. So, that's a big reason.

Q&A







**ARTIST STATEMENT**

I WROTE AND DESIGNED THIS BOOK FOR MY YOUNG DAUGHTERS, SO THAT THEY COULD HAVE A STORY THEY COULD RELATE TO AS WE MOVE ABROAD. MANY BOOKS ABOUT IMMIGRANTS OR EMIGRATING ARE ABOUT PEOPLE COMING TO THE UNITED STATES. WITH SO MANY AMERICAN FAMILIES LEAVING THE US DUE TO THE CURRENT POLITICAL CLIMATE, GUN VIOLENCE CONCERNS AND OTHER REASONS, I WANTED TO WRITE A BOOK THAT COULD BE RELATABLE FOR AMERICAN EXPATS. I'M WORKING ON A SECOND VERSION WHERE THE CHARACTERS MOVE TO A FOREIGN COUNTRY WITH A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE.

And then the other reason is that they're both girls, and I don't want to raise them here in a place where they may not grow up with access to health care and things. So it helps that we have a sister over there and that my husband spent his first 18 years over there, so he's sort of familiar with things. But it's a brand new place for me and it's a brand new place for my girls, and they're going to have that idea like my older sister has, where it's like she's never felt quite British even though she's been over there for 20 years. And when she comes home, she's never quite American because now she's been over there for so long.

And so I know that at least my older girl, who's going to be five when we move over there, is going to be torn and think, “Am I American? Am I British?” And she's going to have these two identities. So, it's really interesting.

**UN:** Is that a lot of the concern with moving abroad with your family?

**KA:** It's not like my parents live right down the street now. They're both a plane ride away, and so are my in-laws. So, we have to get on a plane to go see them anyway, but I think just the idea of a time difference, calling at bedtime, things like that. It's going to be tricky. And holidays, right now my dad can drive, even though it's a nine-hour drive, he can drive to see us if he really wants to, and now it's going to be across an ocean. And they're concerned about losing communication, even though we live in a digital world, and I'm constantly sending pictures and FaceTime.

But I think just the time difference, and then also they're worried that the girls won't be able to relate as well to things as they grow up, if that makes sense culturally. Like some of my sisters were saying, you know, they're going to feel so out of touch with the family and others, you know, if they have cousins that get born after they move over there, and they're not going to have that same relationship. But they will have that with their cousins over there. So, I think it's going to be wonderful. But of course, as soon as you start telling people, they start listing all of the things that are wrong with that idea and why we shouldn't go and try to talk us out of it. But it's too late now. We're going.

**UN:** I hope everything goes as well, and I'm glad that you had that connection over there.

**KA:** It's much better. I know some people just move to the Netherlands or move to Thailand or South America, and they don't know anyone, and that would be really scary. I mean, not only is my husband British, so he'll fit in, but they also speak the same language.

You know, when I was brainstorming for the book, I came up with the first idea, which was to move to a Spanish-speaking country. And the words are different, the language is different, the signs are different, everything's different. And then I wanted to make it a little more personal so that I could read it to the girls and they would have the same experience, as we move over there. But I think I'm going to write a second one with the language barrier because, you know, England is very similar to America in a lot of ways, especially that they're English-speaking.

But for another family who might be moving to Spain or Mexico or just another non-English speaking country, but where the language is completely different, I think that would be even scarier, especially for kids. So I definitely want to write a second one at some point.

**UN:** Oh, that's awesome. So, have you always been a writer, or is this something that you got into recently?

**KA:** No, just recently. Actually, I have an identical twin. She's coming with us to England, but she has always been a writer, and I've been sort of the creative, artist type. And we always planned on writing a book together, and so she would write the text and I would do the illustrations, and so that's kind of what happened. She's much better with words than I am, and she always has been. So, she helped me write the text, and then I did the art part.

**UN:** Speaking of your art style, one of the things that I really, personally, love about your style is that it reminds me of books I read when I was a kid in the '90s, and like it. There’s a lot of beautiful mixed media and textures, and it's such a unique style. Do you have any like influences that you draw from?

**KA:** That's a good question. I think just memories of what I read as a kid, like you said, and because I like being hands-on. So I'm not really a tech person when I am at work. Even drawing on an iPad is weird for me. And I love sewing and crafting and embroidery and painting and all of that. And so I think it evokes that cut and paste art style that you know kids love and that I loved doing in high school, like cutting pieces out of magazines and pasting it onto things and cutting felt shapes out, and doing paper dress up dolls and all that kind of thing.

Q&A


When they landed in England, everything looked the same... and different.
The words on signs were in English, but people spoke with a soft, musical accent.
Buses had two stories!
Cars drove on the other side of the road!
The houses were made of brick and lined up neatly in rows.


This feels weird...
It's an adventure!

So I think just evoking that nostalgic feel of hands-on, like putting things together as opposed to just drawing on an iPad or something else like that.

**UN:** And I could see that there's just such a level of care about setting up your scenes and everything. Do you want to share, maybe a little bit about your creative process? About how you come up with these scenes. Do you draw it out first?

**KA:** Yeah, definitely, pencil and paper first. I mean, that's the thing. Reading the text first, and then I try to think. So I've always been fascinated with miniature things, like a miniature dollhouse or like mini food, or mini whatever else you make out of clay. So, I was always trying to think if I was going to build something like in the 90s when we were in school, and you had to make those like dioramas of a scene, you know?

So I was trying to think if there was no text and you were just looking at the scene, could you still show what's happening with just the characters and the backdrop, and the scene? So, planning it out that way as if I was building a little mini stage set, and then and then starting from there. But again, just really making it like- if I had to pick words to describe it, it would be whimsical, nostalgic, fun.

**UN:** Very warm, too. I've noticed that it's just very warm and comforting, for lack of a better term.

**KA**: And that's exactly how I wanted it to feel. I'm a photographer, too, for families and things, and warm is definitely my style. Like warm and cozy.

**UN**: As kind of a final question, what would you like for your readers to take away from this story that you're sharing?

**KA:** I feel like the thing that I would want people to take away is the same thing that I would want to just tell every human right now, especially in America, that like we're all human on the same level. I mean, especially kids. You see those videos of kids from different cultures, and they don't have the same language, and they can play together for hours because it just doesn't matter. And they can be best friends. And I just wish everyone would realize that, like you can be halfway around the world and from a different culture and from a different country. And at the deep core level, we're all the same, and we all just want to be loved and have friends and have safety and security and human connections. And it just doesn't matter.

Like in the book, when it's like, oh, they play TIG or they play tag or cookies or biscuits, and you know, sneakers or trainers, and at the end of the day, it just doesn't matter because it's all the same. Like kids playing together and making that connection, and celebrating birthdays or writing letters. It's all the same. And so I just wish everyone would remember that we're all deep down humans, and it doesn't matter where you're from.

And that's what I want to teach my girls growing up, which is part of the reason that we're moving over there, honestly, Because then they can travel throughout Europe and we can hop a bus or hop a train and go to France or go to Italy or go to Eastern Europe or Northern Europe as opposed to just kind of traveling around different states, which is what I did as a kid, which is great, but it wasn't very diverse. So, I'm really excited for them to get to grow up with a multicultural, very diverse childhood and get to experience lots of different places and cultures so that they can also grow up with that feeling of, Oh, I see similarities in people throughout the world, even though we don't speak the same language.

And, on a final note, one of the things that inspired that feeling in me is that my twin sister and I went on a semester at sea in college. So, we lived on a ship and we traveled around the world in four months. We went to 14 countries, and we also talked about we want to write a book about that at some point-a children's book about sailing around the world. Maybe we will, but that was one of the things that showed us, like, there were the same types of college kids and all these places and to see kids and older people, and once you really just sat down and had a cup of tea with someone in Morocco or China, it's like, yeah, you and I are the same. We both like music, we both like art, we both like Titanic, you know, the movie or whatever. And it doesn't matter what religion they are or what color their skin is.

And a lot of people in America who never leave their state or even their neighborhood just don't see that. And so I'm hoping that through this book and then through my girls' childhood that they'll grow up to see that. And I just wish that everyone could travel outside of their world and meet other people.

**UN:** It's definitely an opportunity for growth when you do.

**KA:** Yeah. That's huge. It's just eye-opening. But I know not everyone gets that chance. So, I feel really, really lucky.

***LETTERS FROM FAR AWAY*** **CAN BE PURCHASED ON ETSY**

# FROM SPARKS TO WILDFIRE

BY C. DANIEL FOSTER

When I read the news about the ban on abortion in late June 2022, I didn't realize it was a spark that would start a wildfire in my life.

The family group chat (me, my husband Taylor, my co-parent/ex-wife Emily, and her husband Gravatt) instantly blew up:

**Taylor**: **sends news briefing of Roe v. Wade being overturned** This is crazy!

**Emily**: I don't know if I should cry or cuss react to this. I can't even process this right now

**Me**: What the fuck?! We're next, no way we're not

**Taylor**: Yeah, this is crazy, we knew this was coming

**Taylor**: We just talked about it last week!

**Me**: I can't believe some people are celebrating this right now. I can't believe we would have celebrated this a few years ago @Emily and @Gravatt

**Emily**: Grav probably isn't getting this, fucking lucky, wish I didn't have to read this shit

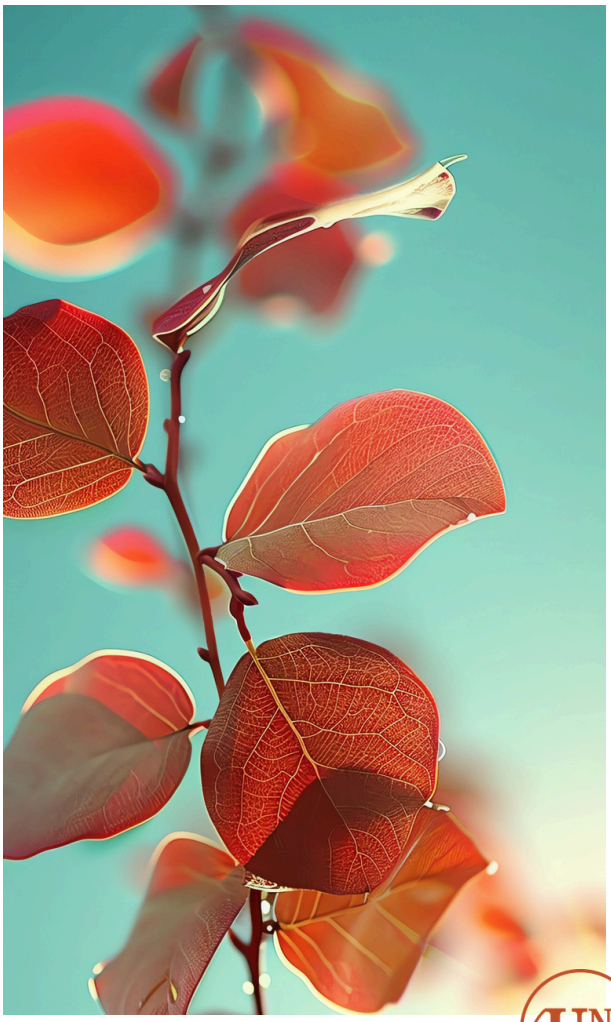
**Emily**: We've changed a lot, and I'm glad we got out. Those beliefs are so harmful

**Me**: He's gonna have a lot to come home to

**Me**: They are. Let's talk more about this after work, we're all almost done

The texting frenzy quickly turned into an in-person conversation, a common occurrence since we all moved in together in the spring of 2020. After I came out as gay and my wife and I separated, we found new partners without the intention of living together, but our plans changed, which happens so often in life.

We bought a split-level home on 5 acres in the fall of 2020 with a goal to have a homestead and build something together as a blended and chosen family. We had hundreds of feet of rows of vegetables, dozens of chickens, fruit trees, and we were building a greenhouse. My husband and I got married on the property. When repair issues came up, and many did, we worked together to fix them, and we all invested in the dream for the long haul.





We obviously didn't imagine ourselves moving abroad together. We thought we would build a life and grow old there, surrounded by chickens and flowers.

"Where would we even move to? How could we even do this? I really don't want to move again! Which states protect women's health and equal marriage?" Emily tilted the wine bottle and poured herself another glass.

"I understand, but we need to think about the big picture and what we're looking at. There has been gerrymandering for decades, the court is packed, and gun violence is out of control," I replied.

Taylor chimed in quickly, "Exactly, let's not forget about the two six-year-olds who brought guns to school last year! In our own state! We know only one of them made it onto major news because the other wasn't violent, but it could've been."

"I know, I know." Emily took a sip. "And I mean, we know everyone in Chesterfield has a gun except us. I really wish Grav were here to talk about this."

Taylor and I spoke together, "Yeah, me too."

After a heavy pause, I said, "We can't even consider moving to another state with the factors we're talking about. Gun violence is everywhere, so even if we move to a state with social rights protections, he won't be safe in school."

We all took another sip and listened to the crickets chirp. Our kid was playing in his sandbox in the backyard as we spoke. It had been a long day at work, and all of us struggled to focus with the news.

I felt our dreams smoldering, but I couldn't see the flames yet. I could only hear the rustle of chickens in the grass, the buzz of bees in the garden, and smell lightning in the air. I had grown so used to hearing and being in tune with the natural world around me, and I hoped it was still in our future.

I sighed and said what we were all thinking. "Should we actually consider moving abroad? Do we really think this is something we can achieve?"

Taylor reached over and squeezed my leg. "Yes, this is definitely something we can do. It would be a lot of changes and things to navigate, but we can do this together. We've done a lot of hard things together."

Emily swirled her wine and thought about it, and reminded us that Gravatt wouldn't be home for another few days. "We will just need to talk more about this in depth then. We can't seriously talk about these things or make any decisions until we can all be together and talk. But what else can we do?"

Conversations like this flowed for days, even after Gravatt came home from his camping trip. We recognized the erosion of social rights as a turning point in the socio-political landscape. If over fifty years of legal precedent could be overturned so easily, the barely decade-long freedom of equal marriage was not far down the chopping block. Each right was kindling for the fire, and our social progress was burning.

We didn't see any legal advancements to protect children and limit gun violence. We had to find a way to protect ourselves. The more we spoke, the more we agreed it was time to consider moving abroad.

Until this point, it had only been a joke before. We would send each other memes or news articles about other countries, or make comments on bad days about how much we wanted to leave it all behind. It was not something we thought would be realistic or possible for us until lightning struck and we saw the spark.

Many factors go into moving, and many more for moving abroad. No one decides to move out of the country for only one reason, and we had a growing list. We investigated which countries might work for us. We googled, read opinion articles, and news from around the world. We joined Facebook groups and reached out to people online. Anything to learn more to help us decide. We prioritized safety, LGBT+ rights and acceptance, culture, language, visa pathways, and many other aspects. It was one of the hardest decisions of my life.



Many factors go into moving, and many more for moving abroad. No one decides to move out of the country for only one reason, and we had a growing list. We investigated which countries might work for us. We googled, read opinion articles, and news from around the world. We joined Facebook groups and reached out to people online. Anything to learn more to help us decide. We prioritized safety, LGBT+ rights and acceptance, culture, language, visa pathways, and many other aspects. It was one of the hardest decisions of my life.

As our son was growing and approaching school age, so was our anxiety for his future. We had a year and a half before we needed to move if we wanted him to start school in a safer place. I was earning my master of science in rehabilitation and mental health counseling at the time, and I reflected a lot about the negative mental and emotional impacts of living through violence and the ongoing threat of violence.

"I can't stop thinking about what I've been learning in school," I said to Taylor as we cleaned out the fridge again. With our busy schedules, there were always science experiments growing in it.

Being naturally curious, with a passion to learn new things, he asked me what I had been learning.

"I've been learning a lot about trauma and how it shapes the brain, especially in development. These are the crucial years, and recurring threats of violence can cause a lot of mental and emotional problems later on. Even if our son didn't live through a school shooting, he would be living through years of active shooter drills and threats that would negatively shape his education. We're seeing higher rates of anxiety, depression, suicidality, and PTSD linked to gun violence in schools."

I handed him another leftover container forgotten at the back of the fridge. He made a face as he opened it and looked inside.

"And that's on top of the normal day-to-day gun violence," he added.

"Exactly, we know outside of school, there's the threat of violence in almost every public space." I took the container from him to clean.

"The Walmart shooting that just happened a few months ago, the Pulse nightclub, the Aurora shooting..." He trailed off, shaking his head because he knew we'd be there for hours listing them all.

"I know. It's like there's no safe spaces left." I sighed. "I'm always alert when we're out. This isn't normal, but our society normalizes it anyway. All of the hypervigilance and fear impacts our nervous systems, especially kids while they're growing."

"I know! I've been reading so many articles about different places, and it's really clear this gun violence issue is a U.S. problem."

It was daunting to pick a new country, culture, language, and home. In many ways, it felt impossible to make the "right" choice. We all spent hours reading articles, government websites, and watching videos to narrow our options.

We didn't want to make the wrong choice.

After a while, I realized there is no right or wrong in these kinds of decisions. It's more like a spectrum, including many possibilities. I'm not sure where we landed on it, but it's clear we are safer, which makes things better.

Many countries were difficult or impossible to obtain a visa or meet financial requirements, and we were prioritizing a long-term plan, like citizenship or permanent residency, versus temporary residency, for legal security.

Within a few weeks, we made a decision. We chose Argentina because of its social progress (first country in Latin America to legalize same-sex marriage, universal healthcare and education, and codification of women's rights), safety ratings, visa options, and because it is a part of the **MERCOSUR agreement**, which would allow more opportunities for us in the future.

After making the choice, it was like another fire was lit, but this one was fueling our new dreams. We were willing to burn the old ones for the hope of something better, but it felt risky without visiting.



So we all agreed the next step would be to visit and see for ourselves.

Within a few weeks, we had a short trip planned. It was a privilege for us to be able to visit the country we hoped to immigrate to, especially on such short notice. I couldn't have done it without our family structure and teamwork. Some of us earned more money, others provided support around the house or with planning, but we all work together. Like any team, we had our disagreements and problem-solving challenges, but the priority has been clear from the beginning, which is our son's and our family's safety.

It was important for us to talk to people, experience the culture, and make sure it was a good choice for us, which seems a bit silly now. After all, we could not truly get a sense of the country in two weeks, but we tried our best!

We had many special moments when we visited. Our son was four, and we made incredible memories as a family. We went to museums, spoke with locals, met with our immigration lawyer, and planned our move. Our son loved all the parks, and we couldn't get enough of the beautiful spring weather. It was strange being in another hemisphere and the opposite season.

Learning was one of the main objectives of the trip, and it brought us a clearer understanding. The country we wanted to move to was not perfect, but it was indeed safer, with a warmer and more open culture. The people have a passion I have not seen in the U.S., and this was a different kind of fire that lit something in all of us. We wondered if we could build something here.

Shortly after the trip was over, we decided that we would move.

It was a huge undertaking for us. Like normal people, we had jobs, vehicles, pets, and other things that we needed to resolve before moving. It took us fourteen months to move with four adults, one child, and four pets. It was filled with fireworks and bombs as plans changed frequently along the way, and emotions were always burning high.

There were so many big and small tasks that needed to be done. We had to prepare paperwork, prepare our animals, secure flights and travel for the pets, locate housing, and finalize a lot of little details. Having four adults drastically lowered the burden for each of us, but even with this additional support, it was incredibly overwhelming and exhausting; much more than we imagined it would be.

With each task completed, it felt more like a prescribed burn than a wildfire. Some seeds can't germinate without exposure to fire, and we didn't realize we had something like that inside of us, too. There were aspects of the burning that were outside our control, but we were building firelines to protect the new dreams we were growing. People said moving abroad would change us, but I couldn't have imagined it.

We've now been in Argentina for two years, and the seeds we've planted are growing in ways we didn't anticipate, but are still beautiful to see. When I look around, I see charred wood and green, and I realize now that maybe that's the mark of anyone who has lived through wildfires.



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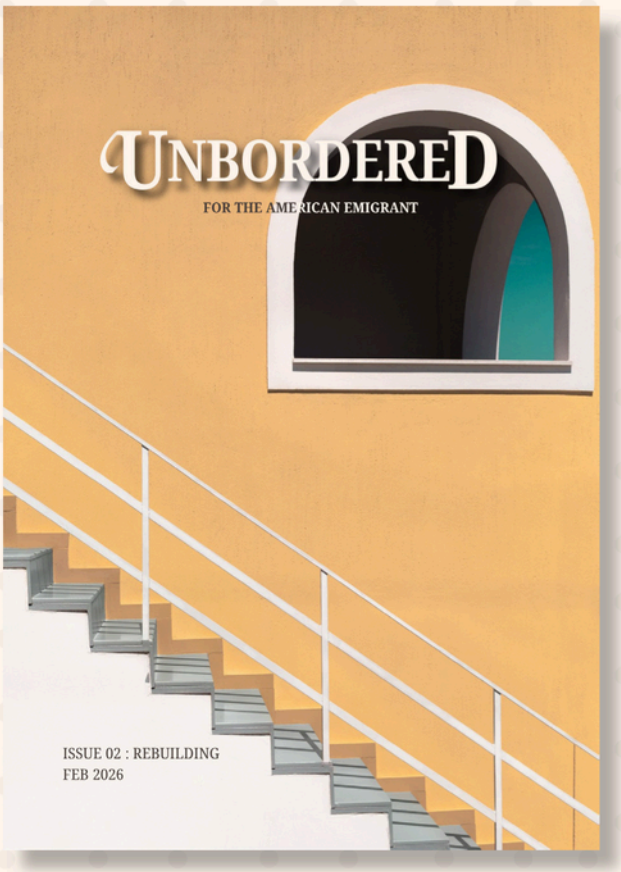


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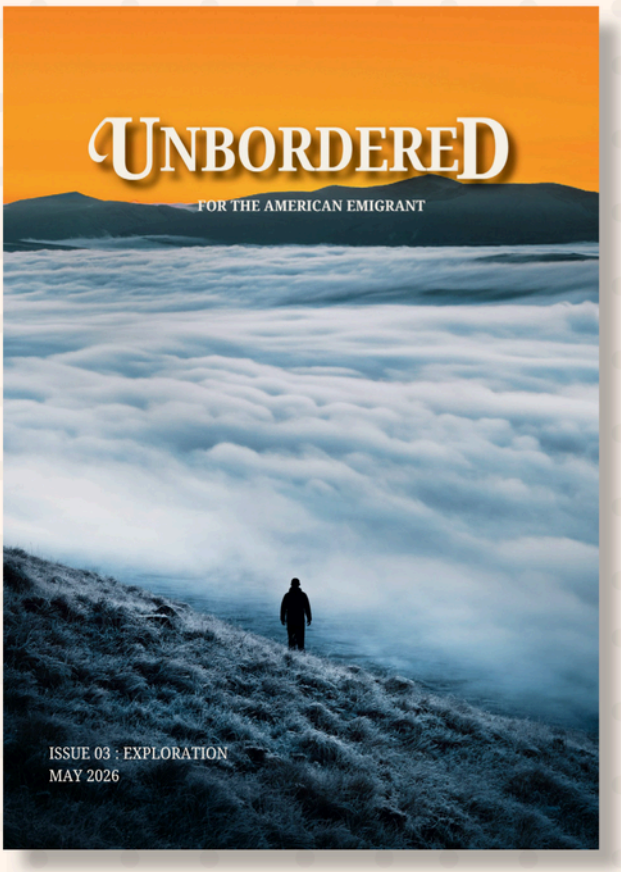


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# WRITERS, ARTISTS & CONTRIBUTORS

### MARGARET SUFFICH

Margaret Suffich is a poet and artist currently residing in Uruguay. Born in Mobile, Alabama, she left the United States in 2025 to search for a better life with her partner, Sydney. Her writing explores belonging through worship, transmuting the ache of alienation into devotion for Mother Earth.

### TAMLIN DAY

Tamlin Day is a trans masculine immigrant from Iowa in the process of seeking asylum in Quebec. He left behind a small two-bedroom home, employment as an assistant manager of a small college cafe, two cats, and a family. He grew up evangelical and this piece is a reflection upon his origins, transition, and the origin of our current political moment. He writes in depth about these issues in his upcoming memoir, Ghost Memories: Revelations in Palimpsest.

### CHÉ WILLIAMS

Ché Williams is a queer, disabled, autistic person newly relocated to Uruguay. They work remotely as a licensed professional counselor to predominantly queer and neurodivergent folks. Their joy in life is their two tuxedo cats. And Stardew Valley.

### TYGER PLISKA GIRARD

Tyger Pliska Girard lives with his wife and daughter, whose love fills their days with meaning. After surviving a severe brain injury that caused both retrograde and anterograde amnesia, they write to explore memory, identity, and connection. They find joy in friendship and the steady rediscovery of what it means to be alive.

### MELISSA RAE

Rae is a queer abstract watercolor artist who grew up in Conway Arkansas where they graduated with their Bachelor's of Fine Arts. Rae's art is inspired by colorful impressionist and modern contemporary movements. Their work draws on vibrant colors and flowing lines mimicking the whimsical paths of nature. Rae moved to Montevideo Uruguay in April 2025 with their partner and 3 cats. On sunny evenings they can be found walking an orange cat named Arkie by the Rambla.

### LAURA SKOV

Laura Skov is an award-winning journalist and the founder of Notes from Exile, which explores life as an ex American. Fearing a democratic collapse, she left the U.S. with her family in 2019 and is now a Swedish citizen based in Stockholm.

### EMILY

Emily is a Miami native and teacher. She is currently living in Ireland and teaching students. Emily grew up surrounded by refugees and people seeking political freedom and paid attention to their stories about fleeing their homeland.

### KATE ALLEN

Kate Allen is a mom to two girls, ages 4 and 1.  She is also a former teacher who now works from home and enjoys illustrating, sewing and photography. She grew up in the midwest in the 90s, and I wants to give her girls the same type of safe, independent childhood  that she got to enjoy, free from lockdown drills and constant hate speech. She and her family are currently planning on moving abroad in the next 6-9 months.

### C. DANIEL FOSTER

C. Daniel Foster earned a Master of Science in Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling as a first-generation college student from Virginia Commonwealth University. Their writing blends professional knowledge and lived experiences with the hope of inspiring and informing readers. They have been living and assimilating in Argentina with their family since 2023.

You can find more about this writer on Medium or TikTok.



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Amber Stewart - Poetry

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