

# the post calvin

selected essays

2013–2016



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Josh deLacy  
Will Montei  
Debra Rienstra  
Abby Zwart

Illustrator: Maria Smilde

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<http://thepostcalvin.com>

*for Professor Bill Vande Kopple*

We are a collection of Calvin College graduates who couldn't stop writing when the classes were done. Here, we explore these restless post-diploma years in the best way we know how.

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# Foreword

Debra Riestra

IT'S COMMON ENOUGH to tsk-tsk about young adults, or worry about them, or assemble statistics about them. Rarely, however, do we listen to them.

All the more reason to treasure *the post calvin*, a space created and sustained by recent graduates of Calvin College. In this space, we can all celebrate the power of writing, specifically the short essay, as a place for true speaking and deep listening. Anyone who cares about young people—anyone curious about human experience, actually—will find in these essays a window onto the passions, worries, and wisdom of twenty-somethings, freshly launched into adulthood. Plus, it's great writing, straight up.

A selection of post calvin essays in print honors the achievement of *the post calvin's* first three years and, we hope, helps expand the circle of those who will come to this space for solace, provocation, and amusement. This print anthology, beautifully curated by Josh, Will, and Abby, with the help of the whole *post calvin* group, gives us something tangible to plop into a friend's hands with the admonition: "Read this!"

Life after college is what we might call unexplored territory in our public imagination. Yet it's a fascinating paradox of

*Foreword*

new responsibilities and new freedoms, a period of enormous upheaval and tentative settling down. Testing what you've been told. Trying one thing, laying it down, trying another.

In these essays, the best of our best, excellent young writers recount their adventures, mishaps, ambitions, and joys. They review concerts and celebrate weirdness. They write a lot about change: getting married, having a baby, reconnecting with relatives, inviting old friends to move in with them, making new friends in new towns, and moving. Always moving.

Regret, nostalgia, kookiness, and prophetic pronouncements swirl together in a single essay. Wide-openness and wariness, earnestness and cynicism inhabit the same sentences. Doubt and faith, disillusionment and hope jostle together in their paragraphs.

I'm inspired by their exuberance and occasionally heartbroken by their longing. Maybe you will be, too.

Debra Riestra  
Professor of English  
Grand Rapids, Michigan  
September 25, 2016

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# Growing Pains

*Today I am twenty-one,  
and my body trembles from effort.*





# Stay Gold, Ponyboy

Lauren (Boersma) Harris

I'VE REALIZED THAT I think about life as if the journey were like climbing a tree.

A tree begins with a trunk then splits into limbs which then split into branches which, in turn split into more branches which then split into twigs. When climbing a tree, the climber reaches a series of intersections. At each intersection, this climber must decide which branch to climb on to next. At the end of a climb, I might be sitting on a vastly different branch than someone who climbed the same tree on the same day.

The issue that I have with tree climbing is that I panic every time I hit an intersection. When I'm standing at the base of the tree, I can see the whole thing. I have endless possibilities. Not all the branches are within my reach, but they all *could* be. But as soon as I make a decision, some of those possibilities disappear.

If I decide to be a business major, I can no longer "be anything that I want to be." I am limited in my opportunities to become a ballerina or a nurse or a black ops agent. I fear making decisions because I fear that I will regret them; I fear shutting doors because I don't know if I'll like the window that God opens. What if it's on the second story? What if it's too small?

LAUREN (BOERSMA) HARRIS

Here's the thing. Robert Frost has this poem that you've probably heard if you've ever read *The Outsiders* (which you should) or you've ever been in a seventh grade literature class.

Nature's first green is gold,  
Her hardest hue to hold.  
Her early leaf's a flower;  
But only so an hour.  
Then leaf subsides to leaf  
So Eden sank to grief,  
So dawn goes down to day.  
Nothing gold can stay.

That's the trouble with me. I want everything to stay gold. I'm the crazy lady who picks a flower then rushes to Home Depot to buy fertilizer and Miracle Gro, talking to the man behind the counter to find out the secret to agricultural eternal life, sanitizing my kitchen so that not a single hoo-doo voo-doo floral disease will attack my precious plant, Googling the proper amount of sunlight and rebuilding my kitchen to accommodate, never realizing that the flower actually died three days ago.

You can't hold on to every cup of coffee forever. If you don't drink it, it will get cold. If you keep trying to pretend that your daughter is still an infant, your experience as a parent chaperone on that next field trip is going to be a little awkward. If you lie crying on the floor outside your ex-boyfriend's apartment, dripping with snot and mascara while you continue to scream incoherent things about the way he smells like Old Spice, someone might mistake you for a crazy person.

It's okay when beautiful moments pass away. It just means that they were real, that they were gold. We've all put a lightning bug

*Stay Gold, Ponyboy*

in a jar, expecting it to light up our bedside table for the rest of forever, as long as we poke holes in the lid. But eventually, the light goes out. And we can't waste our lives trying to resuscitate dead lightning bugs.

Here's another thing. We can love those gold moments while they live, because when they live, they shine. Sometimes they flame out in a blaze of glory. Sometimes they glow and crackle and go out in a puff of smoke. Sometimes, if we're lucky, they're like that frozen moment when you jump off a swing and time seems to stop, like if you wanted to scratch your knee in midair it would be a very real possibility because you have years until your butt will hit the ground.

But eventually, all of our butts hit the ground. Summer vacation ends. We break up. J.K. Rowling stops writing Harry Potter books. The bath water gets cold. The ice cream scoop scrapes the bottom of the box. We realize that we're about to break curfew. We graduate from high school.

Someday, we've got this promise of a glory land, a place where our forever will be golden. But in this life, Eden sank to grief. Leaf subsides to leaf. We can only hold on to the eternal and know that the fleeting beautiful moments of this world are just tiny buds that flower and die on the tree of life. Maybe we can't climb to every branch on the tree while we putter around as the mere psychotic mortals that we are, but making some progress is better than standing, anxiety-ridden, at the bottom of the tree while everyone else works their way from branch to branch.

So what? So the world isn't perfect. So beautiful things don't last forever. So we can't just push the pause button when we feel like our life is right where we want it. Constant motion. Doesn't that make the adventure an adventure?

LAUREN (BOERSMA) HARRIS

When one moment subsides, be assured that there will be another. Life is a bunch of golden moments, strung together, building a ladder to eternity that will crumble in the presence of something of which these moments are only crude caveman drawings. Life was built to be lived. So live it. And realize what you're doing. Don't let those golden moments pass you by—grab onto them with all your might, squeeze them between your teeth if you have to. But know when it's time to let them go.

Here's the last thing. Look backward with a happy heart. Look out for what's in front of you. And for now, climb that next branch and look forward to the resurrection day, when gold comes to stay.

# Superlative Syndrome

Caroline Higgins

I AM REGULARLY TEASED for using too many superlative phrases. “This is the *best*,” I will often proclaim. Another one of my favorites is “This is all I have ever wanted,” which I have been known to use in a situation as daily and simple as reading a well-worn book with a warm cup of coffee. I realize that I can’t keep telling multiple people, “You are my favorite person!” and I should probably stop referring to certain vacations, or even fun-filled weekend excursions, as “the best trip ever!” A friend once told me that I couldn’t keep telling people that swimming out to the sand bar at the beach was “so much fun” because then, what will I say when we actually do something that is extraordinary?

But the truth is, it was so much fun, and all of my friends are my favorite in their own way. Sleeping in is my favorite. Waking up early is my favorite. Cooking healthy food is my favorite. Eating mac and cheese every day? Also my favorite.

Can’t we love it all?

I am comforted by the fact that I am not the only one who has been faced with this problem. Kerouac, for example, was puzzled by the fact that he had too many ideas and passions. “I like too many things and get all confused and hung-up running from one

CAROLINE HIGGINS

falling star to another 'til I drop,” he writes in *On the Road*. It is in this book that he also writes, “the only people for me are the mad ones ... desirous of everything at the same time.”

I hate making decisions. Deciding what to watch on Netflix is impossible. I prefer to order last when eating at a restaurant in hopes that the pressure of everyone turning to me and the waiter's hand outstretched to retrieve my menu will force me into finally choosing between the vegetable pad thai and the fish tacos.

Do I embrace new adventures joyfully because I can't make decisions? Because I need a change? Or because there is a good chance that I will love it?

In early July, I spent a week in Alberta where my best friend and former roommate, Emily, had grown up. Ultimately, I was there to be a bridesmaid in her wedding.

The wedding was at her dairy farm, and everything about the experience was beautifully rustic. Remembering the way Emily had thrown herself into my family's New York life when she visited my hometown (despite the “I'm the only blonde person on the subway!” comment), I was excited to experience everything about the dairy farm where my best friend grew up.

So I let baby calves with rough tongues suck on my fingers before I unpacked and followed Emily up a dangerously rickety staircase to a hayloft. I listened eagerly to every detail about how Holsteins are bred and how often the government milk truck comes and when and how the oldest son of the family is going to inherit the farm—all while riding around muddy roads in a John Deere Gator.

I stopped caring about whether or not I was getting dust on my white shorts or cow manure on my shoes. I jumped at the opportunity to drive Emily's father's farm truck to pick up more

## *Superlative Syndrome*

wedding attendees and friends from the airport. After driving around the nearby downtown area with them for a while to purchase wedding gifts and such, I jokingly commented, “This city driving is exhausting! I need to get back to the farm!” A good friend called me out: “Caroline. You grew up twenty minutes from New York City. Stop pretending to be a farm girl.”

Still, I could see the appeal of growing up in a place where you are awakened by your father getting up at 5:30 a.m. to milk the cows, spend your afternoons running through fields and around your mother’s vegetable garden, and the evenings swinging on a big wooden swing that your grandfather built.

I loved the way the wedding party and relatives from afar congregated and camped on the farm, dozens of people arriving days before the wedding to contribute their hands and hearts. During the day, groomsmen climbed trees to hang twinkle lights and constructed the dance floor, while aunts and cousins set tables and folded place-cards. At night someone inevitably built a campfire that was then encircled by everyone from small children to grandparents, us kids in our twenties being the last to linger over the smoking embers. The nights grew surprisingly cold, and one night the northern lights were just visible enough for the out-of-towners to stand in awe only to hear the locals say, “This is nothing.”

After watching an incredible sunset from the end of Emily’s gravel driveway, I was ready to buy a piece of land, raise a family down the road, and never look back. As I considered my options and prayed a two-word prayer I read once in a book by Annie Dillard (“Last forever!”), the photographer in me came once again to believe that everything and everyone is beautiful in the right lighting. But this—right now—is my favorite.





# About the Illustrations

Maria Smilde

EACH CONTRIBUTOR to the post calvin represents a unique facet of the character we often call “writer.” The adventurous spirit, the introspective philosopher, the political journalist: these people remind us that this character cannot be written into a box. The distinct ambitions and motives of each of the post calvin’s contributors has landed him or her in a different part of the globe. The architectural style of each of the buildings represent the landscapes in which each writer has attempted to create the time and space for him or herself to continue writing, thinking and processing what life brings.



# Contributors

ALISSA (GOUDSWAARD) ANDERSON ('10) 2013–2016

Alissa Anderson lives with her husband, Josh, in New York City, where she is earning her Master of Divinity at General Theological Seminary. Alissa enjoys binge-watching TV shows, singing in the shower, and perusing other peoples' bookshelves. For more, find her online at [www.episcotheque.wordpress.com](http://www.episcotheque.wordpress.com) or tweet her @episcotheque.

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Contributors

NARD CHOI ('11)

2013–2014

Nard reluctantly completed her studies in English and Latin in 2011 but has since discovered that she just might love the big unknown outside of school as much as the classroom. She has spent the past two years running a library in Tanzania, exploring volcanoes, and blogging sporadically about it on [bigpado.blogpost.com](http://bigpado.blogpost.com). A children's literature master's program at Cambridge University is coming up in the near future.

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JOSH DELACY ('13)

2013–2016

Josh deLacy lives in Seattle, Washington, where he climbs cliffs, summits mountains, and builds websites. NPR called him “a modern-day Jack Kerouac” after he hitchhiked 7,000 miles across the United States, and a few dozen surprised drivers told him he didn't smell bad. Since that experience, he found homes in the Pacific Northwest, the Episcopal Church, and *the post calvin*. Josh deLacy's writing has appeared in places such as *The Emerson Review*, *Front Porch Review*, and *Perspectives*. His website: [joshdelacy.com](http://joshdelacy.com).

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*Contributors*

BEN DEVRIES ('15)

2015–2016

Ben DeVries graduated with degrees in literature and writing. He and his wife, Jes, another Calvin English grad, live in Champaign, Illinois, where Jes holds down a real-person job and Ben goes to school. He will maybe stop doing school in 2022 when he graduates with a PhD in American literature.

*Miracle Drug*

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MELISSA (HAEGERT) DYKHUIS ('10)

2013–2014

Melissa lives in Lafayette, Colorado, with her husband Nathan, cat Sophie, and sons Matthew and Jonathan. She graduated from Calvin with a physics degree and then got a PhD in planetary science from the University of Arizona in 2015. After years of science, she's ready for science fiction again and is currently writing and editing young adult sci-fi novels.

*Dr. Seuss, PhD*

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*Contributors*

AMY (ALLEN) FREISON ('10)

2013–2015

After graduating with an English degree in 2010, Amy moved to New York City and spent several years working in children's book publishing. Now, she works as a career consultant and has much more time for writing, reading, wandering the city, cooking non-vegetarian meals (a new thing), dreaming about apartment renovations, and leading worship along with her husband at their NYC CRC.

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DAVID GREENDONNER ('12)

2013–2014

David Greendonner is an MFA candidate at Western Michigan University where he teaches writing and is the managing editor of the literary magazine *Third Coast*.

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*Contributors*

LAURA (BARDOLPH) HUBERS ('10) 2013–2015

Laura Hubers is wife to Matt, mother to Samuel, and copywriter at Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. She loves the Chicago Cubs, cooking good food for people she loves,

*Retail Resolve* 203

MATT HUBERS ('12) 2013–2015

Matt Hubers works as a Recruitment Specialist at Hope Network. When they're not working, Matt and Laura enjoy doing crossword puzzles, reading all sorts of good books, giving their old house some love, and playing with their Narnian cats: Puddleglum, Pevensie, and Rumblebuffin.

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