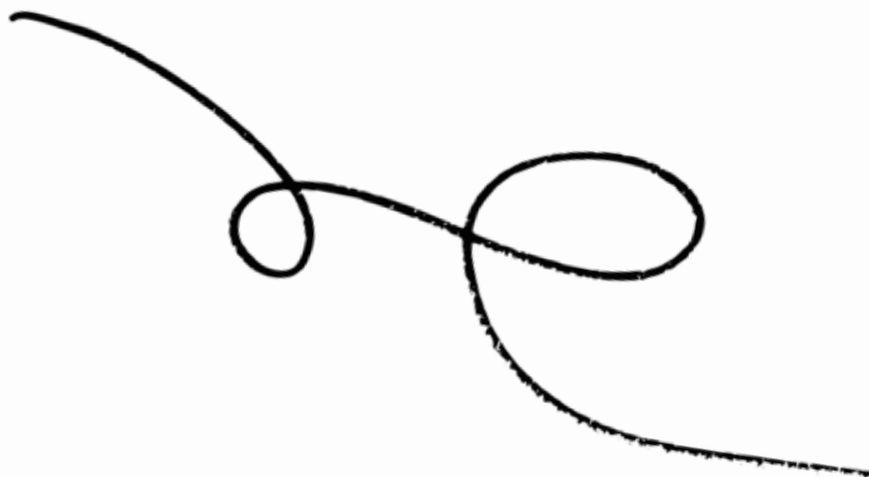


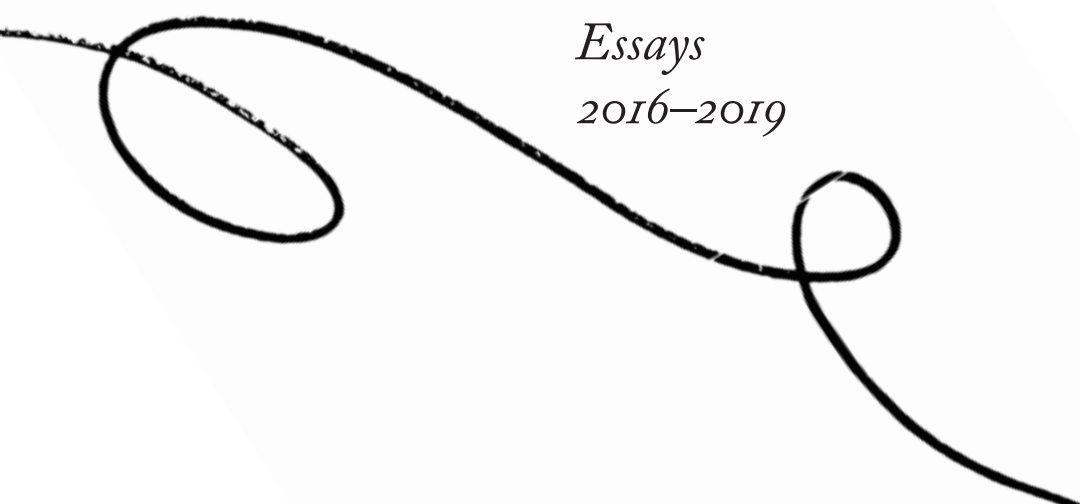
**THE
POST
CALVIN**

Essays
2016–2019



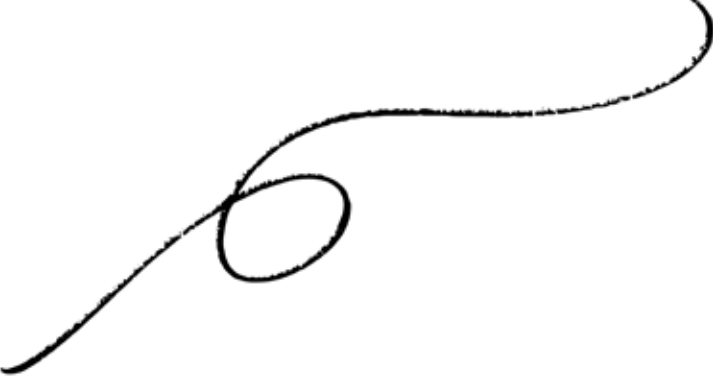
THE POST CALVIN

Essays
2016–2019



Josh deLacy
Will Montei
Debra Rienstra
Abby Zwart

Illustrations by Paula Manni



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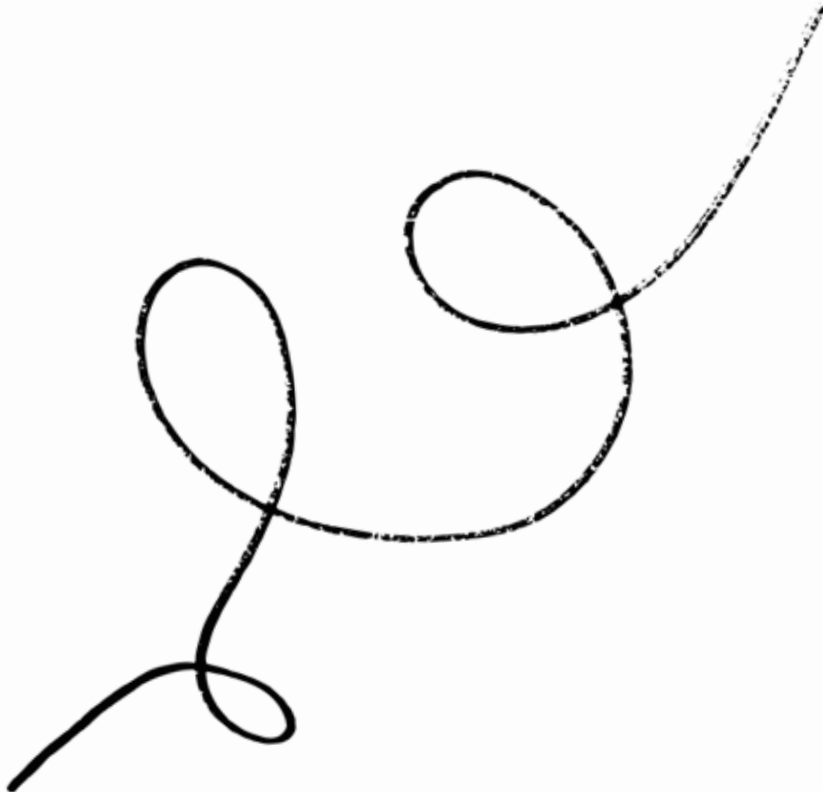
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for the Calvin
English Department



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Preface *Josh deLacy*

The post calvin has never turned a profit, and I can't imagine that changing. We write, edit, and illustrate for less than free; it takes our own money to keep the website on, and everything takes our time, which is ourselves.

I once gave a spate of talks at churches, service clubs, and senior centers about a two-month hitchhiking journey. One senior center paid me with a \$35 gift certificate to Patti's Eggnest Restaurant, and a Rotary club gave me a club sandwich and a side of potato salad, but the rest just promoted me to their ninety Facebook followers or shared my website in their newsletter, and we called it even. I loved it.

The compensation or lack thereof had nothing to do with distilling my journey into a half-hour presentation, remembering a backwoods drive during a question-and-answer session, or re-exploring those roadside months in the conversations that followed. I met old men and women who had hitchhiked themselves,

younger men and women who wanted to, and others who simply enjoyed the story or my telling of it (or my embarrassing enthusiasm).

And then I had a big break—Furman University offered me airfare, two nights in a hotel, and \$1,000 in exchange for an hour-long, TED-style talk about my trip—and after that, the rotary clubs and church basements felt like wasting time in the minor leagues. My talks hadn't changed, but the ruler had.

"A man's whole life, he matches himself against pay," John Steinbeck writes in *East of Eden*, and I read that line as a lament.

In his 1971 study, Edward Deci instructed college students to work on a Soma cube puzzle. Group A was told they would receive a financial reward for their puzzling; Group B was not. Although Group A left the experiment with money, Group B played with the puzzle significantly more in a "free-time" period and reported greater interest in figuring out the cube. Later experiments on the effect of extrinsic motivation versus intrinsic motivation have reproduced similar results, spanning numerous variations in design and subjects.

We have no Group A in *the post calvin*. Our Group B advisory board (Abby Zwart, Will Montei, Deb Rienstra, and I) puzzled out which pieces to include in this anthology and how to order them. Paula Manni and I crafted the cover and layout while Abby edited each essay. A shelf of well-worn grammar and typography books testifies to our "free-time" interest in commas, ellipses, indentation, hyphenation, small caps, widows and orphans, and other minutia. Our anthology proofreaders (Ben DeVries, Gabe Gunnink, Geneva Langeland, Stephen Mulder, Carolyn Muyskens, and a team of Calvin students) likewise defied financial incentive, as did, of course, every *post calvin* writer who has offered their words and their time (which is to say, themselves) to this book.

The ruler for *the post calvin* is not money, fame, or prestige. I couldn't tell you what the ruler is, not in words that pin down a single common meaning for the seventy-two writers who have written regularly for us since 2013 (plus the 119 guest writers), but it has something to do with truth, beauty, and liking the way words fit into sentences. It has something to do with a lot of self- words, too, like -expression and -exploration and -love. And, I think, it has something to do with giving to Caesar what is Caesar's, and giving to God what is God's.

Josh deLacy

Seattle, 2019

Foreword *Susan Buist*

“How will I continue to write?”

In response to that oft-asked question, an English professor and two soon-to-be graduates approached the Calvin Alumni Association Board in 2013 with an idea: an online journal featuring thirty writers under age thirty. The board members were quick to see that this idea aligned with the Alumni Association’s mission—to connect alumni, strengthen the university, and inspire alumni to answer God’s call—and the Alumni Association provided some modest start-up funds.

At the time, I understood how the proposed *post calvin* would strengthen the academic experience by providing recent grads with an opportunity to keep writing and a venue to publish their work. Since then, I’ve been delighted to see the way *the post calvin* has become a hub for conversations and connections among alumni.

The post calvin has a linear beat to it, one post steadily following the next for more than 2,200 days. What surprising insight or entertaining narrative will I read today? At times, I'm startled by how creatively a post articulates something I've felt too: the joy of cuddling with a nephew, the bittersweet feeling of a friend moving away, the scent of a pot bubbling on the stove.

As a reader from day one, I've come to know Katerina in Honduras, Will and Gabe and Josh in Seattle, Caroline in New York City, and Nick from my own West Michigan hometown. The authors have given me a firsthand look at a day in the life of a social worker, a barista, a teacher, a new father. They keep me in touch with the post-college years: searching for the right job, navigating ever-changing relationships, frequent moves.

But each new essay also creates the beauty of concentric circles, not only as I re-visit familiar voices each month but as I observe the chatter and camaraderie among the alumni authors themselves. Over six years, I've seen friendships emerge among fellow writers. I see them encouraging one another: "I love that line..." "Thanks for introducing me to a new artist." And what a smile it must bring to see a "well done" from your former professor. The circles expand even wider when one writer links to another writer's post, citing it as an inspiration or an example, and initiates a dialogue among writers.

The Calvin connection can often be subtle, but it is always strong. Relationships develop because all the writers share the transformative Calvin experience. It's not surprising that these writers are able to notice the small details of life (such as a handful of sun-warmed blueberries) and also reflect on something much more complicated (like the nature of forgiveness). After all, in addition to writing well, these Knights for Life know how to embrace God's gifts—big and small—and at the same time think deeply and pursue justice.

This collection of essays contains the best of *the post calvin* from 2016 to 2019, representing forty-four alumni voices. Join them on their life journeys, and perhaps, like me, you'll find them to be excellent traveling companions.

Susan Buist '98
Program Coordinator
Calvin Alumni Association
Grand Rapids, 2019

**THE
POST
CALVIN**

Essays
2016–2019

**A prayer for the
twentysomethings** *Meg Schmidt*

*It strikes me that many of the
essays that we write for the
post calvin are really unlabeled
prayers.*

Lord, my lord,
God of all unanswered questions,
God of whatever is ahead,
Be with the twentysomethings.

Be with us in our changing, in our movement from the world that
came before, to the world we now make for ourselves.

Toward that making, be with every late-night job-searcher, every too-old-for-internships-er, all of us just looking for a step in the door. Be with the waiters who aren't scientists yet, the sales clerks who aren't published yet. Be with the ones of us still waiting. We have songs to sing you, Lord, if only you gave us instruments to use. Don't let us wait too long.

Be with the twentysomethings.

Be with us on our first days, Lord. Those butterfly-stomach days. Those "what the hell do I wear" days. Even more, be with us in the later days of beginning, the days when friends stop asking us how it all went. Don't let us get tired. Give us big challenges to grow in, Lord, and interesting tasks to excel in. Give us days to be proud of, and sleep that is well earned.

Be with us in the mistakes we'll make—for we know we'll make them. We'll say things in anger, say things in pride. We're beyond our teachers, past the voices telling us that there are consequences for our actions and advising us gently how to improve. We can be so sure of ourselves, Lord, like your Israelites before they began to wander. Teach us, again and again and again, to listen. To remember your laws, and recognize them for what they are: paths to a life well-lived.

Lord, there can be loneliness in the twentysomethings. Be with us in our losses. Losses, we must know, are not your abandonment but you saying something we simply don't want to hear. Stay close as the communities we secured ourselves to during our younger years begin to disband, as surely they must. We're moving forward lord, and (try as we might) we can't take everyone with us as we find new homes, step through new doorways,

wait uncomfortably as the unfamiliar becomes—slowly—the familiar.

Lord, we can feel like strangers in a strange land, but remind us that all lands are yours.

At the end of the long days, don't let us fold into ourselves. Don't let us be quiet. Turn off our distractions, Lord. Let us move in the world, want to be out in the world, even on the cold days. Help our homes to be churches. We will be a light welling up, Lord, where there has been no light before.

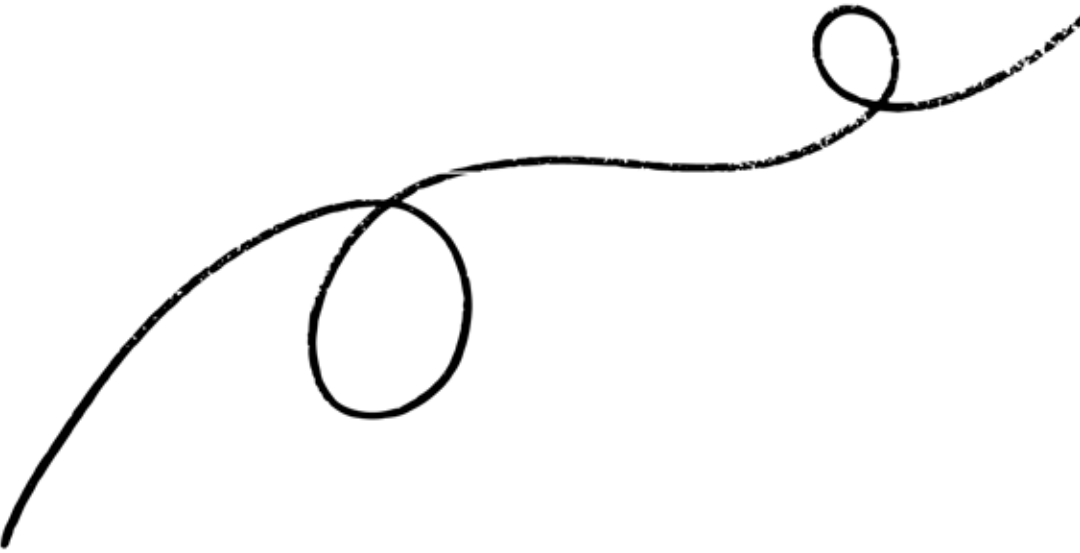
Remember your promises to us.

Remember that you have saved us.

Remember that you love us, Lord.

God of whatever is ahead.

Sex



When the church fails to talk about consent

Katerina Parsons

1

You are a teenager before you notice boys, though at this age, with their bad skin and loud jokes, you are not interested in any of them. Your attention falls, instead, on the men in the novels you devour. Laura Ingalls's Almanzo Wilder. Eowyn's Faramir. Elizabeth Bennet's Mr. Darcy. You linger on passages, something stirring in you that feels foreign and terrifying, like the breasts you did not ask for and do not want.

Now that you are a teenager, the church talks to you constantly about desire. You hear a lot about purity, but nothing about consent. In church, there is no need for consent, because the rules are very simple. Before marriage, the answer to any question must always be no; after marriage, yes, always yes.

You are pulled aside with the other girls and taught that men are visual, that they may struggle with lust or pornography, and

you are all asked to help your brothers by covering your bodies. That you too will struggle, that you too will lust, you are left to discover alone, each of you wondering if you are the only broken woman in the world.

At church you learn this, to cover your shoulders and to make sure your skirts always fall past finger-tip length. You also learn about peace, and forgiveness, and eternity, and when you think about everything later, how it all turns out, you will not be bitter. You will understand that there was an exchange made—moral rigidity for a space carved out beyond the reach of the world.

2

In this charmed space, you were allowed to be a child far longer than any of your peers. You played with stuffed animals and made daisy crowns. No one hurt you; you were rarely sad.

You were fortunate that no one shattered this innocence. If you had been assaulted, for example, you would not have had the words to describe it. You were eleven or twelve before you realized that “penis” is not pronounced like “pen,” and at least that age before learning that the middle syllable of “vagina” is not pronounced “gee,” which, anyway, you were not allowed to say because it was too close to taking the Lord’s name in vain.

Can you imagine if someone had hurt you? It had been mortifying enough to tell your mother when you got your first period. Can you imagine if it had been someone from the church? You would have had to go before the elders, who were also your best friends’ fathers—an all-male jury, tall as giants, their heads a gradient of vanishing hair. What words would you have used? You would have rather died.

3

You're only nineteen the summer you work at a hotel front desk, and you look young, so young that an older woman pulls out her phone and without asking snaps a picture of you.

"Isn't she precious?" she says to her husband, gesturing at your Goldilocks braids, your polyester uniform top, your trainee badge.

That's how young you look when, alone at the desk, you check in another guest, just one more ageless white man in a tight shirt and an expensive watch. He smiles at you, flirts blatantly, and when he sees you shrink into yourself, he seems to grow two inches taller.

Later you won't remember what he said to you, but you'll remember the way your skin crawled and the customer service smile slipped off your face. You'll remember being short with him, much shorter than you meant to be, and you'll remember the way his face also changed, falling in an instant from smug and inviting to smug and cruel.

Later, your manager pulls you aside. The man complained.

You sit through the warning (*our guests come first!*), understanding what your error had been. You had broken an unwritten contract, this man's understanding of how the world worked. You had not laughed at his double entendres. You had not humored him. You had not flirted back.

Such a small incident, in the scope of everything. The man's revenge is minor. Your warning, whether because of sympathy or absent-mindedness, is never written down. A few months later, you leave the job, go back to school, and your life continues. But you can't shake it from your head, and as you get older, you're frustrated by the fundamental unfairness of the rebuke, and haunted by an even more unwelcome emotion—shame.

Had you said something during the innocuous process of checking him in that had provoked his words? Was the outline of your bra visible through the cheap polyester top?

Sexual indiscretion, you have learned, comes as a direct result of the places you go, the clothes you are wearing, what you drink, the way you dance. You are taught to guard yourself so tightly that you blame yourself for even the acts that are committed against you. Men's eyes fall on your budding chest—you put the shirt at the back of your drawer. Men's words fall at your back as you walk downtown—you hunch your body, walk faster.

But if these indiscretions are to be endured, apologized for, you have no mental category for the attention that one day, suddenly, wholly, irrevocably, you realize you want.

There's a boy, and despite what you've been taught, you want him to kiss you—you spend entire days imagining his lips on yours, his body against yours. Of course, you cannot tell him this; you are ashamed to admit it to yourself. Instead you need him to read your mind. If he takes you in his arms, you know that you will follow him like a dancer follows her partner's subtlest cues, your body vibrating with energy, tight as a coiled spring.

He cannot ask to touch you, because the correct answer would be no; it must always be no. But if you don't allow the words to be spoken or the spell to be broken, you can pretend it is nothing more than the night, the way the birds fly overhead, the stars. You can pretend you are leaning against him because it is cold, and that what happens next is neither your fault nor his.

You are a young woman. After all these years, that is what you have internalized, this is what you have been taught—*sex is something that happens to you*. That you can be both guilty party and passive agent, this paradox doesn't occur to you. You're afraid to think too hard about it. You're afraid to admit that you think about it at all.

5

If sex is preached as sin, it should be preached with a broader remedy. Surely godly sexuality goes beyond abstinence preached by the letter; surely it extends to respect and honor of other persons and of the bodies that belong to them, and only them.

So many children are startled and shamed by the desires that are part of their bodies' wholeness.

So many girls and women blame themselves for acts committed against them.

Men and women who are never taught about enthusiastic consent and emphatic refusal enter into relationships where they hurt and are hurt, regardless of which physical boundaries are crossed, regardless of whether or not they are married.

The church is already talking to its children about sex. These teachings are black and white, with marriage a clear, dark line between what is good and holy and what is sin. Some members of the church community have met the #MeToo movement with something like a smirk, taking it as a sign of the world's brokenness and the church's moral superiority.

But one need look no farther than sexual infidelities and assaults being committed by church leaders from every sect and denomination to realize that this is something that the church must reckon with. One need only listen to the growing number of voices saying #ChurchToo, calling out harassment and abuse in church spheres.

More broadly, in the United States, more than one in six women have experienced criminal sexual assault, and so many women face sexual harassment that the question is not if but when. What's more, in the United States, nearly four out of five single evangelicals have already had sex, a fact that they'll admit in anonymous surveys, but never to each other, and never out loud.

6

You are a child.

You are sixty.

You are only nineteen.

You are the women raised by the church, holding up the church,
and you deserve more from the church.

Teaching? Reckoning? Or only an acknowledgment:

You are not invisible.

You are not broken.

You are not the only one.

**The sex talk
I never had** *Bart Tocci*

And other atrocities
committed by
my parents

*I found my virginity. Turns out
it was there all along.*

*— Joke I keep telling people that
only I think is funny*

I was eight years old.

I was collecting half-sized Sears bra brochures sent to the house. I paged through them, inspecting the square-inch pictures of torsos. I hid these under the mattress of my bottom bunk, and I would review them if I wanted to remember what a supportive beige bra looked like. Rebel! My mom found my two-catalogue collection when she was changing my sheets one day. “What are

these?” she asked. “Oh,” I said, imploding. “... Emily must have put them there.” *The perfect lie*. That’s it... my older sister... must have gone into my room... with multiple bra catalogues... and placed them under my mattress.

I was nine years old.

I thought a *uni-sex salon* was some sort of brothel.

I was eleven years old.

I was sleeping over at my friend’s house. We were camped in his TV room, pretending to sleep. We were fast-forwarding through the *Titanic* VHS tapes, plural—*Titanic* is so long it required two. If you’ve been an eleven-year-old boy, you know what we were looking for: Kate Winslet being painted like one of the French girls. *This is what’s under the bra*. Boobs.

I was twelve years old.

I discovered AIM chat rooms. People would type “a/s/l?” and you’d get to see their fake age, maybe fake gender, and hopefully fake location. I was an eighteen-year-old man from New York City, and I. Was. Livin’! I’d talk with these hopefully women who were my same fake age, and I’d say things like, “Yeah I’ve been doing *it* a lot lately.” “Oh I know all about the new *things*.” “Too bad we’re both not in Saskatoon, otherwise we’d *really* have something to talk about.”

What is this... “IT”?

I was thirteen years old.

I was supposed to go on a weekend trip with my dad. On the drive, he was supposed to put in Focus on the Family cassette tapes where Doctor James Dobson was supposed to explain what happens with a penis and a vagina. Spoiler alert: sex happens. (My brother told me.) Days and weeks and months went by, my father would randomly remember we never took this trip, and he’d say, “Hey, we gotta go on that trip!” And I’d say, “Dad, I’m thirty, please stop asking.”

Just kidding. The odd thing is, it was never explained, but we both knew what trip *that trip* was. “Pick a weekend and let’s go.” And I’d say, “Okay,” and leave the room. As if thirteen-year-old me would then grab a calendar to compare notes with my dad’s Palm Pilot. “Hey Dad, how about Friday the nineteenth? We can have *the talk* on the twentieth, never speak again, and be back by the twenty-first and get a head start on the week.”

We do anything to avoid talking about sex because we do anything to avoid being uncomfortable. The sex talk is called “*The Talk*.” We don’t even want to say “sex.” We say we’re talking about the “Birds and the Bees.” Why?

I know *for a fact* birds and bees don’t sex each other. “Listen, son, no—sit down! This is important, DAMMIT! NOW REMEMBER: birds lay eggs, bees pollinate flowers, women are like birds, men are like bees . . . the flower is obviously a woman’s vagina . . . *starts sweating* . . . The bee . . . uses his penis—his bee penis, I THINK, now I *THINK* it’s called a *beenis* . . . DO NOT QUOTE ME ON THAT. He uses his bee penis to pollinate the flower’s vagina, a bird flies near, freakin’ ah, gets pregnant by OSMOSIS, lays eggs, then there’s a baby and here we are! NOW GET OUTTA HERE!”

“ . . . Dad, what’s osmosis?”

“I’ll tell you when you’re older.”

I was sixteen years old.

I was lifting weights and drinking protein shakes and trying to clear zits. I had no idea what was happening to my body, and google wasn’t a thing. I also wasn’t allowed to be taught. I was one of those religious kids whose parents didn’t let him go to the health classes because they were “just going to tell you sex is fine as long as you use a condom.”

My mother told me I could take a health class in a homeschool environment. Unsure whether this meant she would teach me, I told her I would be running away from home. I never ended up

finding a replacement for those two health classes. With four kids, a dog, a cat, and life in general, I think my parents just forgot. I figured these classes were two full courses on sexual mechanics, so I found an online course taught by women with giant breasts. *Pornography 101.*

It was around this time that one of the elders was preaching in my small Massachusetts church. He asked, “When do you become a man?” He asked again. “Is it when you get married? Have kids?” He spied me behind the soundboard: “What do you think, Bart? Is it when you have sex?”

My face was probably twisting into red hot mortification, like he kicked down my door, shot my dog, and was now asking me in front of the whole church if I was a virgin. He acknowledged this and apologized profusely. I was embarrassed, partially because I thought the answer was yes, but also because I had never heard sex so openly mentioned. It was taboo. It was quiet. It was hidden under a mattress, it was a secret found in a split second in the middle of a long movie, it was alone in the dark on chat rooms with strangers, it was implied but never spoken about directly.

“The talk.”

“IT.”

“Birds.”

“Bees.”

This is the part where I’m supposed to lash out at my parents, the church, and adults in general. *Could the church have been better on this?* Yes.

How? I don’t know.

Could my parents have admitted they were too busy or uncomfortable to teach me? Yes.

Am I mad, bro? No.

Do I think we could address the issue head on? Yes. We can talk about sex without code words, and we can explain it without

fear that we'll ruin our children. We have to stop pretending our kids won't learn from somewhere else (AKA literally everywhere). And I know people have been a lot more hurt than I have, but, children of the church, maybe we can give the adults in our life a little grace. Because God knows we'll need it too.

**Squirrels, pearls,
& makin' whoopie
with your hat on** *Julia LaPlaca*

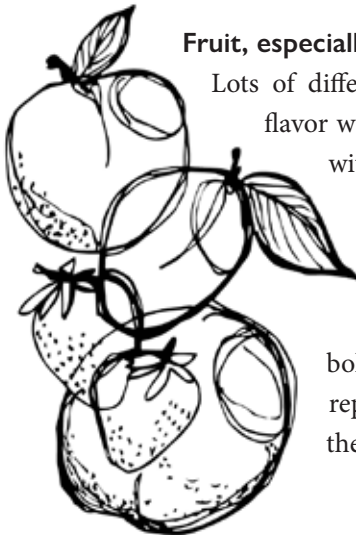
I have blushed and blundered and nodded and smiled my way through many a conversation that branches into unfamiliar slang territory, especially of the sexual variety. During my freshman year of college, I was more familiar with 1930s phrases such as “makin’ whoopie” than I was with the term “to bang.” This particular gap in my knowledge had embarrassing consequences when I told a room full of my peers that “banging” was my pet peeve. Of course, I meant people who nervously tap things, but that’s not what everyone else immediately thought.

But I don’t believe that I’m the only one who has felt *out-of-the-know*. Sex and bodies have offered humankind an endless reservoir of ever-evolving euphemisms, some of which are obvious, while others remain obscured by their cultural and temporal specificity.

So let's take a quick and superficial dive into the wild world of the Middle Ages, an era when the church prescribed all patterns of human behavior, including when and how to have sex. For example, the medieval church declared you could not have sex on Sundays (or Thursdays, Fridays, or Saturdays) or during certain chunks (long chunks) of the church calendar like Advent or Lent. And, if you must have sex, only the missionary position was sanctioned and excessive caressing was discouraged. Sex should be a quick in-and-out with procreation as the only objective.

Here's another of my favorite medieval sex tips: a man should wear a hat during sex, lest his wife suck out all his body heat. According to the anatomical structure of the four humors (the liquids they believed made up the human body), women tended to be cold and wet, while men, as befit their supposedly superior intellects, were warm and dry. A hat could help the man retain his heat against his wife's clammy coolness.

As twenty-first-century people, we are quite "out-of-the-know" when it comes to jokes about medieval sex culture. So gird your loins, and I'll illuminate some of the more subtle "need-to-knows" about the objects that often symbolized sex in the Middle Ages.



Fruit, especially with seeds

Lots of different fruits can take on a sexual flavor with a bit of imagination. Anything with a lot of seeds—like strawberries or pomegranates—were medieval favorites. Also, figs, because of their dark exterior and red interiors, were considered symbolic of female genitalia, while pears represented a male. Think of these as the eggplant emojis of their time.

Animals, in general

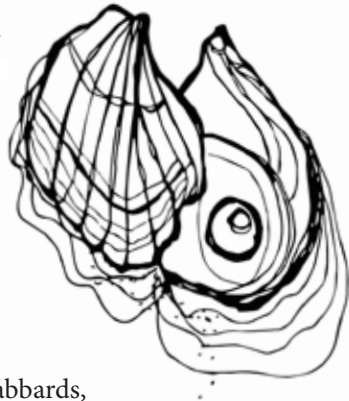
Animals often represent the bestial human passions. But certain animals took on more specific connotations—even the most innocent and cuddly creatures. A sleeping dog could denote a hiatus from sexual chastity. Rabbits were associated with a willingness to breed.

Even squirrels could become a sex symbol. (Warning: if you happen to think squirrels are cute creatures, maybe skip this part. But if you, like me, already think squirrels are nasty, garbage-bloated vermin, then read on!)

In one medieval French tale, a lady asks a man what he is holding beneath his tunic. He says it is a “squirrel,” and he asks if he can put the squirrel into her belly so that it can “eat some nuts.” The willing lady encourages the squirrel to eat up.¹

Anything round-ish that opens

You name it: if it is round-ish and can be opened, poked, and somehow marked as having been penetrated—it could be a medieval symbol for a vagina. Oysters reminded medieval readers or viewers of the precious pearls inside, waiting to be plucked. Rings receive fingers; the open pages of a book are punctured by the pen. The famous poem “The Romance of the Rose” literally revolves around an elusive, erotically charged rose with titillating metaphorical petals that are peeled back.



Anything that pierces

Needles, plows, pens, swords, scabbards, protruding shoes, arrows, towers. Get the point?

The obvious

And then there's stuff that needs less explanation. Lots of medieval art is overtly sexual. You don't really have to guess that a painting depicting a nun collecting male genitalia off a tree has something to do with sex! Some medieval visual culture is as boldly bawdy now as the day it was made.

Of course, what continues to be a mystery is *why* the Middle Ages were so rife with sexual imagery, which appears even as decoration in the margins of holy books. What was the context? Would everyone have been in on these jokes, or just a limited literate audience? Are images of lusty apes in a prayer book satirical? Cautionary? Or just goofy? Today, scholars still surmise and wonder about these images, and there are fascinating studies that seek to answer these "whys." But a full understanding may always remain somewhat mysterious—lost to ribald ages past.

Confidence
in the flesh *Caitlin Gent*

*Forgive me, Father;
I have loved a man.
(not in the Biblical sense but
almost)*

*Forgive me, Mother;
I have stroked his hair but also
silk shoulders
stomach and waist and
—you don't need to know that, I guess.*

*Forgive me, Lord,
for quicksilver hands and
curious mouths.*

Christ.

*Forgive me
I am not sorry.*

— 2015

I wrote this prayer two years ago. I wrote it for a poetry assignment; I wrote it for myself. I needed to remember how it felt to wonder at my own shamelessness—to wonder if my guiltless enjoyment of intimacy was an epiphany or an indication of heretofore unexplored depths of moral decrepitude.

Two years and a thousand kisses later, I've privately settled on the former—that this prayer was a revelation that I've carried in my body ever since—but I can't tell you that. I don't want you to get the wrong idea about me. I don't want you to think I'm a slut or a harlot or a whore or any of the other words we use to make women feel dirty. I believed those things about myself off and on for a while, but no longer. While the writing of it took minutes, it took me years to own that prayer and determine that the story of my body will never be defined by unnecessary apology.

I've talked to many Christian women who have fear, judgment, and shame written into the threads of their nervous system. That was me, too, but I don't want to talk about that today. I want to give you the right idea about me instead.

The right idea about me is that I am a confident, empowered female person who rejoices in her sexuality. Whether partnered or single, I strive to embody my sexuality in how I honor other people's bodies, how I experience touch, how I talk about consent, and how I identify myself privately and publicly. The more comfortable in my own skin I become, the more fully I experience myself and others as diverse refractions of the image of God. And the more I know of God, the more confidence I have that my physical body is a gift of grace, not a mere minefield of temptation.

While I respect the biblical exhortation to put no ultimate confidence in the flesh, I am confident that God created my particular body to love particular people in particular ways. For some

people, that particular way is waving or high-fiving. For others, it's hugging. For very few, it's kissing. For one, it's something else.

For years, I wandered all the wrong roads to embodied confidence. I ate too little; I shaved my legs; I signed a purity pledge; I plucked my eyebrows. I built my self-concept upon the favorable gaze of men. I did all of these things and more until I found healing grace in the hands and feet and eyes of women. Yes, women, and in their friendship—love stronger than blood that flows straight from the heart of God.

None of this is radical, and I know it. Embodied liberation, thank God, is bigger than any one angsty white Protestant girl figuring out that she probably won't be condemned for kissing and being kissed in all the best places. I'm not the first Christian woman to grow into her own skin, but maybe that's the point. I've glimpsed what powerfully embodied women can do together, and, wow, we can be electric. We can, collectively, grow in confidence and spunk and wisdom: we can do that work with our bodies. We can embrace those who mourn, interweave fingers with friends, turn pages of books, voice important questions, write and speak bold truths, ask before we touch, expect to be asked before we're touched, give enthusiastic consent, and anchor each other in God's love.

Because of you—dear, fierce women—my prayer has become a declaration:

Forgive me. I am not sorry.

Sex-ed
thank-you notes *Paula Manni*

*I am the Church,
you are the Church,
we are the Church together.
All who follow Jesus,
all around the world,
yes we're the Church together!*

– “We Are the Church” (or that
song from Sunday school)

Dear Mom and Dad,

Thank you for affirming our interests—for encouraging dress-up and cooking, fishing and bug-collecting. Thanks for giving Jonathan and Gregory their own baby dolls, and for asking if I wanted to bring the garden toad to show-and-tell (I was going to

bring a Barbie because that's what all the girls brought). Through small actions like these, we learned that there are many ways to express our personhood, and that respect for others, regardless of their gender, appearance, or preferences, is the foundation of any solid relationship.

I don't remember *the talk* with either of you, though I'm guessing it was uncomfortable and probably involved a Focus on the Family book, time for questions, and prayer. What I do remember, Mom, is that you told me you sat at a sexual health stand (read: free condoms) on the downtown street corner when you first started working as a public health nurse. If premarital sex was wrong, as everyone said, and you were giving condoms to people having premarital sex, then there must be more to the story. My eleven-year-old mind was comfortable with a simple set of rules, but knowing this about you, one of my primary rule-makers, opened space for more nuanced conversation. Thank you for trusting that I could hold complicated conversations.

Dear Mr. Sherman,

Thank you for spending two weeks on the reproductive system in tenth-grade anatomy class and for delving into the mechanics of sex and the physiology of arousal with frank and detailed clarity. Though we heard *the talk* often (by then, we'd endured five annual gender-segregated "Purity Days"), this was the first time I understood how sex actually worked. You cried happy tears when you got to the part about the joy and beauty of sexual intimacy. Sorry for snickering behind your back. Your uncharacteristic tears left a deeper impression than any previous "save it for marriage" lecture had. Thanks, too, for crying. Here, men weren't really supposed to cry. Thank you.

Dear First Kiss,

Thank you for the pause and rephrase that changed your “can I kiss . . .” to “can we kiss?” The memory is a good one, and I recall pulling away, looking into your eyes, and smiling with a happy yes before leaning in again. It’s a question I didn’t expect and probably wouldn’t have noticed, had you stuck with your original “I.” And yet it’s this moment, pre-kiss, that I’ve always remembered. “Can we?” comes to mind before other firsts and seconds and sevenths and twenty-thirds. “Can we?” asks for a yes or a no. “Can we?” recognizes that both you and I are active agents. “Can we?” reminds us that we’re doing this together. There’s a responsibility and mutual respect in “can we?” Thank you.

Dear Dave,

Thank you for writing plays that tell real stories of intimacy, brokenness, and human sexuality. Listening to these beautiful retellings sometimes feels like looking into a mirror and other times feels foreign. Thanks for creating space for compassion and deeper understanding. Thank you for asking difficult questions, listening well, and for sharing your art with the Calvin community. We (both Calvin and the Church) like answers. Thanks for not providing answers—that, too, takes a certain kind of courage. Instead, you printed programs full of more questions to consider: “How does human sexuality fit into a holistic principle of intimacy?” “How do you think sex and gender affect the way you think about your body?” “Does God have a gender? Does the Holy Spirit? Does it matter? Why or why not?”

Dear friends,

Thank you for the conversations that unfold in the normal, boring places—over long text messages, in your kitchen after dinner, in the car, over drinks at The Meanwhile. Thanks for sharing your

sex advice—what’s worked, what hasn’t, what to expect—sounds, fluids, foreplay—the stuff that Focus on the Family and Purity Day never came close to mentioning. Thanks for being vulnerable—for sharing your experiences and mistakes, and for listening to mine, too. These things matter not only because we trust and care for each other, but because we’ve a responsibility to each other: to listen, but also to challenge. Thanks for being the kind of friends who are willing to challenge.

If the Church is its people, as the Sunday school song says, then thank you, people of the Church, who open space for nuanced, complicated, and sometimes uncomfortable conversation. Thank you for pursuing both wisdom and wonder and for recognizing that wisdom and wonder are sometimes one and the same. If the Church is a body of believers made up of individual bodies that affirm the life, death, and resurrection of a holy body, then thank you, people of the Church, who affirm, respect, and celebrate bodies. If I am the Church, and if you are the Church, and if we are the Church together, then we have a responsibility to each other to have these conversations together. Can *we*?



Gender

morning in ways that it doesn't once the sun has risen, and I can see the park where I meet friends to run on Sunday mornings and the illuminated cathedral on the hill where I occasionally attend a Sunday service and the decommissioned ferry where I first learned that Chad can dance.

I see the vacant apartments waiting to be filled and the 2001 Honda Civic that I plan to buy from a coworker on Monday and the dexterous cranes that I have never seen move and yet are always building.

The apartment is filled with tissue paper breaths and the murmur of flannel sheets as I wait for the city to turn pink.

And I know that I will never be able to leave the way I came.

Afterword *Will Montei*

The post calvin began with the goal of creating a space for alumni to write in a community. Without professors and deadlines, many of us worried that our writing habits would simply peter out. So the website was created, and here we are. Though I've co-edited and written for *the post calvin* for a little over six years, who we are as a community remains as elusive to me now as when we began. We all come from Calvin. We all believe writing is important. We each have our day of the month, we write about whatever we want to write about, we send our piece to Abby for her quick, smart edits, and a fragment of our thoughts is suddenly available for anyone in the world to see. It's a simple framework that has carried us forward all these years, come what may, even as our lineup of writers continues to change year after year. Two years from now, not a single author or editor among us will have come from the original lineup. Whoever we may be, our ambition is only that *the post*

calvin continues, so that some legions of Calvinites after us who also believe in the importance of writing might have a place to express this importance. That may not sound very ambitious, but six years in, I find it rather grand.

When Deb Rienstra, Josh deLacy, Abby Zwart, and I gathered once again to put together this anthology, we began democratically. Writers offered up a few of their own pieces and a few of their peers' pieces from the past three years for consideration, which the four of us then read and debated amongst ourselves. This process reminded us, again and again, how privileged we've been to host such remarkable talent on the *post calvin* over the years. We didn't labor over what to include so much as what *not* to include. *Damn*, I'd think to myself every once and a while, *to think that essay was a post calvin exclusive*, and then I'd get a little sad that we weren't a real journal with a larger audience. But would it have been written the same way? Would a professional editor have cut that vulnerable moment? Would the writer have been willing to make such a bold statement? We aren't the only place online to find a smattering of disparate thoughts; we're one of many. But we do seem to lack pretension. We do seem to be honest.

In her novel *Gilead*, Marilynne Robinson writes, "In eternity this world will be Troy, I believe, and all that has passed here will be the epic of the universe, the ballad they sing in the streets." If that's the case, I think the essays contained in this anthology will be a part of many people's ballads. At least in our small corner of eternity.

*Thanks for reading,
Will*

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Anderson

Class of 2010

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Sadie Burgher Encounters of the patron kind:

Class of 2017 Three memories from work
at a public library 236

Sadie graduated with degrees in environmental studies and writing. After a year of working in public libraries, she now serves as the Program Coordinator for College Access Programs at Calvin University. She loves essential oils, books, and the idea of getting fit. She is married to Luke, and they make their nest in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Matt Cambridge Farewell to certainty 365
Class of 2012

Matt is a new dad to Chloe, husband to the beautiful Kendahl, and a human resources professional at Boeing. He lives in St. Louis and enjoys eating Hershey's kisses, riding roller coasters, and watching the latest stand-up specials on Netflix. You can read more of his work at *laughcrythink.com*.

Matt Coldagelli Porcelain nightmare 232
Class of 2014 Sounds of Salamá 393

Matt majored in English writing and psychology. He's currently pursuing a doctorate in clinical psychology with an emphasis on children and adolescents. He watches an absurd amount of TV and is a certified craft beer snob. His emotional wellbeing is overly dependent on Wisconsin sports, and thus he finds himself often in a state of disappointment. Matt lives with his lovely wife and daughter in Phoenix, Arizona.

India Daniels Mutual respect in the streets 34
Class of 2017 Umeboshi no tsukurikata, or
How to make red fermented
plums 285

India graduated with majors in history and English literature. Her first year out of Calvin, she moved home to Chicago to serve as an AmeriCorps VISTA at

Turning the Page, a nonprofit promoting parent engagement and literacy in North Lawndale schools. She now assists Turning the Page's used bookstores and coordinates a citizen-reporter program for City Bureau, a civic journalism lab on the South Side.

Josh deLacy	Preface	<i>xv</i>
<i>Class of 2013</i>	Black-eyed peas	63
	The Tinder Boys	78
	On owning guns	162
	Crotchpot	270

NPR called Josh "a modern-day Jack Kerouac" after he wrote about his 7,000-mile, no-money hitchhiking journey through the United States. Since hitchhiking, he's found homes in the Pacific Northwest, the Episcopal Church, and *the post calvin*. He builds websites and designs books as the director of Branded Look LLC.

Ben DeVries	Pete	109
<i>Class of 2015</i>	On Gollum	136
	Chocolate milk	295

Ben graduated with degrees in literature and writing. He and his wife Jes, a fellow Calvin grad, live in Champaign, Illinois, where Ben is looking to add some letters behind his name. During the academic off-seasons, he reads fantasy and thinks about the end of the world. He's been known to make a mean deep-dish pizza.

Tony Ditta What up, haters? 85
Class of 2012 My dog, my dawg:
A study in contrasts 95

Tony graduated with majors in mathematics and economics. He now lives in Chicago with his dog Coach and is pursuing graduate study in economics.

Gwyneth Findlay Coming out ruined
Class of 2018 Christmas Eve 40

Gwyneth is a writer and editor working in publishing in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She graduated with a degree in writing and minors in French and gender studies.

Caitlin Gent Confidence in the flesh 22
Class of 2015 An apostate's epistle 140

Caitlin lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and is working toward her EAA English teaching license at UW-Milwaukee.

Jenna Griffin Foreign prayer 134
Class of 2017 Four meals with strangers 282

Jenna graduated with degrees in French and writing. After a year teaching in France, she moved to the Jiu Valley, Romania, where she now works in community development at a youth rock climbing gym called Fara Limite. In her free time she walks in the mountains, collecting stories and photographs and wild herbs.

Gabe Gunnink I'll make a man out of me 43
Class of 2014 OCD DCO DCO OCD 315
The way I came 396

Gabe lives in Seattle, where he works for a European travel company and gawks at the landscapes and skylines surrounding him. In his free time, he enjoys practicing Portuguese under his breath on city buses, running far enough to justify eating an entire pan of cinnamon rolls, and faithfully implementing Oxford commas.

Olivia Harre The other Manhattan 239
Class of 2018

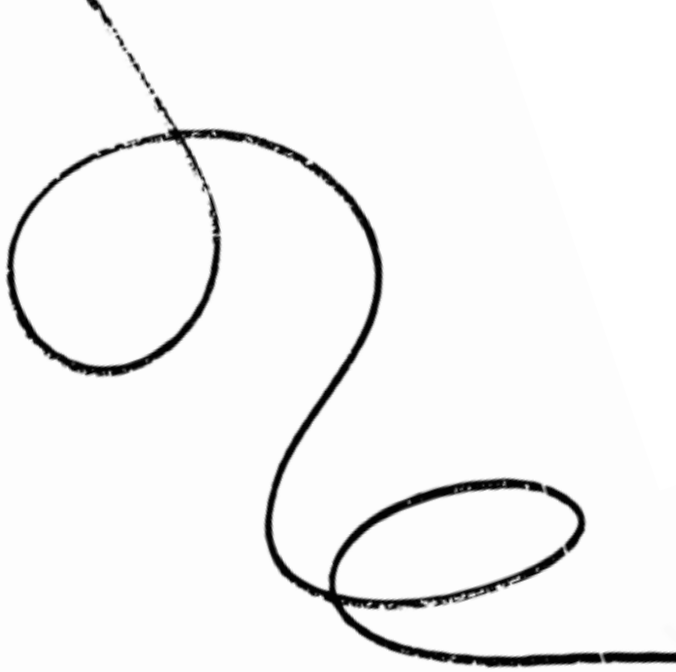
Olivia graduated with a double major in business (human resources) and writing. She is currently living and working in Nashville, Tennessee, and spends her spare time listening to Ben Rector and petting other people's golden doodles.

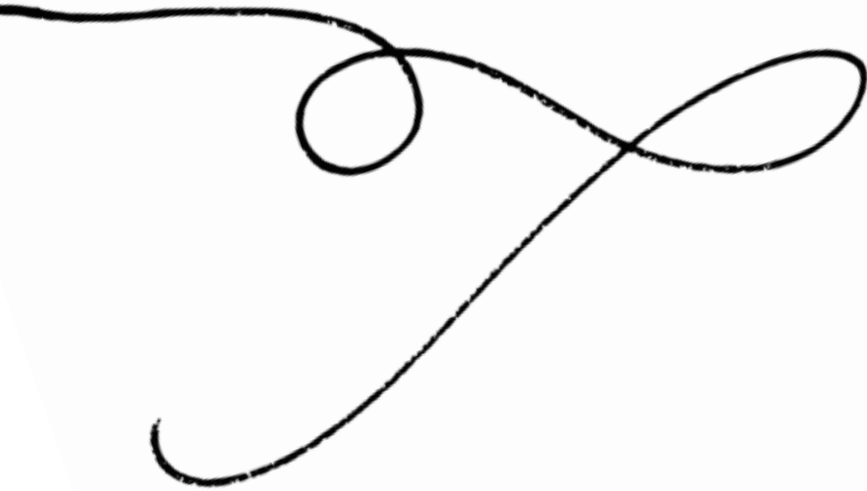
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