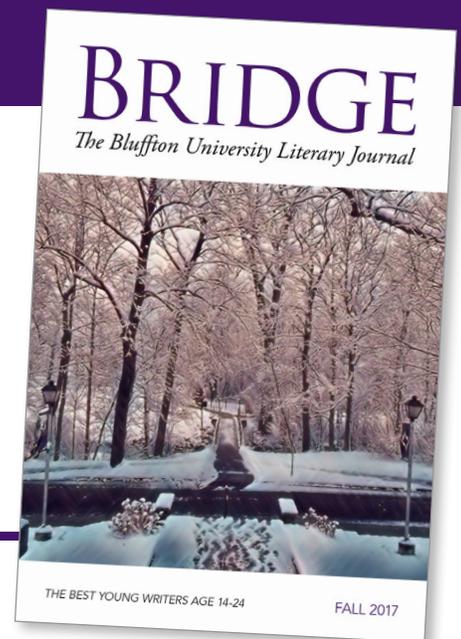


BRIDGE

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PACIFIC

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During the summer I spent in Monterey, I came to believe that every man and woman working as a fisher possessed a trace of magic.

The fishers could accurately forecast the day's weather by a fleeting haze of fog or an imperceptible shift in the smell of the salty air.

The fishers could distinguish species of fish by the way the water roiled and rose underneath a boat.

They could even locate elusive places in the vastness of the open ocean by the subtle contours of the bottom and the fluctuating patterns of the tides.

Fishers possess a myriad of other unique characteristics as well: the capacity to endure boredom, loneliness, and separation; instincts, cultivated by experience, that precipitate assured responses to unanticipated emergencies; loyalty to each other, paired with trust in themselves, and a fervent independence, sometimes at the cost of comfort and family.

Lying back on the damp nets stacked in an abandoned skiff, I could afford to romanticize their life; to allow myself to be ignorant of the less pleasant aspects of an occupation that had a higher mortality rate than steelworkers or aircraft pilots. The summer breeze filled me with warmth, despite my constant drowsiness and creeping anxiety about the upcoming school year. Time paused for those moments, and I daydreamed about sailing away and never returning to land, propelled by a strong swell of wind and the steady waves of the ocean.

The most reasonable alternative to escaping aboard a fishing vessel ended up being a summer pass to Monterey Bay Aquarium. This allowed me to lurk among tourists and enclosed kelp forests for hours every day, flitting between sea turtles, stingrays, and the pungent scent of sunscreen and salt. But the enchantment of the aquarium began to dissipate as the summer slipped away. Everything felt too civilized, too artificial. The collection of aquatic life housed in the aquarium seemed less and less like a display of humanity's knowledge of its surroundings and more and more like a demonstration of power, exhibiting how nature could be tamed, organized, collected, and dissected.

It was raining hard on my last day in Monterey, but a trek to the aquarium was necessary because I needed to say my goodbyes to a family of lumbering manatees I became attached to. As I was walking there, mentally rehearsing my parting speech to the manatees, I glanced across the street and saw the early morning fishers. I watched them skillfully haul their nets up from the depths of the bay one last time, like magicians pulling rabbits from hats, their powers inextricably tied to the water beneath them.

CAROLINE GIANOLA is from Iowa City, Iowa, and is a senior at Iowa Mennonite School. She enjoys playing piano and violin and volunteering at her local library. Next year, she hopes to attend college or take a gap year to focus on service and volunteer work.