

VARIATIONS

2017

VARIATIONS

Literary and Creative Arts Magazine

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North Allegheny Senior High School

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The NASH English Department

Thank you to the students who shared their creative talents.

Floating Away

Alyssa Snavelly

Oil Painting



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Policy and Selection Process

VARIATIONS Literary and Creative Arts Magazine is published annually by the North Allegheny Senior High School located at 10375 Perry Highway, Wexford, Pennsylvania 15090. The content of this magazine consists of text, artwork, and photographs submitted by juniors or seniors enrolled at North Allegheny Senior High School. The staff may choose up to six submissions from individual contributors. Cover art is not included in the limit. With the exception of artwork, the staff is not responsible for returning any submissions to the students. *VARIATIONS* is an after-school activity that meets once a month to evaluate pieces and discuss ideas; the staff is comprised of juniors and seniors attending North Allegheny Senior High School. *VARIATIONS* is not affiliated with any one section, group, or organization within the Senior High School.

All work submitted to *VARIATIONS* is judged fairly without bias on the part of the staff and without knowledge of the author's or artist's identity. Members of the staff are eligible to submit entries but do not participate in the evaluation of their own work, allowing all submissions to be judged impartially.

The Literary Department votes on the literary works submitted to the magazine. Entries are judged on literary content using generally accepted standards of evaluation. The staff reserves the right to edit the literary entries for punctuation, spelling, grammar, and syntax.

The Artistic Department selects works based on their intrinsic appeal and perceptible artistic proficiency.

The staff strives to incorporate a variety of styles, subject matter, and genres as selections are made.

All submissions are uploaded electronically at this website:
<https://northallegheny.blackboard.com/>

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Preface

Sarah Losco
Editor in Chief 2017

“I gotta have roots before branches--to know who I am before I know who I wanna be-- and faith to take chances, to live like I see a place in this world for me.” Inspired by the song “Roots Before Branches” by Room For Two, the 2016-2017 issue of *VARIATIONS* magazine celebrates growth: both the foundations our students have built throughout their high school years and the opportunities they are branching out to seize and experience.

From Harry Potter to Shakespeare my roots have thrived in the rich soil of words and stories. English class, libraries, and the pages of books are my gardens--the places where I find my own power, form my own beliefs, and discover both the darkness and beauty of the human experience. *VARIATIONS* forms a unique and essential portion of my roots. During my time working on the *VARIATIONS* staff, I uncovered stunning works of art produced by my peers that stimulated just as powerful of a reaction from me as any Shakespearean play could: *VARIATIONS* helped me to better understand that those I interact with every day see the world in distinct, gorgeous ways. There is something indelibly powerful about self-expression through the arts that crosses borders, spans centuries, and touches the hearts of those willing to listen. The arts are the tether--the common thread--that joins every human being regardless of culture, race, or creed. I believe my life is irrevocably and beautifully tethered to the literary arts, and I feel so blessed to have worked with our wonderful staff to celebrate the works created by students at North Allegheny Senior High School.

As you follow our magazine from the first green growth of roots, to outreaching branches, to the sweet peak of fruition, and finally to the regenerative process of scattering seeds, keep in mind the growth experienced by the writers and artists as they continue on their journey and consider how our magazine may help you to grow in understanding or revitalize your hope. As our back cover Rehydration suggests, reaching the end is not a definitive termination: it is a promise of a new beginning, a time to spread fresh seeds and continue to grow. So when you close our magazine, we challenge you to consider it a call to branch out and seize new opportunities, because no matter the stage of life you are in, everyone has room to grow. Thank you, and please enjoy the 2016-2017 *VARIATIONS* magazine.



2 0 1 7

V A R I A T I O N S

Dragonflies

Lauren Rogus

Digital Art



Cherry Avenue

Levi Cole

Poetry

A joyride on a pair of red training wheels
In the purple tint of a summer evening.
The low roll of my tires against the sidewalk
Creeping through my rubber helmet.
The steady hum of streetlights filling the crisp
Air fluttering around me.

We flew with the fireflies
Dancing in their neon lights
Ducking under the branches that cascaded over
And formed a cave of shadows.
Bravely enduring that darkness
We continued through the unknown
And emerged at the edge of a canyon.

The low roll of my tires broke
As I was ejected from the seat.
And as I soared through the air, I listened
It was not filled with the hum of lights
But rather the gasps of my parents still in the cave.

I sat there on the very sidewalk I once ruled
Through watery eyes I peered down at my skinned knee
And through the same eyes I looked up and saw those
familiar neon lights
And I wondered

Do fireflies ever get hurt?

Summer days and wedding bouquets

Kara Preisendefer

Poetry

mid summer day--

The sun was calling us by the names

Two little brace face dorks running out her back screen door

Looking for a secret hide-out for the day

With composition books in hand of course

Our Top Secret composition books, where we wrote about our futures and boys (shhh)

We ruled the streets of Bennington Woods

Claiming the oak tree in someone's yard

Where we competed for height in our cheap foam flip flops

Owning the pine trees of another

Where we spied on the teenagers

trying to understand their secret language

But it was under an old wooden porch where we pulled out the books

And this time we'd plan our future weddings.

We would wear beautiful dresses and pointy high heels,

just like a princess,

Most certainly marrying our dreamy blue-eyed boy crushes

I even crossed my heart and hoped to die so she would be my maid of honor

And of course, we had to choose our wedding flowers

It was the season of flowers--tulips, daisies, marigolds..

Every house was decorated in colorful array

We ran exuberantly scanning our options

Then began to pick away

Every flower that we knew or didn't,

as long as we had one of each

We covered the entire street til our hands and books were overflowing

At home we taped them into our precious journals,

Sealed forever so we would remember,

These were the flowers we would have in our wedding bouquets.

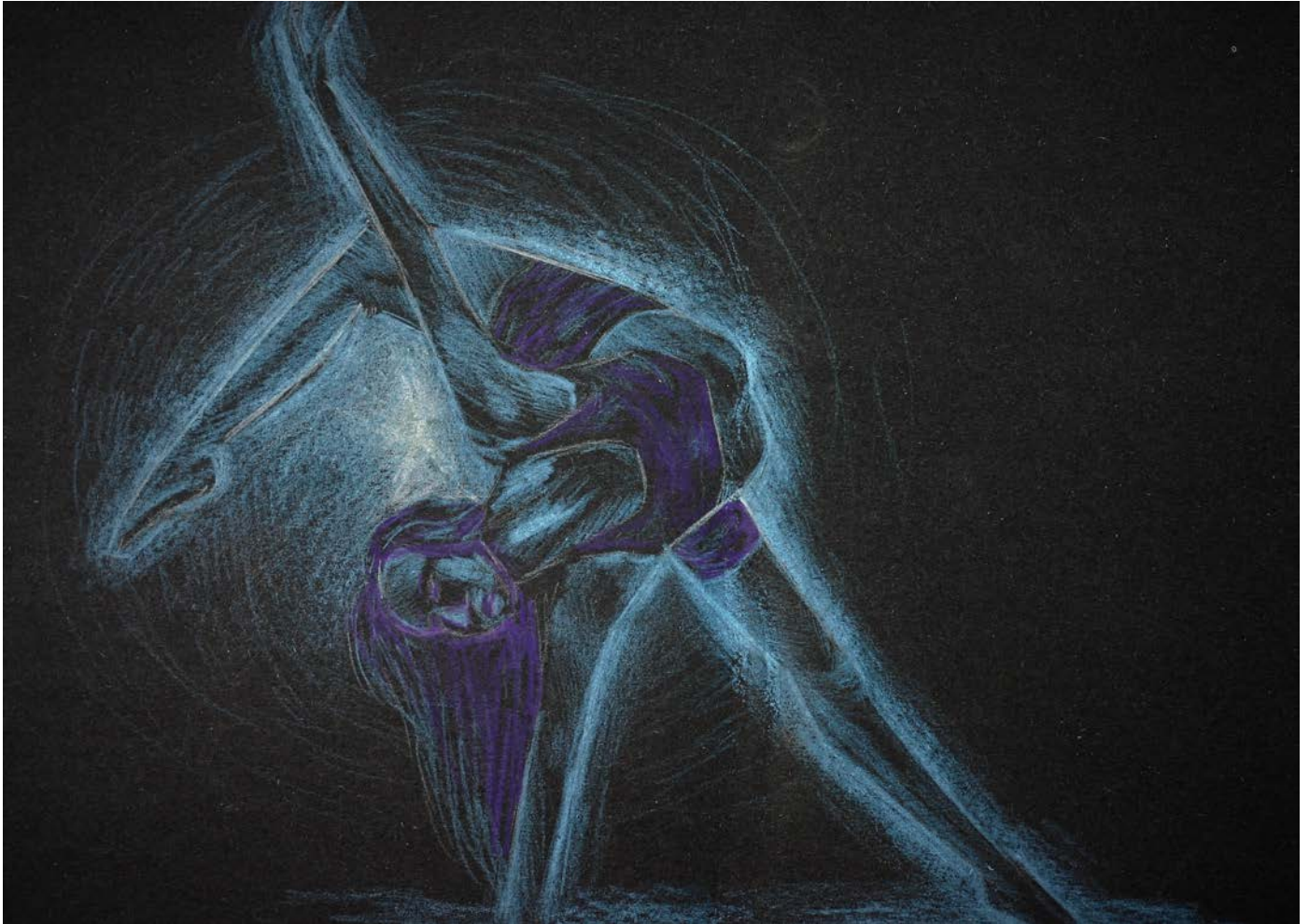
Flower #1
Alyssa Snavely
Photography



Karina Goldthorp
Maxim

We all wore Crocs at one point.

Taking Center Stage
Caroline Huang
Colored Pencil Drawing



Marissa Lambert
Maxim

Don't fight over the front seat before
you've found a place to go.

Intertwined

Taylor Broz

Poetry

i tried to step over the vines.
if my soul was a rose,
i am trapped in its stem.

my ankles crack on every step i take
but i hear the ripping and the tearing
of muscle
of being rooted to you.

i've tried waiting and watching over stoplights
hoping that no one would be reckless enough
to damage others around them,
to damage what they have

the red reminds me of nights when the sun wasn't ready to go down and neither was i,
but you always got me home safely so i could return in the morning to find you asleep still with the stars and
nebulae floating in your eye sockets

what do those mean?
do they mean you hold a universe for you or for the both of us?

were you formed from star stuff next to the black hole that designed me?

maybe it just spit out my body
and nothing else inside of it.
that's why my eyes are black in the rain and sun,
or in the dark i know exactly where you are even if you can't see me.

i have black eyes,
only a glossy dark light from the sun.
the sun that i hope i am to you.
the sun that is feeding the roses that are slowly growing around my body, anchoring me to the ground and i
see your stars in the mud, (they're not any less beautiful,
you are not changed)

the roses that i touch in a beautiful beautiful garden.
one filled with every graceful and ugly and limber and rigid moment.

A Letter to Fear
Madeline Escourt
Letter

Dear Fear,

I address you only as “dear” not because I am fond of you, but because of the deep, intimate, lifelong relationship that we have shared. As a result, I feel as if you have earned at least that recognition. You have been a terrible companion to walk through life with and as much as I have despised you, I must thank you. You are the one who created me. You taught me lessons that I needed to learn, only you did it in the harshest, most despicable way. You have taken pieces of me, but that is okay. You can keep them because I have built new pieces to go in their place using what you taught me, and they are stronger, more durable than the pieces that you took.

Since you have spent years tormenting my mind, looking into the deepest darkest depths of my soul, I have a more personal question to ask you since it is only fair. Are you lonely? I ask because you have been popping up in the world a little too frequently in the recent months for my liking. Or is it because you are craving attention as a result of being deprived of it for a few years?

I do not know the inner workings of the mind of Fear, but if you feel any other emotions other than fear, embrace it. Just because society labels you as such does not mean you have to conform to this label. I am aware you dwell in the deepest corners of the human mind desperately fighting to reach the surface. I know that people turn to you because they find it easier, and you like that, for it makes you feel desired. However, you may not be mindful that infecting the minds of the human race makes you vulnerable because at any moment the illusion that you present will be realized, and you will be dismissed.

You are just a viewpoint of the people who do not yet understand the other side because, as I said earlier, it is easier to move towards fear than towards empathy. You may think that humans come to you because they are fearful of the darkness, but it is actually quite the opposite. They are fearful of the light. They are afraid that they are not worthy enough to step into the sunshine because you are the one who has convinced them that they deserve to stay in the dark. You told them that if they step into the light, failure is inevitable.

Although I realize that your job is a very important one, it is crucial that you know when you overstep your boundaries. You are allowed to give your input, but being the final decision maker is the role that you are no longer allowed to fulfill. That job is reserved for happiness.

Sincerely,
Madeline Escourt

Noah Fenton
Maxim

Good leaders know
they aren't important.

La Bestia
Vanessa Anthony
Acrylic Painting and Collage



Shoes

Anushka Shah

Poetry

I take
My shoes off
In the mandir[1]
Ring the bell
Three times
And smear red
Kumkum[2]
On my third eye[3]
May Bhagwan[4]
Bless me.

I take
My shoes off
In the masjid[5]
Wash my
Right hand and
Then my left and
Kneel down and
Bow my head
May Allah[6]
Bless me.

I take
My shoes off
In the gurdwara[7]
Cross my legs
In silence and say
A prayer, taking
The offered
Karah Prashad[8]
May Wahe Guruji[9]
Bless me.

I take
My shoes off
At the airport
Cast my eyes
Down to the
Floor and make
Myself as
Small as I can
May America
Bless me.

[1] Hindu or Jain temple

[2] Red powder used for religious markings

[3] Middle of the brows/forehead that is considered an inner eye of wisdom

[4] "God" in Hinduism or Jainism

[5] Mosque

[6] "God" in Islam

[7] Place of worship for Sikhs

[8] Semolina based sweet offered to devotees at a gurdwara

[9] "God" in Sikhism

American Dream

Mathilde Nepiani

Photography



Forgetting to Remember

Shreya Bibra

Poetry

Out of the womb
Ready to play
But you need your mother's milk
You need it multiple times a day

Out of her arms
You're walking on those legs
But if you fall she'll catch you
Before you feel the pain

Out of the crib
You're sleeping on your own
But when you cry she's there
Making sure you feel at home

Out come the training wheels
You're riding that bike

You've got cold feet
But he holds onto you tight

Out of that seat
You're flailing your arms
Scrapes everywhere
But he helps break the fall

Out of the house
10 years pass
You're working 9-5
No trace of your past

People come and go
We feel and forget pain
But why don't we all just for a second
Remember how we got our name.

Faces of the Earth

Serena Yan

Colored Pencil Drawing



Je Me Souviens
Yuri Tamama
Photography



Jane Yun
Bop Haiku

Raindrops on the window
Race each other
To be the first one down.

Bridget Bove
Bop Haiku

Peaceful summer night
A man alone
Gazing at the stars.

The World's Wonders / Las Maravillas del Mundo

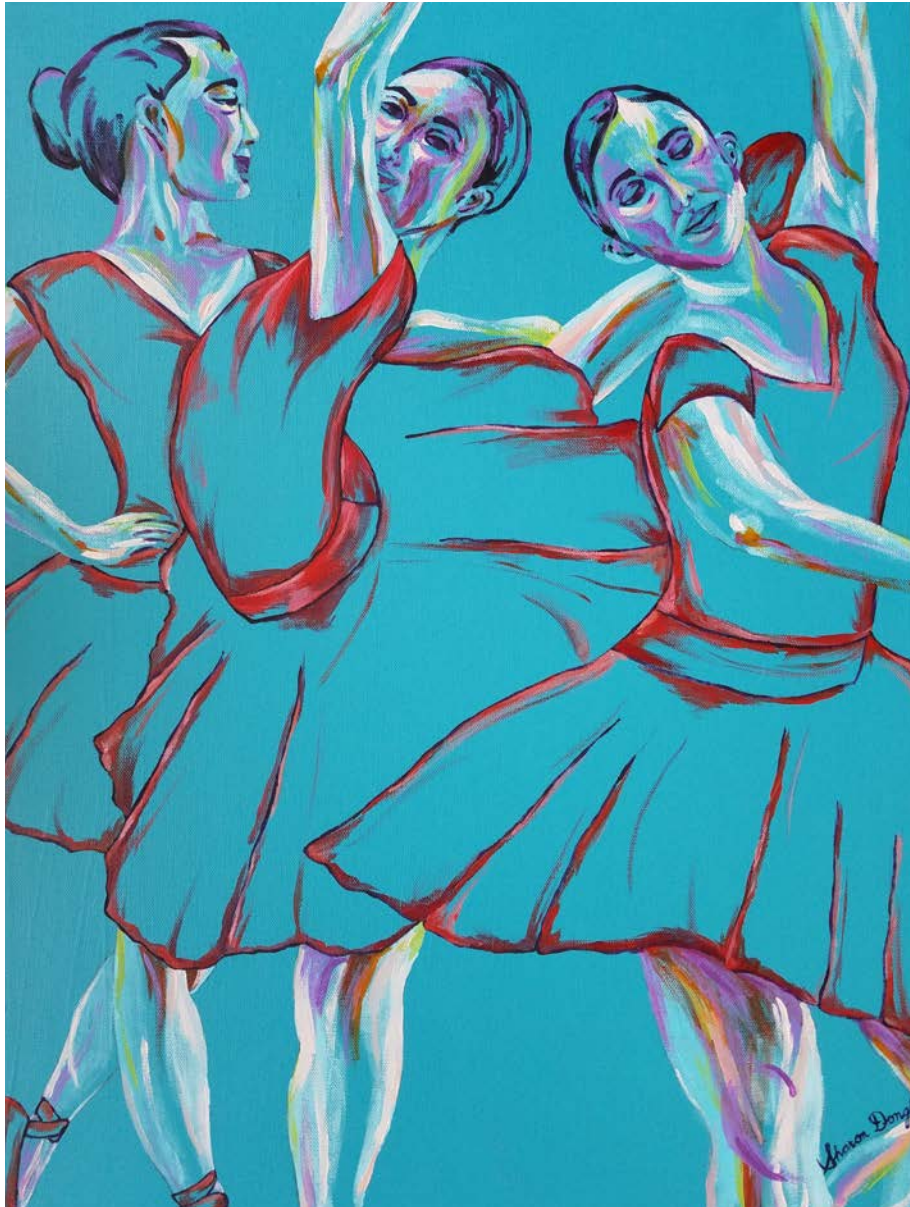
Manuel Bautista

Poetry/Translation

People persisting in the prairie, plowing and toiling their plentiful crops
And citizens in the cities calculating and clarifying their complications.
The ocean man grabs me by the hand, and takes me to his land.
Different from the land man with his adamantine rocks of equal elegance.
Zeus, Hermes, Aeolus guide me in my travels as a bird, as do
Neptune and Tiberinus and Volturnus, as they guide me in my travels as a dolphin.
The world's wonders ever astonish me, with never ending fascinations
From the heads that guard the Island of Easter to the
Towers that scrape the heavens in the lands of Dubai.
Towers built upon men upon men for thousands of years
And will continue to do so until the bones of man break.
Until the muscles of the working man are torn and lost with the wind.
There is beauty in this place we call our world
With our different cultures, views, and ways of life making
Each one of us but an atom in the making of a mountain.

Personas persistiendo en la pradera, arando y trabajando sus cultivos abundantes
Y los ciudadanos en las ciudades calculando y clarificando sus complicaciones.
El hombre del océano me agarra por el mano, y me lleva a su mundo.
Diferente al hombre de la tierra con sus rocas adamantino que son de la misma elegancia.
Zeus, Hermes, Aeolus me guían en mis aventuras como un pájaro como
Neptuno y Tiberino y Volturmo, mientras me guían en mis travesías como un delfín.
Las maravillas del mundo siempre me asombran, con sus fascinaciones que nunca termina
Desde las cabezas que protejan la isla de Pascua hasta las
Torres que raspan los cielos en el mundo de Dubai.
Torres creadas encima de hombres encima de hombres por miles de años
Y seguirán haciendo eso hasta que los huesos del hombre rompan.
Hasta que los músculos del hombre que trabaja estén rasgados y perdidos en el viento.
Hay belleza en este lugar que llamamos nuestro mundo
Con nuestras diferentes culturas, puntos de vista, y formas en que vivimos hace que
Cada uno de nosotros somos tan solo un átomo que forma una montaña.

For My Friend, May
Sharon Dong
Acrylic Painting



Kristine Mihm
Six-Word Story

Wake up. School. Practice. Homework.
Repeat.

Rosy
Sarah Losco
Poetry

A rose, porcelain petals enfolding the
radiant light that melts
shadows and casts a
rosy glow over the
baby pinkness of the walls.

A delicate silver key
which winds the
music box exactly seven times
releasing the pastel notes that
pirouette to the
tinkling melody before
all stop to rest.

A pocket-size puppy
ears worn threadbare from years of
love, burrowing in the
blankets and keeps
watch in the night with
loyal diligence.

A dainty heart-shaped earring, long alone
dangling on the hope that
its partner would come
wandering home
one day.

Innocence
Lauren Rogus
Acrylic and Oil Painting



Bhamini Sundararaman
Bop Haiku

Reading a book
Cuddled in blankets
With a box of chocolates.

Princess Tom

MZ Tiv

Script

INT. CHILD'S BEDROOM - DAY

ANGELA, a deceitful young girl around five to seven years old, is playing with her stuffed animals in her bedroom. Her mother, LISA, is tidying up the bedroom while in business attire. Lisa's new boyfriend, TOM, is standing in the doorway of the bedroom watching Angela play.

TOM

What if she gets...hungry?

LISA

She's a human being, too. She eats whatever we eat.
Just give her some animal crackers or something.
She will want the frosted kind, but don't give in.
Just give her the regular ones.

TOM

What about if she has to, you know.

LISA

Tom, she goes to school. How old
do you think she is? I wouldn't ask you to do this if I
didn't think you could handle it. It'll just be an hour or two.
Corporate loves to inconvenience me anyway they can.

TOM

Okay, I'll see you later. Please don't take your time.

LISA

(to Angela)

Bye, honey. I'll see you in a little bit.
Mr. Tom is going to hang out with you for a while, okay?

ANGELA

Okay, mommy. I love you.

LISA

I love you too, angel.
(to Tom) See, she's a sweetheart. Bye you two!

Lisa exits. Tom takes out his laptop.

TOM

Well, Angela. You don't mind if I do some things for work, do you? While you just continue playing, whatever you're playing?

ANGELA

Where do you work, Mr. Tom?

TOM

Oh, I'm a lawyer. Boring, I know.

ANGELA

What type are we talking? Personal injury, corporate, immigration, criminal...

TOM

(confused)

Mostly corporate. How do you—

ANGELA

What are you working on?

TOM

Well, I was put in charge of thinking of tactics, I mean, ways, to cut out competition in our area. We all seem to promise the same thing to potential clients.

ANGELA

I want to play princess.

TOM

What?

Angela pulls out a tiara.

ANGELA

Put it on.

TOM

Angela, I just told you—

ANGELA

Do it.

Slightly intimidated, Tom complies and puts on the tiara.

ANGELA

Good. You know, you don't really look like a princess.

TOM

Why aren't you the princess?

ANGELA

Excuse you. I'm the queen.

TOM

My mistake.

ANGELA

I think I know what you need.

Angela darts out of the room and returns hauling a box of her mother's makeup.

ANGELA

This should do it. I need to get to work right away, though.

TOM

Why don't we play something else?
Perhaps doctor? I have been feeling
a little nauseous.

ANGELA

(sighs)

Doctor is Mondays and Wednesdays.
Tuesdays and Thursdays are space aliens,
Fridays and Sundays are secretary.
It's Saturday. That's princess day.

TOM

Got it. So what are the royal duties for today,
my Queen?

Angela puts bright red lipstick on Tom.

ANGELA

We need to choose the royal cake for the annual royal cake ceremony. Obviously.

Angela takes out her coloring books.

ANGELA

Here I have the sketches of all our royal options of the entire royal land. There are short cakes, tall cakes, rainbow cakes, white cakes, glitter frosting, no frosting, and, of course, a cake that looks like Moana. Choose wisely.

TOM

What if it's a Moana cake with rainbow cake in the middle and glitter frosting in her hair?

Angela slaps Tom.

ANGELA

Are you a mad man? What are you thinking?

TOM

The more the merrier, right?

ANGELA

No, Thomas. Not at all. That cake is trying way too hard. No client would ever fall for such a busy exterior. The key is to lure them in with a clean, polished frosting finishing, then once they come inside, surprise them with that dazzling rainbow center.

Angela winks at Tom, as he begins to understand the comparison. He opens his laptop to begin taking notes.

TOM

So, what other parts of the cake would you like?

ANGELA

Well, I want to buy that cake from somewhere with superb customer support, friendly workers whenever I enter that bakery, and of course for the head baker to promise me the best damn cake I have ever eaten. Better than any bakery in the entire kingdom.

TOM

Would you consider buying a cake online?

Lisa enters with a box of pizza.

LISA

Hey guys, I'm home! How was your playdate?

ANGELA

Great, mom! Tom and I played princess!
(whispers to Tom) If you need anything else,
you know where to find me.

TOM

(whispering to Angela)
It was great working with you.

The Light Princess

Eliza Ross

Oil Painting



Rebecca Wettergreen
Bop Haiku

Stolen sock of mine
Reluctantly returned
From under her paw.

Colson Voss
Bop Haiku

The sun comes up.
Ow! Too bright.
I need coffee.

Mornings
Izabel Peterson
Photography



AIDS and a Stupid Fifth Grader

Samir Yellapragada

Humor

For the first time in a long time, I was very relieved. There was a lice epidemic going around Franklin Elementary School, and I had just gotten the clear from the school nurse. She closely examined my hair and simply nodded her head to say, “no.” The next kid in line was fearfully awaiting his fate.

After school that day, I went home and slept because I had no homework, and it was Friday. The next day my cousin would be coming to our house. He was 22 at the time, and he went to college in New Jersey.

The next morning I woke up, and I was feeling a little nauseous. My nose was a little stuffy, but other than that it wasn't too bad. My cousin came, and we gave him a warm welcome. Unfortunately, by the end of the day, my stuffy nose turned into a really bad cold. So I was upstairs trying to “sleep if off,” but really I was just playing on the iPad. My cousin came into room and asked me how I was feeling. I told him I felt horrible. He told me to describe the symptoms. So I told him: stuffy nose, moderate body pain, slight headache, etc. And he looked at me and said, “Yup. It's confirmed. You have AIDS.” Now I had heard the name of this illness being thrown around in the past, but I never really knew what it meant.

“Wh...w..wh...what AIDS?” I innocently asked him.”

“Well, lets look it up,” he said.

“Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) is a disease spectrum of the human immune system caused by infection with human immunodeficiency virus.”

“Am I going to die?” I asked him.

“Depends on what stage you're in.”

“What stage am I in?”

My cousin pointed to a pre-existing scar on my arm and began his performance. “Yup. Yup--once you develop this scar--that means Stage IV AIDS. Actually, there a might a little Chlamydia in your body, too.”

“H..ho...how long do I have to live?” I asked.

“I would say fifteen days tops,” he sharply responded.

Right when I found out I had only a couple days to live, the first thing I did (and this pretty much sums up my character in a nutshell) is that I went on Disney Channel.com without my parents permission. I was convinced I was a thug.

That night I couldn't sleep at all. I was too scared to tell my parents because I didn't want them to know. The next day I woke up super early. I started researching the symptoms of AIDS. I went on Google images and only threw up twice. There were multiple disturbing images and a plethora of pictures of a dude named Magic Johnson.

So I checked the symptoms--

- Lack of energy. (uh...yeah I guess)
- Short term memory loss (kind of)
- Frequent colds and fevers (check)
- Muscle cramps (I think...)

So my research confirmed that I had AIDS. That day my cold evolved into a fever. I was bedridden with a body temperature of 103 degrees. I would catch my cousin looking at me throughout the day giving me looks of pity. That afternoon my parents and my cousin went shopping. All I remember doing that day was watching the “Living Like Larry” episode of SpongeBob over and over again. I slept well that night, although I had multiple nightmares involving Magic Johnson.

The next day my fever had ceded, and I was feeling perfectly fine. I couldn’t focus in any of my classes because I was way too worried to be doing any learning. After all, why did I have to be spend my last fifteen days being caged in school? I walked into math that day feeling worse than ever. I wasn’t actually sick, but I felt horrible. To my avail, we weren’t having normal math class that day. These two representatives from the local hospital were in the room, and on the Promethean Board was the first slide of a powerpoint titled “AIDS/HIV/Other STDs.” My mouth literally dropped all the way to the floor. My heart was racing, and my palms started to sweat. How the heck did these people find out? Are they going to tell the school, the police, my parents? Am I going to have to spend my last days behind bars because I possibly got everyone else sick? My head was spinning. The representatives had begun their presentation. They were going over what AIDS was and how it was transmitted. I couldn’t listen to any of it because I was in so much shock. Actually, I was a little offended because I knew they were referring to me indirectly, knowing I would notice. I was outraged by the insult and could not bear it any longer.

Finally, the man asked, “Do you have any family members or relatives afflicted with AIDS?” I then raised my hand. Fearfully yet boldly I said, “I have AIDS!” At first there was pin-drop silence, and then the whole class burst into laughter. WHY WERE THESE PEOPLE LAUGHING? My face turned red, and I ran out of the room and straight to the nurse’s office. By the time I got there, I was panting.

“What’s wrong honey?” the nurse asked.

“I’ve been feeling a little sick.”

“Oh what happened?” she asked.

“(whispering) Actually.... I think I have AIDS...and possibly Herpes, Gonorrhea, and Chlamydia.”

Right after I said that, this woman lost it. I mean she was rolling on the floor laughing. She ran out of the room and told every single staff member including the principal. She told all of her friends as she tweeted it, changed her facebook status, instagrammed it, made a Vine, and I’m pretty sure I even ended up on Club Penguin. Obviously, she called my parents and told them. They weren’t very happy.

They picked me up after school and drove me home. Boy were they mad at my cousin. After they finished chewing him out, they proceeded to explain to me I wasn’t afflicted with an STD, but I just wouldn’t buy it. I mean I was sold. How could anyone argue with the scar? It was perfect evidence! Because they couldn’t convince me, they called a friend of theirs who was a doctor. They scheduled an appointment where this doctor would do a bunch of fake tests to prove to me I didn’t have AIDS.

So afterwards, my parents angrily drove me to the hospital. The doctor got a little carried away and tried to put on a performance that he thought would win him an Oscar. He checked my weight, my height, asked for my favorite number, and somehow weaved that into his calculations; he made me run laps, do push ups, my best George Bush imitation, etc. He finally took me and my parents into his office. “Your results have come in,” he said very seriously. I was having a nervous breakdown, and my parents had an apathetic “kill me” look on their face. The doctor was having the time of his life.

“Drum roll please...” he said. “Congratulation you tested negative. You do not have AIDS!” Right after he said that, I was crying tears of joy while my parents were probably thinking to drop me off at the nearest orphanage. The doctor gave me a lollipop and sent on my way. Eight years later, I still hold that as a fond memory. I still remember the euphoria I felt on the way back from the hospital. For the first time in a long time, I was very relieved.

The Old in Colour

Alyssa Snavelly

Photography



Helping Hands

Josh Duch

Sculpture



Glacier
Kate Germain
Poetry

I imagine a beauty, almost fully submerged.
A rare kind, endangered to the touch and a
Taste so numbing that no one knows it's there.
I wonder why such monumental beings
Are prone to a plain existence and
Why the sun chooses to bless some
And abandons others to damnation.

I imagine that the snow accumulates,
But never bears to be a burden.
Perhaps, the sweet prickle of absolute zero
Feels like a wildfire pacing the path of your veins.
Maybe, it distracts you from the sun,
Melting and chipping
Away at who you knew yourself to be.

I imagine that you appear differently
Below sea level and I long to see you
At your purest, most true form.

For when existing is not enough,
You have the pleasure of knowing
That something lies deeper than
What my naked eye can view.

I imagine that you imagine.
Whether that be the battling of
Your greatest contenders or the satisfaction
Of the coldest winter that has ever been.
Or, possibly, how I could comprehend
What melting truly means.

I imagine that it all ends.
With one surviving, for now,
And the other disappearing into the sea.
I know this as well as you.
I, too, am a glacier.

Clear Waters
Judy Zhang
Photography



A small brown bird is perched on a thin, light-colored branch that runs horizontally across the middle of the frame. The background is a soft, out-of-focus bokeh of light colors, including pinks, blues, and greens, with small, glowing light spots scattered throughout. The overall mood is peaceful and artistic.

2 0 1 7

BRANCHES

VARIATIONS

Is This Goodbye?

Rani Pietrzyk

Fiction

One. She rounded the corner just after she made it through the security line. I wanted to run to meet her, but my feet were heavy and glued me in place; I was entranced with her and disconnected from my surroundings. A man ran into my side with his suitcase in my vegetable-like state. I could even feel the bruise forming. But all thoughts of pain and all the hassle I went through to get a gate pass to see her off were eradicated from my brain once I saw her barreling towards me. The impact was profound when her forehead made contact with my chest, leaving me breathless and praying that she couldn't hear my heart and brain screaming at each other.

Two. College had treated her well. She hadn't grown much since high school, maybe an inch or two, but she matured much more than I had. Her long dirty-blond hair had been chopped off around the shoulders and danced on the edge of them. She looked older. She looked happier. Well, sort of. Right now, she looked devastated, but her eyes had hidden a gleam of anticipation and excitement inside. In short, she was a mess. But she was one heck of a beautiful mess. I was pulled from my thoughts when I felt her arms wrap around me and smelled the scent of her hair. She always smelled a little like peaches, and it never failed to calm me down.

Three. Fireworks exploded behind my eyelids when I felt them slip shut. The sparks were a soft red that reminded me of a light rose: Meg's favorite color. They exploded and left crackling sounds ringing in my ears as a way of letting me know, as if I hadn't already noticed, how conflicted I was feeling. Her smooth hair rubbed under my chin and it only made the fireworks explode at a faster pace. But what really killed me was when I felt her grab on tight to my shirt. If this lasted much longer, I would have to pry her off of me despite not wanting to. She twisted her hands into fists and just kept pressing tighter and tighter.

Four. Meg pulled away to look me in the eye. Her dark, rectangular framed glasses were sliding down her nose as if it was a slide. I ignored my brain warning me against it and pushed them back up to the crooked bridge with my index finger. Her hazel eyes reminded me of autumn; I could almost smell pumpkin and hear the crinkle of fallen leaves under my feet every time I looked in them. She blinked. I saw a single tear cascade down her cheek and hover around each freckle that was painted on her face, hanging on to each one as if its hand was slipping off one finger at a time. Meg quickly grasped my shoulders and whispered, "Can you give me a reason to stay?"

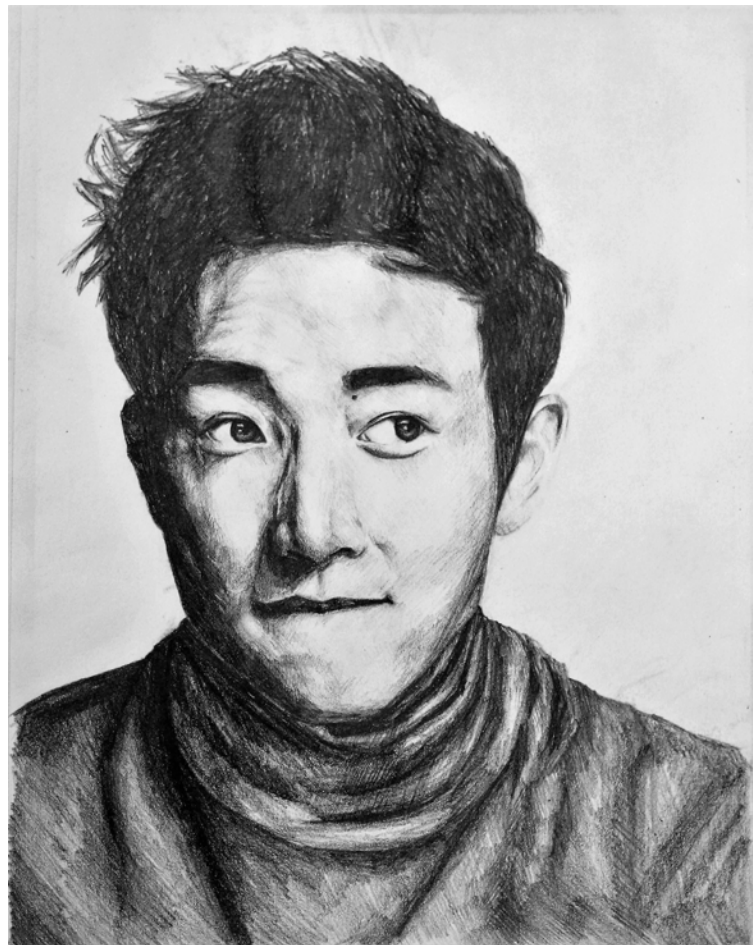
Five. College was over. After four years away from her family who had just moved to Virginia Beach, where her dad was stationed, she finally had the chance to be with them again. Her dad was never around much while she was growing up, always deployed or off somewhere else in the country. But now she had the chance to be with them again. Together and whole as one happy family. And now that her mom was sick.... No. I couldn't keep her from them anymore. They had an interview all lined up for her at one of the elementary schools close to where her parents and sister lived. No more San Diego with Connor. This intense Connor and Meg friendship, or whatever the heck was

going on between us, needed to be sacrificed. As much as I didn't want to, I'd do it for her. I was done preventing her from being where she really needed to be. So... I grabbed her back into my embrace. Biting my tongue, I forced back the metallic taste that flooded my mouth. My stomach somersaulted and I smelled something sour in the air, possibly my own sadness and pathetic nature. I turned my neck to whisper in her ear, "Your mom needs you." The voice that escaped the prison of my throat barely sounded like my own; it cracked and felt like it was going to choke as it had gone as dry as the desert.

Six. I felt her nod. Next thing I knew, she pulled away. That is, until she came back and gave me a chaste kiss on the cheek. She forced a wad of paper into my hand and then, just like that, she was gone. Everything seemed to have a blue hue to me now. It was gloomy, and I felt like a whole section of my chest had just been ripped out of me. Slowly, I looked at the note in my hand. It just had a tiny blue heart drawn on it. I sighed. There was so much left unsaid, and I just let my best friend get away from me. I didn't know what on earth I was going to do now.

That's when it hit me. It only took 6 seconds to realize it but... I'm not too bad at playing follow the leader.

Hidden Smile
Caroline Huang
Graphite Drawing



Beowulf Boasts

Grace Spencer

Poetry

Spencer, daughter of Catherine, educator of the innocent,
and Mark, seller of healing gifts.

Grace, writes words that wish to wander through the minds of those who thirst for stories. She finds the place where her heart resides when helping those in need. She strives for excellence in the building of knowledge. She will travel to faraway lands, capturing moments that life has to offer.

Beowulf Boasts

Christian Parreaguirre

Poetry

Parreaguirre, Son of Costa Rican Mario, the merchant of air moving
And Megan, the great educator of the mighty antelopes.

Brother of Will and Matthew--his greatest rivals and companions.

Christian, light-footed runner, winner of a state medal on the fiery oval of destiny.

Slayer of twelve brute beasts, one conquered every year since the age of five starting with a monster named "kindergarten." Traveler to distant lands, where twisted tongues speak unknown words and wild jungles rule over the land. He will fight a long, brave battle to conquer the thirteenth and final beast to enter the kingdom of "College" (not sure which one yet).

Beowulf Boasts

Matt Bernarding

Poetry

Bernarding, of the vast and luscious green fields of Germany,
Son of Joseph, O great detector of crime, and he who
teaches vicious self-fortification and Rebecca, the town beloved accountant from the company that makes
wires and springs.

Brother of Ben, O famous soccer goal keeper and notable player of the silver strings.

Matt, O district renowned player of the brass music maker.

The prominent player of soccer and the savior of youthful lives from the hazards of water throughout the blistering hot days of summer. He will clash through the overwhelming amounts of homework and tests during his senior year of high school so he can gain acceptance from a grand university.

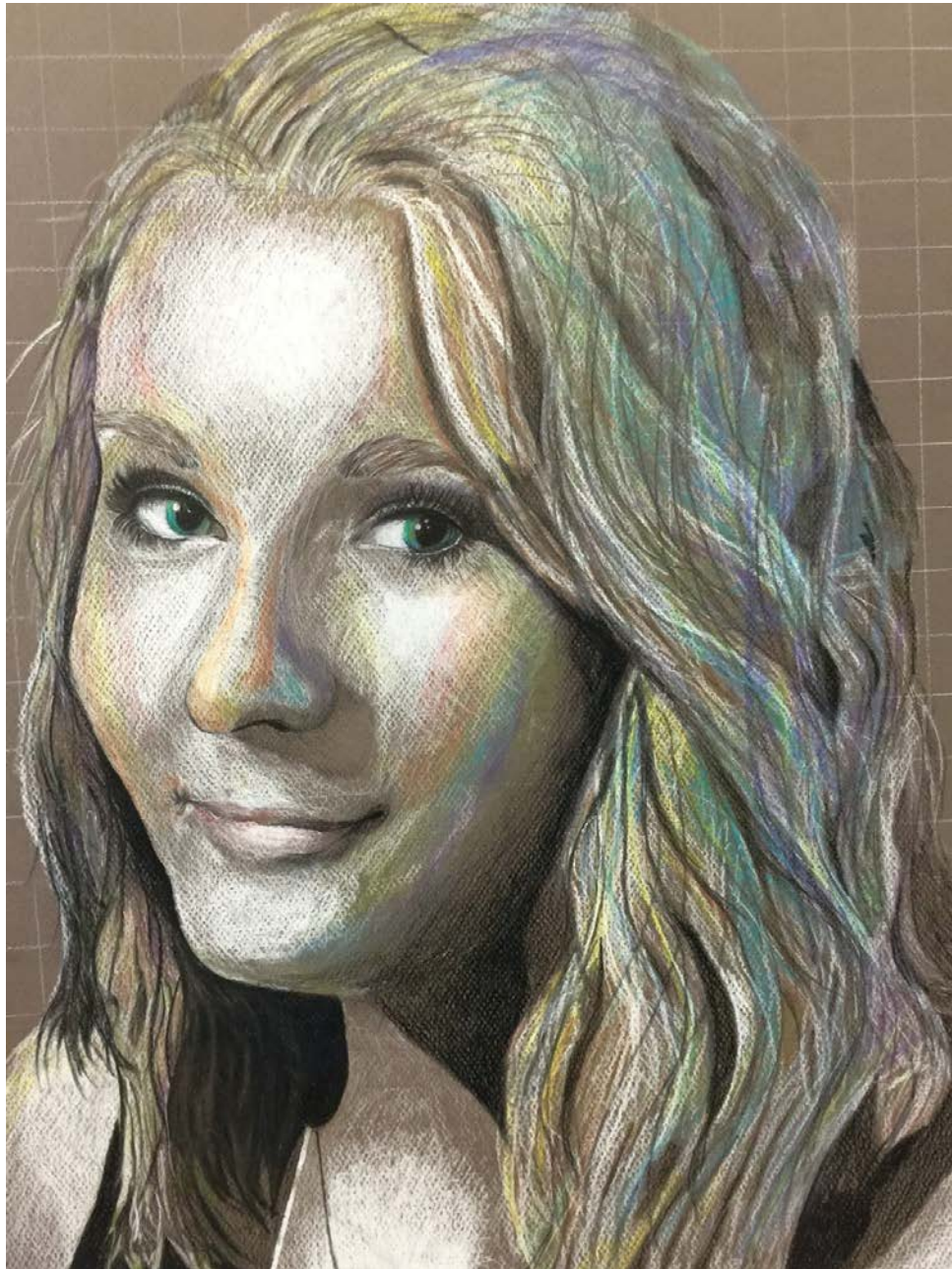
El Panecillo
Judy Zhang
Photography



Noah Fenton
Six-Word Story

God first. Grades second. Better life.

Self Portrait
Reilly Deller
Colored Pencil Drawing



Nancy Xu
Bop Haiku

The beautiful maiden
Homebound
Makeup off.

Lost in the Shuffle

Maddie Bordo

Poetry

WANTED!
MISSING!
Where Did They GO?
I've lost some things,
have you seen them?
My favorite purple pencil
A black flip-flop,
left foot
More than four water bottles,
and at least six sweaters
The NICEST pair of rain boots
I ever owned
A slide phone, full keyboard
My lunch, at least twice a month
Some pride, on a slippery stair
The diary i started when i was 7
More socks than I can count,
lost to the dryer or the locker room
Goggles, goggles, goggles
A bit of hope,
each time i read the news

Most of my sense of style,
and most of my motivation
A pair of red wool mittens
The majority of my innocence
Mr. Bunny
Several bras, god knows where
those scoundrels got to
My rose colored glasses
And 2 pairs of actual glasses
Every travel mug
I ever owned
Some muscle mass,
but also some fat
My 4.0
Concern for others' opinions
A brand new box of crayons
Some drawings from my brother
Your heart, and chunks of mine,
lost in the shuffle

Scenery

Kelly Kim

Colored Pencil and Ink Drawing



Bend in the Road

Ciara Cullen

Poetry

I stand here, the sharp right turn ahead of me.
All my life,
The road I've travelled,
The people I've met along the way,
The friends I've made,
And the friends I've lost,
The love I've found,
The tears I've cried,
The fears, the failures,
The joy, the strength,
All my memories and all of me—
Everything I've ever known has led me here.

I stand here at the bend in the road,
The place my journey has led me,
And I slow.
I stop.
I look back, and the path seems far
Too short.

I stand here, enveloped in friendship, guided by
love.

The people who have given me these gifts
Will not follow me to this new adventure.

As I stand here at the bend in the road,
I see the shimmer of potential from the right.
I see the sparks of friendships to come;
I see the searing pain of heartbreak.

I know my path doesn't end here,
But it does begin again.
The hardest part of new beginnings
Is that they feel like endings sometimes.

I stand here at the bend in the road,
I take a breath
And turn.

Pittsburgh

Jess Robles

Photography



Never Again
Maddie Bordo
Poetry

I would rather
vanish
disappear
disintegrate
than let you
worm
sneak
claw
your way back into my
persuadable
naive
cavernous
bitch heart

Unmasked
Serena Yan
Colored Pencil and Watercolor Drawing



Things That Matter

Julia Maruca

Fiction

I. Duck butt.

As a kid, Max was used to his twin sister's duck obsession. Jamie brought at least five yellow rubber ducks into the bathtub with her every night, wore her "You QUACK me up!" tee-shirt at every opportunity, and had once been reprimanded in school for continuously making duck noises at the teacher.

And her favorite playground game was Chase Ducks. She and Max could be frequently found racing through puddles in pursuit of quackers.

Max himself was largely ambivalent about ducks. But this game was important to Jamie, so Chase Ducks it was.

In April of first grade, Jamie leaped across the soccer field, arms outstretched, towards the duck on the other side of the net. She shoved her muddy hands through the netting, nabbed the hapless bird, and held fast.

Jamie and Max were so ecstatic at having done the impossible -- they'd CAUGHT a DUCK -- that they didn't immediately notice Jamie's awkward position. She'd wedged her torso into the soccer net and was stuck with the duck pinning her in place from the other side.

Jamie panicked and wriggled. The duck quacked. Max struggled to push his sister's head out of the net. It quickly became clear to Max that Jamie could break free only by dropping the duck. So Jamie had two options: give up on her pet duck dream or stay trapped in a soccer net forever.

Visions of a dark future flashed before Max's eyes: daily visits to his reclusive sister who lived alone in a soccer net with only a duck for company. He grabbed the duck out of his sister's hands, ignoring her squawk of protest. The bird wiggled in its grip as Jamie twisted her head free.

As she ran around the net to retrieve her avian prize, Max held the bird aloft like a trophy.

"Hey, guess what?" he said.

"What?"

He turned the squirming bird around. "Duck butt!"

Jamie giggled as she fist-bumped him. Their twinship had endowed the pair with certain innate teamwork skills, but this was the first time Max realized just how great Jamie and he could be when working together.

II. The Wind Ball All Time Champion.

He was a tall blond kid who never shut up. He moved into the neighborhood one day, and Jamie hated his guts.

Fifth grade was a time of competitive everything, from hopscotch to Pokemon cards to whom can throw this rock across the playground harder. And in Jamie and Max's neighborhood, the sport of choice was Wind Ball.

Someone had glued a colorful bandana to a rubber playground ball to create the Wind Ball. It had been around since before most of the players were born, and had multiple mysterious origin stories. A neighborhood legend.

When you were playing Wind Ball, you didn't let ANYONE touch the ball if you managed to snag it. It brought fifth graders into their bloodthirstiest states. Multiple concussions and broken arms had resulted from Wind Ball matches. It was the sort of game that could easily get a gym teacher fired.

There were no winners in Wind Ball. Just those with more bragging rights than others.

No one was better at Wind Ball than Jamie and Max. Collaborative skills they'd been nurturing since babyhood made them the best duo imaginable.

Until Sydney showed up.

("He looks like a rat," Jamie had whispered to her brother as they peered at Sydney from the bushes between their houses the day he moved in.)

Max didn't want to hold Sydney's rodent-like visage against him. But a rat that was this good at Wind Ball was a problem. Because even in a game with no winners, everyone knew who held the Wind Ball title: Jamie. And she wouldn't let any new kid one-up her.

Personally, Max didn't care. Unlike most boys his age, he wasn't particularly competitive. He liked the athletic, fun part of Wind Ball way more than the never-ending battle for neighborhood honor.

But he played along with it for Jamie's sake. Things mattered more to Jamie, and so when Jamie decided that Sydney was going down, Max was in.

The two gathered buckets of rocks from the woods behind their house and tossed them in a bag. The plan was to stuff as many rocks as possible into their pockets and conveniently drop them all over the ground in the hopes that they'd impede Sydney's progress and scare him off from playing Wind Ball altogether. (Jamie was nothing if not ambitious.) Half an hour of muddy-shoed rock-grabbing later, Jamie proclaimed that they'd gotten enough. The duo headed home to a night of restless sleep for the game tomorrow.

The next day, Jamie and Max waddled over with weighed-down sweatpants to Maggie's backyard, ready for the battle of a lifetime. The game started when Maggie's older brother threw the Wind Ball down into the yard from the deck. Max and Jamie watched in anticipation while the long-tailed ball plummeted to the ground, then made a mad dash once it hit.

Max grabbed the ball and booked it across the yard, dropping rocks from his pocket as he went. He could feel Sydney's sweaty breath on his neck behind him. Kids whizzed around him like rockets, but Max held fast to the ball.

Jamie raced at him as fast as she could. Max hurled the Wind Ball in her direction. Sydney leaped.

And twenty sharp rocks spilled out of Max's other pocket all at once.

Neither Jamie nor Sydney had time to adjust. Both of their feet caught on impressively large stones. Rocks, kids, and ball went plummeting down.

Jamie and Sydney made it out without any broken bones, but didn't manage to evade the scrapes, bruised

egos, and parental consternation. Fortunately for the state of the sport of Wind Ball (if not for the twins' consciences) no parents had noticed their rock-dumping attack. For 11 year-old Max, this was the most daring, cinematic moment of his life.

III. The last softball game of eighth grade.
The Mango Monkeys weren't doing too well.

Even with her orange visor pulled down over her face as far as it would go, Max could see Jamie's intensity. Her team was on the wrong end of an 11-5 score, and it was the bottom of the 9th. The inning crawled by like a fat turtle and ended four runs later. It was hard to watch the defeated Monkeys slink off the field, heads down and shoulders slumped.

Jamie had never been a good sport. The whole car ride home, she refused to look up. Once home, she stomped up the stairs and slammed the door to her room.

Max could hear emo music coming from the other side of Jamie's room. He edged open the door as carefully as he could, trying not to disturb her. She noticed anyway, whirling around to reveal a tear-stained jersey and red eyes. Part of him really wanted to ask her why the hell she was getting so upset about a softball game, but his wiser nature suggested that wasn't an okay thing to do. So he awkwardly sat down near the threshold to her room.

After a silent minute, she barked "You don't get it, do you?"

"Don't get what?"

Jamie sighed dramatically. "That was the last time I'll ever get to play softball. There's no way I'll make the high school fastpitch team. I'll be stuck in the slow pitch league, and then what's the point? Everyone there is like, ten years old. This game was everything. EVERYTHING, Max." She slammed her visor down on the floor. "And I blew it! My last chance to make a name for myself in this stupid game and I completely trashed it."

Max had no clue what to say, so he sat silently while Jamie sniveled then offered her some rumpled tissues from his pocket, which she accepted with good grace.

"You know, Jamie, it's not like it was all on you. You don't have to carry the whole weight of the team on your shoulders like that," he offered weakly, trying to remember the advice the teachers had given at the last anti-bullying assembly about comforting people. "I mean, I think you did great. You more than did your part."

"You're just saying that," she muttered, but there was a hint of relief on her face.

"Seriously, did you check out their coach? He looked like a bulldog. Whenever he talked, he spit all over the place, and his chin and cheeks wobbled! I could see it from way up on the bleachers. Arf, arf!" Max barked sarcastically.

The comment drew a genuine smile out of her, and after a moment she laughed. They continued trash-talking people from the other team and giggling until Jamie had the confidence to really talk again.

“I just...I wanna be remembered for being good at something, okay?” she admitted. “I wanna have people say good things about me when I leave the team, I want people to think I’m cool, dammit!” Jamie wiped her nose on her sleeve, prompting Max to reach over and offer her a Kleenex. “Is that so much to ask?”

“No. It’s not,” he agreed. “People are gonna remember you, though, because of all the cool things that make you Jamie. Except they won’t if you quit softball next year. So what’s the point of doing that?”

Something clicked for her right then and there, and Max could see it in her eyes. “Yeah. I guess you’re right.”

IV. The most successful lie ever told.

Somehow, whether by miracle or curse, Jamie and Max had both landed the same sophomore history class with Mr. Fernard. Nicknamed Ferny by his students, he was notorious for his slimy toupee and garlicky breath. Max didn’t normally insult teachers, but he had to admit Ferny was nasty. Chronic halitosis notwithstanding, Ferny wasn’t the type of teacher one could take lightly. His frequent group projects were graded harshly and worth half the class’s grade.

Halfway through the year, Murphy’s Law went into action: a kid in Jamie and Max’s group skimmed on his end of the project. That morning Max went to print out the group’s citation page in the library from Google Docs, only to discover that it didn’t exist. He approached Kenny, the member of the group who’d been assigned the task of writing up the works cited. Max saw Kenny’s beanpole-thin neck start to sweat as soon as he approached. No one believed him when he swore he did the page last night and sputtered that he “just didn’t know where the file went.”

Jamie turned her back on Kenny and announced to the rest of the group that they had to come up with a different sort of plan if they wanted to pass World Affairs. She gathered the group close (except for Kenny, who sat shamefully outside the circle on a wooden library chair).

“We’ve gotta get Ferny to believe we did it somehow. We need a story. Because if we pull this off, he’ll let us have another day, and then Max can do the citations tonight, since we obviously can’t rely on Kenny. Right, Max?”

Grade at stake, Max nodded.

“Jamie, what’s your dad do for a living?” said one of their group members in a hushed voice.

“He’s a lawyer, why?”

“How about you tell Ferny you left the flash drive with all the citations on it in your dad’s car, and he just, uh, he just left town for a business trip?”

The group made approving group noises. “Yeah, that’ll work. You’re good at this sort of thing, Jamie, right?”

“People say I’m the best liar they know, so yeah.”

Max didn’t think that was something Jamie really ought to be bragging about, but he wasn’t the type to tell people how to live their life.

“Okay, I’ll head over to his room right now. Wish me luck! Max, be my back-up.” Jamie walked away quickly.

Shrugging, Max followed at a slower pace. As they approached Ferny’s room, Max watched in wonder as Jamie bit her lips, mussed her hair, and coaxed tears into her eyes.

Tearfully, she began to relate to Ferny a tale of absolute misery while Max nodded and tried to look worried (which wasn’t hard). Jamie breathlessly explained that their dad was already halfway to New York right now, and oh, my god, if she’d only managed to remember the flash drive when she got out of the car they’d all be fine, so this was all her fault, and she totally admitted it, and if he wanted to give her a zero on the project and no one else that’d be understandable, just not Max and not the others (here Max brightened a little, to his shame), and--

Mr. Fernard was tired from a long weekend working his second job as a banquet manager, and he didn’t feel like dealing with teenage angst and self-sacrifice. And so, from his stinky mouth came a chosen few words that would either make or break the group’s grade: “Jamie, it’s fine, just bring the citation page in tomorrow.”

The duo grinned gratefully and rushed back down the hall. From the looks on their faces, you would have thought they’d just won the lottery.

V. The biggest conflict in all of Randall family history.

Carter Briggs, the most popular football player in school, was throwing a party.

It was the sort of party that you heard about in bad pop songs or YA teen romances. “A real major rager,” in Carter’s words. Mom and Dad Briggs were out of town: no parents, no rules. Jamie wanted to go more than anything else in the world. Max didn’t particularly care.

Mom and Dad didn’t know a thing about the event in question until they caught Jamie walking out the door in a skimpy black dress, claiming to be heading to a friend’s house to work on a project. Max’s back tensed from all the way upstairs when he heard Dad gasp, “Where do you think you’re going, young lady?”

Jamie’s lying skills, although prodigious, had never once worked on their lawyer father. Max could hear the shouting from upstairs where he sat on his bed.

Ten uncomfortable minutes later he heard the door to Jamie’s room slam. Max waited for the sound of Jamie’s typical post-argument crying, but it didn’t come.

He hesitantly texted: u alright?

im sneaking out. f this. cover for me.

Max wasn't completely surprised. Given Jamie's track record for suspicious activity, sneaking out was EXACTLY the sort of thing she'd do. But that didn't mean he was okay with it.

NO WAY!!!! Get over here. Let's talk.

too late already on the roof lol

Max opened his window and looked up and realized Jamie wasn't bluffing. She grinned at him from the roof, sparkly heels in hand, and held a finger to her lips.

A fear of heights prevented him from following her out onto the roof, so he hesitantly reached into his pocket for his phone again.

I'll tell Dad

NO U WONT >:(

She was right, he didn't have the guts to. Plus Jamie would hate him forever if he did.

He tried logic: oh my god ur gonna get in so much trouble pls come back inside

Jamie stuck out her tongue at him and typed: nah

Sighing, he resigned himself to the fact that his sister was going to risk her neck for a dumb party no matter what. He waited until he saw her victory fist pump when she made it to the ground and then texted: at least text me while you're gone, ok? if I'm covering for u i need facts

kk

The rest of the night was punctuated by sporadic texts from Jamie, including a selfie of her and some sweaty jock dancing in dim lighting. Eventually she announced that she was heading back to the house.

wasn't even that good lol

Jamie WTF you've been to like 2 parties in your whole life

lol. ill knock on the window when back. window's still open right

I assume so I didn't touch it.

kk

gnight jamie love you

(Read 11:41 PM)

VI. The explosion of the H-bomb.

She hadn't replied to his text by midnight. At 12:21 A.M., the little grey (Read Yesterday) on the screen mocked him. He fell asleep around 1 A.M., worried but too exhausted for more effort.

At 5 A.M. he found himself being shaken awake by his mother. Half-asleep, he shoved on the shoes that were handed to him and allowed him to be pulled along by parental hands into the car.

As they passed the dining room, he asked, "What's going on? W...where's Jamie?"

Silence for a second. "Honey..." his mother said to no one in particular, with a voice turned broken glass by worry. His father just shook his head and opened the car door.

No one spoke for ten minutes, until the family SUV reached the intersection of Wood Street and Alabaster Drive and slowly came to a stop next to flashing lights and scattered policemen.

The three emerged from their car, instinctively walking close together like warriors into the dawn. Max's father turned to him and said, "Max, I'm going to tell it to you straight. Jamie snuck out to that—yeah, I'm assuming you know. She was hit by a car sometime last night. (Max registered his mother's involuntary sob). And, it's bad. We don't know if she's going to make it or not."

And Max was hit--blasted back with a magnified sensation of sitting in a car while the one parked next to you backs up, a feeling of moving forward in time, nausea, and guilt, all far too fast.

VII. The last text the paramedics found on the screen of her shattered phone.

love u, duckbutt

Timeless
Anjelica Calle
Photography



Autism

Joshua Gerthoffer

Blog Entry

Often people feel that autism will negatively impact a person or define and limit their abilities.

However, I think autism opens new doors in life. Also, I think it's weird to be normal. Often, I find it difficult to communicate with people. However, I have friends like Desiree, Joe, Jeremiah and the best brother in the world, Bradley, who I feel comfortable talking to and spending time with. My family is very supportive of my disability. But I don't like too much attention because that freaks me out. I struggle sometimes making friends and expressing my emotions correctly. But, I like a challenge once in awhile. Also, it can be very tough, but cool, to feel emotions more greatly than everyone else. Whenever I'm happy I am so elated I cannot control myself or my emotions. And when I'm sad I am depressed. It could just mean I have a big heart. My therapist Becky, helps me not make little problems into big ones. Another thing she helps me with is to have back and forth conversations. Sometimes, she gives me breaks to play games with her. My mom is stressed about my future and attitude all the time. But she's a hard-working kindhearted woman who makes my life awesome in every way possible. I look at autism as the "Magical Disability." What I love about myself is me.

Carved In Colors

Caroline Huang

Colored Pencil Drawing



Heinz Meanz Heinz

Raghu Venkatesh

Personal Essay

In the dying days of January 2015, I thought I had uncovered a massive atrocity. While consuming my lunch in the North Allegheny Intermediate cafeteria, I noticed that the ketchup I dispensed from one of the Heinz ketchup dispensers was somehow... off. Permanently borrowing a neighboring friend's french fries, I could not bring myself to enjoy what should have been and generally was the highlight of my meal. The next day, I retrieved some more ketchup, and my worst fear had returned. The ketchup contained within that dispenser seemed to be a nonstandard variety of Heinz ketchup, contaminated, or a different brand of ketchup entirely. After a few minutes of shock and disgust, I decided to acquire additional ketchup--this time, from one of the dispensers located on the table in front of the "Signature Entrees" line, as opposed to the lone dispenser in the "Up For Grabs/Pizza Express" area. To my delight, the dispenser poured into the souffle cup rich, pure, genuine Heinz Tomato Ketchup, as far as I was able to tell. Discussion with residents of the lunch table regarding this issue continued, although it seemed like my endless venting would not lead to anything besides their annoyance.

A few days later, the good, sincere ketchup from the middle dispensers was no more. Performing a relatively thorough blind taste test involving all five ketchup dispensers in the cafeteria and neutral experimental subjects, I found that both centrally located dispensers as well as the dispenser closest to the cafeteria entrance now stored a foul tasting, weak, discolored red substance, and only the twin past-the-gate dispensers in the "Grill" line remained true to the spirit of ketchup "Grown, not Made" with Heinz seeds. It was clear to me that by sidestepping the problem, I had only allowed the situation to worsen.

McDonald's was not able to cut all ties internationally with Heinz without massive public outcry, and I vowed that the same would be the case with North Allegheny School District. Travelling to northallegheny.org, then clicking on "Lunch Menus" on the side bar, I saw that "Questions can be directed to diningservices@northallegheny.org or by calling (724) 934-7201." A letter was prepared, tweeted out by the profoundly-affected @bigsamirishere to a response of nearly 57 favorites, proofread for an inappropriate article, and delivered. The email, which was actually sent out on February 4, read exactly as follows: "Dear Foodservice, This is Raghu Venkatesh, a sophomore at North Allegheny Intermediate High School. It has come to my attention that the Heinz Tomato Ketchup dispensers located in the cafeteria are being filled with some other, inferior, off-brand ketchup. This is simply inexcusable. Not only is Foodservice giving off the false impression that they are serving legitimate, wholesome, and all-around outstanding Heinz Ketchup, but they are also serving a substantially inferior product. The only acceptable course of action is for Foodservice to reinstate Heinz Ketchup and apologize for their misdeeds. Sincerely, Raghu Venkatesh."

Within four hours, my inbox was alight with a reply. "Hello Mr. Venkatesh, You have received inaccurate information and as such your accusations are false. What has led you to believe this false information? The condiments within the Heinz pumpers are all Heinz products. This includes the ketchup, mustard, mayo, bbq sauce, and ranch. If you have any further questions please let me know. I hope this clarifies things for you," responded the Assistant Food Service Director and Nutrition Educator of Metz Culinary Management. The next lunch period, I came equipped with two ketchup packets. One, a negative control, was labeled "McDonald's Fancy Ketchup." The other proudly bore the image of a bottle, an iconic symbol of quality, that read "Heinz." A few squeezes and dips later, Heinz Ketchup returned to the cafeteria on Thursday, February 5, 2015.

In conclusion, what is the moral of this Observation Paper-resurrected-as-a-VARIATIONS-submission? Can it be learned from this experience that I do not know my ketchup produced by Pittsburgh-based corporations? Do I express an over-infatuation with minute details in the absence of true knowledge? Or is the case that a government contractor is trying to cover up their sins from a mostly-oblivious public? I may have already said too much, so farewell.

Religious Differences

Lauren Rogus

Photography



Maneesha Nagabandi

Maxim

What appears to be a chocolate chip cookie may be an oatmeal raisin.

I used to, but now I

Morgan Lauer

Poetry

I used to think that the moon followed our car as we drove,
but now I know our minivan isn't nearly important enough for the moon to love that much
and it's all just perspective.
It's better, of course, to know.

I used to think that I should give my sister my own ice cream cone to replace the one she dropped,
but now I laugh at her misfortune and clumsiness because I am her older sister
and I continue to eat my ice cream.
It's better, of course, to laugh.

I used to think the crunch and orange and red of fall would always be fun to jump into,
but now I live in skinny jeans because they make my thighs look nicer
and those are very hard to jump in.
It's better, of course, to live.

I used to think that my family and my cat and chocolate were my favorite things,
but now I love someone I know won't matter to me in ten years because I'm young
and I'm told she's just a phase anyway.
It's better, of course, to love.

I used to think church was a place where I'd always be safe--considering God was there,
but now I pray only when no one's around because I tend to cry
and oh, God, where are you then?
It's better, of course, to pray.

I used to think everything was worth crying over including my friend's bee sting,
but now I don't cry even when grandma died because all she did was teach me how to sew
and I could have learned that anywhere.
It's better, of course, not to cry.

I used to think that adulthood was something I'd love to grow into,
but now I grow older or I feel like I do because I'm still young
and losing all the good things that make me that.
It's better, of course, of course it is
Of course it is better to grow.

Pedro Moncayo

Judy Zhang
Photography



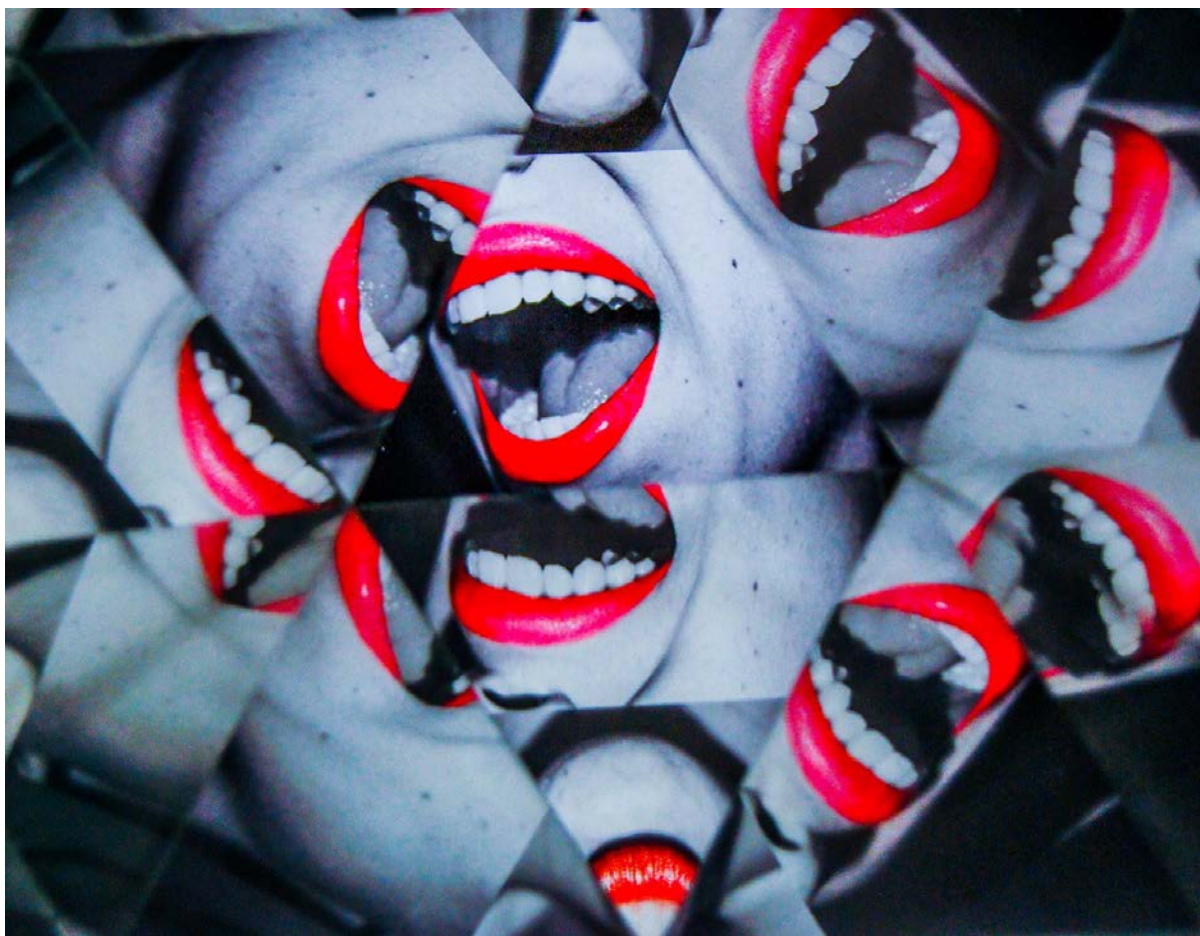
Joseph Schaub

Maxim

If you didn't want to get mud on your shoes, you shouldn't have gone hiking.

Evan Peterson

Cherry Lips
Photography



Comme d'hab (As Usual)

Anushka Shah

Poetry

Cherry stems,
Once twirled,
And knotted into rings
(whose unset rubies I treasured in my palms)
From your tongue furled and red
With promise and citric acid,
Cluttered the concrete sidewalk
The seeds long gone
In disaster trails to
That blue china bowl that

Mama liked so much,
And into the cherry pits of
Our chests.

I was in a cotton dress and
You in denim trousers
When I decided I wasn't
So fond of cherries
(anymore).

The Essay
Julia Maruca
Fiction

500 words. Tell us why you are important.

Nora groaned and squinted at her laptop in the dark bedroom. Anxiety began to bubble in her stomach. What kind of college essay prompt was this?

“I think of myself as important because I am a...” A what? She searched for a word.

“A young person growing up in a changing world?” No, too fake.

“A hopeful soul—” No, sanctimonious.

“---excited to move forward—”Nope, trite.

The deadline was in two days. She’d sent in every other important document—transcript, resume, recommendation letters—but had left this essay for last. Frustration and guilt were mounting.

Of course, 11 P.M. was no time to be writing college essays. She resigned to figure it out in the morning and slammed the laptop shut.

When Nora woke to the screaming of her 6:30 alarm, the pit in her stomach had gained depth and mass. She left the house with low expectations after hastily applying makeup.

Calc class painfully suspended time as usual. Thoughts of the essay competed with math problems for priority in her brain. Nora scribbled in the corner of a sheet of looseleaf, “I’m important because I...”

Was she important? Was this essay important? Maybe she wasn’t meant to attend Barnes-Farquhar College. It was a reach, after all. Maybe she was hopeless. As the others at her table worked on a graph, Nora despondently questioned her life choices and emptied her pencil of lead. She probably didn’t have a chance. After all, Samantha hadn’t gotten in, and she’d applied Early Decision.

Samantha. Miss Perfect. She’d made it known to anyone who’d listen (and then some) that she was applying to Barnes-Farquhar. She had the keychain, the hoodie, the water bottle—everything. She was a legacy. She was set. And then...she’d gotten a rejection email in the middle of European History class last month and burst out crying. Nora had to dig deep for sympathy because Samantha was about as catty and pretentious as anyone could be, and the girls had years of childhood baggage to haul between them. But still, rejection? That was probably going to be her own Barnes-Farquhar fate. She should have felt sorrier for Samantha.

Nora dragged herself and her existential crisis to English class. Forty-three minutes of sonnet analysis and her brains were leaking out of her ears. She eyed Samantha from the other side of the room, wondering how anyone ever measured up on the mysterious college acceptance scale.

In the mad rush out the door to lunch, Samantha tripped on a chair, and papers flew out of her binder.

Samantha's clique of Smart Girl Friends fussed. Nora noticed a stray paper drifting to her feet. She picked it up.

"Barnes-Farquhar College Admissions Essay. 800 words. Tell us why you are important."

"No way," she thought.

It was Samantha's essay, the one that hadn't gotten her in. And she could see why. A quick glance revealed that the paper was riddled with spelling and grammar errors. She would have thought it a shame if she didn't hate Samantha so much. But beyond typos, the writing was sound.

Nora tucked the paper into her backpack, feeling like a Cold War era spy.

After school, she ran upstairs to her computer. First she carefully retyped Samantha's essay, correcting typos as she went.

"Nobody'll know," she rationalized. "They throw these essays out after they deny someone. It's not important where it came from."

Something in her protested, but she shoved it down. This was her chance. She pushed aside moral self-repudiation and focused on editing and personalizing. "It's stupid to claim to be important, anyway. Samantha is self-important. I don't matter. Let her words speak for me."

By midnight Nora had rewritten Samantha's essay to her satisfaction. She hit Submit, blew out her hopes with an exhausted sigh, then fell into a dreamless sleep.

She wouldn't know the results for months. English class dragged on. She found it hard to look Samantha in the eye--not that Samantha registered a lack of eye contact with the likes of her. And of course, she'd never know. It didn't matter. Nora forced herself to forget, to focus on the important trappings of senior year, like prom drama.

The day before decision day, Nora stopped after class to ask her English teacher a question. She caught sight of Samantha's clique walking in a row down the hall. A pang that might have been guilt or the aftermath of her lunch rose up inside her.

It floated with her through the day until she checked her email at 6:01. She gasped. Three acceptances, but the best? Barnes-Farquhar wanted her! She was in! She jolted up in excitement,

then plummeted back down with the weight of her guilt.

Did they know?

Did it matter?

The next day, Nora's English teacher asked everyone to submit one of their "successful" college essays so next year's class could benefit from the examples. Nora considered other essays but ultimately chose her Barnes-Farquhar submission. It didn't matter. She'd won. She was important.

And then her English teacher sorted the students into groups and told them to discuss what had worked in their essays. "Nora, how about you and Samantha and Jen work together?"

"Maybe she won't notice," she thought. "Maybe she forgot..."

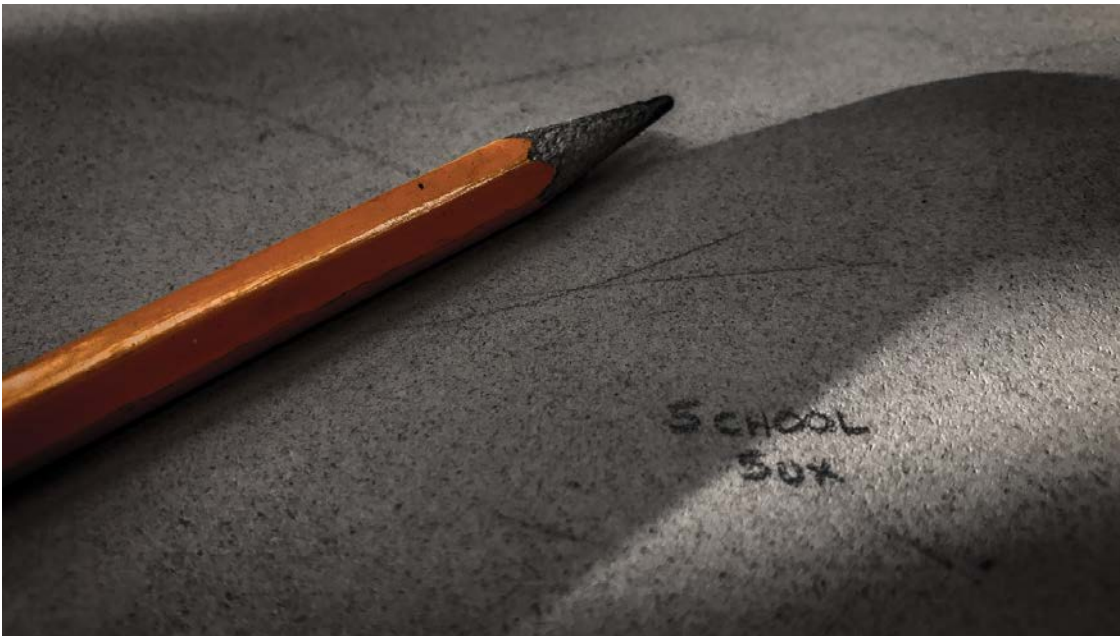
But as Samantha read Nora's essay, her face twitched with confusion. Nora swallowed.

And she realized that, yes, it really did matter.

Stress

Jason Stiefvater

Photography



Jeremy Ruppert

Maxim

Don't live like a pencil;
be a highlighter.

Megan McDermott

Bop Haiku

Slouched down
Casually doodling
Class keeps going.

advice for the modern lois lane

Riley Smith

Poetry

i.

life is better when the glasses are on.

ii.

there aren't as many telephone booths anymore. get creative.

iii.

he'll never listen to your advice about the cape. don't be afraid to laugh when he trips.

iv.

villains will call you pretty. ask how pretty they will be with a bloody nose, then show them.

v.

the day will come where you wish he was less super and more man. it will pass.

vi.

but not for long.

vii.

bloodstains don't come out of red capes.

viii.

or hearts.

ix.

don't become a tragic backstory. you're worth more as a place to call home.

x.

he might be the one with the cape, honey, but sometimes you've got to save yourself.

La Carretera

Josh Duch

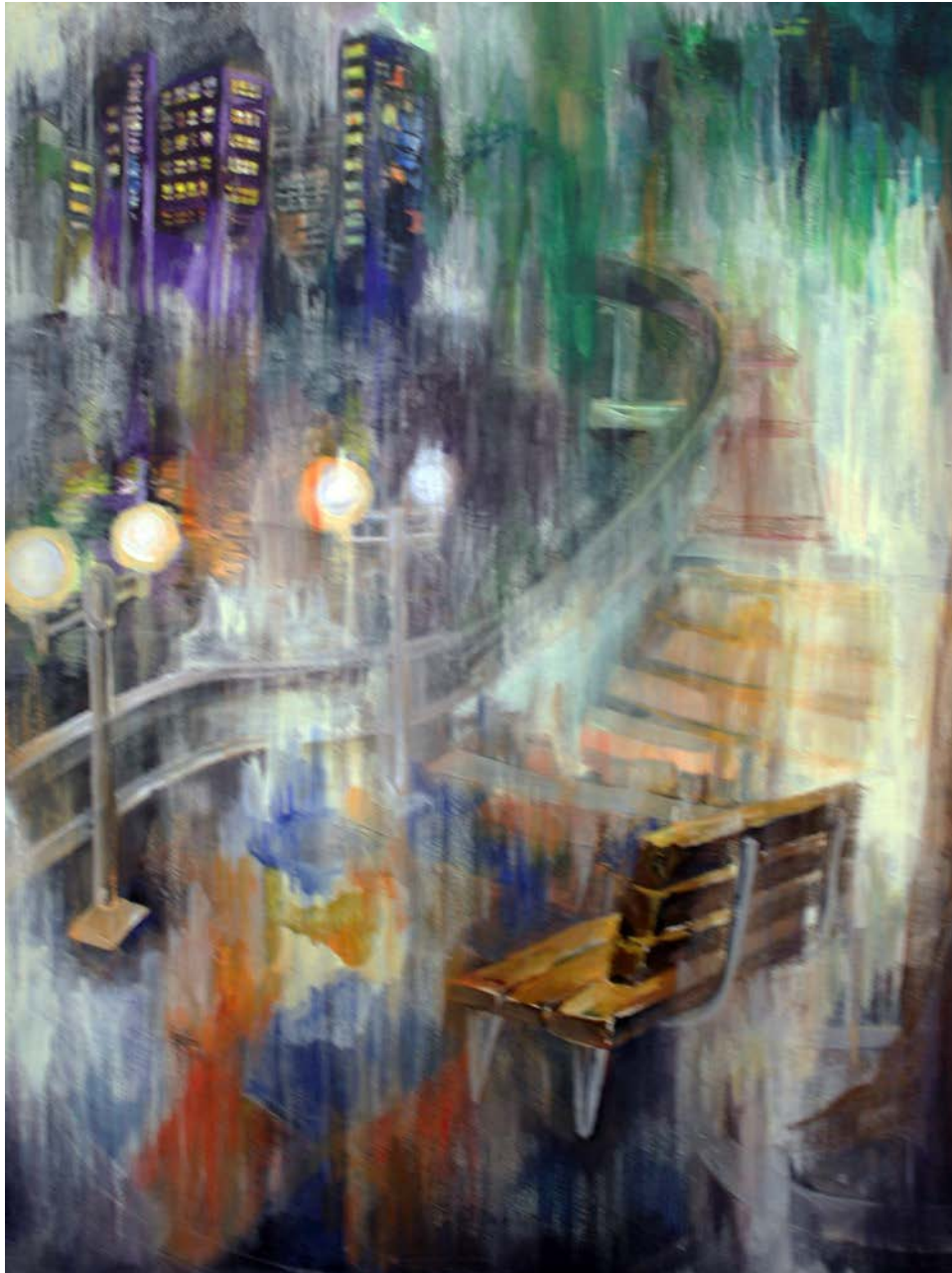
Photography



For Morgan
Davis Creach
Poetry

We were meant to be the beauty that the world hides away.
Behind closed doors and tall grass we would stand there.
But the stars changed course quicker than the sinking sands of time.
You were so distant, a lighthouse in the bay, barely leading me.
The thickening fog did not hinder me until the final steps.
Naivety, denial, lies to myself, kept me sailing the rough seas.
No bout of scurvy or plague could hold me down on the deck.
But speech has always carried more weight than Nature's fury.
I understand the anger, confusion, the seemingly sudden explosion.
But what was so sudden about the fiery eruption of Vesuvius?
The danger was written across the wall, and often painted over.
The weary traveling Roman ignored the smoking mountain top.
He choked his canteen for water and was blessed with none.
Smoke burned his throat and he never spoke the rest of the walk.
Love was a cloak thrown over an old dining set as tutelage.
But nothing can stop wood from warping and splintering.
Love was a broad rim hat on a little girl's head in summer.
But nothing can stop the sun from blistering her fragile feet.
Love was the last resort, a way to provide comfort and reason.
It was foolish to believe the double-edged sword was loyal.
When a black cat crosses one's path, he should quickly throw salt.
But for a crumbling foundation, a love long lost, charms shall fail.
No rabbit's foot or clove of garlic will save a starving swan.
My heart is set, my mind is made, and my soul is sorry.
There was nothing I could do to save that weary bird of white.
I left it in the wakes of water, to hopefully die in peace.

Melancholy
Kelly Kim
Acrylic Painting



James Qu
Maxim
He who is critical
mustn't be hypocritical.

Dreams of All Hours

Davis Creach

Poetry

Hundreds of slumbering dreams have passed me.
Each night greets me like a cold innkeeper,
His unwelcoming lantern thrust in my face.
The scruff on his chin is scratched with contempt.
Rain does not sway his decision to turn me away.
I spend the night alone, groveling with the swine.

Evening after evening, sleep after sleep, Death is upon me.
He cares not for my life, but instead for my love.
Night is but another eight hours to spend alone.
Thoughts provoke me, but never do I call for them.
Death chuckles at my constant torment.
Would giving him my hope save me? Would I be free?

The billions of people convince me otherwise.
No words, or even knowledge, shed on my predicament.
Only the way they walk and talk of their own troubles.
There is also her, the delicate red hair and misty eyes.
She comforts me, in thought alone, and I pray to keep it,
Lest I be brave and cast away my ignorance.

One must always carefully consider abandoning ignorant ways,
For the heart thinks more cheerfully than the brain.
Beware the ability for the mind to surrender and concede,
For too many dreams die after being longfully dreamt.
Oh, how I wish to plant my feet on solid ground,
But there is no way of knowing if my crops will flourish or weep.
And so she rests beside me, asleep with the night.
She walks through the springtime fields with me only.
Her hands are enfolded in mine, her smile beams.
Our unanimous laughter soars through the air,
And our joy lofts high over the melancholy we once knew!
Or so it is in the chambers of my wishes.

No one told me it was easy, but I never knew it was this hard:
To look at someone, become trapped in a dream with them,
And yet the dream is frozen in a cemented period of time.
Action requires the fortress to be vulnerable, the defenses to fall.
The hardest part is uncertainty, and the fear of loss once again.
Confidence is a lie we tell ourselves, one is either sure or unsure.

I want to give and receive the most complicated emotion.
Not just to anyone, but to her.
I love seeing that bright smile, the serene sound of her laughter.
The eternal sunshine shines on her in my ocular reflection.
Pitter patter of rain and hazes of sun; all seem to compliment her.
Could I be the rain man? The golden keeper? Or just an admirer?

Someway, somehow, my mind will show me the light of the truth.
Rather, my neck will extend to the guillotine and she will signal.
Kill or spare? Omnipotence is not mine, and so the verdict.
Until then, the hours of sleep will continue to pass.
The thoughts of her and I will saunter through my dreams.
Death as my crutch, God as my staff, I clasp my eyes shut

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Stream of Unconsciousness

Serena Yan
Acrylic Painting



Just Around the Horseshoe Bend

Alyssa Hudson

Photography



Dheeksha Senthur

Bop Haiku

A pink and violet night
Stains the grand canyon
With little speckles.

Studies in Starlight

Maxwell Gonzalez

Personal Essay

I laid on my back listening to the rush of the wind as it ran across the bay, over the beach, and to my ears. My ears, however, were not the sense that was overwhelmed but rather my eyes. I gazed up into the clear, cold sky and saw more stars than I could comprehend. The creamy cloud of the Milky Way Galaxy's farthest suns set the scene, while the stories of the constellations played out in front of me. Streaks of shooting stars danced across the image with immeasurable frequency. One. Four. Seven. How many was that? Thirteen. Eighteen. Twenty-six. I lost count. The performance I witnessed that night on a small isolated island in Chesapeake Bay is burned into my memory forever. From then on the stars would have a special role in molding who I am.

I now know how stars work, but when I was twelve looking up at the heavens, they remained a mystery to me. I knew nothing of the fusion reactions taking place light years from Earth, but I was curious. I loved math since elementary school, but investigating the inner workings of stars opened me to the universe of physics, currently my favorite subject. I wanted to understand how everything worked—not just the stars. Can I really get a potential difference out of a potato? If I tuck tighter will my swim turns be faster? My need for knowledge was insatiable. I grew a passion for learning, and as I learned more, I looked up at the night sky with new thoughts. I learned lessons, perhaps, more complex than nuclear physics.

The stars shine on places other than little islands in the Chesapeake Bay, and they shine for more people than just me. The stars gave me an understanding of the shared human experience. They taught me to feel sympathy for people. Everyone feels pain. Everyone feels sadness. Everyone sees the same stars. Likewise, grasping the idea that everyone was just as human as I helped me to feel more confident in front of people. This year when I carried on my swim team's tradition of juniors giving farewell speeches to the seniors, I was not nervous about my monologue. I felt at ease because even if my speech did not go as I rehearsed, no one would boo me off the podium. The audience was just like me, neither of us perfect. The night sky showed me how to see different situations from others' perspectives.

My mother always made me go to church on Sundays as a kid, but I was cautious to believe everything I heard. Who says God is real? The guy standing at the altar yelling at the group of mostly elderly men and women? Why should I believe him? The stars convinced me of the truth in religion. I realized it was no accident that the many suns of galaxies formed beautiful spirals and designs across space. The planning of these awe-striking patterns were beyond anything I could figure. Science explained what it could, but nothing could explain why the sky looked magnificent. No one told me what God was, but the night sky could show me. The stars again educated me in a way a person or textbook never could.

The stars follow me everywhere. They are companions outside the bus window on the long quiet rides back from swim meets. They sparkle and smile with me at bonfires on warm summer evenings. They are teachers to me just as much as the teachers in my school. They are part of who I am. I replay the night I saw universe's theatrical performance more frequently than any other moment in my life. I know there is always one more lesson to be learned.

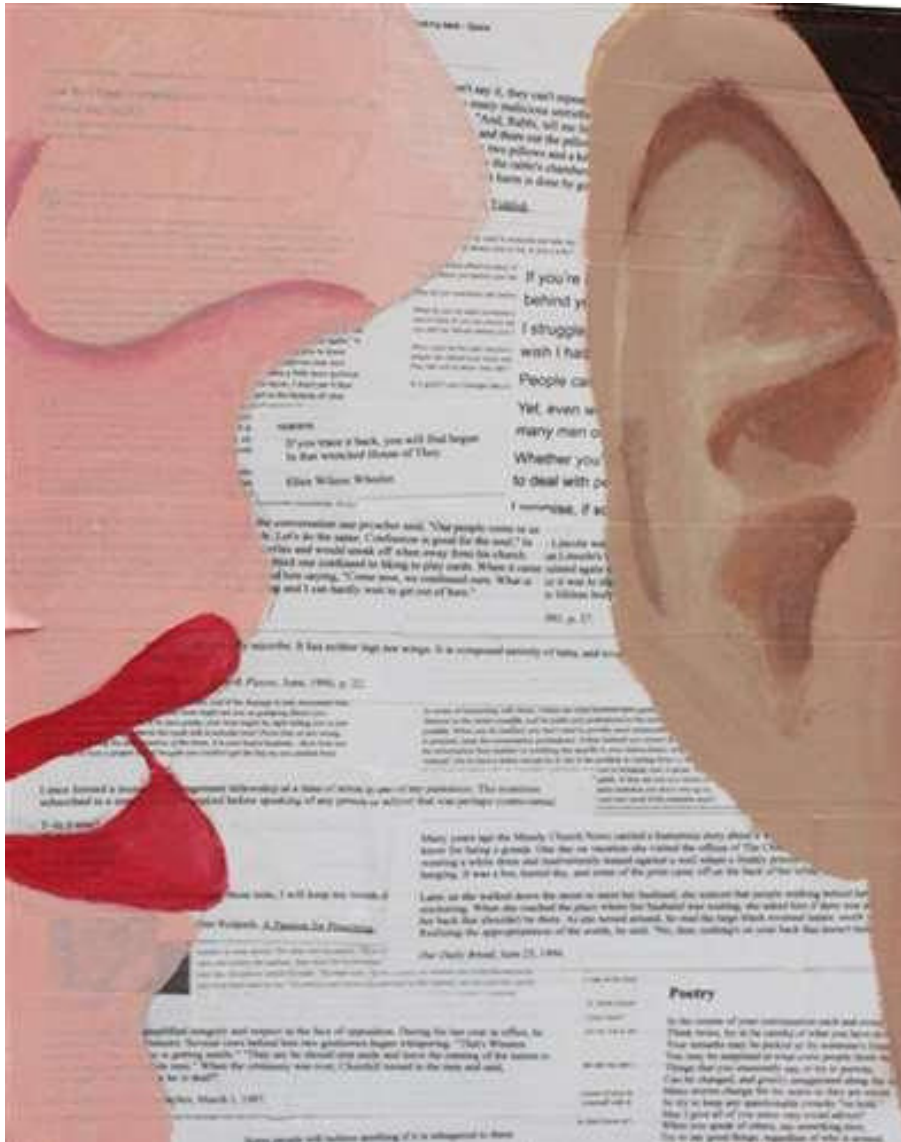
Kailey Witherell
Bop Haiku

No phone
At the dinner table.
Stimulating conversation.

Owen Traynor
Maxim

If there's information
You are selling,
It won't get across
If you are yelling.

Gossip
Lauren Rogus
Collage





2 0 1 7

V A R I A T I O N S

Return to Summer I

Davis Creach

Poetry

Far green countrysides and Carolina blue skies are waiting.
The tut-tut-tut of an old steam engine rolls through town.
Billowy tufts of charcoal smoke puff from the pipe of the train.
Blue birds soar between tree branches and fields of tall grass.
Flowers as far as the eye can see are blooming in salutation.
One blue-eyed boy attempts to pick every last one of them.
His girl, swinging her legs in the sycamore tree, cheerfully gazes on.
The light buzz of honey bees caresses their ears.
A ripple within a once-tranquil aura cannot be contained any longer.
Sunshine blesses the earth with her bright and harmonious warmth.
The forests are once again filled with rustling leaves.
All that was still is now in full form, running and laughing with freedom.
The young boy exhausts himself with his impossible flower task.
The girl, laughing at his foolish ambition, graces him with a smile.
Summer has returned, and her kingdom is now content.

Outside In

Anika Ko

Photography



A Late Night Storm and Its Beauty

Gage Koontz

Blog Entry

One of my favorite things in life is a storm late at night, around 9 or 10 P.M. The roaring, steel-drum pitched sounds smashing off of the roof as the dim lights dance across the walls of the home are zen-like. It's like meditating without being in a Buddhist temple. Looking out into the dark abyss of the night and not even seeing the rain, only hearing its pulsing heartbeat. The crackling lightning illuminating the endless blackness, the thunder soaring in to accompany its brother at his side. The white noise blurs out my worrisome thoughts, allowing me to relax. So I pause and blend a mix of hot chocolate and caramel and sit by the window letting loose of life. To just enjoy mother nature's free circus of wonder from the safety of my home is a special joy. Many would call this weather depressing; I see it as nothing such. The temperatures turn chilled and refreshing; the flowers get their much needed hydration, and a smile curls upon my face. Once the thunder and lightning stop clashing above, I go outside and stand in the way of the sheets of rain. The cold jolting my skin, making me feel alive and free.

Though some choose a drug to make them happy, I choose Mother Nature and her Beauty.

Hefty Heart

Lauren Rogus

Acrylic Painting



Canvas in the Winter

Kate Germain

Poetry

Sometimes, when the world is in the midst of Winter,
Silent and dark,
She paints on a canvas of barren trees.

She paints the low hum of cicadas in the nights of July
And begins to sense a familiar hand on her back,
Pushing her so close to the Milky Way that she can feel
The Stardust speckle her toes;
Swing after swing.

She paints whimsical carnivals with flashing lights.
Swimming through the salty air and seeing boy meet girl.
He had eyes for the Ferris Wheel and she had
Cotton candy lips--pink, not blue.

She paints the song of an alluring symphony
That she heard under a dim streetlamp,
Years and years ago.
The pavement, wet from midday rain,
Glistens like the center of a ballroom floor.
She can still hear the echo that illuminated the entire avenue.

She paints the rosebed in which she seeks the clouds,
But cannot reach quite far enough without collecting dirt
Beneath her fingernails, still painted an elegant scarlet.

She isn't quite sure which of her paintings bleeds the most
Color into the ivory snow
Or which painting could sing the loudest so that each tree
Would awaken with leaves on every branch
Or why she paints with such vigor with only desolation to show for it.

She isn't sure if her paintings are even vibrant enough to clear
The dark pigment of the season.
She just wishes that she didn't have to paint, at all.

The Mind
Devin Bluemling
Acrylic and Tempra Paintings

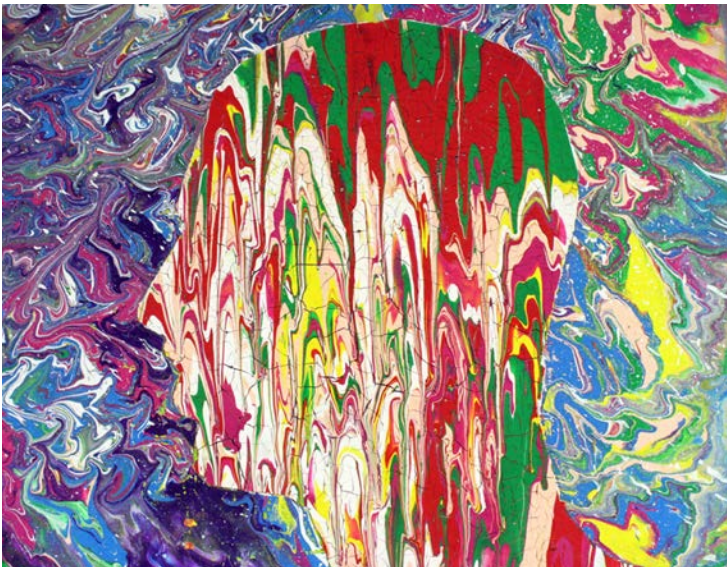
Grief



Confusion



Creation



Happy



The Machine

Riley Smith

Essay

As America's first truly great thinker, Ben Franklin placed education first and foremost in his mind, even as he set about accomplishing a myriad of other tasks that established his place in history. Yet Franklin changed the world of education; he attempted to make learning more accessible by insisting on English rather than the more formal Latin or Greek teachings and teaching students skills that would be applicable in their lives. His plans for a school were ultimately realized in the University of Pennsylvania (McConaghy). Ben Franklin once said, "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn." While this thinking is just as applicable today as it was on the day Franklin said it, education as a whole has forgotten Franklin's vision. Today, education is less about students' potential and more about the facts and figures they can spew. This departure from Franklin's philosophy must be corrected to benefit the minds of generations to come.

In a world of constant standardized tests, students are measured purely on a one-time number. They do not have the time or the desire to involve themselves. Scrambling for that "A" or grasping for a score of "proficient," test-takers cram as much information into their heads the night before the test as possible. They work late into the night, dimming the lights when their parents finally give up on persuading them to sleep and go to bed themselves. Then they stagger into school or the test room the next morning, regurgitate their late-night study session onto the paper, and then forget everything that they were taught, just in time for the whole process to begin again. They fulfill the first part of Franklin's quotation: they are told, but they forget.

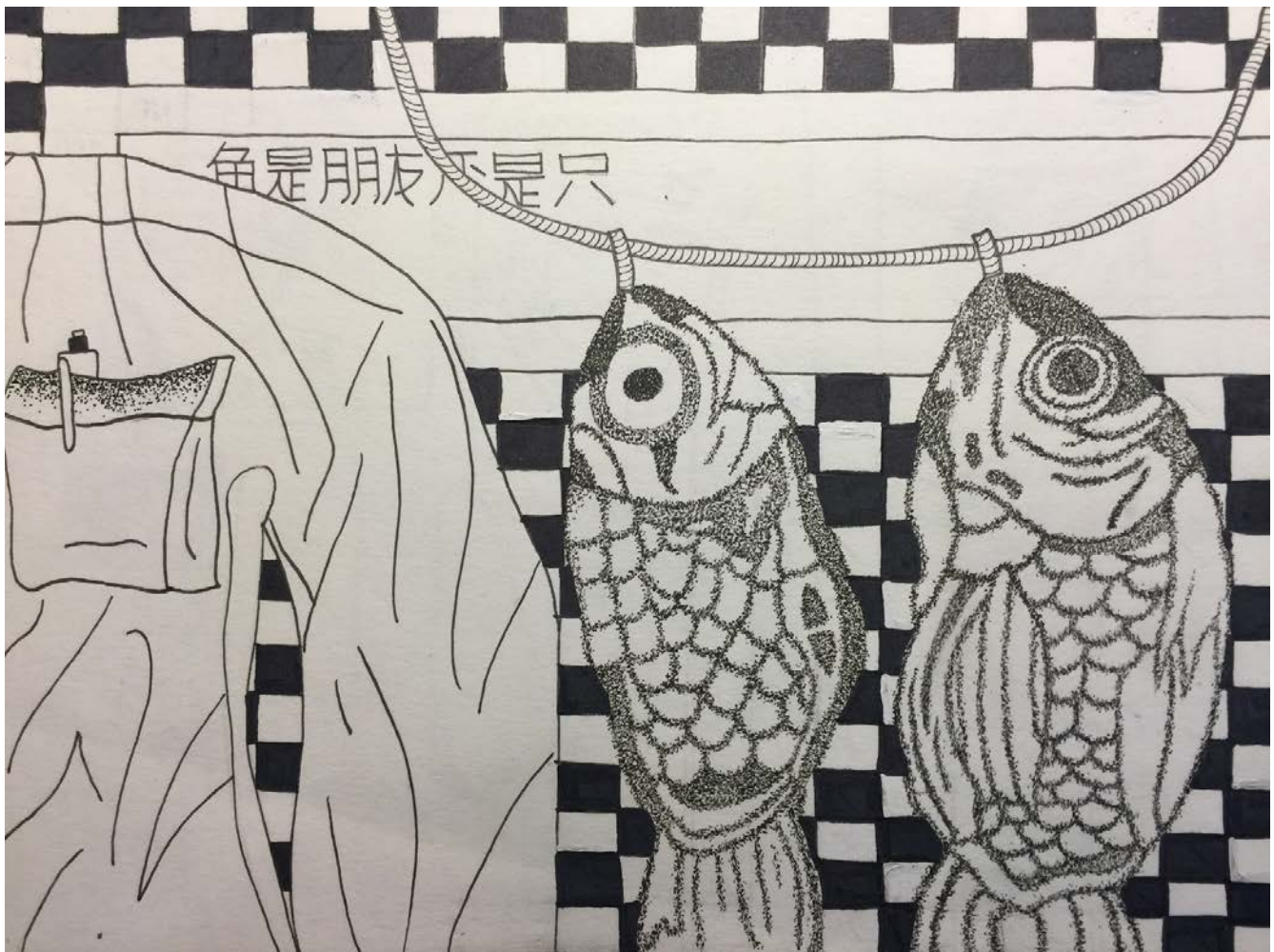
Unlike in Franklin's time, teachers today are graded on their students' performances. They, too, are not motivated to involve their students. With their yearly evaluations, or in some cases, their jobs, hanging over their heads, the teachers are just as desperate as their exhausted students. Instead of teaching something memorable, they are forced to dump as many test-taking tips into their students' heads as possible. From how to fill out the test bubbles so answers will be scored correctly to how to answer the kind of questions students will see on a specific test they may take only one time in their lives, teachers have been reduced to the level of mere functionaries, imparting knowledge on how to pass. But this knowledge is not applicable to the world outside the test, the world we all live in. Teachers teach for their students "to remember," but only until the Scantron form is submitted.

The two most enduring lessons I have ever learned in my educational career have also been the most unusual. The first had the students choose a region of ancient Greece to represent. We spent a month playing games and discussing ancient politics from our region's perspective. I connected almost patriotically with Athens, and I still remember the information we learned, even though four years have passed since I learned it. The second lesson was the tyranny of my eighth grade social studies teacher as she reigned as queen over her students—the American colonists. Through oppressive classroom rules, she taught us the resentment the founders of the United States felt towards their mother country. Once again, I remember the legislation she taught us because I lived it. Both of these units involved me in a way that I have not forgotten and likely never will. Franklin was right. Only by involvement can students truly learn.

Involvement, the most important part of Franklin's vision, is lost in today's learning machine. As the ancient Chinese proverb goes, "Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime." Lessons that students are taught once are not enough—they must authentically learn in order for the lessons to be effective and to feed them for a lifetime in a world where their SAT scores must not define them. Until we can return to Franklin's words and involve students in a meaningful way, education will never fulfill his vision and do what it is really meant to do.

McConaghy, Mary D., Michael Silberman, and Irina Kalashnikova. "From Franklin's Vision to University of Pennsylvania." University of Pennsylvania. University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, 2004. Web. 11 Oct. 2016.

Fishy
Reilly Deller
Ink Drawing



Shipwreck
Kees Vanderzee
Photography



Nancy Xu
Six-Word Story

I'm alive, but have never lived.

Turtle
Alexa Hueston
Photography



Olivia Scherrer
Six-Word Story

What all want. And few have.

Happy Ending

Eliza Ross

Oil Painting



Hidden Figures

Josie Wadlow

Movie Review

Katherine Johnson (Taraji P. Henson), Dorothy Vaughn (Octavia Spencer), and Mary Jackson (Janelle Monae) are brilliant African-American women working for NASA in the film *Hidden Figures*. Their intelligence leads them to partake in NASA's so-called greatest mission: launching American astronaut John Glenn into orbit. Throughout the long hours of work required to send Glenn into space, the three ladies provide invaluable mathematical expertise necessary to achieve NASA's goal. Their assistance allows the U.S. to regain confidence and turn around the Space Race. Although they are a part of one of the greatest operations in history, they face struggles along the way that, at times, bring them a step back in their tracks; despite the obstacles, the strong-headed, determined women persevere. Together, they cross gender and racial lines in order to achieve big things and become a part of U.S. history.

Hidden Figures is an empowering, encouraging movie that will have viewers rooting for the main characters from the beginning. Rated PG-13 for language and some actions, the film is eye-opening. Starting with the first scene, viewers see the struggles Johnson, Vaughn, and Jackson face as African-American women working for NASA. The times that the women must walk one-and-a-half miles to use the colored bathroom or to use a different coffee machine leave the audience dumbfounded. Constantly, viewers find themselves asking, "How is it possible people were treated this way?" The film is astounding and saddening; the repeatedly bigoted treatment of the women both in and outside of the workplace leaves the audience feeling grateful that times have changed.

The storyline and characters are incredible. Throughout the movie, viewers will hang onto their seats wondering what will happen next. Beginning with scene one, viewers instantly fall in love with the main characters. Their charm, humor, and determination drive viewers to cheer them on, wanting only the best for the strong-willed mathematicians. The storyline allows for an emotional appeal unlike any other movie. The movie manages to be sad, heart-warming, and powerful all at once.

The segregated Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia where the women work depicts the racial bias of the time and invites the audience to experience the intolerance along with the characters. The town and costumes perfectly depict the 1960s and show what life was like back then. From "Runnin'" to "I See a Victory," the sound track dominated by William Pharell enhances the film's effect.

For viewers looking for a powerful story, *Hidden Figures* is a near-perfect fit. While experiencing the 1960s lifestyle and culture, viewers learn how African-American women were treated and how they overcame their struggles. The "based on a true story" movie will touch every viewer in a different way, but the film emphasizes this message: never give up on your dreams.

Perspective
Ben Smallwood
Poetry

Wake up to a blazing sun
Sweltering sweat pouring down my flesh
Swatting away swarms of fevered mosquitos
With a shrug of shoulders, a sigh
At least they'll eat
At least they're not deprived
It'll be quite the feast
On this village of vagrants
Suck, suck, suck, they'll drink it up
Deep within the divested deflated desolates
There is bound to be a swelling well
Of full fluttering blood cells
Excitedly bursting with dehydrated exuberance

My cones and rods follow the sharp sting of wind as it scrapes against the swirling dirt
Toward my children curled up in a ball starved from daily strife clenching eroding ribs and prolapsing
stomachs

I pick up the jerry can
Give it a shake
It's as dry as this barren wasteland
That goes from hand to hand down the dna strand
With no break from the starvation and suffering

I walk out of the shack
Put foot to dirt
A five mile trudge for slushy suicidal sludge
Caustic cancerous chemical
Seeping through serpentine septic riverbeds
And bloodstreams alike

I am not alive
I am a shell of a man

A skeleton

I am not the exception
I am the rule
Just another prole

Born centuries late
And continents away

A short list of household items

Dirt
Muck
Mud
Straw
Hay
Oh, I pray a bite

So I live from day to day
With no change
While fat men with their stomachs and purses bursting
Stuff their gullets with endless produce thousands of miles away

Slaving for 4 Dollars a Day
Vanessa Anthony
Acrylic Painting and Collage



Olivia Scherrer
Bop Haiku

Wind in my hair
Like loving hands
Untangling my thoughts.

Seeing Canada
Alyssa Snavely
Photography



Blossoming
Judy Zhang
Photography



Dheeksha Senthur
Bop Haiku

Red rose petals
Cold with dew
Like crimson glass.

Jordan Farrell
Six-Word Story

Thinking about tomorrow, longing for yesterday.

Tim
Megan McDermott
Photography



The Thief
Tristan West
Fiction

The penthouse was empty, its occupants out for dinner and a show. All was quiet, save for a snow-white poodle sleeping on the couch. The New York skyline shone brightly through the windows, the skyscrapers contrasting against the black sky, the never sleeping city's sounds calming.

The door opened, a figure clad in all black putting away a lock pick. The only color was his ice blue eyes peering out from his ski mask. He spotted the poodle, and before it could bark he reached into his bag and threw a treat, experienced with pets. The dog leapt down from the couch and started chewing. The boy had experienced robberies gone wrong due to dogs. Thankfully, these rich snobs never got anything big like a German shepherd or doberman.

Alec wasted no time; he went from room to room, silently opening drawers and doors. He filled a black canvas bag with silverware from the kitchen along with some expensive wine. He crept to the master bedroom and looked around. His eyes widened when he spotted the jewelry box. He went over to it and studied the lock. He drew his multi tool and set to work on the lock. It was an old one but nothing he couldn't handle. He got it open after half a minute and opened it. Jackpot!

Gold, silver, genuine jewels! He went to grab them, when he spotted a photo at the bottom. It was of an elderly woman, hugging a younger woman. Mother and daughter. These must have been the mother's jewels.

Alec hesitated. These could fetch a fortune, feeding him and Natalie for months. Oh, and dad.

But his eyes kept wandering to the picture. He groaned and shut the case. He would have to make do with what he had already gotten.

He went back out into the living room when the front door started opening. He dashed into the kitchen, hiding behind the marble counter. High pitched laughing hit his ears as the occupants walked inside.

"Oh, darling, that was exquisite," a woman crooned.

"Indeed. We should go to the shows more often," a man replied. Alec groaned inwardly, regretting not grabbing the jewels. These rich snobs made him sick.

"Cash-cash, where did you get that?"

Oh, no. The treat.

"Perhaps Sebastian bought him a new treat," the man commented. "Let's not worry about it dear. You still haven't had your dessert," he added seductively.

Alec's eyes widened. Crap.

"Mmmm, you're right, darling. Let's head for bed," the woman replied, giggling.

"Why not stay right here?" the man asked.

Alec heard a thud and then the couple laughing as they dropped to the floor. Alec was sweating; he did not want to listen to this. He heard them breathing heavily. He was red in the face. He peeked out from behind the counter and saw the man kissing her neck—both of their eyes were closed. Alec took advantage of their obliviousness and crept to the door, not making a single sound. He walked past the couple, the two of them completely unaware of their surroundings. He made it to the door and slowly opened it just enough to slip through. He closed the door again and sighed in relief. He headed for the elevator and pressed the ground floor. As it descended he took off any suspicious clothing and stuffed them in his bag, his raven hair falling to his shoulders. He reached the lobby. He almost made it out when a security guard grabbed his arm. "Excuse me, sir," he said.

Alec internally screamed. He pasted a smile on his face and turned to the guard, his already pale face whiter than chalk now. "Y-yes?"

The guard smiled and held up his mask. "This fell out of your bag."

Alec breathed a sigh of relief, genuinely smiling now. "Thanks," he said. He took the mask and turned and walked out the door.

* * *

Alec got off the subway once it reached the Bronx. One of the worst places in New York to be, it was one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the city.

He kept his head down and his bag of goodies clutched to his chest. He had his hand in his pocket, gripping the pistol. The eyes of passerby sizing him up were not lost on him. He managed to get to the shabby apartment building and went up the stairs to 3F. He fished the key out of his pocket and opened the door.

His sister, Natalie, was in the kitchen, cooking dinner. Her dirty blonde hair was in a messy bun, a few loose strands falling over her piercing green eyes. A silver stud was planted in her left nostril, a small silver ring in her right earlobe. Her lips were pursed as she worked, having shed her jacket.

He sighed, taking the safe and putting the cash inside. He would have to find another hiding place for it now, for the hundredth time. Maybe in his room, he thought as he took out his soup and stuck it in the microwave.

* * *

Alec stared in disbelief at the empty safe. He had picked the perfect spot this time. There was no way his dad should have found it. He felt the anger and frustration build up inside him. Seething, he stormed over to his dresser, taking out a suitcase and starting to pack. He didn't have many belongings; they all fit in the single suitcase.

He went to Natalie's room. "Pack up, we're leaving," he said when she answered his knocking. Her eyes widened, but she nodded, closing her door to start. Alec wheeled his suitcase into the living room, to see his dad preparing a needle. He walked over and slapped the syringe out of his hand, shattering it on the floor. His dad turned in outrage to his son but faltered when he saw the fury in his son's eyes.

Alec stared at him hard, then took a deep, shuddering breath. "Dad, we're leaving. Natalie and I. And you're not coming with us."

His dad's eyes widened. "W-Wait, what? What? Why?" he stammered.

"Because you're killing us, Dad," he growled. "You steal our money; you let us starve; you're a deadbeat. We'll be able to survive on our own, where you can't take from us."

His father opened his mouth to argue, tears in his eyes. Then he shut it. He knew his son was right. His addiction was endangering his children's lives.

Natalie came into the room and avoided looking at her father. She had seen this coming for a long time now, but it didn't make it any easier.

Alec put an arm around his sister, leading her to the doorway. "There's an apartment I've had my eye on a few blocks over," he whispered. "If we take out a loan, we can probably make it until my next job." She only nodded, wiping the tears from her eyes. The two of them went out the door, neither one looking back.

* * *

Five days after his children left, he sat down on the couch. He loaded up the syringe, wrapped his arm in the band, and injected himself. After he felt the buzz, he loaded the syringe again. Another injection. His head was already feeling fuzzy. Again, he loaded it. Now his heart was pounding and he felt as if he had left his body. He was going to die of an overdose; that's what everyone will say. That's what his children will believe.

No one would know he did it on purpose. He knew if he killed himself, and his children knew he did, they would blame themselves. So he made it look like an accident. Like a thief slipping jewelry from a box, he let his life slip away from him, accepting his fate. The drugs shut down his brain. He passed away on the couch. The police didn't find him until three weeks later when the landlord showed up for the late rent and saw the rotting corpse on the couch. Alec and Natalie heard of his passing, and just as their father knew, they believed it was drug overdose, not a broken heart, a broken soul.

* * *

Nick
Megan McDermott
Photography



Rainbow
Lucie Waller
Poetry

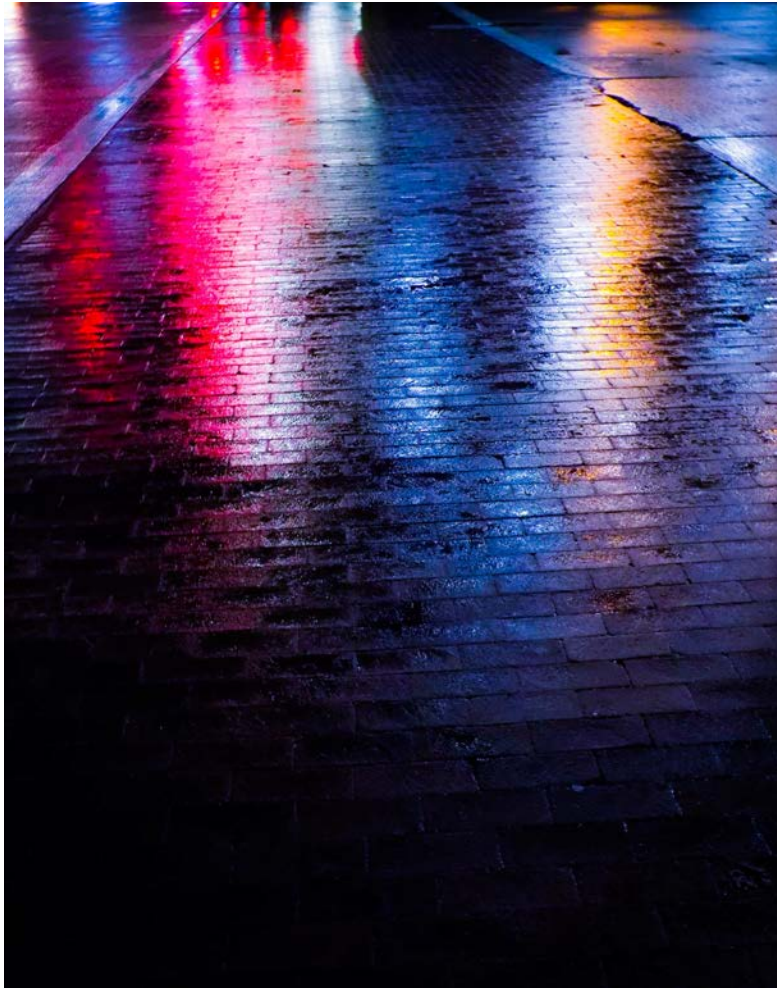
I could smell the show was about to begin
When the breeze turned violent
And the sky darkened
With that grey curtain

And before I knew it
The rain made its grand descent
With thunderous applause
And a jagged spotlight
Tearing across the runway of air

Dancing on rooftops
Skittering in the streets
Tapping on windows
Drumming to the beat

And with a closing deafening clap
The curtains fell and gave way
To a blue backdrop and an array of colors
As the rain made its final bow

Streaks of Hope
Rachel Koontz
Photography



Heist
Emma Kiley
Fiction

“Money is not a problem,” I say, not glancing up from my hands as they work expertly at pulling apart the gun, cleaning each part with practiced ease as I go. “We’ll make it all back anyway. Buy whatever you need.”

“Whatever I need?” he asks, sounding sheepish, and visibly stiffening when I set my gaze on him, “Um, sir?”

“Whatever. You. Need. Anderson.” I grind out, quickly losing my patience. He seems to finally take note of the fact that I do have a gun, and he only has about thirty seconds before I put it back together and perhaps decide to test it out on his body.

“Thank you, sir!” he stutters out, hitting his hip against the corner of the table on his way out and stumbling the rest of the way to the door. As soon as it clicks behind him, I turn to look over at the other man in the room, a lanky looking guy with wild, electric-blue bed-head, who goes by the name “Z” (Yeah, I know it’s dumb, but he won’t respond to anything else). He’s currently hunched over a laptop, typing furiously, his headphones blasting what sounds suspiciously like a remix of Taylor Swift’s “Blank Space.”

“So tell me again why you hired that guy?” I ask with a sigh as I shove the clip back into the gun that I have finished reassembling. “He’s like, totally useless. Gonna get us killed, that one is.”

Z pulls one headphone out, raising a dark brow up into his tangled mane of blue, “What was that boss?”

“That guy. Anderson. Why hire him?” I state, quickly running out of patience for dealing with these idiots that I have to pull off a heist with. Z chuckles a little.

“He was the only guy I could find who can fly a jet at such short notice, so you’re stuck with him until Ralph is recovered,” he answers with a grin he is obviously trying and failing to fight down. I have never wished looks could kill more than in that moment as I glare at him.

“May I remind you how Ralph broke both his legs in the first place? If you hadn’t dared him to--”

“Hey we don’t talk about that!”

“What do you mean we don’t talk about it; it happened yesterday!”

Suddenly our argument is interrupted by the door swinging open and a man wearing a Domino’s pizza uniform drops a box of steaming hot pizza onto our meeting table.

“How did you find this place?” I immediately snap, standing up to stare the pizza man down.

“The guy on the phone gave us the address!” he squeaks out. I lean to the right to look around him, to find several other pizza men taking boxes to the other rooms of our covert location. And right there in the doorway is Anderson.

“Anderson! You gave Domino’s pizza the location of our secret base!?”

“You said I could buy whatever I needed!”

The Closet
Eliza Ross
Oil Painting



Four Thieves

Davis Creach

Poetry

Four thieves 'astealing a mason jar full,
Of sanguinal red and a heart more deep
Clutching the jar, hands offer it smother
But one's intent is not like the other.
Fate, 'tis folly, to trust in the keeper,
But night will always move past the sleeper.

I

She was the first, and, at first thought, last.
Naivete and wild youth plagued this young heart.
A million miles away, a smiling star.
Visions of life, love, and eternal sunshine on a green countryside.

Time never speaks true to the soul and its keepings.
It ticks away, paying no attention to transpiring tragedies.
No exception was made for these withering blossoms.
No swan song sung, the morning star blazing above.

Such devastation would surely drive out even the steadfast lovers.
And yet, the grip is ever so tight on the rim of the jar.
Not by choice, but by ignorant will of the mind.
Or is it the loneliness and melancholy of the unpitted heart?

Oh, the quarrels of the governing bloods!
One's conscience cannot often see the clear path.
It is the wants of what we cannot have that we long for deeply,
But it is the wants of what we should not have that destroy us.

II

The great divide bridges with a blonde paved road.
Bold changing colors of amber brighten the path.
The twine of golden thread knits around two lovers.
Each step gliding closer, each stitch holding fast.

A twist of fate, a shimmer in broken glass.
The shattered pieces drifting into shape.
All seemed to defy the odds of the ominous swinging pendulum.
Mystical sunsets, early morning rises; all seemed worth its while.

Alas, the ever swinging pendulum came down.
The gold flaked off with its rust, returning to earth.
Maple trees wished for the days of the sapling.
Lovers longed for the never fading sunset, long forgotten.

Lo, the gavel forever reigns supreme.
The judge forever blinded by his own inequity.
One can always see his misjudgments clearly in the future,
But the past is behind him, which pains the soul of thought.

III

A lost and lonely beggar finds his way home in the new year.
His eyes, surely tricked by some spell, brightened with black.
Finally, his tin cup rang with the jingle of coins.
A sweet song of nonmaterial fortune sounding from his heart.

A slow-moving journey of two conflicted parts.
A connection, at last, formed in the shimmer of the night.
The beam of light from the porch light shining through,
Lead the beggar to his bed on the bitter, concrete ground.

All were fooled, at this constant misleading ruse.
The poor beggar, his hat lost in the wind, woefully cries.
His tin cup, bereft of all fortune, collects only his falling tears.
The final stalk plucked from the field of grain is wasted.

Ah, the peace of falsified passion of heart.
The true passion exists in the mind, its alternate meaning.
We love our bread, our butter, but most importantly each other.
This, we are taught to find, but in reality, we get left behind.

IV

An autumn glimpse of hope, jewel of blazing fire.
Chance, so gracefully falls into the hands, but never taken.
Each passing day fills with doubt and suspicion.
What could be? Do the risks offer worthy rewards?

A man need not know, as long as fear grips his heart.
The obstacles of man are that of the black widow.
Her dance captivates unnoticed prey, love the only motive.
But alas, fangs crush the trance and love, and its keeper, devoured.
An unforeseen turn of events on the course of passion.
The road smells of honeysuckle and cherry wine.
But the musk of rotting wood from the gavel lurks.
The voyage must halt, return to false safety.

Hark! The angels wail and weep at this blasphemy!
The loss of potential love at the hands of perpetual fear.
Love is what drives the soul to persuade the mind into action.
Fear is what inhibits the sense to begin at all.

City Nights
Izabel Peterson
Photography



Peach
Kelly Kim
Digital Art



Jaemin Lee
Bop Haiku

On the tree
The humble apple
Ready to be picked.

Kailey Witherell
Maxim

Talk to me, and I will listen.
Talk at me, and I will sit and stare.

Behind Every Pretty Face is a Sad Story
Ally Kutzmas
Photography



Here's the Thing

Caroline Bondi

Poetry

Here's the thing about not being fat anymore:

you won't feel it

or, maybe you're lucky, and you do feel it.

but I feel it in the little things--the pants size, the piggyback rides, the attention

I don't feel it all the time.

I don't feel it when my extra skin jiggles,

or the number on the scale is still too high.

I should be proud of my extra skin--and maybe when it's a neat party trick, I am.

I am not proud of it when the pants don't fit,

and the dress doesn't look right because of the tight sleeves,

An unfortunate reminder of an unfortunate past.

I'm not proud of the unnecessary wobble in my stomach in my high-waisted bikini bottoms.

Here's the thing about change:

You don't want to talk about how you looked before.

as if there is just a point "before" and "after" extreme weight loss.

it doesn't happen overnight--it takes weeks, months, years.

Here's the thing about image:

People say you look "beautiful," "great," "fantastic"

but what did I look before?

was my fat shameful?

I did not feel it "before"

but I'm starting to feel it "after"

I wasn't ugly. I'm not ugly.

But maybe I was--maybe I am.

I'm trying to accept it--

it's a lot

it's too much

--my weight is crushing me, still.

Long after it's gone, it's effect still lingers.

Matter is neither created nor destroyed--so the maybe weight hasn't been lost

but rather it has settled upon my heart

forcing it into a shell.

Suburbia
Gabrielle Kossuth
Photography



Babyland
Julia Maruca
Fiction

TXT LOG APRIL 11 8:03 AM

omg christie
my life is over

what?

Dad announced @ dinner that we're going to be living in Breckford for
THE WHOLE SUMMER
bc he has a super special research project @ the University there

are you serious?
that sucks....

i'm SO MAD!!! i'm going to be stuck 2 hours away from anything interesting

Breckford can't possibly be THAT bad
my cousin lives there.

Christie, Breckford has an entire museum dedicated to the production of lawnmowers.

ok
this is bad

:^(

wait why can't your dad just commute? or whatever

well #1 it is 2 hours away and no train
#2 the University is giving my dad this house rent-free that contains the archives,
So it'll be "convenient" for him, or whatever
And I have to live in this nasty archive house in Breckford!
RIP me

jeez
don't worry, we'll chat all summer
we'll keep you in the loop, girl

you freaking better

—

MAY 28th

Haven't written in this old journal in ages, but I overheard from Mom that the Breckford house has crappy Wi-Fi. So I thought I might as well get used to pen-and-paper. But I swear if I can't get on Snapchat, I'll kill a man.

We finally finished packing today. We'll only be gone for three months, but it's still tons of work. I don't get why we all have to move. For three months, can't Dad commute home on weekends? I asked Mom but she snapped and muttered about "family togetherness" and it ended with calling me "selfish." Alright then...

In other news, I'm pretty sure Branden and his girlfriend cheated on the math final. I heard his girlfriend talking in the bathroom before the test, and she was smirking about a "secret plan" to ace it. Her friends just giggled, and then they segued into talking about Starbucks and which tanning salon was the best, and I tuned out. So no details, but I hope Branden gets caught. He's a jerk.

That kid, Ben, who was supposed to finish the last part of our history project? Blew it off. He was supposed to do the entire citation page, but he bailed on us. Apparently his grandma died. Big whoop. Not to be a jerk, but just because someone old kicked the bucket doesn't mean that you should let down your entire group and potentially ruin their grades. Me and Christie had to do it all by ourselves.

I should write in this journal more often. Guess I'll be forced to if Breckford is as off-the-grid as Mom says.

—

TXT LOG: JUNE 3 1:00 P.M.

hey whats up?

dude we're leaving today, did u forget? I have to take boxes to the moving truck

your parents got a moving truck?
How much stuff are you guys even gonna need?

Well we are staying for 3 months. So...a lot?
Like, a library's worth of books and stuff for my Dad, I swear

How big is it again?

I actually don't know....
My parents have gone to see it a couple of times but i had soccer practice so i couldn't

you haven't even seen the place yet?
It could be full of rats or homeless people or ghosts or something

WELL THANKS MISS POSITIVITY...

Just sayin'
You owe me \$5 if a crazy axe-murderer chops your head off

Yes, my severed head will 100% come back to life just to make good on that bet, Christie
That's how salty I am already about this

i'll be bored in the car on the way down, i'm gonna live tweet it

Nice
haha omg

—

TWITTER FEED

Allie @Allie9Babcock 2:00 P.M.

we're off. :(goodbye fun and freedom... hello boring history Breckford

Allie @Allie9Babcock 2:40 P.M.

broke my earbuds...that means Parental Music

Joni Mitchell, OMG kill me now, THEY KNOW ALL THE WORDS

Allie @Allie9Babcock 3:13 P.M.

just saw a sign for "Bobby's Mega Gun Depot" Am afraid.

Allie @Allie9Babcock 3:40 P.M.

3 bowling alleys in town. Breckford takes bowling seriously

Allie @Allie9Babcock 4:02 P.M.

Guys i think my mom got lost haha...we're turning at the gate to Breckford Cemetery

Allie @Allie9Babcock 4:07 P.M.

Seriously, we're legit in the cemetery and she's following the GPS further in

Allie @Allie9Babcock 4:09 P.M.

MY MOM JUST PULLED UP TO THIS HOUSE IN THE CEMETERY and said "Here we are!"

Allie @Allie9Babcock 4:10 P.M.

I'm not kidding! This is actually the house! It's like 1000 years old and it's in the dead middle of the cemetery?

Allie @Allie9Babcock 4:11 P.M.

i can't believe my parents would do this!!! HELP I'm living in a cemetery for 3 months!!!!!!

—

TXT LOG JUNE 3 5:00 P.M.

So, yeah

I owe u \$5

Because my life is totally over

NO EFFING WAY

Your tweets! OMG!

i swear this is like the beginning of a horror movie
and I'm the girl who gets murdered

bruh this sucks

yeah...

i can't even complain about it cause, you know, PARENTS

any creepy neighbors?

What? Besides potential zombies, ghosts, ghouls and goblins?
Isn't that enough?

haha im so sorry thats really lame :(
maybe you can go exploring like you used to when we were kids?

don't bring that up, man, that was an embarrassing time

we were 8, Allie

i block out all memory of my childhood
I was a dweeb

shut up Allie, you had fun making those maps of the neighborhood
we were like, little detectives

LAAAME

you're no fun, Agent Charlie Bravo

shut up Agent Delta Tango
you are not helping
i'm stuck in Boring McBoresville and I LIVE IN A CEMETERY

well, running from ghosts is more exciting than sitting around with no internet

oh come on. ghosts aren't real, Christie

Not real?

What, a minute ago you were freaking out about goblins & zombies
i literally have screenshots!
"other than potential zombies, ghosts, ghouls, and zombies?"
See? So make up your mind!

christieeeeeeeeeee
i was kidding. lemme go unpack my pathetic life

wow fine then

—

JUNE 4

Well, that didn't go well. This morning at breakfast I blurted out at Mom that she's destroyed her teenage daughter's life by moving to a freaking CEMETERY, and she reacted like she usually does when I argue with her. Only, worse, because at the end she told me to go to my room. Like, really? Who says, "Go to your room" anymore? I'm not 8!

Fortunately, she didn't take my phone, so I've been browsing Instagram. Turns out she had no idea what she was talking about with the Wi-Fi. It's weak, but enough for me to browse the idiots on Instagram. Would you BELIEVE Katie is going to San Diego this summer? She posted this smarmy picture of her grinning in front of an airplane. Bet she comes home with at least two surfer ex-boyfriends. Meanwhile, the closest thing I'll probably get to a boyfriend is whatever dead bones crawl out of Breckford Cemetery.

Not that I'm scared. The only scary thing here is my dead social life.

According to the cemetery caretaker, this house is seriously 100 years old. Back when Breckford was a busy industrial town (making lawnmowers?), there were two cemetery caretakers. One stayed here

onsite while the other one lived just outside the boundaries of the cemetery (where he lives now). The current guy keeps this place clean and usable because it's where the records are--these big, dusty, ancient-looking books containing the names and burial dates of every dead person buried out there. And, of course, none of them are digitized, so that's why Dad had to actually come here for his research.

As for the actual cemetery, it goes on forever. I mean, eternity. Haha. From my upstairs window, all I can see are tombstones. Some are elaborate, with carved skulls and urns and crosses and names of people I've never heard of. There's a pond near the big gate at the entrance, the sort that old-timey poets like Emily Dickinson would write about. The caretaker's house is at the foot of a big hill that's covered in tombstones, shadowed by tall trees and monuments. If I was a history nerd like Dad, I might think it was interesting. But pretty much the only cool thing about dead people is the actual process of decay, which we learned about in bio this year—but that's also incredibly disgusting and creepy. And I'm not digging up any bones in the name of science.

I'm gonna go to bed. Maybe things will be slightly less creepy in the morning.

—

TWITTER FEED

Allie @Allie9Babcock 1:02 A.M.

It's 1AM, pitch dark, and I just heard a thunk outside my window. is this how I die?

Allie @Allie9Babcock 1:04 A.M.

If I die here, I'm going to owe Christie \$5 from heaven. I can't have that. Gonna investigate. #NancyDrew

Allie @Allie9Babcock 1:08 A.M.

So I stuck my head out my window. Saw a raccoon in the tree leering at me. Thanks for waking me up, Raccoon. Go away.

Allie @Allie9Babcock 1:11 A.M.

Okay but now there are FLOATING LIGHTS up on the hill in the cemetery. Great. #Spooky

Allie @Allie9Babcock 1:15 A.M.

UPDATE: Lights still there.

Allie @Allie9Babcock 1:20 A.M.

Can't tell what it is from here but I'm officially freaked out. I'm going back to bed. Seems like it's far enough away that I won't die. Yet.

—

JUNE 8

The Mystery Light has persisted for the past four nights, so I decided to ask Dad about them. Well, I didn't directly ask him about the light, because that's weird. But I did ask about the area of the cemetery that I can see from my window.

He said that back when the cemetery was first established, child mortality was much more common than it is today. Children died of, well, just about anything. Families sometimes hadn't thought of buying a plot yet or didn't have the money to do it. So the cemetery set aside an area specifically for children's graves. Cemeteries everywhere had these sections called "Babylands" reserved for stillbirths, infants, and small children.

Babylands, I kid you not. Like a theme park area or something! Dad said some had fancier names, like Garden of Angels or Lullaby Land...which aren't any better, really.

Anyway, Dad described how the graves were laid out in grids with smaller plots, because, well, babies. The gravestones were often less elaborate, too, because a lot of these families were poor, and plus the graves were close together. Dad said he wasn't sure whether kids were still being buried there nowadays but that he'd check for me. He seemed genuinely happy that I was interested.

Which I'm not. Mostly. I mean, I still think it's creepy to study cemeteries and dead people all the time. But I have to admit this was kind of cool. In a weird way.

—

TXT LOG JUNE 12 1:35 P.M.

allie holy crap omg

what??

did u hear? branden got busted!!

u know how u thought he was cheating? well it turns out he was

whoa

ya i know right? crazy

also at lifeguarding today these two bratty kids were fighting and I totally told them off

it was great. my boss was like "whoa you're the queen"

well not literally ahaha

anyway girl are you dead yet? you get a vampire boyfriend?

Nah lmao

Hang on I gtg my dad is calling me

—

JUNE 12

I know this sounds stupid, but I can't bring myself to care about whatever gossip Christie is going on about. Just seems kind of distant now that they're two hours away.

But the Babyland and the cemetery and stuff, it's on my mind a lot. I think I might actually take a walk and check it out. Whatever is that's up there, I want to know.

Now, I'm not brave enough to go up there at night. It's creepy and scary, and, also, Dad, would be way scarier if he caught me.

So I'll go in the daytime. Maybe tomorrow. If the light really is a ghost (which it's totally not) then hopefully this minimizes the Angry Ghost factor. I think that's how it works...I dunno, I never liked Scooby Doo as a kid.

I think I'll bring this journal with me instead of using my phone. I feel like it would be disrespectful to livetweet in a baby cemetery.

—

JUNE 13

Okay. I sat down on a bench up here to kind of take things in, because this is just...weird.

It took me a long time to get up the hill, what with trying not to step on the heads of dead people or where I think their heads are. Uhm, were.

As I neared the top of the hill that I could see from my bedroom window, I could tell that I was moving into an older part of the cemetery. The tombstones got smaller, more eroded, and harder to read as I progressed.

I reached the summit and immediately knew I was in the right place. Instead of tall monuments, the ground was lined with mostly flat rock markers engraved with names and dates. The graves were closer together, and it was obvious that they'd cost a lot less than the towering monuments below.

Staring at all those kids' graves made me feel dizzy. The oldest ones dated to about 1870. Most of the stones just had a name and two dates, birth and death. My heartbeats seemed to get louder each time I did the math to figure out how old each child had been when he or she died. These were kids under ten years old...six....five....two year olds, infants. I saw a whole cluster of kids who had died in 1917, which I knew from school had been the year of a flu epidemic.

A few of the children had obviously come from wealthier families, as their graves were much nicer than the rest. Several of the graves had stone lambs carved into the top of them, which I remember Dad telling me was a signifier of a child's death. There were epitaphs that broke my heart, things like "Little Brother, Forever At Rest" or "Gone to be an Angel."

The names, though. That's what made it real. There was "Little Joe Miller" or "Our boy Tommy Carterwood" or "Daisy, our little flower." And some of them must have died at birth or soon after without ever having been named, because there were plenty of graves that just said things like

“Brentwood baby boy” or “Baby Chesterfield” or “Dau. of T.R. & Hazel Hornwood.” Those were the worst ones. Babies, up on this hill without even a name. Lives that never were.

Some of the graves had worn-out stuffed animals lying on top, and others were neatly trimmed with flowers. But most had been abandoned long ago by parents who were no longer living.

I moved to the back of Babyland and realized that what was a hill on one side was a fairly steep cliff on the other, which I couldn't see from my bedroom window. The sun was setting in the distance, and I could see our house and the expanse of the cemetery spread below me when I turned around at the fence.

There were just a few graves at the very edge here, and the dates on these graves were more recent: 1999. 2003. 2014. I reached the newest grave, and took a deep breath. “Alyssa Woodward. A beloved daughter.” A tiny lamb adorned the stone.

The date of death was only a few months ago. She'd been three years old.

There were three candles on the grave, and they'd been lit recently and regularly. Wax had melted onto the new stone. It hit me that these candles were the lights I'd been seeing from my window.

I felt like an idiot. This poor girl's parents had been visiting her every night to light candles in her memory.

Next to the candles lay a beat-up stuffed toy dog and a plate with some crumbs that had probably held cookies eaten by that marauding raccoon. Alyssa's parents must have left some of her favorite things here to comfort her. It reminded me of what Dad had told me once about the ancient Egyptians, who brought all those weird necessities they thought they'd need in their tombs.

So I've been sitting on a bench up here for a while, thinking about things. Really cliché, sappy things, about how short life is and how teenage gossip means nothing in the scope of all eternity, and stuff like that. But at this point, I don't care how sappy and cliché it is.

Because here's the thing: I was a premature baby. I could have been one of these kids who died before I'd ever lived. This stuff's personal.

I don't think I can ever share my Dad's fascination about history or dead people. I'm more interested in the living. I've been kicking around the idea of going into medicine, and I think this has clinched it for me. Because most of these kids, they'd probably be alive today with modern medicine. On the other hand, maybe not. Infant mortality is still an issue in some parts of the world, even in our own country. So maybe that's what I'm meant to do, and maybe that's why I had to come to middle-of-nowhere Breckford to live in a cemetery all summer.

I sound like some kind of deep philosopher. Something about living in a cemetery must be making me all emo. Maybe I'm possessed by a dead poet, haha.

Anyway, maybe, just maybe, Breckford isn't as dead boring as I thought.

—

Breathless
Gabrielle Herbert
Photography



Aaron Greenburg
Maxim

Procrastination: the bastion of the...



2 0 1 7

SEEDS

VARIATIONS

Asleep

Grace Spencer

Poetry

And when the night is young and wild
And your dreams unclear,
Let me soothe your worried mind, darling
Because even in the early gleam of the raw, morning glow of light
My thoughts are with you,
Are on you
Tightly cradling your innocent body
And rocking your mind asleep
Rest easy in the comfort that I am awake in your dreams
As your head sinks heavily into your pillow
I'll be the first lookout
For nightmares and unsettling thoughts
And if need be,
I'll be the last lookout
At least one of us deserves to sleep.

Bright Eyes

Kayla Grasak

Photography



Godfather Death

Eliza Ross

Oil Painting



Sleepless
Lucie Waller
Poetry

It's 11:11, the moon is high, and I'm all alone. Make a wish.

It's 11:40 and my phone vibrates. She calls me about a boy who's shattered her heart and she needs stitches. I help her pick up the pieces.

It's 12:01 and she tells me her uncle is suicidal and they can't find him.

It's 12:15 and my parents are fighting again.

It's 12:34 and he misses me. He wants to meet together one last time before we say goodbye forever.

It's 1:12 and my eyelids are heavy. I'm afraid to sleep.

It's 1:29 and they found her uncle. He's alive.

It's 2:08 and she's overdosed on pills. I comfort her as she cries through the phone. I can hear ambulance sirens just as she hangs up.

It's 2:30 and my phone vibrates. I reluctantly answer. She's in tears and tells me she's run away. Her family outed her and she has nowhere to go.

It's 3:01 and my world is quiet except for the icy wind outside. It sounds like a hurricane. There's a weight on my chest and I can taste the salty water rolling across my cheeks.

It's 3:45 and she's drunk for the first time in a long time. She can't stop thinking about him. She slurs through a ballad as she laments.

It's 3:59 and my phone is a brilliant star in contrast to this devouring darkness. My eyes are burning.

It's 4:07 and she calls from the hospital. She tells me she's okay but nothing is okay.

It's 4:23 and he's high again. He just wants to feel happy.

It's 5:00 and my sister is taking a shower. I know she's drowning out the sound of her weeping. The water is like thunder, breaking the silence with a crash.

It's 5:42 and his dad came home again with whiskey on his breath. He's afraid.

It's 6:11, the sun is low, and I'm all alone. Wish again.

The Page Turner

Maddie Bordo

Personal Essay

During the day, I sit among the dust bunnies. It's calm and dark here under the bed, and I have plenty of missing socks and forgotten art projects to keep me company. But as the night wears on, her hand usually reaches beneath the outdated bedskirt and gropes around for me. This is it--my favorite part of the day, the time when I am most useful and appreciated. She pulls me into a cozy, bright bedroom and digs a pen out of the pile of books on the nightstand--then it begins. I am filled with one day's worth of thoughts and feelings and a tangled web of events. Some days her hand shakes, and my pages are wet with tears. Other days, she is so happy I am filled with more doodles than words.

Increasingly, I show my age. She acquired me as a gift from her best friend for her fifteenth birthday three years ago. I am dark, navy leather, with sturdy pink string holding my swollen pages closed. Two bright yellow buttons garnish my cover, and they're my favorite feature: yellow is the happiest color. I burst with millions of words, thousands of starry doodles, and some rogue photographs too cherished to be hung on a cluttered wall. Nail polish smears, spilled drinks, and watercolor paintings that bled through give me color at nearly every turn.

I have collected beautiful memories. Loopy handwriting reveals tales of long hikes on the Appalachian Trail, summers spent in the lifeguard chair building relationships with the neighborhood kids, and friends who shake the world a bit wherever they go. I watched her transition from a mere girl to a passionate young woman. Rants about politics and equality poured onto my pages in the last two years. Sometimes flowers plucked from a picnic site are pressed into me or wrappers too pretty to throw away. Those are the good days.

Each story in me is mine to keep and protect, but there are the stories I would love to be rid of. I have a front row seat to every fight, every disappointment, and every heartbreak. It comes with the job. I hear about family feuds, the overwhelming pressure of attending a high-achieving high school, and the ups and downs of young love. There is darkness near my front cover, sometimes coating page after page with anxiety and despair. But I am full of growth.

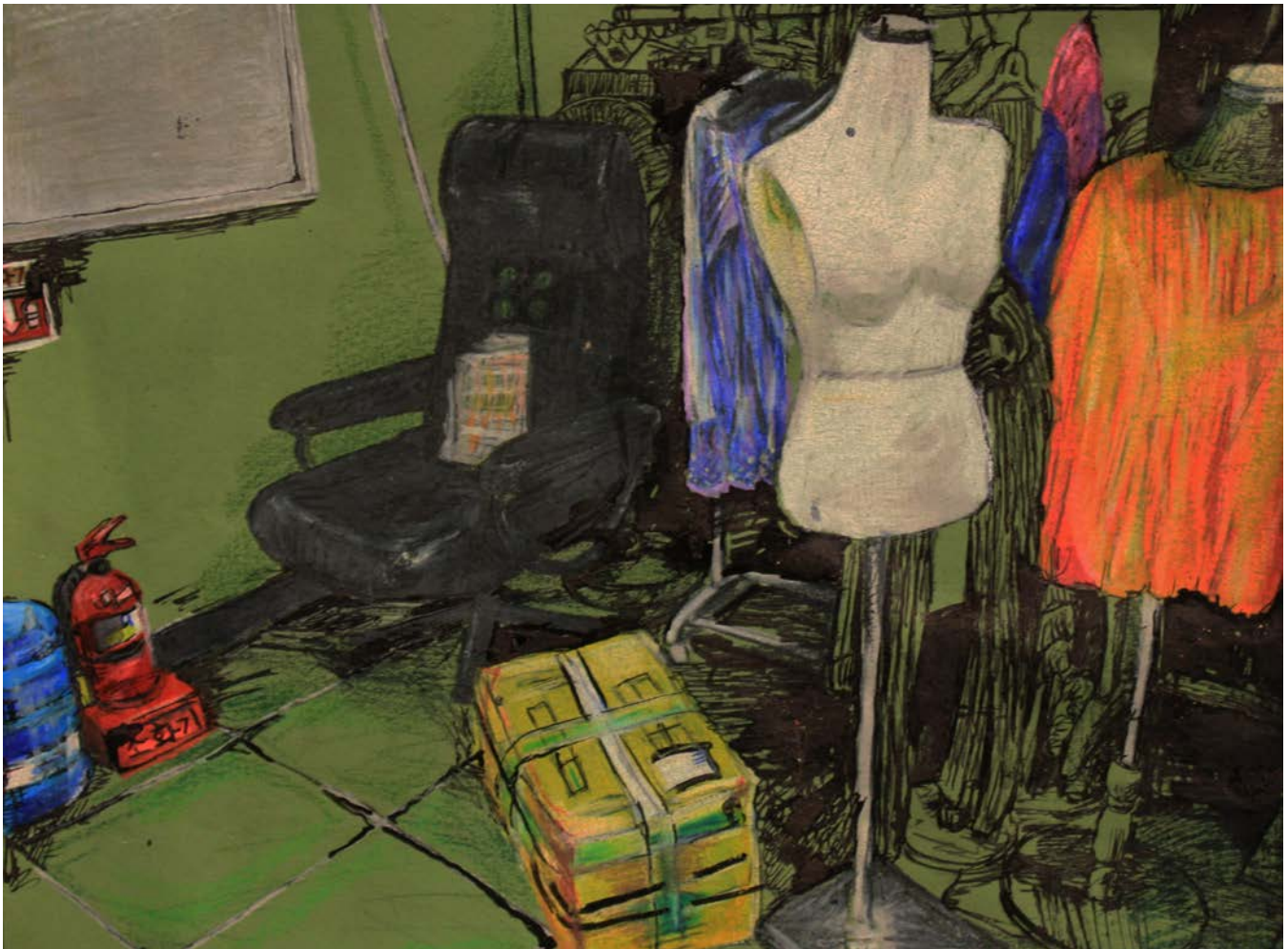
Recently, there is more acceptance and self-acceptance. There are stories of standing up to parents, teachers, and peers when ugly bias and hate surface. A new curiosity about the inner workings of government and media was explored, and her disgust at the results has emboldened her to raise her voice. Knowing her opinions and how to stand up for herself has brought such confidence; even her handwriting improved. She recently bought a pair of canary-yellow Converse, and I've never seen such peace and confidence coming from her. The best part is that, as her creation, I am able to improve alongside her. Every stride she makes is reflected within me, and I serve her well as both a time capsule and a listening ear.

She opens me less these days. The long nights of tumbling words are behind us now, and dust settled on my cover. At first, I worried something happened, that she gave up and stopped writing. But to my delight all is well. For a long time I was her most faithful audience, but now she is heard by others, lots of others. The skills developed on my pages now manifest through eloquent self expression as her voice is heard on a larger scale. This is a bittersweet moment for me: I am overjoyed with her progress, but it is hard feeling my usefulness decrease as hers increases. It was a privilege watching her mature, and I am thankful for the journey we took together.

Warehouse

Kelly Kim

Colored Pencil and Ink Drawing



dear m.
Anushka Shah
Poetry

we were twelve
and thirteen,
gawky in glasses,
staring at the grubby
grey carpet floor
unwilling to look at each
other and Gujarati
in the eye every
Sunday and I
would always admire
your shiny
green mechanical
pencils that rattled
contentedly with
lead.

dear m.
you were gone
from Gujarati class next

year and I confess:
I forgot about you,
but not your name:
the ascension
to heaven.

dear m.
I sat against
the car seat six o'clock
this morning
numb and cold
wondering why
you had decided that
eighteen was the right
time to ascend.

dear m.
I wish I knew you.

Lazy Times
Alyssa Snavelly
Photography



Cigarettes
Hayley Stulz
Photography



Hatred
Ciara Cullen
Poetry

I don't remember the day I learned to feel
this fire licking my insides, climbing, trying to find
that part of me which would yield to it.

Flames seared my eyes and scorched my heart
until I saw like my father and feared like my mother.
The fire had consumed me,
its lies engulfing me like a disease.

My hands burned red like the fire in my blood.
My flames poured from them,
coating my actions with their sinister heat.

I drank the flames like cough syrup,
fancying them my bitter cure.
Every dose I swallowed was a pleasant poison,
bringing destruction wrapped in comfort.

As I grew and I learned and experienced the world,
I was forced to drink a glass of water
Then another and another.

When the smoke cleared,
all that was left where my fire had been
was a pile of sizzling embers.

The heat had diminished but still remained.

Death in the Afternoon

DaJanae Drake

Fiction

Music drifted, bouncing off the greying wallpaper more than the dim lights could ever do. In places where the wallpaper peeled, the moldy wood was revealed. The place was not near fancy, but to the young owner, it was a second home. It was a dreary Monday; rain had coated the earth, and the legless monsters erupted from the dampened ground. The young bartender gathered the leftover popcorn, slipping it into the brown bag it had once been in.

“It’ll last another day.” She hummed to the music, and did a small dance. Her schedule usually consisted of closing early on days like these, but for the past few weeks, her schedule was running off track. Always, at eight forty on the dot, a man nearly six feet tall would loiter in. Always with him was his friend, a dark dampened mood that was known as his shadow. He’d always order “Death in the Afternoon.” She was always cautious taking note that it was a depressing name, which suited him terrifyingly well. As she cleaned up she glanced at the clock, waiting for his arrival. She glanced back down, clearing the rest of the popcorn. The doorbell chimed, and he walked in, setting himself down at the bar.

“The usual?” After a while she knew exactly how to make his usual. “One jigger absinthe into a champagne glass. Add iced champagne until it attains the proper opalescence.” Occasionally, she would switch it up and add the absinthe on top to create a stunning visual effect.

“Yes, please.” His gruff voice, heavily laced with a Korean accent, had shaken the bartender. She usually received a short nod to confirm the regular order, but when she heard his foreign voice emerge, she couldn’t help but to swoon. She quickly gathered what she needed to create the beverage.

After a while and more than a few drinks, his voice cut through the music catching the tired bartender's attention.

“You know...” he murmured.

A simple, “hmm?” came out as she placed a glass down, showing her attentiveness.

“My wife... She recommended this drink to me.” He took a long sip as the bartender looked down to see he had a simple silver ring on his left hand. She felt dejected, so she nodded her head.

“I am more of a beer in a can kinda guy, but she said this suits me quite well,” he chuckled.

Hesitantly, she spoke up in agreement with his wife. “I think it suits you quite well.” She gathered up some courage to continue the conversation.

“How long-” he cut her off.

“Another one,” he said.

She grabbed his chute, pouring the alcohol.

“Continue,” he demanded, “your sentence.” He gave a small smile allowing her to know it was alright.

She blushed. “How long have you been married?”

His half smile disappeared but he continued, “Almost ten years.” He set the glass down. She sensed the tension, but she ignored it. She wanted to know more. Why is he always here? Doesn’t his wife worry? She kept these questions to herself, but she let herself slip into the depths of curiosity.

“So, since your wife has introduced you to this drink and opened up a new pathway, you find the need to come here almost every day?”

The question came off cold-hearted. It wasn’t something she intended on, but her voice seemed too harsh and too unsettling. The man cleared his throat before announcing that he had drank too much. Instead of arguing, she let him go. She had already invaded his privacy she couldn’t hold him hostage. Invading one’s privacy was new to her. Usually she would have waited for a drunken customer to spill his soul to her, rather than prying it out of him.

The doorbell chimes, leaving her to take a deep breath. She grabbed his chute, pouring out the remainder of alcohol. Outside, there was a loud thud following a long and loud chain of profanities. She set the glass down before scurrying outside to see what had happened. To her surprise she saw the man standing there with a bloodied fist and tears running down his face. She urged him to come back inside; he glared at her, more than agitated by her appearance. She continued begging and coaxing him to come in. Defeated and exhausted, he nodded his head. The two head inside; she turned off the open light and shut the door behind her.

“Let me get you some water.” She went behind the counter opening the fridge. While doing so, the man sat down at a counter stool.

“Here, sober up.” She handed him the bottle. He grasped the drink, opening it and chugging it down and slamming it onto the countertop. He took a deep breath and ran his fingers through his long, thick black hair.

“I just don’t know what to do anymore!” Exasperation was apparent throughout his voice.

The bartender was scared. She dealt mostly with loud and rude customers, but one wrong move or a simple word could break this man apart. I may never see him again.

“Kim Shin!” she said quietly, yet forcefully. It was the first time she had said his name. She felt it was rude to call someone, especially a customer, by his first name, but she needed to get his attention. He looked at her, tears in his grey eyes.

“What’s wrong? Please tell me?” She leaned over the counter and reached for his hands. Her thumb stroked his left hand, touching the wedding band. He slapped her hand once he felt her touching the ring. He took off the ring holding it dearly then tossed it into the nearby trashcan.

“What are you doing?”

“Throwing away something that I should no longer keep.”

“Why?”

“She left me,” he gritted through his teeth. Speechless, she went to his side to comfort him.

“She left me for her coworker three months ago. I took too long to realize that she no longer smiled for me. Simple things turned into complex complications. I didn’t realize how I hurt her when I wanted to drink a couple of beers instead of cuddle and talk about how I hated work. I was blind not to see her late nights at work turned into two day trips away from the house. How our daughter and I sat patiently for her arrive home when she didn’t want to come home. I wanted to be the man she could depend on, but I wasn’t.”

Simultaneously, they took a deep breath. The man to receive oxygen and the woman to take in what she had heard. She looked at him, eyes full of pity. He pushed her away.

“Don’t pity me! Because, I pity myself the most. When I saw her there with that man smiling across the street I wanted to kill myself. Not because I knew she was cheating, it was because I could no longer make her happy. That I failed as a husband.”

“You didn’t fail. No, not at all.”

“Then why did she leave? Why do I want to die?”

“Because she didn’t want to work through simple things. She didn’t want to try. But you are trying! You’re still alive; you have a daughter that needs you so much. You are coping. It’s going to hurt, but you can get through this!” She screamed. She dug into the trashcan grabbing the wedding ring.

Then everything became silent, the background song just ended and the only thing you could hear was stifled cries and heavy breathing. She walked over to give him a tight hug. He tried to push her away but she clung on. Not holding onto him not like a woman but as a friend that he could lean on. She knew now was not the time to take advantage of his weakness, so instead she let him cry, while tears slowly trickled down her face.

It was almost twelve A.M. by the time they had gathered up their wits. She gave him his ring then said a short goodbye, awkwardly, but it had sentiment. After the late night talk on that cool, dreary Monday, she didn't see the man for months. So, as the seasons came and passed, she closed the bar earlier as she had done before she had met him. Still on certain days she'd glance longingly at the clock and try to keep the bar open just a tad bit later. Of course, just in case a man came in with his old friend, darkness, asking for a "Death in the Afternoon."

Crystal Clear
Reilly Deller
Photography



Colson Voss
Maxim

The whys fuel the wise.

The Question

Maddie Bordo

Poetry

At risk of seeming
ungrateful
I have a question.
This life is wonderful and all but
what next?
What happens
after?
Are we just gone? Really?
Because deep down my
narcissistic heart can't
accept that answer
and i've remembered my
loved ones lost
far too fondly
for them to be truly gone.
But then again heaven
goes hand in hand with

glass slippers and
Prince Charming in my mind,
another casualty of a
Holy Home.
Heaven MUST NOT be for real,
because then my
Teenage Rebellion
was all for naught.
So if it's neither
Nothing nor
that Most Beloved Something
then what is the answer?
Not ghosts,
at least not for every soul.
Where do the masses go?
But the only way to know for sure
is far too permanent.

Hidden in Darkness

Caroline Huang

Graphite Drawing



Eyes of the Beholder
Lucie Waller
Photography/Digital Art



To Whom It May Concern
Arlen Belitsky
Poetry

To whom it may concern,

This letter is URGENT!
You must be aware!
Pass it on quickly!
There's no time to spare!

"To whom do I give it?"
you're probably thinking,
"Or is it to who?"
Your window is shrinking.

You try to remember
the rules of grammar
when you should be tending
to this urgent matter.

Such a vague greeting
is difficult to discern.
I'll give it to myself,
for it's caused me much concern.

Paradoxically,
Whom (Who?) it still concerns.

Eleven thirty
Anushka Shah
Poetry

At eleven thirty
The newspaper crossword
Will be halfway done
Black eraser shavings
Swarming the linoleum floor
Like ants
And the morning soap operas
Will have been watched,
The light skinned, six crore rupees palace
Clad wife of an adulterous
Husband frozen in a technicolor slap
Until the evening at least,
And my elbows will be sticky
With mango juice, attempting
To to get at whatever
Golden flesh is left at the pits
Of six mangos who
Were ripe enough to become
A part of lunch,
And Mumma will hang the laundry
Smelling of artificial lilac
On the clothesline
And her saris will begin to flap
Like giant polyester butterflies
That could fly up to the Mumbai sun.

And at eleven thirty,
When the Pittsburgh sky
Was black and glittering
With iron and steel
She flew away with the
Mumbai butterflies
But she didn't take
Me.

Isabela Island
Judy Zhang
Photography



Too Young

Amber Vora

Poetry

Death

As I hold the sharp knife in my trembling hands,
I can feel my muscles tighten; my throat and my glands.
The idea of leaving my family behind,
Makes me wonder whether this is asinine or kind.
I heard about heaven and the wonders that it holds,
The mysteries and secrets to be told.
My dispirited soul indicates this is the only way,
But the small amount of sanity that hasn't gone astray,
Tells me that maybe I should rethink my plan.
My mind is somewhere in an unknown land,
As I drop the knife from three feet high,
And realize; I'm too young to die.

Appearance

As warm tears pour out and a loud gasp releases from my mouth,
I can tell my life is going nowhere but south.
I frown in disgust from my sickening reflection;
The scars on my arms and my repulsive complexion.
I do as the voices in my head command,
And hold the sharp knife in my trembling hands.
The blade sinks deep into my flesh and bone,
And I let out a deep, piercing groan.
The pain and frustration rises through me,
And I become aware that I feel anything but free.
I look up to the the dark, frightening sky,
And realize; I'm too young to die.

Love

Love is a four letter word that disgusts me.
It traps us and never lets us be free.
I'd rather be dead than alive with this word,
Swirling around us like a black cloud, it's absurd.
No one can see how dangerous it is,
Since they are blinded for love is a quiz.
A test to see how one reacts,
And how they face the cold hard facts.
I decide I can't take this anymore,
And realize that love is war.
But hate is like a tornado, and love is like a dove.
And I come to my conclusion; I'm too young to love.

Understanding

I stand still with enervating knees.
As I'm pushed back with a powerful breeze,
I regret speaking the cold heart truth,
And risking my life and my youth.
Trusting him was the worst mistake,
And made my heart and mind break.
The truth has an unpredictable fate,
That can turn love into pure hate.
Although I've tried so hard to forgive him,
His voice replays like a catchy church hymn.
I fall on the wet, earthy land,
And realize; I'm too young to understand.
Too young

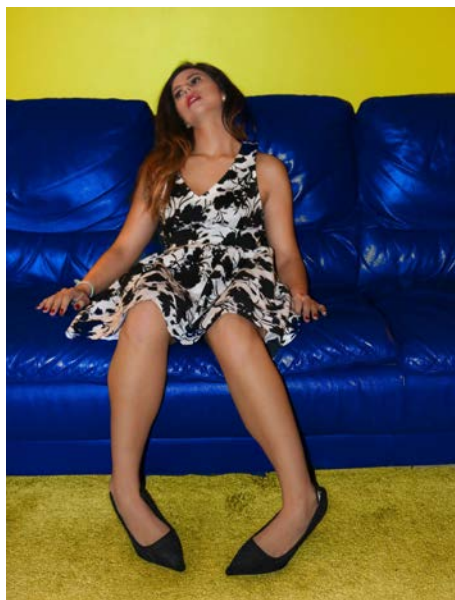
Lying

I stepped out and looked around to where I could run,
But my eyes were stinging from the glossy bright sun.
The weight that I bore was like no other,
The lies piling up one after another.
That small little lie that slipped out,
May have ruined my life, no doubt.
Yet I don't regret my choices so far,
And maybe I can make a wish upon a star,
That none of this will affect my life,
And I will no longer beat myself with strife.
I run down the street and try not to cry,
When I notice; I'm too young to lie.

Lifeless

Becky Brown

Photography



The Mirror
Ciara Cullen
Fiction

She stared at the mirror and saw every word he'd said reflected back at her. She saw her thick thighs, her curvy hips, her shapely body--all barely-concealed insults, painful truths hidden in delicate phrasing. Each one was a tiny knife cutting away at her heart, crouching in the back of her mind. All the time.

She was shockingly heavy for her size, he'd say. The mirror glinted its agreement. He told her that her face wasn't conventionally pretty. That's clear, the mirror seemed to say. And she was lucky to have them, her mirror and him. Who else would care about her enough to show her everything she wasn't?

He found something new to critique every day, and every day, she would go to the mirror and ask for a second opinion. The mirror always proved his statements true. She used to think that beauty hurt, but now she knew that wasn't true. Only the truth hurt, and her truth was especially painful.

She tried to cover the truth in shrouds of heavy sweaters and loose-fitting jeans. She tried to drown herself, her unattractive legs and arms and stomach and face. Even her smile couldn't be beautiful, her mirror told her. How could it when everything around it was so unseemly?

So she got rid of her smile, too.

It wasn't hard to do when she had her mirror and him. They constantly reminded her of all she'd never been and would never be. Could never be. And she couldn't escape her failures because her failure was existing the way she was. She couldn't hide from herself and the body she hated. Her body.

Every day, the sight in the mirror grew uglier. She became fixated on it, on the grotesque horror of it, like seeing the aftermath of an accident. How could anyone be so ugly? How could she possibly go outside looking the way she did?

She didn't know when she'd stopped leaving her room. All she knew was that her mirror gave her every reason to stay. Nothing mattered because she didn't matter. She had no friends because no one would want to spend time with someone as ugly as she was. She had no job because no one would hire her after seeing how disgusting she looked. She just sat in front of her mirror, every day, for hours, until she could no longer bear the sight of herself.

He knocked on her door the first few weeks. He told her she was lucky he'd come at all. He didn't have to. She was ungrateful. He would leave, and she'd be all alone. Good. She deserved it. He meant it. He wasn't just bluffing. And the knocks came less frequently, and very soon thereafter, they stopped completely. He had more important things to attend to than an ugly girl with thick thighs and curvy hips.

Her mirror laughed at her. It no longer pitied her. Her thighs no longer touched, her hips were bones, her straight body had no shape. Even without these flaws, she was still ugly. Her flaw was herself, and there was nothing she could do about it.

She stared into the mirror ceaselessly. She no longer slept. She no longer turned away to wipe her tears. In fact, she no longer cried. She heard only the mirror's words, incessant, punishing. The sun rose and the sun set, and then the sun stopped shining on her room. Why would the sun waste all its energy, its vibrant light, on someone, something so pitiful?

The mirror's criticism grew louder, burying her. Suffocating her. She couldn't bear to hear another word, but she knew the mirror was right. She should trust the mirror, for it was her only friend.

No. No longer. Her fist broke the glass in one punch, one last display of strength. The mirror lay in bloody pieces in front of her and stuck in her hand.

And still, the words didn't stop.

It was only then that she noticed the mirror spoke with her voice.

She would never escape the words as long as she existed.

So she stopped. Existing.

Reflection

Lauren Rogus

Acrylic Painting



Promising Michele

David Malik
Personal Essay

I do not enjoy making promises. They are meaningless strings of words that obligate you to do something for someone else solely because you “promised to.” That is why I make as few promises as possible, and the ones that I do make are easy to keep like, “I promise to clean my room,” or, “I promise to do my homework.” Actual promises, however, scare me. They are strong pacts that you pledge to another person and swear to uphold with every fiber of your being. And if someone really, truly, and deeply wants me to promise them something, I most likely will. It is just that, ever since I broke one of the most important promises I have ever made, it has been hard for me to trust myself to make new ones.

It was a stupid promise. It should not have meant anything. It didn’t mean anything. At least not to Michele but it meant the world to me. In the eyes of my seven year old self, I saw Michele as one of the coolest people in the world. Nothing seemed more important, more beautiful, more fascinating, more unique, or more strange than Michele. Michele was in her mid thirties when I knew her as a seven year old. She seemed to be absolutely enthralled by me and would play with me constantly. She particularly enjoyed watching Scooby-Doo with me, even when my rambunctious energies got the better of me, causing me to bounce around the couch instead of watching it.

One day, Michele and I were playing outside. She sat in her walker’s seat, watching me as I trotted across her driveway. Michele had just gotten me some chalk and I drew her a picture of us on her driveway as a thank you. As I drew, Michele said to me, “David? Can you make me a promise?”

“Shure!” I replied, grinning through my teeth.

“Never grow old okay? Promise me you’ll stay seven forever.”

“Of course I won’t! I will shtay sheven forever! I promisha!”

And thus our pact formed. I allowed that binding string of words to grab hold of me and force me into a position that I could not possibly maintain. Sadly, I did not discover the secret to eternal youth, so I eventually started to grow up. I did not realize until around the age of nine or ten that I would not be able to uphold my promise, so I decided to go for the next best thing. If I cannot actually be seven, I will just be seven in spirit. I will hold on to my childlike habits forever and do my best to stop the corruption of the world from spreading to me. I thought that this would make Michele happy. It would keep our promise.

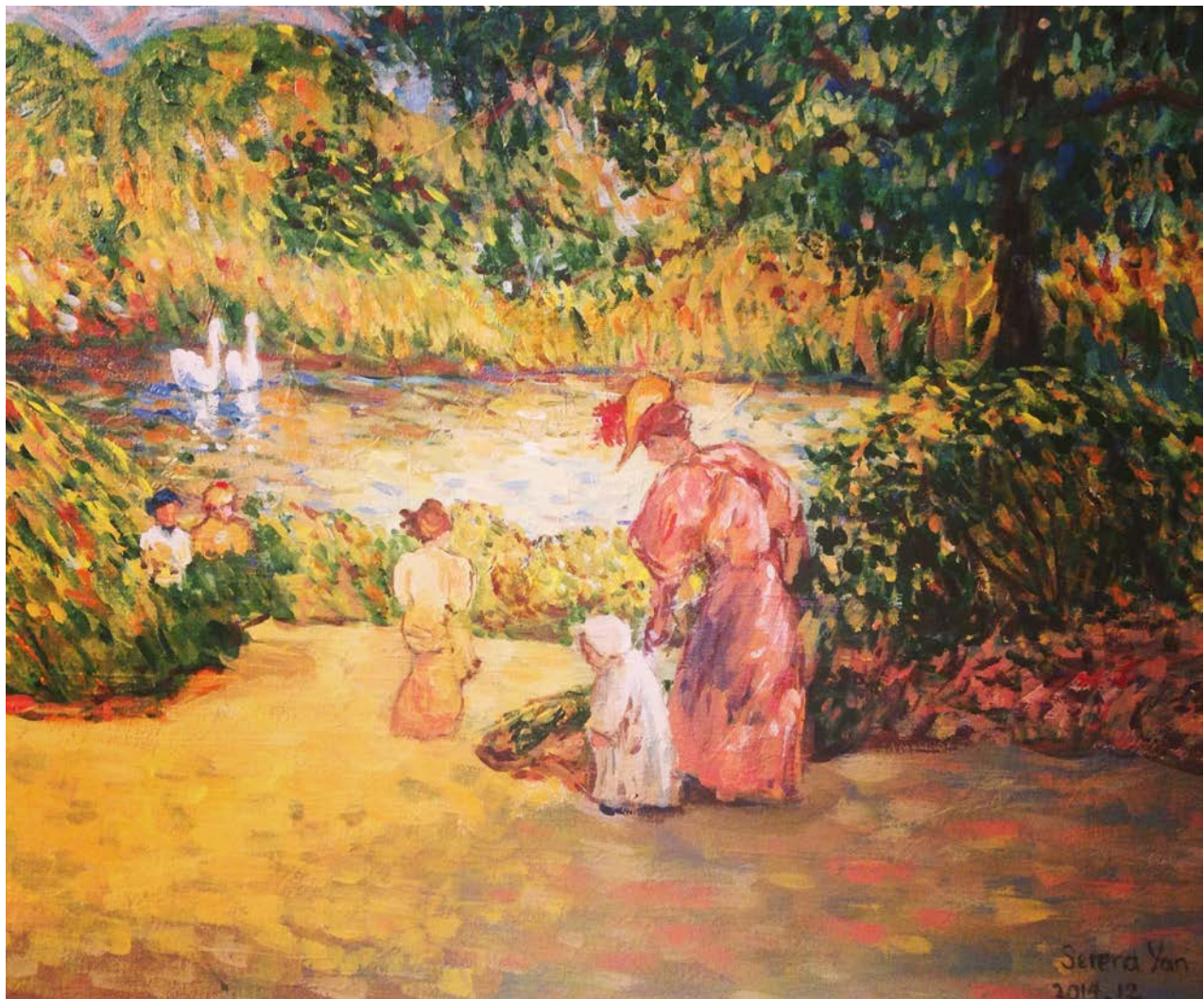
Alas, time changes everything. Soon I got even older and Michele got sick. Technically, Michele grew sick when I was born, but I only realized the severity of it when I became thirteen. I struggled to cope with her sickness. It was a lot to deal with, but I got through it. I survived, with my child-like mindset in tact. Unfortunately, Michele passed away when I was fifteen, shattering everything.

There was no way I could deal with my mother's death if I continued to act like a child. I would not be able to say any words at her funeral as a child. I would not be able to honor her life to it's fullest as a child. So, I broke our promise, and I grew up. Now, I deal with my problems, instead of running away from them. Now, I work hard, instead of "taking it easy." Now I treat people with respect, instead of ignoring them. Now, I am an adult. Hopefully, I am an adult that would make my mother proud.

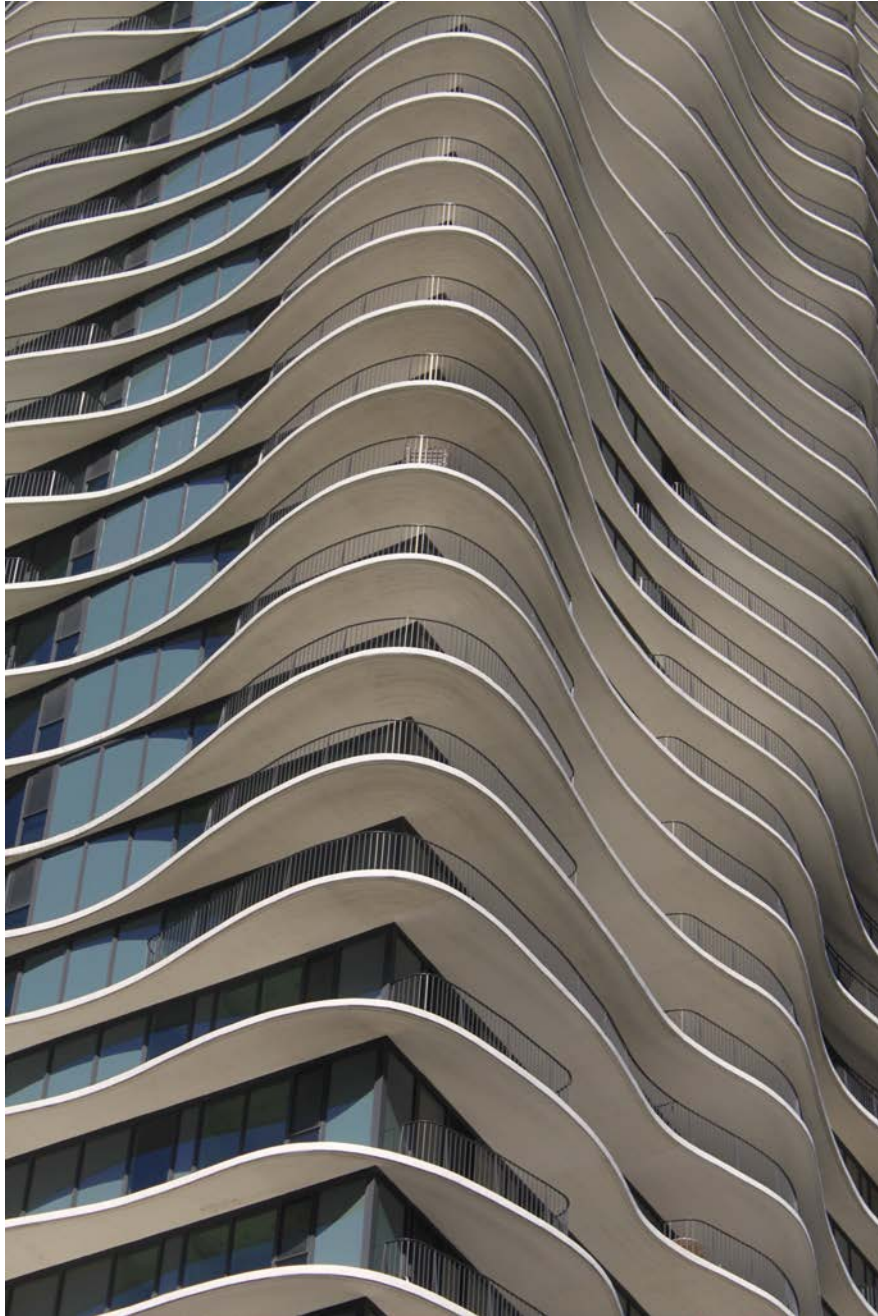
A Peaceful Afternoon

Serena Yan

Acrylic Painting



Waves
Izabel Peterson
Photography



Kirthana Kannan
Six-Word Story

Dreamer. No hope. Chasing imaginary happiness.

A Drop in the Ocean

Lucie Waller

Photography



Samantha Mauer

Bop Haiku

The time ticks away
I rack my brain for your voice.
I have forgotten.

Reminiscing With Family

Rachel Jacobs

Blog Entry

“Do you remember the time when.....” and you would say “Yeah, I do” or “Sorry, I don’t.” But if you ask me, I will say “Yeah, I do.” I remember the last pumpkin ride. The last Big Butler Fair. The last homemade meal. I remember the scenery outside of his room. I remember the tears. But I also remember the smiles. This last Friday, I was with my mom, aunt, sister, and cousins talking to each other about someone so wonderful to all of us: my Pap, my grandfather. We were talking about how we can feel his presence, hear his voice. Being the closest to him, I didn’t hear his voice. He didn’t appear in my dreams. But I have the memories by which to remember him. I remember his complaining. I remember his blue eyes. I remember him. Everyone will lose someone at some point in their lives. Some experience the pain and grief, while others just go day by day. Some days, it can be hard when you spontaneously start thinking of that person. But when the right people are near you, you can share whatever you are thinking, be it sad or joyous. Be it remembered or not. I love my Pap, and I love that I can talk to others about him. Just being with family and talking about someone we all miss is the most awesome thing that could happen to me...or anybody.

When Light Comes

Kelly Kim

Colored Pencil and Ink Drawing



Silver-Grey Hair

Kaylyn Foody

Flash Fiction

Sugar, mixed with notes of cigarette smoke and cologne. Hair the same color as your smoke, silvery and light, slipping through my fingers. The way you laughed when I would strike a pose. The soft clicks of your camera cutting through the crisp January air. The way the photos turned out, making me feel more beautiful than ever. The way you made me blush when you said that the real thing was better. Laughing in your car as we rode down the highway. Screeching tires and someone screaming. You shaking me in my seat. That's all I remember of you.

Everything had happened so fast, gone downhill so quickly, it was hard to believe that just a few hours earlier we had been wandering the city, stopping at each little sightseeing spot, me laughing at something stupid you said while you snapped photos. With each stop, I fell more and more in love with you. When we stopped to get coffee, you smiled when you beat me to pay for it. I know it makes you feel better about your manhood, but let me pay sometimes! You never failed to make me smile though. The way I gripped the cup and you asked if I was cold was ridiculous. Of course, I was cold. I could feel butterflies in my stomach when you laid your hands over mine promising to try and warm them. Now my fingers are far too cold for you to warm.

I see you everyday, you know? I watch you get up in a bed that's half empty, move to a kitchen that's just slightly too big, pour yourself a cup of coffee from a pot that's just a little too full. I watch you go to work, editing photos of other beautiful girls, girls who laughed just as much as I did, girls who would kill to have a spot in your heart. You'll have to let one in eventually. You can't hold onto my ghost forever. You know that, and I do, too.

I know it's difficult, my love--I know. Leaving you was the hardest thing I had to do, but it was out of my hands. So I need you to move on. I can't stay forever, but the sooner you move on, the sooner I get to, as well.

Watching Rain Drip Down the Window

Caroline Huang

Colored Pencil Drawing



Half Human
Grace Spencer
Poetry

Her face was stained with the ghost of a smile
 Smeared heavily like red lipstick.
 Pigments of red left like footprints
On all of the boys who would never even care
 From a girl who would only care too much.
 She wore streaks of the tears
 That once cascaded down her face,
 Rivers of sadness, streams of sorrow
None of which could ever quite quench her thirst.

 She was merely half a woman
Living off of the breadcrumbs of life and love
 A silhouette of beauty cloaked in tragedy.
 But there he was
 Half a man himself
 Controlled by the push and pull of the tide
The current washing away the line between clarity and uncertainty
 And the need to love everyone more than they deserved.

 Two weathered souls
 Living in the shadows of vacant stares
 Would be a hell to anyone else
 Besides two people too broken to break
 And too lonely to be alone
Lurking in the silhouettes of who they used to be.
 That was who they were
 And that is where they'll be.

Looking Beyond the Face

Elaine Guo

Acrylic Painting



Faith, I See It
Dheeksha Senthur
Poetry

Faith is the flower that blooms like the sweetest song of summer,
I hear it as I walk past the wild grass, glorious as the starred and striped dream,
I carry it in my pocket, strong and warm, singing songs as the dewed branches touch me,
I feel it stirring, a sleepy crimson robin that awakens in the dimmest of days,

I see it, in the fresh seedlings of brittle wheat, they peak, blithe in the parched earth,
I see it, in the blood of men with burns in their hands, who watch the good sparks with no fear,
I behold it, in the everlasting clouds that break apart to reveal the wonderful light--

I depart, my feet leave the dusty track on the pitted and rutted and crumbled earth,
The pitted and rutted track of generations before me, with shoots scattered between,
With little leaves it sprouts, like that made of dreams, springing up--
The sweet roots, anchored deep within against the eddies of an autumn wind,
The scent of a floral paradise dimpled on the mountainside, the divine peace,
Is a calming and beautiful thing, I feel in my flesh, free, against the prickly rush of ice--

Faith is the red rose that blooms and braves in the thorniest weather,
I do not need to see, when I can feel, my heart soaring to you.

Elle a rêvé des fleurs
Ciara Cullen
Photography



Basilica del Voto Nacional

Judy Zhang
Photography



The Blossom

Dheeksha Senthur

Poetry

I do not fear the chill of autumn--
For in the ice I see a little Blossom--
Folded tight--afraid of the Night--

Why? I wondered, when in the Night--
The dark is illuminated by a thousand lights--
They are always forgotten.

VARIATIONS Staff Biographies

Rebecca Avigad - This is Becca's second year being a member of the *VARIATIONS* staff. Reading is one of her favorite pastimes, and she has loved getting to look at the incredible work submitted to the magazine this year. As part of the literary committee, she gets to spend a lot of time hearing from many of NASH's most talented writers. She hopes that people will enjoy looking at the hard work of everyone involved this year.

Shreya Bibra - As a first year staff member of *VARIATIONS*, Shreya has loved seeing all the work come together. She has enjoyed seeing how the thoughts and expressions of the people in her school can come out so incredibly on paper—whether it be a visual or a piece of writing. She has been thrilled to be a part of this experience and hopes anyone who picks up this magazine enjoys it as much as she does.

Taylor Broz - This is Taylor's first year as a member of *VARIATIONS*, and she has enjoyed being part of the magazine's art department. She enjoys all kinds of writing and art and loves the creative construction of the magazine. Her own passion for visual art is inspired by the artwork of other students.

Ciara Cullen - Ciara is thrilled to be rejoining the *VARIATIONS* staff as the literary editor. Ciara always loves to read something good (especially Dan Brown books and the finest fantasy novels in the land), and she has had a great time looking at all the wonderful submissions to this year's magazine. She hopes you all enjoy reading it as much as she has!

Liz Guo - As a first year staff member of *VARIATIONS* magazine, Liz is an active participant of the literary department. She adores the works of others and is eager to construct a larger piece of literary work out of them. She is impressed with the various takes her peers have on the overarching theme and loves to be a supporting member of the showcase of such talents.

Gabby Herbert - This is Gabby's second year being a part of the *VARIATIONS* staff. She enjoys being able to see all the work that goes on behind the scenes of the magazine. Gabby is always amazed by the artistic talents and abilities of her peers. She loves being able to be a part of a club that has the ability to showcase these talented individuals who may not always get the recognition they deserve.

Lillian Hsiao - Lillian is a senior student who is working on the *VARIATIONS* staff for the first time as part of the artistic staff. She has enjoyed the time that she has spent on the staff as she chooses from various works from different artists to include in the magazine. She hopes that all sorts of people will be able to value the hard work from her fellow staff members and herself.

Heya Lee - Heya is a junior student who works with Laura Jeon as the other layout editor. She greatly enjoys viewing the marvelous works of other students, especially the art work because she herself is an avid digital painter. She is amazed how her peers have managed to integrate the submissions with creative interpretations of this year's theme, and is proud to be a staff member of *VARIATIONS* magazine.

Sarah Losco - Sarah, this year's Editor-In-Chief, is very proud to present the 2016-2017 issue of *VARIATIONS* magazine! With a passion for literature and creative writing, she is thrilled to have had the opportunity to celebrate and showcase the work of the phenomenal writers and creative minds of North Allegheny. She believes self-expression in the forms presented in *VARIATIONS* is one of the most captivating and precious of all human capabilities. To quote her favorite Emily Dickinson poem, "A word is dead/ when it is said,/ some say./ I say it just/ begins to live/ that day." *VARIATIONS* will always hold a special place in her heart.

VARIATIONS Staff Biographies

Laura Jeon - Laura, one of the layout editors, is very excited to explore and appreciate all of the literary and creative works for two consecutive years. She has seen numerous students find their own ways of expressing their feelings and thoughts through their works, and *VARIATIONS* works flawlessly for those students by publishing their work. Her experience with *VARIATIONS* always inspires her, and she believes it brings happiness to everyone involved, including herself.

Julia Maruca - Julia, a senior, is excited to be part of the *VARIATIONS* team again this year and to participate in both a literary editing and creative aspect. She is a writer herself, and three of her pieces are included in this issue of *VARIATIONS*. Her flash fiction story "The Essay" won a Gold Medal on the national level of the Scholastic Art and Writing Contest this year, and her short stories "Things that Matter" and "Babyland" both earned Gold Keys. Outside of *VARIATIONS*, Julia is the Co-Editor in Chief of the North Star Magazine, and she hopes to explore journalism and writing in college. She is also a Marching Band, Jazz Band, and Wind Ensemble musician. She hopes that through *VARIATIONS*, she can help to encourage the arts at NASH and promote creativity.

Mona Rokh - As a first year staff member of *VARIATIONS*, Mona is thrilled to work on the business aspect of creating a literary and creative arts magazine. She is grateful to experience the hard work and determination demonstrated by her fellow members. She hopes that after reading, more students will be inspired to let their creativity flow and participate in the future. She cannot wait to be a part of the team next year!

Eliza Ross - Eliza is ecstatic to be reprising her role as one of *VARIATIONS* artistic editors. Art has always been an important part of Eliza's life--from coloring on her bedroom walls with crayons to traveling to New York City to view Vincent Van Gogh paintings. It was an immense pleasure to see all of the beautiful art that was produced by the students. Eliza has had a wonderful experience on the team and plans to continue her pursuit of art long into the future.

Riley Smith - A lifetime writer, this is Riley's first experience on the editing side/publishing side. She is constantly amazed by the wide range of talents that she sees during meetings, from the pieces themselves to the creative choices made by her fellow staff members. She can't wait for you to page through *VARIATIONS* and discover some of the magic for yourself.

Amber Vora - This is Amber's first year working with the *VARIATIONS* staff, and she could not imagine her junior year without it. Just seeing the talents of her fellow classmates leaves her speechless at every meeting. She is amazed at how many future artists, writers, and photographers North Allegheny holds in one building. Amber hopes that you can appreciate these beautiful works of art as much as she did.

Josie Wadlow - This is Josie's first year being a part of the *VARIATIONS* staff. She enjoys being behind the scenes of the magazine and working with others who share the same interests in writing and art that she does. Josie is astounded by the creativity and talent that the North Allegheny student body has to offer, as well as the passion that was included in each piece. She hopes you enjoy all of the beautiful work!

Alexander Wältermann - Normally found locked within existential broodings at the corner of a room, Alex wishes to provide to others the freedom of expression stolen from him by Asperger's Syndrome. He takes extreme interest and passion in discovering the perspectives of others, and he considers joining *VARIATIONS* less of a privilege and more of an obligation to his fellow classmates' artistic wellbeing. Alex may disagree with your thoughts, but he will always ensure that you have a right to think, express, and publish them.

Variations Staff Biographies

Lucie Waller -This is Lucie's second year on the *VARIATIONS* staff. She enjoys writing and taking pictures in her free time. She loves seeing all of the literature and the photography that students have sent in. Lucie is continually amazed by how much talent is within this school, and she cannot wait for everyone else to see it too.

Serena Yan - Serena is a first year member of the *VARIATIONS* magazine. She is very excited to arrange all of the amazing pieces of artwork by fellow classmates and use her designing skills to contribute to the artistic appeal of the magazine. She encourages NASH students to support *VARIATIONS*.

Judy Zhang - This is Judy's first year on the *VARIATIONS* team. Although she has interests in art and literature, she has also enjoyed spending the year working in the business/public relations department of the magazine. Judy is thankful to have had the opportunity to contribute to the creation of this year's edition of *VARIATIONS* and hopes that students will appreciate the beauty of the works presented in the magazine.

Colophon

Designers

Layout Department
Literary Editors
Artistic Editors
VARIATIONS Staff

Design Program

Canva

Printing Service

Toshiba Business Solutions
200 Hillvue Lane
Pittsburgh, PA 15237

Paper Stock and Printing

Text: 8.5 x 11, Color Expressions 24 lb.
Cover: Hammermill Photo White, 80lb, perfect bound
215 copies printed at \$3.00 per copy

Finance and Operation

Fundraising by *VARIATIONS* staff
Donation from Safari

Typography and Fonts

Source Serif Pro 56 titles
Source Serif Pro 12 headings
Source Serif Pro 10 text
Source Serif Pro 8 folio



