Dragons’ Fire

da Vinci Arts Middle School
Literary Review
2015 - 2016
From a pool of submissions, the teacher advisor selected pieces for the fifth annual publication based on literary merit; each poem or story had to be interesting, engaging, and well-written. The advisor edited pieces for grammar, punctuation, word choice, sentence fluency, and sensibility. Some pieces were nominated by language arts teachers. Some selections students wrote as assignments for the Creative Writing elective. The visual arts pieces were selected from the Capstone exhibition, based on theme, to illustrate the poems, stories, and essays. We thank da Vinci students for sharing their creative work with us.

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Colors

By Jaryn Barefield

You were red
Electrifying
Not depicted by
beauty or personality
only color
Your smile like a
crescent moon
dancing across
the sky of your face
You were my morning

I was blue
Despondent
No more
of your vibrant
colors but less
I was the
dark blue night
My eyes the
shimmering stars,
but not your
stars,

You touched me
and I was a lilac
sky,
Painted across
the canvas of
your galaxy
Once trying
to embrace the
warmth
but no longer
because that’s what you made me with your kaleidoscopic red

And you decided purple just wasn’t for you.

Abby Crabtree
I Should be Sorry

By Jaryn Barefield

I should be sorry,
for convincing you
that you’re adopted,
that you belonged to
someone else,
that you were just
another kid to fill the
empty house.

I should be sorry
for pushing you
off your bike.
When you crashed into
the prickly vanilla-colored
roses.
When you spent months
going from doctor’s office
to doctor’s office,
trying to heal your
wounded knee.

I should be sorry,
telling people I’m
an only child.
Telling them my
lonely childhood story.
Wiping you away
like the rain on the
windows.
Telling them I longed
for a sibling
though I had one.
I should be sorry
for truths and lies,
for yelling and crying,
for hitting and punching,
but the thing is,
I’m not sorry.
I’m the opposite
of sorry,
I’m okay.
And you should
be apologizing.

For I am the one
you hit and kicked
For I am the one
who got told on
For I am the one
who listened
to your arguing,
over what?
Did you not get
your way again?
Pathetic.
And for that, you
should be sorry.

You should be sorry
for destroying my will
to live in the house I do.
Filling my spare time with
your stupid games and stories.
How you suddenly become deaf
when I tell you to leave me alone.
And for that you should
be sorry.
But then again
I should be sorry.
For always yelling
at you,
For always beating
you at the simplest
things.
But I would never tell
you that because I
wouldn’t really
mean it.
And I’m never
sorry.

If you’re ever
wondering,
why I can’t
stand you,
for that you
should be sorry.

Eliza Arnaut-Hull
Sylvester Stallone

By Jack Barrett

You’re the child of acting,
Action movies, and never giving up
Amongst the rebuttal
And denial of the world.

You were born into this big green world
With a very bright future.
Green like the wet bus station bench you once slept on,
Green like the grass you once walked on,
Green like the endless money you’d soon make.

You were broke then,
Mr. Michael Sylvester Gardenzio Stallone,
So broke that you stole your wife’s jewelry
And sold your own dog for 25 dollars to a complete stranger,
Walking away crying.

Broken, beat, and desperate for food,
You wrote the script for Rocky in less than 20 hours.

You wanted to sell the script,
But it was also your dream to become a successful actor.
So much so that you declined 125,000, 250,000, and 350,000 dollars.

You wanted to be Rocky no matter what price,
But they said you looked funny,
They said you talked funny.

They finally accepted, and they let you act,
But only gave you 35,000 dollars.
You finally accomplished your dream
And bought back your long lost dog for 15,000 dollars.
I swear, Sylvester,
When I watch your movies and
Witness your exemplary acting, I
Remember your story and how
You didn’t give up when the world
Pushed you down.

Because somewhere out there, there is a kid
Watching your movies and remembering your story,
remembering how you didn’t give up,
And that will influence them to work hard
And accomplish amazing things,
Just like you did.

Lydia Wade-Sully
Ode to ADD

By Amelia Carpenter

It’s because of you that my hands are covered in purple,
but my computer screen remains blank.
You’re also the reason that I’ve watched seven episodes of Supernatural,
as opposed to doing math homework,
And I’m going to blame you for the fact that this poem,
which was due two weeks ago, is only now being written.
You are honestly the most unhelpful bastard I’ve ever met.
If you could just bother someone else,
I would get so much more done! I could actually get things done!
But, because you exist, I’m rolling duct tape back and forth
across my bed while this doc sits open in front of me.
I’ve scrolled through miles of tumblr while I was supposed to be writing out a lab report.
Side note: trypophobia is the fear holes in irregular patterns, like sponges and bee hives.
Don’t Google this, you will regret it.
I also once spent a class period reading the Wiki page on anesthesia
when I should have been researching some topic that I obviously didn’t care about.
Did you know that it was first used in 1842?
Back to the actual topic of this poem, I spent the time
I should have spent memorizing lines
for a show I was actually in learning
the lyrics for shows I was not.
Case and point, I can sing the majority of Hamilton,
but flubbed my lines on opening night.
I spend countless hours trying to just focus, just concentrate,
just sit down and do the thing!
I can’t just sit down and do the thing.
I wish I could just sit down and do the thing.
Do you honestly think I’d choose this
if I could just sit down and do the thing?
But I can tell you that sick plants take care of each other
And I can tell you that I will turn in this poem
And I can tell you that my hands are still purple.

Ella Jones
Cosmos Kid

By Zelda Carrico-Glover

I am the Cosmos Kid
At the end of my fingers
Twinkle stars
And my head is filled with only
Hydrogen
Helium
Nitrogen
Everything swirls with purples and blues
Rings of ice and rock
Surround my heart
I come from a far away place
Somewhere out past the asteroid belt
Past the oldest light
That reaches Earth
I’m made from carbon
Forged in stars
I’m a tiny little universe
And inside me
Might be a little blue planet
With little curious people
With big big questions
I am the Cosmos Kid
Made of only from space and time

Karter Bryan-Hart
Getting Better
By Zelda Carrico-Glover

I wanna tell you about
A girl
She had depression
She took pills for the
World’s discretion
All her thoughts were
Rooftops
Heart stops
Sweet-tasting lemon drops
Death on her lips

But you wouldn’t
Have guessed it
Upon her torn tongue were words
that tickled like butterflies
She smiled all the time
People said she was
Happy

And in her mind
It was foul
Like thick black tar
Her thoughts were infested
She was invested
In the thought
Of a bottle of pills

The slits on the wrists of her thoughts
Bled freely
She couldn’t stop it
Her head filled with blood
And she drowned
I wanna tell you about
A girl who got better
She sent a letter
To herself
It said
“I love you

And it’s okay
You don’t have to be scared
I got you”
And she replied to herself
She said
“That’s all I’ve ever wanted
Thank you”

The sunshine in her
Smile
Brightened up her mind
She wrapped bandages around herself
Her thoughts had scraped-up knees
Sprained ankles
Shattered ribs
Slits and cuts and
Bruises

With a little time
They healed up
People said
“You’ve changed”

And she smiled
Because she had
She whispered it again
To herself
“I love you”
And she wasn’t lying anymore
The Ocean and the Stars

By Zelda Carrico-Glover

Did I ever tell you the story about the ocean
And the stars
Well
The ocean was quite sad
Quite blue
She thought no one would like the way she smiled
She was afraid of herself
But the stars
The stars thought the ocean was beautiful
They thought she could do anything
But the stars
They were scared to talk to the ocean
Because the stars thought they took up too much
Space
They thought they were too loud and too fast and too much all the time
No one loved the stars for too long
But the ocean
The ocean thought the stars were wonderful
She wanted to reach her fingers up and touch the stars
She wanted just to look at the stars all day
But the ocean was scared to talk to the stars
Because she thought that no one liked her
That she wasn’t worthy
But one day
The stars fell into the ocean
And they got to talking
And the stars told the ocean they thought she was lovely
And the ocean told the stars they were special
So the ocean and the stars fell in love
And everything was how it was meant to be
And the stars spent their time kissing the ocean
And the ocean laughed and smiled again
Fishing for Jasmine

By Rayan Cretan

The silent young woman in bed number six is called Jasmine. So am I, but names are only superficial things, floats bobbing on the surface of the water, and we share deeper connections than that. Which is why she fascinates me—why I spend my off-duty time sitting beside her.

Today is difficult. The ward heaves with patients, and I am kept busy emptying bedpans, filling out forms, changing the clothes of crippled patients. Finally, late in the afternoon, I get a few moments to make coffee, and I take it over to the orange plastic chair beside her bed. I am thankful to be off my feet, glad to be in her company once again.

“Hello, Jasmine,” I say, as if greeting myself.

She does not reply. Jasmine never replies. She is down too deep.

Like me, she has been sea-damaged. I, too, am the daughter of a fisherman, so I cast my words, like fish-hooks, down into her ears, imagine them sinking down through deep, cold, dark water. Down to wherever she may be.

“I have little time today,” I tell her, stroking her hair.

With Jasmine, it is always difficult not to touch. She is that rare thing: a truly beautiful girl. Because of this, people invent reasons to walk by. I catch them looking, drinking her in, feeding on her. They are hungry, hungry for a sight. Wheelchair-pushing porters who slow to a tip-toe when they near her bed. Roaming visitors with greedy eyes. Doctors who stop, draw the thin screen of curtain, and continually re-examine that which does not need examination.

Great beauty is something Jasmine and I do not share. I am glad of it.

“Your father may be here soon,” I say. “Last week he said he would come.”

Jasmine says nothing. Her left eyelid flickers, perhaps.

It is two months since the incident on her father’s fishing boat, since she fell overboard, sank, became entangled in the nets. It was some time before anyone noticed, then there was panic. Her father hauled her back on board and sailed for home. When he finally arrived, he carried ashore what he thought was his daughter’s body.

“Jasmine,” I whisper. I want her to take our baited name. I want her to swallow it.

Fortunately, there was a doctor in the village that morning, a young man visiting relatives. It was he who brought this drowned woman back from the brink, he who told me her story. She opened her eyes, he said, looked up at her father and spoke a single word—then sank again, this time into coma.

Barracuda. That is what Jasmine said.
When her father visits, he touches her hair, kisses her cheek, sits in the orange plastic chair at the side of her bed and holds her hand. Like my own father, he has the big, brown, life-roughened hands of a fisherman. He, too, smells of the sea, and pretends he is a good, simple man.

Jasmine. We share so much; we are almost one.

I remember early mornings, my hair touched to wake me, my father lifting me half-asleep from my bed, carrying me, dropping me into his boat. His voice rough in my ear, his hands rough on my skin. I never wanted to go, but I was just a child. He did as he wished.

I remember saltwater, hot sun, my mother shrinking on the shore. I remember the rocking of the boat, the screams of the gulls.

“Jasmine, you have a life inside you. Can’t you hear it calling?”

Nothing.

The ward door bangs, and I see Jasmine’s father walking towards us, carrying flowers. He smiles at me. Even in death, my own child had my father’s smile, and Jasmine’s will have this man’s. I know it.

He stops by her bed and touches her hair. Something stirs deep inside me. I watch Jasmine’s eyelids, waiting for her to bite.

Brennan Fadel
egg i’d like to forgive you

By Samantha DePinto

egg i’d like to forgive for wanting to kill time and time again

for striking on my first easter and my first birthday

egg i’d like to forgive you for your tempting taste and sweet aroma

you make me live in a box and you’re laughing on the outside

egg i’d like to forgive you but i can’t

Robert Chandler
The State Time

By Hazel Derr

Saturday had gone by in a flash. Everybody had said I did amazing, but I didn’t entirely agree. The state time still lingered above my head, and my only goal was to grab it. I was so close, yet so far. No matter how hard I worked and practiced, it seemed like I would never achieve my goal.

“I have another chance,” I whispered to myself.

Sunday morning was the same as all of the other swim-meet mornings. My mom and dad made a healthy breakfast and packed the bags, and my eight-year-old sister refused to get out of her warm loft bed at 6 a.m. I asked her nicely to get up, and she replied, “I’m too cold, I’m too tired.” I finally dragged her out of her bed, and we quickly got ready. As I was slipping on my flip flops, a weird feeling placed itself in the pit of my stomach. I brushed it away. Nothing could get in my way now. I had worked too hard.

My family piled into our white car and turned on the radio to get my sister and I “psyched up.” A song we had never heard before blasted through the speakers in our car. “Get Ugly!” When my family heard those lyrics, they all started laughing. I laughed along, but my heart wasn’t in it. The butterflies in my stomach were a new feeling. I almost never got nervous for swim meets.

We got to the pool and headed over to the area where we had been the previous day, a little strip of concrete near the white bleachers. My friend Victoria joined us and we set out our colorful, patterned towels. My sister, Victoria, and I checked in with our coach. He greeted us with a grunt that could be translated to “Hello.” Warm-ups were okay. There wasn’t enough room in the indoor pool, so the coaches moved us outside to the 25-degree morning air. I was swimming backstroke in the outdoor warm-up pool as I looked up at the gray clouds. Somehow, those clouds calmed my nerves. Just for a moment I believed that I could get that state time. Then the feeling dispersed like the fog surrounding the pool.

About 45 minutes later, I was standing behind the blue and white diving blocks, getting ready for my first race: the 100 individual medley. I had swum this event many times before, but that didn’t mean I liked it. The only thing running through my head in the moments leading up to that race was “get a state time, get a state time.” The swim official announced the race: “Event 5, Heat 14. Swimmers, step up.” The rest of that race was a blur, but from the moment I touched the wall I knew it just wasn’t good enough. This happened on repeat. I got the same time I had before on the 50 freestyle.
The time came that I only had one race left. My last chance to get a state time. The pressure was almost too much for me, but I sucked it up. The rest of the day went by, and I found myself standing behind the blocks for my last event. My race was announced, and I stepped up.

Beep! I flung myself off the diving block into the clear blue water. All thoughts disappeared from my brain. My body knew what to do. Every time I popped up for a breath, I heard the support and love pouring out of my family and friends. Even my coach, I could hear, was yelling and cheering for me. I poured all of my strength and energy into my finish, into hitting that shiny black touch pad. Before I knew it, the race was over. I almost didn’t look up at the scoreboard for my time. Almost. But I did, and I nearly screamed. I was exhausted and soaking wet, and my head hurt from my swim cap, but I didn’t care. My only goal, my only hope, my only dream.

Breathlessly, I heaved myself out of the water. My muscles stung. I closed my eyes and was embraced by my mom’s arms. She whispered almost like she didn’t believe it, “I am so proud of you.” That was my confirmation. I had done it. All of my weariness dropped off of me in a flash. I jumped up and down and let out a small scream. People looked at me like I was crazy, but I didn’t care.

Finally, after all of the worrying and sadness, all of the tears, and hard practices, it all paid off. I had gotten a state time.
The Third-Floor Bedroom

By Ethan DeWeese

The trees swayed and bent in the wind. Little Lucy, only six years old at the time, snuggled under her warm blankets and tried to shield herself from the sound of thunder and wind. Her window jiggled in its frame, threatening to pop off and shatter on the ground. The wind rustled her family’s wheat crops and the threatened to take the trees. It blew through the small crack under the ancient frame and all throughout her room, filling it with cold air and twisting her curtains. Then, it stopped. Her curtains returned to their normal position, and soon there was only silence, punctuated by the sound of the old, rickety, heater under her window.

Lucy’s heart slowed down and her fear diminished; she peeked over the blanket to see her normal room filled with the light of her Sesame Street nightlight, the abc’s forever battling the darkness trying to engulf her room. She thought she saw a tall, lean figure out of the corner of her eye. She quickly turned her head to investigate, but was greeted with the regular sight of the peeling white paint on her door. It must have been her imagination. She lowered her head and closed her eyes. Her eyelids became heavy, and she slowly drifted to sleep.

Bang! Young Lucy jolted up and put her teddy bear in front of her as protection. She could not see anything, for her nightlight was out. She grabbed the flashlight off of her dresser, clicked it on, and scanned her room. Below the outlet holding the colorful device was a pile of glass. How could the bulb have shattered? Before she could muster up the courage to get her parents, the six-year-old’s window jolted open. Her scream was masked by a loud, ominous, ring, like a dog whistle made only for her. Her parents did not wake, nor did she go to get them.

Lucy did not need them to repair her nightlight, for there was a light outside her window, an enormous spotlight in the sky aimed toward the ground, illuminating a furry white puppy. The puppy danced around, chasing its own tail and barking. It was beckoning to her, calling her to come down and play with it. Being the little girl she was, Lucy enjoyed this and giggled at the furry pet. She was young and still learning, so she did not notice that the dog looked a little off. You would have to look close, and if you did, you would see that the creature, pretending to be this cute little plaything, had not yet mastered the art of shapeshifting. The dog was asymmetrical, and its fur looked like thick spaghetti noodles. Lucy did not see this though, as she put on her pink bunny slippers to match her even brighter pink nightgown and climbed through the window onto the tree overlooking her family’s small farm. She was very experienced at these things, like a monkey in human form. Well, not really a monkey; she could not actually change form like the creature below her.

She jumped from the lowest branch to the ground, splashing mud on her night clothes.
“Come here puppy,” she laughed. The “puppy” barked, and approached her. It licked her hand, but its tongue felt spongy and gooey. Before she could pet it, it jumped away, and began to run into the field. Its noodley fur glistened in the light. The light! She forgot about the light! She looked up and was blinded, the white rays hurt her eyes. She thought, God must have sent me this puppy, for he is illuminating me with the light of Heaven. She followed the puppy into the field; it looked back and barked. She giggled again. How fun, she thought. The light followed them. Then, almost like clockwork, the puppy stopped moving. It stood still, looking at her through its black eyes.

“Are you okay, puppy?” she asked, knowing that it could not respond. It did though, but not using the puppy’s mouth. In an extraterrestrial language, it stated the following: “Please remain calm and still standing. Prepare for departure.”

Ethan Novakoski
Lucy screamed, for to her it had sounded like a bunch of beeps and weird noises. She tried to run, but was almost instantly brought up in the air. She hollered even louder as she floated toward the light. “Mommy, Daddy. Help!”

Her shouts were again masked by the same menacing noises that made her ears ring. There was nothing she could do now. She had fallen for the creature’s plan. She was an easy target for them, as were the other eleven children they had collected. She was carried up to the source of the light. The ship’s ringing continuing to cover her cries for help. The light shut off. The puppy was now gone, and the same dark figure that had hid in the corner of her room ran from the house, through the wheat field and into the forest, bound for another sleeping child. The wind started again, the crops swayed, dancing to its unknown song. Her parents remained fast asleep, as if nothing had happened, as if their beloved daughter were still in the room next to them.

They awoke the next morning, and she was gone. They made a grave and buried a coffin out back.

Life went on. Years passed. They tried for another kid, with no success. They woke up every morning, went to work, and drove home to watch TV. One day, Lucy’s mom woke up, walked down the old wooden stairs, and went to get the paper from the front porch. She was shocked to find her daughter’s pink nightgown there, nicely folded, and a slowly decomposing pile of skin.

Ruby Dean
Leggings

By Anne Dynes

The leggings: green, black, blue
They will find you
Find you with their leggy legginess
They were born for a leg
They will die for a leg
They have known nothing but leg
Some legs so hot you fry an egg
Some legs so great you don’t need arms
Some legs so bad they fall apart
At night the leggings walk around
And they sure as Hell don’t make a sound
They creep and crawl into your hair
Making sure you don’t go anywhere
But then they take you by your hair
And drag you, screaming, to their lair
You will know the elegance
Of these halfway pants
They know your weaknesses, inside and out
And they know that you won’t shout.
But as they start chanting,
Your legs, they start dancing.
Cursed with voodoo magic
Your leggings you wore to bed wreak havoc.
Dancing, dancing, till you out you cry
Because you know that you will die.
Following an ancient rhythm
Syncing up to the leggings’ hymns.
As the leggings circle you, round and round
The earth opens up under you, pulling you down.
You fall, trying to cry out in haste,
But your mouth feels like it’s filled with paste.
With a shock, you realize you are dead,
Never to be seen again.

Helena Guerrero-Sullivan
Ode To a Pencil

By Lindsay Faust

Pencil, you are my soul;
I chew on your eraser
And scrape off your paint—
I grip you with rapture.
You do not follow my dreams
Or ideas;
Instead, I follow you.
I travel in your footsteps
Of ambition and potential.
At twilight, I tiptoe after you
In your shimmering silver tracks.

You, pencil
Are my nourishment,
My sustenance,
The very fabric of my being.
When I come in from the cold of winter,
Frozen and starved,
You are like a hot meal awaiting me.
I can drink from your words
And imagination.

You vanquish those pens and crayons,
For you are dressed
So humbly
In your honest yellow tunic,
While they are showy and superficial—
Nothing but hollow gimmicks.
You have no waxy pigment,
No permanent ink,
No fluorescent, neon hues.
Unlike them
You do not seek attention
Nor endeavor to impress the countless fingers
You rest in.
You are simply looking for
The caress of that one hand
You can call home for life.

As my palms close around you, pencil,
The two of us merging into a single shape,
I feel I will never
Let you go.
I trust you,
Believe in you,
And someday, someday...
You will become just a nub
That I will scrape into dust,
Though your legacy will be everlasting;
A memory I will embrace as the icy enchantment of winter
Slowly melts away,
And patches of purple crocuses
Appear in the snow.

AJ Brazile
Sometimes Harley feels as if the world has a pulse. The Earth's heartbeat working into her like a fine machine. The tweet of the birds, scuttling sounds of the animals, just like the ticking sounds of clockwork. She sits in a field sometimes, pants layered with dried mud from playing, splatters of it covering her cheeks like freckles. Her fingers curl delicately around soft blades of grass, her nails only lightly scraping against the surface of the dirt that layers the ground. Harley's eyes are closed, and she's enjoying the moment, yet she has a perfect picture of everything that surrounds her.

To her left, there's a heavy stream of water rushing along, splashing up against the side of the bank every time a gust of wind happens by. The whispers of the rocks as the ripples run over them flood her ears, and if she were able to understand them, she would bet that they had years worth of secrets to share with her—but only her.

Just within her fingers' reach is a patch of daffodils. Every winter they wilted there, and every spring they grew again. She suspects that they held some sort of life magic that she would be able to obtain when she got to the age of wilting. Harley ran her fingers along the petals as delicately as she could, memorizing the touch, as if it would be lost forever if she didn't. She then ran a hand through the cascading curls of her hair, trying to memorize every knot and tangle, every smooth spot, as she had just done with the flower. Sometimes she heard people say her hair had to be a rat's nest, but she begged to differ. She felt as if it could be compared to clouds, or something just as big and miraculous. She didn't believe in their ridicule.

Finally, a few feet behind her, is a stump. She didn't have the privilege of seeing the actual tree when it was big and tall, but she did get the honor of sitting there whenever she pleased. Even though it was hardly bigger than she was (and she was no more than five feet, mind you), she liked to think of it as a second home. There she read her books and scribbled down her thoughts, and even brought her friends there. Not to harm it, no, not even to show it off. Just to sit, and appreciate what she had around her.

Harley's mother was another figure that she had remembered well. She could reach her hands up to her cheeks, run her fingers through her stiff hair, gently brush her thumbs along the sags under her eyes, and instantly know who she was feeling. She had grown this ability from years of wanting to be able to appreciate the simple yet complex textures of everything in her home. The roughness of her mother's working hands, the gentleness of her lips against her forehead as she kissed her goodnight, even the way her frail shoulders shook when she was wrought with grief. Her mother was like a well-known book. She was able to know each crease,
each blotch of ink, each word. Among other things in her home too, of course. But her mother was her favorite.

Harley opened her eyes, a grin spreading across her face, pale sight-deprived eyes moving towards the direction of where she assumed the sun to be. After all, she could feel its rays gently lay across her dark cheeks.

Yes, she could memorize every sound, every smell, every feeling that was in this small bit of field. Yet she could not see it anymore. Not a single thing.
Dear Paris,

You may not be my home, or even in my own country, but I sometimes feel a stronger connection to you than anywhere else. Some call you the city of love or the city of light, but I think you’re much more than that. You’re the people sitting outside street cafes in the early morning, newspapers spread out upon glass tables. You’re the children floating paper sail boats across the turquoise colored pond at the Luxembourg Gardens, the homeless man on the corner begging for money with a rattling, empty tuna can.

You’re the vast crowds of tourists gathered outside the Notre-Dame Cathedral, which I have now learned to never visit on the weekends. You’re the paintings and sculptures that live inside the maze of halls at the Louvre, the people pushing to the front of the crowd to see the Mona Lisa, which—by the way—is not as big as I imagined it might be. You’re the dozens of languages echoing down narrow cobblestone streets, red, blue, green, white spray paint layering the walls, spelling out words that I don’t recognize.

I was scared by the old woman wearing the billowy, maroon colored tunic on the street who yelled: “Où suis-je? Où suis-je?” over and over again as I passed by. I did not understand, and my mother later explained to me that she was only lost and asking for directions. In the most touristy parts of town, vendors line the sidewalks, their eyes bloodshot and tired-looking from sitting under the sun all day. My mother has told me dozens of times never to approach these people, because they’ll steal anything off of you worth money. I’m not sure if I believe it. You taught me!
that there is always more to a place than what people see on the surface. Visiting that ancient-looking bakery tucked away behind the tall, modern buildings was truthfully more enjoyable than riding the crowded elevator to the top of the Eiffel tower.

Then something happened that changed everything. The throngs of easygoing, joyful people disappeared, only to be replaced by mourning, sorrow and terror. The steady whisper of voices was replaced by the hollow bang of gunfire. They locked you up, and men marched down your deserted streets with guns on their shoulders. The lights turned off in the City of Light, and love was the only thing holding some people together. I hope to see you one day soon, Paris, and maybe things will be better then.

Until I see you again,

Riley Hoy
The Scavengers

By Eli Jones

The weakness of men has long festered in the minds of the learned, but none thought that it would come to this. It seems as if the universe has taken hold upon the greedy, increased their wants tenfold, and seized the honest and kind, twisting them until unrecognizable. The world’s ideals have sunken into a dark past in which all the other things forgotten and ignored have retreated and wallowed. The trash litters the ground like so many windows into the world’s suffering. The inevitable truth is upon us, and we don’t want to accept it.

Sometimes, I walk down the dilapidated street and wonder what life might be like if the capitalist warmongers just left the rest of us alone. I might stare at a rusty can and contemplate the wonderful possibilities. Once, I climbed a mound of trash and just looked at the miles and miles of smog and debris. Occasionally a lone speck would move among the still sea of remnants, a raccoon or a dog, or even a fellow human. Because that’s what we are, scavengers, like raccoons and dogs. Nothing else.

Home isn’t really a concept anymore. It’s more like… temporary shelter. I might be the only person on what’s left of the Earth in a permanent residence. I used to hear people say “home is where the heart is.” They don’t say that anymore. If it were true, we’d all be living in our memories, and I don’t want to go in there. I might feel different if I had any happy memories. But I don’t. And won’t.

Mostly, I keep myself sane, if I can be called sane. If anybody can be called sane at this point. And if not insane, then just depressed. That’s what I am. Depressed. The human mind easily falls prey to the ails and lures of power and prestige, but the higher they are, the harder they fall.

Just the other day I decided to explore the detritus. I found rubble and cans, wrappers and metal, rubber, plastic, anything and everything. I hiked up a mound, but I didn’t stop to look. I slid down the pile, and actually had a little fun. But then my thigh got stabbed by a rusty fork. Because nothing, and I mean nothing, comes without a price.

Beans. I eat beans, straight from the can, while some aristocrat enjoys the fine flavors of an extinct animal’s flesh, with some salad and wine. All my beans come with is bitterness and hate. Whoopee, meal time.

A lot of people before said that we could persevere, survive, repopulate, and clean up. That didn’t happen. No societies, no persevering, no surviving or repopulating. None of it happened. We, the human race, are being swept into an unforgiving river of extinction and nothing.
The rotting rubbish smells like a raccoon died in a dead whale. It looks like a massive plain or ocean that stretches as far as the eye can see. The trash feels like one big machine that broke down and rusted, but if you close your eyes, you can imagine it's just a large, friendly robot that gives out free gangrene. If you just sit and listen, the whole cacophony of shouts and barks and yelps and trash sliding down hills sounds like a full cantina, bursting with joy. Oh, and dying dogs.

It's all akin to a fish out of water. We gasp for air and survival and flail around, knowing we'll die in the end. It's sad really. Like we're wasting something. You could say it's like a crocodile came and ate the fish. It's like the crocodile then was dismembered by a psycho with a chainsaw.

But I digress, I say we stick to the subject at hand, which is the despair of the world. That, granted, is a depressing subject, but the despair of the world is really all there is to talk about. I'm running out of things to say, and the things I still have to say should not be uttered aloud, end of the world or not. But then, are we not weak in body and mind? Are we not victims, but perpetrators? Nobody seems to understand how little we have left. While any man can just blame the governments, we are at fault too, for what is life without faults? Truly, what is death even mean to us anymore? Punishment, or liberation?
Chapter One: How My Parents Disowned Me

I am finally in trade school. I’ve already decided that I am going to be the best plumber there ever was. It’s my first day, and I’m pretty nervous, my friends (the few of them that I have) assured me that everything would be fine, but I am worried that I have made the wrong decision.

My parents are both literally rocket scientists. They really wanted me to be a scientist too, but I was never into that kind of stuff. For me, plumbing was the absolute coolest field there was.

When I told my parents that I wanted to go plumbing trade school, not science college, they basically disowned me.

Plumberson’s University was the only trade school I could afford without my parents.

Chapter Two: Sandy Beach, Washington

When I had first checked out the website, I thought it was actually on a sandy beach. That, apparently, was too good to be true. Upon further investigation I discovered that it was actually a cold, stormy town far from the coast. It was named for its founder, Sandy Beach, which I think is the most unfortunate name ever.

I decided that I still wanted to go to Plumberson’s, so I electronically bought a bus pass to Sandy Beach, Washington.

Chapter Three: My First Day

My first day was great.

My first class was the art of toilet fixing. It was so fun; I even got to plunge a toilet.

My second class was sink unclogging. The activity in that class was guessing while blindfolded what was clogging a sink. My sink was clogged with hair, and I guessed it on the first try.

Plumberson’s lunch was delicious.

My third class was pipe fixing. I got to use a welding tool to close a pipe.
When I walked into my last of the day, drain fixing, I was excited. My first thought about the teacher was, man, he is ugly, but then he turned around. I saw his hair, and I was instantly in love.

I took my seat and waited for class to begin.

The teacher began class by introducing himself as Mr. Smith.

During next few weeks, I found it very hard to focus in drain fixing. My grade dropped steadily. I knew I would have to take this class again next year if I flunked, and I couldn’t afford that.

Mr. Smith got quite frustrated with me as I didn’t do much in class, opting to complete most work in my small, two-room apartment. His amazing hair made it too distracting to get anything done.

His class was actually quite fun, and by the fifth week, I was a little better at focusing.

I was also climbing the ladder in my other classes, too. Soon, I was top in all my classes except for drain fixing.

Chapter Four: The Biggest Surprise

One day during the sixth week, I walked into drain fixing, and took my seat.

Mr. Smith started with the normal daily pop quiz on what had done the previous day, which I miraculously aced.

Then we went on to the activity for the day. He got out the easily broken drain that we used for practice. The drain had a big crack in it. And his beautiful hair got stuck in the crack! He shrugged, like it was no big deal, put his hands on his scalp, and pulled off ... a wig?

Then Mr. Smith pulled his wig out of the drain, (he was bald!) and continued the class.

I was awestruck. Since his hair was fake, I didn’t really like him any more.

Two months after the wig incident, I was top in that class, too.
What She Took with Her

By Sam Kahn

The box of chocolates I got her for Valentine’s Day, and only three shirts. Three shirts
That would not get her very far, and a skirt.
Just one, and I wish I had been with her
To plan out her suitcase.
But if I had known, she wouldn’t have left.
She took a bottle of shampoo and no conditioner
And some bobby pins. I know because when I woke up
And went to do my hair, there were only five.
She took a package of microwave burritos
She took eighteen dollars and fifty cents
She took my favorite sweater.

What She Left Behind

She left the dog, which was good.
I would have missed the dog.
She left her favorite movie.
She left her diary, which I didn’t read.
She left a note that broke my heart.
And she left me.

Arlyss West
Campone

By Rachel Kerr

Hot wind beats at my hair, lifting strands and swirling them like ink spilled in water. I lift my water bottle, letting the last drops trickle down my throat. I glance back at my hometown of Campone, now in the distance. Far from my body, like a memory, still there, always in the background, running, working, but never noticed. I absent-mindedly run my fingers through my unkempt hair, feeling layers of dirt and grime coat my fingertips. With day-after-day of working with oily, greasy parts and scrambling through dusty paths, I can’t be bothered to wash my hair. I notice a large pile of metal and kneel down. Scrap metal and bits of machinery left over from the Mechanical Age are everywhere when you travel out a few miles from Campone. I am a scavenger, a person who hunts for metal scraps and parts. If you can find anything valuable, you can trade it at Dariel’s shop for food, clothing, and medicine. Picking through the pile of nuts and bolts on the ground, I weigh a few crumbling pieces with my hands. Nothing worth keeping. I kick through the dust and trudge onward.

The parched wheat field to my left sways in the early summer breeze, while the cool woods to my right provide precious shade. I move closer to the trees, taking a moment to catch my breath before looking back to the ground to renew my search for valuable objects. I kneel down again, clutching my old, tattered satchel, the only reminder of the family I once had. They are gone now, just a whisper lost in the wind, a faded photograph imprinted in my heart. Lost in a world of metal and machines, my mind empties, my hands working on autopilot, collecting, sorting, tossing aside anything worthless to me. I calculate the estimated value of each object in my mind, weighing the worth, loss, gain, then it’s on to the next scrap. Engines: valuable; sheet metal: not so much. Numbers, figures, parts whirling around my head, each finding their niche. A loud crash from within the trees brings me back to my senses. I leap up like a singed cat and shriek. I calm myself before creeping tentatively into the woods, diving and ducking behind trees each time I hear a sound. I peer around a particularly thick oak, my eager eyes soaking up the out-of-place commotion.

I watch as a thin, tall man in a crisp black suit steps out of a buzzing hover car. A real hover car! I let out a small gasp of amazement as my eyes spark. I have never seen a real, three-dimensional hover car before. The grass below the hover car blows around erratically, like a small bird beating against the bars of its cage.

I watch as the man looks around for a brief moment, as if waiting for something, or someone. After some time, no one having appeared, he lifts his arm and mutters something into the folds of his suit sleeve.
A few minutes later, I hear a rustle in the bushes, and another man appears, his face and body still half hidden by shadows. I peer closer, but still can’t make out his features. Who are these men?

“Ah! there you are,” the first man snaps. “You weren’t followed, were you?”

“Always so uptight, are we? But no, I am here alone. Good God, I haven’t seen you in...Great Scotts 15 years!” the second man exclaims. “Good day, Barney, old chap.”

“Afraid not, Philip,” the first man, Barney, replies. “Bad news at headquarters.”

“What? Not those blasted diggers again!?” Philip predicts, a joking smile twitching at the corners of his mouth.

“No. Worse,” Barney discloses, a solemn expression on his face. “A rebellion in one of the camps!”

“What?” Philip snaps sharply, his amicable, joking demeanor and slight lilt suddenly dissipated, like a mask slipped off and tossed aside. “Not...this camp?”

“No.” Barney says.

Wait. I’ve heard this stern, no-nonsense voice before. Philip steps out of the shadows, and his eyes narrow as he spots me.

Sweet mother of God…

Philip is the leader of Campone.

I run. The burnt wheat slaps at my knees, hands, and face, cutting into my skin. I double, no, quadruple, my pace from what it was on the way there until I trip and stumble, but I get up and keep running, too scared to stop, not understanding what I have seen and heard. As I run, my tired mind tries to process what I have learned. I don’t know for sure what any of these things are. I only know rumors, whispers from people hidden in the shadows. I’ve heard rumors of diggers, people who had randomly gone insane, digging holes and burying themselves alive. But camps? There are stories. Stories of camps. Secret stories, divulged in the darkness of a tent in the town fair. Stories of people, trapped without knowing it, surrounded by fences, never leaving, no one coming. What did President Jones, or Philip, as you know him, mean when he said “this camp”? Who is this man, Barney? Why would people rebel? And against what?

Suddenly, the life I lead seems so pointless, so foolish, so small and insignificant. Tears sting my cheeks as they slide down to the tip of my nose. As my foot slams into a root, and I realize that I am too tired to catch myself, I sprawl onto the ground exhausted. I just sit there, maybe for hours, maybe for just a few minutes. I don’t know. My eyes skim the fields, and I breathe a sigh of relief as I confirm that I wasn’t followed. My muscles are searing, and my bones ache. My chest is heaving like a wave, rising and falling with the tides. Slowly, I rise, and begin the short walk to my town.
A sense of apprehension settles onto me like a second skin as I approach the crumbling shack. I finger the small engine in my satchel, letting the cool metal slide over my skin, soothing my nerves. I push aside my fears as I sweep open the makeshift door, consisting of a battered cloth dangling off a pole.

As I enter Dariel’s hut, I dig my nails into my palms, flick my eyes from side to side, and take a cautious step forward. A thick smoke hangs in the air, curling from fat mens’ pipes like dancers and billowing into dense clouds of sickly scented fog. The hazel-colored wood floor, now dusty-brown from dirt, shifts under my feet. Glancing around the room, I take in the usual scattered buckets containing sorted bits and pieces, the tables with chairs being passed back and forth like frisbees. I look around and don’t see Dariel, but I do notice several men in dark suits conversing quietly in the corner. I sneak toward them, hoping to catch a few words of their conversation. Squeak! A loud noise discharges from a misplaced step, causing me to jump back. One man lets out a shout as he spins around, and his eyes settle on me. His hand slides to a holster on his back. I feel a sharp sting above my knee, and the world goes black.

I sit up suddenly and open my eyes, letting color flow back into the world like oil paint on a blank canvas. I blink a few times and clear my eyes, taking in my surroundings. My head feels like thousands of drums are beating in quick succession, tiny hammers battering my skull. I reach down and pull a small dart out of my thigh. A tranquilizer dart.

I look around and realize that I am in a small storage room of some sort. I stand up, pushing aside the blanket that was haphazardly tossed on me. I blink confusedly as I try to remember what happened.

I collapse on the small cot dizzily as it all rushes back to me, like a strong wave, knocking me backwards. I push myself up and look around. The room is lined with metal, big sheets bolted together at the edges. I brush my fingers along the panelling, looking for a weakness. How did they get me in here?

My experienced fingers catch on a ridge of raised metal. I slide my hands around the perimeter of the panel. The bolts are drilled in from the other side, and slightly warm to the touch. So I haven’t been in here for long. Or at least, I haven’t been drilled in here for long. Looping my fingers underneath the panel, I try pry it open. It won’t budge. I kick it. Still no use. I punch, batter, pry, and even shout at the sheet, but the panel remain solid. I am sure that this is the only entrance. I collapse on the bed in defeat.

Suddenly, the floor disappears from under me, and I am falling.

I hit the ground with a thud, and my body screams in pain. I think I may have broken an ankle. Looking upward, I watch as the hover car that dropped me speeds away, now fading off into the distance. I am surrounded as far as I can see by tall grass, yellowing as it tapers off into
fine clumps of seeds. A touch of dusk colors the valley, making the whole place glow peacefully. It is as though time has no effect here, and this fleeting moment, where the sky touches the Earth, will last forever, as though trapped in a glass bottle.
A Letter
By Ada Kolze

Dear Airstream,

You were the majority of my summers, my happy childhood memories. When we approached danger with you it was thrilling. With your shiny, smooth, curvy shape and blue line running down the side, you looked like fun; you gave vacation a meaning. Your sofa bed, table bed with a navy green, blue and grey pattern. The small kitchen with the black stove top, oven, sink and fake wood cupboards. The master bed and tiny bathroom, shower and sink. And the tiny heater to cluster around after a cold outing. Everything that I wanted to have for camping you had.

You hosted a family of five. There was one tall man with a beard sometimes and sometimes not, always wearing a dark plaid button down. One woman, short brown hair, bustling around the kitchen. A son, who had grown up in your eyes, his blond hair turning darker, but always sleeping in. Twins, with longer hair by the years, darting around to places outside, staying up late by the campfire. And then there was the dog, the white puffball, who had gotten hair on your carpets, always adored, getting a little more chubby and much more hungry over the years, always tired at the end of the day. He made a thud each time he plopped himself down each day. This family you hosted with open arms.

When you roll down the highway, you are mostly silent. But you'll occasionally bump or squeak, groaning as you're pulled along. Once we stop, music's playing, either some blue jazz, news, or any music from the 1960’s to the 1990’s, but the music never stops coming. In the morning, you creak as someone walks, but it’s a light sound.

I have so many memories from you. There was one time we strung colorful balls of light around you, they reflected against your shiny metal, like a party without the noise. Or when we rolled out your blue cover to hide from the pestering sun. We’ve lived in you for two weeks, and it wasn’t bad at all. And I loved the time when we got to ride in you while you were moving, no matter how short that time was.

However, there are things about you that make me cringe or sigh. There was the effort into having you. We had to dump out all your waste and hook you up, pay for the place where you were staying. But the saddest thing wasn’t your fault. It was a sad day when I found out you were going to be sold. I went and mourned for you, I said they couldn’t do this, I yelled and protested, but they were set on selling you, taking memories that I hadn’t made yet away, my voice was lost, and they didn’t listen to it anyway. You were gone by summer.
You taught me things, I will remember. I learned how to live outside of home from you. To endure living away from everything, including technology. I was taken on long hikes, I learned to endure them, perhaps even enjoy them, and miss all the exciting, worn-down, overgrown ones that we didn’t go on. You even gave me the chance to see, if you want to eat sweet camping, you have to eat healthy at home. I learned to enjoy everything in the present, for you never know when something will be taken away from you. Thank you, for everything.

Sincerely, Ada.
Everyday Heroes

By Ada Kolze

“With a dog, loneliness is abandoned, happiness is faithful, and lessons are learned,” that was a famous quote by Ada Kolze. Not really, but it is true. My dog has brought me happiness, been there for me, and taught me things. So that quote was based on my dog, Ivan.

Ivan is a samoyed. Translation: he is big, white and fluffy. Samoyeds are from Russia. If they get any kind of dirt on them, once it dries, it falls off. So you never have to give Samoyeds a bath. With round tails that sit on their rear end, a pink tongue always hanging out of their mouths on their friendly faces, it’s impossible to not dub them “cute.” Especially since Ivan is chubby. Ivan lives with a family of five. One set of girl twins. One older brother, one mom, and one dad. He’s the only dog. But I think he doesn’t mind.

Ever since we’ve had Ivan, about four years, he’s always made you happy. Even if he ate your favorite stuffed-animal. If he does happen to eat something, he gives you this look like he’s saying, “I’m so so sorry for eating that.” Then it’s forgotten. If you have an injury, he’ll try to lick it. If you’re sad, he’ll find you. And if you’re really just not caring, he’ll make you happy anyway, by being happy himself. And, being scientifically proven, happiness gives you a longer life. And he’s the best to confide in, he always listens and he’ll never tell, ever. So yeah, he’s about 80 percent of my happiness, and about 20 percent of my learning.

I know, I know. You’re thinking, “Your dog, teaching you? Hahahaha.” Don’t be that person. I’ve learned a lot from Ivan. Because Ivan has Addison’s Disease, we give him medicine to help him. That medicine makes him feel like he’s starving, so he’s developed the technique of begging. From begging, he has learned patience, and in that way, he helped me develop patience. He also never gives up hope that you are going to give him food, in that way he taught me perseverance. So Ivan has taught me things. But those two things are much smaller compared to the other impact on my life he has.

No, that impact is not love. I do love Ivan, but I was thinking of being there for me. I’ve heard many times that feeling lonely is terrible, horrible and a variety of other things. With Ivan, I don’t feel lonely, because he’s always there. (It’s not like he can just leave anyways.) And, as a sixth grader, I haven’t been through any life traumas. But middle school is stressful, it’s good to have a dog to cuddle with after a long day. Especially a fluffy one. So Ivan helps me in that way too.

Ivan has inspired me in many ways. From big to small. Ivan has inspired me to not only make other people happy and be happy. Not only to sketch him. Not only teaching me, but also being there for someone. And all of those amazing things I will remember and try to carry on.
So, if you’re a dog owner, I hope you know realize how important your dog is. Even if not, you might want a dog now. Ivan has taken a big impact in my life, a good impact. I will always remember him and love him for it; he is my hero.
Copen Blue

By Amber McConnell

[cinderella]

Her gown was that color.
Her gown, falling like a rushing river to her feet.
In a waterfall of silk or whatever it was that she wore so elegantly.
She danced all night underneath the waning moon, pale in the dark, starry sky.
And when morning came, she fled, her gown rushing out from behind her.
The sun rose slowly, and her magnificent dress faded to the girl’s rags she had worn before.
She swore not to go back,
She did anyway, against better judgment.
And she danced all night again, fleeing in the morning time.
[sea imagery] deep from the soul

By Amber McConnell

I love the smell of the ocean.
Salt and campfire and freedom
The crashing, grey waves.
The sparkling blue view from above,
The forest of green trees leading up to the beach
and dispersing.
The sun shining.
I love the sounds,
laughter on the shore, thunder in the sea.
I love the stories,
swashbuckling pirates,
historical events ending in tragedy
(okay, maybe I don’t love those).
I love fires at night,
when the sky is dark,
after the flaming sun has slipped under the horizon.
And the only light is the shining, pale moon above our heads
and the crackling, orange flames reaching for the night sky.
I love being there.
I hate leaving.
Anxiety

By Kendall McKone

Anxiety is like living in constant fear.
Fear that you will mess up or make a mistake,
Or get yelled at.
Yelling is the worst thing to do.
Because if they do, you shrivel up.
You shrivel up like a wilting flower, and you constantly worry.
You never raise your hand in class.
You have the never-ending fear of being wrong.
What, you have to present something?
You shake.
You shake like you have your own personal earthquake.
Your knees shake so hard you almost collapse.
What if you stutter?
What if they can’t hear you?
What if...
What if.
You’re forced to put that all behind you for the time being.
But Hell, that’s hard.
You pray to God that everything will go okay.
Okay...?
That is all you need... Okay.
You push through each day, trying to make as few mistakes as possible.
You do that each and every day.
Just for it to start all over again.
Telling someone with anxiety to just “stop worrying”...
Is like telling someone stepping on glass not to cut their feet.
You can’t just “stop worrying.”
You can’t just turn off anxiety.
There isn’t some sort of on/off switch.
If there was...
There’s no way in Hell you would miss that.
But it always hangs over you like a cloud.
No matter how ready you are.
In the back of your mind, you still think about what could go wrong.
Being given a test is absolutely terrifying.
It’s like a nightmare.
No matter how hard you study.
No matter how much you prepare yourself for this.
Your mind just goes blank.
You know you’re smart.
You’re always told that you are smart.
You just don’t know the answer.
You sit there thinking
I know this
I know this
I know this
But you are still unable to answer.
You are scared to move on.
You want to get it done.
You can’t just leave it completely undone.
You didn’t used to be this way.
You used to be that outgoing little kid.
The one who loved everyone and everything.
What happened to that?
What happened to always jumping up when asked for a volunteer?
Or when you even had the slightest idea of the answer?
What happened to that you?
Did it just disappear?
Because that you isn’t here anymore.
Who knows if that you will ever return?
You shouldn’t get your hopes up.
So you won’t.
You don’t.
You want to get better, you really do.
But it doesn’t always work like that.
You try to put yourself out there when you aren’t too afraid.
But you are afraid a lot.
You usually seem to be able to find a way to be afraid.
What is there to be afraid about?
That’s the thing.
You don’t know.
There is just always something.
Something to block your way.
Something to keep you from getting past.
But something is just an obstacle that you have to get around.
Over.
Under.
Around.
Just pick something.
But what if the one you pick is wrong?
What if you just get stuck deeper in than when you started?
What if you end up in some sort of bottomless pit?
There is no way for you to know.
You’re just going to have to figure it out when you get there.
Because you have to do something.
Go somewhere.
You can’t just stay where you are forever.
You don’t want to stay where you are forever.
You wouldn’t get anywhere.
In life.
In general.
You just can’t.
You have always wanted to be the person to change the world.
But you can’t do that if you hide behind your own barrier.
You want to be able to change.
The world, yourself...
You need to do something.
You want to be remembered.
You can be remembered.
You will be remembered.
You are determined.
You need to do your best to knock down these walls.
You need to try.
These walls and barriers are no excuse.
You know that.
But you don’t always have the choice.  
It isn’t as easy as you would think.  
You don’t usually have the choice just to completely change who you are.  
Because life doesn’t work that way, no matter how much you wish it did.  
It doesn’t.  
You know that.  
You know that.  
You know how you are.  
You know you best.  
You know what you are like.  
So don’t let people try to change you.  
If you want to get past this you have to try.  
You need to try.  
Try to change yourself.  
Learn how to help yourself before others try to help you.  
I know it seems hard now.  
Just think about how great it would feel to get past all of this.  
How awesome it would feel.  
Think about how accomplished you would feel.  
You.  
You could do that.  
You can do that.  
You will do that.  
Now is the time to mess up.  
Mess up and learn from your mistakes.  
Now.  
I know you’re scared.  
But you can do it.  
As each day passes, you’re getting closer and closer to too late.  
That needs to change.  
As each day passes, you should be getting closer to success.  
That’s what you want, isn’t it?  
Well, you don’t know exactly what you want.  
You just want it to be different.  
You want it to be better.  
God, if only you weren’t terrified of answering a question in class.
Or asking a teacher for help.
You need to be able to ask for help.
If you want to get better you have to be able to talk to people.
Because this is fixable.
As long as you’re willing to talk to people.
It will change.
It has to change.
But this question stands.
Who are you really?
Well..
You are me.
I need to be able to talk to people.
I need to be able to ask for help.
I need to do these things.
I.
I..
I...
I can do it.
And I will.
You just watch me.

Ruby Mae Zapf-Geller
Road Trip
By Sofie Morris

It was a nearly unbearably hot day. Even so, it was unusual to see smoke lifting of the surface of the road. I saw the smoke first. The middle-aged women in the car were chatting away and too distracted to notice.

The smoke was finally acknowledged when Charlie, being Charlie, said, “Golly Gee, Mom. The car’s on fire!”

This prompted Nancy to tell Charlie to use his inside voice, but my mom turned her head. Out of her mouth came, “Oh, my God.” We all watched my mom intently as she continued, intently, “Okay, guys, we’re pulling over.”

In the summer of 2015, my family took a trip to Bend to see friends. The trip was fine, but that is not the point of this story. On the drive home, our car was packed to the max. My dad had left early and was not with us. The driver’s seat was occupied by my mom, who was driving, and Nancy, Toby and Charlie’s mom, who was slouched in the passenger seat. Charlie sat in the back seat on the right, with Toby on the left. Our minivan’s optional third row was on the verge of exploding. Jack, or the Little Bro, slept on the far left. Becky, Mom’s friend, sat in the middle and I took refuge on the far right. Suitcases and bags were stuffed in every nook and cranny of the overcrowded car.

Old Edna, our minivan, took a sharp turn that caused the beings in the car to tilt and hit each other like bowling pins. Once parked, we exited the car out of the two working doors. Old Edna moaned and cried under the weight of her curious passengers.

“What happened?” asked my brother who was still in a daze from the nap he was taking. “Are we home? Did our house catch on fire? Is Noodle okay?”

“Listen,” said Nancy. “The van is not on fire. It’s leaking gas, and it’s smoking, so we have to call AAA.”

During the phone call, we all listened in perfect silence as the AAA guy stated, “Do not get back in the car. Do not try to drive the car. Do not try to push the car.”

We all sighed as disappointment rushed over us. It would be a long time before we could get Old Edna home.

The four children flocked around the debating women. In the end, a verdict was reached: Nancy would lead Toby, Charlie, me and Jack on a “hike” to a rest stop that might exist somewhere down the road, while Becky and Mom would wait with our car for a tow truck. On hearing this, we all raced to the van to retrieve items to take with us on the journey: a phone, an iPod, Nancy’s purse, a water bottle.
One step at a time, we began the walk. Soon, Old Edna was camouflaged by heat waves. The highway ran through a never-ending habitat of bright sand and sun-bleached rocks. Charlie used the iPod to blast Eminem in our ears. We counted license plates and spotted things we found on the side of the road. Once in awhile, a cloud would be kind enough to drift over and give us shade for a few minutes before we (or it) moved on. We began discussing who we would eat first.

Then we saw it. Like a mirage. A parking lot appeared in the distance. We had finally reached civilization. Toby, being the most athletic, ran ahead and scouted out the potential town, but came back with a frown on his face and sorrow in his eyes.

“Closed for summer,” Toby said, as if his dog had just died.
“What do you mean?” Jack asked in disbelief.
“Oh no,” Nancy interrupted.
“It’s just a stupid snow park!” Toby yelled.
We did not pretend to be indifferent anymore.

“NOOOOOOOOOOOO.” Charlie fell to his knees in an effort to mock being overdramatic. “Oh come on, there could still be a rest stop, guys.” Charlie had kept us going this whole time with his bleached blond curls and particularly loud voice. “I bet we’re real real close.” So, with a new-found determination, we walked forward, into the unknown.

The water bottle was empty, the iPod was out of charge and the phone lost reception. The five of us smelled like sweat. The road’s shoulder had shrunk, and we had to walk in single file. Jack, then Charlie, Nancy, Me, Toby. Most of us didn’t believe we’d find anywhere to rest and take shelter from the heat. But then, we saw it. A neon yellow sign brought us hope. The faded white arrow that said BAR on it shouted, “Don’t give up!” Our work was nearly over, and we didn’t even have to hitch hike. Our pace picked up until we spotted the words “Rattail Bar” lit up in the letters. The T was out in rat and the A and L in tail, but it was real. We were saved.

Nancy opened the doors to the restaurant, and the air conditioning washed over us. The smell of soda, beer and fries wafted in the air. You could practically taste our desperation.

“Hi,” said Nancy, kind of breathless from running.
“What can I get ya folks?” a man with a cowboy hat questioned. He looked like he didn’t often see kids in his establishment.


“Okay, Okay. Slow down,” replied the man.

“Three orders of fries and a diet Coke.” Nancy was beaming. She had led her team to success. “Oh, and do you have a power outlet? I need to make some calls.” She grinned some more. We applauded. I had never been so happy to see a dirty old bar.
Thank You Letter

By Lilith Neuse-Kartmazov

Dear Bipartisan Cafe,

You have been in my life for as long as I can remember, the smell of coffee and croissants wafting into the air as I enter the coffee shop, touching the cold, metal handle my dad made for you years ago.

Bipartisan, my parents doubted you on your first days, they were curious and unknown to your bliss. But oh, how things have changed. We know you now, and we are thankful for everything you have given us

Thank you for everything, Bipartisan. You are so inviting and welcoming to all types, the man with the bushy hair who sits on the couch with his computer, the woman with her young child, sipping on her coffee while wagging a block in front of the kid’s face for entertainment.

The man with his markers, working on a new piece of art every time; the little girl who wants to be mature and independent, so she sits at the front counter.

Bipartisan, you love all, you are kind and giving, but you don’t get much back. While you bask people in food and comfort, they can be loud and obnoxious, they talk on their phones and litter their straw wrappers and napkins on you. They order food and take three bites, then they shove it away from them, dismissing the bus tub that happens to be four feet away. But, Bipartisan, you overcome that. You are still sweet and nice, and you still welcome everyone; because you know, with every obnoxious person come five polite, hungry customers.

Bipartisan, I admire you with every bone in my body, I look around and see the sunlight, floating, drifting in, lighting up the whole space. You know me, Bipartisan. Whenever I walk in, I always get a welcoming hello. When my mom orders coffee, she gets her usual; you know us, Bipartisan.

So thank you, diligent Bipartisan, I will hope to see you throughout the years, and I will forever be in your debt.

—The girl with the croissant

Karter Bryan-Hart
I Love Horror

By Chespin Parsons

I love horror.
I can’t get enough of it.
Images on the internet
Drawings
Ideas from friends.
I love the scary dreams I have
‘Cause I can recall the
“Scare rush” I had.
I love showing other people the scary things.
Their reaction is hilarious.
Their fear of something that is not real.
The way they scream and shout.
Or if they just cringe.
Don’t like clowns?
Now they are new and improved with sharp claws and fangs.
Don’t like spiders?
Here’s a GIF of one crawling up your nose.
Don’t like zombies?
“The longer you look the more appear” image.
Practically Hermione Granger?
Professor Blankity-Blank gave you a nine out of ten.
LOL (Laugh Out Loud) that reaction though. XD
Sometimes
I can’t help but wonder: what would my parents say?
In order to truly know this story, you must first know about this world it takes place in. This is an world in which everything exists. Everything. Elves, orcs, dwarves, imps, unicorns, dragons, fairies, demons, and many more magical beings.

Elves are slender and kind. They are often healers and archers, and they are excellent war strategists, yet prefer peace. It is rare for an elf to carry a sword, however, they do carry daggers, in case they come face-to-face with an enemy at close range.

Orcs are the opposite of elves. They are more of the hand-to-hand combat types, and absolutely loathe nature. Their armor is crude, but effective.

Dwarves love to work in the mines, and are excellent crafters of weaponry. They prefer hammers and battle-axes over spears and bows, and turn to stone after a short period of time in the sunlight. They can sometimes use this fact to turn over coals with their bare hands, if necessary.

Imps are a special breed of devil with a small height of about four feet. They generally have goat-like horns and red skin, with red-tainted, yet fluffy bat-like wings.

Unicorns often are portrayed as peaceful creatures, and perhaps some of them are.

Dragons are big scaly beasts with wings, and most breathe fire. Dragons are normally elemental, so their powers vary.

Fairies are elemental as well, so powers also vary. However, they all really like to feast on human flesh.

Demons are where this story starts. They can shape shift into any form of being they wish, and can even possess humans or others.

A particular demon, by the name of Nightmare, was in need of a new body.

A tiny voice asked, “Is he the one?” And the light of the voice seemed to be looking at the chubby faced boy sleeping in the bed.

“Indeed,” replied another, gruffer voice.

“Turn him to what he need be.”

The light of the gruff voice wandered into his chest. It was time.
(Part II) Morning

It was morning. Time to get going. It was just another day in the countryside, which meant chop firewood, or go get food at the local market, or go sell the wood carvings you made. It was not quite a life yet accustomed to, but every one needs time. To work then. I chopped the firewood with a lot more gusto than usual. The wood was either rotten, or the pushups before bed were finally paying off. I fed the fire and began to walk down to the market. I kept my eyes on the ground, and I realized, despite the still dark-night sky, I could see better than usual. It was almost as if I had headlights instead of eyeballs. Hmm. I could almost see cracks in the ground.

Was it just me, or did I seem taller than usual? Did I have some sort of growth spurt last night?

Then ground swallowed me. I don’t know if I was just tired or what, but that’s what it looked like. Later, I woke up in a living Hell. Literally.

(Part III) Hell Sucks

Hell sucks. A lot. There is way too much red, and where there wasn’t, there was orange or blue fire.

My eye was gone. In its place was an empty socket.

I processed this all while a cyclops reeled me off in a cage. (What?)

“Where are you taking me?!” My voice sounded hoarse.

“Shut up, boy,” replied the cyclops driving the cart, as another noticed me and knocked me out with a punch to the face.

When I came to, I was in an arena. It was huge. I couldn’t make out any details, but I knew a cyclops was dragging me by my arms.

I was plopped into the middle of the arena. “OOooOOOhhh...” I grunted as I barfed on the ground.

The crowd booed.

Another creature came into view. I imagined this is what an orc looked like. The orc snarled at me and charged. I quickly recovered from barfing and punched him aside. Why did my fist not hurt? The orc jumped up and charged again, this time with a wicked sword, which had a weirdly shaped blade. This time, I had no time to swat him aside. He drove the sword down to the hilt in my left arm.
I screamed in pain, and smashed him to bits with my strong, powerful hands. The crowd was quiet. I fell on my side and half closed my eyes. Just before passing out, I heard the crowd roar with approval.

(Part IV) Revenge Taken

By winning the match, I was allowed to go back to the mortal world for a good solid hour. In that hour, I found my old home and killed my stepfather, a very abusive man. He would get drunk and hit my mother until she was black and blue. Literally. While I was there, I found out that my mother was killed—by my stepfather. He had whipped her to death with his belt.

Humans are overrated. I now prefer the demon life. See all you humans in Hell. You’ll get your punishment. Or better—be good. Go to Heaven. I’ll see you all anyhow.
I pull the hat down firmly onto my shaved head. The barber had messed everything up. I look terrible.

“Mom, please can I skip school... I don’t feel very good.” I lie.

“Honey, I know what this is about, but you cannot skip school. Your hair looks great.”

I grab my lunch and walk out the door. The bus pulls up to the stop at the corner of the street. I start running quickly to catch it before it pulls away.

“Wait!” I shout.

I just barely make it. Quickly, I find a spot at the back of the bus, far from civilization. But that dingus Sally Jackson comes up to me. I just want to jump from the bus and hide in that dirty alley where Slippery Tim lives.

“Hey, did you get a haircut, Maximus?”

I nervously ignore her comment. But her boyfriend, Chad Shreddr, the school bully, approaches.

“She asked you a question, numbnuts,” he grabs me by the collar, lifting me from the cold bus floor. No one messes with Chad. He is 14. Still in fifth grade though. Got held back three years straight. Big red pimples protrude from his hairy face. Breath so bad it can knock you out, literally.

I hold my breath tight as he lifts me higher. With his other arm he pulls the hat from my head. The whole bus stares at me. Everyone is silent. That is, until they all start laughing.

Chad starts snorts in my face, a storm of spit sprinkling on my cheeks. He throws me down hard in my seat. Then he tosses my cap out the bus window.

The bus pulls up in front of the school. I am the last to get out. As I exit, the bus driver gives me a sorry look. Entering the front doors is like entering Hell. All eyes are on me. Laughs, whispers, pointing. I run into the bathroom and lock myself into the stall.

I look down at my watch. Class started ten minutes ago. If I don’t show up, my mom will get a call and know I skipped. I unlock the stall and exit the bathroom. The halls are empty, and I make my way to class in peace.

I stand nervously outside the door, I am afraid to go in, but I have to. Reaching out, I pull down the handle and open the door. Squaaaaa, it squeaks loudly, and all eyes snap on me yet again. The teacher looks up from her computer.

“You are late. Sit down and talk to your table buddy, he’ll tell you what we are doing,” she tells me, clearly annoyed.
I tip-toe to my seat, avoiding everyone’s eye contact. My table buddy, Sean, only stares at my (lack of) hair.

“Sean, what are we doing?” he still is silent. “Sean!” I say louder.
He snaps out of his trance. “Um... right now, just get out your book and read until chapter 4.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

As I read, all I can think about is my hair. The words on the page have no meaning to me. I hear the whir of the microwave as Ms. Welsh warms up her mac-n-cheese. The smell of melted cheese makes its way up my nose and into my brain. My stomach growls.

The bell rings. Time for gym...

The day goes on. It feels like I’m in school for a hundred years. There is constant laughing and pointing. I am tired of it.

Chad approaches, getting ready for his millionth tease I bet. But I have had enough.

“Hey, baldy.”

“Chad, quit it,” I snap.

“What are you gonna do about it, dweeb?”

I spin and punch Chad in the stomach, then RKO him to the floor.

“I said quit it, Chad.” I pull him to his feet, a peace treaty. But he is mad. He throws a fist, but I easily dodge. I kick his knee, and he falls to the floor.

“We are done here.” I walk to my next class, smiling, seeing Chad’s stunned face as he sits on the floor. I don’t need to listen to what people are saying. I got a bad haircut. I’ll live.

Stevie Pendleton
Dear Grandmother’s house,

You have been near my heart even when you were 3,187 miles away. I would look forward to seeing your welcoming gravel road, the orange wood covering your overheated, fresh cookie Yankee Candle-scented home. The mingled scents of cinnamon and pumpkin spice and brewing coffee. Dry, crisp, harsh, fresh air. The drips of a Keurig. The soft creaks of the beige carpeted stairs, the lightning bugs floating outside over the black river at night.

You have shown me that the town that encases you, nobody believes in. The drive to get “downtown” is surrounded by churches and the scent of grilling meat. Only one lone mall is where I feel at home. Only one radio station shines my music through the small speakers of the old car.

You have taught me that the sounds outside aren’t always my overactive imagination. That the rustling is something climbing, something trying, something failing. You have shown me the people in your town. The monthly baptism. The people staring at me funny because of my “modern look.” The old people stuck in their time. The young people who looked miserable as they walked into the tall, white, steeple-crowned churches. Their gelled hair, scratchy vests, and button-down, ironed shirts. The stiff dresses that looked impossible to breathe in. The short heels that were disguised as new, expensive shoes, when they were only Disney princess shoes with all of the decorations taken off.

You have let me realize that the store-bought chocolate chip cookies eaten in a room filled with fresh cookie-scented candles and the heat cranked up high, all make this seem like the perfect grandmother’s house.

You have taught me that I need to come out of my life, and into yours. You have pulled me into the oysters or clams filled with pearls on your small beach, a hammock filled with countless naps, something so beautiful that is so unkempt, a place only I knew was there, a place I will never forget.

Sincerely,

Sage Reagan.
Do you often question life? The universe? Everything? Everything humanity has created? The good, the bad, the skyscrapers filled with enthusiasm and the potholes filled with doubt. The emotions we have, and how simple it is to purely think yourself into a certain mood. To have feelings. You could think your way through life so easily it seems, right? Alas, no. I’ve tried, all it does is bring on the other emotions, the negative ones. Grief. Sorrow. Loneliness. Depression. Pain. Confusion. Helplessness. And once all you’ve thought about for thirteen years are these emotions, it’s pretty darn hard to think your way out.

But maybe! Just maybe, you talk your way through life. Maybe you believe that your thoughts are words to share. That your thoughts aren’t yours for any particular reason other than to be shared. Maybe you focus on the foremost emotions, the positive ones. Love. Caring. Acceptance. Joy. Helpfulness. Passion. Hope. But those are so easy to think yourself out of! Maybe that is why you talk your way through life.

I grew up knowing my emotions well. I was always lonely, I feared society, I hid my true self so that I might be accepted by others. Just maybe. But when I entered middle school, still alone, still hiding myself and still afraid, I decided to take my mask off. I decided that if I was going to be sad and lonely, I might as well be myself in the process. So screw society, screw the rules, screw it all. I’ll do what I want and be who I want, not some misshapen, broken down, sculpture made by others, that no one likes anyway.

So now I am the real me and though I may be teased and pushed around for it, I wouldn’t change a thing. Not a thing about me, or my choices that got me here. And heck, some of it wasn’t even my choice, but I still wouldn’t change it. Maybe I won’t find my perfect other half, but I was always lonely, I could deal with it for a little longer.

I’ve questioned all these things. I’ve thought my way through younger life. I’ve talked my way through adolescence. Neither of those have worked, I learned that it takes a perfect balance of the two which is nearly impossible to achieve. At least for me. I’ve also learned that maybe instead of one-hundred percent, thinking, or fifty-fifty thinking and talking, writing works too. Because if you’re a thinker like me, you need to get your thoughts out, but as a thinker, you don’t exactly know how. But with writing, you can over-dramatize everything. You can twist words to fit perfectly, and you can create perfect images that you maybe couldn’t do if you tried to verbalize them.

Now that I’ve taken my mask off, become myself, though I do get a little harassment, I also found my people. I’ve found the loud, funny, considerate-but-not-too-self-conscious, people. I now have people around me that I can truly relate to, and I enjoy surrounding myself
with. I’ve not only removed an old mask, but I’ve also taken off a blindfold that I didn’t even realize I wore. But now I see, I see my balance, I see my people, I see all of the emotions that I never did before. I’m happy.

Cayden Wagner
Lin-Manuel Miranda

By Dashiell Rucka

You, the child of Latin, musical theatre and hip-hop.
A punk rock jackpot mashed together, a better,
clever thought into the letter, is gonna be forever.
You, the child of immigrants, who get the job done.
You won, outdone anything you’ve done before.
You the child who grew up listening to musical theatre albums while cleaning up from the party.
And every word I hear inspires me.

I swear, Lin, when I hear the beginning of “Guns and Ships,” my heart skips a beat.
I know someone will tell your story.
Lin, you deserve to go down in history with Alexander.
You wrote some notes, the beginning of a song someone will sing for you.

You, the child of tumblr, who said no to those that encumbered you,
the rhythm like a drummer. With numbers of awards.
In other words, you might as well win a teen-choice award.

Winning the hearts of young girls over the nation.
You, full of dedication, imagination, creation, a musical sensation,
filling us with fascination, admiration, idolization.

Of a man with more hearts than one,
who combines more arts than one,
A doctor of musical arts, who won.

Every prize you could win, every person you’ve been.
You are the child of all of those who believed in you,
and an inspiration to anyone who wants to.
The Dare

By Celia Russ-McCoy

I was three, and I was sitting on my half of the bunk bed. I was babbling to myself as little kids do. I was, in a way, grounded, and my sister was doing her own thing, elsewhere, not in the room. I decided to start looking at the many, many, many picture books that we had in the room. The books were strewn all around, as neither my sister nor I cared enough to put them on the bookshelf or even in a neat pile nearby.

All of a sudden, I heard footsteps coming towards the room, and I quickly pretended to be bored. I heard the door open. I was afraid that it was my mom or dad, but it was my sister. Although I didn’t know why she had come in, I was pretty sure it was to make sure I wasn’t doing anything I shouldn’t be. But she started getting ready for bed.

I thought to myself, “What did she do to get herself into trouble? Probably something as stupid as what you did.” Then I realized, “Sissy is smarter than that. I am the extremely stupid one, not her. She has tons of sense, and most of the time I never use sense when I have any at all.”

The event that followed completely proved how without common sense I was.

“Hey, Sissy, what are you doing?” I asked her.

“What does it look like? I have a dare for you,” she replied.

I knew it was a bad idea for me to take my older sister’s dares, but, of course, I ignored this logic.

“What is it?” I asked, sincerely wondering what it was.

“I dare you to walk along the edge of the bed and try to jump across the toy chest,” she told me.

I tried to do the dare, but when I got to the jumping-across part, I jumped, fell, and hit my nose on the corner of the toy chest. I don’t remember what happened next, but I have a scar on my nose from this incident, and I assume that I went to the doctor and got stitches.
A Letter

By Ariana Sado Masi

Dear House on 57th,

Your rooms are filled with a child’s laughter as she runs from her dad. Hiding in the mini library at the top of the stairs, the six-year-old reads for hours, hidden in paradise. Amid the kitchen smells of baking, the girl sits on the counter in yellow-footed PJ’s, batter on her face and hands, while her dad begs for the next ingredient. A big yellow bear named Edgar hugs the brunette as she reads, curled in a warm ball.

You are filled with the sounds of drums and chatter. The girl and her father have found a housemate, and band practice happens once a week. The girl, age seven, hides in her attic room, the tucked-away library providing shelter from the deafening music.

The girl, now eight, plucks a fat red tomato off the vine in the backyard and runs to her dad, calling out in joy. Homemade tomato sauce decorating noodles will be served for lunch. The young girl pushes her straight brown hair behind her ear, annoyed by it constantly covering her face. Her dad calls to her, and she goes running to where he’s planting seeds for next year’s vegetable crop.

Sitting on the old, gray, freestanding porch swing, the nine-year-old and her dad toast two cans of A&W root beer, their signature drink. Your corners provide the girl hiding places as her dad searches for her. The girl giggles as her dad looks under an overturned wheelbarrow.

Once again, you are filled with the sound of voices, but this time the mood is different, there is no music. Your rooms are filled with boxes and people rushing in and out, loading the items into a truck. The ten-year-old girl with her curly hair hides in the small playhouse outside, peering through the stained glass windows and the empty doorframe where her dad had promised to build a door. The black cat’s grave sits silently as rain begins to fall, pattering lightly on your roof and running down your windows in tiny rivulets.

Your halls echo with the distant memories of laughter and light. You sit alone on the quiet little backstreet. The girl and her dad are gone, leaving you empty and forgotten. The old bear still sits in your basement, gray with age and dust. The little library is emptied, converted into a closet. In your backyard, the garden is long gone, the freestanding swing creaks forlornly in the wind, its gray cushions rotted. The playhouse still rests in your yard, its windows dulled with dirt, with no little girl to sweep and clean it daily. The small, circular grave was buried under dirt and leaves years ago. You are alone.
I am so sorry, little yellow house. I’m sorry we moved. I’m sorry I couldn’t stay that happy little girl, drinking root beer in the living room, placing new flowers on the cat’s grave every other day. I’m sorry, little house. I will never forget you.

Forever yours,

Ariana Sardo Masi.
I Love...

By Ariana Sardo Masi

I love hanging out with you,
I love sitting on a boulder at the park,
high above the world,
I love singing along to “Count On Me” by Bruno Mars.
I love planning out our futures,
where we’ll live
where we’ll go to school,
what we’ll study.
I love laughing,
chasing each other around the bedroom,
tackling and catching
and giggling when caught.
I love the quiet moments,
relaxing together,
happy to just be in the company of a friend,
even if we’re not talking.
I love the inside jokes from four years ago.
I even love the arguments,
not talking to each other,
never lasting more than a day.
I love knowing that we’ll always be there for each other,
even when we go to different schools,
or live in different cities,
or only meet online.
I love having you as a friend,
I love creating nostalgic memories that make me wish for years past,
back when everything was simpler,
back when you two were friends,
back when we all laughed,
when we all played,
when we were kids.
Praise Poem

By Mariella Swearingen

She had the kind of voice you had to stop breathing to hear;
It was a faint tickle in the ears of all those who opened their hearts enough to listen,
Arms outstretched and palms up.
My aunt’s words pulled at your heartstrings and rubbed you red raw.

The words that spilled over her lips made the air hum with new revelations.
They settled in your very bones,
Rewiring and rewriting your perception of everything around you.
If I were to see the world from her perspective, everything would transform before my eyes,
The annoying ants infesting my kitchen become a marching band,
Stars shine in the eyes of all those I met,
like they were bursting at the seams with magic.

The click of her tongue to the roof of her mouth could have you rethinking your entire life.
And I swear, the simple wave of her wand-like finger could conduct the sway of the branches.
To an artless rug rat such as myself, it seemed as if she held the entire world under her fingertip,
Ready and waiting for her to bend it to her every willful whim.

The porch light of her house was always on, glowing scintillatingly,
Her welcome mat rolled out to say “come in;”
As if everything about the house didn’t already scream just that.
At times, her slanting roof was the only one to shelter gay men in the 70’s and orphans;
Outlandish outcasts in their regimes, people with no place in society,
Odds and ends converged to find their corner of the world in her run-down home.

Every once in a while, a memory of her will seep into the cracks of my mind,
The image of her ankle-length skirt fanning out around her like a parachute, a safety net.
Or of her sweeping hair clippings into a dustpan,
The lilt of salon gossip drifting through the beauty parlor.
I’ll remember her bustling her big body around her shoebox of a kitchen,
Wide hips swaying to a smooth jazz tune and the smell of enchiladas wafting through the air.

I find it hard to shake the memory of her legs, wide and tall as redwood trees,
firmly rooted to the ground when they came to take her away.  
I can still feel the quake at the bend of my knees and fingers the day they broke her door down.  
The click of her being locked away forever still rings in my ears.  

So though her porch light has long since flickered out,  
I know she is still guiding me through everything.  
And despite the fact that she is gone, and I can never seem to get her enchilada recipe right,  
I can still feel her presence filling a room.  
She may have gone behind bars and wrapped in chains,  
But her spirit lives on, free to roam.  

Lily Tewfik
Have you ever...
Felt like something was on the tip of your tongue?
Not like the recollection of ideas or contributions to verbally communicate
But that you can’t find the voice to speak it
When the truth burrows in your mouth
But you still scrape at the dirt for courage

“They won’t believe me
They’ll call me a coward
I’ll be perceived
As a weak traitor”

If they do all of that
Or if they don’t
It doesn’t matter
Don’t let their impression of you
Determine your vociferous nature

It takes bravery and strength
And conviction and power
To finally come out
So do it

If they accept it
Home run
If they don’t
Heed me

You will know
In the bottom of your deepest thoughts
That they have limited perceptions
They do not calculate you
They are ignorant
As we all are

You will be stronger than they know
More grown-up
More sincere
Wiser

Assure yourself
Beyond what they can

Haley James
You’re the one who sits and waits.  
Waits for an inpatient voice to roughly come  
From your old walkie talkie,  
Reminding you that kids make messes  
And forget their locker combinations.  
Although, you don’t mind much because  
You love their presence.  
Yes, you love working with us.  
25 years with PPS, and all good ones.  

But those years weren’t the easiest.  
You’ve had to work to get where you are today.  
Work hard, because no one just hands you success,  
It’s something you work for, and you did just that.  
From when you were a little boy, lots of sports filled your free time.  
You became the coach of your little girl’s basketball team  
Because you exceeded at playing hoop.  
She and the rest of your babies are all grown up now  
With families of their own.  

Family.  
It’s always meant so much to you.  
You’d do anything for your family,  
Because at the end of the day,  
That’s all you’ve got.  
You and your wife for years and years raised your children right.  
Just how you guys were raised.  
And you believed how you were brought up is how your kids  
And kids today, should be raised:  

Be home before the streetlights come on.  
That’s how you and Jennifer will teach your two grand-babies.  
Be kind to people,
Respect others,
Be successful.
You don’t have hate in you.
And you don’t like to spread it,
Because you like seeing others do well.
You like watching us learn how to be better individuals.

You send out this positive vibe that makes people enjoy being around you.
That makes people willing to miss half of their lunch
To go have a conversation with you.
All of these smiles that you lend,
The laughs that you willingly share,
Even though you’re struggling yourself.

Four,
Five car accidents.
Leading to a bad back and knee pain.

Four,
Five trips to the doctors to see if you need a knee replacement.
A knee replacement.
That you may need to get because you slipped
down the stairs
from cleaning up after us.
Even though you are greatly appreciated,
You’re not always thanked.
But I’m here to say thanks for the ones that don’t.
Thank you,

Thank you, Terry Martin, for everything you do,
Because you are one of the many people who hold the school together.
You are who I look forward to seeing in the mornings.
You are who you are.
And that’s what I appreciate about you.
Thank you.

Lydia Wade-Sully
My Zoo

By Sophie Vera

I went into the kitchen,
I saw a purple parrot,
I saw an orange monkey,
I saw a yellow carrot

The monkey was loud,
Ooh ooh eeh eeh ah,
My parents own a zoo,
I wish they had a pink macaw

The pink macaw,
Would be my pet,
My parents bought one,
Which they regret

I want a turtle
The neighbors have two
They’re both named Hurtle
The species is new

The zoo is home,
The zoo is new,
I love the zoo,
The zoo sign is blue

Enough about the zoo
The zoo sign that is blue
Enough about me
How about you?

Do you live in a zoo?
Is the sign red?
Is it held up,
By a Phillips head screw?
Rapture Blue Waters of Multnomah Falls

*By Carson Viggiano*

The rapture blue water spills
over my feet,
seeping down into my clean white Converse,
the wet canvas sticks to my skin.
The cold,
clear spray hits my face,
and I jump backwards.
My (now soggy, muddy) shoes grip
the misty bridge,
keeping me from tumbling
from so many feet:
150.

The rapture blue water pools
on the high-up bridge,
and my reflection ripples in the collected water.
My hair is falling out of my ponytail,
wild and blown over my face,
hiding my reddened cheeks.
I hopelessly tuck the tangled strands away.
His Leaving

By Carson Viggiano

What he took:
His red Cardinal’s hat,
all seven dress shirts,
the navy-blue razor,
a pair of brown suede shoes,
fifty-seven dollars
and thirty-six cents in change,
the radio on the kitchen counter from the ‘90’s,
the Vermont Frost Heaves season tickets,
his restored 1950’s Cadillac convertible,
two weeks worth of clean socks,
a pair of shot glasses,
his favorite aftershave,
the family dog.

What he left behind:
    his wedding ring,
lonely and still on the nightstand.
His ancient wood guitar tucked in the corner,
forevermore untouched,
and the floorboards
quiet in his absence.

Emiel Miller
Tupac

By Lydia Wade-Sully

You were the one with the chest tattoos and the red bandanna,
You were the one with an old soul and a young face,
You were the one who was taken from us too soon,
You were the rose that grew from concrete.

The rose that started from nothing,
The rose that was made out of the streets,
The rose that made mad beats,
The rose that was raised by the rhythms of Harlem.

Raised by the freedom fighters, who fought to stop police brutality, and black on black violence,
Raised by your mom, but just her alone,
Raised by the Bloods and gang signs.

All you wanted for was there to be a change. You
Taught us to hold our heads up, because there was a light in the sky,
Taught us not to cry.
But when you, the rose from that grew from concrete, died,
There became a new brightness to the light in the sky.

Rest In Paradise Pac.

June 16, 1971-September 13, 1996
My Life as Casualty #5

By Luna Warren

My name is Clarissa
But you didn’t know that
I am 21
But you didn’t know that
I planned on being a pastry chef
But you didn’t know that
You only knew one thing about me
You knew that I was killed
You turn on your TV
The screen flickers to my movie
Not my movie, actually
But the one I’m in
You watch as the main characters are introduced
You see their dreams and ambitions
Their personalities and friends
And then you see the conflict
You see the sea serpent in the depths of an endless ocean
Or the battleships of aliens hovering above our planet
Or a graveyard, so still, until a hand breaks through the earth
The conflict rises to meet our world
And our protagonists
And me
It comes to the nearest humans
A group of miscellaneous people
I stand among them, behind a dull man with his dull wife,
And the conflict pounces and devours us all
Then the movie continues
And the tragedy matters to the story
But not me
The horrible thing is the amount of deaths
Not those who died
When you look to the credits
They list my actress
She plays someone called “Casualty #5”
That’s what they call me
I am not a fan favorite
I am not a hated character
I am not even the forgotten character
No one remembers that I am forgotten
I am nothing to the characters
I am nothing to the plot
I am nothing to the viewers
My name is Clarissa
And now you know that
I am 21
And now you know that
I planned on being a pastry chef
And now you know that
But the mass-kill movie in which I resided didn’t

Luna Hearst
Black and White

By Sunshine Westfall

There was never a grey zone
Only a nondescript placement where
the color used to be
and simply lost touch
The color loses its vibrance
as soon as someone falls short
Short of stature
Short of possibility
Short of will
And the air spoils
like an apple
left to itself
A painting, half-finished
Not lovely enough to cherish
But simple, as a desert sky
There is black and white
Where the color
Where the depth once stood
Two choices
And only two:
Practicality and Normalcy
Resembling the new mindset of the ever-changing human being

Samira Sweilem-Zook
The Girl in the Black Converse

By Addison Wood

The girl in the black Converse was too innocent for all of this. She had dealt with everything, but not like this. It was like comparing a single orange to a bucket of oranges. She had dealt with thick and thin before, but not like this. With the rumors circulating through the air, she stood tall, with her red lipstick and her black Converse. She stood tall over the mountain of obstacles and told herself she was beautiful in every way, although the words stayed the same. The words on the phone may be deleted, but not from her brain. Bruises fade, but words stay the same. Words like ugly, fat, trash echoed through her brain a mile a minute. The words dug holes in her heart, and, as the rumors continued, the holes deepened. She stood on the mountain with her hands stretched out, as the words blew through the wind. She thought to herself, “Being sad won’t solve anything. It’s not like sadness will make anything better.” So she strapped on her Converse, put on her lipstick and set out to change some things.

Eliza Arnaut-Hull
I Love You

By Passie Wright

I love falling asleep on your trampoline. I love jumping and watching pillows and blankets jump with us. I love staring at stars, bright and uncovered. I love being under a shining moon, similar to a pearl stuck in speckled black velvet.

I love getting bubble tea with you. I love walking down Alberta’s pavement, Converse scraping against discarded cigarettes. I love exchanging licks of Salt and Straw ice cream. I love sharing truffle fries next to foggy restaurant windows.

I love inside jokes. I love baking cookies and realizing the bottoms are as black as obsidian. I love block parties and chalk, I love stretching to tap cherry blossoms so a storm of blushing petals rains on us.

I love standing next to you as salty waves lap at our toes. I love scratching messages in wet sand, then watching the ocean steal our words. I love your lazy doodles, the ones you think are bad but are actually amazing. I love your eyes, the way they listen, the way they light up whenever you laugh.

I love myself for saying hi to you on the first day of kindergarten, I love myself for seeing right away that you were perfect.