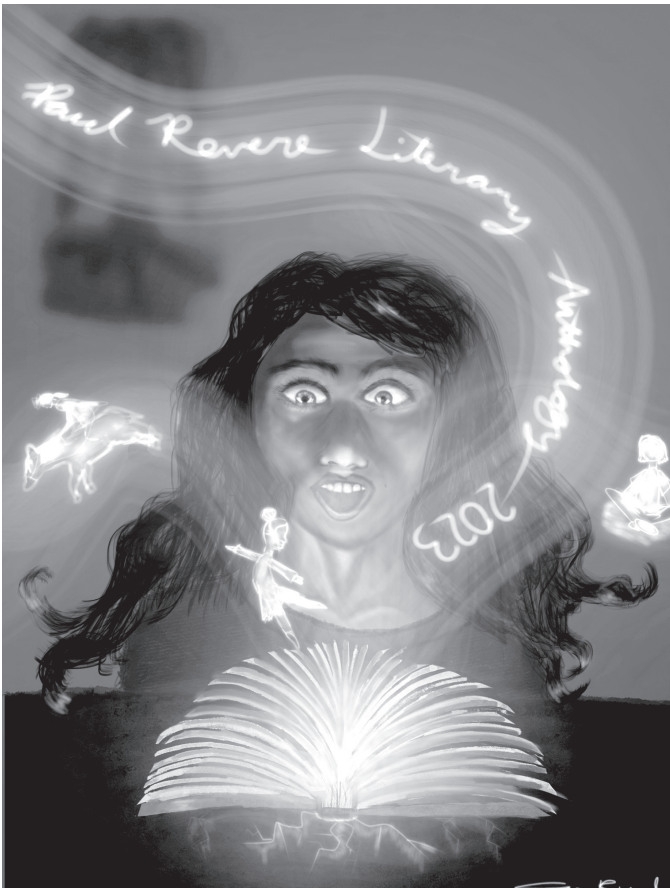


A Volume of Collected Works by the Students of  
**Paul Revere Charter Middle School**  
Math, Science and Technology Magnet Center

1450 Allenford Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90049



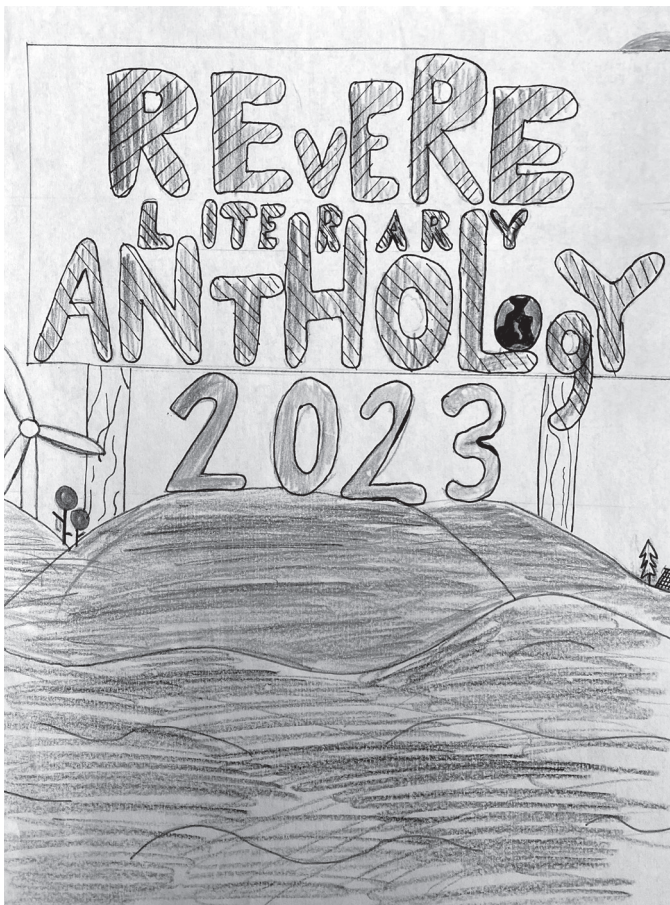


Chloe Richmond



Paul Revere Literary Anthology  
2023

August Brancato



Sadie Ephraim



Esme Drake





## A Message from Our Principal

The remarkable students of Paul Revere Charter Middle School and Magnet Center truly have a way with words. The Young Author's Evening and Literary Festival and the 19th Annual Literary Anthology offer a wonderful opportunity to showcase the literary excellence of our talented writers.

As you'll see from reading the pages that follow, middle school students have the power to communicate surprising perception, emotion and humor through their writing. The poetry and prose appearing in this year's edition offer illuminating snapshots of our students' reflections, interests and experiences.

I proudly applaud all the fine efforts that have contributed to the success of this public celebration of literacy. All students and staff at Revere are grateful for the dedication and hard work it took to produce this exciting and worthwhile project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Iannucci'. The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial 'T' and a long, horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Tom Iannucci  
Principal



# Acknowledgments

We are pleased to present the 19th Annual Revere Literary Anthology. This book is the result of countless hours of organizing, revising, editing, reading, and, of course, writing! Many thanks to the following individuals and groups who collaborated to make this year's publication a great success:

- **PRIDE** for underwriting the costs of printing the publication and sponsoring the Young Authors Evening and Literary Festival. We thank **PRIDE** for all of their support, especially **Monica Otero**, the parent coordinator for this project, **Melissa Lustgarten**, PRIDE President, for coordinating all of the food vendors for the Festival, **JoAnna Rodriguez**, for her help with editing and the many parents who volunteered at the event.
- All the teachers who submitted entries: **Ms. Barbieri, Ms. Daley, Ms. Ernst, Ms. Grella, Mrs. Mello, Ms. Moreno, Ms. O'Connor, Ms. Ruffner, Mr. Schwartz, Mr. Slavin, Ms. Stehlin, Ms. Sturtevant, Mr. Wechsler** and **Ms. Wright**.
- **Mrs. Mello** for managing student submissions, coordinating the Anthology production, and the cover art contest.
- **Mr. Wechsler** for formatting and managing the logistics of putting together this year's book and coordinating with all involved.
- **Ms. Vogel** for facilitating the many moving parts of this event.
- **Ms. Hernandez** for creating the balloon art.
- And **Mr. Iannucci** for his support with building literacy across the curriculum.

## Thanks to our artists:



Sarah Dong  
Front Cover



Alisa Chao  
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August Brancato  
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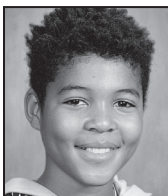
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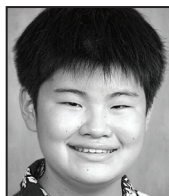
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# PROSE

2023



LITERARY

ANTHOLOGY



# Autobiographical Narratives



## The Healing of Kindness

*James Feresten*

It was a hot sunny day at the end of summer, and the last bit of vacation before school. My mom, dad, brother and I were spending the last few days of vacation at the Pelican Hill Resort in Newport Beach, California. My older brother, Jack, was dressed in khaki shorts, white socks, blue Vans, and a dark blue J Crew shirt. We were also wearing a helmet because he was skateboarding. I was scootering next to him down a hill, dressed in blue Patagonia shorts, white long socks, Nike Blazers, a blue Nike Dri-fit t-shirt, and a helmet. Jack was trying to learn a new skateboarding trick when all of a sudden I heard... CRASH! Jack fell on his wrist and hurt it. "Please don't tell Dad!" he yelled. He was scared for our dad to know he fell on his wrists because he decided not bring his wrist guards even though my dad told him to bring them. I didn't want Jack to be upset with me so I promised him that I wouldn't tell our father.

However, later that day when I was playing tennis at a country club with my dad, I was having doubts about keeping my promise. I was worried Jack had really hurt himself. I decided to tell my dad that when Jack was skateboarding he fell and hurt his wrist, because I wanted Jack to be protected and not end up breaking his wrist. Then my dad said, "I knew I should have checked to make sure Jack brought his wrist guards."

We rushed back to the hotel room. My dad went directly to look at Jack's wrist to make sure it wasn't broken. Thankfully, Jack's wrists were okay, but he got scolded for not bringing his wrist guards. My mom decided that we should go to the beach before we departed for home. The beach was fun, but it was also cold, foggy and crowded and I could tell my brother was angry with me. After the beach, my family and I went back to the hotel room and finished packing. I couldn't help but feel a sense of sadness from having to leave such a fun place. I shrugged the thought away and said to myself, "Oh well, it's sad that I have to go, but at least when I get back home I will have a new exciting adventure at school."

When Jack got into the car to go home, he was as mad as a raging bull that I was sitting in the front seat. Even though Jack was yelling at me, I decided to be kind and said, "You know what, Jack, you can have the front seat." He thanked me and the issues had been resolved. After this incident, I learned that sometimes all it takes is to be kind to heal a conflict.



## Separation Anxiety

*Kaya Brennan*

It was a warm morning in summer 2022 and I was checking in preschoolers at Bel Air Church for Bible school. I was super excited because I finally met the requirement of being 12 years old in order to volunteer. After only checking in three of the kids, I saw a mom walking towards me with a little boy in her arms. He had dark brown hair and big blue eyes. As she put him down, she told me that her son's name is James. As he looked timidly away from me, she informed me that her son cries and gets extremely upset when he notices that his mom is not with him. The second after she finished talking, I immediately knew that I wanted to try and help him not be as upset when his mom left. "My new mission this week is to help him have fun even when he isn't with you!" I said in a laughing voice.

"Thank you so much. You don't know how much this means to me!" she exclaimed in a relieved tone. Right away, James started getting fitfully fussy and didn't want to do the activities since he couldn't see his mom. Since I didn't want to break my promise of helping James, I made the activities sound a lot more fun than they actually were!

I was super surprised that my method worked! The first activity I was able to get him to do without his mom was taking backpacks out of the package and put them in a pile. After we finished, the pile was so tall it looked like it was staring at us. We did this so that the church can donate them to kids in need. He actually found this enjoyable and didn't think for a second about his mom being there. About half an hour later, it was time for water play. For this activity, we filled the kids' play tubs and water guns with water. At first he was a little hesitant to play with the other kids. When I showed him that playing with the water toys with them was fun, he happily ran with a big smile on his face. He worked with his new friends in order to get my friend and me completely drenched by chasing us around with water guns.

The last activity of the day was getting every kid of all ages together to dance, sing and rehearse the Bible verse of the week. When the songs started playing, I looked over to see James dancing and singing his heart out. I was so shocked and relieved that I was able to help him. When his mom picked him up, I told her about all we accomplished. "Thank you, thank you!!!" she responded in a thrilled tone.

This experience really changed my outlook on life because I learned that I really enjoy helping people, especially little kids. It also showed me that there's more to life than social media.





## The Line of a Thousand Miles

*Parsa Geramian*

This story began one afternoon on my summer break in July 2014. I was visiting Disneyland with my brother, my dad and my mom. When we entered the park we were walking around for a bit, but then my stomach started to growl like a T-Rex. We decided to get churros at a stand that wasn't too big. There was a counter and a frying station in the back. After we ordered we got our churros back in about five minutes or so. Of course my 4-year-old self was complaining why my dad's churro was so much bigger than mine. My dad was tired of my whining and just took and ate all of my churro. This set my grumpy mood for the rest of the day.

Then I saw something—a ride called “The Great Movie Ride.” I immediately started to run, as if I was a cheetah. When I got close to the ride I stopped, and saw my exhausted family running over.

When we got in line I realized the line for the ride was A THOUSANDS MILES! There had to be at least a million people in front of me in all types and colors of clothes. But I couldn't really see them too well because the lights were as bright as the sun. I couldn't deal with this line. But I had to.

After an hour we got close to the front. It felt as if I was there for a full day. “Finally!” I exclaimed. It was just my mom, my dad, my brother, and I in the front I thought. But there was actually a guy ahead of us. Of course, I started to cry and punch my dad. The chill dude looked about 36 years old and was wearing a blue collared shirt and jeans. Thankfully he let the four of us go ahead of him, and yes I was happy.

I learned that helping someone can make their day. I wanted to pay it back and I bought a young kid a churro. I hope he does the same for someone else someday.



## A Borrowed Hat

*Ethan Funk*

I was at the baseball field at Clover Park in Santa Monica, a place where I could hear the 405 Freeway busy as always. It was on a cold spring evening. While walking around the diamond, I scratched my head where my hat would soon go. It was about our sixth game of the season, and I was walking into the field getting ready to warm up. When I got to the dugout, I said hello to my tempered coach. Then I said hi to my teammate Max on the bleachers. He had a broken wrist but was still able to cheer the team on. I reached into my bag to get my glove and hat. Unfortunately, all I found was a glove, just a glove, only my glove. I had forgotten my hat! I went to my mom, asking her to check the car for a bright red hat, with a cardinal perched on a baseball bat. It took a million years, but eventually my mom came from the car.

“Nothing,” she said. I frowned. The clock hit 5:30, meaning that I was now late. From the bleachers, Max walked over. He was about my height, with blue eyes.

“Hey, Ethan, did you forget your hat?” he asked with concern.

“Yeah,” I responded. I was beginning to think I would just have to cheer from the sidelines, unable to play.

“Here, take mine,” he said as he handed me his hat.

“Oh my gosh! Thank you so much, Max. I owe you!”

I said with a smile the size of home plate. After feeling the sharp strap of my glove and putting it on, I began to run as fast as I could to my chubby, angered, but well-motivated coach.

“Hey, Ethan, are you ready to play?” he asked. “Go warm up with Noah over there will you.”

“Thanks, Coach,” I responded.

We went on to win the game. I scored two runs and made an amazing play in center field. After the game, I went to return the hat to Max. I thanked him and left for the lot. As the sun set, I entered my car, ready to hit the sack. Looking back on that day, it taught me that my friends have my back, and that I sometimes need a little hope and faith, and everything will work out. Ever since that day, I haven't forgotten my hat. That was a great lesson to learn.



## My Frightful Fall

*Zachary Nourafchan*

One fateful warm summer day, my skinny friend Noah and I were 12 years old in a sleep away camp in Los Angeles. We decided to go to the ropes course for the day with our cabin. We put on our safety gear and we prepared to go on the course that towered before us. As Noah and I went to see our options on what to climb, we saw something that piqued our interests. “The Leap of Faith,” our camp counselor told us, was a 30-foot wooden pole that had little pegs on it so we could climb to the top. It looked as if it was super windy that high up. From there we had to jump and try to grab onto a plastic ring.

Noah and I decided to play rock, paper, scissors to see who would climb it first. I won and was excited and nervous because I had a deadly fear of heights. As I started to climb the ginormous pole I heard my friend yelling, “You got this, you're almost there!” I decided to look at him and I regretted it deeply. When I saw how high up, I was I felt like I was on top of the Empire State Building. Then I slowly started to climb higher and higher and higher! As I reached a top, I realized there was nothing for me to hold on to to stand up on the pole as the sun was setting.

I was shaking from fear that I was going to fall, although I was connected to a rope so I wouldn't get hurt. Noah was yelling, “Don't give up!” And at that moment I knew I had to push myself to stand up. So as I grabbed the rope that was attached to me, I pulled myself onto the top of the pole. The whooshing wind was thrusting itself at me trying to push me off. As I held my ground against the wind, all I had to do was jump and grab the ring. As my friend kept yelling these words of encouragement, I knew I had to jump so I thought to myself now or never.

Then I jumped with all my strength and it felt like time froze. Then I stretched out my arm and grabbed the ring and it was burning on my hands. I slowly fell and my cabin was yelling my name. Noah was so proud of me and so was my cabin. I was so thankful that I had an awesome friend to help me push through and succeed.





## Unexpected Occurrence

*Jonah Houriani*

One sunny Friday afternoon at Paul Revere Charter Middle School, I was at the student store waiting in a line that seemed to go on forever with a crisp one dollar bill in hand and a ferocious feeling of hunger in my stomach. Even though it was the beginning of fall, I still wanted to get a bag of ridiculously spicy chips. I had already been standing there for ages as the line moved as slow as a snail. I was about to get out of the line and give up my wait, but then I had an extravagant idea. I got out of the line and then made my way to the front of the mile-long line. While walking I was worrying that I had made a huge mistake and that I should turn back to my spot and wait. But no, I still made my way to the front of the line with my wrinkled dollar in my sweating hand from worrying. My idea was to ask someone at the front to take my dollar bill and get me a bag of chips.

After rethinking my plan, I walked up to a girl who was wearing a bright red sweatshirt and dark black pants. By the time I got up to her the dollar in my hand was soaking wet from my damp hands. She looked like any other average teenage girl but with unique hair that was bundled and went straight up. "Um, hello?" I began.

She turned around and said, "Yes?"

I then asked, "Can you use this dollar bill to buy me a bag of Doritos?"

She was confused at first but then accepted and said "sure." I handed her the soaking wet dollar bill that once was crisp and dry.

I was waiting outside the line in the warm windy but wonderful breeze when all of a sudden my stomach started growling as if to say, "When will I get to eat?" I started thinking about how my mom told me not to finish my lunch at snack time and then I immediately started to regret not listening to her. The sharp bright beautiful sun came over Paul Revere Middle school and had begun its way to the other side of the world. It was almost as if my daze was over and the wait would be no longer.

All of a sudden my daze became disrupted when the girl came back with the bag of chips and said, "Here you go."

"Thank you so much!" I replied as I started to admire my bag of chips and how on the front it said "Too Hot to Handle!"

As I started walking away, she yelled, "HEY, WAIT!!" I turned around flabbergasted. When she caught up to me, she handed me back my dollar bill. I was confused but then I realized that she had just paid for my bag of chips! I was going to tell her that she was making a mistake but before I could say anything she had already run off.

I stood there for minutes thinking about how there actually are people who are nice and kind in this world. I then told myself that from now on I would be nicer to people and even do small favors because sometimes they can mean the world to them. For the second time I was disrupted from yet another daze and I walked off to my next class.



## The Ironman

*Haakon Knap*

One spring Friday, at about 1:00 p.m., I decided to attempt Paul Revere's "Ironman" run which is a 5-mile run in under 40 minutes. I was in sixth grade and I had always wanted a special P.E. shirt, to differentiate myself from the massive crowd of standard gray and green P.E. shirts. Although I didn't believe in myself whatsoever, I decided I should at least try to complete the 5-mile run. So with summer creeping up on me, and the weather only getting warmer and warmer, I knew that this day was make or break. So although I didn't think I was ready, I firmly tied each shoe, stretched my legs, and then I heard the loud, ear-splitting whistle blow.

I shot off like a bullet, rounding corner after corner, dodging and weaving through the crowds of gray shirts. I felt the soft, dry blades of grass, kicking up on my ankles. Mile one and two zoomed by, and pretty soon I had just run mile three and I felt like I could do this. My running was rushed and my legs ran in repetition. This task that had at one point seemed so complicated and impossible now started to feel within the grasp of my sweaty palms. But then, I felt it. I could finally feel my weak knees, sore arms, and aching torso. I was sore in all of my joints, and each of my legs felt as if they were Jello.

"Only two more miles!" I thought to myself, trying to look on the bright side of things. Although my body was shutting down, I kept on running even though I heard the whistle blowing and I saw the field emptying out of students. I finally reached the fifth and final mile. By this point, I couldn't feel my legs anymore. Each breath was a hard gasp for air. I tried picking up my legs to run, but I just wasn't able to. I reached halfway of the mile, and I started to walk. As I looked across the P.E. field, the burning sunlight was glaring off of every surface.

"I can't do this anymore," I was saying to myself. "Is it even worth it? It's only a shirt." I was just about to give up when from around the corner a group of about four small, skinny kids ran up to me and started cheering me on. They were all wearing the ordinary P.E. uniform of gray and green.

"You got this! Keep going!" the group shouted.

"I can't do this," I mumbled as I slurped up water from the drinking fountain. I kept on trudging through the grass, grabbing onto metal poles for a short break. I began to jog again and as I did I could see a cheerful pride appear in the eyes of the boys. Finally, I gathered up all of the energy I had left in my body. I sprinted the last 300 yards running as fast as a cheetah. I ran through the finish line, and then I collapsed on the hard rock floor. My teacher pulled out her phone and documented that I had finished my 5 miles with a time of 39:25. This whole experience really changed my outlook on life. I realized the kindness that people had. This small group of boys gained nothing from helping me. Heck, I was too tired to even say "thank you." Yet they were happy just seeing me earn the shirt. If it weren't for these boys and their encouragement, I don't think I would have accomplished this great task.





## Pre-School Friend

### *Gemma Paik Schoenberg*

It was a warm fall morning and I had just started preschool. On the second day, I was wearing a pretty pink dress with a layered skirt and a yellow flower on the top of the dress. My dark brown hair had been cut into a short bob. I walked happily into the classroom with my parents and brother. The classroom was decorated with saturated colors. On one wall there were colored drawings that kids had made. I smiled at the drawing as they warmly smiled back. One of the drawings didn't smile and kept its waxy frown. My brother had already made friends with a boy named Elijah from summer, and they were playing. My parents were talking to the other parents, so I was by myself.

The clock ticked as I watched more kids flood the room. Some already knew each other and were playing, but most of the kids were clinging to their parents. One girl walked in already in a bad mood. She looked as if she was being sent to prison, with the intense scowl on her face. She was wearing dark navy blue leggings and a sky blue shirt. Her hair was put back in a high ponytail. She had thick, wavy, black hair that probably went down to her low back when not in a ponytail. Her parents said something to her but I couldn't understand. I walked over to the yellow and red toy bins. There was a carpet with a train track on it. I picked up a Thomas the Train toy out of the bright red bin. The toy was blue and had a red stripe on it with a big, gray smiley face on the front. It had been worn down from previous years and the paint was coming off from the hard plastic. The girl from before came up to me. She glared at me and pointed at the toy. I handed her a different one. She pointed at the Thomas the Train in my hands and started to look angry.

"No, it's my turn," I said in an annoyed voice. "You can have it after." She boiled with anger and started yelling. I didn't understand why she wouldn't just wait her turn. (Later I learned that she didn't understand or speak English.) She grabbed the toy out of my hands! I got mad and tried to take it from her, but she hit me on the head with it! The pain stung as the hard plastic banged against my head. I looked around hopelessly for someone to come but the parents were busy talking or had already started to leave. Tears came running down my face as I fell to the ground. Suddenly Elijah, my brother's friend, came over to me. He was in a green shorts and yellow shirt.

"Gemma, are you okay?" he asked. Then one of the teachers came over and helped me up. As I was leaving with the teacher Elijah came over and patted my head. "It's okay," he assured me.

Looking back on this experience, I see how kind it was for Elijah to do that. He noticed that I was hurt when the teachers didn't see, so he came to help me. I learned how valuable it is to help people and not be a bystander to people who need help. I also learned that even just coming over and asking if they're okay can make a big impact and make us feel better.



## The Long Swim

### *Kade Craft*

I could smell the salty sea shore as I was walking down to the Will Rogers State Beach. I was about to join my junior lifeguards group on a sizzling sunny morning in the middle of summer before my 7th grade year. I felt like I could have melted into a puddle. I didn't feel great. I felt like I woke up on the wrong side of the bed. I had my Junior Lifeguard uniform on which consisted of a gray-labeled T-shirt and blue-labeled swim trunks. While walking down I tripped and rolled my ankle, and it felt like 10,000 stingray stingers were piercing my leg. In pain, I kept a good pace towards the yellow Junior Guards umbrella, which was in between two jetties. The sun was shining, with no clouds in sight right on the water in between the jetties. This is where everyone meets. Still in pain, I walked up to my instructor, Phoebe, who had blonde hair, was 5'9", and was wearing the red instructor swim suit.

"Good morning!" Phoebe said.

"Hi, good morning," I replied. "I have something to tell you."

"What is it, Kade?" she asked.

"I rolled my ankle while walking down here."

"Dang that sucks, because you have to do the long swim to move up to the next group."

"O.K., I guess I will do it," I said.

Then I kept walking in pain towards the line of people getting ready for the long swim.

"Everyone get water ready!" she shouted. Then all my fellow junior guards and I got water ready, went in line, and Phoebe started counting down "1...2...3...GO!"

We all started sprinting out to the open waters and diving under the waves. After we got past the break we started swimming parallel to the beach, towards Tower 20. It is really a long swim because we all started at Tower 15, and between Tower 15 and 20 is 500 yards! While in the water I realized that my foot wasn't hurting at all! With no pain in my foot I kept swimming as hard as I could, and in no time, I got to tower 20. I had never swam that fast in my life! While swimming back to the shore the sun was disappearing behind the big blue ocean, and I could barely feel pain in my foot!

This incident made me realize that anything I put my mind to, I can do. I'm so glad I went on that long swim and completed it. I still feel accomplished to this day and I am so proud of myself.



## The Perfect Wave

*River Armm*

On a sunny summer day in the middle of June, a month before my 11th birthday, I learned how to surf. I woke up and felt like I had a million cups of coffee. I was so excited. I packed my large lunch and then had some breakfast. I zoomed into my car, and my mom drove the half hour to Zuma Beach in Malibu. I quickly changed into my wetsuit, and I saw my friends Misha, Leila, Presley and Bella already sitting on the beach. “Come, River!” Bella exclaimed in her sandy yellow wetsuit. Her blonde hair was all wet as she came speeding up to the parking lot to greet me. She ran up to me and gave me a sandy hug. “Let’s go get you an umbrella and rash guard. You’re in the orange group with Misha, Leila, Presley and me.” She helped me sign in as my mom talked to the counselors.

We ran into the water with our surfboards. The water was so cold, it felt as if I just walked into a freezer. I felt like I was going to get out and just sit on the sand warmed by the sun. But I didn’t get out, and just tried to warm up to the ice-cold water. Everyone got into groups of five with one counselor each. Our counselor’s name was Rachel, and she was super helpful. She taught me how to get up onto the board and paddle.

“You’re doing great!” Rachel exclaimed. “Now let’s catch a wave.”

I paddled to a wave, and Rachel pushed me into it. I caught it! It was a nice wave, and wasn’t that big but still took me to the shore. She taught the same to my friends, and after a few waves, I finally stood up. It was so fun! The sun shone on the water creating patches of bright light.

“How about all of you take a party wave?” Rachel asked.

“That’s a great idea!” Presley replied.

We waited for a perfect wave, and then we took it. I heard the wave roar. It crashed and then it ended. It was a blast! We took so many waves it felt like we were there for days!

“That was so fun!” Leila said, her brown eyes full of excitement.

“I’m happy I went here. I was scared I wasn’t going to ever know how to surf!” I joked.

Everyone laughed. By the time the sun reached the middle of the sky, it was lunch time. For lunch I ate a peanut butter and jelly sandwich that tasted extra crunchy since it was full of sand, and some juicy watermelon. After that, I reapplied my slimy sunscreen. Since it was made of zinc, it made my face look pink, and filled the air with its sweet smell of summer. I joined my friends in the water. We felt like seals. That day was so much fun for everyone. By the time we left we were all tired, but ready to come back the following day to surf more waves.

This experience taught me that sometimes the longer I wait, the more likely I am to get a good opportunity—in this case, the perfect wave.



## Bus Friendships

*Grant Dershewitz*

When I moved to Los Angeles from Seattle in the summer of 2021, I knew absolutely nobody. I went to Paul Revere, a public middle school, and I had just started my 6th grade school year. I was a very shy kid who got nervous talking to people but I still enjoyed school a lot. Every day, I had to take the bus to get to school.

One Monday morning, I walked to the bus stop. The leaves were starting to change colors to become a wonderful array of reds, oranges and yellows. The clouds in the sky were like a big blanket blocking out the sun from reaching the sidewalk. As I got on the bus and walked down the aisle, it seemed like everybody was staring at me like I was a celebrity walking down the red carpet. It was extremely discomforting. I took the first empty seat I found. The bus was super stuffy because the windows weren’t open. A few minutes later, a kid I didn’t know sat beside me. He was wearing a full Bayern Munich soccer kit. He had hazel eyes, light brown hair, and tan skin. He was much shorter than I was. Right when I heard the screeching of the bus’s tires on the asphalt, I looked out the window to avoid conversation. I was trying to be impenetrable. After a while when we made it onto Wilshire Boulevard, I finally worked up all my courage to break the awkward silence. “Hey, are you a soccer player?” I asked quietly. I was on a club soccer team called Santa Monica Surf so it would be pretty cool if he also played soccer.

“Yeah!” he exclaimed excitedly. “I’m on AYSO United.”

“Cool. I can tell that you’re a Bayern Munich fan,” I said. “I’m a Manchester City fan.” I had just gotten into European soccer a few months ago. “I’m Grant by the way,” I said cheerfully. I was slowly coming out of my shell.

“My name’s Nikan,” he replied a little bit louder than before. As the bus ride went on, we talked about what classes and teachers we had, what video games we played, and of course, soccer. It turned out that we actually had a lot in common. We both played a lot of the same video games and were both obsessed with soccer.

After only a twenty-minute bus ride, I had gotten to know a lot more about him. When the bus finally arrived at school, Nikan and I walked to our classes together. I felt an unusual sense of happiness rise up in myself. We heard the loud ringing sound of the school bell. “I have to get to class,” I told Nikan, “I’ll see you on the bus.”

“Bye,” Nikan said. He had a smile as big as the sun.

This incident taught me the important lesson that sometimes I can’t just wait for the other person to reach out to me. I have to be the one to reach out to someone else. As a result of reaching out to Nikan, I became really good friends with him and he introduced me to some of his other friends as well.





## Like a Good Neighbor

*Ariella Amini*

This is why I always wear a helmet. One hot summer afternoon, when I was 11 years old, I needed to get some fresh air and went outside. I decided to take my skateboard and ride it on the sidewalk down my street. At the time, I wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed. I was also pretty careless, so I didn't take a helmet, knee guards or elbow guards, and even went in sandals.

I was peacefully skating along the road, and I approached a pretty rocky and bumpy part of the sidewalk. I thought that I could handle it and I tried my best to ride over it smoothly. Nevertheless, one of the wheels fell off of my skateboard from all the cracks.

I fell to the sidewalk, then into the road, but luckily I managed to get out of it before any cars came by. My hands were burning hot from the sun heating up the asphalt. I had scars everywhere and bruises all over my legs and arms to the point where I looked like an overripe banana. I scraped my knee so badly that blood got all over my leg. Everywhere on my body hurt.

"Owie!" I squealed, crying on the floor. As I was getting up, my neighbor Isabelle was just leaving the house to go on a walk when she saw me. Isabelle is a tall woman with brown hair. She's in her 30s and has two dogs. Isabelle has been known for being an amazing neighbor. She always helps people out and even gets them gifts.

"Oh my gosh! What happened?" she asked.

"I fell and broke my skateboard," I replied.

"You always need to wear a helmet when you're skating!" she added.

I agreed and thanked her for helping me. After that, she went inside her house and brought me band aids for my cuts and scrapes and asked if I needed anything else.

"Well.... Could you help me get home?" I asked, embarrassed.

"Of course," Isabelle responded. After she helped me walk home, I thanked her and went inside. As soon as I got to my room, my ankle started to hurt. I told my parents who luckily are doctors.

"Why did you go out in these clothes!?" my dad exclaimed. "You have no helmet, and you are wearing flip flops!" He examined my foot and touched the cut that I got.

"Owie!" I shouted in pain. My dad told me that I sprained my ankle badly. "Thank goodness Isabelle helped you get home, or else your foot would have been much worse."

After that I had to wrap my ankle for a week, all because I wasn't responsible enough to put on sneakers or a helmet.

This experience taught me that there are many kind people out there who will even help people they don't know well. It also taught me to be more responsible when I go out. Ever since then, I always wear a helmet and protection when I skate or scooter anywhere.



## My Junior Guards Experience

*Dominic Longo*

It was a cloudy morning in the summer before 7th grade. I woke up with butterflies in my stomach, for it was my first day of Junior Lifeguards! I put on my Junior Guards shirt and swimsuit, got into my mom's car, and drove to Venice Beach. I saw my friend, Ben, and ran over to him.

"Hi, Ben," I said.

"Hi," he replied. "Are you excited for our first day? Our counselor is right over there." Our counselor, Valarie, seemed nice, so Ben and I went up to our group to greet everybody.

"Hello everybody, and welcome to your first day of Junior Lifeguards!" she said. "Let's get right into it with our first swim event. There are two buoys out in the ocean. You will have to swim around both of them, and then swim back." Everybody ambled over to the starting line and got ready.

"Ben, it's the first day. I'm not going to try too hard on this race," I said to my friend.

"On your marks, get set, GO!" Valarie yelled.

Everybody sprinted into the water and started swimming out to the buoys in the ocean. Ben and I were in last place at the very beginning of the race. We swam out, nice and easy, and then swam back in towards the beach. We walked to the back of the line, which meant we finished last.

Ben and I became great friends by the end of the summer. We swam the races together, but we never really decided to try hard. Before we knew it, we closed in on the last week of Junior Guards.

"Good morning, guys. Looks like the sun finally came out today," I said to my friends.

"Yeah. If only the sun came out earlier in the summer," Ben said.

"Junior Guards with me! Let's start class!" Valarie exclaimed. "Today is going to be our last day to do swimming events. We will be doing another buoy swim."

Everybody lined up at the starting line like every other day at camp.

"You know what? Let's try on the last swim race," I said to Ben.

"You're right. Let's try," he responded.

"On your marks, get set, GO!" Valarie screamed.

I raced towards the water like never before with my friends and we were the farthest from last place than we had ever been. We cranked our arms and legs as fast as we could until the very last second of the race. All three of us finished 19th, 20th and 21th. We were so excited and we felt like Olympic swimmers at that moment.

I learned to always try my best when I can and if I want to get better, practice is the perfect thing to do.





## Third Grade Savior

*Brady Starr*

It was 2018 and the first day of third grade. A relaxing summer vacation had just ended and I was very nervous. I had just moved schools from Saint Monica to Mar Vista Elementary. It was my first time switching schools and I had no idea what it would be like. The bright sun was in the middle of a cloudless sky as recess started. When I was walking around the campus it was the first time I really got a good look at the school. I was on a big field that was surrounded by large peach and white-colored buildings. There was a big patch of grass in the shape of a cross, and two soccer nets that had about ten kids in between them kicking the ball around. There were also four handball walls all painted with waves and about a dozen tetherball poles. I was standing next to a bright red play structure. There were two rows of monkey bars and two slides; they were curved, tall, and a couple kids were sliding down them. I heard one of them say, "I told you a million times, I am not jumping off the slide!"

"All right," said another, "but you are missing out." Then he proceeded to jump off the slide onto the soft blue and green tiles below. I decided to ignore them and look at the field. It was covered with big green trees. They were all dancing in the wind, swaying from side to side. But even though it looked cool I still didn't know anybody in the school. I didn't think that there were many other new kids in third grade, especially those who don't already have some friends with them. Also, it wasn't like someone would just walk up to me and invite me to play with them. So that meant that I would be all on my own.

As I was sitting down next to the slide, I started daydreaming about what I would do. I could try to meet people in my class, like maybe the person I sat next to, but there was a low chance that I might like them. But before I could go on to my next thought, I saw a kid jogging towards the play structure. He was white, with brown eyes and hair combed to the right. He was wearing a bright blue shirt and black shorts. He had a soft expression but he also seemed tired, like he was just running a lot. He looked very nice but I was sure he was just going to talk with his friends or play on the structure. Then he did something I never would have expected. He stopped in front of me and said, "Hey, me and my friends are playing a big game of tag called infection. Do you want to join us?" I just looked at him, shocked. I was just the new kid, I didn't know anyone and no one knew me. So why would he just invite me to play so casually?

"I-I, yhea," was all I could manage. He just smiled and laughed.

"Come on," he said. "We are in the middle of a game of tag after all."

"Wait, I don't think I got your name," I said.

"Elói," he responded. "And you are?"

"Brady," I replied, we ran off, ready to play tag.

This taught me to always be kind to someone even if I don't know them. It will always make them feel better and whenever I am kind to someone, they might be kind to me.



## Bus Troubles

*Nikan Jafari*

"Ring Ring," the school bell sounded. Finally school was over, leaving me with an entire Thursday afternoon to enjoy. I jumped out of my seat and sprinted straight out of the freezing X Building into the wonderful, wondrous warm spring weather. I headed towards the front of the school, hoping to find a good seat on the bus. When I finally reached the bus, I ran straight in and found a few seats in the front, so I sat down and placed my backpack over the other ones to reserve them for my friends. When my friends Zachary, Ethan and Jonah finally arrived, they thanked me and took their seat. After a few seconds I realized one seat hadn't been taken yet.

I looked around and I noticed that Matthias, a tall friend of mine, limped towards the back of the bus. "I wonder what's up with him," I asked my friends, as millions of possibilities raced through my mind.

"I don't know, but it looks to me as if he has been having a rough day," my friend Zachary said, as he munched on his chips. A few minutes later the bus took off and headed onto Sunset Blvd. which happened to be full of cars. A loud "screech" came from a car as it blasted past a sharp turn. When we finally arrived at the first stop it was only 2:20 p.m., but it felt like we had already been on the bus for an eternity. When I looked around I couldn't help but to notice how lonely Matthias looked sitting by himself in the back of the bus. I decided to go and check up on him.

When I made it to the back, I asked him, "Hey, how's your day been going?"

He furiously responded, "Horrible! I totally screwed up, as I forgot my textbook, I tripped and hurt myself while running the mile, and still have a mile high pile of homework to do when I go home." After processing his story, I sympathetically replied by sharing my stories and offered him help with his problems. After I finished I realized my stop was coming up, so I told him goodbye. I then stood up and made my way to the door, when I realized I had the board game Connect Four in my backpack from the Gift Exchange we had done a couple months earlier.

I sprinted back to Matthias as fast as a speeding train and asked out of breath, "Do you want this board game? I already have a copy."

He joyfully responded, "Yes!" After giving it to him I made my way to the front and seconds later stepped off the bus into the shining sparkling sun. "Thanks again, Nikan," he shouted from the back as the clock struck 3 o'clock.

"You're welcome," I replied, noticing that he had a smile a mile wide on his face. Seeing his happiness made my mission complete. I walked the remainder of the way home satisfied about what I had accomplished that day. This experience taught me that we should always help others in need because we may never know what they are going through.



## The Celebrity Lemonade Stand

*Ashton Aabedi*

One afternoon last summer, I opened up a lemonade stand near my house. Since it was summer, the sun cooked me like steak, which still made it the perfect day for a lemonade stand. Luckily there were a lot of trees around to make shade for the stand. At the time I was 12 years old and I was wearing a gray LeBron James shirt with blue Nike shorts. I was just trying to make a little money but what I didn't realize was that something was going to change my life forever.

The roads shimmered in the heat of the midday sun. After 30 minutes of selling lemonade I made adequate progress. Suddenly, a black Cadillac Escalade passed the lemonade stand and then turned around to come back. The Cadillac was as big as a tank so I predicted that there must be someone very big in there. The tinted windows of the car pulled down and instantly I realized that it was Anthony Davis. He was wearing a bucket hat and had a couple of chains with a Rolex on his wrist. He also had a wife in the passenger seat plus two kids in the back. The inside of the car was made out of double-layered luxurious leather. I was so happy that I felt like I was flying. "Can I get some of that delicious-looking lemonade?" he asked.

"I'm a huge fan, of course!" I replied. I poured him some lemonade and asked him to sign my Lakers hat. "Wow, this lemonade tastes amazing!" he exclaimed. He reached into his wallet to pay me but I informed him that it was on the house. "No way! I have to pay a fellow Laker fan," he answered. Anthony gave me \$100, and fist bumped me. I thanked him and he sadly ended up leaving. Ultimately it was an interesting experience and it taught me to go out of my comfort zone to help other people. In addition, it taught me to be generous to other people too.



## My Breakthrough Practice

*Leif Hochstein*

It was a dark summer night on University High School's turf soccer and football field. It was also the night when I became a better soccer player forever. I was 12 years old. It was our team's usual Wednesday soccer practice and it had been going well so far, but we were about to play a scrimmage against the older kids. I wasn't looking forward to getting smashed by kids twice my size. In the beginning of the game the player I was guarding had the ball. His name was Adam and he was the biggest kid out of all the older kids. He had dark curly brown hair and was a very good technical player. He got past me using his strength and size. But after he got past me I gave up and just started jogging in his direction. They almost scored a goal and after the play was over my coach went up to me and yelled, "Leif! What are you doing? When he gets past you, you have to sprint back and try to get the ball from him."

Then I said, "OK, I'll try my best." Later in the game it

was tied 2 to 2 and Adam had the ball again. He once again got past me using his strength, but this time I wasn't just going to stop playing. I felt a new sudden urge of confidence and I knew I was going to get it back! I sprinted back as fast as Alphonso Davies and put my foot in front of the ball and took it from him! It hurt as bad as when a scooter hits your shin, but it was worth it. After I had the ball I sprinted up the field and then when I got close to the corner flag, I crossed the big bright ball to my long-haired teammate Michael. He slotted it into the bottom-right corner. Our small faced tall coach Phil came over and told me, "That's what I'm talking about! Now just keep doing that every day."

"OK," I replied. As I was walking off the field I saw a baby bird leaving its nest for the first time and then flying away into the dark gloomy night.

I could barely focus, since I was so happy with myself. I knew I would be a better player from then on. I learned from this experience that instead of just being scared I should just do it instead of thinking about it. The reason I'm a much better soccer player today is because of that experience.



## The Fear

*Figo Fischler*

One Saturday on Catalina Island, right around noon, my family and I were on a boat getting ready to go parasailing. I was putting on sunscreen and making sure my life vest fit me. My aunt, cousin and I were getting harnessed onto the parachute. I was shaking because I was scared and the guy that worked for the parasailing company noticed and said, "Stop shaking. It's going to be O.K. as long as you let yourself be O.K. with it." I agreed and said "O.K." We started flying up but I was closing my eyes, not enjoying the glorious view of Catalina Island from just about 100 feet from the water's surface. We kept rising and rising. It felt like a roller coaster on a chairlift. I kept on holding on to the straps on the life vest like bowling balls trying to hold myself down with them, so that we wouldn't rise any higher. My face was red because I was squeezing it into my life vest. Once I opened my eyes we were about 300 feet in the air. The sun was hitting like a rock crushing on me slowly. "This isn't as bad as I thought it would be," I said. With my legs dangling, it felt as if my legs were falling off and like my shoes were slipping off my feet.

We started moving very fast and my aunt said, "Open your eyes and enjoy it." After I took her advice, I loved it! I had been absolutely terrified for nothing. It was all great—the breeze, the view and being about 500 feet in the air. Once I got off I noticed a sunburn, probably because the sun felt like it was pulling me into it the whole time. By the time we were done the sun was starting to go down. After that I went on to enjoy my day.

The lesson I learned that day was to try first. What I mean by that is you will miss so many opportunities and experiences with your friends and families if you don't try before you deny. Those experiences turn into memories which you can think back on later in life.





## Masks, the Start of Problems

*Alex Kook*

During the lockdown, we had to do Taekwondo in Zoom classes. Finally, a month after the lockdown ended, the teachers decided that we would have our belt testing in person. This would be my black belt testing, the most important one. So at roughly 5 p.m. in the Spring of 2021, mid-April, I arrived at the studio's parking lot. This is where we would test for that day, as we couldn't go inside the studio because of COVID. It was an extremely humid and hot day, the sun was shining brightly, but the sky around it was starting to dim down. I could see the pure white brick walls surrounding the area, and giant trees outside that peered over the wall.

I got out and said goodbye to my mom as she drove away. As I headed towards the testing area, I saw my teacher, Mr. M, and walked towards him to talk. He was extremely tall, had thick eyebrows, dark hair, and eyes.

"Hello! It's so good to see you again in person!" he said happily and energetically.

"Hello, Mr. M," I responded. "It's good to see you too! What did you do during the lockdown? I just talked to my friends to pass the time, doing online classes and such."

"Oh, I just talked with my family since I couldn't see them during the lockdown," he replied, still in a happy mood. "Also, after testing, I recommend you try to relax; it's going to be a long day, especially with the masks." The masks! I had forgotten all about them and dreaded the idea of testing with the masks on. After talking with Mr. M, I headed to the spot and waited for the test to begin.

When it began, we first ran laps around the huge building. Fifteen minutes later, I was exhausted; I felt like giving up. The masks made breathing so much harder, just as if I was drowning. I could taste the harsh metallic taste of blood in my mouth and slowly become dizzy. Before I could catch my breath, we moved on to sparring. We put gear on and began. While trying to regain my strength during spar, I let my guard down and failed to dodge the person's attack. As they kicked my leg with all their strength, jolts of electricity ran up and down my entire leg, which quickly became a burning feeling as if it was on fire. As I stumbled back, the person who kicked me looked at me in shock, as they thought I would successfully dodge it. Right then, the round ended, and we got a 5-minute break.

As I sat down on the benches with my hurt leg, barely catching my breath. "I can't do this anymore," I thought. "I'm so tired, and my leg hurts so much. I don't think I can keep up." Negativity fogged my brain like clouds, and I felt miserable. The person who kicked my leg looked at me sorrowfully; at one point, they stood up from their seat, walked two feet, but then quickly sat back down in embarrassment. As I was suffocated with these thoughts, an unusual one popped into my mind. "If I got this far, why should I give up now?" I thought about my goals; I couldn't give up just yet. Then, the break ended. With a better mindset, I got to my spot, and the test began. When testing, I pushed through my hurt leg and tried

not to let myself down. I tried my best and made it all through the testing. In the end, they gave out black belts to people who passed the test, which included me. I was thrilled; I finally did it.

As I got inside my mom's car, I peered outside the window, relaxing. I saw that the sun was nowhere to be seen, and the sky an extremely dark blue. I rode home happily with my bold black belt in my hand, and I was so happy that I had reached my goal after years; it was a huge milestone. I was proud of myself for pushing through and staying strong, and I learned that day that if I push myself and work hard for something, I can achieve it. So even though I don't take Taekwondo classes anymore, I'm still proud of myself for not giving up.



## The Swimming Savior

*Zack Eisen*

This summer I was at my friend's 12th birthday party at the beach. Since it was summer, the weather was hot and perfect for the beach. I arrived at Tower 15 around 3 p.m. I was wearing blue and black swim trunks. Everyone wanted to go to the water and swim far out. I didn't go right away because I was putting all my things down. When I got to the water everyone was already about 30 feet ahead of me. It was easy as I swam forward but it started getting harder and harder as I got closer to my friends. The waves that were crashing onto me felt like hundred pound weights falling on my head. When my friends started going farther into the water, I started to get worried because I couldn't catch up.

"Wait for me, wait, wait!" I shouted.

Then my friend Malakai came back to me. He was always a very nice friend of mine and this is another example of his kindness. He was wearing a wetsuit with a boogie board by his side and said, "Do you need help? It looks like you can't catch up."

That was exactly what I needed, I thought to myself. I said, "Yes please, I have been trying to catch up to everyone but I kept being pushed back by the waves."

Then he said that he would help me and tell me when to go over the waves, when to go under them, and when to swim. After I got the hang of it, Malakai and I swam out to all of our friends. I felt so relieved that I was able to make it because I was tired and it was very stressful when I was swimming. Now that we were far out there were no more waves to push us back.

When everyone got bored, we swam back in and onto the beach. I was so grateful to Malakai because of his help so I went up to him to let him know how much I appreciated what he did.

"Thanks a lot for the help, Mali," I exclaimed. "I wouldn't have made it to everyone else without you."

"Yeah, no problem. Anytime," he responded.

Even though it seemed like a small act of kindness, it felt like Malakai saved my life at that moment. I learned that even just a small act of kindness can go a very long way. This really changed my outlook on life because it made me realize that I should always try and find ways to be kinder to people, even if it's just a small act of kindness.



## Finding Debra Winger

*Willa Libaw*

As we walked down the street through the misty fall morning, my brother launched into his dramatic monologue. Beverly Hills was always quiet in the early morning. The only sounds were from distant cars and sprinklers spraying arcs over bright green lawns. However, the Libaw family was up early to walk to breakfast, and my younger brother Desmond took advantage of the quiet to tell his ‘story’, infinite pieces of fiction that never really ended so much as were abandoned.

“I’m an elf,” he began, “an orphan, all alone in the wilderness. And I have a pet lion. I have three friends and three knives. Also, two swords, some poison, an invisibility cloak...”

My dad, who enjoys cooking and listening to Bob Dylan, listened with mild disinterest, while my mom, a teacher who knew the secret hierarchy of elementary-school staff, ignored him almost completely. I was a grumpy and tired eleven-year-old sister and never listened anyway. I entertained myself by finding ways to correct his story. My brother himself, a foolish second grader obsessed with Pokémon, continued cheerily despite his quiet audience.

I breathed in, then out. This was my favorite type of morning, where the air was cold and sharp and quiet. The morning seemed to whisper, but it might just have been the dry brown leaves rustling.

We walked past a house with a dried-out lawn and pale yellow arches like watery sunlight on its porch, and my dad stopped suddenly. “Hey, look at that!” he said, pointing. A tiny, colorful bird sat right next to the sidewalk. I stepped forward. The bird stayed there.

“That bird is too friendly to just be sitting outside,” I said, looking at the bird, who sat as if glued to the spot.

“The house cats of Beverly Hills wouldn’t let it live for more than two days,” my mom said. “Someone should probably catch it.”

“Nononono!” my dad yelled. He did not want another pet.

But it was too late. We chased it around the yard, trying to surround it. I felt both nervous and excited. At one point I jumped forward and grabbed the bird, but as soon as I held it in my hands, I could tell I was holding it wrong. The bird felt tiny and soft and round like freshly-packed snow. I let go for a second and the bird leapt into the air as if its tail feather were on fire.

“Why did you let it go?” Desi screeched, staring up into a tree at the tiny yellow and purple spot of a bird. We would have to wait it out.

Then the bird flew out of the tree and landed on the lawn. My mom suddenly ran into an alley and grabbed a shoe box and newspaper and told us what to do. Taking them from her, we surrounded the bird and dropped the cardboard box over it, then slid the paper beneath and slowly turned it over. We had done it. We immediately dubbed it Gregory Peck, but at the pet store we learned that it was a she, and she was renamed Debra Winger. Finally, we sat with Debra Winger as the sun leaked through the clouds and ate some pie that was now lunch pie instead of breakfast. My mom called some of her

friends on her iPhone 12 and she was soon adopted by one of my mom’s teacher friends.

That day I learned that with perseverance and a little luck we can achieve our goals. And that a new pet can never be a bad thing.



## Giving Up a Ride

*Brooke Liu*

One windy winter afternoon in 2013 when gray clouds stretched across the sky like a blanket, I was at Berwick Buddies preschool during afternoon playtime. This preschool was in my neighborhood, so it was extremely close to my home in Los Angeles. Although it should have been the warmest point in the day, it was still chilly, and everyone was wearing jackets and long sleeves. The wind was so frigid that it seemed to bite at my hands. I could hear dry leaves crunching and rustling at every gust.

When the teacher, Teacher Karyn, let my classmates and me out for afternoon playtime, I sprinted out of the room to secure a scooter for myself. The preschool had a narrow alley in between the school and the fence. This was where the bathroom was and was also where the scooters were stored. Teacher Karyn only let my classmates and me use them during afternoon playtime, and they were really popular. By the time I got to the alley, there was one scooter left. It was a faded sky blue with dirty white handles and wheels that seemed to have been through a lot. It was leaning against the white fence that bordered the preschool. When I locked eyes on that single scooter, I started to pick up the pace. Five seconds later, I had finally made it. I grabbed the scooter and started making my way towards the front yard. Just then, a boy named Jules came into the alley. He had short curly black hair that clung to his head and had on a gray long-sleeved shirt.

“Hey, are you using that scooter?” he asked.

“Yes,” I replied.

“Oh, okay,” he answered sadly.

He started walking away, looking defeated. I felt a pit in my stomach and immediately started thinking. About a million things went through my head in an instant, and I had made up my mind.

“Jules! Wait,” I yelled to him.

Jules turned around looking startled.

“You can use the scooter. I don’t want it anymore,” I told him quickly.

He brightened up with a smile brighter than the sun and ran towards me. Jules took the scooter eagerly and I expected to feel disappointed, but I didn’t. Then, he turned to me.

“Thank you,” he said gratefully. “I have been waiting for a chance to get a scooter all year.”

That explained why he looked so down when I told him I was going to use the scooter. Seeing someone so happy because of my actions made me ecstatic. I learned that one small act of kindness can really make someone’s day and also how amazing it feels to be kind to one another. This small experience changed my entire outlook on life, and I am forever grateful for it.





## Grocery Gratitude

*Zelda Browne*

It was a chilly autumn afternoon. Red and gold leaves were scattered across the sidewalks, crunching under my sneakers. I had just come back from a long day of fourth grade. I was walking up my driveway, on the way to my bright red front door. Putt putt. I turned around to see my elderly neighbor, Ms. Lewis, parking in her driveway. She wore her large circular glasses and a heavy beige sweater to combat the cold weather. Ms. Lewis was an old friend of my family's and she was always baking delicious treats for us. Her thin silver hair hung limply across her back as she stretched her fragile legs out of her silver car and hobbled to her trunk.

"Hi, Ms. Lewis!" I called out to her. She tilted her head in my direction.

"Oh, hello dear!" she replied as she lifted up the lid slowly and reached into the car. Piles and piles of grocery bags were overflowing in her trunk. It looked like she had tried to fit all of the United States into her car. She looked at her bags frantically and the huge pile overwhelmed her.

"Would you like some help?" I called out to her.

"If it's not too much trouble, I would appreciate it," Ms. Lewis responded gratefully. I marched into her driveway and peered into the back of her car and saw nine grocery bags, stacked up taller than Mount Everest. Fruits and vegetables were spilling over the tops of the bags, and my mouth hung open a little bit.

"Thank you very much for helping me," Ms. Lewis said warmly.

"Of course," I returned even though I was reconsidering my decision to help her. I reached into the heap and managed to hoist a bag. I held my hands beneath it and they turned red from under the mass of food. My arms burned under my thick sweater as I entered her blue front door. I took three long strides and released the sack onto the table. I caught my breath and walked outside. Only eight more to go!

I repeated my hoisting, heavy breathing and releasing process eight more times, but it felt like a thousand years each trip I took from the car. Finally, when I dropped the last bag onto the table, I felt like I had just won the Olympics. Ms. Lewis trailed inside behind me with a grin upon her face. "Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you!" she praised me. Out of her purse she pulled a crisp five dollar bill.

"For you and your kindness," she offered. I looked down at the money and immediately started fantasizing about how to spend it. But suddenly, all the times Ms. Lewis had shown my family and me generosity vividly flashed through my mind. I was only being a good neighbor by carrying her groceries, which she would've hurt herself carrying. I looked back up at her sapphire eyes and made eye contact.

"No, Ms. Lewis, I can't accept it," I insisted. "You always help me and I'm only returning the favor."

"Are you sure?" she questioned puzzledly. She felt pleasantly surprised. She didn't expect a nine year old to be so mature about money. Five dollars sounded good, yet I still nodded my head. She shrugged her shoulders and thanked me again. Once we bid our goodbyes, I journeyed back to

my house and saw the afternoon sunlight had begun to dim into a purple twilight.

Looking back, I learned that good deeds don't have to be transactional. Good deeds should be done just to help somebody in need, not for money. I walked away that day with a smile brighter than the sun spread across my face.



## The Catwalk

*Leonard Maksimovic*

On a cold April morning last year, I was at Pali Camp. On that day my activity group and I were going to do the obstacle course which was built in the middle of the forest. I was very nervous at the time because I had never done any of these challenges before. I could still feel the cold morning air blowing towards the group. My friends Ryan and Grant were walking with me as we approached the obstacle course. Crunch, crunch, crunch was the sound I made as I stepped on the fallen branches. All of the obstacles were held up by huge trees. They were miles high up in the sky and I was very frightened. I was wearing a gray hoodie underneath a blue rain jacket that I won at a soccer tournament. I had gray sweatpants and blue indoor soccer shoes on. I was 12 at the time and was very nervous about having to climb so high.

The camp counselors explained to everybody the rules of the obstacle course, like no running and always waiting our turn. About an hour passed and the clouds were beginning to move away from the sun. I had already done two of the obstacles but there was one that I thought I could not do. It was called the Catwalk and it was the highest obstacle in the whole course. It was held up by two enormous trees that were like a million feet high. They gave me a menacing look that told me, "You can't climb me!" The two trees were holding a log that I had to walk across.

I watched as my friend Ryan did the Catwalk. He was about 5'6" at the time and was wearing a black hoodie, black sweatpants and black shoes. He was climbing up the tree and I realized that if he could do it, I could probably do it too. He was climbing as fast as a squirrel and he got to the top. He walked across the log and then he just jumped off like he didn't have a care in the world. He was actually singing as he came down and he had the biggest smile on his face. He walked up to me and told me, "You should do it!"

"Do what?" I asked him.

"The Catwalk," he exclaimed as he was panting. "Just do the obstacle and then tell me if you liked it or not."

I answered, "No, I can't do it. It's way too high up."

"I will give you my dessert if you do it," he said.

"I will think about it," I replied.

I got in line and before I knew it, it was my turn. The clouds moved away from the sun and a big yellow ball glowed down on us. I started to climb and my heart started to race. Once I got halfway up, I realized I had to go to the top. That was when I realized I can do anything I want to do if I put effort into it. I got to the top, walked across the log and jumped off. When I hit the ground, I saw Ryan with a huge grin on his face.



## Six Seconds of Shock

*Jason Boulware*

There I was. Sitting on the grass at recess. The wind brushed against my face. Curiosity. What a strange thing. Curiosity is what led me to shock. What is that I see? An outlet. All by itself. Wouldn't it be fun to play with it? I think it would. I stick my hand out to offer it a hand shake. But the outlet doesn't accept it. So, I shove it in its face. Little did I know that the outlet had a temper. Immediately right when I touched its fingertips, it zipped a crackling, stinging, and burning pain right up my arm. Little thorns made of electricity pricked my fingertips. A second of relief hit me like a truck but then the outlet became angrier and angrier. At this point it was electrocuting my hand to the point where I couldn't move it. To a point where my muscles went raw and hardened. Then it finally stopped. The outlet got all of its anger out. I looked at the outlet again one last time. A burnt, bitter, and consuming smoke emitted from it. It had a rough day. So, I left it alone, never to play with it again.



## Riding the Wave

*Emma Raymond*

During the 2021 winter break, I traveled to Honolulu, the capital of Hawaii. I was on a famous beach with its soft and smooth stretch of white sand and clear, turquoise blue water. I had been there multiple times, but I had never gone surfing before. My dad signed me up for surfing lessons, and before I even knew it, I was out in the water, terrified about what was to come.

I spotted a tan, tall young man that seemed to be my surf instructor. The sun was high in the sky and afternoon sun was shining on his face. I waved him over and I reluctantly hopped on the board that he was holding. He told me to paddle out to where the waves start to break. "How long are you staying here for?" he asked.

I replied, "I'm staying at this hotel for a couple days, but I'll be in Hawaii for two weeks." While we were talking, I was zoning off into the distance of other surfers. They were all falling down, which was bringing my confidence level down. He started telling me how to stand up on board and what to do when a wave comes. "I can't!" I exclaimed. "I'm gonna fall and then a wave will crash on me!"

"You're not gonna fall. And if you do, I'll be right here," he said with great warmth. I could tell that he really meant it. I felt like a volcano ready to burst. I saw a wave coming and my instructor yelled, "That's the one!"

"Oh, no!" I cried out. My surf instructor comforted me, as he could see the fear in my eyes. I stood up on my board, ready for the wave. The water roared in my ear as it crashed on my board. I felt the water stroke up against my feet. My board started to move and I was so relieved I didn't fall, that it felt like a gallon of water had just been taken off of my back. I was gliding so smoothly on the water. As I glanced at the

shimmering blue water, I noticed two surfboards next to me. When I realized that my sister and Dad were surfing the same wave as me, a smile finally appeared on my face. I jumped off my board into the water happily that looked gold from the golden hour sun. I could taste the saltiness of the water seeping through my lips. I felt a delightful pride rise up in me.

This experience changed my outlook on life because it taught me a lesson that I have to get out of my head. I have to be in the present moment and I have to let go of unhelpful thoughts. My mind was telling me thoughts that were scaring me which was keeping me from doing what I was trying to do at that moment.



## Buzz Off!

*Genesis Michel*

It was a sunny Friday afternoon in the summer of 2017. I was on the swings in the backyard of my yellow one-story home not knowing of unexpected events that were about to occur. I could feel the midday heat beaming onto my skin. There was also wind which whistled wistfully through my hair. It was so hot I could cook an egg on the sidewalk if I wanted to! I decided to ask my mom if I could bring out an old pool we had in storage and fill it up.

"Mom, can I get the small pool from the garage?" I asked.

"Yes, but be careful and make sure you wear sunscreen," she replied.

As soon as she said yes, I got excited for the day ahead.

While I was getting the pool from the garage, I saw my brother in the distance playing with his toy transformers. I knew playing in the pool without my brother would not be as fun. I asked him, "Max, do you want to jump in the pool with me?"

"Yeah sure!" he exclaimed.

Soon, the two of us were filling up the pool excitedly. After it finally filled up, we changed out of our pajamas and into our swim clothes. I wore a green swim shirt and shorts. My brother on the other hand was wearing some shark swim trunks. Once we were finished changing, I dipped my foot into the pool, and it felt ice cold. It was as refreshing as a cool *agua fresca* on a nice hot day.

The midday sun soon turned into a sunset. I spotted a yellow bee as yellow as the sun on my brother's arm. Being the empathetic person that I am, I remembered how much it hurts when a bee stings you.

"Maximus, stay still," I shouted.

I took a closer look at the bee. I saw that it was getting ready to sting my brother. I pushed him into the water but as this was happening the bee flew onto my arm and stung me instead. I jumped out of the water crying. As soon as I ran inside my mom grabbed me with a towel and sat me down. She took the stinger out of my arm and put some ointment on it.

A year or two later my brother stepped on a bee in the yard and it turns out he was severely allergic to bee stings. By the time he got to the hospital, his throat was closing and he nearly died. Sometimes I think back to that day and wonder if I had let the bee sting my brother, would he have survived the allergic reaction? But then I remember my parents always telling me that everything happens for a reason.





## I'm Not the Queen of Spain

*Isabella Aguilar*

My name, Isabella, is the name of queens. It is full of stories and legends and strong women. It means "God is my oath" in Hebrew, and it is the same name as Elizabeth. But that isn't why I got my name. I was named after actor and model, Isabella Rossellini because of how honest and down to earth she seems and also because my parents just liked the name. I like my name and I'm proud to have it. Just sometimes, a little, tiny, nagging voice whispers, "You don't deserve it, you haven't done enough, you're not fast enough or even smart enough." And it makes me wonder, maybe this grand, luxurious name shouldn't be mine. This is the sort of name that belongs to a girl who is better than me in every way possible. The name "Isabella" belongs to a girl where animals sing when she walks by, just like Cinderella. Maybe, I am unworthy of the name. What have I accomplished? I'm not the queen of Spain.



## The Blanket

*Quentin Kaufman*

One cold winter afternoon, it was raining and very foggy. I was downtown with my mom and we were driving around doing errands. We went on a great adventure driving through all of the different streets. We saw all of the cultural streets. My mom told me how iconic and how wonderful these streets were. They have food, old buildings, activities and even more amazingly fun stuff to do. As we were driving by an outdoor mini mall downtown, there was a sad, cold homeless man struggling to find body warmth. When we saw him we felt bad and wanted to help somehow.

My mom asked me, "How can we help him?"

I replied, "Don't we have an extra blanket in the trunk?" She remembered there was an old blanket in the trunk that we were going to donate. So we went back to the car and opened the trunk. The blanket was so soft and cozy. It was like touching a cloud. After we got the blanket we walked over to the sleeping man in front of a closed store.

When we woke him up we asked, "Do you need anything?" To which he replied, "Anything helps!"

So, we gave him the blanket and he said, "God bless. Thank you so much!"

After this, the now very happy man offered to do anything we wanted to repay us. He kept insisting we let him do something to repay us.

My mom said, "No, we are just happy you have a blanket and can stay warm!"

He still kept saying, "Please, please! Let me do something to repay your kindness."

My mom told him to stay where he was and we went into the nearby corner store. We went inside and bought water bottles, a bag of chips and fruit. We then gave it to the man and he

got even happier. He was so happy he couldn't even speak. He was speechless.

The kind man said, "This is the nicest thing anybody has ever done for me. Thank you so much!"

He asked what our names were. My mom replied and said to him, "My name is Tracy and my son's name is Quentin. What is your name?"

He replied, "My name is Carlos. I will never never forget this."

From this, I learned that I am so lucky to have a roof over my head and food to eat.



## Always Be Kind

*Benjamin Pacheco*

It was a scorching morning in Venice, California in 2017. I was walking in the small hallways of my elementary school. I could see leaves out the window dancing through the morning sky. The sun was shining barely though because it was early in the morning. I was trying to get to class early next to the teachers' lounge that is as big as an Olympic swimming pool and the small little class that was as short as an ant. When I was walking by there was a tall skinny kid who looked like he was as tall as a giant with green eyes. Just by the way he was looking at me I could tell he was a mean big blond boy. I had never seen him before so I thought to myself that he must be new.

Then he walked up to me and said, "What are you looking at, idiot?" He spoke in a very deep voice, and he was very tall so I was scared like a ghost was haunting me.

"Nothing," I replied. He threw me on the ground and then he took my backpack. He opened it and he ripped the pages out of my book and then the books made a boom sound as they hit the floor. He walked away and the bell went beep. The high note was really loud and comforting, but it was the first bell so I could still make it to my class since I was on the ground. I used all my power to get up, picked up my books, put the books in my backpack and sprinted faster than gushing water out of a waterfall to class.

I finally got to class. I was so tired from running and sat down in my seat. My teacher, Ms. Dan, announced, "We have a new kid in class. His name is Austin." He looked like the kid who pushed me on the ground. Then I realized that it was him in my class! Austin sat back down. He and I were sitting on different sides of the room. We did a bunch of school work and took a test. I got up and walked to my next class.

In the hallway I saw Austin again and he looked like he was lost. "Do you need help?" I asked. I decided to help him because I feel bad because he was probably having a hard day because he had to transfer schools

"Yes, I can't find my class. I am sorry I was mad earlier," he replied. I helped him find his class and then the low beautiful note of the bell rang. I was late to class and got in trouble when I was walking to detention. The sun was bright in the sky gazing down on the white wash of the school buildings but I knew when I got out the moon would be in the highest point in the sky. It was all worth it to teach the kid to always be kind because it probably brightened his day.



## In Heaven

*Victoria Barrera*

What would heaven look like? Probably something akin to a DVD rental.

I spend a lot of time watching films. Particularly the long old ones. I spend lots of time consuming media in general. I cultivate myself around the CDs I listen to, and the Blu-rays I watch, and the books I read. A month ago, when I watched Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, I felt like someone had opened up a door to my insides and poured into me new knowledge. I was like a huge landfill full of experience. But isn't everyone? Every person is warm and fleshy and full of experience. The things people create are parts of them. When I look at paintings and listen to songs and watch movies I'm in heaven. Whether I'm letting consumerism consume me, I don't care. The joy of creation is unparalleled.

The dimly lit aisles of my local record store are my Shangri-La. The irreparably damaged copies of Lindsay Anderson films in my collection are the Mr. Bubble I bathe in. Music is an accessory I wear and the walls of the home I live in. And while it may break my heart to think of why someone would discard a compact disk with "To my dear friend" written on it with black Sharpie, I praise the skies for letting me find a piece of life.



## Rock, Paper Scissors

*Julia Reinman*

One cool fall afternoon in 2014 when I was four years old, I had just come back from a fun day at preschool and was headed to the park. My older brother, Justin, was talking about his day at elementary school, and I was jealous. I wanted to be like him. My dad, brother, and I drove to Crestwood Hills Park in Los Angeles. I was wearing black leggings with sparkles, a pink T-shirt, pig tails with bright pink scrunchies in my hair, and a huge smile on my face.

We had hiked up the hill at the back of the field and were making our way back down. The sky was a bright and vibrant blue color. It may have only been a hill, but it was as big as a mountain to me. It was very steep, so my dad went down first. Justin, however, decided to run down, it was like he was a king wearing a crown. My brother's brown curly hair bounced as he flew down the hill, his arms waving and his voice laughing. My dad told him to be careful of the boulders at the bottom. My dad and brother sat on one and waited for me to come down. I wanted to run down like my brother, so I launched myself down the hill. I was flying at the speed of light! Unfortunately, I lost control and I slammed my face right into a boulder! I could hear it laughing and mocking me. The strong, watery taste of blood flowed from my lip into my mouth. My whole face was an angry bruise. My dad rushed me to the hospital. On the drive there my brother was comforting me. He was holding my hand. "It will be O.K. I'm here with you," Justin said. The rest of the bumpy car ride he kept holding my hand and comforting me. As I was getting out of the car, he helped me along. The hospital smelled faintly of

hand sanitizer. After they stitched up my lip, Justin helped me into the car again.

Once I got home, I stayed in my purple bedroom, and my tears made a river in my room. As I looked out the window longingly, I saw the deep purple color of the sky and it was as if there were a million stars. Suddenly a sweet aroma danced around me. I wiped my tears and traced this scent to the kitchen, where I saw my brother making oatmeal chocolate chip cookies — and a huge mess. He gave me a warm plate. For a minute I forgot how badly my lip hurt — until I bit into the cookie.

Despite the pain, I learned a few things from my experience. First, I learned that even when things seem rough, family is always there for each other. My brother was so kind to me. Second, I realized how much an amazing cookie can do for my spirits. And last, I learned that even though paper can beat rock, rock definitely beats me.



## My Dive From the Sky

*Olivia Smeeton*

When I was 11, I went to a country club with my sisters and grandparents on a blistering hot summer afternoon in Atlanta, Georgia. My grandparents own a membership at that club, and it has many blissful things to do, but the main attraction on my mind was the pool. Above all the fun things to do at that pool I was always drawn to one, the high dive. I stared at the long board as it dangled off the mile high concrete platform. I continued to watch as kids my age bounced over and over on the thin plastic. It seemed as if that diving board was luring me toward it.

I finally gave in after what seemed like forever. I timidly walked up the slippery stairwell dreading when I made it to the top. I inched to the edge of the diving board. I looked down from the clouds and saw my two sisters watching me from below. I looked down to plan my jump, when I realized how high I was. The surface and the bottom of the pool blended together to make the pool appear deeper. I couldn't do it. I ran down the staircase faster than a gushing waterfall. I repeated that routine about a thousand times. After many attempts to jump I finally just sat down and watched everyone else jump. I was busy admiring everyone's fancy poses as they jumped when a girl about 7 years old approached me. It was over a year ago but I still vividly remember that this girl had platinum blonde hair and gorgeous brown eyes that sparkled in the sunlight like sequins.

"I saw you on the high dive," she began. "I was scared to jump off once too but then I realized that I would always regret it if I didn't."

"Wow!" I exclaimed, awestruck. "I've never thought of it that way. Thank you!"

This small little conversation may have changed my outlook on life. We only live once so why waste it? After that I walked up the slick stairs that I knew far too well and jumped without hesitation. I fell for longer than I wanted to, my limbs reaching out in all directions. I plunged into the frigid water to make a wicked splash. When I arose to the surface, I saw the same little girl clapping with a smile as big as the whole pool on her face.





## My Perilous Piano Experience

*Mila Lucas-Doyle*

I woke up on a chilly, fall morning, and my mom reminded me that this was the day we had been waiting for, my piano award competition. I ran downstairs and practiced everything over and over on the shiny, white piano piano. My mom reminded me not to over practice, as I was worrying if I would do something wrong.

I put on a dark blue dress and some nice white shoes.

It was about an hour-long car ride before we arrived at the college, but instead of feeling relief as we got there in time, we were stressed. There was nowhere to park, and we were lost in this enormous campus.

It was a giant college on a mountain side, still pretty cold, and we had never been there in our life. We finally found where to park, so we rushed out of the car. I could feel the blazing hot concrete through my thin shoes.

I was waiting anxiously on a stiff, unsupportive chair watching small flies buzz around the room as the hours went by.

"Mom? How much longer until it is my turn?"

She quickly checked her iPhone XR and replied, "Only about one hour."

"Only!?" I exclaimed, upset.

Later than sooner, it was about 10 o'clock in the morning. One of the many employees walked up to me, and she handed me a piece of paper and almost demanded I did not lose it.

I scurried to the elevator, alone, and asked someone where to go. I entered the room and automatically felt intimidated. It felt like everyone was staring at me, but in reality there was only one. A giant beam of sunlight was shining directly on the piano chair. It was like a spotlight in a stadium. When I sat down it was almost like that beam of sunshine gave me a new burst of confidence. The piano was singing and I was playing both white and black keys.

When I finished, the judge did a seemingly judgmental clap as I left. I got in the elevator again, and it screeched as it came down to floor three. I got out of the creepy elevator questioning if I was even on the right floor.

I found someone sitting on a chair next to the elevator, assuming she was one of the millions of employees, so I came up to her.

"Excuse me? Do you know where the sight-reading room is?" I asked.

"Uhm, I don't work here," she replied.

Embarrassed, I sped away. At last, I found someone who could help me and she told me right where to go. This felt like it would never end.

"Miss? So you know where the sight-reading room is?" I asked, hoping this time she actually worked here.

"For piano?" she asked me.

"Yes," I answered.

"So you're going to go to floor seven," the very nice woman told me. "And it will be right around the corner, okay?"

"Okay, thank you," I replied, with a sign of relief shown very clearly in my face.

I rushed back in the elevator and straight into the room, and I walked to the piano and began basically right away. I was never very good at sight reading piano, so this is where I was most nervous. I had to sight read a piece I have never seen before. Nervously I started playing. The high notes of the piano immediately sounded wrong, but I tried to go with it.

When I finished I scurried out of the room and rushed to my mom. We came back to the car and my mom was excited

to hear from me.

"How do you think you did Mila?" she asked gently, yet eagerly.

"Well I don't know, I messed up over and over and over again. I'm just hoping they don't notice or something."

As we drove home, my mom was reassuring me that I would most likely get the award. But other than that, it was a quiet drive home.

When we got home my twin sister, Bijou, with long blonde hair kind of like mine, was wondering how I did. After a few hours of impatiently waiting, my mom finally got a message. She did not want to read it, until we were all there.

"Mila, guess what!" she said happily.

"What?!"

"I got a message!" she continued.

"Okay, read it mom, read it!"

She quickly clicked on the message and aggressively swiped to the end and read it out loud.

"After a close examination," my mom started reading, "we have decided to congratulate you with the achievement award for the Los Angeles board of music!" She added, "Good job, Mila! I'm so proud of you!"

"Good job, Mila!" Bijou exclaimed.

This was a very important event to me and I am very happy I earned that piano award. It taught me that very stressful moments pay off, and even if I am doubting myself, there's always a light on the other side. I built up to that moment for a long time, and it definitely did pay off.



## A Gift That Changed My Point of View

*Carmen Morales*

One sunny morning when I was 7 years old, my mom had asked me if I wanted to go with her to Target to get something important. I told her yes that I wanted to go. We got to Target and we had stopped at the school supplies section. I was confused why we were here. My mom let go of my hand and started to pick up notebook after notebook. Then she started to pick up pencils and crayons. My mom asked me if I could get erasers and pencil cases. So I got them. She started getting tons of backpacks.

"Why are we getting all this stuff?" I asked her.

"These notebooks are for this charity event that I'm doing in Mexico. Some kids in our village don't have any school supplies and they really need some, so I'll be sending all of this stuff to Mexico," my mom responded.

We headed home and she asked me if I wanted to help her fix the stuff. I agreed to help her. I was happy but a bit jealous because I really liked some of the backpacks that my mom got for the kids, but it was okay because I knew that this was for a good cause.

A few days later, my mom got a call from a lady in Mexico from our little village that her package arrived there. They FaceTimed each other and I got to see all the kids happily choosing their own backpacks and then opening their backpacks and finding school supplies inside. They thanked my mom and me. Their smiles were as wide as a house. I was so happy that they were happy.

From that day on I learned that I should always be thankful for what I have because not a lot of people have as much as I do.



## Bouncing and Booming

*Ava Mizrahi*

They live in the house next to mine. Three boys. Our backyards might as well be connected. I don't really know them. We almost never interact. The oldest one is probably a senior in high school now. He throws parties. Loud obnoxious parties that keep me up with the vile chatter and booming music. BOOM! The constant sound. I hear it in the basketballs that hop across their yard like a kangaroo. I think this is the work of the middle child, though the eldest might also play too. He's my age, or maybe a little older, and plays basketball with his friends late into the night. I hear it in the youngest. I'm honestly unsure of his age, the big, white wall between our yards obscures our view, but I do know this—he loves his trampoline. Ugly giggles destroy my ears and they bounce and bounce and bounce. We don't tell them to stop on the weekends because my dad says to let them have their fun, so instead I stay up into the wretched night, listening to the booming music or the constant bounce, bounce, bounce. And on weekdays is when we do talk. To tell them to stop, until the next weekend.



## The Glider

*Sam Moussavi*

One sunny Autumn afternoon about two years ago when I was eleven and my twin brother and sister were nine, my dad took us up to a ginormous mountain in Malibu. At the time my siblings and I didn't know what we were doing there but we were about to find out. It was dry and dusty, the cruel sun burning my skin, and below was the clear, blue ocean. The only noise was some birds chirping in the lush trees looming up behind us.

My dad told us we were here to go paragliding off the mountain all the way down to the beach, with our instructor Jack. He was a tall, slim, middle-aged man with brown hair, with a big, wide friendly smile. Even so, it was like I was at Six Flag Magic Mountain, feeling the rollercoaster of emotion from excitement to terror. My brother and sister went first. Jack and I waited up the mountain with my dad, petrified.

"Do I really need to do this? It doesn't look safe," I stammered.

"You'll be perfectly fine," whispered my dad as he put his arm around me.

Before I knew it Jack was back and he was delighted that his first run went so smoothly. I was very nervous because the mountain felt like it was a thousand miles high.

"Be brave and it will all be fine," my dad whispered again and pushed me towards Jack.

I was terrified. Jack strapped me into the harness. It felt very loose and unsafe. Jack explained if we wanted to get a good glide, we needed to run off the cliff. Jack said to run and I started to sprint at lightspeed. As I bounced off the cliff a big,

black bug bit my butt. At first, the ride was smooth and calm. It felt amazing because I was soaring like an eagle, the cool air ruffling my hair. But then it started to get rough, and we were going up and down instead of gliding down to the beach. Jack started tugging on some lines to see what the problem was.

"There is a twig in the line," shouted Jack.

I was uneasy and very worried about my life, so I closed my eyes the rest of the way and when I opened them, we were on the beach surrounded by my family. I suddenly felt a feeling of relief and safety, very happy and grateful that we had landed on the beach unharmed. I was on cloud nine, and ready to go home for dinner.

I realized I can do anything I put my mind to. Even though we had a twig stuck in the line, we survived and I am so glad I tried something new.



## My Sister's First Swim Meet

*Ido Levertov*

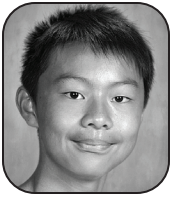
On a summer day in 2022 at 8 a.m., my sister was going to attend her first swim meet. I decided to go watch her compete. It was a hot day at the Pali High swimming pool. I could smell the fresh air and the pool water. It made a perfect summer day smell. My sister was ready. She had her bathing suit and goggles on. Right before she went into the pool a ladybug landed on her arm. It was as if the ladybug was talking to her telling her she will do great. At her first event she got second place. Everything was going right until she got disqualified at her second event. She was devastated and after the meet ended we went home and she was very sad.

I told her, "You got second place. That's great, especially being your first time at a swim meet and competing at one." She said, "Thanks, but I'm still really bummed out by it. It's not what I expected should happen at my first swim meet. But you're right, I did get second."

My sister really didn't want to go to the meet at first but after thinking about it, she said she might not be able to go to one ever in her life, so she wanted to go and face her fear. I was comforting her and making sure she was ready to face her fear. She still was a bit scared but she hid all that scariness and threw it away. Just like that she was ready for it. I think it was a smart decision even if she got disqualified.

So when we were at our house we went to get some frozen yogurt, we walked and walked and walked and my sister was always singing as we walked. She got so much yogurt in her bowl it was like the height of a skyscraper. I didn't get much because we were only rewarding her and I wasn't that hungry anyway. So we walked back home and then we went into our swimming pool because my sister loves doing that. We did a cannonball contest and her splash was the height of a mountain. Before we knew it, it was time for dinner and my mom made homemade pizza which is also my sister's favorite. She ate so much, she probably gained a thousand pounds. The sun was down and the moon was rising. So we went to sleep knowing the next day was Sunday and we wouldn't have school. I fell asleep in a flash of a second.





## Downward Spiral

*Jeffrey Ren*

One afternoon on the way back from Sequoia National Park to our hotel, my family noticed something intriguing. There was this orange, rectangular, camper van with a small white ladder on the back, that drove frustratingly slow. That's all we could see, because the trailer would never let us go past them when traveling down the mountain. Every time when there was some sort of empty stop at the side of the road, we would honk the car horn. But the driver and its passengers never put two and two together; they probably failed basic common sense school. So, for an hour, we followed the trailer that was driving at five miles per hour in the downward spiral from the mountain. At one point, I looked behind our car's rear window, and there were at least six other cars, all waiting and following that pathetic trailer, like ducklings following the mother. The dry, yellow-colored bushes on the dirt road with pebbles littered everywhere were going past the windows at an incredibly slow pace. Even after honking a million times, the driver never understood our message, or they were purposely making us suffer. Once we were off the mountain and on the highway, my family looked back to see who was in the van. Frustratingly enough, I don't even remember who it was!



## Calm Lakes and Scary Jet Skis

*Sophia Pasio*

The summer before seventh grade, on a warm summer afternoon on Lake Erie, in Ontario, Canada, the sun was shining brightly. I could tell it was going to be a fun day. My family and I were on my grandpa's spacious boat. He and my uncle were getting the jet skis ready for us to use. All seven of my cousins were excited to go. I, the cautious one, was a little scared. The first to ride was a mix of my uncles and cousins. They started the jet skis and the engines roared like an angry grizzly bear. The strong odor of exhaust fumes lingered in the air and they made me sneeze. They rode off into the glassy lake, shining like thousands of sequins. I watched as the clouds glided across the sky as I waited for them to get back. Once they were done with their ride and drifted next to the boat, my grandpa yelled, "Who's up next?"

"We are!" my other three older cousins shouted from the lake.

My mom merrily made her way up to me and said, "Are you sure you don't want to go?" She already knew I didn't really want to ride on a jet ski.

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure," I replied gloomily as the guys drove off.

My cousin, Emma, with her silky blonde hair and bright green eyes, climbed up the ladder of the boat and asked me, "Are you gonna ride a jet ski?"

"I don't think so," I answered.

"Why not?"

Embarrassed, I responded, "Well, I'm kind of scared."

Emma told me, "The first time I went on one, I was scared too, but when my dad told me we were heading back, I begged him for us to ride a little longer. I know that probably doesn't help that you're scared, but you'll have so much fun. And you'll probably regret it if you don't go." I thought to myself how I probably WOULD regret it if I don't go that day, and, I couldn't help but think, when is the next time I'll get to ride a jet ski?

"I'm gonna do it," I told her excitedly.

Emma looked at me, smiled and said, "You're going to have so much fun!" When the guys got back, my mom and I got on the two-seater jet ski and drove off slowly into the calm lake. I had a great time on that jet ski.

This incident changed my outlook on life because it taught me that even if something seems scary or hard, it could be an amazing experience and a lifelong memory.



## The Horrendous Camping Trip

*Paige Song*

When I was four, my brother, who was two years older than me, and his friends and I went camping, at a beautiful camping site at Mammoth. It was noon, humid and it was the year 2014. We were with our close family friends staying in two brown smelly looking cabins. It was dark and we were surrounded by dead brown bushes, gray weird looking rocks, trees, boulders and a big brown river that smelled like a strong stinky salty aroma of fish. There were thousands of beautiful fish. There was a skunk that smelled horrible, as horrible as the stinky old cabin.

Everybody was standing on a huge tall rock that was surrounded by green plants and flowers. The rock was the size of Mount Everest. It was sunny and hot but our parents still wanted to take a group picture of us. Afterwards, they all said "SMILE!" and our grins were as big as an ocean. After the picture was done my brother's friend with brown eyes with black bouncy hair approached me from behind. He acted like he was a thousand pounds and proceeded to push me off a rock. I was wearing a unicorn shirt and leggings with pink and silver sparkles on them with my hair up in French braids. I was trying to hold back the tears in my eyes but the amount of water in a fish bowl came out of my eyes, and my brother's friends walked away and didn't care.

Payton, my brown-eyed, black-haired brother, screamed at them, "What the heck is wrong with you!" They walked away as my brother helped me up. Payton asked, "Are you okay?"

I replied, "Yes, thank you for asking." My brother was very disappointed with how they treated me. After that we stayed in the cabin as I got bandaged up.

The other adults were all trying to comfort me and they felt bad. They all asked, "You okay?" The boys walked away to go into the brown cabin that smelled as stinky as old socks, where they were playing with each other.

I learned that I should treat other people the way I want to be treated because if I don't, then I might end up being the one getting hurt or, as in this story, getting pushed off a tall rock.



## A Moment More Colorful Than a Box of Crayons

*Sofia Yashouafar*

It was August 2022, a warm, windy, wonderful summer afternoon with clouds in the sky when this amazing incident happened. My family and I were walking out of Costco, after buying two carts full of food. As my parents were putting the items in the trunk of the car, my older brother, Kamran, suggested that we go to the Dollar Store and see if they have any school supplies to kill some time. My parents disagreed because it was getting late and we had to leave, but my brother convinced them to allow us to go.

The three of us split apart, trying to find what we needed like a game of hide and seek with the supplies. My little brother, Ari, found a couple of things and stuffed them in his pockets from his shorts. After we all bought what we needed, we went to stand in the line that wrapped around to the back of the store. Kamran started to nervously run his fingers through his bird's nest of hair, clearly showing his frustration. It was getting late and we had to go back. Suddenly, the sun came out and the clouds went away. We sensed that something good was about to happen. Turns out, something amazing that I would never forget happened! These two older African American ladies who were wearing leggings and big hoop earrings told us to stand behind them in line. They must have seen how worried we all looked by this point. As we were thanking her, it became our turn to pay. We waited for the two ladies to pay for their stuff and leave, but they continued to stand there even after paying. We hurriedly placed our items on the conveyor belt for the cashier to scan.

Little did we know, as we took our cash out to pay, it was already paid for! I could see the great discombobulation in my siblings' faces. We were still confused as the ladies started talking and smiling at us. Her smile was sharper than the pencils. The older lady, who we later learned was the mom, gave a valuable lecture that will forever remain ingrained in my mind.

"I paid for your supplies," the daughter started saying. My siblings and I had a shocked look on our faces.

"You three seem to be very smart, well-behaved, and responsible kids. We will pay for these, but in return, try hard in school, get good grades, do your homework, and forward this act of kindness. Have an amazing day and I hope you do well in school."

The words "thank you" seemed to just jump out of my mouth. Kamran, on the other hand, said in a very calm and mature voice, "Thank you very much! We will take your advice and try our best. Have an amazing day."

Ari was still a little confused as to what had happened. However, after a few seconds of comprehending what had just taken place, he fully understood what the two ladies had done. He blurted out a big "thanks" as the ladies were walking out of the store. As we left the store, the sun started to go down and the stars started to glow and sparkle. This was a very memorable moment in my life.

This valuable lesson taught me to be nice to everyone even if I don't know them, and even if they are a different age or different gender. I will try my hardest in school, and pass on the act of kindness when I find the chance to.



## The Shirt

*Mitchell Majors*

It was a warm spring afternoon and I was 12 years old heading into the final months of sixth grade. The sun was shining, beaming down from above me and there was a cool breeze blowing, rustling the leaves of the two big oak trees on the Paul Revere Middle School field. This was the first time I ever felt scared to do a run. I felt so much pressure from everyone around me I nearly chickened out thinking I couldn't do it, but I stuck to it.

I was just about to start my run for Ironman with my friends Haakon, Jonny and Huckleberry. Haakon and Huckleberry are both around the same size but Haakon has straight blond hair and a medium build while Huckleberry has curlier brown hair and a more skinny build. Jonny is on the shorter side with short straight black hair. "I'll be fine. I have nothing to worry about," I convinced myself. The thing is this was the last attempt I would be able to do for a while so I had to make it count.

As I lined up on the starting point with my friends, the TA walked over with the clipboard. She made me put on a blue, meshy jersey so they knew who I was.

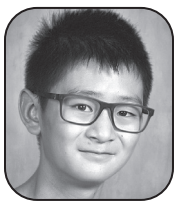
"All right, are you ready!?" she asked, setting up the yellow stopwatch.

Sounding a bit nervous, I replied, "Yes we're as ready as we can be." We got in our starting stance, heads down waiting for the magic word.

"O.K., three, two, one.... GO!" she yelled. We start running as fast as the wind that was blowing in my face for the first 100 meters. All I could hear was the clomp clomp clomp of my feet hitting the ground. Our plan was to have one person as a pacer in the front at all times. Whenever he needed a break, he would fall behind me and would jog with my other friends. If someone got too tired and needed a break, the next time I ran by he would hand me water.

The first lap felt good, the breeze in my wavy blond hair making it go crazy. Kids in other classes that knew me were cheering as they sat in their rows listening to their teachers. My friends wouldn't talk much because they knew it would drain me if I talked too much. After that my laps were the same and I sort of got used to seeing those two big oak trees at the top of the field and the volleyball courts with their old, brown, dangling nets with kids playing around them. When I rounded the corner on the final lap I saw Rex, yelling at me to go faster. I crossed the line at 38:46 while looking as red as a tomato. When I completed Ironman and got my shirt, I felt great. I thought I could do anything now! This experience really showed that teamwork can make a dreamwork. When we work with people we know and can help us, we can achieve almost anything.





## Pool Party Panic

*Jackson Yean*

One October when I was 9 and in third grade, I was at a friend's birthday party, along with almost everyone else from my class. Tambry, the birthday girl, lived at a nice house on Parnell Avenue in the heart of West L.A., complete with a pool in the back. It was a pleasant warm and sunny day. Even though I couldn't swim, I was excited to get the chance to play with my friends in the pool, and after that, we would get to play with puppies. Like any young kid, I loved puppies like Romeo loved Juliet, so they were the main selling point for me. So, as soon as we finished lunch, we went straight to the pool, ignoring the warning to never go in the water right after eating. We took turns changing into our bathing suits in the bathroom, then ran out to the backyard.

My friends splashed into the pool first. I hesitated, and stood at the edge for a moment, looking at the shimmering water as the afternoon sun reflected off it. "Hey man, come on in!" called Tambry, splashing water out of the pool and onto my dry legs. I knew I couldn't swim, so I was a bit nervous at first, but the professional lifeguard sitting at the corner of the pool, which Tambry's family had hired, gave me confidence. I took a first tentative step down the stairs, shivering from the sudden cold of the water, then I plunged the rest of my body in. Then, staying at the shallow part of the pool and clinging to the tiled walls in the deeper ends, we had splash fights, chased down floating balls, tossed around sinking darts, and duelled with pool noodles. Even though I was limited to where I could go, it was the most fun I had had in a while. I had almost forgotten about the dangers of the pool, until I got too bold.

I wanted to see how far into the deep end I could go, while still touching the bottom. Looking back, I realize how stupid that decision was. But, to 9-year-old me, it seemed like a fun idea. So, I let go of the pool's slick edge, and slowly walked deeper and deeper into the pool. The ripples from my classmate's play obscured the bottom, so I couldn't tell how much deeper the pool went. I was about to turn back around, when all of sudden I lurched forwards and my entire head was underwater! I let out a quick, strangled gasp, and in a panic, I pushed my feet off the rough concrete bottom. I tried to propel myself up, and broke the surface of the water for a few seconds, gulping down as much air as possible. I was scared, and instead of slowing down and thinking about my options, I was just trying to keep my head as high as possible. This worked against me, as the water slowed me down and I couldn't push off hard enough to get back to the shallows. Instead of bending my legs and launching myself, the tip of my toes simply grazed the bottom. "Help! Help me!" I tried to say, over and over, as my head bobbed up above the surface, then fell back under again. I willed my body to be buoyant, hoping that by some miracle I'd rocket up to the surface like a pool floatie. My eyes flicked to the lifeguard, and I directed my efforts to trying to get his attention. It seemed he wasn't doing his job too well, as he was looking in the opposite direction, at the people who could actually swim. I went on, helplessly bouncing and waving my arms in the water. Despite all my efforts, I had only moved a couple of inches towards safety. My predicament probably only lasted a few seconds, but time seemed to drag slowly on until someone finally saw me.

It was one of my classmates, Aaron. He was about my height with short brown hair, wearing swim trunks like me. We weren't particularly good friends, but at that moment, I would have ditched everyone else for him. I flailed about in the water like one of those inflatable tube men as he quickly and expertly swam over, grabbed my arm, and gave me a pull over to the shallow end, all in one smooth motion.

"I've got you," he said to me, popping above the surface.

"Thanks," I replied. I couldn't think of anything else to say. I hauled myself out of the pool and sat at the edge for a moment, breathing heavily and trying to recover from my shock. "Thank you so much," I told him again, gasping for breath.

"No problem!" Aaron reassured, sounding surprisingly blasé and cheerful about it, before he returned to the pool.

Despite my scare, the rest of the party went well. We had fun playing with the puppies in a small pen set up on the grass, then goofed off in the backyard. When it was time to leave, I said my goodbyes and thanked Aaron again, for probably the hundredth time. I spent the car ride home looking out the window at the fading light as it tinged the clouds pink, thinking about all that had happened. I realize now how important it is to have friends I can count on, and to appreciate them as much as possible. You never know when one might save your life.



## The Book

*Ava Mansouri*

One rainy summer morning, where the sun was just rising above the horizon, I was walking through the halls of my elementary school, Westwood Charter, when I saw two of my friends. Imann, a tall girl with long wavy, black hair, was talking to Adele, a shorter girl with short, straight, black hair. I waved them over and as I was walking toward them, I could hear the pitter patter of the hard rain outside. The dark weather could only mean trouble. While we were talking, Imaan stopped walking suddenly and said, "Shoot, I forgot my reading book at home." She had a worried look on her face. "Why does that matter?" Adele asked. Imann told us that she got points taken off if she didn't bring a book.

"Oh," I said, "I would give you one, but I already promised someone to give them one."

"Who?" she asked. I hesitated, since I felt it might hurt her feelings if I told her. I had promised Adele that I would bring her a book because she forgot hers. But I knew I couldn't lie.

"Adele asked me earlier," I replied.

"Do you have any other books?"

"The only books I have are my book and the one for Adele." She looked as if the world was coming to an end.

"Oh." The loud, ear defining, bell signified the starting school day. With that she walked away to her class. Imann and I didn't always get along. In fact, we fought daily. But I felt so bad after telling her that I wouldn't give her a book. And even though I was going to read my book, I knew I had to do what's right.

"Wait!" I shouted. "You can have my book." Her face glowed like the sun.

"Really?"

"You obviously need it more than me," I said. And at that moment I realized that no matter how much I needed that book, she needed it more. Now I know that I should look at other people's perspectives rather than just what I may need.



## Rosy Skies

### *Gisele Ferrero*

Aloha! The waves say as they crash down on the brittle hard sand. The sky, almost as sweet as pie. The warm rosy sunset, so comforting and peaceful like the smell of freshly baked bread right out of the oven; still warm and crisp. The clouds with a tint of citrus fall perfectly beneath the smiling sunset. The fresh icy wind brushing itself against me with a sense of loneliness in the slightest touch. The trees slouched over us with the most beautiful arch. The roots, strong like it's cemented into the sand but the branches are so soft and gentle like a newborn baby. I lay on the golden sand, warm from the sky's touch. The salty wet aroma from the wistful ocean, crystal clear, icy blue. Tired and beaten from slamming down over and over again. Boom! Crash! Again. Boom! Crash! The touch of the water on your skin feels like a warm hug. Snug in the arms of Mother Nature, what a nice place to be. Alone but protected by the rosy sunsets, the wet oceans, the citrus clouds, the brittle sand, and the solemn willowing trees above.



## My First B

### *Lily Yadegar*

I could feel the cold morning air flowing through the windows as I watched the autumn leaves hit the ground. "Five minutes left!" Mr. Agcaoili announced while staring right at me. His glare was laser focused and his dark eyes were weighing on me heavily.

I was running out of time, and I still had two questions left. How would I have time to answer both questions AND check my answers? There was no possible way I could do that. I knew I wasn't getting an A on that test. My heart pounded as the clock ticked. Thoughts came rushing through my mind as fast as someone could answer five times five. My hands started sweating and my body was heating up. I felt as though I was standing on the sun. "The last thing I'm going to do right now is give up. I am going to finish this test," I thought to myself with empowerment.

I did exactly what I told myself I would do. I finished that test.

*Briiiiiinnngggg!* There was the timer. "Left hand high, right hand low. Row six, turn in your tests," Mr. Agcaoili stated to the class.

I hated myself for not having enough time to check my answers. What would I do? This was not good.

Same time, same seat, one week later, we got our tests back. It was a cloudy morning, so I should have known it was going to be a dark, gloomy day. I got a B. A lousy B. That was the first time in my life I got below an A. I was devastated. I knew my parents were going to be upset. My eyes felt like heavy clouds before rainfall.

When I got home from school, I could smell my mom's famous spicy cucumber salad—home sweet home! I alerted my parents that I was home and sat them down to tell them the

story from start to finish. I finished the story by telling them about the travesty of obtaining a B for the first time in my life. My parents looked at each other and smiled. What was going on? "You persevered through that test," my mom said. "You could have easily told yourself that since you only had five minutes that you were going to give up, but you didn't."

Just then, I realized that the end result doesn't matter as much as the road it takes me to get there. I took the high road and put my all into that test, so at the end of the day, that's all that matters.



## My Remarkable Brother

### *Ela Santana*

On one fall evening during 6th grade after school, my brother and I were working on our homework. I heard my brother groaning and sighing out of frustration.

"What's wrong?" I questioned.

"My math homework is too hard!"

"Do you need help?" I asked.

"Not from you," he shot back.

"Suit yourself," I sighed, returning to my work. I shifted my position on my tan chair so that my legs were crossed. I quickly wrote the last answer of my math homework and shoved all my notebooks and folders back into my black bag. I could tell that my mom was making dinner by the scent of pasta that lingered in the air. The scent made me hungry so I decided to get something to eat since I was done with homework.

"You're done with your homework?" my brother asked, stopping me in my tracks.

"Yea! Why?"

"Can you help me? My math homework is like rocket science!"

"Oh please! Rocket science?" I scoffed.

"Please help me!"

I sighed as I crawled onto the soft brown rug where my brother was sitting. I took the long yellow pencil and the smooth white paper from his hand and glanced at his homework. I saw that his homework was something that I also had trouble with, but I didn't want to let him know that. I knew that my brother was a difficult person to work with. I didn't want to deal with the attitude he had when he was frustrated. I sat there for a second wondering whether I should help him or not. No. I thought. I told him that I would help him so I will help him.

"All right," I sighed. "So first you start with multiplication or division, whatever comes first."

As I was explaining, I saw my brother's face light up as he started understanding the concept. I smiled and kept going. Once I finished, I looked up at my brother who now had a large smile spread across his face from ear to ear.

"Do you understand now?" I asked.

"Yea! Thank you so much!" he exclaimed.

For some reason when his face lit up as he understood the concept it also made me feel good. That day I learned that someone happy is worth more than money. It's worth more than almost anything.





## Too Easy

*Juliana Leb*

Sweat not being able to break free. Ten miles in. Too easy. The wheels turn quicker and quicker as I near the rest stop. My dad, brother, and friend finally arrive. I take a bite out of a protein bar, and as I chew, it's bland, stale, and tasteless flavors come to life. The wheels finally start turning again. Eighteen miles in, I feel like I can bike another 100 miles. The first steep, towering, and menacing hill came up. I race to the top, the hill is no match for me. But the hills keep on coming. Each time I bike up another hill, it feels like someone is lighting a fire in my legs. My teeth are clenched so tightly, they might start to break. My hands grip the handlebar, like it was what was saving me from giving up. My legs felt tight, they won't operate. The pain in them won't go away, like a fly in your house. My body is shutting down, it can't keep this up for much longer. I see the top of the hill, a glimmer of hope. It feels like an illusion. I force my legs to pedal just one more time, again and again. Suddenly, it's gone. The street even out and my legs can finally get a rest.



## Little Cookbook

*Audrey Shamooilian*

There was a special moment that took place in the summer of 2019 that I still think about all the time. Over the summer, I was taking a cooking class in the back of the Sur la Table cookware shop that was only a few minutes away from my house in the Westwood area of Los Angeles. The store had a strong, savory and spicy smell wafting through the air from the chicken and curry that we cooked in class that day. The day before this moment took place, I finally made a good batch of French macarons after three failed attempts. I wanted to bring them to my class to show them to my teacher after class. My dad entered the store to take me home.

I desperately wanted to show her my work, but I was a shy girl at the time. My dad pushed me to go and speak to her. I walked toward my teacher with my plate of macaron cookies and said, "I made these myself." My tall brunette teacher who was wearing her apron was genuinely surprised that a nine-year-old girl baked such an advanced French dessert.

"You made these yourself," she said with an impressed tone.

"Even some of the most advanced bakers can't accomplish amazing macarons like those!" Then my teacher realized something and told me she would be right back.

After about a minute, she came back with a little cookbook. She handed it to me so I could read the title: "Mastering Macarons: Classic to Contemporary Techniques." With a big smile on her face she said, "Flip the page."

I flipped the page and saw a beautiful message. "6/22/19 — To Audrey — Here is a special gift for a special young lady. I am so excited about your bright future in the industry! — Kimberly Knorr."

I suddenly felt a burst of joy and hugged my teacher. "Thank you! I can keep the book?"

She responded, "Of course!" I was red like a tomato because I was still a bit shy, but I was more than happy that I received such a meaningful gift.

"I'll see you for class tomorrow! Thanks again!" I beamed.

Dad patted me on the back and we walked to the car. I kept my apron on, feeling like an important little baker. That day I learned I shouldn't be so scared to master even the tiniest things that I have a passion for.



## 4th of Disasters

*Borne Williams*

It was the Fourth of July 2017 on a hot, sunny summer afternoon. So far in the day we went to a water balloon fight (where I was hit in the head many times) and watched a playful, patriotic parade. My family and I were getting ready to go to the Bel-Air-Bay Club party at the beach. My mom was taking a long time, and my dad was getting impatient. He drove me over and it was just us at the Bel-Air. It was a hot afternoon so I really wanted to get in the water. I slowly got in the icy water, and dove under some white wash. I noticed a cloud that looked like a huge wave, and it was cool to see because I was in the ocean. I was out there in the water with a guy that looked to be around 50. He was wearing a half wetsuit and he was on a boogie board. When he caught a wave, I saw him get held under for a few seconds. I was wearing red, white and blue swim trunks. There was a jetty with rocks to my right. I could smell the aroma of the perfectly cooked Greek food from the kitchen. The sun shone to my right, just about to start setting. The ocean was as calm as a pond, but in the distance I saw a set coming. I swam out and dove under a wave before seeing a huge one coming. I kept swimming out farther toward the break and the guy next to me warned, "Watch out, this is a big one."

I dove under the monster but it caught me before I could make it under. I was ragdolled around like I was in a washing machine. I started to run out of breath because I was trying to swim out of it. I was completely out of breath and if I didn't come up soon it wouldn't be good. Luckily I came up and I was looking around confused and very scared.

"Are you O.K.?" the guy asked.

I started to cry and he realized that I was panicking.

"Come here, come here," he said as I was balling. He started to take me back in but another wave came and when I tried to go under I got ragdolled again. Luckily it didn't rip me around for as long this time.

"Come on, you will be O.K.," he promised. He took me over to my dad, who was surprised and confused why I was crying.

"Oh no, are you O.K. buddy?" my dad asked. "What happened?"

"He got hit by a big wave out there," the guy said. "It ripped him around for a long time. He did the right thing. He ran towards it and dove under." My dad comforted me and I was really freaked out. My mom came about 5 minutes later and she comforted me too. I learned that I can't get too confident with something because some things will go wrong. After that day I was scared as a rabbit that heard a wolf howl and didn't go past the break for a long time.



## Malibu

*Leela Bahador*

The blazing hot sun is glaring down at us. Wind going through my hair, separating my curls, but I don't care. The ocean is glimmering from the reflection of the sun, blinding me, but I don't care. The sickening, putrid, rancid smell of fish and seaweed from the ocean fills the air, but I don't care. I hear the roaring, bellowing, blaring engine of my dad's Shelby Cobra, followed by the faint sound of the Beach Boys playing in the background. The palm trees of Malibu are swaying back and forth, while waves as tall as buildings are crashing to the sand. All this chaos, yet I still feel so at peace. At that moment I realized, life can't get better than this.



## Lost in Bed Bath & Beyond

*Poppy Stevenson*

It was just an ordinary late, sunny Saturday afternoon in the fall. I was in kindergarten wearing my yellow floral dress when my mother asked, "Do you want to go to Bed Bath & Beyond to get some cooking supplies for the kitchen?"

"Yes, Mom! I would love to go!" I happily replied.

I rushed straight to the white front door and put my white sandals on.

"Mom! I'm ready!" I yelled.

As soon as I saw the dark and uphill garage filled with cars, I knew we had arrived at Bed Bath & Beyond. There I was, sitting in the front part of the cart, and after a bit, I got bored so I asked my mom, "Can I please walk around next to you instead of sitting in the cart?"

"Yes, of course! Whatever you'd like," Mom replied.

As time passed by, I saw two dogs in the distance. I decided to go run off so I could go pet the dogs without telling my mom. I quickly realized that I didn't see the dogs anymore and I didn't know where I was going!

"MOM!!! Where are you??" I yelled loudly and got no response except for a random kind lady.

"Did you lose your mom? Do you need help finding her?" she asked.

"Yes, I can't find my mom anywhere," I replied with lots of fright.

"Okay, let me take you to the front of the store and they can help you find your mom!" she responded.

I was absolutely terrified. I thought that I would never see my mom again, but of course, that wasn't the case. The people that work at Bed Bath & Beyond were so helpful and were kind enough to go on the loudspeaker saying, "Attention! If you lost your child please report to lane 3. Your daughter is here waiting for you at checkout!"

While waiting less than 3 minutes for my mom to come up and get me I was staring at the sun in the sky slowly setting

with doves flying, making me feel calm and relaxed.

I recalled that our cart had loud, squeaky wheels and so when I heard them I knew it had to be my mom. And so it happened, it was indeed my mom! She came up to the front and as soon as I saw her, I ran to her as fast as lightning.

"Mom! There you are! I was looking for you!!" I said feeling so thankful that I was reunited with my mom.

"Poppy, you can't go off without telling me! I was so worried!" Mom replied, sounding relieved.

"I'm sorry. I won't do that ever again. I know I have learned my lesson to never run off without telling you," I promised.

Shortly after my mother and I talked we went up to the lady who took me to the front and thanked her very much. Still to this day, I am forever grateful for her kindness.



## I Survived the Carr Fire

*Desmond Rutherford*

On the afternoon of July 27, 2018, I was playing on my Xbox in our living room. I should have known this day was going to be bad after seeing dark gray clouds. My mother and father, who were both 40 at the time, came in and exclaimed, "We have to leave!" They were visibly concerned. After I saw the sky I understood why. It was red, the air was thick with smoke and it was extremely hot outside, even for Redding, California. The temperature gets in the 100s every summer, but that day it felt hotter than the sun.

My parents gave my 10-year-old sister, Lilah, and I, who was 7, each a suitcase to quickly fill with clothes and toys. We put our older cat in a pet carrier and our chihuahua in a harness in the car. When we attempted to place our other two cats into our large carrier, it broke. This meant we had to leave them behind. That was the hardest part of evacuating. We got into the car and picked up our aunt and her pets on our way out of town. The heat was oppressive and the smokey air attacked my nose.

Once we got on the road that evening people were driving crazy and the traffic was terrible. Everyone was in a panic because it seemed like the fire was closing in on us. While my fearful father focused on the road, my sister and I saw flames dancing around in the wind. All the hotels and motels in the surrounding areas were sold out. We drove to Chico, which is usually a 45-minute drive, but this night it took over two hours. It was hard to find a rental place that would accept our pets, but we finally found one.

We tried to make ourselves at home in the guest house we rented via Airbnb. We went out to eat and bought some things to make our pets and ourselves comfortable but mostly we nervously watched updates on the news. They ended up closing the road to our house the morning after we evacuated. Our two younger cats were still trapped in the house! We put out extra food and water for them before we left. We also left a spare key on our patio. The cats in the house were lucky to be alive. Animal control found them and said they were safe. These were terrific tidings.

Although frightening, this experience helped me to be prepared for emergencies and natural disasters. We never know what will happen next in life.





## The Big Glass Door

*Yvette Thompson*

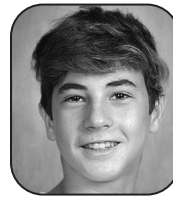
It was a warm but breezy sunny morning. The breeze made it the coldest day of summer. I was eight years old, and it was mid-July. My mom had woken me up telling me that I had to come with her on a hike. I gave in because my mom bribed me with a stop at Starbucks on our way. I had put on a white and blue flower-patterned romper. My long blonde hair was tied in a ponytail, which draped over my shoulder. My mom and I hopped into our little blue Nissan. It was so blue, it would make the sky seem gray. We went on our way.

The Starbucks looked so much more appealing than normal. But the gas station which was a kitty corner to the Starbucks was so bland. Its gray-beige stucco looked like rotting cottage cheese. The Starbucks, on the other hand, had left little twinkling lights hanging from the edge of the roof. The sun was now high up in the sky, and the morning mist began to disappear. As my mom drove the car numerous times around the loop, we just couldn't find a parking space. She eventually became impatient and decided to have me hop out of the car and grab our stuff. Fortunately, we had pre-ordered.

I walked in through the big glass door. It felt like it was fifty feet high, and seemed as wide as an SUV is long. I felt the cold air from inside crawl down my back, giving me shivers. It was at least two times darker than it was outside. It was also very cold. I went up to the table and grabbed the coffee and juice. Because of my little hands, I had to hold a cup in each, making me unable to open the door. The coffee seemed to get hotter and heavier, while the juice in my other hand became colder. I started to struggle. Just before I was going to spill my mom's coffee, a soft woman's voice behind me asked, "Would you like some help?" I nodded my head vigorously, but before I could speak, she opened the door.

"Thanks," I replied in a breathless tone. I sounded like I had just run a marathon. I met my mom back out of the Starbucks in the loop, and she looked at me with raised brows and said, "That took longer than I expected."

That moment seemed just yesterday—a yesterday morning, four years ago. Last week I noticed that a young girl, maybe six, was struggling to open the same big glass door. I remembered the kind act that the older lady did for me, in that very same situation. To myself I said; this time it is my turn to lend a hand. I have always tried my best to do the same, just to put a smile on their face, or a squint behind the mask, and an ear to ear grin on mine.



## Trippin' in the Woods

*Jake Weisblum*

When I was seven years old, I visited my sister at her summer camp in Upstate New York, but I ended up leaving with a brand-new outlook on life. It was about noon and the summer sun was resting in the east coast sky. My friend Hudson and I were just finishing our fresh American-style grease-filled burger along with a side of french fries that felt like an explosion of sodium in my mouth. Then our sisters, Charlie and Jayden, walked in. They were both wearing bright pink bathing suits with purple flip flops.

"Do you guys want to go down to the waterfront?" Jayden asked the two of us.

"Sure, we'll go!" Hudson and I excitedly replied.

We then gobbled up the rest of our lunch and headed out the door. The tall green trees crowded us like we were superstars as we walked toward the lake. As we passed the many cabins we saw our moms waiting for us by the rock climbing.

"Are you boys ready to go?" my mom asked the two of us. Both of our moms were wearing stone gray bathing suits with brown sunglasses that let the sun take a look at itself. A gray golf cart zoomed past us with a great big screech and a little honk. The wind willingly shoved a stick in the way of us like a grenade being tossed in during a battle. My shoelaces were tied in a bow and one of the hoops got caught on the stick, causing it to untie. I just stumbled and tumbled a little bit and didn't really notice it until later. As we walked farther and farther my shoelace dragged across the dark gray asphalt ground.

"This way, guys!" my sister said. All four of us all started walking down a hill that seemed as steep as Mount Everest. The trees were as tall and wide as the Empire State Building. The summer sun was high above the mountain range in the distance and it was beaming at the bustling brown bark of the trees.

"Look at that slide!!" screamed Hudson. A kid was sliding down the steep and narrow slide stumbling to the bottom. Hudson darted toward the lake and was going in a second. As soon as I realized he was running I started to as well. I dashed down the concrete road.

As soon as my mom yelled, "Be careful!" I tripped on my shoelace and went flying. I was like a bird. Time froze. It felt like I was falling in slow motion. I slid across the ground like butter on a pan. I burst into tears and the same gray golf cart carried me all the way to the infirmary. I took one look into the mirror and I looked like Two Face from the Dark Knight. The whole left side of my face was all scraped up. I will always remember this day for the rest of my life and always remember to make sure my shoes are tied.



## The Forest

*Tabitha Kopple*

Our footsteps crunched on the wet mulch and dirt. Raindrops splattered and bounced off the trees, arching and creating a canopy above us. I breathed in the scent of the fresh, and earthy, pine aroma coming from the trees. The flowing, foamy river blocked out the sound of our breathing, our walking, our whole existence. We were merely ants to this forest, our only trail was the slowly fading boot tracks pressed into the mud. I wandered ahead from my family, to a secluded spot in the forest. I stood still and let the rain splash my face. I didn't care. I let the rain and the wind and the river spray over me, until I melted into the grass. It covered me like it covered the trees and the plants. The ground lifted slowly, inhaling, and exhaled, the ground lowering and settling once again. The forest was like a giant, snoring above the clouds. The forest was like an island, a planet, a mountain. Nothing else existed but this forest. I stood still and breathed with the forest. I stood still and heard the forest breath in, and breath out.



## Lost in Summer

*Val Ward*

Have you ever wondered what would happen if you were a small child and got lost in a mall? Well, when I was six, my mother and I went to Westfield Mall on a sunny and hot summer afternoon in July 2016. We went to Macy's to buy some new clothes. After that we were going to go to the beach after we were done shopping.

I was with my mom who is a short lady and that day was wearing Lululemon leggings and a white blouse.

As we walked in the Macy's I saw birds flying through the air and one going astray from the flock. There were many people inside and it looked like it was a zoo and the ground was squeaking with pain as people walked along its surface. After a while, I got bored and just started to wander off and do something else. I finally realized that I was lost and felt as if I had just seen a ghost. I started on a fast walk and got into a run as I downright desperately tried to find out where my mom was.

"Mommy, where are you?" I shouted repeatedly.

A lady wearing a lavish red dress and a Louis Vuitton purse and very strong lavender perfume came up to me.

"Young man, are you lost?" she asked nicely.

"Y-yes," I said with a stutter.

"It's all right. You don't need to be afraid. I'll help you find your mom," she said in a silky voice.

"Do you remember the last time you were with her?"

"I-I was with her at Macy's last," I said shakily.

"Okay, then, honey, let's go and find her."

I told her what my mom looks like and she walked me toward Macy's. As we got near, I saw my mom and felt great relief.

"There you are!" she cried as she came in for a hug. "You can't wander off like that again, but I'm just happy you're safe."

I sniffled, "I'm sorry."

The nice lady was still there and I said, "Thank you for helping me."

"No problem, young man, but next time try to stay with your mom," she joked.

Later that day I was with my mom and felt grateful that that woman helped me find her. That day I learned that many people in life are very kind and only want to help us. If it weren't for the nice lady, who knows what would have happened.



## Skiing Accident

*Cameron Vahidi*

One snowy winter morning where the bells were jingling, where the roads were more slippery than an ice rink, my family and I were driving through the beautiful mountains of Mammoth. My family and I had been driving for over four hours. By then, our energy was drained by the four-hour car ride. We were just arriving in Mammoth when we got stopped by a peaceful and proud police officer, and were told to put chains on the tires. We did as we were told and after a long thirty minutes, we finally arrived at our cozy and warm hotel room. My family and I were extremely tired because we woke up at five in the morning to avoid the traffic. On this day we were planning to rest and get ready to ski through the snowy mountains of Mammoth the next day.

We woke up, and we were full of energy, ready to ski. We went down to a nice cafe where the sun shined like a bright light through the mountains, and ate a good meal to energize ourselves. By ten in the morning, my family and I were already on the ski slopes ready to ski. As we started to go up the lift, I was getting nervous because it was my first time skiing. My parents told me that everything was fine and that we were going to have a great time. As we were approaching the top, I was getting ready to jump off when I saw a huge cloud shaped like a mountain. Quickly after I jumped off the lift and I slipped, but I saved my fall. We started to head down the mountain, and so far everything was going well until I slipped again and fell. My parents came over to help me, but the mountain was heavily packed and chaotic so it was a struggle to get up. My parents were having trouble getting me up, so a kind skier came up to us and helped me out.

As a 7-year-old boy, I was shivering in the cold wind. As I was crying, my parents thanked the helpful and caring young man.

Trembling, I said, "Thh-hank yyy-ouu."

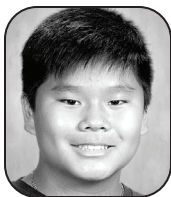
Before skiing off, the young man asked me, "Do you want me to teach you some skills?"

I looked at my parents to see if it was O.K. and they nodded yes.

My dad, talking over the wind, said, "That sounds good, and we'll follow along."

After he taught me some good skills such as parallel turning and how to stop more efficiently, my parents and I went back to the hotel and had an adequate dinner. For a couple months after that incident, I was still scared of going skiing. Soon after, I got over my fear of skiing and quickly got back to skiing. I learned that being kind to others can make a big impact. This experience changed my vision on other people and how kind they can be.





## Not So Scary After All

*Kai Hung*

This was it. My family and I stood below a forty-foot tall tower in a rainforest under a canopy of trees. It felt like the middle of nowhere even though civilization was just a few miles away. I looked up at the tower where I saw the long, menacing zipline, glaring down at me. I inhaled the crisp air as I put my foot on the first step of the tower.

What am I even doing? I thought. I don't even want to go on this.

But, I had to. It was the only way down the mountain that I had just taken a ten minute lift up to. And, I didn't want to embarrass myself and cause a scene.

The first few steps felt like a never ending staircase, and I kept thinking about how much I didn't want to do this. The only person that I could really relate to was my younger brother, Keanu, who looked easily as scared as me or even more. "I really don't want to do this," I said to Keanu as we were climbing the steps together.

"Me neither," Keanu replied with a smile that I could tell was holding back fear.

Honestly, this made my stomach feel a lot lighter. For a second, as we were climbing up the steps and looking around at the trees, it made me forget about my fear. But, like always, what felt like a hundred pound weight dropped back into my stomach.

My family and I finally got to the top of the tower. But at that point, my legs were as stiff as cardboard. I wasn't ready to move on, but I forced my legs to move knowing it was my only option.

Then, disaster struck.

I realized this wasn't any normal zip line. It was a Superman one where you lie down, and I was too light, so Keanu had to sit on top of me.

I'm lying down and someone is sitting on me? I thought. What if I fall?

My mind was picturing all the ways I could die, but before I could think about opting out, it was Keanu and my turn.

"Are you ready?" I asked him, glancing at his hazy brown eyes that kept darting up and down the tower with unease.

"No," gulped my brother.

I agreed, "Me neither."

As I heard the metal click of my harness locking into the zip line, I tried to muster up the courage to just go through with it.

C'mon, you got this. It will only be for like 30 seconds, I thought.

The zip line operator counted down, "Three! Two! One!" And off we flew. For the first few seconds, my eyes were squeezed shut. But, after not feeling myself falling to my doom, I opened my eyes. I was a bird soaring through the sky, and I was looking down at all the trees and plants 500 feet below me. I started laughing. All that anxiousness just to have this much fun!

"This isn't actually that bad!" I shouted to Keanu.

"You're right!" He shouted back.

And after about 30 short seconds, the zip line suddenly came to an end. After getting unclipped from the zip line, I could feel my feet finally hit the soft dirt of the ground.

"Woo hoo!" I cheered. "We did it!"

I took a sigh of relief. Even though I was happy to feel the ground again, I was extremely glad that I did that. I had so much fun that if we could've gone again, I probably would have.



## Control

*Leila Heyat*

Don't you hate it when you feel like everything is out of control? I do, and this was definitely one of those times. It was a sunny day with a cool breeze—not too cold—which made it the perfect day to go surfing. My dad and I piled our boards into the trunk and set out to the beach. We decided to meet with my instructor at a new location we'd never surfed before. We started to walk down towards the shore, and I got a glimpse of the crashing waves. "Wow, those waves look big!" I said, trying not to sound nervous.

"Eh, they're probably 6 ft., but you'll be fine," my instructor replied. I could feel myself start to sweat under my wetsuit.

"Calm down Leila, it's just the heat," I thought to myself.

Once we reached the water, I got on my board and started paddling out just as the first set of waves were rolling in. I quickly turned my board around and paddled as fast as I could to catch the wave. The wave picked me up and with its powerful force it pushed me towards shore until I paddled back out. Soon, a new set of waves were coming in, except these waves were much bigger and even more powerful than the last. I started to feel nervous again but I had no choice but to go for it. I paddled for the wave just like I had done earlier, but as soon as I stood up, the front of my board nose-dived and before I could react I found myself underwater. Instinctively, I covered my head and waited for the wave to pass over so I could swim up for air. I was able to find my board but didn't move fast enough to avoid the alarmingly big waves rushing towards me. I was pushed back underwater again and felt the leash around my ankle tug me in every which way. Up, down and back around. It was dark and I couldn't see anything. The freezing water going up my nose and into my mouth made me feel like I was choking. Panic started to set in and I scrambled up for air for a second time but before I could catch my breath I was pulled back down again. This time, as I was spinning underwater, my leg scraped hard against a rock. I couldn't think clearly, it was hard to tell which way was up or down, and I had no control over anything.

"This is it. I'm gonna die," I thought to myself. I shut my eyes tightly and tried to stay low to the sand and rocks until the water above me felt calmer. To my relief, I could finally swim up to the surface without struggling with the current. Gasping for air, I managed to get back on my board and paddle to shore. I laid in the warm sand and laughed because the whole thing felt so unreal. "Phew," I thought to myself, "that was a little too close!"

I sat for a few minutes until I stopped feeling like I was going to faint. I guess it's unavoidable for things to sometimes get out of control, but you have to stick it out and learn to get through it. Even so, that'll be enough surfing for me for now.



## New York to Los Angeles

*Marcy Eljio*

My life was different from other kids, like the rich kids who lived in upper Manhattan. I grew up in lower New York. This was East Flatbush, where a lot of Caribbean people and Dominicans live, but most of them live in upper Manhattan by Harlem and the Bronx. In my neighborhood I would see a lot of apartment buildings, retail stores, and the hustle and bustle of the people in the neighborhood. East Flatbush was cool but going down into 2020 East Flatbush was getting violent and a lot of dangerous things were happening. When my mom heard about it she moved me from East Flatbush to the suburbs in New York by Coney Island.

I moved schools then a lot of new things happened. I had a big change. I started not caring about school and I barely went. I was always in my room not wanting to do anything. Then summer came, and my mom was very upset with my report card, so she called my dad. In the next room, I overheard their conversation.

My mom forcefully told my dad, "You need to take her. Marcy needs to do better in school. It's unacceptable...the grades she is getting..."

He was pretty worried about what my future would hold because of what my mom told him about what was happening with me.

So he told my mom that I would stay with him for a while to get my act together.

I went to summer camp, and it was very educational. Due to the fact that I needed a lot of help in math, I went to the camp. Then the summer was very boring because I went to summer camp.

After the end of a long, boring summer, it was time for school. I was starting a new school because I just came from New York. It would be very different then New York school. The new school that I would be attending was Paul Revere Middle School. I was trembling because it was my first day at a new school. On my second day of school, I made friends and I went to my favorite English class with my favorite teacher Mr. Slavin. He really made me enjoy the couple of days I was in his class. For months, I was really looking forward to going to school everyday, going to his class. He really made me want to go to school every day. I liked how he lit up the room with his green eyes and made everyone happy to be at school every day.

Los Angeles is kind of different from New York because there is more accessibility on transportation. Don't get me wrong, they have trains and buses, but they take a long while to get to the place that you need to get to. Sometimes the bus driver drives slowly, and you won't get to your destination on time. In Los Angeles, people use cars because they are more accessible to get to where you're going on time. This is different from New York since most people use public transportation, but I kinda like living here in Los Angeles because I don't have to wait for trains or buses, I just get in a car and go. I miss a lot of my old friends and my mom's side of my family because everyone lives in Brooklyn. Since I live here, I talk to them on the phone a lot. My family on my dad side, I'm not really close with, so it makes me depressed because I'm much closer to my mom's side

I like my school in Los Angeles because the school is bigger than the ones in New York. In New York some people don't have the opportunity that other kids have to go to a good school. But in Los Angeles a lot of kids have the opportunity to go to good schools and have a lot of opportunities to get into like other good schools if you're going to high school or college. Therefore I learned to just work hard to get a good education. By doing this I could be successful in life.



## I Will Never Forget You

*Simon Mains*

It was my Grandpa Richard's 83rd birthday and we were in Lamorinda at my uncle's house for the celebration. I walked in feeling like a God getting hugs and kisses from my whole family. The stench of oysters, sea water, and the sharp scent of red wine vinegar filled my sinuses. It was my Grandpa's favorite food. My Grandpa was in a mask and I didn't know why, but I didn't think much of it. I was talking to my favorite cousin when my mom called me over to watch a mini orchestra of guitarists composed of my uncles and Grandpa, who was singing in his deep raspy voice, which sounded amazing. I was annoyed that my mom made me go over and take a picture. My Grandpa kissed me with his cold, wet, and wrinkly lips while his eyes filled with tears like an ocean. As soon as we got in the car I was attacked with a lecture informing me that my Grandpa had stage four cancer. Now I wish I could have been nicer to him because that was the last time I saw him in person before he died on November 6th 2022.



## The Inevitable

*Adelyna Hernandez*

I was suddenly awakened by my buzzing phone. It was a text from my grandmother saying that my great grandmother had passed. I ran to wake my mother and tell her that the woman that everyone loved, the woman who was deathly sick, my great grandmother, was gone. As my mom, my aunts, and I approached my great grandmother's house, I could hear the wails, and cries. I was so overwhelmed I didn't know what to do. I was lost waiting for what was next. All I could hear was the cries of despair, the ones of hopelessness and hatred towards a world that would rob my family of her. I remember the lingering unpleasant smell of medicine and urine in the house because she could not get up to drink or eat, yet that day it was masked with a freshly cleaned scent, because the hospital nurses had come to take care of everything that very morning. She was as delicate as a flower being ripped out of the ground and placed into a vase. Big Grandma, what were you thinking before you took your last breath? Did you think of your husband? Children? Me?





## A Feeling Found in Darkness

*Luca Lim*

“So uh, where are we going again?” I muttered, “Something about some stupid cave and some boring ruins?”

“Luca, can you just be happy? We are just as confused as you are, but we’re still excited!” my mom scolded. “It’s called a cenote. It’s a cave! doesn’t that sound fun? Besides, we’re on vacation in Mexico. You should be happy anyways.”

“I just want a bit more detail, okay?” I complained.

My family and I had been in the car for an hour and a half now, and I was itching to get out. It seemed like the boring road would never end. The pictures my dad showed me looked sort of fascinating, but not worth the two hour drive. It wasn’t any more special than a park or field. All it seemed to be was a dull pool of water in a slightly dark cave no bigger than a garage. Nothing more, nothing less.

At last, we made it to the cave. We were met with an ecstatic tour guide. He was very skinny and had cool, light brown eyes. The actual size of the cave was that of maybe three or four classrooms. Half of the water glimmered in the sun and the other half was cowering in the shadows of the cave. We put on our bathing suits and a life jacket (it was supposedly 150 feet deep), and we went into the icy cold water. Swimming, I thought, “Ugh, this is so boring.”

“Okay guys, let’s go on to the next part of the cenote!” the tour guide shouted.

“What?” I whispered under my breath. “There’s a second part?”

He led us through a small hole in the cave until we popped out in that little river we saw earlier. The river was in a sort of ravine and the walls were covered in gorgeous plants. The contrast of the green walls, the dark and murky blue of the water, and the bright sun after the spooky cave was amazing.

“Isn’t this cool, Luca?” my dad asked.

“Yeah. I guess,” I reluctantly agreed. I still didn’t think it was worth coming all this way.

After taking it all in, the tour guide once again announced, “Alright, now let us go on to the best part!”

Although surprised, I felt my face light up in excitement. Something that could top this might actually be worth the annoyance I’ve endured so far. Little to my knowledge, was the magnificence I was about to witness. We swam through the river and went into another cave. This would have been the darkest place I’d ever been in if it wasn’t for the slight illumination from the tour guide’s small flashlight. The winding, inky tunnel was like the esophagus of a great, mythical monster. After swimming through the tunnel for about a couple of minutes, the guide turned off his flashlight.

“Okay, this is it.”

It was the most astounding thing I have ever seen. In the darkness was a vast, open cavern slightly lit by a small hole in the ceiling with the sun peeking through. We had reached the belly of the beast. It was dark and ominous like a starry night sky. With the minimal sunlight, the murky water looked like ink with specks of glitter from the sun. Stalactites shot out of the ceiling pointing at us as if it was accusing us of something. It was almost completely silent except for a quiet dripping

noise from one of the stalactites.

“A lot of people used to call this the underworld,” the guide explained, breaking the silence.

Like the underworld, it was bathed in darkness, but also full of power like a skyscraper. Floating, I found myself at the center of the dark cave and the glimmering water.

“It truly was worth it, after all,” I thought.



## The Reality

*Rocco Chaaban*

One day I was just walking back with my dad from Trader Joe’s and we were talking, and we got the mail. I saw him looking through the mail and looking at important things. My dad said, “Hey looks like your 20 week report card is in.” I remembered that my heart dropped down to my stomach. I recalled the time I got a F on the test and my grade dropped from a D to a F.

He sat the cards down on the countertop. He then left the room and my mom, and I knew that the report card was in. She opened it up with me and I saw her blue eyes staring at me. We saw that the discipline and work habits were all good in all classes and the grades were all good. We got to the last class and it was accelerated math, so I got a little nervous because I had prior knowledge of what my grade was in the class.

After my mom opened it up and saw what my grade was in math she was disappointed, and I was also disappointed. We had to cut it out because my dad came back into the room and he didn’t know what my grade in math was yet. My dad has always loved math and is superb at it. I, on the other hand, don’t love math as much as he does but always persevered in it and tried my best. My mom and I both told my dad together which was very difficult for me especially because I didn’t want to disappoint anybody, and I did.

After that me, my dad and mom all sat down and talked about how to improve this before the twenty five week report card which is the final grade. My mom whispered, “You have to do better, Rocco.”

Those words stuck with me because they were so meaningful. I remembered that my mom also said, “If you want to try out for the soccer team you have to have a B minimum.”

Those words really lingered in my head while I was walking in Paul Revere. My dream is to play soccer. It’s what I love and wouldn’t be the same without it. After the talk with my parents, “I was as straight as an arrow.” I kept my head held high and always looking for opportunities to improve my academics.

Afterwards I improved my grade up to a solid B me and my parents were ecstatic over my improvement in an advanced class. We therefore decided to celebrate and go to my favorite restaurant Cheesecake Factory. I remember I had an old fashioned hamburger with fries which was scrumptious. We then had desserts. I had a strawberry shortcake and my dad as well. That ended the night and all of us went home and said goodnight. My dad said,

“Great job Rock, you deserved this.”



## Something New

*Jaden Arciga*

We trudged up the steep and bumpy trail embellished with sticks and stones. I sensed the aroma of pine trees whirling gently in the air. The trail opened up to a dusty glade with two stone picnic tables, a tall and rough stairway that led to the peak of the hill, and a tarp on the ground, layered under helmets and harnesses.

Looking up, I saw two long cable lines stretch high above the tall trees. At the top of the hill, there were two lofty starting platforms attached to the cables with trolleys secured to each one.

We were going zip lining.

"All right, anyone who wants to go down that zipline has to have a harness secured around their waist. We will have multiple counselors help you tighten your harnesses so you can zip down safely," a camp counselor called out.

I had never gone down a zipline before. All I knew was that it was high up, and I would need a lot of courage to try something like this, let alone overcome my biggest fear: heights.

All of the kids grabbed their own harnesses from the tarp and scurried to a counselor to have them tightened. My friends were grinning from ear to ear, and their faces were elated. I thought, with a little uncertainty, "I might as well give it a try... it's not every day I get the chance to go down a zipline..." I stepped into my harness and had it tightened before scrambling into the long line.

The kids at the front of the line had cables and ropes clicked on to their harnesses, and they walked up the stairway to the platforms at the top of the hill. I watched from below as the kids on the zipline whooshed down with big smiles on their faces. My heart beat faster and faster in my chest. I realized I had to pick a partner to zip down with me. I turned to my friend, Zoe.

"Hey, do you want to go down the zip line with me?" I asked, glancing at her hazel eyes and soft blonde hair.

"Sure!" she beamed.

Edging towards the start of the line, I felt my palms dripping with sweat, and I heard the thumping in my chest pounding stronger, shaking my entire body. My thoughts raced a mile a minute about all the things that could possibly go wrong.

After a few minutes, we were finally at the front of the line, ropes were clipped onto our harnesses, and we were all set to walk up the steep stairway to the top of the hill. My legs were weak, wobbly noodles attempting to carry my almost paralyzed body up the steps of the hill.

At the top, one of the counselors took a picture of us, and then we were next to go down the zip line. I watched my two friends in front of us whiz down the zip line, yelling at the top of their lungs in enthusiasm.

Now it's my turn.

Zoe and I stepped up on top of the two metal platforms, and the counselors hooked the cables and ropes attached to our harnesses onto the two cable lines above. We walked down to the very bottom step of the platform.

"All you have to do is lift your feet off of the step, and you'll be on your way down!" the counselors cheered.

I couldn't believe I was actually going to do this. I shivered enormously, and not from the cold. My heart felt like it was thumping out of my chest, but I knew it was impossible to back down. Inhaling, I prayed it'll all be worth it in the end. On the count of three, Zoe and I lifted our feet off of the step, and we dashed down the zipline faster than screams could escape my lungs. The breeze felt so cool and fresh against my skin, and the sharp, green trees were speeding by the side of my face as I spun around and around, too stunned to take it all in at once. Looking at the site surrounding me, I felt the beating in my chest slowing down, and the steadiness of my breath relaxing my body. I leaned back and felt free.

But just as quickly as it had started, it was over. I was still trying to comprehend it all as the counselors were unhooking the attached ropes from the top cable lines. Zoe and I stepped off of the landing platforms, and we had our picture taken again.

"Now just walk all the way back up the trail to where your group members are," one counselor directed.

"That was actually so fun!" I rejoiced, "I want to do that again so bad!"

Walking up, my heart danced in my chest as I held my head high with pride.



## A Lose-Lose

*Parsa Montazeri*

Pound, pound, pound! Niko, with his hazel hair who gets angry like a bull. Pound, pound, pound went his skinny fists. And then there was Josh, under Niko's lengthy body. His red curly hair jerks as he attempts to dodge and not be hit. And his eyes, like a deer's in front of a speeding car. In those eyes, I saw the regret he carried for opening his big mouth. But in the blink of an eye, that helpless expression vanished from his freckled face. At this point, all the kids, from those that were playing on the brightly colored playground to the towering 5th graders, with their deep voices and elder frames, came to watch. And they all arrived just in time. The skinny one let loose, and after the beating Josh had taken, Niko thought he had won. The noises of children screaming was hushed by the pound, pound, pound of fists to face. But that pounding grew quieter, and slower. Giving Josh, with his new expression, to pounce. He put his small, chubby hands on the burning, bumpy concrete and lifted himself out of Niko's unforgiving reach. Cuts, sweat, and dirt covered the faces of the opponents like that of an abandoned attic, dirty and old. Radios shrieked and blared in the distance, along with thundering footsteps of worried but angry teachers. But they were like first responders searching for dead bodies. The one with the red, curly hair jabbed at his opponent with a new gust of energy. The circle of loud bodies, big and bulky, came closer around the scene, blocking out the teachers and TA's. And right before Josh's chubby hands landed, the last punch for the day, Niko's face was painted with an expression of fear. And a sense of regret on Josh's. That day, no one won.





## Unreachable Medal

*Zoey Morris*

My heart was beating faster than it ever had before. I struggled to stay balanced as I used my friend Sarah's shoulder to stabilize myself while I stretched. It was a chilly afternoon, perfect weather for running my final cross country race. I knew the coaches were talking to us, but their words seemed to slip in one ear and out the other.

"Top ten runners will receive medals," my coach informed us. This news, unlike the seemingly unimportant things my coach was informing us about before, caused me much interest. The problem was, I wasn't a top ten runner. My best place I had gotten this year was 14th, and that wouldn't get me the shiny medal that glowed in my mind.

"Zoey. Zoey."

Sarah and Sienna were vigorously tapping on my shoulder.

"What?" I replied, coming out of my haze.

"Are you going to try for a medal?"

I replied with a simple "I dunno." But, in my mind, I couldn't stop picturing myself holding the smooth piece of metal. My friends, being the enthusiastic and supportive people they are, wouldn't let me get away with "I dunno." I was standing under the tent, listening to them for five minutes telling me how I could do it. But, again, I wasn't focused on anything but my lingering thoughts.

Only thirty minutes later, I was being called up to the starting line. The dusty track was taunting me with its steep hills. "Go!" someone shouted, and I dashed away from the line. One by one, I passed other runners. With every step, I zoomed closer and closer to passing the person in front of me. It was then that I passed my friend, one of the fastest runners in the school. If I could just keep my lead, I would definitely get top ten.

Sooner than I expected, the last hill emerged in front of me. The Mount Everest hill was the most treacherous part of the race. I was struggling to grasp my breath as two people sped in front of me. I had to pass them. I hustled, climbing the rocky hill one step at a time, but I couldn't pass anyone. I sprinted downhill with only one turn to go, but as I bolted, so did the person in front of me. It was like an endless race. My foot crossed the finish line just moments after my friend. "What did I get?" I said between gasps of air to my mom.

"Eleventh," she replied.

My heart dropped to the pit of my stomach like a boulder. Still, I couldn't help but smile when I heard my time. I had dropped more than a minute on the hardest course of the season and gotten my best place.

"Zoey! How did you do?" I heard Sarah shout at me, running over to my side.

"Eleventh place," I replied.

Her green eyes glistened in the sunlight. "Zoey, that's amazing!"

"Thanks," I said, feeling my lips curve into a smile.

I might not have gotten a medal, but I knew it didn't matter because there was always next time. Plus, I finished the race at a time I never expected I could get!



## Long Division

*Mabel Lowe*

We had just gotten back from our day-snorkel, and I was very happy and adrenalized. I was walking with my best friends Natalia and Moxie, probably chatting about random 10-year-old girl things.

As we hopped and skipped up the dirt road, happy as can be, I heard our counselor, Ms. Knox, shout, "I know you have all had fun, but it's time to do some learning while we are here. Long division!"

I rolled my eyes and felt extremely annoyed. We were sat down by some hippie-looking guy with a long braided chestnut beard. I looked at Nat and Moxie and groaned. We were trying to prepare ourselves for the long boring math class coming our way.

"CLINK!" I saw a trap door open.

"Surprise!" yelled the hippie man. "Long Division is the name of a maze!"

Are we gonna go into the maze and do long division? I'm confused! I thought.

"This camp used to be a spy training camp, and this was used for tunnel scaling. It is pitch black and there are no flashlights allowed!"

I thought, It can't be that bad! Sounds really fun!

Then the man said, "Oh, and it's so tight you'll have to crawl."

I raced against my own thoughts inside my head hoping to come to a decision, and fast. After many long seconds of debating and listing pros and cons, I decided I would go.

"I'm so excited!" exclaimed one person.

"Me too!" replied Moxie. Her bright green eyes were almost crystalized as they lit up with excitement.

The line moved up some more. I got a rush of a perfect mix of excitement and nerves.

"All right, who's next? Ryan, Mabel, and Francesca!"

It was time to go. I lifted the old wood trap door and slipped inside. They were right. There really was nothing but black. I felt a few kids rush by me and couldn't find my friends. I felt my way through the tunnel. The mesh sides and duct tape were colorless, and I couldn't tell where I was going. I took a few turns, slid down something, and finally found my group.

We sat for a few minutes in the sightless cave. I kept hearing bits and pieces of voices from my other classmates. This might have been the darkest place I've ever been, almost as dark as the midnight zone in the deepest part of the sea. I tried to grab the edge but accidentally grabbed Nat's frizzy hair. Slowly, the voices faded. My lungs started to feel clogged, and I felt like I would be stuck here forever. I started to black out. Thank god for Moxie and her twin sister, Gardy, for going to get the teacher to come and get me. I was pulled out of the maze, and SOMEHOW made it back alive. I finally saw light coming through the trap door, and a rush of relief came to me. My teacher greeted all of us at the front. "That wasn't so bad, was it?"

I said, "Yes it very much was," in a joking voice.

Though there really was no happy ending to this story, I will always have this experience to look back on and remind myself to never do that again!



## Missed Merge

*Natalie Chen*

The air was thin, and it was the kind of cold weather that numbs your cheeks and fingers. Powdery snow enveloped the mountain and pine trees.

"Let's go on the blue run. It's a smooth trail and there aren't many people crowding the slopes," my dad suggested, pointing towards the intermediate route on the large map by the top of the slope.

We nodded our heads in agreement and skied down the trail, gracefully gliding down the glistening, velvety snow. Skiing down the hill took little effort, and we had accidentally skied too far down the mountain, missing the trail we planned on merging onto.

"Um, Dad!" I shouted, stopping briskly on the side of the mountain. "I'm pretty sure we just missed the blue run."

We all stopped, and I stared at the snow-covered sign with the word "Avalanche" printed on it in bold letters at the top of the slope.

My brother, Connor, shimmied over to me with his skis still on, with his earthy brown eyes gazing at me, and said, "That's fine I guess. We can just go on the black diamond run just up ahead. What's the worst that could happen?"

Standing at the edge of the black diamond run, my heart was an anchor in my chest. Unlike many of the wider and powdery black diamond slopes I had gone on before, this trail was extremely steep and narrow; I couldn't even see the bottom of the slope. To make matters worse, the snow was rock solid ice.

I swallowed my fear and descended down the hill, ice scraping the bottom of my skis. I flew down the slope and lost control of my skis, nearly crashing into a tree. My skis spiraled as I attempted to catch my fall with my hand. My effort was short-lived, and my face grazed the side of the slope. Pain shot through me like needles stabbing a pin cushion, and my vision blurred. As I attempted to stand up, the ice where my head had just slammed was stained a light, cherry red. There was a scathing pain in my left ear and a high pitched screeching noise filled my head. My dad frantically rushed over to me.

"I'm okay," I began before he could talk. "Just give me a few minutes."

I fished a tissue out of my pocket and held it against my ear in hopes of stopping the bleeding. The scrape on my ear stung as I put pressure on it, blood trickling through the tissue until it was soaked through.

After resting for a few minutes, I forced myself to stand up, still clutching onto my ear. I carefully skied down the last part of the black diamond slope, relieved to be off of that traumatizing hill. My skis gained speed, and this time, I didn't hesitate. I allowed myself to gain more and more speed, feeling the crisp air on my cheeks and the wind in my hair. I stopped thinking about falling and started to embrace the speed and thrill of it.

When I finally reached the bottom of the mountain, my dad came over to me and asked, "How are you feeling? We could go back to the cabin if you're not up for more skiing."

I thought for a moment, but I replied, "No, I'll be okay. It was honestly kind of fun. At least I now have a feel for some of the more unexpected runs we might go on."

I rushed over to the ski lift with certainty, smiling as we ascended the mountain. I was secretly glad we missed the blue run, since I knew that I wouldn't have voluntarily gone on the black diamond.

"Now," I whispered to myself, confidence bubbling within me. "The next thing on my agenda is conquering a double black diamond!"



## The Small Yet Big Help

*Shantal Israel*

On one early Sunday morning, I looked out the window and noticed the gloomy gray clouds, with only a small patch of blue sky. When I got out of bed, I walked towards the bathroom being able to hear the creek sound of the brown wooden floors. As I quietly walked towards the bathroom to brush my teeth with the cool water, I heard the slight sound of footsteps coming from my parents' bedroom. I knew this had meant that my parents had aroused from their sleep.

I walked towards the dark, murky kitchen to notice my parents sitting at the table. As I walked towards the kitchen, I noticed the warm, sweet aroma of the Eggo waffles my dad made, with the sweet syrup, lingering in my nose. I saw my mom's reflection on the counter and looked back noticing her brown eyes glowing in the sunlight. My mom looked washed-out and haggard. She was wearing a light blue robe, with her hair in a low ponytail.

I was concerned and quickly asked, "Mom, are you okay?" "I'm alright, I just have a bad headache, and a slight cough. I just need to rest. Don't worry about me," replied with her voice sounding gravelly.

"Okay. Feel better and let me know if you need anything," I replied.

All though she said to not worry, I was worried and frightened seeing my mom in pain and hurting like this knowing if I felt this way she would do as much as she could to help me feel better and take care of me. As she went to sleep on her bed with her white cotton comforter, on her silky pillow case, I was thinking of what I could do to help.

I thought to myself, "What if I help her out by doing the house chores?"

I thought this was a great small idea to make her feel at ease, considering she wouldn't have to worry about the dirty dishes in the sink, the messy bedrooms, the clutter on the kitchen counter, or the dirty clothes in the hamper.

I started off by taking all of the clean dishes out of the dishwasher and placing them in the cabinets. Following by placing the dirty dishes into the dishwasher after rinsing them off with the cool water from the sink. Then I scrubbed the pots and pans with the damp sponge, drenched with bubbles from the soap.

As I continued the rest of the house chores, I felt amazing knowing that I did something that will help my mom and make her happy. The sun was shining through the windows, lighting up the house. She awoke from her sleep and entered the room. She was wearing the robe again. This time with her hair down, and in a mess from just waking up. She noticed the house was all tidied up and clean. She was enchanted and overjoyed!





## Go or No Go

*Chelsea Sargent*

It was the night before Halloween. A couple friends and I were going to Universal Studios for their special edition of Halloween Horror Nights. I was thrilled, ecstatic even. It was going to be my first time there and I was preparing myself for all the jump scares and haunted houses.

I wasn't going to be scared at all.

As my friends and I checked in with our tickets and walked through the gates, I asked, "You guys want to get food really quick?"

"Sure let's go," my friend Alina said excitedly. "I'm starving!"

After we had settled and gotten our food, a loud "BANG" echoed throughout the park. I almost dropped my fork in fear. "What was that?" I asked my friends.

"I have no idea," Alina said as she looked around. "Maybe the scare actors are starting to come out. Let's go see."

So we all packed up our food and made our way towards the commotion.

As we walked around, I held one of my friends' hands.

"This isn't so bad," I said while I strutted through the park.

"Yea I'm not even scared," said my friend Daniya.

"Hey, to make things a bit more exciting, how about we go into a haunted house!" said Alina.

Daniya added, "Yeah, That would be so cool! I heard there's one for La Llorona. Let's go check it out!"

As they started to walk towards the house I let go of Daniya's hand. "What's wrong, Chels? Let's go," she said.

I paused and said, "I don't know guys, I'm kind of scared."

"It's fine! We'll be with you the whole time, just come with us!" Alina added. I stood there and contemplated going into the haunted house for a while until I finally decided to swallow my fear and go with them.

As we stood in line, I tapped my foot quickly. "Are you guys sure you wanna go in there?" I asked.

"It'll be totally fine, stop sweating!" Daniya said excitedly.

"All right, fine," I said as we moved forward in line.

A couple of minutes passed, and we finally got to the front of the line. As we walked inside, I stood between Daniya and Alina and held onto them tightly. I was terrified. I contemplated running out of there, but I decided to stay until the end. A scary actor jumped out at me as I screamed in fear. The rooms were filled with dim yellow lights and a weeping woman and children everywhere. Blood was on every nearby object and the sound of La Llorona's cries echoed through my ears. The blood-curdling screams made me almost run out the nearest exit. But then, we finally reached the doors and I rushed out the exit.

When we finally reached the outside I felt a nice gush of wind. I could hear people laughing instead of horrifying screams, I was so relieved. My friends looked at me all excited.

"That was so much fun!" Alina yelled.

"Agreed, we have to go again!" Daniya exclaimed.

"How'd you like it, Chels?" Alina said, questioning me.

I looked at them both wide eyed and yelled, "That was awesome! Let's do another one!" They both laughed and took me by the hand.

As we made our way to the next house, I was running while guiding my friends with excitement.

"Maybe haunted houses aren't so bad!" I thought to myself.



## Saying Goodbye

*Jordan Detwiler*

Walking towards the funeral home, it hit me: I was never going to see Sitto again. I was never going to play Go Fish with her. Or paint each other's nails again. Or talk about my week at school again. And this thought haunted me.

In the chapel, I saw her casket. I had thought that I could keep it together, but I broke down into tears in front of everyone. I didn't care that everyone was looking at me; I just wanted my grandma to come back.

My mom grabbed my hand and pulled me aside. We walked over to a garden, where no one could see us, and sat down on a wooden bench. I sat there crying like the sky. Sobbing, I looked into my mom's ocean blue eyes, and they consoled me, somehow making me feel at ease. I was supposed to give a speech at Sitto's funeral that day, but I was feared and frightened that I would break down in front of everyone, and I wouldn't be able to do the speech.

My mom knew this, and she said, "Jordan, I know how much you want to do the speech, but I know how difficult it is, so if you don't want to I completely understand."

I replied, "No. I have to do this, it would make Sitto happy."

Hugging me, Mom said, "I am so proud of you."

I wiped my tears from my face and faked a smile. Then we turned back to where the service would be. The walk back helped settle my nerves. I glanced around at the garden filled with green trees and pink flowers that surrounded the chapel. I looked at my mom and said, "It's beautiful isn't it?"

"It is. She would have loved it here," Mom replied, "but she is in a better place now and we just have to remember that."

I agreed and remembered how Sitto was no longer suffering and that eased my mind.

When it was time for the service, Mom and I sat in the front row and my Aunt Lynn sat next to me. They started the service with a slideshow about my Sitto, and then the pastor said a few words about her. My mom spoke first for our family speeches, and her speech was so moving that it brought me to tears.

Then, it was my turn. I approached the podium, setting the piece of paper with the speech on it. I moved the microphone down, so it would be at my height.

"Hi everyone, I'm Jordan and I would like to say a few words about my wonderful grandma, Sitto."

After I stammered the first sentence out of my mouth, everything else came naturally.

"I think if you were to Google who was the best grandma ever, Sitto's name would come up first. I know this because she was kind, loving, smart, strong and beautiful."

As I was saying my speech, all I could think about was how much I missed her. But somehow, I felt a wave of acceptance rush over me. I knew that I would not see her again for a very long time, but I would learn to live with that.

"I love you so much Sitto, and thank you for being an amazing grandmother."



## The Climb

*Blake Anna*

My knees hit the ground. My chapped lips were as dry as the Sahara and I found myself begging my dad for just a small sip of water.

I looked up at my dad. His eyes met mine and he sternly said, "Every time you say you are going to drink a sip of water, you drink nearly the entire bottle and leave almost none for me. We have a long hike ahead of us and we need to save the rest of the water."

As I got up from the ground, his shiny bald head had beads of sweat coming off his forehead. He wore his worn out Nike white t-shirt with a faded gray logo and his ocean blue eyes glistening in the sun as he nudged my shoulder in a forward motion, demanding we finish the hike.

This was our camping weekend together in Yosemite. It was dry and blistering hot in the Central Valley in August. My dad took the lead up the side of the steep dirt trail that showed no mercy for eleven year old me. The very reason for the camping trip came from my dad's concern that I wasn't getting enough exercise.

We started the hike with a lightweight gray and black backpack that held two water bottles. I had no idea how much I wished we had two more. We climbed up the side of the hill along the dirt trail higher and higher. Eventually we reached a beautiful clearing where the trees parted to create an opening and we could see the beautiful waterfalls shimmer with the reflection of the sun. Not only did we reach the top of the mountain, but we found ourselves above the waterfalls.

We looked at each other and I begged on my knees, "Can we please slide down the hill?"

My dad responded, "Fine but be careful, I don't want you to get hurt."

So that's what we did. I got on my butt and slid feet first down the hill.

My body picked up speed heading down the hill, and I shouted at the top of my lungs, "This is so fun!"

My dad caught up to me and yelled, "Be careful!"

We came to a stop where the hill leveled out to flat and found a pond the size of three swimming pools just below the waterfall we found earlier. I looked over at my dad and smiled without saying a word and jumped in the cold mountain water. As soon as my skin made contact with the fresh cool water, it was cooling away all the pain from sliding down the hill. We started swimming and wrestling in the water when suddenly I said to my dad, "How are we going to get back on the trail to get to the car?"

In a matter of moments, goosebumps turned up all over my skin. It could have been because I was cold, but more likely nerves, as I realized we hadn't seen any other hikers for hours and were in the middle of nowhere.

My dad said, "We must climb back up the mountain. I can help you, but you have to be careful. We are going to need to do this together."

We climbed and climbed, and my anxiety drove me to climb at a faster pace. I looked up and out of nowhere saw some hikers. My reaction was pure shock and disbelief as I hadn't seen any form of life in hours.

I smiled from ear to ear and shouted out loud, "Finally!"

We made it to the top of the trail and asked the hikers how they got to the waterfall.

The young male hiker pointed to his right and said, "Yeah, there is a path a mile that way."

I looked at my dad, hit him in the shoulder, shook my head and laughed only to say, "Really, Dad!"



## The Black Diamond

*Sarah Schmidt*

I looked down at the steep rocky slope covered in glistening snow. Green pine trees clung to the edge of each side of the mountain. I looked down to see the foggy abyss below me. The cold wind bit at my ankles and my ski boots squeezed my feet. I realized this was not going to be easy.

"All right, girls. Are you ready? Make sure to watch your turn," Abby's dad Lucas said.

What did I get myself into? All I know is bunny slopes! I thought.

I saw a distant sign that said "black diamond."

"How about we start by going a little bit, then stop?" Abby suggested.

The snow crunched beneath my feet as I reached a small hill. I pushed off. I felt a pull on my leg and I fell. Wet hot tears dripped down my face like raindrops.

"I can't do this!" I exclaimed.

I saw Abby's ocean blue eyes fill with concern.

"Abby, why don't you go ahead of us and we will meet you," Lucas said.

Her blonde hair flickered past me like a flame.

"Sarah, either you stay up here forever, or you come down," Abby's dad said.

Part of me knew he was right, but I really didn't want to ski. I decided to persevere and move. I stood up, my legs shaking with fear. My heart pounded like a drum. I slid to the edge of the slope and breathed in.

I was off. All my thoughts quieted down.

Suddenly, I heard, "Turn!"

I realized my eyes had been closed the entire time. I looked up to see a pine tree towering over me. I used all my strength and leaned, and soft snow greeted me. The adrenaline and fear I had heightened.

"Are you okay?" Abby's dad shouted.

I felt my face turn into a smile.

I laughed, "I'm okay!"

He handed me his ski pole and I pulled myself up. Feeling more confident, I pushed off. Wind hit me, and snow flew in my face.

This time I followed a pattern. Push, push, turn, and repeat. As I made a turn the sound of people walking greeted me. A blanket of relief fell over me. Going at full speed, I rushed down the last hill and I turned my feet towards each other to slow down. I made a hockey stop and almost fell!

Looking back at the slope, a river of pride rushed over me. I clicked my skis off, opened my arms wide, and fell into the soft powdery snow.





# The Great Pickle Conundrum

*Jack Johnson*

The year was 2022, and I was staring blankly at a wall, focusing with much effort on a very important dilemma about hamburgers. I had to choose between having pickles on the burger or on the side. If I made the right choice, my mom, dad, and sister would all be proud of me, and I would also enjoy my burger at least ninety four times more than if I didn't make the right choice. If I didn't make the right choice, I would regret my decision and have my family disappointed in me. However, I would finally know the correct way to have pickles with a burger.

It was a tense one hour and nine minutes before I made my decision. If I put the pickles on the burger, then it would be too sour but there would be a nice crunch. If I didn't include the pickles with the burger, and instead, put them on the side, the burger wouldn't be too sour, but it would be missing that satisfying crunch, usually with a burger.

This is exactly the moment when my sister, Ella, an affable, classy character, said to me, "Jack, you must not make the wrong decision here or I will be disappointed."

I gulped, not wanting to disappoint her. I moved to grab my pickles, but I was interrupted again before I could.

My mom remarked, "Don't make the wrong decision Jack, or I also will be disappointed."

I gulped again, also not wanting to disappoint my mom. I grabbed my pickles right as my dad was going to assert the same thing, and almost established them upon the burger instead of on the side.

I sat down and began to eat my burger. It was a McDonald's Happy Meal, in that it was so tasty. However, I noticed that it was missing the crunch and the sourness of the pickles and almost gave up halfway through the burger but alas, I kept going.

It finally reached a point where I couldn't resist the pickles any longer, so I set the burger down gently and picked and snatched one of the pickles from my plate. This pickle was as green as a blade of grass, as crunchy as a freshly opened bag of Lay's Potato Chips, sour like Sour Patch Kids, bumpy as gravel, tastier than McDonald's, as round as the plate it was on, and juicy not unlike a watermelon.

I bit into the pickle, but that's when Ella asked if I made the right decision.

I didn't know yet, so I answered, "I don't know yet."

I took another bite of the pickle and finally learned the answer. The answer that would decide if my family would be dissatisfied or not. The answer that would prove my decision making. The answer that would decide the enjoyment of my burger.

I set the pickle down very, very slowly and said with the same speed as I used to set down the pickle, "I have potentially, perhaps, maybe, possibly, within reason, made the wrong decision."

Ella was staring at me with her vibrant, emerald green eyes in a way that would make someone cry, but said, "Okay," and left to get a burger.

A few moments later, I looked into my mom's eyes which also looked extremely downhearted, but unlike Ella, she did not grab a burger, but she did tell me, "Jack, I'm not angry, just disappointed." Classic mom move.

I regretted my decision instantly, and just like the rest

of my family, I was also deeply saddened, frustrated, and disappointed in my inability to make the right decision when it comes to a dilemma about pickles and burgers. Even amidst this great sadness and depression, even with all the disappointment and frustration, I still walked away with more knowledge than I had prior. This great knowledge of which I would remember for the rest of my days. Great knowledge, not pertaining particularly to hamburgers and pickles, but something else perhaps, potentially, possibly of equal importance and magnitude.

From that point on, I never ate a burger without the pickles on it because I never wanted to make the same mistake ever again.



# Memory Depository

*Ziling Gao*

I struggled out of the bush, and my brother, Alex, followed me. The sky was turning dusk; wind howled by, and the leaves rustled violently on the tree. In front of us was a greenhouse, and it was a very broken greenhouse. There were a lot of planting tools and equipment in it, like small shovels, big shovels, small scissors, big scissors, small flower pots, big flower pots, small sticks, big sticks, gloves, whole box of gloves, and more tools that I can't even name.

"Can this be our super-secret base?" Alex whispered.

"I mean somebody definitely owns this mountain, but I don't think anyone owns this greenhouse. It's like abandoned," I replied while I set down my hiking stick, which was a branch.

"Can we take the shovels?" he stared at me.

"We should probably keep those here," I said.

"Can we dig holes and plant things?"

"No," I answered with a sigh.

"Can we..." he didn't even finish.

"Stop asking so many questions. Maybe we should start cleaning up this place tomorrow. Sun is setting," I said, looking up to the sky.

Tomorrow we arrived, and the sun shined bright; birds performed symphonies. We started to set up the base. I wanted to make it the best secret base ever!

Making a secret base is not easy, and especially when you started from a broken greenhouse. We started to clean up the area. There were flower pots everywhere, and some were clean, yet some still had a lot of dirt and bugs in them. I saw a lot of cardboard on the ground, then I lifted one up, and there was a whole kingdom under the board. There were so many ants, even on the board too. A balloon popped in my heart when I saw all those ants, and I shivered, then I immediately threw the board away, and silently walked away, as if nothing happened.

Alex mostly just jogged around and did absolutely nothing but stared at me. When I noticed he was staring at me, I would stare back at his classic brown eye, then he would just awkwardly walk away. He would come and help me if I asked him to, and he would also pick up different items then stare at me in a confused face, as if he was asking me to show him what to do.

After some cleaning, we found somebody else's secret. We found a metal box in a pit at the corner.

"Look at this!" I yelled.

"What?" Alex said, confused.

"A box!" I said excitedly.

"I want to see what's inside!" He speed-walked toward me. "We shouldn't peek at what's inside. That's somebody's secret,

just like our secret base, and this must've been their secret base before too," I explained with my prediction.

Everything we found at the secret base we would not throw away no matter how terrible they were, because that was something somebody else wanted to keep safe, and I know they were. I would respect the stories they had here, while I believe somebody else would respect our story too. We brought old toys, notebooks with colorful sketches, mini maps we made, trading cards collected from the ground, beautiful plants and flowers we found on the way to the base, and more old yet memorable items. I wanted to build this base to store all the precious or miserable memories people had. This secret base was like a magical house that had everyone's secrets and memories, and the magic would protect those valuable memories from those who wanted to take them.

This idea to make a secret base can be really stupid, stupid like a child when we believe everything can be true. No matter how stupid this idea was, and no matter how stupid you think I am. I like this secret base surrounded by nature, just like someone who likes their very expansive and all-golden palace. This is my luxury palace, with all the luxuries that no others can get.

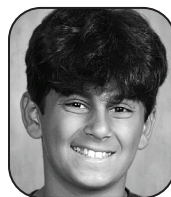


## My Neighbor

*Chloe Fields*

I remember being surprised when I heard someone's voice, a kid's voice coming from the corner of my backyard. I didn't think there were any other kids in my neighborhood, not my age at least. My backyard was medium size, with three layers of fence, a dull wooden fence, a thin chain fence, and a row of thick leafy trees surrounding the yard. In the corner though, there was a hole in the chain-link fence and one of the boards in the wooden fence was missing, all that was there were trees. I saw a face in the gap of the wooden fence, and from what I could tell it was a young girl with tousled brown hair. It probably wasn't very smart of me but I walked towards her and said hello. We talked for a little, I don't remember what we talked about but I remember her name was Charlotte. My mom came out of the back door after a while, I'm assuming it was because she saw through the window I was talking to the fence. She came over and saw Charlotte through the fence and said hello, asked where her parents were, and spoke to her dad when he came outside. That's all I remember from the interaction but we promised each other to meet at the same time the next day. She was there the next day, and the next and the next. We met up every day of the week at the same time. Some days we threw a ball back and forth through the trees and sometimes we had lunch together. Thinking about it now sounds weird but eventually I invited her for some ice cream. My mom took us down the street. I think it was a little awkward at first, like when you're seeing your favorite cousin for the first time in a while, but eventually we warmed up to each other again. I think we both had fun. When we got back to our houses we promised to meet up again the next day. We did. But the day after that Charlotte stopped showing up. I remember being out until it started to get dark and cold, calling her name every few minutes, she didn't come out. I felt like a forgotten child left at the supermarket. I later learned that she had to move. I never learned why but when my mom and

I drove by her house her dad's truck was gone and her lights were out. I think about our interactions together. I think it's super weird that we were able to meet and become so close. I wonder if she still remembers me.



## Buzzer Beater

*Kyle Soleimany*

When I was 10 years old I was on a basketball team named the Utah Jazz. I was in the finals and I felt like it was the biggest game of my life. If our teams won we all would get gift cards and trophies as prizes. When the game started I was really nervous. By halftime, we were in the lead: 38 to 36. I played well but at the same time, I was missing shots because I was nervous. When there were 2 minutes left the other team was in the lead: 55 to 58. With 10 seconds left, they were still in the lead. I knew it was my chance to shine so I told the inbounder to pass me the ball. He did, I started running down the court and stopped in the left corner. Jumped, fadeaway, corner, three buzzer beater... "BANG, BANG, BANG!" the commentator said right as the ball went through the net. The team started a mosh pit and at the end, everyone got the prize. I got the MVP and walked out with a smile on my face.



## If Snakes Could Fly

*Athena Nguyen*

It was crowded sitting between the laughter, shouting, and slamming plates in my elementary school cafeteria. I quietly ate the sloppy school-made enchiladas listening to children talking around me. Kids banging tables, some chasing each other, and others clanging objects together as if they were in some circus, -made me feel oddly left out. I looked over at a kid from my class sitting beside me in an attempt to initiate some type of conversation. "Hey, do you think some snakes can fly?" he asked, looking into my eyes as if he was an animal about to sink his teeth into my flesh. Baffled by his question, I answered him with the obvious response of an extremely intelligent first grader, "Yes, I think some snakes can fly."

As I chewed on my food, he continued speaking, "Well no, actually, some can glide, but not fly," he said. "No, they can fly," I replied. "You're wrong, no they CAN'T fly," he screamed. We went on and on with our petty little argument. It was like beating a dead horse. At my wits end, I grabbed the white, plastic, bendy knife from my silverware packet. The knife flopped around like a dead fish as I waved it in the kids face. "If you really don't think flying snakes are real, I won't play these games no more," I threatened, as the barbarian I once was. His expression suddenly changed. Tears dragged down his sorry face, pulling down what was once a taunting smile into a sorry frown. After being sent to the principal's office, for the rest of the week, I realized that I was completely wrong, and finally apologized to the kid for pulling a plastic knife on him.





## Moving

*Monica Kelley*

My phone lit up as I heard a buzz. I got out of the pool and saw a text from my mom. I grabbed a towel and wrapped myself around it, then unlocked my phone and read the text out loud.

I said under my breath, barely whispering, “Your dad got the job.”

I stared at the screen and thought, “Wait, he got the job?” My face froze up and I felt chills running up my spine as I came to a realization of what this meant. If my dad got the job in Colorado then that would mean we would have to move. The sun had already gone down and it was about seven pm. I felt myself shivering and my teeth rattling as I was staring at my bright screen. This is what I had been dreading this whole trip to Virginia. I went to Virginia to visit my cousins for the summer and I knew it was either a yes he got the job or a no he didn’t. This meant I would have to move all the way to Colorado, move schools, leave all my friends and family, and start a whole new life.

“What happened?” Mariah asked, floating on her back in the pool.

Mariah was my cousin who I was visiting for the summer. We were super close and both the same age.

“Hold on, I’ll be right back,” I responded, putting my phone on the table.

I walked carefully into the house, being very cautious because it was very slippery. I saw my brother sitting in the kitchen watching football, and I didn’t say a word and showed him the text.

His jaw dropped then I told him, “It’s real.”

I walked away and went back outside to the pool where Mariah was wrapped inside her towel while sitting down and looking at her phone.

“Guess what,” I told her, taking a seat next to her.

She looked up and answered, “What?”

“I’m moving,” I said, waiting for her reaction.

I saw her dark amber colored eyes widen and I couldn’t tell what she was thinking.

“Where to?” she asked.

“Colorado,” I replied.

“Well at least you’re closer to me,” she said, trying to cheer me up.

I knew she wouldn’t be sad because it’s not like I lived in Virginia with her anyway, I was still pretty far from her whether I moved or not.

“Wanna go inside? It’s freezing,” she asked, smiling.

“Yup,” I replied, my teeth still rattling from shivering.

We then went to the movie room and watched All American with Leej. Leej was one of Mariah’s family friends and we were sleeping over at his house that night. I tried not to think about it too much because I wanted to enjoy myself. Just the fact that there was nothing I could do about it made me upset. “I never wanted this to happen, so why did this happen to me?” I thought.

Later on I had forgotten about it because we started playing hide and seek in Leej’s neighborhood. We were running

away from one another in the dark. I loved the feeling of having no stress and nothing on my mind. I was just happy to be in summer. Eventually we were exhausted and sat down on the concrete outside the garage. We were all out of breath while looking up at the stars. The stars were beautiful, and the dark sky was filled with them. In Virginia there seemed to have been more stars in the night sky than in California. As I was sitting there with Leej and Mariah thoughts were running through my head. I thought about it and I had forgotten about moving to Colorado just by playing hide and seek. Maybe it would be nice to see new things, make new friends, and to see the snow during winter.

I thought to myself, “Right now I’m about forty hours away from home and I’m having a great time and making new friends so maybe Colorado won’t be so bad.”

Now of course I still thought about missing my friends and leaving my family, but I could always visit.

I thought, “Everything happens for a reason so maybe this could be a good thing.”

“I’m so hungry,” Leej announced.

“Yeah, same,” Mariah and I said, synchronized.

We all got up and walked back inside to get some spaghetti Leej’s mom had made.



## Gloria, Gloria

*Chloe Richmond*

The older woman across the street. I think her name is Gloria. I’ve always forced myself to be nice to her out of pity. She used to hate me like a cat hates water. Lately, she’s been happier. She said she’s getting married, and I can’t help but wonder why. Granted, she’s 87. That night, I wonder. Who is she marrying? How old are they? I don’t ponder upon it for much longer.

A week passes. Gloria has supposedly gotten married, but I haven’t seen her groom at all. Maybe they haven’t moved in yet? Maybe they are scarily young? I hope not.

More time passes. I think I’ve realized what happened, but I can’t be sure. Either she was left at the altar, or her groom is just a recluse. I talk to her health assistant. (What? I’m curious, sue me.) What I find out makes everything click.

Gloria shouts my name as I walk down the street. I turn and see her beaming, while sitting alone on a creaky porch, yellowed teeth crookedly splayed. “Isn’t he such a darling? He’s my Prince Charming!” she exclaims.

I stand there, confused. So, I pull a smile and wave. Nod and look away. Her assistant says its fine, but I can’t help but wonder what would happen if she realized her supposed “darling” was just an illusion. However, no one has the heart to tell her. Her family just watches, observing her interact with someone who was never there. I don’t think anyone has the heart to tell her. I can hear her delighted, high-pitched laughing, echoing across the walls of her house during the night. To this day, Gloria sits, in a rocking chair on her porch, talking to and loving someone who was never there.



## Evacuating from the Getty Fire

*Eli Kagan*

I woke up groggy, not ready for yet another day of school. I got out of bed and went to brush my teeth, got dressed, and grabbed my backpack. As I was walking down the hallway, I looked out the window. Instead of the sun coming up, it looked like my house got transported to the deep pits of hell. The entire sky was bright orange, I couldn't see anything from all of the smoke, and ash was flying everywhere.

"Mom, look out the window!" I called out.

Rushing to the window, she exclaimed, "Oh my god, there's a fire!"

My sister, Isabella, looked out of her window remarking, "Well, it looks like we aren't going to school today."

My mom checked her favorite neighborhood app, Nextdoor, to get the scoop on our situation. An extensive collection of soccer moms were posting their queries about whether or not the Devil let a little bit of hell slip through, and the rest were posting their prayers for Jesus to save them.

The soccer moms' cries for help were interrupted by a phone call from my sister's school principal, Mr. Iannucci. "Good morning Revere!" He went on to say that school was canceled due to the fire. He concluded with his classic, "Go Dodgers!"

As the call ended, my mom went back to Nextdoor to continue her search for any more information on the fire. She told us that she saw a post stating that the fire was near the Getty Center, but that it was built to be fireproof, so it would be safe. My mom also read that people were being evacuated from their homes near us, as the fire spread quickly.

My mom, sister, and I discussed whether or not it would be better to evacuate early or wait the fire out.

"Many people were evacuated in the middle of the night, with only a few minutes to pack all of their belongings to leave," my mom told us.

"Yeah, but there's a chance that we might not need to evacuate if the fire doesn't reach us, or they put it out," Isabella replied.

Before I could say anything, we saw a few of our close neighbors leaving in their cars, presumably to stay in a hotel. We decided that if our neighbors were leaving, we should too. I took my laptop bag out of my closet, and it was time to pack. In the smallest pocket, I put my chargers for my phone, laptop, and headphones. My laptop went in the middle compartment and I put an extra change of clothes in the biggest compartment. I also grabbed a separate bag for my deodorant, toothbrush and toothpaste.

My sister packed her bag with similar items as me, and my mom grabbed any important documents (in case our house burned down without permission while we were gone), food, and her belongings.

We stuffed everything into the car, and we were off on our adventure (finding a hotel with vacancy). Heading towards Santa Monica, I looked back through my window. Large clouds of smoke consumed the sky, which was filled with red haze. It seemed like we were leaving a wasteland, but we hoped the fire wouldn't spread much further.

After around half an hour of driving, we found a motel near the beach. My mom parked the car, and we went to the check-in desk to inquire about any open rooms. They luckily had one available. We didn't want to unpack too much in case we needed to leave quickly, but I did take out my laptop to play the game every kid my age was playing during 2019: Fortnite. It made me a little calmer to be doing something that I would have been doing at home.

Unfortunately, the fire was spreading further than we expected. A few hours had passed since we had left, and the air quality was horrible in Santa Monica because of the smoke, so we decided to travel somewhere further away. The hotel thankfully refunded us, and we were on our way again. Figuring Culver City was plenty far away, my sister searched on Google for a hotel in that area. She found one called Hilton. As we got closer to Culver City and farther away from Brentwood, we all noticed a considerable difference in air quality. We could finally open the windows and take a breath of fresh air.

Once we got to the hotel, we were exhausted from the long day and went up to our room. I... played a little more Fortnite. We all got some sleep and learned that the fire was mostly contained by the time we woke up. We packed all of our things together again, put them back in the car, and went on our way back home.

The viscous smoke clouds still hung in the sky and the horizon was still tinted orange, but we felt safe from the fire again. As we drove up to our street, the road, trees, cars, and homes were covered in ash, but at least they didn't burn down.



## Beautiful Birth

*Liam Efron*

Ahhh! I woke up at 5:57 a.m. to my pregnant mother's shrieks. I suddenly realized she was in labor and I began panicking in a joyful but terrified way as I didn't know if I was ready for my new sister. My dad immediately rushed my mom to Cedars Sinai where my grandma, my siblings, and of course myself joined them. Although the hospital is probably one of the safest places to be in the world, I felt so uncomfortable as all I could hear was the piercing, cackling, and screeching sound of cries and sirens. We waited outside for so long, but finally, after years of doing absolutely nothing, my weeping beautiful baby sister was born. We joined the circle of love between my parents and our new sister as I realized how emotional and life changing a birth can really be. I couldn't wait for my turn to hold and comfort my unnamed baby sister and although I almost dropped her, I will never forget the feeling of her soft, silky, and smooth baby skin. I felt time come to a pause, as if it knew how special this moment was. Unfortunately, I ultimately had to let her get some rest. Out of nowhere, my parents began to shed some tears and I instantly knew it was time for me to leave the room as nobody enjoys seeing their parents cry even if it is for something great like this. But wow! What a great feeling this was. It really showed me to appreciate life for the simple things that it has. My sister is now three years old and we are inseparable like peanut butter and jelly.



## Running Out of Time

*Sam Schwartz*

An empty yellow Lays potato chip bag lay in front of the dull blue lockers, and water dribbled into the drain on the floor, yet today was special.

"Today is the day," I thought. "The day I get sub-six!"

I changed into my light gray P.E. shirt. I knew if I got sub-six, I could stop wearing this musty, basic P.E. shirt. I could see the sub six shirt in my mind. Others had it, and I wanted it. I could imagine the black shirt with laced white lettering, and I knew it could be mine for the taking. I slammed my P.E locker shut.

The bright sun caressed my face, and I felt my skin warming as I bounced outside towards the track and field area, where I saw my friend Marley waiting for me. His ocean blue eyes seemed to study me as I approached.

"Hey Sam. Are you ready?" he asked.

"Yup," I replied confidently.

I began stretching. After a few minutes, Mr. Amos said it was time to run. I breathed in through my nose, out through my mouth, calming myself. I was ready, and exultant.

"Oh, yeah," Mr. Amos said. "If you get your personal best, you get a popsicle."

"I'm going to get that sub-six, and I'll get a popsicle!" I thought excitedly.

"All right guys. Time to run. Get ready, set, go!" Mr. Amos shouted

I shot down the straightaway in front of the basketball courts and the gray, broken down concrete. I ran around the volleyball courts, right into another straight away. I sprinted until I reached the broken, worn down concrete hill. I sprinted up it and started to run down the grass. The grass was soft, and I felt good. At that moment, I felt at my best. I was free from all the worries I had before.

Suddenly, all of that was taken away. As I ran around the grass, I felt a stab of pain in my chest. It was excruciating. I started to slow.

"We're not going fast enough. We can't handle the pain. We both know you're not fast enough. Just give up already," the little voice in my head said.

"No!" I shouted at these thoughts.

I knew I could do it. I ran around the big tree near the gate to the school. I sprinted right around the muddy curve, and then I got to the concrete hill. I always ran faster on the concrete.

"I can do this. Let's go. Come on! Let's get that popsicle," I urged myself.

"Wait a second. You don't even like those Otter Pop popsicles! You're not getting anything that you like," said the little voice.

"I don't care. I'm done with you. I know I can do this," I thought, forcefully pushing out the little voice from my mind. The downhill came to an end. I sprinted around the gate to the starting line. There was Mr. Amos. Passing him, I was halfway done. I ran faster in the second lap. I ran around the whole course, and there I was, back at the straight away. "Six minutes on the dot. You were so close. Great job," Mr. Amos

confessed.

"Not sub six?" I gasped breathlessly.

"No, Sam. You were just off. It has to be 5:59 or lower. You did great though," Mr. Amos assured.

My head was spinning. I was so close. One millisecond off.

"Here you go," Mr. Amos said as he handed me something. It was wrapped in plastic. It wasn't just any normal Otter Pop. This was different. I carefully opened the plastic. And there it was. It was green and purple, like the ones you get during summer. I tasted it. It was just like I remembered.

It even tasted like summer. Like happiness. And it tasted even better because I had worked for it.



## Bases Loaded, Two Outs

*Shelby Rosenmayer*

It was a gloomy night in Collecchio, Italy. It was raining and every few minutes there was thunder and lightning. The softball field was brightly lit. I was going to be up to bat soon. I was on deck, and I was standing outside of my dugout timing the pitches and swinging my bat to get ready to hit.

The bases were loaded, and there were two outs. My worst nightmare had just come to life.

My heart was beating as fast as the beat of a drum roll. I was already upset that we were losing by so much, and the thought of having to bat one more time made my head spin. I was afraid that I was gonna strike out because it's not fun to be the last out, especially on a strikeout.

My coach pulled me aside and said, "I believe in you. Just do your best."

I nodded my head at my coach like I fully understood his motivational words, but was I really paying attention to what he was saying, or was I just thinking about the fear of striking out?

I stepped into the batter's box. I was a nervous wreck. My bat felt like a 500 pound weight in my hands.

The pitcher was intimidating. She had her brown hair tied in two braids. She pitched two strikes, but then she pitched a ball. I was trying to relax, but my shoulders felt heavy. I inhaled deeply and stepped back into the batter's box. The pitcher pitched the softball and I swung at it. As the ball hit my bat, I started running around the bases as fast as I could while hearing everyone around me cheering! The ball soared all the way to center field.

All of my teammates on base made it home, except for me. I wanted the hit to be a grand slam, but I was happy about my huge hit and that at least my teammates had scored.

After my hit, I could hear one of the Italy coaches yelling in Italian at one of the umpires, and next thing you know one of the coaches got kicked off the field.

Even after my hit, we still lost because Italy was already up by so much, but after the game, my dad ran up to me with a meaningful smile on his face, and I could see his green eyes gleaming.

"I'm so proud of you!" he said with joy.

I was also proud of myself, but it was hard to keep my head up after the game. I guess because it was hard to lose by so much, when we beat Italy by so little the first time we played them. I couldn't let the loss get to me too much because we were gonna play Italy again the next day in the championship.





## The Overthinker

*Jasmine Garcia-Monterroza*

"Hi, how can I help you today?" asked the pharmacist.

"I don't have an appointment, but I wanted to know if I could please get my Covid-19 vaccine?" I asked, shaking like an earthquake.

"Here is the fill-out information, and your parents can help you!" the pharmacist said.

"Oh he's not..." I stopped as she turned away and helped the next person.

I sat down in a cheap plastic chair in an aisle of meds. I wrote my date of birth and all the other medical stuff you have to write down. I remembered to stop thinking of the needle or the pain. I kept saying to myself, "I'd rather feel a pinch than die in the hospital for not getting it."

My past doctor's appointments were awful. I would cry myself to sleep the day before. I don't know where my phobia came from, since growing up I would never cry. I was a strong little girl, but as I was growing up shots became scarier and more painful. In the doctor's office I would tremble like a volcano erupting. I would fidget with my long, silky, hazel brown hair.

Once I stepped in the checkup room I felt like I died walking in the door, with my soul leaving my body. My cheeks felt so hot as I sat on the medical bed. I started crying on the inside. I felt my eyes fill up with tears.

The nurse walked in and took my temperature, then weight, then height. When he left the doctor would come in and talk about how I was doing and what was going on about my health. He left after pinching my index finger with a stapler-looking needle. I thought we were done when the nurse came back in with three vaccines.

I wanted to disappear and never come back. This was it. I wanted my mom's hand, but she said, "No, you're too old for that".

"I'm sorry, lady, I'm never too old for that," I said, yelling in my head of course. I was holding on to the nurse for dear life. When it was over, I never wanted to come ever again.

I decided to go to CVS for my Covid vaccine, because I couldn't stand the doctor this time.

After I handed the paper back to the pharmacist she said, "Okay sweetie go on into the little room in the corner, the one with the little half red door."

"Okay thank you," I said while walking into the room of death.

I wanted to not think about it at all. I sat in the same looking chair as the ones outside in the waiting aisle of meds. A nice lady with a huge doctor cape that looked the wrong size for her.

"Okay so relax and take your non-dominant hand out of your sweater," she said.

"Okay sure!" I said with a smile on my face but dying on the inside.

I said, "Sorry, can you please not show me the needle?"

I tend to get more scared!"

"Of course no problem!" she said politely.

She wiped my arm with what smelled like rubbing alcohol.

"Okay you're done!" she said.

"Wait, are you joking?" I asked while opening my eyes.

"No, why would I? Just wait in the aisle for fifteen minutes and you can go home. I recommend you drink an Advil right now for no soreness on your arm."

"OMG, thank you so much!" I stated with an even bigger smile on my face.

I walked out of CVS thinking to myself, "Wow That was nothing at all!"

At the end of the day I learned that all the crying and overthinking wasn't going to help at all, but If I did my actions right I would get over the fear. Just as W. Clement Stone says, "thinking will not overcome fear, but action will."



## Lost and Found Grandma

*Mika Adler*

My family and I were in Kauai. I remember the swoosh of the warm breeze breathing on my shoulder. The marvelous, radiant, gorgeous blue sky with a couple of clouds. All of us were relaxing outside. My sister and I were swimming in the pool; the refreshing, soft, and warm water. My mom watched from the edge, and my grandma, well, I didn't know where she was, we presumed at the pool bar. In a flash it turned gray, foggy, and murky. It started drizzling, plop, plop, plop. The drizzle turned into big heavy drops of pouring rain. My mother decided to take us back to the hotel room, and my grandma stayed, I guess, at the pool bar. After all, my grandma does love her martinis and nachos. When my mom, my sister, and I were all cleaned up and relaxed in our warm and cozy pajamas, we noticed our grandma was not with us. We waited. An hour passed and then another, and finally my mother decided to look for grandma, who was still nowhere to be found. Fifty minutes later my mother came into the hotel room dragging my grandma by the shoulder. Apparently, she had too many drinks with her nachos at the pool bar. My mom explained that when she went to the lobby, there was a man asking around "Are you Lelah aah-do-la?" My mom always mentions how my grandma can't pronounce our last name right, and it's always been that way. When the man brought my mother to my grandma, my grandma was lounging in a chair. My mother always says my grandma loves her happy hour and can outdrink anyone.



## One Canoeing Morning

*Sienna Nocas*

It was 6 a.m. on Catalina Island Camp Emerald Bay. As a small group of second-year girls' footsteps could be heard, we ran down to the oceanside, threw off our jackets, and sat down for what would be a long morning ahead of us.

The wind was howling. I saw what I was most terrified of, the canoes. The boats were being shipped out to the water and girls were loading in. My best friend looked at me terrified. We glanced back and forth at each other but suddenly Mike yelled, "Sienna!"

My stomach dropped. This was it. All the time, all the long hours and extra sessions during free time, this was it. Time to show Mike and the seniors what Sienna Nocas can do.

I stepped into the canoe and looked up. All the girls had left, so I quickly started to paddle. Once we got out in the open water it started to all go downhill. When we reached Indian Head, our half way point, I felt as if I was being watched. I saw not one, but three motorboats full of senior boys glaring at me. I looked away. I tried to ignore them, but they kept staring so I started paddling, paddling as fast as I could. They were faster than me. They drove their little boats right up to me and looked me directly in the eyes.

Then with their devil brown eyes, one pulled out his megaphone, and yelled, "Hey girl, I want to go to breakfast and you are the only reason I can't, so get your ass up and paddle."

I flipped him off. I was beyond tired and freezing, and all the fancy turns and twists I was taught felt like they did nothing. Turn to the right, nope I went left, turn to the left, nope I went right.

I was so defeated I felt like everything I was doing was just making me go backward. I sat there for a minute until one of the ASMs came up to me. It was my old patrol leader's mom. "Sienna, I'm so proud of you, you've gone so far and look you're almost done!" She encouragingly told me.

I thought she's right, I'm almost done. I got up. My knees burned from all the cuts and bruises I had gotten this week mixed with the salty sea water, but I ignored it all and pushed on.

I was almost there. I could see the land and all the seniors yelling my name. My mind filled with happy thoughts of seeing my friends and finally eating breakfast. I could just imagine the sweet taste of food. Warm French toast drizzled with maple syrup and topped with whipped cream.

But that's when it happened again. Senior boys. They came up again in their cutesy little motorboat and said, "Girl, do you know how long it has been? What the hell? Also your technique sucks. You don't deserve this badge!"

Jerks, I thought. Just ignore them.

So that's what I did. I ignored them and paddled back to my friends.

When I finally got back to the land I asked, "Where is everyone?"

"Breakfast," they said, so I started to walk but they called me over and they said, "Sienna, it ends in two minutes, canoeing is about to start."

They grabbed me food and I sat alone at a table and ate.

The food tasted like it was a five-star meal made by a Michelin chef; the maple syrup dripped down the French toast and just melted in my mouth.

I thought about what I had just been through. All the pain and agony but the strength I had gained. As I heard everyone coming. I joined my friends, I stopped thinking about it all, I just thought about the new experience I had. I was happy. It was hard, but I continued with it because it was all over now.



## Time Flies By

*Dylan Moore*

I sat down on a wooden bench on a small grassy hill with my cabin mates. It was a warm night and I could see lights bouncing off the river in front of me and stars in the dark sky. There were many other wooden benches in front me and behind me where other groups were sitting. But, this wasn't the only attraction of the small grassy hill. A small fire in between four wooden planks for this last evening campfire was a tradition of the camp.

"Welcome campers to the last campfire of this session," the director Derby said when everyone sat down. The sorrow of leaving camp filled the air as she spoke. Then, one of the managers, Spark, started singing and playing the guitar to soften the mood; the whole camp put their arms around each other and swayed side to side. A waterfall started to spill from my eyes.

My counselor Star's dark chocolate eyes looked at me and said, "It's okay."

A smile spread across my face. I knew it was going to be okay like always, but it didn't feel like that this year. Then, all of a sudden, memories started pouring out in front of my eyes. My stomach started tightening like someone pushing it in; tears kept flowing from my eyes. My whole body felt like it was about to explode, because I had to leave everyone I cared about tomorrow.

I looked at Star and asked, "Why do I have to leave tomorrow? It feels like just yesterday I got here."

"I know you have to leave, but we had so much fun together," Star replied.

My whole body started shaking and tightening even more. More tears started pouring out.

Soon, it was time for the Buckaroos to leave for bed. It was sad seeing the little ones leave. I started to remember my last campfire when I was as young as them, when I had so much fun for the first time. When River Way became my home.

The managers started talking to us as the little ones left. "This session was filled with happiness, memories, and making new friends," Derby said.

I started thinking about that. How many memories I had with my new friends that I made and the memories with Star. Soon, the tears stopped and my body started to feel normal again.

I told myself, "Even though we have to leave all my new friends and Star behind tomorrow, we can come back next year and see them again!"



## The Snow War

*Christopher Kindle*

“Do you want to have a snowball fight?” my cousin Ian asked.  
“Yes,” I responded with little thought.

So the fight began. The first hour of the war was simple, just running around collecting snow, then balling it up, and finally lobbing it a few feet in hopes that it would hit the other person. It was generally painless when one of us got hit by a snowball.

Soon the war evolved as I would entrench myself after Ian took a bathroom break. I had created a small mound about one backpack in height and two times as wide. I had crouched behind the mound where the displaced snow was. I was impervious from the front, but my Achilles heel was the un-defended sides.

I had escalated the fighting by entrenching myself into the snow. Ian was thin, he had brown eyes and puffy black hair. His frame made him nearly impossible to hit while in a chase. That was not a problem now because his lack of tactics and strategic thinking outweighed his physical advantage. Ian kept attempting to break the mound from the front for a few minutes until he realized that he could use his ability to move me from my position. By the time he had realized his mobility, I had built three more walls, and a new phase of the war had begun.

He began to entrench himself soon after he realized that my defense was impenetrable. In the middle of his effort to create a defense it was time for lunch.

The first ceasefire of the war was the first of many failed attempts at peace. Once lunch was done, fighting continued in the snow covered backyard.

Ian had a different strategy when it came to his trenches. Thin walls that once destroyed could be repurposed as snow balls they were quick to build but had almost no integrity. My trenches’ defensive walls were thick, hard to build, and time consuming to create but could defend against most attacks. So the trench warfare began. We would now throw snowballs at high angles in hopes to hit, because popping up out of your foxhole could lead to an easy hit for the other person.

The second day started as a continuation of the first. Soon the stalemate will be broken. Between our two trenches was a garden shed. That shed contained everything for me to turn the tides of battle. I dubbed my plan operation art.

Having fully prepared, I began the execution of operation art. I positioned myself in such a way that I could enter the shed with a minimal amount of steps. Just before springing out I contemplated. If I left the trench and went through with the operation I would escalate the war, extending it indefinitely, but if I didn’t go through with my plan we may have come to a permanent peace ending the war. I chose the former, and so I sprung out of my trench and sprinted into the shed. Once I had made it into the shed I grasped for a snow shovel, but I felt nothing as my fingers collided with themselves. I began frantically searching the walls then the floor. And right behind me there was the shovel, and Ian. The shovel lay between the two of us. I dove towards it, but I overshot, and Ian barely jumped out of the way. I barreled to the middle of the battlefield like a boulder down a hill.

Soon after I stopped I stumbled up back to the shed. Where I finally acquired the shovel. With the shovel I was able to

bombard Ian’s trench with half a dozen snowballs at a time. Innovation but not enough to stop the threat that would end the war on the third day.

I started the day by looking out of the window looking out onto a sea of lights. The early morning created many idyllic views, but one I was most interested in was that of the trenches. Looking at the faintly lit snow you could just make out what looked like two massive worms laid into it. Those were the trenches, which had begun to snake across the backyard. Megastructures in their own right, but for what purpose? Why had I dug in? Why was I discontent with the simple fun? Questions all, which were meaningless because what is in the past will stay in the past which can never be changed.

This day would mark the final battle of the war. I emplaced myself early in the morning at around six. Waiting in the trench left me isolated only me and my thoughts. The question “Why?” plagued me until the door creaked open. Ian had arrived. I balled up some snow and threw it at him. The impact had no physical effect but certainly woke him up. He dashed into his trench, and so the status quo continued. Hours passed, the world continued to spin.

Suddenly a quiet whir from the window, and then a snowball flew at me and then another and another until I began to crawl on the cold snow. I got to thinking about how we could survive this onslaught of snowballs. Then it hit me. I needed to unite with Ian, so we could just win the war. So I walked to his trench and hopped in. He was creating a snowball, but I smacked out of his hand.

“Go back to your trench!” he barked.

“No. We have a problem only the two of us can solve,” I sternly said.

“What?” he replied

I explained our plight to Ian. We quickly planned how we could defeat the third party. Then the time came. They walked out of the door launcher whirring ready to enter the war. They quickly overwhelmed us, so we had to make our last stand. As we had planned I sprung out of my trench and him out of his. We dashed almost like rabbits hopping from left to right. Snow balls in hand and just a few feet away we threw them in tandem. This display of unity was not enough as we were quickly covered in snow.

We were forced into surrender. Ending the snow war.



## A Favorite Place

*Natalia Pulice*

Over this past spring break, my family and I went to Santa Barbara. We stayed in a charming hotel called the Upham. It is a beautiful boutique hotel surrounded by lush gardens, fountains, and aromatic flowers. Surrounding the gardens are small one-bedroom cottages that look like they’re straight out of a fairytale. When you walk into the room a plate of freshly baked, soft-sugary cookies, and hot chocolate awaits you. Each room is filled with antique furniture, a large wood-burning fireplace, and a king-size bed filled with large fluffy pillows that are super luxurious, warm, and soft. At night the air is filled with the scent of nighttime jasmine and if you’re lucky enough you may catch a glimpse of a bunny hopping across the gardens.





## Sparkling Water

*Harlow Hanson-Beattie*

It was a cold winter morning when I was on my way to Prescott. From my grandma's house, it was approximately an hour drive of just going uphill, with occasional large turns. To keep myself from feeling nauseous, I looked out the window into what was a never ending abyss of trees and snow. In the past I dreaded going to Prescott because of the drive and my motion sickness. It also didn't help that I felt so bored going up there because I'd always go in the summer where it was hot so the majority of my time there was inside or at a restaurant. I always heard about how great and fun Prescott was, but I just didn't understand it. If it was so fun, then how come I wasn't enjoying my time there?

However, during the drive I felt anxious. This time was different. It was snowing. I had never seen snow before and could feel the excitement in my body. It felt like butterflies but different. I was dying to know what it was like.

Could I really build a snowman and have snowball fights? I thought.

I knew I was definitely going to drink hot chocolate and take lots of pictures.

Looking out the window, I admired the snowflakes falling down from the clouds onto the trees. I was surprised by how peaceful everything looked. Snow is a perfect kind of picturesque panorama. This made me realize winter time is precious. It was only winter once a year. When could you see the snow any other season? I then understood why my dad always wanted to come up here so much.

Shortly after, my dad said, "Harlow, we're almost here! Are you excited?"

For the first time I actually was.

"Yeah, I am! I've never seen snow before," I said, while looking out the window.

My dad, astonished, replied, "Wow, really? You're excited? That's weird. You usually hate coming up here. Trust me, we're going to have a lot of fun!"

Before I realized it, we were driving on the street of the cabin. As we were getting closer, I noticed it was snowing and I could see snow forming patches on the roof in the distance. It was like powdered sugar being sprinkled on a pancake. The snow was as white as a blanket.

When we pulled into the driveway and got out of the car, I quivered like a leaf in the wind. The weather app had forecasted there would be a winter storm which caused the wind to be very strong. When my dad unlocked the door I quickly ran inside.

That day, I made gingerbread cookies, hot chocolate, and had snowball fights. My mom made sure to take lots of photos so we could relive the memory.

During my time there, we explored around the city and went out to amazing restaurants with holiday specials. The food was so amazing and nothing like what I've had before. We also bought Christmas gifts for the family which consisted of perfume, record players, chocolate, and much more.

The days passed by very quickly. As they say, time passes by when you're having fun!

"I want to come back next winter! This is amazing!" I exclaimed.

My dad's emerald eyes widened. "Really? Okay! I'm so glad you had fun."

Before I knew it, it was our last day there. While packing the car, I heard my dad saying he was happy I came and enjoyed my time with all of us as a family. He had a pure smile on his face that could light up the room. He was already talking to me about what we could do the next time we came. As we were getting in the car and saying goodbye to the cabin, I felt happy that I made my family happy and that I got to experience snow for the first time. See you next year, Cabin!



## Goodbye, Liby

*Milan Shoef*

I was playing video games with my friend when my mom walked into my room.

"Want to say goodbye?" She said in a depressing mood. Her blue eyes were watery and there were tears resting on her cheeks. I was confused for a few seconds then I realized what she meant. A dark cloud flew over me.

I thought, why is it happening now? It had only been a few months ago that I finally gained her trust. She had always been nervous around me because my brother and I messed with her when we were baby's.

I walked down the hall toward the living room of our apartment which was cluttered with toys. I saw my dad; he was petting our dog Liberty. I had never seen my dad that sad. It makes sense though, he thought of our dog as his daughter. I walked over and put my hand on her.

I said, "Goodbye Liby, I'm going to miss you."

I swept my hand through her soft orange fur. My mom then asked my brother if he wanted to say goodbye. He pet her, although I knew he didn't understand what was happening. I don't know if he ever will.

My dad picked her up and left. I walked back down the hall to my room. Everything felt harder even walking. I got back on my computer, unmuted. I could barely talk.

I managed to blurt, "My dad is going to put our dog down."

I didn't know what I was feeling. But I knew it was mainly sadness. My parents had talked about putting her down for weeks, but it didn't feel right. Yeah I had known that she was older than me, and that she could barely walk, but it felt wrong. It felt too soon.

I couldn't think about anything other than Liby. It felt as if I was trapped in a cell of thoughts. I managed to ignore my feelings and just go back to playing video games with my friend, but when my dad came back with tears flowing down his face, it hit me like a punch of sorrow and memories.

There was no more hiding my sadness.

I remembered playing with a laser pointer with her. I remembered running up the stairs to our apartment with her. I remembered going camping with her. I remember racing against her in the park. The good memories just made it harder. They felt like a kick to the butt. I had never lost anything living until her.

I didn't think it would be this hard.



## Hard Work Pays Off

*Evie Swerdlow*

You would think that since I had done it twice before, testing for my third-degree black belt would not feel as significant as it did. That morning I put on my brand-new taekwondo apparel and braided my hair like I always do before a test. For years, I have been training for this day, yet it was impossible for me to anticipate what would happen this time. As I entered the gym, I noticed that my usually jovial instructors looked much more hostile to me that day. I wanted to turn around and vacate the premises immediately! I took a deep breath and took my spot on the mats.

Each black belt degree is exponentially more significant than the ones before it, requiring many more years of rigorous training. This time I was required to break two bricks! Stepping up to the brick on the makeshift stand of two cinder blocks is terrifying. But I can't think of anything equivalent to breaking it on my first try! I guess hard work really does pay off! It was an amazing day!



## The Slippery Slide

*Emma Stephens*

I stepped through the gates of the Ocean Breeze Water Park with my mom, my younger sister, Charlotte, and her mom. "What do you want to start with, Emma?" asked my mom.

I felt my jaw drop as I turned around. Tall structures and slides towered so high above the ground and there was a wave pool the size of Charlotte's house. I glanced over my shoulder and saw a tube slide that seemed fun to try.

"Hey, Mom! What about there?"

We saw a puddle of water in the distance, so we scurried across the baking concrete to cool our feet. When we reached the slide, my stomach felt a sharp pain of fear.

As I tilted my head up and I started to slowly back away, Charlotte asked me, "What are you doing, Sissy?"

Her eyes were as blue as the wave pool excitedly looking up at me. She squealed and jumped up and down, clearly waiting to go on the slide. How could I back out of something she seemed so excited for? After all, she was only seven.

After a few minutes, one person after another went down the slide, and soon it was my turn. My hands shook frantically. "What's wrong, hun?" my mom asked. "Do you not want to do this one? We could go to another slide."

"No. I need to do this. Besides, how bad could it be, right?"

Wrong. I glanced off of the top of the slide and saw the steepness of the slide.

Emma, you have got to do this. You can't be scared of something so harmless! Suddenly I was at the front of the line. I lifted my leg onto the tube and peeked over at Charlotte. She had the biggest smile across her face. I needed to do this with her. We never have any bonding time, so I needed to suck it up. I mustered up the courage and got ready.

"Here we go! You ready?" asked the park worker.

"Yup. Let's do this!"

I took a deep breath and then she pushed me off. I felt like

I was plummeting to my death. I swung all over the slide and then all of the sudden, the tenseness in my muscles melted away. I could feel my cheeks scrunching up. Was I smiling? I saw the end of the slide and all I could do was let out a squeal! "Weeeee!"

The sensation in my stomach was like it was being squeezed in a way I had never felt before. I jumped up and down for ten seconds straight. But I was even happier when I saw my sisters grin. I ran up to her and hugged her.

"Do you wanna do that again?" I exclaimed happily.

"Yes!"



## Cannibal

*Josie Begum*

Sweat ran down like a raging waterfall. My vision, so blurry I couldn't see straight. I had been fretting this moment for so long and now it was here. As my head slowly followed my eyes, I looked up at the blood red tower-like ride.

"There's no way I'm going on this, I bet it reaches the clouds!" I thought.

I felt like I was going to faint. All I heard was screams which obviously wasn't helping!

While I looked around everyone seemed so thrilled while all I felt was the chills. This was it, I thought. As I slowly approached the front of the line, my legs were shaking. Making it hard for me to walk straight. I stared at the chip bags and pretzel crumbs on the floor anxiously waiting.

"You look nervous," my dad said laughing.

"I'm not!" I replied with an awkward smile, obviously lying. With every minute that passed, I was closer to my grave. I refused to move, paralyzed in fear. My dad pulled my arm trying to get me to go, glaring at me with his big brown eyes.

"We have waited in line for 30 minutes; finally at the front and you want to get off now?!" he exclaimed.

I know I would feel guilty if I wimped out at the last second, since my dad seemed so excited.

"I'll do it," I said unsurely.

My dad's face lit up. I looked down at the red cart that had almost lost all color. It was so scratched up it almost looked as if it was the prey of a mountain lion. One foot on. Then slowly the other. My heart beat faster with each step. I sat down not being able to move much due to the bar holding me down. I could feel the ripped up parts of the chair poking into me. Hyperventilating, tears formed in my eyes. I didn't want to be there anymore.

"What if the bar doesn't hold me and I slide out?!" I thought.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath to calm myself down.

"KCHHHH."

With my stomach twisting knots, the gates opened as a gust of wind hit my face. The cart slowly made its way into a pitch black tunnel. I couldn't see anything except a very faded light at the end. As that light started to get bigger and bigger I reached the platforms that would take the cart up to a very high point. The whole world was visible from up there. One... two... three... four... five! The cart ascended down the tracks like a speeding train. Up and down; going through loops. It wouldn't stop. My hair flew in my face and I struggled to keep my eyes open. Yet, in a blink of an eye it was over.

"Did you like it?" my dad asked me.

As I tried to hide a big smile on my face, I mumbled, "Yeah," not wanting to admit it. "Can we do it again?"



## The Great Escape

*Brooke Abraham*

"Meet me at the crepe counter at exactly 8:00. No later," my mom began. "Be careful, and call me if you need anything!" I could sense the consternation in her voice.

Brigitte, Katia, and I spent the next few hours at Century City. We made our way around the mall, stopping at shops every so often. We later headed towards the food court and ate there until the sun began to set. Swirls of orange and pink painted the sky. The clouds were like chunks of blue raspberry cotton candy. We should've waited for my mom at the crepe counter, but we rushed to The Sugar Factory instead. I gripped my phone tightly in my hand, skipping behind my two friends. "Guys, I think we should head back. We can take photos next time."

"Oh c'mon, Brooke! What's the worst that could happen?" Katia asked.

"I don't know, I've never stayed out past dark. This isn't a good idea!"

"Stop worrying. It will only take a few minutes," Brigitte insisted.

"Fine." Despite my attempts to stop them, it appeared my friends were determined to take photos in front of the sunset. The glass gate next to Sugar Factory looked out over the busy streets of Santa Monica. Cars zoomed past, stopping at the red light. Brigitte, aka Bri, leaned against the gate. She placed her hand on her hip and posed like an inexperienced runway model.

"Take the picture! Quick!" Bri muttered in between her forced smile.

Click! I snapped the photo, "Okay, let's go. It'll be dark soon. I'm starting to worry."

"Can I see the picture first?" Bri asked.

I opened my phone to my camera roll and handed it to her as Katia looked over her shoulder.

"Ew! Take it again. This time with Katia, please," pleaded Bri.

I rolled my eyes, "Last one."

By the time I took the picture and my friends approved it, the stars were the only thing emitting light in the sky. The photos had taken much longer than I had anticipated.

Buzz! My phone rang in my pocket.

I picked it up, "Hi Mom."

"Where are you? It's past 8:00! Don't you remember our deal?"

Guilt rushed through me like a flood, "We are coming right now. I'm so sorry!"

We were barely five feet away from Sugar Factory when I spotted a man, wearing a backwards baseball cap and sunglasses, maybe oblivious to the fact that the sun had set. He held a blasting radio on one shoulder, while a pair of brand new Reeboks connected by an anti-shoplifting device perched on the other.

Did he steal those? I wondered.

"That guy is so strange." The sound of Bri's slides got louder as she sped up.

I turned around to see him heading in our direction.

"Run!" I yelled.

We ran like rabbits escaping a predator, scrambling into Old Navy.

"What's wrong?" asked an employee as she folded a pair of baggy jeans.

"A man is following us! What should we do?" Katia's honey brown eyes overcome with fear.

The employee's response was interrupted by the sound of the blasting radio, loud as thunder in the middle of the night. Katia took cover underneath the cash register while Brigitte and I scurried back to the front entrance. So fast, I could barely feel my feet.

The man screamed at Katia, "Why did you run from me? Huh? Get over here!"

Silence.

Finally the employee said, "Sir, it's time for you to leave," she escorted him out of the store.

As soon as he had gone I called my mom, "Mom! A man chased us into the Old Navy! Please come get us!"

"I'm on my way! Stay there!"

When my mom, dad, and brother arrived, I ran into my mom's arms, apologetic, frightened, and relieved all at once.

"I'm sorry," I said looking up at her.

"That's all right. The three of you girls learned your lesson. I know it won't happen again. Now who's up for crepes?"

"Meeee!" my brother exploded.

The six of us walked to the food court, through the sliding doors, and to the crepe counter.

"Four Nutella crepes with strawberries and whipped cream please."

"Coming right up!" announced the chef.

When the crepes were ready, we sat down on the red, leather chairs of the food court and devoured them until nothing but melted Nutella remained on our plastic plates. Regardless of the unprecedented events that took place, everyone was right where they belonged, safe and sound.



## Sunny Streets of Paris

*Antonella Finci*

After two hours of waiting, it was finally our turn. Our turn to take the large elevator up to the top of the Eiffel Tower. So many different languages were spoken all around me. The crowd was getting bigger and bigger but we kept moving forward. We finally arrived to the front of the noisy line. The lady at the front desk checked us in and directed us towards the packed elevator. Everyone was chattering about how excited they were to get up to the top. The elevator doors closed and we started to rise up towards the sky. After almost three whole minutes, in the crowded elevator, we finally exit out. The fresh air felt like a winter breeze blowing swiftly over our faces. My legs suddenly started to wobble as I realized how high we were. I could see the bustling, and sunny streets of Paris. All the churches and towers rising over Paris like trees reaching over a forest. I gazed from above and looked down below and pondered what happens when people drop something from so high. I started to feel more comfortable on this elevated peak. After a whole hour, I was inspired. I felt like a fresh flower bud, newly bloomed.





## The Spirit of the Season

*Jayla Maqsoudi*

Even though my family isn't religious, we like to celebrate Christmas. One year, in particular, stuck out to me, probably because of how perfect it was. Our Christmas tree was decorated with an assortment of different ornaments. The metallic tinsel and the twinkly lights swirled around the tree, leading to a magnificent yellow star on top. Underneath the tree lay an abundance of presents, varying from big to small. I felt the large bicycle-shaped present calling out my name, begging to be opened, but I reminded myself to be patient. Our Christmas tree was a beacon of our Christmas joy and spirit. My dad, sister, and I were selecting a movie to watch, while my mom was in the kitchen. We were away from the chilling weather outside, underneath our warm fuzzy blankets and in the safety of our cozy living room. The fireplace whistled and danced to the spirit of the season. Once we decided on a movie, "The Elf", my mom came in, just in time, with freshly baked cookies. I helped myself to a cookie, biting through the crispy outer layer before getting to the warm, chewy center. My senses were captivated by its irresistible taste and the sweet aroma of cinnamon-sugar. We all settled in and played the movie. I had a big smile plastered on my face, ready to immerse myself in the holiday spirit.



## Skilled Skis

*Anders Baak*

I raised the pole of the chair lift and scooted to the end of the seat. My legs were shaking, and I was sweating even in the cold temperature. Once I arrived at the top of the hill I finally slid off the seat. The sound of my skis landing echoed around the quiet hills. My mom and I both glided down the soft slippery snow. We made our way towards the slopes.

I could very faintly see the cabins and stores with big signs saying "Alta, Utah" through the thick green trees covered with snow. I knew in a couple of minutes we would get to the first black diamond, but of course we would go the easier way like we always did. I've always wanted to ski on that black diamond, but every time I attempted I would get too scared and my head would start spinning. I was scared because, since the hill was almost vertical, and if you tried stopping or slowing down midway through you would surely tumble and hurt yourself. Meaning that if you didn't have 100% courage, you shouldn't go.

After going over and around some hills and trees we made it to the black diamond. This was our last day skiing so of course my mom asked me if I wanted to try skiing the black diamond once before leaving.

"You sure you don't want to go?" she asked. "We won't be back here in a while."

"Okay, I'll do it," I said unwillingly.

"Okay, you got this!"

I let my mom go first before inching my way towards the descent. It looked so easy the way she did it in her bright pink helmet. I got to the edge and looked over. The landscape was pillows of snow. I felt the chill of the snowflakes landing on me. I waited for a moment. I could see my mom's bright green eyes through her goggles at the bottom. She gave me a thumbs up.

My whole body was tingling, and my head was full of tension, but I tried to summon up the courage. My legs were twitching. I pushed on my skis and leaned forward. I tucked in my body like a snowball and I started picking up speed. Suddenly the wind was whistling. I was going so fast it was blurry. My skis were rattling but I kept them straight. I almost fell but kept my balance. I made it to the bottom of the massive hill and zoomed past my mom then hockey stopped.

"Woo!" she cheered as I slid by, shaking.

"I did it!" I laughed.



## The View Without Eyes

*Sarah Hajmomenian*

It was a nice afternoon in San Francisco. The sun was smiling down, brightening everyone's day. A salty and refreshing scent drifted through the air from the ocean down below. I was walking back from camp on a high cliff. Birds were soaring around me, making shadows on the hills. As I walked, I thought about what it would be like to be blind, to lose all sight. I had recently watched a movie about a blind girl, so it made me think. Imagine not being able to see all the magnificent beauty that surrounds you.

So, right then and there I decided that, if I ever became blind, I would hold this enchanting image in my mind. I would want to remember every single detail about this beautiful place. I close my eyes and breathe in and out. I take in the fresh air with a hint of cypress. There are trees that cover the hills, and bushes too. They make this area so relaxing and fresh with their clean fragrance that sends out oxygen. My nose is filled with a variety of smells coming from this special place.

Then I transfer my senses to my ears. I can hear the cawing of the birds that fly through the bright blue and cloudy sky. The birds are as free as the American flag in the wind -swaying and flying through the breeze. The little birds sing their special tunes. I hear the waves crashing on the sandy shore, making a loud, but soothing sound as they hit the dark gray rocks. The wind whistles through the trees, the sound being brought over with a gentle breeze. I can feel the burning sun on my dry skin. The bushes brush against my ankles making little scratch marks.

And then I open my eyes to see the wonders of this special place. The beautiful cliff overlooking the blue and white ocean that sparkles with the sunlight. The ships in the distance sail through the wavy waters. Trees stand on the hill, planted, stationary. The clouds swirl around in the sky, making shapes, images. I take it all in, every detail, just everything. I shall remember and hold this view in my mind forever.



## It's Me or Football

*Trista Federman*

"Trista, wake-up. It's time to go to the high school!" my dad yelled from downstairs.

I shuffled down like a zombie, pulling on a hoodie. Brett was already in the car and of course I had to be in the backseat next to his football bag, which reeked of sweat and old socks. Heading to Brett's first football practice of the year, I sat in the car, wondering why I had to go too, clenching my fists and grinding my teeth, holding back my anger.

When we arrived at the football field, we walked Brett down to his teammates and I didn't know what I was supposed to do from that point on.

"Go run the track, T!" my dad exclaimed.

Does he think I'm a runner now or something?

The field was huge. Green turf and the white lines marked for every 10 yards that looked like they were paved minutes ago. A bright red track with long jumps scattered around the mile lap. Everything looked new, even the score board that was digital. We waited around two whole hours just staring at Brett's practice. I could see my dad's eyes frozen on what was going on. His brown eyes stretching side to side.

The practice was finally done, and I prepared myself for what the car ride would look like. I was in the back seat again and I put down the middle part to rest my head on. At last the football talk began.

"My team sucks, and don't get me started on the plays," Brett said.

"Your coach is way too old to be coaching. I don't know what we're going to do all season," my dad replied.

"I think your team looked good," I chimed in.

"Trista leave it to us to talk about football," my dad replied.

That comment made me snap, not to mention I was already in a bad mood.

That's when I emptied out my heart and said, this "Everything's always about football and I'm tired of it. You guys act like I don't understand anything because I'm a girl. Well, news flash, I get what your 'guy' stuff is about. Dad, you never care this much about basketball. You never drag Brett to any of my practices on early mornings."

I could hear my dad huffing and puffing. The car console opened, and he grabbed a piece of gum and smacked on it. My dad always chews gum when he's thinking, so I knew he was processing everything I said.

After a few minutes of silence in the car my dad spoke. "You're right, T., I haven't been fair. I have a special connection to football and I took it too far. I care about basketball and I'm so happy you play it, which. Which is why I support your practices and take you to far away games. It is not my intention to make you feel like I don't."

My eyelids were weighing down on my face. However, I listened, and I knew the connection he was talking about. He played football at the same exact high school at which my brother's playing. My dad couldn't go pro. He was going to do anything to ensure Brett would.

I understood why he was acting the way he was about football. Him promising he wouldn't talk about it as much was enough for me.



## Preschool Mob Boss

*Areyan Abadi*

I don't remember if it was daycare or preschool, but daycare feels like walking in diapers and pushing kids off couches. This place was the buffer zone between daycare and preschool if you know what I mean. The place was pretty small, built in someone's house with mustard yellow paint, and a musty scent of wood from the brown gateway you entered through. On the first day, the main priority during playground time was the swing set. I immediately marked it as my territory. On the set, there were two seats and maybe like ten kids. Most kids were afraid to challenge me because I was like a walking dictator. To my surprise, I noticed I did not threaten another kid, so I told him I would give "ownership" over the second swing so there wouldn't be any turf wars. I already had a mob boss mentality from day one. The other kid, like me, had similar interests, so I knew he wouldn't challenge my power and give freebies. Since I had the swing set under control, I formed a small militia to command. They were driven by the salary of small amounts of swing set time and the fear of their scary, commanding, incredibly attractive, mob boss. I ruled the daycare-preschool for a couple of weeks until the attention-deficit children lost interest.



## Home Away from Home

*Vitalija Schafer*

I step off of the bus, finally getting a deep breath of fresh air after a painfully long bus ride. We were on the bus for two and a half hours, trying to reach Big Bear. Each hour feels like a lifetime while I am cramped in a small space, bored out of my mind, yet the anticipation keeps me awake. I can smell the stale scent of the bus while being occasionally presented with the faint nauseating stench of vomit. Yet it is all worth it when I first see the disheveled archery range. When I finally get my first whiff of freedom. I am immediately drowning in luggage and trash bags and people flooding out of the buses. I join into the wild frenzy of finding that needle in a haystack. When I finally locate my luggage, I get a deep breath of piney, fresh mountain air, mixed with the slightly moist scent of the hay from the archery range. I glance around at my surroundings, trying to start my mental photo album for when I leave. But for now, I need to find my dorm. I walk down the pavement, full of dust as I hear everyone rejoicing. We are here! One week of freedom and fun and friendships. I haul my bag up the seventeen wooden stairs with the brown paint peeling, exposing the white paint on the opposite side. I throw my backpack onto the crinkly grayish-blue mattress. On top is a mismatched wooden bunk bed with low exposed rafters. I sprint down the stairs to capture my favorite smell of Camp Big Bear, the Jefferson pines. When I smell the warm bark, I smell vanilla and honey, and a dash of cinnamon. It's pure warmth. It floods your senses and fills you with a feeling of happiness so great that you feel all of your worries melt away. It smells like home.



## The Old Must End for the New to Begin

*Leo Turner*

It was a sunny Saturday after the last day of school and I had just woken up in my bedroom. I climbed down the blue ladder from my bed and walked out of my room and then into the kitchen.

I filled a tea cup with water at the sink and added a tea bag. "I can't believe this is my last morning at this home I lived in for my whole life," I thought. "I am about to go on a vacation to Oklahoma and my family is going to reunite," but I also remembered that "first I have to leave the home I have lived in for my entire life."

I opened the back sliding door and I walked out to the backyard. I smelled the fresh morning air and I sat down on a wooden chair and set my breakfast down on the table.

I looked at the green backyard and thought, "The backyard is the best part of this house, but at least both of my parents will live together in the new house."

I was like the pink and white rose that was blooming, my emotions a mix of excitement and sadness.

My mom opened the door and asked, "Did you pack everything?"

I answered, "Not yet."

"Okay, go brush your teeth so I can pack the toothbrush. Then you can pack your stuff," she said.

I finished my breakfast and went inside. I saw my mom and brother rushing around the living room to pack everything. I went into the narrow bathroom where my sister was brushing her teeth. I picked up my toothbrush and started brushing my teeth.

"Are you excited to go to Oklahoma?" my sister asked me. I responded, "Yeah, but I'm also sad to leave this house."

I finished brushing my teeth and rushed to my room to pack my backpack. "It's sad that the last time I will spend here is rushing around to pack instead of enjoying it," I thought to myself. I collected some books and my phone and packed it in the backpack. I reminded myself, "When I am in Oklahoma I can see my family and go to the museum." Then I realized, "This is the last time I will spend in my room. It's sad that I only had this room for a year and I am already leaving. I never even got to decorate it."

"The taxi's almost here. Are you ready?" my mom asked.

I responded, "Yes, I am ready."

I was the first person to finish packing, so I decided to walk around and remember all the memories from around the house.

Then I heard my mom say, "The taxi's here!"

I looked into her blue eyes and realized that my life was about to change forever.

I walked to the front door slowly. The door was a portal to my new life where my parents would finally get along and I wouldn't have to switch houses every week. As I walked out the door I realized the old life had to end for the new one to begin.

I sat down in the taxi feeling excited and sad about the change and left my home for the last time ever.



## The Final Serve

*Brett Rosenblatt*

Court #7. Championship match. A tiebreaker. Next point wins. I rolled the ball around in my fingertips trying to gain confidence. I bounced it once, twice, three times, counting as the ball ricocheted back into my hand.

I felt the light breeze flow through my hair. I looked to my left and saw my doubles partner, Ben. His light blue eyes looked back at me and he gave me a nod of approval. I looked ahead of me to my adversaries across the court. They were high schoolers, and they towered over us like giants.

I looked to my right to see my family, Ben's family, the other team's family, my team, and the other team. Everybody was watching me. It was all up to me.

I tossed the ball up into the air, with the big bright sun shining in my eyes. All of my worries flooded.

What if I miss? In that case we would lose the match, and our team would lose the championship.

That's the worst case scenario, I thought.

Let's not do that. I tried to stop myself from thinking about it, but I just couldn't.

If I miss, I'll let down my whole team. Not just me, not just Ben, everybody. And I'll make a fool of myself in front of everybody watching me. No, don't be silly. Don't think about that. Think about winning. You know you can win. Now you just have to do it.

I started my backswing. I brought my arm around my head, and my racket followed. I bent down with my legs to gain momentum. I brought my arm up, about to swing, before another idea hit me like a racket to the face.

I had just auditioned for an All-State Jazz Band, and had actually forgotten about it because of how long the results were taking to come in. Unfortunately, I remembered it at the exact wrong second. What if I don't get in? I'll be so disappointed in myself. Will my family be disappointed in me too? Of course not, they're your own family! What are you thinking? Just win already!

I continued to bring my racket closer to the ball. I went to my tippy toes, and then jumped and contacted the ball right where I needed to. I landed, the ball zipping through the air. It hit in the corner of the box, with my adversary running towards it. It felt like the perfect serve. I saw Ben grinning, so I knew he was thinking exactly what I was.

Our opponent couldn't get to the ball in time, which is when I heard the cheers. First my dad, followed by my mom, followed by everyone else watching. We had just won! I couldn't believe my eyes. I had aced the final serve, winning the championship for my team.





## Fly High

*Evan Ibarra*

Dear Alex:

You were the closest friend I had to family. You are family. You were everything I could ask for. Your unique spirit filled rooms. My favorite times were when we would stay on calls for hours and hours. It meant a lot when you would randomly text me “how are you doing?” all the time. You came into my life so sweet and vibrant, and you left being the same and more.

It can’t be put into words how much you meant to me nor how much I love you. You were the sweetest best friend one could have, and you mean a lot. We had so many arguments over stupid crap; it’s now what I look back at to remember you. I love and miss you infinitely.

I can’t imagine the troubles you were going through but I respect your decision. You will always be in my heart. Always and forever.

Sincerely,  
Your best friend, Evan

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Sitting there on a park bench, I listened to the excruciating sound of dial tone. After an eternity, it stopped, and I heard, “Hello?”

I replied, “Hello, Chloe, have you heard from Alex lately? She hasn’t been answering my phone calls or text messages.”

“You haven’t heard?” Chloe replied.

Confused, I answered, “Heard what?”

In a darkening tone, Chloe said, “She died, Evan.”

Everything went blank, and there I sat, impacted by so many feelings. It felt unreal. My best friend was dead, and I didn’t know what to do.

Crying, I said, “Chloe tell me the truth!”

“That is the truth,” she exclaimed.

I honestly didn’t know what to think at that point but all I could do was cry, cry and cry.

I couldn’t move.

The feeling of confusion, sadness, regret, anger, heart-break. All of those feelings combined paralyzed me.

The fact that my best friend had died at this young age actually shocked me. I couldn’t imagine what her mother was going through. So many people in this world hide their emotions and don’t tell people what they are feeling.

Thinking back, I remembered the last time I saw Alex was on the day after her birthday. She seemed so jubilant and joyful, but I couldn’t say what she was actually feeling.

Alex was an immense part of my life. There is a big hole left in my heart now that she is gone. That hole will never be filled. That’s how much Alex mattered. Alex is irreplaceable. Alex is Alex, my best friend, and if I could say one thing to her right now I would say, “I miss you.”

I don’t know why Alex did what she did, but I understand. What she did was her decision and I respect her wishes.

Alex was so unique and funny and always brought out the best in unfortunate situations. Yes, we had hard times, but everybody has arguments. I’ve gone through so many hard times in my life, but Alex was always there. I can’t say how much she has helped me in hard times.

I believe Alex was a gift from god. Truly a person with a heart, and she will always be remembered. FLY HIGH.



## Courage for Coasters

*Zane Wolsefer*

If you know me, you know that I love roller coasters. But this wasn’t always the case. It was on December 31st, also known as New Year’s Eve, and my family and I were on our way to Knott’s Berry Farm. Now at the time, my cousin was in town, who was a huge fan of roller coasters. As we entered the park, we wanted to go on their newest attraction, HangTime, because we hadn’t been on it yet, because it opened in 2019, and we went last in 2016. As we were waiting in line, I watched the carts race all around the track. As we got closer and closer, my heart was beating faster and faster.

When our group was up next, I could feel my heart beating faster than the carts on the track. As the cart entered the station, I had an awful feeling in my stomach. I felt as if I was going to throw up. The layout of the coaster didn’t help either. It was a dive coaster, with five inversions, with a ninety degree vertical, 150 foot tall lift hill. At the top, it would suspend you over the whole track in front of you, and then, you would plummet 150 feet on a ninety-six degree drop at a top speed of fifty-six miles per hour. It was white and a shade of light blue.

“I’m super excited to ride this roller coaster!” my cousin exclaimed.

“Me too!” my little brother shouted after him. I didn’t say anything, because I was silenced by my nervousness.

As the cart started to leave the station, I didn’t know what to do. The lift hill only took about seven seconds, but if it felt like it was seven hours. Finally, we were suspended at the top. We started slowly moving, and I knew what was next. We dropped and we did the first inversion. After that, I realized it wasn’t so bad.

“I love this! I love this! This is so fun!” I screamed. I could barely hear myself, because of the terrified screams of the other people, and the wind blowing fast. After we hit the final break run, I talked to my cousin.

“That was so fun! What did you think of it?” I exclaimed.

“That was one of the best coasters I’ve been on!” he replied.

When we got off, I ran over to my mom, proud of my accomplishment.

“Mom! Mom! I did it. I was nervous at first but now I love roller coasters!” I exclaimed.

My mom was proud, too.

“I’m so proud of you!” my mother replied.

After that ride, I realized no roller coaster is too scary for me anymore, and I went on more roller coasters like Silver Bullet and Xcelerator. Unfortunately, HangTime scared my dad so much that he dislikes roller coasters now. After we got off, I could tell my dad was shaken up.

“That was so scary, I’m never doing that again,” he said.

“No it wasn’t,” I replied.

When we left, I was proud of myself. I conquered my fear of roller coasters on that day.

After that, I realized that even if I am nervous about something, I should probably just try because who knows? You might just find something you really love.



## The Woman

*Noa Kanegsberg*

The sound of my alarm ringing in my ears woke me up. I whipped my head around the room, my heart thudding in my chest, before reaching for my phone and turning off the eerie music playing from it.

I sighed in relief and thought, Phew, it was just a nightmare. I yawned, adjusting to the subtle gray light creeping into my bedroom. I remembered the dream. Images of frail figures glaring at me while holding gleaming kitchen knives flashed through my head in a montage. My heart pounded in my chest, and I pulled the covers up to my neck.

I tried to calm myself down. It was just a dream. You're safe. But my eyes still darted across every wall and object they could see like detectives searching for evidence. My mind played tricks on me. Across my room, the old wooden chair, cloaked by the darkness of the early morning, stood and lunged at me in the corner of my eyes, but when I redirected my gaze, it was still.

I closed my eyes, trying to block out the sight, but the moment my eyelids touched, a set of blood red gleaming eyes stared at me, a sharp, crooked smile plastered to the old woman's face. She held the knife high above her head, taking a swing at me. My legs were stone, and I trembled as a splitting pain coursed through my body.

"Aaaagh!" I screamed, tears welling up in my eyes.

The woman faded away into the foggy darkness of my mind. Collapsing on the ground, I began crying, the aching pain around the deep wound in my chest leaving me helpless and immobile. I wiped the tears off of my face, but when I pulled my hands away, they were covered in my own glistening blood. Dark red teardrops dripped in thick beads off of my cheeks.

I snapped my eyes open. While taking shaky breaths, my paranoid mind guided my eyes around the room to make sure that no one was there, or that anyone appeared.

It was just a dream. You're safe. It was just a dream! You're safe!

My thoughts quickened with my heartbeat; I slowly got control of my breathing.

I picked up my phone, the vibrant light straining my eyes. 6:30, I gotta get up.

I stood up on shaky legs, fixed my wrinkled shirt, and walked towards the door. The floor creaked slightly as I tiptoed across the wooden planks. Just as I was about to turn the doorknob, my hand froze as I imagined what could be waiting for me outside.

I shook those thoughts off. There's nothing there. Stop being childish, I scolded myself, yet I couldn't ignore the anxious knot in my stomach sending me warnings.

I turned the doorknob slowly, taking one step forward, when THUD! My heart dropped from my chest, and I slapped a hand over my mouth to stop myself from screaming. The other hand clutched my chest tightly as I stumbled back into the wall, my eyes wide in terror. My grandpa stood by my door, about to go downstairs to make his morning coffee, but he paused, raising one brow when he saw my mini heart attack. I felt like my soul had left my body, but I tried to gather myself. I ended up just laughing, having had too much shock

in one morning.

"S-sorry," I managed to stutter in between laughs.

"Uh, okay."

My grandpa slowly walked away from me, heading downstairs.

I heard him mutter under his breath, "It's too early for this."

I sighed, taking deep breaths. I pushed myself off the wall and headed to the bathroom to get ready for school.



## Beating the Audition

*Ilan Shapiro*

It was a warm spring afternoon, but I wasn't outside. With the pandemic spreading rapidly, I was stuck inside all day doing Zoom school. I didn't find my classes too interesting that day because my mind was stuck on something else. Right after school I had an audition. But, I had never done an audition like this before; it was for the Los Angeles Youth Orchestra. All the other auditions I had done were video auditions, so I was able to redo it as many times as I wanted. There was no pressure. This time it was different. I would have to get on a Zoom call with the bass coach and play a live audition for him. I had been practicing excerpts from Tchaikovsky's "Romeo and Juliet" and Berlioz's "Symphonie Fantastique" for weeks, but for some reason I felt unprepared. When school ended, I picked up my piece and started furiously playing through the pieces. I knew I just needed to practice as much as I could in the little time I had left. I practiced ferociously. I missed notes and it all sounded pretty jumbled. My palms started to sweat and the more I played the worse it sounded.

Before I knew it, it was too late. I looked at the clock: 4:25. I positioned myself right for the camera, tuned again and joined the Zoom. After a few minutes, the bass coach, who was judging the audition, joined too. He looked at me, and even though it was Zoom, his dark brown stone cold eyes felt like they were piercing right through me.

"Hello, I'm Stephen," he said. "It's nice to meet you."

At this point I was so nervous I could barely reply. Finally I managed to weakly say, "Hi, it's nice to meet you, too."

He then told me to play both two-octave scales I had prepared. I began to play, but the bubble in my chest was about to burst. I had poor tone and soft volume. I looked at my fingers moving along the fingerboard and the bow rubbing against the string. I imagined myself in my room practicing all by myself, no one but me, no pressure, nothing to worry about. All of a sudden I started playing more clearly and in tune, I was playing louder too.

Then I finally finished my scales, and it was time for "Romeo and Juliet" and "Symphonie Fantastique" that I had spent the most time practicing. I was in my own world. I was feeling the music. It felt as if someone had lifted a huge weight off of my shoulders, but this time I was lifting the weight off my own shoulders, making my own music.

When I stopped playing Stephen said, "Wow, really good job."

At that moment I knew I had played the music to the best of my ability. I lifted my head a little higher and smiled.

# 100-Word Stories



## Big Jump

*Julian Blanchard*

Skiing in my opinion is the best sport invented. I mean in what other sport can you just do flips off jumps and go 80 down a hill with no one caring? Sometimes when I ski, I take it a little too far. Like one time when I was skiing, I decide to hit the big jump at max speed and do a 360. Later, while I was getting my arm twisted back (not fun) and regretting my life choices, I realized, “Hey, this could be a good story one day.” And so, then the best 100-word story was born.



## Close Call

*Jayda Fararooy*

My first time in Israel, I was getting out of the sea, drying off, shaking my hair like a wet dog. Turning around, I spotted a huge playground. Grabbing my brother’s hand, I dragged him over, starting on the rope course, and moving onto the seesaw. Suddenly, a man yelled, “Hey kids, I wanna talk to you, come here!” Julian and I lingered anxiously as a different man added in, “Do you guys like ice cream?” Was it a trap? I grabbed Julian’s hand and ran as fast as I could while the skinny, dark-haired man chased fast after us.



## The Tropical Mystery

*Ayden Dzuban*

A beautiful bundle of exotic colors flourished brightly in the sunlight. The floral rainbow wrapped around its own core like a burrito, guarding the food inside. This scarlet, oval shaped flora had large, wine-colored streaks draped over its body. A spiral green staircase held up the oval like Atlas holding up the world. The fluorescent bundle of nature danced and swirled in the wind while surrounded by a massive leaf that towered over its bright red armor. The sun shone brightly upon the three-pronged living ruby while a sprouting, yellow petal gracefully covered the sides of the exotic oxygen producer.



## The Best Place on Earth

*Jett Del Giorgio*

Standing in a white painted box, my bat resting on my shoulder, my eyes on the pitcher, his eyes on me. Our legs went up in sync. I was dancing with the pitcher. As soon as the baseball left his hand, my eyes lit up. The baseball looked like a beach ball floating in my direction. I connected. The ball was sent on its mission to space, gone from the universe of the field. Dropping my bat and rounding the bases, my mind and body felt like they were floating. I hit a game winning home run! What a feeling!



## Puppy Surprise

*Zoe Friedman*

We pull into the small parking lot at the shelter and get out. “Remember guys, we aren’t adopting the dog for sure, so don’t get your hopes up,” my mom reminds me and my siblings. We are brought into a room where pictures of puppies flood the walls. While waiting, the suspense grows until it’s looming over us like a dark shadow. Just as my brother begins to complain, a small bundle of fur and slobber zooms in. After a never-ending conversation between my parents, we make a decision. Excitement is practically radiating off me as we leave the shelter.



## Midnight Collapse

*Stella Robinson*

Tears of laughter form in my eyes as Eloise and I lay on the freezing hotel rug, unable to stop laughing. An old church clock chimes in the distance. It’s midnight. I sink into my bed, letting the warmth of the blanket absorb me. The hotel grows quiet, like a heart that no longer beats. BANG! I immediately get up and stare through the dark, foggy colored glass, into the barely lit up parking lot, into the place I would never see the same again. One heartbeat ends as mine continues. I watch as a body collapses to the ground.





## Humpty Dumpty Had a Great Fall

*Liam Avshalom*

It was the first day of summer break and my mom took me roller skating. It was hard at first but after about two hours, it got easy and I was flying down the rink. Eventually, it was time for one last round. BOOM! "OW!" There was a loud thump behind me. I turned around faster than a speeding train and realized it was my mom! I rushed to her as fast as I could. She was on the floor and her arm was as crooked as an old tree. Then I realized why my dad calls her Humpty Dumpty.



## Lost Leo

*Mariana Balderas*

In Quiroga, Mexico people lose kids. I went there for a wedding. We stopped by a toy shop and my brother started crying. I told him we can come back. My mom said, "Take care of him so I can go inside the church to pray." I looked away for 5 seconds. My brother was gone! I asked everyone if they had seen him. My mom came out. "Where is Leo?" Heart pounding, I was scared. We yelled his name so loud and then he came out running. My panic went away. I walked to the car holding his hand.



## Worst Birthday

*Ella Baldwin*

On my 8th birthday I went to Knotts Berry Farm. I could barely catch my breath. My sister said, "Let's go on Silver Bullet!" I was laughing, and running towards the ride. I was the perfect height! Little did I know that the ride would have me shaking and crying, traumatized for about 5 years. After the horrible day I wanted to relax in the warm hotel pool. The floaties I put on my feet as a joke to float my feet up tipped my head over. Black, blurry vision, coughing, struggling to breathe. This was the worst birthday ever.



## Jamaican Me Crazy

*Falon Anfuso*

"I don't care!" I shouted as my mom lathered smooth coconut sunscreen on my pale arms. "You'll get sunburned, like a red tomato!" I ran off, imagining warm ice cream dripping down my hands while lying in a sun chair listening to the waves of Jamaica. Playing in the cold crystal-clear water. Ignoring my mom shouting, "Get back here or no dessert tonight!" Later, I was at a fancy restaurant on the shore, listening to Caribbean music. All I could smell were crabs. My skin was burning like it was on a grill. I really should have put on sunscreen.



## Ruckus in the Neighborhood

*Nicolette Khashayar*

I sat up and pulled the covers off my bed. I traipsed across the cold hardwood floors and clutched the thick, silky, embroidered curtains, pulling them apart like a good grilled cheese. Flashing blue and red lights flooded my room. Muffled voices echoed throughout my house. "Criminal on the loose...we are searching every house nearby." I leaned over the balcony, then suddenly, WHOOSH! Police opened my front door. I leaned further trying to have a better understanding of the situation then "BAM!" My neighbor's tree snapped in half as vivid red apples flew everywhere. There lay a hooded figure, unconscious.



## Sucky Shabbat

*Eli Benyamini*

Walking through the door, my back slouched, my arms loose, and my smile upside down. I put on a fake smile to greet everyone. Walking outside I noticed a couch next to a warm cozy fire pit. Time was like school on a Monday. It was getting colder, and later, and my phone was dying. Could this get worse, I thought to myself. I moved the couch closer to the fire. Feeling sleepy, I unintentionally shut my eyes. I opened them. My hand was covered in blisters and little black pieces of my shoe. My hand had just been burnt.



## Surf for the Win

*Madison Goodman*

Hearing the screech of the referee's shiny silver whistle, I pass the ball back to my teammates as the other team charges to defend. Our parents enthusiastically chant, "Go, Surf, go!" My excitement grows as parents with colorful banners jump on the sidelines. "Ball, ball!" I yell, as I get in position to shoot. My teammate passes, I prepare to swing my non-dominant foot, my left, as the ball approaches me. The ball spins and soars through the air. Just barely skimming the goalie's fingertips, my face lights up as the ball meets the net. "Swoosh." Music to my ears.



## Sweet Surprise

*Jack Itaya*

Driving into the middle of nowhere. Dirt roads, cows in small pens, farmland. Pull-up to a random town. At a random house.

Barking, lots of barking. I jumped out of the car and ran toward it. Then I saw them... Red puppies, tons of them, but not just any red puppies—Golden Retriever puppies. We were eventually allowed into the pen and were greeted enthusiastically by balls of fur, wet tongues, and teeth that had infinite energy. We played for hours on end. Then we decided on a fur ball with a button nose. We named her Molly Malone.



## One in a Million

*Pearl Cohen*

The buzzing sound of the pottery wheel turning on. Me trying to stop my apron from getting wrapped around it. The muffled sound of my teacher screaming for someone to get scissors while my apron pulls my neck onto the wheel and tightens. My hands scratching at my neck trying to get the apron off. My friends trying to cut the wires to the pottery wheel while the younger kids, confused, stare at the teacher. And then snap! I gasp for air while people come running to my aid. I burst into tears, my body blue from lack of oxygen.



## Uninvited Surprise

*Sebastian Funk*

I walked down the old dirt path with the sun shining like God was watching me. A glance over my tight right shoulder, then I saw it! A party, with cheese pizza glowing like it was calling to me. "You only live once," I told myself, and got in line for the glowing cheesy pizza. Then, a kind old lady asked me, "And who might you be?" I replied in an uncertain, shaky voice, looking up at the balloon with Lily painted across it. "I'm Lilly's friend." I left the birthday party uninvited with cheesy pizza in my right hand.



## Run!

*Lior Kasheri*

Sauntering around the ghost-mall with Aaron, Aidan, and Rahm, we traversed to find something that wasn't boring. Anything? Found it! A mysterious path crossing over the busy street. It was as dark as Wendy's twitter account, but we eagerly ventured there. Standing at the height of the bridge we witnessed a man mysteriously appear, standing at the foot of the bridge wearing a complete matte coat, accompanied by a black ski mask and dress pants, grasping a dark implement close to himself. Feet thudding toward us. My heart reached for the concrete. Toes glued to the floor. Breaths rapid. Run!



## "Simba!"

*Rubi Garcia*

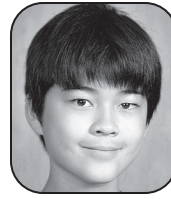
A week after Christmas. My dad saw a dog online and asked us, "Like the dog?" We answered "Yes!" so my dad called and asked if it was available. He hassled us to vacuum the house, to show we could keep it clean when the dog came. I feared the worst when my parents returned home. What if they didn't bring the dog? My mom came home with something inside a red gift bag. He was brown and cream and adorable. He chased a tennis ball in a circle. My sister giggled, "What should we call him?" "Simba!" I shouted.



## The Pearl

*Gabby Flynn*

At Pali camp, I had to slice open the slimy, wet squid while getting frostbite in my fingers. Before I sliced it open, my counselor, Ms. Frisbee, gave a bland, long lecture on the squid body. I didn't realize that under its dark colored eye there was a pearl. My counselor said joyfully, "Find the pearl!" Poking the squid eye, ink came gushing out like a geyser. The pitch-black ink consumed the table. My hands were stained. I spotted something shiny. It was a pearl, drenched in ink. I dashed over to my counselor, pearl in hand, beaming with joy.



## Locked and Loaded Disaster

*Eugene Herzog*

WOOSH. Fiona, Cameron, and I all zoomed past my house. My sister's glittery purple bike had grayish whitewall tires. My cousin's glossy red bike had screeching scratchy brakes. Weak six-year-old me tried to throw a tennis ball onto the iron gate balcony. The ball was locked and loaded in my hand, then it got fired. My mom was strolling back into the house. Uh oh, "MOM, LOOK OUT!" She turned and there went the tennis ball into her face. Her glasses were skewed, her face was red. Everyone had shocked faces, she had angry paces. Boy was I in trouble.



## Unfair!

*Hanna Sadzik*

Trying to make me feel better with its bright streams of light, the sun did no good to lift my grouchy pout. My chubby gremlin of a baby brother threw a screeching fit while Mommy was trying to softly calm him down, and "didn't have time" to draw animals with me, the one thing I was looking forward to the whole day! Unfair, unfair, unfair! Salty tears stung my eyes, blurring my vision with anger and rage, and I collapsed onto the couch, which engulfed me with its rough white cushions. Why did my stupid little brother always ruin everything!



## Summer Slip

*Lilou Hashemi*

As the sun gently bathes my skin, the soft breeze blowing my wet hair shepherds the smell of pizza and Italian chatter. My dad was gripping slippery rocks, trying to climb a formation that led into the sea. Screaming, he was instantly sliding down the gray, moss-covered rocks. The world around me evaporates and a thousand questions swirl in my brain like little kids squirting random liquids into a bowl. Sliding. Sliding. CRASH! Snickering filled the air, the harsh wind blew my dry hair, and my dad limped back to the train station, blood trickling down his cuts and bruises.



## Uneven

*Aaron Lavi*

Feet pounding against the ground. My face, alive with excitement. Six-year-old Amir, a few scooter strides away from me on the uneven driveway floor. I haven't beaten him at anything yet. I was now neck and neck with Amir, when my scooter decided to jump off the ground. Chin first, I hit the ground. My tears fell fast and hot, mixing with my blood. Looking back, Amir saw me. He ditched his scooter, made sure I was okay, then ran to tell his mom. Ten minutes later, in the ER, I thought, "At least I have better pain resistance now."



## Lost

*Maha Mahdavizadeh*

My palms were sweating, and my heart was racing as my dad and I ran around the dirty streets littered with dog poop and trash. "Where are we?" I asked a lady nearby. "I Can't talk, I'm busy," she replied rudely. We walked past a pub that reeked of beer and smoke, making me want to go home even more. We were lost. How did a walk with my dad turn out like this? I was shaking, breathing hard as sweat dripped off me. I stopped, wiped the sweat off my hands, and then asked another lady, "Where are we?"





## Ignoring the Sign

*Zoe Tillman*

2018 - "CAUTION: DANGEROUS TRAIL, DO NOT ENTER." We ignored the sign. Our bare feet sloshed through a muddy, steep, slick, Hawaiian slope. A woman carrying another human inside her hiked by. If she could do it, we could. We trudged through Jurassic Park-like mud puddles. End in sight.... "CRACK, THUD, CRASH!" Man down! Dad slipped. He laid there, his backpack now loaded with SHATTERED camera equipment. He could keep walking with his hiking stick. OH WAIT, he broke that too. Muddy monsters, we zigzagged home.

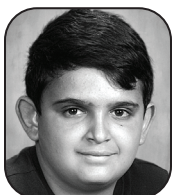
4 years later - "Ding." iPhone notification: "Hawaiian trail closed due to deaths." Oops....



## Float

*Laleh Pashmforoush*

There was no time to think, I jumped into the water with everyone else. Splashing in like crashing waves on the Hawaiian shore. Fears had turned into excitement. We floated on top of the water to see dull sand. We waited to see if there was anything. I was getting impatient. What if nothing had come? I spoke too soon. In a matter of minutes manta rays were coming and dancing in the alluring ocean as if they were ballet performers. Time was almost up, I got out of the water shivering from the cold crisp air hitting my skin.



## Mouth on Fire!

*Aiden Shamoeil*

At the orthodontist over the summer, waiting for the doctor, the mouth vacuums were sucking up my saliva. He finally came and cleaned my teeth. He dried them and put on a very sticky and sour type of glue. He said, "Don't move your tongue until it's dry." While waiting I saw the TV playing some news. As I slowly leaned up towards the screen, my tongue moved and hit my teeth. My tongue stuck to my teeth with the extremely sour and sticky glue. The cold chair. My throat burning from glue I swallowed. I mumbled loudly for help.



## Sweaty Crying

*Elizabeth Polyak*

Early Saturday morning. Our coach is yelling at us, like a bear. Limping around the gymnastic gym. Running in the hot burning sun. Chin ups, squats, mat-pushes, tumbling passes, flips. My feet felt numb. A tiny light fan blowing, sounding like it is about to die. Drenched in sweat. Thinking to myself, "Only 30 more minutes left, I could be done." Staring at each other, my friend and I weren't giggling or making faces like we usually were, we were sweating and stumbling, even crying. Down to the last 10 minutes. Then finally, I had finished, the sweaty crying stopped.



## Tricycle Trauma

*Reed Winters*

"Dong. Dong. Dong!" The bell signals my kindergarten friends to recess as I scramble to get first in line to use the coveted red tricycles. I was doing laps when a small kid with a buzz cut asks me to use it. "Five minutes," I say as he marches off angrily. Two minutes later, stomping back, he demands to ride my tricycle. "No," I growl. In a flash I feel a stinging pain in my upper arm. I shriek. Tearing the kid off the tricycle, a teacher scolds him as I gawk at the gaping bite marks on my shoulder.



## It's Just a Game

*Jude Alpers*

The music began. Everyone anxiously orbited the set of chairs while the tune ticked on. Suddenly, silence. In the scramble to sit in one of the coveted chairs, someone failed to make it. One down. Abruptly as it stopped, the music restarted. Dread. Anticipation. The song ceased. This endless cycle continued until only two remained. I was shocked, thrilled, ultimately terrified I had made it this far. One last time, the music started. Submerged in my thoughts. Hoping, praying I'd emerge victorious. Silence fell. Instinctively, I dropped onto the final seat. It was over. I won. Onto the next game.



## Four-Legged Wonder

*Noah Beroukhim*

As I excitedly skip towards the furious, murky blue water spurting humongous waves forcefully onto the rocky shore, I inhale the pure, fresh air of the area. A majestic creature appears with its strong, scaly back facing me, camouflaging into the smooth, yellowish-grey, microscopic rocks. Slowly crawling around a stock of vibrant, lime green stems, the beast's spiky tail sways back and forth, brushing aside plants and leaves. The creature's shiny, wet eyes survey the vast land, desperately trying to locate a resting place. This prehistoric miniature digs its claws into the sand, heads off and gradually melds into its surroundings.



## The Mysterious Critter

*Ayden Gabbaie*

The magnificent pallet of colors lies on the brilliant green surface as it chews at its delectable greens. Migrating east, this delicate living beauty scavenges while it morphs from a crawling, fuzzy invertebrate to a flying canvas of paint. The aroma of the green blooming sphere pervades the air while azure airspace surrounds Mother Nature's creations. Herbage spills from grey boulders as this six-legged canvas perches on the emerald, green, blossoming stem. This astonishing critter is unique because few creatures have such colorful, appealing charm. This winged mysterious wonder of life is envied by those who view it.



## The Gray Bombers

*Vincent Cariati*

The beautiful horizon line of the sea glistened as the gray bombers of the ocean were basking in the sunlight, gray coats almost turning white. Waves crashed against the boulder and made splashes, waking the animals from their slumber. One stood proudly puffing his chest perched atop the highest point of the boulder staring me dead in the eye. The look on his face said, "Don't come near me; you don't want a piece of this." The bombers began to fall peacefully back into deep slumber as the sun was going down, covering them in the darkness of night.



## The Open Air Market

*Julia Sibley*

A cold, free, mist blows from the distance. Particles of dirt fly as the many townspeople hurriedly go about their bartering and bargaining. Several men and women, their eyes wide with greed, stand beneath large, white tents inviting buyers to view their wares. Blankets, looking like summer flowers, are hung, their vibrant colors all in a blur. Soft, delicate dresses lie crumpled tragically beneath the tents as if they are seeking sympathy from the passersby. In the distance, an ominous green mountain eclipses part of the sky, dominated by cloud cover and threatening to rain upon the bustling bazar.



## Untouched Garden

*Kolton Gustafson*

A native of the forest leaped into the deep dark blue while the trees swayed as if they were taking in the amazing view. Air swirled and twirled about carrying the dense mist from the nearby springs. Birds and animals, though invisible, chirped, flew and ran around the untouched garden. Dawn's sunlight sparkled against the dark sky. Surrounding trees bore fruit as warm wind knocked the orbs into the deep dark. Beneath the dark blue, aquatic creatures devoured the ripe, untouched delicacies. Wind blew into the small, unaltered garden as the moon slowly rose and the sun gradually sank.



## Lighthouse

*Olivia Bingham*

A mystical night guide reaches up into the sky. Glass panels sit between long pillars. Rust runs down white walls, spilling from the inside out. Solar panels sit on a ledge towards the top of the structure. On the ledge lies a balcony stretching into a spiraling piece of glass. Triangles spread across glass and hold up a circular roof. A weathervane spins on top, like a young child on a carousel. An outstretching landscape of rolling hills, grass, and plants wave in the breeze. Wires and poles run up the walls while the sky and sea soar on forever.

# Contemplations



## Spring!

*Heleena Barnett*

I take a deep breath of the cool spring air, grateful for the moments away from the panic of school. I find myself in a stupor, walking wistfully towards the beautiful meadows by my home. The glistening sun brightened the whispering lake.

The water was so clear that it mirrored the sun perfectly. Not a ripple in sight. The soft dewy grass gently sways as the wind coaxes it awake. A brown bunny with a soft white nose peaks out as birds sing a duet in the redwood trees above. The clouds seem to disappear and the sun seems to smile as a fish swims laps around the lake. I long to dip my hand in the perfect water.

The shy little flowers sway and dance as the playful wind whistles the tune. What a wonderful time spring is.



## Sunsets

*Dashiel Karish*

It's not total color "blindness" I can still see color. It is more of "color deficiency syndrome," where someone sees less of a color. In my case, I can barely see red. If you can only partially see red, it opens up other problems. Such as how I can't see red in purple or pink, so I see them as blue and light blue. Another difficulty is how red, orange, green, and brown can all get mixed up in my head. Colorblindness is like being tone deaf for color. Because of this, it means I have to use logic and common sense to guess what color a color is. For example, if I see grass, I might see it as orange, but I know it is green because it is grass. Also, sometimes it is hard for me to differentiate between yellow and green. It is hard for me to imagine what the world looks like to other people. For me, seeing is like completing a puzzle with missing pieces. I see the world as a dull gray, -a boring set of colors. It's like being tone-deaf in a world revolving around hearing. Did you know that color-blind people can't be astronauts? It's always awkward for me when I have to ask someone what a specific color is because I know immediately after, they will say things such as, "What do you see this color as?" or "Really? Can you see this?" One of the most disappointing things about color blindness is that you don't see the color that sunsets cast. Sunsets look like a sad, fading, and depressing blue disappearing into the night.



## Music from the Heart

*Gabriella Gilyard*

I take a deep breath and sit down at the majestic grand piano. My fingers fly across the keys as they coax out music that fills my heart with the feeling of joy. I play my repertoire without sheet music, guided only by the confidence that comes from practicing songs over and over and over again. The white, pristine, and vivid keys split by elegant and radiant black keys obey my command. Practicing piano isn't always like this. Sometimes I have to force myself to practice, mind aching with boredom. Most of the time I go through the motions like a ticking clock, relentless and repetitive. First practicing my scales, next my repertoire, and finally some sight-reading pieces. Yet sometimes, I can sit down on the piano bench without thinking of all the chores and homework I have to do. Sometimes I can momentarily forget about my books and my homework and focus on playing the piano. Those are the times when I can sit at the piano devoid of worry. Those are the days when I can make the piano sing with full promises of forgiveness, freedom, and life.



## Family

*Carter Branch*

Some friends turn into family, and Justin is part of the family, the half of my cracked heart, the toaster to my bread. I wouldn't know what to do without him. He's helped me through the tough times—entertaining me when things take a slow turn in class—but that's what family does. When I see him, a warm jolt of energy sparks through me, energizing me, making me move faster like the flash. That smile of his exposes all his hidden secrets and shuffles them straight into my brain like a deck of cards. The hair of his is clean silky, healthy, and voluminous with sparks drizzling down his hair. One year down, and it's safe to say Justin is my family not a friend, because friends don't do what he does. He is my sidekick in class, my buddy as we walk to each building and over to lunch. There is no one like Justin, and that's what makes him unique. He always has a hilarious story to tell. When someone doesn't care, Justin cares. Justin is my personal bodyguard tough, dauntless, brave like metal steel. It's not easy to come by a Justin like this one, and I know one day we will laugh and think back to the time we were in middle school at Paul Revere.





## Bees

*Oliver O'Donnell*

I love bees. I have a beehive in my backyard, and even though I am allergic to them, they make me happy. I always look forward to Saturday or Sunday when I open the hive. As soon as I take the top of the hive off, their fluttery, soft, and gentle buzzing sounds like a sound machine calming me down. I love to peer at the wax cells that look as if a factory made them. Perhaps my favorite thing to do is to watch the baby bees hatch out of their cells. Their big eyes, soft fur, and clumsy walk makes them look very cute. As soon as a baby bee hatches, it can hardly walk. It stumbles around looking almost drunk. Another reason I love having a beehive is the honey. In the summer, the warm, sweet, and comforting smell of abundant honey from the hive spreads across my backyard making it smell amazing. I am also able to harvest the honey from the hive and sell it at my local Farmers Market. The rows of jars look like piles of liquid gold. I love bees.



## The High Peaks

*Cash Cook*

The high peaks above everyone and everything. The air thin, but fresh, comforting in a way. The clouds a gray sea of mush. Everything so beautiful, untouched, and preserved. You can hear the silence of nature, no loud people or machines, everything is at peace. Then when winter rolls in the gift of snow, soft, fluffy, and cold at the same time. Snow, the cold side of your pillow, air conditioning when you can't handle the heat anymore. Then after the greatness of winter slips away, spring comes along. Baby animals everywhere like a pet store in the wild. Flowers popping up everywhere and anywhere. Tadpoles and baby fish zooming through ponds like toy cars. Then when it's sadly all over it starts back again in summer and the greatness never stops repeating.



## A Flight Through Nature

*Emma Otero*

Through the marshmallow clouds dotting the bright blue sky, I flutter my wings. I spot the beautiful stone formation below and find my way to a green vine full of fragrant yellow flowers eager to bloom. I love spring days after the rain when the fresh soil and multicolored flowers produce a lovely, earthy smell. The sound of the wind swirling around is music to my ears. I raise my head and absorb the warm glow of the glimmering sun. Slowly, I stick out my proboscis and drink up the sweet, irresistible nectar. All is right in my insect world.



## Brothers

*Yasmine Mikhaeli*

My love for my brothers Ely and Eden is humongous. They are so funny that they make me laugh and cry at the same time, so hard until my stomach hurts. I love how they are so smart, caring, calming, loving, and always smiling. Even though we get into fights sometimes, and they can get annoying, I still love them very much. I love that they always check up on me to see if I'm alright and for always taking care of me while my parents are gone. It's so fun getting to play basketball together in our yard and getting tips from them to get way better. I love how they usually think of me when they're at work and bring me back a yummy treat. It's great when they have time to be with me and help me with my homework whenever I need it. My brothers teach me more and more everyday, even if it's helping me on working with apps on my iPad for homework. I'm so proud to have siblings that are in college and can share all their experiences with me, and I'm so grateful and happy to have them as my brothers.



## Pencils Problems

*Joshua Taylor*

I hate humans. I'll say it. They abuse me every day and in EVERY CLASS at school. They rub my precious little face against their paper until a little bit of graphite comes out of me. Ugh. And then, when I get dull and can't write anymore, they stick me in the blades of death. Headfirst. Ouch. It hurts like H-E-double markers. It's terrible. Anywayyyy... after the blades-that-shall-not-be-named, I feel a little fresh and better because I get a shiny new head and a sharper brain. But at least I'm not a pen and my ink gets smeared all over people's hands like cream cheese on a bagel. Mmmmm bagel and cream cheese. Nevermind. And my WORST enemy is the eraser. I guess some dude woke up one day and just decided to put them on the back of every single pencil. Like do they even know how hard it is to get up in the morning with all that added weight? Oh, and look, here comes that punk, Elliot. Wow, he has a really strong grip. Wait what the- \*loud, audible crack\* Owwww...



## Pretty Little That's Me

*Joseph Cook*

My face doesn't look like a face anymore. I know that even if I was good looking, I would never be able to tell because I've stared at myself so much in my bathroom mirror that I'm not a body, I'm not a face, I'm just a shape, and what a mess it is. Look at that asymmetry. Each clogged pore dots my cheeks. Each pimple spot glows red on my pale dark colored skin. The curve of an uneven stomach, uneven hips. Big nose, red tongue. Two eyes that see mostly everything. Two ears that hear absolutely nothing when I get home.

Brown hair that's almost unnoticeable above the line of chewed-on reddish pink lips. It's moving now. A brain sends nerve signals to muscles. They contract and move the skeleton inside. It shows its straight white teeth. A crease of the cheeks. A body made to live, reproduce and die. A collection of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, iron atoms. Elements. They make geometry. Spheres on cones and cylinders. Gases and liquids. Mass times volume. Density.

Light reflects color from the form, to make cool and warm. Distorted darkness.

Look at it.

Brown, yellow, and red.

A color. A shape. A body. A boy.

That's me.



## I Can't Figure Out Why

*Jackson Baril*

Why? Just why? Why would anyone hack LAUSD? Did a kid really hate their grade that much? It's only the fourth week of school. What if whoever did it did it for fun? What if it was a mistake? What if some kid in coding elective just mis-clicked when they were doing their homework? What if it was a younger sibling who found their big bro's computer? What if some dad got mad about the calls and e-mails and tried to send a complaint? What if someone at software spilled their coffee? What if someone tripped on a power wire and tried to cover it up? What if so many people were watching the movie Bullet Train that the technology got overwhelmed? What if a hacker was tricked into thinking LAUSD was an evil corporation? What if the teachers in coding elective have turned to the dark side. No, wait, I got it! It has to have been...



## The Life

*William Russo*

Take a look at my life in L.A, it's almost like a play. All the loud honking horns and screaming cars roar, that's L.A. Hollywood stars and big fancy cars, that's L.A. Car lights as endless as the sea, there are lots of places I'd rather be. But here is my home, and I'm not alone. My two brothers, my one cat, my one house, and my friend Mat. It doesn't snow, but it sure does glow like a Christmas tree, it's a part of me.

I'm not sure if I like it here, I want to move somewhere more clear. But I do like my church, and the fresh happy smell of refreshing birch. I don't like the atmosphere here, I want to be a mountaineer. I don't know if this is the right place for me, and I'm sure some of you can agree. I might not have a Mercedes Benz, but at least I have my family and friends.



## The Dolls Sent from Heaven

*Amanda Silver*

I loved my American Girl Dolls. When I was little, they were my favorite toys! They had so many different outfits, and so many different stories. Sometimes I would force my brother to play with me. He would tell me that he absolutely hated playing, but I knew he secretly loved it. My dolls were named Kiki and Claire. Sometimes I would take them on secret adventures, like, "climb the daring, muddy, trail, all the way to the grapefruit tree," or "try to run as fast as a cheetah past Dad to get candy from the cabinet." My cousin Emma gave me the dolls as a hand-me-down. Kiki had a leg loose, Claire had a broken arm, but that didn't bother me. They were perfect in my eyes. Just because they were a little beaten up on the outside, didn't mean their lively personalities were meaningless. Kiki was sassy, while Claire had an attitude of contempt; that was just how it was. Both dolls were made of perfect, smooth, soft, vinyl. They had intriguing eyes, glowy hair, and both had colorful freckles. When I was younger I wished I had freckles like them. One night, I took my mom's old eyebrow pencil and started to dot my face with freckles, just like my dolls. I admired them. "Emma must have sent them from heaven," I thought. Then one day my Grammy took me to the American Girl Doll store -that I didn't even know existed. Suddenly I knew where the dolls came from. It was a girl's dream.

# Research Reports



## Misty Copeland's Inspiring Life

*Eleanor Yoda*

Misty Copeland's story had a huge impact on many dancers and people of color. She was born on September 10, 1982, in Kansas City, and raised in San Pedro, California. She is a great dancer, but she had to overcome many hardships. This compelled her to persevere through everything she went through. Nevertheless, she has made many accomplishments such as her bestselling novels or becoming the first African American to join the American Ballet Theatre. Misty Copeland is a successful dancer who has inspired many young dancers to persevere through obstacles, no matter how hard they get, just like what she did.

One of the most significant obstacles she went through was discrimination. She had been discriminated against ever since she was little. People would often disparage her for being black and having a muscular body. She was told by many people that she "didn't belong in ballet" or that she "didn't have the right body for ballet." She also experienced racism. "In many institutions, not just ballet schools, students of color are made to feel unwelcomed, alienated, and marginalized" (Webb 5). She was made fun of, and chastised for being black. People made passives-aggressive racist jokes about her and to her face. Despite this, she chose to ignore whatever people were saying about her, and move on.

In addition to discrimination, she has also faced poverty. Growing up in Southern California, she had a very unstable childhood. "At one point, she was living in a motel with her mother and five siblings" (Renault 1). Between the ages of 3 and 7, her mom was already married to her fourth husband. Because of her mom's family drama, she told Copeland that she could no longer do ballet anymore. Her ballet teacher, Bradley, wanted her to continue. So, they made a compromise. According to Wikipedia.com, "Copeland spent the weekdays with the Bradleys near the coast and the weekends at home with her mother, a two-hour bus ride away." It was very hard for her to drive back and forth every week, however, she didn't let this stop her from achieving her goals.

Although she went through many obstacles and hardships, her hard-working spirit and determination led her to be one of the best ballerinas in the world. One of her biggest accomplishments is that she changed the ballet industry. "As a muscular Black woman she has changed the face of the Ballet Industry and broadened what it means to be a ballerina" (San Juan 1). Her success as a Black woman in the ballet industry (a predominately white industry), has opened the eyes of many ballet companies. Not only did she inspire others, but she made many huge accomplishments, like being the first Black person in history to join the American Ballet Theatre. She has also won many awards, such as the Nominee entertainer of the year award in 2016, or the Spingarn Medal in 2021. In addition to this, she has written multiple award-winning, bestselling novels.

Today, 41 years later, Misty Copeland is one of the greatest ballerinas in the US, with multiple awards, books, and trophies. She is famous worldwide, and she has inspired many people. She has thousands of articles written about her, and hundreds of newspapers, magazines, and more, with her name on it. She has had a huge influence on many people. Even her most famous quote says, "Be strong, be fearless, be beautiful. And believe that anything is possible when you have the right people there to support you."



## King James

*Ethan Nelson*

LeBron Raymone James, Sr., is one of the best basketball players in the world. He has entertained hundreds of millions, and has done extensive charity work. He was born on December 30, 1984, in Akron, Ohio. LeBron's childhood was full of poverty, moving, and absent father figures and even without going to college he achieved greatness on and off the court.

His mother, Gloria Marie James, was 16 at the time of his birth. "His father, Anthony McClelland, had an extensive criminal record and was not involved in his life," according to Wikipedia. "When he was in fourth grade, James and his mom had moved so many times that he missed more than 80 days of school" (Ganguli E4). At age nine, he moved in with another family temporarily because his mom couldn't support him.

Even with his rough past, LeBron has still helped millions through his charity work. In 2018, LeBron opened up the "I Promise School" to help kids with similar backgrounds as his own. "His upbringing served as a motivation to provide future generations of children with similar backgrounds with special support and care" (Wikipedia). LeBron said, "I had the vision of wanting to give back to my community. The people around every day are helping that vision come to life" (Green Arica A12).

Thanks to hard work and perseverance, LeBron has become the highest scoring basketball player in NBA history and was the first NBA player to make over one billion dollars. He earned 4 NBA MVP finals awards, NBA champion awards, NBA MVP awards, AP Athlete of the Year awards, and copious more.

"Commitment is a big part of what I am and what I believe," he states on Inc.com. "How committed are you to winning? How committed are you to being a good friend? To being trustworthy? To being successful? How committed are you to being a good father, a good teammate, a good role model? There's that moment every morning when you look in the mirror: Are you committed, or are you not?" Despite the poverty, constant moving, and absent father figures, LeBron has still found success at a young age. He has become a role model for many millions of children around the world.





## Elon Musk's Flight to Fame

*Amir Ben-Cohen*

Elon Musk's astounding accomplishments have impacted the lives of millions and maybe one day billions of people. He was born in Pretoria, South Africa on June 28, 1971. He is best known for his many interesting ideas on changing the way humans live through technology. Although he's quite famous, many people don't know about the difficult journey that he had to go through to get to where he is today. Although it was very difficult, he started out in the bottom and slowly climbed to the top. He hurdled many obstacles along the way and persevered to implement his ideas in technology and helping the world.

The first challenge he encountered was a tough childhood. His early life was plagued with bullying as he would get beaten up and left out of activities. He was once pushed down a staircase by a bully and he had to be hospitalized. As Elon puts it now in an interview with CNN, "I did not have a happy childhood to be frank. It was quite rough." During this time he was a big bookworm and would spend lots of time reading and studying. "Mr. Musk's bookishness seemed to make him a target at his all boys school in Pretoria," Dr. Haldeman said, "where classmates would distinguish themselves in such sports as rugby and cricket. Mr. Musk's brother, Kimbal, about two years younger, became his best friend and confidant" (Higgins B6). At the age of eighteen Elon left for Canada and attended Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, for two years.

His next obstacle was making Tesla work through sacrifices and dogged determination. In 2008, Elon was struggling to make Tesla a success. It was nearly bankrupt and he was doing his best to turn the company around. Although it seemed impossible, he knew that with hard work and sacrifices he could reach the goal no one thought he could achieve. He would work all night and would even sleep in his office in order to maximize work efficiency in order to reach his goal. Tesla was still declining and was nearly bankrupt. "Surprisingly, he opted to declare bankruptcy and utilize his own money to keep the firm afloat. This wealth was made up of the funds (\$35 million) he received from the sale of PayPal," said Keith Peterson on the Max Communications website. As he kept persevering and turning around this company, it slowly became popular and grew to where it is today. Today, Tesla is one of the most successful car companies in the world, but it would not have been possible if he didn't overcome this obstacle and keep trying with a failing company. Overcoming this obstacle led to a monumental achievement in his life.

Even though he's worth billions, he doesn't take it for granted. Elon is still impacting the world with money, ideas, and technology. According to the Fortune magazine website, "Elon Musk donated around \$5.74 billion to charity in November." He is also trying to make space travel possible for humans to leave earth and find a stable planet to live on. One of those planets might be Mars. He has also impacted the car business. Electric cars do not use fuel and do not release tailpipe emissions. These emissions are responsible for a big role in the earth's global warming and reducing them with electric cars can help our environment. This makes the world better for

every living thing on earth, making it one of Musk's greatest positive impacts.

One day in the future, Elon Musk will be remembered as the man who changed the way humans live, and he continues to do this through his inventions, ideas, and technology. According to The Perspective website, "Musk co-founded PayPal, Tesla and NeuroLink, has put forth numerous ground-breaking projects (anyone ready for a trip to the moon or Mars?)." Although this quote may simply sum up Elon Musk's accomplishments, it does not sum up how he accomplished these great things. He said in an interview with Scott Pelley of 60 Minutes, "If something is important enough, you do it even if the odds are not in your favor."



## Protesting for Education

*Makayla Farhami*

Malala Yousafzai's amazing story has changed the education of millions of young girls worldwide. Born in Mingora, Pakistan, on July 12, 1997, she is known as a symbol of the fight for young girls' education who was able to accomplish astonishing things. She was able to fight for the education of young women and herself, helping her win a Nobel Peace Prize.

Malala's first significant obstacle came upon her when she was only in elementary school. According to Myhero.com, she said, "They banned girls from going to school. . . . In January 2008 I said goodbye to my classmates, not knowing when I would see them again." Malala was devastated. Going to school meant everything to her. But while the other girls were forced to stay home and resign their ownership of their education, Malala was determined to fight. Through an iron will and passion for learning, she and her friends managed to reclaim their rightful claim to an education, and return to school.

Perhaps Malala's greatest challenge came upon her when she was on the bus coming home from school. A member of the Pakistani Taliban boarded her bus and shot Malala on the left side of her head, shattering her eardrum and breaking her jaw joints. Malala was in the hospital for over a week on bed rest. Even then, after what could've been a devastating experience, Malala yet again found her footing and continued the stride of a purposeful life.

As a matter of fact, Malala fought and protested to let the world know who she was. She got much support from women worldwide. Malala had so many role models in her life such as Barack Obama and Benazir Bhutto. But above all, her biggest role model was her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai. He was a teacher and an education advocate; he ran a girls' school in the village where they lived. According to Womenshistory.org, "Due to his influence, Malala was passionate about knowledge from a very young age."

The vast impact Malala Yousafzai has had on society spans almost two decades. She may have been born in the twentieth century before people had any respect for women's education, but her message spread rapidly. In October 2014, Malala won her Nobel Peace Prize, making Malala the youngest person to receive this prize. Her drive and savvy allowed her to acquire this exclusive award. Now in 2023, Malala is known worldwide for fighting for the education of every child.

In the future, young girls all over the world will remember Malala as a woman of courage and ambition. Malala is very heartfelt in what she does, and she shows that through her speeches and writings in her book. She is the girl who, in her own words, "stood up when others couldn't" (Yousafzai 309).



## Prianka Chopra Jonas' Rising Up

*Sophia Sznaider*

Prianka Chopra Jonas is an icon to so many and has inspired countless people around the world with her story. Born on July 18, 1982 in present-day Jharkhand, she is commonly known as an actress and pageant queen who broke standards—and proved everyone wrong. Those who aren't familiar with her story might not understand all she has done. Even with racism holding her back, she was able to break through and show the world that no matter your ethnicity or the color of your skin, you can do great, even incredible, things.

Prianka Chopra Jonas faced many obstacles but one of the first was racism. She was often made fun of “for her skin color was darker than that of her family members” (ETonline.com). She also stated in her book “Unfinished” that when she released her first single, “In My City,” she got a lot of racist remarks like: “Go back to the Middle East and put your burka on.”

Racist comments weren't all that she was up against. While trying to change the mind of sexists she herself has been called “sexist” by many news articles. The Cut took down an article after getting lots of hate. They referred to her as a “global scam artist,” saying she and Nick Jonas don't have real love. Prianka has been taken advantage of by many people, so her father, Dr. Ashok, makes a ground rule for when she goes to meetings. The rules are that she will have no meetings at night, and when she goes to meetings she will always have her father or manager with her at all times in order to avoid being tricked. These things came as great obstacles, and made her career a lot harder to build and maintain.

Although Prianka Chopra Jonas faced many arduous obstacles, perhaps that's what took her where she is today, a strong and powerful woman who speaks up against racists and sexists. Prianka also has people who are willing to help her no matter what. Her father wanted the best for her and tried hard to keep her safe when she was just starting her career. Nick Jonas, her husband, and all that support him are a big help in Prianka's life, when people questioned Prianka Chopra Jonas and Nick Jonas's love for each other, Joe Jonas was ready to defend them. In an interview with The Cut he said, “What Nick and Pri have is beautiful love.”

The impact Prianka Chopra Jonas has had on the world continues to open the eyes of so many. Her messages are further shared in her autobiography, *Unfinished*. In this she explains all the troubles women have to go through, and all the horrible things racism and racists have done to her. This book has shared the message that women are going to take a stand. Prianka Chopra Jonas has donated to countless charities. She even became a UNICEF goodwill ambassador. She has donated very generous sums of money, but that's hardly all. She is working to spread awareness, and help as much as she can, not only donating but proving, showing, and dominating.

Years from now others will look at her life story and gain not only hope, but gain determination to help others just like Prianka Chopra Jonas has done. She is a woman who not only made her mark in history by donating and inspiring, but also a woman who opened the eyes of so many. According to TheNews.com, Prianka once said, “Don't try to squeeze into a glass slipper. Instead, shatter the glass ceiling.”



## Lionel Messi's Inspiring Goals

*Hector Curiel*

Leo Messi is an Argentine professional footballer who in his career has amazed and astonished millions of soccer fans around the world. Lionel Andres Messi was born on June 24, 1987 in Rosario, Santa Fe, Argentina. Even after the hard work and inspiration, everyone still criticized his height. These people don't appreciate his achievements, because they only see the person's weakness. But he still overcame impossible obstacles that tried to stop him. He shows kindness off and on the field to fans, teammates and opponents. He signs kids' jerseys, gives money to charity, helps sick kids, loves family, and shows sportsmanship in the sport of soccer. Leo Messi has accomplished many things that show people that anyone can do anything.

Sean Gregory wrote in Time.com that “Messi always voiced his enthusiasm. ‘Argentina is my country, my family, my way of expressing myself,’ he said in 2014. ‘I would change all my records to make the people in my country happy.’” This true dedication and loyalty to his country shows how hard he tries to make a national impact. Even the doubt of others couldn't stop Messi. Messi is “a guy who'd been considered undersized his whole life and had been told as a young kid that he is too short and too small to be much of a player” (Wetzel 3).

Lionel Messi's childhood was a little different than yours and mine. He grew up poor, and had hard-working parents that worked in a factory. When he grew interested in soccer, his grandma approved, supported and accompanied Messi to training and matches. He then was told during a checkup that he had a growth deficiency, and might stop growing. There was a medicine that could help him grow a little, but it was expensive and Messi's parents couldn't afford it. Barcelona FC found out about Messi's talent and wanted him to play. They paid for the medicine, and with it he reached 5'7”. He left his family and went to Spain to play for Barcelona. After 18 years playing for Barca, he went to play for Paris-Saint-Germain (PSG). He continues to score goals and reach more achievements thanks to family, clubs, and his grandma. He won the Champions League, World Cup, and 7 Ballon D'ors. To thank his grandma, he points to the sky as a celebration (she died before he turned 11).

The marvelous impacts Lionel Messi had made all fans happy. His kindness for people has made him a role model and respected star. As Messi explained in brainyquote.com, “I prefer to win titles with the team ahead of individual awards or scoring more goals than anyone else. I'm more worried about being a good person than being the best football player in the world. When all this is over, what are you left with? When I retire, I hope I am remembered for being a decent guy.” These words tell the truth of what he thinks about his football career, and how much he cares and supports the team.

Messi didn't want other children to experience what he suffered, so he created and supported organizations. He donates around 1 billion euros to the charities and visits them often. He just wants to make a difference in the world by showing respect to others. His sportsmanship on the field is equally important, helping UNICEF and his Leo Messi Foundation. If he can keep it up, then he will truly be the Greatest Of All Time.

# Inspired by Steinbeck

*The Red Pony* served as the inspiration for these novel “extensions.”



## The Unforgiving Mountains

*Sung LeGrande*

The bright morning midsummer sun smiled down on the Tiflin ranch where the little boy Jody stared sorrowfully at the unexplored mountains to the west. Just the day before, an old paisano named Gitano had come back to his boyhood home, the land now occupied by Jody's family. The boy's father refused Gitano's request for a place to stay, and the paisano eventually went into the mountains to die.

"It's a shame," said the ranch hand Billy Buck sadly. He thought that Gitano's death would be meaningless if he were to die in the mountains. Jody was startled to see Billy standing behind him.

"Shouldn't we do something?" the ten-year-old boy suggested. Billy Buck looked thoughtfully toward the horizon where the dangerous and jagged and frightening mountains towered over everything.

"Well, old or young, people shouldn't go off searching for death," Billy said. "Rather, death should be the one to find them." Billy started walking toward the Tiflins' house intent on convincing the stern Carl Tiflin to save the innocent Gitano. Jody followed along and looked at a horde of tiny mice trying with no avail to get into the Tiflins' shed that was filled with food. Billy Buck felt the urgency of the situation and started walking faster, while Jody struggled to keep up. When they arrived the Tiflin household, Billy knocked confidently on the hard, hand-carved oak door. He was surprised when Jody's kind mother answered the door instead of Carl.

"Where'd Carl go off to?" Billy asked.

"He went to help that old man," Mrs. Tiflin answered happily. Jody and Billy were shocked.

They couldn't even imagine Carl Tiflin going out of his way to help anyone that was weak, let alone searching for an old weak person in the unexplored mountains.

"Well, let's leave him to it," Billy Buck said with a surprised face. Jody's mother smiled. She liked this new side of her husband.

Later that day, when the shimmering sun shone the brightest, Billy Buck spotted a horse with two familiar silhouettes riding on top.

"They're back!" Billy hollered. Jody and his mother expeditiously rushed to Billy Buck only to see a shocked and horrified expression on Billy's face. As Jody ran to see them with a smile on his face, he saw something that made his blood run cold.

"What happened?" Jody frantically questioned as he saw, clinging onto Carl Tiflin, the mangled, bleeding Gitano. The dog Doubletree Mutt ran toward Gitano because of the vile, repugnant smell of the dried blood.

"A group of coyotes attacked Easter and him when I found him. Easter wasn't strong enough to make it all the way back to the ranch, so he's still out there," Carl Tiflin said solemnly.

"We should get Gitano some medical help," Jody's mother suggested.

"It's too late, he's lost too much blood," Carl Tiflin replied. Jody looked into the wrinkled, lifeless, barely-open eyes of Gitano. His torso was heavily bleeding and had claw marks all over it, and his left arm was limp with blood still streaming from a wound.

"Thank you," Gitano managed to say, "for returning me to my home." Then he went silent and fell slowly into an everlasting sleep. Carl Tiflin, filled with sorrow, shed a tear because of the regret and sorrow he felt for treating the old man terribly before.



## The Apple Tree

*Charlotte Robley*

The little boy Jody stumbled out of the barn still in shock. He had just seen Nellie giving birth to his new colt, and he had just seen Nellie die. He trampled the delicate spring grass, as he shakingly stumbled to the mossy tub and grabbed an old, rusty bucket. Plunging it upside down into the tub of cool water, he watched the air bubbles float to the surface and pop. This wasn't how he wanted the pony. He wanted it to be easy, to be simple, but instead the image of Nellie's blood splattering over Billy's face was burnt into his eyelids. He rapidly blinked, trying to rid his mind of the unsavory sight, but it was no use. He gazed around at the California ranch which was normally beautiful in the early morning, but even that sight was tainted. He walked back to the barn, holding the water bucket with two hands in front of him, and grabbed a rag to wipe down the little black colt that he now somewhat resented.

Early next morning Jody lay wide awake. His mind tossed and turned with the thoughts of Nellie and Black Demon and Billy. He sat face up, staring blankly at the ceiling. Then suddenly, as if an urge possessed him, he leapt out of bed and slipped into his clothes. He crept out of the creaking front door, gently pushing it open and close so as not to wake Carl, his father. He tip-toed out onto the porch and jumped over the stairs, his blond hair blowing in the cool spring breeze. Jody ran to the barn like he had when Gabilan was a colt, but his intentions were not to see the new pony. Instead, after he opened the barn door, he walked straight past the stall and towards a shadowy figure only illuminated by the moonlight.

"Billy!" Jody whispered hoarsely, shaking the ranch hand Billy Buck's arm. When Billy showed no signs of awakening, Jody grasped his arm firmer. "Billy, wake up!" Jody jostled him back in forth until —

"What boy?" Billy Buck croaked, grabbing Jody's arm firmly. "Why are you waking me up this hour?"



"Nellie!" Jody was now crouching by his side.  
"What about her?" Billy whispered, his irritated expression turning into a guilty one.

"Can we bury her?" Jody said so softly it was barely a whisper. His eyes teared up, just barely, but it was apparent that Billy saw because he got up and found an old oil lantern. Lighting it, he replied, "Come on. Grab the shovels."

When they emerged from the barn, it was pitch black. Only the oil lantern and the thin rays of silvery moonlight illuminated the night. Billy didn't ask where they were heading, but instead followed the little boy as he led the way to the brush line. They stopped for a moment, observing the dark, mystical landscape. They listened to the calming chirping noises of the crickets and toads, creating an early spring harmony. There was very little light in the night, but the vague outlines of the mountains created giant silhouettes.

"Here?" questioned Billy, trying to rid his voice of skepticism.

"No," Jody said, walking forward. "Up here." Billy didn't question anymore, instead followed the little boy for a little while longer. They arrived at a tall apple tree.

"This would be a nice place," Jody said as he thrust the hilt of a rusty shovel into the soft dirt.

As they dug in solace, the sun continued to rise as if an invisible string was pulling it up into the cloudless blue sky. The temperature was high, but the big apple tree kept the workers shaded all morning. By noon the grave was big enough for Nellie. They decided against asking Carl Tiflin to help carry Nellie. Instead, Billy and Jess Taylor and a few of his friends hoisted Nellie into the deep hole.

"You need help covering her up?" Jess Taylor asked, picking his teeth with a piece of straw.

"No," Jody replied. "But thank you. Some jobs take only one person to finish." At that, Jess Taylor and his mates trudged off, leaving just Billy to accompany the boy.

Billy proudly watched the little boy shovel the last clumps of dirt into the hole until it was filled. The two stepped back from the grassless mound right as the sun's string started to drop.

"It's about time for dinner right about now," Billy murmured in a soft, comforting tone, putting a hand on Jody's shoulder.

"Yeah," Jody agreed. He sounded exhausted. Then life jumped into his eyes. "Wait! Stay here!"

He ran off back in the direction of the house. From over the hills came Jody, who was holding something swaying by his side.

"What was that about?" Billy questioned, confused. Jody replied by raising a silver bucket. "What's that?"

"It was Nellie's mush bucket," Jody explained to Billy. "You can go. I'm just going to stay here for a bit." Then he hesitated. "Tell father I'm seeing the colt." Billy nodded and walked off without another word.

The sun was lower in the sky as the navy night shoved it down over the mountains. Jody fell into the soft grass and set the mush bucket down so that it obscured his vision of the mountains. As the sun went down he stared at the rim of the bucket until it flared with a fiery golden glow. The glow blazed until it slowly faded, and the sky turned dark blue. The sun had set on Nellie's grave. Jody let out a deep, relieving breath he hadn't known he had been holding. Before he went to dinner he stopped by the barn and stared at the little colt in the stall. Jody opened the door and sat himself down in the hay.

"Hello there, little pony," Jody whispered softly. His voice was soft and comforting and full of love. "Hello, Black Demon."



## The Black Stallion

*Aidan Wong*

The late winter moon shone on the young boy Jody's back as he walked outside into the chilling breeze of the night. Jody felt like his head was spinning as he stared at the Tiflin's California ranch, then down at the newborn colt in his arms. He recalled everything that had just happened: the mare, Nellie, was giving birth to the colt, but everything went wrong...

He snapped out of it. The ranch hand, Billy Buck, had in fact not broken his promise to deliver Jody his beautiful colt. He remembered how Billy Buck had told him that if there was a problem with the birthing, they would kill the colt, and he silently sobbed as he thought of poor Nellie and the colt who would be raised with no mother. Jody had realized the dire situation.

Jody then remembered what Billy Buck had instructed him to do, and he went to clean the colt. Kneeling down beside the water trough, his place of calm, he picked up the sponge and went to scrub the colt. The colt whinnied softly, and Jody felt a fatherly affection for the colt flow through his body. Jody felt he was a better parent than his own father, Carl Tiflin. He smiled as he soaked the sponge in the trough.

Suddenly, the colt neighed, and kicked Jody in the mouth. Letting go of the colt, Jody could only watch as it galloped wildly around the open area. Seemingly filled with an energy unmatched by any other creature, the colt created havoc, attacking the fences and startling the animals and running up and down the open field and never relenting.

Finally, after what seemed like a day, the wild animal came to a halt, and stopped to rest by the ragged, crooked cypress tree. The cypress tree had burrowed into Jody's mind, for it was the place where the pigs were taken to be slaughtered.

Above, the clouds had become as big as the oceans themselves, and they were so heavy they fell, showering Jody and the colt and the ranch in an enormous blanket of water. Jody was startled, and he ran to bring the colt to the barn. But the colt would not budge, even with Jody's furious encouragement. When Jody resorted to picking up the newborn horse, it was stubborn, kicking and thrashing. Jody ran as fast as he could into the barn, closed the door, and put the colt down. He sprinted, looking for Billy Buck, for he could not let rain ruin everything again. He closed his eyes, and thought of the colt he had cared so much for before, Gabilan, the red pony, and how it had died of strangles when he was left in the rain. "Billy! Billy!" Jody cried out. "It just started raining and the colt got soaked!"

Billy came running into the barn, looking at the mess of the horse lying on the ground. "Come with me. We need to get him some warm mash as quickly as possible," Billy commanded in his gruff voice.

They sprinted for the kitchen, and Billy called out to Mrs. Tiflin, Jody's mother. "Please get some mash goin'," he requested. "The heavy rain soaked the boy's horse." He looked at her, and she could see the desperation in his eyes. They both knew he could not let another horse die on his watch.

Billy sat with his head in his hands, when he heard a small voice beside him. "Billy, Billy, it was so amazing," Jody be-

gan. "I was cleaning the colt and he kicked me and ran all over the place. And then when I picked him up he kicked again!" Billy sat there stunned, and opened his mouth, but nothing came out. He finally got the courage to tell the boy, "Boy, you might have yourself a fine newborn stallion."

"You really believe it!?" Jody exclaimed excitedly. He had always wanted to have a stallion to care for. However, he knew that his father, Carl Tiflin, would not want such an uncontrollable animal on his property. He knew he would have to find a way to keep it secret.

"Well Jody," Billy started, "if you hope for things enough then one of them is bound to come true."

The next morning, Jody got up early. As he stepped out, the dim, morning sun streaked through the window. The rooster called out in his firm tone. The crickets stopped chirping and the day began. Jody knew he would have at least 15 minutes to spend with the colt before Mrs. Tiflin rang the triangle to signal it was breakfast. He went down to the barn and opened the door of the stable. Standing there was the colt, full of energy even after the cold, rainy night the day before.

"So-o, so-o little colt," he cooed as he tried to calm it down. But the colt would not back down, and looked ready to burst out of the stall. Then Jody had an idea. Remembering what he had always wanted to call the colt, he tried again.

"So-o, so-o, Black Demon," he said, resting his hand on the stallion's nose. This time it worked, and the colt looked up at Jody, as if thanking him for caring for him. Jody smiled, and looked back down at the colt affectionately. From outside the barn came the shrill, piercing squawking of the birds, the sunlight peeking through the door, and the smell of wet dirt. He went back to his room to get prepared for breakfast and farm chores and the new day.



## The Return

*Nima Garemani*

It was a nice and sunny autumn morning. The soft breeze was swirling through the air as a sobbing little boy named Jody looked at Gabilan, the red pony that was lying lifeless on the ground on the Tiflin's California ranch. The life was driven from the pony's eyes and his blood was strewn all over his bright red hair. The short ranch hand Billy Buck stood cradling the boy in his arms, as an angry Carl Tiflin stood nearby, still upset that Billy Buck had yelled at him in front of his son.

"Don't tell me what to do with my son!" Carl Tiflin angrily shouted at his ranch hand. Billy Buck still held the bloody bandana in his hands, and looked down to the dead buzzard lying near Gabilan, with its feathers spread all around.

"Jody, go up to your mother in the house for now," Billy Buck told the boy. Jody hurried up to the house as he passed by two squirrels. They were fighting over an acorn, but soon reached an agreement, and ceased fighting. He passed by the barn, the old black cypress tree and the bunkhouse as he finally reached the house. He threw the doors open and flew into his mother's arms.

"What happened?" his caring mother, Mrs. Tiflin, asked him, stroking his golden hair as she hugged him. She had

sensed something was wrong.

"Gabilan died," Jody shakily said, as tears came from his eyes, as he clenched his mother even harder.

"I'm sorry, Jody. Everything will be all right," Mrs. Tiflin said, trying to comfort him the best she could.

"Here, come sit down and eat something, till Billy Buck and Carl come for breakfast." As his mother sat down at the white tablecloth table, a plate of eggs and biscuits sat on the tablecloth. The warm and fresh and savory smell of the biscuits began seeping through Jody's nostrils. His mother put a plate of eggs and biscuits in front of him, as he picked at his food, still feeling sad because of Gabilan and how he had died of strangles. As Jody picked at his food, the old oak door creaked open, as Billy Buck and Carl walked inside. Carl looked at Jody, gloomily picking at his food, with his head down at the dining table. Carl walked over to the table and suddenly hugged Jody as hard as he could. Jody, surprised, looked up to his dad as he clenched him so tight Jody thought he was going to be broken in half.

"I'm sorry, Jody, I'm sorry," Carl said as tears came out of his eyes. He continued to hug his son like he had never hugged him before. Jody's mother and Billy Buck looked at Carl and Jody in awe. To see Carl come out of sternness and apologize to his son was an almost unbelievable sight.

As Carl finally let go of his son, he asked him, "Jody, would you like to help me and Billy Buck bury Gabilan?"

"Yes, Papa, thank you," he replied. Jody looked at his father's bright blue eyes looking at him in a way that they had never looked at him before.

"And where would you like to bury him?" Carl asked, rubbing the tears from his eyes.

"By the brush line behind the house," Jody answered as he looked at his father dutifully.

"Then that's what we'll do," Carl said. He hugged Jody one last time, before he let him go.

Later that day the ranch hand Billy Buck, Carl Tiflin and the small boy Jody all headed up behind the house to the brush line. This was Jody's favorite place. After breakfast Carl and Billy Buck had gone to collect Gabilan's body for the burial. From outside the house came the high sound of birds flying through the air. The sound of wind was swooshing through the air and the bright green trees lay in the path of the sun. The sycamore leaves lay quietly on the dirty, brown ground. The afternoon sun was beating down on them, as they started digging near the water tub. Jody's mother came up for the burial. She set a stone onto the ground next to the tub on the bright green grass, as the water whined softly in the background.

When they had finished digging the grave pit, they put down their shovels, laying them next to the old wooden water tub. Jody stepped next to his mother, as Carl and Billy Buck lifted the bag containing Gabilan's body off the ground. They carefully laid it into the large hole. The afternoon sun brightly shone on the green grass and Gabilan's body. As Carl and Billy Buck grabbed their shovels, they added the last layer of dirt on Gabilan's body before it was over. As Jody wiped away tears, he grabbed the stone from its spot and planted it in the ground above Gabilan's body. As they all overlooked his grave, the blue sky stood staring down at them.

"I'm very proud of you," Carl said to Jody as he put his arm around his son's neck. "It takes a lot of time and hard work to take care of an animal that well." Jody looked up and smiled at his father, and he put his arm around his father's neck.



## The Learning

*Brooks Franco*

"Jody!" cried out Mrs. Tiflin. The little Tiflin boy, very confused, sat up and almost headbutted his mother in the process. He looked around, feeling the California heat on his skin, and the humidity setting. It was another sunny summer morning at the Tiflin ranch where Jody had fallen asleep in the brush. The chirping and whistling of the birds and crickets surrounded Jody. Mutt barked towards the glaring sun and squirrels quickly ran away, faster than the eye can see. Mutt chased after them, but made a loud crash when he hit his head on the tree.

"Jody, what are you doing out here?!" Mrs. Tiflin roared. "I thought you were already in bed asleep!"

"I-I'm sorry ma'am," Jody said, cowering. "I didn't mean to." Mrs. Tiflin sighed and looked around.

"Just this once," Mrs. Tiflin whispered, "you get off the hook."

"Really?" Jody asked with excitement, "You really mean it?"

"If it happens again, your father hears about it," Mrs. Tiflin whispered once again. "Do you understand me?"

"Y-Yes ma'am!" Jody replied, his voice cracking. The sheer thought of knowing that his father would know next time brought an immense sense of terror to the boy's mind. Jody quickly got up on his feet and hustled inside of the house. As he came in, all eyes were on him. The creaking of the floorboards and scraping of the chair legs on the planks added another level of anxiety to Jody's mind. Carl saw Jody and thought about punishing Jody, but had a change of heart for the poor boy.

"And then she tells me, 'Give a man a fish, he'll eat for a day, teach a man to fish, he'll eat forever!' and I say 'Shut it!'" Mr. Tiflin said firmly before looking at Jody. "Where were you last night, boy?! Y'know how mad I was when you were gone for dinner?!"

"I found him outside spottin' birds," Mrs. Tiflin said, taming the beast known as Carl Tiflin. "He must've gone to bed early, woke up, and sat outside to spot some." Carl quickly turned and looked at Jody with a glare that was too familiar.

"Well, why don't you spot some more, bird boy?" Carl said sarcastically, storming out.

Jody quickly turned to the kind Billy Buck, who was also in the room with him. Jody looked at him for a moment, then ran to hug Billy whilst the pathetic boy started to sob in the ranch hand's arms.

Later that day, Jody went outside to get away from the house for a bit to sit on the patio, his favorite place to be. He looked up at the clouds to see what he could make out. He saw a few things, like dogs and hawks and squirrels. He quickly got bored of this and started to look down at the street and the rest of the things surrounding him. Jody was really happy, but also really sad, in a way. He had seen some horrific things, if only a little. He looked around one more time and saw a wolf's corpse in the trail, being swarmed by birds. They had already eaten its eyes and its right leg. It looked hollow inside, and Jody could see bones sticking out of it. Jody then heard his father stomping back into the room, so he quickly made his way from the patio back to the table to sit down.

"Glad you could make it," Carl said to Jody with a tone that sounded like a rumbling earthquake. He coughed and let out a loud ahem. Carl then unnecessarily hit the table and hurt his hand, startling Mrs. Tiflin.

"I'm glad too, sir," Jody said with uncertainty. "W-What will we be having for dinner?"

"I hunted in the forest today and got us a deer," Carl replied with a sense of courage in his voice. "We eat good to-night!" His voice echoed through the dining room as he licked his lips, ready for some hearty deer dinner.

Mrs. Tiflin came out of the kitchen and served up the piping hot deer steak. She gave her husband a glare, and Carl responded with a shrug. Mrs. Tiflin gave Carl another glare, looking to her side at Jody. Carl looked at her, then at Jody, then at her, and then at Jody once more. Carl sighed and let up. "Look, Jody, I've been holding this in all day," Carl said in a calm tone. "I've been trying really hard to not go soft, but..." Carl started stumbling over his words. He started pinching himself. "I'm really sorry," Carl admitted to the clueless boy. "I lost my temper and I... I'm sorry." Jody's jaw dropped. He couldn't believe his ears. Jody felt so joyful, so amazed, so dumbfounded! Never in his life would he ever thought his father would say something like that to him.

"T-Thank you, sir!" Jody said with surprise. "I accept your apology!"

Mrs. Tiflin looked at Carl and gave him a wink. Carl smiled and shouted, "Now who's ready to eat?!"



## The Mending of a Broken Heart

*Isabella Acosta*

The winter snow poured like it was racing to make it to the ground. The little boy Jody watched the delicate snowflakes dance to the ground from the frosty window in his bedroom. His earthy gray eyes were glued to the gloomy morning beyond the glass. After the red pony named Gabilan had passed away from strangles, the boy barely left his room. The ranch hand, Billy Buck, noticed Jody's lack of self care and was worried for the boy.

"He can't keep going like this!" Billy cried to Carl Tiflin, Jody's father. "This boy can't do anything good for himself! How can you not see that?" Billy tried desperately to show his stern boss that this wasn't healthy. But Mr. Tiflin thought otherwise.

"It's all a part of growing up. He is learning that the world isn't always happy," Carl responded. "My mother always told me, 'The flower always suffers the first time it encounters a weed, but once it has, it won't go down so easily next time.' I know what she meant."

Carl left Billy standing there without another word. Jody woke up when the dinner bell rang. As he got up, he saw the feather of a buzzard that he had stapled to the wall the day before. It had darts piercing through, wrecking its fuzz. Jody hated buzzards, because maybe if they weren't there, he could have saved his pony that day. It seemed the feather was laughing at him.



Jody dragged himself down the simple staircase and took a glance at his mom. She had her signature laced apron on and her gray hair was pulled back into a messy bun.

She gave her son some lemonade. He could feel the sweet sour taste in his mouth that he had tasted many times before.

"Carl! This has gone on for long enough!" yelled Billy. "I get you want to teach your child to expect this kind of thing but don't you think that this is too much?!" Carl looked outside to see Jody sadly sitting in the meadow where the red pony, Galiban, once loved to trot about.

"Fine... what is your idea to fix this?" Carl replied. He hated weakness, but this wasn't weakness, it was being strong for someone else. Billy was being more distant with Jody. He always ran in the barn when Jody tried to speak with him. Jody thought that they were avoiding him and this damaged his heart. Each time this happened it was like Gabilan had died again. Out of the barn came Billy. Jody saw this as an opportunity.

"How was your day?" asked Jody. Billy broke out in a nervous sweat.

"Ha... looks like the pigs need feeding," Billy replied as he tried to inch closer to the barn. Jody's fist clenched up and his face looked dead serious, a replica of Carl's. Billy ran in the barn but Jody clutched Billy's arm and it was clear he wouldn't let go. The warm sunlight had begun to fade away as thunder and dark clouds rolled into the sky. It became colder on Jody's skin, causing them to take on a fragile pink look. The wind picked up and brushed the boy's hair over his eyes, yet he didn't even flinch to move it.

"What are you hiding from me?" asked Jody. "Am I not trusted by you to know what you are doing?" It started to rain heavily. Jody was drenched but he didn't move. Billy could barely make out what he was seeing, but he quickly identified the water on Jody's not to be rain but instead tears. Jody softened his grip and allowed Billy to wiggle free. Billy turned around and hugged Jody. He was completely wet too, but he didn't care. Suddenly the rain stopped pouring on them. They looked up to see Mr. Tiflin holding an umbrella over them all. The man looked cold and mean and evil but Jody knew he was one of the most caring fathers in the world.

"You are going to get sick.... Get inside the barn or something," Carl said as he tried to remain tough, but Jody could feel the warmth inside his father. When Jody got inside of the barn, Billy brought him something wrapped in a blanket. Jody felt nervous as he held it, but his curiosity kept it in his hands.

"Open it," said Billy, giving it to him.

Jody hesitated but he pulled one layer of the blanket off of the other. He saw a tiny colt, black as night, sleeping.

"A chance to try again," said Billy. "Your father bought it for you," said Billy.

"I thought we weren't going to tell him that!" yelled Carl. Billy gave Carl an "oops too late" expression and Carl sighed. Jody put the colt down and jumped on his father.

"Careful, Jody! You are going to wrinkle my tie!" screamed Carl from the grips of his son. Hesitantly Carl wrapped his arms around his son. Both of them enjoyed feeling each other's warm bodies despite how wet they were. Jody stared at his rifle and mouse trap from the view of the hug. Jody didn't want to hunt or be cruel to animals anymore, because he had more important things to do now.

The rain clouds disappeared to reveal a setting sun in the distance. A tiny little baby bird flew freely with its mother into the California sunset.



## The Adventure

*Ari Sanandaji*

When the little 10-year-old boy Jody got up, his shy gray eyes were red but no longer full of tears. By this time, the sun was approaching mid-arc on the Tiflin's California ranch. A warm summer breeze swooped up from the coast, messing up his wavy blond hair and rustling the grass. The clouds had decided not to arrive, showing the sunshine in all its glory. Birds sang from the leafy green treetops and were responded to by the high-pitched whinny of the horses. A nameless sorrow still covered Jody like a blanket. By that time, he heard Carl Tiflin, his stern and disciplinary father, talking to Billy Buck, the middle-aged ranch hand, inside the barn. He ran close to it and put his ear up to the old, red, wooden wall.

Inside, he heard Billy Buck saying, "Carl, are you sure that you don't want to go look for them? Easter was your first horse and Gitano could help you rebuild that old adobe house."

"That old paisano isn't living with us," declared Carl, feeling a little bit guilty that he had not let him stay. "We'll have to pay hundreds for his doctor bills."

"Carl," Billy said, "if he helped rebuild the old adobe house we'd be rich. We'd pay his bills and have extra to spare."

"No, Billy," Carl said, quietly mulling over the idea. "But we'll discuss it inside over some brandy."

Jody watched the two men walk outside the barn. He thought of the Great Mountains and how he'd like to go up there himself. A curious form of excitement suddenly appeared, chasing away the nameless sorrow.

As quiet as a mouse, he followed the men. He saw his two dogs, Doubletree Mutt and Smasher, chase something that leaped inside a bush. Four small gray birds perched on the large evil black cypress tree, where the pigs were slaughtered. A giant brown eagle circled overhead, eyeing the birds' every move until Smasher's bark scared it away.

Inside his old ranch house, his mother, Mrs. Tiflin, poured caramel-colored brandy inside two small glass shot glasses. "Hello, Jody," she said, not bothering to turn around. "Why don't you take these cups to your father and Billy? I have to start making some lunch."

The boy snatched the cups and walked to the small table next to the woodbox. He placed the cups in front of them and watched them smell and savor the delicate flavor. After a minute, the brandy started to kick into Carl's system and carry him out of his sternness.

He said, "Billy, we should search for Gitano. Let's do it soon before he uses that gun on himself."

Jody suddenly became interested in the conversation and said, "Sir, please sir, may I go too?"

"All right, Jody. You may go into the mountains with Billy, but try to be home before supper."

A few minutes later, Jody and Billy had packed food and a lantern and water. Billy also took one of Carl's guns. "It's better to be safe than sorry," the ranch hand explained.

Before they left, Mrs. Tiflin whispered in Jody's ear, "Try to look for the bear that went to see what he could see."

Once they had set off, Jody noticed that the warm afternoon sun was starting to climb down its large mountain to get eaten up by the sea. The climb was grueling, where every step had sand and rocks that slid underneath his weight. The

buzzards that Jody despised were circling overhead, knowing the aura of death that covered the barren mountain.

At that moment, they heard the whinny of a horse and the swing of a blade. Jody's curiosity took over, hoping that his father was wrong about there being no civilization on the mountain. They tore through the brush, following the sound until they reached the entrance of a cave.

The cave itself was dark as night until the lantern came to eat away the darkness. Inside was a very old horse with nothing but a piece of rope for a bridle, which Jody immediately recognized as Easter. There was also an old man wearing a denim coat holding a golden rapier running and slashing like a warrior. He was fighting a giant brown bear with gray claws and its large white teeth showing.

"Gitano, Jody, get back," Billy said to him and the old man after seeing the bear. "I'm gonna shoot it."

At the warning, Jody ran toward Easter and grabbed the rope. Gitano followed, with his jacket coming off and exposing his bare chest. Billy pulled the black gun out and pointed it at the bear. The cave filled with smog and Billy ran outside, plugging his nose. When it cleared, the bear was gone.

Dumbfounded by its disappearance, Jody asked, "Billy, where's the bear? Haven't you killed it?"

"It was a blank, and that's why I carry blanks," Billy said. "Did I ever tell you what happened to me when I was younger?"

Jody shook his head and Billy continued.

"Well, when I was little, I moved from place to place with my father. He was quite strict, kind of like yours. One night, I wanted to get out of work and wandered away. A large bobcat attacked me and would have torn my face off if a bear didn't roar in the distance. The sound was what saved me, and I've never been able to hurt or kill any bears since. But come on now, let's get back to the ranch."

Once they returned, Gitano spoke with Carl about his living arrangements. They agreed that Gitano would teach them to rebuild the adobe, where he would live until he passed. He would also grow a little produce and help take care of the animals on the Tiflin ranch, which would pay for his medical bills.

And after this adventure, Jody never needed to ask about the Great Mountains again.



## The Rescue

*Jesse Alvarez*

The ranch hand Billy quietly entered the little boy Jody's bedroom and walks up to his bed in the dead of night. "Hey Jody! Wake up. It's time," said Billy.

Jody responded in a tired voice, "Time for what? It's too early and too cold."

"It's time to rescue Gitano and Easter! Remember? The early bird gets the worm!" said Billy.

"Oh, of course! Do you have all the supplies?" Jody asked.

"Yes! I have the bear hunting rifle. I also have jackets and blankets for the cool fall weather. When dusk hits, the air gets chilly and the powerful wind sometimes picks up so we need to be prepared. Now come on. We need to go now!" Billy responded quickly.

Jody and Billy were setting off on their journey. Their plan was to rescue the old man named Gitano and Carl Tiflin's first horse, Easter. They would do this without the short-tempered Carl knowing of course.

Three days before this, old man Gitano had returned to

the ranch and asked if he could live there because his original house was up the hill. Carl, Jody's father, told him that all old things should just die and that there was not enough room or food for him at the ranch. So Gitano had taken Easter up into the dangerous mountains and has not returned since.

On this day, Jody and Billy started their long journey up into the dangerous mountains. The terrain was steep and rocky and sometimes it was challenging to see where you were going. As Jody was walking on the path with Billy he suddenly slipped and fell into a hole. "Ow! Billy, help me!" Jody exclaimed.

Billy asked, "Jody, are you O.K.? How did you fall in there?"

"I slipped and fell down. Now, please help!" said Jody in an annoyed tone. Billy went to him and used all his might to pull Jody out of the hole. Then they continued on their journey. They kept climbing up the mountain with lanterns in hand. The light of the lanterns was like a warm hug, helping to illuminate the journey ahead. They were both completely silent until they realized that day had come upon them. Little did they know what and who the day ahead would hold. Billy exclaimed, "Wait! Jody is that the sun? Oh no. This is not good!"

Jody inquired, "Billy, why? What is so bad about the sun?"

"Jody, do you not realize that you have to go to school at this time?" Billy responded angrily.

Jody replied, "Gitano's life is much more important than school! We have to keep going in order to save Gitano's life!"

Billy thought for a moment and then said, "You know what? You are right. We have to save Gitano!" So they continued on their journey all through the day. They were growing increasingly weak and tired and just as they wanted to give up they heard a rustling of leaves.

"Uh, Billy, what was that?" exclaimed Jody.

Billy replied, "I have no clue. Maybe it was a..." and right at that moment a large shadow overcomes them and a flash of gold appears in the tree above. Suddenly, Gitano came flying out of the tree screaming "YAAAA HOO" and landed in front of them as Easter's head appeared from behind the tree trunk. Gitano was wearing only his ripped and tattered clothes, a bear head and holding a gold rapier. Billy and Jody couldn't help but notice the two birds, white and black in color, like yin and yang, that flew out of the tree as well. "Oh my goodness! Gitano, is that you?" asked Billy.

Gitano responded, "Oh, it's just you two youngsters."

"Yes, it is us! Gitano, come here. Bring Easter. We have some food and water for you!" Jody exclaimed.

"Oh, thank you," Gitano responded. "I have been very hungry. That bear meat ran out fast. Easter is hungry as well."

"Yes, please eat some food! But eat it fast because we have to get back to the ranch," said Billy. Gitano and Easter quickly ate the food and then started on their journey home. After a couple of hard hours they finally made it back to the ranch. When they arrived Carl ran over to Jody and gave him a big hug.

"Jody, you're back! You are in so much trouble and Billy, we will talk later! Had I known you were leaving, you would have been grounded for a very long time," Carl said.

"Yes, fine Dad, but are you at least happy that Gitano's home?" Jody asked.

"Hello, Carl," Gitano said in a raspy and tired voice. "I'm happy to be back at the ranch. May I stay?"

"Yes, and I am sorry for being horrible to you before. Perhaps you can share all of your knowledge about rebuilding that adobe on the hill over some beer," Carl suggested.

"Yes, that would be very nice. But make sure to add a slice of lime," joked Gitano. And with that, being kind was better than being unforgiving.

# Creative Writing



## The Monkey Apocalypse

*Romeo Jensen*

"Timmy, you're going to be late to school!" Timmy's mom yelled.

"I'm on my way," Timmy replied quickly as he ran down the stairs panting.

Timmy had just turned nine on November 5th, 1956 in Berlin, Germany. He was a very athletic kid who loved football. In Timmy's mind today was going to be a regular Thursday where he would go to school, followed by his football practice, but little did he know that today, November 6th, 1956, would change his life forever.

Sixth period ended and Timmy was on his way home from school to get ready for football. As he turned the corner, he realized that there were very few people on the streets and the air had the bitter taste of ash. He also noticed it was awfully warm for a winter's day in Berlin.

All of a sudden Timmy heard screaming, but it didn't sound like human screaming. It was too high pitched and more of a screech than a scream. It almost sounded like nails scratching a chalkboard.

The screams started coming closer and closer. Timmy remembered he had cleats in his bag and took them out just in case someone or something attacked him. He had beautiful white and gold leather cleats with a black stripe through the middle. These cleats could become a series of tiny, dull knives if he needed a makeshift weapon.

He was looking at the ground when suddenly a shadow appeared right in front of him, but it wasn't a human shadow. It more like a superhuman. He looked up and saw it was a monkey, but not a normal monkey. Rather, it was a massive super monkey! It looked about ten feet tall and had COLOSSAL muscles. It was covered in black fur and had massive, shiny canines.

He dropped his only weapon, his cleats, and started running full speed in between two buildings in the direction of home. Timmy felt like he was going faster than the speed of light and he didn't want to turn around in fear of what he might see behind him. His leg started cramping and he dove into a dark alley hoping the super gorilla would not find him. The pain in his leg increased and started to feel like his leg was being stabbed with knives. On top of that he was also drenched in a pool of sweat. After what felt like an eternity of waiting, his leg started to feel better so he decided to just run full speed towards his home. He quickly peeked out of the dark and gloomy alleyway filled with rats to make sure there was no threat around. When he saw he was safe, he jumped out of the alleyway and started running home full speed. Once home, Timmy quickly ran to the fridge and devoured a bottle of ice cold water.

When his mom found out he was home, she came downstairs while yelling, "Where were you? You're going to be

late to football practice." Then she saw Timmy and screamed, "What happened?!"

Timmy ran to a mirror and saw his face was extremely pale yet somehow still red like a hot pepper, and he was completely drenched. It was as if half his face was as red as blood and the other half was like a ghost. His shirt was dripping and made a noise that went PLIP, PLOP, PLIP, PLOP. He started feeling dizzy and everything suddenly went black.

When he woke up, he saw his mom standing next to his bed. Timmy felt like only a second had passed when he fainted, but it turned out he had been unconscious for two days! The small television next to his bed was on and the news was reporting that some Nazi scientists from WW2 were trying to make super monkeys. During the creation of these creatures, the super monkeys escaped, killing the scientists. The only way to defeat the monkeys was to go to the lab, steal the cure, and make all the monkeys inhale the cure. When Timmy's mom saw this, she started crying, thinking that the world was going to end.



## Magical Sneeze

*Kotaro Kaneko*

Mr. Charleston's sneeze was magical. When he sneezed, a diversity of flowers started to grow from his head. Mr. Charleston always felt like he was superior compared to other people. When he sneezed, he would always take the flowers out and put them in his flower basket to give them to his friends. But one day, something he never expected happened while he was lingering around at the park. His nose started to itch because of his allergies and he let out a big sneeze. As soon as he did, there were ample amounts of flowers growing out of his head. The sneeze was so big that the flowers grew too much and tons of pollen came out which caused an even bigger sneeze. Every time he sneezed, he felt more and more pollen falling down from above.

After a few minutes, Mr. Charleston managed to get his phone out to call his friends to ask if they could collaborate with him to deal with this problem. He asked this in a very concise way because he couldn't waste a second. "Achoo! Achoo! Achoo!" There was an endless amount of achoos that kept going until his friends Tommy and Micheal came to help. "We came to help, it's all okay, don't worry we got it all under control," Tommy yelled as Mr. Charleston kept sneezing and producing more flowers. Tommy and Micheal tugged and tugged on the flowers as Mr. Charleston yelled "OWWWWW-OWWWWW!"

After a few minutes of tugging and pulling, the flowers came out and Mr. Charleston stopped sneezing. The three of them let out a big sigh and they went home to rest. The next morning, the town's TV crew came to Mr. Charleston's house to ask for the whole story, so they can make a funny parody of the event. "Yipeeeee!" Mr. Charleston got too excited and blew out another big sneeze.





## Calm Charles

*Owen Stromborg*

My name is Charles. I'm a silverback gorilla. Many think that I'm scary and harmful, but I'm as dangerous as a sunflower and as scary as a puppy. I wasn't always a gorilla. When I was a human I recently found out that I had the power to make anyone relax and lose every ounce of anger in their body. As fast as a cheetah, the word spread and the government soon found out. In panic, I reached out to my friend Alexander Paul Johnson Jr the 3rd to turn me into something so I could hide away from the world. So he turned me into a silverback gorilla, so I hid in the forest, never to be seen again by anyone that knew who I was. I lived with a tribe of gorillas, and I taught everybody to speak, read, and write at an accelerated level. I was their king, their all-knowing god, their all-powerful lord and savior, but it was all gone in a blink of an eye. The government soon found out about us. It turns out that one of the gorillas was wearing a wire.

We gathered on the top of the hill and heard the army say through a speaker, "Charles, we know you are in there. Surrender now and have your people spared."

As loud as a cannon I shouted, "You will never find me! Try your best, my people were trained for this situation!"

As soon as I said that, the army charged with their tanks, guns ablaze. Instead of fighting, I ran away to gather weapons. I gathered swords as sharp as tungsten needles, bats as thick as a tree, and my chill containers. The chill containers are empty bombs that I spray my relaxation dust into. It is an easy way to get rid of enemies.

When I went out to the battlefield, my people were being obliterated. So, I had my men boost me up in the air and in slow-motion, I quickly filled the bombs with the relaxation dust and threw them at the army and in the tanks. Before they could flee, the dust entered the soldiers brain and triggered certain parts of the frontal cortex that made them relax and forget all about the fight. That gave us a bucket-load of time to stab them in the hearts, slice their heads off, throw them into ditches, and take their weapons. You may think it was over, but it wasn't. It turns out, those soldiers were distractions. The real army was behind us. We found out as soon as half the army was sniped. Without thinking, I charged straight ahead and was shot in the head. In my final moments I saw something in front of me. A bright beam of light appeared in front of me.

A mysterious voice said, "Come into the light, Charles. Come." After hearing that, I stepped into the light and was taken up by an escalator. I saw a sign that said, "Don't try to go back to earth." So I did what any normal person would do, I ran down the escalator and jumped into a tree. From the tree, I saw that the military was advancing. I was as frightened as a little boy turning off the lights and as scared as a kindergartener at the circus, so I ran away. I thought I was safe, but the military noticed me and took me into captivity.

As I began to fall asleep, the general said, "I'm going to kill you someday Charles. Even if I have to bring heaven down, I will find you, and kill you."

My prison cell was small. It consists of a toilet, a bed, and a small door where my food is given to me. They put these power dampening gloves on me so I don't spray any dust. Every day the prison guards yell at me. They say,

"Hey monkey!"

"You can't hurt us out here!"

"Hahahaha!"

They always make sure to make fun of me. Every time

they leave, I punch the wall with my power dampeners. Since they were made to be indestructible they can make a perfect way to escape. To make sure that the guards don't find out about this, I cover the hole with a painting of the jungle. Yesterday after I was teased by the guards and ate my food, I made the final blow to the wall. As the rubble begins to crumble the alarm begins to sound. As fast as the speed of light, I jet out of the cell and run into the village. Behind me, I faintly see a bulky figure with a metal mask and a black coat. In the blink of an eye the man teleported to me.

"Charles. That's your name right? You know, death is a funny thing. It's the unstoppable marching of time that eventually leads to your unpreventable destruction. Some are taken early and some taken late. You're supposed to be dead, Charles, you can't escape death."

In my head I thought, "I can't keep running forever. I must accept my fate." In a swift movement the man jumped at me and in what felt like hours, I was at peace. No one to run from, no more violence, and no more worries. I saw the light again and walked into it, but this time I stayed on the escalator and walked into the gates. Even though I thought that everything was fine, the ground beneath me was beginning to crumble. I heard a very distinct voice. The generals voice. Before I could react, heaven fell down onto the earth. Every dead soul filled the streets. Behind me I saw the military, ready to hunt me down.

Through a microphone the general said, "You may have been killed already, but I swore to kill you. Even if you like it or not." I was fed up with what has happened in the past few days. All of the sadness and anger was held inside of me, so I let it out. I rammed into the tanks, sprayed everyone with my dust, and tore their heads off. There was someone special that I saved for last. The general was shaking as I charged in his direction. He tried to run away, but I jumped on him and overdosed him with my chill dust. When I overdose someone with the dust, their lungs become so filled that they can't breathe anymore. In the end, I was sitting in a pile of blood and dead carcasses. Then, I heard a voice. It was my mother's voice. She said, "Charles, it's time to stop. You have killed the general. It's over. I've made a gorilla sanctuary for you to live in." To this day I live with other gorillas in the sanctuary, and I will live there until the day I die. Again.



## The Time I Thought I Had Died

*Abigail Shin*

I woke up, gasped for air, breaking out in cold sweat. I realized this wasn't my bed and this wasn't home. I lingered in the same spot for longer than I should have. I muttered to myself, "Where am I? What is this place? Have I died?" I paced there while asking a diversity of questions. As I stopped staring into the pitch-black abyss, finding a box of matches lighting one for light. As I watched it ignite I started to wonder, "If I died how did I and how old, what year was it?" I had only one objective: to try and get out. I went back to staring at the fire from the match, its bright colors distinct compared to everything else. Remembering the lack of diversity in the colors and my goal to get out. I started running trying to find an escape but alas, I didn't.



## Penalty

*Jonathan Gomperts*

It was the final minutes of the soccer championship, and it was still tied. Eli was desperate to win. The opposing team had a clear-cut chance to score a goal. Eli, with the last of his energy, flung himself like a catapult toward the ball in a final effort to stop the other team from scoring. He felt the studs of their striker's cleat on his leg and experienced a sudden excruciating pain.

Three days later, Eli was in his living room gloomily looking down upon a large cast that encased his entire leg. No matter how much his mother consoled him, it wouldn't change his mind. He was helpless, practically immobile, and the one thing which his life revolved around had been taken away from him and there was nothing he could do. He was a dog without its bone.

His mother brought him some crackers and said, "You can't be like this...not for three months." Eli didn't answer because of a combination of anger and lack of energy. And yes, Eli's broken leg would keep him away from soccer for three entire months, which would feel like a billion years.

It was 2015, in the suburbs of Kansas City. Eli was a 12-year-old, soccer obsessed boy who grew up in a small, humble, town where nearly everything revolved around soccer.

Everyone in the town, even if they weren't even slightly talented, played soccer in some shape or form. Eli played on the local team for a great coach named Coach Jacob. Eli immensely respected him along with both of his biggest fans, his parents Jane and Charles Mack.

Eli was one of the best on his team. However, there were players on his team who weren't so talented. Carlos was a shy, unskilled player, but he had a great attitude and always cheered his teammates on, despite being second choice for those chosen to play on the field.

It was three days after the championship. "Come Eli," his mom called from the kitchen. "Your coach sent you an email." Despite his pain walking, he highly respected his coach and eagerly made his way to the kitchen. "What did he say? What did he say?" Eli inquired.

His mom replied, "He has a strict rule that every training and game that you can come to you must attend."

"Why?" Eli respected his coach, but why would he make him come if he was unable to play? Going to watch his team was frustrating and worse, they would probably lose without their star player.

"Coach Jacob says that it's important you cheer on and learn from your teammates," Eli's mom said.

Eli laughed. "Learn from them?" Eli said incredulously. "How am I going to learn from them?"

"Your coach's orders," his mom replied. That ended the conversation, for no matter how outrageous his coach's orders were, he would always obey them.

It was a month and a half later and the first game of the new season. Eli was on the mend but wasn't excited for the new season as he still had a month and a half left of recovery. His team, short of players, had a bench usually occupied by one player: Carlos.



## The Destiny of Morjoh

*Jason Shayestehfar*

Tonight was not an ordinary night. The clouds were dark and all magic and transformations had been depleted throughout the world. Morjoh had not seen a stormy night since Vladmir had attacked 1,237 years ago in 4029.

"Boom! Crash! Bang!"

"Sybranian missiles have been launched upon the vault of Jonkoh!" the Morjanian police announced to the world.

Smoke filled the air while the temperature increased dramatically. The temperature was almost 10 million degrees Celsius. This meant that for at least four hours all magic would be cut off with the potential possibility of everyone's magic catching fire. Immediately thousands and thousands of Morjanian soldiers rushed to the vault, but it was too late. The creation stone or the legacy of the greatest wizard that had ever existed was stolen.

On the roof of the tallest building ever created stood a wizard who went by the name of Morjoh. He held one of the most powerful weapons in existence and the highest cunic level, (the higher cunic level the more powerful wizard you are) yet he just did not know it yet.

"Morjoh, come down for breakfast. You're going to be late for school! Plus you have already been late like a million times, so hurry up!" Konah, Morjoh's mother, exclaimed.

"Coming mom!" Morjoh shouted from upstairs.

Morjoh strapped on his lucky socks and high-top Jordans and walked over to his bathroom. He looked at himself in the mirror and wondered, "Am I missing anything?" He then immediately remembered, "Oh yeah! I need my wand."

He grabbed his wand and said, "Nemo hanc virgam tangere poterit nisi ex sanguineo membra."

Morjoh pressed a button on his wand that made the wand about 100 times smaller. He placed the miniature wand in his rustic, silver ring that had been in his family for generations. The ring had a secret opening to hide his wand in it. As he finally wrapped up his final preparations for getting ready for school, he walked out of his room and closed the door behind him. He rushed through the corridors of the mansion and made it downstairs in the kitchen. The kitchen was very unlike the house in the aspect of how it looked because it was made in the 4000s.

"Hey, Mom! I don't know if I want to go on a field trip to Astro camp," Morjoh said. "Are you sure?" Konah asked.

"Ya," Morjoh responded.

"Here, how about this? You can think about it at school and then when we get home we can talk about it and make the final decision then," she said.

"Fine," Morjoh said reluctantly, "But I have to go. I am really late."

Morjoh quickly took a sip of the frog goo and immediately geo-leaped to school. Once he got to school, he met up with his best friend Kojan.

"Hey, Bro," Morjoh said. "What's up?"

"Nothing, and by the way, did you want to go to the Cave of the Dragon today and try to crack the impossible riddle?" Kojan asked.

"Uhh, ya, sure," Morjoh responded.



## Child of Law

*Alexandria Pelsue*

There was nothing but a boy. Not a man, but a 12-year-old boy, in an empty room in an empty house, sitting all alone. The kitchen remained untouched except when the boy made a homemade meal once a year. The door was always locked. Even though the boy had the key, he felt no desire to open it. This boy's name was Mark and he was completely and utterly alone. Mark's life was terribly uneventful, but not today.

Mark was sitting on a couch staring up at the walls like every other day. All of the neighbors were scared to even walk past Mark's house. The cobwebs and ghostly dead colors on the house deterred them. Mark was never the same after his mother and father were killed in a car crash: Emma and Jimmy Stevens. All the neighbors thought the house had been abandoned and that ghosts haunted it because of the clanging of pots and pans on Christmas Day when Mark prepared his once-a-year homemade meal. On this day, however, the neighbors would learn the truth.

"Mark Stevens! Please open the door!" yelled a cop, not knowing that Mark was but a young boy in an empty room, in an empty house, all alone.

SLAM!

"Mr. Stevens! We need to speak with you immediately!" another officer yelled.

Instead of freaking out, Mark sat still like any other day. "You'd better open the door Mr Stevens!" the first cop yelled louder and louder. At that moment, Mark said his first word in three years.

"Sir, what can I help you with?" Mark asked in a very calm voice.

"WHAT?! This is not Mark Stevens," replied the cop incredulously, not believing a boy this young could live by himself.

"Excuse you. I am very much Mark Stevens," responded Mark in a cold tone.

"Well, then you should know that your father used to hide drugs, so would you mind if we check the house?" asked the irritated cop.

"No, he didn't! How dare you? Why don't you...go die in a ditch?" Mark mumbled angrily.

"Check the house, Boys!" the cop yelled.

The cops marched up and down the house. Mark was calm, but he could feel the cops' footsteps vibrating the floorboards. "I found something!" yelled the cop.

"What? No! That isn't possible! I am being framed!" exclaimed Mark.

"I am sorry, Sir, but you are going to jail. Hop in the car. You have the right to remain silent. Everything you say can and will be used against you in the court of law," rattled off the policeman.

Mark did exactly that. He stayed silent. The cops were surprised that he didn't say anything and wanted something to use against him, so they started to ask him questions, but Mark remained quiet. By the time they arrived at the station, the cops were furious. They wanted him to talk. The officers didn't know why Mark annoyed them, but they certainly did not want a kid to win a case. Mark thought the same person who framed his father was framing him now, and he was determined to find out who the culprit was. He was thinking

about the best lawyer to hire. His father and mother left a huge fortune to him and he was not going to waste it!

The cops were horrible at whispering, so Mark heard them clearly when they said, "There is no way he goes to court and wins. Let's just leave him here to rot."

"You must be an idiot. Of course, I will go to court and win the case!" Mark replied confidently.



## What Happens in the Dark

*Beatrice Hudson*

As I passed the house, I thought it was weird that the lights were all off but the car was in the driveway. I turned on my phone's flashlight, the street lamp out too. The light illuminated my police badge reading Evelyn Hart before I quickly turned it towards the house and took a better look. The usually bright house was so dark and oddly dangerous looking. The trees in the front yard were caressed in shadow, the prickly red rose bushes looking ominous in the dusky light of the setting sun. My eye caught some commotion through the bedroom window, and I wondered what was going on. I heard the slam of something on the ground, so I was worried that someone had fallen. The loud noise of something slamming down on something, the lack of light, and the figure surrounded by darkness in the window made me want to see if I could do anything to help with whatever was going on. I was unsure of what to do though. As I walked down the footpath to see if Miss Laith needed help with anything when I heard a blood-curdling scream.

I thought about running inside, but just then I saw someone coming down the stairs with a huge bag in his arms. Knowing this couldn't be good, I threw myself into the dark bushes and pressed the record button on my phone. In the meantime, my arm snagged on something as I pulled the phone out of my back pocket. I realized too late that I had just landed upon Miss Laith's perfectly kept roses. The scratch was small, but quickly the blood seeped out and matched the color of the red roses that had caused it. But I quickly forgot about the roses and the blood when the front door slowly blew open. I heard a phone ringing, echoing loudly through the hallways of the now-empty house.

When the figure snuck out of the door with the bag, I could tell that he was tall with a sturdy build, looking eerily similar to someone I know. He looked so familiar, but who was it? His head turned towards me and I was terrified beyond belief yet also hopeful to see who was behind the mask of shadows. Our eyes locked for half a second, his strangely bright, light, blue eyes meeting my vivid green lit up by the screen of my phone that was still recording. In that short amount of time, I was paralyzed with fear, more terror-stricken than I have ever been. A whimper escaped my lips and I slapped my hand over my mouth, the numbness lingering, and my phone fell to the ground.

Then he bolted away and I was left there wondering what just happened. I looked down and picked my phone up from the misty ground, reading the time of 6:31 on the bright screen. That was when the gravity of the situation dawned on me. I just witnessed an abduction.





## Deep Down

*Edward Baatarsuren*

Reyes and Cassidy were brothers. They lived in a very rural area. Their parents were on a business trip and they were home alone. Cassidy one day had an idea. He wanted to collaborate with Reyes to bring their parents' boat onto the lake behind their house. They had an ample amount of time to complete this objective. It was a very concise idea. Reyes goes on the boat to unchain it and comes back onto the dock so they can hop on.

Reyes had unchained it until the engine had malfunctioned and ignited. It bolted across the lake and Reyes was stuck right in the middle of the lake. "Help Cassidy!" he cried. A tentacle came out of the deep water. The tentacle swooshed up and snatched Reyes. There was another distinct orange tentacle right about to grab Cassidy. Cassidy dove right in time and managed to escape the monster.

The monster didn't linger for long. The monster immediately fled back into the lake. Cassidy ran and ran for his life, crying like a baby. Cassidy ran for hours without caring about the house or what his parents would do. Who knows what happened to that monster, Reyes, Cassidy, or his parents?



## Hello

*Thomas Butler*

I live in Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco and I go to UC Berkeley. It is the summer of 1967 also known as the Summer of Love. I just got back to my house from a concert at the Fillmore Auditorium. On June 10–11, which is in 7 days, there is a music festival that I am going to on Mount Tamalpais called the Fantasy Fair and Magic Mountain Music Festival. There will be a lot of cool bands like Canned Heat, Jefferson Airplane, The Byrds, and The Doors. 2 days after the concert I headed to The Panhandle with some friends listening to Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band on a portable record player.

When the record was done, we headed to my VW Bus and I dropped them off at their houses. I went back to my house and had a snack. 4 days after being at The Panhandle I was grooving to some music with some friends at my house. We were having a party. We were all going up to Mt. Tam for the festival. The party ended and I went to sleep. I woke up and had some breakfast and coffee. I went to pick up my friends and we headed up to Mt. Tam.

The first day it was a gorgeous day. The music started and it was good. Then the Doors performed and their set was great. After a bit Canned Heat played and they were good. Then we had some food and the music started playing again. It was the end of the 1st day and we headed down the mountain and back to Haight-Ashbury. In the morning we headed back to Mt. Tam. Jefferson Airplane started the day and they were good. Then the Byrds played and their set was good. By the end of the day we were all tired but happy we went. The day after the festival I saw an ad for Monterey International Pop Festival and I knew I needed to go. Time traveling in my mind...dig it.



## The Principal

*Amy Portillo*

One day two girls walked into the library of their school. "Look at this letter I found tucked in my library book!" whispered Melina.

"What does it say?" asked Erica.

"I'm not sure. It is written in a strange language," replied Melina. "I bet the librarian could help us out."

The next day the girls took the letter to the librarian, Mrs. Larry. As she helped the girls translate the strange language, a huge school secret was revealed! The letter revealed that the principal had murdered his recent and past rich wives. Everyone knew how rich the principal was but didn't know that the principal would go this far just for his wife's will. The letter stated: "Whoever is reading this STAY AWAY FROM THE PRINCIPAL! I am his wife and just found out he is trying to kill me for my large amount of will. He had killed all of his dead ex-wives. I found out that they were all librarians just like me. When you are reading this I will probably be dead. CALL THE police—" The librarian that had helped the girls translate the strange language, said that the language was a language that all librarians use to communicate.

Everyone was scared after all this information was given, but the real scare was the next morning when Mrs. Larry, the librarian, was lying dead on the floor. The girls were frightened until the principal came into the scene and acted like he was so sad and then started fake crying. Then what was shocking was that the girls had found out that all of the principal's old wives had cheated on the principal with the vice principal. They had found this information in another letter found in the principal's office. When they had been trying to find more clues and they did not know what they were getting themselves into. During the girls' lunch break, the principal was not seen as usual. The principal never came outside when it was sunny. They got close to the abandoned stairs that lead to the school basement, and it was unlocked.

As curious as they were, they went down to the basement, and what was found there was shocking... All of his ex-wife's dead bodies were in there. But there was something unusual about the dead bodies, all the blood had been sucked out of the bodies. "What can that be?" The girls asked themselves. Then the principal had come down the stairs with the librarian's dead body. The girls were frightened and tried to get out of that basement now knowing the truth and never wanting to come back but then suddenly the principal's eyes met with the girl's eyes. They were caught and thought they would be dead in a minute watching the principal walking right toward them. They were about to say their goodbyes when suddenly the principal looked calm and his red eyes went away.

The girls thought for a second that they could still live until the principal started shouting and threatened them that if they said something about his secret they would die. Immediately the girls agreed but knew that they would never come back to that school and made sure that the principal would pay for what he did. Melina and Erica planned to go to the park collaborate, and try to plan a way to show the principal's true colors without being killed by him. One thing they knew for sure is that the principal is distinct.



## I Can't Breathe

*An Excerpt from Not Like The Heroes*

*Samantha Ryan*

After a long couple of hours of listening to the priest drone on about Jesus and how he hung himself on a cross to save us, it's finally time to go.

"I will be \*cough\* passing out the communion bread," the priest announces, before heading towards our direction. He comes up to my mom, holding out a bowl with little pieces of dried bread, and my mom mumbles something before taking a piece out. I panic.

What? Are we supposed to say something when we take the bread? I don't know what to say! He's going to kick you out, he's going to embarrass you! No wait! Ok I'll just say thank you really softly so that he doesn't understand what I'm saying, but it'll still pass.

When he holds the bowl out to me, I mumble thank you and take a piece, waiting for him to walk away. But instead he stays there, looking at me quizzically, before turning to my mom.

"Has she had a church education yet?" he asks.

My mom replies, "No."

His face turns in disapproval before taking the bread out of my hand. "Then I'm sorry," he says, before turning to walk away.

My face turns red and heats up, as I hear the whispers of the people behind me.

"No education? At that age? Honestly, what is she doing here?"

"I know..."

My mind goes red, full of panic signs, replaying what just happened over and over in my head.

YOU EMBARRASSED YOURSELF! EVERYONE IS JUDGING YOU! YOU SHOULD HAVE KNOWN! YOU DON'T BELONG HERE!

My face gets even hotter, and then I start to feel nauseous. Black spots swarm in front of my eyes, the sun glaring down on me.

OH MY GOD! I'M GONNA PASS OUT! NO! I'M GONNA DIE! PLEASE HELP ME! HELP ME!

The spots get darker and bigger, blocking my vision, as I panic. I turn to my mom and grab her tightly.

"Mom, I need to get out of here, I'm going to pass out." I whisper, the spots taking over.

"What? No, we're staying until the end."

I grab her even harder, showing her my face. "Mom I swear to God I am going to leave right now, I need to go to the bathroom, I'm going to throw up!"

Running out of my seat, I sprint towards a building, hearing my mom's footsteps behind me. Bursting into the bathroom I head towards the toilet, feeling my vomit coming up. NO! BUT I CAN'T THROW UP! I'M GOING TO DIE! I CAN'T THROW UP! I'M GOING TO DIE!

My hands start shaking, and soon enough my whole body is too, and I throw myself on the dirty bathroom floor, and place my head in between my knees, hoping to hide in the darkness and coolness of the knees and floor.

"Agari!" I hear my mom's screech. "You're going to ruin your dress, get up off the floor!"

But I just stay there, hiding in the dark, and then the sobbing starts. My tears burn my skin, their salt filling my lips,

as I choke out a sound. I keep on trying to tell myself, it'll be okay, you'll be okay, but my mind just won't listen.

I can't breathe. I'M GOING TO DIE! PLEASE MOM HELP ME!

"MOM! MOMMY!" I scream out. "PLEASE HELP ME! MOMMY HELP ME I'M DYING!"

"NO, HONEY, NO!" my mother replied, tears pouring down her face. "YOU'RE NOT DYING. YOU'RE NOT DYING! FIGHT IT! FIGHT IT!"

But I can't fight it. I CAN'T. My brain keeps on telling me there's danger, and my body responds by panicking.

I can't breathe. I am going to throw up. I am going to die.



## Y Ddraig Goch

*Alexander McNeill*

Dryden anticipated a horrible time, yet the majority of his family was jovial. Singing filled the air. The crowd was very unruly, filled with music, people dancing, and everyone eating meat pies. Kind sounds brushed against his ears. Dryden stretched. "Mum, what should we do?"

"Shush, I'm listening to the music. Eat the meat pie I gave you before it goes cold," his mother spat. As he sighed, Dryden heard his mother sing along to the song. "Argh! Why are we even doing this?!" he screamed. Dryden ran off, throwing the pie away. "Dryden! if you're going out, wear warm apparel!"

His mother cried. "Dryden! Where are you going?" His sister called. "Away. This place is awful! Folklore is not real!" Dryden screamed. His sister grinned. "Okay then, Dryden! Watch out for the Y Ddraig Goch!" she laughed.

"Not. Real!" Dryden shouted. Dryden ran into the forest, paints in hand. Lights from the parade shimmered in his eyes. "Hmph! Y Ddraig Goch and Adar Llŵch Gwin are so fake! How stupid can they be?!" he cried. "Dryden, never say that. How do you know that it's fake if you haven't even met one?" A voice groaned. It was hostile and dry. Dryden thought it was his sister. "Well then, how do I meet one?!" Dryden laughed sarcastically. There was silence.

"Look behind you." The voice called. He turned around, to see a massive creature with a sharp tongue. It was the famous dragon on the Welsh flag. It was bright red with massive wings and yellow eyes. "I am the Y Ddraig Goch. I am he who protects Wales. Since you are unbelieving of me, I came here." The dragon hissed.

"You protect Wales?!" Dryden screamed. "Yes, I do," it replied.

"I'm a part of Wales, why didn't you protect me when I broke my nose?!" he cried. "Because that was a problem that you caused, dear boy. But now, you must get back to the parade. I hope that now you will respect your culture, me, and all the other creatures in Wales. And never turn down a meat pie like you did before. That is a personal preference, but that is still a part of my wisdom. Goodbye, Dryden."

The dragon nodded, and vacated into the forest. He ran back to the parade, all smiles. After that, Dryden made sure to never disrespect the creatures of the Welsh forest, and to never turn down a meat pie.



## The Expanse of Duality

*Aaron Rahimi*

I awoke to another irritable and sweltering sunrise in Bata, Equatorial Guinea. My felt-like eigengrau blanket narrowly enveloped my toes; the evenings were rather frigid, resulting in my dog, Mba, often huddling with me in order to conserve body heat.

We had encountered him on the streets approximately four years ago, in the slums of Malabo, the largest city and constitutional capital of Equatorial Guinea. However, we were only there for my father's business trip, an occasion not rare preceding his death. Despite the fact his breed has eluded us, we can articulate he is indeed loving with unequivocal adamancy. My father, a cosmonaut, often worked in conjunction with the Soviet Union, traveling to Moscow, Magadan, in addition to Nur-Sultan as to converse with oligarchs and political bureaucrats regarding his arduous mission to the International Space Station—Operation Desert Hawk when translated from Russian. However, he once departed to St. Petersburg to assure his mission and never returned.

The sun blared via the hole in my wall, shining on Mba, placing him in a deeper sleep than prior. I can only presume how comforting the warmth was for him. His boisterous snoring emanated from his relatively small black nose, permeating every crack, crevice, and orifice in the house, waking everyone as a result.

As I began to ascend from my bed, I patted my eyes, and detected my mother, Maria.

She was sitting erect, near my headboard; her eyes were crimson in color, making it seem as though she had been lingering intently for hours in hopes of disseminating pivotal news.

"Happy seventeenth birthday, my son," she exclaimed. "I have a few surprises planned for you!"

Despite not always possessing adequate funds for necessities, she always planned exhilarating celebrations for our birthdays; in conjecture to exhibiting her love by composing a delectable and salubrious meal, she additionally prepared inexplicable celebrations to such an extent that one would not believe them unless present.

"Thank you, mother," I stated. "I must prepare for school now. However, once I return, we can celebrate to our hearts' content."

She vacated succinctly thereafter to the kitchen to prepare breakfast for herself, Antonio, my little brother, and myself. My eyes still rather weighty, I glanced to my side, and observed the disarray present in my sect of the room, with bottles, clothing, in addition to paper scattered across. It had accumulated insofar as for one to have supposed I was assembling a shrine.

Antonio sat upright half-asleep atop his loft across the room, disheveled by dint of Mba's garrulity. As I dismounted my bed, I peeked into the mirror present on the opposing side of the room. As my lanky and feeble figure appeared in the partially shattered mirror, I began to see my rather burly father present in my reflection. However, the fact that I was fraying his white button-down in addition to his navy jeans may have yielded this sentiment.

I picked up my cumbersome and torn smaragdine backpack, comparable to the color of green found on the flag of Equatorial Guinea, and began to walk to my terminus of the Daylight International School, Bata, Equatorial Guinea Primary and Secondary Section.

"Salutations, mother," I shouted to her, not having adequate time to consume breakfast. "I am leaving now!"

As the heavy door pivoted expeditiously, a clamorous screech sounded; my bones rattled, and a shiver was sent down my spine.

"Are you okay, son?" my mother inquired, rather nervous. "What was that sound?"

"It was simply the door, Mother," I remarked monotonously, having told her this every day succeeding the commencement of the caterwaul.

The sunrise was rather scenic and the juxtaposition of the gargantuan buildings of the business district, and the infinitesimal slums only accentuated the beauty unfounded by many. "My life was rather good then, huh," I said hoarsely, laughing in the process. As I sighed, my expelled breath was visible; a blank, white room encompassed my position. "You really didn't know," I remarked, coughing between words, slowly succumbing to my wounds as I lay in what can only be defined as inexplicable.



## Don't Drink the Among Us Potion

*Thaddeus Moriarty*

Once upon a time, there was a YouTuber named "Doctor Tadyadyopilis." He made mysterious potions. No one knew what was in the potions, and most importantly no one wanted to know. One day "Doctor Tadyadyopilis" made a potion so disgusting no one could look at it for more than 10 minutes. He called it, "The Among Us Potion." One day he decided to do a live stream and drink the Among Us Potion. He was anticipating something big to happen. The time was exactly 9 p.m.

When he drank it, nothing happened. He got really sad and he closed the stream. Then, all of a sudden, the stream turned back on and you could see him in a total rage throwing everything in his house. After a while, he passed out under the Among Us Potion.

At exactly 3 a.m., a drop of the potion dripped into his mouth. He started growing into the Among Us imposter. The imposter stepped outside to be greeted by the paparazzi. This enraged the imposter and he became hostile. He broke down a dam and made a great deluge. He was yelling in his own language, and our experts found out what he was saying. He said, "Now that's a lot of damage." Everyone was scared until a boy made a makeshift boat out of cardboard and flex tape. Everyone was jovial that they were safe. They tried to rule the imposter but he was unruly.

Today, the imposter still roams the earth. If you ever see it, run for your life.





## A Mysterious Splash

*Owen Robles*

Vroom! The dirt bike passes by the sandy mounds spitting sand everywhere. Christopher yells out like he's jovial on the bike. However, at that moment a drop of water lands on his head, and more follow, they are all quite equivalent to each other. In a flash, huge waves of water deluge over Christopher charging at fast speeds, so he goes faster than the bike can handle and it starts to overheat. In the distance, he sees a sanctuary not too far ahead. He arrives and enters the building, but at the last second he enters the sanctuary and it is hit by a flood-like wave that almost destroys the sanctuary. When the wave is over he tries to look for anything he can salvage in the dry now moist sandy terrain.

He finds his bike geared apart from the waves and looks around for any other parts so he can repair his bike. Christopher walks around inside the sanctuary and finds a smaller rusty bike seat than his nonexistent one. He grabs it and sees a bike engine, and it's a little rundown and needs a little tuning. He is so happy that his findings were exactly what he needed. Turns out that Christopher is very ingenious when it comes to building dirt bikes because it is his job. Christopher also found a map and a compass after cracking open a safe with an axe he found. Not long after Christopher found the map and finished repairing the engine, he was on his way back to civilization or also known as Arizona.



## The Project Planner

*Andie Walok*

There once was a girl named Jilly and she had an upcoming project where they had to collaborate with other classmates. Jillian was absolutely ignited by her project and she couldn't wait! Everybody was talking about the project it was superior to them. Most people couldn't wait to see who they were in a group with. Jilly just did not want to be in a group with Larry. He was known to linger. Jilly was usually consistent and Luca did not like that about her Luca was known for being lazy. A week later the teacher assigned who they were going to be in a group with. Jilly was crossing her fingers and her toes that she wouldn't be in a group with Luca. Gilly opened the paper and the first name she saw was LUCA'S name along with Bob and John. Bob and John were fine to her since they strive to be great.

A week later Jilly felt very distinct from the group; she was the only girl. As the project started, Bob and John just started to dominate the group. Gilly started to hate her group. She hates bossy people and people that sit around and wait till the last minute. Jilly asked her teacher if she could switch groups. Her teacher told her to wait. It's only been a week. She went home and cried because she hated Luca with a passion. Turns out Luca actually turned out to be fine and he finished his work on time. Billy and John were only bossy because they wanted to get finished on time. Their project turned out to be the best project. The moral of the story is never to judge a book by its cover.



## Ben's Hot Streak

*Lucas Gallagher*

Back in 2009, Kobe Bryant was significant in helping the Lakers in the NBA. He already had three championships looking to get another. At Kobe's first game of the 2006 season one kid named Ben Simmons was there trying to learn how to get better at shooting, he thought it was an ingenious idea. Then he asked for an autograph. When Kobe signed it their hands touched and all of his abilities flew into Ben's body. Three days later Ben tried out for his middle school basketball team, everyone thought he was going to embarrass himself but he proved them wrong he made the team. He had a deluge of happiness and he was so jovial.

Meanwhile in the NBA, Kobe Bryant was playing horribly, he couldn't make a shot to save his life. So he went to one of Ben's games, and he saw Ben using Kobe Bryant's signature moves. Once he saw that he was hostile, he couldn't believe it. After the game Kobe approached Ben and told him what had happened, he told him it was causing a lot of controversy in the NBA and people were making theories. At first Ben didn't want to give back Kobe's skills but then he realized that Kobe was his idol. So they put their fingertips back together and the powers were transferred back to Kobe.



## The Next Future

*Luca Tudor*

In 2036, Elon Musk created "Spaceship X" to send people to Mars. Shotaro, Samuel, Garret and I were designated to ride Spaceship X and go to Mars.

"I'm so anticipating this," said Garret.

"Yeah, I'm a bit nervous though..." said Samuel.

"Preparing Engines, 10.. 9.. 8.. 7.. 6.. 5.."

"Buckle up guys!" I said.

"4..3..2..1..!" The engine started to rumble while tons of smoke came out. We all reached outside the atmosphere in seconds. After a couple of hours we had already passed through the moon and were about to land on Mars.

We slowly landed on Mars. Surprisingly, Mars has civilizations of aliens. They have agriculture, technology, and language. One of the aliens approached us, they didn't look hostile. But it looked like it needed some help. When we paid close attention to the city, the farm crops were destroyed.

"Hey, it's destroyed because of dehydration," I declared. "Let's try to salvage this situation!"

We all helped by giving out some of our water to the city. One week later, the city was saved. The farming was perfect because of the terrain. These aliens were also ingenious. They know many things and we're glad to be equivalent together.



## A Love Letter

*Henry Mauch*

Dear Sushi,

This has been a crazy relationship. From the moment I went to my first sushi restaurant I have been in love with you. You gave me the support and confidence to keep living life.

Your stickiness! To die for.

You are salty and spicy! Amazing.

Your texture! Incredible.

I even make you on a daily basis at my house because you are so good. I can't stop thinking about you.

To sum this thing up, what I am trying to say is I love you. You make me feel relaxed. Whenever I eat you, your flavor is left in my mouth and I love it. The best part is how you get a perfect bite every time I eat you. I could not have been here without you. I love you sushi!

Your love,  
Henry Mauch



## The Pigeon

*Gael Plazola*

A decently sized time period ago, there was a pigeon. That pigeon didn't know yet, but soon he would be the master of Capoeira, a Brazilian martial art, and would be epic. He started off life working at his dad's restaurant, but that wasn't his jazz. Soon after, the crowning of the Capoeira Master happens, and his dad has him advertise his restaurant. He accidentally enters on the fighter's side, and distracts the other fighters. They all get knocked out, so by technicality, he became the capoeira master. The headmaster of the competition is mad, and denies him the title. The other headmaster then helps the pigeon train at the gym. After a month or so, he gets super buff and can now challenge them for the role. Right before the fighting, they have a change of heart, especially the wizard. That doesn't matter right now, because Daniel the Mustache Lord is taking people's mustaches! They fight him, but Daniel turns his mustaches into soldiers. It was a big mistake, as they got their free will back and left. Daniel, now mustacheless, surrendered. But, right before, remember how the wizard was super happy about the Capoeira Pigeon? The wizard actually hated it, and is super mad it wasn't him. So instead of asking to be the Capoeira master, he turns himself invincible, goes to town on our heroes, then leaves with a samurai in his place. The samurai confronts them, and in response our hero wisely asked why he chooses to use outdated technology. The samurai stares blankly, and while he's contemplating his entire life choices, they head to the wizard. They're at their last stand, and they get an idea. He starts telling puns so awful, the wizard is practically paralyzed. This buys our side heroes enough time to sabotage his wand, and when he does a spell to stop hearing it, the spell shut down his brain so he'd no longer

hear it. The samurai came back for vengeance, and was about to start fighting them. The protagonist proved that there are better weapons than a katana, shot him, and they all lived happily ever after! Except for Daniel who has 25 years in jail, the samurai, who has half a million in hospital debt after surviving the gun shot, and the wizard, who died.



## Out of this World

*Slater Copen*

"Welcome travelers to the tour of space," our robot tour guide said once we boarded the spaceship. "We will be traveling through the Milky Way and further! Let's start our tour," the robot exclaimed. When we vacated the earth I saw everything! I noticed little details like the different shapes of the clouds and the vibrant, blue sky.

As we arrived at the center of the Milky Way, the robot started to deluge us with specific information about black holes and other planets. I stared at the beauty of the galaxy. The little stars and the big stars sit in the endless dark night in harmony. The unruly, small black holes circled the big black hole like a baby duck imprinted on its mother, even though black holes are known to be hostile. We went to many different areas just as pretty as this. When we landed back home I was extremely jovial, because how could I forget this ingenious and amazing moment?



## The Evil Computer

*Makayla Friedman*

The city of Brookville was one of the most wealthy and jovial cities in its terrain. The people's lives look perfect but had no idea a computer could take that all away from them. JC173G, or Jeremy, was kept in a lab. He had terrorized this city centuries ago when there weren't even computers. In fact, the ingenious computer built himself from the single piece of metal he first was.

Max was picking up his daughter Quinn, from her elementary school. Once they got home, Max went to go check the news on his computer. It was a very significant part of his daily routine. He realized that the computer started to say very hostile things such as "I can see you" and "I know where you live." He ignored the comments until he heard a shriek of fear coming from Quinn and her mom, Hailey. They all vacated with their belongings and drove off. When they returned the computer was no longer there. No one knows what happened to the computer, however, some believe it traveled off into the woods and it's still there to this very day.



## Modern Artemis

*Isabelle Lim*

“Once upon a time, there was a man named Zeus. He was a well-known Actor turned Billionaire-” Leto was interrupted by her 10-year-old son, Apollo who said, “No, Gazillionaire! Tripadillionaire!” “I’m pretty sure Tripadillionaire isn’t a word,” Artemis, his twin sister scoffed. “Anyway, let’s get back to the story. This man was incredibly famous. He had a wife named Hera. They were always in the movies together. Their love was famed but false. Zeus didn’t feel the stirring of true love in his chest when he looked at Hera. But if he divorced her he was sure his salary would spiral and he’d be public enemy #1. So when he met me, Zeus didn’t tell anyone. We got married in secret. Somehow Hera found out and she told the newspaper a whole wad of lies to make everyone, including hospitals unwilling to take me in to help me have you two!” “What happened?” Asked Apollo, even though he knew this story by heart. “Well,” Leto said, “Somehow I found a healer. She hadn’t heard the news so she helped me give birth to my beautiful babies!” Artemis and Apollo leaped onto her lap and they did a group hug.

Apollo was tramping along Bristol Ave. dragging his backpack behind him making sure his homework got good and damaged before he got home. He had guitar classes and flute lessons that day, and he wished he knew how to finish his homework as fast as his twin sister Artemis. She always got straight A’s and was a very athletic girl. After school, Artemis always volunteered at the childcare place. Both of them loved little kids. But another difference was that Apollo was totally a day person, while Artemis loved the night. She said that being hot bothered her. Well duh. But Apollo knew not to argue because his sister was amazingly good at shooting the wooden bow and arrows they had in their apartment. Actually, both twins were the best at archery at camp but Artemis didn’t mind making Apollo black and blue on a regular basis.

Artemis was sitting in the tree that sat in the courtyard under their apartment. She always wondered why her father didn’t come back and buy them a beautiful villa if he was so rich. She wished she had three hunting dogs. She never said this though, because she knew her mother really loved the mysterious guy Artemis couldn’t even remember. It so happened that right at that moment she saw a well-dressed middle-aged man walk under her branch. He had a chiseled face and fiery ice-blue eyes. He looked like someone Artemis had seen before, probably on TV. And then she realized that the man’s slightly curved smile reminded her of her brother’s I’m-about-to-do-something face. She slid off the tree and ran after her father’s departing back. She was the quickest kid in her grade so she caught up with Zeus before he even reached the stairwell. “Zeus,” she sputtered. “I mean dad. I’m Artemis!” He turned slowly. He took in the lithe girl in front of him. She was probably 4-foot something. Her long auburn hair had been inherited from her father, he could tell as had her broad shoulders. “Hello Artemis, my daughter,” he said with pride. “Daddy, why did you never come to see us? Mom really misses you. And Apollo asked me the other day if you had forgotten us!” Artemis cried. Zeus looked heart-stricken. “My daughter, ask me for anything you want to make up for all that

time we lost.”

Apollo watched a man enter, Artemis leading him by the crook of his muscular arm. “My son, ummm...Apollo!” He beamed as if remembering his son’s name was a great achievement. Apollo wasn’t even convinced they are related.



## Happy

*Lily Clarke*

There’s something off about this place.

You know that feeling? When you know something bad is about to happen, but you don’t know what? I’ve felt it every day of my life. Every. Single. Day. Around here, anyway. Looking at my town, you’d think my life is perfect. The luxurious houses with three floors and acres of green grass. The perfectly painted walls and clean, black stone streets. You know that saying? Don’t judge a book by its cover. Well, don’t judge a place by what you see. Sometimes the most beautiful things in the world are really the ugliest in disguise.

I took a vacation once. My family and I drove for days until we reached an empty desert. Nothing around for miles and miles. And call me crazy, but I swear it was the best day of my life. That terrible feeling just vanished. And I was happy-truly happy- for the first time in my life. I think it was the first time I smiled. I cried when we had to go back home. Burning, raging tears that refused to stop. I screamed and yelled and sobbed. And I begged my parents to let me stay. But we went back home anyway.

I fell asleep in the car. When I woke up, I knew exactly where we were. The first thing I felt was that same stabbing feeling. And I looked out the window and we were home. I didn’t talk to my parents for a week.

My parents don’t seem to feel the same way. None of the adults do. You know those movies about mindless zombies? Well, I’d rather the adults be like that than like they are now. They’re always happy. Always. Their smiles always seen, as if plastered on. Their laughs can be heard anytime, anywhere. I hate it. How can anyone stand being like that? Some people think being happy all the time is a gift. And maybe if I had lived somewhere else, I would’ve agreed. But I don’t. It’s a curse I’d do anything to lift.

At least the kids are different. Normal. I feel better around them. That strange feeling fades a little. It’s nice to feel like you’re not alone. At least it was like that before. Now the kids try to be like their parents. They try to smile too. All. The. Time. And don’t get me started on school. We have normal subjects and stuff, but we also get graded on whether or not we smile. Yeah. You heard me. Fifty percent of our grade is based on how much we smile. Fifty-percent. What kind of school does that? Anyways, if anyone asks, that’s why I currently have a D or F in all my classes. I’m not like the other kids. I hate smiling. I hate being happy all the time for absolutely no reason.

No one understands me, though. I don’t expect them to. They all think there’s something wrong with me. And maybe there is, but I won’t let them hurt me. I know who I am and no one can tell me otherwise.





# Julia, Flying Teacup, and the Phantom Whale

*Kiki Welsch*

It was three days before Halloween. Julia was looking out at the ocean. The water was gray and there was a layer of mist over the ocean. In Julia's backyard, there was a tree. It was in its full fall effect, its leaves a blur of orange, yellow, brown and red. That's when she saw a distinct shade of pink against the fall colors.

Julia opened the front door and stepped outside. The air was cool and humid. She picked up the pink leaf. Almost immediately, it began to grow, then spin. Before she knew it, Julia was being lifted off the ground and into the air. It lifted her off the hill where her house was perched, and then down, down over the gray sea. It plopped her on a small island she had never seen before. Then, the bright pink leaf vanished.

The island was tiny. It was more like a huge rock sticking out of the ocean than an island really. Except that there was sand and one single plant growing there. Julia was stunned! She wondered, What was this tiny island doing here? She spotted a large boulder sitting on a pile of sand. Maybe if I get up there I can get a better view, she thought. Julia had almost reached the top when she felt it move. It rolled, increasing in speed as it went down the slope of sand, as if the slope was igniting the boulder's speed. Terror filled Julia. Soon, it was clear she had no choice but to jump. So, jump she did! She jumped over the boulder and into the cold, gray blanket of water.

Luckily, she was a very good swimmer and stayed afloat. Before she could do anything else, there was a sudden disturbance in the water racing towards her. Then, a puff of mist blew out of the sea.

Wait! It was... the breaching of a...

"Pant, pant. I think I lost them. I might be small, but I am as fast as a Great White going for a seal."

Julia whirled around and saw a small dolphin. It was a clearly superior dolphin. Its skin was slick and smooth looking. Its eyes, that were big for a dolphin, seemed to connect with its tiny dolphin mouth, which was in the shape of the cutest smile Julia had ever seen.

"Oh, hello," said the dolphin. "Who are you?"

"I am Julia," Julia said.

"Oh," said the dolphin. "My name is Teacup. My older sisters and I love to play tag, but this time I wanted to explore a little. I should probably go back soon. We are going to hunt for some munchies."

"Well, I was lingering around the house after I finished my homework. Then, there was a pink leaf. When I picked it up, it lifted me off the ground and then put me on that island," Julia said, pointing in the direction of the tiny island that now had no dominating boulder on it.

Teacup's big eyes got even bigger. "The Phantom Whale," said Teacup the dolphin.

"The Phantom Whale?" Julia repeated in confusion.

"Yes," said Teacup. "Long ago, there was a brave orca. She was the Alpha Orca and she dominated all the other orcas. She was really strong and it is said you could see scars on her dorsal fin. She was so huge! She could eat a Great White in one single bite! But she was also very kind. One time, she even lent food to a diver who she probably thought was a way under-fed orca. (She did not have a good eye sight). Another time, she even raised an orphan whale that wasn't even an orca! All sea creatures in this area look up to her and pass on the story just as we pass on family hunting techniques. Most believe that she was magic. It is said that every October she comes back and grants a gift to a very, very, very special human."

"A gift?" Julia asked.

"Yes, the gift of talking to animals," said Teacup.

Later that night, Julia was eating dinner with her family when she realized she could understand her dog!

"I'm really thirsty, but I'm out of water." Julia heard her dog Rudy say.

Amazed, Julia got up from the table and got him some more water.

"Thhaaank you," Rudy said, lapping the water up viciously.

The next day, Julia got out of bed and went to school in a daze. When she got home, she finished all her homework. She read a little and then walked her dog. They were coming into the house when...

"Aaahhh!" Juli shrieked as she fell in a hole.

Rudy's leash was not in her hand anymore. She started to panic. Would Rudy run away and get lost? Wait... if she could speak to animals, then maybe she could...

"Rudy, go in the house. I should be back soon," Julia said.

"Ok," Rudy replied. "As long as you come back soon!" (Rudy hated being left alone.)

Now to get out of this hole, she thought.

Before Julia could try to get herself out of the hole, the ground cracked just enough beneath her for her to fall through. Down she went through the dark hole. Then the hole opened and she was flung in mid air. She landed in the sea. Today was more sunny than yesterday. Blankets of wispy clouds were in the blue sky. For a while, she treaded water and enjoyed the gorgeous view. She was then happy and surprised to see Teacup. Teacup sprang out of the water and then dove under Julia. She then surfaced, right beside Julia.

"Hi!" said Teacup. "How did you get here?"

"I don't exactly know," Julia replied. "I was walking my dog. Then, I fell in a hole and somehow it brought me here," said Julia.

"Wow," said Teacup. "Guess what I was up to?!" Teacup proudly showed Julia a red bandanna. "My sisters and I had just finished a meal when this diver came down in the sea. We were kinda scared at first, but the diver and his buddies just wanted to play 'capture the bandana' with us! I am a very small dolphin even though I am not an adult yet. That is why my name is Teacup. I wish it was something cooler like 'Flash', but I also like the name Teacup. My sisters have names that are about their talents. Like, my oldest sister's name is Diana because she is really good at hunting."

Julia thought for a moment. "You are really fast and small right?"

"Right!" agreed Teacup.

"Then, how about Flying Teacup?"

Teacup let out what sounded like a squeal. "YYYYEEESSS! That is the perfect name for me! Thank you so much!"

"Here," said Teacup, offering the bandana to Julia. "You can have it. Like a friendship bandana."

Julia smiled. She had never had a dolphin as a friend before. But this one in particular was special. Julia and Flying Teacup played Capture The Bandana. Then, all of the sudden, a huge figure started circling them. Julia was shaking with fear. It almost looked transparent, like a ghost.

It came up to the surface and said, "Hello, I am the Phantom Whale. I have magic powers because of this magic jewel a friend of mine found and gave to me. Even though I died, this special jewel brings me back every fall. I pick a very special person to give the very special gift of talking to animals to. This year, I chose you Julia because you are very kind and generous. You are an outstanding friend and you have a good sense of humor. I like people with a good sense of humor. I didn't mean to send you to Teacup."

"My new name is Flying Teacup," Flying Teacup said proudly.

The Phantom Whale seemed to smile and said, "Ok, Flying Teacup. For some reason, this jewel connected you too. Now I know why you two have already become friends. Is that right?"

Julia and Flying Teacup both nodded.

"This is one of the many reasons why I love granting this gift!" said the Phantom Whale. "Julia, I will then give you a portal."

"A portal?," Julia asked.

"Yes," said the Phantom Whale. "A portal to get you to Flying Teacup. So, which portal would you like? The leaf, or the hole in the ground?"

Julia chose the leaf.

"Goodbye," said the Phantom Whale. "Enjoy your gift!"

After Julia said goodbye to the Phantom and Flying Teacup, there was a leaf there waiting for her that would always be there to take her to and from where Flying Teacup lived. She could turn it any color she liked, and right now her favorite color was turquoise.

So, a beautiful turquoise leaf took Julia home.



## Starter

*Julia Terani*

First, get into a comfortable position. You can lay down, or sit up with your feet planted on the ground. Whichever you prefer. Now that you are comfortable, let's begin by focusing on your body and breathing. Place your hand on your stomach and feel your stomach inflate like a balloon. Take a deep inhale and hold it for 7 seconds. 1.. 2.. 3.. 4.. 5.. 6.. 7.. done. Now, feel your stomach deflate as you exhale. Focus on your feet. Suddenly, the muscles in your feet have lightened. Focus on your legs, the muscles in your legs are at ease. No more tension there. Focus on your torso and arms. You feel as light as a feather. You now focus on your head. Not a single thought on your mind. If there is, just grab that thought, and watch it drift away on a cloud. Your head is now clear. Not a single muscle in your body is tense. You are in pure bliss.

I take a slow barefoot step onto the warm, welcoming blades of grass beneath my cold feet. I take a long look at my surroundings. I admire the brown squirrels frolicking around in the rolling hills of Earthy green grass. The golden sunlight beams down on my glowing, healthy face. I admire the early birds chirping and tweeting the morning away on the branches of oak trees. I admire the way the shady oaks provide shade for the Earthworms, cooling down in the fertile soil. I admire the fluffy multicolored neutral-toned sheep playing together. I look down at what I'm wearing. A cute and lengthy white, flowing dress that puffs up when I twirl. The wind starts to blow. Wind blows through my hair. Wind flows back my white long dress. Wind brushes through the blades of green grass. I've never felt so free. I start running. My bare feet crunch through the grass, one step at a time. Crunch. Crunch. Crunch. The wind blows faster. Through my hair. Through my dress. Through the grass. I keep running. Crunch. Crunch. Crunch. Oak leaves sway. Squirrels nibble on chestnuts. I keep running. Crunch. Crunch. Crunch. Sheep nuzzle against each other. Early birds chirp louder. I keep running. I run and I run and I run. My face glistens in the glowing sunlight. The noise of the grass crunching beneath my feet stops. I stopped running. The wind stops blowing. The trees stop swaying. The birds stop chirping. I inhale a deep breath. I take a moment to enjoy the sound of silence. I exhale.

Where am I? I'm deep inside a gloomy rainforest with all sorts of different creatures and animals crawling around in it. There's purple and green toads hopping all over the mud, rainbow color changing parrots, white and black Siberian tigers, exotic wildcats, and other furry friends. The plant life is just as beautiful as the animals. There's tall firm trees with millions of diamond cut emeralds hanging off the branches. There's gold glowing berries spiraling down the trunks of the emerald trees, lighting the gloomy forest with a golden glow. There's a special spot in this magical forest that I always go to for meditating. There's a narrow stream of water that leads to a pond which leads to a waterfall which leads to a lake. I always lean up against my favorite emerald tree as I watch the sun set next to the pond that leads to a waterfall. Next to my favorite tree, lies a wooden, handcrafted sign which reads, "crystal waters lake". In the pond water, I stare at the glowing cyan baby squids and jellyfish. Surrounding me are floating crystals. Amethyst, rose quartz, and tiny diamonds float all around me. A purple sparkly toad hops onto my head, releasing an awakening croak. I inhale a deep breath of the moist, crystal waters air. I listen to the breeze of the wind, the sound of the waterfall, and gaze into the sight of nature.

I feel the warm blazing sun beaming down upon my soft,

glowing skin. I feel billions of heated grains of sand lying beneath my body. I've never felt so relaxed. I listen to the sound of a slight breeze in the air. I glance at the swaying leaves of the palm trees towering over me. I adore the peace of the ocean waves washing up on the shallow seashore. I admire the sounds of the seagulls singing. I cherish the salty scent of the beach bliss. I take a refreshing, icy sip of my beverage that is stored in a half cut coconut bowl. I could stay here all day. I lift myself up from the warm, comforting sand. I take a standing moment to savor one last crisp, gust of morning breeze headed my way. I find comfort in the peaceful voices of nature. The palm trees sway. The ocean waves slide to shore. The morning wind whistles my name. All I hear is harmony.



## Forgotten Souls

*Penelope Mihal*

"Get out! Get out! Luke go upstairs!" my mom screams.

"Wha— I'm your daughter! It's me, Stella!" Something is definitely not right. Tears flood my eyes, my emotions in partial disbelief, and loneliness.

"I said get out before I call the police!" my mom yells once more before I bolt out the door in a fury, headed straight towards the police station. My family has lost their minds. I run through the doors of the police station in a panic, "You have to believe me," I say as I approach the front desk, "my family has literally lost their minds. They didn't know who I was and wanted to arrest me. I don't know what is happening to them!" The police officer working at the front desk doesn't look amused.

The officer looks at me unfazed, "Ok, slow down there, what's your name?"

"Stella, Stella James." He types, what I assume is my name, onto the computer and sighs after he types.

"Listen, kid, whatever kind of hysterical joke you are trying to play here, isn't going to work on me. Now just go home and get outta here."

I look at him once more, "This isn't some kind of hysterical joke officer! What are you saying?"

"Stella James doesn't exist, she's not a real person, ok?" I look at him in disbelief.

"Please, just type it in again. I can spell out my name again, this really isn't a lie. My family doesn't know who I am, and they threatened to call the police on me and have me arrested!"

"It's not showing up, okay? Stella James or whatever doesn't exist. Thank you for coming to tell me this amazing joke but I need you to leave."

"What—what do you mean I don't exist? I am Stella James. You have to believe me. I'm not trying to be funny, I came home, and my family yelled at me to get out of the house."

"You can press charges for something else, but I don't want any part of this joke. So unless you want to talk to me about some other situation, just hit the road kid."

I can't believe this, there must be something wrong with the computer. How is it even possible that I don't exist, I'm a living human and I'm walking around on this Earth, but somehow I don't exist. I thanked the officer for his time, even though it was the most chaotic news of my life, and walk out of the police station. There's a small wooden bench on the other side of the crosswalk that I walk over to and sit down at. Tears come rolling down my face, I'm entirely alone, I can't even go home, and just as I'm about to get up, I hear a voice.



## The Amazing Dog Competition

*Theodore Mihalev*

It is a bright, sunny summer day, and I wake up to the sun shining in my face. Today we were going to take my dog, Charlie, to a very special place in the park.

"Cathy, let's go, we are going to be late," My mom calls from downstairs.

"Coming," I call back, as I am putting on some clothes suitable for the park. Today is a very special day, because today is the National Dog Competition Day. This event starts at 12pm and all dogs are called to a nearby park to win a prize of \$10,000 as well as two pounds of dog treats, and 30 pounds of dog food. My dog Charlie has been training for this competition with me, and he has learned many cool tricks, like shaking my hand with his paw, fetching a specific item, and even jumping over me! I can't wait to win! I run downstairs and get Charlie's dog treats, food bowl, and water bowl just in case he gets hungry and thirsty. My mom had already packed all of the food and water for Charlie, so we are all set.

"Charlie," I call. His head pops out of the living room area. "It's nice to see you!" I tell him. "Are you ready?"

Charlie then barks in approval and runs toward me. Since he is a German Shepherd he is quite big, so when I get in the front seat of the car, he takes up the whole back space.

"Do you have your seatbelt on?" my mom asks.

"Yes I do, as well as Charlie's food and water bowl, and treats."

"Excellent," she tells me. "Let's go!"

We are now driving to the park with my mom and Charlie. He is probably very excited, and I can't wait to show the judges what we can do. The park is close to our house, so we arrive in five minutes and I quickly get out of the car and run with Charlie.

I rush to the line and wait for about thirty minutes until it is our turn with Charlie. Once the man in front of us leaves, it is our turn to go.

"Good afternoon," I say to the judges

"Good Afternoon," They reply back, "Please say your name, as well as your dog's name, so we can begin."

"My name is Cathy, and this is my dog Charlie."

"Very well, Cathy lets see what Charlie can do!"

"Speak!" I say to Charlie, and he barks. "Sit," I say, and he sits. It is going well so far. "Stand, Lie down, and roll over." Charlie does this with ease, and impresses the judges. "Now shake my hand." He walks over and puts his palm to my hand. "Now Charlie, I want you to get my mom's hat." I grin and look at my mom. The judges look at her directions. Charlie then runs to my mom, and takes the hat off her head and brings it to me.

"For our final trick I will need a chair," I say to the judges. One judge with blond hair calls the assistant, who pulls a chair and sets it on the ground next to me. I turn the chair so that the back is facing towards me and away from the judges. "Charlie, Jump!" I say and he runs up, jumps on the chair and goes over my head. "Judges, these were my dog's tricks, and I hope you consider us as the victor! Thank you!" They clap and I rush over to my mom with her hat in my hand and my dog at my side.

"That was amazing," she says with a smile "That deserves first place."

"Thanks, Mom!" I say as I sit in her lap, and wait for the special announcement of who won this competition.

We wait for many hours, talk to each other and play with Charlie, until it is 4:30 and the judges announce the winner.

"Hello all," one judge says. "This has been an outstanding day, and I am looking forward to seeing you all again for next year's event with new tricks, and new specialties. However, today there can only be one winner, and out of all the talented dogs we have seen today, it's a unanimous decision that the dog Charlie, and his owner, Cathy, win this event."

When I heard my name I had mixed emotions. I quickly ran up to the judges stand with Charlie.

"Thank you so much for this honor," I say as they give me a trophy with my name, and dog's name on it. I am taking my other rewards, as I hear the people clapping and cheering. I thank the judges once again, and I go to my mom who is now in tears. This was my first and last win!



## A New Beginning

*Brigitte Pylon*

The protagonist, Chloe, lives a difficult journey of adapting to London from moving there after many years. At Chloe's new highschool in London, Sparkle High, she goes through new experiences and a true teenage life. Chloe dreamed of being popular ever since birth. In a short period of time at Sparkle High, Chloe meets new friends who either are a good or bad influence. She lives through bullies and individuals being malicious at Sparkle High. Chloe has a passion for writing in her journal everyday, expressing her emotions. Shh. Shh. All the things in this journal will be kept in this journal, as soon as it is shut. Right when this journal is opened, people will see it and non stop talk about it. A new beginning can change everything.



## Dying Kingdom

*Wallace Copen*

Once upon a time, there was a king who was trying to salvage his kingdom, Elixir, after a large deluge. After the flood, his citizens created a controversy that heaven didn't approve of his ruling anymore and that they needed to designate a new ruler. All of a sudden he had an ingenious idea, to try and prove to his unruly citizens that he is still worthy of the throne.

He decided to leave the kingdom to show them what will happen when he leaves. It works, they want him back in power! The king was in a cheerful mood and gave everyone some land in return for them letting him rule again. In the end, he found a way to salvage his kingdom and reputation.





# Star-Crossed Lovers

*Maira Reyes*

"In movies, they're called star-crossed lovers," Hunter said as he looked into the darkness. The only thing he knew was that someone was right next to him. Hunter opened his eyes, the yellow torches in the corner were lighting up the room.

"Star-crossed lovers?" Leo asked with raised eyebrows.

They both were helpless in the cell. Both of them being the solution to Mirabelle's experiment. Mirabelle had already taken away the Fire and Ice element. It only meant bad news for them. If she got a hold of the other elements then it would be game over for them and their siblings.

"Basically two people who are not able to be together. Like Romeo and Juliet. But in this case it's me and you." Hunter reached out to grab Leo's hand that was resting on his knee. Then Hunter leaned his head onto Leo's shoulder, trying to feel a little bit better with his lover by his side.

"Who's Romeo and Juliet?" Leo asks, squeezing Hunter's hand lightly. Hunter lifted his head off of Leo's shoulder and looked into his lover's eyes.

"You don't know what Romeo and Juliet are?" Leo shakes his head as he tries not to chuckle. Hunter scoffs and untangled his hand from Leo's, causing Leo to frown a little.

"You're joking." Hunter insisted, but Leo shook his head again, informing that he did not know what the book or play was about. One of Hunter's top books was Romeo and Juliet so seeing that his own boyfriend didn't know what it was, was deeply concerning for the boy.

"Okay, well in this short of time I'm going to explain what Romeo and Juliet is to you, whether you like it or not, hon." As Hunter says this, he stood up in the process. Leo always loved when Hunter would either exaggerate things or when he would put things into excruciating details but Leo didn't mind Hunter's behavior one bit.

Instead Leo would look at him with mesmerized eyes and a soft smile on his face. His siblings would take photos and show them to Hunter in a way to tease the two about how head over heels Leo was for Hunter. But right now his siblings were not there so he could look as mesmerized as he wanted too.

"Are you even listening to me?" Hunter asked and Leo picked his head up from his knee. Leo didn't notice how long he was looking at his love until Hunter's voice was showing more concern.

"Ya." Hunter's smile faded into a smirk. "Then what did I just say?" Leo fiddled with his finger before shrugging.

"Does it matter?" Leo asked which made Hunter shake his head as his smile started to grow. "I'm telling you about one of the greatest books of all time and you're telling me that it doesn't matter?" Leo laughed and pulled Hunter in by his waist.

Hunter started to laugh and wrapped his arms around Leo's neck. Pulling both of them into each other's embrace. The cold, damp atmosphere quickly changed to warm and soft. Like most hugs they embraced each other for a few seconds before leaning in for a kiss but for this hug it was a little bit more different and there wasn't a kiss straight after it.

Hunter didn't want to let go. He made jokes about star-crossed lovers because part of him wants to say that what he said is not going to come true. His bad luck likes to come at the last minute sometimes and he's praying that it won't this time. But Leo wasn't going to decline the loving actions that Hunter was showing him because he wanted to have Hunter in his embrace as well. Hunter was cold and Leo was warm, one of the more perfect but opposite combinations.

The last echoes of their laughter died down and it was silent now. The burns of wood chiming in now and then. The chains on the walls creaking and wavering on their walls.

Leo and Hunter separated for their half cold and half warm embrace. Their foreheads touched. Hunter's eyes were swimming with tears and Leo wasn't far from different. Soon later, their lips connect-

ed in a sweet kiss. Soft and heartwarming but also sad. Both of them are scared that it will be one of their last ones.

"Leo, I'm scared." For one of the first times Hunter doesn't know what to do. A plan. A plan is what he needs that might change both of their fates. But part of him has given up and doesn't know what to do.

"Don't be." Leo replied with a soft smile. He didn't even believe his own words. He tried to believe that there might be some way. Some type of miracle that saved them.

"I'm betting that Nia, Kai, and Lyla are thinking of...some kind of plan to get us out of here. You're not dying here Hunter. None of us are." Leo tried his hardest to console Hunter. Believe it or not, he was one of the few people that could console Hunter. It used to just be Nia-Hunter's sister, but now they had become his family by his side.

"You sure sound confident." Hunter laughed as the tears started to drip down his cheeks and down to his chin. His lip quivered as his body shivered. Leo's eyebrows furrowed with sadness and hugged Hunter again.

Leo needed to make himself sound at least a little bit confident about his words. He was crying too in the moment but couldn't let Hunter see him like that. The person that Hunter was relying on was Leo and if Hunter also saw that Leo was starting to feel the hope slip away from his fingers then they both would give up. He didn't want to let that happen.

Hunter sobbed softly into his shoulder. They both had so much to live for. Leo's last bits of hope were to his siblings that he was 90% sure were going to come. If not, then Mirabelle had for sure caught them. Then something had knocked them both out of their senses, it was the spilling of water that was coming from the bottom of the door.

"I can't do it." Kai admitted as he clenched his hands together. Kai's element was water and he didn't know why he agreed to be the one to break down this humongous door. But he felt like he needed to do something. Or impress someone?

"What do you mean, you can't do it? You were the one so confident about being able to break the door down. Or more like drown the door." Lyla mumbled the last part of what she said. Her insults were nothing new. Her element was Earth and she thought that she would be the one to break down the door but it seemed as Kai called dibs on it first.

"Guys please be quiet. We can't have Mirabelle finding us down here trying to get Hunter and Leo out of the cell." The last was Nia and her element was Wind. She didn't even want to call dibs on breaking down the door as she knew that she had no chance.

"Just leave it to me." Lyla cockily said as she stood in front of her brother, Kai. The boy rolled his eyes but let Lyla continue what she was doing.

Lyla balled her fist up and continuous rocks rolled up on the surface of the door. Once the door was completely submerged then her fist broke and so did the rocks and along with the door. The only thing in sight was dust.

All of them waved their hands to attempt to get the dust out of their faces. And then once the air cleared up, the three were able to see their siblings.

Leo was holding onto Hunter's waist as he had a small smirk. "Knew it."

"Okay, for the record it was my idea to get you guys out." Lyla tried to take all credit for it but Kai seemed to not be having it.

"What are you talking about?" Kai yelled a little too loud which made Nia go up to him and close his mouth with her hand. The room fell silent but the footsteps that were coming closer and closer were starting to increase with sound.

Nia signaled to them to run out of the room and up the stairs that the three previously went down. They tried to go as quietly as possible to try and not lure any more sound than they already did.

The weight on Hunter's chest felt like it was lifted off. They got out of the cell with or without their powers and they were safe. Leo reached down and grabbed Hunter's hand to ensure that they were not Star-Crossed Lovers and just lovers that would have a happy ending.

Hunter wished that he could say that what Leo thought was true.



## The Mystical Forest

*Matthew Macias*

Once upon a time, there were four kids. They love dragons and dinosaurs. Life was a fairytale to them. The kids' names were Ruth, Jeffrey, Alex, and Victor. They were all adventurous. They live in the woods far from the cities. They live in fragile woods. Their parents were always mean to them. The parents' names were Matthew and Izzie. Ruth hated her dad Matthew because he was mean all the time. One day Ruth had enough so she said to her brothers, "Let's get out of this house!"

Alex said, "Yeah, I'm sick of our crazy parents." Their objective was to run away from their parents.

They wandered off to the forest, and all of a sudden Jeffrey was hungry. They didn't expect to linger in the forest. But they were so far in the forest they could not get any food. It was so late, it was around 1 a.m. They collaborate and work together to collect leaves. They decide to sleep next to a tree. They cover themselves with leaves and use their jackets as pillows. Victor woke up and saw a witch! The witch said, "Hi, my name is Wyatt." Victor shouts and wakes everyone up. Ruth said, "What am I-," she didn't have enough time to finish her sentence. She screamed in terror!

"Welcome to Destinyland, where all of your dreams come true," says Wyatt the witch. The four kids saw a dragon flying over their heads. Jeffrey says, "Wow, this is amazing!" Wyatt the witch said, "I know it is a True Wonderland." Jeffrey sees a chocolate water fountain then he rushed over there to get a taste of the Holy chocolate. Jeffrey had an ample amount of chocolate. Jeffrey was ignited to see a chocolate fountain. This was a true wonderland.



## The Huge Disaster

*Jolyssa Guillen*

Penelope began to feel nervous and scared after the deluge had overtaken the city as all the people began to vacate and run. She waited for her brother to come back with something to eat as she waited on top of the roof of an abandoned house while her stomach was growling. She anticipated her brother would come back as she imagined something bad might have happened. As her brother came back she saw a bag full of fruit, it was not much but it was enough to fill their stomachs. They both sat down, you could see the jovial expression on their faces as they were happy they had something to eat.

As they finished eating, Penelope decided to makeshift an old blanket into a bed where they could sleep. After she had finished it was all dark as being locked in a dark room and they could hear the self's breathing so hard. As soon as they fell asleep they could feel the flashing light, they woke up as they realized they were being rescued. They grabbed all their stuff and ran barefoot toward the helicopter, their feet touching the cold rocks. They were both so happy they sat in the helicopter as they discussed how the flood had been hostile and dangerous towards their city.



## A Soft Buzz

*Julian Saez*

A boy lays at his bed, he thinks he's alone, he isn't, his mom left not too long ago, who knows when she would return. Something is there with him, no clue what it is, it's just something, it breathes, it moves, it haunts, it's something.

The boy is thirsty, he goes to get a glass of water, it follows, it watches, it haunts, it lurks.

He's unaware of its presence. If he did he wouldn't know what to make of it. It's an abomination, of something....

He grabs a glass of water, he hears a soft buzz, he turns, nothing, it vanishes, like nothing was ever there, the boy, confused, shrugs it off. The being cackles and laughs, saying to itself, "The boy has no idea I was ever here." It continues its vile laugh, each giggle ramping up in intensity.

The slimy thing returns in a blink, the boy returns to its bed, the thing is curious,

It wonders, it thinks, it believes. The thing, it wants to know more, learn about the boy.....

The disgusting thing goes into the room, still wondering, every eye on its well face will be a compliment, on the boy, it crawls onto the desk, it breathes heavily almost angry, it wonders, WHY DOES THIS BOY GET A GOOD REST WILL , DO I EVEN SLEEP?

It continues its fury questioning every breath, every movement, in a incontrollable fury, it lunges, the boy can't stop it no he won't.

The boy hears a soft buzzing. It gets louder and louder. The boy wackes the mosquito away, and the boy walks off. The thing screeches and roars, it thinks, no, no, I am a disgusting, vile thing, an abomination, an indescribable and horrifying thing. The thing roars and screeches.

The boy returns and sprays the mosquito with a repellent. The thing stops, it halts, it cancels its movement, like if a beast just stopped.



## Lovelle's Christmas

*Lovelle Starks*

One night before Christmas, there was a kid named Lovelle. He was distinct from others because he thought that things can come alive such as gnomes. He lived in a rural country with not that many people in it. So, when he was home alone his mother had these gnomes so when he was sleeping he heard a noise one night and he was so scared he lingered in his bed. So, the next morning he realized that the gnomes were gone, and his objective was to find them. Then he got his friend named Braylen and collaborated with him to find the gnomes so one night he heard the noise again so he and Braylen went to check it out and they found out that it was his dad.



# Sadie and the Spy Stepmom

*Mali Singh*

"Now may the bride and groom kiss, wait I forgot, does anyone object". I OBJECT ME I OBJECT. Hi, I'm Sadie and today's my dad and stepmother's big day. THEIR WEDDING DAY, I never liked my stepmom I always had some bad feelings about her. What if she was a serial killer or maybe she's a gold digger or maybe she's cheating on my dad? Now back to where we were. I OBJECT ME I OBJECT, my dad gave me a look and I knew what that look meant, they don't screw this up look. I tried everything to stop this wedding but nothing worked. I was so upset when I watched the whole wedding and I hated this big fluffy sparkly white ugly dress my stepmom picked out for me.

I didn't really introduce myself so here I go. Hi, I'm Sadie I'm a 12-year-old girl and I love to play sports..... like a lot. I lost my mother, when I was 8 years old, from cancer, but I know she's looking down on me. So it was just me and my dad until he met my stepmom, Hannah. It was a couple of weeks after the wedding and my dad and stepmom just got back from their honeymoon. But my dad had to go straight on a business trip FOR A MONTH. But I shouldn't be surprised, he's always going on business trips. So it was just me and my stepmom, but for some reason, she was always going out. So one day I decided to follow her. She was wearing a long black leather coat with a red turtleneck dress. It was pretty hot outside though but I'm not surprised, she's so suspicious.

She was in a very urban area for some reason, because we lived in a very private area but anyways she started walking down an alleyway. Then she walked towards a warehouse behind very big buildings. But something weird is that she had an ample amount of purses but she only wore one black weird mini-looking purse. Was it important or some? But when my stepmom walked towards the warehouse she put in a code to get in. I was nervous, how was I supposed to get in oh no. While I was hiding behind the dumpsters in front of the warehouse I planned to run and slide into the warehouse door before it closes. I made it but when I slid in I saw the most shocking thing I have ever seen.

There were computers, the walls and ceiling were all made out of metal, and everyone wore black except my stepmom. She was almost distinct with her red turtle neck dress. Everyone was sitting at their desks typing on their computers but I had to hide so I hid under an empty desk. My stepmom was walking to a glass room, it seemed like she was the boss of this weird freaky warehouse. This all was very confusing but I lingered under this table for a while until someone walked over to the desk. When they sat down on the chair at their desk their leg hit my back while I was rolled up like a ball. "Hi," I said with a smile while waving. The guy who sat down at the desk grabbed me by my ear and walked me to the glass room where my stepmom was at. She was changed into a leather black jumpsuit. "WHO IS THIS"?

My stepmom stared at me with shock. "How did you get in here" she said "well um this might sound weird but I followed you" I said with my head down and holding my hands together. My stepmom sighed "first of all what is all of this, you better start explaining yourself or else I'll tell my dad". I sounded like a little brat but who cares it's just my stepmom. "I'll tell you in the car" she grabbed my arm and we walked out the warehouse and we walked to a her car that I've never seen before. It kinda looked like the bat mobil, she opened the door for me and I jumped in the car kinda ignited. My stepmom kinda looked stressed but I didn't care I only cared about how she was going to explain what was going on.

"Basically I'm a spy and what you just saw was my layer/lab and I'm going on a mission right now". My mouth dropped "how long has this been going on for?" I said "well for a couple

of years" my stepmom said "does my dad know?" "No but please don't tell him I'm still planning on when I'm telling him but I guess your helping me on my pretty big mission." "Well what's this mission all about" I asked "well a group of guys have stolen very important gems that are apart of the canon waterfall". "These gems keep the waterfall flowing and all water everywhere on earth to keep flowing". "I've been watching them for a couple months now but now I'm actually catching them and I'm pretty excited about this but we should get going". "we've been sitting here for a while now and try not to talk while I'm driving it bothers me" Hannah said.

I kept my mouth shut but this whole spy thing was so crazy to me. My stepmom was driving super fast I was scared we would get pulled over but we didn't. I thought to myself, am I starting to actually like my stepmom? Maybe I am but my mom would be proud of me. We finally arrived to this secret warehouse that was made out of concrete where these bad guys were. "Okay, change of plans. You're gonna stay in this car," my stepmom said.

"Bu-" before I could finish my sentence my stepmom shut the car door, I really wanted to help her with this mission. I waited in the car for a little bit but I couldn't help it I just had to go in there, good thing my step mom left the window open. I climbed out of the car from the window and ran to the warehouse.

I wondered how I was going to get in but I had an idea. There was a ladder by a big old tree I climbed the ladder up to the window at the top of the warehouse with a rock. I threw the rock at the window and jumped in the warehouse falling a long way down the ground. My stepmom and the three guys were fighting but then I saw the three gems sitting on a table a green gem, red gem, and a blue gem. This was a piece of cake I walked over to the table and grabbed the gems. "Hey who's kid is that" one of the guys said trying to flip back his long black hair. I freezed with my legs apart "I TOLD YOU TO STAY IN THE CAR!" my stepmom yelled.

The guys ran over to me like they were going to hurt me, well of course they were "hey don't touch her!" My stepmom said and then did this cool trick and kicked one of the guys in the nose making him pass out "AWESOME" I said. One of the guys tried to sneak up on me but I kicked them in the face with my new plat-formed shoes. "Two down one more to go" my stepmom said. Then out of no where two of the guys that passed out woke up me and my stepmom were faced back to back with our fists up with the guys surrounding us. The gems fell on the ground by the table and I had to get them back me and my stepmom dropped kicked the guys in the face. I grabbed the nunchucks off the back of my stepmoms back and I knocked on of the guys out. I jumped on the wall and on to my stepmoms hand do a backflip and kicking one of the guys in the face sending them to sleep.

There was one more guy left and we was pretty big and very strong. Me and my stepmom tried to kick him in the stomach but he grabbed our legs and flipped us over. "Is that all you got" he laughed "how pathetic" he said I gave my stepmom a look and she knew what was about to happen. I jumped on to the man's shoulder and covered his eyes with my hands and he was moving a lot. While I had my hands on his eyes my stepmom kicked him in the stomach sending him flying towards the wall. My stepmom tripped him and I jumped off right when he was about to fall. Then my stepmom grabbed his head and lifting his head and then I jumped off the wall and kicked him right in his nose.

My stepmom and I grabbed the gems and ran out of the warehouse to the car "I called the police and their on their way". "Oh crap your dads almost home from his business trip, we have to get there before he does". My stepmom was zooming but we made it on time and then once we got in the house we dressed into better clothes. Then we sat on the couch in the living room like everything was normal. "I'm home" said my dad "what did you guys do while I was gone?" "Oh nothing we just stayed home" said my stepmom. She winked and smiled at me and I smiled back.



# Persuasive Writing



## Uno Is the Best

*Sophia Ruiz*

Uno, the card game, is the best game ever. My first reason is you can play Uno whenever and wherever you want. You don't need electricity to play the game. I always keep Uno cards in my small purse or backpack. I like that Uno is travel friendly; it is small and compact, and I even play it when I am waiting for my food at a restaurant. My second reason is that Uno is a great game for all ages. I play Uno with my younger sisters, my uncle, and even my mom. Finally, Uno is a fun family game that any number of players can play. Uno is a great game for socializing with everyone you know.



## Bullying and Its Consequences

*Jonathan Rojani*

Throughout the years, bullying has evolved into different kinds of bullying, for example, physical and cyberbullying to name some. Children mostly will get bullied for unwantedness such as weight or height, skin color, or the clothing brands they wear and accessories. For example, kids with glasses could get called "four eyes." These are some bullying reasons that children could suffer from not only in person, but also online. As a result, bullied kids will isolate themselves rather than find a solution to their problems. Because bullying is about power and control, so being targeted can cause a child to feel powerless. According to Gordon, S. (2021), "Why victims of bullying often suffer in silence" (Verywellfamily.com). Online bullying is well known as cyberbullying. These threats can be unbearable because bullies scare their victims. In addition, this can be very angering to them because they usually don't know who the bullies are. Therefore, standing up for themselves is almost impossible. This can lead to depression, mental issues, or even suicide.

A bully can encourage other children to bully someone if the victim doesn't reach out to a friend, teacher, principal of the school, or parents for help. Some psychologists claim that standing up to bullies can help a child to mature. According to Derbyshire, D. (2010), "It's not always bad to be bullied: Learning to fight back helps children to mature" (Dailymail.com). But in some cases, standing up to bullies can become physical and create even more problems. Some other people also argue that a child shouldn't ask for help, and learn to solve their own problems. Unfortunately, children might not be able to find the solution or make the right decision allowing them to continue being bullied.

Overall, physical bullying, or cyberbullying can destroy a child's life by lowering their self-esteem and putting them through depression. By not reaching out for help, we give the bullies another reason to multiply. Let's all stand together and end bullying.



## The Olympic Problem

*Noah Hein*

The Olympics have been, and are a major international multi-sport event that has been in place since the late 1800s. However, not all middle schools and high schools offer these sports as options. Schools should implement Olympic sports programs because it will promote healthy activity for students, students would be able to relate and be more social with peers and it can lead to future job opportunities.

Implementation of the Olympics in schools can promote healthy activity for students. It is well known that it is beneficial to physical health, but exercise and activity can also positively impact mental health. Studies by the national library of medicine show that sports can both improve confidence and reduce anxiety. Therefore Olympic sports can promote healthy activity for all students.



## The GPC

*Kady Ho*

(Sanctions: A Sanction is something a country puts on another country to cut off its flow of goods.)

Sanctions are very powerful. For example, Russia had planned their attack on Ukraine. But when sanctions came in the plan fell apart. It deprived them of the resources they needed to do this plan. According to belfercenter.org, "Outside powers could use economic sanctions to prevent internal conflict." Also, "it could pressure one or both of the colliding parties to adopt more peaceful policies." And a country can only do this if they have influence, and how does one get influence? GPC.



## Homework Banned, Happiness Planned!

*Maliyah Holmes*

Students on a day-to-day basis have after-school activities. After-school activities take up an immense amount of time. There is only so much time, things get in the way of homework. Students get overwhelmed and stressed at an early age due to homework and end up cramming their schedules with homework instead of doing what they enjoy outside of academic screens. Homework should be banned from school due to having less time to be a child, schoolwork should be done at school, keeping in mind that not all students have an equitable commute to school or quiet space to complete assignments away from school.



# POETRY





# Haiku



## December's Cold Moon

*Kaiden Park*

Clouds around the moon  
Big moon drifts in pale blue night  
Good weather for me



## Is This What Is Real?

*Theodore Stanford Graham*

People are happy  
I for one do not know why  
People cheer I cry

Do not be sad now  
For you are loved by everyone  
Now I love, I know



## My Heart's Desire

*Cristina Bolanos*

You have been my friend  
You have been my heart's best friend  
So I will thank you

You are there for me  
You are a good friend, you are  
Now my heart's desire



## All About You

*Grace D'Eletto*

Valentines is here  
It is only here for you  
As some like to say

This day's to show love  
It is made for everyone  
To show we love you



## The Day

*Charlie Coberly*

The day you choose love  
The day you express your love  
For all people 'round

The day of chocolate  
The day you send a present  
To make someone's day



## For You

*Maddison Pierce*

For you, a great rose  
For you, all my loving too  
For you, my whole heart

For you, a good treat  
For you, a good home as well  
For you, for me too





## Love Month

*Saori Martinez*

Glistening inside  
Love for you grows like roses  
Love written for you.

Love letters take long,  
I might just tell you instead,  
Be mine for the day?



## Valentines

*Denise Gonzalez*

Roses bring love  
The world is filled with happiness  
February Heart

Pink roses mean sweetness  
Spending time with family  
Love your family



## Holiday Haiku

*Linka Tiesiera*

Pour it in a cup  
Hot cocoa, sweet and yummy  
Sip it once, then twice

Small falling snowflakes  
Twinkling on the window  
But I'm in blankets



## Love

*Maya Schur*

Love is all around  
Leave your hearts with each other  
Red and pink hearts shoot

Chocolate candy  
Hearts beat fast as can be  
It's Valentine's Day



## My Valentine's Day

*Miller Ronchetti*

'Twas Valentine's Day  
I woke up with great despair  
For I was sick then

Without any repair  
And I was a goner I thought  
After I couldn't talk



## 'Tis the Season

*Jose Torres*

Christmas is so fun  
Christmas is a happy time  
Presents are all mine

# Odes



## Ode to Christmas

*Lauren Song*

Jingle bells, jingle bells  
You know it's coming  
Christmas time is almost here  
Homes are bursting with holiday cheer

Trees are going up  
The sweet aroma of fresh pine  
Lingering throughout the house  
So many memories are made by the tree  
Just wait and you'll see

Red, green, gold, white  
Click, cling, rustle  
Stockings are hung  
By the warm crackling fire  
Ornaments dangling on the branches  
The star so beautiful and bright  
As I stare so late into the night

Flour, sugar, eggs, butter  
We stir it all together  
Put it in the oven as we watch them rise  
Hot and toasty ready to decorate  
Icing and sprinkles all over  
Even in my hair  
But I don't care

Christmas Eve my favorite night  
The carols we sing, the candles we light  
Christmas is taunting me  
The anticipation hurts

On Dasher and Dancer and Prancer and Vixen  
Saint Nick comes through the chimney  
We trade cookies for presents  
Then Santa rides away  
On his great red sleigh

Even though I love my presents stacked high  
I forget the real reason why  
The greatest gift of all  
The one God gave us  
This is why Christmas is the best  
Way better than the rest  
We can spend it with family and friends  
My love for it shall never end



## Ode to My Dog

*Aixa Montanez*

Oh sweet Berry, I love you so  
Love your honey eyes, fluffy fur,  
and your iridescent glow.  
The speediest dog known to man,  
who could run the school mile faster than you can!

Oh sweet Oscar, I love you so  
Love your curly tail, mammoth ears,  
and your oddly long nose.  
The friendliest puppy living on earth,  
will always be welcoming unless on alert.

Oh sweet Sal, I love you so  
Love your small chirps, cozy cuddles,  
and your poofy toes.  
The most lovable canine on the planet,  
definitely sweeter than a pomegranate!

Oh sweet doggies,  
I love you so deeply.  
I hope you know  
that I love you completely.  
I'll perish in seconds with you not by my side!  
No more snoozing dogs by the bedside...  
No walks  
No playing fetch.  
No happiness left.  
Thank goodness that's not now  
You're the absolute best!



## Ode to Candy

*Blake Shepherd*

Oh sweet sweet candy,  
Your taste gives me a buzz,  
You will give me cavities,  
If I do not brush.

Oh sweet sweet candy,  
You give me such a rush,  
Which turns into a crash,  
But I do not care much.

You can be sugary or sour,  
You can be gummy or crunchy,  
You can be gooey or hard,  
But you are always delicious.

Oh sweet sweet candy,  
You are just a treat,  
You started off with bitter chocolate,  
Which turned into sweet.

You started as a privilege,  
But now you are a delight for all,  
You are happiness,  
You are the best.

Everyone should feel the bliss,  
That is as good as this,  
Everyone should feel the magic,  
You are a gift of joy.

# Ode to My Kindle

*Charlie Garrick*

My precious, my precious  
My precious little child  
You take me away to worlds gone wild  
Comedy and romance  
Horror and action  
With one flick of my wrist  
You take it away  
Gone is all pain, despair, and sadness  
Instead I'm wrapped up in worlds of madness  
With each new story told my heart grows  
    lighter and brighter  
My imagination soars  
Putting pictures to your words  
You rip my soul from my body  
And place it in a crazy party  
Every adventure is unique and new  
From black to white  
From red to blue  
We dive in head first to every adventure  
When the world falls away  
My heart sings your praise  
When one adventure is through  
I find one anew  
And then we repeat this never ending story  
Away we fly to each new story  
So I'll see you there my precious little Kindle



# Ode to Tacos

*James Whelan*

Oh, Tacos  
The way you have everything all in one  
Tortilla, steak, lettuce, cheese, onions, sour  
cream  
All together  
You make a bad day great  
On a Tuesday night I await my mom's tacos  
The smell of deliciousness seeps up my nose  
I can't wait to put you in my mouth  
For my taste buds will thank me  
Finally, they're ready!  
I make sure to put loads of sour cream on it  
And put in my mouth  
CHOMP, CHOMP  
I take my first bites  
Ahhhhh, delicious  
All of a sudden I am happy  
I go for another  
And another  
Until I can't eat anymore  
I go to brush my teeth  
But I don't want to lose the taste  
I wake up the next morning  
Craving more  
So I have leftover tacos for breakfast  
I don't care what people say  
For it was delicious  
And made my day



# Ode to College Football

*Mrs. Mello*



There's winter, spring, summer, and fall  
but football season is my favorite of all.  
Back to school the students go  
College football is back too, you know.  
Oh, College football you bring out teamwork and comradery  
Your sportsmanship is needed for a victory.  
Fans come to tailgate from near and far  
Dedicated supporters will travel by bus, plane, or car.  
Strangers meet and become friends  
College football connects fans of all generations.  
In the stadium, the band starts to play  
pumping up the crowd for college game day!  
The National Anthem sings, a flyover goes by  
Coaches and players stand with their heads held high.  
Such an honor to play on this field  
College football players are truly skilled.  
The kickoff starts the action  
A 30-yard return is great satisfaction.  
Onward down the field they go  
Another 10 yards for a first down throw.  
A trick play by the running back  
Somehow, he sneaks through the pack!  
The crowd roars because they're in the red zone  
The opposing fans begin to groan.  
Quarter back sneak, they crossed the line  
Touchdown! The feel is sublime!  
The halftime show is a sight to see  
The cheerleaders and twirlers dance around cheerfully  
The band and flag leaders fill us with pride  
It's an honor to be here by our team's side  
The final two quarters are a series of nerves  
It's like a roller coaster ride with many swerves.  
The game is tied, just a few minutes left  
I get so nervous; I hold my breath!  
The kick is up, right through the goal posts  
This is the moment I love most.  
Tears of joy run down my face  
It feels like home to be back in this place.  
Oh, college football you bring all the emotion  
Sometimes it's heartache and sometimes devotion.  
Win or lose, we come to the gridiron in the fall  
To see our favorite teams come and play football.



# Ode to Books

*Ella Riccio*



Books are the best  
They are really blessed  
They come in all shapes and sizes  
They shine bright like diamonds  
If you're a bookworm like me  
You'll definitely experience the joy  
And glee!

Fantasy is filled with magic  
Sadly, something might happen that's tragic  
Sword fights and Dragons are filled with mystery  
Legends are told and will go down in history  
Fairies and magic wands  
With this kind of genre, you will make  
Life long bonds

Fiction books are filled with life  
Maybe the main character will make a decision that isn't right  
I think about characters that dance off the page  
Running across as they come out to play  
I like The Hunger Games and Katniss Everdeen  
The hills are alive with the trees a bright evergreen

Horror is filled with scare  
Hopefully you don't get eaten by a bear  
Scary days are filled with blood  
Maybe you will get stuck in a flash flood  
Penny Wise and Dracula all wrapped up in a bow  
These kinds of books will follow you like a black crow

Mystery is a kind of book that will leave you stranded  
When you write a murder mystery you need to be left  
clean-handed  
Nancy Drew is a binge worthy book  
How about you grab it and take a look?  
These kinds of books will leave you on the edge of your seat  
These mystery books are really neat

Sci-Fi is out of this world  
It's like something in a dream world  
A Wrinkle in Time is an amazing book  
Read the first few chapters and you'll get hooked  
Outer space is a bright abyss  
Space travel mwah \*chef's kiss  
Sci-Fi books you can breeze through at light speed  
These books are amazing, you'll see

No matter what you read  
All books are amazing I hope you can agree  
Read a book or two  
Hopefully it's not a book that will make you blue  
I hope you stuck in your fantasy land  
Maybe you'll become a big fan  
This was my ode to books  
So get up on out there and take a look

# Ode to Music

*Alexandra Pokrywka*



Music  
You are heaven to my ears  
Relaxation to my mind  
The only sense of therapy  
I seem to find  
When I see a choral score,  
My heart longs for more  
I will never stop singing  
With the joy that you're bringing  
People stop and listen  
Whenever you play  
You are my euphoria  
On a dark day  
The sound of glee  
That's what you are  
All worries washed away  
By a wooden guitar  
I can never live without you  
And I vow to never try  
If I attempt such a feat  
Trust me, I will cry  
Soprano, Alto, Treble, Bass,  
Those words light up my face.  
The songs I have sung are etched in my brain  
The lyrics are all words I'll retain  
You are part of me now  
As you have always been  
I will teach you to everyone  
Including my next of kin

# Ode to Football

*Nicholas Loffredo*



Coaches yelling  
Fans screaming  
Players cheering  
This is an ode to football  
Football, you make me feel blessed  
You give me the satisfaction of catching the football  
And make me feel cheerful  
I see the pass go in the air and my life turns as bright as the sun  
Blue skies, green grass, fresh air and a game that is fun  
I can hear the fans cheering for my team  
It's like I get to live a dream  
You introduce me to new people  
I study the plays so I can intercept and juke  
My achievement is not a fluke  
Tall or small I can make people fall  
You, football, let me run, catch and move  
Live my life with nothing to prove  
Oh football I will play you day and night  
Even without light  
I feel like I can be me when around you  
I get butterflies every time I step on your field  
There is a power that you wield  
Oh football, oh football how you bring me joy  
I have played you since I was a small boy  
And hope for many more years of happiness with you  
Football this is an Ode to you

# Ode to Sleepaway Camp

*Cassidy Granz*



Oh Sleepaway Camp!  
You are like home  
Don't have to make my bed or fold any clothes  
The food isn't great, but the memories are  
All my worries and doubts are left in the car.

Oh Sleepaway Camp!  
Look at my wrist  
It's flooded with friendship bracelets,  
made from friends that I miss.

Oh Sleepaway Camp!  
I love your big lake  
It's even better than cookies to bake.  
Vroom! Vroom! Splish! Splash!  
I hop on the jet ski and hope I don't crash.

Oh Sleepaway Camp!  
I'll always admire  
The warm summer nights,  
roasting s'mores by the fire.

Oh Sleepaway Camp!  
You are the best  
There's so much to do, there's no time for a rest.  
My rosy cheeks are now burnt  
From the blazing, hot, sun  
I'm having so much fun.  
I don't want to go back  
I tear up as I begin to pack.

# Ode to Dance

*Kailey Zelaya*

When you dance you have nothing to lose  
You go into a new world that you choose  
Doing leaps and turns in your dance shoes  
And putting your other thoughts on snooze

You could dance among the stars  
Or leap to Mars  
Dance with your imagination  
No hesitation

Turns on one leg  
And pirouette  
Then take a leap  
With great technique

Dancing is the best  
When you can express  
Letting go  
And feeling the flow

Point your feet  
Dance to the beat  
Put your hands in the air  
Like you just don't care

Shaking with fear  
To my parents  
Whom I'm near

Here on stage  
Dancing uncaged  
Boom! Your done for the day  
This is my ode to dance.



# Ode to Smoothie Bowls

*Sophia Weiss*

The taste of the tangy fruit  
makes my tongue tingle  
But as I take another bite  
I get sweet crunchy granola

Everything together feels  
like I'm in a dream  
Strawberries, Bananas, Blueberries  
throw them into a blender

Granola, Chia Seeds,  
Strawberry and Bananas on top  
The first scoop is heavenly  
taking that scrumptious bite

Right there and then  
you must eat it quick  
the thick goes away  
into a river you must be quick

It tricks you as a dark  
purple color not having flavor  
but it tastes cooling, sweet and tangy

As you blend all the frozen fruits  
They swirl in multiple colors  
pink, blue, yellow and any color want to make

Alone they are just fruits  
But all together  
Makes the best snack ever





## Ode to Books

*Kaia Mitchell*

Oh...Books.  
My favorite pastime.  
Your words forming a beautiful rhyme.

The Harry Potter books  
about a brave Gryffindor.  
These books are no bore.  
Alongside his friends  
Harry Potter brings Voldemort to an end.

The Percy Jackson books aren't quite the same  
because to the gods this is a game.  
He must follow the prophecies  
this isn't a hypothesis.  
He will fight for his life.  
While Luke's will be taken by Annabeth & #39's knife

Keeper of the Lost Cities is a dream.  
The Neverseen will lose to the unstoppable team.  
Sophie will lead them to victory.  
A natural leader  
and nobody can beat her.

Cinderella died in his embrace.  
And Manford is a disgrace.  
He is an awful king  
nobody believes he is Prince Charming.  
He wants your head  
and Sophia wants him dead.

39 clues to solve  
Will Amy and Dan find them or will the world dissolve?  
Cahill's: Lucian, Ekaterina, Janus, Tomas, and Madrigal.  
Can they beat them all?

The Heroes of Olympus are a force that can't be broken.  
Gaea will soon be awoken.  
Percy Jackson back again.  
He will fight with his friends.  
The team that will always win.

Scythes bring death.  
They let people take their last breath.  
Citra and Rowen must compete,  
which one will be beat?  
Faraday's not dead  
but that's all that can be said.

These amazing tales, books bring me  
are all I ever need to see.  
Oh...Books.

## Ode to the Ocean

*Elizabeth Alexander*

Oh, ocean  
Waves gently flowing over me  
I wonder how high in feet  
As the waves get larger  
They surpass buildings that are taller  
This is an ode to the ocean

The endless waters to the sunset  
The glistening reflection makes the water look holy  
Surrounding island with your beauty  
With your fame and glory  
Since the beginning to the end  
This is an ode to the ocean

As you hear the gentle roar  
As the waves crash in  
The sea creatures below my feet  
Whales and turtles are diving in  
Coral reefs brighter than city nights  
This is an ode to the ocean

Take a dive in the deep blue sea  
Explore until the ocean floor  
Oysters wearing pearls to  
Snail shells looking like curls  
Orca callings being heard miles away  
I can't imagine a more beautiful sound  
This is an ode to the ocean

The delicate night of the sea  
With the star's constituents to the scenery  
A quiet place where you can be free  
I can't think of a better scenery  
Oh ocean



## Ode to Chicken Nuggets

*Lou Gaillot*

Golden and crispy  
Tender and delicious  
Chicken nuggets, my heart's true mistress  
Dipped in sauce  
Or eaten plain  
My love for you will always remain  
In times of joy  
In times of woe  
Chicken nuggets, I'll always know  
You're the one I need my fast food queen  
Chicken nuggets, you're my everything.







## Ode to Nature

*August Brancato*

Oh, how I love your natural ways  
The infinite cycle of destruction and rebirth  
The way you create these beautiful landscapes  
The way you destroy them without mercy  
The secrets you hold in each and every organism,  
    mineral, and process  
My ode to the secrets in every little thing

The birds chirping, singing a ballad  
Just for you  
The dolphins swimming, entertaining  
for you  
The leaves rustling, dancing in the wind,  
for you  
The crops growing, trying to reach the world above  
trying to reach you  
All for you, nature

Everyone and everything will eventually die or be destroyed  
But that is the beauty of life, what gives it meaning  
Some may live in fear of that fact  
Some may embrace it  
It's really not about what you decide to do about it, though  
It's so you can humble us, even if ever so slightly  
It's so we can learn to appreciate and live life to the fullest  
But all good things must, eventually  
come to an end  
My ode to the original and oldest meaning of life

The way you leave one season behind, not looking back.  
But you do it with such grace and beauty, none dare question it.  
Your serenity helps me when my mind is scrambled  
Just your essence is enough to heal not just the mind, but the  
    soul as well  
As we sit, eyes closed, using only breathing to guide us  
senses sharpen, and only then, can we truly feel your presence  
From your warm, healing times in summer  
To your cold, grounding times in winter  
From your ascending, rejuvenating, times in spring  
To your melancholy, bittersweet times in fall  
We appreciate you  
My ode to the forgiving seasons and to the soul and mind

You have enlightened us, humans with the ability to learn,  
    to grow.  
You gave all animals the ability to adapt to the unstoppable  
force that is you  
You're cold, yet warm, your utter chaos, yet perfect tranquility  
This mix and jumble of emotions must  
truly be  
you  
This was my ode to nature

## Ode to Roller Coasters

*Olive Boog*



Ode to Roller Coasters  
By Olive B

The wind is in my hair  
Flying without a care  
All my anxieties are gone  
The feeling is a phenomenon

I taste the beautiful day  
Only the track knows the way  
The loop spins me around  
It is fearlessness that I've found

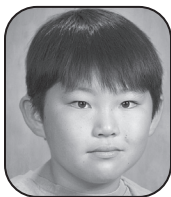
As I climb the rickety track  
I know there's no going back  
As we drop I feel eager  
The people look about a centimeter

I hear the sound of people screaming  
After the ride I am beaming  
Every coaster feels like new  
All I want to do is stay on you

The line is long but worth it  
I wait for an hour but never throw a fit  
I jump into the cart  
Just waiting for the ride to start

I love the anticipation  
I feel on top of the nation  
The track is roaring  
It's anything but boring

As we start to pack up  
I feel extraordinarily tough  
When we leave I'm not sad  
Bye, bye Six Flags



## Ode to Cinema

*Lucas Lee*

Oh, Cinema,  
How I love your exciting adventures  
and your dazzling images  
on a silver screen.

I step into the cinema.  
The person at the booth  
greet me like I'm a celebrity.  
Oh what great feeling that is for me.

I smell a lovely aroma.  
The popcorn smell dancing and prancing  
around my nostrils.  
Oh, it is a wonderful scent.  
As I sit down in my cushy seat  
I gobble a morsel of my salty treat  
Oh, it tastes like heaven.  
The liquid butter flowing down my throat like  
a waterfall.

The trailers end.  
The lights begin to dim.  
The silver screen turns on  
as if it is being awakened from its nap.  
The movie starts  
I am transported to another realm.  
It is like I am inside the movie  
that I'm watching.  
I walk through the movie  
I'm following the plot.

Crash, bang, boom!  
As the screen comes alive.  
I see drama, comedy, action, and many more  
on the magical window.  
While I'm in the realm.  
It feels like I can fly in the sky high  
I can do many more with my imagination  
as I watch the magical flick.

The movie ends.  
The lights go back to normal.  
I leave the realm.  
I'm back to the real world where I see reality.

When I leave the cinema, it reminds  
me part of this famous poem to say.  
"So dawn goes down by day,  
nothing gold can stay."

## Ode to Theater

*Cecilia Hill*



Lights on the stage, cast mates by your side  
The curtains open  
All at once yet it feels like slow motion  
After each song, applause  
After each joke, laughter  
No other feeling is like being on stage  
That is the beauty of theater

Whether it's a sparkly bow tie, a leather jacket, or a little hat.  
a costume turns you into someone else  
As soon as you step on stage  
You are a character  
That is the beauty of theater

Acting with people you know so well  
Backstage, friends  
Onstage, who knows?  
friends, enemies, family, somewhere in between,  
It's limitless  
That's the beauty of theater

Oh no  
That wasn't my line  
The moment you realize it you are caught in a ball of fire  
The lights burning you  
But you can't apologize  
There's nothing you can do except hope somebody saves you  
And they do  
That's the beauty of theater

Memorizing songs could be a pain for others  
But when the melody flows into my ears  
I get it  
The words fall from my mouth like water from a pitcher  
I dance across the stage with lights on my face  
That is the beauty of theater

As we passionately sing final line of the final song,  
I realize  
It's over  
We did it  
The crowd erupts in applause  
And we'll do it all again tomorrow.  
This is my ode to theater

# Golden Shovel Poems

Golden shovel poetry was recently invented by the acclaimed poet Terrance Hayes in honor of Gwendolyn Brooks, the former poet laureate and the first African-American to win the Pulitzer Prize. The last words of each line of the original golden shovel poem are, in order, words from Brooks's poem "We Real Cool." In our case, students picked lines from songs or poems that they admire as inspiration for their own golden shovel poems.



## Friendship Morgan Kelly

(from Taylor Swift's "Cardigan")

Flowers blossom and die. Just like **A**  
Friendship. From **friend**  
To strangers, love to hate. **To**  
Being your number one, to nothing at **all**.  
Do all relationships end like this? **Is**  
It a universal law for people to grow apart? **A**  
Law that everyone seems to follow at some point? A **friend**  
Is someone that everyone deserves. Deserve **to**  
Feel wanted by someone. Then feel wanted by **none**.



## Thank You, Dad Samantha Ulbrich

(After "You're on Your Own, Kid" by Taylor Swift)

You gave me **everything**.  
The stars, the moon, and the sky. **You**  
taught me it's okay to **lose**  
as long as you try. **Is**  
there anyone more caring than you? **A**  
goal I set is a **step**  
towards making you proud. You are all I aspire to be and more. **You**  
will forever give, but you will never **take**.

## Dreams

Dilani Badkar

(After "Love" by Lana Del Rey)



We look around as we hear **the**  
sound of the big bright **world**  
around us. We wonder, "**Is**  
it as it seems?" as we live through dreams. But are they **yours**,  
or do they belong to the countless other optimistic **and**  
hopeful people, searching for cures? **You**  
keep wishing but never appreciating. We **can't**  
change the past, but we can carve our future. There is no room to **refuse**  
what we have been given, but there is room to pursue **it**.

## Peonies

Skyler Bral

(for Taylor Swift)



I am a flower. **If**  
You shade my light, **you**  
Won't see me blossom and will **never**  
admire my colorful petals. You'd cause me to **bleed**  
And wilt. Though **you're**  
dimming my light, I will pivot, and need you **never**.  
Don't try to steal my light. I'm **gonna**  
Keep blooming, but you won't see me **grow**.

## Sunny and Cloudy Days

Avery Kawejsza

(After "Another Day of Sun" from La La Land)

The darkness will fade away 'cause  
There is a new day every morning.

And the dark cloud rolls,  
So it may come back around.

There may even be rain and  
It may shower harder as it's  
Cloud moves throughout another  
Day. But, there will be a new day  
That is filled of  
Even more sun.





# Tribute Poems



**Dalai Lama**

*Huckleberry  
Gardner Howarth*

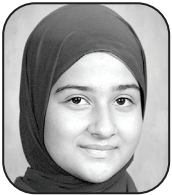
He is very modest  
And is always honest.  
In schools he taught a lot  
And was the peace mascot.  
He was a refugee,  
His home he had to flee.  
When Tibet was released,  
He got plenty of peace.  
Even though he is old,  
He is still bright and bold.



**J. K.  
Rowling**

*Isabella Sznaider*

Although she was bullied,  
She found ways to succeed.  
Although her past was dark,  
For books she had a spark.  
And then success found her,  
After Harry Potter.  
Her books are known world-wide,  
Her pages filled with pride.  
What she has created  
Cannot be outdated.



**Priyanka  
Chopra**

*Rashida Ismael*

Although raised really poor,  
Her life can't be ignored.  
Winning Miss World pageant,  
She acts with great talent.  
Married to her dear love,  
They're peaceful like a dove.  
Great films like D - D - K  
Made her a star today.  
Successful in acting,  
Maybe next thing she'll sing.



**Lady Gaga**

*Karina Hibbert*

Born in New York City,  
No one gave her pity.  
But they were all proved wrong  
When she sang her first song.  
When people call her strange,  
Those words don't make her change.  
Her songs always inspire,  
Passion fueled with fire.  
Outrageous she can be,  
Her future's much to see.



## Misty Copeland

*Eleanor Mammen*

In times of great hatred,  
Her fate was created.  
She faced battles bravely,  
Though others were shady.  
She danced so hard each day,  
At last she got her way.  
It was no mystery  
That she'd make history.  
She was ABT's best prize,  
A star in young ones' eyes.



## Selena Gomez

*Nissa Jannati*

Born in the Lone Star State,  
She faced a mean classmate.  
A talented actor,  
Her music's a factor.  
With her number one song,  
She makes music yearlong.  
With so many awards,  
She made herself adored.  
Her fame will never fade,  
Thanks to the fans she made.



## Lizzo

*Skylar Poursalimi*

She was born in Detroit  
And could not disappoint.  
Once discovered by Prince,  
She's been #1 since.  
Four-time Grammy winner,  
She was told, "Be thinner."  
When hit by hate, by shame,  
She would always stay sane.  
Her passion was to sing.  
She always added bling.



## LeBron James

*Levi Haloossim*

He missed a lot of school,  
But he's nobody's fool.  
Not the average Joe,  
He became a young pro.  
He worked hard on his game  
And gained a lot of fame.  
He won it all four times,  
Even higher he climbs.  
Most valuable player,  
An NBA slayer.



## Eminem

*Ryan Nasseri*

He hit the stage with rage  
And birthed a new song age.  
Guess who is back again?  
Slim Shady ain't your friend.  
He worked and got on top.  
Nothing made him quit pop.  
They said whites cannot rap.  
He proved that was just crap.  
From 8 Mile in Detroit,  
His success proves his point.



## Jordan Peele

*Atticus McElwee*

He grew up a black nerd.  
His future seemed quite blurred.  
He is so very smart  
All he does creates art.  
On YouTube he did skits  
He had people in fits.  
Then he switched to movies.  
They really were groovy.  
His life got very dope  
With "Get Out," "Us" and "Nope."



## George Springer

*Griffin Cosman*

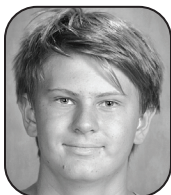
Wearing 4 on his back,  
This MVP won't slack.  
A World Series legend,  
His skills are so splendid.  
He's quite a great hitter,  
Nowhere near a quitter.  
With his great baseball skills,  
He is quite the great thrill.  
Despite his bad stutter  
His game is like butter.



## Jeremy Lin

*Jonathan Hom*

Though no one thought he could,  
He became really good.  
Against the Asian hate,  
He still can dominate.  
He scores game winning threes  
And rips through teams with ease.  
Each time he shoots and scores  
Crowds burst in deaf'ning ROARS!  
His championship ring  
Shows he can do great things.



## Michael Phelps

*David Nance*

Into the pool he dives,  
And through the lane he drives.  
On lap two he will lead,  
Because he is pure speed.  
Past the record he went,  
The rule of time he bent.  
His bouts of depression  
Just did not repress him.  
With twenty-eight medals,  
He finally settles.



## Lewis Hamilton

*Daniel Fridman*

He faced separation,  
And discrimination.  
The man revived his team.  
World champion, the dream.  
He is the best indeed,  
Giving to schools in need.  
Seven tournaments won,  
He will never be done.  
His magnificent name,  
Forever etched in fame.



## Neymar Jr.

*Lyra Rabbie*

With his passionate soul,  
He was always at goal.  
He almost always will  
Use his amazing skill.  
He's not afraid to shield  
The ball that's on the field.  
He had some injuries,  
With three league victories.  
Champions league top score,  
He could win even more.



## Elon Musk

*Salar Arani*

He started off abused,  
His ego was quite bruised.  
In school he was bullied,  
But he still took the lead.  
Businesses he began,  
To begin his great plan.  
He made electric cars,  
Now he's going to Mars.  
As a great engineer,  
He brings the future here.





## Kevin Durant

*Simon Rivlin*

An MVP or not,  
He brings the top tier shot.  
His life was not easy.  
He gave to the needy.  
His use of his success,  
Fit his nonprofit best.  
Eleven all-star games,  
He's worked his way to fame.  
The man always stood tall  
And conquered basketball.



## Leo Messi

*Sasha Amiri*

Born in Rosario,  
Sadly, his growth was slow.  
That did not affect him,  
Since he's a magician.  
He dominated teams.  
He is the best, it seems.  
Seven Ballon d'Ors,  
Walking teams out the doors.  
The World Cup in his hands,  
#10 loved by fans.



## Michelle Obama

*Cheyenne Montgomery*

She's from the Prairie State  
And blessed with gifted traits.  
They said she did not fit  
But still she did not quit.  
Harvard Law was a breeze.  
She earned many degrees.  
Model for black women,  
First in her position.  
Now she's giving to schools  
And changing many rules.



## Venus Williams

*Graysen Gregory*

She grew up pretty poor,  
But now she is adored.  
With grace she hits the ball,  
An icon standing tall.  
She fights for women's rights  
And soars to greatest heights.  
Her steadfast discipline  
Gets wins at Wimbledon.  
This tennis player's fame  
Has truly changed the game.



## Greta Thunberg

*Ellerie Newell*

Environmentalist,  
She was the catalyst.  
Climate change made her sad,  
She knew it was quite bad.  
Educating the youth,  
She showed the world the truth.  
Small protests outgrew her,  
Making change come sooner.  
Once a total loner,  
Now no one can slow her.



## Steven Spielberg

*Elexus Ray*

Bullied as a young child,  
His life was very wild.  
Although he was skinny,  
Achievements were many.  
"Saving Private Ryan"  
Left the people cryin'.  
Great films brought him much fame  
And then the awards came.  
Director for all time,  
His movies are sublime.



## Lin-Manuel Miranda

*Clay Carpenter*

A bully in his school  
Made him feel like a fool.  
All can see his great stage  
On the New York Times page.  
History he rewrites,  
The great lines he recites.  
“Hamilton” the great play,  
Incredible, they say.  
With songs of insane fame,  
Broadway won’t be the same.



## Lorde

*Jack Dorfman*

Hailing from New Zealand,  
Her songs are beat-feeling.  
She did what she wanted,  
For that she was taunted.  
She used to be ignored,  
But her songs won awards.  
Some claimed she plagiarized,  
But she pushed through the lies.  
She sang a great big hit.  
She writes and still won’t quit.



## Malala Yousafzai

*Serkalem Belachew*

School laws were very wrong,  
Yet she stood up so strong.  
When she made her big stand,  
She announced her demand.  
When she heard the gun shot,  
Her life then changed a lot.  
Thankfully she survived,  
Which left the world surprised.  
With her Nobel Peace Prize,  
She’s a star in girls’ eyes.



## Dak Prescott

*Leo Babikian*

He lost much family,  
Went through calamity.  
He wears the number four,  
As he changes the score.  
Doubted was he always  
But now he deserves praise.  
Throws dots to receivers,  
He is an achiever.  
The rookie of the year,  
An impactful career.



## Pope Francis

*Abigail Yoda*

His name was once Jorge,  
But it’s Francis today.  
First from Argentina,  
Flores, near marinas.  
He’s now bishop of Rome.  
The Vatican’s his home.  
He champions the poor,  
A change from popes before.  
A pontiff for today,  
He’s proud to lead the way!



## Lil Nas X

*Sophie Govindraj*

Raised in the Peachy State,  
Music making was fate.  
Being both queer and black,  
Money he once did lack.  
He's now inspiring,  
It's not at all tiring.  
He won on MTV,  
A star all can agree.  
The king of country rap  
Closes the genre gap.



## Ali Stroker

*Surya Kaplan*

She's paralyzed knee down,  
But doesn't make a frown.  
Although she cannot walk,  
She seems to be the talk.  
Once terribly bullied,  
Now she's taking the lead.  
With her Tony Award,  
She is really adored.  
Even in a wheelchair,  
She's now a millionaire!



## David Goggins

*Theo Mayeda*

He was three hundred pounds,  
Then turned his life around.  
He did hell week three times.  
His teammates fell behind.  
He watched his group get shot  
And he did not get caught.  
He ran one hundred miles,  
Always with a smile.  
With all his strength and drive,  
He's the toughest alive.



## Jimmy Butler

*Dylan Moran*

He got kicked out so young.  
He couldn't sleep, no fun.  
No mom, he thrived and grew,  
He had ball to pursue.  
A hard-working player,  
In game he's a slayer.  
Bench warmer to all star,  
His game has come so far.  
Defensive team three times,  
Not much of a surprise.



## Megan Rapinoe

*Maya Hively*

Although some think she's strange,  
She fights to make a change.  
She's a soccer stand out,  
Strong activist no doubt.  
Her goals and games inspire,  
She's gay and much admired.  
For females who all play,  
She fought for equal pay.  
She won Olympic gold,  
Plus two World Cups all told.



# What My Name Means



*Sophia Belzer*

My mom thinks my name means “smart” and “lazy girl”  
My dad thinks my name means “kind” and “always worried girl”  
My sister thinks my name means “annoying but makes me food”  
My best friend thinks my name means “happy and friendly”  
My history teacher thinks my name means “girl who needs to pay attention”  
The girl who sits in front of me in English thinks my name means “person who is always talking to me”  
My cousins think my name means “girl who is always doing something crazy”  
My grandma thinks my name means “girl who helps me cook”  
My tennis coach thinks my name means “girl who needs to practice her serves”  
I think they forgot some things like,  
“Girl who is worried about her grades” and  
“Girl who hopes to make her family proud” and  
“Girl who wants to make her friends smile” and  
“Girl who sometimes lies awake at night thinking about something she said” and finally, “Older sister who is proud of her younger sister”



*Nailah Cheka*

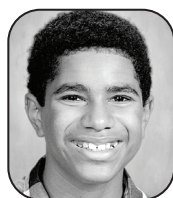
My mom thinks my name means “girl who always tries to get good grades”  
My dad thinks my name means “girl who fights hard to get what she wants”  
My brothers think my name means “girl who is always finding something to do”  
My favorite cousin thinks my name means “girl who tells her everything and favorite family cousin”  
My grandma thinks my name means “energetic girl”  
My close friend thinks my name means “nice, amazing friend”  
My best friend thinks my name means “crazy, best, best friend”  
My uncle thinks my name means “girl who plays the violin”  
My aunt thinks my name means “adventurous girl and babysitter”  
But honestly, I think my name means a girl with many goals who loves to ice skate and rollerblade, a girl that loves the snow and really wants to be an interior designer when she grows up, and a girl who just wants to be a successful person.



*Sasha Peterson*

My mom thinks my name means “always helpful and not that smart”  
My dad thinks my name means “only thinking of sports and family”  
My dog thinks my name means “best playmate and treat giver”  
My best friend thinks my name means “this kid plays basketball too much”  
My dentist thinks my name means “this kid has bad teeth”  
My neighbor thinks my name means “always playing outside and playing video games”  
My cousin thinks my name means “only eats at restaurants”  
My grandma thinks my name means “best shopping partner”  
My uncle thinks my name means “great sports player but not that smart”

I think they left some things out:  
“Best chess player ever” and  
“Goes fishing all the time” and  
“Loving to hear whale noises” and  
“Dreams of living in a big house” and  
“Listening to music.”



*Ali Jackson*

My mom thinks my name means “on phone too much”  
My dad thinks my name means “smart”  
My brother thinks my name means “plays too ruff”  
My cousin thinks my name means “too lazy to play”  
My grandma thinks my name means “buys too much stuff”  
My cat thinks my name means “picks me up too much”  
My friend thinks my name means “vending machine”  
My P.E. teacher thinks my name means “does not do mile runs well”  
My grandpa thinks my name means “is getting bigger”

There’s some stuff that they left out like “wants to go to New York” and “wants to go fishing” and “worrying about my cats at school” and “likes to play Xbox with my brother and cousin” and “likes looking at rainfall on the car window.”



*Ayla Jannatipour*

My best friends think my name means  
 “Full of joy and laughter.”  
 My mom thinks my name means  
 “Always trying harder and never gives up.”  
 My dad thinks my name means  
 “Girl who is obsessed with sports and loves our dog.”  
 My soccer teammates think my name means  
 “Always smiling and always trying harder.”  
 My dog thinks my name means  
 “Always ready to play and give snuggles.”  
 My sister thinks my name means  
 “Girl who is always annoying her.”  
 My cousin thinks my name means  
 “Sharer of secrets.”  
 My grandma thinks my name means  
 “Always has a smile on my face.”  
 My soccer coach thinks my name means  
 “One of the best passers on the team.”

I think there’s some stuff they left out, like:  
 “Worries about homeless animals and people”  
 “Has doubts about her grades.”  
 “Dreams about going to Paris.”  
 “Loves being with teammates.”  
 “Loves nothing more than spending time with her friends.”



*Piper Freelen*

My Dad thinks my name means,  
 “sweet but super sassy.”  
 My Mom thinks my name means,  
 “Mischievous but loving.”  
 My sisters think my name means,  
 “Rude, but my built-in best friend.”  
 My bestie thinks my name means,  
 “Shy but could kick your butt.”  
 My Gommie thinks my name means,  
 “Darling and graceful.”  
 My Grandpa thinks my name means,  
 “Loving.”  
 My Grandma thinks my name means,  
 “Gentle but short-tempered.”  
 My Teachers think my name means,  
 “Talkative and hard-working.”  
 I think  
 There’s some stuff they forgot, like  
 “Avid reader,” and  
 “Stubborn as heck,” and  
 “Overthinks everything,” and  
 “Loves nothing more than baking on a snowy day.”



*Zachary Kuperberg*

My Dad thinks my name means  
 “Boy who goes on mountain bike rides with me.”  
 My teacher thinks my name means  
 “Always complains” and “Really smart.”  
 My dog thinks my name means  
 “Always sleeps with me” and “Plays with me.”  
 My coach thinks my name means  
 “Doesn’t get tired.”  
 My PE teacher thinks my name means  
 “Got 6:10 on the mile” and “Likes soccer.”  
 My friends think my name means  
 “Makes me laugh.”  
 My neighbor thinks my name means  
 “Has a dog that barks too much.”  
 My doctor thinks my name means  
 “Kid with no health problems.”  
 My desk partner thinks my name means  
 “Can’t shut up.”  
 I think  
 There’s some stuff they left out, like:  
 “Gets sad alone” and  
 “In their free time listens to music” and  
 “Gets home from school at 9:00 because of sports” and  
 “Loves animals.”  
 “Who is afraid of getting a B on a test.”



*Zaidee Abarca*

My sister thinks my name means “girl who’s annoying and always taking my clothes.”  
 My mom thinks my name means “gets mad very easily and is always hungry.”  
 My Starbucks barista thinks my name means “girl who always comes to Starbucks every day and has long orders.”  
 My friends think my name means “Super funny and energetic.”  
 My dad thinks my name means “daughter who’s always asking for “unnecessary” things and is always mad.”  
 My Ballet teacher thinks my name means “girl who’s always late and doesn’t talk to anyone.”  
 My dog thinks my name means “always wants to hold me and take me everywhere.”  
 My cousins think my name means “fun and always wanting to play hide and seek.”  
 My friend group thinks my name means “funniest person and shares her snacks.”  
 However, there are some things they left out like:  
 The girl who loves being around her friends,  
 The girl who has the biggest obsession with Starbucks,  
 The girl who hopes her future will come out how she wants it to,  
 The girl who wants to travel the whole world.  
 And lastly, the girl who stresses over her homework.



*Taryn Leishman*

My brother thinks my name means “does too many sports.” and “gets Starbucks too often.”  
 My mom thinks my name means “always hungry.” and “goes shopping too often.”  
 My dad thinks my name means “favorite daughter.”  
 My best friend thinks my name means “amazing passing partner.” and “always there for me.”  
 My synchronized swimming coach thinks my name means “always gets first place but is on her phone too much.”  
 My science teacher thinks my name means “annoying.”  
 My friend thinks my name means “calls me too much.”  
 My volleyball team thinks my name means “powerful serve.”  
 My English teacher thinks my name means “raises her hand too often.”

However, I think there are some things they left out like “goes to Brandy Melville everyday”, “tries very hard to succeed in school”, “wears too much pink”, “hates to read.” and “does nails every day.”



*Garrett Reese*

My Mama thinks my name means  
 “Kid who sleeps in way too much” and “Kid who plays too many video games”  
 My Papa thinks my name means  
 “Kid who needs to wash the car” and “Kid who needs to put the dishes in the dishwasher”  
 My Brother thinks my name means  
 “Kid who is really cringey” and “Kid who is really annoying”  
 My Grandma thinks my name means  
 “Kid who loves to see me” and “Kid who is very interested with the rabbits outside of my house”  
 My friends think my name means  
 “Weird kid who somehow managed to infiltrate our friend group”  
 My dog thinks my name means  
 “He who bears the snacks”  
 The kids on my bus think my name means  
 “Kid who listens to foreign music without earbuds”  
 My teachers think my name means  
 “Huh? Well you’re on my attendance sheet, so therefore I totally knew you even existed”  
 My Spanish Teacher thinks my name means  
 “Making decent progress”  
 But there are some things they don’t know about my name, such as:  
 “Lies awake at night worrying about the future” and  
 “Hopes for change in an unjust system” and  
 “Just wants to go home and unwind” and  
 “Bravery, but just in name”



*Sonja Burokas*

My Mom thinks my name means  
 “Bakes and makes a mess.”  
 My Dad thinks my name means  
 “Rides back from swim” and  
 “Complaining that I’m tired in the morning.”  
 My sister thinks my name means  
 “Thief of clothes” and  
 “Bully’s my brother together.”  
 My friends think my name means  
 “Goes to Starbucks together.”  
 My dog thinks my name means  
 “Gives treats” and  
 “Plays outside.”  
 My swim coach thinks my name means  
 “Always bumps into the lane line.”  
 My teacher thinks my name means  
 “Wants to move seats.”  
 My classmates think my name means  
 “Never brings a pencil.”  
 My neighbor thinks my name means  
 “Babysits the kids.”  
 I think  
 There’s some stuff that they left out, like  
 “Wants to be a lawyer” And  
 “wants to live in the big city” And  
 “Loves comedies tremendously” And  
 “Makes cookies when I need to escape reality”  
 And “Wants to fall asleep listening to music.”



*Sacha Graham*

My mom thinks my name means “Guardian”  
 My dad thinks my name means “Pizza and Pasta lover”  
 My brother thinks my name means “Not Related to him”  
 My friends think my name means “Slim Shady”  
 My dog thinks my name means “Emotional Support Dog”  
 My PE teacher thinks my name means “A Hard-working kid”  
 My other friends think my name means “Good at soccer and running”  
 My other dog thinks my name means “The person who feeds and plays with her”  
 My grandma thinks my name means “The kid who cooks and bakes with me”

I think they missed a few things though.  
 I think my name means “Boy who wants to get as fast as he can”  
 “Boy who dreams of being better at soccer”  
 “Boy who wants to be a master at cooking”  
 “Boy who wants to be more athletic”  
 And “Boy who wants to work out more”





*Aida Ebrahimi*

My name means a lot of things to different people in my life.  
 My mom thinks my name is "Loves to play volleyball and Let's go back to NYC!"  
 My dad thinks my name is "Get's good grades and Is always sleeping."  
 My friend thinks my name is "Let's hang out and Funny."  
 My dog thinks my name is "Playful and Always gives treats."  
 My coach thinks my name is "Needs to hit harder."  
 My teacher thinks my name is "You need to pay attention and Stop talking!"  
 My grandma thinks my name is "A perfect little girl."  
 My neighbor thinks my name means "Kid who is very loud."  
 However, what I think about myself is that "I am a slow runner," "Loves the rain," "Likes staying in instead of going out," "Has weird dreams," and "Is competitive."



*Luca Raine*

My Dad thought my name meant,  
 "kid who cares too much about sports and always is doing sketchy things"  
 My Mom thinks my name means,  
 "Has too many friends but is nervous with new people"  
 My Brother thinks my name means,  
 "always is one step ahead of me with everything and tries to make me paddle out with him in surfing so he can scare me"  
 My dogs think my name means,  
 "Cuddles too much"  
 My best friends think my name means,  
 "Crazy and only shows his real self around us"  
 My new school friends think my name means,  
 "Very good friend material"  
 My sports coaches think my name means,  
 "Always one of my best players"  
 My teachers think my name means,  
 "Always doing something either good, funny, or bad"  
 My mom's boyfriend thinks my name means,  
 "Always makes me laugh and quickly got used to me and likes me a lot"  
 They might all know stuff about me but,  
 They don't know that,  
 "I always am nervous about how I fit in"  
 "I wish everybody knew me and my name"  
 Also, they missed that,  
 "I wish I could know what to say to everybody"  
 "I only perform well in sports for my own enjoyment, if I didn't have fun but was the best I would stop"  
 "Worries about being successful"



*Lucas Slan*

My mom thinks my name means forgetful but gets good grades.  
 My dad thinks my name means gamer but an early bird, like me.  
 My dog thinks my name means The chew toy who pets me.  
 My sister thinks my name means Annoying.  
 My friends think my name means Funny but weird.  
 My teachers think my name means Quiet but jokes around.  
 My dentist thinks my name means Doesn't floss.  
 My coach thinks my name means The joker  
 My grandparents think my name means Ballplayer  
 But I think my name means some other important things  
 I think it means hard worker.  
 I think it means thinker.  
 I think it means a boy who loves dogs.  
 I think it means energetic and odd.  
 I think my name means honest and nice.



*Jonathan Simantob*

My sisters think my name means "annoying, little, middle child that bugs us."  
 My dad thinks my name means "the boy who is gifted in basketball and football."  
 My mom thinks my name means "a lot of dropping and picking me up from karate."  
 My grandma thinks my name means "the kid who loves to eat."  
 My karate teacher thinks my name means "the kid with good manners and sharp techniques."  
 My doctor thinks my name means "the young kid who is in very good shape."  
 My dog thinks my name means "great owner and good at walking."  
 My physical education teacher thinks my name means "a young boy who needs a better mile time."  
 My friends think my name means "the goofy kid"  
 However, deep down I know my name means "loves dogs, birds, Diet Coke, and going out to ski on a nice and cold winter day."



*Kayla Fields*

My mom thinks my name means “helps around the house and loves to listen to music.” My sister thinks my name means “I’m beautiful and hard working.” My friends think my name means “funniest person alive” and “obsessed with ‘80s songs.” My Starbucks barista thinks my name means “cake pop lover” and “strawberry açai drink lover.”

My P.E teacher thinks my name means “a good basketball player.” My basketball coach thinks my name means “works hard during practice.” My math teacher thinks my name means “participates during class.” My dentist thinks my name means “brushes teeth well.” My grandpa thinks my name means “a wonderful person.”

I think some people left out a lot of stuff, like “wishes to go on a fancy vacation” and “always does work on time.” Loves watching dolphins” and “worrying about losing championships next year” and “loves listening to the rain.”



*Shaya Nayebdadash*

My dad thinks my name means “good at basketball.” My mom thinks my name means “watching YouTube in the car” and “good at math.” My sister thinks my name means “bad at Roblox even though I don’t play” My uncle thinks my name means “looks like me” and “becoming a soccer player.” My P.E teacher thinks my name means “over-accelerating the mile.” My dog thinks my name means “give me treats” and “belly rubs.” My friend thinks my name means “making it to the Olympics.” My grandma thinks my name means “go to Harvard or Princeton” and “get a good degree.” My coach thinks my name means “improving in basketball with his handles” I think they left out a few things like, “riding bikes around the pier,” “scared of the dark,” “loves going to the beach with Kha,i Graig, and Halen,” “loves playing Fortnite with new people I meet and with my friends,” and lastly “loves investing my money in different games and brands.”



*Evelyn Chung*

My brother thinks my name means “sometimes annoying” and “fun to hang out with.” My mom thinks my name means “a creative little angel” and “loves music, like me.” My dad thinks my name means “needs lots of rides to ballet” and “likes exploring new things.” My best friend thinks my name means “knows me like the back of her hand” and “can always trust her.” My teachers think my name means “has good grades.” My ballet teacher thinks my name means “perfectionist.” My basketball coach thinks my name means “definitely tries her best.” My pediatrician thinks my name means “needs to grow taller.” My neighbors think my name means “the loudest one in the neighborhood.” I think There’s some things that they left out, like “hopes to become a successful person” and “loves food, especially sweet things” and “worries about what other people think of her” and “likes to be challenged” and “dreams of becoming an actress.”



*Lourdes Hernandez*

My mom thinks my name means “always asking for boba” and “cries for no reason” My dad thinks my name means “little girl with a passion for soccer” and “always up for a challenge” My sister thinks my name means “bossy and annoying older sister” My friends think my name means “perfect person to tell your secrets to” and “always down to go out” My cousins think my name means “mini-me” or “little Lulu” My soccer coach thinks my name means “the last one to finish the laps” The barista at the boba shop thinks my name means “always has the same order” My nieces and nephews think my name means “free babysitter” The neighbor’s cat thinks my name means “main food source” and “always ready for cuddles” However, I think they left out a few things like “worries about her future although she’s only 11”, “loves being with children”, “always makes time for others”, and “worries about others more than herself” and finally “loves nothing more than to drown out all of her thoughts with music.”



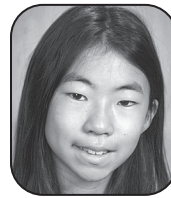
*Fernando De La Cueva*

My dad thinks my name means “helpful son, caring”  
 My mother thinks my name means “handsome kid, funny very nice”  
 My brother thinks my name means “kid that takes my clothes, annoying”  
 My English teacher thinks my name means “kid with good handwriting”  
 My friends think my name means “funny, cool, nice friend”  
 My basketball coach thinks my name means “the best player on my team”  
 My math teacher thinks my name means “the kid that pays attention in class sometimes”  
 My grandma thinks my name means “very helpful, nice, funny grandson”  
 My bus driver thinks my name means “cool, funny”  
 They forgot that “I like to work on cars and love to do IXL, and loves football but plays basketball and plays video games all day.”



*May Plaks*

My mom thinks my name means  
 “Leaves home too often,” and “Loves art and singing like I do.”  
 My dad thinks my name means  
 “Very unorganized,” and “Loves math, like I do.”  
 My cats think my name means  
 “Loves cuddling us” and “Is always on that little device that makes sound.”  
 My grandparents think my name means  
 “Gifted at music.”  
 My school friends think my name means  
 “Really kind, optimistic, and smart.”  
 My choir friends think my name means  
 “Has a very strong voice.”  
 My choir conductors think my name means  
 “We can trust her to sing well.” And “An enthusiastic singer.”  
 My math teacher at the Russian School of Math thinks my name means  
 “Should definitely go to Harvard.”  
 My school teachers think my name means  
 “A good author,” and “Works hard on art-related things.”  
 However, In my opinion, there’s more, like  
 “Loves animals a lot, especially her cats.” and  
 “Likes to have lots of fun every day.”  
 “Wants to try new things,” and  
 “Tries to resolve arguments.” And also  
 “Enjoys Taekwondo but not many other sports.”  
 I think my name is all of these.  
 As you can see, there’s more to me.



*Ayaha Yukimoto*

My mom thinks my name means “smart, hardworking, and independent.”  
 My dad thinks my name means “his little girl.”  
 My brother thinks my name means “Annoying.”  
 My dog thinks my name means “the person who walks me and feeds me.”  
 My friend thinks my name means “So funny, helpful, judgemental.”  
 My cousin thinks my name means “the girl that always gets attention when she goes to school in Japan.”  
 My grandma thinks my name means “first girl to be born and the only bilingual grandchild.”  
 My dentist thinks my name means “the girl with crooked teeth, and the person who needs braces.”  
 My classmates think my name means “smartest student in class jk, strange, and funny.”  
 But I think they left some stuff out  
 I think my name means “honest, funny, strange, and weird.”



*Camden Denny*

My mom thinks my name means  
 “boy who does not clean his room” and  
 “second breakfast.”  
 My friend thinks my name means  
 “trips to the Grove to eat food at the Farmers Market” and  
 “enjoys playing Roblox with me.”  
 My friend thinks my name means  
 “kid who gives me snacks at lunch.”  
 My neighbor thinks my name means  
 “scared of dogs.”  
 My grandma thinks my name means  
 “good manners.”  
 My nana thinks my name means  
 “getting taller”  
 and “my sweet boy.”  
 My cousin thinks my name means  
 “always playing a game.”  
 My 4th-grade teacher thinks my name means  
 “student who wants to play Blooket.”  
 My coach thinks my name means  
 “Speedy” and  
 “dribbles like Thomas Muller.”  
 I think there are some more things to say about me, like  
 “worries about taking tests at school” and  
 “finishing my homework.”  
 “Dreams about playing basketball with friends.”  
 “Especially loves to go to Eataly and eat pizza.”





*Alex Davidian*

My mom thinks my name means “funny and extremely hyper.”  
 My brother thinks my name means “annoying and fun to play with sometimes.”  
 My dad thinks my name means “crazy and loves everyone.”  
 My dog thinks my name means “always gives me treats and will always play with me.”  
 My cousin thinks my name means “always needs my attention, and always loves to go where I want to go.”  
 My best friend thinks my name means “loves to play around, and is a big goofball.”  
 My grandma thinks my name means “knows how to fix any electronic and is so smart.”  
 My P.E teacher thinks my name means “I love talking with my friends and hates trying on my mile.”  
 My friend group thinks my name means “funny, and can be a little mean when playing around.”  
 I think they are forgetting some things about me because when I play around I mean it in a good and funny way not to hurt anyone. I try to keep my grades up. I just have a lot of stress about my homework and things around the house. I don’t mean to bother my friends and family, I just want to feel included. I don’t think they know I really love going out on walks and riding bikes. I love electric bikes. They are my favorite things I wish to have one day.



*Matin Toumari*

My mom thinks my name means “hair is too long and hard working” My dad thinks my name means “always spending money and loves the dog more than me”  
 My twin thinks my name means “always there for me and person to sit next to on rollercoasters” My older brother thinks my name means “always asks to go out together and always talking while I’m on the phone”  
 My best friend thinks my name means “person to tell secrets to” My PE teacher thinks my name means “needs to run a better mile time”  
 My grandma thinks my name means “well behaved” My grandpa thinks my name means “wears clothes too big for him” My dog thinks my name means “treat giver and person to sleep with”  
 However, there are some things they left out. I think my name means “tries hard to get all his assignments done,” “tries to take care of his responsibilities,” “tries to wake up in time for the bus,” “tries to run faster but runs out of energy,” and “tries to eat healthy but just can’t resist.”



*Liam Kenney*

My neighbor thinks my name means “ a kid who does nothing but step on my grass”  
 My friends think my name means “ give me food”  
 My coach thinks my name means “ needs to gain more weight”  
 My doctor thinks my name means “ a kid who gets sick too much”  
 My dentist thinks my name means “ needs to floss more”  
 My dad thinks my name means “ make my coffee” or “ do my laundry”  
 My mom thinks my name means “ do my dishes” or “ go outside”  
 My sister thinks my name means “ too spoiled” or “ get me food”  
 My cat thinks my name means “ give me comfort” or “ let me out”  
 I think, they left some things out, like a kid who has “ dreams of making it big”  
 or “a kid who goes to sleep at night in chills”,  
 or “a kid who just wants to succeed for the better”,  
 or “ a kid who wants to be great at everything he does”,  
 or “ a kid who wants to be the most respectful they can be”.



*Jayden Dubose*

My brother thinks my name means “a goofy girl and a shorty.”  
 My cousin thinks my name means “a great person to vent to and very hilarious.”  
 My grandmother thinks my name means “failure because I don’t stay on top of my grades like I used to.”  
 My mother thinks my name means “ a little girl who plays too much but she’s caring.”  
 My best friend thinks my name means “a very helpful person and a sleepy girl with no energy.”  
 My little cousin thinks my name means “a chew toy and a friend to play with.”  
 My cats think my name means “a bed to lay on and a good caretaker.”  
 My sister thinks my name means “a person who never knows how to ask for help.”  
 My aunty thinks my name means “a shy girl who doesn’t talk as much anymore.”  
 However, there are some things they don’t know about me, like “dreaming not to be a failure” and to “ get out more and not to be shy” and “not worrying about how people think of me” and “a girl who listens to music a lot to get out her stress” and “a girl who has stress she tends to ignore it but she knows it’s wrong and just deals with it” and “just a little girl who isn’t supposed to be pushed into things she doesn’t want to do.”



*Carter Westbrook*

My dad thinks my name means too much money and never cleans the room  
 My mom thinks my name means very smart and funny  
 My brothers think my name means annoying and fun to play with  
 My friend thinks my name means goofy  
 My pe teacher thinks my name means too much energy and great motivator  
 My dogs thinks my name means fun to always play with  
 My teacher thinks my name means always talking  
 My cousin thinks my name means annoying  
 The student store man thinks my name is always begging for a dollar  
 I think my name means athletic  
 I think my name means pretty smart  
 I think my name means lots of energy  
 I think my name means super high jumper  
 I think my name means pretty cool



*Nahum Mulu*

My sister thinks my name means  
 “kid who fights with me and is nice”  
 My mom thinks my name means  
 “kid who is crazy and needs better grades”  
 My dad thinks my name means  
 “obsessed phone user and never goes outside”  
 My Dentist thinks my name means  
 “Kid who needs to brush more and is hard to control”  
 My neighbor thinks my name means  
 “Kid that cuts my grass and gives gifts to me”  
 My pe teacher thinks my name means  
 “Kid who needs to run faster and does anything for otter pops”  
 My guitar teacher thinks my name means  
 “Kid who tries hard and is really helpful”  
 The starbucks worker thinks my name means  
 “waits for their drink and always buys the same thing”  
 My little cousin thinks my name means  
 “boy who plays with me and who finds good movies”  
 I think there’s some meanings they left out  
 “Boy who wonders if people are real”  
 “Kid that’s a picky eater”  
 “Kid who loves starbucks and boba”  
 “Loves himself”



*Jaya Fox*

My brother thinks my name means “annoying but also good company”  
 My mom thinks my name means “a sweet girl with a sweet tooth”  
 My dad thinks my name means “always wanting to learn new things”  
 My step-mom thinks my name means “full of empathy”  
 My cats think my name mean “FOOD DISPENSER”  
 My teachers think my name means “an overachiever and perfectionist”  
 My friends think my name means “fun, but overthinks everything”  
 My grandma thinks my name means “loves baking just like I do”  
 My dance teachers think my name means “dedicated”  
 However, there are some things they don’t know about me, too  
 Like the fact that if people around me aren’t happy or calm  
 I can’t be either, and that I dream of being successful and wealthy, and that I have very high expectations of myself, and that I occasionally worry about what other people think of me, and that sometimes I feel like my responsibilities are just so overwhelming.



*Piper Abrams*

My mom thinks my name means “loving and caring.”  
 My dad thinks my name means “funny, and has a sweet tooth.”  
 My brother thinks my name means “annoying, but there for me.”  
 My best friend thinks my name means “we can be weird together.”  
 My school friends think my name means “short tempered but also funny.”  
 My horseback riding trainer thinks my name means “sweet, but falls off too much.”  
 My tennis coach thinks my name means a “fast learner and a hard worker.”  
 My neighbors think my name means a “dog whisperer.”  
 My PE teacher thinks my name means “she always tries to get a good mile time and really likes running short distances.”  
 However, they do miss some things like how I’m afraid of failing, I don’t really like people, how I have anxiety, and how I really want to live somewhere in the wilderness. That’s what my name really means.



*Jamie Valdez*

My mom thinks my name means  
“precious” and “helpful.”  
My dad thinks my name means  
“favorite daughter.”  
My older sister thinks my name means  
“different” and “pretty.”  
My little sister Jocelyn thinks my name means  
“bigger sister that is artistic” and  
“fun to play with.”  
My youngest sister Sophia thinks my name means  
“kind.”  
My friend thinks my name means  
“An empathetic person” and “is very funny.”  
The person that sits across from me on the bus thinks my name  
means  
“fun to talk to.”  
My grandma thinks my name means  
“zealous.”  
My oldest sister Elizabeth thinks my name means  
“gift from God.”  
I think that they left some stuff out, likes  
“spending time with my friends and family” and  
“loves every second she can help change the world” and  
“loves playing Roblox” and  
“worries that one day she will not exceed.” and  
“dreams to share kindness with others.”



*Sophia Valera*

My older brother thinks my name means “loves to play fight  
and is always hungry”  
My oldest brother thinks my name means “loves baking and  
loves boba”  
My mom thinks my name means “is on her phone too much  
and needs better grades”  
My dad thinks my name means “hates and loves walks and  
changes hair color too much”  
My best friends think my name means “always steals my  
food”  
My cousin thinks my name means “laughing until our stomach  
hurts”  
My music teacher thinks my name means “needs to practice  
violin more”  
People I sit next to think my name means “doodles in notes  
too much”  
My puppy thinks my name means “the one who loves me  
unconditionally”  
But I’m so much more than that  
Like how much I love music and  
Love being on calls with friends and  
Is obsessed with the movie “Mid90s” and  
How much I love skateboarding.



*Melyssa Guillen*

My mom thinks my name means “really smart but needs to try  
harder and  
Kid who needs to get along with her siblings”  
My dad thinks my name means “likes to draw and likes to read  
comic books”  
My English teacher thinks my name means “talented at drawing  
and needs to turn in her assignments on time”  
My sister thinks my name means “fun to play video games  
with and really annoying sometimes”  
My classmates think my name means “barely speaks in class”  
My history teacher thinks my name means “needs to participate  
more in class”  
My cousin thinks my name means “really funny”  
My cousins puppies think my name means “picks us up too much”  
My brother thinks my name means “even more annoying little  
sister”  
However there are some things they don’t know like “sometimes  
doesn’t want to be annoyed” and “tries hard to finish  
her assignments on time” and “thinking about what to do” and  
“stressing about what my parents expect of me” and “that I  
like listening to music when I am feeling down.”



*Dave Galeano*

My mom thinks my name means  
“kid that takes out the trash.” and “kid that is always playing fifa  
23.”  
My dad thinks my name means  
“Kid that loves chicken nuggets” and “kid that eats too much  
Taco Bell”  
My Dog thinks my name means  
“Boy who picks up my poop” and “boy who feeds me everyday”  
My sister thinks my name means  
“Brother who is annoying” and “Brother who talks too much”  
My coach thinks my name means  
“Boy who loves to jump rope”  
My teacher thinks my name means  
“Kid who doesn’t turn in his homework on time”  
My favorite cousin thinks my name means  
“Cousin who always begs me to play FIFA 23 with me”  
My brother thinks my name means  
“Older brother that bothers me too much”  
My neighbor thinks my name means  
“Boy who plays soccer outside everyday”  
I think  
There is some stuff that they left out, like  
“Dreams of wanting to become a well known soccer player” and  
“Stressed all the time” and  
“Worrying what I’m going to become in the future” and  
“Has doubts about doing well in school” and  
“Boy who loves sunsets and listening to birds.”





*Khai Pallatt*

My brother thinks my name means “super annoying but funny at the same time”

My dad thinks my name means “spends a lot of money and needs to wake up earlier for school”

My mom thinks my name means “very athletic and loves video games”

My dog thinks my name means “cuddles too much and needs to feed me more”

My music teacher thinks my name means “tries very hard and is getting better”

My baseball coach thinks my name means “definitely an all-star”

My friend group thinks my name means “will end up skipping school from a bug bite”

My best friend thinks my name means “loves to mess around with people”

My P.E. teacher thinks my name means “needs to run faster on mile days”

But I think they forgot a lot like, “never responds to text messages”, “always eating or sleeping or playing video games”, “loves to watch magical movies”, “loves sports.”



*Ranel Tehrani*

My mom thinks my name means

“the person in the family that is way too competitive” and “a person that is really good at every subject besides math.”

My dad thinks my name means

“My son who is really good at soccer” and “the only one in the family that likes Cristiano Ronaldo.”

My older brother thinks my name means

“the most annoying person in the world.”

My younger brother thinks my name means

“the brother that is always helping me out if I need it. also “the brother that loves me and cares about me a lot.”

My uncle thinks my name means

“the person that is caring and adores soccer” and “the person who loves doing fun activities.”

My soccer coach thinks my name means

“one of the best and smartest players that are on the team.”

My friends think my name means

“The guy makes jokes at the wrong times.

My grandma thinks my name means

“The boy who is kind and sweet.

My English teacher thinks my name means

“A kid who tries his best in class.

Although these opinions could be true, what I think my name means is a person that loves to play soccer, and basketball, wants to make friends, loves to help people, loves being with family, and loves to go on vacation.



*Niayesh Aguayo*

My mom thinks my name means “a smart girl that loves shopping.”

My dad thinks my name means “TikTok obsessed girl that has a caring heart.”

My brother thinks my name means “funny, but sometimes very annoying.”

My friends think my name means

“A really kind person that you can always look up to.”

My dogs think my name means “the holy treat giver.”

My volleyball coach thinks my name means “t talented player.”

People in the stores think my name means “a worker that’s not in her uniform.”

Brandy Melville Employees think my name is “girl who shops here too much and takes too many handfuls of stickers.”

My neighbors think my name means

“the girl who always accidentally hits the ball over our gate.”

While most of it may be true, what people don’t see is that my name also means “the girl, who overthinks every mistake she makes, big or small.

The girl who is adventurous and fearless, but is scared of growing up to become an adult. The person who pays attention to the little details her friends say to make them little gifts of their favorite things.” That is what I think my name means.



*Arcei Phillips*

My mom thinks my name means “her pumpkin and her little model”

My dad thinks my name means “one and only favorite daughter”

My cousin thinks my name means “funny and creative”

My best friend thinks my name means “loving, caring, and outgoing”

My friend group thinks my name means “talks too much and laugh that is so loud it can break a cup”

My Science teacher thinks my name means “talks too much and talks too loud”

My niece thinks my name means “the best auntie in the world”

My brother thinks my name means “the best little sister in the universe”

My dog thinks my name means “the belly-rubbing champion”

However, there are some things that they left out like...

When I grow up I want to be a cosmetologist

and I want to own my very own shop

And that I really do like to read

And how I can sing like nobody’s watching

And that I love to paint

And I love to run but I never do

And how good I can actually play the violin



*Asneth Lopez*

My mom thinks my name means  
 “need to work harder and get better grades”  
 My sister thinks my name means  
 “Someone she can talk to about her problems and nice”  
 My brother thinks my name means  
 “Hard working when it comes to soccer and sometimes sad”  
 My dad thinks my name means  
 “Always nice to people”  
 My aunt thinks my name means  
 “Always nice to her family”  
 My teachers think my name means  
 “Never getting her work done”  
 My dog thinks my name means  
 “Always loves giving me a walk”  
 My bestie thinks my name means  
 “Always have fun and always being nice”  
 My cousin thinks my name means  
 “Someone who she can play Roblox with and who she can call  
 every single day.”

But I feel like there were some things they missed, like “always hiding who she is and staying up late trying to finish the homework”, lying in bed awake sometimes, worrying what other people think about her and rethinking if she really wants to play soccer.



*Laila Taylor*

My best friend thinks my name means “short and crazy”  
 My friend thinks my name means “the girl with anger issues and the girl that loves pickles”  
 My dog thinks my name means “my favorite person”  
 My brother thinks my name means “silly little sister”  
 My mom thinks my name means “the girl who wants a dog and a ferret”  
 My science teacher thinks my name means “the girl who can never turn in her work on time”  
 My bus driver thinks my name means “the girl who forgets her bus pass  
 And needs to come on time”  
 My history teacher thinks my name means “the person who needs to participate in class”  
 My grandma thinks my name means the “best grandchild of hers”  
 However, there are some things they don’t know like “I have bad anxiety and am an overthinker and I cry sometimes in the dark, I like to go on midnight walks and I have a fear of speaking in class”



*Amaya Martinez*

My dad thinks my name means “favorite daughter that loves dogs and bunnies”  
 My mom thinks my name means “really good at swimming and likes to be on her phone”  
 My sister thinks my name means “good at keeping secrets and that sleeps a lot”  
 My brother thinks my name means “girl that dresses funny”  
 My brother thinks my name means “that likes to eat a lot and that is funny”  
 My bunny thinks my name means “girl that loves me way too much and that has more photos of me her on her phone”  
 My friend group thinks my name means “annoying and has a nice smile”  
 My swim coach thinks my name means “girl that takes way too long to get in the water and that does not try”  
 My English teacher thinks my name means “student that is nice to everyone”  
 However, they forgot that one day I would like to have 2 bunnies and 4 dogs, also want to become a professional swimmer or a veterinarian and that I love my bunny and my dog with my whole heart, and that I don’t like water polo and I don’t like getting yelled at and I love Mexico and want to live there.



*Jazmin Marquina*

My mom thinks my name means “the only one that helps her”  
 My sister thinks my name means “the crazy and fun sister”  
 My English teacher thinks my name means “the girl who always forgets her things”  
 My aunt thinks my name means “the girl who loves her dog too much”  
 My science teacher thinks my name means “the girl who won’t talk”  
 My best friend thinks my name means “the one who is always going to be by her side”  
 My history teacher thinks my name means “the one who always says good morning to”  
 My PE teacher thinks my name means “the girl who needs to run faster”  
 My math teacher thinks my name means “the one who does good work”  
 However, there are some things they don’t know like I love to sing, dance, color, and cook Hispanic food.



*Danae Love*

My sister thinks my name means “A girl who loves to take pictures, and Loves to play with”  
 My step-dad thinks my name means “A girl who likes to be in her room all the time, and A girl who likes to read”  
 My dad thinks my name means “A girl who likes to dress, and A girl who loves Hershey bars”  
 My mom thinks my name means “Likes to be on call with friends, and A girl who likes Arizona tea”  
 My aunt thinks my name means “A good example for her son”  
 My grandma thinks my name means “My only granddaughter, and Really tall girl”  
 My friends think my name means “Has really good pasta, and Funny”  
 My little cousin thinks my name means “ Likes to hang out with”  
 My P.E teacher thinks my name means “ Can get a better mile time, and Wants to have volleyball unit really bad”  
 However I think there are some things they forgot like “ A girl who loves to watch movie marathons”, “ Loves the smell of flowers,” “Loves listening to music,” “Loves wrapping gifts for people” And “likes getting new shoes.”



*Huck Rose Marshall*

My mom thinks my name means  
 “The person who never wants to watch movies”  
 And “The person who plays “way” too much video games”  
 My dad thinks my name means  
 “The person with the childhood he always wanted”  
 And “The person he taught how to surf”  
 My grandma thinks my name means  
 “The best kid she knows”  
 And “The only grandchild she’ll ever have”  
 My best friend thinks my name means  
 “The person who he surfs with”  
 And “The friend who always likes the same things as him”  
 My carpool friends think my name means  
 “The person who tries to make them laugh”  
 My neighbor thinks my name means  
 “The person who always delivers hot meals to her door”  
 My dog thinks my name means  
 “The one who he’s equal to”  
 My history teacher thinks my name means  
 “The person who always raises their hand”  
 My English teacher thinks my name means  
 “The person who always has something to say”  
 But I feel they’ve left some things out:  
 “I love listening to music but only some kinds,”  
 “I always want to be around other people,”  
 “I listen to rain at night to fall asleep,”  
 “I hate getting up really early in the morning,”  
 “Lots of people annoy me but I put up with it”  
 “I hope to be a scientist”  
 “I play basketball at least twice a week and games every week”



*Kentaro Watanabe*

My mom thinks my name means, “Lovely child that asks for help in projects and homework.”  
 My dad thinks my name means, “A kid that is bad at art and needs some of my help for doing his projects and homework.”  
 My best friend thinks my name means, “A kid that is goofy and funny.” and “A kid who has very terrible luck.”  
 My friends think my name means, “A kid that talks less than others.” and “Presence that cheers people up.”  
 My cat thinks my name means, “A kid who chases me and tries to do suplex on me.” and “Monster that stalks me everywhere.”  
 My small cousin thinks my name means, “A bully who steals my stuff and breaks my stuff.” and “A kid who makes me do the thing I shouldn’t do in games to ruin it.”  
 My classmates think my name means, “A faint presence in our class.”  
 My neighbor thinks my name means, “A very cheerful child.”  
 The employee in the store I go to often thinks my name means, “Very nice kid in our store.”  
 But, I think,  
 I think my name means, “Person who has severe bad luck and gets into problems very often.” And “A kid who only wants friends but very bad at making friends.”, And “Kid who wants to tell people about the inside of himself but has no courage to do so.” And “A kid who has a dream to be the karate champion.”, And “A kid who is so worried about everything every time.”  
 I wonder what the others think of me.



*Cameron Nzimbi*

My best friend thinks my name means “funny and always comes over”  
 My dad thinks my name means “lazy and always tired”  
 My little brother thinks my name means “unusually good at video games and really good at baseball”  
 My baseball coach thinks my name means “best on the team and fast”  
 My basketball coach thinks my name means “kid who barely shows up for basketball practice”  
 My aunts think my name means “very sleepy all the time”  
 My uncle thinks my name means “surprisingly good at soccer”  
 My cousin thinks my name means “terrible at FIFA”  
 Although there are some things they left out as I listen to music a lot, I love field trips, I like staying up late with friends, I’m obsessed with baseball and I like basketball in the backyard with friends.



## Jacob Garcia

My dad thinks my name means “the next Lionel Messi” and “the next Kylian Mbappé”  
My mom thinks my name means “plays game 24/7” and “Call of Duty pro”  
My brother thinks my name means “lazy” and “athlete”  
My sister thinks my name means “lazy” and “annoying”  
My parakeets think my name means “spray millet”  
My dog thinks my name means “Person who feeds me”  
My little cousin thinks my name means “best cousin ever”  
My big cousin thinks my name means “funny”  
My Aunt thinks my name means “cute and adorable”  
However, there are some things they don’t know about me like sometimes I go out of the house to skate with my brother.  
Another thing is I’m not lazy, I’m the most athletic and energetic person in my family. Also, I’m not annoying, I’m the quietest in the house. I’m the most talented artist in my family. Finally, I’m the most talented boy in the house.



## Owen Abrams

My mom thinks my name means “Capable and funny”  
My dad thinks my name means “Smart and thoughtful”  
My sister thinks my name means “Annoying and weird”  
My friends think my name means “Fun to be around”  
My therapist thinks my name means “Interesting”  
My teachers think my name means “Goofs off too much”  
You think my name means “Mysterious”  
Future me thinks my name means “Young”  
My neighbors think my name means “Too annoying”  
I think my name means an average kid, with a fear of some sounds. It means someone who cannot concentrate, and does not do very well in school. It can mean anything! I think my name means Owen.



## Louis Vazquez

My dad thinks my name means “lazy”  
My mom thinks my name means “hard working”  
My best friend thinks my name means “fun to play video games with and nice”  
My dog thinks my name means “the best person to annoy and play with”  
My cousin thinks my name means “fun to hang out with and funny”  
My P.E. teacher thinks my name means “working hard and striving”  
My history teacher thinks my name means “does work well”  
My science teacher thinks my name means “always turns in assignments on time”  
My math teacher thinks my name means “perseveres all day”  
However, there are some things they don’t know, like friendly kid, good swimmer, helpful person, good listener, and smart kid.



## Shotaro Yari

My mom thinks my name means  
“A child who tries to get good grades”  
My dad thinks my name means  
“tall and cheerful”  
My friends think my name means  
“funny and happy”  
My dog thinks my name means  
“playful and good at throwing balls”  
My music teacher thinks my name means  
“positive and negative”  
My karate teacher thinks my name means  
“strong and healthy”  
My mom’s friend thinks my name means  
“nice and good at eating”  
My soccer coach thinks my name means  
“fast and skilled”  
My soccer team thinks my name means  
“loud and good at shooting goals”  
But, I think they forgot a lot of things like,  
“dreams of being a doctor”  
And “loves to play FIFA 23” “worries about failing in life” and “calms and loves listening to birds chirping.”



## Solange Iraheta

My mom thinks my name means  
“Bright and responsible daughter”  
My little brother thinks my name means  
“The only sister that can make me laugh and that plays with me”  
My dad thinks my name means  
“loud when I speak and crazy when I play”  
My stepbrother thinks my name means  
“That I am weird when I act and the one who likes to wrestle with me”  
My stepmom thinks my name means “I am just like my dad”  
My favorite teacher thinks my name means  
“That I am a talkative person in class”  
My friend thinks my name means “weird and goofy person they know”  
My favorite Tia thinks my name means  
“My only niece that does not want everything”  
My Science teacher thinks my name means  
“The girl that never asks for help”  
However, there are some things that they don’t know like when people ask me if they can give me something, I say no not to be mean but I just don’t want them to waste their money on me, someone who thinks I did something wrong all the time when I hear my name, I am always in my room, thinks that if I do something my mom would get extremely mad, never had a grade lower than a D, loves shoes, hoodies, and baggy clothes, favorite hobby is to bake cakes, when I am sad or mad or stressed out I dance, always wanted a sister, someone who loves to straighten hair and curl it, has a lot of perfumes, obsessed with Rich Rose 4 and Jordans, regrets cutting hair short but still does it, people might think I listen to music but I don’t, always trying to make people laugh, extremely nervous starting a conversation, loves science and history.



# I Am Poems



I Am . . .

*Joseph Mann*

I am from the blue sky  
the toys on the shelf  
I am from the other side of the ocean  
where fog flows and rain pours and goals score

I am from a bright blue flower on a field  
I am from Christmas to Halloween  
to my mum and my dad and to my sister  
to my dog and the dog walks all day

I am from the story 'Jack and the Beanstalk'  
and from the portraits on the wall  
I am from the love of my family, to my ancestors up there  
I am told not to run with scissors and to always be kind

In England where my family and friends live  
And my Grandma who is 76 years old  
As I eat so many Yorkshire Puddings my heart fills with happiness  
And the importance of family is to always stick together



I Am . . .

*Elliana Faktorovich*

I am a tennis player  
I wonder if I'll be in the Grand Slam  
I hear people shouting my name  
I see myself winning Wimbledon  
I want to be the number one racket  
I am a tennis player  
I pretend I am beating Iga Swiatek in a match  
I feel the sweat coming down my body  
I touch the Golden Pineapple trophy  
I worry I will lose  
I cry when I get beaten  
I am a tennis player  
I understand that I can't win all the time  
I say that everyone has a chance to be the best  
I dream of being better than Serena Williams  
I try and strive to be a champion  
I hope that I will be the GOAT  
I am a tennis player



I Am . . .

*Liam Kane*

I am tired of school and I also need some sleep  
I wonder how many more days must be left in school  
I hear the sounds of children walloping in their sadness as they  
are forced to learn new things  
I see children running out of their classrooms, ecstatic to be free  
I want school to end and for my suffering to be no longer  
I am tired of school and I also need some sleep  
I pretend to be happy and try to look to the light  
I feel my eyelids droop as the boredom of the math lesson sets in  
I touch my pencil and pick it up to jot down some notes  
I worry how many generations have to endure what I am going  
through right now  
I cry for the amount of times I come to class unprepared  
I am tired of school and I also need some sleep  
I understand all the things we learn in this hour, yet when I get  
home I can't remember any of it  
I say this poem, speaking no lies  
I dream of the day I can say, "Yay! Monday!"  
I try to pay attention, yet it is still too hard  
I hope tomorrow will be better  
I am tired of school and I also need some sleep.



I Am . . .

*Iman Rashed*

I am a Muslim and the definition of girl power  
I wonder if math will ever get easy  
I hear a unicorn running by  
I see a unicorn running on a rainbow  
I want to live stress free  
I am a Muslim and the definition of girl power  
I pretend that I am perfectly fine when once in a while I'm not  
I feel happy when I'm with my friends  
I touch the unicorn's colorful mane  
I worry that math will never get easy  
I cry when I am under pressure  
I am a Muslim and the definition of girl power  
I understand that life is tough  
I say that everything will be okay  
I dream that one day I'll realize that I am good enough and  
have nothing to prove to anyone else  
I try to always make everyone smile  
I hope that I will love myself forever  
I am a Muslim and the definition of girl power

# Inspired by Longfellow

“Paul Revere’s Ride” served as the inspiration for these poems.



## Hurt Pride

*Noah Jackson*

Listen my children and you shall hear, a day in my life  
at Paul Revere  
I wake up in the morning and my mom has a fever  
When I’m in class I act like I know everything in my brain  
But when the grades come out I really feel the pain  
When I’m in 6th period I act funny and play dumb  
But when I get home I get slapped on my buns  
We drive home and I’m on punishment  
When I go to my room I plummet  
No texting the boys no going outside  
so you know what that means no Fornite, that hurts my pride  
I sit on my bed wanting breakfast  
I think of myself I should have aced the test



## Number 1

*Daniel De la Cueva*

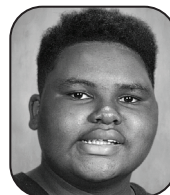
Listen my children and you shall hear, a day in my life  
at Paul Revere  
I roam the halls with confidence and no fear  
I see my friends smiling and laughing  
New looks everyday, the style is adapting  
I do my classwork and try to finish it fast  
Because I’m always number 1 and never finish last  
My teachers helping me learn every day  
I get everything turned in and participate  
At lunch I enjoy going up to the field and play some sports  
I either play football or hangout on the basketball courts  
I go home and finish my homework and come back  
tomorrow and be here  
And that is a day of my life at the Great Paul Revere



## Quite a Strong Story

*Isly Calero*

Listen my children and you shall hear, a day in my life  
at Paul Revere  
It’s quite a strong story, my clear  
I wake up at 5, barely awake  
But I have to get up for my attendance record at sake  
At an hour, I’m already out of the house in a jiff  
My dad driving me to my bus stop where the bus will give me  
a lift  
The bus drops me at school and I go to homeroom  
Sitting in my wooden chair awaiting my doom  
My endless classes becoming a blur  
Making me forget how today’s events occurred  
A whirlpool of unfinished homework, assignments, and tests  
A day at school is quite a different quest



## Toned Skills

*Nehemiah Moore*

Listen my children and you shall hear, a day in my life  
at Paul Revere  
I get out of my bed my alarm I hear  
I get dressed quick to make it to my bus  
I don’t want my mom to make a big fuss  
We get on the bus and we start to clap  
But then everybody starts to take a nap  
When I’m at school, I tone in all my skills  
Then after school the bus takes us on bumpy hills  
When I get home I put down my bag  
I play against my brothers but rose in defeat  
“dinner is ready” my mom calls us its time to eat





## Huffing and Puffing

*Isabella Viera*

Listen my children and you shall hear, a day in  
my life at Paul Revere  
I wake up in the morning and get my mom, her  
morning breath I always fear  
I get on the bus and go on my phone  
The guy sitting next to me needs some cologne  
I go to my homeroom and it gets loud  
I finish all my homework, and now I'm proud  
I go to nutrition and eat my food  
This guy comes over and is super rude  
It's time for P.E. and now I'm suffering  
All these miles got students huffing and puffing  
The rest of the day I'm just sleeping in class  
My friends tell me to wake up and I have to pass



## Speeding Dart

*Evan McNeill*

Listen my children and you shall hear a day in my life  
at Paul Revere  
I get up and head to my bus  
Stop because it is near  
I go to school with lots of dumb kids  
All the pretty girls wearing fake wigs  
I have to run the mile today  
All the kids are saying slay  
In English I read a very good book  
When a fight broke out I may give a look  
When the day was over I flew out like a speeding dart  
Then on the bus I watched Mario cart  
Then at my house I relaxed and chilled  
Then for dinner I had salmon that was grilled



## Drawing on Command

*Aubriana Sobhani*

Listen my children and you shall hear, a day in my life at Paul  
Revere  
I walk into the quad and my friends appear, we talk 2nd laugh so  
sincere  
Once the bell rings that begins the day, my friends say goodbye  
and go on their way  
I sit in the art room, sketch in hand – as my brain begins to draw  
on command  
I sit and wait until my next class, P.E. where we play soccer after  
taking a knee  
I switch my mindset as math is next, where we have to present our  
projects  
Thankfully nutrition follows after, full of weird stories, hugs and  
laughter  
Then is my favorite—history, with no homework so I can pass no  
worry  
I simply walk into English class in “A” as people are late almost  
every day  
Thankfully lunch follows after, full of weird stories, hugs, and  
laughter  
I run from the quad to the “W” building, for science which I hate  
and don't find thrilling  
I then complete my day with art, the class I was at in the very start



## Day at Revere

*Jonathan Agabra*

Listen my children and you shall hear  
Of a day in my life at Paul Revere  
I wake up early for an early bus stop that is near  
I check the school breakfast and the weather, it's clear  
I get ready for school and quickly get there  
I make my way through homeroom and history  
Then I head up to P.E.  
After getting sweaty I make my way to my next class for the day  
Finally I make it to 6th period, the last class — oh, hurray!  
I think about the myriad of things I have learned  
I rush to the sound of the bell all day  
I hope that all of the rest of my days will go as well



## Happy to Go

*Alexandria Amarillas*

Listen my children and you shall hear, a day in  
my life at Paul Revere  
I turn off my alarm clock the time is near  
to get to the place to form my career  
The room is filled with smiling faces  
We nearly filled all our places  
The teacher is eager to give us knowledge  
So we get into a good college  
The learning is done and I am happy to go  
Although there is still so much I still don't know  
Mocktrail, debate, tennis, and more  
So many subjects to explore  
Family dinner as we always do  
The color of the night is warm and dark and blue



## Last and Fast

*Benjamin Agabra*

Listen my children and you shall hear, a day in my life at Paul Revere  
I wake up, get ready, and go to the bus stop wondering why I'm here  
On the bus, I give the ones who annoy me a glare  
Otherwise I look out the window with an empty stare  
In class the constant chatter is louder than a plane  
Sometimes I wonder how I am still sane  
Nutrition and lunch are the only breaks in the day  
Although my brain feels like it's a similar consistency to clay  
You would expect the bus ride home would be good  
But you have to watch out for flying food  
A break from the insanity and chaos, home at last  
But if I want to have fun I have to finish my homework fast



## Side by Side

*Srivar Koilada*

Oh, Paul Revere Middle School,  
A place of learning and growth,  
From science to math, we learn and we grow,  
Art and music, creativity to show,

The students come from far and wide,  
Different backgrounds, cultures, and pride,  
Yet we come together, side by side,  
Respect and kindness, always in stride,

Oh, Paul Revere Middle School, we adore,  
A place we'll cherish and forevermore,  
Where we learned, laughed, and explored,  
Our futures now bright, we have soared.

# Poetry Potpourri



## My Dream Chocolate Cake

*Maxwell Moore*

This Sunday I feel so very lazy.  
The urge for cake will make me crazy.  
I search the aisle for what to bake  
Then come upon some instant cake.  
I can't believe this, "Be true!" I beg.  
All it calls for is one single egg.  
I grab my bowl.  
And a mixer too  
I'm ready to make my dreams come true.  
I crack the egg and pour it in the pan.  
Ready to eat as fast as I can.  
I put it in the oven for half an hour.  
I get dressed nicely and take a shower  
My plate is ready.  
My mouth is as well.  
The oven lets off a tiny bell  
"Looking great," I unknowingly say.  
My sweet treat is about to make my day.  
I'm about to dig in and then I hear.  
Oh no it can't be I'm full of fear.  
My alarm clock screaming RING! DINGALING!  
I have to throw out that thing.  
I sadly get out of bed.  
Then a hungry thought strikes my head.  
What if I had chocolate cake today.  
I fantasize all while I lay.



## Messy

*Bailee Brown*

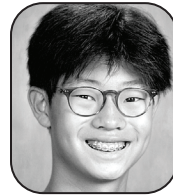
Transitioning from elementary school to middle school was messy  
Teenagers like to keep up drama and be messy  
They smiling in your face when all the time they want to take your place because they are backstabbers- they are messy  
My time in middle school hasn't always been so easy while trying to navigate around the people who are messy  
Goodbye middle school, hello high school. I hope it's not as messy  
I am moving forward with options and courage and leaving behind all the things messy  
I hope high school kids aren't as messy  
I hope all people can learn not to be messy



## The Brown Bird

*Sophia Castellanos*

The brown bird sings in the dead of the night  
A gentle whisper in the cold winter air  
As the call of the bird echoes to me  
It doesn't stop, won't leave me be  
I could scare it away it would be easy  
Imagine the brown bird , off in flight  
But I let it stay , I bare it's glare  
I don't plea  
That is leave  
I don't mind it stays outside, near me



## I Hate Pigeons

*Connor Kang*

The rats of the sky fly through the town  
They drop down in groups to take our food  
They don't do anything but steal  
Why is my lunch their meal?  
I don't care how they feel  
They are worthless animals  
Why do they exist?  
They only take up space  
They're always in my face  
They should leave without a trace





## Top Gun

Senses Poem

*Alex Traister*

planes flying in the air  
sweat on my face before going into battle  
sound of the plane engines revving  
nervous energy coursing through my veins  
victory pulsating in my body after the mission  
Top Gun trophy and graduate



## Life Moves On

*Hunter Kizze*

Life goes on is what my dad said  
My brain will never believe what he has said  
As I transition in life I'm always thinking about what I said  
Now it's in the past is what my brain said  
I still wonder if I am doing the right thing but remember what said  
Life goes on whatever you say brain you don't know what you said  
I wonder what their last text said  
Life goes on ah yes as my dad said



## Art

Pleiades Poem

*Jolie Maqsoudi*

Admirable artwork expressing agonizing emotion  
Appreciate the astonishing talent of some  
Aesthetic paint strokes attracting you to the painting  
Acrylic and oil paints used to assemble abstract art  
All can do this addictive avocation with absolute ease  
Anything can be considered art as it is immensely objective  
Allow yourself creative freedom to achieve your artistic aims.



## Cats

*Waverly Foster*

When you pet, they claw  
Your clothes? They might gnaw  
They look very elegant  
With eyes multicolored and intelligent  
Just beware their dangerous paw



## Test Anxiety

Senses Poem

*Aleena Shamsuddin*

students stressing out as they try to complete their tests in time  
my brain frying as I desperately try to come up with the right answers  
other students shout in joy as they check their scores and see they've earned A's  
hot tears starting to fall from my eyes as I see my score is relatively low  
salty droplets rolling faster and faster down my cheeks as I think about how this might affect my percentage  
I should probably study for the next test

## Daydreaming

*Sophia Harelik*

I'm floating on a cloud  
But why is it so loud?  
A pirate ship flies past  
Why was it so fast?  
I hear a wedding bell  
But why does it smell?



A giant chicken appeared  
This is getting weird  
A firework explodes  
My confusion grows  
Now it's raining fish  
They shout "Make a wish!"

A wish?  
A wish  
I wish to know what's happening  
What's the square root of pi?  
Pi? Why?

Focus  
Oh right, I'm in math  
I think I went down a different path

## Owl's Eye

*Diepreye Tantua*

Once in a while I see you in a tree  
Looking out into the world  
I wonder what you see  
Wonder what you hear  
Wonder what keeps you at ease  
That owl makes me think  
What it can that I cannot  
It looks at me with its blinking eyes  
Black and dark as the night sky  
Making me wonder what you see with those eyes





## The Devils and Angels of Photography

*Hiyab Dunham*

This afternoon I went out to indulge in the art of photography  
The sun was burning my skin to its boiling point  
My metal camera made burned my hands leaving behind marks  
I felt like I was dying

I found an extravagant plant and took its photograph  
The annoying sun came down and destroyed each and every one  
of my photos  
I was crying a million tears over these pictures  
Could this day get any worse?

The next day the weather was kinder to me  
I took the best photos in the universe  
No one could match my photographic wizardry  
Every form of photography I have mastered

I know every artist in the world dating back to the Big Bang  
I sent my photos to my agent  
He said these were worth more than his life I would be richer  
than all the billionaires combined  
I fell dead after hearing him say that.



## Blue

A Color Poem

*Cal Foxson*

Blue is the color of elderberries  
Blue is the sky above my head  
Blue is the water I drink every day  
Blue looks like the ocean at Venice beach  
Blue smells like the cold frozen air while going skiing  
Blue tastes like ripe blueberries straight from a farm  
Blue sounds like rushing water at night  
Blue feels like powder snow in the winter  
Blue reminds me of going swimming in the summertime  
Blue is a color that is underrated



## So Hard

*Jack Wimmer*

I try to have a good day, but it ends up being so hard  
Getting up from my cozy and soft bed is so hard  
Sustaining good grades and not getting U's is so hard  
Studying for all my tests in history is so hard  
Maintaining my good balance between friends and  
school is so hard  
Staying away from unhealthy food is so hard  
Keeping off social media and technology is so hard  
Looking good mentally and physically is so hard



## Oh, Quail

*Crystal Porter*

Sometimes I think that life should be longer  
And that bad things should last slender and lessened  
Though some moments should be captured  
Things you miss can be easily treasured  
Your last moments can fill you with pleasure  
As the Quail enjoys its life  
One little regret might change the life it's living  
Times when you feel really sad  
Maybe a hint of rage and a little mad  
Just remember that great moments will be in hand



## Tan

A Color Poem

*Kiara Selim*

Tan is the color of sand  
Tan is a basic color  
Tan is the color of cardboard  
Tan looks like bread  
Tan smells like the beach  
Tan tastes like chicken broth  
Tan sounds like an empty library  
Tan feels like a hardcover book  
Tan makes me think of graham crackers  
Tan is a color that looks like a country dirt road



## Car

Synonym Diamante

*Julius Ramos*

Car  
Fast, stylish  
Jumpstarting, running, bouncing  
Engine, doors, hydraulics, windows  
Turning, moving, racing  
Colorful, loud  
Ride



## Twin Fin

*Elsa Rodriguez*

It has patterns  
Sit and observe  
Sets of big waves  
Sets of small waves  
It stills your mind  
Water slips through fingertips  
You paddle and paddle  
With the rhythm of the waves  
Past the break, you wait  
It's a cloudy day  
Glassy slabs  
A calm sky  
Silence



## Transformers

Antonym Diamante

*Arash Khamesipour*

Autobot  
Good, merciful  
Fighting, running, hiding  
Optimus, hope, ... hate, Megatron  
Attacking, chasing, hunting  
Bad, merciless  
Decepticon



## The Pond

*Sonia Shirley*

frogs jumping around playing  
fresh leaves in the trees  
splashing of water in pond  
slimy mysterious animals brushing against legs  
muddy pond water filled with fish  
love to come back here again



## Moon

Synonym Diamante

*Olivia White*

Moon  
Cold, Lonely  
Orbiting, Jumping, Exploring  
New Moon, First Quarter, Last Quarter, Full Moon  
Waning, Rising, Waxing  
Spinning, Twinkling  
Crescent



## History Is a Struggle

*Souleyman Fall*

Getting high scores in history is a struggle  
I read, answer questions, review and study, but still struggle  
I stay up until midnight and still struggle  
I get feedback from my teacher and apply it, but still struggle  
I want to ace a test, but I'm still in the struggle  
My continued appreciation for the teacher styles is a struggle  
Maintaining my love for history is a struggle  
I will continue trying hard to get an A, although it's a struggle





## She Rhymes

*Sophia Karafin*

She does rhyme  
And she may have to climb  
To climb, to form these rhymes  
While she gets poked and prodded  
Poked by the tines of our time  
So please have a spine and stand up for things Share your  
things and care  
Care for people  
I try and I will  
I will not whine when people in need plead  
Plead for necessities that I possess  
I will not whine like how a toddler yells "MINE" I strive to be  
like her  
Because she does rhyme, and climb, and never whines She  
rhymes for you  
She rhymes for me  
She rhymes for all, all of society  
And in time I will rhyme for you, and me, and all of society



## Clerihew

*Gabriel Williams*

A teacher named Mr. Brown  
An attitude that makes him frown  
He hates the kids in his classes  
And he wears very ugly glasses

There once was a pig named Bob  
All he did was eat corn on the cob  
Everytime he ate it was a mess  
To me he was still the best



## Pack

*Lily Jones*

I went to the park our favorite spot  
I see a blue jay fly by I knew you loved them  
This time though I did not smile  
This time I just stared for awhile  
This time I wanted to run for miles  
The blue jay flew and landed on the arm rest of the bench  
We both looked at each other  
The bird flew away  
I never saw him after that day  
But I do wonder were you that blue jay?



## What Is That Noise!?!?!?!?

*Mr. Schwartz*

What is that screaming outside of S-4?  
The yelling and shrieking right outside my door.  
Has a student snapped from too many mile runs?  
Did a speck of dirt sully someone's new Jordan Ones?  
A one chip challenge, did someone try it?  
Is there another Hebrew Club Pizza riot?  
Are the Lakers playoff hopes being hotly debated?  
Was someone's new iphone just confiscated?  
Did someone get bit by a rabid squirrel?  
Do I have to go out there and give a referral?  
Did someone eat a big bag of red Kool-Aid mix  
And chase it down with some Skittles and a Twix  
Then chugged a giant sugary iced tea  
That's it, that's what the screaming must be!  
Was there a golazo in a World Cup game  
Or was like someone like being super totally lame?  
Did someone bomb a 100 point quiz?  
Does someone think loudness makes W rizz?  
Was it dismay that there's no school tomorrow?  
For a day without school could only mean sorrow.  
So much to scream about cause this year's such a pain,  
Headaches as unceasing as the endless cold rain!



## Perfect

*Duke Badt*

Perfect, perfect, perfect.  
Nobody is perfect... unless you're talking about me.  
I buzz like a bee and fly like I'm free.  
Free of charge, free of rules, nothing applies to me,  
I see how perfect I am, in so many ways.  
People should pay me to consult about these days.  
I am so, so perfect, I can't even explain,  
It's such a pain to do anything wrong, it strains my brain.  
If they say I'm not perfect then they are not sane  
If you say I'm not great, well... I hope you get run over by a  
train.  
"You're so cocky," they say "You're not cool," they say.  
But every time I remind them, "I hope you have a miserable  
day."  
But the story is not over, it has only just begun.  
I run, run, run, until the day is done.  
I wait out the night seeking fun and delight  
But when nothing comes, it gives me some fright.  
The fear of being unwanted haunts me now.  
"Am I perfect? Was I wrong somehow?"  
Maybe I'm not the perfect reflection.  
People might have been right about my imperfection.  
So I pile up a collection of despair and disdain,  
But put on a smile to cover my pain.



## Blanket Season

*Alyssa Wilks*

Why must it be so cold outside  
 Why must the wind be so crisp  
 All I want to do is stay in bed  
 Before I start my day I'll take a walk to clear my head  
 Realizing that summer has fled  
 Blanket season is finally here  
 Layer and layers so fuzzy and plush  
 Warm blankets waiting for me  
 On my cozy bed they will be  
 Alongside my hot cup of tea



## School Day

An Exaggeration Poem

*Ryan Bergstrand*

Another day at school!  
 What could be worse?  
 With a frown on my face, walking 20 miles to get to my class,  
 not ready for the test I'm about to take.

The teacher gives me the 400 question test.  
 I don't know what to do.  
 I look at all the questions  
 and don't know anything.

I turn in the test with a defeated look on my face.  
 Great. Now we must take notes.  
 The teacher never stops writing.  
 It's a never-ending loop.

Arrive to third period, dying for the bell to ring.  
 Get in to class and again a 100th test to take.  
 This test will never end.  
 It's impossible.

I didn't even study and my that's my fault.  
 I turn in the test and look at the clock.  
 I still have 30 minutes left but it feels like 108.  
 This day will never end.

I finally get out of class, ready for poetry.  
 I do my poems which were kindergarten easy.  
 I get to PE and have to run the mile.  
 Only ran one lap and have another million to go.

Finally the bell rings.  
 The endless school day is over, but wait!  
 tomorrow is what?  
 It's Monday all over again.



## I Live in Chaos

Inspired By "i live in music" by Ntozake Shange

*Kiana Saraf*

I live in chaos  
 does it encompass you as well?  
 I live here in each hollow breath  
 I live on the scornful tip-toeing of my heart,  
 my friend lives in bliss that is unidentifiable  
 do you live with these waves  
 sounds  
 bruise me like heavy chains on old slaves  
 whispers shackle me  
 cold as silence of a crowds  
 hot like the pressure of the Sahara's rays  
 thinkin makes it worse  
 I got 13 reasons where other women got eyes to see  
 & a arrow's bloody head for both sides of my heart  
 I list my insecurities like somebody  
 else be talkin about their day  
 I live in chaos  
 live in it  
 wash in it  
 I could even taste my self-malice  
 wear sobriety on my shoulders  
 I'm descending like Alice  
 ya could make a river where your arm is &  
 lose yourself  
 lose yourself in a land of fluffy clouds

## Pete's Break

*Thomas Krasnow-Lahita*

Once for Pete's break  
 He went to the Great Lake  
 He went for a swim  
 Then the sun began to dim



## Wings

*Ren Newhall*

High in the sky  
 Wings fly  
 Through clouds dusk and dark  
 They are the cause to many barks  
 Oh what sweet songs they sing  
 You may even spot the young nestlings  
 Beneath their soft wing



## My Friend the Crow

*Anton Andres*

I have been told that crow remembers fears  
I want to befriend a crow  
Everyday I see the same crow  
He sits outside my window  
I stare at him when I lay on my pillow  
I would tell him all about my day  
But the problem he wouldn't be able to stay the same  
Still I look forward to seeing him tomorrow  
Even if he looks full of sorrow  
I will give him a smile hopefully he will follow



## A Rap About the Word Terrain

*Olivia Clark*

The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain  
Plain, desert, mountain, forest  
These are all terrain, yeah you should know this  
Terrain is a stretch of land  
Especially with regard to its physical features, features  
You hear that, teachers?  
Teach about terrain, students will feel no pain  
Here's something else you should know  
Terrain can have rain, sun, wind or snow  
Mountains, rivers, forests, canyons, or a plateau  
Terrain is also known as: land, ground, territory, region  
Topography, landscape, country, y, y, y  
Now that you know about terrain  
You can use your knowledge again and again



## Rainy Day

*Ella Matilda Temer*

Wake up to the sound of rain  
Grab a cozy blanket and a cup of tea  
Spend the day reading a book  
Curl up in a comfy ready hook  
No one else is around, take a look  
Put on your favorite pair of boots & your warmest hoodie  
Don't forget to bring your umbrella  
Go outside, take a walk, make just 1 stop  
To buy a hot chocolate at a coffee shop  
Walk back home listening to the rain drops



## Ares

*Nikolai Shipitsyn*

Ares God of War.  
Relative of Zeus and Hera.  
Lover of war and bloodshed.  
Who feels pain and thrill of battle.  
Who needs battle and glory.  
Who fears losing and pain.  
Who gives pain and suffering.  
Resident of Olympus Mars



## Soar

*Ben Kohana*

Every day I see you soar through the sky  
From sunset to sunrise you make loud noise  
For when my eye catches you, you are so beautiful  
For what you provide is plentiful  
But when you go away it makes me feel so pitiful  
As the day turns to night  
And the stars start to rise up  
In the night I cannot hear you  
Only thing I hear is my nephew  
For your kind is so undervalued



## The Flamingo

*Juliette Iginiamre*

Every day at the zoo you catch the people's attention  
With your bright pink wings in the spotlight  
Your bright pink wings so devine  
The attention that brings you shine  
Better be happy people will make designs  
That flamingo makes me happy  
It reminds me that pink is my favorite sometimes  
The night has passed now the flamingo shall rest  
Life can be the best  
Once you get set





## Strawberries

*Jacob Carlin*

Sweet, juicy, and delicious,  
Strawberries are not so vicious.  
Sadness disappears after taking one bite  
Sacks of strawberries bring me delight  
So, if your mouth needs some delicious food  
Send it a strawberry if you wish to be shrewd  
See you later hope you enjoyed,  
and remember strawberries aren't to avoid.

## Living Leaf Life

*Katelyn Solemany*

Fall leaves are just different  
They take my breath so far away  
As you see them falling  
It's usually coming  
To take away my balling  
My body leaves my soul  
The colors are just perfect  
I cry with pain  
But as I see the leaves, I feel sane  
And sadly when winter comes I feel faint



## Social Anxiety

*Morgan Stoler*

She sat down in her class at her desk  
But she still felt that horrid weight on her chest  
She felt as if they were all looking at her  
As if she was a ugly monster with fur  
The teacher asked a question and looked around until he called on her  
Her feelings were now all in a stir  
She eventually mumbled "I'll answer, sure.."  
She stood up and answered the problem that was very obscure  
She guessed it was incorrect, because now they were all laughing at her  
Her legs became wobbly and all she could hear was her peers  
Sweat dripped down her face making sweaty smears  
She sat back down in her seat and felt as if she had faced all her fears  
But she still heard that cackling sound ringing in her ears  
She raised her hand to ask if she could go to the bathroom even though it was only so she  
could drown in her own tears.



## The Man in the Park

*Diego Cruz*

I go to the park, there is a man I see  
I wave at him, he smiles with glee  
I play basketball with him we go a few rounds  
By the time we're done playing, I lost a few pounds  
My cousin plays with us, the man teaches us some things  
We rest for a few minutes as the clock decides  
Whether to stay home or stay as night arrives  
We shoot our last shot and say our goodbyes  
It was getting dark  
And that's a day in the park



## All About Lions

*Brandon Shade*

A big strong loyal animal  
With a big mane  
Is the king of the jungle which is a lion  
But if you get too close you end up dying  
I would like to say they're friendly but I'd be lying  
They hunt for prey and protect cubs  
They are light brown with thin fur  
We stay in large groups  
So we scare other animal troops  
Enough about lions imma shoot some hoops



## Skin and Bones

*Jonathan Tehrani*

Ay skeleton this one's for you  
Ay bro why you built like that?  
Oh yeah I forgot I can't be talking  
You can hear our bones when we walking  
We both weak, it's an exercise when we talking  
We both look like we've never seen the gym in our life  
Gotta find 26 x 32 points its annoying  
When we sit, we can feel our bones on the seat  
I think it's obvious how much I need to eat  
But all I know right now is that this brought out heat



## Pork, a Poem

*Dean Scarpa*

Gertrude loved pork  
But she never ate it with a fork  
As the dinner party was coming near  
Her mind was filled with fiendish fear  
For how she ate the pork on the plate  
Her judgmental friends would surely hate  
But just when it came the day  
A good car crash got in the way.  
Stars were around the judgmental friend's heads  
When they were rushed to hospital beds  
Now Gertrude was surely saved  
The friends wouldn't see how she would have behaved  
But she was sad that they had died  
So she ate some pork,  
while she cried



## Myself

*Violet Cash*

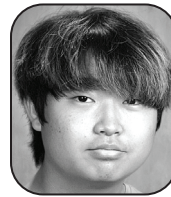
Sometimes I wake up and doubt myself  
I get out of bed and want to cry to myself  
Eating some food since I need to feed myself  
Tiding to school to teach myself  
Walking through the hallways holding back tears so I don't  
embarrass myself  
Almost done with the day so proud of myself  
Finally home, taking a nap to treat myself  
Tomorrow we do it again, it's ok, I can persevere with myself



## Strong

*Giovanni Ramirez*

From above your eyes look down  
Your prey below is unaware  
They scurry about the ground below  
Death is above, they do not know  
Sharp your talons are ready to go  
Speed and strength with sharp eyes  
Ready to strike and attack  
Death is soaring in the sky  
The rabbit cannot spy  
The hawks intention for him to die!



## December's Cold Moon

*Kaiden Park*

Clouds around the moon  
Big moon drifts in pale blue night  
Good weather for me



## Tyrone the Starfish

*Nicholas Yates*

Tyrone the starfish was stuck to a rock looking so **red** and slimy  
 I saw him sunning during a breezy **summer**  
 Tyrone stuck around the coast of **Muscle Beach**  
 I tried picking him up with the **warm sun** beating down and nearly dropped him  
 His red spiky skin matched the color of an awful Hawaiian shirt  
 Under the sea, Tyrone sits on a coral **sofa**  
 Tyrone could be a character in "**SpongeBob SquarePants**"  
 If Tyrone could leave his beach retreat for just a moment and try human food, would he go to **Burger King**?



## 74 Days

*Jackson Perkins*

I am stuck here for only 74 more days  
 I work in the night and arise early in the morning for 74 more days  
 I feel trapped in an endless cycle, yet only for 74 more days  
 Like Sisyphus, doomed to lift the rock up the hill, just to do it again for 74 more days  
 Less than 4 more months, 15 more weeks, and 74 more days  
 Everyday I excite that one more day is over, but then I realize I have 74 more days  
 This may seem like I'm exaggerating this struggle I shall endure for 74 more days  
 However, I truly rejoice that I shall be free from this place after 74 more days



## Loneliness

*Simon Day*

Loneliness is black like a squawking crow perching on a branch of a dead tree  
 Like a long desolate fall season that never ends  
 It feels like an abandoned home that was once protected but is now left to rot  
 It's an endless snowstorm causing heartbreak to those in its wake and killing the spirits of those directly in its path  
 Loneliness looks like a long, tattered wedding gown that somehow lost its way  
 The emptiness it brings is a ripped, torn couch that cannot be salvaged  
 And it has the hopelessness of a true crime playing on an old, broken TV.



## Still There

*Amari Johnson*

As I see the thing standing there watching me in just a stare  
 With a hollow head and body of newspaper it was around starting to taper  
 As I look at it I think as I look but don't blink  
 It's floating around smoothly as if on an icing rink  
 But as I stare at it more my courage starts to shrink  
 I think of one I loved before who is now in the ground nevermore  
 For they used to lend the crops so long ago but now are food way buried in snow  
 For have I wish to no longer live this night  
 Oh how I sorrow the loss of something so bright  
 But that scarecrow shall always stay reminding me of the one had fright





## Autumn

*Allison Prado*

Autumn leaves fall down  
They are all over the neighborhood  
The color of green disappears  
And the color of brown and orange appears  
When its heading towards a new year  
All the leaves begin to fade  
And a new season is on the way  
Where it replaces the leaves with snow  
And when the crops can't even grow  
And you'll feel the cold breeze blow



## Mother and Father Nature

*Maria Afzal*

Father Nature awoke from his slumber  
Aroused by Mother Nature  
Not wanting to do his work  
"But then, but then," Mother Nature said,

Who will help me rise the sun in the morn'  
And set it at dusk?  
And grow flowers?  
And bring rain showers?  
And fall snow?  
And help young un's grow?  
And make mountains form?  
And raise plants for bees to swarm?  
And cause fires to spread?  
And help the spider to make her thread?  
Convinced, Father Nature said,

"Alas, you are right."  
And got up to do his work.



## Son to Mother

Response to "Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes

*Gabe Smith*

Well mom I'll tell you:  
Life for me ain't been no shiny Tesla.  
It's lost a wheel.  
Chipped paint.  
Run out of gas.  
Places with no padding on the seat. Lost.  
But through all of that.  
I've been driving on.  
Speeding through.  
Driving past.  
Trying to refill my gas.  
Going through the night.  
Going through the day.  
So mom, don't turn back.  
Never stop.  
Because it's harder to start again. Hit the gas.  
Keep going fast.  
And life for me ain't been no shiny tesla.



## Repeating

*Phoebe Brunner*

I wake up just to hear me talking in my room  
I always wonder why I even got this talking bird  
I haven't said anything since yesterday all it does now is repeating  
How has it only been an hour in the day, its deceiving  
Just wondering what I can do about it, In believing  
If I'm lucky it could stop talking  
It's only been a week , how is it just as smart as me  
I can't let it's claws near me, it feels like rubber  
Though those feathers are always filled with virbrant color  
Just my luck, I can hardly sell it for a dollar



## Clouds

5 Ws Poem

*Sorcha Cinadr*

The puffy clouds, amazing to look upon  
Give the sun a cushion to lie on  
As it glistens and shines in the sky  
Flying up, up, and up during sunrise  
Hoping to make it to the moon, sometime

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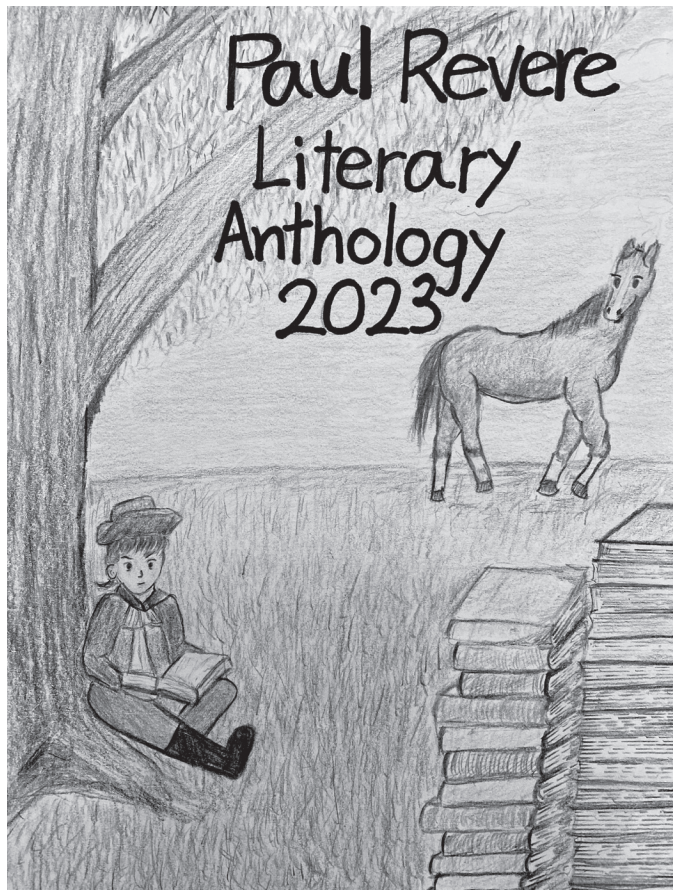
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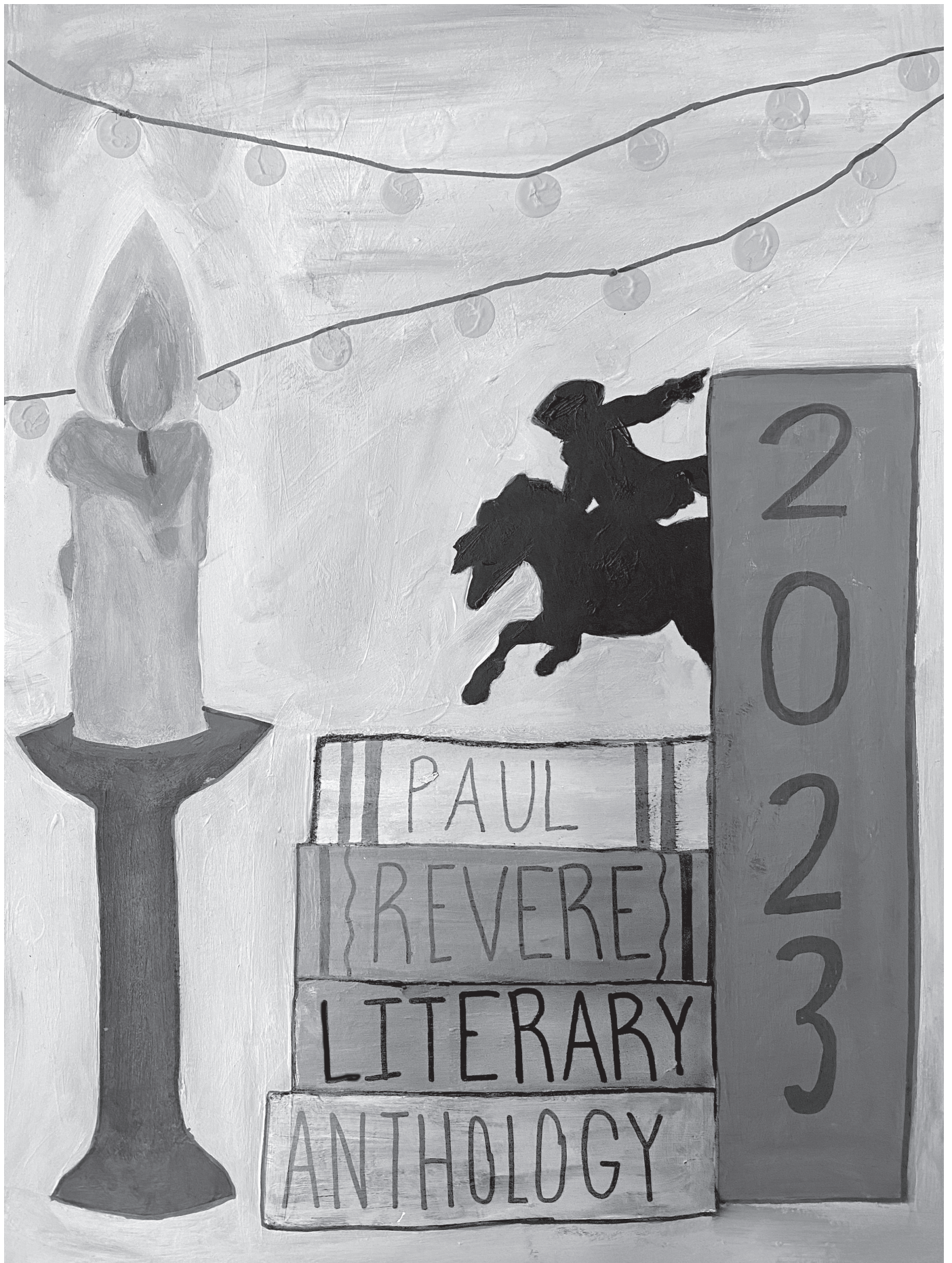


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Leo Wolfe





Bianca Madridejo



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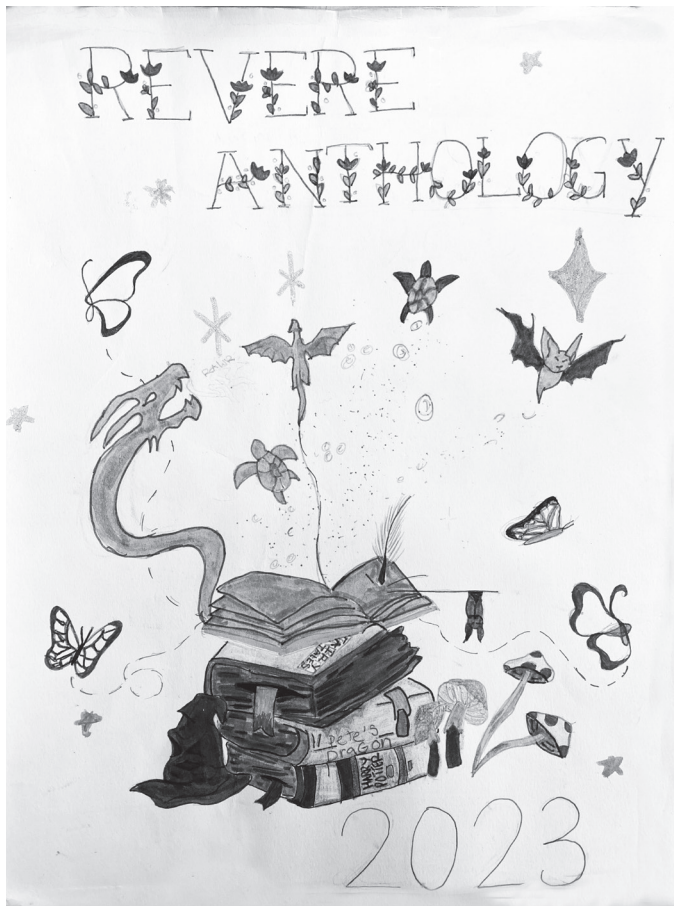
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