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RAM LIT

CLARKE MIDDLE SCHOOL'S LITERARY MAGAZINE



ARTWORK IN THIS ISSUE BY:

SOPHIA CHEN

OLIVIA KAPUSTA

STACEY CASTRO MOYA

ALVIN SUN

LIAM ENG-WIND

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:

RYAN ANGELL
MIA ANSELMO
SHREYA BALAJI
AMITIS BARZEHKAR
BETHANY BASE
JANINNE BAUTISTA
GURNAM BHURJI
RYAN BUI
AURORA VENTURA CASTRO
NATALIA CHAVARRIA
STEPHEN CHAVEZ
LEELYN CORR

LIAM ENG-WIND
ELIZABETH EZE
RUBEN GOMEZ
JISOO KIM
KYLE KRAUZ
BRENDAN LANG
SEAN MCBRIEN
ARIELLE MINKOWSKY
STACEY CASTRO MOYA
ARIANA ORTEGA
ARISSA QU
MARK RICCIARDI

ELISSA SANTORO
IRENE SEO
AYAAN SHARMA
HRIDHAAN SHETTY
JOY SHIN
GAVIN SINGSON
CAMILLA SILVA
ZACHARY SIMMONS
RAJAN SUKHU
ELLIE TAYLOR
LIA VALENTI
FINN WELSH
CLAIRE ZHENG

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We are incredibly inspired by the creativity and self-expression shared throughout these pages. Every student featured in this magazine brings a unique perspective, and each piece, whether a poem, memoir, short story, or artwork, reflects the imagination, experiences, and individuality of its creator.

This literary magazine is not simply a collection of student work. It is a space where students can express themselves, discover their voices, and share the thoughts and experiences that matter most to them. We truly believe every student has a story worth telling, and this publication is a celebration of those voices and ideas.

~ Mrs. Peretzman & Mrs. Kevlin



PERSONAL NARRATIVES

THREADS OF MEMORY

BY AMITIS BARZEHKAR

The smell of wet soil after rain always takes me back to my grandfather's garden. I can still see the sunlight shining through the terrace window, where he would sit for hours weaving carpets, his hands moving carefully as if each thread mattered.

A lot of the things I have learned in my life, I learned from my grandfather. When I was little, we would sit by the terrace window. He would weave carpets, and I would read out the numbers of the colors he had to use. Whenever I was bored or upset, he would ask me if I wanted to draw with him. My grandfather had always been a great artist and my role model. He would help me with my drawings, and often he would draw my favorite cartoon characters, like Dora, Cinderella, or Snow White, for me to color. What I admire most about him is that he never told me my drawings were good just because I was a child. He always gave me his honest opinion, like when I colored in different directions instead of smoothly in one direction. At the time, 7-year-old me viewed it as criticism, but now I realize he was just trying to make me a better artist and prepare me for the real world, where sugar-coating doesn't exist.

When my parents were at work, my grandfather, grandmother, sister, and I would play Mensch ärgere Dich Nicht and Snakes and Ladders together, laughing and arguing over who was winning. Almost every afternoon, my grandfather and I would make a fruit bowl with fresh purple and green grapes, cucumbers, and sliced red apples, as he always said to me, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." We would also eat the mulberries I picked from our trees. Some were perfectly ripe, while others were still pink and sour, which were my personal favorite. We called this safa kardan, which basically means "enjoying time together." I loved climbing the mulberry trees to pick the fruit, even though my clothes would always end up stained with pink and red juice from the mulberries, my hands looked like they were covered in reddish-purple paint, and sometimes I climbed so high (even though I wasn't supposed to) that I would fall and the tree branches would scrape my legs.

THREADS OF MEMORY

BY AMITIS BARZEHKAR

(CONTINUED)

In the mornings, when my grandfather watered the plants in the garden below our terrace, I could smell the fresh, earthy scent of dirt and water. Even now, the smell of rain brings back those memories. My family and I loved eating breakfast on the terrace after he watered the plants. My favorite part was smelling the cool, refreshing summer air, feeling the soft breeze, and watching the sunlight warm my skin as the trees swayed gently, as if they were waving good morning. After breakfast, I would go help him water the plants. I can still hear his voice saying, “Lower the pressure of the water hose, or it will damage the flowers.” He cared deeply for his garden, treating the flowers as if they were his own children. Sometimes, the wind would knock over the pots, or I would accidentally water them too much and drown the smaller flowers under the cool water. Even when he was upset, he tried his best not to show it because he always cared about his family more than anything else.

If you looked through my camera roll, you would find hundreds of pictures of those flowers. It’s as if my grandfather’s love for them became my own. His passion for art and creativity inspired me to draw and paint whenever I had free time. I remember seeing one of his woven carpets filled with images of nature and deciding that I wanted to create something just as beautiful. To the best of my ability, I tried to capture the way the sun reflects on the ocean, how birds travel together in the winter sky, and how flowers bloom as if they were painting the earth themselves, all on a canvas with the paint he had given me.

I wanted to become like him - a strong, caring, and selfless person who treats both people and nature with love. To this day, my art has been featured in the Salisbury School Art Gallery Exhibit several times, and every time I show him my artwork along with the certicertificates, I watch his tired face light up with a smile that says, “I am proud of you.”



FINDING MY WAY HOME

BY RYAN BUI

The air in Vietnam was the heaviest thing I had ever known, but also one of the best feelings I had ever felt. With every breath, I smelled hot street food sizzling in the air. I couldn't tell if it was me being burned alive by the heat or just the food cooking nearby. The sun glared over the country while motorcycles rushed past pedestrians like lightning.

I followed my family through a crowded market, trying to keep up. Voices overlapped, making everything sound blurred together. At first, it was exciting. It felt like home. Bright decorations waved above my head, and baskets of fruits and vegetables overflowed onto the streets. Vendors called out loudly while the smell of grilled meat, bánh mì, and other street foods filled the air. Everything felt unreal. But after looking around for too long and enjoying the familiar view, I realized my family was gone. The crowd closed in around me, strangers bumping past me as if I wasn't even there. The sounds that once felt comforting now overwhelmed me. I had gotten so used to the United States that I forgot how chaotic Vietnam could be. I looked around frantically, starting to run out of breath. It felt like my heart was about to stop. I turned in circles, street names passing by like the wind, and I grew dizzy searching for a familiar face. But all I saw were endless crowds of strangers. Every street name looked the same.I was genuinely lost.

Then I remembered something important: I'm literally Vietnamese. This is my homeland. I'll be able to figure a way out. I stepped aside from the crowd and leaned against a small stand where an elderly woman was arranging bundles of fresh vegetables. She looked at me with a soft but curious expression. I spoke politely, though my voice sounded frantic. "Con bị lạc rồi. Con đến từ hướng đó." ("I'm lost. I came from that direction.") She smiled. With a slow, gentle nod, she pointed toward a direction I hadn't noticed before and motioned for me to follow her. I hesitated for a second, but her warm smile reassured me, and I trusted her. Her presence gave me a sense of familiarity. I wasn't in America... I was home.

I followed her slow steps through the market, weaving between people and stalls. Then I saw them. My family stood near a bánh mì stand with tense expressions until their eyes landed on me. Relief washed over me so quickly it felt like mountains had been lifted off my shoulders. I turned to thank the woman, but she had already slipped back into the crowd. She has a family to return to too, I thought. That day, the market no longer felt like something that had consumed me. Instead, it felt like something I had learned how to move through. On the way home later that day, I realized I hadn't just found my way back to my family. I had found a little more confidence in myself and in my homeland.

WHEN I GROW UP

BY JOY SHIN

On a sunny day in June 2017, my teacher, Mrs. Daily, asked the class to draw what we wanted to be in the future during carpet time after singing “The Days of the Week,” something we did every day to quickly learn the days of the week. After carpet time, the class went to their tables, and Mrs. Daily handed out the sheets. Everyone started thinking and cheerfully discussing what they wanted to be. “I want to be a firefighter—no, actually, I want to be a policeman,” I heard from my friend sitting beside me. Me, on the other hand, I was quick to draw and write what I wanted to be. Right then and there, I started drawing a nurse.

A couple years later, on March 14, 2026, I’m in the car with my mom, who is an RN nurse. It’s a cold night, and we’re on the way home from Queens after having dinner there with my family of six. We’re driving home in two different cars: my mom’s Tesla and my dad’s INFINITI with my siblings. My siblings and I separated, and they went with my dad while I went with my mom, who had just finished work at 6:30. She was still in her scrubs, smelling like hand sanitizer, with a sweater that said “RN” over them.

While listening to “Cookie” by NewJeans playing in the background, I quietly hummed along until I suddenly thought about kindergarten and our “what we want to be when we’re older” assignment. I decided to tell my mom about it.

“Mom, I was thinking about a time in kindergarten when we were drawing what we wanted to be when we were older, and I remember being so happy and immediately drawing a nurse.” My mom listened, sighed, and said, “Aw, I remember when I would pick you up from school and you yelled, ‘I told you my mommy was a nurse!’ and ran to hug me after my night shift.” I smiled and looked at my mom. “You know, you’re the one who inspired me to be a nurse.” My mom looked at me and asked, “What about me inspired you to be a nurse?”

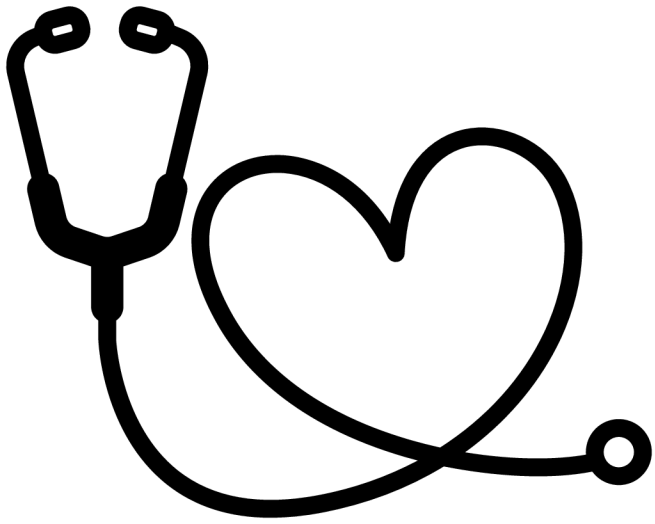
WHEN I GROW UP

BY JOY SHIN

(CONTINUED)

I looked at my mom and told her how I remembered watching her study to become a nurse. I remembered waking up and seeing my grandmother come to watch my sister and me while my mom went to a psych ward for work or school. It also caused her to work at night and come back during the afternoon to pick my sister and me up from school in her blue scrubs. I also explained how, as I got older, I realized she always had stories to tell about helping patients, and that inspired me even more to become a nurse.

In the end, that little drawing from kindergarten was never just a drawing. It was the beginning of something that quietly followed me through the years, growing with every memory of my mom coming home in her scrubs, every story she shared, and every moment I watched her care for others. Sitting in the car that night, I realized that my dream hadn't changed—it had simply become clearer. What once felt like a simple answer to a classroom question had turned into something real and meaningful. As I look ahead, I know that becoming a nurse isn't just something I once imagined; it's a path shaped by the person who inspired me all along.



THE WAY LOVE FINDS ME

BY CLAIRE ZHENG

I used to know everybody. Every street, deli, store, neighbor, you name it. I don't know why I thought fitting in somewhere new would be as easy as somewhere I used to call home. From recognizing every place like the back of my hand, I couldn't even name one street in this new place. On a random day in late August, I almost fell off my seat. Dad told me we were going to the orientation for my new school at 1:30 p.m. WHAT!!! I mean, so soon?? I'm not even ready yet, but it's not like I didn't want to go. I was curious to find out how my school worked and what it looked like, but that also came with standing out among everyone. Clothes, friends, shoes, personality, I mean, how could I even survive a day in this place in the future? I had no friends, didn't know anyone in town, didn't even know where the bathroom or the cafeteria was, and probably wouldn't even have anyone to sit with at lunch. Sad, I know.

That afternoon, the sun escaped through the window and landed on my face as I lay back on the couch, eating my favorite crackers. It was one of those days that felt stuffy, as if a wind god planted cushions in the atmosphere to suffocate me. Mom came back with a bowl of fruit, sat beside me and my crackers, and informed me, "Claire, there will be a lady waiting for you at the orientation at 1:30 p.m. today, okay?" My parents don't know this, but I think they have a memory problem from repeating things. "Okay Mommy, I'll make sure I tell Dad."

Gosh, how bad can my day get?
"Dad, come on, we're going to be late!"
"Alright, coming!"

I already knew it was going to be too late. It was bad enough that I was so nervous I felt like peeing in my pants, but now we were going to make a bad impression in front of that lady on the phone. I walked in with my dad, embarrassment written on my face. Dad just spotted a bench to sit on and shooed me away. Rude. There was no trace or sign of the lady being there. Now I have to tour this whole thing alone! I walked up to a lady sitting at the front desk with a pixie cut and beautiful green eyes to receive my schedule.

"Hello, can I have my schedule?"
"Sure! What's your name?" she asked.
The desk was filled with papers I had never seen before and a cup with ladybugs drawn on it that was overflowing with pencils. I want something like that.

THE WAY LOVE FINDS ME

BY CLAIRE ZHENG

(CONTINUED)

“Claire Zheng,” I replied.
“Okay, give me a second.”
She took some time to search through the messy pile.
“Ah, here it is,” she said while holding up the paper to me, smiling from ear to ear.
“Thank you,” I said back shyly.
“No problem. Have a good day!”

I smiled back, and on the surface it looked like I knew every hallway by heart. Truth was, I didn’t know anything. I looked like a lost child while walking back and forth between the same hallways. Everyone giggled and laughed around me with their groups of friends. I looked down at the floor when a group walked past, wishing I had one of those invisibility cloaks. My heart felt like it stopped beating for a second. I didn’t stay for very long. I wasn’t able to tour anything without a guide, and I was way too scared to ask for directions. I hurried away from a boy who started walking down the empty hallway I was in, sweat trickling down my head, my throat hurting every time I breathed, and my legs running so fast I couldn’t even feel them. Finally, I stopped in front of my dad, who was waiting for me in the main lobby, while panting again and again.

“God, I hate this place!” I finally confessed when we got in the car.
I looked out the window, trying not to burst out in anger.
“Claire, you will be fine. The world is not going to end,” he reassured me.

The following morning, I almost got lost coming off the bus at school. I almost walked into this blue hallway. How stupid. Why are there so many different colors for hallways anyway? So confusing. I tried my best to remember from the orientation where my locker was, and thank the heavens, I found it. I opened my new locker and found a stack of loose sleeves and a pencil case. I closed my locker and paced around the hallways, filled with so many new faces staring blankly at me as I passed them. Gee, never seen a new student before?
Then the warning bell rang. OH SHOOT. I didn’t even find my first period classroom yet. I walked into a green hallway, and there was a lady walking by in a hurry.

“Hey, excuse me, do you know where room 224 is?” I asked nervously.
“This is the high school side, sweetie. That’s on the middle school side.” *SAY WHAT NOW?*

THE WAY LOVE FINDS ME

BY CLAIRE ZHENG

(CONTINUED)

“Oh, thank you!” I replied in embarrassment as I hurried out of that zombie colored hallway. I finally found room 224, and dang, I passed by it so many times. I seriously need to get my eyes checked. As I walked in, there was a pretty blonde girl with a flowery top and jean shorts, wearing a long gold necklace with a big C. The moment she saw me, she beamed at me, and I of course smiled back.

“Hey, are you new?” she asked curiously.
“Yeah. How’d you know?” I replied as I set my heavy backpack on the floor.
“Well, I heard there were 15 new kids coming, and I never saw you around, so you know... it was obvious.”
“Ohh, I see. No wonder.”
I turned my chair around and tried to avoid eye contact with her, but also tried to observe everything at the same time.

“Okay, settle down guys. I’m Ms. Delsignore. Some of you guys might’ve had me, and some of you might not have. Today is a chill day. We will be doing a Kahoot about me activity.” The rest of the day was a blur. At lunch, I met an old classmate from elementary school that I hadn’t seen in a long time. We caught up on everything, and soon she became my lunch buddy along with her two other friends. During my classes, I sat alone most of the time. At that point, I couldn’t care less. I was just so... so angry. I didn’t even know who or what I should be mad at. I couldn’t believe I just moved away like that. I left everything behind: my friends, teachers, and classmates who all loved me so much. I was hurt by the fact that everyone would still be okay without me and things were still normal at my old school.

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Looking back now, if I could go back to that version of myself, I’d tell her she wouldn’t feel that way forever. Now I’ve met so many people and connected with everyone, along with a version of myself that I didn’t even know existed. The real truth was that, for the most part, I know every hallway like the back of my hand now, and I know at least one street in this town. Maybe this move was supposed to happen for me to slowly realize that taking the first step might not get you far, but it’s better than staying in the same position. And that can bring you so many things, such as love from new friends, new teachers, and new classmates. Love doesn’t just disappear when things change. It just finds new ways to exist through new people.

MY SISTER AND ME

BY AURORA VENTURA CASTRO

“Aurora, get up. We’re running late.” My sister spoke, usually tired, since she got a ton of workload from school that she often finished late at night. I always felt bad for her—she was constantly stressed, and to top it off, she had to drop me off and pick me up all the time.
It was around the beginning of 8th grade, and my sister was in college studying architecture. She began driving me to school and picking me up in her car, which was always filled with bright anime stickers. I never really cared, though. I always had mixed, sometimes unpleasant, feelings about her. I thought she was a little “childish” or too “bossy” around me because I was younger. We had quite an age gap, and as a kid, she always helped me with my homework. I never thought twice about it. She was just my older sister, nothing more. She always invited me to go out with her and her older friends since I never really had close friends and rarely went out, so I agreed almost every time.

“Okay,” I said from my bed, still in my pajamas. I never enjoyed getting up for school—it always felt like a chore. But I got up anyway and rushed to get dressed in time. After that I was already trapped in a place called school.

The day went by quickly, like a gust of freezing wind in the cold. Soon, I was walking to the high school lobby, just a hallway away from the middle school. I adjusted the satchel over my shoulder—what I considered my backpack—before taking my phone out of my pocket. My headphones blasted music loudly into my ears as I pushed open the exit door and headed toward my sister’s car. She was easy to find in the mountain of cars, her bright stickers standing out like a beacon of sunshine.

I opened the car door, lifting my bag that sagged down to my knees. I sat in the passenger seat beside her, holding my phone as she asked the usual question.
“How was school?” she asked as she pulled onto the road.

“It was okay,” I replied tiredly. I just wanted to go home and lie in my bed.“How were classes…?” I asked, surprisingly. I didn’t usually engage in conversation, but this time felt different—maybe because I noticed her curly hair and bright smile. “It was good. Professors just enjoy giving work,” she said. I expected that response, and somehow, by the time the conversation ended, we were already home. I hopped out of the car, struggling to hold my bag and my phone at the same time. I shoved my phone into my pocket and adjusted my bag as I walked to the front door. My sister followed behind me, holding her car keys.

MY SISTER AND ME
BY AURORA VENTURA CASTRO
(CONTINUED)

“Um, I have a test tomorrow... Can you help me study?” I asked loudly, already rushing to drop my satchel in my room before running back to the living room where she sat.
She smiled and nodded, and I returned an awkward smile. She gestured toward her room, and I followed.

Her room stuck out like a sore thumb. It was right next to the kitchen—you couldn’t miss it. The entrance had huge wooden doors, and bright light spilled through the cracks.
“The subject is math, by the way... just algebra,” I said. My sister sat at her desk while I sat on her bed, holding my phone, my leg bouncing up and down. I realized I forgot my papers, so I quickly ran back to my room, grabbed them, and returned in record time.

I looked at the review sheet, flipping through the pages before setting it down beside me. I gave up on studying and took out my phone instead. My sister stayed focused on her own assignments, staring at her computer screen through her blue-light glasses.
I put my earbuds in and scrolled through my playlist before choosing a song by Tyler The Creator, my favorite artist. I slumped over on her bed, my head resting on her pillow. Then I looked away from my phone and over at my sister.

I started thinking about everything she had done for me. She bought me food sometimes with her own money. She took me out and even invited me to events with her friends. I didn’t understand why I was only realizing it at that moment, but I finally saw it clearly...my sister really did love me. The same sister I used to fight with as a kid. The same sister I blamed to get out of trouble. The same sister I cried to and watched shows with every day growing up. The same sister who comforted me whenever I cried. I didn’t even know why I had felt so distant from her before. She had always shown me love and care. She had always looked out for me. I really was grateful for her.

I got up and walked over to her desk, where she was finishing her assignments, and hugged her. This was unusual for me—I didn’t like physical touch or showing affection through hugs. But in that moment, it felt necessary. From that day forward, I enjoyed walking out of school and running to her car full of anime stickers. I started listening more to what she was going through, and now I often sat in her room, hanging out with her and ranting about my day.
“Wanna go to that dessert place tomorrow? It’s Friday,” my sister asked, turning her chair to face me. “Sure,” I replied, smiling back at her.

MY FAVORITE PLACE

BY LEELYN CORR

Imagine yourself standing on a big stage, behind a microphone and in front of a 300-seat theater. You would probably be able to count everyone watching if the huge lights weren't blinding you, but there are still a few people you can see—just two of your friends sitting right at the front because the others you invited couldn't make it. All eyes on you. All eyes watching. All eyes waiting. I wouldn't need to imagine this. It happened to me, and this experience is one of my favorites.

I look into the crowd as I stand on stage, smiling wide and holding the microphone tightly. My band and I practiced these songs for months leading up to this performance, and even though there are about fifteen songs on our setlist, I only sing on five. I listen to the instruments being set up as I glance at the other vocalists: one main vocalist, one for the higher harmonies, and one for the lower harmonies, which is me. The song starts, Can't Stop by Red Hot Chili Peppers, probably one of my favorites on the setlist. I begin performing, moving along with the music created by my bandmates, my friends, nodding my head to the beat. All I do is have fun on stage. That's why I love this so much. I barely make my cue when I come in with the lower harmonies, but the notes come as easily as walking. I think I did pretty well. I can't really hear myself over everything else, but it feels right. When the second verse comes, I hear our lead singer stumble over his words, but the song keeps going. The music doesn't wait for mistakes. I know he's going to complain about it later backstage. The song ends, and the crowd erupts, adding even more noise to the atmosphere already filled with humming amps and quiet chatter between band members.



MY FAVORITE PLACE

BY LEELYN CORR

(CONTINUED)

I'm backstage for my break. It's not an official break, but there are about six songs in a row that I'm not in, so it feels like one. I sit on what's supposed to be a couch but looks more like a bench, barely fitting me with all the guitars taking up most of the space. I see my friends standing in front of a big mirror, talking. I shift the guitars to make room and stand next to them. "I did so bad," one of them says. "No, you didn't—literally nobody heard you mess up," the other replies, trying to comfort him. I consider joining in, but honestly, I think people did notice. Before I can say anything, my song gets called. I take a long sip of water and slowly walk back toward the stage. "Beating Heart Baby!" I hear our band director call from backstage, and I quickly move back behind the microphone. Beating Heart Baby by Head Automatica - I love Head Automatica, even though there are better songs on that album. I really like all of Daryl Palumbo's work. I barely finish that thought before the music starts, and I'm back to singing. This song is a mouthful - three full minutes of nonstop singing, and not the easy kind either. There are vocal runs in almost every line, with barely any time to breathe. It got easier over time, but when I was first assigned the song, I wondered why Daryl Palumbo made it so hard to sing. This song feels like mine. I look into the crowd and smile. They're all watching me. Everyone is looking at me and it feels amazing. People always say I thrive on stage, and this time, I can really feel it. Being on stage feels natural, like this is exactly where I'm supposed to be. The song ends, and the room fills with noise again. As the applause fades, I walk backstage, still full of energy, with only one thought in my mind.

The stage is my favorite place. The whole band returns to the stage for pictures, and I stand next to my friends, smiling widely even though I don't usually like my smile in photos. I don't care right now. Look at how much fun I'm having. Pictures are taken, but all I can think about is how much I love this, how much I love performing, how much I love people watching me, and how I can't wait for the next show, even though this one just ended. I know stage fright is one of the biggest fears in the world, but personally, I would love to be on a stage every day. That day, I discovered something important about myself: I found my favorite place.

BASEBALL: THE GREATEST GAME EVER

BY MARK RICCIARDI

Before I learned to walk, I learned the rhythm of a 6-4-3 double play. In our house, baseball isn't just a game, it's the blood that keeps me and my family moving. My dad even had the highest batting average when he was in high school, batting .541. My family and I talk about baseball as often as other families talk about what's for dinner. Even as far back as when I was 4 or 5 years old, I started loving the game of baseball, from the first time I had a catch.

There is so much to love about the atmosphere of the diamond, from the earthy scent of freshly cut grass to the sharp crack of the bat. Baseball is a game that tests your limits, pushing you physically and mentally on every play. Whether it's the gritty red clay on your skin after a slide or the sting of your palms on a cold morning hit, the game demands your best. Even though you're part of a team, you have to find the inner strength to stand your ground and give your absolute best when the spotlight is on you. Most importantly, it teaches you how to handle failure with grace and grit, proving that the toughest lessons are what truly build your character.

There are so many good lessons that come out of baseball. In 1996, there was a great speech from an old baseball coach, and this simple lesson provides a great way to look at life. In baseball, home plate is 17 inches wide and is the same size from T-ball to the major leagues. As a pitcher, you're taught to throw strikes, and if you're unable to do so, we don't just make the plate bigger to make it easier—we have to find ways to improve and throw strikes over that same plate. To me, this is a good, consistent reminder of how baseball is very much like life, because there is greatness found in accountability.



BASEBALL: THE GREATEST GAME EVER

BY MARK RICCIARDI

(CONTINUED)

From the moment I picked up a baseball, I fell in love with it. Baseball teaches you how to embrace failure in so many different aspects. Being able to deal with adversity is crucial in both life and baseball. A player who succeeds only 3 out of 10 times at bat is considered elite and a potential Hall of Famer. This teaches that setbacks are not final but are necessary feedback for growth and eventual success. Furthermore, throughout baseball, it is more than common to go through a hitting slump, which can really take something out of you and create self-doubt. Additionally, the stress of it being a game of inches means a single inch can be the difference between a home run clearing the fence and a fly ball being caught at the wall. Similarly, a pitcher's accuracy or a runner's slide to a base often comes down to a fraction of an inch to determine a strike or a safe call.

Baseball is, hands down, the most epic game on the planet, and here are two huge reasons why. First, it captivates you. As soon as you pick up a baseball, you experience a "love for the game" and all it has to teach you. Second, not only is it the greatest game alive, but it's also the hardest. Baseball brings out the best in both the physical and mental sides of you. You are required to work hard and focus on the little details. Through intense, repeatable training, you learn to confront self-doubt and manage success when it shows up. Ups and downs happen all the time in both baseball and life, so it's a good reminder to remain steady and consistent while always moving forward.



A PURPLE BOX

BY STACEY CASTRO MOYA

“Stacey, excellent behavior today! A purple crayon for your behavior!” I let out a sigh of relief. This meant I could go to Chuck E. Cheese! I looked through the crayons, trying to find the prettiest shade of purple. As I drifted from one crayon to another, my eyes landed on a soft lavender—the best one. The best part was that it was perfectly intact, fresh out of the box. The faint scent of crayons filled the classroom. Red, blue, green, and purple—colors used to show who behaved the best and who didn’t. One color sat in each of my classmates’ hands. As I colored in my notebook, still holding the box, my mind drifted off. I smiled, thinking about how my mom would tell me “good job” and how we could go to Chuck E. Cheese that Saturday. As I packed my bag, the sound of zippers filled the quiet classroom, and we all lined up, ready to be dismissed.

As my brother Steeven picked me up, we started walking home, and I began telling him about my purple box. “Steeven! I got a purple box!” I said. He replied, “Really? That’s nice.” When we arrived home, I started doing my homework at the kitchen table, waiting for my parents to come home. After a couple of hours, I heard the door open. I ran upstairs and said, “Mami!” I hugged her and showed her the purple square. She said, “Wow! Good job, hija! We can go to Chuck E. Cheese on Saturday when papi comes home.” I replied, “Thank you, mami!” Four days later, it was finally Saturday. I was so excited, waiting for my dad to come home—I could barely sit still. As I played Uno with my siblings, I heard the door open. I watched my dad walk in, and I ran to hug him. “Let’s go to Chuck E. Cheese!” I said. He chuckled and told me, “In three hours.” Those three hours felt like three decades.

I was in the car, bouncing in my seat. It was finally time to have fun at Chuck E. Cheese. I kept thinking about Skee-Ball, one of my favorite arcade games of all time. After about 30 minutes, I started to get a little hungry and asked my mom if we could get food. She said, “A ver, ya que te ha ido tan bien en la escuela últimamente... Vamos a pedir una pizza y un refresco, para ti y para Katerin.” I said, “Yay!” and ran off to tell my sister that we were getting pizza and soda. I found my sister shooting basketballs at the arcade game. I always forget what it’s actually called, so I just call it the basketball shooting game. When I reached her, I tugged at her shirt and said, “Katerin! We’re getting pizza and soda! Let’s go back to mami so we can order it!” She told me to wait a minute because the game was still going. After a minute or two, she got her score and said, “Yes!” We went back to my mom, who asked why we took so long. My sister explained that she didn’t want to waste her points.

A PURPLE BOX

BY STACEY CASTRO MOYA

(CONTINUED)

My mom then led us to the counter to order pizza. “One medium pepperoni pizza and two cups, please.” The employee smiled, told us the total, and gave us a number for our table. I watched as he picked up two Chuck E. Cheese paper cups and handed them to my mom. I immediately called dibs on the mouse cup—he was always my favorite. I didn’t know his name, but I knew he was a mouse, and mice were one of my favorite animals. My sister grabbed the other cup, which had a girl chicken on it. I didn’t know her name either. In fact, I didn’t know any of the mascots’ names—I just knew they were some of my favorite characters to see. I filled my cup with Coke while kids around my age laughed and played. I asked my mom where her drink was, and she said she wasn’t thirsty. I felt a little bad and offered, “Mami, papi! We can share a cup!” My sister suggested that we each share—she could share with mom, and I could share with dad. A win-win situation: no one gets more, and no one gets less. When the pizza arrived, I started eating a slice, but I noticed my mom and dad weren’t eating. I asked, “Why aren’t you eating?” They said they wanted me and Katerin to grow big and strong like them. I said okay and went back to eating. After three slices were eaten, one by me and two by my sister, my mom and dad ate the remaining slices.

After we used all our points, we started packing up to go home. I was a little upset that we had to leave, but I had so much fun that I was mostly just tired from the adventure. My mom asked me and my sister if we had everything. I was in the middle of drinking my soda, which muffled my voice when I said, “Everything!” I glanced at my sister, waiting for her reply, and she said, “Yup, I have everything.” As we got into the car, my dad honked the horn, scaring both of us. Laughter filled the silence. As he started driving, I looked back at Chuck E. Cheese and thought, Today was really fun. I can’t wait to go back. When we got home, it was getting dark. The first thing I did was tell my brothers everything I did at Chuck E. Cheese. They seemed interested, and after about 30 minutes of me talking, my mom announced that it was time for bed. I said, “Night, Steeven! Night, Jonathan!” and got ready for bed. My mom tucked me in, and I fell asleep shortly after.

A PURPLE BOX

BY STACEY CASTRO MOYA

(CONTINUED)

It was around 8 a.m. when my mom woke me up. It was Monday and we were going back to school. After I woke up, my mom picked out my outfit: a white shirt, a black skirt, along with socks and shoes. As I ate breakfast, pancakes with syrup, I thought about my classmates and my teacher's reactions when I told them about my Chuck E. Cheese experience. After I finished eating, I put on my backpack and walked to school with my mom. I asked her if we could go to the park later since the park we always go to is right in front of our house. When we arrived at school, I kissed her on the cheek and ran inside, saying, "Bye, mami! Love you!" She replied, "Bye, love you too!" About 30 minutes later, class began, and my teacher asked, "So what did you guys do this weekend?" My classmates raised their hands, and so did I. She looked around the room, then at me. We made eye contact, and she gave me a warm smile. "Stacey, what did you do this weekend?" I put my hand down, took a deep breath, and said, "I went to Chuck E. Cheese!"

My parents usually worked from the morning, when they dropped me off, all the way until midnight. Seeing them was always the highlight of my day. I loved them so much. When I was younger, I made sure to tell them I loved them every day, making sure they felt appreciated. My parents always worked hard, but they never forgot how to love.



GOODBYES IN FOURTH GRADE

BY ARISSA QU

Some time in February, Mrs. I promised to the class, “I will visit you guys again at the end of June.” We never saw her again after that. Mrs. I was my fourth grade teacher. In my memory, she was a strict, but cool teacher. When I started fourth grade, she told us, “Remember this: hard work will take you places. When you become successful, you’ll think back to this moment and realize that Mrs. I was right.” At that time, I didn’t think much of it, but now those words seem permanently etched into my mind. Mrs. I was one of the best and most memorable teachers I have had in my life. Not only did she teach me academic skills, she also taught me important life lessons.

A great example of that is one day when we were learning about social studies and copying down notes. I was seated in the back and couldn’t see the screen. However, everyone else seemed to have no problem seeing and was diligently copying notes as pencils scratched against paper. Even when Mrs. I specifically asked anyone who couldn’t see to go sit in front of the screen, no one budged. My head was whirling with conflicting thoughts. Should I go up there? Why is no one moving? Am I the only one who can’t see a single thing? Are these notes important? Should I just pretend to take notes and not go up there? Do I need these notes? I think I should go up there. Yeah, and be the only kid who can’t see? No thanks. My mind finally came to a conclusion: pretend to take notes and spare yourself the judgmental glances of others. I soon adopted the same position as everyone else. I crouched over my notebook and moved my pencil, writing invisible words in the air. Suddenly, Mrs. I stood up from her seat and came towards the back, where her desk was located, to get something. Please, don’t see me, I chanted in my head. I’m just an ordinary student like everyone else, diligently taking notes. She passed by and I sighed in relief internally. However, when she passed by me again to go to the front of the classroom, she stopped. “Arissa, why is your paper blank?” My heart dropped like a stone. My fingers grew cold. I felt as if the world was spinning around me. “I um…” I stammered out. Why was my luck so horrible? Mrs. I seemed to understand what was going on immediately. “Arissa, I clearly stated that anyone who couldn’t see should go to the front. Why didn’t you listen?” I had no response. I just looked down at my paper. After a few moments of silence, she said, “Just go up to the screen and copy the notes.” I nodded my head and stood up with my notebook and pencil clutched tightly in my hands.

GOODBYES IN FOURTH GRADE

(CONTINUED)

BY ARISSA QU

As I walked towards the front of the class, I could feel my cheeks burning with embarrassment. I sat in front of the screen and hurriedly took notes. Contrary to my expectations, no one gave me judgmental looks or anything. My classmates never talked about the embarrassing situation of Arissa getting caught by Mrs. I not taking notes. To be honest, I'm not even sure if they were aware of what happened. I soon understood something really important: no one cares about your embarrassing moments as much as you think. Ever since then, I stopped worrying so much about what others thought of me. After that incident, I've always liked Mrs. I because she taught me a valuable lesson, probably without even realizing it.

As much as I loved Mrs. I, she had to retire. Her mother was sick and there was no one to take care of her. "Don't worry though, my friend, Mr. R, will be your new teacher. He's a great teacher and you guys are going to love him. I'll also visit you guys in June, before you graduate fourth grade too," she promised. Mr. R soon joined our class to teach with Mrs. I. Like Mrs. I said, he was an awesome teacher. He loved to tell jokes, offer class challenges, and soon became the class's favorite teacher. For me, they were tied, but I think my classmates liked him more than Mrs. I. Soon, it was Mrs. I's last day of being a teacher. Some people were sad, but we knew we would see her again. Besides, Mr. R also promised to update us with news of her and to update her with news of the class. The next day, Mrs. I retired and Mr. R taught our class and offered a class challenge. If anyone in the class could solve the riddle he gave out, he would reward the whole class with candy from the prize bin. However, the class only got three chances. This fired up everyone's competitive spirit and we tried to solve it through all sorts of ways. We voted on the answers we thought were the best and had the person who came up with the answer declare it. In the end, we used up all three chances with incorrect answers, but it was still fun.

On the second day, Mr. R taught the class like normal. He didn't have any fun class challenge this time, but maybe he would have one after recess. Soon, it was time for lunch and recess, and the class rushed outside like a wave bursting through a dam. After recess, we went to class with our recess teacher. This was weird because we usually went back to class with our homeroom teacher. When we arrived at our classroom, there was no sign of Mr. R. A few minutes later, the principal came in with a blonde haired woman. She said to us, "I'm sorry to say this, but Mr. R had to leave unexpectedly due to personal reasons. However, Mrs. C over here," she gestured towards the blonde haired woman beside her, "will continue teaching you guys."

GOODBYES IN FOURTH GRADE

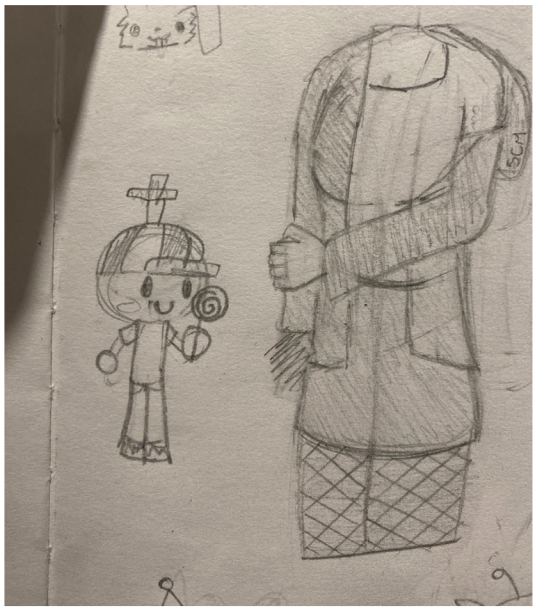
(CONTINUED)

BY ARISSA QU

The once rowdy room turned silent in an instant. “What?” someone asked. “Unfortunately, Mr. R will no longer be teaching your class,” the principal answered, her eyes filled with sympathy. “Why?” someone shouted. “He had to step away because of personal matters,” she answered gently. “Wait, does that mean we’ll never see Mr. R again?” another person asked. The principal gave no answer to it. That means yes, doesn’t it? I thought. Tears started to well up in my eyes. I didn’t even care if it seemed too “baby like” if I cried. However, I wasn’t the only one. A lot of people had already begun crying. Mrs. C, seeing the room full of crying children, tried to cheer us up. “Okay, how about we play some Minecraft Education for the rest of the day?” No one answered her, but a few people started moving towards the computer cart with Chromebooks. Soon, the loss of Mr. R was softened slightly through the power of video games, and Mr. R fell from his throne of being the favorite teacher to the teacher who left too suddenly. When school ended, the class slowly moved on. We had a new teacher, Mrs. C, and she seemed really nice. We started the day with “get to know each other” activities, but I refused to let my guard down. What if she left suddenly too? However, as time went on, I no longer thought like that. I had this feeling that Mrs. C was here to stay. Soon, the class started to forget about is collective sadness over Mr. R and Mrs. I leaving.

When June came, Mrs. I had been long gone, but what she taught us remained. She taught us about the importance of hard work, but she also taught us that sometimes a goodbye is forever. In fourth grade, I would have been devastated at her absence, but now, with the erosion of time, I find myself accepting the outcome. While we may have started on the same path, circumstances forced us to go different ways. I experienced two losses, one expected and the other unexpected, but it was understandable. There were circumstances and no “villains” in the story, contrary to what I would have believed four years ago. Maybe Mr. R also had family to care for. I believe that fourth grade taught me a lot of things, not only academically but also emotionally. I am no longer the same person I was four years ago. The girl who used to pretend to air write and hated Mr. R for leaving so unexpectedly has grown up.

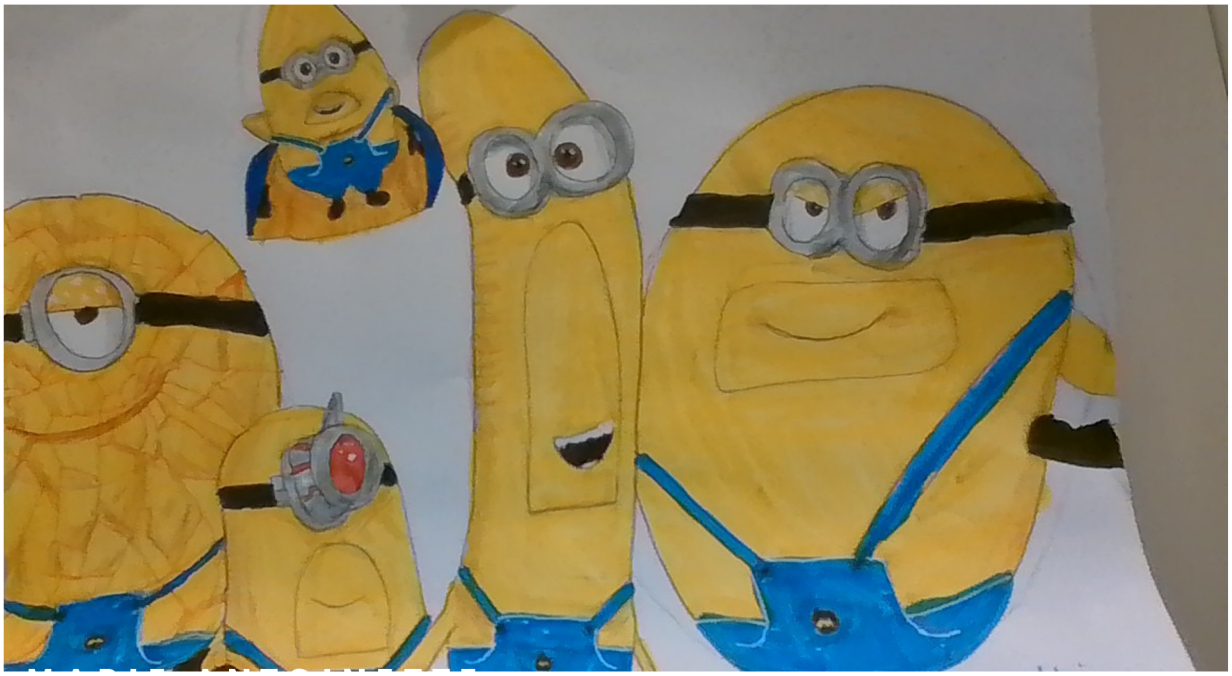
ARTISTS' CORNER



BY STACEY CASTRO MOYA

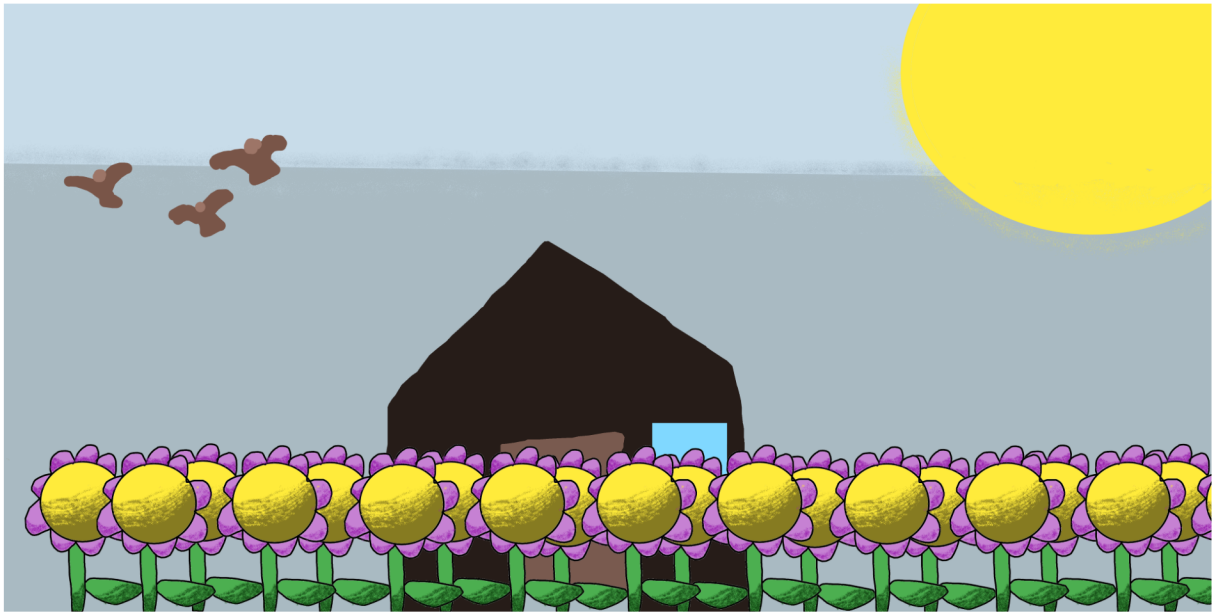


BY ALVIN SUN



BY ALVIN SUN

ARTISTS' CORNER



BY LIAM ENG-WIND



BY OLIVIA KAPUSTA

BY SOPHIA CHEN





POETRY

THE COLOR OF MEMORY

BY SEAN MCBRIEN

Nostalgia is orange
It smells like the pool on the first day it opens,
filled with chemicals,
but reminds you of what is to come.
It tastes like a double chocolate cake
on your fifth birthday,
pure joy that you wish to experience
for one last time.
It sounds like the train's horn at night
before you go to sleep.
To wake up the next morning,
on the first day of May.
It feels like a hug from your mother
after you come back home at last.
It looks like the sun waking you up
on the last day of school, shining on the grass.
The color of memory, you always wish to get back,
but will forever be placed in storage,
Nostalgia is orange

WINDOW

BY ARIANA ORTEGA

I look between both sides

Spotting a stray cat and a thirsty houseplant

I'm not blind to the truth

I clearly see, I am rarely visited

Tended to only twice a day under the sun's control

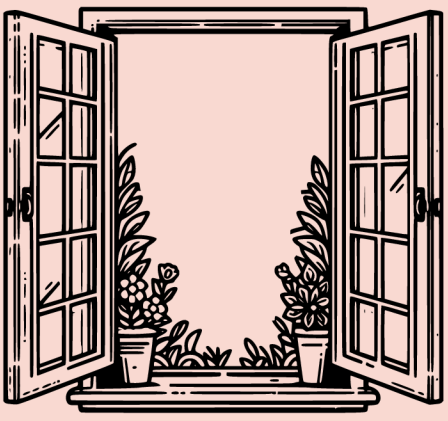
Responsibility draped over me like a curtain

My face is left clouded with bore

Yet I continue to paint patterns of frost and offer a view

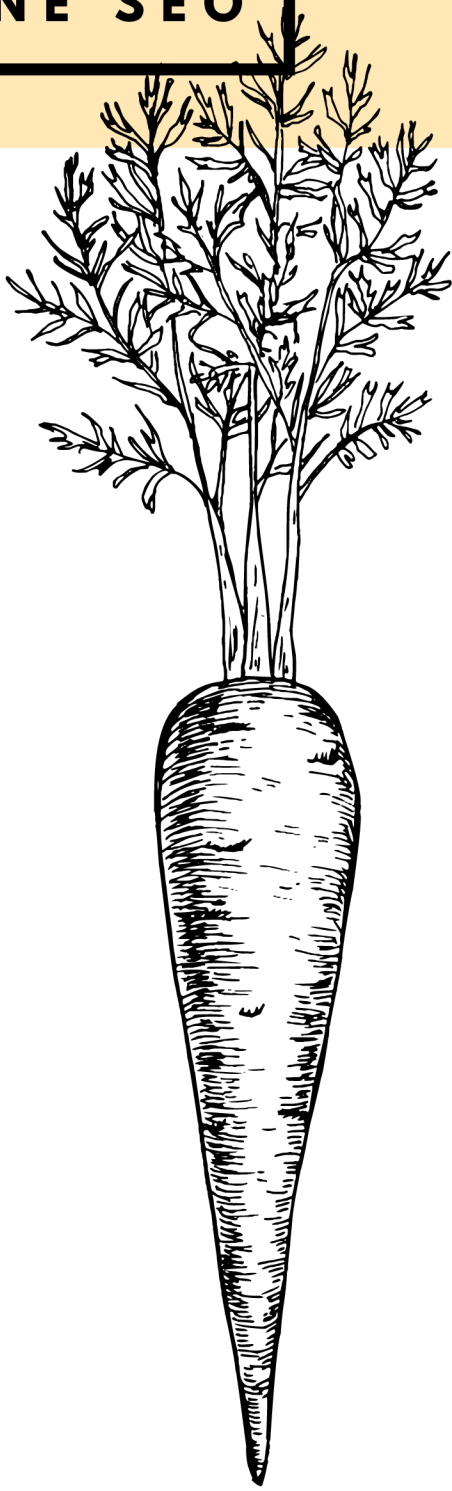
Weighted fingertips drag me down

when the sky disappears too soon



LUNCH PLATE CARROT

BY LIAM ENG-WIND & IRENE SEO



Lunch plate carrot

The v e r y

l

o

n

g

carrot

was on my lunch plate.

Left over from lunch -

it was fate.

Even if it was strange,

I still ate.

LOVE

BY ARIELLE MINKOWSKY

Is it the joy I feel when we hug?
Or is it just when we smile?
Is it having fun doing nothing at all?
Does it feel like you have nothing on your shoulders
nothing weighing on your back?
Do you feel it when you make eye contact?
Is it your lively laugh?
Is it the fact that time stands still when we are together?
Does it have to end or can it be infinite?
Has it always been there?



TIME

BY BRENDAN LANG

I am always consistent,
never early or late.
Endless.
Inevitable.
A constant cycle.
I will always catch up to you.
No matter how strong or fast you are.
You can't stop me.
I am represented on a circle
with numbers and black hands.
Indefinitely tied to a wall,
spinning.
You may enjoy me
or hate me.
But I will always
catch up.

FORK IN THE ROAD

BY FINN WELSH

From colorful and lively,
to droopy and brown.
From swaying in the trees,
to falling on the ground.
From fresh and warm,
to sour and chunky.
Used to be cool in the fridge,
but now tastes funky.
From short and beautiful,
to overgrown and long.
From greenery and scenes,
to growing weed in the lawn.
A necessary thing in our lives
frequently is change,
but sometimes I wish things would stay the same.
As I wrap this up,
I would like to ask you,
Sometimes don't you feel the same too?

WHAT AM I?

BY LIAM ENG-WIND, IRENE SEO & CAMILLA SILVA



I was born on a farm,
but now I live in a carton.
“YooHoo” I hear my mother say.
Mooooove over!
“Pick me” I scream to the kids on the lunch line.
I go well with coffee,
but a cookie hates to see me coming.
What am I?



My parents names are Mario and Theresa
I live in many different places
I can be hot or cold
People like me with many different toppings
My jokes are kinda cheesy
I’m hanging out in the cafeteria everyday
People think I’m sweet as pie
Everyone wants a piece of me
What am I?

ANSWERS: 1) milk, 2) pizza

WHAT ARE YOU, EMPTINESS?

BY LEELYN CORR

Are you the look of the tree brances
as the season starts to freeze?
Are you a cold bathtub
as all the warm water takes its leave?
Are you someone's memory-filled bedroom
when they deside to start from new?
Are you a newly bought notebook
waiting to be filled?
Are you a canvas before the artist gets to it,
ready to become beautiful?
Are you used to represent starts or endings?
What are you,
emptiness?



THANK YOU GARDEN

BY SHREYA BALAJI

Thank you garden
it's full of joy
It brings me happiness
like a squeaky toy
the sound of the buzzing bees
like they are chasing the pollen
the smell of the fresh lily flowers
before they have fallen
it makes my life create more memories
with the tree branches that have any leaves
the feeling of riding the big blue bike
like going on a long hike
you made my life turn around
planting the roots of the pretty flowers in the ground
thank you, garden

BEFORE TIME TAGS YOU

BY ELLIE TAYLOR

Youth is like a roller coaster,
You might think at first that it is going so slow
but then, POW! It all speeds up.

Youth is like an avocado on a counter,
At first it seems perfectly ripe
then in a matter of a day
it can turn brown and mushy like mud.

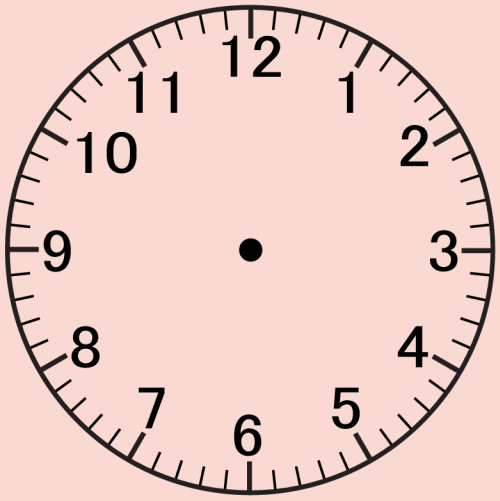
Youth is like a new pair of shoes
when you first get them
you feel that they will be with you forever
but, before you realize, they became worn out and soon
enough it's time to get a new pair of shoes

Youth is like a bouquet of flowers you get from your family
as a token of appreciation.
At first you put it in a vase with water in it,
but within a few days it withers
and all the vibrant lovely leaves turn into shriveled dull ones

CLOCK

BY ELISSA SANTORO

My parents say that I am very wise
It's because I never run out of time
Eyes are on me at all times
When you don't watch me I get older faster
Just like humans, I have hands to count
I stay in a corner, high and still
Watching everyone and everything
I am as inevitable as eternity
Everywhere I go people say I am endless



DOORMAT

BY ARIELLE MINKOWSKY

People walk all over me,
day by day
I just hope that I can show them the way
At the front of your house,
like a welcoming sign
Watching people come in,
sit down and dine
I see party dresses
And Nike shoes
Everyone walking by
in different hues
Hopefully one day I can say,
thank you!

MOTHER NATURE

BY KYLE KRAUZ

As I close my eyes,
I see the bright yellow sun
I relax as it warms my body
I hear the swooshing of the sea
along with the chirps of the birds
the sound getting softer then louder,
as I walk on the path
I take a moment to smell the flowers
the sensation going through my nose
As I bend down, I touch the sooth rocks
the world feels so nice
nature healing the world
I wish I could be here forever,
but I know I cannot stay

BLUE POOLS & BURNING SMOKE

BY RYAN ANGELL

It's peaceful and chaotic
I smell the smoke
I see the explosions
I'm here with them and it could last a lifetime
On a towel, sitting on the grass
It's dark but the streets are illuminated by a flash
Red, white, blue, and green
The biggest ones I've ever seen
Almost like a liminal space
If I could, I would never leave this place
The blue, glowing pool and a fun night
Everything here always feels right
Soon the day will come again,
a quarter millennium and definitely not

WHAT IS THE FEELING THAT TAKES YOU BACK?

BY STEPHEN CHAVEZ

Nostalgia can be anything and everything
You look through your window,
seeing luscious bright green lawns.
It's when you hear your family bright and cheery
before immense work and old age has taken over
That feeling my friend, is nostalgia.
It's like jumping into bed the night before Christmas,
ready to jump and wake your family at any cost.
It's something we all know, but also don't.
Like that one rumor at school that bugs you non-stop
Nostalgia is a shower, warm and cold,
all the bad moments disappear.
It might be boring like waiting in line for hours,
or exhilarating like being at the edge of a tower.
Think of a watermelon at a birthday party,
sweet but sometimes sour.
Or beautiful, like a sparkling blue beach.
Nostalgia,
Nostalgia can be anything and everything

TIME

BY HRIDHAAN SHETTY

Time is a fresh, cold bottle of iced tea.
You enjoy it until you realize
how little is left
and how fast it's gone by.

Time is the precious memories
we hold with the ones dear to us
in that they shouldn't be wasted.

Time is like a gallon of pitch-black printer ink
as it's overwhelmingly more valuable
than it appears on the surface.

TAKE ME BACK

BY ZACHARY SIMMONS

The assignment essentially forces me to
take a trip down short memory lane.
Closing my eyes,
I can remember more clearly:
The bright and golden sunset making me want to go outside
and play tag on the dewy grass,
the sweet, ripe, yellow mangoes
cut up into a million pieces that would still
have my parents groan and grab the paper towels,
my ears being surrounded with a horrendous melody
that can only be made from someone who keeps
a "yellow wall" of love
from my loveable glasses wearer.
I can smell--not really-- the sweet yet crispy and steamy
food while I log-in to my hunk of junk,
and enter my first class,
the black and white animals I sign away my privacy to.
Opening my eyes,
I can remember more clearly.
The assignment lets me look back on my life,
making me realize,
I wouldn't have had it any other way.

INNOCENCE

BY RUBEN GOMEZ

Innocence is white
It smells like fresh cut grass
in the early morning
It tastes like cold water
from a mountain spring
It sounds like a quiet jingle
on a winter breeze
It feels like cold white snow,
soft before the dawn
It looks like a snowfall,
covering everything
Innocence is pure as a silent morning,
Innocence is white

BIG BAD FIGHTS TO BONFIRE NIGHTS

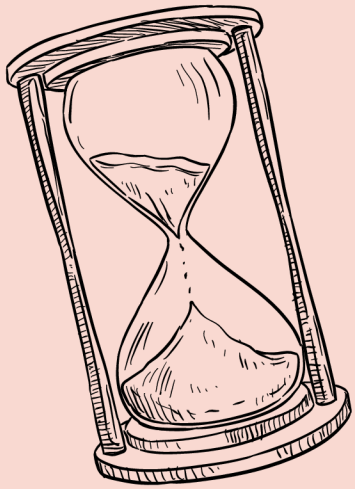
BY LIA VALENTI

I am from the blue chairs with Papa's initials
written in thick black sharpie
I am from the black and white photo albums of all the
grandchildren, one with color for baby Harpy
I am from the front porch barbeque with the overlook of
Nana's cabin
I am from the loud yelling from my older brother's room,
"guys be quiet it sounds like a stabbing"
I am from "Deck The Halls"
with a smile on my dad's face
I am from Papa's big flashing camera
right in my face
I am from Elvis Presley figures
and shelves of collectable toy cars
I am from stories of the Vietnam War and all the scars
I am from a tight attic room full of cousins
the smell of popcorn, there's about a dozen
I am from the slamming of doors after a fight
I am from walking to the bonfire with flashlights at night
I am from sweet treats "Please give me some"
I am from the writing of "The best is yet to come"

TIME

BY GURNAM BHURJI

Does it fly like a bird in a flock?
Can it talk, words heavy as a rock?
Does it run like water in a stream
can it deliver a message that makes me scream?
Why does it go by so far?
Leaving me behind in the past?
How can one second can feel like 100 years,
but at the same time,
words seem to fly past my ears?



INTERCONNECTEDNESS

BY ANONYMOUS

And then it continues,
day and night
and it still repeats.
There is a rhythm that anchors
to stay stable
As the area unfolds into a perilous confluence.

Continuity is with no doubt
the key to interconnectedness.
Going through the steps of my day,
I can only follow what lays.
For the choir hums of murmuring and buzzing,
the way is still paved to walk.

Wherever I go, I remain unmoved.
Hopefully I can stay clued.
From my day to its night,
the trail stays intact
and so, I can continue onto the next path.

THE DIAMOND

BY NATALIA CHAVARRIA

Something flies beneath the sun

A game of grit, A game of fun

Leather waits with open hands

As teammates shout from dusty lands

The boom on the big black bat

And the guy in blue

Who makes all the rules

Every fall, reaching for the ball

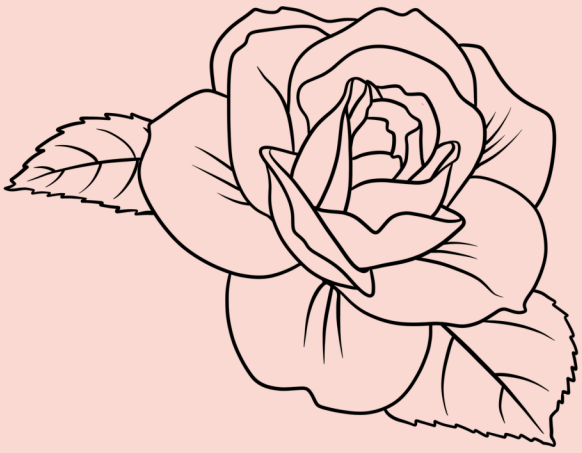
The audience waits for the call

This game reminds us to give our all

SPRING'S BEAUTY

BY AYAAN SHARMA

As I open my back door,
I feel a sense of excitement waiting to be free.
I could see the sun peering through with a smile,
As if it was waiting for me.
I could see the flowers rise,
As if it has waited for its time to shine.
I can read the trees embracing their colors,
Just like the happiness about being different,
Filling the joyous air here and there.



EXCITEMENT

BY JISOO KIM

Is it always existing?
Is it there lurking in those corners,
waiting to be seen?
Do you feel it
only when you want to?
Is it like a trip to the beach
on a bright sunny day,
where the air smells salty
and the waves feel cool against your body?
Or is it a snowy Christmas,
when your face lights up like those shiny
gleaming ornaments as you open the presents?
Is it a Saturday night,
where the family gathers
around that sturdy wooden table?
Is it a long anticipated meeting with your best friends?
Is it that jumpiness, a longing, a waiting for something?


FANFICTION

LEGACY

(A SEQUEL TO THE SECRET KEEPERS)

BY ARISSA QU

Chapter I: Life In Point William

“Rise and shine sleepy head,” said Reuben’s mom. “Uhh,” groaned Reuben in reply. “Come on, it’s only 6 in the morning.” “Yes and school starts in an hour. I’ve already made your breakfast, your favorite french toast and scrambled eggs. My shift starts in 15 minutes and I expect you to go straight to school after finishing your breakfast.” She looked at him dead in the eye. “Also, don’t go out on another adventure on your way”. Reuben sighed. “Mom, you’ve said this everyday and I promise you, I won’t.” Reuben’s mom let out a laugh. “It can’t hurt for one to be careful. Who knows, one day, I might just find out that my son has gone trespassing on the property of the unspoken ruler of the city and is in grave trouble. Man just imagine the shock. Just when I think that my son is making friends and having the best day of his life with that said friend, I get a phone call telling me that my son is currently in trouble.” Reuben decided to look at the interesting flower vase on his cabinet instead of looking directly at his mother. Reuben’s mom let out a sigh. “Alright, I was just joking. It’s been months and in all honesty, I’ve forgiven you. Just tell me the next time you plan to do something so dangerous, alright young man?” “You bet, mom” Reuben replied. “Have a good day at school, Reuben.” Reuben’s mom said. “Thanks, you too mom.” With that, Reuben’s mom left the room. Though initially hesitant on revealing the full truth to his mom, Reuben, in the end, still decided to reveal everything. Alright, maybe not everything as he left out how he got the watch, how dangerous Mr.Faug’s mansion was and how in the end, Mr.Faug had a club and was not afraid to use it. But Reuben still informed his mom of the important details, he found a watch that could turn the user invisible, he figured out that “The Smoke” also had this watch so he wanted to steal it to stop his days of terrorizing(making the citizens tremble in fear from just thinking of his name) the innocent citizens of New Umbra. After finishing the story, Reuben’s mom was shocked. After all, who wouldn’t be? She just heard that his son tried to go after the mysterious tyrant of their city and actually “defeated” him. But most importantly, he had done all these dangerous things and she didn’t even know. Granted, he kept her in the dark and covered up his absence by saying that he was with a friend but still. She vowed that she would keep a better eye on Reuben and made him promise never to try to attempt something so reckless again without consulting her. But there was a flaw in her plan as Reuben could easily break that promise and do something reckless again without telling her. That’s why she decided to take some lessons from Nova Meyer on how to know if another person is telling the truth based on their facial expression and voice. Although she believed Reuben, she was still preparing for the worst as Reuben did partially break her trust in him.

LEGACY
(CONTINUED)
BY ARISSA QU

Chapter II: A Horrible Morning

I woke up only to have the Sun assaulting my vision. Ah, what a wonderful way to start my day. My door creaks open. “It’s time to rise and sh- Oh wow you're already awake. Wow, is this day when pigs fly?” Asked Hazel, my older sister. “Get out of my room” I politely said. “No can do, dear brother! Mom and dad have left to go to work and have tasked me with looking after you! Aren’t you lucky?” “Oh, great,” I murmured. “Wow, I thank you for your great enthusiasm. Anyways, school starts in like 30 minutes but we’ll miss the bus if you don’t get up right now.” “Yeah, yeah” I said as I dragged myself out of the bed. “Wow, what’s gotten into you? I know you’re all emo and depressed but this is the first time I’ve seen you so tired. What, did you sneak out last night and partied until 4AM or something?” “Wait, wait, wait. Excuse me, did you just say that I’m emo?” I asked, ignoring her horrible party guess. “Hmmmm, I still remember a certain someone that wanted to fill their closet with all black clothes and became the most grumpiest human alive after that certain someone’s parents said no.” she replied. “Come on, that was a year ago! I was in a phase alright!” I said. “Hmm, yeah, yeah whatever you say” Hazel replied with a smirk on her face while walking towards my door. Ugh, older sisters are truly the worst. How in the world do they remember your most embarrassing and darkest memories that happened ages ago? Worse, they never cease to stop reminding you of it! If I were going to become depressed, I would blame it on her because she won’t stop bringing these memories up.

LAS GRANADAS

(ALTERNATE ENDING TO ESPERANZA RISING)

BY GURNAM BHURJI



IN ESPERANZA RISING THE AUTHOR NAMES THE CHAPTER AFTER A FRUIT OR VEGETABLE IN SPANISH SO NAMED THE LAST CHAPTER "LAS GRANADAS". IT TRANSLATES TO THE POMEGRANATES. THE FRUIT POMEGRANATE CAN REPRESENT VARIOUS THING ONE OF THEM BEING DEATH.

I ALSO DECORATED THE LAST SLIDE WITH MARIGOLD FLOWERS BECAUSE THEY REPRESENT MANY THINGS ONE OF THEM BEING DEATH. ANOTHER REASON I USED THESE TO DECORATE THE SLIDES WERE THAT THEY ARE ALSO USED TO DECORATE ALTARS ON DIA DE LA MUERTOS A.K.A. THE DAY OF THE DEAD.

BOTH OF THESE THINGS THAT REPRESENT DEATH BECAUSE IN THE ALTERNATIVE ENDING HER MOTHER DIES.

As the days turned into weeks, Esperanza watched as Mama grew weaker, the relentless valley fever tightened its grip. Despite the doctor's frequent visits and the home remedies, her mother's breath grew shallow, her once vibrant almond shaped eyes now clouded with fatigue. One quiet morning, as the sun began to rise, a vibrant golden glow casted over the lush valley, Esperanza sat by her mother's side holding her hand. Mama smiled weakly, her voice with a mere whisper as she spoke of Papa and the rancho in Mexico, of memories filled with laughter and love. With a final, gentle sigh, her eyes closed, and her hand went limp in Esperanza's. A cold fist seemed to grasp Esperanza's heart as tears streamed down her heartbroken face. The world seemed to pause as Esperanza overflowed with emotion, her mother was gone.

The days that followed were a blur of grief and sorrow. Esperanza felt as though a part of her had been ripped away, leaving an emptiness that echoed through her heart. Abuelita arrived, her presence a comforting balm amidst the pain. Together, they mourned, sharing stories and memories of Mama, celebrating the beautiful life she had lived. Though the pain was profound, Esperanza knew that she had to be strong, not just for herself but for Abuelita and the memory of her mother. She would carry Mama's love and strength within her, using it to face the challenges ahead and to build a new life in this foreign land, honoring the legacy of the woman who had taught her the true meaning of esperanza-hope.

A NEW STEP

(AN ALTERNATE ENDING TO FALLING OVER SIDEWAYS)

BY JANINNE BAUTISTA

It’s been a few months since Dad’s stroke, and things still don't feel “normal.” But maybe things are okay that way. I walked into the community center for my dance recital, and my stomach tightened full of nervousness. For the first time, Dad was there, not watching in the crowd, but with me backstage. Although he can’t walk, he practiced moves in his wheelchair with me so he can accompany me.

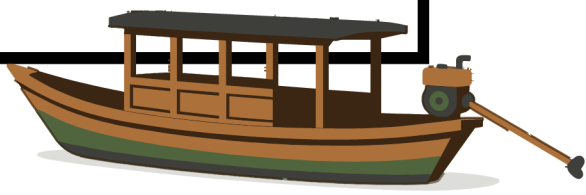
When the music started, my chest was heavy, but when I looked at Dad having fun regardless of his impairment, all the butterflies faded. We moved together with chemistry that seemed long lost. The audience ruptured in applause when we were finished.

Once we made our way back backstage, we just smiled at each other. I realized our connection will never be the same as before, but we made a new stronger and better one.

LEGACY ON THE RIVER

(ALTERNATE ENDING TO TERROR AT BOTTLE CREEK)

BY RAJAN SUKHU



I can see Liza knocking on my front door as I'm eating my cereal. The loud bang hurts my ears for a moment that I pause in my steps.The loud bang reminds me of the wind smacking against my boat during the hurricane. As I open the door I see Liza and Francie dressed up nicely in yellow dresses. We are getting ready to teach people about preparing for hurricanes. I let them in and following them, a huge gust of wind enters the house. I immediately slam the door and lock it. Liza says “Wow you like nice today!” I say, “Thanks, you look great too.” I walk towards the couch and pick up my prepared speech for today's tour. Liza and Francie sit on the couch next to me and turn on the television.

After lunch, we headed down for the docks. I watch the eager tourists line up to get onto the boat, and I feel those old butterflies in my stomach.

The boat rocks as it moves down the river. To my left, I notice a hog wading in the water near a tree. To my right, I see an alligator ominously lift its bumpy head out of the water.

My mind goes back to the day when I was a twelve-year-old boy on a similar boat with my dad. I was in awe of my dad the first time I watched him kill an alligator. He was always teaching me things and I cherished our time together, so when he left during the hurricane, it changed everything.

“Are there any natural disasters that have ever affected this town?” a child asks and it interrupts my daydream. “Years ago when I was your age, there was a major hurricane that impacted this town...” Out of all of the tours I’ve done over the years, this is the first time I am asked that question. I told the child about what it was like to run from a hurricane, climbing a tree with two other people while snakes lurked beneath our feet. As I recount my story, I recall the hunger pains I felt from not being able to eat for days as we stayed in the tree.

Returning home from work that night, I thought about dad and how he would view me now. I hope he would be proud of me, seeing me teach lessons of survival on the water, sharing my knowledge of all of the animals on the river, and demonstrating leadership skills. He was the guy I looked up to, even if he wasn’t there physically. The wisdom he gave me is what I want to share with others.

LIBRARY OF SOULS

(ALTERNATE ENDING TO LIBRARY OF SOULS)

BY MIA ANSELMO

‘I felt the impact of the bullet almost before I heard the gun roar. It was like being walloped by a giant, invisible fist. I was knocked off my feet and thrown backward and then everything became abstract. I was dimly aware that my body was experiencing a great deal of pain. That I was dying.’

‘I could hear Emma and Miss Peregrine shouting and panicking, as I could faintly see them kneel down. I felt like I had no energy left to move , like my soul was slowly being taken from my body.’

‘I could feel and see them trying to rescue me as I was slowly losing my sight. Is this what dying really felt like? I wanted to do something, anything to stay alive, especially now. As the shouting ensued, I felt as if I was floating away. And then, everything went dark.’

NO TURNING BACK NOW

(AN ALTERNATE ENDING TO THE THING ABOUT JELYFISH)

BY BETHANY BASE

As soon as I give my passport to the flight attendant, she takes a quick look at it and without any question she tells me to sit and wait for my flight. I go to an empty chair next to a women with a crying baby and question myself again, “Am I sure I want to do this?” Yes. I’m doing this for MYSELF and to see Jamie. Now I can finally talk to someone for real about something that I’m actually interested about. A few minutes pass by, I can’t hear anything but the baby sitting next to me, crying. I feel like crying too. Then a flight attendant comes out of a door that I think leads to the plane. Everyone gets up, I just follow. I go on a line without knowing what's going to happen next. Soon enough I’m in the front of the line. The flight attendant asks me to show her my boarding pass and my passport. I take a long pause and think about everything possible that could go wrong. “What if my mother comes home and she wonders where I am?” “What if my parents can’t find the money that I took to pay for this flight?” The flight attendant repeats again and gives me a look. I say yes confidently. She clears her throat and repeats again, “Your boarding pass and passport please.” She says impatiently. My cheeks turn bright red and I nod and give her my ticket and passport then enter the mysterious door.

I go through this gray hallway. It’s long and I don't know how long it will take for it to end and for me to get on the plane. All I can hear now is luggages rolling, a baby crying, and a lot of people talking at once. I think back knowing there's no turning back now. “But do I really want to do this?” I think. Then I hear wind blowing and there is a flight attendant standing greeting people and helping them with their luggages. I don’t have much stuff but she greets me and tells me to take my bag to my seat. Once I enter the plane I try to find my seat but there are so many people and so much commotion. Once I find my seat, I can’t reach the compartment above the seat for my luggage. I go on my toes and even try jumping up and down to even get it open. People are probably l staring at me wondering if I even know what I’m doing. Then, an older but tall man approaches me and asks if I need help with my luggage. I nod and he puts my luggage in the compartment without any struggle then he leaves.

I sit in my assigned seat and put my seatbelt on. The flight attendant then makes a loud announcement that I don't even pay attention to.A few minutes pass, and I feel the plane slowly lifting up. I've never been on a plane before. I know there is no turning back now. I try to look down from the thin oval shaped window seat but all I can see are clouds. Big, white, fluffy clouds. A few hours pass by, I do nothing to entertain myself. I take a deep breath and pinch myself making sure that this moment is real. My parents must be so worried about me. The plane drifts away slowly and I start to fall asleep. Don’t worry Franny, I’m going to figure something out somehow.

OFFICER MOORE

(AN ALTERNATE ENDING TO GHOST BOYS)

BY ELIZABETH EZE

I held the door open for my wife as we entered a restaurant called Le Petit Marcel. I discovered this restaurant from one of my buddies in the police force, at that time, I was trying to find a place to propose to my wife. I wanted to make everything special for her. I wanted to make her feel carefree. I wanted to make her feel like she was the most important thing to me in my entire life. But during these few months, I felt like I had made her seem unimportant from the way I had been acting after the incident. I had felt like everyone hated me. I mean, it's not like they don't have a reason to.

I had killed an innocent child.
I now have cold blood on my hands.

Today I was trying to make it up to my wife. For her to trust and forgive me, just like my daughter did. I wanted her to see that I am truly sorry.

As we walked into the restaurant, we were greeted by the servers. The servers took our orders and left my wife and me in a pile of silence, other than the other conversations going on around the restaurant. I tapped my fingers nervously on the table as my wife took out her phone, completely ignoring me.

I let out a deep sigh, she looks up, "Look, honey, can you please put down the phone and look at me?" I plead. She stares at me for a second, then concedes to put down her phone on the table. "I brought you here to apologize to you and to our family for the big mistake I made. I never meant for it to end up like this. I wasn't thinking I.. I promise you I truly didn't know it was a child-" "I forgive you" "I didn't mean to- wait what"" I stopped talking to stare at my wife in surprise. "I said I forgive you," she states as if it were obvious. "But why?" I say confused at how fast she gave in.
"I forgive you because I know you wouldn't kill a child because of its color." She looks at me, "For the past few months, I was just disappointed in the fact that you didn't do anything to prevent his death." I look at her tears starting to form in my eyes. "I forgave you because I love you and I know the person you are," she starts to get up, and I copy her movements. She wraps her arms around me, "I forgive you," she says. "Thank you," I whispered into her ear.

But I don't think I could ever forgive myself.

THE FINAL WORDS

(AN ALTERNATE ENDING TO SCYTHE)

BY GAVIN SINGSON

In front of the entire MidMerican Winter Conclave stood Citra and Rowan. They turn to the elegy of Scythes.

“Do you Citra Terranova accept the terms of which in the case of ordainment?” asked H.S. Mandela.

“I do.” said Citra.

“Do you Rowan Damisch accept the terms of ordainment?”

“I accept the terms of which, your honor” Rowan says with confidence with the least amount of doubt in his voice.

With the tension at peak Honorable Scythe Mandala finally tells the conclave “Rowan Damisch has been ordained into the scythedom.”

Half the conclave aplaude while half whisper between themselves. Rowan stands in disbelief as what he has just heard finally clicks. He feels a little dizzy but keeps his composure and keeps staring into the crowd which is now all in standing ovation.Rowan claims his new ring and Mandala says “Will you please show your ring and share your Patron Historic.”

Rowan hesitates and tells the crowd “Lincoln” Mandela confused in this quick and choppy answer.

“Rowan, would you like to explain why you chose Lincoln?” Mandela asks.

“I chose Lincoln because he freed the slaves” Rowan says confidently.

Everyone confused, they start whispering.

“Silence in the conclave if you will.” Mandela says to the elegy. “I don't see how that is appropriate to your experience Rowan.”

Rowan doesn’t respond.

“Very well then. Welcome to the Scythedom, Scythe Lincoln.” Mandela says. “We will now provide you with the gleaning tool of choice.”

The second Mandela is finished Citra and all the other Scythes other than Xenocrates and Mandela understand Rowan’s Patron Historic. Rowan will definitely free Citra or himself. Or is there something else behind this all.

THE FINAL WORDS

(AN ALTERNATE ENDING TO SCYTHE)

BY GAVIN SINGSON

Rowan finally speaks “Before I pick my weapon I have something that needs to be shared.” Gasps heard from around the elegy. “The High Blade himself has been hiding something.” Xenocrates stares at Rowan and Rowan stares back. Rowan mouths I allow you to share my secret, right after yours is known by everyone. Rowan sees the tears ready to pour out of Xenocrates when he changes his mind and yells “I KILLED GODDARD!”

Everyone gasps and some scream as Rowan pulls a knife from a cart not so far off to the side and raise it. He yells “This is my one and only act in the name scythe hood.” He takes the blade to his wrists as Volta once did as he stares into the crowd. And in those final moments he tells everyone “Good Luck.” Citra grabs a blade and threaten the scythes and say if they want to glean her they would have to get past the blade as she runs out to Scythe Curie who is ready to bring her to Amazonia.

