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November 2026

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Letter *from the* Editor

It's that time of the year again; the leaves are falling, pumpkins are carved, frost is covering car windows in the morning, and the sweet autumn breeze is soon going to be replaced by the bitter kiss of winter. Our first issue of the year is published! This, for me, is a rather bittersweet fact. It is the beginning of the end of this era of my life. As a senior, I feel like time is flying by so fast, so I'd like to take this moment to appreciate *The Now*. Wherever you are, stop. Look around. Find two, maybe three things you can see that are with you, right now, in this very moment as you live and breathe. Right now I hear the clack of my keyboard as I write this. Enjoy your now. I'd like for you to apply that to this issue of Towpath as well; enjoy the feeling of it in your hands, savor every word on each of these pages. Enjoy *The Now* of these articles; let them pull you in till you can taste, smell, and hear them. That's how you should read this issue. In the present, in *The Now.*

- Nyema Campbell

SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH

BY ARIANNA SWATTSWORTH

September was Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. This month is dedicated to remembering, honoring, and spreading awareness about loved ones who took their lives by suicide and providing help and resources to those having suicidal thoughts. Suicide is one of the most urgent mental health issues. People struggling with suicidal thoughts can often stay silent and could be too scared to reach out due to the stigma around suicide. Some call it "selfish" or "attention-seeking." These are two things suicide is NOT. Sometimes people think suicide is the only way out, but that's also not the case.



Signs someone is about to take their life are: isolating themselves, giving items away, writing notes to their loved ones, and pushing people away. People isolate themselves due to their energy being drained; it can be hard for them to get out of bed and simply take care of themselves. This can make social interactions difficult for them. People giving or throwing away important items to them is one of the biggest signs. They do this because they do not want their family heirlooms, pets, and things they might have attachments to go to waste, they feel better when close family members have them. Writing notes can be classified as one of the final signs. They can write notes to be simply understood and explain why they were struggling with these hurtful thoughts, or they can be a goodbye note. Finally, one last sign could be pushing their close ones away. People often do this because their mind can be full of shame and guilt. This can cause them to feel like a burden and that they don't mean anything to anyone. These are all signs someone may be thinking of taking their life.

If you think one of your peers is struggling, do NOT be scared to reach out to them. One simple "Are you doing okay?" may be the difference someone needs to convince themselves they should stay. **If YOU are having suicidal thoughts, please reach out to a close friend, trusted adult, or call the 988 lifeline.** You are loved, wanted, and needed. *Never* forget that.

988
SUICIDE
& CRISIS
LIFELINE



ARE ENERGY DRINKS THE NEW CIGARETTES?

BY NYEMA CAMPBELL

Cigarettes weren't always the cancer-bringing harbingers of death they are today . There was a time when it was not just okay to smoke, but even recommended. Pregnant women used to smoke; children used to; it was seen as just a normal thing. Obviously, as hindsight is always 20/20, we can see how crazy this idea is. How dangerous and detrimental it was to the health of the people who lived like this. But it took us years to get to the point where we saw the adverse health effects of cigarettes, and even longer to convince people to stop. This leads to a burning question: what else are we missing? What else, in 20 years, will we be horrified we consumed so readily? There was a joke made by comedian Ronny Chieng that followed such logic, though his claim is that the substance would be the internet. But I think that substance will be energy drinks.



Energy drinks have been around since 1962, invented in Japan to help blue-collar workers and drivers stay awake during long hours after stimulant drugs were banned. The caffeine-chucked drink touched down on American soil in 1985 and became a giant hit when the famed Redbull hit shelves in 1997. They became popular with busy people with busy lifestyles, which might have called for less than the recommended 8 hours every night. It was used much like a doped-up coffee by college students and night owls. They were seen as a tool to help the tired. Nowadays, with the introduction of newer energy drink brands like Alani, Celsius, and such, the idea of energy drinks has shifted in the consumer's mind. It's moved from a drink of necessity, to a drink of pleasure. Look around any classroom in America, you'll see a sea of colorful cans in almost every hand on almost every desk. Teens drink an egregious amount of caffeine daily, most even liking to brag about how they drink 2 Alani, 3 Red Bulls, and 7 Monster each day! This is obviously an exaggeration, but honestly, not by much...

The amount of caffeine an average adult should be consuming in a day is about 400mg, which is a generous number to begin with. The most popular brands like Alanis, Celsius, Bloom, and such can contain as much as 200mg of caffeine in one can; that is half of the daily limit for an adult person! So when you see teens who drink more than one energy drink a day, it's safe to assume they're getting close to or hitting that 400mg limit. The effect caffeine has on the body is not a pleasant one long-term, either. There have been cases of early heart failure, enlarged hearts, and high blood pressure. And in cases like the charged lemonades at Panera, these energy drinks already have a kill count. Constantly having high doses of caffeine running through your body is not healthy.

This isn't a call to ban all energy drinks; I myself enjoy a Redbull when needed. But that's the key word: “needed.” Caffeine is already an addictive substance, and when mixing that with the masterful marketing of these energy drink companies, it's easy to see how people fall into habits of drinking more than they should. The cans are cute, the drinks taste good, and it feels nice to be energized. All I urge is for everyone to be conscious of what they're putting into their bodies. Treat these kinds of substances with proper caution, and maybe take a look into which energy drink is actually ‘good’ for you.

ETHICAL FASHION

BY MADEYLN VOLLAND

Nowadays, it feels like wherever you put your money, you are supporting some kind of negative issue no matter what. Whether that be child labor, dangerous working conditions, or maybe you just don't want to give your hard-earned money to a corrupt CEO. If this sounds like a problem you have, then worry not! Because there are steps you can take to consume a little more ethically. It can be tempting to just order all of your clothes from fast fashion like Temu or SHEIN when those new pants you have been eyeing are less than three dollars, but the first thing you need to do is think: Do I need new clothes? Do I have a similar item or one that serves the same purpose? Can I repair something I already have? Taking a second to think is the basis of ethical consumption. Once you have an idea of an item you need and have determined that you need it, that's when you can start searching.



Try not to use sites like Amazon if you can; start by searching small businesses or Etsy before you go searching a bunch of stores in person to get a general idea of what you are looking for. Thrift stores are also a great resource, but you still have to be careful, because buying a new wardrobe every season from Goodwill is still overconsumption. When thrifting, make sure you thoroughly inspect the item you are looking at so you don't experience thrift blindness (which is when you buy an item and never use it again). Does it fit? Is it in good condition? If not, can I mend it? Will I wear it often?

There are many great steps you can take to be more ethical when shopping, such as trading clothes with friends before buying more, but keep in mind that every decision has an impact. This article is not meant to shame you for using apps like Amazon, but to make you more insightful when shopping, so next time you are at the store, think before you buy.

COLOR PSYCHOLOGY

BY ELIJAH KOLLING

A constant debate that I've seen with this generation is what each folder subject should be. In my personal opinion, math is red, science is blue, English is green, and history is yellow. On the outside, this may just seem silly or useless, but colors affect our emotions and they're more than just sticking papers into a folder.

Colors can shape your mood, attention, and physical reactions through what is known as color psychology. When I was in daycare years ago, during nap time my sitter would tell us to sleep on the blue side of our mats, never the red. Why was this? She said it was because the blue made us calm and sleepy, and the red would keep us awake. Of course I never believed her because I tended to stay awake during nap time, but this statement wasn't completely false. Colors can have an effect on our sleep, in fact, the color red helps produce melatonin whereas the color blue stops natural melatonin production in the brain.

Our brains associate colors with emotion as well. It's almost like the color inside out. Happiness is yellow, disgust is green, sadness is blue, anger is red, and so on. We use colors to differentiate how we should feel about certain things we see, even if we aren't doing it intentionally.

Of course, don't always have to mean something, but math is red for a reason.

BUFFALO BILLS OFF TO A STRONG START IN 2026 SEASON!

BY STOIC DOLL



It's been an exciting start to the 2026 NFL season for the Bills! After eight games, the Bills have a record of 7-1, putting them at the top of the AFC East. Buffalo opened the season on September 13 with a close 36–31 victory over the Houston Texans. The Bills followed that win with a 41–31 victory against the Detroit Lions at Highmark Stadium. In Week 3, the Bills faced the Los Angeles Chargers. The game was a tough battle, but Buffalo came away with a 24–16 win. Despite some turnovers, the Bills' defense kept them in the game and helped the team make a fourth-quarter comeback.

The Bills' winning streak came to an end on October 4 when they hosted the New England Patriots. Buffalo led 26–21 late in the fourth quarter, but New England scored a late touchdown and completed a two-point conversion to take a 29–26 victory. The loss was Buffalo's first of the season. Fans and commentators disappointed by this loss, humor it by sometimes using the term 'meatball sub' when Allen throws a terrible interception directly to an opposing defender. It is a humorous way of describing a pass that goes straight to the other team.
The Bills also had several players suffer injuries during their play. Wide receiver DJ Moore injured his shoulder, while defensive tackle Ed Oliver hurt his knee. Cornerbacks Dee Alford and Te'Cory Couch also suffered injuries to their ankle and hamstring.

When Bills fans needed something to celebrate, Buffalo delivered one of the most exciting games of its season. On October 12, the Bills traveled to California to face the Los Angeles Rams on Monday Night Football. What followed was a wild 37–34 overtime victory that showed just how much fight this team has. The game was a back-and-forth battle, with neither team willing to give up. The Rams even managed to tie the score at 34–34 with only five seconds remaining, sending the game into overtime.

The Rams had an opportunity to take control, but Buffalo's defense came through at a critical moment when the defensive end blocked a potential game-winning field goal attempt. That play gave the Bills another chance, and they took full advantage. Tyler Bass eventually kicked a 45-yard field goal to seal the 37–34 victory. The victory was especially meaningful for Josh Allen because it marked the first overtime win of his NFL career.

The Bills carried that momentum into their next game against the Las Vegas Raiders on October 18. Buffalo won another close contest, defeating Las Vegas 33–30 on the road and improving its record to 5–1. Allen delivered a strong performance, completing 23 of 33 passes for 255 yards and two touchdowns. Cook added 95 rushing yards and scored the go-ahead touchdown late in the game. The Bills recovered Las Vegas's attempted onside kick and held on for the victory.

Although Buffalo came away with the win, the game also brought some unwanted attention. Bills safety C.J. Gardner-Johnson was ejected after an unsportsmanlike incident involving Raiders tight end Brock Bowers. Safety Sam Franklin Jr. was also subsequently suspended for one game by the NFL over a separate alleged spitting incident. Even with their first loss, the Bills have shown that they can win close games, and this one loss won't set us back. With a 7–1 record and Josh Allen trailing only Joe Burrow in total fantasy points, Buffalo has plenty of football still ahead of them. Bills fans will be watching closely to see if the team can continue its strong season.

WHO ARE THE WILD CATS?

BY NYEMA CAMPBELL

The Lockport Wild Cats, also formerly known as the Lockport Rampage, are a professional advancement football league run out of Lockport. It's an organization that allows men and women all around the area to continue to play competitive football outside of high school/college.

It's made up of a tight-knit group of highly skilled players whose blood, sweat, and tears led them to victory in their league this year. And even though they've always been close to the top, true competitors and a team to keep your eye on, they went the extra mile this year and actually got what needed to get done. The Lockport Wild Cats, the 2024 hometown champions!

In 2024, I was lucky enough to get a personal one-on-one interview with one of the founders of the Lockport Wild Cats, Roland Davis III. In which I asked him 10 questions pertaining to the team, their success, how they got where they are, and how far they will go. Here's how it went...

Nyema: Okay, let's get started. Just for people who are not familiar with professional advancement football, can you explain how it works a little? Like, what are the differences between your game and something like the NFL, for example?

Davis: Our game is like a mix between the NFL and High School, at least rule- and game-wise, but the biggest difference we have is the money aspect. This is a hobby for our guys; we aren't paid to play; in fact, we pay to play. We pay for the field, we pay for the refs, so yeah, the biggest difference is that we don't have money to throw around like the NFL.

Nyema: Okay, question number 2, what do you think was the biggest difference this year from the following that gave you the extra little push you needed to take home that championship this year?

Davis: Well, I think the biggest thing is that we've been so close for so many years. We've always been the runner-up. Like, the Lockport Wild Cats just had their eleventh season.
It took eleven seasons to get that championship title! And the biggest difference was the realization that everyone isn't always the best for our organization. You may have a great athlete, but he's, you know, toxic, or he isn't a team player. You just gotta learn to let those players pass and go be a burden on somebody else. Last season, I have to be honest...we were a better team. We had very skilled players; we were unbeaten, and going into the playoffs we were up against a team that got there by default. We had big egos.
We didn't take the prep before the game as seriously as we should have, and it hurt us. We lost, but this year everyone was locked in, and we were all working toward the same goal.

Nyema: Okay, next question. Who do you think was your biggest competitor this year, and how did you overcome them?

Davis: This year our biggest opponent was the Southern Tier Stallions. They're a team from the Binghamton, NY area, and they're a very small community, and they're a unit. In fact, we often looked to them to see what we should be doing; you know? They were three-time champions! And they're the team we ended up facing and beating for the championship game. They're a very good team, and they have some big guys. We, on the other hand, aside from our quarterback, have more speed and agility on our side. We used it to our advantage and were able to take the win, 14-8.

Nyema: Wow, that's impressive!

Davis: Yeah, it was a very good season.

Nyema: It was. I was ecstatic when I heard you guys had won; it makes me feel proud that our team was able to accomplish so much!

Davis: Yes! This win was big, and a long time coming. This one was for all of us, and so will the next ones.

Nyema: I love that! Alright, question 4. How did your players handle the pressure of an undefeated record? Even from my personal experience, it's a lot to have that title, going into every game worrying about losing it. Like, you know the saying, the higher you climb, the harder the fall?

Davis: The goal was always to win the championship, from the very beginning, so we weren't so worried about being undefeated. Along the way, we just wanted to pull through when it mattered. And you know what, we had some very close games.
That team I referenced earlier, we played them at their home in Ithaca, NY, and it was 14-14 going into the fourth quarter.
But the resilience that our guys had, with our backs against the wall, on a foreign field, it was the leadership, the guys who were willing to sacrifice their well-being and put their bodies on the line to get those first downs and to make those tackles that led to our win. It was a joint effort, and after every game, it was just another win. Of course it's always nice to see that zero, to have that title. But we weren't focused on anything like that; there was no pressure.
We came to win, and that's exactly what we did.

Nyema: That's really inspiring!

Davis: Thank you, but don't get me wrong, because we had that undefeated title, we got to host the championship game at home on our field, which was great because you get to play a game of that importance on the field you've spent the most time on, and you have a crowd full of your people. It may be small, but honestly even the little things like that matter.

Nyema: Definitely, there is a big difference between being home versus away, and I'm sure it felt good to play the game that mattered most, in front of the people that matter most!

Davis: It did, definitely.

Nyema: Okay, the next question is...were there any standout players or moments that you believe were crucial to this season's success?

Davis: Oh, definitely, there were 17 guys who made the All-Star team, the most in Lockport history. I would say we were led by our quarterback, Willie Fair III. He was also named league MVP; he had 19 touchdowns on the season, over 2000 yards passing, and he's just a great leader and a phenomenal player. He stepped up a lot this year and really just put the team on his back.
Also, our running back, Sean Marshall, was the offensive MVP for the league and helped lead the way. And he's a bigger guy, so it's good to have him. He's like a workhorse; he can run down on somebody, knock them over too. But he can also use his feet, break some ankles, and break out for 80 yards!
On the defensive side is where some of our veterans are; they've been with us a long time, and they're consistent. Cliff McDowell is one; he's a Lockport native, a standout in high school. He's been playing at this level...at least 20 years.
Robert "Earl" Nevins is also a standout player who is always someone we can count on. And it's no secret that at this level the most important part of any team is the offensive line; those are the guys who get it done, they protect the quarterback, and I will say that Willie did not get sacked at all this year, which is an amazing accomplishment for our offensive line!
And back with the defense, we have D'Andre Jenkins, who is another Lockport standout, he played a bit in college, there's also Khalil Sommerville, from buffalo. He was actually on the Buffalo Bills Practice squad for a while! Then there's Mike Kelleher, an Alfred University alum, who was actually an OL who transitioned to DL and has been giving hell to other teams' offenses throughout his career with Lockport.

Davis: And then our veteran Dewayne “Flash” Gordon, from Syracuse. He joined us this year, and his whole goal was to help carry Lockport to champs. And in that championship game, it was a 14-8 game, one possession, we had the ball down on the 20, and Flash is usually defense, but he told me, “Coach, put me in as a fullback; I'll go get this first down so we can close this thing out,” and he did. He helped us put that game away and, in no uncertain terms, helped us leave that field with our heads held high in victory formation.

Nyema: That's amazing that you have so many reliable and skilled players with you; it sounds like you have a very wonderful team!

Davis: Thank you!

Nyema: Okay, moving on, can you share any specific challenges you faced this season & how you overcame them?

Davis: One of the biggest challenges we have here is practice; it's tough because, again, this is a hobby. Guys have jobs, families, and other responsibilities that make it hard for everyone to make it all the time. But how we overcome that is by-I won’t say simplifying the playbook, but having it in a way where, even if they show up on game day, they can run the play and run it well. I will say other things that have been a big help with this problem are platforms like Zoom or Facebook Messenger, where you can communicate all the time. We have group chats, and we do chalk talk. My head coach, Erik Clark, he’d put out a weekly coaches video doing the X’s and O’s on a whiteboard. So that's kinda how we overcome those challenges.

Nyema: Okay, so what's something you're excited/hoping to see more of next year? Or well, your season is still technically going on; what's the next big thing you're looking forward to?

Davis: So we're very excited for this game we have in February. It's down in Miami. It's a national championship game that we get to participate in because we’re the #2 team in the country! On Sunday, February 16th, we're playing in the 3A national title game, which is the biggest game for Professional Advancement Football every year. So we’re super excited that we were chosen to participate in this game. And after reviewing film and just getting to know our opponent, we feel like we may have an advantage going in. So we’re looking forward to that...

And in addition to owning Lockport Wild Cats, I'm also the commissioner of the Northeastern Football Alliance, and last season we had 7 teams in our league, but as of today we have 12 New York State teams in the league and 3 out-of-state teams in the league, so everyone is super excited to see where the league is taking Professional Advancement Football for the 2025 season.

So we were all excited for our upcoming season, were ready to put on a show, like we always do and have done, were ready for the big crowds, and at this point, we just kept growing. The only place we're going is up! But yeah, right now our only focus is winning that game, and becoming the top team in the country going into 25’.

Nyema: Well, it sounds like that's exactly what's gonna happen! But anyway, kind of on the tail end of that... moving forward, how do you plan to build on this season's success and continue to improve?

Davis: So what I've been doing is getting out in the community quite a bit and trying to encourage more businesses to notice us and offer small sponsorships to help our players. As I mentioned before, our players pay us to play. So some guys are deterred because they just don't have it. It's not that it's expensive; it's just that, to some people, a couple hundred dollars can do a lot. A good helmet is about $400 on top of shoulder pads and everything they need; it adds up. I'm hoping to get into the community so we can get some of those guys who just don't have the means to play and show them the brotherhood that we have. We even have some guys that we have our eyes on that we know were very good in high school, but life's been tough, and we just wanna give them the opportunity to get on the right track and get back on the field. And maybe through leadership of their fellow teammates and the support from us and their community, they can turn their life back round the right way. I mean, we have guys on the team that range from 18-45 years old, so there are a lot of people and a lot of connections you can make. When there are 70 guys on a football team, someone is bound to know someone, and my players and staff aren’t afraid to help one of their brothers out. So our biggest thing is enhancing our community involvement and getting the community involved with us too.

Nyema: Well, I hope that goes well for you; you deserve it! But moving on, who helped you make the changes that needed to be made to make the winning difference this year?

Davis: I would have to say, my executive board, James Mount, Jeremy Brown, and of course, myself. We all sat down at the table and asked the question, " What can we do that's gonna take this team to the next level?" and we all contribute equally. We have a strong bond; we pick each other up, support good ideas, gently let down bad ones, and at the end of the day we all know what we're doing, and we all trust one another.
We're always looking for ways to improve; we reflect on the past and let it teach us; we ask ourselves who we can talk to to make things just a little bit easier, and the city of Lockport as well was a major supporter this year.
Mayor Lombardi helped tremendously in securing fields and locker rooms for teams that are coming from all over the state, and out of state! We don't wanna say "Oh, come to little Lockport!" and not even have a locker room for them. But on the back end of that, we were able to help numerous businesses in Lockport as well, just by having other teams come in and, you know, stir up the local economy.

Nyema: Alright, onto our final question of tonight: how does the city support the wild cats currently? How would you like to see the support be shown in the future?

Davis: Like I said, the City of Lockport supports us, they do very well in making sure we're taken care of. We are a non-profit organization, so if I were to say how the city can support us further, I would say- without being negative- we do pay a small fee for the fields. I'd love to get to the point where we maybe even get some rights to the fields, where we can do upgrades to help even our youth organization and us. Also, just more control over what we do in Lockport. It'd be nice to be able to say, "Oh, our field is free" and recognize the contributions we make to the community. Like, for example, if you are a high school student, you come into all Wild Cat games for free! No admission for high school students. Also, our concession stands, we don't run them. The Lockport cheerleaders send out girls every week who take back all the proceeds from the concession stand. We do a charity game every year, so I'd say that's the biggest thing. Just to have them say, "We see what y'all are doing, we see how you give back to your community, we see how you support us, and we recognize your contributions, and for all the good you do, maybe we waive the fees for the field. And take all they give as payment"

Nyema: Yeah, I can understand that; you definitely deserve that at the least! But at this time, I have asked all my questions, and I believe my part of this interview is over. Thank you so much for your time!

-end of interview-

After talking with Mr. Davis, I fell in love with the Wild Cats, so it came to my complete and utter surprise how little most people know about them. They are such a great organization full of wonderful people, so please, this is my call to action: spread the word, go to some games, and support our team. Good luck, Wild Cats. I can't wait to see just how far you'll go.



FALL UNSCRAMBLE

PAPEL IDCRE _____

ROCN ZEAM _____

HOLWELANE _____

TEARSEWS _____

RYBCARERN _____

NLEFALN _____

DIRYHAE _____

GHSAINTKNVIG _____

VELASE _____

EPNI NCOE _____

LAMECRA PAPEL _____

ANSWER KEY





PAPEL IDCRE	APPLE CIDER
ROCN ZEAM	CORN MAZE
HOLWELANE	HALLOWEEN
TEARSEWS	SWEATERS
RYBCARERN	CRANBERRY
NLEFALN	FLANNEL
DIRYHAE	HAYRIDE
GHSAINTKNVIG	THANKSGIVING
VELASE	LEAVES
EPNI NCOE	PINE CONE
LAMECRA PAPEL	CARAMEL APPLE

THE 'E' IN FEMINISM SHOULDN'T MEAN EXCLUSION

BY ELIJAH KOLLING

There has been a recent rise in transphobia online from those who are known as TERFS, Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists. Today I want to ask the question of why a community that prides itself on being inclusive and supportive of all suddenly closes the door on those of the genderqueer community. Well, first, we need to establish the difference between feminists and radicals.

A feminist is a person who believes in and advocates for the social, political, and economic equality of all genders, whereas radical feminism is a movement and theory that calls for a complete restructuring of society to eliminate male supremacy and end the patriarchy. Both don't sound that bad right? In fact, both of these groups can be helpful and give women the rights and recognition they deserve.

But since its origin, Radical Feminism has suffered from divisions on the subject of Gender Identity. These women believe in bioessentialism, which is the belief that people's most important characteristics are controlled by biology and cannot change. In particular, the belief that some groups of people are naturally less good than others because of this is one of the main things they are trying to fight against. Now you may be asking, "What do you mean by fighting against bioessentialism?" Women, for so long, have been watered down to simply being here just to produce offspring. This misogynistic take is not only wrong, but extremely stereotypical and harmful to all women. Your genitals aren't what make you a woman in the real world; it's your pride! Which is why it is crazy that it is the other way around when it comes to transgender women.





Suddenly people are saying, "You don't have a uterus, you can't be a woman!" Or "You're just a man in a skirt." Why is someone's biology only a problem when they want to transition? I've seen so many people commonly say that trans women don't know the struggles of being a woman since they grew up male in a male centered world. Well, that might be true in hindsight; several trans people may realize they are in the wrong body from a very young age. Most people who suffer from gender dysphoria are by the age of 7. Cis women and trans people both face similar struggles with gender-based violence as well. 32 people in just 2024 alone were murdered for being transgender, and those are just the ones we know of. Many victims are misgendered and deadnamed, which covers up who they really are.

There is also a very common misconception that trans women are taking scholarships and awards from cis women. First of all, if someone is getting awarded in said situations, it is because THEY DESERVE IT. Secondly, cisgender women make up around 169 MILLION people within the population in the United States alone, whereas trans women only make up about 0.5% of the US population; that is roughly about 698,500 people. There are simply not enough opportunities for trans women to take the place of cis women.

So, no, trans women aren't taking anything from you; you just want to use the word feminist as a shield for your bigotry.

FINDING PRIDE, COURAGE, AND CHANGE THROUGH CHEER!

BY KONNOR MAXWELL

Cheerleading has a long history of changing and becoming more inclusive. It began in the late nineteenth century as organized crowd cheering at sporting events, and over time, developed into the athletic activity it is today, with jumps, stunts, tumbling, and dance. Although cheerleading was once seen mainly as an activity for men to watch, it eventually became more popular for men to participate as well.

Cheerleading also gave people a way to feel uplifted, show their team spirit, and spread a positive attitude. As time went on, it became more inclusive and expressive, allowing people to expand its possibilities and challenge old expectations. Learning about this history reminds me that cheerleading has never stayed the same. It has continued to grow because people were willing to step into spaces where they were not always expected to belong.



Knowing this, I decided to step out and be seen. Being the First openly gay Black teen on the JV cheer team in four years in Lockport means a lot to me and maybe even others. Cheer has taught me that being brave doesn't mean you have no fear; it means showing up even when you're scared.

At first, I was scared of what my friends would think if they saw me cheering, and I worried about people judging me or looking at me differently. I kept thinking about what people might say, but I had friends and family who stayed by my side and encouraged me when I was scared. They reminded me that I should do what makes me happy and not let other people's opinions stop me. Their support meant more to me than they probably know.

I decided to push through my fear and give myself a chance. Some people might look at me differently, and honestly, that's okay because I can't and won't live my life worrying about what everyone thinks of me. Through this experience, I've grown as a person, made new friends, and found a family I never knew I needed. Even through the hard times and doubts, I've learned to be myself and be proud of how far I've come.

I hope my story inspires others to be themselves and reminds them that they belong, too. Learning about the history of cheer makes me proud to be a part of something that has changed so much over these last few months and years. I know there will still be times when I feel scared or out of place, but I'm learning not to let that stop me. Looking back, I realize cheer has helped me become a stronger person mentally, physically, and spiritually. It has left me with a different perspective. And even when the season ends, the friends and memories that support me, and the lessons and the struggles I've learned, will always be there for me to look back on. This sport is special to me, always and forever.

A BOOK REPORT: ALL QUIET IN THE WESTERN FRONT

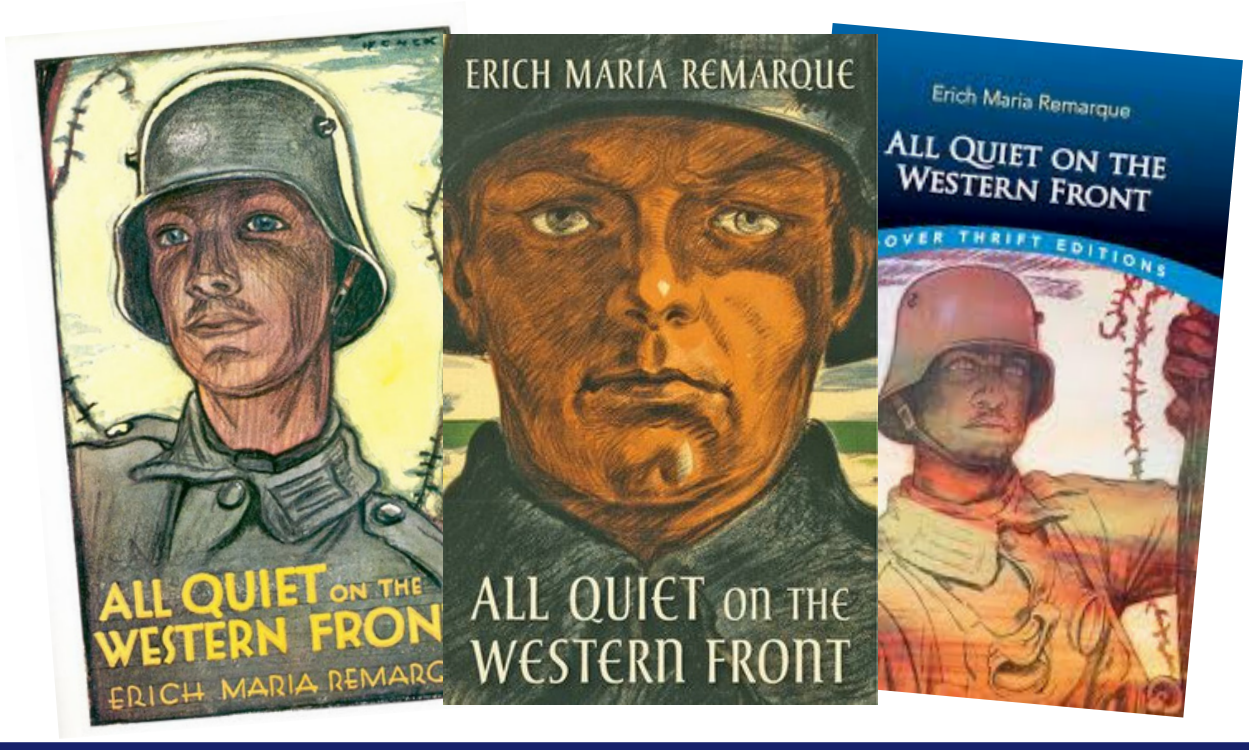
BY ASHLEY BARTEL

One of the most impactful anti-war novels to ever be written continues to stand the test of time with its raw truth. The famous title, "All Quiet on the Western Front," released in 1929, was heavily based on the personal experience of Erich Maria Remarque, its author, who was drafted into World War I at the age of eighteen. A powerful quote from the book that depicts its message goes, "I see how peoples are set against one another, and in silence, unknowingly, foolishly, obediently, innocently slay one another."

This story begins with its main character, school-aged Paul Bäumer, alongside some of his eager classmates, ready to serve for their home country of Germany. They are completely oblivious as to what they will soon face. Once enlisted, Bäumer quickly realizes that the army wasn't as glorious as the recruiters had chalked it up to be.
In the military, circa early 1900s, living conditions were rough. Throughout the book, you witness the change Paul Bäumer goes through internally as the war goes on, alongside the deep connection he forms with his fellow comrades, including the bond with his most beloved companion, Stanislaus Katczinsky. He is significantly older than Bäumer, and had been serving in the military for far longer. Naturally, he acts as a mentor towards the younger soldiers, and is often depicted lightening the mood for Bäumer in particular as they face the harsh conditions of war together.

Bäumer watches the life drain from himself and others in more ways than one. From mentally to physically, no one is the same as they were before. He is faced with the struggle of his morals against what he had once willingly signed up to do. He fears his time away from the front, because then he would have to deal with how different normalcy is in the outside world compared to what he is now accustomed to, and the political propaganda that had gotten him there in the first place. He deals with emotional numbing as he grasps the pointlessness of what he is fighting for.

If any of this sounds interesting to you, check out the book "All Quiet on the Western Front" if you haven't already, or at the very least, one of the movie adaptations of the book! This book kept me up late at night, reading page after page in the midst of winter, and kept me thinking about it for quite some time after. It's a heavy read for sure, though it is quite the perspective-changer. I promise, you probably won't regret it!



FANTASTIC MR. FOX AND THE EFFECTS OF GROWING UP WEIRD

BY MADELYN VOLLAND

Many times I've found myself lying in bed at some ungodly hour of the night, trying to find something calm and comforting to try and fall asleep to. And more often than not, I end up choosing Wes Anderson's 2009 film *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. This film has all you could ever want: stop motion, Willem Dafoe voicing a criminal sewer rat, and my personal reason for constantly rewatching: how it shows the feeling of growing up different from your peers.

One of the characters this story follows is Ash Fox, the 12-year-old son of the titular Mr. Fox and Felicity Fox. Ash is obsessed with comic books; we often see him reading them throughout the film along with some memorabilia in his bedroom. This obsession also explains Ash's outfit in the film: a sweater with an A on it (for Ash), pants tucked into his socks, a cape, and later in the film he gains his iconic bandit mask made out of a tube sock. Many people question this superhero-esque attire, including his own father and a boy in his class who says: "He's too short, dresses like a girl, he's just... different."

Many people call Ash "different" throughout the film, with a little hand movement to emphasize how strange they think he is. This is emphasized when we meet his cousin, Kristofferson, who is staying with the family while his father is ill. Kristofferson is everything Ash isn't; while Ash is snappy, keeps to himself, and rude, Kristofferson is polite, knows karate, and meditates; in fact, one of the main things Ash resents him for is his athletic abilities, as Ash wants to be an athlete and believes himself to be one despite what everyone else tells him.

The main turning point of the story is when Mr. Fox goes back to his old ways and starts stealing from local farms again, in which he enlists the superintendent of his tree house—an opossum named Kylie— and Kristofferson. And while I could go on and on about the plot of this movie for ages, that's not what we're getting into; our main focus in this article is Ash. Ash exhibits tendencies that some people have theorized are typical of "weird kids" or even autism. Even though he is somewhat self-aware when he acknowledges his grumpiness, he misses some social cues throughout the film, and he cannot understand why people don't see him as an athlete because he sees himself as an athlete. We also see him get mad at Kristofferson when his lab partner at school seems more interested in his cousin than him.

While this could all just be typical tween behavior, many avid watchers of the film (including myself) have taken a liking to Ash, as they can relate to being thought of as "different". In the last scene of the movie, we see the kids drinking juice boxes that are all the same flavor, except for Ash's; this symbolism shows us how differentiated he is from his peers.

In conclusion, many of us feel "weird" or different growing up, and that can influence our actions well into adulthood, but as Felicity says, "We're all different, and there's something fantastic about it." So be weird, and don't apologize for being yourself.

THE PERFECT SHOWS/MOVIES THE REST OF YOUR YEAR.

BY LILLITH CLARK

Have you been looking for the perfect fall shows and movies to watch? Well then, this is the article for you!

Cozy Shows:

Gilmore Girls - A cozy fall-directed show about a mother and daughter. There are 153 episodes to keep you entertained and interested. Each episode has an average runtime of 42-45 minutes. Interested in even More Gilmore Girls?

Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life - A Netflix revival miniseries to bring back that same cozy feeling with every season. There are four 90-minute-long episodes, each named after a season to correspond with their life throughout the year.

Only Murders in the Building - Do you like busy New York street movies and Murder Mystery? Well, that's exactly what this show is about. Dive into the life of three friends obsessed with true crime and end up right in the middle of one! This exciting show runs 5 seasons with 50 episodes, averaging about 20-40 minutes each.

Friday Night Lights - While not a fall-centered show, a relatable and drama-centered show about the life of a football coach, expressing the stress of the game and a look into his problems

Some animated shows or movies:

Gravity Falls - An original show everyone should watch at some point in their lives, diving into the mysterious events happening to two twins at their grandpa's cabin in a small town.

Over the Garden Wall - Two brothers making their way through a mysterious and strange autumn forest.

Some Movies if you aren't willing to start a time-consuming series:

You've Got Mail - A 1998 movie full of bookshops and the smell of coffee during the autumn season in a city.

Practical Magic - The perfect movie full of sisterhood, witchy vibes with cozy seasonal aesthetics. It recently had a second movie release if you enjoyed it!

Good Will Hunting - Boston autumn with deep, reminiscing feelings.

Hocus Pocus - Another great witchy option, the perfect blend of fall and Halloween vibes.

Knives Out - A creepy and creaky house of crime and mystery, much alike some others on this list!

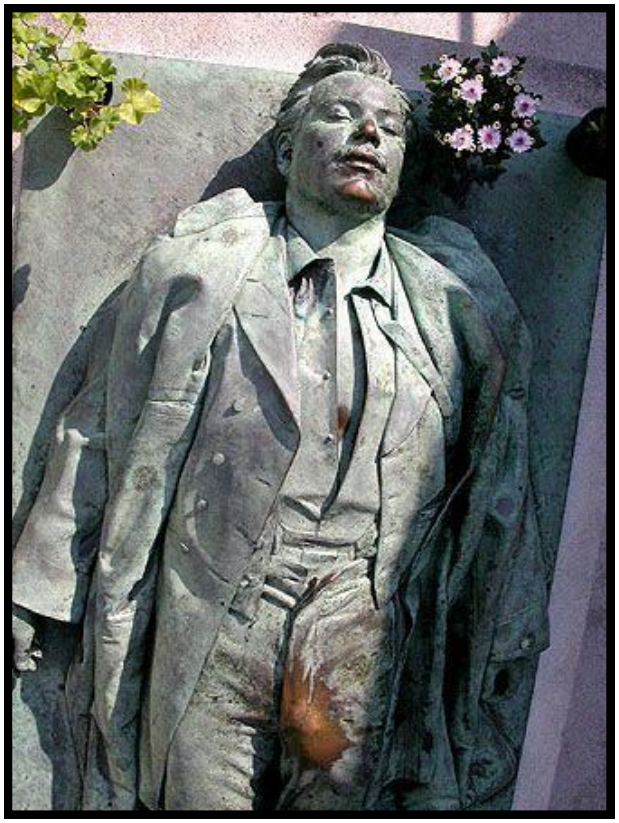
THE CURSE OF TOUCH

BY ABBEY GLOVER

When you go to famous landmarks or monuments, it's normal, encouraged even, to take photos with them or next to them. But when does your simple act cross the line?

In Ireland lies the statue of Molly Malone. Molly Malone is the name of a song and now the unofficial anthem of Dublin. In the song, Molly pushes her barrel through the streets of Dublin selling mussels and cookies. She catches a cold and dies, leaving her to haunt the streets. The song's purpose was to symbolize the working class and resilience of Dublin.

Since the statue was built in 1988, it has faced constant touching because of the myth that touching her breasts will bring you good luck. I am sorry to tell you that touching a woman's breast will not bring you good luck; I see it as a justification for one's inappropriate actions. Due to the constant touching of her breasts, most people only know her by the ¨Statue with the breasts " and don't even know her story.



This constant touching has caused her coating to give out, and it's clear that her chest has been touched excessively, mostly in her breast area. Her bronze was so worn out that in October of 2025 she was closed down for repairs. Her bronze was repaired, but that didn't stop people. The Dublin City Council initiated the idea to surround her statue with a flower bed to stop the touching. Knowing how disgusting people can be, this didn't work. The repairs lasted around two weeks before new worn-out bronze appeared. People now just step on the flower bed to touch her chest and take a three-second photo. That's all they do. They ruin art for a photo that is going to get 10 likes or be scrolled past on social media. Molly Malone is a legacy, and future generations deserve to appreciate her. We can come up with a million different solutions; put protective paint on her, guard the statue, place a garden around her, or maybe just don't ruin art. So if you ever get the chance to meet Ms. Molly Malone, stop...take the time to learn and appreciate Molly′s story instead of just taking a picture with your hands on her chest.

Victor Noir was a French Journalist who died while being shot by Prince Pierre Napoléon Bonaparte. His statue is located in Peré Lachaise Cemetery, Paris. His sculpture presents him lying down with his hat beside him. His statue has an obvious bulge, so you can probably assume where this is going.

Victor Noir′s statue is known as the ¨fertility statue¨. There is an urban legend claiming that if you rub his crotch area and kiss him, you will be blessed with fertility, a blissful sex life, and it ensures pregnancy and marriage.

What does fertility have to do with a 21-year-old French journalist? The simple answer: Nothing. This is just another excuse for one's weird and obscene actions. There have been an abundance of photos and videos circulating online of women ¨sitting¨ (the more pleasant way to put it) on his statue for photoshoots or short media content.

What was supposed to be a symbol of political opposition is now the symbol, and is more recognizably known as the fertile statue. Because of this excessive touching, the coating on his statue has been rubbed off. You can see which parts are being touched. Authorities tried to put a fence around his statue, but protests stopped this initiative.

¨It is just a statue. Then why try to justify your actions with far-fetched legends? Luck, love, marriage, pregnancy- none of these will come from touching a statue inappropriately. This is art. Art that is being actively destroyed when people decide to grope statues. Why even make art when it's just going to be ruined? Imagine a world without art because of fear of it being ruined. Your ¨minor¨ and ¨funny¨ touch is a curse. A curse that every person after you can see.

Next time you come across a monument, statue, or landmark. Stop and read about it. Talk to your company about what you′re seeing. Take a photo next to it. Admire art. We don't need proof of your ¨admiration¨ with a worn-off coating.



WHAT COMMUNITY MEANS TO ME

BY THEO LOVE

“Kindness makes the world go round.” A quote attributed to a multitude of adults, said to me in my earliest days. In fact, I think back to kindergarten, where the idea of a “bucket filler” was rampant. Kids would be encouraged to say kind things to students, help them out with work, and play fair. Why as kids are we so encouraged to be kind to others? This focus on kindness to others shows kids the importance of the world “going round.” Acts of kindness and service are themselves a reward. Your community is this reward. Kind words, helping with chores, and having fun with your community are important no matter what stage in life you are. To me, holding a community is like being the aforementioned bucketfiller, doing small acts of kindness that lead to a prize: friendship. My acts of service—although not large—have taught me that community is upheld by the idea of reciprocation. That actions, no matter how big or small, can leave a lasting impact on people, and that your community and friendships are the valuable reward, not just the things you get out of them.

Reciprocation is what I find to be the most impactful part of a community. The idea that actions are willing and are constantly driven between people, with little motivation except the kindness from your own “bucket”. Just recently, I have found myself on my school's robotics team, which actually gives me the perfect opportunity to practice this very belief. We are actively encouraged to be good sports, to always make sure to listen to everyone else's ideas, and I find that is what makes our group very successful. During kickoff, we ended up having to work together in order to make a mock field of our upcoming game, and everyone's ideas were exactly what allowed that to come to life. I ended up drawing up the field, keeping measurements handy, while other teammates reviewed the rules or actively searched for items to set the field up. This constant reciprocation between our team members is what leads to our success and friendship. The same can be applied to a large number of communities. This idea of constantly bettering each other, of lifting each other, and helping each other when we are down, is what makes a truly powerful community. As it’s said, “strength forms in numbers,” and a community can find this very strength in each other, through the idea of reciprocation.

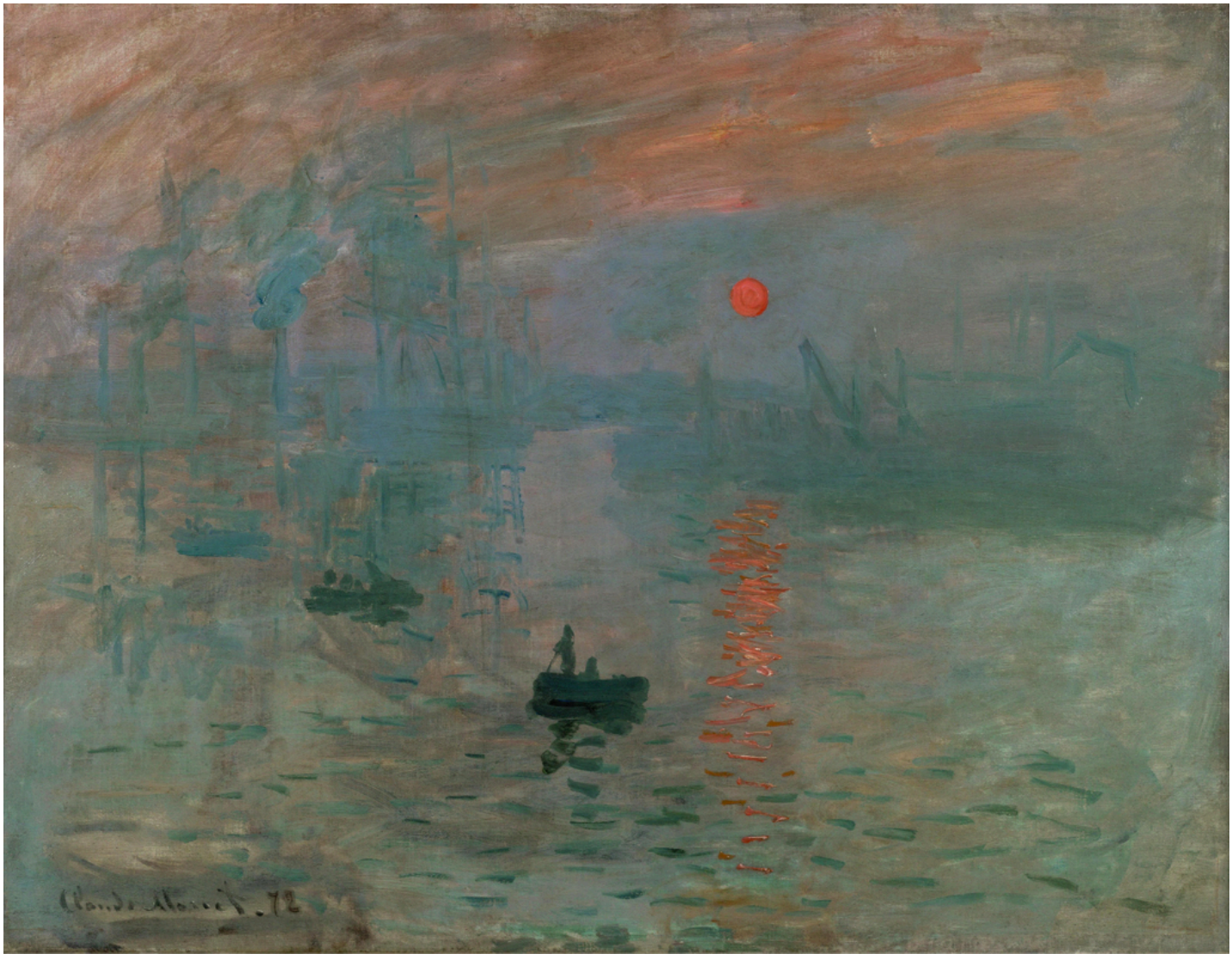
Now, these actions do not have to be large to have a major impact. Just a few weeks ago now, I ended up simply watching my neighbor's kids while they were out at an event. This is something that I’ve done many times before with my own siblings, making sure “they don’t die,” as my mom would say. Now, honestly, their oldest son is around my sister's age—which is about 7 years old—so these aren’t kids that I find myself having an easy time hanging out with, per se. This was a perfect opportunity to do so. Although it was a bit awkward trying to get them figured out, I eventually found out a pretty simple solution to that issue: just let them do what they wanted to do. We ended up coloring for a pretty long time, just talking about who they planned to give the drawings to, or what the son's favorite game was—their daughter is maybe 3, so not much input there—but we had fun. This very simple action for me allowed both of us to get to know each other better and strengthen our bonds as a result. Even though watching your neighbor's kids is not some crazy task, it had a lasting impact, even if that was just making both of our days a little better and having something to connect with – as I am also quite fond of the arts.

Let’s talk about my community, my friends and family. I’ve spent many years picking out my friends to fit how I see myself living in the future, and I think I have succeeded. No matter what has happened to us as individuals, we always find a way to stay behind each other's backs. Like when my friend went through a breakup just last year. I gave her a bit of space to calm down, then listened as she complained about how all of her other friends were trying to demonize her ex, even if nothing bad happened. Or my friend's birthday last year, when we all went out for sushi and gossiped for what must’ve been at least an hour, letting me discover my new favorite restaurant. Simply knowing that there will always be someone to listen, to help you, and to enjoy moments together is what a community truly is.

PURSUING HAPPINESS THROUGH CREATION.

BY LAYLA DUMAIS

Happiness is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as the "quality or condition of being happy," though this is just the definition. In reality, the only reason "happiness" means what it does is because we gave a name and meaning to the feeling, in the same way as we put a name to the sky or a tree or a person. A tree has more meaning to us because we know it is a tree, not just some hard, flammable growth out of the ground. We see it, give it a name; therefore, the name defines the object, or feeling, or person. So when we feel happy or experience happiness, that's what we call it. Not because it's the actual name, but because it is the word we chose to define the feeling. Happiness as a feeling in and of itself is subjective; it can be different things for different people. Many find their happiness through friendship, family, and romance. Some find happiness through material possessions and wealth, though it cannot be a substitute for human connection or lifelong contentment. Then there are those who find and continuously pursue happiness through creation.



"Impression, Sunrise" Claude Monet, 1872

Claude Monet (1840-1926) was an Impressionist painter in a key period of time in the history of art. Most famous for his paintings of water lilies in his garden in Giverny, France, I'd like to draw your attention to the painting included here. Monet's impression of a sunrise overlooking a harbor with fishermen and boats on what looks to be a gloomy morning. This painting is one of many, but I find it so striking. Physically, it is the stark red sun rising over the pale and cool-toned seascape that draws you in. It is also a marvelous example of impressionism, in which, when you look at the painting too closely, it's nothing more than a mess of colored strokes of oil paint and vague figures. When you change your perspective and look from afar, you see the image of workers starting their day captured in a canvas. Isn't that the intent, though? To capture the life of nature, even the mundane? This painting is an example of pursuing happiness through creation. Monet, an Impressionist capturing an image of everyday life, the mundane and simplicity of the world, isn't unusual for someone who painted for a living. Art was his life's work, and it brought happiness to his life as his paintings brought life to the mundane.

Similarly, another famous artist had a more direct pursuit of happiness. Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890) was a Dutch Post-Impressionist. We all know him for his painting of the countryside on a starry night, his self-portraits, or even his paintings of sunflowers. It's a sad truth that Van Gogh's work didn't gain fame or success until after he committed suicide in 1890, or that he spent time in and out of institutions for years prior to his death. It is said that Van Gogh consumed yellow paint in order to feel happy, which is nothing more than a myth. Van Gogh, in a letter to his brother, Theo, stated that "It appears that I up filthy things and eat them, although my memories of these bad moments are vague" (Van Gogh Museum). Why perpetuate this myth, though? Van Gogh is what I and many others would consider one of the greatest examples of a tortured artist. A man who struggled his entire life with his mental health and found sanity and solace through his art and died before his art found any actual success.

While it is true that Monet and Van Gogh are two people who pursued happiness through their creation for different reasons, they are two specific examples. These both are men who—depending on their situations—found success in their passions. What about the everyday person, you, me? Creative people often find solace and contentment in, redundantly, creating. Personally, I used to find joy in drawing and writing. I spent hours filling pages in my sketchbook and doodling on all of my schoolwork. I'd spend more time daydreaming about my own stories rather than paying attention to any story in any media that I'd consume. Now, I find it much more difficult to spend my time doing it. It doesn't bring me any joy the way it used to, and I spend more time searching for ideas and inspiration than actually doing anything productive. Still, I can't deny how good I feel every time I get a piece of writing done, or I complete a sketch. I don't know if it's the simple feeling of sticking through with something to completion or proof that I didn't pour more of my time that I can't get back down the proverbial drain that is my phone.

It goes without saying that art—especially fine art—or writing aren't the only forms of creation. There's cooking, music, film, other more specific or broad categories of art like crafting or scrapbooking, journaling; other forms of creation. You can even find happiness while splashing through a puddle or telling a good joke to your friends. The possibilities are endless. Creativity is expressive. You express yourself in all of your work, down to the way you dot your i's and cross your t's. Your voice comes out of your writing; your soul pours from your art; your views stand like pillars in your essays. Pursuing happiness can come in many forms. Creation is the most human form of that pursuit. You don't have to make something great, nor do you have to make something decent. As long as you find happiness in the process or the completion or whatever lies in between, there is no reason you shouldn't. Happiness is the quality or condition of being happy. Happiness is also the final touch to a painting you spent months on. It's the right word for that lyric verse you've been waiting for. It's the perfect amount of garlic in your sauce. It's the perfect amount of anything that you enjoy in your life, and it's worth every second.





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