

THE  
VANGUARD

A COLLEGE LITERARY MAGAZINE

2021

“FILL YOUR PAPER WITH THE BREATHINGS  
OF YOUR HEART.”

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

## Letters from the Editors

When describing *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald said, “That’s the whole burden of this novel - the loss of those illusions that give such color to the world that you don’t care whether things are true or false as long as they partake of the magical glory.” As someone who has devoted their career to literature and writing, this quote has always fascinated me. The paradox of its truth about the way we structure our lives, always chasing the next thrill, the next purchase, the next achievement, searching for a sense of meaning – Fitzgerald captured that in written form. And yet, it is often through literature and art that we can, if only briefly, recreate these illusions, finding meaning and connection, through someone else’s words. To me, that is magic. And I hope that for a moment during the bustle of the semester ending, the stories, poems, and artwork within, can help create that magical escape for our readers.

I would also like to thank my colleague, Lori Joyce, for all that she has done to support *The Vanguard* over the past three years that I’ve served as editor. I wish her well in her retirement, and she will be missed. A special thank you to my student editor, Sam Bicking, as well. Thank you for ALL you do for the RCSJ community. Your efforts are tremendous, and your spirit is admirable!

It is an honor to work in a community of talented students, faculty, and staff. Please continue to send your stories, poems and works of art to [vanguard@rcsj.edu](mailto:vanguard@rcsj.edu) – we are already looking forward to our publication next year!

Very Best,  
*Andrea Vinci*  
English Instructor, Rowan Choice Program  
Faculty Editor, *The Vanguard*

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“No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world.” This is a quote that has resonated with me through high school and has continued to resonate with me in college. It was said by Robin Williams, who embodied creativity in its most raw form. Creativity comes in all forms, from literature to artwork and can be found in comedy and film creation. It is an honor to contribute to a publication that brings the creativity of Rowan College of South Jersey’s student, faculty, and staff population. Despite the year-long quarantine and virtual operations, as a community of scholars we came together to produce writing pieces, photography, and much more.

I would like to thank Professor Andrea Vinci for allowing me to volunteer as a student editor for *The Vanguard*, as well as, I would like to thank every creator who submitted work for this publication that encompasses the resilience, aspirations, and devotion that flows through the community at Rowan College of South Jersey. I look forward to releasing this publication for you to view!

Cordially,  
*Samantha Bicking*  
Student Editor, *The Vanguard*

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**Photography**

**By: Linda Slomin, EOF Counselor**



## Living Flowers

By: Cecilia Lemanowicz, Student

“Living Flowers”

Life is lovely  
No matter who it be  
Sometimes hard to see  
Delicate, put simply

Soft and gentle  
Sweet honeycomb  
Made flesh and bone  
Substantial and fragile

Made of pure flowers  
The tiny buds  
Blighted in mud  
Tender fruits soured

Ensanguined petals fly  
Amid the sobbing  
Head is throbbing  
To God on high



**Photography**

**By: Dan Leeder, RCSJ Tech Support**



## **Dream**

**By: Katelyn Warren, Student**

Shadows on the wall dance in tune with us

As copper lights burn a hole in my mind.

Two faulted souls fall prey to black.

Kiss me with your dying embers,

But don't close your eyes,

And I won't close mine.



## **Photography**

**By: Katelyn Green, HSOP Student**

## On the Conditions Surrounding My Son's Birth, Nov. 5, XXXX

**By: Nicole Yates, Student**

*Sept. 12:*

I looked out the window today. The woods are forever looming over our home, but I do not believe there is anything in them, no matter what my husband says.

“I want to go on the porch,” I said.

“You can look out the window,” he said. “You know I’m doing my best to protect you and my son.” I am tired of looking out the window. I cannot feel the breeze in my hair or the sun on my skin from the window. But he sounded angry, so I did not insist.

*Sept. 20:*

I have been in my nook for a long while. The pain is unbearable; I feel I am under great pressure, such that I cannot endure, but no matter how I pray, God does not comfort me. I do wish I could write my mother, but Richard says she has not responded to my previous letters. That woman! She always has something better to do than talk to me. When I find the strength, I will write her again today and insist she responds.

I asked Richard to open the window in the corner of my room, just for a little while. I could not stand, it hurt so bad. He was reluctant, but he did so. The air was stagnant, but it felt so nice to hear something besides my own thoughts. I wonder what animals are in the woods. I have seen many deer, but never a bear. Could a bear be lurking in the woods? Richard tells me I cannot go,

because the Devil lives there. I certainly do not wish to meet the Devil...yet I find myself wondering how right he is.

*Oct. 2:*

It is a glorious day; I felt the baby kick! I cried from happiness. I want my brother and sisters to know. I will write them again today and ask Richard to run the letter to the post office. If I could do it myself, I certainly would. I find myself wishing I could get out of the house more, now that we have settled in more permanently. But Richard says the baby could get hurt if I go out. I suppose he is right; I should not take the chance. Besides, there are nothing but trees for miles, so I would likely not see much of interest. When I am truly feeling desperate, I ask Richard to open the window.

But it is odd. The forest has become louder recently.

*Oct. 4:*

I felt better today. Some of the nausea has gone away and my cramping is lessened. I was able to go downstairs, only to later be greeted by Richard, who came home smelling of liquor. I admit, I began screaming at him. I said, "You promised this was a new start!" He did not say much back to me but shoved me aside and went upstairs. What is there to do but grit my teeth and pray? I foolishly expected an apology when I followed him up.

"What are you doing?" I knew, of course. In our room, he violently took the drawers from the bureau out and threw them on the floor, bending his back and craning his neck to look inside. The drunkard was scouring the room for money, I knew that. But sometimes, it is easier to feign ignorance.

“I’ll be back tomorrow afternoon. Stay in the house.”

“You promised.” I did not want to overstep my bounds. But what kind of mother would I be if I let this slide? Richard was angry. He always got worse when he drank. I knew that. I knew from years of experience. I knew what would happen if I talked back, but against all good judgement, I did so.

When he left, I fixed up a saline rinse for my lip.

*Oct. 5:*

Richard apologized to me today. I find myself wishing he had not. I know God may not forgive me of my own sins if I hold a grudge, but I am struggling to find the strength within me to pardon him.

“You know I never mean to hurt you, Eliza,” he said. “I wasn’t in my right mind.”

“I know.” I said nothing more. Maybe I should have.

He took me on the porch today. We sat together, not speaking a word. But it was not silent. It is so loud. Whining, screeching, I have never known an animal to make such a sound before. I asked Richard, “Do you hear that?”

“The woodpecker? I think so, yeah.” I did not bother to inquire further. I did not hear the woodpecker.

*Oct. 13:*

Being stuck in this house is getting to me. I look outside and can swear to God I see figures moving in the trees. I cannot open the window anymore. The screaming is loud enough with it closed.

I decided to tell Richard about the sounds and visions. He says it is “pre-birth hallucinations.” I have never heard of such a ridiculous thing, but I did not argue.

Richard has been leaving nearly every night, getting drunk and likely barely making it back to tell the tale. If I am not in our room by the time he returns, he will hurt me. This, I am accustomed to, no matter how much it pains me to admit, but being with child, it only makes me see red. He does not listen to reason. He says little to me, besides the command of “don’t leave the house” before he goes. What is out there he does not want me to see? I am becoming more and more inclined to believe he has made up these stories about the woods to keep me here.

I have made up my mind. I will go out tomorrow when he leaves.

*Addendum:*

When Richard left, I saw the door to his office was ajar. It is usually locked “because a man deserves his privacy,” but in his stupor I suppose he forgot.

How could my mother have written me back when each letter is collecting dust in my husband’s study?

*Oct. 14:*

Richard left late at night as expected. As soon as I could no longer see him, I put on my jacket and stepped onto the porch. What a mistake, it seemed! The groaning, the screaming coming

from the trees not even thirty feet away...I had to cover my ears, truthfully to no avail...but there was something more, I could feel it in my bones, my tendons, and even on the top of my skin.

I did trudge forward on this night, into the woods. The baby kicked furiously, I cramped and ached worse than ever before, but there was something magnetic about the forest. I saw the figures up close, yet my limited human vision could not discern their true appearance. They laughed and yelled and circled me, and I found myself shocked but unafraid. I could not hear the animals I thought would be there. There was no bear in the woods.

I felt something touch me, and I stumbled and fell back, onto the cool soil. I could not make out what they were saying, the people of the woods, but I knew it was directed at me. I am unsure how long I was in there, though I can assure it felt like mere minutes. It was only after those fleeting moments that I encountered the horror in the woods.

Richard brought me home, hurt me, yelled at me. “You never listen to me,” he said. “You always do whatever you want. What if you went and got my son killed? What if you went and let the Devil take him in the woods?”

My face was numb, I imagine I would not have been able to recognize it in a mirror. However, I did not feel much pain. I felt anger. I said something I should not have.

“What is there to listen to? Empty promises, lies? Did you think I would not find the ‘unresponded to’ letters to my mother? Truly, I do not believe you have ever said anything genuine in your life!” I was irate, I did not mean what I said. “I hope this child *is* the Devil, you goddamn deadbeat!”

I do not believe I had ever seen such a stunned look on that man's face, nor a time where he did not have a retort in the form of a fist. He was in such shock, I believe, that he said nothing but went upstairs, and slammed his door. I did not pray for forgiveness tonight.

*Oct. 21:*

I met with the midwife who will help to deliver the baby soon. She is a kind young woman, likely around my age. Her name is Judith. I enjoyed speaking to her. Speaking to anyone, really. She told me she looked forward to coming back in a couple weeks to deliver our child. I do imagine she had questions about the bruises; her face contorted in concern when we met. But with Richard there, she did not try to ask, and I did not try to tell.

Richard did not bother to put up a front of a loving father. He just stood there and listened, then went back upstairs when she left. He has not spoken to me since I said those blasphemous things. I do not know how much I blame him, but God help me, I am grateful for the reprieve.

Now that I think about it, he said something rather odd just once a few days ago. He said, "I can't hear the woodpecker." He is looking more haggard lately, has not bothered to shave or groom his hair. When I do see him, his eyes are bloodshot, sleepless.

I am thinking Richard hears the forest, too.

*BIRTH DAY:*

The midwife came as scheduled. I had been in so much pain the last two days, I barely knew what time or day it was. Richard was sitting next to me, in my nook, speechless. He was not looking at me. He stared out the window, mouth slightly agape. I did not bother to speak to him.

The process was explained to me. It was simple enough, I thought. Though, if I can be honest, I could not hear a lot of her explanation. Between my own groans and those from outside, it was a blur.

Judith stayed all night. But my Son, he was born early in the morning. I do believe Richard looked over to see him, but it was only for a moment. I was handed my Son, my beautiful Son. He had blue eyes, just like his father.

What I write now is as true as every entry in this journal. It was the most extraordinary event I have ever or will ever see. I was holding my Son, as any new mother would, with tenderness and undying affection, when I noticed something was amiss. He stopped his gurgling, holding my finger, crying—and began to grow. Growing...larger than anything I can imagine. I did not want to let go of him, but he surely would have crushed me where I laid if I had not moved. Judith was in the bathroom washing up, Richard was watching the event unfold, expressionless.

My Son, I heard his tiny finger bones crack, crack like celery stalks to make way for hideous talons. His shoulder blades, too, moved with a terrible sound as wrinkled wings sprouted forth, curling around his now huge arms. The milky white skin I had so loved only a few moments before was rapidly growing *fur*, real animal fur, rotting at his gaunt abdomen. Horns, like those on a ram, forced their way through his head at the same time his beautiful blue eyes became the color of blood. This monstrosity before me was my Son. He smelled like decomposed meat, and for only a moment, there was absolute silence in the room.

This much, I remember. Afterwards, it is a bit of a blur. I remember my Son turning from me to Richard, and in one swoop of his disgusting talon, my husband was in pieces, dead as could be. The midwife, poor Judith, happened to walk in at the wrong time, I suppose; she never got a

word in edgewise. My Son used his gargantuan teeth on her, bit her head clean off. How he shrieked, how he groaned...the sound was grating and all too familiar.

He looked at me. In the eyes, we met. I was in a state of shock, I could not move, could not speak. I thought for sure, *this is where I will die.*

But he did not kill me. My Son, he used his newly grown wings to carry his deformed self out of the window, destroying a side of the house. I do not know why he spared me.

I sat for a long time next to Richard and Judith, listening to the echoes of the woods.

*Dec.:*

The howls from these pines are not so painful now. Perhaps it is the maternal bond, or maybe I am just used to them. Richard was right about there being a Devil in the woods. I know, because I get to see Him when I go out on the porch.

## **The Road to Success - Or Is It the Road to Personal Success**

**By: Toyan Thompson, Student**

The travels of our paths to develop what we think is success

The depth of the journey, for sometimes we follow our mind, then follow our hearts

The conflicts between what is true success; the personal development or the process of achieving the ultimate goal

The fire that feeds the curiosity of what the success may be

The pits of each decision that leads us in a uncertain place, but left us with enough curiosity to keep traveling through high waters

For this where you will find personal success to develop and deliver your abilities on the road to success!



**Photography**

**By: Makayla Rossi, Student**

## Andre's Ghost

By: Sam Lillie

It was cold as Arthur walked away from the cemetery.

“It’s never fun,” he said.

“What is never fun?” his daughter Penny replied.

“Burying someone. It’s such a shame when someone so young dies, but at least it’s over now.” At this, Penny just kept walking and staring at the ground. They walked together through the cold wet leaves that were so sodden they clung to ground, as if desperate to stay attached to something in this world.

“Funny,” Arthur thought to himself, “it’s funny the way something that is as dead as a fallen leaf can cling to the world of the living and make such a fuss for those of us that are still hanging around.”

How many countless hours did he spend raking leaves in the dying time of the year? Alone at that too. His son, Cal, was never interested in yard work. Sure, he might hold a bag here, or jump in a pile of leaves there, but his mind was always somewhere else. Cal did not care for tools, yard work, or pinewood derbies. Cal cared about dressing up and dancing. *Even my son isn't always like a son to me*, he thought (McNally 17).

Arthur hugged Penny goodbye and got in his black Jaguar. The smell of the leather seats were in stark contrast to the decayed moldy smell of late fall. He began to drive home and continued to think along the way. No matter what activity Arthur came up with for him and his

son to do together, Cal never seemed interested. He would try to get him to sit on the couch and watch the Vikings game with him, even offer him that token sip of beer that so many fathers share with their sons in their formative years. “That’s gross, Daddy!” Cal had said. Arthur knew that he and Cal would never bond over a beer or a Vikings game, or even raking leaves. Those moments were reserved for fathers with real sons.

The moment Arthur knew, truly knew, that he had no son was on Cal’s 12th birthday. Perhaps it was a reflex or a last-ditch effort at bonding with his boy, but Arthur went out and spent a little over 500 dollars on a brand new set of hockey gear for his son, everything he would need to sign up for the upcoming peewee hockey season. Cal looked over the gear lovingly, but there was a hint of something encroaching upon resentment in his eye. “Thanks, Dad. Can I go play Nintendo with Steven upstairs?” Cal asked.

“Of course, son, it’s your birthday.” Arthur did not seem to mind; he was beaming at the thought of his son being a star athlete. As he cleaned up from the party, he thought, *maybe the boy would like to try it on*, so he went to his room to see if he would. Arthur opened the door without pause or hesitation, “Hey, Cal, I...” what Arthur saw inside causes him to shudder to this day. Cal was there with Steven, Star Fox 85 was playing on the Nintendo in the background, but no one was playing. Cal and Steven were kissing; not a peck or a joke kiss, but a real kiss. “I know what you could be, I know what you should be, I just hope you wake up.” (Russ, pg. 142). That was the day Arthur knew, and it was the last day he had ever called him son.

Arthur pulled up to his two-story colonial house just as the sun was setting. The backdrop of the Minnesota woods always made him feel better, but not today. Cal had had many, um, friends over the years. They were all decent enough fellows, but they weren’t the kind of

companionship he had wished for that boy. That being said, Arthur did always like Andre, truly. He knew Cal had felt very strongly about Andre. Penny's word still rang in his ear, "God forgive me for wishing you were straight every time I laid eyes on you" (McNally 30-31).

"Hmm... if only they could have really loved each other. Maybe in another life, one of them might have been a woman. Then there may have been a hope at love," he said into the cold, dark house.

Though it was well within the norm for late autumn being cold, the house was down right freezing. Arthur hung his keys on the wall and checked his thermostat. It seemed to be working, but it was so cold that Arthur could see his own breath. Arthur decided that the day had been long enough. He decided that he would go and wash the funeral thoughts off of him in a long, hot shower then put on his robe and read in his bed until he fell asleep. —*Creak.*—

*What was that?* Arthur thought to himself. He turned on the hall light to reveal just the emptiness in his house. Arthur shivered and put the creaking floorboard out of his mind. *It is an old house, after all.* Arthur ascended the stairs but could not shake this impending feeling of dread. It had to be because of the funeral, stirring up all of those thoughts of his past. This feeling would not leave him as he hurried up the stairs to the bathroom. He retrieved his bathrobe and a towel from his bedroom and walked once more into the loneliness of his empty hallway only to be assaulted by coldness.

*Death, decay, worms, worms and grubs, worms and grubs feasting on your flesh. You, in the ground, with the worms and the grubs as they feast upon your flesh.*

"NO!" he drew back. *Why am I thinking like this?* The thoughts were coming from somewhere else, as if another person was whispering behind him into his ear. Arthur slammed

the bathroom door against these thoughts and hung his robe on the door hook. Arthur once again shuddered to himself as he hung the towel on the rack next to the shower. He turned the shower on and desperately tried to think of anything besides those wretched worms.

His thoughts wandered, as they often did, to how well he had performed in a situation. He congratulated himself on how well he had done at the funeral. He had been nothing but a perfect gentleman to Cal and Penny, especially in front of... *Oh, what was her name again? Andre's mother.*

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She stood at his grave for a while after Cal had left. So many thoughts and emotions flew through her mind, everything that Cal had said left her stunned. She felt pity for the poor man, having just bared his soul effectively to a stranger. Oh, what a stranger she had been to him and to Andre, and she just stood there and listened. When someone shows that much of themselves, their true selves, to another, what words can be said? *Mini tragedies play out like this every day,* she thought.

How often had she been on her way to the grocery store or to work and she had passed a funeral procession? All those cars with the orange tags on their windshields that read "FUNERAL" in bold, black letters. She had often looked through the windshields to gaze upon the somber faces without much empathy or thought as she was always in too much of a rush, but now... now that she, too, had lost her son, it was different. Everything looked blurrier and almost colorless. She had grieved before, of course. Her grandparents had died before she was a teenager, and her father had passed three summers ago. These deaths, though difficult, were of course in accordance with the natural order.

*We all live according to nature*, she thought. *We are born, we grow up, we live, we grow old, we die*. That reinforces the absurdity and finiteness of a child's love for their parent. They love them as little ones, and then they become teenagers. They push them away and rebel, sometimes by drinking or doing drugs, and sometimes by being the only boy on the varsity cheerleading squad, or one of two boys to complete four years of dance class in high school. Only when children have children of their own do they finally start to see how much their parents mean to them.

However, by then the gray hairs and wrinkles of time have started to become more apparent. Soon their parents are unable to walk as well and need help getting around. Sometimes their parents become totally dependent upon their kids, reversing the caregiver relationships. Sometimes, as was the case with her father, a persistent cough of twenty years turns into something much more malevolent and volatile. He had been strong and proud, but that *cough*, the emphysema, stripped him bare of his pride and left him a withered husk of the man he once was. Within weeks of the diagnosis, her father was gone.

"I lived a long life," he had said to her in his final days. Maybe that was why he went so quickly, why Andre had tried so hard. A child watching their parents age and wither is natural. It is hard for sure, but it is natural. That grief can be talked about. That grief can be overheard being spoken of in lines at grocery stores, as if it is some dark rite of passage to enter adulthood. "Oh, I remember when I lost my mother," "Yes dear it is always hard. I lost my father six years ago, and I still feel like I can smell him," "It happens to all of us, you know, we all eventually have to pick out our mother's casket."

These conversations and more take place every day in this country, but what of the grief that cannot be spoken of? The sheer look of utter despair upon a mother's face who has lost her pride and joy? The look of pure helplessness on a father's face as his cancer-ridden daughter asks him if there is a heaven? That grief is not chalked up to as "natural" while strangers wait in line at the movie theatre to see the new Sandra Bullock movie (another dark rite of passage into adulthood, being a fan of Sandra Bullock movies). When two parents who have lost a child meet, words are not exchanged. "I lost my son four years ago," is enough. That one phrase says everything that needs to be said between them. No words can possibly capture the raw emotion involved in grieving for your own child, grief does not even do these emotions justice. The look exchanged by two grieving parents will say more than a poet could say in a thousand lifetimes.

Andre's mother knew this now. She knew what it was to be a part of the world's least coveted club. She knew all of the harshness, cruelty, bitterness, and death that this forsaken world could offer. She knew that no color would ever be as bright. She knew no melody could ever sound as sweet. She knew nothing could ever be as good or as pure again. She knew that her son, her boy, was gone. She could think of a thousand things she wished to say to him now, and she knew she would never get the chance. If only she could tell him how much she loved him.

She begged against reality to just tell him that she had always known who he truly was and that, despite her misgivings, she had loved him still. The tears streaked out of her red eyes down her scarlet face now. She knew a million things to say with no way of telling him. If she could not tell her Andre, maybe she could at least tell Cal. *You had your chance to tell him*, she thought to herself. Cal had opened every wound he had to her and she just stood there, dumbfounded by the gravity of the situation, and she had let him walk away. "Oh god," she said to herself, "why can't I just tell them?"

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The hot water felt great on Arthur's cold skin. The steam had helped clear his sinuses as much as his mind. He couldn't believe how worked up he had gotten earlier about some coldness in the house. He had run up the stairs and slammed the bathroom door shut as if he were a scared schoolboy. But such fears and thoughts were gone now, washed away by the puritive waters of the shower. He closed the handles for the water and dried off standing on the shower mat. Arthur wrapped the towel around his waist and walked over to the door to grab his robe, but it wasn't there.

"That's odd," he said to no one. Arthur distinctly remembered putting the robe on the door. He must be misremembering, he was flustered after all when he had all but run into the bathroom. Arthur walked over to the sink to brush his teeth. He picked up the toothbrush with his right hand and wiped the fog from the mirror with his left, and then- *Shrriip!* He heard the sound of leather rubbing against leather and pulling apart. Arthur looked up from the sink basin and dropped his tooth brush. Over his right shoulder he saw the most macabre sight he could imagine.

*(Worms)* it was a brief fleeting image (*grubs*) where he swore that he saw this gangly, pale, rotten, humanoid (*feasting upon your flesh*) cadaver of a person standing behind him. The skin looked as if it had been liquid (*you in the ground*) that was literally melting from his bones. And that face, that horrible wretched face complete with the most erroneous mouth turned as if to smile but more resembling a waning moon (*you in the ground with worms and grubs feasting upon your flesh*). Aside from that horrendous smile and ghastly appearance, Arthur thought the specter bore a striking resemblance with the late Andre.

Arthur stood there in nothing but a towel, horrified at the thought of what he could have seen. *No*, he thought to himself, *that is impossible*. Andre is dead and buried (*worms feast upon your flesh*). He was just seeing things. It was a long and taxing day after all, pretending to care that the boy's "friend" was dead. How could he care after all? It wasn't love. It was wrong, backwards. A mistake of Arthur's as a father. There was no possible way any son of his could turn out so, so just wrong. *Why is my robe not on the door?*

Whiskey. He needed good, strong whiskey. That would set his mind right. Damn his robe, damn that whole funeral, damn that boy's sick adoration of that damned Andre. Arthur swung the door of the bathroom open and walked out to the hall. He stopped for a moment, gazing over the stair banister to see that ghoulish fiend from the bathroom mirror standing downstairs in his foyer. He was just standing there, translucent, staring at him. Neither spoke for what seemed like an eternity.

"No," Arthur said succinctly. "You are not here, you are dead, and that is the END of that." At this, the creature's horrible smile began widening. The sickly flesh became stretched taut over his rotting teeth which gave way to the most horrendous stench (*worms*). It was a sickly stench that invaded every molecule of oxygen that hung in the air, the smell of necrosis which dominated Arthur's olfactory senses. It was the kind of smell that smothered the very essence of life itself. *Shrriip!* Arthur heard from over his shoulder. As he turned, he saw the ghoul standing not but a foot away from him. *Oh, the stench, please make it stop!*

As the creature's smile grew ever bigger, his heinous grin overtook his face. His cheeks began to tear as thick, black blood poured from what once was once a rosey, happy face. The smile widened, punctuated by blood and turned upwards passed the ill-set eye sockets (*grubs*).

“No!” Arthur yelled, “get out! You cannot be here, you cannot possibly be here.” A rotten hand reached up from the creature — no, not a creature. Andre. Andre placed a single gangrenous hand upon Arthur’s chest and pushed him towards and over the banister.

Arthur’s body gave a loud thwack, crunch, thud as his head struck the floor, followed by the crepitus of his fractured neck, and finally his body hitting the hard wood floor below. As Arthur lay there lifelessly, Andre’s wretched form began to fade away.

What were his final thoughts? What can any of ours be? As people, we want our thoughts to be of our families or memories but what are the final thoughts in reality? For Arthur it was likely that his final thought in this life was simply: *This is not happening.*

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The wind was brisk as Andre’s mother strode up her damp, concrete driveway to her home. *It’s over*, she thought. Now she was at the worst part of a family member’s death. Funerals are scripted, and professionals help you through the process of getting your loved one into the ground. But once it is over? It’s done. All the rituals are gone. Once the casket is lowered and the last goodbye is said, what then? The world moves on because all the rites are completed. But for those still longing for their son’s embrace? The worst part of a funeral has just started. The end. When everyone has left with nothing more than parting thoughts and prayers. They leave you in this world of solitude and grief to answer your own terrible questions. The lights were off in the house as they had been for years; after all, who was visiting? She opened the door and walked directly to the kitchen. *Brrrr*, she thought, *it sure is cold in here.*

She stood alone in her house by the liquor cabinet and pulled out a bottle of dry red cabernet sauvignon. She poured herself a large glass and turned to go into the living room, and

*crash!* The wine glass shattered all over the floor. In the doorway between her kitchen and the living room stood a grotesque version of her son. His skin hung softly off his skeleton. His eyes were sunken into his rotting face and he just stood there, without so much as a word to her. His mouth was turned ever so slightly so that it might be verging on a smile, just waiting on the right words to trigger him into one. As Andre's mother gazed upon her decrepit son, the thoughts from the funeral began to fill her mind.

Thoughts and emotions swirled through her mind. All of the love she hadn't said and all of the... the... the ANGER. Why did he leave her like this? She knew it was not his fault. He died from disease but still, how dare he? *No*, she thought, *he can't be here. Fuck him for being here! What can I say to make him go away? Oh my god, I'm a terrible mother...* How could she feel all of these things at once? Especially while this monstrous corpse stood there staring at her. But it wasn't a corpse. It was her son, her precious Andre.

Suddenly, she knew a million things to say, literally hundreds of emotions she wished to convey to him and now she could. She had been given a second chance! As she looked into his eyes, his whole body seemed to become uncorrupted. The being that stood before her was no longer a monster, it was simply her son. He was standing there as plain as day, just waiting. Waiting for what? The years the disease had taken from him? The opportunities she herself had robbed of him? A chance at life? A chance at happiness? Or had he been happy? He and Cal in their apartment in Minneapolis. Of course they had been happy. They loved each other. They knew each other at their basest forms and they still loved each other.

A child can love their parent, but it's finite, as the parent will die. A lover can love longingly but ultimately it will die too, who first? That is for fate to decide. But a parent's love

for their child? A mother's love? *Her* love? That was forever. He was never supposed to die before her and maybe he didn't. Maybe she died a million times before him, one for every missed opportunity to say how much she loved him and how much she wished nothing but joy for him and Cal. How could she possibly say all that now?

She looked into his eyes, and just smiled. His apparition began to fade away as a funny sweet, sad smile crossed his face (McNally 55). There are some grievous emotions that are too raw, too sad to be expressed with words, but at the same time, there are also emotions too pure and happy to verbalize. Some things are too strong to be communicated with words. Some things are better left unsaid, unspoken. And other things aren't.

“On the other side of your fear is your truth” (Russ, pg. 51). With tears in her eyes, Andre's mother cleared her throat, and spoke, “It's okay. It's okay to be who you are. I love you, I always have, and I always will.” The ghost of Andre disappeared into the weather of eternity with a smile upon his face.

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Lauren Carbone 2021 (c)

**Photography- Cape May Point**

**By: Lauren Carbone, Student**

**Crafted Photography**

**By: Samantha Bicking, Student and  
Vanguard Editor**



## A Perspective on Having Chronic Illness

By: Sara Pavesi, Student

I decided I wouldn't think of myself as a sick person  
Rather a tree with strong branches  
and roots that grow deeper everyday  
Every molecule of oxygen is my gift to bestow  
I thank God with every leaf  
that I have a gift to give  
And when my leaves fall and my roots give out  
let the seeds of my existence  
sprout new life that brings  
fresh air in the spring  
vibrant colors in the fall  
and hope that it all comes back again when in winter  
I want my legacy to be perseverance  
Standing strong against hard winds  
Not letting up when the rain gets rough  
And when my time comes to finally fall down  
I will do it with grace, but still make a sound



## Photography

By: Tehreem Kahn, Student



**Panoramic Photography**

**By: Alexandra Dionisi, Staff**



**Photography**

**By: Lauren LaMaestra, Student**

## Another Chance

**By: Theresa Bennett, Student**

“I’m sorry Mr. and Mrs. Bennett, there is nothing else that I can do for your daughter Theresa,” said Dr. Marthy as she looked at my medical documents with gloomy eyes.

My mother slowly hung her head down as she was trying to hold back the tears that were rested at the corner of her eyes. Her long hair flowed over her face as she tried to push it back to wipe away her tears. My father stood up as he puts his hands over his extremely tired face, not knowing what else to do.

“Can you do anything else for my daughter? Please we need your help. She can barely move; she is always in pain and you know she been instilled in a wheelchair for months,” my mother said to Dr. Marthy, as she started to cry.

Growing up in an Apostolic Church, I was taught to always have faith in God, but in that moment all I could do was cry with her. Being diagnosed with Mixed Connective Tissue Disease since I was five years old, has been one of the hardest things that I had to accept in my life. This disorder has robbed of my childhood, decreased my physical moments, and it has given me unbearable pain. To hear that Dr. Marthy couldn’t do anything else for me, brought me to tears. The excruciating pain of my joints and open rashes was no fun at all. It was as if someone with anger issues was constantly stabbing all over my body with a pointed knife repeatedly. At that moment while sitting in the doctor’s office filled with the scent of rubbing alcohol, I wanted to

go. I wanted to pull the wheelchair that I was in to get out of there, but I couldn't. I needed strength, but my arms were like Ramen noodles. I felt useless, weak, and broken on the inside.

“A ten-year-old shouldn't have to go through this,” I said painfully.

After saying that, I no longer had faith in God anymore. The many times I've seen my mother pray to God to heal me, in those moments I felt as though her prayers were useless. She is a firm believer that Christ can do all things even in the mist of uncertainty but unlike her, I wasn't sure what to believe. My mother would pray by my bedside every night crying out to God, but I began to think that God himself wasn't listening anymore. Sometimes I felt like my mother had doubts as well. At times when she cried; she would stop praying. She was frustrated and beyond tired. Although I was physically in pain, I could still feel a connection to my mother's emotional pain and anxiety. I could only imagine what it would feel like seeing your own child sick and possibly never getting better. I felt as though it was my fault that I had put her in this situation. Every day was a struggle for her, even to keep a job that she later lost because of me. With all the prayers being said, we weren't seeing any result, but that didn't stop her from crying out. She was determined to pray every night with me, no matter what.

Furthermore, as my mother continued to beg for more answers that the doctor was unable to give her, my father stayed silent. He had the same exhausted and painful look on his face just like my mother. The only difference was that he wasn't crying. The look on his face almost scared me. When I turned around, his small eyes bulged out, and he started to breathe hard. All I could see was anger and pain. It was penetrating inside his body and showing outside of his face. My dad is not one to hold his tongue when he's upset, but this time he couldn't say a word.

The same way I felt an emotional connection to my mother's pain, was the same connection I felt with my dad. The only dissimilarly was that their pain was shown differently.

"I'm sorry Mr. and Mrs. Bennett, but Theresa's condition is way beyond my medical studies. I can, however, show you other options that you can consider," she said very abruptly.

My mother looked up slowly with tears and said, "We will find a doctor for her that can help her, no matter how long it takes. My daughter has to live."

I saw again the look of exhaustion and stress on my mother's face. Her red weary eyes hung low while the little wrinkles on her forehead stood out. Deep down on the inside, my mother was still worried about me. If only it were possible to take away someone's pain, I would do it for my mother. As my mother tried to hold her head up, Dr. Marthy walked towards her with a large, heavy book. When she opened the book, it was filled with names of different doctors. Rapidly my parents started to read and take notes on a piece of paper. After hours of searching through a book of never-ending listed names of doctors, my parents finally saw one that caught their eyes. Immediately they picked up the telephone in Dr. Marthy's office and booked an appointment that day. I was happy that my parents found a possible doctor, but I still had my doubts. Despite my uncertainties, I still wanted to get better not just for myself but for my parents as well.

The following week at nine o'clock in the morning on a Tuesday in the year of 2011, we were on the road. The sun was shining brightly throughout the sky that day, but the heat was unbearable. After about an hour of driving, I saw a sign saying, "Welcome to Philadelphia" and

twenty minutes later we saw this huge building filled with glass windows. It was about twenty stories tall, wider than the size of three houses combined and has a huge sign called “St. Christopher’s Hospital for Children.”

“We are here,” said my mom to me very nervously.

My heart felt like it was going to explode, as I held my chest with my hands, one on top of each other. The closer we got to this huge hospital surrounded by sick people, the more I got nervous. In my mind I was constantly saying, “What if this doctor can’t help me? Then what are we going to do? If my old doctor couldn’t fix me then no one can.”

I turned slowly to my mom with a great feeling of unbelief and said, “What if this doctor can’t fix me? I don’t know if I can take this anymore.”

My mother with her soft skin touched me on my shoulder gently and said, “God will make a way in due time. You won’t be in pain for long.”

She gave me a huge hug filled with love and compassion. It was as if I could feel her energy through my veins and it warmed my body with comfort.

“Thank you, Momma,” I said while smiling.

Following my mother’s hug, my father decided to drop us off at the entrance door of the hospital. The car parked slowly and closely next to the curve of the sidewalk. After parking the car, my father came out. He walked through two glass doors and came out with a wheelchair just for me. He opened the car door to my right and wiped out the little dirty part of the wheelchair. Just turning my body to the right side to take my right foot out of the car hurt so bad. My mother slowly took my left foot, as my dad put my right arm over his left shoulder. With a little push I

was out of the car and placed slowly into the black leathered wheelchair. We went through the two big front doors to proceed into the main lobby.

“What is your name?” Said the young lady at the brown wooden desk.

“We have an appointment for my daughter Theresa Bennett at ten fifteen today,” said my mother, as she started to rub both of her hands together in a circular motion.

All I could hear was the sound of the desk lady clicking on the keyboard rapidly, as she looked up my name on the computer.

“You’re all set. You can have a seat in room three and the doctor will be right with you,” she said with a smile on her face as she handed my mother a form to fill out.

As we entered the room, I saw a round table, two chairs and a bed covered with a long white paper.

“I hope this doctor knows what to do,” I said as I rolled my eyes.

I was filled with sadness, but I was also upset with myself. Upset that my parents and I must go through this again. I realized that I had to start telling myself that everything was going to be okay, whether I got better or not. In many ways it affected me, but it also kept me motivated now to keep pushing. When I turned around to my left side, I saw the worried look once again on my mother’s face.

“Everything is going to be okay,” I said to my mom.

She patted the back of my hand and with a little smile on her face she said, “You’re right love.”

“Knock, knockkk!” someone was at on the door.

It was a male doctor whose hair was as white as snow and stood about six feet tall.

“Hello everyone, my name is Dr. Goldsmith and you must be Theresa,” he said with a smile on his face.

I smiled and said, “Yes”

“Now before I tell you all the good news, I would like to examine Theresa a little bit,” said Dr. Goldsmith with a smirk on his face.

Dr. Goldsmith directed me to the bed and told me to lay flat on my back. While he was examining my rashes and inflammations on my knees and arms, I started to remember what happened during church service last week. In front of the pulpit where my pastor preaches, there is a communion table. My church strictly only used that table during communion every once a month where we would come together to partake of the Lord’s super and when it was offering time. During that Sunday, everyone was praying, crying and falling out on the floor.

While I was sitting on the bench, a mother of the church gently held my right hand and asked, “Can I pray for you?”

With no hesitation I shook my head yes, and she insisted that we both go to the alter together to pray. As soon as I got the front of the alter, my Bishop picked me up and laid me prostrate on the communion table. As soon as he did so, people got up from their benches and started to pray alongside with the Bishop for me. I did not know what else to do but to cry.

Everyone in the church was praying just for me and in that moment, I knew that I was not alone. Just like how my church was there for me, I somehow had a good feeling that this new doctor is going to be there for me every step of the way as well.

As Dr. Goldsmith finished examining me, he opened a folder filled with a lot of papers.

“Now I’ve looked over your medical documents and have done a lot of studies and research and I think I’ve found a treatment that will help you tremendously. We can start right away. Depending how you will react to this treatment, you might see results faster or a little bit at a time, but you will get through this. It’s an infusion called IVIG that you will take every once a month. It contains a mixture of antibodies that helps to treat several health conditions. I have seen great improvements with cases that are even more severe than yours and I believe this is just the thing for you. My team and I will do everything to help you get better. You’re not alone,” said Dr. Goldsmith with a genuine smile on his face.

My eyes glowed up and I started to smile. My heart leaped for joy! I had never heard those words come out of any doctor’s mouth that I had been to! It felt like my pain was gone for ten second because for once something good was happening in my life. My date to start the infusion was exactly one week away. I was excited for this new change. Dr. Goldsmith did just what he said and was going to help me along the way.

“I told you God will make a way,” my mom said smiling as she was wiping away her tears from her cheeks.

I held her soft hands and smiled. I turned around to my dad and he had a smirk on his face. I felt like the emotional bondage of pain that they had was finally lifting and that made me happy on the inside. Having the feeling of hope after so many declines and, “sorry we can’t help

you anymore,” felt so good.

As a result, when you don’t believe in yourself, there will always be someone who believes in you. I never realized how essential having a strong support group is until I conquer one of my biggest obstacles in life. When you don’t have the strength to believe in yourself, there will always be someone who can lend a helping hand for you. Every obstacle in life has a great outcome at the end and though I was still in pain, I was happy. As we proceeded to get back on the road, all I could do was smile because at least now I knew I had another chance at life and a sense of hope.



**Flowers at Night -  
Photography**

**By: Lori Joyce, Professor**

## Maybe

By: Miriam Craig-Venti, Student

Maybe when I'm gone is when they'll start to care  
 Maybe when I can't come back they'll wish that I was there  
 Maybe when I'm gone my beauty they will see  
 Maybe when words can't be heard they'll wish that they told me

Maybe when I'm gone  
 Maybe when I'm gone  
 Maybe all I've said will happen one by one  
 Maybe when I'm gone

Maybe when I'm gone my love will then be known  
 Maybe when hugs can't be shared they'll wish their love had shown  
 Maybe when I'm gone is when they'll start to cry  
 Maybe when I finally leave they'll wish they said goodbye

Maybe when I'm gone  
 Maybe when I'm gone  
 Maybe all I've said will happen one by one  
 Maybe not while I'm still here but maybe when I'm gone

## Silence

By: Liza DeStefano, Student

Trade the quiet for just one word, why afraid to allow the voice to be heard.  
 Never to know what I truly did wrong, as music notes file depressing songs.  
 Tears are shed for hurt and shame, of no answers given just stillness to pain.  
 Apologize oh how I tried, spending so many nights wondering why.  
 Was the word Love the straw that broke the trust, of being my friend but now disgust.  
 Quietness has been the answer received, a wall of emptiness left feeling bereaved.  
 To love another is not to fear, it's universal in life and okay to share.  
 Absence conversation only wanting to belong, the tiniest spot for me I fake the strong.  
 Silence is punishment I plead not need, forgive to forever I will concede.

## The Mother of All Mistakes

**By: Gabi Ganski, Student**

I placed the clipboard on the ledge of the reception window. The receptionist looked up, first at the packet of filled out health information, then at me. “Thank you. Have a seat, Ms. Powe.” Back at my scratchy waiting room chair in the middle of a desolate row of seats, I tapped the toe of my loafers against the speckled floor, scanning the room for a no smoking sign. None in sight, but I feel like it wouldn’t be something that has to be stated. Imagine how ironic it’d be to light one up in an abortion clinic! Gotta kill ‘em somehow, am I right?

With an audible sigh to my inaudible thoughts, I dug through my bag for something to do. Pushing past my Newports, I only came across my slim Vonnegut volume that I’ve been reading at the speed a turtle fucks. Nobody can get my mind off reality more than Vonnie’s bizarre words, no matter how sleep-inducing the plot.

I cracked open *The Breakfast of Champions*, and three sentences in, my stomach became hollow. The sentences looked like caterpillars, and once again I was paralyzed with disbelief that I ended up here. In an abortion clinic. Halfway through my freshman year in college. I will be the first to admit I’ve done some pretty reckless shit in my life, my parents a very close second. Rolling joints like a dealer at fourteen. Falling down the stairs drunk at fifteen, although depression will get the brunt of that one. Between the ages of sixteen and seventeen, I was helping (unknowingly at first) a man ten years my senior cheat on his longtime girlfriend, and somehow it was okay because I was “in love”. My senior year, I sawed the prom queen’s heels,

so when she got onstage she fell face first and broke her nose. Thankfully, I was already admitted to the most liberal of liberal arts colleges by then.

Now here I am at the granddaddy of them all! My eyes welled up. I never thought I'd make it here. Three other women were scattered about in the other seats. I know it's not a catastrophe. Abortions happen daily. It's not a life-or-death thing. I know that. I know it's a routine procedure, but something about it in my routine made my throat tighten. It's a physical, surgical reminder that *hey, you fucked up*. And I know what it's like to fuck up, but all the other times ended with a good chuckle, a mark on my permanent record, or - at the most severe - a solid sob session. Never with regret and a human being inside me.

I was still zoned out at pages 163 and 164 when I heard, "Are you okay?" My throat became tighter as Landon Sawyer, teacher's assistant at college by day, record store coworker by night, and lover everywhere in between, appeared next to me. "We're in public," I told the meaningless pages of the book on my lap. He chortled. "It's not like the entire student body is getting an abortion today."

"Who told you?"

"Not you."

"I had my reasons."

"I'd love to hear them."

I bit the inside of my lip, flipping the flimsy volume on my lap shut. "It didn't matter if you knew or not. It's gonna be gone either way, and you can't convince me otherwise."

Trust me, that didn't sting as much as the other half of the truth. The other half that he might never know, and I still barely know. I don't know if I ever want to fully know.

"I'm not here to convince you. Playing house is the last thing I want to do," he said.

“Of course not. That’s reserved for someone ‘your own age.’”

“Hey, I was panicking. I wasn’t expecting to see the girl I did it with in the records closet sitting in my lecture hall.”

“Oh, I’m sure you were panicking every time you ogled at that blonde bimbo on campus.”

“Gen, dear, I’m a history major. I don’t do blonde bimbos.”

“Well you seemed to have made an exception for this one.” I paused to roll my eyes... and to prevent myself from raising my voice. “All smiling and such in the hallways. You probably listen to her more than you listen to me.”

“First of all, Kellyanne and I went to grad school together --”

“*Golly*, she has a name.”

“Yep. She’s engaged, too. To a man eight times my muscle mass and an eighth of my I.Q.”

“That never stopped anyone before.”

“Stop being so goddamn righteous. Don’t act like you don’t talk to other guys.”

“Fuck you,” I said loud enough for the three other sullen women scattered about the waiting room to stare. “I might talk to other guys - half of which are gay - but I have *never* ignored you in the process.”

“Neither have I.”

“Oh please! The week after we fucked you barely said a word to me.”

“But we resolved it after that.”

“Yeah, and then along comes Kellyanne. Just in time to cover up your dirty little secret.”

“I’m here, aren’t I?”

The monsoon of guilt poured over me. My arms stayed crossed, and my own dirty little secret stayed locked away. I couldn’t even look into his eyes.

“If I were so ashamed of you, of us, I would have stayed home. I’d still be sleeping on this Friday morning, but I wanted to see you. I wanted to make things right after such a tense few weeks, and when Lydia told me where you were, I couldn’t just go home.”

“Damn, so much for having a trusting roommate.”

“It was better she said something. I’m glad I’m here. I’m glad you’re okay. Believe it or not, Genevieve Powe, I think I might like you.”

A few tears fell down my cheek, putting a line through my concealer. Goddamn these hormones. Goddamn the male species. Goddamn Landon Sawyer. “Don’t say that. Not now. I’m not myself.”

The wooden door adjacent to the front desk swung open. “Genevieve,” announced the nurse. As I began to get up, pulling my bag over my shoulder, Landon grabbed my hand. “I’ll say it again when you’re yourself again. We can talk about it.”

I wiped the wet spot under my eye, intensifying the streak of messed up concealer. “Okay. Are you gonna be here when I get out?”

“Yeah, I told Lydia to enjoy her Friday off from class, if that’s okay with you.”

“Wouldn’t want it any other way.”

“Good luck in there.”

Our hands slipped apart as I followed the nurse into the exam rooms. Even when it seems too good to be true, I have to find some way to do something stupid. I was close. I felt the truth

pushing against the back of my teeth, but I swallowed it back. It felt like nails against my throat, and hopefully it will be the nail in my coffin of recklessness.

All I can hope is that when I wake up, both of the little kids inside me are gone.



*Onaizah P. F.*

## Photography

By: Onaizah Fabrigas,  
Student

## “Back to the Convention”

By: Beth Hoffman, Student

It’s not that I have a problem electing a woman president. I just have a problem electing this woman. These words nearly made my wife ballistic during not one, but two election cycles.

Today, Jenny looks like anybody’s grandmother. She sits on our screened porch, her feet curled under her on the loveseat. She’s wearing an old pair of Levis and a Rowan University hoodie. Her silver ponytail sparkles in the sunlight. She snuggles Amy, our only grandchild, in her lap. Jenny reads *The Berenstain Bears* out loud, and Amy tries to follow the words.

Jenny’s memoir, *What Matters*, brought in seven figures, allowing us to buy ten acres about an hour and a half outside the district. We had always wanted a place where we could relax on the deck and watch the border collies play. We never realized we wanted kayaks, or even waterfront, until this property found us. We built the place ourselves. There was a brief kerfuffle about that, but my wife’s career had long forced her to sacrifice the joy of doing things for herself. There was no stopping her from personally bringing this dream into reality. Only one family lived on the dead-end street when we chose the property, so most of the neighbors knew what they were getting into before they bought.

Down the hill, Jenny’s assistant, Pete, stops his brown Equinox at the entry post. Jenny stands to go meet him. She hands Amy to me and motions her head toward the checkerboard on the table.

“The suit is fantastic,” Pete says as he bursts through the office door, plastic garment bag in hand. “The forest green will be perfect. Great for your coloring, nice and slimming, very powerful. We are so lucky Chasten was unhappy designing at Hugo Boss. Let’s never lose him.”

“Indeed,” Jenny says. “I made a few changes to the speech. Can you look them over and get it emailed to Andrew by five?”

“No problem. Do you need any help with your packing?”

“We’ll handle our own suitcases. Let me take the suit up to try on.” She unzips the garment bag and touches the fabric of the collar. Oh, this is a work of art.”

“Ok, I’ll have the cars ready to leave for Dulles at eight. I’ll ask the cook to pack us a cooler.”

When we come downstairs at seven the next morning, Pete is already in the kitchen looking sharp yet comfortable. The three of us ride in the second of three tan Suburbans. At 9:45, we pull up to a discreet back entrance at Dulles. The two TSA agents stationed at this door have gotten to know us. We say hello as we walk through the metal detectors. Amy runs to greet us at our gate, where she’s been waiting with her parents, Bernie and Liz. We wait in the lounge until Cory, the head of Jenny’s detail, gets the all clear on his radio, and we board.

I sit back in the comfy seat and close my eyes. Jenny slips her hand into mine.

“I really killed any chance you had at a normal life,” she says.

“Suppose you did, but you also saved me from flying coach ever again.” I remember when it all started.

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Jenny’s second term as New Jersey’s governor earned her national attention. Drug-related deaths were down, people had successfully moved off public assistance, graduation rates were rising, and more than that - people just seemed to feel good about their state for the first time that anyone could recall.

She questioned her scheduler one day about her lunch appointment, PF Changs with Ed Rendell, “What does he want?”

“I didn’t ask. I assumed the party chair didn’t need to be asked why he wanted to see you.”

Ed sat waiting for her at a quiet table in the corner. They exchanged pleasantries. Ed showed her pictures of the grandbaby, talked about his new place, and lamented on the loss of his marriage. Jenny told him the boys were studying engineering at Rowan. She felt accomplished and grateful for the opportunity to serve the people of her state, but her favorite part of her career had been homeschooling her kids.

“That’s because you understand the kitchen table is where everything that matters happens,” Ed said.

The waitress set their plates in front of them. Jenny dug into her sweet and sour chicken, and Ed said, “have you ever thought about running for president?”

Jenny grabbed her napkin. “Of the United States?”

“Besides having revolutionary policy ideas, you’ve got this charisma that makes people proud of New Jersey, makes them want to do their best.”

She smiled; “I modeled my style after you when you were mayor of Philadelphia.”

But Ed’s plans were not to be. Jenny’s complex policies were often grossly misconstrued on social media by people who clearly hadn’t read them. After four years of a wild lean to the right, the country seemed inclined to go wildly left. Jenny dropped out of the race before Super Tuesday. After she finished her term as governor, we returned to our quiet empty nest in Gloucester County.

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Our plane lands at West Palm. Four Suburbans, black this time, wait to transport us to the hotel. Amy rides in the third car with her parents. Its 2:00PM when we settle into our suite of oceanfront rooms.

Pete pulls back the curtains and Amy squeals with delight. She tugs on Jenny’s arm. “The ocean is right there! Can we go, Grandmom?”

Jenny looks at Liz, who nods. “Of course we can, little pumpkin,” Jenny says.

Cory talks quickly into his radio. Jenny pulls her hair through the back of a baseball cap while Bernie and Liz each slather sunscreen on a side of their daughter. By the time we enter the hallway, two agents in khaki shorts are waiting to walk us down a back stairway to the beach. On the ground level, we walk through the steamy hotel laundry room. Jenny engages in a quick exchange with one of the housekeeping staff. I feel my ears turning red. I can hold six programming languages in my head, but I never did get a handle on Spanish.

Amy runs up and down the beach with each wave, “That one almost got me!”

I watch the water. The waves lull me. Today is a day for reflection.

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Two years into his term, the new president’s policies weren’t getting traction and his health was slipping. At breakfast, Jenny turned her MacBook toward me and played the video of the announcement. He would not seek a second term. Our eyes met and held for a moment.

I took a sip of my coffee, leaned forward in my chair, and said, “Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“Yes, to both. You want to know if you should, and you want to know if I’m in. But you don’t want to ask. So, I’m just answering.”

After eight years of living at the political extremes, the bulk of the country had grown much more receptive to the value of good common-sense solutions. Jenny liked to get to the root of the problem. What if we fixed the challenges that bring people to our southern border in droves? Free college just devalues public education. How about free Internet instead? Why are so many people turning to drugs? How can we lead them to more satisfying lives?

We spent eighteen months rolling along in what was actually three Jenny-mobiles. Shed improved her ability to articulate her policies, and they resonated with a wide demographic.

Jenny's rallies drew huge crowds, but plenty of people on the fringes were having none of the idea of a female president. A man jumped on stage and assaulted her at a rally in Ohio, leaving her unconscious. I sat beside the hospital bed, waiting for her to wake up, thinking, Damn, and I was all set to be a great sport about selecting china. When Jenny woke up, her eyes went to the IV in her arm. A fleeting expression of defeat crossed her face.

I knew what she needed from me. I reached for a paper on the bedside table, and said, "Pete dropped off a tentative campaign schedule for next week." She nodded and took the paper. I added, "Nevertheless, she persisted."

The corners of her mouth curled up just a hair. "Hey, what happened to the guy?"

"Jill Biden took him down before security jumped on stage."

"Oh my god. She is one of a kind. Jill definitely needs a role at the White House."

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There are three televisions backstage, each with its camera pointed at a different angle. Jenny sees the camera cut to our box, and waves as though we can see her.

"Stop fussing. I swear, this is as good-looking as I get," she tells the hair and makeup people. Pete snaps a photo of Jenny and Jacqueline and texts it to Chasten, who is sitting in the Indiana delegation.

Chasten texts back two thumbs up and replies, “Oh, ladies, if I were straight...”

A stage crew member dressed in black approaches and says, “They’re ready for you, Madame President.”

Jenny takes a deep breath, puts on her game face and steps into the spotlight to chants of her name.

“Hello America and welcome to Florida! It is always wonderful to see you! Tonight, it is my great pleasure to tell you about an outstanding epidemiologist named Jaqueline Kramer, whom I have known since her first science fair at the tender age of ten. I find nominating the second woman president more exciting than my own election. It proves it wasn’t just a fluke or a stroke of luck. We took a glass ceiling with 63 million cracks, and we shattered it.”

**“On the Autumn River Rocks”**  
**By, Thomas E. Edmund Jr, Student**

Golden hues paint the horizon in brilliant amber, orange and yellow.

Woodland creatures awake to the sounds down towards the river delta.

Chirp, chirp, tumble, tumble, fall.

On the Autumn river rocks

Rustling on the ground, and from above

Come the calls of the woodland creatures big and small.

Chirp, chirp, tumble, tumble, fall

On the Autumn river rocks

Crashing against huge, jagged forms, the white waves

Whistling and hums of the hollow trees

With hues of rust and golden yellow, the leaves fall

Gently on the Autumn river rocks.

## “Herb”

**By: Ashley LaForce, Student**

It was a busy day. They're all busy days. The constant ringing of the phones; the door clanking in the door frame as patients constantly come in and out, in and out. The drills and aspirators: drilling and sucking, drilling and sucking. Endless voices booming down the long hallway mixed with the background voices on the TV and the radio. The front desk at a busy New York City dental office is where I called home for about a year. Most days I wondered how much longer I would be able to put up with that place.

It was a busy day. They're all busy days. But the busyness of the city and the busyness of the office didn't seem to have an effect on Herb, an elderly man with wild hair and a crooked smile that was always spread wide across his face. The world zoomed around him as he moved ever so slowly; his walker moving one step forward, followed by one foot, and then the other. He stopped and smiled at the top of the stairs, his hair floating every which way in the breeze, looking as if he just woke up, but it was 2:30 in the afternoon. He was a new patient to our office. He had explained over the phone earlier that day that his previous dentist had passed away and he didn't care for the new guys that had taken over.

Herb peered down into the office from the sidewalk, but there was a small staircase between himself and the door hindering his procession into the office. He made eye contact with me and waved for assistance. I grumbled to myself in agitation thinking, “I don't have time for this.” I made my way out and greeted him, grabbing his walker as he made his way down the

stairs one step at a time, holding the rail. He thanked me; his big, crooked smile spreading across his face again, in genuine gratitude.

After getting Herb into the office, and as I turned the corner to my desk, the phone was already demanding my attention. I asked the caller to hold and placed the phone receiver back in the cradle, and I looked up at Herb, still smiling, and hurried through my usual greeting, the words all running together: “Hi-how-are-you? -I-need-your-I.D.-and-insurance-card-please”. He stood firm, just looking at me and smiling. I stared back at him for two full seconds before looking down at my computer screen, fingers speedily tapping away on the keyboard. After a minute passed, I looked up at him again. He was still in the same position; his grin still shining on his face. I sighed and repeated the last part of my greeting, “I.D.-and-insurance-card-please”. This time he slowly reached down and retrieved his wallet, which was strategically placed in one of the many pockets of his cargo pants.

Normally I would have patients fill out paperwork on the office tablet, but I could tell that will not be an option in this instance. I sighed again, gathered together the necessary paper forms, and set them on the counter in front of Herb, asking him to kindly have a seat and fill everything out. He looked up at me; there came that big, crooked smile again. He paused for a moment and then said, “I am not able to fill these forms out myself. I am going to need you to help me.” He paused again as his eyes squinted a bit and his smile curved slightly downward, considering his words, and he corrected himself, and said, “I mean, will you please help me with the forms?” I took a deep breath, my shoulders rising slightly, and then falling down abruptly as I exhaled and reluctantly agreed. I asked him to have a seat and give me a few minutes.

After I assisted the caller who had still been waiting on hold, I came around the desk to find Herb sitting on the couch. As I sank down into the couch next to him, I wondered if he

would be able to get back up, or if I'm going to have to help him with that, too. We began going over the form: name, address, insurance, and other general information; and then reached the medical questionnaire. These are all very serious questions, of course, especially being that Herb was an 80-something-year-old man, and many of these answers were "yes". As we continued on through the questions; yes, no, no, yes; I got to a question that I already knew the answer to, and therefore, didn't really need to ask him. I hesitated for a moment, wondering if I should just breeze on past it, and then a grin began to spread across my own face as I looked up at Herb. Our eyes met, and I asked him, "Herb, are you pregnant?" Without missing a beat, he smiles and says, "Yes." and we both chuckle for a moment. There was something in that moment, something I couldn't quite explain. Then we finished up the paperwork, and the appointment continued on from there, business as usual, and eventually Herb left the office satisfied.

For the rest of the afternoon, I kept thinking about Herb; wondering about his life, wishing I'd had the time to talk to him more, and thinking about that brief, yet significant, moment we had shared. I came home that evening, and my boyfriend came over. Sitting on the couch together, I told him about my experience with Herb that day. I told him I disliked how I had handled Herb in the beginning, and how busy that office always is, and as I was talking to him about it, I remembered that when I was younger, I had wanted to be a nurse. Somewhere along the line I had given up on that dream and it had been far from my mind as I worked hard every day to make ends meet. I found myself telling him that I wished I had gone to school for nursing like I had planned so long ago. He smiled and said, "Well, why don't you? It's not too late."

After much thought and research, I ended up enrolling in classes at Rowan College and now I am on my way to fulfilling that dream. I don't work for that dental office anymore, but I

still think about Herb from time to time; wondering how he's doing, wishing I had gotten the chance to tell him that my interaction with him had inspired me to go back to school. But mostly I just wanted to see that silly, old, crooked smile one more time.



**“Birds on the Beach” - Photography**

**By - Mary Malinconico, Professor**



### **“Tribute to a Fallen Friend” - Photography**

**By – Amy Charlesworth, Staff**

## **The Statue**

**By: Emily Olson, Student**

The sounds of vendors, tourists, and gulls rushed into the taxi when Karin opened the door—quite a difference from the quiet bustle of the girls’ hometown.

“You know, they say there used to be magic in this city,” Catherine said as they scooted out of the taxi.

“No, I could never have guessed,” Jig responded with an eye roll. “It’s not like you’ve told us the stories six billion times.”

“I just think it’s cool, okay?”

“You know what else there used to be here? *Royalty*. And lots of royal drama. Do you know how many wars have started here?”

“Now who’s repeating herself?” Catherine shouldered her backpack. “Crash, what do you think is more exciting—the boring history, or the magical legends?” As she said the word “magical”, she wiggled her fingers in the air for dramatic effect.

Karin laughed. “Both. I’m here for the whole ride.” She had long since given up on escaping the embarrassing nickname “Crash”. You crash your bike into a tree *one time*... “So where to?”

“I think we should go to the history museum. I hear—”

Catherine cut Jig off mid-sentence. “The square! That’s where all the magic is.” She skipped forward a bit, almost tripping on the uneven cobblestones.

“Of course.” Jig rolled her eyes again.

“How about we see the square first, then we can go to the museum? It’s right on the way,” Karin suggested.

Jig shrugged. “Sounds good to me.”

They set off walking in the direction of the square, with Karin looking at the map.

Jig had been hoping they’d get through the square quickly on their way to the museum, but Catherine insisted on taking her sweet time browsing the stalls. Despite her exasperation, even Jig had to admit there was something whimsical about the place. Like everywhere else in the city, there were vendors out in full force for the Festival days, but these ones were... different? More... exciting, Jig supposed.

One was selling gems and amulets, another wine and “magical” teas. Catherine bought four amulets from four different stalls, disregarding Jig’s warnings that they were scamming her. Karin got a necklace for her little brother, but Jig politely declined every vendor’s offer.

In the middle of the chaos in the square, there stood a statue. It was a young woman who looked about a couple of years older than the girls; she held her hand out in front of her, as if reaching for something. After buying the necklace for Jim, Karin read the inscription. “Hey guys, apparently this statue has been here for over six hundred years, and no one knows who made it.”

Instantly, Catherine was reading the plaque over her shoulder. “Wow. Look! It says the girl was cursed by an evil sorcerer. How cool is that?”

“It says *in legends* the girl was turned into a statue. Keyword: legends.” Jig uncapped her camera anyway. “It is pretty though.”

“I wonder if there’s a way to break the curse,” Catherine pondered.

“Oh, but there is, lass.” A man’s voice came from behind them.

The girls turned to see a man in a chef’s outfit. He was a little on the large side, with a heavy accent.

“Another legend?” Jig asked, inwardly rolling her eyes. She was doing that a lot on this trip.

He shrugged. “Perhaps. Or perhaps truth. Who am I to say?”

“Jig doesn’t believe in magic,” Catherine said scornfully.

The man considered Jig for a moment. “That’s your prerogative, I suppose. You’d be hard pressed to prove magic real unless you saw someone break the curse.”

“The curse?” Catherine was immediately intrigued with this friendly stranger who talked about magic.

“You want to hear the story?”

Before Catherine could respond, a young woman came up behind the man. “You telling that story to some unsuspecting tourists again, Pops?”

He smiled at her. “You know me.”

“Sorry about my dad,” said the woman. “He always sneaks up on tourists and convinces them they’re the magical soulmate of the statue.”

“It’s alright,” Karin said, at the same time as Catherine exclaimed, “Magical soulmate?”

“See, Leigh? They want to hear it,” the man said.

She laughed. “Well, if they want to. I’m Leigh, by the way, and my dad is Max.”

The girls each introduced themselves.

“Nice to meet you all. Well, if you really feel like listening to my dear old dad for an hour, I’ll leave you to it.”

Her exasperation with her dad was teasing, and Karin figured they'd probably had this conversation many times.

Jig almost protested standing in the square for another hour, but Karin and Catherine seemed engaged, and two beat one. "Let's hear the story then." *And get this over and done with.* She put her camera back in its bag.

Max jumped right into it. "I'm sure you've all heard the legends of magic in the city."

Catherine and Karin nodded.

"Not many people still believe it's true, and even fewer believe the story of this here statue, but my grandmum always used to tell me it, and if there's one person I trust it's her. Before the city was even built, there was a great war. A magical war." His accent thickened as he slipped into a storyteller's voice, but it barely registered with the girls. If anything, it drew them deeper into the story. "There was a sorcerer whose name is lost to time, and he wanted to destroy another great city—and he did."

"Wait, he *did*?" Catherine interjected.

"Oh yes, Miss Catherine. No one could stop him. He ravaged the entire city, and came out here, to what was then countryside. A small village stood in his path, and he contemptuously went to burn it down. But that small village was his downfall, for after he burned the buildings and killed hundreds, he went for a small, helpless puppy. The dog couldn't have done anything to him or stood in his path, but he prepared to turn it into a marble statue, to keep as a trophy."

"That girl jumped in front!" Catherine shouted.

Max smiled at her. "That she did. She saved that little dog, and the rest of the world."

"Let me guess, the spell rebounded onto the sorcerer somehow," Jig said.

"Transforming a living thing into stone was a difficult spell. A small dog would have been easy, but the unexpected size of the girl drained the sorcerer's energy faster than it could replenish—which made him vulnerable and his spell weak. The girl's mother stabbed him in the back with a pitchfork. All the villagers who had magic gathered together, and because the spell was weak, they were able to create a countercurse."

"Wait, but the statue is still there," said Karin.

"The countercurse was that whoever loved her the most in the world, and who she loved, could break the spell by taking her hand."

“That seems like a terrible solution. Why not make it something they knew they had? Like, I don’t know, water or something” Jig asked, trying and failing to keep the scorn from her voice.

“Water wouldn’t have done it. It had to be something stronger than the darkness of the curse. And besides, they thought they did have someone who loved her.”

Max let the silence draw out for a second before continuing.

“The girl—whose name, for the record, was also forgotten centuries ago—was engaged to be married. Everyone in the town thought the lovers were smitten, and her fiance was too embarrassed to admit otherwise.”

“He wasn’t in love with her?” Karin looked at the statue. Her initial impression had revised itself. She didn’t look like she was reaching for something. She looked like she was holding her hand out to *stop* something.

“And never had been,” Max said solemnly, with a nod. “He did exactly as the spell required but it failed. Turns out he was forced into the marriage, and even though she loved him, he never loved her. No one knew what to do after that. The city that was destroyed was rebuilt around the statue, and it’s been here since.”

“So it’s a soulmate legend.” *Pretty sure it isn’t any of us*, Jig thought.

“You might call it that.”

A dog trotted up to Max and yelped.

“Aw, is he yours?” Karin asked.

“Akiva? Nah, he’s been hanging around this square for a while. No one really knows who he belongs to. He’s pretty friendly though.”

Karin squatted down to Akiva’s level. “Hey pup.” She let him sniff her hand then patted him on the head.

Leigh approached again, carrying a coffee in one hand, and in the other a meaty bone which she tossed to the dog. “Akiva’s a bit of an urban legend around here. He and his dad and his granddad all lived here in this square.”

“What she means is, there’s been an identical dog guarding the statue since anyone can remember.”

“How do you know it isn’t the same dog?” Catherine asked.

Max leaned conspiratorially towards her. “We don’t.”

“Dogs don’t live that long,” Leigh said. “Even my great-grandmum remembered a dog. There’s probably a family of them.”

Catherine whispered to Max, “I dunno, that sounds like the same dog to me.” He grinned at her.

“I wonder if the dog was her soulmate,” Karin joked.

“Oh, don’t give her any ideas,” Jig said, but it was too late. Catherine had already jumped on the idea.

“Aww, that would be so cute!”

Max tilted his head, considering. “Worth a try,” he said.

“At the very least it’ll make a cute pic,” Karin said to Jig.

Both of them knew there wasn’t really any chance of the statue turning human, but their indomitable Catherine wouldn’t be stopped.

“Come on,” she pleaded. “Let’s try it.”

“Fine,” Jig said. She got her camera back out.

“Have you ever tried to pick him up?” Karin asked the two locals.

“I have,” Leigh responded. “He doesn’t mind it.”

Karin crouched down to where Akiva was contentedly chewing on the bone. “Hey bud, wanna take a picture?”

Catherine scooped him up. “Come on, you.” She climbed onto the pedestal and hoisted the dog up level with the statue’s hand. Akiva whined.

“Ready?” Catherine asked.

Jig lifted her camera to her eye and gave her a thumbs-up.

Catherine guided Akiva’s paw to the statue’s hand and grinned in Jig’s direction.

A frog jumped near Jig’s feet, startling her as she snapped the pic. “Ugh, sorry, I think it was blurry.” She navigated to the menu to check.

“Just take another one, my arms hurt,” Catherine complained.

“Okay, okay.” She raised the camera again.

Karin was the first to see it. She gasped and covered her mouth.

Jig squinted through her viewfinder. She thought at first the light was playing tricks on her lens, but that notion was quickly dispelled when she lowered the camera. *That can't be real.*

Catherine was the last to notice. “Did you get it yet?” She shifted Akiva to a more comfortable position, and that’s when she glimpsed the movement out of the corner of her eye. Her jaw dropped.

“That’s it. I’m dreaming,” Jig said.

Leigh’s coffee slipped out of her hand and splattered on the cobblestones, but no one was paying enough attention to care.

The smooth grey stone was rapidly becoming skin.

Starting from where the dog’s paw had touched it, the color change spread out from the hand and over the rest of the girl’s body. The arm dropped, and the girl blinked for the first time in centuries.

## **In These Unprecedented Times, We Say 'I love you' To A Microphone** By: Hannah Senatore

The audio fuzzes  
as it takes over the lover’s voices.  
The weight of all  
that’s bigger than them  
Stomps over top of the two dear friends.

In practical matters, the coldness wins.

But in the heart,  
who never took the truth so well,  
just the thought that two are connecting—  
even with failure interjecting—  
is a triumph that makes it swell.

I have no worry if this can be withstood.

When I love, my dear,  
I love for good.

**Oil Paintings**

**By – David Brecht,  
Staff**



## Depression and I

**By: Joshua Gras**

You ever have a panic attack? I remember my first one vividly. I was 13 years old when I remember waking up in the middle of the night all alone thinking that I was dying as my heart pounded inside the boney cage that holds all the stuff that will kill you if it fails. The pounding of my heart against my boney 13-year-old rib cage woke me up in the middle of the night. I thought I was dying. My brain went instantly to thinking that I was having an asthma attack. I was having a hard time breathing and there was this intense...fear that's hard to describe unless you've felt it. It's this irrational fear that death is seconds away, but as you regain your senses you realize that you have no idea why you are so afraid. This event wouldn't be the first, far from it, but it set in motion this anxiety ridden life that until recently I had no control over.

It's a strange moment when you realize that life doesn't last forever, and you aren't this invincible machine that children believe they are. Most people learn this lesson later in life, late teens perhaps, or when they are younger, they understand that death happens but don't really grasp it as I did. When I felt afraid for my life because my mind didn't know how to handle the stress of being a teen, I got this idea in my head that life ends when you die, and it doesn't matter what you do during this time because eventually your existence will be forgotten. If you read that sentence and said "Jesus Christ, that's some heavy shit", I promise things get better. High school wouldn't treat me much better with me realizing that I would be shorter than Tom Cruise and that the combo of ADHD, anger issues, as well as a dislike for school ended with me dropping out.

The resulting years would be those of self-discovery, but not the kind you'd see in a John Hughes movie where the main characters have this beautiful tale where they get the guy/girl of their dreams after accepting themselves as they truly are. That's a bunch of bull. My tale is very simple: I worked at my first minimum wage job. Yep, folks if you want to shock yourself out of a shitty world view? Get a job that you still get cold sweats thinking about. I can't say it was all bad though, I made some friends that I never spoke to again when I quit and learned to give as good as I got insults wise. What hellscape did I work at do you ask? Well I can't tell you that, *cough* Shop-Rite *cough*, it wouldn't be professional of me. The sense of worthlessness that you get working at a minimum wage job for any length of time is what gets to you. Being forced to run an entire department by yourself and being told that your replaceable plays havoc with your psyche. Reality hit me like a freight train and my thought process went like this "Life is still meaningless, but I didn't know it was this bad." Which reading it back isn't exactly what you'd call progress, but it gave this hopeless sad sack a direction to head in when I was aimless, and that direction was...literally anything but what I was doing.

After drifting in this dark self-loathing sea for so long I had found a piece of driftwood that I could use as a paddle, a therapist, but things weren't so easy. I had many mental breakdowns and losing my path out of my mental hell hole before finally I was pushed into therapy by my girlfriend at the time. I was convinced it wouldn't work but when someone you love tells you to take care of yourself how do you say no? Therapy and I had a not-so-great history. Sitting down in his small office with the tissue box there for the emotional wrecks on the side table, I was skeptical if this guy was going to be any different than the others. When talking to other therapists it was different because they looked at me as the problem that they had to fix but as I spoke to the therapist, that I'll call Jason, I felt for the first time that someone was

listening to me as if what I had to say wasn't crazy. Jason gave that voice in the back of my head that told me that no one else would get me an uppercut as I reached for the tissues, I had mocked in my head previously.

Three months is how long I went to therapy that last time. After that I had to stop going because America's healthcare system is trash, but Jason had given me the tools I needed to keep my demons at bay. They are still there of course like any person struggling with mental health can tell you, but they no longer sabotaged my life like they had since that first panic attack all those years ago. Jason had taught me about the importance of enjoying life and putting aside time for things you love. I put many of Jason's teachings into practice as I could feel when the worst thoughts inside my head wanted to cause my self-destruction and I knew to tell myself that those voices were wrong. I found my path in my current degree as my passion to create/tell stories that reach down inside and help us better understand revealed to me a sense of purpose that I never had before. As I sit in my cheap office chair that loses pressure every thirty minutes causing me to sink slowly in a rather hilarious fashion and typing out this memoir I feel as if I'm writing at some sort of end point in my life. The truth is I still deal with depression, ADHD, and a certain amount of anxiety but the biggest change is that I don't think that life is meaningless anymore. Life is crazy, tragic, funny, amazing, beautiful, and an innumerable number of other adjectives that I don't have the time to list, nor do you have the time to read. There is one thing I know now that I wish I could tell that 13-year-old boy having his first panic attack alone in his room in the middle of the night and it's that life, as hard as it may be, is worth living.

## **Transforming Basic Police Training for Newly Appointed Officers**

**An Academic Article By: William Addison, Ed.D. & Charles J. Kocher, Ed.D.**

“Class Attention!” “What is your problem, recruit?” “What took you so long to respond, recruit?” “Get down and give me five!” are awfully familiar sounds at most police academies. The question to examine is centered upon preparation. Are newly trained police officers prepared mentally to handle the issues they are faced with daily in the community? The physical agility training and the importance of understanding the chain of command for a large organization such as the United States military in all branches (Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force) serves objectives that are based upon the needs for the military service personnel to be mentally and physically prepared for defending this nation. More detail pertaining to the United States Army requirements can be found at [www.operationmilitarykids.org/apft-standards](http://www.operationmilitarykids.org/apft-standards). Smith (2019) points out that each branch of military must be physically fit. For example, the United States Marines must pass three different types of fitness tests: Initial Strength Test; Physical Fitness Test (PFT); and Combat Fitness Test. The PFT was changed in 2017, for the first time in several decades. Push-ups were added as a new exercise, minimum standards were raised, and both the maximum and minimum number of repetitions for different exercises were raised. The fitness charts can be found at <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/marine-corps-physical-fitness-charts-4058388>

Most will agree that it is important that our officers are physically fit for the task. The objectives for police officers are different from that of our military forces. How much of this type of military-style rigorous training is needed for police officers? It is important to define the need as basic cardio and physical exercises designed to enhance a person’s fitness. The Indiana Police Academy provides an excellent review with questions pertaining to the intense training for police recruits at [www.in.gov/ilea/2339.htm](http://www.in.gov/ilea/2339.htm). The underpinning of this discussion is not to create the impression that police recruit training should not have or does not require a rigorous physical training routine, it is quite the opposite. Police officers at the basic training level require knowledge regarding how to maintain physical fitness throughout their career to be able to perform physical tasks as well as enforce community laws, rules, and respond to social issues throughout their community. The issue facing police training is to implement more education and training at the basic level for social skills.

To transform police training, various types of courses need to center upon the non-combative situations that police officers face during much of their tour of duty. It is a given that police training requires a degree of rigorous physical training to prepare the new officer for any situation to meet the adversary when called to do so. The skills come in different formats such as distance running, physical agility, and maximum strength ability. The question becomes are eating habits and physical training the only qualifications necessary to serve their individual

communities? The programs in place throughout most of the nation's police training programs stress the need for a sound physical fitness program certainly make sense. There is no question that such preparation is required. Providing the necessary physical skills are an important element to be stressed during the training period. Here is a good link to review pertaining to fitness <https://www.nj.gov/oag/newsreleases07/pr20070413a.htm>

So, what then are the issues that has resulted with public sentiment that is less than favorable of our policing style in the United States? Not all communities view the police as friendly and cordial. Why? The Pew Institute study conducted in June 2020, found that 58% of those surveyed believe the police do a "good" to "excellent" job of protecting the public from crime. The figure is slightly down from a similar research study in 2016. Further information about the research study can be found at <https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-protests-for-racial-justice/2020/07/09/889618702/police-viewed-less-favorably-but-few-want-to-defund-them-survey-finds>

Generally, there are mixed reaction of positive and negative feelings today pertaining to the responses of police officers. If for example, police officers were trained to sharpen their skills to converse with the public would this possibly result in improved police-citizen relationships? This question is not a simple one to answer. Susan Rahr and Stephen Rice (2015) have published a report in the Harvard Kennedy School of Government titled, "From Warriors to Guardians: Recommitting American Police Culture to Democratic Ideals." The report, which she co-wrote, warns that too many academies are training police officers to go to "war with people we are sworn to protect and serve." <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/248654.pdf>

Do we want a military type presence throughout our community? Should the police be heavily armed and trained for terroristic attacks with heavy body protective armor and fortified police vehicles able to knock down a building? Do we as a society want a national police force created for safety, dressed in military type uniforms that "talk down" to individuals rather than "talk with" individuals? Many of us have often had their parents tell them that a policeman is your friend. For example, if you should become lost in your travels, always approach a police officer for assistance. Have things changed in a sense of how the community views the police officer? It is not "policeman" but rather "police officer." Do you feel parents will advise their children to approach a police officer if lost today? What has happened to the idea that a police officer is your friend? Steering (2019) points out the transformational changes in policing since the mid 1950's era until present that the police officer is no longer your friend.

Our current police training methodologies will differ on each level of government. Generally, we are generally discussing local law enforcement methods of training that are usually overseen by each individual state. The model of policing training locally is generally designed to protect the officer from evil doers and to some extent mirrors the military. The basic police training methodology tends to lose focus of the fact that most of the time the officers will be dealing with victims and witnesses of crimes or with someone in some need of information

and assistance. Why do most basic training courses require police recruits to completely shave their hair off their heads, like the methods utilized by the federal level of training, such as the military? What message does this send? A military answer might center upon the belief that psychologically it is necessary to take the person to a basic start level to instill the principles of that particular outfit. Is this necessary for municipal level policing? Does it serve to identify the police officer as someone different in appearance from the community? Recently, many large departments are experiencing issues with recruitment. Are the requirements of training too restrictive that individuals are no longer interested in a career of law enforcement? Another question that comes to mind as to what system of training will ultimately better serve the community? Have we reached the point that to fight crime, the officers can no longer smile but rather must give a stern face to those they have contact with daily?

This is not to say that safety of the officer and proper preparation are not requirements as well. Weeks of firearms qualifications, defensive and pursuit driving skills, law for adults and juveniles, plus an array of subjects for due process for legal procedures such as arrests and search and seizure round out the training requirements. Masterson, (2014) points out that much time is spent by police agencies improving equipment. Masterson (2014) further states that Law enforcement agencies will usually spend much research time to the tangible things that can be improved such as more efficient technology systems such as laptops and cameras, better bullet proof vests and weapon usages. In the end, is one better than another? Possibly the bottom line becomes as to whether should the basic police training courses need to better promote the learning process as either education or training? Maybe the curriculum should be designed for both training and education? Often, the phrase of the “Quality of Life” is expressed to represent the role of policing today. This link further explores the concept of both training and education. <https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/perspective/perspective-improving-officer-safety-and-citizen-support-solving-the-puzzle>

Looking at a historical timeline of the modern era of policing we can easily observe what has happened anecdotally. Historically, most will agree that the police experienced their golden era during the 1950’s. Jones (2017) observes that this reverence of policing gradually eroded through the 1960’s and the norm became 8 to 10 weeks of mandatory police training. Gradually the amount of required information was increased, and the 1970’s was marred with Civil Disobedience and we learned that officers and police departments were not prepared for large crowds and more training was added. In the meantime, crime prevention became a theme to educate the public to protect themselves from burglaries and other types of thefts. Lastly, the idea of proactive policing or preventing the crimes before they occur took hold with various methods that have morphed with the advent of technology. Jones and Newburn (2002) have pointed out that policing has experienced a watershed of programs today and the priorities have been shifting for the primary purposes of policing.

How much has policing really changed since 1829 with the Metropolitan Police in England? During the mid and late 1980’s Robert Trojanowicz began promoting “Community Oriented

Policing”. Today, the sociological word of “oriented” has been deleted and we hear the expression as community policing. What was the underlying reason for the efforts to involve this type of philosophy? Flynn (1998) points out that more effort to define just what is the specific community to be addressed? Different strategies may be required, and the police agencies need to take this into account with the training mission.

Transformation takes place with the implantation of enhanced education and training. Police standards should be reviewed across the nation to fully prepare the officers for both proactive responses and social engagements. If the component of trust is re-established with our communities that was present during the 1950’s, better relationships can prevail. The questions still to be answered are based upon better relationships with society in general. What percent of time is spent responding to incidents of violent crimes? According to Asher and Horwitz (2020) the police agencies surveyed spend approximately 1% to 4% of their time answering violent calls. For traffic related incidents approximately 20% of their time and non-criminal calls approximately 35% of their time.

Finally, to prepare the future officer it begins with their basic training. Training and education need to be more relaxed for the recruit to learn policies, procedures and most importantly, the culture of policing. Police work is not centered upon “locking up the bad individual” but rather being there for the community when the need arises. Dealing with all generations, both young and old, requires awareness, patience, and practice. There is no need to require a specific hair cut for police officers as this is not the model of policing designed by Sir Robert Peel. As Chappell and Lanzo-Kaduce (2009) have pointed out as well, there is a need for understanding and an ability to express empathy when appropriate and tactics when the situation calls for such. There should be more socialized educational emphasis if policing is to be successful.

In conclusion, there is a need for understanding and an ability to express empathy when appropriate and tactics when the situation calls for such. There should be more socialized educational emphasis if policing is to be successful.

## Ukrainian Easter Eggs

By: Natalka Pavlosky, Professor

As a first generation Ukrainian American, I have been writing *pysanky*, or Ukrainian Easter eggs, most of my life— ever since I was old enough. They take their name from the word *pysaty*, “to write,” since the designs are created using pens that write with melted wax. Like batik, this is a wax-resist process in which the eggs are dipped into a succession of dyes.

I tend to work in traditional designs [picture 2], in which every design element has a meaning. Bands that circle the egg symbolize eternity, as they have no beginning or end; wheat represents a good harvest. Last Spring, during the Covid lockdown, the traditional designs didn't seem to apply. I created a *pysanka* for the times, with a horse— symbol of health— trampling a Covid molecule. [picture 1] Be safe!





### Artwork

By: Cassidy Juraniac, Student

### Poem

By: Joshua Tighe, Student

### Cards

Papery plastic embellishes complexion  
as brown eyes sing in victory.  
Haunted eyes of black cremation  
spit words like a man in lexicography.

A masterclass of counting cards  
better than an entity who collects souls.  
Just to hold onto this woman's heart  
nothing will stop me reaching my goal.

Brittle bones lay down two aces  
and match the diamond and death.  
But my two cards of spades  
take away his royal breath.

## Where Ends Meet

**By: Emma Foley**

He flipped the quarter over his calloused knuckles, back and forth, up and over it went. He leaned back in the booth, putting the coin back on the table. The girl across from him was still looking at the menu. She was gorgeous, her hair curled and coiffed. She had the blonde mane and physical appeal of a young Farrah Fawcett, the girl all the boys wanted.

“Danny!” The girl exclaimed. Her partner looked up at her.

“Yeah, babe?” He looked bored. Not paying much attention to what she had to say.

“A coffee costs 50 cents! Two quarters! Since when do they cost this much?” The girl was excitable, not angry, just seeming to make some sort of conversation with her boyfriend. The diner was fairly empty with the exception of a few patrons. It was 6am, most people were just waking up- not ready to acknowledge the day. The man replied to her nonsense with the rolling of his eyes. She frowned. She just wanted to talk to him.

An older waitress moseyed up to the pair. Her hair in a tight bun, she smelled of fresh coffee, not that crap they give you later in the day, the real stuff.

“What’ll it be, you two?”

Danny looked at the girl, snatching the menu from her hand. He turned to the waitress.

“She wants blueberry pancakes and OJ. I’ll take two eggs, sunny side up and your finest cup of coffee.” He flashed a smile at the lady taking their order, he seemed charming in the moment, a charm that dissipated as she turned away.

He turned back to the girl, asking, “Okay, do you remember what I told you?” The girl was busy leaning over the table’s jukebox. Flipping through the little song book, she jumped when the man snapped his fingers to get her attention.

“Oh, sorry Danny, yeah! We go east to Watercrest Street and head to the bank on Midland. The bank opens at ten and is two hours away.” She smiled, proud of herself for remembering the information.

“Good. Then do you remember what?” Danny asked. The girl paused, thinking for a moment. “Shouldn’t be this hard, *babe*, we’ve been over it a bazillion times. God, we can’t afford you to be so dense now.”

Shaking her head the girl closed her eyes. A light bulb seemed to go off as she looked into his eyes.

“No! I know, we head to the border. Mexico! Oh it’ll be so nice there. Bright, sunny, warm. I’ll have to get a swimsuit once I’m-”

The man laughed at her eagerness. “Yeah, but we aren’t done yet. First we have to head to the bank. It all starts with this bank.”

“We’ve held up places before, Danny! Who’s to say this’ll be any different?” She giggled, glee washing over her face as their food arrived. Blueberry pancakes with whipped butter on the side.

She turned to the waitress, her fork already stabbed inside a chunk of blueberry in the pancake. “Thank you!”

Meanwhile, In the back of the parking lot sat a blue Plymouth roadrunner. A large black duffel bag and an old coke can on the floor, the car looked like it had seen better days.

About half an hour later, Danny made his way to the car and soon the girl joined him.

The girl hopped into the passenger side seat. “That was yummy, I was so full it was a wonder I could make it through the powder room window!” A check sat at their old booth. No cash inside.

They’d make it to Mexico City by noon the next day.

## Just a Haircut

**By: Miles Fort, Student**

“And you’re sure this is what you want?” My mom asked nervously, hoping I’ll decide against it.

“Absolutely,” I responded.

And with that, my mom cautiously began snipping away at my hair with her scissors. She started slowly, only cutting small chunks of hair at a time, waiting for me to tell her to stop. I could see the golden, brown strands of hair fall onto the floor, each clump of hair growing in size. As she continued, I felt a nervous excitement growing inside of me. My hair had never been shorter than my shoulders, let alone short enough to use trimmers on. Asking my mom to cut my hair this short had been stomach twistingly nerve-racking. It was impossible to gauge how she would react to the question. But as always, she was cautiously supportive, after 17 years of raising me she was used to strange requests. Only a few years ago, had she been using the same kitchen she cut my hair today in to bleach and dye my hair a tidal wave of blue and purple hues. After a while, my mom stepped back and admired her handiwork.

“Want me to keep going? We could stop here, and it would still look pretty good.” My mom asked confidently, putting the scissors on the freshly cleaned countertop beside her assuming her work was finished.

Pulling at my hair in large tufts around my head, I could tell it wasn’t short enough, “I think shorter would be better.”

“If I cut it any shorter, you’re going to look like a boy...” My mom replied in a dejected tone.

“I think I still want it shorter though,” I responded, trying not to give away how enticing the thought of looking like a boy was. “Worst comes to worst, I could just grow it back out.”

“It’s your hair... Don’t go yelling at me if you don’t like it...” My mom said defeatedly, knowing what she was about to do next.

She then reached for the trimmers and prepared herself to cut my hair even shorter. I could hear the loud buzzing of the trimmers as they were flipped on. My mom then glided the trimmers against my hair, slowly drifting into a rhythm she developed after years of being after years of being a hairdresser. The vibrations echoed in my head as she trimmed each side, making sure the hair was evenly cut around my head. I closed my eyes as she continued and focused on the sound of the trimmers. The vibrations and sounds the trimmer made were intoxicating. It wasn’t long before my thoughts were filled with ideas about what I would look like once she was finished. Eventually, she switched the trimmers off and tried to brush some of the hair off my shoulders.

“Now go hop in the shower before you get hair everywhere,” My mom said as she began looking for a broom to sweep the hair that had accumulated from the cut.

After several excruciating minutes spent building up some courage, I stepped in front of the mirror and opened my eyes. Time stood still. My mom was right, short hair would make me look like a boy. But as I stared at my reflection, every worried thought that had been in my head was wiped away and replaced with pure happiness. I had been terrified to get my hair cut short because I wasn’t sure if it would help how I was feeling. Looking in the mirror, I was finally able to recognize my

own reflection, and the person staring back at me wasn't a stranger anymore. The person that claimed to be my reflection was finally me; I just didn't expect my reflection to be a boy.

## A Fallen Star

By: Emmanuel Sannon-Jules, Student

A 16 year old kid named Martin, who seemed to have so much potential in both football and school.  
He had so many offers- from the University of Oklahoma to the University of Alabama  
He applied himself well, but he just did things that he shouldn't have.  
He would always smoke drugs. He tried to stop, but he couldn't.  
His popularity also helped him sell.  
He was making good money day to day--- pretty swell.  
One night he was smoking with friends, and everything was fine.  
Everyone was relaxing  
No one noticed the black and white car passing.  
Red and blue lights went off and everyone took off running.  
Moving as fast as those Black Friday sales that are coming.  
Hopping and jumping fences. Dodging cars in the streets.  
These boys were moving along the neighborhood on their feet  
Martin tried to hop a fence, and as he landed, he tweaked his ankle.  
Knowing he couldn't run anymore, he tried to hide.  
It was at this point he heard barking and all he could do was hold his breath  
All he could do was hide there and hope for the best  
In the alley he laid, after ten minutes went by, he got up and started walking.  
He then heard the grown men talking.  
Quickly he was followed by a few heavy footsteps.  
The sound of boots shadowing him step by step, moving at a fast pace.  
He tried not to make a peep or a noise, but then a flashlight shined in his direction.  
Martin knew that this was no good. They cuffed him up and he knew it was over.  
A fallen star in the back of a cop's car.

## Life's Paradox

By: **Andrea Vinci, Professor**

It is the gentle parting of your lips the first time we kissed  
And the angle of your face, the final time I walked away

It is awkward small talk at a cocktail party  
And the familiar peal of a friend's laugh

It is a sea of heat and bodies in a crowded store at Christmas  
And the crunch of pine needles against earth on a cool morning walk in the woods

It is a newborn hand clasping your finger with surprising tenacity  
And the paper-thin, spotted, wrinkled skin of a face that was once beautiful

It is a 100-year-old birthday  
And an 18-year-old suicide

It is the swish of a net from a perfectly aimed shot  
And the swish of a bat for the third strike

It is an elegantly crafted, grammatically perfected line of prose  
And it is an "I love you" that was never spoken

It is the tiny freckles on your chest that were only discernable from inches away  
And it is the image of your face, slowly fading with time

It is vanilla ice-cream in a sugar cone with rainbow sprinkles  
And it is fad diets, for a perfect body that will never exist

It is the wet, warm sand on your heels, as the cool ocean foam touches your toes  
And it is a bus stop, at strip mall, by a highway, in December

It is pancakes on Sunday mornings  
And black coffee on Mondays

It is the way a 6-year-old walks, always at the brink of running  
And it is miles 13-23 of a marathon

It is an "I do"  
And an "I'm done"

It is a kindergarten graduation  
And another school shooting

It is the smell of the soft skin on your baby's head  
And the knowledge that you can never truly protect them from the world

It is the unstoppable progression of time  
And the powerful beauty in a single moment

## Everlasting Love

**By: Arianna Adan**

It was the of June 2012, I remember this day as clear as yesterday. I was walking on the boardwalk in Point Pleasant Beach. I spotted a sign saying, "Psychic readings for \$5 to read the palm of your hands." Of course, after reading this, I instantly said, "I'm doing this." As I was walking towards the entrance, The psychic reader said briefly, "Give me your hand please."

She was sitting down with a poker face. I slowly gave her the palm of my hand, and she gently felt around it with her thumbs. She started her session with me by saying, "You are a very strong person, you love music and you are going to live a long life, up to your 90's. Lastly, your future soulmate, his name starts with the letter J. You both will have 2 kids, to be specific, 2 boys." She finished.

I was completely stunned. I have been through a lot in my life, so I recognize that makes me strong. As a result of overcoming a lot of obstacles. Along with that, half of the things she mentioned were accurate. Nonetheless, the rest are still unknown. Most importantly, the letter J of my potential future soulmate remained inside the back of my mind. Fast forward to high school graduation, I did not meet any boy that had the letter J. Or that I even considered potential lifetime partners. This is because in real life it's hard to find true love, the way it's portrayed in movies and romantic novels seems drastically different.

That all changed, my freshman year of college. It was the first day of public speaking class. I was sitting in the front, with a perfect view of the door. All of a sudden, I glanced over to the door and the most handsome guy I truly have ever seen walks in, slow motion in my eyes. It was like watching a superhero, coming to save the day. As he was walking, his light green eyes caught my attention, his eyes were so gorgeous. His summer tan was so radiant and golden. He was glowing inside and out. Every detail about him was beyond perfection. I knew there was something truly special about him. My entire face followed him into his seat, without turning my body. He was prince charming, a true fairytale enchanted prince come to life. The best part of this, I had a guy friend named Kyle in the same class, sitting next to this mysterious lovely guy. Kyle was a dark haired, short guy and very talkative. Conversations with him always went smoothly. It was that straightforward and effortlessly to communicate with him. Regularly, I told Kyle how mesmerized I was about this mysterious guy, that he sat next to in class. On top of this, you all think I would know his name by now.

Well, for some unknown reason till this day. I believe I did not know his name because I was too busy drooling over him at every sight, anything else was a blur. A considerable amount of time passed by and I demanded Kyle to take pictures of him during their calculus class they

had together.

Kyle replied, “You are something different, Tessa.” He said hilariously.

I replied, “I want to smile, seeing him again.”

Of course, Kyle did not get good angles, and the pictures of him were the back of his head. The only thing I for sure knew was, both of them are Engineering majors. I knew this guy was extremely intelligent, which I admire. The same night I was gathering all this information, I texted Kyle, “What is this guy’s name?” He responds instantly, “He’s Joe.” As he's trying to play his video game in his dorm.

At last, the mysterious letter J finally appeared. I almost dropped my phone, I was completely stunned. Could this be the mysterious person that is meant to be my other half? Could this be the person I am going to have a family with in the future, and be an outstanding father to our children? Is he the one? These questions kept spiraling around in my head. The letter J came to mind right away, from when I was 12, was the psychic reader correct?

The following day, we had class together, yet again. In this exact classroom, is where I met Joe. The emotions and butterflies I was feeling in my stomach while entering this classroom, made it impossible for me to concentrate in our lecture. When Joe made a first glance eye contact with me, he noticed I was smiling in a very gazing cloud nine look at him. An intense surge of happiness flooded through my body, it felt like love at first sight.

As I started my presentation, I quickly glanced at him to see if he was paying attention to me and this is the first time we both made eye contact. Instantly, I realized that he needed to be mine one day. Let’s say, I managed to make a fool out of myself in multiple ways. My first mistake was trying to get his attention, waiting for him to get out of the bathroom. Somehow, I forgot his name and said out of the blue, “Is your name Hunter?” He then looked at me confused and said, “No?” And he walked away, and so did I. Surprisingly, I was not defeated. My personality and mindset is, if I want something, I am going to get it. The key was to be persistent.

Now it was the middle of October, a month had gone by with no results. I was on facetime with Kyle. As annoying and relentless I was, I insisted on getting Joe’s phone number. While on facetime with Kyle I asked, “Should I text him?” and “What if he is not even interested?” and of course “What if he doesn’t text me back?” Many thoughts were flying around my head. Until I told Kyle at the last second don’t text him anything! He still sent him the message that same second and said “Oops too late”. The best takeaway from this was, that life is about getting out of your comfort zone. When you do life changes, maybe for the better. The best things in life happen when you least expect it.

At that moment, I was so nervous and anxious to know about their conversation. Kyle’s

exact words were, “Yo, do you know Tessa in our class, she thinks you're hot.” And Joe replied, “Yeah, she’s a dime.”

When I found out about that, I immediately felt uplifted and thrilled. Meanwhile I was entering my dorm building with a magnificent smile, Joe was exiting the building, we crossed paths. Could this be a sign of fate? Seemingly, I thought this was meant to be. As we both just so happened to find out we liked each other. I felt in my heart that it was truly so special. My roommate and I we’re laughing because she went to high school with Joe. Small world, right? Kyle texted me soon after, “He will text you when he leaves the gym.” Surely, I was impatiently waiting and anticipating his text message.

Soon enough Joe texted me, saying “Hey this is Joe.” I waited two minutes to reply, so I wouldn’t seem desperate. Overthinking, became my best friend. I texted him back saying, “Hey it’s Tessa, but you can call me Tess.”

This is where it all began and took off for us. Our first hangout happened two days after texting back and forth. My first impression of him seemed standoffish. Clearly, I misread him, because he was shy, just like anyone would be in the beginning. Our first hangout, he hugged me tightly goodbye. This meant a lot, because it was our first hug, and I cherish that hug still till this day. It is the little things that turn out to be the greatest things ever. We continued to text back and forth and slowly create a bond with each other. One week passed by, now it was Halloween weekend, and we planned to match.

He was a lifeguard in real life, so he dressed up as one. And I wore a red one suit as well. Both of us had an immediate connection, we could not stop hugging each other. I would lean on him, and he squeezed me tightly, in a comforting way. It was so obvious this was going to be a lifetime full of love with our emotional connection and physical attraction. The second week into talking back and forth, we went out at night to a party with friends. I told him frequently,

“Ask me to be your girlfriend.” and “Joey, ask me to be your girlfriend.” For about ten times I repeated myself, until he popped the question.

“Will you be my girlfriend?” and immediately he said, “Yes, of course, but let me ask you.”

Joe said, “I wanted to ask you in a perfect time, but right now feels right. Will you be my girlfriend?” He stated.

I replied, “Yes.”

The date was November 9, 2018. We were happy together, however I was unhappy in my classes, because I knew this university didn’t offer the top classes for my particular degree. The

school I was attending was not going to help me with my major and ultimately dream career. Secretly, I applied to New York University and UCLA. I knew this could be an amazing decision, but I didn't want to break Joe's heart. Few days prior to receiving a letter in the mail, from the best school for my major. I didn't open it, I wanted to tell Joe about the choices I had out in the open, and that I wanted to open the letters with him. He said, "I always want the best for you, but how could we continue dating? If it's extremely long distance. And on top of that, I'll just miss you so much. This makes me really sad Tess." He finished.

"Joe, you know the university we are attending is the best for your career path. And that's exactly what I want for myself. Nothing is set and stone, I just wanted to see if they would reply back and to have an open mindset, that's all."

I wanted to say more, but I was extremely upset too, because I loved him. And I wanted to say those three words and eight letters to him. Now I have to make a huge decision to stay with him and stay miserable in my classes. Or attempt long distance relationship, and be happy with my classes to pursue my dream career in the long run. I blurted to him before opening the acceptance or rejection letter, "I love you, Joe." and he said back, "I love you too, Tess." This was the best feeling in the world for the both of us. It took us a month to say these words to each other, and it meant everything and more to us.

Finally, as I read the first letter, "New York University" I slowly opened the letter, and unfolded the paper. I read out loud, "Thank you Tessa Lavallete, for considering our school for your choice. We are happy to announce that you are accepted and we are so excited for you to be joining us!" Jumping up and down, running in circles and jumping on Joe with excitement. He was smiling at me, but he showed a deep sadness with his body expression and sad face. He said, "Congratulations, I am so proud of you. Now you just have to think about what you want to do."

"Thank you, and yes I need to take everything into consideration."

We were both opening the next letter from, "UCLA" and my hopes from this school are not as high because the acceptance rate is low, so it's a competitive school. As we were opening the letter, it said, "Congratulations, you're accepted." We didn't choose to read the rest because that's all we needed to see. I was so thrilled and not at the same moment. Although, Joe was even more upset because this school was much farther than NYU. He managed to tell me, "Congrats, Tess you are so motivated and I know you're going to do great things." Tears started rushing down my face, because of how amazing he was. He could have reacted in a bad way, but he chose to put his feelings aside and be proud and happy for me.

Little did he know, I was more upset than he was, because I know I was causing this. I started this and it made me feel so selfish and guilty. So now it was time to decide and see what's the best alternative.

“Joe, you know you mean the world to me, that's why I wanted to open the letters with you.” I said,

“I have your best interest too, and I said this was your call. I don't want to tell you what to do for your future. That's not my place to say.” He finished.

We both were looking at each other in complete silence, however we said, “I love you”, we were somewhat at ease. The next morning, I told my family and friends and they we're full of joy and excitement for me. However, the price for these schools were extremely costly, and out of state. Here, I have a full scholarship, with a lot of benefits. The major benefit is not having debt when I graduate in two years. I knew the right choice was to stay here. I am part of Rowan Choice, so this was the right choice. I mean this is where I became independent, gained freedom, and meant amazing people, like my sweet Joe. If I ever wanted to get a master's degree, I could consider online classes, but that was far beyond my thinking right now. I started to run to Joe's house, it was pouring rain. I was soaked wearing the complete wrong wardrobe. No rain jacket, umbrella, or rain boots. So I looked as if I just took a shower with my makeup completely disfigured. As I am approaching his house, I notice he's walking outside.

“JOE, WAIT.”

He saw me, and we both started running to each other, it was still pouring excessively. It was like the Notebook scene, when Ali goes back to Noah and they reunite.

“I wanted to let you know that I am staying. I have a full ride here, I spoke with my professors, and family. I love you so much. There's no way I am leaving today, tomorrow or ever. I'm here to stay.”

He grabbed me, and we hugged each other like we weren't going to see each other for years. And then he kissed me.

“Meeting you, was the best memory of my life. You make me feel loved, appreciated, self worthy, everything good and positive. My mission is to continue to love you unconditionally.”

We were running around the middle of the street, with our arms wide open. Feeling so content with each other.

“Alright cute boy, let's grab something to eat. I'm starving!”

“Yes, let's do it.” He says,

Going out to eat was definitely our favorite thing to do together.

“Let's celebrate tonight, love and living life with you.” I said,

“To have a person like you by my side, I could never get tired of you. You're so energetic

and always wanting to explore and try new things.” He stated. “Cheers to you, cheers to us, cheers to living life to the absolute fullest,” he finished.

“This sushi is so delicious!” I exclaimed.

“Be careful, don’t choke on it. You always choke on your food.” he said.

“Sorry, I just love talking to you, that I seemingly forget to chew properly.” I sarcastically said.

As we are finishing our dinner, we left an extremely great tip for the waiter because tonight was about celebrating.

“Do you want to go to Atlantic City with me?” Joe asked.

“Yeah, sounds like fun!” I replied.

“It’s a wrestling tournament, everyone goes to it. It’s the state championship.” He explained.

“Awesome, I love hotels and adventures, count me in!” as I hugged him with excitement.

“Make sure to have everything packed by tomorrow, that’s when we’re hitting the road!” Joe said abundantly clear.

It was Friday night, we were on our way to Atlantic City, and when we arrived it was such a beautiful hotel. We stayed with his parents because we were not 21 yet.

As I shrugged off the bags, and suitcases on the floor, immediately I jumped on the bed. Full relaxation mode.

“Let’s walk on the boardwalk and see shops!” I said as I was walking out the door.

“Right behind you!” as he grabbed a jacket because it was very windy outside.

We’re walking on the boardwalk, super cozy and feeling romantic vibes.

“Ohh, psychic reading for \$5 let’s go see what the person says to me!” I said,

“Okay, but I’m just sitting next to you, I don’t believe in this stuff.” He replied.

We’re entering the place, and the lady had a poker face but seemed friendly. I handed her the \$5 bill. The session immediately started once I handed her my hand.

“You are a very strong person, you like bad boys, but fall in love with the good guys, you love music, and the boy sitting next to you, does his letter start with J?” She asks.

“Yes,” I said quickly.

“That’s your soulmate.” She answered confidently.

As we both got up, because she finished with that statement. Joe and I started to tear up, because of how real that moment felt to us.

“Joe, are you a believer now?” I asked.

“Yes, wow that was crazy. So insane.” He said in a shocking way.

When I was 12 years old, I was told this as well. Now a completely different beach, area, and woman said the same exact thing. That we are meant for each other.

“It’s so lovely to know this. It’s hilarious, because we’re different from each other. You know what they say..” I said,

“What do they say?” He asked.

“Opposites attract.” I replied.

I am an early bird, he is a night owl. It’s a perfect balance. I take my time to get ready, he’s out the door in two minutes. We were leaving Atlantic City, and by now it was February 14th. Valentine’s Day. Joe is an extremely romantic person, sentimental gifts are his way of showing that real love is not about materialistic things. But rather gifts that touch the heart so deeply, that they last forever.

He was walking into my house, wearing a light red button up shirt with black jeans and black vans. He walked in, smelling like freshly sprayed cologne and a fresh haircut. Admiring him was so easy.

“Wow, you clean up nice, cute boy!”

“Thank you, this is for you Tess. I hope you like it. I purchased it months ago.”

As I am opening the box, my hands are trembling because I knew this gift was going to be precious. I started to cry, reading his letter saying, “Happy Valentine’s Day Tessa, this rose is eternal, like our love. This is the perfect gift, for the perfect girl.” and I see a beautiful, majestic gold and white rose. Joe gave me an, “Galaxy Eternal Crystal Rose.” This beautiful rose signifies timeless love. For many years to come, this unique rose will represent our everlasting love.

Yes, he is the one.

## Gotta Give It Up

**By: Kristina Johnston, Student**

*Brrring, brrring.*

“Hello, Law Office of Regina Nando. How may I transfer your call?”

“Attorney Nando, your nephew is on line two for you.”

“Thanks, Tracey,” Regina called across the office to her temp.

“Hi, Justin. How are you doing? I can’t talk long. I’m tied down here with work. How’s the job?”

“Awful, I can’t believe it. We had a noon meeting, I assumed it was to review the exchange protocol for our foreign holdings. I was wrong. The big boss called me in to his office and did a performance review. They let me go on the spot!”

*Shit, not again.*

Regina’s brow furrowed, worsening a permanent imprint on her forehead. She glanced at the clock.

*5:07pm. I still have another hour or two, at least. Gotta finish that bitch of a brief for Stanley and print the exhibits to file the complaint. Why now, Justin why now?*

“You there, Aunt Gina?”

“Yeah, sorry, I’m a little swamped here. I’m so sorry, Justin but I can’t talk now.”

“Shit, sorry to bother you. Can I come by this week to talk? If you have time can we have coffee or lunch? “

“Sure, sounds good. Come in on Tuesday please. I don’t have any client meetings that day. Talk to you then, Justin.”

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*“Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I’m sixty-four?”*

Regina rocked her head to the beat singing along to the Beatles. Cruising down I-95 on a clear evening, free of traffic, was normally Regina’s ‘happy time,’ but this evening she was overcome with a nagging deep in her gut. The rare smile left her face and her normal grimace returned.

Her birthday was Friday, and she was turning sixty-five. Forty years...Was it forty years

well spent? Was she ready to shut down the law firm? She put her life and her heart into this business. More than a business, it was her baby. But babies come with their own burdens. Michael wanted to turn their annual trips to Florida into a permanent move. Was she ready to leave? Regina sighed deeply and changed the station on the radio from oldies to easy listening. She needed a good cry.

\*\*\*\*\*

It was completely dark as Regina turned into the development. She continued to Wood Duck Drive past the pristine, large houses and turned left onto her dead-end street Monarda Trail. She maneuvered her SUV into the two-car garage, parked and went inside. She glanced up at the brick bi-level house and hurried inside when she heard Ernie barking. Regina's dog, Ernest Hemingway was there at the garage door to greet her with slobbery kisses and his incessant bark.

"Hi, Ernie. How was your day, pup? Ready for our walk?"

Regina clasped the leash around the Golden Retriever's harness and started out the French doors that lead to the backyard. They walked down to the woods behind her house. As they walked down the path, Regina paused briefly while Ernie sniffed every bush. Her mind drifted to her earlier conversation with Justin.

*He was a smart kid. He went to Cornell and graduated at the top of his class. Why can't he hold down a job? Was the market the right place for him?*

Regina focused on the daffodils sprouting up through the dead brown leaves like harbingers of Spring.

*It's so damn cold out tonight. I can't wait until Michael and I go to Tampa. I could use a warm, sunny day on the boat. Hell, I could live on the boat and never come back with how cold it is out here. I can't believe I let my stress level get to this point. I need to hire someone to help me at the firm. I should start taking Tara's vinyasa class on Mondays again. I need to make a change.*

Regina pulled her hood up and tightened it around her face. Stuffing her hands in her pockets, she tightened her grip on Ernie's leash and guided him back towards the house. *Michael will be home soon and he'll be hungry. I'll heat up the leftover lasagna. I'm too exhausted to cook. I just want to read and relax on the couch with Ernie. If my mind will let me...*

\*\*\*\*\*

"Hey hon, how was your day? You look tired," asked Michael.

He took off his sweater and laid it on the back of the chair and turned to scoop a heaping piece of lasagna out of the pan.

"Thanks, honey. I needed that." Regina said as her mouth turned up at the corners.

“Long day... and then Justin called around five to tell me he lost yet another job. I don’t know why he spent so much money on education if he’s never going to be able to hold a job long enough to pay back his loans. I wonder what Lisa thinks. Is he even talking to his mother?” Regina questioned aloud.

“Well, it’s going to take some time for him to grow up and find out exactly what path is calling him. The market wasn’t the place for him. It was too cutthroat. Probably more cutthroat than working at a real estate law firm,” Mike said.

“Him.... work at the firm? I wasn’t saying that, Mike. I mean, he would have to move down from Ithaca and find a new apartment. Is he really going to want to leave all his college friends and Stacey? He’s living the life of Riley up in Tompkins County.”

“Well you have to find someone to help you while we’re gone. If not Attorney Bridges, I don’t know. Remember you have to hire back a temp or two. You’re overwhelmed. I can tell with the way you have been acting irritable. We both are agitated. You need a break and we need to plan our annual Florida trip. We need it, hon. And soon. I’m not trying to press you, babe, but we need to consider our future. How long do we really want to stay in Yardley?” Regina exhaled deeply as she rose from her seat.

*I still remember to use my breathwork from yoga. That’s a good thing.*

“I’m not discussing moving now, I’ve had a hell of a day, Mike and I need to go chill on the couch for a bit.”

She began clearing the empty plates from the table and rinsed them before placing them in the dishwasher.

*Time to take Ernie out to pee and relax with The New Yorker until bed. My neck is stiff.*

*I’ll draw a bath and use a lavender CBD bath bomb. I don’t know how much longer I can do this.*

*Why can’t the nights and weekends be longer? Tomorrow is only Tuesday. Just breathe, Gina.*

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*Knock, knock.*

*Oh dammit, who is it today?*

“Hi, who’s there?” Regina called out into her jammed packed office while she said amidst three files strewn about her two desks.

“Hey, Aunt Gina. It’s Justin, remember I was going to stop by today?”

*Oh yeah... better put this file on pause.*

“Oh, sure, Justin. I’m so happy to see you. I’m just pausing my timer and we can go get

a bite.” She fumbled with the computer for a minute and then turned, grabbing her jacket off the back of the chair, and slung her bulging briefcase over her shoulder.

“Let’s go. I know this new sandwich shop two blocks away, Pal Joey’s, that has a great sandwich called a Diablo.”

“Cool, I’m starving.”

They walked together through the cold February day toward Broad Street. As they made a left toward the restaurant, Justin began, “I don’t know how to tell you this. I’ve decided to make a few changes. I hope you can listen to me fully and let me get it out before you make any comments.”

Regina clasped her hands together gritting her teeth as she opened the door to the brick restaurant.

*Great, a serious conversation. I don’t think I can’t handle this with all the stress I’m under. Why can’t anything be easy?*

“Okay, sure. I’m here for you. Shoot,” Regina said as she followed the waitress to a corner booth and sat down. She quickly placed their order and shooed the waitress away.

“Okay, well like I said things are changing. Stacey and I split last year. I was getting too heavy into the bar scene and she wasn’t having it. I stayed out five nights a week drinking with my friends. It put a huge strain on us. I realize that now that she’s gone but there’s nothing I can do. She moved in with this dude Frank. She had her eyes on him for months before she left, and I never knew. Dammit!” Justin was interrupted by the arrival of their drinks. He paused for a moment and then continued after the server left the table.

“I had no idea you were going through that. You could have called or visited sooner, Jus. You know I’m here for you always. Did you talk to your Mom?” Regina said taking a sip of her iced tea then pausing to add a second teaspoon of sugar.

“No, you know how she is. She’ll criticize me about leaving the market and changing jobs again. She did help finance my education.”

Justin was interrupted by the arrival of their waitress with their hoagies. Regina and Justin dug into their sandwiches pausing the intense conversation, giving them both a needed break. Justin inhaled half his Diablo in a few bites. Washing it down with a sip of Coke and continuing, “After Stacey and I split up, I stopped going out and became depressed. I became so bad that I had to get some help and my counselor really helped. Together he helped me realize the only way to stop drinking and partying was to throw myself into my career. Unfortunately, I can’t stand the market. The plan to straighten out through my career backfired. It’s so high

pressure. Every morning, up at the crack of dawn, in a suit, worried that I'm going to screw up and lose my clients' money. And not a little bit of money either. Hundreds of thousands of dollars. It's too much responsibility for someone my age. I didn't feel confident or capable and became plagued with panic attacks. I knew it was time for a change. I never told you but the last two years while working I've been putting myself through school to become a paralegal. I tested the waters and I love the law. I applied for my law degree at Drexel."

Regina couldn't help but interject, "Drexel! That's in Philadelphia. Are you moving here? Oh, Justin. I didn't realize you were going through all this. You should have called me more often. I've always been here to listen."

"Thank you, Aunt Gina. I've never told you, but you're are my inspiration. I'm want to become a real estate lawyer, like you."

Regina froze and clasped her hands together. She set her hands on the table and Regina looked Justin in the eyes.

"Can you handle it? I mean, are you sure this is what you want, especially considering the panic attacks? You've been down a few paths and I want to make sure you are headed in the right direction. A direction that will serve you well for the rest of your life."

"I've been toying with the idea of law school since my last year of Cornell. I went into the stock market world and tried my best. I wasn't cut out for it. That's why I went back for the two-year degree before applying for my Doctorate. I made sure a law career is what I want. I've been in therapy for over a year and my doctor thinks I've made great headway. This is the best direction for me to take for the future. It's the career I really want."

*We'll see if you can handle it. I have a little test for you, nephew.*

"I have a great idea which I think will set us both at ease," Regina started, "How about work directly with Attorney Bridges for a few weeks while Michael and I go to Florida in March? It would give you a chance to dive into the legal world and get direct experience before enrolling in law school. I trust you, but I want to make sure this is something you want, a lasting career for you. It's best to give it a real shot and see what happens before investing a lot of money and four years. I will also have two temps there to help."

"Wow, really? You'd trust me enough to assist Attorney Bridges with the law firm after I revealed all that? It scares the Hell out of me but you're right. There's no better way than to dive right in and test the waters. Thank you, Aunt Gina. I appreciate you trusting me like that, and you being there and listening today."

“You’re a responsible young man. You veered off in your early twenties, but it seems like you’re really straightening out. You had some troubles in Ithaca, but I think Philly will be great for you.”

“Awesome! I can’t wait. Everything seems to be falling into place now.” Justin sat back in his chair, smiled and sipped the last of his Coke.

“Think about it, Aunt Gina. When you’re out sailing the Gulf, I’ll be here in Philadelphia freezing my butt off preparing Bargain and Sale Deeds,” Justin said poking fun.

“Well, maybe...” Regina smiled to herself and trailed off into a half a daydream. She shook herself out of it, and continued “But, seriously, Attorney Bridges’ name is Steve and he’s down-to-earth. I’ll introduce you before I leave. Let’s get out of here and if you have time, I can show you a few things around the office.”

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A month later, Regina adjusts her hat to block the sun from her eyes. She steers the bass boat through crystal Gulf waters toward a sunset picnic on Anclote Key. Ernie is sunning himself on the front deck. His tail wagging in time with the Bob Marley tune piping from the stereo. Michael is sipping a Corona beside her. They both stare in silence at the cerulean waves. *Ahhhhh, this is it! Paradise. Mike, Ernie, and nothing to do but sit back and watch the waves and the sunset. Nothing ahead but lazy beach days. No deadlines, no computers. Nothing but calming nature surrounding me. This is my happy place.*

As Regina smiles, Michael pulls out a lighter and places his cigar to his lips igniting the Macanudo. Gina glances down at the android in her hand. She shifts her gaze back to the blue horizon. She glances down at her phone again with a grimace. She rises and walks to the edge of the boat, wiggling past Ernie. With a word, Gina drops her android into the water.

*Plop.*

The smile returns to Gina’s face as she turns to her husband, “Mike, I gotta give it up.”

## The Great Composer

By: Dr. Gene Garone, Professor

I am a great composer  
with notes that never cease.  
But if I could compose one thing  
I'd write a song of peace.

My piano keys are black and white  
playing side by side.  
I would make each note resound with joy  
echoing in pride.

The strings of my sweet violin  
I'd bow with elegance  
as trumpets blow and chimes ring out  
resounding eloquence.

There'll be singing to a gentile rhyme  
and dancing all around.  
A melody together  
and harmony abound.

A story that my song will tell  
the rat-a-tat of drums  
respect for all and love embraced  
when bigotry overcomes.



Artwork

By: Kayleigh Mariner, Student

## Their Betrayal

**By: Carmen Taylor**

I missed what we used to be. I still love her, as crazy as it may seem. I loved the way she'd curl up next to me in bed, and how she lightly snored on my chest. I missed the way she gazed into my eyes and pronounced my name with a level of gentleness. The words slipped off her lips with ease and passion. Despite all of the good times we had, I still couldn't shake this level of uncertainty. Was I ever enough for her? Did she really feel as deeply as I felt every time I looked at her? Innocence was a lot of things, but she wasn't a liar. I had to find out the truth. I had to ask her.

My infatuation for what our relationship could have been changed rapidly. My heart was pounding against my chest as she stood beside someone else. From a distance, she laid beside my older brother. I observed secretly, seeing them laugh the night away. My heart faded into dust and blew away with the gust of wind. It had only been a week since our breakup, but she seemed happier with him than she ever was with me. My feet were stuck to the asphalt as my legs tried to fight the urge to move like some sort of quicksand. I kept my identity unknown. I built up hatred towards him for the way he touched her, tracing every inch of her body hungrily with his fingers. He didn't love her like I did. No one could. At this point if I couldn't have her then nobody else should. I watched them inside of her window for hours. During that time, I observed him taking advantage of her. Taking away my soul every time he took her to places I couldn't take her anymore. I watched him put back on his shirt and give her a kiss before he headed out the door. It was too dark for him to see me, but my presence was there. He backed out of her driveway, as I stood there loathing in my bitterness. How could love make me so foolish?

The next morning, I woke up sick to my stomach. My relationships with my ex and brother were ruined. It's crazy to think that the people that hurt you the most are the ones right underneath your nose. They've been playing me this whole time. Innocence broke up with me for him, and now I understand why they've both been acting so weird. She cheated. The worst part is she never thought I'd find out. Love makes you do crazy things. My sweet darling Innocence. If only you knew what I was capable of.

I tried my best to mask my emotions as I walked into the kitchen and sat across the table from my older brother. He nodded in my direction as his attention went back on his phone.

"Hey man can we talk?" I asked him with a tone of seriousness inside of my voice.

"Yeah, wassup?" Zaire spoke as his eyes glared down at the bright screen.

"Where were you last night? I sent you a text, but you didn't answer." I questioned.

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There was no point in lying to him. I could tell just by the expression on his face that he knew. I looked at the hurt in his eyes, and for the first time I felt bad for all of those nights that I spent with her. All of those nights that we crept around, silently fucking as he was asleep inside

of the other room. Even though she initiated it, I didn't say no because deep down I didn't want to.

“Im sorry Deondre...I didn't mean to hurt you.”

I watched his hands clamp into fists as his dark brown eyes clouded with rage. His brown skin appeared flushed as he charged toward me exasperated.

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I was going to kill him. This was my chance before our mother came home. I reached for the knife inside of my pocket and stabbed him in the chest. His eyes widened with fright. His body fell limp to my feet as the red liquid pooled on the tile floor.

“Now look who's the fool.” I glared at him harshly as he laid there spitting up blood looking confused.

His watery brown eyes struggled to stay open. His breath became shorter by the second. There he was fighting for his life and I didn't even care that he was dying.

It was another dreary day inside of Seattle as the clouds thundered with lightning. Small rain drops escaped from the sky as if God was crying. I stole Zaire's keys and headed over to Innocence's house unsure of what I wanted to do with her. She was the love of my life, but she did have to pay for her repercussions. As I parked in front of the house, I reached over to the passenger side of the car to gain access to the glove compartment. My hand searched below the paperwork to pull out my gun. Instead of going through the front door I went through her backyard. I've been here so many times and no matter how much I told her to lock her screen door, she always felt like nothing would happen to her.

“It's a good neighborhood. We have the best security surveillance.” But look at me now. Somehow, I was able to bust into her house and no alarms went off. She was this close to death and she didn't even realize what was going on.

“Innocence!” I yelled with anger. “I know you're in here.” It was like playing hide and seek inside of a damn maze. Before I made it up to her room, a long-wailing scream pierced through the stillness of the day. Rotating beacons of blue and red emitted into the window's, blinding me with the ferocity of their light. FREEZE! This is the Seattle police department. Deondre we know you're in there! Come outside slowly with your hands on your head and drop all weapons!

“Fuck!” This had to be Zaire's doing. I knew I should have finished him off when I had the opportunity. A low whimper emitted from the outside closet as I stood in the hallway near her room. I could hear the shakiness inside of her breathing, and smell the saccharine scent of her perfume.

“Come outside willingly and I won't hurt you.” Many men in uniform yelled.

“The police are outside. It will only be a matter of time before they barge into the door. If you don't surrender now, they'll kill you.”

“I don't care about my life. If I'm going down, then I might as well take you for the ride.”

I aimed my gun at the closet and released a series of shots. A loud boom bounced off the nearby walls. Her body fell out of the cabinet as she choked on her own spit. Her emerald green eyes

glanced at me dumbstruck as her body trembled irrationally on the cold tile floor. The last thing that she saw was my face as my beautiful Innocence became no more.

It's been ten years since I've been incarcerated, ten years that I killed my ex and attempted to kill my brother. That's right, Zaire is still alive. How do you think the cops found me at Innocence's house? He's the reason I've been rotting in here for years, but my mother says it's because of my own actions. I could have gotten away with it too if he hadn't foiled my plans. Moral of the story is never leave loose ends.

## The Summer We Found Findlay Market

**By: Matt Brzezinski**

It was 70 degrees and clear skies stretched across the highway as my girlfriend Taylor and I were driving home from a work conference in Louisville, Kentucky. We'd decided to drive out, attend the conference, and take an additional week off to explore new places on the way home. It was our second year attending this conference together. Rather than spend money on a flight, we chose to make the 13 hour drive to Louisville from New Jersey. The conference had concluded and, while it had been a lot of fun, we were ready to start exploring.

We set out with no destination in mind, just our home address in the GPS and a plan to stop multiple times along the way. A few hours into the drive, we made the decision to exit the highway and see what we could find. Breakfast at the hotel had left us dissatisfied, and we knew we had to find a place to have lunch. We were driving through Cincinnati, Ohio, and saw signs for a few restaurants which piqued our interest. Our first stop would be at a convenience store in order to use the restroom and pick up more ice for our cooler. We pulled up to the store and saw a poster advertising a "Slush Puppie," a sugary drink which brought back childhood memories of hot summer days. As I filled the gas tank, I pulled up Google Maps on my phone. I began browsing nearby places of interest for somewhere we could have lunch. I saw that a brewery just down the street was having an anniversary event, and we decided to head over and check things out. Navigating with GPS, we found ourselves circling around in search of parking. The streets reminded me of my childhood in Philadelphia, extremely narrow with cars parked up on the curb to allow space for passing traffic. Surrounded on both sides by row homes, the streets had an old

and charming character, similar to my grandparent's house in Port Richmond, Philadelphia. Parallel parking was never one of my strengths, so I was determined to find a parking lot or larger space to leave my car. After a few minutes of circling the block, we came across a bustling parking lot with large signs reading "Free Parking." Little did we know that this parking lot would lead us to finding something completely unexpected.

Parking in this lot wasn't a very easy task. There was an abundance of cars flowing through a less-than-spacious one-way path, all looking for a spot. Cars were tightly parked along the sides of the one-way. Occasionally the lead car driving through the lot would stop to let someone else reverse out of a spot, then take it. Curious as to what could cause all this traffic, Taylor and I began to speculate what was going on. As we sat in the long line of cars, hoping to get lucky and snag a spot, we crept closer and closer to a large wooden archway which was filled with people. We began to realize that the archway led to a large wooden gazebo, lined with individual aisles. All kinds of fruits, vegetables and flowers were laid out on tables among the space under the gazebo. A large sign which hung across the front of the building was finally in view, and it said "Findlay Market: Farmers Market." Finally, we were able to secure a parking spot. Completely forgetting our plan to visit the brewery, we set off to explore this mysterious place that made us feel like we traveled to a much simpler time.

Walking up to the giant gazebo, we could see that each table was its own farmstand. Offering assorted items such as fresh produce, locally produced honeys and jams, and many more things, it became clear that Findlay Market was a place where local businesses came to sell their products. As Taylor and I browsed these festively decorated displays, we came across one selling hot sauce and salsa. Taylor's mother loves salsa and we decided to purchase a few jars as gifts. As we continued through the gazebo, the pathway at the back of the structure opened up into an alleyway with more businesses on either side. Through the alleyway, there was a break in the old brick buildings which led to a sprawling market. There were tables and chairs throughout the plaza, all filled with people enjoying fresh foods and drinks from the surrounding shops. What we thought was simply a small gazebo, turned out to be a large market with a diverse assortment of shops.

Filled with childlike excitement, Taylor and I began to make our way through the crowd and explore the market. Immediately catching my eye was a quaint looking shop with a red door and four black pillars in front. A large red letter "M" was painted on the glass of the door and upon the window was a sign which read "Maverick Chocolate Co." Having a sweet tooth, I rushed inside to explore the shop. Inside was elegant hardwood decor, matching the style of the

outside of the building. Behind a dark wooden bar stood a kind-looking man in a black baker's uniform and on top of the bar sat several intricate glass containers filled with chocolates. Each container was a different shape and size and had a small paper card in front, embossed with black cursive print of the type of chocolate inside. Inside the containers were small bits of chocolate, all masterfully crafted and stamped with an "M" on the front of each piece. The man offered to let me sample as many types as I wanted. Intrigued, I tried a few different types and made my selections to take home. My favorite was a bourbon and dark chocolate bar which tasted both smoky and bitter. The bars of chocolate were wrapped in elegant packaging deserving of the premium cost of the product. After making a purchase, Taylor and I continued our adventure in the market.

With our stomachs still grumbling, Taylor and I decided we'd look for a place to get lunch. As we continued walking through the market, our noses picked up a sweet and smoky aroma wafting through the air. We were immediately drawn to it and came upon a barbeque restaurant nestled in among the other shops. Without a second thought, I followed Taylor into the restaurant which had a sign depicting a pig hanging off the rustic yet modern looking wood beams of the building. Inside, our noses were met with a melody of smoky, rich and savory barbeque. Available was a large assortment of pork, chicken and brisket. We both ordered and took the food back outside into the market, finding a table near the front of the restaurant. As we sat and filled our bellies with the delicious food, we listened and took in the sights and sounds of Findlay Market. Music played in the distance from an artist performing songs on his guitar. Too many conversations to keep track of passed by from the people wandering through the market. Surrounded on all sides by sounds, I could feel a comforting energy pulsing through me. This market was alive and felt like an oasis in the concrete jungle, completely out of place with the rest of its surroundings. If we went a few blocks to either side of the market, we were in the middle of an inner-city neighborhood. However, the market felt more like home, more like a New Jersey farm stand. Encompassed by local business and entrepreneurs, there was a true sense of community at Findlay Market. As we finished our meal, we continued exploring. We came across a few more unique businesses and were able to find a few more gifts for those we love. Deciding to continue our adventures for the day, we headed back to the car.

Sitting down, Taylor and I couldn't believe that we had come across this place. Needing to know more, we researched this place on the internet. It turns out that Findlay Market is the last surviving municipal market house in Cincinnati and was built in 1852. It has a rich history and is visited by millions of people every year. We vowed that we'd absolutely return next year and

that Findlay Market had earned its spot on our itinerary. The rest of the vacation was great, but we kept thinking back to our first day. The organic discovery of this place had inspired Taylor and I to travel off the beaten path. In the years since our first visit, we've been able to discover many other exciting places along our journeys. However, Findlay Market will always have a special place in my heart, for igniting my passion for exploration.