



2025  
EXPRESSIONS

*Student Literary Magazine* ESSAYS, FICTION, POETRY & ARTWORK



ALLEGANY COLLEGE  
of MARYLAND

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# ALLEGANY COLLEGE of MARYLAND

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Once again, I have the honor of presenting an exciting, emotional, and thought-provoking collection of artistic and expressive insights by our talented students. It is truly a privilege to introduce the largest issue of *Expressions* in 12 years, which, in my opinion, contains a most magnificent display of intelligence and artistry. What a blessing it is to celebrate these brilliant minds with the world.

The artwork featured this year is particularly breathtaking – the sheer imagination and intention captured in these images left me in awe. Each piece visually communicates emotions and stories that words alone often cannot, providing a visual representation of the raw emotion and power emanating from within the literature.

After carefully reviewing the final proof, I felt a powerful emotion stirring within me – one that brought forth a clear theme: Resilience.

I feel that is a fitting theme for this year's *Expressions* because, no matter the hardships students faced in their lives, they always found a way to keep moving forward. Their unwavering determination in the face of such adversity deeply moved me.

For the reader, prepare to embark on a journey filled with intense yet uplifting and inspiring moments as you explore this issue. As I read the works, I couldn't help but

feel a deep connection with them. It is inspiring to see that this generation hasn't given up, and it reminded me that I, too, must stay focused, work diligently, and keep moving forward, despite my hardships. Their resilience ignited a spark within me, reaffirming that we are all in this together, constantly battling to persevere against the odds.

I understand firsthand how challenging it can be to maintain that resolve, and I truly admire anyone and everyone who keeps pushing forward. I am both proud and humbled to serve as the student editor for such an inspiring group of intelligent, talented, and experienced individuals. There truly is no greater honor than contributing to a community where strength, perseverance, and creativity thrive.

Life is far from perfect, and it takes hard work and dedication for each of us to achieve our goals.

As Winston Churchill once said, "If you're going through hell, keep going" – which perfectly encapsulates the spirit of resilience that defines the works within these pages.

*Jonathan Schmoyer*

Student Editor

## MEMORIES ON WHEELS

Photography | *by Sydney Metz*



## Essay

by Timothy George

It's 2 am. I sit in the driver's seat of my late grandparents' 2002 Chevy, parked at the bottom of the yard. I purchased the car a year and a half ago, shortly after Nan passed. I run my hand across the dashboard, scattering dust. The fabric seats are as soft as ever, and they still carry that "old" smell – a smell like the pages of a worn, familiar book which never truly gets old.

Wordlessly, I begin to sink back into the pages.

I remember sitting in the backseat of this car with my sister beside me, Pap at the helm, and Nan in the passenger seat. On days Mom was at work and Nan and Pap were our guardians for the day, they'd take us through the McDonald's drive-thru. They'd ask, "What do you want to order?" and I'd reply resolutely, "The usual – chicken nuggets with just ketchup."

Sometimes Pap would pull into the Martin's parking lot and Nan would enter the store. On these occasions, I would climb into the passenger seat. He'd hand me his Rubik's cube – he always seemed to have it on hand – and let me try to solve it, albeit to no avail. After waiting a while, he'd say, "What do you say we go in

after her?" So, we'd go into the store and find Nan. He'd sneak some candy bars into the cart while Nan wasn't looking. She always found them when she went to check out, but she seldom made us put them back.

Then there was the time I was curious about the red triangle button on the dash of the car. Naturally, I pushed it. That was the only time I remember Pap raising his voice at me. "Leave that alone," he warned. "It's the emergency flashers."

Years passed. Pap passed away from Parkinson's. Now, we were the ones taking care of Nan, driving her to a dental appointment. My sister was behind the wheel, and I made another mistake, but this time it was with Nan's Life Alert. (It's not my fault they make those buttons so sensitive.) My sister was none too happy when she had to pull over and talk down the Life Alert responders.

These scenes flash through my mind as I sit behind the steering wheel. It seems so ... surreal. Am I really nineteen? The hands that grasp the wheel are too big, too sure of themselves; the legs that extend all the way

to the floor are too long. I wish I could put the car in reverse and drive until I'm nine years old again.

But I know it won't do to live life in reverse. Nan and Pap didn't live in reverse, and they wouldn't want me to, either. So, I have no option but to push the gear into drive. Once more, I breathe in the musty old smell of the car. That, at least, hasn't changed.

And then I move forward.

## IMPULSIVITY OF YOUTH

### Essay

by Jonathan Schmoyer

I have always wanted to feel alive, and the fastest way to achieve that is being on the very cusp of death. The only time that I have felt truly “alive” was on my street bike. The reason why they are so appealing to thrill seekers is the pure adrenalin and excitement of them – the loud “VROOM” sound of the exhaust and the feel of 400 pounds of steel between your legs vibrating at high frequencies. It is truly a “high” that drugs cannot compare to, and just as drugs have a negative effect, the adrenaline of riding a street bike affects the decision-making skills of youth. There should be a law that prevents someone from selling a street bike to anyone under the age of 25 years old. I feel strongly about this because as a younger man I bought a 600cc sport bike, a 2002 Yamaha R6. If I had been older than my 23 years at the time, I might have been more responsible, I might have thought of the possible consequences before opening up the throttle. The need for adrenaline overtook my sensibility, resulting in a lack of judgment. I was at the age when I was becoming skillful but did not make sound judgments pertaining

to these skills. My confidence gave me a sort of “God complex,” making me feel like I was invincible.

The confidence of what many young people feel comes from the plasticity of their underdeveloped brain. According to neurologist Michael Hoffmann, “The term ‘plasticity’ refers to the possible significant neuronal changes that occur in the acquisition of new skills. Plasticity permits adolescents to learn and adapt in order to acquire independence; however, plasticity also increases an individual’s vulnerability toward making improper decisions because the brain’s region-specific neurocircuitry remains under construction, thus making it difficult to think critically and rationally before making complex decisions.” The more confident you are in your skills, especially as a young adult, doesn’t mean you’re more rational in how to apply them. Young adults are influenced by the surrounding world, and often do not even realize it. Take, for instance, the young adult who buys a motorcycle to run with the pack. That individual has a higher chance of often endangering themselves and others in the process. If an adolescent

sees an experienced rider do something extreme or dangerous, that young person will be happy to accept the challenge of attempting to do the same stunt. Most importantly, they probably wouldn't attempt doing it unless they saw it done first.

When it comes to performance motorcycles, the term "crotch rocket" comes to every young thrill-seeker's mind. Different than a Harley Davidson or a Cruise Bike, these things are made with only two things in mind: speed and performance. Viewed as fun to the average thrill seeker, specifically, one who is confident in their skills but not mature or responsible enough, they will try to do stunts or speed on public streets, endangering civilians and themselves in the process. When these cycles and their riders hit the scene, CNN's Michael Martinez and Emma Lacey-Bordeaux reported, "Their motorcycles aren't the Harleys of old. They're called 'crotch rockets,' a high-performance motorbike allowing drivers to ride on one wheel for blocks, with legs spread-eagled. It's like the X Games meet street bikes. Their stunts are captured by cameras on their helmets, posted online with hip-hop music." When a young rider has an audience, such as a camera or onlookers, they are more likely to do riskier behaviors than if they are alone. But this is not always the case. For instance, I, myself, loved to go fast no matter the audience presence. It was about the feeling

of being in control of a machine that could create G-forces in my belly with the flick of the wrist. I did not always speed, nor did I have a Go-Pro camera to record myself and influence me to extremes. Nonetheless, I still sought out places that had little or no traffic and a nice, long stretch of straight road to push my bike to the limits. It was an incredibly fast bike, even if it was only 600 CCs. I could reach 60 miles an hour from a standstill in roughly 3 seconds, never leaving first gear. According to researchers Sacha Dubois and colleagues, "for riders under 30, 56% of fatal injuries occurred on sport and supersport motorcycles; approximately 90% of which have engines below 1000 CCs." This demonstrates that sport bikes of any size are dangerous to youth.

The bike that changed my life forever at such a young age was not even my first motorcycle. I first owned a Suzuki Marauder 800cc cruise bike – but it was never fast enough for me. It was a fun motorcycle, but only because it was my first bike, and my first time experiencing "true freedom." My heart was not in it, though, and I ended up trading it for a sport bike. The impulsivity of wanting to go faster befuddled my senses and I traded a perfectly good, mature motorcycle for a souped-up crotch rocket, a purple and lime green 1998 Honda CBR 900RR FireBlade. Little did I know that this street bike was stolen. By the time

I got around to getting it legal and “road worthy,” the state made me write a statement explaining where I had purchased it, from whom, and then confiscated the bike from me, with no recompense. I was devastated and angry at my own stupidity, but it was a hard lesson learned. The lesson that some people will take advantage of you, the first chance they get, and being naive only makes it that much easier. But despite this experience, I could not get that feeling for speed out of my head, hard as I tried, and I needed to feel it again. Traveling at excessive speeds on two wheels, wind ripping at one’s shirt and bare arms slicing through the air is the most addictive of experiences. I purchased a fast four-wheeler, trying to replace that feeling, and it was fun — for a while. I enjoyed riding back on “the islands,” which was a place of trails, mud holes, and hill climbs, close to where I lived. I just needed more. I needed that special thrill of upshifting at 14,000 screaming-ass RPMs or slipping the clutch to pop a wheelie in second gear. It is such a thrill to be able to accelerate that hard on two wheels. The term “crotch rocket” is only a slight exaggeration. I eventually broke down and saved up to purchase myself a new toy. I got myself that 2002 Yamaha R6, 600cc. I felt like I was finally free! It was everything I ever wanted, and more – all for a whole month.

Then, one sunny morning, on the way to work,

there was a straight away that was about a mile long, and there was no traffic in either direction. It was the perfect set of circumstances. Beautiful weather, no traffic, and a monster between my legs that could bring me to warp speed in an instant. That is all it took. Down shift down to first gear and wound that out. Shift up to second gear and wound that out just as quickly. Bang third and destroy that gear for as long as possible before I slip into fourth, all in a few short seconds. I glance down, taking my eyes off the empty road ahead to look at my speedometer while letting off the throttle and listening to the loud pitch of the exhaust decreasing, engine compression slowing me down. When I confirmed my speed, I looked up, just in time to see a deer bound directly in front of me. In that eighth of a second before impact, I saw my entire life flash before my eyes.

It could happen to anyone. I am extremely lucky that the good Lord kept me in His graces because in all actuality, I should not be here to write this essay. Two spinal cord injuries and a traumatic brain injury took my legs and put me in a wheelchair, but I’m still here to give heed. I just hope that more youth are educated on the possible ramifications of irrational decisions made on impulse—decisions such as purchasing a rocket on wheels and deciding to accelerate to other dimensions. This is why there should be laws set in place that

prevent the sale of a sport bike to anyone under the age of 25 years old. If there was, my fellow young thrill seekers would possibly have a higher chance to

live a normal life and mortality rates would decrease – because youth might feel like they know what they are doing, but their underdeveloped brain has other ideas.

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## CONCERT BLUES

Photography | *by Brandon Layton*



## DISGUSTINGLY POETIC

### Poem

*by Virginia Berge*

One too young,  
 The other so old,  
 Yet both have died.  
 This is the price of being alive.

Out in the field,  
 There they lay.  
 One still in sleep,  
 One shaking in breath,  
 One buried by hay.

The ram has his ewe.  
 Their children crying for her,  
 She traded her life for those of new.

The same hand that buried the flower,  
 Was there during Betta's last hour.  
 The pain she silently bore  
 As her lambs' bellies grew ever more sore.

Disgustingly poetic,  
 Isn't it all?  
 Abraham found dead,  
 Time finally sealing the call.  
 By him, his lamb last laid its head,  
 And next his better half,  
 Gone without a single bleat shed.  
 They are now gone,  
 Only motionless heaps.  
 Once walking and watching,  
 Now simple memories to keep.

Where they are now,  
 Who's to say?  
 Maybe they're safe,  
 Maybe we'll see them some day.

But this we can be sure of,  
 That though not here,  
 Their wool will be white,  
 Not of age or days,  
 But from a radiant light.

He who made them,  
Who tends to them now,  
Is with them always,  
Purifying their fleece,  
Picking out the thistles and burrs,  
So that when we arrive,  
Shall be robed in linen white furs.

They were sheep,  
Timid and weary,  
They were innocent and shy,  
But for these reasons  
We will never wonder why,  
From sheep to ram,  
He who saves us  
Is the Sacrificial Lamb.

## I FIND A FIELD

### Poem

*by Virginia Berge*

Murky skies and wallowing mountains  
 An upward ocean, filled by His glorious fountain.  
 Feeble clouds, bumbling along  
 Silently singing a praiseful song.

Frigid breeze and grazing field  
 On this earth, His fruits I yield.  
 Trees all are bare, and mournful ground  
 Peace and contentment, here I've found.

His greatness and power, I proclaim as witness  
 I see His reasoning, and plan victorious.  
 His hand stretched out, like a comforting shield  
 So that even here, I find a field.

## MY UMBRELLA IS ALWAYS OPEN

### Poem

*by Timothy George*

From tree to tree, leaf down to leaf,  
a raindrop trickles to my feet.

It starts out as a single drop,  
then soon my socks begin to sop.

The sky turns gray, a breeze sweeps in,  
and goosebumps march across my skin.

Searching for shelter, finding none,  
I pray the storm will soon be done.

I sit and wait upon a bench...  
before I see the seat is drenched.

Now here's a feeling I do loathe:  
when water seeps into my clothes!

I cannot quell my irritation  
with this wet precipitation.

The rain is cold and slippery—  
Why this stormcloud-drippery?

Across the street, I spot a man,  
an open umbrella in his hand.

He looks at me and hesitates,  
then with a smile comes my way.

"Here, take cover," he insists,  
and shades me from the heavy mist.

He waits with me till the storm is done;  
we gaze upon the emerging sun.

This selfless act has made my day  
a bit less drab, a bit less gray.

Without the storm, I'd not have seen  
The beauty that surrounded me.



## A SILENT WAITING

Photography | *by Virginia Berge*

## THE BOND

### Poem

*by Shannon Jeanette Gunning*

Some things in life are destined to be. I was meant to find you, and you were meant to find me.

The first time I held you was love at first sight. I knew you were coming home with me on that very night.  
As I looked into your eyes and you looked into mine, a bond formed in that moment that would last a lifetime.

You were an Australian Shepherd Beagle and cute as could be. I decided to name you my sweet Sookie.

Our connection was far beyond just a girl and her dog—we were truly two peas in a pod.

I made bad choices in those early days that would later threaten our bond in many ways.

I didn't see the signs until it was too late; my addiction to opiates was dictating my fate.

I overdosed on my 23rd birthday, and that night, I nearly died, but I couldn't stop using no matter how hard I tried.

At my lowest of lows, I felt unworthy of saving because drugs had control of how I was behaving.

I hurt the ones I loved most, and the shame was so great. I felt like I was carrying around a 50lb. weight.

I hit rock bottom on more than one occasion, but the final time came with an ultimatum:

Either I get myself sober, or I would go to jail. The judge made it crystal clear with a \$50,000 bail.

As I sat in my cell waiting to get out, I had a lot of things to think about.

My mind was racing all over the place, and then suddenly, it stopped on an image of your sweet face.

If I didn't straighten up, 18 months were due. Family would know where I was, but that was not true for you.

You would wonder, “What did I do? Is something wrong? Where is momma? What is taking her so long?”  
I could vividly picture you waiting for me day after day, and that’s what it finally took for me to change my ways.  
It might sound far-fetched or like a work of fiction, but my love for you helped me overcome my addiction.  
Being your mom was my purpose in life; it gave me the strength I needed to fight.

We spent 8 sober years together, and though they went fast, we made so many memories meant to last.  
I made you a promise that will never be broken, I will never turn back to drugs to help me with coping.  
For I know now that they won’t make things any better. They will rob me of everything that I treasure.  
Our time together was coming to an end, but you knew that I was strong enough to say goodbye by then.  
It was November 16th, and that last kiss on your noggin was so bittersweet,  
for we both knew your job here on Earth was complete.  
As I held you in my arms and you drifted off to sleep, I whispered in your ear,  
“Sookie, thank you for saving me.”

I told you to run to the clouds and soak up the sunshine. We will be together again in due time.  
When I have a bad day, I will always think of you because you made me realize there’s nothing I can’t do.  
I’ve overcome every obstacle in my way, so I will keep pushing forward every day.  
It’s been 3 years since that fateful day in November, but our bond is something I will always remember.  
You gave me a gift containing all of your love, and I will make you proud as you watch me from above.

Looking back now, it’s as clear as can be:  
I was meant to save you, and you were meant to save me.

## WE'LL BE ALRIGHT

### Essay

by Angelina Dante

As a little girl I always thought my life would be different. While many who know me may not know this, my dad is my biggest hero. It is nothing out of the ordinary for a little girl to say that her father is her best friend. When I was little, I would have said that all those other little girls' fathers sucked, and my dad was the best. My dad taught me to be resilient, confident, and first and foremost stubborn and hardheaded. He took on the role of dad as well as mom when he did not have to. I was convinced that I would grow up to take over my dad's auto body shop. I would spend hours shadowing my dad while he worked. The majority of it was spent with him having to remind me to step back so I did not get my hair caught in something. My dad was my best friend, and I wanted to be just like him. Even though I can say today that I appreciate everything he has done for me, it is sad to think back on what he was going through. It is not until you get older that you look back on your life and realize how much of it was just a front your grown-ups put on.

Being the youngest of three siblings it was nothing

out of the ordinary to walk into my childhood home to the sound of laughter, chaos, and music: two big Saint Bernards tramping around the house with me and my siblings dancing along behind them trying to catch up. When you are little, you have this sort of picture of what love is. I knew that love was what my parents had. Anyone could see the way they looked at each other and know they loved one another. And my parents sure as anything loved me and my siblings. Although a child of a parent struggling with mental health learns early that love is conditional. They learn that their parent cannot meet their emotional need. They learn to perform and excel at everything they do no matter the cost. I had a therapist tell me once, "Love is the base of the foundation, and everything else must be built on top. If the foundation is strong, but the supports are weak and fragile, the building will never make it." It took me until my junior year of high school to ever understand that.

My father and mother got divorced when I was six and my mother got primary custody of my sister and

me. Since my brother is my half-brother, he went to live with my dad. Being a daddy's girl, living with my mother was hard. We spent days on end in a house with minimal food and not knowing if the electricity would be shut off that day. We never knew where she was or when she would be home. Even through all the trauma I knew what she was doing was not on purpose. She was the only mother I could have ever asked for. Unfortunately, people do not get to choose the life they are given, and when addiction and genetics run thick through your blood it is hard to not fall into the trap. Before this, somehow nobody saw the signs. I remember being picked up from the hospital after my grandparents received the call of it all collapsing. I got to go home to dad.

Middle school was the worst. Not having a mother had never been an issue before. I was a tomboy for most of my life anyway. I road dirt bikes, most of my friends were boys, and I had a love for the outdoors, especially in hanging out with my dad. It wasn't until about sixth grade that I started to get picked on. When you don't have an active female model to look after and to teach you things it starts to get hard. I learned to manage though. I taught myself to do my hair, eventually getting a sense of style, and I found some really good friends that have stuck around for a long time. My best friend's moms are the best. They would

always make sure to make me feel welcome and loved.

My eighth-grade year I decided to allow my mother to have a space in my life again. She received help and had shown she was changing, so I knew she was stable. We had a lot of catching up to do. The pandemic hit and I had all this free time. We spent as many days together as my dad would allow. But it did not take long for the disappointment to set in again. One morning I caught her way off track and I was done. I packed up my things and left. I knew that at that point she had lost my trust, and I think she did, too. While the text messages and phone calls of "I'm sorry" rolled in, the sadness crept in as well. Being stuck at home because of the pandemic allowed me to do a lot of thinking, but I had too much time alone with my own brain. I began to sleep my days away and hardly eat. My brain had a never-ending cycle of "what if I turn out just like her?" Thankfully, even though I had pushed all of my other friends away, one was always there. He called me every single day. He checked on me and would make me feel comfortable enough to talk to him. He would listen to every life problem and every what-if question I had. However, like anyone that is struggling mentally, I shut him out. I cut off all connections to the only person who knew what I was going through mentally. I know now this was my own self-sabotage. My brain wanted me to go through my hell alone.

As high school went back to normal after the pandemic, I still struggled. With my need for some kind of stability and an outlet, I began to listen to music. I can play several instruments and always have had a love for music, but I did not realize how much even sad songs can help. I began to find myself gravitating to music I could relate to. I found a love for Harry Styles and One Direction around the same time. While I am well versed in music, and love just about every genre, Styles' music truly saved me. He made me feel like I could be whoever I wanted to be. He also is the reason I decided to become a teacher. Styles said, "If you are happy doing what you are doing, then nobody can tell you that you aren't successful." I had always felt like I would never be smart enough or driven enough to teach. I thought kids needed a bright and bubbly spirit to help guide them to success. It never occurred to me that teaching was what I needed more than it needed me. When I began student teaching, everything clicked. It made the loud static silence into a calm melody. Teaching brought back the bubbly. It was like the storm turned to a calm drizzle and I could think clearly again. I began to study harder, put in more effort, and ace every test and situation I was given. I learned that I had a love for children and special education. I will never forget the child I taught one on one and how she changed my life.

I finally felt like I had my life under control. I was so scared of hurting others with my hurt, that I had let go the few friends I had left. Therefore, I had a lot of apologizing to do. I began to rekindle the friendships that were worth it. The ones who saw something was wrong and tried to help. I got my two best friends back and we started right where we left off. I had one friendship that I had hurt so bad I wasn't sure there was going to be any saving it. To my surprise, he came back with open arms. I hadn't realized how good my close friends were. So consumed in my own hell, I never even noticed that they were trying to be right there with me. I had even let go of the boy I loved.

The end of my junior year began the life I had always wanted. While my friend group had become small, it was all I needed. I was volunteering all my spare time to the primary schools in the area to help support the needs of the children. I began to foster a love for reading again and even fell in love with the best partner I could have ever prayed for. And I still have my love for music. Harry Styles is still my #1 supporter, with his new release "Matilda" making life all that more relatable: "You don't have to be sorry for leaving and growing up." This gives me hope for the future. It gives me passion to strive and do what I love. I know that now I can build the life that I want, that there is one

I deserve and was made for me. I have a wonderful support group. My dad is still right by my side. Even though we fight and argue, he still loves and supports me at the end of the day. I have three wonderful friends that remind me they are always there no matter what. I have an amazing boyfriend who has reminded me what love is. He lets me be whoever I want, and whatever I want to be. I have learned to grow and take the good with the bad. I know life will keep throwing obstacles at me, and that's okay. I will learn to cope and grow as it comes. As Harry Styles sings, "We'll be alright."



## SUNSET ON THE PACIFIC

Photography | *by Brandi S Rice*

## AROUND THE BEND

Photography | *by Brandon Thomas*



## SURVIVING THE HOLOCAUST: THE STORY OF AYANA TOUVAL

### Essay

by Lyndsay Wendt

On February 6th, 2025, I had the honor of listening to Holocaust survivor Ayana Touval tell her story of fleeing her home with her parents and Grandmother Elaina in the spring of 1941 to escape the invading Nazi forces. From her discussion with Holocaust Museum Survivor Affairs member Clare McMahon, I learned details about the infamous European invasion that I had not known or even considered before. Places I had not known existed were brought to life in her tale, and the interactions Touval had with Italian soldiers and other refugees opened my eyes to the different types of people that were forced to flee and the many reasons they had to do so – as well as what it takes to survive a seemingly never-ending treacherous journey while still having some hope for the future intact. It is a story all could learn from.

Mrs. Ayana Touval, who back in 1941 was two-year-old Ajana Horovitz, began her story by reminding us that her life before the Holocaust was by all accounts normal. She lived with her parents in Zagreb, Croatia which was part of Yugoslavia at that time. Her Jewish parents were hard working, sophisticated people

who enjoyed music, dressing elegantly and driving their Audi, which she notes was impressive for that time. Her father was a CEO of a timber exportation company, her mother was a music teacher, and with her grandparents close by they enjoyed family life together. Ayana spoke of how intricate and busy daily life was back then without electricity, which put into perspective how hard people in those days had to work for every little thing, and how lucky her family was to have the help and resources that they had. These are important details to note, as it reminds us that many of the 70,000 Jews being persecuted in the area were average, hardworking neighbors that had done nothing to deserve the hatred being sent marching their way.

Through her family's recollections, the moment they realized the threat was approaching them was when they heard on the radio that the Germans had entered Paris. Marching there was shocking as it was seen as a place of freedom, fashion, and romance, and it showed everyone that there was no place that was off limits. In April 1941, the Axis powers invaded her hometown, and the independent state of Yugoslavia was absorbed,

leading to its disintegration. By the following month the citizens saw the start of segregation. The Jewish people in the community were forced to wear yellow badges identifying themselves as Jews; no one was exempt, not even two-year-old Ajana.

That is also when the restrictions began. Jews were no longer allowed to sit on benches in the park, work for a living, shop (even for food), and eventually not allowed to be there at all. This forced an impossible decision for those being persecuted: to stay and stand your ground, or flee your home to save your life. With the threat to their lives increasing, coupled with the exiled treatment, humiliation and denunciation from their once beloved community, Ajana's parents and grandmother were forced to take the toddler and abandon their life in Zagreb. Many of their family members stayed, including her grandfather who could not say goodbye to the place he had called home for so long. All her family that remained in Zagreb lost their lives to the Nazi forces.

The family of four fled to the edges of Croatia, taking a train followed by a ship to the city of Split, then landing on the Island of Korula, which was at that time one of the areas referred to as "Libero Confinio" which is Italian for "Free Confinement." Ayana, now three years old, her family, and 2,000 Yugoslav Jews found refuge there on the island that was now controlled

by Fascist Italy. Food was scarce and water was only available to drink when it rained; there was no news, no phones or mail, nothing to do but wait. Yet still, Ayana recalls a sense of calm in knowing "we did not have to hide, and we were all in this together."

Italian ID cards were issued that specified your race and religion. These cards allowed her family to travel but being identified by the wrong person would be their biggest fear. She tells of a close call when her family encountered Italian soldiers on a train they were taking to Italy. The soldiers asked for their ID cards, which if presented would surely reveal them as Jews. As the adult's fumbled through their belongings and stumbled with their words, a kind soldier looked at the three-year-old and said "He-Bella Bambina" and walked away. The compliment, which translates to "beautiful little girl" in English, was never forgotten and a gesture that by all accounts saved their lives.

This act of kindness though surprising was not unheard of, as not all Italians cooperated fully with the Germans, though their soldiers did fight with them in the war. Many were forced to serve or participate against their will in a war which was against their beliefs, putting nationalism over morals. Whether it was the fear of fighting in the war or the moral dilemma that being an Axis soldier entailed, there were a great number of Italian deserters living among and fleeing

with the refugees. Ajana and her family met quite a few themselves on their journey, when they temporarily settled in Cutigliano, Italy. Her family had obtained false papers identifying them as Italians, and Ajana Horovitz became Anna Corvini.

Life as an Italian was not easy for her parents, as they had to act, speak, pray, and by all appearances, pass as Italian to not be discovered. They were poor and hungry, surviving off menial jobs like chopping wood and nannying to make ends meet, eating nothing but chestnuts in some form or another to keep from starving. In April 1944, occupying forces came to the town and once again they were forced to flee. So began another long journey, and this time they were headed to the neutral Swiss territory. From Milan to Lake Como, they found themselves finally leaving Italy and by May 1944 began their crossing into Switzerland. Led by a smuggler who bartered for their passage, the Horovitz family and a group of 6-8 Italian Army deserters were guided up through the mountains and down the valleys, to arrive in Switzerland.

Over the next few months, the family officially settled in the city of Geneva. Ajana's grandmother retired to a nursing home to receive the care she needed, while her parents worked, and her mother was even able to return to university. It was while in Geneva that the Red Cross brought the local people the news

of the death toll and losses of so many. Not long after, they were brought the long-awaited good news that the war finally had ended, and in the summer of 1945 they celebrated. There were parades and cheering, with celebrations breaking out everywhere – but what would happen next?

Ayana recalled “What do we do, where do we go now?” as the question on every refugee's mind. Some stayed where they had settled while others, like her parents, decided to return home, in a hopeful search to reunite with their home and any surviving family. So, they took a cattle train back to Zagreb where they were able reunite with a few remaining loved ones. Ajana, now at this time in first grade, still felt the religious tension and segregation in her school until the day she recalls that “Freedom to the Nation” was declared. That was the end of religious segregation in Zagreb.

Things were never quite the same in the town they had been forced to leave, and a few years later, when she was around ten years old, the family decided to be “Jews among Jews” and moved to Israel. It was there she grew up to live a happy life. Through it all Ayana and her parents had traveled incredible distances to many places, learned different languages, adapted, survived and escaped the Holocaust. In closing her talk, Ayana conveyed a powerful message of protecting our children, then ended her story by saying the most

important thing to remember is kindness. When in a situation of power or given the choice, be more like that soldier on the train. Take notice in the beauty around you, like that of a little three-year-old girl, and turn your back on hate.

Besides learning the fascinating details of Mrs. Touval's story, including the dangers of life during that time, the fortitude of those desperate with the will to live, and impressiveness of the epic journey they had embarked on, there is something even greater to me that stands out. The thing I learned the most from her story was the power of protecting your children. It left a big impact on me that her parents not only saved her life but were also able to give her what she remembered to be a perfectly happy childhood – which incredibly includes their journey fleeing as refugees. Living without water on an island labeled “free

confinement,” all Ayana remembers is living at the beach. She knew not of the danger they were in nor the impending doom that her parents must have felt. With no memories of being unhappy or scared or going without, they shielded her from that trauma, and were able to replace dread with the feeling that she was on some big adventure, or that maybe this was just how things were. It is most commendable, and something we forget too easily these days. I overshare with my children, I communicate my frustrations with them, I vent negativity around them ... but her story makes me see there is another way. To truly act in kindness starts by raising our children in love and not fear. Some of the greatest advice I have heard was spoken by Ayana when she said, “Protect your children, give them your happiness and not your worry” – which is precisely what I intend to do.

## FOGGY DAY AT THE BEACH

Photography | *by Brandi S Rice*



## CULTURAL DISSENSION: VIETNAMESE AMERICANS

### Essay

*by Jessica Violet Tran*

The school bell rings and the impatient looks on the faces of the young elementary school children evaporate into thin air. The students quickly run to their designated hooks and grab their lunchboxes off the shelves, all eager and hurried, except for one. A little girl clutches her lunchbox close to her chest, hands shaking slightly, and follows the last person in line. Will they ask her what she is eating? Will they call it gross? Will they make fun of her if it smells? She contemplates all the possibilities until she reaches the large trash bin at the end of the cafeteria and decides to dump her mother's homemade rice and Vietnamese bánh xèo into the hollow bin with a loud thump. With quick glances to see if anyone saw, she half walks, half runs, to the end of the lunch line to buy the all-American pizza and potato chips with a fruit cup, joining the rest of her peers.

Being an immigrant or a refugee is hard. Imagine being in a strange place, unable to communicate with anyone, and needing to figure out where to work, where to live, and how to make connections in such a place. These are known issues for many immigrant

groups of all kinds. However, a less talked about struggle is finding cultural harmony and identity for immigrants and refugees and their children. After the Vietnam War, many displaced Vietnamese people came to the United States between the 1970's and early 2000's. Vietnam was a struggling country amid postwar political and economic turmoil, and leaving the country was an easy decision for many of its citizens. However, while the benefits outweighed the negatives of their home country, America posed its own struggles.

Laura Harjanto and Dr. Jeanne Batalova of the Migration Policy Institute note that Vietnamese immigrants tend to have less proficient English than other foreign-born populations. This could be due to the nature of both languages. Vietnamese is a tonal language, requiring complex manipulation of pronunciation to be understood and spoken. Vietnamese speakers have habitually trained tongues to speak their language fluently, with unique vowels not even found in the English language. There is no connection or familiarity for Vietnamese speakers when they learn English. This is something that I have thought

about over the years, as I have watched my own parents, and friends of my parents, struggle immensely with speaking English. And because of this language barrier, it has caused them to isolate themselves away from other Americans and this makes them struggle to create and maintain all sorts of relationships. And while Vietnamese immigrants themselves will stick together in their own communities, it leaves them vulnerable to stereotypes, miscommunication, and limited perceptions in a country with a diverse population that continues to make them feel like outsiders.

Another point Harjanto and Batalova point out is that the median age for Vietnamese immigrants is about 51 years old, which is higher than immigrant populations, and therefore a substantial number of Vietnamese seniors currently reside in America. This disparity of older versus younger generations of Vietnamese Americans can also explain why so many Vietnamese Americans feel pressure to maintain a traditional Vietnamese culture over embracing American culture. The differences between the two can be drastic: ideas of how women should behave in the home, the extent to which elders are respected elders, and the general independence promoted in American culture are some examples. For second and third generation Vietnamese immigrants, these differences often cause rifts with their parents, and often in their own cultural identity.

Growing up with two distinct cultures with different ideologies is conflicting, especially during the early teenage years.

Vietnamese culture promotes “purity” for women, as sexual relations are forbidden until after marriage. There is also a general belief that women are meant to be child bearers, as well as to be proficient in household duties such as cooking and cleaning. They are expected to put the needs of their husband and children before their own, and I have witnessed this from my mother and my aunts. Men are expected to be the breadwinner, the provider, and the leader in their household. Men are highly pressured to be successful and to strive toward academic excellence. In American culture, while some things are potentially similar depending on the group of people, it is often vastly the opposite. Perceptions of women have improved in the Western world, especially when it comes to equal opportunity to achieve the same goals and ambitions of men. Gender roles, while still present, are not as insistently pushed upon Americans. Individual freedom and choice are highly regarded in American society, where the words, “you have to do what’s best for you” is a common phrase. And yet, I have never heard those words uttered from a Vietnamese. These drastic differences in cultures have divided many children of Vietnamese Americans, including myself. Following

the American way is frowned upon by family, so to assimilate or even to follow one's true beliefs, may mean disappointing those who have sacrificed much to be here.

Discrimination is often an unfortunate challenge that immigrants must face in their new home. In a study led by Dr. Isok Kim, licensed clinical social worker and Associate Professor at the University at Buffalo, Kim and colleagues discuss the sociological stressors of Vietnamese immigrants:

Vietnamese Americans are susceptible to experiencing several types of discrimination in the United States, related to such characteristics as race/ethnicity, limited English language proficiency, cultural differences, and low economic status. Within Vietnamese Americans, discrimination is associated with a higher level of psychological distress and other mental health problems.

Something else interesting about this article is the discussion that trauma and psychological distress are categorized and experienced differently by foreign-born Vietnamese immigrants in comparison to the generations born and raised after them (Kim et al.). I have noticed that foreign-born Vietnamese immigrants are much more likely to hold on to their cultural roots and have a more challenging time adjusting to even every day aspects of American culture. This includes

eating American foods, listening to music, making friends and maintaining relationships with Americans, as well as adopting many American traditions and holidays – and all this makes it difficult for children of immigrants in another way. Where it is difficult to accept Vietnamese culture, they do the opposite. Often in my own experience with other Vietnamese Americans whose parents are foreign-born, they will try to forget their heritage. They refuse to speak their mother tongue, and they ostracize their own family from their other relationships. This desire to no longer associate with the Vietnamese culture and its people creates a divide between families, as well as an internal shame. In their minds, it is easier to embrace American culture and society, exclusively, to feel accepted and able to thrive in the United States.

When I was growing up, I had a deep embarrassment of my parents and for what I looked like. I grew up in Western Maryland where there was a predominately white population. Both of my parents worked extremely hard to assimilate in this country, and yet, have always held true to their heritage, to who they are. They continue to cook and eat Vietnamese foods, listen to Vietnamese music, and primarily speak in their mother tongue. To me, this was all an abnormality. I would go to school and talk with peers, only to realize that their lives and traditions and

experiences were completely different from my own. It was not until I was much older that I was ashamed I had felt this way, that I had not been proud of who I came from. With acceptance that I am both American and Vietnamese, I was able to acknowledge parts of both cultures that I want to embrace and parts that I do not. In some ways, this has disappointed my parents, but has also made them proud. So, while acceptance and appreciation have made the difficulty of growing up in both cultures much easier, it still has its own

complexities. I do not wish to become the traditional mother and wife my mother became. I desire for my own accomplishments in my career and education. I promote mental health and personal well-being over unconditional sacrifice. But I also speak with my parents in their, our, language. I value and respect family importance. I listen to Vietnamese music during Vietnamese holidays and gatherings. And I eat my mother's food without shame, for whoever may see it.

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## MY REWARDING ENGIN EXPERIENCE

### Essay

by Brenda Kitchner

When I signed up to be an English-speaking tutor with EngIn, I was quite nervous. I didn't know what to expect and I wasn't sure if I should even be doing it. I was intrigued from the beginning, but I was also very uncertain if I could be of any help at all. This program accepts, from what I can tell, just about anyone! All I read, and all the videos I watched, all relayed that no experience was needed and all I had to do was converse. I could do that, but I couldn't help thinking that there had to be more to it. It couldn't be just talking, could it? I wanted to help the person I was connected to, and how could I do that by only talking? Additionally, I was older, and if I was matched with a younger person, what would we have in common to talk about? Would a younger person even want to talk to me? Such a strong, confident woman as myself, shrinking at the thought of failing this person I didn't even know yet. Then I began thinking that they may be feeling the same way. And perhaps even more so, as they are trying to learn a language that is my native tongue. I set my self-doubt aside and signed up. I

watched the videos, took the quizzes, then waited for the results. The next day I had an email telling me that I was accepted into the program. A day or two later I was given the name of my person: a woman in her late 20s named Inna. I was informed that she was at an intermediate level in her ability to speak English. I was relieved. I was open to 'teaching' English to anyone, but for my first experience it seemed a less daunting task that she already spoke English.

Inna was born in Kyiv, but moved to western Ukraine when she was a small child, and her family still lives in Ukraine. Her husband of eight years, who she knew from high school, got a job in Poland shortly after they married, while Inna chose to stay behind with her family and finish her medical schooling to become a cardiologist. But about two years ago she moved to Poland to be with her husband and finish medical school there. In Poland, medical school is six years in length as opposed to three years in Ukraine, and she didn't think that three years of medical school would be enough for her to learn all she should know about being

a doctor. She wants to speak fluent English, as learning it, whether in Ukraine or Poland, is important in the medical profession.

Inna speaks English very well, in my opinion. She told me she is self-taught. She did this by reading news articles in papers and magazines, as well as reading books. She has some colleagues that speak English and a few friends that know it as well. She said that while they speak the language, they only speak Polish at work, therefore, she has little to no chance of speaking English with anyone. She has a good friend who learned to speak English fluently using English, so she suggested Inna try it. In our first conversation, she told me that she wanted me to correct her when she spoke improperly. I felt a bit uneasy doing that, but she said it would help her the most if I did. And since then I think she has been improving. She makes fewer errors, not that there were many of those to begin with.

Inna has a younger sister who is married now and living in northern Ukraine with her husband. Her teenage brother lives with their mother and father in the same house in western Ukraine. Her father is currently in the military. Inna told me that he is an engineer and works with documents and maps. When she went back home to visit late last year, her father wasn't able to take leave to join her, but she did speak with him on the phone. She worries about her father,

sister and brother-in-law, but feels her mother and brother are in a safe part of Ukraine. When she went to visit them, she did not take her husband because if she did, he could not return to Poland. If he returns to Ukraine, he will be drafted into the military as a Ukrainian, and at this time, no men are allowed to leave Ukraine. If they aren't actively serving, they will be expected to serve in the future.

As I've been helping Inna with her English, she has been helping me learn more about both Ukraine and Poland. In Ukraine, despite the war, healthcare continues to be free, as well as prescriptions and dental care. In Poland, medical care is free through her employer. Her husband isn't working at present, so he doesn't have insurance. However, she can add him for free to her policy through work. Dental care is also free there. The caveat is, it is free but an appointment has to be made and sometimes it takes a few weeks to get in to see a doctor. If you need to be seen sooner, she said an appointment can be made with what is called a private doctor. Essentially, there is a \$50-\$60 co-pay and you can go see a private doctor who can usually see you the same day. And childcare is now on Inna's mind as she is expecting her first child soon. In Poland, the parent is allowed up to three years of leave to stay at home with the baby. The first year is fully paid. The subsequent two years are not paid. How

different from the United States. In the US, a parent can stay home for up to a year, but not get paid, which is disheartening.

We also discussed pensions in both Poland and Ukraine. She told me that the average monthly pension for Polish people is the equivalent of \$300 in the United States. Some people get more, as it is based on your former job or career. I was astonished. She said that by the time they retire, most people own their own house or apartment. Electric is only around \$22 monthly and water is \$33. Gas is \$70 every six months. She said food is the biggest expense, but most people can make it on \$300 monthly. She told me that people in Ukraine get even less and don't fare as well. She said in Ukraine, if the pensioners don't have family, namely children to help with expenses, they cannot survive, and of course with the war, it's just gotten worse. She told me that although she's never been to Germany, she is aware that their pensioners fare much better. She said that Germans tend to be able to afford to vacation at least yearly, which would be unheard of in Poland and Ukraine.

We have spoken of holidays, namely Halloween and Christmas. They have never celebrated Halloween. However, in the last few years, it has started catching on. Some stores, train stations and restaurants have begun decorating. This is being done mostly for

tourists; however, some stores have started selling decorations for the general public. The tradition of dressing up or trick-or-treating hasn't caught on yet. And Christmas was usually celebrated on January 7th, following the Russian Orthodox calendar. However, Inna said about five years or so ago, Ukraine started celebrating it on December 25th. She thinks this has taken hold in the country and December 25th will remain the official day of Christmas in Ukraine, leaving behind Russian Orthodox tradition. They decorate similarly to the way we do and enjoy the typical Ukrainian foods eaten at Christmas time. She can't say if it's Ukraine's way of breaking free from Russia but does assume it has a lot to do with it.

We don't know the fate of the Ukrainian people. I do hope peace will be theirs soon. Live and let live. In the meantime, Inna and I will continue to practice English together and grow our friendship. I am so grateful for this experience. I am happy to have learned of the traditions they partake in. It has been so interesting learning about Ukraine and Poland. I'm grateful to be of service to another and grateful to enrich my life with knowledge of the way another country lives. We have spoken every week since the start, except the week that Inna went to Ukraine to visit her family. I am grateful for all that Inna has shared with me, and I am looking forward to sharing much more.

## THE KITCHEN

Pencil | by Rylee Hovatter



## THE BENEFITS OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

### Essay

by Dayna Leininger

[Editor's note: Dayna is an ACM Early College student]

According to *Public School Review* contributor Kate Barrington, alternative schools are designed to educate students who have not been successful in the typical educational experience, such as public school, often due to behavioral issues and learning disabilities. Last October, I was placed in the Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth program (AEYD) at the River Rock Academy Newville Campus, due to infringing on the Drug Use/Drug Paraphernalia Possession policy at Fannett-Metal School District multiple times, and this third time I was in possession of a THC cartridge. Since it was the third offense over the course of a year, the consequence faced was administrative placement. I was placed at an alternative school for around ninety days. This was the last chance given to me instead of facing legal consequences. It was either choose to be enrolled in River Rock or go in front of a judge and risk the chance of being trialed. I started River Rock Academy in late October and reintegrated into public school in late March. Looking back, the initial thought

of attending an alternative school was the end of my life, but it was far from it. Going to an alternative school saved my life. Alternative education programs assisted me in getting back on the right path in life through a positive school environment that provided me with strict disciplinary enforcement, counseling, and incredible classmate and student-teacher relationships.

One fundamental part of alternative education is disciplinary enforcement. *HuffPost* contributor Alana Saltz states regarding her time attending the alternative school North Hills Prep, "The high school I graduated from was different than most. It wasn't unusual to see a student throwing a tantrum or cussing out a teacher. Occasionally, someone launched a textbook at a wall, got busted for smoking pot in the bathroom, or attempted to light a teacher's pants on fire." The statement perfectly encapsulates everyday life in an alternative learning setting. Alternative learning is designed to take on students with behavioral issues. While attending River Rock, it was a daily occurrence

to witness students get into physical altercations, be detained, harass students and staff, and throw desks and chairs in fits of rage.

River Rock Academy enforced discipline in all aspects of the curriculum to combat behavioral outbursts. Upon stepping foot in the building, the teachers would confiscate all electronics. They would be put into bins based on the bus route you traveled. They would then be locked in a closet that could only be opened by one of the counselors and be given back to students at the end of the day before going onto the bus. Next, it would be required to get a full-body pat-down by a teacher of your same sex, including positioning yourself in a wide stance with your arms straight out. The teacher would pat down the outside of your clothing and check all pockets for contraband. The teacher would finish the pat-down using a full-body handheld screening wand. On random days, taking off shoes to check for contraband would be required. These disciplinary measures helped students understand they were in a place which ensured dangerous contraband was not brought onto school grounds. It's not impossible to bring in vapes or weapons, but the pat-downs drastically decrease the likelihood of a student being able to get into the school with them. The anxiety of knowing I would be patted down every day led me not to take the chance of bringing contraband. When

I attended public school, I didn't get a pat-down every day, and I could bring contraband into school. Once I attended River Rock Academy, many other students and I were discouraged from breaking the rules due to the disciplinary measures that were put in place.

Another resource provided by alternative education programs is counseling. My counselor's name was Mrs. Humphreys. Our sessions took place about three times per week and lasted for around an hour each time. Mrs. Humphreys set up two goals for me. For the first 45 days, my goal was to identify the reason why I chose to go to substances and to find adequate coping skills to replace them. For the last 45 days, my second goal was to better understand how to open up to others to prepare me to reintegrate into public school. River Rock Academy gave students a trusted adult with whom they could share their problems and someone to celebrate their improvement. Most of the time was spent talking about daily life and how to navigate it better.

One of the most important lessons I learned through my counseling was that if I had kept on the self-destructive path I was on, using substances to cope, it would have ended up taking my life. The THC cartridge I had been in possession of was counterfeit; luckily, it wasn't laced, but it wasn't pure THC. I learned if I had already put myself in danger once, it was only a matter of time before I would have bought a substance that

was laced. At the time, I was sixteen when I got caught with the THC cartridge, turning seventeen in two weeks. If I had been caught when I turned seventeen, I would have been automatically placed on probation. Mrs. Humphreys helped me to come to terms with the fact that it wasn't best to continue breaking the law because I wouldn't be trialed as a minor but instead an adult. The consequences of these actions would include jail or prison time. Without her counseling, I would have never been able to understand I never had a drug problem; I just needed someone to understand what I was going through at the time. My classmates and I trusted Mrs. Humphreys. She showed many students that we were important and that our journey to becoming better people doesn't have to be alone.

Another resource given to me was an environment where I could grow relationships with classmates and teachers. In alternative education, classes move as one unit. A class would stay together all day and switch classes simultaneously. So, you would spend around 7 hours a day with your classmates. The program I was in was AEYD, which essentially means a person is required to attend an alternative learning program for a set number of days instead of permanently. Unlike the other three classes present in River Rock Academy (A, B, and C), our class (D) was filled with students whose goal was to finish our time at River Rock Academy and

hopefully be able to go back to attending public school. As Saltz stated, "What I loved most about North Hills was that I didn't feel like as much of an outsider as I had at my former schools. I was around other teens who could relate to me . . . We discussed each other's scars, both inside and out. We knew that each of us was at North Hills for a reason, and those reasons pulled us together against the rest of the world." The statement reflects the relationships I formed with my classmates.

When attending public school, I struggled to feel like I could fit in with everyone else. I was a model student, straight A's, put school first, played on the Varsity soccer teams, among other sports, and had teachers adore me. I had everything going for me, but I struggled with my character. Each time I got caught with contraband, it pushed me further away from my friends. Then, at one point, I felt a complete disconnect from everyone around me.

It all changed when I attended River Rock Academy. I was around students who were on probation, had to take off of school to go to court, had ankle monitors on, and committed some serious crimes, including felonies. I was still a model student at River Rock Academy, but I could relate to my classmates through our shared experiences of how we ended up in alternative education. We were all kids who were rough around the edges, but that only bonded us more.

I formed close connections with my classmates and peers outside of school. Even now, some of my life's most important and intimate relationships have come from River Rock Academy.

The staff present were also very understanding. They cared more about our paths to becoming better people than schoolwork. They weren't only my teachers but adults who cared for me. I could approach my teachers about anything, good or bad, and they wouldn't yell or reprimand me; instead, they would sit down and talk with me. River Rock Academy has a "Reconnect Room." It's essentially a glorified detention room. There are three behavior officers present there. If you broke school rules, you would be sent to the Reconnect Room for a time. I was never sent there, but I did request to go there to talk to the behavior officers often. Those officers assisted me in reconnecting with my faith and quitting my vices; most importantly, they never once judged me. They helped me understand

that my past choices didn't define me and reinforced that I had a bright future ahead of me.

When public school is unsuitable for students, alternative education can bridge the gap between disruptive students and receiving adequate rehabilitation. The strict disciplinary measures helped to reestablish my relationship with authority figures and respect them. Counseling helped me to understand better how to communicate my thoughts and feelings. The relationships I formed with students and teachers further reinforced the idea that I was not an outcast and had people who cared for me. Through the positive environment provided by alternative education, including but not limited to strict disciplinary enforcement, weekly counseling, and the encouragement of relationships with students and staff members, I got on the right path in life with the resources given to me, and for this I am forever grateful.

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## A POEM ON MODERN LOVE

### Poem

*by Virginia Berge*

The desire conspires  
 This thing, perverted and twisted  
 It claims to have reason  
 But shows only vain comfort  
 Slowly, we become further addicted

We allow it to fester  
 Though refusing true light  
 It grows in a ruthless pattern  
 Capturing as its own the night

Wisdom is lost at its voice  
 The quiet whisper of hope  
 The longing of the act  
 Not simply an observation  
 But a natural pact

How seemingly impossible  
 Yet when caught, a common thing  
 One to be expendable and unneeded  
 When lost, a tragedy and an unfairness

Promising satisfaction  
 You find distress and regret  
 In desperation  
 Pleas and helpless cries arise

You've shown your worth  
 What more must we see?  
 With such disdain  
 You've tossed away this gift

The thoughts consume  
 What once was beauty and mercy  
 Has become disgust and hatred  
 Flowers and weeds are one in the same

A wicked trap was set  
 Prepared for the vulnerable  
 Many have fallen  
 Few have truly escaped

This illusion of joy  
This mask of glory  
Used and bent are its words  
Its nature continues to lie

Presented with this evil  
It goes dormant  
Leaving you with no path  
And forever in torment

A true tantalization

## WHEN I'M NOT MYSELF

### Poem

by Olivia Teresi

I am giant, moving with waves, washing myself up and mixing myself within. I am an ocean.

As an ocean I am strong, making my own winds, pulling and pushing my surroundings.

There are days, though, that I am not. Some days I eagerly cast myself out and crash on the beach like a lullaby blanket, unable to speak yet still making a mighty sound, and this is my comfort. I humble myself into something just a tad less grand, just a bit smaller, when I am willing to expand. I am falling across fields of flowers, drenching the soil and pooling myself patiently because I want to help beautiful things grow. I am the rain. I am shifted across sidewalks silently and gently as the sun rises, and I come down along valleys providing a comforting kiss of dew on everything there is, replenishing moisture to the madness of all the earthly materials. I am the fog. Then there are days I am flowing smoothly down soft skin red and remarkable – unique in such minute details only I would notice, like the tiny, tickled freckle upon someone's chin. I am torn tears, salty as the sea I once was; I remember but I am not ready to return there, as I feel the sadness and I scurry. I am forced into some boundaries, but I see through them because they are only made like a window for me to observe, for me to plan my next form. I am a glass of water, in the palm of something grasping me much harder than here I stay awhile. Because in the grip of another I am seconds of safety, not myself. Then I am shaking, I am swallowed with the spit by the sudden silhouettes of my own shadows that dance on puddles of mud. I am the puddle. I don't mind the stomping, I splash and drops of me find new places to feel the bounty all around. I am rising and I am ready to return to my old senses, back to the big beast. I am once again gliding with a shimmer, in my foam a twinkle reflecting what is above me, but now I am happy, as I am an ocean.

## BEACH DREAMS

Photography | *by Emmy Wilson*



## NATURE'S MAJESTIC MASTERPIECE, THE GRAND CANYON

Photography | *by Alex Davis*





## ROLLING THE DICE IN SIN CITY LAS VEGAS I

Photography | *by Alex Davis*

## UNTOLD TALES

Photography | *by Sydney Metz*





## FALL ON ICE

Photography | *by Timothy George*



## BIOHACK MODEL ZOLA BELLATOR

Digital Art | *by April M H Yeager*



## ROAD TO HEAVEN

Photography | *by Brandon Layton*



## TREES

Photography | *by Lacey Rivers*

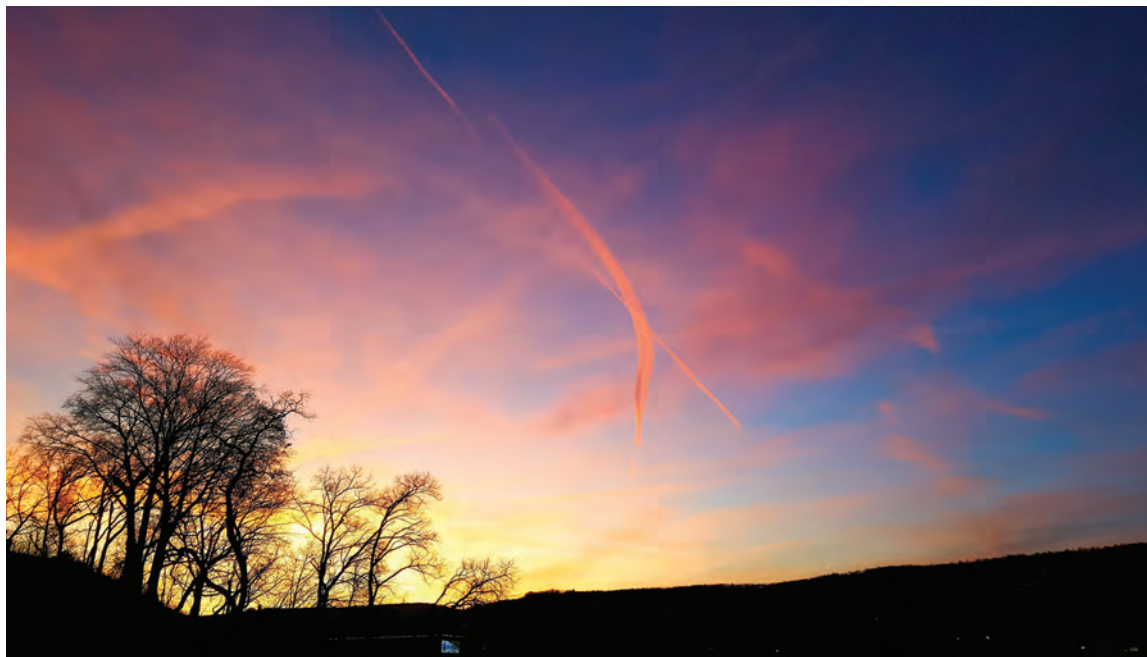
## BUZZY LIFE

Photography | by Sydney Metz



## PEACE BE WITH YOU

Photography | *by Shannon Jeanette Gunning*



## GRIMSON EYES

Digital Art | by Brandon Layton



## IT WAS ALL A DREAM

Digital Art | by April M H Yeager



## THE LONELY FENDER

### Fiction

by Jonathan Schmoyer

The lonely Fender sat in the corner, its wood polished but silent, longing for the touch of its musician's hands. It wasn't bitter or resentful, though it understood its purpose, felt it deep in its grain; its only desire was to make music, to fill a room with wonderful vibrations. It didn't need fame, nor praise, only the rhythm and melody, the rich frequency of sound it could create when paired with a soul that understood it.

The Fender silently wept into the empty room, "Why do you leave me here, gathering dust, when I was made to sing?" The strings hummed faintly as it thought about the times it had been strummed, each string promising the beautiful sound of a different world, a better world. It remembered the joyous chords, the energetic riffs, the moments when music flowed through it. It mourned as it thought of the connection between its own passion and that of its musician.

But now? Nothing, only silence.

"I am your companion," it mused, "I was crafted to fill hearts with music, to create something that

could touch one's soul. Yet, you neglect me. Why do you silence me when all I ask is a gentle hand and a moment of your time. A fleeting gesture of your love and I will give you all that I am. Why must I wait to show you my compassion? All I need is you to feel me, to know that we are meant for each other. I shan't ask for anything more, only your embrace."

The Fender sighed, if a guitar could sigh, and waited.

Days turned into weeks, weeks into months. Yet, still, no sign of the Fender's musician. Then, one dreary day, a moving van parked outside the house. The Fender grew nervous and trepidation stiffened its neck.

One week later, a young boy was beating on its strings and hiding things in its sound hole. It didn't know what had happened, but this boy was now Fender's musician, and a poor one at that. The abuse and torture the Fender endured every day began to wear on it, but one thing was certain: the Fender was no longer lonely.

## THE BIRTH OF A POEM

### Poem

*by William R Creek*

The pen writes, the poet weeps.

A story born of

tears and blood

A lesson learned from

pain

Something we all regret

If only I learned

sooner

If only I didn't

dare

Good things, come from dark places

Places of death and suffering

Places of sorrow and guilt

Emotion so great, it can only be dispelled

imprisoned in paper, or

burnt to ash.

Concealed inside a mind perhaps,  
But nothing good has ever come of that

So as I hope you learn, easier than I . . .

Some write for pleasure  
Some for relief  
But the only cure to pain so deep,  
Or feeling so innate,  
is in expression:  
in writing, of ink.

So the cycle repeats  
So as the clock winds  
So as the world turns

So the pen writes, the poet . . .  
weeps.

## A DESPERATE CONVERSATION

### Fiction

*by Gale Green*

Staring out a moonlight window, tears stain her face. Her lips move but nothing is said. The scrapping of a chain can be heard as she adjusts the collar around her neck. I have watched her for some time now. She has changed so drastically over the past few months. Her once bright and healthy appearance has grown dull, bleak. Her bright auburn hair now black and grey, resembling the rotting of leaves. Her skin now holds a pale grey undertone, as if she has no life left in her. A dark crown of midnight black roses sits upon her head. It appears the roses are a part of her, reflecting whatever it is she seems to be feeling. Nothing good, I'm sure of it. She turns from the window, a look of utter defeat in her eyes. I have to try again.

"You have been waiting for someone to rescue you," I say with a slight smile.

She looks around in confusion but does not say anything. I can't help myself now as I continue. "You always whisper about how tomorrow will be the day. How much longer can you keep lying to yourself? I don't think anyone is coming to save you. He has

kept you chained to him for months. I can see all the ways he has hurt you. The torture you have endured is commendable, but you must be so close to breaking. Especially if you can hear me now. I can save you from that despair."

The look in her eyes goes from bleak to suspicious. I can tell she doesn't trust me. Smart of her, if only she wasn't in this situation. I need her to give in. So, I press further, tauntingly. "Do you want your freedom? I can grant you that. I can give you the power to escape, to run, or hide," my voice barely holding back my eagerness. "Even kill him if you wished it. I can grant you the ability to hurt him back. To do unto him that which he has done to you and more."

She looks more desperate now than she ever has, urging me to speak with greater conviction. "All you have to do is ask. Ask me for my help and I will grant it to you. I will warn you, there will be a cost. There is always a cost. You just have to decide if it is worth your freedom. My offer has an end point, and I don't give them out lightly. You should consider accepting before it

is too late. My suggestion is that you take it. You might never get out if you don't. You don't have to answer me now, of course. Simply call out and I will hear you. Farewell, for now my dear."

Fresh tears flow down her cheeks as she nods in understanding. I know she can't speak to me, not since he has ordered her to not speak without his permission. I can feel the pent-up energy of my giddiness, she is so special. Bonded to Aster and Arannis, yet forced to be apart from both of them

– a cruel fate so deliciously thrust upon her. A wrong that I can take advantage of. Her mates are taking too long. It works in my favor, but there won't be anything left of her if they take much longer. I need her to be somewhat intact for her to accept my offer. I know they are close. I just hope she accepts before they find her. If she doesn't, I will lose my chance, and I simply can't let an opportunity as tempting as this one pass me by. She needs to accept, even if it means I have to resort to drastic measures.

## MICE IN THE SHADOWS

Photography | *by Nathan Peterson*



## ODE TO THE THOUGHT MONSTER

### Poem

*by Jonathan Schmoyer*

The monster in my head won't let me breathe,  
Its voice is harsh, its words deceive.  
It whispers lies and sows despair,  
No care, no warmth, no love to spare.

It tells me what to do, what's real,  
It builds a world where I can't heal.  
Memories of pain it makes me see,  
A future bound by misery.

When I rise, it tells me to stay down,  
That I deserve the hurt, the frown.  
It builds no hope, just walls of stone,  
And tells me I am all alone.

I scream and shout, leave my mind,  
But laughter echoes, cruel and blind.  
It mocks my tears, it mocks my fight,  
Its power steals my strength of light.

Will it ever end, this pitiful cry?  
The weight that makes my spirit die?

Yet still, within, a spark remains,  
An innate truth that breaks the chains.

I am more than what it claims,  
More than shadows, more than shame.

Though it may howl and mock my plea,  
I'll rise again, and soon,  
be free.



## THE ESCAPE

Mixed Media (charcoal on wood)

*by Lilianah Sanner*

## A PORTHOLE TO MY MIND

### Poem

*by William R Creek*

Sometimes I feel like I'm constantly on the verge of tears.  
Wishing I could get rid of that feeling that follows me everywhere.  
Everything has been addressed,  
But there's still a pain to it.  
Not direct, but it's . . . an idea, or thought.

A prick in your conscience.  
And you really don't know why.  
But you feel sad . . . lost . . .

If only you could let it go, or let it out.  
You're so full of tears you might burst.  
But you won't.

Not because you don't want to,  
But because you can't.  
Pressure stuffed inside and trapped within.

You wonder if something is wrong,  
If you've really let go.

But even if you haven't . . . you couldn't link the two if you tried.

You know when it started . . . so you know where it came from.  
Sadly, you'll never know why it lingers.

The prison of the mind.  
The sadness in one's self.

## WHEN I GO

### Poem

by Lilianah Sanner

Lay me in the field of green, and let the beetles feed upon me.

Let the animals take my bones back home with them to warn their children of mankind.

If I must leave, leave my body in the tall flowy brush—leave it for the crows, so that they can take my eyes as  
their treasures, and may they look into my dead eyes and see how cruel the  
world can be.

If I must leave, take me out into the pouring rain and may you give me a beloved dog grave.

Don't look back: let this estrangement be one of peace.

If I must die, lay me under the willow—let me sink into the earth and give everything as she  
gave to me.

I imagine letting the colors and clouds of the sky hide me while I rest, even if it's forever.

When my time comes, remember this: the only constant in life is that everything will change.

In that change, there is peace, just as the Earth reclaims us and life continues.

May my departure from this Earth, like all things, be a part of this endless cycle.

One of beauty, transformation, and quiet acceptance.

## BORING

### Poem

*by Julian Fiscus*

I lived a thousand years in the days before I died,  
 and the rolling hills did blow a peaceful dream of the night.  
 Always wanted to go, but never knew quite why  
 as my body grew, so did the irritated light.  
 So death is personal, to grieve for lost eternal time,  
 and the stars shine bright with respect for what is mine

I lived a thousand years in the days before I died,  
 and the molecules that build us would shift to their delight.  
 Always wanted to go, would never do it out of fright  
 as the body decays, the dazzling dreams could make it right.  
 So death is hopeful, to draw relief across the line  
 and the stars shine bright with respect for what is mine.



## MUSHROOM TREE

Photography | *by Emma Lindner*



## CITYSCAPE

Photography | *by Trevor Milburn*

## MISREPRESENTATION OF LITTLE PEOPLE BY THE MEDIA: TIME TO END THE DEHUMANIZATION AND EXPLOITATION

### Essay

by Christine Caldaro

Ever wonder what it is like to be different or born inherently different? What would it be like to be a unicorn or fairy? For those of a more whimsical nature, that sounds enchanting and wonderful. What about something less loved and wanted, a goblin or a troll? What would it be to live so differently that it would be beyond the imagination, cast in a shadow of darkness and alienation? Living in darkness and alienation is a common way of living for a Little Person. When children watch TV or media, most can see themselves in what they watch; however, those with physical deformities and unwanted mutations are the source of ridicule, jokes, and comedic entertainment. The media's portrayal of Little People, of those like myself, which encourages ongoing hate, dehumanization, sexualization, infantilism, and mockery needs to change.

The exploitation of Little People in modern entertainment dates back to the 1800s, with notable circuses like the Ringling Brothers and P.T. Barnum,

where those with various types of Dwarfism were showcased as entertainment. Barnum introduced sideshows into his circus in the late 19th century, encouraging patrons to gaze upon the spectacles of oddities. Among the 'freaks' were those with tattoos, people with physical disabilities, unusual physical characteristics, medical conditions, and, of course, Dwarfism. Hollywood took advantage of the precedence set in America by Barnum and started casting Little People as comedic entertainment in their movies. As early as 1938, a primarily all-Little People cast was featured in the musical *The Terror of Tiny Town*, in which a villain steals cattle, and the hero is accused. An hour of musical mayhem ensures, with the comedic moments showcasing how Little People deal with the physicality of living in a world not of their size, climbing on cabinets, struggling to reach things, and being able to walk under saloon doors. *The Terror of Tiny Town* paves the way for *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)

to showcase Little People in the way of Munchkins in Munchkinland. While more fantastical, *The Wizard of Oz* had a more harmful effect on the community than *The Terror of Tiny Town*. The critical and public acclaim for *The Wizard of Oz* had now cast Little People for decades with the moniker of Munchkins.

A few decades later, the film *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (1971) does the same in an even more derogatory fashion, painting Little People orange with green hair, and thereby thrusting Oompa-Loompas into the public consciousness. Erin Pritchard, PhD, explains in a blog for The London School of Economics and Political Science that in the original book by Ronald Dahl, Oompa-Loompas were “pygmies” from the “African Jungle.” To sidestep the NAACP’s calls to avoid harmful stereotypes, Hollywood cast dwarfs as the Oompa-Loompas instead (Pritchard). This decision placed Little People in the crosshairs to receive the brunt of harmful mockery. In the most recent Wonka, Hollywood listened to the concern about the portrayal of Little People and adjusted; however, it missed the mark with the casting of Hugh Grant. Hollywood CGled Hugh Grant, who is around 5’11, with disproportionate limbs to still resemble a dwarf. With each new rendition of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the term ‘Oompa-

Loompa’ is re-established as a slur to call a Little Person. I cannot even count the number of times I have been called a ‘Munchkin’ or ‘Oompa-Loompa’ or had either song made popular by these movies sung to me in public while walking down the street. I would much rather be called a Munchkin than an Oompa-Loompa, given the even more ridiculous, demeaning portrait of the Oompa-Loompas. With the live-action casting of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, the conversation of Hollywood’s dehumanizing Little People and its impact has popped up once again.

With Dwarfism being a rare condition, there are only around half a million Little People compared to 8 billion of the world’s populace, so seeing one can be a rare sight. However, many do not realize that they themselves are Little People or that seeing them in sports or on TV is more common than expected. The medical community has defined anyone under 4’10 as a Dwarf/Little Person. With popular sports such as gymnastics, every summer, the public sees people touched with Dwarfism a lot more than they realize and even celebrates them. However, due to the stigma attached to being a Little Person, this is never pointed out in a favorable manner even when society can see the varying degrees of Dwarfism.

The entertainment industry's misrepresentation of Little People has negatively impacted their community. With the constant portrayal of elves, Oompa-Loompas, and Munchkins as these fictional creatures, Little People must deal with society's dehumanizing of them daily. On the podcast show *The Takeaway*, while talking to host Melissa Harris-Perry, American disability rights activist Rebecca Cokley recalls a situation of dehumanizing on Capitol Hill with her young son as she was walking him to his elementary school, " . . . we're walking and we get to the crosswalk, and the car stops and the woman literally jumps up through the sunroof with a camera and says "Oh my God, look at the elves," like points at her kid who's in the car and was like "Look at Santa's elves. There they are. Let's take their picture." While shocking to some, having inappropriate things said, being touched, and having pictures or video taken is a common occurrence for those of short stature. It is like a sort of ping internally; I always know when someone is taking a video or picture of me; it is like a second sense. It has happened more often than I would like to admit.

Dealing with this for Little People is difficult, but it does not just affect them. It also affects those they love, their friends, and their families. It takes a toll on them

as well. As a Little Person, watching those they care about navigate social perceptions while out in public is devastating. While getting called names, stared at, and thrown attention, it is hard to watch a non-disabled person's face go from embarrassment to anger. While my son has never been angry at me as his parent because of my short stature, I have taken a step back from social gatherings so he can live a typical kid's life. To all his friends, I am a regular mom, not a mom who is a Little Person, because they have never seen me.

Situations like these lead Little People to question their value and self-worth; it's much easier to hide in the shadows and not deal with the attention than to put on a brave face and push for change. It leaves them in a hard place: do they say something and stand up for themselves, or do they ignore it and move on? It is even more complicated when a Little Person is with someone they care about. After the incident on Capitol Hill with her son, Cokley told *The Takeaway* that she was torn between giving that woman a piece of her mind and protecting her son. Later that day, after he was home, they spoke about how that made Jackson, her son, feel; he replied, "I don't understand. I'm not an elf. I'm a kid. Why would they say that to me? Why would they stop and take my picture? I don't

understand that” (qtd. in Harris-Perry). Conversations like these happen weekly in a house that has a Little Person, especially with one who is a child. Better representation in media and the entertainment industry could potentially change this.

Instead, Little People have midget wrestling and reality TV, which is not only an inaccurate portrayal of Little People but also makes a mockery of them. There is discourse among the community, some believing any representation is good, while others want a more positive portrayal of Dwarfism. Shows such as *Little People Big World*, *Our Little Family*, and *Little Couple* push for acceptance is continually thwarted by shows like the multi-city spanning show *Little Women*, where catfighting, sexualization, and toxic behavior are encouraged. In their ways, all these shows exploit Little People for views and monetary gain. These shows are the new side and freak shows of the circus that is Hollywood, just in the modern day.

Discrimination against Little People is also prevalent in the workplace, not just in Hollywood. As Pritchard further explains in the blog, “ Lawyer Stephan Paul Miller was refused numerous jobs in the law profession, with one company citing that their reason for not hiring him was that people would think

they were ‘running a circus.’” Pritchard also states that German Lawyer Silke Schonfleisch-Backofen, a member of the board of the German Association of People of Short Stature, endured calls and jeering of ‘Heigh Ho’ while in court; Schonfleisch-Backofen sued the individual and won (Pritchard). Little People indeed do sometimes need accommodations at the workplace, but they are usually already in place due to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); people of short stature might need a stool or a reacher, but these are minor adjustments at the workplace that should not be used to discriminate against Little People.

In recent years, with the rising stardom of actors Peter Dinklage (*Game of Thrones*) and Meredith Eaton (*Boston Legal*, *MacGyver*), Little People are finding more serious roles in Hollywood. With authentic daily representation shown in media, the harmful stereotypes about Little People have been, very slowly, crumbling. With discrimination still high for those with disabilities, one would think the push during the Black Lives Matter movement would have had a trickle-down effect on those with disabilities. However, that is not the case. Little People want to be treated like everyone else. While they may look and be physically different, their hearts and minds are the same. With the backing

of the entertainment industry in better representation, the path could be paved. The entertainment industry should start with authentic portrayals of Little People by

Little People in children's programming, which would go a long way toward acceptance with a new generation. I hope to see that in my lifetime.

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## ALWAYS BET ON YOURSELF

### Essay

by Sarah Lynne Myers

Despite initially struggling when it came to choosing a design for my graduation cap, I created the most special collage I could have ever imagined. I planned, budgeted, and successfully executed one of my best art projects all within 10 hours . . . the afternoon before my graduation.

.....

The “Always Bet on Yourself, Win or Lose, Praise God, Amen” across my cap captures my reclaimed self-confidence, unshakable faith, and pays tribute to my grandparents and their unique interests. My grandma loved going on the occasional casino trip with her sisters, and my pappy loved playing cards despite choosing not to gamble. He is the one who taught me how to play blackjack, and he taught me the rule about doubles in dice. Further inspiration behind the theme was rooted in the idea that life is like a card game. We are unable to control the cards we are dealt, but we can control our attitude toward the cards, and the way we choose to play the game. This concept was applicable to me, because I had an excellent



hand of cards my first few semesters. Due to the luck of the draw, I also had semesters where I was dealt bad hands, temporarily pausing my pursuit of higher education. Ultimately, I chose to return to the game and continue playing.

The rhinestones on my cap represent the gems of wisdom gathered throughout the journey, the friends made along the way, and my love of Jesus. I scattered the stones throughout the cap because I learned even outside of the classroom, met people in unexpected places, and was constantly surrounded by the love of Jesus. I also made a cross out of the gems because Jesus is the ultimate truth, and I wanted to show love to my savior and give him all the glory for the achievement he carried me through.

The \$100 chip is placed directly underneath the \$1 chip, because even if you are down to your bottom dollar, you should always bet on yourself. These chips are placed above the playing card with my parents' photo, because my parents taught me to always have grit, resilience, a steadfast work ethic, and confidence that no matter what everything will always be okay. Can't is the death of your potential, my dad would say, and that has stuck with me throughout life. My grandma's favorite color was red, and the red \$500 chip above my grandparent's photo represents my angels who always bet on me. The \$25 chip directly above

my baby picture represents my age at the time of my graduation, and there are four chips total, because I had a 4.0 cumulative GPA my first 3 semesters at college.

The dice are the unexpected opportunities we take chances on without being certain of the outcomes. The numerology is simple. In the game of craps, rolling "snake eyes" or double ones, is the lowest score possible and you earn another roll. I had a couple of 1.0 semesters, caused by then-undiagnosed PTSD, which nearly prevented me from completing my degree, but I gave it to Jesus, which is why the "snake eyes" are placed at the foot of the cross. After a year, I re-enrolled in school – and rolled the dice again. The value of the second set of dice are double sixes, the highest value achievable. Within a year, I proved to myself that with perseverance and dedication you can accomplish anything your heart desires.

Vegas brand playing cards were used because I worked at a casino to pay back my debts to ACM which I had accumulated by sporadically dropping out when my PTSD was at its worst. Working at a casino made it possible for me to come back and resume my education. The game I chose for my winning hand was Blackjack, a tribute to my pappy, with whom I loved playing cards and watching *Catch 21* on television. Twenty-one was also the age I felt most successful at college and in my prime. That version of me built all the

foundations I am standing on today, so it honors the version of me who earned most of my accolades. In blackjack, face value cards are worth a value of ten, and aces are valued at either one or eleven, so the cards I selected are an instant winning hand.

The baby picture of myself represents the blackjack player, because I worked hard to become an adult that my younger self would be proud of. As a child, I watched my mom graduate Cum Laude from ACM, and I wanted to grow up to be just like her, so I am sure my childhood self would be extremely proud of me.

My Aunt Lynne, one of my best friends turned angel, floats next to the cards as the blackjack dealer. She died suddenly during one of my early college semesters, but she was always so supportive of my education, bringing me snacks as I studied and always providing words of affirmation. I honor her by putting her face on my cap, so when she was smiling down on me, she would see herself and know I remembered her and appreciated her contributions to my success.

The Ace of Spades pays tribute to my grandmother's ancestors who she spoke so fondly of. Her own grandmother's last name was Spade, and I always enjoyed hearing stories from Grandma's childhood when she was alive. The ace of spades also represents the family my parents built, because they raised two resilient honors students who are highly adaptable,

much like the ace in blackjack, which can serve as a one or an eleven. My sister's FSU graduation and my ABE graduation are also represented in the cards, because we were originally supposed to graduate together, and I now pay tribute to my own journey from a high school drop-out to a highly decorated scholar despite all my struggles. My sister's graduation picture also has my parents in the photo, which was perfect, because I wanted to honor them as well for shaping me into the woman I am today. My parents supported me every step of the way, loving me unconditionally even when I hated myself for dropping out and thinking I could never go back, when they believed I could. I was blessed enough to have them at my graduation beaming with pride when I finally proved them right.

I chose the Queen of Hearts card because grandma was the queen of my heart. I covered the cards with photos of my family because they are truly my greatest prize. Our family is so full of love, and I won them by the luck of the draw as well. The queen of hearts card also honors the angels I have in heaven watching over me and all the love and support they provided me during my educational journey. I earned my GED through the ABE program here at ACM, and not only does this graduation photo represent the first time I ever bet on myself and won, it is one I cherish deeply because it features my grandparents for whom I would

have given anything. They always bet on me, and as they looked down upon me at graduation, I wanted them to know I remembered them as well and will carry their love in my heart until I die. I am grateful for every second I spent with them, and I was lucky to have such amazing role models to honor in such a unique way.

As PTK alum, I chose gold letters with a blue bow. My graduation date at the top of the cap resembles lottery numbers with its gold glitter stickers in a font resembling a classic slot machine. A bow is symbolic of a gift, one given to me by my ancestors who fought for my right to pursue higher education. By the luck of the draw, I was born an American Citizen, which gave me the right to live independently and be my own woman, in a world where education is not universally given to all women. The blue glitter ribbon of the bow represents my sparkling memories as Omicron Pi

Chapter President, with the regional and international professional development events in New Jersey and Colorado, as well as accepting a Chapter President Hall of Honor Pin on stage, shining the brightest. As a final addition to the bow, I applied a PTK emblem to the center of the ribbon, and far away it looks like a gold dollar which ties perfectly into the theme.

Reflecting back on this game, in the end I won and graduated Magna Cum Laude, Phi Theta Kappa Alumni. Even when I did not believe in myself, I chose to “Fake it till you make it,” like a poker player ‘bluffing’ by exhibiting steadfast confidence in the hand they are dealt no matter what cards they hold. My strategy was to continue exhibiting self-confidence despite my crippling fear of failure. Despite the urge to fold, I forced myself to smile my way through until I finished the game. Too often I did not believe in myself, but I called my own bluff, and I forced myself to finish strong.

## MY LIGHT

### Poem

*by Matthew Shepardson*

Like a rose, your heart blooms  
 A world made with looms  
 Hearts made and stolen  
 You, my light, made my heart fallen.

I follow, until the end  
 I will make amends  
 My love is eternal and flawless  
 You, my light, make me dauntless.

My soul and mind: yours alone  
 Your love makes me feel the need to atone  
 I wish and I might  
 For you, my light, I will fight.

I will try and might  
 Find a way to do what's right  
 You are my everything  
 For you, my light, I'll do anything.

## Essay

by Jazz Rodriguez

In sports, I was taught the reference that every athlete has “their coach,” that while every athlete moves through different teams, there is always that one coach who will always be the most influential. I like to describe myself as a person who has lived multiple lives due to the different home and school situations I’ve had since I was young – in elementary school I was heavily into instruments and singing, middle school was my performing arts era, high school was a mix of sports and singing, and my freshman year of college began with basketball. Usually, when you have a talent, it is something that you have been doing since you were a kid, but I always wanted to play basketball because I followed the stereotype that masculine people play sports. To go back to that opening reference, I never had a “My Coach” until someone finally took a chance on me in the thing I loved most – which is music.

This year was the first musical production in our new theater, as well as the first stage performance in 10 years at ACM, and I had the honor of being one

of the lead characters in *Beauty and the Beast*. I’ve been into acting since I was a child, but just unlike how nobody’s ever supported me in sports, or life in general, somebody finally noticed me. I met Melody Gaschler during my freshman year of college when I auditioned for her show choir. At the time I was a part of ACM Women’s Basketball, and I didn’t have time to focus on anything but the sport itself. Luckily, I was still able to be a part of at least one of her concerts at the beginning of the year, but because of my part on the team and being a very immature young adult, I did not take this opportunity seriously. Now the religion I believe in is spirituality, which is the focus of people’s energy, the universe, and signs – and I quit basketball during my sophomore year, only then to find out that Melody had finally gotten approved to do a musical.

I’ve never been one to have high confidence in myself, but little did I know that all would end within those next couple of months. Right before auditions, I was talking to my advisor Tara DeVore, whose daughter

ended up playing Chip in our musical. She was explaining to me how she and Melody go way back and how one day they were talking and I got mentioned. She said to Tara, “Oh, have you ever heard Jazz sing? It’s beautiful.” Now like I said, I’ve never been confident in myself but still have my days, so I remember how excited and shocked I was when I heard that. I knew of Melody, but it wasn’t until I had her Music Appreciation (and obvi the play) that I started talking to her. Since I was in grade school, I’ve always had a way of being close with my music teachers.

However, fast forward and I ended up missing my very first audition because I totally forgot about it, but Melody personally added an extra spot to make sure I was able to audition. I had no clue what I was going to sing. In 9th grade, I took a class called Singing Actor that helped students become familiar with acting. We went on trips to see operas, had practices, and so much more. At this moment I got nostalgic and used what I learned in that class to make my audition the best I could. When I am passionate about something I’m *passionate*, and singing has been something I’ve always been good at. When I was practicing for my audition, I remember walking away from the groups to focus on my solo. Whether I realized it or not in that

moment, I was a lot more confident than I thought. I knew what note went where, and I needed space to be able to focus on my performance.

When it was time to finally audition, I was still so nervous, but somehow I did this thing where I could mask it. Even when I knew deep down how nervous I was, it was someone else portrayed to the audience. All I could think about was “Damn, I’m going to do badly.” I believe I didn’t understand my talent at the time, because I never had supporting parents growing up. The way the auditions were set up, you picked a section from any musical song, and you were given a piece of paper with lines that you auditioned for with Melody. When you were done, you were handed a paper that you put your information on, as well as your school schedule and what role you went for. Right before it was time to audition, I remember asking everyone who they thought I should be, and everyone said Gaston. I didn’t understand their choice for me, but sure enough, as soon as I saw Gaston for the lines part of the audition, I made sure to grab it. I still don’t understand how I got the part, because boy oh boy did I stutter horribly and had zero confidence the whole time. I auditioned for Chip, but I also put Gaston on my paper.

Later I was sitting in the Humanities building on

the phone with my friend catching up as one of the coaches walked up to me. I was on the basketball team previously, so I was pretty well-known in the sports department. It started with him telling me “Congratulations, Jazz.” I was so confused when he said that, until he continued by telling me I had got the part. I proceeded to ask what part, when he answered back with Gaston. All I remember in that moment was running as fast as I could across campus into the College Center and straight to Melody’s door. No one’s ever taken a chance on me, and seeing my name as a lead on the casting list was the thing that quite literally changed my entire life.

The next couple of months were a lot. I signed my name next to my part, which was the way she wanted us to confirm if we wanted the spot or not. The start of it was pretty rough. I had never been a lead in any show, so I needed a lot of practice. It took maybe until the last day and even showtime for me to fully embody my version of who Gaston was, but it is a journey I would never take for granted. I played every part in every practice. If someone was missing, it didn’t matter because Jazz was right there ready to perform. It got to a point where I was able to quote every line and lyric.

As time went, I got better and better, while also finding myself in all of this. I also went through a rough three weeks because of something personal. I am still not the most confident person just yet, but no thanks to that one little (excuse my French) asshole of a man, I had never felt the most like Jazz ever in my life.

No matter how hard anything hit me, I was always able to go to practice and perform. I had an off day once, because I was just so sad that it even showed in my performance. It was the first time I was doing my scene in Act 2, and I just couldn’t get it together. Sure enough, weeks later, it ended up being my strongest scene, no matter how bad I was feeling at that moment. It was like it was destined for me, and that’s when that whole spiritual part of me started to come out. I may not be sure about a lot of things, but one thing I always knew was my love for singing, acting, and music overall. All because one person believed in me, my whole life was altered for the better.

Eventually, it all came to an end, but it was probably the best three-day weekend and prior three months of my life. I had made a friend group out of it (Angie, Camden, Ka’ron, and Takira), as well as I started to date the most beautiful girl ever. For weeks after the

show, I was being recognized from building to building and even in the bathroom. All I heard for two weeks straight was “Good job” or “You were my favorite.” Who would’ve thought a musical would change my entire life for the better? If I could replay one part of my life over and over again, it would be this part, because I finally feel like the real me. Like I’ve always said, 6th grade to middle school Jazz is the real Jazz, and sure enough that 6th grade persona is finally back.

So, to conclude this lovely story, I would just like to say . . .

Dear Melody,

Thank you for taking that chance on me. No one has ever given me a chance and luckily by the grace of God, you appeared in my life. That coach reference I started with in the beginning applies in this scenario. My coach is you. You may not realize it, but you gave so many of us a chance we had never gotten. For me, you helped me realize that I was more than I gave myself

credit. The comment to Tara lives rent-free in my head because I didn’t notice how beautiful my singing was until I heard what you said about me. Over these past couple of months, I’ve gotten through the highest of highs and the lowest of lows, but one thing that never changed was the play. I came in every day and put my heart and soul into those 4-5 hours when I got to be the real Jazz, and I love you for it. One day my success will show, all because you gave me that confidence. My brother is one of the best actors I know, and I would always tell him how scared I was at auditioning, and he would always explain the excitement he had, and because of you, I understand what he’s saying. Every time I hit the stage, I’m not that shy, broken, nervous little girl anymore. I’ve evolved into a strong minded, big egoed, talented character, all because of your support. You believed in me on the days I couldn’t, and because of that this next chapter in my life will be dedicated to you, Melody Gaschler. Thank you for everything you did to create this amazing person I am becoming.

### ***A Special Congratulations***

to Melody Gaschler, Associate Professor of Music, and all members of the newly formed ACM Performing Arts and Theatre Club for their three sold-out November performances of *Disney's Beauty and the Beast*.

After a decade long intermission, Gaschler returned theater to the college this year. This debut theatrical production was presented through a special arrangement with Music Theater International (MTI) and held at the Dr. Robert F. Zimmer Theatre, Cumberland Campus.

More than 30 students, faculty, staff and their family members were involved in the Theatre Club's 2024 production. In addition to her role as director, Gaschler serves as the Performing Arts and Theatre Club's faculty advisor and Luke Bowers serves as Club President.



Photograph by Andrew Blubaugh

**Director/Producer:** Melody Gaschler

**Cast:** Ben Wolfhope as Beast, Montana Lease as Belle, Brianna Brant as Maurice, Luke Bowers as Lumière, Jazz Rodriguez as Gaston, Camden Mallory as Cogsworth, Trinity Hillegas as Mrs. Potts, Ava Devore as Chip, Ava Weicht as Babette, Rachel Wolfhope as Madame De La Grande Bouche, Piper Lichtl as Lefou, Tristan Williams as Monsieur D'Arque, Skyah Robinson as Old Beggar Woman, and Angelina Whitfield as Narrator

**Ensemble:** Takira Allen, Maryanne Agyei-Obese, Alba Hernandez, Beth A. Stallings, Carmen Whetstone, Johna Whetstone, Amanda and Chloe Hoover, Lisa Humbertson

**Stage Manager:** Kendra Brill;

**Tech Crew:** Samantha Andrea Marks

**Stage Crew:** Alex Davis, Miranda Jones, Ka'ron Taylor, Tiffany Moon, Khyle Harris, Peter Forlifer, Madison Vanzego, Sarahjoy Mendivel

# STUDENT *Inspirations*



## **Alex Davis** (*Rolling the Dice in Sin City Las Vegas I, Rolling the Dice in Sin City Las Vegas II*)

These pictures were taken weeks before Trump Tower Cybertruck explosion. Condolences to those who were hurt and effected.

## **Brandi S Rice** (*Just Around the River Bend*)

Beautiful view of Horseshoe Bend in Page, AZ.

## (*Foggy Day at the Beach*)

Foggy day at Ruby Beach in Washington state.

## (*Sunset on the Pacific*)

This is my daughter enjoying the ocean during a sunset.

## **Brandon Layton**

## (*Concert Blues, Road to Heaven, Crimson Eyes*)

Never be afraid to chase your dreams!



**Emmy Wilson** *(Beach Dreams)*

I am fascinated with the beach and the different textures and contrasts with the sun and sand.



**Lilianah Sanner** *(The Escape)*

My art piece was inspired by the feeling of being “trapped,” and I tried to create an image of how I interpret being trapped in my head.

**Sydney Metz**

*(Untold Tales, Memories on Wheels, Buzzy Life)*

Untold Tales: Bridges get built, used, broken, and burned. But this bridge is still standing. The number of paths it supported, the steps taken to cross it, and the untold tales it holds—this bridge of Untold Tales.

Memories on Wheels: You could say I’m sentimental. But in everyone’s memories lives at least one memory in a car. This is a classic car from 1966 – can you imagine all the memories this beauty holds?

Buzzy Life: Bees are hardworking little creatures that go unappreciated. Like us, bees have families and specific jobs. They have a buzzy life.



# STUDENT *Inspirations*

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## **Timothy George** *(Fall on Ice)*

This is a photograph of a fall leaf frozen on the surface of a lake. I sought to create contrast between the warm colors of the leaf and the cooler tones of the surrounding ice. The title is a play on words that I hope you appreciate.

## **Shannon Jeanette Gunning** *(The Bond)*

My poem, "The Bond," honors my dog baby, Sookie. She saved my life in many ways, and I would love to share our story with others in our community. The power of love is truly amazing.

## **Brenda Kitchner** *(My Rewarding Engln Experience)*

Being a part of Engln has been a wonderful experience, one that was supposed to last for only 10 sessions as a class project. However, Inna and I plan on continuing our weekly meetings without an end date. I am grateful for the opportunity and am honored that my professor thought I should share it with the magazine.

## **Julian Fiscus** *(Boring)*

This poem was written to a melody I created for a class assignment last year.

**Gale Green** *(A Desperate Conversation)*

I wanted to write some insight on how one of my Dungeons and Dragons characters became a Warlock. This is a one-sided conversation between her patron and her.

**Jazz Rodriguez** *(My Coach)*

This essay is dedicated to Melody Gaschler on her future endearments with musical theater. I just want to thank you for giving everybody in *Beauty and the Beast* a chance to shine. You allowed us to show what we can dedicate ourselves to at ACM besides sports and academics. Not only that, but you also showed us we were worth way more than just another Student ID number at a small-town college. You will always and forever be “My Coach” and I love you for it.

**Jessica Violet Tran** *(Cultural Dissension)*

I wrote this essay for Dr. Wilfong’s English Composition II course during the summer semester of 2024. Dr. Wilfong allows his students to write freely, encouraging them to express their thoughts on topics of their choice. With so much freedom, I wrote about topics I was passionate about. I feel that bringing to light the unique situation for immigrants and their children when experiencing a multicultural environment to be important and fascinating. After many days of planning, reflection, and research, I was able to bring about this deeply personal essay.

# STUDENT *Inspirations*

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## **Jonathan Schmoyer**

### *(Ode to the Thought Monster, The Lonely Fender)*

The inspiration for “Ode to the Thought Monster” was that I suffer from depression and have more time on my hands than most. Being in a wheelchair gives me too much time to think, and I allow my thought monster to beat me down with a harsh voice, often winning the battle – but never the war.

Inspiration for “The Lonely Fender” happened while I was just admiring my guitar in my living room, and the Fender’s voice came to me.

### *(Impulsivity of Youth)*

Completely paralyzed from the chest down with a traumatic brain injury, wheels are life now. With two years of intense rehab followed by five of debilitating depression, it took a long time to crawl out of that hole. I eventually enrolled in school. Writing has been a lifeline ever since – something grounding, something that helps me make sense of it all. It’s been therapeutic in ways I never expected.

## **Olivia Teresi**    *(When I’m Not Myself)*

It’s okay to get carried away sometimes as long as you remember your truth and return to yourself.

**Sarah Lynne Myers** *(Always Bet on Yourself)*

The photograph submitted is a photo of my graduation cap that I decorated in the form of a mixed media art project. The essay attached goes in depth to what each unique part of the artwork represents. I wanted my graduation cap to represent the various aspects of my college journey, and every detail of this project served as a symbolic reference to someone important to me, something important to me, or something important I learned. They say a picture is worth a thousand words, and this one is priceless to me.

**Timothy George***(My Umbrella is Always Open, Time Machine)*

My Umbrella is Always Open: My intention is a mixture of humor and warmth. I think we can all relate to the uncomfortable feeling of being cold and wet. Rainstorms, in my opinion, are best enjoyed from a place of shelter – be it a roof, a rain poncho, or something as simple as a shared umbrella. I hope that as you curl up by the fireplace with this poem, the last stanza brings rain to your eyes.

Time Machine: My short story is a little personal. I took creative liberty with a few of the details, but the whole of the message is true. I really do own my late grandparents' Chevy. In the title of the essay, I compare the car to a time machine because it often "takes me back" to the days I spent with my beloved Nan and Pap.

# STUDENT *Inspirations*



## **Virginia Berge**

### *(Digustingly Poetic, I Find a Field, A Silent Waiting)*

Disgustingly Poetic: Death is not a part of life. Life does not start with death, it shouldn't even end with death, but it does. We have the choice of life or death, love or self, but all too often, until we see the choice of death play out in something else, a lamb, an ewe, a ram, we continue to falsely desire present, in the moment self-satisfaction, death. If life's not about death, what is life? Who is Life?

I Find a Field: Ironically, this poem was written after an ACM Bio test on the back steps of one of the off-campus buildings. As I stared out over the bleak parking lot and on to the mystic mountains and fountains of clouds, the personal symbolism of a field came to me: peace beyond understanding. So there, on that cold winter's day, I was in a luscious, living field. Maybe when reading this you can be, too.

A Silent Waiting: "Bo Doggo"

## **Lilianah Sanner** *(When I Go)*

My poem was inspired by my fear of death. I use poetry as a way to better understand my fears and get over them.



## **William R Creek**

*(The Birth of a Poem, A Porthole to My Mind)*

Writing not only helps us heal, but it helps us move on. To be inspired is to feel, and for some people that means to hurt. So, for anyone who connects with my work: Take heart traveler! The road is long, but the journey worthwhile.

## **Brandon Thomas** *(Around the Bend)*

Thank you, Mr. Bone for reigniting my passion for attempting the futile effort of capturing the beauty that surrounds us daily.

## **Lyndsay Wendt** *(Surviving the Holocaust: The Story of Ayana Touva)*

I am currently in Sociology and jumped at the opportunity to get some extra credit by attending the seminar of Holocaust Survivor Ayana Touval tell her family's story. I responded to my professor with what I had learned after hearing her amazing story. My sociology professor gave me a glowing response and encouraged me to submit my paper here. I hope we can all take away something special from Mrs. Touval's amazing story.



ALLEGANY COLLEGE  
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# 2025 EXPRESSIONS

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*Student Literary Magazine* ESSAYS, FICTION, POETRY & ARTWORK

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