

# The Bellarmine Review

FALL ISSUE

2019





# The BELLARMINE REVIEW

---

Volume 77, Fall Issue 2019



The Literary Magazine of Fairfield College Preparatory School





# MISSION STATEMENT

We desire to publish poetry and prose that is clear, concise, and evokes the senses, taking the reader to the writers imagined placed through strong writing and a good sense of rhythm. It is believed in Jesuit education that an academic endeavor may be an encounter with the divine, and we strive to live by the motto *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*. That is to say that in the authenticity of our written thoughts we may unknowingly stumble on truth. Our intent is to give our students' words a place to land, serving as a venue to acknowledge their living truth.



# STAFF CREDITS

*Editors-in-Chief..... Evan Small '20*

*..... Ben Short '20*

*Layout Editor..... Max Weinbach '20*

*Cover Art..... Ryan Davis '20*

*Faculty Editor..... James M. Chesbro*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Letters from the Editors.....</i>	<i>Page 5</i>
<i>“Inspired” (Noel Bernard ’20).....</i>	<i>Page 7</i>
<i>“Painting in the Mirror” (Ryan Davis ’20).....</i>	<i>Page 9</i>
<i>“Anger into Action” (John Godino ’20).....</i>	<i>Page 11</i>
<i>“The Band on My Wrist” (Luke Hopkins ’20)....</i>	<i>Page 13</i>
<i>“The Freedom of Reaction” (Patrick Kelly ’20)....</i>	<i>Page 16</i>
<i>“On Snow and Discovery” (Andrew Rios ’20).....</i>	<i>Page 19</i>
<i>“Adhesive Storybook” (Brian Rooney ’20).....</i>	<i>Page 21</i>
<i>“Restaurant Heroes” (Sean Seiler ’20).....</i>	<i>Page 23</i>
<i>“Chanting the Mantra” (Aryaman Sharma ’20)....</i>	<i>Page 26</i>
<i>“A Short Guide to Avoid Bears and Writers Block” (Ben Short ’20)</i> <i>.....</i>	<i>Page 28</i>
<i>“In a Realm of My Own” (Evan Small ’20).....</i>	<i>Page 30</i>



# Letters from the Editors

Dear Fairfield Prep,

It is with great honor that we present to you the 79th edition of our school's literary magazine, *The Bellarmine Review*. As the oldest student-run publication at Fairfield Prep, *The Bellarmine Review* seeks to honor and display the brilliant work of our students in the pursuit of literary excellence. Since 1942, it has been a symbol of students' hard work and craftsmanship, both in and out of their English courses.

It is often believed that an essay must follow a rigid five-paragraph structure, that without it, an essay cannot maximize its potential. Yet, this year, we have come to learn the underlying freedom of pursuing an idea in a personal essay, free from the limitations of the obligatory five paragraphs. A personal essay seeks to tell the story of a writer. Whether it be emotional life experiences, or a description of one's daily routine, every writer—more specifically, every Prep student—has their own experiences and thus, their own narrative to reveal.

As the college application process culminates in either an overwhelming joy or painful confusion, these essays serve as reminders of our tremendous growth, both as writers and young men in pursuit of furthering our own life narrative.

Sincerely,  
Evan Small

# Bathroom Hooks, Imperialism, and Truth: Notes on Personal Essay Writing

Ben Short

Perhaps no academic process is more intimidating—yet ultimately rewarding—than personal essay writing. The college essay looms at the beginning of senior year; no college application is complete without one, and yet, my classmates and I struggled with the personal essay’s identity.

Like any essay, the personal essay is a writer’s argument. It encompasses two layers: a broad subject that eventually reveals a larger thematic subject. To help us, our teachers supplied us with authors who excel at the personal essay, like Tobias Wolff, Michael Chabon, or George Orwell. The two-layer dynamic has unlimited range; we read an essay that argued against classic notions of manhood with an anecdote about hanging bathroom hooks, and an essay about shooting an elephant that presented arguments about imperialism. With each author we analyzed and paper we wrote, our comfort with personal writing gradually increased.

A good personal essay has several aspects, and it’s difficult to work these elements together harmoniously. The voice must be sincere and formal, yet casual enough to connect with the reader. Ultimately, the most important element is telling the truth. Personal essays reveal unique stories from a writer’s life that connects to a universal theme. Treating subjects with honesty is crucial. As Wolff writes in *This Boy’s Life*, we must do our best to “make [essays] tell a truthful story.”

This issue of *The Bellarmine Review* is dedicated to the work of Prep’s senior class. While many of the following essays were submitted to college, all of them are examples of how we’ve grown as both writers and thinkers. We’re still learning the craft, but midway through the year, this issue serves to celebrate our current progress.





# Inspired

Noel Bernard

There are times when we reflect on our experiences and take inventory of what we have done, failed to do, or wish we did differently. Those times are also the times we realize purpose and meaning in life. My reflection occurred May 20, 2019.

I woke up numb and disoriented to blinding lights flashing in my eyes. I gazed at the ceiling unaware of where I was. I felt hungry and used every ounce of energy to lift myself to search for food. Was that chicken soup I smelt? Unfortunately, it wasn't. It was the chemicals in the emergency room. I heard a gasp to my right and looked over to see my little sister, Nia, laying in a hospital bed with a brace on her wrist.

I managed to whisper, "Nia, what's up?"

Nia whispered back, "Noel, we were in a car accident."

The accident occurred the Monday after a long weekend where I had gone to Junior Prom, and Nia and I had a grueling 12-hour dance recital. Afterwards, I needed some well-deserved rest. With a fractured disc, a concussion, and a broken nose, I could have used the accident as my excuse for that rest. However, it was an inconvenience. I had a performance coming up playing the Prince in *Cinderella* and the SAT in a week. I also had two summer intensives at Joffrey Ballet in New York and at the American Ballet Theater (ABT) in Alabama. I had gotten prestigious scholarships to both and couldn't miss either.

As I lay in that hospital bed, I realized I was lucky. Looking at the car, completely totaled, I could have very easily died. However, by surviving, I had the luxury of considering the accident as only an "inconvenience". It would be melodramatic to believe that my whole life derived from a singular bad experience, yet the experience did help me put things into



perspective.

While in the hospital, I had the opportunity to think back upon those who inspired me and those I was an inspiration to. My older sister, Jacinthe, was the driver in the accident. I can't remember why, but she swerved and lost control while picking me and Nia up from school. She blamed herself, but the accident didn't diminish how much I look up to her. Jacinthe is the strongest, most composed young woman I know. Actually, Jacinthe inspired me to begin dancing when I was four. When I began dancing, most of my elementary school friends thought dance was for girls. It was hard to get them interested in anything dance related besides hip-hop. So, while they played basketball, I spent my time doing plies and tapping.

That reflection in the hospital, my nostalgic thoughts about Jacinthe's influence on my childhood, was somehow overheard by fate. Daniel, a young, Filipino boy at my dance studio, came to visit me. Like most boys, Daniel was into hip-hop while his sister was learning jazz, contemporary, and ballet.

Daniel gave me a get well card and a very concerned look.

"Noel, are you alright?" he asked.

I responded, "Yeah, Daniel. I'm alive and kickin'."

He replied, "Good, 'cause we need you to come back."

We hugged and I thanked him. As he walked away, I got a look at the dance clothes he had on. He wore tights. Daniel was doing ballet! It left me speechless.

The accident helped me to reflect on how we are inspired and in turn inspire others. Jacinthe inspired me to dance and Daniel was inspired by me to do ballet. Jacinthe helped me understand that despite momentary lapses, people are still inspirational. Our successes and failures make us human. So, despite the pain that lingered, I danced at Joffrey and ABT, I took those pesky SATs, and I continue to try to be an inspiration for anyone who doubts themselves.



# Painting in the Mirror

Ryan Davis

I view my art like a diary. It is something that can be deeply personal to me. However, sometimes it is important to ditch the diary and tell the world how you feel. Only then can others hear you out and guide you. That is why an artist must always be open with their art. But, it is easy to become absorbed in the art I create. To get so wrapped up in my perception that I get lost. That might not always be a bad thing. It might just mean that I have become engrossed in whatever I am engaged in, allowing my brain to tip out and spill. However, it might also mean that I have become too wrapped up in myself.

One such moment occurred this summer. A blank canvas lied before me and the world around faded away. The solitude of the empty canvas intimidated me. Nevertheless, I proceeded on my mission. I sketched in my subject. Slowly, the figure came into view. First the head, then the eyes, nose, and ears. My colors were all prepared on my palette: my burnt sienna, my yellow orchard, my titanium white. Grasping my brush, I mustered the confidence to make the first stroke. I took my leap of faith, sweeping my brush across the cheek of the figure's face. My toes were more than dipped now, in fact I was soaking knees down. There was no more point in being reserved, it was time for a cannonball. My palette turned into a sea of reds, oranges, and yellows. I loosely applied my paints to the canvas. What was once an assemblage of shapes and lines came to life. The solitude was no more, and in its place lied a person of my creation.

As I painted a thought occurs to me - a memory of a video I had recently watched. In it, the narrator explained a simple trick to improve your paintings. All you had to do was look at it through a mirror.



"Why not?" I thought. I grabbed my painting, already a quarter way complete, and brought it to the nearest mirror. I held the painting up to my chest as I flicked on the lights. I looked at it, taking it in as my eyes adjusted. "What the heck", I muttered in disbelief. Everything was wrong. The eyes were different shapes, the left ear was higher than the right, the entire face was practically tilted. How the heck didn't I notice this?

The trick with the mirror has an explanation as simple as its execution. After enough time, our eyes get used to looking at our drawings, dulling our perception. This causes our brains to overlook many simple mistakes in proportion and shape. When looking at a picture through a mirror it flips, allowing us to see it with fresh eyes. Then, the mistakes stick out like a fly on a wedding cake.

The hardest part of the process is always separating myself from the art. When I create art it becomes a part of me, but there comes a time when I need to let it become its own entity. The best art can only be made from a distance. Taking a step back and seeing things from a different perspective is a necessary step of any process, but I do not always have the right perspective. That is why I did not notice the mistakes in my painting. However, by active seeking it, new viewpoints can be achieved.

That same painting now lays locked up and deserted in the darkest corner of my closet, never to see the light of day again. In its place there is a completely new painting, same in concept, but better in execution. The mirror was only the first step. The next step was a willingness to accept the mistakes and to start all over.



# Anger into Action

John Godino

I do not remember much about the first time I watched Emma Gonzalez speak. I only remember getting goosebumps. Everything she was saying through tears and rage was what I had been feeling in some form or another for the past five years. I was struck that someone my age was getting this platform and was using it so effectively.

Now, I have not even come close to the kind of trauma that she experienced. I consider myself one of the lucky ones from my community. I am from Newtown, Connecticut. And no, I was not in the school. And no, I did not lose a family member or friend. So, when talking about my past in relation to the event, I feel strange and guilty as if I am in someway exploiting it. Even worse, later on in this essay, I will be drawing a connection to someone who actually survived a shooting. That has made writing this essay an exercise in guilt and a self-applied pressure to get it right. And yet despite these truths regarding my own experience, I still feel as if I have become inextricably linked to the event that shook my town to its core. For the five years following the tragic event at Sandy Hook, I had an anger boiling inside of me.

I did not know what to do with this passion that, for some reason, would not go away. Then I saw Emma. And though I could not understand everything she had gone through, far from it, I still felt a connection to her.

Then came the walkout movement. I saw it as an opportunity to finally be active and make some sort of a stand against this dark cloud in my psyche. I led our school's walkout and even though there was only a hundred or so kids out there with me, I still felt apart of the army, ready to march on Washington and



make change. And I felt perfectly myself. I felt as if I was doing what I was meant to do. The walkout helped affirm something I had been feeling within myself for years now.

I do not feel on the same level at all as Emma, as what she went through is a million times worse than what I did. What makes me feel connected to her is not common experience. What makes me feel connected to her is her ability to turn anger into action. We both had this stewing rage within us and she was able to build the platform, that I was looking for, on her own. I also plan to make use of my anger, but I don't know how yet. What I know is that I have only begun to fight, that my generation has only begun to fight. I am ready, no, I have been ready to take on the establishment and to make all the anger and pain worth it.

---



---

# The Band on My Wrist

Luke Hopkins

For the past four years, every single time I looked down at my left wrist, I had seen the

bracelet. It was navy blue, worn and tattered, loose from wear with fading words that were no longer legible. I hadn't taken it off since April of 2015, when my grandfather pressed it into my palm one of the nights I came home from the hospital in desolation. Wiping the tears from my eyes, I read the bold white font encircling the band. Back then it read "HOPSTRONG," a play on my family's last name. Our community had assembled to design the bracelet following my father's accident. It was their way of reminding my family that we needed to be strong -- that I needed to be strong, and somehow, I convinced myself the bracelet represented that strength.

So I never took it off. What I didn't know, though, was that the bracelet was not what defined my strength, I was. This realization comes later on as it completely changes my view on the idea of being "strong" and what the meaning of this navy blue bracelet was.

I was wearing that navy bracelet the day I first saw my dad in the hospital, his bandaged body covered in third-degree burns, as the doctor told my mom and her four children that their father would probably never walk again. The repetitive beeping of the hospital machines as the words slowly flowed from the lips of the doctor rang my ears as I stood there in shambles. It was fastened to my wrist as I held on to my dad in physical therapy, his arm draped over my shoulders, holding back tears as I encouraged him to stand for the first time. I remember reaching



down and touching the words the day my mom opened the front door, allowing my dad to finally walk into his own home. Seeing his radiant smile as I made eye contact with him resulted in an immediate outbreak of tears and laughter as I embraced my father and promised to never let go.

I wore that navy bracelet the first time I adorned a football helmet and the first time I was handed a rugby ball. Through the toil of every workout, the intensity of every practice, the fervor of every victory and the dejection of every defeat, I felt the band clasped upon my wrist. I was still wearing that bracelet in January of my junior year when I was elected captain of the football team as well as in June when I received the same honor for rugby.

I wore that navy bracelet the night my brother tried to kill himself, a traumatizing moment that suspended my life and fractured my family. I clutched it to my chest when I visited him in the psychiatric ward for the first time, fumbling for words of comfort and condolence, grasping desperately for some sense in the tumultuous world I had been cast into. But then I remember that bracelet clearly the day I handed him the comic book I had created based on his favorite childhood cartoon, watching his face illuminate with joy and life as he gave new meaning to mine.

I wore that bracelet through every triumph, every failure, and every instance I needed strength throughout my life. It became the beacon of my progress, the emblem of my maturation as an individual throughout the struggles I faced and the challenges I overcame. While at first I attempted to derive resolve from the bracelet, I found myself relying entirely upon it. The bracelet gave me the strength I didn't have.

And then I broke it.

As I held the torn band, I came to the most important realization I have reached in my life. Even without the bracelet, I was still the person I had become. I was still my brother's best friend, the captain of two sports teams, the son of a crippled man I would come to accept as my father. I still persevered, I still fought tirelessly for my goals, and I still had the determination to stand after every game and every obstacle. After all that I have lost and all that I have gained, I can finally

say that I am proud of the person I have become -- something I have never been able to say before. This self-acceptance has inspired me not only to continue respecting the inner resolve I have found, but also to help others see the strength they possess as well. Everyone is capable of overcoming, everyone is capable of learning how to love themselves, and I intend to show them how, with or without that navy blue bracelet.

The solidity of our own beings are often times concealed within ourselves as we saunter through our simple days. The moments when people find out how strong they truly are come in times of great pain and dejection. As opposed to waiting for a tragedy to occur in order to push yourself to be strong, realize the being you are and your own capabilities. Through all those moments of pain, sadness, and struggle, that blue bracelet was slung on my left wrist. When it came down to it, though, the bracelet might have broken, but these absolutely life-shaping moments never broke me or my strength. After everything my family and I have been through, we are still standing today whether is be with or without that blue bracelet. As human beings, we are not defined by our own actions; rather, we are defined by the way in which we react to situations. Realize your strength and never live another day without acknowledging it.





# The Freedom of Reaction

Patrick Kelly

There are three images that I would like to present you with of Chris McCandless, rather than just rambling on with a strung out description of his character arc from youth to death, full of all the adventures and mishaps in between. Image one is a young man in running shorts waving his arms about wildly as he jumps from a rock into the water of the Grand Canyon. Image two focuses on a young man, perched on a rock with a book in his hands (probably Thoreau or London if I had to guess) reading, while occasionally looking up at his wild surroundings with a distinct reverence for what it is he gazes upon. The third image of this young traveler, is of a man standing atop a mountain with arms outstretched beside him and the Alaskan wilderness spread out beneath him.

These three images of McCandless, along with many others, are probably the three images any psychologist—or anyone who’s ever spoken to me after I’ve (a) watched “Into the Wild,” (b) read some of my Annie Dillard essays, or (c) thumbed through some Thoreau—might tell me are just the romanticized images of a wanderlust filled young man who threw away his future. Those same people might even go so far as to argue that he is not in fact some warrior for inner peace in the modern world, or a man brave enough to take his life into his own hands and rip open the gift of nature. That gift he rips open is of utmost importance, as it grants him the freedom to place himself somewhere where he can just live simply, day to day, in a way in which he can purely react to the world around him in the most ancient of fashions.

I am not ignorant to the fact that McCandless had many flaws, and I am far from taking the steps he took to commit to a life of his intensity. Yet there is an ele-

ment of his life who's pull I simply can not seem to escape. There seems to be a part of his existence that I often feel is lacking in my own and that is his complete freedom. In my eyes, McCandless has access to the ultimate freedom. He was able to leave the corruptive chains of society behind, and move himself into a world in which only laws as ancient as Father Time himself governed—the Alaskan Wilderness. Chris was able to place himself into a place where he could become the hero of many men trapped in lives of falsities they despise, by allowing himself only the raw essentials and living on a day to day bases reacting to each kiss and punch Mother Nature tossed at him.

The raw style of life lived by McCandless is the kind I find myself deeply pulled towards. I am not sure entirely where the craving for the freedom represented by McCandless comes from, but I know there is a beauty in its simplicity as it allows one to shed their chains of society and as Chris would say “find [oneself] at least once in the most ancient of human conditions . . . and come out on top.” So it comes in moments like the ones in which I am hiking to what is affectionately known as “The Church” and I feel myself slogging along, skis on shoulder, “Promise” by Ben Howard playing out of my coat pocket, that I feel I am living with the freedom and simplicity of Chris McCandless. I trudge along and am actually able to take in the snow laden pines of the side-country of Lincoln Peak mountain, and they seem to offer clues in regards to living truly well. But it is only in the moment where you stand atop the cliff over the mountains spread out before you, in a setting that may quite well resemble one he often found himself in, that the full effect of Chris' freedom makes itself, in hindsight, at home in my brain.

I feel I am poised to fling myself through the air, landing potentially off balance on the snow below, before wildly dancing through the low hanging pine trees that seem to guard the entrance to the couloir below. This is when that staple McCandless freedom comes. It comes when I am far away from the calls of life at home or with friends, and for a split second I am reacting to what I am throwing myself towards, and what is at the same time (in accordance with Newton's third law) throwing itself back at me. This freedom comes from a blankness of the mind, can only be felt every once in a while, and really is a blessing from nature. Mother Nature is willfully giving us access to her freedom, and to—as cliché as it



sounds—step outside of our heads and let our bodies work to protect themselves and survive in the most ancient and instinctual way possible.

I am not entirely sure if the chasing of this free sensation was a component of his journey or just something I may have infused with him in my mind based on my own experiences following his example. However Chris knew the importance of “not necessarily [being] strong, but [feeling] strong” which I feel may allow one the freedom and confidence to place their moral codes above those of society’s, aligning them with those beautiful feelings that nature imbues in us. What’s more, is it seems to me that Chris calls us to use our fleeting moments of freedom attained in those states of reaction and put it to good use, so that we may “have the courage to turn against [our] habitual [lifestyles] and engage in unconventional living.” Hopefully in holding that advice close, I can satiate the part of my soul that yearns for a deep connection to nature: and in turn lead a life that is lead purely, with just motives, while holding a deep reverence towards the beauty in the natural world which is being offered down to me.



# On Snow and Discovery

Andrew Rios

I reached the summit. The wind whips my face. The condensation from my breath freezes on my goggles. While many would call this seemingly infinite view breathtaking, it gives me breath. I look at the trek I have taken to get to where I am now, but instead of appreciation for the journey, I am filled with anticipation for what is to come. It is hard to identify how I feel except for being satisfied. There is a mixture of both ecstasy and something else, something deeper. Something that strikes a chord within the very depths of my being. But my anticipation has reached its boiling point, and off I go, thinking of nothing but the swish of my skis.

For a long time this feeling and its relationship to skiing has eluded me. I have always recognized its presence, but only semi-consciously, and frankly, did not care enough to address it. However, upon setting off on a path for self discovery and becoming enthralled with philosophy, I have come to a conclusion.

I am at the precipice and need to make a choice. Two trails lay in front of me: one which is groomed but steep and the other off in the woods—untouched and unknown. Both reach the same end, but the journey differs. The former is shorter yet more exhilarating; the latter is more dangerous yet unventured. I feel alone with nothing but the infinite blanket of snow beneath my skis, yet in this solitude I find solace. Once again this same feeling returns to me. The choice becomes clear: I befriend the woods and set off into the unknown.

I now have come to identify the reason why a simple sport can resonate with my soul.



It is because while my interests vary from making films to building homes, from physics to philosophy, the one constant, the unifying characteristic in all of these interests is my yearning to explore and think without boundaries. The contentment I feel when entering the glades stems from the same curiosity I have in my learning. This desire to discover correlates to my thirst for knowledge. There is no one area or one subject that defines me, for I am truly fulfilled when exploring as many as possible.

Within the canopy of trees, my ecstasy has peaked. There is no moment more beautiful than feeling swallowed by the woods. The trees brush off the sun's penetrating rays. The sound of my skis is the only noise heard. I feel absolute solitude, yet this realization scares me a little. I know my friends are only a few seconds behind me, but the feeling still lingers. However, along with this isolation, the indescribable feeling returns. It compels me to stop and lay down in the snow. In this moment I feel liberated. For a second, I forget about everything and embrace this sensation. I realize as I look up at the canopy while internally looking into my soul what this feeling is—harmony. Just then my friends arrive. Without saying a word, without needing to, they lie down beside me, and without exactly knowing what this moment is, we enjoy it together. I feel fulfilled in a way I did not think was possible.

Ultimately, this harmony derives from my realization of being my own person. Just as I felt in the woods, I also feel when I am discussing philosophy with my friends, creating a video, or learning in the classroom. Regardless of the trail I take, this journey of self-discovery is one that I look forward to continuing.

Rising from the snow's embrace, I see the setting sun glistening through the branches. While this day has come to a close, I realize it yields another adventure with more of the mountain left to explore.

---



# Adhesive Storybook

Brian Rooney

Some may look at the back of an old Volvo station wagon, and upon seeing the myriad of faded bumper stickers, think, as one classmate put it, that it looks like his “grandma’s wagon from her hippie days in the 60’s.” But what I see is a family history played out in initials, acronyms, and silhouettes adhered to a green bumper. I see that our memorable experiences can completely change and shape our perceptions of even the simplest things.

For twenty one years, this green Volvo has accumulated stickers from vacations, favorite stores, and shared experiences. Each addition to the bumper has its own unique story to tell. What may look like a disorganized collection to others, is the retelling of some of my happiest memories, such as a hard-earned “CTHK” sticker from the island of Cuttyhunk, MA. During one of the many sailing vacations that my family has shared, this particular sticker was retrieved from the only store on the island, inhabited by just seventy people during the summer months. These four letters remain imprinted in my mind as a day of true joy shared with my family. These seemingly nonsensical, random letters arranged in a retelling of a happy event prove the power of happy memories to shape our world view.

Yet another memorable feature remains tied to the headrest, hanging over the back of the front seat. This, to most, may look like a dirty piece of string, yet in fact, is a wish string. Hung from its permanent home in the days when my dad drove, and my siblings and I sat in the back, before I could even remember, this string holds special powers. Our family legend maintains that it was this string that was responsible for snow in the middle of summer, after my brother and sister wished for an unseasonable change in weather. Because of this event, and several



others, this string has hung in glory for well over two-hundred thousand more miles of the story. Perception is clearly altered by experience; my fond memories have shaped my view of what others may see as odd, faded artifacts. These artifacts have become a daily reminder to me of all of our family adventures.

What we happen to see in something is formed entirely from our past experiences, our happiest memories, or our worst ordeals. It is interesting how our perception of something can be so different from one another's as a result of our past experiences of something, perhaps only remotely related. The stickers on my car immediately bring me memories of "that time when..." This reaction may differ greatly from someone who has never felt pride in the Fairfield Prep crew team, or taken a trip to Block Island. To my family, who has experienced both, each of these stickers serve as chapters in an adhesive storybook.

Thankfully, this story continues, as more stickers appear on that faded green bumper. From family trips to the Maritime Aquarium, represented on the side window, to multiple Prep-related stickers, eventually to higher institutions of learning, attended by each of my siblings. Each sticker, proudly placed, provoking a memory for my family. I am proud to continue the story and to add my own miles to the family car, just as my parents and siblings did before me. I have gone from a baby seat to the driver seat in our station wagon, and this has made me content with its sixty mile per hour top speed, and its "old car smell," and especially, its many bumper stickers. Because I see this car differently.



# Restaurant Heroes

Sean Seiler

I rush through the damp city streets, my eye on the time and my feet in high gear. It's a Thursday night in February and I'm late for work; my train succumbed to the fresh layer of ice that is covering the city. As I push through the back door to my uncle's restaurant, I clock in quickly and hustle towards the back of the dining room. I am met by a constant flow of waiters, full dishes and drinks in hand, as they exit the kitchen. Busboys lug piles of dirty plates, silverware, and empty glasses back to the sinks. I can already tell it's busier than usual, which means that it will be a long night for a dishwasher such as myself. Sighing, I open the door to the bustling kitchen and make my way over to my station. As I approach, I see one of my co-workers, Rafi, already hard at work. "Nice of you to show up," he says, smiling at me. Grabbing an apron, I counter with my own sly remark. I have a chin-high pile of work at home and, as I rinse the remnants of food from our patrons' plates, I start counting down the hours until I will be back home and in my bed.

Since the start of high school, I have been working at my uncle's New York City restaurant, a traditional Irish pub in midtown Manhattan. The restaurant was passed down to my uncle and my mother from my grandfather who, despite being an immigrant with no formal education, was able to buy the building and start his own business. Surprisingly, I'm the only one out of my three brothers to ask for a job.

Working in a family business means I go where I am needed. If the kitchen is busy, I can



be found prepping for the chef, peeling potatoes or scrubbing pots and loading the dishwasher. I have cleaned the bathrooms and been directed to wipe down all the glass in the restaurant. This past summer, I graduated to wait staff, where I am the first impression that a customer has of their dining experience. While some might think I get preferential treatment (since I do know the owner), the opposite is true. I'm managed by the senior staff, who are full time employees. When they holler, I mop, scrub, and pick up broken glass. Restaurant work is teamwork and, in order to succeed here, I must be part of the team.

In between my less than glamorous assignments, I keep up the banter with Rafi, one of my coworkers with whom I've formed a close relationship during my three years at the restaurant. Rafi, along with many of the employees, is a Mexican immigrant (much like my grandfather who came to New York from Ireland). Every employee, regardless of their position, work long hours at least six days a week. Some even work second jobs to help provide for their families. Rafi is a perfect example of the immigrant mentality as he is one of my uncle's most trusted and valued employees. He simultaneously manages maintains long work hours and responsibilities while also taking classes at a city college in the hopes of becoming an engineer. Needless to say, if I need an assist with my science homework, Rafi is my man.

The work isn't easy; for one thing, no matter your role, you can count on being on your feet all the time. And as a waiter, it's even more important to be on my toes. I'm often racing the clock, memorizing the daily rotation of specials. Customers can be demanding and it's important to remain calm and patient. On duty, I've developed a sense of how service workers are treated in our fast-paced culture and it is, at times, very disheartening.

In the kitchen crew, I have developed a heightened sense of what it means to want so

badly to make it in this country. I'm inspired by my co-workers and it's their respect I seek more than that of my customers (though I do want them to like me!). They have truly showed me what it means to be hard-working. Despite the many obstacles they have faced, they still seem to manage their hectic lives. It's for that

reason that I try to show up early and stay until the last light is turned off. For their approval and camaraderie, I mop up the messes and volunteer to take out the trash.

I've had the privilege of having many great mentors and role models growing up in Darien: those successful in business, those who are incredible athletes, those who are dedicated to community. But, as I head out of the restaurant and into the night, I know I'm leaving the best examples at the restaurant door. These are the people who have overcome some of the greatest obstacles in life, yet are still grateful for every opportunity they receive and even spare some time to help some kid with his science homework.





# Chanting the Mantra

Aryaman Sharma

A tear pushed itself through my eyelid as my uncle, from the opposite end of the bedroom, beckoned to me. He smiled warmly, yet his radiating grin did not resonate with me. As my feet shuffled across the grimy carpet, each step increased my emotional burden and enlarged the apparent abyss I was staring into. I was stressed — immensely. More tears trickled down my cheek as I sat down. My uncle flung his arms around my back, firmly hugging me. He then wiped my tears with his shirt. I inhaled heavily through my sobs, but I finally mustered strength and disclosed what was troubling me. He then told me to meditate. Confused, I reluctantly closed my eyes. He instructed me to imagine a ball slowly plummet through the air, enveloping my head and filling my body with energy. I envisioned the ball and chanted the mantra “Om,” the most sacred word in Hinduism. Ten minutes later, he told me to open my eyes. The abyss had vanished; light was now flooding the room; the stress faded away. I matched my uncle’s radiating grin and beamed at the man who had just changed my life.

The help my uncle provided two summers ago was not the first time he guided me. The summer before, I spent two weeks with him and his family in India, yet I was afflicted with stress then as well. There was one particular evening when my uncle came home from work and could tell something was bothering me. He took me aside, but I was too stressed to even speak to him. He finally ordered me to go out into the yard. My younger cousins were running around gleefully, playing together. The grass, hugged by the wind, swayed without limit. The subtle scent of incense emitting from a nearby alter pervaded the surroundings. My cousins kept calling out “Bhaiya,” Hindi for “older brother.” The urge to play with them over-

came my gloominess. Nature's beauty hauled me into the yard like breeze forcing a piece of paper to float in the air.

After teaching me meditation, my uncle left. As he got into the car, I recalled a moment a few days earlier when my dad drove us both to New Hampshire. As the car zoomed through the highway, my uncle rolled down the window and laughed like a maniac. Initially, I wondered if he had gone insane, yet as I saw the car pull out of the driveway and waved goodbye, I realized he was doing what he was best at — enjoying his life.

There is no doubt that I am an intense student. I admit there are still times when I stress myself out from an overwhelming workload, but the blessing of receiving my uncle's counsel is a reminder that the best things in life stretch beyond stress, beyond academics. He taught me to break out of my routine and meditate. He taught me the importance of spending time with family. He even taught me (once in a blue moon) to just stick my head out of the car window and let go of everything.



# A Short Guide to Avoid Bears and Writer's Block

Ben Short

My Saturday cross-country practices are "run-on-your-own days." They're glorious except when I get lost and start envisioning a bear behind every tree, waiting to devour me. I'm sure there's no breakfast as scrumptious as a cross-country runner. Last October, I drove to my neighboring park, finished my coffee, and stretched at the trailhead. There's silence in the morning that combines with my repetitive footsteps along the forest floor. It's a simple fulfillment that's contrary to a stressful week. It's decompression. My only responsibility is breathing and landing my feet between the roots and rocks.

This particular Saturday was perfect. It was sunny yet cold enough to see my breath, and the forest smelled like dried leaves and pine needles. I immediately entered a flow as I ran. I took new paths, but after thirty minutes I realized I was lost. I didn't recognize the landscape or the specific trail, and as with anything foreign, a largely irrational fear began. A bear was hiding at every corner. I swear I've never run so fast to find the path.

That Saturday run is my memory's best anecdote to describe creative writing. Euphoric moments exist when I'm creating a story, especially when I write about real events through the guise of fictitious characters. It's like a secret code that only I can decipher. Running and writing give me distance from high school's hectic pace, and I practice both everyday - writing, admittedly, is more difficult to maintain. But like running, I get lost when I write. While there are often high praises for creativity, there's almost no discussion about just how challenging it is.

I underestimated this difficulty my sophomore year when I decided to write a book. For the first time, I realized there are more ways to perceive the world than



how society dictates; mainstream thought and entertainment aren't the only perspectives through which to see the world. I doubted the Catholic faith in which I was raised, and my childhood friends began spending time with new people. I desperately needed an outlet. I wrote anecdotes about a teenager named Wilder who had thick blond hair with glasses, loved the woods, and felt isolated in the world. I wrote every day - sometimes at the expense of homework - and I slowly began melding stories to create chapters. I had a path for Wilder. Using Salinger as my influence, Wilder was going to run away from his boarding school and live on his own terms.

After months of writing, however, I was lost with Wilder's arc. He ran away, but I had no solution to his loneliness. My own problems were embedded in Wilder - I was fearful of expressing loneliness to my closest friends. Future chapters became blank documents. Sometimes I lose direction because I don't know which choices to make. Whether it's crafting a character's arc or running a trail, it can be difficult knowing which direction to go.

On that Saturday morning, I rediscovered the path by stopping to collect myself and noticing a trail sign. After months of writing, I finished a one-hundred-and-seventy-eight page novel. I

named it *Pieces of the Moon*, ate a celebratory caramel cupcake, and realized that writing itself gives me clarity. I finished the draft with Wilder returning to his school, and like Wilder, I began opening up to the people closest to me. I held conversations with my friends where I expressed loneliness, and we exchanged similar experiences. To feel connections with others, I need an outlet to reconnect with myself. Both writing and running give me that space. I can feel my insecurities and doubts on trails or with a notebook, but I also connect with my beliefs and values. While I can look at a map to navigate a run, writing is the means that I discover my path.



# In a Realm of My Own

Evan Small

I am a slave to routine. I live my life, one day after another, bonded by the need for structure. I have never felt a passionate urge to defy the structure that has been both internally and externally imposed upon myself. In more ways than one, I live a life absent of liberation. The fear of the unknown has forced me to accept and even desire a strict routine that both fulfills my daily tasks and satisfies the aesthetic desires of my mind. In a life defined by responsibility, namely familial and educational, my own spiritual liberation exists beyond this realm of common life; it exists in a realm of my own—the ski mountain.

My life is defined by routine. It is fundamentally rooted in a “get-up, work, and sleep” culture—a culture that I have willingly become a part of. Yet within that adherence to routine, there has always been a part of me that yearns for a more freeing experience, one outside this artificial state of order. The ski mountain, and skiing in particular, has always offered me a world of freedom beyond my everyday life. Perhaps the best illustration of this was my learning to ski before I could even walk properly. The beauty, the passion, the rush—I am accustomed to them all; however, as my adolescence has progressed, I have come to learn that skiing is so much more than hurtling your body down a slope at inhuman speeds.

This epiphany brings me back to my early childhood at Okemo Mountain. I was only nine and the rain ceased to stop as the ominous clouds hovered above. I looked up at the barren mountain, hoping to see at least one living person getting their money’s worth of that one-hundred dollar ticket—yet, I saw nothing but a mountain. The day was seemingly lost; the joy of skiing, I had once believed, came from being in the presence of others, overcoming a sense of self-imposed iso-

lation. Yet, as I looked up at this mountain, absent of life, I ignorantly turned my back and headed towards what I knew best—the structured routine of my daily life.

It is in these times of reflection that I often ask the question: how? How did I not see it. Was I too young? Had I lacked the experiential pain and failure necessary to understand? How did I not realize that my own joy and pleasure from skiing has never come from the people I was with?

I failed to realize that the jubilation of skiing came from the purity of its artistic nature—feeling as though one has broken free of societal constraints, become one with the elements and unleashed their most suppressed primordial self. On that day, I failed to realize that skiing is freedom and freedom, if you will, is my own earthly salvation.

Perhaps it is the unknown element of skiing that liberates me from my current status. Soaring down the face of a mountain, each new turn creates a different path and thus, a different future. Skiing creates a world absent of predictability, where snow conditions and weather patterns create the unpredictable—the very opposite of human routine. It is in skiing, that I feel reborn.

I've escaped society and all its limitations, entering into a realm of my own desired isolation. The words of Aristotle offer valuable insight into my own desire for solitude, to a certain extent. "Whoever is delighted in solitude is either a wild beast or a God," he once said. Humanity in itself, desires the very opposite of seclusion. We are bonded by our inability to stand alone and thus, our society is one made up of no wild beasts or Gods, it is made up of sheep. Skiing is an art that allows me to become one with the world around me. And there is an immense power in that unity. Soaring down a mountain, at incredible speeds, I feel that I have almost transcended my human self. It is within these brief moments of solitude that I no longer am a wild beast; it is within these moments that I am finally in control of my life and future, existing in a realm of solitude as the God of my own person.

I vividly recall my most recent moment on a mountain face, making my way from the wind-gusted summit, a place of resurrection, to the base, a place of societal restraint and routine. As I slowly began to push my idle body off of the snow-



covered butte, all of the pressure, stress, and emotions began to fade. I slowly began to feel at one with the world around me. It was in this moment that I felt a connection to my ancestors, and to the primordial world itself. As I sent myself off the crested butte, I could feel myself drawing closer and closer to the mound of powdered snow that awaited me on the ground. I could no longer be governed by routine and I was no longer bonded by societal limitations: I was liberated; I was free.

I still am governed by my dependence on routine—we all are. It provides us with structure and order, such qualities that I, nor any human, can live without. Yet, as I sit in those classrooms, in

that car, or at that desk, I am taken back to the ski mountain. I am taken back to moments of spiritual and mental liberation—to the moments of solitude that free me to live.