



The Bellarmine Review

Spring 2020, Volume 80

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We desire to publish poetry and prose that is: clear, concise, and evokes the senses, taking the audience to the writer's imagined place through strong images, and a good sense of rhythm. It is believed in Jesuit education that an academic endeavor may be an encounter with the divine: *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 an accomplished venue to acknowledge their lived truth.

Colophon

The text of this book is composed in Footlight MT Light, with accented text in italicized Times New Roman. The typeface used for the cover is Perpetua.

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Forward

This year's Short Story Contest guest-judge is Eugenia Kim. Her most recent novel, *The Kinship of Secrets* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018). Her debut novel, *The Calligrapher's Daughter*, won the 2009 Borders Original Voices Award, was shortlisted for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, and was a critics' pick by The Washington Post. Her stories have appeared in *Asia Literary Review*, *Washington City Paper*, *Raven Chronicles*, and elsewhere.



A note to all finalists:

The writing in these stories is excellent, captivating, each with its own personality in voice. The originality is striking, and the use and specificity of detail in each story is remarkable. I was particularly impressed by the application of fiction to explore gradations of human circumstance, the character-driven narratives, and how these writers developed individual story situations into universal themes.

Winner

“*Requiescence*” by Jack Colabella

This richly descriptive story of a ghastly yet also naturally gorgeous dystopian future, told from the point of view of the world’s creator, captured me with its competent voice, lyrical writing, and poetic juxtapositions. Short in length, it is intricately detailed yet sweeping in its reach, and inventive in its approach. The tone is contemplative, a tonality that is harmonious to the action, imagery, and the theme. The story is complete, self-contained, and the title is perfect.

Finalists (alphabetical)

“*The King of America*” by Joe Altieri

As a critical element of historically based fiction, precise attention to detail about the setting and visuals of this story bring it into engrossing focus for me. Use of simile is strong and original, and goes far to enhance the apt snapshots of a distinctively and lovingly described time and place, fully encompassing the grittiness of the ship, the trials of the journey, and the ironic and ultimate sadness of the ending.

“*A Bookcase Odyssey*” by Ryan Davis

The appealing edge of humor in the descriptions in this story, and its sharp sense of detail, especially of smells—one of the senses often ignored in writing—went far to engage me with this narrator’s observant odyssey, whose benchmark of safety and constancy is the library. The contrast of his illiteracy with his love of libraries is an original twist, and the occasional use of second person draws the reader in.

“The Dance of the Stars” by David Jaworowski

The lush prose and nuanced detail of this story enhance the characterization of an elderly man who falls on ice, resists, and then comes to embrace his death in a stunning display of acceptance. First person was the appropriate choice to explore this moment, allowing intricate scrutiny of a simple action that culminates in a rare and moving splendor.

“Act Five, Scene One” by Ben Short

This story introduced me to the heart and psyche of Henry, with whom I became deeply involved by use of internal monologue and an increasingly complicated description of the deceptively simple action of waiting for the Downtown 4 train. The story takes a slim slice of Henry’s life, and by considering what he hears, sees, feels, and thinks in these few minutes, intriguingly explores the depths of story available to an observant writer within such a short moment of a character’s life.

Short Stories

Requiescense

Jack Colabella '21

It is nearly sunrise, and the world knows peace. A short but sweet moment of solace in a scarred landscape. The birds sing merry tunes, and the bats fly into their caves. The rabbits gleefully emerge from their burrows, and the raccoons enter theirs. The deer graze in the fields and the wolves hunker down with their pack. The leaves rustle in the wind. The world is alive with beautiful, serene melodies, and it is times like these where I truly feel proud of my work. The radiance of nature overpowers all else, until a distant engine hums as its treads imprint themselves in the soil below.

The ominous droning travels across the land, but what was once a cause for dread is now a part of the mundane routine. The bulky metal box is carried through the mud on its seemingly invincible treads. Rainwater drips off of the barrel, and, with rudimentary automation and power derived from the sun, it moves to its designated location to wage a war that ended years ago. The hefty machine, which was once a ferocious weapon, is now more akin to a coffin. A coffin for dead pawns fighting a war for dead kings. The rough terrain and the stirring of the engine cause the bones in the crew's cabin to rattle intensely. Every outing causes another emaciated appendage to be dislodged from one of the decayed torsos. The drab military garments just barely hold the remains together. Of the five bodies, only two still possess legible dog tags. One reads, Arnold J. Fitzgerald, and the other, Howard T. Sullivan. One of the pockets in Arnold's fatigues is torn open to reveal a faded picture of a wife and a baby girl, who have also been reduced to bones, somewhere else in the world, a long way from their dear Arnold.

The deer, and the birds, and the rabbits hear the purr of the metallic man-made denizen, and they flee to safety, as they do everyday, at the same time, in the same place, for the same reason. The barrel explodes with tremendous force as a solid steel shell is plunged into the crater that stands before it. The same crater that was hit yesterday, and the day before, and the day before. The coffin then moves on to its next crater, and nature resumes

its daily music of life. As the coffin chugs along, there is a whistling in the distance. The ear piercing hiss comes from a bomb dropped in the same spot, at the same place, by the same sets of bones, as yesterday, and the day before, and the day before.

High in the sky, the bones rattle even more than down below, and the constant erosion of the pawns in the cockpit have reduced them to little more than organic rubble. It would be a lost cause to search for the identity of these sorry souls. Unfortunate for them, that the decay is the only thing that does not reset by the day's end. The great metal bird, filled with bones that aren't its own, continues to decimate the earth with no help from its pilots, whose days of piloting have long since come to an end. Luckily, the unknown soldiers in the cockpit don't seem to be quick to boredom. These routines of life and destruction go on and on, almost entirely unchanging, but there are occasional breaks in the monotony. The great metal bird in the sky succumbs to time, just as its crew did, and it plummets to the earth, just as its bombs do. However, the deer and the rabbits and the birds are not aware of the break in routine, and the great metal bird reduces everything in its path to ashes as the metal is morphed and bent into a jagged wreckage.

Humanity, my most intelligent creation. My most accomplished creation. My most arrogant creation. My most dangerous creation. Still finding ways, so many years after extinction, to disrupt my peace and snuff out the life around it. But time and nature reclaims all, and soon all the routines will come to an end, and the scarred earth will be healed. The deer will continue to graze, and the rabbits will continue to hop, and the birds will continue to sing.

The Dance of the Stars

David Jaworowski '21

My cerulean irises looked out over the steadily dimming field. The shadows of the afternoon sun began to subside, and became replaced with a more complete darkness throughout the landscape. I steadily craned my neck, and the cranium at the apex of my body tilted upwards to acknowledge the beauty of the sky as it found its way into slumber. Within the evening of the winter day, stars would already be finding themselves ruling over the civilizations of the earth, akin to the ferocious glowing of gilded crowns, and already giving light to a suddenly quiet and indiscernible surrounding.

I groaned, averting my eyes as my stiff neck voiced its concern through audible clicks and setting of my uppermost vertebrae. My left hand shakily raised to wipe away sweat from my forehead, as well as itching at my nostrils before lowering it. The right grip I held on my cane only tightened as I exerted the effort, my lips pursing themselves to release a coveted exhale from exasperation. An exhaustion began to take over my aging body, my head beginning to shiver in a shaking that I could not cease. *I'll be alright*, my mind thought as I swiveled slightly to look back at the beginning of the field I traveled into, *but why am I here?* My Lexus RX 350 sat on the edge of the road, a good ways from my current position. *Perhaps I should sit down and rest for a moment, I concluded.*

Ultimately, there was not a bench in sight - and if there was one, the darkness of the world maintained its veil over my gaze. But, the exhaustion continued. My legs were shaky, my body commanding the strength of the cane as it began to give in. Slowly, albeit shakily, I stepped forward. My foot found no traction, befriending ice as I slipped. I was only halfway to the ground when I lost my grip on the cane, the rod dropping when my posterior hit the ice. With demanding intensity, pain soared throughout my anatomy. A yelp es-

caped my lips, but there was no one around to hear it. In my newfound torment, my back slowly began to lose the ability to remain upright, and I was now laying on the cold, frosted ground of the winter night. The eyes that were just examining my surroundings were now squinted shut as I struggled with the pain enthralling my consciousness.

I rolled back and forth, attempting to bring my elderly hands to my hip to comfort the injury. This was to no avail, as any sense of adrenaline was destroyed with age long ago. *No, no, no, no, no*, I thought rapidly, *this is not the end, please no - God, no. God. God.* I began to whimper, this state of deprivation overcoming any sense of self-worth and pride that I may have clung onto beforehand. The irony dripping in my thoughts was not unfounded, I realized while I began to recognize the helplessness of my situation. Only now, on the border of thoughtlessness and the hooded vale of death did I pray to a forlorn God that I had scorned my entire life. If I could laugh it would be palpable, despite the obscene nature of the moment.

I am too old for this, the evident truth began to take hold. While the pain of my unknown injury became numbing and constant, the ancient lids that were situated on my features opened up. Those two bright irises revealed themselves to the open air, crystal clear tears streaming down the side of my face and only multiplying as I blinked them away. I stared directly into the sky above me, tracing over the formations that the archaic, heavenly bodies created with their illuminating light. Despite the age of those formations, they seemed to dance in my blurring vision. A duo of lights would spin around each other, twirling to the beautiful and alluring music of the sky, and my worries fell away into nothingness. The world faded around me, a dark curtain settling as the existence I contemplated was nothing more than those dancing lights. Any sense of loneliness was missing from my thoughts, because despite the emptiness of space, the stars still danced among one another.

My will began to weaken, the only movement I felt was the constant shivering of my body. Every time I blinked, it took longer to open my eyes. But, when I did, the stars danced more. They seemed to multiply, coming together to put on a performance to entertain me. How wonderful, my fading thoughts spoke, that they would do all of this just for me! A yearning overpowered my emotions, a need to be with them. Surely, if they are willing to entertain me with such intensity, I would be able to join them.

And so, I called out. No words seemed to come from my lips, only an indiscernible whimpering groan of a dying man. But, I think, they seemed to understand! The lights continued to multiply and expand itself over my vision, until any semblance of the dark that the night should have provided disappeared into a burning white. The stars, in their exhilarating dance, accepted my wish with elation. That aforementioned music of the world remained, but now, I was able to dance to it alongside the lights.

The King of America

Joe Altieri '22

March fourteenth, 1922, on board the Vita Nuova. A dusty, rusty piece of floating metal departing from Ostia, Rome, tasked with a twenty day sail to New York City, and filled with people hoping for a new beginning in the land where all can be. Below decks was a vast room, accessible only through one hatch, above which hung the sign "Resting Hall". It was no more than a place where people stood, usually smoking cigarettes, or sat idle on their suitcases. Many of the Italians stared at the great, majestic, empty ocean out of the small portholes that ran from bow to stern of the old vessel. Some laughed, children ran around playing tag, old ladies prayed the rosary, others tried to hide their sea-sickness, while the most, as is the Italian way, enlarged the whole ordeal by theatrically coughing and moaning. Yet there were some poor souls, amid the large and clumped-up mass of people, who were truly affected, sadly for them, there were only two restrooms in the resting hall and comfort nor rest would they find, not at any rate until their brief stop in Lisbon.

Toward the boat's stern a young, slender, brown haired, short Italian boy stood looking into the nothing. He was leaning on an opened porthole, one of his arms resting on the wall, the other supporting his chin. He wore a white, now almost grey shirt, and a green wool vest, his trousers were of good making, yet had seen better days, and his brown shoes were nothing worthy of praise. His watery eyes were fixed on a letter he held in his right hand. He tried to hold the tears in, so much so that only an elderly lady sitting next to him acknowledged them. She sat on her leather suitcase, wearing a white dress, a blue hat with two white stripes running horizontally on it, and on her feet were shining white dance shoes. Her hands were resting on her oak-wood cane, which she was pressing hard, for an elderly woman that is, against the grey metal pavement. She was interested, if not troubled, by the boy's staid pensiveness.

The lady tapped him on his right shoulder with her cane. “Gioventù, I’m Gabriella, what troubles you?” she said. The boy seemed surprised, as if awakened from a long dream, he turned around, wiped his tears with his sleeve. “Pleased to meet you, Signora,” he said. “I am Giuseppe Lucano, and my letter troubles me. It’s from my father, but I can’t read it.” He stared at the floor. “You are very well spoken for a boy your age,” said the lady. “What are you, fifteen? Sixteen? Your mother must have done a good job.” When the boy lifted his face, a faint smile was on it. “I am thirteen, and you are right about my Mamma,” he said. “We didn’t have enough money for both of us to board the ship. She sent me. She said I would be better off in America with my father.” he added. The smile had left his face. “I’m sorry to hear that. Here, I will read you that letter if you want” she replied, extending her hand. The boy handed her the letter.

January 30, 1919

Dear kid,

It’s your Pa’ here, I’ve made it to New York.

I am not poor no more, I feel like the king of America!

And when you and your mother come here,

I’ll show you my castle, in Manhattan.

I love you dearly, send a kiss to your mother

And a hug to your grandmother.

Your loving father,

Davide, the king of America

“Thank you,” he said. “Now I think I can sleep” He sat on the floor, his back leaning against the hard, cold metal beneath the window, his knees were up to his chest, his arms were resting on them, he lowered his head and closed his eyes.

The following days were monotonous, made of conversations with Gabriella, long waits for the restrooms—in which were no showers—and more (mostly restless) sleep. He learned that Gabriella had worked as a seamstress in a shop near Salerno for over forty years, and that she was joining her husband and sons in New York. She didn't learn much of the boy, and their days were long.

On April third, 1922, the Vita Nuova finally harbored in New York. Most of the Italians were shepherds, cheese makers, or farmers, who had never even pictured the sight of a skyscraper, towering over all else like a rose in an ivy meadow. So, when their vessel finally arrived in the city, they were all on deck gaping at the New York skyline as if it were the eighth wonder of the world.

The people were left on Ellis Island, to pass the immigration controls. There, stood more than three thousand of them, most of whom had not showered for days, arranged in lines and squeezed as rats in a tight sewer. Gabriella and Giuseppe were together and, at length, it was their turn to be inspected. Gabriella gave the control-officer to understand that Giuseppe was her grandson. "Do you have any documents to prove that, Ma'am?" asked the officer. "No, I'm afraid not, Mr. Alcott," said Gabriella, reading the officer's name tag. "But can't you see he has my face?" Then a nearby guard replied "Yea, you all have the same face, skin like olives, and you're all named Tony, aren't you?"

"Shut up Jones!" shouted Alcott. "Pardon him, Ma'am, you may go." He stamped Gabriella's papers. "Next!" he yelled out. Before long Giuseppe and Gabriella boarded a boat to Whitehall terminal.

Waiting for his nephew at Whitehall was a stout Italian man wearing black shoes, old pantaloons, a white shirt and a coppola hat. His cigarette shone light on his dark, unshaven face. He saw people coming down the newly arrived boat and began to walk towards them. "Giuseppe it's me, Antonio, your Zio!" he yelled, waving his hat in the air.

The boy embraced Gabriella and gave her a kiss on the cheek. “Thank you,” he said, then turned and ran toward his uncle. Antonio and Giuseppe, both in tears, embraced for a long time. At last the boy’s uncle broke the silence.

“Who was that?” He asked, “Just my grandmother,” Giuseppe replied, impishly. “Come, I will take you to my house, you are in need of good rest and a shower. And you have a new aunt to meet,” said Antonio. “Thanks, uncle, this city is beautiful. I really liked the statue of the green woman holding a fire,” replied Giuseppe. “Where is my father, and when will I see him?” Antonio ceased smiling. He remained silent for some time.

“Your father,” he said at length “You’ll see him soon.” The boy nodded.

They kept walking for about half an hour, until they reached a small red building, four stories high. They entered and walked three flights of stairs into a one bedroom apartment. By the stove stood a beautiful brown-haired Italian woman. The aroma brought the boy back to his now far home. “You must be Giuseppe, I’m Veronica,” said the woman from the kitchen. “Yes I am, Zia” he said, yawning.

“I can see you’re exhausted, here, follow me” she said, pointing Giuseppe to a ready bed. He tucked himself in and closed his eyes. Before sleep took him, he heard his uncle speaking. “...It was all that damn smoke and fumes from the factory. I told him not to work so many extra hours, but, ‘No, I need the money for when Giuseppe and Maria arrive,’ he always said. I’ll take the boy to see him tomorrow” Giuseppe turned over and fell asleep.

The next morning was a beautiful one, the sun shone high, the sweet scent of newly reborn flowers prevailed against the smell of industry, and invaded Manhattan. Giuseppe rose from bed and walked to his uncle, they were both dressed and ready to leave. “Let’s go,” said Antonio. They walked two blocks to Saint John’s parish. “Behind the church is a small garden, at its end is a meadow. There is your father,” said Antonio, pointing at the building.

The boy ran, he passed the church and saw the garden. The air was sweet, but the boy's heart was rent. He walked towards a grave. The inscription read: Davide Lucano 1887-1922—*Hardworking friend, devoted husband and loving father.*

Giuseppe stood before his father's grave. He reached into his pocket and grabbed the letter he had received three years prior, tears dripping on it. Folding it into a crown — a trick Gabriella had taught him on the Vita Nuova — he placed it on the grave “Every king needs a crown,” he said. There, on a warm spring day in New York, the boy had found his Pa’.

He turned, a man, and began walking.

Act Five, Scene One

Ben Short '20

Across from the turnstile, nearing the edge of the platform, Henry looks back at the EXIT sign. The glow from the “N” is flickering, and Henry becomes deeply annoyed with the sign.

The frustration, he thinks, is an excuse to feel annoyed with his surroundings. A local train left three minutes ago, and Henry swiped the card to cross through the turnstile when the train stopped and the doors opened, but a strange feeling resented moving towards the train. Henry watched as people walked past him—or into him—as he stood motionless on the other side of the turnstile. He remained paralyzed until the doors closed and the train lurched forward, and Henry shamed himself for being so inefficient.

Henry waits for the express train to bring him downtown, but everything is late. Even the turnstile was delayed with other commuters when he came into the station. He looks back at the automated board that posts departures and arrivals, hoping for a change:

DOWNTON 4 TRAIN —7 MINUTES

Henry walks closer to the tracks and leans against a cement post. As he walks, his phone vibrates through his left khaki pocket and he forgets about the EXIT sign. Henry keeps his phone in the small pocket of his backpack once he’s left work (it’s to get away from the same technology that keeps him employed, he tells himself) but he was bored by five P.M and horny and the horniness was an ashamed horny feeling that came on Friday nights when he knew he’d be alone that night and probably use the internet. That feeling also came on Tuesdays. Between finishing emails, Henry set up a date on his phone, and she was responding.

Henry opened his phone. *1 New Messages From /lover-.30*

hi;) how r u?

Henry thinks about the flickering EXIT sign, and his frustration reappears. I'm good, he thinks. Well, maybe not good. But I'm not bad either. Everything's fine. It's just that I was given another assignment to finish this weekend that shouldn't be mine and my water filter broke so I need to buy all of my water bottled. Oh, and Dad called this morning and is sick and the subtext implied that it's somehow my fault and I needed to help him because Mom was useless again but I was already running late and needed to buy more bottled water so he hung up on me and I stayed fixated on him all day.

In his head, Henry wrote all of this. He decides, however, to slightly change his approach because his thoughts seem tasteless and being tasteless was the last thing he wants.

good! hbu

Henry sees that */lover-.30* is typing a response, and he gets excited. He's trying to focus on his apartment's condition and what he'll have to clean when he gets there. His apartment is a mess, and he didn't know if */lover-.30* was the type of person who resented people who kept their apartments dirty. As he focuses, Henry becomes aware of voices coming from the other side of the cement post. He hopes they'll move to another section, but they get closer to him.

Henry's frustration returns.

"Why donnya try music fow da job," says a man behind Henry.

"Mmmmmm mmmm mmmmmmm mm."

“Dats the same song you done yesday,” says the first man.

“So?” the second responds.

“So,” he starts, “don ya know sumfin else?”

Henry turns off his phone and listens to them, trying not to be seen. That’s the first rule down here: you can’t let people know you were interested; you could, however, subtly show interest. Henry slowly turns his head to look at the men. Besides the billboard advertisements are two men with MTA uniforms. The first has deep, hollow eyes that are brown. The second is slouched against the wall. The men are blocking the advertisement, and Henry retreats behind the cement post.

“Don complain ‘bout my choices,” says the sloucher, louder. “You ask for it.”

Henry’s phone is silent. He doesn’t care about the advertisement, or the men.

“Dis job is ridiculous,” says the brown-eyed man.

The sloucher nods. “But we gotta do it,” he responds.

The brown-eyed man takes rag and bottle from his pocket. “Cleaning ads fow da subway?” he asks. “Dat don’t seem stupid to you?”

“They putting in a new one,” says the sloucher. “After we clean here.”

The brown-eyed man shakes his head slowly, giving his partner a wry smile. “Look here,” he says. “Loot dat spot.” He points to a brown smudge across the bottom corner of the plastic. “As soon we gone, new spot gone show up. Next crew den gone show up and clean it an’so on.”

“We still got the job, though,” responds the sloucher.

The brown-eyed man smiles and twirls the rag between his fingers. “Lemme ax’ you sumfin,” he says. “Wat da only thing keep us here?”

The sloucher’s eyes’ lit up. “Booze,” he says.

The brown-eyed man slaps his chest with the rag.

“Dumbass,” he says. “Money keeps us here.”

“There something else,” says the sloucher. “Money ain’t as strong as it.”

“Yeah?” says the brown-eyed man. “Sumfin stronger den money?”

There’s a pause between them. The sloucher looked down to the subway tiles. “I can’t tell you.”

The brown-eyed man rolls his eyes. “Quit fuckin wid me.” “I don’remeber,” says the sloucher, looking earnestly at the brown-eyed man. “Honest.”

The brown eyed-man hands the sloucher another rag. The sloucher moves from against the ad, and they start wiping the wall together.

“Mmmmmm mmmm mmmmmmm mm.”

The brown eyed-man looks at the sloucher but lets him continue. With the men now occupied, Henry moves forward and looks at them. They are engrossed in their work, crouching while scrubbing the plastic and listening to the sloucher hum. Henry looks at the advertisement behind the plastic cover and stands paralyzed. It’s a poster, advertising a missing girl with her picture. The girl has delicate features and wears a shirt with water lilies. The girl looks sweet but sad. Henry recognizes the girl.

“We help you?” asks the brown-eyed man. The two men are standing up now, looking at Henry. Henry didn’t notice them stop their work and approach the awkward-looking man staring at them.

Henry stumbles to speak. “What are you doing?”

“What does it look like we doin?” asks the sloucher.

“You look lost or sumfin,” says the brown-eyed man.

Henry shakes his head. “Lost?” he repeats. “It’s just—”

“Jus’ what?” asks the brown-eyed man.

“Just that—I knew her,” says Henry.

“Knew who?” asks the sloucher.

The brown-eyed man elbows him. “Da girl,” he says, nodding his head behind them.

The sloucher opens his mouth. “Oh. Her.”

“So ca’we help you?” repeats the brown-eyed man.

Henry looks at the girl again. “She lived in my complex. A few floors down. She always ran around the lobby.”

The two men are silent, and Henry thinks about her. She would run up the first few stairs of the complex and smile as she climbed the banister. Her parents took her down when they noticed her, or they gripped her hand when they walked in, but Henry loved when she could escape and climb up the banister. She never got very high, but she always looked proud for an instance.

Henry doesn’t feel his phone vibrating several times. “Is she still alive?” he asks.

The two men look at each other, and the sloucher fiddles with his rag.

“Git some air,” says the brown-eyed man. “You lookin’ sick.”

There’s a loud noise behind them as the subway shrieks and breaks into the station.

“Your trains here, mister,” says the sloucher.

Henry looks behind them. The platform has filled since Henry came to the advertisement, and people push past Henry to line up when the doors open.

The brown-eyed man places a hand on Henry’s shoulder. “You can’t worry about it too much,” he says.

Henry turns from them to get in line, but he can’t move. He can’t move them past the advertisement, or the men. He thinks about the flickering EXIT sign and about /lover-.30, and he watches people walk past him. Henry is no longer frustrated—he wants to be, but he can’t find it. When the doors open, a crowd

pushes its way inside the train. People push past the annoying stranger blocking them, and Henry is swept into the crowd as people shove him, and the doors close on the downtown 4 train.

A Bookcase Odyssey

Ryan Davis '20

Ever since I quit my job, I've been roaming from place to place. Every location carries with it its own scent, and you'd be surprised at the variety. I've come across all kinds. Towns that smell of wood and evergreens, counties that radiate of mud and dust, cities that reek of cigarettes and car exhaust. However, no matter where I travel, within the uncertainty, the libraries always smell the same. And this one will be no different.

The library doors are heavy, forcing me to plant my feet. But once they open I'm immediately taken into its arms. The strong, familiar aroma of old paper and vintage furniture makes me feel like a regular. The beige, carpeted flooring compliments the tan walls and hazel shelves to create an overarching mush of brown. But don't let that fool you, because that only further highlights the array of colors from the book spines.

"Oh, good-morning young man." The librarian's head pops out from behind her dell monitor. She's seated at the circular desk left of the entrance, around her lies piles upon piles of loose paper and returned books. She's your typical librarian, you know, the one that always comes to mind. A sweet little lady with a turkey neck and frames two sizes too big.

"Morning. Do I need a library card to enter?"

"Oh, only if you're checking a book out."

"Thanks," I reply, and with my newly acquired freedom I head on my way. I stroll down the aisles of bookshelves, admiring their vast collections of wealth. Given that it's early in the morning, I can go about my business uninterrupted. I keep a mental tab of the different colors of the spines. Right now I think red's winning, but I've got a bad memory so who knows. Every now and then I choose a book with my eyes and try to think about the life it's lived. I pick out a green book with a yellow trimming and a tear down the spine.

This one must have belonged to the maid of a very well-off family. A maid that would read to the children this book while the parents were busy away at work. And they loved this book so much that she would read it over and over again, until eventually both the children and the book had grown old. Now that the kids were too old for the maid, she found a new job and gave this book to the library. Either that or the coffin-dodger behind the desk bought it at the same second-hand store she buys the furniture. Once more, who knows.

I stumble upon a book that must have fallen off its shelf. It's hardcover lies face down next to a torn up string from the carpet, revealing the barcode sticker on its back. When I pick it up and flip it over, I'm met with an illustration of a whale attacking an old-timey ship. I assume this book's Moby Dick, but I can't tell for certain because the letters of the title are all scrambled. Must be the Spanish edition or something.

I continue on my little adventure, which eventually leads me to the back end of the library where all the out of date computers are. It's here I find an old man using one of those antiques. His back is hunched over, his pants are lifted to his chest, and in his hand he holds a red flip-phone opened in the direction of the computer screen. I move in to get a glimpse at what he's looking at. Oh, it's porn.

The perv must have noticed my presence, because, once I saw what he was up to, his head creaked around. Our gazes meet, leading to an uncomfortable amount of time spent exchanging eye contact. Neither of us mutter a word nor show sign of reaction, but the air becomes intolerable. Finally, I break it off and turn back the way I came, and the old man gets back to work. Having seen enough this day, I head for the exit. On my way out, I pass by the librarian's desk.

"Oh, will you be checking anything out today?"

"No need ma'am - I'm illiterate." I reach for the door and struggle to push them open once again. I plant my feet but to no avail. They must have grown denser since our last encounter.

“The sign says pull young man.”

“Oops, my bad.” Thanking her, I pull on the door, stepping back out into the unfamiliar, grateful to have been welcomed by the arms of another library.

A Man Walks Into a Bar...

Liam McClure '20

...but this guy's no joke. Gavin McGavin had seen his fair share of rough-and-tumble, business-only cowboy types during his days on the American Frontier. Western Colorado is a long way from good old Chicago, but there was money to be made off fools trying to find gold. Part of being a bartender around these parts is dealing with the tough guys - telling them not to spit on the floor, not to kick open the saloon doors, asking them nicely not to shoot the guy next to them - but there was something different about the one that just walked in. He opened the two saloon doors gently enough to be respectful, but did so with enough force to make McGavin, and everyone else, look to him. As if God or the Devil had entered the bar, the outside light brought in by this man gave those inside only the image of a silhouette. A silhouette who, hanging up his hat and putting out his cigar, began to walk towards Gavin McGavin. Gavin McGavin never saw his bar so captivated by anything before, save for the occasional knife fight or high stakes card game (which would usually turn into a knife fight). The saloon doors now fully closed, McGavin couldn't get a read on who exactly this person was. The sound of his horse-riding boots clopping against McGavin's wood floor filled the now-hushed tavern, as if this person was the only one there. Gavin owned the place, but suddenly felt as if he was stuck in a room with this guy.

McGavin pretended to pay the man no mind as he pulled out a stool, sitting directly in front of Gavin. The man sat down into the light, his face now illuminated. As Gavin looked over to him, he took note of the man's light stubble and grey eyes, but he mostly studied the rugged looking ridges and wrinkles all over his face. He didn't look old, not a day over thirty, but the more Gavin looked at this man's face, the more wrinkles he saw. Every little mark smaller than the last -- fainter, too. There was nothing intimidating about this guy, by the looks of it. So why did he feel his throat close up? Why is the bar still silent? Gavin

realized he was staring. And the man was staring back, too. His eyes felt like splinters in Gavin's, but he couldn't make himself look away.

"Are you gonna get me something, young man?"

Young man? Gavin McGavin was, at most, only a couple years younger than him. The man's face became continually more perplexed as McGavin worked up the power to swallow the lump in his throat to ask him what he had asked a million tough guys before.

"What can I ~"

"I don't give a damn as long as it's not too strong."

McGavin began to fulfill his request, taking out a bottle of something 'not too strong.'

Whatever that meant.

"I don't want that. Doesn't taste good."

To any other tough guy, Gavin McGavin would have acknowledged that he should have said that before having the bartender begin preparing his drink. He didn't say anything this time. Instead, every word the man spoke made McGavin more unable to speak himself. McGavin reached behind his cabinet and retrieved a small bottle of a strawberry flavored drink, showing it to the man.

"Delicious."

The particular mixture McGavin procured was popular among the local women, reddish in color and so sweet it could make an old gold digger love again. Gavin McGavin had no idea what this guy could want with it. The man took the glass, and bizarrely admired the liquid before taking it all down in one swig. Gavin McGavin had never been intimidated by a tough guy before, but that was the weirdest thing he had ever seen. And it shook him to the core.

"Thank you kindly, young man. I s'pose time's due for payment."

The man shuffled around his coat pockets in search of something for a second. What was he going to pull out? A gun? A knife? McGavin watched intensely. He didn't pull out either of those things, but an entire refined gold ingot that was clearly worth much more than the

drink McGavin gave him. It made a loud thud on the wood bar, shutting everyone in the bar up once again. Everyone watched as the man got up, pushed in his stool, and walked towards the saloon doors. As the man walked away from McGavin, he couldn't help but wonder what had made him so intimidated in the first place. Maybe it was just how intimidated everyone else seemed to be. But that guy was weird as hell.

Gavin McGavin started to clean up his bar when the saloon doors violently flung open, and the man returned with his gun in the air. An audible gasp swept the room, as the other tough guys stood to draw their guns and knives in preemptive retaliation.

"My horse is missing. I know damn well where I parked it, and I know even weller that one of you sons of rattlesnakes took'er from me," he announced. He took another step into the bar with a look on his face reminiscent of a thousand devils. "If my horse isn't back outside right where I left her by the time I've had another one of those sweet womanly drinks, I'm gonna have to do exactly what I did the last time somebody took my horse from me."

Gavin McGavin was stiff, in a way he never was before. The man walked toward Gavin, his gun still pointing to the ceiling, and sat down exactly where he had sat just a minute ago. McGavin remembered exactly why he was intimidated. McGavin poured him another womanly drink, not daring to say a single word. Once again, the man did his strange admiring of the glass, took it down in one go, and dropped an entire bar of gold right on top of the last one. He got up, and began his stride outside. Everyone was silent; the toughest of guys and the most overtalkative of women wouldn't dare say a word. They could only watch. As he opened the saloon doors, everyone inside could see his pale horse outside, safe and sound. With a smile on his face, the man collected his hat and lit a cigar. McGavin's curiosity got the better of him. Not even believing what he was doing, Gavin McGavin, through trembling lips, asked him:

"Say partner, what'd you have to do last time someone took your horse from you?"

The drunkards and tough guys in the bar were more attentive than Gavin had ever seen anyone before, awaiting his answer. A story sure to horrify them all, most surely. The man took a deep breath, looked down, and then looked back into McGavin's eyes. He began to speak, enthralling the McGavin and the patrons of the bar. His steely eyes drove knives into McGavin once again, as he said:
"I had to walk home."

Poetry

Gone

Charlie Gedney '20

It begins with a retracing of steps
a panic begins to settle,
first maintained and collected
now slowly rising to the brim of my kettle.

Sofa cushions and table tops scattered throughout
the once immaculate house, in search of the merchandise
lost from myself and snuffed out from existence.
The angst continues to rise.

It's now circles and circles, back and forth
the world is crashing down around me,
an item of great importance is gone
filled with a boil guaranteed.

all hope lost and no patience to ponder,
a hand is rested upon my shoulder
reassures a definite hope for the future,
future will ensue no matter present stupor.

I change my approach and take a seat
among the mess, deep breaths ensue.
Now to depart on a journey revisiting my past
where the answer rests and awaits a breakthrough.

Fireworks

Stephen Wong '21

Psst! Psst!
The first sparks run along the start of the wire,
Or is it a rope?
Whether it be rope or it be wire,
It still runs to my wooden base.
For in which,
The sparks continue to trail.
Faster and faster.
More and more upon each second.
Now they're seconds from end,
Where torch meets mineral,
And expression meets beginning.
Crack! Fwooom!
Off I go.
Far throughout the clouds above,
Along with doppelgängers at my sides.
We begin to feel a slight drop,
In which we burst.
BOOM!
Color.
Or just droplets of our sparkling beauty.
The most extravagant colors beyond any human's mind,
But there all for you,
And nobody else.
However,
You don't see them.
Instead,
Only I feel can them,
They explode and burst within my chest,
While my heart and mind begin to soften up.
For I have been standing at my side.
And you have simply walked right by.

Family

Joe Altieri '22

I wish you were here, by my side, All I fathom is memory, waning, Scathed
by depths of time,
A candle lit, forgotten in a corner, Left without my pride,
She's miles away, over the ocean, But love, love can't be taken,
By measure of days or count of miles, And I will spend the bitter wait,
Thinking, remembering your smile, Until that day arrives, reunited,
When memory's restored,
And pride kindled anew,
Happy in the end, loving life,
Living life with you. Under the stars,
in that eternal city.

King James

Noel Bernard '20

Cold like coal
his painful soul
which can't contain
the Christian mold.
From his desire
a great empire
maintains his honest moral.

Orchard

Noel Bernard '20

High in time thine humble wine,
You've draped in grove for hunger'd swine. I rest but
know a lot
to grow enough, you grow enough.

La Fragua

Noel Bernard '20

We're all born in a fire.
We were lifeless forms of dirt, mud, and earth,
then the fire gives us life.
However, we still don't have form.
Suddenly, form is made by the forger.
The forge makes us, and the forger shapes us. But, our forms are made
for paradise,
and the true tragedy is that us unfortunate creations,
who's form is not ready to the forger,
Are incomplete without him.
We are born in fire, the forge.
We simmer and cool by living,
then,
before we finish,
our forms are taken back to the forge.
Why does the forger not let his creations finish?

Essays

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

Ben Short '20

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 connect 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.

A Short Guide to Avoid Bears and Writers Block

Ben Short '20

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.

Inspired

Noel Bernard '20

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 '20

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.

The Band on My Wrist

Luke Hopkins '20

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 '20

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 element 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, 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.

Flames and Other Consolations

Kevin Miller '20

The most difficult concept for me to understand, even to this day, is pity. Since this all began I have craved normalcy. For example, I remember one time when my family had gone out to eat. Because of the noise and terrible acoustics, the frequency and pitch of my tinnitus increased dramatically. Instead of staying through the entire meal, I left the restaurant. After my father explained why I had left to the waitress, she included a free slice of chocolate cake. I absolutely hated that. I want a balance between people genuinely caring for me and people feeling badly for me. Having a brain tumor and losing my hearing in one ear does not define me.



My parents always prioritized religion growing up. We attended Mass every Sunday. At a middle school run by Benedictine monks, I memorized St. Thomas Aquinas' definitions of law, grace, and mercy. Simply put, my faith lacked spirituality. For the longest time though, that's how my faith life was: pure memorization of terms that I never thought applied to me, zoning out during Mass, and going through the motions. But that all changed when I lost my hearing. I felt betrayed; I didn't deserve this punishment. What had I even done wrong?



I'll admit that coping with a brain tumor resulted in questioning myself numerous times and turning away from my faith, but I've also encountered several moments, much like flames in the dark, that have transformed my perspective of the world around me. My favorite is rather simple: a small, driftwood fish bowl. While vacationing in Maine this

object caught my eye. The bowl, a genuine consolation, became home to a Betta fish who I named Charlie. I now happily devote my time toward Charlie, upgrading his tank and adding plectos, tetras, goldfish, and even an African dwarf frog. There's something about a fish tank that is both relaxing and comforting. The routine of weekly tank cleaning is a distraction, not a chore, and the aquarium has become a coping device, something for me to focus on when times are challenging.



After four consecutive MRIs showing the tumor changing in both shape and size, Dr. Kahle (a graduate of a Jesuit high school himself) was going to need to operate to remove tissue samples from my tumor to identify the molecular structure as well as how to treat it. Honestly, that was about the worst news you could tell a teenager, and I was terrified. On May 30, 2019 I underwent brain surgery at Yale's Smilow Cancer Center; that day remains a blur for me. What I find most memorable from that day though are the relationships I forged. Surprisingly, I'm not the only Prep kid I know who has a brain tumor. My Kairos prayer partner was instantly able to support me because his own brother had nearly died from a brain tumor. I also met another recent Prep graduate who had cancer at the top of his spine. Not only do we have the same neurosurgeon and pediatrician, but we share many mutual friends. I had begun to reach out and ask for help creating a desperately needed support group. There were so many people (my nurses, my father, and friends from all over the world) that helped me get through my darkest moment.



The aftermath of surgery was probably one of my worst desolations. I had to learn how to manage the debilitating chronic headaches that never seemed to go away for months. With brain surgery, neurosur-

geons have to drill through the epicranial aponeurosis, the muscle that covers your entire skull. Regardless, the pain was excruciating and threatened my spot on the Jamaican Immersion Trip in July. I felt compelled to go. While it might not always feel like it, I decide how to live my life. At Mustard Seed (a Jamaican orphanage for children with disabilities), I pushed Ockiliah, suffering from developmental delays, up and down a hill in a homemade wooden scooter, I watched Jehvaughn soothe himself through rhythmic drumming, and I slept decently for the first time in months. Despite their unfortunate circumstances, these energetic and optimistic people taught me the valuable lesson of perspective, to never wallow. What I have experienced is nothing like what others must confront.



A week after brain surgery I was forwarded an email in June 2019 with the subject line: “Saludos from Damien House” by Father Simisky: *“We recently received the news that one of the Fairfield students, Kevin Miller, who came on the trip to Ecuador with Rostro de Cristo in 2018, is struggling with his health. We are wondering if there was a way to let the student and the family know that we are praying for them during this difficult time. We hold a weekly Mass and Kevin and his family will receive our prayers in a very intentional way during Mass. We hope that Kevin will be well soon and we send all of our love to the family and to the Fairfield Prep community.”* This was the same organization that my family had donated to through our parish when we lived in Florida. The same organization that once seemed so distant from my world but was right in front of me in Guayaquil, Ecuador. When I visited, I didn’t even speak or comprehend Spanish fluently; yet the residents’ joy, happiness, and devotion to God didn’t need a spoken language to be communicated. By reaching out to me in my darkest moment, Damien House had returned the “favor” and were again serving me. They were my consolation.



You can't have the light without the darkness. After questioning "why me?" for so long, I realized that you truly have to live in the moment. There's this never ending circle of consolation and desolation, so you can't take life for granted. I was never really betrayed, rather I was challenged to develop a new perspective. Part of the reason I was intrigued by the Spiritual Exercises was that I still struggle with my faith. The tinnitus, amplified by the church organ, makes Mass hardly bearable. I still haven't found the perfect balance, but prayer, not bound by fixed words, comforts me. While my life has forever changed, I gained a sense of awareness of what is going on around me and appreciation for what I do have. No one expects the darkness to happen to them. But, there's always a flame, flickering in the darkness — you just have to open your eyes and seek it.

On Snow and Discovery

Andrew Rios '20

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 '20

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.

Resturant Heroes

Sean Seiler '20

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 '20

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 overcame 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.

In a Realm of My Own

Evan Small '20

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 isolation. 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. 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.

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Anger into Action

John Godino '20

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 some way 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 Alluringly Impossible Ideal of the One-Handed Backhand

John Godino '20

My two-handed backhand and I have had a complicated relationship. It has been the lesser of my two groundstroked for as long as I can remember playing tennis. Tennis is all about muscle memory, having the steps for any given shot programmed into your body like it is second nature. You should be able to feel when a shot is being hit right as it feels perfectly smooth like the pieces of a puzzle falling into place. That feeling spreads through the whole body as your feet should glide into their appropriate position, then your shoulder, then your wrist, then finally the backswing through the ball. There is no thinking, no deliberation, just movement and action.

This feeling has been missing from my two hander for a large chunk of my time playing tennis. There have been moments here and there when things sync up just right, but something always got in the way. I have always thought it was because of the many moving parts when it comes to the shot itself and how complicated it feels when trying to teach my body how to do it.

And, during my thoughts of self-doubt and frustration, I will always turn to the idea of the one handed backhand. I think of Roger Federer flying around the court, hitting the shot with a beauty and grace that seems to be missing from a two hander, no matter how technically sound or powerful it may be. This shot, in my mind, is the complete opposite of my clunky backhand, with fluid motion and a simplicity that appeals to me after years of struggling with the many moving parts to my two hander. Don't worry though, this will not be a long David Foster Wallacian pontification through the mechanics that make the two shots different and similar. What differentiates the two meaningfully for me is how the two are illustrated in my mind.

The one hander itself is a thing of beauty and anytime I see someone hit one, I always get a little pang of envy, even if they are hitting it poorly. Why can't I hit a shot that is so elegantly powerful? My back-

hand looks fine, but it does not evoke an appreciation of human mobility, for me anyway.

And this may be very much a personal thing with no real bearing to anyone else. But for some reason it has always been something I think about when playing. I am extremely hard on myself when on court, every mistake being analyzed and examined with a lot of self-criticism heaped on them for good measure, and instead of just accepting that I am going to make mistakes, no matter how good I get and no matter how much I play, I look at every misstep as some preventable act of stupidity that I should be able to avoid at all times in the future after making it once.

This sentiment, of course, makes me seem like an egotistical, irrational jerk who thinks that for whatever reason, he can conquer human nature. And I know that. But for whatever reason, I do not really comprehend the absurdity of the expectations I am putting on myself when I am playing. I still feel like I can blame all of my mistakes on something to do with my own fixable incompetence rather than the undeniable fact that I am a human. And my two hander makes me feel this way more than any other shot. “If I could just move my feet more, or drop my hands just a little sooner” and more thoughts like that are constantly running through my head. And because of all the hard work I have put into this annoying two hander, I have idealized the image of the simple, graceful one hander. It represents in my mind that impossible goal of the perfect match with no stupid errors. The two hander has come to represent everything wrong with my tennis game, the reality, while the one hander is ideal, perfect in my mind, unblemished by years of work and mistakes.

Those two dueling ideas is what makes the two shots seem so radically different in my mind. The images are not tethered to any sort of reality or hard truths, but just my own desire to be perfect. Never mind the fact that the one handed backhand is losing popularity because, ironically, many consider it harder, and more complicated. However, in my mind, that does not matter. What matters is the idea, the grace, the

beauty, the image.

But, unfortunately, it's too late now. I have been playing tennis competitively for years now and am a captain of the team at Prep. It would be much too radical of a change to all of the sudden change to the one hander. And maybe it's better that way.

Maybe it's better that the ideal stays ideal. If I were to try and make the shift I would realize that I would not be able to hit the one-hander like Federer, but would probably struggle with it just as much as with my two-hander. Instead of searching for the answers in some impossibly perfect image, I should try to find a way to be happy with the fact that I will just have to keep working on the two-hander and maybe, just maybe, lower the expectations I am putting on myself. What a concept.

What it Means to be “Human” During a Time of Social Distancing

John Godino ‘20

Yes, I know. More coronavirus themed content. At the time of writing this, the world’s creatives have been consumed by the pandemic. Not just like the rest of us who are also forced to stay in our homes to “flatten the curve”, but thematically as well. Every podcast, every Instagram post, every late night show, every comedian, cannot, like the rest of the world, think about anything but our impending doom.

So, you see the difficult position I am in. There is a tsunami of essays just like this being written as I type, with people theorizing on the social and philosophic impacts social distancing will have on us. About what it truly means to be “human” and “ourselves” in this moment. And it’s all mixing together, dulling their impact on us like a bed of nails. Add essayists to the list of the creators who are stuck in the moment, myself included (though to call myself an “essayist” is generous). And given my inexperience as a writer and “social theorizer”, there is very little hope that what I write stands out at all.

And yet I would feel remiss if I did not jot down what I was feeling during this immense moment in human history, the first of its kind I have lived through. So, despite my criticism of this mono-themed zeitgeist, I am going to shamelessly participate in it. This whole “social distancing” thing should be easy for us. Social distancing is not the same as quarantine. Quarantine is being confined to your home and not being able to leave in any capacity. That for any person is always going to be tough, to say the least. Social distancing is just staying at home for most of the day, working from home if possible and keeping away from others. You can leave the house, go for a run, get take-out from whatever restaurant is serving and more activities along those lines. That is a good amount of freedom with a pandemic going on.

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To add to that flexibility, we have all the content and entertainment we could ever want or need right at our fingertips for ten bucks a month or less. We have easy means of communication that are more personal and intimate than anything previous generations ever had. We have endless ways to improve ourselves like books that can be bought cheaply and arrive to us instantly online or home workout drills that can be found by the click of a button. There is no shortage of things to do, to put it simply. And yet we are all going, some more slowly than others, crazy.

I have only been doing this for about a week and half at the time of writing this and I am already developing a little cabin fever. I have taken drives, gone outside, talked to friends over FaceTime, read multiple books, binged watched a huge amount of 30 Rock, and yet I still feel unexcited, sedated, bored. So now the over-asked questions are asked, what is social distancing doing to me, to us? What does that say about us as a people? For me personally, I think the answer is pretty simple.

Maybe what social distancing is bringing out in us, in a painful, forcing-us-to-look-in-the-mirror way is that we need each other much more than we think we do. Maybe that's the ultra-stripped down truth of why we all feel like we are going crazy. Maybe you are sitting here reading this thinking "duh". But from what I can gather, that does not make it any less true or impactful. For all that we think technology has done for us with FaceTime and other video chat services, we are still in desperate need of each other. Not an image on a screen, or a disembodied voice, but the person. As modern people, many of us would like to think ourselves above such primal, base urges, and yet here we all are, desperately hoping this all ends so we can just be around each other again. Ignore the introverts who say "I've been training for this my whole life ahahahaha", because soon they will be pining for the opportunity to just have lunch with another human person who is not their family or significant other.

We thought ourselves advanced, constantly connected and together. But this crisis has shown us that the old ways of doing things are still the ways that fulfill us the most. It has shown us that our attempts to modernize human connection are sorry replacements for the real thing. We are not as evolved as we thought we were.

And maybe that will be the silver-lining at the end of all this. When we all come back into the light, we will have hopefully realized that what makes us feel like ourselves is each other. That substitutes for real human interaction that we have been trying to fall on for years will never truly make us feel as whole as a hug from a friend or a handshake from a stranger. Maybe this will be the awakening that a select few of us said that we needed. I for one cannot wait to see my people again and to be surrounded by the energy that I have come to think of as home.