

CREAN LUTHERAN HIGH SCHOOL
THE MIRROR
A LITERATURE & ARTS MAGAZINE
VOLUME 2 | 2021



Secure

FOR I AM SURE THAT NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE,
NOR ANGELS NOR RULERS, NOR THINGS PRESENT
NOR THINGS TO COME, NOR POWERS, NOR
HEIGHT NOR DEPTH, NOR ANYTHING ELSE IN ALL
CREATION, WILL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM
THE LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.

ROMANS 8:38-39



THE MIRROR

FOR NOW WE SEE IN A MIRROR DIMLY, BUT THEN FACE TO FACE. NOW I KNOW
IN PART; THEN I SHALL KNOW FULLY, EVEN AS I HAVE BEEN FULLY KNOWN.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:12

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. ROMANS 8:38-39

FROM THE EDITOR

by Glen Worthington

SOCIAL SCIENCE TEACHER & LAW COHORT ADVISOR

These are sad and difficult times. I am writing this Editor's Note in February 2021. One year ago, my retrospectively naive concern was whether classes would be taught online for just a couple weeks or at most a couple months before finishing out the 2019-2020 school year on campus. Now we are over halfway through the 2020-2021 school year still taking public health precautions, with reduced campus activities, and with many of our friends and peers taking classes remotely. We all long for a return to a more "normal" high school experience. But if we must face adversity, what better place to be in times of trial than in the boat with fellow Christian disciples looking to Jesus to guide us safely through the storm?

Yes, these are sad and difficult times, but neither "things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). The theme of this year's edition of *The Mirror* is "Secure." What a blessing it is to find our security in Christ rather than the world! When the world seems to crumble, our foundation remains Secure. Nothing can separate us from God's love! Certainly not Covid-19.

Our Crean Lutheran Literature & Arts magazine serves as a vehicle for students to help us see and know the world around us. Yes, our vision is dim and incomplete compared to God's (1 Corinthians 13:12), but creative expression helps us to see perhaps a bit more. Though I can't claim to know each author or artist's personal vision, I can describe how

their works speak to me. Our incredible front cover, back cover, and title page photographs powerfully display that we are Secure in the midst of the wildfire destruction on and around our campus this past fall (Gracious Lord, a pandemic and two wildfires in the same school year? Even so we trust in You!). *The Tree* and *Sunset Sesh* provide the nostalgic comfort and security of familiarity. *The Cemetery* and *God's Creation* find hope and solace amidst sorrow. *I Am a Man of No Fears* and *Learning Differences* demonstrate true strength in accepting the truth about oneself. Several works show the very real and very harsh impacts of the ongoing pandemic (e.g. *Social Distancing*, *The Gilded Cage*). Others reimagine the head or face as a way to conceptualize identity (e.g. *Running Out of Time*, *Castle*, *Two Faces*, *The Reaper*, *Separated*). *The Happiest Place on Earth?* and *House of Horror* remind us not to take ourselves too seriously. And *Unity* reminds us that God designed us for community as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Crean Lutheran faculty and staff are grateful for the opportunity to continue in ministry serving the Saints families during this pandemic period — and we pray you are blessed to be part of our Crean Lutheran family during these trying times. I hope Volume 2 of *The Mirror* is a blessing to you as well. Through our fantastic student works, may we be reminded that we are Secure in Christ no matter what trials we face.

In Christ,
Glen Worthington

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THE MIRROR

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THE INCAPACITATION OF THE MIND
Amanda Barrier, Class of 2021
PHOTOGRAPHY

The shiny green leaves glisten in the fading sunlight. The hues shift from amber green to dark amber and golden tones, growing and changing as the people who sit at the tables beneath this Tree do. The high school years, the friendships and the memories, the stresses and the questions, the doubt and the loneliness, the conflicting emotions and constant uncertainty, the bits of excitement and life: the Tree witnessed it all.

The leaves began to morph into an array of vibrant colors, marking the beginning of another season and another school year. The shiny tables beneath its branches glistened in the warm afternoon air. The students filed in and out of their classes with an aura of excitement. Every lunch beneath the Tree was filled with new conversations, reunions with old friends, and recollections of summers well-spent. The Tree watched with anticipation, listening intently to each person's tales of summer adventures and romances. Each night, he waited in the corner of the schoolyard, awaiting the excitement of the days to follow.

As the days passed, the students got caught up in the stress of school. Witnessing each person's downfalls and drama, the Tree's leaves dropped like flies as the stress wore on him too. The weather shifted and tensions built. The tree was subject to the complaints, the whining and the groaning, the objections and the rejections. He tried to cheer them up with his rapidly fading leaves but it was pointless. The cold winter winds whipped through the schoolyard and the tree lost its strength.

The students did not come for weeks. The tree sat sad and still with no leaves left to display. Cobwebs cluttered the dusty tables and the school bell made no sound.

Then, one morning, a noise awoke the Tree from his winter slumber. The morning larks chirped as the warm golden sun peaked above the hill. The students sat underneath the Tree's branches once more, refreshed and renewed by their time away. Ecstatic, the Tree listened once again to the stories his people told. As the weeks flew by, his branches gained new life while the students pursued new opportunities and chances. The flowers bloomed and the air rang with the sweet sounds of spring. The students began to grow and mature. Some acquired jobs and licenses and therein a newfound independence and freedom. The Tree drank in all the new recollections and occurrences. As his branches blossomed with color and life, his canopy grew, and the Tree watched over his friends with contentment and tranquility.

The calm was followed by minor calamity. The Tree had rebuilt its strength and rose to the challenge. As the stress of finals and AP tests crashed into the students' lives, the Tree stood and watched as they poured into their study guides, went hours without sleep, and put themselves fully into their efforts. The Tree stood tall and unmoving, silently motivating the students to press on and finish what they started.

Soon, the sparkling spring air morphed into a summery breeze. Although the sun beat down, the students were jubilant at the prospect of a year close to completion. As the students departed from beneath his branches for a long summer's break, the Tree stood reflective and resigned. The long, heated months of the summer season seemed to drag on for eternity ...

But then that fateful bell rang out and the Tree stood willing and ready to witness the joyful chaos all over again.

I HAVE NO VOICE TO SING! | *by Elise Cho*
(EXCERPTS) | CLASS OF 2022

i have no voice
to sing aloud
the thoughts inside my head,
much less the crowd of notes
stuck on music sheets.
i have no proper voice
to sing you a song,
for if you heard me
you would only know
my flat voice,
as timid as my ambition,
for i only know
how to express
my melody in printed words
so let me sing you a song
on paper.
that much i can do
for the both of us.
...
the words in songs,
born with wings,
are free to fly
whenever they wish.
spoken words
must be content
to stay close to the ground.
but don't they remain
closer to the heart
like that?
...

i may not be able
to give you a song
ripe with melody,
full of rhythm,
for i have no voice to sing.
but
i can give you a story
to hold close to your heart.
i can give you words
to speak
and
to treasure.
i may never know
the sound of your spoken voice,
if it's soft and sweet,
or if it's cracked and husky,
or if it's deep and melodic,
or if it's all those things and more.
yet,
all the same,
no matter the quality,
i would be enchanted
because the voice belongs to you.



RUNNING OUT OF TIME
Victoria Pan, Class of 2021
ACRYLIC



UNITY

Madison Mikhail, Class of 2023

MIXED MEDIA

A cool breeze blew across my face, exposing a wet stream of saliva dripping down my chin. As my mom unbuckled my seatbelt, I slowly blinked open my eyes to behold the most glorious land of imagination, adventure, and creativity: my grandparents' home. With a gravel driveway, a massive magnolia tree, a lush lawn, a mysterious rock pile, and every fruit tree one could possibly name, the house was an absolute paradise to my 5-year-old eyes. What I imagined, Agong and Ama's house had.

From one to ten years old, Agong and Ama's house was an outlet for creativity and exploration. Stocked with a spectrum of oil paint, brushes, and canvases, the charming art room at the end of the hall watched as I experimented with colors and marked its walls. In the backyard, a cornucopia of refreshment awaited me — apples and oranges, loquats and lemons, persimmons and avocados, grapes and peaches, guavas and cherimoyas. The immense rock pile lining the white picket fence was an archaeology site where I spent countless hours trapping critters and examining the miscellaneous stones, ranging from black to white to red to grey. Whenever Agong stopped by my mini excavation, each modest rock suddenly transformed into a glistening jewel that he promised to craft into charms for my plastic bead bracelets. On one clear afternoon, Agong and I planted a precious little seed that I had randomly found while biking in my community.

From eleven to thirteen years old, Agong and Ama's house was a site for learning and gaining new experiences. Summertime entailed week-long sleepovers and wide smiles at the aging house. Shishamo sizzled on the stovetop under a starry sky, and the delightful aroma of green onions and sesame oil filled the air. In the mornings, the loud grinding of a blender reverberated throughout the house, signaling breakfast time. At the compact dining table, I painstakingly wrote my first Chinese characters, the lines

impressed into the thin varnish of the wood. Shaded by the flowering magnolia tree, my brother and I engaged in intense badminton matches on the new concrete driveway. Nearly five feet tall, the tree planted years ago finally saw me eye to eye.

From fourteen to fifteen years old, Agong and Ama's house was a rare gift to enjoy as school grew more rigorous and obligations accumulated. Nevertheless, the sturdy wooden doors invited me in and relieved my shoulders of the increasing responsibilities of adolescence. The trusty air conditioner cooled down hot summer nights, and the 2005 Dell desktop computer still managed to handle my lengthening pages of summer homework. Towering over my head, the now-identified silk floss tree intertwined with the adjacent drooping wisteria vines.

Sixteen years old. Agong has moved out to receive 24/7 care for his sudden stroke. Ama has boarded the next flight to Taiwan. The lonely house stands quiet, empty, faded, dry. Occasionally, my dad will bring me to the house to check on it. I face the withered remnants of the luscious grapevine that once blessed me with bursts of sugar on fiery summer days. I face the dead, prickly brown grass crushed beneath my worn-out sneakers, a carpet once so soft and green that I would spend hours simply sitting in the backyard, admiring the sublime scenery. I face the enormous magnolia tree, its once bountiful branches reduced to stubs, and its remaining leaves shriveled to brittle skeletons. The thorny silk floss tree soars high above the roof of the vacant house, a reminder of the memories made there and the vivacity that once flowed through its halls.

Walking into CVS is usually a short, boring time, except when I walk past that machine. The machine that makes some people feel intense excitement. The machine that might let you down a little or make your lifetime unimaginable. The machine that takes just a little from you and can turn it into something wondrous. I am, of course, talking about a lottery machine. They are amazing. For just a little amount of money, you get such a rush. Who would've thought that something with mere numbers could create so much fun? In my case, this one machine, this one time, was about to change my life forever.

I walked into CVS on my regular Wednesday afternoon to buy my dessert right before I picked up my dinner for the night. I looked to my left and waived to the employees who always hold a smile and welcome me in. I smiled back and headed to the middle of the store, grabbed my Sour Patch Kids, and made my way towards the register.

Before I walked up to the counter to purchase my candy, I took a quick glance at the lottery machine with a display that read, "You could be next." I approached the machine and looked at the bright, flashy colors that glowed in my face. I made my selection and fed in the cash the machine was asking me to insert. I finished my purchase at the machine and headed to the register to empty my pockets some more. I was almost ready for dinner.

I took my quarter out after purchasing my candy at the register and began to read the ticket: "Match three leprechauns to win!" Nothing more had to be explained. All I had to do was scratch off the silver paper. I dragged my quarter along the first black square and started scratching at it. Under the square was a unicorn.

"Not a great start," I said to myself. Next square, scratch, a diamond. Another square, scratch, a little bit of green appears. I scratched the rest and saw my first leprechaun! I was excited to find my first leprechaun but remained humble knowing there were six squares left. It went like this for five more squares, scratch, and repeat.

What remained were two leprechauns, three diamonds, two unicorns, and one green turtle.

One square lay between me and a prize anywhere from \$10 to even \$100,000. I took my quarter off the card and thought about what I could buy with \$100,000. I thought about a brand new sports car, a brand new iPhone, or even one semester at college. I put my quarter back on the card and slowly scratched off a corner of the square. Nothing could be seen yet. I started to sweat, knowing that the next image to come up could change my life. I began to feel hesitant and decided to move my quarter to the middle. I scratched off a little bit more to see just a little bit of green! I was excited to see green but knew it could be a turtle and wouldn't let myself think too much of it.

The suspense finally got to me, and I scratched off the rest. A bright green leprechaun was revealed! Completely forgetting about the cashier next to me, I screamed, "I did it! I won!"

The cashier smiled and said, "Congratulations, would you like to redeem it?"

"Yes, please," I replied. I handed her the ticket and asked, "Where do I get the prize money?"

"Right here," she replied.

I did not believe what she said. There was no way there was that much cash in the cash register. I responded to her, saying, "There's not enough cash in that register, is there?"

While pulling out a dull \$10 bill, she said, "Yup, there is more than enough. You might want to look at the ticket again, champ."

I looked at the ticket, but this time the back. "Scratch off 5 leprechauns to win Super Grand Mega Prize! Scratch off 4 for Grand Mega Prize! Scratch off 3 for Mega Prize!" Finally, aware of what the rest of the lottery ticket said, I became dejected. I walked out of the CVS and spent the money the best way I could: on the brand new Travis Scott burger only from McDonald's.



SOCIAL DISTANCING
Yena Won, Class of 2021
ACRYLIC



CASTLE
Kate Zhou, Class of 2022
PEN

I am fortunate enough to have only been here once. It is a dreaded location yet valued more than any other place. As I looked over the expanse of the undulating hills covered with grass and towering trees, I noticed the cemetery was strangely full of life. Golden rays of light crept through the gaps of guarding trees, illuminating the freshly-mown grass and scattered flowers. The beams of sunlight cast shadows around the trees that swayed with the wind. Vast fields spotted with gravestones stretched in all directions with no human in sight. As I walked down the winding trail, passing by gravestones of different sizes and stones, I pondered the lives that these buried children, adults, and elders had lived. Each individual monument in a sea of countless gravestones was a symbol of a human life with memories, hopes, and dreams. My throat tightened as I realized the incomprehensible amount of life lost that surrounded me. The air was heavy with silence, interrupted only by the rustling of branches. Surrounded by lush greenery and boundless rolling hills, I could only focus on the ground, watching my feet sink into the dewy morning grass, wondering who may be beneath. How ironic it is that life blooms from the ground that houses death.

As my parents and I reached the top of one of the innumerable hills, we noticed a gathering around a varnished wooden coffin that reflected sunlight off of its polished surface. Staying close to my parents, I approached the huddled, bereaved crowd. People of differing ages, statuses, and lifestyles gathered, yet all felt the intensity of this moment with downcast eyes and heavy hearts. Their sobs overpowered the melody played by a band who gently strummed their guitars. Between the heads of strangers, I caught a glimpse of the widow with a white scarf draped around her head. She focused on the buzzing tractor, clanging as it thrust rich soil into the grave. The murmur of the tractor was interrupted by her sudden wail, followed by hiccupping sobs as she tried to steady her breath. Tears stained her trembling face as grief washed over her. I wondered what it was like to be surrounded by your loved ones yet to be alone, a feeling foreign to me.

Rows of headstones, perfectly lined, stretched all the way to the horizon. My attention was drawn to the perfectly smooth and polished stone monument in the center of the crowd. This new, furbished headstone was unlike the surrounding weathered and barren gravestones, cracked at the edges. Bouquets of vibrant red roses and freshly-cut lilies crowded around the gravestone. Although these flowers will wither, the gravestone will remain in place, a permanent landmark to remember a life gone. This is a sacred place for loved ones to return for solace and peace. The cemetery stays not in my memory because of its beautiful landscape but because of its reminder of the strength and eternity of love despite the fragility of life.

TOGETHER UNDER THE LIGHTS

by Hannah Cumming
CLASS OF 2021

“Now that she’s back in the atmosphere with drops of Jupiter in her hair, hey...”

The song started playing, and our eyes locked. It was just me and him on the red wooden deck. Bright lights, hanging from the lush green trees, glowed above us, illuminating the dark night. It was as if time stopped, and it was just me and him on that dance floor. He slowly walked up to me, put my hand in his, and put his other hand on my waist. We started swaying back and forth to the music. Then he took a small step back. Then to the right. Then forward. Then left. I followed his lead. Or at least tried to. I stepped on his toes and said, “Ahh I’m sorry!”

He gently replied, “It’s ok, you’re good!”

I took a deep breath and looked up at him. The way his clear blue eyes looked into mine, and the way he warmly smiled at me made me feel like the most special girl in the world. We danced to the rhythm of the music. He twirled me. And twirled me again. He whispered, “Don’t overthink it.” I relaxed my tense muscles and let one hand rest in his with my other hand on his shoulder. I let him lead and allowed myself to feel the beat of the music and feel where his next step would be.

“There you go,” he quietly said.

I looked at him and smiled.

He whispered again, this time saying, “You’re so beautiful.”

My heart fluttered, and a smile spread across my face.

As a little girl, I imagined myself being a princess and dancing with my prince. Years later, I finally had that chance. It was better than I could have ever imagined. The song ended, and he pulled me in close and hugged me tightly. That perfect moment, dancing under the lights on that wooden deck and being held in his arms, was a moment I’ll never forget.



GOD'S CREATION
Sydney Dews, Class of 2021
PHOTOGRAPHY

I am an infant of no fears. The minute I came out of my mother's womb — my parents had told me countless times — I did not shriek like most newborns nor did I shed a single tear. In the eye of the hectic delivery room, there I lay, astonishingly calm and, to everyone's surprise, still as death.

I am a child of no fears. The moment I had a semblance of control over my hands, I would grasp anything within my reach: lightbulbs, knives, and small figurines of Toy Story characters. Of course, these actions had their respective consequences: second-degree burns, lacerations, and ingestions of foreign objects. All these moments of fearlessness — some may say, recklessness — lead to the hospital. In fact, by the time I was in first grade, I had gone to the emergency room six times. However, the hospital, a place of fear for many, did not induce any fear within me, not even once.

I am a boy of no fears. For my seventh birthday present, I received a brand-new bicycle, the Mongoose Legion Mag Freestyle Bike. Exhilarated by the mere thought of having access to such speed, I decided to step it up a notch: I would remove the training wheels and go straight to riding the bicycle — just like those cool teenagers I watched on television. Being the headstrong individual that I was, I raced down a declined street — one with many bumps and small rocks and pedestrians and cars. As I peeked out with my peripheral vision, all of a sudden, I saw blinding headlights swerving towards me. Keep in mind, I was accelerating and was fighting a losing battle over control of my bike, desperately pushing and pulling and yanking and thrusting the handlebars. The car did not stop. It neared me, my adrenaline kicked in, my right hand grasped towards the brake. Next thing I knew, I was at the edge of the street, my once-beautiful bicycle scuffed up and on the sidewalk. Immediately, I was rushed to the hospital once again, this time for deep abrasions and a broken right arm. Treatment consisted of stitches, needles, tubes, and other medical equipment. Despite all the injuries and pain, yet again, I did not fear the emergency room nor the life-and-death experience.

I am an adolescent of no fears. In sixth grade, my graduating class was given the option to go on a field trip to Knott's Soak City. Of course, I could not turn down the opportunity handed to me. Like the name entitled, I was having a blast, having been soaked by the park's water rides. However, as the scorching sun rose above the clouds and radiantly beamed its rays at me, I felt light-headed to the point where I had trouble walking and talking at the same time. One second, I was having the best day of life, and the next, all I could see was pitch-black. When I awoke from this state, I was greeted, afresh, by the cold, uncushioned mattress of the emergency room bed. More confused about what had happened than feeling frightened, I questioned my father who was beside me. Ironically, I had fainted due to dehydration ... in a water park. I almost burst out laughing and wiped a tear, but this was not a tear derived from fear but from hysteria.

I am a man of no fears. Last year, my mother and I were flying down the freeway, for I was late for my orchestral audition that happened only once a year. Nervous that I would be late for my time slot, I obliged my mother to put full force on the pedal: nothing was going to stop me from auditioning for this world-renowned youth orchestra. As I exited out of the carpool lane and into the regular lanes, I heard a deafening boom. My head was ringing, the airbag propelled on top of my immobile body. The next moment etched onto this experience was at the hospital once more. And again, I felt no fear and even asked myself, "What's so scary about this place anyway?" But then, I looked to my left. There was my mother with her eyes shut, fresh blood still stained on her white flowery shirt while the cardiac alarm slowly beeped. In an instant, I had a rush of panic. I had never seen my mother in this state, a state of helplessness. My brain connected my panic with something else, something that was so deep within my own mind that even I did not realize it.

Yes. That was it. My fear. It was, indeed, the hospital. I had an epiphany; I had always feared the hospital. I had simply forced myself to suppress its ever-scary moments, fleeing behind a curtain of bravado, protecting me from lasting trauma. Every single time I was placed in the dank emergency room, my lurking subconscious warned me of my mind's fear, but it was my body that simply rejected its messages. This time was different. This was when I came face-to-face with the pain of potentially losing my mother. Suddenly, my fear of the hospital surged through every part of my body, and I could not handle it.

I am not the man that some may have thought I was. I am not a man of no fears.



THE GILDED CAGE
Dustin Kim, Class of 2021
MIXED MEDIA



MY FACE
Darcy Wang, Class of 2021
PHOTOGRAPHY

I LIE AWAKE | *by Jade Stankowski*
CLASS OF 2021

Keep me awake,
My torso, blazing with fear,
Perch your head, in my lap,
Your eyelids, a drape,
Swathing your eyes, with slumber,

Why is it, you slip so effortlessly,
Into sleep,
But I lay awake, thinking, of you

Your breath, is weightless,
Your forehead, is cold,
Chains drag, my lungs,
Blood bruises, my cheeks, pink,

“Love, will set you free,”
If the trite is true,
Why am I imprisoned, when,
You’re next to me
No, this can’t, be love,
When only I’m,
Thrashing, wheezing, flaring,
And you’re asleep.

I have never felt the need to change for anybody.

Never in my life have I come to a point of self-doubt. Confidence has always radiated in my soul and my appearance. Adults will compliment my “self-assured poise,” as well as my “unique flair.” I guess the older people around here aren’t too accustomed to seeing skateboard riding, flannel-wearing girls.

Life has never been that complicated. If I’m having a bad day, I can just grab my skateboard and ride the pain away. If I’m having a really bad day, I ride my skateboard to the lake and skip stones. If I’m having a super bad day, I might throw some rocks at a tree. Who knows. I don’t have much to worry about.

Who knew how much a few words could change.

I walked down the hallway to the trigonometry classroom for a weekly tutoring session, my new Converse squeaking on the freshly waxed floor. Seeing that Mr. Williams was working with another student, I waited by the door. That’s when I heard Sydney and Cameron chatting around the corner. I started walking towards the corner to say hello.

In a hushed tone, I heard Cameron say, “It just seems weird and wrong that Jo doesn’t know.”

I stopped dead in my tracks.

“Doesn’t know what?” A pause. “Oh, yeah,” said Sydney.

“I’m not saying that she’s weird or anything, but how long will it take her to figure out that we keep hanging out with her because no one else will?”

As Cameron slammed her locker shut, I whipped my phone out of my pocket and pretended that I was writing a text. They turned the corner and offered big smiles and cheery hellos.

“Hi, Jo!” said Sydney and Cameron.

Instinctively, I plastered a grin on my face. As I watched them pass, heat rose up in my face, my stomach twisted into an untieable knot, and I was struck by an overwhelming dizziness. Mr. Williams popped his head out into the hallway and paged me, only to see my silhouette sprinting towards the school entrance. That night, I sat on my bed staring blankly at the wall. Sydney and Cameron’s words played on a loop in my mind. Their words stung. Like needles sinking into every square inch of my skin.

Numbly, I dragged myself onto my feet and walked towards my closet.

Maybe if I start looking like them I'll be worthy enough to be their real friend, I thought with a sarcastic snort. Little did I know that this insignificant speculation would rule my life for the next few months.

I retired my skateboard and flannels, replacing them with high-waisted jeans and crop tops. Sure, I looked like a clone of every other girl in school, but I certainly didn't feel like one. Everywhere I went, I felt the stares follow. I knew what everyone was thinking.

Why on earth would the tomboy suddenly start dressing normal?

I wished I could answer that question. Because I honestly had no clue. But the stares weren't what did the most damage. That was:

"Oh! Jo ..." said Sydney and Cameron, looking me up and down with shocked expressions.

"Yeah! Just thought I'd switch things up a bit."

"Wow! Uh, you look great!" said Cameron with a smile.

Their approval was all I needed. I took this as an invitation to keep going, to become one of them.

And that is exactly what happened. The facade I put on as an experiment to test Sydney and Cameron became my new normal. Hours turned into days, which turned into weeks, which turned into months, and after a while, I couldn't even recognize myself.

It was a Thursday. I don't quite know what happened, but I'm guessing it was some sort of sign, someone telling me to snap out of it. I was sitting in my physics class when an overwhelming dizziness came over me. In a flash, I sprung up and ran out the classroom, down the hall, and into the restroom. Heaving, I clasped the sides of the sink and glanced at my reflection. I saw a different person. A person that didn't know who they were. I crumbled to the floor and sobbed.

And sobbed.

The next day, I made a choice. A choice to stop. So I walked into school, donning flannel and holding my skateboard under my arm. The widest smile spread across my face. A smile that unapologetically said, "This is me."



TWO FACES
Andy Lee, Class of 2021
ACRYLIC

I suffer from learning differences. The term “learning differences” does not denote that I am inferior but rather denotes hope and suggests that my brain works differently. I truly believe this. This is why I choose the term learning differences versus the original term “learning disabilities.” I feel that I am equal to everyone no matter if they have learning differences or not.

The term learning differences was a rebrand of the original phrase, “learning disabilities.” “Learning disabilities” portrays someone being held back by something. The term “learning disabilities” was first coined by a psychologist at a conference for Handicapped Children. The word “handicap” implies helplessness, that there is a problem out of one’s control, that something is wrong. Originally, I had this same line of thought. As someone suffering from learning disabilities, I thought something was wrong with me.

When I first found out I had learning disabilities I felt helpless. I was an anxious 11-year-old failing fifth grade who had just been placed in the lowest reading group. These academic difficulties destroyed my self-confidence and spread to other aspects of my life, including sports and my social life. I enjoyed this self-pity to some degree as it gave me an excuse to not truly put in my full effort. I allowed myself to take the easy road and did not challenge myself. Changing the phrase “learning disabilities” to “learning differences” changed the way I viewed myself.

“Learning differences” is a neutral phrase, one that suggests there are work-arounds and solutions for the way my brain learns. Adopting this phrase gave me hope and made learning differences have a positive feeling. Learning differences taught me how to adapt and deal with

circumstances that I could not control. I was forced to learn new approaches and I did. I learned how to manage my studying habits. Rather than procrastinating and waiting for the night before, I study for shorter sessions, twenty-minute increments, that occur more frequently. I learned to advocate for myself, to speak up respectfully even to adults and to use the resources at my disposal.

As an unexpected result, my learning differences have taught me how smart I truly am. I cannot only do the same things as other students with no learning disabilities, but in some aspects, I can do them better than the learning “normers.” My learning differences have given me confidence in my intellect and in my ability to adapt.

No matter what my learning differences or disabilities are called, there is no changing the fact that my brain works differently than others and everyday tasks like reading and writing by hand are more difficult for me. However, I have been blessed with other aspects that help compensate for the difficulties caused by learning differences. My work ethic and empathy for others has been fostered by my difficulties. Therefore, while to some I may have learning disabilities, and to others I may have learning differences, to me I have learning advantages. In the future, I hope to help others understand and advocate for their needs, as just because we are different doesn’t mean that we aren’t all capable in our own ways.

Sweat bubbled through my pores. My limbs trembled uncontrollably. The sharp chill of night encased my body. The rhythmic sway of leaves cast an eerie sensation over me as I planted my feet into the firm grass. I allowed the pungent odor of petrichor to invade my senses. As I sniffed the heavy air, I instantly knew something was different. Something was wrong. My biggest, inescapable fear swam across my vision: darkness.

The soft hum of silence infiltrated my ears. Darkness wrapped its bitter hands around my arms and restricted my movement. My breaths became short and few. Inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale. Chills cascaded down my back as melodic whispers of darkness tickled my senses. In the midst of panic, I unhinged my jaw, preparing to cry for help. A belch threatened to crawl up my throat as a flicker of light caught my charcoal eyes. I instantly drew my attention to the source of luminosity. However, the light came and went. Its glorious radiance was soon replaced with seemingly-eternal darkness. In the midst of unadulterated darkness, my breaths once again became short and few. Inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale. The trees viciously screamed and the wind violently tossed and my arms instantly grew numb. My body trembled as the ground seemingly shook. Fearful heat struck my cheeks as something caught my eye. It was light.

It was almost as if time had stopped. The wind seemed to whistle a soft and melodic tune. Crickets sang mellifluous symphonies. My lips formed a toothy smile as small specks of light slowly entered my vision. The radiant specks of light left a lustrous glow on the once shadowy sky. I slowly began to count the innumerable glints. One, Two, Three, Four. As I counted, the specks of light quickly disappeared, being replaced by other figures of light. In awe, I reached toward the specks. A glint of light gently rested upon my youthful hands. A gasp gradually twirled out of my mouth. The fragile speck of light danced across my palms as I stared in complete awe. The speck was a firefly. I looked around to find thousands of fireflies swirling through the air. Their magnificent wings sang the tune of hope. I looked up as the trees began to peacefully sway from side to side.

The scent of my mother's baking wafted through the illuminated air. I slowly spun around to find my kitchen light melding with the fireflies' luminosity. I pressed my nose against the smudged glass door leading to my kitchen. I momentarily forgot about the fireflies' radiance as my taste-buds quivered at the sight of cake. The beauty of the lustrous sky soon faded into the background. Right when I began to open the sliding doors, a firefly rested upon the smeared glass. The small specks no longer invoked curiosity. The luminous being no longer seemed luminous. Disregarding the insect, I slid open the glass door and sprinted towards the oven. The sweet scent of heaven tickled my nostrils. Shaking with excitement, I reached to thrust the oven door open. However, something stopped me. I was instantly drawn towards my kitchen window. I beheld the dazzling fireflies for one last time as I approached the clear glass.

One by one, the radiant beings left. Darkness seeped into the gaps left behind. The trees gently swayed in the wind. The wind no longer sang a melodious tune. The world was no longer bright.



I SEE RED
Mia Diaz, Class of 2021
DIGITAL MEDIA



THE REAPER
Malia Maynard, Class of 2021
MIXED MEDIA

DOORSTOP | *by Camryn Caruthers*
CLASS OF 2021

This seems to play out well
No bells and whistles to keep watch for
It should be working
But I just. keep. Thinking.
I want to forget (remember what happened)
but I trap myself in my own head
(Thought) after [thought] I just {THINK}
I can't seem to *escape*
[You can't forget] {don't you see what you've done??}
I (REMEMBER) can't hear {you can't go on} myself [DO SOMETHING]
THINK.
just GO
.....

THE HAPPIEST PLACE ON EARTH?

by *Joseph Menton*
CLASS OF 2021

One summer day a few years ago, a couple of my friends and I were bored and wanted to go somewhere fun. We put our heads together to decide what we wanted to do, and after some deliberation, we finally decided to go to Disneyland, which we remembered was The Happiest Place on Earth.

As soon as the idea came to mind, I told my dad, and after some convincing, he agreed to take us. Everyone jumped in his truck and we started our drive. As soon as we hit the freeway, there was terrible traffic, which persisted throughout the entire commute. That did not matter. We were going to The Happiest Place on Earth, and our transportation troubles would be but a distant memory. We finally arrived at noon, even though we left at eight in the morning, and our hardships were just beginning. We needed to find a parking spot. The closest that we could find was a fifteen minute walk from the park, but the walk was worth it. We were going to The Happiest Place on Earth.

Once we arrived at the main entrance to the park, we had to go through security: the first line of the day but certainly not the last. After a prolonged period of waiting, we finally passed security and arrived at the ticket booth, ready to purchase entrance into The Happiest Place on Earth. They say that money doesn't buy happiness, but it apparently does here, at a rate of \$120 per person per day. However, it was a small price to pay to access the joy we would receive here at The Happiest Place on Earth. We reached the final checkpoint before being set free into the place of boundless happiness and joy: a location I like to call the border checkpoint. Here, you need to have your ticket available as a passport to permit entry into the kingdom of happiness. Once verified, you are given a

stamp of approval and allowed into The Happiest Place on Earth.

Finally, we were in the park. We were welcomed by a host of grown adults wearing animal costumes and parents gently forcing their children, who — so overcome with happiness — are standing stiff with tears of joy rolling down their cheeks to take pictures with said costume-wearing adults. Next, we were greeted by the sweet aroma of horse pies as the quaint horse-drawn carriage passed by. As we continued to walk down Main Street, we were inclined to purchase some snacks from the roadside vendors. However, at \$8 per popsicle and \$10 per bag of popcorn, we decided that there is only so much happiness that you can purchase here at The Happiest Place on Earth.

Once we passed through the gates of the castle of happiness, we cheerfully set our sites to the joyous attractions within its walls. The average ride experience was an hour long adventure, which entailed plenty of standing, wall-leaning, and eager anticipation, eventually accompanied by some coaster-riding, cup-spinning, or log-floating. Space Mountain was under maintenance, presumably with additional joy being added for our next visit. Seemingly everyone in California wanted to enjoy the Matterhorn, as its line of jovial park-goers reached all the way to Tomorrowland. Four rides was enough happiness for one day, or at least that's what the clock said as it approached midnight here at The Happiest Place on Earth.

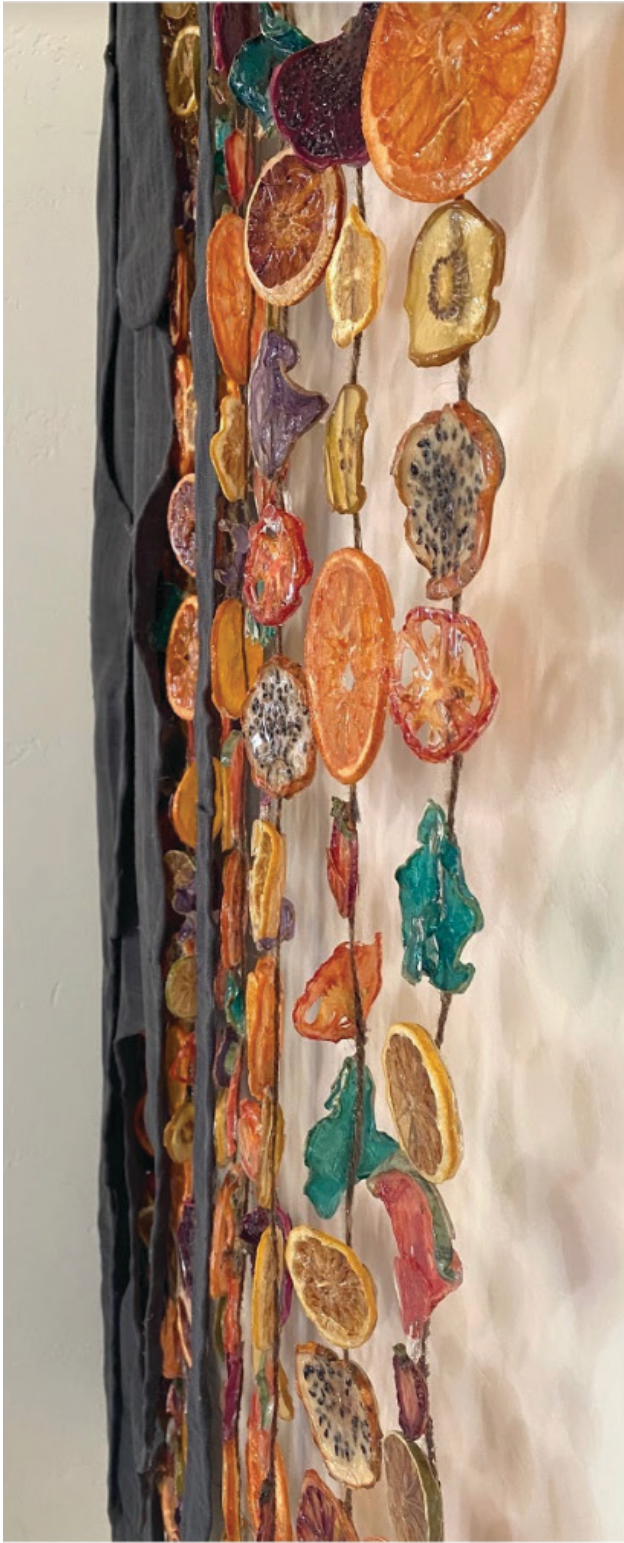
As the day came to an end and we exited the pleasant park, our journey here at The Happiest Place on Earth was nearing its conclusion. However, one question still remained: Where did we park the car?



WIND WIELDER
Kanoa Loo, Class of 2022
DIGITAL MEDIA



KOI BOY
Josh Meyer, Class of 2021
PASTEL



REGAINING LIFE
Jade Stankowski, Class of 2021
 MIXED MEDIA

She is beauty; she is grace. She is “umm el-donya,” the mother of the world. She is congested with millions of people; she is a warm hug to natives and tourists alike. She is home to the cramped, antiquated apartment that contains more memories than rationally possible. She is the city of Shubra, Egypt. She is home.

This apartment is a historic building, one that should be preserved for generations. Despite its compactness, it holds a wide range of emotions and nostalgia for both its residents and visitors. The humble home resides on the third floor — one hundred and thirty concrete, crooked, narrow stairs above the ground floor. There is always a mangy dog or bony cat begging for attention from each passerby. After knocking on the wooden front door (praying it will not disintegrate and collapse from years of pounding on the frame), upon entering, it is clear that the flat has been more than adequately lived in. The dining table is to the immediate left, and it is necessary to walk sideways in order to avoid crashing into the vanity on the right, which displays pictures of nearly everyone in the family. Across the dining table is the modest room where my grandparents sleep and which is also the acclaimed workspace of my Teta (grandmother), who spends innumerable hours sewing, crocheting, and knitting.

The peeling paint on each interior wall of the house is a faded shade of light teal. Beside the bedroom is the living room, which offers more space for laughing than anything else. It can only comfortably accommodate five people, but practically sitting in one another's laps is my family's way to show affection. Many, many meals and beverages have been eaten and drunk in this room, after being brought over from the awkward kitchen that struggles to hold more than one person and does not provide any walking space. The bathroom, hardly larger than the kitchen, has a more vivid teal color hugging the walls. The sink defiantly stands in the way of the door's ability to open and close, so the middle of the door has a handmade, square cut-out that allows the edge of the sink to pass through the door with ease.

Perhaps the most enchanting, exhilarating element of the apartment is the balcony. It is connected to the confined living room; however, the balcony is anything except confined. Courtesy of my grandfather, there is consistent bird food provided on the ledge of the balcony, just above the multicolored clothes-pins, which faithfully hold clothing garments in lieu of an electric dryer. Although the standing room on the concrete balcony is limited, the busy lives of those below serve as an endless supply of entertainment. The fruit market to the left, the shabby gas station straight ahead, the identical apartment buildings in every direction — this is home. The visible pollution in the air, the incessant honking of car horns (an Egyptian driver's practical method of communicating with surrounding drivers and pedestrians), the dirty children passing a soccer ball up and down the street — this is home. The men yelling and bargaining with one another, the women and their daughters adjusting their hijabs, the loud adhan (prayers) from the speakers outside every mosque playing five times a day — this is home.

There is one specific object in the balcony of this apartment that I must take advantage of every time I visit. The Basket. I was taught how to use the basket as a toddler, and I still receive immeasurable joy when using it today. An identical hand-woven basket made of rope sits in every balcony in every apartment building. The basket's rope-like material is rough, adding to its charm. When I visit, my grandfather yells down at the market owners for a mango (if it is mango season) and we carefully lower the basket down, hoping it will not scratch the parked cars below. The vendor will place a few mangoes inside, and we will pull the basket back up again, eager to make a mess from the sweet fruit.

There is genuinely no logical explanation for my desire to stay in such a pinched apartment with no air conditioning, no Wi-Fi (or any signal for that matter), no available privacy. And yet these people, this balcony, this basket, somehow pay the price. This single apartment carries a collection of memories that will last forever, and each tiny apartment in Egypt does the same. This is home.



SUNSET SESH
Emma Inglis, Class of 2022
PHOTOGRAPHY



SEPARATED?
Camryn Caruthers, Class of 2021
DIGITAL MEDIA

MY CHILDHOOD HOME | *by Peter Chen* CLASS OF 2022

“You have to come home for Christmas.” Home, as dad likes to call it. In that house where thousands of hours were spent in anguish and distress. The building where dreams were crushed, and hopes perished. Let me take you on a tour of my home.

Our first stop, the backyard. What’s on the floor? “We got you a dog in our new home.” What is a dog? Is it the creature in the grassless backyard that is chained to a wooden stick? Is it the animal that mother hates and sister is terrified of? Is it the beast that killed three chickens in the neighbor’s backyard? It seems that getting a protective pet served only the opposite effect, as I would always lie in fear, eyes wide awake at night to its terrible howls at home. Home, as dad likes to call it.

The second stop, the guest room. Sorry about the smell, you’ll get used to it. “You’ll cry at my funeral, right?” Of course, just as you repeatedly crushed my dreams and hopes as a little boy. Of course, just as you smoked countless packs of cigarettes in my face day and night. Of course, just as you told me numerous times, my mother and father hated my sister and me as you walked out of your room drunk at 10 a.m. My dear aunt, why wouldn’t I cry at your funeral? After all, your room was the biggest in our home. Home, as dad likes to call it.

The third stop in our trip, the children’s rooms. What’s that on the wall? “Sorry, there’s pink elephants and teddy bears on your walls, we ordered the wrong thing.” Are you sure those were the only wrong things in my room? How about the chair that didn’t fit the table, the TV that didn’t work, the internet outlet that was broken, and the window that never fully closed? Or did you forget about the crack on my closet door, the chandelier that looks like it

could fall, the curtains that looked like ghosts at night, and the little light that was never right? But then again, it was my favorite room in my home. Home, as dad likes to call it.

The fourth stop, the dining room. “Where is papa?” The question that was asked a million times but never answered. Countless starry nights where the three of us ate in silence because dad had commanded: “No talking while eating and no chatting while sleeping.” Oh look, it must be a special occasion tonight. The tables were set, the nice silverware was out, and the chicken was slaughtered. The master must have made plans to dine at home. Home, as dad likes to call it.

The last stop on our tour, the basement. Why is there dust everywhere? “It’s time to practice!” It seems that those words can still be heard in these hallowed halls. The room with the most potential, as the designer of this great house must have envisioned. But when you look at the piano that was collecting dust for years, the family movie room that was used only once, and the living room that never saw a living being, you begin to wonder what happened. Perhaps it was the lack of living that the home was truly missing. Home, as dad likes to call it.

Home for Christmas, home for the New Year, and home for the summer. Maybe one day those words will not mean home to be alone, but home to be united with family. I believe that day will come, when the home won’t be what it used to be.

Such a house of horror will forever haunt my soul, causing my stomach to quake in fright. Ever since I was a child, my family frequented the god-forsaken grounds. From the unseasoned age of three or four or five, my untried body shook in fear after viewing those plain, dull, green letters.

When I was young, my parents designed my platter. My plate was lightly dressed with olives, wontons, pizza strips, and sunflower seeds. This hid some of the repulsiveness from my youthful eyes, but as I aged, I was trusted to make my own decisions. Green salads, pastas, and soups had appeared on the edges of my trays and bowls. My growing hands were trusted with the responsibility of lifting the primitive tool, placing the food, and returning the tool. However, the glorious feelings launched by responsibility soon died beneath me.

With every pro, there exists a con. Right around the turn of my first decade, I had begun to see the dried napkins on the “washed” tray, the smashed, possibly consumed food on the plates and cutlery, the trash littered on the sides of the floor, the odd piece of drywall exuding from the inner beams. The children that handled the serving utensils with their freshly-picked noses and the lady who grabbed blueberry muffins with her hands, only to stuff them into her purse, were merely a few of the spectacles my young mind witnessed. How could this pass a health inspection test?

As my extended family continued to remain loyal to the plethora of pestilence, I started to wonder about my surroundings. I worried for the poor chap allergic to dairy, as dressing from three bowls over spilled into the salad. I worried for the employees, struggling to lift piles of plates filled with the remains of particularly hungry individuals. How could this pass a health inspection test?

Marketing of the satanic shack appeared before me. I saw statements claiming that the freshest and healthiest ingredients were used, and yet, the news had covered their E. coli outbreak earlier that week. Advertisements on my table, and adorning the tables alongside mine, stated to try the “crispy, fresh Wonton salad,” while I saw wilted cabbage, lettuce, and peanuts. The “greens” contained next to it had poured over, forging a blend of tuna and sesame-seed dressing that no gastronomist would even imagine trying, and ruining the hopes of the poor vegetarians reading the sign above. How could this pass a health inspection test?

After returning to the hellish horrors located not but four miles from my home, I decided that I could not eat. Despite the pleadings of my Indian family, I resolved that I could not risk the sickness and plague from the nine-dollar meal. Such items that had graced my plate with their presence for nearly twelve years were banished, never to see the inside of my stomach again. How could this pass a health inspection test?

Since forming my extreme stance, I have never, not once, regretted my claim. My body thanks me each time my parents and brother depart for the dastardly dungeon, entering the house again groaning and clutching their sides. I have chosen to order food delivery on glorious websites such as DoorDash, UberEats, and Postmates. I have chosen to dine by myself, attracting pitiful glances from adults across from me, at the small yet delicious establishment across the street, not minding expending my own dime.

I will never regret not returning to Souplantation.



REFLECTION
Ella DuPree, Class of 2022
PHOTOGRAPHY

“Oh no! I’m late!”

Elijah hurriedly walked down the familiar pathway, hoping to arrive at his destination quickly. He dashed past several people, occasionally saying a quick, “Sorry!” whenever he accidentally ran into someone.

He quickly arrived at his destination, promptly sitting down on a bench as he got there. A garden filled with beautiful, vibrant flower beds, each one intricately unique in shape, size and colors, surrounded the area where Elijah sat. In the center of the garden laid a crystal clear pond. The bright sun beamed down on the breathtaking scenery, making the pond glisten under the light and making the flowers even more radiant.

“Late again, huh?” said an old man, not bothering to look at Elijah. He quietly sat on the bench next to the younger male, gazing at the pond in front of him.

“I’m so sorry sir! I was caught up with work again,” Elijah said, lowering his head with guilt.

“Work, work, work. I swear kid that’s all you ever do! Ya know, your life is gonna fly right by ya one of these days. And trust me, you don’t want that to happen.”

“But that’s not true, sir. If all I did was work then I wouldn’t be here with you.”

“Heh, getting smart now? You’ve been spending way too much time with me, kid.”

“Hmm, I’d like to disagree sir. As a matter of fact, I think I don’t spend enough time with you.”

An awkward silence settled over the two of them, neither one of them willing to speak first. Elijah was about to change the topic of conversation when the old man abruptly said, “Hey kid, I’ve been meaning to ask, why do you visit me here everyday? I’m sure you got better things to do then keep some old geezer company.” The man, for the first time since the conversation started, looked towards Elijah, doubt and genuine curiosity evident in his eyes. Elijah paused for a moment and thought about the question at hand: why did he visit him here? He thought for a moment longer, pondering why exactly he chose to see this man, who he actually doesn’t know personally, so often that they have a set schedule for visits. Finally, he spoke up, “In all honesty sir, I don’t know.” Silence settled upon the two once more. However, it was Elijah who broke the silence this time.

“However, what I do know is that I don’t regret it. To be frank, you’ve made these tough days a little more bearable and given me something to look forward to after I get off work. So thank you, sir.”

The old man looked away from Elijah, gazing upon the pond once more. He stayed quiet for a moment until he spoke up. “Ya know, kid, this spot here was my wife’s favorite spot.”

Elijah looked at the old man, shock evident along the features of his face. This was the very first time since he had stumbled upon the old man in this very spot that he had ever opened up about his personal life. In all of the previous conversations they've had, never once had the man ever mentioned anything about a wife, kids, or anything along those lines.

"Really?" asked Elijah.

"Yep. No matter how many times we came here, she never grew tired of the scene."

"I don't blame her. It is quite beautiful here. If I may ask, where is she now?"

Once more, the old man fell quiet. However, this time, Elijah noticed the slight change in the old man's expression. The man's once stoic, expressionless face now was one of sadness. It was a subtle change, but a noticeable one.

"I'm sorry, forget that I asked," Elijah said hurriedly, not wanting to upset the old man.

"Ya gotta quit apologizing, kid. It gets old after a while. Anyways, she's not here because she passed away only 10 years after we got married."

"I'm so sorry, sir."

"Hey! What'd I say about apologizing?"

"Right."

"As I was saying, this was her favorite spot. But after she left it never felt quite the same; it's been more lonely. But it's one of the few things that remind me of her so I never had the courage to stop coming here. I guess what I'm trying to get at is ever since you started comin', it hasn't felt quite as lonely. So thanks kid. I may not always act like it but I'm glad that you put up with me."

"Thank you, sir! I'm glad that you enjoy my company."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever. Enough sappy stuff. Now, if you're gonna be spending more time with me, you gotta learn how to toughen up. I ain't letting no friend of mine grow all soft and wimpy on me, ya hear?"

"Yessir!"

Friend. That was the first time the old man had ever referred to Elijah as something other than just some random kid. Elijah couldn't stop the bright smile that grew on his face. He knew that this would be the start of a friendship that would be worth more than gold.



JEEP
Katie Doche, Class of 2021
PHOTOGRAPHY

If Andrew could have prepared himself for the day he was about to have, he would have. He probably would have been up the whole night before studying for it. But he had no clue. So when it came time for him to take his three-year-old son to the park he loaded up the car with a few toys and a blanket. He then filled up a few water bottles and put his son into the car and they were off.

Once they arrived at the park, Andrew let his son go play for a little bit while he set up the picnic. After a while his son came back and they ate together. Instead of going back to playing after he was done, the child just sat there staring at an ant on a blade of grass, fascinated by it, watching it crawl up and down in a search for food.

Then the child asked, "Daddy, why can ants crawl up and down leaves and grass?" Andrew replied, "Because of the way they were created."

"Oh," said the child, who then went back to observing the world around him. Right as Andrew was beginning to relax, his son asked, "Daddy, why can birds fly?"

"Because of their wings."

"Ohhh." A minute of silence went by. "Why do birds have wings?"

Andrew thought for a moment on how to explain it to his child and then replied, "So they can fly."

"Why can they fly?" asked the child.

And so they cycled back and forth for a few minutes until Andrew finally said, "They have wings because that is the way God created them."

Silence. And then "Why did God create them that way?"

"Because it was a part of His perfect plan."

Soon the child's questions became more frequent and sporadic. Why do fish live under water? Why do birds eat worms? Why do squirrels eat nuts and seeds? On and on the why questions came. After a while Andrew stopped

thinking about precise answers. If it felt like the answer could be plausible, he went with it.

"Animals walk on four legs to help them keep their balance," replied the dad.

"Why do we walk on two legs?" questioned the child.

"Because we can keep our balance on two legs," reasoned Andrew.

After this exchange, there was a moment of silence and Andrew laid back on the blanket. His kid joined him. After a few minutes of looking at the sky, the child pointed his finger up and asked, "Why does it look like that?"

Now Andrew remembered this from his high school years. He wasn't sure how but it stayed with him. "You know, I've heard a few different answers on why the sky takes its colors. I used to think it was because it was a reflection of the ocean. But it's really because of the way different particles in the atmosphere absorb the wavelengths of light. Thus in the daytime we see mostly blue."

The child was quiet for a few seconds and then said, "I was talking about why that cloud looks like Oliver."

Andrew looked up more closely and noticed that the cloud did in fact look like their dog. He looked over at his kid, ruffled the child's hair, and said, "Come on my little detective. Let's go home." And so they loaded up the car. Once stopped at a red light, Andrew looked back through his rear view mirror at his kid who was looking out the window.

"Tonight mom is bringing home dinner," said Andrew.

"Daddy, why do we eat dinner?"



A VOICE OF TIN

by Elle Neuhoff
CLASS OF 2021

Christmas Eve. The smell of chocolate. Of pine needles. Of snow. London had been my home for as long as I could remember, but there was something about the city during this particular time of year that was unique — a metamorphosis from daily life to memory making. I had just come from Gimble's, the enormous store on the corner of Oxford Street. Something about walking through the store, just smelling the scents, and taking in the sights made it feel more like Christmas than even buying our tree or making gingerbread houses.

I only had an hour to run home and get ready for dinner at my parents' house. Christmas Eve was a tradition and marked the night of by far the craziest party my parents hosted all year. They were always the entertainers, the hosts among friends. However, they even outdid themselves on Christmas Eve — seven courses, live music, ice sculptures, the works. I gathered my bags in my arms rooting around my purse to find my phone. Loose mint, old receipts. Where is my phone! At last, I felt the freezing block at the bottom of my bag. I pulled it out and began dialing the number I knew by heart.

"Hey, I'm almost home. We have to be at my parents' house by six. Will you —" I didn't have time to finish what I was about to say before I turned the corner and was knocked to the ground. Goodness, that hurt. My mind was blank. Everything around me was empty, and the color of coal, and absolutely freezing. I seriously had to get knocked out on the coldest night of the year? Not when it was a million degrees in the summer and I could defrost

with the sun on my face while the crowd gathers above me? No. It had to be in the dead of winter as I lay in the middle of a puddle of what seems to be a finally thawed iceberg.

"Miss, miss! Are you alright?" I heard a voice come from directly above my head. This was not a usual voice. Certainly not one of a generic variety. It was a voice of tin, of rusted tin that had once been shiny and new but at some point had gotten wet, been left outside, and rusted for decades on end. Suddenly I panicked. My mind raced. Why can't I open my eyes? Is it because I hit my head? Wait, no, they are definitely frozen shut. My eyes are frozen! Frozen shut! I could feel my mittened hand reach up to my eyelids.

"You took quite a spill, ma'am. Allow me to help you to your feet!" I could hear the voice explaining as I felt an arm pull me slowly upwards. I could make out the shape of a person and hear the voice of rusty tin but could not make out any details. I heard this voice explaining to someone nearby, someone in a uniform standing beside a glowing truck. Then suddenly it was gone.

"Ma'am are you alright?" This voice was different, a commanding voice far deeper than the one of tin. My eyes let bits of light in slowly at a time until I saw a man in a navy uniform above me.

"Ma'am someone just explained you were knocked off your feet by a man running by. Do you recall this?" he questioned.

"No officer, just a kind man who checked on me before anyone else arrived. I must have slipped on the ice," I replied.

Big Ben struck 5 pm. It was Christmas Eve and the city was bustling with the rapid paces of countless shoppers, sightseers, and pedestrians rushing to and fro in preparation for celebrations. A young woman rushed out of the storefront, her arms filled from wrist to shoulder with countless bags in shades of cherry and forest green. She was filled with joy, excitement, and shock at her sudden realization of the time. The woman grabbed her purse, the one grey item among the vibrant shopping bags, and after many failed attempts, pulled out her cell phone. She dialed a number she knew by heart, her fiancé, and only began to explain her time crunch when her call was knocked short, quite literally.

For just fifteen minutes earlier a man had been in the same store as her. He too walked out of the store with countless bags in his arms. Only they were not bags of cherry and forest green but rather canvas sacks to conceal the valuable content within. The man ran out the side door so as to not set off the alarms. His arms ached, but his feet carried him forward with great speed. His feet froze from the icy water that sloshed within his shoes, but he could care less. His mind was only set on the value of what he had just stolen, the stacks of paper that would take him from rags to riches. Faster, faster he thought to himself emerging from the alley.

“Hey, I’m almost home. We have to be at my parents’ house by six. Will you —” came the young woman’s voice on the corner. The thief heard it but in the echo of the ally, he could not tell where it was coming from. He

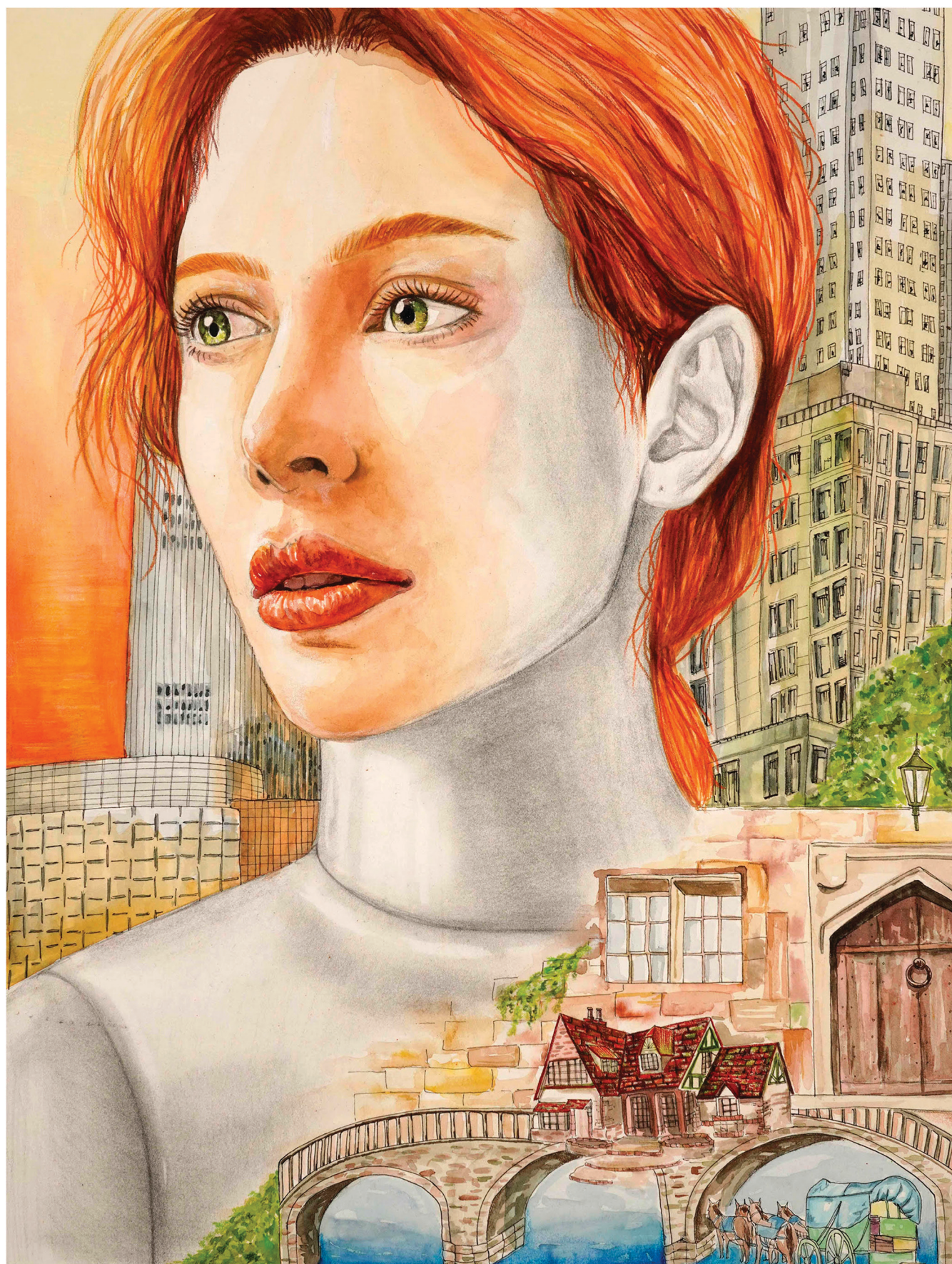
was only focused on moving forward until ... smack! The despicable thief and innocent shopper collided, knocking the poor woman straight to the ground in a puddle of liquid frost. She had no idea what happened, no clue as to why she could not open her eyes.

“You took quite a spill, ma’am. Allow me to help you to your feet,” the thief stated as he concealed his bags under coal-colored garbage bags and attempted to hide in plain sight. What an odd voice. A voice like rusted tin, the young woman thought to herself as she was slowly brought to her feet. She could barely make out the sounds of this voice explaining to another person what had happened. How someone had collided with her. But he knew better than to run or to admit anything. Rather, he helped the woman to her feet, he explained to the EMT what had happened, allowed a crowd to gather, and hurriedly ducked out the back. A crowd gathered around her as the EMT, stressed under the pressure of such a crowd, attempted to attend to the poor woman, bags caked in alleyway mud and her entire trench coat soaked in melted snow.

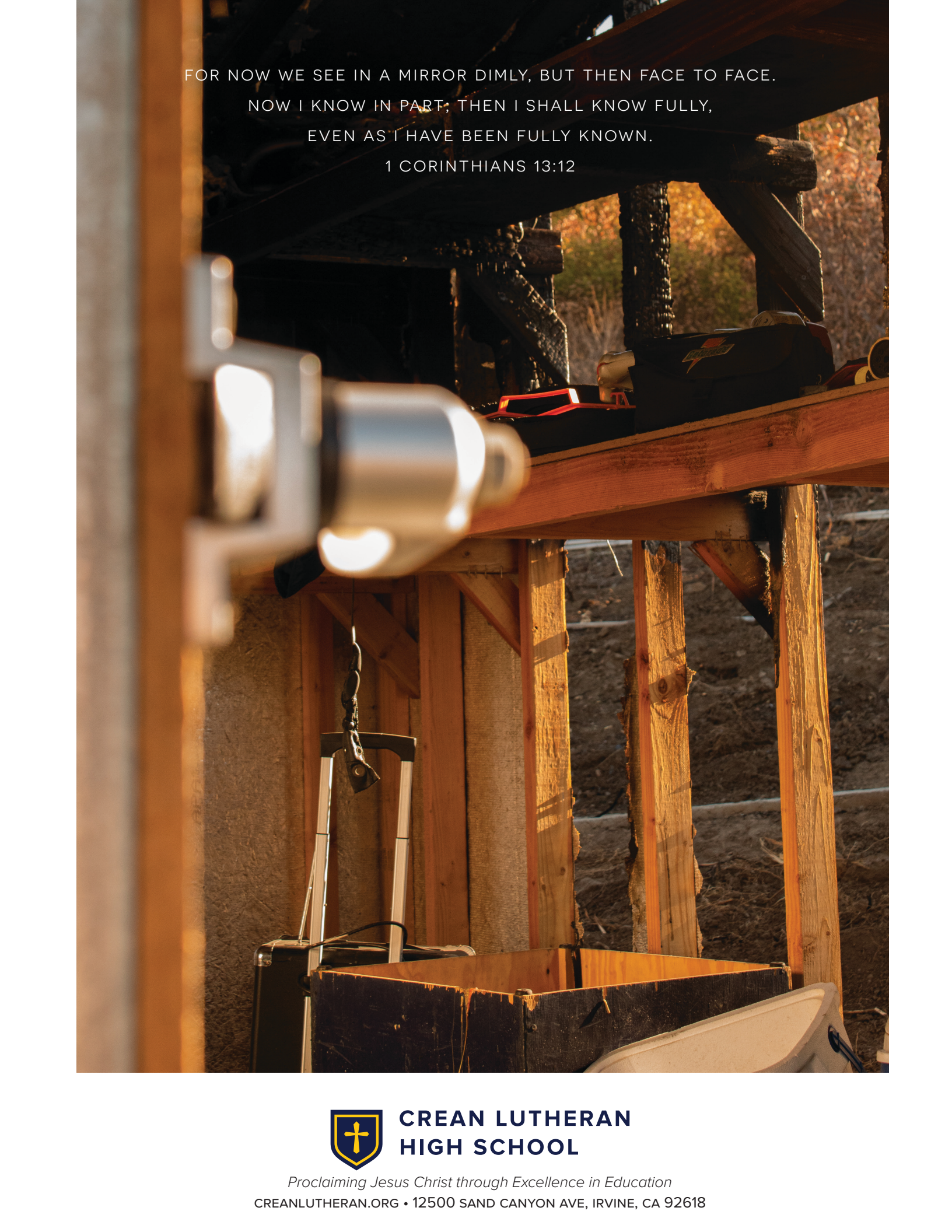
“I must have slipped on the ice,” she confusedly attempted to reason while a heinous man ran off with the wealth of a king and not a tinge of regret weighing on his conscience.

EDITORS NOTE:

The paired stories on pages 42-43 derive from an assignment asking students to describe one scene from two points of view. With the artist's permission, the artwork on pages 42-43 has been cropped to fit.



NATURAL BEAUTY
Stella Rhee, Class of 2021
WATERCOLOR & PEN



FOR NOW WE SEE IN A MIRROR DIMLY, BUT THEN FACE TO FACE.
NOW I KNOW IN PART; THEN I SHALL KNOW FULLY,
EVEN AS I HAVE BEEN FULLY KNOWN.
1 CORINTHIANS 13:12



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