

NO. 13

SPRING ISSUE



No. 13 | Spring Issue

**THE WILDCAT
REVIEW**

Cover photo by Cleoko Chan

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ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

The Wildcat Review is a student-run literary magazine that publishes creative writing, art, and photography by Los Gatos High School students and staff. By serving as a platform for members of the LGHS community to express their creativity, *The Wildcat Review* aims to spur the LGHS community to create more, share more, and reveal the uniqueness in them that sometimes only the creative arts can express.

The Wildcat Review aims to publish new issues twice a year: once in the fall semester and once in the spring semester. Students may submit their work online via a Google Form. Submissions are open to the entire student body and staff.

The Editorial Board reviews submissions and provides constructive feedback during weekly meetings, as well as through an online asynchronous editing process. Editors are allowed to submit their own work for others to review.

Once published, physical copies of *The Wildcat Review* issues are available at the Los Gatos Public Library, LGHS Library, and classrooms around LGHS for people to read for free. Digital copies are also available on the school website. Copies are also available for individual purchase.

Visit our website www.wildcatreviewmag.com to learn more about our publication, submit your own creative work for review, and find opportunities to support us.

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ART

Serena Luo | Junior



REMINISCING

ARTIST STATEMENT: This artwork reflects the way my dreams manifest—filled with replays and reenactments of memories that pull me away from the present. I often revisit my younger self, a time when I spoke fluent Mandarin and felt certain of my cultural identity. Through contrasts in color within the dreamlike atmosphere, I illustrate how dwelling in the past can leave me stuck. While dreams can foster personal growth, losing touch with reality can lead to the erosion of identity.

DANDELION

Anonymous | Freshman

The summer sun hung in the air
The clouds in puffs of smoke
I watched people pass along the path
I watched but never spoke

I saw a dandelion plucked
From its home in the sun-soaked ground
The stranger blew the seeds away
Spoke words that distance drowned

Seeds floated towards my outstretched hands
And I took their wish for my own
I buried the seeds deep underground
Among the dirt and stones

Why would I ever do such a thing?
See it from my point of view
How can I let someone have their wish
If mine will never come true?

PHOTOGRAPHY

Connor Lin | Sophomore



UNTITLED

ARTIST STATEMENT: (@connorclickspics) This was taken at 2024 STPR in Wellsboro, PA.

THE LAUNDROMAT

Matilda Luton | Junior

The laundromat is a dismal place. Dim, pale yellow lights illuminate the cracks on the old benches and the long-worn linoleum floors, the glow echoing that of the faint quarter moon outside. A certain stillness settles upon every patron coming through the door; pools in the corners near the extra detergent, coats the smudged glass walls, lingers like an endearing peace among the machines.

You know your path well now. Sorting your laundry on the old tables, getting a bag for your delicates, finding your machine. The clink of change echoes faintly through the room. Even at night, your preferred laundry slot, a few souls still linger; they quietly share this space with you. Every night you're here. So are the others, moving in and out through a familiar rhythm.

The Laundromat is a transient place. The people never stop coming, a continuous movement, ebbing and flowing like the waves on a lakeshore. Life never stops moving here. While the dryer runs, you move slowly back to the worn bench on the left wall, glancing at the others in the shop. Someone special once taught you how to observe a life through the simple habits, a talent you continue to practice, watching people cycle through life among the worn-out machines. Someone fiddles distantly with the bill reader, inexperienced hands on the dirty surface, someone unaccustomed to the rhythm of the laundromat. A purple plastic basket holding detergent and fabric softener sits lonely next to a chair, waiting patiently to be picked up by its owner – she's later than usual. The laundromat shuffles through routines and phases, just like its inhabitants.

Pulling your laundry into a cloth bag, you notice the unfamiliar smell, the new detergent you had to buy because your roommate moved out and stole your old one. You wonder quietly if the machine noticed the difference; if anyone else would notice the difference, if the other patrons quietly learn each other's routines, moving in a rhythm through the stillness. Would they notice if a man's clothes were mixed in with yours, maybe someday a baby's onesie? Would they notice when you

stop coming back, the silence of the laundromat filling the space you left? Can they see your life moving in circles like the laundry turning in the dryers?

In the shop a machine dings, finished with its cycle. The door creaks open with a new patron, fabric beads sloshing in their container. An old one leaves for the last time. She says goodbye to the old door handles. A father struggles to fold a child's multicolored tulle skirt. Saying goodbye to the old yellow lights, you breathe in the stillness before heading out into the night, the Laundromat illuminated behind you.

ART

David Wang | Senior



GIRL 39.5

ARTIST STATEMENT: My 39th digital portrait study. I wanted to submit something more interesting than yet another portrait, so I put a spin on it following Joseph.



JOSEPH

ARTIST STATEMENT: I asked my friends to name this piece and one of them just said “Joseph”. I thought it was funny. This model was designed by Yutaka Naito and folded with a 84cm x 28cm rectangle with no cuts. This choice of model was inspired by the miserable amount of anatomy studies I have been doing.

SHEEP SKIN

Anonymous | Junior

Once again
I am left
Without obtrusion.
In cold dawns, glowing
The sun peeks her head behind mountains
Shy to expose herself to our landscape.
My mother snores softly
Sleep, a gentle blanket
Shielding her from the frozen air
So shockingly real
Its teeth gnaw softly on my shoulders.
Her freckles, sprinkled across soft skin
Like craters of a soul, seeping
Our blood manifested in those specks
Seen in ones that litter my face.
The dog rests on papers
His whining ought to commence soon
But now, the blanket soothes him
Letting his dark eyes trust his dark lids
The rain bears no harm to us.

A WALTZ WITH DEATH

Kelsey Sycks | Junior

Dead. My blood-soaked hands tremble, with fear or excitement I don't know. My mind is a jumble of noises, and my brain shuts off. My eyes wander down, taking in the pale body. He looks so unnatural in this position. His eyes are open, green eyes staring lifelessly into my blue ones. His head bleeds so much blood, creating a pool around my feet. I can only think of one thing: monster.

Tears start pouring down my eyes as I collapse, the sand running between my thighs. "I'm sorry," I scream to the heavens, hoping they can forgive me. "I had to," I say, repeating that thought over and over like a broken record. But did you? My mind retorts back. Now I question myself. Did I even have a choice? *Of course I didn't*, I think to myself. My choices were stolen the day I was born.

3 hours earlier

It's a beautiful night out with my boyfriend. The air is warm, but a slight breeze trickles through. We always have lovely conversations, but sometimes he starts asking philosophical questions.

"Who are you?" he asks. I am at a loss for words.

"I don't know," I respond.

"Well, let me help you find out," he says, grabbing my hand.

We dance. The sun is setting, casting an orange glow upon us. The first stars are just peeking out as if to say hello. The music floats up into the air, creating ripples that dance in front of the sun. The mountains stand tall and majestic, acting as a shield for the sun to rest. As he leads me around the dance floor, we waltz and step on each other's toes. Well, he steps on my toes. My rigorous training would freak out if I messed up a waltz. By then, the sky is a bright black, and the lights come on, illuminating the square.

As darkness falls, people start drifting off. But not us. We dance under the moonlight, with the symphony of the band playing in the background. We dance for hours, just us. Me and him against the world. As he twirls me around, I let all my worries disappear. I feel the ring in his back pocket. A flutter of happiness runs through me.

After we grow tired, we flee under the cover of darkness to the forest. A noise makes me turn around, and my love is standing there. His wind-swept hair gives him a handsome look, and the lopsided smile floods me with happiness. He leads me deeper into the forest, the trees blocking the moonlight. We come across a graveyard, the headstones all withered away. Is he proposing to me in a graveyard? Sure, I may have some dark thoughts, but I don't think it would warrant a graveyard.

"What do you think about death and romance?" he questions.

I am startled.

"What would you say if I proposed to someone in a graveyard?" he asks again. "I think it is very romantic. Do you think death is romantic?"

"I suppose," I say, thinking aloud. "There's something beautiful in death. Peaceful. It's tragic, too. But isn't everything? We're all going to die one day. Proposing in a cemetery is like... It's like acknowledging that your love may not be forever in life, but it will exist for eternity. Beyond this plane, beyond the life we're living now. Love doesn't run out when we die. We stay loving the people we love, and that never fades. I think that's beautiful. But tragic, because what happens when you love someone so much but you lose them? You're left with all this love and nowhere for it to go. The world is full of love, I can't imagine it stops in death."

"That's..." he looks shocked.

"Graveyards are like a reminder of that. All those people loved someone at some point, and they were probably loved in turn. Yet their gravestones become weatherworn until you can barely decipher the words engraved on them, and moss grows around the base until the whole stone looks neglected and uncared for. Because at some point, everyone we love in life joins us on the other side," I finish off, hoping I'm not getting too philosophical, even for his standards.

He looks toward the trees, deep in thought. He then gets down on one knee and pops the question. "Will you marry me?" he asks, his voice full of hope.

I am quiet. What should I say? "Yes," I respond.

His whole body deflates, and his eyes get back that shine. He puts the ring on me, and it's a beautiful blue diamond stone. As we stroll hand in hand together, we start talking about forgetfulness.

"Isn't it a bad thing to be forgotten?" I ask, wondering what he

will say.

“Of course not,” he says. “It means we have everyone we love in life with us. We’re finally reunited. One day, I hope I have a joint headstone with you, and I hope it becomes one of those stones people look at and feel sad about because no one is left to remember us. Nobody is left to maintain the stone because everyone we love is with us, in heaven. We’ve been reunited. I could care less about my headstone. What I care about is the people who will visit my grave and cry for me.”

I ponder that thought. When you think about it that way, it makes death seem almost human. I see a shadow in my peripheral vision. I know the time is up. I stare at the back of his head. I reach into my pocket and pull out a large rock. I pick it up when I scout the beach for the perfect spot. The most beautiful spot. I look away. I love him. It’s why I can’t bring myself to look at him. “Love?”

“Yeah?”

I exhale. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

I swallow as I step closer. I raise the rock, my lip wobbles, “I’m so sorry.”

“What are you—”

I bring the rock down hard. My love’s body crumples to the floor. I strike him again, and again, directly in the back of the head. I keep going even as tears fall down his face, and the moment my grip begins to slip from all the blood staining my hand, I know it’s done. A sob breaks from my chest. What have I done? The rock falls from my hand, landing with a soft thud on the ground. As the sky begins to fade into a light pink, and the stars begin to dwindle, the only thing I can think of is death awaiting my love. I have a choice to make today, and I wonder for eternity if that choice is right. As I look at the shadowy figure, he nods and vanishes away, his job done for the night. I now know who I am. I am the messenger of death and darkness. I am the everlasting soul. I am Death’s daughter. And I am always, always destined for tragedy.

ARTIST STATEMENT:

I was always fascinated with death and romance and was looking for a piece to submit for my Creative Writing class. I was feeling philosophical at the time, and I just wrote what my thoughts on death and romance were, connecting them together.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Kay Clevenger | Sophomore



PASSERINE

ARTIST STATEMENT: It's hard for me to calm myself down and remind myself that life is more than my worries, but living my life outside with the birds brings more meaning to my everyday.



PERCHED

OH ABBESS

Anonymous | Junior

What will become of us
When space is extended beyond walls,
Our dichotomy irrelevant?
Will you answer me with scorn?
Our youth, pressed into polaroids,
Blurred by visions of warmth and camaraderie –
Was your passion whisked away
Like the years of dark mornings?
Inching into the integrity of my bones,
Those forgotten words
Echo in somber dissonance.
Was my cry too jarring?
As I bled onto our shared tile,
Eyes glazed over by moonlight,
Your room stood adjacent,
And so did you.

ART

Jingtong Gu | Senior



39&39!

ART

Ishaan Allen | Junior



ZENDAYA



IF THERE IS NO STRUGGLE, THERE IS NO PROGRESS

THE NECKLACE

Anonymous | Freshman

When I started wearing a scorpion necklace during the summer of eighth grade, my mom was not excited. We're Indian, so jewelry is a status symbol as much as it is a fun accessory. My mom didn't like how, with all the beautiful golden statement pieces and delicate pendants in the house (hidden in various locations), I chose a cheap, ugly, creepy, gag-gift, hand-me-down necklace: a scorpion encased in glow-in-the-dark plastic, hanging from a tough black string.

As for why I chose the necklace, my reasons were simple: I thought it was cool and I liked scorpions. But the reason was a bit more complicated. Like my too-many-bracelets phase, my only-leggings phase, and my brief cat-ear phase (which I blame on pandemic-induced insanity), the scorpion necklace was another attempt to define myself. After so long of being pressured to wear whatever my parents chose, eat whatever everyone else was eating, be what everyone expected me to be, I needed to find out what I wanted. And, for a phase at least, what I wanted was to wear too many bracelets, or wear only leggings, or wear cat ears continuously (the only phase I regret).

Or wear a scorpion necklace. I wore "Scorpy" (don't judge me!) continuously for a full year, only taking it off for certain outfits it would clash with. But my time with Scorpy was sadly cut short. During high school orientation, I was fiddling with my necklace when the string broke and the pendant fell into the grass. I immediately fell to my hands and knees, and, ignoring the people staring at me, began looking for it. Despite recruiting all my friends and several strangers, it was gone.

The loss of the necklace coincided with my biggest identity change yet: the one each adolescent goes through upon entering high school. The truth I hadn't known through all my experimentation was that it's more complicated to be yourself and know what you really want than just trying different styles and accessories. And it's possible to lose yourself, like I lost my necklace in the grass that first day. As a high-schooler with social and academic pressures, I fell down the rabbit hole in more ways than one. For so many teenagers, the same issue is

there: you don't realize the White Rabbit you are chasing is an illusion. And after spending years in Wonderland, returning to the world above seems impossible.

I'd love to say that I found the necklace again sometime during my time in high school. But the truth is that I never found it again. While some part of me would love to think that someday, perhaps returning as an alumni, or as an old woman taking a walk past my old school, I would find the necklace in the grass, I know that finding it is a journey—finding parts of yourself, losing parts of yourself, and trying to know yourself just a little better.

ARTIST STATEMENT:

This is a true story about a necklace that I lost. When I lost it, I remembered thinking, "Wow, this would make a great metaphor!" It ended up actually being a very good metaphor with everything that happened in the following months. I hope this piece is a good reminder of how important it is to have respect for and stay true to yourself.

ART

Estelle Paduano | Junior



MOUNTAIN CHARLIE MCKIERNAN

ARTIST STATEMENT: I live on Mountain Charlie Road, named after Charles Henry McKiernan (also known as “Mountain Charlie”). Originally, the road was a Native American footpath. It was later widened by Native Americans at the behest of Spanish monks from Mission Santa Clara to accommodate horses and establish Mission Santa Cruz. In 1858, Mountain Charlie McKiernan, the first white settler in the Summit area, graded the road with a team of oxen, allowing for horse-drawn carriage traffic. He operated the road as a toll road from Scotts Valley to the Summit of the Santa Cruz Mountains from 1858 to 1878, after which Santa Cruz County paid to make Mountain Charlie Road a public road. Mountain Charlie lived a colorful life, which included two fights with grizzly bears. While tracing my sketch onto the canvas, the carbon tracing paper stuck to the paint and created lines that reminded me of the marks termites make while chewing underneath tree bark. I decided to incorporate this texture into my final painting as a way to connect Mountain Charlie’s image to the land he lived on.



CHESEBROUGH MANUFACTURING COMPANY

ARTIST STATEMENT: My property's 1,000–2,000-year-old old-growth redwoods were logged in the early 1900s to help rebuild San Francisco after the 1906 fire and earthquake. This Chesebrough Vaseline Manufacturing Company jar was found at the bottom of a gulch by a creek, among old-growth stumps and the second-growth trees that surround them. This vintage jar was only manufactured between 1908 and 1912, providing some insight into the date of its deposition. I depicted the jar, implicated in the removal of redwoods, repurposed to hold cones bearing the seeds to germinate future generations.

SHOES

Natalie Schubert | Junior

You get a new pair of shoes
Good shoes
Expensive shoes
Shoes that cost you a lot.
You love them and if they pinch your toes
And if they scratch your heels
You can ignore that.
Because they're good, expensive shoes.
You love them and if you get blisters
And if you trip on them and fall
You can ignore that.
Because you gave up a lot for these here good shoes.
And if blood soaks your socks
And if every step is discomfort and pain
You can ignore that.
Because they're good shoes.
Expensive shoes.
And they're worth it.
Despite the blood
Despite the pain
They're worth it.
And if your feet are ground to nothing
And if you are paralyzed by agony
You can ignore that.
Because these good, expensive, costly shoes,
They're worth it.
Right?

A LIGHTEYES' LAMENT

Cassie Wei | Junior

Mother, Father, Brother, Bother
Of her family, lead to slaughter
Not her fault, of course it's not
A Testament to torment, say
Their faces lurk beyond her thoughts

Faces, Edges, Points and Patterns
Each sketch comes with a midnight splatter
Her haunts return, force her to tell
Lies cannot abstain her fate
To face her mind, this tortured hell

Symmetry: a prize for which we strive
One line changed, a different life
She, A doll, in masks of craft
Under Veil, they don't see
This formless thing that she might be

Me, her, it, she
In Radiance unveils my plea
To speak my truth, to face my truth, to live my truth, to be my truth

Mother, Father, Mother, Mother
Testament dead in the eye
Oaths spoken by none but I
Trapped in here, I'm not alone
A new me grows, one I condoned
No Veil, no Radiant, form true of me
To face the years in this bead sea

ARTIST STATEMENT:

Disclaimer: This is not a poem about me, but about a character named Shallan with split personality disorder. Throughout the poem you see her struggle with hiding from her childhood trauma (killing her parents) by wearing a “mask,” or new persona. You see her three personas converge into one through the pronoun change. Sprinkled throughout are names of important people in her life, including, but not limited to, her other personalities. (Hence the seemingly random capitalizations).

PHOTOGRAPHY

Chesle Bae | Junior



BEACH

ARTIST STATEMENT: No creative process; just wanted banger archives for my Instagram but later realized they're too good for my feed.



SPIRIT OF THE BAY

ONLY DOWN

Hayley Strahs | Junior

In a time of triumph, what once gave me powers
In an age of panic, now leaves me blind.
Fogged up and slippery,
I see two mirrors: the funhouse kind.

I bid farewell, for the end is near.
I greet the statues, still trembling with fear.
Sturdy yet sickly,
I see my reflection.
I see another timeline.

Despite turning and burning, I cannot escape.
The effigy is gone; two kaleidoscopes took her place.
The future surrounds me, engulfing me whole.
I can't escape it, no matter which way I go...

Except for down.
Only down.
That's the way I must go.
No one will expect it,
And naught will dare follow.
When the last grain hits, I wipe away my tears.
Through reluctant acceptance, my vision clears:
Only down is the way from here.
Only down.
Only down.
Let go of your fear.

If I were but an image,
I'd be encased in stone,
Unhappy with my choices and forever alone.
If it weren't for the shards,
I'd never have been found.
Thankfully, I stopped to look around.

ARTIST STATEMENT:

“Only Down” depicts the feeling of paranoia and how when left unchecked, it can lead to misinformed and rash decisions. I based this poem on my own experiences with anxiety and how it often impacts my view of the world

PHOTOGRAPHY

Hayley Strahs | Junior



9:52 AM

ARTIST STATEMENT: I love cityscape photography, so when I came across this corner in Japan, I had to snap a photo! With all of the cherry blossom decorations, this looks like something out of a comic book, which I thought was really cool.



GOODNIGHT, ARIZONA

ARTIST STATEMENT: I took this at my grandparents' house in Scottsdale. Growing up, my family would always read those "Goodnight, Moon" books with me, so I thought "Goodnight, Arizona" would be a fitting title for this grand sunset.

BORN AS A WRITER

Sage Cobb | Junior

Sometimes I wonder
If I was supposed to make it to sixteen
I know I wasn't supposed
To survive that first week
But here I am
Sixteen

I don't know if it's a question
Of life and death
Or identity
I know hate dies easier than love
I know love lives easier than hate
I'm not saying hate was me
I'm saying I hated
When I should have loved

I wonder what the newborn
Who had to be shocked
Back to life felt
Or if they even did
It was probably scary
It still is

Sometimes I wonder
Why I am a writer
And if I was destined to be
I know at this point
I hold on to that identity
Like the unpromised tomorrow
Will never come

As the newborn grew up
Into a disabled child
They never thought they'd make it
To sixteen
I don't think they thought
They'd meet their death,
Or maybe they did,
But they couldn't
See themselves growing

I don't believe in destiny
At least, I don't want to
Though, I find it pointless to ponder
But I guess that's what I'm doing

If you take someone's name,
Someone's gender,
Someone's hatred,
Someone's identity,
Are they still the same person?
Or have they been replaced?

I don't actually think
The newborn or the disabled child
Made it to sixteen
Maybe parts of them
Still exist in the soul
Of someone out there

I don't want to believe
In destiny
Because I don't want to believe
That the deaths were always going
To happen
That feels like a betrayal
To them

I used to think I was a writer
Because I was born new
But maybe that newborn
And the disabled child
Want to understand
The intangible world
And the only way that's possible
Is through my words

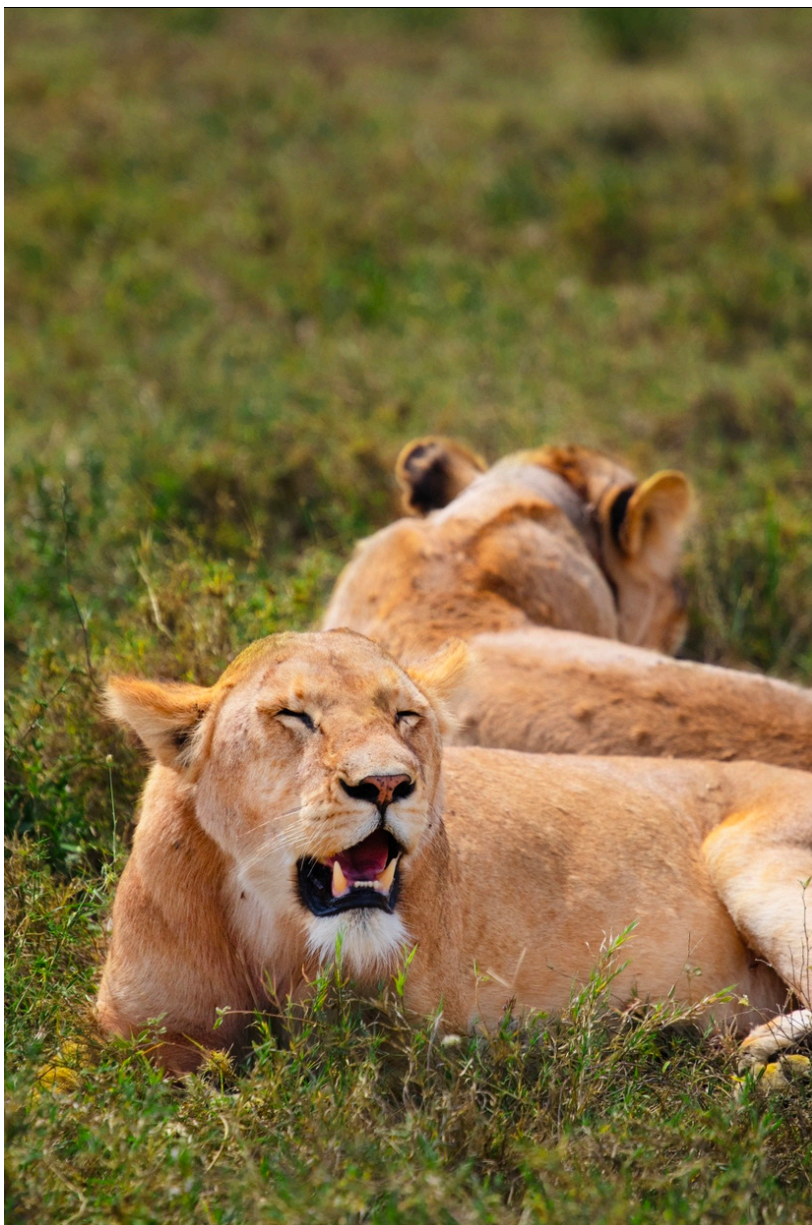
So yes,
I was supposed to make it
To sixteen
But I wasn't born
As a newborn
I was born
As a writer

ARTIST STATEMENT:

This is a poem about my experience being trans and having cerebral palsy.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Ishaan Allen | Junior



POWERFUL YAWN



KING OF BEASTS



LAZY LION

THE SECOND FLOOR

Anonymous | Junior

A sudden revelation
Through lapses of euphoria
Dulled quietly by a trace of loneliness.
Left in my own clothes
Words, thoughts, myself
So different yet undetectable.
Will you hold me
Like a helpless child?
Slurred with laughter
That constant ringing of air
Annoyance, solitude
All those that bring me.
Just waiting,
My body encapsulated
Like a gelatin warmth, and
Your cold eyes
Breaking what was left.
Let my words leave no mark
Shield me from disappointment
Take my sword as the sound.
Let me spill and break
Leaving you to clean me.
I'll dream fuzzy, content
You would drive me home.

WHY REAP THE WEEPING RHINO

Cruz Cortez | Freshman

I show off with shame my horn on my head,
Satan's curse: the Javan Rhino birthright;
Whispering winds whip as the day winds dead,
Reminding me more of earlier light.

We were walking when we were met with man,
His sin stick loaded and ready to go;
He held it sky heaven high, so low I ran,
Dooms deadly baton in adagio.

Metal lightning meets, and my brother falls;
Foreign fear stings as silence steals his eyes.
The land man stands laughing as close he draws,
Two black points on his head and eyes of lies.

My brother's horn he grips and he rips;
It tears off his crown as crying blood drips.

ARTIST STATEMENT:

Evil can harm the different, even if different is good.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Naitik Gupta | Sophomore



SILENT TRACKS

ARTIST STATEMENT: Emphasizing the calm yet moody atmosphere as the cart moves through the city. | Capturing San Francisco's low-rise with a gloomy yet serene vibe.



HIGHBOUND STREETS

GOODBYE TO 754-3093

Tonya McQuade | Staff

Yesterday, my dad had me call to cancel the phone line at their home on Minta Lane. He and my mom are moving to an assisted living facility, and even though he'll be going back and forth between the two for a while, he said they could just use their cell phones. I also cancelled the internet service and Direct TV, but neither of those carried the same weight for me as canceling the phone number with which I grew up: 754-3093.

We moved to Antioch when I was four years old. My dad had accepted a teaching job at Antioch High School in Industrial Arts, and my parents purchased the house at 2300 Kendree Street. I quickly began meeting some of the neighbors, and soon found myself roller skating with Suellen, Tonja, and Trina who lived next door.

That Fall, I started Kindergarten at Turner School and met my first school friends: Karen (who lived just one street away) and Margaret and Sandra (who were quite a few blocks away). I also met Jamie, whose mom was my teacher, but Jamie was in the other Kindergarten class and didn't become a close friend until we had the same teacher the following year.

As we grew older and began exchanging phone numbers, "754-3093" was the number my friends would call to reach me. No area code was required in those days, at least if you were calling locally. I can still remember many of my friends' old numbers, even though I haven't called them in years. Ask me if I remember any of my current friends' phone numbers. Ha.

Back then, we had one phone in the kitchen, with a cord that was not very long and a rotary dial. Even when the push-button style became much more common, we still had a "dial phone" because, according to my dad, the "push button type" cost more. I don't know if that was actually true - I just remember how long it took to dial numbers with 9's and 0's like ours.

There also wasn't a whole lot of privacy when you had to talk on a phone in the kitchen. At some point, my parents added a phone in their room, and I do remember sneaking in there sometimes to make calls where I could enjoy some peace and quiet and not worry everyone was listening to my conversation.

When I was in eighth grade, we moved to Minta Lane, into a house that my parents built. Our phone number moved with us – and we added an upstairs phone extension that I could use. Eventually, we got a phone with a longer cord so I could bring the phone into my room. Ah, that felt like such a luxury! LOL. I still had to argue with my brothers about who was or was not “hogging” the phone (it was usually me), but still, there was more privacy than talking in the kitchen.

Of course, kids back then still had limited “phone control.” There was a good chance your parents would answer the phone, so you couldn't exactly “hide” who was calling you, and callers faced a good chance of having to interact with your parents. Some did this better than others, earning your parents' praise or “concern.” Young people today, who grow up with phones in their pocket, don't know how good they have it.

In college, I had to adjust to a series of new phone numbers each year, tied to the dorm room or apartment where I was living. Sharing a phone with roommates was not always easy – nor was settling the bill at the end of the month. “Who made that long distance phone call?” was a common refrain. “Not me,” was the usual response.

Still, through my various living situations in those college years and the early years of married life, my parents were always there if I needed to chat. All I had to do was call 754-3093. Of course, by then, I had to add the area code, which had changed from 415 to 925. And, back then, every long distance call cost extra, so you had to weigh the number and length of your calls carefully. We wrote more letters back then – at least, I know, I certainly did.

I'll never forget the first phone call I made to my parents from Osaka, Japan, where I had moved after college to teach English. My dad couldn't believe how clear the call was. He thought I must be calling from somewhere nearby – that I must have decided to return to California early. No, I said, I'm calling from Japan. Truly, the wonders of modern technology, we both thought.

Now, of course, long distance calls are included in most (all?) people's phone plans; and email, texting, Facetime, and Zoom have changed the way people communicate globally. When my daughter, Anna, was living in Hong Kong and Italy, and when my son, Aaron, was living in Japan, I could easily message them, email them, chat with them, or talk to them through Facetime where I could even see their faces and get a look at their apartments or the world around them. So amazing!

I could never text 754-3093, nor could I see my parents when I spoke to them using that number, but that number always meant home. It's where I knew I could find them. It embodied my early history, my early friendships, my early romances. It was the "permanent" number that didn't change while so many others did. It was the emergency number I listed whenever I traveled to other countries; the number I called when I had my own "emergencies" and needed help.

Now, if I call that number, I hear that it has been disconnected. My parents have moved on, at least for now, to TreVista Senior Living in Antioch. My father will still be spending time at the house, but he said their friends can call them on their cell phones.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"I'm sure," he said.

So, it's time to officially say goodbye to 754-3093. You've served the Graham family well for fifty-four years. I'm sad to see you go. May someone else connect with you in the future.

CREATIVE WRITING - COMIC

Cassie Wei | Junior

Benzene Boy, Electron Eddie, & Copper Tom



PHOTOGRAPHY

Claire Evans | Senior



PICTURE IN PICTURE

ARTIST STATEMENT: This photo is a little preview of the way I see the world—I notice the little details in ordinary objects or daily life. Just because they were made to serve a purpose doesn't mean there isn't a beautiful side to them.



BITIS GABONICA

ARTIST STATEMENT: Wildlife photography is one of my favorite kinds of art. Both pictures were taken at the San Diego Zoo, but only one was in an exhibit. While not exactly “wildlife”, the Gaboon Viper was still fun to photograph! Both animals kept posing for me, allowing me to get just the right shot with the perfect angle.





GREEN & GOLD

IN EVERY LIFETIME

Kelsey Sycks | Junior

James stands in a painfully bright white room. The fluorescent lights daze him, and he blinks, waiting for his eyes to adjust. Everything feels clean and light. He takes a moment to look around and notices a hallway to the side. A pull tugs at his heart, urging him toward it. Glancing down, he sees that his hands are no longer gnarled with arthritis and wrinkled, but strong and sturdy. Ezra's ring still rests on his finger, and somehow, James knows he's young again, no more than twenty-five. The pull in his chest intensifies, and this time, he follows. At the end of the hallway, James enters a large room with both sides entirely covered in doors of various shapes, sizes, and colors. Pink, blue, and black all come together to make a kaleidoscope of colors. The sight overwhelms him, but the center of the room claims his attention. There, on a bench, sits a boy with curly hair, gazing at the painting *Starry Night Over the Rhône*, by Vincent van Gogh.

"Ezra," James breathes, his voice echoing in the room. Was it a question? A fact?

Ezra turns from the painting and smiles at him. Oh, how James has missed that smile. His heart surges, tugging him toward Ezra until, in a rush of movement, they are in each other's arms. James holds him close, his heart singing with every beat. We're home. Tears stream down James' face as he kisses Ezra's forehead, nose, chin, lips—every part of him. He doesn't care where they are; all he knows is that time doesn't exist here. It feels like a dream, yet James knows it isn't.

"Come sit with me," Ezra whispers, taking James' hand and pulling him toward the painting. "Do you want some tea?"

James looks around. "Ezra, I don't think—"

Before he can finish, Ezra places a cup in his hand. "You can do stuff like that here," he says with a small grin.

James sips the tea, savoring its warmth. Then, a realization hits him. Ezra has been dead for a long time. If he is here, then that means James is—

"Yes," Ezra nods, as though reading his mind. "You are."

James isn't afraid though. He feels completely at peace. "You waited for me," he says, his eyes locked on Ezra's face. The soft freckles, the smile. His Ezra.

"Of course I did."

"But Ezra, it's been so long."

"Not for me. For me, it feels like yesterday." Ezra kisses James' hand gently. James has so much to say, but he senses Ezra already knows. It's comforting to feel so deeply understood without saying a word. James has missed this. This fluffy feeling of not having to worry, or think.

After a pause, James asks, "So, where do we go now? Do we stay here?"

"No," Ezra smiles, his eyes twinkling. "We go through there." He nods toward the wall of doors. "But don't worry, we can leave whenever you're ready."

"What's through those doors?"

"Possibilities," Ezra whispers, leading him to the doors. "You and I, living a million different lives, scattered across the cosmos. A mirage of different lifetimes."

James eyes the doors with uncertainty. He isn't sure he's ready to leave this lifetime, with all its memories.

"I'll let you in on a little secret," Ezra says, pointing to a small brown door with a golden handle. "I've had a long time to look through these doors. This one's my favorite."

James still hesitates.

"You want to know something else?" Ezra's voice softens. "Out of all the doors I've looked through, I've never found one where we don't meet. We always find each other, you and me."

"In every lifetime?"

"In every one."

James feels a deep certainty that this is true. "Pinky promise?" James asks, holding out his pinky.

Ezra smiles at the gesture, linking their fingers together. As they stand there, the love from all their lifetimes—past, present, and future—surges between them. Ezra's eyes gleam with excitement.

"Pinky promise."

ARTIST STATEMENT:

I really wanted to write about the different lifetimes and what happens after death, and then this story idea just popped into my head and I was like "This is brilliant" Everyone at some point in their life wonders about the afterlife, and so this is my take on what might happen.

ART

Hayley Strahs | Junior



BEARY SWEET

