

# *Kintsugi*

*by SLAMM*



*Carolina Day School*  
*2024-2025 Literary Magazine*



# Magazine General Information

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Address:

2 Westgate Pkwy

Asheville, NC 28806

We are hugely grateful to Allegra Marketing Print Mail, the printing company that worked with us to produce our magazine. It is due to them that we were able to distribute a hard copy version of this magazine.

Front cover was designed by Mia Dalton (9<sup>th</sup> Grade).

The kintsugi pottery featured on the front cover was created by Mia Dalton (9<sup>th</sup> Grade).

This magazine features only student writers and artists. With the exception of the printing press and the teacher advisor who helped with logistics, Susan White, this magazine was put together entirely by students.

This magazine features many regional and national scholastic winners! Pieces that won are marked by their respective awards of either a national or regional gold key, national or regional silver key, or a bronze medal to represent honorable mentions at either a national or regional level.



Carolina Day School

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1345 Hendersonville Rd,

Asheville, NC 28803

# Editor's Note

History is told in themes because the true amalgamation of infinite experiences is impossible for the mind to comprehend. Thus, themes are the way we take the invisible colors of the world and paint them in the shades we can see. Not only are the pieces within these pages thematic themselves, but the curation of this magazine was guided by the theme of *Recovery*. It was selected a week after SLAMM (Society of Literature, art, Music, and Media)—the club that organizes the magazine each year—reunited post-Hurricane Helene. Many pieces within the magazine are in some way inspired by the hurricane, but each student's experience is different—except for one thing.

We all had to recover. We are all still recovering.

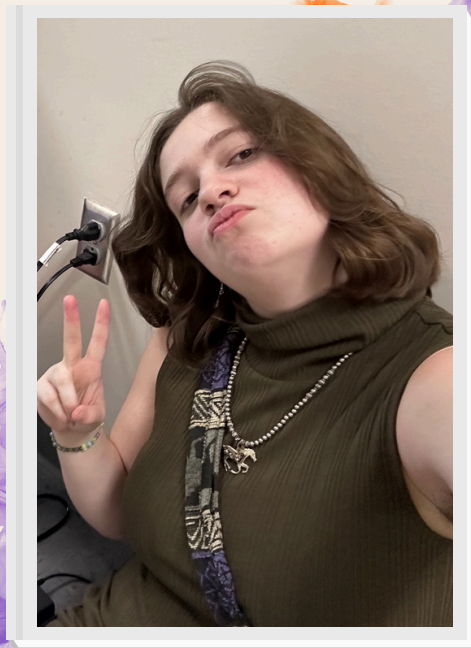
When we got back, we were quickly thrown into midterms, marching to our futures, even while the scenery on both sides of our paths were marked by fallen trees, flattened buildings, and fields of scrap. Seniors wrote college essays from couches belonging to friends because their homes had been washed down a river. The freshmen's first year of high school has been framed, and it's not by awkward crushes or school workload. And, today, I can walk down my neighborhood and see distant mountain homes because the trees that used to tower in the way are gone.

These experiences are told through our art. Our art is about the tragedy, the hopelessness and tears. And yet, our art is also about being happy—those moments when we breathe rather than gasp. Though it is hard to imagine a beautiful future based on the shards of our pasts and presents, we do so anyway. We stride toward our futures with our heads held high because even though we have been injured in ways that are debilitating, we recover. We journey the destruction-lined path forward together. To reflect this, the magazine has been organized in a way to take the reader from the most painful moments to the pieces that are bursting with hope and happiness.

In our search for a title to embody our theme, we discovered and

subsequently fell in love with the artistic practice of kintsugi. Kintsugi is a traditional Japanese artform that repairs broken pottery with gold lacquer. It is not the practice of gilding trauma or implying that beauty is in spite of trauma. Rather, it is the embodiment of acknowledging, honoring, and celebrating recovery. In our creation of this magazine, we hoped to do the same: to acknowledge, honor, and celebrate our collective recovery. This magazine is thus our archive, our history, our voice. This magazine is the evidence of our resilience.

Editor in Chief:  
Dannan Garner, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade



SLAMMers (from left to right)

- |                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| Amelia Lopez      | Janaki Kavir    |
| (not pictured)    | Wyatt Blonshire |
| Susan White       | Elizabeth Rose  |
| (teacher advisor) | Eli Zickerman   |
| Carys Alexander   | Gigi Evans      |
| Mia Dalton        | Gabi Diamond    |
| Dannan Garner     | Maddy Gill      |

Dedicated to Susan White

This magazine is possible because of you. I am only here, writing this dedication as the head editor of this magazine, because of you. Thank you, Ms. White, for the gift you have given me in this opportunity.

Dedicated to Carolina Day School's 2025-2026 students and staff

We all made it this far because of each other. I am forever grateful and proud to call this community my community.

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# *Continuity*

*By Paige Howard*

*12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Drawing*

# *When Gears Wear Down*

*By Kit Repoley*

*10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Fiction*

Evangeline is waiting for me in the flat light of dawn. Tiny clockwork butterflies swirl around her silhouette, and she twirls her pistol in her left hand.

I was this woman's sister, once, and she was mine. Now she turns her back to me before I can catch even the gleam of her silver eyes.

I finish the walk to her and place my back against hers. She's thinner than I remember, but then again, so am I. This world isn't kind to women like us.

"I miss you, Eve," I murmur to her.

She replies, "I miss you too."

We turn around. There's no one here to referee, but we're both fair—neither of us would risk losing that moral high ground. Evangeline stares at me, pale hair flying out like a halo, gun at my chest with perfect accuracy. We begin to count ten paces together, our hearts still pounding identical rhythms. They were set by the same pocket watch when we were children, binding us to each other by something stronger than blood.

"Ten."

"Nine." She isn't as ready as she wants me to believe.

"Eight."

"Seven." Her voice trembles, and I pretend not to notice.

"Six." She extends me the same courtesy.

"Five."

"Four."

"Three." A sharp pain rips through my chest. For a moment I think she's shot me, broken our agreement of a fair duel, then I see that she, too, has staggered. Our hearts falter on the rhythm. The final notes don't matter anymore.

We call each other's names instead of "two," and twin acknowledgments

instead of “one.” There are twenty feet between us, a distance I haven’t wanted to bridge in years, but now that I stand confused and possibly dying, I need her.

Two golden pistols fire harmlessly into the air.

Two sisters sink to their knees.

Our eyes lock as our quicksand, clockwork hearts fail.

## *Eye See Through You*



*By Eli Zickerman*

*9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Photography*

# *The Sky Was Dark in the Normal Way*

*By Amelia Lopez*

*11<sup>th</sup> Grade, Fiction*



That night I woke up wanting to die, so I got myself an orange. Like the moon, I realized as I padded into Turner's kitchen barefoot. When I got to her kitchen counter, I stared out the window next to the chair. The moon looked like a fruit meant to be picked with one hand.

Like you know (you used to steal her bananas) Turner had this little fruit bowl that her grandmother gave her. Every Sunday for the past two years, Turner has headed down to the bodega at the end of the street to fill it up again. I wish my heart could be like that: never empty, always full at someone else's manipulation. My heart should be a bowl full of bodega-fruit.

That was an awful metaphor, but you get the gist. You've always understood my rants and listened intently every time I'd attempt to wax poetic. Thanks for listening, baby. I appreciate it. Your red-ink notes on my manuscript are still in my closet.

I grabbed a clementine from the fruit bowl and leaned my elbows into the countertop. The little orange was nearly bursting through its thick skin, and when I grabbed it I could feel the inner flesh jiggle. My nails are never long, you know this, but I succeeded in carving a little moon-shaped sliver into its skin. You'd be proud. You always had to open my oranges.

I listened to the sound of the nighttime radiator and the drones of cars below Turner's loft. Through the window, the moon stared as I deskinned its brother. I worked my way back from the sliver and stuck my nail through until it came away orange. Fingerprints sticky, I worked to unravel it in one ginormous swirl, orange and white—just the way you taught me. Its green stub of a stem scattered to the ground, but I succeeded. Now I was left with the heart of the fruit, flesh and white spider-webby arteries and seeds.



*By Duncan Skinner*      *Dew*      *12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Photography*

Do you remember when we bought our first bag of oranges for the new apartment? Eating fruit together is a form of poetry, isn't it? I don't know what I'm saying. Maybe it's that I love you.

"What is that thing?" I had asked through a grin. The fruit looked wrinkled and fleshy, with a weird knob on the top that made my stomach churn.

"It's a sumo orange—and it's gonna be the best thing you've ever eaten."

I was playing music on my phone, and between the paper-thin walls of your bathroom, each note echoed to infinity. Your eyes were these little brown mirrors that reflected my sunken face back at me, and I remember distinctly thinking that you were so out of my league. Later, when I told you how I felt about that night, you said you thought the same way about me. The last dregs of the day's purple light latticed your cheeks. I pulled my knees to my chest in mock anticipation and you drummed your hands against thighs. Drumroll, please. I skittered across the floor and you handed me my own sumo orange. You told me to just twist the knob like so, and with great ease, the skin ripped

and the knob pulled up a brain of off-white pith. “See? Easy.” You grinned, staring at me, waiting for my approval. “Now try a bite, please, the anticipation is killing me. You uncultured swine.”

I giggled and our knees brushed. I popped a wedge of orange into my mouth. My eyes widened and you laughed with teeth in the way that I do now. I wonder, what am I if not a reflection of all the things that you left behind?

“I told you,” you said, “this is why oranges are the best fruit.”

My mouth tattooed with the flavor of sumo orange, we leaned in for a kiss.

The clementine didn’t taste as good. But you knew that already. It was shriveled and sour and reminded me of something unmentionable: the smell of the cleaning solution after your funeral reception. I spat it out into the garbage disposal and threw the rest in the trash, disgusted.

I wanted a sumo orange. A big, messy sumo orange, the color of that sweatshirt that you got at that garage sale in New Jersey with me. I wanted a sumo orange and I wanted to spend an eternity plucking its white strands away with you.

# Space Jawn

By Abrey Hernandez

12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Poem

The universe stretches out before me in silence. Stars shine brightly but offer no warmth. I glide through empty space, a small silver dot on a vast canvas.

My board hums softly beneath me, feeling far away, a soft sound in the emptiness.

Each planet I pass is a lonely ball, spinning in its own path, untouched by any life. The nebula are beautiful clouds of dust and gas, reminding me of dreams that once sparkled but are fading. I glide past, leaving no trace.

I have traveled through many galaxies and seen stars rise and fall, worlds born, and then decay. As time slips by, like the space around my silver body, I drift further from anything that feels like home. There are no voices or laughter here. The universe is a colossal, voiceless form, and I am its only worshiper.

This solitude wasn't always so heavy, but over time it has become a weight pressing in on me. I pause for a moment near a distant blue planet. It interrupts the silence, full of life that beats with the rhythm of the universe. I wonder if it can hear me?

This silence fills my soul; the loneliness echoes louder than any star's hum.

# Lovesick

By Jalena Raine

12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Music Album



Scan to play album!



Track list

- |                    |                   |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. lovesick        | 6. lose your head |
| 2. graves          | 7. haunt me       |
| 3. sixteen shadows | 8. bad side       |
| 4. black lotus     | 9. hunting prey   |
| 5. jessebelle      | 10. train song    |

# lovesick

*By Jalena Raine*

*12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Lyrics*

They say nothing lasts forever  
Darling tell me it's a lie  
They say nothing lasts forever  
Darling look me in my eyes

So what if I'm lovesick?  
So what if I'm toxic?  
So what if I'm honest?

At least I'm honest.

He don't know that I'll always be  
the same  
Got his finger on the trigger, pull  
the trigger, take the blame  
He don't know that I'm never really  
sane  
Go ahead and leave me

I'm already in your brain  
I'm already in your brain

This love is killing me  
Who goes first, guess we'll see  
And I just can't believe  
He's finally leaving me

Darling tell me it's a lie  
Darling, tell me it's a lie  
Darling, tell me it's a lie  
Oh, darling tell me it's a lie

He don't know that I'll always be  
the same  
Got his finger on the trigger, pull  
the trigger, take the blame  
He don't know that I'm never  
really sane

Go ahead and leave me

I'm already in your brain  
I'm already in your brain

She could never take my place

I'm already in your brain.

# Molded

By Peyton Stephenson

12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Fiction

Lana didn't realize when the days stopped feeling like days or when the nights blurred into the same boring routine. At first, she felt numb from the shock of her mother's funeral, but an unbearable weight fell upon her. The small home she had always lived in turned dull. Without her mom's jokes or singing, the spark had died. The absence of her mother sitting in her favorite blue floral chair, immersed in books with coffee or her favorite tea in hand, haunted her. Nothing could separate her from that chair; well, nothing but death.

Lana had always been lonely, overwhelmed by the world and what it had to offer. Some days, it felt like she was going through the motions, pretending she was fine, even when the world around her seemed to have shifted in ways she couldn't yet understand. Her body became weak with a tight twisted stomach that felt like it was chained up. Her mind was telling her to get up and fix herself before it was too late, but her body remained still.



# Hunting Prey

By Jalena Raine

12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Drawing

The chair had become her safe place, with the sunken spots where her mother's legs rested and the worn flower pattern on the arms of the chair where her mother would hold her books steady. She spent silent hours every day sitting in the chair trying to feel as close as she could to her mother.

Lana never understood how her sister, Scarlett, was not affected by losing their mother, as they had no other family. Scarlet walked away from her job, her friends, her home—everything—to care for their dying mother. She was left with no choice but to care for her sister, a situation she never saw coming. Scarlett would come home every evening, flip the switch for the living room lights, and there Lana would be sitting, distant and drained. It wasn't the exhaustion in her posture, but the way her eyes seemed to have no life left in them.

“You haven't moved in a week, Lana. It's been a year since Mom passed, it's time to let go,” said Scarlett, as she walked over to the windows to let the stale air out.

“I'm just tired. I'll be fine soon,” said Lana.

Scarlet reached out her hand, grabbing Lana's, feeling the cold touch and the gritty texture of her skin. “We need to start working on this, or nothing will change. Let's get you settled into your room for the night.”

Lana's body weight dropped back. Her eyes were half open and fluttering closed. “No...no, I can't leave mom.”

Scarlet came home every day, always checking on her, knowing exactly where she would be each time. Lana was getting worse and worse, but she felt helpless.

“This is getting bad, Lana. You won't let me help you,” Scarlett said.

Lana sat there with no movement, her head lying dead on the chair. “I'm okay.”

“You can barely respond to me. Please, let me help you.

Scarlet had to leave for a work trip though every part of her told her to stay. “I'll be back soon,” Scarlet whispered, knowing there'd be no response.

The next few weeks, while Scarlett was away, Lana felt a creeping sensation on her skin, like a slow crawl of fingers beneath her flesh. Each day it got worse. Small black dots grew into a map of black-green mush. It spread onto her arms, neck, and back. She was turning into something unnatural. She built up the strength to look in the mirror, but when she looked, it was a stranger. Her cheeks were hollow, her eyes droopy and purple, and her skin draped over her bones like curtains. She couldn't bear to look any longer and dragged her soft body back to the chair.

Scarlet returned home from her trip and set her bags down on the floor. She turned on the lamp above the chair and switched on the living room lights. There was a strange, damp odor in the air. As usual, she opened the window and spoke with Lana, but there was no response—not even a faint mumble or the sound of her breathing. Turning around, she faced a silhouette stain on the chair's fabric. The floral pattern was almost unrecognizable, covered with thick, black mold that took on the shape of her sister.

"Lana.....Lana..." said Scarlet as she fell to the ground. "What have you become?"

## *Mauve Manor*

*By Wendy Howell*

*11th Grade, Pottery*



# *The Echo of Innocence*

*By Winston Bauer-Wolfe*

*12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Poetry*

A boy of fourteen, a world to explore,  
Sadly, nevermore.  
Something as small as a whistle,  
An accusation—superficial.

Dragged from his bed in the dead of night,  
Swallowed by shadows, consumed by fright.  
Chained and beaten, defaced and disgraced,  
A beautiful life gone to waste.

His story was told by his mother so bold,  
In the open casket lay his body cold.  
The world needed to see this horror,  
That rocked the nation to its core.

Emmett Till, wrongfully killed.

# Ambition

By Campbell Haas

11th Grade, Film

Scan Here to Watch





*I Think of a Time When*

*I Will Be Relaxed*

*By Eva Schneider*

*12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Poem*

(Inspired by “Three Modes of History and Culture” by Amiri Baraka)

I am a composition of cloth in thirteen folds; I am a crooked hat  
Hail “To the Color,” first hallowed notes play  
Assert my standing at Reveille  
Citing willpower and gunpowder  
Third, sixth, and seventh folds, threadbare sword and shield each veteran  
wields

Full staff, marble halls stocked with cash, seats filled aisle to aisle  
A penny for your thoughts, would you pause a breath, dream about my  
weightless commands  
Listen and lend me every ounce  
Virtues expounded, virtues extant  
I think about a time when I will be relaxed  
When my stars and my stripes bleed into each other

I think of a time when I will be relaxed  
When my stars and my stripes bleed together in the heated  
noon sky

As wind whips  
Independence Day stars and pyromantics elucidate my presence, stark and  
estranged from  
darkness

As these stars mimic and bypass the real, my life for your dreams

Pin on hope, pin on love, pin on God in the nation

Walking with false lightness as if you are not the first step in your  
descendancy

Never questioning, "Will my children be more free than me?"

*Stop Side Down*



*By Maddox Linen*

*1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Photography*

Eleventh and twelfth folds for those who walked as prophets, Lambs of God  
who follow

A cradle for your dreams, breadth of the Rocky Mountains, irresistible like  
Atlantic riptides

If you stand near enough to listen, my rustle abounds  
acorns flung from boughs hoisted higher and higher  
awaiting their twisted, breathing, earthly growth pains to eagles soaring  
height

*Always*



*By Scout Deters*

*10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Photography*

Wet foot, dry foot, my beacon echoes; my fourth fold of faith  
On hot heels of pursuit in the name of the red, white, and blue  
Democracy's shadowed smile, pausing, sliding from one to the next  
Flowing rigidly, falling back, snapping to attention  
I think of a time when I will be relaxed

Mountains sinking into gaping sea on legs as weak as a newborn fawn  
Democracy is mortal, but defenders and desperation are not  
Taken for granted while always clawing, carving myself from unforgiving  
stone

And I think of a time when I will be relaxed.

You watch the pixelated politician and think my God, he's sold his soul  
Good for nothing, washed out, dog-tired like the fight long hung up  
But if you turned to a patriot and rolled your fingers in my cloth  
Clasped the red blood in the blue veins of their warm hand with a grip firmer  
than a Wall Street tycoon or the father of your first girlfriend  
Carried my weight as you climbed damp, verdant hills in your summer camp  
whiteys and red tie

Let the girl in the bunk below lift my fabric above your head so you could line  
up the edges as the pulley clicked into action

Watched my stripes become a mirage in your scorching windshield on  
winding Southern highways

Fourth fold, divinely guided and eternally indebted

History was forged in a fire as blinding

Fifth fold, brings my prodigal sons home

But democracy has no face, no down payment, no interest fee, only the first  
step in your ascendancy

You wait for the pennies to land face up, to find feet and rise  
When my stars and my stripes bleed together in the heated noon sky  
Until then, I think of a time when I will be relaxed.



## *Amsterdam*

### *Morning*

*By Aakash Karvir  
11<sup>th</sup> grade, Photography*

## *Crave*

*By Maia Kiiss,  
11<sup>th</sup> Grade, Pottery*



# Dear Helene

*By Mary-Carter Self*

*12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Nonfiction*

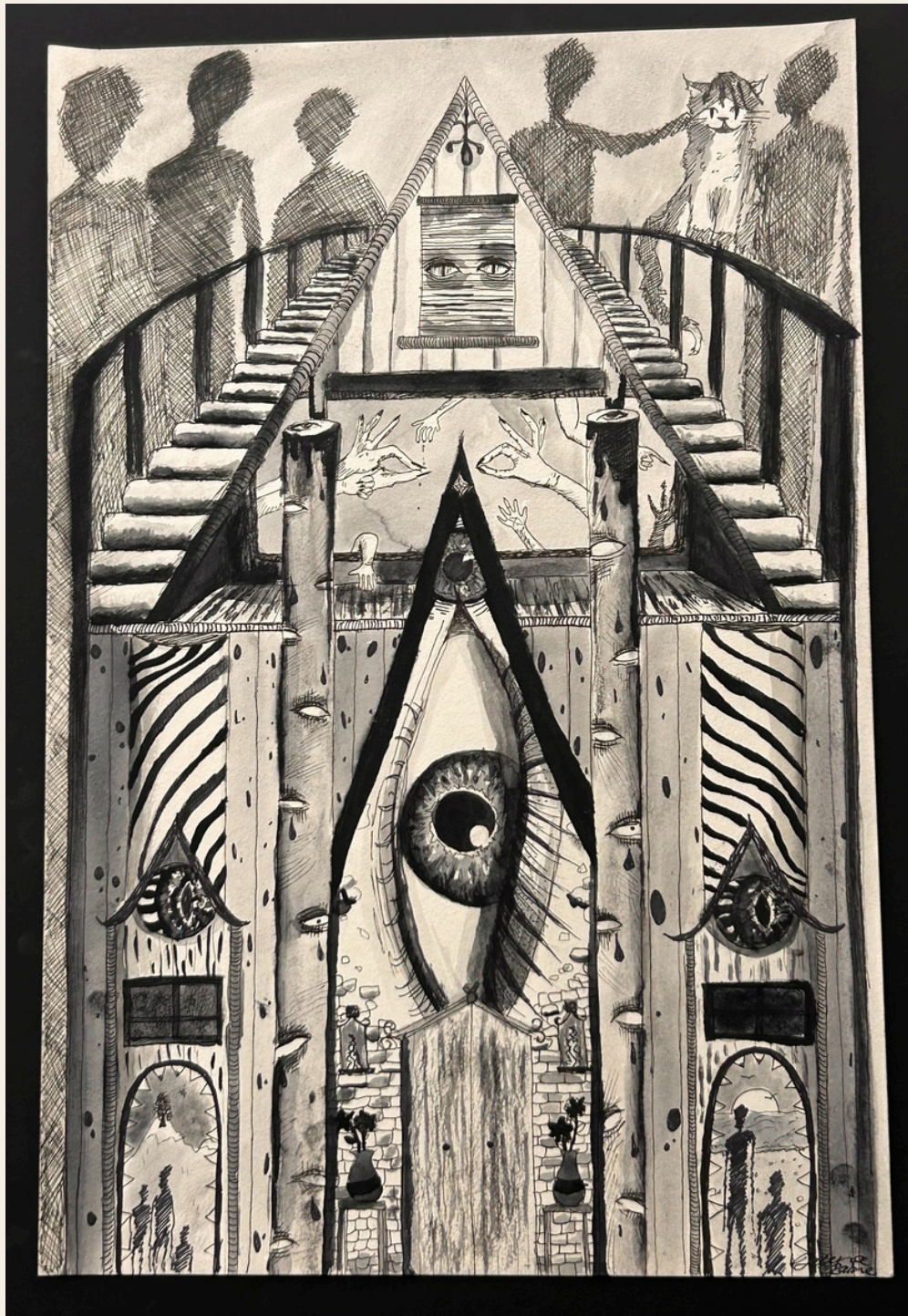
You cannot touch your loss with the hand of love if they are not there to be touched.

The early morning of Friday, September 27, 2024, I had spent a total of four full days as an 18-year-old. Saturday would be my tea party with friends, celebrating adulthood. In place of my friends was an ocean of stormwater at my doorstep. But first I must rewind to Thursday, the night of calm before the wreckage. I had planned to attend school the next day, and I had been consistent that night with working on my AP Physics homework, as my quiz average was a mere 68%. After hours of practice problems, I meandered over to my bed. My quilts were ever so inviting. I plugged my phone in with the charger beside my nightstand and put in my retainer. A normal Thursday night.

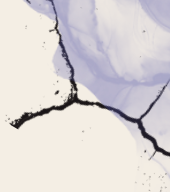
Friday morning came rolling in, with thunder that shook the wall, which my bed lay so gently against. That wall typically shook during storms, so it wasn't anything atypical.

I couldn't go back to sleep, so I went to the bathroom and stood under my warm-toned-a-little-bit-rickety-light that should've been replaced as soon as we moved into my house. That light made funny noises, but this early morning it blinked that warm-toned glow over and over until I finally noticed that all four walls surrounding me were trembling. A normal storm. At the same time, Mom and Scott moved the couch in front of the backdoor to prevent it from swinging open, but that wasn't enough to stop the rain. It shot in like bullets that not even their umbrella could withstand.

Friday, Saturday, and Sunday were spent assessing the damage. We lost cell service in the early afternoon on Friday. One minute I could send a



*Eye of the Beholder*  
By Jalena Raine 12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Drawing



text message to a friend, and the next I could not. Upon stepping outside, the wind threw everything in its path in every direction; still, even after, the rain had stopped. We investigated where the trees had fallen like Lincoln Logs and discussed with the neighborhood—when we believed the water that trapped us together would recede and we would have a chance at escaping. There was not enough food for my family to stay together in our homely prison for more than a week.

Did you know that gunshots rang once we could escape from our hell? My mother cried at your violence. She couldn't hide her tears. But your tears were much deeper—much stronger. How ironic that the abundance of water—the ocean that arrived at my doorstep—would cause no water at all. Days turned into weeks. Those weeks dragged on. I was afraid. I was truly afraid for the first time in a long time. Certainty left me and dread replaced it.

I am the daughter of a funeral home director. Do not misunderstand me when I say I am familiar with death. I am familiar with peaceful death. I am not familiar nor comfortable with the death you brought. That water you brought upon us was that of a murderer. She went on an angry rampage through my town and you kept on pouring and pouting and giving her power. But you were not supposed to be here, Helene. Why did you come here? Why didn't you stop? You broke homes. You broke their walls and ceilings. You stole the belongings of that home's family. You stole lives. One-hundred-and-three officially. Likely more. Boys and girls and men and women. Now, forever they are frozen. Not by the frigid waters in which they took their last trying breaths, but frozen in the minds of those who love them. A funeral without a body is a difficult funeral to be had. No last look. No last "I love you." I know what a funeral looks like. I have seen my fair share, and I know what is typical. You are not typical. The morgues were full, and you are the culprit. Boys and girls and men and women are frozen in time. Maybe they drowned because of your too-confident water. Maybe it was the aftermath: the landslides. Maybe it

was a home you crumbled. But they are frozen in time in the eyes of their loved ones. They are frozen in the minute before you decided to break so much into so many pieces.

All this to say, Helene, I am not okay yet. Those around me are not okay yet. Months later I still have second thoughts about the safety of getting water from my sink. You cannot go back to that Thursday night and Friday morning and stay over the ocean. You cannot suck up the droplets of water that you dumped on us. You cannot bring back all that is lost. But we will try to.

Grieving,  
A girl who will not forgive you

## *Reflect*



*By Squires Martin*

*10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Photography*

# *God Holds Ice at Midnight*

*By Dannan Garner*

*11<sup>th</sup> Grade, Fiction*

I hesitated at the classroom threshold, for God was in front of the blackboard.

She had waterfalls of braids swinging down her back, dotted with beads of every color. She glanced at me and smiled, teeth bracketed by purple braces. I was shocked into silence; reverence sewed my lips shut. I knew if anything was holy, it was her.




## *Prismatic Cave*

*By Wyatt Blonshine*  
*9th Grade, Photography*

Give me some leniency for that conclusion—I was twelve and desperate to find God for no real reason I could articulate. I knew it in my heart but as it often does, the language we have created and set rules upon is unable to describe that which is lawless by nature; but what is faith, if not something that cannot be described? I cannot say what about her was divine, but I can assure you she was real. She was as real as the skin of my hands, the hair on my legs, and the ground beneath my feet. Her smile existed in this world and the next, I'm sure.

She lives at the edges of my memories still, and on late nights I consider Alice, my first crush.



My eyes would wander to the back of her head in every class we shared—I'd stare shamelessly, a sheep and its herder. Whispers trailed my heels and bounced off my neck as I followed her around, eventually falling in step with her until we walked to school side by side, books in our hands, smiles on our faces. The sun rounded out her cheeks and lit up her eyes, its rays beaming from the wrinkles made when she furrowed her brow and scrunched her nose as we giggled. The first time we kissed, it was quick. It was less of a kiss and more of a melding of laughs, lips pressed against each other but too busy grinning to do any kissing. Mostly, we held hands, getting away with it as little girls do before little girls realize the power they have in being little girls, but by that time they're no longer little girls.

Then, one day, we didn't hold hands. The next we did, but not the day after. Slowly, a foot of empty air hung between our shoulders—then a yard, then two, and suddenly God and her follower had drifted apart into friends.

It was not so much a heartbreak as a heart drift, two wholes that had been united on a dock suddenly taking different rowboats to sea. We glided over the ocean, in sight but not together, and I knew at that moment, curled on the wooden bench of my little rowboat, that I was mistaken. She was not God, but another little girl, looking for her person to share a boat with. So I picked up my oars and rowed towards the Horizon, searching for God along the way.

Perhaps we were lucky we had gotten that innocent love before we were old enough to have it be more than interlocked pinkies and melded laughs. I loved more girls, but I never said, for a year later, two boys began to hold hands and kiss. And they were caught—once. It only took once. One still shows up to school, but he isn't there, eyes somewhere else. He's probably watching his crewmate through the hazy wall between this world and the palm of God, but I couldn't tell you for sure.

Alice and I locked eyes and I saw in her gaze the same that I saw in the mirror. We didn't need any disciple to tell us we were Godless; we were not. We simply hadn't found Him yet, and no God of ours would forsake us for wishing to meld laughter, interlock pinkie fingers, and maybe, one day, with

other girls, run down that path Alice and I had poked around the entrance to.

I never hesitated in my belief that God—wherever He was—would love me. I was raised to believe Him all-loving, after all, and I had no intent of betraying the trust I had already granted Him.

That's probably why it hurt so much the day I did.

*See full story:*



## *Infinitesimal Insecurity*



*By Max Farmer*

*12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Photography*

# *Not her, Not Yet*

*By Carys Alexander*

*5<sup>th</sup> Grade, Animation*



*Scan Here to Watch*



This digital animation was created after the events of Hurricane Helene and follows the main character as he traverses the death of a close friend.



# Ink

By Amelia Lopez

11<sup>th</sup> Grade, Fiction

Mami says that Papá’s coming home, and I don’t know what to do with myself besides scrubbing the ink off my hands. Mami wants me to dress up real nice for him. *Put on a button-up, chico. The one that Abuela got you. ¿Tan guapo, eh?* But it feels awkward to pull out my Sunday best for someone I haven’t seen in seven years. So, to act indifferent to the magnitude of my father’s return, I crouch over the sink like a monkey peeling away shreds of mango with its fingers—which is to say, I’m careful and diligent with my scrubbing. I turn the tap all the way to the right, and the heat burns off all the words scribbled across my fingers, little blue rivers circling the drain. Soon, all I can see is a faded-out “a” in what used to be “banal;” all the other words —“scanty,” “vacillate,” and “prosaic”—have washed down the drain with the bubbles.

See, I’d like to pretend all the words decorating my skin represent some unspoken profundity. The truth is, my curls are just sticking to the back of my neck and the apartment’s AC is broken and I can’t deal with Mami when she’s acting impatient. She’s pretty much never static; fifteen minutes and the entire living room will be rearranged because she “thought there wasn’t enough space to see the T.V. from the kitchen.” This excuse is hackneyed at best, but I let it slide because I am my mother’s son and I am no better.

“Esoteric” smudges off my thumbnail. That was Sharpie from Thursday, which Mariel scribbled in the middle of Civics. Still, I have ten words that have amassed on the fronts and backs of my palms; they lattice together into a string of illegible sentences that look like they’ve been taken straight from the dictionary—they have. Here’s something you should know about Mami and me: our house is always full of words. The house is always full of words. The supple curve of our oakwood bookshelf is propped up by volumes one

through ten of *Webster's Dictionary*, the pages yellow and swollen with Miami humidity. Rose-pink sticky notes mar the wallpapered kitchen, bedrooms, and even bathroom— “avaricious” on the scratched-up mirror in my mother's purple scrawl, “animosity” on the kitchen’s countertop, and “blasphemy” (my favorite) on Abuela’s shrine to the Virgin Mary, ironically burrowed beneath the dangling rosary beads. There are apocryphal stories about the sticky notes, but my favorite is the one that Mami told me about Papá when she was wine-drunk. We were curled up on the couch as I was spooning slurries of frozen Publix peas into my mouth. She grabbed my wrist with her manicured nails, pulled me close, and whispered *when we just got to the U.S. from Cuba, Papi managed to find a job at Walmart. But he needed to speak English, and he was barely fluent. So he got those big dictionaries from*



## *Balancing Act*

*By Mia Dalton*

*4<sup>th</sup> Grade, Illustration*

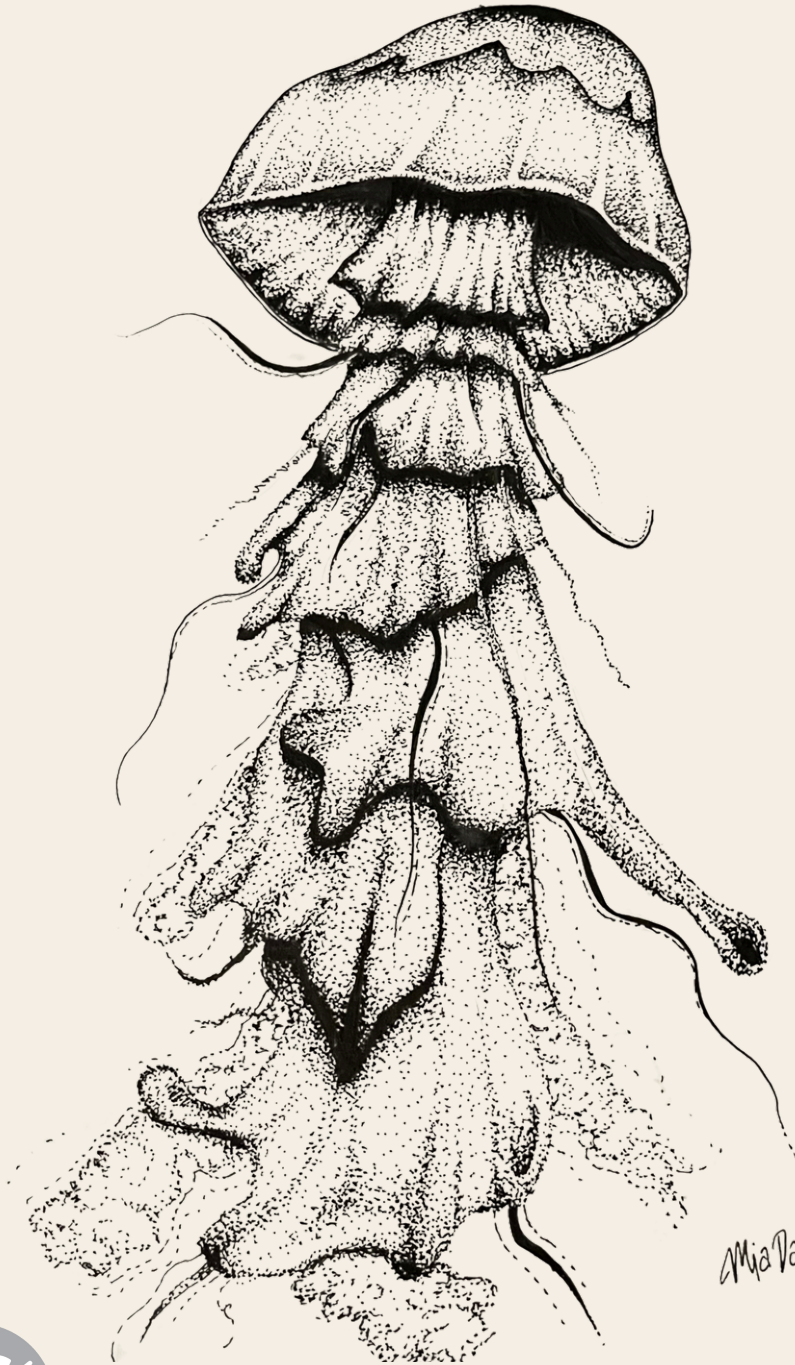


*the library. For hours, he'd cross through every word that he didn't know and write it on a sticky note. They began easy. "Toilet" on the toilet, "fork" on the fork. So on.*

*That's why we have so many now?* I asked. She didn't say anything. Just nodded. What she didn't need to tell me was that his big words did nothing but foment the cries of angry white men indignant that Papá was more eloquent than they could ever be.

Papá's legacy feels prodigious now; he isn't just in a photo that Mami hides on the bookshelf, but he is on every letter on every wall on every sticky note. This man is an immutable figure in our apartment; all I've ever known is that I want to be just like my father, untouched by the vicissitudes of time.

I lean against the fogged-up bathroom mirror, languid like a spine. Slowly, "avaricious" peels off the mirror and flutters into the sudsy basin of the sink, onto my shin. That's when Mami yells at me that Papá's back and in the kitchen, and I quickly scrub a cursive "trepidation" off my wrist.



Mia Dalton



# Ballroom Scyphozoa

By Mia Dalton

4<sup>th</sup> Grade, Illustration



# WaterFALL

By Abrey Hernandez

12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Fiction

The heat of the summer afternoon clung to the air like a heavy blanket. The sun hung low, casting a harsh golden light over everything, and the ground beneath Lucas's boots felt like it was burning. Sweat trickled down his back as he walked the narrow trail toward the waterfall, the path almost empty today. No families, no tourists—just the rhythm of cicadas and the distant rumble of the falls.

When he reached the clearing, the waterfall stretched before him, water tumbling over the cliff in endless sheets. The sound was deafening, but somehow it felt soothing. The mist rose into the air, cooling his face as the sun pressed down on him. He hadn't come here for the view, but it had an effect on him anyway. The wildness of it. The noise, constant and unyielding.

He glanced around. Nothing. Of course. A small part of him felt relieved. The last few weeks had been a blur of unanswered questions and missed opportunities. He wasn't sure when everything had started to feel so heavy, but standing there, in front of the falls, it felt a little easier to breathe.

The water roared in its endless rhythm, and Lucas thought, not for the first time, what if he jumped? The water below looked dark and rough, but maybe it wouldn't matter. Maybe he just needed something to shake off the weight, something as constant and relentless as the waterfall itself.

But he stayed where he was. He wasn't ready for that, not yet.

Instead, he sat down on a nearby rock, letting his legs dangle over the edge, as he watched the water thunder over the rocky cliff, plunging into the murky pool below. The cool mist hit his face, and, for a moment, everything else faded—the pressure, the calls, the things he couldn't fix. Just the water. Just the noise.

Then, a voice interrupted the stillness.

"Hey!" A man across the falls waved at him, a grin on his face. "You want

to jump in? The water's refreshing!"

Lucas blinked, surprised, but shook his head. "Nah, I'm good."

The man shrugged, laughing, and disappeared into his group. Lucas watched them for a moment, as they jumped away pushing each other as he sat there on his own. But as their laughter faded into the distance, Lucas let the sound of the waterfall fill the silence again.

The sun was lower now, shadows stretching across the rocks, and Lucas felt, for the first time in weeks, a little less heavy.

## *Starlit Silence*

*By Sophia Bucholz*

*9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Painting*



# The Paradox of Struggle

By David Rusnac

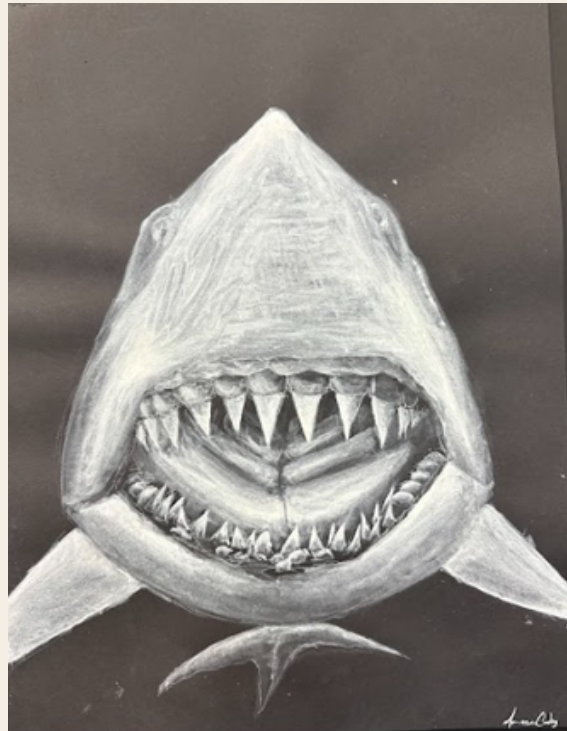
9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Nonfiction



29.5 seconds again. 29.5 seconds, over and over, no matter how hard I push myself. Each lap feels like an endless cycle of effort with no reward, the stopwatch frozen in time as if mocking my struggle. I try and try, but nothing seems to work. My efforts feel like they're worth nothing, my hard work slipping through my fingers like water. It's torture, staring at the clock and seeing no progress, no reward for the hours spent pushing myself to the limit. Yet, despite the frustration, despite the ache of repeated failure, I dive in again and again. Why? Why do I keep trying when it feels like I'm destined to fall short?

Why do humans keep trying? Why do we reach for goals that often seem unattainable, push against obstacles that leave us hurt, and persist in the face of failure? At first glance, life's endless cycle of striving appears to be an unrelenting torture. The climb toward success, the constant competition, the moments when our greatest efforts crumble into dust—it all feels senseless, as if we are condemned to a Sisyphean fate, rolling the same boulder up a hill, only for it to crash down again.

I used to think this way, caught in my own despair. When I failed —



*Face It* Marissa Cody  
11<sup>th</sup>, Drawing

and I failed often—it felt as though life had conspired against me. The sting of rejection, the ache of effort unrewarded, the heaviness of dreams deferred: they all piled on, dragging me deeper into a pit of futility. Why try at all, I wondered, when the universe seemed indifferent to my struggle?

But one day, in the quiet stillness that follows exhaustion, I realized something extraordinary. It wasn't the moments of joy or the rare victories that made life meaningful. It was the suffering itself—the valleys, the bruises, the nights spent staring at the ceiling wondering if I was enough. The truth hit me like a revelation: suffering is not the enemy. It is the proof of life, the evidence that we are striving for something greater than ourselves.

Without the lows, the highs would lose their meaning. Without struggle, achievement would feel hollow. It is in the ache of effort that we find the deepest pleasure, the satisfaction of knowing that we fought for something, that we cared enough to endure the pain. The more I thought about this, the more I saw the beauty in struggle. A painting without contrast would be nothing but a blank canvas. A melody without dissonance would lose its depth and fade into blandness. It is in the tension—in the push and pull of effort and resistance—that true greatness is born.

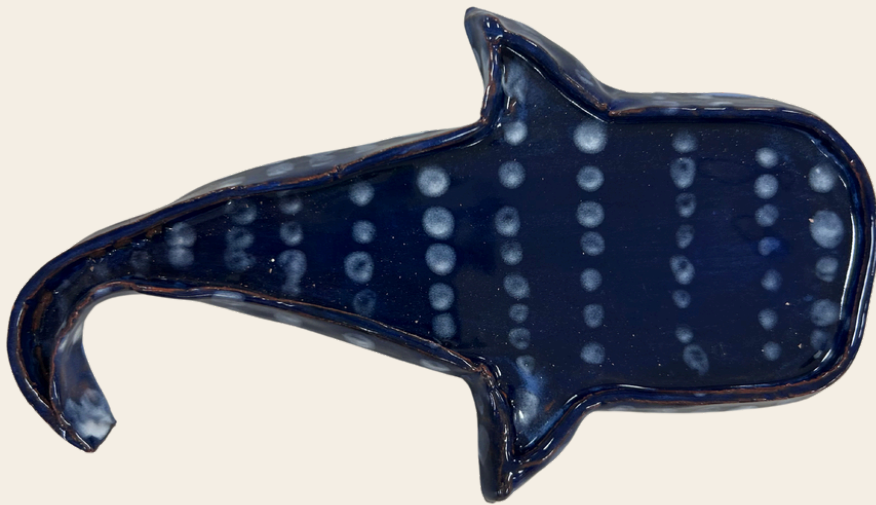
Once I understood this, the cycle of striving no longer felt like torture. It became an adventure. Every failure was not a punishment but a lesson. Every challenge, no matter how scary, became a test of how far I could push myself. I stopped fearing the possibility of falling short and embraced the climb itself. The bruises and scrapes became badges of honor, proof that I was alive, that I was growing.

I started to view my goals not as distant peaks to be conquered, but as guiding partners along the journey. They are there to guide me, to pull me forward, to give me purpose. Yes, I may stumble. Yes, there will be moments when the weight feels unbearable. But nothing—no failure, no rejection, no setback—will ever stop me from reaching for them.

Because in the end, it is not the goals themselves that define us. It is trying. It is the endless striving that makes us human, the courage to dream—even

when the odds are against us. To suffer is to live, and to live is to hope.

So I will keep trying, not despite the suffering but because of it. Each fall will teach me to rise again. Each failure will sharpen my resolve. And each step, no matter how painful, will bring me closer to becoming the person I am meant to be. Life may be a relentless cycle of striving, but it is also a river. The water flows, sometimes crashing against rocks, sometimes slowing into calm pools, but always moving forward. The obstacles that seem impossible to pass only shape the current, carving a path toward something greater. Like water, I will persist—fluid yet unbreakable, endlessly determined to reach the ocean.



## *Gentle Giant*

*By Maitland Griffin*

*9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Pottery*

# One Minute After

By Emery Suess

3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, Poem



One Minute

After I wake up,

I hear the sound of something thump.

**Bang!**

Awoken by the sound of the third,

A sound that I have never heard.

Run downstairs, then I nearly jump,

Three trees down, only leaving the stump.

A hurricane passes through the land,

Mother Nature losing command.

**Whoosh!**

The wind comes through in a wild way,

Leaving trees only to decay.

The rain falls hard like the sound of drums,

Wind howls loud as thunder comes.

As more wind comes, the house begins to shake,

Blaring loud as more trees meet their fate.

The fourth is tall, but it is bent,

But it stands at seventy percent.

**Crack!**

As the rush of wind came through,

It goes down, repairable beyond glue.

The fifth goes down without a fight,

A giant down, still five more to the right.

Sooner or later, the rain has to give way,

Yet it's still pummeling, showing a display.

After witnessing two giants fall,

I remember how they'd stood proud and tall.

***Boom!***

The sixth comes crashing down,  
The trampoline flies high in madness,  
Turning our beloved joy into sadness.  
It spins it like paper, tossing it high,  
Watching it die beneath our eyes.  
For a moment, the storm grows chill,  
Holding our breath, we see time stand still.



***Rendered Grey***

*By Atali Ripley*

*10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Photography*

***Creak!***

The seventh goes in a steady way,  
Leaving behind only a pile of decay.

***Pop!***

Eight follows, splintered and split,  
Its roots are torn loose where they used to sit.

By then, I feel a large blow,  
Watching the mighty, one by one, go.

*Crash!*

Then comes nine, a loud creak,  
As old wood screams in its final streak.  
They rest now, limbs tangled in grace,  
But it's not over yet, still more to  
embrace.

*Smack!*

Number ten hits the ground,  
Princes that could never be crowned.  
Silence fills the yard I once knew,  
Where rooted plants once held a view.  
Ten trees down, a fierce goodbye,  
In a broken yard, beneath the sky.  
They rest now, tangled in grace,  
Leaving behind a large trace.  
The storm has passed, the earth laid  
bare,  
For my backyard, I can only leave a  
prayer.

*The Initiation Well*

*By Wyatt Blonshine  
9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Photography*



## One Hour

After the storm had only just hit,  
We decided we didn't want to just sit.  
We go outside just to see,  
Mother Earth had gone on a spree.  
Our street's a shadow, strange and bare,  
Where voices float around in the air.  
Our neighbors come out from their broken doors,  
Their faces tired, and their voices worn.  
Some we know well, like two peas in a pod,  
But some are unfamiliar, their faces odd.  
Everyone is together now, like a thread,  
All in fear of what's ahead.  
We take our bikes and ride along,  
On roads that once were strong.  
Now silent roads after the storm,  
Taken by rain, no hint of warm.  
Our phones are no help, now just glass,  
What was once the future seems like the past.  
Not a single message, call, or cry,  
No signal, we are left out to dry.  
No Wi-Fi or service bars,  
Without this, no reach to loved ones afar.  
Disconnected from the world, stripped of sound,  
Our loved ones might think we are buried in the ground.  
Normally, the sound of tires through leaves,  
But only now there are hanging trees.  
A strange route, we've never ridden here,  
But it's so empty now, we are in the clear.  
No cars to be seen, only people pass,



## *Green Man*

*By Wendy Howell*



*12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Pottery*

Fragments left from houses of the past.  
People walk with faces full of grief,  
A silent world, upon everyone's belief.  
The streets are quieter than ever,  
Dreams that they had are now a never.  
Past crushed poles and wires downed,  
The storms came through a beloved town.  
Then, something comes into our view,  
This is what a storm can do.  
A car, nearly crushed by the wood,  
The windshield shattered; it doesn't look good.  
We stop, staring through the downed trees,  
In the driveway, a person standing there, looking displeased.  
Once a simple drive, an easy way,  
Before the world gave way.  
A human's eyes catch the sky,  
Through the dark windows, they nearly cry.  
They blink and breathe, showing their life,  
They look at each other, him and his wife.  
We call 911, asking for assistance,  
They arrive quickly, without resistance.  
They gather around with arms and care,  
Lifting branches, no time to spare.  
Together now, survivors all,  
We are bound together by God's call.  
They raise them up from the car,  
As we watch from afar.  
On the quiet street, through the lows,  
We walk them home, scars from head to toe.

A strange parade, hope restored,  
Through times low, belief soared.  
As we return, go back to bed,  
We don't know what's ahead.  
We got lucky, not too bad,  
For others? Bad. So, so bad.

## *Broken Road*

*By Wyatt Henry*

*1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Photography*



### **One Day**

After Helene, we step outside,  
The world still soaking, trees scattered wide.  
Leaves are scattered on every road,  
Branches broken, the world overflowed.  
Our phones are useless, no calls can come,  
Everyone now in a world with no outcome.  
Feeling cut off, pulled apart,  
A deep feeling of ache in our hearts.

We decide to drive through the streets we know,  
Sounds of chainsaws in the air grow.  
Past fallen power lines, and broken signs,  
The storm came through, left nothing alive.  
We reach a parking lot filled with cars,  
People packed in, it looks bizarre.  
Signal found, texts from people we know,  
Only one bar, signal weak, but hope grows.  
We make calls, blessings flood in,  
Confirming our life, don't know where to begin.  
Relief in their words, hope in their heart,  
Love in their messages, we don't want to be apart.  
Images shared from far and near,  
Of the place we loved, people in fear.  
Houses bent, boulding scarred,  
Mother Nature plays a savage card.  
Back in the car, we find a line  
An hour for gas, as the sun begins to rise.  
People wait, baggy eyes, tired and worn,  
Faces blank and clothes torn.  
As daylight slips away,  
An evening comes into display.  
We spot a figure, face unable to see,  
A flashlight flickers, who could it be?  
Even through hard times, people scarred,  
Humanity still finds its way to tear people apart.  
They linger close to the Stop N Go,  
Looking for something, something we don't know.  
A whispered movement in the night,  
Shadows merge in the dimming of light.

Mom grips the wheel, eyes wide and scared,  
We leave, afraid to be impaired.  
Finally home, darkness reigns,  
Our street still dumped with the storms remains.  
We light a match, the candle glows,  
Casting light and warmth, faint and slow.  
No electronics, no flood of screens,  
Just little flickers, yellow and green.



## *Look at Me*

*By Charlotte Liebman*

*9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Pottery*

The night goes on, with a hint of fear,  
And candles guard us through the clear.  
Each flame a prayer, a spark from God,  
But the storm is still very odd.  
One day after, in broken lands,  
We share the quiet, we never ran.  
Bound together by storm and by quiet peace,  
By all the things not still in one piece.  
We stay together, calm and still,  
In the gentle glow, stars in the sky refill.

### **One Month**

After the pain, the shock,  
The towns waking up, working like one flock.  
Debris still lies on lawns and streets,  
People start helping those in need.  
The school fills with the sound of feet,  
Laughter echoes where people used to weep.  
Books and pencils in hand,  
A sense of normal, a new life planned.  
The kids don't notice the pain,  
Parents talk of things they can't make.  
Water still poisoned, dark brown  
Bottles pile up all around.  
Mud now where life once grew,  
Backyards broken to patches of dew.  
The stores have stocked shelves, the lights have power,  
Hope still growing by the hour.  
But water still muddy, refusing to clean,  
For drinkable water, everyone is keen

Neighbors outside asking if we've heard what's up,  
Asking each other, "Did you hear the latest talk?  
They say it could be months!"  
But still not known, if it will ever show up.  
In quiet tones, leadership shared,  
Prayers whispered, clothes spared.  
The river flows just miles away,  
Yet it feels like it's lost its way.  
Each bottle counted like gold,  
Each sip, a keep hold.  
On a life that still feels somewhat real,  
Almost normal, something we nearly feel.  
The water doesn't sing, yet our spirits rise,  
Hope is still near, waiting for the prize.  
And with every sunrise, we move on,  
Slowly rebuilding until each dawn.

## *Kintsugime*

*A Kintsugi-Inspired Ramekin*

*By Eli Zickerman*

*9<sup>th</sup> Grade*

*Pottery*





By Wyatt Blonshine

9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Drawing

# Rosy-Fingered Dawn



# *A Bug's Life*

*By Maddy Gill*

*Nonfiction, 9th*

All my life I've felt like a bug.

Going with the flow of others, following instinct. Swatted away by people I land on. Sometimes it's nice to glide along with the wind. Feel the breeze of life pass by, catching experience after experience. Sometimes it's too much, and reality knocks me down like a piece of hail in a riotous winter breeze.

Did you know when praying mantis' mate, the female eats the male once he's done all he can for her? I've been eaten multiple times. Each time being hollowed out from the inside leaving nothing but a goo of confusion, suffocation, and loneliness, like a cocoon in mid-formation. A while will pass, allowing wallowing and boredom to settle. Sometimes it's nice to wait, to have those good memories replay, reliving those feelings of joy and peace. Sometimes it can be harsh and come in waves, knowing those days only survive in my memory.

It starts with new beginnings, after hatching, after spreading my wings again. Like a peacock spider, I put on a show. My gestures and sounds are sporadic and unsure - never knowing when the waters are safe enough to stop testing and jump in. A risk will be taken in the end - my impatience always gets the better of me. I draw attention to myself, as flamboyant as can be; wanting, hoping for there to be someone who notices. Soon there will be someone who's been lured in and caught by my web. I smile and laugh and hold on tight. Sometimes I know it will get better. I know I will move on and start again with people who reciprocate the feeling of joy when we're together. Sometimes I feel as if I appear to people as merely a mosquito, latching on for my own benefit, and I know that they can gouge me out of their flesh anytime. Just like a bug will always be, I am attracted to the light. Light will always be a captivating source of attraction that leads you in many directions. There are multiple lights that will guide me to the place of belonging as the

has done beforehand. Some lights come and go, and some stick around. Some have been there as long as I can remember, only just coming back out, shining bright and full of life. With the warmth of lights surrounding me, I am once again in a place I belong. Most times I can now be at peace as I feel the recurrent warmth on my back, not fading or leaving. Very little now do I worry of a light going out on a whim, because I know the lights surrounding me will continue to shine bright.

So I am a bug, attracted to the light, watching from outside, listening, and waiting, and I know I am not the only one. Every day I see bugs; each differs from the other. Whether they be tall and fragile, small and curious, strong and sensitive, I know in my heart that they will find their own light to guide them to a place where they will belong.



*Living Branch*  
By Maddy Gill

*9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Painting*

# *I Wonder*

*By Max Farmer,  
12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Poetry*


I wonder,  
I do. It's hard,  
Hard to listen,

I look in a mirror, I see Me,  
Hard to focus,  
Too many thoughts,  
I wonder,  
What do they think of me,  
Who am I to them,  
Those people,  
Who am I,



## *Incan-Inspired Gold Mask*

*By Virginia May Taylor  
7<sup>th</sup> Grade, Pottery*



Its boring looking at myself—It's the same face every time,  
The same. It's all the same,  
We rely on these screens,  
We watch others faces,  
Others bodies,  
Yet we get bored looking at our own,

Shut up,  
Don't listen,  
I need your help,  
Talk more,  
Listen more,  
I don't need you,

I wonder,  
If I could just stop thinking would I change,  
Would I be someone else,  
I look at myself and see,  
Well me But is it me?  
Is what I'm seeing really me,  
It's like,  
I'm seeing the reflection of myself,

I wonder,  
If I were someone looking at me,  
Then would I think different of myself?  
No  
Yes  
Maybe—

It's hard.  
No,  
Easy?

Just stop thinking. Don't think.  
Hard to listen,  
It's hard,  
I wonder,

I really do wonder,  
Wonder if the world stops thinking,  
If anything would change.

## *Hearth*

*By Megan Kleive  
12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Photography*





# *The Gift of Snow*

*12<sup>th</sup> Grade, 12<sup>th</sup> Grade,*

*Fiction*

*By Isabella Stafford and Lily Valeika*

At the beginning of time, a young white leopard was born in present-day Japan, given the name Fuji, meaning enchanting beauty and resilience. Back then, leopards had pure golden coats and lived side-by-side with the village folk. Every day he basked in the sun, hoping for his pelt to darken like the other leopards. One day, while climbing to his spot, the mountain began to rumble, and lava erupted from its mouth. Fuji raced down the mountain but could not escape the hot fire. Ash rained down as the leopards attempted to flee, but the ash caught up, burning spots into their coats. Fugi's home was destroyed and fur darkened, and he was distraught. As the rest of the leopards swam to shore and migrated west to the central mainland, he stayed behind. Fuji worked day and night, moving boulders and trying to restore his home, as well as helping the townspeople.

One night, the moon shone brighter than ever. As he watched, it appeared to get closer to Earth, and a glowing goddess appeared, her skin bathed in starlight. She had billowing rosy wings and pale white skin. She told him she was sent by the gods of the birds, as she watched over the roseate spoonbills. Fuji was in awe of this beautiful creature. The goddess bent down, connecting her forehead to his, and pulsing energy rushed through his body. Pink stardust swirled around him, and when it cleared, he found he had grown large wings like hers. The goddess told Fuji she had granted him wings and immortality so that he could embark on a noble mission to prevent another catastrophe from happening again. Fuji bent his head in understanding as she flew away.

Fuji worked laboriously to perfect his flight.

At first, he was wobbly and injured himself many times from falling, but he got better and better, until one day, he was ready. Fuji took flight, soaring high into the sky and towards the wintering clouds. Flying in fast circles, Fuji

*Snowfall*  
 By Paige Howard  
 12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Drawing



swirled the clouds around until it began to snow. Then, beating his powerful wings, Fuji pushed the storm toward home. The snow showered the mountain, covering the opening of the volcano so that it would never erupt again.

People cheered as the summit whitened, and they chanted his name. They honored him by naming the volcano after him: Mount Fuji.

Every once and a while, the mountain still rumbles, and an avalanche occurs. Fuji rushes down from his cave and saves people who are trapped in the snowfall. To this day, people revere the first snow leopard who grew wings to save their town.

# Mi Receta

By Amelia Lopez

1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Fiction



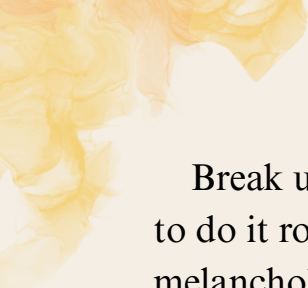
Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat.

It's nearly dinner time, and I'm standing barefoot over the lemon-scented kitchen tiles, making my family's *picadillo* recipe with my grandmother. I want to learn how to make her recipe myself, the way my Nani's mother taught her back in Havana before her family fled, leaving everything they loved behind—except for each other. Sometimes I imagine her lovely white house is still there, sitting just as it appeared sixty-five years ago, frozen in time. Her stories are so detailed that I imagine her closet of pleated skirts and the vase of fresh-cut ginger flowers still there, waiting for her to return home.

Mince the onion and garlic into grains. On warm days we sit near the pool, eating a spread of food pulled out of my grandparents' fridge and placed in little ceramic bowls. Nani sits at the lip of the piscina, pants rolled up mid-shin. She gives me a sliver of frozen mango off her plate like dozens of times before. Life in Cuba was great, she says. Every story she's told me starts with the good—the cinemas (600 theaters on just the island, more than Paris and New York City combined!), the gossip magazines (my father never let me read them, I was thirteen), and the pleated skirts (to the knees! The girls today could never.)

When the olive oil smells like the burning food outside of Pollo Tropical, sprinkle globs of pinkish-brown meat over the pan. Wait until it sizzles like Nani's hair being curled into ringlets before the party in Havana.

Fry until brown, about eight minutes, the same color as her skin after a summer on the beach, shirt soaked through with overripe mamay pulp. Despite what Castro's Cuba took from her family, after sixty-five years in America, she still longs for the beauty of the country that I will never be able to see with her.



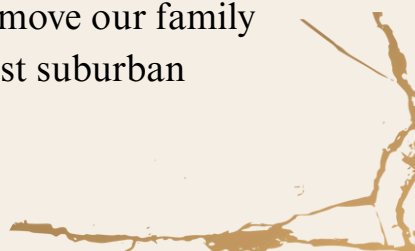
Break up clumps of cooked meat with a wooden spoon, and don't be afraid to do it rough or you won't get the pieces even. Her face swells with a melancholy smile as she tells me that she was my age when she got engaged. Later that night, I realized that she wasn't laughing at my sixteen-year-old immaturity, but rather her own.

Olives and raisins, now, and wait until they rehydrate, thick with tomato sauce, and remember the image of Nani in a wedding dress marrying Abu, seven years her senior. They love each other, though. Nani and Abu. They're inextricably linked, so I save energy by saying their names in one word: NaniandAbu. After lunch my grandfather will sit in his Lay-Z-Boy, head drooped, gently snoring, while my Nani sits beside him rubbing the soft skin of his wrist. She will rub his wrist for the rest of her life.

My Abu fled his family's home in Manzanillo, at nineteen, and returned two years later in the belly of a U.S. C-46 transport, strapped to a parachute. He spent two years in Castro's prison, and when the Americans bartered for his freedom, he joined the U.S. Army as a commissioned officer. My Nani had to fend for herself and her newborn daughter through two tours of Vietnam and countless military posts.

Don't forget the bell peppers. Chop them into glossy squares, and watch as bits of orange scatter to the floor—like in the Louisiana army base, when my Tía's six-year-old hair was reduced to a boyish cut after my Nani's motherly exasperation got the better of her. The strands flutter to the ground, and my Tía cries out in staccato Spanish. Nani slaps the back of her hand. English must always be spoken, even at the house—with practice, Tía finally stops tripping over English words in school, and the teachers who called her “slow” slink back into the shadows. The lilting sounds of Spanish fade from their home for good, and its melody grows just out of reach for my infant father; he has never found its words comfortable on his tongue.

Stir in a teaspoon of sazón and watch as it dissolves in the brown slurry. When I was eight years old, my American mother decided to move our family to a more wild part of the country. We left behind Miami's vast suburban



sprawl for an Appalachian town carved out of endless forest and bisected by an ancient grey river. I suddenly found myself surrounded by southern accents and their reassured twangs that seemed so out of place to my Cuban-American sense and sensibilities. But then, before I knew it, I found a home in the pine forests of the Blue Ridge Mountains: in the caves, in the streams, under the dappled gold canopies of the white pines and spruces—but I’ve never felt like these two identities seamlessly blend together to make something me-shaped. I’m not southern enough for the rural mountains, yet



## *Golden Vegetable*

*By Maddy Gill*

*5<sup>th</sup> Grade, Painting*

too *gringa* for the grandparents whose identity is built on their shared Cuban struggle. With my Abu's hard time hearing, and my Nani's dream of a *nieta* with elegant Spanish and a love of posing for her candid photographs, I've never been able to tell them that my only claim to Cuban-ness is my struggle: like wondering if I'll ever be able to truly understand their dulcet Spanish, if I can wax my eyebrows to look like the girls in those magazines, and if I will ever stop feeling like an imposter when I say my last name.

Pour in a little bit of sugar. Nani insists that I used to be fluent in Spanish as a child. Secretly, I wonder if she purposefully misremembers to distract herself from her very American™ granddaughter. I say it like it's a brand because it is. We both know that there are Americanized girls like me who don't even have their *bisabuela's picadillo* recipe—who have to look up their ethnic dish in the margins of *Food and Wine* magazine because they don't know how to ask for something that never felt like it was theirs in the first place.

My most recent trip to Miami, where I felt comfortable in my Cuban-American skin for the first time, taught me that maybe my Cuban-ness shouldn't be rooted in my fear of how I lack it. What if I'm Cuban in the way my Nani cooks me *picadillo* when I'm feeling sad? What if my Cuba is a menu of flavors and options, like thick eyebrows and a sense of overwhelming awkwardness whenever I'm forced to do a cheek-to-cheek kiss at every entrance and exit? My Cuba is a love for the Spanish language, which I'll always struggle to speak. My Cuba will never be my Nani's Cuba, or my Abu's Cuba. And that might be okay.

Here's the thing: the spices of my life aren't the same as my Hispanic grandparents, but I'm starting to sense that my recipe has its own kind of beauty. It's an umami dash of the mountains of Western North Carolina, unting chicken of the woods mushrooms in the hollows of old-growth forests. It's a cane-sugar sprinkle of caramel-brown Pollo Tropical platanitos on the curb with my little sister, whose searching finger I shoo away with the plastic tongs of my fork. It's my childhood stutter, and how my bleach-white skin



## *View to a Lighthouse*

*By Maddy Gill*

*9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Painting*

burns to the color of overripe tomatoes on the Miami playa; it's my deep love of English words and writing—the only ones I have to describe my beautiful Cuban family.

Nani scoops the slurry of picadillo into her favorite ceramic bowls. In the dining room, my grandparents sit next to each other, clutching hands, watching my sister and me eat. Steam fogs water glasses, and my Nani smiles as I swallow my first bite of her picadillo, which I tell her is muy sabroso in effortful Spanish—I like the dinner, but what I really love isn't the stew-stained recipe card: it's the fact that I get to enjoy it with my abuelos. They are the very best part of my Cuba.

Wash the bowl under the sink's steady stream, now.

I watch my grandma clean her always-tidy kitchen, and I realize that she loves me enough to appreciate whatever I bring to the dining room table. So next time my Nani craves Cuban food, I'll make my own *picadillo* recipe for her— and it will contain all the seasonings of her half-*gringa nieta*. It won't be the same as hers, but maybe she'll find it just as delicious.



## *The Fibonacci Sequence*

*By Sophia Bucholz*

*9<sup>th</sup> grade, Painting*

## TO HAVE AND TO HOLD

his territory one winter day. He will fly to her. He will become most excited for a few minutes and then we must assume they will consider themselves paired. They will share the territory, defending it together, as from then on they share their daily life. When springtime comes they will mate and raise a brood. But why did he let her into the place to begin with? Lack's only explanation after five years of robin-watching is that the cock knows it must be a hen because if she were a cock she would have lost her courage and flown away. The answer may not sound very scientific, but since there seems no better one, it will have to do.

These were the long years of robin-watching, however, that put Lack to pondering the value of the pair-territory to the pair bond. Robins on the lawns of Devon might pair with a little moment of display and excitement as early as December. Through three hard months of nesting time they will lead a most ordinary life, feeding, finding shelter from the cold, standing on the leaders, largely ignoring each other. It is not too different from the life of roe deer before the rut. The roebuck of course has his specialized activity of territorial defense, while the doe must lie and bawl for her young. But it is a social relationship, isolated from all other members of the species by the privacy of the pair-territory. So it is with robin. Unburdened by young, he and she in these early months are life alike. Isolated on their own territory joined together, they form a special relationship, a familiarity, which can be described by no word other than psychological. Rarely in this period of betrothal will one desert the other. The relationship—this bond—has become of such potency that neither can do without it.

With warming weather sap will flow in the veins of trees and hollyhocks will bloom in the wings of robins. One fine day she will hump over, giving the signal, and he will mount her and that will be just about that. It is difficult to think of a species that gets less fun out of sex. There will be a fine to-do of nest-building, for the hen is very fast. A gardener at Basingstoke hung up his coat in a toolshed at nine fifteen one morning and returned shortly after noon to discover an almost complete robin nest in a

## To Have and To Hold

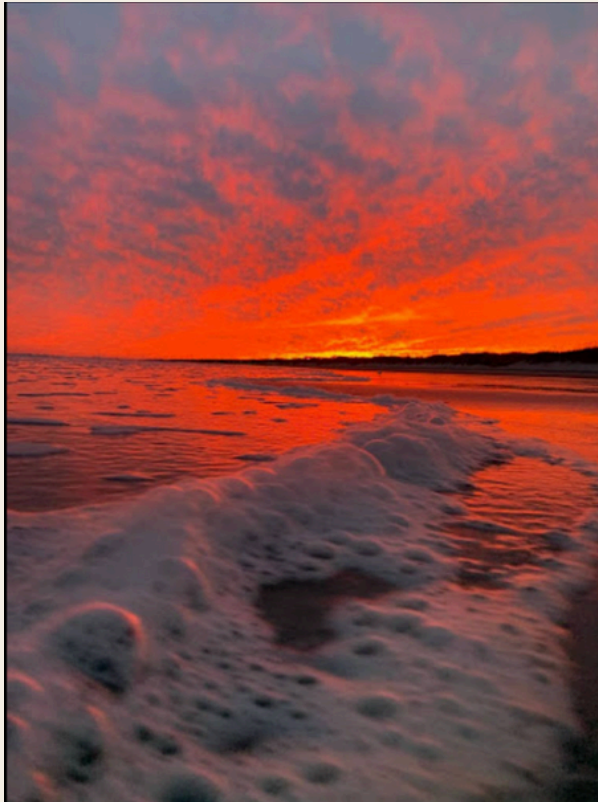
By Oakley McCarthy-Arcos

10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Poetry



# *Amie*

*By Mia Dalton  
9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Drawing*



# *Horizons*

*By Atali Ripley  
10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Photography*

# Brothy Soup

By Zeke Garris

11<sup>th</sup> Grade, Fiction

The glow of the microwave is the only light you see. The only things active around are you and the box of radiation that heats the canned soup you just bought. Brothy Soup. You know you don't even like the brothy soup and wish you had more meat and vegetables in the soup, but for some reason, you keep going back to the brothy soup. The microwave calls you for dinner, like your mother used to do years ago.

Alone at your table, the glow of a street light through your window fills a third of the room with a soft luminescence. You have a spoonful of soup. You're used to the tasteless, flavorless, bare liquid. It does not have the companionship of the chunks of chicken or the squares of steak. It lacks the cuts of carrots and the slices of celery. The soup reminds you of you. The phone buzzes at the right side of the plastic bowl. You pick it up hoping anybody has reached out or said hey. The notification reads, Reminder: Don't forget the Wordle today. You put the phone back down and continue eating the Brothy Soup.



# Dirty Ducky

By Hunter Spalding

10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Pottery

# *The Flight of the Eagle Monkey*

*By Alex McKay*

*1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Fiction*

This story begins with a young and enthusiastic god named Eluna. She had apprenticed with the elder gods for millions of years, learning the sacred art of creation. Finally, the day came when the gods decided she was ready to create a solar system of her own. With their blessing, she wandered out into space to create her first worlds. She got right to creating all the planets we now see surrounding Earth. But she was not satisfied yet. She longed to create something new and unique. Her thoughts went to Earth, a planet that the gods were allowed free reign over in its design. It was a canvas where her vision could come to life. For the years that Eluna had been alive, she had always dreamt about creating an Earth wrapped in ice and snow. She had seen many Earths where humans marveled at and the snow and cold. They danced and played in it, and that time of the year was filled with joy and excitement. And so she imagined that a world of endless winter would bring these humans eternal happiness. Eluna shaped her Earth with great care and patience. After years of work, she had created a perfect sphere made of ice and covered it with clouds that poured down snow. She placed this creation into the sky among the other planets, and she placed humanity upon it, watching with pride, believing she had given them a paradise.

But as years passed Eluna started growing worried. The humans weren't thriving as she had hoped. They huddled together for warmth and shared their fire, but as time passed, the cold began to change them. The chill of the endless winter crept its way in not only their bodies but in their souls, freezing their hearts and spirits as frigid as the ice around them. They were no longer kind to one another. Survival became their only concern.

Eluna, watching from the heavens, knew she made a grave mistake. She had thought that humans could adapt to this cold weather, as they had in many other worlds, but this cold was too great. She had waited and watched for

hundreds of years—hoping that they would endure, but she could no longer watch them suffering. Yet the laws of creation were strict: once a world was created, the gods could not directly interfere. The mortals could never know how much of an influence the gods had on their fates.

To break this law would invite chaos into the balance of the universe. Eluna was bound by this ancient law but also by her love for her creation. So after careful thought, she decided to create a being capable of bringing warmth into these human hearts. Quietly, without notice, she snuck her way onto Earth. She picked up a handful of snow and shaped it into a creature unlike any other. A strong animal with the body of a monkey and the wings of an eagle, strong enough to fly through the stormiest skies. Eluna knelt carefully beside her sculpture and, with a breath as gentle as the wind, blew life into her creation. The being began to glow with a soft and radiant



## *Bird of Prey*

*By Aakash Karvir*

*11<sup>th</sup> Grade, Photography*



light. It stirred in the god's hands, fluttered its wings, and opened its eyes. Eluna poured all the qualities she wanted to see in humanity—love, patience, kindness, and peace—into the creature. This new animal, an Eagle Monkey, let out a great cry that resonated across the world. The creature knew her purpose and immediately set out to help the people of the earth. As she flew across the Earth, the ground began to thaw and the ice cracked. For the first time in that world's history, flowers began to bloom, grass pushed its way through the melting snow, and the air, once biting cold, softened and warmed.

The humans were awe-struck. They felt this winged creature's presence, and their hearts began to melt. They remembered the warmth of love and kindness that had been buried beneath the ice. And for the first time, the clouds parted and the sun bathed the Earth in a golden warm light.

Eluna watched from above, relieved that her planet had been saved, yet she knew this balance would not last forever. The cold would return and the winters would yet again test the strength of humanity's kindness. But now Eluna had a protector of the Earth, who could return with the winter to remind the humans of warmth and love and help keep the cold at bay—not just from their bodies, but also from their hearts. And so, from that day onward, the seasons begin. The winter would sweep in every year, but it would never last, for the Eagle Monkey would return to rekindle humanity's flame of love and kindness.



*By Jonah Aronson*

*Thoth*

*9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Pottery*

*Driving Home*  
By Selah Frisbee *1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Nonfiction*

On my way home from the racquet club, a vibrant green light appears, but as I get closer it starts to turn yellow, and I press firmly on the break—knowing I will not make it. I come to a sudden stop, surrounded by dozens of other cars swarming the street. I am waiting in the left-turn-only lane, inches away from the concrete barrier. The golden-hour sun shoots straight through my windshield and right into my eyes. I rummage around my car, opening the center console, checking the backseat, and feeling around in the side of my door in search of my sunglasses.

As I lean over to the side of the driver door, I look into my side mirror and catch a glimpse of a tall man slowly walking along the concrete median. My fingertips finally meet my white and gold sunglasses that were hidden away in my door. I slide them on.

The inches closer to me, with his eyes locked on the ground, dragging his weathered, dirt-stained boots like they're made of lead.

I look to check if the light has turned green, but of course, it has not. I reach my jewel-encrusted hand out to grab my phone and quickly change the song. I toss my phone into the red leather passenger seat, and then I take another look at the man.

He has dull long hair, even longer than mine, that he uses to hide his face. He continues walking closer to me, clutching a small piece of distressed cardboard—his eyes still locked on the ground. He stops and timidly turns around to face the line of idling cars. “Don’t be a starrer,” I think to myself and slowly look down as well.

At the the roar of everyone's engines firing up, I look up and know the light has turned green. But I cannot help but look at the man again.

For half a second I glance over at him and his sign that holds sun-faded words: HAVE A BLESSED DAY.

# *I Am a Sea Turtle, Not Old but Wise*

*By Lizzie Pomeroy*

*1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Poetry*

I am a Sea turtle on an endless adventure in the vastness of the seven seas,  
not old but wise on a path of self-discovery.

A calm, flowing attitude guides me on my path as the currents of life guide  
my journey.

When a storm breaks, I will not stray,  
stubborn as a shark hunting its prey,  
a creature of habit always returning to a place of safety.

I am a sea turtle, not old but wise,  
still finding my way through coral and rock,  
as calm as an ocean breeze,  
yet with a fierceness that could rival a hurricane,  
as warm as a summer day.

I can also be as cold as the sea.

I am a sea turtle, not old but wise.

In this journey of mine, I have discovered that my strength does not lie in  
being unyielding,

but in the swim of adaptability,  
the wisdom in knowing when to glide with the waves and when to dive into  
the depths of the ocean,

and finding the beauty in the unknown of the deep,  
embracing the currents of change that will shape me.

In the end, the adventures are not about the destination,  
but the lessons and stories we carry.

The stories we share are met with laughter, echoing like the crashing of  
waves,

remind me that I am never truly alone, even in lonely moments.

# *Sailing Towards the Future*

*By Eli Zickerman,  
9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Photography*



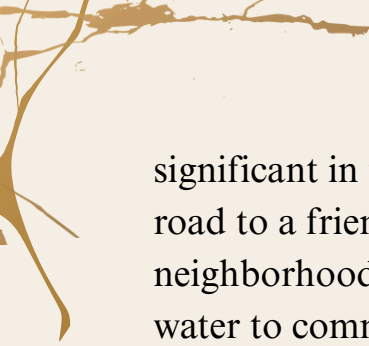
# *I Miss My Dyed Hair*

*By Elliot Rosse*

*12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Nonfiction*

People change almost as frequently as I change my hair color. Shades of bright blonde, gradient blues and pink hues best describe my ever-evolving hair color since starting high school. Color and creativity dictate how I live and express my individuality, showing personal growth with each new shade. But color has a new meaning since the muddy browns of flooding river water and the grays of decaying trees piling along the Swannanoa River within my neighborhood following the devastation of Hurricane Helene.

My hometown of Asheville is typically the most vibrant, colorful place I know. Its hazy blue mountain range—the backdrop of smoky paintings and crackled pottery—is where I discovered my love for exploring the joys of art and nature. When Helene hit, my neighborhood of three hundred people became trapped, stranded on a figurative island, with the only road leading in and out of the community turned to crumbling asphalt and rubble spilling into the Swannanoa River. While everyone in this region lost something



significant in this storm—someone they loved, a building they worked in, a road to a friend’s home, or a memory—I lost my hope of help. My neighborhood’s access to every basic need, from a steady supply of food and water to communication and electricity, was washed away with the unprecedented power of Helene’s rains.

My neighborhood gathered twice a day to organize, share information, offer skills and document needs for assistance and supplies. Everyone was accounted for on the hand-drawn map, with a chart of symbols identifying everything from those with generators to the homes of medical personnel. Those helpers chose a task, knowing the only way to escape our “island” couldn’t be dependent on the first responders’ fishing dead bodies from banks. I learned valuable skills like how to sanitize creek water and properly burn trash. Each morning I stood in dewy grass listening to people relay what information they had:

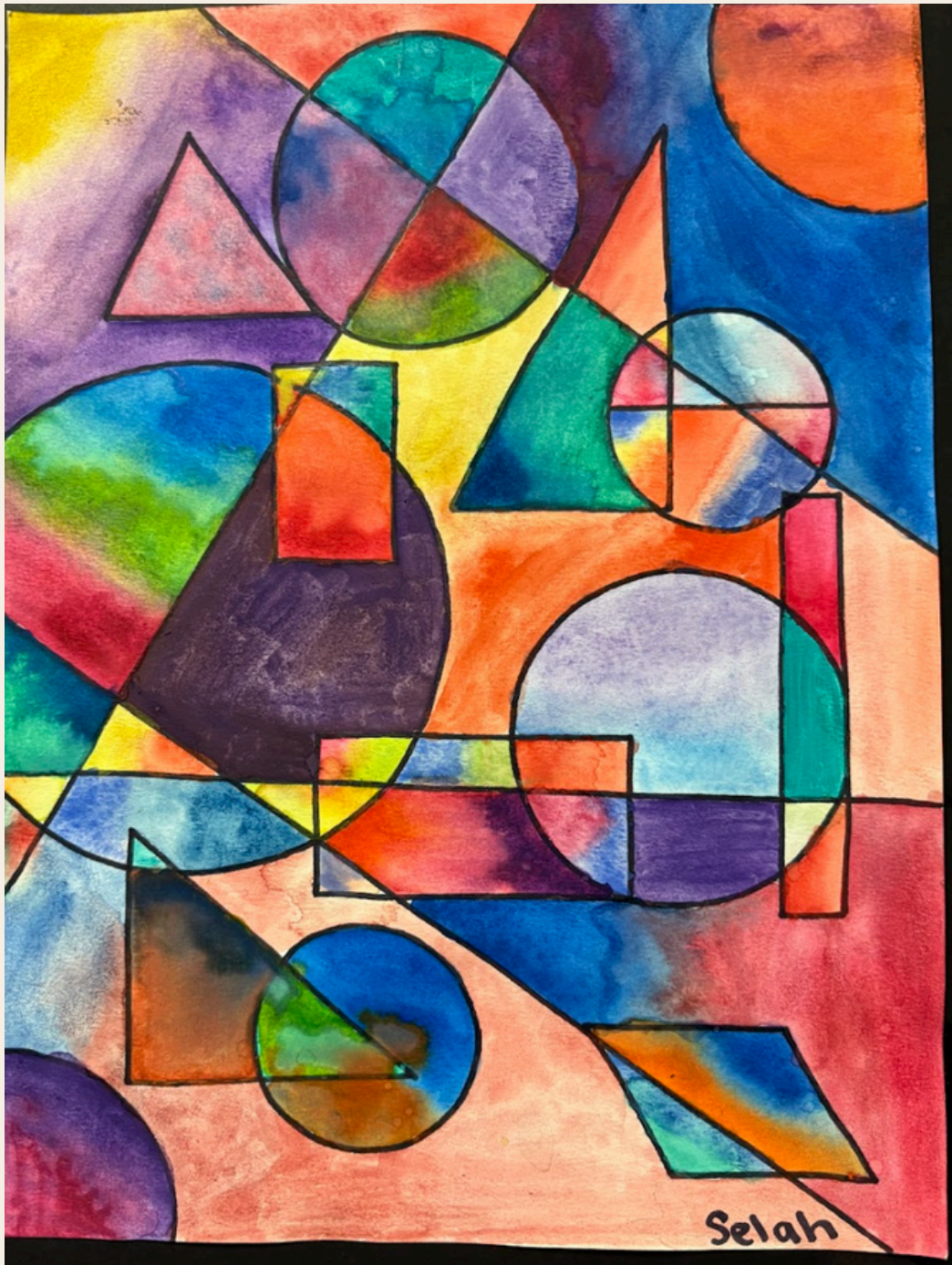
“The highway going east is closed; the only way to leave Asheville is to go south,”

“The death toll has reached 100 people. They are still pulling bodies out of the rivers.”

“There is no one coming to help us yet. We have to work together to make it through this.”

Before the emotions of dread or anxiety could arise, I was working. Nothing was more at the forefront of my brain than the safety and security of my family and those I’d shared a neighborhood with since I was born. I transported water to peoples’ homes from a small creek, bumbling in the back of a car holding Lowe’s buckets close. Every drop that spilled felt daunting, not knowing if we could replace it. After a meeting with a woman begging for help to scrape mud from her driveway, I left the meeting early to gather shovels and gloves from my house for my father and me.

My greatest accomplishment was working tirelessly with others to shovel and level the side of a mountain, laying rocks over a washed-up culvert, creating an emergency access road as the Department of Transportation



## *Prismatic Complexity*

*By Selah Frisbee*

*1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Painting*

rebuilt our main road. We needed a driveable access road for the most vulnerable to leave our island, and so that's what we did.

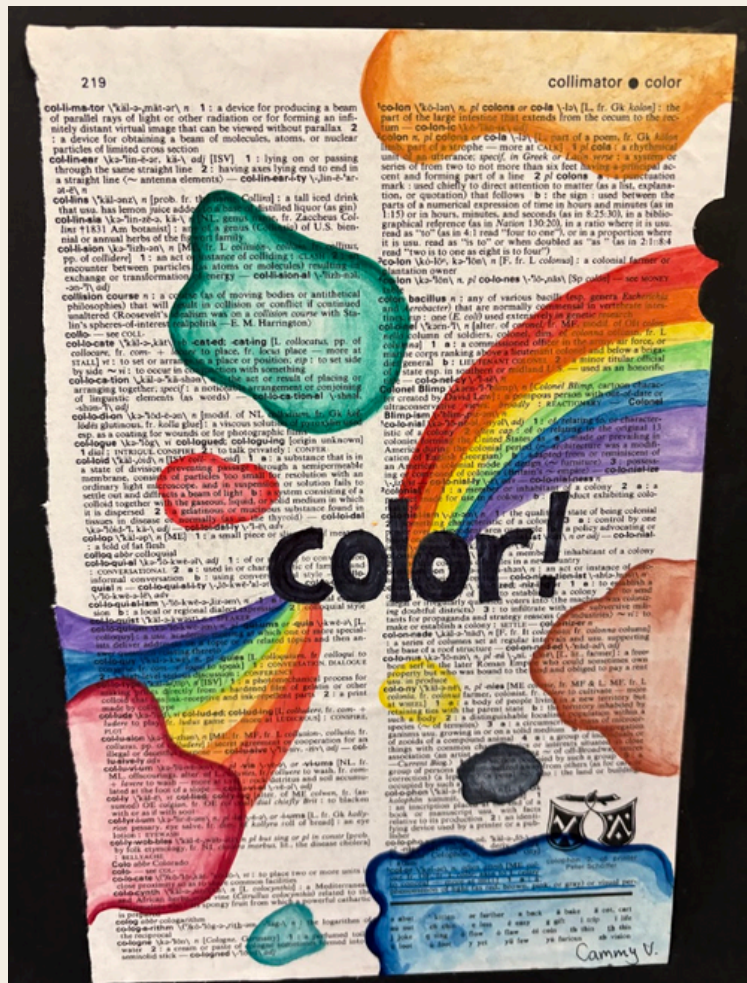
I could feel the color around me draining as the realization of the severity of how much effort was exerted just to survive sank in. The bright colors that used to surround and define me had become dull and monochromatic. For the first time in many years, I've let the color in my hair fade away. I've been moved from place to place, unable to stay for any length of time in my home because of the broken road that's been pieced together with only dirt and sand. But I've come to realize through each of these moves that what truly matters is the color within me that needs to stay alive and vibrant. I've felt the somber hues of blue while crying on an unfamiliar couch and the excitement of fluorescent orange while wondering a Target trying to restock my missing toiletries, or olive green while distracting myself with puzzles on the floor of my temporary guest home.

## *Buttons*

*By Ash Johnson  
9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Pottery*



*Color*  
By Cammy Vance  
12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Painting



The color of my hair is my way of expressing the colors of emotions I feel internally. Surviving Helene and being uprooted from my home drained that color, leaving monochrome emptiness.

Yet, when the colors in the world disappear, that's when I have my own. I don't need the life surrounding me to be technicolor when the fireworks of my life come from within.

The leaves are starting to change color here in the mountains, with dramatic pops of yellows, reds, and oranges displayed between uprooted pines and oaks—showing that color always returns. Helene stole my sense of safety and security, but it could never take away the color-filled sense of hope and strength within me.

# *We Have Always Been Here*

*By Lily Camp*

*10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Fiction*

The first time I knew that other people saw me as “other” or “different” was when I was twelve years old. I was at summer camp in Maine for the third year in a row with my best friend—Ashley— from when I was a kid. We were inseparable, our Barbies were best friends, we had matching bracelets, and were over at each other's houses almost every day. I'd had a crush on her for ages; I just didn't know it was any different than what some other kids my age felt. Halfway through the summer, I told some of my roommates I wanted to ask her to the dance. Some of the girls pretended to vomit, some treated me like a leper for the rest of the summer, one even told Ashley to run away. It was ridiculous, treating me like I wasn't human just because my idea of love was different than theirs. I knew, in my heart, that it wasn't anything to do with me—it was all them. I didn't see Ashley again until high school, when I'd come into my queerness. I'd cut my hair, changed my style, switching out my pink Adidas sneakers for green Nike high tops, and the matching bracelets for a watch and rings. Ashley ended up sitting next to me in my history class, I'd hardly recognized her. She'd switched her girly style up, wearing combat boots and a chain. She looked ... great. At lunch she apologized, telling me she'd liked me too at the time. We remained best friends until college—when finally she became my girlfriend.

I always knew I liked boys, maybe not inherently—but I just never thought differently. I knew I couldn't come out. My dad is a huge man of god, best friends with our pastor, and quotes scripture every chance he gets. I've played soccer since I was six years old, getting up every morning at five to train with my dad since I was eight. When the boys on my team started talking about girls, going on dates, I just kinda zoned out. I remember one time they were asking what celebrity I'd kill to go on a date with, the only face that popped

up in my head was Orlando Bloom. By the time I was seventeen, I knew I had to tell my parents. For school dances and fake dates my best friend, Emma, had been the stand-in for years. No one questioned it.

During one of our 5:00 am runs, I decided to tell my dad. I remember everything about that day. We were running by the beach, the air was sticky already with the summer weather beating down on us. I stopped for a moment to catch my breath, looking out at the barely visible horizon. “Dad, stop,” I said, “I need to talk to you.” That was one of the last conversations I ever had with my dad. He told me his faith couldn't allow him to accept me as I was. I was crushed, stuck in a pattern of self-loathing and anger toward my dad. Then I went to college and met Michael. Michael was a defender on my soccer team. He taught me how to love my father in the face of his hatred and ignorance and in turn to love my queerness. My queerness was not the problem in my relationship with my dad, it was the teachings and hatred of the church I grew up in. Micheal was my saving grace and my best friend. Ten years later we got married. My dad walked me down the aisle and we had a soccer ball-shaped cake.

From the time I was a little kid, I knew I was a boy. I refused to wear girly clothes, I refused to be called “Emily”; I insisted on being called “Dylan.” I refused to develop breasts, which obviously didn't work, and I refused to be a girl. When I was 12 years old, my parents introduced me to the term *transgender*. Growing up in a tiny town in Colorado, I'd heard the word gay probably three times. The minute I knew what being trans meant, I was home. I no longer felt wrong, like I hated every part of my body. Before I transitioned, I'd dread getting dressed in the morning—having to look in the mirror at a body that didn't fit my vision of myself. I got top surgery at 15 years old. That summer we took a trip to the beach, and I got to experience pure gender euphoria. Playing soccer on the beach with my brother, swimming, just lying on a beach with a book used to be excruciating. Now, I felt free, I felt more myself than I ever had. There were harder moments of

my transition, watching the U.S. government try to erase the pure humanity and existence of the trans community. My government was trying to erase me. Then I remembered that they cannot take away the feeling I'd had on the beach, or the first time I got out of the shower after top surgery, the first time I cut my hair short, my first date with a girl, my mom taking me suit shopping for prom. They can never take that away because that is the purest form of resistance, the existence of queer joy.

## *Little Bee*

*By Zeke Garris*

*11<sup>th</sup> Grade, Photography*



# *Circe's Love*

*By Lizzie Pomeroy*

*1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Fiction*

“I was not always a mother,” she said. “And I was not always a witch.”

Telegonus blinked up at her, silent and listening. His trust in her was whole. Unquestioning. And that trust in its purity felt like the most extraordinary magic she had ever known.

“I was born in the halls of Helios, the sun Titan, my father. My mother, Perse, was a nymph of the ocean, clever and cold. I had siblings—famous ones. Aeëtes, Pasiphaë, and Perses. You’ve heard their names whispered in myths. But they were never my comfort. We were not close. Not really.”

She hesitated, eyes distant. “In our family, power was not shared. It was hoarded like treasure. Displayed. Weaponised. I was the quiet one. The soft one, lost amid the storm of ambition that surrounded me.”

Telegonus frowned. “But you’re the strongest person I know.”

Circe’s eyes softened, but her smile barely reached her lips. “It took a long time to see that. Longer still to believe it.” Her fingers curled slightly over the woven blanket. “The gods called me dull beneath them. I could not sing like the Muses or bend the sky like my father. I had no brilliance. No beauty that bent others to me. No golden gifts. Or so they thought.”

She glanced down at Telegonus, and for a moment, her voice caught. You see strength when others see only silence. You give me back the name they tried to strip from me.

“One day, I fell in love. Or something like it. With a mortal fisherman named Glaucos. He was kind. Or maybe I was just desperate. Desperate to matter to someone. He spoke to me as if I were not a shadow. And I was so starved for it, I would’ve given him anything.”

She swallowed. “So I did. I found strange herbs in the shallows. I brewed a spell with my own hands and poured my hope into every word. I made him a

god.”

Telegonus’s eyes widened. “What happened?”

“He became divine,” Circe said flatly. “But not mine. Power changed him. He left me for another nymph—Scylla. A beauty with hair like seafoam and eyes like polished glass.”

Telegonus scowled. “That’s not fair.”

“No,” Circe murmured. “It wasn’t.”

She stared into the fire for a long time. “I wanted to save him. But my grief curdled into fury. I whispered darker words. I laced the sea with them. And when Scylla next stepped into the shallows, she became a monster. Twelve legs. Six snapping heads. A nightmare.”

She felt Telegonus shift beside her, a tremor of unease behind his calm demeanour. “That was the first time I felt the weight of what I could do.” Her voice dropped, heavy with regret.

“Do you ... do you regret it?” Telegonus asked, his voice barely above a whisper, his small hand trembling in hers.

Circe turned to him, her heart tightening. “No, not for what it did to Scylla. But for what it made me. The power to change the world ... came at a terrible cost. It put me at odds with the gods.” She shivered slightly, recalling their scorn.

“Are you ... dangerous?” His eyes, wide and searching, looked into hers as if he were seeking assurance.

“Not to you,” she replied quickly, squeezing his hand tighter. “I would never let my anger take root where it could harm you. You are what keeps the fire alive within me.” Her voice softened, attempting to dispel the shadows lingering over them.

Telegonus shifted closer, inching until their shoulders brushed. “But if you could do that... if you could create something so terrifying... what else are you capable of?”

She drew a shaky breath. “I am capable of many things, yes. But it is my love for you that holds the greatest power. I do not wish to frighten you. I

want to protect you, to keep you safe from all that darkness.”

His small hand clenched around hers, reassurance at his fingertips. “I trust you, Mama.” He took a breath, brow furrowing. “But I don’t want to think of the monster you made. I want to know you ... the real you.”

Circe’s heart swelled at his words, a painful reminder of her past yet a beacon of hope for the future. “Then let’s talk. About everything. About the past and about who we wish to be.”



*Snowy Paws*  
By Sophia Buchholz *9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Painting*

# Baby Days to Better Days

By Joaquin Tordoya and Noah Bialik  
11<sup>th</sup> Grader, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade,

Film



Scan Here to Watch



*By Mia Dalton*

# *Spring*

*9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Poetry*

The wash after the storm was months of gray  
Chills down to the bone or snow some days  
Ruins with running water, running people, running back  
Toward a place we once had before it all went black  
I'd have no idea how to help a place like that  
If our healing hands can't fix what cracked  
Or the crack struck deeper than the bottom of the map

The silence stayed and the blood tarried red  
Rushing through the waters or right through your head  
I am not sure when it changed but I know that it did  
For the little joys of life are no longer hid

I hear laughter now from behind those boards  
Like it did before, maybe even more  
And I hear you take a breath again  
Not a crack in your voice when you say "Amen"

Trees still lie where the wind once blew  
But now, all of a sudden, sprouts of green peek through  
A daffodil sits where the eye once hit but  
I no longer feel my heart drop a bit

I don't know when this change started or  
Where the deepest memories departed  
But I know that the earth still hums  
As it emerges—spring has sprung  
And the best of our memories are still yet to come



By Levi Willeke *Reintroduction* 12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Nonfiction

Hello everyone, my name is Leah Willeke. Most of you have probably seen me around the hallways pacing aimlessly, or in the art room drawing whatever has struck my fancy most recently.

What none of you have seen is the mind directing my hands. Often, it's caught up with art, or something that has shaken me lately. My mind isn't the only thing that can't be seen.

Sometimes, there's a little voice. It doesn't belong to me, but it's still there. The voice likes to lie to me, to tell me what's wrong with me. It tells me that my own voice is ugly, that nobody deserves to hear it. It tells me that I'm not pretty enough to like my appearance. It tells me that I have no future the way I am.

For a long time, I tuned out the voice. I didn't need that crap. It wasn't till my junior year that I realized I messed up by pushing it out. It took advantage of a time when I wasn't emotionally strong enough to keep the door shut, and it walked right in.

It took its chance to make me feel like I should quit everything.

A semester of the voice having full control taught me hard lessons. I understood that the voice was there for a reason, but I didn't understand what that reason was.

It was only after Hurricane Helene that I had time to reflect on what the voice's goal was. It wasn't trying to hurt me. In some twisted way, it was trying to protect me. The voice didn't know I'd misunderstand it.

I don't like my own voice because it's not deep enough. I don't like my body because it feels small and weak. I don't have any future the way I am, because I am not yet the person I need to be.

The voice was questioning my gender identity, something so fundamental that I never even realized it was shaky. So I picked a new name. I didn't put that much thought into the name. I just wanted it to

be more masculine and sound vaguely similar to Leah.

That name is Levi. At first I wanted to settle into it lightly. Just sign some of my artwork with it, maybe have some friends and my trusted advisor call me by it. I didn't realize people noticed until a couple of teachers asked, "Do you prefer to be called Levi?"

I told them to call me whatever they prefer, because Leah isn't a deadname and Levi is just an experiment. But starting a month ago, I've decided I want this experiment to go further.

I greatly appreciate Swhite for introducing both Leah and Levi, but now it's time for me to introduce Levi officially.

My name is Levi Willeke, and I don't know who I am yet. But I'm okay with that—because I know I'll get to know myself in the next stage of my life, whether it's despite the challenges or because of the challenges I face.

There's a whole lot in the world to know, and I only know a little bit of it. I can never learn all of it, but I can learn about myself.



## *Femininity*

*By Charlotte Liebman*  
*9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Pottery*



# Fading Family

By Levi Willeke

12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Drawing

*By Kit Repoley* **Granddaughter** *1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Fiction*

“Did you have a pet?” Bea asks.

Duncan sighs for the third time in as many minutes. “We had a dog, I can’t remember the rascal’s name but it was a little yellow thing. Matilda loved it to pieces. Your mother wanted a cat.”

“Is that why she named Kitty that?”

Surprised, Duncan barks a laugh. “You’ll have to ask her and your father.”

“Why haven’t we stayed at your house before?”

“There hasn’t been a reason for you to,” Duncan says. He thinks it’s close enough to the truth.

Bea doesn’t look satisfied. “Why hasn’t there been a reason, then?”

Duncan tells her, “I don’t think you’d understand, and if your parents haven’t told you, you don’t need to know.”



*Through the  
Closet*

*By Maia Kiiss*  
*1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Pottery*



The girl pouts with all the dramatic fervor of a ten-year-old. “Why aren’t I allowed to know all the things you know? I might not be as smart as Kitty but I can take it, Grandpa.”

Duncan pauses and asks her, “Why don’t you think you’re as smart as your sister?”

“Everyone knows it. You don’t have to ask.” Bea crosses her arms tighter across her chest. “See, I don’t like school. I mean, I liked the ant farm we did in science last year, so much that I got to take it home, but then Kitty killed it ‘cause she was mad at me, and then Mum said she was thirteen so she ought to know how to handle herself, and then she said I shouldn’t have it because I was a bloody idiot, and Pa asked where she learned how to call people bloody idiots, and then she shut up just like a clam, it was fascinating.”

“You’re very inquisitive,” Duncan says. Almost infuriatingly so.

“That’s a sign of a sharp mind.”

“Sharp . . . like a knife? I like knives. Just to look at, you know, not to murder anybody with or anything.”

Duncan does not alert her to the existence of his hunting knife collection. The girl’s mother might just use it to murder him.

“Dangerous things can be beautiful,” he agrees.

Bea’s fingers tap the armrest of the sofa she’s monopolized. She looks up at him. “Grandpa?”

“Beatrice?” Duncan responds with equal gravitas.

“Oh, that’s another thing,” she chirps, her attention already lost from the previous subject. “Why do you always call me Beatrice? No one calls me that except I guess the doctor sometimes.” She pauses briefly to consider something. “You always call Aunt Mattie ‘Matilda’ too, even though she’s less like a Matilda than I’m like a Beatrice.”

Duncan doesn’t know, really, except that he’s never had much use for nicknames. Even the girl’s father is Charles in the Christmas letters. “It’s the name your parents gave you, and it respects them to use it,” he comes up with.

Bea narrows her eyes. “Then why do I call you Grandpa?”

The older man can’t find an answer to that question either. “You could call me Duncan if you like,” he says finally, “but I suspect you’d find it strange.”

“Well, I think it’s strange when you call me Beatrice.”

Checkmate. “Alright, Bea.”

She grins, her work accomplished, and continues her bombardment with, “Do you have a dog now? Mum says you do, but I haven’t seen it anywhere. Is it dead?”

Duncan certainly hopes not. “She’s probably in my bedroom,” he explains. “There’s a lot of sun there in the afternoons and she likes to lie in it.”

“Can we go pet her?” is Bea’s extremely logical next question.

Duncan smiles. “I thought you’d never ask.”

Bea squeals and hops up, and they descend a flight of stairs and a hallway. It’s hard to get places in such a big house.

“Eleanor!” Duncan calls once they get close to his bedroom, and metal tags jingle.

“That’s an absurdly human-like name for a dog,” Bea says. “Ours is called Pancakes.”

Duncan shrugs. “She’s a dignified dog. I don’t think she’d appreciate being called something silly.”

Smirking, Bea shouts the name Princess Waffle as a black-and-white shape emerges from the bedroom. Eleanor pauses, looks at Bea, then shakes her fur and trots over to the girl’s outstretched hand. Bea strokes the dog’s ears the way an Olympic athlete might caress their triumphant gold medal, and Duncan cedes yet another point. He had forgotten one of the only things he learned in primary school, which is that one should never enter a contest with a ten-year-old girl when their pride is on the line.

Duncan remembers that Bea wanted to ask him something, but had gotten sidetracked by the nickname conundrum. To distract from the mockery he feels is sure to come, Duncan asks, “What were you going to ask me earlier?”



# *Dog Daze*

*By Isabella Stafford*



*12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Drawing*

It takes her a moment to place what he's referring to, but she says, "Oh. Well, it was starting to seem like you liked me more, so I thought I'd ask you again why we've never stayed here because maybe you forgot why you didn't tell me originally? I guess it was a bit like when I ask Mum for something and she says to go ask Pa but Pa says to go ask Mum so then I tell Mum that Pa said I could and tell Pa that Mum said I could and then everyone's happy except probably Kitty because she's never happy. I think she got it from you. Isn't it nice to pass something onto your granddaughters even if you don't like them and you never gave anything to me?"

"I never said I didn't like you," Duncan points out, a touch wounded despite himself. Probably her parents had told her not to get her expectations of her grandfather too high. Duncan was lucky she was even here. "Besides, I think you got a lot from me."

Bea's head tilts. "Like what?"

"Well, you're rather too smart for your own good--don't argue. You pay attention to what's really important to you, not what some government-mandated curriculum says you should learn. I had a hard time in school too, but now look at me with my books I wrote and my big house and my lovely dog, and that's all you need, really. Friends would be nice, but you can't win them all. Anyway, Bea, all you have to do is make sure you don't get cynical. Enjoy life. Ask your questions. There's your daily dose of quote-unquote 'wisdom' from an old man."

"I think even old people should have friends," Bea considers.

"My best friend is called Marie and we like to find worms in the mud."

Nodding, Duncan says, "An admirable pursuit." He blows out a big huff of air. "You know, I don't want to upset your parents, but I think questions deserve answers. Long story short, your mother didn't want an old and frankly difficult to live with man like me around her kids, and I respect that, but I did want to get to know you and Katherine. I asked if you could come and stay, and she miraculously agreed, so here you are. Is that enough explanation for you?"

Bea scrutinizes him for a long moment, and he’s strangely nervous of what she’ll say to him. Since when did he care what a child thought of him?

“Well, I don’t see anything wrong with you except that you’re grumpy and you smell weird,” she finally proclaims.

An invisible sandbag slips from Duncan’s shoulders and crashes against the hardwood floor.

“Can we get dinner now?”



## *Beyond The Gate*

*By Alex McKay*



*1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Painting*

# *The Best Reward*

*By Megan Klieve*

*12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Poetry*

I take a deep breath  
And crack my toes  
My brain tells me,  
Megan, you have to go

So I start running  
My heart still drumming

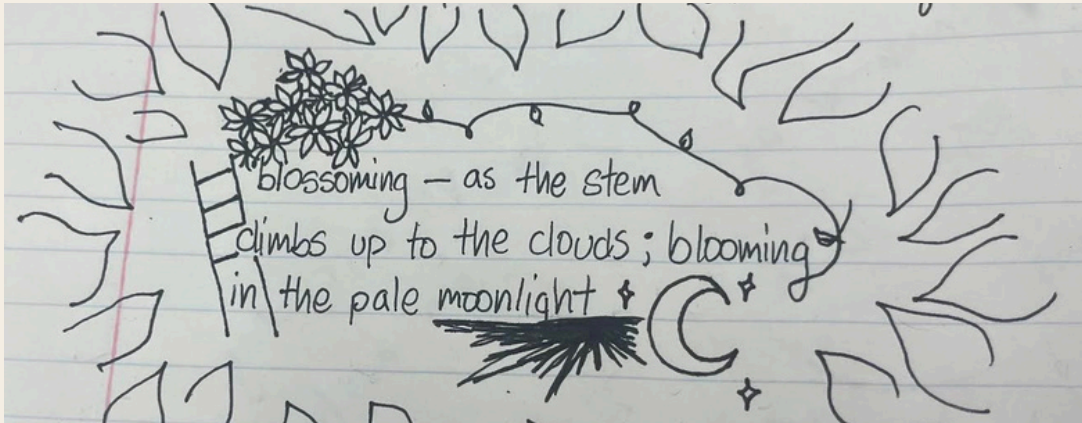
Until I jump.

My feet curl up under me  
And I soar through the air  
I extend my right heel  
My fists by my hair

Momentum sends my heel crashing  
Through the middle of both boards  
I can't believe I've done it  
My black belt, the best reward.



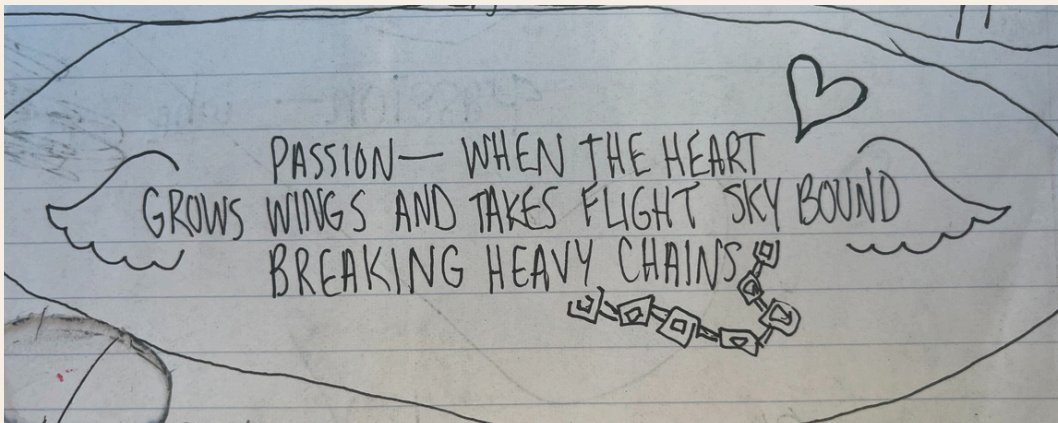




## Blossom

By Cady Hoffman and Daley McCarthy-Arcos  
10<sup>th</sup> Grader, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Poetry

## Passion



# *Axis Mundi in the Backyard*

*By Dannan Garner*

*11<sup>th</sup> Grade, Fiction*


Mama's elbow-deep in a blue bucket of soapy water, wreathed in bubbles that glitter like pocket rainbows in the sunlight. She stands, pulling her arms out of the water, pocket rainbows clinging to her skin. Clutched in her fingers is my wrinkled—now soaked—faded yellow shirt, red ketchup splotch, as ephemeral as a thought, completely gone in seconds under mama's expert hands. That's one of mama's many powers; she controls the world like it's a knitted blanket splayed over her lap and the strings of fate are needles nimbly wielded by her stubby fingers.

I watch her hobble to the clothesline, bent to the ground by the weight of her swollen pregnancy, a phenomenon that fascinates me. It's another power



## *Iris*

*By Isabella Stafford*  
*12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Drawing*



of Mama. Just as she knits the blanket of the world, she adds colors and textures and life itself. She is systematic in her process, flicking my shirt with a twist of her wrist, sending sparkling droplets of water slicing through the air. She hangs the shirt from clips and adjusts it straight, smoothing out wrinkles with prudence. She waddles back to the bucket and the small, wooden stool she had been perched on. When she lowers herself, she's languid and careful. I hear through memory the cracks of her joints and her grumbled curses as she sinks down, even though I'm a yard and a wall away.

I'm watching from my place in the kitchen, through the only window. To get to that window, I've had to clamber onto the counter and twist around the faucet to look through the glass. I've resigned myself to the pain of my toes squished against the metal wall of the sink. It's not bad. Pain is trivial. But Mama says I only say that because I'm young and youth is when most things are insipid. It's not a bad thing, being young. Just a bit different. Your joints don't crack and you don't really care about pain, but you also don't have powers like Mama.

Mama says I'm giving her too much credit and she's as banal as a peach pit. She says I'm being a sycophant, which I still don't know the meaning of, but it's what our neighbor, Ms. Betty, is, so it's gotta be a bad thing. But from my place in the sink, staring through the window, my swollen and stubby Mama is a goddess, bearing fate itself in her fingers and tummy.

"When did Mama get this dish?" says a voice from the kitchen doorway. I glance at papa and wave before returning my gaze to Mama. I hear his heavy footsteps against the wooden kitchen floor approaching me. He places his hands as large as salad bowls on both my shoulders and shakes me. I pout and glare at him. He grins, large white teeth cutting bright from behind the scraggly curls of his beard. "Your Mama would say you look incongruous."

I don't know what that means. I say so. "You're out of place. Only dishes go in the sink, not little girls with crumbs on their chin." He flicks said crumbs off my chin. I stick out my tongue and try to lick away anything left behind.

Papa slides his hands under my armpits and lifts me out of the sink and carries me like that out the door. I just watch, curious, as he ambles right up to my Mama and plops me down on the other side of the bucket. He drags over a stool of his own and rolls up his sleeves, settling next to Mama. He pats her stomach and murmurs something into her ear. She rolls her eyes and gestures me to her side.

“Come ‘ere. I’ll teach ya how to wash ya own clothes. Even your Papa can manage himself with a bucket. But make sure no husband of yours knows until you’ve got him b’fore a priest.”

I nod. And, stoic and diligent, I take my Mama’s teachings to heart. I learn the power to make stains as ephemeral as thought. It was the first of a long list my Mama would teach me.



## *By The Sea*

*By Maia Kiiss*

*1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Pottery*





# *Musical Reflections*

*By Wiley Ray*

*12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Nonfiction*

I honestly didn't want to talk about the banjo initially. I felt like everyone might expect me to speak on it, and I wanted to find a way to defy expectations. But, I am who I am. So here we are. I suppose all my experiences thus far can be summed up in relation to my journey on the banjo. I've always seen myself as something of an individual, and I feel that banjo is a rather fitting way to talk about it.

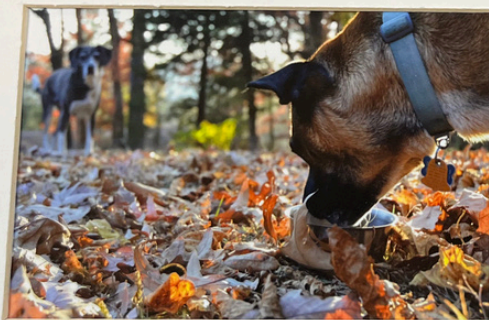
Here we go. I figure I'll start out with a bit of an origin story. It all began a long time ago in the faraway city of Boise, Idaho, my home of eleven years after moving from Asheville. In this Western land, everyone knows how to dress properly and wears cowboy hats and flip-flops. However, there is not a soul I know of who plays the banjo. So, how did I come upon this music that was to be my life? I was, in fact, inspired by the legendary Jerry Garcia's banjo playing (of the Grateful Dead for the uneducated among you).

I began this instrument and thought it was pretty cool, but I had no one to share my music with ... because the Wild West and banjos don't exactly go together. As fortune would have it, when I moved back to Asheville in 2022, I discovered that there is a large old-time music scene here. I soon realized what I had been missing: others to play with. I progressed so much faster having other people to jam with who supported me. As in many things in life, having other people join in my journey was crucial. I grew in a way I could not have just playing banjo in my basement all alone in Boise. I must say I was disappointed that no one here played old-time music, but... such is life. There's no shortage of old people who play old-time.

As I grew confident with the banjo, I decided it was time to shake things up. So I took up the fiddle. Banjo is great, and will always be my soul instrument, as it were, but I wanted to switch things up from my role as a banjo player in jams. See, in old-time jams, it serves more as a support rather

jams, it serves more as a support rather than a driving factor. This isn't to say that banjo isn't an integral part of the music, but I was ready for a new challenge that pushed me out of my comfort zone.

Fiddle did this; it forced me into the spotlight by sheer volume—fiddles are LOUD, especially when you make a mistake. I initially felt this role was out of character; there was a certain appeal to hanging in the background and avoiding an active role. Yet I found that the risk was worth it; aside from the enjoyment I got out of attempting to master this new instrument, I appreciated the feeling of doing something unfamiliar after falling into the comfortable rhythms of the banjo. It seems no small coincidence that this coincided with my decision to run for student body president, followed by class president ... looking back, this was all in a subconscious effort to push myself. I have not regretted it.



## *Autumn Tails*

*By Jovi Locascio*

*1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Photography*

But ultimately I suppose I should ask myself, where is this all going? Why banjo, why fiddle, and why is this all so important to me? If you'll forgive me for taking a philosophical bent, I align with Leo Tolstoy in his speculations on the meaning of life. Summarily, Tolstoy believed that the point of life is to seek happiness. And so my music is all my effort to find happiness. But why confine myself to just one thing? In truth, many things make me happy—the satisfaction of truly learning, my dogs, sleeping until noon. And I have some people to thank for helping me strive for what makes me happy. This list is far from comprehensive: my parents, for supporting me in all my endeavors; my teachers, for fueling my passion for discovery and not minding when I ask yet another question; everyone here who has been a part of this journey; and my dogs, for always being there for me with wagging tails when I get home.

Finally, I have some advice. Find what makes you happy. Enjoy it. However, don't feel rooted to it; if you take up a proverbial new instrument, you might just find that it makes you even happier. In this same vein, be confident in yourself. Sometimes, it's okay not to take anyone's advice, but to make your own. You should take this advice though—it's really good. Thank you!

## *Banjo*

*By Levi Willeke*

*12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Drawing*



## *A Climber's Hands*

My hands are a study in red  
from begonias in the garden  
to dresses made of velvet  
Knuckles sting with the flex of fingers  
full of blisters  
Palms covered in open calluses  
Yet no malice  
within the sprinkled cuts  
overflowing with blood

*By Dannan Garner  
11<sup>th</sup> Grade, Fiction*

Kissing our hands,  
Life and I howl,  
with laughter and praise  
and if death had eyebrows,  
I'm sure they would be raised

## *Cows*

*By Skylar Romero  
12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Photography*



*By Anna Weaver* **Lost and Found** *12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Nonfiction*


When I was twelve years old I wanted to jump out of an airplane. As an avid skier, I enjoyed flying down the slope and wanted to experience the thrill of falling through the sky. Outside of the classroom, my lively energy often drew me to bold, unconventional situations that I fully embraced. I looked forward to hiking up mountains in my ski gear in near snowstorms to ski back down through the trees. I've enjoyed ziplining on one of the most dangerous ziplines in Costa Rica. It was phenomenal.

I'm convinced I've always had a determined, spontaneous mindset in everything I tried, but my self-assurance has slowly declined over the years.

This past summer, I rediscovered what I once displayed: self-confidence, invigorating ambitions, and an adventurous spirit.



*By Brayden Ross* **McBasketball** *10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Photography*



Not too long ago I lived outside with strangers for two weeks. We quickly bonded over the absence of phones and no access to showers. Never before had I woken up to the stench of a 14-year-old boy's armpit blown in my face, or used the same bowl for two weeks, licking it clean after each meal and rinsing it in a communal bucket of murky water. It was also the first time that the only access to water I had was melting snow.

The trip was beyond my comfort level, and these heinous experiences bonded me with people more than anything else, but what changed me most was the mountaineering expedition on Mount Shastina.

The night before our summit attempt, our guides provided us with mountaineering boots, crampons, ice picks, helmets, harnesses, and poop bags for the mountain's cleanliness, which we would have to carry with us for the rest of the backpack. The safety equipment made me nervous, but I felt enthusiastic about the challenge we would face in the morning. We woke up at 2 a.m. Some people refused to leave their tents. People were struck with altitude sickness and anxiety. I was overstimulated with a mixture of exhilaration, eagerness, and delirium. Within the first few minutes of hiking, my body struggled more than it ever had before, but I felt a rush of perseverance to reach the summit. My legs felt heavy from the lack of sleep. People kept dropping out, turning around to rest at base camp. We wore the helmets to shield ourselves from falling rocks. The weight of the harness, my backpack that carried three liters of water, extra layers, and the additional equipment made the climb nearly impossible in the quicksand-like loose gravel, which set us at a forty-five-degree angle. Apparently, that was only the easy part. It would only get steeper from there, and, at some point, we would have to hook our harnesses to our guide in case of slipping and falling. We would also have to put on our crampons and climb up sheets of ice and snow using our ice picks.

We had a six-hour time limit to make it to the summit by 9 a.m. and our guides were strict, telling us that we would only get a five-minute break every thirty minutes, and a ten-minute break every hour.

When they learned that one of the most devastating wildfires in California's history was raging through the state, I accepted that we would continue with the possibility of having to turn around. Over time, the air quality worsened, and we found it difficult to breathe. Some people started vomiting. Our snot turned black. The only way of seeing was with our headlamps, but our sight was slightly clouded with smoke. The cold, smoky air made breathing a chore, and my chest tightened with every step, but my determination overrode my discomfort.

Out of twenty-three, six others and I stood at the spot where we expected to take our ten-minute break. During this break, the guides talked, and I overheard one saying that he had never experienced such dangerous conditions on a summit attempt. He said that no one should have been feeling like they were struck with a cold, which is what several were experiencing. We would have to stop hiking, as the air quality would only worsen over time. We wouldn't successfully summit the mountain, though I was confident I would've made it to see the sunrise from the peak if it weren't for the fire.

Disappointed that I wouldn't stand on the mountain's highest point, I still felt successful. The failed summit attempt made me feel victorious. Although we didn't summit the mountain, I discovered something greater about myself: I can persevere. I still imagined looking down at the bottom, at my unsteady younger self, and telling her to keep climbing. Her lack of confidence was nothing compared to what my self-discipline allowed me to accomplish years later: a life-threatening climb up a 12,000-foot mountain across the country, with people I had just met. I accepted that, metaphorically and literally: this wouldn't be the only mountain summit attempt in my life. I realized I wanted to challenge my limits until possible failure or potential success. This experience alone eradicated my anxious outlook on unfamiliar tasks.

Today I want to ski down even harder terrain, backpack the most difficult trails, raft the steepest rapids, and cliff jump from the highest rocks. I want to grapple with foreign projects and activities to enjoy the outcome of success or



*By Elijah Wharton*

*Shine*

*11<sup>th</sup> Grade, Drawing*

learn a lesson. Climbing back down the mountain made me realize this was only the first of many summit attempts to come.

I recognize that through the smoke and falling through the air, unfamiliar challenges are what make me courageous. When I jumped out of an airplane for my 18th birthday, I was ecstatic on the flight up, while my sister was crying. From 14,000 feet in midair, I pulled and held on to the parachute, taking in the view around me, and thought that I had lived my life to the fullest. But as I noticed how massive the world looked below me, I realized that there was so much more for me to do with my life.

I've discovered this year that challenges like mountaineering and skydiving bring me unparalleled fulfillment. They've sparked a desire to actively seek out and embrace the unknown in every aspect of my life.

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*By Jude Garris On the Whistle 10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Photography*



# *Shadows of Return*

*By Sophia Bucholz*

*4<sup>th</sup> Grade, Painting*



# What is Kintsugi?

Kintsugi (金継ぎ) is an old Japanese art form that involves repairing broken pottery by filling the cracks with some type of lacquer (traditionally urushi but modern practice typically uses resin) and covering it with gold dust to give the appearance of pottery repaired by gold. Throughout the magazine, graphics of cracks--black and gold--line the margins to give the impression of broken rifts slowly being repaired with gold.