

SAN JUAN UNIFIED LITERARY MAGAZINE

WHAT'S YOUR WHY? | 2026 | VOLUME 3

San Juan Unified
SCHOOL DISTRICT

COVER ART

Artist Name: Baran Nikoupourdeilami
Mira Loma, Grade 10
Title: Window of Wonder
Medium: Paint on Canvas

ARTIST STATEMENT

This artwork was inspired by the everyday things in my life that I think bring value and meaning to the concept of living. What I chose to paint reflects the things I personally appreciate and enjoy, such as the beauty of nature, hobbies like photography, animals, and even food. Throughout my piece, I explore the idea of what gives life purpose, as well as the small parts of my life that exist outside of school and other obligations. Without my hobbies and interests, I would not be who I am today, as these hobbies shape my 'why.'

To create this piece, I used acrylic paint on canvas to illustrate my ideas. I intentionally used bright and vibrant colors to bring a sense of positivity and joy to the painting as lighter and more saturated colors are often associated more with more uplifting emotions. Additionally, I applied key elements of art, such as value, color, and shapes. I used a range of shades through vivid color schemes. I also utilized free-flowing organic shapes in the window to separate different aspects of the painting.

I created this piece not only for myself, but for others to see, as if they were the person looking through the window. The title "Window of Wonders" gives a glimpse into some of my interests that make me who I am, which I believe answers the question of "What's your why?" My why is my passions and interests, the small things in life that some may notice and others may not. This artwork is a reminder that the meaningfulness of life does not always come from big achievements or dramatic moments. Instead, it can come from personal interests that can shape someone without them even realizing. Life is filled with so many wonders, even the simplest things have shaped who I am, and they most definitely shape others as well.

SAN JUAN UNIFIED

LITERARY MAGAZINE

WHAT'S YOUR WHY?

SAN JUAN UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
VOLUME 3
SPRING 2026

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EDITORIAL

Why?

That is one of the boldest words in the dictionary. We can easily know who did what, where, and when- but the answer to that final question can show the world what makes you truly different from everybody else. This year, we decided to ask that question to students across the San Juan Unified School District, and they responded by creating a diverse catalogue of worldviews, visions, personal stories, and cultural ideas.

This is the third time that we have been pleasantly surprised about just how many people have taken it upon themselves to put their work out there–to the delight of so many parents, teachers, and fellow students across our community. This team is honored to showcase your hard work.

Speaking of the team, this actually happens to be a bit of a new era for us. This year, we established the new Executive Board in order to fill the unfillable shoes of this magazine's founder, Julia Clauson. Julia had the creative vision and initiative to go out and establish this magazine, and we are forever grateful for her individual efforts to elevate student voice and creativity in our community.

Upon her graduation, we decided that having a leadership team to create the magazine would allow it to reach more people and foster more ideas. It would be an understatement to say that it has been a success. This new team has met about once a month to make decisions, share ideas, and organize events. Their extension was the existing Editorial Board, which assisted the Executive Board with spreading the word about the magazine on individual campuses.

We began the year by brainstorming and selecting the theme, What's Your Why? We chose this theme because it is the guiding question that determines practically everything else in life–what you want to do, who you want to be, what you find meaning in, and exactly why you do the things you do. Asking that specific question would create a snapshot of high school identities in formation. We hoped that this would invite students to take a step back, think about that question, and create something out of it. The result was a vast collection of short stories, poems, essays, and artwork that will inspire you, humor you, and even make you question the very meaning of life itself!

This wonderful product in your hands is the result of months of efforts from student leaders, educators, administrators, and of course, the talented writers and artists. All of those remarkable people made this incredible expression of creativity possible.

We'd like to thank Mrs. Rachel Nguyen for facilitating this process and coming to every board meeting with a contagious level of positivity (and the best assortment of candy you can find)! She is the one who assisted Julia with the establishment of the magazine and continues to raise up new generations of leaders to keep this amazing project going.

Thank you to all of the students and educators who helped review the submitted writing during this year's reading day! We were all incredibly impressed by the synergy that occurred there; it is an experience we won't soon forget.

We would also like to thank administrators Chris Sowry, Crista Koch, and Harvey Oaxaca for their individual efforts. These incredible educational leaders are the backbone of this project and we appreciate them for taking that initial chance on us to establish this and their yearly continued support.

We are incredibly passionate about this. Student art doesn't get the opportunity to be published and recognized in a larger community often, so we are grateful that so many students decided to put themselves out there and share their ideas with the world! Thank you to all of the parents, educators, mentors, and school clubs that encouraged students to submit–you are making a real difference.

This work is dedicated to all writers and artists in our region and everywhere else. The main objective of the Literary Magazine is to create a platform to elevate student voice, and art has a unique way of sharing a message with the world. Every single student who submitted should feel incredibly proud–you are now a published writer/artist! We hope that our theme made you consider your why, and we believe we found our why through sharing this opportunity with you.

Dream On. Write On.

Sincerely,

Mark Yadchuk
Executive Board Member

HELP RESOURCES

SUPPORT FOR LGBTQ + INDIVIDUALS

San Juan Unified School District aims to provide school sites the resources and support to meet the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth and families. For questions or additional support, please go to https://www.sanjuan.edu/lgbtq or contact LGBTQ@sanjuan.edu.

SEXUAL ABUSE OR ASSAULT

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. Call their National Sexual Assault Hotline 800.656.HOPE, or visit online.rainn.org.

BODY IMAGE, DISORDERED EATING

ANAD, the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, is the leading nonprofit in the U.S. that provides free, peer support services to anyone struggling with an eating disorder, regardless of age, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, or background. Call (888) 375.7767, email hello@anad.org, or visit https://anad.org/

CRISIS RESOURCES

If you have thoughts of suicide immediately call or text the Suicide Prevention Hotline at 988.

The Crisis Text Line is here for any crisis, including self harm or thoughts of suicide. Text HOME to 741741 from anywhere in the United States, anytime. A live, trained Crisis Counselor receives the text and responds, all from our secure online platform. The volunteer Crisis Counselor will help you move from a hot moment to a cool moment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

7 **The Quiet Fight**
Az'Jah Jones
Encina, Grade 12

8 **Loss**
Bella Aguilar
Del Campo, Grade 10

8 **why i breathe**
Avery Allman
Del Campo, Grade 11

9 **Fireflies of Tonight**
Fariha Amiri
Del Campo, Grade 12

10 **High Water**
Lucy Baland
Bella Vista, Grade 11

10 **The Things People Can't See**
Katelyn Bedall
Casa Roble, Grade 10

10 **A Seat That Waited**
Somia Behroz
Encina, Grade 10

11 **Peaceful**
Bryan Bernal Amarillas
Encina, Grade 10

12 **Pongalo Pongal**
Anonymous

12 **The Burning Star**
Lili Boyer
Bella Vista, Grade 9

14 **My Why**
Robin Cabrejas
Encina, Grade 12

15 **Jersey**
Flower Calhoun
Del Campo, Grade 9

16 **Un pequeño Marcos Centeno**
Marcos Centeno
Encina, Grade 9

17 **Trisha**
Alana Cobabe
Bella Vista, Grade 10

19 **My Summer**
Ava Commandatore
Rio Americano, Grade 11

16 **Love Thy Neighbor**
Natalia Corona
Bella Vista, Grade 10

21 **My Sweet Bunnies**
Sofia Corzantes
Bella Vista, Grade 11

21 **Colors**
Alma Coto-Moran
Encina, Grade 10

22 **Endeavor**
Everett Dahl
Del Campo, Grade 12

23 **Throughout My Life**
Kelly Davis
Encina, Grade 12

27 **Out of Bed**
Norah Davis
Del Campo, Grade 9

28 **whats ur why**
yasmin d
Encina, Grade 12

29 **My Project Is Not a Toy**
Anonymous

30 **Friends=Lifeline**
Madison Delzer
Casa Roble, Grade 12

31 **Why I Want to Become a Police Officer**
Alex Dibble
Del Campo, Grade 9

32 **It's Almost As Easy As Swimming (Not Really)**
Maya Douesnard
Rio Americano, Grade 10

32 **My Life**
Anonymous

33 **Singing is Why**
Ava England
Del Campo, Grade 11

34 **My Bright and Yellow Garden**
Calvin Carrillo
Bella Vista, Grade 11

36 **Why?**
Anonymous

36 **Pressure**
Audrey Greco
Del Campo, Grade 11

37 **The Day the Candle Burned Out**
Myra Harris
Rio Americano, Grade 12

38 **Stuck in the Middle**
Humaima Hedayat
Encina, Grade 10

39 **People Kind of Suck.**
Naythan Hernandez-Tellez
Bella Vista, Grade 12

40 **Fast Paced Reality**
Kiera Hightower
Del Campo, Grade 10

40 **Westward Train**
Amelia Hogge
El Camino, Grade 12

41 **Wings of Tar**
toby holcomb
Rio Americano, Grade 12

42 **Education Is My Why**
dd idleburgh
Encina, Grade 11

42 **What's Your Why?**
Anonymous

43 **Flames of Change**
Joshua Jhang
Bella Vista, Grade 10

43 **My Purpose**
Alora Jones
Rio Americano, Grade 9

44 **Although, I Will**
Claire Le
Bella Vista, Grade 12

44 **My Blessing**
Anonymous

45 **They Ask Us**
Avni Mahendra
Mira Loma, Grade 10

46 **T H e H i D D e N L i G H T**
Hawa Malik Zawa
Mira Loma, Grade 9

46 **A Love Letter to My Friends**
Emalee McCurry
Bella Vista, Grade 11

47 **My Will to Live**
Natalie Miramontes
Del Campo, Grade 9

48 **Our Neverending Forest**
Lyla Monahan
Mira Loma, Grade 10

49 **Who Is She?**
Angie Mucci
Bella Vista, Grade 10

49 **Dearest Prayer**
Chloe Myers
Bella Vista, Grade 12

50 **My Choice - My Why.**
Sofi Nefedova
Rio Americano, Grade 10

51 **Waves**
Nathan Perez
Encina, Grade 10

51 **What's the Why?**
Lucy Poletiek
Rio Americano, Grade 10

52 **My Name or Not**
Nyla Pomtong
Encina, Grade 10

53 **The Chance They Never Had**
Jennifer Prudente
Encina, Grade 10

54 **What's Your Why?**
Eva Raczko
Mesa Verde, Grade 11

54 **Aprendí a Creer a Través de Su Voz**
Anonymous

56 **Leaves from the vine…**
Gerardo Rojas
Encina, Grade 12

57 **My Name**
Finn Rousseau
Rio Americano, Grade 10

58 **Mount Vernon**
Miley Ryan
Bella Vista, Grade 12

59 **A White Coat for Both of Us**
Yasna Saboori
Encina, Grade 10

60 **Joy**
Alina S.
Del Campo, Grade 9

60 **Pushing for Your Passion**
Lyn Samuels
El Sereno, Grade 12

61 **If I Died Right Now**
Paige Saumure
Rio Americano, Grade 12

61 **My Why**
Leah Schlocker
Del Campo, Grade 9

62 **Wellus VonSaintswood's Great Heist**
Dash Seabolt
Bella Vista, Grade 12

63 **My Why**
Elissa Silva
Del Campo, Grade 9

64 **How I Will Repay You**
Zak Sims
Encina, Grade 12

65 **The Day Ends**
Sophia S.
Del Campo, Grade 9

65 **Earth Cannot Yearn**
Erin Spratt
Bella Vista, Grade 11

66 **Best Night Of My Life**
Malachi Sterling
Encina, Grade 12

67 **The Joys of Life**
Anonymous

68 **My Team of Hope**
Yuki Suzuki
Bella Vista, Grade 11

69 **Music is Why**
Sariah Thompson
Del Campo, Grade 12

70 **For Her**
Emeraude Vazquez-Sandoval
Encina, Grade 11

70 **Son Of Raven**
Anonymous

71 **Wake Up**
Olivia Verne
Casa Roble, Grade 9

71 **What Bailee Is**
Bailee Wagnon
Casa Roble, Grade 12

72 **When The World Goes Quiet**
Mackenzie Warr
Bella Vista, Grade 10

73 **A Man of Magnitude**
Ryland Wilson
Bella Vista, Grade 11

73 **Work Shouldn't Be Your Why, but a Means to Achieve it**
Mark Yadchuk
Bella Vista, Grade 11

74 **Turning Fear Into Career**
Rana Zaheer
Encina, Grade 11

EDITOR'S CHOICE

The Editorial Leadership board selected one submission to be the recipient of this year's Editor's Choice. This selection was based on the following criteria: Adherence to Theme, Exemplification of Values, Quality of Writing, Impact, and Technical Excellence. The choice of the Editorial Leadership team is based solely on such criteria. This year's selected piece is "The Quiet Fight" by Az'Jah Jones.

The Quiet Fight
Az'Jah Jones
Encina, Grade 12

Worry.
That belief that anything I do is wrong
That I'm not as worthy of life as I should be
Worry.
The reason why I do extra
Even though I've already done enough

Failure.
A fire that burns in the darkness of my room
A paralyzing fear that weighs on me like a brink
Failure.
A fear that has clouded my judgement, present and unwavering

Survival.
A stubborn will to keep moving
When everything in me begs to surrender
Survival.
The reason I continue to run when my feet ache
The reason my heart carries a beat that refuses to fall silent

Family.
A strong feeling of warmth that wraps around me
Steady hands that lift me higher than I imagined I would go
Family.
Clear voices guiding me with truth
With love that only takes me further

Peace.
The kind of peace that tastes like fresh air,
The peace that sounds like trees whispering secrets
Peace.
That feels like sunlight on my skin
Like a river current pulling me forward

Dreams.
Wanting to leap, though I stay grounded
Wings airbound, I stay seated
Dreams.
Doubt and unfamiliarity going places
My dreams could only wish to go

Hope.
A small spark that grows slowly
Weak and trembling
A soldier unwilling to surrender, even as fear creeps slowly behind
Hope. A shaky breath I have yet to take

Loss
Bella Aguilar
Del Campo, Grade 10

What's Your Why:
Loss.

Loss is my drive
Losing everything you love before you arrive
It makes a soul break in demise
Cold, hard, loveless, fear
Compile to form the heart and soul
Of a girl that lost everything in a matter of a year

Loss is what breaks
It's what tears you apart silently
Yet drives you to be better
Better for those who left this world so quietly
Loss breaks the girl until all that's left is her shell
The shell of what once filled her but now it feels like hell

But loss drives her
Loss makes her want to be better for her dad
Not to crumble because of the remembrance of a world she once had
She wants to be better
Just doesn't know how yet
But that drive will fix her 'til she's herself once again
Until that day she will focus on the good
Instead of the sore aches of her past
And that is the drive that was given to her because of her dad.

why i breathe
Avery Allman
Del Campo, Grade 11

some mornings i wake up
and my heart's already racing.
like it started
the day
before i did.

the air feels even heavier
than it usually does
but i rise anyways
because somewhere
beneath the panic
i know
that i can do it.

anxiety tries to shape my choices
putting its 2cents
into everything i do,
but i continue to thrive
to prove that fear
doesn't get a say.

every small step
is a victory i see
a reminder that
surviving
counts too.

i keep going
because even a racing heart
can build a life
worth living.

the moments when i laugh
and can breathe
without thinking
when i realize
i can do it
even with setbacks.

Fireflies of Tonight
Fariha Amiri
Del Campo, Grade 12

What's my why, you ask?
It's the day after a night
It's the A after months of class
It's warmth of fire after the rain

What's my reason to feel, you ask?
It's the loving lullaby of my mother
It's the gentle smiles of my father
It's the love I feel for the unloved

What motivates me, you ask?
The children that go hungry every night
The animals that don't speak before slaughter
The dreams that vanish with sorrow

What's my reason to keep going, you ask?
It's the wins followed by losses
It's the smiles followed by tears
It's the highs followed by lows

High Water
Lucy Baland
Bella Vista, Grade11

I sit upon the glistening metal throne, towering over the entire beach; with the ultimate power to save lives resting in my bare hands, and tucked inside the red pouch strapped around my waist.

I scan the deep ocean waters, searching for anyone who needs my assistance. People place their trust in me, as I must also place trust in myself.

I can't control who visits the beach, I can't change what's happened in the past, and I can't stop a storm from happening. All I can do is work as hard as I can, train to my limit, and practice as much as I can to be prepared for whatever a new day might bring.

If I can improve myself to be the best that I can, I can be there to help others when they need it. I refuse to comply with a simple lifestyle. I am always chasing something greater. I may fall from reaching too high and stretching too far, but I know what I have the possibility to do, and I can't be stopped from that achievement.

Sometimes I swim too far deep and forget to come up for air. When I do, I'm reminded of the blessings of our world: the nature, connection, love, and that I'm able to share these with others.

So, I sit in this chair, ready for anything to happen, and to provide support when someone needs it.

The Things People Can't See
Katelyn Bedall
Casa Roble, Grade 10

The most important and special thing to me in life is the thing no person can see. No picture to fully describe it, no drawing that can fully capture it, and no words to express it. That thing? Trust.

Oh, we have a love-hate relationship for sure! Sometimes we get along so well, just like the fish in the water! But other times you and me… we just don't get along. You make me question things, make me overthink things, make
me do stupid things that sometimes break relationships that I care for.

But those wonderful things, those times when we walk hand in hand, I don't have to overthink things or question things. I can feel you and be you. But when you break my precious trust, it's hard to rebuild you.

Oh, how I love you, Trust, and I promise I will rebuild you, but you will never be the same.

People hurt you, don't they? They use you and mistreat you. You deserve so much better. So even though I may seem to hate you, not like you, push you away, Trust, I am always trying to rebuild you.

I will rebuild you and get you back because throughout my life, you were there for me. I will be there for you.

A Seat That Waited
Somia Behroz
Encina, Grade 10

Sometimes late at night, when the house is quiet, my mom tells me about a school she never got the chance to enter.

She doesn't talk about the classrooms or the lessons but how she stood outside, her face pressed to the window, looking at the desks, the chairs, the kids who never had to leave. The ones whose fathers wrapped permission around them like a coat. My mom's father did not wrap a coat around her.

So she stood outside, watching the kids being kids, while the world tugged her forward by the wrist, teaching her how to survive before she ever learned how to be a kid

Now I sit inside classrooms she never could, I hold pencils she never held. Every time I open a notebook, I think about that window and how thin it was, how much it kept from her.

I move forward, but never alone. When I write, when I learn, I feel her there, past the window that kept her out. Every page, every step, feels like letting her live a little.

Peaceful
Bryan Bernal Amarillas Encina, Grade 10

Living for myself
Though it may sound selfish and self centered
Not wanting to live for other peoples sake
Not for family
Not for friends
Not for strangers
Not for that nice old lady who thanked me for helping
Sounds like a peaceful and great life

Living for others makes you lose track of yourself, never knowing who you are
I say this because I myself have done this
Living my life only to benefit my parents
Believing the reason I was born was for this particular cause
But there's only so much a ten year old can do

During my first year of middle school I stayed alone focusing on my purpose
Working each day getting better and better grades
Going home cleaning and being responsible
As if it had a huge impact leading me closer to my goal
Never once had I thought it was pointless
Which may have been because I was doing my chores
But was no other reason or goal that helped me get through each days
Days, months, years went by still thinking I am doing my job

On another day working like its a 9-5,
Someone asked “Why do you take everything you do so serious”
Making it a shock itself someone had spoke to me,
But of course it was for my parents
Who else sits by themselves forcing everyone away
Ignoring people who could have been friends
Having their mental health deteriorate just for this cause
Ruining myself having no personality because I never needed it
Someone who does all of this is someone who's determined right?
It was such a simple question yet led to many and many answers
I could have just told the guy what had he meant
But my mouth had a mind of its own
More I explained my reason had sounded more as an excuse
Explaining as if I was forced to do what I was doing
But their was no problems with me or my parents
It was as if my parents tied me down to these rules saying if I ever broke free I wasn't their son
I was inside an open cage saying it was locked
Telling everyone that only I was able to unlock it
There was nothing to unlock just me trapping myself
Never once had my parents asked me help them
Just wanting a reason an excuse to help,
Had they ask for my help
I would’ve helped in a heartbeat
Dropping everything I was doing to tell them
I was here

Slowly letting go of this so called goal
Realizing without this goal, who was I
Was everything I've done an act
Or was it who I really was
Living through each day as if there was some purpose for me to accomplish
Shouldn’t I worry about not knowing this?
Yet it was like all the stress I have ever had vanished into the air

Fews years had came and went and I was starting highschool
Not knowing who I am
But I knew what I wanted was not a reason
It's a purpose for myself
That on its own makes this way of living the best
Messing up, doing something bad can all be blamed onto me and only me
Doing amazing things and trying to better myself is my doing as well
Trying sports,eating healthier, actually caring for myself
No one is to blame but myself for my own actions
Not family
Not friends
Not strangers
Not that nice old lady who thanked me for helping
Sounds like a peaceful and great life to me

Pongalo Pongal
Anonymous

The bonfire burns the old to ashes
The old clothes, the old me, burns with them
The ashes are scattered, and they fall
Slowly settling into the water

The pot full of rice is sealed
The milk of the future is poured in
Our own *kshira sagara*
Yet the only island is that clump of jaggery
Defiantly refusing to die
Its sweetness warms the insides.

The crows feast upon the colored rice
Getting fat off the wealth of the laborer
But will not the coal-tinted birds
Bless us after taking their fill?
Or will they abandon us like so many have?

Kin from all over bring cakes, chaat and tea
They ask how are the studies, the wife, the kids
And you wonder do they really care?
Or are they just a cog in the machine
Playing a part, a role for society
Just like you are.

I dance atop the bulls
Careful to avoid the horns
It's hard to hold in.
And when the sun rises again in the next morning
On its new path
We see it off
We all set off

The Burning Star
Lili Boyer
Bella Vista, Grade 9

I'm burning. I rarely shine. My neighbors ask me "Why bother? You'll fall anyways! All stars do! You're just an early bloomer, a fast burner!" And they're right. My grasp on the cosmos is weakening. I can barely hold myself steady. The pressure in my chest is imploding my security. I want to e x p l o d e. But no, I hold on. I don't know why. Maybe it's this tiny hope in my core. The hope illuminates my heart and sparks the neurons in my brain. You see, it's like this: Every star's purpose is to cater to the dreamers that wish upon them. The brightest stars are the most visible. They serve the most dreamers. But for little lights like me, no one can see them. Their light is dim. No matter how bright they try to be they only burn. And one day those stars will burn out.

But I won't burn out. I won't let it happen. Because one day someone will wish upon me. And it will be my job to grant their wish, I don't care what the others say. I will not burn out. They can't dim me. I adjust my grip on the galaxy and shine my hope. I want to e x p l o d e. When I do I'll be so bright even my neighbors will look dim. They'll point and say "Look at her! She's going to make a beautiful North Star one day!" But that hasn't happened yet. So I shine.

I'm shining. I'll never burn. Not again. I've wasted so much time burning I may never catch up. But I have to.I just need to. Even when the sparks in my core depart and dissolve into ash I'll keep shining. And when the passion in my lungs turns to poison and I choke on inadequacy I'll keep shimmering.

I won't dissolve. I can't if there are too many reasons to shine. Not just for me, I shine for the dreamers. Imagine this: what would happen if the sky went dark one day? As dark as the fathomless sea, or the shadows under your bed. How could you dream if all the sequins in the sky came loose and unstitched themselves? The dreamers want us. The dreamers need us. Dreams are what gives us purpose. Purpose is what gives us hope. It's the oxygen to our fire, the gravity to our rivers. It drives us forward with mountainous leaps.

Our purpose lives in us like seasons of hope. We begin with a blooming faith for change: a complex overgrown garden. Growing belief for salvation. Then our passion ignites. It energizes the atmosphere and blossoms our faith into explosions of color. Suddenly, our faith transforms- from a brilliant green to a sparkling gold. It kisses our necks with the soft breeze of possibility and keeps our fire warm. Finally, our passion crystallizes. It turns hope into beauty and produces fixtures of faith that grow like frost. The possibility of redemption bites your nose and paints your cheeks pink. Just like it once did when you were young.

This is why I shine. Not to prove my neighbors wrong, or to become brighter than the North Star, I shine upon my faintest hope. My hope for prosperity. My dream for a halcyon existence. My love for possibility. As a star I don't just toil in the sky and fight the inevitable. I admire the planets. I hear the dreamers. I listen to their wishes. And their wishes are gorgeous. Wishes give us our why. They're the water for our garden, the pages in our books. The yes to our dreams.

This is why I s h i n e.



Artist Name:
Benjamin Brewer

School/Grade:
Bella Vista, Grade 12

Title:
Brotherhood

Medium:
Digital camera

My Why
Robin Cabrejas Encina, Grade 12

November 10, 2007, the day I was born. It was a hospital in San Jose. I know that for sure in Santa Clara county. I have lived there for almost my whole life and I can say that my family have been there for me every time.

Family for me is a big part of my life because they are the ones that will always be with you no matter what and they motivate me to keep going and do my best, I can't let them down. In San Jose I had so many friends; I knew everyone there and it was great to have connections with people. I went to school excited all the time to see my friends and was in a great mood whenever I saw them. I guess you can say that is also what keeps me going, seeing them knowing I am going to have a great day.

In 2020, quarantine hit and all of us were stuck in our homes because of COVID. It was so boring, and the online classes made it worse. But there was one thing that entertained me and kept my mind sane: it was music. Since I had internet access I could watch Youtube videos, and I discovered new music genres and sounds I have never heard of.
Listening to music I produced emotions like joy, hype, nostalgia and sometimes sadness.Music made me who I am.

Videogames during and before quarantine were my escape from reality. I would be so thrilled to play games all the time and have a great time. It’s a competitive thing for me, and I love to win. I actually believe that videogames is my #2 things that will keep me going and is my why. Why? Because I played videogames when I was a young boy. It was my very first thing that I enjoyed doing. Videogames will forever be in my heart.

We moved to Sacramento in 2021 but I will fast forward to 2023 because that is when I had a passion for something. That something is my sport. My main sports that I enjoy are cross country and wrestling. Cross country to me was like meeting my second family. The teammates and coaches are what made them fun and practiced with them. And during our meets I remembered the funny moments we would all have and our interesting talks and bus rides. It felt like I belonged. I cried at my last meet, and that meant that I really loved this sport and the people. Cross country kept me going.

Now wrestling. Wrestling is something that I found and not brought onto me and I'm glad I found it. I kinda wish I had found it when I was young because I would be a beast. I love moving around and getting physical. I love the tense handfighting and scrambles. I also love conditioning because it keeps me in shape. My teammates are the best I could ask for and the bus rides are fun, full of laughter. I am proud to call myself a wrestler because that is what I yearn for and need in my life.

The sports I do are what keep me alive. I wake up every morning not excited to go to school but to practice. Without these sports I would not have the urge to do anything but just relax and I don't want to sit around and do nothing.

Senior year is coming to an end. I am realizing something. My future. I think about my future a lot and what I am going to end up doing. And of course I want it to be a great future but in order to do that I must succeed. I do my best in school so I can have great grades and really show off for my peers and family to make them see I am capable of this. I try my best in everything and give it my all because I am that type of person.

I need to focus on my military career and that is a thought that is on my mind. I will be alone, but that is okay because it is my will that keeps me going. I know that if I do this I will have a better outcome. My mentality is just “get it done and you will be straight.”

I am proud to have these whys, they are what make me myself. Without these whys, I don't think I would be the person who I am today. I am grateful.

Jersey
Flower Calhoun
Del Campo, Grade 9

You gave me a gift
and I took it as an invitation.
Maybe I'm not looking in the right places
but each time I think of you,
I think of the spaces in-between us.
I keep searching for a deeper meaning,
to see maybe this feeling isn't just
my desperation
for you to need me.
So I stare at the ceiling
and I imagine you asking me
to be your fool,
I make up these plans of how maybe
I could try to hold your hand next time we hangout.
I think about you all the time,
every touch,
every stare
that lingered far too long.
You asked me my favorite song
and I had to pause and refrain myself
from saying the sound of your voice,
the way you say my name
as though it's a question,
as though my name brings up uncertainty.
These feelings are far to real to be one sided,
I don't want us to be divided
because when I'm down I can always
confide in you,
I can try to hide from you in plain sight
but you always see right through my mask,
and it hurts when you ask me what's wrong
and I can't just out right say
I'm in pain,
longing for you everyday.
You gave me a gift and I took it as an invitation
-a jersey maybe you didn't see it as flirty
but the smell of your scent has my heart
aching and yearning for your embrace.
You said it'd look better on me,
so why can't you see
I'm you just in shades of blue
and you're my red,
together we make purple.
When you mentioned another girl
while we were on the phone,
me still in your jersey,
my entire body started hurting
and my stomach started churning.
There goes last night's stir fry I guess,
I felt word vomit,
or maybe it was real vomit
I guess I couldn't tell the difference.
I don't see what you see in her
she doesn't call you,
she doesn't play with your hair,
she doesn't wish you the best,
she doesn't see what I see past the mess
of curls atop your head.
You said you date girls for their personality,
what does she have that you need?
Now my hands are stained red
from the pieces of my heart,
now it's broken and bleeding
and I'm silently pleading
for this to be a dream.
What do you mean?
You gave me a present
and I took it as an invitation,
late night calls laughing
till three in the morning
and now I'm mourning
the picture of us I painted
in my imagination,
so why do you play these games?
We're in a everlasting battle
of dancing around the truth,
is she more beautiful,
does she know you like I do?
Has she met your mom,
does she know your favorite song?
Well I do,
and if I have to ill keep
bending over backwards
to prove I'm not
someone you want to lose.
You gave me a present
and I took it as an invitation,
I thought if you saw
how much we have in common
when we're playing on the same team,
both in red
like the blood that I bleed for you.
It's funny because I thought
to make a team
you need two.

Un pequeño Marcos Centeno
Marcos Centeno
Encina, Grade 9

Ya la gente murmura que soy una rarita, cuatro ojos, fea, una mujer. Mienten, Marcos, Ellos Mienten.

Tú eres una mujer bella, joven, inteligente y hermosa, yo no. Yo soy un hombre joven que no deja que los demás escojan lo que él debe ser, lo que religiosamente es correcto para Dios y los ojos de los demás. Mientras la gente me quiere avergonzar, me quieren sentir como menos y "reparame" ir al camino "correcto" yo felizmente expreso mi género sin que los demás arruinen mi momento de pura alegría.

Tú eres una futura ama de casa, con esposo y niños mientras Yo no. Tú y Yo somos muy diferentes pequeña Mareling. No somos lo mismo, tu no existes, sólo eres un fragmento de mi pasado pero ahora yo renací como el ave fénix y soy más feliz que nunca. Tú eras una triste niña que estaba atrapada pero mírame ahora- ¿no estás orgullosa de mi? Al fin pude salir de mi caparazón que me asfixiaba.

Soy la juventud, soy la masculinidad, soy un concepto de tiempo atrás que pudo ser real, gracias a ti puedo ser real en vez de una idea- ¿por qué me siento así? ¿por qué quiero ser un niño en cambio de una niña?

Yo soy real, más que nunca, tu me trajiste a la vida con tus pecaminosos deseos de ser un niño en vez de como tu Dios te creó. Eres una simple humana que quiere dejar el camino "correcto" para ser algo hermoso. Algo que siempre deseaste. Algo que siempre se sintió correcto.

Pero al final esta felicidad se siente como una jugosa manzana prohibida.

¿Ser tú mismo y tener que recibir el odio de los demás? ¿O ser atrapado con la infelicidad del mundo entero a cambio de no ser tratado horriblemente por tu seres amados y todos los que piensan que tus ideas son erróneas?

Al final del día los animales no entienden aunque los maltrates.

¿Eres lo suficiente macho para dejar tu género asignado?

Oh Marcos, tú quieres ser un niño, un chico, un joven, un hombre y no una mujer femenina.

¿Puedes sentir como tu alma grita con dolor y agonía al estar atrapado en un cuerpo incorrecto?

Little Marcos Centeno (English Translation)

People already whisper that I'm strange, a weirdo, four-eyes, ugly, "a woman." They lie, Marcos. They lie. You are a beautiful, young, intelligent, and lovely woman. I am not.

I am a young man who does not let others choose what he should be, what is religiously "correct" for God and for other people's eyes. While people try to shame me, try to make me feel like less, and try to "fix me" and push me onto the "right" path, I happily express my gender without letting others ruin my moment of pure joy.

You are a future housewife, with a husband and children, while I am not. You and I are very different, little Mareling. We are not the same. You no longer exist; you are only a fragment of my past. But now I have been reborn like a phoenix, and I am happier than ever. You were a sad girl who was trapped, but look at me now—aren't you proud of me? At last, I was able to come out of the shell that was suffocating me.

I am youth, I am masculinity, I am a concept from long ago that could have been real.

Thanks to you, I can be real instead of just an idea. Why do I feel this way? Why do I want to be a boy instead of a girl?

I am real, more than ever. You brought me to life with your sinful desires to be a boy instead of how your God created you. You are just a human who wants to leave the "right" path in order to be something beautiful—something you always wanted, something that always felt right.

But in the end, this happiness feels like a juicy, forbidden apple.

Dare to be yourself and have to receive the hatred of others? Or to be trapped in the unhappiness of the whole world in exchange for not being treated horribly by your loved ones and by everyone who thinks your ideas are wrong?

At the end of the day, animals do not understand, even if you mistreat them.

Are you man enough to leave behind your assigned gender?

Oh Marcos, you want to be a boy, a guy, a young man, a man—and not a feminine woman.

Can you feel how your soul screams in pain and agony
from being trapped in the wrong body?

BIOGRAPHY

Marcos Centeno is a 9th grade student at Encina High School. He is originally from Managua, Nicaragua and has been trans for two years. He is exploring more about his gender identity. He's been in the United States for almost 4 years and has proudly reclassified as fluent proficient in English.

Trisha
Alana Cobabe
Bella Vista, Grade 10

She wears baggy clothes
To cover her slim figure
A red hoodie
The same color of the blood she runs through
My blood
Her source of life
She sits on my head
And feeds her evil dust
Into my thoughts

Whenever I overthink
She is to blame
Not a person
Or an unknown entity
But she's the demon
The demon that lives inside of me
She's the reason I overthink
Or the reason I don't think at all

People say they have an angel
On their right shoulder
Telling
Leading
Them to do right
And a devil on their left
Pleading
Plotting
On your wrong decisions
And although I do believe I have those
I also believe I have something worse
And overthinking demon
And her name
Is Trisha



Artist Name:
Travis Comas-Mckinney

School/Grade:
Bella Vista, Grade 11

Title:
What Are Girls Made Of?

Medium:
Digital Painting

Smile

I don't smile
Like how I did with you
A smile of admiration
A smile that no one else saw
You gave me my smile
But you also took it away

I don't smile
When I think about the memories
Because the memories that used to make me smile
Now make me feel like a fool
Because I lost my smile
But you didn't

I don't smile
But I want to again
Not with you
But with someone who keeps my smile pure
Someone who loves my smile
Like I loved yours

Because all I'll ever want
Is to smile again
My smile with you
My smile in the memories
But for now I want you to know
I don't smile

BIOGRAPHY

Alana Cobabe is a 15 year old writer who loves to write out her poems like a song onto paper. She loves music and writes songs in her free time, but writing is her absolute passion, her way of expressing her feelings in a way that only the right people will understand.

My Summer
Ava Commandatore
Rio Americano, Grade 11

why was it a lifetime ago

there's only cold
so very dark
and cold

it wasn't always like this

in a fleeting moment there's sun
it rips through the clouds
and a stray beam floats across my face
it reminds me of a lifetime ago
it was all different
a lifetime ago it was summer

there are brilliant sunsets
and long late night talks
it seems not so very dark and not so very scary
there are colors
blues that dance in the waves
and bright flowers which scorch at the edges in oppressive heat

i dance in bright flowy skirts
tank tops that shift with me
my sun-kissed skin blinks in the UV
i am a free person
my skin radiant with life
a certain spark in my eyes that can't be dulled
there's laughter and friends
there's adventures
and there's the beach

sand stretching for miles
boats nudging the edges of sea salt kissed docks

water floating over fins
Shifting across shells
And gliding through gills

there's a whole world we have yet to see

there are birds
that whiz across the pink orange and yellow sky
they dance intricate patterns
flying in a synchronized V before breaking into an illustrious display of feathers
there's even Bob Marley stretching the promise of love and warmth
Drums and guitars flutter through my hair
The notes tickle my ears and envelop my brain

there's everything i love
tucked into a beam of sun

in a flash it's all gone
the earth returns to the pale cold of winter with its dark corners
the wind takes a sharper turn
the sun not longer shines

there's only cold
it was all a lifetime ago
why was it all a lifetime ago



Artist Name:
Benjamin Brewer

School/Grade:
Bella Vista, Grade 12

Title:
Brotherhood

Medium:
Digital camera

Love Thy Neighbor
Natalia Corona
Bella Vista, Grade 10

Call us unnatural, protest our existence,
Create lies to push us back in the closet of silence,
Say we are "overreacting" while our rights are debated,
Seems love thy neighbor is underrated

My Sweet Bunnies
Sofia Corzantes
Bella Vista, Grade 11

“Can I please have a rabbit?”
I asked so much it became a habit.
To get this pet was my task,
So everyday I would ask.

Although I begged, it seemed that it just wasn’t my fate,
Until the day my family brought in a crate. I looked
inside with anticipation,
And was hit with shock by my revelation.

Inside that crate, was a beautiful sight
Four adorable bunnies, it was a true delight.
I couldn’t believe that my dream could come true,
But I didn’t keep only one, no, I got two!

But it wasn’t all it was cracked up to be,
Because now I am constantly sleepy.
Every night they wake me up with surprise,
And now, I can’t stand these bunnies of mine!

Colors
Alma Coto-Moran
Encina, Grade 10

The world's a very colorful place from bright red roses to purple lavenders to yellow tulips
And yet
Everything seems so dull
Black
Beige
And white
But the colors of blues
Reds
And yellows
They mix to make the world light oranges , sage greens, and plum purples and so on
But some days those colors though so bright to others seem so dull they make a muddy color an unpleasant Dusty red
Ash blue
And a ash yellow
Until they’re put them onto something the hues shift and change working like the lyrics of a song making the Listener feel a joy of the song of the voice but with colors
Sky blues
Crimson red as well as mustard yellow
Eggshell white
Blue black
Jade green
And colors in between
All the colors that make up our world - even when they are so muddy, you can capture them on a canvas, on A piece of paper, on the walls of San Francisco - magenta, cobalt blue, light blue, and a light yellow, soft and Comforting like the warm sun
Though that feeling doesn't come from the sun it comes from the colors you see, the colors you've mixed
And used to create your work.
Like crystals
I’m drawn to the colors like a moth to a bright orange flame

To a life full of borings whites, beiges and boring browns and black
To a life full of empty walls there's a window of color covering the boring of the white there will always be a Window of light and color covering the sad browns the sad whites the plane blacks there will be a chocolate Brown an eggshell white
There will be a midnight black
The world may sometimes appear rusted and dull but once you find the colors the soft baby blues, the Yellows that color like mustard and your lovely crimson reds used in ancient china to decorate the homes of Those ranked high and you'll realize
Maybe it's not so dull after all.

Endeavor
Everett Dahl
Del Campo, Grade 12

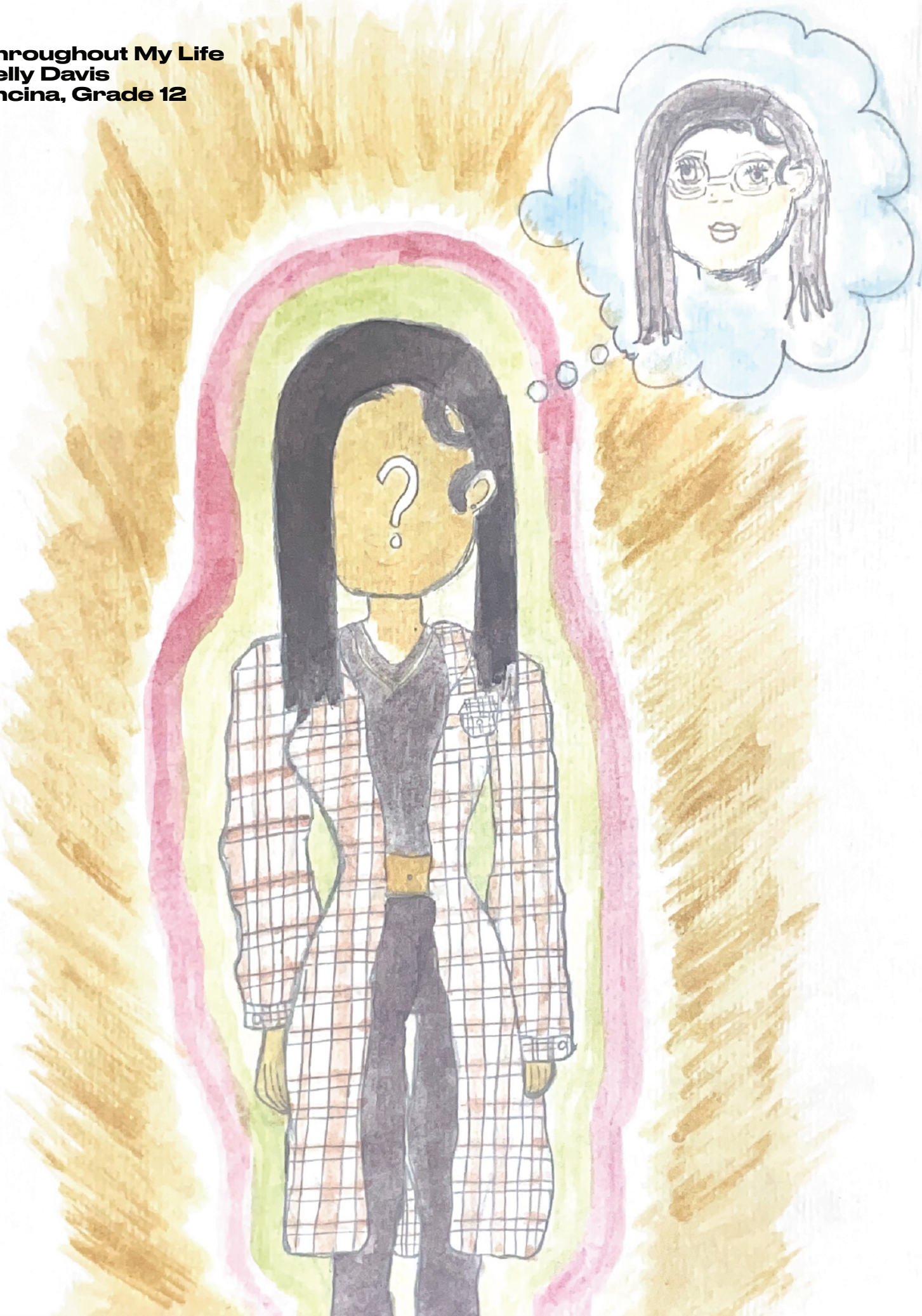
It’s your validation that I yearn
A pride for you to feel
The heavy weight of boulders
Chained upon my heel

It’s hard to paint a picture,
Of someone that you're not
The feeling of failing
Dashing through my thoughts

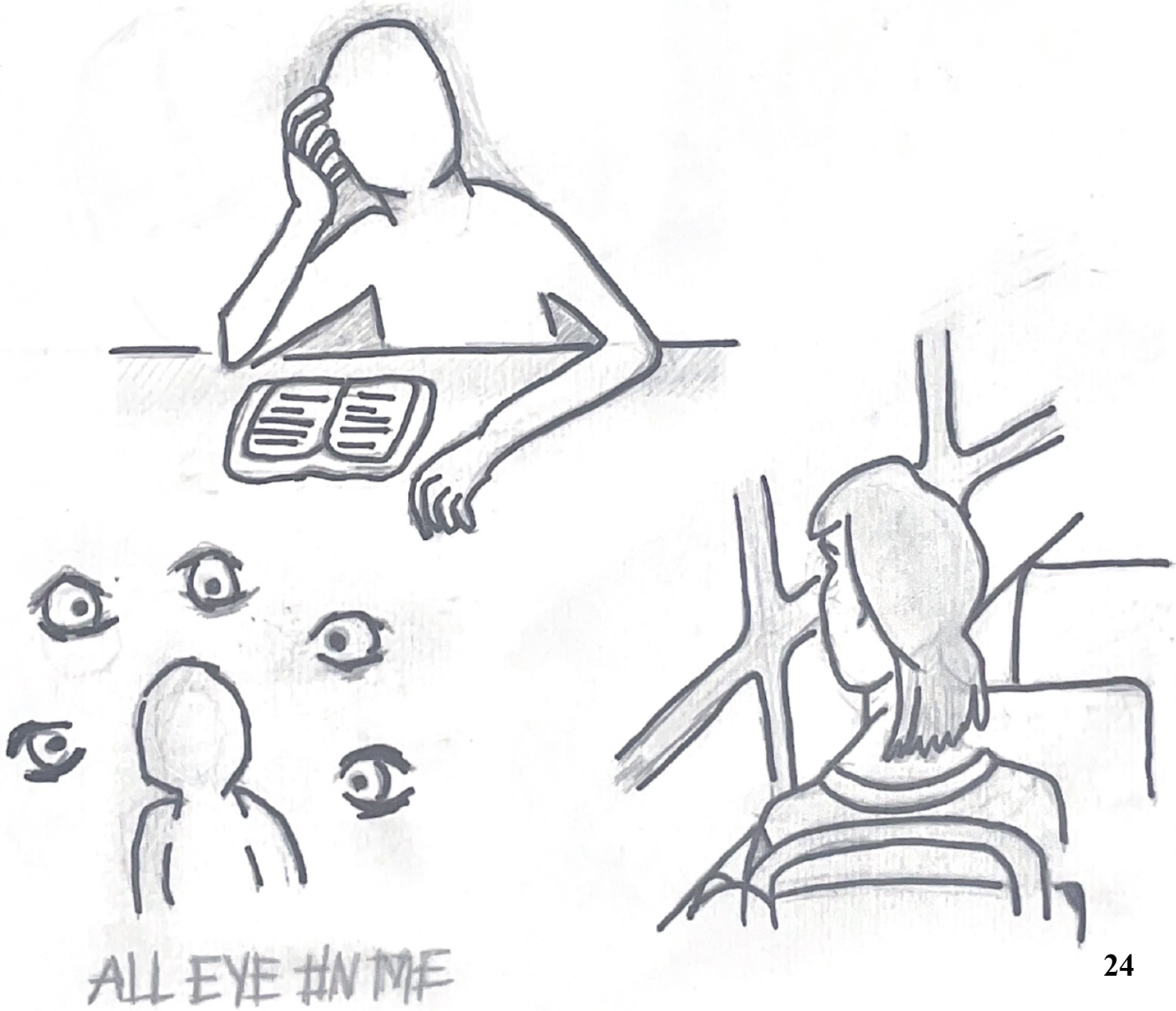
And when you finally look
Seeing what I’ve done
I can’t help but think
What else could I have done?

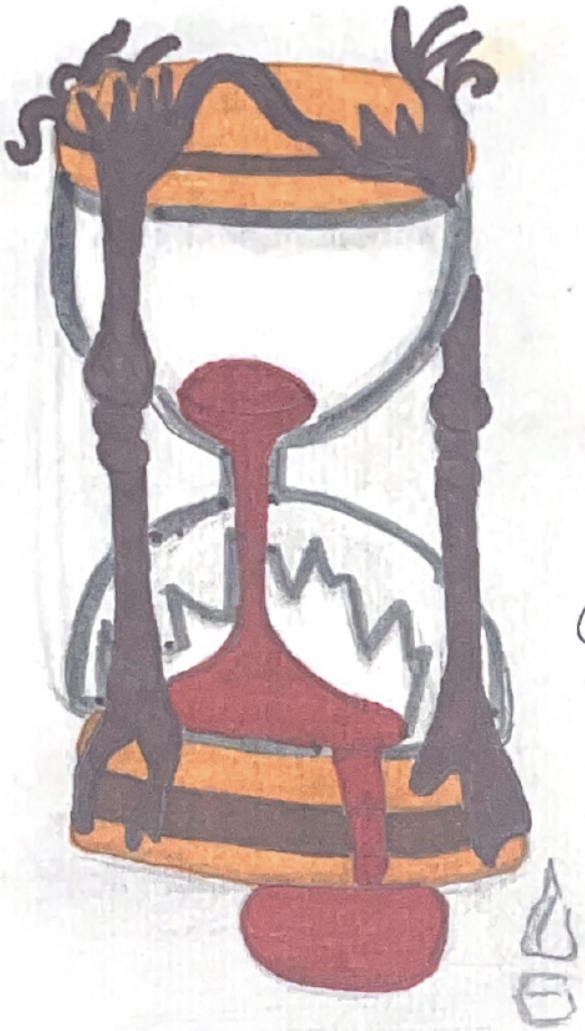
Kelly. Nelson
P. 4

Throughout My Life
Kelly Davis
Encina, Grade 12



My "Why" didn't just appear out of nowhere
it grew with me from the environment around me... At that
moment, I opened my eyes and found the world was quiet
around me enough that I could hear my own thoughts. I wasn't someone
who always listened to my inner voice and for a long time I growed
up and moves to places where I felt like life was happening
in front of me, but never through me, when you're the new
kids at school and still figuring out who you are. But somewhere
between late night homework, quiet walks to the bus stop and
crowded hallways. I realized every decision, every choice I make is
resulting in shaping myself but I want to be awake for my own
becoming. It was something that is attached to me.





But as I grew up more to learn time is limited, there a saying " your times is limited, so don't waste it living someone else life" by Steve Job everytime i reminiscing this quote it make me understand that I have to live authentically to follow my passion rather than trying to follow another path that isn't mine.

Growing up in a Caribbean household, espeaally with a Jamaican mother, is not easy. Jamaican mother their parenting is often shaped by tough love, discipline, and the belief that children must be strong, respectful, and hardworking to survive the world. Many parent are strict and use authoritarian style because they believe structure and firmness will protect their children from failure. My mother is a single, hardworking woman, and her childhood was shaped by trauma, regret, and failure friendships. Because of what she endured, she was determined that her children would not follow the same difficult path she did. I was not a child who caused trouble, yet there were moments when her anger felt connected more to her past than to my actions. At times, her her unresolved pain was placed onto me, even though her intentions were to protect and guide me. She raised me to be resilient, independent and confident in myself. her parenting reflects both the strength and the emotional weight carried by many Jamaican mothers, showing how love, sacrifice and trauma can exist as the same time.

I'm a emotional deep, observant, sensitive but I learned to survive [redacted] in an environment that valued strength over vulnerability. But my other side is when I feel too much, I shut down, go quiet or zone into my own world until someone notices

I wasn't just a child who needed care, I often understand to behave, to be strong and not add stress. I feel like I can read the room and learned when to speak also when to stay quiet.

In my inner child, I found myself observant, sensitive, learned to be good, not loud and watches before ~~she~~ I speaks. I didn't ask for much when was little, but I hopes someone will notice.

Growing up as a teenager, I learned to be strong before I learned how to be ~~soft~~. As a teenager I learned to shut down instead of explaining myself, to observe instead of asking and protect my heart by staying silent. Now, I am becoming aware of these pattern and learning to hold a version of myself, the child who needed comfort, the teen who needed to be heard

As I continue my high school and being a senior.
I am learning more about myself, my emotions and my futur goals. High school taught me how to balance my responsibilities it help me understand self-expression

I enjoy drawing and listen to music because it help me release stress and feelings that are difficult to explain. Sitting on the floor of my bedroom with a notebook balanced on my knee. I realized drawing was more then a hobby. Outside my window the loud traffic of cars hummed in the distance, but one day something came alive inside me. Drawing and listening to music get me

out of bed in the morning even when my body feels tired or heavy and my mind feels crowded, there's the one thing that doesn't judge me or rush me. Art is where I can be honest to myself and music is where I take all my emotions that I can't put in words (fear, hope and excitement).

Looking ahead to my future where I can achieve my future goals and confidence.

BIOGRAPHY

Kelly Nelson is a senior at Encina High School. She is French and Jamaican. She is a quiet person who uses art to make sense of her life. She prefers to communicate through the written work and her drawings.

Out of Bed
Norah Davis
Del Campo, Grade 9

Out of bed:
The sun will rise
Shines through the blinds
The rays will hit me in the eyes.

I think of the future
What I will do when I am older.
Even when I am cold and say "Burr"
I get to see what I will do when I am older.

Out of bed I will I rise
Look out my window
I will see the beautiful skies
And think of where I will go.

whats ur why
yasmin d Encina, Grade 12

My routine is the same wake up, wash my face, brush my teeth, get ready, go to school, go to volleyball practice, come home, and sleep And sometimes, in the middle of that routine I find myself wondering why I'm here and what my purpose is

For a long time I didn't have an answer I struggled with my mental state and with how I viewed myself and the question Why am I here? has followed me since I was 10 Now that I'm 17 and understand my emotions better where they come from, what shaped me, and how healing works I'm finally able to answer that question

And I've realized something important I'm here for a reason I've learned that I give support, love, understanding, and appreciation in ways that many people don't always receive I understand how much people need kindness, connection, and non judgment, and I try to offer that to others I also know that I still have a life to live and a journey to experience

The fact that I'm still here, still growing, and still becoming myself shows that I have a purpose. My purpose is to keep becoming the best version of myself, to support others, to learn, to grow, and to make an impact even if it's small I believe I'm here to live fully, to help people who cross my path, and to discover everything my life still has offer

The life I've lived has been rough and filled with toxic environments and different kinds of hardship As a kid I never felt like I had a voice or any meaning behind it I always felt like bad luck and a joke The environment I grew up in made me question my worth and whether I mattered I never understood why my father couldn't love me the way he loved other people's kids why he gave up on me or why he treated me like I wasn't his own He made me believe that love and trust weren't real I started doubting everyone relationships, friendships, even family I thought family didn't matter because he chose someone else over his own blood Why put me through so much that I had to question my value?

The person I am today isn't who I was supposed to become I walk around judged because of my appearance people call me things that aren't true, they judge me based on my scars, they try to tear down my character People claim to know me and speak on things they know nothing about They spread false information about my trauma and about what I deal with, and they act like I'm "mentally unstable" just for attention

Honestly those people made me feel even more worthless than I already did but I've learned that I can't let my past define who I become I want to motivate myself by thinking about the people who care about me and the people who need me I don't have to stay stuck in who I was I can grow, heal, and become someone new I want to build self love and organize my mind around my goals, my needs, and the emotions

I'm learning to understand I want to be able to say I'm proud of myself When I think about my mom and my siblings, I know they deserve to see me grow and keep moving forward I don't want to let myself fade into the background or give up on my potential I have goals and dreams I haven't even started yet and I'm still young enough to change everything around Nobody really inspires me not even myself sometimes but I push forward through realism and logic At the end of the day you can't depend on everyone else You have to trust yourself, because you know your mind, your intentions, and your path better than anyone else I've learned not to follow words just because they sound nice I follow what makes sense, what's true, and what helps me grow

My purpose is to create a future where I heal, succeed, and become someone I'm proud of someone who proves that the past doesn't get to decide the rest of my life I'm starting to understand that I'm worth more than just getting through each day I'm worth more than the pain I grew up with and more than the limits people tried to put on me

I'm beginning to see that my life has meaning beyond the hurt, beyond the judgment, beyond the past that tried to define me I'm learning that I deserve growth, peace, and a future that reflects who I'm becoming not who others said I was I'm not here just to exist I'm here to evolve, to build myself, and to claim a life that holds value, purpose, and strength My story doesn't end with what happened to me it starts with who I choose to become.

My Project Is Not a Toy
Anonymous

When I was seven I was average in school. I loved doing classwork, tests, quizzes and essays. By the time I was nine I kept failing, trying to keep up. My teacher thought I needed extra support because I wasn't trying to actually get a 100% on my assignments. Then they would talk to my mom about it, but my mother told her I always try to aim for average. She didn't know why I would aim for average instead of A's.

"I think Bob needs extra support because he always gets around 40 to 50% on tests and quizzes."

"Bob just always aims to be average for some reason, we don't know but we want him to do his best on his assignments."

My mom thought it was because it was my way of doing my best even though I was on the verge of being held back because of it. My mom would ask me, "why do you always try to get a score around 50%?"

I responded with, "I don't want to be seen as a nerd, and I'm technically passing."

My mom would say, "You are on the verge of staying in the same grade if you keep doing that. You will have to go to summer school.

I stared at her confused. "But I thought 50% is passing!"

"It's not, and you are on the verge of failing because of it. Do you want to stay in the same grade and go to summer school?"

I said "No, I will try to get 100% and always try to do my best so I don't get held back."

My mom said, "If you need help with something, ask your cousin Brian to help you since you like to talk to him the most. He has A's in all of his classes."

I glanced at her then responded, "Okay I will ask him for help if I need it for my work."

I finished doing my homework and went to the kitchen to warm up some pizza since it was late then I went to bed. When I woke up, I got ready for school and double checked my project. I went to the bus, leaving my project on my table. I called Brian to see if he could go to my house to pick up my project. Brian agreed to get it. I was waiting in the cafeteria for him to show up. When I saw him I walked to him to get my project, but it was broken! We tried to fix it before I went to class. While we were fixing it the bell rang. Then I went to my class with a semi-fixed project.

When I walked into my class with my project I went to my seat. My teacher called my name to show my project. I got a D+ then I went back to my seat. Putting my head down, feeling embarrassed about my project, wishing. I wanted the class to end already so I could go home and forget about my semi-fixed project. Then I thought about how and why it ended up broken. I remembered the only people who were home with my project were my little brother and my little sister, who were home sick. It wouldn't make sense why they went to my room and broke my project.

As soon as I heard the bell I hurried out the door and ran home to interrogate my siblings so I knew which one of them broke it. When I walked into my house I walked to my siblings' room and opened the door.

I went to my little brother, Bob, and asked him, "Did you break my project that was in my room?" He responded "no it wasn't me. I think it was Ashley."

Then I walked to Ashley and asked her, "Did you break my project that was in my home?" She said, "Yes, but Charlotte helped me do it."

I asked, "Why did you break it?" Ashley said, "We thought it was a toy then ended up breaking it by accident." I stared at her then left the room and walked to my room annoyed they broke it by playing with it.

And that's when I realized that I had been treating school like a game, nothing serious. Now, I give it my all. Success is my why.

Friends=Lifeline
Madison Delzer
Casa Roble, Grade 12

Friends..
Friends are my reason
They are my air, my blood, and my soul
They are the reason I get up in the morning
But there is a forewarning..
If you get too attached, you'll never break away
Something most people aren't able to convey
Getting that love and comfort from those you care of most
All of that stabs you back when they decide to ghost
Taking care of friends, using all your time
Can you see I'm still trying to rhyme?
I love my friends, they are my air
The pain of losing them is too hard to bear
I try to stay connected, even when it's me who goes
But usually the friendship doesn't quite grow
My heart is full of much, full of love and care
I wasn't sure if you were aware
When someone leaves, my heart breaks down
My mind freezes up and I start to drown
Drown in all those feelings that were all for my friend
Because when they left, my mind can't comprehend
To summarize this up, because I'm only writing a note
I survive for my friends, they're the ones that keep me afloat.

My Heart

One day, my heart will die. Someday my heart will cry.
Otherwise my family will see me smiling
Smiling like nothing is wrong
Nothing can be wrong
For I am alive to be the optimist
I want to make sure everyone is happy
My reason for living
I love the day of thanksgiving
Hearing everyone in the same room
Wanting to see their smiles
Hear their laughs

I love my family
I love my friends
I hope that their love for me never ends
I get up each day thinking man am I tired
But those friends of mine, they make me feel inspired
I go each day not knowing what to expect
But I know that each day I have the perfect people to get my through

My life is full of people who make me feel amazing
My family, my friends, even to my youth director
They are my protectors
My reasons for staying

BIOGRAPHY

Madison is a senior who loves to write and has written multiple poems and short stories over their life. They have been in the San Juan Magazine since the first submission and will always continue writing to show their emotions and put things into words.

Why I Want to Become a Police Officer
Alex Dibble
Del Campo, Grade 9

As a fifteen-year-old on the verge of high school, I have experiences that have influenced my viewpoint in ways that my peers cannot comprehend. Even though there have been particular difficulties because of my parents' incarceration, it has given me a strong desire to work in law enforcement. Despite having ADHD and dealing with the challenges of having parents involved in the legal system, I am committed to being a police officer who improves my neighborhood.

The scars from my mother's abuse are deeper than the physical wounds, which have long ago healed. I learned about vulnerability in ways I never wanted to learn from living in dread, being cautious, and receiving treatment that no child should have to endure. Any preconceived notions about safety and trust were destroyed when I found out that my absent father was a registered sexual offender. The constant worry of being judged, the embarrassment, and the whispered conversations that halted when I entered a room became the norm.

Instead of sending me down a negative path, these painful experiences sparked something strong within me. I observed how police handled problems each time they responded to our home in the midst of pandemonium. While some treated me with dignity and genuine concern, others saw us as just another issue to deal with. The seeds of my future calling were sown by those compassionate moments from police who viewed me as a person, not just a victim or statistic. For other kids who live in circumstances that I am all too familiar with, I want to be that officer.

I've learned perseverance and adaptation from having ADHD. Even while it makes it difficult to concentrate and stay organized, it has improved my alertness, fast thinking, and creative problem-solving talents. When used appropriately, these qualities can be useful in law enforcement. I've been honing the multitasking, quick thinking, and multifaceted problem-solving skills necessary for police work while controlling my ADHD.

My desire to turn the sorrow I've experienced into a purpose is what motivates me to pursue a career in law enforcement. I've lived in fear, felt helpless, and questioned whether anyone really cared about my well-being.

These encounters led to an unwavering dedication to safeguarding others, particularly kids caught in circumstances similar to my own. I want to be the cop who can spot warning signs of abuse that others might overlook, who knows how to comfort a fearful child, and who acknowledges that calling the police is both terrifying and essential for victims.

I won't let my father's transgressions determine my destiny or the heritage of my family. Knowing that someone who was meant to protect me chose to hurt other people weighs me down every day. But I'm also determined to be everything he wasn't—someone who protects the weak with power instead of taking advantage of them. My experience has sharpened my empathy, and my suffering has become my purpose.

Some people might ask if someone with my past should work in law enforcement, wondering if I'll repeat familial cycles or if I can be trusted. However, I think that I have something vital to contribute because of what I've survived. I have a deeper understanding of trauma than what is taught in textbooks. I understand what it's like to need assistance but be reluctant to ask for it.

Although my path to becoming a police officer is unusual, it is motivated by a sincere desire for justice, community healing, and service. I'm prepared to put in a lot of effort, keep developing, and demonstrate that our decisions and commitment define our future rather than our past.

It's Almost As Easy As Swimming (Not Really)
Maya Douesnard
Rio Americano, Grade 10

I've spent too much time crying. My whole life I was drowning. It's been years, my hands are wrinkled from the water. The bags under my eyes start feeling like my face is melting off. My grades are slowly slipping just like me. My soul wants to retire. But my heart is hopeful. I know I'm more than that feeling that's been eating away at my heart for years. But I'm scared to swim, the shore feels so far away.

I want to be better and I want to fit. I'm sorry for my sad writing. I hope someone can read this and know they aren't the only one who's so distraught that you're debating taking those pills. Maybe you've already taken them. Or maybe your showers start to burn because of the choices you made the night before. Or maybe you're clean but still keep the water at the hottest temperature. You're clean but you don't pull your hand away when the cat is scratching your arms. Maybe your chest feels tight, you're desperately opening the window trying to clear out the smoke that filled your room and you're about to cough up a lung but at least your mind is at ease. Maybe your throat is burning but it feels like your issues go away. Maybe you spend hours talking to someone above hoping they will hear your prayers and save you. Maybe all you do is come home and as soon as your head hits the pillow you fall asleep with a heavy heart. Maybe you spend most of your meals counting how many calories and turning to the side when looking at yourself in the mirror. No matter what you do to make the thoughts go away you wake up the next morning. You wake up in disappointment but also relief. You're thanking God but also cursing under your breath. Surely you're here for a reason, but why? What's your reason?

Lately I've been overwhelmed with the feeling that I'm surrounded by expectations, voices, and opinions that are meant to help but leave me feeling even more lost. I already have to constantly push down the feeling that I'm not good enough on a daily basis. I get that my parents, teachers and others are there to support me, but I hate feeling like I'm depending on people. But it becomes hard to hear my own thoughts. And the thing a lot of people don't get is that learning to stand on my own isn't about rejecting and pushing people away. At least not on purpose. And I'll admit trying to find this independence made me do some really stupid shit. And that's when I learn. Learning how to do stuff on my own gives me the confidence my mom, my dad, my friends, and my teachers can't give me no matter what. My dad, countless times, gave me pep talks every single morning in middle school. Only one of those lectures stuck with me and I think about it almost everyday, "I can give you anything, but I can't give you the will to live." Because of that I finally learned to walk away, I walked away from friendships, relationships, anyone that I knew could bring me down. Sometimes I made the mistake of letting someone get too close. Quickly remembering why I was distant in the first place. I'm naturally distant, it's who I am. It makes me feel safe. I'm not talking about that kind of independence though.

My Why is deeply rooted in learning how to stand on my own without depending on something that doesn't do anything more than deepen the struggle. For many people who have endless battles with their own head know that the battle is deep and personal. Its exhausting having to choke on your words when trying to explain what's wrong with you. Independence, for people like us, isn't about having every thought figured out, it's about learning to sit in silence with ourselves when the world is weighing us down. Writing, reflecting, allowing emotions to exist can become a lifeline. And even though these choices don't automatically get rid of the struggle it helps us feel more in control. It's hard trying to become someone who can find their way out even without support, someone who doesn't feel like they're drowning but learning how to swim. I decided to finally swim to shore that once felt so far away and choose growth over comfort and self understanding over dependence. Letting go was almost as easy as swimming (not really).

My heart goes out to all who face mental health battles and to those grieving someone they lost along the way. You are loved.

My Life
Anonymous

I grew up in Sacramento, California, and for most of my life it has just been my mom and me. She raised me on her own and worked hard to keep things going, even when life felt unstable. Growing up, I did not always understand how much pressure she was under. I was focused on myself, my own feelings. As I got older, I started to notice how much she carried, but I still struggled to step up when I needed to. Recently, my life has felt especially stressful because of all the moving. We kept going from place to place, and it felt like I never had time to settle. My things stayed packed most of the time, and I did not have much space to call my own. I spent a lot of time playing games with my friends to distract myself.

Gaming helped me relax and forget about stress for a while, but it also became a way to avoid problems I did not want to face. During this time, I stayed with my dad for a bit so my mom could focus on finding a new apartment. I knew she was working hard to get approved, but I did not fully think about how much help she needed from me. When she finally got approved, my dad called her to talk about moving into the new place. I was nearby when the call happened, and I could hear the tiredness and frustration in her voice. She said she was not ready yet because she was not getting much help. Hearing that made my chest feel tight because I felt as if it was my fault for her frustration.

After the call ended, my dad looked at me and asked why I had not been helping my mom more. His question caught me off guard. I felt blamed right away, and my first reaction was to defend myself. I told him that I had asked my mom if she needed help. I felt like that should have been enough. My dad shook his head and told me that helping means doing things without waiting to be asked. His tone was serious, and it made me uncomfortable.

As the conversation went on, my emotions started to build up. I felt frustrated, embarrassed, and angry at the same time. I told my dad to leave me alone because I did not want to hear it anymore. That only made him upset. He raised his voice and told me that I was being lazy and that I needed to change. Hearing that word hurt more than I expected. I wanted to argue back, but I could not. Deep down, I knew he was not completely wrong.

After that moment, everything went quiet. I did not know what to say, so I stayed silent. My mind kept replaying his words over and over. When I was finally alone, the feelings hit me all at once. I cried, which surprised me because I had not cried in a long time. I felt disappointed in myself and ashamed that I had not been there for my mom the way I should have been.

For the next two days, I felt sad and distant. I spent a lot of time thinking about my actions and my past. I thought about how often I chose comfort over responsibility. I thought about how I used games to escape instead of helping when it mattered. Playing games still helped calm me down, but now I started to see them differently. They were not the problem, but using them to avoid my problems was.

That conversation with my dad forced me to look at myself honestly. I realized that if I want a better future, I have to start changing now. I want to help my mom without being asked and take responsibility for my actions. I know I will not change overnight, but I understand that effort matters. That moment was painful, but it helped me see the person I want to become.

Since that day, I try to pay more attention to the small things at home. I help carry boxes, clean rooms, and take out the trash more often. These actions seem small, but they mean something to me now. I still play games with friends, but I make sure chores and things come first. I remind myself that improving myself means showing effort, not laziness. I know I will mess up sometimes, but I am learning from those moments.

Thinking about my future helps me stay focused. I want to become someone that my family depends on. That goal pushes me forward every day, even when motivation feels low or progress feels slow. I keep moving forward, one choice at a time.

Singing is Why
Ava England
Del Campo, Grade 11

Singing is my why
When I sing is when I thrive
When I sing I am free
When I sing its like no one's there but me

My Dad is my reason to sing
Seeing him happy is all I need
My dad motivates me
He makes me proud to be me

When I sing my dad is in my heart
His laughter, his smile
All of him has a big part
Of my heart
Singing is my why
My dad is also my why
They both make me feel alive
They make me thrive
Those are my reasons why
Reasons I laugh
And cry
All the reasons why my heart is so big on the inside



Artist Name:
Gabi Keolanui

School/Grade:
Bella Vista, Grade 12

Title:
The Fool's Paradise

Medium:
Digital Artwork

Biography:
Hello, I'm Gabi! I'm a Sacramento based small artist. I am 17 years old and I am obsessed with all types of art, especially digital art. I've been drawing ever since I could pick up a pencil. My favorite subjects to draw are people and cartoon characters. Art is my passion and I hope to dedicate my life to creating art for people.

Artist's Statement:
I made this drawing with the idea to make an elaborate and detailed drawing that depicts themes such as foolishness and death. The jester is adorned with elaborate expensive clothing, he cares very much about his appearance despite being a fool. He has an innocent calm expression as he admires the flowers he is holding, paying no mind to the columns where a skull looms over him. The skull rests above his head, a reminder of an inevitable end, no matter the delusions or materials he surrounds himself with below. The flowers he holds and are behind him represent a fleeting beauty. He doesn't concern himself with the fact that the two flowers he holds will soon decay which subtly hints to one of the matters at hand, death.

My Bright and Yellow Garden
Calvin Carrillo
Bella Vista, Grade 11

The flowers in my garden once blossomed with beautiful yellow petals.
For the longest time I thought they grew on forever.
I began to pick their petals–
to stare into their bright, beautiful color,
on my shelf,
to brighten my room.
Then, I decided to share them with my friends.
I wanted to share the happiness that it brought me.

Just one.

Then another.

Pluck.
Pluck.
Pluck.
Pluck.
Pluck.

And pluck.
As I plucked them,
The garden revealed itself to be turning grey.
It began to stop growing yellow petals. Only grey.
But my friends continued to ask for more.
I was running low.
But they continued.
Ask.
Ask.
Ask.
ASK.
Then.
I ran out.
A gray field with nothing to feel.
The feelings that it once held are now not real.
I became a husk.
That smiles.
For awhile.
Unable to finish the poem.
It just stopped growing.

The Fake Garden.

My fake garden.
Is all that is left,
Nothing grows here anymore.
I didn't want it to change.
But I gave it all away.
I told them it was hurting and fading away.
They changed.
They continued to want more. Craving more.
Like I took something away.
Like I changed.
I was always this way,
And they knew the garden was fading.
There were no more petals left to pluck.
Is that why they changed?
They knew it was fading?
So, I decided to spray the gray flowers yellow!
My friends became normal again!
They loved my new garden,
Sometimes I slip up and forget to spray it yellow and they notice.
But I remind them it's still yellow,
Just wait till tomorrow.
They'll be back tomorrow.
Never again.
Never again will they see the gray ones.
Never.
Never.
Never.
Never again.

BIOGRAPHY

Calvin Carrillo is a photographer and a poet/storywriter and author of "My Bright and Yellow Garden". His work has also been on the sequel "The Fake Garden" and upcoming story, "Dying Is Awkward". Calvin has had experience in videography and editing.

Why?
Anonymous

"Why?" Why is the question that is always asked. Why do you want to pursue education? Why do you want to wake up everyday? Why? Why? Why? and honestly even sometimes I don't even know. Maybe it's the way I was brought up, or maybe it's the way everyone has pushed me to reach farther, or maybe just maybe my parents. Their sacrifice. Their sacrifice of sacrificing everything for me and my future.

I have always had difficulty answering that question, "Why?" I have always felt that the answer was so vulnerable, for people to know that yes my parents immigrated, that yes I don't feel like I belong from here nor Mexico, yes my parents are the ones that supposedly "take Americans jobs away," and yes my parents are also the first ones to help strangers in need.

I have been brought up by my parents to take every single opportunity that is available for me, every opportunity that is given to me in this land of opportunities. I am the daughter of a man that had to stop his education to work the fields to help his father, and the daughter of a woman that had to work to get a bit more food for her younger siblings. These same parents of mine that had to go through the loss of education and opportunity in their own country, immigrated to find that "promised successful future", but were met again with a problem, a difficulty in this land that was supposed to be their exit from all those difficulties, their supposed escape.

That country that they had to leave behind that was filled with family, friends, culture, something that can not be easily replaced and hasn't been able to be replaced. The difficulty they have been met with in this country isn't just something my parents have to worry about, but every single immigrant in America can feel this pressure and fear of being separated from their families. Most Immigrants came to this country as their escape of hope, and freedom, but were met with hate and oppression. Those same families that they had immigrated for, being taken away from them, or those kids who were waiting for their parents to get home from work feel scared because they never arrived home.

Most people see immigrants as people that are supposed to be less than them or maybe not people at all, which is weird because almost every single individual, every single immigrant has a story, a motive to keep going. They have their own humour, their own culture, and their own persona. They are just not numbers, not criminals, not animals, not detainees, but people.

My parents are very Catholic; they have taught me everything about Christ and his sacrifice and love, and I am not someone that should judge because I myself am not perfect, but I find it very sad that individuals who define themselves as Christian's, and that "Christian administration" want to bring up hate and violence towards certain people, instead of welcoming and love. Christ is all about loving the ones that are different from you, not chasing them as the Romans did towards christians, or how the Nazis persecuted Jew, or how the government has always been oppressive towards the African American community.

It has just been injustice, after injustice and most of the people who have had to endure this had no criminal record, no breaking the law, the only thing that was seen as "dangerous" was their religion, and the color of their skin, and that's all these oppressive regimes see. They do not see legal status anymore, if you do not look like you belong you get detained. They do not see a father of 3 kids, nor a working single mother who is trying her best to keep her son well fed, nor a 15 year old boy that is just walking to class.

This is my why. The answer to these whys is to be able to show that my parents did not endure all this fear and sacrifice for me to not take full advantage of the opportunities that are given to me here. I will never be able to repay them for all this sacrifice. The sacrifice of their family, their land, and their heart. I have to show them that maybe this country has been against them, and our people ever since they got here but that does not have to define my future, and the future of this new generation of proud sons and daughters of immigrants.

Pressure
Audrey Greco
Del Campo, Grade 11

My environment has always put pressure on me
I could be with my friends or family
It could be good or bad
But I always get pressured by something
I could be pressed to do good things but then the bad things take over
But I could be doing bad things but the pressure of being good takes over

I have realized it's all about control
I can control the pressure on me because I control myself
All my decisions don't happen because of the pressure

It happens from what I choose to do
The pressure I choose to put on myself so I know how I want to succeed
I can use the pressure for motivation or I can use it to push me down
But my environment always makes me
I am who I am around
So I know it's better for me to stay by the environment that's good
Because if I'm in the bad environment I know that pressure will push me down
Or if I'm in a good environment that pressure will push me up

But it never really matters because I am the one to choose what pressure I want on me
I make my own decisions
I get to choose what pressure takes me up or down
But I've learned after letting the pressure take control so many times
That if I can get out of it I can stay out of it
So I choose to stay in control and not let the pressure take down
I stay up and let my environment bring me peace in the pressure.



ARTIST NAME:
Myra Harris

SCHOOL/GRADE:
Rio Americano, Grade 12

TITLE:
The Day the Candle Burned Out

MEDIUM:
Multimedia - Pencil, water color, color pencil, ballpoint pen, oil based pen

The Day the Candle Burned Out
Myra Harris
Rio Americano, Grade 12

An 8 year old girl prays on the cold floor of her moonlit room to spare her cousin's life in exchange for doing her dreaded math homework, simply because that was all she had to offer. My cousin's life was a candle in a storm. A 12-year-old boy with leukemia, the kindest boy I ever knew. He was able to stop an argument between 8 year old me and my older brothers by just saying so. The world seemed to get quiet to hear his words. Despite having cancer from the time he was 5, his kindness never faltered. His candle-like-warmness may have only been for a moment, but it became my example on what it meant to be kind. He was real, he laughed, he played Call of duty, he watched movies, like any other 12 year old boy. He never got to attend a school dance, never graduated middle school or high school, never had the opportunity to learn to drive. The day his candle went out our family was devastated. He left behind his mother, his brother. My brothers and I each lit an electric candle for him in a church. I sat in the church rows until that electric candle went out.

The boy's life may have flickered out, but his burning candle sparked a mark before it went out. Despite going through the motions for years learning to live with the grief, I, like everyone around him, had a mark left from him. As I matured I did my homework without gambling with god, I found ambition that wasn't just winning an argument with my brothers, and most importantly I learned to carry on the kindness that I was shown by the candle boy. I'm not sure when the spark from my cousin set the flame for my ambition I never knew was there, but once I realized it was there I knew I wanted to use it. Since early middle school I've made it my own personal mission to become a pediatric oncologist with the empathy my cousin has. A dream to help other kids like my cousin, in the possibility that even one person will be able to walk across the stage at their high school graduation. In hopes that at least one other family doesn't have to grief the loss of a child before they ever experience the end of middle school.

Even though I have this ambition, it's not always easy to get up in the morning. Although math homework is the least of my worries now, there are days I still struggle with getting out of bed. The constant question of "Where would I land if I stopped moving forward?", "Why should I get out of bed today?", or "Why does it matter?". I think about my future as a pediatric oncologist, the kids I could help, and how I wouldn't be able to do that without doing my best every day. My cousin's light didn't flicker out, it lit flames in those around him, changed those who loved and cared about him. I get up every morning, not just because I might be able to help someone, I get up every morning because I have the ability to get up and make the world a better place.

Everyone has the power to make someone's day, let them know they are seen, to call someone by their name and look them in the eye as you say "Good morning, _ how are you?" then take interest as you listen to them explain what they did that day. I walk in the sunlight doing what I do everyday not only for those I lost, but those who live alongside me.

BIOGRAPHY

Myra Harris is a Senior High School student at Rio Americano and Eagle Scout since 2023 December, and the author of "The Day the Candle Burned Out," a story of a part of her childhood of how losing a close cousin to leukemia changed her and taught her growth. She plans to go onto studying biochemistry in college.

Stuck in the Middle
Humaima Hedayat
Encina, Grade 10

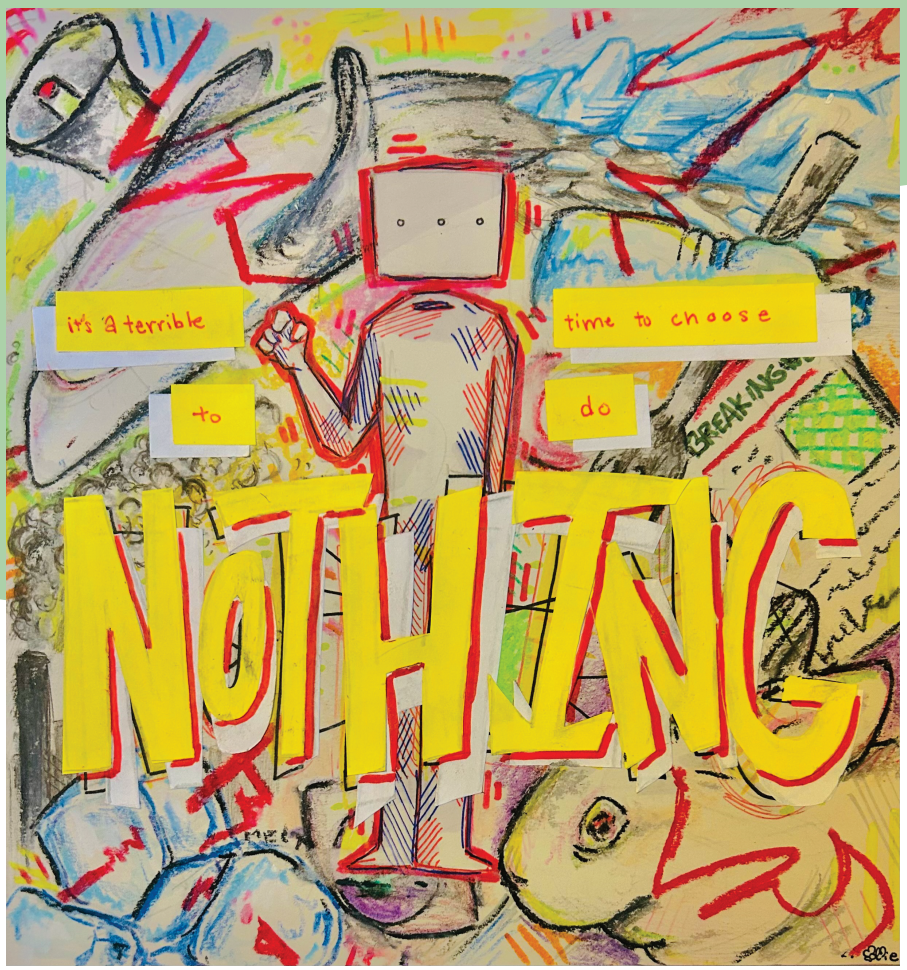
When I get up in the morning, I consider every choice that I have made. Where I've gotten back up and kept going and ask myself "Why try so hard?" "Why do I keep going?" "Why is this important to me?." Stuck in between wanting to push myself further and fear that I would fail in the future. Which the fear out weighs any fear I've had before. Whenever the darkness comes, I remember my fathers saying. " The happy life doesn't come to you, you create the happy life yourself", he says while he breaks blood, sweat and tears for me. " Don't put yourself too much in the sorrows of this life" my mother encourages.

When I joined the soccer team in sixth grade, my heart raced like a drum in my chest, terrified that I would fail or let my team down. The fear made me want to quit before I even started, stuck between my doubts and my dreams of trying something new. That night, my parents sat me down and I remember what they said " Don't worry too much about it, you know?, give it a shot." Those simple words were like a light guiding me forward. The first match felt like a battle, not against two schools but me and unease thoughts in my head. The field looked huge, the players seemed faster, and the crowd's cheers sounded even louder. For a moment, I froze and thought about telling my couch if I could walk off, but then I saw my parents on the sidelines, and I remembered their words . Their encouragement pushed me back into the game. Even though we didn't win the game, at the end of the day I realized I've won something bigger: Proof that I could move through fear.

Now, whenever fear creeps into my life, I remember that moment: my parents' encouragement has become my "why," the reason I keep moving forward despite uncertainty.

BIOGRAPHY

Humaima Hedayat is a sophomore at Encina High School. She is from Afghanistan and came to the U.S in 2023. She is hoping to share her experience of her overcoming her fears and moving forward to inspire others to do so.



Artist Name:
Olivia Wu

School/Grade:
Mira Loma, Grade 10

Title:
Action

Medium:
Multimedia - Oil Pastel, Crayon, Alcohol Marker, Ink, Paper

People Kind of Suck.
Naythan Hernandez-Tellez
Bella Vista, Grade 12

People kind of suck.

I've grown to accept this fact. Of course, humans are certainly complex creatures. We have the facilities present for communication, empathy, and reasoning. We can do amazing things, create magnificent art, and form meaningful relationships. Yet at the same time, people can commit actions that negatively affect others. And even worse, a select few can do these actions without ever seeing the people they affect, with no chance of any legal repercussions, in a club completely separated from you and me.

Advancements in technology have only accelerated this fact. Wars are being fought by drones, visible through the same screen that brings you your favorite Netflix show. It doesn't take weeks to forge documents or illicit photos for blackmail anymore; it takes a prompt.

I accept this fact. Throughout the course of history, technology has been used for both good and bad. And now it's being used to put our data in countless databases, both corporate and government, with plenty of labels to sort us if ever necessary.

But I do not accept that I can't do anything about it. I will make it harder for people to suck, both in my career and in my life. Whether it be making an AI chatbot take a fraction of a second longer to consider the ethics of its decisions, or simply refusing to spread small rumors in a friend group. I might not be able to end every injustice and negative action, but I can certainly make them a bit more difficult to commit.

Fast Paced Reality
Kiera Hightower
Del Campo, Grade 10

I can see time running towards me
Fast as a bullet yet miles away
They say time waits for no one
But I'm the one waiting on time

For when it final comes close to me
I'll grab it by the neck and hold it firm
And I'll live my life and live my dreams
Like the thousands like me before

Every place I hear of I'll visit
Every art form I'll try at least once
And I'll bounce around meeting
Bounce around learning
From nearly each and everyone

These of the words of girl in fantasy
But a girl tucked close in my heart
And even though dreams aren't everything
If the Lord wills I can live through just one

Westward Train
Amelia Hogge
El Camino, Grade 12

the metallic clanking of a westward train puts me to sleepin a house that is not mine

for a moment is it like an explosion,
an eruption of sound so low and heavy I feel it pulling me
Down, Down
and with it each frantic thought that swarms my
Terrible
Beautiful mind

I close my eyes and let the noise tell its story
of cities past
of sunrises over dead lands
of lost souls
and curious feet

I allow the weight of it all drag me
Down, Down
until I am one with the ground beneath me
and each person who walked it

I am asleep before the train passes

in my mind I return to a meadow
locked between blue hills and
blanketed by tall, rough grass

my hands sink to the dirt, fingers stretching to roots,
hair to worms

the silence is so loud, like a westward train

for a moment, I can see the truth-
I am nature's Art,
a manifestation of every
Terrible
Beautiful thing

I am all the Love, Rage, Warmth, Grace of every
soul of every
human

I am the westbound train-
a relic of the past
flooding with the present
traveling, always traveling through time and space
to a place not on any map

when I wake, I will write with all the passion of centuries of
Sorrow
and
Wonder

I will attempt to communicate the complexity of being human in an unforgiving world

I, as Art, will create Art

and maybe one day the silence of these words will be
loud enough to remind another of their
Art.

Wings of Tar
toby holcomb
Rio Americano, Grade 12

I was born with curls, blue eyes, and that intoxicating newborn baby smell. I was set with a name that was too crooked to put on a nametag. A name that didn't sit on my shoulders in the way I could shake off.

As I grew, my curls grew out, my eyes shifted its hue to brown, and I lost the sickly sweet scent that bonded me with my mother. And the name came off my relatives tongues, scraping against me like sandpaper against my once so soft skin.

I wondered for a long time who I was, and at one point, I started to wonder whose life I was living. I was in the body of someone else. Eventually, the name started to rip. I was fighting between trying to keep my family happy, and letting my wings break through the thin layer of deceit.

As I grew, so did the thin layer. And soon, that layer got so thick that I couldn't even remember I had wings in the first place.

The persona I played and the person I was, both envious of the other. But, in the center of it all, sat a deep seeded hatred for the world. The hatred often bubbled out in rage fueled moments of lashing out. I lost my friends one by one, each one hurt by my snapping jaws. I never wanted to be violent, but eventually, the sparkle in my eyes dimmed.

I was so mad at the world for making me who I never wanted to be. All I wanted as a young teenager was to have the boys excitedly wave me over during physical education, to have the doctor walk out of her office and call something other than that name that made my stomach churn.

And then, high school happened. I was alone again. No familiar faces. No weird looks. And suddenly, the demons holding onto my shoulders slipped deep into my soul instead, hiding.

Instead of having a reputation, I was just a freshman. Just another face in the crowd. I was so used to being berated or ignored, that the silence felt worse than the negative attention. But in that unfamiliar silence, I heard a voice. It was small, unsure, and underdeveloped. But it was, undoubtedly, mine.

"Dont let them kill us again."

And so I didn't let them kill me. I promised myself, I would carve through that layer. And I would learn how to fly with those oh-so underdeveloped wings. It was hard. It was so hard to fly.

But with each person that touched my wings, and were so gentle with them, they grew stronger. Even if they left, taking a feather with them, I knew I could still learn to fly.

And now, for the first time in my life, I can finally move my wings, even if they're covered in scars and tar.

Education Is My Why
dd idleburgh
Encina, Grade 11

Education is something people take for granted a lot more than most people think.
Education is something that is important.
Not because you need to be smart or to be the smartest in the class, but to have a future to succeed in life. To be somewhere great, to reach goals you set for yourself.
Education is the bridge to success.
Being educated also helps a lot of people get jobs. As well as getting recognized for who they are.
Education is how it all starts Pre-K to college graduation.
You choose what you want with your life, how it goes, how it forms.
How you let it mold you.
Are you going to let it mold you in a bad way or a good way? Only you hold that answer.
For me I choose a good way. I want to be great in life and spread inspiration to others.
Take your classes seriously, it's never a game. It's the foundation to the start of your life.
School education is where it starts.
What happens is up to you. How you decide how you let it affect you.
Never get off track.
If you do, you will regret it.
Stay in school because it has so much to offer.

What's Your Why?
Anonymous

Me thinking about my why took me to an event when I was fourteen years old. At this time I was in middle school, I had difficulties learning due to my sister having cancer and watching my mom suffer from stress with life and her same birthday twin which was my sister.

I would be in class always doing my best but also would zone off thinking about the trauma of losing my sister and seeing my mom cry losing herself. But after school my brother-in-law would pick me up in the "Green Car," a lime green 2010 Dodge Charger with the Black Daytona stripe on it. He would take me to see my sister in the hospital bed at their house. Each day I was losing hope thinking my sister was losing time, chemo made her skinny to the bone with her eyes rolling in the back of her head.

But one day I was sleeping at home and my mom called my phone from across the house, She said, "Rahiem I have to tell you important news, your sister died at 3 am this morning." When I heard that my heart dropped, and I cried all my tears out until I couldn't feel anymore. But my mom was still on the phone telling me to come to the room as I heard distancingly because the phone wasn't next to me. I went to her room with tears coming down my face. She was also crying, looking in a depressed state, but she knew she had to fight for me even though she was in pain.

We both had to go into the important places of our life, for me it was school and so much for my mom it was work. I got in the shower thinking and feeling my emotions wildly. Never knowing at the age of fourteen how losing my older sibling would be or even thinking someone I was growing up with and even lived with could just be distant than a trillion miles. It felt like a comparison to when the finger snap happened in Avengers and Iron Man watched Spider Man vanish.

When I went to school I was around my friends, they were all smiling and laughing but they felt something was wrong with me. I never disclosed information about anything to anyone except my best friend, Aidan, and my teachers because my academics were falling a bit due to lack of mental stability.

I cried at school in front of classmates, I couldn't hold my tears back not one bit. But when school ended I went everyday to see my nephews and nieces, they didn't know what it truly meant to lose their mom and I didn't know how to feel either. There was a lot to think about. I had guilt, pain, worry, and self harm in my mind but wanted to be there for my mom, nephews and nieces. But I had support, I had friends, family and even myself to support me. My friend, Robert, came over with me to see my nephews everyday and I spent the night at his house, but then one day on a Saturday me and him went to my

moms and he spent the night at my house.

When we got to my house I saw my mom laying on the couch, she seemed a little off and was acting more peculiar. I asked her “Hey mom, are you okay? I love you.” She replied with “Yes baby, mom is okay, I love you son.” I gave her a concerned smile and went upstairs.

The next morning the house was pure quiet, so I went to my mom’s room. I gave it a knock and said “Mom!” There was no answer so I left her alone, deciding in my head that she was asleep.

Robert and I started playing video games until I went downstairs. I saw my mom’s situationship of a boyfriend lying on the couch. I was wondering why he was sleeping on the couch. I kept my day going and got some breakfast for me and Robert, I went back upstairs then we kept playing Call Of Duty. A few hours went by and I started to worry about my mother, she usually is up doing something before I wake up. So I went to her room and said “MOM!” again. I opened her door and I saw her dead on her bed with her white cold pale skin. I started crying, I didn’t know what to do. I told my mom’s boyfriend and Robert, then I called 911. I couldn’t believe my life anymore after two important losses in my life.

But these two past events are the reason why I strive for positivity in my life. I have to go on for them, to live my life in their honor.

Flames of Change
Joshua Jhang
Bella Vista, Grade 10

There was once a songbird in a lively forest full of trees, animals, plants, and organic beauty. The bird’s chirping mimicked the sound of the forest, whether it was the waterfalls, the slow clomping of a deer’s hooves, or the wind blowing against the luscious grass. The forest provided the songbird with an imaginary pamphlet for its chirps. The melody the bird sang was unique and had many tourists searching the forest to try and witness it.

One day a mining plant near the forest caught on fire. The fire spread and wrapped the forest in a blanket of heat. What was once a peaceful and gorgeous center for wildlife was now charred and brittle. The forest was no longer habitable for the songbird. With nowhere to turn, the songbird fled to a nearby metropolis made of steel and cement. In the new environment water came in plastic, and wildlife was minimal as well. Even shouting blocked out the noise of the locals footsteps. The bird even had to scavenge for scraps with the sky rats.With these new surroundings, the songbird had no blueprint to create any song.

Over time, thriving in the city became like 2nd nature for the songbird. He knew the best places for leftovers, he drank from the wishing fountains, and had created a comfy nest in a vent. Although the ropes of the city were now apparent he still felt like something was missing. He knew what it was: he could eat, drink, and sleep as much as he wanted, but he’ll forever miss his song. Weeks later the songbird was feeling hopeless as usual. Perched on top of a bridge, he was staring at the traffic jam backed all the way out of the city. He slowly heard a rhythmic beat.

“What was it?” he thought to himself. He put his head down and focused. It was the honking of the cars! More and more, after each second the sound of the honks started to form a pattern. The songbird then flew through the whole city, checking every crack and crevice. He realized there were other mini paradigms everywhere. The steam coming out of the sewers, the shaking of the underground metro, or the little rats scurrying against the city's surface.

After a couple days the songbird had constructed a whole new song out of the city's noises. The new song was more impressive and spectacular than the forest symphony. City locals would film the bird wherever he went. He was now the city's mascot. He had found his meaning again, and understood the truth about one's surroundings. The songbird now had grasped that one's environment can affect them, and even provoke change, but it’s their choice to adapt and prosper.

BIOGRAPHY

Joshua Jhang is a tenth grade student at Bella Vista High School. He pursues activities in journalism and tennis.

My Purpose
Alora Jones
Rio Americano, Grade 9

The waves crashing down,
Seagulls soaring through the sky,
Finally at peace.

The Difference

In a crowded room,
There is just one standing out,
The brightest one there.

Although, I Will
Claire Le
Bella Vista, Grade 12

I never went to summer camp.

I never got to bunk in cabin seven,
breathe the scents of pine and wood, hike to the open plains in the early sun— although I wish I could.

I never had a sleepover

I never watched a silly movie with my girls, beneath the dim and borrowed lights, swallowing laughs, hearts in sync— although I wish I might.

The clock is like a river,
flowing past, a quiet, constant chill.
I might never be able to catch up again— although maybe I will.

I'll travel to London with a one-way ticket, roam the stalls of rings at Camden Market. I'll finally learn how to play the guitar, waltz around my room, pretend I'm a rock star. Have a picnic in the fields of flowers, sit with friends and paint for hours. Maybe even learn how to snowboard, let every fear melt as I begin to soar.

There's still so much I need to do,
so many journeys still to complete.
I'll ride the currents, wild and free,
and seize the days I've yet to meet.

My Blessing
Anonymous

I'm walking up the staircase and each step I take I can feel my heart flutter more and more. "I'm outside" is the text I send to my blessing. My blessing opens the door and I see her gorgeous face and I fight back a smile. I walk in and I'm greeted by her cat, our "baby." We walk to her room and suddenly nothing or no one else matters. Only my blessing matters. We're with our baby and she starts sniffing me. She's sniffing me because I haven't visited home in a while. Cleo was a couple months old when I last saw her.

Now she's close to one year. Our baby turns one on May 20th. We're giggling and staring at each other, you can tell how much we've missed each other. Bodies and hearts. My forehead is pressed against her chin and we're watching her favorite movie. I steal a glance every now and then, just admiring my blessing. My blessing is gorgeous. "My blessing, you're so beautiful", "My blessing, I've missed you so much," "My blessing, can we stay like this forever?" I think to myself but I don't let the words escape my mouth because all I want to do is listen to her heartbeat. It's that moment when I noticed the sleeping pattern of her breathing, feeling her body go slowly up and slowly down when I realized that this is my person.

That moment when I found comfort in hearing her heart beat was when I realized I need to be the best version of myself so I can love her. So she can love me. She deserves the best and that's why I want to be the best for her. She's my sunrise, the reason why I want to wake up in the morning and the way she makes everything bright. I wrap my arms around her tighter and she pulls me in closer. Being in her arms feels like home, a feeling that I've always chased after. My body is relaxed and my mind is at ease, there are no rushing thoughts. I found someone who I can let my guard down with. I found someone who drives me to be the best. She takes up my whole mind, everything I do is for her.

They Ask Us
Avni Mahendra
Mira Loma, Grade 10

They Ask Us

what do you want to be when you grow up? they ask us
what career will you choose?
what path will you take?
what mark will you make on this world?

who do you want to be?
they ask us
you must know by now?

i think
        and think
                                                and think

but i cannot come up with anything except for more questions

i wonder
why do they never ask who we are? is who i am not enough?

they ask
        and ask
                and ask
and for them i have no answer

perhaps it is the search for the answer that keeps me going
the hope
that one day i will find my calling

a calling that promises not money not fame
not materialistic pleasures
but change
change that i could make in the world change that would help billions

and passion
a passion that fuels such profound thought a passion that makes me work with such rigor that i must keep going

does passion feed empty stomachs? they ask us
can a longing to change the world
magically pay bills?

they mock us
and they look down upon us
but they are not us

one day

in the distant future
i may be hungry
        i may be poor
                                                i may be “disappointing”

but i will not be unhappy
i will not be without purpose
and i will not be done

there is always more to accomplish more people to help
more passion to be fed
more change to be made

but what is the point?
they ask us
what do you gain?
and for them i have no answer

THe HiDDeN LiGHT
Hawa Malik Zawa
Mira Loma, Grade 9

In tHe quiet of tHe night,
A whisper glows so bright.
Shadows dance, the world asleep,
Secrets hidden, dreams to keep.
Through tHe darkness, soft and near,
A gentle light appears so clear.
Guiding hearts that lost their way,
Until the dawn of a new day.

BIOGRAPHY
Bibi Hawa Malikzada is a young writer and poet with a passion for exploring light and hope through words. She enjoys creating stories and poems that inspire reflection and imagination. Her work often focuses on nature, dreams, and the human experience. “The Hidden Light” is one of her latest creations.

A Love Letter to My Friends
Emalee McCurry
Bella Vista, Grade 11

It’s them
They are the reason I get up in the morning
They keep me happy
And safe
And honestly…
They are the reason I get up
And go to school
And stay sane
And honestly…
I don’t know what I’d do
Without them
I love them
I love them all
And I hope they know that
And honestly…
I should tell them more
I think I will
Tomorrow,
I’ll tell them all how much they mean to me
Every single one
Every day
All the time
And honestly…
I don’t know if they’ll say it back
But I know that they mean it
They are my why
And my how
And my light
And my direction
When I can’t see
And when I don’t know where to go
I love them all
Eternally and Infinitely
Always
And honestly…
I wouldn’t be here without them

BIOGRAPHY

Emmalee McCurry is a Junior at Bella Vista this year. She will graduate in 2027 and plans to attend college. She loves poetry and all forms of creative writing, especially unconventional styles. She admires all kinds of art and creation. She hopes to become a poet and artist. This is her third year submitting a poem to the Literary Magazine.

My Will to Live
Natalie Miramontes
Del Campo, Grade 9

That's a tricky thing
They say “when theres a will theres a way”
But that's not always the case.
Because my will to live was lost the second I found out
What happened to you. My only will left is the will of my sister

When she was born it was like the sun after a storm.
My hope came back.
I have always had a lot of siblings, mostly boys
But she was like me. She played with my toys.
She is like my mini me.
She is my key.
I think of her on the bad days
And on the sad days.

Now that she is a little older I see myself in her.
All my sass
But also my class.
But I hope she never goes through the things I had to,
From the fights
To the sad and dark nights.
I pray that she has a better life.
And she knows that I will never let her fail
She must always prevail.
But I will always be here for her failures…

On the days when she feels like there is no one,
I will be there
When she needs to get out of the house
I will be there
I will never let her feel an ounce of loneliness
Just wholesomeness.

So when you ask me if I have a will to live, I guess I do
But it just took a little longer to find
Because it wasn't with me
It is with her.

Our Neverending Forest
Lyla Monahan
Mira Loma, Grade 10

We are infinitely fortunate to have been born into a world.
It is not perfect, but it is hopeful.

I am a redwood tree that stands tall, reaching towards the sun.
Under the surface I am linked with you, our roots intertwined.
Chickadees live in your branches in exchange for a song.
We are able to be majestic when we hold onto one another.

We try to purge marks of time from ourselves.
Injecting plastic in the skin or poison in the stomach.
Nothing can soothe the ancient rings inside a tree.
Let me rot a little before I am chopped down.

Tourists race around my trunk everyday.
Some zoom so quickly that I don't catch their faces.
I love to see their lungs rise and fall with every breath.
The spark of life is silent but noticeable.

My grown-up child falls to the ground and cries.
The rain makes me feel queasy.
It is still the most beautiful sight I have ever seen.
If I had a face I would smile.

Bulldozers sit on the horizon in front of us.
Please, let us sit in silence for a second.
We must celebrate the miracle of you and me.
One. Last. Time.

We are hopeful, but not perfect.
We are infinitely fortunate to have lived in a world.



ARTIST NAME:
Angie Mucci

SCHOOL/GRADE:
Bella Vista, Grade 12

TITLE:
Forage Inside Oneself

MEDIUM:
Painting

Who Is She?
Angie Mucci
Bella Vista, Grade 10

I look into that dreadful mirror
And I can't help but ponder.
Who am I? Who am I?
Eyes look into eyes.
Eyes I do not recognize.
Who is she? Who is she?
Who is the girl I see?
For it cannot be me.
A tear rolls down my cheek.
I blink.
And I realize:
That it is me, it was always me.
Different but always me.

Dearest Prayer
Chloe Myers
Bella Vista, Grade 12

I feel sick from a harsh jump back to reality.
From my closing my latent literature
I jump from one beautiful thing to another,
this is what keeps me going.
The hope that something wonderful
could be made of this age old world
painted with horridly putrid colors.

The jewel tones of the ruby red trees
like the promising pomegranate
that triggered Earth's first autumn
hold promises like no other.
Persephone, queen of darkness,
Please guide me through this season.
Promise the love you chase
through dark caverns.
Promise me light at the end of the tunnel.

Promise me that these bones are made
of more than pearly white sticks,
that this skin holds a softness to the universe
untold by our modern language.

Please promise me this hope I grasp tells no lies,
tell me these beauties I find in life
are more than a prolonged demise

Promise these things in paintings and
lovely languished words
poured out of careful keyboards
painstakingly protruding from papered trees.

Hold my hand close
and with gentle maternalistic nature
whisper sweet promises of my life.
Of beauties I will find.
Promise me hope,
even if it is a lie.

BIOGRAPHY

Chloe Myers is the author of the poem "Dearest Prayer" and the monologue "Insanity" which was performed in SJUSD theater festival 2025. Raised in the Sacramento area, she often enjoys painting and reading in her free time. When she is not drinking way too much coffee and contemplating life's meaning, you can find her stressing over school or trying to improve her writing.

My Choice - My Why.
Sofi Nefedova
Rio Americano, Grade 10

When life starts losing sweetish flavor
When there is nothing more to loose
You have to do yourself a favor.
The happiness you have to choose.
When life starts over after silence
And people ask me who am I,
Who raised anew from cruel violence
How do I live? What is my ¨why¨?
What is the purpose of me trying
To build a life that was destroyed.
After I lost two years to crying,
After the war that brought this void.
What was the purpose of my life,
When I had nothing but just me.
I have some luck that I survived,
But lost alone in an endless sea.
I knew this luck, it had a ¨why¨.
I had to make one big choice.
I could stop trying, I could die.
Or I could stand, bring back my voice.
My ¨why¨ is hidden in my past
My ¨why¨ is drawn in a future aisle.
The bombs and death not gonna last
But long will last my happy smile.
This life can leave a happy bruise.
But if you ask, my ¨why¨ is me.
The happiness you have to choose,
And just like that you will break free.

BIOGRAPHY

Hello there! My name is Sofi and I am Ukrainian. I moved to America three years ago after the full war invasion in my country. A lot of things have happened since then but one of my goals is helping people who are going through similar stuff. This poem is about a choice you have to make, about strength and hope that doesn't come naturally. About why I keep going instead of giving up.

Waves
Nathan Perez
Encina, Grade 10

I'll write your name into the sand, scraping every letter into the earth hoping that the waves will wash it away and maybe take the memories we made with them. I'm a lot similar to the waves and you know this.

The waves wash in and eventually meet their fate, a line they cannot cross. Just like me, as I sit here and admire the pink sky and purple ocean, the light from the sun reflecting on the water. I reflect on us.

The wind brushes past my face, bringing that familiar scent of you. I soak it in. I soak the beauty of the world, hoping to not drive myself crazy with this, hoping for someone to save me, but I doubt that will ever happen.

I've been feeling fine and lately you've been feeling sorry, but ill tell you this, don't put any stress on Yourself, life is meant to be lived one day at a time. And I wish I knew this before, I would've enjoyed having

you as my reason, as my purpose to wake up,as my purpose to yearn and understand something way greater than you and I. Your divinity would make any good man a sinner, but my wave has met its end point, and I'm

stuck in a deep state of nostalgia,asking myself if I was really your soulmate, because you were my angel, you were too divine for my human mind. And as I reach my fate, I finally let the waves take me and take me to a

place of peace, the waves take control of my body, the splashes hitting against me. I finally accept the void of you, the absence of your presence, I accept the outcome of things, I accept the traumas I never got to truly heal,

and I'll accept the fact that you can't love someone without loving yourself. As my time runs out, and the clock keeps ticking and as I watch the night turn to light then turn to day,

I know the waves will bring me back
to the shore, and I'll find my why again.

What's the Why?
Lucy Poletiek
Rio Americano, Grade 10

What's my why?
My why is to figure out why no one is trying to figure out the why.
What's the why?

It's hard to imagine that once my thoughts and wishes were all mine,
That no one had gotten to them yet
Now the demands from men are identical to my dreams for myself

I can't tell if I pick up that tube of mascara for my own enjoyment or because I can no longer tolerate the feeling of their eyes on me when I wear my natural beauty.
Perhaps they can both be true, but one is an option while the other is an obligation no woman can be saved from.

My Name or Not
Nyla Pomtong
Encina, Grade 10

N-Y-L-A
Nyla
Nyla Pomtong
The name my father gave me
The name that haunted me

The thought
its faded
my father… my father
It's all a blur
This name that I've been given
Pomtong, I carry his legacy
But where is he?

Everyday
Everytime I write my name
I see the name I'm given
I think of him
But who is he?
I can't, I can't seem to remember these memories I have
The past, the time I spent with him
It's all gone but he is still a part of me
I wear him on this jersey for a sport I love
I carry him every day
But why?
What is it that I owe him?

The young mind
The mind that had to put up with a leaving father
No one saw it coming
how could they
A loving father with all the love it started to overflow
The picture he put up for the outside world
Those meaningless arguments that could be solved with a little confirmation
It was all given to him
But it was never enough
I was never enough
Those were the thoughts of a 9 year old

So when I look
See this name I was given
Given from a father who doesn't know me
The name he chose for me
I think of the meaning
"The achiever"
But what does he want me to achieve?
These question that spin in my head everyday
I never got to ask
It was way too late before I could
He was gone

Left
Left and never came back
He left me there pondering whether this name was actually mine
If I wasn't worthy of his presence, then was I worthy of this name?
I didn't think I was…
How could I the absence left when he did
Was soul crushing
The time spent picking up the pieces he broke
It was so time consuming I wanted to give up
I needed a break
I needed a break through
I needed a break from this name

"Kaur"
I chose to wear my mother's last name on my back
To carry the legacy of someone present
The one that gave me worth
My break through
I'm achieving all that I couldn't with this name that gives me meaning
That was what I needed
To push past his haunting presence
To let my wings unfurl from the binds that once held them
They were so tiny and shriveled from this name that gave me nothing but emptiness
But now I know im strong
Strong enough to break through with the sense of self value I took back
I've made my own achievements
I'm " The Achiever"

I've detached myself
from that name
I'm free.
I'm flying.

The Chance They Never Had
Jennifer Prudente Encina, Grade 10

Why is school important to me? Growing up, I struggled with homework and had no help at home. Even though both of my parents were in my life, they didn't know how to read or write in English. They only knew spanish, when I asked for help, my dad would say, "I don't know how," or "What does that say?" As a kid, this made me feel very confused and frustrated because they didn't have the answers.

By the age of eleven, I began to understand why my parents couldn't help me. My mom never finished school, and neither did my dad. They didn't even make it to high school. They had to start working at a young age while living in Mexico. My mom also had to take care of her siblings as the oldest daughter so her mother can provide for her and her siblings. Making school not an option for my parents.

Realizing this helped me see how important school really is. Every day, I come to school knowing that I am one step closer to graduating high school. That thought motivates me to keep going, even on hard days. I am doing something my parents never had the chance to do.

School is important to me because it represents hope and opportunity. It gives me a better chance to build a better future not only for myself but for my family. My parents are my biggest inspiration, and through my education, I hope to achieve the dreams they were never able to reach.

What's Your Why?
Eva Raczko
Mesa Verde, Grade 11

Everyone has a 'why,' whether it's complex or simple. For me, my why is straightforward: the United States Coast Guard.

Just a year ago, I was completely convinced that the Navy was for me, my future. But as I researched it more, talked about it, and shaped my goals around it, time passed and something shifted. I learned about the Coast Guard; their mission, their community, their demanding standards. I felt drawn toward it than any other branch. Recently, that pull has only grown stronger. I've become way more motivated to enlist but also to reach the level of discipline, strength, and resilience required to qualify for such a respected and disciplined branch. And it's definitely not every day that you meet a young woman who wants to take on a boot camp ranked 2nd hardest out of every branch of service. It doesn't intimidate me or make me insecure; it makes me want to push. To reach that potential I don't have yet. I'd be the first woman in my family to enlist, and that's something I want to brag about to everyone I come across. It's a huge responsibility, a source of pride, and a reminder that I'm paving my own path, one that future generations in my family would look at and think, "Wow, she's in my family?"

That's my why. That's what pushes me to get out of bed every morning and keep going, even if the process will feel overwhelming. Of course, other reasons motivate me, but this one stands above the rest. This is the reason I'm ready to give my all. Motivation isn't just about passion; it's about purpose. The Coast Guard illustrates a path where discipline, courage, and strength come together as one. That combination inspires me on a level I didn't think of before. When I think about what it takes to earn a place in such a selective and demanding branch, I feel challenged in the best possible way. It's a huge lake to swim across, and all I have is a raft and a branch. You'd best bet I'm already on my way to the other side, where my future begins.

In the end, my why isn't about a title or just picking a branch and going with it. It's really about the kind of person I aspire to be. The Coast Guard pushes people in a way I want to be pushed; a strong, disciplined, and dependable person. When I think about the future, I don't just think of the uniform and benefits, I think of impacting people's lives and saving them, bringing them a purpose. That keeps me going even when things don't feel good or when I'm uncertain. It reminds me that the journey is much bigger than any doubt that'll come my way. So when the steps are small, I'll keep moving forward. I'll be going in the right direction, carving my own path. So, to close it off, my why isn't just a title; it helps me stay focused and reminds me to keep going. ***What's your why?***

Aprendí a Creer a Través de Su Voz
Anonymous

No todas las personas que me inspiran lo hacen por lo que muestran al mundo. Algunas me inspiran por lo que cargan en silencio. Y así lo logró hacer una cierta persona ella me enseño que aunque todo el mundo esté contra ti eso no define la persona que eres y que eres más valiente porque a pesar de todo el ruido te terminaste levantando sola. Con tan solo escuchar su voz y todo lo que pasa a su alrededor y poder ser una persona que haga una mínima diferencia en ella es algo que me trae mucha alegría. Su silencio terminó siendo lo que desató su fuerza. Si logré caerme, pero su música y su voz siempre logró curar algo que ella nunca daño. Y claro como ella misma me hizo aprender que "Nadie Se Va Como Llegó" y ella tuvo mucha razón porque yo no llegue al punto donde estoy solo para verme caer.

Y claro hubieron "Lágrimas en mi Garganta" pero al final esas lágrimas se convierten en felicidad, toma tiempo sanar y por eso a veces ocupamos "Un Minuto De Silencio" para volver a conectar con si mismo.

Ella tuvo una forma de reconectar con su gente después de haberse caído tuvo que enfrentar miedos que nadie más tuvo que hacer porque cada quien se cae y se levanta a su manera. Ella enfrentó su mundo con la cabeza en alto y con la ayuda de su familia. Y yo aprendí que también podía hacerlo con mis propios demonios.

Tal vez no tuve el sostén que ella tuvo pero ella me sostuvo a mí con cada melodía y cada canción. Ella estuvo cuando dolía todo, estuvo cuando no sabía cómo seguir y estuvo cuando necesitaba sentir que no estaba sola. Eso es lo que más me inspira de ella que si para sanar significa desaparecer de todo el ruido por un año y medio eso es lo que se tiene que hacer.

Quiero ser como ella en el futuro, tiene una fortaleza que nadie más ha logrado tener, regresar a ser tú misma es algo que es admirable. Hay gente que la quiso ver derrotada y ella aun así no se dejaba, que rara es la vida.

Muchas veces las mismas mujeres se quieren tirar entre ellas mismas pero si algo malo pasa con la mujer ahí están queriendo dar lastima, esta persona me enseño que nunca deberías de tener una mujer en contra tuya y que las mujeres se deben de tratar igual, y aunque mucha gente especialmente las mujeres le tiraban a ella siempre se ha mantenido firme con eso y ha dicho que "Las Mujeres Bien Portadas No Hacen Historia".

Cuando yo me caí en su momento sentí que rendirme era la única opción porque no miraba cómo salir del lugar donde estaba sin huir de mis pensamientos. Quería alejarme de todo mi interior y donde estaba pero no lo lograba porque siempre había esa persona que no te dejaba caer y ahora más que nunca entiendo a qué se refería esa persona de la cual hablo que mientras ella sanaba tenía a la gente que la querían a un lado de ella siempre sosteniendola porque no la querían dejar sola. Ella no merecía todo lo que pasó.

Y si yo tengo algo que aprender de ella es eso, cada quien tiene su batalla y cada quien se levanta a su manera pero al final del día siempre terminan regresando a ser la persona que fueron un día. Termina regresando la felicidad, la sonrisa las ganas de volver a ser esa persona activa que siempre fue. Y eso se lo debo mucho a la persona que me devolvió la sonrisa con su fortaleza y con el amor que transmitía.

La vida da muchas vueltas pero cuando encuentras esa paz mental que no todos logran encontrar terminas mirando hacia atrás y ves todo lo que dios te hizo pasar y lo que tuviste que poner en prueba para salir adelante. Esta persona me enseñó todo lo que tuve que aprender para poder salir adelante. Así como a ella la vida la puso en prueba asi conmigo y aun así las dos poco a poco hemos logrado salir.

Ella no solo es una inspiración para mí sino para muchas más mujeres, niñas que se han sentido solas y que se han conectado con ella de alguna forma o otra. Y por eso la admiro mucho más de lo que la gente piensa. Si ella logró tener un corazón libre porque los demás no. Y por eso aprendí a creer a través de su voz. Logre tener la misma fuerza que ella tuvo.

Y si una vez me vuelvo a caer la volvería a elegir a ella como mi inspiración porque ella de verdad ayudo mucho.

I Learned to Believe through Her Voice (English Translation)

Not all the people who inspire me do so because of what they show to the world. Some inspire me because of what they carry in silence. And that is how a certain person managed to inspire me. She taught me that even if the whole world is against you, that does not define who you are, and that you are braver because, despite all the noise, you ended up getting back up on your own.

Just by hearing her voice and everything that happens around her and being able to be someone who makes even a small difference in her life, brings me great joy. Her silence ended up becoming what unleashed her strength. Yes, I fell, but her music and her voice always managed to heal something she never broke. And of course, she herself taught me that "No One Leaves the Same Way They Arrived," and she was absolutely right, because I didn't come this far just to watch myself fall.

And yes, there were "Tears in My Throat," but in the end those tears turn into happiness. Healing takes time, and that's why sometimes we need "A Minute of Silence" to reconnect with ourselves. She had a way of reconnecting with her people after falling. She had to face fears that no one else had to face, because everyone falls and gets back up in their own way. She faced her world with her head held high and with the help of her family. And I learned that I could do the same with my own demons.

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Maybe I didn’t have the support she had, but she supported me with every melody and every song. She was there when everything hurt. She was there when I didn’t know how to go on. She was there when I needed to feel that I wasn’t alone. That is what inspires me most about her: that if healing means disappearing from all the noise for a year and a half, then that is what has to be done.

I want to be like her in the future. She has a strength that no one else has managed to have. Returning to being yourself is something admirable. There were people who wanted to see her defeated, and even so, she never let them. Life is strange. Many times, women try to tear each other down, but if something bad happens to a woman, suddenly everyone feels sorry for her. This person taught me that you should never have another woman against you, and that women should treat each other equally. And even though many people—especially women—criticized her, she always stood firm and said, “Well-behaved women don’t make history.”

When I fell in my own moment, I felt that giving up was my only option, because I couldn’t see how to get out of where I was without running away from my thoughts. I wanted to escape from everything inside me and from where I was, but I couldn’t, because there was always that person who wouldn’t let you fall. Now more than ever, I understand what she meant when she said that while she was healing, she had people who loved her by her side, always holding her up, because they didn’t want to leave her alone. She didn’t deserve everything that happened to her.

And if there is one thing I have learned from her, it is this: everyone has their own battle, and everyone gets back up in their own way, but at the end of the day, they always return to the person they once were. Happiness comes back. The smile comes back. The desire to be that active person you always were comes back. And I owe that greatly to the person who gave me my smile back through her strength and the love she shared.

Life takes many turns, but when you find that mental peace that not everyone manages to find, you end up looking back and seeing everything God put you through and everything you had to face to move forward. This person taught me everything I needed to learn to keep going. Just as life tested her, it tested me too, and even so, little by little, we both managed to rise.

She is not only an inspiration to me, but to many other women and girls who have felt alone and who have connected with her in one way or another. That is why I admire her much more than people realize. If she managed to have a free heart, why can’t others? And because of her, I learned to believe through her voice. I found the same strength she had.

And if I ever fall again, I would choose her again as my inspiration, because she truly helped me so much.

Leaves from the vine...
Gerardo Rojas Encina, Grade 12

When I was 13, somewhere in the 8th grade, I had a dream. It was about me and my best friend, Emma, the one who decided to hang out and play with me in 3rd grade while I was alone playing with sand at recess; a period I wasn’t really myself and didn’t really have any friends around anymore. And ever since then, we were like peas in a pod, forever inseparable.

Unfortunately, in the 5th grade, she told me that she wanted and had to go to a different school in the 6th grade, her brother's school. I said I understand this and know where she's coming from, but I argued back that Encina is a good place. Especially when my sister is there, and she and I would be together. But even with my comments, she was still convinced of what she said about Encina and that it’s not worth it. But, she said if I want to go there, then she won’t stop me — I wished she had stopped me. But it would only prolong the inevitable between us; long-distance or not, I would never learn or grow as a person while being with her. It took me years to realize that. But the past me was persistent.

Before the last day of school, I tried several times to give her my Playstation username, so we can still keep in touch, continuing as friends from different schools. But before I knew it, after the ceremony at our 5th grade graduation, she was gone; nowhere to be seen. And I regret it, really; by not doing anything before. I really missed her when the quarantine

happened in 2020. It made me think back and remember, about how much I want to have it all back; go back in time and change it all. I wished… I wished to God. I begged, I begged, and I kept on begging while crying in bed, but… Silence. Nothing but silence. All I am is just a crying child who needs help. But like always, no one came, even when I reached.

Until at last, in my dream, we were together again, just like I wanted. Just like I asked and prayed for it to happen. Us hanging out with each other once again, being best buds, forever… Except, there was something wrong about this, about us, about me; this feeling inside. Because once we started talking and playing around with just the two of us, when I looked at her face, she had this huge smile that shined the world and was laughing out of joy because of me… And I didn't feel a single thing about it; empty, no joy at all. No immediate positive emotions that came out of me. I felt like an alien. I didn't know I wasn't happy; "Why don't I feel happy? Why can't I get the same happiness I had while I was in elementary school? Why can't I feel that anymore — it doesn't make any sense?!" I wanted to say something, I wanted to say something to her, about this feeling right now. But I was thunderstrucked to speak about this revelation, and we kept on hanging out, against my will. All I can do is watch how this dream plays out in front of me; "I don't understand, why?"

When I finally woke up from it. I immediately felt terror, sadness, and most importantly… Heartbreak. This pain, this experience, this regret… It's all too late to fix. It took the entire day and some writing to fully get over with, mostly because it was just a dream, right? "It won't happen, it can't happen, right!?" but deep down it will happen once we meet, and I hated it. I was nothing but a clueless boy who didn't know what was happening in his life. The people he sees; they all just come and go. Never fully understanding what was happening, and how to permanently make a friend for once in his life because no one taught him that. Or how to express his feelings to nyone; he couldn't even do that with his own family because it was always the same result. Not understanding him; all alone.

One thing to say about this dream is that it did help me from breaking down and losing it when I met an old best friend during 8th grade named Diesel; thankfully. It's probably just to reassure me that it's not the end. That there's still more that the world has to offer to people like me. Just got to keep trying, and hold it very tight this time. You can't just do nothing and get everything. Just like you can't do nothing, and just get a long term friend. I won't do "nothing," ever again.

My Name
Finn Rousseau
Rio Americano, Grade 10

When I was younger, there were girls in my class who shared my name. The other girls were pretty and popular, respected and beloved by all. I never got that. That love, that praise, that popularity, I never felt like that. I never got the chance.

When I was younger, my family would try to call me by nicknames. I always told them to call me by the name that they had given me. The name that made me feel included. I was trying to be more like the girls in my class.

When I was younger, I always looked up to the people around me. I did what they asked, I played whatever they wanted to play. I was a sheep; a total follower. I felt as if I needed to work in order to even be noticed like the girls in my class. I never got noticed, like a piece of paper. A piece of paper that was discarded for not looking right, acting right, being right. By the time I got to middle school, I started learning that no matter how hard I try, I can't make the other girls like me.

I got my name from my great grandmother. I never knew much about her, so I never felt tied to my name. I felt like there was nothing connecting me to my name except for some random woman that I would see every few years. When she passed away in 2020, I started thinking more about what my name means.

My given name is tied to a flower, a delicate plant, a symbol for purity and light. The grace and beauty of this flower has never resonated with me, and the name itself makes me feel uncomfortable. When I got that name, my family didn't know me yet. I didn't know myself yet, and I wouldn't meet myself for thirteen years.

The name that I was given was what I wanted to be, what I wanted to have, what I wanted to look like. I don't want that anymore, so I gave myself something new. To me, the name that I chose means comfort and safety and home. It means chosen family and acceptance. I'm not who I was seven years ago, because I now understand who I am. I'm happy, I'm seen, and above all, I'm Finn.

The World Through My Eyes

The world through my eyes
Is cold, loud, and gray
Like a skyscraper in the rain.
It is bleak, it is boring,
It is flooded with words
But I've learned to live through the storm.
Because every now and again
I discover something
That appears in neon colors.
It is bright, it is bold;
A book, person, or song,
That lights a match at the base of my brain.
Ideas burn in my mind
And escape onto a page
And for a moment there is silence.
The world through my eyes
Is cold, loud, and gray
With fuchsia lightning in the rain.

BIOGRAPHY

Finn Rousseau is an aspiring author, poet, and artist. His biggest inspirations are Harlan Ellison and Edgar Allan Poe, focusing on dark themes and surreal, bleak worlds. Growing up autistic, the easiest way for Finn to communicate his feelings were through writing, and he fell in love with the art form in first grade.

Mount Vernon
Miley Ryan
Bella Vista, Grade 12

Her house, fence full of splinters and side full of ivy, the grass has almost always been dead but there is something about her house that gives it life. The sound of her doorbell reminds me of what a clock tower in France would sound like, the stained glass on the front door, see through but adds to the beauty of it all.

When I walk into her house my nose is full of the scent of Folgers coffee and dust. The side table by the door was full of coffee candies, never looking like it was missing any, though every time we walked in I always took one or two. The living room looks like something out of a sitcom, the cranberry chair and box TV always gave me a sense of blues clues. Remember the Christmases sitting with her watching Rudolph the rednosed reindeer till we dozed off. Her kitchen is small and dim, eating toast with butter and jam on her little island. The fridge is full of art projects and fun magnets, getting so much playtime with them. Cabinets full of expired food, but no fail you could always find mothers iced oatmeal cookies, snickerdoodles and coffee, a lot of coffee.

The small dining room table I never saw anyone use, but it still feels like it belongs. The family room, the one with the fireplace, unused, but pretty looking. But the garage was the best part. The many hours I would play with my dolls on the cold floor, just me and my sister. The small fridge with a soda or two, but we wouldn't tell dad, she says. Out the back, on the patio, chairs count 4, and a wall of painted branches. The pool I learned to swim in. The dark deep end I never stepped foot in, the look of it would swallow me whole.

Left to the hallway, the bathroom, in the mirror she told me to look into when I was angry or upset, knowing I would start to giggle at the reflection of my crooked smile. The bedrooms we slept in when we had nowhere to go. In this house lives one of the greatest ladies I know.

I was 15 years old when she passed and I still had never seen her when it rained, though the day she died it did, but why was it like that? It sounded like a clip from a movie. But I felt, in a way, I saw her for the first time. When I found out, I wanted to call her, but that's so stupid to say, why would you want to call someone who's not there anymore? It's because some part of me didn't believe him, or anyone at that moment.

I wanted to believe the last time I talked to her wasn't actually the last time. I wanted to believe that it was some sort of prank and she had miraculously gotten better. I wanted to believe I would give her a hug for the last time, and tell her thank you and I love you and not let it go to waste. I knew that I would never get the chance to say that, ever again. I ran to the little hill by the football field and I stood there. Stand there watching the grey clouds, stand there thinking of her, of what I'm going to miss. Thinking of the last time I saw, unknowing it was our last time, we chatted like I just saw her the previous

day, like she was sitting in her cranberry chair. I could only give her stories and pictures and good times, I could give her the image of me and how I look like my mother, but act like my father. She gave me someone to hope for, someone to pray for, and she gave me exigence.

I stood there on that hill waiting for something to happen for someone to give me something, so god made it rain. This is my why; why I love so hard, why I care so much, and why it's hard to let things go. When you find the good in someone you want to hold onto, shape it, mold it, into you. Because at the end of the day, it's the people along the way that shape you into what you're meant to become.

BIOGRAPHY

Miley Ryan is a senior in high school who has been writing music and poetry for the past four years, being in marching band and track and field she always finds time in her life to write.

A White Coat for Both of Us
Yasna Saboori
Encina, Grade 10

My mother once told me she wanted to be a doctor. She said it quietly like it was something fragile. I remember watching her face as she spoke; how her eyes stayed somewhere far away, as if she was looking at a life she almost had.

She used to love school. Learning came to her easily. But the streets that led to her classroom grew dangerous, and wanting education became something you could be punished for. One day, fear replaced routine. Another day, explosions replaced dreams. And somehow, without a single decision, her future closed in on itself.

Years later, she stood in our kitchen and told me about it. About leaving. About watching everything she knew disappear. When she talked about becoming a doctor, her voice didn't break; but her eyes did. That was when I understood. She wasn't asking me to become something she couldn't. She was asking me to carry what she was forced to leave behind.

She told me she wanted to see me in a white coat. Not for pride. Not for status. But because she wanted to see a dream survive.

Now, every time I imagine my future, I see two people standing there. One is me. The other is a girl whose wings were cut before she could fly. I do it for both of us. I dream for both of us.My dream did not begin with me. I move forward with a hope that once had to stay behind, holding it carefully as I go, for myself and for someone who could only imagine this path.

BIOGRAPHY

Yasna Saboori is a sophomore at Encina high school. She was born in Takhar, Afghanistan. After the Taliban took over Afghanistan her family moved to the U.S. in 2024 seeking safety, freedom and basic human rights such as education. Ultimately, her desire for learning has kept her passionate about reaching her goals.

Joy
Alina S.
Del Campo, Grade 9

Joy from me,
After all the days that were
hard for me,
Now I see,
That I had passed,
Every class,
That was hard for me,

Joy filling me and you can see,
By me,
The sigh of relief filling me,
For the whole Day,
I had Joy feeling me,
Even if I had a test,
Joy was still here with me,

Everyone can see
that joy was with me,
People clapped,
Now and then,
After seeing me with joy.

Pushing for Your Passion
Lyn Samuels
El Sereno, Grade 12

What makes most people want to get out of bed and go on to have a good day? Rather than just sleeping in for that last peaceful 15 minutes of rest? Well, I wouldn't be able to say… See, I get the extra 15 minutes of sleep then go about my day. I suppose we should start with what makes me roll out of bed in the morning, it's usually my overbearing alarms, each set 5 minutes apart; but that's definitely not my why, or what keeps me going!

Setting that aside, the thing that keeps me going, my biggest motivator at the moment is to graduate high school. Isn't that what we are all thinking about right now though? Surely that's not enough to drive a person to keep going… Well, I aspire to do something big one day, but I'm not sure yet, which is a struggle most of us face. Simply growing, learning and finding myself will lead me to happiness, it will lead me to my why. This in turn, I believe will lead me to find my passion, to find a successful career that I hopefully will enjoy one day!

There are too many things I could say that can give reason to my life, or my day by day routine. I live in a sea of rather descriptive words. Lets see what the top 3 words that describe my life are right now: Adventurous, challenging, and last of all chaotic. You could say I'm all over the place, but you could also say that there's always a reason why my life is currently like this. I've been trying to find out why, but I've come to no avail.

You will change as a person, nothing and I mean nothing is set in stone for your future, you make your own decisions, you grow, you learn, and your why evolves to have a greater meaning or purpose in your life. Your why will change, but in a sense it'll always be the same, because at the core, it's always you who's pushing on, you're the one striving to cross the finish line! No one thing will ever be the same no matter how close it looks to another, you are unique, your reason to pursue your dreams is unique, because there is only one you on Planet Earth!

What makes you feel alive? Well, I don't know you, but I do know myself! For me, the combination of a long drive in the mountains and music makes me feel alive, the cool breeze in my hair, the scenery, the twists and turns, it's therapeutic to a very deep point in my soul. I'm easily inspired by nature and love all things related. From having grown up near Pollock Pines in my early childhood, travelling to Northern California, for example the Coastal Redwoods, to MT. Rainier in Washington State, I'm very familiar with nature! I love the smell of the bark sitting on sand on beach shores, I love hearing the morning birds' songs, I love the way the colors fade together in every single sunset. My absolute favorite place is Lassen Volcanic National Park. 4 generations of my family have been going there; it's an absolute beauty.

However in 2021 the Dixie fire burnt about 69% of the park, leaving a forest of pointy sticks instead of its former glory. I was

actually on vacation there 3 days before the fire happened, and although I'm completely devastated about the wreckage, I'm glad I got to see it in all its glory before the unexpected. Revisiting yearly after, it makes me want to take some action, to conserve, or restore, I just want to do anything, because this park was a place where I was always truly happy. It could be me missing "the old days" and just wanting to re-live that, but this is also a serious issue, it's hard for me to personally think about.

Maybe in this small writing I've discovered a bigger part of my why; this is what I mean by finding yourself and learning, you are you, you know you, maybe you just need to put it into words. Just writing about my love for nature, and being all philosophical, I've learned more about myself. I know you can do the same thing, I believe in you! I know myself better than anyone, so the same automatically goes for you! Go on and live your life with an ever changing why, but keep the core in mind and in heart, it's you, give yourself some credit!

If I Died Right Now
Paige Saumure
Rio Americano, Grade 12

If I died right now I would not be satisfied
I would not feel like I made my mark
Like I went over my proper arch
I'd feel that my emotions weren't matured enough
That I didn't have experiences I should've
Like sharing a kiss or popping a bottle
My life always feels at full throttle
But it's not, not in the way we should be living it
I've burnt the happy candle, the worker one is still lit
I work and care so much about what's forward
And yet, that's not what gets you the reward
In the end it's the love and passion that spark the satisfaction
But when you haven't experienced it, it feels like a fraction
A piece of the puzzle that you've missed out on
And then all of the sudden,
You're gone.

BIOGRAPHY

Paige Saumure is a Senior at Rio Americano who has been passionate about poetry since being published in 3rd grade for her poem "Something, That Something." From there, she's continued to write, being published by the 2nd annual SJUSD Literary Magazine. After she graduates, she'll attend a four-year university, majoring in Political Science and double minoring in Philosophy and Journalism.

My Why
Leah Schlocker
Del Campo, Grade 9

The feeling of being alive
Does not come guaranteed,
The feeling of being alive
Comes with great responsibility

Staying up late talking to friends,
After school meets ups, we always attend,
Always trying to catch the next trend
Decisions are made by hitting dead ends,

Sometimes, to live life fully, you have to transcend
Holding on to an idea like holding on to an old friend

Some people choose to pretend
While others choose to blend
But does that ever have an end?
Getting by until the next weekend



Artist Name:
Daria Lavrenova

School/Grade:
Bella Vista, Grade 11

Title:
Unleashed

Medium:
Multimedia - Colored pencils

Artist's Statement:
This drawing shows a greyhound in mid-jump, full of energy and grace. The stretched body and strong muscles make it feel fast and alive, but still grateful. The piece is about freedom, movement, and doing what you love, capturing a moment that feels real.

Wellus VonSaintswood's Great Heist
Dash Seabolt
Bella Vista, Grade 12

Why do I continue to live? A question I often propose to myself, and one that I struggle to answer time and time again. A question that seems to haunt every moment of my life. Yet somehow, I am unaffected by the weight of such an inquiry. My disregard for the question could be for one reason or another, but whatever said reason may be is not my concern. Someone as great as I surely cannot worry about matters such as that when I have to dedicate my entire being to my next big score.

For I am, The Great Rogue of Pelepetter, The Most Cunning Thief in all of the lands, The Scoundrel of Tinna'Vont, The Dashing, most Handsomest Marauder the lands have ever known; Wellus VonSaintswood have set my sights on my next great score. I will be going after the capital of this continent's great vault to steal the bountiful amounts of riches it possesses, so much so that it will forever change my life. I may never need to steal ever again. For once, I may be able to live an honest life, and then, only then, may I finally have the answer that I have been looking for. But I must focus on the task at hand, the heist.

The capital is, of course, a super highly guarded location; its vault is even more so, so this job will not be as easy as many of my other past jobs have been; in fact, this job will be on an entirely different level than any other job I have ever done, but even with that being true, it shall still be a breeze for someone as great as I. While I wish I could share my whole plan with you, it is too great for you to fully understand the brilliance behind it, so just follow along with my recounting of the events, my dear viewer. Now, with that being said, my heist shall commence, and with it, the first steps to a much grander, fuller life.

It started with burying myself amongst the packages and packages of meaningless rubbish that came and went from the capital, allowing me to easily hitch a ride into the castle gates and into the courtyard. Anyone could get inside the courtyard, of course, but such a renowned criminal as I would be noticed and arrested on site. Once inside the courtyard, I waited till late after dark when most, if not all, the buzzing populace checked in for the night, there under the great coating of night, I snuck from shadow to shadow as if one with them myself reaching ever so closer to the inside of the castle walls themself. I could imagine now how those riches would forever change me, the crickets and toads almost seemed as if their croaks were singing me my victory song already, but I shouldn't get too hasty, I still have to get inside the castle and then the vault, a long way to go.

As I prepared for the next step of the plan, I heard one of the patrolling knights nearby. I didn't have much time as they already sounded close, and my next step was still not ready. Just before the knight reached me, I was struck with great inspiration. I was to be a beggar and beg for just one knight in his highness's great castle. And of course, much like every other plan of mine, it went perfectly.

The brave ol' knight, being the kind soldier he is, led me right inside to a nice warm guest room, which almost made me regret what I was soon to do to his king. After I was certain there was no more movement within the halls, I began the final stages of my plan. I crept out of my room and through the halls and explored just about every crevice of the castle that I could reach, yet still no vault.

I had begun to feel defeated, which is at this point when it hit me that the king knows better than to give all his treasures to one room that could be easily found; no, no, no, it would be hidden and hidden well. It was at this point that I remembered something crucial, which led me to exactly where I needed to be, the wine cellar. The king loves his wine, so of course, he'd put the other thing he loves most in the world with it, his treasure. It was from here that I discovered the secret vault hidden behind a fake tankard of wine, carefully making my way down to the riches.

I had but one thought: This is what my life is about.

BIOGRAPHY

Dashiell Seabolt is a young author who enjoys music, writing, and hopes to one day write his own comics, he has had two short stories published in last year's literary magazine as well.

My Why
Elissa Silva
Del Campo, Grade 9

I wake up to sunlight sneaking
through my window,
My phone buzzing with messages I
haven't opened yet.
Some days feel heavy, like my
backpack full of books,
But I still get up, because there's
something waiting—
A laugh at lunch, music in my
earbuds,
The feeling today could be
different.

What shapes my choices are the
people around me,
friends who know my real laugh,
family who reminds me who I am
when I forgot.
The world can be loud and messy
and confusing,
but it teaches me to be stronger,
to speak even when my
voice shakes.

What makes me feel alive is being
Myself,
weighing my thoughts down when I
can't say them out loud.
I'm motivated by the future I haven't
met yet,
the person I'm still becoming.
My why is hope—
hope that tomorrow will understand
me a little better.

How I Will Repay You
Zak Sims
Encina, Grade 12

There are many reasons and things that make me feel alive, and or motivate me to get out of bed in the morning, but the most important is my family. My parents and siblings push me and help me to be a better person in so many ways either if that's from telling me what to and what not to do, or me learning from their mistakes. My family is the reason I get up and continue to thrive even when I'm tired and don't want to. My family is the reason I never just give up and downplay myself.

My family is why I hold myself to a high standard, and not just do something because I can. But out of everyone in my family my main “why” is my mom and dad. I've always had love for my parents but the day I really felt the love back is when I was 7 years old. I was in a light sleep and woke up to the sound of my family laughing. I climbed out of my bunk bed and looked out the window. It was dark and I was confused that I had been sleeping for that long. Rubbing my eyes walking slowly down the hallway trying to fully get up, I see my mom.

The first thing she asked me was “why are you limping”. I said, "I'm not”, not but sadly noticed I was after I looked down and took a couple more steps. My mom brought me into the living room to see what was going on, putting the hurt leg up on the couch. Right when she pulled my pajama pants up we were met with a big bump on the side of my knee. She went to touch it and I screamed, I had not felt anything like it. The pain was indescribable but my mom was still curious about what was inside.

She then pushed on both sides pushing some weird blood and pus liquid out from the bump. I was now in tears and she told me “We will see tomorrow go lay back down,” and I did just that. When I woke up my leg had hurt worse than before and started to itch.

My dad kept telling me not to itch it or mess with it until my mom got back. I started to not feel well and the pain in my leg got worse and that's when my dad pulled my pant leg up. The bump was worse and nasty looking filled with pus. My dad put a band-aid on it and took me to the hospital. I woke up when we arrived at the hospital feeling worse than before, my head and stomach were now hurting badly. So my dad carried me and halfway there I threw up over his back.

He rushes into the emergency room and it takes like 5 mins for me to be seen. The doctor thinks nothing of it and pulls the band-aid off. When pus started spewing and spraying it sent me and the doctor into a big panic, I started to squirm and try to get away but my dad held me covered with some cloth. She ran out of the room, then a man doctor came in. He looked at my leg and instantly said “We need to take your son”. I was crying scared, not wanting to leave my dad but I had to.

The next thing I remember is me waking up in a hospital bed and Transformers playing on the TV. I look around to see mom. She immediately got up and gave me the biggest hug and started to call my dad. She had come straight from work with nothing to eat, no shower just to be with me. My dad then comes forcing her to leave and go home but also to shower and see the other kids. I talk to my dad for a little bit before shortly going to sleep again. I wake up and it's finally morning time. I see the doctor in the corner and look for my dad but it was my mom. She had slept at the hospital with me and then stayed for another day before my dad forced her to go home and shower.

The time between her leaving and coming back was crazy. She didn't want to leave my side. She then stayed with me for 7 days, leaving here and there to see my siblings, showering and coming straight back. It turned out that I had a really bad spider bite and if I hadn't come anytime sooner I could have lost my leg. The love and support my parents both showed during that time is what I look back to when I'm discouraged, or not wanting to get out of bed, and I think how I have to repay someday.

The Day Ends
Sophia S.
Del Campo, Grade 9

From the moment you wake up,
To the moment the sun hits your face,
To the moment you get dressed,
The Day Ends.

To the minute you brush your teeth,
To the second you're out the house,
To the moment you're in the car,
The Day Ends.

Time unfolds,
Tests are sooner,
Presentations fear you.
But you think for one moment,
The Day Ends eventually.

Earth Cannot Yearn
Erin Spratt
Bella Vista, Grade 11

We begin with empty hands,
Dropped onto our given lands.
Starting some with passage paved,
Others claw to find their ways.

Life is built through open doors.
With some unlocked, and others forced.
Having no clue which is for you,
But choosing from just one won't do.

To find the one and only way,
To gain the options one must weigh,
A price is paid in blood and sweat.
An shot on every front and yet,

It never seems to be enough.
The hope for more is always snuffed.
So… why try?
Grapple with your absurd existence.

Get up.
Keep going.
Slide through classes, workouts, chores,
Body moving but the mind?
No one can see inside the mind.

But such is how the earth turns,
It doesn't think, it doesn't yearn.
It keeps its motion mile to mile,
It plasters on a weightless smile.

The key to life, to know not think.
Knowledge keeps you on the brink.
To understand and live life too,
Information makes you true.
Seek until the end.

Best Night Of My Life
Malachi Sterling
Encina, Grade 12

A couple of weeks before the best night of my life, I remember saying, "I don't think I'm gonna go to Homecoming."

But then my friends were like, "Why won't you go? It's the second to last year of high school. It would be a missed opportunity, and it would be fun, so what's the harm?" So, I decided to go.

A few days before the Homecoming rally, there was a poll for each grade to pick some people to be homecoming royalty. After they finished the activities, they announced the Homecoming royalty. They announced 3 or 4 for each grade. Fast forward to 11th grade, and I got picked. I knew a couple of people voted for me, but when I got picked, I wondered in my head how many people actually voted for me?

I walked down to the center of the gym; one of my other friends also got picked. It was my senior friend, Nate. I was laughing, but also in shock that he got picked. He wasn't so happy about it before all of this happened. I was just going through junior year, I was almost out of high school, and about to become 18 years old very soon. I was surprised, I knew I was pretty well known around campus, but not popular.

A few days later, everyone was talking about what they were going to wear to homecoming, suits and dresses. I did not have the luxury of having a suit, so I needed to improvise. I thought of wearing a button-up shirt, some jeans, and some nice shoes. As the days went by, I kept thinking about how it would go and what the vibe would be in the atmosphere, because I've never been to a homecoming before, so I just let school go by, and I was overthinking it.

Furthermore, it was the only thing me and my friend group could talk about everyone was like are you gonna go to homecoming with someone? I said, "Nah, I'm just trying to go with the boys, enjoy the night with everyone." The group and I were just playing super smash bros after school, because we were bored, and it's really the only thing we all played after school for a couple of hours, then we left, and we all headed home.

When I got home, sat down, and a few minutes went by, I got up to go get something to eat, and then sat back down in front of my TV to game for a few more hours. I was playing For Honor at the time, and I got done playing that. It got pretty late, so I decided to hop off and get some sleep. I woke up and chilled most of the weekend so I could keep my mind off of school, and heading back to school on Monday it had me thinking, really, I'm I really wasting my time going to this event Friday night, but then I just thought: the majority of the friend group was going, so there's no point into staying home, So I just went with the flow for the rest of the week until Friday. Week goes by, and it's Friday and after school I chill before I go home to change and come back.

Fast forward a couple of hours, and I looked at the time, so I decided to leave. So I could go get changed and head to the dance. So I get there, and I see all my friends, and we all greet each other, then we all head to the dance room, chill in there for a bit, then the group splits off to do their own things. I stayed in the dance room singing my lungs out was pretty fun. That's what I did for the most of the night but I did take some photos with the group and got my thing for being Homecoming royalty.

Honestly I'm so happy I didn't stay home because I got to hangout with some of my Senior friends I don't talk to anymore. It was such a great experience I would do it all over again.



Artist Name:
Camila Vaca Tapia

School/Grade:
El Camino, Grade 11

Title:
Sugar Kissed Brunch

Medium:
Acrylic Paint

Artist's Statement:
A brunch picnic features French toast, cinnamon rolls, croissants, bagel, and a smiling waffle on a checkered cloth, plus coffee and tea. Beyond food, it reflects the artist's struggle with an eating disorder, most especially with sweets. Food feels threatening towards her body, which is an importance of an everyday life problem. This is her comfort. 16-year-old Mexican-American student attending High school.

The Joys of Life
Anonymous

That little spark
of joy
from friends.

That little feeling
when you give
people gifts
and put a smile
on their face.

That little joy
you feel
when you do
the right thing.

That little breeze
in the forest
when you go
for a stroll.

That little feeling
when people
appreciate
the hard work–
and love your work.

That little jolt
in your heart
when your brother
says hello.

And, that little meow
and pounce
when I
wake up.

My Team of Hope
Yuki Suzuki
Bella Vista, Grade 11

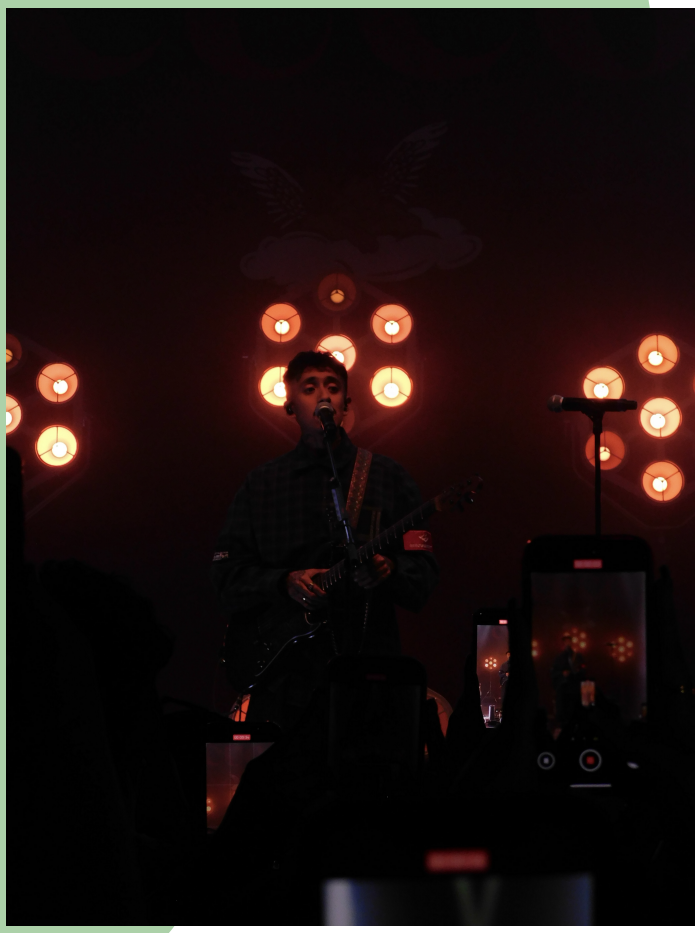
Life. It's something everybody has, but it's something that a large majority of people unfortunately simply take for granted. And that was something in my life I never fully realized until just a few months ago. Now, reflecting back, I can more easily answer my question of: "How did I get to that point?" And to even begin answering this, it all commenced about two years ago.

It was the beginning of the second semester of my freshman year. And being that age, obviously I was online for a while, striking conversations with people, and just having a fun time. But during that age, something stirred within me, and while I couldn't quite grasp it at that moment, it would then spark a journey lasting over a year to even attempt comprehending the true spectrum of my own identity as a queer person. And yet, even with all of this extreme confusion, I still wouldn't have it any other way. Being queer has immensely opened my perception of the world, along with but obviously, these fascinating self-discoveries have come with some severe consequences. As I continuously learned about my identity, there more I felt a need to lie. Lie to hide my true colors. Lie to protect my relationships. But unfortunately, that has done more negativity to myself rather than others. The main example that comes to mind is that some of my friends could potentially be queerphobic, and then knowing that information could decline our friendship.

But having to keep this extremely major secret about myself has negatively affected something worth even greater than my friendships: my mental health. At that time, I couldn't understand the crippling grasp this secret held on my mind, but as time went on, my situation would only deteriorate even further. I would eventually develop some issues, such as depression, anxiety, and an overwhelming amount of stress, all of which mainly stemmed from the fear of people uncovering even this tiny bit of confidential information of mine. However, as time went on, I started to realize that being out to more people could potentially be a benefit. Doing this would allow me to relieve that burden on my shoulders, and even find allies who I could feel comfortable being around. While having its own risks, the beneficial potential of being out was more promising to me than staying closeted for years on end. So, I slowly started opening up about myself. First, mainly online, as I had relatively few friends who I knew in person, and it was obviously easier to tell people online about a secret that likely wouldn't make its way into my personal life easily. Fast forward to near the end of my sophomore year of high school, and I am out to a few of my friends.

But during summer break, I decided to take a major leap, which would require immense amounts of confidence on my part. For context, every year, during the last week of July, my cross-country team hosts a summer camp. There are many fun activities, and to end the week on Thursday night, our team has a bonfire where we give out secret buddy gifts that we created throughout the previous few days, and share stories around the campfire. It is an absolutely amazing experience, and a very emotional one at that. I didn't say anything at last year's bonfire, and didn't go to camp in 2023. But this past summer, I decided to come out to the whole team as non-binary. Being on the team for two years, it has done wonders with making connections and boosting my mental health, that I wanted them to know this information, that I was able to trust them with this secret. In fact, I would consider this a second family of mine with how much I enjoy being around them, running or not. To help my anxiety while I was speaking, I did have a couple close friends up there with me, which greatly helped. After I told them I was non-binary and wanted to go by Yuki, I was overjoyed to hear applause, cheers, and later, a lot of hugs affirming me afterwards.

Nowadays, I understand more that some kids who are queer don't receive the support they need, especially from people who are close to them, and this makes the team even more special to me. Because if not, who knows how greatly my mental health or even my life could've deteriorated if it weren't for the comfort I feel everyday being around these people. Having supportive friends is one of the best things you can have basically for free, but it does wonders for one's health, which is why I am all the more grateful for them, now and forever.



Artist Name:
Emanuel Huante Aldrete

School/Grade:
El Camino, Grade 11

Title:
Audible Warmth

Medium:
Nikon L840 Digital Camera

Biography:
Emanuel, a 16-year-old 1st-generation Hispanic student who does photography on the side. Showcases emotion and memories through lights of lenses with unique style, found within the composition and aura radiating off his work-it stands out, its uniquely his.

Artist Statement:
Photo was taken at a warm emotional Cuco concert in the beautiful downtown Sacramento area that I'm in love with, the beautiful scenery and lights it has to offer near the venue of Channel 24. The atmosphere and crowd made this night unforgettable and imprinted into the moment captured by the camera. It's moments like these that can move you as a person and save lives, countless lives have been saved through the love of music and communities presented by it. As all our voices joined together it created a harmony that touched everyone's souls including the artist as he expressed how he was moved by the shared love of the audience.

Music is Why
Sariah Thompson
Del Campo, Grade 12

I used to be bored all of the time
It was because I didn't have a reason why
I had nothing that made me feel alive
It took me a while to realize
That music was my why

The motive behind my passion
Is the same one who taught me fashion
It is none other than
My very own mother
She is not the only reason
My grandma pays for my lessons
Always cheering me on
And sometimes they sing along

As my fingers fly across the keys
I only think of one little thing
How I was eight years ago
Too scared to play on the stage all alone
Now here I am, preparing
To play in church and it's really scary

For Her
Emeraude Vazquez-Sandoval Encina, Grade 11

I am doing this for her.
I want to make her proud.
She's made so many sacrifices for me, most importantly her education.
When she found out that she was pregnant with me, she was studying nursing at Sacramento State University.
She tried to continue the year but she couldn't because of how difficult it was to care for a child at 20 and study at the same time.
The only way I can repay her is if I do amazing in school and graduate from high school and from a good college.
That's why I go to school.
Why I try so hard to get A's and do extracurricular activities.
I want to make sure she feels like I wasn't a waste of all those sacrifices.
I want to be able to have the life that she would want me to have.
I also just want to feel accomplished and do more for my community.
I want to help the next generation of students succeed in life, that's why I want to study to become a teacher.
I am doing this for her and the future generation.
I am doing this for the future she would want me to have.
That is **My Why.**

BIOGRAPHY

Emeraude (pronounced ema-rude) Vazquez-Sandoval is a Junior at Encina High School studying in the CTE Careers in Education pathway. She's involved in many clubs and activities for her 2nd year at Encina such as Somos Latinos Club, GSA club, plays defensive in soccer, and is currently trying out for Track and Field. She is going to be a first generation high school graduate in 2027 and is planning to study at Sacramento State University or at UC Davis.

Son Of Raven
Anonymous

The last name Velazquez comes from Spain, meaning son of Velasco, and Velasco is derived from Belasko which translates to raven. The raven symbolizes intelligence and adaptability-similar to the raven I have had to adapt to having been given this trojan horse of a last name.

Before I knew how to crawl, before I knew how to walk ,before I knew how to understand the man who gave me my last name walked out. The one person who I was always supposed to look up to was determined to leave even if it meant becoming invisible to everyone on earth. I had a burning fear of me turning out like him but my mom always said I may have inherited his last name, face, and other physical traits but I inherited her heart, compassion and loyalty. It helped but didn't put out that burning feeling.

At home no one treated me differently but I still felt like I stuck out like a sore thumb because I was the only one in my entire family with that man's last name. Every time I would hear it ,it made me feel like I was a reminder of the man everybody hated. My siblings always told me, "Mom should've given you her last name", or "What if you had our last name?" I know they meant well but it only made me resent it more. I pleaded and begged to change it.

To restart and become part of the family. But my mom said we couldn't because "Money doesn't grow on trees."

During my elementary days I always saw kids with their example of a man to look up to, The person that was there for them no matter what. That's all I wanted: Someone to help me tie my shoes, someone who could teach me how to swim.

Someone who could teach me to ride a bike, to drive, shave, deal with emotions, and how to be a good man, even though he was gone all he left me a shadow of his negativity in my standing over my life.

Once the 15th year of his disappearance rolled around, something in my mind had shifted focus like a crossroads in my future. I realised I didn't want to end up like a mirrored image of my father. I could choose to let that man's actions dictate who I would become with the last name Velazquez, I could choose to walk out on my duties, relationships, and my creations in reaction to fear or uncertainty but instead I have decided to battle the giant he didn't. I decided to adapt, and try to turn my last name into something to be proud of, not only for me but for the people who will eventually look up to me, for my own Velazquez's.

Echela Ganas

As I gear up for the long, tough, and brutal practice I ask myself why I'm going through rigorous training day in and day out? Why do I ignore my injuries just to keep my starting spot? I go to practice with aching shoulders, bruised knees, and a constant battle with my mind whether to drop on my back like an animal or to keep on trucking through everything. As my vision fades due to exhaustion, I hear the sound of my mother's voice "Echela ganas mijo." Since the first day of pre-school that phrase has been chiseled into my heart and mind. Even at my lowest, lower where there's a feeling of no escape, that phrase always runs around my mind like a marathon "Echale ganas mijo." It rescues me from that feeling of no escape, giving me hope and a ladder to climb higher than I did before I fell. I carry that phrase with me in everything I do from delivering a big hit on the field, driving my feet on takedown on the mat, or giving it my all in the classroom, I will do it all Con ganas.

Wake Up
Olivia Verne
Casa Roble, Grade 9

The familiar smell of coffee greets me as I wake up, but that is not the reason my feet hit the floor beneath my bed. I opened my eyes from what felt like a blink but was actually eight hours of sleep, instantly filled with the overwhelming thoughts coming from my head. The thoughts of failure repeating in my mind like an advertisement with a catchy song.

If I don't get out of bed, I won't go to school. If I don't go to school, I'll miss assignments. If I miss assignments, I will fail my classes. If I fail my classes I won't graduate. If I don't graduate, I won't succeed.

I let those thoughts repeat till I felt my feet hit the scratchy carpet beneath my bed, the thoughts leaving my head temporarily,this insidious cascade of "what if's" and dire predictions held me captive for what felt like an eternity, each thought weaving a tighter web of anxiety.

I got up, I affirmed myself, a silent declaration of defiance against the lingering shadows of doubt. The sound of pencils on paper surrounds me as I dissociate on a faint line on the wall. I do not know what it is or how it got there but it seems like my attention is completely consumed by it. The pencils stop which snaps me back into reality, the realization that my pencil is not moving nevertheless not in my hand as well, the thoughts come back.

If I don't finish this assignment I won't be prepared for the test. If I am not prepared for my test, I won't get a good score. If I don't get a good score, I won't pass the class. If I don't pass the class, I will fail.

The thoughts snap me completely back into reality, grabbing my pencil like a safety vest on a sinking ship, I flip my paper once I do it again; it seems like I have forgotten that I have already finished which brings me back to the reason for my apparent focus on the wall.

I was already done, which did not matter much to me since the thoughts of academic failure brought me back to reality and kept me going for the rest of the academic day, not by choice, but the same insidious fear that had dragged me out of bed.

What Bailee Is
Bailee Wagnon
Casa Roble, Grade 12

Everyone asks what is my why? What keeps pushing you; people ask how you are so strong? How can you keep a smile on your face?

The truth is I had been wanting kill myself, it's hard to have no friends to hang out with whenever or talk about graduation and plans after graduating. I try to find ways to overcome it, I write and try to talk about it but no one will understand the pain of always not being wanted.

Every time you try to make friends they all go away when you need them the worst. People change, everyone changes.

What keeps me pushing is I want to change how kids treat each other. I am also the oldest of them all and they need someone to be there for them. I also have a sweet goofball puppy that needs me and my family.

They need me to push, even if I have fake it, they won't know until this is shared to the world but I need to show people like me it's ok to be alone. It's ok not to figure out what you want to do with your life. It's ok to have an IEP and still have a hard time in school, like I did.

So this is Bailee, this is what Bailee is. My message in this poem is to keep pushing no matter what. At the end of the day you matter as much as everyone else does. You're enough and perfect just the way you are.

When The World Goes Quiet
Mackenzie Warr
Bella Vista, Grade 10

When the world goes quiet, what do you hear? It's late at night and the streetlights come on, the neighbors dog finally stops barking, the birds stop chirping, and the kids that play at the park behind your house head home for the night. The world seems to go quiet. You lay down in bed, looking up at the ceiling, alone with just you and your thoughts. What plays in your mind?

Every single night for over 14 months, the same question replayed in my head, “What’s the point of it all?” The more I thought about it, the louder it grew. I tried everything to make it stop. I blasted music through my headphones, I stayed up at night scrolling on my phone to distract myself, I tried to keep myself busy until one day I just couldn’t anymore. I was eventually consumed by my own thoughts. The same question I couldn’t stop asking myself also forced me to search for an answer. My teachers have always reported that I’m a great problem solver, but this time it seemed there was no solution. I gave up. I stopped replying to messages, I stopped eating, and I stopped speaking. I couldn’t focus in class like I used to, so my once perfect grades dropped, and suddenly my teachers stopped acknowledging my problem solving skills. They told me I just need to try harder, and as I silently stared back at them with heavy eyes and a heavier heart, I thought of the same thing I had been thinking of every moment for weeks, “Why?”

Although I was silent on the outside, inside my head was unbearably loud. I often found myself socially isolating. I was constantly alone with my thoughts. Things just got worse, and at my lowest, before I went to sleep at night, a part of me wished I wouldn’t awake the next day, yet morning came every time. After the sun had risen and I realized I was awake, all I could do was cry. Each time I woke up, I knew I had to face another day silently fighting for my life. The weight of the world was like no other, and I had to carry it with me for yet another day, each step more painful than the last.

There was one night in particular where everything changed. Once again I was sitting alone on my bed, staring at the blank wall in front of me. As tears streamed down my face, I looked up, I saw my cat sleeping on the foot of my bed. For the first time in what felt like forever, instead of thinking about the meaning of my existence, I thought of something else. If I wasn’t here, who would care enough to talk to my cat? I thought back to when I was younger, I would come home and immediately tell my cat about my day, even though he never responded. So this got me thinking about similar experiences, like how for each of my friends’ birthdays, I would write down everything I loved about them just so they would know I appreciate them. I remembered how almost every single night I would go on long walks around my neighborhood and stop to pet every single cat I saw. Memories of everything I have done to spread my love to the world came flooding in. But what I really remembered is who I truly am. I’m a thoughtful person with so much love to share with the world. I remembered that the light inside me used to shine so bright, until one day when my light gave out.

I now wake up every morning, ready for another great day. Every morning is a new opportunity to make someone's light shine brighter. Everyday I can help others carry the weight I once walked alone with. Now of course I’m not anywhere near perfect, and there are people who would tell you I’m not a kind person, but that just gives me even more reason to keep pushing. Everyday I wake up and strive to be an even better person than I was the day before.

Some days I do think back on that question that once controlled my life, and I ask myself once again, what is the point of all this? Well now I have finally found my answer, my motivation, and my reason for living. It’s to show the world that whatever darkness that consumes you won’t last forever. I want to help others going through the same thing I once did and give them hope that they will get better, and I want to tell them that the greatest thing you can offer the world is your love.

A Man of Magnitude
Ryland Wilson
Bella Vista, Grade 11

There's a flame in my heart
A wanting for more
An unending need, insatiable greed
Crying a defiant roar

What am I to do?
But reach through the night sky
Take hold of the moon, make use of my boon
Blaze bright 'till the day I die

Alas, it won't suffice
My fire burns thin
First, I'll cast my hair
Then the rest of my skin
My scorched bone a petty price
For my own ambitious vice

To what length will I go?
'Till I'm all burnt bone
My limbs torn apart
All for a throne
And a flame in my heart
With all else subdued
My ambition will accrue
Ah, the things I'd do
To be a man of magnitude

Beyond the Sky

Emboldened by flame
Large balloons take to the sky
No limits in sight

Work Shouldn't Be Your Why, but a Means to Achieve it
Mark Yadchuk
Bella Vista, Grade 11

When you are young, the driving question that adults ask you is "what do you want to be when you grow up?" Most people end up changing their answer to this question as they get older children default to the idea of becoming a first responder, as those professions are looked at in a positive light by many. Then, dreams begin to form- becoming an athlete, a movie star, or a singer- only to be replaced, in most cases, by "practical" jobs. People begin aspiring to attain corporate positions that many people are accustomed to like data analysis, accounting, or marketing.

There is a complex argument to be had about to what extent you should follow your dreams. But no matter what job you are looking for, there is something fundamentally flawed with expecting a child or adolescent to answer that question: "What do you want to be when you grow up?" with a job title. It implies that a person's value is derived from what position on the corporate ladder they find themselves in or how much money they make. Instead, it is time to start answering that question with character traits. We can change that question from "What do you want to be when you grow up?" to "What kind of person do you want to be when you grow up?"

With this approach, a child develops a vision of what type of person they want to be instead of confining themselves to one specific role. They will be more inclined to follow their dreams, but also not be devastated if they don't achieve it in the form of a job since they can still achieve their general goal. If you become a professional

athlete, that's great! But that is simply not the reality for most people, so having a more generalized goal like being "physically active via time spent on an activity I enjoy" is a more achievable feat that can bring you satisfaction amongst other things in your life. This type of rhetoric can be applied to literally any job. Instead of "I want to be a policeman," it can be "I want to be a hero in my community." Instead of "I want to be a movie star," it can be "I want to spend time developing my acting skills." Instead of "I want to be a data analyst," it can be "I want to be part of a team working towards a meaningful goal." When your "why" is to develop a certain type of character, you both broaden your job options and create a more meaningful life for yourself. Or how about something even simpler? A child can just say that they want to be "kind" or "helpful"- and there are a million great ways to do that.

Changing the sentiment surrounding this is especially important in today's world. We are living in a tension-one where we could see a significant restructuring of the labor market due to the rapid advancement of technology in areas like AI and robotics. The children going into Kindergarten this fall will likely graduate into an economy where the jobs that exist today are either heavily changed or completely nonexistent. So, a child finding meaning in the idea of them becoming a translator someday might find themselves heavily disappointed when they find that the translation job market is crushed.

But it's not necessarily a negative thing that we have to switch this paradigm. In today's world, not even considering the future, the majority of people are dissatisfied with their working conditions. According to a CBS News survey released in October 2025, 60% of workers do not feel that their job "offers basics such as fair pay, a steady schedule, and career growth." If people are already finding some dissatisfaction from their work, we shouldn't be making work the center of a person's identity.

However, we shouldn't get the impression that work is useless, either. Like mentioned earlier, if a child wants to be a "helpful member of their community," then becoming a doctor is a great way to fulfill that goal. But the goal of becoming a doctor is most meaningful when it coincides with a broader goal, making sure that you are never deprived of meaning in case that doctor job ends up fizzling out.

All of this circles back to the fundamental questions we ask in life- "what should I do?" "why am I doing this?" "what is my purpose?" Sure, you can answer that question with a job, but we should first aspire to becoming better people, doing the things we love, and making connections with others. Together, we as a society can give ourselves permission to pursue more than just jobs.

Turning Fear Into Career
Rana Zaheer
Encina, Grade 11

Nine years ago. When I was 6,7 years old I lived in Afghanistan. I went to the dentist. I was terrified because I had a toothache. I did not want to sit in the chair امز من خوخیدی. But the dentist was kind and helped me to stay ارام. The dental assistant came and took her time to explain everything. She told me مم رادیزی. That reassured me.

The nurse checked my teeth and kept asking if I was okay. After the visit I felt very happy. That moment is why I want to go into the dental field.

With Pashto Words Translated:

Nine years ago. When I was 6,7 years old I lived in Afghanistan. I went to the dentist. I was terrified because I had a toothache. I did not want to sit in the chair and I didn't like it. But the dentist was kind and helped me to stay calm. The dental assistant came and took her time to explain everything. She told me,"don't be scared." That reassured me.

The nurse checked my teeth and kept asking if I was okay. After the visit I felt very happy. That moment is why I want to go into the dental field.

BIOGRAPHY
Rana Zaheer is an 11th grade student at Encina High School. Originally from Afghanistan, she now plans to pursue a career in the dental field.



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