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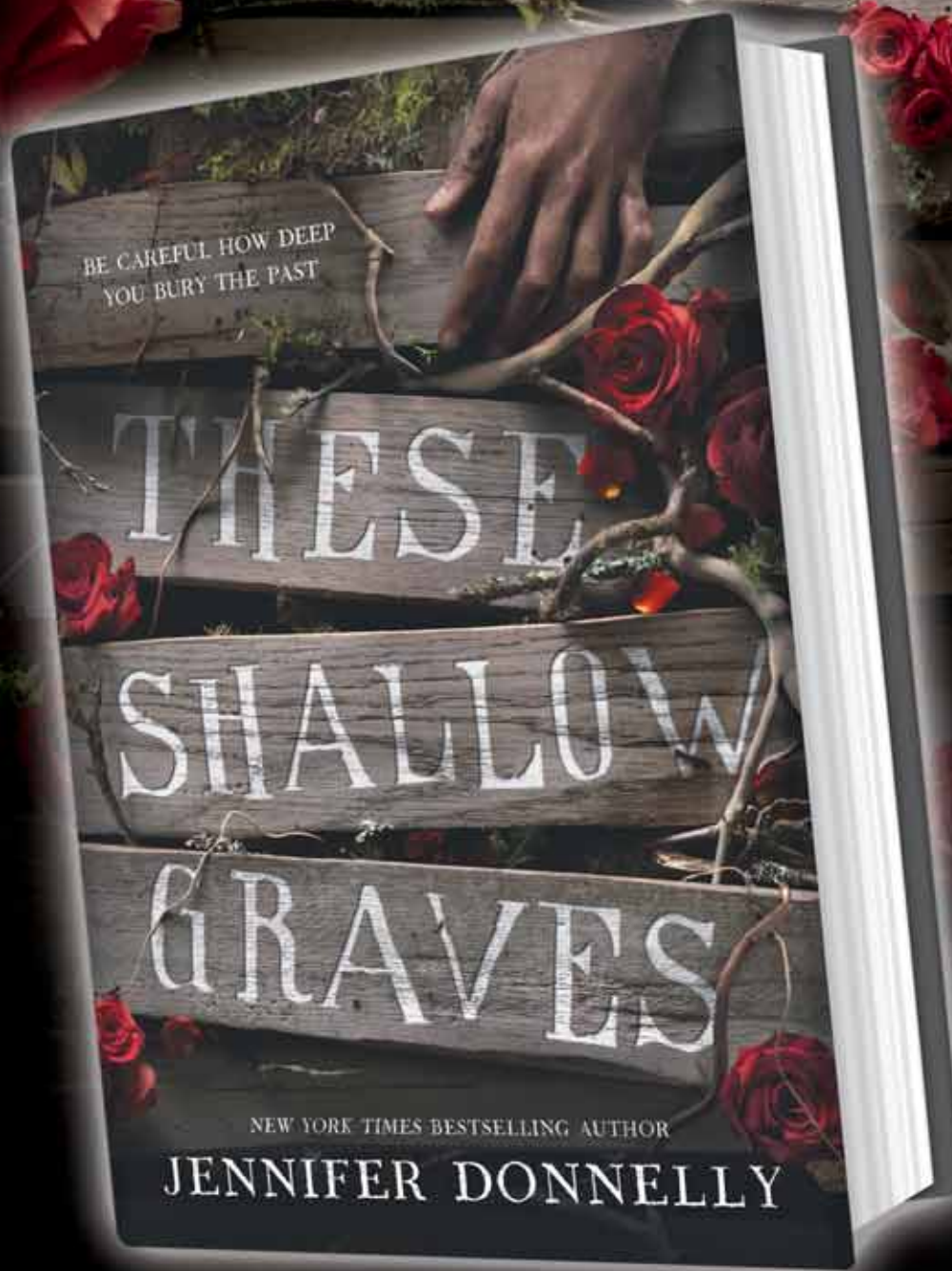
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Syrian Refugees: Why We Should Care

"Imagine that you are 16 years old, and death could happen to you at any moment. No matter what age, too many people are living like this right now. I don't know all the answers. All I know is that those of us who were lucky enough to be born in a safe and prosperous country should be helping those in need in whatever way we can." Points of View, page 26

Cover photo by Melanie Hughes, Johns Creek, GA

Senior Regrets

When I read “Senior Regrets” by Alex Helm, her writing about the regrets of her high school past left me feeling nostalgic. I can relate to the line, “My first day as a senior hasn’t even passed and I’m already planning my good-byes and dreading my sister’s tears,” because it’s only the beginning of my junior year and I am dreading having to leave a place I have known my entire life. I am nowhere near ready to leave my friends and all the familiar faces around school, but in a few short years I will have no choice. I will wish I had been friendlier and smiled at everyone who passed, and I will wish I tried harder to get good grades.

I don’t want to think about the future; it scares me. As Alex writes, “Sometimes I wish I could think only about right now,” but we are forced to talk about college plans and future careers. No matter how hard I try, I will never be able to think only about the present, so I will have to get used to this scared feeling.

Brianna Baker, Defiance, OH

The Tunnel

The fiction piece “The Tunnel” by Max Firehammer is a flawlessly written horror story that keeps your heart in your throat and your mind sucked into its woven lines of terror and suspense. It leads you to a small town that is haunted by a mysterious tunnel that hides unnerving secrets in its hollow mouth. Three young friends, out of foolishness, decide to explore this hole in the hill that looks like an open mouth screaming. The three walk in, and only one walks out. This story’s hypnotizing lines will not let your eyes leave the page ’til the end.

This story is perfect for the lead-up to Halloween. From the first line I was drawn in and held my breath the entire time. I loved feeling dismayed when things were hopeless, and the thrill of the moment when I was filled with dread. The tense beginning captured my attention with the line, “They all knew about the tunnel. Everyone knew

about it. Knowing it was there was ordinary, common. Talking about it wasn’t. Going into it – that was insane.” Finishing the story left an icy feeling on my spine. This piece is a must-read on Halloween. Especially if you and your friends are tunneled under the blankets.

Souad Hassan, Brooklyn, NY

When Dad Goes to Prison

After reading the article “When Dad Goes to Prison” by “Alicia,” I really understood how tough her life is. Even though my dad has been in prison all my life, I still get the same feeling Alicia describes when my name is called at visitation: “Goose bumps dot my skin. I rub my arm hoping they will disappear.” That feeling is agonizing.

Alicia and I both know that that person in the jumpsuit with an inmate number stitched on is very good on the inside. But working a minimum-wage job and having to take care of several kids ... people aren’t going to hand you survival; you have to go get it. Some people just go about it in different ways.

I really appreciate your honesty, Alicia. There are many kids facing this problem, and for you to speak out is amazing.

Tyrique, Phoenix, AZ

3 Poems of Apology

As our society evolves, we try too hard to adapt to our surroundings and fit in. “Three Poems of Apology” by Hannah Cabral addresses this. In her poem, she apologizes to her dad, God, and her younger self. She tells her dad that she changed to try to adapt to her social life but didn’t realize how much it would affect him when she was no longer his “little girl.” She goes on to apologize for sinning and doing the things that the Commandments told her never to do, and finally, to her younger self, she apologizes for trying to be someone she’s not, changing just to try to fit in, neglecting to take care of herself and the people around her. Hannah

accurately presents the struggles of teen life and tries to amend her wrongs by acknowledging them.

In the first stanza, Hannah writes, “I’m sorry I took down my pigtails and ripped off the streamers from my bike. I’m sorry I let the world tell me who to be. I’m sorry I’m no longer your little girl. I fear – I’m no longer me.” We rush to grow up, not treasuring the moments we have right now because we want to be seen as adults. As we grow, we regret the time we should have taken to live our youth to its fullest, with careless pigtails and knee scrapes from riding bikes. Hannah’s poem depicts this perfectly.

Sharon Ren, Brooklyn, NY

16 and Definitely Not Pregnant

I applaud Gabriela Rodriguez because her article “16 and Definitely Not Pregnant” reminds me of myself. She upholds that society is contradictory; “parents want you to be that goody-two-shoes with Ivy League potential, but every teenager ... seems to be coaxing you to break your good-girl habits.” I understand what it feels like to try to be a perfect daughter; it feels like everything you do is never good enough.

It’s nice to know that there are others who feel the way I do. I’m not missing out on anything by not partying or “turning up.” I know what I want in life, and I’m not going to achieve it by doing those things. Thank you, Gabriela, for sharing your experiences.

Valeria Jaramillo, Phoenix, AZ

I Hate School

“I Hate School” by Megan Lewis left me feeling more aware. I agree with Megan that many teens in America take their education for granted. She writes, “It’s easy to forget that education is not guaranteed or even considered a right in many parts of the world.” We Americans fail to realize the struggles others go through to receive an education.

This problem is extremely present in my school; so many kids do the bare minimum just to say they did it. Most don’t grasp what they are learning because they believe they won’t need the information down the road. How are we supposed to change the world if we don’t learn from others?

Megan did a great job summing up why we should view school differently by saying, “If we aren’t conscious of and grateful for our blessings, what do we have?”

Kaylee Clemens, Defiance, OH

I’ll Win Your Heart Some Day

Dear *Teen Ink*,
I know it’s not meant for me –
All the physics and chemistry
I do not like making bonds
Nor do I like trigonometry.
From Newton’s laws
You are my only refuge.
Yes, my dear love – only you.
Each night I manage to sneak to you
And sometimes write something to post
Hoping that you’ll reply
With a yellow MAG mark or
The red circle with white.
Views but my own, comments
And likes none
Make my sutures itch.
You remain silent
Break my insides,
Crumple my heart, discouraging me.
But yet I write, hoping,
Something you taught well
And writing with better style, more vigor
Never giving up, taking inspiration
From unknowns yet knowns
(writers have some similarities).
Wishing every minute
That you’ll reply with
Some precious little sign of thy.
Ignore any love letters of mine,
I won’t stop, I’ll win your heart some day
Forcing you to reply with your
Red-yellow sign.

Qudsia Khan, Aligarh, India

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The Flaw in My Facebook

by Kiara Huemer, Verona, WI

Tomorrow, my concerned mother will ask what time I got to bed.

"I don't know. Sometime after midnight," I'll respond, but the mental snapshot of my computer before I turned it off clearly read 1:27.

"Homework?" Mom will ask, her eyes sincere and sympathetic.

"Yeah. Homework." I'll avoid eye contact to keep her from seeing the guilt staining my eyes. I'll know the truth. It won't be homework.

But this conversation will take place tomorrow morning.

Right now, it's 11:45 p.m. A dull yellow light seeps through my grandmother's lampshade onto the messy contents of my desk. The Piano Guys' "Rockelbel's Canon" buzzes softly from my laptop, inaudible to my long asleep mother. My favorite fleece blanket wraps my limbs tightly in my swivel chair. A notebook, open to a blank page, reflects its perfect whiteness into the cold air of my room.

Tomorrow, school demands a completed creative writing draft. For days I've fretted over doing my homework without staying up late Sunday evening, but here I brood, surrendering my sleep to the wee hours of Monday morning. I sulk, staring at the clock, hoping that it will turn back upon receiving my angry vibes. I ask myself how I let this happen again.

I sigh. No use identifying the cause. Might as well get working to minimize the effect. There is so much to do, so much stress, so much pressure. I must focus.

Suddenly a mysterious energy interrupts my rationale behind commencing my draft. My mental process shifts, as if now under the influence of a foreign force.

"You deserve this. It's okay," a voice says from the back of my mind. "Just five minutes won't hurt."

I agree with this familiar voice without much thought. I set my hands into motion, typing quickly before I think through the consequences. My fingers swiftly slide and click. My heart beats slightly faster as I scurry.

I exhale. Relief fills my body as my eyes soak up the words and pictures framed by the solid blue background, as if the opiate diffused into my brain and I forgot the pain of the needle.

Selfies of insecure middle schoolers litter the screen. "19 Reasons to Start Wearing Black Lipstick Immediately" blares its presuming title, accompanied by a rather attractive woman flaunting a quite unattractive lip color. "Definite Proof that Lady Gaga's Stage Show Will Never Be Topped" insults my intelligence. Overeager Cally posts a foodie of her morning breakfast cereal that literally looks like every other bowl of cereal. Annoying acquaintances nag me to join their quest to grow corn and pigs consisting of nothing more than LED lights. Bob Lloyd shouts his excitement over his shiny red Ford F150. Wait, who is Bob Lloyd?

But there I stare, entranced as I scroll down my newsfeed soaking up the superficiality. Fluffy golden retriever puppies spring to water for the first time; I giggle at their adorableness. I snap open "Seven Ways to Know He's the One," immediately comparing my relationship with their flaky but juicy advice. "Twenty-Five Great Photobombs" sounds just too fun to miss; I amuse myself over these

perfectly timed masterpieces. An attractive senior photo of a classmate claims the spot of her profile pic; soon I'm flipping through her boyfriend's mom's page, gazing at vacation pictures from two years ago. For some odd reason I still click after the forty-seventh picture of the Rocky Mountains. I have no clue who this person is, but flipping through this album makes the world seem simple. There's no creative writing draft deadline in this album. Just mountains.

Of all the ways I could procrastinate, it's baffling that Facebook so easily seduces me, when I boast that I'm a classier girl who walks her dog and plays the cello. After all, a girl who achieves a 4.0 GPA

doesn't succumb to the foul entertainment choices of the hoi polloi. A girl who's expected to get scholarships and become a lawyer or a doctor certainly is better than that. She doesn't waste time watching movies with friends on Friday nights; she studies for her plethora of AP classes. She doesn't flip through Netflix on Saturdays; she travels between music rehearsals and

her job and church leadership meetings.

Perhaps, however, my world of high expectations and overanalytical mind cause me to greedily soak up this drug I outwardly condemn. Truth is, I'd play my cello to relax, but my perfectionist mind would scream, "Why can't you play this piece by now?" Truth is, I'd walk my dog, but wandering park trails leaves me alone with thousands of thoughts shooting through my head, stressing me with reminders of unmet deadlines.

However, on Facebook I escape life in a way that's so shallow I slip into a near hallucinogenic state. My hyperactive brain relaxes in this imaginary world, where there are no worries, no deadlines, no expectations; just a lot of cat videos.

Being insightful means scaring myself constantly with all the fears my brain churns up as it searches for the deeper meaning of the scenes around me.

*There are
no worries, no
deadlines; just a
lot of cat videos*



Art by Hannah Smoot, Baltimore, MD

Being smart means treating life like a creative writing draft that needs to be elaborated, revised, evaluated, and picked apart until it is perfect; however, once connected to Facebook, my brain finally forgets about elaborated thoughts and meaningful "so what's?" and instead completely accepts boring, generic narration.

But right now, my mind isn't analyzing my inner turmoil or justifying my secret addiction to Facebook. At 12:39 a.m., my world simply consists of a dark room and a laptop. My fingers rhythmically slide down my mousepad, while my writer's notebook shines its untouched page into my bedroom's cold night air. ♦



Photo by Greta Chen, Birmingham, AL

10 Dirty Toes

by Megan Rutkowski, Hartford, WI

They are the ones who leave prints in the house. I am the one who defends them. Ten dirty toes, long digits and painted clothes like others. Ten who belong in shoes but are not. Ten rank excuses that help me balance. From my view, I can smell them, but Cleo licks them and doesn't mind the color.

Their pink is secret. They send giant arms into the dirt. They kick up and they mash down and grab the sap between their hard calluses and pinch the ants with vigorous tendons and never quit their march. This is how they walk.

Let one forget to lift up, they'd all crumple like rocks off a cliff, each with their nails in the other. Throbbing, throbbing, throbbing they feel when I run. They harden.

When I am too tired and too sore to keep moving, when I am an old woman from many years, then I will look at my toes. When there is nowhere left to go. Ten who hardened despite shoes. Ten who throbbed and do not forget to lift. Ten whose only reason is to keep me up and not fall. ♦

Remembering for the Future

by Adrian Rivera, Mission, TX

The funeral has just ended. A maelstrom of dirt swirls around me as the black hearse pulls up to the burial site. I am wearing a white long-sleeve shirt with a black coat. My shoes are black. My tie is black. Black birds perch in the swaying mesquite branches above, whispering their tales of sorrow. Of newfound widows, clad in black veils. Of priests and ministers, dressed in black garb and metal crucifixes. As the casket is lowered into the ground, I see its black edge, but more than that, I see the deep red, the angelic white, the patriotic blue that is draped over the final resting place of this soldier, veteran, and hero. Everything is black today, save the symbol of purity and innocence, of hardiness and valor, of vigilance, perseverance, and justice. It is fitting: while the polished black casket symbolizes the death of one who took up arms for these things, the glorious Red, White, and Blue means that the values the man inside fought for, live on. Today, I lost my role model, my hero. Today, I lost my grandfather. But I have not lost his history.

Ever since I could remember, my grandfather would tell me his war stories. Of the time that he walked amongst the smoldering ruins of Dresden. When he would flirt with the voluptuous, blue-eyed frauleins of Berlin. And finally, of the journey across the glittering green Atlantic, to the quaint little town in Texas. He told me of his time in veterans school, and how he graduated valedictorian of his class. He told me about when he met the love of his life at the neighborhood grocery store. The way her eyes smiled across the register, the way her skirt flitted around her knees as she turned to bag his groceries, the way their hands and eyes slowly met as they reached for the same paper bag. And the rest is history.

I can still remember my last conversation with my grandfather, my last glimpse into a life that stretched from the aftermath of World War II to the first and second invasions of Iraq. Usually, a light shone in his eyes as he regaled me with stories of

the good times he had with his brothers in arms. His voice would rise and fall along with the action of the story, and he would wave his arms and gesture with his hands, always outfitted in a white T-shirt, plaid shorts, and white Nike walking shoes that dated back to the '80s.

However, this last conversation was different.

The light in his eyes was fading, replaced by a hollow, solemn gaze. He began his story with the words: "My only grandson. We are blessed ..." He went on to say that our family had done well after the war. He hadn't ever seen major combat, and had come home unscathed. "There have been some who were not as lucky as we were ..."

He proceeded to tell me stories I had never heard before. Of his brother who died before his boots hit the sand at Normandy. Of his cousin whose body was never recovered in the demilitarized zone of Korea. And finally, of his bunkmate, whom I had only known as the homeless man who talked to himself under the expressway.

"There are some stories that are never told, my boy ..." Stories of despair, of horror, of death. Of a quick glance at a picture of a high school sweetheart before charging onto a beach where so many had already died. Of a soldier's last request, to tell his mother he loved her. Of post-traumatic stress disorder. Of a pain-numbing descent into drugs, alcohol, and mental instability. These are the stories that go untold, not only because they are hard to talk about, but because

Our veterans are our teachers, and we must ensure that their stories are preserved

many of those who could tell them are no longer here. Their stories are gone.

The spirit of America is like an unwritten language: It passes from generation to generation, not through formal lessons, but through stories. With their collective experiences and stories, veterans instill in us a love of country, a sense of courage and sacrifice, and a desire to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. In our shared American heritage, our veterans are our teachers, and we must ensure that their stories are preserved for future generations.

As I rise from placing a flower by my grandfather's grave, the clouds begin to part and rays of celestial light fall on the American Flag. I look around and see the crowd of mourners weeping, and in that moment I have a revelation. I see past the tears, and detect a communal sense of reverence at the life and sacrifice of my grandfather. At the stories, the experiences, the lessons that he shared with us. In this moment, I realize that I am blessed to have been witness to the life of this warrior, this veteran, my grandfather. It is our duty as citizens to share these stories so my grandfather and all other veterans live on in our collective American conscience forever. ♦



Art by Sicong Zhang, Pittsfield, MA

Ending 10 Years of Silence

by Alexandra Silva, Menifee, CA

I was molested when I was four years old by my babysitter's daughter. I kept it a secret for over 10 years.

I had forced myself to forget it, to pretend it was just a nightmare, but it wasn't. The week before my junior year of high school, I had been thinking about telling my mom, but I didn't know how.

I really felt like it was time to say something, but how? My mother has always been extremely protective of my sister and me. How could I look her in the eyes and tell her that one of the only people she trusted us with had done such a horrific thing to her youngest daughter. I couldn't.

Until I heard the song. It flooded my ears and pushed the river of tears out. "There will be a day with

no more tears, no more pain, and no more fears." I had heard Jeremy Camp's song dozens of times, but suddenly it hit me hard.

I finally found my bravery. It was hidden deep inside me, buried under years of fear and shame. I used to think it was my fault – that I had been asking for it – but it wasn't. I was four.

I walked into the kitchen, sat down, and told my mom the truth. Once I started, I couldn't stop; the words fell out of my mouth in piles. She cried, and held me, and it felt like a weight had been lifted from my chest, one that I had been living with for so long I forgot it was there.

It was time to say something, but how?

The only other person I've told is my best friend. I know his deepest secrets, and I felt as if I was lying to him by not telling him mine. When he found out he was angry because

of what happened to me, but I feel as if now we have a closer relationship, and I'm thankful for that.

I know it must be weird for someone to be thankful for such an atrocious thing, but I am. I am stronger now because of it, and I can help others who have gone through similar situations.

I hope I never see my abuser again, but if I do, I will forgive her. That may sound crazy, but forgiving is the best way to heal. I think we

have a skewed view of forgiveness. We believe that it means to let things go back to normal, to completely let it go and act like it never happened, but forgiveness is simply refusing to hurt someone who has wronged you. She took my innocence. She took my childhood. But I forgive her and feel sorry for her because she has to live with her mistake.

Every day, I am coming to terms with what happened. Some days are great, some days are terrible, but after every day comes a new day. With time and practice it is becoming easier to say it out loud. I was molested. I was assaulted. I was abused. I am stronger because of it. I will not let my past define me but rather use it to guide me in the future. ♦

Reward My Thirst

by Valerie Muensterman, Evansville, IN

Like many teenagers, I have spent a considerable amount of time around dumpsters due to the dark magic known as extra credit. As if by witchy incantation, students' Saturday mornings vanish from 8:30 to 9:30 at the chanting of biology teachers across the city, and in this time slot habitually used for catching up on sleep, we find ourselves donning orange vests and hefting beer bottles from the back of someone's van. I reflect spitefully on how I've been wronged as I separate piles of paper and plastic into their corresponding bins, hollow bottles clattering in a high-pitched rock slide as they rain from an empty cat litter tub. *I will earn those 10 points*, I tell myself solemnly, swiping a grocery bag into its rust-stained bin with a flourish.

During the many Saturdays I spent at Wesselman Recycling Center freshman year, idleness and chit-chat between students was reprimanded by the park groundskeeper, who held a half-eaten banana in one hand and brandished the other like a banner as he directed traffic. Nevertheless, I did everything in my power to avoid hard labor as I waited for wheels to skid across the pavement and slow as a pack of 15-year-olds paced round to their trunks like ragged dogs circling a stray cat.

To pass the time, I sifted through the discarded magazine bin to uncover the stale celebrity gossip as I kneaded my frozen, clammy fingers, too grossed out by the Miller Lite residue to slip them into my jeans pockets. I was just recalling the Brangelina breakup of '06 when I was ordered to get back to work. Begrudgingly, I did, and my world changed.

This is when I discovered Coke points.

I had never before noticed the thin, black letters inked in the guts of a cardboard 12-pack, but as I shined through truck bed after truck bed of junk, I sometimes noticed a long, rectangular strip had been clipped from the corner of a Coke or Sprite carton. As I would soon discover, these codes were part of an incentive campaign to get people to buy more Coke products by amassing rewards in points with the box codes.

Suddenly I had an idea. If other people weren't going to use their codes, I could reap the glorious rewards of their points! Eagerly, I researched the prizes, but the only one of interest to me was more Coke.

My family has long wrestled with an addiction to soft drinks, especially me. Considering that I was then newly proclaimed street-legal, working a minimum wage job, and had just cashed my first paycheck, nothing could stop me from satisfying my thirst. For me, a short trip to town would always merit a Polar Pop

from the Circle K – a tall Styrofoam cup filled with sweet, bubbly death liquid that flooded the lid when I punched in the straw. Every gas station was a House of Vice. Drinkers get their booze. Gamblers get their lottery tickets. And people like me, we get our Coke.

I realize how dangerous my artificially sweetened addiction can be. In fact, I often imagine my future self 20 years from now, still shackled to my old habit. My face comes into focus as I'm lying on a couch, reaching toward a lofty 44-ounce Coke cup. The table is three feet away, but I can't reach it because my arms weigh 500 pounds. It is a nightmare grounded in reality that daunts me and my family alike, but I can't admit my true concern to them for fear they will stage an inter-

vention and take steps to cut back my Coke intake. I'd go through withdrawal.

Just to clarify, I'd deem myself average in body mass. I'm healthy and 17, two facts I assert as my excuse for courting the demon drink. And when Coke points came into my life like a sweet blessing from Jesus, I had all the more reason to keep Coke in my life, and to get it for free through coupons. On Saturday mornings, you could find me at the recycling center, hidden behind a green paint-chipped dumpster with my stash of cardboard boxes, ripping the codes free like a rat attacking a discarded box of chow mein.

In this way, I succeeded in concealing this hobby from my friends to avoid being framed as a thrifty, sociopathic weirdo. It was the high school-world equivalent of a body in the freezer. I could already hear the rumors buzzing violently like wasps in my head. "Did you hear about Valerie?" someone would say in the cafeteria, directing her friend's eyes to me, unsuspectingly eating a chicken sandwich a few tables over. "She has a collection of cardboard. From dumpsters."

"That's not what I heard," the friend would say. "I heard she takes it home and eats it. Like a goat." And then a drop of ketchup would land onto the flap of my zipper.

Although I was self-conscious about this new habit, it was not something I could hide from my family. As I amassed more and more points, coupons arrived in the mail, and in turn, my family began saving codes for me. My sister, Jaclyn, would send me texts of upturned bottle caps, and so did her fiancé, Gage. Helping me get my codes became a family rite of passage of sorts. My sister Susan's new boyfriend began asking his coworkers for their bottle caps, presenting them like a shiny gift with which to win my heart.

However, as the school year wound

down and recycling days grew fewer, I hungrily sought more codes to keep the stream of coupons coming. At weddings, I'd frequent the refreshments table, pour a Mello Yello from a two-liter, and "forget" to screw the cap back on, cupping it in my palm and slipping it into the pocket of my pink dress. Gage would assist in the effort by going on brief missions of his own, feigning indecisiveness as he picked up shallowly filled bottles one by one and dropped their caps into his suit jacket pocket. We'd then return to the candlelight of our white, silk-clothed table, passing our little victories to Jaclyn, who would store them for me in her purse.

There was one person not compelled to love me by an everlasting blood bond with whom I did share my secret: my best friend, Erin. Soon after, our moms dropped us off at the West-side Fall Festival. The oil and grease were condensing in the air, so heavy I felt them seeping into my pores as we filed through row after row of parish food booths. With bratwurst in hand, I took in the sights: moms with cumbersome double strollers, children gripping puffy, foil-wrapped pretzels. Suddenly, I dug my rubber heels into the blacktop, swatting Erin on the shoulder as we passed a burn-barrel-sized ice cooler. Folded stacks of cardboard cartons were tucked discreetly beneath it.

I could taste the bubbles.

I turned to Erin. "Would it be wrong?" I asked.

We approached the woman beside the cooler, who was wiping icy water from the cans with a towel as she collected dollar bills. I bought a Cherry Coke and Erin bought a Mello Yello. "Excuse me, ma'am," I began. "Could I use that cardboard for a school recycling project?"

She skimmed me up and down with her eyes, interrupting the rhythm of her money-taking. "I guess so," she replied.

"Thank you!" I pulled case after case free and swerved in the opposite direction, laughing feverishly as I handed all but one box to Erin and began to tear.

In May, I found myself at the final Saturday of recycling, my last haul. The air felt fresh and radiated warmth. I quietly scrutinized each car, having learned that older, rickety cars often demonstrated the owner's disregard for health, thus making them more likely assets to my cause, and also noting that old men were more likely to buy name brands, a characteristic I speculated derives from their sense of comfort in the familiar, the reliable.

I squinted in fixation at the "Proud

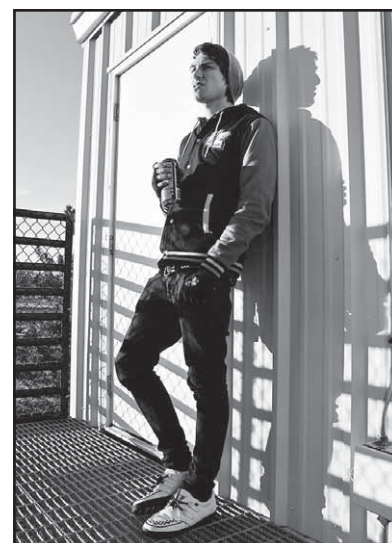


Photo by Alexandria Ness, Palatine, IL

"She has a collection of cardboard. From dumpsters."

Vietnam Vet" bumper sticker on a green Grand Am when I noticed a brown paper bag on a pathway directed straight toward the largest dumpster in the lot. In the arms of my bio classmate, Maggie, I could see the gleaming red and white cardboard flicker at me, a bittersweet good-bye smile, and it occurred to me that all this cardboard junk we've been collecting is basically reincarnation before our eyes; the image of a Raisin Bran box struck my mind like quivering thunder – this Coke in the next life. The scene rolled frame by frame as I saw it passed along to a boy hanging from the dumpster's side ladder, preparing to fling it to its doom, its reusable, eco-friendly destiny.

"Wait!" I yelled, sprinting in front of a Buick. "Can I have that one sec?"

Maggie's eyebrows lifted. She dropped the bag to the ground, holding her hands up as if to surrender. "Why?" She stared at me as I sifted through the rubble, plucking out the Cokes.

"The codes," I replied. I handed the bag up to the boy. "I wanted the codes."

As my fingers began bending the cardboard, I heard her laugh.

"Aww! That's so cute! You're like a little old lady!"

I laughed shakily, ripping the fold from a Mr. Pibb with the other three flattened cartons pinched under my arm like a clothespin. My pockets bulged with folded cardboard.

I had been reckless. In that fleeting instant, my secret was revealed, my body in the freezer uncovered. I searched myself for the sensations of dread, embarrassment, regret, but now that I had set the truth free, it didn't feel like I'd imagined. The boy on the ladder was rifling through the top layer in the dumpster. "Here," he said, passing down a Sunkist box. "Does this help you out?"

It wasn't even Coke brand – it was Dr. Pepper/Snapple Group Inc. – but I guess normal people wouldn't know that.

"Thanks," I said, smiling, and accepted the empty box. ♦

Impact

by "Sylvia," Worcester, MA

I stood alone on the blacktop. I had always hated recess, everyone would group off with their friends, and I would have to withdraw to my corner. I always tried to smile and appear content so that no one would think that I was strange and pity me. However, my efforts had entirely the opposite effect, as others walking by questioned my sanity in worried tones. I never could understand other people. So I just stared at the meticulously shaped hedges and counted the minutes of torture and solitude remaining. Suddenly I spotted a football soaring through the air directly at me. The culprit was Angela, of course. I saw my former best friend laughing brazenly. In other's eyes I was nonexistent, but Angela's grudge had not faded. I ducked, but the ball grazed my shoulder and left a pulsating impact.

• • •
Angela came to my school when we were in third grade. I remember the moment I first saw her. She was a newcomer, and she stood out from the crowd. Angela was pretty and tall and everything I wished I was. She had pin straight light brown hair that barely grazed her shoulders, and her innocent-looking large eyes were the same caramel hue. Everyone was looking at her and wondering who she was. I assumed she was older than me until she was placed in my class. Julie, my best friend at the time, insisted that we go talk to her, and we did.

As we got to know Angela, I realized that something was wrong

with this girl who quickly proclaimed herself the leader of our trio and made us tie and scrape the gum off her shoes. This girl who insisted we create matching Neopets accounts and play tag every day at recess. This girl who created a system where we had just three "chances," and if we used them up, we could not be her friend anymore.

I mistakenly thought that perhaps this was what friendship was. At that time, I thirsted for companionship and acceptance and feared loneliness more than anything. So I went along with Angela's rules and ignored the persistent feeling that this was not what I wanted in a friendship. I wanted to talk about books and a myriad of other things, but all Angela wanted to do was play tag and talk about boys. Those activities got repetitive and almost unbearable.

One day I decided to tell her that I didn't want to be friends anymore. When I was around Angela and Julie I felt lonely, and when I was not I still felt lonely. So I told Angela that I did not want to be ordered around anymore and that I did not feel like her real friend and surprisingly added that I did not like playing tag all that much either. As expected, she didn't take it well and told me to leave. Julie was upset. She asked if I wanted her to go with me, but I told her she should do what she wanted. My mouth said the opposite of my mind, which was begging her to leave with me. I reminded myself that Julie was a shell of her former self anyway, and she admired

Angela so much.

I can still remember how she walked away, back to her chosen friend. She was the first of a long line of friends who left me. Now I wonder if I ever mattered to her as much as she did to me. I guess not.

Angela never forgave me. For the next three years she bullied me constantly. She threw things at me and called me names, but what hurt the most was the isolation. Whenever I started to make a friend or talk to anyone, she would whisk that person away to her clan. I don't know what she said, but afterwards they gave me loathsome glares as well.

I will never forget her smirks as I stood alone at recess or in the mornings when we stood outside on the blacktop. I would stare right back into her malice-filled eyes and never let her see me as weak, but I fought back tears every second I stood in that parking lot alone and breathed a sigh of relief as we were ushered into the building.

I fell apart during those years. I loved learning and reading, but I started to hate school by the middle of fourth grade. I had to put up a brave front at school, but when I got home I would cry. At home I also felt lonely. My siblings were in middle and high school and never had time for me. They thought I was being childish and laughed when I told them my troubles. My parents had opened a convenience store and were so preoccupied that they didn't notice I was struggling. I became really confused. I didn't like school, but I felt isolated at home. I didn't know where I belonged.

At a time when I felt that my world was crumbling to pieces, I started to read more. I did it to escape. I loved Laura Ingalls Wilder's books and visualized myself on a vast open prairie, where hens roamed and wildflowers grew, starched sunbonnet in hand. I cried when I found out that my idol, Laura, had died before my mother was even born.

I would read *Jane Eyre* and feel Jane's pain. I would read *Little Women* every year and cry when my favorite character, Beth, died. I would read books and feel connected to the heroines, unlike all of the deceitful people in my real life. Reality seemed like a horrible nightmare from which I wished I could wake up.

I realize that the circumstances then are what made me so withdrawn now.



Photo by Madison Johnson, Denver, KS

I couldn't tell anyone my worries or they would laugh at me, so eventually I stopped talking and just read. My classmates made fun of me and called me a nerd, but when I read, I felt good.

My reading addiction led me to love academics and learning. I quickly rose to the top of my class, and I was acknowledged by my teachers at least. I gained a reputation as an intelligent girl who always seemed kind of upset. That year, I realized that my habit of smiling on the playground was only making me look crazy, so I tried to appear as blank and emotionless as possible. That conditioning is something I cannot get rid of even today.

Now, about five years later, when I am told by a doctor that I should consider taking medication, I try to think of the source of my problems. The memories of that time flash before my eyes. As I try to remember the things that I have tried so hard to forget, I realize that the impact has never gone away.

I could lie and say that everything has improved since then; I could say that I have evolved into a social butterfly, that I am surrounded by friends who I adore and who adore me. But that is not true. I am still a social pariah, I still have very few friends, and I still feel isolated.

Because of my experiences, I am reluctant to trust others. I feel like any more betrayal would destroy me. I sit in my classrooms and feel isolated, even when peers are surrounding me. I question what the meaning of a best friend is. I want to find someone who will understand me and accept me for who I am. Although I am strange and different and have felt devastated for years by my individuality, I have come to accept it. This is who I am, and there is no point in trying to change that.

Although the past has taken its toll and the impact remains, I am comfortable with who I am. The intensely clumsy, ditzy, diffident, and witty me is the only one that is real. ♦

Deep Creek

by Rachel White, McLean, VA

I squeeze Mom's hand and step outside, my light-up sneakers flashing bright through the early morning fog. A shower of red falls on our heads, and I look up at my favorite tree, shedding its last leaves. The air feels crisp in the mountains where my family and I spend Thanksgiving. The chill is a familiar reminder of the joy that comes with the changing of the seasons.

Mom and I make our way toward the lake, stepping only on the new fallen leaves, which we pretend are stepping stones. It is here we spend our Thanksgiving morning, sitting on the dock, feet swinging low over the freezing water. Usually we buy seeds to throw to the flocks of birds preparing for their migration south. Today we indulge them with leftover bread. Mom has me rip the pieces small enough so the birds can eat them whole. Sometimes I throw the bread as far as I can to see how fast the birds fly, but my favorite is watching them peck out of my hand. Mostly the birds flock to my mom. She seems to have a way with them.

Our morning passes like a blur of happiness: feathers, wood fire, pine, our laughter playing like a film score in the background. We bask in the peaceful pre-dawn until the sun peeks over the hills. Soon, my brother will call us in for breakfast. Our ritual is put on hold until next year, when, once again, we will say good-bye to the leaves and the wildlife on their journey to a new home. ♦

A “Smashing” Experience

by Uma Raja, Palm Beach Gardens, FL

An infinite river of nerds. That’s the only way I can describe it. In all honesty, I had no idea what to expect – but it certainly wasn’t this.

Last month, I attended a gaming tournament for the Super Smash Bros. game series. Sponsored by Nintendo and hosted at 16 Gamestops across the country, the tournaments celebrated the new 3DS edition of Nintendo’s legendary fighting series. At each event, 64 gamers competed in four-player matches until one emerged victorious to win a grand prize of \$250, a 3DS XL, a copy of “Super Smash Bros.,” and a trip to New York City for a chance to compete in a national tournament.

I was in it to win. After finding a secret code on an online forum that allowed me to play the demo early, I practiced for two weeks until I mastered the highest-level computerized opponents in three-on-one battles. But was I ready to face experts?

The night before the tournament, I bought the game after school and practiced until my hands ached with exhaustion. While I knew that professional players would be at the tournament, they certainly couldn’t be that prepared.

That morning I left the house at 7:30 and drove an hour to Gamestop. Because gamers weren’t allowed to start lining up until 9, I assumed that I was in the clear. But as my car pulled into the plaza parking lot, I saw it.

The nerd river.

A massive number of gamers huddled by the Best Buy near the Gamestop. They stood in a long, makeshift line and every one of them was vigorously punching buttons on their 3DS. I quickly ran to the back of the queue, knowing my chances of being one of the 64 entrants were slim.

“I’ve been here since 5 a.m.,” one guy said, tussling his neckbeard.

To pass the time, I engaged in some battles with the gamers around me. However, despite beating the hardest computers with ease, I could not defeat these geeks in battle. Their fighting style was brutal. They killed me instantly, then had their characters taunt me with sarcastic waves as Pikachu exploded.

It dawned on me then that these nerds had probably acquired the Japanese version of the game, which had been released a month ago. While my demo allowed access to just one course and five playable characters, they had been practicing with the full roster and all the courses.

As I resumed waiting, hoping to get a spot by divine intervention, I examined the line while the Gamestop manager began to hand out stickers to the first 64 in line. Although the crowd was full of odd folks, the thing

that struck me most wasn’t the dude in a complete Link cosplay – it was that, besides me, in this crowd of over a hundred people, there was only one other girl.

Suddenly, a fight broke out a few people in front of me.

“He cut!” someone roared, pointing his 3DS at the accused.

A tall, buff man had skipped the line, and the cutoff was imminent.

The Gamestop manager was frantically breaking up people.

Accusations were being flung faster than you could say “Super Smash Bros. Melee.” After some yelling, the manager kicked the offender out of line as the crowd cheered. Everything calmed down, and the manager continued to hand out the last few stickers.

The people directly in front of me were a group of friends. There were three of them but only two stickers left. They conducted a heated game of rock-paper-scissors, and the loser hung his head as his friends snatched up the last tournament spots without remorse. I had never seen a more sorrowful gamer in my life.

Unfortunately, after an hour of driving, weeks of practice, and enduring the weirdest line ever, I had missed the cut. Sixty-four people were allowed in, and I was number 66.

It was disappointing, but perhaps

it was for the best. Never knowing if I would’ve won the tournament is arguably better than getting publicly destroyed by geeks in a broadcasted contest. I left the line, grabbed a smoothie, and contemplated the morning.

Perhaps it seemed like this would be a story about how I kicked geek butt, won the contest, snatched the prize money, and crushed the gamer patriarchy with girl power. While that is (unfortunately) not how it went down, one thing is for certain: I will never forget that river of nerds. ♦

Was I ready to face experts in a video game tournament?



Photo by Ashley Tsang, Johns Creek, GA

Bargain Brand Brio

by Helen Hu, Darien, IL

“I’ll give you 15.”

“15? This is real silk! I won’t sell for less than 45 yuan.”

Raucous voices filled the tiny shop, just one of many crammed into the market’s crowded hallways. Shifting from leg to leg, I stared resolutely at a narrow shelf blanketed in dented plastic dolls, fragile keychain plushies that I knew from experience would tear apart soon after they were purchased, miniature models of Buddha carved out of unidentifiable maroon stone, and lurid novelty goods stacked haphazardly. The menagerie blurred as my eyes slowly unfocused. I buried my hands in my coat pockets and glanced toward the shop counter, hoping to convey my growing impatience. No such luck.

My mother was facing away from me, locked in the heat of battle. Her diminutive stature, a product of malnutrition and heavy labor, did not detract from her demanding demeanor. After all, bartering, her chosen art form, was dictated by only the wits and wiles of the combatants. She smoothly traded blows with the increasingly irritated shopkeeper, their voices swelling into a chaotic duet. Like a spark igniting into a flame, my mother’s normally precise

Chinese became a rushing stream I could no longer comprehend.

To compare this articulation to her English would be to juxtapose an elegant heron with a waddling penguin. Here my mother commanded the ferocity of a tiger, words like coiling vipers ready to strike at weakness. She gestured violently at the shopkeeper, never pausing to take a breath. She sported this affectation only in China.

I kept several feet between us, though when in downtown Tianjin I usually stayed close enough to brush my fingertips against her coat sleeve, an assurance that we wouldn’t be separated in the crowds. I hardly spoke outside the compound in which we lived; when I did, I couldn’t have been more conspicuous if my hair was blond and my eyes blue.

It was the price I paid for laziness. My mother had tried to coax me into learning, offering one hour of TV for each hour of Chinese study. Stickers were exchanged for correct poem recitation, stars for exceptionally pretty characters. But my mother’s power over my Chinese education had been weak during the most essential years; America tuned my tongue to English only. This bitter realization came to me when, during my first meeting with my relatives, a

cousin jeered and mocked, “*Baichi*.” I recognized that word, at least. “Idiot.”

China is a country of counterfeit, a place where fake pearls are abundant and green glass masquerades as jade; sellers are hungry wolves, using flimsy cloth fans and faux marble stamps to tear into the wallets of unsuspecting tourists. Yet even while standing among stacks of cheap statuettes, chipped pendants, and questionably manufactured scarves, I knew I was the greatest knockoff in the market. For as much as my mother had attempted to ingrain China into my being, to raise me as a tiger cub, America had embedded itself into my body the moment I was born on democratic soil.

It was a barter I didn’t know my mom had been willing to make, if she even knew she had made it when she followed my dad to America. She couldn’t have anticipated my discomfort with China’s brash criticism and necessary skepticism, the mahjong parlors and the disorderly shops. She couldn’t have foreseen my refusal to follow Chinese etiquette or use chopsticks. The moment she turned away, I became a mouse.

My mother stalked away from the counter, proud as a lioness with a fresh kill. She had paid only 20 yuan. Even in hindsight, the scarf was a good bargain. She would never wear it. ♦

I was the greatest knock-off in the market

"But You Don't Look Sick ..."

by Cassidy DeMona, Wyckoff, NJ

I hear the phrase "But you don't look sick" at least once a day. It comes from teachers, fellow students, even friends. Most of the times it's uttered in disbelief: "How can this teenage girl who was perfectly fine a few months ago be spending so much time in the hospital?" Most people try to pass it off as a compliment of the "you look so good for a sick person" kind. I normally answer with a sarcastic remark about how I wear a lot

worse. I was tired all the time, and my body hurt all over. I could feel my muscles getting weaker. When I had to drop out of dance, I cried for a week straight. I went back to the doctor, who told me I had the flu and put me on antibiotics.

Needless to say, I didn't have the flu, and I kept getting worse. One night, in the middle of dinner, I passed out. I was admitted to the hospital and was diagnosed with postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome, or POTS. POTS is a form of dysautonomia, an umbrella term used to describe a number of conditions that cause the autonomic nervous system (ANS) to malfunction. The ANS controls all the bodily functions that are done without consciously thinking about them, such as heart rate, blood pressure, digestion, kidney function, and body temperature. With POTS, my heart occasionally forgets how to be a heart. I was put on a medicine for that and wore a monitor for a while, but after a month I saw very little improvement with my heart, and the rest of me kept getting worse.

Less than two months later, my mother took me back to the emergency room because I was in so much pain we didn't know what else to do. I ended up spending four days in a little white room on the third floor of the children's hospital. It was there that I was diagnosed with two more chronic illnesses, fibromyalgia and myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME).

Fibromyalgia is not uncommon; over 3 million people in the United States and Europe deal with it. However, 99 percent of them are over

45, and only 0.5 percent of patients are under 18. ME is also occasionally called chronic fatigue syndrome. This doesn't just mean that I'm tired all the time; it also involves sleep problems, abdominal and digestive issues, tremors, sinus problems, and severe muscle pain.

But even with all these diagnoses, I wasn't getting better. So we went back to the doctor, and it was discovered that at some point in my life I had been bitten by a tick that carried Lyme disease. However, it had gone undiagnosed for so long that it turned into chronic Lyme disease. This

controversial diagnosis is actually a good thing.

Now that we know what is wrong with me, we can manage it with medicine and other treatments.

Now three months since I was diagnosed, I'm still no better. I probably won't start seeing any improvement for at least another few months. I still spend far more time in the hospital than I would like to. In fact, I'm writing this from my hospital bed. Using medicine, intense physical therapy, and some non-traditional methods like acupuncture and chiropractic, I will hopefully get back to normal. Unfortunately, the reality of my condition is that even with all this treatment, there's a chance that I will continue to get worse. There is a 25 percent chance that I will be wheelchair-bound by the age of 21.

Recently, my school's marching band took a trip to Disney World to lead the Main Street parade. The night after we marched, I collapsed on the bus returning to the hotel. My legs gave out completely, and I couldn't feel them at all. I had to use a wheel-

chair for the rest of the trip. It wasn't too bad though; I got to go to the front of the line for all the rides. When I got home, I went to my second home – the hospital. I was switched from oral medicines to IV ones. In a week, I will have a PICC line (a long-term intravenous catheter) inserted to administer my medications more easily. I also have to walk with a cane, which results in a lot of stares when I go out, but I get it; I look like a grandmother.

People ask me about my health a lot. Chronic illness isn't common at my age, and lots of kids, especially at school, want to know what it's like. Yes, it's hard. No, I can't just get better. No, I can't die from this. Yeah, at least it's not a brain tumor. I say at least one of those things every day.

I have a lot of people tell me they feel bad for me. I'm forever grateful for the support I've received, but I never really know how to respond. To be honest, even though I put on a fake smile and try to breathe through it, this situation pretty much sucks. I had to give up dance, and I can't go to parties or even hang out with my friends very much. I'm now gluten-free, which is torture considering I used to bake all the time. Gluten-free cake is not real cake.

I've gone through hell and back, but the experience has made me a stronger person. I've met so many friends from support groups who know what I'm going through because they are too. My illness has shaped me, but it doesn't define me. That's why I don't often talk about it; I don't want to be known as the sick girl. I want to be known how I was always known, as the girl who's read Harry Potter more than a hundred times. My condition isn't what I am; it's just what I have, and I'm stronger than it. ♦



Art by Sophia Dudley, Morgan Hill, CA

of concealer. I really shouldn't, but I don't know how to tell them that even though I look fine, my body really doesn't work. On the outside, I look like every other 15-year-old girl, but inside I'm about 70 years older.

I was a remarkably healthy child. So when, in the summer of 2014, I fell seriously ill, it was a shock. It started with dizziness, then migraines. I went to the doctor, who sent me to a neurologist, who sent me for an MRI. Normal. The migraines persisted. I went back to the doctor, who sent me to a different neurologist, who sent me for a CT Scan. Normal.

I waited some more. My health got

I don't want to be known as the sick girl

Finding "The One"

by "Kate," Clinton, CT

"I don't need help! I can handle everything myself!" I screamed at an octave high and loud enough to shatter glass. My mom was attempting to coax me out of the car. Defeated, she slammed the door in my face and walked alone up the cracked concrete stairs to the bland gray trio of office buildings where I was expected – 15 minutes ago.

Someone like me does not belong somewhere like this. The June heat soon became oppressive. My stubbornness wavering, I decided the time was right to enter the building. An overly enthusiastic woman met me at the door, and soon I sat uncomfortably in a stiff paisley print chair in an office that reeked of potpourri and old women. After a half an hour of awkward small talk and failed efforts to pry into my mind, my mom and I walked silently back to the car. On the way home I delivered my ultimatum: "If I am going to ever set foot in another office to meet with a psy-

Someone like me does not belong somewhere like this

chologist, she better be nothing like that. I want someone who isn't old."

Weeks passed as trips to bizarrely decorated offices and even more peculiar sites became a weekly event that I dreaded. From spider web-filled waiting rooms to dull old men, the search for what I considered "the one" seemed a nearly impossible feat. After all, someone like me should not be somewhere like this, and the futile pursuit of a psychologist who fit my ever-changing criteria simply reaffirmed my ignorant belief.

The journey led my mom and me to a beautiful yellow Victorian in downtown New Haven. The waiting room was filled with the traffic noises of rush hour. Pictures of strange watercolor clowns hung high on the walls, making eye contact from every angle. As the clock struck 5:30, a middle-aged African American woman entered and introduced herself as Mary. Before another word was spoken, I knew I

had been defeated. She was "the one."

Within moments I felt as if I had known Mary forever. I began making weekly visits to her office; little did I know that she would do more than act as my psychologist.

Now, two and a half years later, Mary has become my closest ally in this grim and problematic time of my life. From Mary I have learned vital tactics to deal with the challenges of life, but most importantly I have learned to keep an open mind.

I never saw myself as someone who would go to a psychologist because of the stigma of mental health and the embarrassment I felt. However, weekly visits to Mary are the times I can be myself and feel no shame about my state of mind. She has taught me to accept new people and situations, and to forgive those who have left.

Possessing an open mind has enabled me to embrace change, a task that at one time was grueling for me. Mary has inspired my love for helping people like me. One day I hope to be the Mary – "the one" – in someone else's life. ♦



Art by Kian McKeown, New York, NY



Photo by Rachel Hawkins, Vincent, OH



Photo by Josh Charow, Summit, NJ



Art by Karlee Thomas, Emerald Isle, NC



Photo by Katie Marke, Nipomo, CA



Photo by Emma Mortellaro, Granville, OH



Art by Pam Best, Greenlawn, NY



Art by Abigail Laymon, Escondido, CA

Teen Ink College Connection

Photo by Dyllen Nellis, Los Angeles, CA

INSIDE: COLLEGE DIRECTORY, ESSAYS, ARTICLES AND FACTS

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS TIMETABLE

GRADE 9

- Enroll in college prep courses. Math and English are essential.
- Begin to read about admissions and think about your college financing plan.

GRADE 10

FALL:

- Contact the guidance counselor to discuss plans regarding college.
- In October you may elect to take the PSAT or PLAN (pre-ACT test) for practice.

WINTER AND SPRING TERM:

- Consider taking SAT Subject Tests for courses you are completing this year.

GRADE 11

SUMMER BEFORE:

- Begin preparation for the PSAT/NMSQT and PLAN. If you feel you could use help, seek a reliable prep course.
- Begin exploring college interests and visit local campuses to get a feel for various settings.

FALL:

- Contact your high school counselor to initiate the college selection process.
- October – Register and take the PSAT/NMSQT or PLAN.

WINTER:

- Attend college fairs to gather information and speak with college representatives.
- Visit nearby colleges to help gain a better understanding of characteristics that are important to you, for example, location and size.

SPRING:

- Register and take the SAT or ACT. Consider a prep course if you need help.
- Take SAT Subject Tests, especially for subjects in which you are taking the last course.
- Over vacation visit some colleges to begin figuring out what suits your needs.

GRADE 12

SUMMER BEFORE:

- Contact colleges to make appointments for interviews and visits. It is usually better to visit a college when students are on campus to get the real flavor of campus life. Talking with students is helpful too.
- Research online about colleges.
- Begin to narrow your list of colleges.

FALL:

- Contact your guidance counselor.
- Develop a final college application list.
- If previous SAT/ACT scores are low, retake the tests.
- Begin applications, especially the essays. Have a teacher or a counselor review your essays.
- Apply for all possible scholarships.
- Many Early Action/Decision applications are due October 15, so be sure application materials are completed early.
- Be aware that some colleges have “rolling admissions” deadlines as well.

WINTER:

- Complete applications for regular admissions. Be sure to include one or two “Likelies” and one “Reach.”
- Request transcripts, send all recommendations (from teachers and counselors) and other supporting data to colleges.
- Complete and send appropriate financial aid applications.
- Be sure to keep a record of every document. It will save time, money, and aggravation if an application is lost.
- In January/February, check with the college registrar to see if your application is complete.

SPRING:

- March/April – Colleges send admission, rejection, and waiting list letters.
- Make your choice and, if necessary, visit colleges again to be sure.
- April/May – Send an acceptance letter and deposit to your college choice and write polite letters of refusal to the others.

U.S. Statistics • 2013-14

NUMBER OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Public 4-year	698
Public 2-year	939
Private 4-year, nonprofit	1,606
Private 2-year, nonprofit	88
Private 4-year, for-profit	816
Private 2-year, for-profit	663
Total	4,810

Graduation rates at 4-year institutions:

All	60%
Men	57%
Women	62%

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Women	57%
Full-time.....	62%
Minority	37%
Foreign	4%

81% of freshmen who graduated from high school in the previous year attended college in their home state.

Students averaged **21.0** on the ACT and **1010** on the SAT.

SOURCES: *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, U.S. Dept. of Education, The College Board

COLLEGE FACTS

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Why I Hate College Parties

by Mary Stanton, Ponte Vedra, FL

“You’ve got to get out of your room more. Go to parties! Hang out with people!” When I told my dad that I had turned down the offers I’d gotten to go to parties since I started college, he attempted to convince me that by skipping them, I was missing out on part of “the college experience.”

I’ve always had friends, but until now I hadn’t realized that I’d made most of those connections through a mutual dislike of partying. In seventh grade I admired my to-this-day best friend Cayte from afar because I’d always see her off by herself playing pretend and trying to rope others in, or seeming content to play alone.

I met other friends through school plays, where we sacrificed our social lives for vigorous rehearsals. I often make friends when I’m off doing something by myself and some other loner decides to join in.

Now, I wouldn’t consider myself socially deprived. I’ve been to parties, and they all feel the same. At cast parties, frat parties, even family parties there seems to be this innate flow that I just can’t seem to catch on to. It’s like everyone else is flowing with the tide and for some weird reason I’m trying to swim upstream. The activities make no sense: many people are simply eying the crowd for potential mates, and the few conversations that occur seem uninteresting.

My dad’s defense of partying was interesting for a few reasons. First, he phrased it as if not enjoying partying was wrong. He implied, just like the countless college films I’d seen, that there was something wrong with me – that I should, in fact, enjoy partying. I don’t, on the whole, like parties, just like some people don’t enjoy attending lectures or going to comedy shows. Also, Dad talked about partying as if it were healthy. Is it really a rite of passage for college students without which we miss out on some crucial part of our development?

To answer this question, I knew I had to do something so completely out of my comfort zone that I was positive I’d have an awful time. I attended a college party.

The party was loud. People stood around and then one by one sifted through the little cliques that had emerged and settled on a new one. After playing with the dogs for a while, I decided I should try to talk to people. I practically lost my voice after an hour of shouting over the unnecessarily loud music. Some people were dancing. There were a few couples and a few soon-to-be couples and then a lot of single people flirting it up. Some were having fun and going crazy. Everyone seemed to be smiling. I didn’t understand why. I

still don’t.

In trying to talk to people, though, and going with the flow of the party, I became more comfortable. I didn’t feel left out, but simply disinterested. I discovered that the attendees enjoyed being at the party – despite the loud music, cheap conversation, and constantly changing cliques – because of a shared desire to enjoy this mo-

ment together and not think about the rest of their lives. The music is loud to drown out all the stress. People said they go to parties to feel good for a little while before they have to return to school, jobs, and family life – the things that cause them worry.

Although I finally opened my mind and learned to respect the party culture, I still didn’t find any joy in it.

It isn’t for me, and that’s okay. I can feel free to do the things I enjoy, and respect people who enjoy different things. I can feel confident in my dislike of parties but not be afraid of them.

Humans all need to occasionally escape from our worries and de-stress. The unique ways that we choose to do that make us who we are. ♦



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Infrequently Asked Questions

by Laura Chapman, Pleasantville, NY

This summer I visited Columbia University with my mom. We were listening to the prospective students ask questions at the general information session, having survived the bulk of the presentation, which we both thought was unnecessarily monotonous.

"I wished they had played a video," Mom said, concisely summarizing the problem with the talk.

People asked the standard questions – about financial aid, housing, and student life – but the most memorable question came from a disgruntled-looking mother sitting with her dormant-looking son.

"What is the median salary of your graduates?"

To start, this question violates the first rule of Asking Questions During the Asking Questions Part: Never ask the admissions officer any numerical or other strictly objective question. Not only could you easily find the answer online and are therefore wasting everyone's time, but the admissions officer will never give you a satisfying response. Based on my vast experience attending and analyzing college visits, I have surmised that the only numerical information admissions officers will readily give is about financial aid. Ask them about minimum SAT scores, average GPA, or rate of admission, and they will revert to Political Mode and give a non-answer, such as, "We use a very holistic evaluation process, so we don't have minimum requirements," or "To be honest, I'm not sure what our statistics were this year."

You're not fooling me, Equivocating Admissions Officer. You may be fooling Joe "Got a 350 on his SATs" Schmo or Jane "Got a B in one class and will

never forgive herself" Doe or Mrs. "Crap! I need to get my underachieving kid into a college so convince me that it can be done" Smith. But I don't buy the idea that an admissions officer doesn't know basic stats about the school he or she works for.

Of course, they're trying to get as many kids to apply as possible and don't want to scare anyone off. If they made a statement at the beginning of the session like, "Before we begin, I'd like to make everyone aware that our middle 50 SAT

Math Scores range from 770 to 800. Take a moment and let that fact resonate with you, while you can still spare yourself from this info session," a bunch of people would probably leave.

From an optimistic perspective, admissions people want to be positive and encourage everyone to reach for the stars and believe in themselves. Cynically, it

is in their best interest to have the lowest possible acceptance rate to be competitive with other schools.

However, this question comically resonated with me (meaning: forced me to stifle laughter for the remainder of the presentation) because it was both out of the blue and embarrassing to the kid. If it was my mom, I would have been embarrassed the way you get embarrassed when you accidentally spot the book *Your Spirited Child: A Workbook for Success* on the family bookshelf and wonder what exactly they mean by "spirited."

Essentially, what the mother was asking was, "If I pay a quarter of a million dollars to send my kid to your fancy school, will he just end up living in my

"Can your college rid me of this surly person-unit?"



Photo by Bianca Shropshire, Waikoloa, HI

basement anyway? Can you turn my spacey, underachieving teen into a financially successful adult? I don't want to drop a few hundred dollars a day for four years if you can't guarantee that your college education will rid me of this surly person-unit."

Probably in that case the answer isn't what the mother would want to hear, or what the admissions officer would ever say. Columbia can't reform her slob-child. He'd never get in in the first place. Because, of course, her son has violated the second rule of Asking Questions During the Asking Questions Part: Do not let your parents ask questions. You are supposed to be posing as a strong potential candidate for admission. Your job is to convince everyone around you that you have dragged your parental unit along to this college visit because you are so desperately interested in said college. You must hide the ugly truth that it was your mother's idea and she basically set up everything for you.

Let's be real: not many high school students are actively and independently seeking out college visits. I'm certainly not; parental reminders are the only way my college visits happen. But I, unlike you, slob-child, am doing everything I can to appear otherwise. Unfortunately your cover is blown if you're totally checked out and your mother is asking about median salary. Busted. Wait a minute ... are you sleeping? How dare you do what all of us wish we could but have the politeness to refrain from doing.

(Brief side note: I actually did fall asleep during an information session at Boston College. I was wearing sunglasses and a coat with a large, furry hood and figured no one would notice. I woke up a while later only to the disappointment of Still Being at the Boston College Info Session.)

The admissions officer, a woman in her mid-twenties, was taken off-guard by the disgruntled mom's question. I perceived that she too was trying not to laugh. "Well, I'm not sure exactly what the number is," she said, "but I'm pretty sure it's quite good."

A sophisticated "I don't know."

I give you a hard time, slob-child and corresponding mother, but ultimately you have provided some much-needed entertainment during an otherwise dull information session just like all the others. In my family's college-visiting experiences, we've heard countless times about "our unique, holistic evaluation process" and the "300 clubs and activities, including 57 a capella groups." We've heard too many college histories. At this point we'll just assume that some man donated a lot of money between the years 1800 and 1950, and that's who countless things are named after. We don't need to know specifics.

We do, however, desperately need some comic relief, and for that I thank you. ♦

Running Out of Time

by Kyrsten Williams,
Dell Rapids, SD

As freshmen in high school, our heads are filled with advice like "Always do your best; it will help in the long run" and "Start planning your future now" and "Push yourself!" and "Live it up now because these years will be over before you know it!" These nuggets of wisdom go in one ear and out the other. We think it's ridiculous; we're only freshmen and have four long years ahead of us – why start college planning now?

Then, sophomore year arrives, and we have yet to figure out what we want to do. When the counselor comes with resources to help us prepare and start planning our future, do we take it seriously? Nope. Are we worried? No way! We still have three years, and there are more important things to worry about.

Like all the schoolwork. It seems like the older we get the more we get. So much that it becomes stressful; we start to lose sleep, become frustrated, and eventually maybe give up. Some people start copying friends' assignments last minute without caring if they're right or not. All we care about is that we pass.

Now it's junior year, and we still have no plan for what we are going to do with the rest of our lives. Our GPAs have started to slip because we've been getting by with doing the minimum. As juniors we can get jobs, which means more freedom. But who has time for schoolwork, a job, a social life, and sleep? Oh, and

don't forget we have to sign up for ACTs, and we only have one year left to figure out what to do after graduation – practically impossible!

Now it's senior year, and we realize we are running out of time. We still have to decide where we want to go to college, what we are going to major in, and we have to apply for scholarships. A lot of "lasts" are right around the corner, and we want to live this year to its fullest and make forever memories.

We realize we should have listened to all those people freshman year who told us to do our best because now we are limited in the colleges where we can possibly be accepted and what scholarships we qualify for. Those people told us to start planning our future four years ago, and now we don't have the slightest idea what we want to do. They told us to get started early because high school is over before you know it, but we didn't grasp how true that was.

We thought we were stressed before, but now it's at an all-time high, and we don't have a clue what to do. All we know is that it's crunch-time. The only thing left to do is take a deep breath, fill out the applications, pick a college, and push ourselves to finish the year strong. The door of our high school career is slowly closing, but another door is about to open. High school was full of lessons learned, and it's time to take them with us for the rest of our journey. ♦

We only have one year left to figure out what to do!

The Birthing Crisis

by Rachael Morton, Oxford, OH

Essay prompt: The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

The gentle, coaxing fingers seized a pair of shining scissors, rushing its blades deftly through a veil of muscle and skin, releasing a trail of glistening red in their wake. Screams, commands, and moans melded in a symphony of chaos, climaxing, then fading into blackness.

I awoke to a collection of concerned faces hovering over me: “Are you okay?”

I was not okay. The feeling of nausea paled in comparison to my emotional distress. In one moment, all my dreams were shattered. This was the moment of triumph I had waited so long for. I had envisioned the envy of my peers, the congratulations of my parents, and my bragging rights for all eternity. I had finally witnessed a live birth. Yet, instead of identifying with the OB/GYN doctor in the room, I was more like the wailing newborn – exposed, raw, and utterly confused

about my place in the world.

My path to becoming a baby doctor was set in motion before I was born. In a town of 25,000 at the foot of Appalachia, my grandfather was the sole OB/GYN specialist, delivering 21,000 babies in his 30-year career. Numerous local children were named after him. Families who had moved across the country came back to have their babies delivered by him. Relatives visiting town were pardoned for speeding tickets upon mentioning his name.

For my grandfather, delivering babies was more a passion than a job; each delivery was a celebration of life itself. Hence, I grew up believing that delivering babies was the most joyful profession in the world. I was the family hope to continue the profession. I had shown a natural predisposition toward being a baby doctor: I was a popular babysitter in my town, was known to be observant and patient, had excelled in science and math, and when one of my pet rabbits deposited a mess of placenta and fetus at the foot of her

cage, I resuscitated the cold bodies and nursed seven cuddly creatures to life.

I eagerly waited to be old enough to volunteer in the obstetrics department at the local hospital. For over a year, I rushed samples to the lab, sorted through patient records, answered phone calls, and transported stirring

I grew up believing that delivering babies was the most joyful profession

pink and blue bundles between mothers and the nursery every Tuesday night. The moment I was waiting for, the chance to participate in a live birth, finally arrived. What was meant to be my reward for persistence, reliability, and dedication instead became a meeting with the cold delivery room floor.

After this disastrous incident, I consoled myself with my other favorite activities – classes, music, and a few gallons of ice cream. Yet, a void had been left by the departure of my long-held aspiration.

A new door opened four months later. I was offered a research opportunity by a computer science profes-

Rachael is a sophomore at her dream school – Caltech – and is studying computer science and English.

sor at the local university where I take college classes. This interdisciplinary project bordering between computer science and life science quickly captured my imagination. I am now creating software that will help discover patterns of repetitive DNA, to reveal humans’ connections with other life forms and identify contributors to illnesses beyond our current ability to cure, such as Alzheimer’s, Huntington’s, and muscle dystrophy. Next spring, I hope to deliver a presentation at an international conference about this “baby” tool I’ve helped bring into the world.

And, I hope that I will be able to carry out my grandfather’s legacy – not as an OB/GYN, but as a scientist dissecting medicine down to its fundamentals and discovering means to improve the quality of life, while finding great passion in bettering the world and serving mankind. ♦

A Profile of Freshmen at 4-Year Colleges

Reasons deemed “Very Important” in deciding to go to college

To be able to get a better job.....	86%
To learn more about things that interest me.....	82%
To get training for a specific career.....	77%
To be able to make more money.....	73%
To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas.....	71%
To prepare myself for graduate or professional school.....	60%
To make me a more cultured person.....	47%

Probable field of study/major

Business.....	15%
Biological science.....	14%
Engineering.....	12%
Health professions.....	12%
Social science.....	11%
Arts and humanities.....	10%
Math and computer science.....	5%
Education.....	5%
Other majors.....	5%
Physical science.....	3%
Undecided.....	10%

Highest degree planned

Master’s degree.....	43%
Bachelor’s degree.....	22%
Ph.D. or Ed.D.....	19%
M.D., D.O., D.D.S., D.V.M.....	10%
J.D. (law).....	4%

SOURCE: UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, 2014

First generation in college?

Yes	No
20%	80%

Average Starting Salaries for Class of 2014 College Graduates

Major category	2014 average starting salary
Overall	\$48,707
Engineering	62,891
Computer science	62,103
Business	57,229
Communications	48,253
Math and sciences	44,299
Education	40,267
Humanities and social sciences	38,049

SOURCE: National Association of Colleges and Employers, September 2014 salary survey

My Addiction

by Isabel Kaspriskie, West Orange, NJ

Essay prompt: Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?

I hunch over the dimly lit desk in my bedroom, my thumb poised to push the plunger of the syringe I clutch tightly. Before I send the dark red liquid out of the blunted needle, I breathe deeply, preparing for the ritual rush of exhilaration. I am cut short by the door opening.

“What are you doing?”

My mom stands in the doorway with a questioning look. I hold up the fountain pen I’m refilling with oxblood-red ink, and her surprised eyebrows quickly relax.

“Okay, when you’re done, please get your laundry out of the basement

so I can do mine.”

I smile and nod, too engrossed in my project to formulate a coherent response.

It is Saturday evening, pen maintenance day, and nothing can distract me from my paradise. My desk is my true home, my office supply center, a Staples-away-from-Staples. The cabinets above the desk house dozens of ink bottles, hundreds of ink samples, and a fleet of fountain pens. Diluted ammonia and old T-shirts meant for cleanup live on their own shelf, ready to be pulled out at a moment’s notice.

I finish filling the Pilot pen in my hand and put away the bottle of ink. HP Premium LaserJet 32 paper is retrieved from the top drawer of my

cabinet, and I begin the real work. When the 14k nib of my Pilot pen touches the paper, I let out a long sigh of contentment. The reddish-brown ink flows from the pen smoothly, leaving behind swirls of color. I write

*Nothing
can distract
me from my
paradise*

a pangram to give myself an impression of the color and the ink’s properties before writing my review. I test the waterproof quality, saturation, and bleed-through, giving each property a rating. Once I use cotton swabs to lay down thick lines of color onto the paper, I can compare the new ink to others I have tried. I use my handheld scanner to digitize my handwritten review before opening up my laptop.

“11,518 views,” my blog dashboard reads.

Isabel is a freshman at MIT studying chemical engineering.

I grin and click the “New Post” button. A few keyboard strokes and mouse clicks later, my “Diamine Oxblood Ink Review” is online and ready to view. I shut the tab and open up the Fountain Pen Network forums. After ogling over pictures of limited-edition Montblanc pens and Waterman inks, I check the price tags and close my laptop.

Before I can get back to writing out song lyrics and history notes with my well-loved utensils, I run downstairs to get my laundry from the washing machine. ♦

COLLEGE FACTS

Wages for Selected Creative Occupations

Occupation	Median annual wage
Artists and related workers	
Art directors	\$85,610
Craft artists	\$31,080
Fine artists, including painters, sculptors, and illustrators	\$43,890
Multimedia artists and animators	\$63,630
Designers	
Commercial and industrial designers	\$64,620
Fashion designers	\$64,030
Floral designers	\$24,750
Graphic designers	\$45,900
Interior designers	\$48,400
Set and exhibit designers	\$49,810
Media and communication workers	
Editors	\$54,890
Photographers	\$30,490
Technical writers	\$69,030
Writers and authors	\$58,850
All occupations	\$35,540

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics survey (excludes self-employed), May 2014

Vests

by Jenelle Doolittle, Danville, CA

Essay prompt: Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

Three years ago, I stood on a street corner with my best friend wearing a (hideous) bright orange vest while directing cyclists in a race, and found myself putting my soul on display – much like those vests put us on display for everyone within a two-mile radius. However, the vest was the least of my worries at that moment. Sickening fear, adrenaline, and uncertainty coursed through me, but as I do with anything unpleasant, I channeled them into something positive. Using that nervous energy, I forced my mouth to open and form two words that were the start down a long road of self-discovery: “I’m gay.”

High school was when I began taking long, hard looks in the metaphorical mirror at who I was and who I wanted to be, rather than how society wanted me to be. What I found in that mirror was frightening. I kept wondering why I wasn’t finding guys attractive like my friends did, and why instead, for as long as I could remember, I thought that girls were beautiful. I prayed for months that something would change, but at some point, it finally hit me that this wasn’t going to go away.

My initial misery didn’t originate in homophobia; I grew up in an accepting family, knowing and respecting gay church members, next-door neighbors, and friends. It originated in having to come to grips with the fact that the story I had heard all my life and expected for myself – girl meets guy, falls in love, and they grow old together – would only ever be fiction for me. It originated in feeling that my sexual

Jenelle attends Northwestern University and is studying theatre and environmental engineering.

orientation would be like that ugly, bright orange vest: something that people would fixate on, dislike, or – worst of all – use to define me. I felt as though my entire perspective was crumbling like so many bricks in an earthquake, yet I was overcome by a panic of losing myself, of being consumed by this one characteristic, because I believed others wouldn’t be able to see beyond that part of me. However, my base values of balance, adaptability, logic, and empathy allowed me to take in these emotions and all that I learned about myself in order to grow instead of fall.

I know that my life will never be what I expected it to be, and I know that there are people in the world who would assault and even kill me given the chance based on this one characteristic, but I also recognize that this is an extreme on a broad scale. My sexuality is merely one characteristic of many, only one article of clothing in an outfit – just an orange vest accenting a volunteer getup. As long as I know that, I cannot and will not be defined by it – not by others and, more importantly, not by myself. Now, as the co-president of my school’s Gay-Straight Alliance, I have the chance to help those who are experiencing what I went through and to make the future a place where others won’t have to feel the way I did. I am extremely grateful to be able to show them how to recognize their worth beyond any single characteristic – as a student, athlete, friend, musician, and artist, but above all, as a person.

That bright orange vest is no longer frightening or overwhelming. Instead, it’s just a part of the bigger picture of who I am. ♦

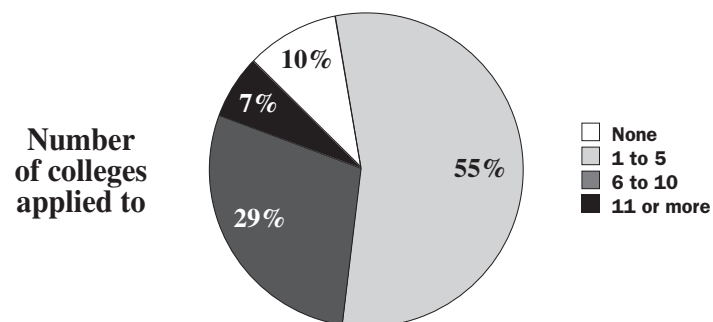
*High school
was when I
began to look
at who I was*

Fastest-Growing Occupations

	Projected growth by 2022	Median pay per year
Physician assistants	38%	\$90,930
Information security analysts	37%	\$86,170
Industrial-organizational psychologists	53%	\$83,580
Health specialties teachers, postsecondary	36%	\$81,140
Physical therapists	36%	\$79,860
Diagnostic medical sonographers	46%	\$65,860
Genetic counselors	41%	\$56,800
Occupational therapy assistants	43%	\$53,240
Physical therapy assistants	41%	\$52,160
Interpreters and translators	46%	\$45,430
Insulation workers, mechanical	47%	\$39,170
Segmental pavers	38%	\$33,720
Medical secretaries	36%	\$31,350
Skincare specialists	40%	\$28,640
Helpers – brickmasons, blockmasons, stonemasons, and tile and marble setters	43%	\$28,220
Helpers – electricians	37%	\$27,670
Occupational therapy aides	36%	\$26,850
Physical therapy aides	40%	\$23,880
Home health aides	48%	\$20,820
Personal care aides	49%	\$19,910

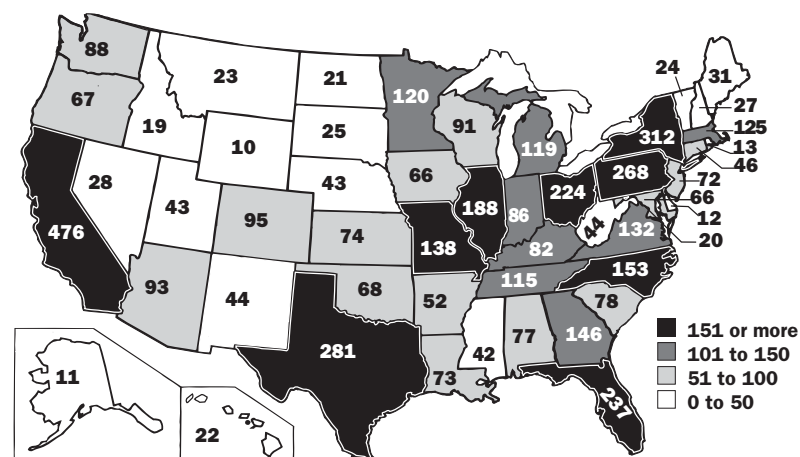
SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012

A Profile of Freshmen at 4-Year Colleges



SOURCE: UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, 2014

Number of Colleges and Universities



SOURCE: U.S. Education Department, 2013-14

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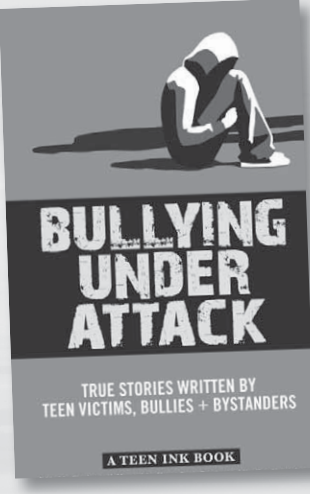
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The Story of Me

by Angela Solon, Springfield, IL

My birth was atypical. I was born at 25 weeks – three months before my due date. My mother calls me her “miracle” or “alphabet soup” baby, for all the three-letter acronyms for my various conditions. At birth I weighed 1 pound 10 ounces and was given a 50/50 chance of survival.

When I did survive, I was expected to be severely disabled – both physically and cognitively. Slowly, I was taken off the ventilator as I learned to breathe for myself. In time, I learned to breastfeed without sucking milk into my lungs.

I vaguely remember my three years of physical, occupational, developmental, and speech therapies. Neither I nor my mother remembers when I

first learned how to ... crawl? Walk? Speak? Only that it happened slowly, with two steps forward and one step back, for months.

I couldn't read – at least not independently – for the first 10 years of my life. At 15, I'm almost ashamed to say I spell only adequately.

Despite all this, I learned to speak fluently, honed my motor skills, and learned to follow along both physically and mentally. Steadily, I was molding myself a normal girlhood.

There are always those quick to remind me of my journey. When I started school, not everyone was accepting of my differences, and even some

who set limits on my future potential. These assumptions deeply angered me. To think that almost strangers could see me and decide who I was, who I was going to be, based on what I had struggled through in the past.

When I saw these same biased views cast on others, I felt obligated to protect them. Experiencing my struggles attuned me to the struggles of others.

Throughout middle school, I was there for my bullied friends. I supported my friends who “came out” in school. And I was the voice against racism in my Girls on the Run team as we watched a group of young black men get racially profiled by police.

I was born at 25 weeks

Angela is a high school sophomore. She wrote this essay for a Martin Luther King writing contest. She hopes to become a wildlife biologist and a published author.

Throughout my life, I have learned to covet my firm belief in this, above all else: Doing what you can, when and how you can, and doing it one step at a time makes a difference. All change happens as a series of steps – we reach our destination as we keep moving, going slowly, one foot at a time. ♦

Bursting the Conformist Bubble

by Eli Elman, West Orange, NJ

For almost five years I attempted to fit in by conforming at school. The administrators had convinced students that being different was unacceptable, success was obtained with strict step-by-step instructions and, most importantly, with a tremendous amount of money. I had tried to fit in by buying expensive clothing and joining sports teams, but the burden of pretending I was happy made me realize that I would never be successful where individuality was an undesirable characteristic. I needed to be in a community that allowed me to be the author of my own future. Once I finally realized that, I popped the conformist bubble that surrounded me for many years.

I made the difficult decision to transfer in the mid-

dle of the academic year from a small private school to a large and diverse public school. Although I was scared of what this decision might bring, resiliency and an open mind were bound to help me prosper.

Change helped me discover possibilities

During the first week at my new school, I was cast as the lead in the musical and joined several clubs. For the first time in almost five years, I wasn't afraid of being myself. Still, I cannot deny the splatter effect of the bubble. When a person bursts the bubble of expectations, life can get a little sticky. I was not accustomed to the slang that my classmates used, or to the behavior that definitely would have been considered undesirable at my old school. However, I soon recognized that these were just different ways people chose to ex-

Eli plans to attend Boston University and study international management.

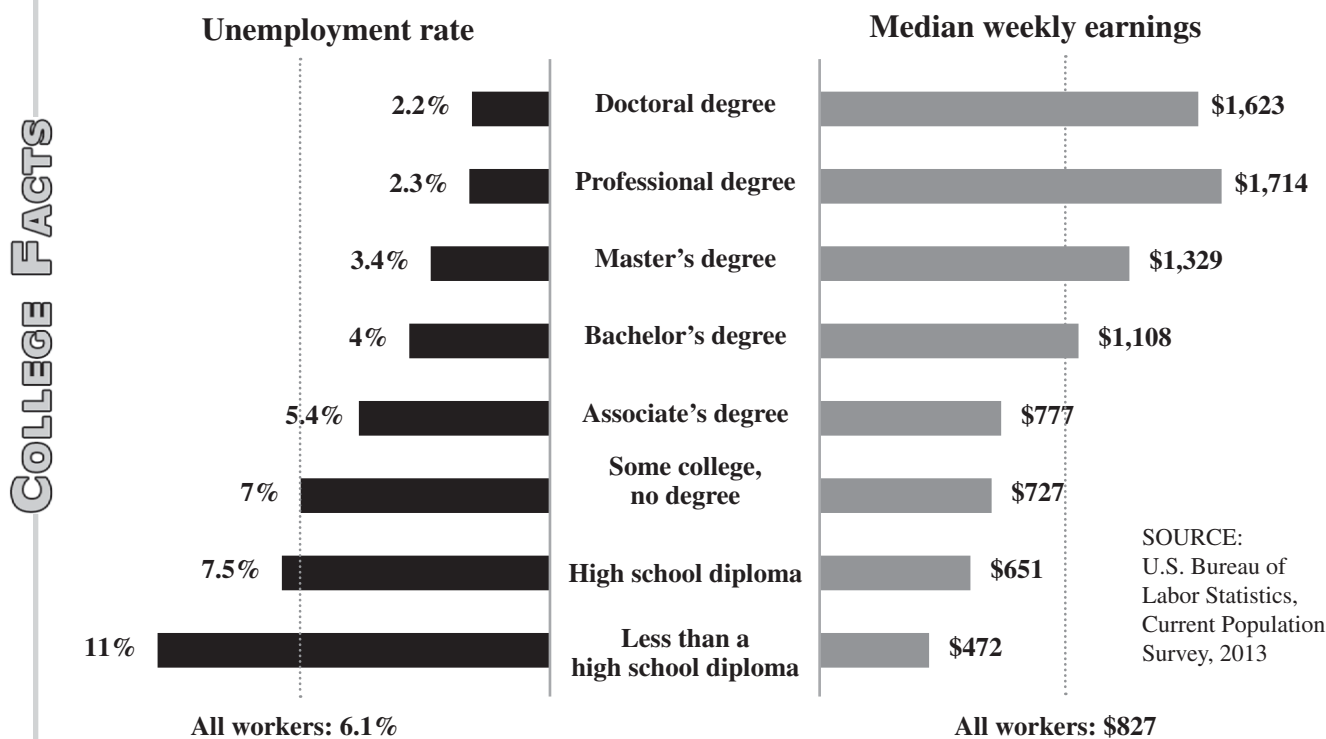
press themselves. Finally in an environment where different backgrounds and opinions were encouraged rather than looked down upon, I embraced the opportunity to succeed by being myself.

The fear of change causes many people to fail because they feel too frightened to capitalize on chances. The ability to welcome and accept change helped me discover endless possibilities in the world that were waiting at my fingertips but that I could not yet see. With time, I began to take advantage of these opportunities, regardless of the challenges. This determination – bordering on stubbornness – is a quality I cherish most because it grants me the strength to overcome obstacles.

Although I still vividly recall the pain I felt from middle school until the middle of ninth grade, I don't regret those years. I am not mad at anyone or anything that tested me during this time; I am proud of myself for always trying, even when failure seemed inevitable. The years I spent eating lunch in the bathroom and coming home from school crying have passed but will never be forgotten; remembering these hardships reinvigorates my courage to persevere.

Inclined to strengthen my open-mindedness and determination for success on a global scale, I studied abroad in Beijing, China, this past summer. I now use this experience to help other teenagers escape their ethnocentric ideas by talking to students enrolled in Chinese language classes. Before gaining the strength to pop the bubble of conformity, I felt uninspired to make a difference in the world because I was unaware that diversity and open-mindedness invite success. However, the power to act as the architect of my future destroyed this fear and allowed me to thrive through hard work, determination, and perseverance. ♦

Unemployment Rate and Earnings by Educational Attainment



A Pigeon, a Louse, and Me

by MinGon Kim, Schenectady, NY

Early in our lives, as curious children, we naturally fantasize about growing up. We may visualize a triumphant future as a magnificent astronaut, a visionary president, a virtuoso soloist, or a world-class athlete. The magical aspirations we hold early in our lives often drive us on our long trek, encouraging us to carry on whenever we falter. Through high school we endure heavy strains and stresses that often make us question our place in the intimidating, gargantuan world. In these turbulent times, our dreams shine a light on the dark path we travel.

I myself was drawn to many fantasies, but one was strikingly distinct: becoming a scientist. I perceived science to be a mysterious and charismatic being. The suspense of investigating something new and understanding the world around me rendered it an enormously exciting topic both in and out of school. This affinity was further propelled by science-fiction novels, movies, and TV shows. I vividly remember being enchanted by “The Magic School Bus” and shrieking along to “Bill Nye the Science Guy.”

As I slowly climbed up the grades, science was the easiest topic to excel in; despite its difficulty, my deep immersion in the sea of information encouraged me to absorb facts like a sponge. Wherever I went, my thought process followed that of scientific inquiry: observe, ask, test, and judge.

When I entered high school, science became more than a way to learn; it was a channel through which I could develop my identity and plant my foot in the world. Heavy hours of reviewing biology persuaded me to adjust my habits for better personal health and environmental consciousness. Chemistry connected me to the tangible world and opened my eyes to the diversity around me. Outside of school, I burned hours on the Internet reading about cutting-edge discoveries and watching videos that plunged me into even greater depths of scientific knowledge.

In my highly competitive Science Olympiad team, I focused not on winning awards but on learning as much as I could and implementing bits of new insight into my life. Even fiction including Orwell’s *1984* and Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* made me contemplate science’s societal roles. As I matured, science kept me grounded and helped me form my identity by providing me wisdom and opening my mind to new ideas.

With my mind set on following the field of biology beyond graduation, I decided to test the waters. I landed a summer position in a laboratory at a local college, where I was to study the nature of host parasite systems. The projects were centered on the parasitic relationship between columbiform birds – better known as pigeons – and the numerous lice that thrive on their soft feathers.

A rookie to research, I expected to be living my fantasy: working with complex machinery to analyze the body composition of the species, using intricate devices to observe and influence their activity, and making significant discoveries. The enticing dreams of my childhood set in

again, and I entered the lab bursting with anticipation.

Predictably, I was not introduced to a dream, but instead flung into reality.

In my first experiment, I was to examine the correlation between lice coloration and the pigeons’ ability to preen the parasites from their feathers.

While it was an intriguing subject, most of my time was spent painstakingly painting tiny lice under a microscope with red nail polish, then gluing each one onto the feather barbs of a none-too-pleased bird. The process was tedious and had to be completed for several excruciating hours a day in order to gather sufficient data.

The second project was to study pheromone-based communication between lice. My lab partner and I placed a group of lice in one branch of a clear, Y-shaped tube, leaving the other side empty. We inserted a lone louse into the chamber and observed if it chose the “lousy side.” This experiment was much more problematic; we stumbled over many obstacles, including equipment failure, the difficulty of working with live lice, and the issue of determining what minuscule chemicals the lice could be emitting. An entire month was spent solely on preparing a sound experiment.

After a barrage of discouraging failures and a lack of conclusive findings, I began to doubt my initial views on science and research. My expectation of a quick and convenient outcome was shattered, and the fantastic mirage of my childhood dreams was diminished. I even considered foregoing my final

I began to doubt my views on science and research

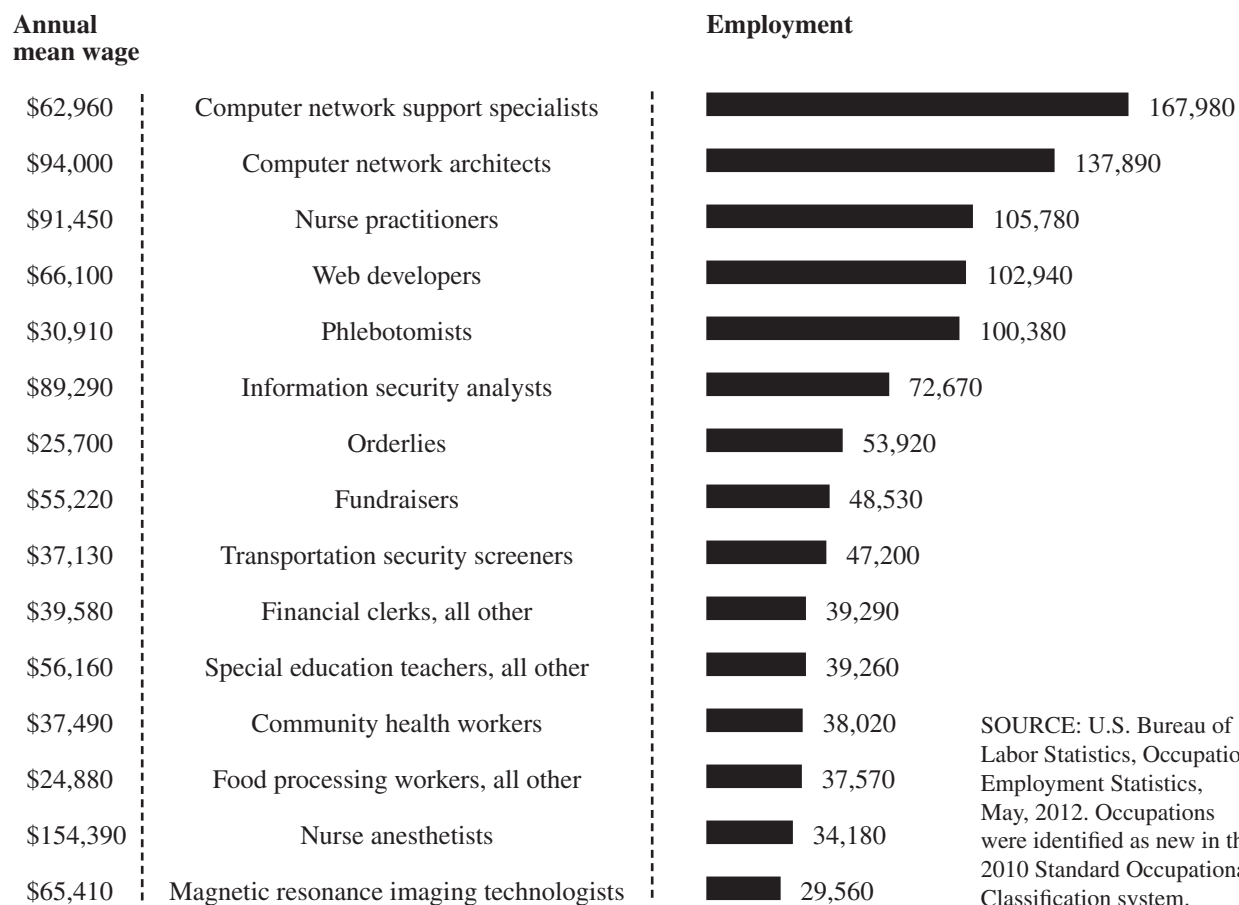
MinGon plans to apply to Emory, Northeastern, Georgetown, and Stony Brook.

weeks at the lab. However, despite my declining morale, I remembered how much science had meant to me my entire life: how it had consistently been by my side to overcome any adversities, and helped me become who I was. This rocketed me back onto my feet, and uncovered the meaning behind my work.

It began to dawn on me that despite the poor impression the projects had given, my role was just a small fragment of the unified campaign in science. While it may appear irrelevant on its own, understanding this parasitic relationship will help us form a clearer picture of host-parasite systems. Such an understanding can help us more accurately comprehend the disease-spreading viruses and parasites that affect millions of people each year. In this manner, my small research is an embodiment of the historical process through which humans have blossomed: Cooperatively working to understand our place in the world.

Sure, painting lice and watching them crawl up glass tubes in slow motion isn’t the magical experience I had fantasized about. However, it exemplifies our curious nature, our slow but sure process of working with others to figure out how the gears of the world turn. That is the genuine nature of science, and the truth that I only realized through the continuum of my lifelong aspirations. ♦

National Employment and Wages for the Largest New Occupations



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics, May, 2012. Occupations were identified as new in the 2010 Standard Occupational Classification system.

Reflections

by Namrata Verghese, Missouri City, TX

Essay prompt: Some students have a background or story so central to their identity that their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

In my dance studio, there are mirrors everywhere, panes upon panes of mirrors. My face is hidden, broken – a flash of eyes here, a twist of wrist there – until I can no longer pinpoint exactly where I am. If I look at myself while pivoting, my smile is scattered into a thousand glittering shards.

When I was younger, I would view each mirror as a different me. Here was lighthearted me, casually clad in shorts and a T-shirt, off to play basketball. Here, artistic me, with charcoal-smudged fingertips and acrylic-caked locks. Here, traditional me, with center-parted braids and bangles winding up my forearm. I could never wrap my mind around how they all managed to fit inside one small girl.

I was at the Department of Public Safety a few months ago getting my license. When the officer opened my passport, her mouth fell into a perfect O as a spiral of attachments fell down the length of the counter.

“Wow!” she exclaimed, thumbing the various stamps and pictures disbelievingly. “You’ve really been around!” Through her eyes, here was a 17-year-old who was born in India, lived in England, and moved to America. But that’s only half my story.

What she doesn’t know is that there used to be an unmarked grave at every airport I’d ever left, an invisible inscription scrawled in the mud and nothing else. A burial of the person I was, a memento to the person I would become.

In India, whispers of jasmine blossoms and humid nights lay under the earth; England’s tomb hid pleated pinafores and the aroma of fish ‘n’ chips.

I naively believed these buried ghosts would rest forever, growing paler and weaker with each year. That unearthing them would be futile, like checking the time on a watch that’s stopped.

When I first moved to Texas, I struggled to change my accent, to force straight my wild Indian curls. I was hollow, carved out from the inside, perpetually suspended in the wafting air between reality and

pretense. Finally, I saw the letter “Z” projected on my optometrist’s screen and pronounced it as “zee” in my head before my mouth could form the sound.

Two years ago, though, I went over to my friend Rukmini’s house to prepare for church. As always, we decorated our palms with henna, its pungent scent unleashing long-ago memories of chirping crickets and Crayola sunsets. We donned starched *churidars*, secured *bindis* between our eyebrows, fastened our *jhumka* earrings that feathered kisses down our shawl-covered shoulders.

As we dressed, I asked her, “Do you ever get embarrassed acting like a perfect Indian at church and then pretending to be completely American at school?”

She glanced at me, her brows furrowed in genuine puzzlement. “I’m not pretending,” she said simply. “This is me. I’m an Indian American. I speak Malayalam and English equally well. I touch my guru’s feet and shake my teacher’s hand. What should I be ashamed of?”

Something about her words struck a

I have pieced together my fragmented mirror selves

Namrata is attending Emory on a full-ride merit scholarship. She was also accepted at Dartmouth, Cornell, Johns Hopkins, UC Berkeley, NYU, and Rice.

part of me so deeply buried I’d almost forgotten it was there. I felt like I’d stayed in the shower so long that the cold water had begun to burn. Dazedly collecting the dispersed fragments of who I was, all the lost chapters forming my story, I followed her out to the driveway, taking in the typical American cul-de-sac surrounding us. The fragrance of our newly applied henna mingled with the sizzle of a barbecue next door; I was shocked by how right it seemed.

Today, I have dug up my faraway graves; I have pieced together my fragmented mirror selves. I am not a collection of wispy ghosts. I am a person who has seen the world and drunk it in, who has stared at the sun scorch in India, simmer in England, sear in America. My tears have collected in a puddle at my feet, and in it I can clearly see my reflection smiling back at me. ♦

Selected STEM Occupations with Many Job Openings, Projected 2012–22

Occupation	Job openings, projected 2012–22	Employment		Median annual wage, May 2013	Typical entry-level education
		2012	Projected 2022		
Software developers, applications	218,500	613,000	752,900	\$92,660	Bachelor’s degree
Computer systems analysts	209,600	520,600	648,400	81,190	Bachelor’s degree
Computer user support specialists	196,900	547,700	658,500	46,620	Some college, no degree
Software developers, systems software	134,700	405,000	487,800	101,410	Bachelor’s degree
Civil engineers	120,100	272,900	326,600	80,770	Bachelor’s degree
Computer programmers	118,100	343,700	372,100	76,140	Bachelor’s degree
Sales representatives, wholesale and manufacturing, technical and scientific products	111,800	382,300	419,500	74,520	Bachelor’s degree
Network and computer systems administrators	100,500	366,400	409,400	74,000	Bachelor’s degree
Mechanical engineers	99,700	258,100	269,700	82,100	Bachelor’s degree
Computer and information systems managers	97,100	332,700	383,600	123,950	Bachelor’s degree
Industrial engineers	75,400	223,300	233,400	80,300	Bachelor’s degree
Architectural and engineering managers	60,600	193,800	206,900	128,170	Bachelor’s degree
Web developers	50,700	141,400	169,900	63,160	Associate’s degree
Electrical engineers	44,100	166,100	174,000	89,180	Bachelor’s degree
Computer network architects	43,500	143,400	164,300	95,380	Bachelor’s degree

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program (employment, projections, and education data) and Occupational Employment Statistics survey (wage data).

Living With Asperger's

by Brianna Arsenault, Rustico, PEI, Canada

My brother, Gabe, was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome at 13. This common but rather unknown condition is highly disabling to those affected. However, with support, those with AS can become productive members of society.

Asperger's syndrome is part of a spectrum of developmental issues called Autism Spectrum Disorder or ASD. It can be characterized by a lack of social awareness – for instance, not understanding social cues or lacking skills for socializing or making friends. This does not mean, however, that those with AS are not interested in making friends or socializing. On the contrary, their desire to sustain meaningful interactions and friendships is poignantly constant. I can't count the times I've seen my brother alone in his bedroom, wanting to go out but unable to because he doesn't know how to reach out to acquaintances.

Other symptoms include an inability to decode others' thoughts, feelings, or emotions. My brother and I often argue about the intent behind something someone said to him. He doesn't understand the subtleties of speech. When someone asks, "What's your point?" he doesn't know whether the person is joking, in need of clarification, or challenging his point of view. He takes everything to heart or personally.

Another defining characteristic of AS/ASD is obsessive interest in a topic – for example, cars or trains, or even more specific things like the mechanisms of a watch. Over the years, Gabe has had a number of fixations. For a while he was so taken by video games that all he could talk about was "Call of Duty." Presently, his fixations are working out, tattoos, drawing, and still video games.

Often people on the autism spectrum have other developmental or neurological diagnoses, including obsessive compulsive disorder, anxiety disorder, depression, or other mood disorders. The co-occurrence of one or more of these diagnoses is 83 per-

cent. Last December, Gabe started having increased anxiety and showed signs of depression and OCD. One day we were home alone and I was making something to eat, cutting vegetables with a chef's knife. Gabe looked at me anxiously and begged me to put the knife away. He said it was making him nervous because he was afraid he was going to use it to harm me. In his head, he could visualize the bloody knife in his hand and a big gash in my back.

Soon, we discovered that he had been struggling with intrusive obsessive thoughts that he could not control. He became so overwhelmed by violent thoughts and anxiety that he could barely function. It was heart-wrenching to watch him in constant

battle with himself. Although we knew about his violent thoughts, we were never afraid that he would act on them. That was the core of his struggle; he could not convince himself that he was incapable of harming those he loved.

Unfortunately, ASD is a common disorder. More and more children are being diagnosed with it. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2000, one in 150 children were diagnosed on the autism spectrum; in 2006 it was one in 110, and now one child in 68 is identified with ASD in America. It is almost five times more prevalent in boys than in girls.

Despite these sobering statistics, there is hope. For people with ASD, success is within reach. All they need is encouragement and support. My brother is considered high functioning. With proper support from his family and medical specialists, and the tremendous work he has done to improve, my family and I are confident that he will succeed in life. Moreover, Gabe has shown amazing courage to overcome obstacles. He has held jobs, was an exceptional gymnast, and made it through the darkest anxiety and depression.

To me, AS is not a disability. I do not see my brother as disabled. I prefer to describe those



Photo by Talia Bernstein, Aptos, CA

awesome and often highly intelligent individuals as having different abilities. Instead of using the word disability, I prefer "diffability." Most people with Asperger's syndrome are hard workers and can accomplish more work of better quality than their "neurotypical" peers. Thanks to their common characteristic of extreme fixation, they are passionate and motivated by the things they love doing.

Undoubtedly, living with someone on the autism spectrum has been eye-opening. I still don't know what it's like to have Asperger's, but supporting Gabe has helped me develop more love, appreciation, and understanding for other human beings.

Words can't describe how much I love my brother. If he didn't have AS, he'd fit in just like all the boring "normal" kids. Who he is makes him unique, and I wouldn't want it any other way. I'm so proud of his progress and accomplishments. Next year, Gabe is off to college to pursue what he's most passionate about – 3-D video art animation. I know success will be waiting for him at the end of his studies.

"If I could snap my fingers and be non-autistic, I would not. Autism is a part of who I am."

– Temple Grandin ♦

My brother doesn't know how to reach out to friends

77 Percent Equal

by Hannah Vogel, Darien, CT



Photo by Maya Goodwin, New York, NY

She's twenty-three, a clever little thing with dreams bigger than the blue eyes she caught him with. He loves her, or so he says, loves her so much that if she's seen with another guy she'll end up dead. So she stays, stuck in a daze spinning between bruises and kisses a mouse wandering a maze. He says she should feel lucky, after all look at her prize, a guy who thinks that love means purple rings circling her eyes. But what's to believe? Why's she wearing long sleeves? It's the middle of August, how can she even breathe? Well it turns out she hasn't taken a breath in a while, a warrior fighting behind the flimsy

shield of a false smile. But the story's over, I'm sure you've all heard it before splashed across the back page only there's no uproar. But let's move along, there's another story to tell, another city, another woman, I'm sure you know it well. She's around thirty-three, determined to succeed, ready to take on the world since the ripe age of three. But apparently her failure was the plaid skirt she was wearing on the train, exhausted from a long day of work. After all that's what matters, it's the question she was asked, by a beady-eyed man, glaring down at her from his self-righteous wooden stand.

Bring the skirt up to testify, it's a quarter inch too short. How's anyone able to resist, who's even seen a leg before? The trial was over before it began it was over before the skirt was folded on the witness stand. And so the last story finally begins, a mother sitting on her daughter's bed, her face looking grim, pack pepper spray, and don't wear that there, bring a flashlight, always travel in pairs. And whatever you do, don't say the F-word you're not a man-hater, don't let it be heard! Just take your 77 cents, and don't be proud, remember the world is your oyster, and keep your voice down. ♦

My Breaking Point

by Keaton Hamilton, Grandville, MI

If I had an arch-nemesis, it would have to be broken bones. They have pushed me to my physical and mental breaking point, especially in the last two years. It all started with my first baseball game last season.

After being diagnosed with tendinitis in my left elbow, and told I could still play, I was pumped for the first game. But after warming up, I was feeling a little skeptical about my arm. The aching pain just wouldn't go away. I was awaiting my first at bat of the season. Unfortunately, it would never come.

Three up three down – our turn to take the field. After a quick break down, I sprinted out to left field, where I would play catch with the center fielder to keep my arm warm. However after one throw I motioned him off; the pain was too intense.

“Balls in!” the catcher yelled.

As the first batter stepped up to the

plate, I gave my arm a rub, hoping it would ease the pain. No luck. After two strikeouts, and a triple, I figured I would get through the inning then tell coach I couldn't play. Just as I felt a wave of relief at the thought – *ding* – a base hit right in my direction. Of course I stupidly tried to throw the runner out at the plate. In mid-throw I heard a pop, and everything went blurry as pain shot down my arm. It felt as if Satan himself had come up from his fiery home and taken a bite out of my arm.

After being rushed to the hospital and told I'd be in a cast for six weeks, I felt as broken as my arm. Being out for the baseball season killed me. Having to sit on the sidelines and watch every at bat of every inning of every game was torture. Sports are my life, and not being able to play was like a singer with no vocal chords, or a fish with no water.

As my bones mended, I grew into a better person

Finally, after the longest six weeks of my life, I got the cast off and it was time to get back into shape. I would be done with physical therapy just in time to try out for basketball.

Unfortunately that season would not last long either. Ten minutes to be exact. That's right, in the first 10 minutes of the first practice, while going up for a rebound, I came down hard and bounced on my ankle like a trampoline. After basically crawling to the trainer's room and being examined, I was told that it was sprained and to go home and ice it. That night was awful; even when I wasn't moving it felt as if my ankle had been hit repeatedly with a sledgehammer. The next day my parents took me to the doctor. And, of course, it was broken.

Being out for another whole season was awful, but being out and not being able to walk was a living hell.

Although, I never want to break another bone, this experience taught me about myself. I had to learn that there is more to life than sports. As



Photo by Jordan Musick, Seymour, TN

my bones mended, I grew into a better person. It brought me closer to God by giving me something to pray about and even giving me time to worship. Although broken bones are still my arch-nemesis, they made me the person I am today. ♦

Trophies

by Lauren Saxon, Cincinnati, OH

A seven-year-old girl is playing in her first little league soccer game. She's better than most of the girls her age, and dribbles up the field with surprising speed and tenacity. With the game on the line, the little soccer star breaks through the defense and strikes what could be the game-winning shot. She watches the flight of the ball, face showing anticipation and joy. But the ball sails just wide of the goal. Game over. As the players exchange high-fives and “good game”s, the girl turns to see her disappointed father walking briskly to the car.

Why do so many parents push their children so hard at such a young age? Maybe they want their kid to experience success. Maybe they feel their child's failures as their own. Or maybe parents hope to save money by their kid earning a college scholarship. Regardless, it's clear that a line has been crossed when it comes to the role parents play in youth athletics.

To the parents who think their child will be the next Derek Jeter or Brittney Griner, here are some stats from National Christian College Athletic Association research: only 2 out of 100 high school athletes go on to play collegiate sports at any level. One in 16,000 high school athletes attain a professional career in sports. And only 2 or 3 out of 10,000 high school players end up in the NBA or WNBA.

Those are very small odds.

Here are some bigger percentages: 65 percent of youth sports participants play to be with friends. Seventy-one percent wouldn't care if the score was not kept in their games.

Ninety percent would prefer to play on a losing team rather than warm the bench on a winning team.

The moral of the story: winning isn't everything. Parents can get so wrapped up in their kid's success that they are blind to what's really important. Yes, kids should experience success, but they should also experience failure. And teamwork. And friendship. And most importantly, fun.

So parents, while your children might not bring home scholarships or championship trophies, keep this in mind as you watch them compete: Memories and life lessons gained at a young age are never forgotten, lost in the attic, or covered in dust sitting on a shelf. ♦

What role should parents play in youth athletics?



Photo by Carol Carpenter, Cannon Falls, MN

Ups & Downs

by Jayne Moynihan, Wyckoff, NJ

When you're the best, there's that feeling of invincibility, that no one can touch you or ruin your groove. Everything you do is glorified to the point that mistakes don't matter; you can't mess up. A mistake is a small bump in the realm of perfection.

That's how we felt. Our game was impeccable, a never-ending climax. No team could beat us. Nothing could stop us.

The county game hadn't even started yet, but we were already thinking about the next round. It'd be an easy win, since we were untouchable, unstoppable, and unbeatable. The attitude at halftime was the same. The locker room was buzzing and we were on a roll. We'd had a great first half, making crisp passes, hitting clutch shots, and creating great opportunities from our defense. As I looked around, every one of the girls was smiling as if we had already won. The number 5 rank in the bracket always beats the number 12, right?

The worst part of being on top is the inevitable fall back down. Each game, the expectations grew, the target on our backs grew, and the downfall grew along with us.

The third quarter was a completely different game than the first half. We played messy and scared. Like sharks, our opponents sensed our fear and attacked to gain the upper hand. By the end of the fourth, we were grasping the lead by a hair.

Unfortunately, none of the plays were in our favor, but every single one was in theirs. Our stomachs churned as that last shot went up and the other team won the game. Their 46-point comeback was particularly ironic since we pride ourselves on defense.

Mentally we thought we'd won, so physically we stopped trying. I watched my team – deemed one of the best in the state – let this paramount game slip through our fingers. None of us on the bench had comforting words for those who collapsed in disappointment as the last buzzer rang. It can only be described as gut wrenching.

The locker room was silent except for occasional sniffles caused by the tears. The atmosphere was unbearable; I had never seen my team so dispirited. We wished we could melt into the walls and avoid facing our disappointed supporters waiting outside.

After our highest high, we had hit our lowest low. As a team, we were ready to do anything we could to never feel this dejected again. Now the question was: how do we rise up again? ♦

Nuclear Power in the United States

by Andrew Berg,
Titusville, FL

The splitting of the most basic unit of a chemical element can turn into the consummate source of energy for an entire city. Research into the nature of the atom began in the 1800s and continues today. Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, and Enrico Fermi dedicated their minds to unlocking the secrets of the atom and, consequently, nuclear energy. Eventually, it became clear that a self-sustaining nuclear fission reaction was possible, and this discovery led to the dawn of the nuclear age.

After the end of World War II, the United States and the rest of the world continued to research nuclear weapons well into the 1960s. Ultimately, the focus became not weapons but the more benevolent use of nuclear power. In the early 1970s, 20 percent of the power in America was nuclear. However, the meltdown of the nuclear reactor on Three Mile Island in 1979 and the accident at Chernobyl in 1986 created widespread skepticism about it, even though those accidents ultimately led to safer reactors.

Concerns over safety brought on a national reduction in nuclear power plants. Today, as the United States remains reluctant to embrace nuclear energy, other countries are increasingly taking advantage of it. With the fear of climate change driving a need for greener energy sources, nuclear power is an inexpensive, simple, and safe option that could combat the negative effects of climate change and provide a reliable, economical alternative to fossil fuels in the United States.

There is no doubt that America needs greener energy solutions. Temperatures and sea levels are rising as glaciers thaw. In order to stave off climate change and make it through the 21st century, we need to drastically reduce CO₂ emissions. The easiest way to do this is by adopting cleaner energy. Nuclear power indisputably has the least impact on the environment because it does not release carbon dioxide or methane: the roots of the greenhouse effect. In fact, in 2013, nuclear energy facilities prevented the emission of almost “595 million metric tons of carbon dioxide across the United States,” according to the Nuclear Energy Institute. That’s is roughly equivalent to 135 million cars being taken off of the roads.

Nuclear power is not the only energy option that fits the “green” label. But unlike developing ideas like clean coal and intelligent power grids, “nuclear power is here now,” says David Kalson, Auburn University professor and consultant.

Nuclear energy is not only safe for taxpayers wallets, but it’s also safe for human health. Yes, some will contradict this idea, citing the infamous tsunami that struck Japan in 2011 and destroyed a key nuclear power plant, resulting in one of the biggest releases of nuclear radioactivity since Chernobyl. But this disaster did not prove nuclear power to be chronically dangerous. Instead it pointed to the need for updated regulations for reactors. The

Fukushima plant was commissioned almost 40 years ago. Since then, technology has made huge progress, specifically with seismology and the examination of flood hazards. This will be applied to modern nuclear reactors so a catastrophe like Fukushima does not happen again.

Nuclear energy is now safer than it ever has been. The U.S. Navy is an excellent example of how benign nuclear power can be. It crowds people into submarines, forcing them into close proximity with an extremely powerful reactor for days and weeks – with no major incidents.

One of the main arguments of opponents of nuclear energy is that the improved safety requirements will increase costs. As Marc Jacobson, a professor at Stanford and opposer of nuclear energy, puts it, “the price tag for a new nuclear power plant is from \$6 billion to \$10 billion – much more than plants covered by fossil fuels.” But much like the replacement of a standard light bulb with an efficient yet more costly LED bulb, the expense will be outweighed in the long run. Nuclear power plants have the lowest operating cost of any electrical generation option. The operating and fuel cost of a nuclear reactor leads to less reparations for the average Joe in the long term.

France is an excellent example of how feasible the comprehensive use of nuclear energy is. It went nuclear for 75 percent of its grid in under 15 years. Ac-



Photo by Kaylie Murphy, Medford, NY

According to the World Nuclear Association, France’s per capita cost of electricity is half that of a country with 25 percent nuclear power. And other countries, such as China, are “actively building nuclear plants to provide electricity in the future,” according to *Current Controversies: Nuclear Energy*.

Meanwhile, major opposition to the widespread use of nuclear power still exists in this country, and the nuclear industry is having trouble finding footholds to replace old plants. America needs to recognize that onerous regulation of nuclear power is not the same thing as a de facto ban on the technology. Nuclear power can only be achieved if Americans understand that regulation is necessary to prevent accidents, and that there must not be fear regarding the investment of time and money into research and new plant production. We need to observe other nuclear countries and learn from their successes, not just focus on their mistakes.

As greenhouse gasses accumulate, there is a pressing need for a clean and affordable source of power. Nuclear power is by no means a panacea for this problem, but it is a big step in the right direction. Climate change is a substantial problem, however, nuclear power can provide an efficient alternative to fossil fuel energy sources. Overall, nuclear energy is dependable, green, inexpensive, and simple to implement, as demonstrated by countries around the globe. A nuclear power renaissance is long overdue. Further postponement will do nothing but raise the stakes for America. ♦

**There is no
doubt that
America needs
greener energy**

The Raccoons



Photo by Megan Brawner, Ledyard, CT

“We need to put the food away”
Trevor reminds us of the raccoon warnings
“Four more minutes”
Dominic says
not wanting to leave the warm fire
Then there’s a rustling
coming from the screen room
My eyes widen
in a mix of surprise and fear
“The raccoons” I think
I’m frozen in my chair
Eyes glued to what’s going on around me
Trevor flying from his chair
snatching the umbrella pole
lying around from when we went to the beach
Dominic and my dad are right behind him

Ax and fire poker in hand
They quickly unzip the tent
Bursting into the screen room.
Before I can stop myself I’m laughing
Trevor’s hissing at the raccoons
and knocking the umbrella pole against the
picnic table
Successfully scaring the raccoons
Everyone’s laughing and teasing him
about his ridiculous charade
as we pack up the food
putting different coolers in different cars
Not much later we go to bed
Listening to the *bang-bang* of the dumpster
the raccoons’ failed attempts to get in.

by Corrin Goss, Clarkston, MI

Injustice Behind the Lines

by Narrelle Gilchrist, Royal Palm Beach, FL

In the U.S. military, a woman is more likely to be raped by a co-worker than killed by the enemy. In 2013, according to a report by the Department of Defense, there were nearly 1,400 reports of sexual harassment and over 5,000 reports of sexual assault in the military; thousands more are believed to have gone unreported. Because military commanders often put the reputation of their unit above carrying out justice, perpetrators of sexual assault and sexual harassment go unpunished in military courts. To prevent these miscarriages of justice that continually occur in our armed forces, all cases of sexual harassment in the military should be reviewed by civilian courts, not decided unilaterally by the military court system.

History has proven that army courts are not capable of properly administering justice. In *The New York Times* (Nov. 26th, 2014), Colonel Don Christensen, a martial prosecutor, described his experiences in military courtrooms. He witnessed commanders showing their solidarity with those accused of sexual assault or harassment, using their power to tip the scales in favor of the accused

by selecting the juries, and ordering the withdrawal of cases because the accused was a “valuable” officer. In one case, Christensen witnessed a commander leap from his seat and yell “Yeah!” after a pilot was found not guilty of rape.

Furthermore, after witnessing countless perpetrators of rape and sexual harassment escape punishment, many victims decline to report their assailants. According to a CNN article by Congresswoman Jackie Speier, only an estimated 13.5 percent of victims in the military report their attackers. While 40 percent of civilian sexual offenders are prosecuted, only 8 percent of sexual assailants in the military are sent to court.

In 2002, army specialist Andrea Neutzling reported a sexual assault to her military commander, who gave her assailant a punishment of five days of base restriction – barely a slap on the wrist. The next time Neutzling was assaulted, this time by a different soldier, she did not report it, knowing that it would do no good. A month

later, she was raped by two soldiers, and again chose not to report it. Instead, she kept a rifle pointed at the door in her barracks. When another woman in her unit told their commanding officers of the incident, they did not believe Neutzling. Even the chaplain told her, “You don’t act like a

victim.” Her assailants were never charged.

In the military, commanders have full jurisdiction over these cases, arbitrarily deciding when, and whether, to investigate. In addition, if they choose to punish the

perpetrator, commanders decide the severity of punishment, with sentences varying widely from informal reprimands to dishonorable discharges. In contrast, a prosecutor who is independent of the chain of command would be far more likely to select a punishment appropriate to the crime. Civilian courts would more effectively dole out justice without considering rank, authority, or reportedly valuable

She was raped by two soldiers and chose not to report it



Photo by Devjani Paul, Queens, NY

service to the military. A 2013 ABC/*Washington Post* poll found that 59 percent of respondents supported giving a civilian prosecutor authority over sexual assault and harassment cases in the military. Doing this would ensure that those who should be prosecuted are, and that victims in the military are no longer afraid to speak up.

Our government has a responsibility to protect those who are serving in the armed forces. How can we expect soldiers to defend our country if our justice system does not provide them due protection? Making sexual crimes in the military civilian-reviewed offenses will help remedy the broken system that has allowed thousands of perpetrators to go unpunished. ♦

Why You Should Care About the Refugees

by Chinasa Okezie, Hayward, CA

“Imagine you are sixteen and you are always afraid to be dead at any minute.”

The girl who said this is the same age as I am, and she makes me want to cry.

Now I am no politician. I don’t know all the ins and outs of the refugee crisis. I am only a teenager living in America who loves people. Again I say, I am no politician. I am only a humanitarian living on the other side of the globe. But I still care, and you should too.

The refugee crisis is no easy thing to define. I’ll try to explain it briefly to the best of my ability and understanding. Basically, millions of people from Syria and other countries have been displaced because of war, persecution, and violence. These people are fleeing to Europe in search of political asylum. The majority of them are willing to risk the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean Sea. Many of you have probably seen the gut-wrenching pictures of Aylan Kurdi, the Syrian toddler who drowned along with his mother during the passage and whose body washed up on shore. That is the kind of risk that so many take to escape their war-torn homeland. Yet, a lot of countries, including America, either don’t want to take in

refugees or are afraid to. But, all I can think about are the countless reels of footage I’ve seen of tired, sick, hungry people who just want peace. Somebody needs to help.

I feel so powerless as a young person so many miles away from this crisis. I have no money to give, no means by which to communicate with these suffering people, and no way to help except by trying to make others aware of what is happening.

I have seen and heard so many vacuous remarks about the refugees that I am downright disgusted at the lack of love and humanity. The issue is far too complicated for anyone – myself included – to try to dissect all its facets. But the two main arguments I have heard against aiding the refugees

are the unfounded belief that most of them are military-age men (i.e. potential terrorists) – in fact, the majority are women and children – and that their “Muslim brothers,” the Gulf Arab countries, should be the ones to take them in, not Western countries. How any American living comfortably in the safety of their home with enough food to feed their family and not living in the constant shadow of fear could have the audacity to make such comments is

The majority of Syrian refugees are women and children

beyond me.

I can understand some people’s hesitation, especially after the events of 9/11. I am not so naive as to say that every refugee is a good person, but we have to look at the situation realistically and with love in our hearts. These refugees are people, not cattle to be pushed from border to border by governments who have decided that they don’t want to deal with them. There are a million more things to be said about the topic, and I don’t know it all. The situation is a big mess, but I think that we can all agree that when it comes down to it, it is mostly just sad.

Now imagine that you are 16 years old, and death could happen to you at any moment. No matter what age, too many people are living like this right now. I don’t know all the answers. All I know is that those of us who were lucky enough to be born in a safe and prosperous country should be helping those in need in whatever way we can.

The Syrian refugee girl whose quote is the opening of my essay is Noujain Mustaffa. She loves the TV show “Days of our Lives” and wants to become an astronaut. She is also paralyzed from the waist down and as far as I know is still in a refugee camp waiting for help, like millions of others.

I pray for all of them. ♦

Taylor Swift & Double Standards

by Stella Wiswall, Portland, OR

points of view

After years of being criticized for dating too many men, writing simplistic songs about love, and having no self-awareness, Taylor Swift has come out as a feminist and spoken forcefully against the gender-based hostility she has faced. As a result, she has increasingly been identified by women as a symbol of female empowerment. Her treatment has exposed sexism in our society – and the media. In the last year, Swift has developed as a feminist and revealed the double standards that the media and the music industry seem to impose on women.

In her early career, Swift was often criticized by feminist and progressive organizations, blogs, and magazines such as *Jezebel*, *Slate*, and *Bust* for failing to identify as a feminist. However, she has recently developed a greater understanding of what the term means. She attributes this new awareness to her close friend Lena Dunham, creator of “Girls,” the popular HBO series that showcases the lives of young women. Becoming friends with Dunham and learning about her beliefs and values helped Swift realize that she had been supporting feminist ideals without explicitly saying so.

In recent interviews, Swift has defined feminism in basic, understandable terms. Rather than describe feminism in an anti-male way, she refers to its true definition: the belief that women and men should have equal rights and opportunities. As Swift explains it, feminism is not synonymous with man-hating, but rather with gender equality.

The artist has also exposed the unfair double standards in the way male and female songwriters are evaluated. Not surprisingly, she is offended by certain “jokes” made about her by the media, such as, “Watch out guys – she’ll write a song about you.” The singer confronts these headlines by pointing out that such sentiments stem from sexism in the music industry. She has noted that no one makes those sorts of comments about male singer-songwriters who write about their love lives, like Ed Sheeran or John Mayer. In Swift’s words, “if a man shares his feelings in writing, he’s brave. If a woman shares her feelings in writing, she’s over-sharing, or she’s over-emotional, or she might be crazy.”

The difference in the way people think about music based on the gender of the artist was proven in 2010 with the release of Swift’s “Speak Now” and Bruno Mars’s “Doo-Wops and Hoologans.” Both albums were reviewed by *Rolling Stone*, which is one of the most respected publications in American music. Swift’s album received the higher ranking, yet in reading the reviews, Swift’s work seems less significant.

The author who reviewed “Speak Now” focused on how, based on the song titles, you could make a guess at what chick flicks Swift had been watching. On the other hand, the review Mars received contained the line, “It’s the year’s finest pop debut: 10 near-perfect songs that move from power ballads to bedroom anthems ... and deliver pleasure without pretension.” Although Swift released an overall better album, she received critique pointedly based on her gender, whereas Mars was praised for his love songs and made to sound like a more serious artist. Furthermore, only 9 of the 14 songs on Swift’s album were about love, compared with 7 of the 10 on Mars’s. *Rolling Stone*’s review wasn’t the first

trivialization of Swift’s work. Her second album, “Fearless,” was also reviewed by *Rolling Stone* with comments like, “she mostly sticks to her favorite topic – boys, boys, boys – in songs filed neatly under ‘lovestruck’ or ‘pissed off.’”

These comments suggest that the normal human emotions of anger or love somehow don’t matter or aren’t meaningful when expressed by a young woman. In addition, the *Rolling Stone* review of Swift’s pop debut, “1989” claimed that she has “way too many feelings” and is “oversharing.” These demeaning statements reduce Swift’s work to an image of a blonde airhead who serial-dates for inspiration.

The manner in which the media has covered Swift’s romantic life also reveals gender bias. There has been endless reporting on how she’s “dating too many guys.” However, since 2008, she’s been linked to just five men. On the other hand, her ex Harry Styles has been linked to seven women in the past three years, and yet this has not generated significant publicity. Swift even penned a song called “Blank Space,” written from the satirical point of view of the man-eating, serial-dater she is portrayed as in the media. In the

music video, she dramatically cries mascara tears and smashes an ex’s car. The hit pop track is Swift’s funny take on what is actually a serious issue.

As the artist explained in an interview for National Public Radio, females’ relationships are “tallied up in ways that they aren’t for men.” This speaks to the way female sexuality is often shamed in society, whereas men are praised for having many relationships.

Inequality in the treatment of genders is a prevalent issue in the music industry. This imbalance not only damages the musicians but also female fans who are told to keep their emotions to themselves or be accused of sounding dramatic, disgruntled, or complaining. As sex educator and feminist advocate Laci Green explains, the criticism Swift receives conveys a message to her young fans that it is shameful for females to discuss their experiences and relationships.

Taylor Swift is not an anomaly when it comes to women being minimized in their profession. From Iggy Azalea to Solange Knowles, our society and the media often question the validity of female songwriters. People are generally more reluctant to give credit to women in industries traditionally dominated by men. Swift once told *Time* magazine that she feels “discouraged” by the amount of work women have to do just to prove that they have skills and can do their own work.

Recently I presented a speech at a speech and debate tournament that chronicled Taylor Swift’s background and increasing significance in the music industry. I chose Swift because she has proven to be a powerhouse in an era where success in the music industry is incredibly difficult to achieve. Although she is clearly a talented and capable artist, the judges marginalized my topic as trivial. Having my presentation dismissed as a “fangirl tribute” not worthy of discussion speaks to the way Swift’s influence is minimized.

With greater awareness of the double standards our society and the media have for women in various industries, I am hopeful that these sexist stereotypes will begin to diminish. ♦

“If a woman shares her feelings, she’s over-emotional”

– Taylor Swift



Photo by Özge Üçoluk, Ankara, Turkey

Roots

It is older than dirt
It has inspired all, from beginning to end
It gave strength to Adam and Eve when
They had to leave

It gave will to Noah
When the rain came down
And the animals had to come

It has led leaders with tons of courage
David Solomon Alexander Lincoln
All knew it

It has grown ideas that feed a whole village
As though it’s the seed
And they are its soil

Martin Luther King Jr. was soil
As was Gandhi
Einstein too

It doesn’t just visit those in the past
It sees people today too, and we see it
in them
Malala Yousafzai Ebola fighters all its soil

It doesn’t discriminate between us
Religion sex race age – it’s blind to all
of this

It just sees your heart, if there’s love
and a want
A want to change things for the good

It will be your seed then

It is Hope

by Taylor Hurley, Independence, KY

Hyphen

by Matthew Sun, Centreville, VA

“Why don’t you treat me like everyone else?”
 “Maybe if you were actually Chinese you would know.”

I sit silently in the back seat as his answer, dripping with contempt, festers in my mind. Biting my lip, I turn to stare out the window. Our translucent reflections hover in the glass, and I wonder how the boy sitting next to me can think we are so different. We share the same onyx hair, angled eyes, and golden tan, yet his words have erased any hint of solidarity between us. Like the cars hurtling past, I wish that the question, demanding to be resolved, would simply fly away.

Who am I?

Genetically, of course, the answer is simple. My mother is from Guangzhou, and my father from Hong Kong. They met as immigrants and had me and my older sisters, Diana and Karen. My blood is as Chinese as the waters of the Yangtze River. But the ever-changing, elusive concept of cultural identity is never complete with just 23 pairs of chromosomes.

I sit in my room, dutifully working through my daily pre-algebra problems. Downstairs Mom is cooking my favorite dumplings; she promised if I work my hardest, I’d get two extra for lunch. According to her, academic excellence is a tradition my sisters and I need to begin now. After all, Diana, Karen, and I are the first in our family to be born on American soil.

A door slams. I hear Karen’s voice, but it’s garbled, twisted, raw. I peek downstairs.

“Who did this to you?” My mom demands in a voice that is somehow equal parts empathy and fury. She grabs the rotten apple and tenderly caresses the newly forming bruise on Karen’s forehead.

“I-I don’t know,” Karen sniffles. “I was just walking home, and some kid shouted at me and threw it.” After a moment of silence, she looks into my mother’s concerned eyes.

“Mom, what’s a chink?”

My sisters and I are dressed in traditional robes for Chinese New Year. I love the feel of the intricately woven silk, the brilliant crimson and blue hues. Six years mark me as the youngest, so I stand in the back while Diana leads our mini-procession into the living room. There, our parents are seated with the red *hongbao* envelopes filled with money.

My eldest sister is the first to step forward. She bows, palm flat on palm, and dutifully recites the dictum expressing thanks and good luck to

both of our parents in perfect Chinese. I hear them repeat the phrase back to her and the sound of two fat packets landing in Diana’s open hands. Karen does the same.

I move forward reluctantly. I am the only child who can’t speak fluent Cantonese. In order to better understand the culture of her children, my mother has tried her best to assimilate into America, gradually transitioning from Chinese soap operas to “The West Wing.” She saw language as a path to becoming a better parent,

enabling her to participate in our school and its sports activities. By the time I was born, English was common in our household, and today, my Chinese vocabulary is embarrassingly limited. Nevertheless, I

bow, close my eyes, and slowly begin to recite.

“*G-gong hay f-fat choi.*” Painfully aware of my thick American accent, my voice lifts at the end of the sentence, already asking for leniency.

Trembling, I raise my head to the surprising sound of my parents’ laughter. My mother reaches out and pats my scarlet cheeks as I exhale in relief. “We know what you meant, *siu laumong,*” my father says, affectionately using my nickname “little rascal.” They hand me my red packets.

“And that’s how I got forty-five!” I finish with a smile and final flourish of the purple Expo marker. I turn around at the front of my third-grade classroom and am met by blank stares. Apparently, my impromptu lecture on multiplying by nine has not gone over well.

Someone snickers. I slide back into my seat, and a familiar whisper, slipping through the spaces between cupped hands, finds its way to my ears: “Are all Asians like that?”

I smile. It’s a refrain I will hear for the rest of my academic career, but in a way, it makes me almost happy now. Before, I used to lash out at comments like this, but I have learned to stay thick-skinned after my sisters’ encounters with the same stereotypes. My parents have shown me that surrendering to anger accomplishes nothing, opening my eyes to the reality that one ordinary boy cannot stop widespread ignorance. Instead, they taught me to view these comments as compliments. If Asians are seen as successful and smart, why not take pride in it?

My mother and I arrived only a month ago, yet I’m already hearing the wheels of our full suitcases screech across the glossy marble of

my grandparents’ apartment for the second time. My mother has served as translator for the past few weeks, and thanks to her, the language barrier melted away as I chatted with my grandparents over steaming bowls of rice and pork. I’ve never felt so at home in Guangzhou, with America and the fifth grade literally a world away.

“Is there anything you want me to say before we leave?” Mom asks softly, rubbing her reddening eyes.

“You’ve said so much for me already,” I say. “Let me take this one.” Walking over to Gong Gong and Po Po, whom I knew I may never see in person again, I embrace their frail bodies one last time to thank them – this time, in their native tongue.

“*Gong Gong, Po Po...xie xie.*”

Grabbing the handle, I nearly rip off the door to my mailbox. My heart is beating faster than my hands are shaking. The envelope is thick, but I tell myself not to jump to conclusions as I race home. I tear the orange folder, snatch the top paper, and begin to read. My eyes fly over the obligatory “thank you” and straight to –
 ... accepted into the High School for Science and Technology.

I can barely hear myself shouting. Like the embraces of my family members, waves of excitement, relief, and joy swallow me whole. My mom laughs. “Who would have thought all three of my children would attend the best high school for technology?”

She calls Gong Gong and Po Po with the good news first, and then barrels through an impressive array of calls. Relatives express congratulations, alternating between English and Chinese. I’m lucky my parents take over the calls, giving me a chance to catch my breath. One voice in particular, thankfully in English, says: “Keep doing what you’re doing. You are making us proud to be Huangs, and proud to be Chinese.”

“But you’re not Chinese, so you don’t understand.”

A knot of pain tightens in my stomach. My mom’s friend from Guangzhou and her son are visiting the U.S., and we are driving them from the airport to a relative’s house. While my mother chats with her old friend, I have tried to introduce myself to this boy, but with each attempt I am met with laughter. He mocks me, parroting my voice in the Chinese he knows I can’t understand. The few words I can make out are “ugly,” “stupid,” and “American.” Here I am, facing rejection from a member of the very community I so

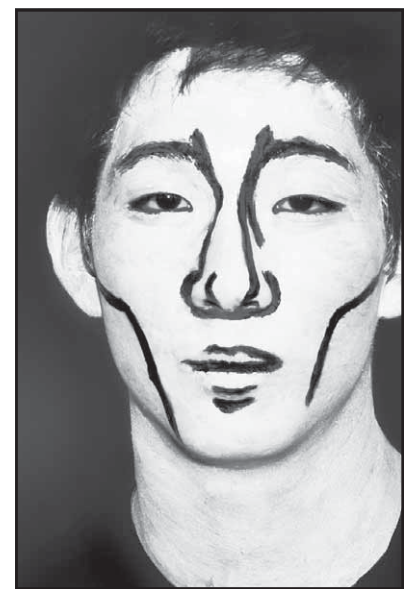


Photo by Leah Choe, Burke, VA

proudly identify with, the community I have endured racial slurs for, the community of my loved ones.

But this pain isn’t new. If anything, it’s simply the peak of a slowly growing mountain. I’ve experienced years of tacit exclusion from conversations with friends and family, parents who meet me and begin to complain about American whitewashing. “Such a shame,” I’ve been told. “Such a shame you can’t speak Chinese.” To the Chinese, shame is a loaded word.

When we arrive home I am burning with emotion. I attempt to race upstairs before my mother can sense what’s wrong, but there’s no escaping the eagle eyes of a tiger mother.

“Matthew, is there anything you want to tell me?” She asks. I turn and sit next to her.

“I’m fine, Mom.” I hesitate. “I just have one question.”

“Shoot.”

I lower my voice. “Promise you won’t laugh?”

She stares at me, then nods.

“Am I Chinese, or am I American?”

The next day, I wake up with a renewed sense of purpose. After thinking about what my mother told me, I feel as if I finally belong. My identity cannot be dichotomized; I am Chinese-American. I refuse to believe, as I have for much of my life, that a hyphen is a symbol of mutual

exclusivity. That hyphen, insignificant as it seems, is a symbol of connection. It is a bridge that I, my sisters, my parents, Gong Gong, Po Po, and millions of others have crossed because the simple

happiness we share, whether it is felt on Independence Day or the Mooncake Festival, cannot be contained by oceans and borders. I know who I am.

I can’t tell you who you are. Nor can your father or anyone else. You must decide for yourself. But know this: your culture won’t come from your tongue. It’ll come from your heart. ♦

“Are all Chinese like that?”

The Old Man and the Mountain

by Ujjwal Khanal, Kathmandu, Nepal

After what seemed to be ages of blind strolling in the dark, Rohan finally admitted that we were lost, vulnerable to danger, and in desperate need of help. “Alright, guys,” he said with a sigh. “It seems we are lost, vulnerable to danger, and in desperate need of help.”

Arushi, who had been holding her anger in for a while, suddenly burst. “Well, good luck finding help on this freaking hill in the freaking middle of nowhere, Einstein!”

Despite their arguing, I noticed the faint red glow appearing in the east. We’d begun our trek at 4 a.m., hoping to catch the sunrise from the summit of the Sarangkot hill. When Rohan suggested taking the “road less traveled,” we were all focused on the adventure. Rohan had never before failed to persuade us with his buttery voice as he playfully implored, “What could possibly go wrong?”

A lot, as we later found out through Arushi’s little book, *Trekking in the Himalayas: A Complete Guide*.

“Possible causes of death,” Arushi read, her pitch wavy like the hilly horizon. “Uh, hypothermia ... dehydration ... falling off a cliff.” The book even claimed that snow leopards roamed freely. “So don’t wear anything too colorful,” she recited, the book held tightly in her pink, furry gloves. There wasn’t a single map inside.

Rohan pointed abruptly toward a small bamboo structure behind some pine trees a few yards away. All three of us took a confirmatory glance at each other before making a frantic dash toward it.

The house was made of bamboo and mud, a typical sight. The floor and bottom half of the walls were painted orange, while the rest was white-washed. Beneath the thatched roof was a space for travelers to rest, a feature common to many houses in the hills of Nepal. The faint flickering of an oil lamp glowed inside.

Hearing us, an old man appeared at the carved door, murmuring Sanskrit prayers. Clad in *Daura Suruwal*, he had a traditional *Dhaka topi* on his head and a black scarf wrapped around his neck in the careless fashion only the elderly seem to enjoy.

“*Baje Namaskar!*” we excitedly greeted him, unable to contain our joy at having found another human being.

“*Oho, babuharu! Namaskar, namaskar!*” he replied, equally cheerful to have these eccentric teenage strangers in his front yard. “*Ani katabata aapunubhayo?*” he asked. “How did you reach here, children?”

We caught our breath and explained everything from the school trip to getting lost to finally reaching his beautiful house.

He burst out laughing as we thanked him for saving our lives. “Oh, city kids these days!” he giggled, making absolutely no attempt to hold back his amusement. “A few moments without your phones and suddenly you think you’re lost! You should know you’ve stumbled across a shortcut, rather! It takes half the time to reach the peak this way,” he continued. “In fact, this was the original trekking route before the *touri*.”

The tinkling sound of a woman’s bangles interrupted him. She was wearing a red *sari*, a traditional green *pote*, and large gold earrings visibly heavy for her ears. Baje explained everything to his wife; thankfully, she did not laugh. Instead, she looked at

us with a candid smile. “Just wait here,” she said. “I’ll bring you tea. You must be tired.”

We weren’t in the mood for tea, and we were already late. But rejecting the offering of a simple cup of tea, would show disrespect.

“Our grandson must be about your age,” Baje continued. “He lives with his father in London. He does some sort of a job there, he’s a soft ... uh, what was the name now?”

“A software engineer?”

“Yes, that! He’s been living there for two decades.”

I looked at the fields below, green with barley and wheat, and a straw-roofed shed. I could see the cattle chewing their cud with carefree expressions and lambs running around. A baby goat came over to Arushi and made delightful noises as she petted it. Meanwhile, it was now bright enough to see the giant lake glisten below the hills.

Our son is in London ... The old man’s voice echoed within me.

Everybody seems to be leaving these days. Europe. Canada. Australia. The U.S. Anywhere but here. The sight left me wondering how anyone could leave something so beautiful and heart-warming merely for the promise of something supposedly better.

“People have grown very materialistic these days,” Baje said, as though he’d read my mind. “I have been waking up to the same view for 72 years, and I am not tired of it yet. These mountains offer much more than the view. And, lo, there you have your sunrise!”

Indeed, the sun was offering the most beau-

tiful view we had ever seen. The great mountain range, which had been invisible against the dark sky, was now lit in a majestic aura of gold as its reflection floated on the glistening lake below. We watched, spellbound.

After enjoying the tea, we bade farewell to the couple and took the path Baje had shown us; it was just a matter of moments before we reached the summit.

The hilltop was crowded with tourists frantically taking pictures of a moment that could only be felt.

“Where have you been?” our guide asked frowning. “You won’t believe what you missed.”

As we were leaving for Kathmandu a week later, I couldn’t help but think about this encounter with the man and his little world in the hills. He was right, the mountains could indeed offer much more than a view. ♦

The sun was offering the most beautiful view



Art by Elmira Moskvina, Sunny Isles Beach, FL

Turbulence

by Andrew Brunetti, Wyckoff, NJ

I believed that it was going to be the best summer vacation of my life. We were taking a painstakingly long, direct flight to Oahu, Hawaii. We were going to celebrate my eighth birthday in the most relaxing place in the United States! My serene state of mind came to an abrupt halt, however, when I left my seat to use the airplane lavatory.

We were roughly four hours into the uneventful flight. Everyone has been in the situation – whether on an airplane or not – when you just have to use the restroom. In my defense, I had been “holding it” for over two hours. The “fasten seat belt” sign was shining bright in my face, mocking me. Out of necessity, I disobeyed the law of the sign, unfastened my seat belt, and scurried to the back of the plane, eager to beat any other passenger who may have been in my predicament.

I had just shut myself into the claustrophobic bathroom when the captain took over the intercom, and in the trademark Chuck-Yeager-persona, said: “This is your captain speaking. We’ll be hitting some slight turbulence. Anyone who is not in their seat, please return and fasten your seat belt.”

This should be fun, I thought. *Wish they put seat belts in the bathrooms.*

Less than a minute after the warning, which did not sound dire, the plane began to shake. I panicked. I

frantically washed my hands and attempted to unlock the bathroom door, which seemed to have turned into a handheld labyrinth. My stomach churned and my body was tossed against the door. Slight turbulence, yeah, right.

All of a sudden, the lights flickered, and a *crack* echoed through the cabin. The consistent blaring white noise of the plane’s engines stopped, and in that instant we were suspended 35,000 feet in the air in a powerless 747. Then the descent began – against our will, that is.

We had been struck by lightning and plummeted 2,000 feet down. Admittedly, it was better than any roller coaster I had ever been on. I don’t believe my stomach had ever jumped into my throat before that moment.

On the flip side, I was hoisted in the air and thrown around the lavatory, hitting my back on the walls and my head on the ceiling. I was terrified, and my use of the facilities had been interrupted by the anarchy, so I was left scared and uncomfortable.

Luckily, the plane’s engines revived themselves, and we went on with our trip. We made it to Hawaii, and I did have the vacation of my life. It was almost jeopardized, however, by a traumatic event in an airplane bathroom.

If I can issue a warning to you, do yourself a favor and abide by the “fasten seat belt” sign. If you do not, I can guarantee you will regret it. ♦

“This is your captain speaking ...”

Bird(wo)man

by Uma Raja, Palm Beach, FL

The curved beak of the black vulture juts between the cage bars, scraping the side of my rain boot. I leap backwards as the tiny kite birds flit around, squeaking in alarm, knocking over my bucket. The bodies of three baby chicks roll out – the vultures’ impending meal – blood spewing from their severed heads. Welcome to my day at Busch Wildlife Sanctuary.

I’ve been volunteering at the sanctuary since eighth grade. I started in the Junior Naturalist program, where kids work with staff. When I turned 15, I could finally volunteer independently. Located in Jupiter, Florida, the rescue facility houses injured animals ranging from panthers to alligators. I spend four hours every Sunday hanging out with birds.

At 8 a.m. I grab a bucket and head to my assigned area. This includes places like the bird rehab, a wooden building containing majestic owls, angry turkeys, a sassy pelican, a one-eyed falcon, and more. There’s also an outdoor area sheltered with mesh fencing. Wild ibises perch on the top, and inside are 14 rooms filled with birds, including turkey vultures, hawks, a gray-crowned crane, and a talkative bald eagle. There’s also a sand hill crane named Fraser that is allowed to roam outside his cage. I throw twigs and the four-foot-tall bird plays fetch with me, spreading his enormous wings and jumping up and down with excitement.

The 4-foot-tall crane plays fetch with me

There’s a series of rooms called Small Flights, which host barn owls that dive bomb your head and northern crested caracara – not to mention the gigantic, elongated room called Large Flights, which contains 20 eagles, hawks, and black vultures. They perch on rods above my head and watch me with their reflective eyes. A bald eagle missing half a wing hobbles away as a juvenile eagle flaps his wings and sprints across the room, trying to fly.

I stand in the cage with these bird inches away. Most just stare at me calmly, minding their own business. Others become frightened and puff up. A select few (such as a particular black vulture, the pelican, and the turkeys) are unfriendly. I hose down the cages, spritz and scrub dirty areas with bleach, wash away feces, and pick up feathers, dead mice, fish guts, and decapitated chicks. I also prepare food for other animals, like deer and skunk. I pour live mealworms and frozen crickets into a bowl and weigh raw meat. I clean flecks of mystery substances off dishes in a room full of caged raccoons. I play music on my phone as I work, and the coons bob their heads to Nirvana’s “Smells Like Teen Spirit.”

The sanctuary is never boring. I mean, where else could you find the fossil of a rat skeleton in the



Photo by Maia Jackson, Playa Del Carmen, Mexico

trashcan? Or open a door and find two upside-down dead hogs centimeters from your face? While the job may sound gory, it’s well worth it. I know that these injured birds need help, and I can make a difference in their lives.

Over time, I’ve found ways to make the job easier. You can keep the turkeys at bay by leaning a rake against the doorway; they’re scared to get near the prongs. You can lure Fraser back to his cage by leaving a trail of twigs. If birds aren’t scared of the hose, you can stomp your feet and spread your “wings.” They’ll run away so fast they often topple over. Screaming while flapping your “wings” is humiliating, but it sure beats getting bitten.

Volunteering at Busch is an unforgettable experience, and a grateful little bird told me that it’s worth black vultures gnawing on your rain boots. ♦

Food for Strays

by Lauren Kearney, Burgas, Bulgaria

I’m part of the Roots & Shoots program founded by Dr. Jane Goodall, which promotes making positive changes in the world. As Dr. Goodall says, “What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.”

In Bulgaria, where I live, stray dogs are everywhere. Although many people here turn a blind eye, I cannot ignore the soulful gaze of a malnourished street dog. That’s why I’m no longer a food waster. When I see wasted food, I picture an emaciated dog prowling garbage bins, searching for a meal. When eating in a restaurant, I’m not afraid to take leftovers to feed stray cats or dogs.

I can’t ignore a malnourished street dog

A week ago, I saw a stray dog around the garbage bins. I knelt down and stroked his head. Hours earlier, I’d bagged up a plate of leftover fish. As I unwrapped it, he wagged his tail and sniffed at it. He devoured the fish in no time.

It’s sad, isn’t it, how we waste so much and think little of it? These homeless animals have taught me that food is precious. Even when I don’t have leftovers with me, I take the time to get something from the grocery store.

The next time you see wasted food, turn it into worthy food. You have the power to save a life! ♦

Visit the Roots & Shoots website at: www.rootsnshoots.org.uk



Photo by Julia Perry, Andover, MA

Building Hope in Gary

by Olyvia Gryzik, Park Ridge, IL

“Love is simple, Olyvia. You don’t have to do much to make someone’s day,” my mom told me. There came a time in my life, a little over a year ago, when I had the desire to make a difference, to impact someone’s life positively. My good friend Kaylee told me about a trip she took to Gary, West Virginia, and how it was a life-changing experience. After looking into service opportunities, I decided to go on a mission trip to Gary.

Eager to participate, I talked to my parents; they didn’t say yes right away. My dad was concerned about my safety. Thankfully, after I showed my parents information about the trip and attended some meetings, they said I could go. The process and preparation took a while, but it was worth every minute. This was a dream coming true.

When we arrived in Gary, I noticed how different the town was from where I lived. Houses were built on little hills. Some of them didn’t have doors or windows. Some had lattice instead; it was cheaper than screens and helped keep animals out. There were few stores or restaurants in town; most had closed. You were lucky to find a gas station or grocery store.

My job was to help repair houses. The work days were long and hot. We awoke

at 5 a.m. and worked through the day in 90 degree heat. There were always encouraging people by my side who helped keep me going.

The children I met in Gary were unique. Despite their poverty, they seemed to cherish every moment that God gave them, and they hoped for the best for the future. The littlest things would make these kids happy. There aren’t words to describe the joy I saw when the local kids

received an ice cream, a ball, a bike, or even a hug. I found it inspiring that the community was like a big family. Everyone knew each other and was there when someone needed help.

I am so glad I decided to go on that mission trip. It was indeed life changing and worth every tear, every drop of sweat, and every minute of hard work. I am thankful to have been able to work with an amazing group and community. I truly learned what it means to put others’ needs before mine.

As my mom said, “Love is simple, Olyvia.” It’s true – you don’t have to do very much to make someone happy. My goal during this experience was not only to make someone’s day, but to make their life happier. Little did I know that helping others would change my life as well. Gary, West Virginia, will always be in my heart. ♦

Some houses didn’t have doors or windows

Author Jennifer Donnelly

Interviewed by Megan Ansems, Kentville, NS, Canada

Jennifer Donnelly is best known for her historical novel *A Northern Light*. The *New York Times*-bestselling author's newest novel, *These Shallow Graves*, is a story about Jo, an American aristocrat with a bad case of curiosity about the world around her. Although Donnelly wasn't alive during the 1890s, her story expresses the hardship and beauty of living in New York during that era.

What was the hardest part of writing *These Shallow Graves*?

Everything! Did you ever read this quotation – “A writer is someone for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people” by the German writer Thomas Mann? That's me. It's all hard. Pacing, world-building, chasing the characters until they tell you who they really are, creating suspense, making a compelling and logical mystery – it all makes me rip my hair out. But still, there's nothing I'd rather be doing!

Why did you choose historical fiction as the genre for your books?

I love history. It's how I understand this world. I truly believe that we can't know ourselves without knowing those who came before us. Not all my books are historical fiction. My *Waterfire Saga*, for middle-grade readers, is fantasy, but it does have a big historical component. I can't resist sharing my love of history with my readers.

The main character, Jo, is an activist for female rights, in a way. She wants to report the stories that are considered unladylike and speak in a tone that isn't proper. What was your inspiration for Jo's character?

Women of the eighteenth century, so many of whom were silenced and shamed for trying to make their voices heard. The trailblazing reporter Nellie Bly and the novelist Edith Wharton were two major inspirations. So was an heiress named Consuelo Vanderbilt, who was forced into a miserable society marriage. And a working-class girl named Lizzie Schauer, who was arrested for soliciting simply because she was walking in Manhattan at night, alone.

The story takes place in the 1890s. How much research did you have to do in order to make it historically accurate?

A huge amount. If there were no such thing as a deadline, I'd still be researching. I absolutely love it. Finding an old book on etiquette or a diary, postcard, or magazine that gives me insight into the lost world I'm trying to recapture makes my heart thump.

In the novel, Nellie Bly is mentioned a lot, as she was Jo's role model as a female writer. Why did you choose Bly to inspire Jo throughout the novel?

Nellie was one of the first female reporters. She became a journalist at a time when very few women did, or could. She was bold, exceedingly brave, daring, and committed to social justice. By her example, as well as her convictions, she was an advocate for women, the poor, and the mentally ill. She had guts and smarts, and I admire her every bit as much as Jo does.

What do you do when you feel discouraged as a writer?

Whine. Stamp my feet. Complain to my husband. And then get back to work. Work's the only remedy.

What do you think makes a good story?

First and foremost, a true and distinctive voice. I'll read anything if the voice grabs me. Also, characters compel me. I don't need to love them, but I do need to be intrigued by them. Suspense. Surprises. A believable world that I can see, hear, and smell. A bit of humor. A lot of heart.

When writing, do you set deadlines for yourself or do you write when you feel creative or inspired?

Neither. I sit down to work in the morning and get as much done by night as I can. I learned many years ago, as a young reporter, to never, ever wait for the muse. Sit your butt down, start working, and she'll show up.

How long does it take you to write a book?

It has taken me as long as 10 years. (That was my first novel. I was teaching myself how to write – at 4:30 a.m., before work.) And as little as nine months.

What are you currently working on?

A new, top-secret story!

Any words of advice for young authors who are trying to publish their first book?

The road to publishing a book can be long and hard and full of rejection. I know this for a fact. No one can ever guarantee you'll get published. But one person can guarantee you won't: you. By quitting. So don't. Don't give up on yourself. The world is full of people just itching to tell you no. Don't be one of them.

For more advice, check out my website: www.jenniferdonnelly.com/faq.html.

What made you decide to become a writer? Did you always want to be a writer, or was there another path you wanted to take in life?

I did always want to be a writer. Though there are times – usually as I'm approaching a deadline – when I wish I were the owner of a cupcake shop. I was fortunate to have a mother who told me lots of stories, and I grew up with this love and expectation of stories and books and words, and when I got a bit older, I decided to start telling some of my own.

How do you get over writer's block?

Writer's block is like the monster under the bed – it can only mess with you if you believe in it. And I don't believe in it. I do often get stuck, and when I do, I know it's because I haven't done my homework. I haven't cooked up a good enough plot. I haven't coaxed out a character's deepest self. I haven't done enough research. To get unstuck, I often get away from my computer, get some paper and a pen, and start writing down questions. They might address a specific concern with the book, or they might be super general, like: “Why does this book suck?” And then the answers come, and when I know what's wrong, I can set about fixing it.

How often do you write something and realize it doesn't work with the plot, or the character wouldn't say something like that?

All the time. You just have to kill it and move on.

Do you read the reviews of your books?

Only the good ones.

Why did you choose the title *These Shallow Graves*?

My wonderful editor at Delacorte, Krista Marino, came up with that title, and I love it. It evokes the idea that if you're going to try to bury the past, you'd better bury it deep. I'm pretty lame when it comes to titles. I'm good at long and involved, not so good at short and snappy.

What made Jo hard to believe? She had facts and a few pieces of evidence, but every time she told someone her story, they didn't believe her.

Several people do believe her. Another one does but only appears not to. Some don't. I think whether a certain person does or doesn't believe Jo is a result of that person's background and consequent perspective. Society people don't believe a young society woman of good breeding could possibly have seen and done what Jo sees and does. People of a less sheltered background, who adhere to less rigid social roles, do.

Who are your favorite authors, and do you take inspiration from them?

James Joyce, Emily Dickinson, Stephen King, Jeanette Winterson, Phillip Pullman, Mary Oliver, David Almond, Walt Whitman, John le Carré, Marilynne Robinson, M. T. Anderson, and I do take inspiration from them. I love, need, crave, and can't exist without good writing.

What do you find easier to write: single books or series?

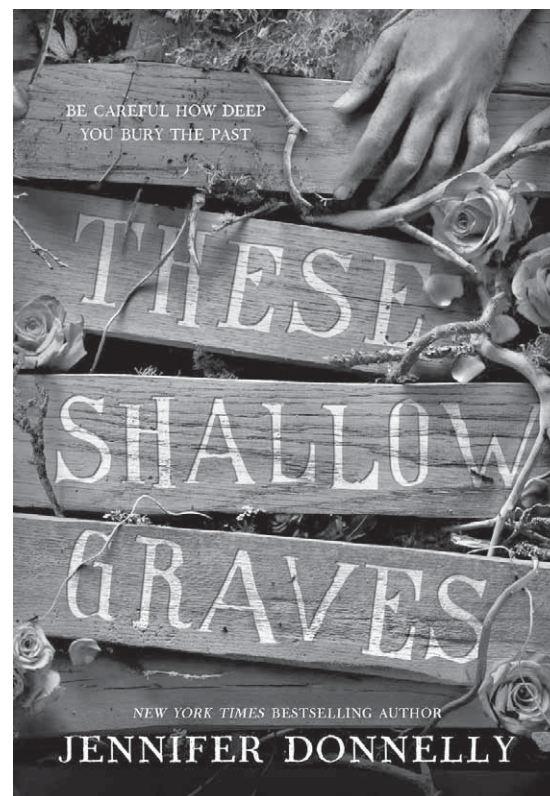
Both are hard. I never find writing anything to be easy.

Which was your favorite book to write?

They were all my favorite, at the time.

Would you like one of your books to be made into a movie? Which one?

It would be lovely to see them all made into films or miniseries – as long as they were good films or miniseries! ♦



The Hurry and the Harm

City and Colour

As all City and Colour lovers out there know, Dallas Green's style is generally consistent throughout his albums. The sound of his acoustic guitar paired with his smooth voice is Green's artistic signature, but "The Hurry and the Harm" is quite different. Every track features a full band, which creates a very different audio experience for the listener.

The tracks on this album are dynamic. Each song has its own distinctive sound. The title song, which is first on the album, is upbeat and contains a



Features a full band

simple backing track including a steady drum beat. It is probably the most representative of City and Colour's previous work.

Yet pushing beyond those limits, the track "Thirst" is quite different from Green's casual yet comforting style. This song is more mainstream and sounds like top 40. My personal favorites, "Commentators" and "Paradise," are unique tracks with great messages. "Believing all you have is wonderful instead of everything that you lack" is a powerful line that inspires the listener. "Paradise," an extremely catchy song, contains the lyric "I'm searching for a paradise that I just

can't seem to find." That is what life is all about, searching for things that make you happy and then pursuing them. This song is exceptionally deep and delves into Green's mind, as most of his music does.

For those who have never heard a City and Colour song, this album is a must-listen. It is Green's best by far as it has something for everyone. His range is so sophisticated and this album includes the usual alternative sound in addition to several pop and rock aspects. "The Hurry and the Harm" includes songs about current subjects, comedic ideas, catchy songs, and a number of the finest instrumental breaks ever produced. This album has a theme and overall sound that everyone will fall in love with. ♦

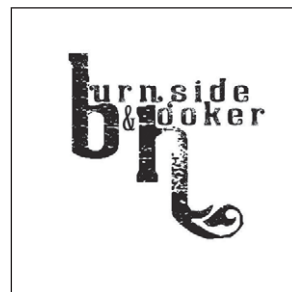
by Alanna Munjal, Brampton, ON, Canada

Rail Yard Hymns

Burnside & Hooker

The sensational debut album of indie acoustic band Burnside & Hooker has arrived! A play on the names of two Confederate Civil War generals – Ambrose Burnside and Joseph Hooker – their "Rail Yard Hymns" marches on like an army. And pumped with country flavor, modern sound, and out-right fun, it's a hotspot for musical fun and fiesta.

Even better, the band sounds great. Lead singer Rachel Bonacquisti dazzles every song with a crowning, magnificent voice. But each song



Fantastically acoustic and tangible

is defined by more than the swinging lyrics. Fantastically acoustic and tangible, each song opens up in a new light with ever-dashing instrumentals. Time to lay down your synth-zapping headphones, bud. Actual guitar, viola, drums, cello, and bass shake up the squeeze-line boundaries of what makes country music American, even edging into jazzier realms on occasion. Everything's so loose and raw (and cough, cough, unedited) that you're bound to sigh in relief before you run up to cheer on the show.

An excitable mix of 10 songs rubs off authentically and sweetly Americana, not to mention that each has an unforgettable story. Opening credits "Seasick Woman" and "Ophelia" establish volatile, sizzling soundscapes filled with equal parts howl and haunt. "Red Betty" is like a classic jaunt into a playful downtown nightclub. "Strangers" has the ability to make you feel reminiscent euphoria; it's exciting, bittersweet, and empowering. "Scars" is ultraviolet energy, lights twinkling then cat-eye fierce. "Taps" is like a gentle indie anthem, and "Logan Square" marks the end of a thrilling evolution of sound, the jolly ukulele taking care to promise (thank goodness) a return.

It's final; this album's lessons, love, and lust offer real hymns to live by. ♦

by Angelina Lee, Naperville, IL

Outlander • Bear McCreary

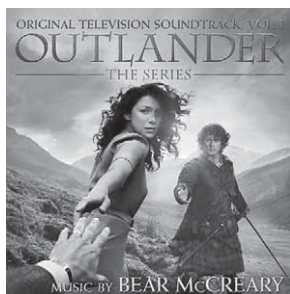
Listen to the "Outlander" album, close your eyes, and see the rugged highlands of Scotland.

Emmy-award winning composer Bear McCreary is no "outlander" when it comes to television soundtracks. He has composed music for "The Walking Dead," "Battlestar Galactica," "Black Sails," "Da Vinci's Demons," and more. And his latest work does not fall short. McCreary claims in his blog that he feels as though "Outlander" is "the score that I was born to do."

Outlander is a book series, which was recently adapted into a TV show, about a British woman named Claire who is pulled from post-WWII Scotland into the time of the Jacobite Uprising in 1743.

On Scottish folk songs of this period, McCreary says in his blog, "I was awestruck by the ability of these songs to communicate hidden meaning, tales of tragedy and triumph, with deceptively simple melodic lines and evocative harmonic progressions." The album has instruments, inspiration from composers, and source music from 18th century Scotland. Some songs are sung in English, some in Gaelic, and many don't use or need any words.

Traditional Scottish instruments are featured, including the penny whistle, fiddle, accordion, *bodhrán* (a Celtic frame drum), and of course, bagpipes. These instruments – along with haunting vocals, orchestral strings, and percussion – combine to make the soundtrack echo in the listener's ears for days.



Bagpipes burn with the fire of Scotland

The title song is an adaption of Robert Louis Stevenson's poem "Sing me a Song of a Lad that Is Gone," set to the tune of the Scottish folk song, "The Skye Boat Song." Soloist Raya Yarbrough has a clear and timeless voice. After listening to the song a few times, you'll be belting out the lyrics with her: "Sing me a song of a lass that is gone / say could that lass be I."

Yarbrough also appears in "Dance of the Druids." Her voice takes on a haunting quality that pulls you back to the pagan times of mystery and intrigue. The unearthly song progresses with the plucking of Celtic harps, sudden sweeps of the orchestra, and pounding drums.

The soundtrack has songs for every human emotion that can be expressed through sound. There is hope in the song "People Disappear All the Time." It

features the "Claire and Jamie Theme" (an ostinato that appears often on the soundtrack), alluding to the romance that is to come. There is despair in "The Losing Side of History," as the song shifts into something dark and foreboding with the use of pleading strings. In "Clean Pease Strae," there is unadulterated celebration in the driving percussion and energetic bagpipes. "The Wedding" features a lone pipe and an orchestra that sweeps bows over heart strings with its tentative beginning, and then bursts into joyous romance and bagpipes with the "Claire and Jamie Theme."

There are many more songs that tell the story and enhance the listener's world with their beauty and passion. With orchestras, small ensembles, and powerful soloists, McCreary creates music that's delightful to venture through. There are songs that steal breath, vocals that inspire wonder, and bagpipes that burn with the fire of Scotland.

The album is a patchwork quilt; each song so different but sewn together with the same sounds. All within 51 minutes, your heart will pound with passion, ache with sorrow, swell with joy, and break with beauty. Listen to "Outlander," close your eyes, and let the music take you away. ♦

by Natalie Caswell, Dover, OH

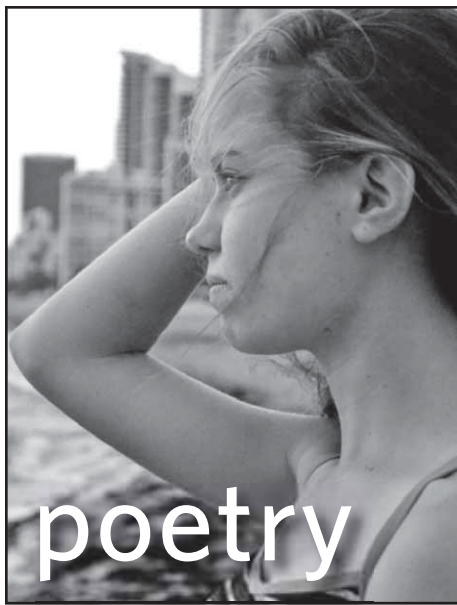


Photo by Erin Shields, Plantation, FL

Robert Fulton

Brown hair cascades over her shoulders,
like water spilling off a steamboat wheel
her tight striped shirt hugs her,
like her future husband will
her green eyes, murky and mysterious,
like a lazy Louisiana stretch of river
With tiny hands she furiously jots notes
(Robert Fulton – inventor of steamboat)

And now she's standing on the deck
hair waltzing with the wind,
white dress billowing around her knees.
She smiles, the spray jumps up around her,
the dry sun twinkles off the droplets.
Her wide brimmed sun hat
suddenly is soaring through the sky,
running away along the river.
She laughs because she is happy,
I laugh because I am happy,
the steam streaming behind us.

by Caleb Miller, Brooklyn, NY

he shoots and ...

girls in pencil skirts
walk down the sphere
of grass with bent backs
the guys in blue jeans
bleached smiles and skinny
arms strong enough
to hit or swing
they all sit in a circle
brightly painted cheeks
hollering at 8 p.m. like a catcall
yellow more
demon than sunlight
in a soccer-match of dignity
he shoots and
he scores

by Megan Tyler, Winnipeg, MB, Canada

Fly Far

"It's time," he croaks,
his fever-bright heart
thumping every minute or so.
A glance is cast
to our rain-coated window.
The world has seemed
to take notice of him.
I do not let the word
"now"
slip through my lips,
lugging a question mark along as luggage.
We ride the sidewalk
like a wave, washing up
on our amber hill.
There is a barrier of history
shielding us from the new air.
My voice slides down
its insulating walls.
I will say many things
on this eve to many days
with every part
of my aching being.
He resonates
long after his fire ignites the sky,
carrying him somewhere kinder.

by Sarah Bridgeport, Columbus, OH

I am the Diplomat of –

The roar of the garbage truck
interrupting our mundane miserable
doesn't have anything on me!
I wonder when my tired neighbor will
squash me like a summertime mosquito.
One night when I go out to see
Oh! How cold the concrete steps can get
with no sun to bleed into them!
This serious meditation is my usual way.
Some nobody said my neighbor was too pale
to be a real Mexican,
So there I sat, tilted my head-
My glare stopped the universe.
Still, I know
it doesn't make the slightest difference
to you
that I didn't laugh instead.
What do you talk about
when you talk about me?
I'll throw my pennies down that it's
my dumpster mouth or my seemingly
pointless
walkabouts where I stop at half
the crossroads
and roll up the loose ankles on my
secondhand jeans.
I wonder how much you see.
I'll have you – and the world – know
that I am different like everybody else.
Not quite like the classic misunderstood and
tortured soul. No, not like the school
bully with
two homes a or a lifeless clay body
buried under
the banks of Mean Creek
More like the neighborhood child
with a dumpster mouth yet the sweetest
see-through smile that your tired eyes
ever did lay on.
I don't think existence is ready to know
about my time freezing glares, I steal
comfort in knowing that I don't know
it all. In my mind
you are not boiled down to a fleeting smile
whenever life throws us together though
that is all I see.
Please do the same for me.
Next time you hear the quick stepped
rubber thudding you know is mine going
off on another angry suburban mission.
You are in your car, can't seem to find the
key, you heard enough last night and it's
hard to breathe.
Remember friend!
Though I am the least,
there is more to me.
In your mind, I hope, I am still alive,
Still conscious and very much alive
Still moving around in the way that I do
and
alive.
I hope that I am not reduced
to a quiet little mess of brown and sticky
bug blood
mosquito
that
I
am.

by Chinasa Okezie, Hayward, CA

Grandfather

They listened while I used my tongue
To weave blankets and sleeves, excuses
Used them to cover myself
It is easy until it is not.
It is deeper than sadness
It is profound, but not poetic
You cannot contain it in prose
Or verse.
Dependency and dependent
She sat there while I talked
While my lips stained as if with a
Grape or cherry popsicle
The kind children eat in summer;
Perhaps this one was flavored of desperation.
A constant magnet board pattern
Fall, frightened, forget,
Or wish to do so
As sure as the squares on a checkerboard
Is it you asking?
That was the year I cut my hair
Too many secrets hid in it
Nestled, curled up between the strands
I tried to shed them.
I could not
Everything and nothing
Packaged, neatly wrapped in
bright blue paper
A celebration of loss.
I once heard it is common to plead,
to beg before you die
Is that what happened
That day?
He was the type that would tie you up
and expect you to be grateful
that you weren't chained instead.
Helpless as a beetle is
Upturned on the road, light
Reflecting, refracting, reframing
Did you know?
The light catches your eyes
As it does broken glass.
Trust is a childhood
I lost too soon
Anything can rape you
When you deserve it.

by "Ella," Vancouver, BC, Canada

girl braids hair on bus

a connection
swift fingers knot blonde and human matter
stays put;
swings
across white shoulders.

when she gets where she is going
she will untie herself
and spread her thin fingerbones
through the rope that she has woven
until it dissipates
like it was never there
and let it drape,
forget it where it drapes,
a part of her,
a yellow shadow,
easily removed.

by Morgan Chesley,
Tumwater, WA



sobelieve.com

new zero calorie
naturally sweetened.
try our three delicious flavors.



Our
27th Year



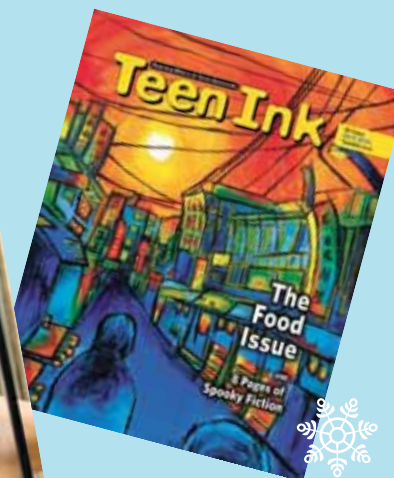
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