



A DIFFERENT VISION OF LIFE

The Walrus 2020 * Saint Mary's Hall * San Antonio, Texas * Volume 54



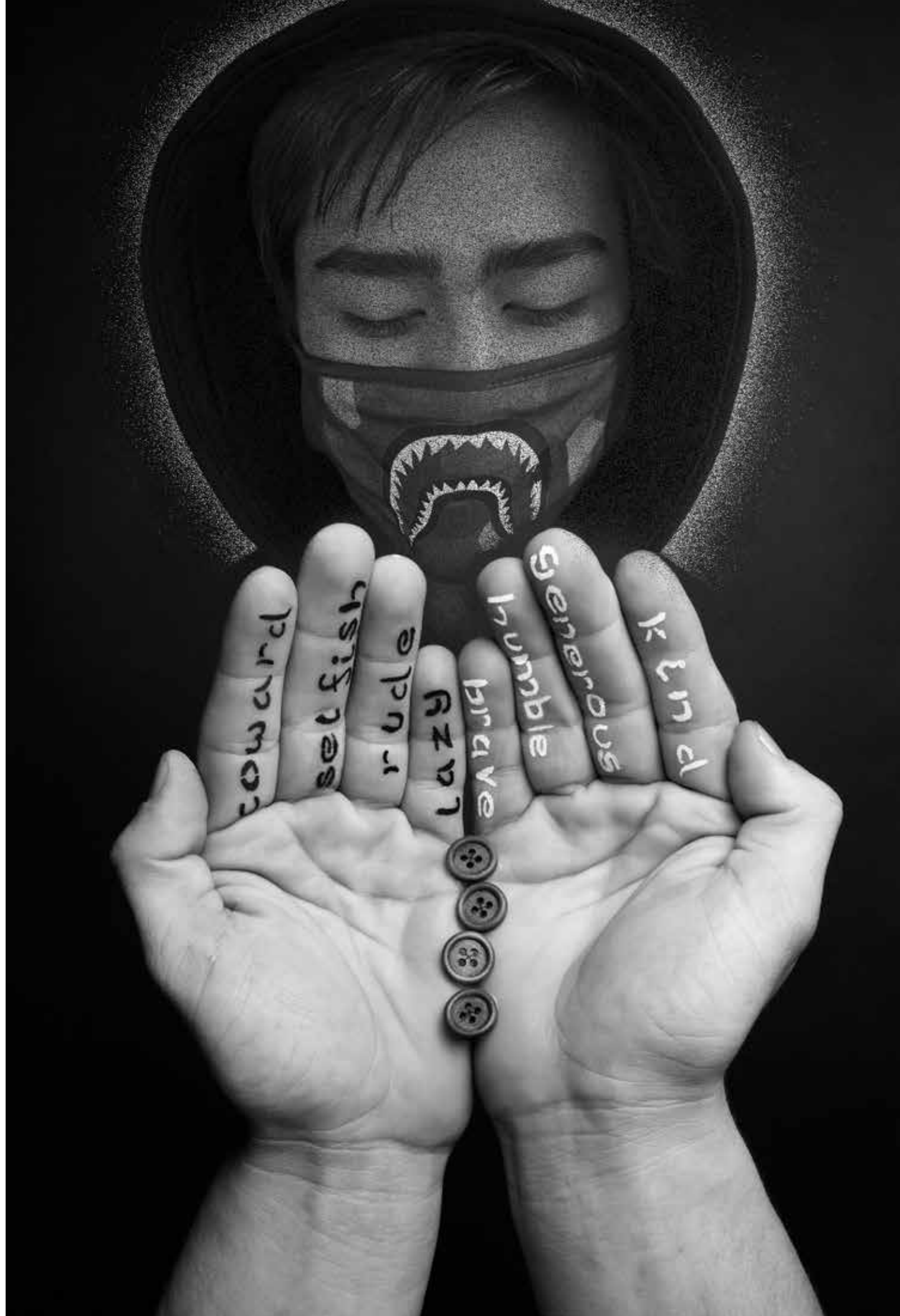
THE WALRUS

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"A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE IS A
DIFFERENT VISION OF LIFE."

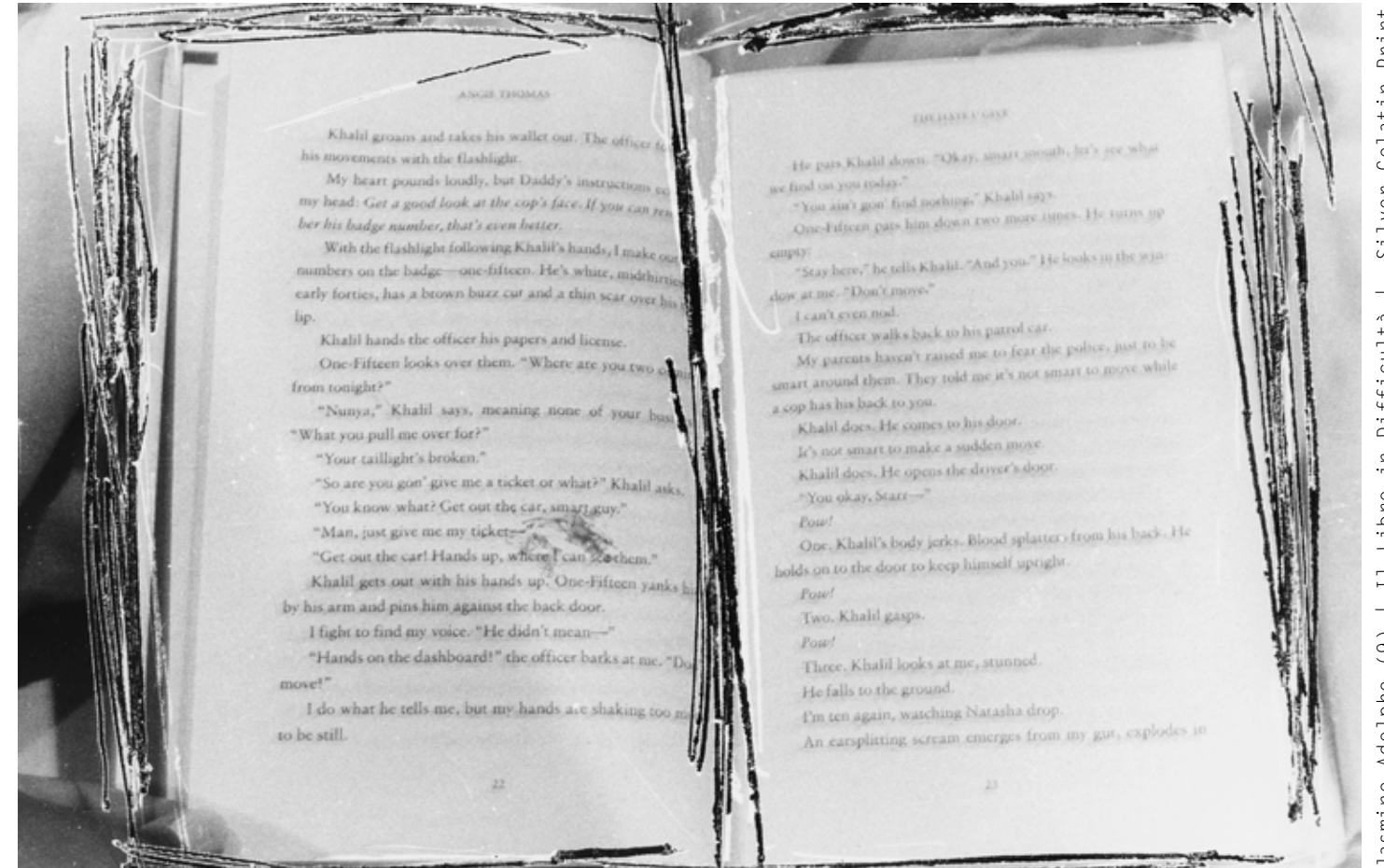
- FEDERICO FELLINI



Corina Zaratte (12) | Savior | Digital Photo

**"A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE IS A
DIFFERENT VISION OF LIFE."**

- Federico Fellini



Jasmine Adolphe (9) | Il Libro in Difficoltà | Silver Gelatin Print

A Note from the Editor

Language has long been classified by mankind as a divisive mechanism utilized to construct invisible barriers. However, the fear of becoming absorbed by a culture whose language is not ours limits creativity and prohibits our souls from obtaining a new vision of life. To understand a language is to create a window to the sentiments and most intimate thoughts of a people. While we don't often realize it, we breathe, dream and become the languages which define the world surrounding us. This year's magazine is a celebration of our diversity, reminding us that regardless of our countries of origin, whom we pray to, or the languages we think and write in, we are all united by the strength and power of art and writing.

-Mafer Benavides, Senior Editor

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SUBMISSION POLICY:

The Walrus welcomes submissions from any member of the Upper School student body from August through February 14. Teachers are also encouraged to submit work for their students. All work is judged anonymously, so we ask that all submissions arrive without a name on the piece and with the required submission form. Submission forms may be obtained from Mrs. Amy Williams-Eddy via email or your English teacher’s resources page. Digital submissions are preferred and are to be sent to aweddy@smhall.org along with a submission form. All writing submissions should be submitted as MS Word files or PDF files. All digital photographs and artwork should be submitted as JPEG files or PDF files and must be 300 dpi or larger for printing purposes. During the third quarter, *The Walrus* selection committee works during lunch dutifully selecting the written works that go into the magazine. During the fourth quarter, the editorial team works to copy edit, match photos to the written works, and create the magazine during Creative Writing Class. This year, because of COVID19, magazine production was done via Zoom.

EDITORIAL POLICY:

The Walrus editorial staff reserves the right to edit minor errors such as grammatical and spelling problems, while other submissions may be returned to the author for other requested corrections or approval for editorial decisions.



Emily Cox (9) | *Memorabilia* | Silver Gelatin Print

UN TELÉFONO DESCOMPUESTO

Mafer Benavides (12) | Poem

Como se quiebra mi corazón,
como la línea de teléfono
en la que intercambiamos palabras.
Ya no me describes los amaneceres
con los que despertabas,
los susurros que echaban
a volar tu imaginación cuando salías
de paseo el miércoles por la tarde,
las noticias que te comparten tus vecinas,
las golondrinas.

¿Dime, qué fue lo que sucedió?

Nuestros estíos bochornosos, difusos y tardados se esfuman en el pasadizo del tiempo,
como tus dedos que solían acariciar mis rizos dorados que descansaban sobre tu regazo
hasta que me consumiera el peso de mis parpados y cayera en un sueño recóndito.

Como se quiebra mi corazón cuando se da cuenta que jamás volverá a ver
tus manos, obsoletas y endebles, cobijadas en un edredón de harina,
o a escuchar los dóciles pasos de tus pies, cicatrizados con las melodías con las que cobraban vida,
o a recibir el amor de María en mi torso cuando me sostenías,
o a mirar las constelaciones en tus pupilas de las cuales esta forrada la noche.

Como se quiebra mi corazón, que sabe que sin importar cuanto use sus palabras como adhesivo, ni cuantos rosarios
rece en tu nombre, ni los rayos de sol que robe para dar luz a tu soledad, no puede reparar el tuyo.

TRANSLATION:

THE BROKEN TELEPHONE

Mafer Benavides (12) | Poem

How my heart breaks
like the telephone
through which we exchange words.
You no longer describe to me the sunrise
you wake up to,
the whispers you hear
during your Wednesday walk
which cause your imagination to fly,
the news of your friends,
the singing birds.

Tell me, what happened?

Our warm, lazy, lengthy summers fade away in the passage of time,
Like your fingers which grazed my golden locks as they rested on your lap
Until the weight of my eyelids overpowered me and I fell in a profound sleep.

How my heart breaks when it realizes it will never again see
Your hands, frail and obsolete, coated in a quilt of thin flour,
or listen to the gentle sound of your footsteps, stamped with the melodies that brought them to life,
or sense the love of Mary in my torso when you held me,
or witness the constellations in your pupils which embellish the night sky.

How my heart breaks when it realizes that despite the words it uses as adhesive, or how many rosaries it prays for your
name, or the rays of sun it steals to bring light to your solitude, it cannot repair your own.



Nikki Curry (12) | Backyard in Hawaii | Digital Drawing

MY HOLY GROUND

Joy Ding (12) | Personal Narrative

“I STOOD IN MY BACKYARD, ANXIOUS BECAUSE I WONDERED HOW MUCH LONGER THOSE BRICKS COULD SECURE MY INNOCENCE... WOULD THIS GROUND BECOME HOLY TO ANOTHER CHILD?”

It is amazing how a flat ground, probably stepped on over millions of times, can turn into a holy ground. A ground that is holy to me, a ground under millions of bricks and tons of concrete. Holy to me because those bricks keep my childhood safe and that ground holds my hope stable.

If my childhood home is holy only to me, then it only belongs to me and no one else.

I will not allow anyone to invade this ground.

“Mom!”

“What? Why are you still awake? Go to bed!”

“But I want you to come too.”

“Honey, I need to rest.”

“Sleeping is resting.”

“Go. To. Bed.” Her mouth busy chewing on sunflower seeds and her eyes fixed forward as the artificial light illuminated her face. The light’s reflection on the wall changed constantly. I could tell the TV was on.

“But -”

I never understood her logic. She said she needed to rest, but isn’t sleeping resting? How is watching TV resting? Every night I would creep down the stairs, trying not to make a sound, and cursing at the wooden tiles if they squeaked and blew my cover. I was scared of mom finding out that I was out

of bed—I would be in big trouble. But I just wanted to be with her. I stood on the staircase, leaning against the wall and digging into it with my index finger, waiting.

I think I was only five years old the winter I got my dog Happy. I remember that. He jumped up and down on his hind legs in a tiny cardboard box, not worrying if the box, already moist with rainwater, was going to collapse. I remember his fur— a coat yellow as dried grass, with a hint of black peeking through. He was hideously cute. I lifted him up by the armpits and pouted into his face.

As an only child, I saw Happy as my younger brother, who in just a few years was older than me. It wasn’t long until he reached adolescence and became territorial and left a pee stain on the wall. No one warned me how fast time would fly by and how short our friendship would last.

Ten years, that’s how long dogs live, TVs will tell you, but they will never tell you to cherish that time.

Forever, that’s how long houses last, realtors will lie.

Mom left us. She went on a trip with her friend to Hong Kong. Lucky.

When I woke up, the sash of her robe was no longer in my hands. Holding onto it was the only way I felt safe, but she always managed to slip away. I thought she must have done it again. I kicked the other side of the bed. It felt cold, as if she were never there. I remember sitting up with tears welling up in my eyes, running out of the bedroom, reaching for the phone, and pressing against the grey button on the telephone with my tiny and shaking thumbs. I cried and sobbed that weekend morning because of my mom’s absence.

It wasn’t until a few moments later that I realized dad had the responsibility of taking care of me, the biggest brat in the world, as my grandma would say.

“Mom always does my hair before school,” I demanded Monday morning as we stood in front of the bathroom mirror, clueless.

My feet were red and bare on the cold porcelain tiles. Mom wasn’t there to nag at that. I handed dad two hair ties. They were the trendy ones, with pastel blue and pink plastic balls attached to them. That was fashion to me. Dad fumbled his hands through my hair, creating more knots, and gathering less than enough hair as he looped the ties, leaving them barley hanging onto my hair. With my hair lopsided and looking like a chicken coop, I tugged on the pigtails and wailed. My crying echoed off the walls.

Dad did them again, but I refused to look into the mirror, knowing it was not good enough.

As my kindergarten teacher waved at me with a bright smile from the bus, and the kids judged through the windows, I tugged at the hair ties. I did not notice how much I hurt my dad’s feelings.

How stupid of me.

I got a bunny in third grade from the carnival. I never bothered to learn its gender, but I called it Snowy. Snowy was white, of course—white as the first snow of December. Every day I prepared Snowy’s food by cutting up carrots and lettuces and sticking them through the cage. I admired the tiny pink nose moving rapidly and the teeth that made crunching sounds. I wondered if I could hold Snowy like a baby. Picking up the bunny, I tried to flip it on its back. It struggled and

fought my mighty grip. Large feet were stained yellow, just like the pee stain on the wall.

Snowy was my friend. Until we left it out on the patio. It rained that night, and when I came back from school my housekeeper told me, “That rabbit. It’s dead.”

I don’t think I was sad. I knew I should have been—how could you not be sad? I tried to force tears out, but my eyes remained as dry as a savannah. I decided to bury Snowy under the palm tree in my backyard. Over time grass and other plants grew over that piece of ground - I couldn’t name them.

Dad was the cook; he was the chef. Every Sunday he cooked us dinner, and the aroma of the dishes were forever trapped on the walls. I remember when he cooked venison, it was the tastiest thing I have ever had. As I bit into the soft meat, the sauce danced to the melodies of the juice, and I had a euphoria of flavor. Dad told me it was deer when I asked; it didn’t bother me. It was tasty, after all.

The hot summer sun glazed the backyard. I stood in the grass, anxious because bugs were attacking me, but also dazed because of the humidity of mid-July. I was older then, sixth grade, I think. My mom was inspecting the trees and complaining to dad. All those pest control sprays were ruining her precious plants, she complained. And the gardeners were not doing anything about it. She continued as my dad scratched his head and ran his hand through his black hair. You could tell they were serious.

Crack.

Crash.

“OH!”

The tile on the patio’s wall fell, crashed to the ground like a meteor, smashing into pieces and grey ash. Someone could have died.

“The glue,” she said. “Look. It’s melting under the sun.”

“It’s getting old.”

June 2016. I found myself once again admiring my holy place. The exterior paint that was once white was a gross yellow. A piece of tile was still absent on the patio. The plants were replaced with new trees, and I hated them as they boasted with their young leaves and branches under the sun. Plants covered Snowy’s grave—four-leaf clovers, I’m sure. Happy was old. He couldn’t run that fast anymore and wouldn’t chase me around the kitchen anymore, poor guy. The living room’s ceiling was leaky and moldy. We needed to call the repair guy, my mom said with that same complaining tone. Dad ran his hands through his hair, which was no longer black with a young spirit, but a mix of black, silver, and grey. I walked around the house full of memories. The old wood panels squeaked once more, I no longer cursed at it, because after all, I was sixteen, I didn’t share the same bed with my mom anymore. No, that would be too embarrassing.

I stood in my backyard, anxious because I wondered how much longer those bricks could secure my innocence. One day, my parents would decide to sell the house to someone else.

Would this ground become holy to another child?

Maybe I will share my stories. Maybe I will keep them to satisfy my selfishness.

EVE OF DAWN

Natalia Zambrano (12) | Poem

clouds tossed across crossed skies
it's me
where are you?

you're here
the apple of the eye
the limbo between
 him
and
 her

(we're the same)

the wind:
a death dance
embedded in his skin
his biggest sin
the sin
of

(existence)

I hear the mountains mocking
I hear the apple curse
 and
the pear
 cry
 cry
 cry
 for me

(but not for him)

but maybe it's not me
 why me?

where is he?



Evelyn Cox (11) | Spot | Digital Photo



Emily Braddock (11) | Stripped | Mixed Media

NOON

Fletcher Spear (11) | Poem

It's noon. Everything warps.
A zebra trips over its elastic stripes
And orange turns blue.
Chagrined, the zebra raises his glimmering shield
And everything, at once, is hidden
At least to him.
He is free to move about.
He stands on his hind legs, puts on his sweater
And, at 12:01, walks out a man.
No one has ever seen such a seamless gradient
And no one ever will again.

JUDGEMENT HAS COME

Felicia Early (12) | Poem

God no longer exists, but He will be missed.
Plink-
Plink-
Metallic in color. Chemical in flavor. Poisoning the sickly air.
Plink-
Plink-
Skyscrapers are falling and people are crying.
Why is this happening?
Plink-
Plink-
Years have passed, and boats are rising.
Plink-
Plink-
There is no food, no hope, and no love.
Plink-
Plink-
A man stands on the last bow, looking toward heaven.
Plink-
Plink-
In his hands, a small relic of our Lord's salvation.
Plink-
Plink-
Reaching upwards, Kroin prays for mercy.
Plink-
Plink-
But no rainbow appears, and the earth goes barren.
Plink-
Plink-
Rain comes down in torrents.



Ethan Acevedo (12) / Across the Pond / Digital Photo

THE MOUNTAIN

Stella Markey (12) / Creative Non-Fiction

“EVERYTHING PROCESSES LIKE IT IS IN A DARK ROOM PHOTO LAB. EACH SECOND THAT PASSES BRINGS MORE CLARITY, AND EVENTUALLY, LIKE A SNAPSHOT, A SNIPPET OF LIFE IS PERMANENTLY ENGRAVED IN HER MEMORY.”

Not completely certain whether she should look up or down, she looks ahead.

These mountains know how to claim their presence.

Perfection exists in its imperfection, the jagged edges point out of each weighty miracle of nature to create a sharp contrast with the soft slushy snow that continues to persist through the final days of winter.

She feels small. Meaningless.

The encompassing mountains mock her minimal importance; they speak to her—not listen—but speak. What she discern their words as an invitation.

This their world.

Her eyelids close, and she sees so much more. Everything processes like it is in a dark room photo lab. Each second that passes brings more clarity, and eventually, like a snapshot, a snippet of life is permanently engraved in her memory.

Time stops.

Her unfortunate instinct to click the home button on her phone results in a time displayed, a time that lacks importance. Time seems fabricated by a force much weaker than that of a mountain, than that of nature. She chooses to trust the sun she knows will always be there.

The sky clears her mind. Carbon-dioxide emitting machines sweep through the blue, forming thin, precise lines that erase what was once there. She focuses solely on her sight, her touch, her smell, her reach as she tries to imagine taking a rubber eraser to remove everything that once caused her distress.

She is still.

A plethora of multi-colored dots move over the white snow, ranging from kids who can ski better than they can walk, to men and women in their sixties disproving the myth that with age comes limitations. Silence breaks when two young girls appear from what seems to be nowhere. They carry two wooden sleds, and by the flushed color of their faces, one would believe that these sleds were made of robust pieces of iron. They speak in a language she does not understand.

She sees the never-ending rays shooting out from the sun—the kind that she would draw on her elementary school art projects.

She stands up, feels dizzy, lacks control. The mountains move with the sharp wind, in momentary hallucinations.

Eventually, she takes one step back into reality. She finds the lounge chair she sits in served as her spaceship, transporting her mind elsewhere.



LETTER FROM VINCENT

Joy Ding (12) | Poem

Dear Friend,

I'm tired today.
I'm not feeling too well; thus,
I am obligated to rest.

My head is not my friend today, my friend.
I just wish it would stop for a day or few,
that's all I ask, that's all.
I decided to paint my bedroom,
I thought that might ease my pains.
Let my busy mind rest for a while.

I apologize if the painting makes you uncomfortable, my friend.
I promise the tight walls mean no harm.
But this is one of my proudest works –
I might send you more sketches someday...

Anyways,
Dr. Gachet has been taking really good care of me. And
I think my dormant life will be coming to an end,
For he promised that my condition will allow me to explore the outside again!

I can't wait to see the night sky and feel the wind twist and turn
and wrap itself around the stars.
I can't wait to admire and smell the wild sunflowers.
Did you know every petal is unique, my friend?
I can't wait to paint the greens of the mulberries,
feel the velvet paints and the rugged canvas, and smell the raw scent of the oils...
I promise they feel different when I'm outside.
My friend!
You have no idea...
I really can't wait...

I wonder how long until I can be free again.
I hope you are well too, my friend.
Will you come visit me one day?

Yours,
Vincent

Evelyn Cox (11) | Mandara Hut | Mixed Media



Lainie Hoalst (11) | *Drawing Lines* | Digital Photo

FOR YOU, DEAR MOTHER

Alejandro Delgado (10) | Sonnet

Our big blue home that gives us so much joy;
Granting us life fulfilling every need.
We burn, we slash, pollute, and we destroy,
Extracting all the gifts we have, indeed.

In summer months we watch the oceans rise,
Then watch as fire burns our precious homes.
Time ticking like the ice that cracks and cries,
As glaciers melt and sink with pleading moans.

When winter comes bringing a tide of cold,
And summer's glorious heat and warmth go away,
Then sends the tide back over, then behold,
A drastic change that turns the world to grey.

Not solving these will only mean more pain
For our future people living on these plains.

NIGHT SKY

John Bourland (12) | Poem

Is what I see before my eyes
thousands of Gods in golden disguise
gazing down at man below
bemused by what we claim to know?

Are they balls of fiery gas
containing incomprehensible amounts of mass?
The conflict at their inner core
creating the earth, the moon, and so much more?

Is what I see laid out before me
a dynamic record of our ancestry?
A tapestry of heroes, immortal in the skies
playing out their greatest moments before my eyes?

Yet pollution clouds the night sky, our lights remain on,
and more and more of the bright stars are gone.
Be they deities, history, or mere beautiful skies lost,
are modern amenities really worth the cost?



Sofia Meagher (11) | *Bottled Up* | Mixed Media



Izzy Castillo (11) | Alter Ego | Digital Photo

BOUQUET OF BUTTERCUPS

Nikki Curry (12) | Prose Poem

The flower shop stood at the corner of two busy streets. The large windows displayed bouquets ranging from red and pink roses, large open sunflowers, to tall orchids.

And you are the one bouquet made up of buttercups. All the way in the front.

You're such a dainty display but you stand confident, despite being so small. People can hardly see you when they pass down the sidewalk and peer through the glass.

You don't get noticed by them. So you sit patiently by the window sill.

You can't tell if that bothers you or not.

You know, everyone likes roses. They're a pretty shape and color and a universal symbol of love. A buttercup is different: cute, smaller, childish. They say it's good to stand out, and that it's no fun when everyone's the same. There's no other flower there that can relate to you.

Soon you will start to rot.

Your color will fade and your petals will wilt because your burdens and anxieties weigh too heavy. You start to realize that the roses and the sunflowers and the orchids do bother you.

The stem begins to decay and you don't think you can go on any longer.

But then a child pops up in front of the window with a gleam in her eyes. She's captivated by you, but you don't know why. The roses have brighter colors and the sunflowers are as big as her smile. But she picks you.

She makes your faded yellow feel like gold.

FLUFFY & SIMPLE

Joy Ding (12) | Poem

The dewdrop falls on her face,
the sweetness awakens her skin,
radiant with a rosy hew.
She opens her eyes
and sees the blue sky.
Finding herself once again on this green field,
she knows its time to climb
the ladder to that cloud.

Her heart beating faster,
her steps getting lighter,
she ascends into the sky.

The cloud mystifies,
the green in her eyes intensifies,
and her mind fills with fantasies.
Her feet pulses
as she imagines the soft tender surface of
the cloud.

One more step and she reaches her dream,
where cakes are limitless,
where water holds the sweetness of fruit punch,
where the pain of falling will not wake her
at night.

She takes the last step.
Cotton candy wraps around her foot.
But the softness soon turns into emptiness.

Falling into thin air,
she plummets.
No one will help her.
The cloud shrinks
into a white dot in the
blue sky,

and the world goes silent.

WEDNESDAY

Hunter Allen (12) | Poem

The familiar quake and rumble
Shook the thick boots,
Rattled the ski bindings,
And relieved the aspens of their heavy snow
Once again.

It was Wednesday, after all,
And those quiet travelers,
Enjoying the warmth of cocoa and coffee inside the lodge
Knew it too;
Yet they remained,
Licking the cream off their lips
And watching the brown, sweet swirls shake in their cups
As the flakes outside
Flew past.

They waited for the initial boom to clear
Before continuing their conversation;
What's for dinner tonight?
Asked a child,
With his tight-knit gloves
Hugging the hot porcelain mug.

Bright and blue
The sky was as clear as the minds of those on the slope
With no trace of white
So blank and so fair;
Where had the clouds gone?
The sun had no answer
As it began its retreat behind a distant mountain
Foreseeing the inevitable;
It was Wednesday, after all.

The bounding wave had begun down the mountain
Gracefully grooming the slope,
Trimming the trees with care,
Sweeping up passersby as it glided,
Washing away what it wanted, and

Burying unwanted foreign bodies.

The kids,
Struggling with their skiing form
And tumbling over each other,
Were helped down the slope
By no instructor,
But only the generosity of the snow.

One experienced snowboarder
Slid down the trick park to showcase his skills,
His final attempt had him slicing through the cold air
Almost matching the speed of the wave;
Yet he left the crowd that had gathered to watch
Wondering how his landing would've gone
If it wasn't
Wednesday.

Slinging snowballs at each other
With shrill laughter,
Other kids ran about the base of the mountain
Competing in their icy duel,
And as their parents planned out the day ahead,
The mountain joined the fight
As a soft, young voice whined,
Complaining that it wins every time.

The hills were now a smooth white
With not a soul visible,
Just as the mountain likes it;
Unfortunately for him
The riders had returned,
Comfortably taking the lifts back up
To start their runs again.
They loved the fresh slopes
And light powder.
Luckily,
It was Wednesday, after all.



Sofia Prestigiacomo (12) | Blue Meets Purple | Digital Photo

SHE LOVED ME

Emily Garrett (12) | Poem

Through the simple act of cutting fruit
I'll never have an apple quite the same

She wouldn't ask about my day
Or expect extravagant things for me to say

She loved me through the simple act of cutting fruit

With naïve fingers and string cheese hair
I'd sit ready as a Venus fly trap
For my juicy plate to arrive
Determined as a willow tree
Breaking wind in sweet sky

Her hands like prunes never failed to divide
The soft silk fiber slowly
With care

She loved me through the simple act of cutting fruit

Her indifferent Papaya lips never took a side
And although she never asked
I always told her
Something about her silence
Made the color of my words ramble

Her eyes like shining seeds
Planted only on the task ahead
And although I never felt her heart against mine
Her spirit walked with me
Through every garden of life

She loved me through the simple act of cutting fruit

A stranger to words
Teacher of patience
A stranger to contact
Wielder of reflection

That's how she loved me
Through the simple act of cutting fruit

I'll never have an apple quite the same.

Nikki Curry (12) | French Toast Diner | Pencil Pastel





Ansley Steele (10) | Nothing Gold Can Stay | Leather and Metal

TWO WAYS TO SEE A HOUSE

Alex Riebe (9) | Personal Narrative

“ITS BEAUTY ALWAYS WELCOMED ME LIKE AN OLD FRIEND, AND I ALWAYS YIELDED TO ITS TENDERNESS. HOWEVER, AS I APPROACHED THE STRUCTURE, WEARING MY GRANDFATHER’S DEATH LIKE A PAIR OF NEWFOUND GOGGLES, IT SUDDENLY SEEMED COLD AND ALOOF, WILLING TO IGNORE MY GRIEF WITHOUT A PASSING GLANCE.”

The morning of my grandfather’s death, I groggily stepped down the stairs to find my father hurrying frantically around the house. He hastened over to me and told me that my grandfather, my mother’s father, was in the hospital after his health took a turn for the worse the night before, and my mother was already on her way there.

“We don’t think he’s going to make it this time,” he solemnly whispered.

He asked me if I wanted to come to the hospital to say my final goodbyes, and I, standing there like the baffled child I was, could not form the words to say yes or no. He

asked me one more time. Without thinking what I was doing, the word sprang from my mouth, and my father left for the hospital while I stayed behind, sitting anxiously on the couch.

Eventually, after hours of waiting, my phone buzzed, and my father gave me the news that I had dreaded hearing. He was gone.

I collapsed and began to cry. It was the kind of cry that envelops your entire body, where your mouth gapes in anguish and spastically releases sobs and takes in gulps of air, and you wonder how much water your body can lose before you dry up like a grape turning into a raisin.

I wanted to return to my grandparents’ house, hoping to feel comfort and to relieve the longing I felt. I always saw my grandpa’s house as something of grandeur, reminiscent of the Parthenon in Ancient Greece. With tall white columns, salmon-colored bricks, windows that were amiable eyes and a door that always seemed to smile at me, it was the most beautiful structure I had ever seen. I remember as a kid, I would walk up the steps leading up to the house and see little cats lounging in the shadow cast on the porch by a large oak tree. The sweet creatures, joyous attendants to the house, settled themselves underneath my open palm, letting out soft, contented purring sounds as my hand glided across their soft fur.

I remember, immediately to the right of the front door was the living room, lavishly decorated with patterned furniture and bathed in a peachy light. When my grandfather was alive, it brimmed with light and sound. Whether we liked it or not, my grandparents always kept the TV on when we left the house, whether we were gone for five minutes or five hours. In my mind, my eyes lazily wandered away from the TV and landed on the La-Z-Boy chair that rested in the corner of the room, an old friend stained with chorizo splashes and housing a dent perfectly suited to my grandfather. On the scattered occasions that he would rise up out of the chair, I crept over to the recliner and settle into its pleasant and familiar warmth; its cushioned fabric surrounded me and provided me with a pleasant comfort, only broken when I had to give my grandfather back his throne.

I let the memories continue. Striding away from the living room, I wandered into the kitchen, a place replete with my favorite sweets and junk food, its abundance only rivaled by the witch’s cabin in Hansel and Gretel. When I stayed with my grandparents, I indulged myself in the glutinous extravagance of the kitchen, only to realize I had gained a few pounds upon my arrival back at home.

I remember, appearing out the kitchen window like a mirage rising above the sand dunes was a pool as clear as an aquamarine jewel. My eyes stung from the summer sun reflecting off the water, but I could not look away; the water was just that beautiful to me. Memories of splashing around the pool with my family sitting on lounge chairs just next to it and bathing in the Texas sun filled my mind.

Overlooking the pool on the floor above was my grandparents’ bedroom. My grandfather never wanted anyone to go into his room, so I, peeking through the crack of the door to try find some fleeting impression of the closed, great chamber, could only ever catch glimpses of its beauty. The light of the room seemed fiery and orange, as if it was warmed by a glorious hearth tucked away just beyond my view.

Across the hall from that mysterious suite, a cache of unearthed treasure lay waiting to be found. Full of invaluable items, my grandfather’s office presented me with new gifts every time I entered: a baseball, gadgets I had never recognized, and an expansive amount of paper for me to draw on. Effervescent and unapologetically 80s, the childhood bedrooms of my mother and her sisters were just two steps away from the treasure trove. Two separate bedrooms for the three sisters in the house, the rooms were filled with childhood memorabilia, decorated with family photos and punctuated by the softest beds I’d ever lay in. The family photos that dotted the wall invited me to come study and admire the smiling faces of my family from a time long before I was born.

I loved that house.

Its beauty always welcomed me like an old friend, and

I always yielded to its tenderness. However, as I approached the structure, wearing my grandfather’s death like a pair of newfound goggles, it suddenly seemed cold and aloof, willing to ignore my grief without a passing glance.

As I walked up the steps of my grandfather’s home, the home that once spoiled me with its tender nature and coddled me in its familial warmth, it now stood as an austere and unrecognizable ruin. It seem to alienate and neglect me in the time I needed its reassurance the most. The front of the house was nothing grand; its white columns and bricks served the same purpose as a thin layer of gold paint on a gilded plate—to deceive and distract those who behold it from what lies beneath. The cats that scattered themselves across the front porch were not innocent and sweet, but greedy and terrible. They were not to look at and pet, but another mouth to feed, another dent in the pocket, another cause of runny-noses and closed throats, another nuisance.

Through the new lens, the living room, once beautifully decorated, felt crowded and claustrophobic and suffocating, its furniture making an unsolvable maze with sharp twists and turns ready to trip you and bust your head open. The TV no longer emitted beautiful music and light, but screams, noise, babble, and a blinding glare. My grandfather’s throne in the corner, a forgotten and unused chair, pushed away my attempts to sit on its uncomfortable cushions, its prominent dent an ugly reminder of what was missing.

The kitchen that once made my mouth water with greedy delight for its sugary foods, now left a bitter aftertaste in my mouth, a gesture of my grandfather’s fluctuating sugar levels. The pool, previously defined with elegance and mirage-like beauty, now appeared a green, lapsed eye-sore in the backyard. Childhood memories of time in the pool dried up as if they had never existed.

Stunned and dispirited, I staggered away from the kitchen and went up the stairs to face my grandfather’s room. Without my grandfather there to tell me not to go in, I realized that the door to his room was not locked by a steel bolt or key, and the door gave way with a slight push. As I turn the handle, its metal stung my hand with unforgiving frigidness, and behind the door shocked me even more. The intense glowing light that developed images of a hidden brilliant blazing hearth were just tricks born from an orange lampshade. The mystique that once entranced me was destroyed.

Now, the office across the hall that was once viewed as a treasure trove with immense value is now full of concealed warning signs of my grandfather’s condition. The baseball was used in his physical therapy, a lost attempt to regain his strength. The gadgets that once fascinated me were used to monitor blood pressure and sugar levels, and if I had turned over my drawing paper, I would have seen that my cartoons were marked on the back of unpaid, racked up medical bills.

Wandering away into my mother’s and her sisters’ rooms, I saw them as separate halves. A gloomy metaphor for a foreboding family relationship, the rooms symbolically splitting up sisters into sides that have opposed each other throughout their entire lives. The family photos now stare with staged, fake smiles and forced hugs, repelling me away from them in a despondent slump.

My grandfather’s death had not actually changed one thing in that house, yet my views had shifted so drastically, so quickly, leaving me to mourn not just the loss of my grandfather, but of my innocent view of all that is around me.



Trianne Cooper (10) | Framed | Silver Gelatin Print



Trianne Cooper (10) | A Shot in the Dark | Silver Gelatin Print

DEAR GRANDPA

Emily Braddock (11) | Letter

Dear Grandpa,

When I go back to my Grandma's house, I see pictures of us together from many years ago; me laughing in your arms as you look at the camera with a wide grin. My mom tells me I could sit with you for hours, completely taken by the stories you'd tell of your time in Africa training as a pilot until I was called away to bed.

We had fun together, I'm sure of it.

I say "I'm sure" because try as I might I cannot remember any of it. I kept this forgetfulness to myself though, because I knew it would break your heart if I told you.

As the years passed and I grew older, you became more and more like a stranger to me, but being surrounded by all the pictures in that house was a constant reminder that the distance we experienced was somehow my fault. I made up my mind... I wanted to fix it.

I wanted us to go back to being as close as we were in those old photographs.

But you were gone before I even got the chance to tell you.

I wanted to make more memories with you that I would be able to cherish and hold onto forever and ever, because the ones I do have are in no way representational of who you were or what you meant to me.

Why are my only memories of you from the last years of your life when you would sit in your chair for hours on end in a kind of stupor?

Why are the only words I can remember you saying to me: "I'm sorry I'm like this... I'm not doing so well"?

Don't you realize you have nothing to apologize for?

...

I'm sorry I took our time together for granted.
I hope you can forgive me for it.

Love always,
Emily



Abby Lavender (10) | Muted | Silver Gelatin Print

ENGLISH AS A SPECIAL LANGUAGE

Kathleen Benson (10) | Personal Narrative

“EVERY DAY I ASK MYSELF THE SAME QUESTION: HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH BEING PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR DESTROYING THE IMAGE THAT ONE HAS OF THEIR MOST POWERFUL AND DYNAMIC ASSET, THEIR OWN VOICE?”

“¿Puedes ayudar a Luis leer número cuatro?”

My eyes rolled as I turned around in my seat. The obvious annoyance in my sigh was enough to let anyone know I was not happy about having to explain how to pronounce the word “canoe” to a classmate who spoke English as a Second Language (ESL).

Although I was in fifth grade, I had been in the Spanish-immersion program at my school since I was six years old. A small group of English-speaking students—fifteen or so obnoxious kids who had been selected because we were prematurely categorized as “advanced” by our kindergarten teachers—were chosen to be a part of an immersion program at Woodridge Elementary where, during the course of five years, we would share a classroom and a teacher with fifteen other ESL students.

The program sought to instruct all subjects in Spanish for the English-speaking students, who would then receive enrichment and application of the Spanish language from the ESL students. In return, the English-speaking students would help lessen the severity of the learning curve often faced by ESL children by assisting them with learning English and assimilating to the standard American curriculum. But a seven year-old does not know how to inform someone on the complexities of Texas public schooling; all we know how to do is to make black and white judgements based on the adoption of ideology that has surrounded us our whole lives.

I was a white girl with blonde hair who lived in one of the cookie-cutter neighborhoods of Alamo Heights and had been told all her life that she was special. By seeing myself as a student whose learning was of greater importance,

and somehow, on an independent track than that of my ESL counterparts, I hindered their ability to achieve academic and personal growth, thus reinforcing the toxic image that ESL students are second-hand learners. Luis was not lacking in potential compared to me, absent of hopes and dreams and talent compared to me, dumber compared to me. However, my failure to recognize this fact due to the unconscious biases that laid hidden beneath my pigtails caused him to feel that he was a lesser student.

Now, as a sophomore in high school, I call Luis every few months to see how he is doing; however, the terrible guilt I feel every time I pick up the phone and hear his voice is a pill that will forever be hard to swallow. Every time I hear the harsh, cacophonous sound as he over-pronounces his “c” in a futile attempt to mask insecurity, I am reminded that his lack of confidence in his speech is possibly a consequence of my actions as a fifth grader. The attitude of superiority that I took in our learning space made the ESL students feel self-conscious of the sound of their own voice, and this lack of confidence manifested itself in the timid voices of the students when they were called on to answer in class or when they were brave enough to ask a question.

Every day I ask myself the same question: how do you deal with being personally responsible for destroying the image that one has of their most powerful and dynamic asset, their own voice?

The lack of confidence that ESL kids have of their speaking abilities is not the only consequence of my actions; the belief that my learning was independent and superior to theirs also led to a catalogue of defense mechanisms that ESL kids chose from when responding to my self-absorption. Whenever I took the role of leader in a group project as if it were endowed to me, or whenever I instantly corrected the ESL students when they made any grammatical errors, their physical reaction was instantaneous: limbs stiffened with anger, noses scrunched in annoyance, and faces and mouths contorted to devise the nastiest comeback possible in order to immediately deflect the pain that they felt with simple humor.

For the ESL boys, my false sense of superiority translated into a resentment towards any learning environment, specifically the classroom. My “did you knows” and “shhhs” put the young men in a box whenever we sat in class. Itching and crawling to get out of their seats and away from a four-cornered claustrophobic prison, the boys would practically leap in the air at the teacher’s announcement that it was time for recess or lunch. When a break was not on the horizon, the boys would come up with any excuse to leave class—an urgent need to use the restroom, a desperate plea for water, a pressing request to see the nurse. If they were not able to physically leave the classroom, they would have to settle for disrupting it. I can still envision a moment when the boys flipped their desks and walked out of class on the last day of school. I can still hear their rowdy hollers and taunts behind me as they shouted at the teacher from their desks in the farthest row just to see if they could provoke her enough to stop the class. I can still smell burning matches in my nostrils as I recall the various times the boys watched small flames lick up their homework on the basketball courts while they rallied their comrades on the basis of a common sentiment of hatred

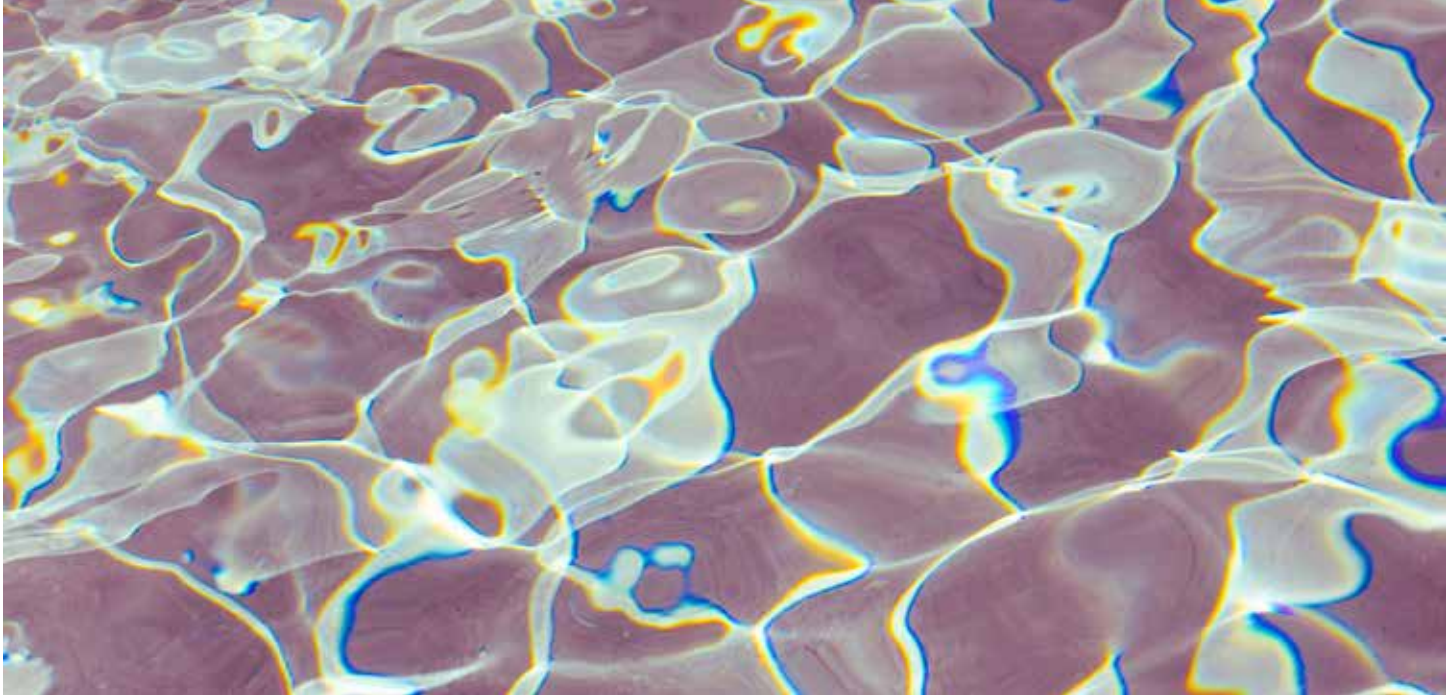
they all felt towards the classrooms they would be forced to return to when their victory tour was over.

Between the ESL girls and me, the belief I held that my learning was of a greater importance than theirs translated into a sub-textual hatred that festered within the social dynamics of my elementary school classroom. More specifically, life became defined by which clique you belonged to and which one you opposed. The ESL girls made sure to secure their social rank and therefore social security by joining a tight-knit hair-braiding or *plática* coterie. This alliance of girls would serve as a group where any annoyance they had with my egoism could be expelled to one another. I do not blame the ESL girls for the divisive tactics they used nor do I hold them responsible for the girl-on-girl hatred that was so prevalent during my adolescent years. It was because of how I acted, as if my learning was above theirs, that they responded the way they did. It is natural for a person to group with others in order to feel safe when threatened, and what is more threatening than a blatant disregard for your intellectual worth?

The sense of superiority that I took on in the learning environment had effects on the behavior and responses of the ESL students, but its most notable effect was deeply psychological. It was my arrogant behavior stemming from unconscious biases that led to the formation of more prejudice within the minds of the ESL students. Some may disregard the discomfort and division within our classroom as simply childish—but so many of our earliest memories and most foundational moments occurred right there in the cafeteria or on the playground outside the library. Just think about how an impressionable young brain can make judgments about events and people around you that end up influencing all future relationships in your life.

My conceit and lack of patience made it that much easier for ESL students to buy into the narrative that it was us against them, brown versus white. My actions made it easier for them to believe that all English-speaking students behaved this way and that it was our goal to strip them clean of every trace of their rich heritage if they ever wanted to have value in our educational environment. The glares and snide comments made by ESL students were bred from their well-justified anger every time I was not patient enough to let them finish thinking of *that* word in English or when my hand shot up to answer the teacher’s question before they even had a chance to speak. However, the anger they felt only perpetuated the continuing cycle of discrimination and prejudice that is so pervasive among ESL and English-speaking students. The sad part is that there is absolutely no way that I can bridge some of those gaps because of the widening rift that time wedges between the past and our ability to reconcile with it.

I am racked with a deep sense of guilt and regret when I think about how my behavior affected those who were so worthy of attention and recognition. Luis never deserved to be treated as if he were a second-hand student, and in some ways, this is my apology to him. Nevertheless, I have recognized how my actions threatened the ability of ESL students to flourish in what should have been a shared learning space. I have learned the importance of lowering my own voice, and by doing so, making space in the classroom for students who rightfully deserve to be heard just as much as I do.



Carson Miller (11) | Shadow Play | Digital Photo

MEDALS & METTLE

Sarah Hernandez (11) | Personal Narrative

“IN THE MOMENT, I TOOK HIS WORDS SERIOUSLY, AS IF I WERE TAKING ON AN ANCESTRAL RESPONSIBILITY, FULFILLING SOME SORT OF PROPHECY.”

We squat in the middle of our carpeted living room, my brother and I facing my dad with looks of anxious curiosity. He kneels with us as if in prayer, preparing both himself and us for his words to come. Carefully, he pulls out from behind him a black beret, meticulously stitched with blue and white thread, a silver eagle resting clutching in its talons olive branches and arrows. The beret holds what sounds to be heavy chunks of metal, crunching against each other. In his other hand, my dad grips a cap with a familiar pixelated pattern of army green, beige, and grey, “HERNANDEZ” scrawled upon the Velcro strap like a name etched into a gravestone. I recognize the same eagle, glorious and stoic, staring at me from the crown of the cap.

He nimbly separates the contents of the beret, shaking out a heap of mementos onto the family room floor. Smoothly, he flips over the contents as a gambler playing poker, exposing two thick disks of brass awards, four patches, and seven one-dollar coins in front of me. Out of the camo-patterned cap emerges a collection of velvet cases, which my dad pushes over to my older brother. I immediately feel a tinge of envy from within my chest, comparing my menagerie of coins to my brother’s elegant prizes.

My father and I have always had a ruinous relationship, contradictorily filled with constant conflict and unrelenting tenderness. Our toxic connection manifests as disdain towards my siblings, a contempt born out of jealousy and insecure conscious comparison. I feel that I can either strive to be my father’s favorite child, his little baby, or the black sheep of

the family. And my father doesn’t try to prevent such competition, typically overlooking our petty disputes, and instead bathes in the knowledge that his children adore him, that his children strive to please him. But none of us is perfect (in my opinion, at least). While my sister is a little socially awkward and my brother simply lacks initiative, I seem to be deficient in the most basic of traits, existing within our family as the oddball, the weak one, the child. That is, I lack courage.

The most challenging of sibling competitions is that of earning the attention of the extended family, especially on my father’s side of the family. While I easily connect with my mother’s family, I struggle to ally with the Hernandez clan. I always blamed the language barrier, simply answering my abuelos’ calls with “¡Lo siento, no entiendo!” or “Te amo mucho.” Now, as a high schooler in AP Spanish, I have no excuse. At our families’ unofficial reunions, I opt to speak in English even though I should be able to hold conversations with *mis primos, tios*, and *abuelos*. As much as I want to identify with my paternal Puerto Rican half, I hesitate to do so, unable to claim the Latina label due to my monolingual status; however, today I acknowledge that my weariness about my father is exacerbated in the presence of his family. Contrary to my linguistic resistance, my sister, who adores my father, jumps at the opportunity to speak Spanish, even if her speech is broken and awkward, patterned by hiccups and pauses in her slightly wavering yet confident voice. As she attempts to converse, I cringe and secretly correct her grammar as I would correct mine, and I know that my perfectionism keeps me from

building a relationship with my *abuelos* and poisons my relationship with my sister. My father takes notice.

Each time “Elvira Román” brightens my father’s phone screen, he calls all the kids over, ensuring that I speak to my grandparents (in Spanish, of course). As I take the phone from his hands, I begin to sweat. To avoid embarrassing myself in front of my father, I pace across the kitchen, through the living room, up the stairs, into the common room, down the stairs once more, into the music room, and finally back to my father’s brown leather chair, handing the device back with relief. As much as I truly want to get to know my abuelos better, I speak Spanish with them primarily to show my father simply that I can.

The smaller of the medals catches my attention. At the center of its face is a golden staff with wings, encircled by two serpents, embedded within a sealing gloss. Curving around the centerpiece are several unknown names, which are themselves surrounded by the words “United States Army Medical Corps.” I giggled, realizing that I had read in my mind “corps” as “corpse,” but I quickly hush myself, hoping to avoid my dad’s wrath. The back of the medal hosts a red flag outlined in gold, boldly bearing two white stars like a coat of arms. I recognize the countenance of Our Lady of Guadalupe, prayerful and humble, upon the next souvenir. Reverent and awed, I reach out, grasping and rotating the disk, surprised by the complex etching on the opposite side, “ADEAMUS GUM FIDUGIA AD THRONUM GRATIAE” carved within a white banner. My immature mind rejected the Latin, resolving to interpret the symbol itself. The insignia bears a crest split in half, one part presenting a white cross and star against a blue background, the other depicting a rising sun, a rose, and a second star. Soon enough, I once again give up with my hopeless analyses. Briskly, I drop the coins and look up, hands brushing against the floor, knees supporting my small frame, my whole form poised for my dad’s words.

As I listen to my father’s words today, I notice a sense of superiority woven throughout his lectures, a superiority held by a king above his subjects, or a male lion above his pride. Our whole family exists under an implicit martial law: one founded on Catholicism. Each Catholic belief, Catholic practice, and Catholic moral rules my home life through my father’s iron fist. My childhood consisted (and continues to consist) of frequenting mass on Sundays – as well as on every day of obligation – and regular attendance of religious school. Our Lady isn’t the only Catholic article within my bedroom walls; She is accompanied by an innocent cherub strumming a harp and a slew of rosaries, bottles of holy water and prayer books. Frankly, despite the comfort offered by the little celestial musician in my room and Our Lady’s kind gaze, I can’t say if I got confirmed two years ago because I truly wanted to be Catholic or because I happened to be raised Catholic by my father and following through with it would be easier than resisting him. Rather than questioning my father, I bowed down to his unspoken wishes, definitely hoarding my doubts in the deepest part of my heart as a revolutionary would hide from his prosecutors.

Religion is another one of those unspoken competitions within the Hernandez children – and I have to say, in this field, I also take last place. My sister holds a somewhat worrying attachment to religion, fully accepting every Catholic doc-

trine as true, simply as they are. I think that she is still insecure enough with her faith that she is unwilling to question it, which results in such a strict adherence to rules. She takes an active role in her school’s church and Pro-Life club, isolating herself from exposure to the real world, further immersing herself in the strictures she grew up with, accepting each of my father’s epiphanies. On the other hand, my brother, quiet and thoughtful, is not susceptible to my father’s propaganda. He still, however, pulls ahead of me in the race to heaven, as he also is comfortable with his faith and all the Catholic apologetics – he even started a Bible club at school, something I would never think of doing. Because of their acceptance of the Catholic religion (as my father taught it to us), my siblings are distinctly conservative, an identity I cannot accept blindly.

In contrast, I don’t read the Bible every day. I don’t pray every day. I doubt everything I hear, afraid to trust my ears, or my mind, or my heart. I have a chronic lack of courage which materializes in skepticism, denial, and sarcasm. To me, each word my father says about Catholicism rings of manipulation and propaganda, and I often end up meeting his words with piercing cynicism. Accordingly, I take last place. Nonetheless, I know my father wants the best for me, and to him, that means I should live a faith-centered life. I certainly find religion useful; prayer, attending mass, and connecting with my church friends has always given me a more optimistic view of the future. I love Catholicism, yet I hate how my father taught it.

“One day,” he starts. *Shy and nervous for the coming lecture, I quickly look down once more. I pick at the patches, confused as to why the American flag is backwards. Again, I am drawn into the threading of the second patch, which commemorates my dad’s participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom, and I briefly recall his three-month-long deployment, his strange and disturbing separation from the family.*

“One day, I won’t be around anymore. That’s why I am giving you guys these medals, to keep my memory alive.”

I didn’t know how to take these words, at first. Truthfully, my father does this sort of thing quite often – that is, he forgoes his usual silly warmth for sincere yet dramatic declarations which often feel slightly patronizing for his peeved audience. Yet, in the moment, I took his words seriously, as if I were taking on an ancestral responsibility, fulfilling some sort of prophecy.

Indeed, my father himself fulfilled a prophecy. He grew up in a small town in Puerto Rico, Arecibo, eager to escape the mundane world of street violence and corruption. The military was my father’s ticket for the American dream – a suburban family living in a comfortable home, experiencing all the pleasures of life. And he achieved that dream, bringing honor to his family. With the passing along of his military medals, my father passed along his traditions, his life to me, formulaic doctrines that I can’t help but question and dismiss. He gave me all his love (for us, for his family, for God) and all his hate (for others, for those who are misguided, for those who are “wrong”). Objectively, despite all of my immature complaints, all of my bitter criticisms, my father is a good man who cares for his family, who does honorable work, whose moral compass is aimed towards virtue. As hard as I try to resist, to persist in my solitary effort to find my identity, to reject my father, I still accept them, just as I accepted those medals years ago, with honor.



Evelyn Cox (11) | Turn of the Century | Mixed Media

TRAPPED

Carson Miller (11) | Poem

Today,
I feel trapped
I attempt to pry myself free from the
bars of my timorous penitentiary, yearning
for liberation from inescapable self-uncertainty.

MOTHER

Shilpa Gunuganti (12) | Poem

The foreigner
was what they called her;
never a title of respect or acknowledgement.

She is an MD intern,
but there is no prestige.
“Nurse, nurse,”
they call out to her.

Slipping on her white coat in the morning,
she yearns for a day without complications.
She cradles her belly bump,
dreaming of a better future.

Her colleagues stare at her stomach,
as if they had never seen a child growing inside someone
in the course of their medical careers.

She is the last intern chosen
like an undersized youth before a dodgeball game,
because the men are certain
she cannot handle the pressure
of medicine.

She dreams of the opportunity
to prove herself.

She leaves work every day to a place
that she will never be able to call home,
empty, neglected

with never-worn saris
strewn about the floor,
prized possessions stuffed in misshapen suitcases.

Everything personal is visible to the eye,
yet nothing there comforts her.
She yearns for the familiar,
but dreams for even better.

The American dream is yours to achieve,
they tell her.
Work hard enough,
finish medical school,
and you will succeed,
they say.

But the white picket fence,
paint peeling and posts crumbling,
taunts her.

She pays her loans and sends money back home,
but loneliness and destitution shroud her.
She soon relinquishes her own dreams of grandeur.

No time or will left
to dream for herself,
She vows to give her baby more,
the opportunity to truly flourish, and perhaps
to dream.



Izzy Castillo (11) | Hostage | Digital Photo

DEAR DAUGHTER

Juliana Czar (12) | Poem

Dear daughter,
You are going to be so perfect
So strong, incredibly silly
So kindly human
You will make us laugh

Dear daughter,
Please have an imaginary friend
Real people let you down
They want you to fail
No matter what they say

Dear daughter,
You will learn much faster than me
To take advantage of the time you have
Because I always forgot what it meant
To just stop

Dear daughter,
I wonder what you'll love
Not who
I love to dance
You don't need to

But daughter,
If the music is good
Then you dance
And you don't look back
Not for a second

Dear daughter,
I hope you have your heart broken
So that you will learn what it means to
Feel something
Don't worry it fades
It always does

Dear daughter,
Don't forget that you
Are worthy
Of more than being a symbol
Of beauty, of body, of brains

Dear daughter,
The best people in life
Cannot spell
Please get B's
You'll get C's if I'm lucky

Dear daughter,
It's ok to cry
Sad days will make
The happy days mean more
So let it out

But daughter,
You will have the
Loudest laugh
Annoying to onlookers
And I will love it

Dear daughter,
Don't let them tell you
About the real world
This is the real world
Live in it now

Dear daughter,
No one is going to
Do it for you
Do it for yourself
Fight

Dear daughter,
I hope you know
That when I am gone
You exist
So carry on

Dear daughter,
Please be a mom
Be kind to her
Hug her
and squeeze her
Hold her tight

But daughter,
Don't forget to be kind to
Yourself
To love your mind
And your soul

Dear daughter,
I can't wait to
Meet you
You are more than
I could have ever hoped for

I love you,
Mom

FÁTIMA

Mafer Benavides (12) | Creative Non-Fiction

“‘YOU REALLY ARE A MADRINA!’ AND SO I TOOK HER HAND. MY TEACHER HAD WARNED ME ABOUT SPEAKING TO STRANGERS, BUT THIS WOMAN WAS NOT A STRANGER, SO I THOUGHT. ”

For Fátima

I waited to get picked up from school. The bell rang and I ran outside to play *bebé leche* with my friends. We laughed and jumped until their parents escaped the terrible traffic of Mexico City and they had to wave me goodbye. I sat crisscross applesauce in front of the school gate drawing a kingdom with me as its princess. The beaming sun I drew on the corner of the paper made it the brightest day my empire had ever seen, until she cast her shadow over my castle.

Her kind face I already knew, she was our *madrina*, the woman who sold us snacks across the street. We called her that because her freshly cooked kettle chips gave us something to look forward to at the end of each day. Her voice was lower than what I imagined, but it was still nice to put a sound to the idea in my head. She said she liked my green shirt, that it reminded her of the veils of a willow tree she sings to at midnight near her home.

“I thought willow trees only exist in fairy tales like the one in the Disney movie, not here,” I said. She told me she lived in the outskirts of the capital, where the open landscapes and the silence allowed the trees to grow. The woman kneeled in front of me and put her mouth next to my ear, even though no one was around us, as if the words she wanted to say were so special she was afraid the air would taint them with its pollution. She then told me an old legend which said if I asked the tree for a wish, it would come true.

“How do you know?” I gasped.

The woman promised it had happened to her once before extending her hand and telling me she would take me to the tree so I could make a wish of my own.

“You really are a *madrina*!” and so I took her hand. My teacher had warned me about speaking to strangers, but this woman was not a stranger, so I thought.

We marched until every corner of the city I had ever known was out of sight, and all that remained was the silence she had described, although the beautiful landscapes and the willow tree was nowhere to be seen. Instead, we stopped in front of the remains of scorched and charred wood.

“Where is the willow tree, *madrina*?” I asked her, looking up into her face.

She seemed upset. She frowned and pressed her lips together, just like you do whenever I spill chocolate milk on the carpet, mom. Still, the way she stared was different. I couldn’t tell you what the emotion she felt. Even when you shook your head at the mess I made, your eyes reminded me you love me. Hers, lifeless, pierced my heart as if she was trying to crush my vessels with her stare.

I let go of her frigid fingers, wanting to run but knowing home was but a faint memory. As the outline of two shadows became more visible behind the woman, I made my wish to the barren and dead wood before me, to see you again.

Four days after Fátima Cecilia Aldriguett Anton was abducted, her body was found inside a trash bag in a bin in the municipality of Tlahuac, near Mexico City. Fátima’s death, along with hundreds of other femicides in Mexico, has moved the nation and sparked a revolution. Women are standing in solidarity with Fátima’s family and raising their voices in the streets of Mexico, fighting for the right to live without fear.



Abby Lavender (10) | *Lost in the Woods* | Silver Gelatin Print



Sophie Morgan (10) | Dada Collage | Digital Photo

UNJUST ACCUSATION

Sophie Jaafar (11) | Critical Essay

“THE OFFICIAL READ ‘JAAFAR’ ON MY PLANE TICKET AND INSTRUCTED ME TO STEP ASIDE, WHERE I WAS SUBJECT TO INVESTIGATION. I WAS TOLD THAT I WAS RANDOMLY SELECTED, BUT TO MY RIGHT WAS A WOMAN WEARING A HIJAB, WAITING TO BE INTERROGATED. ”

From eating baklava from my grandmother’s oven to playing Lebanese card games with my cousins, I have grown accustomed to the traits of the Arabic world throughout my childhood and adolescence. The inseparability of the Jaafar family mirrors the tightness of the Arabic community, but with the ever-present dangers in our world, my worries of retaining the persona of a non-threatening girl are steadily growing stronger. My family and I traveled extensively this summer, but before we started, the most common question asked by my family, especially my Lebanese-born father, was “Are you sure you want to travel if we are going to be interviewed in the airport every time?” It offends me and makes me somewhat fearful to think that I should avoid a flight, or any aspect of everyday living, due to societal issues.

Every time I reject an opportunity to live my life because of its cultural consequences, I accept that my individuality is overshadowed by the perilous actions of a small portion of my heritage region. When my family and I enter an airport, we question our decision as we might be portrayed as potential threats to the safety of others. It damages one’s self-esteem to know that personal feats are not significant in comparison to the actions of one’s community. My friends who have not experienced this prejudice tell me that I shouldn’t be offended, while many people claim that it is not detrimental to associate Arabs with threats because an individual knows his or her personal values. Personal beliefs are inherent, regardless of cultural and ethnic values; however, connecting someone’s identity to a perilous community debilitates individuality, resulting in an abandoned ability to use personal values for the betterment of the world. The presumed correlation between Arabs and terrorists does not advance the cause of world peace, but rather hinders the development of the Arabic community induced by these accusations.

Violence of Arab countries arose with Israel in the mid-20th century, and the various conflicts culminated in the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, the basepoint of the historical accuracy in the accusation of Arabs as terrorists. In the Middle East, various religions and cultures influenced the actions of conflicting regions to enable dominance of national beliefs.

In 1948, Palestine was occupied by Israelis, and the conquest concluded in 1967, but the violence in the gray area of this black and white domination signifies the traits that we collectively attribute to an innocent population, the Arabs, that was predominantly engaging in defense warfare. The majority group in this Middle-Eastern fight, the Arab countries, was attributed to bloodshed, but the terrorist acts executed centuries after —completely dissociated from the Arab-Israeli war — sparked an accepted affiliation of the Arabic population with terrorism that brought a newfound historical validity.

Following this war, various nations mistrusted Arabs, and their skepticism intensified after the deadliest terrorist attack in human history: the crash of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. The performers of the strike, Al-Qaeda, became imprinted with a reputation of violence — and rightfully so — but the proclamation of Al-Qaeda’s threat consequently tainted Arabic society. The 9/11 events strengthened the preexisting tendency to fear the Arabic population, but this heightened inclination has dimmed the praiseworthy traits of the Arabic population that aid its ability to harmonize with the rest of mankind.

The harassment inflicted upon an Arab after an accusation, its continuity corresponding to the inability of accusers to consider the individual as someone other than a terrorist, rids the opportunity for an accused Arab to develop in the eyes of society. Assumptions evolve as people follow an individual who identifies an Arab as a threat, and these presumptions increase as terrorism becomes more widespread, but people who choose to be followers of a one-sided mindset advance towards a harassment that is not individualized. A bandwagon illusion exists, encouraging individuals to theorize that everyone considers Arabs a terrorist population, and harassment maintains the bias that Arabs are unable to defeat.

My father’s late cousin, a victim of terrorist assumptions, was accused of an act that took his own life: the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 in Lockerbie, Scotland. Before the discovery that Libyan terrorists executed the crime, news channels broadcasted that Khalid Jaafar killed 243 passen-

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gers on an aircraft from Frankfurt to Detroit. The aftermath of the accusation was disastrous—his siblings were physically harmed in school, and his parents were verbally abused at the supermarket. Khalid’s life was taken away by terrorists, but his family’s life was taken away in a different manner. The Jaafar family was deprived of praise for their individual values and accomplishments, and they were instead attached to the assumption of terrorism with the glue of the harassers. Harassment traps Arabs in a lifelong “out” group, and this group of outsiders is deprived of the belief that they will ever be able to demonstrate its worth, unblinded by the opinions of the prosecutors.

The accusations connecting Arabic people to acts of terror can instill self-deprecation, leading them to assume that their presumed partnership with an act as evil as terrorism proclaims them as inconsequential in our “innocent” world. I experienced this self-denial on a middle school field trip to Washington D.C. when I was approached in the airport security line. The official read “Jaafar” on my plane ticket and instructed me to step aside, where I was subject to investigation. I was told that I was randomly selected, but to my right was a woman wearing a hijab, waiting to be interrogated.

Reflecting on my experiences of seeing my father being interviewed in airports, I identified the relation between all of these situations: the “randomly selected” were usually Arabic. It wasn’t until I was pulled aside myself that I discovered the link between my last name and a culture that was treacherous, particularly prior to boarding a flight. Being connected to the ethics of terrorists, I began to speculate that my personal values might be overshadowed by the ideals of terrorists, from society’s perspective. Although I was not directly accused, association between myself and a threat persuaded me to doubt the importance of my ethics in a society that questioned my identity. I contemplated if my personal ideals mattered, and I questioned my ability to dissociate my morals from those of terrorists. The Arabs’ apprehension of personal character, including my own, can prelude actions that prevent progress more than harassment ever could.

Uncertainty of individual value can be a person’s worst enemy, and for many Arabs, this insecurity makes it easy to abandon their Arabic heritage. My father’s friend Zach, whom he met in medical school, was born and raised in Lebanon, but he denied his origins by telling classmates that he was from Canada. Zach later revealed to my father a fear of being affiliated with terrorism, so he eliminated the possibility by detaching from his native country. Zach’s concern of being associated with terrorism reflected that he regarded his personal motives as susceptible to manipulation, so the easiest escape route was away from the country in which he was raised. Zach, like many other Arabs, contributed to another detriment, the developmental isolation of the Arabic culture into an unsafe organization.

Confining the Arabic culture to a threatening entity

results in cultural isolation for Arabic people who are not allowed to experience the growth that accompanies interaction and cooperation with various cultures other than their own. Improvement of culture is achieved with observation of other lifestyles in various regions of the world, but the figurative detachment of the Arab population results in a tendency for Arabic individuals to remain in their homelands. Since childhood, my grandparents from Lebanon resided in the United States for six months out of the year, but in the early 2010’s, the tradition was halted. Fatigued by mentally strenuous plane flights and terrorist accusations in United States news, my grandmother and grandfather decreased their stay in my country to a mere three months per year. Ensuring their own safety and comfort, my grandparents lost three months every year to witness another culture and bind it to their own. The Arabic population is forced to segregate in its own bubble of desolation, and upon any attempts to pop this bubble, the unnerving, self-degrading consequences encourage them to blow the bubble once again.

The magnitude of terrorism has influenced the perspectives of people who believe that accusing any portion of the terrorist population will initiate progress towards a greater world peace. World peace is indeed characterized by the safety of every citizen, but the connection between innocent individuals and terrorism harms a cultural region of the world, inducing developmental hindrances that alter the status of peace. The accusers are actually ironic in their mission to attain world peace, reaching their own standards of the goal by erasing the peace of others. Some people focus on the individual, claiming that people are defined by their individual decisions, so blaming a singular person or group will not harm the entire cultural community. Although a singular person or group can be suspected without accusing the entire Arabic world, the assumptions that inspire these accusations target the Arab culture; therefore, the entire population’s development is crippled. Cultural prejudices compose a developmental hindrance that can and needs to be improved with worldwide effort.

If we do not have ingrained reasons to accuse terrorists, then how will we accuse them at all? We must rid ourselves of prejudices, only doubting people’s integrity based on their individual actions. Accusations are not forbidden, but meticulous consideration based on personal observation is necessary before associating someone with a crime as catastrophic as a terrorist act.

Naming an individual a threat without cultural preconceptions will allow the Arabic community to grow, but it will also grant the accuser credibility that is not present with prejudice. Growing up with a Lebanese father, I will witness the improvement of my family’s culture that will reflect the development of the Arabic world, an evolution that will bring us closer to the world peace, the accuser’s initial goal. International peace may never be achieved, but if we are willing to try, eliminating prejudices would be a great start.



Ava Pace (10) | Trash Fish | Digital Photo

SWIM OR SINK

Isabella Sanchez (12) | Poem

Up to this point,
You have not had many worries.
There have been smooth winds
And no rough waters.
The sun has been out,
No clouds in sight.
Perfect day for boating.

But that is about to change.

The boat you are on is about to sink.
It will sink and you will have to choose.
You must choose which ocean.

Although you don’t swim
Now you must learn for
You will swim for the rest of your life.
You will swim against the waves.
Against the tides.
You can try and change this,
But you will always swim.

Your influence will be a speck
in a vast body of water.
Don’t try to swim back to shore.
The ocean will always pull you back.
Embrace this monotonous life.
It is the only one you have.



Sofia Prestigiacomo (12) | *A Boy and a Fire* | Digital Photo

THESE ARE THE RULES

Juliana Czar (12) | Poem

Red means stop
Green means go
These are the rules of
The road

I often wonder why
I yield
If I know that no one is coming or why
I stop
At a four-way when there is no one near me

I think this is why people break out
To be themselves
When no one is watching
At 11 o'clock
On a Saturday night
Going 80 in a 65

What actually makes us different?
It must be the number
On the back of every vehicle
Or the signal that lets everyone know
Which way we are turning

I gas up for energy
just so the road can take it from me

I chase yellows
So I don't fall too far behind

I crack windows
just to catch a breath of air

And yet the pickup truck still races by
The one that left me
Irrelevant
In a pile of rubble
At 7 o'clock
On a Wednesday night.



DEAR CAT HATERS

Emily Garrett (12) | Opinion Editorial

“NOW, MY SOUL SWAM. MY WEE LITTLE BLACK AND WHITE ...PRINCESS BECAME MY ULTIMATE ORIGIN OF COMFORT AND CARE. HOWEVER, WHEN I’D TELL PEOPLE HOW MUCH I ADORED CATS (MOSTLY FELLOW FIFTH GRADERS), THEY’D SCOFF AT ME SAYING ‘EW, CATS SUCK! DOGS ARE BETTER!’”

I, Emily Garrett, am an addict. Bold start, I know, but it’s true. For as long as I can remember, I’ve been a victim to the overwhelming, viscous and dangerous allure of animals. And when I turned six, that love of animals hugely aided my newfound obsession with cats. I genuinely felt the devastating isolation that comes with having a personal addiction. It took forever for my family to accept who I truly was: a cat person.

Although we had a dog, multiple fish, several hermit crabs, and a bunny, my family was completely determined to be anti-feline. That is, until the day my aunt brought home an abandoned kitten who’d been starving in a barn. She was black and white, she had green eyes, and she was absolutely terrified. Her fur was straight out, and her paws looked like all the most magnificent clouds and marshmallows in the uni-

verse mashed together to create four flawless little love babies. She was perfect.

I guilt tripped my family and thankfully, they decided to take a chance on her. I couldn’t have been happier. I immediately decided that this kitten, soon to be cat, would be mine forever. She’d stay in my room until she got used to the house, she’d primarily bond with me, and her name would be Orca.

I won’t lie – the first few weeks of having an abused kitten were hard. By this time, I was around eight years-old, and I was hurt when every time I walked in my room, I’d watch her go from curiously looking out the window to scuttling underneath my bed. But soon, she realized I was the one who was feeding her, I was the one talking to her, and that I

was a complete baller. So, naturally, she loved me!

Now, my soul swam. My wee little black and white whale princess became my ultimate comfort. However, when I’d tell people how much I adored cats (mostly fellow fifth graders), they’d scoff at me saying “Ew, cats suck! Dogs are better!” and then go back to making concoctions of ketchup and fruit snacks at the cafeteria table.

This hurt my feelings; no matter how much I explained that I loved dogs, but having a cute, cuddly and low maintenance cat was also an amazing experience, they still chastised me and my precious with their sick, meek minds. I just had to come to terms with the fact that some kids are just stupid and don’t care about relationships with animals as much as I do. Once they got older and more mature, I was sure they would have to understand.

Sike!

It’s been eight years, and people are still STUPID! And judgmental against some of the greatest creatures on the planet! Except now, they can sicken me online too! Yes, you know who I’m talking about – the people who comment “dogs r better” on every funny, wholesome cat video online. It takes every ounce of self-control in me to rip their comments to shreds.

If it isn’t obvious, I have a lot of pent up anger towards cat haters. So, CAT HATERS READING THIS ESSAY, I’ve developed some rules to kindly encourage you to stop hating on some of the world’s most immaculate creations.

1. You can’t say you hate cats if you’ve never even had a cat. My brother claimed to hate cats, but once we got Orca, he immediately converted to the feline clan. I know, I know, *Tom & Jerry* must’ve really scared you with the malicious portrayal of the big gray scawy cat, but you’d be surprised to learn that real live cats actually aren’t anything like their portrayal in children’s cartoons. (Except for in *The Aristocats*. That movie is awesome). So, before you ostracize cats and their admirers, maybe try to *gasp play with one in person.

2. Dolls have absolutely nothing on cats, and you should never gift them as presents. If your little girl loves playing with Littlest Pet Shops and talking about how excited she is to become a veterinarian someday, take the hint. She hates the preppy porcelain doll you ordered her from China months in advance, and that polite smile she flashes at you from beneath the Christmas tree is really just out of pity. Trust me, I should know. I did the same thing for years when my family, failing to recognize who I truly was, kept gifting me those American Girl dolls with scary realistic eyelashes. Right after unpacking them, and throwing out an adorably, deceptively respectful, “Thank you,” I’d run upstairs to my room, rip off their carefully designed clothes and shove the creepy dolls into the back of my closet naked and afraid. Dolls provide no emotional value. You can’t cuddle with them at night like a cute fuzzy kitty – they’re too hard and uncomfortable. Plus, there’s got to be a reason why there are so many horror films revolving around them. No worries, though. If you get her a cat and it ends up terrorizing her, at least she knows it scientifically has the ability to do so, and it’s not just being possessed by a demon named Annabelle. Way less creepy.

3. You feel chosen when your cat comes to hang out with you. Unlike dogs, cats are very independent. They enjoy meditating while looking out the window, playing with golf balls, napping in cardboard boxes, and overall just doing their thing. They don’t always rush to your when you call their names or summon them with the classic “spspspsp.” So, when they do join you on the couch and gaze into your eyes with dilated pupils and needing paws, you feel like the sun of the solar system. I mean, this adorable, independent creature chose to hang out with you. That moment should be impossible to take for granted.

4. Look through cat Instagram pages, and find one you can relate to. Yes, even though you may hate on the occasional Dodo post or mischievous kitten meme, some Instagram accounts allow you to get to know cats without even meeting them in person. My favorite, for example, is @thurstonwaffles, a goblin-looking cat who’s wispy white paws tickle my funny bone every time. He likes to twitch, chase flies and play with the window cleaners. If Thurston isn’t for you, there are plenty others right at your fingertips.

5. Stop cringing at stray cats on the streets. All of my cats have been strays, and they’re each just as loving and fun as the last.

6. Cats are nothing like the ones in the musical. I mean personally, I love the musical, but I definitely acknowledge that not everyone has the intellectual capacity to appreciate art. The movie, on another hand, was aesthetically a bit appalling. Still, though, James Corden in a tight body suit with a CGI tail and whiskers? Umm, yes please.

7. You can like cats and dogs at the same time. I know, shocker. My dog Lucky was the first pet I ever had, and I loved him dearly. When we got Orca, we just added another, different member to the family. Lucky loved Orca just as much as we did, and even though she was occasionally a bit scared of his size, she loved watching him from the counter-top. I think of dogs as the fun loving animals that you can take places and do high energy activities with during the day time. I think of cats as the companions to sleep on your back at night and to cuddle you to sleep. Everyone needs a balance of both!

8. You won’t get along with every cat, and that’s okay. Not everyone loves everyone, whether it be humans, dogs, fish or any other living thing. So remember that before judging every cat by the first one you meet. Just because the first was anti-social and mean doesn’t mean the next one is. In my experience, every personality is different, but still very entertaining. Go to your local shelter, play with the cats and pick one that you vibe with.

I think that’s about all I have to say, for cat beginners at least. I think that people who say they hate cats are just ignorant and inexperienced and are really missing out on a whole different level of entertainment and love. But, go ahead, follow the rules and see for yourself. And for the love of God, STOP CHASTISING ME FOR LOVING CATS.



Jennings Stuart (11) | Shadows | Digital Photo

NOT A LOVE LETTER

Natalia Zambrano (12) | Poem

Dear love,
This is not a love letter,
for I do not write it with love;
I write it with hate.

I wish, with all the veins in my body
and all the knives in my chest
that my heart was
big enough,
warm enough,
alive enough,
to love you the way you love me
and see the future with you
you see with me.

But the truth is that my heart
barely beats enough to keep me breathing,
and if I give you
a single vessel
I will die.

I die
every time you look at me;
puppy eyes the color of lime
to chase your tequila lips,
sink into my own
like a nail into the brain
and I can't stand myself,

for when you kiss me
my chest shuts a little tighter.

And so I write this letter with hate
not towards you,
towards me.

I hate that
I never learned to love
in a way that doesn't sting
and I never learned to swim
without letting myself sink
and I never learned to cry
in a way that doesn't spill
and I never learned to feel
in a way that doesn't kill.

I'm killing you,
I can tell,
and probably doing the same
to myself in the process
if I'm honest,
which I am,
because I have nothing left to hide.

You've seen my all:
the way I bleed my prey until it's empty,
the way I watch its tears flow like a flood.



Jennings Stuart (11) | Clair de Lune | Digital Photo

The way I sabotage all that I'm given,
the way I kill just so I can taste the blood.

And yet you love me.

My love,
I believe in the power of words,
my love,
do you?
My love?

I wish you didn't believe in me
the way you do
and that I could see myself
when I see you
and the voices in my head
weren't so damn loud
and the sun would shine
even when there's clouds
and people would still tell me
I could reach the sky
and the stars had aligned
for you and I,
for they are my last hope.

And so please understand,
my love,

that my love for you
is not love,
it is simply a denial
of what I can't feel
for myself
and will never find in
anyone.

It's not that I don't want you,
it's just that I left love somewhere
between that boy at twelve
that said it was my duty to love him
and show him my chest
and the one at seventeen
that said he'd love me forever
but couldn't even love himself.

But like I said,
my love,
I believe in the power of words,
and so even if I can't love you
the way you love me
I will keep pretending I do
and maybe I will.

And so I will start by addressing you
in this letter like I never have:
my love.



Helena Hanor (9) | *Floating Barbie* | Silver Gelatin Print

A REBUTTAL TO “VALEDICTION: FORBIDDING MOURNING”

Emi Kosterlitzky (10) | Sonnet

Gold gets scratched up and bends too far and breaks.
Souls seem as one but then they split in two.
Stiff twin compasses will snap and unmake.
And in a flash flawed circles go askew.
Non-sublunary lovers grow apart.
They'll stay together for ten loving years,
But suddenly their loving hearts depart,
So then they'll melt, make noise, and shed some tears.
Some think love lasts far into the future,
But it can diminish before your eyes.
The love forgotten causes a rupture
As emptiness of words begins to rise.
The search for love goes on with turbulence,
And still seeks out perfect circumference.

MONSIEUR LE PRÉSIDENT DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

Mafer Benavides (12)
Stella Markey (12)
Marguerite Morgan (12) | Poem

Nous ne voulons pas vivre comme ça!
Vous mettez des lois en place, mais à quoi ça sert?
Puisque le gouvernement ne soutient pas
les femmes,
nos aspirations,
la justice,
et l'égalité.
Nous serions ignorantes si nous pensions que le problème
se situe seulement dans les actions
des personnes comme vous, Monsieur Macron.
C'est plus que ça, en fait.
C'est l'attitude envers les femmes.
Quand nous marchons dans la rue,
Nous ne nous sentons pas en sécurité.
Nous ne voulons pas vivre comme ça!
Et nous n'allons pas être passives!
On s'adresse à vous puisque vous avez le pouvoir.
Et nous, les femmes,
N'aurons jamais ce pouvoir s'il n'y a pas de changement.

Nous ne voulons pas vivre comme ça;
Nous vivrons en tant que femmes.



Sydney Ulmer (12) | Equine | Mixed Media

IT'S BETTER THIS WAY

Emily Garrett (12) | Short Story

"SARA WAS ALONE NOW, LEFT TO PITY THE BEAUTIFUL ENIGMA SHE USED TO CALL A CONFIDENT FRIEND."

"Sara!"

Across the sea of wooden bleachers and beer bellied men wove Amber—a classic, American beauty with effortless blonde beach waves, a face full of makeup and legs wrapped in Miss Me Jeans. The weather was warm, but not too warm, a typical late July evening in the Texas Hill Country. Margot and Sara's favorite event, barrel racing, had already passed, but they figured they'd stay for the bull riding anyways. Bandera rodeos were never very organized, so each event had pretty long breaks in between them, and the staff swore by entertaining audiences with overplayed AC/DC and country songs about lonely alcoholics.

Amber was supposed to join them about two hours ago, but her tardiness wasn't a surprise. She was known to be a fickle free spirit who wasn't exactly the most reliable with scheduling. No one blamed her anymore, though. It never

seemed like she was in control of where she was going.

"Well, well. Look who finally decided to show up," muttered Sara.

"Just ignore it, dude. Amber's never on time. She was probably just talking to some riders or something."

"We both know which rider that is."

"Shhhhh. Here she comes."

Amber's red boots planted themselves in front of Sara right as the speakers hit the last thunder in an AC/DC song.

"Hey, Amber. Where've you been?"

"Oh, I just ran into some people at the front. But, um, Sara, I actually wanted to talk to you about something."

"Okay. Shoot."

"Actually, I was thinking just you and I could talk," her eyes flashed to Margot. "By ourselves. Just for a second."

"Is something wrong?"

"Sorry, Margot."

At the sound of her name, Margot's eyes shot up mid-corn dog bite. Her eyes darted from Sara, to Amber, and back to Sara again. Despite the ongoing white noise of children running with snow cones and a pitiful rodeo clown, an opaque silence cast itself over the girls.

Three seconds was unbearable enough for Margot, stifling an inappropriately timed laugh, to rise from her splintered seat.

"Okay, you two. I guess just text me when I'm allowed to come back."

Amber's eyes were back to piercing Sara, "Don't worry, it won't be long."

Margot gave an awkward goodbye salute. It took her a while to get all of her things together. Attempting to juggle her corn dog, purse, phone and water, the silence became even more excruciating. Finally, she got a phone call.

"Oh, thank God," she answered it abruptly and hobbled away.

Sara looked up into Amber's oddly firm stare and asked, "Do you want to sit down? I'm pretty sure the bull riding is about to start and the people in the back probably want to see."

Amber plopped down beside her.

"So?" Sara asked.

"So."

"So..."

"Let's talk about Colt," Amber began.

"Colt?"

"Yeah."

"Your boyfriend?"

"Yeah. My boyfriend."

"Uhhh, okay. I mean I've already tried talking to you about him so many times but I guess now could work. Let's see, where to start? He's an abusive, manipulative, lying hypocritical—"

"Funny! That sounds a lot like you."

"Excuse me?"

"I thought you were supposed to be my friend, but talking to my boyfriend of three years sounds a lot like a betrayal to me."

"Woah, woah, buddy. What are you talking about? Did someone slip something in your drink?"

"Cut it, Sara, this isn't a joke. I know you've been talking to him. He told me last night."

"He told you last night? You mean when he was high and threatening to kidnap your dog if you didn't quit your job?"

"That's not the point. Apparently, you've been after him for months. That really hurts me."

"Okay. Amber, listen to me. Come back from lala land for a sec. This guy has had you wrapped around his finger for years, and I can't imagine how hard it must be to escape from that. But please, you've got to at least try and see that he's manipulating you! He feels empty inside and just wants someone to take down with him."

"You don't know him like I do. Couples fight, it's

completely normal. But I guess you wouldn't know anything about that."

"Excuse me?"

"You've never even been in a relationship before and you always have the audacity to lecture me about mine."

"Okay, Amber. I get it. You're hurt."

"Don't talk down to me—"

"You know I would never do that to you. You just think it's easier to stay with him even if it means sacrificing your own well-being to do it! You keep telling yourself 'it's better this way!' when really Amber, it's just not."

"He is the only thing I know, Sara. The only thing. I know it's not perfect, but that's just the way it is."

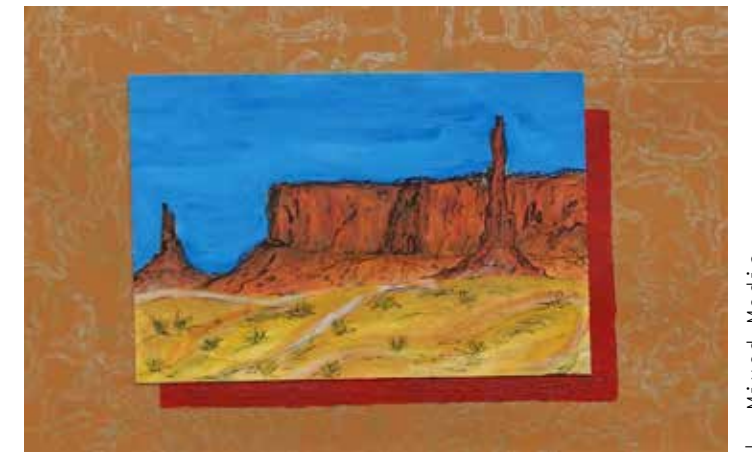
"Amber, listen—"

"I'm done listening, Sara. I came here to ask you to block him off all your social media. That's it. If I know he can't look at your pictures, or I don't know—DM you or whatever then I'll just feel better and—and it'll get better."

Amber, holding back tears of frustration, gave Sara no time to respond before abruptly heading back to the bull riding shoots.

Sara was alone now, left to pity the beautiful enigma she used to call a confident friend. It was darker now, and the cicadas were overwhelmingly loud. After what seemed like an eternity, the bull shoots were ready. The announcer introduced the first cowboy.

"Alriiiight, everybody, let's give it up for the man, Colt Klein!"



Sofia Gutierrez (12) | Dyptich | Mixed Media



Sofia Prestigiacomo (12) | Montage | Digital Photo

TU MANO

Natalia Zambrano (12) | Poem

En tu mano descansan los imperios perdidos;
Babilonia llora por sus almas quemadas
y Roma tiembla debajo del frío,
de la nieve que trajo el Bizantino
y las armas que Persia robo del diablo.

En tu mano bailan las aguas del universo,
las lágrimas evaporadas de los ángeles caídos
y los mares que dicen
haber existido en marte.
“Amarte” está escrito bajo tu piel,
tan cristalina como la mirada de un recién nacido
y tan roja como la sangre de un venado atropellado.

En tu mano vive mi mano,
la mano de un fantasma buscando la luz
en el lado oscuro de la luna,
la luna que comparte su brillo con tus ojos.
La luna que sangra a tu lado,
así como sangró a lado de Grecia.

En tu mano muere la eternidad
y resucita todo lo que a sido enterrado debajo de carne humana.

TRANSLATION:

YOUR HAND

Natalia Zambrano (12) | Poem

In your hand rest the empires fallen,
Babylon mourns for its burnt souls
and Rome shivers below the cold,
the snow brought by Byzantine,
and the arms Persia stole from devils.

In your hands dance the waters of the universe,
the evaporated tears of fallen angels
and the oceans that are said to have existed on Mars.
“Love” is written under your skin,
as crystalline as a newborn’s gaze
and as red as a dead deer’s blood.

In your hand lives my hand,
the hand of a phantom searching for the light
on the dark side of the moon,
the moon that shares its glow with your eyes.
The moon that bleeds at your side,
the same way it bled over Greece.

In your hand dies eternity
and resuscitates all that’s been buried under human flesh.

This edition of the Walrus is dedicated to

SAM HAMILTON

To a leader who is known for her love of reading
and writing and consistently shows genuine care
for all members of the
Saint Mary's Hall community.

Thank you.



Alex Alvarez (10) | *Alamo Phone Speaker* | Ceramic



Caroline Berridge (11) | *Bowl and Tray* | Ceramic

SPECIAL THANKS TO

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COLOPHON

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