

Soundings '22



Created by the students of the Northeast Creative Writing program

Young Love
By Lisbeth Gonzalez-Morales

There's a different kind of pain
in unrequited love.
Then, I must ignore you
and my feelings.
Avoiding the numbing effects
that ruin me completely.
Although,
It never quite slips my mind.
That feeling.
That feeling of you.

In another Universe
By Jasmine Estes

“Right person wrong time”
was always cliché,
either it was meant to be, or it wasn't.
Then I met you and it clicked.
But *our* story? It had twists and turns
valleys and mountains,
that not even the simple phrase of “right
person wrong time”
could make it seem so, simple.

I don't think time
was the culprit in this love story.
I think the realm in which we lived
tortured us with this alternate reality
because there is nothing more
I believe that in another timeline,
another dimension,
we had our happily ever after.
Because it was never “right person wrong
time,”
it was right person, wrong universe

The Lonely Woman
By Jonathan Demas

The lonely woman
Lived in the woods
Her husband thinks she died
But that isn't right
Because She is Susan
She cry's every night
She wants to make things right
But she can't
Because she got lost camping
While she was ranting
To her husband
About the weather
They got lost
She was scared
But she slipped in a river
Only to go downstream
To a village
Where she lived out her life
Looking for her husband
But she never found him

Photography by Clara Engstrom



Eyes

By Cass Morrison

"Eyes are the window to your soul."

-William Shakespeare

Dark pools of brown and black,
Glistening greens and brilliant blues,
Anguish, pain, wonder, love,
Eyes are the biggest tell.
Serious stares into your soul,
Sinister grins with devilish glow.
Comforting looks full of worry,
Loving glances snuck between tasks,
Eyes are the biggest tell.

The Death of My Lover.
By Cass Morrison

The loss of a former part of you, how to react?
Tranquil and serene to the outside world
But the sadness in your eyes never fades.
To comprehend but not accept,
never to let go, a new hole in your heart has formed,
just for you.
Every day that goes by I mourn you.
The feeling of your gentle breath no longer present.
Oh, how I yearn for your eyes.
To gaze upon them again.
Just one glance, my heart stops.

The Happy Couple
By Johnathan Demas

The happy couple
A family of 4
But it is different behind closed doors
They aren't happy
They can't pay the bills
They don't have any friends
They have many issues
They go to bed hungry
They can't keep a job
Because of their cousin Todd
They keep getting robbed
They always sob
They can only afford corn on the cob
They been on the streets
Multiple times before
Because of their tenant Ned

Crash and Burn
By Josie Layne

My mind makes me mad
when it's always making noise.
It can really be a nuisance
when I try to get things done.
It never turns down the volume,
it's like blaring music you just want to turn
down, down, down
but I can't seem to take control,
Because sometimes,
you just have those days
when nothing is going your way,
and your wishing, and your pleading
that you could just do one thing right,
but in the end, you were doomed to fail,
you were doomed to crash and burn.

Digital Art by Clara Engstrom



My Song
By Jasmine Estes

part 1:

Growing up a student
of America, we are
poured and poured into
so much so, we nearly overflow.

We learn subject after subject,
class after class
all the while
interacting with
friends, acquaintances, and teachers
every day of the week
for months on end.

Every run in
and every conversation
from over the
last thirteen years
has molded me to
their liking,
their image.

The school system conditions us to become
someone we aren't,
and to learn formulas
in hopes, we'll become the world's
next genius
but for what?
just to make our mark
in society?
Because if we aren't some genius
Or celebrity
Then what mark
Would you have to make?

part 2:

But what is,
my mark in society?
My "digital footprint"
after years of being told
who I am and who I am not.
You'd think the silly little question
would be easy to answer.
Almost a conditioned kind of answer
from the 13 years in a prison-like
environment.

So, who am I?
Am I the girl that
knows everyone and is always
just there?
Or am I the rising musician
that has built her life around
sound waves that please the ear?
Or, am I actually someone
I don't even know yet.

I mean,
I hope I get to influence the world in a way
that betters the community,
whether it's through music
or some undiscovered passion
that I'm not yet meant to know.

But the concept
of simply knowing my
impact, to such a grand
concept of a society
where everyone is to
"leave their mark,"
is unfathomable
at an age that isn't
able to grasp such an idea.
So, my significance?
In this world of 7 billion
others trying to figure the same notion,
is not one that has yet
been found
or even merely understood.

Violet Lily
By Jasmine Estes

Violet Lily.
A name prettier than
any flower.

But *you* are your own flower.
With a elegance
so rare and unique
that no other petaled leaf
stood a chance.

Such an
elegant flower,
with stories
in every petal and vein
that draws everyone in,
that draws *me* in.

•••

You say that you don't
want to wilt me
but love
my petals are already
bruised and broken,
yet if anyone
were to grow with me,
it would be you.

You are the flower
among the leaves,
a flower among the thorns.
For our petals to grow together,
would be a blessing like no other.

The Cry of a Boy
By T. Grover

The way my arms would wrap around my son at the sound of his cry
would be like the way streaming water wraps around that of babbling brook....

A social construct took away my sons' tears before he could claim them on his own

It took to take,
Instead of take to grow...

My baby boy won't grab a toy to cope,
He'll grab mama's arms and wrap himself within them until he chokes...

...on his words and snot escapes from his nose

A cry so pure and gentle, yet the world took it away
But mommy's here to give it back, not the pat on the back, but the soul
of a cry that they try to take....

My baby boy won't grab a toy to cope,
He'll grab mama's arms and wrap himself within them until he chokes...

...on his words and snot escapes from his nose

My sweet boy... oh my precious boy will know what it is like to have a groggy throat...
From a cry they tried to take instead of take to grow.

I'm Sorry
By Billy B

I know I haven't been the most attentive friend nor the
Best friend to you but I still think about
For the past couple of years just wondering
Where are you standing, there? Here? over there?

Distance between me and you are vastly overreached.

I tried to speak to you one way
And the other way
But you've yet to heed my words.
I've called you several times over and over
Never knowing where you could be
Makes you more mystified.

My mistake in school made this gap
Between me and you
Can never be closed in
That's on me, okay?
I sometimes think
If you are mad at me still

All I want from you is the time from you
Only minutes on a call
I'm guilty of not being with you till you
Graduated. Set back after set back.
I'm just too slow to reach you.

Flowers and Coffee
By Clara Engstrom

I like my coffee sweet
The tastes of pumpkin, honey, and sugar
Overwhelm my taste buds
I don't enjoy coffee that is black as night
Or as dark as the abyss

The sweet scent of my coffee
On a porch, my sleep deprived body swaying,
Rocking, on my rocking chair.
All the smells drift in together
Inhale and exhale
The beautiful combination
of flowers and my sweet brown milk.

The sun rises as I rock
My tired eyes crack open as rays peak
Sunflowers turn their depressed faces towards the sun
They straighten up their spines as the rays bounce into their petals
It makes me happy
To see the sun, cheer up the flowers.

Glitter
By Avery Clancy

She fell from the ledge,
And I opened my arms to catch her,
But I was a little bit off,
And she hit the blacktop,
But instead of breaking,
She turned to glitter,
Which coated my feet,
And would cling to my shoes,
A reminder of the life I could not save,
A glimmering tragedy.
Would she have liked it?

Reflection
By Joanna Godfrey



Mirror Mirror
By Riley Childs

Mirror mirror on the wall
Who's behind you in control of it all
Lookin' down on everybody
Thinking you know them all
Telling us who we are
Thinking you're so smart
It's so deceiving to see you
But when I don't, I feel see through
Am I going to fall through
Into the after life
Where I feel as if I'm through
So, I'm going to smash you
Just to see what you are
Thinking you're so smart
Telling me who I am
And who I can't be
Trying to manipulate me
Your existence is exasperating
I don't know who I'm really supposed to be
And because of you I never will be
Your so selfish
Only want what's best for you
Even though it'll never be
So, will both be nothing
while trying to be something
And we'll be left in the dirt

Left Behind
By Josie Layne

I may cry, I may scream,
I may choke on my own tears,
But none of it can ever comfort me as much
as you could.
If you were just sitting right here, next to
me,
and could say it's okay, it will be alright,
Then that would be enough.
But you don't even know I have tears
running down my face,
because I'm not even a thought in your head
at this moment in time,
I'm just another person you left in the dust.

Nostalgia
By Devin Godfrey

I miss my old friends
And all the special things
That made us close
I miss always having someone
No matter what
That reliability I still crave
That security I still yearn for

I miss the little things
Like our old lunch table
Those laughs that would last for hours
Those old bus rides
Chaotic, but comforting
Those visits to the mall
Never actually buying anything,
But going for each other's company

I'm afraid that I'll never get it back
That feeling of absolute comfort
That no matter who hurt you
Or what happened
There would always be people waiting
With their arms wide open
That sense of familiarity
That kept me going
Those smiles that could alleviate my pain

Those childhood friends
Stuck together by chance,
Stayed together through everything
Long gone now,
But never quite forgotten

Who Could Love Me?
By Holden Smith

Who could love me,
Without it being the love of my mother.

Who could love me,
Without being the love of my friend.

Who could love me,
Without being the love of my brother.

Who could love me,
Without being the love of my pet.

Who could love me,
Without the love of my worth.

Who could love me,
Without the love to pick at my worst.

Who could love me,
Without love for another
Who could love me,
Without the love of a lover.

Who could love me,
Without wanting at me to point, laugh, and
caw

For I ask, who could love me,
Without loving me at all.

Bittersweet
By Josie Layne

I remember when we were little.
We used to laugh until we couldn't breathe.
Crossing our fingers, we would take an oath,
sisters forever.
But now I look around and wonder where
you are.
Sometimes, late at night, I think about how
things used to be.
Tears sting my eyes as bittersweet memories
fill my mind,
floating around, like bubbles we used to
blow.
It's my own utopia, the place where I never
grow up.
I wish I could stay, and you would be there
too.
But the real world waits for me,
and I have to go back without you.

No Room For Mistakes
By Clara Engstrom

“Try, Try, Try again” they say,
But what if I’ve tried everything?
“You can do it” they say,
But what if I can’t?

Your hope is false and so is mine
How do I succeed if I can’t even
Brush my teeth.

I struggle to get dressed.
I struggle to get out of bed.
It’s so cold and lonely inside my head.
My old friends, their faces a blur,
They say it’s okay, but it’s not!
It’s not okay, I’m not okay.
People expect great things.
People expect me to succeed.

Do good in school,
Get good grades,
Score well on tests,
Don’t Fail!
No room for mistakes!
Be perfect, be successful!
A child's goal is to make her parents proud.
“You have to go to college” they say.
How?

There must be more to it.
Study, good grades, and a high GPA.
Is that all it takes?
What if I don’t cut it?
I’m not good enough.
Everyone believes in me, but I don’t believe
in myself.

All I want for my future is success,
But I don’t even Know if I’ll
Pass this test.

To My Mother
By Holden Smith

Mom, I miss you lots.
Your hair, your style,
Your sense of style.
There is nothing I miss more than you.
Do you remember our dogs?
Sugar, Spice, and all the rest
You bred little pups too,
They were the best.

I sometimes wish it could be the same again,
Wash dishes, fold clothes, be lazy,
And eat my ramen.

We would watch movies together,
And have a nice family dinner.
Speaking of food, I miss your spaghetti,
Set the table with plates, forks, and plates,
Then yell “DINNER’S READY”!

All those things were great, we lived our
life,
Still not sure why we were taken from you,
But I know you cared, that you did it all for
us,
And honestly that’s just fine.

Even when the gavel of the gods hath
decreed you were for us no more,
You tried harder and harder than ever
before,
to give us a day to remember forevermore,
on our last woeful day together.
You always tried to keep us safe,
And now I miss your sweet embrace,
And I’m sorry that I had never noticed
before,
That your love was the greatest gift you
could afford.

Basquiat Picture Poem
By T. Grover

A thinker's thought.
What is a thought if it is not our own?
A substance that lacks an owner, yet it
continues to grow?
Intrusive.
Inconclusive.
A thought takes many forms...
For thinking develops art, that transpires to
transform.
Conceptual.
Perpetual.
Surrealism.
Idealism.
A thinker's thought.
Is that correct to say? It still lacks an owner
yet it its way...
To the minds that is, of the artists' thought.
A thought that created harmony by the artist
Basquiat.

Mindless Memories
By Clara Engstrom

Sunlight to blue light
The soft touch of a stuffed bear's fur to the
cold and aching of your thumbs,
Playing in the backyard, enjoying the rays
and mud to a hunched over posture,
And ringing ear drums.
My body aches, my fingers numb, my mind,
blank as we scroll, mindless.
My childhood memories pushed aside for
memes and Tik Toks to live inside my head
rent free.
Free time turns to time to work, and I can't
transition
My eyes are glued down, and I can't control
it.
Can't focus. Can't see. Can't hear.
The loud cries of my parents, telling me to
take a break.
Go outside for a change. Get mud on my
hands and pants once again.
Spend precious time on the couch, time with
the family.
Take a break. Just put it down.
I can't. I don't know how.

Colors
By Cass Morrison

Red is the roaring blossoms in the field,
Orange is the crackling embers of a dying
flame.
Yellow is the rising sun on a new day,
Green is the grand, sprawling fields.
Blue is the crashing waves against the shore.
Purple is the darkening night sky,
And night consumes the colors of the day,
And light will break free the colors of the
night.

Misery Road
By Riley Childs

I was lost
Tryin to find my way home
Stuck on misery road
Waiting for someone to bring me home but
no one did
I was all alone
Looking and waiting got me thinking
What could I be doing
What should I be doing
What am I even doing
I had a long talk with myself
That never turns out well
And I started to hate myself
More and more the anger grew
And im just trying to find
Trying to be a new
But I can't do it
I can't find my way home
I don't even have a person in sight
On this misery road
Now im on this road
Harming myself to ease the pain
Waiting for someone to get lost with me
But no one comes
And I know I will always be alone
Nothing less nothing more
No one loves me
Not even a shoulder to lean on
Not even a creep to kill me
But myself
All alone
Misery road.

Birth
By Avery Clancy

When they were born,
The void had been full,
Now, it is empty,
Death took them to the yard without
forewarning,
Leaving her,
Her and her teddy,
With a half-torn ear and button eyes
attached by loose strings,
And fraying thread to match her sweater,
She was not tempted to invite death back
through,
She was afraid she'd end up replacing it,
though,
So instead, she chooses to imagine a world
A place she thought they'd like,
Where they could live together happily
For the rest of her memory's life,

Her world developed in complexity,
Colors filling the void,
Then she brought in shapes and light
And careful creatures for her limited
eternity.
She let herself live.

The Old Man's Message
By Josie Layne

He sits there, cradling his guitar, like it's all he has left.

Bony fingers, thinning hair, wrinkly skin,
They tell the tale of a life long-lived.

Strumming the guitar, it's music to my ears.
The sound tells me the wisdom of his years.

But he looks so frail, so doubtful.
Regret fills his sorrowful eyes,
Of a dream not chased, his dreams demise.

But it's too late now,
There is no changing the past.
Now sitting there playing a song, which may
be his last.

He speaks to us all,
Giving a gift he wished he'd received.
Even if you fall, do not become deceived.

How Might I Help?
By Ben Reed

The Earth is alive, and it is a predator.
Those who live on it leech from it, but, in
return, they have their lives sucked away by
it.

I am no different; Though I try to make the
lives around me even the slightest bit easier,
I neglect Mother Earth which gives life to
me and my own.

Maybe one day I can become a person that
can give as much as I take.

Everything living on the Earth is alive, is it
not?

So why do we sing different songs and
pretend we live in separate worlds? Is it just
because we sing them from separate
continents?

Oh, I hope that day will come when I am
gifted enough to be allowed to give as much
as I take.

Maybe then I can give homes to others as
easily as I give one to myself.

Maybe then I can entertain the lives of
others, regardless of the fortune with which
they were born.

Maybe then I can bridge this gap between
us.

Why should I care what country someone is
from, what color their skin is, what language
they speak, or what class they live in when
we all face the same struggle to survive that
drives us to insanity?

I offer not just ideas but matching actions
that bring them to life and hope to change
the world.

Time
By Devin Godfrey

Time passes so quickly
And for the boy, it went even faster
He stood in the wake of his decisions
As years of his life blew by
He watched the blur of memories fly past
him
Things he never quite experienced but felt
familiar with
Feelings he had never quite felt but also
longed for
Everyone moved on
But not the boy
He was still just a kid
Stuck in the dark
Screaming for help
But nobody heard him
They were already years ahead

Normal
By Josie Layne

I want to shine like a star.
I want to bloom like a flower.
But if I was a star,
you could only see me when you
stare too long into the sky.
And if I was a flower,
I wouldn't stand out in the middle of a field.
No, I would be a regular wildflower,
hidden among the many.
How boring it is to be so normal.
It can almost hurt being average,
because even when I'm told I'm one in a
million,
I remember there's 7.753 billion people on
this earth,
And then I don't seem so special again.

Burnt
By Jasmine Estes

She was burnt.
from a young age,
she was burnt.

She didn't *want*
to play with fire.
But they made her learn.

She was merely a kid.
A kid.
A kid who was told
not to play with the bright heat
because water doesn't heal the flames.
A kid who was told that
Playing with the fire would result
In getting burnt
And that it would hurt.

But she was put
into the flames
that was constantly ignited.
The fire never died
no matter how, much
she wanted, it to.
No matter how much
SHE wanted to.

She was burnt
from a young age.
Just how many degrees
of burns can one receive?
How many more degrees of burns
can she handle before
she turns to ash?

Helena
By Joanna Godfrey



I Too, Sing
By T Grover

Danaria says it's my "uppity" attitude,
my kindness... the warmth I spread to others.

Virgil says it's the "good" advice I give, to
rescue people from their troubled weather.

Dynasty...says it's my ability to "Heal" and
"nurture" things "freely",
So in a way, I guess... it's safe to say that the
world needs me.

The song I sing is one of a harmonizer,
An alchemist, that inspires people to blow a
kiss at their pain.
A true humanitarian shifting the vibration of
the earth, so that NOTHING stays the same.

I wish to incline people on the silver lining
found within colliding their acceptance and
embracing change.

I, Ta'Nayshia, will heal a nation.
I, Ta'Nayshia, talks the talk and walks the
walk of a unified celebration.
A dedication, I birthed and kept.
A vocation, that I nursed and met.

It is my duty to free and heal the people,
a song I will sing that will be lethal.
Not as in death, but an injection of
inspiration.
An abrasive invasion of positive persuasion
cutting the shackles of stygian sadness
captured at the ankles of my generation.

I welcome healing,
Love.
Peace.
Because,
The song I sing is *one* of many
But where ever I am, there will be plenty

The Whole
By Clara Engstrom

The song I sing is a quiet one, but it's
strong.
I'm quietly working away, selling to crafters
of all kinds.

Clay makers and Calligraphy.
Crochet and Painting
Artists and Scrapbookers.

The money that does not grow on trees is
still recycled.
Art supplies just appear next to me.
I sit on the floor,
Colors and shapes flow from my hands.
I don't understand them, but I can relate.

The yellow, my joy.
The black, my sadness.
The green, My motivation.
Soon they all blend together to create the
blurry outline of a sunflower.
ME.

Some may not like my art but It's ME.
Yet a lot seem to enjoy it
Lines are art and words are lines.
Squiggly ones, straight one, ones that go
loopy loop.
My words are art
And someone liked them enough to put
them in a book.

Although,
That book is of millions,
Yet it has a part of me in it.
I'm part of a large whole.
We all are.

All Too well
By Trevor Perry

May my eyes generally stay level to the
skyline
may they never look as high as paradise
to inquire as to why
The whys in this lifetime i've found
are unimportant contrasted with the
wizardry of the present
which is the answer for most inquiries
there are no really obvious explanations
also, assuming there are, i'm off-base.
However, basically I will not have
consumed my time on earth pausing
searching for god in the billows of the first
light
tuning in out for extraordinary contact
30 billion light a very long time on
No I'll allow the others to do the considering
and keeping in mind that they do i'll be on
my yard
perusing something unsubstantial with the
TV on
i'll be up ahead of schedule to rise
That is the very thing I was thinking earlier
today it's conditions such as this
as the marine layer lifts
off the ocean from the perspective on our
number one café
that I implore that I may continuously keep
my eyes level to your
eye line
never sad at the decorative spread

too anxious to even think about sharing my
deepest contemplations
with you
it's circumstances such as this as the marine
layer lifts
off the ocean on the harbor where we're
standing
that I contemplate internally
there are things you actually have hardly any
familiarity with me
like now and then I'm apprehensive my
trouble is too enormous
furthermore, that one day you could need to
assist me with taking care of it
yet, until then May I generally keep my eyes
level to this horizon
surveying the sparkling new turn of events
off the shore of Petersburg,
never to paradise
Since I have confidence in someone as
abnormal as that appears
On occasions such as these
also, it's not a result of the glow I've viewed
as in your
still ambience on the grounds that I put stock
in the integrity in me
that it's firm to the point of establishing a
banner in
or on the other hand a rosebud
or on the other hand to construct another
life.

18 Years

Lucas Krampitz

It's hard to think where I'll be in the next 18 years.

I've only lived a short while, but I'll give it a shot.

When I'm 19, I'll be in college, trying to get a job to pay off debts that may be owed.

When I'm 20, I'll Be getting my AA degree, friends and family congratulate me.

When I'm 21, I'm going to finally get punished for parking illegally, and see for they first time my car get towed.

When I'm 22, I'll get my bachelors, and relax by myself, perched against a tree.

Ill whisper to myself that I've done a good job, I'm proud of what I've become.

But the battle doesn't stop here, no, it's far from won.

Skip a few I'm 25, I met this cute girl in a coffee shop by the Walgreens I work at.

She makes fun of me for my socks, I was wearing mismatched ones.

I tend to do that.

28 I propose.

She says yes.

I've landed a stable job with stable income, and I buy my first house.

31, she tells me she's pregnant, I'm going to be a father soon, a fresh sleet.

32, it's a boy, and the cycle repeats.

My Song

By Cass Morrison

My song is the scratching of a pencil on paper,

The metallic click of a metal bottle,

The clicking and clacking of keyboard keys.

Gentle beats culminate in a wavering melody,

With the drum of steps matching my pace.

My song has dipped and steadied, but for now it rises.

My song is the rythmic steps of feet.

My words are the notes of my song,

This song can be powerful and it will be,

I will blast my song on speakers because I'm not afraid.

My song is loud and won't be silenced.

My song has been through draft after draft,

And while it's still a work in progress,

I have grown to like it.

My song blends with all the others in both dissonance and harmony,

It stands out but also hides in the crowd.

My song is strong like me, and it's grown like I have.

My song isn't popular, but it has a few people who like it.

My song is who I am,

Loud and strong, unstoppable and stubborn,

Cautious but impulsive, caring and courageous.

My song is who I am, and it'll play with all the others.

What Is Evil?
By Ben Reed

Evil is the opposite of beauty; It is not in the eyes of the beholder, but in those before them.
Few will admit that they are evil, but many will claim to be beautiful.
They are quick to point out the evil of others but refuse to accept that there is beauty in others.
It is the loss of society at the hands of a person's greed, sociopathy, or inability to feed a family.
It shatters the chain that holds us together, as we point our fingers to quickly shift the blame to one another.
It is the violence that plagues the streets forcing free people to cover their windows with boards and metal sheets, hoping or praying that they and the violent never meet.
It is the destruction of cities during invasions by militaries commanded by the savage heads of political parties.
It is the inability to correct one's own mistakes that turns people into blazing ashes, bodies burning on stakes, and fallen bones collected by children with rakes.
It is the only flame that can spread through the impact of a rocket-powered warhead
Dropped by children flying planes as their war-torn brothers march ahead.
It is not without humanity that such events would come to be.
For without humanity, the Earth is beautiful and free.
But this does not mean humankind should cease to exist, for evil is weak to the power of innovation and wits.

I messed up.
By Kaylee Moore

Those are the words a lot of adults do not want to admit but I'm not an adult, and I know when to admit when I'm in over my head. Everyone knows that kids are more receptive to, well, the things in the dark. With active imaginations, readiness to accept, and their general innocence they are easy targets to the things that go bump in the night. I was no exception. When I was younger, I refused to sleep alone because I swore there were things in my room which I could not explain. Now, the things know you are aware of them, it becomes a problem when you don't get over the fear and "grow up". They count on traumatizing your childhood until the brain says enough and blots them out entirely. They hate kids but they hate teenagers that can still see them much more. When a teenager can still see them, it means they haven't done a good enough job, they are the first line of defense when it comes to the things that go bump in the night. And honestly, they are one of the nicest ones. The things that you will see after them makes you wish your brain had just ignored them. I never forgot. The one salvation you have is to pretend you don't notice them. I did that up until a few weeks ago when under a desperate fit of insomnia, I told the thing to stop walking so loudly. It worked for a moment, but then the thing sat on top of my chest and stared at me for the rest of the night. While they physically can't hurt you, they are experts in psychological anguish. For children that is. I know they can't hurt me now so really all I had to worry about was them being pesky bugs that move my keys all the time. After a week though, they left. The thing that replaced them is much worse. From what I can tell this is the next step when my harmless, wispy shadows couldn't traumatize me enough. It of course came at night. It was stupidly tall and white, the shadows were camouflaged in the dark but this one... this one wanted to be seen, and at all times. It also didn't go away when the sun came up, although substantially weaker, it fixed itself in the corner of my eye when I was not expecting it. It can also move much heavier things, and it can touch me too. Now we're all caught up. It stayed with me constantly, left long and angry scratch marks on my back, tore up room, and took every chance to scare the life out of me. The only thing that kept me sane was the hope that after this one they would leave me alone. They didn't. In fact, they have a system in place for people like me. They will keep coming and they get worse every time. I met the new one last night. It is in fact, much worse than the previous two. I messed up by responding to it.

Short Story
By Garces

"Ah, the perfect spot to watch the sunset. And, perfect place to take amazing photos." I sat down after placing my beach towel on the sand to make things more comfortable. My *crazy* friends were running around somewhere probably chasing seagulls or something. It was the perfect time to take a picture when they weren't there to ruin it. The sun was nearly down, the sky becoming dark red and orange. "It's time!" I said to myself. As I was about to snap the picture there, they were...my *crazy* friends. "Ooh! I want to be in it!!" they both said in unison. I ended up taking the picture, but of course it was too late to take another one. But it turned out ok. My friends ended up making the most *perfect* and I mean PERFECT, heart shape with their hands. I guess it's okay to have my friends around. We must come here again, and next time take a group photo in front of the sunset.

Untitled
By Cava

I like to sit in the opal light of the moon, letting the cool night air wrap its hands around me. it takes its share of the weight off my shoulders and breathes its sickly-sweet breath into my lungs reminding me I am yet again not asleep.

I like when the pencil hits the paper and my mind explodes with the caged creativity my fragile brain couldn't unlock during the light hours. I like listening to the wind whistle through the trees, wrapping through my hair and making chaos out of once was orderly.

I don't like how my brain tricks my eyes and I confuse reality for fiction. When conversation turns foggy and my mind slips back to its staggered state of confusion and lackluster dullness that comes with the reality. Stars fall, clean lungs fill with poisoned air, or, at least I think they do. Something so sweet can churn one's stomach to the point every feeling is up to a hundred. I don't like how cold I've grown. My knees clink like silver spoons, the sound waking me from my reality like sleep and I have to wonder-

Is this even real or am I simply too far gone?

Art by Hadleigh Kreger



Suicide Angel
By Clara Engstrom

(Trigger Warning: blood, death, suicidal ideation)

It was over. The red flashes disappeared. My body faded away with my vision. And then there was nothing for a split second. But then there was something. Something of a white light and voices. The voices were so calm and sounded so happy. Why couldn't I have been that happy?

I finally regained my full vision. The white light became crisp and turned out to be the sun. A peaceful park appeared around me. I was sitting in an open field of green. There were trees, that the sun flooded with light and life. Birds sang and butterflies seemed to float as they flew across the field. Refocused on myself, I looked down at my arms. They were clean and pale. The blood and the cuts had disappeared and there were no left-over scares. All the marks and pain were gone. I wasn't sad anymore.

The voices I heard earlier suddenly grew louder. I looked ahead of me, across the field and could notice faint figures in the distance. I was able to get myself off the ground and stumble towards them. As I got closer, I saw flashes of light, as if the sun was reflecting off something.

Only a couple of feet away now from the figures, I could make them out to be human, at least most of them. They all sat in a semi-circle with one of them standing. There was a girl with dark skin and curly hair, a boy with a blue shirt and ponytail, and another boy with a striped shirt and short brown hair. The last person was different. He was the one standing. He had a darker skin tone and had black hair. He seemed kind and made me feel warmer as I grew closer.

I had finally reached the group. As I halted behind the semi-circle, they turned to look at me. I stared at the one who was standing. I was in awe. The warm feeling grew stronger as I realized the large, white feathered wings that emerged from his back.

“Welcome”, he said.

My face reddened and I managed to croak out the words, “Thank you”.

He looked me up and down, then said, “Please if you wouldn't mind joining us, have a seat.”

I took my spot at one end of the semi-circle, the others still watching me. The winged one shifted and the others diverted their attention back to him. He looked at the whole group and then rested his warm brown eyes on me.

“I'm glad you have joined us, but do you understand where you are?” he asked.

Still nervous from the group's stare, I shook my head. He paused in thought and then smiled at me.

“Well of course child, this the gate way to the afterlife”, he said as he flared his wings and arms outward causing a gust to smack the trees and ripple the grass.

He paused, looked at me for some sign of comprehension, and continued his thought.

“I'm the guardian angel to this part of the gateway. My name is Amba.”

He paused once again and gathered his thoughts, letting out a deep breath. He looked more serious now.

Dear child, how is it that you have come here? The others around you share the same death but please do tell your story.”

I glanced at the others and then looked down. Everyone's attention was on me.

“I cut too deep” I said faintly.

I looked up at Amba for approval. He had the same serious expression. He wanted to continue.

“I cut myself to deep”, I said, rubbing my left wrist.

I felt ashamed of how I went but then someone else spoke up.

“I overdosed on pain medication”, said the other girl.

I looked up to see her holding her stomach. Then I looked at everyone else. They all seemed to have the same pain that I had but they all had different stories.

A long silence washed over all of us. But after a minute of two, Amba broke the silence.

“Do you all believe you are to go to hell? Because of how you died? If you are scared, don’t be, because that’s why you’re here with me.”

We all looked up. I could feel relief from the whole group.

“You all have 2 choices.”

He paused for a breath.

“You can go rest in heaven or be reborn but with the promise of a better family and living situation but the same misery that world causes.”

He paused again dramatically.

“You must only choose one.”

There was a long silence.

After a few minutes, the boy with the striped shirt spoke up.

“I would like to rest in heaven”.

Amba smiled and took a few steps toward the boy until he was in front of him.

“May you rest in peace”, he said.

And with his pure white wings, he hugged him. The boy started to glow, and his soul rose from his body. The soul was like a golden ball of light, so bright and beautiful, I wanted to cry of joy.

The soul floated up towards the sky, and the clouds parted to reveal the sun. The soul was then absorbed into the sun's light.

I then stepped forward.

“Me too”.

Amba then stepped towards me. He opened his wings and held me. It was so soft and warm. I felt at peace. Then my body felt very light. I started to rise, and I could see everything. I felt like I could do anything. The air around me became warmer and light swarmed my vision.

I'm finally safe.

Art by Joanna Godfrey



Every time I look up, I'm met with a swirling gray and black vortex. Thunder rumbles from the east, and light dances across angry clouds. Something is happening. A blanket of fog has settled over town as well. This wouldn't be anything out of the ordinary, we usually have fog, but this is different. The fog slowly made its way over town from the road, at first it was very light, but it soon grew thick. Now I can hardly see to the end of my street and I suspect it will only get thicker. I've always known my town wasn't right.

We sit just off a highway, the only thing really separating us from the road is fog. The highway itself seems to stretch on into infinity, with the surrounding forest acting like a block on either side. I've never traveled to the end of the highway; I don't know where it leads. No one does. Not a single person in this town has left, and not a single person has ever entered the town from the road. People just show up overnight, and no one notices or even seems to care.

I go to bed, and the next morning the house across from me has a van in the parking lot that I've never seen before. No one questions it, they just smile and wave or start up a conversation with the strangers like they've been lifelong friends.

The fog is moving now. I can see it swirling and spinning, growing thicker and thicker as the minutes pass. There's something in the air now too, a static feeling? Like the feeling before a storm. It's making my skin crawl. This all feels wrong but I can't place how. Something about it just looks so inviting, but that is a weird thought. Who thinks a storm is inviting?

The tornado siren has been going off for 20 minutes now. Everyone walked outside after 10 minutes to just see what was happening but no one knew anything. I think I can see a figure standing in the fog. I'll go ask them if they know what's going on.

They had no face. The person in the fog, they didn't have a face. They were turned away from me, so I didn't see it at first but after a few minutes I turned them around and...oh God...oh my God. They didn't have a mouth but the sound they made was like- a thousand angry bees swarming me- I think I blacked out. When I woke up everything was gone, the town, the people, the road- only fog and trees remained.

Even the faceless person was gone.

I don't know what's going on but I don't think I'll ever get back to civilization.

I'm sorry. My phone is dying now- and I think I can hear those bees again.

Digital Art by Clara Engstrom



Zen
By Trevor Perry

The birds are chirping, on a dew-filled morning, moisture fills the air, making it a muggy yet crisp feeling. In the misty air, we see someone in the distance. A Samurai warrior in a grassland, tall grass surrounds him in all directions he wears a blue robe long back hair covers the back. Judging by the area, he seems to be alone. But why is a samurai found all alone in nowhere? "Justice, Rectitude, Heroic Courage, Benevolence, Compassion, Respect, Sincerity, Honor, Loyalty, Duty. The virtues of Bushido." The young samurai was repeating in his head. But, the samurai's hands were shaking, heart pounding fast, and voice whimpering. The samurai felt he dishonored his Shogun and Clan. "I need to take back honor to the clan. Fresh blood will join this Earth. What's more rapidly he'll be quelled. Through consistently tormented shame, the little fellow will get familiar with the principles. So I name you unforgiven. Seppuku I will use to restore." The samurai has a paper, of which it has a poem he wrote on it.

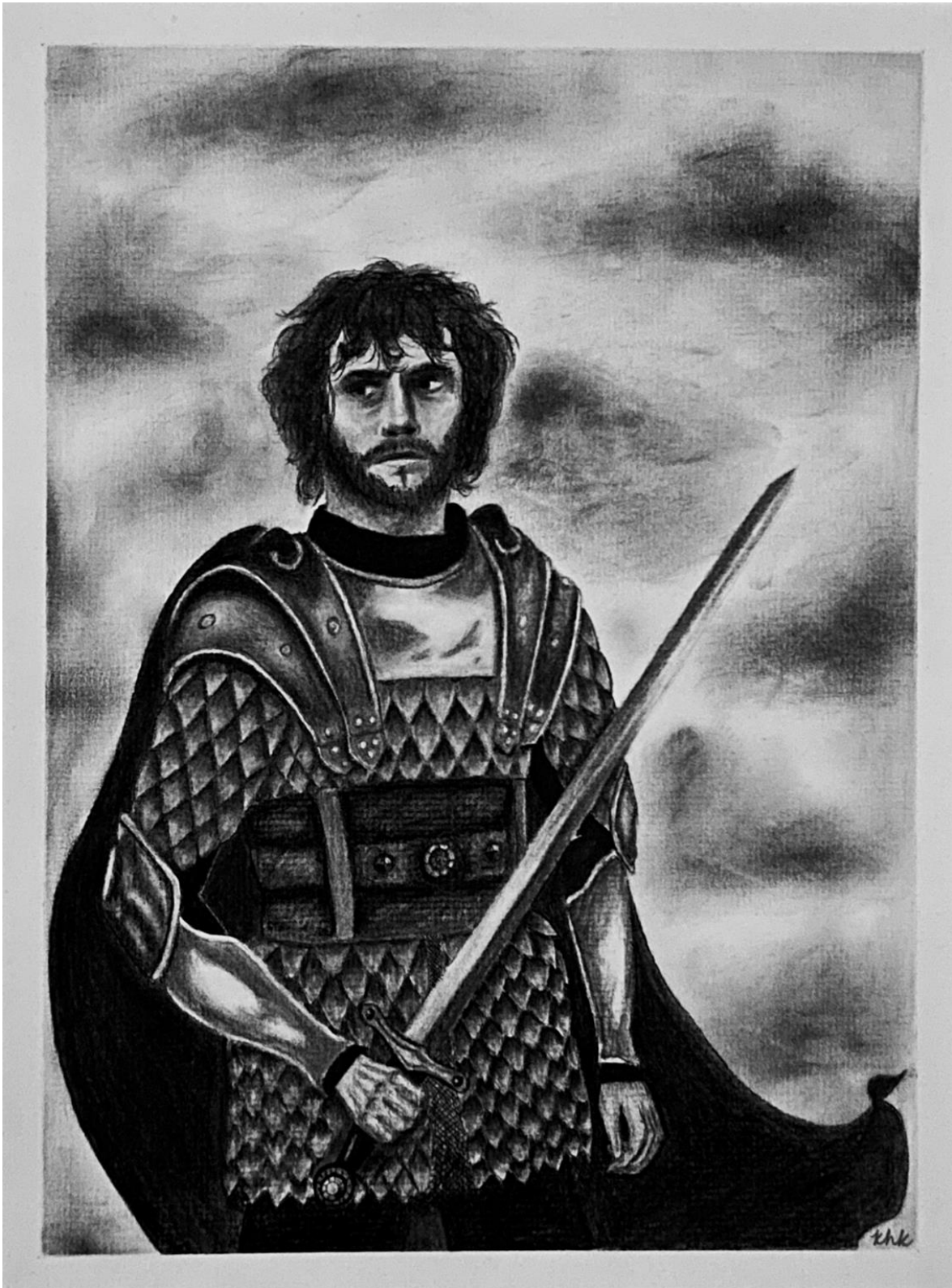
Fall wind of eve
Blow away the mists that mass
O'er the moon's unadulterated light.
Also, the fogs that cloud our psyche
Do thou clear away also?
Presently I'm going to vanish,
Considering how I should get a handle on it.
From the void, I came,
Henceforth I will return there.

The samurai then picks up a naifu and aims it at his stomach. But, right before the knife reaches the stomach, an image comes up in his mind. "Sand, rocks, pebbles, and sometimes plants, water, or bridges, these gardens evoke calm, tranquility, and peace. Raking the sand into swirling patterns is relaxing." His mind goes to a Zen garden he visited on one of his expeditions. He turns to see another guy. "Zen gardens are to help the mind calm down and focus. The imagery of the stones in a harmonious garden is perhaps the main plan element. Upstanding or vertical stones can be utilized to address trees, while level, even stones address water. Angling stones address fire." The other man said. "When I went to Druk yul and Bharat, I was dumbfounded at the difference of their different yet similar to our ways of life. There were big hills and large temples. In those places, I've learned about a religious practice called Zen Buddhism. Zen regularly appears to be dumbfounding - it requires an extreme discipline which, when drilled appropriately, brings about absolute suddenness and extreme opportunity. This normal suddenness ought not to be mistaken for indiscretion. The substance of Zen Buddhism is that all individuals are Buddha and that they should simply find that reality for themselves. Zen sends us peering inside us for edification. There's no compelling reason to scan outside ourselves for the appropriate responses; we can find the appropriate responses in the very spot where we tracked down the inquiries. Individuals can't become familiar with this reality by philosophizing or sane idea, nor by concentrating on sacred writings, participating in love customs and ceremonies, or a large number of different things that individuals figure strict individuals do. The initial step is to control our psyches through reflection and different strategies that include brain and body; to surrender consistent reasoning and try not to get caught in a cobwebs of words." The other man explained. I was a samurai in my past and believed in honor of another person no matter the cost, but I felt so enlightened by the monk's way of life. Monks teach the importance

of self-awareness and seeking truth from within. One of the monks said I see the waves, they come ashore and leave. I compare that to life. We take different shapes and forms unbeknownst to us, and the length of the wave, we have no idea of. They show up in different locations in which we have no control. The idea of this life we have and we try to preserve it; preserve that wave, but we miss the whole point that we are a part of the greater ocean. That quote will stick with me until death.” The other man said. So, in ending, You will never know where you are going until you know yourself, Akimitsu.

In the present time, The samurai, Akimitsu opens his eyes, and looks at what position he’s in, the Naifu close to his stomach, only half an inch away. He blows a sigh of relief that he didn’t go on with Seppuku. He then looks around him at the tall grass, and how it dances with every blow of the wind. He feels contented, and walks away, into the tall grass. Possibly to another journey, but a different journey this time, the journey in order to actually live. He might meditate on this and many other things while he sojourns. The rest is up to Akimitsu. The poem he left dances with the wind.

Art by Hadleigh Kreger



Telephone
By Kaylee Moore

You know, being a police officer was never my first career choice. It was not even the third. But some unexpected life events happened and here I am. I have been at this job for about five years now and it does not get easier. On one of the slower nights, I got a call from dispatch telling me to go to this house just on the edge of town because someone kept calling but not saying anything. When I got there the house seemed abandoned, but I still acted with caution and checked all the rooms. The rooms were decorated very minimally. It was all very dirty with there being a couch, tv, refrigerator, and a few rugs placed here and there. However, nobody was there. I reported it back to dispatch and started to drive away. When I got fifteen minutes down the road, I got a call back telling me that they were getting another call from the same number and same address. I turned back around and checked out the house again, this time I found an old landline in one of the spare bedrooms. I called dispatch to ask for the background on the house and all that came up was it had not been live in for over six years, in all that time the electricity never was turned on. I told them that it was impossible for anyone to call from this address and there had to be something wrong on their end. Just as I was about to leave for the second time, I heard a metal scratching sound. It was coming from underneath the rug on the floor. I pulled it back and there was a metal door leading to a basement of sorts. I called for backup immediately before going downstairs. Descending the stairs was something out of a horror movie, scratch marks littered the blood-stained walls. And in those four walls there was a cage, a large trunk, and numerous chains coming out of the wall. While it made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up, there was no physical evidence of something bad happening, that was until a fellow officer lifted the lid of the trunk. Inside was the scrunched-up body of a small child. To this day we do not know who the child is, who called on the telephone not connected to an outlet, who did it or why. What I do know is that someone wanted me to find it.

I am Good At... I am No Good At...
By Billy B.

I'm good at picking up the pace of assignments when they are about to be due in the near 24 hours of them being due now I won't be getting full credit on that assignment for being late and i hold responsibility for myself on it. I'm aware of me procrastinating on assignments and there isn't an excuse for them not spending the time to complete assignments at home since i don't have a job I just do nothing at home or actually do my homework for most of my class but I start it chronologically from 1-7 periods so for this class when I get to it I try to complete it as I can. Every homework I do will be completed in time.... Maybe I do take breaks from doing homework just to avoid being burnt out and lose any motivation to continue on so i would wash my face to clear my mind with cold water then lay on my bed .face planted into the pillow. eyes shut. Then power nap for maybe 5-10 minutes to achieve a clear mind state. Ok, i can easily just take advantage of this and fall asleep but that cannot happen if my mind won't isn't resting until I finish any work I've started. I've built this habit for a while. Only to realize I should've done this a long time ago for the previous classes that I previously procrastinated in as well but now is terrible timing for this to pick up. In conclusion (yes I used conclusion) I do my assignments a lot faster when an assignment is due and I hate last-minute assignments but try to turn them in on time for full credit while not trying to procrastinate in the midst of an assignment then there are the whole taking breaks in an attempt to achieve a clear mind and all.

I am no good at, sticking to the agenda that I set myself for everyday after-school for homework/projects although it makes more productive when I write down what I need to do for the rest of my day. On the flip side, I schedule my parent's appointments to see their doctors, reminding them when the next bill is due, or even writing down a list on my phone what groceries we need for dinner otherwise my mom will forget them and starts yelling in a random direction or just blames my dad for not reminding her and me sometimes.... When i set a date relating to my parents or other things besides school I can keep up with it I put reminders on my phone when that specific event is nearby and will remember them then complete them on time. The question is why can't I do the same? Well i know why i just suck at keeping up with assignments that i schedule to do myself the only difference between the two is one matters more than the other and I won't say which one of course since its pretty obvious. I try prioritize my schedule for school and get stuff done I literally went through the effort to highlight and put sidenotes on which to start first depending on the assignment and how long it will take me to complete them and move onto the next assignment. I've realized that every assignment is all easy work to complete and finish in a short amount of time but thinking about that though is something my mind just can't seem to wrap around. I am student and my job is to 1. Do the assignments. 2. Complete the assignments. 3. Turn them in completed on time. Teachers only want to see students turn them in and that's all that matters to them by showing up and completing the job.

Uncommon Sense By Ben Reed

Humans have evolved through centuries of innovation to gain better traits, yet they've sacrificed some of their finest qualities. I've come to the realization that most people now put themselves before the world, believing they are superior or should be treated as so. It might be one trait I have over them: often putting others before myself. I'm not brave or understanding. I typically don't understand much when interacting with others, but I suppress my greed and limit myself nonetheless.

I don't believe I should receive everything I want, nor do I want to be given everything I want. I'm not a god or a king; I don't require or deserve any kind of tribute. I'm a normal human being like everyone else, living my life between moments of suffering and of happiness. Everyone has issues. Issues they face with everything they have, sometimes still failing to resolve them, which others could have helped to resolve but chose not to as it had nothing to do with them. How does a person living in the streets, dying before my eyes, have nothing to do with me? How does the world burning to the ground all around me not affect me? Food is wasted and thrown into the trash because it didn't sell when it could have been given to those who needed it. But why donate this discarded product to those worse-off than me when it doesn't make me any profit?

The answers to these questions are so simple that it bugs me others cannot see them. None of us are gods, and most of us are not kings; we are equals who should treat each other as such. If life is as sacred as we claim, is it not hypocrisy to leave another to die when you could have given them at least enough to survive the night? What happens in their life may not affect mine, but it doesn't mean I shouldn't try to make it better. If I'm only going to throw food into the trash, why couldn't I just give it away? I answer questions with questions because humanity is not so simple. Those answers depend on our individual qualities. To me, it doesn't matter that I cannot make a profit on the product that would have been wasted, but to others, profit is all that matters.

The quality of compassion, being selfless despite the lack of personal gain, is so very vital to humanity. It was so common in the past. So common, in fact, that even greedy individuals would offer their services out of pity or benevolence for the less fortunate. It pains me to think that in a world that is considered more developed and civilized, compassion is so limited. People will preach how wrong it is that others live in the streets, shouting that the government should fix it, but they ignore that the root of the problem is their own greed and prejudice.

In an imperfect world filled with billions of people living short, stressful lives, compassion is a necessary good. To put as little a burden on others as possible, to help them when they're burdened anyway, that is compassion. If I am as compassionate as I think I am, it is my most distinguished quality, the one that defines me.

I am afraid of...
By Jayden Lemos

I have been afraid of many things in my life, some I have grown out of, some to this day still terrify me. Some things were little and some big.

As a kid I watched the movie "Mama" by Andy Muschietti and it absolutely terrified me. I never slept with my parents as a kid and that day I did. When I was a child I would have very vivid nightmares and after I watched that movie I could see Mama right in front of me. I would also have nightmares of being kidnapped so sometimes they would smush together, so I would have a nightmare of Mama kidnapping me and that scared me straight to the core.

Now, I am scared of lots of minuscule things. Such as heights, spiders, and rats. Heights isn't that bad, its not being high up that scares me it's the thought of falling that scares me. For spiders I can get over it, I just smack it with my shoe and the world is all better. And if I were to ever be face to face with a rat of any kind big or small I will run away screaming like my life depends on it and make someone else go get it.

I am also fearful of significant things, some of these happen to be disappointing someone significant to me, letting someone down, and more. The things I am fearful of are of a mental aspect where it's all in my head. The fear of disappointing someone I care about; I know no matter what I do they'll still love me but I will always have this underlying fear that they won't. Letting people down; this one is big at work, for an example, I am a hostess so most of the people I come across I have never met therefore there is no relationship other than me greeting you as you walk in, there was one person who had reserved a table and that table was already taken. He and his wife had come in multiple times calling me names, telling me I had no idea had to do my job and more, this really affected me as I had disappointed them, after they had sat down I broke down; it did take me a couple seconds to get back up on my feet but in the end it made me a stronger person.

As I've grown I have learned how to cope with the things I am afraid of, I have toughened up; physically and emotionally. Some of these things I will never get past and I am okay with that. But at the end of the day everyone has things that they're afraid of.

Translation for Mama
By Garces

I miss you.

Not just you as a person but the times we had. What we had was late night conversations.
The way you would cheer me up. The way I would cheer you up too.

You were my best friend. We imagined all the things we could do together. Staying up late.
Watching shows together. I miss you. You were my true friend who was always there for me. I loved you. You would worry about me. I would worry about you.

Not being able to see you made it all worse. The fights and not being able to physically resolve them. It wasn't easy. That's what made it go downhill. Everything was fine. We were fine.

Would you rather be interesting or likable?
Elijah Hawthorne

In all my life, I would rather be interesting because I've always been a well round likable person. I love being a person of interest because it sets me apart from most people of society. I'm well known to be a guy who's able to be organized and tidy with anything I've ever put myself through. My perception can be unique in ways a person who concurs blindly or absolutely regurgitates what is stated isn't so exciting, even though you may discover them reassuring. The key to having an exciting attitude is what you feed your mind. This can be relative by the books I personally read, the indicates I watch. They can also be the stories i have obtained over the years, whether through travel, adversity, or top stories. Connection is also another big factor of being interesting because having that personal drive between two people or more can truly change how two people see each other. This can be brought by communication or experience with that person. Being intriguing means your "presence" is wanted by a considerable number of individuals. A individual named Dale Carnegie has a well-known reputation of being a American writer who influences the plethora of "being interesting, is to be interested". There are numerous ways of being fascinating, however as Dale Carnegie showed many, quite a long time back, the most straightforward way of becoming intriguing to individuals is to turn out to be really (not phony) inspired by them. Fostering the capacity to become keen on others is most certainly an expertise. Whenever you're at a party, focus on how much individuals talk about themselves. If you can set aside the effort to foster the Skill of being Interested In others you will be an extremely fascinating individual. The more individuals you can truly become keen on, the really fascinating you will be. I tend to follow his words of wisdom because truly to achieve the attention of being intriguing is to be interesting to others so you might have to change something you have a habit of, to be interesting. Being intriguing can change people's point of view of how they see you as a person because ultimately, people will always judge you for what you say or do on any daily basis. I love being an individual of interest since it separates me from a great many people of society. I'm notable to be a person who's ready to be coordinated and clean with anything I've at any point put myself through. My discernment can be extraordinary in manners an individual who agrees indiscriminately or totally spews what is expressed isn't so energizing, even though you might find them consoling. The way to having an intriguing disposition is the thing that you feed your psyche. Personally, what I think that sets me apart from being of the norm is that I like to be a social butterfly that loves to find out more about the people I interact with because usually I choose specific people that I enjoy my time being around with just for a example, I've known the same people from 6th grade and I'm still with the same group I've set my future towards. I love being a interesting person well round, and I will never stop trying to be the best person I can be for myself and others.

I'm Sorry
By Billy B

To this human being, I am unhinged content to this one individual and a major annoyance that can go toe to toe with her on a daily basis. People like her make me want to temper her when I get the chance at any given moment we would bicker back and forth over and over and over again every day at 6th period. She carries positive vibes with her and I carry conflicting vibes to counter her vibe which thus starts a battle between me and her. I am a menace to her existence and I'll forever continue on this until the day I die.

This has gone on for a few years in high school now but whenever I'm around this person I basically just become a toddler to that person and only to that person and maybe to a couple of other people but to her? Yeah, I only act out the most to her in person. I would continue on texting but I would just annoy her so I only do this in person, also I don't personally like texting for long periods of time I would get the impression of texts becoming bland after a while not saying to whom I'm texting is boring but just texting is just boring in itself.

My purpose for some of this stuff is to have a more diverse interaction and shed some satire on her but make her think sometimes and reflect on the reality we live in. I don't want her to become a cynic of becoming a jaded person (which is something I personally don't want to see) I am an unhinged person to her but state my thoughts and opinion in a healthy manner because that way she can have a bit of new perspective while still carry the positive attitude throughout the school year.

Life Ends
By Ben Reed

Life is not eternal; it always comes to an end. I understand this but cannot accept the implications. I live my life learning as much as possible so that fear has no room to grow, but I know frighteningly little about death and what follows. Will I reincarnate, go to heaven, or will I lose my senses and be trapped in darkness, permanently unable to think? I am afraid of what follows death, so I try my hardest to make every moment before it worth the time it took.

We may only have one life, or we may have infinitely many. It's sad to think that so many people may not enjoy what could be their only life. Some live in the streets without food or water, fighting every day for what little they have, most certainly not enjoying their lives. Their precious life is being wasted, all for the greed of others. I can't even stand in the darkness for the thought that someone may be lurking within. Why do people take something as precious as a life? I wish I could live free of these worrying thoughts that drag me down.

Sometimes I go weeks or even months without feeling sadness or fear of death, and other times it cripples my mind, and I feel like I've hit the ocean floor. If this truly is my only life, I want it to be enjoyable. The same goes for everyone, though. Everyone deserves to live happily, within the confines of reason. People judge others on trivial things with no effect on their lives. What does it matter if someone wears makeup or shows off their muscles? It may be their only chance to feel beautiful or strong, especially in this world that constantly tries to bring them down. What does it matter if someone else identifies as a different gender? If it combats their unease and betters their life, I want the same freedom.

More than I fear death, I fear its outcome. There may be no chances after this to live different lives. Fear's power to crush and overwhelm is unparalleled. I understand that I will die one day, but I refuse to accept it. I live each day as though it's my last, secretly hoping there will be another. Just as I want to live a good life, I don't want to be the reason someone else's life is less enjoyable. For all I know, it could be their last day, in which case my interaction with that individual on that day could be the last I ever have.

In the case of such a temporary thing as life: it is sacred. The most insignificant memories can have the largest impact, a simple fact that fuels my anxiety. Everyone should strive every moment of every day to live their life to the fullest with as positive an impact on others as possible. As much as I fear death, I fear being a burden on others, damaging their sacred joy. Money doesn't grow on trees, and neither do happy lives. In my case, fear holds less power the greater it is. The more I fear something, the greater my resolve to conquer it.

Art by Hadleigh Kreger



