

Stirred But Not Shaken

Nonfiction writing by
American teenagers

Winning essays in the What Kids Can Do
2014 nonfiction writing contest

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Preface

In 2006, What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD) and Next Generation Press published a book of nonfiction essays by youth across the country. Called *Hip Deep: Opinion, Essays, and Vision from American Teenagers*, the book became a favorite with students (and teachers) who appreciated writing by youth about issues meaningful to them.

Eight years later, the Common Core's anchor standards for writing are drawing new attention to nonfiction writing by young people in the United States. They require students to craft narratives that “develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.” They call for written arguments that “support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.” They ask students to write informative, explanatory texts that “examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.”

How does the writing of youth reflect these standards? In a WKCD essay contest launched in spring 2014, we invited teenagers nationwide to submit nonfiction pieces they had written recently on topics that mattered to them.

“We’re looking for diverse voices on diverse topics: family, school, learning, relationships, race, culture, origins, religion, body image, social media, conflict, peace, change, our planet . . . or whatever topic you choose,” our invitation read. “We care most about fresh ideas and stories written in a strong and true voice, in or outside school. We’re listening for what moves our readers and what gives them hope—that’s why we call our contest *Stirred but Not Shaken*.”

Six weeks after that announcement, we had received over 200 submissions from a remarkable swath of students in grades eight through twelve: privileged and not; native and foreign born (from twenty countries); rural, suburban, and urban (from eighteen states). Whether they attended

an elite private school or a school for incarcerated juveniles, these young people wrote with purpose, finding their own voice and their own true north.

What stirred them? Some wrote about living in two worlds. A girl mastering calculus in a school for young scientists describes the hard work and dignity of a mother snared in poverty. A student returning home to visit relatives in Singapore finds comfort in an old Turkish perfume shop. A Korean son confronts his father's expectations for perfect grades and seeks to define his own self-worth. A young African-American man tells of stereotypes that stalk him wherever he turns.

Many of these essayists revealed painful truths about their coming of age: the dissolution of families, struggles with body image and depression, coping with life-threatening illnesses. Some chronicled how they had come to peace with hardship or "rising to a place of light and affirmation," as one young writer called it.

As well as presenting such perspectives and revelations, we created a special category for informative essays that involved research and persuasion. The selections we publish here handily refute the stereotype of a younger generation indifferent to the issues of our time. On the topics that concern them—same-sex marriage, prosecutorial misconduct, nuclear fission, fast food, environmental balance, and more—these young writers reveal their passion and their reasoning.

In keeping with the WKCD tradition, our selection process prioritized fresh ideas and strong voices. Often the eloquence of the writing commanded our attention. Sometimes its wry wit drew us in. Honesty shone through in every essay we selected. We listened for what would move readers and what would give them hope.

With every submission we received—not just the winners—social-emotional learning provided a through-line. Each piece reminded us how much young people want to be noticed and to succeed, to do well by their families, to stand out as individuals. Each underscored the agency that can develop when youth have the opportunity to speak from the heart, believing that what they have to say matters and that people are listening.

Our selection here reflects and honors the diversity of learners that invigorates our nation's schools. Not surprisingly, the unequal opportunities that separate our schools also show up in their students' writing—not just in the tenor of young people's stories, but in their punctuation, grammar, and polish. Some of our winning essays, we realize, might not score “proficient” in their mastery of common writing conventions. (Indeed, students and teachers reading this collection might discuss how a particular essay diverges from standard, best practice.) In consultation with the writers, WKCD has afforded each essay we selected the kind of minor editing that any author should receive from a publisher.

When we notified the winners of our Stirred but Not Shaken contest, one tenth-grader wrote back: “Oh my word! Thank you so, so, so much! I can't express how much this means to me.” The thanks, however, comes from us: to the young people who trusted us with their voices and vision.

Barbara Cervone and Kathleen Cushman, co-founders, What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD)
Providence, Rhode Island, July 2014

I. PERSPECTIVES

Raindrops in Mississippi are always fat. They fall from clouds no longer able to hold them and slide through the humidity, making a murky storm soup. I am standing outside the Boys and Girls Club peering into the haze of this particular storm, waiting for my mother. Our routine is to walk, hand in hand, through the “old projects” to our home in the “new projects.” Will we walk today? In a soft, rattled voice, I tell the counselor that she’ll be here soon—and she is. Dainty, and cowering beneath the wind and rain, she stands behind a tree, pulls her flimsy hood tighter over her face and flicks her wrist, beckoning me.

My mother dutifully teaches: how to long-divide, how to play defense on the soccer field, how to follow through with my backhand, how to control my breathing when I run, how to protect myself, how to make one night’s meal last a week. She conducts each lesson with the firmness and sass I’m sure only a Southern woman can. But I got my most valuable lesson when I saw her standing in the rain, soggy, but focused: No matter the severity of the storm, if you have somewhere to go, you will have to walk.

From “Journey Through the Rain,” by Rachel Marie Jones, Mississippi School for Math and Science, Columbus, Mississippi

My white Superga sneakers, scuffed gray at the edges with time and adventure, wander through the boiling tarmac of Kampong Glam, the hip Muslim enclave of Singapore in the country I call home. As I turn the corner into Arab Street, I am greeted by the proprietor Deniz, who ushers me with excited gestures into his perfume laboratory.

The room’s walls are lined from top to bottom with tiny black scent bottles both familiar and exotic—cypress, juniper berry, sandalwood. With an exclamation of delight, Deniz lifts the stopper off a heavy glass jar dripping with golden essential oils, beckoning for me to smell the potent infusion. I inhale, overwhelmed by the scent’s potent beauty. Deniz closes his eyes, long black lashes resting against mottled tan skin, and quotes Haruki Murakami’s *Kafka on the Shore*: “Every one of us is losing something precious. Lost opportunities, lost possibilities, feelings we can never get back. That’s part of what it means to be alive.” I sigh deeply.

Adapted from “Singapore’s Kampong Glam,” by Callie Phui-Yen Hoon, Deerfield Academy, Deerfield, Massachusetts

Journey Through the Rain

RACHEL MARIE JONES

RAINDROPS IN MISSISSIPPI ARE ALWAYS FAT. They fall from clouds no longer able to hold them and slide through the humidity, making a murky storm soup. I am standing outside the Boys and Girls Club peering into the soupy haze of this particular storm, waiting for my mother. Our routine is to walk, hand in hand, through the “old projects” to our home in the “new projects.” Will we walk today? In a soft, rattled voice, I tell the counselor that she’ll be here soon—and she is. Dainty, and cowering beneath the wind and rain, she stands behind a tree, pulls her flimsy hood tighter over her face and flicks her wrist, beckoning me.

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The little storms of life have left me doused. The wind of my parents’ perennial unemployment has blown away my umbrella. The chill of watching my mother scrape together dollar bills and dirty quarters to pay rent and wash our clothes freezes me to the bone. The endless drizzle of watching my mother scrape by alone, as the convicted felon I call “father” keeps his distance, has soaked through my raincoat.

There are days I’m not sure how to do my organic chemistry homework, I have ten essays to write, my legs are sore from playing soccer, and I have cross-country practice at 6:30 the next morning. I can’t think because it’s one a.m., I’m running on black coffee and four hours of sleep, and the conversation with my mother that morning informed me that she is unable to pay rent this month as well. So I sit under the humming desk lamp, gazing

at my physics textbook and the C on last week's calculus quiz. Tomorrow I'll be told my father lost another job.

Despite the rain, I have a destination I will reach. My destination is having a thorough understanding of calculus. It's having a killer serve. It's running a marathon. It's executing a flawless bicycle kick. It's writing words that whet readers' appetites. It's looking into someone's eyes and knowing I've helped. My destination is excellence. I'm closer to my destination by leaving my mother and brother to study at the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, which adds to my worries, but also to my optimism. I have places to go, and it's always going to rain, but as long as my legs can move, I'll get there.

Rachel Marie Jones was in twelfth grade at the Mississippi School for Math and Science in Columbus, Mississippi when she wrote about "the little storms of life." She received a national silver medal for poetry in the 2014 Scholastic Writing Awards.

Searching for Yao Zhen

SHIRLEY CHEN

THE FIRST TIME I MET MY COUSIN YAO ZHEN, he challenged me to a race. Bring it, I said, and that evening we ran through clouds of mosquitoes, charging straight into the night.

It was the dusty summer of 2007, when I stayed with my grandparents in rural northeastern China. Yao Zhen and I came from different worlds but we quickly became friends. I showed him how to hit a smoking backhand; he showed me how to feed the foxes at his farm. I relished the discovery of new and strange things at the bazaar; he delighted in unraveling the mysteries of my laptop. I told him about my dream to write an epic fantasy; he told me that he was going to run a business someday.

After I went back to America, we continued to write to each other, but at some point his responses trickled to a stop. Still, I returned two years

later looking forward to avenging my last badminton loss and to reading him the pages I had translated from my favorite Merlin book.

The following month, I fished with my grandpa. I played cards with the elders in the park. I sampled swan meat. I walked around that summer, searching for Yao Zhen, but by then his place was in a gang.

I learned that he skipped school, disappearing at random and then resurfacing, bruised and smelling of booze, to badger his parents for money. Eventually, *he* found *me*, when he crashed a family dinner to demand more cash. His arrival brought a storm of tears and harsh voices, and at the eye of the tempest was Yao Zhen, dark and still and silent. I willed myself to walk over and talk to him about what was wrong, look at him straight on and get through to him. But I had no idea how to start. My limbs wouldn't move through the storm. So I said, from where I sat, what I thought might save him.

"You don't need money; that's not the solution. You need to do the work, go to school, get your life right!"

That was the last I saw of Yao Zhen; his eyes narrowed at me with resentment. A week later, he jumped out his apartment window and broke an arm.

The guilt and frustration weighed down on me. If I had done more, done better, could that moment have changed the trajectory of his entire life? What would have reached him? I didn't know. So I started writing. I viewed the world through the eyes of a boy with a distant father, who observed the lives around him and saw only dead ends, insurmountable challenges. I felt him give up and give in. The gang gave him the semblance of family, the money to be made could be an easy way out.

As the words flowed onto the page, the truths that eluded me before seemed closer. No, his choices would not be my choices. Just as I did back when I raced Yao Zhen through the night, I charge straight into challenges, determined to overcome them. I boldly approach strangers for the weekly newspaper's street talk interviews; before, that had been my biggest fear. When I receive another rejection letter from an editor, I file it away and continue to write. I fight on the tennis courts with bronchitis or a dislocated knee.

However, I could finally see why Yao Zhen made those decisions. And since then, that's been the goal for my writing: to get at the heart of the pains and joys of others, to experience the world beyond my vision and really understand it, so that I can then present my perception of it in a simple, beautiful, and resonant way. If I can do that, I am much closer to making an impact.

Shirley Chen was in twelfth grade at the York School in Monterey, California when she wrote about the last time she saw her cousin Yao Zhen.

Counting Trucks

ARIANA SARMIENTO FIELDING

I'M IN THE CAR, TUNING OUT MY COUSIN'S CHATTER coming from the passenger seat. My eyes focus on an eighteen-wheeler on the other side of the yellow lines not far ahead of us. I stare into its shining headlights until it passes and then I watch until it is out of sight. My eyes hurt; I see spots but I am distracted by the thought I instinctively had as the truck drove away. I am surprised to realize in my head I just said "one"—I just counted the truck.

In the back of the green Dodge caravan, a cluttered mess of sports balls, Curious George stories, and math papers takes up most of the floor space but I don't care. I'm on my way to the homecoming dance, my first-ever high school dance. It isn't at the school; it's at some place I have never been, which I am assuming has a dance floor and tables. There will be a DJ, too. I guess it was pointless to do my hair since it'll be frizzy by the end of the night. But at least I'll walk in looking good. And I'll dance in a crowd of ninth through twelfth graders bumping and grinding to the beat of whatever song is playing. This will be different than the middle school dances I went to.

I turn my face toward the window. It's dark outside. If a light was on in the car I would see my made-up face and straightened hair but instead I see other cars.

When we were younger, my step-siblings and I used to count the big trucks we saw on the highway at night, when it was lit by streetlights and headlights, dulling the brightness of the stars above. Watching and waiting for tractor-trailers to go by kept us awake on long drives to and from visits with family in New York. We would count hundreds of them in just an hour or two. It was a contest: whoever counted the most won and whoever fell asleep first lost. I don't remember who thought of the game, but we played it from before our younger brothers were alive until shortly after the youngest was born.

Despite the late hour of the car rides and the heaviness of our eyelids, we refused to succumb to slumber. None of us ever admitted to falling asleep, and if we were accused of such a thing we'd say we were just resting our eyes or pretending to sleep. I almost never fell asleep during the game, but sometimes I let them think I did, so I could play by myself. I liked to watch different headlights come and go, counting long after my siblings had stopped. It was relaxing to focus on one thing and not have any other thoughts running through my mind.

I have always loved the look of cities and highways at night. Thousands of little lights like holes in an empty box—when a light is shined there are a bunch of bright circles inside the box. The lights are pretty to look at. I liked to count things when I was younger. I counted my steps, stairs, marbles. I counted my breaths sometimes, and how many times I chewed my food. I counted big trucks on the highway at night. Except when I counted those I was not alone.

I still admire the game's simplicity—easy, calm, quieting. Sitting in the van as my mother drives me to Homecoming, every light we pass makes me more visible. I am wearing a short, strapless black-and-white dress and a pair of black heels. The makeup on my face feels like a mask hiding my innocence and I can't decide if that's a good thing. I look pretty and I look my age, not younger like usual. I feel excited but nervous. I start counting the streetlights we drive by; I haven't seen another truck yet tonight. As each light comes into view then disappears, I miss the times when all three of us found fun in our game.

I call it a game but it wasn't *just* a game. It joined the three of us as siblings, letting us be both a unit and separate individuals. We counted in our heads the number of tractor-trailers and after a while we shared our numbers with each other. There was a sort of unspoken agreement that when we were on a long trip at night we played the game. There were always more trucks than we had expected to find, which was exciting.

Big trucks on the highway at night would have seemed like monsters without our game. *One, two, three . . . 96, 97, 98 . . .* so many big trucks. These enormous vehicles were part of the game, so they were not menacing to us children. They were comforting. Seeing them was like seeing the sun rise in the east; it meant that all was well. Life was normal when there were lots of trucks on the highway.

That was before Nana, Mark, and Andrew's dad died. We probably played the game on the way home from Hempstead after his funeral. We even played before my dad stopped calling. Sometime between two trips to New York on which we counted trucks, I received my last phone call from my father. But by the time Nana was gone, we had grown out of it. All that remained were memories, fond recollections of when we still had her and enjoyed our game.

The car stops. We're here: Homecoming 2011. My cousin is quiet. She and my mother turn in their seats to look at me. I wonder what they're thinking. I'm going to get out of the car now, go into the building, and see my friends. I hope they don't try to walk me in.

Ariana Sarmiento Fielding was a tenth grader at Springfield Renaissance High School in Springfield, Massachusetts when she wrote this essay about her growing-up years.

Korean Son

ERIC LEE

MY HANDS WERE CLAMMY. I saw a drop of sweat falling from my forehead and landing on my last midterm test booklet. I lifted my head up and saw my friends looking at their own tests. *Tick-tock, tick-tock.* I turned to the clock. Five minutes left. I thought to myself, “I need to get every answer right. All my midterm grades must be higher than A minus.”

A few weeks later, my teachers, one by one, began to announce the grades for the midterms. As they went around the room back and forth, I noticed how my heart started to pump faster. When the teachers handed me my tests, a great relief flooded my mind as I noticed the big red letters “A” and “A–” written on my exams. Now I was eager to go home as fast as I can and face my dad.

That night, I turned on my computer, logged onto Skype, and got ready to face my relatives in Korea. I heard a *beep*, and many faces of my family, including my dad, appeared on the screen. The conversation started off with my father eagerly asking about my midterms. When I announced my grades, the crowd cheered “Yahoo!” and my grandparents began hugging each with delight. It was quite hilarious. At the same time, my dad reported on how well my cousins had done on their own exams. As I expected, they all did an outstanding job by getting all A’s. At that moment, I imagined getting a B on any of my tests and my body shrank. If I did, I would see my father’s face turn red and frozen.

At first, I did not hear my father’s deep baritone because all of my family members were chatting at the same time. However, as time went on, they began to depart one by one. When my father’s old-fashioned glasses filled the screen, my mother went to the kitchen, knowing that my father would want to have a conversation with me alone. There was a short moment of silence, but my father broke it first.

“Son, you did a nice job. I am really proud of you.”

Joy rose within me.

“But I hope you can get all A’s next time like your cousins.”

Suddenly, all my delight subsided.

“I know sometimes I might be giving you some pressure, but you must understand. You always have to think about our bloodline. Who are you again?”

I took a deep nervous breath. I thought to myself, “I need to get this right.”

“I am the eighteenth descendant of Prince Deokyang, the fifth son of the great King Jungjong of Joseon dynasty.”

“Good. Always remember that. In America, work hard, become an influential person, and bring honor to our family. Understand?” my father asked.

“I do, father,” I replied. “I will.”

That night, when I was looking through my bookshelf, I found a book on the history of the United States Constitution. Since the title seemed very interesting, I began reading it. I learned what the founding fathers of the United States had valued the most: the idea of freedom! The idea included the right to enjoy freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of press, and freedom of assembly. In the United States, I realized, people can be what they want to be without any special status or unique genealogy.

I began imagining a life without family pressure. Rage started growing within me. I did not understand why my father could not simply compliment me for once, rather than give me stress. I detested that, and the pressure made me so mad that I no longer wanted to talk to my family at all.

Then guilt struck me. I remembered how my father and I visited our ancestors’ graves in Korea last summer. The graves were very magnificent. Around them, there were white cracked-limestone boundaries. Approximately fifteen feet away from the tombs were severely weathered statues of fearless ancient warriors. Right in front of each stone boundary were reflective black stones with delicately carved Chinese characters indicating the name of the person in the grave. Even though I knew how to speak and write Chinese, I could not understand the characters on the stone because they were in traditional Chinese. Only my dad was able to read them and

translate them into Korean. In front of the graves, my dad told me about our ancestors and their work. He was like an old wise storyteller of the past, and I was like a small naive child, waiting to hear more exciting stories. At that moment, I felt great intimacy with my father. Then my dad began talking about how superior our family was compared to other people because of our ancestors. The feeling of closeness disappeared. I realized that my father had gone too far, and his talk was full of hubris.

I slowly closed the book and gazed at the white wall in front of my desk, feeling split in my mind. One part of me strives for individuality and freedom, and another feels bound by my bloodline. I wish to be free from the intense pressure from my bloodline, yet my pride in it pulls me back, like a strong magnet. I wonder if I can ever choose between them. I wonder if I can ever be one.

Eric Lee wrote about his challenges as a Korean son when he was in ninth grade at Brookline High School in Brookline, Massachusetts.

Fighting for My Life

JEANIE ANTILLON

THIS STARTED EARLY. When I was four I got mad at someone, now I don't even remember who it was. This was in the parking lot of my old apartment complex. She was making fun of me so I punched her in the nose. I got real scared because her nose started bleeding. So I ran home and hid under my bed.

Her mom came to the door and my dad answered it. He wanted me to apologize, but I didn't want to. I was still mad because that little girl was teasing me.

My dad asked me, "Why did you punch her in the nose?" I said, "Because she was teasing me about being so little." Funny thing is, this girl was a lot older than me, maybe thirteen. But I did apologize and we eventually became friends. We played with each other's cats. We never fought again.

When we moved to my grandma's house there was a lot more fighting between my parents. Constantly.

On the playground during kindergarten I remember this girl Destiny, who I didn't like because her hair annoyed me. She pushed me so we started fighting. We got sent to the principal, who told us, "You need to share in the sandbox. No pushing. Okay?" We went back to class. But Destiny's hair always annoyed me.

In first grade I fought with Dahlia because she cut in line at the cafeteria. But I also fought with Daniel, Nick, and Alex because his big-ass head annoyed me. I fought with Ruth because I didn't like her buck teeth and she always beat me at tetherball. Now I realize that it was so mean to judge other people by their looks. They can't help the way their teeth or their hair look. But then, as a little kid, I didn't know better. Because I grew up around so much fighting, I learned that it was the only way to solve differences, no matter how small. That is what I learned from my parents. They fought all the time.

This continued and got worse in junior high school when I started disrespecting adults too. I found that some teachers felt they could pick on kids and the kids wouldn't fight back, but I would. In seventh grade Ms. B___ decided that I wasn't going to amount to anything, so she wrote me off. She really didn't want me in her class, so she kept blaming me for things that went wrong in her class.

One day the whole class was talking. I was talking to my friends and she singled me out and said, "You be quiet, Jeannie!" And she said it with a lot of attitude, even though all the other kids were talking too. So I kept on talking. Ms. B___ said, "Get out of my classroom." I got up in her face and said, "Make me." It escalated. Words were exchanged. But my best friend, Ryan, pulled me away from Ms. B___ and shoved me outside.

Outside in the hallway Ryan talked to me, trying to calm me down. We walked to the office, Ryan talking with me the whole way. The vice principal suspended me for a week. My dad said, "You shouldn't be disrespecting teachers." He grounded me and took away my phone. I was so mad. But I got over it.

That was seventh grade. I kept getting infractions with conduct referrals which went on my record, so the vice principal expelled me. I got real mad and gave her attitude. I yelled at her and called her a bitch. This got me kicked out of the entire school district.

So I moved to a middle school here in the middle of eighth grade. Everything was fine until about a month later when I got into a fight with Kristal at Jack in the Box because she told my boyfriend to break up with me. I beat her ass. Her mouth was bleeding and we landed in the street. One of the school tutors pulled Kristal up off the sidewalk. She was a mess. I booked down the street.

The principal called me into the office and we both got suspended for a week. But Ms. H_____ was there in that meeting talking about going to Quest Academy if I kept up with my aggressive attitude. She explained that we would have to make a contract to keep me out of trouble. With a contract both sides have to agree to make it work. I really didn't have a choice. I got transferred to Quest. I didn't know what to expect.

The first few weeks at Quest were pretty crazy. I had to learn a lot of new stuff. I had to learn their slang in order to even understand what the other kids were saying. It was a whole new world. There were a lot of older, mostly high school students. I felt small, so much younger than the rest of them. I was scared at first. I thought they were all so dangerous.

It got worse before it got better. I got introduced to new drugs. Somebody told me to try these pills. I asked what they were. They said, "They'll make you trip out." I wanted to experiment, so I took them. I started popping pills and then I got hooked on "Triple C." One day my mom and I got into a big fight and I ran away. I took Triple C and I overdosed on it. I was in the mental hospital for a week. But I got better. My mom and I talked it all out, so we don't fight so much now.

I learned many life lessons while attending Quest Academy. I learned that I don't have to live my history. I have my own history and I honor the lessons I learned from it because they taught me a lot. I have choices. I am the author of my life script and I need to write a better story with a great ending. In life we are all measured by our greatest challenges. My greatest

challenge is controlling my reactions to others. There is a time and a place for everything—even fighting.

When Ms. H____ suggested that I join the boxing club, at first I thought that was weird. I said, “Why would you send me to boxing when I fight all the time anyway?” But then I realized that it might be a good place for me to get all of my anger and aggression out in a safe place. So I went to train as a boxer. Perfect.

The first day I worked individually with the coach. I learned to punch straight and how to block a punch. The coach said that I am a natural. He says he’ll make me into a professional. I really like it. Everyone is so focused there. I am excited to think that this could be a way to productively channel my anger and aggression into a sport that will keep me out of trouble.

What I really want to be is a nurse. I want to help people, not hurt them. I fought a lot of people over dumb things that I don’t even remember. It was a waste of time getting in all that trouble. I need to practice keeping my anger down. I won’t get in trouble for fighting when I get my anger out in the boxing ring. Now I have a good place to fight.

Jeanie Antillon wrote about the lessons she learned from fighting when she was fifteen and a student at Quest Academy, an alternative day school for grades 7 through 12 in Monrovia, California.

Fancy Dining

ALEXANDER LOPEZ-GUEVARA

THE BLADE CUTS INTO THE SURFACE, fluids trickle across the cutting board, and hungry eyes beg for a taste of the steak prepared in the luxurious The Benjamin, a well renowned catering company on Long Island. This place holds some of the most vivacious, roaring, and musical parties for the most affluent people. I myself have attended some of those parties, but not to enjoy the sounds of a new generation of music mixed in with the sound of the Fifties, or to enjoy the food made so intricately in a short

amount of time, or to enjoy the company of wealthy people who have come from all across the country. No, I am a waiter at The Benjamin. I'm slicing steak for people attending a wedding reception for Robin and Steven, a couple in their mid-forties, whose smiles seem to infect the air with glorifying happiness.

In the moments when I'm not serving steak, it's as if I'm immune to their happiness, too busy admiring the landscape. Everywhere I turn, behind those faces decorated with makeup and worn down by wrinkles, there are trees with verdant green leaves swaying in the breeze on a Sunday afternoon. By the patches of grass where the trees grow, there are paved roads composed of granite that lead into the marvelous setting: a fountain, which spouts water into a colliding center, rests next to a patio consisting of tables and chairs, food and drinks, dresses and tuxedos wrapped around Robin and Steven's guests, and of course, The Benjamin staff in their own tuxedos. We can't compare to the essence of the multitude, who have hid their milk skin under layers of Indian cotton and Egyptian silk. Some even in chin-chilla coats. All I can see is their hands—visibly rough and dry, most likely from the shuffling of green paper or the constant grip on briefcases and steering wheels in their Porches and Mercedes—and their faces marked by exuberant smiles and eyes, which shine about as bright as their jewelry.

A cerulean peacock enters the setting, scanning the place for any scraps of attention. Its presence raises inquiry among the guests, whose own outfits parallel, almost defeat, the colors present before them. Its tail feathers sweep the floor with elegance; the circular and symmetrical patterns at the tips gleam like eyes, but not like the haughty ones of the guests. These eyes are more understanding, the natural kinds that rest on your mind and perceive you as another part of nature, a part that's meant to be admired. And as fast as interest came, it left, along with the peacock's ostentatious presence. It flees the scene, and no one seems to bat an eye or even question the presence of a peacock at The Benjamin. All I hear is:

“Could I have some steak please?”

“Sure.” Over the course of the party, words repeat themselves.

“Hi. Would you like some steak? Hi. Would you like some steak? Hi. Would you like some steak? Hi. Would you like some steak. Hi. Would you

like some steak. Hiwouldyoulikesomesteak. Hiwouldyoulikesomesteak.
HiwouldyoulikesomesteakHiwouldyoulikesomesteak.

Tulips claw at the environment with a barrage of blues, reds, oranges, yellows, and purples. Water from a pond flows below a bridge just across the patio, where catfish travel around eroded rocks covered in soft, moist green moss. Bushes intricately cut to form cubes or swirls of green lines in the roads, along with the trees, which are home to three screeching macaws. Nature roars in this ceremony. All that can compare to it is the colorful conversations emanating from the crowd.

As I serve, I overhear conversations of trips to foreign lands and gossip about unknown people.

“We just got back from Paris,” says one husky man. “Last week, we went to Israel.

“I wanted to get a tan before coming here. So we went to the Bahamas for two days just to get some color.” Laughter.

“50K for a wedding . . .” “Pretending to be someone else . . .” “At our beach house . . .” “My Mercedes . . .” “Her dress . . .” “My lawyer . . .” “Those kids . . .” “. . .my money.”

Not one single mention of the world surrounding them. Not a single gasp of admiration. I look into the eyes of each guest, and I can't sense any considerate quality to them. Their grey eyes view the world in grey tones, disregarding the colors that are so vibrant in everything surrounding them, from trees, to birds, to the reflections in the dancing water. The peacock stands by a tree, hiding itself from uninterested eyes. I look at it, hoping that if its anatomical eyes can't see me, that the eyes of its tail will, and that they'll be able to spread out and show Robin and Steven's guests the elegance of nature because they've noticed someone is indeed fascinated. Green surrounded the guests. But the only green they focused on was in their pockets, in those layers of Indian cotton and Egyptian silk.

After an hour of analyzing their fascination for the wrong type of green, I stop serving steak, and start to clean up after these people, who have spoken about such exotic lives, yet haven't managed to spare a few words regarding the beauty of the world surrounding them now, not the ones they just arrived from.

And as I look at the swaying trees, I begin to question nature's relevance as I age. A cloud looms over the sun, and the highlights in the patio disappear as the entire patio is plunged into greyness. I look across, trying to spot the peacock, but it's gone. And I want to see it again and explain to it that nature is still part of man. Even if man can no longer be part of nature.

Alexander Lopez-Guevara was in eleventh grade at Westbury High School in Westbury, New York when he wrote about being a waiter in a fancy Long Island restaurant and the values that revealed.

Home Is Where the Heart Is

WILMARY RODRIGUEZ

MY MOTHER HAD ME WHEN SHE WAS TWENTY. She had never married and never thought her adult life would begin this way. We were poor, in part because my father had left the Dominican Republic for New York when I was three months old. So my mother worked long hours. I've never blamed her for not helping me with my homework or kissing me whenever I fell. I was at the top of my class, and I knew she was proud. She was exhausted, but she could always sing at the top of her lungs. That remains my definition of love.

When my brother and sister were born, I was charged with preparing their meals, bathing and tutoring them, and taking on all the responsibilities of motherhood. I was eleven. My green card was processed when I turned fourteen, and I tried not to cry thinking about living with a man who was essentially a complete stranger. I prepared myself to live with my father, but when I arrived, he was living in a small room within an apartment of strangers. Instead, I moved in with an aunt. Soon after, I was forced to work 30-plus hours per week to help pay the bills. Still, I went to bed hungry. Finally, my aunt gave me my two weeks' notice. Originally, I thought she was joking, that if I worked harder and stayed invisible . . . But after two weeks, she threw me out. I slept in the hallway that night.

The next day, my father and I moved into a shelter, but they kicked us out. The system doesn't understand the reality of the people they try to help. That evening, we found a small room to rent. I'd just turned fifteen, and I would be sharing a bed with my father in an apartment of strangers. I attempted normalcy, but my father didn't help. He would disappear for days, then return drunk and telling inappropriate stories in graphic detail. One night, he demanded matches so he could "turn on the TV." I tried to calm him, but he grabbed me hard and wouldn't let go until I was crying, begging him not to hurt me. I told him he needed help, that if he didn't go to a hospital, I'd call the police. He let go. I stood there holding my arm. A hand-shaped bruise was forming.

I packed my bags. But, standing outside the apartment, I realized two things: I had nowhere to go, and I couldn't leave my father in his current state. With my mother so far away, the only person I could call for advice was my Spanish teacher. She told me to call 911, and so I did, but when the operator answered, I hung up and went back to the apartment. I told him, "Pa, please come with me to the hospital. You need help." He reminded me that I wasn't his mother. Who was I to tell him what to do? I threatened to call 911, and he warned me that if I were to call the police, I'd no longer be his daughter.

I don't remember how long I stood there considering my options. My father needed help, but what would happen to me? Would my father really receive the help he needs? After what felt like an eternity, I stepped outside, and when the operator spoke, I answered.

Thirty minutes later, the police came and took my father to the psychiatric ward. I was picked up by a social worker and driven to a different aunt in New Jersey. But when my father was released, he threatened my aunt so brutally that she demanded I leave. The people we love promise us many things. So I returned. One day, my father began collecting used Christmas trees from the street. This continued until there was a solitary mattress surrounded by plastic pines and needles. My childhood was over. I could never again be "*la niña de papi*." I called my social worker. That was the second time I sent my father to the psychiatric ward.

I was placed in foster care. It's indescribable, being taken to your father's apartment, and while he watches, packing your things and walking out the door. My first foster home was Yasmin's dank, dirty apartment in the projects of the Bronx. It was a disaster. Her son was illegally living there with his motherless children, who I cared for. Finally, it became clear that Yasmin's home was unfit for children, much less any living thing. I was escorted out by the agency, and brought to my second foster home. It took a month before that home was also deemed unfit. After surviving five foster homes, each uniquely untenable in their own way, I finally feel a sense of safety and calm.

People hear this story and tell me I'm brave. They tell me that calling the police was the only decision I could have made. A part of me knows they're right, but there will always be a voice asking if I'm not to blame for my father's estrangement. Who's to blame for the suffering I've since endured as a foster child? A part of me will always return to that night in his apartment, trying to think my way out of an impossible situation, my fingers tracing three numbers on my little black phone.

My story is sometimes met with shock. Granted, I still fight back tears sometimes. But I know that a story like this needs to be told for every little girl whose family rejects her, or who faces impossible choices, or who finds herself amongst strangers whose hearts ran out of love long ago. My experiences have shown me that my future is the one thing that truly is mine alone. For all the darkness in my past, I really do laugh constantly, and when I lean towards the horizon, I can imagine how beautiful and bright the light is on the other side.

Wilmary Rodriguez was in tenth grade at the Pan American International High School at Monroe, in the Bronx, New York, when she wrote this essay about her relationship with her father.

Singapore's Kampong Glam

Tea in a Turkish Perfume Shop, and a Slice of Home

CALLIE PHUI-YEN HOON

MY WHITE SUPERGA SNEAKERS, scuffed gray at the edges with time and adventure, wander through the boiling tarmac of Kampong Glam, the hip Muslim enclave of Singapore in the country I call home. The graffiti is gorgeous here. I stop in awed contemplation as a lady with wild sable hair tinged with silver starlight arrests my attention, her shimmering teal-lidded eyes closed in quiet contemplation as her hair blows about her like a brewing storm. On her forehead rests an arrow-shaped diadem, giving her an air of exotic royalty, while a glimmering metal collar graces her slender white neck. She is both free and caged, wild and serene. I have seen lesser art at museums, and yet, in a country where graffiti is illegal and mandates corporal punishment, this breathless beauty was probably painted by some anonymous street artist no one will ever worship. This discovery is exactly what I love about Kampong Glam—that here I find the finest treasures where I least expect them, even behind two green garbage cans that somehow cannot rob the painting of its arresting delights.

Despite its status as Singapore's "Muslim Quarter," Kampong Glam, like Singapore itself, is a melting pot of international cultures. Affectionately named after the medicinal *gelam* tree, Kampong Glam was once the seat of a Malay royal village that now boasts lively, lantern-lit Japanese *izakayas*; Mexican *taquerias*; and Turkish hookah lounges enveloped in clouds of watermelon-scented smoke. In fact, Kampong Glam is one of the only places in Singapore locals and tourists visit with equal enthusiasm, for strolling down its streets is like embarking on an exotic adventure a world away from Singapore's ascetic cleanliness and stark modern skyscrapers of gleaming glass and steel. Here one can purchase Pakistani prayer rugs with compasses that point to Mecca from a smooth-talking, shaggy Iranian named Moe; custom-made musky fragrances in hand-blown-and-painted perfume

bottles from a bespectacled Arab apothecary; and glass mosaic lanterns that glow like green and purple stars.

As I turn the corner into Arab Street, a store with dark-tinted windows and a wooden door left temptingly ajar beckons. Tingling with curiosity, I cautiously step inside. At once, a potpourri of scents seduces and overwhelms my senses, only intensified by the dull obsidian walls and dim lighting. I peer around tentatively, admiring delicate glass flutes set against Indonesian darkwood shelves, some dabbed with miniature carnations along their base, others dyed various shades of ombré blue—all of them elegant and exotic. Delicate feather jewelry hangs from bronze trees tarnished with time, perfume guidebooks lean on hawk-shaped bookends, and a gentle zephyr from the air-conditioner rustles the page in an ancient typewriter. I am greeted by the proprietor Deniz, who ushers me with excited gestures into his perfume laboratory.

The room's walls are lined from top to bottom with tiny black scent bottles both familiar and exotic—cypress, juniper berry, sandalwood. Protruding from the walls is a desk cluttered with beakers of varying sizes, pipettes, test-tubes, and conical cylinders, like a homely laboratory bench. With an exclamation of delight, he lifts the stopper off a heavy glass jar dripping with golden essential oils, beckoning for me to smell the potent infusion.

“Frankincense, birch bark, and cedar wood,” Deniz confides with a grin.

I inhale, overwhelmed by the scent's potent beauty, and before I know it, we are having Turkish tea.

Over tulip-shaped glasses of cardamom tea and clinking spoons, Deniz weaves a story of his merchant ancestors who had once traveled the Silk Road—the dry, hostile, and grueling path that once connected the desires of nations. Clutching worn leather sacks of frankincense and myrrh, they had left Constantinople to trek under scorching summer heat, delivering their gifts to Chinese traders who in return gave them lush furs and exquisite porcelain. Deniz tells me that in his family, the science of scent had been passed down for four centuries. Scent, of all our senses, he says, has the strongest memory and associations. Humans can distinguish among over

ten thousand different odor molecules that interact with the brain's limbic system, the body's memory and emotion powerhouse. To him, scents are wildly arresting in their ability to conjure melancholy and elicit joy, and because of this, Deniz, armed with his family's leather-bound perfume recipe book, had moved years ago from Istanbul to Singapore to open his little shop far from his native land.

When Deniz mentions that most of the shopkeepers in Kampong Glam are migrants from the Middle East and South Asia, it reminds me that the place I call home is not home for many of its residents. As we sip tea, I ask Deniz what it feels like to be so far away from his motherland.

Deniz closes his eyes, long black lashes resting against mottled tan skin, and quotes Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*: "Every one of us is losing something precious. Lost opportunities, lost possibilities, feelings we can never get back. That's part of what it means to be alive." I sigh deeply and stare into the abyss of my teacup.

Murakami has been one of my favorite authors since sixth grade. It is he who inspires my poetry, so hearing Deniz's words resonates deeply. In my journey to Deerfield Academy in a country ten thousand miles away from home, I lost the home I once had—my family, friendships, language, and culture—and, three arduous years later, continue to feel these losses in my bones. Yet there is always something to cling onto, something we can create during our period of loss: a piece of portable culture, a little terrarium away from home. After all, nostalgia is a part of memory, no matter how shallow or infantile or punctured it is, and memory is a tool for survival. And so, in a perfumer's shop off the Muslim Quarter in Singapore, I found an unexpected home.

Callie Phui-Yen Hoon was a tenth grader at Deerfield Academy in Deerfield, Massachusetts when she wrote about her discoveries in a Singaporean perfume shop.

Arrangements

SOPHIA HU

ONCE ATE AN ENTIRE EDIBLE ARRANGEMENT IN COMPLETE SILENCE. Well, I suppose my aunt may have helped, but for as much as she ate that week, or even that month, I'm pretty sure I can take most of the credit. And I do. Whenever something happens that makes one of us relive that week, I'll inevitably break the sad silence with "Hey, remember when I ate that entire Edible Arrangement?" and everyone will laugh. That's what I do when someone drifts into that headspace; I say something to make them laugh.

If you're unfamiliar with the concept, an Edible Arrangement is fruit cut and speared and organized to resemble a bouquet of flowers. It's overpriced and, depending on how fancy you're feeling, it can be dipped in chocolate or rolled in sugar, skewered, and shoved into an unnecessarily ornate vase. Because nothing says love like overwrought, room-temperature fruit.

This particular arrangement was upper mid-range, chocolate-dipped strawberries skewered with candied pineapple and countless blossoms made from the ubiquitous shades of melon infecting fruit salads far and near. I really hate melon; it's bland and simultaneously soft and gritty and there's always too much; and there it was in all its glory, mocking me in the form of daisies.

I started with the melon.

We'd just gotten back from making a different kind of arrangement, viewing different flowers. It's difficult to pick flowers for a funeral, to walk the line between "celebration of life" and "explosion of gardenias." It's harder when you're trying to pick something for a three-foot-long casket.

I kept trying to speak, but every time I opened my mouth the words weren't there. I've always been the one who had words, both the supply and the ability to use them like an assassin, and now they were gone, like her. Saturday night, I had a cousin and long-winded champagne toasts. Sunday morning, I had paramedics and frantic five a.m. phone calls. Monday afternoon, I had a fruit arrangement and nothing to say.

So I sat across the table from my aunt, in the house where she grew up,

trying to figure out if her suddenly graying hair was a result of the lighting or the stress, and made my way through approximately four pounds of fruit while straining to hear through the white noise in my ears, waiting for words. People came and went, patting shoulders and accepting seemingly endless deliveries of trays of baked ziti from the local Italian restaurant, and we sat silently.

The fruit was gone before the words came. I didn't realize it until my aunt laughed, a pathetic squawk of imitation of the real thing, but still the closest any of us had gotten in the past 24 hours, and I looked up at the crystal vase full of empty skewers.

I don't remember it, but I did a reading at the funeral. I'm told that I did a lovely job with the reading but otherwise shook uncontrollably. I still have the photocopy folded into a box in my nightstand, along with a copy of the eulogy I don't remember my brother giving.

I do remember walking into the church at the beginning, trailing behind the too-small white casket with the too-large flower arrangement, and thinking that the flowers looked like the four pounds of fruit I'd eaten two days prior.

I really hate melon.

Sophia Hu wrote about the days that followed her cousin's death when she was a ninth grader at Churchill Junior High School in East Brunswick, New Jersey.

The Way the City Breathes

MIGUEL AVILA

EVERYTHING I'VE LEARNED ABOUT GRAFFITI has essentially come from this artist right here who was my teacher. He started doing graffiti when he was twelve years old in Miami. He's 41 years old now and he's only been coming to Oakland the past five years doing this kind of graffiti. He's been teaching me for about a year now.

He paints this angel for several different reasons. One big reason is just to pay homage to his friends who have passed away: give an angel to the streets and make the streets happier. That's his philosophy. He also just

loves to craft. He loves the concept of—what he calls it is a modern antique. This image looks very similar to an Ethiopian angel. He kind of modernized it using some parts of graffiti, some parts of hip hop.

One internship I did was in North Oakland. If you ever drive by it you'll know which one it is: the building with a bunch of murals there. That organization started as an antique store and an art collective. And as it developed over the months, graffiti artists slowly started to come in to sell their work anonymously, because most graffiti artists don't want their identity to be known. Every second Saturday of the month from six to two a.m. at night, a little event happens inside his shop. He has live music going on. He has a wall in his backyard that is constantly being painted over, just layers and layers of artwork. At these events a street artist or a group of street artists will go up to that and do live artwork for the community. When it started it was just that little shop, but now the shop owner is building a community. That strip with all the coffee shops, they're starting to get into the Second Saturday event, and more and more people are starting to do it. I think it's real interesting what he's doing there.

On Thursdays I interned with an art collective. All types of artists are constantly going through this organization, sharing their artwork. You have poets and graffiti artists. You have people who make ceramic statues, papier maché, portraits. The only rule is if you want to show in a gallery you have to do a group show. There's a youth art show that happens every first Friday of May. They give youth the opportunity to curate the way they want to, in a professional way. Hundreds of people come out to these shows, and so it's really jumpstarting the youth's career. I participated in last year's show. I screen-printed about 50 to 75 posters the night before and I just gave them away. If people come out to see my artwork in a show, I want to give them something back in return. I'm all about community.

Viejo, that's my tag. If you see the word *viejo*, you know it's me. It's the Spanish word for old man. I paint this image of an old man: the nose, the mustache, the beard, the big ear, the kind of receding hairline, and then the bald spot, and there's usually a little "Viejo" written next to it. Things that are old are always constantly forgotten. Culture is constantly being forgotten. History is constantly being forgotten. The elders are not being respected the way they should be. I put it on the street to put that message in the world:

“Well, if you’re not gonna respect ‘em, I’m gonna put it in your face!” Things that are old still have a use in society, still have meaning.

I love giving presents to people. We just paint on a huge piece of plywood, we make huge canvasses and we just leave ‘em on the street as presents for anybody to take. We do that a lot: just drive around the city and drop it off for anybody to keep. I do it for people who don’t know who I am and just appreciate the artwork. But also for people who do know me, within the community of graffiti. They’re like, “Oh! Viejo’s up there now. Viejo’s over here.”

My parents don’t support the graffiti. They don’t understand the graffiti. And I get it. Parents don’t want their child sneaking off in the middle of the night and vandalizing property. But they appreciate the significance I have behind my artwork and how seriously I take it. So I get support when I’m doing canvases, but when I’m doing spray paint art, they’re like, “That’s not gonna take you anywhere.” And I always explain, “I don’t want it to take me anywhere. I just want to do it ‘cause it makes me happy.”

When you have a large group of different people who have different beliefs and different cultural mindsets, you’re bound to have one group that’s not as looked at. I don’t believe that’s right; I think everybody should be respected equally. So I’m always down to hear about people’s stories and what they believe and who they believe and why they believe in this thing, because it’s just as important as my beliefs. I believe it all stems from one common belief. All these religions had to come from somewhere. There’s always an origin spot. If you look at Buddhism and Catholicism and Daoism and all these different religions, they all have some sort of commonality in one way or the other.

When you have such a huge city, you can see where people have been. It’s kind of a visual history. And I just love seeing that. Driving down the street, I’m like, “Oh! Optimist! I know him! How the hell did he get under that bridge?” You know, “I want to get under that bridge and I want to show him that I was there, too.” It’s really just like a huge game of hide and seek for me. I just see where people have been and where they’re wanting to go. It’s the way the city breathes.

Miguel Avila was in the twelfth grade at MetWest high school in Oakland, California when he spoke about his experiences as a street artist, in an interview conducted when he was in residence at the Woolman Semester School.

II. REFLECTIONS

Just as I believe in the cold of Hoth, just as I believe in the swamps of Dagobah, and just as I believe that Tatooine has two moons, I believe in Luke Skywalker. Some of you out there might say, “Luke Skywalker, Star Wars? What a nerd!” To you, in the words of Leia Organa, I’d say you’re a bunch of scruffy nerf herders! And some of my fellow nerds out there might say, “Luke Skywalker? That vanilla, white-bread, lame-ass guy with daddy issues? Why not Han Solo or Jango Fett!?” Luke gets his ass kicked by Tusken Raiders and by a snow Yeti, he needs a haircut, he can’t even give Yoda a piggy-back ride without getting sweaty and, of course, the guy kissed his sister. In fact, the only action he gets in all three movies, which sadly amounts to two kisses, is from his sister!” Despite that, with every midichlorian in my body, with all the power and wisdom of the Force, and with all the love in my heart, I believe in Luke Skywalker. I have for all my life . . .

From “Skywalker,” by Clayton Starr, Beaver Country Day School, Brookline, Massachusetts

Why do people not know me? I know who I am, this makes me comfortable looking into a mirror. But there is an automatic fear of me because I am a 6-foot 2-inch 210-pound muscular African-American male who walks with his head held high. Due to the portrayal of African-American males involved in drug dealing, gangbanging, flaunting money, denouncing women, and glorifying sex there are already set perceptions of me. One young African-American male can be unarmed walking with a hood on in a predominantly white neighborhood holding a drink and a bag of Skittles, then be labeled a threat to society and later killed. Whenever I walk in predominantly white neighborhoods I feel that my apparel needs to give the sense that I am not dangerous, because I surely do not want to end a victim of this society.

Who am I? I am the dreamer who dreams when his senses are most intense in broad daylight . . .

From “So You Think You Know Me?” by Norrlyn-Michael Allen, Champaign Central High School, Champaign, Illinois

Skywalker

CLAYTON STARR

JUST AS I BELIEVE IN THE COLD OF HOTH, just as I believe in the swamps of Dagobah, and just as I believe that Tatooine has two moons, I believe in Luke Skywalker. Some of you out there might say, “Luke Skywalker, Star Wars? What a nerd!” To you, in the words of Leia Organa, I’d say you’re a bunch of scruffy nerf herders! And some of my fellow nerds out there might say, “Luke Skywalker? That vanilla, white-bread, lame-ass guy with daddy issues? Why not Han Solo or Jango Fett!?” Luke gets his ass kicked by Tusken Raiders and by a snow Yeti, he needs a haircut, he can’t even give Yoda a piggy-back ride without getting sweaty and, of course, the guy kissed his sister. In fact, the only action he gets in all three movies, which sadly amounts to two kisses, is from his sister!” Despite that, with every midichlorian in my body, with all the power and wisdom of the Force, and with all the love in my heart, I believe in Luke Skywalker. I have for all my life, for three reasons.

Reason 1: Luke purely wanted to be part of something bigger than he was.

I mean, come on. The guy’s name is Skywalker! Luke is a dreamer. For the first nineteen years of his life, Luke looks off across the desert romantically every night, searching for the truth, searching for Obi-Wan-Kenobi, searching for, in the words of John Green, a Great Perhaps. I don’t believe in Luke for that, because at some point everyone fantasizes about being a hero or adventure. But I believe in Luke because he prays selflessly and purely just to help a cause he believes in. Luke doesn’t wish to be the galaxy’s savior. Sure, he dreams of joining the rebellion, avenging his father’s death and ending the tyranny of the empire, but initially he just wants to be one of the thousands of indispensable pilots that the Death Star will destroy. At first, Luke has these aspirations for glory, but as he grows, Luke begins to fight not for himself but for a nobler, universal cause: the return of the Jedi and the return of freedom. I believe in Luke not because he blew up the Death Star, but because he purely wanted to do some good for what he stood for. I believe in Luke because that’s all I want to do, too.

Reason 2: I was a Jedi.

I believe in Luke Skywalker because when I was little, I would wake up, open my door with the Force, and eat my breakfast with a plastic lightsaber. After breakfast, my padawan-training began as my brothers and father launched tennis balls at me only to be deflected by my Jedi skills. I pushed over the little basketball hoop in the basement and speeder-biked through the MoonClayton of Endor's lush forests. I spent hours in my backyard alone, fighting in the Galactic Civil War, tearing down the Empire, rebuilding it and exploring my knowledge of the Force. I believe in Luke Skywalker because I, too, resisted the temptations of the Darkside, and I, too, learned to confront the enemy not with anger but with logic and patience. I believe in Luke Skywalker because, from Comm Ave to my basement to my backyard, he was right there with me the whole time.

Reason 3: Forgiveness.

It's not like Darth Vader never played catch with Luke or missed a soccer game from time to time. Darth Vader killed Luke's mom, a score of Luke's friends, and almost every Jedi; he separated Luke from his sister, he severed Luke's hand. And Darth was the backbone for the most oppressive and pervasive space empire in history. I think that Darth Vader was the absolute worst father of all time. Yes, Darth eventually saves Luke's life, but still, I think his hole was too far dug. I believe in Luke Skywalker because despite all of the terrible, terrible things his father did, Luke could forgive him. I believe in Luke because not only does he forgive his father but he carries Darth and his two-ton suit through the Death Star as it falls apart. Luke risks his life for a man he never knew, a man that poured oceans of darkness and death into the galaxy and into Luke's life. But the real reason Luke's forgiveness is so amazing and so unique, the reason I believe in him, is that Luke never stopped believing in his father. I believe in Luke Skywalker because, despite all logic, Luke refused to believe that his father was full of hate. Luke knew that there was a well of goodness and humanity deep within all the machinery and all the anger. I believe in Luke Skywalker because he showed me that love will always overpower hate, and that everyone has goodness inside them.

Clayton Starr was in the eleventh grade at Beaver Country Day School in Brookline, Massachusetts when he wrote about his unshaken belief in Luke Skywalker.

So You Think You Know Me?

NORRLYN-MICHAEL ALLEN

WHY DO PEOPLE NOT KNOW ME? I know who I am, this makes me comfortable looking into a mirror. But there is an automatic fear of me because I am a 6-foot 2-inch 210-pound muscular African-American male who walks with his head held high. Due to the portrayal of African-American males involved in drug dealing, gangbanging, flaunting money, denouncing women, and glorifying sex there are already set perceptions of me. One young African-American male can be unarmed walking with a hood on in a predominantly white neighborhood holding a drink and a bag of Skittles, then be labeled a threat to society and later killed. Whenever I walk in predominantly white neighborhoods I feel that my apparel needs to give the sense that I am not dangerous, because I surely do not want to end a victim of this society.

Who am I? I am the dreamer who dreams when his senses are most intense in broad daylight. Insomnia ruins my nights and keeps me from having visions that comfort me while sleeping. I struggle in late evenings from tiresome days later becoming early mornings. My inability to rest causes me to lack attentiveness during moments in broad daylight. I am the child who carries a questioning mind. Unable to rest I become frozen, a statue in its own bed producing more thoughts than ripples when a pebble collides against the flat surface of a pond.

At times I wondered what was into me. Regardless of all that was happening my spirit ultimately became better and my demeanor was changing in a positive light. As my optimistic mindset defeated pessimistic ideals I envisioned fulfilling my personal desires of playing football and being a clinical psychologist. My faith and determination then locked the rooms rotting with failure and opened the doors generated with the scent of success.

I am a young African-American male longing for his father with the desire to be whole, because a father is a foreign language he will never

understand. The night his father left, he left a hole in his son's heart and a space in his life. This child matured into a well-mannered young male from the lessons of women, mentors, and other disciplinarians. The toll of being a bastard played with him psychologically and emotionally, not knowing what to say or how to feel, so he spends this time alone sorting the dirty laundry in his life. There are no longer incisions that will allow an entrance or exit to the home of these flustered emotions. Though I may be found confused I always find cleansing within my relationships, an abundance of brothers, multitude of mothers, and overflowing amount of friends.

The fears I have are because you do not know me, instead of being viewed as an individual I am accounted for as a number. I fear my voice will not be heard and my passion will be neglected. I fear I will be judged by the color of my skin and not the content of my character. I fear there will never be social justice since race is the deciding factor in most scenarios.

I cannot use the projection of my voice alone to eliminate the misconceptions of our African-American male culture when society uses a stereo to expand stereotypes. I use my character and take it personal to prove that our stereotypes do not represent every individual of a certain religion, culture, or ethnic background. Whenever I walk into a store I represent myself in a way that shows I have respect for myself and people. I also strive to bring positive energy to others around me although it may not always change the opinions of those deeply embedded in the images revealed by society and social media. I am not an animal and I refuse to be a pet of society though I fear I will never be seen as human, only an animal that made it out of the doghouse.

I dream that I can one day float on the same waters which sank my spirit when I felt that I had not received the love from my father I deserved. I am no longer a sunken ship because I was able to repair the damage from my wreck, I have arisen and my ship continues to rise. I will no longer live deep down in the depths of the ocean with the anchor-like moss pulling down my spirit, I will only live as the sharp-edged motor cutting through adversity becoming untangled and rising toward the surface of happiness. I desire not to be a product of this society, but that people will venture out

and recognize me for my personality. My dream is to be a positive force for others, especially those who cannot.

What are you going to do to change now that you know me? Now that you truly know my character it is your decision whether you treat me as a delinquent or grant others the benefit to make their own first impression. My life is a metaphor for African-American males carrying the expectation of failure on their shoulders and the brawl continues. We are aware that every mistake we make will be highlighted and never lived down but we know we will win if our fight does not cease.

Norrlyn-Michael Allen was in twelfth grade at Champaign Central High School in Champaign, Illinois when he wrote about the stereotypes he faces daily.

The Story You Don't Know

ANASTASIA KOROLEVA

WE LEARN IN SCHOOL ABOUT SEGREGATION and discrimination, and we are shown from a young age how whites are much better off than minorities are. Some people assume that whites have these grand houses and these amazing lives and don't even have to work for it. As we can see from our history, white people do have more advantages than minorities, but it is not okay to jump to the conclusion that I'm rich based on my skin color. It is a stereotype to think that all white people are wealthy and don't have to work too hard for their wealth.

I live in a very nice neighborhood. I get a great education, and I know that I am much better off than a lot of other people. Everyone I know has enough money for housing, food, and education. I don't even fully understand what poverty is. But my family had to work very hard to earn the privileged life that we now have.

Past generations of my family have had incredibly difficult lives. They were not wealthy or privileged. In fact, they were the complete opposite.

My grandfather fought and almost died in World War II. Members of my family survived the Holocaust. I don't consider it a privilege to go to war at age eighteen, like my grandfather did. I don't consider it a privilege to have to watch your mother get shot in the head by a Nazi soldier when you're a kid, like my other grandfather did. It certainly isn't a privilege to have to survive many years in a brutal concentration camp, like my great-uncle did.

My grandparents and my great-grandparents were poor, and went through many hardships. They wanted to create a better life for their kids and they made many sacrifices to create better lives for the future generations. My parents are both immigrants who moved here from Russia twenty years ago. They had absolutely nothing when they arrived and started working right away to provide for my brother and me. Thanks to their hard work, my brother and I now have amazing opportunities open to us.

I know that my family is in great condition financially compared to most parts of the world, but it is still not okay to assume that I'm privileged by looking at my peachy skin. My family lives in a tiny condo, and I never buy clothes that are over twenty dollars. Sometimes my family struggles to pay the bills.

Even though the stereotype that white people are rich isn't as harsh or painful as many black stereotypes, it still hurts. It hurts that people think that my family hasn't worked hard to deserve what have. They don't know us, so they have no right to say that. If we ever want to eliminate prejudice, we need to stop making assumptions about people. Every person has a story that you don't know.

Anastasia Koroleva wrote about her experience as a child of Russian immigrants, living in a mostly white and well-off Boston suburb, when she was in the tenth grade at Brookline High School in Brookline, Massachusetts.

Why I Joined

JAKE PORTER

TONIGHT WHEN YOU GO HOME TO LOOK AT YOUR KIDS, what do you want to see them doing later in their lives? You may want your baby boy or girl to sprout into the next millionaire or have the next big idea in business or medicine. You may want them to make it in life, buy a house, have a nice job, get married, even have a few kids. But most of all, I'll bet the world you want them to be safe.

I want to protect your children's rights to all those things and much more. I accept what the Army will train me to do: to stop any threat to our freedom. I don't see the Army as a death march, I see it as a privilege. I want to look death straight in the eyes and fight valiantly for my country. Looking back later in life, I'll see a young man who had the courage to stand up for his fellow countrymen and protect them.

Before I become a soldier I will encounter many physical and mental barriers, but I must not falter. A soldier must be strong in mind, body, and spirit before he leaves. One must accept the physical burden of being able to perform on the battlefield and the mental burden of possible death and unimaginable harm done to one's body. I'm not joining because my mom or dad or teachers told me to, but because I am prepared to fight and die if need be for my country.

This urge to serve began to bloom when I was in kindergarten. I remember sitting in class and watching those two 747s crash into the World Trade Center and it still sends chills down my spine. I look back on other, less publicized events, like service members standing watch outside a small hospital door while a young child lay succumbing to disease—not because they were ordered to, but because they respect the will to never stop fighting.

These men and women give everything so that we may live our lives behind a desk, flipping burgers, making copies, playing a sport, or even mooching off the system. No matter what they see happening to our country, they fight to protect it. That gave me something to look up to as a child.

How many people think that someday they will serve our country like this—and of them, how many go out and do it?

In the last few years, my mind started gearing toward the military. I began watching the news heavily and broadening my understanding of political views, policies, and how the government works. One thing I always noticed was that the military always came up with the short end of the stick. Seeing veterans plead for more benefits and not receiving them, or the military budget being cut significantly, just made me fighting mad. I was inspired by those who supported our troops, such as Brian Stann or Chael Sonnen.

I've grown up in a place where 98 percent of high school graduates go on to college the year after they graduate, and this is now placing me in the 2 percent. At my school I'm almost an outcast for doing this. I'm seen as that crazy kid who doesn't want to put the time in and go to college but would rather go out and shoot guns and play in the sand. Little do they know that it's so much more. I will be meeting all new people, traveling the world, having my college paid for, learning life skills, learning how to take care of myself, and—most of all—fighting for their rights to go to college and receive an education. When someone asks me why I'm joining and why I want to be on the front lines, I smile and simply respond, "Someone's gotta do it."

Jake Porter was a twelfth grader at Kohler High School in Kohler, Wisconsin (population 2,000) when he wrote about his decision to join the military.

No, I Wasn't In a Fire

TEKIUH CHIANN HUTTON

Excuse me sweetie, were you burned in a fire?" "Hey, I don't want to be rude but what happened to your skin?" "Do you have eczema?" So often I get these questions, as people stumble over the line between not wanting to hurt my feelings and having the courage to ask what makes me so physically different.

I have epidermolytic hyperkeratosis, a rare form of the hereditary skin disorder ichthyosis. Long name, but simple to explain. The keratin in my skin clumps up, causing it to look scaly like a reptile's, and my body makes none of its moisture, which brings a brand new meaning to "ashy."

On top of that, my skin cells rebuild at an accelerated rate, which burns energy and boosts my metabolism. This fact is both bad and good. The bad: I'm missing a protective layer of tissue usually found near the epidermis. If I barely bump something or rub against something wrong, my skin will tear like paper. This leads to worried stares and people treating me like an entire body part just fell off. Yet there is a bright side: With my skin cells reproducing so fast, a wound that would take a week or two to heal in normal people only takes a few days for me. (My dad used to call me "Wolverine's little cousin," as in the X-Men.)

No matter if my skin is having a good or bad day, there are some nuisances I can't avoid. The more skin that builds up, the more uncomfortable I get. I take more baths than the average bear to keep the buildup down, but hey, who doesn't mind being extra clean! At the same time my skin likes to follow this rule called "Thou shalt shed and fall off everywhere." That can get frustrating, especially when I'm at the house of someone who's not used to foreign particles randomly appearing on the floor. And since my skin makes *none* of its own moisture, I have to use lubrication methods that most people would find excessive, mixing a whole jar of petroleum jelly with extremely thick skin cream to come up with something that works for me. Otherwise my skin will be ridiculously dry and start to crack within a couple of hours, and that's not a pretty sight.

Many times I've been looked at funny and made to believe that I wasn't as good as "normal" kids. Except for a few bone alignment issues, however, the rest of my body functions are relatively healthy. And a while ago, I found out that I'm one of only 250,000 people in the world with this disorder, which makes me pretty special!

Tekiuh Chiann Hutton wrote about her unusual skin when she was a freshman at North Kentucky University in Highland Heights, Kentucky.

The Wrong Turn

ERIK FLORES

February 12, 2013, been doing what I do best for about a year now. Hanging out with friends drinking, smoking and going to parties like every weekend. Not a single worry or concern that comes to mind. No job and sophomore year going down the drain, failing most classes. Getting high or drunk nearly every day. Only good thing about my life is this perfect cheerleader girl friend I met a couple months ago who's always by my side; still, drugs and alcohol have me doing her wrong.

February 30, 2013, my girl's birthday coming up and I only have thirty dollars to my name. All the messed up-things I've done behind her back have me feeling wrecked, thinking so much about her. I decide to buy her something nice to show her how much I appreciate her staying by my side no matter what. Stupid and influenced by dumb friends, I start dealing drugs and get my hands on anything that will make me a quick buck.

March 1, 2013, life's good, making quick money with no hassle, taking my girl out to eat like every other normal couple. Girlfriend doesn't suspect a thing nor does she ask where the money's coming from, then again any money I'm getting gets spent that same day or week. School's still bad, I'm suspended three times. I don't even know how I'm still attending it, I guess I really get along with the dean there. He always did say he saw potential in me; I don't know why and never really believe him.

March 16, 2013, girlfriend's birthday is around the corner and the only cash I've managed to save up is eighty dollars. I could easily ask my dad for whatever else I needed and he would gladly help me. But I'm not a little kid anymore and I'm tired of depending on him for everything I need. I want my own personal cash flow regardless of how I get it.

I decide to buy a little more weed and double up on what I spend on it. It's all going well, have the ounce for three to four days and already manage to get rid of most of it, only a couple grams left. I might be a little over-excited on the money I am making, I even have more than I actually need for the

present. To celebrate a bit, I ask an older friend who drives if he will go get us some drinks and maybe smoke the weed I have left.

We're on our way to the liquor store, smoking a blunt in his car, when we stop for a red light and spot a cop car to the right looking straight at us. What can we do, run out of the car and try and get away? Smoke fills the car and we see the green light go on. We decide to go about our business and hope for the best.

We're halfway down the road when we hear the blurp of the police car behind us and pull over. We aren't going to go on a high speed chase in a Toyota Camry over something that I thought was no big deal.

We both got booked that night: me for attempt to distribute and possession, him for providing false information to an officer because of his recent warrant for not going to court. I spent two weeks in Juvenile Hall, losing my girl and the money I had made. I guess while I was serving time somebody told my girl what I was doing. She never once thought I was doing it all for her.

Erik Flores was in eleventh grade at the Camden Community Day School in San Jose, California when he wrote about drugs, alcohol, and his girlfriend.

Too Fat

TIARA ANN MENG

LOOK, ANOTHER PHOTOSHOPPED MODEL. Oh, there's another one. And another one. Look, there is a seven-year-old girl looking at that photoshopped model and thinking, "I want to be just like her when I grow up!" Starting the downward spiral to a negative perception of her body image.

It starts when you're young, just when you can start understanding that it matters to others what you look like. This is when you start looking up to your mom and wearing her makeup, looking up to your sister and stealing her clothes. But most devastating, when you look up to that magazine

in the doctor's office about how to drop 30 pounds in a week. You walk into the office and they ask you to step on the scale and you see those numbers pop up. The nurse says "Very good!" but all you can think is that the girl on the cover of that magazine looks so much better than you and must weigh less too.

When you get home, you start trying to wear tighter clothes, more makeup, spending hours on your hair, just so that someone will bother to look at you. You spend weeks at a time working on your body, just to get the perfectly flat stomach, thigh gap, and perky butt. All so that someone will look at you and acknowledge that you're trying. Once they do, it's not enough. You realize you don't look like the models in the media. You continue your spiral down the never-ending staircase to hell.

Now that you think that you'd never look good because you're "too fat" or "too short," you start changing what you were meant to look like. You try finding ways to elongate your body so you aren't so short, you wear six-inch heels every day so people forget you're wearing them, and you start lying about your height to people just so they will forget how tall you really are. You think that you're too big for anyone to love. Everyone knows about eating disorders and there are probably a few girls or boys in your school that have one, so you think, "Why don't I try that?" So you pick a date to stop eating: March 17th, you're going to have your last full meal. You skip breakfast, you don't eat lunch at school, and when you go home for supper you tell your mum that you're not hungry. That was easy enough for one day, but now your stomach hurts. You keep telling yourself that you need to look like that girl in the magazine. You repeat it over and over in your head until you start to believe it.

Weeks go by, and you get daily compliments from people that you'd never thought would talk to you. Everyone thinks that you look so good, so you think that you should keep starving yourself. Pound by pound, you start losing part of yourself.

110 . . . 109 . . . 108 . . . 107 . . . 106 . . . 105. No one notices how drastically you're losing weight until you're lying in the hospital bed because you fainted during a presentation at school. The school calls 911 saying that you fainted and hit your head. When they get you to the hospital, they find out your body mass index is much lower than it should be for your age. You blame it on the

stress of school and the sports that you're doing. They accept that and let you leave with a clean bill of health. You go home and try to eat something, just enough to make sure that you won't faint again, but your body won't let you. You eat just a tiny apple and you throw it up twenty minutes later. You don't worry about it. You just think that it's your inner self telling you that you're too fat.

104 . . . 103 . . . 102 . . . 101 . . . 100 . . . You keep getting the compliments, but inside you know something is wrong. Still, you'd rather be skinny than average. Everything seems to be getting better. You feel beautiful, you're happy with your weight and you actually got a boyfriend. After a few months, you tell him about your eating disorder and he tries to tell you that you're perfect the way you are, but you just don't believe him. After fighting for weeks, you break up and it makes things worse. You start thinking that it was your fault: you're too fat, too ugly, too awful for anyone to like. You start getting worse, you went from one small apple or pear a day to nothing at all, just zero-calorie flavored water.

99 . . . 98 . . . 97 . . . 96 . . . 95 . . . 94 . . . The compliments stop. You hear people whispering behind you and you automatically think they are talking about how fat you are getting. The whispers just linger in your head, all day long, over and over. The little voice inside your head just keeps telling you that you aren't skinny enough.

93 . . . 92 . . . 91 . . . 90 . . . 89 . . . A big presentation is coming up. You're worried that you'll faint again and they will realize that something really is wrong this time. You were right. You faint, but this time you have nothing to blame it on. All the sports teams are over for the season and your stress can't be that high because nothing important or stressful is approaching. When you get to the hospital, they find out your body mass index has dropped three points. After your parents leave the room to get some coffee, the doctor asks if you are hiding anything from her. You look out the window at the laughing child chasing butterflies and say "No, I just got nervous in front of everyone." But everyone knows that's a lie. You used to be so outgoing and boisterous. You start crying as the doctor leaves because you know the act is up. Again, you are dismissed with a clean bill of health by the skin of your teeth. You know something needs to change but you're not willing to make that change.

88 . . . 87 . . . 86 . . . 85 . . . 84 . . . Your parents start to notice that your clothes don't fit like they did last week. You brush it off and go to school. Your best friend asks if you've been eating lately. You take her to the bathroom that no one ever goes to and tell her that you've been trying to lose weight, just not the healthy way. She tries to tell you how dangerous it is but you don't care, you just want to lose weight. You promise her not to tell anyone and you trust her not to tell anyone. A week later you get called down to the guidance office. Your mom, your dad, the guidance counselor, and a doctor are there. You start crying because you know what is going to happen.

After hours of talking, they take you to a clinic and make you stay there until you gain twenty pounds. They start monitoring what you eat and when you exercise. Someone is always watching you. Every time you go to the bathroom you can't flush until someone makes sure you didn't throw up your meal and they make sure you eat everything on your plate at every meal. After gaining fifteen pounds they think you'll be fine on your own and let you leave.

99 . . . 98 . . . 97 . . . 96 . . . 95 . . . You start losing weight again. It's just a habit. You know you have to go for a checkup so you drink gallons of water before and put ankle weights on. They think you're fine so they let you leave.

94 . . . 93 . . . 92 . . . 91 . . . 90 . . . It gets worse and worse. You start exercising more. In one week, you lose thirteen pounds. The biggest loss you've ever had and you couldn't feel better.

77 . . . 76 . . . 75 . . . 74 . . . The voices in your head are louder. "Too fat! How could someone ever love someone that fat!" All you want to do is shut them up. You want them to stop. You hear about people slicing their arms to release the voices so you try it. It works. One cut, two cuts, three cuts. More and more until you can't feel your arm anymore but it makes you feel invincible. Suddenly you faint in the bathtub. You wake up hours later, drowned in your own blood.

But here's the kicker. Your body didn't wake up. Your soul did. You look down at your lifeless body lying in the tub. You try to wake yourself up but it won't work. Your lips are a lifeless blue and your eyes are sunken to the point of no return. You can't believe that this happened, but in a way you're happy. The voices stopped. You're happy. No more little voices telling

you that you are too fat. You start to feel as if you're dissolving. You look into the mirror and you can see right through yourself. "I'm coming home, Grammy, I missed you. I hope you're not—" And suddenly you're gone.

To most you will be known as the girl that had an eating disorder and killed herself. But to the important people, you will forever be known as the girl that they loved, no matter the size, whose life ended too early and who could have gone on to great things.

For those who are suffering from an eating disorder or self-harming themselves, listen carefully to what I can tell you: "You are beautiful just the way you are. *You are you. There is nothing that anyone would change about you. You are loved.*"

Tiara Ann Meng wrote about her battle with anorexia when she was in the tenth grade at the Madison Area Memorial High School in Madison, Wisconsin.

Everything Will Be All Right

MONEE BROADNAX

I AM A GUINEA PIG. It's funny how one single person's body could be so mysterious, like my body doesn't want to find out any answers. Growing up, most of my time was spent at specialists, neurologists, physical therapists, having my blood drawn, and finally a surgery that would change my life forever. I would lie at night in my twin-size bed and wonder about everything, my brain like an erupting volcano shooting many questions at a time. But for years it stopped when I ask the dreaded question, "Why do you shake?"

Then I learned the answer. Goosebumps and a chill came up and down my spine at the moment Kaiser called; it had been three months since the last call from my neurologist. My mother grabbed a pen and paper but she seemed taken aback by the information she received. On the paper I read an unusual name that I had never heard of: "Vanishing White Matter Disease." Had they found a diagnosis or was this another blood test they wanted?

While I waited anxiously for my mom to end the phone call, I saw tears coming down her cheeks. My palms started to sweat and my head and hands began to shake more than usual. Finally, she laid the phone down and I heard her say “. . . life threatening.” More tears, and I wrapped my arms around her waist and hugged her, my eyes watering. “Everything is okay,” I assured her. I was glad there was a diagnosis, but I didn’t expect this.

About two weeks later, my family jumped in the car to go to the doctor. I brought my iPod because this was going to take a while. Inside the waiting room we took a seat. The doctors brought the adults in before me. About thirty minutes passed and I wanted this appointment to be over. Finally, the nurse brought me into the room. The doctor spoke directly to me.

“Two unaffected people, or carriers, have a 25 percent chance with each pregnancy of having a child together that is affected by the disorder,” I heard him say. “Each child would have a 50 percent chance of inheriting just one abnormal gene, which would make the child a carrier.”

My brain began asking questions. *Oh no! Since I am a carrier I could give this disease to my future children. So does this mean my parents have this somewhere in their bodies and they passed it on to me?*

“These episodes are precipitated by infections with fever or minor head trauma,” he continued. “So if you get really sick, have a really high fever, and have to go to the hospital, make sure you call to inform me.”

Well, I have to start taking my vitamins on a regular basis, and bring those masks that cover the nose and mouth at school. I wonder if they’ll let me? Aw, man! I forget my other questions.

Once I stepped inside the house I immediately called my best friend to tell her. “Everything will be okay,” I said. “I’m fine.” After an hour of conversation we hung up the phone. I grabbed my laptop, logged onto Facebook and Twitter, surfed YouTube for hilarious videos. Finally, I gathered all my courage to look up my disease. Everything I read online about Vanishing White Matter Disease contradicted everything my neurologist had said.

I turned off the computer, kneeled down, and thanked Jehovah for giving me strength to forget the negative aspect of my disease and be optimistic about the situation. For thirteen years I begged for a diagnosis. It killed me inside not to know the huge mystery my body kept from me.

Some people think that it's tragic that I have a life-threatening disease, but I say it's another trait of mine I am yet trying to figure out.

Doctors can say that you will die tomorrow or in ten years from now, but I know my body better than anyone. Now my answer to the question "Why do you shake?" can be to reassure myself. I have a disease and everything will be all right.

Monee Broadnax was in twelfth grade at the Lighthouse Charter Community School in Oakland, California when she wrote about being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness.

Memo from the Middle

TIFFINIE ALVAREZ

I'VE BEEN SITTING AT THE COMPUTER DESK staring at my name flashing in a Microsoft Word document for the last forty-five minutes. When trying to write about the topic of my parent's divorce, I find myself unable to find a starting point and an end. Everything that happened in the middle is clear to me. I just can't decide whether or not I want to start at their marriage or the car ride when my mom told me they were done. The end is undecided, as I have no idea what the future holds for us. The middle. It stays the same. If I start with marriage, the middle is fighting. If I start with an announcement of divorce, the middle is fighting. It occurs to me that there wasn't much my parents could do but fight.

This is not to say that they were bad parents, because they weren't. They did everything they could to ensure that my brother Nate and I had a happy, relatively normal childhood. My mom used to make shapes out of our ketchup when she gave us fries. It was never even simple things like hearts or smiley faces; she'd try to write our names in bubble letters or make Nate a dinosaur. Dad was more into teaching us everything. The earliest memory I have of my father is him helping me make a wooden model airplane in our kitchen.

When I was little they contrasted each other perfectly. Dad was

always serious and didn't like to joke. Mom was excited all the time and loved to laugh. Before they started to fight, they were good at bringing the best out in each other. But when they fought, they fought hard enough to make the progress disappear.

They tried to make it work but it just didn't. And somewhere between Thanksgiving of this year and the three weeks my dad was gone for work, they decided to call it quits.

I remember I was standing in Student Council helping the freshmen go over plans for Winter Dance, which now I no longer have the energy to attend. An announcement went off over the intercom, and with the commotion in the room I only heard my last name, which meant that either Nate was being paged or I was being paged. No one in the room really knew if it was my name or not, so I ended up sprinting out of the school. Running in school is weird because you aren't really running, you're briskly walking. I was focused on the sketches in permanent marker across the toe of my shoe and ended up slamming into a freshman who was also briskly walking. Eventually I slammed through the glass doors at the front of the school and slid smoothly into the rough fabric backseat of my Mom's gray car.

I was sitting in the back, picking at a minuscule hole in the fabric shaped like an uneven nickel, while my mom talked about how she "found a few dollars at the bottom of my bag, your father and I are splitting up, what do you want from McDonalds."

I'm almost certain that she didn't give us this news exactly the way I describe it, but to me it sounded like she did. Maybe it has something to do with how weird this news was or how she had jumped topics so quickly. Regardless, everything seemed to happen in a blur. I remember she asked us how we felt about it, and Nate was just very silent and he looked really angry. We had no idea that his silence was just the tip of the iceberg. In the next few days he would only get angrier and barely speak to either of us. Nate was angry with mom because she was the one who told him they were getting a divorce. He was upset with me because I told him two weeks earlier that they wouldn't split up.

I, on the other hand, answered that I was still hungry and still wanted chicken nuggets. Clearly the news hadn't set in yet. Regardless, we went to

McDonalds and I got my chicken nuggets. I didn't react to the news or act strangely until a few days later when it really sunk in.

The tricky thing about divorce is that the process takes forever. I'm time-stamping this essay, December of 2013. By the time the divorce is finalized, by the time my dad moves out, by the time either of them considers dating again, I could be seventeen. My birthday is in April. Nate could be turning fifteen. His birthday is in August. Even though I could give you a clear beginning and middle for my parents' divorce, I'll never have an exact end. The end is always shifting; it moves around with every decision I make, or every decision my family makes. I wait and see, hoping that it works out well for all of us.

Tiffinie Alvarez wrote about her parents' divorce when she was in eleventh grade at Springfield Renaissance School in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Empanadas

MARIMAR MANITUANO

MY MOM LEFT FOR ECUADOR LAST APRIL FOR THREE MONTHS. It was the first time that she had left us with our father since we moved with him three years ago to New York City. My younger siblings and I knew we would miss her. Jose was about to graduate from middle school, Turiana had a Regents exam in math coming up, our eight-year-old sister Amelia was about to take her first standardized test—and I was about to take six high-stakes exams myself. My father is the superintendent of our building. I thought that we would be fine without my mother, but suddenly everything became a disaster.

At first my father did not have much work, so he picked up Amelia from school and made dinner. He always said to me, "Try to come home as soon as possible so you can help me." And I did. Things were running smoothly when suddenly my father's work in the building started piling up. Family responsibilities switched to me and I wanted to do everything

I could. But I was already very busy with SAT prep each morning, Regents and AP test prep after school, and Saturday classes.

Those months were crazy. I was leaving home at seven a.m., and coming back at six-thirty p.m. When my father no longer had time to make dinner for the family, I had to cook. After that, I cleaned up the kitchen, and then I prepared for what I call my part-time job. Since the beginning of eleventh grade, I have sold empanadas before school to students and teachers. This work made me feel useful and—most important—I was able to help support my father with money.

I made the empanadas at night and left them in the refrigerator ready to fry the next morning. Then I did part of my homework, took a shower, and went to sleep around one a.m.—I would finish the rest of my homework on the train. I woke up at five in the morning to fry my empanadas, make breakfast for my family, and get ready for school. I had to pack them very well because I live an hour away from school. On Tuesdays and Thursdays I attended student government meetings in first period, so I hurried to school to deliver the food early on those days.

My empanadas were popular, and all my friends wanted theirs at once. This was insane, but I found a solution: brown bags. Even though the empanadas took longer to pack, this way they were already separated for each of my friends. Everyone lined up, I called out the names on the bags, and the distribution was quicker. Success!

Before the three months that my mother was away, I used to tell her jokingly to be more productive at home. It was probably hurtful to her, but to me it seemed that she never did anything. The only thing she replied was, “You will never know how hard it is to be a mother until you become one.” During her absence, my responsibilities changed me. My experience made me realize how much I still need my mom, and I finally told her how hard it was when she was gone and how much I appreciated her. Today I have some idea how difficult it is to be the most important person in a family.

Marimar Mantuano was in twelfth grade at Pan American High School at Monroe, in the Bronx, New York, when she wrote about her family responsibilities while her mother was away in Ecuador.

III. DID YOU KNOW

All people should enjoy the benefits of a lasting and loving relationship. As a homosexual teen, I constantly think about my future. I think about the possible relationship I could establish in or after college with another man. If I find a man whom I learn to love and plan to spend the rest of my life with, I want the privilege to say “I’m married” to him. As a religious person, I want to be able to be married with the recognition of the church and in the eyes of my God. I want to have the option to adopt children and create a life for my partner and me. Without a legally binding contract and religious recognition for marriage, I can never have the same benefits and satisfaction given to my friends and family.

From “Legalization of Gay Marriage in Michigan,” by Austin Nathaniel Seavolt, Leslie High School, Leslie, Michigan

On May 5, 2000, a lawyer was murdered in his own law office. His name was Richard Armitage and he was my father. His murderer walks free down streets we let kids play on. My father has never received the justice he deserves because his prosecuting lawyers withheld favorable evidence from the defense. Even though clear forensic evidence pointed to one man, all the evidence in the case was thrown out.

From “My Brief Against Immunity,” by Allee Armitage, Oak Park High School, Kansas City, Missouri

Different forms of pesticides have been used around the world for thousands of years; and although they have been such a big part of human history, people still don’t realize how damaging they can be, especially to bees. The common belief in the United States is that pesticides are strictly beneficial, but as their use increases a growing body of incriminating evidence is forcing people to question just how great pesticides truly are. This evidence shows that pesticides are mixing in nature to form dangerous untested combinations, that modern application technologies are harming the environment through processes that aren’t yet fully understood, and that many pesticides commonly spread long distances outside of their application zone. Such factors are combining to decimate the bee population faster than ever before.

From “Pesticides Harm Bees,” by Ryan Rich, Marlette Junior-Senior High School, Marlette, Michigan

Legalization of Gay Marriage in Michigan

AUSTIN NATHANIEL SEAVOLT

IN THE COURSE OF AMERICA'S HISTORY, WE HAVE WITNESSED TWO important social revolutions: the women's suffrage movement and the civil rights movement, both of which centered on discrimination and unfair treatment in our society. As women and African Americans both fought for equal treatment in our society, American society adapted and evolved with a positive attitude. Today, another social movement is taking place, and has been for decades: the gay rights revolution.

In the recent past, America's intolerance towards homosexuals has been unjust. On June 28, 1969, New York City police entered the Stonewall Inn on supposed allegations that the bar was violating liquor laws. The Stonewall Inn was a bar serving mainly homosexuals. Police all over the county invaded these sorts of establishments to target homosexuals without logical justification. In the Stonewall Inn's case, however, the outcome was quite different from that of previous police invasions. Fed up with unfair police actions, the bar's customers fought back that evening in a riot that lasted an hour. Over the passing days and weeks, citizens gathered at the Stonewall Inn and surrounding area, continuing their riots and fighting with the city's police force. For once, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) community was fighting back against unfair treatment.

Before the Stonewall riots, same-gender sex was illegal in every state except Illinois. Homosexuals were banned from many professional jobs, and the public did nothing to stop this discrimination. In the twentieth century, medical professionals diagnosed homosexuality as an illness (Andryszewski 9-14). "People convicted of consensual sodomy [...] were subjected to lobotomies, electrical and pharmacological shock therapy and 'asexualization,' or castration, authorized by a 1941 law" (Eskridge 62). Although homosexuals are certainly treated better today than they were then, there are still many improvements that society must make.

At the center of the gay rights debate, homosexuals are fighting for the right to get married in all of the United States, believing marriage is both a religious bond and a legal contract. In Michigan, where I live, same-sex marriages are currently not legally binding; the state Constitution allows marriage only between a man and a woman (State of Michigan 25).

I consider it unacceptable not to allow two consenting adults to enter into a state of marriage. Having grown up with a gay uncle and a few friends with same-sex parents, I can see the frustration, the economic burdens, the social hardships, and the tension in their relationships that stem from this restriction. Not just emotional stability but legal protections and economic benefits are available to married heterosexual couples that are unavailable to gay couples. For instance: “Married people receive many insurance benefits and inheritance rights not possessed by persons who merely live together. [...] Life, medical, and home insurance, as well as tax breaks, equitable division of property [...], and estate rights are just a few of the many benefits bestowed on married persons” (Hudson 16-7).

On August 29, 2013, the U.S. Department of the Treasury and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) announced a ruling that ensures that all legally married same-sex couples, regardless of where they live, will be recognized for federal tax purposes. This is rewarding for the LGBT people who are already married or have access to marriage in their state, but what about those in Michigan who are unable to marry due to Michigan’s position? Because same-sex couples are unable to get married in the state of Michigan, they do not qualify for specific benefits given to heterosexual couples. According to the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), on average such households pay more than \$1,100 more in taxes a year for health care coverage than married couples do. The IRS and the Treasury Department are making attempts to recognize gay marriages at a federal level, but homosexuals need more help at the state level.

“The U.S. Supreme Court has said that the ability to marry the person of one’s choosing is a basic freedom in a free society” (Hudson 17). Because our society was established on the belief of separation of church and state, religious bias should not be used as a counter-argument to the legalization of gay marriages. Yet in every argument about same-sex marriages,

religion comes into play. Anti-gay activists are more commonly Christians seeking to protect their children and the sanctity of marriage. These anti-gay activists argue that same-sex couples can't meet the virtues and traditions of a true marriage. Others disagree.

Anti-gay Christian activists argue that because homosexuals cannot reproduce, their acts of sex are an abomination and are unnatural. However, in his book *The Bible, Christianity, and Homosexuality*, Reverend Justin Cannon explores how the scriptures in the Bible do not condemn committed and faithful homosexual relationships. He asks, "With regards to two divine ends of sex (i.e. the procreative and the intimately unifying), if you cannot fulfill one, does that mean you should not do the other?" (Cannon 39). Arguing that sex, when between a man and woman, does in fact create human life, Cannon explains in a Biblical context that this is important for the continuation of life on earth. He uses the metaphor, "If you are sick and cannot go to church, should you not pray?" to discuss the use of sex by intimate partners to unify with each other (Cannon 39). If you cannot fulfill the procreative end, should you not fulfill the unifying end?

Because marriage can be looked at as more than procreative, it could make sense for gay marriages to be recognized, even in Christian communities. "Marriage in the Christian tradition serves a number of [purposes]: procreation, fidelity, sacramental, mutual support and companionship, mutual society, and loving companionship" (Cannon 37). With the exception of the natural creation of life, these are all capable of being met by gay couples. Because opponents of gay marriage argue that marriage is a religious sacrament and centers around procreation purposes, it brings into question the marriage of atheists and couples who are unable to reproduce for physical reasons. It is illogical to deny sterile couples and atheists the right to marry, so why do the same for gay couples? Reverend Cannon argues that the term "procreative" could be understood as raising children in the light of God, regardless of whether the child is related by blood or not.

Unfortunately, same-sex couples are unable to biologically procreate together and must search for a solution to that predicament. How gay families have children of their own is a whole other fiery debate. Many LGBT parents

have had children in heterosexual marriages before acknowledging their sexuality, but there are also other ways for gay and lesbian couples to bear and raise children together. Adoption or artificial insemination are two common options.

The adoption process contains many legal hurdles for gay couples. Many people feel that to live a “normal” lifestyle a child should be raised by both a mother and father figure. However, a study conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Psychological Aspects of Child and Family Health has found that there are no negative concrete differences in children raised by heterosexual parents as compared to those with same-sex parents. In fact, the study found one positive difference: children raised by same-sex parents are more open to the diversity around them and accepting of others (Hirsch). Many other studies have found the same results, but anti-gay activists continue to fight back with false and stereotypical assumptions.

In the case of the lesbian couple April DeBoer and Jayne Rowse, who have lived together in Michigan for six years, each mother has adopted children of her own. But Michigan law does not permit them to adopt each other’s children (Pluta). In the event that anything should happen to one partner, the state would legally take custody of her children. The partner would then have to fight to adopt the children as her own, and it would be a legal mess. Gay couples should not have to deal with these unfair judgments.

All people should enjoy the benefits of a lasting and loving relationship. As a homosexual teen, I constantly think about my future. I think about the possible relationship I could establish in or after college with another man. If I find a man whom I learn to love and plan to spend the rest of my life with, I want the privilege to say “I’m married” to him. As a religious person, I want to be able to be married with the recognition of the church and in the eyes of my God. I want to have the option to adopt children and create a life for my partner and me. Without a legally binding contract and religious recognition for marriage, I can never have the same benefits and satisfaction given to my friends and family. In Michigan, my

partner and I will have to pay health insurance separately and file taxes separately. Because the adoption process for gay couples in Michigan is complicated and limiting, we may never be able to raise a child in our home. Our country is in the midst of a social revolution regarding gay rights. For my own future and for the future of our nation, I believe that it is imperative to stand against discrimination and for equal treatment to same-sex couples, in the state of Michigan and every other state.

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Austin Nathaniel Seavolt was in twelfth grade at Leslie High School in Leslie, Michigan when he wrote about the issue of same-sex marriage in Michigan.

Supposedly Strong Women in Young Adult Literature

ALLISON RUDOVITCH

WITH THE GROWTH OF THE VASTLY POPULAR YOUNG ADULT GENRE, literary critics have scrutinized publications for the best possible examples they offer impressionable teenage readers. Ideally, authors of such books craft them both to entertain and to guide teenagers with good role models as they venture into adulthood.

In particular, the young adult genre often wins praise for its portrayals of strong women. According to Goodreads, a social media website designed for critiquing literature, three women stand apart: Katsa, from Kristin Cashore's *Graceling* trilogy; Alanna, from Tamora Pierce's *Song of the Lioness* series; and Katniss, from the Suzanne Collins series *The Hunger Games*. However, although publishers encourage young girls to view these characters as positive role models, that portrayal could not be farther from the truth. These so-called strong women are superficial, destructive, and ultimately a terrible example for girls.

Admittedly, none of the three characters can be considered ordinary women. The average young reader won't be a trained killer like Katsa, pressured into murder by her cruel, kingly uncle. Neither will the reader, like Alanna, disguise herself as a boy in order to achieve her dream of becoming a knight, chosen by the gods to be their hand on earth. Certainly she will never seriously contemplate the murder of twenty-three other teenagers to ensure her own survival, like Katniss in *The Hunger Games*. If, however, these characters' vices cannot damage girls since they have little connection with ordinary life, then neither can their virtues guide young readers. These "strong women" have still failed as positive influences.

Despite their extraordinary circumstances, all three characters struggle with issues of feminine identity in a masculine world. The authors attempt to give them feminine "strength" in the form of beauty. (Alanna is described as "pretty," Katniss as "radiant," and Katsa as "beautiful.") The heroines,

however, often find their good looks a burden. They scorn weak, womanly concepts such as cleanliness, “attempts to beautify” themselves, and even admiration for their uncommon attractiveness. When another character describes her as stunning, Katsa says, “If I wish to stun anyone . . . I’ll hit him in the face.” Without fail, throughout their respective books, all three are occasionally forced into dresses and makeup so that the authors might showcase how little these characters care about beauty—although they draw the line at making them homely or plain.

For all of these so-called strong women, their natural but inconvenient beauty attracts a slew of suitors. Of the three, only Katniss makes it through the series without indulging in an intimate relationship or birth control. Throughout her series, Alanna has three love affairs, starting each new one without breaking off the previous. Katsa, though, reflects the most damaging relationship between a man and a woman. She does not come to the conclusion that she need not be complicit with her uncle’s murders until Po, her eventual love interest, leads her to it.

All three heroines are forced, at one time or another, to pick between two or even three of these men. Despite their young age, they have very definite ideas about marriage and family. Katsa declares to her love interest, “I won’t marry, not anyone, and I won’t bear any man children.” Katniss, another victim of the love triangle, describes not the necessary twenty-two deaths but her relationship with Peeta, her love interest, as “the most dangerous part of the Hunger Games.” These characters whom publishers and fans laud as modern feminists do not exist without the numerous men who desire them.

Most important, and most distressing, all three of these female heroines have a huge potential for physical violence. Their training in combat constitutes a massive portion of these books, and without it they would lose their foundation as characters. Katsa commits murder on her uncle’s orders for the majority of her young life and believes eventually that “she’d killed enough.” When events fail to please her, Katniss chooses to “slam [her] palms into [Peeta’s] chest” and knock him over, injuring him. She even tries to institute a new Hunger Games, so that other children might kill for their own survival as she did. Of the three, only Alanna attempts to use her abilities

wisely. “If I killed everyone who was stupid, I wouldn’t have time to sleep,” she explains, adding, “I don’t even *like* killing.”

This physical domination plays an important role in all three series. It invites readers to equate spiritual and mental strength with the amount of muscle a character has. Aside from the authors’ apparent approval of killing, it also unrealistically implies that a woman can—and *should*, if she is truly “strong”—have a more athletic, capable body than most of the men she meets.

Katsa, Alanna, and Katniss—supposedly the three strongest female characters in young adult literature—provide terrible examples for young women. All three embody the same theme: only when women prove both physically capable and desirable can they win respect. They suggest that physical beauty and strength signify a good person. Not one of them represents the strength of an average extraordinary woman. Worst of all, young women, who read these novels seeking role models at such a critical time of their development, believe them.

Allison Rudovitch wrote about the portrayal of “strong” women in young adult literature when she was in tenth grade at Country Day School in Apex, North Carolina.

Emmet Till

KEIRA ROSEBORO

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF YOUR SON, DAUGHTER, SISTER, or brother left on a summer vacation and never came back? Mamie Till had to experience this when she sent her fourteen-year-old son, Emmett Till, from Chicago to Money, Mississippi. She sent him to some of his relatives, warning him about how the people were down there. Mamie Till expected her boy back in the train station alive and smiling, not beaten, mutilated, but worst of all, in a wooden casket, dead. Emmett Till had a loud colorful personality that could easily get him in trouble in the South, but not enough to get him killed.

Emmett Till's Childhood

Emmett Till was born on July 25, 1941 in Chicago, Illinois to Marie Bradley and Louis Till (Gado). His father was a G.I. in Italy and was later executed for murder, leaving Emmett a single-parent child, nicknamed “BoBo” or “Bo.” When he was young, he contracted polio, which left a persistent stutter.

When Mamie Till was going to send her son, who had just turned fourteen, to Mississippi, she warned him with very specific directions. “Bo, be very careful how you speak, say ‘yes sir’ and ‘no ma’am’ and do not hesitate to humble yourself, if you have to get down on your knees!” (Gado) This is what Mamie Till said to her son before he boarded the train and left for Money, Mississippi.

The Delta and the Town

Contrary to its name, the town of Money was and still is very poor. Money was located in Leflore County with a population of 55 residents (Gado). The Delta’s landscape was flat agricultural land that could be seen out for miles. In the 75 years prior to the killing of Emmett Till, there had been more than 500 lynchings of African Americans in Money (PBS). African Americans from Mississippi called Chicago the “Land of Promise.” Mississippi was still very segregated and had unspoken rules, whereas in Chicago, though it wasn’t totally equal, African Americans had a bit more freedom. In Money, there weren’t many stores, but the Bryant family’s store was one that would play a big part in this tragic happening,

The Incident

Emmett Till and his friends and relatives went to Roy Bryant’s store, where his wife Carolyn Bryant was running the store because her husband was out on his second job, a trucking business. Till was bragging to his friends about how he had a white girl back in Chicago. When Till said this, one of his friends egged him on, saying something along the lines of, “Hey, there’s a white woman in that store, go talk to her!” while others decided to say nothing. It was said that Till walked into the store, bought some chewing gum, and went up to the register where Carolyn Bryant stood. She was later

described as a 21-year-old Irish girl with dark hair and eyes, five feet tall, and 103 pounds (Huie). No one knows exactly what happened then. Some say Till walked up to her, put his arms around her, and said, “I’ve got something for you, baby” (Gado). Others say he didn’t touch her at all and just made crude remarks. One thing is for sure, though: many witnesses heard Till wolf-whistle at Carolyn and that is what became known. Carolyn Bryant, upset by this, ran out to her husband’s car to get his Colt 45 automatic pistol and that was when the kids, mostly the ones from the area, got scared and decided to leave. Carolyn told her sister-in-law Juanita Milam what happened, and they both agreed to not tell their husbands about what took place that day.

The Kidnapping and the Murder

Juanita and Carolyn kept their word for a few days after the incident. But, when Roy Bryant returned home from his trucking gig, a local black came up to him and told him what had happened to his wife, telling on the “Chicago boy.” When Roy heard this, he felt he had to confront young Emmett; otherwise, he would be seen as a coward and a fool for letting a black man disrespect his wife in his absence (Huie). Roy would need transportation for what he planned to do, so he went to his half-brother, J.W. Milam, who was in the military and trained in hand-to-hand combat (Gado).

At two a.m., Bryant and Milam arrived at the house of Moses “Mose” Wright, the 64-year-old uncle of Emmett Till where he was staying for the summer. The two men had a flashlight and a Colt 45 gun. They knocked on the door asking for the “Chicago boy.” Wright and his wife, Elizabeth, tried to talk the men out of taking Emmett, saying things like, “He didn’t know what he was doing,” and “We will pay for the damages” (Huie). Roy Bryant hesitated at this since he was low on money, but J.W. stayed firm and immediately declined, threatening Mose that he wouldn’t live to see 65. When they got to Emmett, he was asleep in bed next to one of his cousins. They told him to get up and get dressed quickly but Till took his time putting on his socks (Huie). After Till was dressed, the men threw him in the trunk of the truck and drove off. As they drove away, Mose ran to his white next-door

neighbor and told him what happened. The next morning they called the local sheriff.

According to Roy and J.W., their only intention was to pistol-whip and scare some sense into Emmett Till. After that, they drove to a cliff over the river. They asked Till two questions: “You still as good as I am?” and “You still have white women?” “Yeah,” Till said to both questions, and with that, Milam shot Till right above the ear (Huie). Then the men tied a fan to his neck with some barbed wire and tossed him in the river. One eye was out of its socket, the left side of the face was severely smashed in, the tongue was swollen and the teeth were knocked out, and there was a single bullet hole in his head.

The Discovery of the Body

Robert Hodges was out fishing when he saw knees sticking out of the water by some branches. When he got over to them, he realized it was a man and pulled him out. That was Emmett Till, found three days after his murder. Hodges then called the sheriff of the town, who wanted the remains buried immediately. But when word got to Mamie Till, she demanded the body be sent to her in Chicago.

On September 2, the body of Emmett Till arrived at the Illinois Central Terminal in a wooden coffin (Gado). When Mamie saw the coffin, she fainted. When she came to, she asked to see her son’s body, though the men warned her of what was inside. When the casket was opened, it emitted a strong-smelling odor because the warm Delta water had caused the body to decompose. Mamie Till could see how bloated the body was and she steadied herself for what she was about to see. Her son’s tongue had been cut out, she could see through the bullet hole in his head, his left eye was out of the socket, and his face was unrecognizable. She could only tell it was him by his ears and her husband’s ring on his hand, with the letters L.T. engraved in it.

After the body was taken to A. A. Rainer Funeral Parlor, Mamie made an unusual request: to have Emmett’s body put on display in a glass case for four days so people could see what had happened to her son. In those four days, 250,000 people viewed the body (Gado). Some people were shocked,

some were appalled, many prayed, but all men, women, and children cried. Emmett's body was buried in the controversial Burr Oak cemetery.

After all this took place, many rumors spread about Till. One was that he was still hiding in Chicago somewhere and the body in the coffin was an unknown victim. *Jet* magazine was the first to publish an unedited picture of Till's mangled body (Gado).

The Trial

The trial for the murder of Emmett Till began on September 19, 1955 at the Tallahatchie County Court House. The jury of ten men was all white. The lawyers for Bryant and Milam were Robert Smith and Hugh White, the prosecutor was Gerald Chatham, and the judge was Curtis Miswango. When Bryant and Milam walked into the courtroom, they had an air of confidence and a light, jovial mood.

Moses Wright was called up to give his testimony about what happened on the night of the murder. A thin, grey-haired man with leathery black skin, Mose wore a white shirt, blue tie, and suspenders in court. When he was asked to point out who had the gun that night, he bravely pointed to Milam and said "Thar he!" (Gado). Willie Reed also testified, since he had heard Emmett being pistol-whipped, and Oudie Brown was also a witness, having seen blood being washed off Milam's truck and also Till's shoes (PBS).

Mamie Till did not stay and wait for the verdict she already knew would come; she left for Chicago. Even though Roy and J.W. admitted to taking Till, the verdict given in the hot, stuffy Mississippi courtroom was "not guilty." After the 167-minute decision, some men on the jury revealed that it would have taken them less time had they not stopped for pop. Mose Wright fled Mississippi after the trial, in fear of repercussions from his actions in the courtroom. (He later died in 1960.)

For many, if not all, blacks, Emmett Till's story was a symbol. The injustice of it all created a huge uproar, mainly in the black community, and it influenced the start of the Civil Rights Movement. In Mississippi, people were upset with black groups like the NAACP, which many thought was a Communist-led group.

The Confession

After the trial, Roy and J.W. went to *Look* magazine, which published a copy of their confession. The men were paid \$4,000 for their story, and because the case had already been closed, they couldn't get booked for that same charge again. They described in detail what they did to Till, in almost a gloating manner because they had gotten away with it. When this went public, many people were enraged and appalled. Mamie Till tried to reopen the case; when that didn't work, she tried to get them for kidnapping but that also didn't work. She sent a letter to the President but he didn't even respond. No one would ever do jail time for Till's murder.

The Aftermath

Roy Bryant and his wife went through a lot of hard times after everything that happened. They lost all of their black customers, lost money, and were forced to close their store. Their friends and community ostracized them. Bryant divorced his wife in 1979, and since he had no job in Mississippi, he moved to Texas in hopes of finding work. He later died of cancer. J.W. Milam also moved to Texas for a better chance at work but was refused it; no one wanted to work for him either. Milam died of cancer in December 1981.

After the trial, Mamie Till worked as a teacher in Chicago and also served in the Civil Rights Movement. She died of heart failure on January 6, 2003, two weeks before the release of the PBS documentary about her son.

Along with her son, Mamie Till became an icon of the Civil Rights Movement. For example, when Rosa Parks wouldn't give up her seat, she was thinking about Emmett Till; that one moment started the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a big milestone in the movement. In 2005, Emmett's casket was dug up from Burr Oak Cemetery for an autopsy. After the autopsy, the body was placed in a new casket while the original was sent back to Burr Oak to be taken care of and kept. In the summer of 2009, gravediggers dug up 300 caskets in Burr Oak and discovered Till's original casket. Because it was considered a moving and important piece of history, the director of the Smithsonian, Lonnie G. Bunch III, decided to have it in an exhibit set to

open in 2015. Emmett Till is seen as an important icon of the second half of the twentieth century.

Connections and Conclusion

Emmett Till's death and the circumstances that came about from it still happen in the world today. They say not to let history repeat itself, but to many it seems as though that is exactly what is happening. On February 26, 2012, Trayvon Martin was shot and killed on the way from the store to his father's house, with some Skittles and an Arizona tea. George Zimmerman, the shooter, was an ex-cop and the neighborhood watchman. There are a number of different stories on what happened, but like Till's case, the only other witness is dead. Many believe Martin was killed in cold blood especially since he had no weapon on his person at the time. In the trial, it was said that Zimmerman shot Martin because he was a racist, but his lawyer quickly denied and shot down that accusation. In the end, the verdict was "not guilty," which angered many people to the point of sending Zimmerman death threats. Many thought he would be safer in jail. He has also had a few run-ins in the law since then.

Do you see the similarities? There are many of them, despite the fact that Till was fourteen and Martin was seventeen and that these events were 57 years apart. Both situations showed injustice, in reactions and in the outcomes in court. Both incidents took on a political force. To many people and families lost in the unusual processes of grieving for two young boys unfairly killed, they hit home.

A fourteen-year-old boy brutally murdered, a heartbroken mother, two men who got away with murder, a segregated courtroom, and a powerful movement. These are just some of the key components and effects of the killing of Emmett "BoBo" Till.

Keira Roseboro was in the ninth grade at Morgan Park High School in Chicago, Illinois when she wrote about the murder of Emmet Till.

My Brief Against Immunity

ALLEE ARMITAGE

ON MAY 5, 2000, A LAWYER WAS MURDERED in his own law office. His name was Richard Armitage and he was my father. His murderer walks free down streets we let kids play on. My father has never received the justice he deserves because his prosecuting lawyers withheld favorable evidence from the defense. Even though clear forensic evidence pointed to one man, all the evidence in the case was thrown out.

A mistake like this and other forms of misconduct are continuously practiced by prosecuting lawyers in the United States, although there are many who are honest. Making inappropriate comments to jurors, coaxing witnesses into giving false testimony, and failure to turn over favorable evidence to defendants are the three major ways that this takes place. Prosecuting lawyers corrupt the judicial system in these cases, causing innocent people to suffer and criminals to be liberated.

In the 1976 case *Imbler v. Pachtman*, the Supreme Court ruled that under federal civil rights law, attorneys enjoy absolute immunity from any lawsuit over any action they undertake as a prosecutor. The opinion states: “Although such immunity leaves the genuinely wronged criminal defendant without civil redress against a prosecutor whose malicious or dishonest action deprives him of liberty, the alternative of qualifying a prosecutor’s immunity would disserve the broader public interest in that it would prevent the vigorous and fearless performance of the prosecutor’s duty that is essential to the proper functioning of the criminal justice system and would often prejudice criminal defendants by skewing post-conviction judicial decisions that should be made with the sole purpose of insuring justice.”

Basically, that is saying that even though you can get wronged by the prosecuting lawyers, that’s okay—because without this immunity, the prosecuting lawyers would not be able to represent you adequately. I agree with the reasoning behind the ruling because, if it wasn’t in effect, prosecuting lawyers would be sued for every case they lost. They would spend more time in court defending themselves than they would spend convicting criminals.

But regardless of that trust, many of them are taking advantage of the system. According to the Center of Public Integrity, since 1977 there have been over 11,000 cases involving misconduct by prosecuting lawyers. Every one of those 11,000 cases has a story behind it, a life that was affected.

For example, John Thompson, a man accused of carjacking and murder, was charged with both crimes and sentenced to death. He spent eighteen years in prison and fourteen of those on death row. Ironically, he was scheduled to die the day before his son's graduation. Just one month before Thompson's execution was to take place, his defending lawyers found some lab reports that connected other people to the murder. It was evidence that the prosecutors had kept hidden. After a new trial, all evidence was thrown out and Thompson was released.

Thompson never could sue the prosecuting lawyers themselves; he had to settle with suing the firm they worked for. The only money he ever received upon his release was ten dollars and a bus ticket. He and his family are still very angry and bitter. He lost eighteen years with his children that he will *never* get back. "I just want to know," Thompson states, "why the prosecutors—who . . . nearly had me killed—are not in jail themselves."

Along with my dad, John Thompson will never get the justice he deserves because of the prosecuting lawyers immunity. I can understand how he feels, for my family is still very angry about losing the father of the house. For ten years my mom went to every trial, hoping that the man who killed my dad would be put behind bars. But he never was.

It is almost impossible to take any action against the prosecuting lawyers who practice misconduct. In 2006, a Yale Law Journal concluded, "a prosecutor's violation of the obligation to disclose favorable evidence accounts for more miscarriages of justice than any other type of malpractice, but is rarely sanctioned by the courts, and almost never by disciplinary bodies."

As of 2011, for example, only four states let you file complaints online. That seems a little ridiculous, as technology continues to drive and dominate our world. Also, in 23 states, complaints have no option of appeal if they are dismissed. According to the Yale survey, "complaints must work through a byzantine structure." In the 2008 Supreme Court case *Pottawatamie County v. McGhee*, the prosecutors were found to have fabricated

evidence that would convict two innocent men. In the end, they were shielded by absolute immunity.

Other than the instance that involved my dad, there have been other possible criminals who got off free. In 2004, a Michigan District Court was forced to dismiss a case against Karim Koubriti and other defendants who had been convicted in the nation's first terrorist case since 9/11. Once again, the prosecution had failed to turn over favorable evidence that pointed to the defendants' innocence. "The prosecution materially misled the court, the jury and the defense as to the nature, character and complexion of critical evidence," the newspaper USA Today wrote. Given that terrorism was a sensitive subject in our country, especially at that point, the prosecuting lawyers should not have made that impervious mistake. This act of misconduct upset the whole country.

My dad and many others out there were cheated out of justice. It is time to stop this carelessness with human lives. There must be a solution. If someone has evidence to back up suspected misconduct, there should be a trial against the prosecuting lawyers. The judicial system hasn't fallen yet. But these lies have to end now, so that we can all progress towards an honest and protected future.

Allee Armitage wrote about her father's murder and the issue of prosecutorial misconduct when she was in ninth grade at Oak Park High School in Kansas City, Missouri.

A Fast Food Chemistry Set

LIAM EASLEY

DO YOU EVER WONDER WHAT YOU ARE REALLY EATING at fast food restaurants? Do you feel that grease sitting in your stomach afterwards? Well, it's not all just grease sitting in your stomach. What's in the options on your fast "food" menu will make you rethink where you eat.

Are you lovin' it? Let's look at the ingredients found in McDonald's™

food. What if I told you that the “King of all Burgers” Big Mac™ is fake? I bet you would cry, if not vomit, if you saw it being made. Obviously, McDonald’s™ beef comes from cattle, but their food is mixed with steroids, to make them beefier. When scientists took a look at a McDonald’s™ burger that had been in a man’s pocket for fourteen years, it still looked as if we could eat it (The Doctors, 2013)! Chicken nuggets? Those nuggets include not only grease and calories, but also all of the chicken’s guts (the organs, the eyes, the bones, etc.). After being raised, slaughtered, and plucked, chickens are thrown into grinders. Their ground-up carcasses are then made into nuggets and deep-fried. A former employee at McDonald’s™ told of accidentally leaving a bag of about 100 chicken nuggets on a counter for too long. “They melted,” said the worker. “Into a pool of liquid. I never understood why. But they were completely indiscernible as being the nuggets I once knew” (Jacques, 2013, unpagged).

Everyone loves apple pie! But McDonald’s apple pie contains L-cysteine, an amino acid found in duck feathers and human hair. McDonald’s™ also uses preservatives that originate from petroleum. The compound called tertiary butylhydroquinone (TBHQ), is found in eighteen of McDonald’s™ products, including their fruit and their yummy McNuggets™ (Breyer, 2012).

Still hungry for fast food? Here are more of its gross ingredients. The eggs in Subway’s™ breakfast sandwiches have something ... “special” mixed with them: a “premium egg blend” with some nice little ingredients like glycerin (used in soap and shaving cream), dimethylpolysiloxane (used in Silly Putty), and calcium silicate (used in roof tiles and concrete) (Jacques, 2013). Dimethylpolysiloxane also shows up in McDonald’s™ French fries (Breyer, 2012). Taco Bell’s Doritos Locos™ taco has only 36 percent beef in its meat, which looks like gingerbread before going into the taco. Well, at least they tried and put some meat in them. Papa John’s™ Italian pizza? Americanized! A writer called into Papa John’s asking for their ingredients. They said they’d call back later, but they never did, despite her leaving two messages. Wendy’s™ “chili” looks fresh because it has silicon dioxide in it, which is found in sand and quartz (Jacques, 2013).

Fast food is like eating from a chemistry set. So before you go to a drive-through or a counter, please remember these findings. Unless you want chemicals mixing through your body, drag your cancles inside and cook your own food!

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Liam Easley was in ninth grade at Carmel Catholic High School in Mundelein, Illinois when he wrote about the ingredients in fast food.

Pesticides Harm Bees

RYAN RICH

DIFFERENT FORMS OF PESTICIDES have been used around the world for thousands of years; and although they have been such a big part of human history, people still don't realize how damaging they can be, especially to bees. The common belief in the United States is that pesticides are strictly beneficial, but as their use increases a growing body of incriminating evidence is forcing people to question just how great pesticides truly are. This evidence shows that pesticides are mixing in nature to form dangerous untested combinations, that modern application technologies are harming the environment through processes that aren't yet fully understood, and that many pesticides commonly spread long distances outside of their application zone. Such factors are combining to decimate the bee population faster than ever before.

Before pesticides are approved for use in the U.S., they undergo extensive testing on their damage to the environment. If the testing goes well, a pesticide can go to market with a positive twist on how harmful it is. However, this testing is often company-sponsored. No matter how you put it, these products are made to kill bugs, including bees.

One problem with individual product testing is that even safe commercial chemicals can become extremely dangerous when combined with other common commercial chemicals. This can happen accidentally in nature when many different pesticides are used in small areas. Such combinations are frequently lethal to bees and other animals and frequently damage nearby ecosystems. Dangerous combinations can also happen when bees return from foraging, bringing with them many different pesticides that then combine in the hive with deadly consequences. They can wipe out entire colonies or dramatically reduce their populations. Even if they do not kill the colony, the health of the colony is jeopardized. Pollination and honey production decreases, thereby decreasing the hive's chance of overwintering and increasing its susceptibility to diseases and parasites.

In addition, many new technologies and techniques are now available specifically for planting, spraying, and other aspects of commercial agriculture. Although they can be more efficient in achieving their goal, questions are arising about the negative consequences of certain methods. One of these controversial techniques is the "air seeding" method of cultivating, currently popular with many farmers. Air seeding uses a machine to shoot seeds into the ground via a burst of pressurized air. This brilliant time-saving method would not be harmful if not for the fact that most seeds are covered with a pesticide coating. The same burst of air that shoots seeds into the ground also shoots some of the chemical coating off the seed and into the surrounding air. As you might have guessed, it is not good for a pesticide that's supposed to stay underground until rendered harmless to be released into the air. To date there is no concrete evidence, but air seeding is thought to have caused mass die-offs of both honeybees and other native bees in this country, such as the largest bumblebee die-off in recorded history

that took place in Wilsonville, Oregon in early 2013. Bee die-offs are exceptionally damaging to both agriculture and nature. Since they halt pollination of most plants, seed production of both wild plants and human crops is greatly reduced, resulting in lower production from nearby fields.

Besides air seeding, U.S. farmers are now favoring longer-lasting, less potent pesticides that stay effective for extensive periods, instead of very strong chemicals that only stay active for short periods. These long-lasting pesticides are much more damaging to bees. With highly potent, short-lived pesticides, many bees die during foraging; and although that's not great, that's the end of it. They don't make it back to the hive with remnants of the pesticide on them, so they are the only bees that die. With long-lasting, low-potency pesticides, bees can be killed nonstop for days or weeks, while continuing to bring contaminated material back to the hive. The long period of effectiveness of these pesticides therefore kills many times more bees than the short effective period of others.

Finally, the methods used for dispensing pesticides, although effective at coating the crops, cannot contain the chemicals to their designated areas. Upon application they flow with the wind for miles, killing bees throughout their journey. When hives are located in the drift area, the damage is much worse. The most damage is done when an apiary, or bee yard, finds itself in the drift area. In these situations, colony after colony may die. A single apiary may contain hundreds of hives, each with 70,000 to 130,000 bees. Severe losses can happen in just hours.

Now that you know how damaging pesticides are to bees, here's why you should care. Over 30 percent of the human diet depends on bees for pollination. Think of your last meal. Now imagine if nearly one third of that meal were gone. In addition, fully 70 percent of the human diet is incapable of existing without bees. (For example, cattle feed is made from crops that must be pollinated.) Let that sink in. Without bees you would have hardly any fruit, meat, or vegetables. No more nuts, blueberries, cranberries, pears, beef, pork, tomatoes—you get the picture. If that wasn't enough for you, listen to this. Ninety percent of all plants in nature are not able to exist

without bees. Imagine walking outside one day and not seeing those trees in your backyard, those shrubs in the fencerow, that woods down the road. That's how important bees are. Although you probably haven't stopped to think about it, you wouldn't be here without them.

After you learn how important bees are to your everyday life, I hope you will make a difference. Read up on how chemicals damage bees, or how important bees are to your life, or how dire their condition is. Talk to local beekeepers. They know what's going on. Find out the truth and then act on it. Tell others, get people riled up, call your representatives, city councils, anyone you think can help fix this problem. And if anyone criticizes you for trying to harm agriculture, remember that we're not fighting against agriculture, we're fighting for it. Without bees there is no agriculture. It's as simple as that.

Ryan Rich wrote about pesticides and bees when he was in tenth grade at Marlette Junior-Senior High School in Marlette, Michigan.

Central Valley Drought

ALEC DONELIAN

CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL VALLEY, A 450 MILE-LONG flat valley region, is one of the country's most productive agricultural areas. The San Joaquin Valley, comprising the southernmost portion of the Central Valley, is the single richest agricultural region in the world. Almonds, artichokes, raisins, and avocados are a few of the more than 400 commodities produced in the Central Valley. Daily temperature fluctuations of 25 degrees along with surrounding irrigation sources create an optimal farming environment and result in an astounding agricultural output. Cool winters also allow for a diverse range crops, providing a seasonal climate for plants less suited for hot temperatures.

For years, California has been experiencing a prolonged drought. Normally, major state water systems such as the Central Valley Project

and the State Water Project allocate water to farmers during dry periods. However, in 2013 and 2014, these water projects have significantly reduced the amount of surface water that is usually acquired from rivers or lakes and allotted to thirsty farms.

Federal organizations as well as environmentalists have expressed concern about the amount of surface water being diverted from aquatic ecosystems to farms. Major marine systems and centers of biodiversity, such as California's salmon run and the Sacramento–San Joaquin River Delta, are being pushed towards biological collapse.

The San Jose Mercury News reported in March 2014: “The federally run Central Valley Project allotted farmers only 20 percent of their share [of surface water] last year—and none this year. Officials who manage the State Water Project, California's other major water system, have also said that they will not be releasing any water for farmers, a first in the system's 54-year history.”

Due to the lack of federally supplied water, desperate farmers are turning to drilling for groundwater. Drilling, however, has its own financial and environmental implications.

Drilling deep wells can cost anywhere from \$200,000 to \$1 million; equipment is expensive and each individual well comes with its own bill. When groundwater is extracted from the earth beneath one farm, the over-all water table drops, leaving less water for neighboring farms to drill. When too much groundwater is depleted, underground particles of clay shrink and compress. This process causes the ground to collapse and can damage aboveground structures.

Excessive pumping also lowers water quality and drains rivers and other water sources. Normally rainfall replenishes underground aquifers, but the lack of precipitation during 2013 and 2014 is leaving the water supply dangerously low. While some farmers are scrambling to maintain their valuable crops and partake in the harmful drilling frenzy, many have simply given up. Farms that normally grow fruits and vegetables, which tend to require more water, are switching to more “low value” crops like cotton.

Grocery prices, in turn, continue to rise. In 2013 the Agricultural Department recorded a price increase in fruits and vegetables of 2 and 3

percent respectively, and it predicts an additional increase in 2014. Rumors are even circulating that the popular fast-food chain Chipotle will be removing guacamole from its menu due to high avocado prices.

Experimental solutions to the Central Valley drought are being explored, many of which aim to convert unusable water into fresh water. For example, the independent water producer WaterFX recently launched a pilot desalination project based in San Joaquin Valley's Panoche water and drainage district. The water in the Panoche region is brackish: less salty than ocean water, but too salty for agricultural use. WaterFX uses solar thermal technology in which curved mirrors bend the sun's rays and focus them on tubes containing mineral oil. The steam released from heated mineral oil is used to separate the water from minerals and salts. A thermal storage unit allows the system to run at night when no sunlight is present. Compared to relatively inefficient reverse-osmosis desalination methods, this technology produces 93 gallons of fresh water for every 100 gallons of brackish water coming in.

The WaterFX founders hope to empower Central Valley farmers by giving them control of their own water supplies and helping reduce their dependence on federal water deliveries and damaging underground drilling. However, although promising and innovative technologies like this are making progress towards replenishing the fresh water supply in California's Central Valley region, many farmers are still forced to abandon their crops. As the Central Valley drought persists, produce prices will continue to rise and America's most fertile region will begin to deteriorate.

Alec Donelian was in eleventh grade at Riverdale Country School in New York City when he wrote about drought and water in California's Central Valley.

My Quest for Clean Power

ZACHARY WILSON

WITH THE FINITE AMOUNT OF OIL AND NATURAL GAS being depleted faster each day, the world needs to begin to switch to using alternative renewable energy sources. The current technologies that are producing clean energy—wind turbines, hydroelectric dams, solar panels, and nuclear fission plants—are effective, but there is a method that can produce enough energy to sustain today's population for five million years. Nuclear fusion powers the sun and, with the proper apparatus, can power the earth.

A major concern regarding nuclear fusion is how to obtain the fuel for the reaction. A multitude of different nuclear reactions can produce clean energy through fusion, including deuterium–tritium, deuterium–deuterium, and deuterium–helium 3. The common atom in these three major reactions is deuterium. Surprisingly, one out of twenty million molecules of water in the oceans contain deuterium in the form of heavy water, according to Dr. Anne Marie Helmenstine of the U.S. Department of Energy. Heavy water is the same as regular water, except that instead of having two hydrogen atoms covalently bonded to an oxygen atom, two deuterium atoms are bonded. The deuterium atom is twice as massive as a hydrogen atom because it contains a neutron. Last year, after realizing there was such a mass difference, I set out to try to separate heavy water from seawater.

The common method of separating heavy water from seawater involves a large industrial distillation apparatus, which requires massive equipment and large amounts of time. In a distillation plant, seawater is heated to exactly 101.42 degrees centigrade because that is the vaporization temperature of heavy water. The steam of the heavy water is then collected and cooled. The small difference in temperature between the vaporization points of heavy water and normal water causes a discrepancy in the collection purity, which is why one sample must be run through the apparatus multiple times to acquire fusion-grade purity.

I explored this option of purity during my sophomore year of high school and, while I succeeded in purifying one milliliter of heavy water to within 99 percent purity from 4.5 liters of seawater, the process was painstakingly tedious because of the multiple distillations. I presented my findings to the Long Island Science Congress, but I knew there had to be an easier and more efficient way to purify the fuel of the future. Looking back upon my data and notes, I rediscovered the mass gap between heavy water and normal water. In a moment of insight, I realized how to revolutionize the field of solution separating.

Four years ago, while visiting Brookhaven National Laboratory with Stony Brook University's GeoPrep Program, I sat in on a lecture about zeolites and their applications concerning the field of water and air purification. Zeolites are natural molecular sieves, due to their microporous structures. There are currently thousands of different zeolites, each with their own specific pore size and shape, and more are being discovered and created each day. While zeolites are commonly used to trap unwanted materials from a solution—such as CO₂ from natural gas streams, and the deadly cesium 137 that was released into the ocean after the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in Japan in 2011—they can act as a screen and allow specific molecules to pass through while trapping others. After some thought and research, I developed an experiment that would separate heavy water from normal water using zeolites and pure mathematics.

Because of the extra neutron on the hydrogen atoms of heavy water, its mass is 11.1 percent greater than normal water. Given the same energy as normal water, it would travel slower through space. This means that if both heavy water and normal water were vaporized and allowed to flow through a zeolite as a gaseous solution, the normal water would travel further through the zeolite; its rate of effusion would be greater since its mass is smaller. By calculating the mean free path of both heavy water and normal water, I determined which zeolite would be appropriate for the experiment. The pore size had to be large enough to allow both the heavy water and normal water to pass through, but small enough to block any unwanted salts or organisms from the seawater. After calculating the rate of effusion for both

heavy water and normal water, I determined how far each molecule would flow through the zeolite in a given amount of time.

Once the solution had boiled completely, the gases were released into a sealed tube packed with zeolites. After a given time, the gases had passed into the zeolite and according to the math, the heavy water should have separated from the normal water because of the effusion rate difference. The only way to extract the liquids from the zeolites without disturbing the separation of the waters was through a process known as reverse distillation. By heating the tube of zeolites to above the vaporization points of both heavy water and normal water, enough pressure would build up inside the tube to force the liquids out. Since the normal water had a higher rate of effusion, it went further into the zeolites; it would come out after the heavy water had been completely reverse-distilled. After collecting the reverse-distilled sample for a calculated time, it was tested to determine its purity with regard to heavy water and found to be 99.2 percent pure. This one-time purification method was just as effective as the common distillation method, but 300 times more energy efficient and 532 times faster.

With over 1015 tons of deuterium present in our oceans, the amount of possibly clean energy at our fingertips is unimaginable. If 1015 tons of deuterium were fused, it would produce as much energy as 103,027,100, 528,545,404,378,600 (1.03x10²³) gallons of gasoline, without the greenhouse-gas side products that occur with oil and natural gas burnings today.

Our knowledge of plasma physics has grown exponentially since its beginnings in the mid-1900s. As Stewart C. Prager of the New York Times wrote, "Since 1970 the power produced by magnetic fusion in the lab has grown from one-tenth of a watt, produced for a fraction of a second, to 16 million watts produced for one second—a billionfold increase in fusion energy." Currently, a nuclear fusion machine is being built in France with the help of China, the European Union, India, Japan, Korea, Russia and the United States. By November 2020, the International Thermonuclear Experiential Reactor (ITER) plans to build a fully operational nuclear fusion Tokomak machine capable of producing 500 million watts of fusion power for 500 seconds and longer.

The benefits of nuclear fusion of deuterium range from clean electricity for homes and businesses to a decrease in greenhouse gases. It also releases oxygen back into the atmosphere, a hidden benefit that is commonly overlooked and does not occur in any of the present major energy production techniques. Before deuterium can be fused, it has to be separated from the heavy water molecule by a process known as electrolysis. If a fraction of the 1015 tons of heavy water were used as fuel, the amount of oxygen that would be released back into the atmosphere would be immense. With an increase of oxygen in the atmosphere, the effects of greenhouse gas global warming could be slowed and even reversed.

With deuterium costing around 4,000 euros per kilo, I plan to continue my efforts to raise awareness of the free clean power that is within our grasp. I hope to use the nuclear fusion methods I developed to lower the cost of energy production dramatically and to further my goal of providing the world with clean, renewable energy.

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Zachary Wilson wrote about his deep dive into nuclear fission when he was in twelfth grade at Copiague High School in Copiague, New York.

IV. HOW TO PUBLISH YOUR WORK

Here we offer an up-to-date (2014) list of some of the best national magazines and web sites where teenage creativity can be discovered—and where aspiring young writers and thinkers can submit their work. We've also included several small, student-run enterprises. Most of these publications accept nonfiction along with fiction writing, as well as other forms of written creative expression. The list does not include journals dedicated exclusively to poetry or publication opportunities restricted to a particular geographical region, such as New York City's Youth Communication.

The Beat Within: Writing and Art from the Inside

<http://www.beatwithin.org/>

Founded in 1996 in San Francisco, *The Beat Within* provides incarcerated youth an opportunity to share their ideas and life experiences in a safe space that encourages literacy, self-expression, critical thinking skills, and healthy, supportive relationships with adults and their community.

The Claremont Review: The International Magazine of Young Adult Writers

<http://www.theclaremontreview.ca/>

Each spring and fall, the Canadian-based *Claremont Review* publishes poems, short stories, short plays, graphic art, photography, and interviews by young adult writers (ages 13 to 19) anywhere in the English-speaking world.

The Concord Review

<http://www.tcr.org>

Since 1987, *The Concord Review* has recognized and published exemplary history essays by English-speaking high school students. It remains the only quarterly journal in the world to publish the academic work of secondary students.

Some Guidelines for Submission

1. Neatly type your work and carefully proofread it for mistakes. The name and address of the author should appear at the top of each page.
2. Fiction and essays should be double-spaced; poems may be single-spaced, but should appear on separate pages. Always check, however, the submission guidelines for each publication.
3. Include a one-paragraph cover letter addressed to the editor, briefly introducing yourself and the work you are submitting.
4. If you are mailing a print submission in an envelope, also include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE).
5. A good magazine will not require any fees or purchases to publish your work.
6. Response times can vary from three weeks to six months. Be patient, don't take it personally—and send your work out again!

Élan

<http://elanlitmag.org/about/>

Élan is an international student literary magazine and a publication of the Creative Writing department at Douglas Anderson School of the Arts in Jacksonville, Florida. A staff of high school juniors and seniors compile original work submitted by young writers and artists from across the globe, publishing two online editions per year, as well as a print compilation.

Latinitas

<http://laslatinitas.com/>

Latinitas is an online magazine written by and for Latina youth, published in both Spanish and English. Aiming to empower Latina youth through media and technology, the magazine covers topics from dating to role models, culture to careers, and includes versions for both girls and teenage women.

Merlyn's Pen

<http://www.merlynspen.org/>

Teenagers who tell their stories and create new ones stand out in a culture that prods them to create less and consume more. Since 1985, *Merlyn's Pen* has published the work of teens who write, think for themselves, and take intellectual and emotional risks in fiction and non-fiction.

MUSE

<http://bit.ly/1o2ijBJ>

MUSE: "The Magazine of Life, the Universe, and Pie Throwing," is a nonfiction magazine for kids and teens. The editors seek engaging, challenging stories about unexpected subjects related to science and culture. "Humor and irreverence are encouraged."

New Moon: The Magazine for Girls and Their Dreams

<http://www.newmoon.com/>

New Moon Girls is an online community and print magazine for girls, ages 8 and up, who seek to share their own poetry, stories, artwork, videos, and other creations. *New Moon Girls* are "girls who want their voices heard, their dreams respected, and their creativity celebrated."

Polyphony H.S.

<http://polyphonyhs.com/>

Polyphony H.S. is an international student-run literary magazine for high-school writers. Started in 2004, the magazine now receives over 1,500 submissions annually from more than 20 countries. High school students from public, private, and parochial schools serve as editors.

The Postscript Journal

<http://www.postscriptjournal.com/>

The Postscript Journal is a new, student-run, international print publication offering high school and college students the opportunity to publish original work, with issues out quarterly. “As a collective, our editors and readers seem to have a love for the electric—looking at subject matter in an unusual, moving way.”

Represent

<http://www.representmag.org/>

Represent, a quarterly magazine founded in 1993, provides a voice for youth in foster care. Their stories give inspiration and information to peers and offer staff a window into teens’ struggles. The magazine accepts submissions from throughout the country.

Scholastic Art & Writing Awards

<http://www.artandwriting.org/>

The Scholastic Art & Writing Awards has an impressive legacy dating back to 1923. Over the years, the Awards have grown to become the longest-running, most prestigious recognition program for creative teens in the U.S., and the nation’s largest source of scholarships for creative young artists and writers.

Skipping Stones

<http://www.skippingstones.org/>

Founded in 1988, *Skipping Stones* magazine for youth encourages communication, cooperation, creativity and celebration of cultural and environmental richness. It provides a “playful forum” for sharing ideas and experiences among youth from different countries and cultures.

SNAG Magazine

<http://www.snagmagazine.com/>

Seventh Native American Generation (SNAG) is a magazine for and by Native American youth. A forum for young people who are unheard and unseen in mainstream media, SNAG features first-person essays, poetry, photographs and illustrations created by Native youth across the United States, Canada, and Alaska.

Stone Soup: The Magazine by Young Writers and Artists

www.stonesoup.com

Stone Soup features creative writing by people aged 8 to 13. Printed in color six times a year, the magazine has a wide national audience.

Teen Ink

<http://www.teenink.com/>

Started in 1989, *Teen Ink* is a longstanding monthly print magazine, web site, and book series by and for people 13 to 19 years old. Submissions of nonfiction, fiction, articles, reviews, poems, essays, art, and photos are welcome.

Teen Voices

<http://bit.ly/1qx9PW9>

For 25 years, *Teen Voices* magazine has provided a place for journalism and other writing created by and for teenage girls. A recent edition of the new online *Teen Voices* tackled issues ranging from why some women wear hijab and others don't to celebrities as role models.

Zeka Academic Journal

<http://www.zekajournal.org/>

Zeka Academic Journal is a new, multi-disciplinary, peer-reviewed academic journal by high school students at Lynbrook High School in San Jose, California.

What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD)

Based in Providence, R.I., What Kids Can Do (WKCD) is a national nonprofit founded in 2001 by an educator and a journalist with more than 60 years combined experience supporting adolescent learning in and out of school. Using digital, print, and broadcast media, WKCD presses before the broadest audience possible a dual message: the power of what young people can accomplish when given the opportunities and supports they need and what they can contribute when we take their voices and ideas seriously. The youth who concern WKCD most are those marginalized by poverty, race, and language, ages 12 to 22.

While other organizations share WKCD's message and commitments, our strategies and style are unique. We view young people as active collaborators in every phase of our work. We bring local stories, voices, and resources to international attention and vice versa. We speak to influential adults and young people alike. We document the good work of others as well as sponsoring our own projects. We bring a thirst for peace and justice to all of our pursuits.

In 2005, WKCD launched its own publishing company, **Next Generation Press**, which develops and distributes books with youth voice at their center. By 2011, Next Generation Press will have published 15 books (with over 175,000 copies in print). In addition, WKCD develops books for publication by other publishers. Two books, *Fires in the Bathroom: Advice for Teachers from High School Students* (The New Press, 2003) and *Fires in the Mind: What Kids Can Tell Us About Motivation and Mastery* (Jossey-Bass, 2010), both by WKCD writer Kathleen Cushman, have been best sellers in teacher education.

In the fall of 2010, WKCD began its Center for Youth Voice in Policy and Practice, a virtual center that showcases the power of youth as researchers, knowledge creators, and activists—real contributors to public discussions about policy and practice.

WKCD has also worked with youth internationally on photo documentary/photo essay projects in: Bangalore and Delhi, India; the Czech Republic; Beijing; Ethiopia; Hungary; Japan; London; Romania; South Africa. Our youth collaborators have included Afro-Caribbean and Muslim immigrants in London, teenage slum dwellers in Delhi, and gypsy youth in Romania.

info@wkcd.org | PO Box 603252, Providence, RI 02906 | 401.247.7665 (P)

Raindrops in Mississippi are always fat. They fall from clouds no longer able to hold them and slide through the humidity, making a murky storm soup. I am standing outside the Boys and Girls Club peering into the haze of this particular storm, waiting for my mother. Our routine is to walk, hand in hand, through the “old projects” to our home in the “new projects.” Will we walk today? In a soft, rattled voice, I tell the counselor that she’ll be here soon—and she is. Dainty, and cowering beneath the wind and rain, she stands behind a tree, pulls her flimsy hood tighter over her face and flicks her wrist, beckoning me.

My mother dutifully teaches: how to long-divide, how to play defense on the soccer field, how to follow through with my backhand, how to control my breathing when I run, how to protect myself, how to make one night’s meal last a week. She conducts each lesson with the firmness and sass I’m sure only a Southern woman can. But I got my most valuable lesson when I saw her standing in the rain, soggy, but focused: No matter the severity of the storm, if you have somewhere to go, you will have to walk.

From “Journey Through the Rain,” by Rachel Marie Jones, Mississippi School for Math and Science, Columbus, Mississippi

