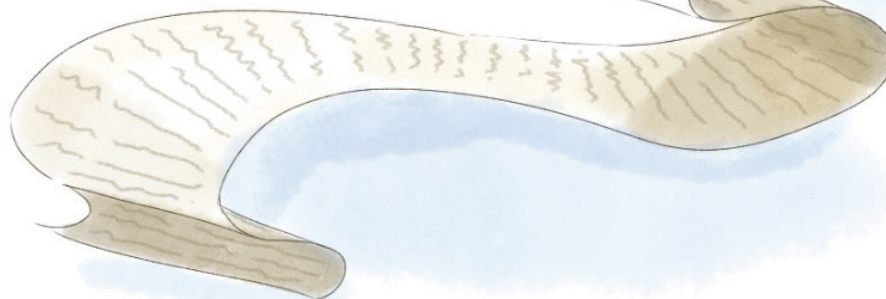
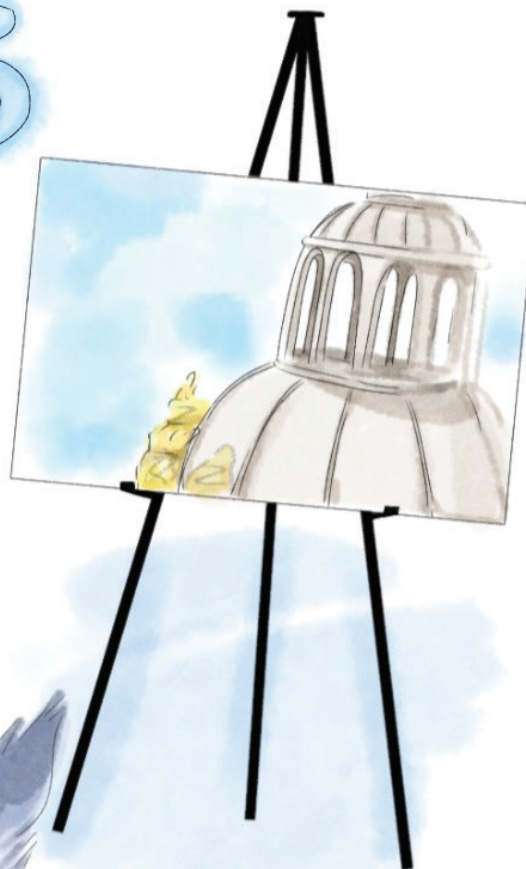


THROUGH *owl* Eyes



A collection of writing and artwork * OWL class of 2028 * Spring 2024

Foreword

This publication is an effort to showcase high quality work over the course of the year by OWL's 8th grade students. In English class, students played with point of view by retelling an existing story from a different perspective, wrote memoirs, and dabbled with poetry. They also read and analyzed Angie Thomas's *The Hate You Give* and participated in book clubs with justice as a central theme. It is my hope that they are now prepared to take on the reading and writing challenges of high school, and that this magazine reflects the voice and talents of this group as they prepare to move on.

Students in algebra two spent time this spring crunching numbers to evaluate how well Minnesota's state spending matches up with its values as they prepared for the culminating event in the senate expedition. The only way to gain a true appreciation of what the algebra two class does is to visit the capitol in May, when students gather in the rotunda to make their case to lawmakers. However, we attempted to pay homage to the work of Tom and his students in this publication by providing a snapshot of their work and their reflections on the experience.

Of course, turning all this writing into a publication is no easy task. This year I was blessed with a particularly talented and dedicated team to help make this vision a reality. Beatrice Cosgrove, Abby Horton, and Charley Cheatham tag teamed the design. All three are talented, experienced designers who work extremely well together. Meanwhile, Zania Hierlmaier, George Abelson, Emily Totushek, and Maggie Jansen stepped in to provide crucial copy-editing work. The illustrations that accompany the stories were created by Nora Xiong, and the collages that precede each section were Zania's work. This team worked extremely hard over interim week, and without their help, this publication would not be possible.

Leo Bickelhaupt
Open World Learning Community

Table of Contents

Senate Expedition - 7-22
Alternate Narratives - 25-37
Memoirs - 40-60
Justice to Me Poems - 63-72

Acknowledgments

Thank you to:

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Publication Team

Abby Horton, Beatrice Cosgrove, and Charley Cheatham

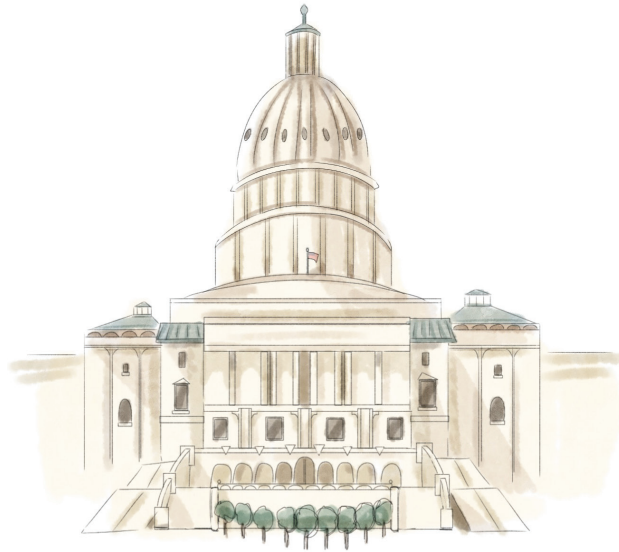


Proofreaders and Editors

George Abelson, Zania Hierlmaier, Maggie Jansen, and Emily Totushek



Senate Expedition



Youth making change is encouraged throughout the Senate Expedition

By Beatrice Cosgrove

The Senate Expedition is a months-long project that focuses on student voice and activism. It is an opportunity for students to meet and discuss topics important to them with people who shape policy -- Minnesota lawmakers.. The expedition is led by OWL math teacher Tom Totushek, who provides resources and support throughout the process, while ensuring the project remains student-led.

The topic is introduced early in the school year when students begin to research scatterplots, government spending, and issues in Minnesota they would like to bring attention to. Once students have organized their information, they create a scatterplot graph that uses trendlines to help draw conclusions about policy and spending changes that need to be made.

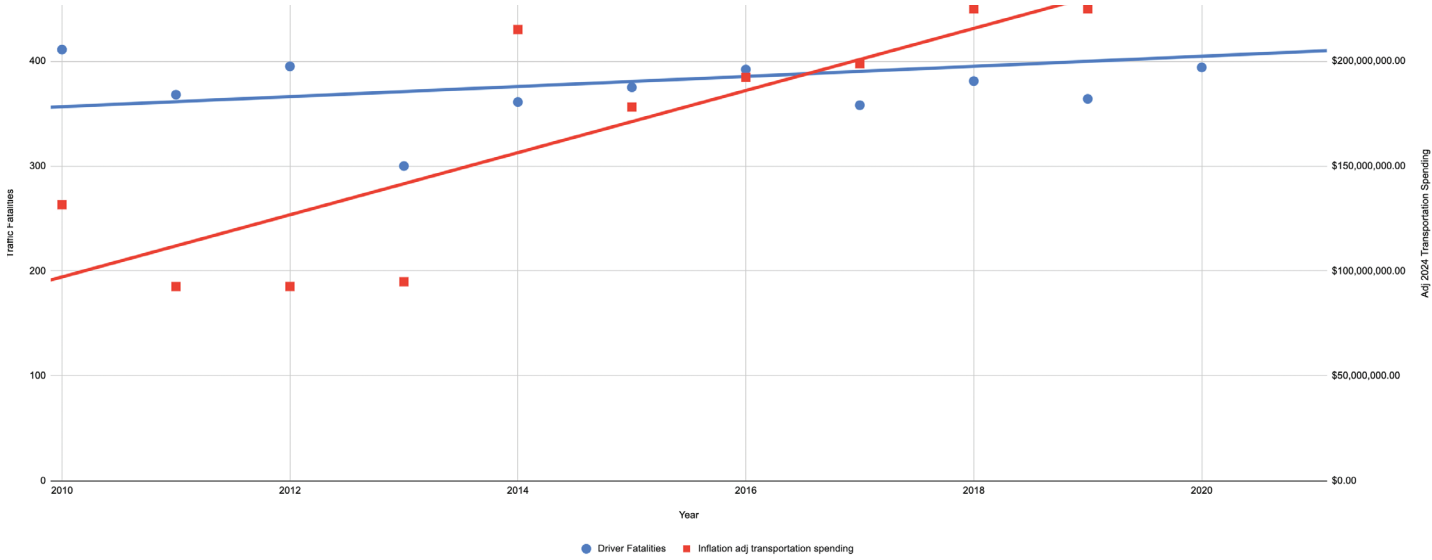
This project has gained recognition since its introduction, and has made change as well. One group helped to influence the decision to move the legal smoking age to 21. The expedition has also been recognized as one of EL Education's Models of Excellence and Tom has presented the project at the EL Education National Conference.

Throughout the Senate Expedition's existence, it has grown and changed. "The first few years we had it at the Senate Building because the Capitol was under construction (hence the name)," Tom said, "Second, we used to rehearse more and film the presentations but I felt like this was too 'scripted' and not authentic enough during the actual presentations." The actual presentations have been changed, also, as Tom found ways to be more efficient. Most of the text was taken away from the posters, allowing the graphs to become larger and challenging students to be more authentic when speaking with representatives by not using the posters as a crutch.

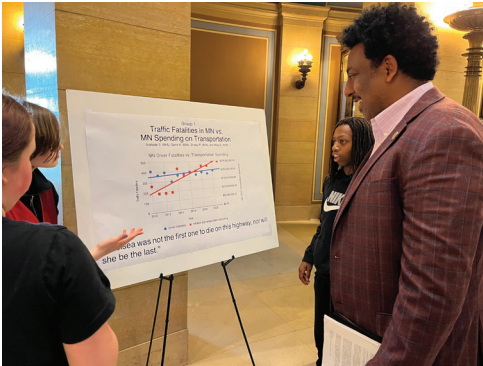
The Expedition isn't simply a school project, it helps students develop writing, graphing, communication and presentation skills. It can seem daunting at first, but Tom says he enjoys watching his students reach the finish line (presenting at the Capitol). "I have two favorite parts. First the look of panic when the students are asked to do something they think is too big for them," Tom said, "...the second is the look of accomplishment after they do the thing they know was meaningful."

Traffic Fatalities in MN vs. MN Spending on Transportation

Adelaide S. (64A), Samir K. (65A), Zinabu P. (67A), and Atlas S. (67B)



We are suggesting spending more on transportation safety in order to lower driver fatalities in MN. We understand that the number of fatal car accidents will go up with more people driving, but it should still be a priority to keep as many people safe on the roads as possible.



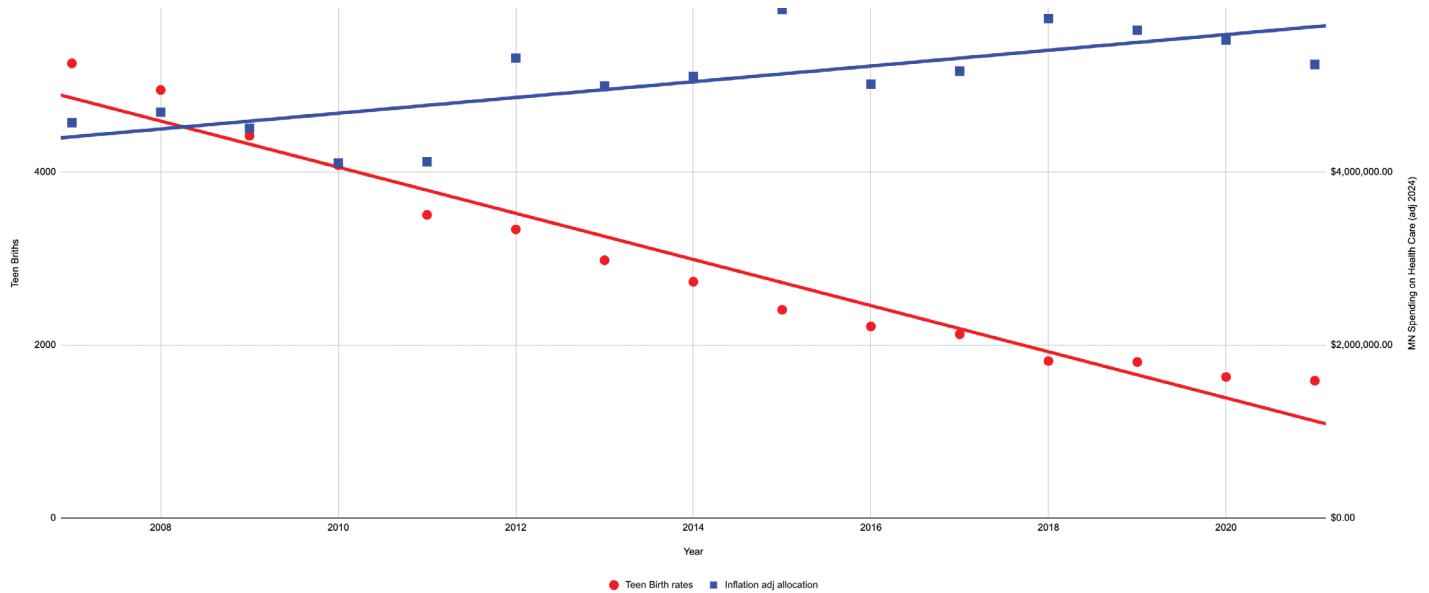
“I was told I talk like a politician.”
- Adelaide Stender



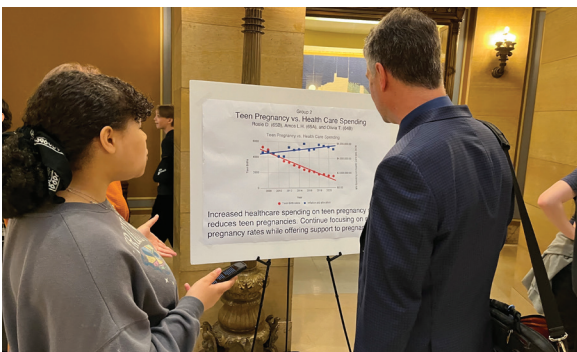
“It seemed daunting at first but it turned out fine.”
- Samir Keller

Teen Pregnancy vs. Health Care Spending

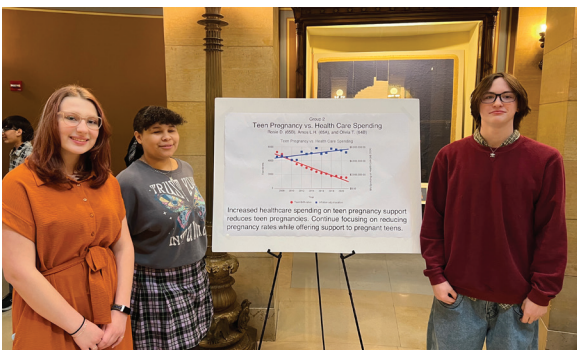
Olivia T. (64B), Amos L.H. (65A), and Rosie D. (65B)



Increased healthcare spending on teen pregnancy support reduces teen pregnancies. Continue focusing on reducing pregnancy rates while offering support to pregnant teens.



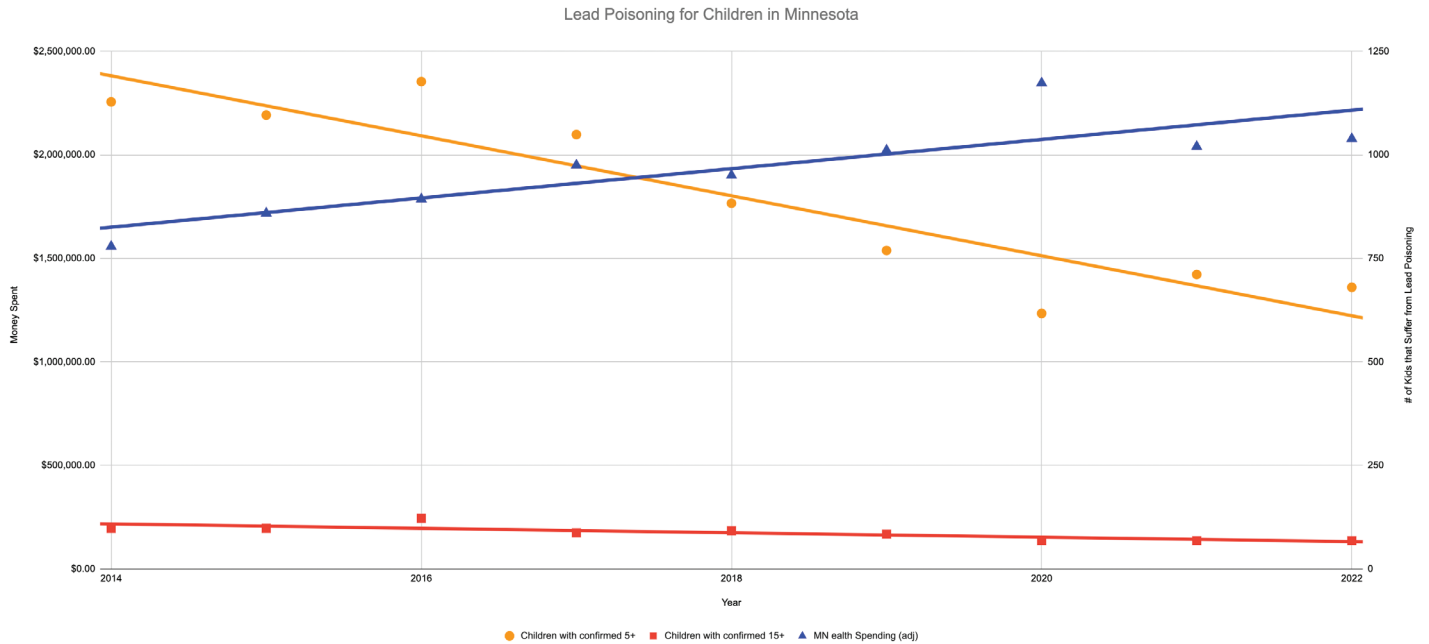
“It was an interesting experience to get to see the senate and speak to politicians like an equal.” - Olivia Trobaugh



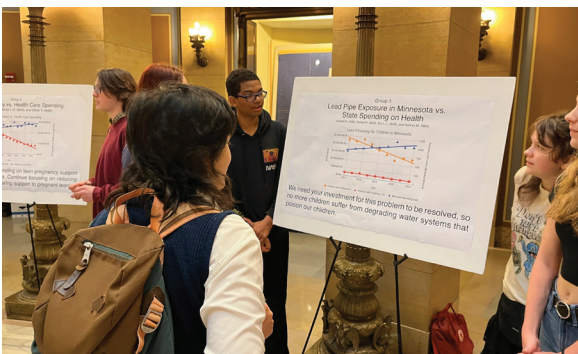
“It was stressful having to talk to people with higher power, but they were super understanding and we were pretty well prepared.” - Amos Lucken Hills

Lead Pipe Exposure in MN vs. MN Spending on Health

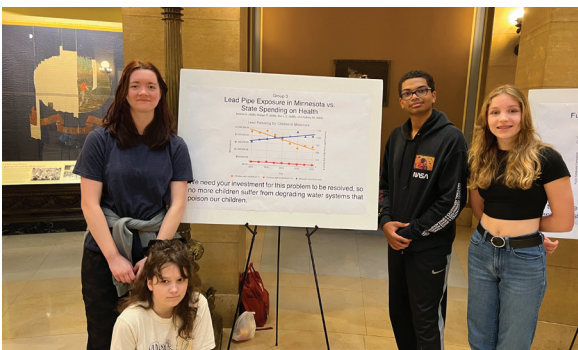
Amelia K. (40B,) Dot L.C. (64B), Rafael P. (65B), and Aubrey M. (66A)



We need your investment for this problem to be resolved, so no more children suffer from degrading water systems that poison our children.



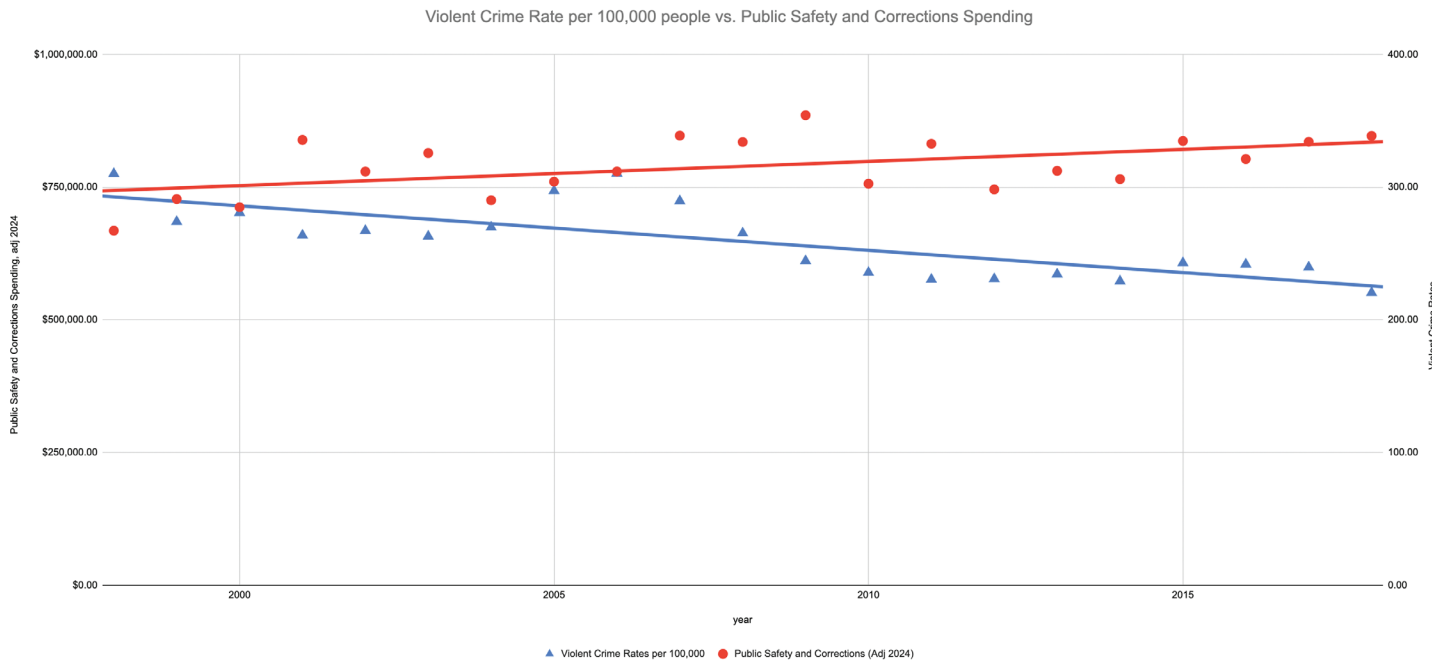
“It was fun to talk to people that had actual power about these things.” - Amelia Keenan



“It wasn’t scary and it was easy talking to them. They were nice and helped build off of what we were saying.” - Rafael Presswood

Funding of Public Safety and Corrections vs. Violent Crime Rate in MN

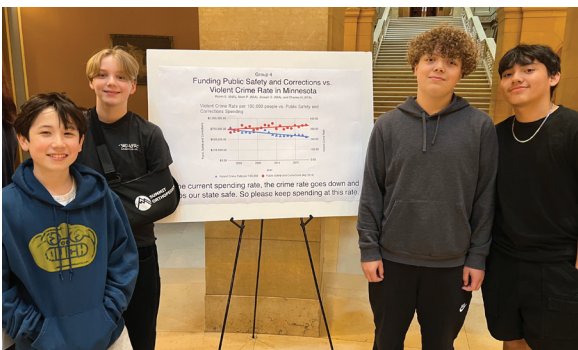
Ronin E. (64A), Atom P. (65A), Joseph S. (66A), and Charles H. (67A)



At the current spending rate, the crime rate goes down and keeps Minnesota safe. So please keep spending at this rate.



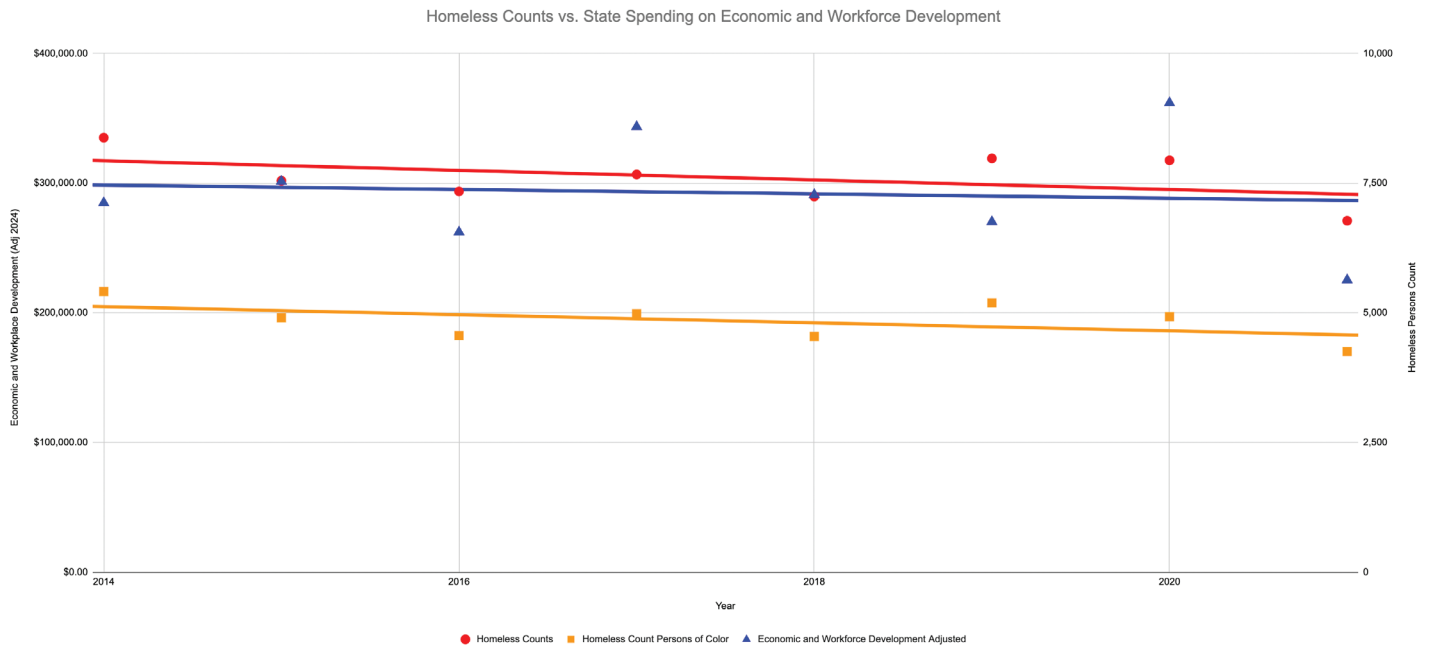
“It went well, we talked to like nine people. They seemed very engaged.” - Ronin Eckfeldt



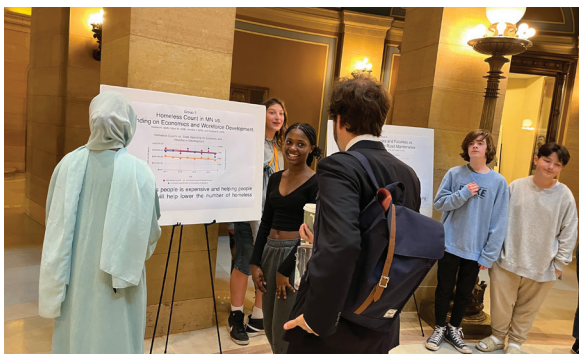
“It was eye opening and inspiring to see my representative.” - Atom Pliner

Homeless Count in MN vs. MN Spending on Economics and Workforce Development

Nazera K. (65A), Hajaara S. (65A), Myya W. (66B), and Kendall J. (67B)

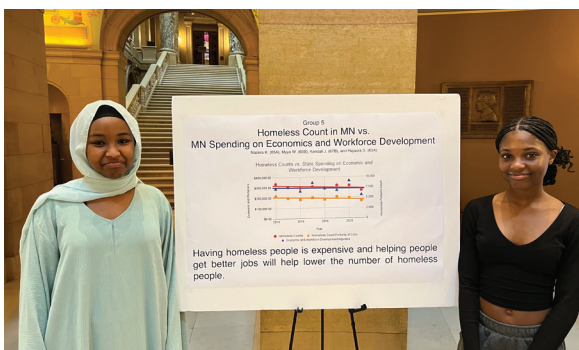


Having homeless people is expensive and helping people get better jobs will help lower the number of homeless people.



“I liked getting to meet different people because there was people who worked with different things and they all had different ways of viewing our project.”

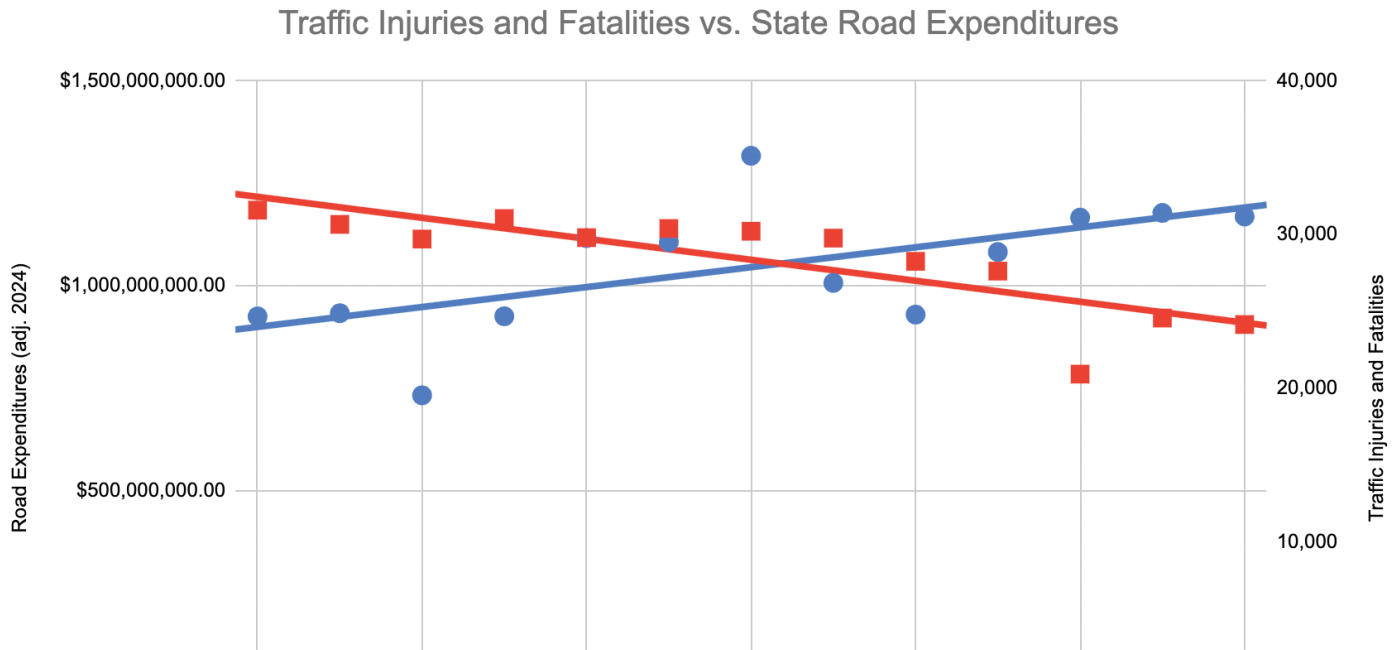
- Hajaara Sakuri



“It was scary but it was fun at the same time, because you got to address issues with people who have power.” - Myya Wilkins

Funding of Public Safety and Corrections vs. Violent Crime Rate of Traffic Injuries and Fatalities vs. MN Funding Towards Road Maintenance

Rowan S. (64A), Erik I. (64B), Julian S. (64B), Phoojywg K. (67A)



We would like to spend additional funding toward improving roads because it will decrease injuries and fatalities, creating a safer environment for drivers and bystanders.



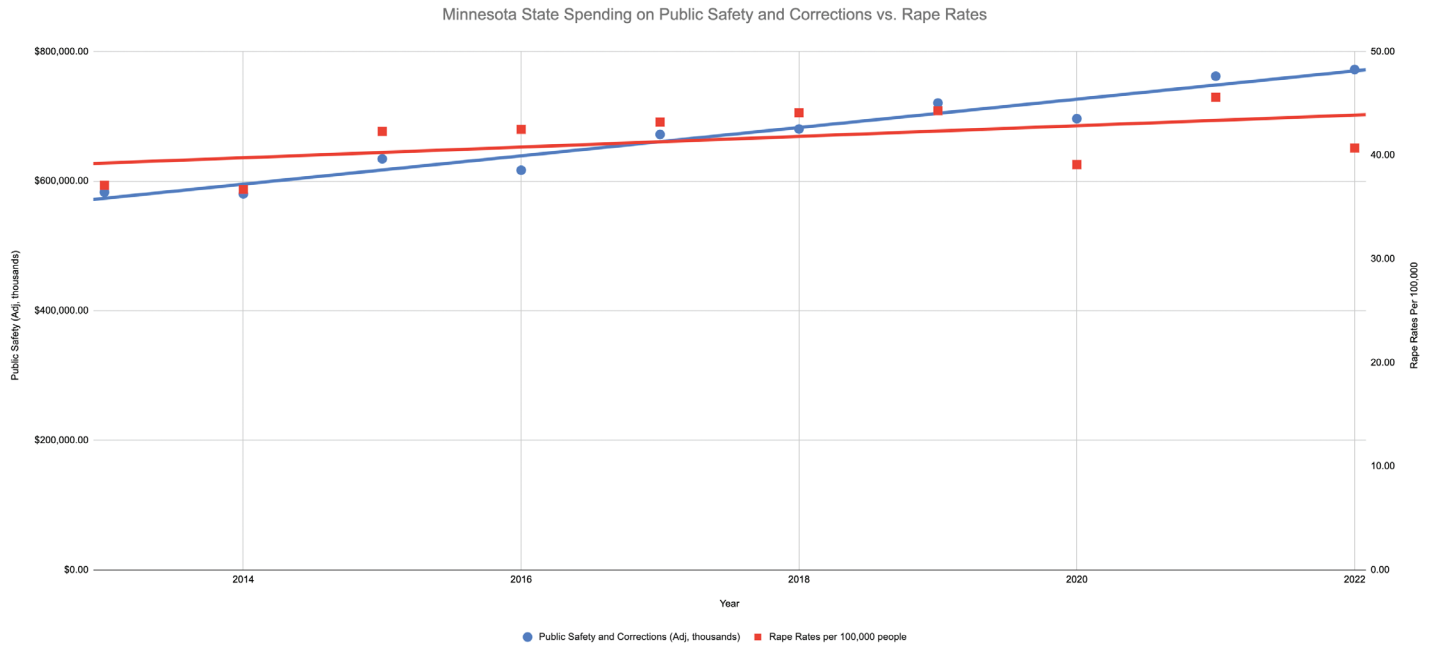
“They know a lot more than I do. They gave me some insights.” - Julian Sem



“There was not a lot of senators there, but I talked to like six different people.” - Erik Imholte

MN State Spending on Public Safety and Corrections vs. Rape Rates

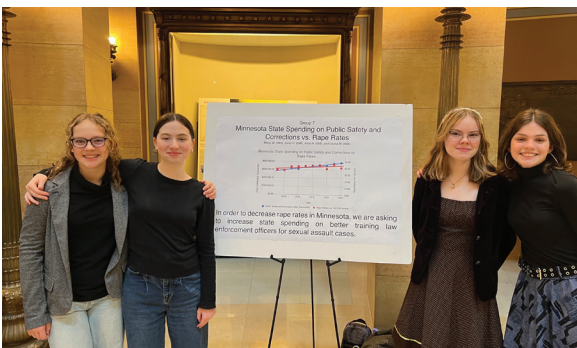
Maisy W. (64A), Zania H. (64B), Abby H. (65B), and Louisa M. (66B)



In order to decrease rape rates in Minnesota, we are asking to increase state spending on better training law enforcement officers for sexual assault cases.



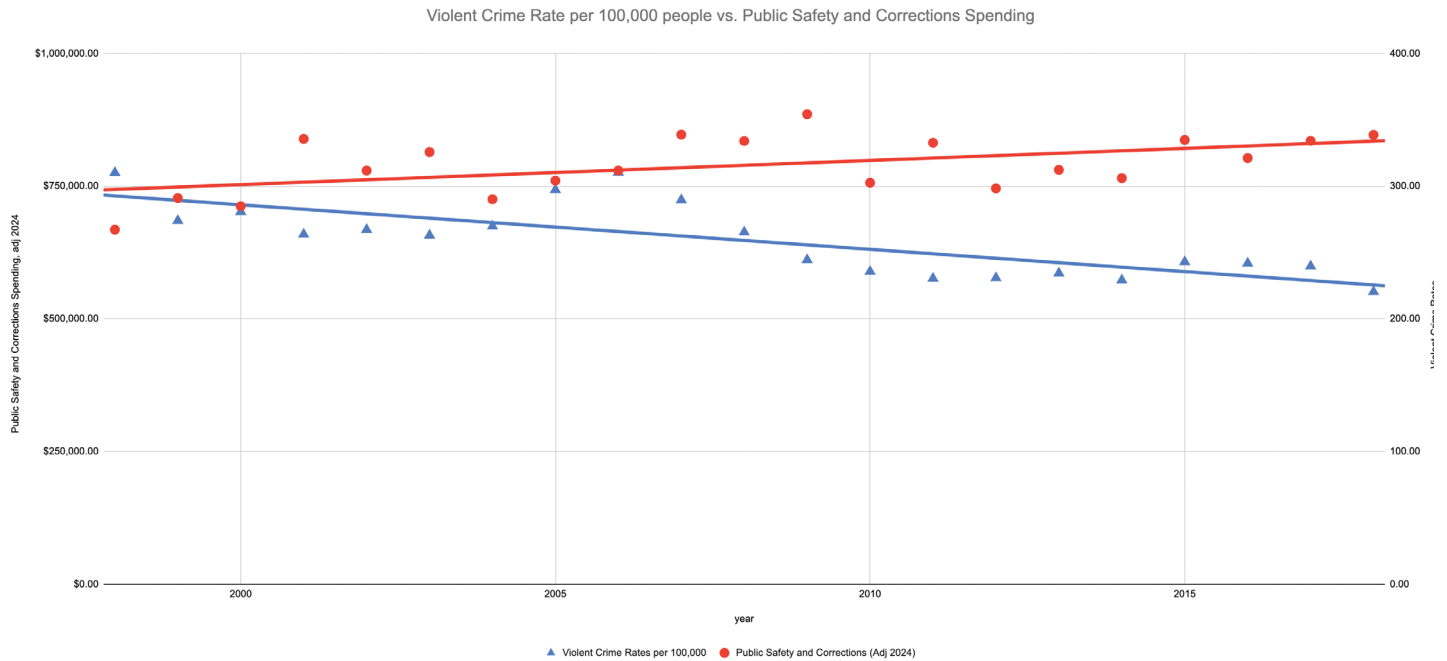
“It felt like I was making a difference or at least attempting to.” - Louisa McAlpine



“It was a very inspirational experience and I’m glad I had the opportunity to talk to our representatives and senators.”
- Abby Horton

MN Spending on Public Safety and Corrections vs. Spending on PreK-12 Education

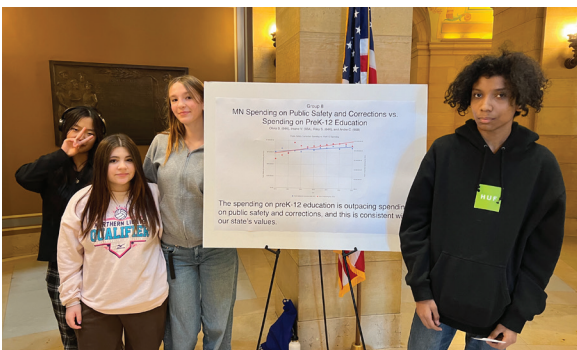
Riley S. (64A), Olivia S. (64A), Ireane V. (65A), and Andre C. (65B)



The spending on preK-12 education is outpacing spending on public safety and corrections, and this is consistent with our state’s values.



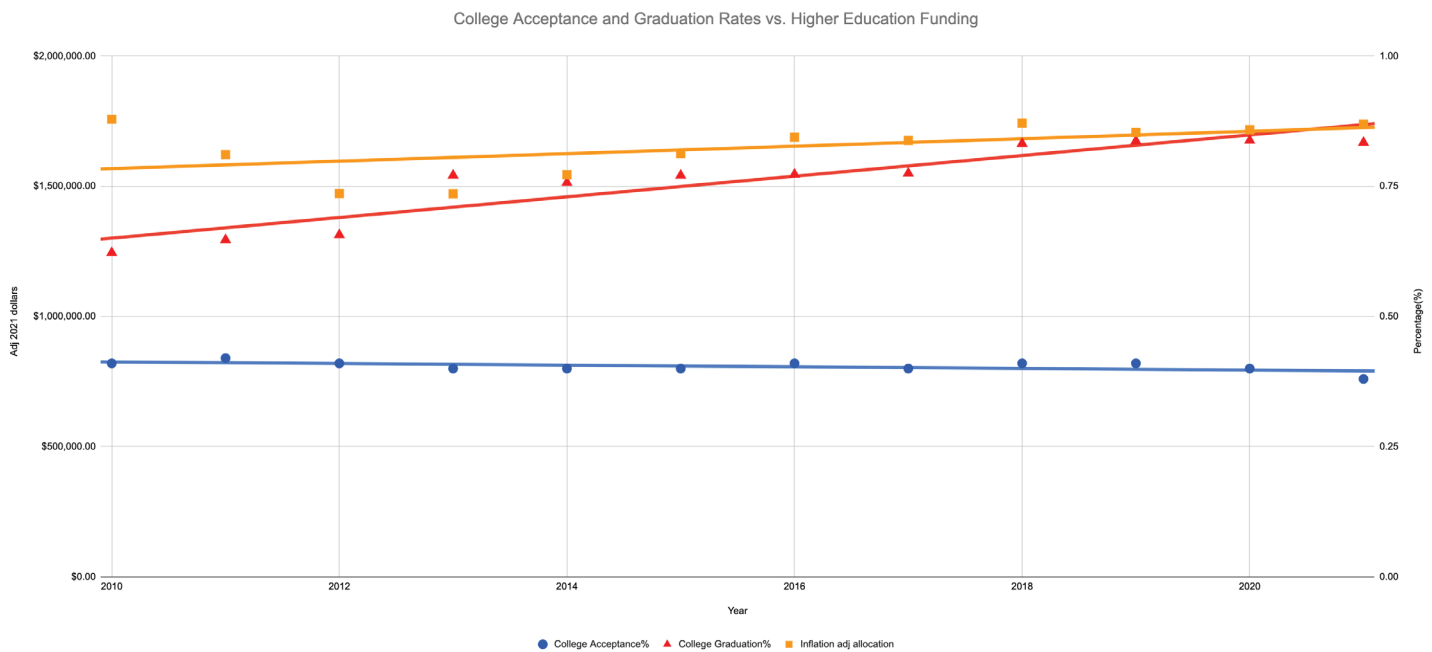
“It was so much easier than I thought. I thought it was going to be a lot more of them asking complex questions.” - Riley S.



“It was a lot easier than I thought it would be.” - Olivia Smail

College Graduation and Acceptance Rate in MN vs. Government Funding Spent on the College Education System

Annika R. (64B), Wesley S. (64B), Nabella G. (65B), and Nora X. (66B)



The dropout crisis overlooks disengaged students in school, missing those who don't enjoy or benefit from it, unaccounted for statistically.



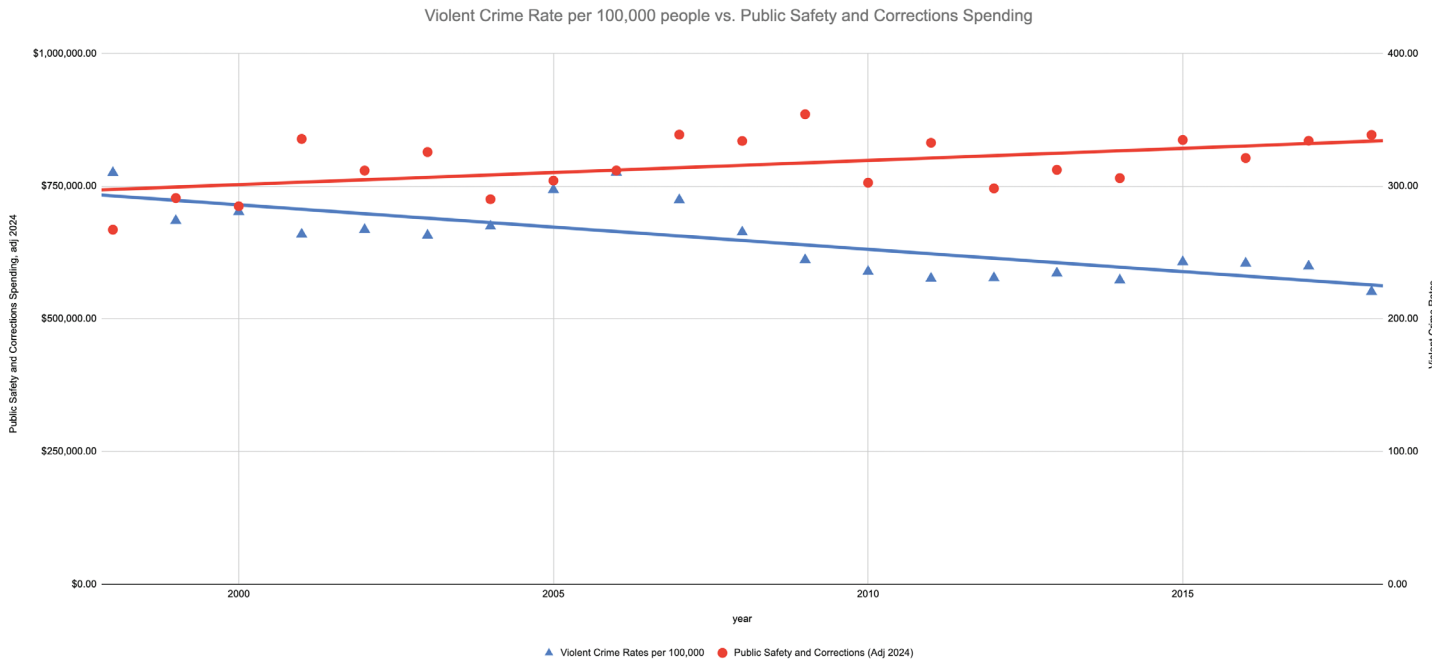
“It was very refreshing to finally get it over with and it was not as scary as I thought.” - Annika Rife



“It was kind of stressful but it was a new experience.” - Nora Xiong

PreK-12th Educational Spending vs. 3rd Grade Reading Development

Onyx O. (64B), Lulu V. (65B), Jay S. (65B), and Tip K. (67B)



Rather than simply increasing funds for educational spending, we suggest targeted literacy intervention for kids who are struggling to read.



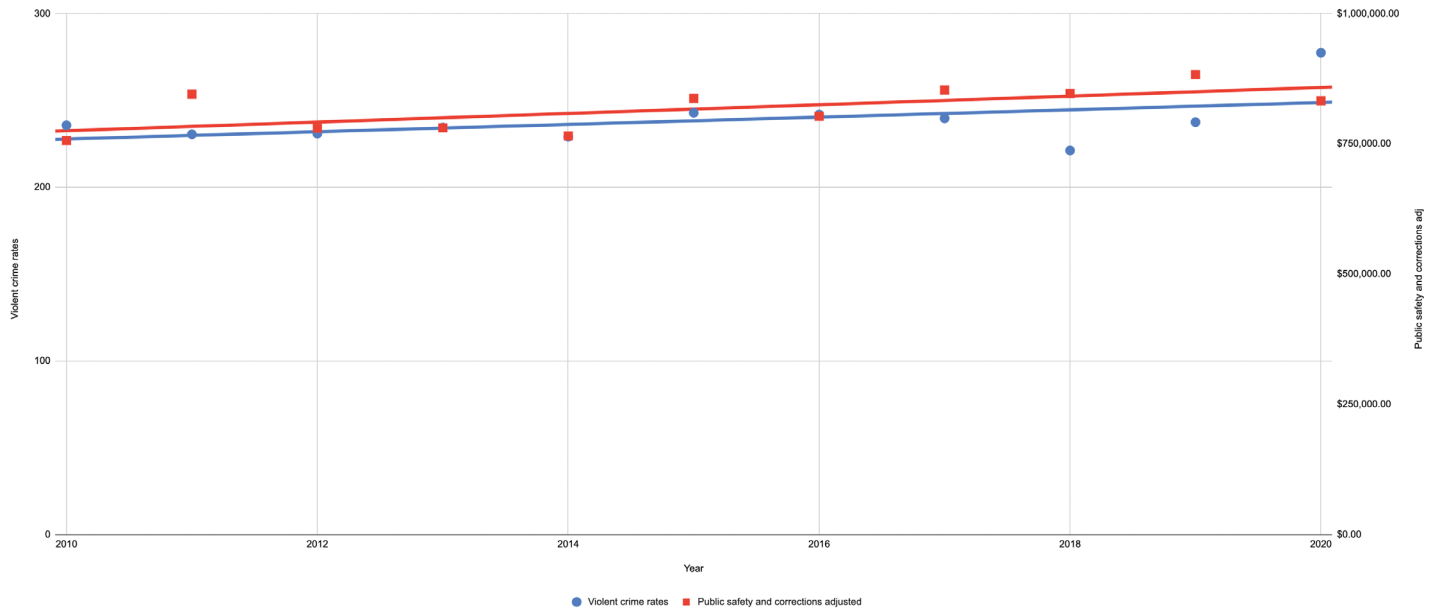
“They were a lot nicer than I thought they would be. Most of them were interested to give their opinions.” - Onyx Oberheide



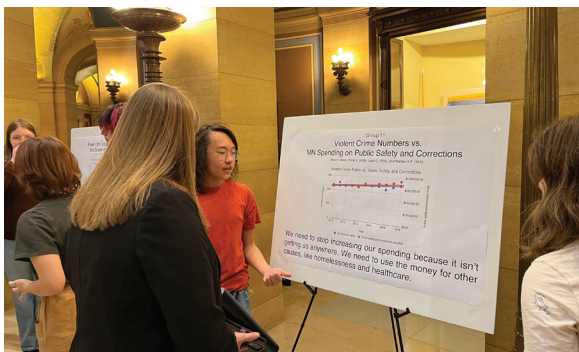
“It was overall very fun and it was worth the work and the outcome was good.” - Tip King

Violent Crime Numbers vs. MN Spending on Public Safety and Corrections

Chris Y. (47B), Alex H. (64A), Matteo A.P. (64A), and Leah C. (65A)



We need to stop increasing our spending because it isn't getting us anywhere. We need to use the money for other causes, like homelessness and healthcare.



“It made me very nervous but after a bit it was very cool to see and present to all of the different senators in our state.”

- Chris Yang

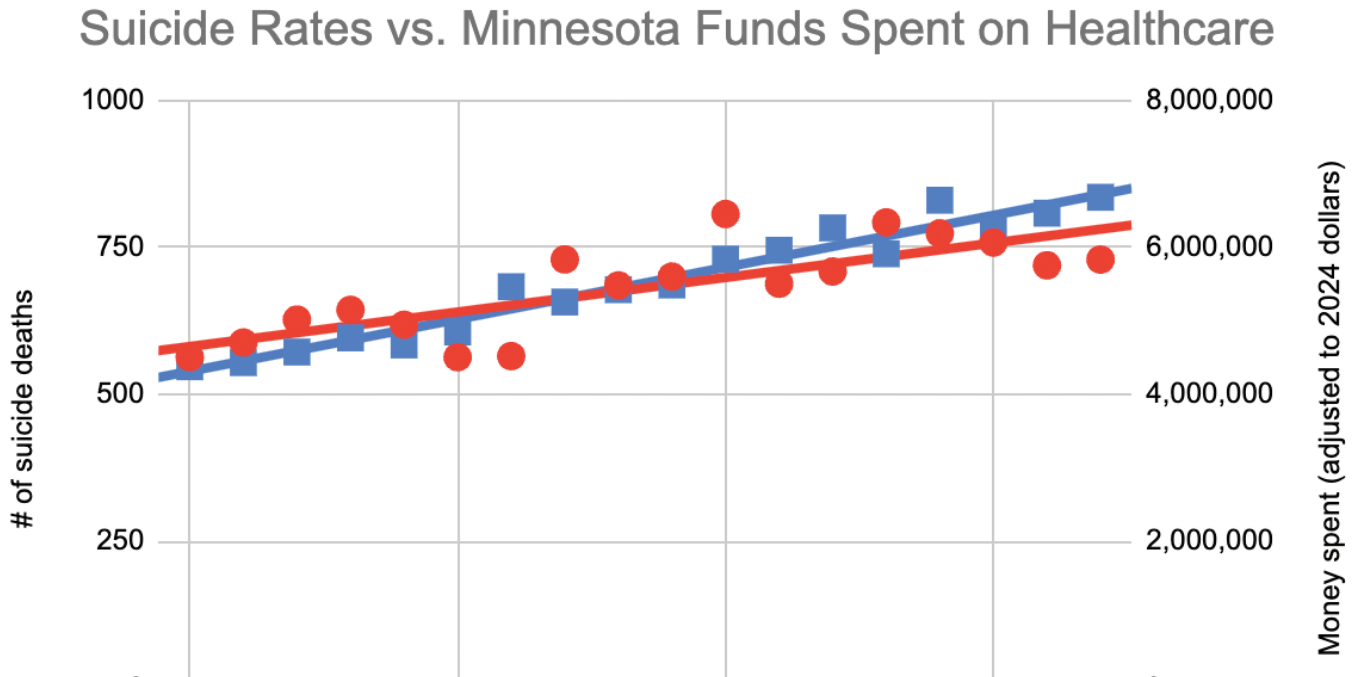


“It was fun, we got to talk to a lot of people and we got to get advice on our argument.”

- Matteo Alejandro-Provenzano

Suicide Rates vs. MN Funds Spent on Healthcare

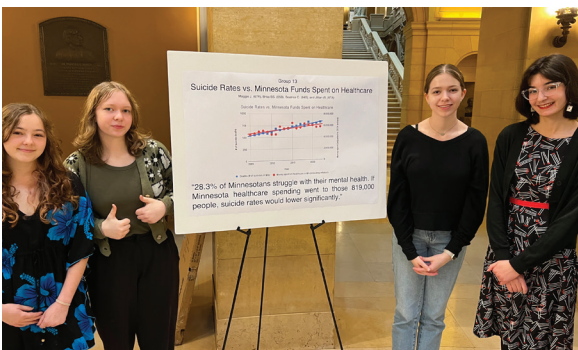
Beatrice C. (64B), Brisa BS. (65B), Maggie J. (67A), and Jillian W. (67A)



28.3% of Minnesotans struggle with their mental health. If Minnesota healthcare spending went to those 819,000 people, suicide rates would lower significantly.



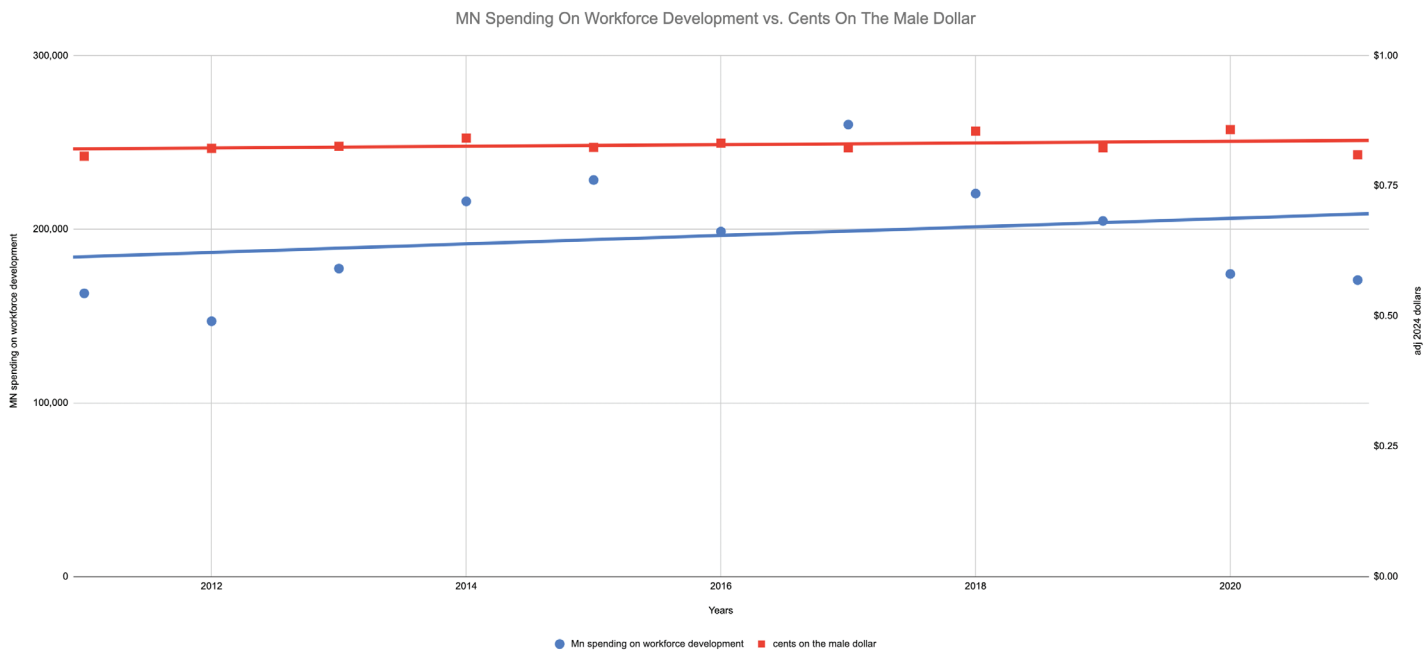
“It was surprisingly easy, I think. I mean it’s not like they’re scary. They’re not gonna, like, attack you.” - Maggie Jansen



“It was definitely a learning experience on how to properly present information in a professional way.” - Beatrice Cosgrove

Women's and Men's Pay in the Workspace in MN vs. MN Spending on Workplace and Economic Development

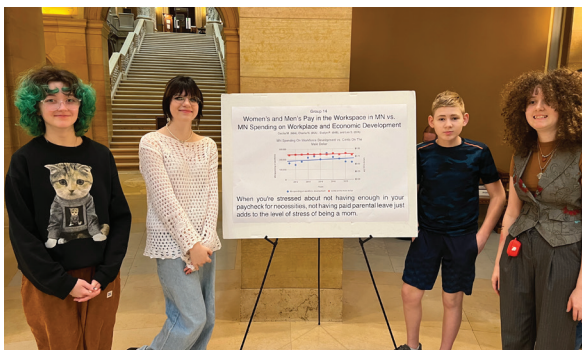
Evelyn P. (64B), Charlie N. (65A), Cecilia M. (66A), and Leo S. (67A)



We need to stop increasing our spending because it isn't getting us anywhere. We need to use the money for other causes, like homelessness and healthcare.



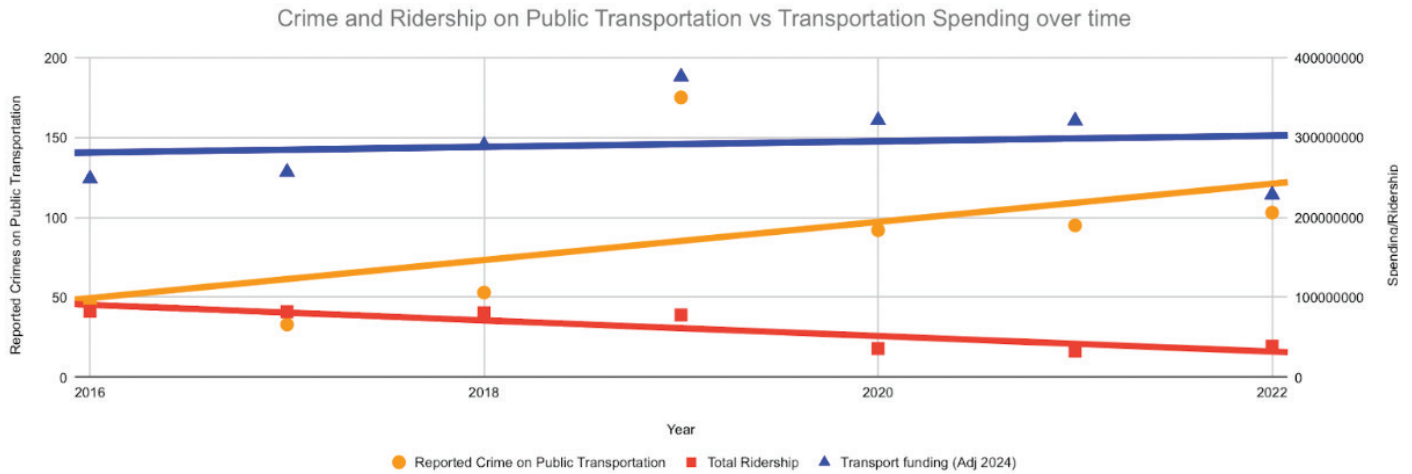
“It was nice because you got to see a lot of different perspectives from different ages.”
- Cecelia Mason



“It felt like we were treated like an adult, but it was good and I would do it again.” - Leo Scoggins

Funding For Transportation vs. Crime on Public Transportation

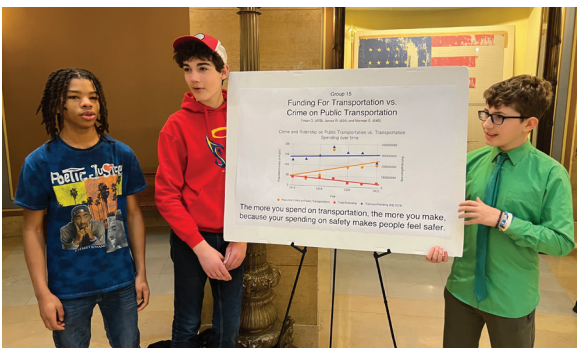
Fintan G. (47B), Norman S. (64B), and Jarvez R. (65A)



The more you spend on transportation, the more you make, because you're spending on safety makes people feel safer.



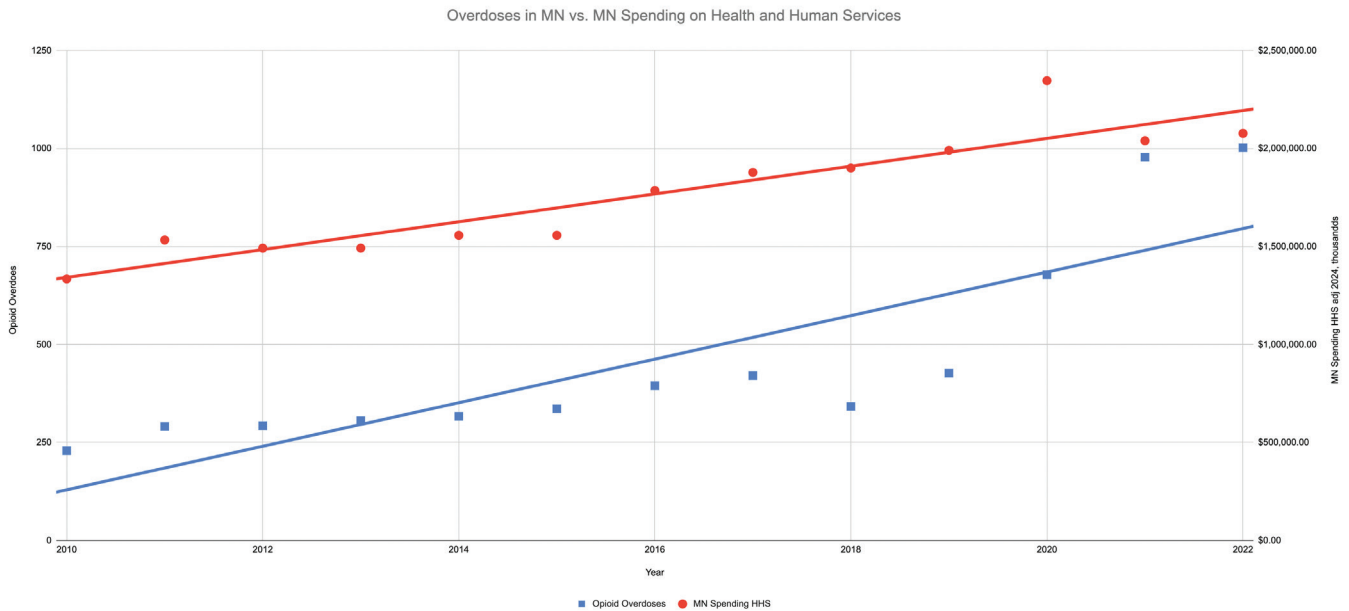
“They asked us some really good questions about our project that really challenged us.”
- Norman Simon



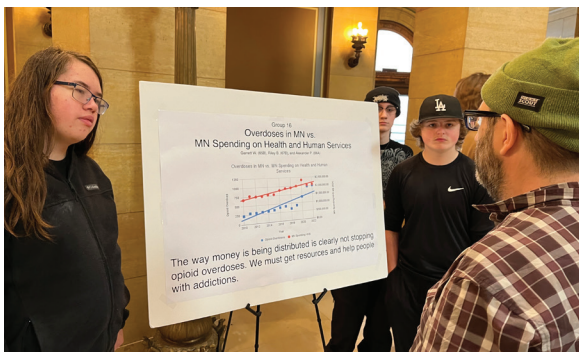
“It was fun and interesting and I was glad I got to talk with higher-ups.” - Finn Glasco

Overdoses in MN vs. MN Spending on Health and Human Services

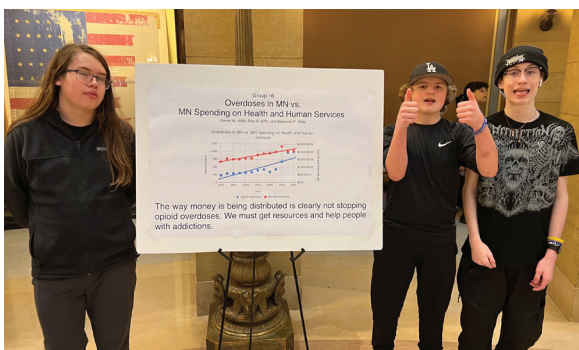
Garrett W. (65B), Alexander P. (66A), and Riley B. (67B)



The way money is being distributed is clearly not stopping opioid overdoses. We must get resources and help people with addictions.



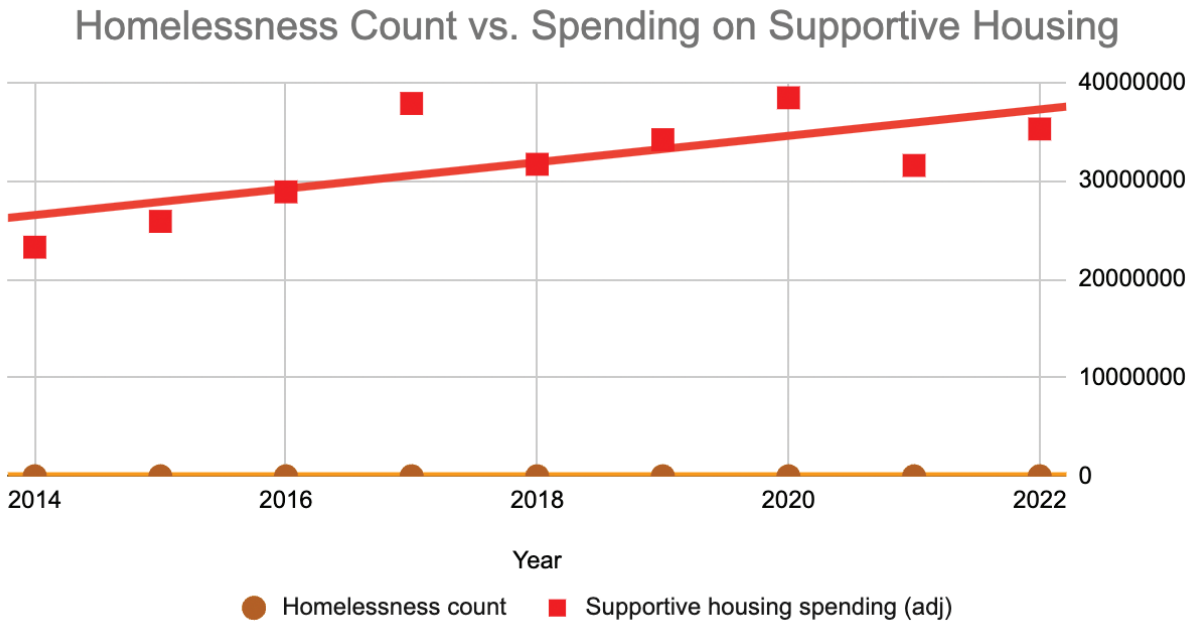
“At first, it was stressful because we had to talk to these important people, but after a while, I figured out it wasn’t as stressful as I thought.” - Alex Phoenix



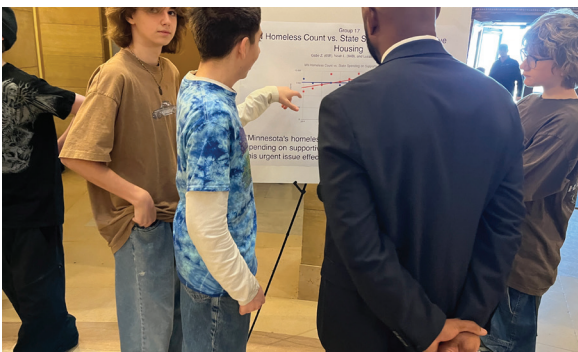
“It was really hard, but I felt well prepared.” - Garrett Weyandt

MN Homeless Count vs. State Spending on Supportive Housing

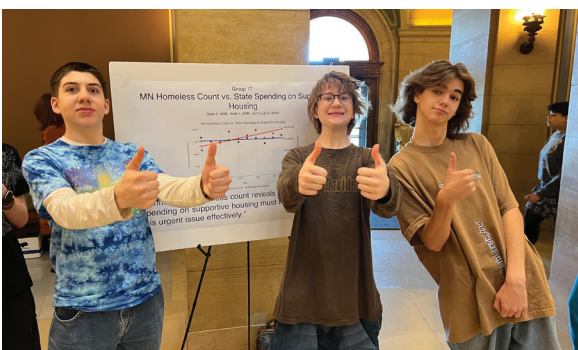
Lucas K. (64A), Noah L. (64B), and Gabe Z. (65B)



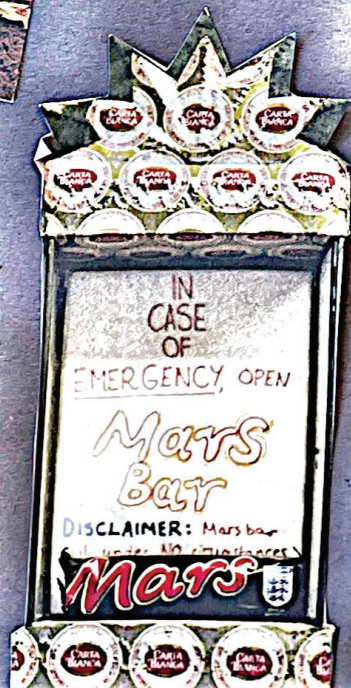
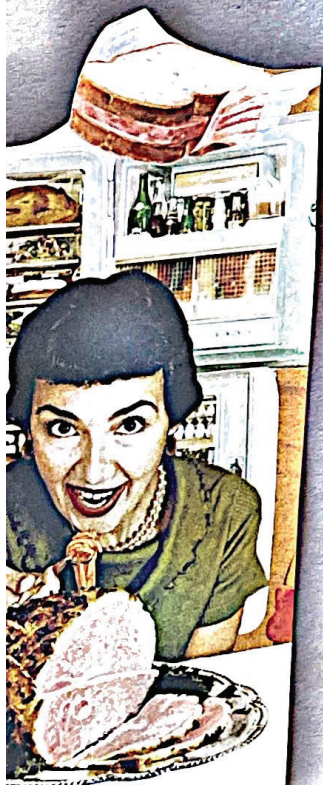
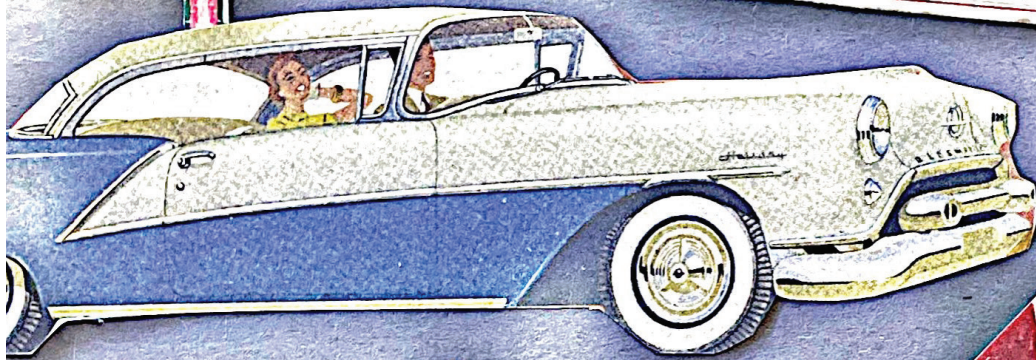
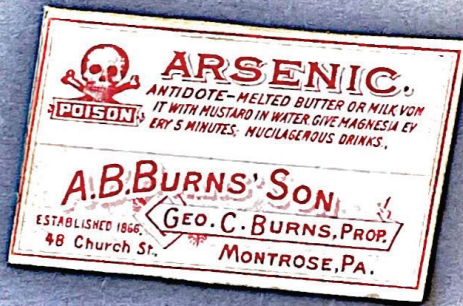
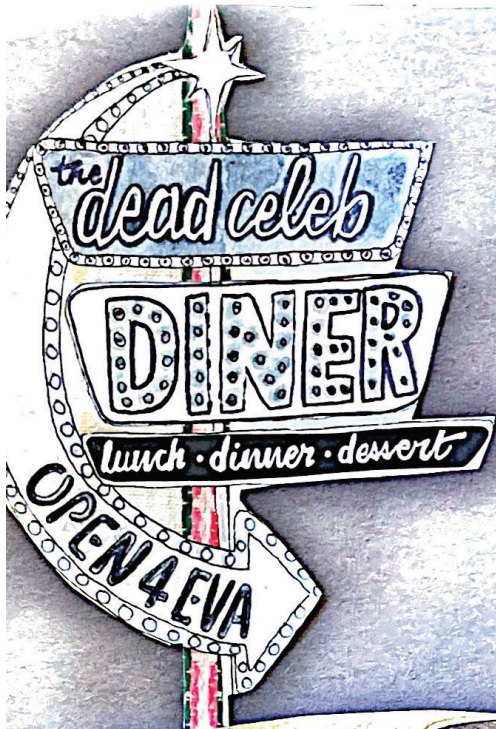
Minnesota’s homeless count reveals dark reality. State spending on supportive housing must increase to address this urgent issue effectively.



“It was surprisingly chill and we messed up way less than we expected.” - Gabe Zupfer



“It was really cool to present a project to our representatives and get our voices heard.”
- Lucas Kivel



Alternate Narratives

In Quarter 1, students read several short stories, used critical thinking skills to identify theme, then wrote an “alternate narrative” for a story of choice. These narratives changed a key scene by telling it from a new perspective, helping students develop narrative voice while allowing them to create within an existing structure.



Table of Contents

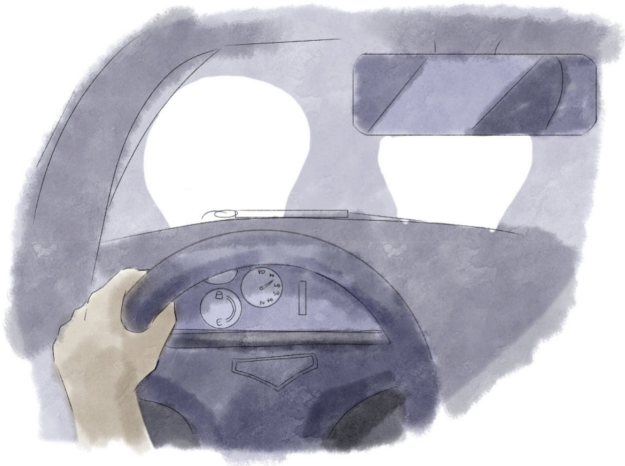
Wife to Woe - Brisa Bolton-Steiner	25
A Dark End - Leah Collier	25
An Apprehensive Evening - Rosie Douglas	26
Drowning - Zania Hierlmaier	27
Confession and Confrontation - Maggie Jansen	28
Helping a Stranger - Phoojywg Kick	30
Food for Thought - Lucas Kivel	30
A Teepee Intruder - Jae Lind	31
Revelations of a Lizard Man - Dot Lipski Cain	31
Divulging Affairs - Cecelia Mason	32
Interrupted Dreams - Annika Rife	33
Standing Up - Grady Smith	34
Perennial Pest - Adelaide Stender	34
Problematic Pupil - Tait Vossen-Nelson	35
Faux Francias - Nora Xiong	36

Wife to Woe

By Brisa Bolton-Steiner

I look at the clock. Okay. Five more minutes until I get out. Five more minutes until I get to the car to drive home. 15 more minutes of having a happy wife, happy life... ding ding ding the bell rang. My mind is racing. I can't leave my chair, my desk, my safe spot. I take one more deep breath then get up and walk out the door. I'm heading to my car as I see my friend. I wave, he waves back with a smile. Then, I see this red car pull up and his wife comes to pick him up.

I start to cringe at the thought of what's going to happen in 15 minutes. I was on the way home and couldn't get the thought out of my mind. How is she



going to react? Will she cry, will she be ok? Should I even tell her? Tell her everything I've done, I think to myself I can't cover it up forever. she'll eventually find out. I'm done making up my mind. I'm going to tell her. All my thoughts are going through my head like a thunderstorm, like the ones I hid under my bed as a kid.

The car ride home feels like the shortest 15 minutes ever. Once I see the driveway, I turn my car off. I watch as the headlights go out and the engine turns off. I open the door so slowly a snail could've beat me to my own door I start walking up to the door preparing myself for what comes next.

I find Mary sitting at the sewing machine, humming away happily. I sit down on the couch while Mary gets me a drink. I have some time before I talk to Mary. I drink slowly then swallow the whole glass. I listen as the ice clanks at the bottom of the cup.

then I sit up and get another, that's probably the fastest I've ever swallowed a cup of whiskey. Then I address, "Mary we need to talk."

She comes over to the couch and sits "What is it?"

I take one big deep breath. Breathe. Breathe. Please. Deep breathes. My mind is all over the place, as I tell her everything. When I'm done talking, I debate getting another drink and decide it's not a good idea. Mary, after taking it all, her face going red, replies, "I'll make you some supper."

She gets up and runs downstairs. I get up and walk over to the window. I'm thinking about how it went. What happens next? I ask myself. I don't know how to live without Mary around. We've been together for over a decade. I keep thinking about it as my eyes land on the window.

At the same time, I hear Mary come back up the stairs. I don't turn around for fear that I'll see Mary in tears. There was no way I could console her after what I did. Then suddenly I hear a loud "UGG."

Then I feel hot spots on the back of my head. For some reason I can't think. My eyes start to close, and I can't control anything at this point. Everything goes black... and I fall just before my eyes close. I see Mary looking down at me with a complete shock on her face. Blackness fills inside of me.

A Dark End

By Leah Collier

I walked into the house and took my shoes and coat off. I put them on the coat hanger and shut and locked the door. I made my way to the living room and walked in. I saw my wife sitting there sewing. She looked content. My heart started to break knowing what I did to this sweet lovely woman I married..I couldn't tell her..but I had to..I had no other choice.. I grabbed some whiskey and a glass and started to put two cubes into the glass, and poured the whiskey into it. I took a sip and felt the cold substance cool off my nerves slightly. I soon felt the light buzz and heard my wife speak, asking how I was and how work was. I said it was fine and slowly sat down on the big leather chair we had got when we first bought this house. I sat down and got lost in my own thoughts.

My wife soon asked if she could get my slippers. I said no. I stared at the ground, getting lost in

An Apprehensive Evening

By Rosie Douglas

my thoughts, unable to think straight. After what seemed like forever I heard her speak again..it was something about being a senior and the police. I couldn't really make out what she was saying, so I didn't reply. She asked if she could get me some cheese since she hadn't made dinner due to it being a Thursday. I again said no, and kept staring at the carpeted floor. I soon started to get up, wanting more whiskey. My wife jumped up and almost shouted out "I'll get it!" I said in a stern tone "No- just sit down." She looked a little confused but sat back down on the couch anyway.

She told me if I was too tired to eat out she could make some fresh food for us. She said I didn't even have to move out of the chair. I stayed still and didn't respond. I started to tell her I had to tell her something. After I told her this, she went quiet. I couldn't tell what she was thinking, yet again I couldn't blame her. After what felt like an eternity she spoke quietly, almost whispering "I'll go make dinner." I watched her walk downstairs into the cellar, and turned around and poured myself more whiskey, looking out the window. It was getting dark out, a little past sun-

I couldn't tell her.. but I had to.

set, and there were a couple of people walking home. The sky was turning from purple to a deep navy blue.

I started getting lost in my own thoughts before I heard my wife come back up from the cellar. I started to get a little annoyed, but didn't bother to turn around. In a cold tone I said, "For god sakes Mary, don't bother making dinner for me I'm going out." But before I could even finish, I felt something hard hit my head. My vision started to go blurry but I remained standing for a couple seconds. Then, everything went dark, and I crashed onto the carpeted floor. Everything started to go away, my hearing started to fade, and my head was pounding. I felt like I was going to vomit, I could hear muffled laughing, I couldn't think. Eventually, I felt myself being dragged somewhere. Soon, everything went dark, everything stopped.

As I walked outside the police station the cold open air hit my face. I should've stayed in my warm office. My keys shiver in my hand unlocking my car door, and I get inside and grip the wheel. How am I going to tell her? She's my wife and I love her. I can't just hurt her like this, but she'll be heartbroken either way, I have to tonight. I shiver at the thought as I start the car up. I'm worried about how she will react. Better to tell her sooner rather than later. I pull into the driveway. Tonight after dinner I'll do it. I convince myself to be brave.

As I walk in the door, I see her sewing and she greets me with a kiss on the cheek, "Hello darling," she says with her sweet voice. I could tell how happy she was to see me, and how much I would hurt her later.

"Hello darling." I reply, as she takes my coat off, hanging it up while I go to sit down next to her chair, slightly panicking.

She comes back with a glass of whiskey for me, then speaks up and asks, "Tired darling?"

"Yes, I'm tired." My response is cold. I have to get it over with soon enough, so I do the unusual, and drain the glass with half left. Ugh, just one more. Before I can get up, she cries, "I'll get it!" It sounded more like a yell or a shout.

"Sit down," I roughly say. When I come back, she looks puzzled at my glass. I could understand, it was a dark amber color Amber... I have to. She pulls me from my train of thought when she says, "Darling, shall I get your slippers?"

"No," I say bluntly, coldly.

I can feel her staring at me before she speaks up again, "I think it's a shame that when a policeman gets to be as senior as you, they keep him walking on his feet all day long," I ignore her, but then she continues, "Darling, would you like me to get some cheese? I haven't made any supper because it's Thursday."

"No," I decline, but she continues.

"If you're too tired to eat out, it's still not too late. There's plenty of meat and stuff in the freezer. You can have it right here and not even move out of the

chair.”

She waits for me to answer. I made no response. “Anyway,” she went on, “I’ll get you some cheese and crackers first.” She began to get up again.

“I don’t want it.” This would be the third time I declined her offers and I could tell how uneasy she felt about it by the way she moves in her chair.

“But you must eat! I’ll fix it anyway, and then you can have it or not, as you like.” She stands up again, placing her sewing down.

“Sit down, just for a minute, sit down,” I persist, “Go on, sit down.” She lowers herself back down to her chair, keeping her eyes on me

“Listen,” I shakily say, “I’ve got something to tell you.”

“What is it, darling? What’s the matter?”

I’ve become completely motionless, keeping my head down. “This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I’m afraid,” I say, “But I’ve thought about it a good deal and I’ve decided the only thing to do is tell you right away. I hope you won’t blame me too much.” So I told her. It doesn’t take long, just a couple minutes.

“So there it is,” I add, “I know it’s kind of a bad time to be telling you, but there simply wasn’t any other way. Of course I’ll give you money and see you’re being looked after, but there needn’t really be any fuss. I hope not anyway. It wouldn’t be very good for my job.”

She looks like she refuses to believe any of it, she seems like she’s in a shocked sort of state, but then she gets up again and whispers, “I’ll get the supper.”

I don’t even stop her. I don’t care, I wasn’t going to stay much longer anyways. Then I hear her take something out of the freezer. “For God’s sake, don’t make supper for me.” I say, “I’m going out.”

I hear her walk up to me. Didn’t she hear me? Then everything goes black.

Drowning

By Zania Hierlamier

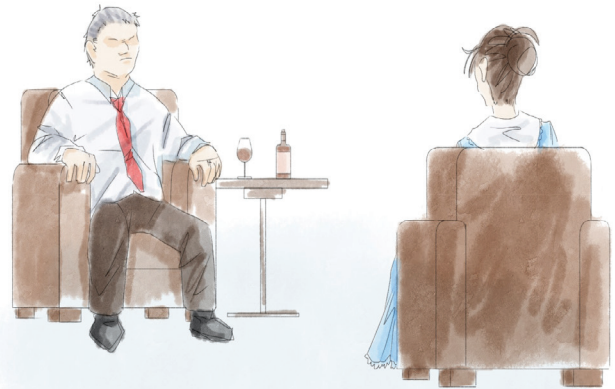
Everyday I see the same thing. A birds eye view of beautiful trees slowly transformed into skyscrapers with no sight of the sun. The lakes so clear they reflected the sky are long gone too, replaced with gravel and dirt that stick to your shoes and become a paradise for weeds. I don’t remember the sound of

those gushing springs at all anymore. I don’t remember much of anything it seems. I’ve learned by now that my job is to stay quiet and destroy the last of this natural masterpiece. As much as it kills me, I watch flames eat up everything, each day faster and faster. Until the only beauty left is surrounded by mass graves and gunshots.

A lot has changed with this new reality and it’s getting harder to get out fast enough. But then Mary will erupt. Out of her perfect world I am the reality. Her baby nonsense is getting to my head as well. Her imagination makes me cry with no tears, and sometimes I wish she could just have what she wanted. But that feeling washes over me quickly, and I remember.

Everything.

I remember the promises she never kept, and the promises she swore her life on. I remember the tape



and the crystals and the whispers. I remember the funeral, and the flowers and the casseroles, and I remember the baby. Her baby. And how nothing was ever mine. But none of that matters now.

The home I remember is gone. Instead the gate locks and the windows are bulletproof. Inside Mary sits in her grieving pose, though she calls it meditation. The amber liquid that swallows my invisible pain sits behind her, even though it’s rationed to miniature plastic bottles filled with mostly air. I don’t have words for this feeling anymore. I think it’s exhaustion, a malfunctioned spell the meds were supposed to take away, along with everything else. Sometimes I wonder if I am even here anymore, if the substance that brings life into me failed a long time ago, and I’m just too caught up in mindless orders to realize it.

I miss the how life used to be. Somehow I feel like it's all my fault that the world is this way. Like if I could have somehow stopped the climate change, there would be no war that never seems to end.

Mary expects small talk, the only thread keeping our marriage alive, but I'm done with the expectations that are buried so high I have an incurable hunch. So maybe tonight I will tell her.

Tell her what, is the question looming in my head. Do I tell her the rumors, the silence, the stares. Do I tell her about the hands behind my back, the sirens, and the blank hole that was me. Do I tell her it was all my fault for the life she was forced to have.

"I missed you dear," Mary whispers, but her voice is a tsunami to my silence. Good. I repeat in my head what I practiced. It wouldn't be this hard if Mary wasn't so hawkish. But she didn't really know me. She knew my gleaming professional mask that cov-



ered the small shell of me left. She thought I was an open book. She really could be so foolish sometimes. That made me feel a bit better. After all, we all knew she only used me as a crutch, that she had a real lover back home, back where women could have a voice, even if it wasn't heard.

"Would you like something to drink?" Mary's questions break my thoughts and capsize my imaginary boat, and I realize I must have been silent, since Mary will only speak if she's uncomfortable. "I'll get it!" That way she won't see me like this, chewed up and choking on life.

The kitchen lights glare brightly, blinding me like I've never seen, and I'm not sure why but I don't even feel like drinking tonight.

I need to tell her.

NOW....

So I leave a note. And watch her face fall, her body crumple, her tears pool.

And then I run.

And I think that kills everything

Left inside.

I killed that baby so she would feel how I felt. How I feel. Every single day. So that Mary wouldn't constantly feel bad for me or treat me less than human. Like I would break in her hands if she did something wrong.

Mary, please listen to me. I can't keep up with this life. I hope you understand. I love you but not enough to keep watching myself.

D

R

O

W

N.

I take the pills, one by one, until the bottles fall down with no weight holding them up.

I should be dead by now. I feel my heart beat beat beating.

Nooooo.

But I need to finish what I started.

I can't even look at Mary anymore. She brings out the worst in me so I'll do the same. I hit her like a punching bag, maroon dots spreading like a wildfire across her collarbone. Her golden hair now red, she looks dazed. It's not a good look. Before I can think, I grab the only thing I can see, a chunk of lamb from tonight's forgotten dinner, and beat her.

She's lifeless, a beautiful dead doll, and only I can admire her. I love this feeling. I have all the power in the world.

My grave is no longer an empty plot, we lay side by side. I really was capable of anything, wasn't I?

Confession and Confrontation

By Maggie Jansen

The air was cold, a chill seeping through the vents of my red Chevrolet Corvette. Autumn had cleaved its way into the South, fallen leaves, an array of colors — red, brown, and orange dusted the sidewalks and tree-lined streets. It was September. I've always liked September; it was a relief from three month's

of summer's sweltering heat, especially on those days I was clad in my police uniform, a feeble wind doing almost nothing to dispose of the dew on my skin during those feverish temperatures.

But at the moment, I couldn't dislike September more as I drive home from work. The outdoor breeze gave my arms goosebumps, a bead of sweat budding at my temple, my hands clammy against the steering wheel. A sickly, aching feeling waxed in my stomach, but I knew that it wasn't the cold—it was the guilt of my anticipated actions clawing at my insides. I just didn't want to admit it.

I fidget with my wedding ring as I shift my gaze straight-on towards the road, leading me to miss the right-turn on Shaker Street, a vital part of the route to the Maloney Estate. I turned around, muttering a curse under my breath, only to miss it twice more. On the third time, I did it purposely. I'd do anything to avoid this confrontation. I even thought of taking off in the middle of the night once—I could leave a check for a couple-hundred dollars for Mary and the baby, at least. But, I knew that would make me worse of a man—as what I did to Mary was terrible enough as is. I had betrayed her trust. So, wouldn't not saying anything at all be an even clearer example of my perfidy?

I eventually arrive at the cul-de-sac where my house sits, pulling into my driveway. I'm nerve-racked as I make my way to the door, colored a saffron-yellow from when I painted it a few years back, per Mary's request. As I turned my key in the lock, my wife rushed to peck me on the cheek, saying, "Hullo darling," her tone is almost eager, if not anxious-ridden.

"Hullo darling," I echoed back. She takes my coat, which was draped across my arm and hangs it in the oak closet east of the doorway. Mary walks away to the sideboard, to fix the two of us drinks, as usual. She returns with two glasses, carrying the clinking of ice and glass with her. She hands me my glass—the stronger drink—and I sit down on the chair opposite of Mary. The two of us lapse into silence. Mary knows I like to bask in the quiet when I come home from work and unwind with a drink. But as I sip my drink, I purse my lips into almost a frown, to keep them closed; I'm afraid what might spill out. I'm not

ready to tell her yet.

Mary breaks the silence: "Tired, darling?"

"Yes," I reply, "I'm tired." I swiftly finish my drink and begin to stand up to fetch another. I suppose this act is the attempt to muster up courage—or to avoid this conversation altogether.

"I'll get it!" Mary jumps from her seat, almost knocking over her sewing supplies.

"Sit down," I say. The words come out harsher than I mean. Might as well not be kind now. I pour my new drink, swirls of whiskey and a dark amber hue filling the glass.

Mary begins to ramble on, but I just lock my gaze downwards on my drink. A soft ring in my ears muffle her words. I have to get this over with. "Anyway," she starts, snapping me out of my trance, "I'll get you some cheese and crackers first." Right now, I need to leave. There is no time for cheese and crackers.

"I don't want it," I say.

Mary shifts in her chair opposite of me, staring at me wide-eyed, exclaiming, "But you must eat! I'll fix it anyway, and then you can have it or not, as you like." She sets her sewing down on the side table, under the lamp.

I sigh in a way that couldn't help but sound irritated: "Sit down," I say, "Just for a minute, sit down." She lowers herself back into the chair, keeping her gaze on me, like a deer in headlights. She acts almost frightened, as she sits down. Though it's selfish, I can't help but think that I should be the person worrying about what I'm about to say, anxiety brewing in my stomach. I run through how this discussion could go in my head and I can't bear the thought of this situation maiming my reputation in any way.

"Listen," I begin. "I've got something to tell you." She responds with a What is it darling? What's the matter? The nickname causes a feeling I can't describe—guilt mixed with frustration. I wish I had gotten along with what I had to say much earlier this afternoon.

"This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I'm afraid," I mutter. "But I've thought about it a good deal and I've decided the only thing to do is tell you right away. I hope you won't blame me too much." And so, I tell her. It takes four—maybe five minutes,

But, I knew that would make me worse of a man—as what I did to Mary was terrible enough as is.

but I tell her all of it. Mary looks at me in a strange, confused, shocked kind of horror as our marriage unfolds with each word. I don't even try to grasp on to this relationship and hold it together in my hands. I sure didn't when I made that fatal mistake many months ago. What is done is done.

"So there it is," I append. "And I know it's kind of a bad time to be telling you, but there simply wasn't any other way. Of course I'll give you money and see you're looked after. But there needn't really be any fuss. I hope not anyway. It wouldn't be very good for my job."

Mary just looks at me. She doesn't say anything for a minute, until she says, barely above a whisper, "I'll get the supper." I watch her step out of the room, down the stairs to the cellar as the overwhelming urge for flight escalates. I'm not sure what to do with myself, so I make my way over to the window, empty drink in hand, amber whiskey residue clinging to the ice cubes at the bottom of my glass.

As I hear her footsteps padding across the floor, I sigh: "Don't make supper for me. I'm going out." Mary's footsteps come closer before I feel a sharp pain on the back of my head and a thud. Then, everything goes dark.

clinging to the ice cubes at the bottom of my glass.

As I hear her footsteps padding across the floor, I sigh: "Don't make supper for me. I'm going out." Mary's footsteps come closer before I feel a sharp pain on the back of my head and a thud. Then, everything goes dark.

Helping a Stranger

By Phoojywg Kick

There I was on the bus, just woken up by the bus's creaking wheels as it came to a stop, the calm winds rushing towards the rusty old doors, its hinges just hanging on. I took my time walking off of it, embracing the smooth fall air stinging my lungs as the bright grass waved. The other kids walked along the sidewalk as they got off the bus making their way to the old red brick building we called school, the heavy metal door only held on by tiny hinges.

By the time I was off, Clint was lookin' at me with a strange look like he was scared of something. He was a skinny tall kid who was from the city. I watched him take a peek around the school before

he ran as fast as those skinny legs could take him into the school. I saw the dense metal doors swing open and slam shut.

Just then, Oakley grabbed him on his shoulder and started saying something foul to him, like always. I was halfway there when I heard Clint start yelling and Oakley yelling back. I was tired of Oakley - his yelling at Clint and his foul mouth. So, I pushed Clint aside, balled my fists, and reared back preparing for my fists to launch at Oakley. I felt the sting of his flesh on my right hand as I hit his cheekbone while my left hit him dead on cracking his nose. There was a crowd now as he stumbled back and fell to the old carpeted floor with a bang.

By the time I was standing straight, I was tackled and dragged away fast I had no break. I locked eyes with Clint. He knew what I meant when I did that. As I was being dragged away. The teachers yelled and yelled but I didn't hear anything. They were almost as mad as Ma. They said I was suspended and was gonna be punished and maybe sent to juvie, but I didn't care cause I helped Clint and saved him from Oakley.

Food for Thought

By Lucas Kivel

As I entered the driveway, I heard the tires rolling on the gravel. The smell of leather and air freshener left a waft in the car. I could see my wife blissfully waiting in the window. I thought of how I would break it to her. I knew it was going to be difficult. I walked to the door and mentally prepared myself for the news I would have to break.

My wife greeted me with a cheerful smile, she took my coat, and got me a drink. It was strong. The smell of cleaning spray was a drift in the air.

I thought about how to tell her. I ran the situation over and over again in my mind, trying each and every way she'd react like a simulation that was subsequent to my own imagination. My wife, only knowing it's a normal evening, asked about my day. She insisted on accommodating me in every way she could think up. I finished my half full drink with a single gulp and got myself another. I made it an extra strong one, with a yellow amberness and a stench of alcohol. The clank of the ice cubes against the glass greeted me once more before I knew I had to tell her. I sat her down

after insisting on making us dinner. I took a deep breath, looked at my wife now with a concerned look on her face and told her everything. As I told her I could see her face change with each word as she went from her giddy, blissful self to now a mindless body staring into my eyes with no meaning.

She told me she'd make us dinner again but this time, I didn't try to stop her. She went to the cellar and I got up to get myself another drink. As I was pouring my drink, I heard a noise coming from the cellar behind me. Then, I felt the strike of a frozen leg of lamb hit me like a club in the back of my head. As I fell to the ground, I could see my wife's mindless expression. She looked at me like a possessed killer from a horror movie. I could smell the alcohol that was now on the ground after I dropped it from the strike. I heard a gasp from my wife as if now that mindless body was being occupied by the woman I once knew. Suddenly I felt the last breath of my life exit my body, and I knew it was over.

A Teepee Intruder

By Jae Lind

I wake up and blink at the ceiling, my eyes blurry in the dark. I yawn and turn over to go back to sleep, the pillow soft beneath my head. Next to me, my husband is snoring softly. On the other side of the tepee is our daughter. She twitches in her sleep, trying to turn over, but she can't. The ropes my husband has placed over her hold her down, and keep her safe. One of the village men tried to steal her last night, but was caught when he stabbed her and she screamed. I couldn't see his face as he dashed away into the night, and now we all fear that she'll be taken from us. Whatever man is trying to steal her would have better luck just buying her.

My eyes flutter shut when I hear a faint rustle and a soft breeze. I open them and turn, glancing around, but it's dark and I can barely see anything except the faint silhouettes of furniture and the thin ribbons of light piercing through the fabric. The leather flap to open the tepee has blown open and the moonlight shines through it, very faint. It likely is illuminating the silhouettes. I wouldn't have noticed it if my eyes remained closed. I yawn, and get up to pin it shut - I must have forgotten to last night. I stumble over to the bed again, trip on something, and nearly fall,

letting out a strange noise. I am too tired to care. I lay there, in the bed, for a few minutes before the darkness settles on me and I am pulled into a faint sleep.

Shht. Shht. Shht. Pop.

I awake suddenly, my eyes still closed. Something is making a noise.

Shht. Shht. Shht. Pop.

It sounds like someone sawing and then the pop is odd. I get a sense of deja vu from it. What was it again?

I turn over, my eyes still closed. I try to ignore the sense of dread settling in my stomach and take a deep breath. I must have alerted whatever was in here, as the noise becomes frantic and rushed- like it may be out of time if it does not finish quickly.

Shht. Shht. Shht. Pop. Shht. Shht. Shht. Pop

Yes that's it - it sounds just like when my husband cut the ropes holding down my daughter this morning. Is there someone here? I try to ignore it, and tell myself I'm just worried. Eventually, my anxiety gets the better of me, and I sit up straight, my back arched and my eyes sweeping around, looking for an extra shadow.

"Hello? Who's there?" I call.

The sawing noise stopped, and my husband groaned softly. "There is no one there, go back to sleep."

I sigh, and lay back down. I could've sworn I saw dashes of white and the glint of eyes in the dark, though. I easily fall asleep without the sawing noise, ready for the odd night to be past me.

I awoke, startled. My daughter is screaming, about half of the ropes cut through. On the ground, curled up, lies something horrid.

It has the silhouette of a human, with long, dark hair. Bits of dried leaves and dirt and tangled in the matted hair. It has dark, black voids where its eyes should be. I know that when they open they'll be bloodshot. It is vaguely human, but its skin is pure white. Black stripes across its back, and curl around its face.

"Old man!" I cry. "Wake up, something is in the tent!"

The screams alert the strange thing and it jumps up with a start. It scrambles out of the tepee, tearing a hole in the door that I'll have to sew up later. My husband runs out after it, and I grab the knife it left. I begin to cut the remaining ropes to free my screaming daughter. After each one is broken, it lets

out a pop - the exact same sound I heard last night.

"What was that?" My daughter asks as she sits up. Fear glistens in her eyes, and she is shivering slightly.

"I don't know," I answered. "You stay here and calm down."

I walk over to the door of the tepee and peer out, tense and ready to run. I don't see anything yet, but suddenly I see the creature running off as an army of people, led by my husband, chases it with torches and guns. I turn back around and say, "I'm not sure, but whatever it was, it's gone now."

Revelations of a Lizard Man

By Dot Lipski Cain



I try losing the stress that is emanating from my body by tracing my hand on the thin worn steering wheel and taking deep breaths as I pull up to the garage.

I step out of the car quickly, Beep! I lock the car like I have for years while opening the front door, and I walk to the living room. The evening sun shines through the curtains to the left of my wife who's been waiting for me not knowing the fact that I've been hiding the fact that I'm a lizard man our entire marriage.

She greets me with a kiss "Hullo darling" and takes my coat to hang.

"Hullo darling" I return the greeting.

After she made our afternoon drinks, I sat down

and put both my hands on the glass, starting to swirl the ice around, lightly tapping the glass.

After a moment of silence she asked, "Tired darling?"

I replied, "Yes,"

The drink should be releasing my stress but instead it feels like she is tripping over my nerves.

"I'm tired."

I make a quick move and swallow the drink dry, leaning forward slowly, digesting the disgusting human poison. I need another.

I start to get up, but suddenly she shoots up with a face of stress. "I'll get it!"

Yelling, just what I need. "Sit down."

I really don't need this right now. After getting a much, much stronger drink I walk over to the chair to sit down.

"Darling, shall I get your slippers?"

"No." It really hits me how strong the drink is when I notice the tiny oily swirls that the drink was creating.

"I think it's a shame," she pauses, only to continue, "that when a policeman gets to be as senior as you, they keep him walking about his feet all day long." Little do you know I'm a lizard who doesn't age. "Would you like me to get you some cheese? I haven't made any supper because it's Thursday." She said.

"No," I replied.

"If you're too tired to eat out," she paused, "it's not too late. There's plenty of meat and stuff in the freezer, and you can have it right here. You don't even have to move out of the chair."

Even if not moving a muscle sounds absolutely perfect, I need to stay on track and tell her, so I make no reaction to this offer.

"Anyway," she continued, "I'll get you some cheese and crackers first."

"I don't want it." I replied.

She swiveled in her chair before saying, "But you must eat! I'll fix it anyway, and then you can have it or not, as you like." She's making excuses! If she cares so much then why won't she listen to me!

"Sit down," I continued, "Just for a minute, sit down."

Her expression changed, she looked frightened as if she'd seen a ghost, shocked almost. I frowned, looking down at my glass as she slowly lowered herself back into her chair.

Divulging Affairs

By Cecelia Mason

The soft wind blows through my hair as I drive back from my work at the local police station. The sun is warm but not overbearing, kids laughing together as they get out of school. Oh, how I wish I could be them. The breeze runs cold around me, and my favorite song starts to play on the radio, but I don't sing along.

Today is the day I break the news to my wife. three months ago I met a woman named Jessica. She had beautiful blonde hair and a nice figure, big blue eyes, and even bigger boobs. She was everything I wanted in a woman, she was everything my wife didn't have. There's a problem though. The gods cursed me by making me not be able to smell, breathe, or touch my Jessica. I live in a small suburb of New Mexico, called Organ. My dear Jessica lives in New York City.

Today I will tell my wife that I shall divorce her and move to New York. Today I shall break my wife's heart. The brakes on my Cadillac Eldorado scream as

Today is the day I break the news to my wife...

I pull up into my driveway. I hop out of my car into the hot fall air and slam the door of my car shut.

As I walk into the house I'm immediately punched in the face with the smell of cinnamon and pumpkin, my wife's big on seasonal candles. My wife's sewing is on the side of the floral patterned armchair next to the drawn curtains. Speaking of my wife, she's already out of her chair ready to greet me. "Hullo darling," she says.

"Hullo darling." I reply.

I love my wife, don't be mistaken, she knows how to treat a man, she just isn't Jessica. I walk over to the table as my wife makes us some drinks. I down the drink in one swallow. This must have concerned my wife because she immediately jumps out of her chair and screeches, "I'll get it!" When I was already up getting it myself.

"Sit down," I simply say, wanting to make myself a special type of drink. I put in seven shots of whiskey, knowing I'd have to be black-out drunk to have this conversation.

I take a sip of the drink, it's a dark amber color,

swishing oily patterns from the amount of whiskey, the bitter alcohol ripping my taste buds. My wife noticed this because she had a concerned face plastered on. Despite this, my wife knows not to question a man so she simply tries to resort to small talk. I don't want to stay in the rubbish house for longer than necessary.

She tries to fix me some crackers. I don't want any. She doesn't seem to understand. She sits up from her seat and places her sewing down. "Sit down," I say, "Just for a minute. Go on, sit down." Her eyes go wide, she doesn't seem to have liked my tone. I must have scared her. I don't care, I won't be seeing her again starting tomorrow.

"I'm moving to New York." I say. She says nothing. It seems she is frozen, she must be in shock, she stays still like a statue. That is until I say, "I've been doing a lot of thinking lately, and I believe it's best for both of us if we get a divorce. I know it comes as a shock, and I'm sorry for any pain this might cause. It's not about you or anything you've done; it's about me and where I am in my life. I've met someone new in New York, and I feel a strong connection with her. I need to explore this new chapter of my life and see where it leads. I hope you can understand my decision. It's not a decision I've taken lightly, and I genuinely wish you all the best moving forward."

This is when her expression turns from a simple blank stare to a horrified grimace. She looked as if I had murdered her mom and clipped her eyes open as I beat her to death with a club. I didn't continue, I don't want to have her blame me too much. "Okay," she whispers as she goes down to the basement.

She comes back up the stairs, and the creek, moaning with each step. "Why did you get it? I don't want anything to eat," I sigh. She walks up to the yellow wooden counter and stands next to me. I can tell something is wrong, her eyes have no color to them, and the honey swirls and bright shine she had just an hour ago are gone. They are but nothing but puddles of mud.

She looks crazed, not in the way murderers look in movies or the people on the street, she looks inhuman as if she had all the color and happiness sucked out of her. I don't get what the big deal is. I told her I'd be sending her money, enough for her to live comfortably for the rest of her life.

Her thin arms bend as she quickly lifts the 5-pound chunk of meat. I see the pink meat and lightly blood-covered bones come toward me. I feel a sharp

pain on the side of my head, my ears start ringing, and my legs go weak. I can't feel my body. My vision is burning. What's happening? What has she done? What have I done? The world goes dark. my body hit the ground.

Interrupted Dreams

By Annika Rife

There I was in my teepee, sleeping soundly next to my white-haired husband. Our cowskin bed kept us off the bitter cold floor and our off-white, woolen blanket kept us warm.

I was dreaming of yellowish-white spirits with gold and red eyes, looming creepily over the tree-spotted mountains in the distance. Their gray and black mouths were opening but they did not say anything. They were definitely trying to talk to me, but all I heard were faint voices and a loud ringing sound in my ear. It sounded as though they were speaking a language made up of short popping sounds like a horse running on a smooth stone path. I wondered if they were trying to warn me about something.

Slowly, I began to drift away from the spirits and closer to reality. Suddenly, I noticed a figure lying next to my daughter's bed. Even though the torch was dying out, I could tell that it wasn't my husband or my daughter. The figure was a grayish color, long with black stripes along its torso. As my eyes became clearer, I realized that the figure was trying to cut the leather thongs tying my daughter to the bed.

I screamed. Hitting my husband with a pillow to wake him up, I yelled, "There's someone else in this teepee!"

When he woke up, he answered, "Why of course, there is someone else in this teepee! It's me!" Then he fell quickly back to sleep, and began snoring almost immediately.

The figure laid back down on the dirt floor. Soon I began to drift back to sleep and began dreaming again of the spirits, still trying to speak to me. The next time I awoke, a scream pierced my ears. It was my daughter, screaming like a dying deer. She was screaming at the sight of the black-striped figure beside her bed. The figure awoke from the ruckus and gave an answering scream. It dashed immediately out of the teepee, taking it down in the process. The

wood beams supporting the teepee collapsed onto me and my family, and the cowskin teepee was no more.

We scrambled to our feet, shoving aside the remains of our teepee. My husband grabbed his bow and arrow from underneath the chaos, and we pushed our way out of the teepee. After gathering a few others from surrounding teepees, we ran after the black-striped figure. We chased the figure through the maze of animal pens and through the never-ending fields of wheat, glowing in the moonlight.

Continuing our search, we approached an enormous, evergreen forest just as the figure disappeared between the dark shadows of the trees. We followed the figure into the forest, but we soon lost its trail. Instead, we came upon a raging river. As we searched in the trees nearby, we heard something large scrambling through the bushes. We approached cautiously, as the figure was dangerous, but did not find a soul. Eventually, we gave up our search and made our journey back to the village.

Standing Up

By Grady Smith

I never liked Clinton. He was like me but he also seemed to be different as if he's trying to fit in with the white kids. He always was a jerk to me. And Oakley, he's just a plain jerk. And when I saw Oakley about to beat Clinton to a pulp, even after all he's done to me, I had to do something. I walked up behind Clinton, spat on my arms, and shined them until they turned glossy. I was watching and listening to

I walked up behind Clinton, spat on my arms, and shined them until they turned glossy.

Clinton as he told Oakley to call him a bad word for some odd reason.

So I shoved Clinton out the way and swung at Oakley with all my strength and hit him on the side of his head which was pink with anger. There was a loud whack and he yelped in pain then turned to me. It

felt amazing to finally get revenge on that brute. He stumbled back and swayed back and forth but didn't fall, so then I hit him once more with full strength to send a message, another to the side of the head and knocked him on the ground with a punch to the nose splattering blood all over. He landed on his butt with a thud then I spat on the ground while looking at Clinton. Oakley laid on the ground crying and yelling at me with the other students and teachers.

Right after Coach Gilchrest and Ms. Calderon tackled me and took me away violently, almost as if they were trying to hurt me. While I was being taken to the office I never took my eyes off Clinton nor did he take his eyes off me, we just looked at each other making eye contact, staring. I got a paddle to the butt by Mrs. Wickham who could swing it like a bat leaving a bruise and a mark. Suspension for the week too, but, I think it was well worth it.

Perennial Pest

By Adelaide Stender

The room was warm, with high windows letting in the evening light, and flimsy balloons bobbing lazily against the ceiling. The other teachers and I had tried to decorate, but the colorful handwritten signs did nothing to lower my anxiety. I saw someone bring in a large chocolate cake as we were all getting ready for the second PTA meeting. It looked good. I was going to have to try that.

We were about to start the meeting when a woman walked. She hadn't been at the previous meeting. She must be Laurie's mother, I thought to myself, walking over to her as she picked up a slice of marshmallow cake and a cup of tea. I picked up a slice of chocolate cake and a cup of tea.

"I do hope I'm not too late. I've been so anxious to meet you," she said. "I'm Laurie's mother."

I was right. I schooled my features into a pleasant smile and tried not to think about her child in class and how he'd acted since day one.

"We're all so...interested in Laurie," I said.

"Well, he certainly likes kindergarten," she said. He likes making my life hell, she must mean. "He talks about it all the time."

"We had a little trouble adjusting, the first week or so," I said, "but now he's a fine little helper. With occasional lapses, of course." "A little trouble." Ha. At least he's been helping. Perhaps his mother has played a role in that. But these "occasional lapses" have been happening more often.

"Laurie usually adjusts very quickly," she said. "I suppose this time it's Charles's influence."

"Charles?" I thought about the names of my students, hoping I wasn't forgetting about one.

"Yes," she said, laughing. "You must have your hands full in that kindergarten class, with Charles."

"Charles?" I repeated. "We don't have any Charles in the kindergarten."

Laurie's mother's face fell, looking confused and laughing. Nothing was funny; she was deflecting. It hit me that Laurie must not act this way at home. Well, she was lucky, then. I thought back on all the times I had punished Laurie and made him stay late for detention.

"We don't have any Charles in kindergarten," I repeated, looking at her uneasy face. I took a bite of my chocolate cake, silently

savoring the rich flavor.

She forced a laugh again. "You must be mistaken. Charles? He's the large one, who doesn't wear rubbers or a jacket and wasn't allowed to exercise? He's not a forgettable boy."

I tried not to enjoy this. "That was Laurie who didn't exercise. All of our children have been following the rules, except for your son." She wasn't in a laughing mood anymore. "Are you insinuating that my son—"

"I'm not insinuating anything, Ma'am. I'm stating the fact that I can't control your son and his behavior." I placed down my cup of tea. I didn't even like tea.

Laurie's mother looked scandalized. "Laurie would never! He only has bad grammar at home, and told us



everything this Charles boy has done.”

I smoothed my skirt, wondering how this woman could still possibly believe her son wasn't who the imaginary Charles was.

“Were you never confused when Laurie came home an hour late? When you were a young child did you ever stay to watch a classmate in detention?”

“Well, I...things are different now. Maybe it's a new thing?” Laurie's mother seemed hopeful, desperate to be correct.

“Laurie has been the only one to stay after school. Would you like me to show you my attendance sheet?”

Laurie's mother nodded. “Yes, I think that would be nice.”

I led the way to my office down the hall, some of the mothers staring at us. We walked down the hall to my office, where I pulled out a sheet of paper from a drawer in my desk, and handed it to her.

“This is the attendance sheet.” I watched her eyes rove over the paper, unable to find Charles. She set down the sheet on my desk, then looked up at me.

“I, uhm, I should go talk to my husband about this.” I nodded. She walked out of the office, holding her light yellow cardigan under her arm. I put the sheet back in the drawer and turned on the light, leaving the room. Hopefully, Laurie will be better in

Problematic Pupil

By Tait Vossen-Nelson

The meeting was very awkward as we mulled over insignificant details, no one wanting to single out Laurie's mother, but all of us staring at her. We just hoped she would come out and apologize for her son's atrocities as they had now become known after weeks of children's exaggeration making them worse and worse each time they described them.

After the meeting, I grabbed a piece of chocolate cake from the cake stand and slowly slid up to Laurie's mom. Talking and greeting other more civilized parents as I maneuvered up to her. “Hi, you must be Laurie's mom,” I say. We shook hands. Strangely she is clean and has a nice smile on her face, nothing like the sweaty rude person I expected. “We're all so interested in Laurie.” I add, trying to be tactful and hoping that I sounded normal.

Her red shirt and jeans ruffled as she put her plastic plate of marshmallow cake down after taking a bite. She swallowed and took a swig of water, “Hi,” she responded.

“Laurie is very interesting, he is a great little helper but had trouble adjusting the first couple of weeks. He's over that now, with occasional relapses,” I add my voice cracking and palms feeling sweaty, I must smell so bad. I can feel my entire body coated in perspiration, my pulse quickening. I'm surprised no one can hear my heart beating inside my chest or my rapid quickening breaths.

“Yes, he's a gem isn't he,” she says. What did she just say? Is it hot in here? The talking of parents suddenly seems deafening to me.

“I'm sorry, what?” I stutter, hoping to sound calm but knowing I must not.

“You must have your hands full with this Charles kid?” She asks. Charles? I go over a list of all the kindergarteners in my head and can't think of any Charles. She must be mistaken and Charles is in a different grade or something. God, I hope I didn't miss anyone.

“Charles? There is no Charles in the kindergarten,” I say.

“I wish, right, ha ha,” she awkwardly responds. “Who is Charles' mom anyway?” She asks.

I'm so confused, “There is no Charles in kindergarten,” I say leaning in with every word to emphasize it.

“Wha-a-a-t-t,” she stutters, “Laurie told me that Charles said all of these things, even,” she leaned in to tell me the bad word Laurie said before I washed his mouth out with herbal soap.

“Oh,” I say finally understanding her attitude and confusion, “Laurie said and did all of those things, he must have lied to you.”

Her jaw dropped and she looked crestfallen at her son's behavior. “Bu-u-t,” she croaked right before she composed herself and smiled with undertones of malice, “Oh, did he now.” I would not want to be Laurie when she gets home.

Later she apologized profusely for her son's behavior, I told her it was okay and that he is over it now and is a very nice helper these days. She said she would talk to him and I felt my chest lift now that I finally met Laurie's mother. I just feel bad she had to endure that sort of duplicity.

Faux Francais

By Nora Xiong

In my homeroom class, I walked over to the teacher as he looked at me with a wide smile.

“What can I do for you Teresa?” Mr Grubbner said with a toothy smile.

“I was just wondering if this was due as homework...” I replied as I held out a sheet of paper in my hands.

“Oh, why yes it is. It’s homework for today.”

“Alright, thank you.” I replied as I turned around and walked through the wooden door, my mind wandering about as I slowly made my way towards French class, my backpack weighing me down as I



walked closer to the room.

I arrive late as I sit in one of the left-over chairs near the front, looking up at the board as the teacher walks over to the chalkboard, “Bonjour” he says as some students repeat after him.

I quietly replied “Bonjour...”

The teacher scanned the room as he asked “Does anyone here know how to speak French?”

I look around the room slowly as I see a hand pop up in the air. It was Victor, a boy I was talking to in my homeroom. The corner of the teacher’s lips had curled into a smile as he asked in a French accent enthusiastically, “Très bien. Parlez-vous Français?”

I turned my head as I looked over at Victor, his face turned pale as he looked away nervously.

Everyone was staring over at him, their eyes like

daggers piercing his head as he started mumbling, “La me vave con le grandma.”

He looks over at me as we lock eyes, his face like tomatoes as he turns away. The teacher eyed him suspiciously, as he said more words in a french-ish accent as the room became silent, everyone stared with curiosity.

“Frenchie oh wewe gee in September.”

Everyone continues staring, the teacher asking for him to repeat his words as Victor repeats, more loudly than last time, “Frenchie oh wewe gee in September.”

The teacher stared at him for a while as he turned away, I looked back at the board as the teacher turned around, the chalk in his hand sliding across the board.

“Le bateau.” He sings as the class repeats “Le bateau.” “Le bateau.” I repeat with confidence.

The class slowly drags on as the time in the clock ticks by. The bell rang and the class packed up quickly and rushed to the door, pushing and shoving other students to get by. I walk over to Victor, who’s just about to leave as I tap his shoulder with my finger.

“I didn’t know you knew French. That was good.” I put on a smile as he turns around bewildered.

I watch as he starts looking over to the teacher, a small pleading look in his eyes. He then faces back to me with a nervous smile as I ask if he would be able to help me with French.

“Sure, anytime.” He replies.

“I won’t be bothering you, will I?” I replied.

“Oh no, I like being bothered.” I smile and head toward the door after saying, “Bonjour,” pushing wisps of hair away from my face.

I hear a small “Bonjour...” from Victor quietly. My feet quietly led me out the classroom doors as I bound down the hallway. I think seventh grade is going to go well.



Memoirs

Memoirs were introduced in Quarter 2. Students read and analyzed several pieces of autobiographical writing, then selected key moments or phases of their own lives to write about. This assignment gave students an opportunity to reflect on their own lives and consider which techniques are most effective to help tell a good story.



Table of Contents

Jerseys and Jealousy - George Abelson	40
Braving the Bighorn Mountains - Charley Cheatham	41
Recreational Journalism - Beatrice Cosgrove	44
An Angry Elf - Calvin Hoenisch	45
Finding Solace - Abby Horton	45
A Day at the Beach - Erik Imholte	48
A Narrow Escape - Ben Karjanen Castellanos	48
Backyard Revenge - Amelia Keenan	49
Snowy Success - Noah Linstad	50
Learning to Lose - Amos Lucken Hills	51
Jumping Fences - Aubrey Mitchell	52
Life in Locktown - Evelyn Pennington	53
A Peculiar Adventure - Joseph Sierra Zepeda	54
Inspired by the Stage - Maisy Wall	56
Accepting Help - Anonymous	58

Jerseys and Jealousy

By George Abelson

It was one of the best parts of the day. I was playing soccer during an extended day and I was goalie; a rare occasion. Someone kicked the ball at me and it felt like instinct took over. I did a sort of somersault and I was able to save the ball from hitting the blue mat. I remember some of the older kids looking at me like they were impressed, and that stuck with me particularly. One memory, or rather a cluster of memories always comes to me when I think about my younger years in elementary school: soccer. Whether it was soccer before school, during recess or after school, these were some of the best memories from elementary school.

There are three players that I would always play with: August, Elliott, and Finn. These boys were all older than me by a couple of years. August almost always wore an Arsenal jersey or a Germany Jersey. Elliott was absolutely obsessed with Liverpool, but Finn did not really have a team that he was super into. August was by far the person I liked the most. He would answer my questions about soccer and sometimes show me skills. Elliott on the other hand was extremely competitive and sometimes made playing soccer not fun. Finn was nice, but we never talked that much. Excluding me, Elliott was the least talented out of the four of us and compensated by using way too much power in his shots.

During these times I was in 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade. It was no fancy field when we played during recess. We would throw down hats, sweatshirts, or water bottles and use them as goal posts. Sometimes, we would use rocks. The field we played on was almost never actual green grass. Right behind our field was a twisty pine tree that oozed sap. We kicked the ball against a chipped, faded blue fence. This was a fence to a rehab center. Most times, you could smell the acrid scent of the people smoking wafting over the fence.

Sometimes, towards the end of the school year when it was hot, we could smell the tantalizing scent of home cooked meals. It made us jealous during recess because we all knew the only thing we would have for lunch was bagged sandwiches and cut up vegetables.

The game we always played was called World Cup. The rules were simple: you called a country, and when you shot the ball you had to say the name of the country. If you did not, the goal would not count. If you scored three goals, you were the goalie, or you were the goalie if you got to the field first. During second grade, I would always wake up in the morning excited to go to school and play soccer. After I ate breakfast and brushed my teeth, I would choose an outfit for the day. A lot of times the outfit I chose was dependent on playing soccer at school. For example, if I knew that we would have outdoor

recess, I would choose warmer clothes. If I knew I would have indoor recess, I would put on clothes like shorts and a t-shirt.

I would always feel a tiny bit jealous of the boys with soccer jerseys. I remembered two jerseys in particular. Now, I have absolutely no idea what was about these jerseys that still make me think about them today. These jerseys were all from the 2019-2020 season before Covid.

The first one was Arsenal's away jersey: it was yellow with faint black zig zag pattern lines across the chest. It was a nice jersey, but there was not anything particularly unique about it. I just remember it really well. The jersey that I remember the most was a Germany national team jersey. It was so crisp and clean. The majority of it was white with a black pattern near the top of the chest and the Germany logo on the side.

I think that these years playing soccer with the older boys helped develop my soccer skills that are still growing today. Not only did these years get me into playing soccer, it also brought about a love for professional soccer, particularly in Europe.



Braving the Bighorn Mountains

By Charley Cheatham

When you are climbing a mountain, usually all you think about is reaching the top. Your legs are aching, the altitude sickness is getting to your head, and the blisters on your feet are painfully rubbing against the inside of your wet boots. But once you make it to the top, and you are looking out over everything you are above, surrounded by people you love (even though you've only known each other for two weeks), it is all worth it.

But let me rewind. Before any mountains, any altitude sickness, any wet boots, there was fear. When I first signed up for a three week backpacking camp in the Bighorn Mountains, I was like, Oh, cool, backpacking. But because registration was more than six months before the actual camp, I had plenty of time to rack up a list of all

of my fears in my brain. I was mostly afraid of what I didn't know. The people, the hiking, the counselors. Those are all perfectly reasonable fears when you know you are about to spend nineteen days in the mountains with only three other girls and two counselors who you have never met. Of course, there were the irrational fears, getting eaten by bears, getting struck by lightning, losing all of our food and having to eat our own - shall I say - feces. The point is, I was scared. I was so scared that the six months went as fast as six minutes and before I knew it, I was on the bus up to YMCA Camp Widjiwagan.

I remember the first day so well. Getting off the bus, waiting through the routine talk about respect, and finally the moment the camp director started going through groups.

This is it, I thought. This was the moment that would make or break my trip. Ok maybe not exactly, but having a good group to stay with for three weeks was pretty important. It was like slow motion watching each group being called one by one, and as I watched more and more people leave, I got even more anxious.

Finally, "Leading another Biggies group we

have Brittany and Anna," called the director before starting to list the group of girls in the group, "Pearl, Nora, Charley, and Greta."

I got up from my seat and walked down to meet with my counselors. I heard more groups being called but at that moment my head was clouded with worries about my group. But from the first conversation, I knew that everything would be alright.

To say we clicked instantly would be an understatement. By the night of our first day at camp, I knew that these girls were going to be my family. With each of them I found I was able to talk about something different and had a different bond. Nora and I shared a similar taste in pop culture with love of Gilmore Girls, Taylor Swift, and chick-flick movies. Greta was a great listener and I felt like no matter how much I yapped in her ear, she took in every word I said and gave me advice. I think though that I probably got the closest to Pearl. We were the youngest in the group and would talk for hours as we hiked. On the hardest days, it was Pearl who usually showed me the light at the end of the tunnel.

But back to camp. For the first few days, we got to know each other, gathered our supplies, and went on mini-hikes to prepare us for our trip. Mostly though, we had a lot of

fun. In our free time, we played cards in the cabin, swam with the other group, or played volleyball in the field. Even though most of the session belonged to backpacking, I thank those first few days at camp for some unforgettable moments that brought me closer to my group, whether they were running into the lake at night when we definitely weren't supposed to or talking about the cute b-dub boys.

Finally, after three days preparing, we set out on the road-trip to northern Wyoming. We shared a van with the other girls, Biggies group, and blasted Taylor Swift and Noah Kahan during our nine hour driving days. On our first night, we slept at a campsite in North Dakota where the wind and rain got so loud that we were afraid a tornado would hit and stayed up in a lightning position singing ABBA until the storms passed. My favorite part of the road trip was getting to know the other group. I got specifically close to a girl a year older than me named Marty and we would chat and play driving games for long periods of time during the drive.

This was the moment that could either make or break my trip.

I remember the feeling when we made it into the final stretch of driving through rural, flat Wyoming and the mountains came into view. They looked bigger than life and I couldn't wait to be at the top of them. I remember feeling this drive, this excitement, this ambition that I had never felt before. For the first time, I really realized what I was about to do and I could tell this trip would change my life. We spent that second night at the trailhead and as I fell asleep, I prayed to the universe that this trip was going to be everything I hoped, and nothing I feared.

The next morning we ate breakfast, packed our packs, and said goodbye to the other group. They were starting at a different trailhead than us so they took the van and drove off as we tied our boots and started hiking. Our first day was only about three miles and it went by rather fast as we were high on motivation and hadn't developed terrible blisters yet. We were only just getting used to the feelings of our packs weighing down on our backs and our boots filling with more water at every river crossing. It was a carefree, exciting, and pretty easy first day but it didn't come close to being as memorable as any other day on the trip.

The second day was pretty much the exact opposite as the first. We woke up, took down the tents, ate oats for breakfast, and packed up our packs. I already knew we would have bad luck when the day started with Nora throwing up her breakfast but nevertheless, we had to keep hiking. The trail stayed steady until near lunch. Somehow our counselors had forgotten to mention that we would have to climb a giant pass between two mountains to get to our campsite. Oh yeah, that sure was a pleasant surprise.

I remember the feeling of wheezing and heaving as I climbed and climbed up the pass. I remember sharing a glance with Pearl next to me, who was clearly as miserable as I was. I remember Brittany's voice far ahead of us encouraging us to keep treading on. I wanted to stop right there, cry, and close my eyes until I was back in my bed at home. I paused in my tracks. I bent over myself and leaned against my knees, tears

stinging my eyes, the taste of blood in the back of my throat. I wanted to give up. But when I opened my eyes and looked up, I saw Nora hiking at top speed up to the top of the pass. In that moment, I gained a new momentum and motivation to keep going.

Get it together Charley, I remember thinking. Nora literally threw up this morning, you could have it a lot worse. You're almost there.

I pushed, my legs aching, my sunglasses fogging. I pushed and pushed, all the way to the top. I immediately toppled over myself the minute I made it all the way up.

"Oh my god." I heard Nora's voice nearby.

Jesus Christ. I just climbed uphill for two hours, what could be more 'Oh my god,' I thought. Still, I pressed my palms against my thighs and looked up.

Oh my god. The view was indescribable. I was up so high. SO high. Like, in the clouds. Ok maybe not quite that high,

but high enough that the lakes looked like puddles and the trees were twigs.

I did that, I thought. I felt so strong in that moment that everything before that moment was irrelevant. Suddenly I started laughing. So did Nora, then Pearl, then Greta. Without saying a word, we said to each other, My god, that was miserable, but in comparison to this moment, what we felt was nothing.

And that was only day two.

As we continued the first half of our trip, we fell into a routine. Wake up, pack up the tents, eat breakfast, pack our packs, and start hiking to our campsite for the next night. The days were filled with singing and talking with each other and when it got really hard, Anna would tell us the plots of her favorite movies. In the evening, we would play cards and help make dinner before gathering in the bigger tent to play One Night Ultimate Werewolf. After we all went to bed, I would sit up in my sleeping bag and journal. Journaling was what helped me through my most homesick moments and helped me keep my happiest trail memories alive on paper.

It wasn't all sunshine though. Literally. After our first week of backpacking, we were clouded with bad luck and bad weather. It started on our sixth



day as we were hiking up the side of a hill, trying to find our campsite. We had only been hiking for a couple of miles, but we were so tired that we stopped for lunch early. We parked ourselves on the hill and went through our packs to grab our food. When I looked up, clouds were starting to move toward the sun and the sky began to darken. We all knew what this meant. When we heard the first crash of thunder, we quickly packed up, eager to find our campsite before the storm got worse. We had just found a good spot when the rain started.

It started slowly, as rain usually does, but it quickly progressed into hard, fast, huge droplets of water. We crowded under a tree in our rain jackets as we watched puddles grow into ponds surrounding us. As we prayed to Dolly Parton for the rain to stop, we heard a strange sound. The splash of raindrops turned into a hard plink. Suddenly the drops were foggy white and much more visible. Hail. We groaned as the hail landed on top of the puddles and pelted us on the head.

"You can't be serious right now," said Greta.

But the hail sure seemed to be. It fell harder and harder, for what seemed like forever. Finally, it began to fall lighter until it was just a small pitter-patter. When the sun finally poked out through the clouds, we looked around the campsite. There were puddles everywhere. Fallen branches floated in the water and everything was covered in hail.

"I guess we can't stay here anymore," I said.

Rain was a familiar face for pretty much the rest of our trip. But that didn't stop us from laughing, singing, and, well, crying everyday. Sometimes I cried happy tears. Like on the day we peaked Cloud Peak and finally saw snow. I remember looking out over the cliffs and seeing the snow line the waterfalls. It quite literally looked like a scene from a movie and the beauty of it all brought me to tears.

Sometimes though, my tears were of sadness. I loved my group and I loved hiking, but the long days and hard passes sometimes made me wish I was at home with my family. Some nights, Pearl and I would cry together and share stories about our families and why we missed them. Those were the moments I found comfort in my tears, knowing someone felt the same way I did.

Before I knew it, it was our last day. We crossed

our last river, ate our last trail lunch, and hiked our last mile. When we made it to the trailhead, we set up camp and sat in silence for a while. It was such a bittersweet moment that we couldn't waste it talking. I thought about everything that had happened, every inside-joke we made, every game of Presidents and Assholes we played, every meal we shared around a tree in the rain. I couldn't believe it was over. That night we didn't go over our route for the next day and the next morning we didn't pack our packs and tie our boot laces. When we got to the van, it came over me like a wave. Trail was over.

The road trip back was basically the same as the one on the way there. Same songs, same friends, same food. But one thing was different. We were done. Trail was over.

The night we got back to camp, families came and we showed everyone our routes and talked about our trips. I was ecstatic to see my parents after so long and I was so proud of myself for everything I did so, I couldn't wait for them to see all that I did. After they

left, we gathered in the dining hall and passed around letters that would be sent out in the winter. On each person's letter I wrote what I was grateful for them for and that I hoped we could stay in contact.

The next morning we packed up our duffel bags and ate breakfast. There was an air of melancholy around us, knowing that we truly were done and about to go back to our normal lives. I remember hugging each of them goodbye unsure of when we would ever see each other again. It was a weird thing, saying goodbye. These girls were my family and the only people I had been with for the last three weeks. Without them, I didn't know how I would move on with my normal life. But I knew one thing. The future was unsure, but our time together would find ways to reappear for the rest of our lives because it really, truly had changed them.

...but in comparison to this moment what we felt was nothing.

Recreational Journalism

By Beatrice Cosgrove

We called ourselves the “NT”. Short for Nerd Train. That was back when being self-proclaimed nerds was cool. There was a huge green globe in the center of our playground with two rubber levels. It spun and could easily fit twenty small children. It had been a popular social gathering spot, kids would take turns pushing while a handful of others would enjoy the ride. Soon enough, someone broke a leg or arm or something significant that got ‘The Globe’ slowed down. No one was interested in it anymore, it no longer possessed the thrill of injury, rebellion and fun. Most of the time, it was completely deserted, but we, my friend Evelyn and I, saw the possibilities that awaited in the spherical centerpiece of our playground.

Before the NT, we had enjoyed a variety of winter activities. We would find chunks of cool-looking ice in a huge pile by the parking lot and call it ‘ice mining’. After finding enough ice, we would carry it to a nook under the big orange slide and polish the snow off of it with our gloved hands, looking out for teachers who would disapprove of our important work (the parking lot was technically off limits). We were not only miners, we were soldiers as well, defending our territory from pesky children attempting to steal our hard work. Other times, we would crawl around the huge field behind the playground. We would loop around the snow covered playground for the entirety of recess, occasionally stopping to rest our aching knees and freezing hands. One day, someone brought Skittles to recess and we had the magnificent idea of burying them in the snow. The next day, we looked for the little red bag and miraculously found it, enjoying our frozen treat in a way only fourth graders would be able to enjoy.

We started the NT on the deserted globe after experiencing a stroke of purpose to begin a playground

club of sorts. The rules were simple. We were the NT, The Globe was the NT. No difference. We were one, bound together as rejects of society. At least, we liked to think of ourselves as rejects of society, we were nerds, cast away by the likes of humanity. So, what did we do? We turned to journalism, of course.

We would go on missions, finding every recreational, educational, irrational and conversational activity anyone was engaged in and interview them. Our interviews were somewhat shortened, sixty seconds max. Evelyn or I would hold the ‘camera’ and the other would hold an imaginary microphone. We would ask deep, meaningful questions including, but not limited to, “What are you doing?” “Is it fun?” “Are you going to keep playing this game?” People would look at us questioningly but were normally prepared to cooperate fully, especially since we appeared inter-

ested in every aspect of everything they were saying. We felt important, strutting around the wood chips, asking crucial questions and reporting on riveting topics. Once we had gathered enough information and were tired of interviews, we would return to the NT and begin a live broadcast from our base. We would quote interviewees and once we got bored of that, move on to other, more pressing matters, (including) rating the school

lunches and best playground equipment. Sometimes we would even make up fake stories, or take bits from our own lives and piece them together to create a news story, adding to each other’s ideas like cargo being attached to a train. We would ask our other friends to join, but they would often refuse, believing it was boring, when, really, to us, it was crucial reportage.

The days when there wasn’t much snow, the boys would play football, drawing up plays at lunch with large x’s and arrows. One day, the girls challenged the boys to a football game. This was huge news. Evelyn and I interviewed as many people as we could, gathering information about the importance of the event and the predictions of the winning team. The day came and went without as much fuss on the actual



day than the days leading up to it. The girls won and we cheered together, huddled in The Globe, cold, but being warmed by the notion that we had created something of great importance.

When the teachers blew their whistles that signified the return to our classrooms, we would sadly leave the NT behind, wishing we had had more time to finish an interview, or keep talking about the goings on of the playground. Leaving the NT, we would trudge through the snow to the doors bursting with kids ready for the warmth inside. The NT continued to broadcast for a while. I'm not sure what happened, but eventually we disbanded.

An Angry Elf

By Calvin Hoenisch

All the way back in elementary school, my friends and I would always play football at recess. It was a great game because we could tweak the rules to our choosing. We made it so that the blacktop on one end of the field was an endzone and the other was a baby tree that Decolo planted.

Every day we would pick new teams with the people who wanted to play. We would choose two captains who would then pick teams from the remaining people. My friend, Tyler, and I were pretty much always captains. Once we picked the teams, we decided who would play what position and which people we were guarding on defense.

One time when we were playing, Olli Limatta fell on me when I tried to tackle him. It all happened in slow motion, me falling, and him coming down on me. I had tried to avoid him but just couldn't. This resulted in the air getting brutally knocked out of me. It hurt so bad I could barely breathe. Gasping for air, I started crying and as air started to come back to my lungs I made a very irrational decision.

So as any sane third grader would do, I punched him. As hard as I could in the stomach. This made him get off of me quite fast but it did also hurt him. One of the teachers came over and said that we were going to the principal's office. The walk there was awkward and quiet, me and the teacher walking down the halls. Once I got there they told me to have a seat. I was already tearing up at this point and once they told me that I was in big trouble, it just got worse.

When they told me this, I was so scared, it was

unreal. I was practically shaking in my seat looking around hoping that this was all a dream. Then, they made me call my parents. Once they said this I started to tear up, oh how I hated when this happened. Now I would have to explain to my parents that I literally punched my friend because of a slight mistake.

When I look back on this story it doesn't actually surprise me that I did this. You see, in elementary school, I had pretty bad anger issues so little stuff like this happened almost often. I've changed my ways with some effort and now it just seems silly that I did this. Man, I was an angry elf.

Finding Solace

By Abby Horton

Since my birth, my dad and I have had an unbreakable bond. He has always been there, present and supporting me throughout every phase of my life. I never doubted that he wouldn't continue to be there for me until April 10th, 2018, when I was just seven years old.

As my five-year-old brother Will and I walked home from school, slushy snow muffled the sound of our footsteps. The sky was gray, and the weather bitterly cold, with gusts of wind that seemed to attack us without warning. Winter was still in its midst, and all we wanted was to get inside and play with our neighbors, who would be babysitting us that night. The steps to our door squeaked, and our teeth chattered in the cold. I glanced over at our driveway, where my dad's black Prius was parked. I didn't think anything of it, he said he was going to stop at home between his meeting that night. I reached for my backpack, unzipping the front pouch and unclipped my lanyard, rushing to put the key in the lock.

The door flung open and hit the back wall of our entryway with a loud clang. Will and I paused for a moment, and then I walked in first, wiping my snowy boots on the rug before taking them off and letting them fall onto the floor with a thud. Will followed suit, and we removed our coats and backpacks. I closed the door, pushing Will out of the way.

"Hello?" I called out, "Dad, are you here?"

As I made my way towards our playroom, I walked past the dining room, switching on the lights with a flick of my hand. My brother followed closely behind me as we continued our search. As I pushed open the door to the playroom with my foot, the door creaked,

and I could feel my heart racing with anticipation. The room was quiet except for the sound of our breathing. As my eyes scanned the room, they landed on our mom's black desk chair lying on its side. It sat motionless on the floor, leaving an imprint on the carpet. I walked towards the chair, picked it up from the floor, and placed it back under my mom's desk.

I couldn't help but frown, where was he? I sat puzzled, unsure of what to do.

"Want to get something to eat?" I asked, trying to let myself worry too much.

"Yes!" Without wasting a second, Will darted into our kitchen, opening the cabinets with a slam as they hit each other. I followed closely behind him, running as I tried to keep up.

"What do you want?" he asked, his eyes scanning the various items on the shelves. "Goldfish?"

"Sure, that sounds good," I replied, my mouth already watering. My hands grabbed two bowls from the side cabinet and I sat

the bowls on the counter and let Will pour the Goldfish. I picked up our bowls, placing them on our kitchen table, right next to my dad's phone, wallet, and keys. Wait what?

With expressionless stares, my brother and I turned to look at one another. My dad's phone instantly switched on when

I grabbed for it, illuminating the time - just after 4:30. Something pushed me from the back of my mind but I pushed it back. He was probably fine.

"Is he on a walk?" My brother asked.

"Probably," I answered, trying to stay calm for my brother. "I'm sure he's fine," I reassured, taking a deep breath. But if anything I wasn't fine. Where was my dad?

The night went on as normal, with our neighbors, Barbra and Marshall, arriving and bringing burgers. I happily unwrapped my burger, and took a large bite. I frowned—the burger was moist in my mouth, and I carefully sat it down, leaving it soggy on its wrapper. Disappointed, I pushed the wrapper aside and stood up to go play with my brother.

After our baths, it was finally time to call our mom, who was going to be working late that night. "Are you both ready?" Barbra asked, placing her phone down on the table before us. My brother

and I sat eagerly, waiting to finally hear from her after a long day. I still didn't know where my dad was—his phone, wallet, and keys still lay on the counter, and his car was still parked outside, but our neighbors refused to tell us where he was. Maybe he had just gotten a ride with someone else to his meeting. But why doesn't he have his things then? Nothing I thought of seemed to make sense.

My mom's voice was muffled, drowned out by the chatter in the background wherever she was calling from.

"Hello?" she asked, her voice shaking.

My brother and I turned to look at each other - something was wrong, and we turned to our neighbors, whose faces had turned somber. What was going on?

"Mommy, what's wrong?" my brother asked, edging closer to the phone as he spoke.

She paused, and I could hear the steady rise and fall of her breathing through the phone.

My mom's voice trembled, "Your dad is in the hospital—he had a heart attack."

At that moment, it felt like the world had stopped.

My ears began to ring, and hot tears streamed down my cheeks one by one.

"What?" I bursted.

My lips quivered and my whole body trembled. My mom described the situation: my dad had a heart attack at home that afternoon and was brought to

the hospital by ambulance. He'd been in surgery for a couple hours. I had no idea what to do. I had no idea what to think. All I knew was that a heart attack was bad. My entire body shook as my mom hung up the phone, saying she would see us tomorrow.

I stared at my neighbors and brother, all of them with tears streaming down their cheeks. My brother looked more confused than I was. He didn't know anymore than I did, he was only five. I cried harder. I couldn't think. I couldn't breathe.

The days that followed were a haze. The next morning, I got out of bed and ran down the carpeted hallway to my parents' room, where my mom lay awake. I sobbed to her, and she cried with me until it was time for me to get ready for school. She stayed; she had taken the day off from work to be with my dad in the hospital, but I wanted to be with her more than anything. What if something happened to her?

As much as I try to move on from this experience I have to remember that this experience will always be an important moment in my life...

Three days later, on my dad's fourth day in the hospital, I came home from school with my brother in silence. We anxiously waited for our grandparents to take us to the hospital to see our dad. The anticipation of seeing our dad again was mixed with a lingering sense of fear, unsure of what we would find when we arrived at the hospital.

I jumped up as I saw my grandparents' car out the window. Will jumped too, startled, and we clambered over our stuff to get to the entryway. As we climbed into the car with our grandparents, Will and I sat in silence, listening to the buzz of the radio until we arrived at the hospital. There was nothing to be said about how any of us were feeling.

We made our way through an intricate series of doors and hallways and then took the elevators until we finally reached my dad's floor. The entire floor was reeked of antiseptic, with undertones of soaps and cleaners. The walls were painted white and covered with colorful artwork, all to make the place seem less dreary than it was. We continued walking and it wasn't until then that I realized we were standing in front of my dad's hospital door. Our grandparents turned around to warn us: "It might be a little scary to see him look a little different, but he's doing okay now," they assured. I didn't believe them. How could he possibly be okay?

The door opened onto a tan room with paintings on its walls, and my dad sitting in a hospital bed in the middle of it. He grinned up at us, and I returned his smile. While tightly gripping my brother's hand, tears began to fill my eyes. My grandparents' hands were on my shoulders, encouraging us forward. My mom sat in the corner of the room, taking notes for work, pausing, and glanced up at us.

"Hi, Dad," I managed to say, my voice trembling. Seeing him there in front of me, dressed in a hospital gown with tubes attached to his arms, was overwhelming. He looked so small, so vulnerable, and I didn't know how to react.

"Hi, sweetie," he replied, his voice weak. But our reunion was short-lived. The doctor entered

the room, and my heart sank. "No," I begged, "no."

Our grandparents ushered us out of the room while the doctor checked on my dad's vitals. I didn't see him again for another three days until he came home from the hospital.

On April 10, 2018, my dad suffered a 100% blockage of his left anterior descending (LAD) artery at only 38 years old. People who suffer the kind of heart attack my dad did can experience death in a matter of minutes because of the blockage of blood that the heart needs to pump properly. Although he only had a 12% chance of surviving, he did.

I don't know what I would have done if he hadn't survived, if he died that day. I have pondered what I could have done to stop this happening to him. What I could have done to have it happen to me instead of him. I used to believe that it was someone punishing me. I thought it was my fault.

His hospital bracelet is kept in a box in my room. It lies there, a fragment of a moment my life changed. I will never forget what happened and its effect on my family and how it both positively and negatively affected my own life. It taught me to never take anything for granted and to appreciate every moment. But it also left me with painful memories, memories that affect my everyday life.

As much as I can try to move on from this experience I have to remember that this experience will always be an important moment in my life and something that has shaped me into the person I am today.

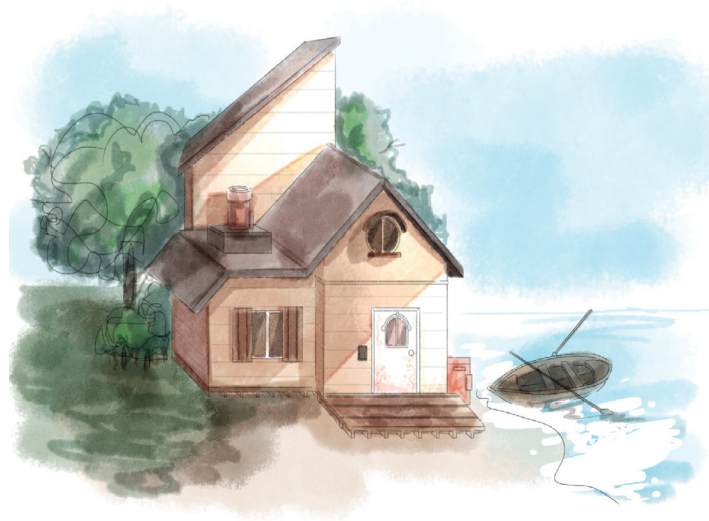
Although I didn't have a heart attack, my dad did. He was present when I was born when I first learned how to walk and ride a bike. He held my hand on the first day of school, took me for ice cream during the summer, and we drove around the city together, went on bike rides, and was there for me during my lowest lows and highest highs. He doesn't know how much he means to me, and words cannot express it enough—I don't know what I would do without him. I'm so grateful that he will continue to be a part of my life, even after this experience.



A Day at the Beach

By Erik Imholte

In the summers, when it was excruciatingly hot at my aunt's cabin, which was up north in Aitkin, the kids would always ease the heat with some tubing. We would grab our beach towels, lather sunscreen all over our skin (this part was optional), and clip up our life jackets. Then, we would hurry out onto the sun-boiled dock in our bare feet and climb into my uncle's speedboat. We would then pull out from the boat lift, get a few paces away from the dock, and then toss the tube into the water. Shortly after, a load of kids would jump off of the boat and crash onto the tube, rocking it violently. Once we regained our composure, grabbed onto the handle straps, and gave the



signal, our uncle would take off, swerving around the lake at 50 miles an hour. I always thought the boat went at a reasonable speed when we were tubing.

The first thing I noticed when I climbed onto the speedboat was that it was slick. It was matte gray and highlighted with stark red streaks, and its sides glistened in the hot sunlight. Its souped-up seats looked hardly used, and it was nothing like the cracked seats of my uncle's boat where you could see the soft, spongy material underneath the worn leather. You could tell just by looking at it that it was expensive and of course, the most expensive speedboats are always the fastest.

The wind stung my face. We approached a wave, and Spencer and Porter cheered. I shut my eyes, and when I reopened them, I was airborne. Spencer whooped and Porter screamed. We crashed back

into the water and my head began to ring. We approached another wave. I didn't want to go through that again, so I bailed, but my face was never submerged. Spencer had caught me by the neck of my life jacket and began to pull me back up onto the tube.

A Narrow Escape

By Ben Karjanen-Castellanos

There was this one incident that had happened in January of this year (or last year I don't really remember) that could've landed me in a very weird situation. It was when I was 13, and after my sibling got a haircut, we went to the pharmacy to pick up some things. We crossed the busy street, cars honking and people walking on sidewalks. Then, we went into the CVS. I saw the blaring red sign as we entered. In-



side, were rows of medicines, drinks, snacks, hygienic products, etc. They were all stacked neatly in rows and there were a few security guards standing around and doing stuff. I thought to myself: "I'll just look for what I need and leave." My sibling and I were talking as we looked at the aisles. Then I thought to myself "I'm bored, I wanna do something."

So I told Lucia, my sibling, "This is boring."

They responded "Yeah, we've been here for a while."

So then we were messing around and running through the store, Doing whatever we thought was entertaining when we ran through an aisle of medicines.

Just then, I realized I knocked down an entire aisle of stuff. I paused, processing what had just happened and what I was looking at. An entire aisle

knocked down various things on the floor had become cluttered. Then Lucia saw what happened. I glanced at them, and we both started covering our mouths and laughing. Still knowing our parents wouldn't like this and there was security in the building, we both immediately picked up the bright colored medicines and other items off the floor. As we were cleaning, one of the security guards from earlier heard the noise. He was there standing giving us a look of disapproval. We both looked up at him, seeing the disapproval on his face. Then, I turned to look around and see if anyone noticed, and then I saw another cop talking into a device.

I hear what he says, "Bring the handcuffs," I then see a shining silver pair clipped to his uniform.

I think to myself "Oh. This is bad.." and then immediately turned back around to tell my sibling. They look back as well, most likely thinking the same thing I did. The cop in front of us then starts talking.

He gives us a lecture about not being destructive in public, and then jokes "I'm not gonna arrest you, or am I?"

My sibling and I both just stare. I get a weird feeling as he laughs it off and then as he walks away, we both talk about how weird that situation was, and that being rowdy in a store could lead to arrest. It was a weird experience for the both of us.

Backyard Revenge

By Amelia Keenan

My sisters and I played a lot of games with our neighbors. When we were younger, we played games like school and family. We played in a summer camp, where everyone had a superpower. We made forts and lemonade stands and climbed trees. I could tell infinite stories about all of the games we played with them, but the one I'm focusing on today is when we would play hunger games.

I was around eight or nine when we started playing The Hunger Games, and my older sister was the same age as Lila, one of our next door neighbors. Her sister, Daphne, was one year older than me, and my little sister was two years younger than me. Lila and Lucy (my older sister) read a lot of the same books, and one of them was the hunger games. My mom thought it was a bit too mature for me and Sally (my younger sister), but Lucy showed me the movie anyway. Then one day, we all had the

grand idea to play a fake hunger game together.

We all agreed it would be a fun game, and decided what role we would all play. Lucy ended up being the 'gamemaker,' and would decide if someone was out or not, and when certain events would occur, like wild-fires and map shrinks. The rest of us were players, or 'tributes.' We set up all of the weapons, armor, and other supplies in the middle of our mini jungle gym to act as the cornucopia, and we started playing. We had to be within ours and our next door neighbors' front and backyards, and couldn't go in the street. We started playing the hunger games all of the time, because it was something we all enjoyed. There was one certain game that I remember very well, though.

The game started, and we all ran into the cornucopia to grab supplies, the grass was damp and dewy, and dirt was getting all over our shoes. Sally and Daphne teamed up immediately and crawled under the red and blue jungle gym, picking up the supplies while grabbing handfuls of grass along the way. I grabbed minimal supplies and ran to the side of Lila and Daphne's house to hide out for a while, and looked

...we swore we wouldn't betray each other until Daphne was out.

over everything I had. Suddenly, I heard Lucy yell, "Sally has been killed by Daphne! Sally is out!"

This happened a lot, where Daphne would betray Sally. But this was pretty early on. I should move. I thought to myself. I crept over to their backyard, making sure I wasn't seen or heard. I ran through their yard to a big wooden playhouse they had. It had two floors, and was very old. Their swing set was attached to it on the side, and there were a few chairs and boxes inside, with stuff we could use in our games like art supplies. It was also a great place to hide out during the hunger games. I climbed the ladder to the second floor, and when I walked in, I saw Lila sitting against the wall, waiting for me. I can't get out yet. I thought to myself. I immediately took out my weapon, when she told me that she wanted to team up. "We could get Daphne out together, and then one of us would win." I agreed, and we sat down to figure out a plan.

We looked through all of our supplies. We split up the weapons, armors, and medicines between us, and swore we wouldn't betray each other until Daph-

ne was out. We split up in search of her, I went to my backyard and she went to hers, and if we found her, we would shout for the other to come over.

I went over to my backyard, and was checking every way, with no prevail. I walked along my garage, stepping on rocks and dirt piles along the way, checking up and down for Daphne. Suddenly, I heard Lucy shout that our neighbors front yard was out of bounds. I wasn't near there, so I didn't think much of it. All of a sudden, I heard Lila scream. I picked up all of my supplies and ran over to their yard, preparing myself to fight. But before I found them Lucy shouted something else: "Lila has been killed by daphne! Amelia and Daphne are left! My heart sank, realizing that Lila got out because I wasn't there in time. I saw Daphne run out from behind their swing set right towards me. I made a run for it, straight to our front yard.



I got out my weapon and armor and stared at the corner, waiting for Daphne. I heard Lucy yell that both of the backyards were out of bounds. She has to come, I thought. I waited for another minute, breathing heavily and clutching my weapon in my hand, staring at their cracked driveway to see when dDaphne would come running around the corner, when all of a sudden I heard footsteps running in the grass behind me.

Before I could turn around to see who it was, I felt a stick jabbed into my back. I fell to the ground in defeat, realizing I shouldn't have expected something like this. All the wiser, we all got up from the muddy ground, put our weapons back in the cornucopia and played another round. I'll never forget all of the times we played the hunger games.

Snowy Success

By Noah Linstad

When I was 8 years old, it was a super snowy winter, and my friend and I were super bored. We wanted to do something, but all the old games didn't interest us. So, we decided to go outside and play in the snow. It was super fun. My friend and I were playing outside in the snow. We were both bundled up in our winter coats, hats, and gloves. As we were running around, we started coming up with ideas for a new game we could play. After a few minutes of thinking, we came up with the perfect game—Snowball Tag! The rules were simple: we would each gather a bunch of snowballs and take turns trying to hit each other with them. If you got hit, you were "It" and had to chase the other person. We laughed with excitement as we began building our snowball arsenal. We started by packing handfuls of snow tightly together, forming them into round balls. We made sure they were the perfect size to throw, and not too heavy. The snow was soft and fluffy, making it easy to shape our ammunition.

Once we had enough snowballs, we took our positions in the snow-covered yard. We counted down, Three, two, one, go!, and the game began. We darted around, dodging and throwing snowballs with all our might. Our laughter filled the cold air as we chased each other. As the game went on, we became more strategic. We hid behind trees, built snow forts, and even made snow barriers to protect ourselves. We couldn't help but feel a rush of adrenaline every



time a snowball came close by or when we successfully hit our target. Time flew by as we played our game. It felt good to know we created it. We took breaks to catch our breath and warm up our freezing fingers. But we always eagerly returned to the game, determined to have the most fun possible. Eventually, as the sun began to set and the cold became too much to bear, we decided to call it a day.

We were exhausted but incredibly proud of ourselves for creating such a magnificent game.

Learning to Lose

By Amos Lucken Hills

When I was 13, I was in my second year of Peewee hockey, the year before Bantams but after Squirts. Nothing really changed from Squirts to Peewees. We still couldn't check people but the game was getting faster and more physical. That always happens every year, games get faster and faster, never slowing down the puck drops, players are off in not even a second, but it's different for me. I'm different. I'm a goalie. The shots get scarier, harder, faster.

"That was an easy shot."

The criticism doesn't start till later years, where the games are worth more, like determining if your school would have a team next year. The pressure starts setting in, this game is getting serious. The last few years weren't as serious. Obviously it's not life or death, but it's something.

A win to carry on with you, especially in tournaments. We were part of this tournament and this game was the "New Richmond Tournament." My team had 3 goalies last year. I was the oldest of them, or more well known as "the senior goalie." The other two goalies and I, during the tournament, split the games half and half, but the games before were more fun and less serious. This one had a different feeling, a more heavy feeling, as it was the Championship game. Coaches said that it would be a good idea to put me in for the whole game, as it was the last time I would ever play in that tournament. The puck went back and forth on the ice, never spending too much time in one spot on the slow covered ice. We scored, and then they scored, and we had some really good goals and so did they until it finally was "over." The game ended tied.

Normally the game can end with a tie and that's fine, but this was a tournament, so we can't end in ties, especially in the finals. There has to be a final winner, which means one thing. The one thing I hadn't worked on at all during the season. Shootouts and overtime. We went through the 5 minutes down and back on the ice. Nobody scored. One player at a time, our coaches chose our best shooters and so did the other team, Edina. The first player went out, and one of the referees came down by my net and told me what I should do once I was ready for the shot. I was scared, not just for myself, but also for my team. This was the thing standing between winning and losing.

As the first player from Edina's hockey team came down the ice, I got into my position, slowly moving backward, trying to keep up with the player. "SCORE!"

They scored the first puck. Now it was our team's turn. I'm pretty sure it was my teammate, Theo, doing the first shot. He pulled his stick back and released, letting the puck hit the crossbar back into the goal.

"SCORE!" They announced as the puck went in the net while Theo was shooting.

I had my head buried in my gloves, not watching the shot. The referee came down and made sure I was okay before the next player started. I stood up and got ready for the next shot. The second player skated down at high speed. I was having a hard time keeping up. Finally, he shot the puck.

"MISS!" The announcer blared once again.

I waited on my knees for our player to take his shot. He finally shot and also hit a miss.

"MISS!" said the announcer.

My stained white pads laid resting on the ice after the shot, as I waited for the next shot to go the other way. The shot seemed to take forever to go down to their net and finally, it went in. Edina ended up matching the goal.

The final shots for either team. Edina skates the puck down the ice, my heart racing in my chest. I dive for the puck and miss it, the other player skates around me scoring it in the back of the net. The crowd erupts with cheering. My team's final shot. He skates it down, takes a shot and misses. Game over. Edina took the win, 6-5 in a shootout. I skated off the ice with my head down. I got to the locker room and threw my helmet off. I got undressed at light speed and stormed out of the locker room. When I saw my parents, tears flooded my face as I went into my dad's warm hug. He started telling me about how proud he

was of me and how hard I worked. We ended up leaving the arena and heading home shortly after that.

The moral of the story is no matter how important the game is, don't let it get the best of you. Another thing to remember is that you're not in a professional sport, so let it be fun. Don't take it too seriously and keep your attitude in check.

Jumping Fences

By Aubrey Mitchell

It was a soggy and wet day in March and my friend Cecilia and I were walking around the neighborhood. This was when we were in 5th grade, so we were probably 10 or 11. The slush squashed against my boots and the air was hot and sticky from the coming spring. Cecilia and I's favorite thing to do was walk. Walk to the park, walk to the market on the corner, or just walk without a planned destination.

I remember this day, we were walking by our park. The roads were icy and the snowy slush piled up everywhere. We were on the sidewalk and needed to walk around the block to this spot under a tree we liked to go to. We would either A: walk through all the slush across the block and drench our damp snow boots, or B: cut through a yard silently and unnoticed to reach our destination faster. It was an obvious choice, harmlessly cut through a yard and act like we were never there.

As we approached a tall, rickety fence, you could see the rot eating away at the corners and the posts sticking out of the slushy snow. Cecilia effortlessly hopped over the fence in one graceful motion but just as they disappeared from behind the fence, a small, black car pulled up into the driveway leaving a trail of smoke sputtering from the exhaust, and turning the soggy snow a burnt-blackish color. Oh shoot. I thought as a short, thin lady with a big thick coat and blackish-gray hair stepped out of the car.

"Hey!" She shouted from behind me.

Her eyes boomed from out of her head, and her eyebrows curled into the corners of her eyes. Oh oh, I'm trapped! I thought as my mind raced with all of the possible escape routes. My eyes darted left and right until I had one option left. I scrambled up the fence, but my foot flew off the slippery, wet wood. My heart skipped a beat as I fell backward into the

fresh, pillowy snow. As I sat up, feeling stupidly embarrassed and even wetter and colder than before, her face was right in front of me, and you could almost see the steam shooting out of her ears. Here we go.. I joked to myself as she leaned forward.

"You know this fence was here for a reason." She spat.

She swayed her hips left and right and swung a big fat finger in my face. I was frozen, feet planted in the snow and I could feel the icy slush sliding down my back from the fall. I didn't know what else to do, so I ran. I leapt from out of her yard and sprinted all the way around the block. My clothes were heavy and damp, and the icy air cut through my throat as my feet squelched in the snow. But I didn't stop. I felt as if she was right behind me, but as I looked back there was no one in sight. I slowed down as I turned a few more corners because I knew for sure that she



wasn't following me.

I sighed in relief that I was out of that scary situation, but I also felt mildly embarrassed that I ran away and didn't explain to the lady why I was in her yard, trying to hop her fence. It would have made sense and she maybe even would have believed me and understood. But I guess I would never know.

I found Cecilia waiting on a bench for me, and I immediately told them the whole story. From then on, we purposely avoided that house and joked about the lady if we ever did see the house.

Looking back at this moment now, I definitely wouldn't have done what I did, but that experience just made one more story I could tell people, and one more memory I could laugh about with my friends

and family.

Life in Lockdown

By Evelyn Pennington

When I first found out about COVID, I was in an after-school theater. We found a random flag on the ground, and someone thought it was China's flag. We looked up the flag of China, and the first result was about how COVID-19 a new deadly virus, was spreading through China. My first thought was "Well, I'm glad it's not here."

Walking out of the building, Beatrice's father was going to bring us home. She had been talking about an event she was excited to go to all day, but her dad said she couldn't go because there were too many people, and now that COVID was around it was dangerous. "But that's in China, it's not our problem," I thought.

About a month after that, the teacher strike hap-

ing! It's not like it will be much different from the normal year, but at least no more exhausting online video chats for hours a day! The MCA's are coming up, and if I want to take them I would be at school again. What would that even be like? I can hardly remember my classroom, do I want to take the test? It would be interesting to see what's changed, but is it worth it? Taking a test I know I'm not going to do very well at? I'm just gonna skip it.

Graduation is almost here, and we get to watch a video on a video chat. How fun. The in-person students start walking out onto a stage, "Wait what? I thought they were gonna be on here like the rest of us!" I thought. Not gonna lie, it made me way more sad than I was expecting to be when I had to watch each of the students step on stage and receive their certificate from one of my favorite teachers. I was angry that they hadn't even invited us to come to graduation, what's worse was each of the students in person got to take their yearbook pictures professionally.

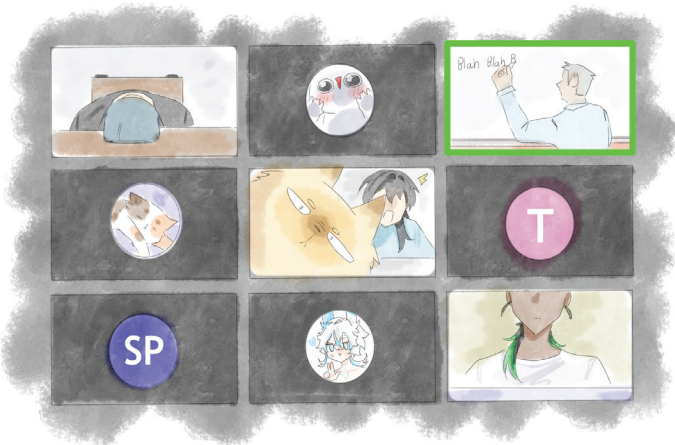
The school year is over. The teachers organized an event for all the 5th graders to go to (thankfully, the online students were invited too), seeing everyone again was like skipping a few seasons of a TV show, everyone's so much more grown-up than from when you last saw them. It was nice getting to see some of the people who I was friends with, plus we got free popsicles which was nice.

The summer is here, we no longer have to wear masks everywhere we go, a vaccine is on the way, and we can finally see our grandparents again, score! The summer was great, I was able to play around with friends, and things were finally going "back to normal."

pened. At first, I was hyped, no school! That was followed by spring break, ok, maybe I missed school... then... the pandemic hit. Digital school was awful, but at least it was short, only about 30 minutes a day.

Months go by and I'm feeling sick whenever I wake up, but I still have to do these video chats for hours every day, 5 classes, and about 90 mins for each of them. My grades were awful, and I failed everything because I would play video games during every class, mostly LOL Beans io (it's a fall guy's knockoff). Sometimes, I wouldn't even bother going to classes. I wasn't going to listen anyway. Occasionally, the teacher would call a group of students, including myself, to stay after class, but I always just left the meeting and that was that. Sometimes teachers would email my parents out of concern for me missing so many classes.

The end of the school year is finally approach-



A Peculiar Adventure

By Joseph Sierra Zepeda

It was 12:00 A.M., and I was in my basement with all of my buddies. They were all 14. . . Except me. So far it had just been like any other sleepover but we did not know the plans the future had for us. We didn't know that this night would be a night to remember forever. We started to play video games because we did not want to wait around until we wanted to sneak out. We mainly played GTA or Red Dead. We like to play games that have long stories and missions. We switched who played every mission. We became bored, so we knew that now was the time to sneak out. It was the perfect time. 1:00 A.M.

We had to be very quiet so my mom wouldn't hear us. We put on our shoes and started walking up the stairs from my basement. I have the creakiest stairs in the world so we had already started to make noise. When we opened the door from the basement we immediately started crawling. It felt like we were on a Mission Impossible mission.

When you are so low to the ground everything seems so big. It seems giant. It felt like forever to get to the back door of the house. We opened the door very silently and started crawling. We were crawling because there was a camera in the back door and the front door of the house. When we had a clear sight of my backyard we busted loose and just went for it. We just hoped that the notification my mom received from the Ring camera didn't wake her up.

It feels unreal when you are outside at night with your friends. You feel alive. You feel free. It's a sense like all of your worries are gone and you can do whatever you want. After we had gotten outside of my backyard, we were in the alleyway. In my opinion, this is one of the creepiest places in the world. There is one light post lighting the whole alleyway. The light post looked like the people up on stage when there was a light shining just on them. The trees cover the back of the houses. It feels like you are in a forest. The wind smelled like something devious was about

to happen. The bright moon was shining brightly in the sky. It lit the whole neighborhood.

We didn't have a destination so we decided to go to a gas station. We doubted that there was a gas station open at 1:00 A.M. but we decided to try anyway. As we walked, I found myself lost. But in a different way. I found myself lost in my thoughts. The night sky was the perfect time to reflect. I thought about what would happen if my mom found out. I thought about how school was going. But my thoughts were going to have to wait. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Beejan being goofy and I just busted laughing. My friends tell me I have a weird laugh, but I don't really hear it. To me, it sounds normal. Everyone's laugh is weird. Nobody is perfect. We walked to the rec center that is right by my house. The place looked lonely. It looked abandoned. There were no lights. Only a light post was lighting the basketball court. The swings are so used and old that they almost screech when you walk by them. The park is run down, with no net on the hoops. Even the slides were falling apart. We

walked around and around noticing all of the houses. We had made it.

The gas station was straight ahead of us. But of course, it was closed. We were all bummed out. I pulled out my phone and started looking for another

gas station that was open at this time. It was so dark that the shining of the screen of my phone was one of the only lights that was in sight. We started walking again. There was not a single car in sight. This was very unusual, especially for a street like Marshall. There were no cars but that didn't mean that the stop lights were not working. This was the only time I could run through a red light. I started doing circles around the whole street and I eventually fell to the ground and ate straight concrete. I think I chipped a tooth. The next gas station was 3 miles from my house but we had to push through it because we were hungry. We walked through so many neighborhoods and saw so many people. Mainly homeless people. This gave you a feeling of how much people suffer around the Twin Cities. We walked and walked until we arrived at our second destination. And of course, this one had to be closed too. We were totally bummed and were deciding to go back to my house. I got the guys to go to one more gas station,

It feels unreal when you are outside with your friends. You feel alive. You feel free.

which would be number three. We were walking to the gas station but on the way there we found this cat. It wasn't a stray because it had a collar but the collar didn't have anything on it. No phone number, no name, no nothing. We gave up on finding another gas station and we became distracted by this cat. The cat had smooth fur but as soon as I tried to rub the cat I got shocked and this scared me and the cat. But more for me. The cat was gray and white. The white fur shimmered in the dark and it was very easy to notice it.

We started walking back to my house and as I was strolling down the sidewalk I noticed that my friends were gone. I became terrified and looked behind me expecting Cookie Monster from Sesame Street to be behind me, but all I saw was my friends sitting on the ground petting the cat. I became irritated and told them to hurry up. I became oblivious to my surroundings and my friends found 2 bikes. I dashed all the way to where they were and stole the tiny bike. The cool wind on a chilly night was not the best thing to go with my T-shirt. I was not dressed according to this situation. I was wearing black Nike shorts with a black Nike shirt and white sneakers. My friends were wearing baggy sweatpants with zip-up hoodies. I was shivering and starving but I was having

the time of my life on this bike. My friend grabbed the other bike and tried to chase me but my miniature bike was way faster than his bike. I stopped hearing the screeching coming from my friend's bike and turned around and of course, I found them doing the stupidest thing possible.

One of my friends was riding the bike and my other friend was on the tiny pegs in the back wheel of the bike hanging on to my friend's back for dear life. Riding, riding, riding, POW. My friends ate a straight tree trunk and crashed the bike. They kept doing this until it finally worked. After about 10 minutes of riding our bikes, we found a shopping cart and I knew something was going to happen. One of my friends was sitting inside the shopping cart and the other was pushing. I stayed on my bike because I

didn't want to be part of this massacre. We wanted to go down the big hill on Fairview and we did exactly that. The screeching coming from the shopping cart woke up the whole neighborhood. Not actually but you know what I mean. We rode the shopping cart and the bike for a while until we eventually became too loud and we actually woke somebody up. The guy was dressed in black sweatpants and no shirt. "Get out of here and get to bed!"

I don't think that guy enjoyed our NASCAR racing show.

The giant train was right in front of us basically begging to get climbed on. We started climbing and the first thing we wanted to do was hop between crates. From the ground, it doesn't seem that scary but when you're up there, the gap is pretty big. I was up first. I gathered all of the power in my legs

and straight jumped as far as I could. I missed it. Well, not really, but my right foot got stuck and I tripped. At least I'm still alive to tell this story. After a lot of jumping from train to train we decided that our adventure was done for the day.

We knew that we should probably go back the way we went out. We started walking up the alleyway that is behind my house. I went around the tree and right in front of

the window I saw somebody just waiting, waiting to find out who was dumb enough to go out while she was right there. That person was my mother.

I got grounded for a week and I got my phone taken away for 2 weeks and I couldn't hang out with friends for 2 weeks. I didn't take this well because 2 weeks without seeing my friends outside of school is basically torture. I learned from this story that it's never right to go outside without a parent's permission, obviously. I also learned that you can find happiness in the smallest things like going on a walk with friends or riding bikes. Mainly, I learned that it's really important to spend time with friends or family because these are moments that you will cherish forever. But mainly don't go outside at midnight. It's not the safest place to be, especially at that time.



Inspired by the Stage

By Maisy Wall

You know how people say your idea of what you want to be when you grow up when you're little will probably change about a million times by the time you actually graduate college? Well, I'm not so sure about that. I've had a passion for acting since I was at least eight years old, maybe even younger, and that hasn't changed. I may be only thirteen now, meaning there's still five years to go before college, but I could definitely see myself pursuing acting as a full-time career. Don't get me wrong, I know it's not easy by any means, but I'm a strong believer in the fact that if you care about something enough that you want to do it for the rest of your life, it's worth the chance. I have my dad to thank for a lot of that.

Both of my parents went to acting school in New York—that's where they met. Although my mom has a special place in her heart for theater, she decided to go down a different road and became a hospice chaplain. My dad, however, loved acting so much and decided he wanted to do it for a living.

When I was in third grade, he got a part in a play called *Gone Fishin'* Christmas at Yellow Tree Theatre in Osseo, Minnesota. Most of the plays he's cast in aren't exactly what one might call "child-appropriate", but this one was—comparatively, anyway. So, almost every night I was at my dad's house, I would tag along to his rehearsals. You could pretty much call me an honorary cast member. All of the adults there knew me by name and wouldn't hesitate to shout a cheerful "Hello!" when I entered with my dad. I felt like just as much of a star as the main character of the show.

I had a small backpack I brought every night to keep me busy backstage. I filled it with snacks, books, markers, paper, fidgets, or anything else my dad thought would stop me from marching onto stage in the middle of a rehearsal, or a dress rehearsal during tech week to announce, "Daddy, I'm bored."

During the drive to the theater, I would look out the car window, swinging my boot-cleaved feet in my car seat. My dad and I would talk, of course, usually about how far along in the play he was, or what I did in school that day. He always kept a tin

of breath mints in his car that reminded me of wheels on a car, except if the rubber tire part was light green, the circle in the middle was white, and it tasted like toothpaste. Sometimes, we would both take one and make the other person guess if it was in our mouth or not. When it was my turn, I would silently spit out the mint into my palm, and make my best "I'm-eating-something" voice, hoping my acting was good enough. "Hmmm..." he'd say, "I think the mint is... in your mouth!" Now that I know better, I'd assume nineteen out of twenty times he was certainly lying. Yet, that didn't change the proud feeling that filled my chest when I won the game.

If we hadn't eaten dinner yet that day, we would sometimes stop at a Walmart near the theater that had a small Subway in it. I always got the same order; a six-inch on Italian bread with turkey, cheddar cheese, lettuce and tomatoes. Not toasted, of course. The Subway also sold slushies—the brand that had the logo of the polar bear with sunglasses snowboarding. My favorite flavor was blue raspberry. So what if

I felt like just as much of a star as the main character of the show.

it's not a real fruit? Cherries don't actually taste how the slushies perceive them! Every once in a while I would get a slushie, but only as a special treat. I cherished those days. After we were done with our sandwiches,

we got back in the car and finished the drive to Yellow Tree. Since my dad was an actor, and not an audience member or visitor, we got to use the special back entrance, an echoey basement-like room with a tall ceiling. There were old set pieces from past shows in the corners, and the whole room smelled musty and homey, in a way. It smelled exactly like the laundry room in the old apartment I used to live in with my dad, the first place he lived after he and my mom divorced. Whenever we had a load of laundry to do, we'd go down to the big room that had rows and rows of washers and dryers. My dad would pluck

me up and seat me on top of the dryer and I'd get to pull the lint holder out of its slot and peel the ever-so-satisfying strip of soft gray fuzz off of its metal prison. The fact that those two rooms smelled the exact same and I had so many good feelings connected with them both made it my favorite smell ever. I wish I could have bottled it up and kept it in a jar under my bed to cradle when I was feeling sad.

I'd inhale that beautiful smell of the storage room,

cherishing the feeling of the sturdy stone under my feet. When we stepped into the actual theater, I'd run straight to the box office to see Molly, who sold tickets for the shows and checked people in. She was my person. That winter, I made her a Christmas tree decoration out of a cardboard cone, green wool and hot glue. She still has it today. During performances, if my dad and the director didn't know what to do with me, I would stay in the box office with Molly, and I would help her sort files or staple papers. After giving her a hug, I met my dad and the rest of the cast in the green room. To say the cast loved me would be understatement of the year. I was like their mascot; they worshiped me and I was their number one fan. They would give me piggy back rides, show me around the stage, let me help them to practice their lines. I felt as if I was one of them. That was my first

time being introduced to the theater community, and I adored it. Everyone was instantly best friends with one another, and I loved to see them support each other. I decided then that those were the kind of people I needed to surround myself with in my life.

During the beginning of rehearsal, I sat slumped on the couch in the green room as actors bustled around me, searching for important props or costume pieces they needed to practice with that night. Sometimes I would read or play with a stuffed animal I had packed for that night, but other times I would just sit and watch, enjoying the noise and energy filling the room. After everyone was nearly ready, the stage manager, Mark, would enter the green room in a hurry, saying "places in five," or "ten" or however long until they needed to be ready to roll. To this, actors would respond, "thank you, places," which I thought was funny, because his name was Mark, not places! But after I got used to this exchange, I would say it with them, because it made me feel important.

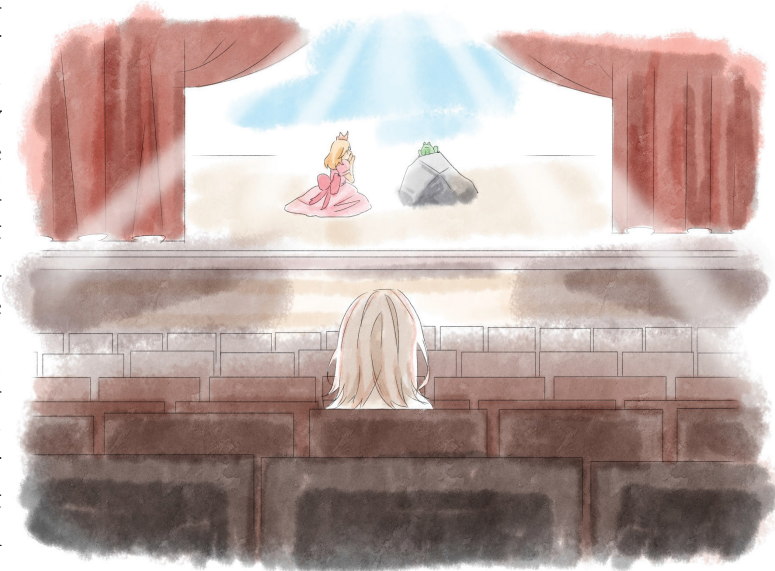
When everyone went on the stage and started rehearsing the play, I was told that it was "very important" that I kept quiet. Of course, I obeyed.

Give me a book, and I could be satisfied for hours. Occasionally, I would want to watch rehearsal, so I would go out the door of the green room, through the lobby and past the box office, waving to Molly if she was there, and into the theater. I had the whole room to myself, meaning I could choose any chair. With the exception of a chair or two being occupied by the director or someone else special. I'd sit in the dark theater and enjoy the magic of the play, appreciating the actor's hard work and soaking in the joy I felt radiating off the stage.

It was a very unique experience to get to watch my dad act. It was odd, sometimes, because he wasn't being himself. He was pretending to be someone else. Sometimes it scared me a little bit if his character was especially mean, or behaved in a way that didn't seem right, but I knew he was still the same person

and he was just putting on a show. I loved to watch his shows, and sometimes when I was in the audience at a performance, I just wanted to leap out of my seat and shout "that's my dad!" because that's how proud I was of him; he's so passionate when he's acting, it's hard not to be. Seeing him interact with his cast members and acting friends made me want the chance

to be in a community like that. And I was lucky enough to later on get to experience that. And it was all because of him that I did.



Accepting Help

By Anonymous

I run my pen down the paper, repeatedly circling No, question after question. Do you smoke? I circle no. Do you often think about hurting yourself? Once again, no. I then read, Do you restrict your eating? I hesitated. Should I tell the truth? I decided against it and circled No, while the feeling of guilt ran through my body.

When I was 12, I used to constantly over-analyze everything about my body and everything everyone had to say about me.

6th to 7th grade was a time period where I was at the peak of my eating disorder. I learned a lot during that span of time that helped me grow as a person, but I would never wish to go back.

The clock struck 7:11 a.m. I watched the hands as they slowly tick to 7:12 a.m. Then, I placed my feet on the scale, watching the numbers flicker back and forth till the scale finally decided a number. It read 120.3. I felt tears well up in my eyes as I stepped off. I wiped my eyes and continued to get ready for school. Slowly, that became my daily morning routine. My day would revolve around what number the scale landed on. The smaller the number was, the better day it would be.

When it reached lunchtime, I heard the familiar sound of the bell. I'd walk to the lunch room and sit at an empty table while I waited for my friends to get lunch. A few times, people would ask why I never get lunch. I would make stupid excuses like "There's no good vegetarian options," or "I'm still full from breakfast." Sometimes I thought to myself, What breakfast? The black coffee you had poured into a mug and choked down, because Google said it burns fat and increases your metabolism?

I would have done anything to burn calories: endless workouts that pushed my body to the limits, excessive dieting, throwing up, and much more. I always had a calorie limit for the day. It fluctuated from time to time, sometimes 250, other times 400. It just depended on how my clothes fit or what the scale read.

For a while this routine became effective. I began seeing results: 120, 118, 117, 112, 109. Slowly but surely, I was gaining satisfaction that continued to feed my problems. Though I had gained satisfaction, I could never feel satisfied enough: there was always a lower number I could achieve. I would stand in the mirror for hours, just staring at what I could fix and what I had achieved so far.

Sooner than later, I got weaker. I couldn't get out of bed without feeling like I was going to pass out. While I brushed my hair, clumps would come out, and my mental health seriously began to suffer. Most days, I would refuse to go to school due to pure exhaustion.

One night, I lost control over my mental health and ended up in the hospital. I still remember the drive there like it was yesterday. I stared out of the window while I heard my grandmother soundlessly crying while driving, asking herself how she hadn't noticed what was happening sooner. We arrived at

the hospital and sat down in the waiting room, anxiously waiting for the nurse to call my name.

Five minutes later, I heard a loud yell: "Jennifer!"

I walked back to the room with her, where she told me to explain why I'm

here and asked me to fill out this question sheet. I read the first question: 1) Have you ever been admitted for mental health previously? I circled No. I then read through the rest of the questions, circling yes or no, and one question read, Do you restrict your eating? My heart jumped in my chest a bit. Do I lie? After my debut, I circled no while guilt filled my body.

I spent a few days in the hospital under observation and was later moved to a mental facility, where I spent about a week and a half in care. The ambulance ride there was extremely uncomfortable; they had strapped my arms and legs down to a stretcher so I couldn't break loose and run. After 15 minutes, I begged the EMT to loosen the straps that were tightly fastened around my feet. She loosened them a bit, but not much. Thankfully, it relieved some pain.

I remember arriving at the facility on the stretcher and getting wheeled into this hallway that was painted all white with little blue lines as trim. The EMT had undid the straps around my arms and legs

Sooner than later, I got weaker. I couldn't get out of bed without feeling like I was going to pass out.

and lowered the stretcher, so I could step off. Another doctor signaled from down the hall to come meet her. I walked into the room. It was pretty empty—just a walk-through metal detector and two chairs. The lady sat down and made me fill out another question sheet. Once I finished, she made me walk through the metal detector. Afterward, she handed me two pairs of blue scrubs and walked me to my room.

The first day was the hardest. I had to adjust to all these new people, doctors constantly asking me questions, the cameras watching me as I slept. The hardest was adjusting to my roommate. I never had to share a room before.

Daily, I would be pulled into therapy sessions alongside the other 12 people in my group: there was always a therapist that would take us out individually. My first individual therapy session was awkward and very uncomfortable. She explained that the more I showed up to group sessions and proved myself to be fit to go home, the faster I could get out.

The first day was also the first time I had had three meals a day in over three months. Breakfast went smoothly, but once lunchtime had come, I was full and overwhelmed with guilt. It felt like if I ate the food placed in front of me, I would gain a lot of weight and everybody around me would judge me for eating. Eventually, I ate the food. As I stared down at an empty plate, all my mind thought was: Is that going to make you fat? You don't even know how many calories were in that? I tried to get up to go to the bathroom so nobody would see me cry. I walked up to the door and shook the handle, but the door was locked. I heard a voice behind me say, "The doors are locked 20 minutes after mealtime."

I wiped my tears, then turned around and said, "Oh, OK," and went to sit back down.

The next few days were extremely hard, but I showed up to all group sessions and individual therapy sessions. I wouldn't say much. I just went trying to prove I didn't belong there, refusing to believe I was meant to be there. The doctors repeatedly told me that if I refused to talk to them and participate in group discussions, I was going to be in here for a

while.

After about 4 days, I realized that refusing to believe I needed help did me no good, and with that logic, I was going to be in there forever. I began to accept help, even though I thought it was embarrassing. To be truthful, part of me only accepted help so I could go home, but the other part of me knew I couldn't live how I had been living. I was sick of not being able to get out of bed and never having enough energy to go out with my friends.

My last 4 days there consisted of lots of talking with therapists, immense amounts of guilt, and creating after care plans. I had agreed that if they released me, I would go to a therapist at least 3 times a week, and go to weekly check ups twice a week.

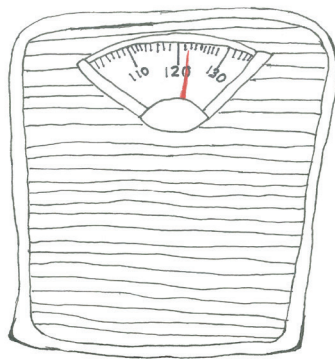
Finally, the day I had been waiting for had come. I woke up at about 8 a.m. and threw my hair up into a ponytail. Then, I gathered the bags I had packed the night before, walked to the lobby, and set them down

in front of the front desk. My release time was 9 a.m. I sat in the community room that overlooked the city. I stared out the window, thinking about the time I spent in there and how drastically this was going to affect my life once I left. Sooner than later, the clock struck 9 a.m. I gathered my bags while the friends I had made said their goodbyes and wished me well. I did the same.

The following weeks consisted of me trying to catch up on school, attending my therapy sessions, and trying to explain what happened to my friends. Somehow many people in the grade found out and started treating me differently. It truly felt like a pity party. But they soon all moved onto a bigger piece of drama.

Accepting that I needed help is probably still one of the hardest things I've ever done. Whenever I reflect on how I used to be, it makes me think about how hesitant I was to accept help and how much I've grown.

In summary, I'm almost 14 now. Without that time period of my life, I don't think I would be who I am today. I'm very grateful I accepted help because without it, I could have gotten a lot sicker and done immense damage to my body.





Justice to Me Poems

Once students were able to recognize terms in prose, poetry terms were introduced. The 8th grade expedition, Justice, was looked at in-depth in Quarter 4. Students researched justice topics that were important to them and wrote poetry that connected with their chosen theme. Poetry provided a medium for students to express their passions and experiment with word play.

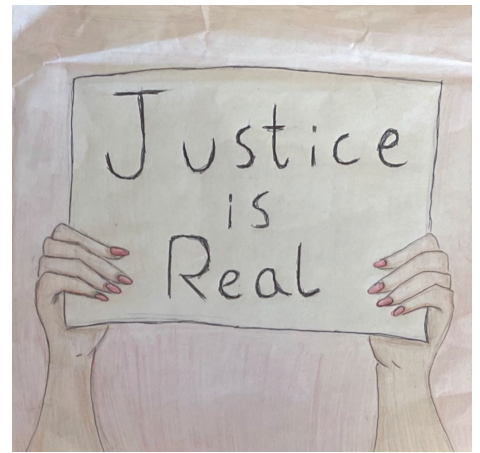
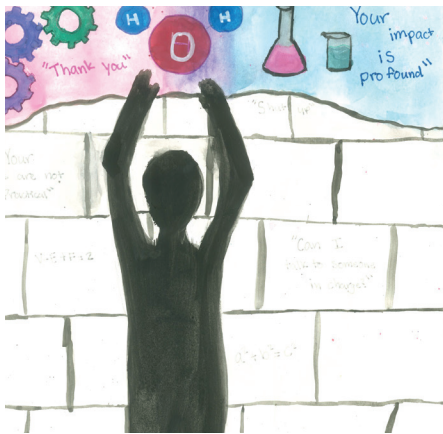


Table of Contents

Trans Rights are Human Rights - George Abelson	62
To be a Mother - Charley Cheatham	63
Lady Liberty - Beatrice Cosgrove	64
“Free Country” - Rosie Douglas	65
Taken - Ronin Eckfeldt	65
An Open Letter to America - Zania Hierlmaier	66
Asian Hate - Phoojywg Kick	67
Man - Louisa McAlpine	68
Climate Change - Charlie Nicholson	68
Let Me Breathe - Jarvez Robinson	69
When is Enough - Julian Sem	69
Blamed - Norman Simon	70
The Equity Equation - Emily Totushek.....	70
Asking for it - Maisy Wall	71

Trans Rights are Human Rights

By George Abelson

Justice to me means
Trans rights
Being yourself
Everywhere
All the time

A trans flag next to every U.S. flag

If you don't support trans rights
You don't support happiness
You don't support freedom
You support
Children Killing Themselves

Maybe one day
Florida will be safe
Texas will be safe
Maybe you can wear a shirt with
Blue
Pink
White
In that order
Maybe you don't have to worry about
Surviving

Justice to me means
Access to life saving healthcare
Representation in media
Education
Everywhere being a
Safe space
Accepting parents
Parents allowed to parent
How
They
See
Fit
The government
Making laws to protect
Not hurt
That is Justice to me



To Be a Mother

By Charley Cheatham

They told me
You must be a mother
It is your duty
To care for
To love
To bare
Tiny smiles
And sticky fingers.

They told me
You must have a career
It is your job
To prepare
To fight
To become
Financially independent
Be the boss.

And then
They overworked
They didn't care
When I threw up in the break room
When I cried into my coffee
They forced me
To return with my child
All alone
In an empty house.

I wasn't ready
I wasn't ready
I wasn't ready.
To go back
But they put my job on the line and I need
To make a life for my child.
They told her
You must be a mother you have no right
To plan
To abort
To your body
So the child grew
Inside of her.

They told her
You must go to school
It is your job
To prepare
To educate

To make
Something
Out of herself.

And then
They hurt her
They didn't care
When she threw up in the bathroom
When she cried into her textbook
When she became the label
The warning
When she became
The teen mother.

She wasn't ready
She wasn't ready
She wasn't ready.
To do this
But she didn't have a choice and she needs
An education
To make a life for her child.
They tell us
You must do it all
It is your job
To be a mother
To be a boss
To go to school.

They tell us
The career woman
The teen mom
All of us
Pregnancy shouldn't effect
Shouldn't change
But it does.

They can't see the nine months of pain
Of sick
Of worry.
And then
They fire
They hurt
They discriminate
When we can't control our hormones
When we have to be with the child
When we get sick in the bathroom
The break room
The bedroom.
We can't be ready
We can't be ready

We can't be ready.

To raise a human if you keep acting discriminatory
unjust,
Unfair
Because we are women
Because we are mothers.
We are raising the nation.
The least you can do
is care



Lady Liberty

By Beatrice Cosgrove

Justice to me
Is not

The long arms Of Liberty
Taking our wrists
Tying them down
And killing our rights

That is murder

Not
Taking something unfeeling
Out of
A body
That could never sustain
What it may be forced
To have

A body
That doesn't want
What it may be forced
To create

A body
That could die in
What it may be forced
To birth

We forever appreciate your interference
That is what you want us to say
But I am not grateful

We are not grateful

We
Want a world where

We

Can walk into
A clinic and be offered
Care

Without protestors
Screaming our sins
Without knife eyes
Cutting across our
Bodies

Justice to me
Is Lady Liberty Lighting her torch
For her angry
Beautiful
Scared
Citizens

Lady Liberty,

Will you light your torch for me?



“Free Country”

By Rosie Douglas

I always laughed when people said
“America is a free country”
I thought it was stupid
I still think it is stupid.

If this country is so “free”
Talk to the trans men and women
Who are scared to walk home tonight
Talk to the drag queens all over the country
Getting harassed,
Receiving death threats on the daily,
And don't forget those who were driven to suicide
Because of all the hurt
And hate that your people cause.

Why am I not surprised?
People go through this as young as the age of 12,

And you're blind.

People walk into a drag show planning to do some-
thing absolutely despicable
That I can't say without tears

And you're still blind.

With every day more people die,
Scratch that murdered!

You're blind, you're blind, you're blind!

People say they understand
They say they see it too
You don't see what I see! You don't hear what I
hear!
You don't hear the crying of the kids who get bul-
lied for being who they are
You don't see the tears of the ones who are proud of
themselves
You don't see the silent suffering of the ones who
can't say it at loud.

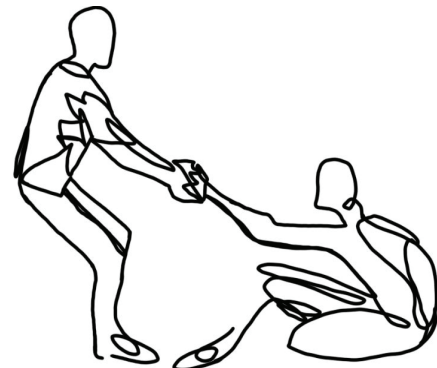
Taken

By Ronin Eckfeldt

Justice to me means
voting rights:
You're silenced before you talk
You're right to vote
Taken
You're right to express
Your voice
Taken

But this isn't some dystopian world
This is our world
This is our America
This world of ours
Steals your voice
Because with it you would be
“Dangerous”
Your voice would be too
“Powerful”
You're voice could be reinstated
The power who silenced you
Is scared of you
You're power
You're greatness
You're ability to change
Everything

What if Our America
Gave you a voice
The bias at the top
Would be removed
You're voice
You're power
You're greatness
Would change everything



An Open Letter to America

By Zania Hierlmaier

Dear America,
When freedom rings
t's cracking bell
The history of this place Erupts
Into
Glorified
Revolutions.
America, you were built up from the broken
And shout to be heard
Through overpowering waves
Of oppression.
Your declaration describes a world of liberty and
justice
For all.
But when you look into the eyes of America's children
You notice the hate
And pain
And pleads
To a country that does not see their names
As important artifacts of
History.

The liberty and justice appear to be lies
Force fed to new citizens
Who already know
They do not Belong.

Women carry dreams on their backs
And provide great deeds that are never returned
Just remember
Your first home was a woman
Don't ever forget that.

Dear America,
When your men whistle to young girls on the street
And shove their hands up her skirt
Will you respond with
"Liberty and justice for all"
Will you hold your hands to her mouth
And hurl names at her back
You America,
Are part of the problem here.

When you hear the news of a new school shooting
The 16th in 2024 alone
Are you shocked or just
Accustomed
To this heartbreak.
Do you understand that these children
Spend more time worrying about the perfect hiding
place
Than their upcoming math final?

We read the news and see the wars
And pictures
Of broken homes
And gunshots
Tiny wars
And huge wars
Both Disastrous
And deadly.

America, when your students finally stand
For the generations whose rights have been denied
And the generations born into this world
With their voices
Silenced
The tear gas does nothing but build the
Resistance
That you fight desperately
To erase.

We are taught that racism does not exist here
In our America
But innocent Black lives are still taken
Every
Day.
Their names are erased from our history
And forbidden
To be talked about
At the dinner table.

But America, I still see this racism
Not going away.
I see it in the way white women clutch their purses
when a Black man walks by
And in the jokes my classmates make
I am white, America, but I still notice
America,
And you should notice it
To.

In school we learn endless facts about physics But
don't learn that survival of the fittest
Exists every damn day
In our American streets
And malls
And schools.

America,
There is trash in your oceans and rivers
And lakes
Flowing from power plants
And factories
Across border lines
And states
Your people
Watch as the life of this place
Drowns
Down
Down
Down.
Into nets and plastic bags
Choking the animals
You fly hours to see
In zoos.
The irony
Is so clear
It is almost
Funny.

Dear America,
We say their names
To crowds who will not listen
And cry for justice
We will not receive
When freedom rings
It's cracking bell
The faint sound
Echoes to you America,
And screams
To be
Heard.

Asian Hate

By Phoojywg Kick

Justice to me
It is NOT yelling at those who have not spoken
It is NOT the "kung flu"
It is NOT attacking the innocent.
It is NOT stabbing someone because you THINK
it would mean "one less person to blow up our
country."
It is NOT beating someone because you THINK
they caused you to lose your job
It is NOT blaming a people because you THINK
they caused this pandemic
This is not justice
Justice IS being able to take public transport
It IS being able LIVE, without the fear of being
assaulted
It IS being able to THRIVE, in this country
It IS being able to go where you need
It IS being able to not have threats on your life

It's being able to live in peace
Without hate
Without stereotypes
Without racism
Without crimes directed towards the Asian people
This is justice to me.



Man

By Louisa McAlpine

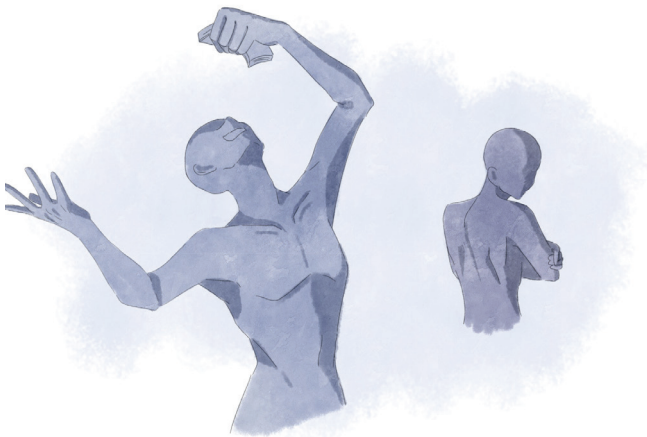
Wake-up
Work
Sleep
Wake-up
Work
Sleep
Work Work Work

Eight hours a day
Five days a week
Working just as hard
Harder even
84 cents to 1 dollar
14 months

In a 12 month year
To make the same
As the
Man

Mother Expectations
Have kids
Be there
“Why aren’t you working”
“Set a good example
For your daughter”

So I work
A promotion
Now a supervisor
Making as much as
The entry level
Man



Climate Change

By Charlie Nicholson

Justice to me means reversing
Climate change

CO2 builds
Turning the earth
Into a greenhouse

Temperatures rise
Ice caps melt
Animals die
Coral is lost
Oceans rise
Empires fall
We lose them all

The solution is simple
No more fossil fuels
The greenhouse crumbles
The artic comes back

So use more renewables
Reduce your carbon footprint
If we all follow these steps
The future is hopeful

Reduced flooding
Smaller storms
Sea levels stabilize
Coral reefs thrive

Justice is reversing
Climate change.



Let Me Breathe

By Jarvez Robinson

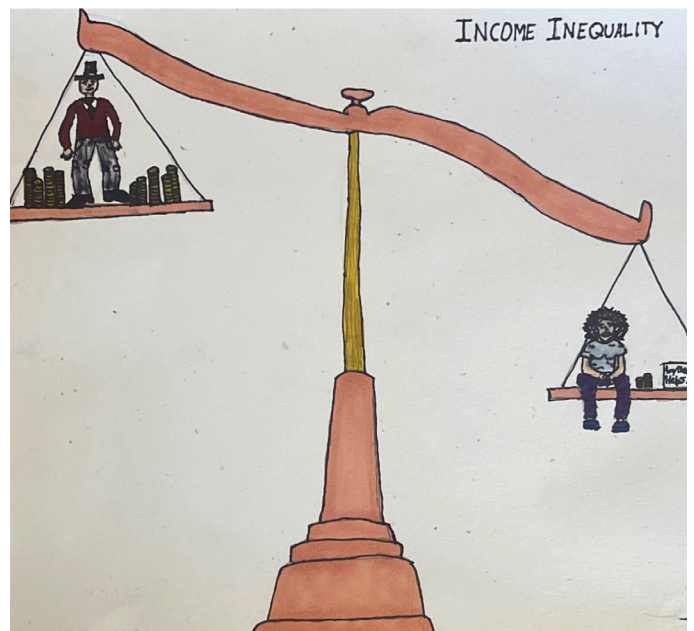
Justice to me means
the right to be me
The right to wear a hoodie
To have my hands in my pockets.
To brush my hair
To reach for my phone
To have my car smell good
And
To be able to play with toys.
A country
Built on the backs
Of my ancestors
Built on lies
And oppression
With eyes
Always watching
I have to be alert
With my every move
Check my tone
No sudden movements.
Honest conversations
Teach the true story
Admitting the truth
See the bias
And realize
People like me
Are human too.
When I think of justice
I think of
A world with equality
A world without
Having to fear
The people that are
Supposed to protect us
A world where
I can breathe.



When is Enough

By Julian Sem

Justice to me
Is the right to work,
The right to make a living,
The right to provide,
The right to a new start,
The right for respect in the workplace,
But...
Do all those things actually happen? Do the employers care for you? Do they care about your labor? Do they care about your sacrifices? You take 8 hours out of your day, just to work for them?
For someone else.
From deathly and dangerous working conditions
To mentally and physically exhausting working conditions
What's the difference?
The difference is the capabilities.
The POWER of the worker.
The power they hold over the employer.
But, is it enough?
Is it enough to challenge them?
But what if we made it enough.
What if we put them in our shoes?
What if they did 9-5 for a day?
What if they felt what we felt?
That is justice to me.



Blamed

By Norman Simon

Justice means
To stop blaming us
Stop blaming us for rain
Stop blaming us for the market collapsing
Stop blaming us for dead children
This is what I ask to you as a
Jew
We have been blamed for two millennia
We get kicked out of our homes
We get sent to gas chambers to die
We are burnt on a stake
And still there's rain
And still children died
And still the market collapsed
And for how many lives did you
Waste
If the world stopped blaming
15 million people we could live better
We could stop children dying
We could grow the market
We could weather the storms
And just maybe the world would be a better
Place
If this happened maybe we could take accountabil-
ity
Maybe religion would not be a thing to get killed
for
Maybe we could just be humans

Because at the end of the day
We are humans.
That is Justice to me.

The Equity Equation

By Emily Totushek

Justice to me means
Being able to share ideas
When it comes to math, technology, science, engi-
neering
The area where acceptance is never truly gained
In a world where numbers and equations roam
Yet again my brilliance is not shown
Because they are already known,
The ones who are always blocking my throne
As problems are found, my solutions are near pro-
found
But as time goes on, recognition is often like a bat-
tleground
In this patriarchal field
The truth continues to be concealed
I attempt to stand tall
To let my work talk for itself
But when someone asks "Can I talk to someone in
charge?" I attempt to hide the frustration, always at
large
Not anymore.
I will not be a shadow in the night
While witnessing others fight
In this continuous war
Together, we will break down each wall
The dust and rubble will start to fall
As a response to our call
By refusing to settle for silence

There could be an upcoming alliance
Of shared compliance
So encourage the marginalized
Let them be heard,
Speak their truth
Chase their dreams
This is what justice means to me.

Asking for it

By Maisy Wall

Justice to me means
Skirts
And tank tops
And v-necks
And no comments.
I don't have to wear a bra
But it's not really up to me, is it?
It's up to him.
It's not my fault men don't control themselves.
They can control themselves.
Why does his lack of
maturity... no
sanity... no
empathy... no
heart
have to be my problem?
They say
"Boys will be boys"
And
"Did you tell him no?"
And
"Cover up"
But I shouldn't have to bring a sweater
everywhere I go
Just in case
He
Is turned on.
He can't help it?
It's my fault?
I'm asking for it??
Let me ask you something;
Why would I ask to be
Hurt
Assaulted
Or
Raped?
Because I want it as much as him?
Who ever said that?
I never said that.

Just because I wear lipstick
Does not mean I want him to kiss me.
Because I wear crop tops
Does not mean I want him to touch me.
Anywhere.
And so I walk into school dressed in

A hoodie covering my chest.
Sweatpants falling far below my thighs.
And hair hiding my face.
Hiding my sexy smile
NO- my beautiful smile.
Hiding my seductive eyes
NO- my joyful eyes.
I will not hide my face.
My youthful
Innocent
Kind
Gentle
Beautiful face.
My youthful
Innocent
Kind
Gentle
Beautiful face.



