

OWL Survived AP Lang

A Collection of Survival Essays: From Serious to Frivolous

The Writing of Open World Learning
Community's AP Language and Composition class

Volume 3, 2024



FOREWORD

The Advanced Placement AP Language course asks students to think carefully about how and why people write what they write. In our pursuit of these questions, we throw terms around like exigence, rhetorical situation, audience, and persona. Frankly I didn't much use many of these words until I was indoctrinated into the AP Language subculture at a week-long training last summer, but I have enjoyed watching my students gradually and grudgingly adopt them.

Once I felt confident that everyone was reasonably well prepared for the AP exam that takes place in May, I presented my students with a rhetorical situation that would help us round out the year: write about a person who has survived something difficult. My students took a wide variety of approaches to this situation.

While some chose to write about things recent and immediate – like senioritis or Nerf wars – others chose topics more distant, such as the Japanese soldier who survived for over 30 years on an island in the Philippines because he stubbornly refused to believe that World War II was really over. The experiences of the assembled survivors range from heart wrenching to silly. What the essays all have in common is that I have asked students to use both narrative and exposition. The narrative is meant to draw us in and exposition to provide useful context as well as perspective. The exigence – why they chose these subjects – is nearly as interesting to me as the stories themselves.

Broadly speaking, the essays fall into three categories: things that happened to the writer, things that happened to their friends or relatives, and things that happened to people they don't know but whose experience is interesting to the writer. All essays required some element of research, but the story is generally as, if not more important than, the assembled facts.

Over interim, a group gathered in my room to pore over the collection of assembled essays and turn it into a publication. This involved many hours of editing, illustrating, and problem solving. Violet Wright was already signed and sealed as my lead editor and designer, and good fortune brought a team together to help. Marjorie Borer-Seabloom, Lili Stoner, and Halie Karre were instrumental in preparing stories for publication. Aria Kulseth also stepped up to provide high quality artwork. It was fun to watch this hastily assembled team work together, and I am indebted to them for making this volume possible.

Leo Bickelhaupt
May 2024

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Emergency Landing

Theo Kimball

Author's Note: The following is an account of my father's experience of an emergency plane landing in Tampa.

I vividly remember the moment when the pilot's muffled voice came over the intercom. I cannot recall if he said anything specific; I just remember him saying that there was a problem with the plane. It was only minutes later that the cold smoke began to fill the cabin.

This was about 15 years ago, when I was returning home from a work conference in Miami, Florida. There were about 10 or 15 coworkers with me, and when we got on the plane, we were all exhausted from the hot, muggy weather and the sluggish pace at which the traffic had been crawling along, which only served to exacerbate the heat. By the time we arrived at the airport, we were all ready to go home.

Shortly after we had settled into our seats and ordered our food and drink, there was an announcement from the pilot. Apparently there was an issue with the plane, and we would have to make an unexpected stop in an airport in Tampa. If you have ever been on a plane, you probably know that there is something innately unsettling about being tens of thousands of miles above the earth. Naturally, people started to panic. After a few minutes of silence from the pilot (only the unceasing chatter of the frightened passengers), the plane was filled with a mist-like condensation, and the windows began to fog up. This did not help the passengers' nerves. The flight attendant promptly began to speak over the intercom, but her English was noticeably not native. Between the flight attendant's thick accent and the voice-muffling effect of the intercom system, no one could make out the full message of what she was saying, and people began to speculate and come up with their own theories as to what might be going on. The confusion was eventually cleared up when the pilot spoke once again, informing us that fuel would have to be dumped into the ocean.

Most commercial airplanes are designed to be much lighter on landing than they were on takeoff, as hitting the ground with too much excess weight

can cause massive amounts of damage to the aircraft. Typically, the pilots account for the loss of fuel over the course of the flight, but occasionally things do not go as planned, such as an emergency that forces them to land early, and they are forced to dump excess fuel into the ocean mid-flight.

“The plane was filled with a mist-like condensation, and the windows began to fog up.”

This was one of those cases. After a few more minutes, I could see the shining lights of Tampa out of my window. I would soon come to see that many of those lights came from the vast ocean of fire trucks and ambulances that sprawled across the area around the airport, standing by in case the emergency landing went awry. In the end, we were able to land safely and no one was hurt. Apparently there had been something wrong with the positioning of the landing gear, but the origin of the cold mist was still unknown. I checked Twitter and saw that many airplane enthusiasts had caught wind of the situation, and flocked to the area to witness the landing. Everyone was relieved, and some coworkers had been so affected by the incident that they attempted to organize rental cars to get back home, lest they have to risk another plane ride. What I most vividly remember about that day were the words of the man behind me: “I'm gonna need some new underwear.”

Lost at Superior

Joe Lodahl

Editor's Note: This is a personal account of Joe's experience of getting lost in the woods at Lake Superior. To write the story, he conducted research on psychology and the environment of Lake Superior.

We trekked through a ditch in the woods, pushing past trees that whipped back into place behind us, through plants that scraped at our

ankles. Not knowing where we were going, I held on tight to my sister's hand as she led me and my brother through the woods to where we thought our campsite was. I stayed quiet and wide eyed, hoping that my sister's confidence wasn't just a facade to keep us from being too scared. My ever growing concerns started to voice themselves in my head. I was sure mom and dad would be looking for us by now, right? We wouldn't be too far gone in the wrong direction, right?

Lake Superior is the largest freshwater lake in the world by surface area, and is surrounded by protected land. This means animals like wolves, coyotes, and bears all live free and in the woods surrounding the lake. In 2020, a six year old drowned in the lake, and over 1100 drownings have occurred in the Great Lakes since 2010, not including the past two years. Although most likely safe within campgrounds, no one knows everything that goes on in the surrounding woods, and there are no lifeguards patrolling the shores. I'm sure when it's your child that's missing, a large lake and dangerous wildlife is not what you want to hear about.

It was summer, and we were camping with my family of 5 on Lake Superior. I was 5, my sister was 9, and my brother was 8. The trip up until then was going great, we had some snacks, and were starting to set up camp after we went down to see the lake.

"Mom, Dad, can we go down to play again?" We pleaded with our parents as they started hammering spikes into the ground.

"OK, just be back soon," they replied, and off we went.

My siblings and I ran through an empty campsite, through the woods, and down to the lake. After a few minutes of laughing, skipping rocks and walking, we saw something in the distance. A house, which was odd.

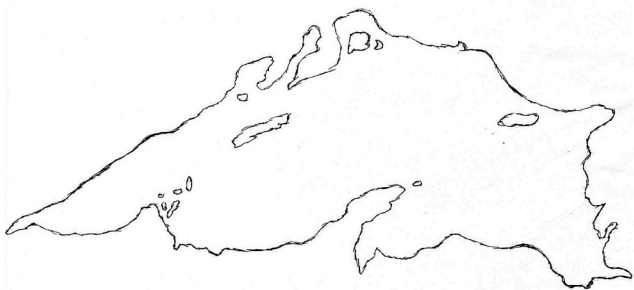
"I don't remember seeing that house before, we should probably head back to the campsite." My sister said, turning me and my brother back towards where we thought the campsite was. As we continued walking, my sister started to look around more, seemingly second guessing her decisions. As we furthered into the woods the trees started to change, becoming increasingly unfamiliar. We went even deeper into the woods, the sun starting

to fall.

"I stayed quiet and wide eyed, hoping that my sister's confidence wasn't just a facade to keep us from being too scared. My ever growing concerns started to voice themselves in my head."

As the sounds of animals increased, so did our nerves, and it didn't help when my sister was honest with us about being lost, although we already knew. We decided to climb up a large hill to the side of us, but I wasn't able to climb up. As my brother helped push me up to the ledge my sister pulled me on top of it, and we struggled up the hill until we finally saw a good sign, a parking lot. My sister leading us with a renewed confidence, we brushed through one final patch of woods before hitting the main campsite road. As we rounded the corner, we saw our campsite. When we saw our dad, relief washed over us and all the pent up fear and anxiety let loose a stream of tears for all three of us. We ran to him and embraced, as my mom walked around the corner talking with the park ranger. She ran towards us, and we had a large group hug as more tears streamed down our faces.

When you're lost it feels like you constantly have the frog in your throat before you cry, and a constant weight on your chest. Although in many situations like this one you have to keep it inside, pretending to be strong, it's hard, and the relief that you feel when it's over is overwhelming. I can hardly imagine what my parents had to go through when they lost 3 of their children who weren't even in middle school at the time. As Dr. Cynthia Divino said, "We find that we can't think clearly and are consumed by fear. With our fight, flight and freeze response taking over, we revert to primitive instinctual responses which are often very poor choices in that particular situation." Logically thinking is the best way out of these situations, but



fear takes that away. Luckily my sister led us to safety that day, because without her logical thinking, who knows where we would've been or what could've happened.

Crosswinds

Marjorie Borer Seabloom

Author's Note: The following is a true story about a Widjiwagen trip that I was on. The first day we were blown into a rocky shore and needed to be picked up by the forest service. I wrote this story from a combination of my own memories, accounts from my group members who were also there, and a journal entry I wrote along with my group the night after.

I was standing in water up to my armpits. The waves were crashing onto the rocks and into the motorized tow boat. "All right, I can take three people, one canoe and 2 Duluth packs, get them right now, the wind isn't going to get better and there is a thunderstorm rolling in later today," said the USFS ranger. The three of us helping keep the motorized tow boat from hitting the rocks grabbed Duluth packs from those who were on shore and dumped them into the boat, still pushing it out to ensure it would not get blown into the shore, full of large, sharp rocks. While we did this, the three on the shore unpacked the cook kit so we could bail water from the boat to keep it higher out of the water, allowing us to be above the waves with the added weight of us and our gear. Once the boat was fully loaded with our packs and the canoe was strapped on the top, the three of us clambered in,

hauling ourselves over the edge and into the boat. "Make sure to hold on. This is going to be a very rocky ride."

Earlier that day, we had been dropped off at the trailhead of Snowbank Lake later in the day than we expected, meaning the waves were bigger and wind had picked up. Despite the strong winds, rain and large waves, we decided to push through the first lake, Snowbank, hoping to camp on Boot Lake which was one lake over. Despite the waves being large enough they were crashing over the gunnels and into the canoe, slowly filling it with water, we were making progress across the lake, and nearing the portage we were hoping to get to. After stopping in a bay for a quick lunch of peanut butter, gorp and a tortilla, we kept going. There was just one more point to go around to before we would be able to see the portage, we were so close.

The first of our two canoes, carrying our counselor and two campers made it around the point. The canoe I was in had a mere 50 feet before we would make it around the point where we hoped there would be some shelter from the wind. As my canoe was about to pass the point as well, we felt the canoe shudder as it hit the big, dark and jagged rocks that we had been eyeing to the right of our boat and had tried to stay away from, ripping through the paint, canvas and wood of the nearly hundred year old wood and canvas canoe. On our way around the point, my group member who was in the stern at the time had misjudged the strength of the crosswind that was coming from our left, pushing us directly towards to point, and had cut it too close to the shore, hoping to stay out of the middle of the lake where the larger waves and stronger winds were. After trying to simply paddle back out, as we were stuck on the rocks and made no progress, I clambered out of the bow, and held the canoe to keep it as still as possible and off the rocks as we talked through ideas. After trying to push off, walk the canoe around the point and get back to the previous bay where we had eaten, we knew it was no use. I told my group members, the one in the stern and the duffer to hold the canoe, in hope of preventing further damage while I crawled up the slippery rocks yelling out to our counselor in the first canoe "We got blown onto the rocks and are stuck!" Over the wind, rain and waves it was no use. I tried to wave to the other canoe when the duffer finally turned, wondering where we were and

saw me, passing the signal on to the two paddling in that boat.

“We felt the canoe shudder as it hit the big, dark and jagged rocks, ripping through the paint, canvas and wood of the nearly hundred year old wood and canvas canoe.”

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area is a designated wilderness area founded in 1978 that spans over 1 million acres of unroaded, uninhabited land and has no cell service in the majority of the region, making communication tough. Located in northern Minnesota, the BWCA has over 1,100 lakes, the majority of which have strict no-motor boat policies. Connecting the lakes to one another are portages, or small, unpaved trails. A 4,655 acre lake known by many for its large waves, and windy nature, frequently with white caps, Snowbank is not known as the lake to go for a leisurely paddle. On the day we were paddling, we later learned that there had been a steady 30 mph wind with 45 mph gusts hitting us from the side, commonly known as a crosswind, by far the hardest orientation of wind to deal with while in a boat due to not only getting pushed in that direction, but that it makes it exceptionally hard to steer the canoe.

The first canoe turned around and paddled back to us, which led to what we thought would be a fairly simple task, but due to the waves and lack of proper footing, getting the packs, paddles and other gear out of the canoes, then the canoes themselves out of the lake was harder than we thought it would be. This deceptively simple task felt like it took hours, getting pushed around by the waves, unable to see the bottom of the lake for footing, feeling the rocks that were being pushed around by the current hit our feet and all being exhausted from the day. Due to the waves, both canoes were full with water, with only the gunnels and yolk pads showing above the surface of the lake, and the bottoms still being bashed into the rocks. Once all the gear was out it did not get much

easier for us as there was nowhere easily accessible that we could set our gear that didn't risk it rolling into the lake, and there being nowhere on shore that we could set the canoes. Slowly, we were able to walk the gear along the shore, with nowhere on land, we had to carry everything walking in knee-deep water, rocks moving under our feet and the rain still blinding us.

Eventually, we got all the gear to a more stable area a ways down the bank, and we sat down to figure out what we were going to do. The waves were too big to paddle any more that day and the shoreline was too rocky to safely walk back to a calmer part of the lake. We decided to look around in the closer area for a campable spot and would wake up in the middle of the night when the waves were generally smaller. While half the group scouted out potential camp spots, the rest of us stayed on shore hoping we would see somebody who could help us, or at least tell others where we were, but due to being with a YMCA camp, we were unable to get picked up by anyone other than the forest service. After a few hours, we saw a boat with a canoe rack on top go by, with the boat operator offering us a ride. Because of the camp rule, our counselor yelled back “I don't know if my organization would allow us to ride with you,” but he said he would come back with help. Despite the uncertainty of the situation, we decided to wait to set up camp, hoping we would be picked up by a forest service ranger. After another hour or so of waiting, we had nearly given up hope. We saw the same boat come back, and this time the operator pointed at his badge, indicating he was with the forest service which we had not seen earlier. My group mate exclaimed “Finally! I can't wait to get out of here.”

Carefully avoiding the rocks protruding from the water, he came closer and he told us his plan: as we got all of our gear consolidated, he would go out behind an island that was blocking some of the wind so that he could drain the water that had come from waves crashing over the sides of his boat, then he would come back, and 3 of us would hold the boat as far from shore as possible while bailing more water with the pots and water bottles while the rest of the group loaded it with our gear, keeping the weight in the back as to keep the bow of the boat high in the water as it would make it be able to go over the large waves. Finally, the three of

us were allowed in, with our counselor and the 2 others who were still on shore still staying until the USFS ranger could come back for the rest of the gear, the other canoe and them. Since we did not have good footing and were so deep in the water, we all had to pull ourselves over the side of the boat, which was up to our necks, eventually flopping into it, glad to be out of the lake.

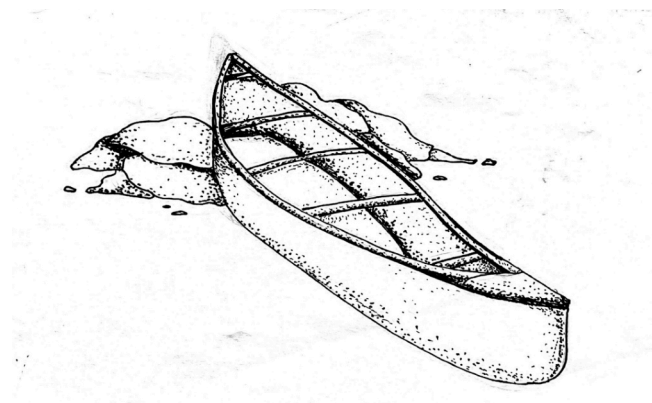
After a nauseating ride across the lake, we arrived at the boat landing we had been dropped off at just hours earlier, where we waited for the rest of our group to meet up with us. Once the whole group was together, we checked all of our gear over. The food we had packed for our 16 day trip was soggy, and the packs were soaked through, but seemingly everything was alright until we were able to thoroughly look the wood and canvas canoe over. With a large area where the rocks had scraped through 3 layers, the gray paint and canvas and had ripped up the wood, there was not much hope of a patch working, though we tried with the duct tape we had, but as we thought, after just 10 minutes, there was standing water in the boat.

Widjiwagen, a YMCA camp founded in 1929, is based on Burntside Lake. It has been sending small groups of teens out on trips through pristine wilderness for 95 years. With a fleet of over 100 wood and canvas canoes, it is one of the largest in the world. Many of the canoes in its fleet are nearly 100 years old, and are made from well known canoe maker, Joe Seliga's form, which was gifted to the camp to carry on producing the boats after his death. These canoes are sent out on trips many every summer, and maintained at the camp itself. Though wood and canvas canoes are not common anymore, Widji's canoes are recognizable by their battleship gray paint, and wood interior.

Using the satellite phone, we called back to camp, getting permission to camp at the trailhead, which is usually frowned upon. Those passing through the parking lot were eager to help in any way possible. We were unable to get a fire lit to make our dinner as all the matches and lighters were waterlogged, so a couple who had been fishing gave us one of theirs, a Girl Scout group picking up their van after a hike gave us a free box of cookies and others offered us a ride. We set our tent up in the ditch on the side of the dirt road hoping to stay

somewhat unseen, bringing our canoes with us. In the morning, a van, driven by 2 other counselors from the camp drove out to us with a new canoe early in the morning, allowing us to get out much earlier than the day before, avoiding the worst of the wind. This time, we did make it to Boot Lake, finally able to continue on our trip, though our adventures didn't end there. We found ourselves in burnt and smoky areas due to active forest fires just a few miles north in Canada's Quetico Provincial Park, where our trip was originally planned to be, unable to find a campsite before dark, and running out of our hot chocolate mix on day 10.

Though it may seem insane to say, we had still had fun while we had to deal with this situation, and it brought us closer together, building trust and understanding for the rest of the trip. We found our "pack present," a tradition at Widji where counselors try to sneak somewhat annoying "presents" into others bags before they leave for trail, with the one we found at the time being a large board book of Where's Spot? If I had the choice to have that day go smoothly, I probably would take that option as it was stressful at the moment, but it has not put a damper on my love for the wilderness. Since that trip, I have continued to go on longer, and more challenging and remote trips each year through Widji. This coming summer, I will spend 37 days on a trip through remote Canadian rivers, which is the second to last trip offered by the camp. In hindsight I learned a lot about how to stay calm under pressure and in intense, potentially dangerous situations, and how to help others also stay calm despite being stressed myself. I found that ignoring the stress to some extent helped me to stay calm, and continuing to make jokes about the situation brought the mood up despite everyone being soaked, freezing, and tired



Gag Reflex

Ted Dobbins

Editor's Note: This story recounts the tale of Chase Dellwo, who survived a near fatal bear attack in 2015.

In the snow and rain of a cold Saturday morning outside of Choteau, a small town in northwest Montana, Chase Dellwo and his brother Shane Dellwo headed out into the early morning air to go bow hunting for elk. Chase, 26, along with his brother, trudged through 30-40 mile per hour winds for a few hours before they came across a herd of elk that had stopped by a narrow creek bed. The brothers separated, with Shane walking up a ridge where he quietly waited for the elk, and Chase slowly approaching the herd along the bed of the creek. Chase, with his footsteps masked by the roaring wind, was nearing the herd of elk when he turned his head slightly and realized that he was standing directly next to a 400 pound grizzly bear that had just woken up. So he turned to face this hulking beast that was standing only 3 feet away.

Before this encounter, Chase had had numerous encounters with bears in his life, going as far back to when he was very young, when a bear once entered his family's house when he was a little kid. Bears had walked towards him before and even charged at him a few times. Chase had even had a bear on the back of his dad's pickup truck the year before his encounter with a grizzly outside of Choteau. However in all of his past interactions with them, the closest Chase had ever been to a bear was about 20 yards, which meant that he was a little inexperienced when it came to being 3 feet away from a grizzly.

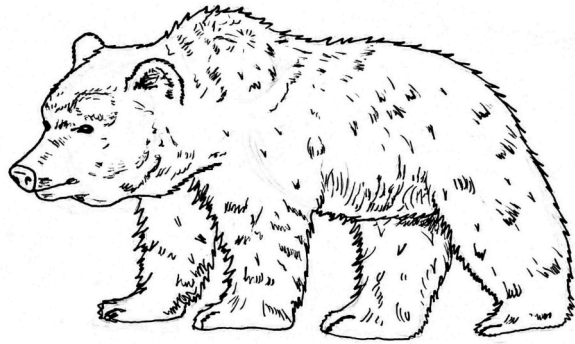
The bear immediately struck Chase, throwing him to the ground and biting down tightly onto his head and face before jumping on top of him, roaring deafeningly. The bear let go of him for a few seconds and then returned, bit down on his legs and started throwing him around the creek bed. It was at this moment that Chase began to force himself not to panic, as he knew that he would have to stay somewhat calm if he wanted to make it out alive. So, as the bear returned to where it had thrown him, it prepared to bite down on him once

again. It was then that in a split second, Chase calmed his mind and remembered a small moment from many years prior when his grandmother once told him about an article she read about bears having bad gag reflexes. So right before the bear could bite down on Chase, he stuck his arm directly into the bear's mouth and down its throat. The bear promptly gagged and released Chase's arm, before it ran off quite startled, leaving Chase lying mangled in the creek bed. He managed to stand up, and made his way over to where his brother was, with the two of them immediately heading back to their car and driving to get Chase help. After being moved to a hospital in Great Falls, and only a couple hundred stitches later, Chase was able to be released from the hospital in only a few days and begin his recovery.

“The bear let go of him for a few seconds and then returned, bit down on his legs and started throwing him around the creek bed.”

This entire ordeal brings up the question that you have probably run through your head by now, “could I stick my arm down the throat of a bear if I was actively being mauled?” Yes, the decision to stick your arm down a bear's throat is not an easy one to make, however what makes Chase's encounter especially interesting is the fact that he was able to calm himself down enough to remember such an obscure piece of information like the one that his grandmother had once told him. Stressful situations are known to impact how we recall information, with cortisol (the hormone that often causes stress) impairing parts of your hippocampus that encode memories. So in the moment of extreme stress or adrenaline rushes, it can be extremely hard to recall small minute details or pieces of information. This shows that Chase calming himself down and trying his hardest not to be overcome by panic, probably led to him being able to recall what his grandmother had once told him. This is what makes Chase's encounter with the bear even more astonishing, how could someone who is actively being chomped on by a 400 pound bear remain calm enough to make a decision like

the one he did? This is also why his story is a pretty interesting example that shows the importance of staying relatively calm in an immensely stressful situation, with the outcome of the encounter probably being extremely different if he hadn't remained calm during that moment of unbelievably intense stress.



A Night To Remember

Anja Gundale

Editor's Note: This is the story of Anja's experience with heavy rains during an Outward Bound trip in Colorado.

Looking around at the area where I would spend the next 24 hours alone, I felt prepared for what I thought would be a peaceful and relaxing break. After backpacking for days with my Outward Bound group I was completely physically and mentally exhausted. Outward Bound is a group that was opened in 1941 by Lawrence Holt and Kurt Hahn. The first program that came out of Outward Bound was in Maine, and their founding mission was to help young seamen improve their chance at survival if they got torpedoed. Outward Bound's current mission is to encourage individuals to push their limits physically and emotionally while experiencing nature. To help push kids past their limits, they created a thing called solos. Depending on the length of their trip, a person will be by themselves in the middle of the woods for a designated time period. Arriving at my solo site, I found the perfect spot to set up my tarp and began

my reflection process. Nature has always been a peaceful place for me; I've always loved hiking and camping with my family. Going into this solo I felt confident with my abilities to be alone. Plus this was my chance to reset, or at least that's what I thought.

Settling into my tarp for the night, I pulled out my journal and started writing about the day while munching on dried fruit that was supposed to last me the next 24 hours. It all began to change when it started to sprinkle. At first, I welcomed the rain. I've always had a soft spot for the sound of raindrops falling. It created the perfect atmosphere for journaling. Rain was a daily occurrence in the mountains, so this weather was nothing unusual. Normally, the storms only hung around for a couple of hours. Unfortunately, this wasn't your typical August storm, as I would soon discover.

July through August is when the monsoon season starts. A monsoon is a seasonal cluster of winds that comes from the Gulf of California that makes a continuous supply of rain. In Colorado it's called the NAM which stands for North American Monsoon. Monsoon season is notorious for its crazy weather, ranging from winds blowing chairs into pools, to hail breaking car windows.

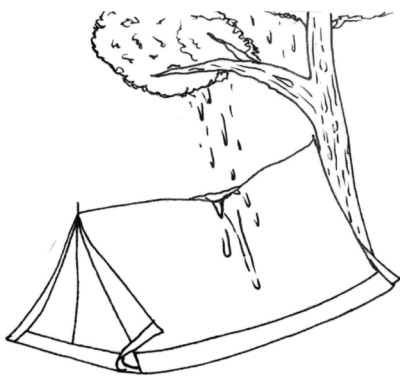
“The lightning and the following thunder around me left me stuck.”

As the night progressed, the light drizzle became a torrent of rain and hail which started piling up on my makeshift tent, made from two trusty hiking sticks and a rather budget-friendly tarp from Home Depot. I tried knocking the hail and pooling water from my tarp. It kept getting closer and closer to me, and every time I cleared it away it came back in minutes. Eventually, it gave in and collapsed on top of me, soaking everything except a few clothing items and my journal which I had cleverly hidden under my body to keep dry. The lightning and the following thunder around me left me stuck. At 8,000 feet up, you could feel the energy of lightning around you. I remember a few days earlier having my hair stuck up in multiple directions from the electric charge in the area and having to sit on a rubber sleeping pad as the sky

started to rain and lightning crashed from the sky. This kept up for a couple hours but then slowly came to a stop.

There I was, freezing cold, surrounded by pitch-black darkness, with hail pounding against my body. I felt the cold plastic whistle hanging around my neck for emergencies. The urge I felt to blow into it so the counselors would come find me was overbearing, but I hated the idea of giving up. So instead I curled up into a ball and started crying. In that moment, I knew I had to control what I could - my emotions. Negative thoughts would only make things ten times worse. So even though I was scared and feeling utterly helpless, I focused on the idea of the morning sun and the warmth it would bring - something I was desperately missing. This focus gave me a reason to keep going, a reason to tough it out.

When I was younger I used to be afraid of the dark. Now, looking back, I wasn't afraid of the dark but what I couldn't see in the dark. I used to keep my closet light on so I could be sure there weren't any monsters lurking in the shadows. I would stay awake counting sheep and making sure my toes were safely tucked under my blankets so no monsters would take them in the middle of the night.



Sometime later that night, the counselors came by to check on everyone. They saw my collapsed tarp, fixed it, and before leaving me alone again, they asked, "Are you alright?" That simple question gave me pause. I had persevered through the heaviest part of the night and emerged in one piece. It was a strange feeling of strength that I couldn't quite put my finger on. With tears streaming down my face, I gave them a thumbs-up. Then they left to check on the rest of

the group scattered throughout the woods.

Finally, I closed my eyes. Waking up I felt the morning sun, the same sun that had kept me going through that long, challenging night. The next day I found myself laying on a tree that had fallen down and soaking in the sun as I journaled my thoughts away of the unforgettable evening that later I would think back on and be grateful for. Our trip mantra stuck with me: "You find your strength in the mountains and your soul in the river." I genuinely believe that I found my strength on that unforgettable night in the La Sal mountains when I was just 15. That night is a reminder to tie my knots more securely and that I can persevere through many things.

Whitecaps

Anna Nowatzki

Editor's Note: This is Anna's personal experience canoeing with her family while there were white caps. She used both her own experiences and did research about how to stay safe while canoeing.

"1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4," my family cried out in unison as we gripped the oars tightly, rowing with all of our strength. The white caps lapped against our canoes, threatening to pull us under. I looked over at our twin canoe to see my brother rowing furiously in the front, my mom straining to keep calm in the back. From behind me I heard my dad leading our count, "1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4," our paddles rowing together, as one. My eyes were not straying from the dock we were headed to as the wind whooshed past my ears, drowning out my thoughts. I paddled viciously, focusing on the only important thing at the moment: get to land.

Canoeing, although it can be a leisurely activity, can be very difficult if you don't have the resources (physical or mental) to cope with what's thrown at you. My family had experienced our fair share of canoeing (we do live in Minnesota after all), but this was different. In previous instances we had had a guide or had been on a reliable body of water. On this trip, we had no guide and were canoeing in the Boundary Waters, a much more unpredictable area. It was a new territory for us and the harsh

conditions caught us off guard.

The day didn't start this intensely. In fact, the water was very calm at the beginning, and the weather was partly sunny, partly cloudy. Our goal was to canoe to a trailhead where we could hike up the hill to an overlook. I think it speaks to our lack of experience to say that we entirely missed the head and continued canoeing further than was necessary. We ended up finding the trailhead on the way back, hiking the trail and making it to the overlook. I wonder however, if we didn't have that delay, would we have had to endure the treacherous conditions on the way back?

“The white caps lapped against our canoes, threatening to pull us under.”

Likely not. The prime time to canoe is earlier in the morning, whereas at around 1, the wind usually starts picking up. We reached the lookout at around 2:30, when it was still relatively nice and calm. Little did we know that once we got back in our canoe the wind would start picking up. It's recommended that the average canoer shouldn't canoe in wind over 15 mph. Due to the strong winds and spraying whitecaps I would estimate that the wind in this scenario was about 25 mph, which is way too dangerous for beginner canoers. To combat wind, the most important thing to remember is to paddle into the waves. Never let them hit the side of your boat or else they could tip you over. It's also good to paddle near the shore so you can get out to wait it out easily if it gets very dangerous. However, if the shoreline has large rocks and the waves are very strong, stay away, because the waves could push you into them. You can also decide to wait out the waves. This is a personal decision based on ability, wind speed, and the weather forecast if you have access to the internet. If there is lightning and heavy wind once it reaches nighttime, plan to spend the night where you've pulled off and canoe back early in the morning, as that time typically has the calmest water.

An hour of paddling later, my dad and I pulled

into shore, my mom and brother close behind us. Shaken, we stepped out onto land while the people we rented from cracked jokes about how it's typically a one hour trip and it took us three. There were many things we weren't prepared for but I believe that the catalyst was missing the trailhead at first and still continuing to hike it.



Going on any canoeing trip you really need to be prepared for anything, for the weather to change suddenly, for getting lost, for running out of food or water. Before you get on the water you need to evaluate how well you'd be able to handle these situations and that should dictate whether or not you take this risk. It's important to let someone know where you are, have a basic first aid kit and food and water at the very least. We learned a valuable lesson that day, weather can change fast, and if you're going to expose yourself to that, you need to be prepared.

Nerf

Bea Lloyd

Editor's Note: This text recounts Bea's experience with "Nerf Wars", a popular event that took place among the Junior and Senior classes at OWL this year.

6:04 am. Which is two hours earlier than I usually get up. I grab my phone and shut off my alarm. It usually takes me at least 5 alarms to get up, but this time it was the first one that did the trick. I let my team know I'm up. I roll out of bed, the adrenaline giving me an extra boost that keeps me from crawling back under my covers. I open up my curtains and check my phone, "I'll be on my way in an hour." The plan is on. I get ready for the school day as if it's any other day, however there's something me and my team need to attempt before we attend school that day. After an hour, my ride is waiting outside. I grab my backpack, my water bottle, and my gun. My nerf gun, of course. I hop into the passenger seat of a giant black car I have never seen before, and we are on our way.

"Nerf Wars" has become an increasingly popular event across high schools around the country. Similar to the idea of Senior Assassin, you are assigned your classmates as targets, and the goal is to get them out when they least expect it. For Nerf Wars, upperclassmen get together in groups of their friends, make a team name, a poster, and purchase their spot in the game. Every team must pay to play, usually around \$10 per person. This provides the goal of the game: to win the pot. Every week each group is placed against another 2 groups, and their goal is to find and shoot any members of the opposing teams whenever and wherever. Obviously, certain areas are off limits. Rules can differ, but generally school, inside homes, and places of worship or employment are off limits. Otherwise, everywhere else is free reign. Teams stalk, stake out and shoot opponents, get up early, and stay out late in the hopes to catch an opponent by surprise and shoot them. Each week, the team with the least amount of kills is eliminated, and the bracket continues until finally it is just two teams against each other.

The adrenaline rush has hit. I am sitting in the passenger seat, Nerf gun on my lap, as me and Luis pull up to the house we followed Maria Imholte's Snapchat location to. It seems too good to be true. So here we are waiting, parked on the street about one house up, but not in secret. Which was our first mistake. My phone buzzes. A text! "Whose car even is that?" She knows we're here. As we continue to wait, we go over what we know about Maria's usual morning habits. Today, Maria is not at her own house, she is house sitting. Her blue car is not in the driveway, which means she's being picked up. Perhaps by her Mom, or perhaps by her usual morning chauffeur, Mae Heeringa. The house has no alley which means she has to come out the front or side door. Either way, we will be there. As Luis and I go over these details we begin to really think, this seems too good to be true. No way she would leave her Snapchat location on, text us so we know she is inside and can see us, and have no way to school besides a car that will get here after us so that we'll have a straight shot. This was our second mistake. As we continue to wait, Maria texts me a little more, "See you at school!" Me and Luis are absolutely dumbfounded right now. She is so confident, there's no way she's actually in there. I checked her Snapchat location, active 44 minutes ago, which was about 10 minutes before we arrived. Someone picked her up, and brought her to her own house. That is the only logical answer right? Luis steps on it, as we race to get to her house before her possible ride to school does. A mild twenty over the limit. I decided to make a brief call as we quickly pivot our plan.

"The plan seems to be failing miserably. I am sitting in the alley of Maria Imholte's house, cold, in my underwear with a Nerf gun."

The dangerous aspects of Nerf Wars have begun to involve the intervention of law enforcement. Students organize the game themselves, and although it is never affiliated with the school that students go to, it doesn't stop students from getting into trouble. As of recently,

law enforcement has had to intervene with more serious cases of students trespassing onto private property, driving recklessly, and even deaths related to the game. Commissioners of the game take rules very seriously, and remind players numerous times of the penalties if they break any of these rules.



Mae Heeringa won't talk.

"Mae, are you picking up Maria for school today?"

"Ummm I can't disclose, I am eating a chocolate muffin right now."

No help. Maybe Maria is already on her way to school? Maybe somehow we missed her? Suddenly, as Luis is driving down Cleveland Ave, there it is. The bright blue car, heading the direction we just came from.

"THAT'S HER MOM. SHE IS PICKING HER UP FROM THE OTHER HOUSE TURN AROUND."

Luis whips the car around and the streets of Mac Groveland become a winding maze. Everyone is driving at senior citizen speeds. At about the slowest pace we have ever had to go, we make it back to the house sitting house. Nothing. Nobody. Nada. We missed her. "Maybe we should go back to her house just in case? One last attempt, she's either stopping at home to grab something, or she's already on her way." Either way, none of us are going to wait around long enough to be late to school and miss the grace period. Luis and I's final plan. I take the garage and back alley, while he stakes out the front in the car. Luis drops me off in the garage as I wait for Maria to make an appearance.

Some further context about Nerf Wars. Immunity is your underwear. This means, if you are in your underwear, even if someone shoots you, it doesn't count. Unless they're in their underwear too. But then it gets complicated, and a little weird. So if Maria were to come outside in her alleyway with a gun and try to shoot me while I was waiting back there for her, there was a way I could guarantee that I wouldn't get out of the game. So that is what I did.

The plan seems to be failing miserably. I am sitting in the alley of Maria Imholte's house, cold, in my underwear with a Nerf gun. If literally anybody else comes into this alleyway I will jump into the trash can. Pure humiliation. I'm on the phone with Luis and Gabby, the two other members of my team, as we begin to call it a day. Suddenly, her garage door opens. The mixture of the cold morning air and the fear that literally anybody else is out in this alleyway right now to see me jolts me up. I grab my gun and stand up (another mistake). There it is. The bright blue car, not only with Maria's mom inside now, but with Maria. She was at the house sitting the whole time. No shooting attempts were made, because the bright blue car we had been chasing all morning simply drove right by me, and although I survived the first morning of Nerf Wars, what was the cost?

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Uncurved

Elena Davis

Editor's Note: This is a personal account of Elena Davis's experience with scoliosis. In order to write this, she used her personal experiences along with conducting research.

There I was at 12 years old sitting next to my mom in the same waiting room, the same chair, on the orthopedic floor of Regions Hospital. The normal routine of a full back x-ray and checkup with my doctor. Somehow this time I felt nervous, sitting in the same chair and same waiting room. I had taken what felt like a million x-rays before today, this should be just like the others but I felt off. "Elena?" a nurse called, and summoned me to the x-ray room where I slipped my shoes off and put on a fake smile towards the nurses as I entered the x-ray machine. The loud buzzers went up and down my spine as I held completely still. As I exited to gather my belongings I look back to find the nurses looking at the images screen with concerned expressions. I took a deep breath and muttered "Thank you!" before I joined my mom in the doctor's office where we waited for an analysis on the images. My gut knew what I was expecting, which almost scared me more.

Scoliosis was first discovered in 400 B.C by the Greek Hippocrates. The Greeks had to seek out treatment for the curvatures as they didn't have the efficient treatment we have today. The first back brace was attempted to be made through wooden sticks and innovation didn't advance until further research was done for scoliosis in 1575, when a French surgeon named Rene Gurein attempted the first surgical procedure to treat severe scoliosis. Unfortunately, the outcome was unsuccessful as the spine didn't respond to treatment.

"Thankfully, scoliosis technology and knowledge has transformed over the years to become more effective, supportive and minimally invasive," said researchers at ScolioBend, and I couldn't agree more. Throughout my five year scoliosis journey I had a lot of experience with bracing treatment. I wore three back braces all molded and shaped specially to my body in hopes to maintain the current degrees of my spinal

curves. The brace itself took a lot of getting used to and I wore it 22 hours a day. Taking it off for gym class and showers, it became a part of my daily life. I had to buy different clothing and wear special wool t-shirts to make sure I was comfortable. I often had large rashes and scrapes due to chafing and sometimes I would wake up in the night when the plastic straps dug into my skin. This wasn't easy as I enjoyed being an active child, so even with the restrictions, I made mental goals to stay positive and continue being a kid.

By the time of the appointment I was on my third back brace which had started to feel uncomfortable due to how much I'd grown in months prior. I was in pain practically all the time as the middle curve in my spine grew so much that my ribs and organs within were pushed drastically to the right. It became hard to breathe during physical activity and the bones of my rib cage weakened, making them prone to breakage. I knew for a while what this appointment meant for me, but that didn't mean I was actually prepared to undergo a big transition. "With the severity of your curves, I think it's best to pursue surgery," were the words from my doctor that I always feared hearing. I sat in the chair unresponsive for a few minutes, staring at my feet before nodding. I recall looking at my mom who had teared up, which only made the situation feel more surreal for me. Looking at the x-ray images, my curves had reached over 60 degrees, which in other words meant severe, and surgery was needed sooner rather than later.

"With the severity of your curves, I think it's best to pursue surgery," were the words from my doctor that I always feared hearing."

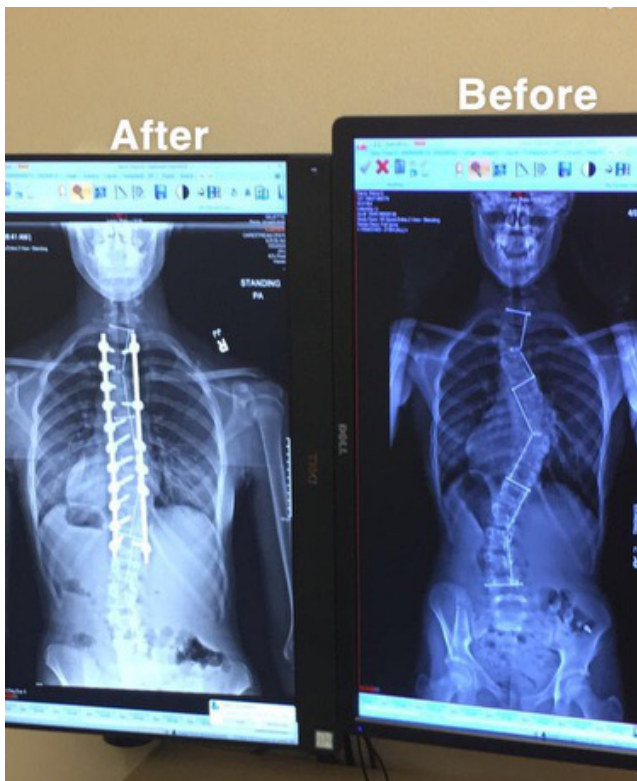
Spinal fusion surgery is a procedure that involves permanently binding the vertebrae together so there is no further movement between them. The vertebrae are bonded by titanium screws and rods that hold everything in place. The procedure is very intricate and takes about 3-4 hours. The most difficult part of the surgery is recovery time. In the hospital, you have to learn

how to sit, walk, stand, and get out of bed to avoid twisting the spine so you can learn how to care for yourself as you recover at home. Generally over the course of a year, patients follow a timeline of restrictions to ensure proper healing. For the first 6 months there's no strenuous activity of any kind, this goes as far as only lifting weight as heavy as your dinner plate. 6-8 months include lighter activities such as swimming and long walks. During the 8-10 month period, patients begin what is called "closed chain kinetic exercises" which means you partake in exercises that involve foot and pivoting activity, such as bike riding. 10-12 months are the most exciting, as solo sports, running, and jumping are allowed.

Waking up from surgery the nurses told my parents, "It's almost like she had a few adult beverages." I was laughing and smiling and singing *Stronger (What Doesn't Kill You)* by Kelly Clarkson, so loud the whole floor of the hospital could hear me. An hour after surgery the nurses had me walk to immediately make sure there were no nerve complications in my spine. I walked down the hallway and back, holding onto my dad and a nurse. As they led me back to the room I said "Wait, I want to keep going," and I took another lap. From the moment I woke up from surgery I was

determined to have a diligent recovery. Unfortunately, the first 2 months were the hardest. I was in unbearable pain. I had sleepless nights, ice packs weren't helping, and the required positions to sit in from my doctor were uncomfortable. I was under many restrictions until month 4, such as not being able to sleep in a bed and being unable to shower normally. This time period of healing was difficult but I was still motivated to have kept a positive mindset.

Thankfully, I had very supportive friends and family that brought me ice cream, snacks and meals to fuel my recovery. Once I was cleared for walking exercise, I often had friends come over and we'd go on long walks. It felt good to be surrounded by loved ones who kept me company in a difficult time. Reflecting on my 5 year journey I realize how even though my situation was severe, I was lucky compared to other girls. "I had a lot of tension and soreness throughout my lower back and in addition to my spine curve, my spine had popped out of my right shoulder blade," said Claire, who had spinal fusion surgery after being diagnosed in 2012. "It was hard to go to school wearing a brace, I felt alone," said Megan who was diagnosed in middle school. Similarly to these girls, I like to take chances to tell my scoliosis story in hopes to inspire and motivate others. It's been 4 years since my surgery and I took all opportunities to be active again, including joining ultimate frisbee and running cross country. Having no restrictions allowed me to live my life to the fullest. Scoliosis isn't always a familiar subject and it's important to me to spread awareness, especially to individuals who've just been diagnosed, as I remember how nervous and uncertain I was. I'm grateful for my journey teaching me perseverance and dedication to my goals. My scoliosis will always be a part of me which is something I'll always be proud of.



It's In Your Head

Danny Hobday

Authors Note: This originally was not my first pick but when my English teacher Leo said I couldn't write about my extremely bad luck with neighbors I had to come up with another plan. I haven't gone through all that much surviving in my life but my concussion was pretty scary to me. That mixed with the fact that my little brother has had way over his fair share of them and has considered quitting sports because of them I felt I had to write about them. As for my research I initially interviewed my tablemates on their experiences with concussions which helped form my tone and just the way I went about while attempting to write this. I also did research on stats about concussions in sports and precautions being taken all over the world. I learned a lot about concussions through this process and am glad I picked this topic.

I'm running left and then cut up field into a strike cut when I see Noah wind up his arm. He releases but as soon as he does the wind catches the disc and puts it much farther down the line than I am. Everything turns into slow motion as I track the disc but it keeps going farther and farther away from me. Step after step it feels like I'm running in molasses, my cleats glued to the ground. The disc dives towards the ground as the wind dies and I know this is my only chance if I want to get it. I use all my power to throw myself at the disc AND I GRAB IT. Then my head hits the turf and my sight goes dark and I black out. About three seconds later I open my eyes again and stand up but my head is spinning and I see all of these yellow dots all over the place. I try to call an injury but before I can get anything out of my mouth or kneel down an Edina player hucks it deep and scores. I walk off the field swaying to my right, then my left. My head's still spinning so I can't walk straight like normal. A couple people help me out as they see I can't walk and when I get to the sideline I lay down and shut my eyes. The pain calms a little, but my head still feels like I'm on a swing at the playground.

In any given sport around 1 in every 10 kids playing get a concussion in a season. That corresponds to about 3.8 million athlete

concussions each year. My siblings and I all have played sports our entire lives and concussions have heavily impacted certain seasons of those sports. My sister Lili has had three concussions, my little brother Luke 5 or 6 (around 13-14 if you ask him) and I've had 2. The only sibling who hasn't had a concussion is my older brother Tom but he's been injured many other places. A concussion is when your brain goes rapidly back and forth in your skull, stretching out and damaging brain tissue. Not a great sounding feeling and an even worse feeling in real life.

“About three seconds later I open my eyes again and stand up but my head is spinning and I see all of these yellow dots all over the place.”

After I got home from my game I took some Advil and headed straight to bed. My head was throbbing and it felt like something was jumping around inside my brain. When I woke up my head still hurt and my mom told me I could take a day off from school but because of my symptoms I just had to rest the whole day. She told me no phone, TV or computer. She wouldn't even let me do my school work that was on paper because it hurt my head. I was very upset with that. I knew I had a concussion so I knew that I wouldn't be able to use any screens but not being able to do any school work really ticked me off. The next couple days I stayed home again but while I was resting at home I was falling far behind in my schoolwork. On the third day with my concussion I willed myself to go to school only to find out that I had a pre calc test first period. I tried to do as well as I could on it but without the practice I was supposed to do the previous days I had no clue how to do half of the problems on the test and failed the test. Just another way I was behind in school because of this concussion. I continued feeling my concussion symptoms for about a week longer. More headaches, feeling light headed and most importantly... more falling behind in my classes. Eventually, when all of the

symptoms were gone, I was cleared to play frisbee again and be on screens. My weeks were normal again with frisbee practices twice a week and I returned to my normal schoolwork but I had to catch up in both of those. I had to learn what we had done in practice for the last week and I had to make up MANY hours of work for school.

Many precautions have been made to prevent such concussions that happen so frequently in all sports. In many physical sports there are rules on shots to the head to avoid concussions. For example the NFL has flags (fouls) like helmet to helmet and targeting that will give the other team significant advantages or get the player ejected from the game. Other precautions the NFL makes are advanced helmets with extra cushion and new turf that will lessen the blow of hitting the ground to players. According to the NFL, "The league's position remains unchanged. Player health and safety is a top priority of the NFL, especially in the realm of concussions."

There is even research being done on retired NFL players to see the effects long term and short in the attempt to limit those in the future. Roger Goodell, the NFL commissioner, endorses this fully. "I think players who want to participate in the research necessary to advance science is a positive thing."

The NFL and football in general is certainly not the only sport or league that is making changes to prevent concussions. Professional soccer teams are having their players do specific training that involves strengthening their necks so it's harder to get concussions by your head snapping down and hitting the ground. Many other leagues and teams are taking similar precautions but it doesn't just end at the professional level. Precautions and just overall safety are a big part of youth leagues as well. Coaches, athletic directors and anyone participating in helping these kids in these sports have to go through mandatory concussion training so they know how to spot them and what to do when they do. Overall, the attempt to prevent concussions is becoming more and more popular and there's a massive amount of research being done all over the world on how they affect people long term.

I'm lucky I got through mine with only falling

behind on my work... but we'll see what happens in 30 or 40 years.

One More Hit

Mae Heeringa

Editor's Note: This is Mae's personal account of becoming addicted to Afrin, a common anti congestion nasal spray, and her experience quitting it. She did research on general drug addictions and their effects on people.

"One more hit will let me breathe a little better," I thought as my hand went for my bag. I seemed to feel everything but my nasal spray. Chapstick, airpods, wallet. I began to panic thinking I forgot the spray at home. My hand moved deeper into my bag and finally after an excruciating twenty seconds, I found it. For whatever reason AP Lit always seemed to make me congested. Maybe it was the room, maybe it was my spot, who knows, but one thing was for certain, I always needed my spray in that class. My hand slowly formed a fist around the container as I lifted my arm out of my bag and brought it to my side. I was admittedly a little embarrassed that I needed the spray, so I liked to hit it as quickly and discreetly as possible. Glancing around the room I saw no one looking and in an instant the deed was done. I lifted my hand to my nose quickly and pressed. The cold, tingly mist was a relief for my congested nose. A faint "pshhh" sound emanated from my seat and a few classmates looked at me confused. "What?" I asked. "Mae...we know you just used your nasal spray. You know you're addicted, right?" Abe said.

Nasal spray is a type of decongestant spray that works to immediately resolve sinus congestion. Oftentimes the spray is bought off the shelf and requires no prescription to obtain. There are three main types of the spray in circulation: steroid sprays, saline sprays and decongestant sprays. Contrary to their name, steroid and saline sprays are actually pretty safe because they're non addictive and have considerably less chemicals in them versus decongestant sprays. Decongestant sprays contain a chemical called oxymetazoline, more commonly known as Afrin. When used

frequently Afrin can be very addictive. It's common that people try out decongestant sprays when they get a cold and then become dependent on it because it works so well. This was the case for me. I had started using nasal spray when I was ten years old and my father showed it to me. He came into the kitchen after work, heard me breathing from my mouth, and told me to use nasal spray. The spray had worked so well that I started to use it every day. It got to the point where I started using it three to five times a day. It's common for people to start developing a dependence on the spray like I had, but three to five times a day is admittedly a little excessive. A main reason that people aren't able to quit is because they develop rebound congestion. Rebound congestion is when you become dependent on nasal spray and when you stop using it your nostrils become inflamed and you can't breathe. Some sources claim that the congestion can last up to two weeks. I had heard of the symptom through my time using the spray but



always comforted myself with the thought that “I can stop anytime I want.”

It was now July 3rd 2023. I had once again gotten a common cold and was still using my nasal spray. As I pressed down on the container to release the cool tingly air that so many times relieved my congestion, nothing happened. I pressed down again and shot more mist into my nose. Again nothing. I nervously walked to my moms room, fearing telling her that the spray had stopped working. “Mom?” I called out, almost hoping to not hear her respond. “Yeah honey?” she called back to me. I entered her room. “My nasal spray stopped working and I can’t breathe,” I told her, while not making eye contact. “I’ve had this cold for almost a week now and nothing is working. Do you think I should go to the doctor?” She looked at me while folding the laundry she started early that day. “I guess it wouldn’t hurt, I can take you to the ER in an hour since I doubt any office would take you as a walk-in.” I turned around and staggered back to my room, breathing heavily through my mouth.

“I turned around and staggered back to my room, breathing heavily through my mouth.”

After an almost painful hour of waiting, I got into the car and drove to the ER with my mom. Pulling into the parking lot of the doctor's office I feared that my friends may have been right. “You’re gonna develop rebound congestion if you’re not careful,” Abe would tell me time and time again. My mom and I walked into the office and checked in. We were told that it was going to be about a two hour wait until the next nurse could see me. “Great, another excruciating waiting session,” I thought to myself as I sat down in one of the office's leather chairs. During those two hours I sat and listened to my fears. What if my friends were right and I am addicted? What if I have to quit using the spray? How will I live if I’m constantly congested? After the two hours were up, I was called back to the nurse’s office and asked some questions about my usage of the spray. “How long have you been using nasal spray for?” the nurse asked. I looked at my feet and reluctantly answered with a lie. “Around

maybe five years.” This was of course a lie, as I had been using the spray for around eight years now.

The nurse almost dropped her clipboard and looked up from taking notes. “Are you serious? You are only supposed to use those sprays for a maximum of three days!” After being lectured on how I was killing my nose and eventually killing myself, a doctor came in and gave me a plan to stop using nasal spray immediately. He handed me a prescription sheet and started to explain my next steps. “You are to take this pill once a day for the next week and stop using all nasal spray immediately. After that you will be on your own for dealing with the congestion.” He started to walk out of the room when he turned around and added something else. “You are also to never use Afrin nasal spray again. It could be serious if you go another eight years being addicted.” He shut the door quickly and left the room.

Over the next weeks I experienced the worst congestion I had ever known. I breathed from my mouth for two weeks and couldn't sleep for one of those two. However in the end I prevailed and beat my addiction. I was (and still am) free from my Afrin addiction.

In current day America, many of us are fast to medicate. When we have a headache we take tylenol, when we have a sore leg we take ibuprofen, and when we catch the common cold we use nasal spray. My story of addiction tells a greater tale about how fast and careless our society is to abuse medication. It's reported that around 20% of the U.S. population uses prescribed medication for nonmedical related events. This number is staggering on its own but it gets worse when you realize that this is only the number of people using prescription medications, not over the counter drugs.

A recent social media trend perfectly encapsulates the problem going on. The ‘Benadryl Challenge’ is a challenge recommending participants to take over twelve pills of benadryl at once to induce hallucinations. Early in 2023 the challenge took the life of a thirteen year old boy who was intrigued by the effects hallucinations would have on him. The boy was likely able to obtain these drugs easily due to not needing a doctor's prescription to get them.

Another serious epidemic happening in

America is the opioid epidemic. Many people get prescribed opioids to help relieve pain caused by surgery or other procedures but end up continuing to take them long after necessary. This continued usage eventually results in a serious opioid addiction. In a study by Mayo Clinic, they reported that around ninety people die per day due to this addiction. Many of these people could be helped if there was a general shift in attitudes towards medication in America. In the grand scheme of things, my addiction wasn't as serious as something like an opioid addiction, and saying it was would be borderline offensive. But it does reveal the disturbing truth about how easy it is to develop an addiction without even knowing you're necessarily addicted. I know people in my life that are currently addicted to Afrin and still refuse to acknowledge they are. My story as well as countless others prove why we should all be more cautious about the medication we take and understand when it's healthy to stop.

Snap, Crackle, Pop! *Mintesinot Sturm*

Editor's Note: This is a true story about Mintesinot's experience with ACL surgery. He researched statistics around ACL surgery specifically recovery timelines. Mintesinot also speaks extensively on his personal experiences with recovery from ACL surgery.

I sat in the surgeon's office, bracing myself for the news. About 10 days prior, my left knee buckled while I was playing ultimate frisbee, and after getting an MRI scan, I was finally going to learn what was wrong. I hadn't been able to bring my knee back further than 60 degrees for the past two weeks, and while I was hoping it was not serious I was beginning to be seriously concerned. The surgeon, Dr. Jeremiah Johnson, pointed me to the computer images from the MRI. “So, this is your knee here. As you can see there's some bone bruising where your femur and tibia meet,” he said. He continued to describe all the ligaments within the knee; the medial collateral and lateral collateral ligaments which run on the inside and outside of the knee respectively, connecting the femur to the

fibula, as well as the posterior cruciate ligament (PCL) and anterior cruciate ligament (ACL). “And this is where your ACL should be,” pointing towards an open, empty space.

As I took in the pictures in front of me, the realization hit. My ACL, the 30 millimeter piece of tissue that holds my leg together, stabilizing the knee and absorbing force, was gone. My doctor described to me how this could have happened and what the injury would mean for the rest of my year, but I was just half paying attention. As he explained “most ACL recovery takes 9 months to a year,” thoughts of my senior seasons in basketball and Ultimate ran through my mind, as I came to terms with the fact that I would most likely be on the sidelines for both. But those thoughts were later joined by a steely resolve. No, I was not going to miss my entire frisbee season. A couple days before surgery I promised myself and my teammates that I would be back by a random, arbitrary date: May 10th 2024. I picked that day because it seemed relatively reasonable, seven months after surgery exactly. But to get to that point, a lot of work would be necessary. Even after my potential date to be cleared, I knew I wouldn't be out of the woods.

ACL reconstruction surgeries boast very sobering results when it comes to returning to pre-injury levels of sport, with a depressing 45% of people never coming back to competitive sports. The numbers for reinjury are also staggering, with up to twenty percent of people suffering another ACL tear following surgery, which goes even higher when they return to sports too early. Returning to sports before nine months runs a serious risk of reinjury at a rate seven times higher than those who wait the whole nine or longer. Young athletes are especially susceptible.

Knowing these facts, the goal of May 10th may have been unwise, but I had no intention of allowing myself to rot away without the sport and community most meaningful to me for a year. So I immediately got to work. Three days after surgery, I had my first physical therapy appointment where I finally had my leg unwrapped. Seeing the muscle atrophy was astonishing. My entire left leg was tiny after just over 60 hours. This appointment wasn't very eventful as I was not nearly strong enough to do much other than sit on a chair, but we got measurements done and goals set for the coming

weeks. My therapist introduced me to some exercises I could do at home to strengthen my knee and gain back some of my extension and flexion. I had a long way to go, as my healthy right knee could hyperextend a full 15 degrees, significantly more than the normal adult. My left knee couldn't go further than 3 degrees the first week following surgery!

“Returning to sports before nine months runs a serious risk of reinjury at a rate seven times higher than those who wait the whole nine or longer.”

Within a couple months I began getting stronger and started running, albeit “too early” compared to a normal recovery timeline. When my physical therapist told me I could walk around and shoot at basketball practice (I was still with the team despite not being able to play), I decided to test my limits and began driving to the basket for layups and change of direction into jumpshots at about 50% speed. Those activities always felt good and I never had a moment where I felt I was pushing too far, which told me that it was fine to do. Classic logic from someone chomping at the bit to come back. I went to the frisbee team's morning practices in January, starting off with just simple throws but after a month I joined the scrimmages as well— though I wasn't doing much change of direction in my sprints yet. January was also the date of my first Trac test, during which the numbers confirmed what I had been feeling: I was recovering far more quickly than expected. After knee extension and flexion tests along with many other exercises and an evaluation of my quadriceps strength, my LSI (limb symmetry index) was at 77 percent, exactly 12 percentage points higher than the average level at three months. Seeing these numbers, I got more excited, which was honestly a big part of why I rejoined scrimmages at practice so early.

My teammates consistently told me not to push it, saying “We want you for the season.” While I

wasn't necessarily glad to hear people telling me not to play hard, I recognized that it came from a place of genuine concern and caring, and it also told me that they trusted I would return in time. Many people had cast doubt on my chances, which I understood, but not one single player on my team ever suggested I wouldn't be back, and that helped motivate me even more.

Being with the frisbee team was one of the most important parts of moving through this challenging process, but basketball was where I found the resolve to push forward in the beginning. Some of my teammates made fun of me initially for my propensity for injury, which gave me a good laugh. Last year I missed the first seven weeks of the basketball season due to an ankle injury. When I was eleven I broke my foot playing basketball at recess; I broke my arm at four years old on Father's Day, and my arm just months after I had moved to America after adoption. Additionally, I had procedures to remove my tonsils and a spinal tap when I was younger, so the surgeon's room was a familiar environment.

With the basketball team I was able to maintain my connection to the sport and the people that I had grown up with for nearly seven years of my life. Instead of playing, I was employed as a shot-clock worker during home games, volunteered to man the concessions stand during B Squad and JV contests, and helped out at practice as a manager. I rebounded for my teammates and while they scrimmaged I took the opportunity to shoot around. I imagine I attempted at least 300 shots a day during the season, and I honestly believe I am a better player now than I was last year.

Coming out of the basketball season and entering frisbee, I became more confident in my ability to make the recovery in time for the season. The first game on April 1st (a 12-6 Manatee win against Central), I actually played about ten minutes, which I was not cleared for. I then got chewed out by my mom in the car afterwards, and I didn't play in a single game for the next three weeks until I had my second Trac test. I once again blew away the doctors, with an LSI of 98 percent. Following that, my team had the Matoska Classic, the initial tournament of the year, in which I did play significant minutes during the second day. This was once again a direct disregard for my physical therapist's opinion on the matter, but the

line of whether or not I was

cleared had been blurred so much that my parents had no idea, so of course I took that opportunity. My teenage brain was working at full power, right there. When I went back to the Training Haus for my appointment it was revealed to me that my PT had a conversation with my mom and was going to allow me to play as long as I had a knee brace, so we set up an appointment with my surgeon and got my brace fitted two days before my team would leave for a nationals qualifying tournament in Illinois. I have now been playing somewhat consistent minutes for the past two weeks, and have never felt better — though the brace is a bother.

I have always been pretty mindful of my health. I maintain a balanced diet, stretch every day, and play sports year-round. However, my sports were the place where I didn't have to think about anything other than what I was doing at that moment. I never thought I would have to be careful with each sprint, each change of direction, each stop. Suffering one of the single-worst sports injuries became a moment of deep reflection and a lot of learning for me as I found myself forced to think about every step I take on the field and the court. Physical therapy was also the only thing keeping me in the weight room, and I appreciate the amount of discipline and focus I had to learn in order to keep being successful. I intend to take that newfound passion for building strength and maintaining my health with me in college so I can continue my growth as an athlete and as a human being.

TRAUMA

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Surviving Hate

Mylie Peterson Antin

Author's Note: The following story reveals a look into what I and many other Asian Americans experienced during the spike in Asian Hate Crimes during COVID-19 (2020-present day). To write this story, I used both my own personal experiences with racism and statistics from online sources about Asian Hate Crime numbers during that time period. I chose to write a story about my experiences because my life was deeply impacted during the time that these crimes were being committed, and I want to share this perspective with people have never had to experience similar events.

I stared through my window, eyes darting back and forth as I surveyed the area around me. Every flash of movement caught my attention, and my body trembled with every passing minute. I wanted to go outside and explore the green-filled neighborhood, I really did. But I didn't. I couldn't. I can't. I saw a man walking across the street and wondered if he had a gun or knife or any other sort of weapon. I wondered if I had been outside, would he have hurt me? I hated these thoughts, but I couldn't stop them. I hated that my mind made me assume that everyone wanted to harm me, but I couldn't control it. I hated that this had become my entire world, but I couldn't escape.

In March of 2020, the world shut down. Coronavirus, or COVID-19, stands as one of the top five deadliest pandemics in history, with over seven million deaths caused as of April 2024. As COVID-19 began to rapidly spread throughout the country, many rumors came with it. The most popular story was that a Chinese person had eaten bat soup, and infected the whole world. Another popular story was that the virus was created in a lab in China and was then spread to the rest of the globe. This of course brought multitudes of unjust, unfair, and simply untrue stereotypes about Asian citizens, and caused Asian hate related crimes to spike monumentally.

Every time I went to the store during the pandemic, I had people stare at me. At first, I thought it had to do with my outfit or my hair.

Naturally, I would pull out my phone and check my appearance in the camera app. When I found nothing wrong, I thought about other possible reasons for this strange behavior. Then I realized that it did have to do with my appearance, just not in the way I could control. Despite the fact that I'm Korean, not Chinese—and the fact that targeting anyone of Chinese descent during this time was absolutely absurd either way—I was still seen as a threat.

“I wondered if I had been outside, would he have hurt me? I hated these thoughts, but I couldn't stop them. I hated that my mind made me assume that everyone wanted to harm me, but I couldn't control it. I hated that this had become my entire world, but I couldn't escape.”

During this spike in hate crimes against Asians, many brutal offenses occurred across the United States. One crime that stirred up particularly extensive shock and unrest occurred in 2021. A white man took a gun to three separate massage parlors around the Atlanta area and shot and killed eight people, six of whom were women of Asian descent. From 2019 to 2020, Asian Hate Crimes increased by over 150%, especially in densely populated Asian-American states such as California, Florida, and New York. This increase in hate crimes against Asian-Americans was fueled by many things, but one of the most influential factors was former President Donald Trump's comments regarding the coronavirus. During his very active time on Twitter (now rebranded to X), he made many posts discussing the state of the pandemic and referring to the virus as the “Chinese Virus” and saying things like, “I always treated the Chinese

Virus very seriously, and have done a very good job from the beginning, including my very early decision to close the 'borders' from China – against the wishes of almost all.” Because of Trump’s harmful opinions on the origins of the pandemic, his influence on his supporters created an incredibly fearful, dangerous, and threatening environment for all Asian citizens in the United States, no matter their ethnicity.

Throughout the pandemic, I mostly tried to hide. I wanted to hide from the world, the hatred, the disgust, the people. The few times I decided to leave my house alone, I went on walks. Sometimes I would go to a nearby park, or I would walk up to the CVS a few blocks away. Once, when I walked to the CVS, I was called an “Asian b*tch” by a random passerby from across the street. I stopped going on walks after that.



As the coronavirus took over my life, I became substantially more aware of my race. Each day, I thought about what my appearance could say to a white man who “had a bad day” and decided to kill Asian women as his revenge. Some days, it consumed all of my waking thoughts; some days, I hardly thought about it at all. Before the pandemic began, I barely ever thought about my race. I had only had scarce encounters with racism previously, most of them happening within my school. In sixth grade, I was called down to our school auditorium for a meeting about our Asian Culture Night. They decided to summon us by saying, “All Asians to the auditorium please!” In seventh grade, I was asked to record a video of me speaking in Chinese for—you guessed it—Asian Culture Night. Bad news, I am not Chinese.

Now, as the pandemic fades into an afterthought, I have become nearly hyper-aware of my race. I analyze every space I enter, and see how many faces of color break up the white crowd. And I am still afraid. I am afraid of the people that walk past me on the street. I am afraid when I am stared at in public. I am afraid of being called slurs on the streets of my neighborhood... again. I am afraid that my view of the world will never go back to what it once was. But, despite that fear, I know that if this happens again, if there is another event that targets my people, my identity, myself, I will be able to survive. I mean, I already did this once, right? What’s a few more years? ...Right?

Under Threat

Lucy Keenan

Author’s Note: The following is a true story about a shooting threat made to my school in 2019. It includes the names of real people who taught at and attended Murray Middle School during the 2019-2020 school year. To write this story, I conducted research from the Everytown for Gun Safety and K-12 School Shooting databases, and consulted articles from Pine and Roses, the Child Welfare League of America, and the Tennessean.

“Are you going to the dance this afternoon?” I look up from my cereal bowl in slight confusion. My mom should be out the door by now, all dressed and ready for work with her staff badge hanging from a lanyard around her neck. But instead she stares at me with a weird expression on her face, and asks her question again. “Probably not,” I say, thinking back to the loud, dark, (and if I’m being honest, kind of boring) dance from last year. “I might just watch a movie in Ms. Major’s class. I think that’s what most of my friends are planning on doing anyway.” My mom visibly relaxes, though she still seems a bit tense as she gives me a quick hug before hurrying out the door. Weird. I don’t think about it too much though as I toss my now empty bowl into the sink and gather my things to go out to the bus stop. I sit down in my usual row (seat five) and set my backpack down on the seat beside me to save a spot for my friend Danait. When we pull up to her stop, though, it’s nearly

empty, the usual throng of five or six kids now reduced to two. Danait isn't one of them. She must be sick. As the bus moves on, two eighth grade students slide into the seat in front of me, their voices teeming with a confidence that seems foreign to me as an anxious seventh grader. Per my bad habits, I start eavesdropping on them, catching snippets of their conversation. "—he said he's going to shoot up the dance." I look at the seat in front of me in surprise and keep listening.

"He got a rifle from his parents."

"I thought he lived with his uncle?"

"He said he has a list of students he's targeting."

"I hope I'm not on it." What? I didn't understand what they were talking about. Where had they heard about this? Was it true? Why wasn't school canceled? As the bus chugged on I eventually got more of the story from the kids in front of me. A student at Murray had gone online and said he was going to shoot a bunch of people at the dance that afternoon. I didn't recognize his name. He was an eighth grader, had had a troubled life, and lived with a family member who owned a gun. I wasn't planning on going to the dance anyway. I thought as the bus pulled up in front of the school. If I'm not in the gym, I'll be safe. I'm a seventh grader, he can't know me well enough to put me on a list. I looked around at the houses nearby. If anything happens, I'll run to one of these houses and knock on the door for help. I walked into school with a mixture of worry and morbid curiosity, but I didn't want to ask anyone about the threat. It's probably just a rumor. After all, I got my information from some middle school kids on a school bus.

In October of 2019, Murray Middle School was set to have its first school dance of the year during the Wednesday before the four day MEA break. The dance was set to be held in the school's gymnasium Wednesday afternoon. The night before the dance, however, a student at Murray who had proclaimed access to a firearm went online and posted a threat, stating he planned to bring a gun to school the following day and "shoot up the school dance." While no gun was ever brought onto school grounds, the dance was quickly canceled and parents of students were contacted about the threat. Many members of the student body chose to stay home that day, with more leaving school early,

and various safety precautions were initiated, including the lockdown of all classrooms during class periods. Thankfully no shootings occurred, but the school's reaction and seriousness towards the threat, empty or no, was most definitely warranted. According to data from Everytown for Gun Safety, a database dedicated to tracking incidents of gunfire on school grounds, there were 410 mass shootings, about 1.12 shootings a day, recorded in 2019 alone. Time graphs constructed from the K-12 School Shooting Database reveal the number of mass shootings recorded from the 1960's to the 2020's went up from 9 in 1966 to 328 in 2024, with one of the biggest climbs occurring between 2010 (15 recorded incidents of mass shootings) and 2023, (348 recorded incidents of mass shootings), just thirteen years later. In little more than a decade, the number of mass shootings in America has not only skyrocketed, but has become the leading cause of death for teens and children in the country. Many parents are now calling for gun reform, putting pressure on politicians to pass legislation restricting access to firearms. But while most Americans can collectively agree that school shootings are a tragic and frankly serious issue, they seem to be at odds on how to approach the problem. Meanwhile, more and more students are becoming used to the frequent lockdowns and shut-ins interrupting their school day, with 1 in 4 teachers saying their school had a gun related lockdown in the last year.

I'm the only one sitting at my table in the back of the classroom. The art room was moved from the third floor to the basement over the summer, and its small ceiling windows don't let in much natural light. The classroom's emptiness now feels glaringly obvious under the harsh fluorescent light bulbs, and I can see that most of my classmates decided to stay home today, adding to my growing anxiety. Those of us that are here look sporadically placed in our assigned seats, and the loud bustle of conversation that usually flows well into the start of first period has been replaced by low murmurs and the sound of Ms. Haas typing quietly at her desk. I feel antsy, so I reach to pull a book out of my backpack and try to concentrate on reading. The sound of the buses pulling away rumbles from the street above me, and I suddenly wish more than anything that I was on one. The classroom door

remains firmly shut and locked after the first bell, and I'm still rereading the same two lines on the page in front of me when Principal McKenzie's voice comes on over the loudspeaker. "Good morning and happy October 18th. I would like to inform you that the school dance set for this afternoon has been canceled. We will reschedule a new date after break. Doors and windows should remain locked during class time today, and there will be no bathroom passes given out during class or passing time today. Students should not roam the hallways without being accompanied by a staff member. Thank you and have a good Wednesday." Are we in actual danger? I wonder. Or are these just precautions? My stomach hurts. All the adults seem so calm. Am I overreacting? Maybe there's nothing to worry about. Fifteen minutes pass. Ms. Haas announces we're having a free day in class today. I can feel my heart beating quickly, like I just stepped off a roller coaster, even though I'm standing still. My throat feels knotted and scratchy, and I feel myself starting to tear up. Why am I crying? There's nothing to worry about. I try to focus on reading but the words on the page are starting to blur together. I'm scared. I reach into my backpack again and try to subtly take out my phone, since I'm not supposed to have it out in class. In less than a minute, I type out and send a message to my parents. Can you please come get me? I don't feel safe.

When discussing the topic of gun violence, many Americans adopt the notion that it is an

"Per my bad habits, I start eavesdropping on them, catching snippets of their conversation. '—he said he's going to shoot up the dance.'"

"elsewhere" problem that doesn't affect them at home. The Maine-based organization Pine and Roses has helped shed some light on this phenomenon, claiming our national media desensitizes mass shootings by picking only small handfuls of especially devastating shootings to broadcast. Take for example, the Uvalde shooting

in Texas on May 24th, 2022. Twenty-one people, nineteen of which were elementary school children, were killed in the school shooting. In the week that followed, more than fifteen mass shootings took place around the country, none of which were covered. While Uvalde served as a devastating wake up call to violence in America, Pine and Roses argues that limited shooting coverage allows gun rights lobbyists to dodge close scrutiny, and that if the national news opted to remind Americans of every mass shooting every time they occurred, more attention would be brought to the issue, and it wouldn't be as easy to ignore and shy away from. With gun ownership seen as a key value in America, many citizens feel that they are entitled to gun ownership and oppose any policies, even ones necessary for safety, that would limit their access to firearms. Participants at CWLA's 2013 conference voiced concern about the role and glorification of guns in American society, arguing that the media portrays guns as a viable and acceptable means of conflict resolution, and lacks in providing any counter messages about gun danger and safety. Teaching young children about conflict resolution and pro-social behaviors, parents and adults about gun safety and protecting the welfare of their children, and lobbyists and politicians promoting legislation that not only limits public access to guns, but also increases access to mental health services, they concluded, is a reachable means of solving this issue.

Okay. I'll come and get you in half an hour. I stare at my phone and take in a relieved breath. My dad was at work halfway across the city and hadn't responded yet. But my mom's school wasn't far, and she agreed to pick me up and take me home. I went through the rest of that morning in a state of half relief and half anxiety. Passing time was strange, there were more staff members out in the hallways than usual and they were watching us like hawks. My second period was PE, and my gym teacher had the idea to do a lesson on various pop culture dances to make up for the canceled one. We had just finished the YMCA and were moving on to the electric slide when a teacher knocked on the door and told me to get my stuff. I felt so happy to see my mom sitting in the front office. After giving me a hug, she signed me out and we got in the car to head home. I felt guilty, leaving my friends and classes

behind, even if it was just for half a day. But I also felt safe, something I hadn't felt while in school. I don't know if all of my classmates were scared like I was, or if they ever believed there was a threat at all. My experience was by no means the same as those who have actually survived gun violence. I never encountered a gun nor an active shooter, and there were thankfully no casualties at my school. I wouldn't even count this as a survival story, but it is an important one to me, because it showed me that this isn't one of those things that only happens to other people in other places. Gun violence is everywhere, and threats, even empty ones, shouldn't be taken lightly. Mass shootings and restrictions of firearms is an issue that we as a country need to work to solve, especially for the sake of our youth.

We Died Too

Mya Chandler

Editor's Note: This piece follows Mya's account of the death of her brother and her experience with grief and loss. In order to write this story, Mya had to think back on this event to recount what she experienced in the moment and after.

What is grief? Is it coming to terms that they, someone who was once here with you is no longer here? Is it moving on and burying those sad unwanted memories and feelings away? Wishing to not face the hard truth? Denial, loss of one's ways? So many words can describe what grief means of course, but when you are the one going through the process no word or definition can describe the pain one feels. Grief has so many different faces, so many ways people express their grief. In my opinion the grief I felt was a mixture of both. I knew the truth, I knew that the person who I grew up with was no longer with me in the physical form. I could no longer have conversations with him, call or text him, hug, laugh or create new memories with him. I didn't want it to be true, who would? At the time it was too hard to face, there were times that I blamed myself for what happened, but for what reason? The events that occurred were out of my control? See, that's the thing about grief: it makes you analyze and overthink your past decisions

wondering if they did something different, if they were less mean and nicer, if they reached out more, would things be or feel different?

I was a freshman, 14 years old just starting high school at a new school, Open World Learning. It was strange coming back to school in person after being online for so long because of Covid-19 spreading like wildfire, I needed time to settle in with my new environment and learn my way around the school. It was pretty easy. The school is pretty small compared to other high schools with only three floors and about 10 or less classrooms on each floor. The third quarter, which goes from January to March, is always the most stressful and overloaded with work out of all quarters in my opinion. School weeks are draining and like I said before, the third quarter workload is a lot, so by the end of the week I was exhausted. I left my iPad in my bag and decided to take the weekend off to reboot. I believe it was a Tuesday prior to that Friday, my older brother, Isiah, had come over at night to grab some items my mother had gotten him and to catch up on other things. It's crazy but I even remember the color of my LED lights I had on the last time I saw him, a purple pink color.

He had come into my room and immediately started to mess with me about how my lights were off and how it was so dark in my room, but the thing I remember most is how he said I remind him of himself so much that he himself used the word "uncanny." I had a clear blue Rugsrats colored cup that was once his when he was a baby on my table. It was on the right side of my table and he walked over to it after he forced me to turn my lights on and asked if I double drank out of the cup. Of course I denied it just for a good laugh but in fact I drank lemonade out of that cup for about four days straight; yes I washed it in between usage, just because it was the first cup I saw. Before he left he said that he wanted to dye his hair magenta too, just like mine. I said he was copying me just because that's how our brother/sister relationship was like. I remember the smallest details - the color of his shoes, the type of shoes he had on and how much I wanted to mess with him about having on dusty white Jordans that didn't even have laces. I didn't know it at the time but that would be the last moment I saw him alive. It's a bittersweet memory that plays in my head like some sort of old broken record when my mind begins to fill itself with

memories of the past.

That Saturday my brother was killed by a drunk driver in the early morning. I remember that day so well, I even remember what I was wearing; a blue Ecko shirt, black joggers and mismatched socks. My mother had gotten a call around 2:18 a.m. from the Regions Hospital. They had asked if her name was Brenda and if she had a son by the name of Isiah. My parents arrived at the hospital shortly after 2:36 am according to my father. I remember my mother's scream the night she got that call, sometimes I even know I catch myself slipping away into my own thoughts and I hear that same scream. The same night my perspective on life itself changed. Just 6 days after his passing on February 26, 2022, we had his funeral on March 4th 2022. In those 6 days leading up to the funeral I had seen and felt so many emotions I had never felt before prior to that. I had seen my mother change to the point where I didn't recognize her, I was scared I was going to lose her too. My mother once said "When your brother died that day, a piece of me died with him too." I didn't know what to do, but I knew I needed to step up and help more with maintaining the house. Most importantly I needed to be there both physically and emotionally for her, my mother. I had put a pause on my own personal life; schooling, hobbies, my social life and other things. That day the way I viewed life changed, for

"I didn't know it at the time but that would be the last moment I saw him alive."

the better? Even after 2 years I'm still unsure.

I began to cherish every moment I had with my family as if it was the last time I would see them again, even more so than I did prior to his passing. I began to understand that life was a beautiful gift and the reality of it all was that tomorrow is never promised. I became more forgiving to others who have made mistakes that affected me in the past and forgave myself. I understood that vulnerability shouldn't bring you any type of shame, it makes the path of living a life of true peace within yourself because you know all of this; the sadness, the anger, the disbelief is all a part of the grief process that varies by person, in grief there is no time limit.

I'm now 16, a junior in high school and I would



say I'm doing okay now. Before I would isolate myself from everyone, talk less, eat less and have suicidal thoughts because I truly did believe that I didn't deserve to live with myself. I did all this because I felt a sense of guilt? Regret? For all the times I was mean or rude to him. I felt as if guilt became a monster that would hover over me every hour of the way for months on end, but why? I didn't understand why I felt guilty honestly, what happened was out of my control and I knew that? See that's the thing about grief, it eats away at you slowly until there is nothing left of you if you let it, making you question your past decisions and scared to make future decisions. I didn't want to forget what happened, I wanted to be happy even just for a little while. I joined soccer to fill time to keep myself from drowning into my own thoughts. I started to open up more, socialize, meet new people and make new memories.

I found peace, I found happiness and though I do think about him and what happened to him quite often, I understand the reality of things now. It helped me appreciate life more. Life is a gift so pure, so precious and fragile and never guaranteed. To me that way of thinking is the reason why I am the way I am now. Tomorrow, although we all wish is promised, is not, nor is life, and to truly understand this, is to gain a bittersweet feeling of peace.

Uvalde

Basha Douglas

Author's Note: My survival story is about surviving the school shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. The storyline is centered around accounts of the shooting given by survivor, Miah Cerrillo. Content Warning: The following contains graphic descriptions of firearms and extreme gun violence at school. I understand the significance of submitting this depiction of a school shooting and am comfortable with continuing in hopes to remind other people at school that their fears are valid and to bring awareness to the importance of advocating for gun control in our country.

On May 24th, 2022, an 11-year-old, Miah Cerrillo, just returned to her classroom at Robb Elementary School after her mother dropped her off from a doctor's appointment. On the way there, her mother stopped at Starbucks and bought Miah a treat. She asked if Miah wanted to go home after her appointment because there were only a few days left of school before summer and schoolwork was complete for the year. Miah assured her mother that she wanted to return to school and see her friends. She walked into class and greeted her friends. She sat down with her friends and joined the class to watch the film *Lilo & Stitch*. In the background, she could hear the joyful murmur of a group activity happening in the adjoining classroom. Around an hour after Miah returned to school, a veil of worry fell on the faces of her teachers. There were reports of an active shooter at the elementary school.

In the majority of American schools, lockdown drills have become a standard practice since the school shooting at Columbine High School in April 1999. A few times every school year, students and teachers follow a procedure in the classroom to practice keeping the room secure and maintaining safety in the event of an active shooter in the school. Students of all ages practice this procedure and understand the possibility of a dangerous individual entering their school. Since Columbine, more than 338,000 students in the U.S. have experienced gun violence at school. Guns are the

leading cause of death for youth in America. After the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida claimed the lives of 17 people

in 2018, survivors of the shooting started a non-profit organization, March For Our Lives, to advocate for gun control in the state of Florida. Although activists want to end gun violence everywhere, laws surrounding the purchase and ownership of a firearm vary by state. Activists all across the country urge lawmakers and policymakers for better gun control to prevent gun violence. Some states have the minimum legal age to purchase firearms at 21 years old, and in other states, the minimum age is 18 years old. The laws also vary for the type of gun being purchased. Automatic and semi-automatic weapons are the guns that are most commonly used to commit school shootings.

At around 11:28 am, the shooter crashed his truck into a nearby ditch outside of Robb Elementary. Two men at a nearby funeral home approached the shooter to investigate the crash and fled when they saw him with a large gun. The shooter fired at the men, but they were not hit. The shooter began to approach the school and fire at the building while officers began to arrive at the funeral home. The shooter avoided being spotted by the police as he was hiding from them in the school parking lot. He was seen by a few teachers who also dialed 911. One teacher closed a propped-open door, but the door did not lock once the teacher closed it. At 11:33 am, the shooter entered the school through the unlocked door. At around that same time, Miah's teacher went to lock the door and unfortunately, she made eye contact with the shooter. She told her students to "Go hide" before he backed her into the classroom. He said "goodnight" before shooting her in the head.

The shooter then barricaded himself into the classroom and traveled between Miah's class and the adjoining class to kill as many people as possible for 77 minutes before police intervention. He then open fired on the entire class, shooting Miah's other teacher and killing her friends. The bullets were flying dangerously close to her body, so close that bullet fragments became embedded into her little head, shoulders, and back. The children were huddled anywhere they could hide and were

hiding behind their backpacks. Their teacher Irma Garcia passed away shielding her students in her arms. After he shot at the children and teachers in Miah's class, he went into the adjoining classroom. She heard the other children screaming and the deafening sound of the shots being fired at them. In the gunman's absence, Miah smeared the blood of her classmates on herself so she could play dead if he came back to kill the survivors. A child is supposed to play with her toys, and should never have to play dead.

“A child is supposed to play with her toys, and should never have to play dead.”

Miah and her friend Khloie Torres then grabbed a cell phone that belonged to their teacher who was shot dead. They called 911 pleading for them to send police to their classroom. Miah and Khloie dialed 911 three times in those 77 minutes they were trapped in the classroom. They reported to the operator that multiple people were dead and the operator instructed the survivors to remain quiet. When you're terrified and fighting for your life, each second feels like an eternity. Miah had assumed that the police were not at the school yet so she just lay there hoping that they would come in and save them. The first officers arrived at Robb Elementary at 11:35 am, through the same door the shooter entered two minutes prior. By 12:03 pm there were around 19 officers in the hallway. By 12:30 pm, officers were trying to figure out how to unlock the door and breach the classroom. By 12:47 pm the door to the classrooms was still locked and a sledgehammer was brought on scene. A person wearing a stethoscope and gloves appeared to give directions at this time. Finally, at 12:50 pm after 77 minutes, that's 1 hour and 15 minutes of shooting two classrooms of children, police breached a classroom and shot and killed the shooter. They walked away with minor graze wounds. After evacuating the few survivors, the first responders walked into an absolute bloodbath. Some have reported the room to smell of iron because of the staggering amount of blood. The demented shooter even finger-painted the phrase “LOL” in blood on the class whiteboard.

Miah returned home from the shooting; alive, yet unwell. She remains inexplicably traumatized from what she experienced, and her life is forever changed. She struggles with survivor's guilt and is working on treating her Post-traumatic stress disorder with therapy. Since then, she has testified at a U.S. House Committee meeting for reform on gun violence. She and Khloie Torres were awarded the Kid's Hero Award at the 2023 Texas Public Safety Conference. Activists continue to urge policymakers to raise the minimum age for firearm ownership across all state lines. That bill has still not passed in Texas. Since the shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas in 2022, there have been 11 incidents of an active shooter at schools across the United States. This story has been agonizing for me to put into words, but my graphic description of these tragedies must resonate with the people who can help us. It's frustrating when the demands of activists continue not to be met, and students must either live in fear of losing their lives or lose their lives entirely because of the systemic flaws within the American government.

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Too Stubborn

Hazel Wright

Author's Note: This is a personal story about my experience taking 4 AP classes during my junior year of high school. I successfully passed all the classes and all the exams, but it was not a good experience. I wanted to know more about the cultural pressures on high school students to take advanced classes and the physical and emotional effects of stress, so I researched suggestions for college prep and the specific effects of stress on the body.

It was October, 2022. I was only a few weeks into my junior year of high school, but I was rapidly running out of steam. As I sat at the kitchen counter, staring hopelessly at the AP Calc worksheets spread out in front of me, I could only barely resist the urge to bang my head on the counter once or twice. Taking four AP classes had seemed like a good idea when I was signing up for classes the previous spring, but I wasn't even an eighth of the way through the year and it was already overwhelming.

AP Calculus, the most annoying of math classes, was at the moment better than its alternatives. Taking notes on the APUSH chapter of the week or working my way through the APES packet both sounded terrible. And at least if I worked on Calc, I could ignore the fact that APUSH homework loomed in the background.

Or, you know, not. Since, for one, I knew how much time it would take to do the notes, and how much time I didn't have to waste. And for two, I really did not want to do Calc. It didn't make sense, and I was tired of bothering my mom for help every afternoon.

So the Calc homework sat on the counter, under the bright afternoon sun, taunting me. The APUSH and APES textbooks sat on the dining room table, ready to be shuffled from there to the counter when it was time to eat. At least I didn't have to worry about AP Lit homework, or homework from non-AP classes. For tonight.

A page of problems left. Then the notes for APUSH and APES. And I wouldn't even have my study hall in the morning. I finally gave in to the urge to lay my head in my arms.

According to QuestBridge, an organization that assists low-income and first-generation students in preparing for and applying to colleges, the average AP course load that colleges expect is three. Students are expected to begin taking AP classes in junior year at the latest; sophomore year is better. Three classes is a suggestion, not a standard, QuestBridge assures the concerned student: "If taking 4 AP courses means your grades will suffer and you're up all night studying, you may wish to decrease your AP load for the sake of your GPA and your health." If students are struggling to balance their class load with their other responsibilities, then they should take a good look at what they have to do, separate out what is absolutely necessary, and prioritize classes. "You may," QuestBridge says, "even want to consider eliminating activities."

These suggestions are made in the hopes that students will be able to look good to college admissions officers, something which high schoolers start thinking about early. Students take on AP classes, sports, volunteer work, and everything else they can think of in order to appeal to admissions officers. Then, when senior year rolls around, they apply to as many colleges as possible; some go to great lengths to exceed the limit of 20 applications set by the Common App (a popular application method).

In other words, students pile on advanced classes because they're afraid. What if they don't get into a good college, and they can't get a good job, and their lives are ruined? Looking into the future, students are seeing climate change, corrupt governments, and wars. It's no wonder that they're focusing on taking advanced classes: it's something they can do.

At multiple points during my junior year of high school, I asked myself what I had been thinking the year before to sign up for this many AP classes.

It was never a productive question.

The year before, when I had thought about signing up for classes, I hadn't been able to fill out the form without a lot of struggle. I had mapped out the available classes and made a plan for my junior and senior years. I had decided to take 4 AP classes, and every time I wondered again why I had done it I knew exactly why.

Open World Learning Community is a small-

by-design school. There are only so many students, so many teachers, and so many classes available each year. Many AP classes are available every other year, as classes are taught on a rotating basis. When it was time to choose classes for the next year at the end of tenth grade, I mapped out a plan with my family. I noted what classes I'd need to take to fulfill graduation requirements, what choirs I could fit into my schedule, and what AP classes would be available when.

AP US History, which I really wanted to take, was only available to 11th graders as an alternative to regular US History. APUSH was the only available AP social studies class, and I was realizing that I might be interested in majoring in history in college. The available AP classes in other core subjects would also only be available in eleventh grade. It was my only opportunity to take APUSH, AP English Literature, AP Environmental Science, and AP Calculus AB. And I *really* wanted to take all of those classes.

I regretted everything very fast. But every time I thought about dropping a class, my initial reasoning still held up. So I kept up my stubborn insistence on taking 4 AP classes until I made it through the AP exams. And finally, I succeeded. I made it through all 4 AP exams, collected my rightful Klondike bars, and finished out my junior year of high school with a sigh of relief.

“Looking into the future, students are seeing climate change, corrupt governments, and wars.”

It was October, 2023. As I walked in the door after school, I was surprisingly not exhausted, but I still relaxed as I turned to lock the door behind me. School is tiring, as a general rule, but that day hadn't been intense. As I set down my backpack, carefully staying on the rug to keep from tracking dirt into the house, I pointedly ignored the thought of homework. I was taking 3 AP classes for my senior year; they'd been less work than last year's 4 so far, but AP Biology notes were no joke. I'd managed to keep from having to do much homework at home for most of the quarter, but it was getting towards the end of Quarter 1 and there

was a Bio test coming up.

Having successfully dodged my sister in order to take off my shoes, I followed her up the stairs to get a hug from my mom and an after school snack. As the two of us babbled through a retelling of our day, words flowing over and through each other's stream of thought like a river flowing around rocks, I grabbed a granola bar and sat down at the kitchen counter to eat. It was 3:50 on a Wednesday afternoon: I wasn't going to do anything school related until 4:00.

Thirteen minutes later, I was done eating, and I couldn't ignore it any longer. I had to take Bio notes, and I couldn't really save it for study hall. I tried to gather the energy needed to turn off my phone, get up and grab the Bio textbook, and take my notebook and pencil case out of my backpack. I managed to turn the phone off before I stopped, staring blankly at the countertop. I couldn't force myself to turn and get out of the chair.

Why was my brain like this? Hadn't I built up some good study habits last year? I was upstairs, in a communal area, and it was relatively early. Surely, this combination of factors would mean that I could do my homework. I couldn't be done with the day already, right?

Apparently not. I hadn't had to confront the idea of taking an unknown-but-probably-large amount of time out of the approximately 4.5 hours I had to myself each day after school in order to do homework. Or at least, not since the end of my junior year. But sitting at the counter, staring at the black phone screen and contemplating actually taking the notes, I found myself on the brink of tears.

This whole “being a responsible student” thing *sucked*.

Stress is completely manageable, in small doses. Colloquially referred to as “fight or flight,” the human stress response prepares the body to react to physical danger. Then, when the danger is gone, the body is well prepared to dial it back a notch or two. When stress is long-term, however, the body is unable to adjust. Fight or flight mode is constantly active. The continuous activation of the nervous system causes physical responses that wear at the body.

When a stressor is introduced, as the American Psychological Association (APA) explains, the

nervous system signals the adrenal glands to release signaling hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline. These hormones kickstart other bodily systems, causing “the heart to beat faster, respiration rate to increase, blood vessels in the arms and legs to dilate, digestive processes to change and glucose levels (sugar energy) in the bloodstream to increase to deal with the emergency.” These reactions help, when someone is in physical danger, and the stress is short-term. They help less when conditions are chronically stressful.

The constant activation of physical responses can cause a variety of immediate and future issues. Muscles stay tense, causing pain in the upper extremities and lower back, as well as headaches. Airways between the nose and lungs are restricted, which can cause rapid breathing and shortness of breath. The endocrine system is consistently activated, increasing the number of stress hormones, which over time can impair communication between the immune and endocrine systems. The constant increases in heart rate and elevated blood pressure, combined with the greater presence of stress hormones, can increase the risk of hypertension, heart attack, or stroke. Additionally, chronic stress can cause appetite or diet changes, stomach pain, and digestion issues, along with a multitude of other potential problems.

Chronic stress is a problem at any age, but younger people may see more long-term impacts. And according to an APA survey conducted in 2014, teenage stress patterns are very similar to those of adults—higher during the school year. Teens saw greater impacts from that stress, but were more likely to say that stress doesn’t impact their mental or physical health. Teenagers are not provided with the tools to decrease their stress, but they’re provided with the tools to increase it. So students pile on the work and load up on stress, desperate to find any hope for their futures in a world of economic crisis, climate change, and war.

Living With Senioritis

Tess Campion

Editor’s Note: This is a personal account from Tess. She describes how senioritis has affected her. She used her own experiences, interviews from classmates and research done by experts.

Every year, second semester comes around and an epidemic hits high school seniors. Attendance drops drastically, missing work spikes, and all motivation to do school goes out the window. With college announcements made and transcripts sent, many seniors begin to wonder why they even show up at all. But ultimately, university commitments require an at least passing average and seniors begin to feel their habits catching up with them. The frantic tapping of my keys to beat the deadline of this story speaks for itself: surviving senioritis is no joke.

Senioritis is a term that has come into use in the past couple of decades. Articles have been published in the Washington Post on it, it gets about 141,000 hits on Google a year, it has its own Wikipedia page, and even College Board, who many may argue are a main contributor to senior year burnout, have a how to guide to beat it. So what really is this senior year burnout?

“Students gave analogies of living with senior year burn out to being like a withering grape in the sun or melting ice cream on a hot day.”

‘My soul has been crushed, it is taking me down,’ said senior Anja Gundale when asked about her experience in the last semester of high school. The sentiment is shared. In discussion with the senior class at Open World Learning Community, many said their will to continue has vanished. Students gave analogies of living with senior year burn out to being like a withering grape in the sun or melting ice cream on a hot day. These rather childish metaphors represent the desolation of these students’ intellect, but at least they employed

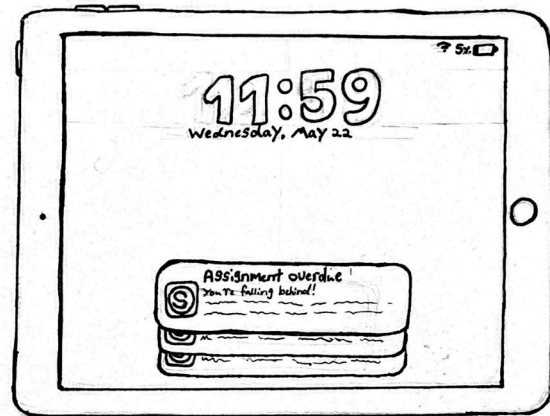
pathetic fallacy. I asked senior Cooper Peterson about his experience second semester senior year. He simply replied 'Yeah,' with a disappointed expression and began to stare off into space. No further explanation was needed on his part.

I too have felt the effects of this self-inflicted condition, as procrastination has a new

sense of home and all motivation to do work has seeped out of me. Opening my computer has a weight and struggle it never previously did, and the missing tasks section of Schoology no longer sees the light of day on my iPad (but I am sure it is a long list). Grades I would have previously obsessively checked seem trivial and I begin to wonder how I even made it to this point. But why the recent effect on seniors? Has senioritis always been a part of American high school rite of passage or is just a term coined to justify why you haven't opened an assignment this week?

Journalist Jay Mathews had an interesting take on the concept. In his column he wrote about the generational problem of 'senioritis' and its greater reflection on our evolving education system. His article points out the worsening state of college admissions and the pressure placed on high school students to achieve higher. 'You don't need to ace the exam. It's May, for heaven's sake. You already got into college,' he writes, encouraging students to enjoy the little time they have. Mathews criticizes college's practice of penalizing students for lower senior year grades and leveraging their ability to revoke admissions, something that also has been proven an empty threat.

This take on senioritis is rather forgiving, but it does merit some truth. Much of the apparent cause of senioritis is burnout, something that has become more and more apparent in our contemporary educational landscape. While changes in our system are needed, they wouldn't guarantee a difference in senior year performance. Even Mathews admitted to having kicked back his senior year and it is hard to imagine that seniors wouldn't have taken advantage of their remaining days regardless. Teacher Leo Bickelhaupt also points out that senior year schedules are holding people back. From senior meetings to track meets to getting interrupted to participate in senior traditions, there always seems to be something more important than class going on in seniors'



schedules.

Whether or not senioritis is placebo or really justified it seems to have caught up with us. Junior Bennett Vaughan-Fier observed, 'you guys sound depressed—I would just be happy I am going to college.' He continued by comparing high school to running the 1600m, 'the final lap of the race is always the easiest.' Famous last words. We will see how senior year catches up with him. Junior Danny Hobday also seems to have noticed the effects of senioritis on seniors. 'People look like they just got sandwiched between two Thomas the Train Target toys,' he said. I am not sure what that means but it seems pretty accurate.

Ultimately, everyone has their own perspective on the second semester senior year expectations, but seniors being affected by 'senioritis' all seem to feel the same way. So whether or not it is a greater reflection of our education system or something that can be combated with a College Board 'how to,' it has taken a pretty strong hold of many.

'Go on and leave me behind,' says Gundale and her classmate Mintesinot Sturm chimes in to say, 'I just want to go into the woods and disappear.' Even if seniors make it to summer, burnout has left its damage and they have a couple of months to recuperate before throwing themselves back into the ring of educational pursuit or whatever challenge awaits.

All I know is that this is the first assignment I have turned in on time in a while. I am not in danger of failing out and things appear to be looking up. Maybe I will have survived senioritis after all.

Sports Anxiety

Annika Lofgren

Author's Note: I chose to write about sports anxiety and sports-induced panic attacks because they have played a pivotal role in my life, especially during my senior season of volleyball. I felt very alone and as if I was the only person experiencing this, even though that is far from true. During the writing process, I was able to delve into several articles that reinforced my experience and forced me to see even more that this is not a topic that only affects me.

My best friend from elementary school that I haven't seen since, many of my classmates -- including a few with whom I have complicated relationships -- and several of my teachers. All the people I'm expecting to see at my volleyball game tonight. My head is low and spirit lower as I enter Central High School's locker room.

I come from a small high school that does not even have a track. Central, the biggest school in our conference, has money and people to spare. They beat us every time and have a whole lineup of benchwarmers, separate from their JV, just waiting to go in. Central cuts people from their program every year while we are begging people to try out. As the captain, I'm supposed to get everyone hyped up, and, although I'm trying, I'm not doing a good enough job. I'm already shaking slightly as I enter the gym, but try to mask it. I put on my 'captain face' as I smile and lead warmups. I try to have fun with my teammates as I pepper with my 8th grade outside hitter.

The gym is still very low on fans, calming me for the time being. People start filling the stands, something that doesn't really happen when we play at home. I see many of my teachers, attending only this game because it is closer to their houses than my school is. I see some of my friends, the guy I like, and people I vaguely recognize from Central. They announce players, I smile and wave, as I think to myself, 'everything is just fine'. The game starts and I try to submerge myself into a bubble that excludes the crowd. Halfway through the first set and I am standing at the net, waiting for the serve, shaking.

My arms are sweaty and trembling as I pick at my nails, an anxious habit of mine during games.

Recognizing the shaking and nail picking only makes me panic more. It gets hard to breathe, but I keep playing. From the bench, my coach is trying to see if I'm okay. "I'm all good." I'm all good, but I start shaking more. I'm all good, but I can't think straight. I'm all good, but my hands are getting so sweaty that I'm scared the ball will slip through them. The whistle blows and the down ref calls for a sub. I'm out. I'm on the bench drinking water and trying to breathe. "Are you okay?" That's making it worse. They mean well, but my teammates that don't understand what just happened aren't helping.

"Is it really our fault they're crushing us?"

I try to tune everyone out, but as soon as I'm on the bench, I start to feel like I'm letting my team down, and my hands shaking starts again. I ask to go in. "Wait a little longer." Please, I'm ready. "Okay." I go back in and everything is better. I'm back in control. The other team has put in their subs, but are still crushing us. I have a tendency to put my absolute all into volleyball, even if that means I start panicking. I know it will hit me again soon, that's how it seems to work. I just have to put as much as I can in before that happens. I set the ball to, then watch as it goes in the net. Again. My hands start to shake again. It's out of my control. Timeout called. "You guys are embarrassing me in front of my colleagues!" my coach tells us, angrily.

Is it really our fault that they're crushing us? I'm trying my best. We go back in and every little thing sets me off. The whiny whistle. The loud voices. The set ends and I break down.

My assistant coach is pulling me across the court, out of the gym, and outside. "Breathe. What's going on in your head?" I try to articulate it to her but it doesn't make sense, even to me. "I just start shaking and then I can't breathe anymore," I tell her. "Try to breathe now. Drink more water. We're staying out here until you feel better," she tells me.

This wasn't my first panic attack. Not even the first one at volleyball. I stopped breathing entirely a few weeks ago at practice over a small miscommunication with a teammate. It isn't new,

but that doesn't make it any better. I feel unreliable and weak, not like the strong, senior, varsity captain that I feel I'm supposed to be.

My coach brings me back into the gym. I feel better physically, but mentally, I feel that I've let everyone in that gym down. My teachers and friends in the crowd must look down on me. The other team is surely making fun of me. I can barely put up a fight. The game ends. Not the result we wanted, but the one expected from us. I try to talk to my teachers and friends after the game to thank them for coming, holding back tears. What was an extreme and negative adrenaline rush is now just a sad lull as I wait for our late bus to come to bring me home.

Sports anxiety is not an experience I am alone in. Athletes very commonly fear losing or disappointing themselves or others, but for some, "anxiety" means more than just being scared to lose. Healthline describes physical symptoms of sports anxiety being tremors, high heart rate, muscle tension, and hyperventilation. It is also shown that teenage girls experience sports anxiety at a higher rate than men and other age groups, with theories of girls being either more prone to general anxiety or facing less stigma around expressing it in terms of the gender gap.

I was not alone in experiencing sports anxiety or sports-induced panic attacks globally, but I was on my team. I felt that I was letting my team down constantly, even as the oldest and most respected player. Coming from a school with such low numbers, I didn't have the ability to have a sub come in for me when I needed a break without the momentum of the game completely shifting. I had panic attacks in more games than I would've liked, but I was still respected and heard on the court more than anyone else. I came into some games fearing that I would lose my ability to breathe, but I still put everything I had on the court, leading by example.

I play two other sports, and in the three years of being a varsity athlete in track and field, I had no panic attacks, and only two in my two years playing ultimate frisbee. I put a level of effort and caring that was seemingly unmatched on my team into volleyball, even if that occasionally led to a panic attack.

I have and still do experience general anxiety

quite frequently, but panic attacks have become a slightly more rare occurrence. My coach was a huge advocate of mine, but was not able to "heal" me in any way. I'm graduating high school in 2 weeks and do not plan to go back to volleyball in a serious way, but might play some level of club or intramural as I wish in college. I've learned that I am the type of person to put absolutely everything I have into some events in my life, and that while it doesn't always serve me well personally, it has gained me a lot of respect within my community.

Panic attacks vary a lot from person to person, especially in how they would like to cope and be dealt with by others. I've learned that getting air and water helps me significantly while talking to anyone tends to just make it worse. There is also some kind of misconception that I have experienced in terms of stopping panic attacks. Some seem to believe that "stopping" a panic attack from happening to someone is a good thing. I disagree. In my experience, after I have reached a certain point of shaking and getting in my head enough, whether I have a panic attack or stay at that level, I am just as handicapped.



Write About Writing

Violet Wright

Author's Note: I decided to write about writing essays because I was having a difficult time with picking a topic for this assignment and the stress was getting to me. This story is slightly fictionalized, but based on personal experience.

She sat silently in the middle of a quiet 4th hour class. The slides in front of her, explaining the assignment, seemed to grow larger, though she hadn't touched the screen of her iPad. Her thumbs tapped on the keyboard without typing any letters, stalling for time. Classmates stared at their own iPads, variably focused, but all making what seemed to be far more progress than she was making. The wind gently swayed the budding leaves visible outside the second floor windows, occasionally sending gusts to cool the students in the hot classroom. She switched from slide to slide, glancing through the potential ideas. Having to choose her own adventure, so to speak, adds an extra layer of stress to an already stressful project. And she didn't have any personal survival stories she'd be particularly willing to have published in a school journal.

“Having to choose her own adventure, so to speak, adds an extra layer of stress to an already stressful project.”

The teacher had assigned the story in an effort to bring together the class's year-long discussion of rhetorical techniques in nonfiction and writing composition. It could be a nonfiction story about something the student had experienced, or something a person known to the writer had survived. It could also be a fictional story about a survivor, written like it was real, from a certain event in history, or an echo story about something from the author's life that wasn't a survival situation, but could have been if it were in a different time. She'd taken a stab at one subject, had written a couple of paragraphs, but abandoned it for lack of enthusiasm and ideas for plot. She

understood the value of the assignment, but even just picking a topic was taking up a lot of brain space. For teachers, quick writing assignments can be used to check understanding of a subject or reading. Longer creative writing assignments can help teachers develop student writing abilities in synthesizing knowledge and ordering their thoughts into clear communications. For students, creative writing assignments that let them pick their own topic is a chance to practice writing techniques with a subject they're willing (or maybe even excited) to write about.

The topic of her essay had come to her slowly, mostly through process of elimination and discussions with her mom. Although she hadn't had a lot of personal survival stories, in retrospect, the number of AP classes she had elected to take last year, all core classes, was definitely too large of a workload. Of course, even with the essay topic selected, the school environment wasn't great for writing. Students in study hall around her chatted with friends or played video games. She wasn't doing great at focusing on the page in front of her. There were other assignments she could be doing, that would take a shorter time and had more clearly defined end points. She put the essay aside to work on at home with fewer distractions and fewer people around.

“I really just can't get started on this essay,” she complained to her mom, “and I know I should just go write it. But I also feel like I have no ideas, even with a topic picked out, and it's starting to feel overwhelming.”

“Just go write for ten minutes, without focusing on editing, and try and put something on the page. You can't edit a blank document, and it has to start somewhere.”

“I wrote something. I don't know if it actually fits what's on the rubric, but it's a full first draft!” she said, slumping tiredly into the living room and collapsing backwards onto the couch.

“Yeah! When's the due date?” her mom replied, turning to face her from her desk.

“It's due by Friday,” she replied.

“So you've got a couple days?”

“Mmhm. I'm gonna see if I can edit it tomorrow, and then maybe you can take a look for me?”

“I’d be happy to.”

“Hey Momma, can you take a look at this? I went through and switched a few things around, so I think the plot line makes more sense, but I’m not sure how consistent the style is and I’d like to know what you think about the descriptions.”

“I left a few comments in the doc for things to look at, but I liked it!”

“I looked at your comments and changed a few things. Can you take another look at it? Thanks.”

“Do you think it’s ready to submit?”

“Yeah, I think you’re good.”

“Great, thanks.”

“Got a proficient! ... glad that’s over.”

“You survived the creative writing assignment!”

“Yeah! ...So this is where we celebrate by getting ice cream or cake or something, right?”

“You’re cute when you’re optimistic,” her mom said dryly.

“Somehow I thought you might say that,” she said, turning to leave the room with a wry smile, somewhat disappointed but not in the least surprised.

Most survivors of essay or creative writing assignments (those who turn a passing assignment in, on time, that is) have a few things in common. The essay is planned out, with time allotted to planning and outlining as well as drafting and revising. Their essays are not written in a rush three hours before the assignment is due. Sadly, most English teachers say the best way to get better at writing assignments is to write more stuff.

“I think the hardest part is getting started,” said a person who writes a lot of essays, and wished to remain anonymous. “It’s daunting to start writing the assignment, and it’s easier to edit or add to existing work than begin. But by the same token, writing anything will help you, because you’ll have a starting point to work from.”

By the time you’ve written a lot of them, you have a better understanding of the timeline, too. It helps to be able to let the completed draft sit for a while before you come back and try to edit it at all,

especially sweeping changes.

A local high school teacher told this author that “I think the most important thing, for a school assignment, is that you submit the essay, because submitting something that will give you a lower grade than you hoped is still better than submitting nothing and earning a zero.”

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Thirty Years At War

Kathryn Totushek

Editor's Note: The following is the retelling of Lieutenant Hiroo Onoda's story. He was a Japanese intelligence officer stationed on Lubang Island in the Philippines during WWII. For the next 30 years, he believed that WWII was ongoing, continuing to carry out his original mission.

Japanese literature and history is full of warriors and heroes who remained loyal to their cause until the very end, even if they were completely lost. During World War II, Japan implemented a no-surrender policy to prevent the collapse of the empire. Japanese soldiers were instructed to never surrender or take their lives voluntarily. They would only cease fighting if they emerged victorious or died in battle.

Lieutenant Hiroo Onoda was a Japanese intelligence officer for the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II. At 18, Onoda trained at Nakano Military School, the primary Japanese intelligence facility during WWII. Later Onoda trained at the Futamata Branch, where he received training in guerrilla warfare, intelligence tactics, and survival skills. His training contradicted the traditional Senjinkun Battle Code, which prohibited Japanese soldiers from being captured and instructed them to die fighting or by killing themselves. Instead, they told Onoda that he was forbidden to take his own life: "Under no circumstances are you to give up your life voluntarily."

After his training, Onoda was sent to Lubang Island in the Philippines on a secret mission. Onoda was ordered to destroy the Lubang airfield and harbor if the Allies were to attack Lubang to prevent them from taking over the island. However, there were already Japanese officers stationed there who outranked Onoda. In February 1945, American forces launched an assault on Lubang. The superior officers prevented Onoda from carrying out his mission, arguing that they would need the airfield and harbor to evacuate their own men from the island.

In the following days, the Allies took over the

island, and the entire defending force was defeated, except for Onoda and three others who had fled to the jungle. Most of the Japanese soldiers had either been killed or fled to the island. Onoda was ordered to stay on the island and continue his mission. The Allies had taken control of all the defenses and settlements on the island and confirmed that there were no more Japanese troops on the island. In reality, there were four Japanese soldiers hidden in the jungle, committed to a secret mission to continue guerrilla warfare until the Japanese Imperial Army would return.

Two months after the war ended, leaflets were dropped into the jungle in an attempt to inform Onoda and the others that the war had ended. However, they dismissed it as propaganda from the Allies, trying to trick them into leaving the jungle.

Onoda had joined forces with the three remaining Japanese soldiers who had also retreated into the jungle. Together, they were committed to the mission of continuing guerrilla warfare, gathering information about the enemy, and sabotaging them. During their time on the island, they would occasionally encounter police or civilians, leading to occasional shootouts between them. In 1949, one of the men in Onoda's group walked away and spent six months alone in the jungle before surrendering to the Philippine authorities. This posed a security threat to the rest of the group, and they became more paranoid about being caught. They became so paranoid that they refused to listen to messages sent to them, trying to convince them that the war had ended and they could come out of the jungle. In 1952, letters and pictures of the men's families were dropped over the jungle, but they assumed it was another trick from the Allies. In that same year, one of Onoda's men was killed in a gunfight.

“Onoda was declared dead twice, and the last search for him took place in 1972 and 1973.”

The Japanese government declared Hiroo Onoda dead in 1959, but instead, he was alive, convinced that the war had never ended. Search parties were dispatched to find them, but Onoda

and his comrade assumed they were Japanese prisoners being forced against their will. They believed that any photos that were dropped were doctored. During the Korean War, they heard jets above them, which made them further believe that World War II was still ongoing, thinking they were Japanese counter offensives.

Over the years he spent there, Onoda learned and adapted to the environment in order to survive. They set up a series of 74 hideouts across the jungle, surviving on bananas, coconuts, and occasionally stealing rice, salt, coffee, and canned goods from the nearby village.

Every year, they would slaughter approximately three cows, selecting only the ones that strayed from the village. They would shoot them in the evening, preferably when it rained, so that the sound of the gunshot was muffled. The cows would take about an hour to dismember, and then the remains would be hidden. They would eat fresh meat for about three days and then dried the rest on drying racks they had built. One cow would provide about 250 pieces of meat, and they would eat one piece a day. Onoda had discovered that if he ate too much meat after they killed a cow, his temperature would rise, and then if he drank the milk of green coconuts, his temperature would return to normal.

Onoda's clothes were always rotting, needing to be repaired frequently. He made a needle out of wire and used fibers from a hemp-like plant or fishing line as thread to repair his clothes. Once his clothes were beyond repair by sewing, he would use parts of his tent to patch them up. Eventually, he started stealing fabric and clothes from the village once his clothes got too ragged. He would also steal old shoes from the village to make or weave sandals for himself. For camouflage, he took an old jacket and turned it inside out and made small hoops which he could attach branches to.

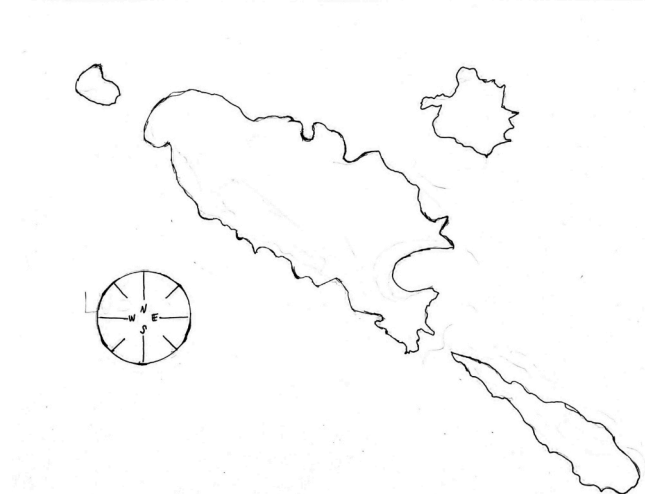
To make fire, he would use powder from rusty metal and used ammo and a lens to ignite it. To produce coal, he would take two pieces of split bamboo, one piece hammered into the ground and the other placed perpendicular to it, stroking it up and down.

During the wet season, they would build shelters to sleep in, and during the dry season, they would sleep in the open. The shelter they built had to be near food, close to where the cows grazed. Additionally, it had to be positioned on the

opposite side of the hill from the village to ensure that their smoke wouldn't be seen. To build the shelter, they built it on sloping ground, where there was a single secure tree. They then built a pole structure, with at least one pole secured to the tree. They built rafters slanted on the horizontal pole of the shelter, covered everything with coconut leaves, and then tied it all together with vines. The upper part of the shelter served as the bedroom, while the lower part functioned as the kitchen. They built a stove structure using two piles of flat rocks stacked so that a fire could go between them. They also secured a pole above it to hang a pot. These structures would take 7 to 8 hours to build with two people. Onoda called these huts "bahai", and said they were more comfortable than tents, but water would leak through the roof towards the end of the season.

"During my entire 30 years on Lubang, I never once slept soundly through the night."

~ Hiroo Onoda



Onoda constantly monitored his health and adjusted his diet or activities as needed. He reported that he only got sick in bed with a fever once during his time there. He spent a lot of time digging and covering latrines. Palm leaves were used as toilet paper. He washed his clothes in the water on the island, sometimes using kelp or lye made from wood ashes. Every day, he would wash his face and brush his teeth with fiber from palm trees.

In 1972, the last remaining combatant who had been surviving with Onoda was killed in a shootout with local police while they were stealing rice from storage facilities. Onoda was now alone, surviving by himself in the jungle. He reported that the

hardest part of his time there was losing his friends who had been killed.

Onoda was declared dead twice, and the last search for him took place in 1972 and 1973. However, a student named Norio Suzuki, who was traveling the world, was determined to find Onoda. On February 20, 1974, he and Onoda met in the jungle. Suzuki told Onoda that the war was over and he could stop fighting and hiding in the jungle, but Onoda was reluctant to believe him. In the end, they came to an agreement: if Suzuki could get Onoda's former commanding officer to order him to surrender, he would. So, Suzuki returned to Japan and presented the government with pictures of them together as evidence that Onoda was alive, urging them to contact his former commanding officer. The Japanese government made efforts to locate his former commanding officer, Major Yoshimi Taniguchi. Once they found him, Taniguchi agreed to go to the island and meet with Onoda. On March 9, 1974, Taniguchi met with Onoda and issued the following orders:

1. The Fourteenth Area Army has ceased all combat activity.
2. The Special Squadron of Staff Headquarters is relieved of all military duties.
3. Units and individuals under the Special Squadron are to cease all military activities and operations immediately and place themselves under the command of the nearest superior officer.

Hiroo Onoda surrendered his sword to the President of the Philippines on March 11, 1974, and was officially relieved of duty. He also turned in over 500 rounds of ammunition, grenades, a rifle, and a small dagger that his mom had given him to use to kill himself if he was captured.

After returning to Japan, Onoda was seen as a hero for his unwavering dedication to his duty as a Japanese soldier for 30 years in the jungle of Lubang Island. "I was fortunate that I could devote myself to my duty in my young and vigorous years." ~ Hiroo Onoda

Onoda eventually wrote a book about his experience but was unhappy with all the attention he was receiving. He moved to Brazil for a period before returning to Japan, where he passed away in 2014. Hiroo Onoda will forever go down in history as a hero who fought continuously, remained dedicated and loyal to his duty, and never surrendered.

Lost Youth

Arthur Madsen

Author's Note: This story is a teenager's perspective, surviving child labor in America's Industrial Revolution in the late 1800's. This story was based on primary sources of unsanitary condition reports. This is not my first time writing about child labor in America, I did my history day project on the same topic in middle school. I already had a sense of where to find reliable sources and I knew what were the important things to focus on and write about. I thought this would be a fun topic to come back to. This time I wrote in first person rather than what I did for history day just writing about facts and laws that were passed.

The sound of a bell rings across the city at 4 A.M, an ear splitting pitch. It is the wakeup call for the whole town. It has been a week since I started to work for the wool combers. I think to myself, "I hope nothing bad happens today." I run downstairs to grab my slice of bread off the table and pick off the moldy spots on my way out the door to walk to work.

As soon as I walk out the door I notice the rush of the outdoor air, to breathe it in is feeling like inhaling coal. As I got to the wool combing factory, I noticed two people passed out in the lobby, and three other people passed out in the break room. I think to myself, "That is more than usual, usually there are only one or two people who passed out in the morning."

"I hope nothing bad happens today."

I put on my dirty apron and get handed my steaming hot comb that is used to pull and straighten the wool, it burns my hand just holding it for a couple of seconds. I notice right as I step in, not only is my comb hot, but also the room is at a very high temperature as the wall holding the wool is also heated. Every time the wool wall moves back and forth, there are scorching waves of heat being exposed to us. Just after a minute, it gets me sweaty and feels uncomfortable, and my head is feeling more and more woozy as my shift goes on.

As I keep working for the next hour, I see my

coworker that looks a little younger than me pass out from the hot temperature and fall to the ground, hitting his head. It looks like a pretty serious fall, it might be a concussion if not something worse. I immediately drop down to the ground to help him, I get help from other sympathetic workers and we move him outside where the air is nice and cold compared to the combing room.

In 19th century America, it was common for families to move to cities for job opportunities. Most people were poor, so sometimes all they had for a meal was discounted bread. Another problem during the 1800's was the lack of restrictions on how labor was managed, whether that be the safety concerns, or overall shift scheduling. Because there weren't that many restrictions on how companies treated their employees, coupled with bad living conditions, the average age at death was 25.8 years in Boston for a while, which was one of the worst in the country.

Families often lived in cities if they were working in factories during the Industrial Revolution and it was very common that not only the husband would work, but the children as well, as they could be useful by bringing in another source of income to the family. According to the 1870 census, 1 out of every 5 children was employed in all of America. The living conditions in these cities were terrible, there was no sewage system to carry off decomposing matter, or exposed heaps of trash and waste, which is unhealthy for anybody. Some kids would be working full shifts and this was very hazardous to their physical and mental health as they were put in dangerous situations and instead of being in school they were doing strenuous jobs. According to the Social Welfare History Project, "child labor is defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development."

As soon as I am done with my shift, I walk out of the hot steamy building and the cool air hits my face for the second time today. Even though it feels like inhaling coal, it is a hundred times better than the heat and conditions inside. In my opinion, it is the best feeling in the world. After seeing another child hit their head working on the job, I didn't ever

want to go back. Later that night, I had vivid nightmares of myself overheating and falling to the ground in the wool combers. I woke up gasping for air, with my palms sweaty. At that moment I decided to quit the wool combing job and never work under dangerous conditions again.

In the weeks following I got a safer job passing out newspapers. I would sell them to people walking by in the street as well as delivering them to people's houses. It was a hard job because people walking by weren't that interested but it was safe. I got paid much less as it wasn't skilled labor but I didn't have any more traumatic experiences. It is a much better job than the horrors I went through when I worked at the woolcombers. A month later after working with newspapers, I noticed there was a section of the paper that talked about a new law that was passed. I was relieved when I saw this, as people my age would never have to experience what I worked in and saw.

The character in the story, decided to immediately leave his job because if he would have stayed longer he could have been the one to overheat and get seriously hurt. He decided to move to a safer job by selling newspapers, and after some time a law was passed, banning child labor, the Fair Labor Standards Act. It banned child labor, and also set the minimum wage. Because of the law, employers had to only employ people of age eighteen or older for full time positions. This act was a major success for people fighting to end child labor. It also made kids go to school as they couldn't get paid, so with school at least they got an education until they were eighteen. Since more kids were in school, it was better for America, as there were more kids going to college after their basic education. The act also had children experience a more healthy childhood as they didn't have to work in factories under dangerous conditions.

Surviving Salem

Nora Crosby

Author's Note: The following story highlights the experience of real people who lived through the Salem Witch Trials. To write this story, I conducted research on the event itself as well the couple who is showcased in this story. While I don't have a personal connection to this horrific event, it is a topic that has interested me for many years.

I stared in shock as the guard opened up my prison door, allowing me to step into freedom. I had spent the past three weeks locked in this cell, only leaving to use the restroom and get a quick breath of fresh air. I was provided with some comfort when my husband joined me a week ago, but his presence gave me little distraction from the overwhelming fear of our impending trial. As I tentatively placed one foot outside my prison door, I took a long look around the cell hoping it would be the last time I saw it. I would not miss the scurry of rats, the smell of human waste, or the cries of those condemned. Building up my confidence, I allowed the guard to escort me away from the cell, out of the prison, and into the street where I found my husband waiting for me in a carriage that I hoped would take us to safety.

“As I tentatively placed one foot outside my prison door, I took a long look around the cell hoping it would be the last time I saw it.”

The Salem Witch Trials was a series of witchcraft hearings in Salem, Massachusetts between 1692 and 1693. The hysteria began in January 1692 when two young girls named Elizabeth Parrish and Abigail Williams began having fits, causing them to scream uncontrollably, contort their bodies, and complain of biting and pinching sensations. Modern historians believe it to be asthma, epilepsy, schizophrenia, disease, or even boredom. The girls claimed to be bewitched

by three local outcasts including a slave named Tituba, a beggar named Sarah Good, and an elderly woman named Sarah Osborn. In February, the three women were arrested for witchcraft and consorting with the devil. During their trials, Good and Osborn pleaded not guilty while Tituba confessed to selling her soul to the devil. As the number of people experiencing symptoms similar to that of the young girls rose, people's fear grew too, forcing authorities to arrest more suspects.

Belief in the supernatural emerged in Europe as early as the 14th century and rapidly spread throughout colonial New England. Rural Puritan communities were one of the main sources that instilled a fear of the supernatural into surrounding communities. The Salem Witch Trials were just a part of large witch hunts that occurred in Europe between 1300-1800. It was believed that witches were followers of Satan who sold their souls to him and participated in secret meetings.

Mary and Philip English were a wealthy couple from Salem who were accused of witchcraft. In April 1692, Mary was ordered to be taken to jail for consorting with the devil but didn't comply until a day later. Modern historians believe possible reasons for her arrest include her husband's ability to speak French (which wasn't a popular quality considering the aftermath of the 1689 war between Britain and France), his Episcopalian connections, and his history with land disputes. Other sources believe she was captured because of her relationships with slaves. Philip was vocal about disliking his wife's arrest but fearing for his own safety, he fled to Boston to avoid capture. He soon realized that his absence was causing his wife more harm than good and returned to Salem to be taken into custody.

As the horses carried us away from the jail, I felt the fear, anger, and anxiety that had controlled my life for the past few weeks drained out of me. Every step away from the jail was a step closer to safety yet I couldn't help but pity the poor men, women, and children still awaiting their sentences. As we pulled into New York, into freedom, I took a deep breath and whispered quietly, “I am not a witch.”

Over the course of the next few months, 150 people were accused of witchcraft, 19 of whom were condemned to death.



Philip and Mary English escaped jail the night before their trial. One account says a minister friend persuaded the guards to set them free, yet regardless of the reason the English's wealth and influence helped them escape. They fled to New York and resided there until the hysteria died down the next year.

By 1693 the trials had ended, but the effects of this horrific event lingered for many years. Both the community and individual families felt the bitterness and sorrow of the 19 deaths. In 1957, the state of Massachusetts formally apologized for the horrendous events of 1692 and officially pardoned all convicted people. Despite forgiveness being granted, many people have never fully forgotten the Salem Witch Trials.

The Salem Witch Trials is a series of events that has always intrigued me. Since I was young, I have been fascinated by the way this community allowed their fear of the supernatural to destroy the lives of so many people. The Salem community's judgment of minorities and their inhumane need to eradicate anyone who didn't comply with the norm is a topic that I have thought much about. Why were they so afraid? And what lives could these people have led if they were lucky enough to escape, like Philip and Mary?

Leaving Lithuania

Emilia Johnsen

Author's Note: I wrote this story from the perspective of my great great great aunt, my direct ancestry is from the eldest sister stuck in Lithuania. This story has been recounted to me many times throughout my life. I find it especially important to write down and gather as much information about family history as possible. I thought writing about this would give me an amazing excuse to bombard my grandma with questions and look into new, related information. All of my research was centered around the everyday life of German displacement camps.

The news had reached us. The Russians weren't far. They'd be here by the morning, giving us barely enough time to flee. The only place to go would be the port city, Klaipeda, Lithuania. I ran to my room and packed anything near me into a pillowcase, making sure to not make it too heavy. I then rushed to the front room as my mom began yelling "Paskubekyte, vaikai, mums reikia greitai begti! (You kids must hurry up, we need to leave now!)" Soon after, me, my mom, dad, siblings, and grandparents hurried out the door. I took one final look at my home before turning to join my family. I began to wonder how long it would be before I would see my friends again.

After a moment of grieving, we began what would be a 15 mile walk, a blanket of silence falling over us. The only noise was the chirping of the crickets, as the day fell to dusk. We had only walked an hour before my grandma began to grow tired. At first my parents gave their arms for support, but soon that wasn't enough. My grandma stumbled along, while telling us kids she was okay. My mom kept whispering to her, "Pakentek, tik truputi toliau nueiti bereikia (It's okay, we only need to walk a little further.)" This wasn't true. Our three hour journey quickly turned into four hours, then five. As we walked along the road, a crowd of people formed, then grew until the streets were full. After hour four, my legs began to ache. I started to count my steps repetitively in my head to distract myself from this endless walk.

I was startled out of my trance when my little sister squealed "Mes cia, mes cia. Atsigavom!!!"

(We're here, We're here! We made it!!!)" I look up to see the beautiful city of Klaipeda, the biggest port city in Lithuania. A rush of relief ran through me. It wasn't long until we would escape the Soviets. But first my family and I had to wait for my oldest sister to catch up. My dad had spoken with her weeks earlier to make a plan of escape in case the Soviets attacked. She knew where to go, but with four little kids we didn't know how quickly she would arrive. The longer we waited for her, the more worried we got. We were adamant about waiting until we heard bombs in the distance. Then I saw smoke fill the air. Someone yelled "Keliai! Jie sprogdina kelius! (The roads! They're bombing the roads!)" My parents pulled us kids close as the city descended into chaos. People screamed and ran frantically. My family formed a line, gripping each other tightly as we forced our way to the boats. As we crammed into a boat, the realization hit that we would have to leave without her. I burst into tears. When will I see her again? Will she make it out? Will she survive?

"We were adamant about waiting, until we heard bombs in the distance. Then I saw smoke fill the air."

The Soviet Union invaded Lithuania and the other Baltic states in June of 1940. This occupation was short lived, as Germany occupied the Soviet Union in 1941 and took control of the Baltic states. The Soviet Union later re-occupied Lithuania in 1944, and with this the Sovietization of Lithuania began. This included the suppression of their native language and religion. They also isolated Lithuania by implementing travel restrictions for both natives and foreigners. In 1941, hundreds of thousands of Lithuanians fled upon the rumors of a Soviet invasion. Approximately 40,000 refugees were able to flee to Germany. Later on, in 1944, rumors of a reoccupation spread and 70,000 Lithuanians managed to escape to Germany. To prevent resistance from Lithuanians, mass arrests took place. Many who were arrested were either killed or deported. The number of Lithuanians deported to Siberia from 1944 to 1955 was 245,000. Around 28,000 of these deportees were murdered. In 1956 deportees were slowly allowed to return

home. The Soviet Union fell in 1991, and Lithuania gained independence. My mother was six.

The boat eventually arrived in Germany. We were immediately transported to the nearest displacement (DP) camp. There were thousands of us, all of us scared and confused. The DP workers handed each of us some clothing, shoes, and a small food ration. Once my entire family was processed we were guided to a tent. As I entered the tent, I was shocked to see another family in there. The tent would have barely fit our group of 10 alone, not 15. I nervously smiled at our roommates. They were a young couple with 3 restless little kids. A DP worker came by and gave us plenty of blankets. We used them to divide our tent into two sides.

No one in the camp ever had enough to eat. I ate half as much as I used to, and my body reflected that. I soon learned that the 3 restless kids were not in fact restless, they were hungry. Starvation made us weak. The whole family contracted a cold, which was exacerbated by our lack of food. All of us made it through this cold, but my grandma was permanently weakened by it. Whenever we saw another outbreak going through the camp, we all would give extra pieces of food to grandma in hopes it would boost her immune system. To our amazement she did not get any worse.

We eventually settled into the normalcy of the camp. My parents were able to find jobs, and they would use whatever they got to buy extra food for us kids. My younger siblings went to the camp's school. When I attempted to apply, the teachers told me I had already been educated in the curriculum they provided. My grandma took it upon herself to tutor me. When my siblings got out of school we all played basketball with other camp kids.

With the end of World War II, a new source of hope emerged throughout the camp. Some were anticipating the fall of the Soviet Union, and to return to Lithuania. My mother, on the other hand, was determined to get to America. She did not want to wait on the fall of a nation. She wanted safety for her kids and to feed her kids good food, something she had been promising for years. An immigration agency came and began assigning meetings to each family. Our family was overjoyed when we received our meeting date- it was only weeks away. As the weeks inched closer our excitement grew. But days

before our meeting my grandma fell ill. She shivered relentlessly, unable to walk on her own. We did everything to nurse her back to health, but the day came and she still was extremely ill. My parents supported her side, as I wiped up the sweat from her forehead. I watched my grandparents and parents walk towards the immigration tent. My younger siblings and I waited in our tent for what felt like hours. They returned saying they will know soon whether or not we will leave. Their faces looked somber.

Displacement camps had horrible conditions. Food rations had about 2000 calories per day, but there was never a guarantee of food. Several conditions resulted from this food insecurity including malnutrition, anemia, and dental issues. Housing in DP camps was atrocious as well. As many as three families would be crammed into a tent at one time. The only way to have privacy was by hanging up blankets. The smells, crying, and yelling made for an unhappy environment. With the end of the war the world expected Lithuanians to want to return home. Some Lithuanian refugees chose to return home believing that the quality of life was better. The majority, though, feared that if they returned they would either be deported to slave camps or murdered. With Lithuanian refugees choosing to stay in Germany, the world viewed Lithuanians as Nazi sympathizers. With immigration aid provided in DP camps, a large number of Lithuanians moved to America, Canada, and Australia. Smaller groups of Lithuanians immigrated to Britain, Argentina, Brazil, and New Zealand. Around 30,000 Lithuanians immigrated to America, with a large chain migration to Chicago that created a prominent Lithuanian community there.

Soon after, we heard that we were eligible to immigrate to the United States. My family decided to settle in Chicago and build our life there. We learned years later that my older sister never made it out of Lithuania. She arrived in the outskirts of Klaipeda to see the roads completely bombed. She then shifted her focus on the survival of her family. She was a single mother who raised four children alone. We were able to reconnect after 20 years of separation.

The Will of God

Maria Imholte

Author's Note: The following story is about a religious cult called the FLDS- Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. I was interested in writing this story because the culture surrounding religious cults is very intriguing to me, and this cult specifically has grown to be quite infamous because of its unethical practices and illegal conduct. This survival story hones-in on one specific survivor, Elissa Wall, and her story with the dangerous religious cult of the FLDS.

My childhood memories are filled with family picnics away from the judging eyes of the world, learning the skills I would need to be a wife and mother. Attending the church-run private school, where alongside academics I was taught absolute obedience and faithfulness to our religion. The extent of control that the church had in our lives was felt harshly in my family when my father was deemed 'unworthy' by the leaders and my mothers were taken from my father to remarry other men.

Elissa Wall, Salt Lake City native, lives in a polygamist family and is a member of the Mormon offshoot sect known as the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS). She, along with an estimated 10,000 other present-day members, submit themselves to a life in service of their God, and who they believe is their God reincarnated- their 'prophet'. This prophet has, in their eyes, taken human form in a couple different men throughout the course of the existence of the FLDS, most notably Rulon and Warren Jeffs. These men were the leaders of the church and everyone obeyed everything they would say. The motto of the church under Warren's ruling was 'Keep Sweet, Pray and Obey'. This motto signifies what the prophets wanted and expected of the women in the FLDS- Never argue or challenge authority. Don't think. Just *keep sweet*. Remember to *pray* and remember that God is watching your every move. Always *obey*.

Rulon and Warren were also polygamists; Rulon Jeffs having around 65 wives and around 65 children at the time of his death at age 92, and his

son Warren Jeffs having around 78 wives and over 60 children. The extent of the prophet's power didn't end within normal limits, though, and Warren Jeffs arranged Elissa, among many other young girls and women, to be married against their will.

At the age of 14, with no other choice, I was submitted by the will of our prophet and had married my 19-year-old first-cousin. Despite all of the teaching and training I had endured in my new role as a wife, nothing could have prepared me for the sexual, physical, mental, and emotional abuse I experienced during my years trapped in that marriage.

Why am I being forced into this? I've known and hated Allen my whole life... he's 5 years older than me, I feel too young to have to be married. Is this really the will of God?

“Despite all of the teaching and training I had endured in my new role as a wife, nothing could have prepared me for the sexual, physical, mental, and emotional abuse I experienced during my years trapped in that marriage.”

Elissa was far from the only young girl that was forced into a marriage that she did not want to be a part of. She, along with hundreds of other girls, were forced into many marriages throughout their early lives, some of the girls even as young as their pre-teens. During Elissa and her cousin's 4-year marriage, Elissa endured psychological and sexual abuse. Upon meeting a new man at the age of 18, Elissa decided she had enough of the toxicity of her current life and wanted to leave the only community she'd ever known, starting completely fresh.

I have to get out of here. I cannot waste any

more of my life in this house, with this man. I have to get out of here. How do I get out of here?

I fled to start anew in the outside world. After leaving the FLDS, I worked hard with law enforcement to bring criminal charges against the cult's current leader, Warren Jeffs. I left behind a deep concern for my younger sisters, and their likely fate of also being child brides motivated me to do whatever I could to protect them.

I never want any of my friends or sisters to go through what I went through. I am going to do anything I can to protect them, even if that means publicly speaking against the man that ruined my life, and the man I obeyed for my entire childhood.

After the culmination of testimonies from Elissa and multiple other victims of Warren Jeffs and the FLDS cult, on August 9, 2011 Jeffs was sentenced to life in person with an additional 20 years on two counts of sexual assault of two young girls that he called his 'spiritual wives'. This sentence proceeded a long, grueling trial in which Elissa and other victims had to recount their traumatic experiences during their time in the church.

My testimony, along with the testimonies of other brave individuals, led to the conviction of Warren Jeffs and his imprisonment. It should have dawned on me that many aspects of the religion were based on revoking the rights of women. If a girl speaks her mind, get her married. Once she's married, get her pregnant. Once she has children, she's in for. Warren and Rulon Jeffs have made so many people's lives so miserable, and I am completely willing to do my part in making sure he does not do this to anyone else.

After escaping from this world that trapped and contained me for so much of my life, I have developed a true passion for self-discovery, education, and advocacy. I am a free, independent woman who has been on an incredible journey. I have moved back to Short Creek, the town that was once run by the FLDS, and being here has helped rebuild me and my community in more ways than I can describe. It has allowed me to look my darkest demons in the eyes, grow beyond the events of my life, and rekindle friendships of my past. Each of my family members and friends around me have motivated and inspired my passion to keep fighting

for justice, being a voice that was disempowered, and advocating for better services and support to assist those who are transitioning out of high-demand religious cults.

Elissa Wall is not the only notable survivor and motivational influencer that speaks on their fundamentalist experience. Briell Decker and many other former members of the church have spoken out on their journeys, and some have even started organizations that create resources for those who are in similar situations. Decker has turned the former headquarters of the FLDS and home of Jeffs into refuges for mothers and children who recently escaped.

While Warren Jeffs continues to be the prophet of the FLDS from his prison cell, releasing his behind-bars revelations and life sentence lectures, the estimated 10,000 followers that remain in America still 'Keep Sweet, Pray and Obey'.

End Goal

Diego Rodriguez

Editor's Note: This is a true story about Diego's uncle and his experience immigrating into the US.

The ride to the airport in the taxi was silent. *Pues íbamos tristes, yo y juanito*; but at this point we didn't really have any other option but to leave. With a couple hundred dollars in my pocket and some change that my dad just gave me, we were on the way to Tijuana. We ended up going to a hotel in Mexicali, *ya en la noche llegamos, tobia estaba un poquito triste*. We were at a hotel for 2 days, and we took a truck to the border. We used a rope to get over the wall. We ended up in the city of Calexico. We were told to go to another hotel. At least 15 people were in the hotel room, a small room with one bathroom; where it would get super hot due to so many people in one area and California heat. And, other than Juanito, I had no idea who these people were. Assumingly though, we all had one end goal. We were not able to leave, due to us being so close to the border. A day later we were told to meet up with the coyotes a little ways away. We took the long way to get there, by small streets and

having to pace the people out in the group, and when they would leave. It took almost an hour to all meet up, but we did.

There was a drive ahead of us, almost 4 hours. The overcrowded, hot bus we were on caught on fire 2 hours into the drive on the way to Los Angeles. "HUMO!" *humo? Pensé a mi mismo*. With panic now erupting, I was confused and distraught. "Pull over dude!" the gringo in the passenger seat loudly yet calmly telling the gringo driving. There was a strip mall in sight when this started to happen, we pulled off the interstate and into the parking lot. To not look suspicious we were told to disperse, "Dispersarse!" *dijeron los gringos*. With no plans of meeting up again with the group of people we started to walk along the interstate, up and down. A taxi eventually stopped for us. We asked if he could take us to Los Angeles. *Tobia les faltan como una hora y algo, tienen dinero?* He stated then asked. Fortunately we had enough money, he agreed and we were on our way. We only had the address of Juanito's at-the-time-girlfriend's house. An hour or so later we were in Santa Monica. She helped us get situated, fed, and gave my brother a call. Two hours later my brother came to pick me up, with a hug and a warm welcome to his apartment. He gave me some fresh clothes and a shower which was appreciated.

"The overcrowded, hot bus we were on caught on fire 2 hours into the drive on the way to Los Angeles."

The United States started to see a growth in the immigrant population of over 8.6 million immigrants entering the country between the 1980's and 2000, which was about a third of the overall population growth in the United States for that time period. In the years of 1982-1997 the United States was experiencing the Reagan boom. This contributed to the prospering economy, which naturally offered more jobs and opportunities for the people of the country. On the contrary, the country of Mexico was unfortunately experiencing the opposite at the time. Including recurrent crises, insufficient economic growth, low demand for workers and with more people ready to work than

actual jobs available that made finding jobs all the more difficult. This caused the people in the neighboring country of Mexico to go and search for more opportunities.

When I started to grow older and older, I took note of the economic situation, and the need that we as a people of Mexico were in. With little opportunities to work and with little income coming in, I had to do something about it. My brother was ahead of the curve and left for the United States a year earlier than me, around the time of the 4th of July. The hearsay was that the border was not as well patrolled during early July. He took his chances and went for it. With being successful he ended up in California. Naturally I followed. In reality there was not much keeping me in Mexico. *La familia, la cultura y la comida*. And, that was pretty much it. Ultimately the biggest factor keeping me in Mexico was my mom. Although it hurt me to leave her, I had to carefully weigh the pros and cons of the situation as a whole, and decided that there would be more negatives than positives if I stayed. With my brother also being over there I had that as a factor that served me as comforting. The difference of the income I was getting in the United States was mind altering. A pay check here in the United States was averaging about \$400 to \$500. *Era como los dies veses que ganaba allá*. Now, being able to help my mom and my family out a little more. It still was challenging, especially the drastic change of culture.

In the later years of the 2000's, around a quarter of the people who migrated from Mexico to the United States went back to Mexico. A lot of the migration to the United States was economically motivated. The great recession that happened in 2007 significantly affected the US economy. Industries that Mexican migrants worked in soon wasn't a secure factor that the United States promised. Family and social ties that migrants had were a very prominent issue that most migrants faced; with them being far from family, and even just friends that made trying to live a better life a little more difficult. You had to be the judge if you would rather live a little better economically, with a more isolated position in life or the opposite in Mexico. But, also in the later years of the 2000s, things started to change and improve in Mexico.

Certain regions in Mexico started to improve on an economic level, which made it more welcoming for those who left.

Getting accustomed to the different life of a new country wasn't the easiest, I grew weary and started to almost regret my decision about the migration. My brother was a huge anchor for me during this time, with me missing my country, people and culture. He helped me through it by analyzing it logically, helping me refocus and understand the pros and cons of the situation. It took a long time to fully get comfortable, with time it became easier to realize it's just how things came about. Now around 20 and some years later, things still can be a little difficult. With family still being the biggest drawback of the whole process it can still sting at times. But nowadays, 24 years later I'm thankful for being here, a lot of the friends I had in Mexico are now dead, with some who got into the cartels. But, thankfully I'm over here with my family, but if I stayed who knows, I could easily have already been dead.

Nisei Persistence

Aanen Kulseth

Author's Note: The following is the true story of Japanese-American soldier Frank Fujita and his experience in a Japanese POW camp during WWII. Due to Fujita's ethnic background and experience in the war, it's a marvel he made it through at all, and this feat of willpower to survive given his circumstances drew me to this story. I researched Fujita through WWII history museums and related articles.

I awoke again, just like I had the night before, as weak and lonely as I had ever been. My skin now clung so tightly to my bones that it looked like I was made of paper. As I rolled over my dirty straw cot, I said to myself, just as I had the night before, "I am going to die here." I lay awake for several more minutes, staring at the ceiling, waiting in agony for the bell to ring— for the soldiers to call us to the yard. It happened just as it had yesterday when they brought us outside to work. I toiled away with my brothers in arms under the two beating suns, one

emblazoned upon their flag, the other burning a path across the sky. The rising sun was my death sentence, in one way or another. Just like yesterday, I sweated so profusely and pained so greatly, yet still no relief would come. After a while, it felt like I finally began to fade away into a place of silence. Suddenly, my brief respite was interrupted by a loud crack from across the yard. Nobody moved. The silence and blue-gray smoke hung in the air like death, and a man whom I had once known slumped to the ground. He was American too, from Texas, just like me. Yet I couldn't bother to care. Stopping would mean my death. No matter what, I had to keep working. The guards cared not for our lives, and liked our "weakness" even less. So I worked, and worked, and worked until the sun fell. At the end of the day, I was fed a small ball of rice—my only sustenance. As I pressed it to my lips, I once again whispered, "I am going to die here."

During the Second World War, many American soldiers were captured by the Japanese while fighting in the Pacific theater of the war. Yet, this particular story is special for another reason. It concerns Frank Fujita, a Nisei— or the second-generation child of a Japanese immigrant. Frank was born in the United States and, by his father's orders, raised in an entirely American way. He was the staff cartoonist for his school newspaper, and lived an otherwise ordinary life. He eventually joined the Texas National Guard, and would soon jump at the opportunity to ship out to the Pacific and serve his country. It wasn't until December 7th, 1941, the day of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, that Fujita would both come to strongly notice his ethnicity, and face danger in naval warfare. Once the United States formally began conflict with the Japanese, his fellow soldiers started to look at him differently. To them, he was not only an outsider, but a potential agent of the enemy. Still, this didn't stop Fujita. He worked tirelessly to sway his fellows and convince them that he was "100% American." At every opportunity, he made sure the other soldiers knew where his loyalties were. In the end, these efforts would matter little, as his battalion would be forced to surrender after the Battle of the Java Sea, placing him and his comrades in captivity.

I've lost track of the days I've spent in Fukuoka. Early on, it was the same as Java, but the work is so strenuous, the food so poor, and the temperature at

night so cold that I feel closer to my death than ever before. Worst of all, the guards seem to have finally pieced together that I'm Nisei. As I awoke today, I couldn't help but feel that my time was at an end. They were going to kill me, I just knew it. Today, as I was dragged along with the other prisoners, they suddenly stopped us all. The guard to my left suddenly kicked my leg out and pushed me to the ground. Another came up next to me, bashing my face with the butt of his rifle. "Don't fight back, then they'll kill you," was all I could tell myself. Yet, I knew that they'd probably end me either way. To them, I was a traitor and a coward to Japan. Another blow came at me, and blood spurted out of my mouth. Another, and another, and another. The first guard, the one who kicked me down, placed his steel-toed boot on my chest and tried to taunt me in his native tongue, goading me to strike him. Unbeknownst to them, I had never learned Japanese, which my father made sure of. As I stared at them blankly, they must have realized that on their own. One of the other guards kicked me in the ribs and spit on me, but soon they all walked away, obviously disgusted – yet more importantly, too bored to kill me. "One more day," I said to myself. Maybe I could make it to tomorrow.

"I toiled away with my brothers in arms under the two beating suns, one emblazoned upon their flag, the other burning a path across the sky."

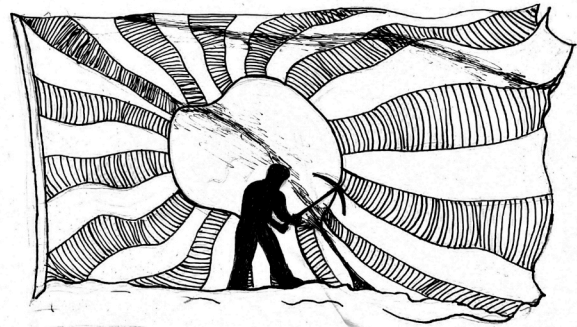
During his time in POW Camps, Frank Fujita faced additional struggles more than other American soldiers. While the violence, malnutrition, and disease were risks to them all, Fujita was worried that his captors would kill him once they discovered his ethnicity. To the Japanese guards, Fujita's status as a Nisei made him a traitor to the country. He was often separated from other prisoners and faced more brutality than his fellows, but the guards did not kill him outright. Instead, the Japanese government thought they had a use for him. For a brief time, they forced him to make

anti-American propaganda broadcasts for the military. Funnily enough, however, a combination of his broken Japanese and general disillusionment led this to not work out, causing Fujita to be sent back to his normal duties as a laborer. While he was not killed outright by the

military, the levels of violence and danger he faced every day were still astronomical. The guards hated him, and made sure he felt it. His wounds began to hurt so badly that simply falling asleep became a great endeavor.

This had been my second year spent confined at the Omori prison camp. My second year of being a hair's length away from death. My second year of the same fearful day, over and over again. But, something was different about today. Even before anything happened, I had a feeling something was new. We had heard whispers of the bombings— of cities melting to the ground, of unimaginable death and a chance at our salvation. Yet, it wasn't until I saw the American soldiers that I knew this intuition had served me right. "I made it. The nightmare is over." I wondered if my own family would even recognize me. The American soldiers rushed in and started unlocking our prison cells, finally freeing me and many others from certain death. I, as was everyone else, was so thin and sickly that I was sure I wouldn't live to see another month. As we crawled outside, shaken by our newfound freedom, I saw the surrendered Japanese soldiers staring uneasily at us as they laid down their arms. "It's finally over," I thought to myself again. I made it through. I would not die here.

Frank Fujita, along with 550 other survivors, would be freed on August 29, 1945, from the Omori prison camp after the Japanese surrender following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He sailed for a long time around the Pacific Ocean before returning to the United States and getting to see his family again. For the next several years, Fujita struggled to deal with the brutal injuries he sustained during his time imprisoned. Nevertheless, he was alive, and that's all that mattered. Although he was called to duty during the Korean War, he never served overseas and instead became an illustrator for the US Air Force. Most importantly, while held captive in Japan, Fujita managed to keep a diary of his entire experience in the Japanese prisons. It detailed



accounts of war crimes and breaches of the Geneva Convention, as well as exploring the personal impact it had on him as a person. He would eventually publish the collected work, and live out the rest of his life relatively peacefully for a man who had known such great hardships and suffering during the war. Frank Fujita, against all odds, survived and persisted through a harrowing experience of pain and danger, all of which lay at the hands of other people.

Sahara

Galadrial Barrett

Author's Note: The following includes a retelling of Mauro Prosperi's story of survival in the Sahara desert. To write this story I read multiple different accounts of the story and took quotes from various sources. I also did research into some of the topics mentioned in the story. This story contains sections that might be triggering to some people, including attempted suicide, so please be aware of that before you read.

It was the fourth day of the marathon and he had already made it past four checkpoints. The sun beat down on him as he ran, carrying his bag of supplies through the dunes of the Sahara desert, when the wind began to pick up speed. It was then that he noticed, he was alone, the pacemakers for the race had gone ahead, and with only 80 racers spread out along the trail; there was no one in sight. All of a sudden the storm hit. He was blinded by a wall of sand, the wind felt like needles against his skin and he couldn't breathe. He knew that he had to keep moving so as not to be buried by the sand and so he walked. Eventually he found shelter, eight

long hours later the storm finally let up.

In an interview, Mauro Prosperi said “When the sandstorm started to blow, I lost sight of everybody else. I kept running, though, because I thought I could see the trail. I was in seventh place and didn’t want to lose my standing. It was nearly dark before the winds relented. I started running again, but after a few minutes it occurred to me that I had lost the trail.”

The next morning he woke up to an unfamiliar area, believing that he wasn’t yet lost he began to run. He ran for four hours in total before he accepted the truth, he was lost.

“I had a compass and a map so I thought I could navigate perfectly well, but without points of reference it’s a lot more complicated.”

“I wasn’t worried because I was sure that sooner or later I’d meet someone. “Who knows how many others are in the same situation?” I thought. “As soon as I see someone we can team up and get to the finish together.” That was my plan, but unfortunately it didn’t work out.”

As of 1994 when he ran in the marathon for the first time Mauro Prosperi was a 38 year old experienced pentathlete and a former police officer who had trained for months prior to his attempt of the 1994 Marathon Des Sables (Marathon of the sands) in Morocco, one of the hardest marathons of its kind. To add to the challenge runners can only carry so much. They have to rely on freeze dried food and a rationed amount of water for the race, restocking on water at checkpoints. Prosperi trained specifically for this, he ran for weeks gradually decreasing the amount of water he was drinking to prepare for the dry heat of the desert.

Today thousands of people run in the marathon. At the time approximately 80 other people ran in the marathon with Prosperi. A six day long race through the Sahara Desert, the marathon is known for its difficulty. The route is the length of six regular marathons and the race itself is so risky that participants have to complete a form detailing where they want their body to be sent if they die.

Believing that he could somehow find help, he kept his feet moving. Alternating between resting

in the shade during the day and walking at night he eventually found shelter. It was an old marabout shrine abandoned in the desert but it was better than nothing. When he first accepted that he was lost, remembering something his grandfather had said to him, he decided to pee into an extra water bottle to use as a last resort. By the time he reached the marabout shrine he was already running low on food and water. Using the knife he had brought with him, he killed any living creature he could find including the bats that inhabited the shrine, cutting off their heads and drinking their blood for moisture. He even ate the meat raw for a source of food.

Three days into taking shelter in the shrine he heard the sound of an airplane overhead. As fast as possible he drew out an SOS in the sand then grabbed as many things as he could including his backpack and set them on fire in an attempt to create a manual flare, having used his actual flare days earlier when he spotted a helicopter, not long after the fire was lit a second sandstorm swept the desert, this time lasting for twelve hours. It felt like the last straw. When he realized that the second rescue plane had missed him, he lost hope.

“Believing that he could somehow find help, he kept his feet moving.”

“I felt it was my very last chance to be found. I was very depressed. I was convinced I was going to die and that it was going to be a long agonizing death, so I wanted to accelerate it. I thought if I died out in the desert no-one would find me, and my wife wouldn’t get the police pension - in Italy, if someone goes missing you have to wait 10 years before they can be declared dead. At least if I died in this Muslim shrine they would find my body, and my wife would have an income.”

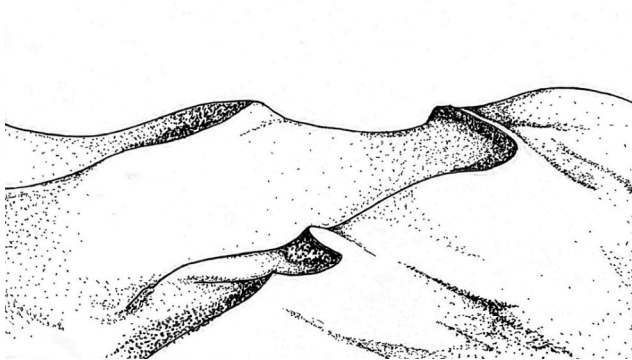
In an attempt to accelerate, what he perceived to be, his almost certain demise he wrote his wife a note in charcoal then used the knife he had brought with him to cut his wrists. However in the dry desert heat and with how dehydrated he was the blood congealed stopping his attempted suicide. Seeing this as a sign he set out yet again with renewed hopes of finding civilization and help.

"I followed the advice the Tuareg had given us all before we started the race: "If you're lost, head for the clouds that you can see on the horizon at dawn, that's where you will find life. During the day they will disappear but set your compass and carry on in that direction."

And so he walked towards the clouds on the horizon. He continued walking for days taking the anti-diarrhea medicine he had brought and killing any animals he could find, then eating them raw to combat his dehydration. By the eighth day of wandering he reached an oasis. His dehydration was so severe by that point that when he tried to drink the water he could barely keep any of it down.

"Really it was only a large puddle, a mirror of water in a wadi. I threw myself upon it and gulped with abandon, but I could hardly swallow. I managed to force a mouthful of it down, and almost immediately I vomited. I couldn't hold anything. I found I had to take tiny sips, one every 10 minutes."

The longer he spent in the desert the more attuned to it he felt. He began looking for clues of civilization in the wildlife and would find sources of water in the dried up riverbeds. Using his skills of observation and the advice that he had been given by the Tuareg eventually he came upon goat droppings. Following the feces he eventually ran into a nomad settlement where he encountered a nomad family that was able to help him.



"I crested a hill and beheld an incredible sight. There was a nomad girl, maybe 8 years old, tending a flock in the sparse greenery of a wash. I ran toward her and begged for help."

The family that found him brought him to a

nearby military base, and it was there that he found out, not only had he walked over 170 miles off course, but somehow he had made it from Fom Zguid, Morocco across the border into Tindouf, Algeria where he was in a hospital being treated.

When he was brought to the hospital they found that Prosperi had lost nearly 35lbs. Both his liver and his eyes were damaged and he couldn't eat anything other than soup or liquids for months. It took him nearly two years to fully recover from the ordeal. Many people don't even believe his story because it seems so far-fetched. Without water the Sahara desert could kill a person in three days and Prosperi survived for nearly 10 days with limited water sources. He even drank his own urine under the assumption that it would be a suitable substitute for water. Little did he know urine can actually make you more dehydrated. However, against all odds, Prosperi had survived.

Now when I first read this story I wasn't necessarily drawn to it because it's hard to believe, although that was certainly a part of it, what really caught my attention was that after his ordeal Prosperi went back years later and completed the marathon. Not many people would willingly put themselves back in a situation where they had nearly died, I know I wouldn't. Despite what happened, however, Prosperi continued to take part in these races, especially the Marathon des Sables, because he felt drawn to the desert.

"Four years later I was back at the Marathon des Sables. People ask me why I went back, but when I start something I want to finish it. The other reason was that I can't live without the desert. Desert fever does exist, and it's a disease that I've absolutely caught. I'm drawn back to the desert every year to greet it, to experience it."

30 years later, now 68 years old, Prosperi has competed in the Marathon five more times since then notably getting 13th place when he competed in 2001. "I feel a connection there", he said. "I love the clarity. And you see, the Sahara spared my life. Those days in the desert were my happiest."

Snowglobe of Dust

Willa Campion

Author's Note: This story is a fictionalized account of my great-grandmother Ethlyn Brown's experience living in Alton, Kansas, during the Dust Bowl based on conversations with my grandmother. While my grandmother's family moved from Kansas to New Mexico and then ultimately Minnesota following her father's job, her cousins (and my third cousins) still operate the largest farm in Osborne County.

It was the type of heat that makes your skin crawl. The kind of heat that makes you want to rip a layer of your body off in order to escape the suffocation of the humidity for even just a second. That whole summer the sun had been beating down on us like a relinquished hell but something about this day felt different. Jim and I took the mattress springs out of our bed and laid them on the sidewalk in front of our house. We placed a wet sheet over the hard metal and attempted to sleep there, our sweat mixing with the dirt that hung in the air. There may have been a moment of relief in gazing up at the star-crusted sky but the perpetual dusty haze instead made it feel like the heavens were closer than they ought to have been. All I could hope for was glimmers of sleep—moments when my mind could grow quiet and could stop thinking about the heat for just a second.

On July 24th, 1936, the hottest day in Kansas history was recorded in the small town of Alton. Temperatures that day reached 121 degrees—only California, Arizona, New Mexico and Nevada have seen higher heat levels. During the 1930s, a prolonged drought plagued the Great Plains and overplanted fields dried up. A lack of soil moisture and vegetation caused the ground to act as a furnace—heat radiated from the earth and the sun. At the beginning of the decade, fewer than 10% of farms in the US had electricity. While the Rural Electrification Act, passed in May of 1936, attempted to reverse this, it was only by the 1940s that the change was felt widespread. In an era without air conditioning or even fans, the heat was inescapable. The summer of 1936, temperatures in the region soared to nearly 130 degrees and few

Plains states have seen hotter years since. 5,000 people died because of heat related causes that summer.

The next day, the wind returned and with it a few precious degrees of colder air. Some may say the worst part of those years was the dirt that filled every crevice of a person's life or the blistering heat that forced families to sleep in their yards, but what haunts me is the eerie sound of the wind as it rattles the windows of the house, as if it might pick you up in its cloud of black dust. That wind has a special ability of uprooting anything it comes across, especially a person's sanity.

“What haunts me is the eerie sound of the wind as it rattles the windows of the house, as if it might pick you up in its cloud of black dust.”

The Dust Bowl was a period in American history when widespread dust storms swept across large swaths of the country leading to mass exodus and further economic depression in the region. When WWI ended, the once high demand for wheat steadily decreased. Increased machinery costs and poverty levels prompted many farmers to abandon soil conservation practices and increase rotations of water depleting crops such as corn—practices that were only perpetuated by the market crash in 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression. When a drought hit the south central United States in 1931, the first of four within the decade, crops dried up and top soil turned to dust, which was picked up by prevailing winds. The worst of the storms in the nine years of the Dust Bowl occurred in 1935 on Black Sunday when gusts of dust were so thick they created what was described as black walls that plowed through towns all the way from northern Texas to South Dakota. The Great Plains continued to feel the agricultural and economic effects of the Dust Bowl long after the droughts of the '30s ended.

I know my husband and I are luckier than most to be living in town. My family on the farm outside



Alton have to continue to plant crops that will never grow in wind bound soil. Two years ago, I had to quit my job as a teacher after the government passed a mandate allowing only one wage earner per family. Now, I stay at home pressing wet washcloths in the cracks of window and door frames and listening to stories from my father, a veterinarian, who treats animals whose eyes and nostrils have become clogged with dirt. Just the other day he treated a cow who was impaled in the neck by a branch launched by the wind, a branch the poor animal never saw coming through the dust. It is in moments like this that I no longer recognize the world I am living in. Yet still, day after day, I get up as I always do. It's funny how the mind does that, convinces us that everything is normal. I guess that's how we survive, even in a snowglobe of dust.

Where Is God?

Kiara Steiner

*Author's Note: I chose this topic because religion has been something I've always been fascinated with. It's somewhat of a foreign concept for me, as I was raised in a non-religious family. When I first read *Night* for my English class, I remember thinking a lot about why Wiesel and his relationship with God changed throughout the book. After doing some research, I found a paper titled 'The Effect of Trauma on Religious Beliefs: A Structured Literature Review and Meta-Analysis.' In this paper I found answers to a lot of the questions I had, and that it's not just Wiesel who has experienced a change in belief.*

"Men to the left! Women to the right!" 15-year-old Elie Wiesel heard as he was forced into a line with hundreds of other men. He had been separated from his mother and sisters, with only his father's hand to clutch. Elie and his father followed the men in front of them as they were ordered. Continuing on their unknown path, Elie heard a disgruntled inmate cry out; "Sons of bitches, why have you come here? Tell me, why?" He heard someone in the line reply; "What do you think? Do you think that we came here of our own free will? That we asked to come here?" With fire in his eyes, the other inmate replied: "You should have hanged yourselves rather than come here. Didn't you know what was in store for you here in Auschwitz? You didn't know? In 1944?" It was true. Up until this point, they had been told nothing. Every surrounding man had arrived from the ghettos they were forced to inhabit and put on a train to a place with a name they had never heard before. The inmate, now overwhelmed with complete fury, continued; "Over there. Do you see the chimney over there? Do you see it? And the flames, do you see them? Over there will be your grave. You still don't understand? You will be burned! Burned to a cinder! Turned to ashes!"

Elie Wiesel was a Jewish teenager living in Sighet, Transylvania in 1944 when he and his family were kicked out of their home, forced into ghettos, and put on a train to the then-unfamiliar concentration camp, Auschwitz. Before he and his family were persecuted, religion was an all-consuming aspect of Wiesel's childhood. In his memoir *Night*, he talks about his dedication to his faith as a younger boy. Before the German SS soldiers showed up in his town, Wiesel would study the Talmud (Jewish religious text) and would find himself weeping over the destruction of the Jewish temple. In *Night* he recounts being asked by a beloved mentor, Moishe the Beadle, why he prayed. He remembers thinking "Why did I pray? Why did I live? Why did I breathe?" Moishe had a big impact on Wiesel's perception and relationship with God. Moishe would tell him that "Man becomes closer to God through the questions he asks Him." Throughout his time surviving the Holocaust, he continued to ask questions directly to God. As he witnessed the atrocities committed to those around him and the cruelest forms of dehumanization, he

began to run out of answers.

Elie and his father continued walking, not knowing where their line was taking them. From the burning flames rising from a ditch they could see ahead of them, they assumed the worst. Elie could tell something was being burned but could not see what. It wasn't until a truck pulled up and began unloading, that he finally saw. Babies. Small children being thrown into the flames. He pinched himself: he thought, "Am I alive? Am I awake? How is it possible that men, women, and children are being burned and the world kept silent? No...this has to be a nightmare. Soon I will be home again." He was torn away from his thoughts when his father began to weep. Everyone around him was weeping. Among the crowd, someone began to recite Kaddish, the prayer for the dead. He then overheard his father whisper "Yisgadal, veyiskadash, shmey raba...May His name be celebrated and sanctified." Elie could feel anger begin to rise in him. For the first time, he began to question why he should sanctify God. The almighty and eternal master of the universe, who chose to be silent. He could find no reason to thank him at all.

After arriving at Auschwitz Wiesel first began to reject the God that he had once wholeheartedly followed. He experienced several moments where the walls of safety and hope that religion had given him were shattered. Research from 'The Effect of Trauma on Religious Beliefs: A Structured Literature Review and Meta-Analysis' gives an explanation to the question that asks: "What caused Wiesel's change in belief?" In most cases, it is uncommon for those who have survived trauma to experience a change in belief. The paper explains that the most consistent factor that contributes to a shift in belief, is PTSD. One study found that after experiencing a traumatic event, 30% of participants with PTSD experienced a decrease in religious beliefs, while only 6% without PTSD experienced the same change. Essentially, the greater the severity of the trauma, the more likely a person is to experience a change in belief. In Wiesel's case, the severity of violence and human suffering that he witnessed during the Holocaust can help explain why his connection to God changed.

Two steps from the pit, Elie and his father were ordered to turn left. Instead of going to the

*"Am I alive? Am I awake?
How is it possible that men,
women, and children are
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be a nightmare. Soon I will
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crematorium they were chosen for forced labor. With their heads shaved, Elie and his father waited with dread in Auschwitz to be transported to a labor camp. After 3 weeks had passed, Elie and his father were sent to the work camp Buna. In the work camp, hangings were not out of the ordinary. Elie had seen many before, but not a single victim wept. They no longer had the will. One day, the power went out in the central power plant. The Gestapo investigated the damage and concluded that it was sabotage. They trailed it back to the block of a beloved Dutch prisoner who had been made leader (known as a Kapo) of the Cable work unit. After they traced it back to him, the SS guards found mass amounts of weapons stashed in his block. The Kapo was soon arrested, and tortured for weeks on end. He was eventually transferred to Auschwitz and no one ever heard from him again. In service to the Kapo, was a young boy whose role was known as a 'pipel.' He was seen as a beacon of hope by all in the camp. He was a delicate and beautiful boy with the face of an "angel in distress." One day after a long day of work, three prisoners were set to be executed. Of the prisoners, two were men found to be in association with the Kapo, and the last was the young pipel. All three of them stepped onto the chairs, nooses promptly placed around their necks. At the signal, the three chairs were tipped over. The prisoners who were forced to watch raised their caps in commemoration. The two adult prisoners were dead. Their tongues hanging out, swollen and bluish. But the third rope was still moving. The boy, too light, was still breathing. The child was left writhing for more than half an hour after. Still alive. As the prisoners watched, Elie heard a man behind him ask "For God's sake, where is God?" Elie answered to

himself; “Where is he? This is where—hanging here from this gallow.”

Besides PTSD, a shift in religious belief from those who have experienced trauma can be attributed to a person's preconceived view of the world, in connection to their religious beliefs. For example, the paper found that “A person who can explain the perceived paradox between the existence of a benevolent God and the presence of human suffering is less likely to have their beliefs challenged when traumas occur.” The paper then goes on to explain that when a person affected by trauma does not have an explanation for the existing paradox, they are more likely to reject religious beliefs when faced with the paradox. In more specific terms; “People who place great importance on their religious beliefs but lack sophisticated theodicies¹ are expected to be especially vulnerable to the effects of shattered assumptions.” This describes Wiesel's point of view very well.

In his memoir, Wiesel describes the mentor relationship he began to develop with Moishe the Beadle. On page 5 of *Night* he writes; “Together we would read, over and over again, the same page of the Zohar (commentary on the Torah)... And in the course of those evenings, I became convinced that Moishe the Beadle would help me enter eternity, into that time when question and answer would become ONE. And then, one day all foreign Jews were expelled from Sighet. And Moishe the Beadle was a foreigner.” It's clear that religion meant a lot to Wiesel, but because Moishe was expelled from Sighet, Wiesel never experienced a time where “question and answer would become one.” Wiesel never reached a theodicy to explain why human suffering coincides with an omnibenevolent God. Therefore, he was more vulnerable to a loss of his faith. Not to mention that Wiesel was a child when he was exposed to these sufferings, rendering him even more vulnerable, due to a general lack of life experience that is needed to build a thorough theodicy.

One of the most compelling aspects of the findings from “The Effect of Trauma on Religious

¹Theodicy: a theological construct that attempts to vindicate God in response to the problem of evil that appears inconsistent with the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God.

Beliefs' paper was that some who have experienced trauma have a decrease in their beliefs while some might experience an increase in their beliefs. A study cited in the paper found that after a traumatic event, 20% of people with PTSD experienced an increase in religious belief including 9% without PTSD. Aron Ralston comes to mind as someone part of that percentage. In April 2003, at the age of 27, Ralston's hand became lodged by an 800 pound boulder that fell after exploring Bluejohn Canyon in Utah. After several days of being stuck, and as his water and food supply began to dwindle, the only way he could survive was to free himself by cutting his own arm off with a dull knife.

Despite his suffering, Ralston who was raised in the Methodist church says that surviving confirmed his faith as he believes that “divine interaction” allowed him to break his bones and survive. Recounting his experience in a *Deseret News* article he says, “I want people to understand that this was a miracle. A person without water usually lasts two to three days...It's phenomenal that I survived six days. It's also miraculous that I didn't pass out while cutting off my arm. I probably wouldn't have gained consciousness. There are greater spiritual energies than us in the world and there are times when we connect with them.”

After being evacuated from Buna because the Russians were invading the prisons to liberate the prisoners, Elie along with his father and several other prisoners were ordered to march. They left during the harsh winter, with snow pounded down on them, making conditions unbearable. It was several days before they finally arrived at a new camp; camp Buchenwald. Every day his father was getting weaker. Suffering from dysentery, Elie's father was confined to his cot. Elie knew it was only a matter of time before his father would be dead. But he tried all he could not to lose hope. One night, as Elie lay on the top bunk, his father pleaded; “My son, water...I'm burning up...It hurts..” An SS officer overheard his cries; “Silence over there!” His father continued his pleading. The officer continued to shout; “Quiet!” But Elie's father did not stop calling for him. The officer took out his baton and dealt a violent blow to his father's head. Elie could hear his father's gasps. Elie didn't move. He couldn't. After roll call, Elie came down from his bunk and stayed with his father, who was bloodied

but still breathing. Elie woke up at dawn the next day. Another sick person lay in his father's place.

Unlike Wiesel, Ralston was an adult when he became stuck. He most likely had developed a preconceived explanation for suffering, which he could use to explain why he became stuck and also why he survived. That being said, their situations were incredibly different. Ralston was stuck for 127 hours, while Wiesel endured suffering over multiple months. Wiesel also witnessed the brutality and deaths of those around him, including his father, the one person he had left to rely on. While both instances are severe, Wiesel was exposed to the cruelest forms of hateful violence against innocent people, which contrasted every ideal about the merciful God he thought he knew.

It wasn't until April 11th, 1945, months after his father's death on January 28th, 1945, that Elie became liberated. On April 5th, after the roll call guard showed up late, Elie knew something was wrong. Two hours later, the loudspeakers transmitted an order that all Jews were to gather at the Appelplatz (roll call zone). Elie believed that this was the end. That Hitler's promise to execute all of the Jews was in full effect. On their way to the Appelplatz, Elie and the rest of the children in his block were told in whispers to return to their block and remain still, as the Germans were planning to shoot them. They did as they were told. After they returned, they learned about an underground resistance within the camp that planned to prevent mass extermination. The next day, when roll call took place, there was an announcement that everyone would be killed. Ten blocks of inmates a day would be executed. Rations halted from then on. By April 10th there were still some twenty thousand prisoners. It was promptly decided that all of them were to be executed at once. As they all were herded towards the Appelplatz, sirens began to screech, postponing the execution until the next day. By 10 am the next morning the SS began herding the last of them towards the Appelplatz. That's when the resistance movement began. Armed men began to appear all around the camp. Elie, along with the other children, lay on the floor of their block waiting for the battle to end. Hours after SS guards had fled, and the resistance effort took charge of the camp, the first American tank

arrived.

Wiesel survived months of brutality that shattered his faith and hope. But these effects were not permanent. More than 50 years after his liberation Wiesel said this; "What about my faith in you, Master of the Universe? I now realize I never lost it, not even over there, during the darkest hours of my life." Wiesel lived until age 87, dying on July 2nd, 2016. His experience reflects others who have survived, losing faith in the moment but rediscovering it later on.

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