REFLECTIONS

Writing and Artwork by OWL's Class of 2027

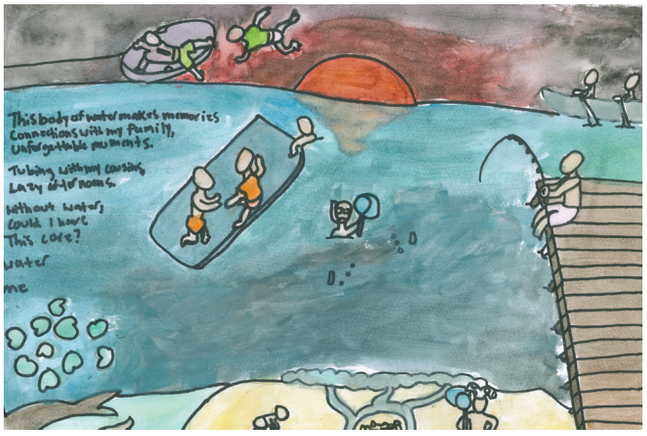




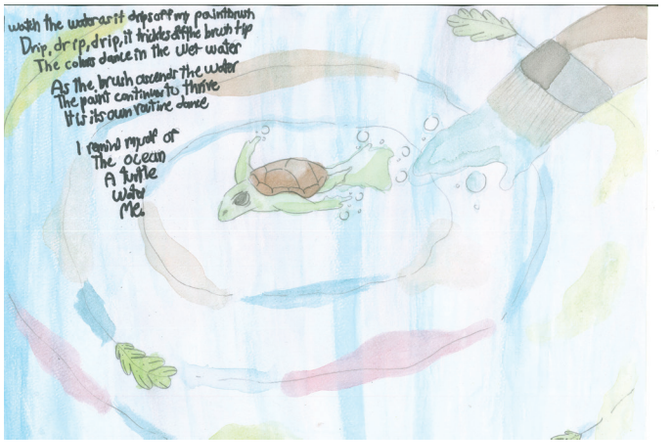
Connie Van Genderen



Ingrid Thune



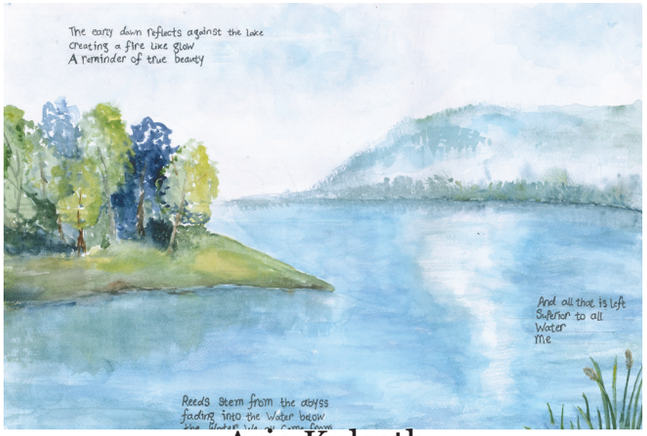
Luke Hobday



Remy Short



Neve Dawson



Aria Kulseth

Foreword

Leo Bickelhaupt

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

The Water, Me poems represent a collaboration across three classes. In science this spring, students spent some time studying the importance of water as a life source through the eyes of multiple cultures. They began with the Ojibwe text We Are Water Protectors, studied the impact of climate change on water as a resource in Minnesota, and brought in guest author Abdullahi Janna to talk about the importance of water from the Somali perspective. In social studies they studied global water shortages and how they affect people and culture. In English class, the students created shape poems that focus on why and how water is important.

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

I would like to thank my dedicated and talented publication team – Claire Ales, Connie Van Genderen, Anya Robertson, and Aria Kulseth – for devoting their interim to all the nuts and bolts of gathering material, assembling and editing student work, creating relevant artwork, and laying out the final product using InDesign. They worked very hard throughout the week and were especially committed to ensuring that as many students as possible were represented in this publication. Without their help, this publication would not be possible.

Leo Bickelhaupt
Open World Learning Community

Cover art by Aria Kulseth

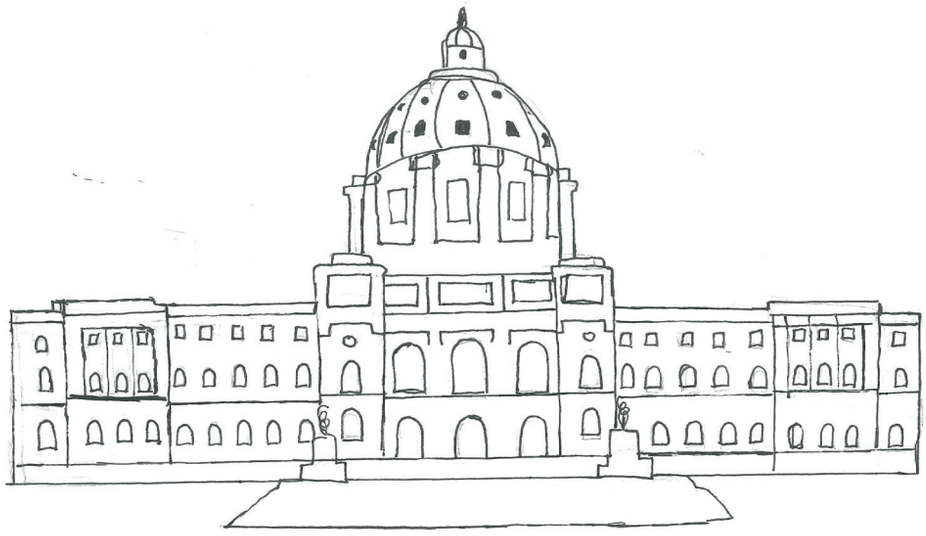
Reflections

An 8th grade collection of high quality work



2023 Senate Expedition ... 5-18
Memoirs ... 19-30
Water, Me Poems ... 31- 33
Alternate Narratives ... 34 - 43
Comic by Markus Leuer... 44-46

2023 Senate Expedition



The senate expedition is a very important part of algebra one. The goal of the project is to create high quality work and present to an authentic audience. Students form groups, select a topic, and present their findings to lawmakers at the capitol in the spring. Math teacher Tom Totushek has been overseeing the project since 2016, but has actually presented at the capital five times, and done the project six.

Groups are asked to analyze how well the budget of Minnesota matches its values. After picking a topic, the students are split into groups, gather data, collect it into a table, create a graph, and write paragraphs that describe their findings. The students can then figure out who their representatives are and send emails to connect with them about their visit to the capitol. Finally, they use the revision process to create a piece of high quality work.

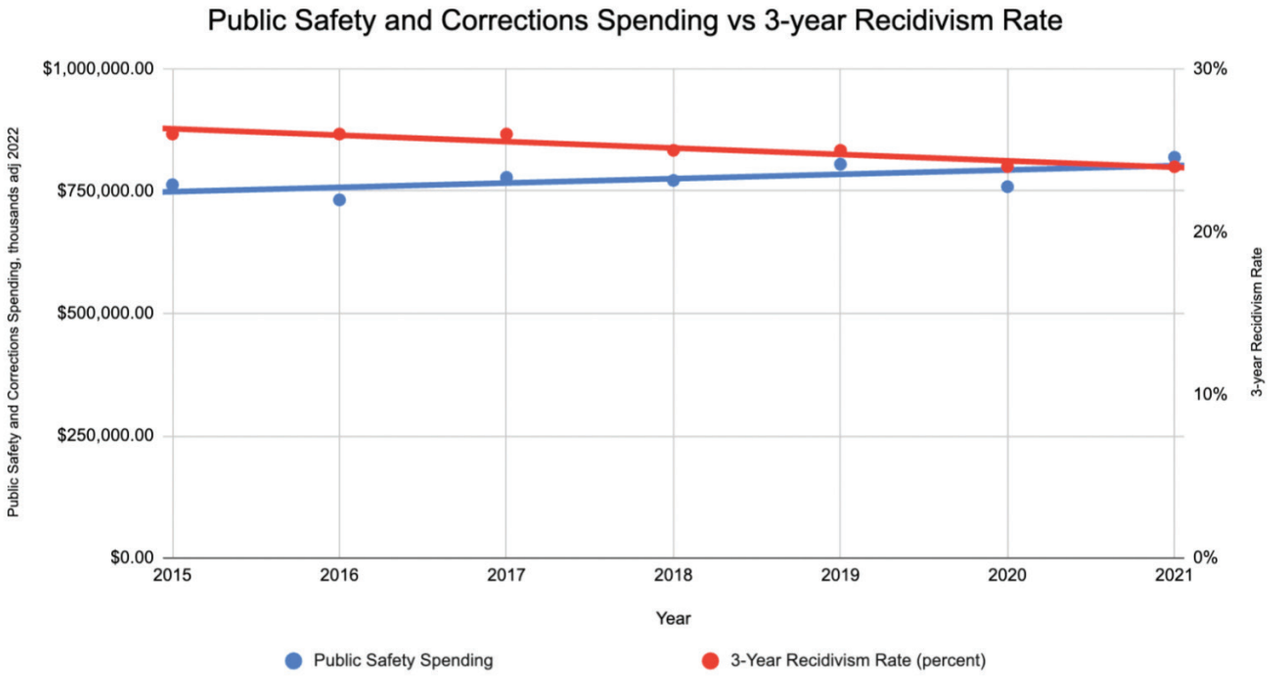
“Over the years, we have done this project several times and each time I have two favorite moments. The first moment is when I tell the students that we are presenting in the capitol to their policymakers and they think it is an insurmountable obstacle. The second time is when we finish at the capital and they realize that they have overcome an obstacle they previously thought was impossible.” Said Tom.

The students create graphs and choose their topic from the state spending on their chosen view and compare it to other data sets.They present in the rotunda at the capitol in front of their representatives for two hours in May. Their state, and district representatives are invited to visit, and parents are invited as well. The lawmakers will hopefully take the knowledge that they’ve gained from the students who presented their project, and find a way to use their information to better the state.

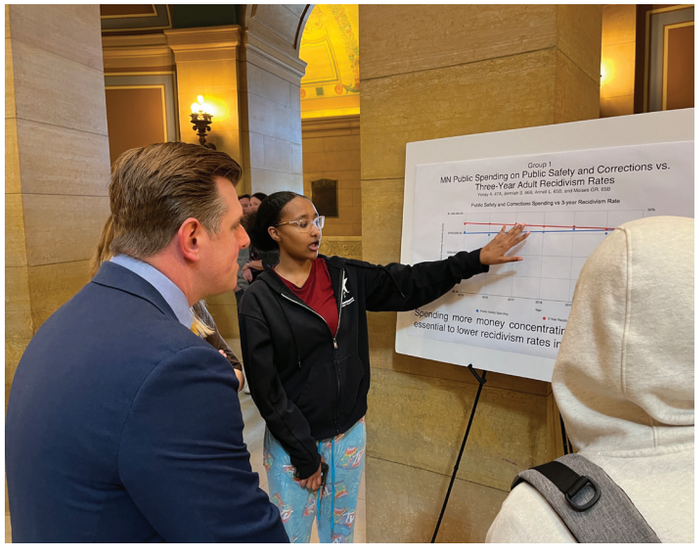
MN Public Spending on Public Safety and Corrections vs.

Three-Year Adult Recidivism Rates

Yenay A. 47A, Jermiah S. 66B, Anneli L. 65B, and Moises GR. 65B



Spending more money concentrating on public safety is essential to lower recidivism rates in Minnesota.



"It was a success. we had a lot of fun."
- Jermiah Streeter

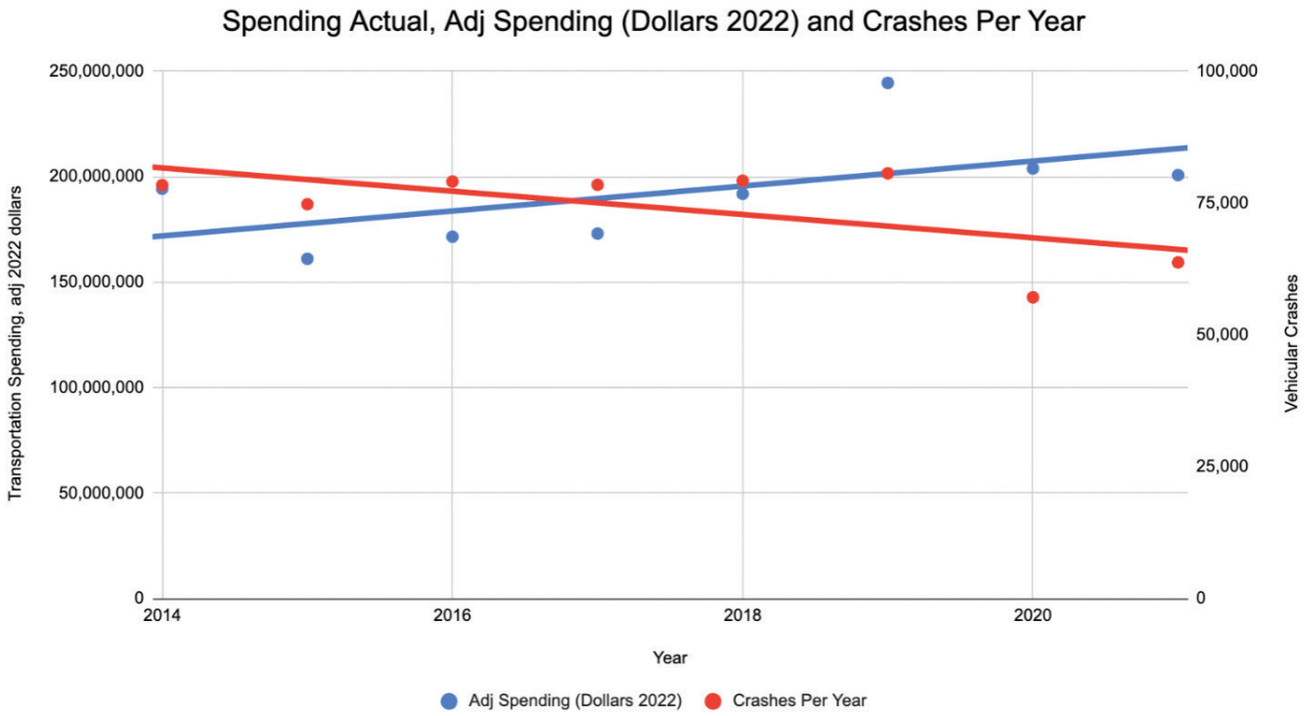
"We talked to a couple of important people, and I feel like our group did a good job at presenting our project to them."
-Anneli Lofgren

"We talked to some peoples parents and we presented to some senators."
-Moises Gadea Rodriguez

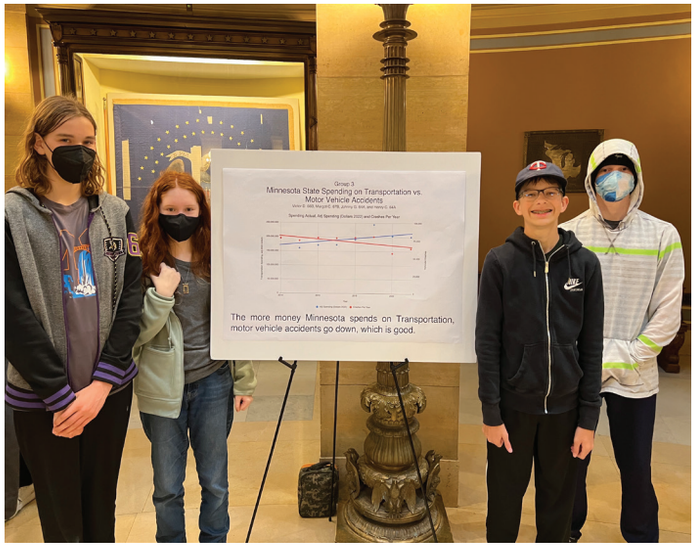
Minnesota State Spending on Transportation vs.

Motor Vehicle Accidents

Victor D. 66B, Margot C. 67B, Johnny G. 64A, and Henry C. 64A



The more money Minnesota spends on Transportation, motor vehicle accidents go down, which is good.

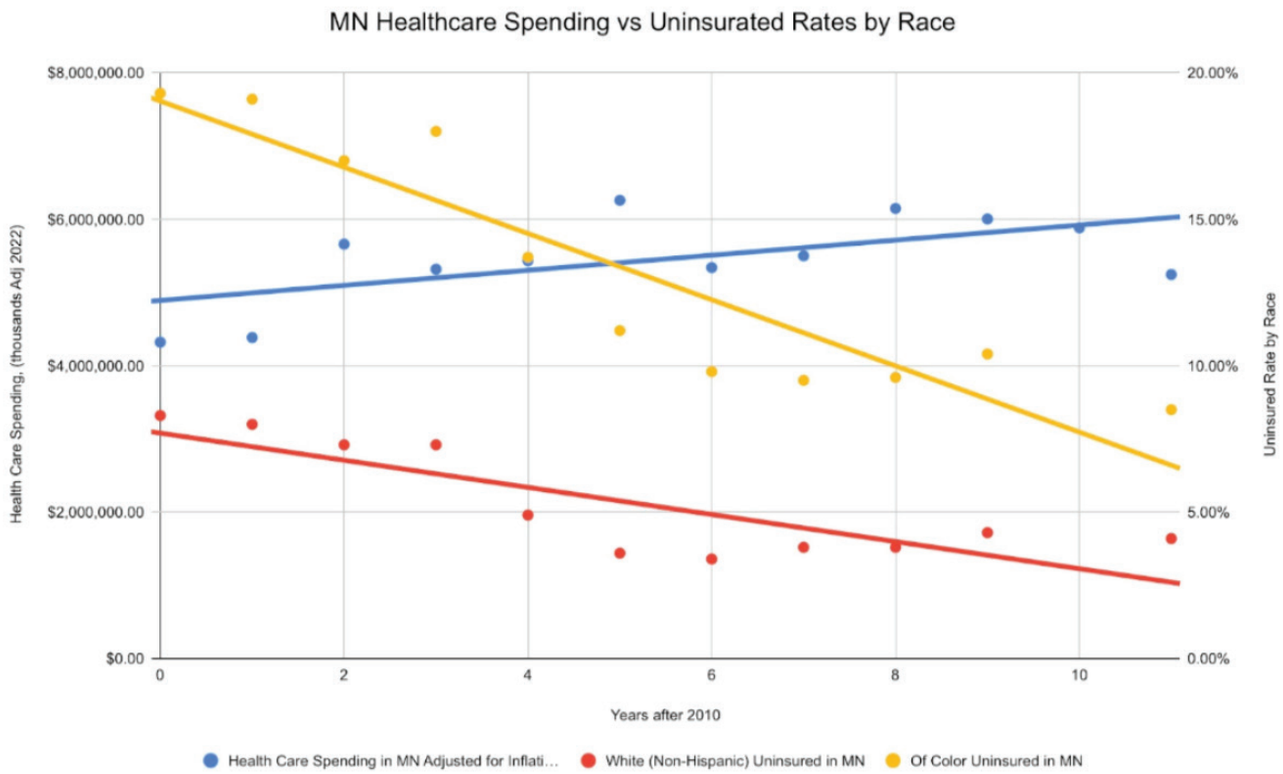


"Our topic was spending on transportation. We had a hard time talking with the senators, but since we prepared, it was easier."
-Johnny Gorton

"I suggest to be in a group with people that would work hard and you work well with."
- Margot Collette

Health Care Spending vs. Uninsurance Rates by Race

Neve D. 64B, Juliette L. 65B, Alva H. 66B, and Remy S. 60B



There's a gap between the rate of insuredness across races in Minnesota. Data shows that as healthcare spending increases, the gap will close.

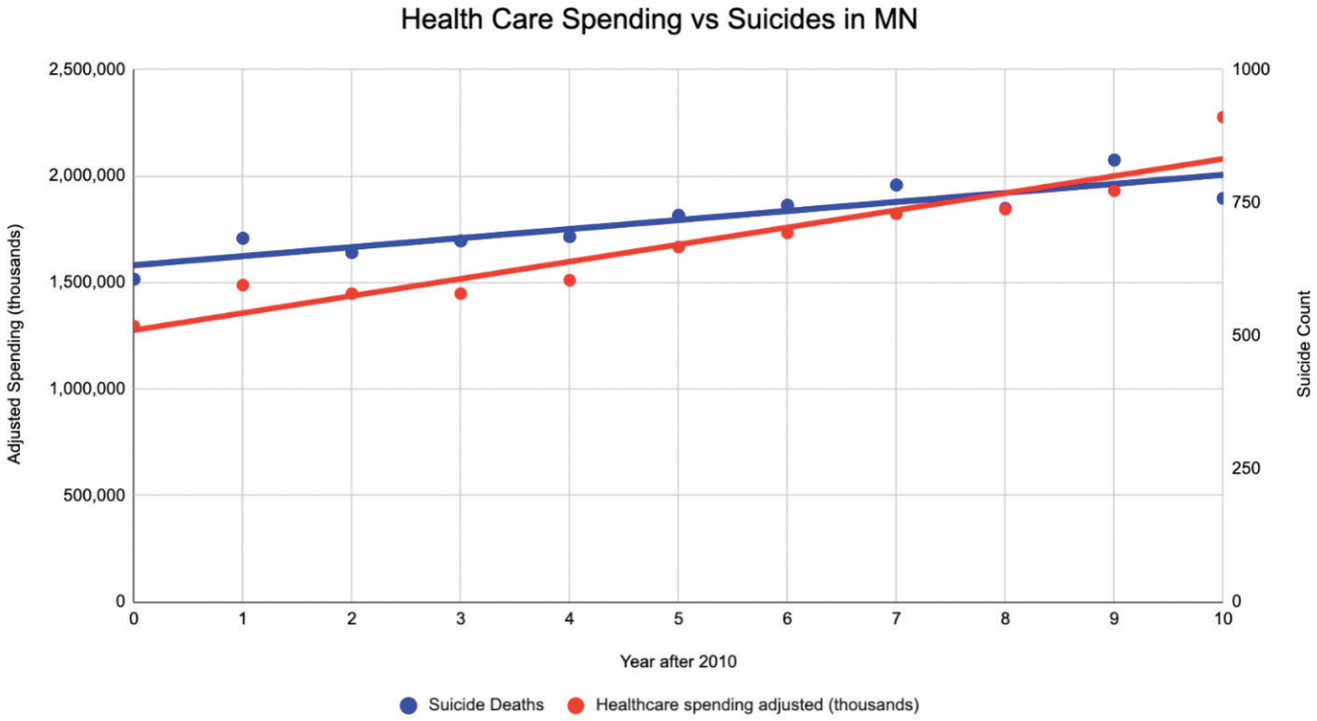


"I would tell someone who was doing this project next year too not rush and really consider the topic you are picking. We spent a long time choosing and deciding, and it payed off well."
- Alva Healy

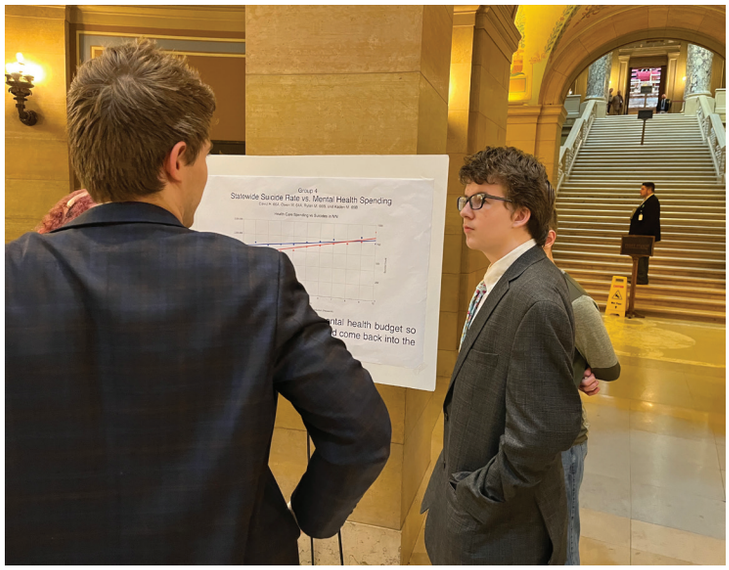
"I feel like it was successful. we shared information with numerous important poeple and we hope to see some change as a result."
-Remy Short

Statewide Suicide Rate vs. Mental Health Spending

David H. 66A, Owen M. 64A, Rylan M. 66B, and Kaden M. 65B



We need to continue raising the mental health budget so people can get the help they need and come back into the workforce.

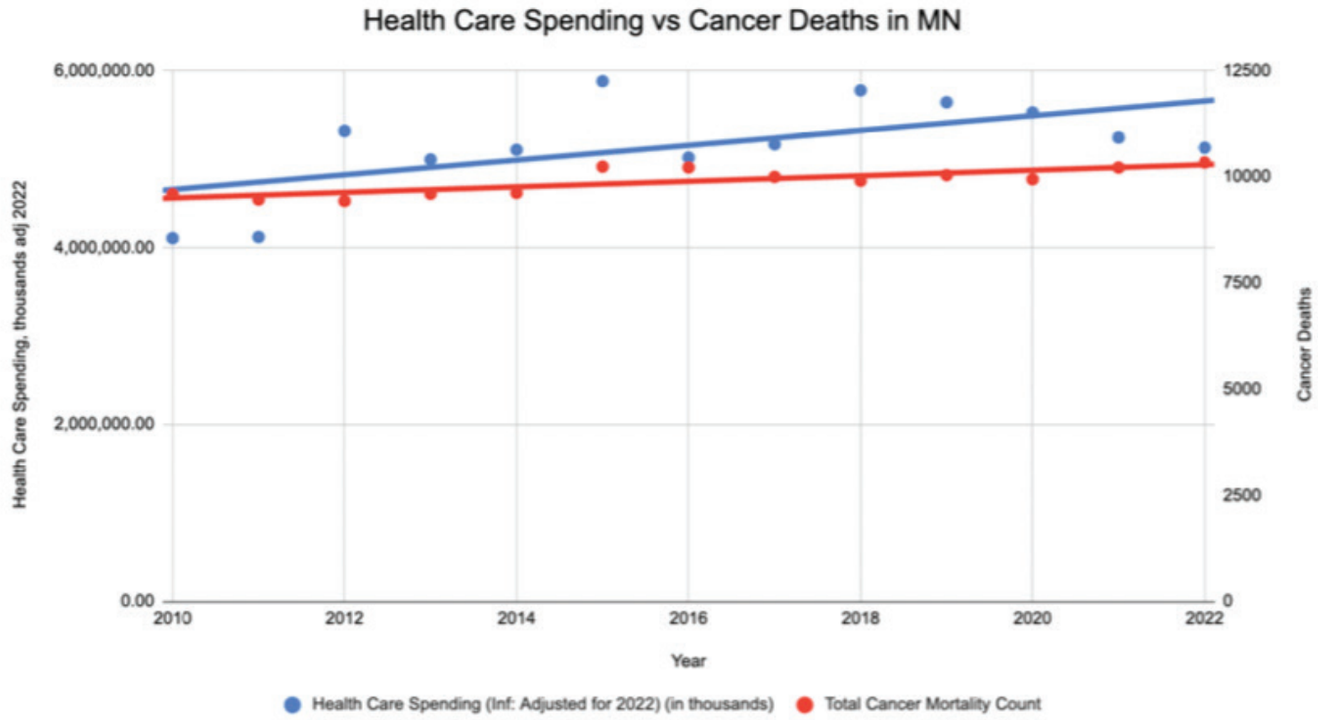


"I met the person in charge of mental health spending. He said our project was great and that we were smarter than he was when he was a kid."
-David Heil

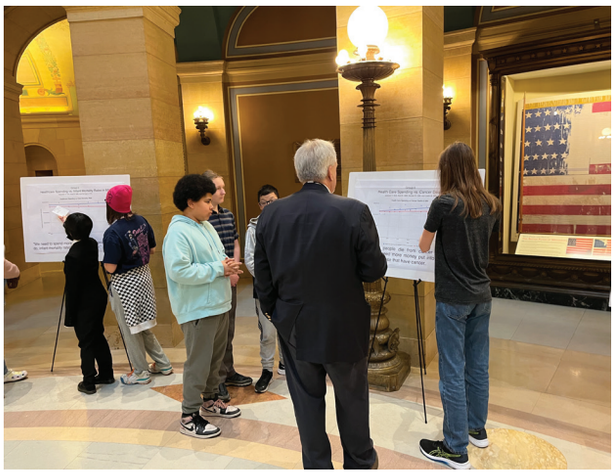
"Being able to present on something that is really dear to me to people who have the power to change stuff and have them take me seriously is incredible."
-Kaden McNamara

Health Care Spending vs. Cancer Deaths

Jackson V. 65A, Sam K. 66B, Xander G. 53B, and Justin B. 65A



Around 10,000 people die from cancer each year in Minnesota. We need more money put into research and medical care for those that have cancer.

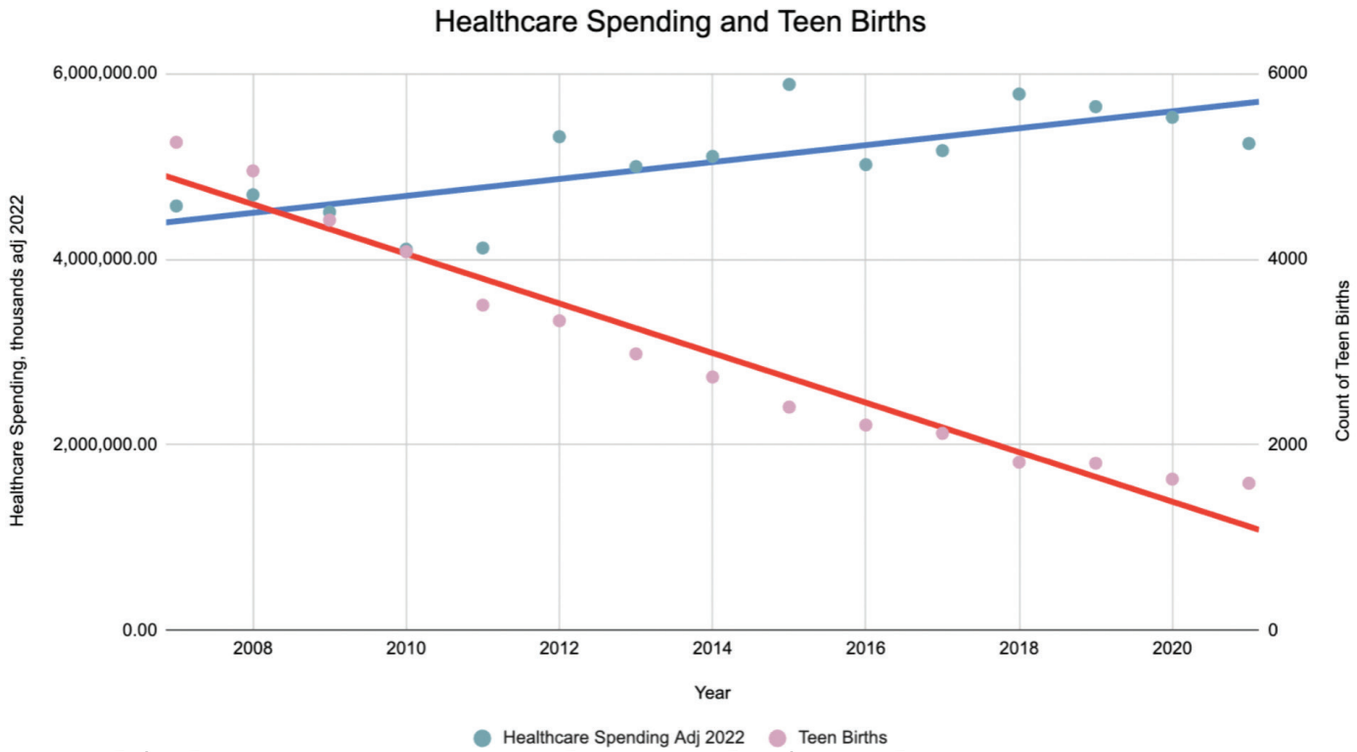


"You should understand your project and what your group opinion is, then youll be able to explain it better the others."
-Xander Gottfried

"I learned that researching a topic and talking to a representitive can really change something."
-Sam Koering

Healthcare Spending vs. Number of Births to Teen Mothers

WahWah S. 67A, Kmwee H. 65B, and Naw P. 66B



Lower birth rates to teen mothers make it so that young women have the best chances to have a good life.

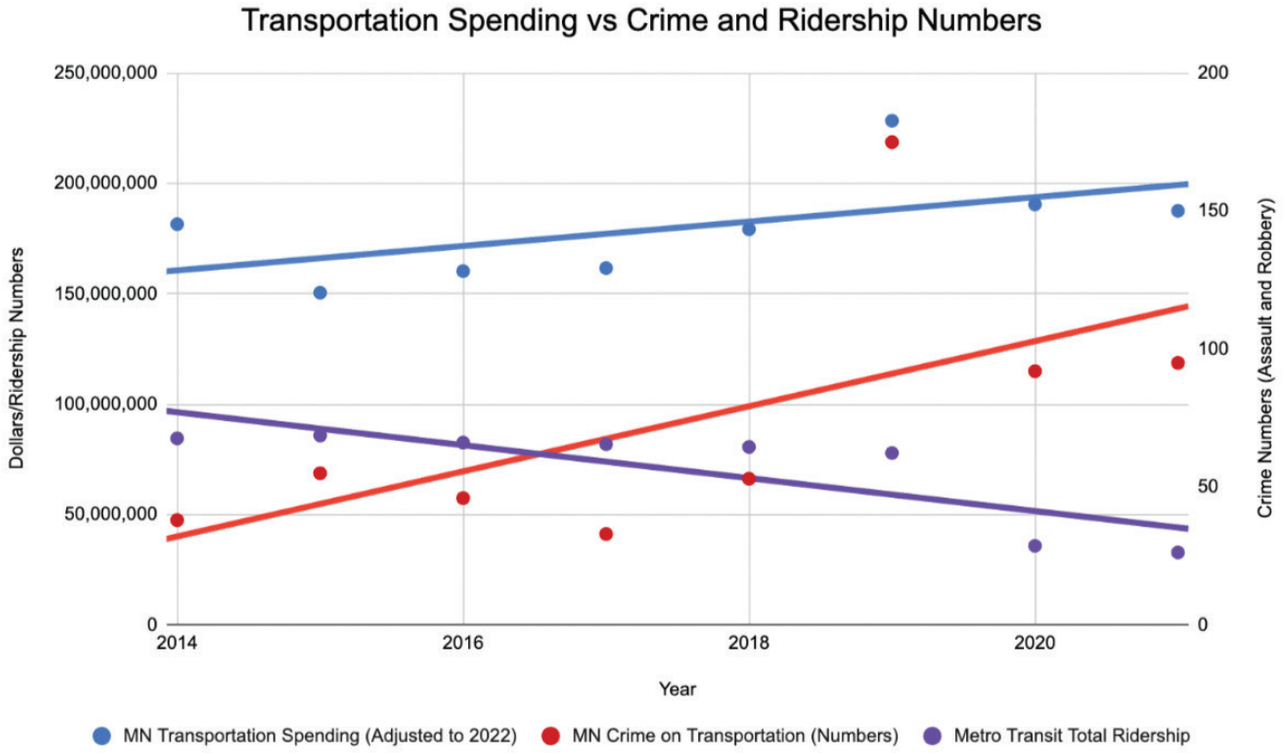


"It was okay, I enjoyed the experience."
- Naw Paw

MN State Spending on Transportation vs.

Crime on Public Transportation

Annabelle W. 65B, Constance VG. 65A, Emily T. 63A, and Ingrid T. 64B



By increasing spending on transportation, we will see a decline in crime numbers, and a larger amount of citizens riding public transportation.



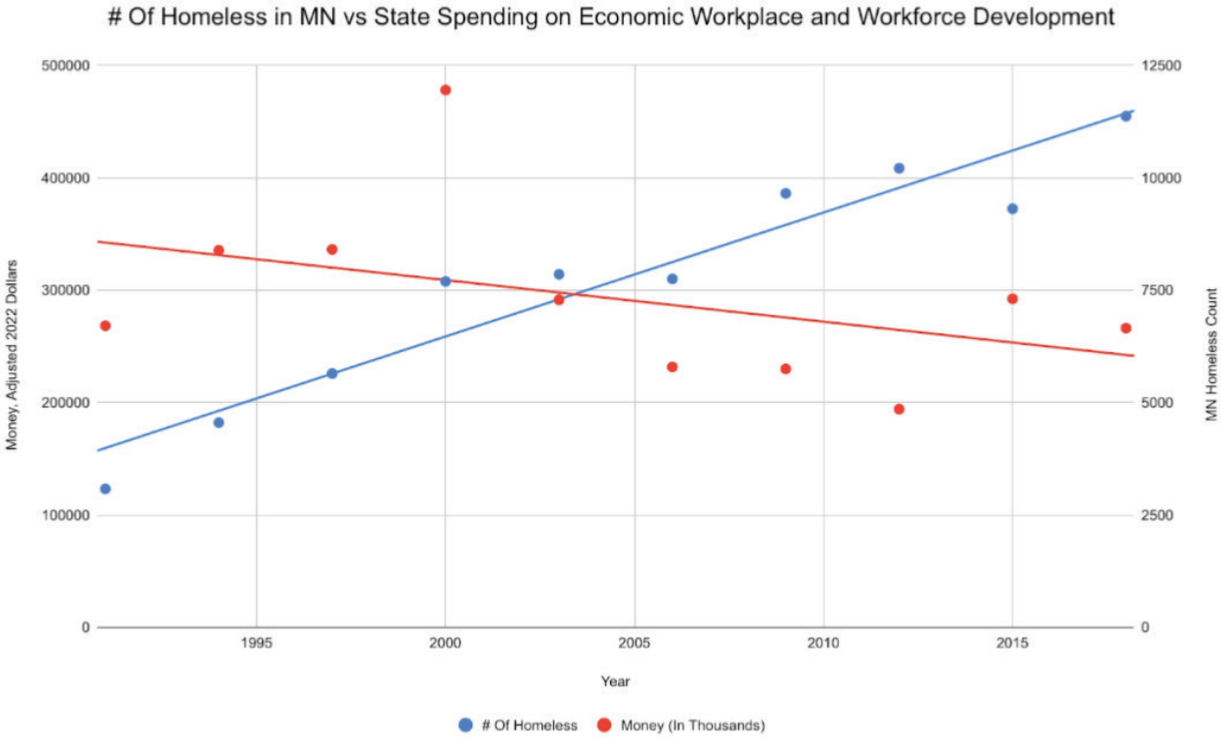
"We talked to some interns and other repersentitives at the capital, it was interesting to see these people in person and have an actual conversation with people who have some power to change."
-Connie Van Genderen

"When you go to the capital, try to talk to anyone that comes up. And talk a lot. Dont let them get away. Talk those people's ears off."
-Annabelle Wilson

Economic and Workforce Development Spending

vs. Homeless Count

Tait V.-N. 64A, Benji D. 67B, Joaquin P. 65B and Liam N. 64B



Our data shows that the more money put into economic workforce development the lower the homeless population will be in Minnesota.



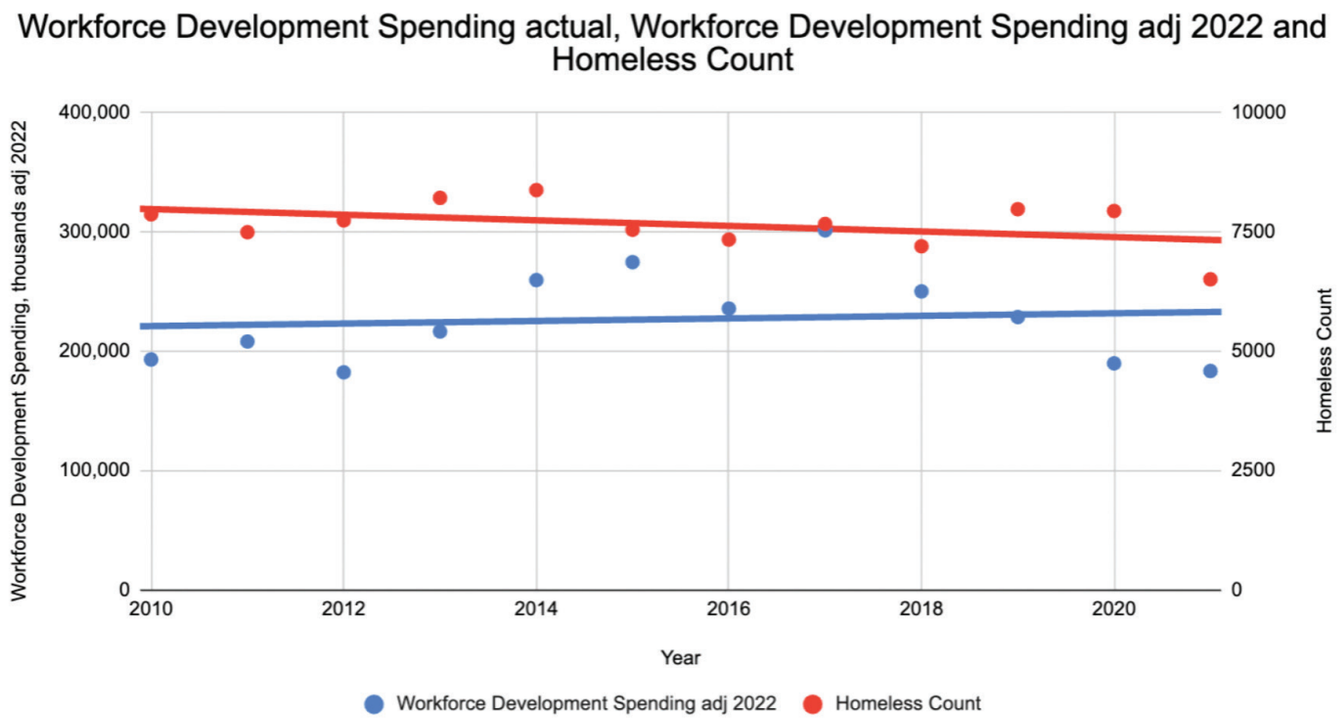
“As of right now the homeless population is rising. If we don’t do anything about it now it could become even worse than it is.”
-Joaquin Paez

"At first I was nervous, because I was talking to people with a lot of power. But once I started talking to people, it wasn't as scary as I thought it was going to be."
- Liam Nowatzki

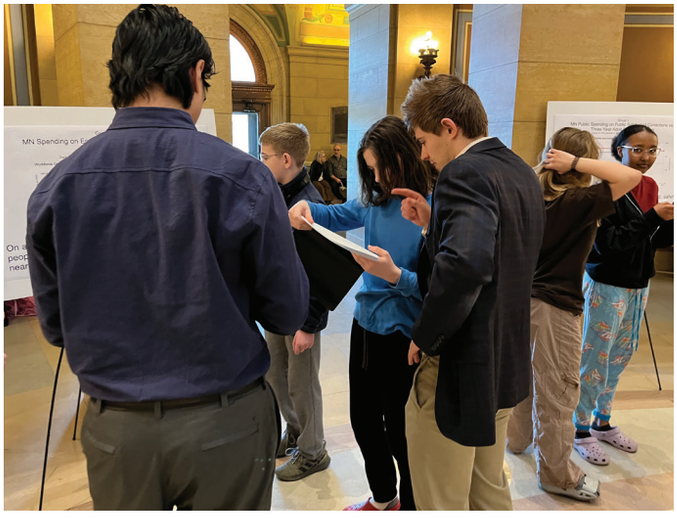
MN Spending on Economic Workforce Development

vs Homeless Count

Zack M. 66B, Beejan D. 64B, Rupert S. 64B, and Owen M. 63A



On any given night in Minnesota, the number of homeless people in Minnesota is estimated at 14,000 people, and nearly 40,000 people over the course of the year.



"I was happy to see our finished product."
-Beejan Daghigh

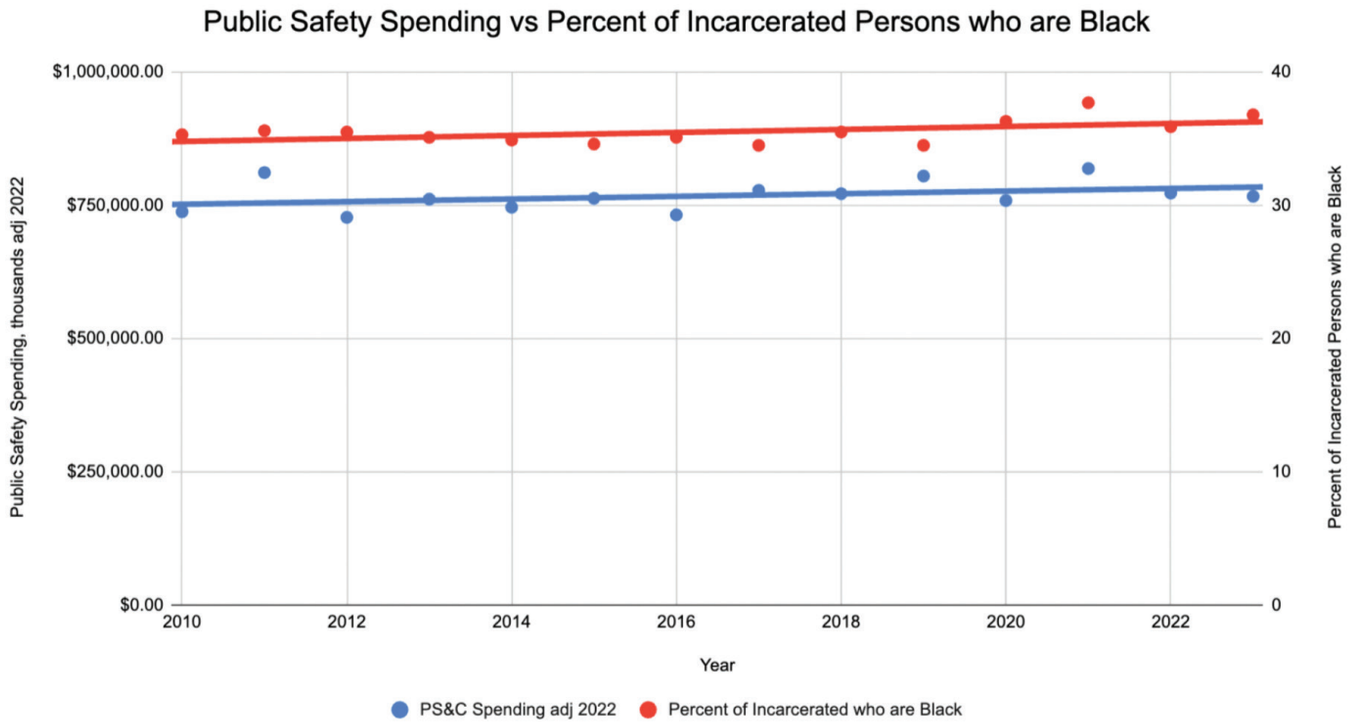
“I got to talk to all of my district representitives and gave a good speech.”
-Owen Mikesh

"There was a lot of standing. But I met a person who was in charge of housing spending for the state. He listened."
-Rupert Smith

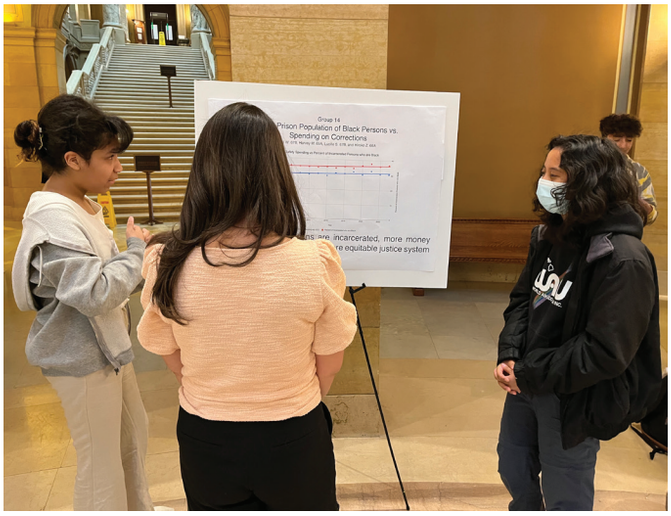
State Prison Population of Black Persons vs.

Spending on Corrections

RJ W. 67B, Harvey M. 65A, Lucy S. 67B, and Hiroko Z. 66A



Too many Black people are incarcerated, more money needs to be spent to create a more equitable justice system in Minnesota.

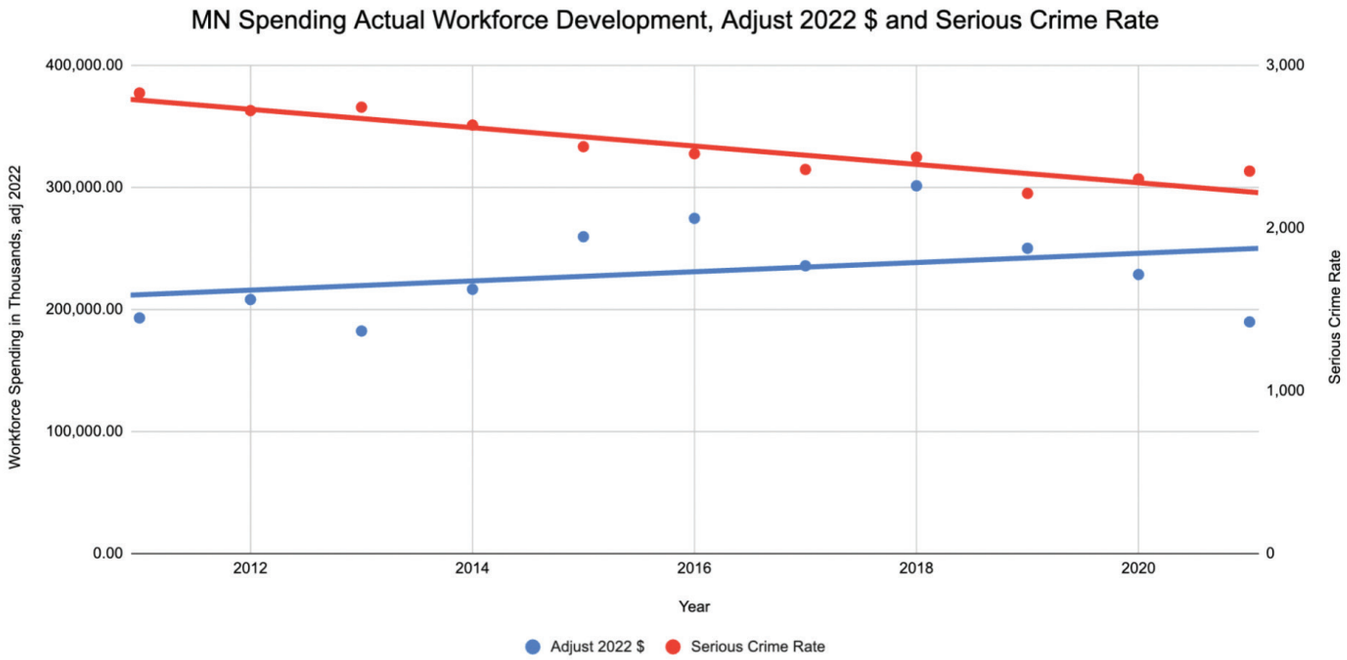


"Talking to important people was scary at first, but I got the hang of it."
- Lucy Sutton

"There was more public speaking and data than regular math. And more writing."
- Lucy Sutton

Crime Rates vs Spending on Economic and Workforce Development

Dylan B. 64B, Liam T. 66B, Ben H. 67A, and August S. 65A



Many criminals end up having a terrible life but sometimes Workforce Development can help them, so lets make these opportunities available for all.



"It was interesting talking to the representitives."
-Ben Her

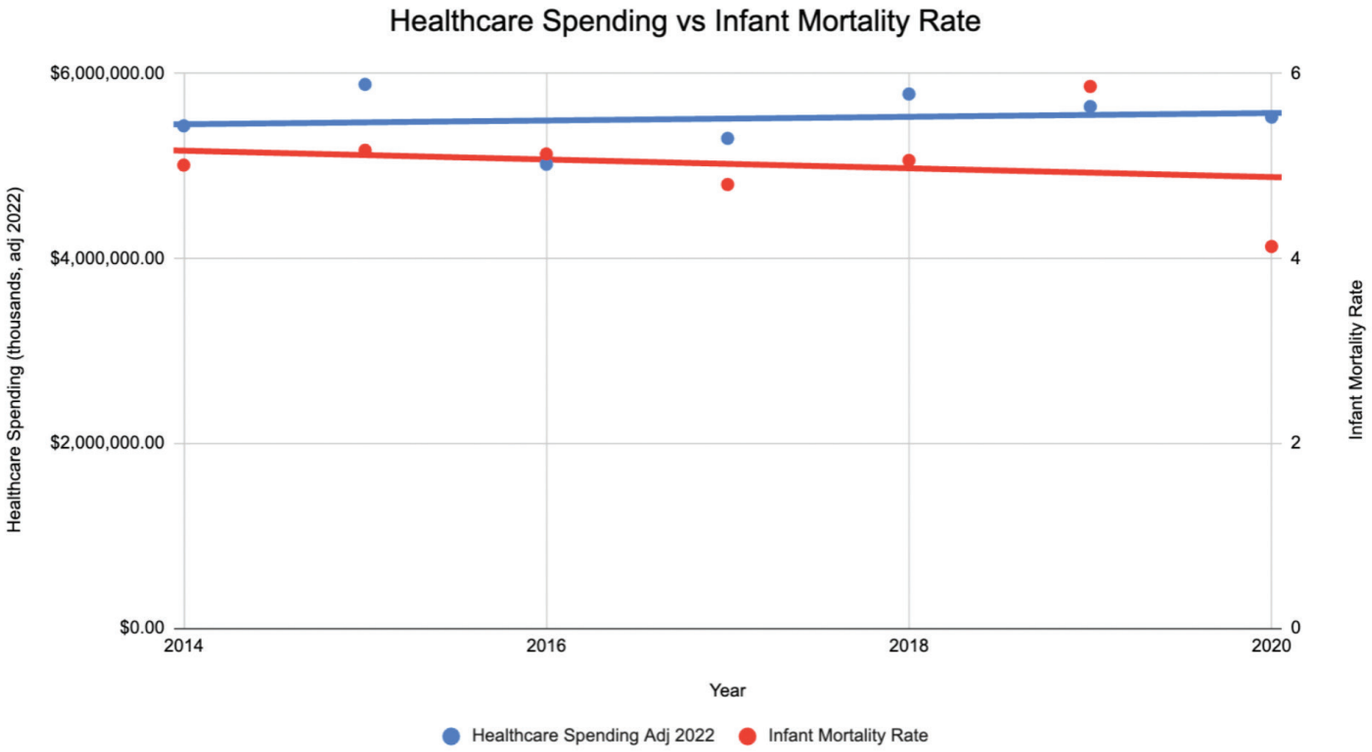
"We were doing more than math. We were trying to make a difference."
- Dylan Bickelhall

"It was cool to meet some of the speakers."
- Liam Tuma

"It was a great learning experience."
- August Seru

Healthcare Spending vs. Infant Mortality Rates in MN

Gwyneth H. 47A, Ariel O. 66B, and Ke'mya L. 67A



"We need to spend more on healthcare, because when we do, infant mortality rates steadily decrease."



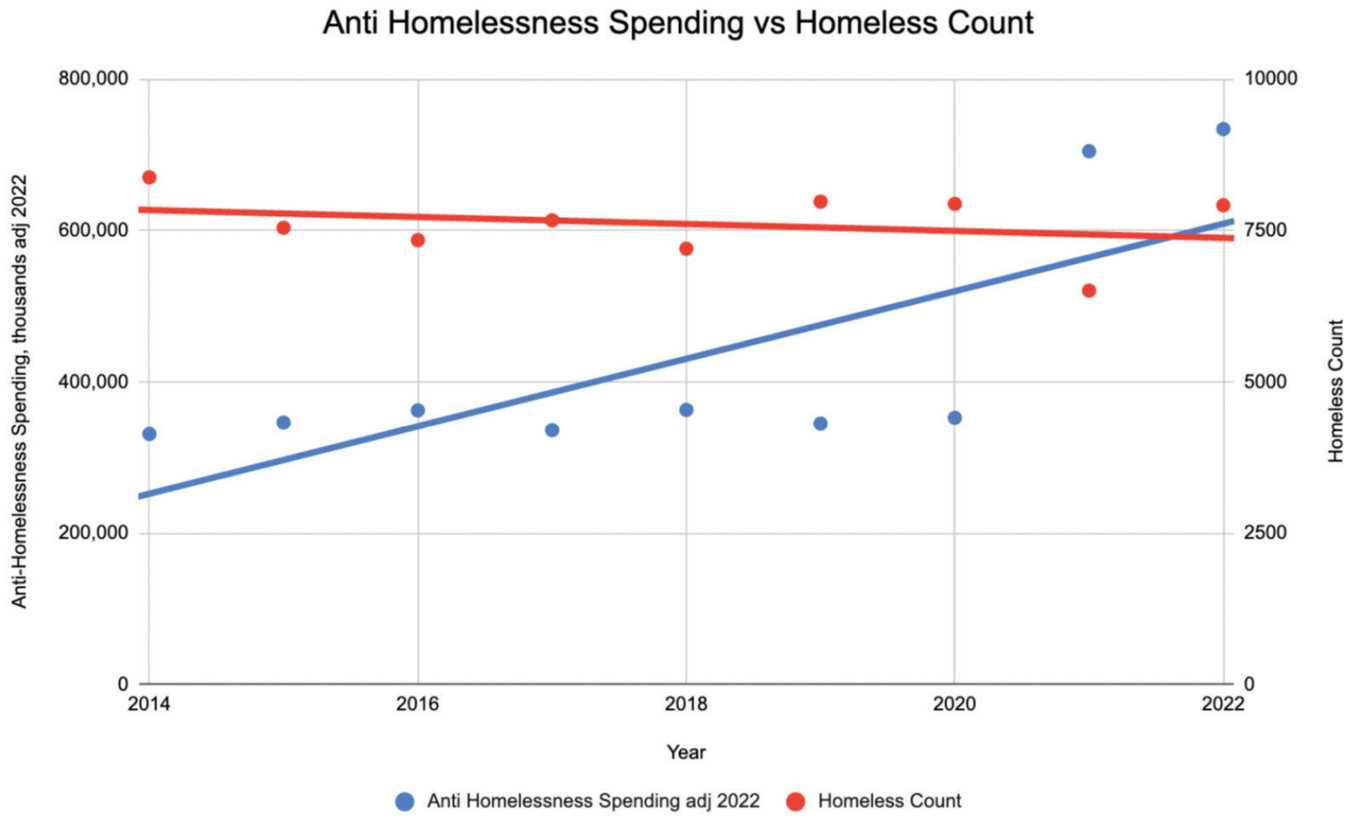
"I think it was a new experience that I liked, but it was a little nerve-wracking."
-Gwyneth Huett

"It was really fun to talk to all the people and see what they thought about the project."
-Ariel Olson

"It was nice to talk to people about the project."
- Ke'Maya Lewis

Number of Homeless Persons vs. Money Spent on Housing in Minnesota

Oskar S. 66B, Kyle P. 65A, Lucas R. 65B, and Nicholas V. 44B



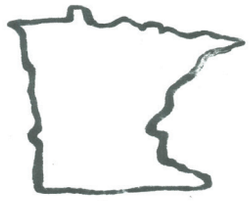
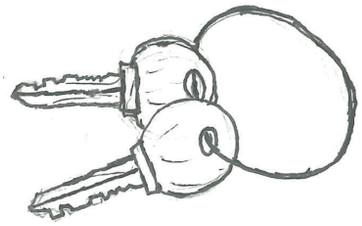
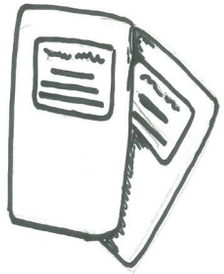
Homeless individuals are the forgotten members of our society, often overlooked and ignored, but deserving of compassion and support.



"It was fun to have a finished project."
-Oskar Swanson

"It helped bring topics into the light that needed to be talked about."
-Lucas Rounds

Memoirs

This year, 8th graders created memoirs about influential experiences in their lives. This assignment for 8th graders demonstrates their writing skills. It shows their storytelling ability and teaches them how to create a polished narrative.

They analyzed and practiced applying literary techniques that they had learned to help create a vivid picture. They had to use imagery to make the reader feel like they're in the story, internal monologue to capture emotions, and write the story in a polished manner including paragraph breaks and a variety of sentence structures.

Inspired by models of great writing, they could choose any experience or time period in their lives. People chose everything from kicking a fishing rod off a cliff to struggles with mental illness to school drama. This lets students reflect and speak on life events which shaped them into the person they are today. These are the best memoirs of this year's 8th grade class.

Table of Contents

Struggling to Read.....Adelaide McHattie.....20
Learning to Fight.....Neve Dawson.....21-22
An Icy Consequence.....Oscar Mons.....23
Fireworks Gone Wrong...Margot Collette.....23-24
Years in Leaves.....Collin Larson.....24
A Loss of Trust.....Aria Kulseth.....25
A Change in Perspective..Anneli Lofgren.....25-27
Forever Grateful.....Juniper Krings.....27-28
A New Life in Minnesota..Lucas Rounds.....28-29
The Key to Disaster.....Ian Myott.....30

Struggling to Read

Adelaide Mchattie

It all started when I was back in Kindergarten, when I began to realize that I may not be on track with my reading. See, at one time, I attended a private Catholic School in Saint Paul, St. Thomas Moore. The teachers never believed me when I was struggling with reading, that I really had a struggle, they always just thought that I was trying to get out of work. Sister Sarah would say, "You are not working hard enough and you are not trying." The nuns at the school would call you dumb a lot and there was a lot of bullying going on. Other kids would then pick on me and the teachers would threaten to hold me back, basically saying that I would never get out of kindergarten.

I only had one friend at the time, Asha. I met her on the first day of kindergarten. We became best friends because we both loved art. I would see Asha succeeding in classes and wondered why I couldn't. I wondered how something that was so hard for me, made so much sense to her.

I would go to church every week and just pray that I could succeed in school just like she did. But no one ever answered my prayers. I was desperate for success, so I started cheating. I got caught and soon, no one trusted me. No one would sit by me in any academic situation. And soon, they would not sit by me in any situation at all.

To tell the truth I was not used to it because I was the mean, popular girl in preschool. I started to get targeted by bullies. The person that would always make my life a living hell was Meave Juneous. She was short, pretty, and straight haired. She was everything that I wasn't. She would start saying mean things and spreading rumors about me. And they always believed her. Who would they trust? A cheater or a nice pretty girl. It was my word against hers.

It was a nightmare that felt like it was never going to end. When the school year was finally over, I felt free but I did not have any friends to hang out with over the summer. Summer was going to feel like a million years without someone to spend time with. In first grade, I started off thinking that somehow, in some magical way, I would be able to read. Like a fairy princess would come and wave her wand and I would be able to read like everyone else. But, nothing happened. The only thing that had changed was that Meave got meaner. She never pushed or hit. She would always say things in my ear when no one else could hear. I would get mad, and say mean things to her face. I got labeled as a bully. For the first month of school, I would try my hardest on the assignments, but no matter how hard I tried, I could never figure it out. By month two, I had just given up. What was the sense of it anyway? I was never going to learn how to read as well as everyone else. I did no reading, no writing. The only class that I would participate in was Art. It felt like the light at the end of the tunnel. But the tunnel was never ending.

I really started to notice I was different when I realized that Asha got to skip preschool and go right to kindergarten. I did not think much of the fact that Asha already knew how to read in preschool. I just thought that I would get it eventually. But the more other kids in my school started to pass me by, I started to wonder even more. Would I ever get to the point where I too could enjoy books the same way that others did? Would I ever make meaning out of those words and become a reader? The gap between me and everyone else just seemed to get bigger and bigger. But, I still thought my time would come. It is just going to take a little longer. I held onto hope.

But when I entered second grade, I noticed that everyone was able to read except for me. This is when it became more apparent that I was struggling with a lot of things academically. My mom took me to get tested to see if I had any learning difficulties like Autism, Dyslexia, etc. I took a lot of different tests to try to get at what the problem was. Lie 5 times worth. At that time, it was decided I had ADHD and Dyslexia. People started treating me differently.

Acting like I was below them and they would not make the effort to try to teach me anymore since I had a learning disability, it was too hard and it was out of the realm of possibilities. They set me up with a school tutor that was not trained in working with students with learning disabilities. She would bully us into pushing ourselves harder. She would yell until kids would cry.

As a result, I was the first student to be put in a Dyslexia program at the school. I was the reason the program was made. I think me being the first person made it nice for the other kids that came along after me because they did not have to be "first". I could do all of the heavy lifting to better be able to let the teachers learn how to work with students with Dyslexia. But what I learned was that everyone with Dyslexia is different and everyone that came to the school had a different struggle. It is up to the individual student to work hard and find out that they too will learn how to read. It is just going to take time.

"I would go to church every week and just pray that I could succeed in school just like she did"



Learning to Fight

Neve Dawson

You know, it's actually a bit hard being told you have a disease. There's something about the certainty with which they tell you that you have a condition, and it's not going to go away, that hits you hard.

Because few things in life are permanent, but a disease is one of them.

A disease will be your faithful and unwanted companion through your whole life, from contamination to cremation.

And it's not easy for someone as young as eleven, in the midst of a global pandemic, to take the news that for the rest of their life, they are going to be stuck with this little group of microorganisms that are causing so many problems in their life.

"I was holding back tears as it was explained to me that I would never truly be rid of Lyme Disease."

I know it wasn't easy for me. I was trying to hold back tears(successfully, actually, which I considered impressive, at the time) when I was told about Lyme Disease, and what it would mean for me. My throat was tight, my eyes trying to focus on one thing in the room and imagine it was the only thing in the world until the tears went away. That thing ended up being a woven design on the wall, made of a rough plant material I couldn't place, dyed lightly with warm colors and arranged in circular swirling patterns. I examined it as though my life depended on it. It didn't make the tears go away though. Or the reality of what was happening.

I went through most of the appointment like that. Holding back tears as it was explained to me that I would never truly be rid of Lyme. I could subdue it, but it would take some work. My knees could heal, but it would take time and effort.

But at the time, it felt impossible.

All my brain could process was that we couldn't really terminate it like most other viral infections.

By the time we left the office we had a plan in place, and I started to feel a bit better. I had a prescription for antibiotics.

I had a prescription for probiotics. I had two herbal tinctures in hand. I had a lime colored folder in the backseat with me, containing all of our notes on Lyme Disease(haha). I had a direction to a physical therapy rehabilitation center. I had a plan to visit the Lyme specialist every few weeks. I had a plan to visit a doctor every few months.

I looked out the window of the car and tried to forget it in the soft pastel orange and blue of the sunset over the city.

I had a smooth little green gemstone I had been given by the specialist clutched in my hands, and I was turning it over and over like it could fix everything. I didn't let go of it the entire ride.

The disease, properly named 'Borreliosis'(after the bacteria that causes the disease, Borrelia)—but nicknamed after the town it was identified in: Lyme, Connecticut—is transmitted via insects, usually ticks, commonly the deer tick.

Borrelia cells attack the joints: knees, elbows, shoulders, hips. This causes arthritis, crepitus(the cracking of joints, sometimes harmless, sometimes painful), and joint pain, but the disease causes more than that. Symptoms and side effects include fatigue, depression, headaches, fever, motion sickness, and chest pain, among others.

I had gotten a blood draw to test for Lymes just a week or two ago. It came back positive. My parents told me as soon as they got the email. I was a bit frightened, but not panicked. I could feel my pulse quickening regardless, though.

I asked if it was fatal.

No.

I asked if it was treatable.

Yes, technically.

I felt fine, albeit a bit wary, because that was enough for me. Until the appointment, when I was told that I would never technically be rid of it. But there are ways to subdue it, keep it dormant. One of those ways included physical therapy, for my injured knees. Attacked knees, rather.

They were inflated, with fluids and cells keeping it inflamed from the inside. I could barely bend them into a ninety degree angle without stabbing pain shooting up my leg, forget crouching, running, kneeling, anything.

My first physical therapy appointment, they asked a lot of questions. For the last part of it they measured exactly how far I could bend my knees, where my limits were, and my strength in other joints. They sent us home with recommendations to soothe the inflation by keeping it elevated above my head, keeping ice on it, and drinking fluids.

The next time we went in we did a few more physical exercises, trying to slowly push my limits and drive the fluid out of my knees.

This first came in the form of exercises like clamshells, squats, lunges, and trying to jump as far as I could with my feet planted next to each other.

We continued to practice these exercises, both at home and in the weekly appointments, adding increasingly more active activities to the appointments, occasionally checking in on how far my knees could bend without pain.

They improved, week by week.

After about two months I had significantly less pain in doing everyday things, but my balance was still majorly affected—something I could only heal over time, with practice.

I remember vividly the day when we went in, and after doing our exercises for the day, my physical therapist suggested doing some stretches. After trying one out that was too painful I started to do the next one, but my physical therapist stopped me and held me there.

I trusted them, so I didn't resist.

And then it got painful.

It started to hurt, sharply. I resisted out of instinct because it hurt, and it couldn't be good, right?

I started to strain with my reserves of adrenaline, but the fight soon left me as the pain became an almost overwhelming factor. I could barely focus on anything besides the stabbing sensation in my knee, and even though every

other part of me was fine, it felt like they were on fire.

And then something released and my therapist let go and I sank down onto my back, shielding my eyes from the bright light with my arm.

And I started to cry, quietly, not just from the pain.

I stayed like that for what felt like five minutes, letting the pain ebb from my knee, trying to compose myself(unsuccessfully), figure out why I was crying, and willing my voice not to falter.

They said I had had a release, which comes when some sort of barrier with your physical limits just gives way, and so many different signals from the brain are sent throughout your body along with varying kinds of chemicals, that it gets to be too overwhelming, at some point, so some of it has to be turned into tears of pure relief.

It sure felt like it.

But wow, did it hurt.

Physical therapy wasn't the only thing we had to do though, by far.

Every few months I would go into the doctor's office for checkups on how everything was going, and a couple times I got blood draws to check on my vitals and see if any active Borrelia cells were in my blood.

Bitter herbs, diluted with a small amount of water, were a routine twice-a-day requirement for me.

Natural herbs like Cat's Claw, Cordyceps, Licorice Root, and Eleuthero made up just one of the four different concoctions I had to down daily.

Many of the herbs had probiotic properties to strengthen and restore my bacterial immune system, and the others acted as soothers to my inflamed joints and kept the Borrelia cells cornered for the antibiotics to attack.

I was taking, at differing points, several antibiotic pills a day.

In the morning, one antibiotic, one probiotic, one that acted as sort of both, and an herbal tincture. In the afternoon, another probiotic. In the evening, the same three pills as in the morning as well as more herbs.

Antibiotics act as a sort of weapon of mass destruction, on a bacterial level. They destroy any cells they can, weakening and destroying the bacterial systems they get into. Probiotics act as a countermeasure to that, each pill containing bacteria to keep my gut and immune system healthy enough to not get sick every two weeks, while still allowing the antibiotics to do their job of attacking the Borrelia cells. That was the most intense it got, but there were also periods of time where I was taking less per day.

Still, all in all, I was in active treatment for nine months.

Lyme is a tricky disease to fight.

This is partially due to the fact that it can change its shape to avoid detection by white blood cells.

When a Borrelia cell is faced with a white blood cell about to detect it as an infectious cell and attack it, it will change its form from a suspicious, infectious cell, to a spiral-like shape to trick the immune system into thinking it's an innocuous cell.

It will then slip into the bloodstream and travel to a different part of the body.

When something does eventually detect a cell and attack it or a group of cells(like antibiotics), the remaining cells will clump together and form a shield, of sorts, out of dead cells and fluids.

This results in a long term stall-out with the cluster while the antibiotics slowly thin out the shield and start to subdue the Borrelia cells into dormancy.

Because of their slippery nature, getting correctly diagnosed with Lyme is a battle of its own.

I remember hearing after the fact how lucky I was that my test came back accurate, but never truly processing exactly how lucky until I heard the numbers.

Once you take a blood draw to test for Lyme, it has to go through two tests: one to initially check, the second to confirm if the first comes back positive. Both tests have the chances against them that they will successfully detect the disease, even if it is there.

According to the CDC, there are approximately 30,000 diagnosed cases of Lyme Disease in the US, out of almost 332 million people in the country. But since the majority of Lyme cases go undiagnosed, the CDC estimates that the number, in actuality, is closer to 500,000.

Patients often experience symptoms of pain or fatigue for at least six months before getting diagnosed.

People can live for years with Lyme disease without knowing it, due to the cells lying dormant.

I'm lucky I wasn't one of those people.

I got the help and support I needed, and I got it earlier than a lot of people.

And so, after nine months, I was officially discharged from treatment.

I remember being handed the official discharge papers in that last meeting with my Lyme specialist.

The paper was simply phrased, blatant and powerful.

It announced that I was to be officially discharged from active treatment of Borreliosis.

I glanced at the hung weaving I had stared at so intensely months before and smiled to myself as my parents shook hands with my specialist.

Light bathed it as the sun hung low in the sky, still burning bright, lighting up its vibrant colors to match those of a sunset.

I walked out of that office with the newest chapter of my life closed, but never gone, and never forgotten(my body wouldn't really let me even if I tried, anyway, given my knees crack every time they bend too far).

So maybe it's not easy being told you have a disease.

Maybe it's not easy fighting it, either.

"I walked out of that office with the newest chapter of my life closed, but never gone, and never forgotten(my body wouldn't really let me even if I tried, anyway, given my knees crack every time they bend too far)."

No one said it would be.
But maybe it's good to learn to fight.

An Icy Consequence

Oscar Mons

During my childhood I hung out with most of my friends after school. Most of these people were about my age and interested in the same things. Most were boys but not all, and some 5th graders, who because we were in 3rd grade revered as gods.

All through elementary school we played a game called 'crystals' during the winter as soon as we were let out for recess or anytime we could after school we would assemble and go outside to collect as many ice balls as we could find, we would pick up the firmest snow and pack it down then leave it to freeze over and become ice, then retrieve then the next day the soft snow would get wickedly hard and compact enough you could smash it against the ground and it wouldn't break.

Then we would build a fortress of sticky snow the kind you could combine and stick together with ease. The ice balls or (crystals) would be divided up between the two or sometimes three groups and then we would begin. The point was to run across the field to the other team's fortress and grab their 'crystals' without getting tagged and run back to your base. Snow balls could be thrown to tag someone or you could touch them with your hands or a stick.

Although it may seem like a simple or uncomplicated game and an easy one, it required intense strategy and focus. Several strategies were what we called 'the rush' when almost everyone on a person's team would rush over the defenses and fan out and run at the other teams fortress and overwhelm them so we could divide their attention enough to distract them and sneak someone past their defenses to steal a couple of ice balls.

The reason we liked the game so much was the feeling of victory that came with leaping over the snow walls of the enemy base and grabbing their crystals then evading them on a victory run back to your own base, your teammates cheering you on all the while. That was the feeling we loved and longed for.

Once in recess when we were in the middle of an intense game, my team had succeeded in grabbing a handful of the enemy's crystals and had returned them to our base. It was the final 5 minutes of recess and the snow laden battlefield was packed with kids preparing for a last minute surge. We had 18 while they had 12 (total of 30) when we were approached by a teacher. Immediately we dropped our snow ball ammunition and put down our sticks. Our thoughts were: "What did we do this time?" Or "Who got in trouble?" But what happened next was worse than we could have ever imagined. When she approached we could tell that she was not happy. We all grimaced "this can't be good." I thought, already running through the various possibilities that could make her angry.

As she approaches I make out her clear red scarf through the falling snow wrapped so tightly around her neck you think it was a noose, I groan internally. Just great it's Mrs. Tranovski the 3rd grade teacher and notorious for her strict teaching and even stricter recess rules. Technically speaking she isn't supposed to concern herself with 4th graders like us but she's a teacher and ironic as it is, they tend to follow the least rules and enforce as much as possible.

"What are you doing?" She asks walking up to stand in front of us, adjusting her already strangling scarf.

"Playing a game." My friend murmurs softly, looking at the ground not willing to meet her eyes which rove over us like searchlights.

"You are all playing too rough!" She reprimands us sternly "

If I catch you playing that violent game again, you'll all be sent to the principal's office!" That shut us up real good. Although we all enjoyed bending the rules every so often, none of us truly wanted to face the consequences of our actions. We all waited for her to leave and even after she was gone we were confused of what to do or what just happened but one thing was certain we didn't go back to our game that recess, our the next and the next and so forth.

We all lost a bit of our childhood then, our lives became a bit more boring and less imaginative. Although not all of us registered it, we became a little bit older and that moment marked the first of many events that ended our childhood as we knew it.

Fireworks Gone Wrong

Margot Collette

We walk into the house, all four of us, but my dad is the only person that wants to be there. I'm nervous, because there are a lot of people there, and I don't know them well, even though they're family. It's the third of July, we're at a family gathering, and there are going to be fireworks.

We walk through the empty house, and get to the back doors. On the porch, I see lots of tables out, with trays of food set out for people. As we pass by them I look at all the food, and notice a tray of brownies that look really good.

We get outside and there are a lot of people there, I don't even know half of their names. My parents go to talk to people that I don't want to talk to, so I wander around. I don't really know or like anyone here, and I don't know why my dad made us all go, because me, my brother, and my mom, don't know or care about the people here. I don't really do much for a few hours, but I find myself playing a game of giant Jenga with my mom and another girl, a little bit younger than me, I don't know her name. Me and my mom find my little brother, Lukas, and get some food. I still haven't seen my dad.

When it gets dark, we find my dad, and he breaks a green glow stick, and puts the green glowing liquid on a tennis ball, turning it yellow, with glowing green splotches, and we play catch.

A couple hours later, all the people gather in the yard and get ready for the fireworks. There are maybe 50-100 people. A few people go out and light the fireworks. Lukas, my mom, my uncle, Zack, and I. Zack is maybe around seven, I sit on a blanket, and Zack is sitting on my moms lap. The people

ran back, and we were all waiting for the fireworks to start.

They did. It was really loud, and bright. The fireworks didn't shoot up, like they were supposed to. The stand fell over, so they shot out at us even though it's late, we can still see the whole yard, and I look up at the trees, they look strange. Everything looks different, it's all orange, or green, or purple, whatever color the firework is. Me and Lukas ran toward the house, and my mom picked up Zack, and ran with us. People were screaming and yelling, everybody was running. We all gathered by the porch, and waited for it to end. Lukas was crying, and I was really confused, and scared.

A few people went out to make sure it was over, my dad went, and I wanted to go with. It turns out, they had used cheap pipes to make the stand, and that's why it fell over. They made sure that the stands were really sturdy from then on, but we didn't go there again. Lukas now hates all fireworks, and I'm really nervous around them.

Years in Leaves

Collin Larson

I have walked this earth for 13 years and throughout that time, I have always felt a deep level of respect for the wonders of our world. That respect manifests itself in a strong connection with nature that I feel whenever I am alone in the wilderness.

"I have often marveled at the strength of these veins, at how something so minuscule can hold a hand-sized leaf in one piece."

Over the years, I have felt that connection in forests, rivers, prairies, mountains, the ocean, and even my own yard. When I am in my house, reflecting on my life as I am now, I remember certain moments when my connection to the natural world felt the strongest. The warmth in the bark of a tree, the crashing of the ocean's waves, the beauty of the sun above the clouds. The strength in the veins of a leaf. I have often held a soft, green leaf, freshly fallen to the earth below, and turned it in my fingers so that the sun's light shines through it. The light illuminates every tiny, needle-thin vein in the leaf, a complex network of branches that holds this frail, exposed fan together. I have often marveled at the strength of these veins, at how something so minuscule can hold a hand-sized leaf in one piece.

Three trees grow along the border of my yard. They are short, round trees with bumpy, gray bark; small, green leaves; and knotted, mossy trunks. I see the veins of a leaf reflected in these trees, reflected in their roots and branches, in a universal symbol of strength and unity. They empower me as well, giving me stability, purpose, and belief, and rooting me to a strong, unyielding holdfast in an otherwise stormy and uncertain world. The trees have been growing in my yard for as long as I can remember. Their lives began long before I was born, and will end long before I die. All three trees were planted years before I moved here as a two-year-old and have always been a fact of life for me. Throughout the 11 years that I have lived in this house, they have been there. At times, I ask myself, What would I have done without the trees? If they hadn't been there, what would I have done? I've climbed into their branches, played around their roots, and everything in between. My siblings and I have always used the trees for our games, hiding behind them, running around them, and building under them. The greatest thing I've ever done with those trees, though, is climb them. Hands reaching for the branch above me, gripping the smooth, warm, gray bark, feeling the many tiny bumps under my fingers. Feet searching for a groove, bump, anything that would serve to hold me up. Where will I sit now? The large branch, or the smaller two? I hoist myself into the crook of two branches, lying back, muscles relaxing, as I hear the wind in the leaves, feel the gentle motion of the branches, watch the clouds scud across the sky slowly, lazily.

My eyes methodically travel around the yard, over the birds chirping in a tree, before tracing the path of a squirrel into the street, leaping the fence of my neighbor's house, and landing on a tree in their yard. Is this what it's like to be a leaf? I wonder. Is this what it's like to be part of a tree? I have repeated this process many times in my life, in every season of the year, and have grown used to the ridges and contours of the trees. My hands know the branches that will hold my weight, my feet know the knots that will lift me up, and my eyes know the gaps in the leaves where the sun shines through.

I have learned the ways of the trees just as I have learned how to walk, how to jump, how to climb, and when I call out to them, they respond. The strength in the veins of a leaf. That strength is the force that holds the leaf in one piece, that stops it from collapsing on itself, that allows it to nourish the tree that it is a part of. I see the veins of a leaf reflected in this Earth, this unique, beautiful planet that nurtures us, that we have failed over and over again.

The Earth is the leaf, and we are its veins. It is our duty to hold it in one piece, to stop it from collapsing on itself, to allow it to nourish the universe that it is a part of. By using its resources until they can be used no longer, by killing its children until only we are left, and by warping its surface until life itself cannot continue, we are not fulfilling our duty. We are neglecting it, and by neglecting it we are neglecting ourselves, our children, and our children's children.

It is time to stop this, to turn the tide, to change our actions. We cannot change the past, but we can change the future. The date is today, the time is now, and the place is here. A leaf's veins are all interconnected, and only by acting as one can they hold it together. The past 11 years have made this clear to me in more ways than one and greatly shaped my worldview as a young person in Minnesota. In the veins of a leaf, I've found that if we only dare to take a closer look, we find that the world has so much more to it than we ever thought it had.

A Loss of Trust

Aria Kulseth

I was 11 when the 2020 pandemic hit. School was canceled, and everything shut down. I was going to graduate from 5th grade that year and all I kept thinking was will we be able to have a graduation? Would I be able to say goodbye to my friends?

I would still play with my best friend MJ, who lived across the alley from me, but we could only play outside. That was fine with me though, we'd been best friends since we were three, so surely we'd be able to find something to pass the time.

We played school in my garage with her siblings, we used my collection of old wooden antique desks I had from when I had wanted to be a teacher. We spent many long summers in that garage playing school, But this time she seemed off. When I would teach she sat there worried. I asked what's wrong, but instead of answering she said " I'm going to ride my bike around the block". She got up and left in a hurry and I went on teaching.

The next day she told me she didn't want to hangout because of the pandemic. I understood , because I was also getting worried. But we decided that riding our bikes was fine so we continued to do that.

One day I was riding by her house and I saw her sitting less than a foot away from another neighborhood friend. My blood boiled as I rode by, why would she lie to me? Because covid clearly wasn't the reason that she didn't want to be around me. I went home and the next day we decided to ride around the block again.

We went with her younger siblings Greta and Teddy. Throughout the whole ride she kept yelling at them to not get too close to me when they were already 10ft away. I was agitated and told her that she needs to chill out and she told me that I needed to be more safe. At that point I lost it and yelled at her that she was the unsafe one and a liar. I told her that I saw her sitting next to Lucy. MJ was furious and she sped away on her bike.

She stopped talking to me for a while after that. Those next few weeks I still didn't know what I had done to make her not want to see me. I spent a lot of time crafting miniature houses in my basement. I still rode my bike around my neighborhood, and made sure to especially ride past her house, just in case she was sitting by her window, so she saw the friend she had deserted. I would see her hanging out with Lucy a lot. This one time in particular, as I rode by she looked at me with a huge smirk on her face, then went back to talking with Lucy. I felt so deserted, how could my best friend since we were four, stab me in the back, then get joy out of seeing me alone.

At that point I pretty much decided that I should be done being friends with her, at least for now. I started to spend all my spare time in my basement, crafting miniatures and playing with my cat. I got really engrossed in building these tiny, perfect, models of houses. But as you would expect, it's hard to cut ties with someone who lives right across the alley from you. I loved building these miniatures, but I missed my best friend. All though I hated her and wanted her to feel so guilty for leaving me. I still knew that wouldn't solve anything, and I probably wouldn't feel much better in the end. So I wrote her a letter, that letter contained an apology. Then I made sure to drop it into her mailbox when she wasn't home. After writing that letter I felt awful. How could I show her that I'm weak? I gave her exactly what she wanted.

A few days later, there was a knock on my back door, just like the old times. I ran down the stairs and was met with her face peering in through my kitchen door. I stood there on the landing for a second, now what, I kept telling myself. I didn't necessarily want to talk to her, but I couldn't just walk away after she saw me?

Finally, after what felt like forever, I opened the door, and saw that she had a picnic basket in her hands. She said "HI" shyly and said she needed to talk with me. "Okay, give me one minute," I told her. I quickly packed a lunch and we walked up to the park. We ate lunch at my school's wide open field "I'm sorry" she said

"Why did you do that?" Was my response

She said that she hid because of the pandemic. I accepted that answer, although I very well knew that wasn't true. Afterwards we stayed friends, even though I was still furious inside. She didn't know that though.

Looking back at those weeks now, it all seems pretty petty on both sides. But it really affected me at the time. I didn't see anyone during the pandemic, and she was kind of my life line, so to have that one person I trusted so much, suddenly turn her back on me, it really hurt. I still don't know why exactly she stopped talking to me, but I guess that I'm happy we worked it out. Although a small part of me still wishes that I didn't apologize, because as far as I know, I didn't do anything wrong, and it kind of gave her an out for the way she acted. We're still friends but sometimes I worry that she'll stab me in the back again.

A Change in Perspective

Anneli Lofgren

When I was 7, I had started watching crime shows, so I had seen people picking locks on tv. It didn't look hard at all, just sticking in a sharp object and moving it a little. I was confident I could do the same if I ever got kidnapped and had to escape.

In the months after, school started again, and I was in second grade. My teacher was the same as last year, because I went to this elementary school that had mixed grade classes, and I was with Ms Garnaas for first grade, so naturally I'd be with her for second grade as well.

Winter came, and soon no one wanted to be outside. The traffic was particularly bad one day. Ms Garnaas was late, and her door was still locked by the time all of the students arrived at school. We were waiting there, with no adults or supervisors. The ground was carpeted, and there were some stray wood chips from the playground caught in the film of matted material. The whole floor stank of foot odor, particularly wet feet, probably a result of people's winter boots after recess.

One of the usual class clowns walked up to the locked

door, studied it, then looked back, watching us all sitting down in our winter gear, playing with the lone wood chips. "Doesn't anyone know how to pick a lock? I mean come on!" I knew he was joking, but I still stood up, anxious to flex on the other children. "I've done it a couple times," I lied.

So I took a skinnier, sharper wood chip, and walked over to the door where he was standing. Some others followed, as it was the only interesting thing going on. I reached the door, looking at the wood chip I had chosen.

"She doesn't know how," some guy scoffed. He was right. I had only seen it on TV. It couldn't be that hard though. I tried to trick my mind into believing I could do it, but I was still lacking confidence. However, I couldn't take it back at this point. I looked at my wood chip, realizing it wouldn't work. I tossed it aside. "Does anyone have a paper clip?" I asked the group. No one did. I went to the cubbies lining the wall, looking for a paper clip. Instead, I found a staple. Feeling the familiar flow of confidence rush back to me, I bent it straight while walking back to the locked door.

Once I got there, I could feel everyone's eyes on me as I put the staple up to the keyhole. As soon as I had it to the door, everyone was dying laughing, gasping for air like they were suffocating. I then came to my senses, and put my hand down, starting to laugh as hard as the others. No one actually expected me to pick the lock, so it wasn't necessarily disappointing when I pulled away. Part of me had wanted to do it for real, but I wasn't that stupid. It was funny for a good five minutes, and we were all laughing as we went back to wait, sitting on the carpet.

Not long after we all sat down, I noticed another group of about six people up at the door. Intrigued, I got up again, seeing Ayman at the center of the crowd. He had taken the woodchip I tossed aside a minute ago, and had it in his hand, almost in the keyhole. I felt my stomach twist into knots as I rushed to the door, pushing my way through the crowd that had gathered behind him. This could potentially be a disaster. I put my hand to the lock, covering it. "What are you doing?!" Bilal yelled angrily. He tried to pry my hand off the lock, but couldn't get a good enough grip. Ayman joined in, so I put my other hand to the door too. I knew that they'd overpower me, but I had to try. Eventually the two successfully pried my hands away, the momentum knocking me to the ground. I was getting up, but Bilal blocked my path to the door. At that point I knew I couldn't do anything, and just accepted defeat.

"I knew he was joking, but I still stood up, anxious to flex on the other children."

Before I could object, Ayman had stuck the entire woodchip in the door, twisting it and wiggling it around. I sighed. I got back to my feet, moved Bilal to the side, and made my way back to the door. I shouldered Ayman away from the door before he got it stuck even more. The wood chip was still in the door. I took it out, throwing it back on the ground. I tried the door, with a faint aspiration that it worked, that we had picked the lock. But my hopes got shot down quickly. The door was still locked, and I could tell from the state of the wood chip that there were still splinters of wood in the keyhole. The wood was all frayed, and the end that had been in the door was crushed.

Before I could yell at the boys for doing this, I saw Ms Garnaas come up the stairs, still in her winter jacket and scarf. She looked up from the stairs, meeting my eyes, and I could see her face fall. Her eyes flicked back to the ground, and she increased her pace, meeting us at the door. "What happened?" She asked. We all tried explaining our own versions, an unpleasant chorus of overlapping voices. She shushed us, and asked again. I tried to tell my story, but kept getting interrupted. I knew there was no use in trying to make them quiet, so I let them talk first. The entire group that had been by the door was leaving out key details, and only talking about how I said I could pick the lock, and now here we were, with the door's lock clogged with wood.

The group on the ground hadn't seen the last part, where Ayman had "picked" the lock, so they all assumed I had gone back to actually make an attempt, and that that's how the wood ended up in the keyhole. I rolled my eyes, getting very impatient with the misinformation. Then I relaxed. I guess I couldn't blame them for assuming anything based on what they had seen. After they had all finished blaming me, I could practically see the disappointment on Ms Garnaas' face as she turned to me. "Anneli..." right then, I could feel my eyes start to tear up. I always sought her approval, and this would cloud her opinion of me. It felt as if I'd never regain that trust she had in me.

I had never been to the principal's office before, and had always assumed that if you go there, you're a very bad person. None of my friends had ever been either, so I didn't have any idea of what to expect. Ms Garnaas was going to walk me down, but another teacher said she should call someone to try to unlock the door, and that another student should take me instead. She chose Pat to walk me down. He was always nice to me, even though he was a grade above me. I looked up to him. He was a role model of sorts.

On the way, he asked me why I did it. I looked to him, irritated and taken aback that he actually believed I'd do something so stupid. "Do you really think I did it?" I asked him, surprised by the clear annoyance I heard in my own voice. He was surprised too, it seemed, because he looked at me, eyebrows raised. "Did you not?" "Of course not! They just all blamed me cause it was easier than admitting they'd done it." I replied, looking back at the ground as we walked. "Oh. Sorry." He said, also watching the floor now. The rest of the walk to the office was silent, except for the occasional random questions relating to anything other than the lock-picking.

We reached the office, and Pat left, leaving me with Kathy, the principal. She hadn't called my parents, which I was surprised to hear. She pulled me into her personal office, shutting the door and motioning for me to sit in one of the black leather chairs, facing her. I sat, sinking into the chair as if I hadn't rested for days. She asked for my side of the story, which I appreciated. I told her. How I had joked about picking the lock, then tossed aside the wood chip to go look for a paper clip, and how Ayman and Bilal had been the ones that really did it, taking my wood chip and shoving it into the lock, twisting it until it was stuck really well. She kept nodding, asking questions to clarify as I spoke. I couldn't meet her eyes as I was talking, because it was so embarrass-

ing that I had even been involved at all.

When I was finished, I finally looked at her, holding my gaze there as she talked. “Okay. I get that you wanted to make a joke, but sometimes just joking about doing something is seen as encouragement for others to do it, okay?” She had that old Minnesotan accent, and talked to me like I was five. I hated when adults did this. And how was she going to blame me? It’s not like I was the one who stuck it in the door. I shouldn’t even be here! Ayman and Bilal needed to be talking with her, not me. I still replied as nicely as I could. “Yeah, I guess that makes sense. I won’t do something like that again.” That was a lie. I wasn’t going to promise that I would never make another joke. That would be outrageous. “Good, because we’re going to have to hire a locksmith to get the door open and the lock fixed. Do you know how much that costs? A lot.” I felt guilty enough just participating in this, but the locksmith and money parts made it even worse. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know my joke would make them do that.” I replied.

Principal Kathy released me without even contacting my parents, which was good I guess. Though all I could think about was how this would look to anybody that’s found out I’d been to the office. I’d be perceived as one of those bad kids. I paused. ...maybe those ‘bad kids’ were really only in a situation like mine. Maybe they too were blamed for something they didn’t do.

This one trip to the office changed my perception of ‘bad kids,’ and what that really meant. This change in perspective and attitude affected my entire life afterward, and I began to have empathy toward people perceived as ’bad kids,’ making me a better person overall. Good things can come from bad experiences.

Forever Grateful

Juniper Krings

When I was in 5th grade it was September. I was 11 when the day came. Our principal had left and in return so did a lot of other teachers. It forced my fifth grade teacher to be in charge and it overwhelmed him. So he yelled a lot more often. One day he yelled at me.

After writing in our journals it was lunch time. I was happy today, we had gotten to write about our summer vacation and I wanted to talk about visiting my mom’s friend Jamie’s farm, fighting her exotic rooster and spraining my ankle. I wanted to tell my friends all about it. But I didn’t have any friends in my class. After fourth grade all my friends stayed together. Except for me. I was alone, I was a crybaby, and I was super sensitive. But we still talked and played at lunch and recess. And during fun Friday! So it wasn’t bad at first. I saw AhJanae walking and ran over. I started talking to my best friend. She recently got new braids with pretty pink and purple beads. She was talking to Nissa when I came over. We all talked but I was happy. Too happy. So I talked really loud and didn’t pay attention to anything around me. That was a habit of mine. I couldn’t really focus on two things. My teacher was telling us to be quiet in the lunch line. I didn’t listen. I was taking the black tray when my teacher turned on the rogar system and said my name.

I recognized his voice in my hearing aids. It made me stop in my tracks. I quieted down, my smile disappeared as I looked at him. He was holding the microphone and he was upset. I didn’t fully understand why. Everyone was quiet and eyed me and he told me to follow him. I followed him to the office.

"I looked over at my teacher who pretended like nothing happened. Like he didn't forget about me."

“Sit there.” He said. He might’ve said something else but I couldn’t hear him. I felt awkward, the office was quiet, besides the typing of the secretaries. I had never talked to them before but I didn’t recognize them. They must be new. So I sat on the uncomfortable chair, next to the kids books. I grew bored so I started reading. I looked up every once in a while, looking for him. Where was my teacher? I grew hungry, my stomach felt like a hole. The air conditioner was on, making me cold. I was cold, hungry, and confused. Soon after what must’ve been 20 minutes one of the secretaries noticed me.

“Do you need something?” She asked.

“Mr Poferal told me to go here...” I said quietly. She led me over to the lunch line and I got the food. It was the younger kids that were in line. I felt awkward as I got my food, punched in my s number and slowly walked over to the gym. The secretary followed the whole way. I looked for my teacher and he didn’t take a second glance at me. Then I figured it out. He forgot about me. So I walked over to my friend’s table. They grew quiet when I sat down. I didn’t look at them, I just ate. My face felt hot and even though I was eating my stomach still hurted. Lunch ended soon after. I put my food in the compost and put the tray down onto the table. I was too tired to wave to my little brother, who smiled as he sat next to his friends Alex and Quinn. When I walked into the line I didn’t speak. I looked over at my teacher who pretended like nothing happened. Like he didn’t forget about me. It made me upset. So I decided I didn’t like Mr Poferal that much. That was a lie. I lied to myself a lot. I actually liked Mr Poferal a lot. He was very nice, just strict.

We met again two weeks ago. He was the same as I last saw him, but now he was married and happier. I understood him a lot better. The old principal wasn’t good at her job. I missed Ms George. But I knew she was doing better too. Mr Poferal talked about Sullivan, who was now in his class, how tall I was, how my hair changed, and how the school district was going. When I look at the hallway, where we go out for recess, the Art room, the dance room, the office, the old kindergarten room, I feel overwhelmed with senses.

I remember the fire hydrants bumpy white cases that kids would run their fingers through or draw on. The cold brick walls you lean against while waiting in line. Walking into my little brother’s class where one of the only class pets was. I remember the picture hanging by the bird’s cage. Me in third grade, medium blue hair with the parakeet named Ollie sitting on my head. I didn’t have glasses until fourth grade but I did have piercings. I remember walking into the weird smelling nurses office and lying down on the cold

crinkly blue mat. I remember taking kaleidoscope glasses and wearing them and showing the theater teacher. I couldn't see her face but she laughed loudly and happily, taking a picture saying I made her day. I remember giggling, so proud I made her happy I didn't care that the other kids gave me weird stares. I remember when Momo came back from Thailand I asked her how it was. I remember understanding what she was signing and laughing that she found it boring. I remember the war between the boys and girls, grabbing a green hoodie in the fight and getting clonked on the back of my head, knocking me down.

I remember my friends getting more distant from me. I remember some boys insulting me and I remember putting my head down and crying. I remember when my best friend yelled at me in front of everyone and I remember crying hot tears, embarrassed and ashamed. I remember the popular girl named Akira, hugging me and comforting me. When she showed kindness her whole group was nice to me too. It was pitiful but it made me feel better. I remember my best friend saying something at lunch that made me leave the table and never talk to them again. I remember Mr Poferal talking about the teacher strike. And then COVID hit. And that was that.

When I left I felt odd. I remembered that day he forgot about me. How he yelled when I didn't listen and embarrassed me. How he screamed at the boys for trying to see the girls changing, how he did his best to control the entire lunchroom. Then I remembered how he read a book about birthdays on my birthday, how he played jump rope with the quiet girls, how we listened to music on his portable Bluetooth speaker during recess, how he comforted me when he realized my friends abandoned me. I remember watching CNN10 while eating healthy snacks. He was a good teacher. He was a great teacher. I didn't notice him trying to help me because I didn't understand why he was so strict. But it helped me learn. And I am forever grateful for him.

A New Life in Minnesota

Lucas Rounds

I moved to Minnesota from Kentucky during the pandemic in 2020. It has been a big adjustment for me and my family. Even though it is the same country there are a lot of differences and I am not just talking about snow though that is a big thing. It is cold, but there are good things. There are things to do. There were not things to do during the pandemic which made the move difficult. However, Minnesota has been a very big improvement over Kentucky for me socially and academically and even my health.

My school life in Kentucky was full of trouble that I would have never noticed at the time I was often in trouble at school although never for anything bad. I have always had problems with increased movement which was finally diagnosed last year by my neurologist in Minnesota who has helped me control it a little bit. My movements and need for movement and my love of goofing off still gets me in trouble here but not as much. The incidents I got in trouble for in Kentucky were often very small. When I was in fourth grade I had a lot of friends, but one of my best friends was named Zane. When we were alone in my 4th grade classroom, I got down on the reading area mat and I did the worm. Two female students came in and saw me doing the worm and went and told my teacher on me. She came in and yelled at me and told me I had to write a note about doing the worm on the carpet to my parents.

At first, I only wrote about the fact I danced on the carpet which made her angrier. She made me write down which dance I did, which was the worm. She made me miss my recess which did not help the fact that I needed to move and felt very active but it was not such a bad punishment. I had to take the note to my parents and my mom did not mind and thought it was a strange thing to get in trouble for since I did not do it in the middle of class or hurt anyone.

Fifth grade was a better year at first, but at the end I found myself in big trouble from a bad choice. We had a program called Accelerated Reader at my school. I was always working really hard to read and finish books, all on my level where I was always ahead on my reading level, and get as many points as I could. I lead my grade in AR points and I was in the top 5 point earners for the entire school which went to 8th grade. I would read Stephen King and other books that had a lot of points and read all of Harry Potter and took the tests. So my friends talked me into taking tests for them too. They wanted to have good grades and be in the AR pizza party rewards. I found the teacher's login and was taking tests for other kids for months. Was it cheating? Yes! But I was not cheating on my own tests just helping other people do it so they could have the same rewards I got.

"That would have never happened in Kentucky. You would be just as likely for a teacher to make fun of you for your movements as to help you in any way."

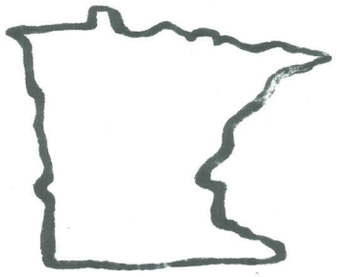
Eventually I was busted. I was sent to the principal's office. There were 5 other kids involved and they were all crying. The principal called my mom. I was sent out of the room while he talked to her. I knew my mom would advocate for me. Sometimes she advocates for me even though I will be in more trouble at home. I thought she told the principal that nothing I did was wrong because he got very upset and even hung up on my mom. Talking to her while writing this paper I found out she told him that I cheated but she did not agree with the way he was saying I would fail out of college and other things since I was the one who actually did all of the reading to be able to take the tests and she questioned why I was in as much trouble when the other kids engaged in cheating. I was sent to ALC for one day which is detention.

This was really the end of the school year for me though. My mom got a job in Minnesota and the day after my ALC day we left to look at my new apartment. I brought my ALC paperwork with me on the trip because it is a long drive and we left right after school. I left the note in our new apartment in Saint Paul. My mom ended up having to call the school because I was in trouble again facing more ALC for forgetting the note and they couldn't believe I left and went

to Minnesota for 3 days and came right back.

"I have better quality friends that I get along with better and can do more fun things and go places with instead of running around to a local Mini Mart to grab a soda."

I was really involved in a lot of athletics in Kentucky. They start younger there in the 4th grade and I started cross country then and started running 5ks with the high school cross country team and even ran 5ks outside of cross country. I ran and got medals and shirts. My best friend ran with me, we were friends since kindergarten and always in the same class. His name was Gabe. Gabe was a bit wild and always causing conflicts because he could never keep his hands to himself. He gets really physical. Gabe was my best friend any way and I had a lot of things I did like cross country and archery but we lived in the country. Life was really simple and you always only knew the same people and those same people always knew you and your parents and exactly what you did and all of your business all of the time. There was never an opportunity to meet new people. And you always had to find things to do like cross country or archery or sports because there was nothing else to do but maybe go look at cows or sit bored in a little house. I used to miss it a lot, especially when we first got here.



Now though, I feel like Minnesota is a better place to me. It is way more accepting here, people in the city can be who they are and there is no judgment like there is back home and all of the constant "what church do you go to?" and everyone is really similar or afraid to be different where I am from. Most people here are a lot more awkward when you first talk to them but they are way more accepting and nicer people than where I am from. People tend to be more educated feeling.

School here is a big relief. The grading is a lot different and you can technically get lower percentages and somehow something that is a D in Kentucky is a C here which makes it a little easier overall. There are no more AR programs which is nice because I can just read things I want to and it counts instead of worrying about how many points I can squeeze out of it for pizza. Also I can move, and I have a really good doctor who has helped me with my tics a lot and when I have needed to privately talk to a teacher or two about it they have stopped being as mean about my movements like Elizabeth in Spanish and that would have never happened in Kentucky you would be just as likely for a teacher to make fun of you for your movements as to help you in any way.

Punishments are different here. I don't get in trouble much but the time I have I didn't lose a lot and instead got talked to about ways I could kind of improve my behavior instead and make better choices. In Kentucky too, if you mess up an assignment you are just out of luck and here we have more forgiving grading which takes the pressure off a lot of the time but I feel like I learn just as much or more.

I finished out my 5th grade year online due to covid reaching America while living in Minnesota. I had a great room in my apartment but making rooms was hard, so I stayed friends which my friends from back home but online and played Xbox. It was hard to make new ones, but I was happy to keep my old ones too and in a way it made moving easier but it was also super hard. I turned 12 in Minnesota and had to be in my room a lot in our apartment. I learned that I did not like apartment living and missed having a house but my parents eventually bought a house. It is pretty big and I trust it more than the house we had in Kentucky because it's 100 years old so you know it lasts.

My mom has a better job working as the accountant for the teacher's union. Her accounting job is what brought us up here and she switched jobs. I have learned a lot about unions since coming here. Kentucky didn't really have unions because Republicans don't like unions, they say they have done terrible things to people. I didn't know that all the people in Kentucky aren't smart enough to want to get raises from the 20-30,000 dollars a year they make and scrape by. The whole population of Kentucky is underpaid to do the same job any one does here. My mom was an accountant in Kentucky but now does much better and it really made life better for all of us.

I think Minnesota is much more in line with my political beliefs and when I think about the kids I was friends with in Kentucky compared to my friends now there are so many differences. Like the kid Zane I mentioned is the only kid I know in Kentucky in my friend group who got any vaccines. I had dozens of friends and still talked to most of them and one of my friends, Hunter, got covid during 2021 early and I would stay up with him while he coughed and felt terrible and play games, but when the vaccines came out his mom refused to get one even though she is a nurse and wouldn't let him or his little brother get one either because she didn't trust the government. She lost her job. But this is how people are there with things and their mindset, so being here is better.

Most of my friends here are a lot smarter and their families have beliefs that are more in line with my family's. This is a good thing because often I got made fun of for not going to church or my mom's Hilary Clinton car stickers. Once in 3rd grade we did mock elections and I defended Hilary Clinton in class while everyone told me she was trash and Donald Trump was great. Also everyone at my school in Kentucky looks the same, basically like me, and here I get to experience a lot of different people and cultures.

Overall I think the move here has been a lot better for me. I have better quality friends that I get along with better and can do more fun things and go places with instead of running around to a local Minit Mart to grab a soda. Also I do better in school even though I am not a perfect student. I feel less stress from the situation and I feel like I learn better things. Moving has been a very significant moment in my life. I always thought I would just end up being in small

town Kentucky, but through moving I was able to discover there is a lot more out there than I knew about and I know I like city life and there are better places than living in the country. After being here for 3 years almost, I can say Kentucky is my old life and now Minnesota is home.

The Key to Disaster

Ian Myott

Listen. I know this is a google doc but just put your head to the iPad or computer or whatever and listen to it. Can't hear anything? Good that's the point and if vou thought this was a good wav to start a story it isn't. In fact I wrote the last three sentences just to throw you off, this beginning bit is just downright stupid. Kind of like my past self. You see when I was 12 I was not the smartest person on the planet and I am still not. But, the thing about 12 year old me is that 12 year old me was stupid and when I say stupid it's more like REALLY REALLY stupid. Like the "Don't do this thing then do the thing two seconds after. Stupid. Okay okay enough self deprecating and on to the actual stupidity.

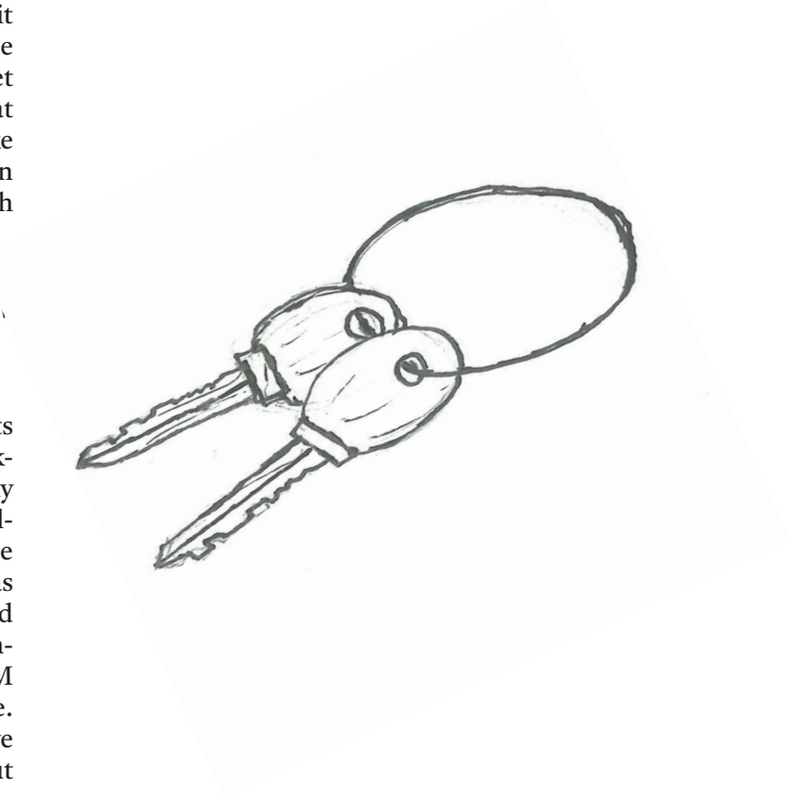
"At that moment it felt like my key slipped through the fabric of reality."

So one day in (most likely) Spring 2021 when my parents said not to go outside of the house while they were working, so of course went out of the house to hang out with my friend Oliver like an absolute idiot. So when my friend Oliver showed up at my house we hung out a bit at his house down the street but after a short while we went to the Gas station a few blocks away from our houses to get some food because it was around lunchtime and we were getting hungry. When we got to the Gas Station we bought a few M&M chocolate bars and ate them on the way back to my house. Anvwavs after we finished eating the chocolate bars we called hanging out for the day and we both went home but then dropped my key in the grass. Like an idiot.

Now this wouldn't be a big deal if it was a regular key but it was a backup key because I didn't have a regular key at the time. So when I tried to open the door to my house my key wasn't there. I looked on the grass like an old lady who just lost her glasses but it wasn't there. At that moment it felt like my key slipped through the fabric of reality. Like the key is metal it should be easy to see I thought. And, as I said before, I am an idiot and that key couldn't be seen at all. For a few minutes the grass felt like it was a foot tall and I could look for the key for a billion yea and still not find it And if you looked inside my brain at that time it would probably be just a wall of swear words. I am pretty sure I said all of them under my breath but honestly I don't remember.

So I called my dad on my beat up old wooden deck admitting that was out or the house and after this I sat in silence looking at the garden and my neighbor Terry's absolute pigsty of a house realizing what had just done was probably a bit stupid and I really should've just called Oliver so he could help me look for the key. After thinking for a while I swore. I thought "I'II just look for the key". And, I decided to do exactly that and after around 3 seconds, I found it. On The first try, I found the stupid key. I probably screamed the F-word at the top of my lungs so loud that my throat spontaneously combusted and made a black hole the size of mars. So called my dad again saying I was alright and didn't need to be picked up by my grandparents

After calling my dad I probably went upstairs to my room and tried to flip my couch over and rip my bedsheets in half because I was so uncontrollably angry at what I just did but I can't confirm that. Anyways, thinking back on it now, that was probably the second stupidest thing I've ever done and I honestly don't want to tell you the first because it genuinely rots my brain because of how mind-numbingly stupid it is.



Water, Me Poems



8th graders created poems and watercolor artwork about the importance of water to them and why we need to protect water. They wrote their poems over the art after they completed both. This assignment helped to hone their creative writing skills and increase their awareness of the environmental crisis.

This assignment was for two classes, Physical Science and 8th Grade English. Students also learned about water shortages around the world in Global Studies. Students learned about the importance of water throughout different cultures, learned about pollution and global warming, and created watercolor art in Science, then created poems in ELA. The poems were created using a structure of 10 lines, starting with 10 syllables and going down one syllable for each line. Students wrote their poems over their watercolor art and they will be placed in the stairwell between the 2nd and 3rd floor by Leo and Tom's rooms.

This assignment shows care for the natural world, one of the EL design principles which OWL is based off of. It allowed students to contemplate on the water shortage and be able to demonstrate in their own words why water is necessary. These are our favorite water poems and artwork. Some artwork will be included at the back of this book.

Going to Mars
Margot Collette

If there was no water, the world would die
All the people would probably cry
The world would end, and people too
If there was no water left
All the humans would leave
We'd abandon earth
We'd go to mars
Leave the earth
People
Gone

I am a Rubber Duck
Victor Dressen

I am a rubber duck, floating down to sea
It seems vast, but how vast could it be?
Is the sea polluted or clean?
Where could I be in this sea?
If it was brown and dirty?
How would that happen?
But I go along
Just the sea
Water
Me

Man Made Pools
Anya Robertson

I swim in man made pools filled with water
The earth's pools are contaminated
Contaminated from our world
Our factories and plastics
I stay in man made pools
Safe in the chlorine
Lakes are dying
And I swim
Naive
Safe

Elixir of Life
Yenay Abrahim

Water flows, giving life to everything
This force of nature, a perfect thing
Life needing liquid, a life force
This human requirement
Is now hard to come by
Impure or absent
Water is still
Forever strong
Water
Me

Echoes of the Dolphins
Claire Ales

I feel the cool ocean breeze on my face
I hear the busyness of the beach
The sun is shining very bright
I put my head in the water
I hear the sound of the dolphins
Click, Click, Click, Click
We are in their home
I am in their home
People invade
People ruin
Water
Life
Me

A Place of the Divine
Alva Healy

Water clear as glass, reflecting the sky
Colorful rocks, shining beneath me
Trees clipping to touch the waves
What can describe such beauty
A place of the divine
Where man and nature
Come to meet
All that's left
Water
Me

Drops of Rain
Annabelle Wilson

Walking down the road, feeling the water
Drops of rain pouring down the grass
Pouring down my purple shoes
Pouring down on my warm hands
Clinging to the comfort
Holding on to you
Just to run off
To anew
Unique
Life

Wasted Waters
Sam Ryan

I'm boating down a river with all the trash
I see a fish floating up lifeless
Bag round the neck suffocating
Oh I'm boating down river
Trash is everywhere
Land or water
There is trash
Water
Me

Rain's Melody
Juniper Krings

Dancing in the rain, thunder and lightning
The raindrops tap and make music
The plants seem to adore rain
I look up at the rain and
I feel safe and happy
And I feel at home
Back inside now
And outside
Water
Falls

Life's Pristine Pulse, Water
Alex Shuster

Water mourns our beautiful world
Along water, the reason our city is right here
The crash of the waves when ships glide
Pristine water flows beneath
Minnesota's lifeblood
Water oh
Water is
Me

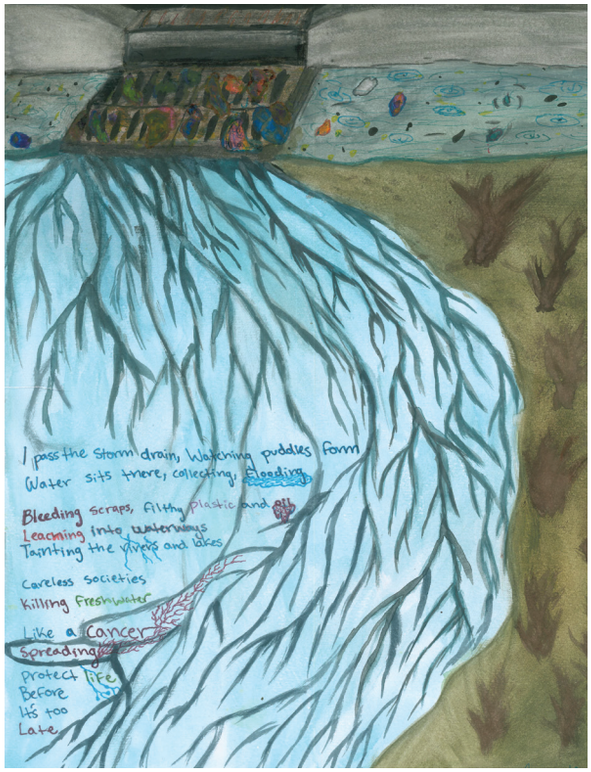
Fading Beauty
Aria Kulseth

The early dawn reflects against the lake
Creating a fire like glow
A reminder of true beauty
Reeds stem from the abyss
Fading into the water below
The water we all come from
Where we'll all perish
And all that is left
Superior to all
Water
Me





Kmwee Hser



Anneli Lofgren

Alternate Narratives





8th graders created alternate narratives based on two stories; Charles and Lamb to the Slaughter. Alternate narratives are taking a piece of writing and telling it from a different perspective, such as another character, omniscient point of view, etc.

Charles is a story told from the perspective of a little boy's mother about the little boy coming home and telling his mother about the antics of a child named Charles, but then the mother meets her son's teacher and learns something interesting.

Lamb to the Slaughter is told from the point of view of a woman with a husband about when her husband comes home from work upset with a secret. He reveals the secret and she becomes distraught. She then commits a crime and covers it up to the police.

Students learned to view stories from many different perspectives and adjust their writing accordingly. They improved their reading skills and their creative writing skills while writing their pieces of writing. Students wrote anywhere from two paragraphs to three pages, but each one creatively expressed feelings of other characters. These are the chosen alternate narratives.

Table of Contents

A Terrible Tuesday.....Dylan Bickelhall.....35
A Meeting to Remember.....Lizzie Dreher.....35-36
A Love Triangle Gone Wrong..Luke Hobday.....36
Wild Child.....Roman Rufi.....37
Small Talk.....Remy Short.....37
The Trouble Maker.....Kai Walker.....38
Waiting and Wondering.....Claire Ales.....38
The Meeting.....Choe Best.....39
Ready to Pounce.....Michael Hurla.....39
The Secret.....Collin Larson.....39-40
Unveiling Shadows.....Joseph Shwartz.....41
Betrayal and Consequences....Connie Van Genderen.....41-42
Troubles in Kindergarten.....Sam Ryan.....42-43
Shattered Vows.....Lilly Cannon.....43
Fractured Trust.....Soren Johnson.....43
A Tough Conversation.....Craig Thompson-Wentzel..43
Fading Love.....Sofia Benegas.....43

A Terrible Tuesday

Dylan Bickelhall

Today was a Tuesday, which usually means I go to work. Today was like any other Tuesday. I went to work, and then headed home after except for the fact I had to tell my wife the most terrible news and then move out of our house. When I headed outside of the office I realized the weather was more different than usual. This morning it was sunny and now it's cloudy with a slight drizzle.

I headed to my car parked in the best spot ever due to the fact I was the first one who came. I unlocked the door and started the car. I started driving through the beautiful town to get home. I was dreading the moment that I would tell my wife the most terrible news. As soon as I got home I walked out of the car and pulled up the garage good then I proceeded to drive into the garage. I grabbed my briefcase and walked to the door and rang the doorbell. My wife came right to the door and the house was very cozy. I knew I was gonna miss it.

As soon as I sat down my wife offered to make drinks for us. I of course said yes to the offer. After she made the drinks we sat down and started drinking. My drink was stronger than usual with a little sweetness. She offered to cook a lamb leg for supper just for the 2 of us I politely declined.

After a few minutes I stood up and did the thing I was dreading the most all day. I told her the terrible news. She seemed mad but nicely kept her feelings in. I headed to the door and then I faintly heard quiet footsteps heading in my direction. I thought nothing of it and kept walking. When I was about 2 steps away from the door I felt a hard bone like thing hit the back of my head. I started to feel sleepy and then realized... I was about to die.

A Meeting to Remember

Lizzie Dreher

There are a few PTO meetings each month. This night was one of them. All

PTO meetings are almost always boring. Someone goes up and drones on and on. Then the parents eat and I shake hands and talk to people. Occasionally, we have a parent start yelling about their child's education, or something dramatic well,

Tonight was a special meeting. It had been going pretty well, although I was quite hungry. I had forgotten to eat dinner at home. I had been too busy feeding Mocha, my cat. Mocha will never close her mouth unless I feed her. This year's kindergarten class was certainly interesting. One boy in particular. Laurie. Laurie started this year and was very loud and rude in class, yelling, and making remarks. Several times this year I had to send him to the principal's office, or deal with him myself. I definitely hoped to see Laurie's mother at this meeting. I needed to talk to her about her son's behavior in class. I had been speaking with parents, greeting them, shaking hands, the usual. I was utterly starving, and tired too.

I had been looking for someone in particular during the meeting, when I saw a new mother in the audience. She was looking around very restlessly, scanning the crowd. I had no doubt that this was Laurie's mother. She sat through the entire meeting. never once looking at anyone but the people in the audience. What a strange lady.

The meeting ended, and at this time I realized how hungry I really was. My stomach had begun to growl impatiently, seeking food. I noticed across the cafeteria a table with snacks. The food was probably for the parents, but I didn't care. I was so hungry, I needed to grab a bite of something. I walked over to the table, and grabbed one of the paper plates. I took in my options, knowing that I could eat more at home. I especially liked the look of that chocolate cake. It had pretty sprinkles, and looked thick, and moist. I load up my plate with a slice, and poured some tea into a cup while

the steam curls out of it.

I looked over, and noticed the woman who I am positive it is Laurie's mother. She had a piece of marshmallow cake on her plate and a cup of tea too. Except hers was iced sweet tea instead. Oddly enough, she was still looking around at the crowd of parents, scanning it for someone. I had thought she would talk to me but maybe she was focusing on finding another parent she knew. I needed to talk to her now, for I knew I could talk to her about her son's behavior. Laurie was a troublesome student, and I wanted to ask about his home situation, or any other factors that could lead to his outbursts.

I began to walk over to her, and forced my most pleasant smile onto my face. I was so tired, it was almost impossible to muster. I shake her hand, and she grins. OShe has a lot of the same features as Laurie. but her mannerisms are much better. "I've been so anxious to meet you." She said almost nervously, smiling

'I'm Laurie's mother." So it appeared I was right. This was Laurie's mother.

"We're all so interested in Laurie," I said. Now that was an understatement

Laurie was one of my most troublesome students, and it had taken him ages to get settled into class. He was a great kid, just a lot to handle.

"Well he certainly likes kindergarten," said Laurie's mother. "He talks about it all the time " Honestly. She seemed quite nice. But she didn't seem to care that her child had been disrupting class insanely often, which was a big problem. I would need to subtly steer the conversation over to that. "We had a little trouble adjusting the first week or so," I said to her, smiling. "But now he's a fine little helper. With occasional lapses, of course." She looked puzzled. "Laurie usually adjusts very quickly," she said, chewing her lip. Then she began to smile again.

Her eyes are clouded with thought, but she puts on a kind face. "I suppose this time it's Charles's influence." Charles? Who's Charles? We don't have a Charles in the kindergarten. "Charles?" I asked her. Now I'm confused too, biting the inside of my cheek. thinking hard. I've never heard of Charles at our school. even though it's a common name. Maybe an

imaginary friend? Some kindergarteners still have them. "Yes," she said, laughing, "you must have your hands full in that kindergarten, with Charles." The only one our "hands were full with" was Laurie, but I didn't dare say that to her. And who was Charles? "Charles?" I asked again. "We don't have any Charles in the kindergarten." Now she and I both looked at each other, confused. What was going on?

A Love Triangle Gone Wrong

Luke Hobday

Well there we go. It's over. I knew my years of adultery would catch up to me. but never imagined it'd be so soon. I started off my day the same as always. Eggs on toast and a cold glass of milk, then off to work. It was the type of day that made me wonder if I should retire early, and my pounding headache wasn't helping. My seven hours of typing up reports was interrupted only by the ticking of the clock, every shift of the hands getting me closer and closer to the end of my time here.

An hour left in my shift, Janet approached my desk. Her hands were shaking as she led me to our usual spot. She's probably just feeling guilty... It is her husband's birthday. I convinced myself I was wrong. She got on her tiptoes and whispered into my ears "I want you to tell her". | didn't get it right away. Tell who what? Then she went into detail. "I want you to tell Mary about us. I'II tell Jim too. We can be together without having to hide from everyone. I love you." A pause and then "If you don't have the guts to tell her yourself. I'II do it for you



That last sentence ruined me. Mary couldn't know. Mary was nothing but good to me. With Janet. If that didn't work. Mary would only have had to hear was a cheater. Not a Lost control. The scissors were right there. It wasn't my fault. Whoever left them out

should really have put them away. I came to my senses with my hand in her stomach. Mv 30 years of being a cop left me with some benefits. know how to cover up a scene. 15 minutes later. She's in the closet and I'm out the door. I'm not dumb. I know that even with my cover up they'll find out it was me.

Mary has always been understanding. Maybe I can convince her to leave the country with me. 30 minutes later I'm home. Deen breaths. I open the door and Mary's there. "Hullo darling" she says and kisses me "Hullo darling I respond. Keep cool. I give her my coat and sink into my favorite chair. The cool leather does nothing to calm my nerves. What do I say? The blood red painting on our wall mocks me. Mary walks over and hangs me a drink. "Tired darling?" She asks. "Yes." I answer. "I'm tired". More than you could imagine. Tired of this stupid life I got handed, tired of sneaking behind your back. and tired of pretending to be a model citizen. So I drink my problems away. The whisky is gone in a gulp. The ice cubes seem to dance as they're freed of the liquid that surrounds them.

I stand up to get another. Mary lumps out of her chair. "I'II get it!" she cries. "Sit down." I say. A little harsh. but she's starting to get on my nerves. I decided to make the next drink stronger than the last. Perhaps it will help loosen my tongue. My legs snake, and I hurry to sit back down before they give out. Before I let even a drop of whisky past my lips. she interrupts again. "Darling. shall I get your slippers?" Slippers won't comfort me. "No." Is all I say. "I think it's a shame. " she says. "That when a policeman gets to be as senior as you. they keep him walking about on his feet all day long." I wish. No, they have me writing reports all day long. But she doesn't need to know that. I'm not going back anyway. She seems uncomfortable now, bending over her sewing like it can stitch up our problems.

"Darling " she says. "Would you like me to get you some cheese? I haven't made any supper because it's Thursday. "No." I say. I'II probably just barf it up. "If you're too tired to eat out." she continued. "It's still not too late. There's plenty of meat and stuff in the freezer. and you can have it right here and not even move out of the chair." She expects an answer, but I don't see a reason to give her one. My silence is answer enough. "Anyway, I'll get you some cheese and crackers first." God she must not be thinking straight. "I don't want it", I growl.

She shifted in her chair. staring at me. I had to look away. "But you must eat! I'II fix it anyway, and then you can have it or not, as you like." she says, getting up. "Sit down." She says. It's time. "Just for a minute. sit down... Go on. sit down." The tear in her eyes was evident as she lowered back into her chair. Right then, I knew. I couldn't tell her about the murder. I couldn't convince her to leave the country with me. The moment I tried she'd run to the phone

The last of my whisky is gone. I start "I've got something to tell you". "What is it, darling? What's the matter?" "This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I'm afraid. But I've thought about it a good deal and I've decided the only thing to do is tell you right away. I hope you won't blame me too much. I've been cheating." I told her my guilt got so overwhelming that my mental health started to crumble. I tell her that I'm going to Mexico for a work trip and when I get back we can start the divorce process. "So there it is, " I finished. "And I know it's kind of a bad time to be telling you. but there simply wasn't any other wav. Of course I'll give you money and see you're looked after. But there needn't be any fuss. I hope not anyway. It wouldn't be very good for my job." She sits there and I can't help but feel sorry for her.

"I'll get supper" she whispers. I let her. She'll need a meal to work over what just happened.

I walk to the window and stare at the sky. I have my passport sitting in the lockbox under my bed. I reckon it'll take an hour to pack and get me to the airport. If I'm lucky, Janet's body won't be found until the morning. If I'm not... I might have to cross the border the hard way.

I hear Mary walking up the stairs and then into the living room. By the sound of it, she has more than enough meat

for one person. "For God's sake! Don't make supper for me. I'm going out." She walks closer. What the hell?

I hear a swoosh and everything goes dark.

Wild Child

Roman Rufi

It was the start of the day and it was going pretty well. I woke up, got my coffee, then got into my car. It's so cold outside it feels like I am in a freezer. Then I went to school. I walked in and went to my kindergarten class. I looked at the calendar and remembered that today was the day of parent teacher conferences.

I looked at who I had and looked and saw Laurie's mom was coming today. Oh Laurie, he is such a wild kid he has the energy of a dog, he can never calm down.

Then the day went on, Laurie was better today which is good because I can focus on other stuff and not Laurie. Then the bell rang and for some reason it was quiet today or the kids were so loud they sounded like wolves howling.

I stayed after school to prepare for Parent Teacher conferences. And they went by quick it felt like. It was mostly just one parent but sometimes both came. It went well. All the parents were nice and we talked about how they were doing even if they weren't doing that good.

Then came Laurie's mom, she looked like a normal woman. Then we started talking and I started off by introducing myself and I thought wow she's calm for a kid who has been making so much trouble. Then I said Laurie has had some trouble adjusting but he's getting better. Actually he has started helping me around the class and people are starting to like him more. Then she said "Well that's great and hope he hasn't had much trouble especially with Charles." Then I thought there is no Charles. And I said "There is no Charles in our Kindergarten class?".

Small Talk

Remy Short

I was getting ready for the PTA meeting, making sure everything was prepared for it. As I set out all of the papers. including grades and notes for the families. I wondered what kind of parents I'd meet, and what they'll be like. While I pondered the thought, I observed the room.

The walls are covered in art projects, specifically lions, which was one of the most recent projects that has been taught. The yellow oil paste felines seem to stare at me. I walk up to look at each one to be sure that they are all ready for the parents to see. It reminds me of that day. It was a peaceful sunny Thursday morning. The kids were so happy, since my class seems rather fond of art.

Suddenly, my phone alarm rings bringing me back to the present. It's finally time for the parent teacher night to begin. I suspect that most families won't arrive for another five minutes so I quickly scan through the classroom to make sure everything is organized and tidy. The windows have been scrubbed. The desks are all perfectly where they need to be. Everything looks right.

Then I hear from the other side of the wall , the families who enter the doors. As the families go to their respective classrooms, the hallways buzz with the children excitedly explaining and navigating the way to their classrooms. I hear a knock on the door, and reluctantly open it. A kind looking family walks in, their warm smiles facing me. introduce myself. and ask whose family they are. They are the family of a student in my class. and we make small talk about school for a while. I then go over the child's performance academically, and socially. As we finish up, I wish them a wonderful rest of their night.

I clean up the files as I wait patiently for the next family, feeling great about how the night has gone so well so far. ponder the thought of who else will meet. take a minute to admire my job, and how amazing the kids I work with are. Then, another family walks in. It's only the mother, and her son, Laurie instead of an entire family this time. I walk over and welcome them, and bend down to say hello to Laurie.

His mother seems like a wonderful person. and wonder how such a troublemaker could have such a warm looking mother.

I ignore this though. and ask the mother how she is and how Laurie has been

As his mother talks, I observe Laurie. He looks aroun the room at the colorful alphabet letters, and the cartoon animals on the wall from the last lesson taught in the class. He then moves on from the walls to the carpet he is standing on. the roval blue carpet beneath his feet.

Then Laurie's mother asks me a rather strange question, "By the way, do you know of a classmate by the name of Charles? Laurie tells me about him rather frequently." I look at her, perplexed. What does she mean by a child named Charles? I'm not aware of any kid in the school of that name

She looks just as confused as me. and I study her face. I try my best to think of each child, but I cannot remember anyone named charles. on, "We don't have any charles in this class. not even in this school that I'm aware of."



Waiting and Wondering

Claire Ales

I walked out of the station at 4:30 and got into my silver car. Of course it was raining and a very gloomy day. As I drive home the only thing that I can think about is how am I going to tell her. Will she be mad? Has she anticipated this? All these thoughts are racing through my mind.

I can't put it off forever, but..... is now really the right time?

When I walk in the door, I see my wife's cheerful face. She looks as if she has been waiting in that exact same spot for hours awaiting my return. As usual we had our afternoon drinks, her in her chair and I, in my own. We didn't talk much, but we normally didn't until we finished our drink. While deep in my thoughts my wife asked "Tired, darling?"

I waited a minute wondering if I should tell her now or wait. I can't put it off forever, but..... is now really the right time? Coming to a conclusion I replied "Yes, I'm tired." Then I did something that I don't normally do. I drank all of my drink in one sip and got up to get myself another one. As I stood up I heard my wife exclaim "I'll get it!" Then without putting much thought into what I was going to say next I calmly said "sit down." She sat down, but I could see the confusion in her eyes.

She then said "I think it's a shame that when a policeman gets to be as senior, they keep him up walking around on his feet all day." My job, a policeman. If they found out I would probably get fired. Let's hope she won't tell anyone. I can't afford to lose my job. I wouldn't be able to get hired anywhere else either if this went on my permanent record.

When I poured myself another drink I added a lot of whiskey into the glass and walked back over to sit down again. Then she asked me a lot of questions like "can I get you your slippers," or "Would you like me to get you some cheese?". And to every question I simply said "no,". I knew on Thursdays we always ate out, but would a restaurant really be the best place to tell her? I don't want to make a big scene.

As I looked out the window at the tree losing its leaves, trying to gather my thoughts. I remembered we planned to put a swing for our child on that very tree. Our beautiful child would be born in a few months. We had even decided on a name, Jane. Jane had been the middle name of my mother who passed away a few years ago.

After a while I asked "Is it okay if we just stay home and eat dinner here tonight?". She replied with "of course darling, I'll just go fix us some lamb for dinner!" "I don't want it," I said. As she continued to stand up I firmly said "sit down, just for a moment sit down." Then she gave me this weird look. She raised her eyebrows and had a saddened look in her eyes. I couldn't tell if she was confused or worried. I really don't like to see her like this but with what I'm about to tell her I think I might get a little more than just confusion.

After she sat down in her leather armchair with the lamp casting a shadow on her beautiful face. The next thing I did was say "I've got something to tell you and I hope you don't blame me too much"

The Troublemarker

Kai Walker

This was the second PTO meeting and I couldn't wait. I put on my turquoise blouse with my white tennis skirt and looked at myself in the mirror. I went to my small powder room and put some makeup on and checked my eyelashes. clipped and painted my nails then out a clear layer on top to keep my nails protected. I got in my Honda compact and started driving to school. I drove through fancy neighborhoods with arched roofs and fancy drain pipes. I was jealous but recited my speech until I drove into the parking lot and I saw nice family cars everywhere.

I walked into the building greeting the secretary and walked into the big hall greeted with air freshener. took the long way to my classroom admiring the new mural that the students had made. That was not the only reason though, I was anxious about my speech and I didn't want to mess it up in front of all the parents. I soon got to my classroom and was alarmed or now many parents were already here.

There were almost twice as many as the last time. I walked in and greeted some ot the parents I had already met and told them about how amazing their children were.

Then when I thought everyone was there I started my speech about the students. It was stressful addressing all of them at once. But as I wrapped up and answered an questions, I felt so proud and spoke with confidence.

As soon as I was done with my speech all of the parents and I lined up at a table to get a piece of cake. As soon as I got my cake, I sat down and talked to some of the parents that were not at the last meeting and they were all super nice but one of them was very peculiar. She was the mother of Laurie, the biggest troublemaker in kindergarten. had spanked him on the first day and every day after that for some horrendous things he had done. He persisted to annoy me and disrupt the class, although about a week ago he started helping my pick up and helped his classmates. I was kind of interested to talk with her though because she seemed oddly calm considering her son's record.

She asked me about how Laurie was doing and considered what to say. Not wanting to give away that her son was a complete disaster so responded with "He's taken a while to adjust". which was true. She told me that it must have been Charles, and his influence on Laurie. I was very confused because she talked about Charles Iike I knew him. told her there was no Charles in our class. At first she just stared at me looking confused until suddenly her face went pale with shock. I tried asking her what was wrong until she got up and walked out the door without a word. After that night, I never saw her or Laurie again.

The Meeting

Chloe Best

It was the night of the PTA meeting I'd been waiting for. I sat at my desk. Most of the formal discussion was over, so everyone else had gathered around the dessert table. (I preferred fluffy coconut macaroons, but there weren't any of those on the table that evening so I'd settled for a square of the brownies). I drummed my fingers on the table, watching the parents chat about their kindergarteners. I'd always liked working with kids, but every few years I'd get one that made me wonder if I should have picked up some other profession. Like watercolor painting, which would have been infinitely quieter and surely less chaotic than the past two weeks.

One of the little boys this year, Laurie, would prod other students or holler obscene things at the top of his lungs. He'd made a mess of my chalk the past Tuesday and even the memory of scrubbing it off my carpet made my back hurt.

Laurie's parents were probably here. I'd never outright tell them that I wished my classroom would be rid of his antics (or him...in general), but I'd have to find a chance to report his behavior. Unless they already knew. I could feel a headache coming on, so I dismissed the thought and got up to get another brownie square.

As the meeting came to an end, I noticed a woman in a long blue coat and scarf who kept glancing over at me. Then she began to make her way over, stepping around all the chairs. I was a bit surprised. Nearly everyone was up exchanging numbers on their way out or already swinging the door shut.

"I've been wanting to meet you," she said once in front of me. A delicately painted mug sits in her hands. "I'm Laurie's mother." Oh. "Oh...yes," I said smoothly. "We're all so interested in Laurie." She continued on about her son, threading her fingers, almost nervously, through the tassels of her scarf. She told me he usually fit in quickly— I couldn't imagine, but I nodded. She thought it might be from the influence of "Charles". "Charles?" I say. "We don't have any Charles in kindergarten." I think I heard her nearly choke on her tea.

Raedy to Pounce

Michael Hurla

I saw all of my students and their parents coming through the door and knew they all had questions for me to answer. This part of my job can be difficult or rewarding as I have to tell parents how their children are doing in class. Parent-Teacher conferences can also be kind of fun as you get to see what student's parents are like which can be interesting and insightful.

When it was getting towards the end of the conferences and the classroom was starting to clear out; I saw out of the corner of my eye Laurie and his mother. I wasn't looking forward to seeing them as Laurie was extremely challenging and pushed me to the limits on some days. As Laurie and his mother moved toward me like two cheetahs ready to pounce on their prey; I tried to look the other way so maybe by chance they wouldn't see me or would think I was busy. Unfortunately my wishes were blown out like a boy at a birthday party.

"Laurie and his mother moved toward me like two cheetahs ready to pounce on their prey"

Laurie came up to me and I could tell by the look in his eyes that he was up to no good. Laurie's mother made small talk and then began to talk about this other student named Charles. The strange thing was we didn't have any other students named Charles. I knew then that Laurie had been pulling the wool over his parent's eyes and made it seem like he was the victim of all of his own discretions. I had to spill the beans and informed the mother that Charles did not exist. The look in her eyes was priceless and I laughed inside a little. From that day on I really never heard from Laurie's mother and I'm pretty sure she was quite embarrassed!

The Secret

Collin Larson

The car rumbled slowly down the asphalt road leading into the sprawling suburban neighborhood on the city's borders like some great, metallic beetle trundling its way over a black, hard branch. Golden, warm afternoon light shone down on its gleaming exoskeleton, reflecting into the blue, cloudless sky and on the rows and rows of identical, two-story houses around it. Sounds of children playing echoed on every side of the car and moved around the neighborhood, reaching almost everybody there.

I gripped the steering wheel harder, staring down the road ahead of me, lost in my own troubled thoughts. Today was the day I planned to tell her, I told myself over and over again in my head. If I didn't reveal my secret to her now, it would cause larger problems later on and I would have to deal with them. With a growl, I shook my head in frustration. I knew I had to tell her today, but how would I tell her? What would I tell her? My mind wasn't thinking about the street ahead of me any more. Now it was only thinking about the secret.

"I paused one last time before inserting the key into the lock with a grinding, metallic click, turning it once, and opening the door."

The secret...A few days ago, I had found my true love, a person who I'd never seen before. In the first few seconds, they stole my love from Mary. I knew then that I had found the perfect person for me to stay with for the rest of my life. By the end of the day, I had resolved to leave my old house

forever and abandon my wife and the baby. Everything else that had to be done before I could leave with my love had been done earlier in the day, and this was the last thing getting in my way of a new life.

I can't stand another second living without them, I thought. Best to finish this whole thing as fast as I could. After I told her about the secret, I would leave for dinner with them and end this unwanted phase of my life forever.

The car was growing closer to the basic, two-story house on my left that I'd painted a light brown a few weeks ago. With a spin of the steering wheel, I turned into the gravel driveway alongside the house, car wheels crunching on the dusty, powdered rocks before stopping with the snapping pop of rubber on gravel. I removed the keys and cut the engine, pausing for a second to remind myself of what I was going to say, before throwing open the door and stepping out into the gravel driveway.

I slammed the car door closed with a hard push, the sound echoing around the houses, before walking to the door. My heavy, shined leather boots thumped dully in the grass by the house as the clear, wide window, its drawn curtains glowing with an inner light, hung above me. I paused one last time before inserting the key into the lock with a grinding, metallic click, turning it once, and opening the door.

I have to tell her about the secret now, I thought foggily.

Mary sat in one of the two padded, velvety red chairs in the center of the living room, her hands moving slowly and carefully as she sewed a tiny, patterned wool blanket for the baby. I was glad that I didn't have to bother caring for another person now after I left, I thought as I watched her, and I had never cared for young children much anyway.

Upon my entry, she set her sewing on the wide, soft arm of the chair and rose from where she'd been sitting to move over to me. Mary gave me a short, gentle kiss before removing my heavy coat and hanging it in the closet by the door.

"Hullo, darling," she said quietly. As she moved over to the sideboard where two tall glasses of soda water and whiskey sat, I replied, "Hullo, darling." without truly putting any emotion into the word darling.

Mary poured the drinks together into a weaker, clearer one for her and a stronger, yellowish one for me, dropping in a handful of ice cubes from the Thermos bucket lying on the sideboard. I took the whiskey from her hand when she gave it to me and moved it around slowly so the ice cubes clinked on the sides of the glass.

I stared down into the drink, watching the tiny, clear blocks of ice float in the whiskey, and thought about what I was going to tell her when the chance came. Now wasn't the greatest time for it and I was tired after a long workday. A stronger drink would help me to speak more easily without having a problem about what I said. Yes, I would have more whiskey, stronger whiskey, now. I held the glass to my lips and downed part of it, letting the liquid wash into my mouth, and was about to have more when Mary asked quietly, "Tired, darling?"

"Yes," I replied. "I'm tired." And before I could think, before I could stop myself, I poured the rest of the whiskey down my throat. It caused my eyes to blur with the rush of alcohol, and I lowered the glass to the arm of the chair, the sound of the ice cubes dropping to the bottom of the cup made louder by the quiet room, and leaned forward slowly, thinking about what I should do now. I moved to stand up from the chair and Mary leapt up with a cry, "I'll get it!" "Sit down," I said in an emotionless tone. She lowered herself back into her seat, surprised by my unnatural actions.

I emptied most of the whiskey into my own glass, the powerful smell of alcohol rising from its dark yellowish-amber depths. The alcohol in the drink swirled in tiny, oily spirals that swam around in the glass. I inhaled deeply and the vapors wafted into my nostrils, showing me how strong it was. I nodded slowly to myself in satisfaction, knowing that this would make telling her the secret easier.

Mary had been watching me as I gave myself a stronger drink, and noticed how much I'd poured into the glass when I returned to my seat. "Darling, shall I get your slippers?" she asked with some uncertainty. "No," I repeated flatly as I held the whiskey in both hands and raised it to my lips, pouring more of the drink into my mouth.

It was quiet for a minute or so before Mary spoke again. "I think it's a shame that when a policeman gets to be as senior as you, they keep him walking about on his feet all day long," she said slowly. I didn't reply to what she had said, my head spinning with the amount of strong whiskey I had drunk by now. What would I tell her, how would I tell her, when would I tell her, went around and around in my mind.

Mary had started sewing again after I hadn't responded to her statement, and I sensed her eyes on me through the growing fog. I poured more whiskey down my throat, its powerful smell burning my throat and making my eyes water, and heard the needle sewing, its movement like a faraway whisper, the clink of the ice cubes in my glass blending into it.

"Darling, would you like me to get you some cheese? I haven't made any supper because it's Thursday." My clouded mind noticed her voice, and I said, without emotion, "No." Mary paused for a second before continuing to speak to me, and I could hear the growing level of concern in her voice now. "If you're too tired to eat out, it's still not too late. There's plenty of meat and stuff in the freezer, and you can have it right here and not even move out of the chair."

I wasn't hearing anything she was saying anymore, with my head pounding and my throat burning. I have to tell her about the secret now, I thought foggily. "Anyway, I'll get you some cheese and crackers first," she said. "I don't want it," I replied forcefully, pushing away the fog that was blurring my thoughts.

"But you must eat! I'll fix it anyway, and then you can have it or not, as you like," she said worriedly, moving into a standing position and preparing to walk over to the kitchen.

"Sit down. Just for a minute, sit down," I ordered in a harsh, angry tone. She stood without moving for a few seconds, her eyes studying my face fearfully, and I repeated, with more calmness and control, "Go on. Sit down."I thought about how I was going to tell her now that she was listening to me, a frown growing on my face as I puz-

zled over how to phrase it. She had sat down slowly after I'd repeated my order, and was watching me, confused and frightened. Finally, I said, "Listen. I've got something to tell you." "What is it, darling? What's the matter?" she asked slowly, carefully.

I felt a muscle in the corner of my left eye twitching from the whiskey, and I sighed deeply before continuing. "This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I'm afraid. But I've thought about it a good deal and I've decided the only thing to do is tell you right away. I hope you won't blame me too much."

Unveiling Shadows

Joseph Shwartz

The gravel of the driveway crunched under Mr. Maloney's feet as he stepped out of his black Mustang holding his leather briefcase. He wiped away a drop of sweat with the cuff of his sleeve, hoping his nervousness wouldn't show once he stepped into his house. He wanted to look composed and in control so his wife wouldn't start an argument. He wanted to get in, tell her what she needed to know, and get out. Like a police briefing. Mr. Maloney was good at briefings. He did police work day-in day-out, he knew he could do a simple briefing.

So that was the mindset he tried to put on as he opened the dark, mahogany door to his house. He wasn't about to have a serious talk with his wife, he was going to brief a detective on a case. At least, that's what he tried to do.

Mr. Maloney didn't react as his wife kissed his cheek, nor as she hung his coat in the closet, he simply moved past her and sat down. "Hullo, darling," she said.

"Hullo, darling," he replied. His wife walked the kitchen and filled a glass of whiskey for the both of them before walking back through the living room. He took the whiskey from her hand as she held it out to him. He held the glass in front of him, swirling the liquid back and forth as he watched the liquid swirl over the ice cubes.

They sat in silence for a few minutes, each taking a couple sips from their drinks. He drank more than usual, drinking half the glass in just a few minutes.

"Tired, darling?" she asked. "Yes," he replied truthfully, "I'm tired." And, God, was he tired. He felt as if he was dragging his feet through mud. He wanted this to go quicker. He wanted to get this over with so he could go on with his life. He lifted the glass from his lap to take a small sip, before changing his mind and downing the rest of the glass. He barely even registered the taste as he swallowed it. He stood up to refill his glass; even if he had drunk the whole glass, he knew he would need more to get through this talk.

"I'll get it!" she cried out, jumping from her seat. "Sit down," he told her firmly.

He walked to the kitchen counter quickly, through the entry archway to the kitchen and picked up the bottle of Jack Daniel, filling the glass until the liquid sat a half inch from the top. He went back to his seat and sat, taking a liberal sip of the dark liquor.

"I think it's a shame that when a policeman gets to be as senior as you, they keep him walking about on his feet all day long," she said. He didn't respond, instead he took a sip of his whiskey.

"Darling," she started, "would you like me to get you some cheese? I haven't made any supper because it's Thursday." "No," he replied quickly. The rest of the conversation seemed to go right over his head. He only robotically responded to what she said, not entirely paying attention. His mind was off trying to figure out how to broach the subject he knew he needed to talk about. He needed to be careful, or else she would get angry and maybe get him in trouble with his job.

"Listen, I've got something to tell you," he said to her. "What is it, darling? What's the matter?" She said in reply. "This is going to be a bit of a shock for you, I'm afraid," he told her. Of course it would be a shock, she never expected him to leave her because he didn't want to be a father, and especially not without talking with her about it before he had set up his housino in a different city with a different police station.

"But I've thought about it a good deal and I've decided the only thing to do is tell you right away. I hope you won't blame me too much."

Betrayal and Consequences

Connie Van Genderen

I walk out the front door of the office, my satchel in hand and an emotionless look on my face as I walk down the street to my car. This was that car that we bought together. She wanted to have a minivan for us for trips with our children. The smell of gas, a small fly buzzing around my head. I look up at the photo I have pinned on the dashboard and take a minute to just think about what I've done.

I have to tell her, I have to. There's no avoiding it. I turn into the gravel driveway and think about how my wife is inside. I can hear the record player inside, near the end of her favorite song. I turn my car key slowly and rest my head on the wheel. I take a deep breath and drag my feet to the front door. Looking into the window I can see the warm glow of the dining room light and the old grandfather clock. 5:46 five minutes later than usual.

I unlock the door and turn the nob. I see her standing there with a smile on her face "hullo darling " i say just like every day. "Hullo darling" she responds and takes my coat. She walks into the kitchen to make the drinks and I sit down in my chair. She comes out a moment later and gives me my drink.

I take a look at her and see the innocent wife that I love and how happy she is to see me and to just not be alone like she is every day. How could i do something like this to her and even when she's with child. She's been extra slow lately. She must have made the drinks before I got here.

I take my first sip. Perfect, to perfect how can I even say anything on a perfect day like today. An early fall afternoon is a special time when the leaves don't smell yet but have a beautiful fade from golden brown to green. That's how the maple in our yard always was. I always told myself that that tree was like my wife. Tough bark with a sturdy trunk and beautiful leaves that turn the color of her hair.

“Are you tired dear?” she says. “Yes, I'm tired,” I say. That's an understatement, dread and exhaustion fill my soul. I down the rest of my drink and get up for another. I want to be the least bit here when I tell her.

“I'll get it!” She says and hops up. “No, sit down,” I told her. I walk into the kitchen to find the bottle in its normal spot in the cabinet. I mix the drink like usual But with more whisky. I walk slowly back to my chair and sit down. “Should I get your slippers?” she asked . Silly girl, she can’t even see I already have them on. Her visions have really been going lately. I take my first sip of the new drink, zoinks, maybe that’s why they're bartenders, this is terrible. I feel it already kicking in. “I think it’s a shame,” she says. “that when a policeman gets to be as senior as you, they keep him walking about on his feet all day long.” What? What’s that supposed to mean?

And so I told her about my worries and how I'm leaving her. And she just sat there, not making a noise, sitting there frozen to the bone in shock.

She went back to work on her sewing. For the last few months she’s been working on making clothes for the baby. All the time it seems like all she does. I continue to take sips of my drink making sure to disperse them to give her the idea that I'm fine.

“Darling,” she says . “Would you like me to get you some cheese? I haven’t made any supper because it’s Thursday.” Oh that’s right. “No,” I say. “If you’re too tired to eat out,” she goes on, “It’s still not too late. There’s plenty of meat and stuff in the freezer, and you can have it right here and not even move out of the chair.”

That’s sweet of her but no thanks. She looked at him for a moment but he gave no sign of even hearing her. “Anyway,” she said after a moment, “I’ll get you some cheese and crackers first.” “I don’t want it,” I say back. There’s no need for anything fancy. I don't have an appetite right now.

She shifted around in her chair, like she was uncomfortable. “But you must eat! I’ll fix it anyway, and then you can have it or not, as you like.” She got up and put her things down to go make some dinner.

Wait, I have to tell her .“Sit down,”I say. “Just for a minute, sit down.” I noticed an unusual look on her face , she was scared.“Go on,” I say. “Sit down.” Okay, I can do this. I take a glance at her face and watch her sit down in her chair while keeping her eyes on me. I finish my drink and say, “Listen, I’ve got something to tell you,”. “What is it, darling? What’s the matter?” Well. “This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I’m afraid,” I say. “But I’ve thought about it a good deal and I’ve decided the only thing to do is tell you right away. I hope you won’t blame me too much.”

And so I told her about my worries and how I'm leaving her. And she just sat there, not making a noise, sitting there frozen to the bone in shock. Nothing, no foot taps, no playing with the hem of her shirt, just sitting there plain still. It was like she was a light post in the dark saying for a light and having her light of hope come to an end never to see the light of the sun. I finished and added “So there it is. And I know it’s kind of a bad time to be telling you, but there simply wasn’t any other way. “Of course I’ll give you money and see you’re looked after. But there needn’t really be any fuss. I hope not anyway. It wouldn’t be very good for my job.”

Then I did the thing I knew was coming and had feared this entire time, I looked at her face. The bright cheerfulness was gone and she had gone pale. She looked like she might faint. Faintly I heard her say “I’ll get supper,”. I watch her get up and walk out of the room. And that was the thing that shook me for real. I wasn’t the kind of man to do this, what was i doing to a woman like her, i came into her life and broke it.

I heard her walk downstairs to the celer and got up, set my glass down and looked out the window. I stood there and for the first time in a very long time, shed a single tear. My eyes became foggy and the visions of our lawn faded to mush.

I Heard the freezer close, wiped my tears and hid my sorrow as they stepped into the room. “For God’s sake,” I say, not turning around, thinking it was my wife. “Don’t make supper for me. I’m going out.”

I heard someone’s steps come up behind me. I feel a sharp pain in my head, but I can't yell out, I can't see, I feel a stream of blood run down my back. My vision is gone.I can't feel my body.my glass shatters on the floor and the sound of the coffee table flipping beside me,

“All right so I’ve killed him”. The voice of my wife.

Troubles in Kindergarten

Sam Ryan

I was in my room where I taught the kindergarten class when the meeting was happening trying to relax some. I was hoping no one wanted to talk to me, but my luck ran out after the meeting ended when I saw LAURRIEE'SSS MOTHER slowly walk into the room.

Each step she took felt like an eternity, I hadn't even thought of what to say about Laurie yet.

But she was getting closer and I figured out what to say to her and be kind at the same time right before she sat down.

"I've been wanting to meet you. I'm Laurie's mother," she said

I then say "Oh, yes. We're all so interested in Laurie" I said vaguely while also trying to be nice. "He certainly likes kindergarten. He talks about it all the time." She said which terrified me. What if Laurie has told her about all the things he's done and said. What if she's going to blame me because I've been the one teaching him, but i carry on acting like nothing happened and tell her he's been having some trouble getting used to school

Then she says something i'm not expecting, she says "I suppose his trouble might be from Charles' influence." | just repeated his name to her because maybe she misspoke, maybe she's thinking of someone else she knows. But then she just says "Yes, you must have your hands full in that kin-

dergarten, with Charles" all while laughing. Now I'm really confused and I decide to just say to her "Charles? We don't have any Charles in the kindergarten

Shattered Vows

Lilly Cannon

I came home from work to tell my wife the big news. I sat down on my favorite chair as usual. My spouse came over to me and offered me a drink. I declined the offer because I didn't feel like it just because something would go wrong. We were in complete silence for a while then I told her I wanted a divorce. She just stares at me in complete shock and she asks me "why, why why?" over and over again, her saying so many times gets me irritated.

"I have a good deal for this whole problem" i say, she starts spazzing out non-sense to me trying to make things better even though she's making things worse. I walked to the kitchen when I randomly heard the lamp move, I turned around to see my lady love holding the lamp above her head. It looks like she's trying to swing it at me before I could even speak a word. She swung the lamp across my head and I fell unconscious.

Fractured Trust

Soren Johnson

Tonight I drove back from work at 5:00, I don't know what I'm going to tell my wife, Mary Maloney, about the news I have to share. I'm picturing her reaction and imagine she's not going to be happy. Ok, I'll just tell her really quickly and get it over with.

I get home and walk into the house where I see her in the kitchen; she is cooking dinner. She looks pleased with a smile on her face. "Hello dear," she said. She offers me dinner and to put my shoes away but I keep refusing because I don't want to waste time. I have to get this over with to get it off my chest. She needs to know and I need to calm down. My heart is beating quickly.

"No, just sit down" I tell her with a firm voice but she insists that I sit down first. I just start talking.

The words come out quickly but quietly. "I know it's kind of a bad time to tell you but there simply wasn't any other way... of course I'll give you money to help. Please there mustn't be any fuss. I hope not anyway. It wouldn't be very good for my job." She seems upset and confused.

She stands. "I'll get supper", she manages to whisper. I watch her walk into the kitchen and I feel relieved to not have her staring at me. "For god sakes Mary, don't make supper for me, I'm going out." Suddenly ice smashes on my head, it feels more like cold steel. I feel my skull shatter, I stand up for five seconds with silence and then I crash down to the floor. Everything goes black and with a gasp I take my last breath.

A Tough Conversation

Craig Thompson-Wenzel

I left work at 5 o'clock and I had no idea how to tell her what's on my mind.

I simply don't love my wife anymore. I know we had some good times together but my love faded away. Mary was always here for me and the love of my life. I often think about our first date at that fancy restaurant near the Beach. I remember the waves crashing against the boats slamming into the docks. I remember hearing the wind howling as I sat across from this Beautiful woman. she wore a fancy blue dress and a vintage hat hat lined with yellow feathers that match the beautiful sunset.

As I turned off the highway I could see the lights glowing very brightly from my house. I could see Mary's silhouette through the window I can't bear to tell her how I'm feeling or how to tell her I parked my car and slammed the door i'm thinking what I must say. With my hands shaking I struggle to find the right key. Mary suddenly open the door well struggled anxiously trying to find the right key to open the door. swings open and I seen Mary standing there " hello darling" she says in a normal every day tone. I respond "hello darling" not knowing what else to say.

"Can I pour you a glass of whiskey"

"Okay "

"Can I get you something to eat? Maybe some cheese and crackers. I'm sure you had a difficult day.

Oh my gosh Mary has no clue what I'm about to tell her. i've got to tell her before but I backed out because I don't want to hurt her. This time I need to follow through

"Mary, sit down, I have something to tell you..

Fading Love

Sofia Benegas

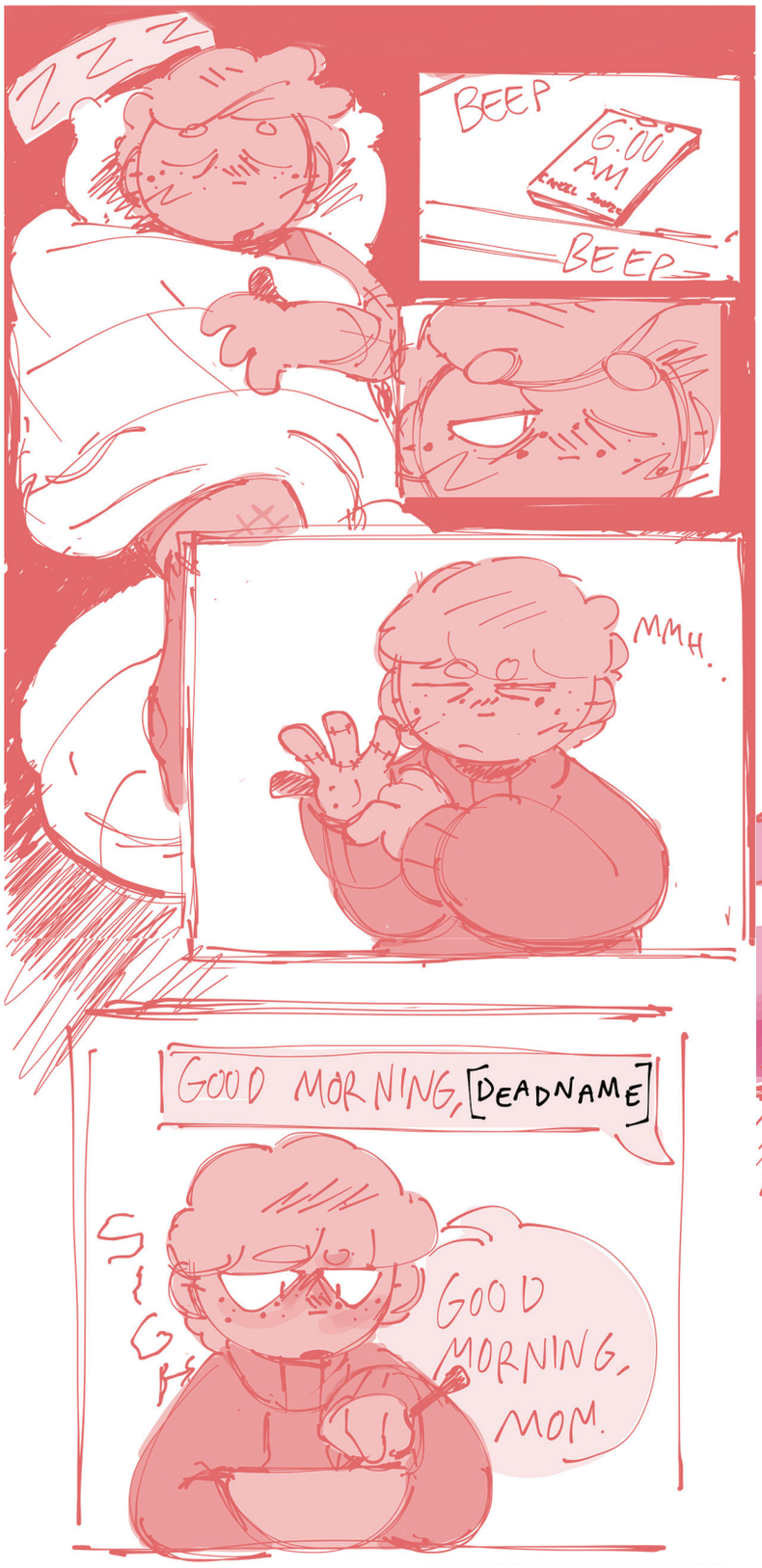
I had to leave work and I have no idea how to tell her that I don’t love her anymore. I know we had some good times together and Mary was always here for me. I often think about out first date at that fancy restaurant near the beach. I remember the waves crashing against the boats slamming into the dock. I remember the wind howling while I sat across this beautiful woman. She wore a fancy blue dress and a vintage hat lined with yellow feathers that matched the beach’s sunset.

As I turned off the highway, I could see the lights glow brightly from my house. I could see Mary’s silhouette through the window and I can’t bear to tell her how I am feeling. I parked the car and slammed the door, thinking about what might happen. Mary suddenly opened the door while I struggled with my keys. I’d opened the door a thousand times but yet I fumbled trying to find the right key.

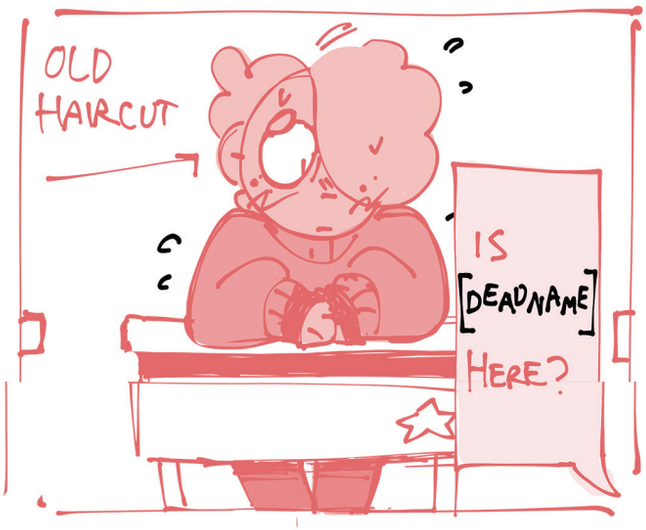
The door swings open and I see Mary standing there. “Hello, darling.” She says in a normal everyday voice. I respond “Hello, darling” not knowing what to say. “Can I pour you a glass of whiskey?” “Okay” “Can I get you some cheese and crackers? I’m sure you’ve had a difficult day.” Oh my Gosh, Mary has no clue what I’m about to tell her.

Substitute Teachers

BY MARKUS, AKA ME



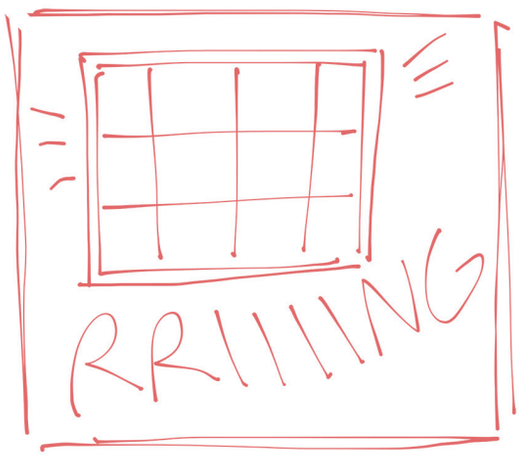



OLD HAIRCUT
IS [DEADNAME] HERE?


OKAY, NEXT ON THE LIST IS.. [DEADNAME] ?


AND.. DO WE HAVE A [DEADNAME] HERE?


SCREEEECH
OPEN WORLD LEARNING
I WASN'T LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.


RRIIIING


JUST AS PROMISED, THERE WAS A SUB.
LET'S START WITH ATTENDANCE.
...
[DEADNAME]?
HERE!
XANDER?
KADEN?
HERE!
HERE!
JOSEPH?
ACTUALLY..
??
..HIS NAME IS MARKUS

This magazine was made by:
The Publishing Platypuses



Claire Ales
Layout Person



Aria Kulseth
Artist/Collector



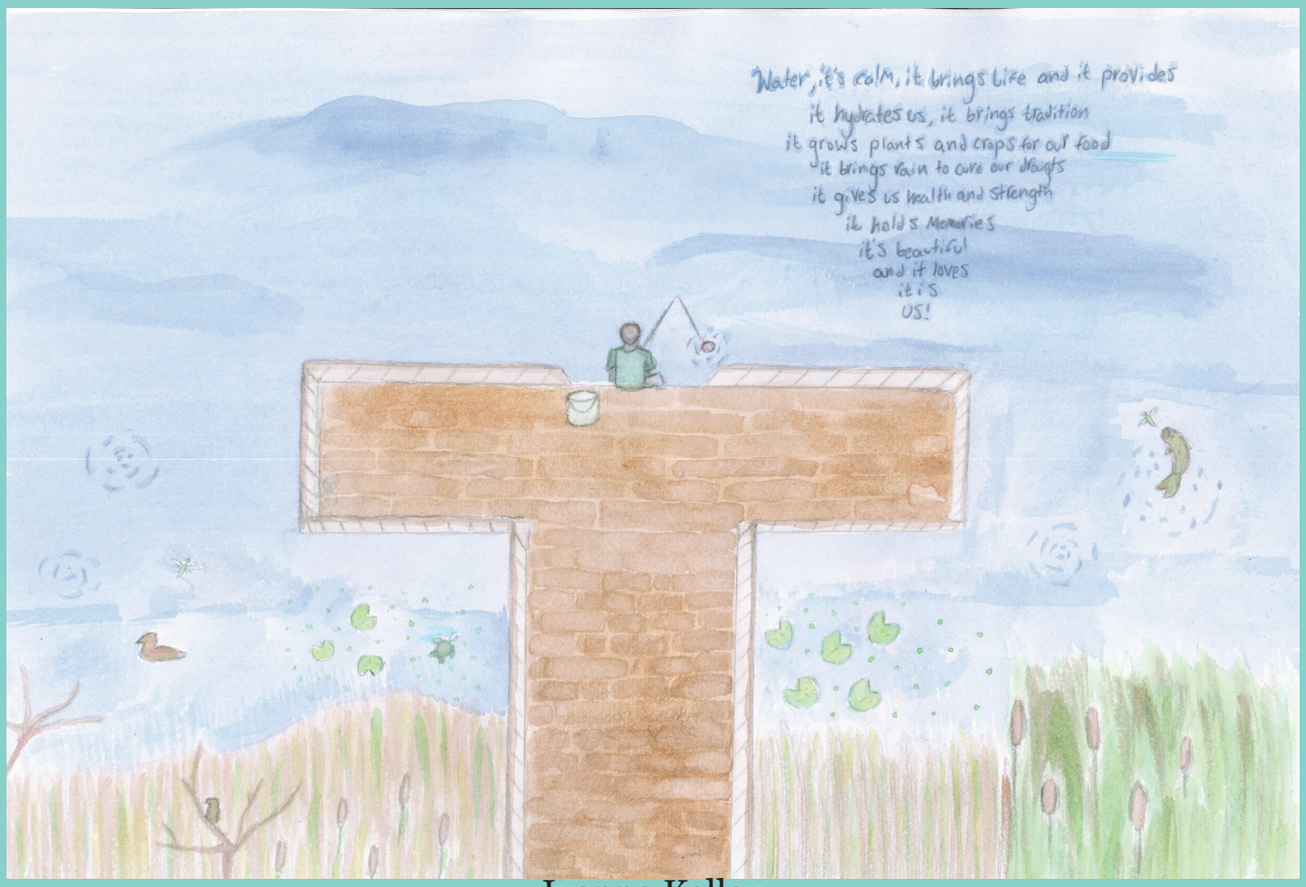
Anya Robertson
Editor



Connie Van Genderen
Jack of All Trades



Claire, Anya, Aria, Connie
The Publishing Platypuses



Iyanna Kelley



Gwyneth Huett