



ALLEGANY
COLLEGE
of
MARYLAND

EXPRESSIONS



2024
EXPRESSIONS

Essays, Fiction, Poetry & Artwork



ALLEGANY COLLEGE
— *of* MARYLAND —

ALLEGANY COLLEGE of MARYLAND

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STUDENT EDITOR'S Introduction

As I'm reading through the final proof for this year's *Expressions* magazine, I cannot help but to be taken aback by the intellectual and emotional prowess of this generation of students. It is truly heartwarming to see such talent in literature and artwork, and being asked to be student editor is beyond an honor. In my essay "The Musician's Cognitions," I shared that "I do not think that musical talent is in one's genetics. I think it is about dedication and persistence, and in the perseverance to keep trying even when you do not see results." Personally, as an ex-musician turned musician again, I feel that consistent practice at anything you enjoy doing creates talent. Musical talent, in and of itself, is not innate (although maybe the drive is). I think that same logic extends to writing and art. Even though writing and artistic talent can be achieved through dedication and persistence, some people are naturally gifted – but the foundation of said gift is cultivated through the act of consuming literature and art, such as can be found in this edition of *Expressions*.

The talented students who submitted a heartfelt poem, a thoughtful essay, or a beautiful piece of artwork for us to view – they are giving a gift, one that lives on beyond their studies here. I will admit, there were parts that made me tear up, as I absolutely loved how raw and honest students were. C.S. Lewis once spoke on the importance of literature, which I believe also applies to music and art: "Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already."

This 2024 edition of *Expressions* is truly a feat, a magnificently detailed work of literary and visual art, and I would like to personally congratulate and thank everyone who submitted their work to make this issue possible.

Jonathan Schmoeyer
Student Editor



LIFE FROM ABOVE

Photograph | *by Amy Custer*

THE MUSICIAN'S COGNITIONS

Essay

by Jonathan Schmoyer

For years my soul was lost, and I would have given up searching for it, if not for the emotional connection regarding music. Sting once said, "if you play music with passion and love and honesty, then it will nourish your soul, heal your wounds and make your life worth living. Music is its own reward." I, personally, am not a huge fan of Sting, but his quote has struck a note in my heart. I was at the lowest of the low and had given up trying to be happy, yet music brought me back and showed me "my life is worth living."

I grew up in foster families and group homes and never felt like I belonged to anything. Because of the confines of being supervised in a group home or foster family, I was not able to do sports or live an active lifestyle, but I was an energetic and wild little person, always acting out for attention because I never had a focal point to apply my creativity and intelligence. I was a bored thirteen-year-old boy. Then, one day, a life-changing person entered my life: a staff member from the group home I was leaving gave me an acoustic guitar as an adoption gift. From that point on, my actions and decisions became deliberate, and I began to focus my thoughts and ideas more on my academic and physiological goals. It was like a psychological medicine for my ADHD. I had picked up what I can only describe as "purpose."

My thinking became clearer and

sharper. I was able to analyze things at a higher level. I felt like my motor skills and verbal skills had increased to such an extent that it changed my personality and gave me the confidence of a lion. I played guitar, and that is not an easy feat. But the audible vibrations that a strummed chord gives off is soothing. It is like liquid diamond directly injected into the brain: crisp and uncut. It is an addictive feeling, a deep psychological need.

During high school, I met another person who also played guitar and I fell into the music scene with him. He played a different style than I did, mainly playing "heavier" music because he played electric guitar, and I played acoustic guitar. He influenced me with "heavy metal" music, introduced me to smoking weed, and helped me become a non-conformative bad-ass. It was a new type of music and all I wanted to do was bang my head and pump my fists in the air, middle finger out in one hand.

My musical subculture was acoustic guitar based, but through him I became influenced by a "heavier" form of myself. Nonetheless, self-made music was in our blood, and through it, we bonded. We both graduated from a private school for the mentally and behaviorally challenged, yet we excelled in our academics, doing better than most in our school. In the article "Instruments of Knowledge," Anne R. Stoklosa

states, “playing a musical instrument has been shown to increase cognitive ability through enhanced neuronal communication between the left and right hemispheres of the brain, resulting in positive effects on learning, memory, fine motor skills, verbal reasoning, and non-verbal reasoning, resulting in an overall more capable brain to apply in a variety of diverse settings.” I found this fascinating because looking back on my life, I see that playing my guitar and my increased mental acuity went hand in hand. Music has been my motivation to succeed at whatever I do, since learning that practice makes perfect. Just as Stoklosa says, my “learning, memory, fine motor skills, verbal reasoning, and non-verbal reasoning” had all increased. I think every child should be given a musical instrument growing up. I believe it opens one’s consciousness and heart to become more susceptible to knowledge and art. I do not think that musical talent is in one’s genetics. I think it is about dedication and persistence, and in the perseverance to keep trying even when you do not see results. Without the knowledge and experience of making music on my guitar, I do not see how I would have had a purpose in life.

Being in the metal head subculture was a fundamental part of my musical influence in my teenage years. Smoking weed and jamming out to metal is what I lived for, including for a few years after high school. Because of this, I was more brash and vulgar, gaining a “don’t care” attitude. Even having my children couldn’t dissuade me from my lifestyle. I was young and wanted to be free, and having

children was not going to stop me. I was not a “dead beat” dad -- I nurtured my growing family with love, respect, necessities, and support. I just smoked weed every day and lied about it.

The major turning point in my life occurred when I wrecked my motorcycle at 23 years old. I ended up paralyzed from the chest down. In a fraction of a second, my life was essentially changed forever.

Going from mowing people down in a mosh pit to bound to a wheelchair alters the mind. I literally could not play an instrument because of damage to my spinal cord affecting my fret hand. My best friend, my heavy music influencer, turned out to be a temporary person in my life, for I never saw him after that – leading me to believe my heavy metal music-making talent, that which I had now lost, was the only reason why he ever hung around.

Seven years I went without playing a guitar. Seven excruciatingly long years I endured what I can only describe as missing an essential part of myself. I had no comfort, and I was living a totally different lifestyle in a wheelchair, with spinal cord injuries and a brain injury. I had all but given up on life by that point. I had nothing to live for. My children were with their mother a half hour drive away and their mom rarely had the time to bring them for visits. Most girls only see a wheelchair when they look at me, and the ones that see me for me are either in a relationship or just not interested. Rarely did I get visits from old friends, if ever. I felt secluded and cut off from the world with very little to occupy my time. I would just listen

to my heavy metal music and stare at the wall. Depression set in and I contemplated suicide. I was a mess.

Then, one day, while I was downtown staying to myself, I ventured into the pawn shop. The guys working were friendly, and I began conversing with them. At the same time, a ukulele on the wall caught my attention. So, I asked to look at it, tuned it by ear using a YouTube video for a reference point and bought it on an impulse. I took it home, began to practice, and was surprisingly adept at it, even with the poor use of my hand. I learned how to play the song "I'm Yours" by Jason Mraz in a couple days and was fluent with the instrument in less than a month.

From that point on, my old flame for life slowly started to rekindle. The heat was a different kind of heat, for I was no longer trying to play "six-stringed" music, but a spark was present. Eventually, the four nylon strings of the ukulele didn't do it for me. Playing it was like a tease. I needed more from my instrument. So, I went into the music store, which I had been avoiding like the plague, and saw a Washburn acoustic guitar, with a beautiful vine inlay running down the neck. It was love at first sight. I picked it off the wall, checked the tune, and satisfied with it, tried to make a G chord shape with my faulty fingers.

Pushing down hard with my weak fingers, I gingerly strummed all six strings, one beautiful sounding string at a time. Then, I began to sob. It sounded like my Father in heaven floated down and whispered in my ear, *don't give up, son*. "Purpose" was in that single chord and a knot of despair unraveled in my chest. It hurt

so good. I had not heard that sound in almost a decade; longer, because my accident occurred at the peak of my electric guitar stage, and I never thought to hear it again. Listening to a song that's been produced, with all the instruments played in perfect harmony is enjoyable, no doubt, but there is something about the imperfect buzz of poor contact on frets that is intrinsically mesmerizing and soothing to the soul.

I made a down payment that same day and purchased it the following month. It felt amazing to feel my soul begin to trickle back inside of me with just a little bit of practice. Despite my injury, I found a new way to make music. I no longer play the heavy metal music I learned to love, but I love all music, no matter what it is, and I have changed to playing a softer sound of music. Playing open chords on my acoustic guitar, instead of heavy and fast music on my electric guitar, still makes me feel complete again. Rhythm is felt, and once you feel it, it becomes innate. I can feel the vibrations of my guitar through my chest, and that shouldn't be possible. It's like my organs remember how the vibrations felt, and so I can feel my organs. Spinal cord injuries are curious that way. My injury slowed me down and gave me perspective. It was both a blessing and a curse. I was headed down a rough path with only misery as far as the eye could see, and then I was born again.

The effects of music have fundamentally changed my perspective and outlook on life. I was at the lowest place I have ever been, close to the point of no return, and all it took was a nudge, the

melodic sound of gently strummed steel strings, amplified by a beautiful wooden box, to bring me back to reality. I do not play the ukulele anymore, not even a little bit, but I will always be grateful for it. I know that if I had never purchased it, I

would, still to this day, be avoiding the music store because the instruments brought back so many memories, and yet playing seemed out of reach. It gave me my confidence and life back, and I am forever thankful.

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Jonathan is a recipient of the Troy McKenzie DelFest Academy Sponsorship and will be attending the bluegrass musician-instructed DelFest Academy in 2024.

ODE TO THE WISDOM OF THE MARCESCENT TREE!

Poem

by *URBuddha2!*

A sapling drawing breath below
tall trees that crowd the forest height
survives with leaves retained through snow,
bleak cold and gusty winds of might.
To shape a life that is profound
we must transcend uneven ground.

Tree fluids, membranes do adapt
that living cells alive remain;
and with dead cells all are entrapped
though freezing naught within the grain.
As humans, change occurs within,
so love all that we find therein.

Nutritious twigs by creatures sought
but yellowed leaves dissuade; induced
in spring the severing is wrought
that mulch will give the tree a boost.
All parts of us in precious time
repurpose into art sublime.

In nature, wisdom is revealed
profoundly and colossally
so, to this great myst'ry we yield
an ode to the marcescent tree!
'O humans, mind and contemplate
how use thy wisdom seals thy fate.



PURENESS IN AN OCEAN OF WONDER

Photograph | *by Isaac Kneisley*

HOPE, FEAR, AND THE DEATH OF DEATH

Essay

by Michael Parnes

Transcending the inevitability of death (or life extension as a stepping stone) has been a longstanding dream of humanity. On one hand, mythology offers the rejuvenating water of the fountain of youth as an antidote for death. Conversely, religion offers resurrection, reincarnation, an immortal soul or an afterlife. Furthermore, proto-scientific alchemists strived to create the elixir of life, a potion that grants its drinker eternal life and/or eternal youth, and cures all diseases. Compared to the medical knowledge of our ancestors, our scientific capabilities would seem like magic, and even still we're on the cusp of further advancement.

Death is due to aging, disease, or injury. Each of these categories has its own indefinite nuance, but has seen great thinkers rise to tackle these challenges. In the last century alone, humanity has seen its life expectancy doubled, the discovery of antibiotics, and the invention of seatbelts. Conversely, it could be argued that antibiotics, which can fight disease-causing bacteria, just redirect you down the path of death by aging. Likewise, the invention of seatbelts was reactionary to the modern tragedy of deaths from automobile accidents, but every life saved by a safety belt will be taken in some other fashion. Nevertheless, the potential of technologies currently being explored show that humanity will challenge any emerging threats to our resistance

to death. Some may try to stave off death through medicine or creating a safer world, while others have much bolder visions for reaching that goal. Diverse approaches are attempting to solve the problem of mortality: genetic engineering, cryogenics, nanobots, cybernetics, biotech, and now with the assistance of powerful AIs. At the same time, other work is being done toward something more abstracted than continuing the physical experience of humanity, such as creating an artificial mind, or digitizing someone's personality into a computer or robot.

Humanity's awareness of mortality is deeply culturally shaping. According to Jeremy Engle in his *New York Times* article "Would You Want to Live to 200?," "All of human culture evolved with the understanding that earthly life is finite and, in the grand scheme, relatively brief." The fear of death and anything that leads to it is innate fear – so much so that even considering ways to avoid it can cause division and discomfort. Just as some people's lives are enriched by prosthetic legs to walk, or with pacemakers to help regulate poorly performing hearts, some people have opposition to living with technology implanted inside of them. As excited as some may be to enhance their body in whatever way they can, there will always be critical voices with a variety of concerns. Taken to extremes, augmentation could alter the human form beyond our

current recognition. While there are fears about specific paths in achieving immortality, even immortality itself could prove undesirable. Engle muses, "If we are one day born knowing that we can reasonably expect to live 200 years or longer, will our minds easily accommodate this unparalleled scope of life?" The thought is summarized nicely in the title of Gregg Opelka's article for the *Wall Street Journal*, "Immortality Isn't All It's Cracked Up to Be; Nanobots May Let Us Live Forever, But It'll Feel Like Forever Too." In a way it's not very hard to imagine boredom replacing death. Opelka goes on to suggest that "Death, the ultimate deadline, is thus, paradoxically, our lifeline. 'Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near,' as Marvell wrote, is the eternal goal to achievement in almost every human endeavor. We may sorely regret curtailing it."

In 1859, Charles Darwin released *On the Origin of Species*, the foundation of evolutionary biology which introduced

the scientific theory of evolution by natural selection. Natural selection, also commonly called "survival of the fittest," refers to reproductive success and the genetic traits that are passed on because of those successes. On the contrary, with immortality potentially within our grasp, the very concept of "survival of the fittest" is redefined in our own image. Shifting our hopes onto ourselves instead of our descendants is unlike what we have yet known as the human experience. Crossing this threshold would put the responsibility of our own evolution into our own hands.

There's that famous line from Jeff Goldblum's Dr. Ian Malcolm in the first *Jurassic Park* – "life finds a way." Nevertheless, death also finds a way. While this despairing thought may be true, humanity searches for its own way too, and will go through the process of eliminating each form of death individually, if that's what it takes to find immortality.

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DEADLINES

Poem

by Drake Rose

I'm really great with deadlines.
They mark a date.
They tell me when
my time is gone.

I'm really great with deadlines.
Even if I'm working
till 11:58,
the next minute,
it's done.

I'm really great with deadlines.
Without them,
I can't finish my stuff
and move on.

Since I'm really great with deadlines,
Without them,
I take my time.
I can have fun.

Since I'm really great with deadlines,
Without them,
I can choose
the due date.

Since I'm really great with deadlines,
Without them,
I'm doing just fine,
my time has just begun.

Has a teacher ever asked you
when you want
the deadline to be?
Not often.

This teacher—
He gave me a choice.
He stood above me.
He made me a deal.

Since you're so great
with Deadlines,
How about I give you one?

Without the Deadline,
you will think,
you're doing just fine,
right?

But when that day comes,
when your time is due,
Will you have your work done?

Or, since you're so great
with Deadlines, He says,
why not take it?
See how much time
you have left to fight?

But without the Deadline,
you can take your time,
you can have fun.

Living with the threat
of Huntington's Disease,
It gives you a choice,
stands above you.

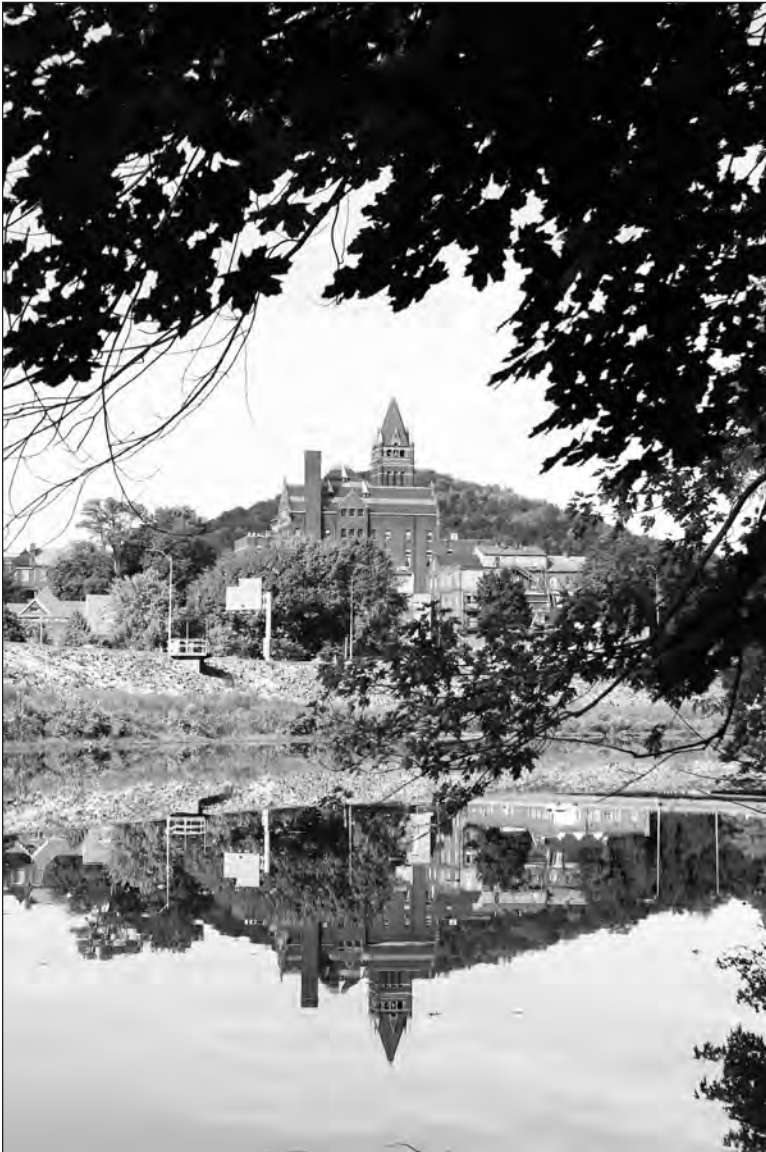
If you're great with a Deadline,
He could give you one.
And when your time is due,
your work may be done.

Without that Deadline,
you'll be blissfully fine,
right?

You will take your time,
you will have fun,
no idea how much time
you have left to fight.

I think my time
has just begun.

I wanna take my time,
I want to have fun.
I don't think I want this Deadline.



THE REFLECTION OF EMMANUEL CHURCH ACROSS THE POTOMAC RIVER

Photograph | *by Austin Black*

HOME SWEET HOME

Poem

by *Angelina Whitfield*

"Are you sure, it's wise to visit?"
is a question she hears often
on the weekends she visits home.

She always questions the decision to go
But once again, she's in the car
watching as the many road signs and small houses
Disappear into the rearview window
and get lost within the tall, stooping trees.

A few miles further and she passes
the laundromat, long useless and abandoned.
Signaling that she has entered the town.
The town where a young, desperate girl died
And a confident woman took her place.

A town that tried to hold her down
And keep her from becoming anything.
She stops at a light where the intersection
is split in half by long, iron tracks.

The railroad crossing sign seems to reflect back
as if letting her know that once she crosses,
it will be a fight to turn back.
But she knows that she has made it this far.
So, in the end,
What's another three miles?

WHAT HAVE I BECOME?

Essay

by Britney

I was a teenager, just like you were. I started talking to a guy and the next thing I knew we were together. We got a place not even a month later, and I was head over heels, or at least I thought I was. He treated me like nobody ever had before. He spoiled me with love, surprises, gifts—you name it, he did it. My mother warned me he was no good, but I thought otherwise, I mean I was in love. Let me just say my relationship with her went downhill. But I had no care in the world because I wanted to prove her wrong. I wanted to show her he was the right one for me. I loved him no matter what anyone else thought.

And then the day came, the day that would change my life: he introduced me to pills. He told me they would make me feel good, and that they did. Days turned into months and months turned into years. He changed, and he was not the person I fell in love with anymore. He was mean, controlling, and it was always my fault. I hated him for what he put me through, and there would be days and weeks when I would hide in the house because of the bruises and marks. I wanted nobody to see me like that. But he always apologized and treated me to gifts or vacations to make up for what he did. I always forgave him because I felt like I had nobody else to run to anymore.

The pills helped make up for what he did. I started using them more heavily. I wanted to hide the pain, and that is what they helped me do. I knew

once that high wore down, I needed to fix my life and get away from him, but I could not because I was in too deep. I was addicted, I had a problem, and I did not want help. I wanted to chase the high with him because that was the only thing on my mind anymore. I changed, just like him. Who was I? I did not even know who I was even more. I looked into the mirror, and I no longer knew who this girl was. The fights only got worse. Even the hospital visits did not keep me from leaving him; I went right back. I knew what I was doing. I only wanted to be with him because of my addiction. I stayed. No matter how ugly it got, I was not ready to leave. I was now chasing a high, and if you have ever been an addict, then you know this. It is a disease. I was no longer in control, it was controlling me.

This addiction took over my whole life. Not even my family trusted me anymore. They knew I was no longer the same person, that something changed in me. They cried for me to leave and get help, but I refused. I was no longer healthy. I was underweight, and the bags under my eyes only became worse. You could look at me and just see that I was an addict. It took everything in me to finally say I had enough, and I mean everything. God must have been with me that night because for some reason I called my nan to come over and give me a ride. She showed up and I never came outside. She walked inside, and there

I lay face down on my kitchen floor. She turned me over, and immediately called 911. She told me I was blue. I was not responding to her, and she told me she had never been so scared in her life. The ambulance showed up and took me to the hospital. I do not remember any of this, only the stories I was told from that night. It took multiple times to bring me back, but I am here. I am still living. I left that hospital and never looked back; he was not worth it, nor were the drugs. It took me to almost lose my life for me to finally get away and be done with all of it.

I stand here today three years clean. I overcame my battle. If you saw me today, you would not know the pain

and darkness that I have overcome. I was the girl who put on a smile and kept going. I will not say it was easy, because it was not. It took many months and years of counseling and rehab to get me where I am. I was lost and broken, but I knew I needed to get help for myself and my family. I am blessed to have a healthy relationship with my mother to this day, despite everything I put her and my family through. Never let yourself get lost in depression. Reach out and seek help. No man should ever put you in a situation like I was. That is not love; it was lust, if it was anything. Those drugs are never the answer as they only hide your pain for so long – but they never take away your problems.



SKIN

Digital Art | *by Justice Warner*

MY PATH TO SUCCESS

Poem

by Shannon Gunning

On my path to success, my life was a mess
I struggled with addiction and mental health sickness.
Blaming was easy for the hand I felt I was dealt
I felt like a Victim that just couldn't be helped

When I looked in the mirror, I thought, "Who am I?"
Do I want to keep using drugs, even if I might die?
I can lie to others, but I cannot fool myself
This situation is dangerous—I know I need help.

When I hit my rock bottom, I was sitting in jail
I finally realized just how much I had failed
But I knew my life wasn't over; it just needed some repair
I had to get sober, and fix things from there.

After a few months had passed, my vision was clear
With support and love from my family, I had no more fear
I learned from my mistakes and made better choices
I no longer felt like a Victim that was voiceless.

Today I am a Creator—my life could not be greater.
Although I live with chronic pain, I could not be stronger
I decided I will not let it dictate my dreams any longer.

Now I hold my head high as I continue my path
It is just the beginning if you do the math.
I just turned thirty-two, what a journey it's been
Some days are tough, but I push through them.
I can be successful; it comes from within
I've proved to myself that the sky is the limit
My goals are in sight, I'm in it to win it
An active learner for life, now my dreams can take flight!

THE EMBRACE

Poem

by *URBuddha2!*

Love,
aborted,
collapses like a wounded animal,
and shame exudes itself
like nuclear bomb clouds
choking the dark recesses of the soul.
The charred remnants of desire
l i n e r in futile fantasy,
clutching nothingness,
surrendering hope.
In this abyss of despondency,
just as a spotted fawn
springs to her cloven feet
after the trauma of birth,
the one rouses up the courage
to manifest the true self,
and vanquishes self-loathing,
embraces transparency
and opens,
triumphantly,
the closet door.

UNFATHOMABLE BEAST

In the Spirit of Percy Bysshe Shelley's Poetry

Poem

by Syd Wilfong

O, how they tremble, how they cry!
Howling curses at the sullen sky;
"Live, live!" Strong men demand,
Thrusting the unfathomable beast from the land.

O, fools! Weep not for the Whale!
For He is never weak nor frail;
Cease, cease! This, I beg of thee,
Only weep when He seizes thy feet, and drags thou, into Sea.

UNTIL THE MONSTER COMES

Fiction

by Syd Wilfong

A body falls.

If one can consider it a body. Shifting through the narrow passageway, flesh peeling against each protrusion in the wall's surface, it slowly descends. Bones cracking and crunching, it aches and trembles with every breath. Regardless of the pain, it knows it must descend, and that, it does. Its limbs begin to loosen, fusing its own shape with that of the passageway. Slivers of its skin remain on the wall's surface, but this shedding helps, allowing it to descend much faster than before. It, in its current state, might be mistaken for a secretion if it were not for the sound of its bones tearing, echoing throughout the small cavity. Its eyes are wet, eyelids swollen; each blink can be heard like teeth biting on fresh meat. Stretching and writhing its figure, inflaming its now sensitive flesh, it grinds whatever remains of itself against the wall. Its bones splinter, pulling and ripping and tearing furiously. Its jaw unhinges, releasing a strained cry. Frothing and gurgling desperately, it exits the passageway. It lies momentarily, misshapen and paralyzed. All is silent. No sunlight pours in from the window; the darkness reminds it of the passageway, engendering a sudden panic. It realizes it does not know the time nor the day: *Perhaps, I am late.* Hurriedly, it crawls to the bed where it resides. Underneath the bed, it squirms, reattaching its bones, the rubbing of its tendons causing it to wince. It tightens its head and its limbs; it dries its eyes and its mouth is thick with saliva and blood. Waiting underneath the bed, terribly frightened, it hides there. It waits there, still, until the monster comes.



WINDOW

Photograph | *by Michael Parnes*

BENEFITS OF BEING AN INTROVERT

Essay

by Ava Weicht

In this world there are two types of people, introverts and extroverts. While both terms can be interpreted differently by everyone, and there is no correct way to be, there are a ton of benefits to being what is called an introvert. An introvert is someone who tends to be viewed as more laid back, quiet, down to earth, and not super rowdy. However, introverts have a lot to bring to the table. A person should never try to completely alter their lifestyle and personality to act like someone they are not, but learning the possible strengths one can gain from being an introvert, can help change the life of someone for the better. It's important to not get caught up in categorizing oneself as strictly introvert or extrovert, because everyone is a mixture, but having more dominant introvert traits can prove to be helpful in many cases.

To begin with, introverts are very observant people who take the time to analyze their surroundings and make themselves aware of the atmosphere that they are in. Different from extroverts who tend to speak and think out loud, introverts can better critically process what is happening around them, and make mental notes of what is going on. This is important because they can better read the room and identify any problems that may arise. *Time* writer Carly Breit states, "They're more likely to notice people's body language and facial expressions, which makes them better

at interpersonal communication." This is a significant skill for anyone to have because being a better communicator is advantageous. Being able to know how someone is feeling by just watching them, allows the person to communicate with them in the most useful way. Introverts are almost like mind readers and can identify how people are feeling or what is going on with them, all by analyzing their nonverbal cues. Breit continues on to say, "They can tell when a person is thinking, processing and observing, and give them space to do so, which makes people feel much more comfortable." This backs up why being observant is important, because it can make other people feel better, too, which is all done by watching them and acting accordingly.

Another pro to being an introvert is that they are thoughtful and wise. Introverts like to think before they speak. When people just say whatever comes off the top of their head, and it doesn't always come out like it was meant to, they find themselves regretting that they decided to share in the first place. This less likely happens to introverts because they think before they speak. They process what they are going to say before they verbally do it, to fully optimize their chance in getting their message relayed. Writers from the website *All About Introverts* state, "Since they hate the feeling of being embarrassed, they'll work hard to make sure their decisions are carefully

considered before acting.” Being able to process what will be said, before it is done, will save any chances of embarrassment that are definitely not wanted. Not only will it do this, but it will make what is being said more powerful and confident because it isn’t just rambling. What will be verbally conveyed are strictly thought-out messages that will give the best impact they can because they were carefully planned. Another benefit to analyzing what is going to be said before it actually is, is that it allows the chance to further evaluate the information and catch any potential issues within the conflict that is being thought on.

Another benefit of being an introvert is that they often make brilliant leaders. Introverts can be excellent leaders because they hold many good qualities that leaders should have. As mentioned earlier, introverts are very wise and thoughtful, and possess the ability to read others through observations. These are mandatory when being a leader because you have to communicate with each member effectively, so knowing how to do so while offering the best crystal clear advice are things introverts can do best. Another reason they make great leaders is because they won’t take all the credit for themselves and attention away from the whole team like some extroverts may do. Breit notes, “They don’t feel the need to step into the spotlight and take all the

credit for group success; rather, they are likely to highlight the strengths of their teams.” This proves that it doesn’t take a loud, boisterous person to be a successful leader, it can be a quiet one who puts the wellbeing of the group above any recognition for themselves. Introverts hold many qualities of being a beneficial leader that many extroverts fail to have.

In conclusion, being an introvert doesn’t mean that a person is just a shy, backward individual with zero self-esteem – they’re actually really powerful people. Introverts are amazing humans with so many skills that are often overlooked because of the stereotype surrounding them. Just because someone isn’t overly talkative or seems not super sociable, doesn’t mean they don’t know how to interact with others, or that they’re uninterested in what is going on. They would much rather sit back and take in what is happening, so they are able to make the best possible decision while utilizing as much information they can. Being an introvert can be a really helpful thing in life because of the observation skills, the thought process, and the leadership qualities that they are capable of having. When being in a room with a loud extrovert who seems to know it all, just remember that the introvert standing there quietly is fully equipped to make the best and most effective decision, because of the skills that only they possess.

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LITTLE BIRDIE

Photograph | *by Jade Kenney*

NALA PEACE

Essay

by Mattesyn Crotts

Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and repeat. Wake up, eat, flip through T.V. channels, stay up as late into the night as you can so you can sleep the next day away, and repeat. This was my routine for the most part after my brother passed. I'd lay in bed as long as I could letting the day pass me by.

Then came May 21st, 2021, another normal day. Well, as normal as it could be anymore. I was graduating high school in a week or two, and my mom was driving to the grocery store with me in the passenger seat. I remembered seeing my friend post about her grandmother's labradoodles, and I thought of what it would be like to have one. So, I asked the question a little above a mumble, "Mom, I was wondering if maybe we could talk about getting a dog? I really think it might help." Silence took over the car which felt like years passing. So, I continued, "My friend from camp, her grandmother breeds labradoodles and they don't shed. I could train it, and with me being home so much it's better circumstances than before."

We have tried the whole dog thing multiple times in the past. Time and time again it never worked out. My family never could bond with the dog, it was always just with me, which made it hard saying goodbye after a month or a week, depending how long it lasted.

"Let me think about it. Show me some pictures," she said once we

parked. A slow grin spread across my face as I pulled out my phone with a small glimmer of hope. A pause as she looked and smiled at the cute puppies and then she spoke, "If you think it will help you then I am okay with it." This was a huge deal because my parents didn't really do the whole pet thing. Like I said before they never bonded with any of the dogs we tried. My dad didn't even like dogs all that much if at all, and my mom was in roughly the same boat.

"What about dad? He would never be okay with it." I knew my dad well. Every time we'd bring one home to try, he would get so mad. He would definitely say no to this. Now for reference my dad never grew up with dogs or pets at all. His parents never let him have one or even try.

"I will deal with dad. He will understand." A feeling I hadn't felt in a while started rising in my stomach. It was warm and hopeful. So, I messaged my friend's grandmother, and sure enough she had a litter due in just a month's time. Small moments like that, I look back on and realize it was more than just a coincidence.

I knew I wanted a girl this time. We had never tried having a girl dog before, and from there it took over. I was filling my days with thinking up names, finding what she'll need, and making sure we were prepared. I wasn't sure how many were going to be in the litter. So, I tried to stay calm in case by chance I wouldn't be able

to have one since I was 10th on the waiting list. Little did I know God was going to work a little more magic into this and lay it on this kind woman's heart to surprise me with being first on her list.

You see, she had been following my brother's cancer story on Facebook and was praying for God to give her a way to help, and little did she know she would be able to with four little paws. I remember telling her I hope her dog, Izzy, has a cream-colored girl with lab-fur and a laid-back personality. It was silly because you can't pick these kinds of things. She would always make me laugh with a reply of, okay I'll pass it onto momma Izzy, ha-ha. The silliest part of this was that I remember specifically praying for those characteristics.

Then June 25th came, and my friend sent me this picture of these two little, teeny, tiny puppies. One was black, and the other a cream. I remember freaking out and running downstairs to my parents' room to show them. By another "coincidence" this cream pup was the first born and a girl. My friend's grandmother even said once she was born, "There's Matthey's puppy." This puppy would end up being the only cream-colored, most lab-featured puppy in a litter of five others who were all pure black.

I kept up with her as much as I could through pictures I was sent. My friend and her grandmother worried a little bit that this puppy would end up being high energy. If that was the case, she would recommend me to get another puppy from the litter instead since she believed in matching the puppy personality to the person.

However, I stayed hopeful.

I eventually got to meet her before her eyes even opened. She fit in the palm of my hand, and there she curled up and cuddled into me. That was the moment a piece of my heart began to beat again. Something in me told me she was mine. Not one doubt in my mind, this puppy was mine. My friend and her grandmother became a little worrisome again knowing I bonded with her so much, and they tried to encourage me to hold another, but I just knew she was the one.

The time came for the personalities to shine through, and yet again another "coincidence." She was the most laid-back puppy in the litter, and it was officially a match. I couldn't believe it. 'Peace' was going to be my puppy. Peace was the name my friend's grandmother gave her in hopes that would be what she gave to my family. So, when we finally got her, I decided to keep that a part of her name, Nala Peace, with 'Nala' coming from my brother's favorite movie *The Lion King*.

Two years have passed since then. She is turning two officially this June and has been my best friend ever since. It took time, but she also made her way into my parents' hearts. They bonded with her and ever since that bond has only grown. We swear she was not only sent by God, but by my brother too. She is so different than any dog we know or meet, and I don't think I would be where I am now without her. She gave me a reason to get out of bed. She gave me purpose. She helped me live again, and as I type this, she is right next to me, curled up asleep.



EARTH'S KNEECAP

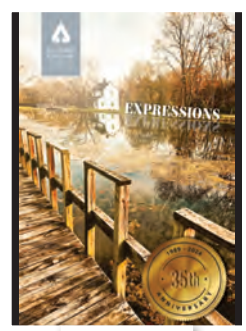
Photograph | *by Drake Rose*



STEAMING HOT LAND

Photograph | *by Drake Rose*

EXPRESSIONS



2024



2023



2022



2016



2015



2014



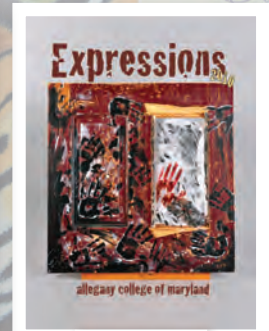
2013



2012



2011



2010



2002



2001



2000



1999



1998



1997



1996

COVERS

Throughout the Years



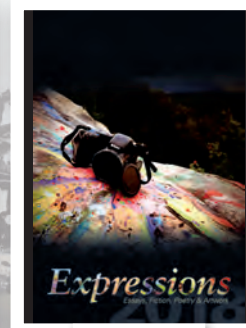
2021



2020



2019



2018



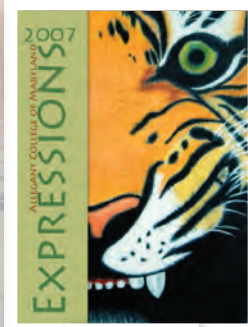
2017



2009



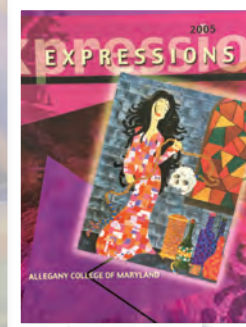
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2007



2006



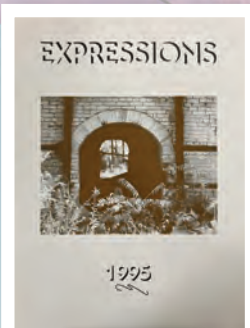
2005



2004



2003



1995



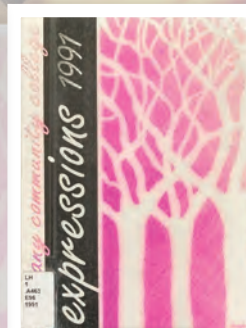
1994



1993



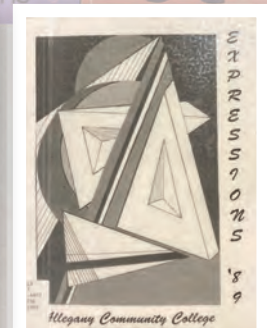
1992



1991



1990



1989



HIGH MOUNTAINS

Photograph | *by Drake Rose*



WEAR A HELMET / SKATEPARK SILHOUETTE

Photograph | *by Harmony Moe Fetterman*



GAS PUDDLE

Photograph | *by Michael Parnes*



AUTUMN ADVENTURE

Photograph | *by Sydney P. Metz*



LIFE CAN BE PRETTY ROCKY

Photograph | *by Sydney P. Metz*



MELANIE MONROE

Acrylic Painting | by Del Mullenax



SISTERS TOGETHER

Digital Art | *by Justice Warner*



EMBRACE THE FLAME

Digital Art | by *Harmony Moe Fetterman & Sydney P. Metz*

EMBRACE THE FLAME

Poem

by Harmony Moe Fetterman

One soul dancing in two
Potential at risk, changing the hue
Blue shines dimmer, whispering of passion,
but insecurities makes you lose compassion

Without unleashing your spirit, nothing is complete
Your spirit is trapped, hardening the heartbeat
You're angry and cold,
Unwanted clay without a mold

The enemy is my mind, constantly fighting
My spirit inside is barely surviving
The fire once igniting, is slowly dying
Taking the last breath, feeling hopeless
The darkness lingers, dying soulless

A hand reaches out, but you look and see yourself
The spirit calls to you, and says
"Only you can embrace thyself"
Change is drastic, an important stage
The time has come, to walk out the cage

Suddenly a burst of light, so bright it can blind sight
But the fumes start to catch fire,
Warmth ignites the heart, only brighter
Embracing change grows higher
Now you see yourself differently,
Now you see yourself confidently

Life is valuable, we only get one
Prone to darkness, we stand alone
The foundation crumbles, starting again
The lackluster returns, feeding again

The broken wings, once submerged in glue
Opened again and are bright in hue
Different now, I am ready to change
My flame burns bright, performing onstage
Break the chains, for life is valuable
Once thought inflammable, now invincible



UN-BEE-LIEVABLE

Photograph | *by Isaac Kneisley*

LOVE

Essay

by Angel Brown

Dim the lights, note the quick flashes of neon strobe colors on the dance floor. Cue the ever popular, never forgotten, heart-pounding Euro techno dance song, released in 1993 but known, still today, and by all throughout the ages. Can you hear those well-known lyrics? Are you tapping your foot, bobbing your head, singing along? "What is love? Baby, don't hurt me, don't hurt me, no more / Baby, don't hurt me, don't hurt me, no more / What is love? Yeah-yeah." Maybe Trinidadian-German singer Nestor Alexander Haddaway said it best, or at least perhaps the simplest. What is love?

How does one describe love? After all, it is a feeling unique to its owner. It can be as effortless as words recited or written in a note. It can be expressed through body language, from innocent hand holding, a warm hug, a gentle kiss, or simply holding someone close. A synonym for the word sex is "love making" or "making love." Love has its own holiday, its own special date. February 14th is popularly celebrated with gift-givings of chocolate, flowers, cards, romantic dinners, and soft squishy teddy bears. Love has its own associated color of red, and its very own symbol, the heart. Love is a theme of music, arguably the vast majority. Etta James wooed us with "At Last." Al Green gave us soul with "Let's Stay Together." The late but ever

great Whitney Houston powerfully yet beautifully roared "I Will Always Love You." Love has its own genre of film in romantic comedy, such as *When Harry Met Sally*. Putting aside the horrifying historical tragedy of the *Titanic*, James Cameron's version weaved together the exciting, everlasting love story of Jack and Rose. Romance novels are their own category of literature, as Nicholas Sparks' *The Notebook* took us through an entire lifetime of Noah and Allie Hamilton's simmering story of endless, eternal love that ended in tearful yet stunning beauty. Perhaps the most famous lovers throughout the ages are William Shakespeare's stars, Romeo and Juliet, the play written of star-crossed lovers from feuding families.

Love has distinctive categories like unconditional, platonic, or romantic. Regarding our children we use the word unconditional to describe our love. For a mother, there is no type of love greater, stronger, or deeper than the love of your own child. It is such a unique type of love that it begins before you even meet, as that love begins in utero. A hand to the belly is the first show of affection from mom to her baby, in trying to offer comfort in letting baby know mommy is here. People love their friends. These are people where a bond has been forged and love can be expressed platonically. But despite parental and platonic

relationships, when we hear the word love, usually 'romantically in love' is the concept that comes to mind. Biologically, we as mammals want to seek a mate and procreate.

You don't have to visit a professional matchmaker for others to let you know they feel you don't have enough love in your life! People unabashedly question why you don't have a significant other. They feel it is wrong, that your life is not whole or complete. Maybe they even go as far as "setting you up" with someone they feel you could love, to fill that gaping hole for you, because that's what life's all about, right? – falling in love, finding your match? Societally, doesn't that determine success in life, finding love? If you're married, you're "doing it right" and if you're single, well, it's obvious to the world you've just got it all wrong. Even those unhappily married or divorced aren't viewed quite as wrong as a lost and lonely singleton, for a single person must be unhappy and unfulfilled. They failed the quest. Detesting a partner, having no commonality, avoiding them as much as possible, and speaking poorly of them is still much better in our society as you're at least "off the market." It's still better than single to far too many. A mindset of "not doing any better" than their current partner is much too risky for many because, again, single

signals failure.

"You're so pretty. How can you be single?" is a phrase that isn't even considered taboo. Not only does it downplay that a person has choice, but it also signals just how barbaric we still think collectively, that being attractive is the key piece to love. People certainly love pretty things and pretty will unarguably land you more dates, but pretty isn't everything. Pretty doesn't define love nor will it sustain love. Looks fade. Pretty people fall in and out of love all the time, and just as much, or maybe even more, than those deemed not as attractive.

So again, what really is love? As the late, great Turner belted out voraciously, "Oh-oh-oh / what's love got to do, got to do with it?" Maybe we'll figure this love thing out, or maybe we won't. As the world evolves so does our society's image of what love and marriage means and what it should look like. I feel as long as a person has companionship, the legality of marriage is not important, nor are labels at all for that matter. We must all determine our own personal wants and our own personal needs. Those wants and needs will inevitably change and evolve throughout our lifetime. So, fulfill your quest. Along the way, you'll find someone or a group of people to share that quest with. Some will stay, some will go, but either way, we can love.

FOR NOW

Poem

by Mykell A. Murphy

As their eyes locked passing through the hall,
Unspoken words passed silently
Between two lonely, broken, and hurting individuals.

The warmth
Which appeared in her eyes whenever she saw him,
Pulled at the very core
Of his lonely,
And downtrodden soul.

The small, shy smile
Which spread at the corners of her mouth
Whenever he was around her,
Gave him something to look forward to

And made this life on earth
A little less ordinary
And a little more hopeful.

He thought of these things as he walked
And just as if she appeared from his thoughts,
There she stood.

With her back to him as she went about her duties.
Her hair was always pulled back whenever she worked,
Never was it let down freely.

He silently observed.
He gathered his nerves together,
And a quiet, yet collected, "Hello" escaped from his lips.

Her lean,
 Yet taut form
 Turned around as
 Brownish-blond wisps of hair spun over her face.
Her tanned arms displayed streaks of dirt
 Which further defined her features.
 As his warm
 Hazel eyes gazed
 Into the piercing mixture of greenish-blue hues
 Which intently stared back at him

His heart plummeted
 And yet, it seemed to quicken at the same time.

For a few, fleeting moments they inquired of each other,
 Asking the simple things
 Such as how the other was doing or
 Asking related questions pertaining to the other individual.

They slowly brought the conversation to an end
 And each went their own way
 And for now,
 He thought,
 That will have to do.



DANCE OF PETALS

Photograph | *by Harmony Moe Fetterman*

THREE LOVES

Essay

by Jazmine Rodriguez

I've heard it said that in life there are three loves. The first love is the love that looks right, the one a person thinks will be forever. It typically happens in high school when you're just learning about relationships. The second love is the love that hurts the most. This love shows you how you would want to be loved. It comes with manipulation, lies, and a lot of pain. The last love is the love that lasts. This love is the one we never see coming.

I'd never learned how to love myself before. Since I was a little girl, my parents were never around. I remember waking up every day and feeling like I just existed. I would go to school and see all the other kids with their parents. I was alone, scared, and just wanted to be loved. I would look in the mirror and say the meanest things to myself. At the same time, this was also my prime years. I was outside all the time, hanging with my friends. I started getting popular. Although I was doing fine socially, I was struggling mentally. My grandma found me a therapist, but therapy didn't help much. Having a girlfriend was my coping mechanism. That's when I met my first love. We started dating our freshman year till junior year. It was a very bittersweet relationship. We would be on the phone from sun up to sundown. We couldn't see each other much, and sometimes three months would pass without meeting. But I remember feeling whole

with her. We made TikToks, talked, played games, and when together we were joined at the hip. In my teenage brain, she was the love of my life. We were going to get married, have kids, and grow old together.

Two years went by and we broke up. I moved to Maryland. That's when I started my first day at my new school. I was sitting in the school office waiting for someone to get me. I remember my eyes followed hers, and it never stopped. She was my second love, the one that hurt the most. She had something called Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), a mental disorder which can be caused by a traumatic event in a person's life. In her case, she had gone through multiple sexual altercations as a child. BPD can cause a person to have manic episodes lasting from hours to days, and during our relationship, there were a lot of lies, manipulation, and pain. She did not understand her mental illness, which forced me to help her through it, although I was only sixteen, so I did not know much about it either. In 12th grade, it was the worst. She got held back and still only came to school every other day, while I was very focused on my education and going to college. My mental health started to decline, as well as our relationship began falling apart. At a certain point, I don't think we were in love anymore; we were just collateral

damage for each other. When we both graduated, and the summer came, we also did not have much time for one another. By this time, I was working a lot to afford the new life in college I was about to start.

Now, I am in college. I no longer have a girlfriend, but I am in a relationship with myself.

It is hard to be alone when all you ever did was focus on someone else in a relationship. I did not have a mom for the breakups and ice cream combos. I did not have a dad to tell me that I was beautiful. I was never fully intertwined with my inner self. My way of getting

loved was by hopping from relationship to relationship. However, I made a choice to choose me for once.

Since I have been in college, I have dialed down relationships and now focus on myself. I meditate daily, care about my hygiene more, and try to work on my spiritual peace of mind. It is all a process, but college has been my focus. I never had the self-confidence to know I was special, but now I am growing. I'm learning that a relationship doesn't need to be obtained by me. I can learn to love myself and be okay within myself. This is my last love.

MY HAIR, MY CROWN: HAIR BIAS IN THE WORKPLACE

Essay

by Jamekia Acosta

What is it about how my hair naturally grows from my scalp that bothers people so much? Some people may say it is the kinks of African Americans' natural curl pattern or the frizziness of unruly hair that makes them uncomfortable. African American hair is considered a crown and has always played a major role in African American communities. History has shown that African American hair once helped distinguish tribe affiliation, guided and assisted enslaved people with escape routes, as well as being a status symbol of class, wealth, and liberation. Hair was looked at differently during the Transatlantic slave trade era when slave owners viewed black people as animals – barbaric and inferior to others for not having similar traits as them. During this deplorable era, slaves risked having their hair shaved by their masters in a humiliation ritual and therefore were forced to use their hair as a form or means of communication. According to Cecilia Bogaard at *Ancient Origins*, "Braided buns signaled a plan to escape . . . while cornrows with distinctive designs hid in plain sight maps to water sources, escape routes and tucked away treasures like gold, seeds, etc. to assist with their journey to freedom." Based off European beauty standards black people were told that they were not as beautiful as their white counterparts which led to a rebellious stance of no longer straightening their hair to conform

to society's say of what beauty was, and so the afro was introduced. Afros were met with and displayed resistance especially in the workforce settings. As time progressed, styles and trends changed, and the work setting deemed African American hair a distraction. Although some may view locs, braids, and afros in the workplace as unprofessional, African Americans should have the right to don whatever their intended hairstyle would be within reason.

Everyone does not have the same textured hair. In today's society you may very well come across different races that are mixed with African American blood, resulting in a more naturally straightened textured hair or possibly curly hair. The curly textured hair is identified by how tight the curl pattern is and assigned a number ranging from 3A-4C. According to "How to Determine Your Hair Type - A Complete Guide" at *Papilla Haircare*, 3A-3C hair is when you first start to see some kind of curl pattern from fine curls to tight thick curls. In the 4A-4C range is where you start to see the kinkier, coarse, tight curl pattern. Trying to tame this type of textured hair may require some finessing, manipulation, and the help of some expensive hair care products like gels, edge control, and hair sprays. Getting up to get dressed for work should not be this difficult for African Americans. Now we are forced to come up with creative, socially-acceptable styles for our hair

instead of doing what we know works best for our hair and hair texture.

Some may choose to go the route of straightening their hair. Excessive use of heat on our hair can result in heat damage and dry, brittle hair. Not only does not having the same textured hair as other African Americans leads to not having so-called professional hair in the workplace, but it also tends to cost more money and time to maintain the everyday upkeep.

Everyone does not have the funds required in order to keep their hair up to par. When upkeeping textured hair, some people's hair will just soak up and absorb any kind of water or moisture when attempting to tame it and may need the assistance of hair gels or edge control to lay the curly coils in place. These gels and edge control products can get pretty costly. Even then you get what you pay for, as opting to get a cheaper gel may result in product not being the greatest and watered down. Another option, or in addition to other products, would be wrapping mousse/foam or hair sprays. These particular products are in the \$10.00-\$25.00 range depending upon size and brand. Although these products would be designed to stiffen and mold hair into place, continuous use of these products may cause flaky, dry hair and/or hair breakage. This can all start to add up and become time consuming once you include a bonnet/durag to protect your hair at night, different types of combs and brushes to detangle the hair to prevent from matting up, and other accessories needed like bobby pins, curling irons, flat irons, etc. – just to be accepted by white Americans in the workplace and deemed acceptable and professional.

This would typically result in African Americans paying someone to do their hair in a protective hairstyle like braids, cornrows, locs, weaves, and wigs to minimize time spent to get ready for work. With a protective hairstyle the most you would have to do is maybe slick back some fly away stray hairs or just get up and go. Besides not having the funds or time to properly treat textured hair in order to be considered professional in the workplace, some African Americans may just choose to go the natural route.

Some people choose to keep their hair virgin by not putting extra products in their hair to strip it and prevent hair growth. Products used to help straighten hair, perms for example, have been linked to cancer, causing more and more African Americans to stray away from such practices. Other techniques include straightening irons that use excessive heat to accomplish such goals and result in heat and hair damage. To be natural, either by choice or religion or budget, leaves very few options to choose from, and to say afros, locs, and braids are unprofessional does not help the situation. For example, according to "The History of Dreadlocks and the Rasta Movement" at *Raw Remedies*, the people who follow Rastafarian religion are against cutting their hair, believing it is what holds their strength and follows the teachings of Jah. Now employers risk infringing upon an employee's religious civil rights, which could potentially lead to avoidable legal action. Additionally, the military used to practice such acts before adapting to change and updating their hair policies. Making the military a more diversified and inclusive workplace

brings in more recruits to choose from, resulting in a stronger and more powerful military. Because of these reasons, hair policies need to be updated to be more inclusive for everyone in all workplaces.

Updating codes and hair policies in the workplace is significant because everyone should be treated fair and as equals, and not to feel ashamed, belittled, or embarrassed about one's physical attributes or worried about the certainty of their job due to their

natural hair needs. Hair should not indicate a person's character or how well they can perform a job. As long as it does not interfere with their work performance, minorities with textured hair should be given some consideration, as they cannot help how their hair naturally grows from their scalp. Textured hair is not going anywhere, nor is it bothering anyone, so let minorities with textured hair style their natural crown how they deem fit.

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OH DEER

Photograph | *by Harmony Moe Fetterman*

ONCE I WAS SO BLIND

Poem

by *URBuddha2!*

What a fool I was – DAMN!
when speaking with that Black gentleman.

He was a customer in the store
that I worked the cash register for.
We were building a beautiful association
in the midst of the conflict of this nation
where white supremacy is expressed still
needing Black foundations like Jack and Jill.

And once more I was the one in power

with the authority to deny in that hour
the sale of an age-restricted product
should an ID not be present in his conduct.
Asking for cigarettes, he said he lost his ID
but it was in his palm so that I couldn't see.
This was a joke on me he played,

making me laugh and feel unafraid
of his silence in interacting –

it was a beautiful moment, and I said when reacting,
and thought how progressive I was being,
in asking that he be more casual in speaking
for I felt awkward at his address of "Ma'am;"
but then I really got myself in a jam
for I suggested that by the use of that word

our equality continues to be deterred.

Never again did he come back
and I realized my approach did lack
an awareness of true reality
which until later I could not see.
Learning that it has been since the beginning
when slave holders did their heinous bidding

demanding they be addressed by "Ma'am" or "Sir"
their evil intention to unfurl

putting in place a racial caste divide
by which Blacks even today have to abide.
But so blind I had been
it was not my customer who needed to change then
but for me as a person of privilege
to become aware and nullify my advantage.

Blacks protest the unjust and together attain more,
but whites must do the welcoming and open the door.

A PRESCRIPTION FOR THE CHANGING OF TIDES IN LANGSTON HUGHES' "I, TOO"

Essay

by Brandon Thomas

With reverence to the past and hope for the future, Langston Hughes weaves a tale of what will be the road from exclusion to inclusion of African Americans in his poem "I, Too." Hughes eloquently highlights the differences and injustices of his people and quietly demonstrates the strength created from the oppression of his race by his Caucasian counterparts. As with most of his literary works, Hughes cultivates a quiet call-to-arms with a non-discriminatory smile upon his face.

Hughes was a prominent figure in the Harlem Renaissance. This was a mass exodus of African Americans from southern states to northern cities, like Harlem, creating a massive boom in black music, literature, art, and philosophy. Aside from being an accomplished poet, Langston Hughes also wrote novels, short stories, essays, and plays. Across all works of Hughes, a common theme presents itself. Much to the criticism of the author, Hughes unapologetically portrays a very raw picture of what would be considered negative and positive aspects of black culture of his time. The negative aspects are dually highlighted in Hughes' collection of "Jesse B. Semple" works and poems like "Harlem Sweeties." In the former, the focus is the complaining, simplemindedness, and inaction of his fellow black man. In contrast,

Hughes articulates the vast array of beautiful colors and array of skin tones of his culture in "Harlem Sweeties." This sentiment is further expressed beautifully in Langston Hughes' essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." Hughes refuted the claims of the critics, expressing that anything other than a true portrayal of all aspects of black culture was "the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America--this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible." Hughes further exemplifies his motivation for and calling toward raw, unfiltered inclusivity in his poem "I, Too."

Hughes opens "I, Too" with "I, too, sing America." This is a powerful allusion to a poem by Walt Whitman entitled "I Hear America Singing." In his poem, Whitman equates America to a song, represented by the different "carols" sung by a multitude of different trades (Whitman). Written just one year prior to the Civil War, "I Hear America Singing" seems to include every trade except for the African American slaves, jacks of all trades by force, that were predominant in 1860's American society. Hughes demands recognition in a peaceful way with the servant's words in the opening line of "I, Too."

In the second stanza, Hughes highlights the differential treatment he receives because he is the “darker brother.” Hughes is beginning to build the idea of his physical difference while simultaneously highlighting similarities between himself and his oppressors. Although the narrator identifies his physical difference of being “darker,” he immediately follows this with being a “brother.” This single line starts to draw a picture of inclusion while breaking down the societal barriers placed between races of the time.

Hughes continues by expressing the injustice of his treatment. As if the narrator was a second-class citizen, he is sent to the “kitchen” to eat when “company comes” (Hughes). Meanwhile, the narrator “laughs,” “eats well,” and “grows strong.” In his second stanza, Hughes shows that the narrator’s seclusion is counterintuitive to the goal of his oppressors. While being treated as less than human, he rejoices in having more food to eat and becoming stronger and happier because of it. Through the picture Hughes paints in the mind’s eye of the reader, the reader begins to build the idea that the systematic oppression meant to hold the author down will ultimately force the strength needed to break the physical and metaphorical shackles placed upon him.

By the third stanza, it becomes clear that Hughes is not using any formal structure or rhyme scheme. Breaking free from the norm of his time, Hughes is exemplifying the message he wishes to convey with more than the words used. The structure of “I, Too” seems to break the mold the

same way the narrator in the poem is breaking the mold. “Tomorrow, / I’ll be at the table / When company comes” articulates the hope that Hughes has for his future and that of his race (Hughes). Simply put, there will come a time when African Americans will no longer be treated differently, will no longer be segregated. To share a meal, to join in on the conversation, to be held in the same regard as company is an inevitability for Hughes. The third stanza exemplifies the quiet call-to-arms. Hughes could have fought fire with fire and been more than justified doing so. Rather, he intelligently chooses to be firm, yet kind: “Nobody’ll dare / Say to me, / “Eat in the kitchen,” / Then.” These lines eloquently convey a message of hope and shows the light at the end of the tunnel. Hughes shows the reader where this path of inclusion will end up without a violent expression of how mankind will get there. The third stanza motivates the reader to be inspired, but also to seek out and demonstrate whatever it takes to make this inevitable reality come as fast as possible.

Hughes then shows the reader what it will be like for the oppressors once equality has been reached. Once humanity reaches the destination of inclusion, those who have sought to divide will see how “beautiful” the individuals that have been segregated are and will be “ashamed” (Hughes). Hughes quietly calls to the humanity of the reader in his fourth stanza. Hughes leaves no room for deviation of the outcome. Every line has been stated as a fact and the way that it resonates with the reader depends

solely on the side of the fence the reader has been on. To the oppressors, this poem is a warning that shame for their discrepancies is inevitable. To the oppressed, this poem is a beacon of light, hope, and inspiration that equality and inclusion are both on the way. Even after the generational mistreatment of an entire people, Hughes gives the opportunity to change the side of the fence the reader is standing on. He doesn't do it through demand or threats of violence, but through a call to the heart of the reader. Through the subtle tone of the poem, the reader can easily imagine a beautiful smile on the narrator's face with tenderness in his heart.

To majestically wrap up this song, Hughes punctuates his poem with a single-lined, four-worded stanza. "I, too, am America" simplistically

demands recognition, respect, and admiration (Hughes). Hughes takes the opening allusion to Whitman's poem a step further, showing that not only is his voice one of the "carols" of the song of America, but he stands as an integral part of the foundation upon which America was built.

Through the eighteen-lined poem, Hughes takes the reader on a beautiful journey. Hughes highlights injustices, builds an image of an inevitable inclusion, portrays a message of hope to the oppressed and warning to oppressors, and firmly stands unwavering in his Americanness. This timeless piece of American literature will continue to resonate with all readers, no matter where they are on what spectrum, perfectly encapsulating the true meaning behind the Harlem Renaissance.

WHY IS NOTHING EVER EASY?

Essay

by Pamela Douglas

One afternoon I decided to make ox roast out of the roast beef from last night. I know what you are thinking, “Who eats oxen?” It is not ox; it is roast beef that has been ground up into a mushy consistency. I imagine the reason it is named ox roast is because they had to grind up the old oxen into a mushy consistency so it would not be so tough when they ate it. I know it sounds gross, but it is the most delicious sandwich you will ever have. I add a thick piece of onion and some ketchup to the sandwich, and it tastes like heaven.

First, I headed down the stairs into the basement to retrieve the food processor. After digging deep into the back of the bottom shelf, I found the dusty, broken box that housed the food processor. Eek! – I stuck my hand into a spiderweb. After karate chopping the air and screaming, I regained my composure and grabbed the box. I trotted back up the stairs and plopped the dusty box down onto the table. I carefully opened the box so that I did not rip off the box flap that was hanging on by a thread.

Next, I pulled out the food processor. There are quite a few pieces that make up the machine, so I pulled them all out of the box. Oh snap! I forgot the lid latch needed to be super glued back together. I had put it away broken, thinking I will deal with this later. Fantastic, I am so glad I did not deal with this before I put it away last time. Yes, I rolled my eyes so hard that

I had to pick them up off the floor. Ha! I then turned my thoughts to, “Where did I put the super glue?” After looking for a half hour, I found that sneaky super glue hiding in the “special” place I put it. I have been accused of a lot of things, but I have never been accused of being mechanically inclined. However, I set out to glue the pieces back together. Well, I had not the foggiest idea how the pieces fit back together. I thought, seriously, I cannot be this stupid. After twisting and turning the pieces into all different angles and many tears later, I set the lid down only to find out the pieces went on the back and not the front. Yippee! I outsmarted the lid and was back on track.

Before I go on with my story you need to know I had not used my food processor in probably five years. With that being said, let us continue. I dumped out the dead, shrivel-legged, translucent spiders and washed up the old girl. I stood there scratching my head, while looking at all the pieces and thinking, “Something seems like it’s missing.” Surely there should be another piece that goes in the middle of the container. I think it is a blade of some sort. I rummaged through the box looking high and low for that piece. Well, to my surprise I did not see it. Hmmm. So, I put the only blade on that I saw, which was a shredding disc. Now I was ready, all that was left was to turn it on and drop the meat down the chute. It did

not take long for the meat to build up under the lid, instead of dropping down into the container. Of course, this is happening because nothing has gone smoothly yet. I took off the lid which was raised up and scraped off the meat and tried again. This time I added some beef broth, thinking this would help to make it smoother. Unfortunately, I got the same result. Again, I calmly and coolly took the lid back off again and thought, "Surely I am doing something wrong." The meat was just shredding and getting clogged up under the lid instead of dropping down into the container.

I looked around for another piece and I found a solid disc. Maybe I need to put this underneath the other metal disc so it will come out of the chute and fall into a bowl. I had high hopes this would work. I then turned it on, and to no avail, it did not work either. The meat just built back up under the disc. But before I could take off the lid, KABLEWY! Pressure from all the meat blew the lid off, spewing meat everywhere. I was shot with exploding meat! As I checked to make sure I was not missing a limb from the explosion, I looked around to survey the destruction. A carnage of meat product was hanging off the chairs, tables, wall, and floor. As I screamed in horror, my faithful, little, white fluffy canine companion came running out to save me. His little tail was wagging so fast when he smelled the meat. He was all too eager to help clean up the delicious mess. Charles licked and cleaned all he could reach. It was manna from heaven.

Feeling defeated, I decided the

ox roast was as ground up as it was going to get. I set out for the task of cleaning up the explosion. I started by rinsing off the food processor and emptied out what little bit of meat that was left into a bowl. I then moved on to wiping down the walls and chairs and lastly the table. As I pushed the food processor box to the side, there was a beam of light from the Almighty shining down on the blade that I was looking for the whole time. The blade was hiding behind the broken cardboard flap from the box. I wish I had ripped that stupid flap off when I sat the box down as all of this could have been avoided. Thank you, Jesus! I am saved! I grabbed the food processor pieces and put it all back together with the right blade this time. Just like that, it was working like it should. I dropped the meat down into the container and the blade shredded it down like it should. Success! I outsmarted the machine.

The ox roast was finally ready to eat. I walked over to get a piece of bread – naturally there was no bread. I grabbed out a loaf of frozen bread from the freezer. Hmmmm. Out of the corner of my eye I spied hot dog rolls. Ugh, of course, it would only be fitting that I would have to use a hot dog roll to eat my ox roast sandwich. I grabbed the ketchup from the refrigerator and shook it, but the lid was not completely shut, and the watery ketchup squirted out all over the table. Sigh. When it rains it pours . . . well, in my case, it rains ox roast and pours ketchup. I then cut up an onion and added it to my sandwich. The fruits of my labor were well worth it, just ask Charlie.



Harmony Moe Fetterman

“Embrace the Flame”

It’s a poem about mental health and how embracing your inner self/flame can bring out the light in you. I think people who go through depression, who have that dark voice in our heads telling us we’re not good enough, may relate to this poem.



“Oh Deer”

The most iconic residents of Nara Park are undoubtedly the hundreds of Sika deer that roam freely within its grounds. Considered messengers of the gods in Shinto tradition, these friendly and curious animals have become a symbol of the city and a major attraction for visitors.



“Wear a Helmet / Skatepark Silhouette”

I was on a 300 foot skateboard ramp and captured this silhouette! These skateboarders had no fear and were asking for a concussion.



“Dance of Petals”

She danced from bloom to bloom, each a tiny world of sweet nectar and pollen dust. Delicate petals brushed against her wings, and fat bumblebees buzzed a friendly hello. Sunlight filtering through the blooms painted kaleidoscopic patterns on her wings, making her feel like a jewel adorning the vibrant tapestry.

Shannon Gunning

"My Path to Success"

No matter how many sunrises or sunsets I have seen, they still bring me such joy and amazement. It's mother nature's colorful canvas and it is free and available to anyone who stops to enjoy the show.



Sydney P. Metz

"Autumn Adventure"

Adventures are fun to go on and the views amazing. Always take a camera with you.



Del Mullenax

"Melanie Monroe"

Melanie Monroe is an inspired piece from the classic dress scene performed by Marilyn Monroe mixed with a music performer, Melanie Martinez from her newest album *Portals*.

Jazmine Rodriguez

"Three Loves"

This is a first-person essay on the 3 loves theory. I wrote it about 2 girls I fell in love with and how coming into college I changed my ways and decided to focus on me. I am now in my self-care journey and learning that the only REAL love I need is me, myself, and I.



Drake Rose

“Steaming Hot Land”

A great contrast between the blue sky, green forestry, and orange hot geysers.



“High Mountains”

A look at towering mountains that make us feel so small.



“Earth’s Kneecap”

A large rock mountain that towers dynamically over the subject.

Jonathan Schmoyer

“The Musician’s Cognitions”

Ever since I was a young boy, musicians have fascinated me. To have the ability to make beautiful sounds on a musical instrument is something I have always envied. When I lost the ability to create music after my motorcycle accident, that disability hurt my cognition more than my spinal cord injury. For seven years I did not have the confidence to even try to play my guitar. It was not until I purchased the ukulele that my dormant musical talent showed itself again. It was this experience that sparked my joy for music and life again.

Brandon Thomas

"A Prescription for the Changing of Tides in Langston Hughes' 'I, Too'"

Thank you to Dr. Tonya Shepherd for fanning the flames of my untapped potential. Thanks to you, I found my "artistic bone"!

URBuddha2!

"Ode to the Wisdom of the Marcescent Tree"

The adaptation of the marcescent tree yields wisdom, and a warning, for humanity.

"Once I was so Blind"

Based on a real incident, this poem reveals the developmental awareness and growth of a white, privileged person regarding the oppression of Black people in this country.

"The Embrace"

This poem captures a lesbian's deep love for an unavailable, straight woman. For her own peace of mind, the lesbian smothers her emotions, feeling intense shame for her sexual orientation. But she finds within her the courage to stop hating herself, to love who she really is, and to out herself to the world. The title "The Embrace" is about embracing her own sexuality.



Justice Warner

"Cumberland Overlook"

Down by where I used to live, I used to walk about at night to this abandoned parking garage. The view was amazing at the top.



"Skin"

Sometimes you feel like you can't keep the thoughts under your skin. First time I tried to digitally paint a face with this type of shading.



"Sisters Together"

This was a dream house my sisters and I had when we were younger.

Syd Wilfong

"Until the Monster Comes"

I always thought I was inept at creating imagery and never thought it was a strong suit of mine. Because of this insecurity, I decided to challenge myself, using as many sensory and descriptive details as possible to create a vivid, terrifyingly real "monster" for this short story.

Britney

"What Have I Become?"

English class has been a great opportunity to not only improve my writing but to strengthen my writing style! Thank you, Mrs. Greise!

2024
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Essays, Fiction, Poetry & Artwork



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