

EXPOSURES 2025

A LEE LANAU COUNTY STUDENT JOURNAL



EXPOSURES 2025

Welcome to this 37th issue of *EXPOSURES*! This is a collaborative project begun in 1988 to challenge Leelanau County students in grades 7-12 to express themselves through art and writing. It provides a showcase for their work.

Each year hundreds of poems, stories, photographs, paintings, drawings, and sketches are submitted for review. This year, 151 pieces were selected to best represent the heartfelt thoughts, fears, dreams, and hopes of Leelanau County students.

The strong bond our young people have with the place where they are growing up is evident throughout these pages. Leelanau County is a special place and we hope you enjoy the inside look at it from our students' perspectives.

It is a testament to the commitment of our teachers and fine arts devotees that we have been able to produce this publication every year during good times and bad, for going on four decades.

We are grateful for the continuing support of the administrators and boards of education from Glen Lake, Leland, Northport, Suttons Bay, St. Mary's, Pathfinder, and the Leelanau School. We appreciate the help of Suttons Bay Public Schools, which serves as project fiduciary.

Ongoing contributions from many generous individuals and Genuine Leelanau, Suttons Bay Art Festival, Leland Educational Foundation, and the Suttons Bay-Bingham Fund of the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation are of critical importance and are gratefully acknowledged.

Special thanks go to the Northport Arts Association for hosting this year's show that presents *EXPOSURES* to the community, and to Andrew McFarlane, who generously hosts our website at leelanau.com/exposures.

On behalf of all the editors, school coordinators, writers and artists, we congratulate the students whose work is included within these pages. Enjoy their beautiful art, listen to their voices, applaud their imaginations and enjoy *EXPOSURES 2025*!

EXPOSURES is a collaborative project which depends upon the time and talents of many people in our community, including:

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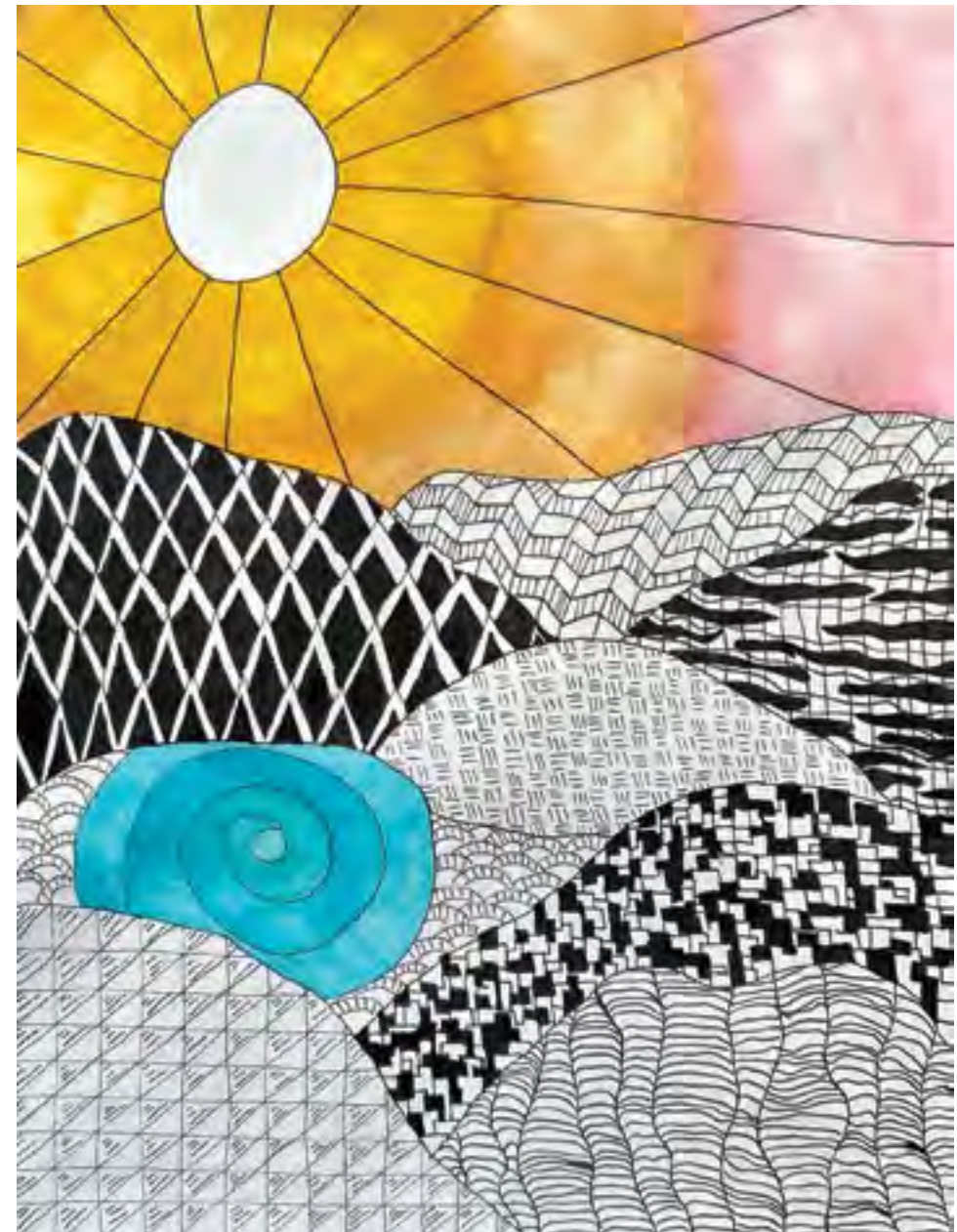
Josh Bunek, Grade 11

Humdrum Routines

Ingrid Paciorka, Grade 11

6:45 a.m.

I feel the suffocating togetherness of those who awaken.
 Of those who move too quickly so they may rewind,
 Those who aren't capable of sight anymore,
 Hind and Fore forgotten to the growing and shrinking ether.
 Actions equal and opposite,
 Love from mother and father.
 Breath, into and out of you, into me and out of you.
 You're too close for my own comfort and further than I could have ever imagined.
 The stars are aligning just right for everything to almost happen.
 I have seen 1000 suns that each share the same unique story,
 Of war,
 Of birth,
 Of saints,
 Of being so in love the taste of it foams and bubbles in your mouth.
 Do not run from the foaming.
 Rather, sing into the choir of those 1000 who feel the same.



Autumn Bailey, Grade 8



Olive Craker, Grade 8

Bloom

Veda Weir, Grade 7

A flower blooms in the darkness of the night,
 one sliver of light
 As the sun breaks through the hard frozen ground
 The only golden glow to be found
 The world has shriveled, but with this new sun
 Nothing has stopped but nothing has begun
 An army of petals to take over the world
 Something so small with leaves so curled.



Adrienne Ackley, Grade 10

The Cliff

Evelyn Roeder, Grade 8

The slope is steep, It goes straight up
Your hands are chalked, or so you think.
Your past lies beneath you, and you can't go back,
The only way through is up.

The monsters lie
Inside their caves
Waiting, to get you at your weakest.
The cliff is greased with uncertainty
Still, you can only go up.

There is no harness, no belay, no training wheels.
You only get one try, so use it well,
Climb Up
Towards the Future

How? Why? Who?

Lana Kennedy, Grade 7

How?

"How" is the conversation starter,
"How" is the important question in everyone's lives.

Because how do I find my place
In this world
Without asking questions?

How do I ask questions
When I've lost my voice?

The importance of questions is
Broad, vast, and overpowering.

Though "how" is important,
"Why" is important too.

Sometimes I am so full of questions
That they all combine into
One extremely important question:

Why am I here and how do I figure out
Who I am and who I'm going to become?

Swing

Vance Bison, Grade 11

As you climb into your wooden seat
sweating from the heat
everyone must prepare
to never settle
for defeat
strength is required for success
both physical and mental, you must possess
The swing, it is the swing
you must perfect

Consistent, persistent work on the water
as you glide, you must work to hide
overwhelming discomfort
looking over your shoulder, you see
another team
that you remember you must slaughter
staying calm, your hands and heart burn
but you push yourself farther
struggling to breathe
wishing to fall to your knees
until you get another order
through the megaphone the coxswain yells
you must push yourself to fight
like a warrior

His only job, a speaker in the spray,
He guides them through the water swiftly
and sly,
With every stroke a challenge on display,
Yet victory prevails beneath the sky.

Swing



Tru Turja, Grade 7



Hazel Wetherbee, Grade 7



Wabanakwad Fox, Grade 7



David Cruz, Grade 7

Estos Días

Alessandra Olson, Grade 10

My big brother
 My built-in bestie
 The one person
 Who doesn't need to turn around
 To know I have his back

We used to do everything together
 Watch movies in the backyard
 Have snowball fights and make snow angels
 Go sledding and hurt our bums
 Make a pool out of a tarp and trash bags
 Play rock band with mops and brooms

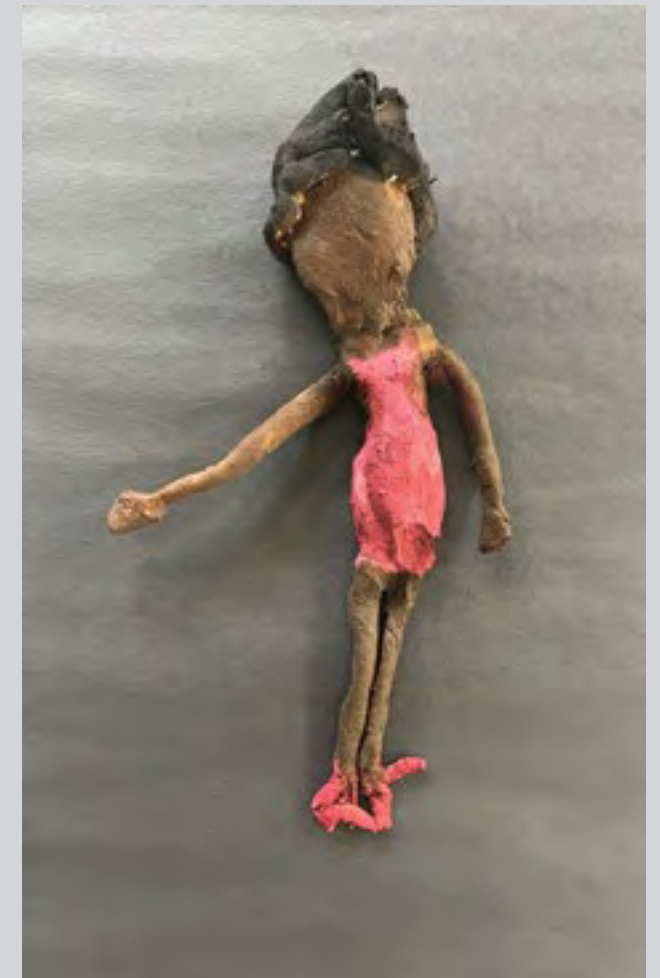
I love the times we played
 Bobsled with the coffee table in the living room
 Even when I hurt my back,
 It was always fun
 I love the Halloweens we trick or treated together,
 Parading the streets
 As proud Star Wars characters

But we grew up
 Now we watch and talk
 Through a screen
 One in Philadelphia and one in Michigan
 Two flags planted back home
 Will never fly together in the wind again
 The memories gone
 As quickly as that fort in the living room
 But as special as the cups of lemonade on a hot
 summer day

To my big brother,
 I love you always



Blake Bradford, Grade 12



Jalen Anderson, Grade 7

Behind Her

Agnes Marshall, Grade 10

Behind her is a fighter who's always fighting a battle with herself.
 Who just wants a break from herself because she has a lot of voices in her head that you don't hear.
 She doesn't want to live but she doesn't want to die.
 If you really know her, you will see a little girl who just needs help and is scared of herself.
 If you hear the voice, you will be scared to your core, too.
 Because the voice tells her she's fat, ugly, stupid, to stop eating, that she should hurt or end herself.
 She just needs to feel her worth more.

Bucky

Ella Frixen, Grade 9

My boots sink into the sand as I climb up the hill. He lifts his head up from the hay bale. I feel tears spike into my eyes as I see him again. When he starts to walk away from me, a tear rolls down my cheek. I chase after him, my heavy boots slipping and sinking in the sand. He stops and looks back at me as I catch up with him. I slip his green halter over his face. I hug his neck and he hugs me back. Then I lead him out of the pasture.

Let Tomorrow Find You

Jax Noonan, Grade 11

looking out at the sky,
beyond the cold, distant waves
the sky like a fire across the horizon
reflecting the beauty of life
upon the waves,
cloudy like the past,

a corpse of who i was yesterday
the angel of death
consuming my every thought,
like a hand pushing me underwater
screaming for help

trapped in my own head
no way out,
the thoughts spreading
a crow of darkness
trapped in a cage of death
empty

don't forget to look to the future
you made it through another day
tomorrow is a new opportunity

Seize it.

as the evening fades into night,
i find myself staring into the eyes of hope,
if you can't find yourself in the darkness,
the hands of tomorrow will guide you
toward the light

do not let go
tomorrow is another day
feel the colors wash over you
with bold determination
let tomorrow find you.



Madelyn Hamilton, Grade 11

Jumping

Nyah McKinley, Grade 8

As I jump off the boat into the water
I see nothing.
I start to panic. Are they after me, where are all of the sharks?
Then all at once I see them, all like a flash, it just happened
the fish and coral, black tip sharks
And an octopus but only one.
But the water feels good in between my fingers.
My flippers glide in the water
My feet kick as fast as they can
Is there anything else and then
I look up to see the boat but I don't see it.
Where did it go?
Am I here alone in the ocean
with no one to take me home?
What will I do, what will I eat, what
Will I have to eat, all of the innocent fish?
What did they do to me for me to kill them
Then eat them. I could never do that.
If the sharks get hungry after I eat all the fish...
I peek my head up above the water and see nothing.
No one in sight, I don't even see any land.
Now I really start to wonder how long have I been
in the water for the boat to not be anywhere in sight
How long would it take the boat to get that far
But I didn't even hear the motor start.
Was I too focused on the fact that I could not see anything?
Now I need a plan, I can't start a fire
Because I am in water
I can make a splash. No, because that will attract the sharks.
It is getting dark, I am getting hungry.
I think about the fish and it wouldn't be that hard to catch and eat one.
I will not eat the fish
I refuse to, I will never eat them, I could never.
How would I eat them? Will I have to eat them while still alive?
Why did this happen to me?
I start to yell Why me, Why me? Why not anyone else?
What were they thinking? Did they want to kill me?
Was this their plan the whole time? Will they have a funeral for me or do
they not care for me anymore, is this it?
Am I done for? The sharks start to circle me.
I think about my life and I think I lived a good one
But it is over now...



Katie Walter, Grade 10

I'm Turning Five

Emilissan Martins, Grade 12

The whole idea of it makes me feel
Like I'm ending my journey
Suddenly I'm on the ground
Everything is spinning around
There's nothing but pain
My stomach feels like a burning flame

Tried crying, tried screaming but couldn't
Laid there and waited for my mom
Who was quick to come

Fell into her arms hoping it would stop
but to my surprise
It didn't help at all
The pain just kept getting worse

Being carried by my dad
We were in and out of planes
From one hospital to another
Seeking answers

My only comfort were those soft blankets
and tight seatbelts
The nice flight attendants
with the fun gifts

Out of planes
In hospitals
Glove balloons, phones, iPads
Fun doctors

The doctors' equipment is not so scary anymore
even got used to needles and even prefer them
They are "magical" and make the pain go away
For a few moments at least

I am five years old
Already have to be strong

My toys
My Nancy dolls
My oxygen masks
Pizza boxes and ice cream sticks

That was distraction, that was pain relief

My mom doing my hair with cute accessories
Huge bows and glittery clips
My dad taking funny pictures of us just smiling and having a good
time
These moments got my few smiles

Smiles I'll never forget
because even when I was in pain
There were my mom and dad

My superheroes
They helped me thrive
and thanks to them
what was once a traumatic experience
didn't seem so bad after all

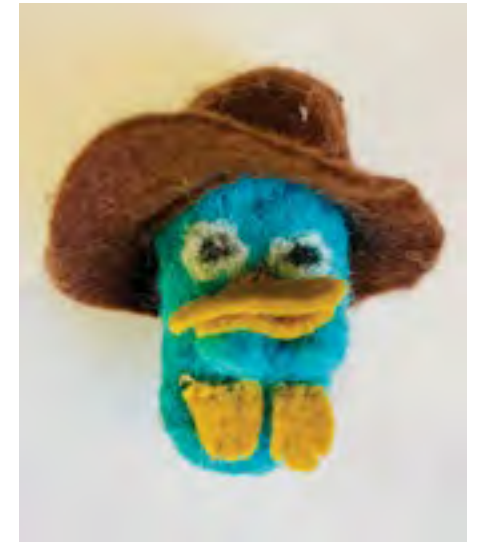
They're my strength
My joy
My superheroes



Noelle Morio, Grade 7



Mackenzie Scott, Grade 8



Anthony Oskaboose, Grade 12



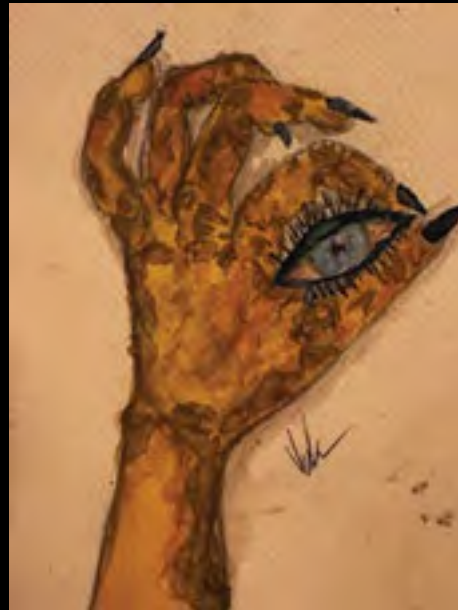
Anthony Oskaboose, Grade 12



Valerie Glidden, Grade 11



Lucy McLean, Grade 8



Veda Weir, Grade 7



Conner Sahs, Grade 12



Natalie Burpee, Grade 10



Ash Anys, Grade 8

Hand-Me-Downs

Hazel Wetherbee, Grade 7

My sister is the hand-me-downs I find outside my room,
 I see clothes worn, and others nearly brand-new.
 They show not only her style, but personality, too.
 Even though she can have an attitude that is quite rude,
 The next day is a new day, not perfect, but new.
 The mystery of what clothes you will get today, just like her emotions.
 I am not allowed to blame her for being unkind,
 sometimes I yell at her without knowing why.
 Going through the clothes I reflect on her.
 Just like the hand-me-downs, she has so many layers:
 she's athletic, sassy, kind, and loud.
 She can be rude, loving, and beautiful 24/7.
 Seeing clothes from sweatpants to skirts,
 I remember her looking so pretty in.
 I will always remember her game-day slick backs,
 and the first time she taught me how to curl my hair.
 She can be bright and loud, or calm and quiet,
 just like a pile of clothes.
 I can never quite figure her out.

Mirror

Emilissan Martins, Grade 12

She just got ready
And as she walks past me
She notices herself

Slowly takes two steps backwards
It was like a bright light hit her

Ah, there it is
That pretty, that big, that happy smile

Just like a kid that threw a fit
and got exactly what they wanted

As I looked at her
She just stood there
Admiring her beauty
Vibing with her own aura

She looks at me
And I see her for who she is
Flawless

In me she sees no pain
No tears
No grief
No wounds
Through me she is the most blessed creature

She looks at herself again
“Monalisa”
She knows she’s just like art
She is the best

She strikes a pose
That pose?
That made the most beautiful picture

“The hottest of them all” she says
As she looks at me

A black panther
Her dark glowing skin
Shines like a diamond

No comparisons
No doubts

She’s definitely that girl



Arlo Woodruff, Grade 7



Lorna Wiesen, Grade 11



César Zaragoza, Grade 8



Austin Van Pelt, Grade 10



Garrick Collins, Grade 11



Lydia Coppinger, Grade 8

Peace

Jack Scripps, Grade 9

ONE: Peace

You don't need to involve yourself in every conflict. Constant arguments will lead to your downfall. People who chase those conflicts always end up suffering and in pain. If there is something that brings you peace and or happiness, hold on to it. You deserve it.

TWO: Don't panic

Try to remain calm. Any time you spend panicking could be spent finding a solution. Panicking will only waste time and energy. It will benefit you and everyone around you if you remain calm and think.

THREE: Trust

Trust is very important. You should only trust those who will be beneficial to your success. There will be people that aren't able to succeed themselves, who will try to bring you down with them. However, if you don't trust anyone, there won't be anyone to support you. You need people to rely on, otherwise you could easily fall into the trap of burnout and depression.

FOUR: Acceptance

Not everything will go your way. However, the way to deal with problems isn't to fear them or ignore them. Instead, you should try to find a way to prevent them from happening in the future. That is how you learn.

FIVE: Looking forward

You shouldn't always dwell on the past. Things might have sucked in the past, but the only thing you can do is keep going. Things are going to happen that you don't like, things are going to change, and the best thing you can do is keep your head up. Sometimes it can feel impossible, but there is always a light at the end of the tunnel and as long as you keep moving forward you will reach it.



Katie Walter, Grade 10



Jayden Kalchik, Grade 7

Extended Metaphor Poem

Elsie Purdy Teahen, Grade 9

Julia is a closed flower. Made of lots of pretty petals, a stem much taller than me.

She is a secret of a 19-year-old. Every afternoon she reminds me of lakes and French fries. Her words are like little buds wrapped up with mixed-up sounds.

Once she took me with her to the course.
 She told me to stay in the cart.
 I didn't. I was run over.
 Later, I saw the times she came home late while I was sound asleep, and I didn't know.

I didn't realize then the many years that stretched between us and the knowledge that went with them.
 Now when I see her, I know that she was growing up and I was too, but we were rooted in different places.

I remember her and the ice cream man.

I remember her leaving and how I cried the whole time. I wish I didn't take all of her secrets for granted.

I've grown to see that I am selfish. With the 4,285 miles between us, those weeks are gone before the flowers wilt. Turning brown as the sun disappears for the winter.

Like a flower, she blooms for 2 weeks and then disappears until next year.
 But I wonder if she knows how much I miss the flowers.
 I wish I could enjoy them for longer.



Allison Duperon, Grade 9



Mark Porter, Grade 12

The Sun

Lillian Herman, Grade 9

When man first looked on the horizon
 Twisted hues of red and gold
 Screamed at him in desperation
 Feared the time for life was old
 But the sun came back

She sat in rain and stormy sorrow
 Not knowing who she was
 Six feet below, no time left to borrow
 He was all that she had loved
 But the sun came back

When I am deep in life's great questions
 Wondering things unanswered
 I'm confident with complications
 Because whatever happens
 The sun will come back



Leah Plamondon, Grade 12



William Krusel, Grade 11



Kaelyn Kelenske, Grade 11



Anthony Oskaboose, Grade 12



Kellan Coppinger, Grade 8

117701

Jacob Beck, Grade 11

His grandson sat cross legged on the basement floor wrapped up in boredom
Above him, adults rioted and chanted carols like prayers
It was the annual Gordon Christmas party and there were no other kids around

Driven by boredom, he went looking through the storage room
Searching for something to do, he looked around until his eyes met a sleek leather guitar case
He grabbed it and brought it to the dusty basement sofa and strummed its old grimy strings
His fingers buzzed

He called up to his grandmother and asked about the guitar
When he asked for its name and got the same question back he knew it would be Cecelia

Cecelia was made in 1965 in Sweden
Right as she was rolling off the assembly line, she was stamped "117701"

Cecelia was shipped to Detroit shortly after construction
She found her way into a little guitar shop on the west side
When my grandfather first saw her, it was like he was meeting his wife again
He knew he had to have her

He took her to the register and slapped a wad of cash down on the counter
With a smile, he told the cashier about all the songs he'd play for his daughter



Gabe Caldwell, Grade 10



Natalie Albu, Grade 12

Better Doesn't Mean Stronger

Delanie Dembowske, Grade 9

I always thought failure came one way and after I failed, I would just need someone to teach me how to succeed, although in the past year I learned more about getting up and trying again than I have in my whole life. Before this, I'd never been set back so far that I would sit for hours on end without the ability to walk. Now every time my foot hits the gym floor that I used to step on everyday, all I can imagine is the squeaking of shoes on the golden-lined court as we all tried to catch our breath. It all sounds like a dream I just can't reach. My dad always told me I had to focus on strengthening my knees because for someone standing at 6'0", injury prevention was pretty huge in becoming the athlete I wanted to be.

I never anticipated being injured, or to be set back months on end. I've jammed fingers and rolled ankles. I worked my body until my muscles screamed to be put at rest. At the end of the day, I truly didn't think I'd miss the running, sweating and constant bruises that lingered from my ankles to my shoulders. Every second I miss my teammates beyond what words could ever express. And to those girls, I'm sorry if I ever sit in silence on the bench, or I'm so quiet one day that it brings the whole team down. A lot of the time I sit and I think about how it would be if I was able to be on the court and experience my first year of high school with a team full of girls I love.

When I was playing, no matter how much I was hurting, or how far I was buried under the pain, I wouldn't ask for help from anyone. I didn't need help. I constantly stressed about playing what I thought was an unacceptable game. My mood was always dependent on my athletic performance. And now that I sit on the sidelines, I realize these games are so much bigger than myself. I worried about the points I put on the board, serve receives, my pitching speed, rebounds, but this time it's different. I'm only worried about one rebound: bouncing back from the injury that cost me seasons I can't get back.

It's rare for teenagers to talk about when one's body fails them. Despite what anyone says about how to feel, I feel like I failed everyone who wants to see me succeed. I made stupid mistakes to set myself right in the same position over and over. So, I worked days on end. And every step forward was three more back. I had to catch up all over again, fight for my starting spot back to be able to play the sport I love. Now, for the third time, I'm watching everything I've worked for slip away through my fingers. This time, the physical and mental pain will last longer than ever before.

The first time it happened, in October 2023, I felt my leg slip out from under me. My heart dropped and a tear rolled down my face. My hand grazed my knee in concern but nothing looked wrong. My eyes shot in all directions, looking around me in a panic. I remember my friends bolting over to me but all I could get out of my quivering mouth was, "I don't know what happened and I can't move it; please get my Dad."

The second my Dad kneeled beside me he started questioning me and ruling out possibilities. From what I had to say, he thought I tore my meniscus. He'd done it himself before and it was all he'd known in the realm of knee injuries. I was falling apart at the seams and my mind was racing. I couldn't bear a single toe of weight onto my left leg. I didn't know what the next step was.

Yet, when it occurred for the second time almost nine months

later, I recognized the feeling. It felt almost as if a metal bar slammed into the outside of my knee, locking it in place. All it took was a wrong step in the wrong direction. I didn't say a word on my drive back in the tailgate of a truck. My parents had been sitting around the bonfire roasting marshmallows to a crisp with the little siblings of the girls on my team. As soon as I hopped down from the truck my mom's brows furrowed and my dad started to follow behind her. I limped my way into the camper where I was propped up with ice for the night.

It hurts even more than the last time I dislocated my kneecap and there's nothing I could've done about it. When someone dislocates their kneecap two times, the possibility of it happening again increases to 80%. All I did was jump to slam the ball into the ground and my knee buckled. I immediately looked into the crowd to see my mother and father reaching their heads as high as they could over the families that sat in front of them. All I did was nod. I knew this feeling way too well. My parents maneuvered their way through the crowd to make sure I was ok. Somehow injuries become a confession. I blabbed on and on about how I didn't take the first times seriously. Everyone knew that this was my last straw and it meant surgery. So as I sat in the doctor's office the next day and considered my options, I knew the only way to get a fix to this series of issues was to go through with surgery.

After surgery I often ask myself, can I fall in love with sports again after an injury changes me? Especially after an injury changes not only my body but my mindset? Am I willing to work ten times harder and after a year come back stronger? Do people truly want to see me come back? The real truth is... I don't know the answer to any of my constant wonders. But what I do know is the second I step on the court or the field for the first time in a year, I'll have my parents screaming from the stands. I would sit and talk about my parents until the earth stopped spinning. I'd talk about how I could count how many games they've missed on just one hand, how they drive hours and pay thousands so they can make my dreams become reality. How they still ask, "How was your day?" even though I always have the same words to say. But, especially how they always see something in me I can't always see in myself. So in the end, I will forever believe that every step I take on a court or a field, and every time I get to complain about running or every practice and game, it's a privilege. And an even bigger privilege to know my family is out there rooting for me.



Beckett DeFour, Grade 10

Storm

Portlin Wheeler, Grade 8

While she stands out in the field,
The wind blows harder each second,
Whirling, twirling her hair tangling into knots,

A drop of water lands on her nose,
Each second a new,
New shade of gray in the sky,

Opens the door to her car
While looking out the window,
Blocking her vision,

She is wet,
The car is wet,
Life is wet,

Entering their dwelling
She hears and feels,
The loud rumble that shakes the building,

Feeling the touch of a button,
Pressing the TV on,
It turns on; Power,

Everything is dark
Running up the stair,
Falling because there's no light,

Hugging her mom and dad,
Not knowing what's going on,
Wondering and hoping when it's going to end.

Jocelyn Martinez-Garcia, Grade 10

Where I'm From

Madison Scott, Grade 8

I am from snow boots stacked in the hallway
I am from a town where Christmas lasts till March

I am from a cold morning in the blind with my dad
I am from warm summers
on the lake, flip-flops covered in sand

I am from a friend who's known me since I was five
I am from crazy siblings
who love me even if they don't say it
I am from my grandma's sweet
treats baked homemade with love

I am from all of these beautiful memories,
Making me who I am.



Suspended in Time

Janai Misner, Grade 9

I went through your purse, oh, how it made it even worse
I thought that the sickening curse

Was broken, but it was not,
It was buried deep, holding back the feelings I fought
Going through your things was a lot harder than I thought

In that purse was you captured in time
A lipstick holding memories, a spare change dime
Your sunglasses that made you look like a movie star dining fine

It looks like you never left, it feels like you are still here
Like you're not so distant
When I hold that purse you feel near

Old Tic Tacs and gum slightly opened, but never finished, it makes my heart skip a beat
Thinking of you reaching in and grabbing one for me as a special treat

Looking at the markers and pens that your hands touched and thinking of the words you once said
Makes me feel like I can still hold your hand in mine, your nails painted in polish the color red

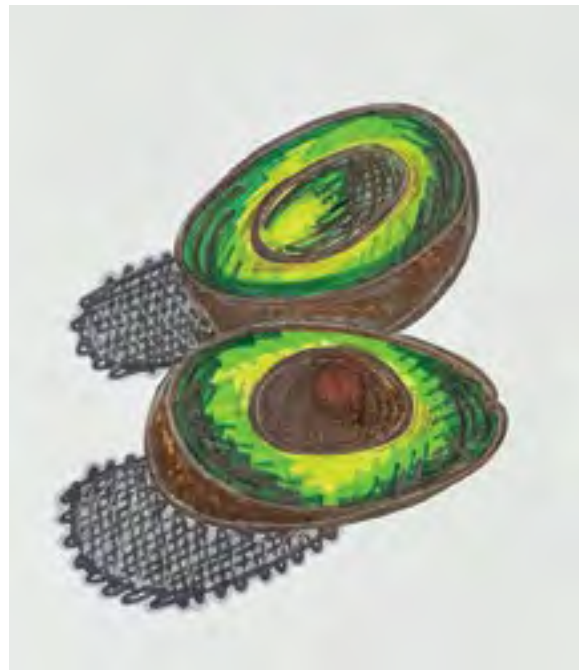
The scary part is how it looks untouched, it looks just as it was left
The sad part is you never opened it again, time was your theft

Looking at it makes me feel better, it makes me believe you're going to come back and use the lip gloss on your smooth lips
And fluff your hair with the comb deep in the bottom of your purse as it sits

The purse is like a time capsule that sat for so long
So I zip it back up, leaving it just as you left it, holding the memories that will never truly be gone.



Ty Schinagle, Grade 11



Dahlia VanThomme, Grade 11



Katie Frank, Grade 12

The Sewing Room

Adeline Guffey, Grade 8

"Grandma is in the hospital," is what my mom said as she pulled me and my sister out of school. The ride to the hospital was like waiting for paint to dry, as I constantly wondered what was wrong.

When we finally arrived, we were greeted by a luscious green flower display accented by little gray pebbles in the main lobby. As we walked to my grandma's room, the bright lights and random colorful walls with geometric shapes brought back a sense of nostalgia from when I went to daycare there.

When we got to the room, I immediately noticed the jungle of cords and tubes behind my grandma's bed, all hooked to different machines making constant random beeping sounds, like a baby toy. I talked with my grandma for a bit, and she seemed to be doing well, so I left the hospital with a good mindset. As the week went on, I was constantly wondering, what was going to happen?

I went to visit my grandma again on Friday, but this time just felt different. When we got there I was devastated to see that her small breathing tube had been replaced with one that covered her whole face, one that she couldn't live without.

We brought her Twizzlers, her favorite candy. As I was talking to my grandma and enjoying the sweet and chewy sensation of the candy we brought, my eyes started to wander around the dim, quiet room and suddenly landed on something that brought a dreadful feeling upon me. It was a list of things each person in the family would get if my grandma were to pass away. The rest of the time we were there, I couldn't help but stare at that list.

Before we left the hospital, I made sure I gave my grandma a big hug and told her, "I love you," wondering if that would be the last time I would say that. A couple days later my mom told me she wanted to talk to me, and that's when I knew Grandma had passed away. When my mom told me the news, it was as if my heart had shattered into millions of pieces. We spent the next couple days together as a family and shared cherished memories of my grandma and her love of sewing. That's when I suddenly realized that my grandma's sewing room, full of endless fabric, thread, and old sewing patterns, was going to have to be dealt with.

Later the next week we journeyed down to my grandparents' house to check up on my grandpa and help him tackle the great ordeal of my grandma's sewing room that we called "the studio." I made my way up the steep, creaky stairs that led to the studio and entered the big room complete with many windows, vintage sewing machines, and photos of old family members and Boblo Island, one of my grandma's favorite places. Seeing the place where my grandma taught me to sew brought back memories of creating fun little projects. I didn't always like to sew, I grew out of it as I got older, but it was always fun to see what she had in store for us next. I remember one time we made a special yellow and blue tablecloth complete with fun patterns and our names sewn on it. We gave that tablecloth to my mom and she still uses it today. Now whenever I see it, I am instantly reminded of her.

Looking back through those old memories and sewing projects made me realize that although I would never be doing another sewing project with my grandma, I would always have my memories with her.



Jacqueline Hearne, Grade 12



Kally Sluiter, Grade 12

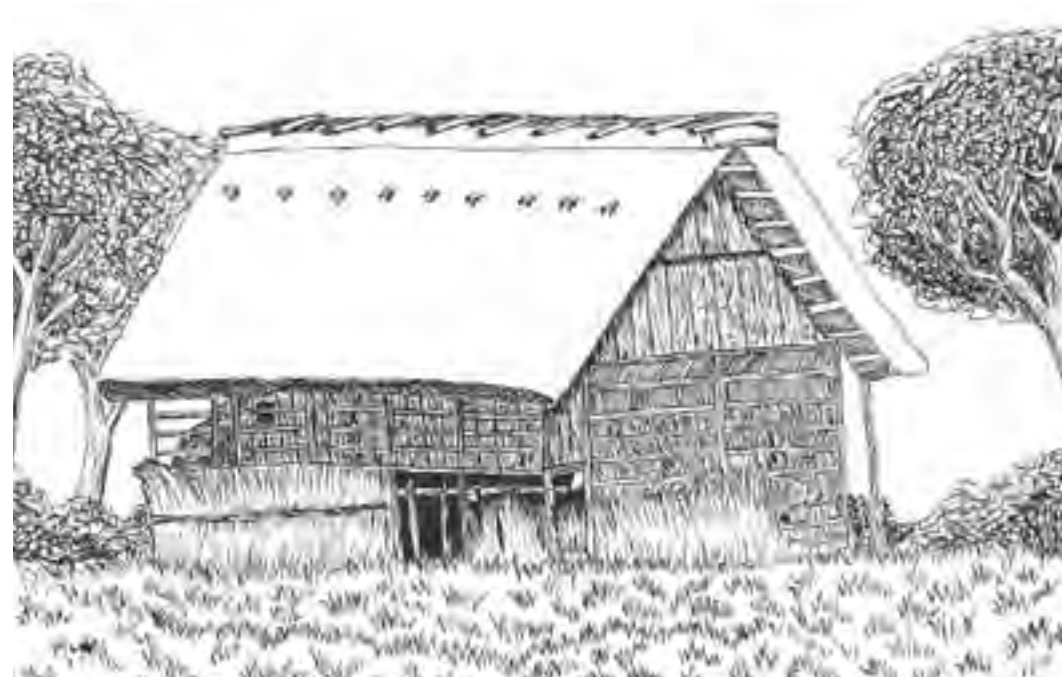
Lonely Nights With You

Keegan Arnst, Grade 11

Always find myself coming when you call
 Because of the tremor in your voice
 Considering the instant reaction it has become to answer when you
 Dial. Because whenever I hear your voice, I think about
 Every other night when I would stand by your door in the
 Fall wind, waiting for you to sneak out your window so we could
 Go out and I could spend my lonely nights with you. But I
 Hate the way you only call when you need something.
 It isn't ideal and I can't help but wonder if I can keep
 Justifying your actions of toxicity and be able to
 Keep putting up with your abuse, but I always think about the
 Lonely nights I've spent with you.



Marie Hobbins, Grade 8



Ariah Amin, Grade 10

Tea Cup

Ada Wetherbee, Grade 9

My grandma is an antique tea cup
 Made of delicate ceramic, yet unbreakable

She is the porcelain polished with care
 Every crack and chip is a mark of time

Every time I see my carefully placed teacup
 it reminds me of all those times we sat on pillows in our favorite dresses
 pouring scalding tea and milk into fragile glasses

Once, she showed me how to be tough
 Like the strong glaze disguising all of the history and hard work that went into making the glass
 only showing the beautiful swirls and flowers that line the cup
 Covering all imperfections hiding beneath
 I watch her not care what anyone thinks and do what makes her feel free

Now when I see my carefully placed teacup
 I remember our No Shoes Club
 I remember our hour-long trips in the red Jeep, rolling down the windows but never actually
 leaving the driveway.

I wish I could be 5 years old again
 Making cribs out of couches
 Watching movies
 Spending all day doing crafts
 Standing on the cold basement floor
 Making dreamcatchers and wearing wigs until the sun goes down
 Waking up as early as I can just so I can have special alone time before my sisters come
 Eating cocoa puffs and toaster strudels with a steaming glass of hot chocolate
 Tiptoeing around the kitchen so Mom doesn't wake up
 Playing dress up
 Having her tie up the dresses on me because I was still much too small to fit them

I have grown to see that I am similar to her because
 I know how to do what makes me happy and not let others control how I feel
 Like the sturdy handle
 That is always reliable, holding up the whole glass
 The drink would not be the same without it

But I wonder if she knows I think about her all the time
 Waiting for Christmas to come around every year so that I can see her
 I wish I could tell her I love her every night before bed
 Instead of wondering the next time I will get to be with her again...



Natalie Burpee, Grade 10



Ravell Smith, Grade 11

The Last Walk Home

Damien Chippewa, Grade 12

Every day, the homeless man sat under the old oak tree at the corner of Elm and Sixth, where the streetlights flickered to life as the sun dipped low. He didn't have a proper name, at least not one anyone used. He didn't need one. People called him "the old man" or "the beggar," but to the little girl who passed him every afternoon on her walk home from school, he was simply Mr. Sam.

She never spoke much, just a quick glance and a nod as she hurried by, her worn backpack sagging like the weight of her soul. She was small, too small for her age, with hollow eyes that seemed far too old. Each day, Mr. Sam saw her. Each day, he noticed the way her shoulders slumped more, the way her footsteps dragged like she was carrying invisible chains. He could almost hear her heartbeat thud in the silence between them—slow, heavy, as if it were losing the will to continue.

She never asked for anything. No one ever did. But every day, Mr. Sam tried.

"Hey there, kid," he'd call gently, his voice erased from too many nights spent beneath the cold sky. "How was school?"

She would always respond, "Fine," her voice low and distant, like the words came from a faraway place.

But he knew. He could see it in the way she walked. He could see it in the emptiness of her eyes, the way her head stayed down, as if the weight of the world was pressing her down, suffocating her. Mr. Sam never asked what was wrong. He knew better than to pry. People like him, with nothing to their names, had no right to offer more than a quiet, listening ear. But still, he waited for her. Every day, he hoped she would look up, really look at him, and maybe say something more.

The days turned into weeks. And then months.

One afternoon, Mr. Sam saw the child coming down the street, her steps slower than ever before. She wasn't just tired. She was broken. Her eyes were red-rimmed, her face pale, and her lips trembled, though she tried to hide it. She stumbled slightly as she passed him, but kept walking, not stopping.

"Kid," he called out, his voice soft but steady. She paused for a moment, but didn't turn around.

"Please, don't go," Mr. Sam whispered. "I'm here, kid. You don't have to walk alone."

She stopped. Just for a moment. With a deep, shuddering breath, she turned and met his gaze. And for the first time, he saw something different. He saw a look that twisted his heart in ways he couldn't understand.

"I'm not alone," she said quietly, almost to herself. "I wish I was, though."

The words hung between them like a fragile thread. He felt his throat tighten. He wanted to say something, anything, to help her. What? The words never came.

"I can't do it anymore," she continued, her voice breaking. "I just can't. I'm not...I'm not enough for them. I'll never be enough."

The weight of her words pressed down on him, sharper than any of the bitter winds that cut through his bones at night. Mr. Sam wanted to reach out, to hold her, but his hands, so calloused and worn, stayed by his sides. He had nothing to give her. Nothing but an empty promise of, "It gets better," which even he did not believe.

She sniffed, wiping her face with the back of her hand. "No

one cares, No one sees me. I'm just a shadow to them. I don't matter."

Mr. Sam had been there, in his own way. He knew what it felt like to be unseen, unheard. To be nothing but a forgotten soul, drifting through the cracks of the world. But he wasn't a child. He could still hold on to whatever scrap of hope he could find. But this girl?

He looked at her—this fragile, broken thing—and he realized that she had no more hope. And he couldn't help her.

"I'm sorry," he said, his voice thick with unshed tears. "I can't fix what's broken, kid."

She didn't answer. She just stared at him for a long time, and then she turned away. Her small frame faded into the distance.

The next day, she didn't come.

And the day after that, there was still no sign of her. No small figure with a heavy heart walking by the oak tree.

Days turned into weeks, and the seasons began to shift. But Mr. Sam stayed. He always stayed, right there under the same oak tree, waiting. Waiting for her to return.

But she never did.

And slowly, the cold began to creep in deeper. The quiet grew louder. The absence of her became something more than just emptiness. It became a wound that would never heal.

One day, Mr. Sam heard a story on the radio. It was about a child. A little girl. A girl whose name he didn't know, but whose face he knew would be forever seared into his memory.

She'd been found—alone, in a cold, dark room. And there was no one left to care.

He closed his eyes and let the tears fall. There were no words left to say, no more promises to offer. Just the bitter realization that sometimes, even a broken man can't save a broken child. He never knew her last name. He never knew the depth of her despair. But he had heard the silence in her voice that day, and it was a silence he would carry forever.

The last time he saw her, she hadn't looked up. But he had tried.

And she had tried, too.

But it wasn't enough.



Valerie Glidden, Grade 11



Mia Luthardt, Grade 10



Madeline Aylsworth, Grade 11



Natalie Burpee, Grade 10



Aazhaaniise Keller, Grade 10

Empty Eyes

Alessandra Olson, Grade 10

The whole idea of it makes me feel
like maybe the crystal clear isn't so clear after all.
i have nothing to look forward to anymore

I remember the day so clearly, years of
the bullying,
the trauma
the stress
no one to keep me going

walking into my home with mascara stained cheeks,
feeling like my heart had been ripped out of my chest.
i need someone else so please god send me someone

I was never the same after that day
my breaths came ragged and shaken.
i'm out of gasoline for the fire

My body was cold and feeling
like a bucket of ice water had been dumped on me
but I wasn't falling anymore.
the oxygen in this room is slowly depleting

I was stuck in a place of misery,
in a deep dark pit with nowhere to go,
nothing to see and nobody to be.
someone help

tell lauren i love her always

Remembrance

Teddy Petrescu, Grade 12

I had a home once, a white manor
Beyond the cities and streets
Placed snugly atop hills filled with silver
My home overlooked a steep forest that I thought to be infinite
The owners were kind, they always nurtured the house
Its white paint, wooden bridge, diverse gardens, decorative rooms,
and grand halls

All stretched and intertwined to create a work of art
As time passed, the house remained the same,
But the owners grew smaller and slower
With no caretakers, the manor aged as well
Bricks began to show as the white paint began chipping
The bridge started weathering from mold, and softened
The gardens were left to the mercy of the weeds
The rooms filled with dust
and the grand halls were soon filled with boxes
I remember saying goodbye,
Sitting in silence on a chair upon a hill in front of the back porch
gazing into the forest one last time



Natalie Burpee, Grade 10

Summer Morning

Marie Hobbins, Grade 8

as i close my eyes and open my senses...
i hear the soft tweeting of the early birds getting the worms.
i hear nature.
i feel the soft squishy grass beneath my feet
and the warm sunshine on my back.
i feel nature.
i smell the earthy crisp smell of fall
and the fresh smell of the morning
i smell nature.
i taste the cool fresh air of nature.
i taste nature.
i see the early fall leaves fluttering down from the trees
and the sunshine reflecting off the dewy grass
and sparkling on the lake
i see nature.



Maggie Walter, Grade 8

Grandma's Chocolate Milk

Mackenzie Scott, Grade 8

My Grandma is a short glass of chocolate milk
Sweet and comforting, but still, in her small form,
Full of strength.

Made of a mix of chocolate and the
Thick creamy milk from Meijer
(the one in TC, of course)

Her coupons clipped carefully
To grab that Hersheys
Squirt kind and
Blend it in her kitchen,
Sunlight beaming.

I remember the smell of that warm summer day,
Sitting in her kitchen,
Waiting for that magical glass
Of Grandma's chocolate milk.

I remember that cold December morning,
The smell of buttercream and chocolate
Fills the air.
Decorating Christmas cookies,
Drinking Grandma's chocolate milk
And talking for hours.

Like that glass of chocolate milk,
She is sweet, comforting,
And rich in kindness.



Lauren Truckey, Grade 7

Paco

Scott Dean, Grade 8

Paco was a bull in a china shop.

Made of over-energetic dog fur the color of snow,
spotted with a couple of brown moments, short fur.

Paco was a friendly guy, but slobbered
everywhere, all the time.
Entering a room, he was all over the place;
on and off the bed, smelly, stinky.

Once, he showed me the meaning of loyalty, humor,
and finding the good in life when it all feels impossible.

He was a mess, but a mess I loved.

Once, I saw him and I realized he had no idea of his size,
Thinking he was a lap dog when he was actually way too big for anyone's lap.

I remember when we first got him. He came from my mom's friend...
In Mexico....
In a bag...
With other puppies....
And he was at the very bottom....
But my mom's friend saved him
And then he came to Michigan.

I remember that shaggy fur,
But clean, and his breath was actually pretty good.

I remember his out of control energy,
Knocking stuff over,
Trying to play with our little dog,
Jumping around, going crazy,
Knocking everything over on the way...
Breaking my Xbox remote.

I wish I could turn back time,
And spend one more day,
With that furry, stinky
Bull in a china shop.



Bok Molter, Grade 11



Natalie Albu, Grade 12



Jenna Cadieux, Grade 12



Nyah McKinley, Grade 8



Valerie Glidden, Grade 11

Outside

Lexi Diaz, Grade 8

I feel the warmth of the sun
 Hitting my face while I squint my eyes
 The feeling of the sandy concrete
 Making my hand uncomfortable
 I appreciate everything my Great Spirit
 Has offered me
 And what the Lord has made for us all
 I stare at the light blue sky
 Not a cloud in sight
 The cool breeze on me
 Blowing the hair out of my face
 I don't think there's a better feeling than this.

This is More than it Seems

Evelyn Kirby, Grade 12

When I walk into the garden all I see is light,
 the sky illuminating my footsteps as I stroll towards the trees,
 there I sit, admiring the shimmering flowers as they dazzle with delight.
 I feel the grass beneath my fingertips and the tingling feeling it gives me,
 the smell of daisies fills my void,
 I taste the fresh croissant I had this morning, and the coffee lingers on my breath.

As I stand up, I walk toward the weeping willow tree,
 the leaves as soft as silk but the trunk strong like an ox.
 I look up and see the birds swarming.
 This is more than it seems.



Portlin Wheeler, Grade 8

Honestly

Lydia Diaz, Grade 11

I was born March 15th
 I hear that makes me a Pisces
 I am an angry teen trying to find a purpose
 I'm a sucker for people with emotional awareness and vulnerability
 I am still learning how to choose the "right" people
 I'm often a mean girl in a room full of nice people
 I'm often a nice girl in a room full of mean people
 I like watching sunsets with nature's music in the background
 I've been told that I'm a crybaby
 People say that you live and you learn
 People say that recovering isn't linear
 Secretly, I like arguing
 Even if that's all I grew up with
 I have this odd fascination with wanting to know people on deeper levels
 I assume it's because little me desired any type of attention
 I know it sounds crazy but I think people will never fully "heal"
 And to be honest, I think it adds character
 I know it sounds crazy but I wish there were more of me
 And to be honest I'd probably dislike me too
 I know this sounds weird but sometimes I wonder how many people I've affected
 I wonder if we stare at the same sunrises
 I'm afraid that if I let you into my mind
 You will seep between the folds of my brain
 Hi, my name is Lydia
 I enjoy people watching, laughing with large groups and talking
 But I don't allow myself to be as happy as I deserve
 I have a short fuse

And an even shorter body

My hobbies are rethinking past choices, worrying about the future and currently missing the present
 I don't know who is truly "there" for me

But I do know I can speak to my ancestors who will never be here with me. I know I am a lot
 I know I am still capable of love



Lexi Diaz, Grade 8



Lilly Gmoser-Duhamel, Grade 8



Mya Denoyer, Grade 12

Summer-Winter

Cadence Bachelder, Grade 8

Oh, how I love summer! It's almost here!
 The shining sun and warmth on my shoulders
 Oh, maybe I will get a tan!
 And we get to go to fun bonfires with friends

But I do miss snow angels.
 And hot chocolate on a chilly day
 Ohhhhhh, Winter

Oh, how I love winter! It's almost here!
 The wonderful snow and chill on my shoulders
 Oh, maybe I will get new skis!
 And we get to go to fun sledding with friends

But I do miss sandcastles.
 And smoothies on a scorching day
 Ohhhhhh, Summer



Hannah Hamelin, Grade 12



Ty Bunek, Grade 7



Evan Keen, Grade 10



Cody Tietje, Grade 10

Just the Same

Lucy McLean, Grade 8

[...the question is how good are these connections?] -Elizabeth Janeway

1
 Same crib, bonnet
 Same face, same dresses.
 But different.
 Always has been, and always will be.

Same face gave me joy at times,
 something to laugh at when bored.
 That was then.

But only crying me to sleep now.
 Always echoing in my ear, "You're just the same."
 But what about me?

I have a bracelet. She doesn't.
 Now how about that?
 That's different.
 That little bracelet changes everything,
 Doesn't it? It does to me.

No one else thinks so.
 They can't view past the same face, same dress,
 All just the same.
 Always has been and always will be.

2
 What if my dress is ivory, and hers is eggshell?
 But that's not right. They are the same.

But no, me, I am a quarter inch taller than her.
 "So what?"
 That's what they say,
 "You're just the same," they say.

Sometimes I wish to hit, I know she does too.
 That's the same,
 That's why I just want to hit her.
 It's not her fault, but could it be?

All that aside we are totally different women.
 We are both strong in different ways,
 We love different things.

But no.
 We're just the same.



Elise Vann, Grade 10



Evan Keen, Grade 10

The Craziest Day of My Life

Max Wassa, Grade 8

Part 1: School

This is the story of the craziest day of my life but you're probably wondering who I am. My name is Fred and I am thirteen years old. I am in eighth grade and go to Montclair Middle School in New York City. I have blonde hair and blue eyes.

This story begins in science class at Montclair. It was a cold school day in the middle of winter, snow was falling and roads were harsh. I rode my bike to school every morning and today's ride was miserable. I fell to the ground twice and the second time I got my butt all wet. Just what I needed, more fuel for the bullies to make fun of me.

Every day at school, I was relentlessly bullied by a guy named Ted. No matter what the occasion was or what I was doing, Ted always found a way to make fun of me. Needless to say, I was not excited for school today with my wet bum.

When I walked into school, I expected Ted to immediately slam me into a locker. I winced, waiting for my back to slam into a locker... but nothing happened. I opened my eyes and Ted was nowhere to be seen. It was a miracle! A huge smile spread across my face and I cheered in excitement. Finally, I wouldn't be bullied at school! Even if it was just for a day! I soon realized people were staring at me cheering in the hallway for no apparent reason. I quickly regained my composure and headed toward my first hour science class, as happy as a clam.

When I walked into class, every one of my classmates was huddled together with a worried look on their faces. I was very confused, so I walked up to the group and asked them what the matter was. It took a while for anyone to respond, but my classmate Jake finally spoke up and said, "Ted is missing."

"Well, yeah, obviously, he didn't show up to school today." I said.

"No, like he's MISSING MISSING. It was on the news and everything," said Jake.

"Oh, no," I said. Even though Ted relentlessly bullied me every day, I couldn't imagine how his parents felt. "Where was he last seen?" I asked.

"The news said he was last seen entering a sewer drain near Papa David's Pizza," said Jake.

The rest of the day was a blur. I couldn't help but wonder what Ted would be doing in the sewers, and if he was hurt or even worse... dead. It made me feel scared and cold. I knew what I had to do. As soon as school ended, I raced home on my bike and started packing. Goggles: check; flashlight: check; sword: check; and most importantly, Zach, my cactus best friend: check! I don't have any friends at school, but Zach is always there to comfort me whenever I'm feeling down,

After I was done packing, I searched the NYC sewer maps on Google and studied them, so I knew where everything was. My plan was to go into the sewers and look for Ted myself. If the police couldn't find him then someone would have to. I waited until exactly midnight to go to the sewers so my parents wouldn't be suspicious. At exactly 12:00 am I exited my house and started the journey with my supplies to Papa David's Pizza. It was only five minutes away from my house. When I arrived, I was feeling hungry, so I bought a piece of cheese pizza. It was delicious and fueled me for this Ted hunt. At 12:08 I entered the NYC sewer

system... this would cause a big chain of events that would change my life... forever.

Part 2: The Sewers

I'd been crawling through the twisty, turny, grimy pipes for what seemed like days, and I was wet, cold, and suffering. "Why would I go through all of this trouble just to save the person that hurts me the most?" I thought to myself. But then I thought about how my parents would feel if I went missing, how sad and scared they would be. I had to find Ted, even if it meant giving up my comfort.

A few minutes later I was crawling and felt an opening in the bottom of one of the pipes. It took me a while to dig out my flashlight from my bag, but once I turned it on, I was shocked. It was a human shaped hole with a blue tie next to it. Ted always wore a blue tie, no matter the time or the weather. I shook with fear. Ted must have fallen down this hole! What if it's a thin pipe and he can't crawl out of it! Or what if it's a pit full of knives!

With shaky hands I lifted my flashlight and the light shone in the hole. At the bottom of the long drop was a big pile of hay in the middle of a large cave.

"Ted is definitely, 100% down here," I thought. "I have to jump onto the hay...for Ted."

With all the confidence in my body, I jumped down the hole. I felt the wind rush around me and the adrenaline fill my body. WHOOSH! The sound of hay being launched into the air as I landed on it echoed off the cave walls. I quickly turned on my flashlight and immediately turned it off. There was a cabin made out of wood in this tiny cave in the middle of a sewer system.

Wow, Ted must have gotten busy I thought. Just in case though, on the off chance it wasn't Ted that was living down here, I made sure to be quiet and use only my sense of touch to make my way to the cabin.

When I reached the wooden steps of the small cabin, I knew Ted was nearby. Wherever Ted went there was always a lingering smell of beef jerky (probably because he never showered) and as soon as I took that first step, the smell of beef jerky immediately filled my nostrils. I was closer than the police were to Ted, and now I just had to find him, and then get him out of here, and maybe he would be so grateful that he wouldn't bully me ever again! I eagerly raced up the steps and opened the cabin door. I slowly reached into my bag and pulled out my flashlight. I turned it on and was left speechless. There was Ted, tied up in ropes on one of the walls of the cabin.

"What in the --," I said, but before I could finish my sentence, I was struck across the back of the head and everything faded to black.

A few hours later I woke up with tape across my mouth and my hands tied behind my back. I tried to remember what happened last and why I was tied up, and then I remembered. I started panicking, trying to think of a way to escape but there was no use. I was trapped and scared. Suddenly a man in black robes entered the room and ripped the tape off my mouth.

"You shouldn't have come down here," he said in a deep menacing voice.

"Who are you, and why am I tied in ropes?" I shouted.

"I cannot answer these questions or else my identity and mission will be exposed," he said. "And now since you came down here, you and your friend will be my dinner tonight."

"WHAT!" I shouted in trembling fear.

"You will both be cooked in my oven, but before I do that, I must prepare the oven for a large meal. I will be back," he said.

I had to think of a way to escape, and fast, or else I will be cooked alive! I tugged with all my might at the ropes restraining my hands, but it was no use. I scrambled, feeling around for anything sharp that might cut through the ropes keeping me hostage. And then I finally felt it... My cactus best friend Zach poked me in my hands. I had never been happier to be poked by a cactus before. I used his sharp needles to saw through the ropes and after a few minutes I finally cut through and my hands were free! Now I had to knock out or subdue the man in black robes.

I crept around the corner of the cabin and entered the room where the oven was. There was the man in black robes, and he was checking the temperature of the oven. I had to do something; it was now or never. Sprinting at full speed, I crashed into the man and sent him flying forward, directly into the oven. As he screamed in pain, I shut the oven door, forever sealing him in that godforsaken human-sized cooking machine. I ran out of the house, dragging Ted by his arm, as he slowly woke up.

"W-what happened? Where am I?" he said sleepily.

"Don't worry, it will all be over soon," I said. I scrambled, looking for a way out, and that's when I saw the exit.

It was a large wooden door with light peeking out from underneath the bottom.

"This is definitely the way out," I told Ted.

"Now help me open the door real quick," I said. Ted and I pushed with all the little strength we had left and the door begrudgingly opened. On the other side was a ladder that seemed to go to the surface.

"Well, I guess we're climbing, Ted," I said.

"Ughhhhh," Ted groaned. We climbed the ladder in silence until we were inches away from the manhole exit.

"C'mon, open the manhole already, I can't wait to take a shower," I said.

"Before we leave, Fred, I just wanted to say, thanks for saving my butt. If it wasn't for you, I would probably be dinner for the weird guy in black robes right about now," said Ted.

"Don't mention it, any other person would have done the same thing," I said.

"Except that's not the case," said Ted in a sad tone.

"I've bullied you without mercy for several years, but you still decided to come down and save me. I think I owe you an apology," said Ted.

"Well, once we get back to the surface, maybe you could start by buying me a slice of Papa David's Pizza," I said.

"Deal," said Ted.

Ted and I climbed out of the manhole and went back to living our normal lives... except one thing was different. Instead of having Zach be my only friend, I now had two. My second friend was Ted.



Isabel Simmons, Grade 10



Corbin Robertson, Grade 12



Jay Craker, Grade 10

The Pinch

Ben Wassa, Grade 9

Everyone has something they are scared of. For me, it was the thought of the deep ocean. When I was a bit younger, I HATED the idea of the salty waters and what lurks in their depths. It was the summer of 2021, and my family and I were staying with our family friends, Steve and Carrie, who live in the Virgin Islands, on St. John.

The first couple days we were there just felt like absolute paradise, and I couldn't even imagine the thought of leaving. Around every turn was the fresh island smell and the feel of the warm air. Iguanas and chickens roamed the large island. Driving felt really strange because there they drive on the left side of the road instead of the right, so it took some readjusting for my mind. We put pounds of sunscreen on every day so we didn't get burnt to a crisp. The places to eat in St. John were unique and weren't the restaurants you find all over the U.S. These were extremely delicious and had tasty meals like fresh seafood and tacos. We even got a chance to go on a boat with Steve's friends and went deep sea fishing miles and miles out into the Caribbean. We'd have the best day of our lives outside of the villa where we stayed and when we came back, there would be a pool and snacks and treats waiting for all of us to finish the day. I was having the time of my life and everything was going great, as I thought to myself one night while swimming in the pool looking across the island.

We decided to spend one of the days entirely at the beach. Before we left, we had a sustaining breakfast consisting of Dave's killer pancakes and freshly picked mangoes from the backyard of the villa. We had packed a bunch of snacks and drinks so we could be there for a while. All of us pulled into the giant parking lot and saw the sign that said TRUNK BAY BEACH. I was so excited to just chill and lay down on the warm sunny day and get super tan. After I found my perfect spot of laziness, I rolled out a huge towel and lay down for a while.

Shortly after, I heard some talk about snorkeling a bit and that didn't sound like what I wanted to do at the moment so I continued to go back into my half asleep state. After what seemed like a long time, I woke up with a fly biting my back and it made me annoyed. Now that I was awake, my parents and my brother were all geared up to go on a snorkeling trip a bit down the beach.

"C'mon, Ben! It'll be fun! You'll get to see things in person you've never seen before!" exclaimed my parents.

"Okay, fine, I'll give it a go," I said. I knew in my brain that I wasn't going to like this one bit but since I was in somewhat of a good mood, I felt up for it. I threw on some snorkeling goggles and fins and walked down to the rocky area where we would see the most fish. We started swimming out and it stayed shallow for quite a while before it really started to drop. It was beautiful. The water was super clear and there were hundreds of different colored fish swimming everywhere you looked. I was swimming out on my own, keeping a good distance from my family. I continuously looked around whenever I got a chance.

All of a sudden, I felt this somewhat stinging pain strike my arm like a quick pinch. I looked down and saw nothing, so I thought it was probably my imagination. I kept on swimming and about three seconds later I felt it again on my other arm. My heart rate started to rise and I looked down at my arm to see...nothing. I was starting to think I was tweaking and didn't know what to do. I pretended nothing was wrong and just kept swimming out

to where my parents were, further along the reef's edge. The pinching started to be a consistent thing everywhere on my body that wasn't covered. I could hear my heart beating like a drum because I could barely see the bottom of the deep ocean floor and there was nowhere to reset myself. My heartbeat increased and I was struggling to swim. I fought through the stinging and gathered with my family. We lifted our heads up above the waterline and discussed if we should keep going or head back.

"I'M GOING BACK! THIS IS FREAKING ME OUT!" I announced immediately, struggling to tread water.

"What's up with you?" asked my brother.

"It feels like I'm getting a needle put into me every time I move my arms," I said.

We decided to head back and I was still super shaky. When I dunked my head under the water, it suddenly felt way deeper than before. I took my paranoid look around and to my right was a humongous jellyfish. I couldn't believe how massive it was. Its cloudy pink color and electrifying tentacles waved menacingly. It was propelling right towards me. My instincts kicked in and I started frantically flapping away from the jellyfish. I was scared I was going to drown because I somehow forgot how to swim. I couldn't tread water anymore. I felt like Michael Phelps himself trying to win an Olympic gold medal on my way back to the beach.

There was more continuous pinching on my way back. I was crying and swimming at the same time, which is a pretty rough combo, especially with a bulky snorkel. Once I got to land, I sprinted back to the spot where we had set up. While I was running, I could hardly move my legs because of the unimaginable pain.

I put some lotion on my spots that were hurting and cried because of the pain. My heart was still beating fast and my adrenaline was still kicking. I never wanted to go into those waters again. The dangers of the ocean had won, and I wasn't ready for whatever it might throw at me next.

My dad came over by me and calmed me down. When he talked to me for a while to settle the nerves, he made me realize that there was barely any danger with the jellyfish but the worry, the 'what ifs,' and the thought of chaos overcame my common sense. I realized that when panic takes over, it can be far more paralyzing than the actual threat could be. The struggle is remembering that calm is more powerful than fear, every time.



Irene Phan, Grade 11

My Poetry

Jazlyn Appleton, Grade 10

My face and soul are made from hundreds of others.
Those who loved harder than others.

Along with love is also the hatred from looking like the other.
I am both hated and loved by what I am made up of.

Am I beautifully crafted? Or am I beautifully shattered?
I'll choose wisely.
So the next is beautifully crafted.
So they don't feel like they are beautifully shattered.
They don't need to question whether it is hate or love they were
formed upon.
But know the last two they were deeply and carefully made upon.



Salvador Pineda, Grade 7



Isabel Simmons, Grade 10

Sand Flies as the Chopper Hit the Skies

Easton West, Grade 9

We lay in the sand, hot and sweaty,
Awaiting the supplies from the skies
As we see that white parachute
The helicopter that dropped it goes flying by.

The sand from the helicopter hit us in the face,
Made us think of another, better place.
A better place with water and beach towels,
A place where we could lay down for a while.

We packed the supplies for the journey,
The journey in the future.
As we took the supplies back to the shelter,
We all thought to ourselves, man, we still have another four years.



Lilianna Migazzi, Grade 9



Emery Wichern, Grade 7



Kaylee Hansen, Grade 11



Belle Peplinski, Grade 11

Ripple

Evelyn Roeder, Grade 12

A million ripples,
One toe, one lake, one long dock,
The water smiles back

Grand

Jax Noonan, Grade 11

When you walk in,
You see it out the corner of your eye
Dark and majestic,
Its top popped open

Grand, black piano, sits in the corner collecting dust and new ideas.
Elegant and beautiful, as the sounds of nostalgia mesmerize me

My dad, the keeper of the piano,
Our connection to music
Strengthens our bond
The music flows throughout the house
Like a stream of notes, chords, and ideas
The smell hits me
With subtle notes of wood and lacquer,
And most of all, home

Decades of songs composed on one piano, never giving up when a mistake is made
The centerpiece of the living room makes the room into a home



Arlo Woodruff, Grade 7

Past Tomorrow

Arlo Woodruff, Grade 7

I'm drowning in my tears,
Falling before my fears,
Buried by my sorrow,
Just trying to get past tomorrow.

You will not break me down,
I will not walk with my head hung low,
Instead, I will wear my crown,
Lighting my face aglow.

I will build a boat to navigate my tears,
I will run because I will not be caught by fears,
I will learn to fly to escape my sorrow,
And for the first time I'm confident,
I will get past tomorrow.

My Dad is Like A...

Jazmyn Strait, Grade 9

My dad is a rusty claw hammer
A rusty hammer that still works even after years of working.
Looking worn out but still keeps going after years of hard work.
Smelling like rust and oil.

After every problem, the hammer is still able to do its job
even when it looks old and worn out.
He works hard for his family
like an old shovel in the winter.

He manages to get rid of the bad stuff to make it look better
like a snow plow, plowing away the snow to make the area better.
He's like a tree in a harsh storm.
standing strong and proud
even when the weather is like a hurricane trying to pull that tree away from its roots.

My dad keeps going even when things are hard.
He built a safe place and warm area for our cat when our cat was outside in the cold,
freezing,
snowy weather.
Letting our cat know he's loved and safe.

Even when my dad's body started getting worse and older
He would help me with problems
Even when it was hard for him to get up.

Even while he's getting older and his body is starting to get worse
He still goes to his work
even when it's hard for him to walk.
He still helps with shopping
even when his body tries to stop him from helping.

Now, seeing tools that are rusted but still usable reminds me of my dad.
Working for hours on end just for his family even when he's rusted out.
Thinking of how he still works for his family even when his body is fragile
It shows that he truly loves his wife, his animals, and me.



Cody Couturier, Grade 11



Elle Miles, Grade 10



Madelyn Hamilton, Grade 11



Alan Heckl, Grade 12

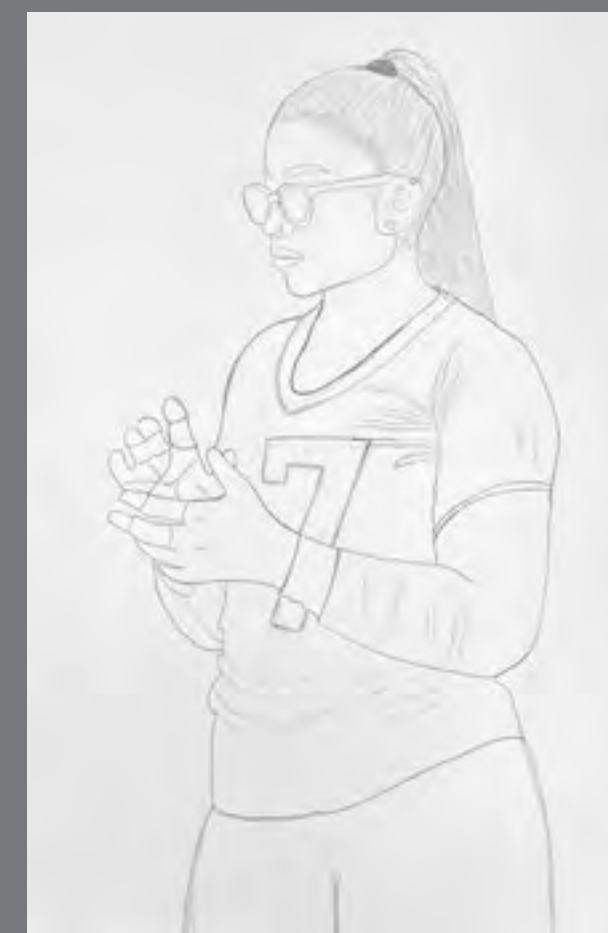


Sophia Rodriguez, Grade 9

Why I Run

Janai Misner, Grade 9

Runners to your marks, the words pulsing adrenaline through my veins. Constructing a wave gushing throughout me, igniting a beast deep inside, trying to claw its way out. Sweat, pain, and sacrifice coming down to this essential moment. I surveyed the track, my obstacle. The finish line, my home. I enter my blocks, legs and heart convulsing. Get set, echoing like a crack of lightning, spreading nerves like wildfire. The gun erupts, exploding, my legs, my thoughts, my mind. I want this. I lean towards my goal, and break through it. My lungs are deflated but my soul is fulfilled.



Nayely Estrada, Grade 12



Marie Hobbins, Grade 8

Stranded

Lana Kennedy, Grade 7

The wind swirls
On the surface of the water,
The lake looks as it usually does:
Calm, lonely.

I feel the water,
Cold in the wind,
Warm if I get in.

I'm all alone,
By myself,
Stranded.

I've been stuck out here
For what feels like ages,
On a little raft
That's falling apart,
No one to talk to,
No one to listen to my heart.

I don't know
If I'll ever be found,
Or if I'll be stuck here
All year round.

I guess I'll wait,
Wait for my fate
To decide if I'm here forever,

Stranded.



Mya Denoyer, Grade 12



Riley Davis, Grade 9



Isaac Petoskey, Grade 10

The Basement

Christian Feeney, 8

"Christian, our guests will be here soon. Can you go downstairs and get some soda from the fridge?" my mom asked casually, as if doing so wouldn't greatly endanger me.

"Sure, Mom," I replied, feeling my mouth suddenly go dry. I peered down the basement stairs, searching for something recognizable in the gloom, but I could only distinguish twisted shapes and shadows, eager fingers reaching towards the doorway. I leaned forward in a futile attempt to see and felt a slight draft drifting past me towards the darkness, blowing the scents of must and cleaners back down into the basement, daring me to follow. Despite the murk, I rushed down the stairs and yanked the pull cord, flooding the space with a glow that burnt away the shadows and concealed monsters. All that was left was an open, innocent space with everything a normal basement is expected to have.

The basement was the scariest place, with its dark shadows and creeping spiders. Combine that with squeaking floorboards, and you get a cesspool of spookiness. The true origin of my basement fears began when I was very young. My family was at my grandparents' house, and all the kids went into the basement to play. As I walked down the stairs, I noticed the printer lights in the otherwise dark space.

"What's that?" I asked with a trembling voice. Having lived only four years, I was edgy about journeying into the dark with unknown lights glaring at me.

"Oh, that's just the basement monster," my older brother replied ominously. "Don't get too close or he'll follow you home and move into our basement!"

Of course, I became even more terrified of the basement. Many would have chosen to carefully avoid this fear, but I was unable to. The basement contained most of my toys and our television. Plus, there were the not-so-rare times when the other two bathrooms in the house were occupied, and necessity caused me to turn to the bathroom in the basement.

While at the time I believed that my fear of the basement would haunt me forever, as I grew older, my fears matured with me, especially when my dad got cancer. When I first heard the diagnosis of leukemia, my head spun and I didn't understand what was happening. Cancer happened to people far away or who were old, but definitely not my dad. Despite this, the diagnosis was correct. My dad did have cancer and this was the scariest time of my life. I waited, unable to visit my dad and unsure if I would ever see him again. My other fears seemed childish in comparison, especially my fear of the basement. Several years later, when my dad was completely cancer-free, my fear for him diminished, but the maturity that came from the situation did not. The basement was no longer a thing to be feared. I realized there are much more real things to fear, like losing the people you love.



Nora Verschaeve, Grade 7



Lilly Dean, Grade 11

Two Loves

Nayely Estrada, Grade 12

We're like the sun and the moon.
We connect together as one.
We understand each other like water and fire.
Our heartbeats are in sync.
Our souls are attached.
We are one.



Isabel Simmons, Grade 10



Brooke Warren, Grade 7

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Jessie Peplinski, Grade 10

Grandma's Old Yellow Pitcher

Lauren Scroggins, Grade 12

That old yellow pitcher
The one that sat on my grandmother's table in the golden days of summer.
The one that always has cold iced tea ready to pour into my glass,
Its pale color is slowly chipping and fading as the years go by.
The clinks of ice and the sloshes of liquid echo in my ears.
Grandma says that it was her mother's pitcher,
And that one day, it will be mine.
One day, my grandchildren will sit at my table and that old yellow pitcher will be there
waiting for them.
Full of cold iced tea for them to drink in the beautiful summer sun.



Ruby McKenna, Grade 12

