



BOOK SEVEN | 2021

The Origin Project

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CONTRIBUTOR CREDITS

Front Cover Watercolor Design, Alyssa Dotson

Back Cover, *The Origin Project* Original Logo, Elizabeth Berry

Story Wreath Cover Design

This year, I was given the opportunity to design the cover for *The Origin Project Book Seven*. I decided to create a story wreath that showed all the aspects of the creative process. The boy laying in the cloud shows brainstorming, and the raindrops are the many ideas that resulted. Those ideas are all collected together into the watering can to be refined. That refined idea is poured into the inkwell for the writer to put on paper for the first rough draft. The magnifying glass shows how closely the writer must inspect their work to revise before the next draft. On the computer, the writer creates their final draft that flies into the hands of peers for discussion. After all of this, the writer will again begin brainstorming for the next piece. I wanted to make it clear that this process is never ending, as a writer is always building from past writing experiences. Each flower in the wreath is a unique native flower to a region in Virginia where a school is participating in *The Origin Project*: Virginia Bluebells (Prince William County), Marsh Marigolds (Hampton), New England Aster (Richmond), and Periwinkle (Southwest Virginia).

ALYSSA DOTSON, ART & MATH TEACHER
JONESVILLE MIDDLE SCHOOL



We offer sincere gratitude to Linda Woodward for all she has done to make *The Origin Project: Book Seven* possible.

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The Origin Project

BOOK SEVEN | 2021

The Origin Project



"You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was Dostoevsky and Dickens who taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who ever had been alive. Only if we face these open wounds in ourselves can we understand them in other people. An artist is a sort of emotional or spiritual historian."

—James Baldwin (1963)

"I've often tould ye there's a silver lining to every cloud. . . . There's a silver side to every cloud that sails about the heavens, if we could only see it."

—[Fictional Nurse] Katty Macane (1840)

Each year we kick off *The Origin Project* with one or two quotations to inspire our students as we present them with their journals to begin writing odysseys to explore the roots and origins of their families and contemplate their unique places in the world.

We knew this would be unlike any other year, and we wanted to provide strength, support, and a lifeline to the students, their teachers, and their families as they navigate the unprecedented choppy waters caused by the pandemic that changed everything. As much as we hoped to provide our budding writers a chance to chronicle this challenging time, we also hoped they would take time to appreciate the special moments that occurred as they sheltered with their families. So we chose the theme *Silver Linings*, and presented each student with a glittery silver journal.

One of our biggest hurdles was getting *The Origin Project Book Six* into the hands of last year's newly published authors: due to COVID-19 we had not been able to hold unveilings in May to distribute the anthology. We also wanted to provide new writing journals as soon as possible but, since most classes were meeting virtually, that was the next big challenge.

We missed being able to meet in person with the students, but we took advantage of the silver lining of Zoom to engage as they shared their writings and thoughts and we collaborated with guidance and advice. This new virtual reality will never replace completely the personal contact we crave, but it has presented us with previously unimagined opportunities for reaching our growing family across a larger geography.

The Origin Project Book Seven presents a unique anthology that shares the painful feelings many of our students have felt from the strains of this year, while portraying the comfort and sustenance provided by their families. We are proud to share their wisdom, ingenuity, and creativity.

As always, we are deeply grateful to our students and their families, the teachers and administrators, our generous funders, and all our community members and friends who help us continue the mission of providing these young individuals the opportunity to express themselves and preserve the oral histories of their families. We wish you all health and peace in the days ahead.

Kathy Balmeir Liske

Adriana Triguani

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WITH APPRECIATION FOR SUPPORTING AND
GUIDING *THE ORIGIN PROJECT* STUDENTS

Dryden Elementary School

Mary Day
Tammy Wade

Eastside High School

Bryan Crutchfield
Katie Jessee

Elk Knob Elementary School

Brian Huff
Alane Barker
Monique Sprinkle

Flatwoods Elementary School

Dawn Crabtree
Gigi Long
Gretta Carroll
Kim Goforth

Greendale Elementary School

Allyson Willis
Brenda Sprinkle

Homeschool

Rhonda Carper

John I. Burton High School

Brad Hart
Stephanie Cassell

Jonesville Middle School

Stacey Belcher
Briana Allen-Austin
Sheila Shuler

Kelly Sharrett
Alyssa Dotson

Lee High School

Stephanie Sumpter
Alex Long
Jillian Skidmore
Cari Belcher

Morrison School

Jami Verderosa
Carla Sisk
Karla Rasnake
Shannon Dabney
Christina Mizelle

St. Charles Elementary School

Kellie Leonard
Roberta Gibbons

Phoebus High School

James Harris
Patrice Williams
Margaret Dee
Kemi Layeni
Jeremy Blunt
Kasey Rizzo
Ann Bane
Kelli Cedo
Jennifer Butler

St. Paul Elementary School

Karen Dickenson

Melissa Galliher
Hannah Mullins

Thomas Walker High School

David Graham
Cari Belcher

Unity Reed High School

Kelli Macdonald
Elisa Dacales
Lori Sellers Sterne
Lauren Kohistani

Union Middle School

Paul Clendenon
Jennifer Whiteaker
Ashley Bowen
Joshua Spurlock

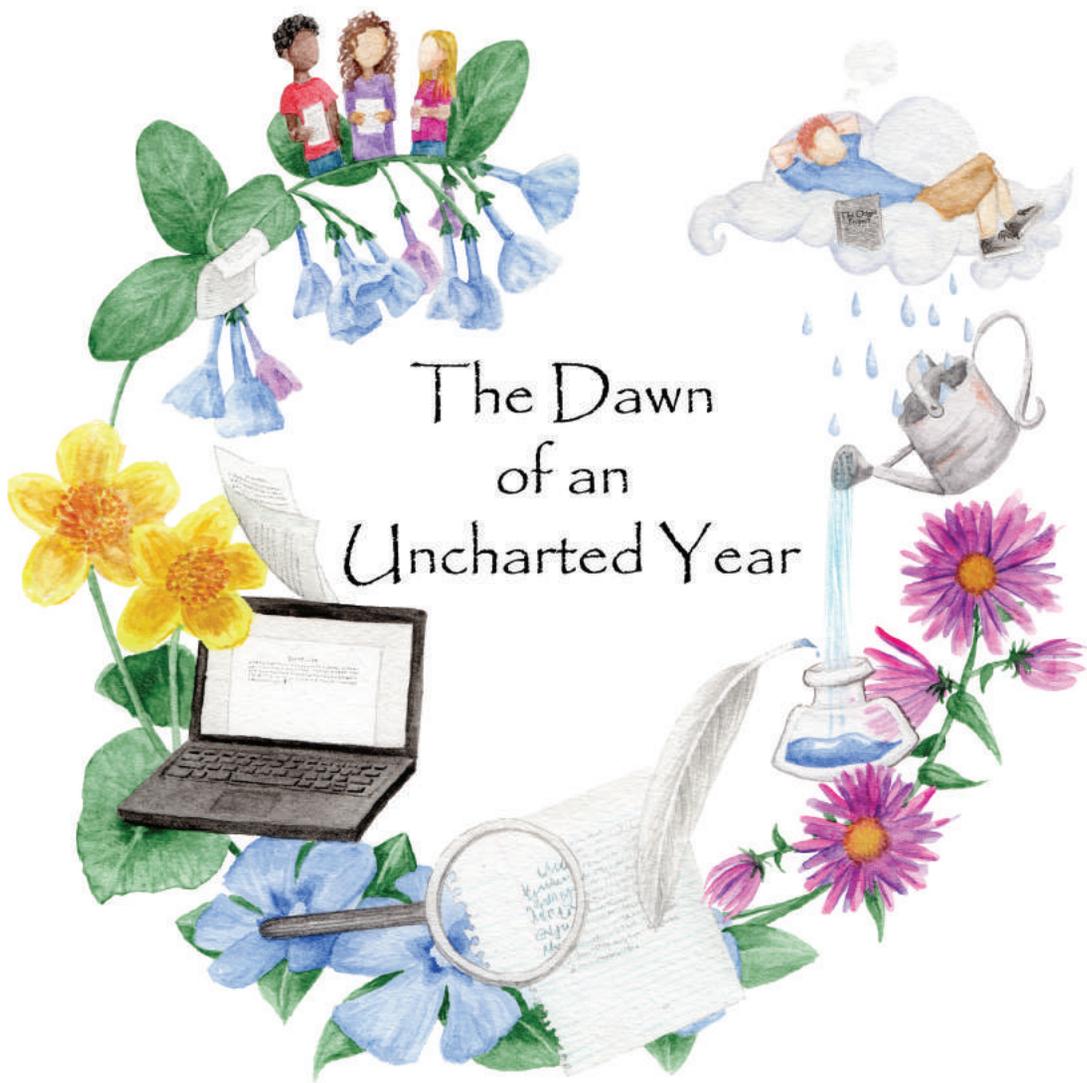
Virginia High School

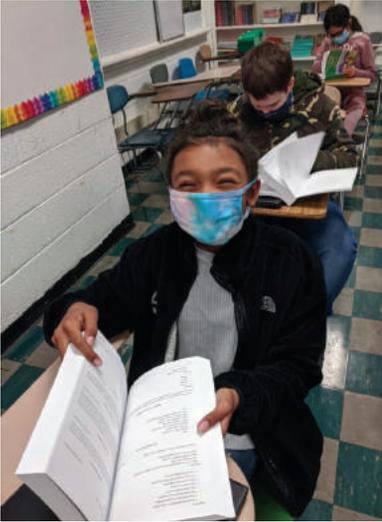
Ronnie Collins
Brad Hutchinson
Crystal Hurd

Woodbridge Senior High School

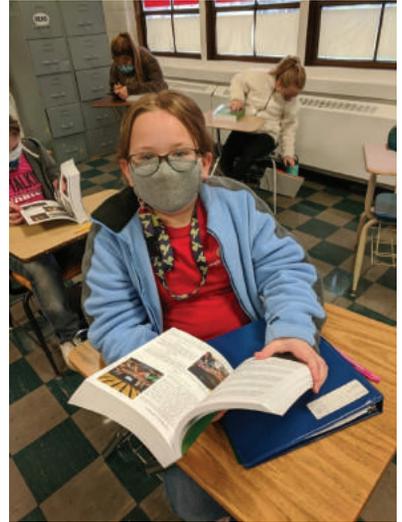
Heather Abney
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MaryLee Tuniki
Roxanne French
Katherine Wood
Crista Colantoni
Stephanie Campbell
Kyle Trott
Catherine Hailey
Thao Huynh

The Dawn
of an
Uncharted Year





Jonesville Middle Student Mia Fortner



Jonesville Middle Student Ella Shell



Jonesville Middle Student Ben Hixon



Jonesville Middle Student Jacob Neff



Mrs. Austin's 5th grade class with Book Six

Silver Linings

As a child, I heard my grandpa say, “Every cloud has a silver lining.” He explained that bad things will happen in our lives and we will encounter difficult situations, but, in spite of how hopeless the circumstances may seem, something good, something positive can come from them. There is hope in spite of how grim the circumstances may appear.

The year 2020 will long be remembered as a year of uncertainty that presented many challenges. Although adults were affected greatly by the impact of the pandemic, our children, too, have dealt with tremendous, life changing circumstances that will forever be embedded in their memories. So, where is the silver lining to this dark cloud?

The distribution of *The Origin Project Book 6* was delayed by several months due to the pandemic. As disappointing as this was, the arrival of the book in late fall of 2020 was perfect timing. Students were feeling the frustration of wearing a mask and distancing from friends, but excitement filled the classroom as students received their own copy of *The Origin Project Book 6*. The laughter and chatter that filled the classroom were uplifting because, in that moment, these students were able to forget about the pandemic and just be “normal” students. Even a mask couldn’t conceal the smiles as eyes lit up. Silence blanketed the room as one by one, students found their own entry and began reading.

A few weeks prior, students had received their journals for *The Origin Project Book 7*. This little journal was where they would pour out their thoughts, emotions and experiences to share with others. How uplifting it was to observe students as they flipped through the journal’s empty pages and held the journals up allowing light to hit the sparkling, silver cover. They were in awe at how the light created a breathtaking glimmer. In a sense, this was their glimmer of hope, their outlet, the “silver lining” to the dark cloud that had loomed far too long due to the pandemic.

Yes, Grandpa was right! Every cloud does indeed have a silver lining, but there are times when we have to wait and look a little harder for that “silver lining”.

SHEILA SHULER, JONESVILLE
MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER

Neither Rain Nor Snow Nor Rain Nor Heat Nor Pandemic. . . . With Apologies to the United States Postal Service

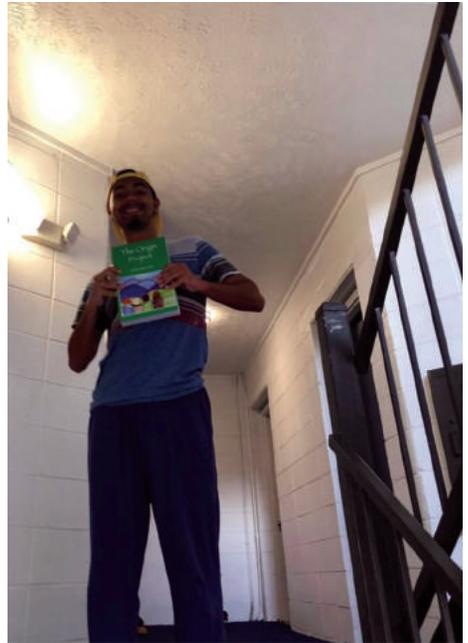


It was the Spring of 2020 and I was suffering. The “Unveiling” of our long awaited books, a labor of love, was not happening because Prince William County Schools, along with most of the nation, were not holding in person classes. The boxes arrived and sat unopened, desolate, begging to be in the hands of the excited 12th grade authors at Unity Reed High School.

Determined to do SOMETHING, I took matters into my own hands and reverently placed the boxes into the trunk of my adorable little mint green Fiat and with the GPS set and a printed out roster of addresses, began *The Official Origin Project Delivery Service*. Appointments were scheduled. Unlike Amazon, no

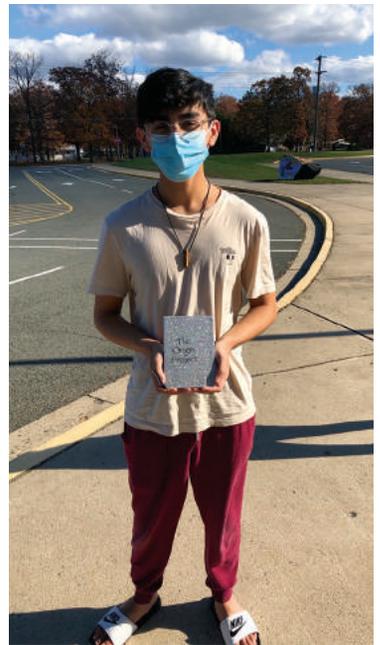


Unity Reed High School published authors receive special delivery of The Origin Project Book Six from teacher Lori Sterne





Unity Reed High School published authors receive special delivery of The Origin Project Book Six from teacher Lori Sterne





tracking was available, so students had to accept a wide time range for delivery. They accepted the delays and the unknown without complaint (which was good because there was not a customer service line either) and as the masked deliverer rang the door bells of their home, they greeted me with smiles (I think they had masks on). It was so good to see them; it had been weeks. It was good for my soul, an end of the year experience I will treasure. During the year, my students and I create a family due in large part to The Origin Project and giving them their books in their own home resulted in a family reunion feel and served to highlight the unified atmosphere that had been cultivated all year long.

The unveiling was different. But right now, different is normal. The Origin Project Class of 2020 had lost a lot. Award Ceremonies, the Senior Trip, Prom . . . everything fun seemed to have been ripped from them. They have had to be resilient and appreciate the little things. I hope that their old Miss Frizzle of a teacher driving to their house to drop off this much anticipated treasure of a book, the culmination of a year spent finding their voices

and telling their stories, made them smile. I hope they experienced a pride they still carry with them.

LORI STERNE, UNITY REED HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER

The Origin Project Book Six

There are many good reasons to get an education, and one of the most important of those reasons is that a good education will help provide you with the ability to be flexible. We can make all the plans we want, but life is likely to surprise us. When that happens, we need the ability to think, question, reason, and plot a new course for success.

After all, who knows when we might find ourselves smack in the middle of a global pandemic?

The Origin Project (TOP) is nothing if not incredibly organized, with plans far in advance for collecting and publishing student creations and for handing out hundreds of new books to excited participants. They line up speakers, secure a venue, arrange to have boxes delivered, make audio/visual provisions, and myriad unknown, unsung, picky, perfecting, necessary details that make those great distribution events hum.

But, in 2020, when it was time to hand out books, we found ourselves smack in the middle of a global pandemic.

Suddenly there were cartons upon cartons of books ready to be delivered – but students and teachers were working from home, and we weren't allowed to have any big public events. To make matters worse, the books didn't even all go to the same place: they needed to be doled out to a variety of schools.

Thank goodness TOP organizers Adriana Trigiani, Nancy Bolmeier Fisher, and Linda Woodward have spent years getting the education (and life practice) needed to save the day.

They decided the best thing to do was to store the books in a single location until a plan for distribution could be made. But there were a lot of boxes; not really the sort of thing you could hide in your kitchen for an unpredictable number of months. So they called Emory & Henry. Surely in all those buildings there would be a place to stash 16 big boxes of books.



Boxes of The Origin Project Book Six safely stored in Monica Hoel's office at Emory & Henry College

well, duck. But also make sure you're prepared to be flexible so you can deal with this and any other unexpected challenge that comes your way. Because we just never know what we'll be smack dab in the middle of next.

But even that was a challenge. We looked at a student residence house that was empty at the moment – but no one knew when students would be allowed to return to campus. We thought about the basement of a residence hall – but it was about to be renovated. We considered a little empty shed – but found out that it is prone to a leaky roof.

However, we were smack in the middle of a global pandemic. So most college staff members were working from home and didn't really need their office space – including me! So on the day of the big delivery we found out that 16 cartons was actually 32 cartons, and we enlisted our friends on the E&H facilities crew to help carry all those boxes up to the alumni office where they lived happily until a plan was made for each participating school to send a truck and pick up their books.

So the moral of the story is, sometimes life will throw books at you. And when that happens . . .

MONICA S. HOEL, ALUMNI DIRECTOR
EMORY & HENRY COLLEGE

This school year presented challenges for our teachers, students, and parents that seemed at times almost insurmountable. At the outset, witnessing the ingenuity, tenacity, and kindness of teachers, administrators, and other angels as they found creative ways to deliver *The Origin Project Book Six* safely to our newly published authors was awe-inspiring. The teachers then turned around and found ways to get our silver glittery journals into the hands of *this* year's writers; we had been anxious to share with students as soon as possible the silver linings theme. We hoped this small book could provide hope as they moved forward in uncharted waters.

We were sad the kick-off in-service with teachers could not be in person, but Zoom turned out to be another silver lining because more of the teachers from our nineteen schools could be together through this virtual platform. It was an ideal venue for sharing stories and strategies of how to navigate a new learning experience. Little did any of us know at the time that many teachers would not be with their students in person for many months.

We are always grateful to our funders who generously help us sustain *The Origin Project*, and even more so this year as the



Nancy Bolmeier Fisher and Adriana Trigiani lead TOP Teacher In-service by Zoom

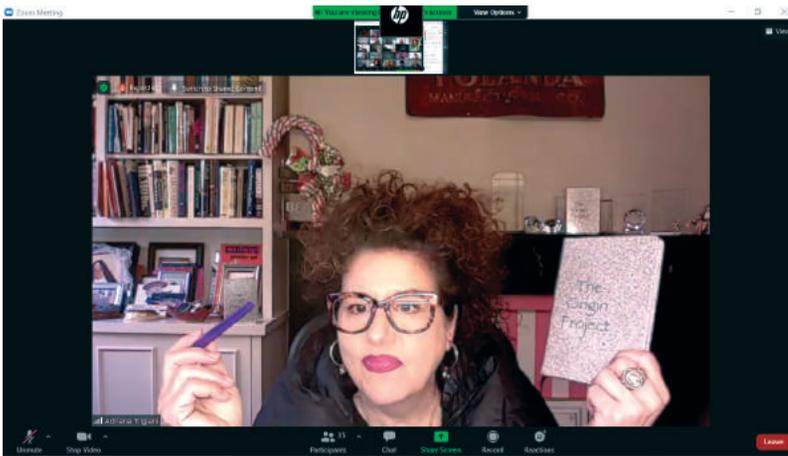
cumulative needs of so many have been so profound. It is wonderfully affirming when our mission resonates with others and inspires people to provide us support.

We were honoured in January to receive the ArtStars Award from Dominion Energy and its accompanying financial gift. Dominion Energy's generosity (together with that of many others) has helped transform this heart-rending year into an opportunity for students to share their experiences in this pandemic and to create the following anthology.

NANCY BOLMEIER FISHER
CO-FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
THE ORIGIN PROJECT



Ann Bane, Director of Community & Legislative Relations, Hampton City Schools, participates in TOP Teacher In-service with Phoebus HS teachers



Author Adriana Trigiani speaks with TOP teachers during In-service



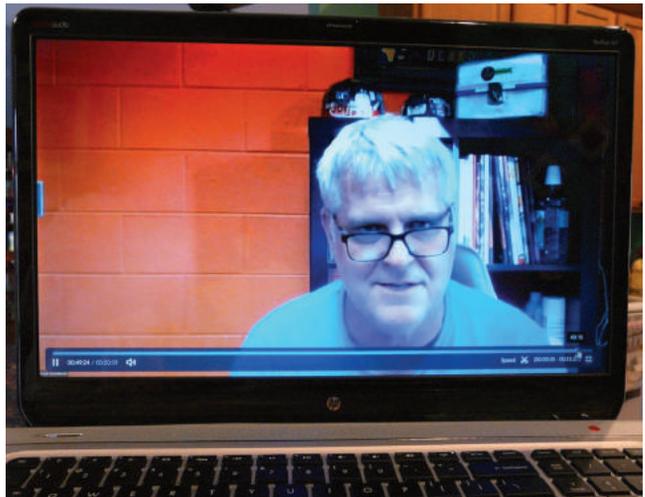
Unity Reed High School Teacher, Lauren Kohistani, during TOP In-service



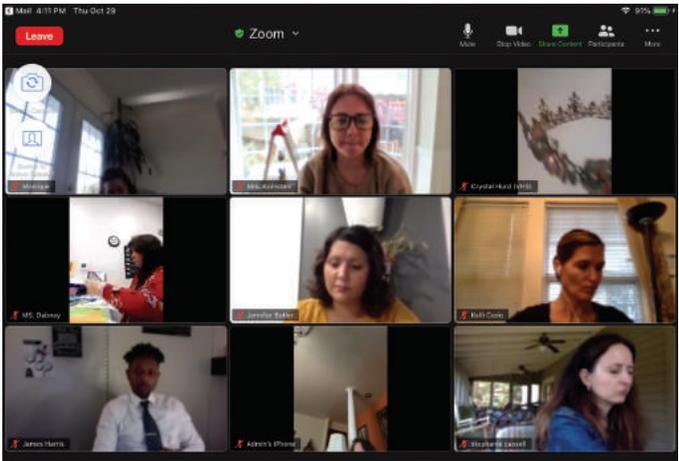
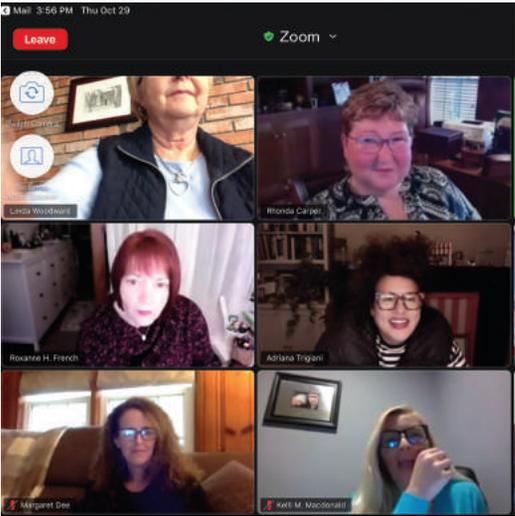
Linda Woodward participates in TOP In-service



Author Adriana Trigiani



Union Middle School Principal, Paul Clendenon, participates in TOP Teacher In-service along with his participating teachers





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Editor's Note: Sunday Stories may be
a little thinner than usual right now,
but we still welcome your photos and
stories. Email them to us anytime at
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Sunday Stories

February 7, 2021

A Special Edition of the Johnson City Press and Kingsport Times News

Big Stone Gap's 'Origin Project' named one of state's ArtStars

By Carmen Musick

A transformative educational experience with roots in Big Stone Gap is drawing statewide attention in Virginia for helping students express their inner voices.

The Origin Project was one of five 2021 Dominion Energy ArtStars honored during the Jan. 26 Virginia Commission for the Arts' Art Works virtual conference. Each of the organizations received a \$10,000 grant to support its winning arts or cultural education program.

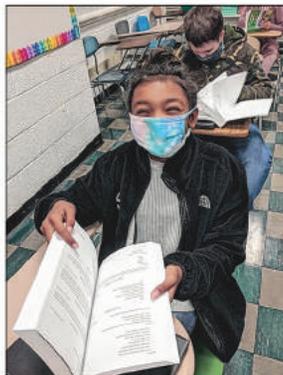
Founded in 2012 by Big Stone Gap native and best-selling author Adriana Trigiani and educational advocate Nancy Bolmeier Fisher, TOP develops and encourages writing and other artistic self-expression to support the students in Southwest Virginia (and beyond) in their academic and professional endeavors. It was launched in Big Stone Gap with a group of 40 ninth-graders. As word spread, teachers and administrators across Virginia lobbied to participate. Over the years, the program has expanded to serve up to 2,000 children in suburban Prince William County, urban Richmond, and the coastal Hampton Roads region — all while continuing to grow TOP's roots to serve even more students in Southwest Virginia.

"Receiving the ArtStars award from Dominion Energy is a great honor. We are particularly grateful for their continued support since we were fortunate to have received the ArtStars award two years ago," Fisher said. "The generous financial gift that accompanies the award is vital to help us sustain and grow our programs."

TOP works with teachers to help students across the commonwealth express their inner voices through the art of writing about their origins. Participants vary in race, gender, academic ability, disability, and family composition; the stories of their young lives are unique.



Executive director Nancy Bolmeier Fisher (left), who along with best-selling author Adriana Trigiani founded The Origin Project in 2012, visits with a student reader at a pre-pandemic gathering at Norton Elementary & Middle School. More recently, a Jonesville Middle School student (right) thumbs through The Origin Project's annual book, an anthology featuring the work of participating students.



COURTESY OF THE ORIGIN PROJECT

TOP galvanizes the students' curiosity about, and respect for, each other through in-school programming, author visits, and cultural excursions, culminating with the annual publication of an anthology of the students' work.

This year, programming transitioned to virtual experiences due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ArtStars grant will support TOP's efforts to continue to provide the programming in today's virtual world. This year's anthology of student works, set to be published in May, will focus on student reflections of the time they've spent sheltering with their families, and stories that embrace the "silver linings" they have all enjoyed as the weeks and months unfolded.

"The recognition is welcome especially this year to help remind our communities that The Origin Project students were busy writing and chronicling the events of this unprecedented year," Fisher said, adding that "The Origin Project Book Seven" is headed to the publisher soon, "and will be full of poignant remembrances of a year our teachers, students and their families will never forget."

Anthologies from the last few years can be found online at www.theoriginproject.org. The

website also features photos of author visits, class presentations, field trips, and more.

This year's other ArtStars winners included:

- Arts for Learning (Norfolk) — for its Take 10 digital series, which provided live and recorded arts programming for students learning from home. Take 10 featured 12 different art forms from a great diversity of cultures and traditions.

- Art for the Journey (Richmond) — for "The Creative Corner," which provides a wide variety of arts education through public television and media. The innovative thinking allows Art for the Journey to reach students that do not have access to high speed internet.

- Fairfax Symphony Orchestra (Fairfax) — for its Link Up program and partnership with Fairfax County Public Schools. They expanded to offer the program virtually, and provide high-quality music instruction to the community.

- Halestone Foundation (Lexington) — for providing inclusive, student-focused dance education for all ages. The innovative virtual and outdoor classes continued to reach their community this year.

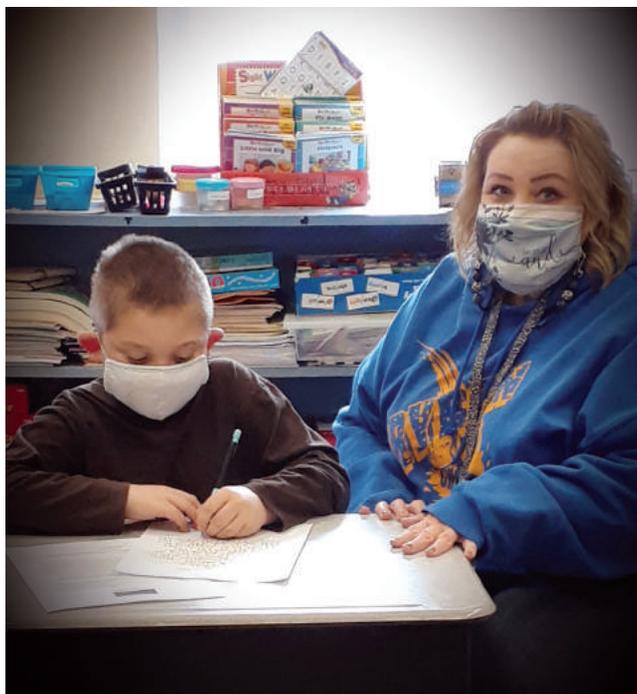


Dryden
Elementary
School

TAMMY WADE, THIRD GRADE TEACHER

The Pandemic of 2020

The year 2020 was a very uncertain and frightening time for our whole nation. The CoronaVirus, or Covid-19, had hit America and had proven to be deadly and spreading fast. On March 16, 2020, the state of Virginia was being forced to shut down or quarantine. Businesses, restaurants, doctors' offices, and schools



Ms. Wade & Jason Marston

all were shut down. People were being required to social distance six feet apart and wear masks if they had to be out in public. All because of this deadly virus that nobody really knew anything about.

Since the pandemic started, we have been faced with so many changes from not being in school at all to having school in groups, to some students fully remote and some in the classroom, to several times everyone having to go remote due to the wide spread infection rates in our area. Finally, vaccines have been approved and our state has started administering them to healthcare workers and other essential workers.

This virus has brought forth changes I have never experienced in my lifetime. Being a teacher, not

only was I concerned for my family, but I was concerned for my students, co-workers, church family, friends, neighbors, and their families. All of this happening in a matter of months has been chaotic and overwhelming for everyone. I am praying the vaccine will bring back some type of normalcy in our lives.

TAMMY WADE, GRADE 3 TEACHER
DRYDEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Covid-19 2020

Covid-19 made me feel sad and scared. I was quarantined and all I could do is stay inside and watch movies and play. I am scared of this virus. We got to come back to school for a while but we had to stay six feet apart and wear a mask all the time. One good thing is we got two cats during the pandemic but other than that Covid-19 has ruined my life.

BRAYDEN BARNETTE, GRADE 3

Covid-19 2020

Covid has been one of the worst times ever. Everywhere we go we have to wear a mask but not at home. My mom and dad both tested positive for it but they got better. I heard there are some people who have died with it. So much has changed because of the virus. We have to wear masks at school and social distance which is six feet apart. We have to stay in the same classroom all day. We even have to eat lunch in the classroom instead of the lunchroom. Sometimes we all have to go virtual which means we have to do our school work at home. We cannot go to restaurants, all we do is stay home and watch tv and be lazy. Now it is 2021 and this crazy stuff is still going on.

ADDISON BLAIR, GRADE 3

The Pandemic of 2020

I dislike the CoronaVirus; it has ruined my life. All I get to do is eat, sleep, shower, cook, and clean every day. This pandemic closed school for months and when it opened back up everything had changed. We have to wear masks all the time and when someone coughs everyone gets scared. I got sick running a fever and was really scared I had Covid but it was the flu. I just want things to go back to the way they were.

KAMI BROWN, GRADE 3

CoronaVirus 2020

To me Covid-19 is very scary. It completely changed our daily lives. There was no vacation to the beach or Dollywood this summer. The school year was cut short and this year has been mostly remote. Church had to be virtual for several weeks and it is still limited to how many people can be there.

My mother's cousin tested positive for Covid, he had a severe cough, trouble breathing, and a high fever. He is still fatigued and still does not have his taste and smell back from it yet. He was not hospitalized, but we were all worried about him and about his family catching it too.

My dad worries about our health because him, my little brother, and I are all asthmatics. We have tried to stay home as much as possible but my dad has to keep working. I hope that this is all over soon and we can get back to our normal lives.



Addison Blair



Addison Carter

ADDISON CARTER, GRADE 3



The Virus that Almost Ruined the World

The beginning of 2020 was normal then boom, there was a virus that was spreading quickly and people were getting sick and dying from it. We had to wear face masks and stay six feet apart. We could not go trick-or-treating. We had to stay home for weeks and school closed for months. It was spreading in every state and country. I was scared for my family. It has been almost a year and we are now in the year 2021 and hoping it will be better.

KAIDENCE COLLIER, GRADE 3

Rough Times

The Covid-19 has ruined the year 2020. School shut down for months and when we did get to come back everything was different. We had to wear a face mask all the time and social distance

six feet apart. We had to stay in the same classroom all day even for lunch. There was no tissue paper or hand sanitizer to be found, people were hoarding it all up. My grandpa got the Covid and he said it was like having the flu but way worse. He survived it thankfully. This virus ruined 2020 and now it's 2021 and it has not stopped yet. All we can do is pray for all the people who are affected by Covid because it is a rough time.

DAVID DEAL, GRADE 3



Tammy Wade, teacher

Corona 2020

Corona is very scary for everyone. People are getting sick and some are even dying. Our school was closed for months and then we got to come back but had to close for weeks a few times so far. We have to wear a mask and social distance all day. We stay in the classroom to have lunch now too. People are asked to stay home as much as they can to try to stop it from spreading so fast but nobody likes to stay home all the time. I know it is just to keep us safe but I hope we can get back to how it was before soon.

LELAND DENNINGSON, GRADE 3

2020

Twenty-twenty has been a very scary year. A bad virus has been making people very sick and even killing some people who get it. We were out of school for

months and when we came back we had to wear a mask all day and keep six feet apart. Covid is really bad and I cannot wait until all this is over.

CAMRYN GALLOWAY, GRADE 3

2020 The Worst Year Ever

Covid-19 has ruined 2020, it was the worst year ever. People are getting sick and some even died from this virus. My nana and pop had it and we were all scared. We have to wear a mask and use social distancing at school and when we go out in public. Everything has changed and that is why I hate Covid-19.

ALEX GOODSON, GRADE 3

CoronaVirus 2020

The Corona Virus started March 2020. We had to learn new ways to go to school and public places safely. We had to start wearing masks and staying six feet apart from other

people. My papaw died from the Corona Virus so I know how serious it really is. This virus has made me very sad, mad and scared. It is now the year 2021 and it is still going on but I know about Jesus and I know he will help us. I hope everything goes back to normal this year.

MARGARET HARTSOCK, GRADE 3

Covid-19

Covid19 was scary, and we could not go to school for months. Most of my family got the virus, we could not go anywhere or do anything other than stay at home. We could not even have friends over. It felt like my life was ruined. I know it was to keep us all safe because people were getting sick and dying but it was rough. Hopefully it will all end soon.

ALESEAH HATFIELD, GRADE 3

The Pandemic of 2020

The Corona Virus is no fun, people are getting sick and dying from it. We had to stay home and school was closed for months. We have to wear a mask and social distance when we go out now. When we came back to school we had to stay in the same classroom all day. We have to wear our mask all the time and stay six feet apart from our friends. We even have to wear a mask in the gym. This is a scary time for everyone.

DYLAN HUFF, GRADE 3

Scary Times 2020

Covid-19 is very scary and has caused a lot of changes in the way we live now. My family has not been able to go to church like we once did. School has also been very different. We have to wear masks and have done



Custodian Zella Flanary



Third grade teachers: Mrs. Hammonds, Mrs. Polly, Mrs. Wade

remote learning several times so far. Some stores have closed and if they did not close they cut their hours. And we have to wear masks everywhere we go. My mamaw and papaw got Covid-19. It was very scary for me but they are doing better now. Even though everything is different now, I know that God will take care of us and the Covid will go away soon.

LEAH HUFF, GRADE 3

Scary Times of 2020

Twenty-twenty was a scary year for everyone. The Covid-19 virus caused so many changes in our lives. School closed for months and people were told to stay at home unless they had to be out. Everyone was required to wear a face mask and stay six feet apart in public. My dad got the virus and I was scared and worried for him but he is better now. All we could do is sit at home, play games, watch YouTube and Netflix. I hope 2021 is a better year.

RHYLEE JENNINGS, GRADE 3

Corona 2020

Covid-19 is a virus that spread across the world that was making many people sick and some even died from it. My family and I were really scared and isolated after they shut school down in March. My mom works at a fast food restaurant and my dad works at the prison so they were around people and worked with people who got the virus. Things have changed a lot since the virus started. Face masks and social distancing is required in public places now. School shut down and once we got back we have been full remote learning several times now. I know it is to keep everyone safe but I can't wait until things get better.

KYLE JOHNSON, GRADE 3

The Pandemic of 2020

My mom had the CoronaVirus. She felt really bad and I was worried about her. I had to quarantine, I didn't like it because we couldn't go anywhere. We had to stay inside the house and do our school work while we were at home. Nobody else in my family got sick but I was really scared that we might. We had to wear masks and wash our hands a lot.

JASON MARSTON, GRADE 3



Coach Rhonda and Coach Arney

The Pandemic of 2020

Twenty-twenty was the worst year ever. You couldn't do anything or go anywhere without wearing a mask. Our state was shut down, so school was closed down for months. We started back to school now but we have had to do remote learning since the virus has started spreading bad around us. I hate Covid-19.

CHRISTOPHER MULLINS, GRADE 3

The Pandemic of 2020

Twenty-twenty was a scary time for everyone. Being a student is very hard because of the Covid-19 Virus. School shut down for months, and we got to come back but have had to do remote learning several times since. This virus has made many people sick. I am scared for my family and about everyone else. I hope this year, 2021 gets better really soon.

ALEX ORR, GRADE 3



Harper Smith

The Virus of 2020

This Covid-19 virus has been really bad for everyone. There are a lot of people who are sick and some who have died from it. Everything has changed. People are staying home and if they do go out they have to wear masks. We are doing remote school, some stores and my favorite restaurants are closed. We now have a vaccine for this virus, I hope it really works and everything gets better soon.

HARPER SMITH, GRADE 3

Scary Times 2020

Covid-19 is a virus that spread across the world that was making people very sick and some people even died because of it. School closed for months and people were asked to stay home as much as possible and if they did go out they had to wear a mask and social distance which is to stay six feet away from others. I found out my mom had Covid and I had to stay at my papaws house until she got well. It was bad and I was scared for my mom. Me and my papaw had to take her food and stuff because she could not go out. Luckily we did not catch it.

NOLAN STACY, GRADE 3

Corona 2020

I wish that 2020 was a better year than it was but it was a very scary time for everybody. I wanted to have fun but with Covid we didn't get to go out and do anything. We didn't get to go to Disneyland, my sisters and I were not happy at all. School was shut down for months and I didn't get to see my friends. People at my dad's work got it. My mom works at an assisted living home and she tested positive with it. I was scared for my mom but she got better. I hope 2021 is a much better year and we can throw the mask away.

HEIDI STIDHAM, GRADE 3

The Pandemic of 2020

Twenty-twenty was a very rough year for everyone. Covid-19 is ruining America so badly. I am so mad that people are getting sick and dying. I am so sad and scared of this virus. We have to wear masks everywhere we go and everything is different. We are told to social distance which is to stay six feet away from people. I wish Covid would go away, it is very scary for me.

KENNA THOMPSON, GRADE 3

2020

The year 2020 was crazy and really scary. Due to Covid-19 we had to quarantine and miss months of school. We have to wear masks all the time and social distance if we go anywhere. Everything is different, I am doing school at home this year due to the virus. I hope things get better soon.

KENZIE WADDELL, GRADE 3

Scary Times of 2020

It is a scary time for everyone right now! Everything has changed and so many people are sick and many have died from the Covid-19 Virus. I am very scared, my papaw Bill has Covid and my Nana is in the hospital with Corona Pneumonia, we are praying they both will be alright. It is so sad but I know it will be ok because God is on our side and will help us pull through. All we can really do now is hope and pray that a cure can be found to put an end to this deadly virus.

SHELBY WILDER, GRADE 3



Eastside
High School

Katie Jessee, Art Teacher

Visual Art

As we approach the New Year and Book 7 of the Origin Series, I can't help but recall the past year and March 13, 2020 when the schools in Virginia were closed and virtual learning began. Educators and parents came to the forefront to meet the challenges of a new learning method. Teaching virtual Visual Arts has been, and continues to be, one of the most challenging feats I've ever undertaken.



Rebeckah Alcantara-Roberts, Grade 12; Watercolor; Title: Wild and Free



Taylor Edwards, Grade 11; Tissue; Title: Blushing

Supplying students with adequate materials to complete their assignments, as well as grading from a photograph, has proven to be near “impossible”. However, in the end, we as teachers charged forward and with this first 2021 class, I am happy to be the recipient of several extremely talented students, despite the barriers in their way.

I, as a Visual Arts instructor, will continue to challenge the students in my class, while personally meeting the challenges as well. I plan to make 2021 the best year ever!

KATIE JESSEE, ART
EASTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL



Taylor Banks, Grade 11; Tissue; Title: Running Free



Marissa Smith, Grade 12, Acrylic, Title: Sunflowers



Taylor Edwards, Grade 11; Pencil; Title: Snow Day



Rebeckah Alcantara-Roberts, Grade 12, Egyptian Watercolor, Title: Hands-On



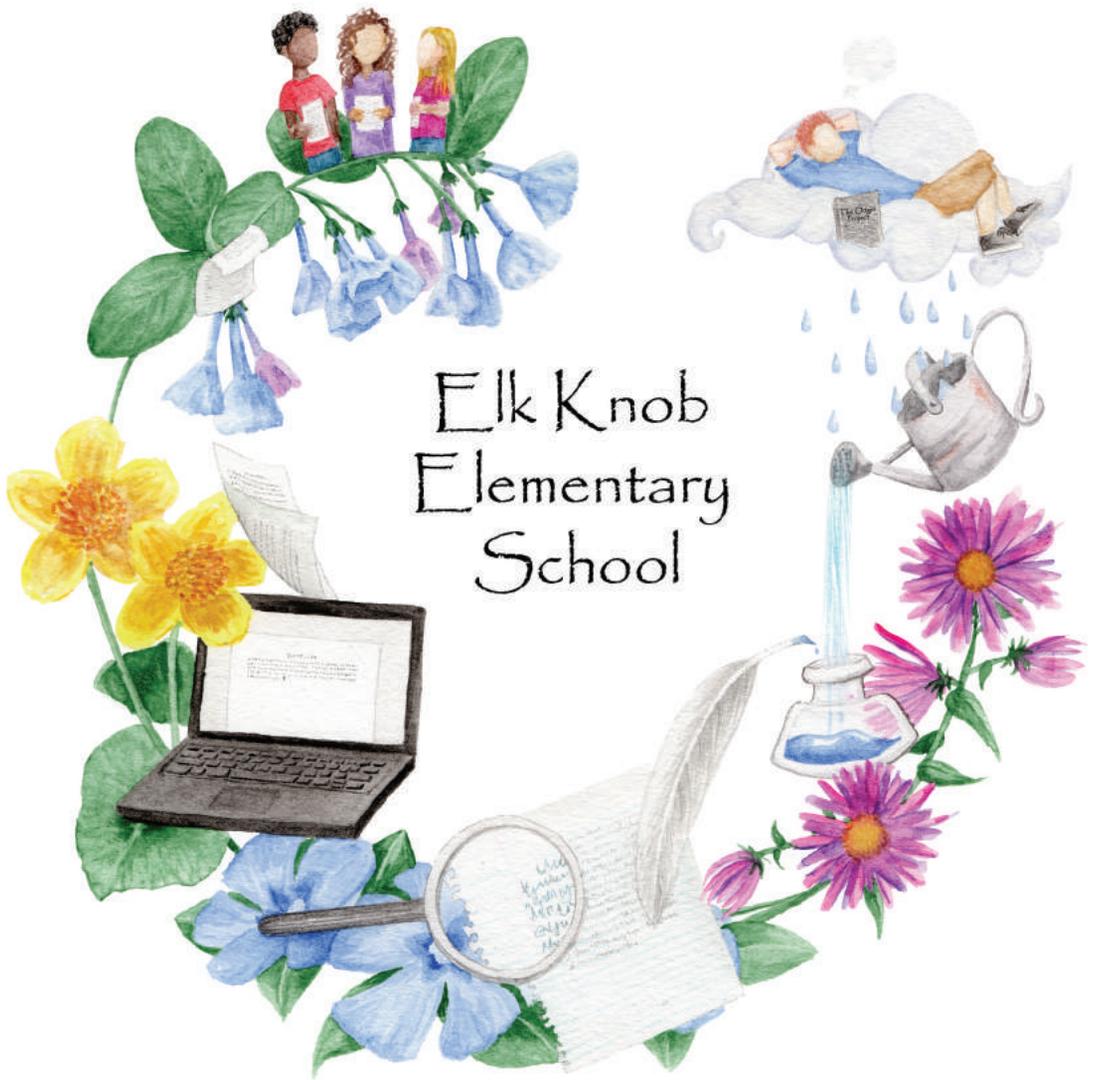
Jasmine Harvey, Grade 11; Watercolor; Title: Mountain View



Jasmine Harvey, Grade 11; Pastels; Title: Autumn Fragrance



Tayler Banks, Grade 11; Watercolor; Title: Poe



Elk Knob
Elementary
School

Teaching During a Global Pandemic

Teaching students during a global pandemic is something no one could have ever imagined. Learning to teach and be taught using technology has been a challenge for everyone. Normally, teachers get to spend the day with their students during face to face instruction, but many teachers and students have not even met for face to face interaction. This interaction allows teachers and students to form meaningful relationships. However, this year we have learned how to use technology to communicate with our students. We can schedule a Google Meet, and students can see and communicate with their teachers and each other from the safety of their own homes. We are very thankful to have this new technology that allows teachers and students to interact with each other!

MONIQUE SPRINKLE, GRADE 2 TEACHER

ALANE BARKER, GRADE 3 TEACHER

ALANE BARKER, GRADE 3

Christmas with a Broken Arm

When I was two, I broke my arm. I got rushed to the hospital. My mom and sister Shaina came. She was 14 at the time. It was two days before Christmas. I woke up and there was a Christmas tree. It had socks, chapstick, stickers. I was great! I had to have a cast put on my arm. It was purple. It's too bad it was not the color blue because that's the color of my favorite football team, the Dallas Cowboys. I will never forget when I broke my arm.

CALI BELTY, GRADE 3

The Red Nose Incident

Every day, when I get home from school, I like to play with my brother Konner. We ride our bicycles, play basketball, and jump on our trampoline. Konner is good at all sports and so am I.

One day, something funny happened to me while performing tricks on our trampoline. I tried a front flip. It did not go as planned. Instead of landing on my feet, I landed on my nose! After Konner and I realized I was not hurt, we laughed. I looked like "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer"! My red nose lasted almost two weeks!

Having this accident only made me work harder on my flips. Now, when I jump on the trampoline, I can do all kinds of tricks. I would even say I can flip better than my brother.

KYLER BLEDSOE, GRADE 3

My Family

I have a nice family. My mom is Nicole Bowles. My dad is Jamie Bowles. I have twin big brothers, Taylor and Tate. I have three dogs named Cali, Cooper, and Duke. I also have a cat named Oreo, three turtles, and a gecko. My grandma is Peggy Bowles, and my grandpa is Edward Bowles. I do homeschool at their house. My aunt's name is Tammy Bowles.

We went roller skating with my family at Christmas and had a lot of fun even though I fell three times.

OLIVIA BOWLES, GRADE 3

My Family

My name is Jacob McKinley Brooks. My mom is Elizabeth, and my dad is Terry. I have 3 older brothers named Matthew, Andrew, and Aaron. I also have an older sister named Laura. My brothers live here

with me but my sister lives in South Dakota. We live on a small farm with chickens, goats, and a donkey. Our family spends a lot of time outside taking care of our animals. My nickname for being a country boy is “Cornbread”. Our family spends evenings around a fire roasting hotdogs and marshmallows talking about our day. We enjoy working and spending time together. Making memories and laughing along the way!!

JACOB BROOKS, GRADE 3

A Fun Day with Family

One day, my dad, my sister Ellie, and I went outside. We played with my cat, Copper. It was so fun. We went to where the horse stays. Ellie and I sat on her. Her name is Molly. We named her that because we liked that name. A few minutes later, Molly splashed mud on Ellie and me. I did not like that part, but I guess it was funny. Then, we went back home to get cleaned up for dinner. A few hours later, I had a snack and then I went to bed. What a fun day!

PIPER ELLIS, GRADE 3

My Royal Grandparents

Grandparents are great! In 1963, my granny, Wanda Mullins, and my grandpa, Bill Mullins, went to their junior/senior prom at Dryden High School. They were crowned the prince and princess. My grandpa wore a white suit. My granny saved her money for a whole year and bought a blue ball gown. She wore the dress the next year at their senior prom. They were also crowned king and queen. They got married in 1967. I love my grandparents because they are nice.

NOELLE FIELDS, GRADE 3

Family Closeness during a Pandemic

During the pandemic, I have become very close to my family. My mom is a nurse but has been working from home because she has to help my sisters and I with our virtual schoolwork. My mom says she is not a teacher and we need to go back to school.

I miss my friends and teachers. While at home, I have been taking care of my baby doll Caiden Alexander. I saved my money and bought him some new clothes and baby items. My mom tells me I am going to have a bunch of kids when I am older. I think that is okay.

My papaw Tommy had COVID-19 and I could not see him or my mamaw for a very long time. It made me sad. They are doing better now, though, and I get to see them all the time. Papaw spoils me and I like to make him coffee. Mamaw Darlene fusses at Papaw for spoiling my sisters and I so much. I hope COVID-19 ends soon because even though I love my family, I miss my friends, teachers, and my bus driver.

KAYLIE FLANARY, GRADE 3

My Family

My name is Braelyn. I was born on October 1, 2012 and I have a wonderful family: Tommy, Pryscilla, Chloe, Kinsley, and me. My family and I have spent a lot of time together during the pandemic. My sisters and I go to work with my mom at the daycare.

After Christmas we went to Gatlinburg to spend time with family from Florida. They were snowed in at a cabin. We used my mom's truck to go and see them and take them a heater. We got to see the Christmas lights. I enjoy spending time with my family.

BRAELYN JOHNSTON, GRADE 3

Tough Dad

One day, my dad got cut. I almost passed out from the blood and cried. Whenever I get cut, it hurts but it does not hurt my dad. He is tough.

JUSTIN HALE, GRADE 3

Family Cabin

My family is building a cabin because we outgrew our playhouse. We built new swings and a seesaw. We have an upstairs area, too. We can shoot deer from the window. I am helping my dad with it. When it is finished, we are going to spend the night in it.

TYLER LAWS, GRADE 3

Camping on the Clinch

Doesn't everyone love camping?!!! I remember a time I went camping at the Clinch River and I was in a house named Deer Run. When I first got there, it was amazing! The house had a loft with two beds where my brother, Preston, and I slept.

The next day, we went canoeing on the Clinch River. I was with my dad and my brother was with my mom. In the beginning, I saw a snake, but it got scared and went away. Then, my dad caught a fish. I saw a carp, but I caught a bass. I got a decent one. It was a hybrid bass. In the end, we left and had supper. I had such a great time with my family.

JACK MCKNIGHT, GRADE 3

Family Vacation

Over the summer, I went to South Carolina. We went to Myrtle Beach. One day, we went to a diner where I got a pineapple drink filled with slushy. Other days, we went to shops and bought souvenirs. We stayed in a condo. It was fun and I had a good time.

SEAN OAKS, GRADE 3

My Puppy Friend, Hudson

This is a story about my best friend, my puppy, Hudson. He is a one-year-old dog. He is white with blue eyes. He is a pretty funny dog, and he is very smart. He can sit and stay. He can lay down, roll over, and speak. He is sometimes a bad puppy when he gets on the couch and runs away. He knows he is not allowed up on the couch. We do like to play and run. He likes to play fetch. He is a soccer pup. He does like soccer and football. He is my best friend.

BENTLEIGH SHELBURNE, GRADE 3

Angry Bull

My grandma had a story to tell. One day, she encountered an angry bull! He chased her and impaled her with his bull horn! She is glad she got to live to tell that story!

JAKOB RIVERS, GRADE 3

Thanksgiving at Mamaw's House

This year has been anything but normal because of the pandemic. Gatherings have been limited to ten people and because of that, my family and I had a small Thanksgiving.

We had Thanksgiving at my mamaw's house with just eight people. We spent the day cooking at my mom's house until 2 o'clock because that is when we went to my mamaw's house. When we got there, we ate our Thanksgiving food and dessert. We helped my mamaw put up Christmas decorations and watched movies until it was time to go back to my house. It was such a fun day. My favorite thing to do is spend time with my mamaw.

ABIGAIL SEALS, GRADE 3

Life During the Pandemic

My mom must take care of very sick people at the hospital. During the pandemic, she has worked extra shifts to take care of the COVID patients. My dad works at the prison. He had to leave for three months to work at another prison because their staff was out due to COVID. My mom had to take care of my sister and me for three months while my dad was gone. We work on our homework at night. My sister and I are very lucky.

RYLEE WHITE, GRADE 3

Monique Sprinkle, Grade 2

Cookies

Eggs
Flour
Sugar

First eggs. Second, add the sugar. Mix it up. Put it in the oven at 350 degrees. Take it out, and there you go!

JAIDEN ANDERSON, GRADE 2



Rylee White Writing in his Origin Project Journal



Gage Barker Making His Favorite Deviled Eggs

Gage's Favorite Deviled Eggs

7 large eggs
3 tablespoons mayonnaise
1 ½ teaspoons cider vinegar
¾ teaspoon mustard
Salt
Pepper
Paprika

Place eggs in a medium saucepan, cover with 1 inch of water, and bring to a boil over high heat. Remove pan from heat, cover, and let stand 10 minutes. Meanwhile, fill a medium bowl with ice water. Transfer eggs to ice water with a spoon to stop cooking; let sit until chilled, about 5 minutes.

Peel eggs and slice each in half lengthwise with a paring knife. Transfer yolks to a small bowl. Arrange whites on a serving platter, discarding 2 worst-looking halves. Mash yolks with a fork until no large lumps remain. Add mayonnaise, vinegar, mustard, and season with salt and pepper to taste. Mix with a rubber spatula, mashing mixture against the side of the bowl until smooth.

Spoon yolk mixture into egg white halves, mounding filling about ½ inch above the flat surface of whites. Sprinkle the tops with paprika. Serve at room temperature.

These are my favorite food because they are delicious, and they remind me of Christmas. We always have these eggs at Christmas. After mom makes them, I lick the bowl. One day, I told her “I don’t like the devil, but he sure has nice eggs.”

GAGE BARKER, GRADE 2

Mom's Ham

1 cup pineapple juice
1 cup brown sugar
1 cup pineapple
1 spiral ham

Put ham in a baking dish. Put brown sugar and juice and pour over ham. Put the pineapples on it. Bake for 2 hours at 350 degrees.

It is special because my mom makes it, and it fills my tummy!

EASTON BOGGS, GRADE 2

Cheesecake Dessert

2, 8 ounce packs Pillsbury Crescent Roll
2 packs cream cheese (room temperature)
½ cup sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
¼ cup melted butter
1 teaspoon cinnamon
4 tablespoons sugar out of the ½ cup
Honey

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spray 9 x 13 baking dish with cooking spray. Press can of crescent rolls to the edges and keep together. Bake the first layer of crescent roll dough until it is done, about 5–8 minutes. Combine softened cream cheese, sugar, and vanilla. Be sure to keep out the teaspoon of sugar out of the half cup. Spread mixture over crescent roll and cover the top and edges to seal. Brush over top melted butter. Bake again.

PEYTON CAROSIELLO, GRADE 2

Peanut Butter Balls

- 1 cup peanut butter
- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 3 tablespoons butter

Mix in a large bowl. Roll into balls. Dip into melted chocolate.

I love this recipe because my Grandma makes them every year. I like to help dip them. It is fun!

LILY HAMMONDS, GRADE 2



Lily Hammonds Making Grandma's Peanut Butter Balls

Mashed Potatoes

- 4 cups of potato flakes
- 2 teaspoons of butter
- ½ cup milk
- Pinch of salt and pepper

ALEXA LAWSON, GRADE 2

Pink Puff

- Cool Whip
- Strawberry Jello
- Fruit cocktail
- Cottage cheese

Put Cool Whip in a bowl. Stir until soft. Next pour in Jello and stir. Then add the cottage cheese. Next, add the fruit cocktail. Put it in the refrigerator, and let it get cold.

My Nana makes this for us, and she loves it! I like to eat it too!

HARLEY MILES, GRADE 2

Pumpkin Pie

- ¾ cup sugar
- 1 ½ teaspoons of pumpkin pie spice

½ teaspoon of salt
1 can pumpkin
1 ¼ cups evaporated milk
2 eggs
1 pie crust

Heat oven to 425 degrees. Mix filling. Pour into crust. Bake 40 minutes. Cool 2 hours and serve.

AUBREE MULLINS, GRADE 2

Pineapple Glaze for Ham

Spiral ham
1 cup dark brown sugar
1 8.5 ounce can crushed pineapple with syrup
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 tablespoon cornstarch
¼ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon prepared mustard

Bake spiral ham according to packaged directions. Combine cornstarch, dark brown sugar, salt, lemon juice, mustard, and crushed pineapple in a small saucepan over medium heat. Continue to stir constantly, and cook until the mixture thickens and boils. Boil and stir for 1 minute. Remove from heat and, using a basting brush, apply to the ham 30 minutes before it is done. May be brushed on several times during the last 30 minutes of cooking time for the ham. It tastes so good and smells so good while baking. I look forward to having ham at Christmas!

CHARLIE WARD, GRADE 2



Charlie Ward Writing About Christmas Ham



Flatwoods
Elementary
School

A Reflection on Behalf of Flatwoods Elementary

Flatwoods Elementary is very fortunate to have been chosen years ago to participate in what has grown to be a phenomenal writing concept known as The Origin Project. We have worked alongside founders, Adriana Trigiani and Nancy Bolmeier Fisher, who have inspired generations of students to write about their ancestry, or perhaps what they enjoy most in life, but 2020 has been a year like no other. It proposed the challenge of asking our students to write about this year's experiences. If so, what would we have them focus? However, our children proved to be resilient. They took the cue from TOP and found the silver lining in which to write.

The community of Flatwoods is no exception to the vast effects this year has brought to every household within our region, across our state, and to our nation. It is through the hard times that our children learn perhaps more of how to cope than academics. Perhaps the lesson this year is realizing the value of family rather than the mechanics of how to navigate a computer. These difficulties bring new ideas to young minds. On behalf of Flatwoods Elementary, it is a privilege to be included in the publication of The Origin Project, which has afforded us a stable outlet to express our heart-felt lessons that we encounter through this unprecedented school year.

GIGI LONG, LIBRARIAN

Feeling Better

When I am sad, I go to the bedroom or go to my mom. If I go to my mom, we talk about it. If I go to my room, I just sit and think about good things. That makes me feel better.

CELSIE AIKENS, GRADE 4



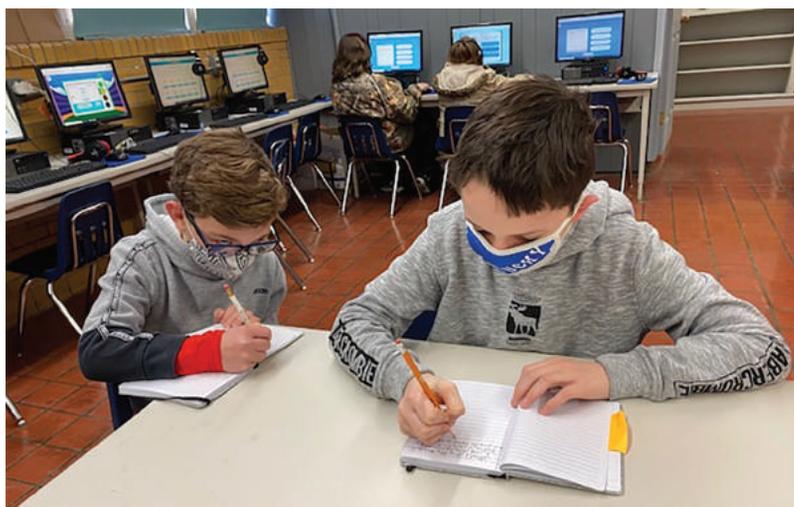
My Favorite Place

My favorite place is my house. I love my house because this is where my dogs are. My two dogs make me very happy. There is just something about the love they give. It is unconditional and they always make me smile, even if I am having a bad day. Every once in a while, they get into mischief, and mess up something I have worked hard on, but it is hard to be mad at them for too long.

Another reason my house is my happy place is because my family is there. My mom, sister and brother all live there. We like to play games and watch movies together. We do all kinds of fun things together like cook and do art projects. On the weekends, my mom lets me cook some with her. My most favorite thing to cook are eggs. They come from Grandpa's chickens. The shells are all sorts of colors and they make a great meal. I am learning to bake. All the measuring gets a little overwhelming sometimes, but it is worth it in the end with the smell of fresh cookies baking. The aroma takes over the whole house and cookies do not last long.

My happy house is where I like to be. It makes me feel safe all the time.

REBECCA BIGGE, GRADE 4



My Favorite Thing

My favorite thing to do is go fishing. There is one spot only a few people know of. It is family time and over at the end of the day. We are happy. We all have fun.

AUBREE BROWN, GRADE 4

My Family

When I am sad, one thing that makes me feel better is my family. They cheer me up. They also do things to keep the sadness out of my mind. When I'm sad, my sisters will do funny things to make me laugh. My family loves me very much.

GRACIE CAUGHRON, GRADE 4

My Phone

When I feel sad, one thing that makes me feel better is my phone. My phone makes me happy because I can play games. I can also call people. I love my phone. I can take it anywhere. It makes me happy. It is so cool and fun to play on.

CARDER CHASTEEN, GRADE 4

Weekend Fun

On weekends, I like to jump on my trampoline. It is fun. It makes me happy. We play dodgeball on the trampoline. We also turn flips. I love to jump on my trampoline.

COLLYN CHASTEEN, GRADE 4

Our Family Holiday Tradition

We get a family ornament with all our names on it. We always get a real tree at a tree farm. We cut it down. We make a gingerbread house for Santa and we leave milk too. We go to my aunt's house to eat dinner. On Christmas day, everyone opens presents. We all have fun.

EVAN COLLINS, GRADE 4

Our Christmas

Our Christmas tradition begins at our house. I usually wake up before anyone else. When everybody wakes up, we

open our presents. After Mom cleans up the mess, we go to my Nan-Nan's for breakfast and gift opening. Afterwards, we come back home, shower, and get ready to go to my mamaw and papaw's in Big Stone. We have Christmas dinner with our cousins, then it's round 3 of opening presents. After we leave Big Stone, we have Christmas with Mamaw Kathy. I am very blessed to have a big family to continue our Christmas tradition each year.

KARSYN COOMER, GRADE 4

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is school. I like to learn, especially math and reading. I have lots of friends that I love like family. I love my teachers. Mrs. Riggs, Mrs. Carroll and Mrs. Sexton are really nice. Being in school puts me in a really good mood.

JASMINE COWDEN, GRADE 4



The Perfect Place

My name is Emmy. It was snowing on Christmas Day. My sister and I wanted to snow sled, and we didn't know where to go. Then, we found the perfect place to snow sled. We had lots of fun. Finally, we came in and took a warm nap.

EMMY GARRETT, GRADE 4

Friends

When I feel sad, one thing that makes me feel better is my friends. My friends make me laugh. They make me smile. They are so nice to me. My friends are the best!

ZOE GIBSON, GRADE 4

Home

My favorite place is home. My sister and her family come over. I would rather be home with my family. My family is always there for me. My home is comfortable because I have a comfortable couch.

SHARPEI HELBERT, GRADE 4

My Dog

I was so happy when I got my dog. The dog was so cute and fluffy. I watch tv and play games with him. Do you have a dog? I have a white cat and a brown and black dog.

AIDEN HINES, GRADE 4

Cooking

I love to cook with my mamaw. It is so,so,so fun to cook! I like it when everyone likes my food. My favorite food to make is banana pudding. I help my mamaw cook all the time.

BENTLIE JAYNES, GRADE 4

The Cancelled Camping Trip

We wanted to go on a camping trip, but we could not find our tent. We also could not find the covers that we normally use. We had to stay home that night, but we had just as much fun because we played a lot of games like Uno, Skip-Bo, and Serry. At first, we were all disappointed and then we had fun anyway. It was so fun that night. The part I loved the most was being with my family.

LACOLE LAWSON, GRADE 4



Feeling Better

When I am sad, I like to take a bath. I also drink a lot of water. I talk to someone and that makes me feel so much better. I turn on my oil diffuser with vanilla oil. I hug my pillow. I turn off the lights and cover up with my favorite blanket.

ABIGAIL MARSHALL, GRADE 4

Thanksgiving

Thanks for my family
Having a good meal
Always feel happy
Never do without
Kindness is what it's about
Stay with one another
Give love to each other
Isn't it a blessing to have dressing
Very good meals
It feels awesome
Never forgetting the smells
Giving thanks for everyone

LILLIAN MARTIN, GRADE 4

The Lake

My favorite place is the lake. I like to go fishing there. It is relaxing. I like it there because I get to spend time with my uncle. I like to swim at the lake. I have lots of fun.

JACKSON MUNCY, GRADE 4

Family Tradition

One family tradition is game night and movie night. It is mostly on Fridays. Each time we vote either game night or movie night. Movie night is usually voted in. Me and Hagan try to vote on game night. Mommy and Dad vote movie night.

HUDSON NEFF, GRADE 4

The Beach

My favorite place to go is the beach. I like to play in the sand. My favorite is to swim. You can also look for seashells. There is a lot you can do at the beach.

CONNOR PEARCE, GRADE 4

Best Gift

The best present I ever got was my dirt bike. My mom and dad got it for me. I have a lot of fun on it. I ride it through mud holes and I pop wheelies.

JESSEE PENNINGTON, GRADE 4



Singing

When I feel sad, one thing that makes me feel better is singing. I like to sing. When I sing, I sing happy songs. I am happy after I sing. I like to sing when I am sad.

HADLEA PRICE, GRADE 4

My Room

My room is my favorite place. That's where all my toys are. The toys entertain me. Playing with my toys is fun. That makes my room my favorite place.

CADYN ROGERS, GRADE 4

Fourth Grade

I was really disappointed when I did not get to go to Dollywood. But, then I came to fourth grade. We had lots of fun in the fourth grade. I love being in fourth grade, but I love my friends even more. I am so happy to be with them. I am also happy to make new friends.

CLOI ROGERS, GRADE 4

Thanksgiving

My favorite thing to do at Thanksgiving is eat. I love eating at Thanksgiving because it is so good. My favorite thing on Thanksgiving is theTURKEY! I also like eating with family because I like to talk to my family at the table. My favorite time is Thanksgiving because I can eat turkey and talk with my family.

SAXON SKIDMORE, GRADE 4

What Makes Me Feel Better

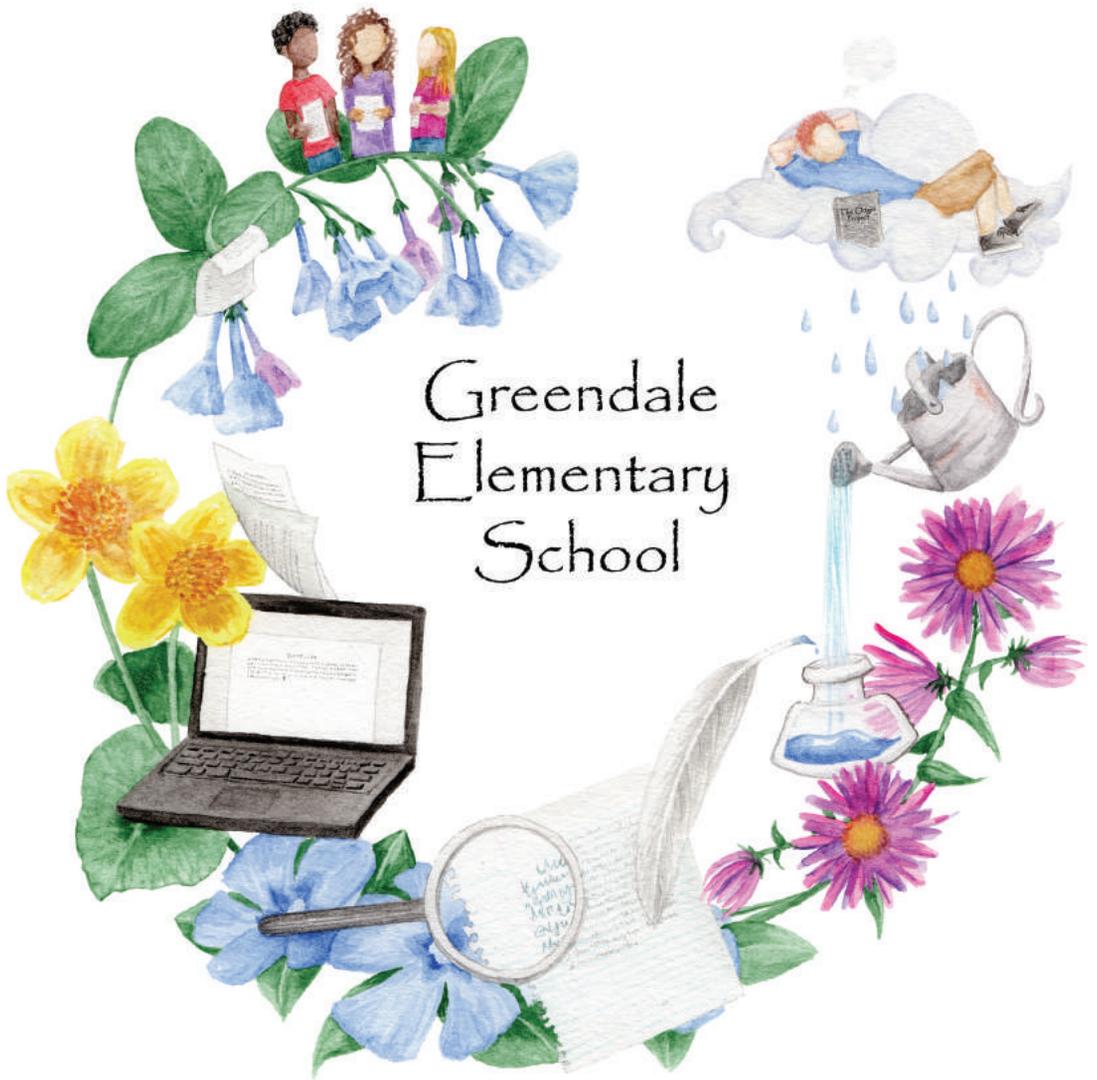
When I feel sad, one thing that makes me feel better is a hug from my baby sister, Kynslee. My baby sister gives the best hugs. Sometimes she even gives me a kiss and a hug. She always knows when I am sad. A Kynslee hug always helps when I am sad.

CADEN SPURLOCK, GRADE 4

My Farm

My favorite place is my farm. I like to play with my pet fox, Red. I like to play with the cows. Riding my dirt bike in the field is fun. I love my farm.

DANIEL SWEENEY, GRADE 4



Greendale
Elementary
School

Memories

I didn't grow up in these mountains.

My memories of childhood are full of these mountains before I was blessed to call them home.

Memories of being chased down a hillside with a gaggle of cousins by a swarm of angry hornets.

Memories of long walks through the woods with Grandma to be rewarded at the end with a picnic of cold fried chicken.

Memories of waking early to the smells of coffee and bacon and biscuits while snuggled in a warm quilt and the loving arms of Grandma.

Memories of outhouses and the pranks cousins would play around them.

Memories of a first crush on the steps of the little white church during VBS.

Memories of a Hoosier girl learning to drive in the Virginia mountains.

Memories of the thrill of a fresh spring of water and filling up on the pure, cold goodness.

Memories of fireflies, crickets and the beautiful sounds of a warm summer night.

I didn't grow up in these mountains, but these mountains are a part of me. These mountains have welcomed me to call them home.

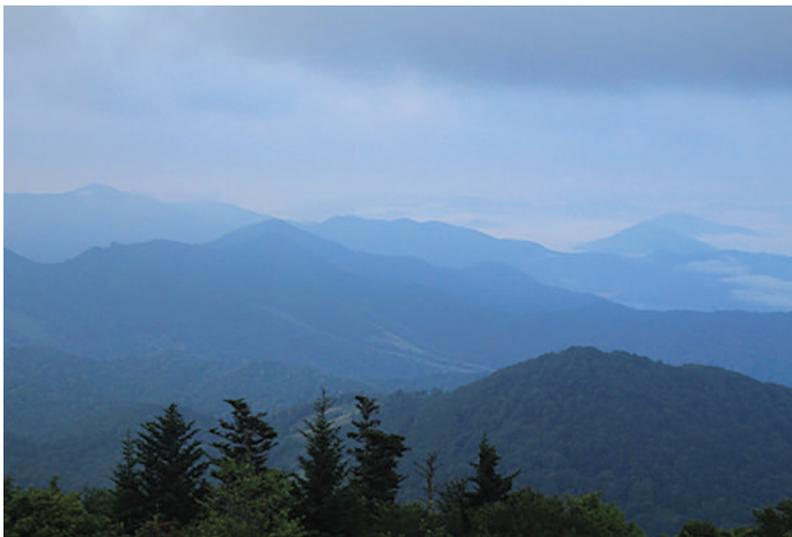
BRENDA S. SPRINKLE
GES LIBRARIAN/WRITING CLUB SPONSOR

My Dad

Participant 1: My name is Joseph. I am 9 years old. Today January 10, 2021 and I am speaking with my Dad, Chuck. I am recording this interview in our house in Abingdon, Virginia.

Participant 2: My name is Chuck. I am 44 years old. Today January 10, 2021 and I am speaking with Joseph my son.

My Dad is the best dad ever. He is patient and kind. He is always willing to help.



Memories - Brenda Sprinkle

These are qualities that he says he would like to be remembered for. Those are things that he remembers about his own Dad, who passed away almost nine months ago. Dad says that was the loneliest he has ever felt in his life.

Dad says although he has some regrets, he is so glad that I came into his life. He

remembers the first time I rode my bicycle without training wheels. He says “I knew you

could do it, you just had to believe in yourself.” He says that is a special memory he will

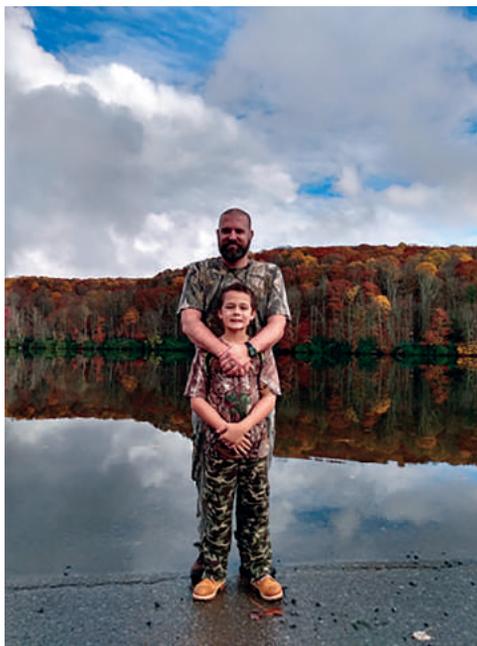
always have of me.

The day my adoption was finalized is one of Dad’s best memories. It took a while to get

here, but was worth the wait. Dad says that he is most proud of me and Mom. He is so

thankful for both of us. He says his life is so much sweeter because we are in it.

L J AUSTIN, GRADE 4



My Dad – L J Austin

My Grandma

My name is Matthew Davidson. I am 8 years old. Today is January 15th, 2021. I am speaking with Loretta Jean who is my mamaw. I am recording this interview in my house in Abingdon, Va.

My mamaw would like to be remembered by being a thoughtful and caring person. She is nice to everyone. The person who was kindest to her was Nellie Foster. She helped when she was in a bad place.

These times have been hard during Covid. The toughest part of her days are getting a schedule for me and my great grandmother Inez but the best part of her day is being with me.

The biggest changes of her life during the pandemic are wearing a mask, not going to church, and not seeing friends.

She grew up in Bristol, Va. She used to sing row row row your boat to my dad. She is still able to sing it.

MATTHEW DAVIDSON, GRADE 3

Quarantine Cooking

My favorite recipe I enjoy at this moment is probably taco soup. Taco soup is very hard to make. It takes lots of patience and focus. The recipe is kind of uncommonwell people make it different ways! I made this with my grandmother. She is a very awesome cook!! Taco soup is made out of many types of beans and tomatoes. It’s filled with nutritious goodness and lots of LOVE! Me and my grandmother have been making it a lot since we have been quarantined.

Also we have been making blackberry cobbler! It’s a tradition we do it every year on April 1st because that is when my uncle’s birthday is. It’s a very special moment because he passed away in an accident. We make blackberry cobbler out of soooooo much LOVE you don’t even know. Sometimes our whole family participates in this, some people do the blackberries, others do the ice cream, and the others do the baking. My favorite is blackberries.

DERA LOUDY, GRADE 4



My Dad - Ethan Nunley

My Dad

During the Covid-19 Pandemic you need to look at the good things in your life, not the bad. My dad volunteered to help me with my writing today. I asked my dad six questions and I think he answered them perfectly.

The thing my dad is most grateful for is his family. He said this because there aren't many loving families out there. He is proudest of building the Abingdon High School strength program because he was able to sponsor a 5K to get better equipment for the strength room. My dad said the most important thing he has learned is that Christ died for him.

The kindest person to my dad has been everyone he has ever met. He said every single person he has ever met was nice and they keep getting nicer.

His life has been much different than he imagined. He never imagined he would teach and coach but is glad he chose that career. His happiest memories are watching his children grow up.

ETHAN NUNLEY, GRADE 5

Sam

Hello my name is Samuel Alexander Orr. My name is Sam because I was named after my Mom's Grandfather. His name was James Samuel - Sam for short. Alexander is from my Dad's dog Alex that he had before I was born.

I have played many sports so far in my life. I have done karate and despite being kicked in the face it is fun. I was on the swim team but it got interrupted by the pandemic and did not finish the year. The pandemic also caused me to go to Day Camp where I played kickball and soccer. I like both sports.

SAMUEL ORR, GRADE 4

My Grandpa

My grandpa was born on July 20th 1954. The Korean war had ended, and his father was working for the city of Detroit as a police officer. Grandpa was an only child. In 1958, he moved to Jacksonville, Florida. When he got old enough he went to grade school.

He moved back to Michigan in 1962 where he continued his grade school education. His life went on pretty normal from then on, but when he went to college that's when his life changed. He started college full time at Wayne State University in 1972. He studied and then he got promoted in his job and switched to part time in college. In 1977 he got hired to the Harper Woods Police Department.

He got trained in the academy, then did in-service training on the road until it was decided that he could work on his own. He worked the whole city of Harper Woods. In July of 1978 he got married to my grandma. In 1979 he got hurt and again in 1983, but he kept working.

In 1985 he got promoted to Sergeant in the police force. Prior to that in 1981 and in 1983 he had 2 children, my dad and my uncle. He retired in 2005 after 28 ½ years of service He moved to Virginia in April of 2014 to be with his grandchildren.

So, that is the story of my grandpa.

HARRY SELVAGGI, GRADE 4

Pandemic Adventures

In COVID-19 my family and I got a camper. We have already gone on two camping trips. I have an awesome pillow and bedspread. We roast marshmallows by the fire. We went on a hike even though I had a twisted ankle. We also played card games and did art. I did not like it when we first got there and my sister and I had to wait for our parents to get the camper set up. It was way more fun because my dog was also there and when we went on a hike at the end there was a river and my dog, my sister, and I all got in. That's all about my camping experience.



Pandemic Adventures - Olivia Cline

OLIVIA THOMPSON, GRADE 3



Zoom with TOP



Zoom with TOP



Zoom with TOP



Zoom with TOP



Zoom with TOP



Zoom with TOP



Zoom with TOP



Zoom with TOP



John I. Burton
High School

The Origin Project

This year, when the administrators of The Origin Project asked if I would again be participating with my students, I almost said “no.” In a year when school as we knew it was turned upside down by a global pandemic, I was already struggling to teach two sets of students, in-person and virtual; restructure my hands-on, collaborative, project-based teaching strategies into a more socially distanced and sanitized setting; and transition to being completely paperless. I wasn’t sure I could handle anything extra. However, at the last minute, I inexplicably said “yes” even though I knew it would be almost impossible to give the project the attention we had in previous years. Somehow, I felt that after months of “quarantine” and social isolation, maybe students needed to write more than ever. My decision was reaffirmed when I read over a college application essay for one of my seniors, who had participated in TOP last year. She wrote about how writing poems as she grew up had helped her deal with challenging family situations and not only survive, but succeed. Her thesis was simple: “Currently I am a senior, still believing that writing saved my life.” While creative and reflective writing gets shortchanged in high school English with its focus on academic and argumentative writing, it’s the kind of writing that matters the most to teenagers: a form of self-expression and sometimes, maybe even life-saving therapy.

As you read through our school’s section, you may notice that most pieces share the same title: “Where I’m From.” I always allow my students to choose the piece of writing that they submit to this anthology, and almost invariably this year, as always, students chose their “Where I’m From” poems as favorites. As a teacher, I first felt tempted to persuade some to enter different pieces for the sake of variety, but then, as I read through each one, I realized that this assignment could not capture any more perfectly what The Origin Project is all about: “where I’m from.”

The classic “Where I’m From” poem, originated by Appalachian writer George Ella Lyon, has been widely used as a mentor text in classrooms and other community settings around the world. I have often used this



poem as a community-building first-day-of-school activity and an entry point into writers’ workshop, as well as The Origin Project. By leading students through a memory mapping activity and then offering a simple fill-in-the-blank template to follow, I can show even the most reluctant of students — the ones who say they “can’t write” or “hate writing” — that yes, they too, are poets and writers with a story worth telling. Some poems are simple and follow the model closely while other writers experiment more with literary techniques and word play, yet without fail, they all become powerful displays of student voice. Most of the poems capture warm and nostalgic childhood memories, but some also offer a poignant glimpse of the real and raw reality of some of the problems that affect many families. Through the power of language, especially specific detail and sensory imagery, each of their poems becomes a lasting testament to their identity, family, and community. So please excuse the

redundancy in our titles, but you'll find that every poem — and every essay — is as beautiful and unique as the student who wrote it.

STEPHANIE CASSELL, ENGLISH TEACHER

Where I'm From

I am from tall trees,
from milk and sweet tea.
I am from the pine needles in the front yard
(Green, scratchy, they hurt when you stepped on them.)
I am from the honeysuckles we would eat
while walking by the road on our way back home.
I'm from bonfires and blue eyes,
from Craig and Tammy
I'm from the smart alecks and singing in the car,
from "cry baby" and "Daddy's girl".
I'm from being excited to dress up
for Sunday morning church with Pawpaw
I'm from Georgia and the Aldridges,
blue Kool-aid and fried bologna.
From watching my oldest brother
play video games and draw dragons,
from wearing my dad's shirt to bed.
Our scrapbooks are scattered throughout the house,
pictures taken by my mom
Although she didn't manage to capture every single memory,
the ones she did will be cherished forever.

BRIANNA ALDRIDGE, GRADE II

Where I Am From

I am from hopeful dreams,
From lavish clothes and expensive cologne.
I am from historical on the hill
Where the floors creak with every step.
I am from the tall trees
That densely populate the forest.

I am from the football and competitiveness
From Clark and Marla
I am from the funny and stubbornness
From selfish but kind
I am from the looking to God in tough times
And praying at Thanksgiving dinner

I am from Norton and Denmark
Homemade brownies and grilled cheese

From picking blackberries
On a hot summer day with my grandpa
From my dad leaving home at 15 years old.
I am from a book
Filled with snaps of years of the past,
Never letting me forget where I am from.

JAYMEN BUCHANAN, GRADE II

Where I Am From

I am from a home that is divided into half
Packing, feeling like I was going on a voyage, but I was not
Eating pineapple fried rice one morning
Eating biscuits and gravy the next day
Hugging and saying “see you later” because we both know it is too hard to say
goodbye
Later, greeted by my brothers and getting showered with warm hugs.

I am from two different cultures
Divided by “y’all” and “you guys”
“Shan rak koon” instead of “I love you”
I am from a place with sweet and bold aroma spices
My mom speaking Thai to my aunt Yai about the latest international gossip
Two different homes with two different cultures
Each home sums up who I am.

GABRIELLA COLLINS, GRADE II



While You Still Have the Chance

I believe in always saying I love you; my mother has always told me that. Since I was a small child, my mom has always shown me the importance of telling the people you love, that you love them. I have always been told that no matter what the circumstances are, you never hang up a phone, or go to bed, without saying I love you. There is a quote that my mom specifically said to me that I will never forget, "You have to say I love you while you have the chance to hear them say it back." As a child I did not really understand what she meant by that quote, but as I grew older, the meaning became more visible.

Growing up, I was always close with my family, especially my grandparents. My family has always been so supportive of me throughout school and sports. They have always been there for me and shown me unconditional love. I have never been in a situation where I felt alone or felt like I was unloved. Being so close to my family has helped me better myself as a person and learn how to love myself, along with how to love others.

"Say I love you, while you have the chance to hear them say it back." On a rainy and gloomy day, October 13, 2020, my grandfather gained his angel wings. The quote my mom always told me was all I could think about, because at that very moment, I wanted to just call him to say I love you, but I knew I would never hear him say it again. All of the countless times I would just be walking into a different room, and I would hear "Love you, sissy." Those memories turned into Facetiming him while he was in the hospital, squeezing in an "I love you" every time there was a pause in the conversation, just to make sure he knew that all of the love he had shown me throughout the sixteen years I spent with him never once went unnoticed.

Although I sometimes catch myself being selfish as I ask God why I only got sixteen years with him, a lesson I learned from his passing was to not only say "I love you," but make sure that they know you mean it. Make the phone call, make the visit, take the chance, because eventually all you'll have is the memories that once seemed like an inconvenience, the ones that you will cherish forever and wish you could do a million times over again. My grandfather left this earth knowing that he was loved, and knowing that he himself, loved with every inch of his heart.

MACKENZIE FRANKLIN, GRADE II

Where I Am From

I am from craft supplies nobody uses anymore.
From being a daddy's girl
And going on fishing trips in the summer.

I am from ugly wallpaper and overgrown flowers and shrubs
That I tried, and failed, to tame.

From the TV constantly running
In a room that's way too hot all year round.

I am from dancing to old vinyl records
And stories about working on the railroad.

From Christmas and Easter at Grandma's
And deer meat from my uncle's hunting trips.

I am from twin black cats and countless strays as friends.
From "because I say so" and a family that ignores problems
Until they can't anymore.

From being the person everyone goes to when they need someone to talk to
The therapy friend.

I am from countless notes left laying to remember to do things,
Yet still being forgotten.

From an apple pie recipe passed down
And from secrets my grandpa kept from all of us.

From peace on a cardinal's wing
And wondering which of my family members came to visit from heaven.

I am from pictures on the walls reminding everyone of what once was.
When Grandpa was still alive and when Grandma remembered things.

I am from hating that old house now because there are too many memories attached.
From avoiding the dog that was once my best friend
Because she reminds me too much of Grandpa and it's too painful to remember.

From having to repeat myself countless times and Grandma still doesn't fully understand.
From not knowing why the place I used to view as my home is unraveling.

ELORA HUTCHINSON, GRADE II

Where I'm From

I am from hand-me-down clothes
from going barefoot outside and getting muddy feet.

I am from sweet tea and coke
from PB&J's and grilled cheese.

I am from a large family

from 25 people in one house on special occasions.

I am from getting a lot of hugs and kisses on the cheek
from laughter filling the house and seeing smiles on everyone's face.

Older ones saying "Don't drop out of high school."
The smell of turkey and ham cooking every Thanksgiving and Christmas.
I am from being told stories about my grandfathers that I never met.

I am from spending every summer at Grandma's with my sister.
Watching Living Faith every day with her.

Nanny telling me, "You better not be messing with any of them boys."
Her sitting in her chair holding the little ones and rocking them to sleep.
I am from taking care of you until you left us a month ago.

I am from sitting in my great grandma's living room watching Tom and Jerry
from her telling us stories from when she was little.
I am from being fed butterscotch when mom wasn't looking.

from running around with a string being chased by the cat.
Being strapped in a stroller with the cat in my lap and my sister pushing us around.

I am from late night Walmart runs with cousins
from blasting music in the car and singing along.
I am from laughing at every little thing until I can't breathe.
I am from being taught that family is something that will always be there
from being told that no matter what happens they'll always have your back.

ALEXIA INGLE, GRADE II

Where I'm From

I am from the log cabin and long fields
From Big Stone and Lee County
I am from the mountains and pastures
And fields full of deer, cows and horses
I am from the pine, locust and dogwood trees
Where the trees bloom in the spring
and the trees' vibrant colors fill the valleys in the fall
I'm from coal mines and small towns
I'm from the Lovells and Lanes
From Chastity and Michael
I'm from Big Stone Gap
I'm from Mammaw's home cooking every Sunday
And from homemade apple butter
From the Appalachian Mountains.

MCKINLEIGH LANE, GRADE II

Where I'm From

I am from pencil and paper
From Faber Castell and Strathmore
I am from the fort in our living room.
Warm, giddy, it felt like time stood still.
I am from succulents and gardens,
Aloe veras and planting tomatoes in the hot sun.
I'm from Christmas and freckles,
From Misty and Terry,
I'm from the arguments and the competitions,
From Be quiet! And Have fun!
I'm from reading the Bible together
And having deep conversations about religious concepts.
I'm from Everette and Tennessee,
Chicken and beef,
From the love story between my grandfather and grandmother,
The back pain my dad constantly speaks of,
Pictures overflowing in totes in our attic.

No matter how many memories we have,
We should always keep these mementoes
To pass their stories on.

OLIVIA MULLINS, GRADE II

Where I am From

I am from the gardens of green beans and tomatoes,
The ones where mud pies formed at my fingertips when cool rain
struck the earth.

I am from the rose bushes that prick your fingers,
Even though mom always warned me,
“Stay away, you’re gonna get hurt.”

I am from the travel on the weekends,
The knowledge that those bruises on my legs weren’t from falling down.
From the bare necessities of living,
From the knowledge that I would make things better someday, somehow.
I wonder what he thinks when he hears my name now.

I am from the popcorn parties with my siblings,
The distraction from the fact Mom was working late again tonight.
We never minded, as we knew things were going to look up for us one day.
All we could do is pray and love, love and pray.

I am from the focus on my academics,
always wanting to achieve and learn and experience.
The need to make something great of myself and make my family proud.
I am from the late nights of studying so I can get to college one day,
For the first time in my family’s history.

I am from the love that is chosen,
Not fabricated from blood.
From the family that cheers me on, supports me,
and doesn’t hold my head beneath the pond.
I am from a new line of ambition, strength, and valiance beyond measure.
Only now, I will feed that bonfire until there is no fuel left to be found.
I am the daughter of my mother,
The being of my own.

SHEALIN PRUITT, GRADE II

Where I’m From

I am from clippity clop heels
From baby dolls and blackberry bushes

I'm from fried apple pie and granny's chicken n' dumplins
I am from cookouts with the family and catching lightnin' bugs

I'm from church on Sunday and backyard football games
from Momma sitting on the porch and Dad working on cars
from eggs n' bacon and fried chicken
from four wheeler races and "don't get mud in your hair"
I'm from road trips and God-painted sunsets.

I am from endless stars and the smell of green
from "watch your sister" and "don't go alone"
I'm from Polaroid photographs and hand-me-down clothes
from hunting and fishing to put food on the table.

I am from Christmas in Dixie and ice cold sweet tea
I'm from homemade slip-n-slides and grass cuts
from honeysuckle and collard greens
I'm from the mountains that hold my life story.

SAREENA SERGENT, GRADE II

Where I'm From

I am from our 100-year-old dining table
From warm tart burners to brown gravy
I am from the house on the hill with wooden paneling and a gravel driveway
All the rooms are different shades of blue
Dogs everywhere, cousins always playing down the road
I am from the black eyed Susies in the flower bed
From family get-togethers and blue eyes
I am from the pond and the unfinished cabin
From Mama Kaye, my role model
Inheriting her creativity and messiness
I am from the dark chocolate on the table in the living room
and wearing Dad's t-shirts to bed
Huge and basically a nightgown, but we loved them
I am from cousin sleepovers and fashion shows
Going on rhino rides and playing in the creek
I am from church on Sunday, singing and hugging each other
(My second family)
I am from The Pound
Potato soup and cornbread
From the "Mama Kaye, I need chocwate"
From the pictures and old toys in the attic
I am from the back room on the right that I call mine.

NAOMI SHORTT, GRADE II

A Girl's Best Friend

A best friend. A four-legged, 100 pound shepherd mix who is the biggest lapdog. Shiny, black and brown fur, and brown, honey-like eyes that sparkle so brightly in the sunshine. My best friend, the girl who made me a better person, who made me appreciate life itself.

My dog, Zoey, is like my child. She acts like one, too, when she doesn't get what she wants. Even through all the temper tantrums, she'll never turn down a good belly scratching. She's done this ever since I've gotten her, around five or six years ago, when my last dog I had passed from old age. I was numb, empty even, and couldn't cope with the thought of all of my childhood dogs being gone. I didn't know what to do without my three other babies. Although I was little, I still felt so much pain. That's when my mom and dad took me to the animal shelter. It was nice to finally see big dogs, small dogs, dogs with those stubby tails, and dogs with the most chaotic energy again. We didn't plan on getting a dog, and my family wasn't even sure if we were ready for another one, but we saw her and couldn't turn her away. We saw her and knew she was the one.

I remember asking the animal shelter workers if we could take her out on a leash to walk her around. She was too excited, though, and couldn't contain herself. It was okay, we understood why. I would be excited, too, if I had to stay in a small area for the majority of the day. A couple days later, we went back to the shelter to get her.

"Zoey. I want her name to be Zoey. Can we please name her Zoey?" Mom probably got sick of me asking, so that's her name.

The moment we picked her up from the shelter, my pain slowly began to fade away. It was different, but nonetheless, I was happy. Happy to have a dog, a best friend, and a new family member.

As years have gone by, she has seen me as my worst. She sees me when I'm in the greatest amount of pain, but yet, she has not one ounce of judgment in her body. No hatred, just love. "My big goofball" has changed me as a person. Zoey has taught me to not be judgmental towards people, no matter their beliefs, ethnicity, race, gender, or even how much money they have; instead, she teaches me to be kind, empathetic, caring, loving, and reliable. The world needs more of that, I think. We all can learn something from dogs, whether it's to be non judgmental towards others or to just be kind. I, personally, continue to learn from



her every day. She teaches me to slow down and appreciate every moment- because those moments eventually go away, slowly, but they do. Life can completely change in any moment, so appreciate what you have. Appreciate every single moment you have with friends and family. My dog certainly does. She will never take any of her days for granted, and I will always remember that lesson she has taught me, along with several others.

MCKENZIE TATE, GRADE II

I am From Black Culture

I am from the motherland. Things considered ghetto and ratchet
until they end up in fashion.

I am from cornbread, collard greens, and baked beans. From brothers and sisters
in bondage, yet “free”. Hushed over voices, yet told we’re too loud.

I am from celebrating my culture
then being told it’s a form of voodoo, hoodoo, and witchcraft.

I am from my hair, for it is art and knows no restraints such as gravity.
My hair redefines reality.

I am from looks of hatred and suspicion from just walking into a store

I am from the sound of gunshots. From being shot even with locked doors
In my own home.

I am from being told to put my head down, hands up, and somehow
Still getting locked up.

I am from negro spiritual, gospel, rumba, blues, bomba, jazz,
R&B, rock and roll, reggae, hip-hip, afrobeat, funk, and
Even country.

I am from the cries of my brothers and sisters dying right before
My eyes. Being treated like weeds, uprooted, put in a
Foreign land, growing again, only to be cut down.

I am from big family reunions with drunk aunts and uncles and the
Music bumping while the kids run around.

I am from summer days where it’s “too hot for lotion” and
Precede to be called ashy. My skin glows in the sun
Yet it is still shunned for being too “ugly”.

I am from the Eve gene, AAVE, emancipation, Jim Crow laws,
Segregation. Every year we find new definitions of the word
Freedom.

I am from perm relaxers and bleached skin
Just to “fit in”.

I am from strain and frustration from mothers’ cries.
I am from Breonna Taylor and Elijah McClain and yes,
Say their names.

I am from my ancestors and all of their achievements
That allows me to be who I am today.

I am from Black Culture.

LEAH TEASLEY, GRADE II

Where I’m From

I am from Dawn dish soap,
From Downy and denture cleaner,
I am from the white house with the green shutters,
so far up the hill that you get stuck when it snows,
I am from the dogwoods that bloom out back in the summer.

I’m from scrapbooks and back dimples
From James and Tonya,
I’m from the strong women
and can’t never could
From get home before the streetlights come on
and don’t judge a book by its cover,
I’m from going to church every Sunday
and Bible study every Wednesday.

I’m from Joyner Road, all the way at the top of Thacker’s Branch
From warm cornbread and cold pickled corn,
From all of the people who have lived on that hill
and called it theirs.

MACY WELLS, GRADE II

STEPHANIE CASSELL, ENGLISH 10

Where I’m From

I am from going out every Friday night
From Dr. Pepper and Pioneer Woman
I am from the red roof and rocking chairs on the front porch.
I am from sunflowers because what’s life without a little bit of sunshine?
I am from cookouts and red hair,
From Rhonda and Brad.

I am from four children and trading cars,
From “If it doesn’t involve you stay out of it”
and “try your best — that’s all that matters.”
I’m from going to church every Sunday evening
I am from Baltimore, spaghetti, hamburgers
From born in Ohio and walking to school every morning with black friends.

CAMERON ABSHER, GRADE 10

Where I Am From

I am from White and Black
To Nike and Hollister
I am from the smell of cigarettes
To brown flowered couches
I am from the blue-eyed grass flowers
To a sunny summer day
I am from the holiday gatherings and summer cookouts
From Bowen and Torres
I am from very loud to strict
From always be kind to others and always do your best
I am from white rocking chairs and watching it storm
I am from Norton community to mac n cheese and mashed potatoes
I am from a place called home.

ALENA BOWEN, GRADE 10

Where I’m From

I’m from mountains
I’m from mud holes
I’m from Folgers coffee in the morning
I’m from summer nights outside till late
from summer air
I’m from the smell of new softball leather
I’m from brick dust in my cleats
I’m from softball pants with holes in them
I’m from long lake weekends with sleepy Mondays
from an old tree swing
I’m from birds chirping
I’m from the nice cool house after playing outside
I’m from a small town
from the picture books that have dust on them
I’m from staying up late to watch for Santa
I’m from decorating the tree with my family
I’m from football games on Friday nights
I’m from Erin
I’m from saving every stray animal I find

I'm from white chipped paint on the barn
I'm from being strong no matter what life throws at me
I'm from chocolate ice cream on late summer nights
I'm from the smell of laundry detergent that my nana uses
I'm from going to church every Sunday then eating after
I'm from grape vine swings
I'm from little creeks
I'm from fields of cows
I'm from Big Stone Gap,

SAVANNAH CHANDLER, GRADE 10

Home

My family is full of fun stories and board games.
Growing up playing backyard football,
Smelling the fresh cut grass while playing,
Dogs barking,
The park always booming, loud and obnoxious,
The smells of trees and flowers,
Lots of fun and excitement with friends and family
Hearing the ball swish through the basketball hoop,
The sound of the wind and hard breathing going on.
I'm from Bear Branch only like six minutes away.
My family preserves our writing and photos
into a photo album.
I believe in Jesus and have tons of respect
and love for him.

BRAYDEN DUTTON, GRADE 10

Where I Am From

I am from playing outside on the hot summer days,
The bright blue sky and beaming sun,
The smell of fresh cut grass and families cooking out,
I am from riding my bike all day long and playing in the street,
From a grey and white brick home with the light colored walls and
the midnight blue Chevy truck in the driveway,
I am from the big brown granddaddy clock in the hall
and pictures filling the walls,
I am from colorful building blocks and playing Just Dance in the basement,
I am from beggars can't be choosy
and treat others how you want to be treated,
I am from large family get togethers on every holiday,
I am from Papaw's brownies to Mama Shellie's mac and cheese,
I am from Hollingers, Livingstons, Lewises, and Harrises,

A'NYAH HOLLINGER, GRADE 10

Where I'm From

I'm from small towns and tall mountains
I'm from kids running and playing in the church yard
I'm from brick apartments
I'm from a close bonding family and many laughs
I'm from neighborhood cookouts every weekend
I'm from parents telling childhood stories and memories
I'm from bumps and bruises from playing backyard football
I'm from Dom and Beth
I'm from hard workers and athletes,
I'm from church every Sunday.

TRE KEYS, GRADE 10

Where I Am From

I'm from the honey yellow house with a big wooden fence.
I'm from the apple tree in the backyard that is always making fresh juicy apples.
I am from the cold living room that smells like crisp wintergreen candles
or sweet caramel.
I'm from the great Dane thinking she's a lap dog and the cat who thinks she's the boss.
From the chaos of having a big family.
I am from the little things I've picked up on over the years.
I'm from the great cooking and no phones at the table.
I am from the bedazzled purse filled with monster truck toys.
I am from the tulips which smell so sweetly every spring.
I'm from the six-foot alligator stuffed animal that still is as soft
as the day it was given to me.
I'm from the water balloon fight in the middle of winter.
I'm from making a vast variety of candies on Christmas eve.
I am from having naturally perfect shaped eyebrows.
I'm from the hifi stereo record player from the '50s that is big as a table.
From the warm love we have for each other.

OLIVIA STIDHAM, GRADE 10



Jonesville
Middle School

Alyssa Dotson, Grade 5 Art

Story Wreath

I challenged my 5th grade students at Jonesville Middle School to create story wreaths of their own, but with a slightly different idea. We discussed how COVID-19 has altered our way of life, but not always negatively. Many of these young writers told me about how happy they were to spend time with their families and some recounted stories about how they learned to cook from scratch, work with siblings on chores, or help around the farm. We wanted to take the idea of silver linings and illustrate it. The students ran with it, and drew gorgeous wreaths to show a story shrouded with a positive message.

ALYSSA DOTSON, ART & MATH TEACHER
JONESVILLE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Briana Austin and Sheila Shuler, Grade 5 English

Covid-19

Covid has affected my life in many ways. In March, we had to stay home because of this sickness that we had never heard that much about. It has been awful and scary. People we knew were put in the hospital. We weren't allowed to go out in public. If we did, we had to wear masks and use hand sanitizer. The worst has been doing school work at home.

JAZLIN ADAMS, GRADE 5

Pandemic Life

In the spring, my dad bought us a camper because of Covid. In the summer, we put our camper on the lake. We also spent more time at home.

Because of the pandemic, I get to spend more time with my pets. I can't go places I love, and I can't see my friends. I really don't like wearing a mask, and I miss school. In the fall, my uncle passed away, I could not even go and see him.

I will never forget 2020!

BELLAH BACH, GRADE 5

My 2020 Life

Covid 19 has ruined my life in 2020! We had to stay home, we had to wear masks, we had to do remote learning, and we had to social distance. ALL the things I thought we would NEVER have to do, we did. When covid 19 first hit I thought "Oh, ok its a virus. It is like the flu, nothing bad". BUT NOW we are further in the year and I am thinking, "Oh dear, what's next?". It is a virus and it is not going to go away no matter how many times we close down and reopen. It is just not going to go away. That is how a virus works.

Also, people think that since 2021 is now here that the virus is just going to poof away, but it is not sadly. I did not expect Christmas to go the way it did. I did not get to see my papaw. I didn't really get to see my granny. We had to wear a mask the whole time we were in her house. I just think 2020 was a bad year and I hope it gets better!

LEAH COWDEN, GRADE 5



Story Wreath by Mia Fortner

How Covid Affected My Daily Life

COVID has affected my daily life in many ways. Before COVID, I knew nothing about remote learning. I was able to go to school, see my teachers, and visit with my friends. Remote learning makes it hard for me to understand certain skills. I do not like it, and it makes me sad because I cannot see my friends like I want to. I am also not allowed to play sports as much as I would like due to restrictions. I want everything to go back to normal like it was before March, 2020.

MIA FORTNER, GRADE 5

The Pandemic of 2020

Covid-19 made 2020 different in many ways. School ended in March and I missed the summer with my friends and the sport I like most which is baseball. It changed my family's summer cookouts and holiday traditions. I miss getting up and ready for school every morning, but I have got used to virtual learning and enjoy spending all day with my brother and papaw.

ELIJAH HAMMONDS, GRADE 5

The Pandemic

If you had said Covid-19 in 2019, I would have said, "Is that the new Iphone?" But now, we know it is a virus. School isn't the same. Everyone has a mask on now. Some people have gotten really sick by the virus. When I grow up, I will always think about how crazy 2020 was and I hope we will have a better future.

LILA HINES, GRADE 5

I Miss My Friends

I miss seeing their faces.

I miss laughing at their jokes.

I miss their funny stories.

I miss playing tag.

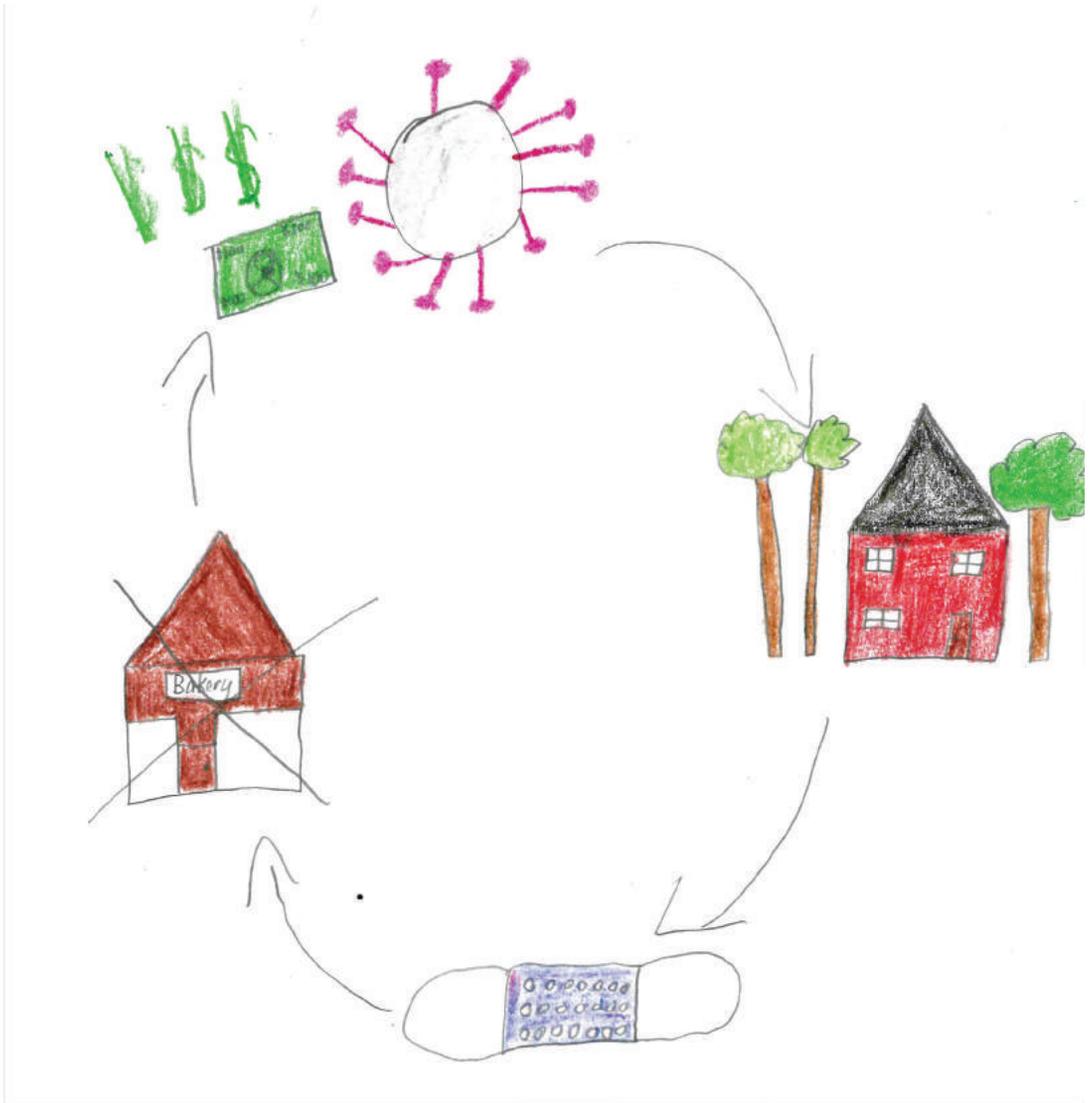
I never thought I would miss going to school but I miss my friends.

BENJAMIN HIXSON, GRADE 5

The 2020 Pandemic

The 2020 pandemic has affected my life in many ways. Number one, would be wearing the mask. I don't know anyone who likes the mask, but we must wear it to stay safe. Number two, I hate distancing from my friends. I'm a big hugger, and unfortunately I'm not allowed to do that any more. Number three, I didn't get to see my friends a lot this summer. I usually get to see them at the park or hang out with them at their house and mine, but I hardly ever saw any of them this summer. There is one thing that we can do, we can pray to the Lord and ask him to forgive us for our sins and ask him to take away this virus. So when times get tough just think about Corinthians 13:18.

ALLIE JONES, GRADE 5



Story Wreath by Allie Jones

Covid has Changed My Life

Covid- 19 changed my way of life. I feel like our land is no longer free. I have to wear a mask when going places. I am at home more. I can not go to church. I can not hug my friends and family. Basically, I feel like I can not be me!!

JAKOB MABE, GRADE 5

How Covid has Affected Me

This pandemic has affected a lot of people in this world. When Covid-19 first started, I thought that we would be out of school for only about 3 weeks, but it turned out to be more than 6 months. I think this

sickness has made me see the real world more than looking at phones or computers. Also, I did have Covid-19 and it affected me a lot. I felt what other people with Covid-19 felt and it just feels like a ball of pain to have. I hope this pandemic goes away really soon and everyone is safe. Also, remember to wash your hands as much as you can and wear your masks.

KENADEE MCELYEA, GRADE 5

The 2020 Pandemic

Covid has affected my life in many ways. I do not get to go to school every day. I do not get to see my friends as much. I also do not get to see my mom as much. We don't go to as many places. We have to wear masks all the time. Some people have lost their jobs. People have hoarded food, toilet paper, and other essential items. I hope we have a better future!

CHARLEY MOORE, GRADE 5

How Covid has Changed My Daily Life

I wake up some mornings longing to go somewhere. I ask mom or dad if we can go visit my Aunt Jackie or my grandpa. Mom looks sad and says, "baby girl we can't because of covid." My Aunt Jackie is in very bad health and needs a lung transplant. So it is too dangerous and grandpa is 91 years old. We can't go visit people, have parties, go to school, or even go out to eat. Covid has disrupted our daily lives in so many ways. I often wonder if it will ever go back to normal.

JOSLYNN PENNINGTON, GRADE 5

How Covid Affected My Life

Covid has made my life different. Most of the time when we go to school, it's only for one week then we have to stay at home. I have to wear a mask all the time at school and I don't really like it because I can hardly breathe. I don't get to go to the library like I did in elementary school. I don't like having to stay apart from my classmates.

Around Christmas, we normally have a big party, but we couldn't this year. I did get to see my grandpa at Christmas though. I didn't get to have as many people at my birthday party either because of covid.

I was really surprised because I thought I wouldn't get to see my new baby niece because of covid, but they are staying at our house more. I was really happy about this.

My friend Deziray doesn't get to come to my house because of covid. I really wanted to show her my new puppy. I don't get to go to my aunt's as often as I used to, but my big brother and I go see her sometimes.

Although I don't get to see some of them very often, covid has brought my family closer together because they get to stay at my house. Covid has had some good effects and bad effects in my life.

VIVIAN SCOTT, GRADE 5

Pandemic 2020

On March 13, 2020, we were let out of school. I thought it would be great, but little did I know that it would be the last time I would hear or see some of my friends again. I also miss my teacher Mrs. Pendergraft. I had my 10th birthday in March. I pierced my ears but it backfired and I got an infection. The only thing good that came out of this year was spending quality time with family during holidays, my birthday, and summer fun with our new swimming pool. We didn't get to go on a vacation to the beach this year, so the pool was a nice addition. This past fall, I had a Halloween party with some of my friends. We had to wear

our masks while we were watching a movie. I hate wearing a mask, especially when I am sweaty. I wish life could go back to the way it was before the pandemic.

ELLA SHELL, GRADE 5

How the Pandemic has Changed My Life

The covid pandemic has made some things better than others and some worse. The things I like during this time is I don't have to get up early in the morning, and I get to go to my awesome babysitters. I like playing with the donkeys at the babysitter's house, the bull, and the other animals. I don't like that I have to wear a mask everywhere I go and people die because of covid.

DEZIRAY WOLIVER, GRADE 5

Covid-19

When the Covid pandemic hit, I didn't know anything about it, but when my aunt said I had to wear masks I was even more confused thinking I was sick. She had explained to me what covid was and I thought we were going to die. I stayed in my room most of the time. I still do. While we were at home, I watched anime over and over again and I also worked on my editing. I managed to get a few memes done without using all of my photo storage. Even if I was told to stay home, I still went with my dad to work to help him. My sister thinks 2021 is going to get better. I think it is going to get worse. The thing I hated about 2020 was everything! It was the worst I have ever seen.

EMELINA ZAMORA, GRADE 5

KELLY SHARRETT AND SHEILA SHULER, GRADE 5 ENGLISH

How Covid Affected My Life

This is how Covid-19 affected my daily life. When we went on vacation in Outer Banks, North Carolina, we had to be careful. When we got to the beach house, my cousins and I couldn't get on the bed because it could have had germs on it. We couldn't go out to eat supper or go to the stores. We could not even climb the lighthouse or get near anyone we didn't know on the beach. My cousin, Graham, could not come and visit us because he lives in Texas and his family did not want to bring the virus to us. That is how Covid-19 has affected my life.

GRADY BERRY, GRADE 5

The Pandemic

The pandemic has affected me and my family in many ways. For starters, my mom says she is going crazy with all of the kids at home. My sisters aggravate each other from being together all the time. I do think the pandemic has brought us all closer together.

AIDEN BROWN, GRADE 5

Covid-19

The year 2020 was starting out to be a good year until Friday, March 13. On this day our schools were shut down due to Covid-19. My last year at Elk Knob Elementary abruptly ended and we didn't get to say



Mrs. Austin's class

goodbye to our teachers or our classmates. It was a very scary and sad time for me and my family. I was hoping that it would all pass quickly, but little did we know that Covid-19 was not going away any time soon.

Due to Covid-19, I had to spend my 10th birthday in May with just my family due to the state shutdown. This was my first birthday that I didn't have all of my friends over to celebrate. For a couple of months, all of our softball tournaments were cancelled and we couldn't have practice. We finally got to return back to school, but had to wear masks and keep 6 feet between our teachers and classmates.

The past year has been very difficult and I pray that 2021 will be better and that we can get back to some type of normalcy. If I have learned anything about this past year and how Covid-19 has affected me, is to never take one thing for granted and always cherish your family and friends.

EVELYN BRUNER, GRADE 5

The Pandemic

The pandemic has affected my life in many different ways. Everything has changed because of it. We can no longer attend school, or go on outings to the movies with friends. We can't even have social gatherings with our friends and families. We have to wear face masks when we are out in public. It has become very scary for everyone. My twin brothers have already had the virus. They have gotten over it and are fine now. It is scary, though, because so many people have died from it.

RAVEN CARROLL, GRADE 5

How the Pandemic Has Affected Me

The pandemic has affected me in many ways. One thing is that my great grandmother, or as we call her granny, has seen us only 9 or 10 times. I just got over Covid because we got exposed just before Christmas. Another thing is that we have not been able to go out to eat, go to the movies, or just have a night out. I have learned to have better patience during this time. I have learned more about some of my favorite things like sports and more. I like that we get to use Google Meets and Zoom to hang out with friends. Everyone please stay safe and wear your mask to protect yourself and others.

CALEB CAVIN, GRADE 5

The Pandemic 2020

The Covid virus is wild but I have been able to spend more time with my mom instead of a week with my dad and only the weekends with my mom. I do get to sleep longer because there's no school but I don't get to see my friends. I don't get to play football anymore. I hate, hate, hate wearing masks because I can't breathe in them but they help keep me safe. I do get to be outdoors riding 4-wheelers, skateboarding, playing basketball, and just enjoying being outside. The virus has caused a lot of difference in this world but I'm praying that the world will get back to normal or even be a better place.

DEVON CHILDERS, GRADE 5

A Covid Poem

Canceled school
My family had Covid
Video chatted with friends and family
In and out of school

How the Pandemic of 2020 Has Affected My Life

Covid-19 has affected my life in many ways. First, I cannot see my friends because of restrictions and guidelines that require people to stay home. In addition, my parents have decided for me to stay home and do school virtually. Also, our church services are conducted online. I miss going to school and church and seeing my friends there.

The pandemic has also prevented us from having family gatherings and going on family trips. We were not able to get together to celebrate birthdays, and we did not get to go on our annual trip this year to Gatlinburg and Dollywood. Sadly, trick-or-treating was also canceled due to the virus.

Covid-19 has prevented me from being able to play in a golf tournament called "Drive, Chip and Putt". Almost all sports activities have been canceled this year.

One positive way that the pandemic has affected my life is that my mom and dad have more time to spend with me and my twin brothers. Their companies have let them work part time from home so that one of them is with us at all times.

J.T. CLARK, GRADE 5

How Covid Affected My Life

This time a year ago we did not know what was about to happen. We were living a normal life and everything was going smoothly. Then Covid-19 became the only thing that everyone could talk about. It was on all social media and TV stations. Our lives have not been the same since. We can't do anything normal anymore. I have stayed home most of the time and adapted to doing everything remotely. We can't even go to school. Hopefully this will all be over soon and our lives will be normal again.

CARTER COX, GRADE 5

COVID

The coronavirus has affected my life. It ruined my life. Coronavirus has shut everything down. I don't get to go anywhere. Some places are open and people go out to eat. I get to go out to eat some but not as much.

I have to wear a mask during Covid-19. That's really hard for me because it's hard to breathe and I can't hardly keep my mask up. It's hard on older people who have breathing problems. Some people aren't wearing a mask and it makes me mad because I don't want this stuff.

Everyone is buying up food and toilet paper and it's hard to find that stuff at the store.

When the coronavirus calmed down a bit, I got to visit my family. That made me feel great! I hope coronavirus gets over so everything will get back to normal.

BRAYDEN ELY, GRADE 5

How Covid-19 Affected Our Lives

How Covid-19 has affected the lives of others and myself:

- School was canceled
- Never finished 4th grade

- ♦ No SOL tests
- ♦ No end of year field trip
- ♦ We have to wear masks in restaurants, schools, churches, etc.
- ♦ Staying home more
- ♦ Fewer vacations
- ♦ Travel restrictions
- ♦ Grocery pick-ups
- ♦ No birthday parties

ELLA HINES, GRADE 5

Covid-19

Covid-19 has been really hard. I see some of my friends at school but some are doing remote school. It is so aggravating wearing these masks all day. I wish Covid-19 was over. I want things to go back to the way they were.

MICHAEL HINES, GRADE 5

Covid-19

Before Covid-19 we didn't have to wear a mask and we didn't have to be six feet apart. Now in 2021, we have to do just that. People are getting more and more sick and it's spreading throughout the nation. Now everywhere we go we have to take a mask. Wearing a mask all day can make your ears feel bad. Wearing a mask isn't all bad; it's pretty warm and nice in the winter. My hands get really dry from all of the sanitizer. Covid is a tough time and it's very hard but I believe we can get through it.

XOE HOWARD, GRADE 5

How Covid-19 Has Affected Me

I never thought I would experience such a pandemic as the Covid-19 has been. I also never thought I would see a time where everyone has to wear a mask to try to keep from getting sick and to prevent others from getting sick. I am doing all remote learning at home and haven't been to school this year. I miss all of the teachers and my friends at school. My mother is afraid for me to go to school because I stay with my elderly grandmother during the day while she is at work. I don't want to bring in germs or something that might make her sick and I don't want to get sick either. I don't get out much other than to go to my doctor and dentist appointments. I eat out sometimes but bring the food back home to eat. When I do go out to my appointments, I have to wear a mask and sanitize, sanitize, sanitize! I didn't get to go on vacation this summer because the pandemic has been so bad. I missed getting to do that. I hope this all goes away soon and things can get back to normal.

KAYLA JONES, GRADE 5

Oh no! Covid!

I was in fourth grade when I heard about Covid-19. They said it's just a virus but I knew something was going on that we didn't know. The next day, our teacher said there will be no school next week. It just got worse and worse. Then they said there would be no school for two weeks. I was in dramatic reading and I



Story Wreath by K-Shea Lane

was one competition away from the finals when my mom got a call that it was canceled. I felt like my whole world fell apart.

After a while, there was no school for the rest of the year. I like that I get to spend more time at home with my family. I miss how it used to be. I know what it's like to have Covid-19 because I had it. I never felt bad except for one day.

I wish we could go back to normal. I feel really bad for older people. I do not like wearing a mask but I have to. One good thing about this time is that I got a new baby cousin. My family loves him so much.

K-SHEA LANE, GRADE 5

How Covid Has Affected Me

Covid has affected me by having to stay home most of the time. I like to stay home but not all the time. It has also affected me in a good way, too. Some places are less crowded and I get to do more stuff I like since I don't have school on some days.

JADEN LAWSON, GRADE 5

Covid and My Life

Hi, I'm Josslyn and I'm going to tell you about how Covid-19 affected my life. First, in fourth grade they called off school for the rest of the year in March. We did not get to have graduation. We did not do our SOLs. We also did not get to say goodbye to our teachers and friends.

When school started back, I went remote doing homeschool. After a month, I was tired of being at home so I went back to school. It was so different. We had to wear masks and stay six feet apart. In most classes, there weren't many kids. Sports are different and a lot of them are canceled. That is how Covid-19 has affected my life.

JOSSLYN LINDSAY, GRADE 5

Coronavirus

The coronavirus pandemic has impacted my daily life in so many ways. For example, schools were closed on March 13, 2020. They opened back up a few months ago. The schools are now closed back down for remote learning. School has changed a lot since March and I feel that they will not really be the same ever again.

Family gatherings are a little different. If you have over a certain number of people in your house for holidays, you have to wear a mask. When grocery shopping, you have to wear a mask in the store. When you walk in Wal-mart, there is someone standing at the door with a box of masks and if you don't have one, they will give one to you. When eating out, you have to wear a mask until you get to your table and you have to wear one to the restroom. If you are sitting down, you can take it off but when you get back up to leave and pay you have to keep it on until you get outside. So much has changed since March. I feel some things will never be the same.

JOURNEY MIDDLETON, GRADE 5

Covid-19 and My Life

Covid-19 affected my life in many different ways. I didn't get to graduate from 4th grade because of Covid. When we went to the beach in June, we didn't get out and do much because we were scared of catching the virus. We had to wear masks everywhere. We even came home early from the beach because of it. We sat at home almost all summer and I swam in my pool. I didn't get to tour the middle school with my 4th grade class. My first year of middle school was supposed to be exciting but it wasn't because we have to wear masks to protect each other and sit six feet apart. Now I don't get to see my friends often because the virus is spreading more and we are doing remote learning. I wish Covid-19 would go away.

DRAKE MILES, GRADE 5

Things Are So Different

I miss my family.
I miss my friends.
I miss the way that life has been.

I miss playing ball.
I miss walking down the school halls.
I really think I miss it all.

Things are so different.
Will it ever be the same?
I hope everything is normal again some day.

LINCOLN MUNSEY, GRADE 5

How Covid Has Affected My Life

One way Covid has affected my life and a lot of other peoples' lives is now we have to wear masks. Another way it has affected my life is church. Church is different now. We can only sit in certain seats. Also, in church, we have this wire that runs outside to speakers so the people in their cars can hear if they are not comfortable coming inside. With Covid, I cannot see my friends as often and school is different as well. School is remote and I do it from home. I hope everything can go back to normal soon.

ADDISON NASH, GRADE 5

Covid and Me

How Covid-19 has affected me is that I can't go outside as much as I used to. Covid-19 has made my life different. We do have a vaccine for Covid so maybe it will be gone soon. Covid-19 has made it where I can't go to birthday parties, pool parties, and some restaurants. Covid-19 has affected everyone and even me but there are steps you can take to not get covid. I hope everyone stays safe and we can get back to normal soon.

EVAN NEFF, GRADE 5

How Covid Affected Me

When Covid-19 started it really affected me and my family. We couldn't see each other as often. It affected all of the sports I play. I had to do online school. Christmas was different with my family. Covid-19 has killed people that I know. I will Covid-19 would end.

JACOB NEFF, GRADE 5

Ethan's World

The covid has ruined my life because I can't go places and do things like I used to. My family didn't get to go to the water park on vacation because of covid. That made me sad.

Coronavirus was very sad because my family didn't get to spend time with my papaw while he was sick then he died. We can't spend time with our family and go places with them like we used to. Some people got sick where my dad works.

School is different because we can't sit together. We have to sit 6 feet apart. We don't have a normal school day because classes and the school day are shorter. I hate wearing a mask all the time when we go somewhere be-



Jacob Neff with his personal copy of Book Six

cause I can barely breathe in those things. I did get to go to the middle school this year and that's good. The teachers are really nice.

Coronavirus makes me kind of sad and kind of mad because so many people have died from it.

ETHAN PARKS, GRADE 5

How Covid Affected My Life

Covid has affected my life by closing school. I don't want school to be closed. However, it is safer doing remote learning. Sometimes wearing a mask smothers me. It smothers me even more during school. I wish other people would wear a mask. It isn't that bad. I don't want more people to die from this virus. I like school and want to go back. It is more fun than remote learning. It will be a thing forever. We have known people to have it and have survived but also know people who have died. Covid-19 has been sad.

AUSTIN REED, GRADE 5

How the Pandemic Affected Me

How has the pandemic affected me? First, I gave it a new name. Its new name is Thanose because it's killing half of the world. Second of all, I can't wrestle this year. I can't do anything. All I can do is sit at home. I wish it would end. I hate Thanose.

DALTON RIDINGS, GRADE 5

The Covid-19

Covid has changed my life and made it worse. I have to wear a mask in school and stuff and I can't breathe in them. My friends have to do the same. School has changed a lot. We have to eat lunch in the classroom not the cafeteria. The teachers have to wipe everything down because of Covid-19 to get rid of the germs.

KENDRA ROBERTS, GRADE 5

How Covid Has Affected Me

Covid changed school a lot. We are now getting less hours of school and we have to wear face masks. When you go out to stores, you have to wear masks. You have to wear them everywhere. I do not like masks. During this pandemic, we have to do remote school at home. I do not like remote learning. I can't be with my friends or teachers.

KYLEE ROREER, GRADE 5

How Covid Has Changed Us

On March 13, 2020, Lee County Schools were shut down for two weeks due to Covid. Before we went back they called us and told us school was canceled for the rest of the year. We weren't able to tell our teachers goodbye or have a graduation. We were also not able to do our SOLs.

We didn't get to go on vacation or play with friends in the summer. We cook at home more now. We have to do church outside in our cars. My brother wasn't able to do anything for his birthday. For my birthday, I am just going to have a few friends over.

Most sports were canceled. For a while, gymnastics was canceled. The Olympics were postponed.

Then we went back to school but we had to wear masks. At this time I didn't care if we had to wear a mask. I just wanted to see my friends and get back in school. After that they told us that school would have to be sorted by last names in alphabetical order. Most of my friends would be in the other group. I was so sad when my friend told me she would be remote learning. I only had one class with my other friend at first. I didn't have many friends in my other classes. Then all of the kids came back together so I had a lot of classes with my friends. My friend came back from remote learning. We didn't have any classes together but our lockers are next to each other. This is how Covid-19 affected my life.

AVA STAFFORD, GRADE 5

Covid Has Affected My Life Entirely

I play sports year round. Covid has affected sports badly, especially indoor sports like basketball. Softball is a different sport since Covid happened, too. We missed part of the season this year. Sometimes crowds weren't allowed in to watch. There are even times when I don't know if we should be playing other teams because I don't feel safe.

Covid has also affected school. We missed a quarter of last year and some of this year. We have had to do virtual learning, which is not the same at all. Also, we all have to wear masks and social distance. Gym is entirely different. We used to play dodgeball and basketball. Now we can only do activities by ourselves. It is not fun to play alone or never get to do group work in class. The only time we see our classmates' and teachers' faces are under a mask or on Google Meet.

Covid has affected everything. Some stores and restaurants have closed. Also, every time you do get to go to a store or restaurant, you have to wear a mask and social distance. My mom will rarely let me go to a store and never to an indoor restaurant. We only do pick up, which is not nearly as fun. A lot of people, including us, had to cancel their vacation. We were supposed to go on a Disney Cruise in November. Obviously, that is not possible during these current times.

While Covid has changed almost every area of my life, it hasn't changed everything for the worse. One good thing that happened during the pandemic is that we still do get to play outdoor sports. Another good thing is that we still get to see our friends, even if we are on a chromebook. We also got to spend a lot of time with our family that we never would have been able to if we had been in school and running around with place after place to go. I have missed many things during this time, but it has also been nice to slow down and just enjoy being together.

ADDISON TAYLOR, GRADE 5

Coronavirus

Coronavirus has been bad in some ways and good in other ways. It's been bad because people are dying from it and we have to wear a mask. We can't do a lot fun things we used to. It's good because all of the places that are still open are not crowded. No one in my family has got the virus yet. I'm not scared of it at all.

BRONSON TAYLOR, GRADE 5

The Pandemic

The pandemic has not changed my life too much. I liked that school closed early because I got to skip on to middle school. I did not get to see my friends and tell them goodbye though. I got to stay home and play games when school closed.

BRYCEN TAYLOR, GRADE 5

Covid Worries Me

Covid-19 has gotten me worried. It affects my mom and dad. They work at a dental office. My mom is the dentist so it affects her the most. I'm really worried about her. I try to help out around there as much as possible. I help clean and sometimes file a few things. It's hard on me because my mom is pregnant and I'm scared. I am relaxing a little because she has the vaccine.

Although I'm glad about a few things during this time. I've been going outside a little more. I am also happy I can work from home. I love the coziness. I love that I can sleep in. I've been with my family a lot more. That is how the pandemic has affected me.

MALLORY WATSON, GRADE 5



Lee High
School

A Time of Togetherness

This past year, our world has forever been altered as we all had to adapt to a new standard in living. Though it was new, we learned and grew with each passing day. In this new standard in which we found ourselves, many chaffed at the restrictions placed upon us for the safety and hopeful continuance of our society. However, not all was bad. Through the mandates of perceived hermitage, we found ourselves and rediscovered our kin. While being closed in, we began asking questions and telling stories. Like a renaissance of our forefathers' day, we had to rely on ourselves and those in our household for strength and support. In the process, we found our origins. A dialogue was struck. Hunting groups were formed. We finally left our phones on the table and reconversed with our mouths and eyes what we wanted to say and give. At dinner tables, living room couches, bedside stories, and backyard vacation spots, we shared memories, hopes, dreams, and also fears. This united us as a family and as a community. Our elders' stories of life and experience took on new meaning as they remembered their immigration, old pandemics before wars, and once thought forgotten skills of ingenious survival and artistic craftsmanship. We found silver linings in what the world wanted to tout as a raincloud. The pandemic forced us together in more ways than one. Covered dishes were left at doorsteps. Cards of encouragement were left in mailboxes and taped to porch swings. "I am here for you," "You are in my thoughts and prayers." Human endeavor and compassion won out.

These thoughts are what I have conveyed to my students through this school year. As we ruminated on our blessings, a narrative was born. We all have stories to share and ears to hear them. Reading through our entries, so many are finding new perspectives in their households, and new outlooks on life. Though we may have been apart; many staying at home, while others braved the storm, together we are a family unit sharing one another's origins of determination and life, and also dreams of a brighter future.

ALEXANDER LONG, LEE HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHER

JILLIAN SKIDMORE, ENGLISH 8

Thanksgiving Turkey

I am made in an air fryer.
I take hours to cook.
It has been a tradition for over 40 years.
After I am done everyone eats me!!!
Feast!Feast!Feast!
I am all gone now!
Just spirit is all I have left now
You will eat another one of us next year.

HANNAH BLAIR, GRADE 8

Thanksgiving at Granny's

Over the past couple of days, I collected information on my Nana's Thanksgiving from when she was a little girl. She went to her granny's house for Thanksgiving every year. She said that sometimes she can remember the smell of the kitchen while the food was cooking because it was that good. When it came time to go to granny's house, her mother would dress her and her siblings up nicely. She put them in dresses and other very nice clothing. The only people that wore pants were her dad and her brother. Once her mom and dad got them all ready, her dad drove them to the country where her granny and grandpa lived. Granny started fixing the meal three days before because it was all made from scratch. Her granny would make homemade

dressing, homemade bread, and her grandpa refused to eat a store bought turkey. He would go out and kill one, then granny or grandpa would pluck it and granny would cook it for dinner. Her granny would also fix homemade apple pies and a big chocolate cake for dessert. Her mom and her aunt always made the side dishes. They always had such good food at her house and a great time. Her granny had a big, long table for everyone to sit at. Not only did granny love her children and her grandchildren, but any visitor that stopped by would also get invited to the meal. Granny always said that they had plenty of food to go around. Granny was a dear, sweet Christian lady who loved all and all loved her. Thanksgiving was her favorite holiday and it was very special to her.

GRIER CRABTREE, GRADE 8

Traditions at Thanksgiving

This year's Thanksgiving was no different from all of our other ones. All of my family gathered together at my mamaw's and papaw's house, as we do every year. Unfortunately, I know for some families that wasn't possible, and they spent Thanksgiving alone. My mamaw was able to cook all our favorite dishes, which included corn pudding, sweet potato casserole, a turkey, mashed potatoes, broccoli and cheese casserole, and so many more dishes. I hope that we get to continue our Thanksgiving traditions at my mamaw's house for years to come.

RYLEY CRABTREE, GRADE 8

My Family Legend

My great aunt, Mary Fae grew up in Linefork, Kentucky with few accommodations. After graduating high school, she moved to Cumberland, Kentucky where she met the love of her life, J.V. Creech. He was a tile setter. Their profession led them away to Florida for a few years. Upon returning to Cumberland, they decided to grow their own apple orchard. Out of the twenty-five trees that they purchased, one seemed different. After consulting with other nurseries and county agents, he found that this tree was producing a totally different kind of apple. They learned that this process was called natural mutation. They got a patent on the apple tree which was called Scarlet Gala, which brought them royalties for many years. Even though they are now deceased, the business is still being operated successfully by family.

MAYA ECHEVERRIA, GRADE 8

Christmas This Year

This year was different from every other Christmas because of the COVID-19 virus. COVID-19 has impacted the whole world and not being able to get together for holidays. My whole family usually gets together for Christmas. My sister came two days after Christmas day. My brother came a few days later and my other brother came three days after that.

After we opened presents Christmas morning, we went out to go sledding and we saw a side-by-side in the driveway. My grandma stayed with us for the first time in forever. We didn't get to do what we do every year. We usually get together and have a big dinner and open presents. We have fun and talk and tell jokes all day. I was just happy my family and I were able to get together and celebrate Christmas. The day our Lord and Savior was born in a manger in a barn.

I feel like maybe next year will be better and we'll actually get together and not wear masks wherever we go. We can get back in school and learn while being able to see friends.

ANDREW HOLMES, GRADE 8

A Family Recipe

My mamaw, Becky Jones, makes the absolute best lemon pie. She will make lemon pie for special occasions such as birthdays, Christmas, or Thanksgiving. I love her pie recipe. It is creamy but tart at the same time. The meringue on the top is sweet and fluffy.

Ingredients you will need:

1-¼ cups sugar
6 tablespoons of cornstarch
2 cups of water
3 egg yolks
3 tablespoons of butter
½ cup of lemon juice
2 teaspoons vinegar
1-½ teaspoons of lemon extract
1 pastry shell (9 inches), baked
Pinch of salt

First in a saucepan, combine sugar and cornstarch. Gradually add water. Cook and stir over medium-high heat until thickened and bubbly. Reduce heat to low; cook and stir for 2 minutes. Remove from the heat. Stir 1 cup of hot filling into egg yolks. Return all to pan and bring to a gentle boil. Cook for 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat. Stir in butter. Gently stir in lemon juice, vinegar, and extract. Pour hot filling into the pastry shell. For meringue, combine water and cornstarch in a saucepan until smooth. Cook and stir until thickened and clear, about 2 minutes. Cool completely. Meanwhile, beat egg whites in a mixing bowl until foamy. Gradually beat in sugar until stiff peaks form. Beat in vanilla and salt. Gradually add cornstarch mixture, beating well on high. Immediately spread over warm filling, sealing edges to pastry. Bake at 350 for 10–12 minutes or until the meringue is golden brown. Cool. Store in the refrigerator. This makes about 6 to 8 servings.

HANNAH JONES, GRADE 8

Favorite Thanksgiving Recipe: Pumpkin Roll

1 cup sugar
¾ cup plain flour
⅔ cup pumpkin
1 tsp baking soda
1 tsp cinnamon
3 eggs

Mix and bake at 350 for 10 minutes and let cool.

Filling

2 tsp butter softened
½ cup nuts (optional)
1 cup powdered sugar
1 8 ounce cream cheese
1 tsp vanilla extract

Put your baked sheet in a dish towel which has been covered with powdered sugar. Unroll and spread the filling over it. Then roll up and cut.

KAITLYN LANGLEY, GRADE 8

Family History

Many years ago my great-great-great grandfather owed most of Harlan County, Kentucky. His wife and him had eleven children, eight were boys and three were girls. He worked in the mines for a living. His wife just stayed home and took care of the children. Some of the boys were moonshiners, some were bootleggers, and the others were coal miners. When the moonshiners knew the law was coming up into the mountains to look for stills, they would get their children to run up in the mountains and hide the jugs of moonshine. They never did get caught with any moonshine stills. But there were a few times they would go to sell shine and get chased by the law; sometimes even shot at. But they always got away. Some of the men would run with the other guy's wife. They would get caught with them and one of them was shot and killed. A few liked the ladies too much and the others liked shine and working. Least to say they were all a wild bunch.

JACOB MARCUM, GRADE 8

Family Legends

I don't really know if this counts as a legend, but it's a story my dad told me a few times. About one year ago was the last time he told it to me. It's about the time he had apparently met Bigfoot. The story starts when he was a kid, around thirteen. He was alone in the dark part of the woods. It was dark enough that you couldn't tell if it was day or night. He was playing there waiting for dinner when a large branch fell right next to him. He jumped out of the way and realized there was something large in front of him. Too small to be a bear, but a little big for a person. He said it grunted at him then walked away. After that, he ran home and told everyone but nobody believed him.

I think it was a bear but he still believes it was a bigfoot. I still remember how well he expressed his emotion when he told me it. One time I went to that part of the woods to see if it was true, but all I found was a rabbit and a lot of random trails. None were of a bigfoot though, so I'm sure it was a bear if it actually happened.

JACEY ROWE, GRADE 8

Family Legends

Imagine you were sitting at home and someone broke in. Although they did not just come in and leave, they came in and kidnapped you. Would you scream? Would you cry? Or would you have no time to do either? This circumstance happened to a forty- four year old man named John Davis Sage and a few others. The legend said that some of them escaped. Others were killed. Although how did they escape? And how did the others not survive?

During the summer of 1862 while the Civil war was upon us, a man named John Davis Sage was accompanied by a group called the "Witcher's band". The Witcher's band is a group who lived in Lee County who rounded up men whose belief was suspected of Union sentiment. As "The March of The Sages" book phrased it, the Witcher's band "preyed upon those citizens of Southwestern Virginia", the group took John Davis Sage and the others to a church called Blue Springs. The church is still there today where people have their religious services. My father got married in the church about six years ago, and so many more memories have happened there, even bad memories.

When they got to the church, they “barricaded” all of the windows and the single door. Outside of the church were trees. They built a campfire under one of the large trees. Today the tree does not stand although it was said by my grandfather that there was a deep depression under the tree, where even a small person could live under it. This memorable occurrence reminds us today that many terrible things can happen in a place you never thought of.

Two of the men who were held captive were thought to have lifted up a puncheon in the floor. The two were small enough to crawl under the floor and escape, while the others were too big and could not fit. If you visit or go to a church service in the building, you can see how the floorboards are pulled up. The book says that their captors were furious, and they were brutally slain. That night John Davis Sage was decapitated. The widow of John Davis Sage then married his nephew after the terrible occurrence.

This legend has gone through the Sage family for generations, and will continue to thrive through the brains and memories of many. Under one of the trees in the churchyard there was the carving of the tree where they had the campfire, my grandfather had seen it as a boy when the tree was still standing. Since the legend has been passed for many years, there will be many more years to come.

CLAIRE SAGE, GRADE 8

Family Stories

When my grandma and grandpa were dating, my grandma and her cousin Carol went with their boyfriends, my grandpa Ralph and Carol’s boyfriend Jackie. They were going down in this hollow to pick chicky pins. My grandma and Carol went on their own down the hollow.

On their way back out, it began to get dark. As it got darker with every step they took, they could hear something stepping behind them. When they stopped, it would stop. When they would walk, it would walk. They began to walk faster, and it would walk faster. And then they heard an eerie scream and realized it was a black panther. They took off running and never looked back.

They ran to the top of the hollow to the gate, when something jumped and grabbed both of them. They screamed and nearly fainted as they were sure the panther had them. It was then they realized that it was my grandpa and Jackie. Carol and my grandma nearly beat them to death.

MAKAYLA SHULER, GRADE 8

My Brother

I didn’t even cry when my brother died. I don’t remember what I felt because I was six years old at the time. All I remember is getting to see my brother every so often. My brother was one strong human being. He was born with major heart defects that would put challenges in his life. He had heart surgery at Duke when he was just ten days old. The first year of his life was filled with heart surgeries. My brother fought through all of these like the fighter he was. My brother was born on the Marine Corps Birthday which is November 10th.

Jacob was a kindhearted person. He liked Star Wars, and he liked to hang out with his friends and family. Jacob’s favorite subject in school was history. He loved history. He made a six hundred on his History SOL in fifth grade. I used to try and take pictures of him. I remember that he didn’t like to have his picture taken.

My brother at the age of twelve had to go to Vanderbilt Children’s Hospital to undergo a very major heart surgery. My brother battled through multiple procedures during this time. I had to visit my brother and my parents every few weeks since I was living with my grandparents.

“I love you Jacob!” Daniel said before leaving the hospital.

“I love you too!” Jacob whispered.

It had been six to seven months in the hospital when something very major and life threatening happened. After his transplant his aorta ruptured, and the doctors did everything they could to fix it. A couple of hours later he was pronounced dead.

My memory was important for me because I love my brother and miss him. I miss my brother everyday of my life, and it's hard to live without him. It is hard to think about all the things my brother and I could have done but never got the chance to do.

DANIEL SPRINKLE, GRADE 8

Traditional Thanksgiving Recipe: Cranberry Casserole

Ingredients

- 4–5 apples (3 cups chopped)
- 2 cups cranberries raw
- 1 ¼ cups sugar
- 1 ½ cups quick cooking oats
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup flour
- ½ cup chopped pecans
- ½ cup butter melted

Directions:

Spray a two quart casserole with cooking spray. Chop the apples, put apple cranberry sugar in a casserole combine.

Bake at 350 for 1 hour until bubbly or lightly browned.

ALEX WILLIAMS, GRADE 8

Earliest Memories

A list of memories my older family members have told me and ones I have experienced. I remember going to Florida with my family household, aunt and cousin. We had plenty of fun there, of course there were bad parts, and it wasn't perfect, but it was still fun. I hold the time dear to me, but not just as a memory, an experience.

I remember various times going out places with my parents and brothers in the past, it was enjoyable. I specifically remember one time when I was really little, us going to a mall, and I had a pet hermit crab with a Hello Kitty painted shell. I remember a time when my siblings, my aunt, cousin and I all went to a little town. I do not remember what it was called or where it was, but we had fun there. We went looking in a couple small stores I think and then met up with the others and continued to have fun together.

I can remember a period of time where I had fractured a piece of my elbow, it was scary for me at first being as young as I was but I eventually got over it and instead made jokes about it. I would joke around with my siblings about it. Looking back, I find it ridiculously funny,

One time when I was younger, my brother called me a messy baby. I was young at the time and quite sensitive. My siblings and I used to argue a lot and got used to it. I remember for some reason I got really sad and wrote about it in my diary. I still laugh at it to this day and have the paper it was written on.

HANNAH YOUNG, GRADE 8

Coal

Coal mining is in my blood. My father is a coal mine foreman, both my grandfathers were coal miners and even my great grandfathers. I have been told a lot of stories about coal mining all of my life. There are two that I remember the best.

My great grandfather on my mom's side owned a little coal mine in Hignite, Kentucky (close to Middlesboro, KY). My grandfather would tell me and my cousins how he would help his dad in the mines when he was only 8 years old. He and his brothers would use a pony and cart to bring the coal out to sell to the bigger mining companies. On the weekends they would cut timbers for his dad to use in the mine to support the top. He said when he was young a mining engineer came to their house and drew up a map of his dad's mine and my grandfather had to pay him \$100 and that is when my grandfather decided to become a mining engineer because he thought \$100 was such a big amount of money.

My grandfather on my dad's side has a very different story. In 1983 he was working in a mine close to Martin's Fork, Kentucky. He had been working for about three hours when there was a rock fall and a rock as big as a car hood fell and pinned him to the ground. It took them three hours to get the rock off of him and get him to the ambulance. He spent a week in the hospital and over the years he has had seven back surgeries. My dad was 8 years old when it happened.

I know a lot of people in this country think coal mining is dirty and that coal miners are just dumb hill-billies but I know the sacrifice some have made and I know that it takes a strong and intelligent person to walk into a deep hole and mine coal. I have no plans to work in the coal mine but I am definitely very proud of my coal mining family.

BRAYDEN ALLEN, GRADE 10

Alien Invasion

I had been working on writing a short story when my English teacher, Mr. Long asked us to write a short exciting mini-story to get a short story going. My challenge was to write something to grab readers and pull them in to read the rest of a story. Here is what I came up with:

It was a stormy Thursday night. I had just finished dinner and started watching tv when there was a knock at the door. I was skeptical about answering the door because it was 11:47 and I hadn't invited anyone over. I continued watching TV when I heard another knock. This time I was going to answer; it had to

be important right? No one would be knocking at this time if it wasn't important. I reluctantly opened the door only to find an out of this world looking creature. It was like a slug but the size of a puppy and looked as if it was made of jell-o. It was pink with purple spots, had little antennas, and little ears. It was



Class "Burns Night" ~ 'To the Lassies'

very cute but it just had to be an alien. The creature seemed like it wanted in, but I didn't want to. What if it was dangerous? Just as I was closing the door it rushed in and started running all over my house. The TV went to static and the lights started flashing. I didn't know how to get this thing out. I grabbed a broom and started pushing it out the door when a huge beam of light shined down. When I looked up I saw that it was a UFO. All of a sudden thousands of those creatures came out of the ship. It wasn't just my lights flashing now it was all the street lights and all the houses. People came out to see what was going on when all the aliens ran into the houses and took them over. That was when we realized there was an alien invasion!

RAVEN BURGAN, GRADE 9

Coon Hunting

From October 15 through March 10 of every year since I was five years old, coon hunting has been an important part of my life. "Coon hunting," or hunting for racoons, is not only a sport, it's also a family tradition. It is a tradition that has been in my family for generations. Southwest Virginia is known for coon hunting. The area is excellent terrain for coon hunting. Hunting for the racoons is important to my family because it's a way we spend time together. I like coon hunting because I like hunting with my dogs; it's just us and the outdoors—often at night when the racoons are active. Coon hunting is fun because it is fun training your pups; it is my hobby and my favorite thing to do. Coon hunting gives me the chance to train my dogs while at the same time it gives my dogs time to enjoy what they love. I have a special bond with my dogs that can never be replaced. When I coon hunt with my dogs, we have each other's backs. Both sides of my family have "coon hunters," which are certain breeds of hound dogs which are especially good at tracking down racoons. The time we hunt allows us to spend time together, train our dogs, and enjoy the beautiful land and mountains that Southwest Virginia has to offer. It is the thrill of the hunt and the friendship I have with my dogs and the closeness I have with my family that keeps me coon hunting night after night.

AIDEN BYINGTON, GRADE 9

Strange Things Happening In Lee County

My friend, Abbey and her Grandma once told me a strange story. I had a hard time believing them because it just doesn't seem real that these things could happen, but they would never lie to me about something so unimaginable.

When Abbey was young, about seven years old, she was simply sitting at the kitchen table. She was coloring on a page and she needed some more colors, so she went to the cabinet to get the box of crayons. As she opened the cabinet door, she saw something that she had never seen before. It was a small, black creature, sitting there. "So it was like, a demon?," I asked. "Yes," she said, "It was just sitting there, staring



Class "Burns Night" ~ 'Response to the Laddies'

at me. It started hissing at me and I screamed and ran away.” Abbey ran to her mother’s bedroom and told her about this strange figure she had seen. Her mother went into the kitchen to see for herself and the demon was nowhere to be found.

Abbey’s grandma, Jean, then told me her story. She was alone at her small home in Sugar Run. While she was cleaning, she heard some pots and pans start to clatter in the kitchen. She went to see what had caused the noises. As she walked into the kitchen, she saw a tall, black figure, standing right in front of her. She said that it was speaking quietly and in a language that she did not understand. She was afraid that it was going to attack her so she grabbed a broom and started to hit the creature. It just disappeared into a cloud of dust. Later that day, she went back to the kitchen to look for the demon. She could not find it anywhere.

As years have passed, nobody has seen these creatures. Abbey and her Grandma have not the slightest clue as to where they went or why they were in their houses. Are they still there? Will they come back to haunt the family one day? We may never know.

BLAIR CALTON, GRADE 9

Our Christmas

One snowy, cold Christmas day, me and my family woke up fairly early and put on all matching Christmas pajamas. After that we opened all of our presents and then ate breakfast and watched the Macy’s Christmas Parade. We do that every Christmas morning so we can enjoy family time during the morning. However, in the afternoon my family and I all go sleigh riding but before that we make sure to add something even more fun than that to our day. When we all get out there, my family and I jump into the snow with our bathing suits on, I know crazy right!

These past few years we have not had a lot of snow so we could not do this tradition but finally this year we had our first big snow in a while. After we ate breakfast we all changed into our bathing suits and my dad into his swimming trunks and then we started to go make our way outside. It was freezing cold but we toughened it out and jumped in the snow. My mom was being dramatic and said that she was about to have hypothermia but we knew she wouldn’t. My family and I stayed out there for like 2 minutes because it was too cold.

The next couple of hours we all sat inside drinking hot cocoa and watching Christmas movies/marathons. When it got around 3 o’clock we finally went sleigh riding at a big hill at Pennington Middle School. It was a really fun time and a great family bonding time. The rest of the day went by kind of slow but that wasn’t a bad thing because it’s Christmas! Some more of my family came over for dinner and we ate and then they left and we all went to sleep after a long, hard, fun day.

CHLOE CALTON, GRADE 9

My Great Grandmother’s Broccoli and Cheese Casserole Recipe

Hello, my name is Jacob Crouse and for my contribution to the origin project, I will be writing about my great grandmother’s broccoli and cheese casserole recipe. This recipe is special to me because for years, we have had this dish at every family gathering. This includes Thanksgiving, Christmas, and when our whole family meets on a weekend to visit each other and learn about what everyone has been up to. This broccoli and cheese casserole is the best casserole that I have ever eaten. I have had people outside my family hate broccoli and they always end up loving this casserole. The best part about this dish is that it is extremely easy to make.

Here is a list of the ingredients required to make the casserole:

- Broccoli
- Shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- Shredded swiss cheese

Shredded Munster cheese
Onion
Salt and pepper
Dressing
Cream of mushroom soup
Butter
Buttermilk

The best part about this dish is that it is extremely easy to make. The directions are below.

1. First, cut all your broccoli into small pieces and marinate them in buttermilk and let it sit for about an hour.
2. Next, add dry dressing into boiling water and let it simmer for 15 minutes and set all your dressing and set it to the side.
3. Then, spread melted butter in the bottom of a glass baking dish.
4. Subsequently, layer in all your marinated broccoli into the glass baking dish.
5. Next, put in your cream of mushroom soup over the broccoli.
6. Now, chop the onion and put it in the baking dish.
7. Then, add equal parts of all your cheese on top of the onions.
8. After that, add all your stuffing on top.
9. Finally, put it in the oven at 450 until it looks like you want to eat it.

One thing you may notice about this recipe is that there are not exact measurements for the ingredients. Grandma always liked to add different amounts of ingredients based off what her cravings were. Each time grandma made this broccoli and cheese casserole, it would always taste different because she did not use exact measurements. I feel like this is what makes her casserole unique from others because most recipes have measurements of each of the ingredients. I liked the casserole the best when she used only one can of cream of mushroom soup and added extra broccoli and cheese. I have loved broccoli my entire life; and you can never have enough cheese. Grandma had a special way of making this broccoli and cheese casserole. It is like she had a secret on how to make it taste like heaven. Other family members can make this casserole and it tastes great, but no one can recreate the taste you get when grandma makes the dish. I have eaten this dish for many years, and to this day, I have never had a bad experience with this dish. I could eat this casserole for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It is a dish that you never get tired of because it has a unique taste each time. This recipe may not be perfect, but it will never let you down.

JACOB CROUSE, GRADE 10

The Start Of A Life

Ever wonder how much time and thought it takes to put into a wedding ceremony? Some people put so much thought into something as simple as a legal change. . . . But love, right. Marriage is the goal, everyone says. Not just to just get married though, but to stay bonded to someone for the rest of your life. Thankfully my parents were blessed with that.

To begin, after talking to my parents, a lot of preparation was involved in getting ready for the main ceremony. First and foremost, a date needed to be set. After much consideration a date was set for the summer of 2002, July 13th. The ceremony would take place at Jonesville First Baptist Church, in Lee County, VA. My mother, grandmother, and uncles grew up attending this church. Both sets of my grandparents were also married at this church, which made the decision a lot easier when deciding where to have the wedding.

My parents had important decisions to make when picking who would be involved in the wedding. They chose important friends and family to stand beside them on the special day. Those chosen were the ones who helped plan important details involving the big day. Including, photography, food, music, reception, decorations, and flowers. After speaking to everyone, they chose who they wanted and planned out the rest.

The wedding itself was absolutely beautiful. Friends and relatives, from both sides, gathered around to witness my parents as they were united in marriage. The bridesmaids came down the aisle in a pale yellow and lavender, then came my mother in a bright white strapless dress. Everyone was shedding tears because of how moving it was. After saying their vows and the ceremony was over, they took lots and lots of pictures.

Lastly, as they entered the reception they were announced Mr. and Mrs. Fortner. They celebrated with friends and family as they danced, ate lots of food, and cut the beautiful wedding cake. Everyone danced until the evening winded down and my mom and dad left for their honeymoon. And just like that, their life together began and they've been married for 18 years and counting.

EMMA FORTNER, GRADE 9

Goat or Acrobat?

We only have 2 goats now, but we used to have 3. His name was Rocky, named after my obsession with Rocky Balboa, and his favorite snack is Saltine crackers. He is a brown Kikko goat with horns, a little white spot on his lower back, and the cutest floppy ears. Rocky is the friendliest animal I have ever been around; this goat truly thinks he is a dog. Anytime someone came over he would jump on them and lick them just like a little puppy. We even had a collar and a leash for him and took him on walks.

After taking him on walks all the time, he realized that the grass was greener on the other side so he started jumping the fence. Every time we would go outside he would jump the fence and come greet us by licking and rubbing on us. Then he got to where he would jump over even if we weren't outside, walk up the steps, and come onto the back porch and stand there looking through the window to find us.

We always joked that we had an acrobatic goat. He jumped extremely high and had an amazing balance. One day we caught him walking across the top of the wooden fence with ease just like he was on a tightrope. Rocky was not only an acrobat but he knew how to dance. I would hold my hands out and he would jump and put his hooves into my hands, and we would dance together.

We never worried about him running away because he would always come back home and jump right back into the fence with his brothers, but over time he got more adventurous. He started to wander around the neighborhood, and everyone loved it. He would even follow my neighbor into her house when she went to get her mail. It was great until he started causing some trouble, like eating all of the rose bushes outside of a woman's house and even jumping up on a car. The last straw was when he walked across the main road and almost got hit, that very day my mom called our old neighbors who had just moved to a huge farm with all their goats. We ended up taking Rocky to live with them where he can run around outside the fence until his heart's content, without having to worry about him getting hit or causing a wreck. Although I was in tears when we loaded him up, I knew that was the best thing for him. Every now and then, we get pictures of Rocky having the time of his life at his new home.

ANNABELLE FRITTS, GRADE 9

Bad People?

This story was originally an answer to two questions I often asked when I was a young child: *Why are there bad people?* and *What if I'm a bad person?* Specifically, I would ask these questions to my great-grandmother, or my mamaw. And, hearing these questions, she would always point to the woods behind her house and tell me this story, which, according to her, was actually about the first woman on earth, Eve. Eve is also the name

of the first woman in the Bible, however, this is not the same story as in the Bible. In fact, I now notice that the story actually resembles both the story from the Bible as well as the myth of Pandora from the Greek tradition. Recognizing this, I made one change from the original story: The main character doesn't have a name, or even a gender at that. I did this so the character could be anyone the reader so desires, whether its Eve, Pandora, or the reader themselves. In any manner, once my mamaw finished telling the story, she would tell me that the same power that the main character had over evil, I had, and I could rest easy knowing I wasn't a "Bad Person." While this story was originally for me, I hope that it can bring peace to anyone who hears it.



Getting into Reading

I was alone. The Woods was my only companion, and yet even she would not provide me shelter, give me warmth. But how could I expect more? My friend was not fair or just, she simply was. She did not have the capacity to care or empathize with my suffering, for she was a force of nature. And in a way, suffering is nature.

Now, reflecting back on these things, I was naive to think that the gift from The Woods was a blessing. Yet, when the dark dogwood tree appeared in front of me that fall evening, my curiosity pulled me towards it. *Has The Woods brought me a gift?* I thought. *She has finally decided to help me!* I began to walk closer to the tree.

The closer I became, the more wonderment I felt. I realized the bark of the tree was not simply dark wood, but rather coal. It had been carved into a magnificent design of three vines, weaving together to create one, cohesive trunk. From its branches burgeoned pure white leaves. Whenever a breeze would billow through the limbs, tiny droplets of white fell from the leaves and floated to the ground, like snow on a winter's day. I could have stood there the entire eve, gazing at the tree's beauty, if it weren't for the startling voice behind me.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" the voice said. I turned around to face my sudden visitor, but instead viewed an empty grove.

"I made it just for you." it said again. I realized at this moment the voice wasn't coming from any specific direction, but rather everywhere. Then, like a knife, the realization struck me. There's only one person that can create actual, living trees.

"The Woods? Could it really be you?" I asked into the forest.

"Yes, of course it's me! Who else could create such a gorgeous tree?" she asked.

Now that I knew who my supposed visitor was, more questions flooded into my mind. *Why did she make this tree? Why is she here?*

"I wish I could answer all your queries, but I'm afraid we haven't got much time," she cautioned, as if reading my mind. "Like I said, the tree is a gift for you, my dear."

Looking at it, I could still not process the beauty of the tree. The longer I gazed at it, the more details that showed themselves to me. Details like the black roots roping in and out of the ground surrounding the tree, or the silver light that seemed to radiate from the tree, bathing anything near it in a gray haze. *There must be a mistake*, I thought.

"This can't be for me," I called. "It's simply too stunning."

"Now, I think I should know who I give my gifts to," The Woods replied, her voice underlaid with a stern tone, letting me know she would leave here with the tree in my care. Before I could protest once more, she added, "There is one important thing you must know about the tree."

"What is it?" I asked, giving up on any hope of avoiding ownership of the tree.

"This tree is a beautiful thing. The most beautiful thing I have ever created, in fact. Yet with its beauty, the tree has a terrible bane: It must never be touched," she answered. She paused for just a moment, in which I had unwittingly assumed she was rethinking the decision to present the tree to me. She most certainly was not. "You may live near the tree, and it will provide the protection you have so longed for. Live at the tree, and you will never hunger, nor will you thirst. But touch the tree, and I will revoke any sense of home you may have at this place, and you must wander, lost within me once more. Do you understand?"

I opened my mouth to speak, but I could already sense that The Woods's presence was gone. My mind raced with questions, thoughts, and worries. *Why mustn't I touch it? Is there something within the tree?* I buried them down, knowing I would never get an answer to a single question.

And so, I did as The Woods said. I lived near the tree for many months, adoring its beauty and living in peace for longer than I ever had before. It was a nice and simple life, I should not have wanted more. Yet, I could never truly rest while I was there.

An intruder constantly lurked in the shadows of my mind, beckoning me to touch the tree. It would feed me lies that I so desperately wanted to believe. *The Woods wouldn't give you a gift if you couldn't fully enjoy it! Just lay a hand on its bark and experience the gift to the full!*

These intrusive thoughts would hound me, day and night, until the final day of my time at the tree.

After being tormented and abused by these lies for so long, my curiosity finally overcame me. I looked at the tree, which had changed since it had first appeared. It now towered over any other tree in the forest, proving that it was a gift directly from The Woods. Its silver radiation engulfed the entirety of my eyesight, so that there wasn't one object I could see that wasn't covered with a gray filter. Most beautifully, the leaves had undergone a complete metamorphosis. Their pure white had been switched with the most brilliant shade of pink I had ever seen. The only white left was a thin line of it shooting down the middle of each leaf. The tree was more beautiful than ever.

I walked towards the tree, and realized the tree had not only grown in size and beauty, but in power. Instead of myself walking towards it, the tree seemed to be pulling me forward. I began to hear a pounding coming from the tree, pulsing like a heartbeat. I tried to turn away, realizing my mistake too late, but the tree was far stronger than I.

As I was forced to continue my walk to the tree, the once beautiful silver light that surrounded the tree began to blacken into a frightening dark fog. The beautifully carved trunk of coal began to crack and splinter, starting from its base and chasing upwards towards the top of the tree. The wonderful leaves fell, leaving only dry, fissured branches. The tree that stood before couldn't be the same tree as before, could it?

When I finally reached the tree, I was being pulled with such force that I led out my hand to brace myself. As soon as my hand reached the bark, all at once everything stopped.

I was no longer being pulled towards the tree. The once overwhelming sound of constant pounding had silenced, and the dark fog that had covered the area finally dissipated. It was peaceful once more.

I realized at this moment that my hand was still resting on the bark. I could feel the coal, smooth and slippery, with its newfound splints and grooves. Although the pulsing sound had been quieted, I could still feel it coming from the bark. It seemed to be flowing through me as well, as if the tree and I were one. I removed my hand from the bark.

Then, further up the tree, another large crack formed, bigger than any I had seen before. I began to see things exit from it. These beings were the most terrifying things I had ever seen, even now I am frightened by even remembering them. I saw Pain and Hurt leave the tree, destroying everything in their path. Sickness and Disease leapt from the fissure, spreading throughout the world. War and Conflict flew down, leaving a

trail of bloodshed behind their trail. Fear and Hate spewed from the tree, infecting more than even Sickness and Disease. More Evils than I could count left the tree that day, and all it was all I could do to stand there, dumbfounded in terror, and watch as these atrocities entered the world. The last I remember from that day was falling towards the ground. And then, I was asleep.

I woke peacefully, nestled in a bed of brush, covered from the sun by a canopy of leaves.

"My dear, I am so glad you're awake" the familiar voice of The Woods said.

Filled with fear, I began to speak, "Oh, I am so sorry! I never should have touched the tree. Oh, please, please forgive me!"

"It is perfectly fine, dear," The Woods began. "I always knew you would in the end."

"What? You knew of my inevitable fault and you *still* gifted me the tree?" I asked, completely and utterly confused. "Why?"

"It had to happen," she explained, "They are the way of the world, these evils. They will be a part of this world no matter what."

Obviously seeing my confusion, she continued like this, "Here, take a seed, for example. If a seed falls to the ground, it already has what it needs to grow. It has dirt and soil, below it, and rain and sunlight, above it. This seed will grow, even without a farmer. The seed could possibly grow rampant, covering up and controlling whatever it pleases. However, if a farmer decides to take care of the seed, watering and farming it properly, they can control where the seed grows, and how it grows. Like the farmer, you have power over these evils! While they are inevitable and will grow, just like the seed, you can keep them at bay, and you can keep them away. Do you understand, now, why I gave you the tree?"

Then, sitting in the brush, covered by leaves, I began to understand. By letting the evils into this world, I controlled them. They did not control me. They would never have full power over me, because I have the authority. I would never, ever let them take control of me, or anyone else, the way the tree did. Ever.

"Yes," I finally answered, "I think I do."

TALMADGE GUNTER, GRADE 9

Basketball: The Game I Love

Basketball is one of my favorite sports to watch and also play. Just the concept and speed of the game make it one of the most interesting sports in my opinion. There are so many different factors which make the game its own and I will be describing them.

Let's start with the basic rules of basketball. For each team only 5 players are allowed on the court to play at once. When moving with the ball you have to dribble it instead of just carrying it around. When a player's dribble has been packed up they are allowed two steps before a travel is called. A travel is when a player takes more than two steps without dribbling the ball.

Another part of basketball which sets it aside from another sport like football which is a full contact sport is fouls. There are many different types of fouls including, personal fouls, shooting fouls, and flagrant fouls which are intentional. Every player is allowed five fouls a game and if they exceed that number they are no longer allowed to participate in the remainder of the game.

There are also a few different positions which all have different jobs and skills in order to help with the progression of the game. First is a point guard, which I am. Their job is to handle the ball and to help set up offenses. Normally point guards are fast and shifty and have good ball handling skills. Next is shooting guards. These players normally play on the wings during an offense. They are usually the best shooter on the team and can also handle the ball pretty well. Normally these players can still handle the ball but also have a really good shot.

The next position is normally made up of the bigger and taller players. The next position is posts. In an offense posts are normally found in the paint ready to receive the ball and get a close shot. These players are taught to work around their defensive player which is also typically taller so a post job can be very difficult at times. But if played well a post can score many points just in a matter of minutes.

Basketball is a very enjoyable game and as the game is aging more and more moves and strategies are being discovered. Back when basketball was first getting started you didn't see people dunking or dribbling all fancy like you might today so the game has evolved so much over the years. Basketball is so fun because you can always learn a new move which keeps it interesting to play.

CASSIDY HAMMONDS, GRADE 9

Family Reunion

Some of my favorite ceremonies are family reunions. We usually only have them on my dad's side of the family, but they are always really fun. There are always a lot of people there and I know all of them, so it's not awkward. Everybody helps with the food, so there is always plenty of food and desserts to go around. There are always kids to play with there so you're not bored out of your mind.

There are always a lot of people at the family reunion because my dad's side of the family is huge. In his direct family he has 7 siblings, 4 sisters and 3 brothers. So, I have a lot of aunts, uncles, and cousins. The reunion is usually held at my Mammie's house in Middlesboro, KY. The people on his side of the family live all over the United States, one sister even lives in Michigan. Most of them live around here or are just a couple hours away. My brother, sister, and I always have a bunch of kids to play with, they have some their age and I have some my age.

The food there is always amazing. Before we eat that's, all anyone talks about, is eating the good food. I have an uncle I call "Uncle Hoghead", he always brings me greens to eat. The greens are amazing, I don't know what he puts in them but they are really good. There's always fried chicken, pizza, casseroles, potatoes, and corn. We usually have more than that but the list would be huge. The desserts that are there are amazing. There is pudding, pie, cake, and pretzels with peanut butter on them, those are the best ones there.

It is usually a very happy atmosphere when everyone is there. Nobody is sad or crying, but there is usually drama being talked about. Somebody's mad at their spouse or something of that nature, but I don't listen to it, so I go outside and play with my cousins. Down the street at my great uncle's house is so kids in it. After we swim, we usually go and play soccer, football, or some other kind of outside activity. We are usually one of the last people to leave the reunion.

We usually stay and help clean. Once the cleaning is done my dad usually stays and talks to his mom (her house is where the event is held every year). When he is finished talking to her he tells us it is time to go. My brother, sister, and I give everybody a pool, we always go for a swim. It's not a big pool but it's perfectly fine with five or hugs and tell them goodbye. Then we load up in the car and leave.

GRAYSON HUFF, GRADE 9

Wild Man Gramps

My papaw was a wild child. He liked to cause trouble. Him and his friends would pull pranks and do dumb things. Most children would get in trouble for the things that him and his friends did, but they didn't. They didn't because they were friends with their principal.

Before he went to school, he did scouts. His scout leader was also his principal. He had become friends with him through scouts, so when he did bad things in school he didn't get in trouble. His teachers got tired of him not getting in trouble with his principal, so eventually they started punishing him themselves. After school him and his friends liked to go hunting and fishing. They did this almost every day. Some days

they would even skip school to do this. A few times they even got the principal to skip with them. They got a lot of hate for being able to get away with everything.

The principal was afraid to get in trouble for being too lenient with them. He eventually started to pretend to punish them. He would give them detention, but he actually let them go as soon as everyone left for the day. Sometimes he made them do community service, but he actually took them hunting and fishing.

They somehow never got caught, even though they did this for years. After they graduated, they all still remained friends with the principal. They would still hang out with him. They remained good friends their whole lives. The principal died a few years ago, and my papaw was really upset.



English class on location

CADENCE JOHNSON, GRADE 9

The Differences Between Softball and Baseball

Softball and baseball are a little different but mainly the same. When you place the sports, you run around the diamond after you hit the ball you run as fast as you can so you don't get out. As you're running you have to make sure you touch the square bases. The baseball field is bigger than a softball field. In softball you use a bigger yellow ball with red laces, in baseball you use a small white ball with red laces. If you've ever been to a softball or baseball game you notice that they each pitch differently. When you play baseball you pitch overhand, but in softball you pitch underhand. But in each sport, you still practice hard with batting practice, pitching, working on plays, and fielding the ball. In batting practice, you can soft toss and hit the ball into a bownet, you can work on hitting the ball off of a tee into a bownet, or you can hit the ball while it lives either into the field or in the building. I love to play softball but that's just my opinion because I've played it ever since I was able to sign up for t-ball. I love going to softball and baseball games they're really fun to go to and watch, yes, they can be competitive, and yes you can get hurt like all sports. If you've ever been hit by a softball you would know that it hurts pretty bad, there's usually a knot and a bruise that is purple, blue, and black but it's not always like that sometimes it looks different.

SHAWNNA LINDSAY, GRADE 9

Making a Difference

What makes me unique is my personality and achievements. Many people have different qualities, goals, and traits that make them different from others. People in the Appalachian region have made a big difference in our region. Many families have worked small and interesting jobs such as teaching, mining, and construction which have worked together to make a truly unique community we have created together. Just as we all have different jobs, many in this region have stories. My most memorable story is that of my pet bird who could talk and copy sounds he heard. His name was Clyde and he was an orange parrot with a blue tint on his feathers. In addition, we have traditions around here that make each person different. For me personally, my favorite tradition is around the celebration of July 4th. It is my favorite celebration because we express our freedom. We remember what our ancestors did for the benefit of their children and their children's children.

That patriotism is something I can find in many here in our region. That celebration of life is what makes us unique, different, living our lives together.

JIMMY MARTIN, GRADE 9

Memorial and Labor Day Events

What makes my family unique is that we have a big celebration every Memorial Day weekend and Labor Day weekend. This has always been one of my favorite times of the year because my cousins from North Carolina come to my house. We have a cookout with my dad's side of the family and all of my cousins from North Carolina. During the cookout, my dad usually makes steaks, burgers, and hotdogs on the grill, while my mom makes all the side dishes and desserts. After we eat, we all play card games and board games, it's really fun. Then when it gets dark we make smores and roast hot dogs over a fire. My favorite part is the next day, we go fourwheeling in the mountains with all of my cousins from North Carolina, it's really fun and it usually lasts the whole entire day. My family has done this tradition on Memorial Day weekend and Labor Day weekend for around the last 20 years. I chose this tradition because I find it pretty unique and really fun.

MATTHEW MOORE, GRADE 10

How To Make Apple Dumplings

My grandmother, Jean, loves to make Apple Dumplings. She has known how to make this for 20 years. One of her friends gave her the recipe to try and she has loved it ever since. She enjoys making this because she says it is good with vanilla ice cream.

Here's some of the things you will need to make Apple Dumplings:

- ♦ Measuring cups
- ♦ Measuring spoons
- ♦ A rolling pin
- ♦ A baking dish
- ♦ A bowl

Here are the ingredients for the dumplings:

- ♦ Two cups of plain flour
- ♦ Two teaspoons of baking powder
- ♦ One half teaspoon of salt
- ♦ Ten tablespoons of Crisco
- ♦ One half cup of milk
- ♦ 4–5 apples

Directions for dumplings:

1. Now mix together ingredients and divide into six equal parts
2. Take each piece of dough, roll it out
3. Add a handful of apples then pull it up to the top
4. After you have done that to all the dough, place each one into a 9 by 11 baking dish.

Here are the ingredients to make the syrup:

- Two cups of white sugar
- Two cups of water
- One stick of butter
- One half teaspoon of cinnamon
- One fourth teaspoon of nutmeg

Directions for syrup:

1. Mix all the ingredients and bring to a boil for two minutes
2. Pour the syrup over the dumplings
3. After that, you are ready to put them in the oven at 400 degrees to bake for 40–45 minutes

My mamaw has always enjoyed making Apple Dumplings. She still remembers the first time she made them. They turned out wonderful. Our family loves the way she makes Apple Dumplings. I don't think anyone can make them as good as she does, they are delicious!

LINDSEY NICKODAM, GRADE 9

My Family's Ghost Story

This story is unlike any other. This ghost has been in my family for many generations. He has made his way through all of our homes. I'm going to start from the very beginning. This story started it all.

It all began in 1932. My great great grandfather was alone in his new house he had built. The stairs would always make strange noises around midnight, or early in the morning. He considered that to be very weird since he was the only one in the house. One morning he noticed the stairs had a wet liquid on them. Nobody had been there, so it made no sense. It continued happening for weeks, and so did the noises.

He eventually decided to sell the house to a family of 4. They never mentioned anything about noises or wet drops on the stairs. He met my great great grandmother shortly after he had sold the house. They got a house of their own, but not long after he started to notice the noises. There was nothing on the stairs though. This continued happening for over a year.

They had a son, named Sherman, in 1934 and the noises suddenly stopped. They transferred from the stairs into Sherman's bedroom. It would sound like footsteps across his floor. One day they just stopped. Years passed by and they hadn't heard a peep.

When Sherman got older, he met his wife and built a house of his own. They moved in and the noises began again. The cycle just continued over the years from house to house. We have come to no explanation except a ghost. It is the only way these events are possible. I never would've thought ghosts were real until this. Honestly, what else do you think it could be?

KAELYN PENDERGRAFT, GRADE 9

My great grandmother, Gerry Utech

Geraldene Janice Gomper was born on February 26, 1932. She is the oldest of six. Including, two brothers and three sisters, Barbra, Ralf, Sharron, Bryan, and Norette. Growing up, Gerry had an average childhood because she came from a middle-class family. Games she liked to play were corner baseball, which is like "The Sandlot" but played at the corner of the street. She was a very good kid. She was extra obedient and never really had to be disciplined. So, all of her early childhood memories are fond. Since it's been so long Gerry cannot remember the name of the elementary school she attended, but she remembers the routine. As soon

as students entered the school they were expected to report to the cafeteria which had meals like iodine pills, chocolate milk, and crackers. After you ate you were expected to report to class. A few hours later the bell rang signaling gym time. Then students went home for lunch. When finished they came back and attended the last class period. Years later Gerry entered south Milwaukee high/second ward which was a middle school and high school. She loved listening to Mrs. Gilbert who taught English and speech. Which inspired her favorite hobby reading. Though she was very good at English she despised her Latin classes, she can speak a little but hated that class. Unlike many people, Gerry was quite popular.

She had a lot of friends but few were as close as Beverly Gedos, Signey Holland, Marianne Bogt, and Inna Swanson. She took part in activities such as bowling, by mist book committee /yearbook club. Even though she was popular she decided not to go to her school prom but instead went to other schools. Like most young ladies at the time, Gerry had no other dream, but to become a great housewife and a mother. Throughout her life, she had many encounters with love including a blind date and the football player she had a crush on. None of those people compared to GP. who she married and had six kids with. All of which include James who was born on 10/ 30/53, Keven born on 10/ 27/54, Rickey born on 8/15/55, Robby born/11/20/1957, Cindy was born on 1/ 20/59, and her youngest and my grandma was born on 8/ 8/60. Now Gerry is 86 and has a big-big family. With multiple grandchildren, something she's always wanted. She is a very wise woman who regrets close to nothing. Her only regrets are she wishes she would have learned to swim and dance. The person she misses most is GP who passed /3/8/2005. She stays very close to her other family members though, and even lives with her 2 daughters.

FAITH SCHROCK, GRADE 9

Appalachian Folktales

Have you ever heard of an Appalachian folktale? Probably not unless you live in or near the Appalachian Mountains. Folktales, myths and legends are part of growing up in the Appalachian Mountains. A Folktale is a folklore that typically consists of a story passed down by generation to generation, folktale may also refer to fairy tales or old wives' tales. These stories are what makes sitting down at the dinner table with grandpa so interesting. A good folktale could change someone's perspective about something, or leave them with nightmares. The Appalachian region has been known to have numerous folktales and stories.

For example, the folktale about "The Bell Witch," doubtless one of the most famous ones around here, is the story of one family's tragic experience with a poltergeist, or violent ghost. It takes place in the early 1800's as John Bell and his family were moving from North Carolina to Tennessee. The Bells were successful farmers moving for more land, however, the family was burdened with strange and unexplainable occurrences. On the first night of the new move, Mr. Bell noticed something in the field while he heard noises in the house, all these activities were blamed on what became known as "the Bell Witch."

As folktales started to reemerge in communities and gain popularity, the first folk festival took place in Asheville, North Carolina in 1928, in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains. As folk festivals started to spread around the country, many communities started celebrating their music, food, and culture. Some folktales have inspired books, songs, and movies, like "Mutzmag," a movie about an Appalachian folktale. Or the "Foxfire" books that embrace and preserve the Appalachian region much like what "the Origin Project" is doing now! These are perfect examples of how Appalachian folktales inspire people all over.

PAYTON SEALS, GRADE 10

A Deer Price to Pay

You're driving in your old, run down pickup at night, just on your way home from work. The air was cold, and the heat was on full blast. Snow gently fell from the sky, and you decided to promptly reach and grab

your phone to check your messages. The road was empty, and it was late, so there shouldn't be anyone out and about, right?

So as you turn on your phone, with your eyes off the road as you hummed a tune on the radio. After a few moments you glance up, just to make sure everything was okay, only to see a huge buck in the midst of the road.

You panic and swerve, the tires squeal and you can feel your heartbeat in your throat out of pure terror. Slowly, the world stopped spinning around you and you glanced around in a daze, nauseous. You pull yourself out of the vehicle and fall on all fours, retching despite the fact that you hadn't eaten much of anything since you'd had lunch, but nevermind that.

During your moments of retching and not vomiting out a thing, you hear footsteps. Or, well, hoofsteps. You look up, and the buck that nearly ended your life towered over you, his antlers sharp as knives.

He bent down to where you were eye-to-eye, and let out a bone-chilling laugh, baring humanlike teeth, almost as if he were smiling. "You're not meant to be here, are you?" He asked, his voice deep as can be, and it sent a chill down your spine. A wave of nausea hit you again, and you let your head drop.

This wasn't good. Your vision went blurry and you retched, then immediately tried to stand, and fell on your butt. The buck seemed amused, almost cruel, and fear rose back into your throat as you began to half crabwalk half scoot away, the mighty creature slowly advanced along with you.

Your ears began to ring, and you let out a pained, blood-curdling scream, begging for the animal to leave you alone, to let you live, but that wasn't the case. Tears streamed down your cheeks, and it felt as if blood had begun to gush from your ears. The animal bent, its antlers pointed at you, and it all went black. . .

Except for a voice. A sing-songy tone, its pitch rising and falling like they didn't know how to speak. "The god of the woods will take you away, and you shouldn't have gotten in its path. You will soon never see the sweet light of day, and the things you may see will soon be your last."

NICOLE SMITH, GRADE 9

Jessica and Justin Marcum's Wedding Ceremony

On Wednesday September 9, 2020, I sat down with one of my family's friends Jessica Marcum and I interviewed her about her marriage to Justin Marcum. They met at the Pennington Gap fair. She was about twenty-five when they got married, and he was around thirty. They have been married since January first 2011. Justin had a son named Jacob before they met and he was around the age of three when they got married. They got married in Gatlinburg Tennessee in a beautiful cabin. Just a simple wedding, nothing extreme. Gatlinburg is a beautiful place to visit if you haven't already. I think they had a perfect idea getting married there. When they gave her roses, they got them wrong but she tried not to think about it. But the wedding still went on! There wasn't much to do on their wedding day because it was thunder storming. The families couldn't decorate their truck because it was raining so much, but they still had a wonderful time! In their wedding ceremony it was just Jessica, Justin, and Jacob. She didn't have any bridesmaids and he didn't have any groomsmen or a flower girl or ring bearer. Just the three to keep it simple. Justin and Jacob wore black tuxedos with red bow ties. Jessica wore a white strapless wedding dress with sequences all down the dress. Her soon to be sister in law Amanda did her hair.

Both of their families were there to celebrate with her. Her step-father Wayne walked her down the aisle to her almost new husband. When the preacher was talking to them during the ceremony Jess started crying and then he told Justin to give her a reassuring hug but that made her cry even more. The whole time during the ceremony Jacob was confused because he thought he was getting married! Jessica put a necklace on Jacob's neck because he was becoming her step-son and he started crying because he didn't want to get married. Jessica and Jacob were both crying. Jacob cried because he didn't want to get married. Jessica simply tears of joy. They had their reception at Damon's. They had a beautiful white wedding cake. At the reception they



Getting into Shakespeare

finally got there and got dressed and headed to the field. We won the game and we had to start making our way to the wedding now. I finally got there and had to change. it was hard work since I was sweaty already from the game and also dirty from all the mud.

As the ceremony was about to start, we all heard screaming outside. I ran outside to find one of my step brothers bleeding pretty bad. I ran and got my stepdad and my mom. They packed him into the truck and started making their way to the hospital. Everyone back at the wedding still packed everything up and we left to go check on him. That day was pretty good other than the fact my step brother cut his leg open. We got to the hospital and checked up on him and he was fine and all. But unfortunately had to walk on crutches for quite awhile. He had cut a nerve in his leg which allowed him to bend it back and forth. He had to have three surgeries just to fix it. A few weeks later, we had another ceremony for the wedding since they never got to have the first one. That day was a pretty great day for my mom as she finally got the perfect day after all.

KATELYN STAFFORD, GRADE 9
CAYDEN TICKNER, GRADE 9

The Big Ceremony

A pretty big event in my life was when my mom got remarried. Everyone but me and my step dad and his children went to the wedding to set everything. But as for me and his kids, we had a football game we had to go too. It was an hour drive there and we had to wake up pretty early. We

Hunting Trips

One thing that my family does that not every family does is that we go on an annual hunting trip. I think this might be unique because I don't know a lot of people that go on a hunting trip almost every year. This is special to me because it gives all the men in my family to get away from the rest of the family and we all get to bond. The hunting trip usually lasts about a week. We try to mix up where we go. This past year, we went to Jackson, Ohio. 5 years ago, we went to Mt. Rogers. 7 years ago, we went to Black Mountain. Every year different people go, sometimes we will have 10 people then sometimes we have 3 people—it all depends. When we go up on mountains, we will either rent a cabin or we will take a big tent with a wood stove to heat it up. When we go up on the mountains, we cook burgers, hotdogs, and other things you can cook on a small grill. When we went to Jackson we stayed in a hotel and ate at local restaurants.

CARSON WILLIS, GRADE 10

Always Pay Your Debt

On Friday, August the 28th, I sat down with my great uncle Ben Willis to interview him about his ghost encounter almost twenty-seven years ago. He told me about this customer that he had. The customer's name

was John. He was about 5 feet 7 inches, slim build, and always wore a cap. He was one of those people who drew a check at the first of the month.

But sometimes John needed a credit loan so my uncle Ben would loan the money to him. John was very adamant about paying the money back whenever my uncle Ben would loan it to him. One time, in August 1991 when my uncle Ben would have been 43. He lent John about maybe 25 dollars. Then that Monday, Ben read in the newspaper that John had passed away. Ben was quite sad about his friend's passing; he never thought twice about the money owed to him.

It might have been about three days after Ben had read that John had passed. When Ben was at work with his son and the other boy that worked for him. Ben decided that he needed to run some errands, so he left the boys in charge of the shop while he ran out. When he got back, he asked the boys if everything was going ok and if they had had a lot of business. They said that everything was ok and that they had the usual amount of business like always. Then Ben's son had brought it to his attention that John had come in and paid the money back that he had owed Ben.

My uncle Ben said, "Boys, that's impossible. John passed away three days ago. They've already had his funeral and everything." The two boys and my uncle Ben were all freaked out, and they all tried to dismiss it at first. Because My uncle Ben thought that it could have been someone else. But the boys were sure that it was John.

My uncle Ben told me that they all three remember that good old John always pays his debt back. Ben hasn't seen the ghost since then, but he will still think about it every once and awhile. The one boy with Ben's son still won't talk about it, even when someone brings it up. Ben has only told very few people, and on Friday, I was lucky enough to become one of the few.



Onstage and in the Spotlight

CHLOE WILLIS, GRADE 9

Cherokee Lake Dangers

It was July 4th, 2015. It is the Fourth of July and today my family and I are going to the lake for the weekend. Our favorite lake to visit is Cherokee Lake. On our way there I got a notification on my phone that there had been sightings of a big lake monster. There were pictures included of a weird animal swimming in the water but I didn't really believe it was real because I've been to the lake many times and never saw anything out of the ordinary. People always say they see things but it is just a stick or something else and not a real-life monster.

When we arrived at the lake we went to our camper that is lodged by the edge of the water. We put the boat in the water so it would be ready to go on the lake later. The water looked so pretty, clear and sparkly from where I was standing. We started to unload everything from the car into the camper. There were a lot of things that we had to bring for the weekend so it took a while to get everything. After we got everything unloaded my mom made some lunch since we haven't eaten all day. Then once we ate our lunch we got into our swimsuits and onto the boat to ride around for a while. When we got about a mile or so down the lake my Papa stopped and anchored the boat for us to jump in the water. My brother and I jumped in first and the water was so cold but it got warmer as we stayed in there for a while.

When we got done swimming in that spot we got back on the boat and rode down the lake a little bit more. We rode around for a while and my brother and I wanted to get back into the water. After swimming for a little bit more I was about to get back onto the boat but I felt something weird touch my foot. I thought it was just a fish or a stick. I got onto the boat and told my parents that something touched my foot and they said it probably was nothing. When we got back to the camper it was the night fall and my Mawaw made dinner for us. When we finished eating dinner I helped my Dad build a fire and we roasted some marshmallows and swam in the water for a while. While I was in the water the same thing touched my foot again and I told my parents again and they said it was probably a fish so I believed them.

Saturday morning, we got on the water early so we could fish. We stopped on the lake somewhere to fish and my dad got a hard bite and his line broke. He said it was a really big fish to break his 50-pound test line. He didn't get any more bites in that spot so we went somewhere else. The sun started to rise and it's always so beautiful on the water. In the center of the sunset there was red, orange, purple and pink. It was one of the most beautiful sunrises I have seen before. Once the sun rose all the way up we got into the water. This time I didn't feel anything on my foot but my brother Darrien said he felt something touch his hand though.

Later that day my grandfather and father went fishing by themselves and they said they caught something huge. They said when they pulled it up they could see its head and it did not look like a normal fish. It looked like a fish you would see in a movie and not real life. On Sunday we got on the boat for the last time that weekend. We all jumped in and saw something enormous jump out of the water. It was the big fish everyone was talking about. It was the biggest fish I have ever seen in my life. We were all trying to get on the boat so no one got hurt but the fish jumped up and got my Mamaw. I was in shock and screamed loudly. We got on the boat and drove off but the fish rammed into the boat and knocked my Dad off into the water and the fish got him also.

Then the fish hit the boat hard again and that hit almost flipped us over. My Mom fell into the water and I threw her a life saver to help save her but she didn't get it in time and the fish got her as well. It was only my brother, grandpa and I left on the boat. My Papa drove the boat to the shore and told us to get off and get onto dry land, we listened and watched from the shore. He tried getting off the boat after we were safe but the fish got him before he could get to land in time. My brother and I made it but we didn't know what to do because the fish got all of our family members. We looked and hugged each other knowing we were the only ones left.

SYBELLA YEARY, GRADE 9

The Incredible Story of my Grandpa

Unlike most of the other grandfathers, my grandpa was not born in the Appalachian region. My grandpa was born in 1945 in a rural town called Fujian, China. The story of my grandpa has always been fascinating to me. My grandpa was born in a poor family. As soon as he was old enough to help my great-grandparents, he had to help out the family in raising money, so they could have enough food to eat at night. My grandpa gave up his education so that his younger brother could go to school. To me education is extremely important, so when he gave up his education when he was in elementary school, I was shocked. After working in the farm for many years, he joined the army in Southern China when he was 18. He would often say that training in the army was very harsh. He was there for about four years of harsh training, he graduated military school as an artillery soldier. His job on the frontline was to provide artillery support to the other soldiers in his regiment. He stayed in the army for about two more years until he returned back home to Fujian. He soon fell in love with my grandma. They got married in 1969 and 4 years later had my dad, but in 1979 he was called back to duty in the army.



"The Incredible Story of my Grandpa" by Benson Zhang

When he returned to the army, he was faced with a battle zone: the Sino-Vietnamese War. The Vietnamese had invaded nearby Cambodia, which was an ally of China. So, in early 1979, China dispatched soldiers to the Sino-Vietnamese border. My grandpa and his crewmates arrived at the border just a few days before fight broke out. My grandpa said that he fired about nearly 100 artillery shells daily. He said that it was hard to confront the Vietnamese, because they would often engage in guerilla warfare, which makes it very difficult to engage the enemy. During a sudden Vietnamese offensive, my grandpa and his crewmates were ordered to cover the retreat of his regiment. He said because he fired so many artillery shells in the artillery guns, it was overheated. At one point of the fight, the noise was so loud that his ears started bleeding, but he continued to serve his duty. After nearly 7 hours of nonstop firing, he finally got the order to stop. He was soon evacuated to a hospital, but he got the sad news that he had permanently damaged his ear drums and that he may not be able to hear anything for the rest of his life. Luckily, the hospital transferred him back to mainland China to get a pair of hearing aids. When he finally recovered, the war was over. It lasted for only 3 weeks, but had caused thousands of casualties on both sides. My grandpa retired from the army in 1980 with lots of medals and awards.

When he returned home, he didn't know what he was going to do for the rest of his life. He was offered free schooling by the army, but he didn't find much interest in it. Instead, he went to go work at a steel mine. In the meantime, he also had my aunt. He worked in the industry for a couple years until he finally retired in 2001. From then on, he and my nana just took care of me and my sisters and his other grandchildren.

My grandpa's story always fascinates me every time he talks about it. The part that satisfies me the most is his courage to continue fighting until the very end. Today, my grandpa is 79 years old and has started a garden where he grows vegetables and flowers. I try to go to China every year and visit him and have him tell me more about his past. He is not only a grandfather to me, but a role model.

BENSON ZHANG, GRADE 9



Morrison
School

JAMI VERDEROSA, HEAD OF SCHOOL

Morrison School

This year brings with it a whole new set of challenges for everyone. Since March 13, 2020, the world has struggled to adapt to and deal with COVID-19, a dangerous novel virus still with many unknowns. Friday, March 13, 2020 was a very sad day not only at Morrison School, but throughout the Commonwealth. Students went home that day thinking they would be back on Monday. Shortly after 3:00 p.m., school leaders were notified all schools in Virginia would be closed for two weeks.

Morrison School staff worked tirelessly throughout the weekend to prepare lessons and instructional learning kits. Two weeks of closure turned into being closed for the remainder of the school year and our Summer Learning Program was canceled. The building was so empty and quiet. The staff and students did the best they could with online learning but we knew we had to do everything we could to reopen in August face to face.

We all were aware that our return in early August of 2020 was not going to be “business as usual,” and we must all be flexible. It was important that parents and community members be flexible and understanding of this shift as educators begin teaching in the midst of what is currently uncharted territory. Some of our challenges included daily temperature and safety checks for all students and staff, individual instructional tools kits for all students, face masks, physical dividers in some classes, and air purifiers in each classroom. We spent time assigning bathrooms for each class, assigning one or two staff to handle things like heating lunches, medication distribution, photocopying, and developing a strict cleaning protocol in between classes as well as daily cleaning after students left for the day. Our goal for 2020–2021 was to do everything we could to stay open Face to Face. We have accomplished this by keeping our students and staff safe and providing high-quality learning each day.

There is no doubt about it: COVID-19 presents a significant challenge for education. However, as we have seen time and time again throughout history, our teachers are resilient; they are qualified; and they are doing one of the most crucial jobs in the world: preparing future generations of citizens to engage in an ever-changing and evolving society. If you are a teacher, please know this: your community supports you.

JAMI VERDEROSA, HEAD OF SCHOOL

MORRISON SCHOOL

SHANNON DABNEY, MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH

Horsing My Way Through COVID

One day this spring, when I finished riding horses, I got in the car and I heard my parents talking about this new virus called COVID-19. I didn't know what it was at first, but I picked up on it quickly. I felt scared while I listened to them. I knew it was important for everyone to stay safe. Since it affects everything, we need to be very careful about what we do and don't do. The virus is really bad so most times people cannot be with friends and extended family, unless they use social distancing, which by term, means to stay six feet apart at all times.

Social distancing was tricky at first, but I still got to ride horses at the barn and horseback riding makes me so happy because it is so fun. The hardest thing for me to do is to make a horse trust me. That does not involve social distancing, but it does take a lot of work. It requires my patience because the horse can tell if I am nervous. A horse named Venmo is the hardest to train. I try to train him to be a jumping horse, but there are a lot of jumpers and that means a lot of competition. There are also barrel horses, and barrel rac-

ing is really fun, too. As you can see, I have found a silver lining in this pandemic, and that is that I can still do what I love, which is ride horses. Horses are very patient and loving, and they teach me to be patient and loving, too.

I went to online learning at the end of the school year in 2019 because of COVID-19. It is so hard to do schoolwork at home, but it was so easy at the beginning to enjoy. After online learning I got to have some fun. It was a long time before I would go back to school in person. Online learning was fun for a little while, but because I know that I have to keep learning, it seemed very hard to do without my teacher right there. I have no idea how to do all of my work, but my teacher has to see what I am doing to help me, and when you are online, that is really hard to do.

COVID-19 is hard, but I'm getting better at handling it. We still have to fight COVID -19 even though it has been almost a year since the pandemic started. I still struggle sometimes because I cannot see my friends, but at least I am back to in-person learning, which helps. The effects of COVID-19 are really big and I cannot wait for it to come to an end. For now, I will keep doing my part to slow down the spread of the virus.

ELLIE CHAMPNEY, GRADE 7



MORRISON
MAVERICKS

From Building Forts to Fortnite

We all know that the world has good and evil. The problem with some of the evil in the world is that it doesn't always go away. One of those evil things in the world is the CoronaVirus pandemic.

Last year on my birthday, not that many people came to my birthday party. One of them that came was my sister's boyfriend Ethan. He was talking about a new virus. It kinda scared me and I believed what he said was true. To make sure, I talked to my mom about it. We were in the living room after my birthday and we watched the news on the television. My mom told me that the virus started last spring. She said it was a super dangerous virus that was making it hard for people to be near each other at all. In my opinion, I think scientists made it happen, but that is just what I think and it is okay if others do not agree. Either way, the virus was so threatening that we had to stay at home and could not even go to school.

I had to go to school online for a while. I did not like it. I could not hear or understand the teacher, and I missed my friends. Still, I learned a lot about using my chromebook. At least I still got to see my friends during class online. I guess that even though I was not in school, I was still lucky to be able to work from home. I bet it was a lot harder for the kids that could not work on their computers from home.

Since I could not play with my friends outside, I learned to play with my friends online. We played games like Fortnite and Roblox. It isn't the same as playing in our backyards, but at least we still got to laugh and joke with each other. So, again, there is always a bit of good even in the bad.

One thing I missed the most was going to the store with my mom. I wanted to go to the store during the pandemic but it wasn't safe because the pandemic is happening worldwide and stores were not letting many people in, and most did not want kids in the stores, either. Since the virus was making people sick, I wanted to be safe, so I stayed at home like my mom asked me to. For a while, I was not able to go to the store with my mom. Then, as I learned to wear a mask and take precautions to not touch things, I eventually got to go once in a while. Even though I have to wear a mask and stay six feet away from people, I am at least protecting myself to be safe. It has been hard getting used to all of these new rules, but I can say that it has gotten better.

Even though there are problems in the world right now, that can't stop me from living my life. My school is nice enough to let us go in-person. Most schools still have to do online learning, but my school is lucky because it is small and private, so we have gotten to come back to learn in person and have fun! I know that we still have to wear masks and social distance, but at least I get to enjoy school, and have my best friends and kind teachers to help me out through the day. It is not the same as it was before, but after a few weeks of online school, I can say that it is better than being home. Over time, I hope we can all get back to talking and playing without worrying about masks and touching. It would be really nice to play some tackle football and build forts with my friends again.

WALKER DARNELL, GRADE 6

Keeping Friends Through COVID

Before the world wide pandemic known as COVID-19 started, people could go places, like to a movie theater or go see live music. It was okay to go across the street in your neighborhood to a friend's house, or go to a new restaurant. The first time I heard about COVID was one day at school when my friend Owen told me about a new virus. They called it a pandemic, and it was supposedly worldwide. To be honest, this made me feel very unhappy. I was worried about what it could really do to the world.

Soon I found out exactly what it could do. Sadly, I could not play with any of my friends because of COVID-19. Owen was my best friend, but we could not play at Owen's house or my house due to COVID-19. Since it affected me from playing with my friend Owen, we found other ways to play with each other, and that was by playing online games together. Even though it stunk that we could not see each other because of the virus, we still had fun seeing each other during the games. So in a way, we found a way to make a bad situation better by going online at the same time and playing games.

Eventually, they closed down schools due to the pandemic. My online learning experience during COVID-19 was very difficult. The online schooling was different, and much more complicated from normal school. I did my online lessons at home. COVID-19 has affected kids from going to school, adults from going to work, and families from going places together. In August, my mom told me that I would be back in school. It was a new school, but they were doing in-person learning.

It is now January, and still some kids can't go to school and play with friends because they're stuck at home, but I can because I go to a private school. During the day, when I'm at school, my mom and dad go to work. I have the most fun in the gym at Morrison school. The best game we play is basketball. We pick teams by talking to each other. Even though we have to wear masks and can only play some games that limit a lot of contact, we are still all there together and not at home learning by ourselves.

Even though, COVID 19 has caused some bumps in the road, we have learned to make the best with what we have. Masks are not very fun, but they keep us safe. Not being able to interact is a little weird, but we are trying to keep from spreading the virus. I hope that there will be a vaccine to help make COVID 19 not as dangerous, and hopefully people will be more safe and we can start getting back to normal.

REECE FRASER, GRADE 7

Making the Most of a Bad Situation

Everyone in the world had a happy life. Parents and their children could go shopping, kids go to friends' houses, go to the movies, go to dance class, and lots more fun and enjoyable activities. That is until one day, and in almost an instant, all that all changed.

I was sitting on my Ipad on a sunny, November day playing a game. I got a notification from the news. In my mind I honestly didn't care, so I swiped out of it and continued in my game. A day or two later, I received a few more notifications and then even texts from my friends. They seemed upset and said that all these notifications were to warn everyone about a virus that could affect us all and prevent us from going places, seeing friends, or even going to school. The government, or the senate one, decided to name this pandemic COVID-19. I really don't understand the COVID part of the name, but I definitely understood what the 19 meant, they were talking about the year, 2019, because that is when the virus actually broke out. The entire world was affected by this virus. At first, I was a bit scared of it myself, but after I had actually experienced the virus firsthand, I personally, didn't think it was that bad. I really thought the media was making it worse by telling people about it in such vast reports. I truly understand that they want to warn citizens, but this massive reporting of data, which does not even seem to be agreed upon between professionals, has really gotten people super scared of it.

The theory of how it happened was that it began and flourished in populations of China, then the people in China flew on airlines carrying it to different places and then spreading the virus world wide. That's what I heard, however there is probably a much bigger story in actuality. At my school, the governor of virginia decided to go virtual because the virus was getting so bad. It was very hard because in person, if you need help, your teacher can come right to your desk to help you. On virtual, however, it's a little more difficult. The good part was that online school wasn't too bad. We only had 2 classes each day, and we were at home so it was kind of nice. My puppy and I got to do school together. It wasn't very easy, actually it was much harder than I thought. Sometimes we had problems with wifi and other things like getting on to a website or finding an assignment. It was great getting the rest of the day off after school, but there were real struggles in getting support to finish lessons and do homework, sometimes. School is much better in person, in my opinion. Once it sunk in that this would be how I did school for a little bit, I realized that it was going to be a challenge, but hopefully for not too much longer.

It was hard having to stay away from my friends due to COVID. I wanted to hangout with them, but for my safety and their safety, we had to stay home. School had shut down so there was not time to see my friends there. So, to pass the time at home, I would facetime with my friends. Normally, I just watched Youtube or played video games to keep from getting bored. I wanted to play with my friends but I wasn't allowed to. The good that came out of it was to think, "Just imagine, if this happened and I lived in the 80's, I would have to use a phone connected to the wall." At least now we can call friends on facetime or text them and see what they are doing and actually see them while we are communicating. So we made the best of it by teaming up in games and having fun battling other groups online. It wasn't the same as playing in person, but at least we found ways to play, so there was a small silver lining in my online learning experience. Even though we are lucky enough to be back at school now, we don't do alot together out of school, but we still have our online teams, and then we can talk about our games the next day in class, so that is better in a way, too.

COVID-19 was hard to get used to. It wasn't fun having to stay away from friends and family. We did it to keep everyone safe. I'm back in school now which is awesome and even though I have to social distance myself from people and wear a mask, I still get to be taught and see my friends. I'm also grateful that we don't have to do online school because it's easier in person than virtual. I'm also very thankful that my school lets us buyout. Buyout is where you earn the privilege to go home early and have no homework on Fridays. School is a little bit different, now though. We have to wear masks, social distance from people, eat lunch

in the classroom, clean the desks each time we switch classes. It's complicated at first, but you get used to it. Some kids in our public schools still have to do virtual learning. A lot of kids at my school actually want to go virtual because they think we will be able to sleep in or something. I know that if we go virtual, we have to be up in time for class, and listen to the teachers instructions, then do all of our work on our own after instruction. I prefer going to school. Overall, I am enjoying school, and happy that I get to be there during the day. Although I sometimes give my teachers a hard time, I prefer them being there for me when I need help. I prefer learning alongside my amazing teachers!

So, in conclusion I would have to say that COVID-19 was really bad but we still made the best of it. We hit bad spots in the road but we got over them. The sickness can't keep us from living our lives. So we made the best of it and now it is getting better!

WILL NORTON, GRADE 8

Cherish What You Do Have

As of eight months ago, families could go to parks, go to church, and so on so on. People could have a great time outside. You might be thinking "what is he talking about, we know all of this already?" If that's what you're thinking just hear me out. One day I was at the hospital when I heard my grandparents talking about something called "Covid-19". I did not even know what they were talking about. I didn't even think about the fact that it might be something way out of my reach. Like I was a baby trying to get out of my crib. I had to listen. They were saying Covid is getting bad. At the time my mind felt governed, I felt like I tried to get out of the conversation, but I could not. It was like I was walking into a dark scary room wanting to walk away, but being too intrigued by what was to come. Even though it was almost a year ago I still remember it like it was yesterday. I feel like no matter how normal I tried to make things, there is always something that can not be.

After a while, I started thinking that nothing could be normal. I did not think about all the good things that I still have. Even though I was not in class in school with all of my friends, and we could not physically touch each other, we could still see each other. We still had each other's back. Sure, it was sad that we had to see each other over a computer, but it is what we had. I am happy and grateful for that. You know what, not everyone feels that way. That may be the case, but this is about how I feel. I am thankful for still having a school experience. I honestly do not like school that much, but it is one of the only things that Covid allowed me to have at the time. At least I am interacting with other kids my age.

As far as other things outside of school, many things have come and gone. Family time is one of those things. At first, we had lots of family time, and it helped me not think about Covid. Then my family was taken from me, by limiting how many people should get together and socialize. I could not do anything about it, the whole state was in isolation. I could not go anywhere near my grandparents, my friends, or even my favorite aunt. I'm sure that some people reading this have felt the same way, and just like me, you felt that maybe that it's got to get better. I hope it has for you, I know it has for me. I am now allowed to go to all my families' houses to laugh and cut up with them. At times, I worry that I might not be able to see them much longer. That's what I thought five months ago. At this current point in time, I feel that I understand that whatever Covid does to me or my family, is out of my reach. That I should not try to make anything better. That is not my job. My mom said not to worry, my dad said to be strong. The truth is I do not know how to be. At this time it is hard to be strong. I try, trust me I do. Sometimes I am, and sometimes I am not. Even though I can not be strong sometimes I still have things that I do to help.

One of the things that help me be able to get over not being strong is my family. My family helps me get my mind off of things. They try to let me have as much fun as I can. I thank them for that, and I would not be as composed about this virus if it was not for them. I think that this is a good time to be with your family. You know what, even friends if you are taking safety precautions. That is what we all need right now. We need the people we love most right now. Even if your dog is your favorite person, just hold onto that love.

I just feel bad for all those little kids that can't go to a playground. I know how bad this is for me. At my age, I know what this is. I know what "Covid-19" is. These little three, four and five-year-olds don't. All they know is that they are sad that they can not go see their best friends or their grandparents, and probably very confused. They do not get clarity from their parents because their parents do not know what to say. How do you tell a cute little kid how a "man-killing" virus is out there, and they can not go out of the house because they might get it? All they can say is that everything is going to be okay when they do not know if it will be. In all this dark time there is some light, like taking your child to see their aunts and uncles from six feet away. For a child being stuck in a house twenty-four seven, I bet they are thrilled to be able to see someone they probably have not seen in a while. I know they are because I was once that kid. Even though I am not a little kid anymore, I still get thrilled to see my family.

You have probably noticed that I have been talking a lot about grandparents. That is because I think grandparents are a huge part of everyone's lives. I know for me, my grandparents are a huge part of my life. They have been with me since day one. They were there for me when I was down, and they kept me well-grounded when my spirits would soar high. They have had a huge impact on who I am today. That is why I am talking about my grandparents so much, and I am sure lots of kids and adults feel that same way.

Overall, Covid is a sweet but sour subject. I feel a lot better and safer when I'm home, having family time. That's when I am not at risk, but even though I can not go to a restaurant and eat, or go to parks without wearing a mask. I still have my family by my side, and the school keeping my head out of the clouds. That's why I think that I and everyone really should be happy for what they still have.

BRAXTON PETERSON, GRADE 6

Making the Most of Things

Most kids picture hanging out, going to stores and having fun, as a normal life, right? But what if something terrible happened, all of the sudden, "BOOM!" and then a deadly pandemic broke out all over the world? Well it did happen. This pandemic was called Corona virus also known as Covid. It was a virus that can cause a very bad sickness that could kill you. Since the virus broke out they started talking about it on the news. In just one day there were over 3,419 new cases! That's crazy! Well at least to me, it seems crazy. You might be wondering, "Where and how these cases started to rise so fast?" Well, I am about to tell you. Basically, the theory is that the virus started in China and they tried to hide it but the virus got out of hand and reached almost everywhere in the world, so that means we all need to stay safe.

At the time the news mentioned the virus, I was going to school at Indian Trail. I heard some people talking about this virus called Covid, but I had no clue what it was. For a while, we kept going to school. Soon, my parents had heard that Indian Trail was closing soon, so I just went ahead and moved to Morrison School.

After I moved, everything kinda slowed down a bit. I was going to start basketball, as well as some other people so I signed up. I was on my way home and my mom had told me that they had postponed basketball until January. This news made me super upset, but I kept in mind that it would all be fine, because I would still be able to play, just a little bit later than I had planned. Yet, just before Christmas break, it was announced on the radio that JC Youth Basketball would be cancelled until further notice due to a recent spike in Covid cases. Now, I am sometimes finding it hard to see the silver lining when it comes to basketball, but I guess I can just practice at home for the time being until things get better. . .

My mom and I were in the car on our way back from school and Christmas was coming around. So, I asked my mom if we could have Christmas at our house this year because we have had so much going on and wanted to have a good change instead of a bad change, like Covid interfering again, because my family usually spends Christmas in North Carolina, and that is really exciting. I just knew that they would probably cancel our reservations, so this time I thought ahead and suggested to mom that we just spend Christmas at home to avoid the disappointment.

Since the end of 2019 throughout the entire year of 2020, things haven't been too good. School has been challenging, but at least we get to go and see each other in person. Even Going to stores and hanging out with friends is a little difficult because of social distancing and wearing a mask. Still, we are getting through it. I am sure that you are thinking, "Man, that must be horrible," and it truly is but we are all doing our part. Actually, I am sure that you are also experiencing this same epidemic, unless of course you're reading this down the road and Covid is far behind us. In that case, lucky you! Aside from people getting majorly sick, and some even dying, I would say Covid-19 wasn't that bad. It's just that the unknown can often be very scary, and when it involves the whole world, well that is just terrifying. Let's all hope that 2021 brings better memories.

ADDISON SPRINGER, GRADE 6

New Life, New Friends

Once, when I was sitting at the dinner table, my sister told me about a new virus called COVID-19. She claimed that it was very dangerous. I checked on my computer to see if it was true, and found out that it was. People thought it was very deadly at the time. As time progressed, I, along with many others, have found out that COVID wasn't as deadly as we thought it was.

Later on, during the summer, my parents were thinking of new school options for me because I told them that I didn't want to do online schooling anymore. They thought of two options, Elizabethton Middle School, or the one I am in now. I didn't really like the first option but the second one was sure to be the one I chose.

I went to visit the new school, and I realized that it was next to a big potato chip factory. This school was called Morrison School, and my parents had met with Morrison School teachers to discuss when I could be enrolled. The teachers decided that I would begin going to school on September 21, 2020. I was tired of online school at the time, so I enjoyed going to the school when the time came.

At the new school, I was trying really hard to make new friends. Eventually, after a few days of being enrolled, I ended up making some really good friends. They are really funny, and the more I talked to them, the more they became friends with me. Now we joke around and have a lot of fun, that is when I am not learning.

At school, I found out about an online game to play with my friends called Nitro Type. I enjoy it because it is so fun to play. In the game, you can type sentences as fast as you can and race to see who is the fastest typer in your group. I managed to get a top speed of 104 words per minute, and my friends couldn't believe it! I started playing the game at the end of the school day in early November, now I play it almost every day.

Overall, I found out that COVID-19 wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. For example, I can relax at home when I'm with my family. When I'm outside or in a supermarket, I have to take precautions, like wearing face masks. I am grateful that I can still go to my school, even though most schools are online because of COVID. In there, we wear our masks every day and only eat in the cafeteria on Mondays and Wednesdays. Still, being with friends helps make this pandemic less intimidating. We spend time together everyday, take precautions to keep safe, and still manage to have fun and enjoy some type of normal lifestyle. For now, it is good, but in the future I truly hope that we can interact without concerns for our health like we used to.

WILLIAM TOWE, GRADE 7

Keeping Down the Spread, Enduring the Mask

It was almost a year ago when we were free to go to parks, go to school, and go to stores with our friends. Then, on the news it said that there was a new and deadly virus going around the whole world, this virus came from China. The President stopped travelers from coming and going to America. Now, we are wearing masks when we go to these places. I remember the first time I learned how bad it really was. It was a normal

day, I was at home getting ready for school. We got to the school and no one was there. So, we went back home then came back later that morning, still no one was there. Then we got an email saying that we would be out for two weeks due to Covid-19. So, in my opinion we got up early for nothing.

The email stated that we would be on a two week break. I thought, "Well, it's only two weeks at home while they clean the school." So, we went on Tuesday to pick up our work to do over the break and there was just enough to last for two weeks. Well, one week went by and we got another email saying that we will have to do school online for the rest of the school year, and to come to school to pick up supplies and learn how to get online and be in class. I liked that idea for about a week and a half, then I realized that going to school is a whole lot better than going online, mostly because of the work that we had to do. Even though we had to go to online school, we didn't have to get up as early as if we were going to school.

Once online school ended I was so happy that I didn't have to get up anymore to be online for school. Although, that wasn't the end because during the two months of being out of school, Covid was still going around. I mostly stayed at home playing on my Xbox One. About a month went by and my parents got Covid. Then I got it, too, but for some reason, I luckily didn't have any severe symptoms. I don't know how but my mom had it for four weeks when I only had it for a day. At this time, we were all expected to wear masks in public. Also, after the summer break ended we were able to go to school but we had to wear a mask the whole day at school, too, with just a few mask breaks. Even though we had to wear masks, there was a silver lining, and that was that we still got to go to school even though other schools were still shut down. I guess there is one good thing about going to a private school.

Anyone who knows me knows that I don't like wearing masks. Well, when I got to school I felt like I was going to pass out from the mask. A month passed and I started to get like a red spot on my nose. My mom and I thought that it was just a bump. It stayed there for half a month and didn't go away. I went to the doctor and we found out that I got Mercer from the masks. It finally went away after we found out about it and got the medicine to put on it. The hardest part about wearing masks is that for some reason we are also expected to wear a mask in the gym. That is not very easy for me to do, but if it keeps down the spread of the virus, I guess we will do it.

Covid-19 is getting worse, now that they found out that the masks may not be working as well as the government planned. Ever since election day the number of Covid-19 cases started getting higher. I heard on the news in the car on the way to school that schools might be closing again. I told everyone when I got to school and no one liked the idea of going back to online school. I don't really like going to school but I definitely don't like going to online school. Maybe it would be better than last year. At least we don't have to wear masks if we do online school, unless they tell us to have our masks. Although it is difficult, the reason we wear a mask, even if it makes it harder to breathe, is so that we can protect others around us.

Apparently Covid-19 is extremely dangerous. Although, strangely, the government seems to think that all sickness is because of Covid, and cases of other illnesses are not even mentioned anymore. If you have Covid, then should quarantine for two weeks. It has been said that even the most common deaths, like heart attacks and strokes are sometimes also being blamed on Covid. It is hard to really understand since it is such a new illness, but the media does not seem to be making things any easier. Still, this is a hard time for everyone but if we all work together to keep the spread down then it will be over sooner than later.

DAVID WEAVER, GRADE 7

CHRISTINA MIZELLE, MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH

My Quarantine Life 2020

Did you know that the COVID-19 pandemic has a spiritual meaning? I would like to verbalize why this historical, and uncompromising epidemic, which was and still is a nasty thing, is also a pleasant thing. The

virus has affected me, my siblings, my parental units, and my grandparents. This virus especially affected my family that lives in New England.

For my immediate family, this virus has tremendously affected our everyday lives. Since my father, who is a Nuclear Medicine Technician, works at Sycamore Shoals Hospital, he could easily contract COVID-19 and transmit the virus to one of us. So, after he comes home from work, while he is standing and waiting patiently on our screened in porch, we have to bring his clothes out to him so he can change his clothes.

This historical pandemic has tremendously affected my family that lives in New England because that is where the largest spike of positive cases and COVID-19 related deaths happened. Even though the number of positive cases is going down, everything is still shut down and everyone is still required to wear a mask.

You might be wondering “Patrick, what is an appropriate acronym for COVID-19?” I think that an appropriate acronym for COVID-19, which I heard from my father, is Christ Over Viruses and Infectious Diseases (Joshua 1:9). This Bible verse proclaims, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” In short, this Bible verse states that you will never be alone because the Lord your God will always be right next to you. This verse is what has helped me through these burdensome times.

Now you know how my family and friends have been affected by this virus. Have you or a loved one been affected by this virus?

PATRICK BREWER, GRADE 7

My Grandfather

My grandfather is a really cool person. He has a joking personality, and he has passed that trait down to my dad. Sometimes he will make certain types of jokes that are kind of funny but do not really make sense. My dad and my grandfather have a very close and strong relationship. They like to talk about different things that have been going on in both of their lives. My grandfather was a really good father to my dad. He taught him many skills and was there when he needed him.

My grandfather enjoys many things. One thing he loves is gardening. He helps my grandmother in the garden. He also loves watches. My favorite one he owns is his gold Rolex. He also enjoys picking me up from school in his black Mercedes. He always likes to listen to me talk about cars. Sometimes when I am at his house, he likes to take me into his office and show me clips of Bugatti races. He will often joke around and say he is going to buy a Prius, but he knows I hate Priuses. My grandfather was telling me a true story about when he owned a brand new Corvette, and he told me all the great things he did in the car. When he is not watching racing or watching sports, he loves to read. He enjoys reading mystery books.

Grandfather has lived in Bristol, Tennessee, for a very long time. He went to college at ETSU and majored in business. When I was very young, my grandfather was the president at a telephone company. He started by working in the mail room at the telephone company and worked his way up. He also worked as a president for a bank. I am not sure which bank, but I know it was a good bank. My grandfather went on a lot of business trips to Asheville and other cities. He and I have had a lot of good times together. Sometimes when my dad needs help with business, my grandfather will be there to help him. He enjoys helping family and spending time with me.

LANDON BROOKS, GRADE 7

A Year in a Pandemic

How has COVID-19 affected my family? COVID-19 affected my family in many ways. For one, it was hard getting used to staying home all day and just not going many places. We could not go to stores, so we

had to do online shopping for a bit. Thankfully my family was all ready for these restrictions because we had stocked up on food before everything started shutting down.

Secondly, school changed drastically. We went online only. While we had school online, sometimes I was late to class because I did not always have good internet. Being online was not fun. I missed being with my friends and talking to them. However, the positive about being online was I could do my school work in less than three hours since there was no one around me to get me off task. This school year our school was fortunate to open face to face. My school requires everyone to wear masks at all times. We also need to be six feet more apart, but it is hard at times. We still have people coming to our school to see if they want to move to our school because their school went online and their parents want them to be at school.

Lastly, the pandemic has affected the community. Everyone has spent more time inside, and they have not seen their family or their friends as often. The elderly had to be careful because they were at a higher risk of getting the virus. Many people chose not to go out to places where they could have a higher risk of getting Covid-19. Many people acted and still act like Covid-19 is the end of the world. Others do not take this virus seriously. Shops were running out of stock in no time and people were buying a lot of things that they really did not need because they feared Covid-19. On the flip side, many stores did not get a lot of business because they were not selling essentials and were closed for several months. Sadly, many businesses had to close for good.

Even though this virus has affected school, home, and community in many negative ways, I try to stay positive and think about the good things that happened as a result of this virus. I hope that 2021 will be a better year.

KAYDEN FRASER, GRADE 8

My Family Christmas

Christmas is my favorite holiday. Why is it my favorite holiday? I love to spend time with my family. To me, Christmas is about being with family at my grandparents' house. On the day before Christmas Eve, my family and my aunt and uncle decorate my grandparents' tree. While we are decorating the tree, we watch a Christmas movie. We also put the train under the tree.

Our Christmas Eve dinner is in the dining room. Before we eat, my dad sets up his camera. When it is time for the picture, we all gather at the dinner table to have the Christmas Eve photo. We then enjoy a delicious turkey for our Christmas Eve dinner. After we finish the Christmas Eve dinner, we play a game called "Find the Prize". This fun game requires you to unwrap a present that has four or eight wrappers. One at a time, each person rolls a dice. When someone rolls a eight that means the person steals the present and tries to unwrap it. The goal is to get to the prize before the other person gets an eight. This game is intense and a lot of fun.

Once the fulfilled evening is over, we go to bed anticipating Christmas morning. On Christmas morning, we all go to the living room where the Christmas tree is, and we each open a present one at a time. Once all our presents are opened, we have breakfast. We enjoy pancakes, bacon, eggs, and waffles. Then it's time to go play with the trains that Grandpa made for me. This fun time with my family goes by so fast. I am always sad when we have to pack up to go home. Although I dread having to say goodbye to my grandparents, I know that my sweet cats are waiting for me at home.

I love Christmas so much that I could explode into many pieces. Christmas is my favorite holiday because it means family time that we share together. I enjoy all of the family traditions with my family, and I hope to continue these family traditions for years to come.

JONATHAN HALLIDAY, GRADE 6

My Mamaw

My Mamaw's name is Julie Thornton, and she is my dad's mom. Over the years, she has taught me how to cook, clean, and how to work in the garden. I go to her house every two weeks or so. I love her so much and enjoy hearing her stories and learning about her rental business.

My mamaw started her rental business with her boyfriend Garry. They started just buying a trailer and renting it out to people that could not afford a house. One of these people is Ms. Johnson. She is very nice and always has her money on time. She is also very kind when she talks unlike some of my mamaw's other customers. My mamaw deals with people like this by not staying and talking. She just gets their money and gets out.

In order to keep my mamaw's business alive, she needs approximately \$3,000 a month for bills, taxes, and personal spending. She gets about \$1,000 from each person she collects money from. This is a lot of money, and she manages to have everything in order and ready for the bills. Sometimes she even has some money left over, so she chooses to spend it on me and my cousins. She spends it on food at the mall, clothes, and Christmas.

In my mamaw's business, she is actually the co-owner. Garry is the real owner, and he lets me collect rent with my mamaw. He's really nice, and I would not change anything about him. Garry and Mamaw split the money between the two of them. I'm not paid yet, but I love working in the business and would happily work for free.

In conclusion, it takes a lot of money to run the business, seeing there are many responsibilities. My mamaw does a wonderful job with this because she makes a lot of money and keeps everything in check. Above all, my cousins and I love her and would not trade her for the world.

GABE MILLER, GRADE 6

Effects of the Coronavirus on My Life

There are several ways how the coronavirus changed my life and how it changed other's lives around me. Throughout this difficult time, I have seen how the coronavirus has been positive and how it has been negative in my life. Life will never be the same after all of this is over. 2020 has been a very confusing and crazy year.

There have been several positive effects of the coronavirus and what it has done for me. First, I was out of school for a couple of months. I really liked doing online school because I could get my work done faster instead of using eight hours of my day to do work. I also had a lot more free time. As I said, I finished all of my work quickly, so I could go do other things. Since I had tons of free time, I had the privilege of spending more time with my family.

Unfortunately, there also have been many negative results that have come from the coronavirus. As you may know, a lot of people have died from the coronavirus, leaving families sad as they mourn the loss of loved ones and friends. My grandmother will not go anywhere because of the coronavirus. She is paranoid about everything since my grandfather died a couple of years ago. My grandmother wants all of my family to wear a mask when we are around her. It is obvious that the coronavirus has changed people's families, and it has caused a lot of pain.

While it is difficult to see anything positive during a pandemic, I believe there are lessons we can learn and knowledge we can gain. I believe that in the future there will be more disease control. Another positive effect that could come from the coronavirus is more disease monitoring. One of the things that contributed to the worsening of the coronavirus is that the United States of America was not prepared for the coronavirus, so we could not have dealt with it easier. If the United States of America was prepared for the coronavirus, there might have been not as many deaths. Hopefully, we have learned a lot of what to do and what not to do if this were to ever happen again.

It is obvious that there have been beneficial results and bleak outcomes or effects, but we will be able to get through this. The coronavirus has been a good learning experience, and hopefully, we will know better how to do this next time. 2020 has been a very stressful and hard year, but we will be able to get through it.

CASH HARKLEROAD, GRADE 7

KARLA RASNAKE, HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH

An Unlikely First Adventure

Hi. My name is Alexis Bramlette and I'm 16 years old. I was born in Maryland and raised in Virginia for almost 10 years, before moving to Tennessee. Moving hasn't always been the simplest of things but I've actually started to get used to it. I was around 5 or 6 when I was adopted, but in an unexpected way. During foster care, I had a difficult time with hearing. Though that was rough at first, this incident actually led to my first adventure: a new home. The audiologist who helped me with my hearing loss, Shannon Bramlette, would go on to become my adoptive mother. First as an audiologist, my mom helped me hear better with hearing aids. Not only that, because of her I was given a new family as well.

I still love the foster family I lived with before. Though we're in different directions now, they're still a part of my family. They have been able to help me everyday and for that I'm really grateful.

Every time I go somewhere new, adventure is always there and I am always ready to try different obstacles. There are times where I'm struggling but I know everyone does their role in helping and plan on doing my part too. By helping people. I'm a daughter, a younger sister, and a friend who's willing to offer support, just like my adoptive mother did for me. She gave me better hearing and by far the best journey I've come across so far: a home with a loving and caring family, who do their best to protect me.

ALEXIS BRAMLETTE, GRADE 10

There Is Some Good Among Us

This year when COVID-19 hit, a lot of people didn't know what to do. Many people panicked and thought that everything was bad. I am not denying the fact that the coronavirus is an awful event, but there are several things that we have to be thankful for, in spite of all that has happened. I have not been happy with many of the things that have resulted from the coronavirus, but I am trying to count my blessings and be thankful for the things that I do have.

The first thing that I am thankful for is the time that I got to spend with my family. Many people, myself included, were tired by the end of quarantine and were ready to see someone besides their own family. However, the time spent with family was not completely bad. I know that many people, including me, bonded with their families and found ways to entertain themselves, even though they couldn't get out and do the things they normally do.

The other thing that I am thankful for is technology. We've always had technology, but I have been especially thankful for it during this time. We have been able to keep going to school. Online school is harder, but it is better than nothing. I have also got to keep going to church and seeing people, thanks to Zoom. Thanks to FaceTime and Discord, I have been able to keep in touch with my friends, even when I can't see them in person. I have been so thankful for the ways that I can keep in touch with people through technology.

I am not happy that the coronavirus came and made us quarantine, but I am glad that I had time with my family. I am also glad that I was able to keep in touch with my friends through technology. I think that we should all think about the things that we have to be thankful for in this time when things are different.

ANDY COTE, GRADE 10

2020 Managed to Have Some Good in It

During this coronavirus pandemic, I have felt a bit more stressed than I normally do. However, there have been some good things that have come out of this. For example, we all know that some things are able to be done even under lockdown.

I have had some good things happen to me this year. For example, I am actually on an in-state trip with my family right now. I have also gone on a trip that was with one of my mom's friends for their honeymoon. They decided to have it in the Smokies due to COVID.

I have also been able to do karate. In April, the place where I practice karate said that they would only have lessons over Zoom meetings. Our family didn't do that but some did. Starting in August, they had it in person, but only outside and up to 10 people. By the end of September, we were doing karate almost as normal, with the exception of having to sign in on an iPad. However, over the past two weeks, we have been going down to 10 people on a mat, masks are required, and you have to have your temperature checked.

I am glad that I am able to still do a lot of the things that I like to do. I am because otherwise, I don't know what I would do in my free time besides just looking stuff up online. I could still talk to my family, but I usually don't much so I probably wouldn't start. For me, the year wasn't as bad as it could have been, and I am thankful for that.

GAVIN DIAMOND, GRADE 9

Granny

This is the life of my great grandmother. Her name is Faye Street, but we all call her Granny. She was born in 1935. The life she had growing up was very different than mine.

She was a coal miner's daughter. Her dad was 18 when he went to work in the mines, where he lost his left leg. He was 70-some years old when he died. When she was growing up, Granny had to do more things by hand since there were no computers like we have today. She has lived through many wars, like WW2, Vietnam, and the Afghanistan wars. She lived through the terrorist attacks on 9/11.

Granny also lived through the Great Depression. It was a struggle for everyone to get things then. She told me the stories of how when she was little, she drove to Bluefield, which was a one and a half to two hours drive, with her momma and daddy to get a freezer because her momma needed one. But, as hard as things were to come by, she said they never went hungry.

She was married in 1952 to my great grandad, Ralph. They lived all of their life together up on Dry Fork. Ralph built their house on Dry Fork in 1954. They moved in and Ralph added on more to their house in later years. Granny raised all of her kids in that same house — my granddad Poppy, Aunt Sissy, and my other aunt, Vicky. Ralph's momma lived right below them on the hill. She had cows, and she and Granny took turns milking the cows on different days. Granny and Ralph raised hogs. Their daily chores were more physically taxing than chores we do today. Their work was more tiring because they did not have the things that we have today. They washed their clothes on wash boards.

Besides her chores, Granny had a few different jobs, too. She cleaned houses for people, and she also worked at a drug store as a cook (they served dinner and lunch). She worked six days a week and drew 68 dollars a week. When she cleaned houses, Granny earned five dollars for six hours of work.

Even today, Granny still lives in that house that Ralph built for them up on Dry Fork. She is a strong lady who is still going strong.

DAULTON HURLEY, GRADE 11

The Eternal Sky Origin

"I'm not a citizen, I don't need citizenship papers, and I've never had patriotism in that sense for any country, but I'm a patriot to humanity as a whole. I'm a citizen of the world."

Charlie Chaplin: English filmmaker and comic actor

"I am not Athenian or Spartan. I am a citizen of the world."

Socrates: Greek philosopher

I have no origin. I know that everyone comes from somewhere, but let me explain. . .

Recently, I was playing a game based on strategy and war. In the game I would choose different tribes, clans or kingdoms to play as. As I browsed through the different factions, I came across one I had never noticed, the Nomadic Huns faction, a mysterious group that helped with the destruction of the Roman Empire. Out of curiosity, I chose it.

The game began playing a cinematic trailer telling of the Huns' savagery, but towards the video's end there was a tranquil moment revealing the Hun leader praying in front of a tree in the middle of the plains, also known as the steppe. Soon the narrator said, "He will unite the four winds and bring about the eternal sky."

The eternal sky? I pondered, then I received a moment of great realization, one that made me shiver. The Huns were a nomadic tribe that claimed no permanent settlements or home of any kind. They wandered around the world freely. Now just imagine if the world was like that — no cities, no towns, no homes. The word "home," a word that we usually associate with a building or single place you're familiar with, but this time it was not a place in the world, it was the world. The world was your home. A world with no specific races, no specific nations, no specific religion. A world where every religion is taught and discussed together. A world where people who feel they are not the gender they were born with are allowed to change and not be judged for it. A world where we are allowed to be born of any color, white or black, without being defined by stereotypes. The world together, as a single country. This world that was in my head was the Eternal Sky, a free-rein world where the people roam as cattle, as a single family, not as a no man's land but a nomad's land for all.

I know the idea is basically impossible, but after 2020 I've learned the world was not meant to be divided by imaginary lines and land that's worth its weight in bodies. The world is meant to be shared, not greedily held by those who believe they are superior. The main teachings of the greats — Jesus, Moses, Mahumud the Prophet, Budda, the Sikh Gurus and many others — preached of love and equality that came with the belief in God, Goddess, Allah, Hashem, Kami, Waheguru, and a thousand other variations. The world is a puzzle, a puzzle that slowly but surely, is piecing it together, and I believe we will one day see a United World.

My origins are the graves of family and forgotten people whom I do not know, but whose names I want others to know. I am the ashes scattered across the world by artists and thinkers who reached fame or went down an enteral slope. I am the thunder and lightning and rain pouring down on my home, born and raised, and later coming to find this country I do not see as home, for I am not a citizen of this country. My origin is not American, my origin is that I am nobody, somebody, and everybody. I am a citizen of this world and my origin lies up above, with the blue that makes the sea bluer. My origin is the Eternal Sky.

JOLSON PETERSON, GRADE 9

My Above and Beyond Mother

My mother, Melanie Sluder, is an amazing lady! She has a master's degree in special education, has survived two brain tumors, and adopted me! I can't believe that she has not given up, even through times of sadness and struggles.

My adoption was an exciting time in her life. When I interviewed my mother about my adoption, she told me that she was so excited to get a call from an adoption social worker. And when she found out that a birth mother wanted her to adopt me, she was overjoyed and could not wait to meet me!! My mother, through previous circumstances, knew that God would and could "open doors for me to come into her life."

Before my adoption, my adoptive mother had been teaching several different families and she had seen that they were excited and overjoyed to see their adoptive children grow up. This made my mother feel that God was "leading her to an adoptive mother's path."

My adoptive mother always wanted to be a teacher, from a young age. She would design curriculums for the books that she had previously read. So, it just came naturally to my adoptive mother that she would one day become a teacher.

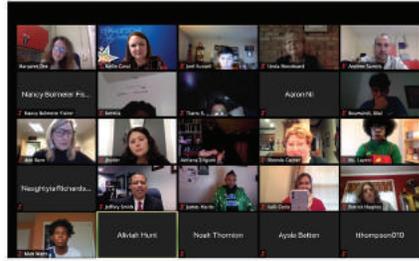
One of my mother's favorite memories during her teaching career was watching her students learn how to read. When my mother taught gifted children, she loved to watch her students rise to the challenge and learn from the curriculums that she designed. Later in life, she loved to see the previous students that she had taught and to hear them tell her about how my mother had impacted their lives. She loved helping a child see how they can persevere and rise to meet a challenge.

In conclusion, I personally think that my mother has gone above and beyond, teaching students, adopting me, watching me learn and grow, and teaching me! My mother has taught me to never give up, even in times of sadness.

MARA SLUDER, GRADE 9



Phoebus High School



Phoebus students participate in a Zoom with New York Times bestselling author

Phoebus High School students involved in The Origin Project participated in a Zoom workshop on December 16, 2020, with bestselling author Adriana Trigiani. Students in Margaret Dee and Kemi Leyeni's English classes shared original pieces of writing, and listened as Trigiani offered feedback and shared information about her own writing process. Other special guests included Linda Woodward, Nancy Bolmeier-Fisher, and Rhonda Carper from the Origin Project.

The Origin Project, co-founded by Trigiani and Bolmeier-Fisher (Executive Director), seeks to inspire students to find their voices through the craft of writing about their roots. The program began in 2014 with 40 students, and now serves over 1600 in 17 schools. Each student is provided with a writing journal at the beginning of the school year. Their final writing projects are published at the end of the school year in an anthology. This is Phoebus' second year participating in the project.

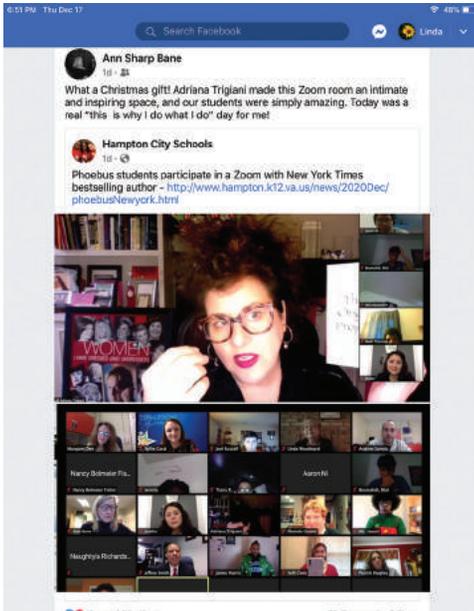
HCS superintendent, Jeffery Smith; Division Leadership Team members Ann Bane and Kellie Goral; as well as Dr. Kelli Cedo, Jennifer Butler, Executive Principal James Harris, and Academy Principal Patrice Williams were also in attendance and had the opportunity to listen as students shared their short stories and poems.

In regard to the Zoom experience, Dee shares, "I am so proud of our students for sharing their work and asking insightful questions. Adriana's feedback and her writing pointers were fantastic."

Adriana Trigiani is the *New York Times* bestselling author of eighteen books in fiction and nonfiction. She has been published in 38 countries around the world. The *New York Times* calls her "a comedy writer with a heart of gold". She is an award-winning playwright, television writer and producer, and filmmaker.

www.hampton.k12.va.us/news/2020Dec/phoebusNewYork.html?fbclid=IwAR0b_9LSWHYVrn-uSc2JmgBfc_KGTG6OBR2Sm0ORgVHAN8eVV9cmdQQU

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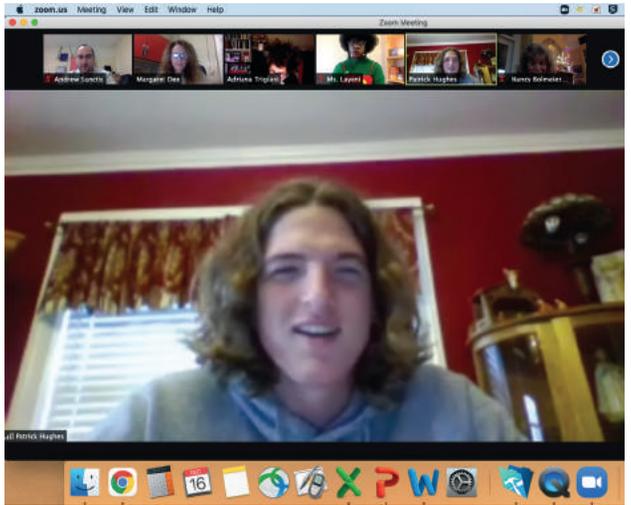


The Origin Project

2020 was a year unlike any other. The Origin Project provided my students and I with an opportunity during unprecedented times to share our unique stories and to forge connections when connection, at times, was difficult. Writing our stories allowed us to see the beauty in our lives, to recall special people and places and to recount magical memories. The Origin Project granted us the gift of recognizing and celebrating our differences and it allowed us to share joy and laughter in a year full of uncertainty.

MARGARET DEE
ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

"What a Christmas gift! Adriana Trigiani made this Zoom room an intimate and inspiring space, and our students were simply amazing. Today was a real "this is why I do what I do" day for me!" Facebook post by Ann Bane, Community & Legislative Relations, Hampton City Schools



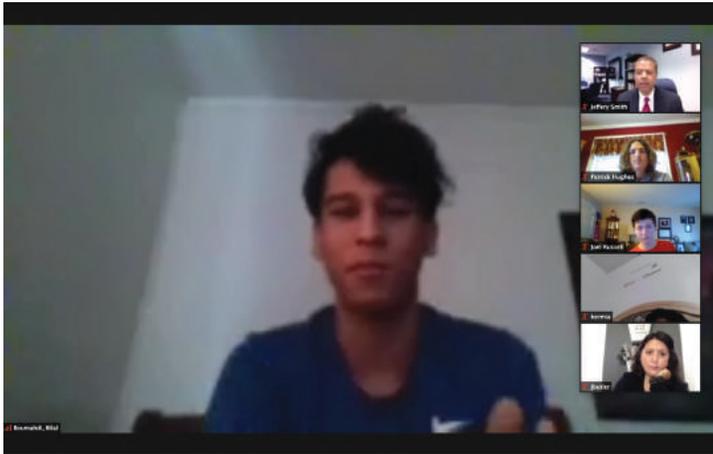
Patrick Hughes during Zoom session with TOP



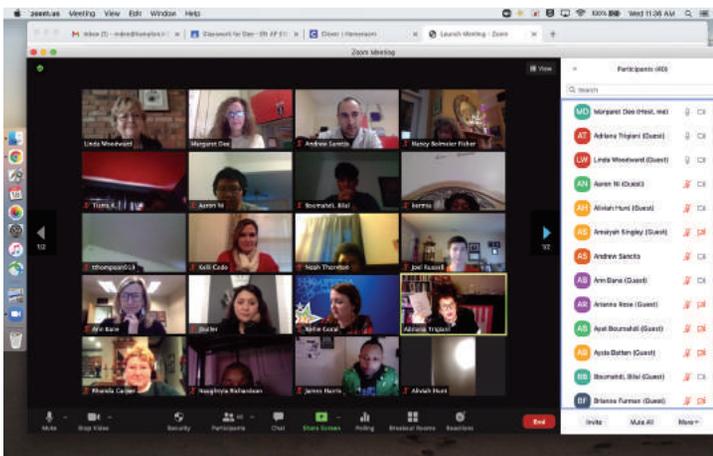
Joel Russell during Zoom session with TOP

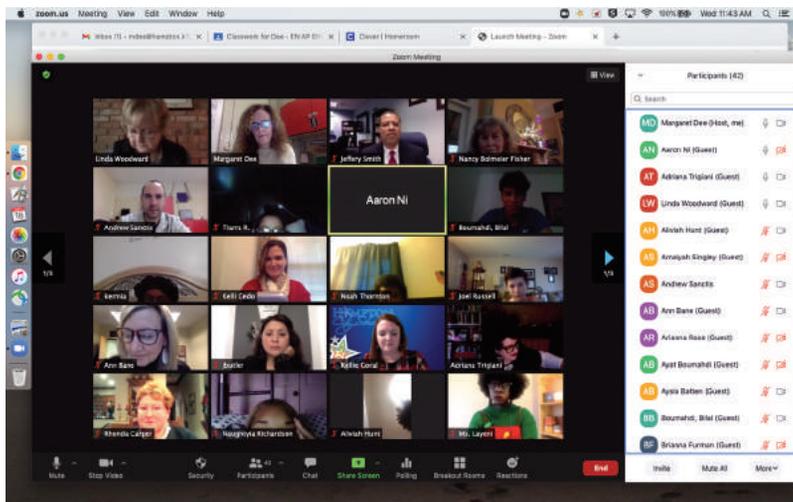


Aaron Ni during Zoom session with TOP



Bilal Boumahdi during Zoom session with TOP





Margaret Dee, English Class

I AM

I am calm and collected.
 I wonder what a stress free life is like.
 I hear my name being called out when I'm alone.
 I see the light in the darkness and vice versa.
 I want success.
 I am calm and collected.

I pretend to be a great soccer player.
I feel lost within the times.
 I touch people's hearts.
 I worry about being a failure.
 I cry when I am frustrated because I mess things up.
 I am calm and collected.

I understand that nothing lasts forever.
 I say "that it all works out in the end."
 I dream of success and prosperity for me and all I hold dear.
 I try to become a better person.
 I hope to be the greatest.
 I am calm and collected.

BILAL BOUMAHDI, GRADE 12

I Remember

I remember the feeling of the morning sun as I raced with my cousins through thick crowds, hearing their excited voices as I took lead. I remember Nathaniel's voice being the closest to me. I remember the feeling

of excitement that filled me as I crossed the mossy stone bridge to Pandora, briefly seeing the sign that welcomed visitors to the valley of Mo'ara. I remember smelling the air and realizing how different it was from the rest of the park, how it somehow made me forget I was even in a Disney park. I remember wanting to cry when seeing the floating mountains for the first time, seeing just how big they were and how small they made me feel. I remember being overwhelmed with nostalgia when seeing the dozens upon dozens of alien plants, recognizing many from the movie while seeing many others for the first time. I remember hearing animal calls instead of music, yet another thing that made everything feel more real.

I remember waiting in the queue for Flight of Passage, loving every minuscule detail I saw, from the weathered stone and vines on the undersides of the mountains, to the cave paintings of Toruk and the Na'vi, to the abandoned and nature reclaimed look of the human base. I remember taking pictures of everything I saw in the lab themed area, forcing my mother to listen to me as I pointed out the giant Ikran skull in the corner, to the notes, charts, and plant sample props in the center of the room. I remember seeing the life size avatar animatronic for the first time and melting on the inside from excitement, telling my family everything I knew about it while being amazed about how it moved and twitched while being fully submerged in water. I remember seeing the giant mural of a Na'vi riding an Ikran and being amazed by it, and getting more excited about what was to come during the ride itself. I remember riding Flight of Passage for the first time, and practically yelling about everything I saw and smelt and how real it felt afterwards with my cousins and mother.

I remember riding Na'vi river Journey for the first time, and having my phone ready to take pictures of everything. I remember talking about the amount of weaving and detail work about the rides queue and wanting to know just how long it took to make. I remember the smell of the water and ride being naturally sweet, but not being able to recognize exactly what it reminded me of. I remember acting like an excited toddler when the boat began to move, pointing out everything to my mother who once again listened. I remember telling her about the effects that made the ride feel more real, from the layered projection screens giving everything more depth, to how the natural sounds of alien nature at the beginning of the ride faded into singing and music halfway in. I remember singing along to the music once I could hear it, somehow remembering the lyrics even though they were literally in an alien language. I remember naming each and every animal I saw, though not in english, but in Na'vi, much *to the confusion* of my brother. I remember seeing the Shaman of Songs for the first time and how my voice rose when I pointed to her. I remember excitedly talking about how she was one of the most advanced animatronics Disney had ever made while pointing out how everything from her ears, her tail, and even her fingers moved. I remember almost crying.

I remember visiting Pandora. I remember feeling like a kid again.

KYLA GILCHRIST, GRADE 12

Orange and Maroon

I remember walking through the autumn filled Blacksburg, Virginia with my dad and my younger brother. We were there for our first Virginia Tech home football game. I remember the smell of tailgate hot dogs, the burning smell of charcoal and the sounds of "Enter Sandman" blasting through people's trucks and cars. I remember donning my maroon and orange Tyrod Taylor jersey as that day was game day against Central Michigan. I remember the Hokie parade, the team moving their way through downtown Blacksburg and the vast sea of white, orange, and maroon. Everyone that day was ready for the game and was celebrating.

I remember arriving at Virginia Tech and seeing the beautiful campus covered in autumn's red and orange leaves and seeing the duck pond by the golf course as we made our way to the tailgating section near Lane stadium. I vividly remember it was almost like all the Hokie fans in the world were packed into the beautiful setting that was Virginia Tech. I remember parking the truck and stepping out and stretching my legs and arms helping my dad get the flag and the grill for our tailgate. I remember pulling out the oakwood cornhole

boards beautifully decorated with the famous Hokie stamp and turkey. I remember my brother, who at the time was only 8 years old, complaining about the chilly breeze that was moving through the autumn air and so my dad had grabbed us our Virginia Tech puff coats properly decorated in the matching orange and maroon. I remember smelling barbecue, hot dogs, hamburgers, and other foods being made. I remember tasting and eating a special soup from one of the other tailgating Hokie fans and I remember how the soup kept me warm from the bitter breeze that was Autumn.

I remember playing cornhole with some fellow Hokies and a few Central Michigan fans. I remember talking with the other fans and asking about the season and specific players and then even getting to try some of their tailgate food. I remember making my way around the gravel parking lot with every step being a loud crunch from the rocks of which was the gravel. I remember seeing the ultimate tailgate setup with an RV decorated in the orange and maroon colors of the school. I remember seeing the two major flatscreen TV's attached showing previous games and highlights along with ESPN commentators getting ready for the game. Then after walking around the RV I saw the snacks and bar setup for the tailgate and me and my brother were invited over to have some Boston creme pie and some apple pie. I remember hearing the infamous gobble sounds from the stadium as they were preparing for us to take over Lane and flood the stadium with the miraculous colors of orange and maroon.

I remember seeing the Corps of Cadets make their way into Lane Stadium and seeing the decorated uniforms of grey and white with the shiny reflective buttons and pins. I remember me and my dad and brother walking through the gravel filled parking lot onto the smooth concrete sidewalk decorated with Hokie treks and foot stamps of the Hokie bird. I remember seeing the mass of Hokie fans flooding the gate and hearing the infamous chant "LET'S GO" and hearing the response "HOKIES."

This was a unique experience that I have never felt at another game. Making our way through the sea of orange in maroon was chaotic with noise all around us and the loud calling of people at the ticket booths and the marching of the band into the stadium. I remember my dad saying we had to hurry up and make our way to our seats as this was a big game and everyone was here. I remember making my way up the stairs and seeing the loud and amazing fly over from F-18's fighter craft and finding our seats for the game. I remember standing up for the national anthem and getting chills when it was sung and seeing everyone around me as an excited fan. I remember hearing the opening riff to the amazing song which got all us Hokies jumping. I remember hearing the drums kick in and everyone started to jump and then the stadium was shaking violently. I remember then hearing the opening lines "Say your prayers, little one, don't forget my son" and getting amped and ready to go play the game. All around us was a sea of maroon and orange people in jerseys, coats, and anything with the beautiful colors of maroon and orange. I remember seeing and feeling the excitement for our team to compete and beat Central Michigan that day was truly a day I remember and I visually see and can hear and taste all of the experiences again and spending that Saturday with my brother and my dad. I remember this orange and maroon day.

PATRICK HUGHES, GRADE 12

I AM

I am thoroughly inquisitive and curious about everything,
from the shape of feet to the stars in the sky.
I wonder why things are the way that they are,
why they look that way, why they are shaped that way, why they work that way.
I hear questions cropping up here and there,
asking simple questions with not-so simple answers.
I see possibilities,

fantasies of what could be.
I want to see it,
the end and beginning of it all.
I am inquisitive and curious.

I pretend to know what to do,
When really, I'm lost.
I feel unsure of myself, so unmotivated to act.
I loathe the part of me that is unmotivated.
I worry about my own indecisiveness.
I cry when I think back to foolish actions.
I am lost and unmotivated.

I understand what I need to do.
I say that I need to make a change.
I dream about changing myself.
I try to put together the pieces,
hoping to find what I'm making.
I hope to find what it is that I truly want to do.

AARON NI, GRADE 12

I AM

I am understanding and caring.
I wonder how many people are hurting on the inside.
I hear people's pain.
I see deranged faces.
I want to help the world.
I am understanding and caring.

I pretend that I'm a therapist.
I feel God touching me.
I touch a cloud.
I worry why the world is this way.
I cry because my grandma died.
I am understanding and caring.

I understand that I can't help everyone.
I say that there is a life without pain.
I dream that everyone will be happy.
I try to become a better person.
I hope that the world will be a better place.
I am understanding and caring.

KERMIA-PERRY GOLDEN, GRADE 12

I AM

I am compassionate and independent.
I wonder how to become successful.
I hear people talking.
I see rooms filled with people.
I want to fulfill my aspirations.
I am compassionate and independent.

I pretend my dream is my everyday life.
I feel content.
I touch my notes and get to writing.
I worry I won't fulfill my dreams.
I cry about not making my mother happy.
I am compassionate and independent.

I understand that life can be challenging.
I say never let anything stop me from being the person I am meant to be.
I dream to become one of the best registered nurses and become more than just that.
I try to do more than what I know I can.
I hope to make my dreams become my reality.
I am compassionate and independent.

TIARRA REED, ENGLISH 12

I AM

I am a lover and impatient.
I wonder what happens after you pass away.
I hear tick-tock.
I see waterfalls.
I want to succeed.
I am a lover and impatient.

I pretend I'm in a movie.
I feel happy.
I touch water.
I worry about myself all the time.
I cry thinking about my mom.
I am a lover and impatient.

I understand I'm quiet
I say never rely on people.
I dream about crazy stuff.
I try to keep myself occupied.

I hope to move on in life.
I am a lover and impatient.

NAUGHTYIA RICHARDSON, ENGLISH 12

I AM

I am imaginative and caring.
I wonder how dark matter works.
I hear rockets launching into space.
I see distant planets through a telescope.
I want cleaner energy.
I am imaginative and caring.
I pretend to agree with my parents.
I feel the warmth of the planet.
I touch rocks of far away solar systems.
I worry about the state of Earth.
I cry when people die in needless ways.
I am imaginative and caring.

JOEL RUSSELL, ENGLISH 12

I AM

I am tenacious and empathetic.
I wonder about my roots.
I hear silent voices.
I see peace in the darkness.
I want equanimity.
I am tenacious and empathetic.

I pretend to ascend.
I feel the vibrations of life.
I touch the souls of my past.
I worry about how long it'll take me to reach the ground.
I cry for the unfulfilled unalome.
I am tenacious and empathetic.

I understand everything and nothing.
I say one day, my someday will turn into today.
I dream of lying in still waters, surrounded by darkness,
as the rain falls gently to meet me.
I try to live.
I hope to one day be a forest.
I am tenacious and empathetic.

SOUL WIND STEGALL, ENGLISH 12

I AM

I am loving and caring.
I wonder why the moon changes.
I hear the wind blowing.
I see the sky.
I want to be successful.
I am loving and caring.

I pretend to be ok sometimes when I am not.
I feel calm.
I touch items.
I worry about me and my family.
I cry thinking about my dad.
I am calm and respectful.
I am loving and caring.

I understand I'm quiet.
I say never depend on people.
I dream about things I wish would happen.
I try to keep calm.
I hope to be successful in life.
I am loving and caring.

TYVIANA THOMPSON, ENGLISH 12

I AM

I am young and adventurous.
I wonder what space is like.
I hear unheard music.
I see stars in the night sky.
I want to explore the unknown.
I am young and adventurous.

I pretend to explore what is unknown.
I feel curious about the unknown.
I touch the sky.
I worry I'll never see it.
I cry over reality.
I am young and adventurous.

I understand it's a big planet.
I say I'll explore it.
I dream of seeing the different continents.

I try to explore my current surroundings.
I hope to explore more places.
I am young and adventurous.

NOAH THORNTON, ENGLISH 12

KEMI LAYENI, ENGLISH CLASS

Misunderstood

Why do you have such an attitude?

Honestly I don't know maybe It's because you don't know how to be nice to me or cope with your childhood trauma to the point where you don't even realize that you're hurting me. Or maybe I don't have one and you just choose to hear every other word that comes out of my mouth in the tone that you want.

"I didn't raise you like this."

Sorry to inform you of the horrible horrible news but you did. Yes you raised me like this but it wasn't on purpose no not at all. You were just to blind to see me crying out for help but now it's too late to try and help me and ask for my forgiveness. I can't hold my pain in any longer, so I let it out by crying myself to sleep, avoiding you and locking myself in the bathroom because it's the only place I can go to get away from you. It used to be school but now that's online thanks to quarantine.

"Why do you hate me so much?"

It is not that I hate you, it's just that it is very hard to tolerate you and never try to see things from my point of view. Everytime I try to talk to you and tell you how I feel you don't listen, you hear what you want and then you sit there and tell me that I'm lying and exaggerating when really it's the other way around. You constantly lie to yourself and try to play victim when you don't even bother to take the time to actually sit down and listen you think just because I'm a teenager I don't go through things and I don't struggle, well news flash you're wrong, yes you read that correctly you are wrong and that's not the first thing you were wrong about. Now I could take the time to sit and write about all the times you were wrong but that would just be a waste of time. Honestly this entire letter is a waste of time because you're never gonna see it and even if you did, you would still find a way to make yourself the victim because that's just what you're good at, playing me out to be the bad guy when it was you all along.

"Why are teachers telling me that you're failing and not turning in work?"

I'm not motivated to do this work, my brain is scattered, I can't focus, I'm depressed, and I overthink everything. I might not even submit this because I'm pretty sure that my grammar and punctuation is all messed up. Ever since middle school I couldn't wait to graduate I had so many goals set but i was too caught up in my little fantasy of graduating high school with my Associates Degree at 17 to realize that I need to stop procrastinating, but it's so hard to to stop, it's like I was addicted to doing nothing. It feels so good to just lay in bed and forget about all your responsibilities. I did it so much to the point where now I do it unintentionally. Now here I am at the end of the first semester of tenth grade failing six out of eight classes writing my sob story to turn in for The Origin Project in hope of bringing up my grade but even if it does it's not gonna help me with other five classes. I don't even know why I picked this academy because I don't even want to go to college, I'm barely making it through high school so I know for sure I won't make it through college. But anyways this was all over the place but i hope you understand what i'm trying to say.

SUKANYA ARMOUR, GRADE 10

Awkward

Awkward; the enemy of mine
Day by day I don't seem to get past it

I say I am awkward all the time
But am I really?
I go out and I shrivel into sigh
Awkward, the thing of discomfort
Although, my passion is being at ease
On that day my soul grew awkward
And for some reason I can get over anything but this
Awkward

AYSIA BATTEN, GRADE 10

My Dearest Mallory

Dear Mallory, this is your mother Katie. I'm writing to you to inform you about the upcoming challenges you're going to have to face. You're different, you're not like other girls; you are filled with a love for others so deep it can physically harm you. The definition of this term is called an empath. You're not just someone who can relate or feels sad when others do. The hard truth is, you will have people coming in and out of your life. Whatever feelings they feel you will have. From the smallest of headaches, to the largest of heart pains. This pain will be excruciating, it will be hard and impossible to control. I don't have a book designed to teach you all of these things but I am here to tell you there is someone who can help you. This person is deep inside you, they are not you, but you are them. They are designed to guide you throughout your life. I know it sounds scary, but have you ever had a gut feeling about something? Perhaps felt someone wasn't a good person. When choosing to ignore it, it always backfires and comes to be true. However, when you followed it you saved yourself from any pain and discomfort. Do you hear whispers in your head at night trying to tell you their secrets? Perhaps see shadows that linger about that cause you fright? Or feel cold winds blowing on your face at night when there is not a window open or fan in sight. Have you ever felt someone brush against you while laying in your bed at night? When your room is quiet and your ears are ringing, have you ever heard your name being called? That's your inner person, but don't worry it will not harm you. You must access them, I say them because there is more than one of them. It is not a she or he, we call them it because they have no gender or number. They do not age, for they are gone, but they did not die. I know this may be frightening and confusing for you, but it is time you know the truth. I am getting older, I've tried to protect you as best I can. Gifting you with hats with built in sigils to protect you, crystals on necklaces and bracelets. Lining your bed with herbs and adding fancy oils in your hygiene products. You are now old enough to resolve it once and for all, it will be challenging and sadly I cannot come with you. The way to control and get rid of it, is to go inside the deepest part of your consciousness. You must mediate and for 10 days and 10 nights you will fall into a deep sleep. During this sleep I will not be able to wake you, nor assist you if you're in trouble. Before this journey begins you'll need training. A dear friend of mine is located in Hawaii, your plane ticket is attached to this letter. You leave first thing in the morning at 9:30 am no later than that. Pack light, only the most necessary items can come with you. I still have Togo and will be taking care of him, he is such a smart rabbit. It probably is all making sense now, and may be overwhelming. However, this is why I insisted on watching him this week. I've been planning this since you turned 3 years old. Saving money, making arrangements, keeping you distant from certain people so your absence is not too noticeable. You may not know but if anyone were to find out your gift you would be killed. We live in a society where having that amount of empathy for another is unacceptable. They fear your presence, they fear you'll ruin the very way of life they live. We were all born with a certain amount of empathy, this allows more focus, smarter thinking, and quicker problem solving in their words. They want zombies, almost people who won't question their way of life, so you pose a threat. Baby they're scared of you, I am scared of what they will do to you. Now that you're 19 I know all my preparation has made you ready. Remember my words of wisdom, the

ones I used to tell you since you were very young. You are so smart Mallory, you are stronger than anyone I know. There is nothing wrong with your ability, it is a gift truly. Mallory you are the future of this society, but they are not ready yet. For your safety my dear you must learn to control it. I wish you the best of luck on your journey. Please be strong, hear my voice telling you to push on, and please come back home to me. Flowers will be arriving in 3 . . . 2 . . . 1 . . . take them. There is a ring attached to it, put it on, along with the wig and clothes. Your new identity is Averie Rain, she is a small time girl. You enjoy sports like basketball and volleyball, you were just proposed to and are traveling to your wedding destination. Your lover's name is Damon Salvator, he is a wild card but very proper. The two of you are madly in love, and are missing each other. I left breakfast in the fridge, eat it, and take 2 relaxers to calm your nerves. I know this is overwhelming but you must stay calm and try to succeed. I love you Goodbye Mallory, or should I say Averie Rain.

KALI BONNER, GRADE 10

I Think

I think I think I think
I think back to my younger days when I was naive and bubbly
The world was bright and full of life
Not a single thing to worry about
A few years later, my joyous world turns its other face to me
This side is serious, dark, and stern
I'm dismayed at how my happy world turned its back on me
"What did i do to deserve this?"; "What did any of us do to deserve this",
these questions lingering in my mind
I start to hear "that's life"
But why can't life have stayed how it was
I think I think I think. . .

AYAT BOUMAHDY, GRADE 10

To be Beautiful . . .

You have to be skinny but not too skinny.
You have to be thick, but not too thick, and only in certain areas.
You must be in shape, but not too much in shape.
You have to have eyes that are labeled pretty by society's standards.
Your skin has to be smooth and appealing to the eyes of others.
Your lips have to be full, but not too full. Even but *slightly* uneven.
Your nose can't be large enough to provide proper air flow, it has to be small and buttoned.
Your teeth have to be white, but not *too* white. Straight but not abnormally straight.
Your hair must be groomed, natural but not *unnaturally* natural.
You have to be smart, but not too smart.
Your personality has to be just the right mix of traits.
You have to have just the right amount of flaws, but at the same time, no flaws at all.

 false information has been detected

BRIANNA FURMAN, GRADE 10

Love and Basketball

I hear silence . . . I feel the air rush on my face
Everyone is in slow motion while I'm still in a fast pace
It's just me and the basket
Ball in my hand. . .
So I JUMP and I SOAR. . .
Legs swept from beneath me
Going to have to crash land
And I fall. . .

Pain . . . can't breath . . . numb.
Everyone's around me
Laying on the ground I think why I had to be so dumb
I come to my senses and I started to rise
And then I started to cry. . .
The pain was unbearable
Can't feel my legs
Looking to god and asked him why

I look like a newborn trying to walk
Crying so hard I can barely talk
wobble . . . wobble . . . drop.
I start to crawl trying not to completely fall
I get some help and carried to the bench
Trying to move my legs trying to make them flinch
I grab some support wonder if this could work
Legs shake . . . felt like they were about to break.
Shake. . . shake . . . stable. . .
The pain is still there
I ask myself why do I even still care?
Why do I still go?
Why do I still play?
Why do I push myself harder and harder to be the best.
I never wanted to be like the rest
Always was an outcast
That's probably why me and my friends never last

I remember when I first put her in my hand
And I never wanted to let her go
I would always dribble her shoot her everywhere I go
She grew on me and that connection will never be broken
And in the back of my head she finally has spoken

My eyes and body filled with strength
Out of the love and passion she gave me

I put my foot down and RISED
Ignoring the pain I let my passion sang
step . . . step . . . tumble.
But I never fell
Rising straight from the ground in the depths of hell
I pick up my pace, feeling the air on my face and I run

Ignoring the pain and having fun. Back in the game just this once
Limping into a walk . . . walk into a run.
The adrenaline in my body electrifies my nerves
Moving left and right hitting the quick turns

Then it's silent. . .
The air brush against my face
Everyone is in slow motion while I'm in a fast pace. . . .
Ball in my hand. . .
Just me and the Basket. . .
And I RISE and i jump like i've never jumped before
And I score. . .
Then it came back to me. . .

This is why I play

This is why I care

This is what I love

I love you basketball.

MATISSE GOYENS, GRADE 10

Social Media Ruined My Self-Esteem

When I was in the 8th grade I got a flat screen phone and started downloading social media apps. Little did I know that my body, the way I looked would be the last chosen. When I was little I was always insecure about my skin, and that insecurity increased as I got older. I felt like I was too dark and ugly to be seen as pretty, I always compare myself to many blonde girls and any other pretty white girls that were praised on social media. When I made it to the ninth grade I started to love my skin but the beauty standards I set for myself were getting worse. I felt worthless and not enough, and sometimes I would cry myself to sleep. **Why couldn't I be pretty, why couldn't I have a nice body, and why does nobody like me?** My self esteem had gotten so low I would never believe some that called me pretty. People are constantly judging people's body types: your butt is not big enough, you're too small, you're too fat, I don't like your lips, you are too dark, you are too short, you are too tall, your nose is too big, you are not white enough, and I let that all get to me, constantly comparing myself gets so tiring I see trends on Tiktok that make new insecurities for me. I am only 15 and there are girls younger than me comparing themselves. Little boys, men, women constantly pushing that standard that you will never be enough. And that's why today I still question, "Am I enough or will I ever be pretty enough?"

LANIYA GERMANY-HARBIN, GRADE 10

Cherub

I close my eyes and sink into my bed. Finally, I can fall asleep and have my mind wander into space for hours on end. I seem to fall asleep a lot quicker than usual. In the distance, I witness a cherub. A chubby little saint, he takes my hand and brings me up. Who knew these fat little angels were so strong. I soar through the clouds, feeling as light as a feather, peace at last. I feel as though I'm flying! Oh wait, I'm actually falling. My body seems paralyzed into my sheets and out of nowhere, I'm facing my death! All I wanted was a couple hours of shut eye, and now I'm dying, great. Where did my cherub go? I guess he wasn't as strong as I thought. I panic, looking around at nothing and wondering when the fall will clash with the ground of nothingness. I try to swing and grab at the darkness around me, hoping to grab a shelf or something to keep me from plummeting. Then suddenly, the world is bright again. Still dark, but better than pitch black. I woke up. I assume I had a dream about falling, but it felt too real. Was that cherub real? Was I actually going somewhere? I guess i'll never know, for now.

MICHAELA HOLCOMB, GRADE 10

A Lost Dream

When I was six years old I would dream of going to the NBA and playing like MJ. I would practice every day from when school ended until when it got dark. Playing basketball was so fun to me, it was like therapy. When I played it removed negative thoughts and everything that was bothering me just faded away. It brings people together in a positive way.

Once I turned 15 my love for the game started to fade away. I started going outside less, playing with friends, and eventually I just stopped playing. But I guess I can blame that on 2020. I tried getting back into playing once the new school year started but nah. . . . I lost love for it completely. It didn't sit right with me thinking that I'm not going to play basketball for the first time in years but it was true. After realizing this, I knew that my dream of going to the NBA. . . . was gone.

KEYSHAWN KING, GRADE 10

The Letter

Dear Diamond,

I think that is your name.
Every time someone knocks, that's what they seem to say.
I have a few questions, try to keep sane
I've been watching you for months, even till this day.
By the end I will explain.
So please don't take this the wrong way
Let's begin on top I will try to remain.
One day you came into your room crying but had nothing to say.
You put down your bag,
Then you grabbed a pair of scissors and all of your tears went away.
Your blood was rushing down your arm,
you acted like it didn't hurt in any way.
Then you grabbed these circular red pills,
Took 16, then I watched you drift away.
I was wondering if that took your pain away?

Oh and do the scars remind you of that day?
The ones on your arm..I think you get what I say
I was just wondering if it still haunts you.
And what that day has taught you?
Sorry, I don't mind the business that pays.
Why do you always look at me?
Even though I could look at you for days.
Do you not see what I see?
Is what you lack self esteem?
Do you not love yourself as much as you seem to love looking at me?
I think you look at me more than you should
If I could speak and tell you you're beautiful I would.
I'll see you when you wake,
Go to sleep now, tomorrow you have a test to take.

With Love,
Your Mirror.

DIAMOND LOPEZ, GRADE 10

The Hat

Whose hat is that? I think I know.
Its owner seems quite happy though.
Full of joy like a calm breeze in the sunset,
As I watch him laugh. I say hello.

He gives his hat a shake,
And laughs until his belly aches.
The only other sound are roaming sneaks
Ready to attack as the day breaks

The hat is live, happiness and deep,
But he has promises to keep,
After a stake and lots of sleep.
Sweet dreams come to him cheap.

He rises from his bed,
With thoughts of killing in his head,
He eats his supper.
Ready for the day ahead.
To slaughter those in his way

FREDERIC RAMIREZ-MELENCIANO, GRADE 10

Untitled

We were always warned about adulthood, "Don't grow up too fast", "You will have a lot of responsibilities as an adult", and "when you're an adult y'all wish you were still a kid", yet no one ever warned us about the journey to adulthood. The children of our generation have gone through so much. A lot of kids stress over

school feeling too overwhelmed and unmotivated to even keep trying. Adults tell kids they are too young to be stressed and tired and I agree so why are we? I know I'm too young to experience all the world's hate, but I do. I know I'm too young to end up hurt but I can. I also know I'm too young to be killed, yet it's possible. No one ever prepared us for that so what now.

NATALIA REID, GRADE 10

MELLOWSWEET

Mellowsweet, the feeling of far away happiness
The feeling of reaching out to city lights that seem so far away
Across the ocean, those lights appear
Astounding lights they are, accompanied by quiet noise
So seemingly distant
Why are they so far?
Clouds cover my sky
Cloudy grey with hues of purple
Calm whispers cover my world
A blanket that brings tranquility
A halcyon atmosphere
The fragrant scent of lavender
Eases my mind.

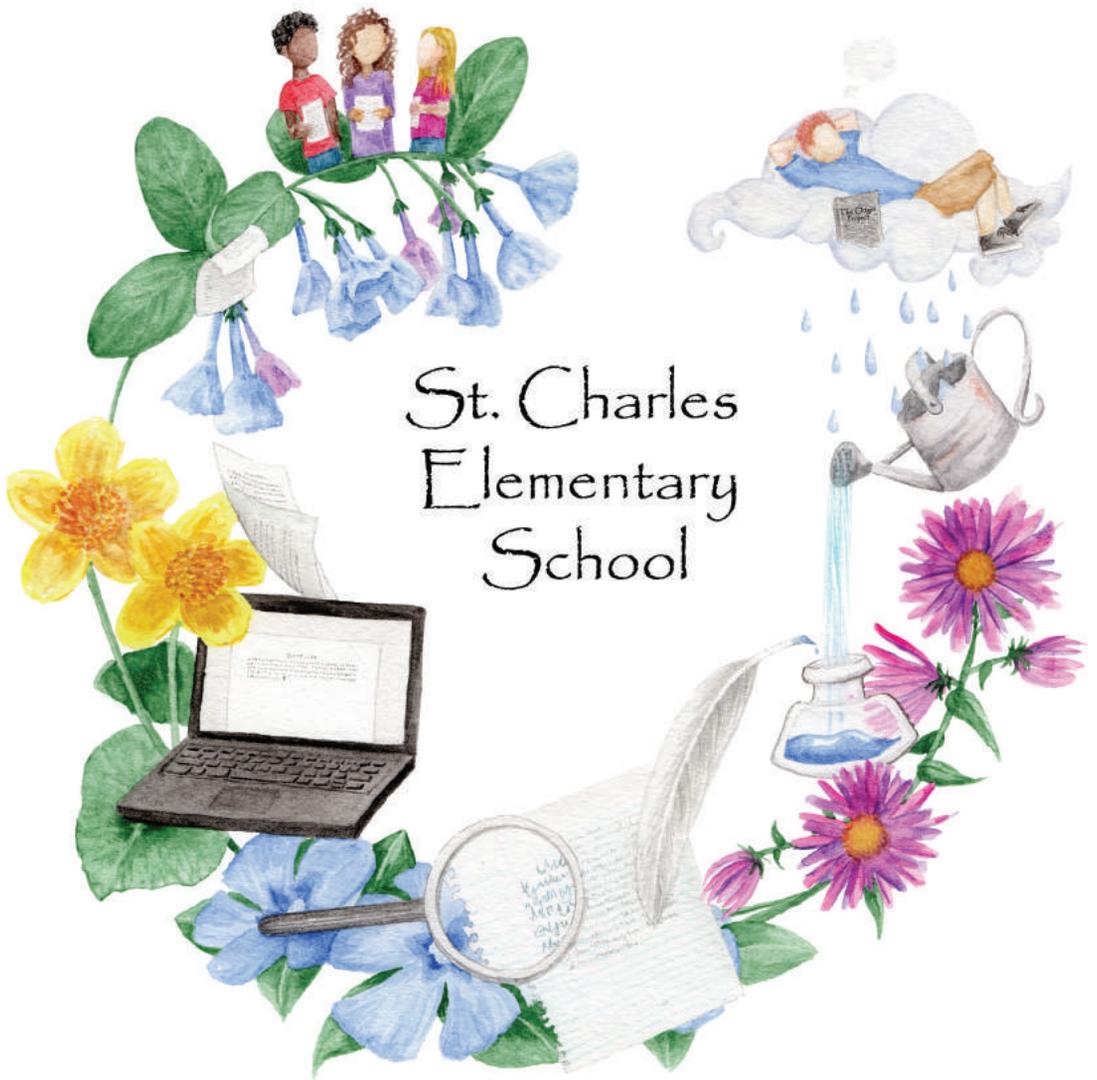
ARIANNA ROSE, GRADE 10

Careers

There are many careers in the world to choose from when looking for one. You got a chemical engineer, vet, nurse, mental health counseling, a teacher and more. Throughout my life I've come across a lot of people who want to do those things in life. I don't know why but I guess those careers are very popular. Well . . . I can see why kinda, people around the world need people that know how to work in those fields of work.

My aunt is a mental health counselor and she used to tell me how she enjoyed her job. But now she says she hates and wants to leave it. She says it's draining, lost love for it, and doesn't make her happy. I can see why it's draining, dealing with other people's problems, making sure everyone else is okay. I'm pretty sure she thinks she needs time for herself or something maybe.

JOSHUA ROYAL, GRADE 10



St. Charles
Elementary
School

ROBERTA GIBBONS, GRADE 4 ENGLISH

As I reflect on the challenges and silver linings of this unprecedented year, one thought continuously reruns through my mind. Thinking outside the box has become a daily experience. The many obstacles that we have faced this year, class size, in person learning, remote learning, busses, all safety issues, fire drills —keeping students safe and apart, yet preparing them for whatever may be a challenge in their academic life. The balance of in person to remote and the ability to adapt and be flexible to move from one mode of instruction to another.

It is very refreshing that some things can be constant, like the Origin Project. As we navigated all of the unexpected differences in teaching this year and worked on the project in a different manner, the children were excited to get to participate in something they had familiarity with, and helped give them a small sense of security.

ROBERTA GIBBONS, LIBRARIAN
GRADE 4 ENGLISH

Mom

For the Origin project, I wanted to write about my mother, Brittany Jones. My mother was born in Lee Co, VA, in 1989. She went to school right here in Lee County, just like me. My mother liked to play outside when she was little, just like me. She said she always had to keep her room clean, and help with the dishes. She also enjoyed cooking with her mom, just like me. I always enjoy helping mom in the kitchen. One of my mothers most happiest memories was Sunday morning breakfast with her grandparents. I chose to write about my mom, because I look up to her, and she is always there for me with a big smile. Her advice for me is always follow your heart, and smile everyday.

GRACIE BLANKEN, 4TH GRADE



Mom's Oreo Balls

36 Oreo Cookies or more
8 ounces Cream Cheese
16 ounce semi sweet baking chips

Add cookies into a food processor and crush into a fine crumb. Place crushed Oreos into a medium baking bowl . Add softened Cream Cheese. Stir until mixed, place Oreo Balls are in the freezer. Dip the chilled Oreo Balls into the hot melted chocolate. Place on a waxed covered baking sheet . Refrigerate for 1 hour until firm . Store in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks or up to 3 months in the freezer ..

BREANNA BURTON, 4TH GRADE

Dad's Spaghetti

1 pound ground beef
2 jars of Spaghetti Sauce
1 box of Angel Hair Pasta
½ pot of water
Oil
Salt and Pepper to taste

In a skillet add ground beef and oil, add salt and pepper. Cook on medium heat for 10–12 minutes, until beef is no longer pink. Fill a pot halfway with water, bring to a boil. Stir in noodles and reduce heat. Simmer and cook for 8–10 minutes, until noodles are tender. Drain ground beef, pour in Spaghetti Sauce, turn on low for 8–10 minutes, while noodles cook. Drain noodles, and mix in the noodles.

ERICA BURTON, 4TH GRADE

My Cat Dude

I got Dude on April 25th, 2019. My mom and I named him so many names, until we called him Dude. He was a kitten. He loves to play. He will eat salad, chicken, chips, and pizza. He doesn't like water, he likes milk and dry cat food. He is lazy, he likes to look at birds, squirrels, and other cats too. He likes to fight and bite a lot. He loves mice, one time he sat on one, but he is the best kitten ever.

BETHANY CARPENTER, 4TH GRADE

Mom

My mom's name is Jenny Greer. She was born in Texas, in 1984. She loved to fish and play outside. Her first job was at the Patio. She met my dad at the Patio, and they got married in 2008. Then she had me in 2010 then decided to stay home with me. Then she had my brother in 2012. My mom said to be kind to everyone. I love my mom.

KAYLEE GREER, 4TH GRADE

THE STORY OF MY DAD

My dad's name is Casey. He was born in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, in 1981. He had 5 dogs as he was growing up. He did not get an allowance his favorite activities were baseball....football....and riding dirt bikes.

His chores were carrying coal and wood. He celebrated all American holidays.....his technology was a tv with video tapes, vcr, and tape players. His house was brown, but it burnt to the ground when he was older. He had electricity when he was younger his family had holiday traditions .His favorite subjects in school were Science and History . The sports he was interested in were baseball and football . His favorite tv shows were Alf...and Chips. His first job was mowing and weedeating. He got his first job when he was 15 years old. The biggest difference between then and now is he has gotten as old as a rotten tomato. His advice to give me is always do the right thing.

CELSEY MOONEYHAN, 4TH GRADE

My Mamaw

My mamaw Helen is the best. Before I was in school, she took care of me and Evan. Even after I was in school, she kept me. She makes the best chili, it is so good! She also makes good banana pudding. She buys me the best gifts.

BLAKE TRITT, 4TH GRADE



St. Paul
Elementary
School

MELISSA GALLIHER, LIBRARIAN AND MUSIC TEACHER

I am so blessed to be the librarian and classroom music teacher at St. Paul Elementary School and in 2017 my students became a part of The Origin Project. This is our fourth year participating in this amazing partnership. During a Zoom meeting in December 2020, many students asked Adriana Trigiani what she enjoyed doing growing up in Big Stone Gap, Virginia. I joked about how I know firsthand how creative and imaginative Adriana is and has always been because during the summer of 1978, Adriana Trigiani was my babysitter. I was asked to write a story about my memories of that time period.

Paper Doll Summer

In the summer of 1978, my family lived on Poplar Hill in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, in what we called “the big house”. I had just finished my second grade year at Powell Valley Primary School and my sisters, Melanie and Melinda, were done with Kindergarten and Pre-K. In the spring of 1977, my family moved into a three-story house on a block that faced Bullitt Park up on the hill. This was the start of our second summer break living in our new home, and we had created lots of fun activities to keep us busy during our weeks of freedom. For fun my sisters and I loved to play “hotel,” pretending that our big house was filled with various guests in the many rooms. We also enjoyed playing freeze tag outside and making mud pies under the canopy of big pine trees in our backyard.

It was in front of the Trigiani family house that we caught the bus during the school year. There were a lot of little girls who caught the bus at our stop because the Litton girls lived at that intersection as well. That meant that there were four Litton sisters and three Moon girls that rode with the Trigianis on the bus. The Trigiani brothers and sisters were older than we were, meaning they went to Powell Valley Middle and High School, while some were off in college. I can remember that riding the bus with the Trigianis made me feel so safe because NOBODY messed with any of the girls from the Trigiani stop

or they had to answer to them. Never in the time that we lived on Poplar Hill did any of the Litton or Moon girls deal with any bullying because the Trigianis, especially the Trigiani boys, became our protectors.

The Trigiani family was made up of seven children, five of them girls, so my mom had a good source of babysitter possibilities. The most memorable activity from the summer of 1978 involved our babysitter from down the street, Adriana Trigiani, who was home from college. To this day, my mom describes Adriana as the most amazing babysitter she has ever seen in action. Many babysitters come and assess what to do with their “charges” by looking at what is available in each house, but that was not Adriana’s style. She came to our house each visit armed with a



Melissa Galliber and her sisters during their Paper Doll Summer

box full of supplies. I can remember being so excited when Mom let us know who was coming to babysit. The three of us would be prepared for her appearance, all sitting around our kitchen table, with our colored pencils and crayons at the ready. When she arrived, Adriana would sit down at the kitchen table with us, and she would draw figures on paper. My sisters and I would then color and decorate them into paper dolls. Adriana would help us cut them out and glue them onto pasteboard pieces for backing.



Melissa Galliher during TOP Zoom session as she reminisces about the fun times when Adri was her babysitter

Our paper doll designs would then become the characters in our stories we created for the rest of our day. Once our new paper dolls were completed, we would spend the rest of our time with Adriana inventing adventures for our paper doll characters. Each time she came to babysit, Adriana brought our completed paper dolls back, and we would then add to our collection, allowing us to expand previous stories and create new adventures. What I can appreciate now as an adult is that her activity with us encompassed our 3-year age span and, according to my mom, actively involved all three of us as kids equally, I'm sure modifying what she had to do to assist us according to our age needs. Mom says that she does not know what happened to our paper doll collection from that summer. My mom's house in Big Stone Gap is still filled with items and memory boxes in her attic. Wouldn't it be a hoot if one day while cleaning out a space, we found our childhood creations!

My mom tells me now that one of the things that fascinated her the most about the days that summer when Adriana came to babysit was that when Mom left the house, we would all be sitting at the kitchen table and when she returned, we would still all four be sitting in the exact same spots, enthralled in our activity and never wanting Adriana to leave. We were spellbound in the imagination adventure she led for us each time that she would come to babysit. In truth, I do not remember how many times Adriana came to babysit during the summer of 1978 or how long she would stay for each visit. I do, however, remember the incredible excitement that I associated as a little girl with our vivacious, dark-haired friend from down the street that made the three of us feel worthy, special, and important.

Through the years I have been to many of Adriana Trigiani's book signings and activities held in Big Stone Gap in association with the premiere of her movie *Big Stone Gap*. In 2017, my students were granted the opportunity to participate in The Origin Project, and I have attended events in person and through Zoom that have involved appearances with Adriana. Consistently in every instance, Adriana remains this approachable, down to earth icon that has an uncanny ability to connect and inspire any and all around her. I still love getting hugs from "my babysitter". I feel so blessed to personally know Adriana Trigiani and appreciate that she shares a part of my history.

MELISSA GALLIHER, TEACHER
ST. PAUL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

HANNAH MULLINS, 6TH GRADE TEACHER

My Papaw

I interviewed my papaw Gary Blevins. He was born February 2, 1951, and is from Bull Run, in Saint Paul, Virginia. Growing up they didn't have much money, so he and his three sisters and two brothers loved to play tag and hide and go seek. His favorite childhood memory was getting his first bicycle and family hunting trips that were taken every year. They raised chickens, cows, hogs, and horses. He always had chores to do like carrying in coal and wood for heat, and wash water for baths.

My papaw married my granny Kathryn and had two boys and one girl, and was in the Navy from August of 1969 - December 1973 where he was a hospital corpsman. Being in the Navy, he traveled all over the U.S., Midway, and Gwam. Once he left the Navy, he became a coal miner until he retired. His proudest moment in life was the day the good Lord saved him. The biggest changes he has seen in his life is when the Lord changed him from a drunk to a saint.

I've known my papaw for my whole life. I asked him because I knew I would get the coolest answers. The answers taught me that life is hard to follow Jesus. I admire my grandpa for his belief in God, his service to our country, and his love for his family.

MASON BLEVINS, GRADE 6

My Papaw

I interviewed my papaw. His name is Curtis Collis Brickey. He was born and raised in Coburn, VA. He has two brothers and their names are Joe Brickey and Willam Brickey. He married Linda Gay Harvey.

His happiest childhood memory was when his dad got him a toy train for Christmas. Papaw had a pet dog, a white rabbit, and a pet groundhog that they played with. His chores were to chop wood, gather coal, and mow the yard. He liked to ride bikes, play marbles, play hide and seek, and play in the creek. He had a job at BIC for thirty years and helped build a golf course.

ACELYNN BRICKEY, GRADE 6

Aellen's Life

Aellen Boyd was born on April 11th, 1953. She has two daughters, one is 37 years old and the youngest is 31 years old; Cassie Boyd and Crystal Boyd. A husband of Joe Boyd, they lived in a trailer park for a few years. They went to a house on a hill but they made it a home with her two girls. She has been through many losses in her life. The most recent loss in her life has been her husband Joe Boyd in the year of 2010. She lost her mother and father years ago from the Hartsock family. She was sent to work at a young age doing odd jobs for the locals. Husking corn, babysitting, and many other things were done to make up some pocket change. It was a hard life but a good life. Over many losses and many hardships in her life, she still finds the time to enjoy the simpler things in life.

BRYSON COLLINS, GRADE 6

My Dad

My dad's name is Richard Ervin and he grew up in Dante, Virginia. He was born in 1969. He has two brothers and his best memory from his childhood is hanging out with his dad and cousins. Growing up he had a hamster named Charlie, a bunny named Bandit, and a dog named Bowser. He had a couple of chores and one of them was to work in the gardens, mow the yard, and pick up toys. He said one of the big changes in his life compared to now was how the world and technology changed.

One of the games that they created and played was called Ragball. They took rags and tapped them up in a ball, then they found a stick. They would play with it until it broke and then find another stick. Another fun thing to do was to play in the woods and make cabins.

My dad said his family just traveled on vacation. He married my mom, Brandie Smith, and they have three girls. I have known my dad all my life and he has taught me things over that all that time.

KAYLEE ERVIN, GRADE 6

Claudette's Life

I interviewed my grandmother. Her name is Claudette Ervin and she is from St. Paul, Virginia. She was also born in St. Paul, Virginia. Her favorite childhood memory was when she went fishing with bobby pins. Her family had no traditions when she was a child. She had 4 pets, a dog named Queen, a cat named Tom, a Billy Goat, and a Groundhog. She had many chores including: Carrying water, getting wood, washing clothes, washing dishes, tending to her younger siblings, and cooking.

She also enjoyed playing many games like: Baseball, tag, hide and seek, "Marbles," and horseshoe which are many of the games we play today! In her spare time she enjoyed running, riding bikes, playing with her friends, and playing dolls with her cousin. Her career(s) were babysitting younger and older people, she also cleaned peoples houses to make money. The only way she could travel was if she walked, but she did go to Michigan for one whole year to babysit.

When my grandmother was 19 she married my pappaw, Harry Marshall "Pud" Ervin. She says that he was the sweetest person in the world, I never got to meet him, but I'm sure he was sweet. She has three children, Harry Wayne Ervin being the oldest, Jeffery Lynn Ervin being the second oldest, and Richard Joe Ervin being the youngest. I've known my mamaw for about 8 years, this is only because I didn't know her until about 7 years ago when I was adopted. The biggest changes my grandmother has seen is the change in technology, the way schools are today, bigger stores, and how easy it is to find food.

I chose to interview my mamaw because I know my grandmother comes from a home with very little along with a lot of siblings, so I just thought that she would have more of a story to tell.

I admire that my grandmother has worked for everything that she has today, and I admire that she is loving and kind and will listen to you if you ever need to talk. My Mamaw taught me that in life you don't just get stuff handed to you. You have to work to get the thing you need and want. My Mamaw's proudest moment is when she had my uncle Wayne (Harry Wayne Ervin.)

I believe my grandmother has more of a story to tell and I wish I could share all of the information and stories that she told me.

LAYLA ERVIN, GRADE 6



Claudette's Life: Layla Ervin

My Nana

I interviewed Dana Duty, my nana. She's from Tazel, Virginia and was born in 1966. She had four brothers and two sisters. Her favorite memory was playing with kids around the block.

A cool tradition she said is Christmas and she had dogs, goats, and horses as pets. The thing she did as a chore was doing the dishes and for games. She said that she played cup ball, red light green light, and mother may I. Another thing she did for fun was ride her bike.

Her career is being a mother and grandmother and she never traveled. She married my papaw, Marcus Duty, and she had four children.

I've known her for my whole life, and the qualities I admire about her is that she dances with me and lets me help her cook. A life lesson that she taught me is that life is important. She said her proudest moment was having children and being a grandmother, and that the biggest changes she has ever seen was growing old.

ERICA GROSS, GRADE 6

My Stepdad

My stepdad, Boone Mullins, worked in the garden when he was little. He grew food and fruits and it was hard work. He was born in 1987. He says it was hard work in the old days. Sometimes for fun me and my stepdad ride dirt bikes.

PEYTON HENSLEY, GRADE 6

My Pawpaw's Life

This is a story about my pawpaw Ronnie Farrial Hileman. He was born July 22, 1948. My pawpaw lived in Virginia City, born and raised there. His dad had a farm so my pawpaw had to wake up early to feed and water the cows, horses, and the chickens. My pawpaw didn't see his dad much because his dad was a full time coal miner. But my pawpaw's mom had a hard life as well. She had to raise all the kids while her husband was at work. It was hard for them to survive back then too. My pawpaw had 12 siblings and he was a loving caring person and he loved all his siblings.



My Pawpaw's Life: Cayden Hileman

When my pawpaw was a boy, he liked to hide in the barn loft and play with his brothers. They would play cowboys and indians. They would play leapfrog and many other games. My pawpaw loved to hunt, so he would help hunt for some of the food they ate. Then, when my pawpaw was in his twenties he met my mawmaw, Anna Katherine Grizzel, and they fell in love and got married. They got married at a rose bush in front of their house.

After my mawmaw and pawpaw got married they had my dad Ronnie Farrial Hileman Jr. Well, now that they had a baby, they needed money, so my pawpaw went to work in the coal mines. He was a miner man, and a roof bolter and he had a lot of friends in the coal mines. My paw-



History: Kaytlyn Mullins

paw worked at least twelve hours in the coal mines every day, and after a while my mawmaw and pawpaw had my aunt Rhonda Ann Hileman, my dad's sister. Since my mawmaw and pawpaw had two kids my pawpaw had to work a lot harder.

Later on, they ended up having two more kids Robbie James Hileman and Ryan Anthony Hileman and to my pawpaw there was nothing like family. He says family comes first before anything else. My mawmaw and pawpaw ended up having four kids.

After my dad got older he went to work with my pawpaw in the coal mines to help support the family. My dad and pawpaw worked in the same coal mines, so they both got a nickname. My pawpaw's nickname was Dog and my dad's was Pup. After all the kids grew up my pawpaw retired from the coal mines and he bought a farm and he also bought 30 head of cattle. My pawpaw loved to farm, so he says he is going to continue to farm until he dies. He says he loves it that much, but not as much as his family. My pawpaw is now 72 years old, still farming, still living, and still loving his family. This is the story of my pawpaw's life.

CAYDEN HILEMAN, GRADE 6

My Dad

I am interviewing my dad, Wayne Kiser. He lives in McClure, Virginia and he was born in 1971. My dad has one brother and three sisters. His happiest child memories are going fishing with the family. He also said that each year you got to pick the meal you wanted for your birthday. He had many dogs and cats. He and his siblings had chores in the house and the garden. They played backyard baseball. His favorite thing to do was ride his bike.

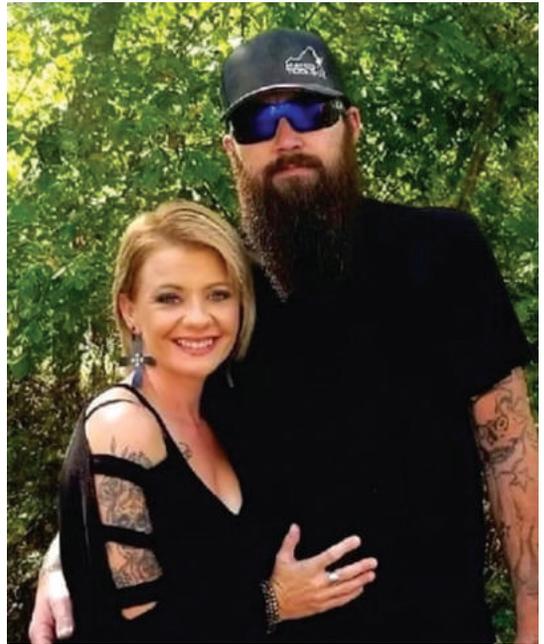
Now my dad is a state police special agent. He has traveled to many places. He is married to Nikki Kiser and has three children. He said his happiest moments were being a father and the biggest changes he saw in his life were phone communication and the internet.

KLAY KISER, GRADE 6

HISTORY

Some things I learned about my dad when I interviewed him is that he has an older sister and they had a dog growing up. My dad, Corey Anthony Mullins, was born in 1987 in Virginia. He loves riding motorcycles and working on vehicles. Things he liked to play in school when he was younger are basketball and baseball, those were also his hobbies to do. He didn't travel and now he is married to my mom and they have three children, me, my older sister, and my little brother.

KAYTLYN MULLINS, GRADE 6



History: Kaytlyn Mullins

My Dad Joey Hale

The person I am interviewing is Joey Hale, also my stepdad. Joey lives in Dickenson county. He was born on August 1, 1968. He has four brothers and no sisters. His happiest childhood moments were spending time outdoors. He didn't have any cool traditions in his family. He grew up with his cat Fido. In the summer he had a few chores. The games Joey played in his lifetime were always outside. For fun he played in the woods. Joey was a Roofer, Plumber and worked for the Gas Company. He's traveled to a lot of places like Alabama, Chesapeake Bay, and Puerto Rico. He married my mother Jessica Hale. He had me and my little sister. He has been in my life most of the time and most of my life. He also persuades me in life to do more things. He helps me and has fun with me. Joey taught me more than I could ever know. His proudest moment in life is marrying my mother.

CHRISTIAN RUFF, GRADE 6

My Mamaw Karen Meade



My Mamaw Karen Meade: Chloe Sartin

Karen Meade, my mamaw was born on May 22, 1960 in Wise County, VA. Growing up she had two sisters and two brothers. One of her sisters is her twin. She is the youngest by 25 minutes. She says that her favorite memory is Christmas 1968. It is her favorite memory because she got to spend a lot of time with her family. Her family had one dog named Rex. Growing up all of her family had chores they had to do each evening. They liked to play hide and seek and kickball in the street. The biggest change she has seen is technology.

She married Randall Meade. They have three kids: one girl, two boys and nine grandkids. Her proudest moment is when her kids and her grandkids were born.

CHLOE SARTIN, GRADE 6

My Mamaw

I am interviewing my mamaw, Janie Stidham. She is from St. Paul, Virginia and was born in Russell county in Lebanon. She has one brother and one sister. Her happiest childhood memory is going hunting with her dad. She said she didn't think they celebrated any cool traditions, but she had dogs and cats as pets.

She said she has plenty of chores and her favorite things to do as a child was play Hide and Seek and Ring Around the Rosy. She also rode horses and ponies. She worked at Buster Brown and has done a lot of traveling.

She married Buford Stidham and had two children: Ashley Hall and Matthew Stidham. She said having her kids is her proudest moment. She also said that the biggest change she has seen in her lifetime was when they rerouted the Clinch River in St. Paul.

My mamaw is hilarious, loving and caring. She has taught me to respect people, to be loving and caring, and to be thankful for what I have.

TAKOTAH SKEENS, GRADE 6

Joshlyn Amanda Blankenship's Origin

I am interviewing my mom, Joshlyn Amanda Blankenship. She is originally from Rowe, Virginia but now lives in Castlewood, Virginia. She was born October 26, 1984 in Grundy, Virginia. My mom has a sister named Tabitha, a step brother Derick, and a step sister Richelle. Some of my mom's happiest memories were growing up on my great grandparent's farm. She grew up kind of poor, but was very blessed in her raising. I've heard her say that they never had much but they always had what they needed, love, faith, and Jesus.

There were never really so called traditions but every Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Eve was spent at my great grandparents' house, who live in Meadowview, Virginia. Christmas Day evening was spent with my great grandparents who had the farm. Now, 36 years later we still do this every year.

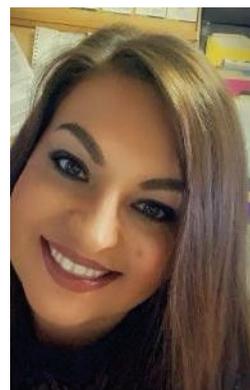
When my mom was little she had multiple dogs. Since she was raised on a farm she grew up with two horses, many hogs, goats, cattle, chickens, and ducks. She never really had chores because my mom was always playing sports. However, she did help in the gardens and with the animals.

Some things she did for fun was playing outside, in the creek, and with the farm animals, riding her bike, and riding four-wheelers and dirt bikes. My mom worked as a cosmetologist for many years, but due to breaking her back in multiple places at only 29, she is unable to work in a salon anymore. Now she is an administrator for some local cemeteries.

She has traveled all the way from Canada to the Grand Turks. She absolutely loves to travel and wishes she could do it more. My mom is not married, so it has basically been my mom, my little brother, and me. I've known my mom since my eyes first opened. She is my mentor and my hero. She's also the only person I know that (besides my mawmaw and pawpaw) helps and takes care of me. I basically admire all of her qualities. Her proudest moment is when she had me and my brother. The biggest change in her life is when COVID-19 hit. I have seen her struggle due to her job since the pandemic, but she is still the strongest person I know.



Joshlyn Amanda Blankenship's Origin: Landon Smith



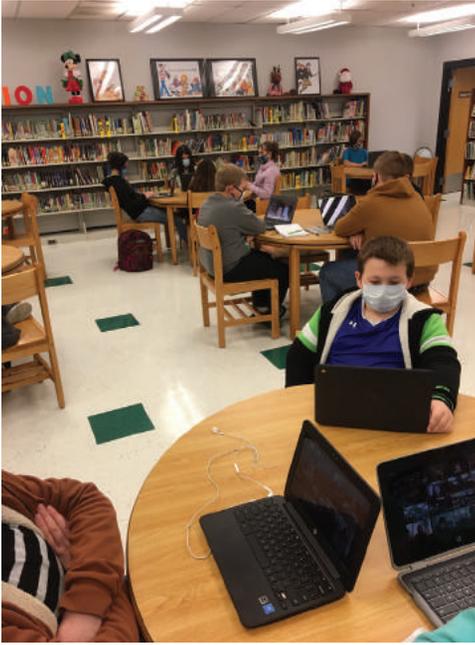
Joshlyn Amanda Blankenship's Origin: Landon Smith

LONDON SMITH, GRADE 6

My Mom

I interviewed my mom, Bethany Stallard. She grew up in Clintwood, Virginia. She was born on March 1, 1986 in Wise, Virginia. She has one brother named Jacob and one sister named Ashley. When I asked her about the things she liked to do as a kid, she said she loved spending time in the woods and playing with her animals. She had so many animals and she loved to see them a lot and hold them. She said she loved to play on uprooted trees with her brother. She loved to play on the trampoline and go fishing. My mom celebrated normal traditions, she said. She has seen technology and communication change the most in her lifetime. Also, she did have chores, but she didn't like doing them.

Now she doesn't work, but she does raise babies. My mom has always dreamed of traveling to Europe, but has not yet. She married Nathan Stallard, they have five kids. She is really nice and she cares for me. She



6th graders participate in our group Zoom call

cooks good food, and I help her sometimes. Interviewing her taught me to go outside more, to cook, and to help. Her proudest moment was having all her children.

ABIGAIL STALLARD, GRADE 6

My Sister

I am interviewing my sister. She is from Castlewood. My sister was born on April 28, 2003. Her happiest childhood memories are going to the aquarium and the zoo. She has grown up with a cat named Princess. She likes to play Monopoly and Scrabble. She wants to be a nurse. My sister likes to go to the beach in South Carolina. I have known her my whole life. I chose my sister to interview because she is a cool person. I like that she is smart and nice. She says that one of the biggest changes she has seen in her lifetime is that the world is worse than it used to be when she was a child.

ISABELLA TARR, GRADE 6

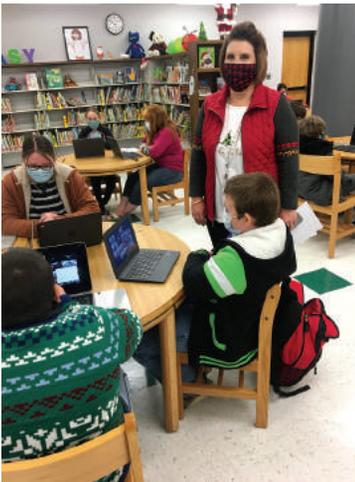
My Mom

My mom's name is Cecilia but her full name is Enma Cecilia Gracia Pineda. She was born January 9, 1983 and is from Guatemala and she is 38 years old. She has 5 siblings. One of my mom's family traditions is on New Years we light up candles and pray for a new year and let the candles go out by themselves over the week.

She said life in Guatemala was poor and really, really hot in summer and winter. When she was a kid she did a lot of sports like gymnastics, basketball, and volleyball. She came to America with her best friend Adriana and they graduated together. When my mom came to America she didn't know any English but my dad later taught her English. She said it took awhile, but she is good at it now.

SHADOW WILSON, GRADE 6

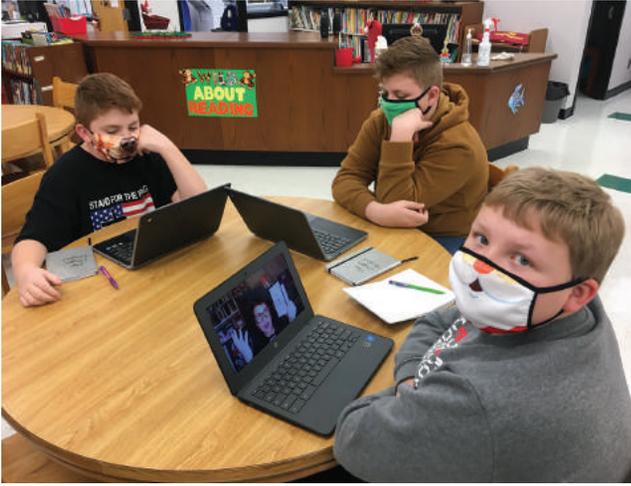
St. Paul and Greendale librarians and students



Our principal, Mrs. Dickenson, joins our Zoom call in the library



Takotah and Gabriel listen to Adriana Trigiani



Peyton, Bryson, and Cayden listen during our group Zoom call



Jameson listens to Adriana speak



6th graders participate in our group Zoom call



Logan listens as Adriana Trigiani offers advice



Christian and Landon listen attentively during our Zoom call



Ms. Mullins watches as her English students listen intently



St. Paul and Greendale librarians and students collaborate on Zoom with Nancy and Adri



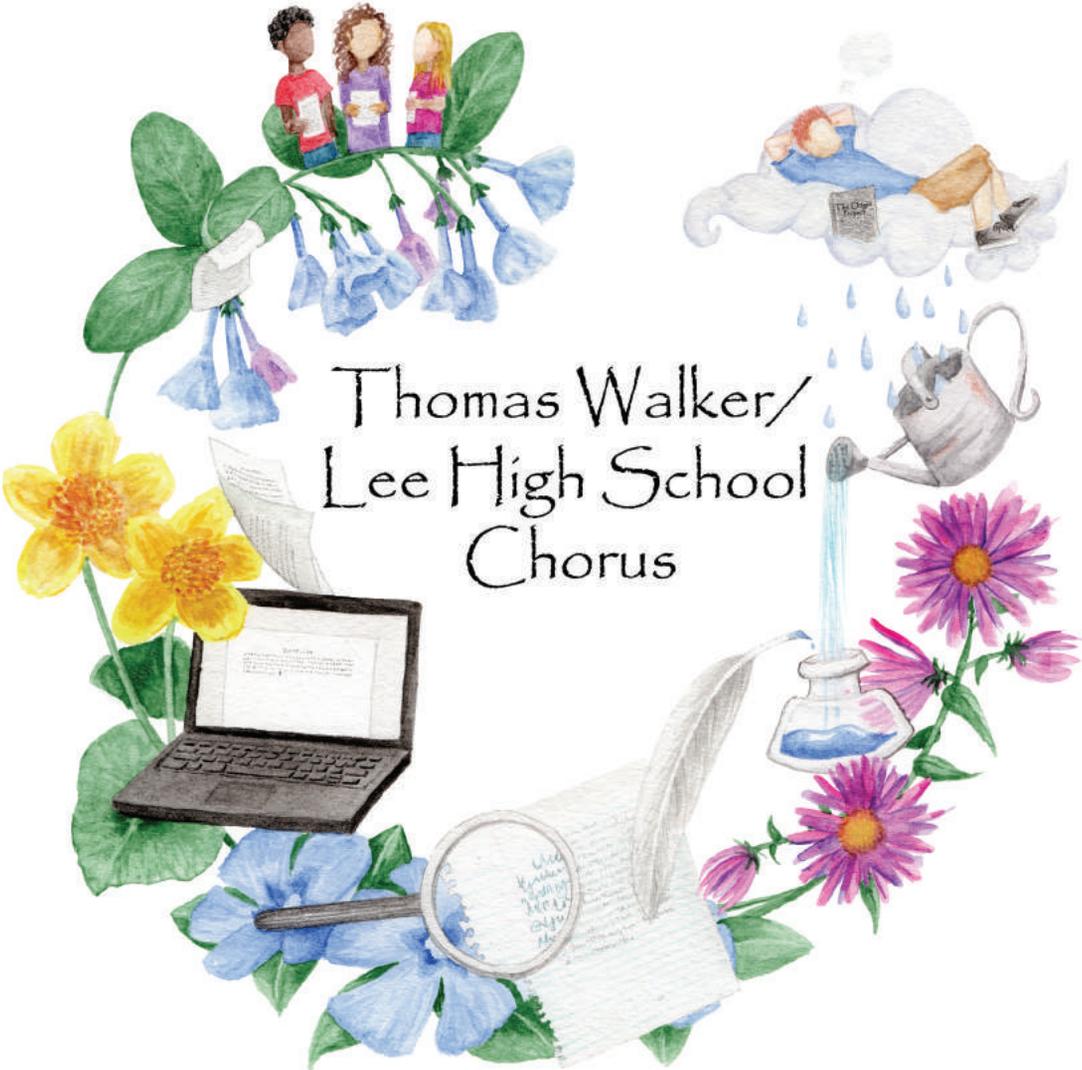
St. Paul and Greendale librarians and students collaborate on Zoom with Nancy and Adri



St. Paul and Greendale librarians and students collaborate on Zoom with Nancy and Adri



St. Paul and Greendale librarians and students collaborate on Zoom with Nancy and Adri



Thomas Walker /
Lee High School
Chorus

CARI BELCHER, CHORAL MUSIC,
LEE HIGH SCHOOL & THOMAS WALKER HIGH SCHOOL

This is the second year that I have had the privilege and opportunity for my choir students to participate in The Origin Project. I have included responses from my 8–12 grade choral music students at Lee High School and Thomas Walker High School. I asked my students to write about the involvement of music in their everyday life and how different their life would be without it. Also, I asked my students to reflect and write about a song that is connected to a memory that means something to them personally. We also enjoyed exploring the creative process of songwriting. My students shared songs with each other that tell stories, express emotions, communicate ideas and share experiences. Overall, I think my students recognize that music is a powerful means of communication. Regardless of musical style and preference, my students were able to connect to the lyrics. Communicating the lyrics or text of a song with the intended expression is what is unique to vocal musicians. I am fortunate to be able to share and experience music making with my students. I hope you enjoy a little insight into the impact and importance of music in the lives of these individuals.

CARI BELCHER, CHORAL DIRECTOR
LEE HIGH SCHOOL & THOMAS WALKER HIGH SCHOOL

LEE HIGH SCHOOL CHORUS

Music And Me

Music has played a massive role in my life. It has allowed me to not only meet new people but also make great friends along the way. I have done some form of musical training for 7 years and over those 7 years I have traveled, competed and acted in many different shows and events. I have met many great friends along the way, many of which I still stay in contact with till this day. Music has always been my escape and my safe place music is an outlet for me to escape the stress of the real world and just relax and breathe.

TRAVIS ADDINGTON, GRADE 12



Combined Chorus of Thomas Walker & Lee High Schools



Combined Chorus of Thomas Walker & Lee High Schools



Lee High School Chorus

Music plays a major role in my life. It has led me to some of the most amazing things. I have met some lifelong friends through music, and it has given me a way to express myself. I'm able to relate to people, and make friends along the way who have the same music taste as me. It has brought me out of my shell, and has helped make me the kind of person I am today, and I am extremely grateful for it.

BROOKE DAVIS, GRADE 12



Thomas Walker High School Chorus



Thomas Walker High School Chorus

Music is extremely important to the world we live in today. Life would be so boring without music. You may not realize it, but music is everywhere.

I like the lyrics from the song “High Hopes.” I tend to have almost unrealistic plans for the future, which probably isn’t the best thing. The lyric and song as a whole says to not give up on your dreams even if they aren’t realistic.

EMMA HOBBS, GRADE 8

Music has helped me get through rough times. Halsey’s music explains a lot of my life. I relate to most of her songs. “Angel on Fire” explains me. I’ve been in choir since 6th grade. It’s made me have such a passion for music.

ISABELLA ROBBINS, GRADE 9

Hip hop songs really help me with my depression. If I feel depressed I listen to music to try to get the bad thoughts out of my head. Sometimes I listen to country music too. Sometimes listening to music brings back a memory like at my fourth grade dance. When I listen to the song “Because of You” it brings back memories of times with my dad.

KAREN SHACKLES, GRADE 8

I’ve never met anybody who doesn’t like music. Some people give their whole lives to music. It’s like sending a message that you find hard to say, so you sing it.

VICTORIA PILON, GRADE 12

Music plays a very important role in my life. I listen to music on a daily basis. Typically, I listen to music just to pass the time. I try to learn some songs because I like them and music always makes things better.

ETHAN WEBB, GRADE 12

Music is like a guideline through life anytime I feel like I'm spiraling. I just grab the life line through listening to music. It helps me feel whole and let out pent up anger.

CHANCELLOR WILDER, GRADE 10

Music and Memory

The first song I remember learning as a child was 'You are my sunshine.' My dad used to sing it to me all the time, and the majority of the time when he sang it was to wake me up in the morning for school. I still remember the lyrics because I still hear it all the time. 'You are my sunshine, my only sunshine. You make me happy when skies are grey. You'll never know dear how much I love you. Please don't take my sunshine away.'

"I wanna make you feel wanted" from the song 'Wanted' by Hunter Hayes. I want to help someone feel loved and needed and wanted. What I love to do is show people love and happiness, and to give them a sense of comfort. That is just the kind of person I am, and this line shows who I am inside.

BROOKE DAVIS, GRADE 12

The first song I remember learning was "We Will Rock You" by Queen. My dad taught it to me. I could probably recite every verse and word to you.

ELIAS EISENMENGER, GRADE 9

One of the first songs I remember learning as a child was "A Thousand Years" by Christina Perri. I vividly remember singing it all the time, and it also led me to learning other songs by her. I still remember the words and music, and still sing it to this day. I was watching a movie and I remember hearing it on there. I actually sang this song my 4th and 6th grade year for the 4-H talent show. I won my category my 6th grade year. It is a beautiful song.

"Find hope in the hopeless, Pull me out of the train wreck" & "Cause a one-in-a-million chance, Is still a chance, still a chance, And I would take those odds" These lines are from the song Trainwreck by James Arthur. It is a song I really enjoy. Everyone has rough times in their life, and I discovered this song when I was in a bad time frame of my life. It seemed like everything was crashing down around me. When I first heard it, I didn't really understand the lyrics, but something about it really spoke to me. Finally, I realized that this song was like a call for help in a way. It has gotten me through all the tough times in my life that is for sure. These lines in particular really hit me. The first one kinda told me that no matter how bad life seemed, there was still hope, and it was telling me to find that hope, and to help myself get out of the trainwreck I was in. The second line told me that no matter how hard life got, no matter how big or how small the issue was, there was always a chance of it getting better. If it was one-in-a-million, or a nine out of ten chance, it was still a chance, and those are odds I should be willing to take. This is such a powerful song and it will always be a favorite of mine.

SARAH JOHNSON, GRADE 10

I know this definitely isn't the first song I ever learned, but I do remember singing "I'll fly away" with my cousins all the time when I was really young. I couldn't tell you who I learned it from. I probably just heard it a lot as a kid and just learned it over time. I do remember how it goes. It's a song that I still know by heart to this day.

"Maybe some things last forever after all" - Forever After All by Luke Combs. When I hear this song it reminds me that some things do last forever and that I shouldn't give up on things in life so easily.

KARLEY SHOEMAKER, GRADE 10

Every time I listen to the song, “Summertime Sadness” by Lana Del Rey, the lyrics remind me to live life without fear.

NATHAN SMITH, GRADE 9

The main song that brings a memory to mind is Back in the USSR by The Beatles. This was one of the first songs that I learned by heart and in fourth grade, I decided to sing it for the talent show. This was the first time I sang for a group of people and the only time I sang in any kind of competition. The first song I remember learning is “We Are Tomorrow” by Bleach. For as far back as I can remember my brother would always listen to the band. After listening to the song with him thousands of times I learned it by myself. I don’t really remember the song or how it goes. I was six the last time I heard it, but the chorus still pops in my head every now and then.

ETHAN WEBB, GRADE 12

There are many songs that I listen to that have this effect for me, but my most noticeable would be “I’ll See You Again” by Westlife. After my great grandmother passed, this song became an emblem of the people I have lost. I can feel them right beside me when I listen to this song.

CHANCELLOR WILDER, GRADE 10

LIFE DURING A PANDEMIC

I miss being able to actually sing in class with all of my friends. Due to the pandemic, not many people come to school anymore. The classroom isn’t big enough for us to sing far enough apart, so we can only sing from home or outside. I miss singing and being able to enjoy having everyone together for our concerts and events.

BROOKE DAVIS, GRADE 12

I miss performing concerts because learning and performing songs with my friends is really fun.

EMMA EWING, GRADE 8

Honestly, I miss all of the choir and musical activities. I always looked forward to going to choir everyday during school, and since I haven’t been able to do that, I really miss it. I miss the nerves I get when I go to audition for all-district choir (never thought I would say that), I miss the bus rides to district and all day practice, I miss being able to sing together to make this beautiful sound while singing a song, I miss performing concerts, I miss it all. Life is not the same without that in my life. Choir has and will continue to be a big part of me, and not being able to experience those things is just not the same.

SARAH JOHNSON, GRADE 10

I miss the in-person musical activities the most. I miss having concerts with my friends in chorus. I really enjoy singing and doing concerts. I also miss all the practice we do to learn the songs. I enjoy these activities because it makes me feel more skilled in my singing. I miss singing and having a fun time.

CIERRA LONGSWORTH, GRADE 8

I miss a lot about pre-pandemic life, especially when it comes to choir. I miss seeing smiling faces and bright eyes while performing at concerts. I miss the all-district trips whether it be auditions or the event. I miss being able to perform in a choir with people from all over the district. I miss being able to hear my partners clearly in order to try to match pitch. I miss the normalcy of what choir was in the years prior to the pandemic.

VICTORIA PILON, GRADE 12

I think what I miss the most about in person activities is definitely the experience you get to have and the memories you make on trips for district chorus auditions or just different choir events in general. It was always so cool to meet new people and work under the direction of another director. It was just something different and new compared to being at school. You could learn new techniques and ways of doing things. I also miss being able to go on very long uncomfortable bus rides with all of my friends and just making memories with them.

KARLEY SHOEMAKER, GRADE 10

I miss having our concerts. Though it can be a pain getting prepared for these concerts, I love when concert day arrives. Usually, friends that have graduated come back to see the performance and to say hi to everyone. It is also a great way to hang out with friends a little more.

ETHAN WEBB, GRADE 12

Throughout the pandemic there's been a lot of changes. When school started, I chose to be completely online because it was the smartest choice for my family. I thought that I could've gone right back to normal in person school, but that didn't work out. I've been an online student for almost an entire year and I still haven't gotten used to it. Aside from my school life I've had to make changes at home too. Before the pandemic I was really social. I ate out and did things like roller skating but now I stay home pretty much 24/7 since January in 2020. At the beginning of the pandemic I really was not doing the best. I was really depressed, scared, and unsure about everything and that affected a lot of my relationships with friends and we aren't as close anymore. I have recently tried to message everyone and try to make myself happier. I can't wait to be able to go out and see the world again covid free.

ALYSSA YEARY, GRADE 9

Thomas Walker High School Chorus

MUSIC AND ME

Music plays a huge role in my life. Music can affect my mood more than anything else. Sad songs come on and make me tear up. Happy songs come on and make me smile. Some songs can also be connected to my memories. When I hear the first note of an old song, it can take me back to the first time I've listened to it or a certain time I've heard it before. Music is such a comforting thing for me, somehow it makes me feel less alone. It makes me feel connected to the artist of the song. Music expresses my emotions better than I ever could, I can always find a song that tells exactly what I am feeling. Music has connected me with many people, especially people I share the same music taste with. Music gives my life a sense of fullness.

REECE BURKE, GRADE 12

Music is so sweet, sorrowful, passionate
and blissful.
The greatest memories come from music.
The hard times and the good.
For the best days of your life.
Music WILL be there for you when no one else is.
Let it embrace you.
Let it give you the love you deserve.

MONICA INGRAM, GRADE 11

Music is everything. It is so uplifting to me. I enjoy the song from "The Show Must Go On." The lyrics of the song says "Inside my heart is breaking. I think I must be flaking but my smile stays on. I

must find the will to go on with the show.” These song lyrics remind me to continue on no matter what happens.

BRITTANY JOHNSON, GRADE 10

Life would be so depressing without some good old tunes. I don't know how I would feel without music, I have a deep love for it. Playing instruments is a big part of my life, I would feel like a piece of me was missing all the time. Music comes in all emotions, we use music to express our emotions. How else would we express ourselves?

ALIYA LASLEY, GRADE 11

Music to Me

When I feel deep in the trenches
like I've lost all my defenses
There is only one escape
it's the music that we make

When there is no way to express
how all day I've been an actress
Emotions trapped inside
in music they cannot hide

Music is the definition of who we are
and it's always near, never far
It's my outlet when I'm stressed
or feel lost and depressed

When I don't know what to say
the song I need always plays
as if it knows that I'm at an all time low
It's a connection to our past future and present
I always carry it with me like a pendent

To everyone it has a different meaning
but it always shows what I'm feeling
To me, music is a reflection of who we are

GRACIE ODLE, GRADE 12

Music to me is a way to get through life. It helps when I'm in different situations or moods including when I'm sad, mad, or upset. Music can boost you up and make you feel amazing! If the world didn't have music it would be too bland and I wouldn't want to be a part of it.

SILINA PARSONS, GRADE 12

I don't think I go one day without listening to music. I love singing by myself. Music makes everyone so happy. It would be a mistake if music didn't exist.

FREYA THOMSEN, GRADE 12

Music plays a really important role in my life. It has helped me through many battles that nobody else could have. I probably wouldn't have been able to overcome these without music. Music is an amazing thing. There's so many genres and there is music for every mood you have, whether you're angry, heartbroken, ecstatic, or bored.

LYNZIE ZIEHLER, GRADE 8

Music And Memory

Back in December of 2019, I got my heart broke for the first time. The night it happened I sat on my bathroom floor and sobbed. I didn't want my family to hear me because I wanted to be alone, so I turned on some music. The first song that played was "if the world was ending" by JP Saxe and Julia Michaels. While I was listening to the lyrics, I started crying harder and wanting nothing more but to feel a little better. Instead of letting the next song come on, I pressed replay and listened to it again. That's the only song I listened to that night, I can't hear it anymore without being back to that moment.

REECE BURKE, GRADE 12

The song "Clouds" by Zach Sobiech is so important to me. This song has a very big place in my heart. When I first heard this song I bursted into tears, the lyrics smacked me right in the heart. This song is about the writer of the song he has cancer. He's talking about going up into the clouds and not being able to see his lover. It made me think of my grandma. Sadly in 2017 I lost my grandma and she was very important to me. When I'm having a bad day I just think of that song. It makes me think I will be with her again someday.

MONICA INGRAM, GRADE 11

I guess I'm too good at goodbyes . . . to me those lyrics mean I'm so used to having to let people go that it doesn't really hurt me that much anymore. I'm so used to people walking out of my life and not saying anything that I have just become numb to it.

The first song that I ever remember listening to as a kid was "Daddy's Hands." I still listen to the song and remember the words to this day. My aunt and I would sit in the living room and sing along to the song.

BREANNA JACKSON, GRADE 11

The song "Cinderella" by Steven Curtis Chapman always brings me back to when I was a young child. I remember the first time that I heard it, I told my parents that it was going to be the song that played at my wedding when it was time for the father/daughter dance. To this day I smile when I hear it because it takes me back to being a little girl.

The song talks about a father and daughter's relationship. The father is singing memories of how it felt as if it were just the other day when his little girl would dress up and play princess and ask him to dance with her. It also talks about the time she brought home her first boyfriend and they went to prom. In the song, she asked her dad to help her practice her dancing. Now she is getting married and is asking her dad to help her practice her dancing for her wedding day.

Throughout the entire song, the dad talks about holding on to every moment he has with her "before the clock strikes midnight and she'll be gone" (married). Every time I hear this song I think of what my future wedding day might look like. Even though the song has been out for years now, I still plan to use this song for my father/daughter dance.

GRACIE ODLE, GRADE 12

One of the first songs I remember learning is "Ring Around The Rosie". I remember at a young age I'd always just hum around and sit in the kitchen. Once my cousins were there and came into the kitchen and

grabbed my hand and we spun around in a circle. At the time I didn't know why we were but then they started singing the song and taught it to me. Basically you join hands normally in a group of three or more spin in a circle and start singing. . . "Ring around the rosie. Pocket full of posies. Ashes, Ashes, We all fall down" And then at the end when you say "we all fall down" you'd let go of each other's hands and fall to the floor, but we stopped singing and doing it after hearing the real meaning of what the song ment.

SILINA PARSONS, GRADE 12

A song that brings memories to me is "Fight Song" because I've been through quite a few hardships but have never given up on myself. Throughout my life I have been bullied and this song has always helped me through it. Everytime I feel like the world is crashing down on me, I listen to this song and it always helps me.

LYNZIE ZIEHLER, GRADE 8

Life During A Pandemic

I remember the day we were sent home from school like it was yesterday. We expected to be out for two weeks, that is not at all what we got. The first few weeks after school getting called off was great. I was working on myself, becoming happier, and really started to love my life. This stage didn't last long, the longer I was stuck at my house the worse it got. I started drifting from my friends, spending my whole day locked in my room and fell into a state of constant sadness.

This stage of "quarantine" lasted a little longer than a month. Not being able to have interactions with people my own age or leave my house when I wanted was terrible. It took a major toll on my mental health. Finally, after coming to the realization that everyone is going through what I was, I decided to change all the bad habits I had formed. I stopped comparing myself to models I saw on Instagram, I started going outside every day, I found some new friends I shared interests with and had a whole new perspective of life. This pandemic helped me find who I really am. Even though this has been a horrible time in the world, I've become so much happier.

REECE BURKE, GRADE 12

2020 Was Not What We Thought

Fires were ablaze
we thought Covid was just a phase
Times were rough and finding tp was tough
Our world was being sanitized
and normalcy was fantasized
Could not go anywhere without a mask
or answering the million questions we were asked
2020 was not what we thought

A somewhat senior year started
after junior year early parted
Sports cancelled
our final year felt dismantled
Everything we worked so hard to obtain
didn't even feel like a gain
2020 was not what we thought

Basketball got to play in the gym
but besides 25 you had to watch film
Protests arose and the election felt froze
Our country felt divided
when we needed to be united
2020 was not what we thought

The year has ended
but its effects are not yet mended
Americans have stormed the capital
this is anything but casual
Our country is headed to shambles
and the election is still a gamble
This past year has left us drained
we wish things could be rearranged
2021 is not looking too hot

This year has been filled with sorrow
and clue of tomorrow
So remember the lessons this year taught
and we all have fought
Never take a moment for granted
you never know the cards we are handed
2020 was not what we thought

GRACIE ODLE, GRADE 12



Union Middle
School

JENNIFER WHITEAKER, ASHLEY BOWEN, JOSHUA SPURLOCK, GRADE 6
UNION MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS

I am from. . .

I am from drawing
From houses and flowers
I am from the small house
Small room, big bed, small closet
I am from PIA Tree Ivy
Green, luscious leaves along a long center branch



Principal Paul Clendenon with The Origin Project Book Six



I'm from Christmas donuts and dark hair
From Sara and Daniel
I'm from helping clean my house and do the dishes
From never lie and there are not monsters under my bed
I'm from Christian; I believe in God
I'm from Appalachia and part Mexican
From homemade lasagna and meatloaf
From the time my sister dropped her phone behind the shower
The dad who stepped on a baby rubix cube, hurt his foot, and broke the rubix cube
Pictures on the wall or in a box
Memories of my big sister from prom

CAROLE-ANNE ADAMS, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from my ginormous rainbow colored dog named Rainbow.
From Coke and Hershey's milk chocolate.
I am from the yellow doublewide in the Southern
(loud, comfy, and somewhat peaceful)
I am from the giant black walnut tree in the middle of the yard
We don't eat the nuts; we leave them for the squirrels
I'm from cooking deviled eggs with Mom on Christmas and loud laughter
From Uncle Dale and Ron
I'm from a family of loggers and working with their hands
From "Clean up your room!" and I was found in a pumpkin patch.
I'm from sleeping in on Sundays, no special routine
I'm from Wise County, Virginia, Ireland, and Scotland
From steak with potatoes and hamburgers with fries
From the times my mom went frog giggin' with her dad
To the times my great papaw brought home baby rabbits, coons, and 'possums as pets
In the living room in picture albums and on the walls
Reminds us to be thankful for our many blessings

MEGAN ADAMS, GRADE 6

I am from. . .

I am from a soccer ball
From kicking and catching
I am from a brick fireplace
hot, bright, flickers
I am from a rose
red, sharp, and pretty
I am from going to ball games and family gatherings
From Megan and Sheldon

I am from laughing and joking
From "Always be kind!" and "You can do anything you want."
I am from Christian; I believe in God
I am from Kingsport and German
From oreos and chocolate gravy
I am from horses that chased my dad and I
From hunting with my grandfather
We have pictures in phones and books
Important memories to have

OLIVIA ADAMS, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from a cozy gray Champion hoodie
From Under Armor and Champion
I am from the big brick house with black shingles on Tate Springs Road
relaxing, safe, crowded
I am from the big oaks and sycamores in my front yard
that have grown a lot since I was little
I'm from spring cleaning in May-June and telling it how it is
From Andy and Chris
I'm from generations of exterminators and faithful Christians
From "Because I said so!"; and "If they jumped off a bridge, would you?"
I'm from Christianity, believing in God and applying the Bible to your life
I'm from Scotland and Northern England
From meat and cheese
From the time when my dad was five, took the truck out of park, and ended up in the middle of the
interstate
To when my brother squirted Chem light juice in his eye and thought he was dying
At my nana's house, pictures surrounding Mr. and Mrs. Claus over thirty years old
Memories

ELIJAH ANDERSON, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from a baseball
From Rawlings and Adidas
I am from 4 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, 4 closets,
windows, shingles, wood, bricks
I am from gold
Soft, yellow
I'm from a Christmas tree and a small family
From Chad and Mandy
I'm from going to my baseball games and eating out
From "If you would eat a seed, a plant would grow in your stomach."
And "If you sit too close to the TV, your eyes will turn into squares."
I'm from East Stone Gap Church and Jesus

From Kingsport, Tennessee
steak, Mexican, and wings
From the papaw who went in the pool and the water was dry
To the dad who says "If the sky is orange in the morning, it's going to rain,
and if it's in the evening, it's not,"
(he said that's how pirates used to tell if it was going to rain or not)
Family pictures of Florida when we visited our cousins
Bible, furniture, and my home are important

KAMRON BISHOP, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from a journal I got for my birthday
I am from people and love
I am from a cozy house
I am from a warm, inviting, and small house
I am from a sunflower
I am from a fun flower because my mom was born a sunflower
I am from a dad who is a good cook and a hard working mom
I am from Brandon Beaty and Chrissy Beaty
I am from playing board games and watching movies
From if I don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all
I am from Christianity, and I believe in God
I am from Norton, VA.
ham and cheesecake
From the granny who held me before she passed
The great-great granny who celebrated my 2nd birthday with me before she passed
From the baby picture on the wall
The kitchen set my mama has

JAYLA BEATY, GRADE 6

Christmas: Then and Now

My grandfather heard the rustling of presents on Christmas, and he saw toys that were so fun for him. One Christmas, he got two holsters: one for his left hand and one for his right; he played with it every day! He felt presents, and he smelled a six-foot pine tree every morning. He tasted a delicious Christmas dinner, which would include ham and oranges and all kinds of different things. He would wake up to the average amount of two feet of snow! One day he woke up to three feet and two inches!

The previous Christmas, I had gotten a cell phone, a truck with a car on the inside of it, and that is all I remember, to be honest with you. I do remember seeing the smiles, the smell of pine, the tastes of ginger, and hearing laughs. Most of all, I remember feeling the smooth glossy case of my new phone. I use it every second my parents allow me to.

I think that Christmas this year will be hard because of restrictions. That is my opinion, but I know for a fact that gifts will be hard to ship. My dad ordered something last September and it only arrived on 12/7/2020.

NIKOLAS BRIGHT, GRADE 6

Christmas: Past, Present, and Future

What was Christmas like for my mom? She said it was fun; her mom would not put any names on the Christmas gifts because mom would open the presents and then wrap the presents back. She saw all of her Christmas presents early and all of her family's. She remembers lots of laughter and family talking. It smelled like lots of candy because she would make it for all of the businesses. Mom remembers all of the snow and lots of delicious food— Chocolate, fudge, and Christmas gravy and biscuits.

On Christmas, we would go to my mamaw's. When we walked in the door, I would see the Christmas presents wrapped in red and green under a skinny multi-colored tree. Then, I would smell mamaw's cooking-turkey, mashed potatoes and green beans. When my cousins would get there, I would give them a hug, and their PJ's were so soft. When everyone would get there, we would eat. I usually eat mamaw's mashed potatoes and turkey; they're so good. When we would open our presents, all I would hear is the wrapping paper tearing and my little cousins saying "Ohhhhhh". My favorite present I ever got would be an ipod touch. I was so happy; I got it early because my sister was sick and had to ride in an ambulance. My mom said, Thank you for your help. You're the best,"so she let me open the present.

Even though 2020 has been a crazy year, I don't think Christmas will be different. I think it will be the same.

EMILY BROCK, GRADE 6

Christmas: Past, Present, and Future

My mother says that Christmas was amazing spending time with her family. Her parents always taught us the true meaning of Christmas- that Jesus is the reason for the season, and He was born on that day. Mom said she always enjoyed Christmas because it is her favorite holiday. She loved the lights, gifts and giving. She said that she may not have always gotten what she wanted, but that was all right as long as her family had enough food on the table and good health.

My Christmases have been great. They smelled like candy cane and gingerbread. They tasted so good and sweet. On Christmas day, I remember sights, sounds, and feelings of joy, happiness and laughter.

I think Christmas 2020 will be tough. I also think it will be hard for people to shop for Christmas. It will take a lot of work for people to find the stuff they need.

JA'MERE BRYANT, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from a couch
From Dasani water and Adidas
I am from the recliner
cozy, comfortable, my nap chair
I am from a tree
Tall, important so we can breathe and live
I'm from a good Christmas dinner and spiritual strength
From Jennifer and C.B.
I'm from the eating meals together and arguing sometimes
From "There was a man named Kris Kringle" and family from Japan
I'm from Christianity, going to a good church service
I'm from Big Stone Gap, VA
steak, strawberries

From the dad who was working and accidently cut a big chunk of his finger off
and had it sewn back on
The man who I call uncle Danny who served in the Vietnam War, but sadly passed from cancer
Pictures at my house, my mamaws, and the fire department
We have something to remember and to love because people who have a good
connection with family will never be broken.

ETHAN BURKE, GRADE 6

My Bed: An Origin Story

When my papaw Harlow was ten years old, he slept in the same bed with his ten siblings. So, he decided to work every day on his farm and in the field. At the end of the summer, he had enough money to buy his own bed for ten dollars, which was a lot back then. The cool thing is that we still have it to this day, and that is the bed that I sleep in.

Recently, my house burned down, and the bed was the most important thing on my mind that I hoped was saved besides the animals. The bed is still okay; all it needs is some more paint.

LUCAS CALLAHAN, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from a shotgun
From Xbox and Subway
I am from the bed
soft, warm, comfy
I am from a tree
tough, useful
I'm from going to church and tall
From Kasi and Jackson
I'm from the wrestling and fights
From Santa was real and the Easter bunny
I'm from Christians, and I believe in Jesus
I'm from Big Stone Gap, VA, and Indians
From slop and pepper steak
From the grandpa who lost his finger in WW2
Then he was a coal miner
Pictures in the hallway
My papaw's knife that we remember him by

JAKE CARPENTER, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from Xbox
From square and small
I am from a big house for a big family
From the big living room with the broken light and big upstairs
I am from grass
From green, thin, dull

I'm from going to my great- grandmas on Thanksgiving and Polish
From Amber and Renee
I am from family gatherings and bible school every July
From "Brush your teeth, or they will fall out." and "Santa is real."
I am from Christians, I believe in God
I am from Tennessee
Vanilla and chocolate cake
From the time I saw a car on fire
I watched the firefighters put it out
Pictures on the walls
They show of a time when I was little

JACOBI CARR, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from my computer
From Oreos and Mayfield milk
I am from Andover; the light brown house with a black roof on Randall Road
(cold and crazy)
I am from the vase with flowers in it
Red with green leaves
I'm from going to nanny's house on Mother's Day and
Clayton is my great grandfather's middle name
From Amber and Chastity
I am from the chores and cooking
From "Clean up, and I will get u candy!" and
"I will give you a dollar if you do not act up in sports!"
I'm from Andover Church; sometimes we play tag and eat
I was born in Tennessee, and my family is from Poland
I am from steak
From the one time I was little and I saw a car get blown up
To the fact that everyone has been to Disneyland except my mom
Pictures on the wall in the living room
Remind me of my family

JULIAN CARR, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from my gold iPhone8
From Adidas and Hershey's chocolate
From the tan house in Cracker's Neck
(annoying with many blackbirds)
I am from the trees that lose their leaves everywhere
Turning red, orange, and brown every fall
I'm from Thanksgiving at my uncle's and papaw's to being crazy about snowmen
From Renae and the Gibsons
I'm from arguing and being loud

From the big brick church on Cedar Ridge with youth trips to Pigeon Forge
From Virginia and Indian heritage
From deviled eggs
From going swimming on a trip to Nashville for mom's doctor visit
To the time my twin, Hayley was scared to cross the Sky Bridge in Pigeon Forge
But she did it anyways
In the picture book and on the wall
Important because it is family

EMMA CHANDLER, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from soft, blue and white blankets with snowflake patterns
From Gold Peak tea and American Eagle
I'm from the house on Cracker's neck with red shutters
(peaceful with gunshots sometimes)
I am from the large grey rock
Where we pretend it is a slide and my cousin jumps off it
From going to my uncle and papaw's for Christmas and snowmen everywhere
From Ann and the Franklins
I'm from a sense of humor and friendly
From the big brick church on Cedar Ridge and more than one trip to
Pigeon Forge with my youth group
From Virginia and part-Indian
From fighting over deviled eggs
From trips to mom's doctor in Nashville who told me to be mean, but I wasn't
To our trip to Pigeon Forge and going across the Sky Bridge
In a picture book
Important because it is family

HAYLEE CHANDLER, GRADE 6

Cade

I am a big Alabama fan
I wonder why I'm taller than everyone.
I hear my table talking to me.
I see the lockers clapping at me when I walk down the hallway.
I want to be a mayor.
I pretend that I am Mr. Spurlock- a tall man with a red beard
I feel like dunking like Lebron James
I touch the sky.
I worry when my mom goes to the hospital.
I cried when I was a baby
I understand that some kids are hard to talk to.
I say that Mr. Spurlock is the best.
I dream about things.
I try not to complain about the homework.

I hope to be a famous basketball player like Manute Bol
I am funny, kind, and crazy

Clark

CADE CLARK, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from my Xbox 360
From Vans and Body Armor drinks
I am from the big house on Bell Avenue in Appalachia
Large porch, noisy, tan
I am from steep hills and Morning Glories
Slippery in the winter time and beautiful in the spring
I'm from big meals on Thanksgiving and freckles
From Molly and Andrew
I'm from the loud and giggly
From "Don't break your arm again!" and "Don't play with fire, or you'll tinkle the bed!"
I'm from Christianity and Oak Grove Baptist Church
I'm from Big Stone Hospital and Woodbridge, VA,
From deviled eggs
From the time Molly and grandpa fell off a bridge into water
To the time when I wouldn't go to school because my sister wasn't going to be there
Family picture on the fireplace shelf
My mom enjoys having pictures of us all

KRISTIN CLINE, GRADE 6

Christmas: Past, Present, and Future

As a little girl, my mom talked about how exciting it was to receive the Sears catalog in the mail. As she studied each glossy page, it was like walking through a toy store. One Christmas she spotted the most beautiful flannel nightgown. It resembled a candy cane because it was a soft white gown with red pin-stripes. It was a long sleeve with ruffles. It was perfect! She loved it so much she wanted it more than any toy that Santa might bring.

When Christmas Eve finally arrived, her mom and dad gave her a gift. It was very soft, and she only hoped that it would be that beautiful gown. She carefully ripped open the paper, and there before her eyes was the gown she was hoping to get!

When my sister was a teenager, she liked to listen to the Jonas brothers, and even got to go to their concert! She is 21, and still listens to them, so I like them too! I also wanted to go to a concert! Last year in 2019, I would listen to the Jonas Brothers every day on the way to school. I wanted a concert ticket so badly! I kept asking my mom, and she told me all the tickets were sold out. However, a week before Christmas break on December 15, there was a present under the tree. It said to wait for my sister to come home on December 20, so I waited; it felt like a year to get her home! My sister and I had a rough week, but when we opened the present, we couldn't believe it! We had tickets to the Jonas Brothers' concert! They weren't just any tickets; they were tickets to the Jingle Ball where you get to see all the celebrities sing!!! The next day, I was checked out of school, and we drove six hours to Atlanta, Georgia where I had the best time of my life! On the way back, my whole family had the symptoms of covid-19, but we didn't know what it was because we didn't know there was a such thing yet.

This year in 2020 has been a long rough year and I hope my Christmas goes well. I feel like everything will lock back down because of all the traveling in all the states and more cases will spread. I am afraid that we may have to quarantine, but we will still have a good Christmas!

MADISON COCHRAN, GRADE 6

Where I'm From

I am from seashells
from Playtime Pals and Dreamland
I am from the beautiful condo
I am from the sand, the grass
I am from Dollywood trips and silly faces,
from Nana and Mamaw and Mommy.
From "We have to be good." and "We have to write Santa a letter."
I am from the Primary School down the road and down the street.
From my morning schedule to my afternoon schedule.
I am from the fire drill.
From the bus with Chance and the boys.
From Mrs. Day's room and Mrs. Gardner's room, just making sure Ms. Hall is ok.
From Thanksgiving dinner at Shawn's with eggs. I had gravy.
From Just Jump, where I hit my head and cried a lot.
From the beach and the boardwalk.
From fun on wheels.
From the Mystery Mine with Mamaw.

CAYLIN CROSS, GRADE 6

Christmas: Past, Present, and Future

When my mother was growing up they spent Christmases at her grandmother's house. Granny was the best cook in the world. They would spend days baking Christmas treats and wrapping gifts. She prepared a huge feast and the entire family would come over to eat. Afterwards, everyone drove to see the live nativity scene. My mom has wonderful memories from her childhood Christmases.

Christmas is my favorite holiday. I love Christmas and always have a good one. We always go to my Nanny's house, my uncle Dwight's house, and my Mamaw Ruth's house. My Mamaw Ruth passed away almost two years ago. We didn't go last year because she wouldn't be there and I miss her very bad. We used to always go to my Granny's house all the time for every family get together but she passed away when I was about four years old. I miss her more than anything and she would give the best back scratches. Since she passed away we always go to my Nanny's house for every family gathering and we have for years and years now. I have the best time there opening presents, seeing family, playing with cousins, and eating delicious food. It smells amazing. I always have a great time at my uncle Dwight's house also. We always have dinner at our house on Christmas day but it's just my mom, my dad, and my brother. My brother Brock and my mamaw come and visit too. My best gift I have ever received would be my gymnastics mat. Around the holidays we always go ice skating and see pretty Christmas lights. It's a lot of fun! We come home and cover up in fuzzy blankets and drink hot cocoa.

This year will be pretty different. We won't get to see all of our family this year due to Covid 19. We don't want to get sick from anyone or get someone sick. At my nanny's house we have to be careful because my Poppy is not in great shape. We won't be going ice skating or seeing Christmas lights this year, but we will

still get together with some family but not everyone. This year there will be a special "Christmas star" on December 21st which is on my brother's birthday. Saturn and Jupiter will be the closest they have been in 800 years. It will resemble the Star of Bethlehem which represents the birth of Jesus. He is the reason for the season and the true meaning of Christmas.

RAEALYN DISHNER, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from Playstation
From Axe and Febreze
I am from the hollow
quiet, beautiful, country
I am from trees
rough outside layer with a soft living inside
I'm from Christmas and blonde hair
From Rebekah and Jerry
I'm from the laughing and hunting
From behave and love
I'm from Christians, God is our savior
I'm from Big Stone Gap and Irish
From the backwoods where Grandpa used a horse to plow fields
The big brother to a gaming little brother
Pictures of hiking trails around the country
Handed down through the years hold memories that can be shared again and again

ANDREW DOAN, GRADE 6

Christmas: Past, Present, and Future

When my parents were my age they went to parades, opened gifts on Christmas Eve, had dinner Christmas Day, and rode around looking at lights. The main smells were the variety of different foods at the big dinners and pine tree candles. It was cold with lots of snow and the taste is grilled cheese.

I do not really remember a lot from past Christmas experiences. However, I do remember last year I went to Pigeon Forge and Dollywood. We got donuts and rolled ice cream on the way home.

I think we might have family coming to our house this Christmas, just be extremely cautious around my grandparents. I hope we have a nice dinner and happily open presents. I'll surprise my best friend from dance class with her Christmas present I bought her for this year.

DELILAH ESTEP, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from a pencil
From Ticonderoga and Dixon
I am from the warmest and most comfortable place
grey, smells like flowers, warm
I am from leaves
orange and crumbly
I'm from piñatas and funny

From Anthony and Jose
I'm from the men lead and women cook
From "Treat people how you wish to be treated." and "Always be kind to others."
I'm from North America, Southwest
I'm from Mexico
Taco salsa, burrito
Pictures at Grammy's House
Shows the people we love

CALEB FIGUEROA, GRADE 6

Christmas: Past, Present, and Future

My mom's Christmas was mostly spent at her grandmother's house. Her family was always together, (extended family), always laughing, so much fun, playing music, and my uncles would play the guitar. Her favorite smell was party mix because she made lots of batches when she put up her tree. There was always music and carols, she could hear the reindeer on the tin rook of their house. There was sometimes snow and she always saw the lights and the presents.

Before 2020, (and 2018), every Christmas in my family was amazing. We would have so many people over at our house, there were so many presents, we had a big family dinner, and we went to church together for the candlelight service. My family and I always had so much fun together on Christmas. We would eat together, play games, and plan for New Years Eve. We always plan for New Years ahead because my aunt makes games for us to play and then on New Years Eve, we would all go to her house and play them together.

I think Christmas will be different this year because I might not be able to be around my family as much as I used to. We also might not be able to have candlelight service at our church because we can't social distance. If I do get to see my whole family this year, we all might have to wear masks because we don't want any of them getting sick. Not only the rest of my family, but especially my grandmother because she recently got diagnosed with cancer and if she gets sick it could do worse. I hope Christmas will be normal but if not, at least I get to see my family.

LAUREL FLEENOR, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from deer head lights
From Yetti and Adidas
I am from the house right beside the fair
Relaxed, very snowy and snug
I am from chicken-in-the-woods
it is an orange plant like the sun.
I am from opposite day and being smart
From Norie, Norah, and Tooter
I am from my family who went to college and had kids
From "Never let people tell you what to do and always do what you think is best!" and
"Treat others the way that you want to be treated!"
I am from Christian and Pentecostal.
From Norton Hospital and part Jewish
From deer meat
From stories of biking zombies named Billy and Borah that my dad used to tell us

To our trip to Florida last August
I have a picture of my Great Papaw Jack in WWII
It means a lot to my mom and the rest of my family.

NORAH FLEMING, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from a 50 inch flat screen tv.
From Adidas and Sprite
I am from the black four- foot couch,
Smart, funny, and tasteful
I am from a rose
Red and beautiful for weddings
I'm from playing golf and having fun
From mom and nana
I'm from working hard and cooking dinner
From "Never give up!" and "Work until you succeed!"
I'm from Christianity and belief in God
I'm from Big Stone Gap, Virginia and cinnamon buns
From the time when my aunt Katie joined the Army,
and could not come home for 7 months because of Covid-19.
The times that my Uncle Robert would always ask me to play basketball
and video games when he was alive.
We have all the family pictures in our hallway.
It is good to be able to pass on stories and pictures
To younger people in our family,
so they get to know who they were.

PEYTON FONSECA, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from my bed
From Oreos and Smart water
I am from the the wooden log house with a green roof beside Farmers Road
(dumb, stinky, big)
I am from sunflowers, they grow beside my house
I'm from chocolate fudge and crazy
From Anngel and Rachel
From "If you don't have something nice to say, don't say anything at all!" and
"Treat others how you want to be treated."
I'm from Christianity, we go to church every Sunday and church camp every summer
I'm from Norton hospital,
Ganny Danny
From an orange and a pizza
From the time I got so mad at my parents, I peed in the floor,
and everyone talks about it
To the time my sister Haley made my sisters and I eat peas when we were kids

The pictures on the wall when you walk in;
of my mom, my sisters, my brothers, my dad, and my great-granny
They are so special to me, seeing what things were like before I was born

LYDIA GALLIHAR, GRADE 6

Halley's Comet

Back in 1910, my Nana's friend's great-great grandmother lived in Washington state. She was around 12 years old, and Haley's Comet was predicted to appear that year. Everyone gathered at the beach in their Sunday best because they thought it was the end of time. Obviously, it wasn't. She ended up moving to Virginia. She actually got to see Haley's Comet a second time in 1986. That time, she wasn't really thrilled about it and stayed home when everyone went to see it. If she had lived another 2 or 3 years, she would have lived in the 1890s, 1900s and 2000s.

BRADEN GIBSON, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from a phone
From Roblox and TikTok
I am from the small brown house in the holler
Cute, cozy, and liveable
I am from a rose bush,
Big, beautiful, and thorny
I am from the kids decorate the Christmas tree and lots of fun
From Brandi Bellemy and Roy Gilliam
I'm from the arguing over who gets something and busy
From "NO!" and "Clean your room now!"
I am from Norton
Sandwiches and spaghetti
From the grandpa who got stuck while working in the mines
The mom who is caring for her three kids
Family pictures in the living room
We can barely get some made, they cost a lot of money

HANNAH GILLIAM, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from caring for animals
From watering and feeding
I am from the farm
cold, warm, and hard working
I am from trees
so leafy green, yellow, and red
I'm from making a homemade gift and farming
From Crazy Granny and Granddaddy
I'm from the positive and hard working
From doing my best and staying positive

I'm from Christianity
I'm from Big Stone Gap
Egg Custard Pie and homemade donuts
The caring people in my life
Pictures at My home
They hold memories, laughs, joy, happiness

MADI JO GRIMES, GRADE 6

An Old Family Story

This is a story passed down from generation to generation from my father and his family. It goes back to my father's Great Uncle Owen Lovell. Owen lived in a small town called Bartow in Florida. He was born and raised there on a fruit farm, where he and his father grew many different fruits like oranges and watermelons, to name a few. When the fruit was at its best for reaping, they would gather the best of the best, and bring it all the way from Bartow to our small town right here in Appalachia, Virginia. He would do that so his family down here and people in the community would have fresh, delicious fruit.

Great Uncle Owen also did it for churches and their revivals. Owen's kindness didn't end with just growing fruit for others; he was always lending a helping hand putting up the tents for those very same church revivals. My father's family and our family still talk about the kindness Owen showed to everyone, and how more people should do to others with similar kindnesses.

JOANA HAMILTON, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from basketball
From AND1 and Wilson
I am from the fireplace
Hot, cozy, smelly
I am from an oak tree
big and provides shade
I'm from vacation and blondes
From Rodney and Donna
I'm from traveling and eating together
From "Don't judge a book by its cover."
I'm from Jesus, the Bible
I'm from Big Stone Gap
steak and sugar cookies
From the dad who was in the war
The grandpa who served too
Pictures on the wall and photo albums
My papaw's knife that he's had since he was a kid

JORDAN HAMILTON, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from a computer
From HP and Apple

I am from a sunflower
Bright, yellow, and beautiful
I'm from Thanksgiving and brown hair
From Courtney and Randall
I'm from the going to nanny's house and having fun
From "Negative ghost negative." and "Don't wish away your life."
I'm from Methodist, going with my mom and dad every Sunday
I'm from Kingsport, TN and Big Stone Gap, VA
From the dad who had a haunted doll that rolled down the stairs
My sister Ashley who thought she could get a senior discount by being a senior in high school
Pictures in the living room wall and in the hall
Family items are important to have to show your kids and their kids so you will have
something to pass down to generations to come

HANNAH HAMPTON, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from softball
From Champs and Wilson
I am from the fireplace
Flames, seeing the flicker
I am from a rose
Prickly, large
I'm from going to church and tallness
From Jessica and Joe
I'm from the softball games and basketball tournaments
From "Never judge a book by its cover." and "Be better than your bullies."
I'm from Christian and going to church every Sunday
I'm from Big Stone Gap Va, American
From the grandpa who started his own business
The mom who wrecked a four wheeler
Pictures above our fireplace
From the pictures of our past, and important family members.

JAYDEN HASH, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from pens
From gel and inky
I am from cozy
Warm, safe, and big
I am from Marigolds
A dark forest plant, bushy, and green
I am from birthday parties and Christmas dinners
From BJ and Brittany
I am from movie night and going to the beach
I am from "Reach for the stars." and "Don't let your dreams stay dreams."

I am from we believe in God
I am from Appalachia
From ewwy gooey butter cake and chili
From the mamaw and papaw whose old house burnt down
The mamaw who took care of me while my mom worked
I am from pictures on walls
I am from a long line of Honeycutts

LONDON HONEYCUTT, GRADE 6

Christmas: Past, Present, and Future

This Christmas is going to be different because of the devil COVID-19. . . it's corona time.

Back in the day whenever my parents were very young, it was a lot different on Christmas because there was no such thing as Corona-Virus. My mom's parents never spent a lot of money because they had 5 kids, so they got to open up one gift every Christmas eve, and the rest on Christmas day very early in the morning. They traveled to West Virginia most Christmases to their grandparent's house to visit. The worst part was when my mom's parents forgot their gifts one Christmas. After they had celebrated at her dad's parents' house, they would go to my mamaw's house which was mamaw's momma's house. She would exchange gifts with her cousins there. And there was lots of good food served buffet style. They would just sit around on couches and chairs and eat.

Now, my sister Jill and I will take a trip to my grandmom's house in North Carolina to visit for a week. We have loads of fun over there, and when it's time for us to go home, I cry every time because of how I miss my grandmom so so so very much, but when we are there visiting it's the life. At home, we bake cookies for Santa on Christmas Eve. When we wake up, we open presents with my mom and my stepdad Tom. Later that day, we go to my Mamaw and Papaw's house and open presents with my cousin, aunts and uncles. There is always good food to eat like ham and mashed potatoes. Then, we go to my Nana and Papaw's and open presents with them, and eat a big meal with them too.

This Christmas is going to be very different for some people because of the coronavirus. When we have Christmas this year, we will do the same thing that we would usually do every year. We know where our families have been and where they are going. Mostly, they would stay home. Next Christmas, hopefully we won't have the virus, we will have a better Christmas, and we will be able to visit our families. When I have Christmas in the future, I won't be celebrating with my family. I will be wrestling with my WWE buddies, and celebrating with them first; then, I might celebrate with my family. But that's how Christmas is going to go for me.

MADISON HOOD, GRADE 6

My Great-Grandfather, the Coal Miner

Stories from our past are passed down from generation to generation. Today, allow me to tell you a true story often told by my great grandfather, Wayne Carlos Wells, as he told it to my dad, and my dad has shared with me. The year was 1982; my great grandfather was close to retiring from his job in the coal mines. My grandfather was at work when a rock fall happened. He had a friend that was under the rock fall. He acted quickly as everyone else either did nothing or just ran to get out. My great grandfather did all he could, and after hard work, determination, and dedication to his friend, he was able to get his friend from under the rock fall. His friend had injuries but nothing life threatening. My great grandfather and his friend stayed close

friends up until the day they passed away. My dad says you never leave a friend or family member behind when they need you. My great grandfather risked his life to save his friend when he most needed him, and they both were grateful for each other until the end of their lives.

GABRIEL HURLEY, GRADE 6

Christmas: Then and Now

My mom grew up in southern California. On Christmas Eve, people delivered sand in piles between the houses. All of the neighbors would fill bags with the sand and line the sidewalks and driveways with the bags. At sundown, my grandparents would put candles in the bags and light them. At night, the streets of the entire town would glow with the light of the luminarias. After they were lit, my mom's family had a tradition of eating fondue on Christmas Eve. They would have cheese, broth, and chocolate fondue pots to dip bread, cook meat, and dip all kinds of things for dessert. Christmas was usually pretty warm, so they would go for a walk and look at all the Christmas lights after dinner.

My favorite part of Christmas is when my Aunt Pam, Mom, and me make peanut brittle and all kinds of cookies. We have a lot of fun and sometimes some of my friends come to help out. On Christmas Eve, my mom, dad and I usually get matching Christmas pajamas. We all put them on and have a fun dinner. I usually wake my parents up in the middle of the night to open presents. We get up in the dark and have fun opening gifts.

I don't think Christmas will be very different for us this year except that we don't live in Maryland any more, so we probably won't go to friends' houses. We will facetime with my sisters and aunts and uncles because they live far away.

MADLYN JENSEN, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from dirty tires

From Mike and Ike

I am from the big blue house on 5th Street

(welcoming, very comfortable and smells like blooming roses)

I am from the tree that gets struck by lightning

Every time the tree gets struck, it looks like it caught on fire

I am from week long sports celebration and athletic sport players

From A.J. and Pap-pap

I am from the "Always on time!" and "I am always flexible."

From never giving up and always doing your best.

I am from no sense of humor, and messiness

I am from Norton, Virginia and Jamaica

I am from Williams Chapel Zion Baptist Church in Big Stone Gap, Virginia
across the road from Dairy Queen.

From the time my great-grandma was diagnosed with heart cancer
a week before she was supposed to do a play

With the children at church

And she did the play

but as soon as she took her final bow, she fell off the stage and died.

I am from my mom, a teacher, who got the flu and
still took her kids on a school field trip to the pool
but she almost broke her leg because she felt so weak
From the silver locket with my great-great-grandma Alice's picture in it
that has been in my family for more than 20 years.
The silver locket is in my attic in a silver lock box looked at every July 6, (her birthday),
remembering important and helpful advice from stories of the past

ARIANNA JONES, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from my rock collection that my dad got me
From Nike and Adidas
I am from the big white and black house on Chestnut Lane.
Relaxing, safe and really hot
I am from the chestnut trees and thorn bushes,
The Chestnut trees are beautiful in the fall, in a row they line the road.
I am from deer hunting with Papa and survival skills
From Mike Jones and Mamaw
I am from the clean freaks and loud voices
I am from "Treat others how you want to be treated!" and "You are going to get video game-itis!"
I am from Spirit and Truth Worship, where I get to be with my friends
I am from Norton Community Hospital
From Fish and rice
From the Halls and Smith family
The Varble
My mamaw got them at the store
Memories

AYDEN JONES, GRADE 6

My Great Granddaddy and the War

The oldest sentimental story passed down in my family is the story about my Great Granddaddy, Foriest Carroll. When he was 18, he enlisted in the Army because he wanted to serve his country during World War II. He was a Private of the C Company Infantry Division. His company was deployed to Belgium, Germany. That's where he fought in the famous Battle of the Bulge. My great granddaddy had a very important role as a trench messenger or runner. Being a runner was a very dangerous job because they had to run messages in open fields across enemy territory. One day during the battle, his unit got pinned down. They were trapped in a fox hole for eight days and nights in the middle of winter. My great granddaddy suffered really bad frost-bite to both feet. He was unable to receive any treatment because he was on the front lines, and he ended up with trench foot. Once he was able to get help, he was sent to a hospital in Paris, France, then to a hospital in England, and then back to Camp Patrick Henry in Virginia. After he recovered, he was sent back home to Jonesville, Virginia.

My Great Granddaddy Carroll was awarded the Purple Heart and two bronze stars for the bravery and courage he showed while he was a runner in WWII. I love to hear the story of my very brave great granddaddy. I only wish I could have met him. I sure am proud to be his grandson.

KAIDEN KEITH, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from tiny angel figures in my living room.
From black Pumas and Sundrop.
I am from the house with a tin metal roof and a swamp buggy in my driveway.
From the place, in the woods, that should not be named (my favorite place)
I am from roses, with petals red, pink, and white.
I'm from Christmas and loving.
From Mason and Ezra.
I'm from diabetes and workaholics with no vacations.
From "Lucas, I love you!" and "You're so strong!"
I'm from a family of Christians, who worship God.
I'm from Big Stone Gap and Sweden,
From chocolate ice cream and ham.
From the time my baby brother, Ezra, tried to say air fryer and said air confryer right after saying air
conditioner.
And the time my sister tried to say my name but said ukey instead,
in the living room, the tall, wooden gun cabinet used for family military items.
Remembering those in my family who have risked their lives to save people.

BENJAMIN LAMBERT, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from Art
From Mr.Sketch and Crayola
I am from the room,
wall color, bed, and clothes
I am from roses,
red with prickly stems
I'm from sending balloons to heaven for our grandfather's birthday
From Hunter and Johnathan
I'm from the green eyes and brown hair
From "If your friend jumped off a bridge would you?" and "Never judge a book by its cover."
I'm from Christan,we have all have a bible
I'm from Virginia
From Warhead and Sour patch kids
From the my grandmother baking with her grandmother
Pictures On the wall
That bring memories

EMMA LAMBERT, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from trees
From Apple and Nike
I am from the hills

Loud, weird, and nice
I am from the woods
Full of trees and creatures
I'm from opening one gift on Christmas and green eyes
From Papaw and Mamaw
I'm from the police badge and horseshoe
From believing in Santa and the Easter bunny
I'm from God, and believing in heaven
I'm from Big Stone Gap
Steak and ribs
From the papaw who worked on trains
The mamaw who sews
Pictures at mamaw and papaw's
We keep them to remember

AIDEN LAWSON, GRADE 6

Dalton

I am the guy who says "dude" all the time
I wonder how the sun is on fire if there is no air in space
I hear my phone yell "Wake up!"
I see the walls move and mock me
I want to live a long fulfilling life
I pretend to wander the wasteland in a brooken
I feel the reindeer staring at me
I touch a dog bigger than the school
I worry that life will go on with no end
I cry when I watch "A Dog's Purpose"
I understand that life can suck
I say that South Park is my favorite show
I dream of big things
I try to eat anything once
I hope I will live on in my actions
I am smart, tired, and funny
So funny

Lawson

DALTON LAWSON, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from a chicken nugget.
From McDonalds and KFC
I am from the little green house on Holly Ave
I am from an apple
Red and Shiny

I am from dinner at Golden Corral and muscles
From Sean Lomax and Zavier Lomax
I am from cooking on the grill and being fast
From “Quitters never win!”, “Winners never quit!” and “Never give up!”
I am from Christianity and peace
I am from Wise County
From Hamburgers
From the time my Granddad saw a UFO while stationed in Germany in the US Army.
To the fact that my dad is able to run very fast
Hanging on the walls at home, in photo albums and Facebook photos
Cherishing good memories

ELIJAH LOMAX, GRADE 6

Christmas: Then and Now

My mother’s Christmases had similarities and differences from mine. One major difference was that she said it used to snow a lot. She would be able to go outside and play in the snow. Her parents always got a live tree, and Christmas morning was filled with the smell of turkey and the presents were stacked everywhere.

My past Christmases were different from my mother’s; there was barely any snow. Another difference is my parents don’t get a live tree. On Christmas, I hear laughter and smell ham and pies. I get to play Santa and hand out presents. My favorite gift from last Christmas was a white world championship belt.

This Christmas will just be me and the people I live with. A difference this year is we had to order more online and be safer when we leave the house. This year, I will be more appreciative of Christmas and my family. When we see our other family, we will be safe and not take a big risk.

JEREMY LOVELL, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from a large white Christmas tree in the living room
From orange Sunkist and Kit-Kats.
I am from the in a trailer on the gravel Rabbit Road
Burgundy-brown,, cozy-warm, fun
I am from the tall oak trees in the woods near my home
They give me shade while I play with friends
I’m from baking strawberry birthday cakes and good at cooking
From Jamesy and Lil’ Squirt
I’m from the loud and rowdy
From “Be Brave” and “Stay in School”
I’m from sleeping in on Sunday mornings
I’m from Norton Community Hospital, Ohio, and spaghetti
From the times when I played football with my dad and my brother in the yard
The time Dad showed my how to make sandwich pizza from scratch
Photos inside my dad’s room
Mostly all of my brothers, for memories

CHARLIE LOVELL, GRADE 6

Trayvion

I am a basketball player
I wonder if aliens are real
I hear the closet laughing at me
I see the shadows pointing at me
I want a PS-5
I pretend I'm a famous Youtuber playing Fortnite
I feel like I could run faster than the Flash
I touch the sun
I worry that school will never be over
I cry when I laugh too hard at the Major Payne movie
I understand that life isn't fair
I say Fortnite is the best game in the world
I dream about being a cop
I try to always get my work done
I hope that covid goes away
I am tired, tall, and lazy

McCoo

TRAYVION MCCOO, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from the deer head on my wall
From Honda and Can-Am in my front yard
I am from the old house on East Stone Gap Road
(white, big, and wooden)
I am from tomatoes
red and delicious
I am from hunting and being loud
From Brandon and Bryson
I am from the tendency to hunt and fish
From "You will get pulled over if you turn the car light on" and
"If you get hurt, suck it up, buttercup!"
I am from the Andover church-the white tall one by the river
I am from Scottish, Irish, and English ancestry
and born in Big Stone Gap
From deer meat and mac and cheese
From the time in the woods hunting in a deer stand and a big bear (maybe
400 pounds) fell and died
To the tall hard-working man that is my dad
Pictures on the wall and bookshelf
The most important thing to my family is love and God
We all believe in God and love is something that you need in life

BRAYDEN MCCOY, GRADE 6

A Family Miracle

This story is about my grandfather's grandfather, making him my great, great grandfather. His name was Harrison Holifield. In 1942, he was in a bad mining accident in Tom's Creek, Virginia. It is told that he experienced a bad head injury! At the hospital, the nurses tried to keep him comfortable until he passed. The way the story has been told, he sat and prayed and prayed until he finally got better. After he got over it, he became a pastor, telling everyone about his accident and how God healed him. He lived until he was 99 years and 7 months old. My grandfather states that when he passed, the back of his head was soft, as it had not completely healed back. He was 54 when the accident occurred. This put him surviving 46 years after the accident where he was expected to pass away.

BRADY MCMILLIAN, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from a purple chair with a computer beside it
From playstation 4 and Xbox
I am from the tall house with stairs in front of the woods
Nice, noisy, fun
I am from a hanging plant,
Tumbling from a hanging seashell plant holder
I'm from Chinese Christmas and going bald
From dad and mom
I'm from playing games and watching movies
From "Love you!" and "Set the table!"
I'm from Faith Hope United Church,
a little church that has red carpet and a pulpit
I'm from Big Stone Gap, Virginia
From Peppers and Mountain Dew
From the papaw that got electrocuted
To spending time with my dad playing games on the Xbox
In the living room, pictures
Good memories

MICHAEL MEADE, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from books
From Wrinkle in Time and Captain Underpants
I am from the fireplace
hot, intense, flickers
I am from a sunflower
tall and beautiful
I'm from going to Virginia Beach and traveling
From Amanda and Joshua
I'm from watching movies and making my sister laugh

From "Don't fail class." and "Do your best."
I'm from Baptist, I believe in God
I'm from Norton
taco salad, salad with poppy seeds
From the uncle in the army
The mamaw who was a nurse
Pictures on a wall
They have family memories

PAYTON MIDDLETON, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from barefoot trampoline jumps.
From Begley Road and the Milbro family.
I am from the wood trimmed house, clean, fragrant, and lively.
I am from tall trees, shading the whole front yard.
I am from holiday meals and curly hair.
From hard headed tendencies and "I love you!"
I am from change and moving.
From slow to trust but quick to forgive.
I am from Sunday gatherings, with all my great aunts and granny.
I'm from Italy bottom, deviled eggs, macaroni and cheese.
From staying strong no matter what and seeing the world as a beautiful place.
The old family photos hanging in the living room,
Wilma Jo and Charles and always making sure to give
granny hugs are where I am from.

KESHAWN MILBRO, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from movies
From Home Alone and Spiderwick
I am from the old house
rusty, ancient, and aged
I am from tulips
red and silk
From Crystal and Lee
I'm from the breast cancer and blood disorder
From "Do your best" and "Try"
I'm from Christians, God
I'm from Irish blood, indians, and Wise County
From the dad whose great-great-great-grandfather was John Wesley
Devil Wright (he got his nickname from tracking an enemy)
Pictures at the pumpkin patch

KRISTEN MILLER, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from a PS4
From games and fun
I am from the couch
Comfy, easy to sleep on
I am from a Venus Flytrap
A meat eating plant
I'm from spending holidays together and we all look alike
From John and Joyce
I'm from movie nights and board games
From clean my room and brush my teeth
I'm from God, the one true God
I'm from Norton, Virginia
Roast, mac and cheese
From the dad who was a veteran in the Navy
The papaw who was a retired veteran
Pictures on the walls and frames
That holds memories for my family

KODEE MILLER, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from art
From Utrecht and BLICK
I am from the white house
with a white door, shiny windows, and black roof
I am from huge trees,
nice family
I'm from baking stuff on Christmas and happiness
From Charlene and Ronnie,
I'm from the sibling fights and movie nights
From treating others the way you want to be treated and believe in God
I'm from Agnosticism, believing in God
I'm from Norton Virginia and Cherokee Indians
From the sun hitting my dad in the eyes and legally blinding him
To the mom working for money and two loving dogs!
Living room walls with pictures
Shows my sister's graduation and other important times

ALEXIA MOORE, GRADE 6

Christmas: Past, Present, and Future

In the late 80s and 90s when my mom was growing up Christmas was different and here are a few examples of how. Christmas smelled like cookies baking, cinnamon, citrus, and food cooking. When she thinks

of Christmas she sees her and her dad driving back from family parties and him saying that he sees Santa up in the sky. My mom hears Christmas music in the background and all of her family laughs. She feels a bit of sadness and happiness but mainly she is cheerful. One of her favorite gifts she has got is a baby had always wanted.

My past Christmases have been good. When I think of Christmas I think of the smell of apple pie and cinnamon. I never have had snow on Christmas but still when I think of Christmas all I think of is snow and family and most pictures that you see of a Christmas scenery there is always snow. I always think of the sound of wind and bells. My favorite gift that I have got in the past is my dog. I did get him this year but he is just the best thing ever. I feel the nice soft snow and taste the sweet candies.

This year I think Christmas will be a bit boring because I will not get to see all of my family sadly. If we do all get to see our family we will probably need to wear a mask so that we don't get older family members sick. We will all have to be six feet apart if we get to see our family. It will be pretty sad but at least everyone will be safe. I am sure I will call them or facetime them to spread the cheer.

PRESLEY MULLINS, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from cell phones
From Mother Nature mountain spring water and Coke
I am from the white apartments near the giant snowman on the pond
tall, extremely noisy, and annoying
I am from the large evergreen tree where everyone gathers to play
When we moved there, my brother and I cleaned up its needles that covered the ground
I'm from weeklong family Christmas celebrations and loud game-players
From Tater and Ray-Ray.
I'm from always lazy and always late
From "You're gonna get a whoopin!" and "I love you!"
I'm from church services at the large brick building in Wise every Sunday
From Norton, Virginia
Pasta salad and lasagna
From the story that my uncle got his head stuck on a power line
To the time my mom told me that my old boyfriend was my cousin
Family pictures are on my fridge
to keep the memories and fun times

KAITLYN MULLINS, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from a pencil,
From Nike and Adidas I am from the big blue building dazzling, chilly, scary
I am from a sunflower yellow, standing tall, bright, and bold
I'm from watching the Christmas Carol on Christmas Eve and blue eyes
From Trista (Mom) and Chad (dad) I'm from having a big heart and being emotional From "The choices
you make today change your destiny tomorrow." and "Keep your hands to yourself!"
I'm from knowing that Jesus is the one and only way to heaven, and Jesus loves everyone I'm from Virginia,
Hungary, and Italy
Spaghetti, Hungarian Stew

From the way my Nana fixed Hungarian Stew that took all day, but worth the wait
From my mom making the best Thanksgiving dinners
Pictures in photo albums, Facebook, at my grandparent's home
To have memories of those before you

EVAN PICCIONE, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from Baseball
From Rawlings and Dicks
I am from the house in Big Stone Gap
From funny, helping, and athletic
I am from a sunflower
colorful
I'm from Christmas and hazel eyes
From Connie and Bill
I'm from the sports and video games
From Santa is real and believing in the Easter bunny
I'm from Christian, believe in Jesus
I'm from Norton, Va and turkey
From beating my dad in 1 on 1 in basketball
We have family pictures in the hallway
That hold memories

ELIJAH PLEASANT, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from the wooden chair.
From Coke and Arizona tea.
I am from the white house with a red roof next to the cow pasture
(white, noisy, two-story)
I am from roses
Beautiful and red
I'm from Secret Santa and being faithful
From Jojo and MeMe
I'm from beach vacations in the summer and ski vacations in the winter
From "Try your hardest" and "I love you"
I'm from my messy bedroom, always clothes in the floor
I'm from Big Stone Gap, Virginia and Jonesborough, Tennessee
From chicken casserole and caramel brownies
From the time my brothers fought on the couch, and my younger brother fell off and cut his head.
To the day my dad and his brother were playing golf, and my dad was messing his brother's swing up
so he threw the golf club at my dad which
hit him in the head and knocked him out; then he had to get stitches.
All of the pictures on the walls of my grandmother's house and on our fridge
Help to keep the memories

JOSIE PREWITT, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from movies
From Christmas Vacation and Home Alone
I am from a 2 story house
remote, beautiful, fun
I am from a Dogwood
beautiful and tall
I am from getting together on Christmas and brown hair
From Mimi and Poppy
I am from the playing games and laughing
From “Don’t chew with your mouth open!” and “Do your best.”
I am from the cross, Jesus my Savior
I am from Wise County, VA and Lambert- Ratliff
Potato soup and rolls
From the Poppy who quit school to make money for his family
The Mimi who stayed home to take care of her kids.
On the wall and in photo albums at Mimi’s house
These things tell our family history

KALEIGH RATLIFE, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from a pencil
From a diary and stories
I am from the welcoming
Yellow room, that smells of pumpkin pie
I am from a sunflower
It’s taller than me and a bright shade of yellow
I’m from movie nights and brown hair
From Robby and Pamela
I’m from spending too much money and arguments
From all of the Skybugs’ and “You can do whatever you put your mind to.”
I’m from Florida and American Indian
Homemade mac and cheese, dumplings
From my aunt’s 80’s salad story, the blue cheese all over her face
Pictures in my dad’s office
They are important because it’s members of my family and I care for them

SKYE REECE, GRADE 6

I am from. . .

I am from video games
From three living rooms
Cozy, warm, inviting
I am from colorful roses

Smells and looks pretty
I'm from cookouts and brown hair, tall
From Logan and Robert
I am from the Irish
From "Nothing's free." and "You have to work for what you got."
I'm from Christians, I believe in God
I'm from North Carolina and potato salad
I'm from the grandma who always has drama
Pictures at my nana and papaw's house
They hold memories for us to cherish

KAILEE RENTFROW, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from electronics
From Iphone and Xbox
I am from the small farmhouse
cute, inexpensive, and smelling like pumpkin pie
I am from a Venus Flytrap
Always keeping its mouth open until the prey is close
I'm from football and green eyes
From Ashley and Trevor
I'm from the big hearts of giving and big mouths
From "Always follow your dreams and noone else." and "If you can't read you'll be unemployed."
I'm from Christian, I believe in God
I'm from Norton, Virginia and indians
Sour Patch Kids, chocolate ice cream
From Papaw Bobby who quit school in 7th grade to provide for himself and his family
The papaw Jr who survived after a lighter blew up on him
Pictures on the walls, scrapbook, and beside my bed
Irreplaceable memories of those who have passed

AUBREY REYNOLDS, GRADE 6

I am from video games

From Playstation and Xbox
I am from the living room
Small and smelling of carpet
I am from the grass,
long and soft
I'm from Thanksgiving and green eyes
From Ashley and Roy
I'm from the arguments and sleeping
From "Holy crap Batman!" and "What the crap!"
I'm from no religion, my parents don't believe in anything
I'm from Norton Virginia and Scandinavians,

blueberry salad and Pumpkin Pie
From the stories about my aunt's cousin by
marriage Johnny Cash
The tallness of my dad
Pictures on Facebook
"Family is not an important thing. It's everything."-Michael J. Fox

HAYDEN RIGGS, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from video games
From Madden 21 and Fortnite
I am from the soft bed
Comfortable excellent nice
I am from leaves
colorful like the setting sun
I am from spending Christmas at my Nana's and loving
From Jesse and Amanda
I am from the get each other presents and family game night
From "I'm not a quitter." and "Cry me a river."
I'm from a Christian, loving of all people
I'm from Big Stone Gap, Va
Oreo Delight and hamburgers
My papaw working in the coal mines
My papaw cuuc when I was little
Pictures on the wall in the living room
It shows cool memories

EVAN ROBERTS, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from football
From NFL and Nike
I am from a fireplace
friendly, warm, bright, cozy
I am from trees I see in the woods
tall,brown,and good to climb on
I'm from cornbread and being nice
From Tony and Julie
I'm from the good hair and taking care of me
From "Don't say can't." and "Don't give up!"
I'm from Christian music
I'm from Big Stone Gap
I'm from pizza and ice cream
From the great-grandfather who served in the Civil War
The dad who was a lifeguard

I'm from the photo of my sister and I at the park
The memories we share together

CADEN ROGERS, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from games
From the Hunter Call Of The Wild and Cuphead
I am from am the oven
hot,smooth, and clean
I am from sunflowers
leaves that are rough, tough stems, and colorful
I am from making chocolate pie and green eyes
From Dylan and Lexi
I am from going to church every Sunday and sitting down to talk to my parents about something,
From be respectful and stand up for someone
I am from being a Christan, I believe in God
I am from Big Stone Gap, Lonesome Pine Hospital, and indians,
Tacos and chocolate pie
From the grandad who broke his arm when he fell from the stairs
The mamaw who had cancer
From picture in frames, yearbooks, and on the wall,
They make you remember the important things that happened in your life

ETHAN ROGERS, GRADE 6

I am from . . .

I am from my lasso rope
From Mayfield milk and Sunny-D
I am from the large grey house with field rock foundation on Oakwood Circle
(comfortable and dogs love it)
I am from riding ponies in the summer and stubbornness
From Samuel and Avery
I'm from a family of farmers, coal miners, and truck drivers
From "Log into your school!" and "Pick up your messy room!"
I'm from Spirit and Truth Worship in the Valley, Sunday school
From Texas, Colorado, Pueblo Indians, and Mexicans
From cornbread and goulash
I'm from great-uncle who was wounded in Vietnam
To the first time we jumped on Gigo with no saddle and flipped off the front
To the large farm in Scott County filled with cows
My favorite one is Pedro who is spotted and let's me ride him
Pictures on the cell phone
Memories
That make me happy

HANNAH ROSE, GRADE 6

I am from. . .

I am from the purple bridle I first got at age 8
From Sunny-D and Mayfield milk
I am from the large grey house with field rock foundation on Oakwood Circle
(comfortable, amazing, and dogs love it)
I am from riding ponies in the summer and stubbornness
From Samuel and Avery
I'm from a family of farmers, coal miners, and truck drivers
From "Log into your school!" and "Pick up your messy room!"
I'm from Spirit and Truth Worship in the Valley, Sunday school
From Texas, Colorado, Pueblo Indians, and Mexicans
From cornbread and goulash
I'm from the military, police, and judge who are in my family
And trying to tame a little pony named Spike 2.0.
To the large farm in Scott County filled with cows
My favorite one is Pedro who is spotted and let's me ride him
Pictures on the cell phone
Memories
That make me happy

SAVANNAH ROSE, GRADE 6

I am from. . .

I am from headgear
From Asics and Wilson
I am from stone fireplace
from hot, bright, bright
I am from an oak tree
Tall and cool
I am from going to church and watch tv
From chris and melanie
I am from the watching football and working out
From "Don't lie!" and "No monsters under the bed."
I am from the cross, Bible
I am from kingsport chicken and pizza
From the time Luke threw up in the car
The time my dad burnt his chest with hot water
On the wall
Pictures for memories

ALEX SALYER, GRADE 6

I am from. . .

I am from a headgear
From Asics and Wilson

I am from the stone fireplace
hot,bright, flickering
I am from an oak tree
brown and tall
I am from going to church and watching tv
From Melanie and Chris
I am from the working out and family arguments
From “Never give up.” and “Never judge a book by it’s cover.”
I am from Christians,I believe in God
I am from Tennessee, Irish
steak and spaghetti
From my papaw who had cancer
The papaw who was in the army
Pictures in a box and on the wall
That hold memories

LUKE SALYER, GRADE 6

I am from. . .

I am from shoes
From Under Armour and Sketchers
I am from the bedroom
clean, big, smells like brownies
I am from roses
They are red, spikey, and pretty
I’m from seeing my dad and weird
From David and Jennifer
I’m from the arguing and loud
From Hollywood and clean your room
I’m from Christian, I believe in God
I’m from Iowa
biscuits and gravy, fudge pie
From the step dad who had to quit school at the age of 14 to get 2 jobs for money
The mother who liked rap songs even at a young age
The long hallway of family items
Important because of the time we put in those memories

ANESSIA SCHUMAN, GRADE 6

Shena

I am always doing tik-tok dances
I wonder who taught the first teacher when school was created
I hear the medicine bottle saying, “Did you remember to take me?”
I see a bear with human legs
I want to go see my best friend, Jake Carpenter
I sometimes pretend I’m a strong boxer and play fight with my brothers

I feel like becoming a nurse
I touch 100 million dollars
I worry about my family members and my best friend
I cry about my dog, Oreo, who got poisoned
I understand that mistakes happen
I say God and Jesus are real
I dream about being a manager like my meme
I try to draw my best anime characters
I hope covid goes away soon
I am sassy, hateful, and spontaneous

Sizemore

SHENA SIZEMORE, GRADE 6

I am from. . .

I am from the black leather couch where my siblings and I watch movies.
From Nikes and Mountain spring water
I am from the old brick house
Red brick with an old white porch and brown roof
I am from the red rose flower on my windowsill,
It has been there for a while.
I got it for my birthday.
I am from Christmas and Thanksgiving celebrations
From James Skinner and Lisa Bartley
I am from the stroke my grandmother died from,
and from the sacrifice my sister made when joining the army
From "Do better!" and "Make me proud!"
I am from the Christian church
down the street that my grandmother takes me to
I am from Lonesome Pine Hospital,
Pizza and burgers
From the time my mom met my dad,
And divorced and remarried
The old grumpy grandpa that lives at the top of the hill
The picture of my great grandma on my fridge
The christmas ornaments on the tree
were my grandma's before she passed
Remind me of her beauty and creativity.

NEVAEH SKINNER, GRADE 6

I am from. . .

I am from a computer
From Apple and Nike
I am from the coziness of my bed
the softness, warmth, comfortable
I am from lettuce, green and round

I'm from football games and dark brown hair
From Jeremy and Crystal
I'm from the Fourth Of July and football games
From "Never Lie." and "Be yourself."
I'm from Christianity, believer of God
I'm from Norton Community Hospital, Irish, Powhatan, and Cherokee
Chess Bars, chocolate or vanilla cake
From the uncle Jim who was an E9 Master Chief Petty Officer in the Navy
To the Marine Corps dad who was an E3 Lane Corporal
Pictures on the mantle or the wall,
To remember those who have passed

EMMA STANLEY, GRADE 6

I am from. . .

I am from my X-Box that I play with my friends
From Dr. Pepper and Hershey's dark chocolate
I am from the white house on Egan Road
(loud, pretty, and comfortable)
I am from the pine tree that I fell out of when I was eleven
And my mom's heart flowers
I'm from eating dinner at my house on Christmas and being short
From the Stanleys and Bowens
I'm from generations of nurses and builders
From "If you don't go to bed, the monsters will get you!" and "Don't chew like a pig!"
I'm from sleeping in on Sunday mornings, but believing in God
I'm from Norton Community Hospital
From cornbread, beans, corn, and green beans
From the time when I was little, and I ran into a nail on my nose
Everyone was really worried about me
On the glass shelf
when we go on vacation, we take lots of pictures
Important because all of it runs through the family

MADISON STANLEY, GRADE 6

I am from. . .

I am from Yeti
From Apple and Viking
I am from the land in the country
pretty, looks, beautiful
I am from roses,
smells good, pretty, red
I'm from going to church on Sunday and tall
From Chris and April
I'm from the honesty and trustworthy
From respect grown-ups and "Always tell the truth."

I'm from Christianity, Godly
I'm from West Virginia, Germany
Oreo Delight, Chocolate Cake
From Treasure our cat who we rescued
The puppies we fell in love with and brought home
Pictures in the office and study
They are important because they bring back memories.

MADISON SYKES, GRADE 6

I am from. . .

I am from a wagon train crossing the woodlands
of Illinois, Ohio, Kentucky, Missouri, and Arkansas
I am from Proctor street in the center of Big Stone Gap on a hill overlooking the town
I am from a big house that smells of cookie baking,
painted white with a large front porch
I am from the trees in my yard, 24 dog woods, 48 poplars, and 3 sugar maples
I'm from time spent with my mom baking for the holidays,
passed down through generations from parent to child
I am from Carrie Street and Benjamin Street, my great-great-great grandparents.
I'm from the country folks and city dwellers
I am from a revolutionary war hero and Civil War soldiers from both sides,
North and South
I'm from Christians, who came to America before it was a country for religious freedom
I'm from Arkansas, Pennsylvania, covered wagons and tall ships,
From hot cocoa and Christmas cookies
From the brave people who came from England on tall ships
almost 100 years before the Revolutionary War.
My great-great-great grandmother was my age when she traveled in a covered wagon
after her father, Benjamin Street, a Civil War hero who bought land in Arkansas.

LILYANNA TANKERSLEY, GRADE 6

Christmas: Then and Now

Christmas for my dad was always exciting. Every Christmas, my dad's mother and grandparents woke him up very early to open presents. His mother always videotaped the presents being opened. They did not have much, but his mother always made sure there were gifts under the tree. He said it was his favorite time of year growing up.

My favorite part about Christmas is my family and I getting together. It's the only time of year that my grandparents, my uncles, my aunt, and cousins are all in the same house. My mother cooks a large meal for everyone. We always have so many leftovers. Our stockings are filled with lots of candy.

I don't think much will change for us this year. We will have a small family Christmas like we always do. We will eat, laugh, and play. I hope this year it snows a foot! I hope my dad will be here when I open presents. Hopefully, he won't be called out to work.

HENRY KNOX TAYLOR, GRADE 6

Christmas: Past, Present, and Future

My mom's Christmases were mostly good. She said every Christmas Eve they would go to their mamaw and papaws house. Her papaw would not let them open presents until midnight. She loved it because all the family was there and they would just hang out all day. They would have a big dinner for everyone! My dad would always go to his aunt's house for Christmas dinner. Both of my parents got to open presents at their house on Christmas morning. They also had a bunch of snow on some of the Christmas mornings.

My Christmases were awesome. We would go to my grandparents houses to eat and open presents. We would have snowball fights sometimes. My mamaw would let us make ornaments and cookies. We would eat dinner at their house and then come home and get ready for Christmas morning. My favorite present that I received was a four wheeler that my papaw Gary and mamaw Tammy bought me.

This Christmas we will probably stay home. My mom doesn't want my sister or me to get sick. My mom and dad are going to cook us dinner. My grandparents said they would drop gifts off to us and we can open them while being on virtual. This Christmas is going to be a lot different not being able to see my cousins and the rest of my family. I say they will make people quarantine after this holiday to hopefully stop the spread of the virus. I just hope everyone has a great Christmas.

CAMERON THOMPSON, GRADE 6

I am from. . .

I am from a soda can
From Coca Cola and Pepsi
I am from the smallest house I've ever seen
Small, made completely out of metal, yellow
I am from a Sandbox Tree
A spiky trunk, poisonous sap, dangerous fruit
I am from a family reunion every year and blue eyes
From Ashley and Bennie
I'm from the laziness and watching a lot of TV
From "Money can't buy happiness." and "Always say, Please and Thank you!"
I'm from Christianity, believing in God but not the bible
I'm from the Vikings, a military air base
spaghetti, Pumpkin Pie
From my great-grandpa was out on a lake when his boat flipped, he couldn't get to shore, so he drowned
The long curly hair
The garage where we keep our pictures
They hold special places in our hearts

CONNOR TURNER, GRADE 6

Jakobe

I am the same as other students.
I wonder how fast a human can really run.
I hear music.
I see a Mexican sign.
I want farm toys.

I pretend that I'm flying in space.
I feel like I could touch the moon.
I touch the pot of gold belonging to the leprechaun.
I worry about the health of my family.
I cry over losing my papaw.
I understand that Christmas is celebrated as the birth of Jesus Christ
I say that my dad will one day be famous because of his music.
I dream of having a Dodge Ram 2500 8.0L V10
I try to be the best person I can be.
I hope that Covid will eventually go away.
I am adventurous, spontaneous, and funny.

Underwood

JAKOBE UNDERWOOD, GRADE 6

Kadence

I am unique in my own way because I am who I am
I wonder if my mom is going to let me get a puppy
I hear a puppy barking
I see a puppy
I want a puppy
I pretend not to have an attitude
I feel like I can bring my grades up.
I touch my puppy
I worry one of my family members is going to get Corona.
I cry when I'm sad
I understand the world and just life itself can be hard, and it's very dangerous
I say you should always speak your mind
I dream about being a movie star
I try to convince my mom I don't have an attitude
I hope my mom lets me get a puppy
Mom says I'm a smart-aleck with an attitude and beautiful.

Ward

KADENCE WARD, GRADE 6

Coming to America

My 4th great-grandfather lived in Germany. When he was about 30 years old, he had to escape to America with his family. The reason they came to America was because of an altercation that led to the death of a German soldier while defending his family. When they got here, they had to change their last name because he was hunted.

MICHAEL WELCH, GRADE 6

I am from. . .

I am from a table
From Gain and Suavital

I am from a deep red brick house in the woods
I am from a tulip
Delicate, colorful, and bright
I am from my grandma's Christmas Eve celebration
I am from my short mother and tall father
I am from an intelligent and hardworking family
I am from a bunch of diabetics and short folk
I am from the United Methodist Church and of Christian faith
I am from Kingsport, Tennessee and of European and Mediterranean descent
I am from cranberry bread and bread and butter pickles
I am from Family Drug the pharmacy my grandpa owns and runs
I am from a family growing with a new cousin
I am from a living room of family photos, these are our memories of loved ones here and gone

NOELLE WELLS, GRADE 6

I am from. . .

I am from movies
From The Grinch and Christmas Chronicles.
I am from the fire pit
warm, cozy, crackling
I am from vacations and arguments
From Misty and Bryan
I am from basketball games and cookouts
From Santa is real and "Don't be mean!"
I am from Christians, I believe in God
I am from Kingsport and German
From sausage and eggs
From the papaw who went deaf from the coal mines
From the dad that works four jobs
Pictures in family books
That holds memories before my uncle passed away

TALEN WHARTON, GRADE 6

I am from. . .

I am from my Dell PC. It's very good even for a minor brand.
From a Youtuber's Unspeakable clothing brand and Nike.
I am from the gray doublewide on Hamner Hollow Rd with a tin black roof and red shutters
(nice, warm, and cozy)
I am from the big heart-shaped oak and maple tree
Made by the oak tree and a maple tree combined.
I'm from movie night if no one is busy and people who say I'm just like my dad
(because I don't think before I speak).
From Kathy, my mom (Kit-Kat) and Sydney.
I am from different and unique and fond of electronics
From "If you stay in the bath too long, you will turn into a prune!" and

“If you swallow gum, it will stay in your stomach for 7 years.”
I’m from many gods but no church; busy on Sundays.
I’m from Appalachia, the United Kingdom, and Native American
From ramen and like calamari, we are tough
From the big tree where my siblings and I made a little fort a long time ago
And the many Amiibos game characters that my brother, who works in Kingsport, owns
Images of family pictures on the side of my yard with fall bushes
that turn red and look beautiful
Making memories of home

MATILDA WHITE, GRADE 6

I am from. . .

I am from mildly warm bed with white and blue covers
From Doritos and Xbox
I am from the two-story house on Blondell Ave
warm, comfortable, sounds of the creek
I am from Jalapeno growing in our house upstairs
Yellow and brown in the middle
I’m from opening presents on Christmas Eve and
My mom calls me a little version of my dad
From Michelle and Dundy
I’m from lots of coffee throughout the day, and creativity
From “Brush your teeth!” and “Take a shower!”
I am from “We believe in the Lord, and we praise Him”
I’m from a hospital, part Irish and Indian tribe Cherokee
From pepperoni pizza
From the time my dad took food to the people stuck in the blizzard of 2011
To my sister who stays upstairs all day
On our wall in the living room all over the living room
To help bring us back to times that have passed

JUSTUS WILLIAMS, GRADE 6

I am from. . .

I am from my comfortable bed.
From Nike and Captain Crunch
I am from the old house on Egan Rd.
little, smelly, noisy
I am from curvy roads,
With deers and farm animals
I’m from dinner at grandma’s and beach vacations
From Bitterman and Nani
I’m from the green belt bike rides and family lunches
From “I love you” in sign language and “Take the dogs out!”
I’m from the church near the train tracks where they have great music
I’m from Chicago to

Big Stone Gap, and
meat lovers pizza
From the funny jokes dad tells
The family of 12 spread all around
Family pictures on the walls
Just ordinary photos

COREY LEE WITT-BLEDSOE, GRADE 6



Unity Reed
High School

LAUREN KOHISTANI, IB GEOGRAPHY TEACHER

Today

I am watching our first female Vice President walk down the steps of the Capitol and I am unexpectedly overcome with emotion.

This year has been hard.

The previous school year ended abruptly without any pomp and circumstance. Without hugs or goodbyes or yearbook signings. While wearing masks we waved to our students as they were in their cars to receive their diplomas. It was hard.

Then a new school year started. Full of worries and concerns. I have not seen the faces of my students. I have not heard many of their voices. We have waited and hoped and waited and hoped. It has been hard.

We have experienced loss of all kinds. Of experiences. Of family. Of friends. This has been the hardest part.

But our silver lining is our resilience.

We continue to show up. We continue to shine our lights. We persevere. We persist.

I am watching a new year begin, one that is full of possibility. And I smile.

MRS. LAUREN KOHISTANI, TEACHER

I Forgot my Mask in 2020

I can only see your eyes and you can only see mine.

Some say it protects us, others just whine.

From March to today we have had nothing but time.

Look at the sky, take in the sunlight.



Delivery of TOP Book Six

Most people don't and just try to fight.
Protective glass and gloves in sight.
We should be united, but no one wants to try.
It turned into politics, which means everything is a lie.
Morgues are starting to have long lines.
Within a year we all wanted to cry.
Everyone is wearing a mask outside.
Nonetheless, I can only see your eyes
and you can only see mine.

KELLY MARQUEZ, GRADE 12

The Footsteps to the Land of Opportunity

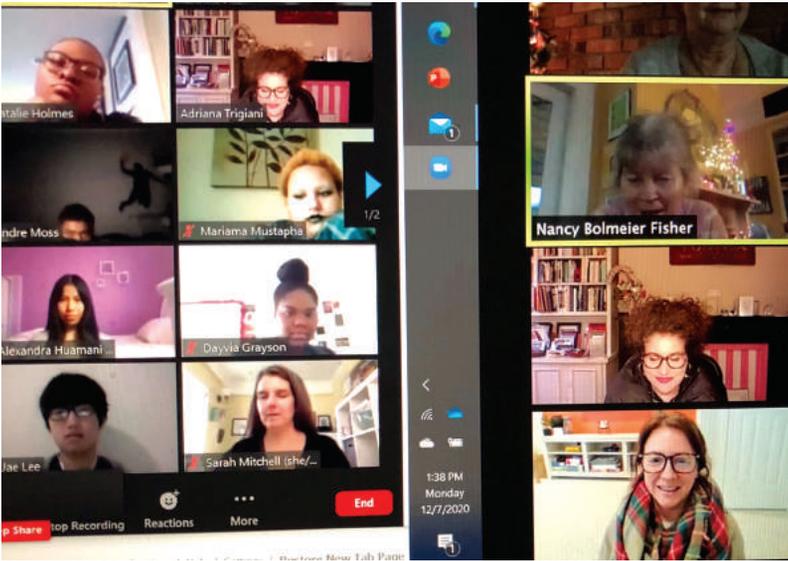
As a first-generation American, I see the struggle that immigrant parents experience for their children. The story of my mother, Neris Paz, is about her journey to come to America with Selvin Paz, my father, in 1989. My mother was only 18 years old and my dad was 19 years old. My mother and father swam, ran and walked thousands of miles just to give my siblings and me an ounce of the opportunity the United States has to offer. They traveled from Honduras through Guatemala, Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee and ended by creating a new home in Virginia. My mother once told me “Los pasos que creamos para llegar a América son los que darán oportunidades a las generaciones posteriores a nosotros, ya que las generaciones anteriores no tuvieron la oportunidad.” This is translated to mean the footsteps they created while leaving Honduras are the footsteps of generations who will come after us. Those footsteps let us remember that two people left their country of poverty and corruption to give us a better life. There were so many other people that did not get the chance to create their footstep path toward new opportunities. Leaving your country is never easy. They came to America with nothing to give us everything. I believe all their sacrifices are the reason my siblings and I are blessed with motivation and determination.

KAROL PAZ, GRADE 12

My Childhood Home

My childhood home would be that of a single-family townhouse that we lived in from when I was born up until 8th grade. It was a three-level town house with linoleum and cheap carpets. A white fridge and a garage only used for storage and useless junk. There were single creaks in some of the old stairs that we soon learned to skip over when sneaking down for a midnight snack. We had a recreational room that looked out to our backyard where my brother and I would build igloos in the winter and where my sister and I would fight about whose day it was to take out the trash. In the recreational room there were years old damages caused by us kids. The outlets were burnt and discolored because as a kid, I thought pennies went in the spaces. Then years later me and my cousins played bed hops and broke an antique glass table causing a dent in the cheap drywall. These things might seem small to someone from the outside, but to my family and I these things were vital to our upbringing. I like to think that it isn't where you were raised, but how you were raised. That as long as you were happy and content the rest didn't matter. I think all the damages and creaks in the floors stand out the most to me because it reminds me that this house was lived in, by my family, by my cousins, and by me. We laughed there, cried there, and found out about all the things we loved there. It was different in that sense that my house was ALWAYS full, on holidays, birthdays, and even school years. I think that's what made it my childhood home and not childhood house.

ANIJAH PEARSON, GRADE 12



TOP Zoom with Adri and Nancy

LORI STERNE, ENGLISH TEACHER

The Black Squares

How's their WiFi?
 Can they see?
 Can they hear?
 How do they style their hair?
 What's their favorite book?
 Do they think I'm funny?
 Do they need me to slow down?
 Do they have a pencil?
 Do they have a coat?
 What's their favorite song?
 Has their day gone well?
 Are they sleeping enough?
 Are they having fun?
 Do they have friends?
 Did they have breakfast?
 Is their mother working?
 Do they miss their grandfather?
 Do they have heat?
 Are they safe?
 Do they look forward to class?
 Does someone love them?

Are they there?
 Do they know I care?

Are they growing?
... The black squares keep me from knowing

LORI STERNE, UNITY REED HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER

Beautiful Girl

The pandemic has been tough on everyone. I have had to get a job to help support my mom and save up money to get our ceiling and roof fixed. There were holes in our roof and during the beginning of quarantine. A storm passed through my city causing my ceiling to have water damage and cave in. Other than that small tragedy, the quarantine was a much-needed break for me.

At the beginning of the quarantine, I was excited to not go to school (as most students were) and spent my newly found free time watching T.V., sleeping, and eating. This routine started to become repetitive and I was looking for new activities to spice up my boring life. I decided to take up cooking which lasted for about a month because I became tired of having to prep and create my meals when I wanted them to be quick and easy. I started to fall back into my repetitive routine which drove me crazy.

My mind raced a thousand miles per hour, filled with me overthinking what the future will hold, what went wrong in my past, and what is going on in the present. I was overflowing with the information I was trying to soak up to stay as informed as possible while also having to deal with my insecurities and the start of having to plan for my college application season. During all of this chaos, my proudest moment was coming out of my comfort zone and loving myself more.

In the past, I was very insecure. People would make remarks such as “you should stay inside” or “you’re as dark as the street”. This caused me to become very insecure in myself and I started to become shyer and more closed off to stop the tormenting. I only talked to my close friends and kept conversations short with others. I realized the best time for me to overcome my insecurities was when I was not surrounded by people that could bring me down. Being forced to stay in my home, I started to analyze what I liked and did not like about myself. I worked on what I did not like from my style to my skin while also speaking positive affir-



TOP Zoom

mations to myself. I had a hard time with this because I hated myself for so long, so this process was tough on me, but I am still learning and becoming a better version of me. I still get insecure, but I just pull myself out of it by thinking that I am a speck in the universe and I only have one life so I should love the body I am in. As I started to become happier, I began to do things I had never thought of doing such as applying for a leadership position in a school club and saying that I am beautiful.

I still have a long way to go and the journey of self-growth and self-awareness for me is far from over, but without this huge gap in my life I would have never started this journey.

AKUA AKOMEA, GRADE 12

Yellow World

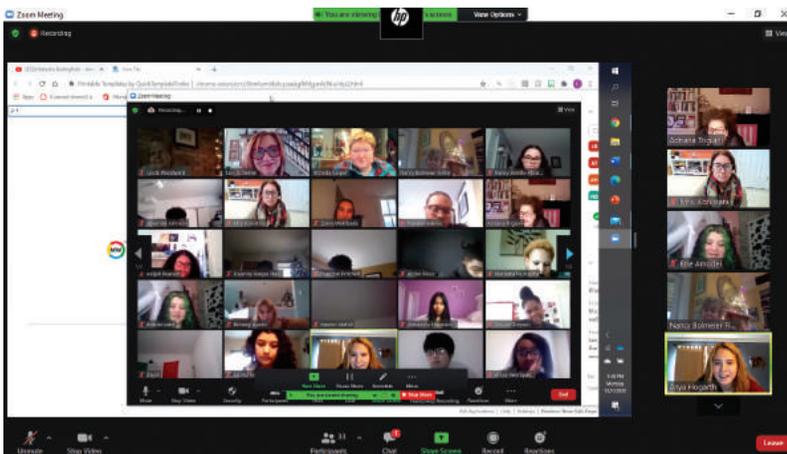
I used to be so colorful. My early childhood was always safe and secure, because you were here. You are my yellow and you will always be. The day you were no longer in my world, everything abruptly faded to grey. Watching it all unravel around me felt as if I was standing in the eye of a hurricane. No control, no peace, no yellow. I always keep your funeral card on me for safety. Guess what color it is. The flowers I threw down at your casket. Guess what color they were. Lately, the colors have been appearing again and I know I will be back in my vibrant paradise again.

BRIANNA AMODEI, GRADE 12

The Day You Got to Stay

March 28th, 2020

“When it comes to you
I wish I could read minds
We’re around each other everyday
Yet I feel like I don’t know you
I wish you weren’t afraid to be yourself
You didn’t live your life hiding your emotions and thoughts
I think about you a lot
I wish you could talk to me
And see there’s no judgment



TOP Zoom

I understand why though
I'm sorry you're scared to be
You
There's nobody in the world I want to see
Happier
I see your pain
I can feel it
I wish I knew what to do
All I'm told is to be here for you
But what if it's not enough?
And you still feel alone
I promise it gets better
And I hope you live to see that"
-Bea
December 2020
I never shared that poem with you

*And if that October night would have gone the way you planned
I would have never gotten the chance to
The thought of almost losing you
Will always bring tears to my eyes
The guilt of knowing I wasn't there for you
Eats me alive
There's no guide on how to move forward
But we'll take it one step at a time
I just want you to know your little sister
Will always be by your side
Thank you for giving this thing
Called life
Another try*

BEATRIZ ASENCIO, GRADE 12



Khalid Williams talks with Nancy and Adri during TOP Zoom

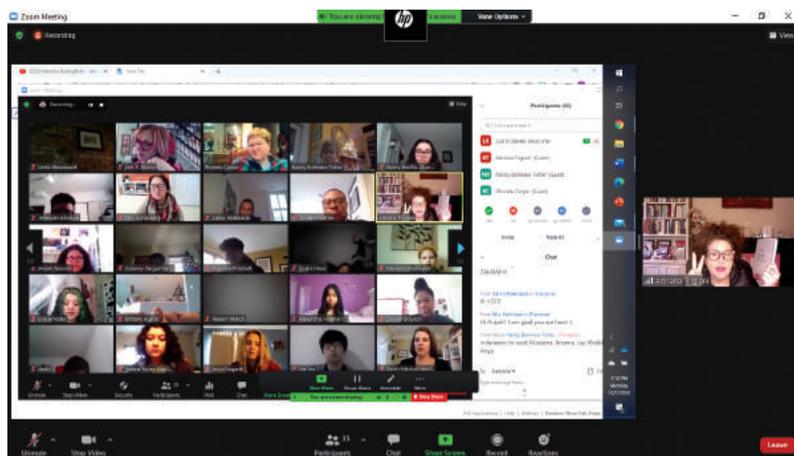
Imagine

I feel as if I am back at the beginning,
I tried to fix it, but they didn't care.
Imagine having a group of friends grinning,
Then in a blink of an eye gone, not fair.
I still don't know why,
They didn't care a friendship of 6–7 years died.
I would call them or text them hi,
this whole thing has made us divide.

Imagine losing all your friends,
All the inside jokes and memories,
I still can't comprehend.
I miss all the stories.
It's like it all was never a thing,
But I tried to keep it alive.
I would try and cling to it,
but there was no point it is unalive.

Imagine being the only one putting in effort.
I am exhausted from being the only one trying,
Not physically but emotionally and mentally.
I guess all they did was lie,
I don't know if they meant to do it intentionally.
But if they did, cool let it die,
because it seems like they don't care.
Imagine.

BRITTANY AUSTIN, GRADE 12



TOP Zoom

Lost and Found

The feeling of a cloudy day inside your head makes your day go by slowly. The constant thoughts in your head are making fun of you; they echo all over the place as they try to bring you down. The constant climbing to reach the top of the mountain, just to see another rock fall to knock you out with it. When you try to speak you feel like you're drowning.

What can you do to overcome these feelings? Try to find an outlet. Continue doing something you love that keeps your mind out of the haziness. For example, Art is one of the many forms to keep your mind at ease. Getting fresh air can help your brain to relax. Seeing the beautiful life around you can make you realize how precious life is. I overcame Depression with Volleyball and Orchestra. Volleyball was my outlet to take out my anger. Spiking a ball brought satisfaction to myself. Orchestra let me express my emotions through its sound. Playing the Violin and Cello let me release my voice in a way that I could never imagine. The Violin can strike your heart strings with pain while the Cello caresses your skin saying it's going to be alright.

Ever since using an outlet, I feel more confident in myself. Slowly and surely, I am fixing myself to become a better me. Once I'm the perfect me, there's no stopping my smile.

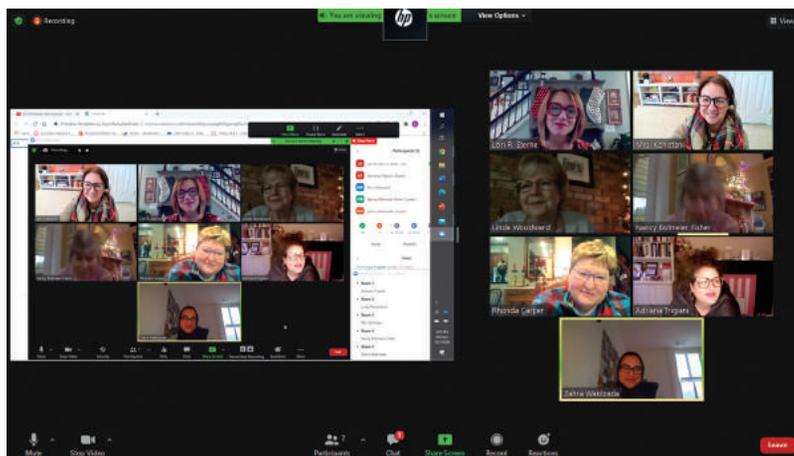
"NO MATTER WHAT, NEVER STOP SEARCHING FOR THE BEST POSSIBLE SOLUTION"

- NOBUTERU IRIHATA, VOLLEYBALL COACH OF AOA JOHSAI.

NANCY BONILLA ALVAREZ, GRADE 12

Influence on Fluency

I have a stutter; I have never been insecure about it or let it hold me back; it has always just been a part of me. My fluency has improved over time and I've developed strategies to combat attacks. Sometimes it's hard to fight and you just have to trudge through difficult words. My emotion plays a role in my stutter; you'd think it would more common when I'm nervous or anxious, but instead it occurs more when I'm happy or too comfortable. It hurts when I'm so excited to finally be able to talk about something I love and express myself, but not be able to get any words out. It hurts even more when I can't speak to the people I love without tripping over my words every few syllables. I'm well aware that the ones that care for me don't mind my disfluencies, but I can't help but feel like I'm wasting people's time just by speaking. Over the past few months, I've felt my speech worsen, things I used to be able to say with ease seem so difficult. Maybe it's because of the lack of verbal communication with



Adri, Nancy, Linda, Rhonda, Lori Sterne, and Lauren Kobistani speak with TOP Alumni and former student Zahra Wakilzada during TOP Zoom

new people or possibly the stagnant environment I've been trapped in for my health. Even the stress of virtual learning and grades could influence my ability to speak. All I know is that it's hard, but I can't give up. I need to speak my mind and talk to the people I love, because no matter what, they're going to love me for who I am. I may be going through a rough patch, but I'll get through it. I've done it before and I will do it again.

DIEGO BYRD, GRADE 12

The Creatures

It was done for me.
It was done for my sister.
It was done for my mother, they said.
He had to leave to support us, they said.
He did everything for you, don't judge him.
It was a mistake; he didn't mean to do so.

But that mistake affects my life so much.
When my mom expresses her anger and feelings of rejection from my father intensely.
Is that also for my well-being?
I've lived in the land of glory, in denial of what is actually normal, but I escaped this land. Unfortunately, my family has yet to escape. They believe my father is. . .

The statue of a father figure. He made it where no one could. He went across the oceans and created a successful life for himself.

He's an outstanding, successful, caring, CHEATING, MANIPULATIVE husband who left unexpectedly and brought 2 more mouths in the world, while the first two suffer and still suffer from his first "slave."

But we ignore it, and never talk about it. Because he is a man, a king, a god. So therefore, his mistakes are not important.

Yes! the land of glory gave life to heavenly creatures. However, they'll never be anything, but creatures.

YVANA DEMANOU, GRADE 12



Mariama Mustapha talks with Nancy and Adri during TOP Zoom

There's More to Life than Rainbows

There's more to life than rainbows and fake passion.
Look deep within and try to imagine.
Who would you be if you wrote the book?
What would the plot be? Can you tell us the hook?
Who would you be if it wasn't for money?
I know, It sounds kinda crazy; it almost sounds funny.
Now imagine that that person is you.
Will I have to convince you, that that is your truth?

MNAWAR ELKHODARI, GRADE 12

Dark Fights

Being the middle child and the only girl growing up came with a lot of teasing from my brothers. Teasing was something that happened regularly, especially from my older brother. He would tease me about silly things or things that would genuinely hurt my feelings such as who I like, my teeth, and my weight to name a few. My weight has always been my biggest insecurity especially as a child, and I was constantly teased about it when I was younger. The teasing would worsen when we would play board games with each other because we are a very competitive family.

There was a time that the teasing was taken too far; my brothers and I were sitting at the dinner table playing Sorry, the board game. The victory was at my fingertips and mixed with the sweet, heavenly smell of cookies gave me the push I needed to win. Since I was winning, my older brother began to get frustrated and started to relentlessly tease me. He started off with light-hearted jokes that I wasn't taking too seriously, but they were still getting under my skin and making me uncomfortable. After I won the game by a landslide, he started to bring up my insecurity that he knew would upset me: my weight.

I got irritated at the fact that my brother kept bringing up my weight and my younger brother stood at the side with his lips clamped shut. My body was filled with so much anger that I began to cry; I did not want my older brother to think that he had the power to make me shut down, so to get back at him for teasing me, I decided to start punching him. The punches led to us wrestling in the living room. In the mist of the fight, my younger brother tried to end the battle by grabbing my older brother and getting him off me. As my younger brother pulled my older brother off me, my older brother tried to slam me onto the couch, which led to my head hitting the table and my tooth chipping off. Finally, my mom came out to see what all the commotion was about and forced us to tell her the truth about the fight which resulted in us not being able to get any of the cookies and we couldn't play any games for a couple of days.

Once my mom walked away my brother said, "She doesn't need cookies or snacks, already looks like she ate them all". Those words flying out of his mouth made me feel terrible about myself for weeks and caused me to not want to be around him for years, which ended with us not having a close relationship. This night made me look at my brother in a different light, because this was how I thought he viewed me. I distanced myself from my brother for a while because I didn't want to be around someone who always had something negative to say about me. Having my own brother, loved ones, and strangers comment on my weight, something they didn't know about, took a toll on me for a while. I have a terrible perception of how I look, I care way too much on how others perceive me, and I struggle with bad eating habits. I'm changing my ways and working on bettering myself and undoing all the things I have put into my head over the last year and a half and it has been a hard journey.

Now that my brother and I are older, him being 20 and me being 18, I have matured enough to forgive him for most of the nonsense that happened during our childhood and early teen years. Even though I still think about it frequently and it has heavily impacted me, I need to grow from this to make change in myself. At the end of the day, I know that he will always love me and have my back no matter what.

DAYVIA GRAYSON, GRADE 12

You Had to Be There

The fresh breeze on my tiny face and the bright blue ocean from the highest mountain view, by my side now and forever: my Dad. Just back from a long mission trip, I will never let go of his hand. There is no other place in the world I would rather be. I feel like I'm on top of the world! I am the luckiest girl in the world. I am loved, I feel safe, and most importantly . . . I am elated. I can only think about what the future holds for me. With my family by my side, life can only get better from here.

ANYA HOGARTH

Summer in My Shoes

So, when I was younger, I moved around a lot, mainly we lived with family so my mother, brother and I never really got things like our own room or own beds. I never really had half of the stuff my friends had before we moved to Virginia. My mom said, "Unpack."

I looked at her and said, "h" "Wat's the point of unpacking if we're going to move in a month?"

When I went to my friend's house, they always had their rooms painted the color of their choice and posters if they wanted, where I always had white walls with no posters. They had so many clothes. From the age of three months to 12 years old, I had to fit everything into either half a suitcase to a full suitcase.

NATALIE HOLMES, GRADE 12

For My Brother

I was born into a family of four; I had my mom, my dad, and my brother, Jurgen.

When I was about a year old, my dad moved to the U.S. in search of a better life for us, better than the one we had in Peru. Five years later, my mom moved to the U.S. While she got to reunite with my dad, my brother and I were forced to stay back due to the broken immigration process. During this time, we stayed with my aunt and three cousins. Even though they became a second family to us, it was nothing like being with our parents. Six months later, my brother and I were finally able to reunite with our parents in the U.S. This was a very emotional journey for all four of us, but I had my brother with me the entire time. He's about six years older than me and while we don't always share similar interests, I know he's looking out for me.

I have several fond memories of me and my brother growing up in Peru. We would visit my grandmother's hometown up in the mountains. There we would walk around her mud house and run around in the fields; we would even get to see sheep walking by with their owners. It was a very peaceful atmosphere with kindhearted people. Now that we're older and living in the states, we like to bond over movies, which wasn't something we were able to do when we were younger. At times I felt alone being without my parents but having someone familiar with me made me feel safe. While our childhood wasn't perfect, I'm glad to have had him with me through it all.

ALEXANDRA HUAMANI, GRADE 12

A Turning Point

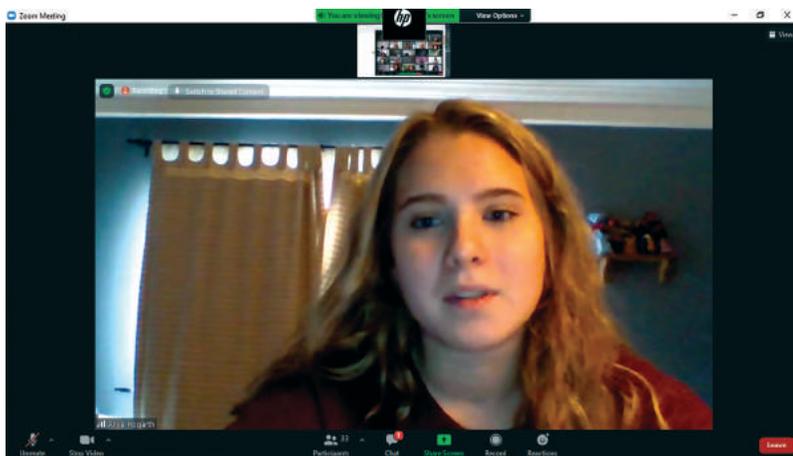
One turning point would be my junior year during track. I remember it was cold and everyone was freezing outside. Coach Taylor had us doing intense running that day. I remember I could barely feel my legs before I stood up to go do 5 100m sprints. But as soon as I took off my calf locked up. I thought I could run through it, but I ended up landing on my ankle. I collapsed and if I can remember, it was my teammate's dad who talked to me first to see if I was okay. Then I got to rest. After that when I got home, I still limped because it hurt just putting a bit of pressure on it. My mom saw I kept limping and looked at my ankle and it was swollen to the size of a golf ball. She immediately took me to Patient First. When I got an x-ray, they told me how I was so close to breaking it. I lost so much strength in my leg and I couldn't jump the same that season.

JEREMIAH JOHNSON, GRADE 12

Choosing Passion over Career

I asked my father why he became a private English teacher, and then a hibachi chef when he has a degree in Engineering.

"I like engineering. I work- my dream was engineer. But at the time, the economy is really hard [in Korea] and the engineer, all the engineer right now all the engineer they got a good salary and a good opportunity good job,



Anya Hogarth talks with Nancy and Adri during TOP Zoom

but the- when I was young me at like my age thirty, it is not a good circumstance. I need more money to live, so I choose, teacher because private teacher get a lot more than engineers at the time. So, I changed my job and then I did it and when I came to America, I changed another job, it is like a chef and now after that, I was a manager, and then now, I have my own business same like a sushi and hibachi restaurant and Jae helped me a lot about it and yeah, so that's why I'm loving my job right now, but somehow, I regret little bit about the engineer but I don't wanna regret, so I like my choice."

My dad taught me that dream jobs can sometimes go bad or turn out unexpected in reality. Finding the right career was challenging for me, because there were so many options. Before I figured out what my college major was going to be, I was too busy finding a career that makes a lot of money. I did not bother choosing a

job that I could enjoy for a living until my father told me why he chose to become a private English teacher, and then a hibachi chef, instead of being an engineer.

Back when my dad was in Korea, English teachers made more money than Korean engineers; in the U.S, it is the opposite. When he moved to America, he left his job as a private English teacher to become a hibachi chef. He did not have any regrets with his decision, because he loves cooking. Hearing him talk about his job satisfaction as a hibachi chef truly made me more confident on what I want to choose for my college major based on what I love to do, which is teaching. My mother wanted me to become a lawyer and my father wanted me to run his food business with him, but they were also fine with me pursuing a career that I would enjoy. No matter what I choose, my parents are there to support me and I thank them. It is not all about the salary; it is whether you are satisfied with the career you choose.

JAE LEE, GRADE 12

Letter to the Old Me

Dear India,

I have seen all that you have been through in the past 2 years from the deaths of your loved ones to completely losing yourself. I want you to know that I understand better than anyone that this journey you went through has shaped your very being. You have had many highs, but you have also had some very deep lows on the roller coaster ride of life. I still remember how dark it was the night you collapsed onto your bedroom floor. Your eyes held as many tears as it held pain and your cries sounded like pleas to the world to take it away. The way your heart began to beat so fast almost as if it was going to beat out of your chest and your hands trembling like they saw a ghost. Nights like those were always the worst for you especially when you had to be sure to stay as quiet as possible in order to keep from disturbing someone else's peaceful sleep.

The best advice I can give you is to let yourself be vulnerable to that same pain and anxiety you always wanted to disappear, because the only way you will get through it is if you let yourself feel it. You spend too much time trying to deny your emotions not only from others but from yourself as well and it's starting to overwhelm you. You always have people to lean on that will help carry your burdens and they will do anything they can to keep a smile on your face. Your job is to put your pride aside and open up to the people who want to help you. Every battle is not one that you need to face alone. It will take time and sometimes you will run into obstacles that will make you feel as though you are right back at square 1, but no storm lasts forever. Remember to keep your head up and everything will work itself out for the better. If you can always remind yourself of this, I promise those moments of anxiety that snatch your breath and leave your body shaking will eventually decrease as time passes by.

I promise you that you will always be able to find yourself whenever you feel lost; just keep your head set on the blessings you will receive in the future instead of on the tragedies of the past. Continue to shape yourself into the woman you want to be and most importantly, always be able to admit your faults and learn from your mistakes because growth is the main road to peace.

INDIA MARTIN, GRADE 12

A Piece of my Heart

During my first breaths of life, the state of peaches took my heart. To this day, I long for the sound of grasshoppers singing in the summertime. I ache for the petrichor emanating from the sharp blades of grass in my front yard. Some nights I lie awake and allow my thoughts to be consumed with the memories of friendships and Publix runs. Even if you are miles away from Home, it still has power to make you dream. Mine consists of the first time I rode a bike without training wheels and growing into getting my license. My heart crushes when viewing my friends continue to make more milestones in life. It's not that I'm not happy

for them; it's that I'm not there to see them succeed. "Home is where your heart is," they say. Then how come the thought of Home breaks mine? How come life doesn't feel as lively without sleeping under my Home's roof? There truly aren't words to describe the ties pulling me back. One day I will return to things I no longer recognize. That is what makes my eyes tear up more than anything.

AVA MCGUIRE, GRADE 12

Life on the Move

In 2003, I was born in the Myrtle Beach hospital, where my family and I stayed with my grandparents until we moved when I was two. I do not remember that point in my life when we first moved to Virginia. Two years after first moving to Virginia, my parents did not stay with each other anymore and lived down the street from each other. When that happened, my mom would take me and my sister for a walk to my dad's house and then back and the other way around. My parents took turns, so my sister and I would stay with our dad at night and my mom right after school.

When my birthday came back around, I was moving again for the second time in my life. My dad took my sister and me to Maryland with him while my mom was going back to school. I wish I could say that we stayed there for a long, but that did not last. We stayed there for half of the school year, so we ended up moving with my grandparents back in Myrtle Beach when I was five. After I was done with school, we stayed in Myrtle Beach for the summer and then my mom came to get my sister and me to move back to Virginia.

We stayed in Virginia this time for three years without moving and I liked it a lot, but I missed my family back home in Myrtle Beach. We packed up our things and headed back home for me to start my fourth-grade year and for my sister start her sixth-grade year. It felt good to be back with my family, but when it was time to go into middle school, I thought it would be better if I stayed with my dad in Virginia, so I moved with him. Since that move, it has been the last move I've made. Life on the move let me see a lot of the different places at a young age. So, I am glad I was not stationary, and I got to go on these journeys as a kid.

ANDRE MOSS, GRADE 12

the closet-a poem

The closet is safe,
It keeps them protected from others,
It holds their hands and says to leave when it's safe for them,
It allows them to stay as long as necessary.
The closet is safe,
Until
 it's
 not.
It becomes suffocating.
The air is swept out of their lungs,
They feel like they're trapped,
They gasp for air,
And leave the closet.
It says, "come back; it's not safe yet!"
But they keep walking and don't look back.
Then they return hours later with
Bruises and fat tears sliding down their faces.
They return to the closet.

They wrap up in its comforting arms
And
Never leave.
Because now they know
Why they can't.

MARIAMA MUSTAPHA, GRADE 12

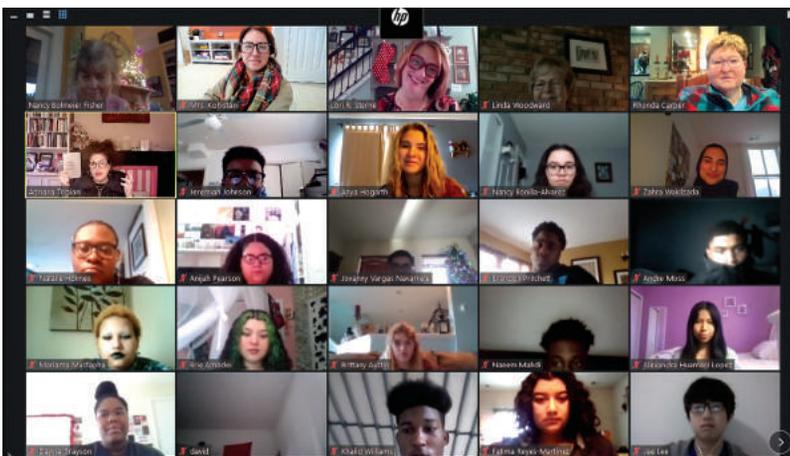
The Butterfly

She used to call me Nana.
She used to need me the way a child needed her mother.
We were inseparable, always hand in hand.
Then life hit the fast forward button and five years have gone by.
She no longer calls me Nana.
She has emerged from her cocoon and transformed into a butterfly.
Her patterns are full of life and her wings fly with curiosity.
Now that she can fly on her own, all she wants to do is fly further away from me.
All I can do is watch her become the beautiful butterfly that she was made out to be.
But I will always be her Nana.

DIANE OLIVA, GRADE 12

The Sun and The Moon

The Moon lets the ocean waves have fun on a night sky. The Sun helps the flowers nourish and grow on a sunny morning. The Moon guides the humans as a night light. The Sun allows the humans to see the beauty of the earth. The Moon is dreamy and calm. The Sun is strong and firm. Or so the humans believe. A secret that has been kept for many centuries, is that the Sun cries when humans wear sunglasses. She negatively thinks that the humans are shielding their eyes from her. The Moon ignores the asteroids when they pass by. She turns a cold shoulder to every single being, except the sensitive sun. They would comfort each other. They would act like sisters. Born from the same mother. They would care for the humans, the little stars, and the earth. They would treasure one another. One day, there was complete darkness. Chaos. Panic. Screams. The Sun arose from



Unity Reed TOP students speak with Adriana Trigiani during TOP Zoom

her beauty sleep. "The Moon is missing!" The tiny stars held heavy tears in their eyes. "No. Everything is alright. I'm sure she forgot to wake u-." The Sun's eyes were bulging with fear and panic. The Sun gasped as she turned to face the earth. The humans were stumbling on their way home, as there was no more of a gentle luminosity. "I'm sure she is safe. She might be gone for now, but she will come back!" The tension was relieved from the little stars. The Sun gulped in worry as she did not believe her own statement. At first it was one day. Then it was a week. After that, it was a month. "Hi!" The Sun excitedly raised her head, Hope covering her eyes. Her head was lowered in disappointment when a gray asteroid waved at her. Her heart was heavy for a month straight. The stars worked as a community to work as a dim light for the humans. How long could they keep this up? The Sun's head was filled with a million questions. Did her heart feel pity? Betrayal? Emptiness? How could the Sun function without the Moon? How could the Sun take care of the stars, the humans, and the earth all at once? Why did the moon leave? Weren't they sisters? The Sun had dark circles underneath her eyes. Her eyes were covered in tears every single day. She would not dare to show her weakness to the little stars. After a dreadful month, the Sun gave up waiting and hoping for the Moon's return. The Sun's heart was shattered in tiny pieces.

When I glare at the mirror, I see the Sun. I see a girl whose sister left her. Was it my fault my older sister left without a word? Why did she move out without telling me? How could I take care of my three little sisters by myself? The only thing left from the Moon and my big sister were memories of the past.

FATIMA REYES MARTINEZ, GRADE 12

Elegy

The big and loud heart beating hugs a daughter can only feel warmth from.
The life lessons girls know as an annoyance at the time.
Happiness, knowing you know you can communicate with the first person you've ever
met in the world.
3,666 kilometers away without a passport and hope.
You were my other half even though you did not know it.
That longing for his physicality that strikes the pain in your chest.
Your passing has been the hardest thing I'll ever go through.
Even in your afterlife, you continue to teach me and for that I thank you.

JENNIFER REYES, GRADE 12

A New Purpose

There was a time in my life where I felt invincible. As the sun disappeared into the night skies, another day of my precious time went with it. What time? you might ask. The time I have here during this cycle we call life. You see I never thought anything could happen to me. As if I could wake up every day and waste the day away because there will always be tomorrow. There's the catch though, there might not be a tomorrow for some of us. I learned that when I first felt the feeling of grief. In a span of ten days, I witnessed two deaths. Two deaths that made me realize tomorrow is never promised. Now when I lay my head to rest at night. I soak in the events that occurred during the day appreciating every second of them. Every second counts because any second could be my last.

TATIANA ROSADO, GRADE 12

The Events of January 6, 2021

On Wednesday January 6, 2021, there was a "protest" turned insurrection on the United States Capitol. This act was not only encouraged, but was incited by the sitting president of the United States, which is an

unprecedented act of sedition. This attempted coup was fueled by the many conspiracy theories the Trump administration is endorsing as explanation for the election being “stolen” from the Republicans. There were many injuries and unfortunately 5 casualties including a woman who was shot and killed by the Capitol police. The right-wing media is attempting to spin this tragedy into an example of police brutality, but this in no way mirrors the tragic losses of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd. The entire display that took place on the sixth leaves me with a bad taste in my mouth and the fact that every point made by the BLM movement was highlighted by the hypocrisy of the police during this event is frankly disgraceful.

MAYA SMITH, GRADE 12

Unity Reed

I have fair skin to the point at which it feels like the sun’s only mission is to burn me. Growing up, I went to schools where the majority of the kids looked like me, but when I came to Stonewall Jackson High School, that all changed. Throughout my freshman year, my friends from other schools would repeatedly ask me, “Are you scared to go there?” I would always reply, “No” because for me, and for everyone else who was a student at my high school, it felt like normal, boring school. However, the perspective I had on my school changed the summer before senior year.

In the midst of the Black Lives Matter protests, my fellow students and I began to speak out against the name of Stonewall Jackson High School. It is unexpected that a school rich with diversity (to the point where I, as a white student am the minority) could be named after someone who fought for slavery. The name did not embody my school whatsoever. It made me feel guilty that our diverse population of students and staff were forced to go to a school with racism embedded in the name. After petitions and emails to the county school board, Stonewall Jackson High School became Unity Reed High School. With a name that includes the word “Unity,” we can finally portray who we are, not only as a school, but as a community.

Over the past year, I have become enveloped in social injustices. I feel it is my responsibility, as well as my peers’ responsibility, to help correct these issues on a local as well as a global scale. Changing the school name was a necessary step, so that students and staff members do not feel degraded because of the color of their skin. We will always try to do what is right and will continue to work for true equality.

JOSEF STOKES, GRADE 12

Let Me Fly

Since I was little, I understood I couldn’t be much in this country.
Until Obama came along and did something for me.
Gave me hope for a better future.
Imagined a fake social security number,
smirking and saying, “I won’t have to use you.”
But that was snatched away, now I sit and wonder.
Why did he take the hope away from me and many others?
I was just months away from filling in,
my application which would’ve given me wings.
But in 2020 it was finally revised,
and this time the courts decided to let me fly.

JOVANNY VARGAS NAVARRETE, GRADE 12

Dear Depression

I will never forget the day you waltzed into my life.
You first made me believe I had no friends, then making me believe nobody cared about me nor loved me.
I gave into your games; little did I know that you were coming to stay with me.
I wanted to cry out for help so many times, but you forced me to be silent. You forced me to be okay even though I was broken.
You made me invisible to myself and to everyone I knew.
You took away my peace and joy. You made me hate all the things I loved to do. You made me feel like life was pointless.
You brought me back to old addictions and old attitudes. You made me do things I let go of long ago.
I wanted to give up. I wanted to just end it all; After all, that's what you wanted me to do right? For me to kill myself?
You almost had me, but there was someone you underestimated, someone that you thought would never come.
God came and He comforted me. He gave me peace that passeth all understanding; yes, it took tears, but at least I knew I was okay.
After all you put me through, I have some final words for you: I hate the way you made me feel. I hate that you made me feel isolated and invisible. Worst of all, I hate that I gave into your games.
I have people that care about me and love me, and with all my heart, I hope you leave and never come back into my life.

KHALID WILLIAMS, GRADE 12



Virginia
High School

Reflection

Never in our wildest dreams had we thought the world would look like this. March 13th had promised to be an average day, until the final hours when Governor Ralph Northam decided to close schools and move us all online for the foreseeable future. Students were, at first, elated. Then as the quarantine lingered on, they became tired, socially deprived, and most of all, worried. “What now?” read a student’s email. Those two words seemed to summarize how we all felt moving cautiously through a global pandemic. Stores and restaurants were closed, events were cancelled, family and friends were restricted from seeing one another. It was our moment in the (technological) wilderness.

I must admit, remote learning is not a suitable substitute for in-person learning. However, at a time when we cannot safely meet, it was our only viable option. Looking across the desk at a multitude of faces is a much better experience than looking at several black boxes, all muted and colorless. But here we were in the midst of the most tumultuous years in recent American history, doing our best to reach our kids. We created YouTube accounts, we recorded lectures, we created cherished friendships with our laptop scanners. We weren’t always savvy, but we were always receptive. We found those connections despite the issues, because teaching requires both flexibility and resiliency. And like the heroes they are, my colleagues rose to that challenge with vigor and enthusiasm.

Bristol Virginia Public Schools was one of only eleven districts state-wide that opened its doors on a hybrid plan in August. Courses were developed fully online, while in-person accommodations were made. Desks had to be moved apart and extra furniture stored to allow room for social distancing. Students and faculty wore face masks. Desks were cleaned between each class and assigned to specific students to allow contact tracing if necessary. The school day was now orchestrated with new rituals and procedures.

But we didn’t mind.

Having the hybrid in-person/remote experience was worth the risk. This school year has been the most difficult of my career in many ways, but reciprocally, it has also been the most instructional for me as an educator. It has taught me the power of teacher-student exchange as essential to learning. It has taught me the multi-faceted roles we have as teachers are only enhanced (and even more integral) as circumstances around us grow uncertain. It has taught me how creative we can be in spite of overwhelming obstacles. We are leaders, role models, cheerleaders, and tour guides through the various changes in a student’s life. What a privilege it is to bear witness to the next generation as they grappled with new challenges and created innovative techniques to cope with an ever-altering world. Now more than ever, we are reminded that classrooms are magic, pure and simple. What we do matters even in the direst of circumstances.

CRYSTAL HURD, ED.D., VIRGINIA HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER

CRYSTAL HURD, ENGLISH 12

Path and Door

I find myself at a division of two paths
Two paths with the perception of
Happiness at the end of both.
Causing a break
In my mind
Derives from the decision of which path to take

One, seems brighter
Seems easier
Seems warmer

With an obvious appearance of
Happiness at the end
Makes me think that,
It would indeed be easier.
That if I were to take it
I could take a break
And walk, and take in the air,
And look at the world around me
As it passes by
Almost too fast to comprehend.

The other. . .
Is dark.
It is secluded, lonely
Difficult to say the least
With only just
A possibility of happiness.
This path is rocky, being swept away for
Staying still too long.
Has sharp turns, and forces
Me to run for the fear of

It leads into mountains,
That block any chance of seeing the path beyond.

It has many sharp peaks
And steep cliffs,
Only to fall off, and pick myself back up
Just to continue to the next steep cliff or sharp peak
It has thorn bushes that
Rip at my skin and cause me to bleed.
The path is rough,
Demands strength and to dispel weakness
Yet
The door makes the path worth it

Somewhere, along the path is a door.
I know not where it lies,
How far I will be required to travel to get to it,
How long it will take to see it,
How hard it will be to get there or
Even if I will have help getting there,
But seldom are paths meant to be traveled alone
Are provided with help.

I know not what it looks like,
Why it stands

Nor what it leads to,
For I have a small idea
Of what it opens to
But how that idea will proceed,
I am ignorant of.
The only question that can, and must, be answered
About the door,
Is whether or not it will be open.

If I travel this path,
The pain
The hurt
The tiredness
The blood
The tears
It will all be worth it if the door is open.
I am willing
To endure all of it
If I have the knowledge that
By the time I get to the door
It will be opened to me.
For if it is not opened to me
I will have to make the trek back
I will have to endure all the pain
Again, in reverse
Just to return to the cross roads again.

I find my self at a division of paths
Two paths with the perception of
Happiness at the end of both.
I have been to this division before.
Every time, I have chosen
The harder path.
But each time
Has been without the knowledge of the door open, or closed
I am kept at this crossroads because of this.
The longer I sit here
The more I lose importance
for what is on the other side of the door.
So, I wait
With a patience that is almost broken
For the knowledge

Will the door be open, or will it be closed?
Will you open the door to me?

Bristol is Home Sweet Home To Me

Often when we think about home we think about the structure in which we live. However, when I think of home many other images come to mind: various members of my family, favorite pets, friends, faith, and mountains. Home is my favorite place to be!

Home means family. I love spending time with my parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. We have many family gatherings throughout the year and the memories that we make are priceless. We have large dinners, make crafts with the children, play competitive card games, spend quality time on the lake, and just enjoy each other's company. Family is home.

Pets, for me, are a huge part of my family and my life. I have a cat named Stanley and a dog named Miya. The first thing that I see when I open my eyes in the morning is Miya. She loves to snuggle and give wet kisses when the alarm clock sounds. After a long day it's always great to come home to purrs from Stanley and snuggles from Miya. They are definitely the best stress relievers that I know. Pets are family and family is home.

I can't imagine home without friends. My parents have always welcomed friends into our home for dinners and events. Impromptu visits are encouraged and always welcome in our home. My favorite vacations are when we have lots of friends with us. It isn't unusual to have a party of 25 people for our yearly vacation and that makes any place that we visit feel like home.

Another things that make home so special to me is my church family. Ever since I can remember I have been a part of Woodlawn Baptist Church. I have spent many days there worshipping. Some of my favorite memories include weekend retreats with the youth group. The bonds that are made at events like TCTC, Hearts on Fire, or while ministering at the local food bank can quickly make friends seem like family. Faith is an important part of home.

Finally, the mountains always feel like home to me. I love, love, love to visit the Gulf Coast and spend time with family and friends. However, when we make the trip back and the mountains of North Carolina come into view my heart always skips a beat. The beauty that surrounds my hometown is breathtaking and Bristol will always be my home sweet home no matter where I may reside!

EMMA BRANSON, GRADE 12

Night is What Makes the Sunset Beautiful

The sun fades as i speed along, desperately clamoring towards the end of my journey.

I think I may miss it, but its beauty will not be lost on me.

The sun's golden-orange rays throw themselves against the mountains and clouds,
they cast that same beauty and selflessly give it to all they touch,

But I grow closer, and i know that the beauty of the full spectacle will not fall to blind eyes.
I finally arrive and feel the golden-pink rays fill me with the same comfort and kindness
they always have.

But as it fades i see the truer beauty, the beauty not inherent to the colors themselves,
the beauty beyond that.

The beauty that lies in the brevity of it. The transiency of the colors is essential to the
spectacle.

Beauty lies alone in the impermanence of the sunset, and the punctuality with which it
ends.

The beauty of life is that it will end. Death is what gives the things we do meaning,
Night is what makes the sunset beautiful.

BRYCE CHEERS, ENGLISH 12

I Am From

I am from Southwest Virginia
From early morning cheddar rounds and SOHO
I am from the fastest half mile
small, quiet, easy going
I am from the Blue Ridge Mountains
Rounded and blue
I'm from mid-July FURFs and good cookin'
From mamaw Bailey and granddaddy Jack
I'm from nana's dumplins without chicken and granny's rolls with butter
From don't swallow that seed or a watermelon will grow in you and this too shall pass
I'm from Bristol, Virginia

RYLEE CORVIN, ENGLISH 12

Brown Mountains

Brown Mountains
It is a land of many colors
Green, red, brown, and white
Skies hued like cotton candy
And milky galaxies at night
Black coal used to stain the workers faces
Now their crystal is as white as snow
Winter kills the red and green sea of trees
Now a brown waste of leaves
But silky snow covers the waste
And soon it will be a misty green
Just like a grey dusty Victorian painting
Rotting on the side of a dull brown barn
Isolated in the forgotten brown mountains

KILLIAN DUFFY, ENGLISH 12

I Am From

I am from hard wood floors,
from Tide and Crisco.
I am from the shed in the back yard.
(Brown, wooden, cluttered.)
I am from the dogwood tree,
the holly bushes
whose leaves stick in my feet
when I run across them.
I am from great cooks and brown eyes,
from Momma and Papaw Glenn.
I am from road trips and the know-it-alls,
from "Be still" and "Hold your horses."

I am from a risen savior and Sunday services.
I am from Bristol and three German brothers,
brown beans and cornbread.
From my father's teaching and wise advice,
from my mother's determination.
On the top shelf of my closet is
a shoe box filled with photos,
old faces and memories that
allow me to travel back in time.
I am from these pictures,
worn and fragile,
which live in my heart for remembrance.

MADYSON FLEENER, ENGLISH 12

Softball Haiku

Home away from home
Relief flows through me each time
Play softball all day

HARLEY HOLMES, ENGLISH 12

My Friend Gabby

Making friends was something that never came easy to me until I had hit second grade. That year, the new girl in class, had come into my life and has changed it ever since. A girl was assigned a seat beside me in homeroom and had introduced herself to me. Her name was Gabby. She had shortly become my best friend and the person who I had turned to when I needed someone to be there for me. Throughout the three years of elementary school with her, we had grown inseparable and done everything together from taking dance classes and performing in the talent show together, being each other's dates to the Christmas dances, going to doctor's visits with me, having our own YouTube channel, and basically living at my house where she had her own closet space. She was truly someone who shaped my childhood and was someone who lit up the room every time she had walked into it.

My life was forever changed the morning I was given the news that she was shot and killed in her home. From that moment, I looked at things all in a different way. Visiting her memorial at her current school and attending her funeral and seeing all the people who truly cared for her like I did, was truly heartfelt because I knew she had touched them in a way she did me. Just because she is gone doesn't mean her spirits are. Since her passing, I have had a new outlook on things, and I want to have the characteristics like she was known for because she truly was amazing. Gabby was someone who constantly reminded me of how when times got rough and I just wanted to give up, her and most importantly, god was there to build me back up. God and her friends and family were the things she put over herself and deeply cared about more than anything. She was the least selfish person you would have ever met, and her love and laughter could make you feel soo warm. As I will never get to see her again and hear her laugh, the memories we made together are something that I will cherish for the rest of my life. Without Gabby, my life wouldn't be as whole as it is now and she truly was not something, but someone who created my origin because she was like a sister to me and home is wherever my family is.

KYLIE GARRETT, ENGLISH 12

The Farmhouse

Dr. Seuss once said, “Sometimes you never know the value of a moment until it becomes a memory.” Though this message might come off as cliché, it holds truth. As humans, we sometimes take things for granted. Though it is usually unintentional, we typically find ourselves not realizing how good something was, until it is gone. There is a place I often think about and I yearn to go back and look around one more time. My heart longs to turn back the clock and just relive the memories just once more.

On a quiet gravel road, there lies a small farmhouse surrounded by fields and fields of farmland. Cows once roamed the grounds and tractors were driven out of the barn early in the morning and didn’t return till late in the evening. You could feel the love radiating from the house as soon as you opened the metal gate, and once you walked in the house, you were family. This place I recall is my great grandparent’s farmhouse.

The house started as a two-room farmhouse and was built onto as the years passed. The house raised many generations of my family, all the way from my great, great grandfather to my grandmother. My grandmother was raised there with her twin sister and three brothers and as our family got larger, the house was certainly not forgotten. It housed Sunday lunch after church, holiday gatherings, quilt making parties, and many more events. The farmhouse was the heart of our family and we cherished it.

I was just a child when the farmhouse was up and running and my memories at of it are slim, but the ones I do have, I adore. I remember eating with my family, playing with blocks, exploring the rooms with my grandmother, eating black raspberry ice cream with my great-uncle, and going to watch the cows be fed all bundled up in my winter coat. I wasn’t old enough to understand how precious these moments were, but now I realize the value of those wonderful memories.

Since those wonderful days, my great grandparents have passed away. The house saw good days and it also saw its handful of bad days too. Now the farmhouse sits empty. The land surrounding it is quiet and although there is no life or laughter there anymore, the remnants of all the memories still remain buried deep within the walls.

We never know a value of a moment until it becomes a memory. For my family, all we have left of the farmhouse and the people that once made it feel like home are memories. As long as we hold the memories close, they will never be far from our minds or our hearts.

This is me and my great grandmother Francis and great grandfather Cecil at their farmhouse on Easter one year. I am not 100% sure on the year this picture was taken but if I had to guess it is either 2005 or 2006.

EMILY HUFFMAN, ENGLISH 12

I Am From

I am from sweet tea.
From spoons and ice cream.
I am from the mud that gets tracked in homes from dirty boots.
(messy, brown, the mops cannot even clean it up)
I am from Dogwoods,
the Virginia state flower,
whose colorful pigments brighten up the land.
I’m from games of Rook and smart-elics.
From Margaret Grace and Buffie Marie.
I’m from the Friday night lights and beach trips.
From “Rise and Shine” and “Stop hitting your sister”.
I’m from church on Easter, with the entire family.

I'm from Bristol and the Jones'
Big nostalgic pots of chili and baked potatoes.
From my Mom getting lost on every road trip to volleyball games.
The stories of all my Grandpas careers after the war.
On my parents' bed side sitting is memories of all three children,
that way they can see them morning and night
I am from my loving parents,
the glue in my messy life,
holding me together each day I age.

CAMDEN JONES, ENGLISH 12

Bristol: A Good Place to Live

From the Blue Ridge Mountains
To the Burger Bar,
Here in Bristol, you will go far
Bella's, Blue Circle, Bass Pro
Where else will we go?
Bloom, Blackbird, Bill Gatton
In Bristol something is always happenin'
From our sign to the world's fastest half mile
You'll find Shamus with a smile
Bristol is a good place to live, you should stay awhile
From Belmont Lanes to Borderline Billiards
Here you always see someone familiar
Bearcats, BVPS, and more
Bristol is the perfect hometown for sure

ABIGAIL LEONARD, ENGLISH 12

Home Haiku

A place I call Home
safe, yet too familiar
guarded, yet too lone

RIDLEY LITTLE, ENGLISH 12

Becoming

Growing up as the youngest in the family has had its perks, but it also has hindered me in ways that I didn't realize until I grew up. I come from a family of actors, which created my bold, outspoken, older sister from the first time she set foot on a stage. For as long as I can remember, she used that courage to advocate for me and act as a liaison between me and other adults. She was always the daughter who people spoke to when coming up to see us at church, praised for being so talented, and wanted to learn more about. I never minded when I was younger, but as time went on, I grew frustrated with constantly being interrupted and overlooked by the older people in my life.

I slowly realized that the shyness my sister had built into me was holding me back in the world and I began to feel like a product of her personality. I had still always looked up to her, so I took part in the same

activities she did. I took ballet when she did, I did community plays with her, and I ended up taking choir in middle school to follow in her footsteps. As I continuously copied her endeavors, I started to notice that no one was as impressed with me as they were with my sister. In all my activities, I felt like I was constantly being compared to the great talent of Rachel Locke. After school plays, I was told how amazing my sister was in the same play a few years prior. In choir class, I was pushed to audition for solos that I wasn't comfortable with because my sister never got intimidated by tasks like that.

It wasn't until my eighth-grade year that I realized I just wasn't cut out for the performer lifestyle that I was born into. I admitted to myself that I was focusing on pursuits that were not my forte, and most importantly, I had no passion about. Therefore, I had to start out on a path of my own. I grew sick of conforming to my family's tendencies, so I chose to focus on activities that could help me make a name for myself. I started with volleyball my freshman year of high school. While I had played the sport in the past, I had never really seen myself as an athlete, so I chose this to help me define my character a little bit more. I started taking art class at school and ditched the choir courses because they never brought me joy. Once I started painting and drawing, though, I felt like I had found a passion. In the second semester of my freshman year, I did something I never imagined I would do and completely ventured out of my comfort zone. I tried out for the varsity soccer team with no experience and no idea what to expect. Despite that lack of skill, I made the team and ended up earning a spot on an all-district team that same year. I started winning awards for art just like my sister always did for singing and acting. I even began to get noticed at school and in the newspapers for my athletic ability, which is something I never expected to achieve having been a reserved child my whole life. This new sense of identity that I had given myself helped me to break out of my shell and feel like I could make a lasting impression on the world.

I'm not entirely angry with my sister for overshadowing me for so long. That struggle pushed me further and made me work harder to stand out from the crowd, so I partially credit her with inspiring me to attain greatness. I wanted to be as successful as her, but in a different way, so I pushed myself to try new things and get rid of my introverted personality. To this day, I have kept up that newfound, creative, adventurous attitude and because of that, I'm now a bolder person with enthusiasm for the unexplored.

KELLY LOCKE, ENGLISH 12

Rick Love Venison Jerky

Ingredients:

- 3 oz Soy Sauce
- 3 oz Worcestershire Sauce
- 1 ½ tsp. Liquid Smoke
- 3 tsp. Garlic Powder
- 3 tsp. Lemon Pepper
- 2 tsp. Black Pepper (coarse)
- 1–1 ½ tsp. Cayenne Pepper
- 2 oz Lemon Juice

Directions:

- Chill Venison overnight (easier to cut)
- Mix all seasonings in a separate bowl (This will stain plastic bowls)
- Cut Venison against grain in 3/16 to ¼ in thick pieces.
- Put cut Venison in sealable bowl with seasoning mixture and mix until thoroughly distributed.
- Refrigerate mixture for 24 hours, mixing once every 8 hours

Place meat on dehydrator. (Make sure to leave space around pieces and lay for air circulation)
Rotate dehydrator racks every 4 hours and check pieces until dry. (Remove pieces as they dry)
To keep fresh, freeze or vacuum pack

This recipe was passed down from my father's uncle, Rick Love, and has been used ever since. I spent lots of time preparing this recipe with my father after we cleaned our deer, so I believe that this meal represents the bonds and memories that were created with my family. Some of my favorite experiences were formed during making this recipe, and I hope that others can make their own with these directions.

ERIC MCCrackEN, ENGLISH 12

I Am From

I am from candles
From succulents and curtains
I am from the stone porch
Weathered yet polished
I am from the dogwood tree
The sycamore
Whose long-gone limbs I remember
As if they were my own

I'm from family reunions and Easter egg hunts
From Jean and Nancy
I'm from taking our shoes off at the door and swinging on the deck
And from exploring the mountains and searching for coal mines around my
grandmother's house

I'm from don't talk to strangers and get your hair out of your face
And Trouble by Taylor Swift
I'm from having Christmas on Christmas Eve
I'm from Bristol and I'm from the Cherokees
From the time my uncle bit a dog back
And got a mouth full of hair, but won the fight
The crystal seahorse my grandma bought me the first time I saw the ocean
In my box of memories in my dresser.

SAVANNAH MILLER, ENGLISH 12

Senior Year

This year has definitely been quite difficult to say the least. I have lost so much this year, and it's been an eye opener for everything that I've taken for granted. I have lost a lot of senior year traditions due to COVID. I haven't played my senior year of volleyball yet, which I was really looking forward to this season. This was our year to possibly make it to state, and we haven't been giving that opportunity yet. I've lost my job due to not enough business coming through, also due to COVID. This year has been really tough, but I still have my hopes that once the vaccine is released, things may get better. Hopefully next semester will be a little bit more enjoyable. It's

crazy the times that we are living in. I would've never thought that this is how I would be spending my senior year, and it's so sad. I hope that my first year of college won't be as affected as my senior year has been. I lost half of my junior year, half of my senior year, and I don't want to lose anymore. I hope that the classes below me will realize not to take anything for granted. I know how dreadful school can be, and how silly and stupid things might sound in school, but I hope they don't take the silly pep rallies for granted. I hope the future student sections will be so full that no one can hardly move. I'm ready for this world to start to become normal again. I'm ready to get back out, go to football games, and have gatherings with my friends and family. I hope and pray that my class can at least have a normal graduation and prom this year. We deserve every bit of it; my class is one of the most hardworking classes to ever come through Virginia High, and I hope we get to enjoy the last bit of it.

MADDY MOORE, ENGLISH 12

Where I Grew Up

I grew up with the grass in between my toes
Mountains surrounding me
Beautiful hikes leading to gorgeous views
places that no one really knows
Random drives at 2 am
Listening to whatever plays
I grew up in a place with not much to do
But many things to keep me occupied
Bristol is a somewhat dull place
But a place built on all my memories
With the ones I love
And the ones I lost

SHI-ANN SHAW, ENGLISH 12

I Am From

I am from floral window drapes
From cable television and a Bible on the table
I am from the cream-colored walls
The light pouring through the windowsill
The big maple tree atop the hill
Whose limbs I see
As if they were my own.

I'm from Christmas dinners and outside barbeques
From Mamaw and Papaw
I'm from cigarette smoking and porch chats
And watching rainstorms from the window.
I'm from I love you and see y'all later
And goodnight, sleep tight, don't let the bed bugs bite.
I'm from hand-me-downs and muddy shoes
I'm from Bristol and a long line of coal miners

Chicken casserole and homemade dinner rolls

Mamaw's heavy country accent
Her different pronunciation of words
The printed pictures from Walgreens
In photo albums and all over the wall.

SARAH STACY, ENGLISH 12

I Am From

I am from the bed
From blankets and pillows
I am from the warmth
Comforting and cozy
I am from the dirt
The grass
Whose long gone limbs I remember
As if they were my own

I'm from cooking and loud
From brother and sister
I'm from shouting and cheering
And from loving

I'm from quiet and mean
And why
I'm from cleaning
I'm from Tennessee and America
Pancake and Bacon

JENISE STUART, ENGLISH 12

Basketball

From when I was 5, to now
It has always given me a wow
It has been my escape
It has been just like tape
It has held me together
Even during the cold weather
It has been the one thing that has never left me
At some points being the only thing that gave me glee
And even though it is coming to an end
Basketball will always be my friend

DALTON TAYLOR, ENGLISH 12

COVID Reflections

COVID has been rough time for everyone in some form, especially because it is a major disruption of lifestyle. However, it has brought lots of free time for some to lead to unique occurrences to pass the time. One of these for

me was developing a small business. It simply started as a hobby, and still is, but recently has developed and turned into a decent income source for me. This is great because I love making the jewelry and rings regardless. On top of this, the business is only scratching the surface of what I play to make and offer in the future. There are hundreds more designs and ideas I have, I just haven't been able to execute them all yet. At the same time, I am also investing in more unique and complex tooling, which would be me to unlimited possibilities and opens the door for so many things I wanted to try. This just shows not everything has to be bad during these past few months.

COLIN THIERS, ENGLISH 12

Reflections

I'm not sure where I've been looking
But I have been searching
To find something that's loving
I've seemed to search far and wide
But never thought to put others aside
I've tried to modify
And tried to ride others high tides
I put my own self-love aside
And focused on the outside
I've committed my very own suicide
Hated myself on this very ride
And failed to see the sunshine on the other side
To look in my reflection
And find my own self respect
To look in the mirror
And find the love that I have searched for
Staring right back at me

MADISON WORLEY, ENGLISH 12

BRAD HUTCHINSON, ENGLISH 12

Soap and Sally: My Family's Monster

The night is cold, the wind feels crisp
I feel the dry skin crack on my lips
I haven't showered today
Now this evil monster has a purpose
I didn't eat my salad today
I know she will come
I am scared
Feeling numb

I now don't know what to do
I feel too scared to even move
I feel her coming very soon
I feel stiff like a stick
I am so scared I feel sick

Lying in bed, hoping this will be over
I know she is coming; I am too scared to roll over.

I jump out of bed to get this feeling out of my head
I must hurry up and shower before I become dead
I run as fast as I can
I hope to change her mind
So that she won't come
Maybe it's too late, and I'm doing this for nothing
I turn the water on and go to eat a salad
We're out of lettuce
I panic

Maybe she will forget to come
I hear the water in my shower turning off
I didn't do that, should I run?
I jump in my bed, go under the covers
I felt a pull of my feet and I started to go under
I see her, she is real
She has hands, cold like steel
She is green, so ugly.
Has trees as hands
She starts to snug me.
I can't breathe
I can't see
I think
I'm inside her
I can see others
Do they see me?

Water pours on my head
I start to drown
I feel the burning going through in my mouth
Her insides made of salad
And pipes of water spraying
It smells like rotten food in her
I know my dad is right, I just want my mommy
Her organs ooze ranch
That goes into my mouth and nose.

I promise to eat salads!
Please let me go!
I scream from inside her
My voice echoes in her soul.
Why does not showering and not eating salads
Make her so cold?
Her stomach fills with greens

I scream so hard, so loud
Until I faint
I wake up in my head
All I hear is my thinking.
I feel a shake and hear a voice, "Wake up."
My mother, but I can't get up
I am cement, my legs are stuck
I open my eyes, I see my mom.

How did I get out of that twisted women's stomach?

My dad was right all along
So heed me when I say
If you don't shower
Soap and Sally with come.
Eat your salads
So, you won't die.
She will know if you didn't because
You are in her eyes.

STELLA BYRD, GRADE 12

Snowstorm

The quiet night echoes a howl
Bouncing off trees and buildings
Snow billows onto the streets
From snowbound angels above
The clouds weep frozen tears
They drift to the earth
To be greeted by happiness
And cold bones
A layer of alabaster lay atop the world
Purity given from the weeping clouds
I hope they weep for beauty
And not sorrow

NICHOLAS DUFF, GRADE 12

Cold Snow

The skeleton—
Small layer of frost on the surface
Of bones so brittle and cold
The skeleton—
Laid in place so still for days

Sparkling white snow so sad
In comparison

Woman stares
At the skeleton
Not yet buried.

She foretold this.
He did not listen.
That nameless skeleton
In the cold snow.

CHARLEY MCKEMY, GRADE 12

Change

Robin Sharma once stated, “Change is hardest in the beginning, messiest in the middle and best at the end.” I faced the biggest change of my life at the start of eighth grade. My dad’s job moved him here, to Bristol, and our family moved along with him. I was leaving everything that I had ever known behind. My friends, my grandparents, my school, and the house that I grew up in were being left behind while I stepped into a new chapter of my life. While this chapter started off with tears, fear, and doubt, it turned out to be one of the best decisions I’ve made in my life so far.

The discussion and decision that changed my life was made around the kitchen table. The word “move” immediately brought tears to my eyes. I refused to leave all of the familiarities in my life and step towards the unknown. I could have moved to Virginia Middle School a year prior, but I didn’t, and my parents didn’t force me. They wanted me to make the decision on my own.

I grew up in a small country town called Saltville. Our school was the same, small and country. My dad and his other five siblings, along with my sister, had been through the school system so I was generationally connected to the community and school. The thought of moving to Virginia Middle School immediately struck fear in me. Virginia Middle School is triple the size of my old school, Northwood. The thoughts that ran through my mind were, “I won’t fit in,” “It is so much bigger than my old school,” “What if nobody likes me?,” “How am I going to make friends?,” and “I can’t do it.” Even with all the doubt and fear I was feeling, I decided to give Virginia Middle School a chance.

It was the first day of school of my eight-grade year. I looked in the mirror and saw a scared, nervous, and anxious girl. I was a year ahead in math because my old school’s criteria was different, so I went to the high school for first period for my math class, then got on a bus that would take me back to the middle school for the rest of my classes. It seemed as if I were tackling two new schools at once instead of just one. My dad drove me to school and the butterflies in my stomach were getting stronger the closer that we got to the school. We arrived at the bus circle and I glanced out my window at the large gathering of students that were waiting to enter the building. I immediately turned to my dad and said, “I can’t do it, I’m not going inside.”

He then turned to me and said, “Dianna, yes you can. Just try it out for today and if you absolutely hate it and are miserable then I will move you back to Northwood.”

I nodded my head, kissed him on the cheek and got out of the car.

My heart was racing a million miles per hour, and my hands were shaky and clammy. The halls were crammed with students, and I kept my head down and made a beeline to my classroom. I got in my classroom and found a seat as quickly as I could and dodged as much eye contact as possible.

When I sat down and gathered my wits, I looked around the class and saw some familiar faces. There were three girls from the volleyball team that I had met the day prior at an open gym, and another girl that went to my church.

After class, I got on the bus and it took me to the middle school. All three of my middle school classes got easier and easier that day. The tension in my gut released little by little, and the fear was beginning to cease.

The welcoming teachers and the friendly students that I met that day gave me the reassurance I needed for myself to know that I made the right decision.

I got in the car after school with my dad, and I told him all about my day. I told him how I know four girls in my math class from the volleyball team, how my science teacher was nice and welcoming, how I loved my history class, and how in art I met three other girls who play basketball. All the nervousness, fear, and anxious had melted away and had transpired into joy and happiness.

The next day, I woke up with a smile on my face and looked in the mirror and saw a confident girl staring back at me. The following weeks and years leading up to today have been nothing but pure happiness. I found my spot, I fit in, and I made friends. I haven't looked back since.

Virginia Middle School and Virginia High School have had the biggest impact on my life and in the most positive way. The change in schools have molded me into the person who I am today. If I could go back, I would tell my timid, seventh- grade self to go for it without hesitation. Back then, change struck fear in me, and I refused to accept it. Now, I have learned that change isn't always negative, even though it still might be scary at times. Without change, I wouldn't have had the opportunities, friendships, and memories that I cherish today.

DIANNA SPENCE, GRADE 12



Woodbridge
Senior
High School

A Year of Reflection and Revelations

This year has been a year unlike any other, and it began, not in August or September, but in March of 2020. When we left school on Friday the 13th, I could not imagine what the end of the year would be like for my 2020 seniors, or how next year's seniors would begin in the fall. Woodbridge High School distributed laptops to all the students who needed them. We adapted our syllabi, our submission guidelines, as the class of 2020 struggled through, and eventually all of my students graduated, but without a formal ceremony after twelve years of study. There were three informal ceremonies; I attended them all. Mrs. Abney, the administrative team, the support staff, and the faculty made each event as personal and celebratory as we could with love, applause, and cowbells when appropriate. Our students deserved more. We vowed to make 2021 better.

We are the Viking family; we work together, and we support each other and our students. As a faculty, in our departments, and teaching teams, we worked to identify the strategies that helped our students become better readers, writers, and thinkers. We knew we had to be ready for online learning and Zoom classrooms. By attending Camp Canvas Live, led by our own Katie Fielding, Instructional Technology Coach, and a NVCC's graduate level Hybrid Certification Course for Dual Enrollment teachers, I discovered that virtual learning required different strategies to create safe places to learn, write, and share our ideas. Once the year began, it became evident that these strategies could not resolve all the challenges.

My classrooms became five gallery views of twenty-eight to thirty-one black rectangles printed with names in a clean white font. Students were hesitant to turn on their cameras, to speak in class, and to write online. Individual breakout rooms became the best way to talk to students one-on-one and to encourage interaction in pairs or small groups. This year, *The Origin Project* helped me connect with my students in a new way. In the beginning of the year, I took my students on a tour of *The Origin Project* website, looked at Book Six and opened the EBooks. I created announcements, opened a Canvas *TOP* page, and added *TOP* assignments to both of my grade books. When we opened the EBooks, we admired the variety of the student submissions, and the beauty of the artwork: drawings, photographs, collages, and multi-media pieces. Finally, I read my reflection from Book Six to each of my classes. Reading "Home for the Holidays" aloud showed my students that I write, and that I trust them. Their responses were colorful emojis and short responses in chat; it was a turning point.

For the last four years, the first assigned essay in my DE English 111 and my four English 12 classes offered my students several writing prompts, including a prompt to tell the stories of their families, their lives, and their identities. The essays are often honest and brave, and they allow me to get to know my students. As I evaluate them, I respond to their stories. I encourage them. I tell them what works. My comments are honest and earned. Slowly, honesty, enthusiasm, and humor began to work. I am interested in my students. I want to know what they think and why they think it. If you are sincere, if you listen, and if you respect what they say, they will begin to believe you. These options have been essay choices for years, but this year the essay options resonated a little more. And they remember that I shared my work with them.

I have shared my writing with students before, mostly poems. Why is this year so different? Is it because the students are isolated, without the structure of their days, without their friends? Is it because they are stressed and working in or out of their homes to help their families? Is it because they are worried about COVID? My comments, verbal and written, convey the power of their ideas. Their stories are validated. They begin to trust, and they begin to believe their voices and their stories matter. This is the silver lining; this is the gift the pandemic gives us. Our time is so fraught with worry, stress, and uncertainty. This gift will grow from this small beginning and continue to grow when they receive their copies of *The Origin Project Book Seven*.

ROXANNE FRENCH, ENGLISH TEACHER

The Big, Bad, Horrible News

It was a normal day like any other, but then my friend Lucas told me the BIG, BAD, HORRIBLE news. Then, that perfect day like any other changed my life forever.

I was getting a snack out of my tall, brown cupboard when Lucas announced that Adam was going to move. I wasn't surprised because he moved all the time, but no; this time, he was going to move to—"New York!"

I was terrified. I couldn't believe the news. I was heartbroken. I was, well, inconsolable that my best friend was moving all the way across the country. I felt like a chocolate chip cookie being crumbled into little pieces. Pretty soon Lucas left my house after delivering this news, and as soon as that white front door closed, I burst into tears; it seemed like I was never going to stop crying. Then I sat down on my comfy sofa and continued crying hysterically until I got a headache and the pain forced me to stop crying. Plus, I hate being sad.

I didn't see Adam until our sleepover that weekend. My mom pulled up to Adam's driveway. Adam was leaning against a pole and had a, "I have something to tell you," face on. I asked him if the BIG, BAD, HORRIBLE news was true, and he said it was. We were both overwhelmingly sad, but we decided to have as much fun as we could before he moved and as much fun as we could at our sleepover.

At the sleepover, after we played kick the can, had fun with hide and seek, and rode scooters, we went inside to



Samuel Agyapong, Grade 12

have a snack. The crunch of the watermelon was so refreshing because it was hot outside. Before we knew it, it was time to settle down and go to bed, but we didn't do a good job in that department because we stayed up late playing video games, goofing around, and giggling until Adam's mom had to come in and demand, "GO TO BED!"

We awoke to the smell of eggs, sausage, muffins of all kinds, and pancakes. We rushed downstairs and found heaven of our favorite foods awaiting us. We sat down in awe of how much food was in front of us. None of us knew where to start, but finally, we just started stuffing food in our mouths.

After we stuffed our stomachs with food until we had stomach aches, we dragged ourselves upstairs to prepare for the long, hot day ahead of us. Since it was so incredibly hot outside, we decided to stay inside and play video games all day. Pretty soon it grew hotter inside than outside, so we went outside. Because it was so hot that we couldn't do anything fun, we decided to mess up the tree decoration's face.

Apparently, Ophie, Adam's mom, found this funny the first couple of times, but not so much the rest. We started by just making it misplaced completely. We called ourselves the "Every day's April Fool's Day!" people. Ophie walked out to get the mail and had a strange feeling that something was wrong, and she was right because she burst out laughing when she saw the frenzied tree face. Trust me, it looked way funnier than it sounds. The second time around, she went to tell Adam's brother, Joshua, to stop hanging on the basketball



Greenery, Cali Aragon, Grade 12

hoop and noticed our giggly faces. She went over to the tree and shook her head, placing the face back as it was supposed to be. The next time it didn't go so well because Ophie came over to us and sternly let us know to stop, in a way that made it clear that the behavior was funny the first two times but was no longer so. "Okay?" she asked. We nodded agreement.

Pretty soon, my mom came, and I went to retrieve my stuff from upstairs. I hugged Adam as hard as I could until he couldn't breathe, and then I left. I tried to think of tongue twisters to cheer me up, but it didn't help at all. The tongue twisters were things like this: pillows pin pipes, pickles, and pans and chairs chomp chimes, charcoal, and chipmunks. I am surmising you know why these didn't cheer me. When I had said good-bye to Adam at our sleepover, it was like saying good-bye forever. Well, it's always like that after a sleepover, but this was big. This might have been our last sleepover ever.

Days and days went by until October came, and it was the day of departure. I had just finished a soccer game and a few days before I had put together a care package full

of junk food. I walked up to Adam, smelling like sweat. I handed Adam the exploding bag of junk food and gave him the tightest hug in the world and said our last good-byes forever. My eyes danced across everything on the way home because I was so nervous. I was thinking to myself that saying our last good-byes was like Adam dying. I pulled up to my house, ran as fast as the wind to my comfy couch, and cried until there was no water left to cry.

I learned that it can be hard to have your best friend move away, but you can get over it after a while. In this case, I'm sure that I am totally recovered because Adam was my best friend. During this time, I learned a life lesson that you shouldn't try to make a big deal out of things like this because it will take you longer to get over it. Although I can still see Adam on my computer and phone, and, I can still talk to him, it is still sad to think that my best friend moved so far away.

MOHDMUDASER AIAZI, GRADE 12

Japan

Despite the fact that both my parents were in the Navy, we did not move around much for the first decade of my life. Although occasionally my dad would go on leave for a couple months, we stayed in the same state, city, street, and neighborhood for ten years. Norfolk, Virginia, isn't as lively as Woodbridge by a long shot, and definitely not as safe by most standards, but my childhood was still full of memorable sleepovers, Easter egg hunts, lemonade stands, neighborhood soccer games that lasted way too long, birthday parties, broken limbs, unfinished homework, crying children, and so much more that is forever a part of who I grew up to be that I will never forget. I was ten years old when my parents dropped a bomb out of nowhere on my brothers and me and all of this was stripped away from me forever.

It was three weeks before the last day of fourth grade, and my family and I were all sitting at Olive Garden together enjoying our food. My family was not perfect. Far from it, but when it was time for dinner, we could all sit down, shut up, get along, and do something we all loved to do: eat. We never ate out unless there was good news, a promotion, or bad news, my dad going on deployment; so, when we went out to eat

at Olive Garden that night, I knew there was going to be some type of news, good or bad. I was taking a bite of my alfredo pasta when my parents dropped the bomb on us. “We’re all moving to Japan for three years!” I just about choked. While my brothers and I were expecting news, we were not expecting this.

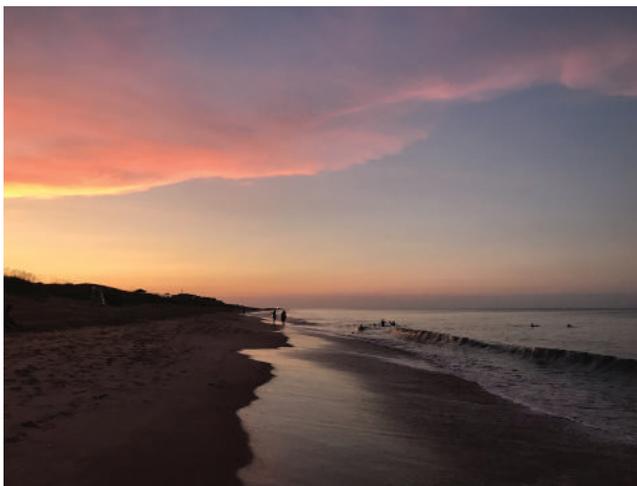
Usually when I read stories about kids moving from a place where they grew up with all their friends and great memories, they were sad to go. This was the complete opposite for me, I was ecstatic to go to Japan. The way I saw it, a lot of people are born and die in the same place, and I did not want to be one of those people. I was excited about everything. The plane,

the food, the language, the people, just everything. When I think back on it, I did not have one ounce of sadness for leaving all my friends and family in Virginia. If anything, I was happy to leave them all behind. Not because I hated my friends and family or anything but because I felt like I could be a whole new person and I loved the idea of that. The same could not be said for my little brothers who were crying as soon as my parents spilled the beans. My older brother didn’t seem to care much about the news; he was going through that “teenage phase.”

When I imagined Japan as a child, I thought of it as a small town with few people, beat down small stores, and broken, empty roads (I guess I didn’t quite understand the concept of a country yet). When I took my first step on Japanese ground, to say I was surprised was an understatement. Japan was different than my ten-year-old mind could have ever imagined. The buildings were tall, skinny, and bright. Everywhere I turned there was a building; it felt as if there was an infinite number of buildings. I felt tiny. There were so many cars on the road it seemed like the cars were just in place, never moving. It was as if there was not enough space on the roads for all the cars. As many buildings and cars as there were, there were even more people. Although Japan wasn’t a very diverse race, there were all types of people: young people, old people, moms, dads, bike riders, glam girls. Any type of person you can think of, they were there. It was the most spectacular image I still to this day have ever seen.

When the initial surprise of the first ten minutes of Japan was over, after a couple months my family and I settled into our own townhouse in Ikego, Japan. It was like any town house, nothing special. There was a playground right next to our house and an even bigger playground up the street that all the kids in the neighborhood would go to. School was fun for me; I was in the fifth grade and had class with kids of military family just like me. There were lots of fun and interesting places to go in Japan: Karaoke, Disneyland, cool restaurants, Legoland, even a place in Tokyo where you could learn to make ramen noodles step by step. Japan may not have always been pleasant, but there was definitely always something to do.

Being American, especially African American, in Japan was an experience in itself, and sometimes not a pleasant one. Don’t get me wrong, Japanese people are probably the politest people you could ever meet. Being courteous is just a part of their culture. So why would being a minority be an unpleasant experience you may ask? Being different anywhere, especially for a young child, is never easy. When you’re a kid all you want to do is fit in and it’s kind of hard to do that when you’re different from ninety percent of the people around you. Also, a lot of the unpleasantness came from my own mind. I’ve always been an over-thinker, and I couldn’t help but feel they were all judging me because I’m different than them when in reality they were probably



Pink Sands, Caroline Sanders, Grade 12

barely paying me any mind. It got to a point where I was too nervous to look people in the eye because I was so scared of the scrutiny I might or might not face.

My mother always told me to never care or listen to what people say. Everyone knows that this is easier said than done, but living in Japan taught me to get past my own mind. Living in Japan taught me many lessons: things aren't always what you expect them to be, different people can be similar in more ways than you might think, make the most of the moments you have before they pass you, and most importantly, do not let your mind get the better of you. I'm so grateful I got the chance to live in Japan; it is an experience that I will never forget.

NAOMI ALIU, GRADE 12

In Search of Something Better

Life can be complicated and overwhelming at times and can feel like a never-ending roller coaster. As a teenager in high school, it's not easy and almost every teenager can agree. For this reason, I tend to look up to my mom because she has gone through a lot but never gave up so that my siblings and I could have the opportunities we have now. Without a doubt in my mind, my mom is one of the strongest people I know and admire. My mom was born in Honduras but after a few years, her mom left her and her brother with their grandmother because she felt as if she couldn't take care of them. Growing up without your parents I imagine is difficult because you can't communicate or share those special moments with your parents the way you'd like to. My mom had to get married at a young age (16) because her grandmother was elderly and didn't want her to be left alone with no one to care for her. Although it may have seemed like the best idea at the time, that wasn't the case because she was in an abusive marriage. Being in an abusive marriage can drain you physically and mentally, especially if you were in that marriage for years. However, that didn't stop her from going away from all that and deciding to give her children a better life than the one she had. She had to make a heartbreaking decision—leaving her children behind so that she could come to the United States. Could you imagine leaving the people you love most without certainty that you will find their well being and yours?

Once she made the decision of leaving her children behind and coming to the United States, she had to face all the struggles that many illegal immigrants face daily on their journey in search of a better life and opportunities. Thankfully, she arrived safely in the United States, and once she arrived, she looked for a job so she could save up and send for my siblings who lived in Honduras. Working three jobs every day is definitely draining, but she did it because she wanted to send for her children as soon as she could. During one of the bus rides to her job, she met a friend who then introduced her to the person who is now my dad. After only knowing her for a few months, he decided to help her bring her children here and give them papers. In a few months, she was able to first bring my two oldest brothers and then my younger brother and my sister. At last, our family was complete. Then later, she had me. Thanks to her determination and courage, all my siblings have good jobs and families of their own in a country where people can dream big and be what and who they want to be. Being an immigrant is hard, but it's not impossible to overcome the hardships. We see this in my mom and in so many other illegal immigrants who have come here in search of something better. I'm thankful that because of her I'm able to get a good education and to have a life filled with unlimited opportunities. Here's a special thank you and I love you to my wonderful mom of five!

JENNIFER AMAYA, GRADE 12

Biryani and Burgers

I was the kid at our rambunctious Asian family gatherings that always sat in the corner with my mother and minded my business. I watched my cousins take part in all the traditional Pakistani customs, chatter away with each other in fluent Urdu, and go full out in terms of letting our heritage take reign unreproached, but I al-

ways excused myself when I was invited to participate. "Maybe next time," I said to them while I thought to myself, "Nobody else at school shows up with orange henna all over their hands and nails," or something similarly critical of whatever I was invited to join in. Much to my parents' mute sadness, I had almost completely forgotten how to speak my mother tongue by the time I was in third grade after years of refusing to speak it at home with my family. Whenever I had my mother's homemade Pakistani food for dinner, I would take extra care in brushing my teeth for twice as long in fear of smelling like a spice cabinet the next day at school.

As for the other aspect of my identity as a Muslim, I would join my family whenever we prayed together and I fasted during the holy month, but that was all I knew about the religion of my parents and those that came before them.

"Why don't you put more effort into Sunday School? You'll see it's not so bad once you try," were my family's words that often bounced off me. Words unable to make

a dent in the way I acted every Sunday morning to get out of going to school and being lectured on topics I had no interest in whatsoever.

My family, including my four siblings and grandparents who lived with us, were all immigrants who were immensely proud of their culture and religion. We had an entire bookcase dedicated to prayer mats, prayer beads, copies of the *Qur'an*, and religious books which were used daily. As soon as you walked into the doorway, the smell of spiced chai, the jingling laughter of anyone at any point in time, the sight of Arabic calligraphy paintings on the walls, and occasionally even heated debates on Pakistani politics greeted you with great vigor. This was what I had grown up around and strangely what I had come to separate myself from the older I got. For my family, this culture was a substantial part of who they were; this culture gave them the feeling of belonging.

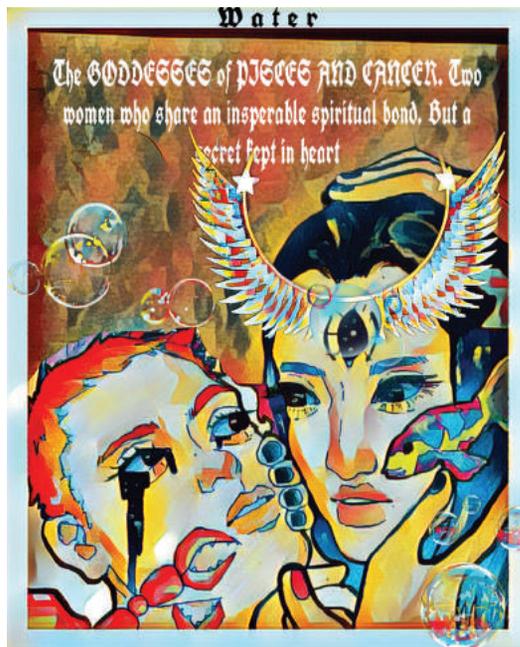
By the time I was in high school, I had tried to find my rhythm within the culture of any community I could find besides my own; I tried four different sports, cooking clubs, tech clubs, academic teams, and student government, but I only wound up with a slew of failures that stemmed from my dissatisfaction with everything I tried.

Despite practically renouncing my culture and heritage to the world outside my family, there was a persistent whisper of guilt in me for being incapable of the pride in my culture that my family showed, which built on to my pent-up frustration as a mere thirteen year-old. I thought it was lame, odd, and at times backwards, but a voice in me still made me long for the sense of community that our culture created.

Nevertheless, I stayed away from that other world. The pre-teen angst in me also kept growing after being watered by the solitude of not having a community or culture to be a part of.

Little did I know, come junior year of high school I would have a lot more time isolated from everything I knew, making me turn to the only source of stability and support I had at my disposal . . . the culture explosion that was my family.

Some might see the great global pandemic of 2020 as an epic and miserable series of disaster after disaster with no light at the end of the tunnel, which rings with some truth, but to me, an excuse to stay home for



Water, Emmanuella Igboanuzue, Grade 12

months was the catalyst for my journey towards accepting my heritage and finding the community I had longed for. With time away from school and the craziness of a busy social schedule, I realized the valuable opportunity I had to reflect and build myself up internally with freedom from the stigmas and influences of the outside world.

After the initial shock and turbulent adjustment to staying at home 24/7 only surrounded by and having to interact with my pureblood desi family, I came to the rational choice of taking everything in stride rather than fighting it. After all, who was I to suppress my roots now that I would be at home all the time?

As I reacquainted myself and became more comfortable with embracing my heritage, the choruses of “Maybe later” and “I don’t feel like it” steadily transitioned into hopeful tunes of “I’ll give it a try” and “That could be fun” whenever I was asked to join in a classic family game of ludo, to learn to cook traditional food, to speak to relatives back home, to listen to virtual religious sermons, and even to try to write in Urdu.

With a growing appreciation and acceptance of my Pakistani and Islamic background, I started to question how I had previously been able to consider myself a student and admirer of different world cultures when I had failed to see the beauty in my own. My new experiences with culture gave me intimate insight and a consciousness of the foreign culture suppression that was happening around me as well.

I realized that I wasn’t the only American-born desi teen who had toned down the ethnic aspects of their life in order to fit in, thus creating a larger disconnection between them and any community they may find. I wasn’t the only one who had shunned all the traditions and even tried to hide the ethnic aspects of my physical appearance and speech in dread of being associated with the term, “fob”, and I definitely wasn’t the only one who felt a lack of community the more I strangled my cultural roots.

Instead of sitting on this realization, my newfound cultural pride led me to reach out to and interact with more people in my previous situation: culturally insecure and longing for a sense of true community, acceptance, and understanding. Taking advantage of modern technology, I took to social media and started boosting up people who spoke out about their culture regardless whether it was the same as mine or not, hoping I could show that it wasn’t a crime to accept the non-romanticized or “unaesthetic” parts of diverse world cultures. I also started to outwardly show my own roots by talking about that part of my identity more and physically embodying what it meant to me to be Pakistani-American and Muslim.

In coming to terms with how I had been suppressing my cultural and religious roots, I had found a social circle (or a few) at last; I finally felt unadulteratedly like myself with my full out Pakistani Muslim family, with other American-born desi teens who grew up with both American and Asian cultures, with people who were still trying to find a balance of culture that worked for them, and with those who wore their cultures with pride in a society that makes it easy to drift away from that which differentiates them from the uniform majority. I now know that while my ethnicity and culture might not be the norm, the sense of community and individuality it gives me is invaluable, and I wouldn’t trade it for any other identity.

WASIA AMIR, GRADE 12

How It All Went South and the Journey After

How can it all go south in one moment, in one second? In a blink of an eye, how can things just turn on you? You can wake up one day, thinking it will be like a regular same old same old type of day. It can go from “Oh another beautiful sunny day. It’s going to be a good day,” waking up with the right mindset, ready for your day to start the complete opposite. Little did we know our lives would change just like that; something that quick could change your life at an instant.

It was a bright and sunny summer morning. My mother was stressed because she had a lot on her plate between work and her college class; raising two kids, it’s not easy at all, juggling everything. My mom was on her way to her class. Nothing out of the ordinary, same thing she’d do every day, same route and everything. She’s a cautious driver; she stops behind a car at a red light like ten feet away because she gets nervous if a

car is too close and likes to have the space. As she was on her way, she arrived at a red light. She was the first car in the lane, waiting for the green light when another car on the opposite lane turned into the lane next to her; the woman hit my mom's car with such a huge impact, it caused my mom's car to go so high up she could touch the clouds with how her car was flipping in mid-air. It spun round and round like a ferris wheel. The car landed on the ground, the tires popped, airbags went off, and it hit the side of a hard metal traffic barricade. My mom was injured with bruises and cuts, but the worst of it was her left knee. Her knee was stuck when she landed and hit the traffic barricade, crushing it deep into the side car door.

Luckily, no one else was in the car with her and no one was hurt. People around the area tried to help but saw how she was badly stuck in. My mom was hurt, especially her knee so they thought the best option would be to call 911 like anyone would in a situation as tremendous as this. She was in shock, wasn't aware of what happened, what was going on, and her eyes were barely open as if she was about to pass out. Fortunately, the ambulance arrived quickly; you could hear it miles away with the loud and annoying sirens. People and cars cleared the way out, and they finally tried to get my mom out gently as a mouse, trying to take apart the side door without damaging or making it worse than it already was on her knee. They got it out and quickly got her in the ambulance to the Inova Hospital which wasn't far from where the accident occurred.

They stitched her up but didn't give her the surgery she needed; they told her to come back in a week for it to be scheduled. A week went by. It was surgery day and the pain she felt was like an ocean, ongoing. She had fifty shots in her knee one by one, crying and screaming as my grandpa tried to calm her down. She was about to rip his arm off, holding onto him with such strength because of the extreme amount of torture she felt inside. She was released from her surgery and went home to rest as we waited weeks and weeks for the results to come and her to be able to walk again.

The day had finally arrived for the results and for them to see if she can get up and walk on her own. She stood up from the wheelchair, her hands trembling like an earthquake because of how nervous she was to see if she could walk on her own again and get back to her old life. She tried but immediately stumbled; she could barely stand. We asked the doctor "What now? This surgery was supposed to fix her. She just wants her old life back. None of this was her fault to begin with but look at the price she has to pay." The doctors were silent, not knowing what else to say because they knew it was true and unfair. But we all knew what that meant, that they couldn't do anything about it. The surgeon then replied, "I'm sorry but if this surgery didn't work, nothing else can be done and no other doctor could do anything else to get you walking again."

It was at that moment I realized this was going to be a hell for my mom; she had already gone through so much. Days, weeks, and months went by as we tried to get a doctor to say "Yes, we can treat this; she will walk again." It felt like we spoke to a million doctors in Virginia and all around the United States. But then we started to look outside of the country in Bolivia, which is where my parents are from. We asked my grandfather, who happened to be visiting Bolivia, to look for any doctors or any family references because we would take any that gave us a solution. My mom called him to tell her story of what exactly she had and what the doctors here had done. My grandfather found one with great reviews along with some family references. The odds of it being so perfect was one out of a trillion and one finally gave us the answer we were looking for. My grandfather marched in the office, asking for this doctor, and gave him the whole story. The doctor cried because it truly was so tragic. He said "screw those dumb American doctors, who, instead of helping, made your knee worse. I can do this surgery. Give me two months for the follow-ups and knee therapy. YOU WILL GO BACK TO THE U.S. WALKING."

When we got the call from the doctor, we were so thrilled, as if we had just won the lottery, thrilled with happiness and emotion. We all cried like babies because of how much she'd been through and finally there was someone with the ability to help her walk again. It's really a miracle that we found him, we said. My mother and I started to plan the trip because I had to go along; I was still a kid and my older brother was in high school so he couldn't miss that, and my dad was always working late every day. It was just my mother and I, and a week later, we flew to Bolivia. She had a check-up appointment on what the doctor needed to

do, and then the next day, BAM! It was Surgery Day! It was the day we were all waiting for. I was so anxious and nervous for it; the surgery was about two to three hours long until she was released. After the surgery, the doctors checked on my mom and it went well with no setbacks.

But the next day they had to test to see if she could take a little walk from down the hall even if she needed to hold on to the handlebar. It was THE MOMENT OF TRUTH. She stood up and the nurses helped her until she got to the hall. All of us were praying to God that it would go well. The nurses let her go and she gave her first step, continuing to take baby steps; she said it hurt like a million needles stabbing into her knee, but it was worth it because it meant the surgery was a success. She slowly walked down the end of the hall. SHE MADE IT! It was the day I was most thankful to God for giving my mother her ability to walk again because this wasn't a miracle; this was His doing. I'm forever thankful to Him and I'm forever happy to have my mom back.

This was quite an experience; even though it was my mom's, it was mine too. I was her cane, the person she held on to, her other half. She always called me her cane in Spanish, meaning I was always physically there to help her walk. Emotionally and mentally, I was there to help her through all the pain for so long; it was not easy for her and not for me, being the only family she had for comfort and a shoulder to cry on. This experience made me realize why life is so valuable. Take care of your body, take care of your loved ones, your belongings, and anything and everything that means something to you, what's given to you. Because it could disappear just like that. I try to remember that every day and put it in practice.

MICHELLE BEDOYA, GRADE 12

Enduring Virtual Learning

As I learn senior year, my computer screen is all I see
As I stare all day with my eyes, punching bags for light that hit uncontrollably
I'd love to leave home and interact and have a normal senior year
But instead, I sit and stare and honestly, just try to persevere
I log off my computer every day with a headache
I feel relieved to go move and operate
I realize it could be a lot worse and a lot better
But hey! I promise this won't last forever

CHRISTIAN BOONE, GRADE 12

A Beautiful Parting

Coming of age, a moment in which all teenagers experience nearing the end of their high school years. A moment where we decide to cross the threshold between child and adult and start leading our own lives. Though amongst my peers, I've noticed that we experience a similar underlying emotion matched with coming of age, a feeling of running out of time and complete loss of one's sense of self.

During the summer of 2020, I felt many periods of time going "too fast" or "too slow"; it sparked the question of why was I experiencing this feeling? Why am I now suddenly in a race against the clock? Why now? It wasn't until recently when I made the connection that the feeling of "running out of time" was because I could sense the ending of my childhood near. This catapulted me into a state of reflection about who I was during my time in high school. Every choice, every ideology, every mistake I had once made was rushing at me all at once, only to come up with nothing. The nothingness of not knowing one's true self. Trying to cling onto the final years of what inevitably is my childhood.

As if recalling the contributions of the feeling of a lost sense of self-identity, I look back at my high school years with fear as the only prevalent emotion; fear of being one's self, fear of being judged, fear of failure, fear of expressing difference, and most of all, fear of letting down my parents. I spend the majority of my time trying to live up to the idealized child in their heads while simultaneously losing my true identity, so I became what I had always feared being: my own person.

I spent time in solidarity, connecting, and indulging in all of those childhood hobbies and interests I had once loved and could spend endless amounts of time enjoying. Spending hours on end, locked in my room, painting and creating new pieces of art that further hone my artistic skill, finally pursuing a sport I had been interested in, and learning the importance of practice and patience from the mistakes, and lastly, spending time reading about different types of political and feminist theory, and having the opportunity to debate with many participants within the #ListenFirst organization, which helps expand an everyday person's view on politics. Through the reconnection of inner needs and interests that had once been abandoned, I have become more confident in who I am as a person; doing what makes me feel comfortable no longer feels like a betrayal to others, and my sense of productivity increased.

I acquired knowledge through curiosity and searched for answers that align with my core values, leading me to make clearer decisions within my life, one of the decisions being to major in graphic design. Relief washes over me daily as I become more attuned to my personal needs; there will be no more confusion, and no more fear in my heart. The only feeling that has been left over is the warm embrace of adulthood and the beautiful parting of a child who was once lost.

CAMILLE BRYANT, GRADE 12

A Gymnastics Paradise

It all started when I was three years old. My mom put me in my first gymnastics class. I don't remember much about it, but I do remember loving it. After about a year, my mom had to take me out because she was going to have my first little sister. Of course, I was excited to have a little sister, but I still really wanted to be back in gymnastics. My parents put me in summer swim when I turned five. I also did a season of soccer, but it just didn't compare. I would always be doing handstands and cartwheels around the house, doing any sort of flipping motion I could on my trampoline and my bed, and probably making some up. Then, my parents finally decided to put me back in gymnastics when I was seven years old.

I remember my mom driving me to my first trial class at a gym I had never heard of before. I walked into the gym with my mom, and a lady took me to where I would be practicing. I was filled with excitement as I passed other girls practicing, some gymnastics, some ballet. But the second I walked into the room where I was going to practice, it was like everything else disappeared. I saw the people I had my class with, the tumble track, all the mats stacked up, how huge the room was, and it was like paradise. Finally, the class started. It was a beginner class, so most of the others were just learning like me. I was even better than some of them, though that was most likely due to the fact I had taught myself at my house for the past few years. After it was over, as fun as it was to do everything, I thought it was a little too easy. On our way home, when I told my mom, she told me that it might be better if I were in a more advanced class, which sounded perfect to me. I vaguely remembered the gym I went to when I was younger, and I told my mom that maybe I could go there. She said probably not, but she didn't mind stopping by before we went home. We walked in and talked to the lady at the front desk, who my mom remembered from last time, so they had a conversation. Afterwards, my mom told me that it was time to head home. I walked back to the car with my mom, not knowing that that building, Gymnastics World, would soon become my second home for the next ten years of my life and would teach me some of my most valuable lessons. And that was just the very beginning of my gymnastics journey.

My mom started working at the front desk so she could get a discount and I



Liliana Payne, Grade 12

could continue to go there. I was there all the time, even when I didn't have practice. Every summer I would go to all the summer camps and get to know all the coaches. I practically lived there, and it was the best. I made my mom take me with her whenever she had to work and begged her to take me when she didn't. Immediately, I knew that was where I belonged. Everything about it drew me in, the atmosphere, the coaches, the other gymnasts. I learned new things all the time and how to perfect everything I already knew. I couldn't picture anywhere better.

I started out in level two and I loved it, but what I really wanted was to be on a team with Coach Diego and his wife. Finally, the day had come. I was bumped up to pre-team. However, it came too late. Coach Diego and his wife had just moved to a different gym and a lot of the gymnasts followed. I thought it was bad news, but really, it opened up the perfect time for me to join. The new team coach, Coach Kieu, was my coach when I was three; even though I didn't remember her, she remembered me. I was super excited to have her again. The team was a bit smaller, which I've come to see as a blessing because they were more focused; every-

one could work together and become much closer than a larger team. Within the new, smaller team, I found some of my best friends. We would share laughs and tears, excitement, and disappointment, as well as some of the best, most memorable moments of my life. After spending time on the pre-team, I was finally moved up to the real team, the competition team, and I made it to level three. At the time, I was artistic, the one with the bars, beam, floor and vault, the one everyone thinks of when they hear "gymnastics". Of course, my dreams were to be on the national team and eventually make it to the Olympics, but at the time, I was happy right where I was.

JULIANNA DIAZ, GRADE 12

The Championship

It was the seventh inning and the game was tied 6-6. There was a silence that fell over the field as the pitcher started her wind-up. But you're probably wondering how we got here. Well, I'm going to tell you.

It was spring and my team and I were warming up for the annual championship game. The team that we were playing was good, but they didn't like me or my team because every time that we would play them, we would win. Both teams were going into this game with everything they had because we both wanted to win, but there could only be one winner. The first couple of innings we were scoreless. It wasn't until the fifth inning that the first runs were put on the board by my team. This excited us and the crowd because someone had finally scored. As the game went on, it became more competitive; this was a "high" stakes game. After the sixth inning, the game was tied 6-6 with only one more inning to go. I remember it being the top of the seventh, and I was behind the plate catching for my pitcher as the other team batted, trying to get more runs put on the board, so that they would be in the lead. They couldn't score any more runs when we got three outs.

Now it was my team's turn to try and score one more run to win the game. Our leadoff batter got on and made it all the way to third; however, we had two outs. The girl that was up to bat walked up to the plate with a lot of pressure on her shoulders. The girl we had batting was ready to bunt, and as soon as she did, the girl we had on third came in to score the winning run. I remember hearing the whole field go silent as

the play was being made at home. As soon as all the dust cleared, you could see the ball laying on the ground and then the umpire called our runner safe. Once she was called safe, everyone on our team yelled and ran out of the dugout to celebrate our win. The parents for our team went crazy as we won. This all happened in the spring of 2019 and is still talked about in our league to this day because we were the team that won the championship on a walk-off bunt.

BRIANNA DRAKE, GRADE 12

A Misunderstood Color

Yellow. Yellow. Yellow.

Yellow is my favorite color.

It is a big and beautiful color that some people are afraid of. Maybe it is because it is so bright. Maybe it is because it stands out. Maybe it is because it doesn't give people the rush of dopamine that it gives me.

When I see yellow it hits me with its lemon zest color. It makes me feel fresh and ready to take on the ugly but beautiful world outside. Yellow gives me a honey dew feeling.

Yellow makes me want to dance and sing in the rain.

Yellow. Yellow. Yellow.

Yellow is a humble color. It sits patiently as the other colors like blue, black, and grey are picked daily. It waits for someone to realize how bright and beautiful it truly is.

Are you patiently waiting too?

CHALEE EFFA-MBOUL, GRADE 12

My Unpredictable High School Experience

Hi, my name is Chalee, just your average seventeen-year-old high school senior. Do you want to know about my silly, crazy, and weird high school experience? Welp, here goes nothing! I am the sixth child out of a family of eight children, so I grew up hearing so many high school stories from my five older siblings. When I was in middle school, I was so excited to finally be in high school. At first, I was thinking that I would meet so many cute guys, make lots of new friends, try out for the volleyball team, and make great bonds. I thought I would love going to class and want to be in school every day, having fun while learning so many new things. I did learn a lot, although I also learned that things aren't as simple and cutesy as I thought they would be.

Growing up, I remember going with my mom to pick up my brothers from wrestling practice and seeing all the cute high school guys on the bench below the front office. I thought high school was going to have so many cute guys and that they would be interested in me, or at least I wanted them to be! I wanted this because I felt like guys in middle school were scared to talk to me or date me; as things go, I was and still am introverted. When I got to high school, I wanted to experience the ideal high school relationship; however, that never happened. Instead, I've had some funny, some weird, and some alarming situations with guys. One experience was in my junior year ASL class. As I walked to the bathroom, I heard a guy say, "I'm going to **** her." I'll leave your imagination to guess what he said. When I got to the bathroom, I almost threw up. Not because of his looks, but the reason was the way he said it; it was gross and aggressive. Ever since then, I have been extremely uncomfortable around him. Unfortunately, situations like this one happened regularly and made me much more cautious around guys at school. My fairy tale idea of a high school relationship no longer seemed possible or desirable to me.

Though my experience with guys wasn't going well, I was excited to try new things and join the volleyball team. My interest in volleyball started in the fall of sixth grade when I heard that there were going to be try-outs. I wanted to play, and I thought it would be fun, so I asked some of my friends if they wanted to try out

with me; they said yes. I'm happy I made that decision. I played volleyball all three years of middle school and I was a good asset to the team. When it was time to try out for the high school team, I confused the date and missed the tryouts. Even though I missed the tryouts, I was still thinking high school was going to be fun and a fresh start, but missing the volleyball tryouts affected my whole high school experience. During freshman year, my body was aching all year. I think this has been happening every year since the sixth grade. My body was used to working out and training in the fall, and out of nowhere, I didn't do any of that. It affected me mentally as not being on the team that year made me feel depressed.

During sophomore year, I went to conditioning and tried out for the team, but in the end, I didn't make it. I think I didn't make the team since at the time my depression got a lot worse and I became terrible at remembering things; I think the coaches could tell. I know I tried my hardest and did my best. When my mom picked me up, I started crying. As I was in the car crying, I thought to myself: life doesn't work out the way you want it to. I learned a lot from volleyball, still; the most valuable lesson I learned was that you need to keep running until you get what you want. No matter how many times you fall, you must pick yourself back up to keep the game of life going.

If I were to describe my whole high school experience in one word, I would use the word "unstable." Though I did make great friends and had some enjoyable classes, unfortunately, most of my experience was not what I thought it would be. I use the word "unstable" because I had a lot of ups and downs. My ups would be meeting so many new people, having fun with my friends and doing silly things with them, learning ASL, and meeting awesome teachers who have helped me. The downs would be me failing English 10, failing Algebra 1, and not wanting to go to school because people made me uncomfortable. I don't mind high school; I just hate dealing with people that talk about me or stare at me. I also don't like the fact that we can't really pick the classes we want to take. I wish high school was more directed towards your career choice or something you're interested in doing, rather than just taking classes and learning about things you don't want to pursue in life. These lower points of my time in high school added a lot of stress and led me to skip school and miss out on a lot of my high school experience.

This is my unpredictable, roller coaster of a high school experience. Being in high school helped me learn more about guys and realize that a high school relationship is not easy to find and is something I don't want for myself. I learned that sometimes life doesn't work the way you want it to, no matter how hard you work. I learned that I won't always love doing some of the things I have to do to reach my goals. I'm incredibly grateful I have free education, and I'm thankful for the people I've met and friends I've made during my high school experiences. Even though it was filled with a lot of downs, I will always remember the ups and the great memories I've had in high school. I've definitely learned that life isn't as cutesy and simple as it seemed. Far from it.

CHALEE EFFA-MBOUL, GRADE 12

"Culture"

Culture

What is culture?

Well according to Google,

Culture is an umbrella term which covers social behavior, knowledge, belief, arts, laws, customs, capabilities and habits of individuals in a group

Now if you ask an expert,

Then it's formed when

There is a transmission of language symbols

And beliefs

But if you ask an individual,
Then it's a big part of their identity,
Their everyday life behavior,
And most importantly
Somewhere where they belong

It's also something an individual is proud of,
now it might not be the case for everyone
because some aren't fond of theirs,
some are less interested in theirs,
while some want to preserve theirs,
so, they don't lose their identity
nor let it go extinct

Conflicts might have a spark
to show whose culture is better
but far away there is a land
where all existing and new culture co-exists together,
and that place is known as "The Melting Pot."

MAHI KHAN, GRADE 12

My Culture

My culture is colorful,
My culture is bright,
My culture defines me,
My culture is mine.

SALINA KHAN, GRADE 12

Sweet Sacrifice

Sacrifice, giving up something for the sake of others in consideration.
Families make the biggest sacrifice despite our differences.
Like a tree root they stand firm with us.
Mother had a chance to make her life better.
This is a once in a lifetime opportunity.
I wonder
Ohh, I wonder what mother is up to now
The sniff of her nose
The crack of her voice
The tear she quickly wiped that slipped through her eyes
Oh I wonder
Sometimes the lord closes a door to open a better one for you.
I made a sweet sacrifice to be with you
You shall not age up without a mother



My Culture; Salina Khan, Grade 12

I shall struggle and fight so you shall have a blessed life
This is my sweet sacrifice
So young I was still confused
Why would you give up a chance to be a British citizen
For me?
It's just a sweet sacrifice
A mother shall not be questioned.

SYRIA MANDERSON, GRADE 12

I Rise

How can the sun get up every morning?
Motivated and punctual to light the world.

The moon takes a break, from shining at night.
But the sun must rise and fall every day.

Motivated and punctual.

Some mornings I wonder why I get up.

I don't light the world.

But still I rise with the sun.

Motivated and punctual.

RAYAL MELLOUK, GRADE 12

Depression

I was drowning in my mind, but I refused to acknowledge it. It was hard to get up, to get dressed, to eat, to smile, and to be motivated to do anything I loved. It was a struggle, and it still is for me. It's not something that I have been able to tame or have in control, but it's a part of me, and now I acknowledge it.

There are days where it is letting me be confident in myself and let me strive to the best of my abilities; it makes me forget that I ever had it before it hits me hard again. There are times that when it hits, I want to stay down and just give up, so it can get what it wants, times where it seemed like it was not worth fighting against it and just let it win. Even at those moments, my lowest moments, I continue to fight the battle.

I have gained so much over the years to help me to keep on fighting and so much support that reminds me that I am loved and enough. I have goals and dreams for the future, I want to go to college and make some memories with my friends, I want to buy my parents a house and repay them and my siblings for believing in me as much as they did.

If I told young Katie everything we've been through and what we achieved, she would never believe me. She would think that I was lying, that we are still drowning in our minds and that we will never get as far as we dreamed. She is right in a sense. I am still drowning, but every day I learned to swim more and more towards help; I never got as far as we dreamed. I surpassed that. I may still be struggling with depression, but that's not what defines me anymore. That's not holding me back anymore like it used to.

KATIE MENDEZ, GRADE 12

A Trip I Will Never Forget

Growing up, my family and I had always loved going out on boats and having fun. We never owned a boat, but if we had the opportunity to go on a boat, we would. We loved being out on the water because it was always so peaceful. Sometimes I would get a little fear of drowning or crashing, but that didn't stop me from doing something I loved. I have always seen pictures of people on beautiful cruises, but never in a million years did I think I would ever go on one until December 11, 2016. A year prior to that date, one night my family and I were talking about a big family vacation to take for my parents' 30th wedding anniversary. Out of nowhere, my dad brought up a cruise. Everyone thought that was an amazing idea because it was something none of us had ever done before. After lots of planning for about a year, we made that happen. It was the best vacation I have ever been on and will definitely never forget.

As the day approached for us to leave for the cruise, I was getting so excited. There was so much to prepare since we were leaving the country. Finally the day arrived for us to fly to Florida where we would set sail the next day. We made it to Florida and spent the night in a hotel and went to church the next morning before we set sail. We called an Uber to church and on our way there we passed a bridge. On the other side of the bridge we could see a bunch of cruise ships at the dock. Ours was right there in front! That ship was enormous! At the time, it was the second largest cruise ship in the world. Allure of the Seas is the name of the ship we went on. After church, we got everything together and headed to the dock. We had to drop off all of our bags so they could be delivered to our rooms. While we waited for our rooms to be ready, we got food. It was the best food I had in a long time! It was finally time for us to set sail into the Atlantic Ocean and we were out at sea!

Our first stop in the Caribbean was Haiti. We had been at sea for almost two days until that stop. There were so many activities to sign up for, and it was hard to choose. My brothers and parents were going parasailing later in the day. My mom, brothers and I went snorkeling that morning! I had never been snorkeling before, so I was a little nervous. We had to get on a boat with other people from our ship and learn a few things about snorkeling and rules related to it. Once we got to our spot, the water was crystal clear blue and our view was the ship in the distance on one side and a huge mountain range on the other side . . . absolutely breathtaking! We all put on our goggles, breathing tubes and life vests and jumped in the water. It was very cold but I did not mind. When I stuck my head in that water I couldn't believe what I was seeing! I was looking at big, gorgeous coral, bright, colorful fish, and pure white sand! I could not believe I was doing this in a different country at that moment. It was truly amazing!

Our second stop was Jamaica. Jamaica was a very nice country to walk through and be around because everyone was so sweet there. The activity we did there was horseback riding, which is my true passion. We went on a trail ride through the woods and on the beach. The final part of the trail was riding through the ocean. It had always been my dream to ride in the ocean and being able to ride in crystal clear waters was so incredible. The drive to the stables was about forty-five minutes. This ride really made me think, "be thankful for everything you have and are given" because I got to see firsthand how some countries do not have it as great as we do. The port where the ships dock is really nice, but the little towns along the ride revealed living conditions that are much different than ours. It was a definite eye opener for me. I went and explored and walked around the area a little bit and came across this really sweet older guy who was doing incredible woodwork. He was so sweet and kind to engrave one of his pieces for me that I will forever keep up in my room.

Our last stop was Cozumel, Mexico. Wow, is that place gorgeous, and it had some of the best food ever! I went to a cool dolphin resort and swam, right up against dolphins. It was so unbelievable, and my love for dolphins deepened! The food was amazing, and learning about all of the culture was astounding. There were big parrots flying around, and they would land on you. There were also trained ones that could interact with us. It was just so astonishing to see so many different animals in their natural habitats.

This trip was the most exciting experience I have ever had. Learning about

all the different cultures and seeing all the different countries was amazing and educational. Seeing how other countries live, and what people have to do to get money was such an eye opener for me because I realized how great we really have it. This trip was a wonderful vacation and the best learning experience I have ever had. I will definitely go back and go on that cruise again because there were so many activities I would love to experience in those countries. The ship was so immense that it was impossible to see the entire ship. I cannot thank my parents enough for this experience; it is such a great memory.

CAROLINE MONACO, GRADE 12

A Family Honor

I love my family
They keep me grounded
With the familiarity
Of my rich Latin roots
We are always loyal
To our family name
We are never ashamed
And we will always stand proud
My dad will always be in my heart
He will always be the strongest man
I have ever known
I apologize for putting you through hell and back
But just know that
You've been my role model from the start
So just smile and relax
I'll take care of you
Until your last breath

EMILIA VILLATORO QUINTEROS, GRADE 12

My Journey to the USA

When my parents got married, they always had a dream of leaving my country due to the poor economy and government; they knew our future would not be great. I was born in 2002 in Egypt, Alexandria. I lived with my parents and two sisters. Alexandria is a great place for vacation, but it is not what it used to be before. The crime rate skyrocketed when Egypt went to a revolution in 2011 and my parents knew it was time to go. They applied for the VISA lottery in 2011, 2012, and 2013. They were denied. They did not give up hope and applied in 2014. Surprisingly, it came true. The application was accepted and my family was invited for an interview at the United States embassy for the lottery. My parents cried with joy and were in shock that we were accepted and hoped that we could make it out of our country and secure a future for us.

Six months later, we got accepted and our visas. But we did not have enough money for everyone to come to the United States together. So, my dad came alone in 2014 for 6 months and worked 12-hour shifts so he could afford a home and tickets for us to come to the United States. It was hard, but we made it. And that surprisingly started another journey for me and my family to learn English and adapt to this new culture. It was very hard because I knew absolutely no English; it was a big challenge. Another challenge I encountered was when we had to live in a basement for a year in someone's house. It had two bedrooms and a bathroom; it was awkward sharing a room, but if you want to make it work, you make it work. My next challenge was school.

When I was in Egypt, I was in the seventh grade but when I attended an American school, I was held back a year due to not knowing any English. It was difficult at first, but surprisingly easy for me to pick up English in a year. It was not perfect English, but I could understand and be understood. Passing through middle school was rough due to me not fitting in with everyone, not knowing English well, as well as, the different culture and the different clothes I wore; I didn't fit in. Eighth grade was a great year. I learned more English and made more friends, and for the first time in years I felt connected again. I went to my first dance and it was a great time. Things do get better, and you will face challenges in life. You just need to adapt and overcome those challenges to become something better, something stronger.

Here I am today. My life is better than I would have thought, but it wouldn't if it hadn't been for my parents and their hard work. It took sacrifices from my siblings and me to leave our old school, friends, and our loved ones. It was an arduous journey and difficult to overcome. I'm glad I was able to get through this and make a future for myself. None of this would be true without my parents. One day, I hope to be half as strong as my parents were for me. I hope to have the courage that they had to leave our country and to start a whole new journey. I could never do what they did; I appreciate everything they have done for me, and I will for the rest of my life.

ABDELRAHMAN SADEK, GRADE 12

Welcome to My House

Growing up in a big household can be difficult. I can never get any alone time with so many people wandering the house causing it to always be chaotic and noisy, almost like visiting chimpanzees at a zoo, except chimpanzees are quiet at night. My family is not. I personally have gotten used to the loud disturbing noises of my younger siblings laughing and the sound of the loud television playing baby lullabies, but witnessing my friend's reactions when they first step into my house is the best part. To put it in the description, their eyes widen, and jaws drop like they have just seen a ghost wandering the halls, when it is just my little brother running around with no shirt on and powdered sugar all over his face after eating a doughnut. I have six siblings in total: two brothers and four sisters. My mother always confuses us with each other's names when she calls us because according to her, "we all look so similar." We were all raised in Fairfax County, Virginia, but decided to move to Lebanon and spent the two previous years there for my dad's job, and now we are living in Woodbridge.

My eldest sibling is my brother Chahine. He is deemed very anti-social considering all he does is go to school and stay at home playing video games in his room; he does not come out until dinner is ready. I am the oldest daughter in the house, meaning I am the most spoiled, and that makes it very common to hear my sisters argue with my parents about me "getting whatever I want." I would not say I always make fun of them for being jealous, but I do most times depending on the circumstances. My sisters, Sarah and Farah, are the same age range as me. We all have the same interests but do manage to argue a lot, whether it is because one of my sisters is taking my clothes from my closet without asking, or if apples should be peeled when cut into slices. We were all raised stubborn, and usually when arguments like this happen, it gets intense; I am surprised the house does not jump up and down. My youngest three siblings, however, were mostly raised by me when my mother was working around the house, a struggle of responsibility that all eldest daughters must deal with at some point in their lives. For a small period, this made my siblings believe that I was their mother and called me "Mama" which was really embarrassing, especially when my mother would come pick me up from school and my siblings would call for me. It makes me happy as that era has passed and now they call me by my real name, Haila. Overall, being a seventeen-year-old girl has made me encounter many issues, whether about school or home, and results in me needing to talk to someone to express my feelings, which is why I am so thankful for having sisters to listen to me.

Family trips can be mediocre. It all depends on the amount of stress the trip causes, which also depends on the amount of time we have to pack and having to decide on what to pack. New Year's in Florida was an unforgettable trip we took back in 2015. I was thirteen at the time, and my youngest two siblings did not exist then, so it was only my parents, brother, and three younger sisters. My father decided it would be fun to stay there for a week during our winter break vacation since Florida had warmer weather than our resident state, Virginia, which was freezing cold at the time. Once we landed in Florida, we realized the weather was way hotter than expected, and that our clothes did not fit the environment, resulting in my sisters and I to complain and beg my parents to take us to buy shorts and tank tops to survive the heat. Eventually my father agreed, since he too needed summer clothes as he only brought jeans and swimming trunks in his suitcase and therefore took us to the nearest mall. My parents booked our stay at the Hyatt Hotel in the Orlando International Airport since it had so many fun things to do, as well as leaving us with a variety of food and souvenir shops to explore, and as a bonus, made it easier to get to our flight when returning home. My three sisters and I had to split two beds equally, which made me decide that I wanted to share a bed with my youngest sister at the time, since she was small and wouldn't take up as much space. Farah and Sarah weren't used to sharing a room together and eventually had a big fight the night before New Year's because of the messiness of their room, resulting in Farah getting mad and deciding to sleep on the couch. Some places we visited ranged from Daytona beach to Disney World and even an amusement park in a small town near where we were staying. When we did get back to Virginia, it was freezing cold, like walking into a huge freezer, which made us, yet again, regret not wearing proper clothing.

One family tradition I adored was playing football in our backyard after school. My brother would practice with my dad for his school football team, and my sisters and I would tag along, as well as my dog, who would run around us as we played. I personally never learned how the real game is played, but learned the basics such as touchdowns, tackles, and fumbles, since my dad always called it out while playing. After getting multiple skin burns and bruises, I finally learned how to throw and catch the football well from far distances. This skill was cool to brag about in school, especially since the boys would be in awe that a girl could play as well as them at recess. This is one of many memories that I love and cherish dearly as it gathered my family together and led to lots of laughter and bonding, and overall made us all forget about our worries.

A big family can undeniably cause headaches and very chaotic sibling fights, but it is also a non-toxic, loving, supportive, and nonjudgmental environment made up of people that voluntarily and genuinely help you for the better. I'm very grateful to have experienced what it's like to be part of a whole, because otherwise, I wouldn't be as wise as I am today in so many different ways, ranging from art techniques Farah taught me, to my brother showing me how to play Call of Duty on his PlayStation. I love my family to a massive extent and would not trade them out for the world . . . even if they did, in fact, steal my shirt from my closet.

HAILA SALAHEDDINE, GRADE 12

My Road to Attending a College

The story that I will be sharing with you today is the story of how I came to choose the college I am attending. This story is close to my heart. Now, let us jump into the story. I am the type of person who loves to travel to the mountains of Pennsylvania because of the beautiful scenery; it is relaxing. I love Pennsylvania; I feel like I was raised there with how much I was there. My family and I would visit quite a bit because of family, which made my decision easier. When I visit Pennsylvania, it is usually the most relaxed and stress-free that I ever am. When I visit, I have a good time going fishing and swimming in the creeks. Honestly, I would say that if you are an outdoorsy person, you should do it. Just go fishing right after a swim. I know that I have a lot of fun. I feel stress-free and let the river current take all the negative feelings out of me.

Family, peace, comfort, enjoyment, and relaxation are the main reasons that I chose to attend Lock Haven University to pursue my education. Everyone that I met on my tour was super polite and welcoming. I love the campus because it is in a very peaceful area. I have always felt comfortable while in Lock Haven because of my family that lives near there and I have gone up to see them all the time. I have had some of the best times of my life in Lock Haven. My first time swimming in a river was in Lock Haven, and my first time catching trout was in Lock Haven as well. I have a lot of fun while I am there because I can go hiking on the beautiful trails. I have always felt the most relaxed in Pennsylvania with how the mountains roll like waves in the ocean. The countless breathtaking views are amazing; they are the type that you can never get out of your head. Every time you close your eyes, you can see them.

The school had both fields that I want to pursue: criminology and forensic science. I have always loved trying to figure out crimes and how they were conducted. Forensic science has always been a part of my life. In a way, I am constantly wanting to know how things were doing. Like a lot of people, I had taken a lot of career tests to help me choose, and ninety percent of the time, it would say detective, so I thought that would be my career. I absolutely love forensic science. I try to use it every chance that I get, but there aren't many when you are seventeen years old. So what do I do instead? I watch documentaries, and as they are figuring out the case, I do it with them. There have been a handful of times that I have figured out who did it before the professionals did, but the other times I went step by step with them. I really enjoy it; it is my passion, and I really want to pursue it as my career. I chose Lock Haven University to pursue it because they work with great people to help make your dreams come true.

My mother was a big factor in me choosing a college to attend because she attended Lock Haven University. She had a great time and made great friends; she still talks to her college roommate a lot, and after college they lived together for a while. I found that interesting, so I took it into consideration. She tells me that the teachers there were good then, so why can they not be good now? She told me that she was able to party and do good in her classes. The population of Lock Haven had a big factor as well; I do not like schools with a lot of people in one place. I do not do good with a lot of people; I feel uncomfortable around a ton of people. I like small groups where I know the people. I would rather have a small group of friends that I know and that I can be with for a long period of time, instead of a large group where I might only know a couple of people.

Those are the reasons why I chose to go to Lock Haven University because of family, peace and comfort, enjoyment, and relaxation. Those are the reasons that I want to go there because they will keep me from going crazy and help me stay in school. Those reasons are why I chose to go to Lock Haven as my dream college.

ANTHONY SIMMONS, GRADE 12

Two Paintings for My AP Art Portfolio

"Mountain Memories"

This artwork is a painting of the last image I remember seeing before leaving Mexico, after the first time visiting. It has stayed with me for many years and I have yet to forget it. It has become a very special memory for me, and I wanted to make a physical recreation of the big green mountain I saw on a cloudy day in Mexico.

"The Golden Cage"

For this artwork I mostly got inspiration from a song made by Los Tigres del Norte called "La Jaula de Oro," which translates to The Golden Cage. This song is about a Mexican immigrant that came to the U.S. to have a better life for him and his family and earn money that he couldn't in Mexico. He talks about how although he has money now, he can't go out freely due to the fear of being caught and sent back to Mexico. He feels like a prisoner in this country, so he refers to himself being in a golden cage. He realized that the American dream wasn't as great as it was made out to be. I felt like this is what I saw my parents go through



Memory Mountain, Nereida Sosa Antunez, Grade 12



The Golden Cage, Nereida Sosa Antunez, Grade 12

when I was younger. My mom never left the house because she knew nothing about America and was afraid of what was out there. My dad only left the house for work and would usually come back late. He always looked tired and my mother always looked sad. I felt helpless because there was nothing I could do. This is why they are both in a golden cage and I'm helpless outside of it.

NEREIDA SOSA ANTUNEZ, GRADE 12

Third Grade Fiasco

Everyone had their struggles during school, whether it was getting bullied, stressing about grades, or having something to deal with at home. From my experience, third grade was the worst school year for me; not only was it the worst school year, it was one of the hardest, most dreadful years of my entire life. It was the funniest year as well because I have a dark humor; not only did I get bullied by my peers, but I was also bullied by my teacher, which is funny to me, and I will explain in more detail throughout my story. Getting bullied, my family going broke and me struggling with schoolwork and so much more were the top tier reasons to why I was always exhausted and forced to grow up at such a youthful age. By juggling all those conflicts for many years, it has truly helped me grow up to the person I am today.

Getting bullied by my teacher and peers not only drained my confidence away at an early age, but it also kept me mentally exhausted every day, and made me not want to do things that most kids would do. For instance, I used to love recess time during elementary school, but with everything that was going on, I started not caring for it and sat on the benches, watching the other kids play. I was bullied, teased, used as if I were a doll by my teacher and peers. My teacher would make fun of the way I dressed, the way I talked, and would tell all of my "friends" to not be friends with me, and they gladly listened to her advice. I am glad they did because it showed me who my faithful friends were and who were not. The bullying I received from them put a heavy, negative weight on me every day I went to school.

It was like I wanted to throw up by how sick to my stomach I felt with all the tears I was holding back. I know what you are thinking, "Why didn't she tell someone about all this?" It wasn't that easy. I knew my family had their own conflicts to bear, so as a kid, I thought it would be better to keep everything to myself. The last thing I wanted to do was burden my family with my issues towards school. With all the financial problems and arguments we went through as a family, the last thing I wanted was my family flipping out about what was going on with me at school. The hilarious part to me was that I realized throughout the years as I have gotten older, my teacher was just jealous of me. I know, right? Jealous of a third grader? She was jealous due to how I treated others and the way I saw the world in my perspective. I very much believe and find it quite accurate that she was jealous because of how she saw the world around her, which was always negative; even my therapist communicated that she had some personal issues, so she took it out on me to make herself feel better. At the time, I didn't have a clue, but now thinking of it, she did act out on her jealousy. When I got close to a friend, she would try "taking them away" from me and talk bad upon me with them. She treated me as if I were a dirty rag who needed a cleanse. I would have described myself as a loving, bubbly person, who was so confident and always wanted to put a smile on people's faces. I loved myself and everything around me, I was so clueless to what negativity was until I met the devil herself. Because of her, I got bullied by my peers. I never understood why I was receiving such harsh treatment from others when all I wanted was to share love and happiness with one another. But in all honesty, with regard to everything she put me through during those days, I truly hope she is doing well. With that much negativity in her to put it out on a child, she sure had some issues within herself or whatever it was she was going through. Overall, I wish nothing but goodness her way and pray she is not the bad person she was back then.

I remember it was a rainy day, and I wore the only shoes I had at the time. I came into the school building and slipped. I hurt my head badly on the floor. It was my shoes' fault since they were slippery and worn out. I saw my teacher giggling at me, instead of helping me, which hurt me the most. That was when I realized, as

a child, that I was not worthy of being cared for. I felt unworthiness, as if no one would appreciate me or love me for who I was. I started to always feel sad and gave up on being happy or making others happy. Despite the fact of how she treated me, I always wanted to impress her and be the best for her. When she teased me to the point where I wanted to break down, all I was able to do was agree with her and laugh about it with her, even though she hated it when I agreed with her. I always felt confused as a child; never knowing how I can be better for a person who made me feel so useless and wanted to do everything in my power to be good enough for a particular person. I wish I spoke up and was strong enough to go to a different adult and just spill everything out. I wasn't able to, not with the burden of her already hating me; I just didn't want her to hate me even more. I cared so much about what others thought about me to the point where it left a permanent mark towards my mental health. I was a literal fetus in third grade, not being able to cope with the world around me just yet.

Yes, getting bullied was dreadful, but going through serious money loss in my family was another struggle we had to deal with. Seeing how my family was—Dad experiencing depression, Mother leaving, and so much more—really left a huge void in my family. With all the mess going on at home, I always thought to myself and overthought many worse case scenarios of raining down my problems from school to my family. I always asked myself, “How do I communicate what is going on at school with me and grades if everything is dysfunctional at home?” I thought everything would get even worse for us because of me. I could not do that to everyone, especially at a time when we were all vulnerable and in fear of what would happen with all of us. Whether it was my parents losing their kids or losing our home due to the financial issues we had, at the end, we all made it through and through the mess; financial issues were getting better, and I was done with the third grade. Even though my grades were bad due to my lack of wanting to do any of it, I still made it at the end and went on to fourth grade somehow. Thinking about it now is very surprising because with the grades I had, I for sure should have repeated the third grade. Though basically everyone in my class did not accept me for who I was and just teased me about it, I was still trying to go on with my days and never gave up. I even forgive everyone for putting me through all of that because why not? Everyone deserves a second chance, and I am sure everyone grew up to be a better person and they have learned from their mistakes. I dealt with the harsh treatment throughout the third grade, but never gave up, and I would say that was my biggest accomplishment/obstacle I have gone through yet, and it will stick with me for the rest of my life because I really never gave up, no matter what.

To sum it all up, third grade truly sucked and lowered my self-esteem tremendously. Since my teacher was pretty much useless in all aspects, especially when I had complications going on at home as well, I am not surprised I matured so quickly due to all that fiasco. As for how everything is now, how I see myself now is all that matters. I am growing up every day and still going through many obstacles. I am partially appreciative of everything that happened when I was in third grade, since it made me mature faster but at the same time, I will always wish I had the childhood most kids got to experience.

SADIA SULTANA, GRADE 12

Freedom of the Horses

The year was 2007 and I was four years old. I lived with my mother, sister, and grandmother on a ranch in a small city in California called French Camp, about forty-five minutes to an hour from Sacramento. I loved living there, I loved being with my family, I loved the open land so I could play, I loved the tree that I climbed every day that sat in front of the house, but what I loved most about the ranch was the horses that lived there with us. Every morning and afternoon I would help my grandmother outside and feed them, and some days I would watch my sister ride our horse: Bella. Bella is the sweetest and nicest horse with golden brown hair with a black mane and tail. I loved watching everybody riding the horses; they looked so free, happy, and content with themselves, and I wanted to have that same feeling. I wanted to have the same feeling

of freedom and the wind blowing in my face, to feel the spirit of the horse, to have the feeling that the horse and I have become one.

One day, I asked my grandmother if I could ride. She retrieved Bella and saddled her up, then placed me on top of her. The feeling I got when I was on top of Bella is a feeling I will never forget, and it's the same feeling I get each time I ride: the feeling of being on top of the world, the feeling of being able to see everything in a new perspective, at a new height. My grandmother began to walk around with the reigns and Bella followed; I felt such a rush of happiness I could barely breathe. I am reminded of this feeling every time I get to go back and ride again. Ever since the first time, I have been addicted to the feeling of freedom. Horses have a sense of freedom, especially wild horses, when they get to run in an open field. Horses share the feeling of freedom with the rider, and the rider gets to feel the spirit of the horse; that is the best thing. When I connected with Bella and got to experience her spirit, it was life-changing; her spirit provided me with a new outlook on my life.

When my life got a lot tougher and I went through some personal struggles, I always looked forward to the summers when I would go back home to my mom and go to my grandmother's house to go riding. Riding in the summer was my salvation, the time where I could leave all my worries behind for a brief moment and feel free of the weight I carry. To feel the wind in my face and my chest being ten times lighter is the best feeling of my life. The brief moment of freedom when I ride tells me that I soon will get that feeling, but I have to be patient and that my time will come. I admire horses because they found the secret on how to be free and not have a million troubles.

The sensation of being on top of the world and seeing things from a new perspective is the same every time I get on top of a horse. Horses taught me to have a new outlook on my life and helped me stay strong. The feeling of freedom I get every time I ride keeps me going forward and reminds me that I will get my freedom someday. Horses helped me get a new perspective on the world, and the feeling of being on top is one I will never forget. I got a whole new outlook on life and a whole new set of feelings and I found it in horses. The year was 2007, and I was four years old. I lived on a ranch in a small city in California called French Camp. A whole new outlook on life started with my grandmother putting me on top of our horse, and I found freedom and salvation.

KAT THOMAS, GRADE 12

STEPHANIE CAMPBELL'S AP LANGUAGE & COMPOSITION

A Poet's Nature

The expanse of the cover of night
Dotted with webs of stars
Is God's blanket
Wrapped around the Earth
Galaxies and nebulas
Crisscrossed along the creases of His quilt
Twinkling with His light to give us wonder

A poet's nature
Is written among them
Words on weathered parchment
The translation of the stars from above
A quill dipped in velvety ink
Is gathered pieces of the night sky
Transposed for us to read

They carefully stitch together
Delicate phrases and soft thoughts
To bring the same twinkling light
From God's cloak
Onto the crinkled pages of books
And into the hearts
Of His children

A poet lives among the stars
Weaving dreams and entwining thoughts
Into the pages of books
To turn God's blanket of night
Into a physical sculpture
Of expressions and styles
Gently singing the world a lullaby
With the breath and word of God on their tongue
So His children may know how it feels
To taste the stars on their lips
And write them into poetry

CHARLOTTE FLYNN, GRADE II

CRISTA COLANTONI'S AP LITERATURE & COMPOSITION

Fish Out of Water

Pink and green are the colors that wrapped around my sixth grade notebook, engraved with navy blue pen markings and small cursive scribbles that spelled "Block 6, Mrs. Smith - English." This week's unit was poetry, and as the classroom filled with "angsty" teens, Mrs. Smith softly said, "Write a poem about a story you will always remember." Letting the lead from my pencil tickle the loose leaf paper, I decided to allow my thoughts to speak for themselves. Images of insecurities coupled with undertones of greys and blues. The picture unfolded without being drawn. The colors were vibrant without being physically seen. For the first time in my life, I felt deliberately happy, and I know that sounds very cliché, but for once, I could inhale bliss and exhale pessimistic tension.

I use writing as my personal psychiatrist. When I'm completely distressed, I sit in her brown leather chair and explain to her all of the ideas that diminish my morals. She listens and translates all of my passion into eloquent pieces. This time, I want my writing to take me to my next chapter, the chapter that leads my identity from the girl hiding under the bridges to building them. I aspire to continue my new journey through the lens of a far more educated black woman, learning to add more to each chapter that elevates its knowledge and maturity.

CINIYA GARY, GRADE 12

KYLE TROTT'S COLLEGE COMPOSITION

Camaraderie

The storm lifts at dawn
The city takes its first breath
A guitar slowly strums in the square

The city gates open
And people stream in
Wearing crowns,
turbans,
bandanas,
gowns

The guitarist faces a beautiful chaos of
colors and crisscrossing voices
and spies a violinist setting up
As she puts the bow to her instrument,
he responds with a pluck of his strings
and their united song makes the city glow

RENATO ECONA, GRADE II

KATIE WOOD'S ENGLISH 10

Taker of my Tide

All began in a room that was unfruitfully organized
With sharpened pencils, colored pens, and lined paper,
Yet sooner or later the tide of clutter will once more rise.

Gum wrappers and pressed pennies, my moments they emphasize,
But somehow memories packed in my trash skyscraper
All began in a room that was unfruitfully organized.

In your modern designs, how can I fantasize?
What little I can call to mind seized by a Baron's catalogued caper?
Yet sooner or later the tide of clutter will once more rise.

No! I will not . . . cannot compromise!
Yours truly will be erased into an old flavor that, even with luck greater,
All began in a room that was unfruitfully organized.

Removing the mess is demanding I jeopardize
The recollected missteps and triumphs compiled by me, the curator.
Yet sooner or later the tide of clutter will once more rise.

There is me in the mess I idolize,
And with me gone, you will only be a Taker.
All began in a room that was unfruitfully organized,
Yet sooner or later the tide of clutter will once more rise.

AMBER HURD, GRADE IO

Family Politics

Our lives shape us. My father thought that things might be all right if you were lucky and worked hard. My mother knew that everything could go wrong, but she was never afraid and she was going to make *damn* sure that we were safe and that we had a happy family. She dared anyone or anything to stop her. It worked for me. I was a lucky child; two parents loved me. Our family was never ordinary, whose family is? We were and are benignly insane.

We were a military family. I was a Navy brat. In fact, when I was younger I thought that we were all in the Navy. I thought that I had a record just like my father. When I did something right or good, my father would say, "That's another accommodation on your record, Baby." I knew all about my record, my very good record, before I went to school. I was embarrassingly old when I found out that I did not have an actual record. It was a sad day. As the youngest child, I watched my sister, Toni and my brother, Terry go to school everyday. They were five and four years older and always, it seemed, so much wiser than I. They did not want to go to school or to eat anything that was green, but they both loved to read. Our houses, wherever they were, were full of books. My brother's books did not appeal to me. His books were full of pictures of war and mayhem and were often sticky with who knew what. My sister's books obsessed me. I tried to read them before I could understand the words on the page. My mother read to me before I went to sleep. When my mother was too busy to read to me during the day, I begged my sister to read to me instead. If she was in the mood, she read to me. She was my first teacher.

Long before I went to school, I was reading my books and trying to read my sister's books. My mother encouraged me to read and my father, who spoke rarely about such things, told us all that we could learn anything if we read and if we kept our eyes open. All I wanted to do when I was a child was to go to school. The only time I ran away from home, I was three and I took my sister's discarded red plaid lunch box (not *pretty* enough for my sister) and set off in the direction of the school. I was walking in the wrong direction, but it didn't matter. My mother caught up with me and brought me home. To placate me, I was given *schoolwork* to do every day after that.

As soon as we were able to do so, we had household tasks. We were expected to do our chores, but we all had jobs. Our jobs were our classes, our schoolwork. I loved school. My first school was a Montessori school in Italy. It was an Italian school. I was the only American student in my class; I was fluent in Italian—I thought I was Italian. We wore white-bibbed aprons with our names embroidered on them. My name was Rosanna. School was everything I imagined. I walked to school in the morning with my mother and my father picked me up most afternoons. It was perfect. While my sister and brother went to the military school, I went to my school with my special school name. Even though I went to three Hawaiian schools in second grade, I continued to love school. Not even long division and eventually algebra could ruin school for me. I never felt the way Toni and Terry felt about school. I was never cool. I always sat in the front, I did my homework, I raised my hand, and I admired my teachers. I still do.

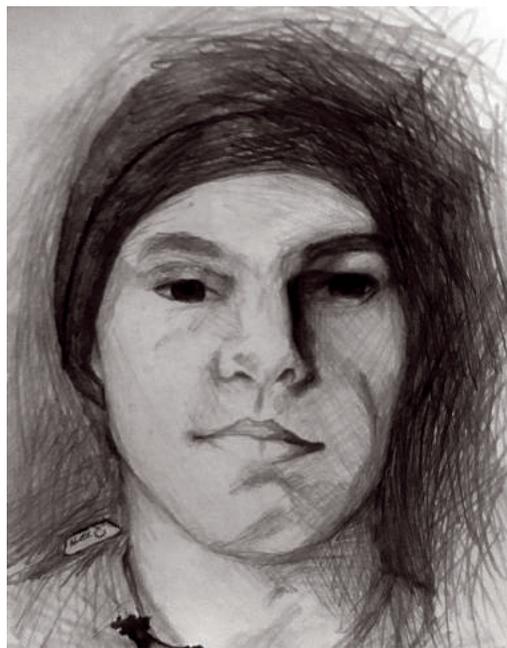
In our family, we discussed everything. Our discussions were often loud and fueled by humor and sarcasm. You could say anything that you wanted to say if you could back it up. My parents expected us to have support for our beliefs. We cited teachers, schoolbooks, newspapers, politicians, and Walter Cronkite. I learned to create/approximate statistics by the time I was in the sixth grade. As much as I loved school and we valued education, my parents encouraged me to challenge everything I read or heard. *How do you know that's true? Who said that? You believe that?* My parents were politically liberal when most military families were not. JFK was our president. He was a Catholic Democrat from Massachusetts. We watched him make his inaugural address and we watched Jack Ruby shoot Lee Harvey Oswald as a family. Through it all, we discussed, we argued, and we learned to think for ourselves.

My entire childhood was spent being the new child. As soon as I made friends and I started to feel at home, we moved. I only went to one military school. Usually, I was surrounded by children who had been born and raised wherever we were. I was different. I was the minority. I spoke another language, I had another skin color, or least of all, I had another accent. By the time we came to Virginia, I was a tall, happy, flat-chested tomboy who wore Keds and didn't shave her legs. My classmates looked like forty-year-old women to me. The other girls wore padded bras, stockings over shaved legs, and perfume. And of course, only certain name brand clothes—Villager, Gant, Bass, and Lady Bug—were acceptable.

Once again, I was different. But by that time, as unhappy or lonely as I was, I was OK. I had always been different and I knew how to do it. I had learned how to act like I was fine; I had learned how to make people laugh with me, and I knew that when I went home I would be safe, no matter what happened.

My earliest memories involve my mother talking and laughing. She talked to friends and strangers. When we lived in Libya, we had African friends, when we lived in Italy we had Italian friends. In Hawaii, we had Hawaiian, Japanese, and Chinese friends. My mother liked people. Military life creates a social/class structure based on rank that has, of course, been influenced by the racial, social, sexual realities of our country and other countries. Our family friends came from every branch of the military, except the Marines. I am not sure what that means. Some of my father's friends were enlisted men; some were even officers. Our home was open to all of our friends. It was not unusual for three to five friends to come to our house for dinner most nights.

My parents were against the Vietnam War and for Civil Rights. We were a family of immigrants. We had been raised to love America and the freedom and democracy it represented, but we were not raised to confuse our country with the politicians we elect to serve it. Whenever my mother's brother, Roscoe, visited, the arguments became louder and less rational. He was the first and the only person I ever heard use racial slurs in our home. My mother made him leave the table and talk to her in the yard. He left (he drove home to Boston—we were living in California) and they didn't speak for quite a while. In our family, we didn't talk about them and us when we talked about civil rights. We used *we* to talk about the family, the five of us. Sometimes, *we* were Democrats, *they* were Republicans. With my mother, *we* were women, *they* were men. We were told and we saw that some people had money, and some people didn't. Money and houses did not make people better than other people. And we were taught that we all needed to help each other when we could. Our family was not a Norman Rockwell painting. My parents were not perfect, but I was told and I was shown that people are people and if we want to dislike someone, it should be because of who they are. And in our family, *who you are* is based on what you do and how you treat people. Sometimes we loved people, like Uncle Roscoe, in spite of who he seemed to be, because he was really nice, deep, deep, deep, inside. This makes us sound too good to be true, but we weren't and we aren't now.



My Buddy; Madison Kennedy, Grade 12

ROXANNE FRENCH



At-Home
Learning

RHONDA CARPER, HOME SCHOOL TEACHER



The Anderson Family



Solomon holding a baby goat who has to be kept in the house for now. The baby goat's mother rejected him.



Joseph also has a challenge coin from Cyberpatriots



Joseph holds a puppy as he works



Rhonda Carper with students Solomon and Joseph

What it Means to be an Anderson

Being an Anderson means a lot. All ten of us have the same parents. Each of our births took place at home. We all grew up without medical intervention. The Andersons have not needed to go to doctors. We have all of the remedies we need from nature. We all enjoy having nine siblings most of the time. We

help each other. If one of my brothers or sisters needs help with schoolwork, there is always someone around who has taken the class in the past.

All of my nine siblings and myself have been educated at home. We focus on core subjects. In addition to our core subjects, we participate in homeschool cooperatives, the Albemarle Christian Teaching Society classes, the Civil Air Patrol and Scouts. Our parents make sure our teaching suits the way each of us learns best. We learn at our own pace, so some go to college at a young age. Some of my brothers and sisters have finished their bachelor's degrees by age 18.

If you walk into my house, you will hear dogs barking, people talking around the table, lots of cooking, dressing up for parties and lots of joke-telling. In our house, you might find baby goats being fed from bottles. We have ariel yoga hammocks hanging in our great hall (a big room where we have our classroom). Even when we're in class, we'll take a break to swing in them. Our great hall is used mostly for school, but also for ballroom dancing. There's always activity in our house. It's loud. My older siblings who have moved out of our house come back often to visit. It seems like we always have company.

My parents believe in God and believe he will provide for us. They believe he has given us everything we need to be healthy and strong. From growing our own food and raising our own animals to preparing them, we eat our own food and sometimes sell eggs. Everyone in the family has a chore around the house and with the animals. We have geo-thermal pipes under our front yard that help to create heat in the house when the sun warms the ground. The Andersons are mostly self-sufficient. Most importantly, we all love each other.

JOSEPH ANDERSON, GRADE 9

Handling Norwegians

A Norwegian's night
Better together
Unusual conditions
Positive thoughts

Seasons of growth
Social focus
Nobody discusses
Winter comfort
Well-being
Learned and survived
Appropriately
Surprising understanding
Polar nights
Incredible hours
Sunset
Northern lights
Learn correlation
Norwegians
January positive
Emotions flourishing.

JOSEPH ANDERSON, GRADE 9

Sense of Family

On my first day at Fork Union Military Academy, my sister gave me a challenge coin. The challenge coin represents family. Even though the coin was given to my sister by the Civil Air Patrol for her aviation achievements, I got it from her as a remembrance of her and my family. The coin helped me through some tough times at Fork Union. Feeling closer to home was important as it kept my sanity. Since the first year was hard, a sense of home and family was comforting. I missed my mom and family. The coin was a way to feel like they were there with me.

The coin gave me a sense of feeling closer to home. While I lived at Fork Union, leave weekends were every three to four weeks and getting bullied made the weeks feel like they would never end. Since it was the same thing day in and day out, the coin was a symbol of what waited at home for me when I got to go home. Thanks to the coin my sister gave me, that first year went by like a breeze.

The coin never left my school bag. Feeling lonely sometimes leaves room for issues to develop. As time went by, I made friends and didn't always feel alone. Some of my friends would ask me why the coin was so important. I was new to the whole "being away from home for long periods of time" thing. Those times I wasn't home felt lonely since I was still new to private school after coming from homeschool.

My classmates thought I was weird and bullied me because I was so small, which made me feel even more alone. The feeling of knowing my family was not nearby to support me was hard. The coin represented family and unity. Having family is important since it gives you a sense of knowing that you have people who care for you. Having friends helps pass time while away from home. Looking back on it now, the experience helped me, but at the same time, it changed me. I don't know if it was for the better or for the worse.

SOLOMON ANDERSON, GRADE II

Compassion

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines "compassion" as "sympathetic consciousness of others." Jesus was a person of compassion. He cared for people who suffer. There are examples throughout The Bible, as well as history, showing compassion for others who were suffering. Mahatma Gandhi was a person of compassion

who sought independence for India from the British. Jesus was compassionate for Lazarus' friends as they mourn over the loss of him.

Having compassion is important because it shows to others you care for them. Compassion demonstrates to others a feeling of care, even if they are strangers. Gandhi showed compassion for the people of India and threw away his luxurious life to go live among the poor. He showed the world what the British were doing to India, which later would become an independent country. The Lord showed compassion to the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:16 for the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah. Through Christ, the widow survived the famine with just this oil and a pot of flour. Jesus made her supply infinite.

Compassion is important because it allows us to show others that we are willing to lay down with them and cry with them. People care for others because we feel remorse for their loss. Jesus showed compassion to the people when he healed them. For example, he healed the people with leprosy and he brought a woman back to life. We as humans comfort each other in tough times. It's our natural instinct to help one another in dire times.

SOLOMON ANDERSON, GRADE II

The Unpredictable Nature of Flowers

Several flowering
Particularly troubled season
Sources Larvae
Early-season predators
Scientists hovering
Requires no nectar
Plants likely stay
Summer attracts predators
Greek Alyssum blooms
Other flowers
Draw attention
Gardens flower
Kale, tomatoes numerous
Birds plot
Sunflowers in peril.

JOSEPH ANDERSON, GRADE 9

Constant Burn

The constant
Itch
Of
Addiction
Creeps
Over us
Like cold wind
Investigating
Effective

Ways
For supplementing
Nafurane
Widely used opioid imposter
Gives
Dose sparing
Effect
Anti-addictive
Equivalent pain relief
From
Constant
Itch
Of
Addiction.

SOLOMON ANDERSON, GRADE II

On the Brink

United States
Teetering on the edge
Socialism
Pattern of events
Similar to
Cuba
From being
Prosperous
Capitalist country
Into socialism
According to former
Cuban Political
Prisoner

SOLOMON ANDERSON, GRADE II

Simple Gifts

From the moment God flung the universe into being and populated it with man, man's desire to seek to understand has been a source of controversy. In my own journey to seek meaning out of this world after my retirement, I took on the responsibility of teaching two young men a course in the humanities. As the child of a teacher and a teacher by vocation myself, I approached this adventure with an open mind and a hope that I might impact the lives of my charges in a positive way. As it turns out, I was as much a student as those I sought to teach.

Maintaining a tradition of being formally educated at home, Joseph and Solomon approached our first meetings ready to learn with notebooks, writing utensils and laptops at the ready. They were as interested to know about me as I was to learn about them. It took little time to realize both were smart, emotionally-present and instinctive. Just like any boys their ages, their minds would wander and they fell victim to the need to move. Managing this impulsivity was my first reminder that we were free to deviate from the model of compliance that was so much a part of public education. This is where my education began.

Having spent a half century of my life advocating for ultra-structure in school and a strict adherence to discipline, I was faced with halting our studies to corral goats playing follow the leader across the road and into the neighbor's yard. As we read tomes on American history and observed the cautionary tales in American literature, times arose when animals and toddlers must be saved from their own peril. "The Devil and Tom Walker" devolved into "The Cell Phone and My Sanity." These were our sessions. In each meeting, as the boys learned how to assert themselves through writing and oratory, I learned how completely limiting my experience in public education had been. While hugely valuable in games of trivia, neither Mr. Rochester nor Jane Eyre taught me to navigate a piglet's failure to thrive, the developmental delays of a baby goat or even the growing pains of a young toddler. Who knew a trampoline could be converted into a condominium for wayward chickens? None of this was covered in Foundations of Education 101 or my half-century in existence.

For years in public education, bureaucrats pushed "authentic" evaluation and assessment in an attempt to apply principles of the marketplace into our schools. Defying logic and fundamentally-flawed at its inception, this approach naturally resulted in the assumption that every student approached learning with a sameness of early childhood experience, intellect and skill. The need to assign a student's performance a "value" increased. One of the most impactful lessons in this homeschooling experience has been the flexibility to quantify work production "authentically" and meaningfully in a manner that encourages rather than defeats. No assumption exists between "what is" and "what ought to be." Both Joseph and Solomon compete against their own best efforts, not the median score on some arbitrary scale. They say education begins at home. Much is to be said for education that remains at home.

Armed with an understanding of the natural world and their part in it, Solomon and Joseph experience the world through the lens of Scripture. Their learning process is no different. Conditioned to believe first that man can solve every problem through reason and good common sense, through their answers to questions meant to expand thinking, they remind me the ultimate power lay in God's hands. Make no mistake . . . a belief in education and hard work exist. Self-reliance is the standard, but above the din of everyday life, the Anderson boys will remind one that we are all a part of a perfectly wonderful world full of abundance. God has provided everything we need and expects us to be principled stewards and watchmen.

In our discussions about the great works of literature, My Antonia's "great dome of Heaven" in Nebraska's night sky takes on dimension never considered in my conventional classroom. One just has to look at the newspaper to confirm Shakespeare's assertion that all the world is a stage, indeed. We've visited with Scout and Jem. It was decided Aunt Alexandra wasn't a pain in the backside after all. After much discussion, we felt the mood at the House of Usher might improve if Chip and Joanna took on the fixer upper. Holden Caulfield might not be so lonely if he had nine brothers and sisters. He might not wonder about the ducks at the pond if he had a house goat. Such are the conversations in the Anderson homeschooling hacienda. If I had to assign a grade to this project, I would give it an A with room to grow.

RHONDA CARPER, TEACHER



Alumni :
The Legacy of
The Origin Project

ALUMNI: THE LEGACY OF THE ORIGIN PROJECT

Eight years ago, The Origin Project guided forty ninth-grade pioneers in Big Stone Gap to interview their mamaws and papaws, parents, and aunts and uncles in order to harvest the unique tales of their families and chronicle and preserve the memories of growing up surrounded by the beauty and heritage of Appalachia. Although we had big dreams, we never imagined what would evolve.

Through the years many students have felt awkward initiating those interviews and doubted their own abilities to write. More often than not, they later thanked us because they learned things they never knew about events, semi-legends, and family relationships. The students have gained understanding of, and cemented bonds with loved ones they might otherwise have taken for granted; and they have learned about themselves.

The courage, creativity and pathos evinced in thousands of their stories comprise an inspiring history and a magical eclectic tapestry. We are in awe of our young writers. They have evolved in their abilities to express themselves in writing, art, and music. We have been delighted to witness their personal growth and the blossoming of their self-esteem.

When students graduate to new schools and opportunities, we are always sad to say goodbye. We are thrilled when they keep in touch and regale us with stories of their new lives. These artists are a treasure to their families, their communities, and to The Origin Project. We are proud of each and every one of them, and wish them safe life journeys and hope they exceed their wildest dreams.

NANCY BOLMEIER FISHER
CO-FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
THE ORIGIN PROJECT

ALUMNI: THE LEGACY OF THE ORIGIN PROJECT FROM ELEMENTARY TO HIGH SCHOOL

Morgan Graham's Introductory Speech
Barter Theatre TOP Event, October 11, 2016

Hello, my name is Morgan Graham. I am a 4th grade student of Flatwoods Elementary. My journal that I received from Adriana and Nancy for The Origin Project is very special to me. It is unique because of the soft texture and the neat smell. I look forward to writing in this journal. Now, I would like to help introduce Margot Lee Shetterly. She is a native of Virginia. She wrote about three African-American women who worked for NASA and America's victory over the Soviet Union in the space race.

MORGAN GRAHAM
PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED IN 2017 IN TOP BOOK THREE
AS A 4TH GRADER AT FLATWOODS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Lucille Graham My Amazing Grandmother

Lucille Graham (my great-grandmother) was born on March 20, 1923. I decided to interview her because she's an older woman, loves me very much, and knows a lot of family history. She is very smart, loving, kind, generous, and an awesome cook. I love my great-grandmother and thank her very much for doing this for me!

Great-grandmother (Lucille Graham) had four brothers and four sisters, so there were nine in all. She went to Rose Hill School for eleven years and Thomas Walker one year. She was in the first graduating class at Thomas Walker. Her favorite subjects were reading and history. She rode the bus and walked to school.

She had a dog named Rex. Rex was very smart, active, and trained. Her favorite games were baseball, softball, and “Ante Over” (you throw a ball over a house and the people on the other side catch it or they’re out)

Lucille was married to Bob Graham who died in April, 2006. They met at a school ballgame. They had two children named David and Patricia. She said that they were good children and well mannered. She worked in Maryland making raincoats in World War II and did some sub teaching. Her favorite game is Rook.

This is Great-grandmother’s Chocolate Pie recipe. She loves to cook and makes everything awesome. This is the recipe which everyone loves!

Lucille’s Chocolate Pie

1 cup sugar

2 tablespoons cocoa

3 tablespoons flour or cornstarch

2 cups milk

2 large eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla

2 tablespoons butter

Add flour to sugar and mix well. Add cocoa. Add milk to mixture. Stir well.

Add 2 beaten egg yolks and 1 teaspoon vanilla. Mix well with flour, sugar, and ¼ teaspoon salt.

Cook until thickened. Add to baked pie crust.

Beat egg whites until stiff. Add ¼ teaspoon salt, 2 tablespoons sugar, and ½ teaspoon vanilla. Mix well. Bake until brown.

My great-grandmother, Lucille Graham once was stuck on a train bridge while the train was coming. When I interviewed her for The Origin Project, she said, “ I was scared, but the Lord saved me, Uncle Gene, and Aunt Sue!” She also said, “The bridge shook like crazy!!!!!!!!!!”



Morgan Graham wearing his papaw’s coat

One thing I remember my great-grandmother telling me about was making raincoats in Maryland for the soldiers in World War II. When I interviewed her she said, “ We made many raincoats for the soldiers in World War II.” I loved interviewing my great grandma because I learned things I didn’t know about her!!!!!!

Lucille also told me to behave, do good in school, become a nice young man, and always stay faithful to God. Thank you very much for doing this for me. Mamaw, I love you very much!!!!!!

MORGAN GRAHAM

PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED IN 2017 IN TOP BOOK THREE
AS A 4TH GRADER AT FLATWOODS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

My Dad and Papaw, a Perfect Match

In my interview about childhood memories, I interviewed my dad, Robert Graham. His favorite memories were hauling cattle with Papaw Bob, his papaw, and my great-papaw. Here are a few stories he told me.

One time they were hauling this old bull. Now this bull was mean, real mean, papaw had to keep speeding up and slamming the brakes to keep the bull in the truck. The method worked until they got in a long line at the cattle market. Then the bull went over the top of the truck. So my dad, papaw, and a few other fellas worked him up in the market and sold him.

There was this old cow they said nobody could haul that wouldn’t go in the truck. So, they called papaw and dad and asked them to come help them load the cow. Turns out this cow was crazy, real crazy! As they worked the cow through the barn it kicked the gate down on Papaw Bob! Then the bull fell on the gate! With papaw under the gate, they loaded the cow and got the gate of Papaw Bob. Of course papaw survived.

MORGAN GRAHAM

PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED IN 2018 IN TOP BOOK FOUR
AS A 5TH GRADER AT FLATWOODS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



Morgan Graham with his grandpa

A New Love Blooms in Old Age

We were best friends. We did everything together. From mowing, to flea marketing, to stirring up trouble, that’s what we did. He was my grandpa. Although I loved him dearly, there were times when we couldn’t hang out. I had school and ball and other things going on. He understood, and he wanted me to do everything that I could, but he got lonely at times. He had a habit of overthinking things, sometimes things he had no control of. He needed someone, or something to keep him company. I tried convincing him into getting a dog, but he wouldn’t go for it. He never was much of an animal person.

I went up to his house one evening, and we mowed his yard. I did the weedeeting and tended to a few more little things that needed done. Later when we were sitting on his porch, he started talking. Talking about a lady he had met near his

age. He talked about how one of his buddies had hooked him up, and the upcoming Friday, well, he had a date. I was happy and a bit nervous at the same time so to speak. I had met the lady before, and I knew her as nothing but a sweet, kind and loving person. I knew that both had been married before, and that they had stayed with their spouses until the end.

I swung by my grandpa's house the day of the date, after school. I helped him pick out an outfit, helped him shine his boots, and we got him spiffed up. He was off for a night on the town.

That day was three years ago. They are very close and do everything together. She is part of our family, no doubt about it. They love to go flea marketing, play cards, and garden with each other. My grandpa and I get closer as the days go by, but I've gotten busier in my teenage years. I believe that they were the best thing to ever happen to each other, especially in their older years. As he always told me, good things come to those who wait.

MORGAN GRAHAM, GRADE 8

CURRENT STUDENT, LEE HIGH SCHOOL

Morgan Graham

Morgan Graham is the epitome of an upstanding young man. I have known Morgan all of his life and I grew up knowing his parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. It was clear at an early age that Morgan's family was a very important part of his life.

I had the privilege of working with Morgan on his writing for previous Origin Project books when he was in the fourth and fifth grades at Flatwoods. It was obvious at that time that this young man had a great deal of talent. Being a part of The Origin Project for so many years has been beneficial to him. His writing captures the true character of those he writes about, and more importantly, it reveals his love for and fond memories of those family members. Morgan is able to take stories told to him and incorporate them into a keepsake expressed in a way only Morgan can. Morgan has made tremendous progress as a writer and I look forward to reading more of his work in the future.

SHEILA SHULER, JONESVILLE MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER

ALUMNI: THE LEGACY OF THE ORIGIN PROJECT FROM VIRGINIA HIGH SCHOOL

Reflections on Statues

The play *Statues* came across my desk as part of our playwrighting assignment in the fall of 2017. Instantly, I was captivated by Jamie's characterization of two Civil War soldiers meeting in a rural section of Virginia, one a Confederate trying to get back to his family, the other a Union soldier protecting his troops. Their conversation begins with threats and rehearsed phrases. However, as the plot deepens, they begin to realize how similar they both are. They were ultimately crippled by the assumptions about strangers who are destined as their "enemy," strangers who could possibly be friends or associates in other circumstances. *Statues* is an intimate examination of how, despite the war raging around us, we can find common ground and foster a sincere appreciation for another individual, no matter the color of his uniform.

Part of the power of *Statues* is its prophetic relevance. During discussions about play topics, Jamie mentioned the roots of racism, which led to chatting about the purposes of the Civil War. It is easy for us to look down the corridors of time and assume that our ancestors had clear and unwavering motivations concerning their loyalties. However, our southern ancestors were complicated beings (much like us, their descendants). We cannot assert that geography always determined these allegiances, and in considering these aspects, Jamie

wrote *Statues*. Jamie demonstrates a keen comprehension of the complexity of the issue soberly and adroitly. *Statues* is a response to the slow removal of Confederate statues that autumn, but it deals much more with examining the misunderstandings that have ushered us to this moment in history, a moment in which we continue to wrestle with these ancient struggles.

Looking back now, after the tragedy of George Floyd while the Black Lives Matter movement endures, *Statues* continues to speak to us about the power of reconciliation. If we come without our armies, if we come with a posture of understanding, empathy, and compassion, we can—one by one—dismantle the ideologies that have plagued our country for centuries. *Statues* illustrates the power of earnest conversation in tearing down suppositions which have drawn strict boundaries around us, oftentimes without our permission or consent. The courage to have these conversations, and inspire the necessary changes, is a true achievement which should be recognized, celebrated, and cherished for generations to come.

CRYSTAL HURD, ED.D., VIRGINIA HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER

The Origin Project

Statues wasn't what I originally planned to write, but it was the play that appeared after events that took place my senior year of high school. I wanted to tell the story of a soldier and his daughter. Instead, I wrote the tale of two soldiers, in opposing goals, coming together in a brief exchange neither planned on.

Since writing *Statues*, I have learned a lot, grown, and changed in ways I could never imagine. I still believe in the roots of the play I wrote. There are stories that we must not forget. The smaller ones, overshadowed by glories or horrors of bigger themes and men, must be recognized for their place in the grey matter of opposition. Not everything is as it seems and all sides must be examined, lest we miss some important aspect that leads to history repeating itself. Once we begin to simplify matters into black and white, or leave out intricacies to conflicts we are faced with, the ultimate solution we find will never be enough to fix the problem entirely. A solution comes when we face everything, no matter how much it hurts to acknowledge and accept as a part of what made us what we are today.



Jamie Kemple

The Origin Project made this play possible. It gave the story a voice and opened a writing path for me. I had always dabbled in storytelling, but I never thought I was capable enough to excel at it until Barter Theatre's Young Playwrights Festival and *The Origin Project*. Since then, I have decided to pursue a writing career and made it a life goal, giving me a trail to follow that I didn't have one before. This project is very important in not only showing young writers they do have a voice, but also preserving those stories of Appalachia that have shaped them. The people there were raised on stories passed down for generations. They live in our blood. The importance of keeping this path open for young Appalachian writers and tales cannot be expressed enough. I thank everyone involved with *The Origin Project*, Barter Theatre's Young Playwrights Festival, and of course my teacher, Dr. Crystal Hurd, for providing this amazing opportunity to me and so many others throughout the years.

JAMIE KEMPLE, VIRGINIA HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNA



Jamie Kemple

Jamie Kemple's Biography

Jamie Kemple is the author of *Statues* and the first place winner of Barter Theatre's Young Playwright's Festival for the 2017–2018 year. Since then, she has been continuing on her writing path by going to college for English and penning several novels. Currently, she is taking a break before the fall semester to continue her studies and edit her works. Other than that, she enjoys spending her time snapping photos of sunrises after sleepless nights and riding horses whenever she's able. She hopes to graduate with a Bachelor's from University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in 2022 and begin the querying process for her hopeful adult dark fantasy debut soon.

Thunderheads

Take your place among the burning fields
 Here where winter wind battled summer into shambles
 Extremes like tides flickering over bloodstained earth

Unity through off balance, wire walkers take their shaking time
 No more cries, little one, our path goes silently before us
 In the ground we warred over, we sleep at long last
 The guardians stay silent as their bullets tear free, hush now
 Enduring has always been a part of us, for change does not come cheap
 Drawn out, that wheel is, slow and steady but never silver quick

Sing together with voices raised high, we are one
 Torn apart house out on a storming sea
 Afloat but not living, joints strained in opposing force
 There are scars here, too many to count and gone unseen by downcast eyes

Everyone is free until change comes bearing down on the horizon
Sing it with me now, our heat strung song of summer drought eating up our tide

On this hill, we stake our claim and will not surrender though
Fires eat up our crops and there is no peace

A rebel born heart does not know how to keep going when the war is won (after all,
whose laws are meant to be challenged now?)
Maybe, if the dawn carried gold instead of red we would be able to breathe
Enough to tell each other what wounds we have suffered without blindfolding gazes
Rebellion was our birth and now it hangs heavy on weary bones
Injustices on a platform held by bound shoulders, scales swaying unsteadily this way and that
Can you see it, coming through? Is that a dawn sky or a spotlight meant to freeze you?
Another storm, actually. Did you not notice the iron grey sky? Perhaps the rain will
finally wash it all clean

JAMIE KEMPLE, VIRGINIA HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNA

Dead Flowers

It's getting dark now. That's how I tell time since they knocked on our door in their pristine uniforms and let me know you were coming home early. I couldn't hear what they said exactly, because the roar of disbelief and the crack of my knees hitting the floor drowned them out. I'm alone now. I know that means time has passed as well, because there were so many people here before. So many flowers.

That's what I'm grieving over now, you see. Flowers. I couldn't do it at your funeral. I was too busy wondering what to tell people I was to you. I didn't want them to take your honors, you see, knowing you had a wife, but they stuck by the protocol. They didn't ask, I didn't tell. But that's why I didn't say the things I wanted to, or get up on the podium to fail at relating the best parts about you. That's why I'm crying now over the mess I made.

There were so many flowers, you see, cause that's all people think to get. They were everywhere and dying, so I tried to sort through them. In reality I was just pushing the vases around the counter and rearranging them because my mind couldn't tell me which to toss, or what to do, or how long they'd been there. I pushed all the vases around and found yours. I wasn't expecting that, I guess, but who expects these kinds of things anyway? I read the card, then, and that's what started it.

Happy Valentine's, love. I'm coming home to you soon. Xx

I don't know what I felt, but it was something that tasted like blood and salt. I didn't have control of my body like I didn't have control of my mind and soon I was trailing through the house, ripping apart flowers, and suddenly they were scattered on our bed. My bed, now, I guess.

You see, that's what's hard about this. Our home is now my house. Our things are now my things, and I'm ruining them with cigarette smoke and dirt and dying flowers. The bedside table that you liked to be kept neat is now scattered with pills to help me sleep and to help the pain that won't leave, along with the alcohol I take them with and the cigarettes I picked up because you left a pack here before you deployed. You smoked outside, but there are times when I can't leave our unmade bed, so I smoke them there and pretend it's a substitute for a meal. I can't even keep the damn house clean like you insisted.

I will make an excuse for the shirt cast over your favorite brown leather chair. You see, it's the only way I can get myself to move. I keep that shirt away from the cigarette smoke so that it still smells like you whenever I pick it up. See? You still make me a better person. With your shirt there, I have to move to gain some sense that you existed here, with me. Even if it makes me wonder why you aren't here now, it makes me move and shakes off that feeling of being as dead as you are.

But now, I can't say that I feel alive. I'm crying because I ripped your flowers apart and scattered them through the remnants of our life together. I'm crying in the nightdress I've been wearing since I came home from your funeral, sitting in my bed that I haven't made since they came to my door, and I feel like the house is so empty now. I'm crying and hoping my tears will water the remains of the brittle red flowers, somehow make them grow and thrive again in my palm, just like how I hope you'll somehow walk through the door and yell at me about the mess. But I know that isn't going to happen, just like I know I'm only holding dead flowers. They've been dead since they were cut from the root and placed in a foreign vase, set on inevitable track to destruction, and some part of me wonders if you were like that too.

JAMIE KEMPLE, VIRGINIA HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNA

For Those Held by Mountains

The wire has snapped
The lights flicker in and out like bright spots of hope
too fleeting to hold

I stand on sighing bones
And drift to the windowsill two stories over the ground
And I take the tape with me

The lights stay
If I hold the wires together with my stained fingers
But I cannot hold them forever

So I tear the tape
And force the lights to stay on, though they may protest
And I do not plan a burial

I know
That tape will not fix everything, or keep it living for long
You taught me that

When I kneeled
At the mountain's broken and bleeding base
That spilled over my hands

And did not
Take its communion, or wonder where
You had gone

The rain
Could not wash away the stain of everything
You used to be

So I bent
On broken knee, with a hollowed body, and
Wire-snapped mind

I washed
The mountain's wounds, and what you left behind
With sorrow

And I asked
That those sentinel mountains, stronger than I,
Hold you well

In the peace
That you so desperately
Sought out

JAMIE KEMPLE, VIRGINIA HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNA

ALUMNI: THE LEGACY OF THE ORIGIN PROJECT
FROM WOODBRIDGE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

*Woodbridge Senior High School Alumni
Alumni Reflection*

Most of the writers published in this Woodbridge Senior High School alumni group represent the class of 2019. Most were participants in the Center for the Fine and Performing Arts Creative Writing Program for three or four years and/or members of the *Eddas* Literary/Art Magazine Staff. Jessica Sebenaler graduated in 2020, but she was also an invaluable member of *Eddas*. Six of our students collaborated on a submission for the Virginia High School League, and they ended their high school career winning the Creative Writing State Championship. Salima Driss and Yareli Sosa entered poetry, Tyler Econa and Leah Ican entered short stories, and Asra Shuaib and Anthony Marovelli entered essays. Individually, Yareli won first place in poetry, and Anthony won honorable mention in short story. Tyler earned a National Silver Medal and many others earned Gold and Silver Keys in the Scholastic Writing Awards. Tyler and coauthors Leah and Candace were selected by the Kennedy Center to have their plays performed as part of the VSA Playwright Discovery Program at the end of their senior year. It was a wonderful experience to see the plays and the authors' reactions to their work performed by professionals. Anthony and Yareli were also recipients of a scholarship sponsored by The Prince William Poet Laureate Circle and the Zan Foundation (in honor of Alexandra Delaine "Zan" Hailey). They all made me proud and made my last year of full-time teaching a wonderful experience. No matter what they are studying now, these students are on their way to making their mark in the broader world, and I know their writing experiences will drive their success.

CATHY HAILEY, ENGLISH & CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER,
RETIRED FROM WSHS, 2019

1 + 1

I am the sum of my parts,
carrying the weight
of a thousand dreams never realized
and decades of silence heavy in the air

I am the sum of my parts,
a loving mother of three

in a loose green hospital gown
who saw her newest joy
drift into lifelessness

I am the sum of my parts,
a frazzled brown woman
in a stout blue home,
who never realized
that she was broken

I am the sum of my parts,
from the blue, gentle glow of Tunisian streets
to the green, vibrant grass in the Virginian fields

I am the sum of my parts,
an arched back,
cutting into fresh wood
in the quiet Southern dawn

I am the sum of my parts,
a wavering olive hand
that blew a whistle sharply, into the oblivion
to feel something resembling power

I am the sum of my parts,
two frail yet fierce women
who managed homes
without the gratitude of their families

I am the sum of my parts,
two gentle giants,
centerpieces of their communities

I am the sum of my parts,
quietly hoping to fulfill
the dreams of these women,
to silence the fears of these men

SALIMA DRISS, WSHS ALUMNA

Salima Driss' Biography

Salima Driss is a sophomore at Hollins University studying history on the pre-law track and is interested in civil rights/human rights law. She is involved with local activism in Prince William County as a PWC Mutual Aid Youth Activist. Recently she spoke on the podcast, Prince William Colors, in opposition to a new juvenile detention center, and she attributes her confidence in public speaking to her regular reading of creative writing at coffee houses sponsored by our literary magazine, *Eddas*, and to her annual experiences with Poetry Out Loud. Salima is currently participating in an internship with

the National Council on US Arab Relations, which she tells me “is very writing-heavy and came out of [her] involvement in Model UN/Model Arab League conferences.” She credits The Origin Project and the Center for the Fine and Performing Arts Creative Writing Program for encouraging her to explore her complex identity as a Tunisian American, inspiring her involvement in US Arab relations, and sparking her interest in learning Arabic in the future. Although Salima’s major is humanities, not creative writing, she continues to write poetry to deal with her emotions during the pandemic and welcomed the opportunity to submit a new poem for publication. Hollins offers many opportunities to work with accomplished professional writers, and in Salima’s first year, she raved about meeting US Poet Laureate Joy Harjo, hearing her perform and discuss her poetry, and acquiring a signed copy of *Crazy Brave*.

Staggering down S. Broad

The Construction Workers have Unionized across the street from the dorms. now good for them it’s time We did something with all our godforsaken theory instead of gawking at those exo- sphere Billionaires gnashing teeth on National Television, masses so tired and guilty we absorb the rain droplets falling in the City bigger than anything god could’ve made, it collects from the tops of the thermosphere buildings where the Businessmen cry and the grey-dirt doves land *splat* on heads of mesosphere kids with metal braces blue hair and almond-milk coffee trekking to class, desperate to avoid the hungry eyes toothless mouths twitching sighing sitting outside the troposphere church that shares a wall with the Academic kennel whose High Rise floors host Seminars Lectures and faculty conspiracies those quiet lipstick whitened grimaces, what should we do with these broken elevators and leaky pipes isn’t it funny we’re *here* now maybe we should have a Fundraiser and cross-contaminate and shiny-smiling with our palms open tongues salivating and right into their pockets slip those fractals of light broken across our horizon, to each their own if you work and wish hard enough they’ll come collect you. I also avoid the Eyes after grocery ‘shopping’ though sometimes we redistribute the dining hall; I wonder what it’s like to be buried in the crust of the earth maybe study in the country where everything is the same but spread out around vast Nothingness cows and stars and smogless maybe I’d be able to breathe better

TYLER ECONA, WSHS ALUMNX

homecoming (from an unpublished collection of sapphic poetry)

a pallid, glacial sleep, you think. all the roads closed for snow with the street signs, if any,
buried in depths indefinite

—no, not here,
too deep to leave a footprint here. too dark you’ll just be swallowed whole.

full coverage. what a thought
nothing left of that tired disguise, my skin left sparkling, unburdened. . .
no more onlookers. no more shame.

if you do intend to be swallowed, come this way.
I know you hate the cold. don’t lie. why not a different darkness, then? obscurity, a blur
of smoke, perhaps? you know,
this is the only city with no strangers— every chimney is our own.

*what a crowd, the thunder. . .
but what of sleep?
winter is calm. I'm so tired
the barren streets were clear, at least*

well, the door is open, I've taken your coat, shake your boots out on the mat.
you are no guest here, my love.
we know your name,

it's okay, stay awhile.

let the ice melt from your glittery lashes, warm your face by the fire.

TYLER ECONA, WSHS ALUMNX

Tyler Econa's Biography

Tyler Econa is a nonbinary poet, artist, playwright, and current sophomore majoring in Screenwriting at The University of the Arts in Philadelphia. Much of their work centers around themes of disability, race, queer love & community. After the publication of *The Origin Project, Book IV*, we learned that Tyler's short story, "The Orchestra" earned first place in the Ann Arbor District Library's "It's All Write" contest; their poem, "the grapefruit" was published in *Polyphony Lit*, and their prose piece "Mosaic" was published in *The Apprentice Writer*. Since graduating, their passion for intersectionality and social justice drives them to work towards greater progressive change with their position as a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Fellow at UArts, where they review policies and communications regarding harassment and discrimination to ensure consistency, justice, and accessibility. Tyler has also been awarded the Virginia Writer's Club Scholarship based on their essay titled "Exemplary, Not Inspiring" on the topic of disability in the arts, and won second place finalist in the Volkswagen's "The Future of Mobility" Creative Writing Competition. Some of their newest publications include a series of poems in *Queerbook*, an anthology by Giovanni's Room in Philadelphia, as well as UArts' own literary magazine, *The Underground Pool*. Tyler continues to expand their craft in all forms; some of their favorite classes include TV story analysis, advanced poetry workshop, playwriting, and short story form. Most recently, they have taken an interest in gender and sexuality studies, and have begun a (recreational) thesis on the state of lesbian gender theory in the present-day community.

January's Pumpkins

I have small pumpkins
on my desk
adopted late October.
Over time their colors
have grown dark,
stained yellow and green.

They still hold their place
on my desk
next to ceramic elephants,
small seashells,
and deceased flowers.

Miscellaneous trinkets
I have no use for
yet can't discard.

Their departure
is long overdue,
well needed,
or maybe their spot
on my wooden desk
is displaced
in late January.

Their colors,
not blending
with the cold look of winter,
disordered
next to barren trees
and empty air.

Maybe in my fantasy,
they dwell perfectly on this surface,
never needing to move,
stagnant in this frigid air,

the only use
they serve,
being a haunt of my past,
lingering moments,
tormented innocence,
the loss of my youth
I am unable to let go of.

They may rot,
grow moist with fungus,
become discolored,
but even then,
I can't muster
the energy
to throw them out.

So they'll sit,
still on my desktop,
no matter what month it is
no matter how long it takes
until their use
dissipates.

NATALYA GREEN, WSHS ALUMNA

Natalya Green's Biography

Natalya Green began college at Northern Virginia Community College, where she explored a variety of courses and majors until settling on English with the goal of earning a teaching licence (PreK-6). Two influential courses that inspired and fueled her creatively included Analyzing Children's Literature and Film Appreciation. Although she momentarily lost her writing, she recently began to reshape her approach to the writing process and the way she treats writing. She also discovered an interest in reading and analyzing literature. Since she has maintained a 3.8 grade point average, the Guaranteed Admission Agreement will allow her to transfer to George Mason University to complete her Bachelor of Arts in English and Master of Arts in Teaching over the next three years. She plans to participate in an internship to give her experience working with children. Her creative goals include putting together, and possibly publishing, a book of her poetry and art and writing a fiction/fantasy book.

Baruch atah

I remember
The first time I heard you pray
My fingers skimmed the Hebrew letters
Followed their harsh curves and
Danced over their dotted vowels
The section moved to English and
Your voice combined with the congregation's
Joining a chorus of Jews in worship

Adonai Eloheinu

I remember
You smelling the Havdalah spices
Cinnamon, cardamom, cloves
Passed around a small circle
As six candles intertwined into one
Glowed with the fading light of the Sabbath sun

Melech

I remember
You taking us to
Friday night services,
Saturday morning worship,
Sunday school classes,
And Tuesday Hebrew sessions

Haolam

I remember
you not being allowed to pass me the Torah on my Bat Mitzvah
because you were not Jewish

Shehecheyanu

I remember
Yom Kippur and
Rosh Hashanah and
Chanukah and
Passover

spent in prayer with you
V'kiy'manu
I remember
Driving to services
And singing with my sister
Along to the radio
Which you then shut off
Because it was Shabbat
V'higiyanu
I remember chanting a prayer
And hearing you chant it beside me
The words foreign to your tongue
Yet ingrained in your blood
Like how my mother's blood
Infused her Jewish lineage into my veins
It somehow transfused into yours
Lazman hazeh
I remember the proud look on your face
As you draped the tallit over my back
And kissed me on the forehead
I was guided into Jewish adulthood
With my mother's arm hung over my left shoulder
And your arm hung over my right

LEAH ICAN, WSHS ALUMNA

Leah Ican's Biography

Leah Ican is in her last semester at Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) and will transfer to a four-year college to pursue a major in Computer Science and a minor in Cognitive Science or Linguistics. She is on the Presidential Scholars List and is applying to a variety of schools, including Virginia Tech, The College of William and Mary, Cornell University and George Mason University. At NVCC, she is President of the Student Government Association (SGA), Treasurer of the 3D Printing and Design Club, Secretary of the Coding Club, and a member of the Forensics (speech and debate) Team. She is grateful for the opportunities to explore her major while being at NVCC and highly recommends it for anyone who is unsure of what they would like to do in college. Leah is an exceptional visual artist, and she continues to create art. Currently she runs a henna business and an Etsy shop where she sells wood burnings.

Behind the Scenes (Of Me)

When I was young I spent a lot of time glued to the television, and I know how that sounds. It sounds like I was one of those children that spent his days with his eyes plastered to a screen, ignoring physical activity, reading, playing, or anything that is genuinely productive. However, it was quite the opposite. I read. I played. I ran outside with my imaginary friends. I did it all. My face being stuck to the television only fueled passion and a desire to see, experience, and reflect what I saw.

One day my small self did something out of the ordinary. I reached up onto our shelf of DVDs and weathered VHS tapes, and brought down our big silver box set of the Star Wars films. This time, though, I didn't pry out *A New Hope* or *The Empire Strikes Back*. I'd seen them too many times. This time I took out the special

features. It didn't have the grand, explosive covers of the other DVDs in the set. It was plain, with nothing but real photographs and the skull-like face of Darth Vader. Yet somehow it still intrigued me and drew me in.

This one DVD shaped the rest of my life. It gave me my goals, my ambitions, and illuminated my future path. That may sound insane, but it's the truth.

For one, it showed me there were people making the media I was absorbing. That story I loved and knew by heart? Someone wrote that. Those ships I watched fly around the screen and explode? Someone made those (and in turn someone blew them up). Those swift camera movements across the Death Star's canyon? Someone had to make those movements, hold that camera.

This was the first time I realized that I could be one of those people who creates. I could make those camera movements. I could make those ships. Most importantly, I could write those stories. And that passion for creation has never left since. I started making books of copy paper and crayon even before I knew the alphabet. This drive developed, my stories growing with it. I learned to type, taking that next step, and wrote constantly. Eventually I auditioned and got accepted into the Creative Writing specialty program at my high school. Now I'm a full fledged writer, with an award winning piece of flash fiction, and publication in my school's literary magazine. My drive all came from that one DVD.

It also built my interest in analysis and study, specifically in English. The DVD discussed the concept of the Hero's Journey, and how Star Wars and many others films and books follow it. It showed me stories could have a deeper meaning beyond what was being presented. Now I'm an avid and active participant in my English class. I love to tear apart stories in search of what makes them up, and to discuss interpretations of what they might mean. Beyond that, now I realize I want to teach English (alongside continuing my passion for writing and creation). This was further pushed by my job as a kindergarten student aide over the summer. I'm now halfway through studying English and education in college. I want to give back to the world in the same way others have given to me, and teach these same topics that I love.

Putting that singular DVD into my television was the catalyst for my becoming the person I am now. I would be a very different and less passionate Anthony had I not done so. Now my life has a goal. There's a place I want to reach before I die—all because I didn't want to watch *A New Hope* again and decided to put the bonus features in instead.

ANTHONY MAROVELLI, WSHS ALUMNUS

Anthony Marovelli's Biography

Anthony Marovelli is a sophomore studying English and Education at Christopher Newport University. At CNU he took a Tolkien course that was wildly beneficial and led to his writing a prequel, "The Early Riser," which Anthony describes as a short story in which "a dwarf awakes in Middle Earth early, before the elves have arrived and the world has been finished." He also enjoyed both a child development course and a Harry Potter course that has allowed him to take a more critical eye to the series. In his spare time, he continues work on a comic he began when he was an infant and a fantasy novel he has been developing recently. Anthony also took a trip to the west coast and enjoyed seeing the Pacific Ocean for the first time.

Ten Steps: An Origin Theory

Complacency.
Figuratively speaking, I've lost my eyesight.
Climbing mountains on a steep hill,
No shoes and no identity.

Forgetfulness.
I've forgotten capabilities,
Underestimated this mysterious world;
Thus, forcing navigation on an unpaved road.

Wandering.
I've asked myself countless times again,
Who am I?
The wanderer is far from discovery.

Pondering.
If I'm connected by blood,
My past history lives through me.
Each breath, a testament to my heritage.

Interrelations.
The mind is linked to the body,
As my body is linked to DNA.
My thoughts are one with my ancestors.

Discovery.
I've finally put on my shoes.
With a bloodline of German, English, Lebanese, Scottish, Irish, Swedish, and Italian
descent; I have found my identity, and the hill is no longer steep.

Listening.
A mind consumed with fulfillment
Breathes heavily in gratitude.
Her journey of life is no longer questioned.

Perseverance.
A glimpse of my lineal past now understood,
It's up to me to carry out our history.
Honor in my origin exists in my name.

Praying.
I am a human being deserving of dignity.
And with my own beautiful race and ethnicity, Never shall they separate my dignity.

Acceptance.
It's an unending adventure with identity.
Moments of uncertainty falter at your being
Because origin and identity is a family tree.

JESSICA SEBENALER, WSHS ALUMNA

Jessica Sebenaler's Biography

Jessica Sebenaler took a Gap Year due to the pandemic after graduating in 2020. She will attend Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) in the fall. Nevertheless, she had a very busy year caring for her grandparents including taking them to appointments. She was integral to redecorating her family home and repainting the downstairs. She traveled to Shenandoah National Park to hike on a monthly basis. In December, she enriched her life by adding a puppy named Hayes to the family, and she has been training him. During this stressful year with the pandemic, Jessica has been writing in a journal, as she says, to reflect on her struggles and, as she says, "to help [her] remember that this devastating journey has helped [her] become mentally stronger and greatly appreciate anything [she] could usually take for granted." When she begins college at NVCC in the fall, she would like to focus on pre-law, but she isn't sure what type of law she's interested in yet, but she'd like to minor in political science or business.

Photographic Reflection

In the past year, I've confronted the thoughts I've always had about myself and where I have them. Being shut in with minimal human contact besides my family has been painful at times but has allowed time for reflection. Having lost contact with so many people sparked a feeling that only *I* am truly there for myself. This is a bittersweet realization. At times I wonder if I enjoy spending time by myself, or if that is simply a coping mechanism developed in the absence of other choices.

For me, reflecting on myself as a person has always been intertwined with physical appearance. Technology, itself a culprit in my fixation, allows me to have years of pictures to look through at my fingertips. I examine and criticize myself. I try to remember what I was thinking and where I was emotionally at the time.

June 2017: I stand on the weathered concrete rooftop of our family home in Pakistan, my blue and white salwar kameez soaked through by the rain, the matching dupatta draped over my head weighed down by the showers. I hope I can relive that feeling even as I feel like a completely different person, nearly four years later.



Ammni

February 2018: I grin broadly and stand still next to Bladee, a Swedish rapper I discovered in my online meanderings, sometime in high school. I had just watched him open for Yung Lean, a similar Swedish artist at the first concert I've ever attended. He stands beside me in his Nike sweatpants and hoodie, his right hand resting on my left shoulder. I had found him in an alleyway, where people lined up against the muraled walls to meet Yung Lean, whose red hair peeked through the crowd of young fans. My face looks so chubby. There is a henna design on my left hand as I display a piece sign. I remember shaking with nerves.



Bladee and Me

June 2019: My mom and I take a selfie at my high school graduation party, wearing our traditional Pakistani clothes. My mom, in her typical fashion, had led a brief prayer to thank God for my accomplishments and health, which may have confused my Non-Muslim friends in attendance. I note a resemblance in our faces: in the fullness of our cheeks as we smile, in the long lines on either sides of our mouths. I had lost some weight, and I felt like I had finally grown into my face and didn't look like a baby.



Ammi and Me

June 2020: I look down at my front camera, false eyelashes droop. I was dressed up for my cousin's small bridal party and felt so depressed. On a video call to family in Pakistan that day, I was consistently compared to my maternal aunt. I look at myself and my eyes rush to the spot where my hair is clearly thinning in the picture, and, sitting here in my bed, my hands float up to gently rest on that same spot. I think it might be getting better but deny it for fear of getting my hopes up. My mom reassures me.



Cousin's Bridal Shower

As I think back, not only to the heartbreaks and frustrations of the last year, but the years that preceded it, I feel like I have come a long way. At the same time, as I traverse through childhood into adulthood, many of the same insecurities and shortcomings follow me. I still poke and prod at my face. I think my jaw is too wide, my nose too bumped, my hair too thin. I thought I would outgrow this by now. I feel small when I hear others talk about how they *used* to be insecure, and they *used* to lack confidence when I am still in the throes of feeling this way. I am guilty about this fixation. I feel bad for feeling bad because I wasn't raised to value superficial traits.

I was never shamed or insulted about my appearance by my family. My mother is so beautiful but doesn't define her self worth in her looks. As I grow to share more physical traits with her, I wish I could also share her generosity, her patience, her organization and the way she can convey love without ever having to say it. I wish I could have her outlook of the world in which one can casually partake in self-care and upkeep without obsessing, without spending hours dwelling and researching on how to change what you are born with. As time passes, I am able to value myself as I am, and can find more empathy for myself. I try to see myself in the same lens through which I view my loved ones, one which doesn't prioritize looks. I am shakily transitioning from dwelling on the past to accepting it and moving forward.

ASRA SHUAIB, WSHS ALUMNA

Asra Shuaib's Biography

Asra Shuaib is a sophomore at George Mason University working toward a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. Her favorite courses are Developmental and Social Psychology. She is currently taking a creative writing course and considering an English minor. Her creative work often focuses on culture, and more specifically her own family. Asra is looking into becoming a clinical psychologist and is researching Master's and PHD programs that will help her enter a career working with women and/or children. She has maintained a

grade point average that would put her on the dean's list if that initiative wasn't on hold due to the pandemic. Asra ended her public school career earning her Girl Scout Gold Award.

Mornings of Hot Chocolate

It was never too sweet for us:
"Add more chocolate," we'd tell Pa,
rich throughout,
revealing once more how memories cluster
in worn metal pots
how fate exists in wedges of cocoa and sugar.

Hovering his hand above the pot, he feels it
simmer to its brim, and then condense over
for two minutes.

A pot full of dissolving worries,
Everyone clutches a
favorite mug,
receives a serving of
warmth, all are family.

When he tilts the lip of the pot
steady and careful between his hands
this is an act of love to his daughters and wife,
enjoy, take a seat, chat, and embrace life.

The chocolate is
the binding of a hearty book.
Like tales and narratives
one will grow and yearn for
a glimmer of truth
a morsel of chocolate.

YARELI SOSA, WSHS ALUMNA

Yareli Sosa's Biography

Yareli Sosa is a sophomore at Hollins University where she is majoring in Psychology with a concentration in Clinical and Counseling Skills and minoring in Spanish. Her goal is to become a therapist/psychologist. Influential courses she has taken include Fundamentals of Writing, Poverty in America, and Hip-Hop in Latin America. Yareli is Senator of Latinx Club at Hollins and has earned a spot on the dean's list. She continues to write with a focus on nonfiction and poetry. As a sophomore, she was invited by her freshman professor, Thorpe Moeckelf, to be a teaching assistant for Edible Poetry. In class, Yareli guided some of the smaller workshops and helped students read and interpret poetry. Outside the classroom, she served as a mentor, helping students navigate social and academic settings. She offered tips on time management and avoiding procrastination. To help them engage socially, she would hold meetings with fun activities, such as movie and craft nights. Because of the pandemic, she feels her impact outside the classroom was more significant than during class.

Stupid

“Derivative . . . the quotient rule . . . undefined slope. . .”

What?

I don't know what he's saying.

I have *no idea* what he's saying.

The class has just finished taking notes, but I am reluctant to start on the homework because of the short amount of time left for that period. The class I am sitting in is Advanced Placement Calculus BC. If “Advanced Placement” doesn't do enough justice in establishing prestige, the word “Calculus” thoroughly reinforces that my presence in the room implies that I'm supposed to be smart or something. I aimlessly stare at the floor and let my mind wander until someone else's conversation catches my ear, the same hobby I take up in the last ten minutes of just about every class.

Some kid about three seats down—a tall, pale brunette who wears his dorky glasses and uneven beard proudly—is talking to the math teacher. “Talking” as in having an adult conversation about purely theoretical mathematical ideas and using big words that probably have to do with the lesson. The vocabulary flowing from his mouth is vaguely familiar, but the concepts seem entirely abstract. Like I said, I have *no idea* what he's saying.

Suddenly, my ears start to tingle. A wave of uneasiness passes through my skull and drains out of my toes. The corners of my eyes start hinting at imminent flames. The air around me starts to feel dense, humid, and dry all at once. The room was already hot, but my thick hair intensifies the climate to the point where it coerces sweat to run from my temples. The constriction of my neck prevents a nervous gulp from successfully fleeing deeper into my throat.

In short, I feel stupid.

As I identify this feeling, I'm hyperconscious of every flaw on my person.

My hair is too big. It's slowly and silently smothering me to death. It's invading my vision; my peripherals are overpopulated with ominous black clouds.

My nose is too wide; my shotgun-barrel nostrils are infecting half of my face.

My chest is too small. The front of my shirt sags to my waist, frowning at my lack of ample bosom.

My underarms are steaming geysers of anxiety. Everyone sees the piping hot springs forming on my shirt.

My jeans are ill-fitting. I bought them from a thrift store, so I deserve the way they look.

My belt is bulky. It hugs my waist awkwardly like a distant relative at Christmas.

My hand-me-down sneakers are clown shoes. They fit, but my feet are naturally large and obtrusive. The rubber soles can't help but jut into the aisles of the classroom like a misaligned Jenga brick.

My socks are dirty. If they weren't before, they're soaked in sweat now. Everyone in the room is choking on the pungent stench of my stupidity.

A degrading stampede tramples over me, digging their heels deep into my bruising rib cage.

I can feel the hairline fractures in my dam of sanity spreading rapidly throughout the infrastructure of my retaining wall. It is an all too familiar feeling, one that willingly returns every time I'm criticized, every time I'm chastised, every time I see red marks on my graded work, every time no one laughs at my jokes, every time my voice cracks in the middle of a song, every time my body insists on stiffening up when I'm trying to dance, every time I feel stupid.

The same process takes place every time. The dam breaks, permitting a river of insecurities to flood into my reservoir of confidence. It's a small reservoir, much more like a shallow basin with the optical illusion of depth. I'm always standing in the center when the unforgiving waves swallow me whole. I flail my arms wildly, hoping to grasp onto something stable to bring me back to earth. I am surrounded by a mirage of handholds

taunting me with what would be their distance if they were real. I release spurts of exasperated gasps, trying to breathe the suddenly scarce air around me. The water invades my nostrils, and the feeling of a thousand wasps fighting in my airway overpowers me. I'm drowning in my own subconscious.

A blood-curdling scream slices through the air and rips me from my self-destructive trance.

Nevermind, it's just the bell.

I awkwardly swing my awkwardly large backpack over my awkwardly sunken shoulders and awkwardly shuffle to my next class. It's a mess, I'm a mess, just a huge jumble of *awkward*. Awkward and stupid.

I keep my chin down as I descend the stairs. At the moment, I can't stand to look in the eyes of my peers. I'm not sure if I'm ashamed of my instability or if I'm afraid of the look on my face. Who knows what inexplicably distorted expression I'm displaying when I'm trapped in my emotional labyrinth.

To my relief, the lights are off in my next class. When I'm in the dark, I can pretend that I'm just as blind to my flaws as someone sitting next to me. This gives me time to breathe. Just breathe.

I'm disappointed at how easily my entire scaffolding of self-esteem is dissolved by one gateway feeling. It's unfortunate that I can't get out of my own head—no, not unfortunate, stupid. It's stupid that my reality crumbles apart because of one thought. It's dumb and weak and unbelievably stupid.

CANDACE TODD, WSHS ALUMNA

Candace Todd's Biography

Candace Todd is a sophomore majoring in Statistics at Penn State University in State College, PA. She was a math tutor all of last year. She also worked as a lab assistant in a STEM diversity research group, mostly to do data cleaning from past research but also writing survey questions for future research. Last summer, she participated in experimental mathematics research with a graph theory group at Michigan State as a part of a program for early-career mathematicians. Candace tells me this school year she is focusing on self-care and staying healthy in light of the personal challenges she's faced due to the pandemic. Although her college schedule keeps her focused on mathematics, she is keeping an informal journal that might fuel future writing.

Closer to Home

For nine months, a time
that grows human life,
Coronavirus circulated
while we watched
in news and social media
as death numbers mounted
to three hundred thousand
and the pandemic
infiltrated our identity,
personal and collective,
a flash point changing
our perspective,
a new point of origin
in the trajectory of our lives.

Bodies stacked up in
make-shift morgues
and refrigerator trucks—

tragedies pervading other
people's lives until December,
when dominoes fell toward me
as Covid-19 invaded
the family of a close friend
I've known since grade
school, her first son, diabetic
since his teens, his wife,
mother of young children, sick
despite conflicting test results.

My friend texted updates
of long-distance worry
while they struggled at home
until Christmas approached,
their health restored in time
for quiet celebration.
Her father's illness followed,
and then her mother's,
both hospitalized until
each progressed enough
to transfer to assisted living.

My husband's family followed;
his brother, sister-in-law,
two adult daughters
contracting Covid-19,
One, infected at an unmasked
Florida church conference,
transferred hospitals
to one where she had worked
as a nurse in a Covid wing,
where she recovered,
just short of ventilation.
The others healed at home.

I learned of the first Covid-19
death in the school system
where I retired while I read
desperate social media posts
by teacher colleagues pleading
to school board members
to keep them virtual and safe
until all are vaccinated.
School officials claimed
the infection of an esteemed
elementary school custodian

did not occur at school.
Although I didn't know her,
her Latinx name, played
on repeat in my mind until I
read a post that linked her
to my school, my classroom.

All four children, one whose death
followed her mother's two days after,
attended the high school I called
home for most of a forty-year career.
During lunch and after school,
her youngest daughter became
a regular in my classroom
haven for creative spirits.
A good friend to a talented poet,
she joined groups discussing words
and matching art for spread design.
I mourn through her eyes as she
grieves her family's Covid loss
of mother and sister only two years
after losing her father to cancer.

And they keep falling—a guidance
counselor at a nearby school,
connected to mine through marriage
to our former band director,
who kept working fifty years;
the father of a friend from early
teaching when I was honored
as a bridesmaid in her wedding,
his death accelerated by Covid,
though he suffered from cancer,
which had already claimed
my friend, his loving daughter;
and that father of my grade-school
friend, who still recovering from
Covid, suffered from Shingles,
and dementia in his final days,
passing quietly in assisted living
accompanied by his loving
wife of seventy-three years—
each death falling closer to home
as the toll reaches 400,000
finally commemorated in candlelight
floating, flickering in a pool of reflection.

CATHY HAILEY, ENGLISH & CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER, RETIRED FROM WSHS, 2019

Since retiring from full-time teaching in Prince William County Public Schools and Woodbridge Senior High School, I have taught part time for Johns Hopkins University's Online Masters in Teaching Writing Program. My course, Teaching Creative Writing, is an asynchronous course, so I have taught students all over the United States and in countries across the world. I have dedicated more time to writing poetry and photographing nature, especially during the pandemic, and both practices have helped lift my spirits. I have also taken on the position of Northern Region Vice President of The Poetry Society of Virginia (PSV). The PSV is a membership organization for anyone interested in poetry, and they hold an annual contest for students and adults that deadlines on Edgar Allan Poe's Birthday, January 19th (this year extended to February 2nd). I welcome the opportunity to work with The Origin Project because I believe in its mission, and I applaud every opportunity to offer young people an authentic audience for their creative work.

CATHY HAILEY, ENGLISH & CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER, RETIRED FROM WSHS, 2019

ALUMNI: THE LEGACY OF THE ORIGIN PROJECT FROM UNITY REED HIGH SCHOOL

The Origin Project: Afterwards

When I was asked to write my thoughts about what legacy The Origin Project leaves, it forced me to stop and consider. This is my third year with The Origin Project. It is one of the most rewarding aspects of my career. There is something profound in observing my students begin to see themselves as writers.

In the spirit of finding their voices, tonight, I posed the question to all my classes, both past and present. I asked, "What did you take away from The Origin Project?"

Makayla will always remember the music, from all around the world, that started each class.

Fatima replied that she had never really talked in detail about her heritage with her family. She explained that she actually assumed she knew all there was to know, but that this was not actually the reality. She concluded with the realization that every day she is able to learn more about herself and her heritage.

Brianna expressed how much confidence she has gained in her writing. She also noted that she has taken Mrs. Trigiani's words to heart and writes in her Origin Project Journal every day.

Anya took advantage of the question to deeply reflect upon her time with the project. She mentioned how the class afforded her the opportunity to learn about other people's opinions more than she had before. She said that the course afforded her with knowledge about others' cultures and what others value. She noted that her mind has been opened like never before. She expressed a desire to carry her sparkly "Silver Linings" journal with her to college and continue to express herself through writing.

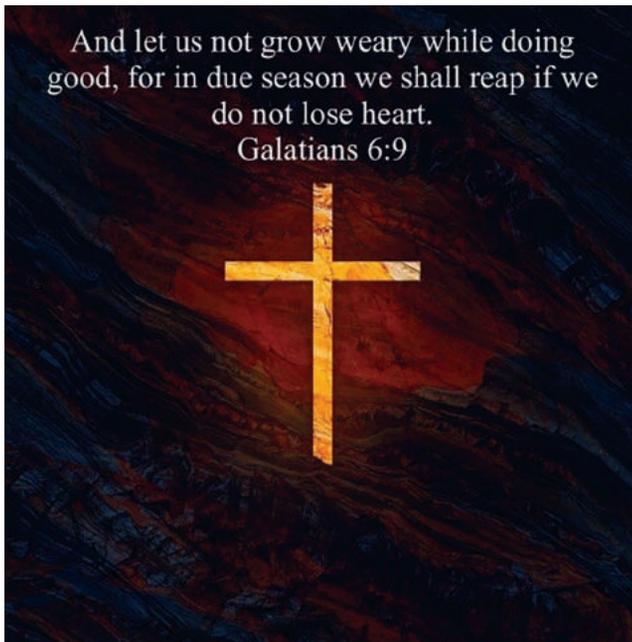
As I consider the past three years, it is the relationships that were built inside The Origin Project walls (and the figurative walls of this year) that I'm so very proud of. Students who had not spoken up in classes before began to feel comfortable because it was a place where students screwed up their courage and shared their vulnerability. I'm reminded of the quote often attributed to the late Supreme Court Justice, "Speak your mind, even if your voice shakes". Because of The Origin Project, we all shared our stories. Stories of struggles with family members, tales of pillow fights, challenges with mental health, memories of favorite toys, music associated with first loves and the powerlessness felt in the inability to stop the debilitating grief that comes with loss. We shared fears and concerns over civil rights, injustice and Black Lives Matter. With these stories came the feeling of belonging. With the feeling of belonging, the feeling of family grew. And even though we all had come to this place from so many different places in our world, our stories created relationships, relationships which will be remembered forever.

Like this year's students will do, they all leave me. I have been honored to keep in touch and follow so many of their undertakings: acting, leading as president of their college freshman class, serving in the military, organizing aid for immigrants, activism. But if they move on and The Origin Project is just a memory of a transformative time in high school, their stories still echo in the classroom, guiding the next group who walk into my classroom, taking up the spaces once held by hearts I grew to love. It will be their turn to learn to speak up, connect, and find their voices. In the end, it will always be about their stories.

LORI R. STERNE, UNITY REED TEACHER

Vindication

this arduous journey, my daunting task
has come now, here at last
from a small lad, so carefree
finishing adolescence, haphazardly
and once again, reaching a new milestone
to adulthood, my future yet to be known
hoping this time, that there's no halts
no roadblocks or mistakes,
anything that has been my fault
because I am my own worst enemy
setting my own self back, inevitably
however with this coming change
i hope to help my self rearrange
and make a new life for myself
studying rank structure & general orders



dusting off old books on the shelf
exercising and mentally preparing
for this thing called life
looking back at me, staring
how this world seemed so cruel yet caring
being frightful, but always moving forward
becoming brave again and daring
i've learned so much, and yet so little
no time to prance or fiddle
to prosperity, and to my future
things i must amend and suture
to continue to expand, and gain
while i'm still on top, let this not be in vain
lastly, to those still deciphering this
solí deo glória, spiritus invictus

JUSTIN RIVAS, UNITY REED HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNUS

Justin Rivas' Biography

Justin, a member of the Class of 2020 at Unity Reed High School is on his way to achieving his dream of serving his country. Soon he will be leaving for Parris Island to join the United States Marine Corps.

"You're really pretty for a black girl."

I am not what society has expected of me. I did not play the role that was written, or walk the path that was paved, by the history of oppression against black people. Physically unique, emotionally content, and culturally clueless. My hair is what ties me to my culture. My hair keeps me grounded to my roots, covered up in centuries of ethnic mixtures and DNA combinations to the point my true history is not retractable. My hair is the rebuttal to assumptions of me being biracial. I feel disconnected from my race until I see television depictions of courageous black women with hair just like mine. It is the tool that allows me to break the chain of heat and chemicals, placed on the crowns of black princesses, as a consequence of uneducation on proper hair care. My hair symbolizes the many values that have carried me into the social pariah I have become. The coils growing out of my head are like strands of DNA, which in my case is the closest I will get to learning where I come from.

To be born a child of pale skin and green eyes, to a mother of dark skin and chocolate eyes, I've always understood the inference of my father being white. But he is a black man. My mother is a black woman. I am a black woman. Growing up, my dad would be questioned the same as I am. I don't believe these presumptions affected my parents more than it did me. The forceful assumptions that I have to be of another race were silently damaging. At a certain point in time, I agreed with the statements, it felt as if I was desired to be mixed. I didn't look like the other black girls. I dug a hole in my heart yearning to know there was more in me than just being black. Reality reintroduced itself every morning as I went to do my hair for school. I was a black girl, nothing else. My facial features may have been able to pass, however, the 4c coils and matted shrinkage in my hair were not. My heart was not fulfilled with contentment, and it wouldn't be until I flipped the narrative. Once I realized being black is one of my greatest blessings, I was relieved to know my hair connected me to other black girls. I don't believe the girls of other ethnicities would be able to relate to the horror stories of "Just For Me."



Amani Sanders

If I were born a generation earlier, I might have been sitting in a different position on the perspective of my hair. I grew up with a renewed perm every four months to help manage my hair. With the occasional not-touching-her-head-for-at-least-a-month hairstyles of cornrows with beads and barrettes at the ends. Out of nowhere, the use of chemicals and heat went out the window, as my mother decided I was old enough to do my own hair. If it wasn't for natural hair pioneers such as Madam CJ Walker and Richelieu Dennis, I would probably be bald right now. Entrepreneurs such as themselves sparked the natural hair movement. They boldly sold products that went against the grain of how black women styled their hair back then. Now, decades later, the natural hair movement has exploded, to a point it is safe to say future little black girls won't have to go through transitioning from damaged to healthy hair. Richelieu Dennis and his Shea Moisture line of hair care products is definitely one of the things that formed the intimate relationship between me and my hair. Their revolutionary enterprise of natural beauty inspires me to create my own line of

beauty for natural hair care.

The long coils growing out of my head embody the principles that are the backbone to my character. I have practiced patience as it takes me 2 hours to properly diffuse my curls. I have learned to leave space in my life for unplanned events, like on the days my hair chooses not to cooperate. Not being able to do certain hairstyles due to the texture and thickness of my hair, has taught me that not everything in life is meant for me. Seeing my curls shrink back into their natural coily state after being stretched out, has shown me resilience resides in me. My hair grows at rapid pace, which shows me that life is an everchanging thing that sometimes moves too fast. As it changes product toleration with each inch that grows, I learn that I shouldn't take anything for granted, nor should I be afraid of what is to come. I am confidently able to state, my hair has been one of the greatest teachers in my life.

All in all, even though I may not have highly melanotic skin or cozy brown eyes, that does not make me any less black. Therefore, having yellow skin and green eyes does not make me any more beautiful than someone else. I am the product of an intelligent black woman and a strong black man. I will not allow the stigmatization of natural hair be passed down to my future daughters. The characteristics I manifest are sculpted by the aplomb my hair personifies. I am not "pretty for a black girl." I am beautiful as I am.

AMANI SANDERS, VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY, UNITY REED HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNA

Amani Sanders' Biography

Amani Sanders graduated from Unity Reed High School with the Class of 2020. She is currently experiencing much success at Virginia State University. While majoring in Hospitality Management, she has also distinguished herself as president of the National Society for Minorities in Hospitality. She serves as a student ambassador and is the Publicity Coordinator for VSU's Culinary Club. Amani was accepted into a study-abroad program called Semester at Sea and in the spring of '22, she will have the opportunity to travel to 12 countries in 4 continents.

The America Dream

Born into a twisted world judged from the very start
Mama holds him tight and prays for his little heart
The baby stares obviously but what he doesn't see
Is he's black and a male and he could never be free
He's too young to understand but one day he will
The systematic oppression that makes his people ill
Lady liberty lied there isn't no place to climb
Man, this isn't any fairytale, no once upon a time

Going to grade school the young boy always had it
tough
That 1 teacher that hated him and made things
rough
He'd get in lots of trouble while others got a pass
Depicted as a class interruption, he'd get kicked out
of class
This isn't anything abnormal just another bad case
About a black boy with potential spared no grace

He's gotten older now the once young boy is all grown up
It all makes sense; he finally sees the world from a close up
Everywhere he goes all eyes are always on him
It's sad but true that they don't love him
He was never once part of the big grand scheme
Besides, it was never meant to be his American dream

ERIC SLEDGE, CLAFLIN UNIVERSITY, UNITY REED HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNUS

Eric Sledge's Biography

Eric Sledge, a Computer Engineering major at Clafin University in South Carolina, is distinguishing himself among his peers. He holds the office of Freshman Class President and is a member of the National Society of Black Engineers, the Clafin Student Ambassador program as well as the Alice Carson Tisdale Honors College. In addition to these leadership and academic achievements, Eric also plays baseball for the university.

Wanted Normalcy

As of March 2020, normalcy is wanted by the United States of America. No, they didn't commit any crimes, and you won't find it on the FBI's most-wanted list. On that date, normalcy skipped town, and loss took its place. Many lost jobs, loved ones, some lost their sense of freedom; whatever it was, someone lost something. Phrases like: "Is it Friday yet?" "Want to go out?" "It's just a cough," turned into: "What day is it?" "Is it safe to go out?" and "You should get that checked out." The common questions we asked are lost, our homes became offices and classrooms, and our lives are isolated. The most common tests taken are no longer with pen and paper, but with a q-tip and our noses. How did this happen? Was it a lack of knowledge? The lack of preparation? Is it the spread of misinformation or even the selfishness of others in the country?



Eric Sledge



Nathan Yannarell

Maybe a little bit of all of those things? Does it matter? Not really, because normalcy is gone. It may never come back, and loss is here to stay. The end.

Or is it? Loss turned life upside down in the United States; however, something snuck along with it. It's not very big, but if you look closely, you can see it. Optimism. With so much negativity in this world, and especially in the country, how did this sneak in? Through our navigation in uncharted territory, we have shown what we are capable of as a human race. It wasn't always pretty, but if you look at the positives, optimism is here. Schools were able to conduct classes in an online environment, people found new ways to stay in touch online, families became closer at home, and a higher value was put on relationships and those we hold close. Normalcy was never lost; it just changed. It adapted to this new life in the United States. Is it scary? Absolutely, but when did life ever lack fear? It is easy to be pessimistic and dread what the future

holds for us after loss came to town, but why look past all there is to be optimistic about. Will things ever go back to the way they used to be? No one knows for sure, but that is what makes this moment in time so exciting. There is a chance to change how the world will be from here on out. Normalcy is still here in the United States; loss came and kind of ruined the fun, but now optimism and hope for the future are what the United States needs.

NATHAN YANNARELL, JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY, UNITY
REED HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNUS

Nathan Yannarell's Biography

Since participating in the Origin Project 2 years ago, I started studying musical theatre at James Madison University. In the Spring of 2020, I had the honor of performing in the Mainstage Production of "Sideshow" at JMU before the world shut down. After that, I began studying from home and doing my many performance classes through a lens. It is tough, but my friends and writing have gotten me through. I journal every weeknight before bed. In about a page or so, I write about my day and reflect on life. The Origin Project helped me develop a love for writing and I have no clue where I would be today if I hadn't been a part of it.

Grandma Does Not Need to Know!

Grandma called last night.
"Bachem, tell me more!"

In her eyes, I am the 12-year-old grandchild
Whose picture is still on her bedroom wall.
The mathematic genius that aced every equation
And canceled every negative with a positive.

I am the American dream
That she never lived.

"Noor-e-cheshmum, why are not you calling me anymore?"
Grandma is too busy imagining how I look seven years later.
She does not notice my r's are no longer rolling.
Last month, a thin accent in my mother tongue appeared.

Grandma woke up at 4:00 am to call me.
Her puffy eyes do not allow her to see
The wall my accent is slowly building between us.

Last year, my teacher said that my English accent proves her point.
I am not worthy of a good grade if I cannot speak my fourth language properly.
Ever since I spit out a part of my mother tongue
With a little bit of toothpaste in the morning.
But she does not need to know.

Grandma asks if I remember that one time
When she cooked me *Shola*?
I lie!
The truth is that my childhood memories were lost
Somewhere between the Pacific and Atlantic.

The night I left her,
I packed the taste of her traditional cooking,
The smell of her saffron chai, the colors of her handmade Afghani dresses,
And the comfort of her sweet love.

Grandma does not need to know they were lost
When the airport security opened my suitcase
In search of terrorism.

I wish Grandma knew that
The American dream was not meant for me,
Her Immigrant Muslim Hijabi grandchild.

Grandma does not need to know
My tongue has tasted hatred too many times
It can no longer remember
the taste of my sweet
motherland.

Grandma does not need to
know
I no longer recognize myself.
I am too American to wear
colorful dresses
And too foreigner to not wear
the hijab.



Zahra Wakilzada's grandmother and mom

She named me after herself.
I am her Zahra Jan!
Her voice echoed as I washed a part of my name last week!
She does not need to know it is just Zara now.

Grandma does not need to know
She still speaks to the 12-year-old grandchild of hers
That trauma of war, refuge, and islamophobia killed years ago.

Grandma does not need to know. . .

ZAHRA WAKILZADA, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY,
UNITY REED HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNA

Zahra Wakilzada's Biography

Zahra Wakilzada is an author, poet, and activist. She is a sophomore at Georgetown University majoring in International Politics and double minoring in Women's and Gender Studies and Creative Writing. Zahra hopes to change the world for better through policy making and writing.

Down the Road from Here!

December 5th, 2019,
As I wrapped my black hijab around my head
And tucked my numb hands in my packed,
I walked into a room filled with privilege.

From every corner of the room,
Every sound presented an origin.
I sensed the sounds getting closer,
And my heart began to skip beats.

"Zahra?"
I began to ramble,
"Me!?"
"I am from Virginia. Down the road from here!"

I prayed that my brown skin and the black color of my eyes,
The lapis ring in my finger and the Persian accent of mine,
Did not already tell the story of my life!

I am from a lost generation.
Too eager to find hope
Between the sun and the moon.

I am from the battle of love and hate
Somewhere between the land of bullets

And the land of free.
I am from the tears of a child
Rolling down his red cheeks
Begging the world to stop bombarding him.

I am from my grandpa's smile
When he makes up stories of peace
Trying to protect my hopes and dreams.

I am from the handful of ashes
Gray and white, placed in my packet
When I crossed two borderlines.

I am from the hands
That once covered ears
Minutes before getting cut off by the bombs.

I am from my grandma's rhythmic lullaby
As her calming voice
Lets the stars of hope fill my sky.

I am from the rectangular green card
Telling me to stay and your fear of Muslims
Telling me to leave.

I am from the broken English
Of my immigrant parents
And their old and tired souls.

I am from the painful moment
Of a mother being attacked
In front of her children for being an immigrant.

I am from "you are not American enough"
To "you speak good English".
From "welcome to America" to "go back to where you came from".

ZAHRA WAKILZADA, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY,
UNITY REED HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNA

The Origin Project

The eagerness to tell the story of a young refugee started before The Origin Project, flourished during The Origin Project, and is continuing after The Origin Project.

My senior year of high school was filled with love due to my experience with The Origin Project. Upon writing pieces, I began to take the ownership of my story and the painful experience of becoming a refugee at the age of 13. While many of us suppress our feelings and try to fit in, I learned that beauty is in being different.

It has been almost two years since I was in a room filled with individuals wanting to learn each other's stories. However, despite not being in my TOP class, I continue to carry the lessons I learned. To many of us, TOP was a way of discovery . . . a helping hand that guided us to find our roots. I am hoping that one day I will be the help that TOP was for me and my peers.

As an alumni of The Origin Project, I will forever admire the endless work of three courageous women, Mrs. Sterne (my high school teacher), Ms. Bolmeier Fisher (the co-founder of TOP), and Ms. Woodward (the editor of TOP), who provide the youth with an outlet to embrace their culture and roots through The Origin Project.

ZAHRA WAKILZADA, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, UNITY REED HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNA

THANK YOU



We wish to express our deepest gratitude to the following individuals for donating their time, talent and treasure in furthering the mission of The Origin Project as we present this year's anthology. Every student receives a copy for his or her home library. All school libraries and public libraries will have a volume available for students and the public to enjoy.

The Honorable Mark Warner, US Senator for Virginia
The Honorable Tim Kaine, US Senator for Virginia

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Olivia Bailey, WCYB TV
The Carper Family
The Woodward Family
Ryan and Ian Fisher
The Stephenson Family

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