

Skipping Stones

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A Multicultural Literary Magazine

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Mar. - Aug. 2025



Art by Ukrainian Youth (clockwise, from top L) Lord of the Forest by Danylo Yerokhin, age 16; Hummingbird by Artem Lopatyn, age 10; Ukraine Right Now by Polina Pustovit, age 17; Ukrainian Village by Danylo Usenko, age 12; Ocean Dweller by Artem Panov, age 13.

Noteworthy 2024 YHA Art Entries by S. Korean Students



“Diversity in the Olympics”

“Diversity is a significant topic at the Olympics. Diversity includes many aspects such as gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and ability. The Olympics are a special event where diverse members of the population from all over the world come together to compete and participate. My artwork shows diversity in the Olympics by depicting the representative Olympic sports of modern countries and athletes wearing modern uniforms in the style of ancient Greek murals. I wanted to express the images of people around the world winning and sharing their emotions without discrimination.”

—Gunwoo Kim, age 16, South Korea.



“Journey of Resilience”

“This artwork, born from my connection to my hometown in South Korea, portrays two iconic symbols—the serene figure of Buddha (*symbolizing peace, wisdom, and spiritual enlightenment*) and a pagoda (*for resilience and strength*). Set atop tumultuous waves, it shows the beauty of my home country and its journey through adversity.”

—Tekkyu Lee, age 14, from S. Korea, studying in Massachusetts.



Cross Country by Justin Chun, age 16, gr. 10, Seoul, South Korea.
“Spirit of resilience & determination can be seen in cross-country competition.”

Wishes (bottom, rt.) by Jungwook Hong, age 13, gr. 7, South Korea.
Jungwook writes: “My work blends Korean paper amulets, *Buhjeoks*, with Buddhism and Christianity, capturing their shared desires for wellbeing, and using sacred Siddham and Latin texts.”



Poverty

In corners of the world, both near and far,
Lies a stark reality, a universal scar,
A silent struggle, where shadows reside,
Poverty's cruel grasp, no place to hide.

In crowded streets and dusty lanes,
Where desperation fuels the flames,
Families toil with hands and heart,
Yet poverty tears lives apart.

In shantytowns and urban sprawl,
Where hope can seem so very small,
Children dream of a brighter day,
As poverty tries to steal their way.

In lands of plenty, and lands in need,
Poverty's hunger, it knows no creed,
It cares not for borders, race, or age,
Its grip is fierce, its cruel cage.

But in the face of this daunting plight,
Humanity's spirit shines so bright,
Compassion's hand extends its reach,
To help those in need, to teach and preach.

Together we strive, for a world anew,
Where poverty's chains are torn in two,
A place where all can live and thrive,
With dignity, hope, and dreams alive.

So let us join hands, from shore to shore,
To lift the fallen, to care for more,
For in unity's embrace, we'll find,
A world where poverty is left behind.

—*I An Ryu, age 16, is a rising senior, South Korea.*

Resilience

Wet like a dog, the tears shake off
I want to stop trying but I know I must not
My resilience is the key to my success
I must do my best because here I am blessed
The most important thing is to never give up
In every failure there is a seed of growth

—*Aaron Friedman, h. s. junior, New York.*

When we envisioned *Skipping Stones Magazine* 38 years ago, at an international peace conference in India, we wanted to provide an international forum for you—the youth everywhere—to share your experiences, your realities, and your visions and dreams! We believed having such an outlet to express your ideas and creativity would help bring a better understanding and harmony between people all over the world.

We continue to provide such a forum for children and youth to bring an awareness of global issues of peace and ecological understanding. Recently, we published a special online issue featuring the painful experiences of Gazan youth in recent years. On pp. 31–36, we bring you many representative pieces from that feature, in support of a more peaceful world. We are hopeful that the recently agreed to ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon will hold and give a respite to the people of this war-ravaged region.

This issue also features many *noteworthy* youth honor award entries that could not be published in our 2024 Awards Issue for space reasons. For example, page 2 shows art entries by South Korean students. We're always amazed by the creativity and original ideas presented by young people in their artwork, poetry, and prose. We eagerly await your entries for the 2025 Youth Awards by 5 May.

A number of published pieces in this issue also focus on nature and ecology—the hot-topic of our times. As you may know, the year **2024 was by far the hottest ever recorded in our history** (*Noteworthy News*, p. 26). Human-caused climate change has now increased the average global temperature very close to the limit that was set for 2030! Unfortunately, our current (and past) energy policies and practices will continue to degrade the livability and sustainability on the planet for a foreseeable future.

It is truly sad that the trends in many nations are for regression! Instead of making social progress, the policies of our governments and businesses are taking humanity away from equity, diversity, and environmental conservation, not just in this country, but also in many other nations. We are taking steps backwards!

But we can't lose hope for a better tomorrow. We must work harder and tirelessly! We will find solutions for all the challenges and difficulties that come our way. Even in hardships, let's rise and shine! Let's smile and greet the world with a happy face. Let's help each other in overcoming all problems. Together, we're ONE and we all win!

Arun

Skipping Stones

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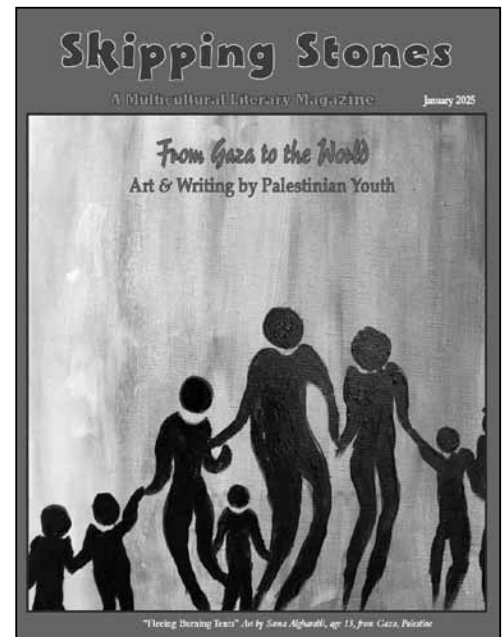
From Our Special Gaza Issue

- 31-36 Representative Pieces from our Recently Published Online-only Issue:
From Gaza to the World • Exhausted • 9 P.M. • Reema's Story
Between Gaza and Me • Artworks by Gazan Youth

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Read our recently published, online-only issue:
"From Gaza to the World" by visiting our
website, www.SkippingStones.org.
Please note that all our online content is *free*!

"No one is free until we're all free."

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



In the spirit of ecological sensitivity, we choose to print with soy ink on recycled and recyclable paper with a 30% post-consumer recycled content.



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About *Skipping Stones*:

Skipping Stones is a nonprofit children's magazine that encourages cooperation, creativity, and celebration of cultural and linguistic diversity. We explore stewardship of the ecological and social webs that nurture us. We offer a forum for communication among children from different lands and backgrounds. *Skipping Stones* expands horizons in a playful, creative way. We invite you to send us your creative art and thought-provoking writing.

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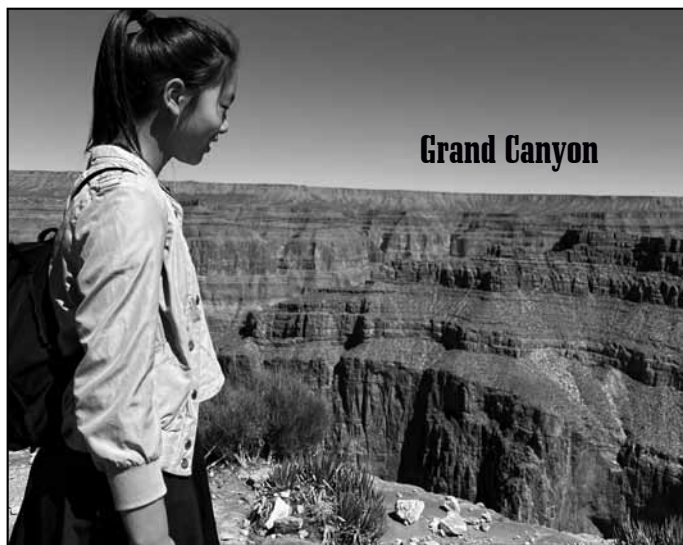
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Winner of three National Association for Multicultural Education Awards, as well as EdPress Association of America, Eugene Education Association, the Writer Magazine, NewsStand Resources, and Parent's Choice Awards.



Grand Canyon

“**W**oah,” I whispered, staring, awestruck, at the scene in front of me. The strong wind whipped my hair back, away from my neck, and I breathed in deeply, feeling the fresh air on my face. I grinned and looked at my mom, who was teetering nervously and fumbling slightly with her phone.

“Are you sure you want to go that far?” she called from behind me. We were on a piece of land that had a precipice that led to a view of the Grand Canyon. I laughed and nodded back to her, continuing to look at the majestic peaks of the rocks in front of me. There was a whole horizon of orange, and it was beautiful. The dusty sunset color of the rocks pierced the clear blue sky, and it looked like they had risen right out of the earth's surface. My brother and dad were next to me, both of them looking over the edge. Deciding to try it too, I leaned over slightly and peered into the seemingly bottomless chasm below me. I sucked in a sharp breath and let the air hiss out between my teeth. It's so deep, I thought, paralyzed. I quickly jerked my head back up and wondered how Zander wasn't scared. However, it seemed like he was, as he mimicked my movements just seconds later. Looking off into the distance, I could see the murky brown of the Colorado River.

“Turn around, let me take a picture of you,” my mom said. I obeyed, and she snapped the photo. When she was done, I looked back at the choppy rocks of the Grand Canyon. They seemed so strong and never-ending. I couldn't believe that these rocks were formed naturally. It was amazing that they were created over time, and I can't imagine that I thought it would just be a bunch of rocks at first. I was very wrong, and I hope that now I have learned to look for the beauty in simple things. Great things might happen slowly, but the end result is amazing.

—Keira Lin, age 11, California.

Mold Apocalypse

One day a mad scientist named Bob found a moldy sandwich in his fridge. His lunch was a ham sandwich with lettuce and tomato. But now, it looked more like a mold sandwich—bluish-green and darker blue with a bumpy, bubbly kind of texture. The mold felt furry like a caterpillar and smelled like Grampa's wet socks.

Bob was a mad scientist, so he was curious. He brought the sandwich to his laboratory. He wanted to figure out how the mold changed the food into itself.

Through a microscope, the mold looked like a tiny green forest of trees in another universe. It had spikes sticking out in every direction with tiny balls at the end.

Bob started doing weird stuff to the sandwich. He shot a laser at it. He combined different chemicals with the mold to see how it reacted. The mold started to move around like it just woke up from a nap.

Suddenly, Bob heard a loud roar, but he realized the sound was coming from his stomach. He realized he never ate lunch! Now his stomach sounded like a grumpy lion.

The mold was growing, and Bob didn't want to leave, but he was too hungry. He closed the door and went to make a fresh ham sandwich.

Alone in the lab, the mold suddenly realized it could escape. It wanted to find more food and new mold friends. It moved across the table to the floor. Then it climbed up through the cracks in the corners of the lab.

Outside, the mold kept growing and moved towards the nearest building, a restaurant named "The Sandwich." The mold squeezed through the front door and made its way across the dining room, dodging the servers running around with plates of sandwiches.

In the kitchen, the mold began eating sandwich breads, meats, lettuce, and tomatoes. It grew fast. It got bigger and bigger until it looked like a huge fluffy green cat.

Pretty soon the chef walked in and saw the green fluffy blob taking over his entire kitchen. He heard throwing up and plates crashing. Customers were disgusted, throwing their plates on the ground. The mold was everywhere!

The TV by the bar said **Breaking News**, so everyone got quiet and listened. The guy said, "Here we are **live** at McSandwich Restaurant reporting on the Mold Emergency taking place across the country. We have reports of injuries and people trying to escape from huge green caterpillars. The mold is fluffy, smelly, and very fast moving. It will stop at nothing to get more sandwiches!"

The same exact scene started to spread across the country, and then across the entire world...

Meanwhile, Bob returned from lunch. He opened the lab door and saw trails of green mold leading from the sandwich to the cracks in the wall and ceiling. When he turned on the news and heard what was happening, Bob realized: His mold was taking over the world, and it was **all his fault!**

There was so much mold in the lab Bob could hardly do experiments. But he needed a solution to the problem—something to kill the mold. He tried every experiment he could think of, but nothing worked.

Bob was about to give up, when suddenly he noticed a tiny green bug fly by and land on the mold. He'd never seen this kind bug before. It was the size of his fingernail. He watched as the bug munched on the mold.

As the bug nibbled, the moldy green mess began to shrink down to nothing. It was like a miracle! The tiny bug kept on eating and eating the mold until finally, the lab was completely clean!

By this time, the bug was really big and fat. She sat down and laid exactly seven eggs. They looked like tiny squish-balls swirled with rainbow colors. The eggs looked fragile, but Bob tried to smash them and he realized they were nearly indestructible.

Then it hit him like a mold sandwich: These bugs could solve the mold problem!

Bob called a huge press conference to make his announcement. TV cameras and reporters speaking different languages showed up and gathered outside.

Bob admitted he first discovered the mold. Then he got hungry and left for lunch and allowed the mold to escape! Bob told the crowd he was very sorry for his mistake. But luckily, he found a solution to The Mold Apocalypse!!!

The audience stood up and started clapping.

Bob said, "I have discovered a unique mold-eating bug. As the bug eats, the mold shrinks and dies. This tiny bug has laid seven eggs that will produce babies who will eat and destroy all the mold in the world!"

Bob put each egg in a shiny red cannonball and loaded them into his powerful Cannon 2000. He shot them in seven different directions. One shiny red ball landed on each of the seven continents.

Mold Apocalypse *continued*

Everyone screamed and jumped for joy. The news started to spread across the world. Bob was a hero.

Each egg hatched a bunch of baby bugs who started to eat and destroy the mold. The green bugs grew larger and larger as they ate, and the mold grew smaller and smaller.

The bugs started having their own babies, and pretty soon all the mold was gone. There were no longer moldy furry green cats roaming around restaurants. People started eating sandwiches again!

Bob was like a celebrity. People forgot he caused the problem in the first place! He even got a special award: **The Golden Moldy Sandwich**, that he proudly displayed in his lab.

But meanwhile...while everyone was celebrating...the big fat bugs and their kids and grand-kids all got together for a secret meeting. There were so many bugs now, they felt super-powerful. The mold was gone, and they had a plan. It was their turn to take over the world...

—Ethan Lu Zou, 10, Toronto, Canada.
“My favorite food is sushi and my favorite sport is swimming or basketball.”

Ladybug waddles
Protecting the friendly tree
Against tiny pests.

—Finn Campion, grade 10, Florida.



—Alexandra Richards, grade 10, Florida.

A Mother's Destiny

On the day you were born
At that misty cold hour
I saw your pink little toes
And your skin as pale as flour

I cradled you in my arms
As I slowly weep
Your soft dark hair touched my arms
As you fell asleep

From that day on
I watched you grow
From six o'clock to nine
And as you drifted off in bed
I realized the destiny of mine

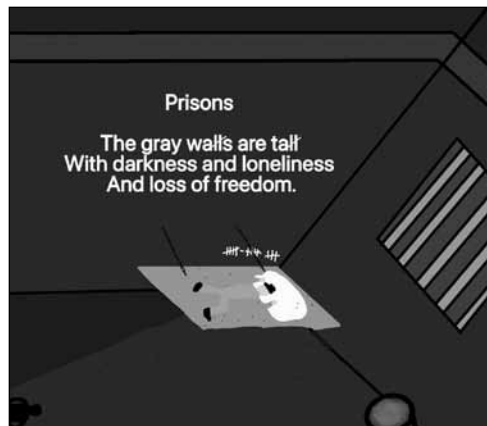
Years pass in the blink of an eye
You are now seven
Your thick black hair comes to your waist
Just wait till you're eleven

I cry in bed every night
Each day as you get older
Soon for a present
Instead of a doll
You'll want a computer
That day comes way too soon

Time to say goodbye
You're going off into the world
To find your new life

As you drive off into the night
I know that I've done well
And all the time we've had together
Is just another story to tell

—Anzhi “Angie” Feng, age 9,
from Vancouver/Toronto, Canada.



—Jose Hugo Rafael T. Tan, grade 5, Philippines.

Haiku and Tanka Times

Spring

Bees buzzing by me!
Flowers the best, with sweet smell
I like butterflies
—Shia, grade 1, California.

Cherry blossoms grow
Baby animals are born
It is fun in Spring
—Lina, grade 1, California.

Fall

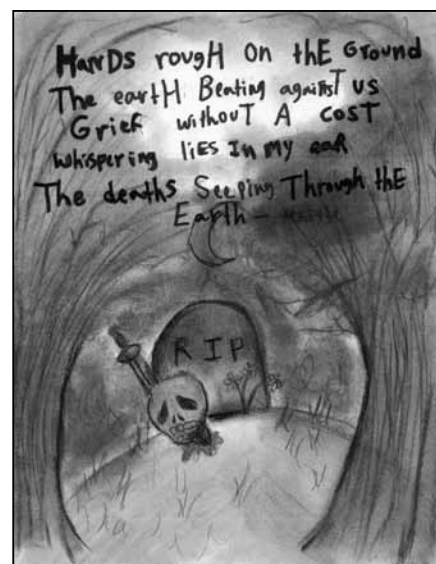
Yellow, orange, red
Animals begin to hibernate
The leaves fall off trees
—Lilia, grade 1, California.

A sturdy oak stands
Despite the storms that batter
It with wind and rain
His roots hold firm upon ground
Standing til the sun emerges
—Saa'id Ali, grade 9, Minnesota.

Bears lumber from dens
Gentle rain on soft petals
Fields of bright green grass
—Keira Lin, age 11, California.

The spring breeze whispers
Cherry blossoms softly fall
Nature's quiet song.

—Lindsey Elliott, grade 12, Florida.



—Maisie Drumm-Sola, grade 5, Oregon.

The Goddess of the Silkworm

White fluffy clouds floated in the azure sky, as the rays of the sun cast a golden glow across the Weiyang Palace gardens. A cool breeze blew through the rhododendron trees, causing the delicate flowers to flutter to the ground, dotting the land in violet.

Calling for some tea, the Chinese Empress Leizu breathed in the fresh spring air as she strolled over to the grove of mulberry trees at the edge of the Imperial Garden. She immediately wrinkled her nose in distaste. The mulberry tree leaves were filled with holes that were drying along the edges. Worms crawled all over the leaves, and there were a few tiny white objects among the fray of fat wriggling slugs. Looking closer, Leizu noticed how pale threads were coming off of the alabaster white ovals which appeared to be fuzzy cocoons.

“Tài zāo gāo le!” exclaimed Leizu in dismay, as she waved her fan frantically in front of her face.

Noticing her horror, a maid bringing tea scurried towards the empress.

“Your Majesty, please, sit down and have some wū lóng chá!” she exclaimed, curtsying before Leizu.

Just as Leizu was about to take a sip of the tea, she gasped. Floating in the liquid was one of the small egg-like objects from the mulberry tree above her. Leizu noticed how the tiny white oval was suddenly so soft, and a singular filament poked through the pale shape. A shiny ivory thread started to unravel in the water and the empress fished it out in awe.

“How long is this strand?” the empress wondered.

Shimmering like South China Sea pearls, the long delicate string reflected the morning sunlight.

“Take the end of this thread and walk to the opposite side of the gardens,” the empress commanded her maid in waiting, starting to unroll the glistening alabaster colored cocoon.

Holding the delicate thread, the young woman slowly backed farther and farther away, until the empress could just barely see her.

“This filament has to be at least a li,” gasped the empress as she took in the distance between herself and her servant.

Leizu then looked down at her hand and let out a shriek of disgust. A dead worm sat in her palm. Shaking

it off, Leizu leaned down to pick up the shimmering thread that had fallen to the grass. The most beautiful lóng páo ever took form in her mind. Golden fabric shone brightly against a crimson background, taking the shape of a majestic dragon.

“Oh, what are such hideous trees doing in my garden?” an authoritative voice sounded from behind her.

Whirling around, the Empress Leizu saw her husband, the Yellow Emperor Huangdi pacing towards her. His woolen robes swished at his feet with every step he took.

Leizu rose from her bow and immediately threw out her hands.

“Please my Holy Lord!” she gasped. “Look! This fine filament came from those cocoons on the disgusting trees.”

She opened her palm to reveal the singular strand of thread.

“There are only a few cocoons on these trees now. But if we wait a few months, maybe there will be enough to make a beautiful lóng páo!” she exclaimed excitedly.

Stroking his beard, the Yellow Emperor nodded in agreement.

“As long as you make me a dragon robe, I can tolerate these monstrosities.”

One month later the bright summer sun shone down on the Imperial Garden mulberry tree grove. Now, the mulberry leaves were covered in cocoons. Leizu put her fan down on the garden bench and took a sip of the tea her maid brought over.

“Now how shall I turn these fluffy little cocoons into thread to weave a beautiful lóng páo?” the empress asked.

Leizu’s maid raised her bowed head and suggested, “My lady, do you remember the time when the cocoon fell into your tea? Maybe you could unravel the thread by placing all the cocoons in hot liquid.”

Leizu told her maids to prepare a bowl of boiling water and bring some cocoons from the mulberry trees to her chambers. Soon, the empress was gently placing the little cocoons into the hot liquid. When the thin alabaster white strands had unraveled, she lay the filament on the table to dry.

The next morning, as Leizu was admiring the shimmering threads, a servant entered her chambers and bowed.

“My lady, the craftsman has made you a special loom,” the maid said as she beckoned for the wooden device to be brought into the room.

Enthusiastically, the empress sat down and started to spin the ivory colored strands. Soon Leizu had made the thread into fabric, and then turned to the servants in the room.

“Go fetch madder root and jinzi fruits from the gardens. We must make dyes.”

By the time the sun’s fading light was painting the sky a deep orange, Leizu had dyed the fabric red and yellow.

The next afternoon, the empress finished sewing the *lóng páo*. Lifting the robe into the air, Leizu noticed how the crimson and gold silk gleamed in the sunlight. She gently carried the dragon robe to her husband’s chambers.

The Yellow Emperor took one look at the garment Leizu had woven and gasped.

“Oh what a magnificent robe you have made for me!” he exclaimed in admiration as he examined the *lóng páo*. “We need a name for this new exquisite material.”

Leizu nodded in agreement.

“What about *sī chóu*?” she proposed.

Beaming at his wife, the Yellow Emperor declared, “That is a beautiful name for such a fine fabric! And you my dear, shall be called the Goddess of the Silkworm!”

Today, the practice of making silk that started with the Chinese Empress Leizu in the Western Han Dynasty is still popular and Leizu is still known as the Goddess of the Silkworm!

Glossary: *Tài zāo gāo le!*: So terrible!

Wū lóng chá: Oolong Tea

Li: Chinese measurement ($\frac{1}{3}$ of a mile)

Lóng páo: Dragon Robe

Sī chóu: Silk

—Catherine Chen, age 12, grade 6, Hong Kong. “My cultural heritage is Chinese. Before Covid-19, my maternal grandmother sewed silk dresses for my sister, my mom and me. So I began to wonder, who in China first thought about making silk clothing? I did some research, and wrote this story which is actually historical fiction.

“My story’s main character, Leizu, is the ancient Chinese empress who invented silk. She lived in the Weiyang Palace, Xi’an during 2700 BCE which was the time of the Western

Wind, the Majestic Temple

Wind, a magnificent force of nature, is beautiful
It escorts pollen produced by flowers to its neighbors
In return plants produce oxygen for winds to carry
That is how plants honor the wind.

The oxygen carried by the wind
Is whisked into animals lungs, allowing them to live
In return animals exhale carbon that winds escort back
to trees

That is how animals honor the wind.

Wind helps carry birds of all kinds
The wind helps birds glide among the sky
In return birds flap their wings to create small winds
that spread

That is how birds honor the wind.

We ponder upon how to honor the wind
But all we have to do is give the wind something to carry
Like how trees give oxygen, animals give carbon, and
birds give wind

We give Wind, the Majestic Temple, music to carry.

—Derek Meng, age 12, California.

Where Am I From?

I just don’t know where I’m from

Just confusion and lies

Am I just the forgotten diary in the closet?

Unknown, warm, ordinary

Positive I’m from dandelions, always believing my wishes
could come true

I am from moon dances and random confidence

Literally from Annie Phan and Ayden Phan

I’m not from the Sunday shopping; I’m more from
the entertainment in physical activities

From being told the basics, “Don’t do this, you should do...”

I’m not fully sure of where I’m from.

—Ellie Phan, grade 6, California.

Han Dynasty. My maternal grandmother is from a place called Xu Zhou in China, about a nine-hour drive from Weiyang Palace. The story is based loosely on real events, and I tried to make the details historically accurate. For example, I researched specific details such as how Leizu first discovered silk thread, how the ancient Chinese dyed fabric, how different members of the palace addressed each other, and even what type of plants bloom in the spring in Xi’an.”

Tall and Proud Like the Yucca *by Chuck Curatalo, retired elementary educator, New York.*

“I wish I were back at the pueblo,” Antonio whispered as he drew the two brown buildings that made up Taos Pueblo. Then he added the mountain stream that ran between them and colored the turquoise window frames that made his pueblo the prettiest Indian village in New Mexico.

“The bread will be ready soon,” called Mama. “Would you like to take some to your teacher tomorrow?”

“No, Mama,” he answered.

“Don’t you want to go to your new school?” asked Mama, feeding Maria her bottle. “You liked school, Antonio, especially art. You draw so well.”

“I don’t know anybody here, Mama. It’s so much better back home.”

“This is home,” she insisted. “We just moved here. Friendships take time but you will see,” she said.

Antonio added Mama baking bread in her *horno*, her outdoor oven to his picture. He drew Papa shoveling mud and straw into wooden frames to make the adobe bricks that were always needed to repair cracked walls.

“It’s wonderful,” said Papa after he came home from his factory job. “Why don’t you show it to your class?” Antonio nodded as he taped the picture on his bedroom wall.

The next morning he glanced at his picture before leaving for school. “Not today,” he decided.

His teacher Mrs. Inez introduced him to the class explaining that a pueblo is Spanish for city. “Antonio lived in one very far from here. Will like to tell us about it?” she asked. He was too shy to answer.

Jonathan giggled.

“That was very mean,” Mrs. Inez scolded while Antonio cringed. Nevertheless the taunting continued whenever Mrs. Inez was busy.

One day Mrs. Inez asked each child to give an oral report on their favorite flower for a science class. “We’ll be doing research,” she explained.

That night Antonio cried as he lay on his bed. Hearing his sobs, Papa came into his room.

“Papa, I hate it here. Why can’t we go back home?” he asked.

“But life is good here too,” replied Papa. “You will see!”

“Yes, but I miss my friends,” explained Antonio.

“We must make new friends,” said Papa. “We go back to visit and join in the celebrations? So, what is really bothering you?” he asked.

“Some children tease me,” he replied.

“Ah, I see,” said Papa, scratching his chin. “Antonio, we must be like the yucca plant in the desert, always pointing to the sky. Even winds can’t harm it. When others tease you, stand tall and proud like the yucca. Now sleep.”

Papa’s words “tall and proud like the yucca” echoed through his sleep. “That’s it!” he said, waking up.

The next day he grabbed the ‘Y’ volume of the encyclopedia. “Ah, there it is!” he exclaimed. Tearing off four sheets from his pad he taped them together to make one long page and scattered his colored pencils about.

A few days later, Antonio raced to the bus stop with his rolled-up report. As he stood, two boys joined him. Taking a deep breath, he said, “Hi, I’m Antonio.”

“Hi, I’m Joe, and this is Mark. You’re the new kid? You’re Indian?” Antonio nodded.

“Neat. You should come to the playground down the block,” said Joe. “On Friday’s after school we play baseball.”

“I used to play the outfield back at the pueblo,” he replied.

“Neat,” said Mark. “We need a good outfielder on our team.”

It didn’t seem very long before Antonio heard Mrs. Inez, say, “Who would like to give their report?” After swallowing hard, Antonio raised his hand. “OK, Antonio,” said Mrs. Inez.

Somehow Antonio’s wobbly legs reached the front of the class where he taped the top of the rolled-up report to the chalkboard. “Oh, what a beautiful yucca!” exclaimed Mrs. Inez after it unrolled it to the floor.

Taking a deep breath, he pointed to its sword-shaped leave. “The leaves of the yucca are made up of stringy fibers. Long ago, my people soaked and pounded them until the fibers came apart. Then they wove them together to make baskets. Some of the baskets were so tightly woven that they could carry water.”

“Wow!” someone exclaimed.

Standing tall and proud, Antonio continued, “After the white petals fall off, little seed pods form. Inside these pods yucca moth lay their eggs. When they hatch into caterpillars, they eat the seeds and bore holes through the pods to get free.”

“What a shame,” said Mrs. Inez.

“Not really, Mrs. Inez. As the moth lays the eggs, it spreads pollen from flower to flower so that the plants =>

The Empty Spot

They stuck us in Studio 8. At first glance, it looked in decent shape. The professional company never danced there so the floors were rosin-free, letting us pirouette with ease. The room also had gaping windows and a cavernous ceiling.

Mr. Vankan would implore the boys: "Look how much ceiling you still have! Jump so high you hit it!"

For us girls, the ceiling only helped us feel dainty. The studio's wonky mirrors trapped us in our own private funhouse.

We all knew that the end-of-the-year performance was scheduled for two months from now, though the specific details of our dance remained unknown. In the other studios, the older girls already had started rehearsals. The soloists' gracefulness took our breath away. I longed to be a soloist someday; I suspect we all did.

Mr. Vankan's yellow notebook appeared more frequently as we got closer to the performance. He creased the spine before placing it open on top of the speaker. We remembered that book from our audition. When that book came out, our

PTSD returned, along with the insecurities of our 15-year-old selves. He circled around us as we danced, then stopped to stare at someone's foot or head before jotting down his verdict. Our bodies felt sore, and we wanted to go home. Often, he would excuse us early, testing our commitment. We demonstrated our resilience by staying as long as he did.

A month before the performance, Mr. Vankan pulled out the dreaded notebook and studied his notes. He instructed the boys to leave early and then told us girls to stand in a line from shortest to tallest. Surprisingly, the boys left without hesitation, presumably sensing that he was in a particularly sadistic mood.

He assigned places, repeating, "Remember, these places are not set. I just want to see how it looks."

For a week, Mr. Vankan moved us girls around as if playing chess. Under the touch-move

rule, he would leave his finger on the piece until the last minute, convincing us that he was sure of his move, only to dash expectations with a "Nah, I don't like it."

Historically, we had been good at learning choreography, having danced from infancy, but we had questions.

When we asked him whether our arms should be up or down when we ran to the back, his puzzling response was, "Do whatever everyone else is doing."

We smiled at him in disbelief, waiting for the punch line that never came.

He split us up into two sections, supposedly intending to give us equal practice time, though he never did. Instead, the second cast sat on the floor in extended splits for the last half hour of class.

Mr. Vankan yelled: "If you're sitting on the ground, you better be doing something!"

Our hands marked the routine accurately, without ever breaking a sweat.

In one muggy session, all were surprised to find Ms. Robin teaching class because of Mr. Vankan's unan-



=> will make seeds. The caterpillars don't eat all the seeds anyway. No other plant can feed and protect the moth eggs like the yucca pods do. No other insect can carry the pollen from flower to flower like the yucca moth."

"Wow, that was interesting, Antonio!" said Mrs. Inez, clapping. "You draw so well. Won't you tell us about your pueblo soon?"

"Yes. And I can bring a drawing of it," he answered, returning to his seat.

"Antonio," whispered Jonathan. "That was terrific."

"Thanks," he whispered back. "We could be friends, if you want?" Jonathan smiled and nodded.

"Everyone clapped!" he exclaimed as he came back home on the bus. "So did Jonathan, the kid who was picking on me. Now we're friends."

"I'm not surprised....where are you going?" she asked as he dashed by.

"Why Mama, it's Friday. I'm going to play baseball!"★

nounced trip to Germany. Previously, he had asserted we couldn't skip any classes whatsoever. Many of us pushed through illness, and one of us even skipped a funeral of a close family member. Now, he had disappeared. After watching both casts, Ms. Robin clenched her teeth, forcing an unnatural smile.

"Uh, okay," feigning a supportive tone. "Where are your arms supposed to be when you run to the back?"

We collectively shrugged, as if choreographed.

"What count do you enter in on?" she continued questioning.

No one knew.

A week later and two weeks before the performance, Mr. Vankan returned, tanned and well-rested. He didn't bother to explain his absence and dove right into class.

"Nooooooo, you run in on 5-6-7-8, not 3-4-5-6-7-8! Again! And Christa, Crystal, uh, whatever your name is, point those feet! You look like a clumsy duck!" Mr. Vankan mocked. It was her first day back from a week of dreadful coughing and sneezing.

Tears rolled down Christie's cheek, despite her best efforts to hold them back. During the rest of the rehearsal, I watched her with the hope that she could hold in her emotions until arriving safely in the privacy of our changing room. Oblivious to Christie's crying, Mr. Vankan pushed her harder and harder.

"Look at your extensions! What's happened to you?" he blurted out.

We all knew that you usually try to sleep when sick, not stretch. It wasn't fair, but there was nothing we could do. She had no clue about all of the changes that Ms. Robin had made. Neither did Mr. Vankan, who was fumbling with the speakers. Tchaikovsky blared from the speakers when Mr. Vankan confused the varispeed and volume knobs, making it impossible for us to verbally comfort Christie. Mr. Vankan was slow to adjust the volume and even slower to get back to the right tempo. The first cast started to dance with Mr. Vankan's count. However, Christie seemed to dance to her own music.

"No, no!" Mr. Vankan exploded.

He stopped the music. A cluster of worry wrinkles formed on Christie's forehead. Mr. Vankan sat in his

chair, face buried in one hand and mumbled, "You know what . . . we don't need you."

Christie stared at him as if asking, "Are you serious?"

Mr. Vankan was entirely serious.

Looking down to hide her tears, she jogged over to the wall. I walked over to her and gave her a hug.

"It will be okay," I whispered. "You'll be fine."

I let go of her. She looked at me with streams of tears trickling down from her red eyes, and she ran out of the room without being excused. I entered the changing room when I could. Her locker was open and empty. I smiled, at least on the inside. Someone was getting promoted to first cast.

Christie did not return the next day or ever again. In the corner of the studio where she set her bag, I set mine down. Her absence left a noticeable gap in the choreography.

"Does anyone know Christina's part?" Mr. Vankan petitioned as he looked around the room.

My hand darted in the air before he finished his sentence. He nodded and motioned for me to fill the gap.

"If you see an empty space, that's where you're supposed to be," he instructed, and that was all.

I didn't need more, even though it was my first time dancing with the first cast. My head spun as I chased the empty spot, like a cat chasing a laser, not knowing where it would appear next. My spirit soared when I felt my arabesque turned out like never before. Renewed energy coursed through my veins as I stretched my legs through. I glowed with confidence. I didn't even mind that Mr. Vankan was not watching me, just as long as he didn't take out his yellow notebook. As I held my final pose with a sense of accomplishment, I caught my beaming smile in the mirror, attached to a body that I could not recognize as my own. It would take some getting used to, but I knew I was in the spot where I needed to be.

—Leslie T. Fry, high school senior, was born in Hong Kong, and has lived in The Hague and New York City. She has been dancing seriously since the age of two. She enjoys literature, art, math, psychology, and chemistry. Leslie is studying Chinese, Dutch, French, and Latin. She plans to study behavioral neurochemistry and hopes to become a neuropsychiatrist.

1. a castle of words

I shall gather your
words into a castle
of shards
and walk (barefoot
into it
like a king
into his final
breath) and
I shall blow life
into them and
watch as they
flutter between
me and you
like dancing
elephants

2. The Song of Saccidānanda

I sing the song of forever.
I sing the gentle winds
as they brush against the cliffs
of endless time.

I sing the tireless birds
as they crowd the windswept plains
of limitless space.

I sing the hushed darkness
as it dreams the *Rudra Tandava**
of boundless life.

I sing myself,
I sing the song of Saccidānanda.**

* *Rudra Tandav*: A divine dance of Lord Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction and transformation, with vigorous, brisk movements.

** *Saccidānanda*: In Hindu philosophy, the direct experience and bliss of the absolute, unchanging reality.

—Kevin Zhang, age 16, Shenzhen, People's Republic of China. Kevin is a junior at BASIS International School PLH. He is an Honorary Junior Fellow of the John Locke Institute and serves on the PLATO Student Advisory Council. Kevin enjoys boating, collecting rocks, and learning about other cultures.

Nature's Eye

From a nature's eye
one could see the vivid hot pink rose.

From a nature's nose
one could smell a faint sweet divine fragrance that enhanced the air.

From a nature's touch
one could feel petals as soft as a fuzzy crocheted blanket.

Gleaming tall above the rest, another flower shines like the golden sun. It's blaring yellow petals are curved like an umbrella.

Still, another beauty the garden hides.

Hidden in the thickets beyond the common eye,
an angel white flower with streaks of lavender painted on waits.
It is as smooth as silk and is sprinkled with the morning dew,
all while spreading a fresh minty scent.

Unlike the rest,
leafy earth green vines laid draped across an arch.
On its bright leaves with a caterpillar-like bottom,
there was a little cucumber dangling off.

From a nature's mouth
one could taste a tiny burst of tangy cucumber juice exploding within.

From a nature's ear
one could hear the sound of the birds chirping here and there.

Behold all that can be uncovered with just a little bit of love towards nature.

—Aadya Agarwal, age 12, New Jersey. She writes: "I love nature, and spending time outdoors with my friends and family is one of my favorite things to do. My school has a beautiful garden of vegetables and flowers and the inspiration for my poem came from a visit to the garden one morning as part of my school project. I was mesmerized with so much beauty packed in the garden and it instantaneously transported me to a new world of melodies and tranquility activating all my five senses."



"Two Roads Never Taken"
—Jihye Choi, grade 9, Jeju Island, South Korea.

Skippping Stones Stew

"half, whole"

i have always been
two halves stitched together
half this, half that,
never wholly me
always half in, half out
not belonging to either
instead, i am two parts,
conflicting, like puzzle pieces
that don't match,
forced together anyways
not one whole,
just bad stitching
the parts that don't fit
hide under the paint,
cracked and chipped
not hiding much at all

they like to ask
if i am this half or that half,
but i say and, not or
and maybe they won't understand
but i am always this half
and that half,
these halves are just me,
whole

—Alyson Henderson, age 16, h. s. junior, Connecticut.
She adds: "I have been reading and writing for as long as I can remember, and it's through reading and writing that I learned about other people's cultures and identities as well as my own. My dad is white and American, and my mom is Korean and immigrated when she was young. For a long time, I've been exploring my own identity through writing, particularly my identity as a biracial person. I often feel like I have to choose between being Asian and being white, and I can't identify as both. However, by ignoring either part of my identity, I am ignoring so much of my life. The way I see it, choosing one half of my identity is being dishonest with myself about who I am. My poem, "half, whole" explores the struggle of never feeling fully accepted as either "half" of myself, and how I have accepted that I don't have to be put in one box and discard parts of myself for others' comfort."

"Failing to prepare is, in essence, preparing to fail!"



Spring

Small fluorescent animals join together
Into sprawling colonies, growing across millennia
An undersea civilization emerges
Pillars grow into branching skylines
Soft-bodied leaves, flowers, and mushrooms cover the floor
Young polyps ride currents with their finned neighbors
Weaving through thin, colorful trees and stinging whips
Before settling into extended colonies
A season passes, and warmth arrives to the city

Summer

The surface brightens, the city quiets
Gleaming, branching skyscrapers dim
Vibrant mushrooms and flowering plants fade
Into the returning memories of ivory reefs long lost
Generations of colonies once teeming with life
Now frail and shriveled beneath the waves
The sun a soul-sucking beam, draining all the reef's radiance
Algae and mucus escape to the surface, clouding the scattered sunlight
A season passes, and the dark city begins to cool

Autumn

As sunlight penetrates the waves slower, the blazing heat seems to weaken
The city's remaining colors endure, each polyp retains its strength
The skyscrapers continue to stand tall, the plants remain in bloom
Memories of the passing heat reach future generations
Strengthening each one more, prolonging their lives
Preserving the civilization's vibrancy
The polyps and fish swim freely once again
Through now illuminated paths
Color returns to the bustling city

—Rachel Agyeman, age 17, Maryland.

Skipping Stones Stew

Move In Day

Desperate Home is a Brand New Toy
Which is to say that it is perfect and sleek
Yet there is no beautiful indent of happy fingers,
No pinch of love in the recipe that is life,
No ache when it cannot be found,
Just a picture-perfect picket perimeter fence,
Just a facade, faked fun feelings
Desperate Home is a Brand New Toy

—Lila Ahitov, age 16, California.

Where's my Sporking Place?

You would think that versatility would be appreciated.
Small forks and spoons for dessert, big ones for entrees.
There's a knife equipped for steak, butter, and cheese.
The amount of money, plastic, and materials used for
cutlery is astonishing.
Certainly, each silverware race was created equally.
But in the kitchen drawer, where there is a myriad of
dividers, there is never one dedicated to sporks.

—Lila Ahitov, age 16, California.

The Moustache

I tiptoe into my older brother's room. His sheets crinkle as he shifts in his sleep. I hold my breath as my heartbeat amplifies and my hands shake. I gather my courage and creep to his pillow. Regret fills me, I should have opened the Sharpie earlier. I first draw the lines under his nose, then on his chin. Facial hair added to his smooth eleven-year-old skin. I run out of the room, leaving the door ajar. Tucked into my covers, I'm able to take a breath. Safe and grinning until morning.

"Me and my brother have always been close. I chose this particular memory because as he is now in college, I find myself wandering into his room. I half expect to find him there. He would be reading a book, on the phone, or asleep, waiting to be a victim of my next prank. There have been many times of us recounting our night's adventures or my pestering him while he's with his friends in his room. One of my oldest memories is my drawing a mustache on him in permanent marker the night before his school field trip!"

—Lila Ahitov, 16, California.



My Mom's Frying Pan

They asked my mom, "What inspires you, Ms. Anne?"
Pat came her reply, "It sure is my frying pan."
Her crisp reply left them confounded.
After all, she clearly left the Sun and the Moon grounded.

My mom was sure of her inspiration.
And this is what she offered as her explanation.

"Frying pan might look like a plain Jane tool.
But look! how, its emptiness itself makes it useful.
It tells me that nothing really belongs to you.
You are just a medium to pass things through.
You must clean yourself of the smallest residue.
So that you are ready to receive something new."

"Frying pan has taught me to choose to be humble.
Go through and show up after every rough and tumble.
Seasoning through slow and high heating.
Strengthening through scratches and beating.
And not to suffer from any self-pity.
Be assured that you are where you are meant to be."

Mom further said, "For me, frying pan is an unsung beauty,
That creates complex dishes through its simplicity,
And keeps my family fed by doing its duty."

—Aadya Agarwal, grade 8, Princeton Day School, New Jersey.

"Love Language" by Gavin Kim, age 16, South Korea.



In this piece, the kitchen becomes a sacred space where memories are created and relationships are nurtured. I depict the delicate balance of the culinary process, infusing each recipe with intention and affection. Through vibrant colors and intricate details, I evoke the sensory experience of cooking—a symphony of aromas, textures, and flavors that emphasize the senses of warmth. Let's reflect on the transformative power of food as a means of communication. Beyond nutrition, it conveys love, gratitude, and connection.

Eons of Thoughts

In the cosmos, who determines the designs?
 Who creates the stars, and who draws the line?
 Am I the actor in a predestined play,
 Or am I the narrator who holds the quill, forming the best
 story ever told in a way?
 Can a single drop of rain question the ocean's mighty
 Or does it become one with the sea and lose its identity?
 Am I the architect of fate,
 Or in this riddle of existence are we all the same?
 What is a fallen tree to the deafening silence of the forest with no ear?
 Is my existence only validated when heard loud and clear?
 If I am hidden in the darkness, does the sun brightly shine?
 Is the universe but a reflection, of my consciousness divine?
 Does the dart of time travel straight, or can it arch or sway?
 If tomorrow mutters a secret, what would today say?
 Is the present, past and future nothing but the illusion of my mind,
 Or are they the stepping stones to the actuality we bind?
 Can we discover the fringe of the universe, the origin of space?
 Is there a creator, a composer, in this celestial embrace?
 Or is it but a Möbius strip, a limitless twist,
 In the loom of existence, does beginning or end exist?
 In this universe, am I a free thinker,
 Is my mind the sole philosopher,
 Or is it but a fragment of a lone troubled lad?
 In this shore of existence, we are but a grain of sand.

—Manvi Gupta, recent h. s. graduate, Madhya Pradesh, India.

She adds: "I'm someone who is passionate about building ideas from the ground up and constantly learning, with a deep love for creative writing."



Art by Leicie Tonouchi, age 14, Hawaii. Cassie (left) has positive vibes. Keila (right) is too cool for school. Both were painted in ink and gouache.

The Days of the Dandelion

Frost★ says nature's first green is gold
 and only lasts an hour,
 but a dandelion stays for a month
 before it turns sour.
 Unaffected by circumstances,
 it survives under any condition.
 Despite its upbringing,
 it grows with ambition.
 A face of golden petals,
 spread wide like a smile.
 Temporary like everything,
 it too fades after a while.
 And even with its beauty,
 the flower is still a weed.
 Limited by its own existence,
 the worst kind of seed.
 Soon enough it becomes weary,
 its vibrance dims to white.
 Having given all that it has,
 it fades from plain sight.
 But the dandelion is durable
 and will grow again next year.
 Even when it's been through the worst,
 it'll always reappear.
 Because the dandelion knows
 that with beauty,
 always comes pain.
 We need to endure the hurt
 so we can learn to welcome the rain.

★Frost: Famous American poet, Robert Frost.

—Chris Cooper is the author of the 2024 debut novel *Crazy by Conscious* from Anxiety Press. He adds, "I created this poem to convey different aspects of the human condition with varying linguistic elements. I hope to one day be content without feeling the existential need to constantly create."



—Graycie Strohmeier, gr. 10, Florida.

Lunar New Year at the House of Du *By Justin Du, age 11, New York.*

Snow blanketed the houses in the neighborhood. Lanterns illuminated the night as the sounds of firecrackers filled up the sky. I sat inside my house, watching the spectacular display of red and yellow from my window. From inside, the delicious smells of dumplings, rice, and spring rolls filled the air. I marveled at the red envelopes piled on my bed. “\$600?!” I thought.

The New Year goes under many different names, such as the Spring festival, the New Year’s festival, and the Chinese New Year. The number of names barely matches the amount of traditions during this event. I heard the footsteps of my aunt coming up to the door. I had not seen her in a year. Even with the wrath of the snow attempting to blot out the light of the New Year, she greeted me with the same smile. As my uncle finally made it up the first step, she handed me another red envelope. As I tore it open, I saw another \$50. “My luck has definitely continued.”

My Grandpa had prepared what I like to call the “New Year’s Feast.” The smell of fresh fish, rice, and Peking duck wafted across the house. I settled in, attempting to resist the urge to stuff myself. Outside, the waves of clouds looked freakishly like dragon scales. Even with the weather and raging storm, my mouth was already full of food. I stared out the window, almost dropping a piece of duck as I looked outside to the display of lanterns. “After dinner, things are going to get a lot more fun,” I thought.

Sure enough, they did. My dad ran from the seemingly harmless cylinder implanted into the snow. A moment later, sparks started to fly. Pop, Pop, Pop! The sound filled my ears as I felt like I was running in slow motion. Crackling balls of light flew dangerously close to my ears, but I did not care. Who would care if this was the last time you could do this for a year? That raced through my mind when I felt a slight burn on my arm. More sparks flew out, vaporizing the snow in an instant. I finally noticed the spark that landed on my jacket, but I did not think much of it. The snow had already put it out. “How come my ears are not bleeding yet? It feels like they should,” I wondered. Even more sparks flew, but the first fireworks were coming to an end. Years later, I would be told that fireworks were illegal in New York. My family and I were extremely lucky not to be caught. Wait... Why am I saying that to you?

The day was over, and I was already tucked in bed. My arm stung from the spark, but I didn’t care. The first day of the New Year was over, but the festivities had not ended.

In China and many other Asian countries, the lunar new year lasts about two weeks. However, in my family, we celebrate it for just two days. Although the first day was over, which meant that most of the things I was looking forward to had passed, there was another occasion coming up that my family considered part of the New Year. It does vary with the years, but my mom’s birthday is right after the Spring Festival. To us, the event rivals the New Year. Unfortunately for me and everyone else in my family, we had to wait until dinner.

Time moved like a tortoise. “Do you really have to do this?” I asked whatever interdimensional being was watching me. Right on cue, the next hour went by, then two, and soon enough it was 6:20 pm.

The Golden Bistro restaurant was a common choice when it came to birthday dinners, so it was no surprise when my mom picked it out. The waiters recognized us and sat us down. At this point, I would usually ask for the WiFi name and password because I cannot live without it, but today was different.

I crammed so much food into my stomach it felt like a water balloon plugged into a hose. As more and more food came into me, the invisible butterflies in my stomach screamed for help. Luckily for me, my brain soon caught on and told the hypothalamus part of itself to stop eating. Good thing it listened, as I might have exploded if it did not.

People started to clap randomly as a flame flickered. “Wait a minute...” I thought.

“JUSTIN!” my uncle shouted. “Take a photo!”

“Oh, okay,” I responded, completely disoriented. I managed to snap the perfect moment as my mom blew out the tiny flame and made a wish.

Back at home, I was too bloated to do anything except put on my pajamas and slump onto bed. Soon, my mom told me to get up and brush my teeth. I was exhausted doing such a simple task, but I eventually slipped through the night. With the last sliver of moonlight shining through my window, I fell asleep in thirty seconds.

Lunar New Year is never celebrated the same, even in the same culture group. For example, instead of fireworks and almost getting caught by the cops, you might just hang a lantern and call it a day. It varies family to family.

I have to wait until next year for more illegal fireworks and invisible butterflies screaming for help, but it will be worth the wait.

—Justin Du, age 11, NY.

True North

wrinkled fingers, time's etchings, knead my scalp—a syrupy prison of coconut. this weekly ritual with *Dadi* (grandma) filled me with dread. my once-proud hair, a battlefield of grease, tangled in memories of taunts sharper than the combs that pried them free. (*childhood dread*)

plastic prisons held fragrant *samosas* and jewel-toned rice, an aromatic betrayal in the sterile air. wrinkled noses, scrunched-up faces—a chorus of disgust still echoes loud. (*lunch box shame*)

mama beams, oblivious: “This is us, *beta*, be proud.” head hung heavy, the weight of scorn a bitter pill to swallow.

hennaed hands, stained with cumin and cardamom. whispered pleas for blonde locks and a name that rolls off their tongues. (*daily prayers*)

my slicked hair, once a shield is now a trendy crown. “whitewashed,” they sneer, a reflection of my distance. (*ethnic estrangement*)

my culture, a muted melody in my own ears. deafened by belonging, I craved their bland song.

viral spectacle—Indian food explodes on screens.

what I once hid, a trend's fickle embrace, or acceptance's gentle hand? (*recalibration*)

perhaps, a compass adjusting after years of pointing astray. now, I navigate towards a self, finally, authentically me.

—Reeti Ramchandani, age 17, is an Indian-origin student at a high school in United Arab Emirates (UAE).

“Growing up in a British international school in Dubai presented a unique cultural landscape. While surrounded by a diverse mix of nationalities, I often felt like an outsider. My classmates, many from Western backgrounds, didn't always understand the significance of Indian traditions and I, like many children of immigrants, had difficulty embracing my roots. My poem explores this internal conflict, particularly focusing on how my cultural heritage, which I once felt ashamed of, has become a source of strength and pride.”

“The inspiration for this poem came from a series of personal experiences. The “dreadful detangles” and “plastic lunch box prisons” represent a childhood where I felt pressure to assimilate and hide my Indian heritage. However, I have met so many incredible people who have helped me reconnect with my culture. Furthermore, every two weeks, I host creative workshops for senior citizens, most of them from India. Communicating in Hindi allows us to share stories, explore artistic expression, and bridge the gap between generations. Witnessing their joy and rediscovering the beauty of my heritage through their eyes has been truly transformative. This experience directly influenced the themes explored in the poem—cultural identity and self-acceptance.”

1. Wildflower

I knew the view
From my heart
Would start
An immense eruption of
Laughing again when I crossed
In front of a homeless shelter
For teens
Not that there was anything
Funny about being homeless
It was what I said to a
Transvestite
One day at the site
Knowing he might
Have taken it the wrong way
‘Sweetheart’ I greeted him with
One morning and
Without warning
He treasured what I said
With a smile and gesture
So big
It melted my inner core
Giving me renewed respect
For what it means to be a LGBTQ.

—maggie d.

2. Losing A Summer Companion

I visit trees like they are old friends
But this time the sweet
Smell of pine that blows
Through my window alerts me
To something going on this early dawn
From a tree that is my peace
From city noise on busy days
My provider on hot days
and my healer on lonely days
I follow my nose to the scent
And low and behold a huge
Standing pine is cut to the ground
I could not stop my tears from
Coming down like rain
When all the property owner
Could explain it is a plumbing problem
“A plumbing problem?” I ask
Aghast with pain.

—maggie d., African American poet, Washington.

Poor, Poor Chicken

I am practically starving after getting home from high school track practice, and I am unabashedly stuffing rice and chicken in my mouth when my grandma just drops a bombshell: “Could you imagine killing the chicken? That’s what I did when I was a kid.” I whip my head around to the tiny, cheerful woman sitting next to me. My grandma continues telling her childhood stories, and my mom rolls her eyes. She tells my grandma, “We should take your grandkids to the Chinese countryside one day. They should experience some real hardship, unlike this richy rich American town.” She isn’t wrong: the other day, I saw a senior drive a Ferrari to school.

The two of them continue to regale the highs and lows of participating in the slaughter of the chicken designated for dinner back in 1970s China. I wince and maybe dry heave a little as my grandma tells me and my nine-year-old brother about the blood spewing everywhere, and other gory details that go something like, “The chicken always struggled but then the neck snapped and it died. Then we plucked out the feathers and roasted the poor thing for dinner but didn’t feel bad because it tasted good, and back in my day—”

Well, there goes my appetite. My mom sits there smugly, adding more fuel to the grotesque flaming garbage dump of a story. I catch my brother’s eye hoping he is equally disturbed, but he continues to stab at his rice with his chopsticks (perhaps reenacting my grandmother’s story impaling my hunger?) Huffing, I mutter “Why at the dinner table?” apparently interrupting my grandma’s speech about the hardships of daily life on a Chinese farm, etc. Suddenly, my dad chimes in with a helpful lesson about pain and struggle and real life. “You see,” he says, “When I came to America, I was a broke grad student. I worked so hard for everything I had...” I just shake my head, gobble a few more bites of rice, take one last swipe of that delicious soy sauce, and leave the table.

As I retreat upstairs into the safe space of my room, my grandmother’s story, although somewhat disturbing, makes me wonder how her definition of normal is so different from mine. At times I wonder if my American peers understand how the Chinese part of me affects my life. My parents and grandparents, both born and

raised in China, constantly emphasize the importance of grades, of developing a logical, problem-solving mind. In America, much of the culture revolves around socialization and sports. And I am expected to do it all. I aim for straight A’s, but I also need to play competitive soccer.

My grandma’s life in China did not have the same expectations. What she did on a daily basis at her rural home in China is so unlike my life in an American suburban town. Even with an ever-increasing Asian population in New Jersey, and bursts of culture showing up around our town, I know growing up here is nothing like the hypothetical life I might have had in China, especially 60 years ago. Would I rather have been in China, the land of academic weapons and chicken decapitation (or so my grandma narrates), or would I rather live in America, where I feel obligated to belong to two contrasting cultures? In our school hallways, I see the quiet Asian robotics kid, and the obnoxious American jock. Where do I fit in? Would I fit in if I was fully American in America? Would I fit in if I was fully Chinese raised in China? Would I be able to behead a chicken?

—Cheri Li, age 14, Chinese American, New Jersey. She says: “...at home, I speak both Mandarin and English. Growing up in a town where more than one third of the population is Asian (many of them, Chinese) has taught me to appreciate my heritage. My upbringing has shown me that my Chinese culture is an integral part of my identity, which I am able to discuss in submissions like this one.

“In my free time, I enjoy writing, photography, music, and sometimes art. I can sing and play the piano, while other times I choose to read books. A large part of my childhood was spent reading or at the library, something I wish to continue to do in the future.”



**“Ukraine,
the
Bountiful”**

Art by Kateryna
Yuhayeva,
age 14,
Zaporizhzhia,
Ukraine.

Made in China

When people see me, they see the narrow eyes, the width of my face, my golden undertone, but they never see me. Either in their eyes or out loud, they ask the question, “Are you Chinese?”

They assume my nationality, and they assume right because pattern recognition teaches that most Asians—specifically, East Asians—are Chinese. While Asia is far from a monolith, Han Chinese people consist of the largest ethnic group in the world. But really, the assumption still hurts because who are they to peg my entire identity as a single statistic from Asia’s second most populous country?

Once they identify me and get comfortable defining me by my identity, they get friendly. And sometimes they think they’re comedians: “Look at that dog! Is that your dinner?”

Or the tried and true: “She’s blind—look how small her eyes are.”

Before others can laugh at me, I start to lean into the stereotypes: obviously I’m a straight-A student—not because I work hard—but because I’m Asian; obviously I’m good at math—I’m Asian; obviously I haven’t responded to their party pity invitation—not because I don’t like them and I don’t particularly want to go—but I need my Asian tiger mom’s permission before I RSVP. Obviously, obviously, obviously. I make jokes at the expense of my own racial and ethnic identity before others can get to it. I enjoy the shock factor; in a way, it feels like I’m taking back the narrative. But instead I am complicit in my own mockery, doomed by the narrative I assume possession of.

Recently, I learned to let go and stop caring about the assumptions people make. It’s not my fault if they judge me; I don’t need to appease them. So what if my grades stutter A-A-A-A-A? I studied for them without my parents hounding me. So what if I have a talent with math? As my parents have taught me, “Take a compliment graciously and gratefully.” So what if I don’t want to go to their party? They never see past the eyes narrowed from suspicion, the face as wide and flat as China’s plains, with its undertone as gold as the wheat fields in the south of my motherland.

Why should I care about what they feel the need to assume?

—Katherine Liang, age 15, New Jersey.

Thorn

The seawater is no longer azure,
crushed, and flung upon the shore.
Under hollowed humanitarian clauses,
warlords clash, and the people wail.
With each transaction of power,
the emperor washes his hands in gold.
Here returns the eternal night, a darkness
to be forgotten in no time.

How could we turn from the sea, its waves stained
with blood?
How could we ignore the cries, the deep sorrow of
the free?
How could we dance upon the graves of those
wrongly accused?

The thorns never forget.
The protectors never forget.
The donors never forget.
The clauses never forget.
We say: our memories won’t disappear.

When the thorn tears open the stagnant night,
when light penetrates the thick grey clouds,
when we finally see the order in eternity—
our discipline brings eternity.

Scars will heal, fractures will seal,
and a broken heart will beat like a drum.
The bleeding words will fly high as birds,
or get carried away by a gentle breeze.
Disasters finally bring Reincarnation.

When splendid red flowers bloom beneath the thorn,
when chaos is dissipated by the dawn of order,
we will push open our windows
to feel again the warmth of the sun.

—Linlang Zhao, age 14, a sophomore at Shenzhen
International High School in China, is intrigued by poetry.



You're meant to stand out
Uniqueness is beautiful
Accept your beauty.

—Skyler Rain Fick,
grade 12, Florida.

Searching for Happiness

I experienced real happiness two years ago, while at my sleep away camp in Lake Wales, about a few dozen miles south of Orlando. No cell phones or electronics were allowed. We were just kids from Miami, except for a few internationals, that would grow together and create an amazing bond during the three weeks that we were there. Disconnected from my phone, I was more engaged and made friendships easily. The camp buildings were close, everything in walking distance, with outdoor games that forced me to play with others, as well as a lake to go tubing. Cabins were next to each other, allowing for closer bonds between the campers. I felt happy because I felt that I was a part of a community that reminded me what true connections with others feels like. From these moments at the camp, I realized that happiness could be manufactured.

The Bhutanese government believes that happiness can be manufactured by the state. The N.Y. Times published an article called, *In Bhutan, Happiness Index as Gauge for Social Ills*, in which they interviewed a “happiness expert” named Dasho Karma Ura who measures happiness in Bhutan, a small mountainous country in East Asia. “Bhutan’s Constitution, which went into effect in 2008 with the transition to democracy, directs the kingdom’s leaders to consult the four pillars of Gross National Happiness—good governance, sustainable socioeconomic development, preservation and promotion of culture, and environmental conservation—when considering legislation.” Having a certain set of “pillars” by which laws need to be measured shows that the Bhutanese government believes that they have identified which pieces need to be in place at the same time in order to create happiness. While I think happiness is defined differently by each person, the promotion of the four pillars can be an effective way to boost happiness. For example, preservation and promotion of cultures would allow for every person to have some sense of acceptance and community, thus making them happier.

Happiness is not a fixed feeling but rather a continuous, changing feeling as you go, and is uniquely produced according to you and your emotions, thoughts, and health. Dasho Karma Ura says, “People feel happy when they see something ethical... something which makes you pause and think, ‘Ah, this is beautiful. Beautiful, meaningful, ethical.’” The thought



that money or material items can buy someone their happiness is not true, as the money creates a tendency, a repeating cycle, wherein a person just wants more stuff. This creates a cycle of searching for happiness through the hoarding of material items. On the contrary, the *New York Times* article said, “... Mr. Ura has spent much of his time asking Bhutanese people questions about interactions with neighbors, quality of sleep and physical vigor in an attempt to understand and measure subjective well-being.” Sleep and social interactions are factors for whether someone is happy, showing that it’s not just the neighborhood someone lives in that contributes to their happiness. If their brain and body aren’t relaxed and recharged, it can tend to make them grumpy or lazy. If they aren’t able to fit into the community they live in, they won’t feel comfortable being there. Being grumpy or lazy as well as uncomfortable with your community makes it difficult to feel happy.

Happiness has been too closely associated with success for me to imagine success without happiness. Due to social media, where users can look and compare their lives to anyone in the world, people idealize others’ material possessions instead of valuing what they themselves have. This causes them to constantly be chasing after these material items instead of striving to do what will make them happy. No matter how much money I had, I wouldn’t be able to feel successful unless I was happy. Typically nowadays, people strive to gain wealth and be financially “successful” in order to prove their worth to others, to prove that they are a person of value. I believe one should instead strive to reach personal goals and feel confident in their own abilities. And, then recognize that when you follow your own goals, you are a success, no matter how much or how little money you’re making. When we are following our goals instead of other people’s standards, we can achieve happiness.

(continued on page 22)

“Happiness is hitting a home run. Happiness is solving that math problem. Happiness is laughing with the ones you love.”

The special thing about being in the Lake Wales Camp was that the sense of community among my peers was strong; everyone seemed to have been friends for a lifetime. Since we didn't know each other's position in society or talents, there were no expectations for anyone, and we could express ourselves as we really were. Some believe that happiness can be engineered in different manners, similar to the belief of the Bhutanese government. Others believe that happiness comes from within and is unique for all. Financial success has been too closely associated with happiness, which distorts someone's perspective on what happiness actually is.



Happiness is hitting a home run. Happiness is solving that math problem. Happiness is laughing with the ones you love. And while we run into countless obstacles daily, happiness will always be waiting.

—Enzo Paesano, age 16, grade 10, Florida. “My parents

and I are Venezuelan. I speak English, Spanish, French, and German. I love to play baseball and listen to music. My dream and vision for the future is a world where everyone has the ability to do what they truly desire and people don't restrict themselves from doing so. Reflecting on my amazing experience at camp inspired me to write about happiness.”

See The Sea by Kasia Badger, age 17, Texas.

Below the waves,	they stay together,
amidst the reefs,	within their world
fish of all kind,	which they meet.
search for food	On land,
and life peace.	within ourselves,
These living beings,	our families,
unlike to sharks,	communities,
are like to us	states, countries,
in more ways	and continents,
than one may think.	let's see the sea
Although each different,	and do just the same,
each color,	in support
each pattern unique,	for you and me.

Florero

¿Qué piensas del florero?
Aquel que tienes en tu mesita,
aquel que te regalaron en febrero,
y que ahora se marchita la rosita.
¿Qué te provoca?
¿Cuál de los tantos sentidos en ti despierta?
Porque su olor a mí me sofoca,
como si estuviera en el funeral de una persona muerta.
Decime, ¿por qué eso significa amor para ti?
Si solo son plantitas que se marchitan.
Dime con tu voz,
¿en ti qué incitan?
Porque aquello para mí es cual ciclo:
cortar, remojar y ver morir.
Eso no tiene sentido ni estilo,
es solo ver podrir.
Dime tú,
tu pensar verdadero,
dime con tu dulce voz,
¿qué hace en ti el florero?

—Alexander Rivera Preciado, 14 años de edad, Idaho.

Flower Vase

What do you think of the vase?
The one you have on your table
The one they gave you in February.
and now the rose is withering.
What does it provoke in you?
Which of the many senses in you awakens?
Because its smell suffocates me
As if I were at a dead person's funeral.
Tell me why that means love to you?
If they are only little plants that wither
tell me with your voice
What do they invoke in you?
Because for me that is what cycle
Cut, soak and watch them die
That has no sense or style
It's just seeing them rot.
You tell me
Your true thinking
Tell me with your sweet voice
What does the vase do to you?

—Alexander Rivera Preciado, 14, from Mexico, lives in Idaho.

Arctic Heat

September 23, 2120:

Heat. So much heat. New York City now feels hotter than Arkansas. Arkansas, that's right. The little state that's much closer to the equator. It's already too late to fix this. If the world had cut back in the early 2000s then maybe we would have been okay. I don't know why I'm worrying about it now. We had a chance to worry a few decades ago. Did we do anything? No, and that's why we're in hell now. I guess we just have to deal with it. We're all going to die anyway, why not pollute the only living biome we have, right?

October 5th, 2120:

Something came in the mail today, an invite to go on a cruise. Have the time of your life, it said. Fun, enjoyable trip to the Arctic! Ha-ha. A trip to the melting icebergs. Is this a joke? That's what I thought, but then my sister signed me up for the \$7,000 trip before I could protest. I'm off to the North Pole in three days.

October 8th, 2120:

I packed my bags this morning for the cruise. I looked up the number of people going on the cruise website, and it's just three. Me, my evil sister who signed me up, a 45-year-old named Lisa. Maybe people were scared, or just lazy. Another problem of the generation, everyone's isolated from another. The only way people talk really is through social media, which really doesn't affect me, but still. Maybe I'm just too old and grumpy.

October 9th, 2120:

When they called us down this morning on the boat for breakfast, all we got was a slice of bread each and milk that tasted sour. I mean we are going to the North Pole, so I think I have to lower my expectations. Sarah, my sister, seemed awfully happy though, and she even drank two cups of milk.

Later, I found out why she was so happy. The captain of the cruise ship was my sister's friend, and she had convinced him to set a route more north than our original plan. As a result, we would see polar bears. Real polar bears! It seemed more like a legend, as no one had seen one in years. This trip was looking better.

October 10th, 2120:

We got to the iceberg where the polar bears were supposed to be. *Supposed to be* are the key words here. They were nowhere to be seen. The loudspeaker crackled and the captain's accented voice came through. "Eh,

sorry folks! Minor dizruption, yes. Polar bears you will see soon!" There was a static that I assumed was the speaker turning off, but then I heard something else. "Where are zes polar bears? All ze izebergs are empty."

That couldn't be. How were the polar bears gone? I frantically looked out into the bay. Iceberg, iceberg, iceberg, unconscious polar bear. Wait, what? I ran up to the captain's office and shouted in his face, "There!" The captain steered our tiny ship towards the polar bear.

In several minutes, we arrived. As we took a closer look, we realized that nearby was a small research building. A scientist in a parka walked out. He waved to us, motioning that we should come closer. The captain anchored the boat and we unloaded. I approached the scientist and informed him that it looked like there was perhaps a dead polar bear, and they should check it out. The scientist's warm smile dropped. "Oh dear," he said. "Our last one?"

The captain looked at the scientist warily. "Ze... last one?"

The scientist nodded. "Polar bears have been slowly dying out over the past century and they were expected to disappear from the earth by 2100. We stalled the process by keeping two polar bears in our research lab, but the male died a week ago, and I guess the female, today." We were shocked. How could the scientist just brush it off his shoulder? One of the most beautiful, mysterious creatures had just gone extinct!

Sarah shouted in his face, "You let them die? You could have been watching the last polar bear! Instead now she's lying on the ice dead!"

"Well, it's not like we could have done anything." All eyes turned to me.

"What do you mean?" Sarah asked.

"What I'm saying is that if we wanted to do something, we should have done it decades ago. Instead, our species decided to leave it for the next generation to worry about. It's our own fault, so stop blaming the people who tried to save them." I braced myself to hear my sister's comeback, but I heard something else instead.

"If we had stopped polluting the Earth years ago, we could have saved them." Lisa stepped up. She had been quiet this entire time, but her voice was loud and clear. The scientist looked at the ground in shame. There was a moment of silence and peace. The only thing you could hear was the Arctic winds howling. The captain eventu-

Arctic Heat... *continued from page 23*

ally cracked and said, "Okay! Back on ze boat!" No one questioned him, and we headed back.

October 12, 2120:

The journey home was pretty uneventful and calm. We didn't really talk about the polar bears, or the fact that it was our fault. I couldn't get it off my mind, so I started working when I got home. The idea of climate change protests clicked. Two months later, I was in Manhattan informing people about the news the government was too afraid to deliver. The polar bears were gone and we would be too, if we didn't stop this soon.

People started taking action. I saw leaflets protesting against climate change and people starting to recycle and use cars less often, things that we should've done earlier. I can't say that it's a happy ending, but at least we're making a dent.

—Noah Xia, age 12, grade 6, New Jersey.

Climate Change

As a teenage girl, I raise my voice,
In anger and sorrow, I have no choice,
For the world I inherit, it's not the same,
For change was permitted, is it you to blame?

I see the forests burn and the oceans rise,
The melting ice and the polluted skies,
My future's slipping through careless hands,
In a world where greed often commands.

Anger rises as climate rise, at those who turn a blind eye,
To the planet's suffering, as it starts to cry,
They plunder and profit, without remorse,
While the Earth's future takes a perilous course.

I want to scream at them who stall,
And deny the science, as our world starts to fall,
They prioritize profit over what's right,
Leaving us to bear the brunt of this fight.

But I won't sit idly by in despair,
I'll join the movement, I'll show I care,
Together we'll rise, and demand a change,
For a future where our planet can exchange,

Its scars for healing, its pain for hope,
A world where our dreams and futures can cope,
With the challenges ahead, we'll find a way,
To protect the Earth for a brighter day.

—I An Ryu, age 16, is a rising senior, South Korea.

Love in Farsi

Love in Farsi is *nazar*

The amulet on the bracelet my aunt gave to me
To protect against the evil eye

Love in Farsi is *taarof*

The offerings of the host
And the appreciation of the guest
Taarof is steaming *ghormeh sabzi*, crispy *tahdig*, and sweet
nan-e nokhodchi

It is my relatives making sure I never leave without
Seconds or thirds

Love in Farsi is *azizam*

The word my relatives call me
It means "my dear," but I don't need the translation—
I understand
Just from the way they say it

Love in Farsi is *jan*

It has a similar translation to *azizam*, but it's used
Right at the end of a name with no pause in between
When I attach *jan* to someone's name, I'm saying:

You and my love for you
Are bound together, one and the same
Inseparable

—Madeleine Kashkooli, h.s. senior, California. "I wrote this poem in honor of my Persian family. I wanted to capture the beauty of my Persian heritage through different aspects of the culture, such as its language, food, and customs. In particular, I sought to explore how some Farsi words have direct equivalents in English while others require more explanation."

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Sept. 27, 2024

—Arun N. Toké, Editor & Publisher

Wind

Wind,

Sometimes, when you're especially poised, I feel you just about to break in my wall, the one with all the windows and mirrors, shattering my room while your silent clutter sweeps me within; I resist.

But I can resist you only as long as I can sleep.

It is only then, when my mind cannot recognize friends from foes, that you rush in through my eyes and take me to the ones of your storm.

We land on the coasts of Assos and I feel your grasp ease as curtains draw back from the sun for the first time since last summer.

Conversations and too many rounds of tea carry us through the day;

We listen to grandpa telling the story of when he first lay eyes on grandma, she blushes and tries to hide, But only you are the master of the art.

And so, just as I feel you drifting away, you engulf me once again and we are in the battlefields of Troy.

I race for shelter, perhaps as Achilles and Patroclus did to each other, but every stride forward, your gust booms in my ears more and more.

Never before have I been so tightly held in havoc.

Even for you, there is a time for rest. I latch onto your wings as we make our way home;

Your gale subsides and I find darkness once again.

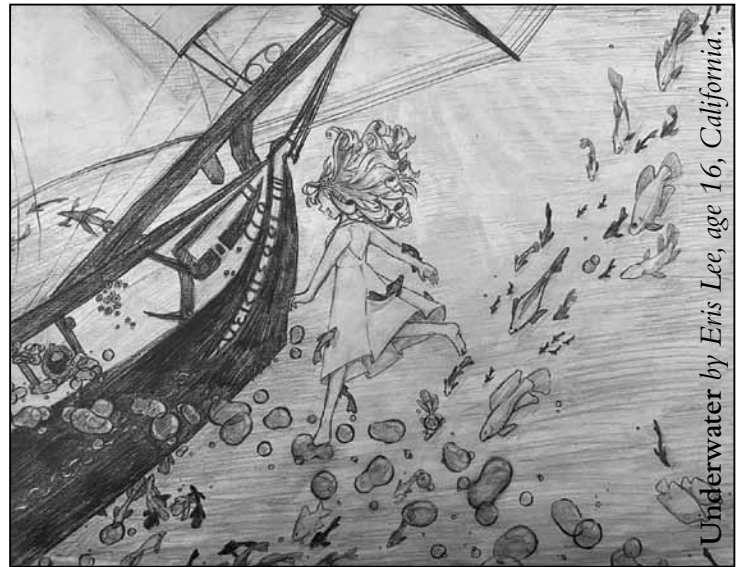
Wind,

For all your chaos,

Your eye is my eye.

Your gust is my soul.

—Ada Habip, h. s. junior, Massachusetts. “Wind explores my bicultural background and the powers of wind as a force of nature. Being raised by first-generation Turkish immigrants, I have been blessed to learn about the history, nature, and diversity within Turkish culture. However, with the complexities of its history, I am at times equally disturbed by the culture. In my poem, I employ wind as a literary device that physically transports me to different parts of Turkey and serves as a reflection of my emotional grounding in those places. The form of the poem itself also reflects wind: with run-on sentences and long lines, it is an homage to how wind, and more largely, the forces of nature, cannot be bound. The poem begins with an attempt to resist the wind and the realities it will bring, but it becomes clear that it will not be contained by human force...”



Underwater by Eris Lee, age 16, California.

Rubenstein

People I don't know hate me for my last name
But I'm a Rubenstein and that's never gonna change;

Your reaction makes no difference

I've started but not finished

Never finished fighting

Never finished dreaming

Never finished writing

This is my life, my “American Dream”

I told you I'm writing, I'm picking up steam
Star of David round my neck cuz I'm not afraid
Of somebody telling me “the Jews killed Jesus”

I'm gonna watch my rapper rock his braids¹

I'm gonna support all the cousins that need it

We're bonded, kindred, family no debate

In a world of stereotypes, indifference and hate

It's not funny, I didn't come here to play

Let's pick each other up, let's find our way to love
Don't try and convert me cuz I'm not gonna budge

Too many people refuse to hear the truth

It hangs in the air; speaking it's uncouth

You think jokes surfing fine lines are cool

Don't think for a second that I'll let it slide

I won't forget it, don't think you can hide

Behind shrugs and silence and social media

Behind corners of the internet with horrific ideas

I'm proud of my family, my stories, my name

And nothing can take my culture away

1. This line is in reference to a Jewish rapper BLP Koshier, who demonstrates creative and empowering wordplay in his songs and wears braids resembling the Orthodox Jewish payot.

—Maddie Rubenstein, age 15, New York.

NOTEWORTHY N.E.W.S.

• **2024 was the Hottest Year on Record!** On Jan. 10th this year, Common Dreams and other media sources reported that according to the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) the average global surface temperatures for 2024 was the highest since modern record-keeping began in 1880. Independent analyses from Berkeley Earth, European Copernicus Climate Change Service, the U.K.'s Met Office, and U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) all concur with these finding. The NASA found that after 15 straight months of new records from June 2023 through August 2024, global temperatures last year were 2.3°F (1.28°C) above the agency's 20th-century baseline from 1951-1980 and about 2.65°F (1.47°C) higher than the mid-19th century average from 1850-1900. Also, the country has endured 27 weather and climate disasters in 2024 with economic losses exceeding \$1 billion each, collectively costing \$182.7 billion and killing at least 568 people.

The NOAA and NASA have both confirmed that ***the last 11 years have been the 11 hottest on record.*** The villains of this escalating tragedy? A climate scientist says that wealthy nations, the fossil fuel industry, and policy makers top the list. Will it take another 11 years for policy makers to heed the irrefutable science and address the devastation being experienced in the country and around the world?"

• The **National Nurses United** says nursing was named the most honest and ethical profession for the 23rd consecutive year in the annual Gallup Poll (Dec. 2024).

• **Kumbh Mela** (13 Jan.-26 Feb.) in Prayagraj, U.P., India, a Hindu religious festival that's held once every 12 years, was expected to draw some 400 million visitors this time!

• On Jan. 20th, U.S.A. celebrated the annual **Dr. Martin Luther King Day**. For many, it was the **National Day of Service** in their communities! The following day, Tuesday, Jan. 21st was observed as the **National Day of Racial Healing**. According to African American author, poet, civil rights leader and speaker, Maya Angelou, "We are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike." Healing begins with understanding, empathy, and action. How are you fostering racial healing in your life or community? **National League of Cities** says: Racial healing is a tool and a process for celebrating our common humanity, acknowledging the truths from our shared history, and recognizing our collective potential. Through racial healing, we can forge deep, meaningful relationships, lay the



Lost Eden,
delves into the
concept of free-
dom and the
human struggle
to attain it.
Through this
piece, I try to
show the pro-
found impact
of greed on
our society.
The Statue of
Liberty repre-
sents our quest
for freedom.

—T. K. Lee, 14.

groundwork to transform broken systems, and bridge the divides to transform communities for our children and future generations. Racial healing is not only important, but also essential, for it is at the heart of racial equity.

Let's **build bridges of unity and love.** Together, we can create a world where our shared humanity is celebrated, even if we don't see any messages or actions to promote racial harmony and unity from the highest authorities.

• Responding to the threat of unilateral **Trade Tariffs** announced by the newly elected President of U.S., the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau spoke eloquently to both the people of Canada and the U.S. to explain why that was unwarranted, unjust, and also against the treaty signed by the governments of U.S., Canada and Mexico. He spoke gently and yet with strength and determination. Mr. Trudeau reminded them of the long history of friendship and cooperation between the two countries and their people. He spoke in both English and French—Canada is a bilingual nation—and while he did not threaten the Americans, he said he had no choice but to do what was good for his country; that he must also impose similar and equal trade tariffs against the U.S. goods. He said he was in constant communication with all the provincial premiers in his country, and that they will work together to respond to such threats. Unity and Cooperation is the way to lead people and nations! Hours before the tariffs were to begin, the U.S. President postponed them for at least 30 days!

• *Plastics are poisonous for people & planet. Period. Deep cuts in fossil fuels, meat, and dairy use will help soften climate change!*

The Consequence of Not Knowing the Full Story

I'm submitting a short essay describing my experience when traveling to Cuba a few years ago. During this trip, I experienced the danger of a single-story, a term used by Chimamanda Adichie (a Nigerian author and activist). A single-story is an overly simplistic and generalized perception of a person or a place. In her Ted Talk, Adichie says that single-stories make "our recognition of our equal humanity difficult." My trip to Cuba allowed me to really understand the consequence, whether subtle or harsh, of a single-story.

On a cold February night before my 6 a.m. flight to the island, I asked my friend's grandmother, Mrs. Perez, about her old life in Cuba. "How did you escape? Are people mostly uneducated? Is there enough to eat, and has communism ruined everything?" She smiled.

"Chiara, it's not so straightforward. Why don't you experience it yourself first? Then let's talk."

As a child of immigrants—my parents are Indian and German—our home has always been filled with global news events, so I thought I knew what to expect before our trip. However, consuming the U.S. media left me uninformed about Cuban life.

Upon arrival, anticipating thievery, I watched my luggage closely. Instead, a friendly stranger offered directions. That afternoon I couldn't decide what to sample as our local hosts served Cuban national dish, *Ropa Vieja*—arroz y frijoles negros, and flan while I peppered their son, Roberto, with questions. One by one, he added color and shape to my drab single story of Cuba. "Chiara, we have a 99% literacy rate, ranking 10th in college attendance with the US lagging behind. We also have free healthcare and a higher life expectancy."

I was puzzled. Was any part of my Cuba story true? After some probing, Roberto's mum glanced out the window, lowering her voice to a whisper. "Yes, there's access to education, but drivers serving tourists earn more than doctors saving lives," she nervously mumbled, afraid the government would hear. Free speech was still not legalized.

Later that evening, Roberto offered me baseball clothes. I laughed. "But you only have boy clothes." He shrugged. "So?" Wearing a too-big T-shirt and "boys" pants, I grabbed my phone. "*No necesitas eso*," he suggested, and outside, I noticed the absence of phones.

With no one sharing TikTok videos, I enjoyed playing with kids without tech distractions, noticing that boys and girls play together like equals. I wondered if the influence of social media on me, even with the liberal, capitalistic, feminist ideal, had somehow impressed the idea that girls should dress and behave a certain way. Recently, a boy in my Brooklyn school was surprised when I sported my class's highest number of pushups. I asked Roberto about it. "Chiara, 50% of Cuba's congress persons are women versus 20% in your country."

That night, I considered my perception of this island only a few hours ago. I had witnessed firsthand the danger of a single narrative. Internalizing Cuba as poor and oppressive, even if the single story of its government is true, oversimplifies the country and minimizes the many stories of education, health, and equality that are shaping it. It harmed not only Roberto but also myself because it interfered with my ability to relate to him. Experiencing Roberto's Cuba made my previous impression biased and one-dimensional. This experience taught me to be curious about stories beyond the single one.

"Mrs. Perez," I ask after returning home. "Why did you leave Cuba to come here?"

—Chiara Zimmermann, age 14, New York. She adds: "I have a reputation amongst my professors and fellow students as being focused, engaged, helpful, with sensitive observations and a pleasure to teach. I am also a competitive gymnast and train 17 hours weekly with additional travel and participation in competitions during the weekend."

Thunderstorm by Arthur Z. Chao, age 15, Canada.

The dark clouds approach from the horizon,

With sky covered by a pitch-grey blanket.

Thunder rumbles and lightning strikes, clouds thicken.

The rain's deluge, the grass feasting upon the banquet,

As if a cauldron had tipped in Heaven.

You can barely see,

The air misty, the world turned pitch black.

Wind roars, droplets fall, in syncopation with the thunder,

Cars zoom by, like pairs of devil eyes.

Clouds slowly vanish, the soaked land dries,

The sun rises again, to warm Earth with its light.

After this, came surprise—

Flashing grass and rainbows, after that night.

Manong Taho*

Cultural Collage

He comes like a seasonal fruit,
Walking the parched streets that greet his shadow like an old friend,
Back bent and burned with the lashings of thirty summers,
Thirty summers of carrying the sun, what's left of his family,
and his bamboo poles across his shoulders.

No one knows his face,
Or the vacancy of his lost smile sticking out like an absent tooth,
Or the brittle ends of his slippers bitten off by rough roads,
Or the twitch in his arm from ladling tofu and carrying the newborn all night

Thirty years ago.

"Thirty pesos lang, ho," he says, but he is elsewhere.
His mind bubbles and brims, prodding at faces of his dear ones through rippled water:
His mother's eyes when he sold his uniform two years before he could graduate,
His father when he inherited the *tindahan* and lost it for a wife and two bamboo poles

Thirty years ago.

He opens and rewraps each memory like an expensive gift,
Just making sure they are still there.
But the hot city is cold in the heart, and when he rests, its asphalt ventricles
Screech against the pails and taunt him with the agony he never dared to speak.

Instead, he yells "TAHOOOO!"
Pointing children and passing businessmen take the cups from his hands.
They spoon the syrup into their mouths, and it is so sweet it stings.
Then he turns the corner forgotten, heart tired and soaked in sweat,
Leaving nothing but a trail of echoes, long and O-shaped, like a mourning cry

That the withered trees still remember from thirty years ago.

* *Manong Taho* is how we Filipinos address the old man who sells Taho on the streets. *Manong* is a term of respect, like Mister.

Taho is a Filipino delicacy made of syrup, sago pearls and tofu. He usually carries the Taho in pails hanging on a bamboo pole across his shoulders. "*ho*" is a more colloquial form of "po", a word of respect.

"My name is Brielle Rodriguez, an 11th grade student, and my name itself is a cultural artifact. Our family's original surname is "Li" (李), but before I was born, my grandfather changed it to Rodriguez in consideration of the Spanish influence. My first name, Brielle, is a shortened version of Gabrielle, the archangel after whom I was named, showing the way colonization and cultural integration of the Catholic faith bled into my identity.

"I believe that culture gives the world its color. The activities a community engages in, and how they do it, is an opportunity to celebrate perspectives that change and collide over centuries. Because of this, I consider myself lucky to have been born and raised at the crossroads of Chinese and Filipino culture.

With this big blend of culture, I speak "Hokkaglish" at home (Hokkien, Tagalog, and English), English at school, Frenchish English with my best friend (who is learning French with me), occasional Mandarin with my grandparents, and Filipino in an emergency where the only language the people I'm with can speak is Filipino (because Filipino grammar is a beast). However, my limited proficiency in the other languages forces me to write solely in English. Unless, of course, I break those boundaries, which is what I try to do by listening carefully to speakers of the other languages and binging Duolingo. "

We're a part of nature,
and our war against
nature is inevitably a
war against ourselves.

—Rachel Carson, *Scientist*
and author of "Silent Spring."

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Three Drops of Water

I tiptoe with my tongue.
We teeter and toddle through
broken Chinese sentences
riddled with gaps and
cavities like an old set of
teeth, rotting from the
vacancy of my hesitation.

Angkong's ancient eyes are
burdened with epicanthic folds. They
drown my incoherent mumbling with
silence, cornering me in words I hardly
understand about how
this poem's lettered limbs
became a betrayal of who I am.

In my mother's tongue, the word
满 (mǎn) means that something is full, with
three drops of water (̇) trickling from
the side. It is the way the child tries to gather
entire gardens of peonies and plum flowers into
the hem of her little skirts. But in
my mother's tongue, all it takes is
three drops of water to turn
“full” into a word that does not exist, as if
the contents run to the edge of a cliff (with
the blood of farmers, scholars, and merchants
that shed from my inkstone heart) and

drips
drips
drips
into nothing.

—Brielle Rodriguez, gr. 11, from the Phillipines, lives in
California. Also see her poem **Manong Taho** on p. 28.



Mystery by Yeva Pavrianidis, 10, Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine.

And the Life Goes On in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine



On February 24, 2025 Ukraine's children along with their parents, grandparents, friends, and neighbors will commemorate 1,095 days (that's three years!) of the largest and deadliest war in the heart of Europe since World War II. Despite of non-stop artillery shelling, drone strikes, bombs and missiles explosions, frequent lack of electricity, food and other basic necessities, life goes on in the Southern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia, home to the largest nuclear power station in Europe. The city's Center for Children's and Youth Creativity keeps its doors open. The Gradient Creative Computer Design Circle at the center continues to operate. The Gradient's students and their families remain in the city undaunted by heavy bombings and devastations. Their teacher Nadiya Chepiga continues meeting with her students online and offline several times per week conducting lessons in bomb shelters or corridors. Since there are no possibilities for schoolchildren to play outside and socialize in person, many of them sign up for various classes in the Center. The number of students at the Gradient keeps on increasing. Children enjoy each other's company, draw, paint, play and create beautiful art. (*Please see the front cover for five of their art pieces.*) They even participate in various nationwide Ukrainian and international competitions and exhibitions winning prizes and awards.

Last summer the humanitarian aid organization **Sister's Sister** (www.SistersSister.org) from State College, Pennsylvania sent the Gradient students several packages with art supplies, special gifts, drawing tablets, children's books, and the **Skipping Stones** magazine issues. The books and magazines were donated by the **Skipping Stones**, and are being used in class by Nadiya Chepiga. The students continue to learn, live, and create new beautiful art in the nearly impossible conditions and undeterred by almost daily destructions. We look forward to seeing their new artwork in the near future.

—Svitlana Budzhak-Jones, Ph.D., President, Sister's Sister, Inc.
See more Ukrainian children's artwork on www.SkippingStones.org.

Haenyeos: Guardians of the Sea

When I was eight, my family journeyed to Jeju Island, a renowned South Korean travel spot. Jeju's natural allure, with its lush greenery, clear skies, and azure seas, left a lasting impression. My mom and I explored a charming souvenir shop adorned with Jeju's basalt stones and shells on my first morning. A magnet depicting a woman in diving gear caught my eye, a souvenir that still adorns our fridge.

During another visit, we ventured to U-do, a neighboring islet. The ferry ride was briny and invigorating, leading us to a seafood feast at Mulko Haenyeo's House. Amidst the savory delights, I was startled by the sight of a familiar figure, the woman from the magnet. Her appearance marked a shift, prompting reflection on Jeju's changing landscape.

Now residing on Jeju, I've grown to appreciate its beauty, yet I've also witnessed its decline due to over-tourism and overfishing. Plastic waste and discarded fishing nets mar its once pristine shores, threatening its natural splendor. Despite fishing's importance to the island's economy, the damage inflicted is undeniable, tarnishing Jeju's magical charm.

While delving into more of the island's environmental issues, I learned about Haenyeo, the black-suited diver I met years back. Haenyeos are mothers. This motherhood started in the 13th century on this island. They are female divers without oxygen tanks who dive up to ten minutes at a time to dive deep to gather a variety of seafood at the bottom of the sea. They wear wetsuits, diving masks, fins, gloves, chest weights, an L-shaped weeding hoe, and a net attached to a floating device. These mothers dive for seven hours a day to sustain their families. They are faithful sea women proud of their scent of the sea.

The Haenyeos I met are true guardians of the sea. Although they make a living from the ocean, they all keep one integral constitution-like conviction: *'to leave the ocean as it was.'* They minimize the damaging impacts they might have upon the Jeju Sea, or ***Badang***, as they call the sea in their Jeju dialect. They coexist with the marine world and are almost a part of it. The Haenyeos respect the ocean, and the ocean respects the Haenyeos in return.

To reduce their impact on the Jeju marine ecosystem, Haenyeos minimize their use of artificial equipment: all they take underwater is their suits and a few

metals to use for scraping and harvesting seafood. The Haenyeos believe they cannot easily give away Jeju's treasures.

Another important rule that the Haenyeos have is to 'avoid over-harvesting.'

Haenyeos only gather abalones of at least seven centimeters in size. If Haenyeos cannot accurately assess the size of a sea creature underwater, they check again on land and return undersized specimens to the sea for them to grow naturally. This allows the Jeju marine ecosystem to continue in cycles, ensuring the marine life is sustainable. Haenyeos also set a period for when certain sea products could be collected from the sea. They cannot collect the sea creatures during their spawning season, and the Haenyeos consider the spawning season for each sea creature before starting their work. In this sense, they were the true guardians of sustainability, which we increasingly forgot.

After grasping the significance of these Haenyeos, I revisited the Mulko Haenyeo's House a few months ago. However, I was informed that the Haenyeo I knew no longer ventures into the sea due to her age. Though initially disappointed, I accepted this as a natural cycle of life—recognizing the limitations of age and entrusting the care of the sea to the next generation.

The persisting tradition of Haenyeos and their efforts to coexist with marine life is now an unwanted lifestyle by many who, while respecting the Haenyeos of their hard work, are reluctant to do so themselves. However, the remaining and past Haenyeos are proud of their work. One of them recalls having disliked the job initially, comparing themselves and their tanned and scarred skin to modern and white-skinned women from the city. But now, she says she stands proud of her independent work, mentioning that the sea feels like her home, where she should belong. The seas welcomed the Haenyeos and invited them to visit, which was possible only because the Haenyeos preserved the ocean. Although I do not understand the Jeju dialect, Haenyeo's facial expressions and wild hand gestures already grant me courage and warmth, the warmth of passion and perseverance. Although I can not imagine myself in a Haenyeo's "flipper," as a resident of this island, I firmly believe there is a Haenyeo spirit of sustainability in me now.

—Naeun Kim, grade 11, from Jeju Island, South Korea.

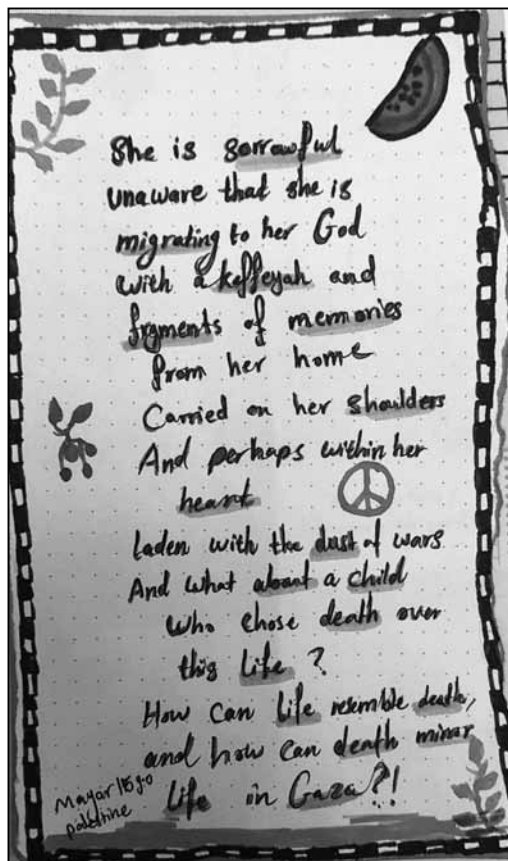
From our Special Gaza Online-only Issue

A few months ago, with the help of guest editors Ad'vorah Kost and Lauren Marshall, we published a special online issue with 24 pages of thought-provoking content describing the painful experiences of Gazan youth. We felt a duty to share their depictions of the reality of the wars waged in the Middle East. On the pages 31-36, we've reprinted some representative pieces from this Gaza feature, in support of a more peaceful world. We invite you to read

the complete feature on skip-pingstones.org. Please note that all our online content is **FREE** for your reading!

Exhausted, a poem by Mayar Alaloul, age 15, from Rafah City, Gaza. She writes, "I am Mayar Alaloul, the child who lost the innocence of her childhood... As I reflect on a life where, since the day I was born, I have never experienced a single day of peace, despite being the child who dreamed of peace the most. This is my reality, and I find no better way to express myself than through writing. Whenever I pick up my pen, it writes of nothing but wars. I hope to write about peace one day."

Photo: Mayar Alaloul, age 15, sits on the rubble in Gaza. Mayar and her family now live in a shelter, their home having been destroyed by the war. Please see a poem by her older sister Nada on page 34.



From Gaza to the World

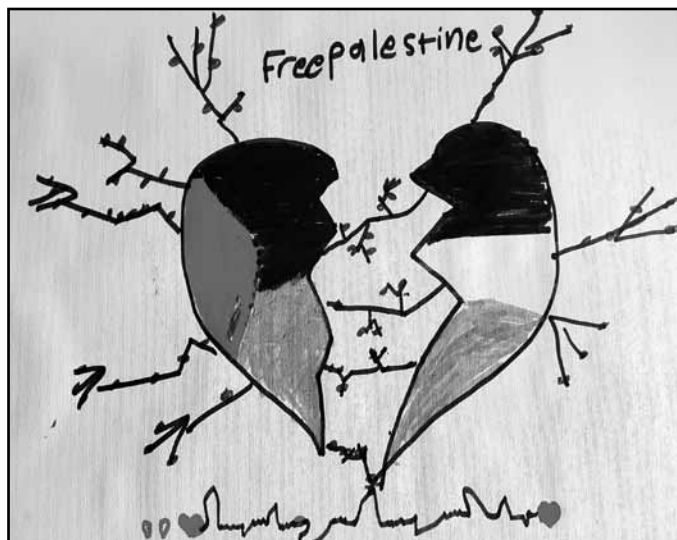
"My name is Emy, I was born during the 2014 war. My mother used to tell me that we were displaced when I was three months old, and I lived the worst months of my life with the bombing of homes and the children of Gaza now dying of hunger and being displaced from place to place. My future and their future were ruined. I left our home, my toys, my friends, my clothes and my school. We were forcibly displaced, and now we are evacuated to Egypt..."

"I would tell the children of the world that I am one of the survivors of the ugly war if someone listens to me and feels that there is a simple right to live in safety. I believe that Gaza is a country of peace and we love life."

—Emy Abu Asaker, age 10 (R) with sister Lareen (L).



They live in Cairo, Egypt for the time being.



Art by Rimas Abu Abed, age 14. Read her powerful poem online in our Gaza issue. The photo shows Rimas, with art supplies she received from Seattle, Washington friends.



Rimas Abu Abed is a Bedouin whose family fled to Cairo in April 2024. She has deep love of the land she has never seen since her grandparents were forced to flee when Israel occupied much of Palestine in 1948. Three generations of her family have lived on and cultivated an ancient olive orchard in Gaza until their recent displacement. Rimas grieves the loss of the land.

She finds relief when she draws her feelings and memories, when she studies, and when she prays. She chants the Qur'an with pure devotion. She longs to visit the villages of her ancestors and sacred sites of Palestine long denied the people of Gaza. Her idea of a free Palestine is peace, freedom and equal rights for all peoples. She hopes to be a doctor to help heal her people's trauma.

9 P. M. by Fairuz Ramzy Birika, from Gaza (August, 2023)

Amidst the darkness of the night and the obscurity of the city, a plastic second hand strikes the hour, igniting the melodies of time and playing a music I despise. It wasn't just nine o'clock; I was watching the minutes of the sunset hours until the clock struck nine with its soft-sounding whisper invoking deeply buried memories. But which ninth hour am I speaking about?

On ordinary nights in the city of noise, where quietness had become a rare commodity and a whirlwind of thoughts spun in my mind, I pondered how to halt the clock's hands. When I was a little girl, the ticking of the clock signaled the beginning of a new adventure with my mom, who compelled me and my siblings to go to bed precisely at 9:00 PM, even if we didn't want to sleep. We did it anyway, succumbing to the pressure. To this day, in that time of night on the pitch-black nights, when we cross the threshold of nine o'clock, the gateway to hate and rebellion opens in our hearts. Then I find myself in a strange world filled with mystery. How can the clock's hands achieve this? How can I be so affected by a plastic scorpion that I could so easily toss aside?

The same scene, over, and over again. It just keeps happening, accompanied by waves of panic that led me running to my mom, to talk about events in the real world: Wars everywhere, flames in the windows, and the wailing of barefoot women in the streets piercing our hearts. One night, the same scene I imagined at the stroke of nine in my mind became our reality.

Since the time of the attack, I have found myself in the heart of a fierce battle. But I can say that I have bravely overcome my fears and hatred for the hour "Nine." I felt like a fighter on the battlefield. At the time of the attack, I wasn't yet ten years old, according to my confused memory.

Nine wasn't just a time; it held a mysterious power to shape moments and memories. Minutes of exploring the mysterious land left many questions: How could that cursed hour reflect our destiny? How could the wall clock cause such internal tumult?

Then I realized that the ninth hour wasn't merely a time that needed to pass. It might have been a gateway to many things; without it, I wouldn't be doing what I do.

—Fairuz is from Rafah, Gaza. She wrote this story for the Gaza Heartbeat project, recalling events of an earlier (2014) war.

Reema's Story by Sama Algharabli, age 13 (2024)

We were sitting in our home, happy with our lives, with our family around us. Suddenly, there was intense bombing. My late father, may he rest in peace, feared for us and took us down to the basement of our home. We played with our cousins, entertaining ourselves, unaware of what awaited us. They brought us food, and we ate happily. Then the aggression against us intensified, terrifying us immensely. Suddenly...the place went dark around me, and I couldn't find anyone beside me.

I started screaming and shouting, calling out, but no one responded. I called for my siblings; they too started screaming in fear and pain.

At that moment, I understood what had happened and tried to free myself. I managed to get my leg out so they would know I was still alive. I called my cousins to do the same so they could notice us. I heard my phone ringing and by God's grace, Aunt Maryam was able to answer it. The anxious caller was my distant uncle, and in a panic she told him a sentence I will never forget: "Hello...help us; we're trapped under the rubble."

Men came and tried to save as many of my siblings as they could. They managed to pull me out with difficulty, and I saw my brother and cousin with me in the ambulance, covered in dust and blood. We went to the hospital, received treatment, fluids, and care for our wounds. I saw scenes in the hospital that I will never be able to erase from my mind. I kept asking about my mother, father, sister, uncle and his wife, but no one

would answer us. Thankfully, we were able to leave the hospital, but I wasn't in good condition. We were broken, with no idea of what awaited us.

We went to stay with our relatives for three days; they were very generous, may God bless them. Afterward, we went to our grandmother's house, and oh, that meeting was filled with tears, hugs, cries and shock.

—Sama Algharabli, age 13, from Gaza City, now lives in Cairo, Egypt. Also see her art, **"Fleeing Burning Tents"** on the back cover.



Sama paints with keen concentration to really capture the textured thickness of the smoke of bombs and gray sky. The words in her artwork say, "My eyes remember nothing but black and gray." Two uncles and their wives and three cousins died under the rubble of their bombed home in October, 2023. Eight cousins, including Reema,

were pulled from the rubble, injured but alive, and suddenly orphaned. These cousins, along with Sama, her brother, parents and grandmother made it into Cairo where Sama helps care for her younger cousins. She misses all that was left behind, and mostly an uncle who strongly supported her wish to be a doctor.



"Black & Gray" by Sama Algharabli. Photo (R): Beloved friend & teacher Wējdan Diab with Suliman, Reema's little brother.



Between Gaza and Me *by Nada Saady Alaloul, age 17 (2024)*

Between all of these
Cold bodies,
Tired faces,
Busy minds
Lost people
There is Nada *como yo*
Between black and white there's me
Between sun and moon, there's a scream
Between hell and heaven, there're my people under the rubble
Between death and life, there's a missile
Between war and peace, there's a border
Between freedom and shackles, there's the whole world
Between tanks & planes, there's my family
Between my family & me, there's an endless cry
Between my happiness & sadness, there's the news of my city
Between the present and the past, there's a genocide.
Between death here, and death there
There's a huge price
I have one heart with
Two separated souls
And I'm a ghost
And I'm completely alone.

I was at home
Now I'm missing my home
Suddenly
I lost my home
I was here and there
But Suddenly
I'm nowhere
My home was bombed
My friend was killed
My sister was scared
And my dad was missed
And all I'm doing here
Is just avoiding to be the
Favorite dish for my sadness
Cuz actually I'm a liar
A big liar
I'm drowning in heavy clouds of sadness
Afraid to confirm
That my happiness is sad
To be with me
My happiness is scared
To be bombed with me
My happiness fooled me

But at least I know
That I couldn't know
That I'm not happy
Without my sadness
I couldn't realize
That I want balance
Between black and white
Between my happiness and sadness
To stop being gray
Without my sadness.

So now
I'm under a sky that
Doesn't target its people
I walk towards the sun but I'll never be burned
Cuz my soul has been burned once
Before when I left Gaza
Alone

What about you, dear human?
Can you bring me the warmth of the sun?

Not the one over my head
Nor the Egyptian sun which
Burns my bones like
The missiles do against
The tents of my friends
I want the warmth of my family
I'm a ghost and
I'm completely alone

I'm blue, drowning in a
Gray ocean of the fog
Gray, the favorite color of the death in
my city
The color that I used to see
Whenever I roam in my ghost city
The color that I used to feel
Whenever the measure between
Death and me is just a path

I have one heart
With two separated souls
I'm a ghost and I'm completely alone
I'm here and there
And suddenly
I'm nowhere
Como Nada como Yo.



Nada Alaloul, 17, from Rafah, Gaza, now lives with relatives in Cairo, while her parents and younger siblings, who had intended to join her, remain stranded in Gaza. With schools closed during the war, she read books, wrote stories and poems, practiced English, taught herself Spanish, took a business course in Cairo, and volunteered for Palestine Charity Team.



"Shattered Windows" by Misk Timraz, age 14, from Gaza, who arrived in Cairo after two months of war. This is a self-portrait. She holds her ears against the incessant thundering of bombs and buzzing of drones. Misk writes: "Our windows shattered when the neighbors' house exploded. It was terrifying." She deeply misses everything they had to leave behind, especially their cat. She is happy to study art online in Cairo. Seeing people appreciate her paintings brings her joy. She hopes to be a famous artist someday.



"Woman with a Key to her Home"

Art by Zaina Adnan Abdullah Diab, age 22, from Gaza, now living in Cairo, Egypt. Many families still hold the keys to their homes from the 1948 forced migration, and now some also hold keys to their homes in Gaza.



"My Family in Paradise" by Reema Algharabli, age 9, from Gaza, now in Cairo. This recent drawing by Reema names her father, mother, and two sisters who did not survive the bombing of their home. She shows them as she imagines them now being together and happy in paradise. Three siblings and four cousins did survive, as described by her older cousin Sama in Reema's Story on p. 33.



Photo: (from left to right) Aunt Maysa and cousins Suliman, Sama, Reema, Mostafa and Sarah. Along with eleven others of the Algharabli family who survived, they now live together as one large family. Those who perished live on in the memory of a child's heart and drawing.

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**G
A
Z
A** *"We had a Beautiful Home" by Areen Abu Oun, age 10, of Gaza City. Areen made this painting of her home in flames while she was sheltering in Rafah, southern Gaza. The Arabic words translate to: "My family had a beautiful home. In it, we were warm and happy. Israel destroyed our home."*



"Fleeing Burning Tents" by Sama Algharabli, age 13, from Gaza. This artwork was featured on the front cover of our online-only Gaza Issue.

"Eye of Gaza" by Misk Timraz, age 14, from Gaza. See page 35 for more art by Misk.



"Dream Catcher" by Amal Alkharaz, 16, Rafah, Gaza.



"Six Miles" by Ahmed Baker, age 13 & Alaa Al-Ladah, age 17, of Gaza City.