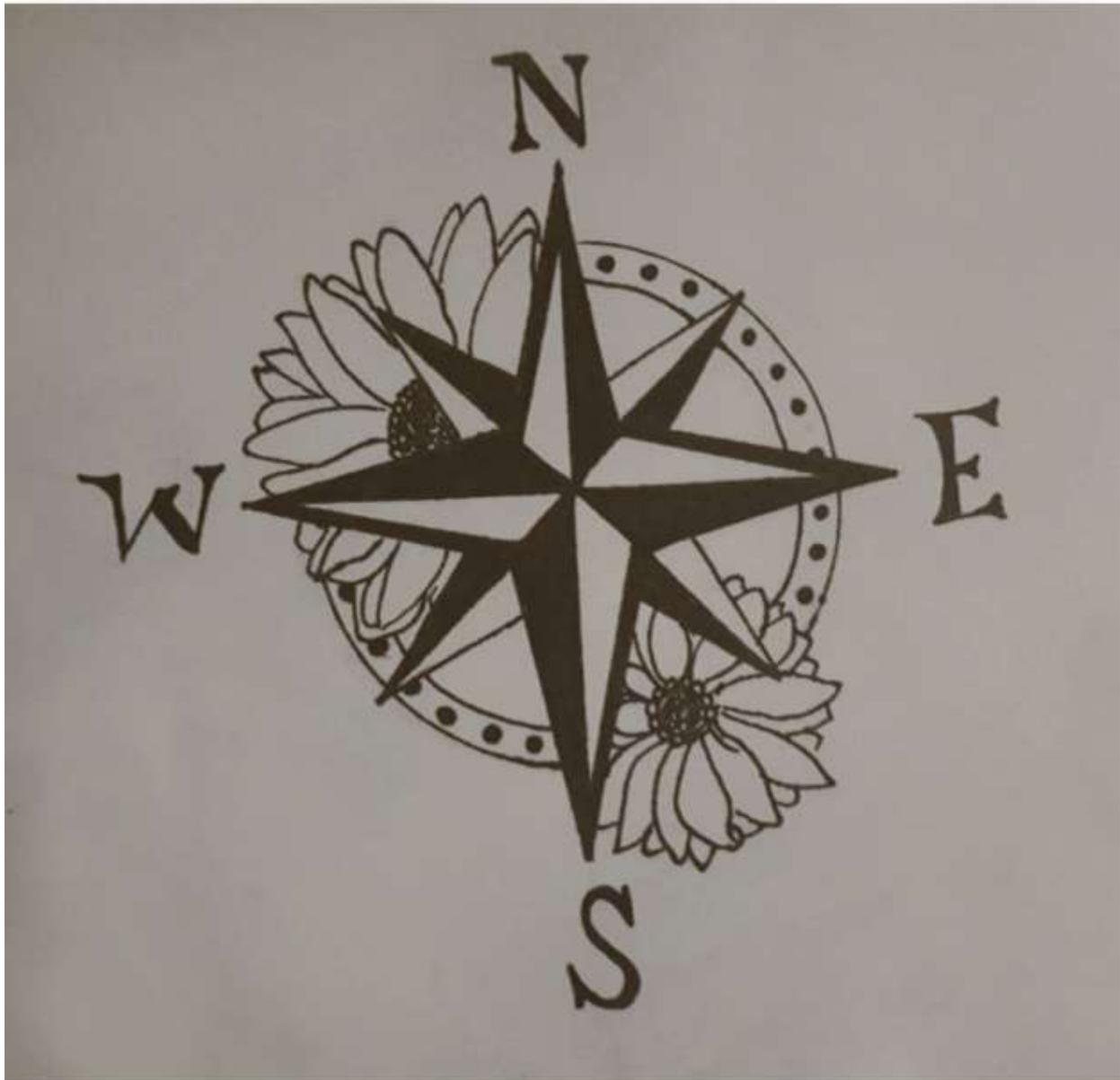


Navigating on Rough Terrain



“Navigating on Rough Terrain:”

Honors Composition Freshman Zine, 2016

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Eye of Your World



Soul of a Jellyfish

By Savannah Ledford



Drifting aimlessly
At the mercy of Gaea
Float on, wandering

Reflection

By Savannah Ledford

In many ways, I am the jellie. I drift aimlessly, wander, and float on. I drift with the current of the earth and Universe, and float gently where ever the currents take me. Like this jellie, I am delicate and fragile. I absorb the surrounding toxins and become sick by them. I am off kilter by things that disrupt my drifting. Like this jellie, I am transparent. I wear my heart on my sleeve and hide nothing. Like this jellie, I am electric. There is a fire within me. But like this jellie, I am still at the mercy of Mother Earth and the Universe. I shall find my own path eventually, but until then I shall float on.



By Dena Markley

Mikaela Miguel

Losing Home

What is home? Home can mean several different things to different people. Home can mean a physical place: a house, apartment, or even a dorm. Home can be a specific town where somebody grew up in. Home can simply be where somebody's family is. To me, home is a place where I share common interests with others--it's where I am accepted and supported. I still have a home that I can always go to, but it's not present with me at all times anymore.

I just recently left my home and moved up here to the Turlock area in August for college, and haven't yet acquired my new home. I'm essentially homeless. Just a few short months ago I was in great standing with my home. I had a few great friends and immediate family all around me that I could go see anytime I pleased. They were my entertainment, my support system, and my life. I had a steady home life. Then I just left it all behind.

Don't get me wrong, I love it up here, but I just haven't adjusted. I haven't found my replacement home yet. I haven't found a group of friends with the same interests as me yet; only acquaintances that I talk to occasionally in class. Without friends, there isn't that support system here that I got used to back at home. I have a ton of family up here, but none that I have grown as close to as my immediate family. I don't have my parents here to give me advice, and I don't have my brothers here to just hang out with and destress with.

I was at a plateau for the last 4 years, up high and level; and now, I've found the cliff. I have fallen over the edge and have hit the rocky bottom: homeless. I have to start building myself up and find a new level ground. I have to broaden my interests and explore my surroundings to find my new support system; my new friends. I have to put myself out there more and grow a stronger bond with the family I am blessed to have up here. I have to rebuild my life, find my place, and create a new home.



Firewood

by Chelsea Gallet

The smell of burning firewood brings me back to a time when we were all together.

Charlie, who once bullied me in middle school, and still feels guilty, even though I don't even remember it happening.

Jasmine, who I befriended in the second grade when everybody was too busy trying to impress the other new girl.

Mel, who convinced me to read her favorite book series in the fifth grade and turned me into an avid reader.

Chichi, who gets the worst nicknames out of anybody I know, and always eventually embraces them.

Ashlyn, who we called "Ashley" for two weeks because she was too embarrassed to correct us.

Ana, who didn't speak to me until she discovered that Charlie and I play the same video games she does.

Audrey, the kindest person I know.

We all met each other at different times in our lives, but by our sophomore year of high school, we were inseparable. We were never particularly popular as a group, but we only needed each other. I've been lucky enough to have met people who I can trust wholeheartedly with anything. I would do anything for any of them, and I know they'd do the same for me. They've helped build my confidence; around them, I can be comfortable with myself, and I know that, whatever happens, they won't think any less of me. Most of our issues are personal, and if an argument ever takes place between two of us, it's resolved swiftly and painlessly, and though we've split up after high school, we make sure to keep in contact with one another.

We sat around the fire the day after we graduated. We passed the marshmallows, graham crackers, and chocolate around our tight circle, laughing as we shared memories of our years in high school. Most of the memories are strange and only funny to us, but they left us gasping for air and teary eyed. We laughed harder than we needed to in our desperation to be happy, and the warmth of the fire and my friends' joy helped ease the cold tendrils that had begun to creep into my chest—the knowledge that we were all stepping into unknown territory. We all knew that in less than 12 hours, Chichi would be leaving home for Idaho. We didn't know where Charlie would be the next week, or if we'd see each other before Audrey went up to Canada and Mel

went to Humboldt, or if we'd ever really see everyone together like this again. And if the tears streaming down my face were from the smoke in my eyes or the joke Ana had just deadpanned or from the twisting in my gut, I convinced myself it couldn't be the last one, because it's supposed to be a happy night.

In a way, I thought it would be easy. Making friends with those seven felt so simple and natural, as if "friends" was the only thing we ever could be. With them, I know exactly where I fit in, and I never have to hide my thoughts bite my tongue; we are always honest with each other and open to accepting any differing opinions. We value everything said, and we do our best to respect if somebody would rather keep something to herself or share it with only one person. We try to understand each other as much as we can, and if we can't, we admit it. We are open and honest, and even though the things we say and do aren't always typical of a group of friends, it never feels wrong with them.

And when the nights calm down, when we've exhausted our usual jokes and merciless teasing, it's peaceful. That night wasn't the first time we've celebrated our friendship over s'mores, but every time always seems to wind down the same way. We lapse into a comfortable silence and stop burning marshmallows. Instead, we prod at the fire with our sticks, watching silently as the logs turn to ash and our own sticks catch fire. I would bring my stick close to my face and watch as the small flame inches its way down, then blow it out. The tip would glow white, and I'd break it off against the side of the fire pit, watching it drop to the bottom and become just another ember of the dying fire. As the spritely crackling of the fire ebbed away, we, too, grew quiet, but the conversation never fully died as long as the fire still glowed.

Going into college, I wasn't expecting to find anything like that. People tell me that the friends I make in college are the friends I'll have for life, but I'm not too sure of this yet. I'm only in my first semester, and I know these things take time, but I'm beginning to wonder how true it is. I've begun to make friends, but I know that, for the most part, they're incidental; they're friends because we have a class together, but once the semester ends, they'll probably move on with their lives, and I'll be alone again.

Even here, though, where I find myself falling back into the isolation I clawed my way out of in high school, I can still lean on them. All it takes is a single message for them to return, threatening to fight my loneliness with surprise visits by the ones still in town or phone calls from the ones too far away. Even though we are moving away from the lives we had in high school, they are there to remind me that I still have a place with them.

The night after graduation, we left before the fire died. We waved to Chichi as she was driven away, and laughed when, knowing that this was the last time any of us would see her for many months, she hung half out the window and shouted, "Ride or die!" I watched the streetlights pass as Mel drove me home, reminded of the faint glow of the firewood—bright, even though the sky was dark—and knew that they'll be with me, regardless of where we are.

A Weary Wanderer's Walk

I traversed alone in darkening night.

Stumbling often, I walked without seeing.

Not one star shone to guide me in my plight,

Nor did I see a single human being.

All alone, the darkness clawed at my mind.

I tried then in vain to out think this beast,

But it was cunning, and I couldn't find

My poor courage; lost for a year at least.

With this gloom I fought to find my own way,

And it was stronger than a thousand men.

It almost crushed me in our violent fray,

But determination came to me then.

I was lost but now that's not the case,

For even wanderers must have a place.

Alice Fielding

My Place

Like a tree in a pot

I cannot be contained

My roots must grow deeper

My branches must reach farther

My home has held me but it is not my place

I must be placed where I can thrive

I must be planted in the ground

Where I belong

Where my roots can grow

Where my branches can reach

In my place

Jaynie Rowe

Dear Píkís

I write this letter for you in the future because I want to know if we have achieved what we have always wanted, and if we haven't I know there is probably a good reason. I hope that my life, our life is full of what we value the most, love. And also that we have not lost that thing that we most appreciate: that love is the most valuable. Do we still have love in our life? Do we know who we are? Do you feel like you belong where you are currently standing? If not, I personally think that we need a change... It might be hard, but that is the whole reason behind this letter. This is a reality check and a checkpoint to know of our life is what we desire. IF YOU HAVE NOT GRADUATED FROM COLLEGE YET, PLEASE DO NOT READ ON!!

We both know that we have hopes and I have hopes for you. As long as we are happy and that you have a home, I am fine. We don't need riches or anything extravagant: happiness and love is all we need. I hope that we are still in contact with those people that we love so much. Mom and dad, and those three little monsters that I miss so much. I hope that they are doing good and that you haven't forgotten about them. You might be too busy with your life that you haven't talked to them, so call them. They love you and probably miss you. Don't forget that we love lots of people and that they love us back, please don't lose that.

I know know that many things have happened in my life ow, that you might remember bitterly, but remember that those things have shown us many lesson and have made us better people. I'm sure that you remember the hard times, and I hope that you have learned. Always remember mom's words: never give up on your dreams and live life to the fullest always. Never forget that you love Ceresmy, Maura and M. Jaqueline with all your heart and never lose contact with those three beautiful little monsters. Always stay positive, I know that it might be hard, but you can do it. And most importantly never forget where you came from and all the effort that you put into getting to the place you are now. Always appreciate that starting point and never forget your roots.

Girl, I love you and never forget it. Tell the family you love them because you do and I know it. Never forget to love and appreciate what you have because we don't have much now, but maybe the future will let us find our place soon. Love you. RLV

Here Lies Lily
By Brittaney Rigby

Lily Ann Laurence was a happy baby. Her two favorite people in the world loved her and she loved them. They made funny faces which made her laugh.

Lily Ann Laurence was a content infant. Her two favorite people were apparently called Mom and Dad. Mom and Dad get excited for some reason when she mimics their sounds.

Lily Ann Laurence was a moody toddler. When she wants something, She Wants It, but screaming and crying don't seem to be working. It seemed to work for the other parents...

Lily Ann Laurence was a curious child. Even though she misses her parents, she rather likes preschool. She likes playing with the other kids and learning about colours.

Lily Ann Laurence was an arrogant adolescent. She knew what she wanted and her parents weren't going to stop her. They just didn't understand.

Lily Ann Laurence was an uncertain teenager. She learned that she didn't know everything and that she will mess up, but that's okay. She'll accept the consequences of her actions.

Lily Ann Laurence was an anxious adult. She wasn't sure what she wanted to do with her life, but she'll figure it out along the way. What she did know was that boy was cute!

Lily Ann Laurence was an excited fiancée. She was going to marry the man of her dreams, but he isn't a dream. He's right in front of her on his knee.

Lily Ann Laurence was a busy pharmacist. She had to juggle work, wedding planning, and the last semester of classes. She still managed to make time for her friends and family.

Lily Ann Laurence was no longer Lily Ann Laurence. She was then known as Lily Ann Noland. She was a loving wife.

Lily Ann Noland was a harried mother. Her two kids were a handful and as they grew older, she understood what her parents had to go through. She still loved her little beasts though.

Lily Ann Noland was a grieving child. She may be an adult, but her father just passed away and she would always miss his child. She held her mother's hand tighter in her own.

Lily Ann Noland was a proud grandmother. One of her children just had a baby of their own. She couldn't wait for more grandchildren to spoil.

Lily Ann Noland was a retired person. She worked hard and saved her money. Her husband was retired before her and he lovingly joked about the retired life with the wife at work.

Lily Ann Noland was a happy old woman. She felt her feet ache with each step and every breath rattle in her chest. She didn't mind though, she was blessed with a wonderful family.

Lily Ann Noland was many things. She was a baby, an infant, a toddler, a child, an adolescent, a teenager, an adult, a fiancée, a pharmacist, a wife, a mother, a grieving child, a grandmother, a retiree, and an old woman who passed away.

Most importantly of all, she was just Lily.

November 7, 1930

October 30, 2016



The One That Stands Alone

Individual

Strong, powerful

Creating, encouraging, helping

Trying to find their place all alone

Unique

A Rose For my Love

With Just one look, I know my place

Siempre a su lado

Always by his side

Always and Forever, words we have always said

Siempre y para siempre

Palabras que nunca dejaremos de pronunciar

Through hardship and happiness

pero siempre juntos: always together

I promise baby... Forever

En las buenas y en las mala

Through the good and all the bad

Mi amor, mi vida I'll always be by your side

Cariño mio, te amo

I love you

Never forget it, nunca, por favor

Mi vida es tuya

My life is yours

My life forever wil be complete only by your side

And even though I know that this is not common

I just wanted to say

Here is a rose for you, my love.



Sara Buenrostro

Kathryn Steele

ENGL 1005-001

28 October 2016

The Single Individual in an Abundant World

I have always been told that people are unique and that their individuality separates them from the rest of the world. This is always enforced as a positive saying, but it is not always true, since just like many other people I have been the outcast for this called “unique personality.” It’s not easy trying to fit in with the crowd when being “different” stands out.

Like any other young girl in school I wanted to be popular and well-liked. This was difficult considering I was not as pleasant to look at or as charismatic as some of the other young girls at my school. I was above average in height with simple facial features that did not bring much attention--well except for my big, hazel eyes and long, dark brown hair. I was also what many students refer to as “very smart.” I did not believe that it was that I was smarter than them but rather I took my course load extremely serious, considering I did not procrastinate as much the other students. These qualities earned me the reputation of “Monica the tall, smart girl with the long hair and big eyes.” If this description wasn’t enough to ring a bell in someone’s mind, it was probably due to the fact that I was a fairly serious individual. I am one of those people who come up as shy but after getting comfortable with people I will open up.

This contributed to the reasons I was not as well-known as I would have liked. I often wish to be identical to those people who would openly talk to anyone and were immediately liked. I did not feel happy about myself because it seemed as though charming people were preferred over anyone else. This is why I began to notice that I felt like an outsider with little to no place in the school. My popular classmates were not to be blamed for my low self-esteem; the way everyone admired them was to blame.

It was tough see how charismatic students were treated as the favorite or the center of attention while I was desiring some of the recognition they obtained from everyone including teachers. I would often feel short compared to these amazingly loved students--which would leave me with a feeling of isolation. This did not help me in my academic or athletic life since I would too often compare myself with everyone and end up feeling as less of a person in comparison.

It never occurred to me to converse with any of the people I trusted; I just bottled up my feelings inside until I could no longer contain my feeling and cried myself to sleep. This all eventually lead to an event that changed my perspective of who I was in this world.

There was a girl named Jessica who was light skinned, had beautiful green eyes, and a slim nose; which gave her the reputation of one of the prettiest girls at school. If being pretty wasn't enough, she also had the figure everyone wanted and the charisma that everyone admired. It was rare to see a day when someone did not complement her beauty. Jessica was one of my close friends which I had a love-hate relationship with. Jessica was so kind and I loved her for that; she was also pretty and well-liked that I hated her for that.

One day after school Jessica was telling me how she enjoyed the attention, but sometimes she wished she could relate to individuals who were not admired in the manner she was. This sparked anger in me because she was so perfect. *Why would she want to relate to someone like me?* In my anger I exploded out, "If only you knew what you're saying! It's horrible to feel like an outcast and being in the shadow of people like you!"

She remained quiet for a moment. Jessica then said in a calm and understanding tone, "Monica, how do you expect to be well-known and liked if you don't have confidence. You shouldn't compare yourself. Being unique can be perceived as a bad thing but if you have confidence in yourself you can fit in easily. You should go somewhere you can be alone and reflect on your negative feelings."

After this we parted ways and left home. I was surprised at her words. They had a meaning that I did not yet understand. I decided to take Jessica's advice and reflect on what she had said. I decided that the next day I would go to the mountain in the city I lived in, and reflect on my feelings while looking at the view from the highest point.

It took me thirty minutes to reach the top. I felt a sense of calm and ease while looking down on the entire downtown of where I lived. I began to think as the cool breeze kissed my face as I looked down.

Jessica had been right. I had little confidence by not accepting myself. *Why did I think less of myself when I compared myself to others? Why did I even compare myself? Why didn't I accept myself?* These questions ran through my mind as I began to feel a certain appreciation for the things I did. I was not a bad person. I had special characteristics that many people enjoyed. I had friends and a family that loved me for who I am. *Why couldn't I love and accept myself too?*

I felt a certain joy as thoughts about accepting my individuality as a gift wondered in my mind. I began to see what Jessica meant by "confidence." She didn't just mean accepting myself but knowing that the world is huge and everyone in it has different and special characteristics. Everyone has the same worth, even though certain people may be treated as more than everyone else. While on the highest point of the mountain, I came to the conclusion that everyone is unique and that is what makes this abundant world special.



Not So Small After All

Jaynie Rowe

In a nation ruled by technology, we can reach practically any part of the country through the internet, which can make the world seem like a very small place. I have recently discovered that the truth is quite contrary to the popular statement that “It’s a Small World.” The world is a limitlessly enchanting place full of indescribable magnificence and it is definitely not small.

I was walking through a small remote village called Huancavelica, in Peru. The village was very small, most of the buildings made of clay with thin metal roofs, and nearly two hours from any developed cities. The poverty was evident, but not

overwhelming. The people got by with what they had and they were happy. When we reached the edge of the village, there was a little farm that continued its way down the mountain. I spent most of the walk down the mountain watching my feet so I wouldn't trip down the hill. At the bottom I finally looked up and saw the incredibly picturesque sight ahead of us. Past the farm was the meeting of two green mountains with the distant scenery of another range of mountains behind it backdropped by a bright blue sky filled with fluffy white clouds.

The mountains of Peru were beautiful the entire trip, but in this moment it was a different kind of beauty. In this small impoverished village, there was unimaginable elegance that few would ever be able to see, that in the mountains of Huancavelica, Peru, there was a small piece of heaven. We were told later that our group was the first group of foreign people to come to this village. This made the experience even more humbling and surreal. I was given the unexplainable privilege to see this unreal magnificence that no one outside of this small, insignificant village in the middle of Peru had ever seen. I had myself on a little bit of a pedestal because I was from America and I had been blessed so much more than these people, but they received their blessings in a different way. They are able to see this everyday while I rarely see something not made by man.

My perception of the world in that moment shifted a little. I had thought that the world was limited and reachable, but it is not. There is so much more that can never be comprehended or contained. In this moment I felt so small and humbled by all of nature. This magnificent place was only one village on one mountain in one small country. There are nearly two hundred countries in the world each with their own secret havens of

beauty that remain untouched. It is not such a “Small World” after all, in fact it is quite the opposite. The world is huge and we are very small and insignificant, no matter how big we think we are.

Mikaela Miguel

ENGL 1005-001

Dear 6th grader,
I know you just transferred to a new school.
I know the other kids are prejudiced towards you.
Don't let them knock you down to their level.
You are above them, keep it that way.
In a few years they'll be begging for forgiveness.
They'll be trying their hardest to be friends with you.
You don't have to be, but you will, with at least one.
That one you chose to forgive will become your best friend.
She'll be there in your hardest times, and your best times.
You'll be there in her hardest times, and in her best times.
She will become the mother of your first Godchild in 2017.
Just keep your head up, don't stoop to their level.

Dear 9th grader,
You're excited for high school.
You're excited to meet so many new people.
You're excited that so many people accept you.
You're excited that you have a large group of friends.
Don't think that these "friends" won't change.
Don't think that they will always accept you.
Don't think that you will always accept them.
You will change.
They will change.
Your large group will start fading away.
This isn't a negative thing.
You will learn that this is the best thing for all of you.
Our interests change, and that's okay.
Our values and goals in life change, and that's okay.
Embrace the changes.
Enjoy your large group while it lasts.
That group will give you the best memories.
Don't forget these memories.
That group will help you find yourself.
Thank them for showing you your true self.

That group will show you that your differences are a positive thing.
Wish them the best in life when they leave.
That group will show you how life works.
Everything changes for a reason.
Embrace the memories.
Embrace the differences.
Embrace the mistakes.

Dear 12th Grader,
High school is ending.
You're almost an adult, it's inevitable.
You only have five classes, yet you're stressed.
Stop stressing over little things.
It does more harm than good.
Enjoy the company of your three best friends while they're still here.
Enjoy the lunch and coffee dates with these friends.
Enjoy not having homework.
Enjoy seeing your parents everyday after school.
Enjoy those cheesy school rallies.
Enjoy being the top of your school.
Enjoy not having real responsibilities.
Why are you stressed?
Because you know what is to come.
In a few months you're going to have to pay to go to school.
Your future career depends on this school.
In a few months your best friends are going to be hours away.
You're going to have to go weeks without seeing them.
In a few months you're going to be at the bottom of your school.
You're going to be a freshman all over again.
In a few months you're going to be spending hours on homework.
You're going to spend more time doing homework than with family.
In a few months your parents are going to be two hours away.
You're only ever going to visit the home you've known for the last eleven years.
Please, just enjoy your last year of high school.
Don't waste these precious last moments stressing.

Dear College Freshman,
You decided to start your life over.
You decided to move two hours away for school.
You decided that you were mature enough for this life change.
You are mature enough for this change.

You did make the right decision.
Life is just beginning.
You will make new best friends, and that's okay.
Just please don't ever lose those three at home.
You will no doubt be stressed, and that's okay.
Just don't let the stress overrule you.
You will get homesick and need mom at times, and that's okay.
Just remember that she is just a phone call away.
You will question if this was the right decision, and that's okay.
Just realize that this was definitely the right decision. You can feel it.
You are a responsible adult now.
But know that it's okay to accept help when needed.
You are on your own up here.
But know that you are surrounded by family who supports you no matter what.
Please enjoy this experience.
Embrace the life change.
Don't forget where you came from.
And don't forget who you are.

A Letter to Future Students

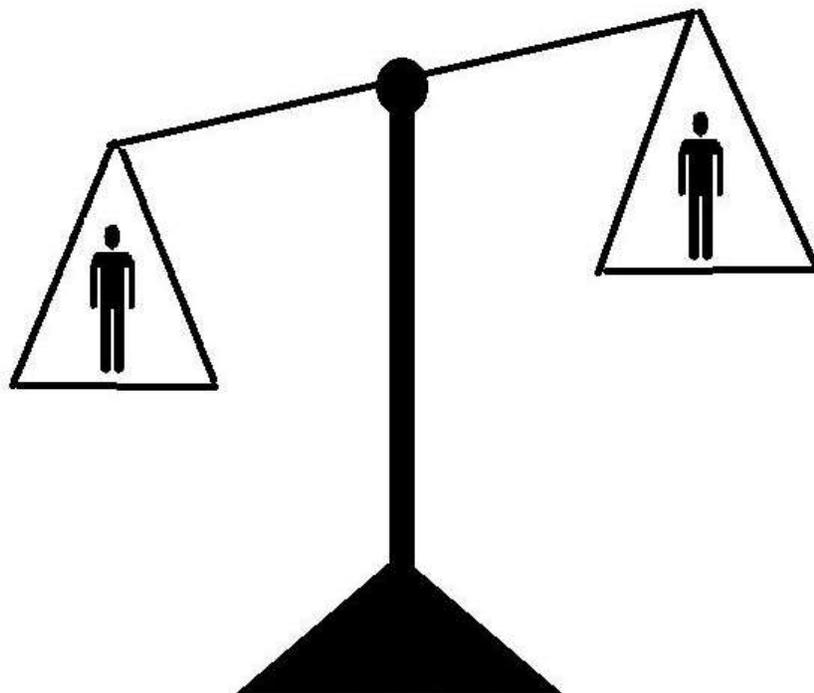
Dear future college freshmen:

This may be one of the toughest years of your life. More than likely, you will struggle with time management, grades, financial issues, and relationships. I have already gone through many issues within these parameters in the first three months of my freshman year. I know this next sentence will be difficult to understand and will sound absolutely insane. Do not stress. Yes, I really do mean it. This year is critical to finding your place in this world. I grew up around someone who had all these troubles, and has given me insight on how to deal with them. My father grew up in a very underprivileged family, where they sometimes struggled to find the money to buy groceries for the upcoming week. He had no money for an education, but pursued his dreams nonetheless. He was accepted into Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, and worked around the clock with a minimum wage salary to put himself through school. Through financial struggles, time management issues with over 40 hours on the clock each week, and driving home to Modesto to visit his parents nearly every weekend, four rigorous years later, he received his undergraduate degree in poultry science and was automatically given a job in North Carolina. Eventually moving home and starting a family, he pursued his dreams, never losing sight even in the darkest of hours. Because of his sacrifices, I have a mentor who can give me the knowledge and wisdom to navigate through the dark times, when I can't see through all the stress and struggles. As a freshman finding his own way, the basis of this is to simply say these the words: Don't. Give. Up. Pursue the dreams you have looked at and wondered about your entire life. Push yourself through the dark times, and don't lose sight of the goal, even when all hope is lost. Find your place, you won't regret one second of the journey.

From a kid chasing his dreams.



Struggling to Find a Place in an Unjust World



Dear Future Self,

Everyone belongs somewhere. Whether or not we know where that place is, or how to get there is another story. For many people, it takes time to understand where their place is and to find their way. People face obstacles, they get lost, they become complacent. Part of the hardship of finding one's place lies in enduring the wrong one. I hope that you have found your place. You certainly endured the wrong ones, places that asked you to leave your morals at the door and pick up a mask on your way in. Tell me you didn't settle on a place that that. The story of being lost and enduring the wrong place is a human one. I hope you took it upon yourself to write your own. I've wrote the beginning so make sure you give us a good ending.

Future self I know you will make it to our end goal which may be greater than today's. I'll get us past the bumps in the road and you climb the seemingly insurmountable heights. I know you can. When you do make it to the top enjoy life. Laugh loudly and live your dreams because the chase is over. Consider this my preemptive congratulations on making it. The road there was difficult and we didn't exactly have a map to success. I'll be honest, there were times when I wasn't sure you would make it. But if you're reading this I know you have. So, stand up and look at everything you have achieved enjoy it but something for me: remember.

Remember that there was a time when you were not as lucky. Remember where you came from. Stockton isn't known for much, is it? But it has an untold story, a story of young hopefuls. Kids who grow up dreaming of touching the stars and exploring the world; in spite of anyone who tells them they cannot. For most this story is hard to see since it exists under the surface. But you did not just see this story you lived it. There was a time when you were just another starry-eyed kid. People who made it, the ones who grew up to be athletes and artist would come back and say "you can do this to". They offered glimpses to a world beyond your own imagination. They sparked something and you chased after that light.

There are kids like you back there. Look back at the path that led you to where you are. Down that road is someone trying to walk the same path you walked. Help them, you know the way, so be the guide you always wanted. Give back to the place that built us, come back to my home. Not to be a hero but a teacher. Use your own story to give hope and set an example. Do what was done for you. Light the spark in someone let that guide them.

You've always said that one day when you get on your feet you'll help those who were not as lucky as us. Honor that. Remember the morals that got you to where you are today. Even if only one life is changed it would be worth it. There was a time when you believed in helping others, because what is joy that is not shared? Do you still in believe this?

Alissa Gonzalez

The Teacher

Ezra Grane

I want to be a teacher once I finish college. This is because I've always wanted to help people, and now that I have 18 years of experience, exploration, and experimentation behind me, I can soundly conclude that being a teacher is what I should do to help people in the best way that I possibly can. These years consist of many of my glorious adventures as a naïve adolescent, a punk teenager, and an introverted young adult. However, it is hard for any moment that I spent in those eighteen years to compare to that single, resolute, unexpected awakening that I experienced during my senior year of high school in my government class.

Although I'm uncertain of what the date was, I remember that it was on a Monday. This is because I was absent the preceding Friday, so there was an entire weekend for the events that occurred on Monday to develop. Because I was absent on Friday, however, I am unable to recite the exact flow of events that took place, but I am aware of the basic ideas, like that one of my friends wore a dress with very thin straps that was a bit revealing and she was reported by one of the students in our government class to a sheriff's office or something like a sheriff's office (I'm not the one who reported her, and where she was reported isn't important, so sue me for not knowing a minor detail). This invoked a very powerful response from the teacher of our government class.

Before he began his lecture about the inner workings of the government, he relocated the women of the class to a forest-like location that we compassionately called "Narnia." With the women gone, he began to question the male population that resided in his class about why he expelled the opposite gender to Narnia. After he grew impatient by the immaturity of some of the students, he finally began to do the most important thing he would do that day: lecture us about the detrimental effects of critiquing a woman's body.

Not only was I now informed that one of my close friends was harassed for the way she was dressed, but I was also being exposed to the passion, the ambition, the conviction, the trenchant dedication to preserving the welfare and self-esteem of his students that my government teacher had. I already wanted to be a teacher at this point, but I also believed that my main goal as a teacher would be to educate my students about how the derivative of an integral of a function is the original function, and other math related topics. This was a horribly stupid belief for me to have. Now, I am aware of my ignorance and have realized that a good teacher goes beyond feeding students with information. A good teacher will fight for those that are walked over. A good teacher will extend her arm regardless of how occupied she currently is. A good teacher will sacrifice his time that he could spend gossiping to help his students retrieve a penny from under a sofa.

I'm an avid feminist, so I wasn't so concerned about the message of his speech because I already agreed with every point he made about sexism against young women. During his lecture, I was more concerned about how he developed this outspoken sense of altruism. Has he always been so outspoken about correcting social injustice? Was he ever inspired by a sarcastic bald man when he was a senior in high school? Would I eventually become a sarcastic bald man? Regardless of how he developed his conviction, I knew that he was a good teacher. I knew that I would be a good teacher.

By the end of his lecture, all I wanted to do was give his old and fragile being a bear hug (which I eventually did). Unfortunately, the opportunity did not present itself, as he acted like

this five-minute lecture was a routine part of his day and calmly invited the women back to the class. He could heavily influence at least one person in the best way possible and act like it wasn't a big deal. I found that even more inspirational, that doing the right thing shouldn't be something that people get excited about because we should all do it without question or the idea of being rewarded. He was a good teacher, and I was privileged to have learned from him. I want to be a teacher when I finish college. Thankfully, I understand what a teacher is.

He
Chelsea Gallet

His hair was pulled.

“Girls don’t have short hair,” they’d say.

“It’s time to shape up.”

“Act like a girl.”

“Look at her—why does she only hang around boys?”

“She’s looking for attention.”

His hair was pulled—or, what was left of it.

“He,” he corrected—patiently, because he didn’t think it was their faults. They were raised that way. It was just the way their parents taught them. They’re young, and they have time to change. He repeated it to himself, convinced that if he said it enough, he’d be right.

“He,” he corrected, but they wouldn’t hear—to them, he was still the girl with the short hair. The one that wanted to be different. The one that lied about who she was.

His white-hot tears streamed down his face, searing his cheeks. His throat was tight, a metal chain wrapped around it, choking him, suffocating him. With each sob, each breath became harder, as if it tightened—as if the hold they held on him was still present here, where he was finally alone. He tugged on his collar, damp with tears, as if that would help him breathe; but the chain was still there, the clamp melted quick against him by the heat of their stares, the sting of their words. He was dizzy, intoxicated by the panic, the pain, the reluctance—the tears, still streaming from his swollen eyes. If he choked out another sob, he’d choke to death.

When he’d finally stopped crying, lulled by the deep breaths his mother urged him to take when she first found him like this three years ago, he forgot why he started. He wiped his face, foolishly thinking that would be enough to hide the evidence, but his neck and chest were still wet and his face was still red. Hollow, tired—he showered and slept, hoping that the sharp throbbing behind his forehead like a pin being tweaked and twisted would dull, that the tenderness of his puffy eyes that burned whenever he brushed his hand against them would cease, that the crescent-shaped depressions in his arm where he’d dug his fingernails in out of desperation, something he barely remembers doing, would heal. They always do. When he wakes, he’ll be fine. He always is.

“Wouldn’t it be easier to just be a girl? That way people won’t be so mean.” She’d said it kindly, cautiously, but he’d heard it before in different words.

“She’s looking for attention.”

He’d heard that one so much that he’d begun to wonder if maybe they were right. He’d thought it bitterly, at first, but there was still that twinge of guilt that settled in the pit of his stomach. Every time he heard it, the guilt persisted. Maybe they *are* right. Maybe he *is* only looking for attention. Maybe there really was nothing different to him. Maybe he *is* just pretending, so he could be special. Even friends who were able to accept him as *him*, the ones that didn’t still persist to use *her*—like he there was still a chance he would suddenly come to them and say that he was *wrong*, that he was just being foolish, that he is a girl—still looked away, their smiles tighter and their eyes clouded, not ready to face what he was saying. They could understand, to an extent, but they didn’t *really*. He never said it, but he knew what they wanted to say. He’d said it to himself before.

“If you like boys, why don’t you just stay a girl?”

He'd tried. He'd tried desperately. He spent most of his life surrounded by dresses and dollhouses and princess movies and long hair and he *liked* some of those things—a lot of these things—but it wasn't about *that*. If it was a want, he could give it up. If he just wanted to be a boy, he could learn to get past that, but it wasn't like that. It wasn't a want; it just was. He is a boy, and he tried to be a girl, and it never worked. Every time he thought about it, every time he considered that maybe, *maybe*, they're right, maybe they have a point, maybe he is a girl—every time that twist in his gut tried to convince him that *no*, he's *wrong*, and he *is* just asking for attention, he reminded himself of the way he felt before. The unending wrongness of it all, the knowledge that he was lying before he even knew why, the hesitation before he circled "F" on any form—wondering, silently, desperately, how different his life would be if he would just circle the "M" instead. He remembered, most of all, the day he made his first step.

His hair was pulled.

But he pulled it himself. He wasn't desperate, that time. He felt compelled. He yanked it as far as it would reach, wincing a bit in his haste, kitchen scissors in his other hand, because those were the only ones he could find in a hurry. And he'd chopped it off, cutting as closely as he could with the scissors, severing, for the first time, his ties with the girl he was. It was liberating. With each lock of hair that dropped to the ground, limp and forgotten, he felt lighter. His hair was weighing him down far more than it ever weighed, and, for that first night, he felt *light*. It was the first time he's felt so unburdened. If they'd attacked him that night with their piercing gazes and their sharp tongues, he wouldn't have cared. He would be able to shrug off their assault with just the understanding he'd found. He wasn't wrong. He's not wrong. As he looked into the mirror afterwards, he didn't find the transformation startling. After years of that wrongness stirring in his gut at every turn, for the first time, he felt *right*.

His mother was horrified when she saw. Not because he'd cut it off, but because he'd used the *kitchen scissors* and was left with damaged, uneven hair. That night, she took him into the bathroom and used an electric razor and shaved the sides and making him look somewhat presentable. He'd cried later, shaking, his mouth unable to form words, his throat closed by the sheer force of the emotion but his heart open. He was so grateful. He was so *lucky*, and he was so right, and his mother didn't bat an eye—she never questioned him like his friends and classmates would. She knew, she told him. She's known longer than he has.

And she told him that it shouldn't matter what his classmates say, or what they think. They don't have to accept him for who he is. They'll continue to tell him he shouldn't *want* to change, because it isn't about whether he *wanted* to be a boy or not. It's about admitting who he is to the only person who matters: himself. And he'd tell himself that—he'd remind himself that the things they think about him are their *own* problems, that if they want to lessen their lives by concerning themselves with him, that was their loss.

But on nights like these, it's easy to forget.

Omilia, The God of Speech

Dave Gonzales

While some gods are born with great powers and authority, there is little to say about one poor child of Apollo. Apollo, revered as the god of the sun, music, poetry, medicine and healing, and one of the most important gods in the entire Greek pantheon, produced an offspring with no power whatsoever. His name was Omilia, and while Apollo tried and tried to see if Omilia had any semblance of special abilities, he could find none.

The tale of Omilia starts with his birth, when Apollo decided to hold a grand concert for every god on top of Olympus, which Zeus, the god of the sky, consented to. And so he mesmerized and lulled every god with his melodious and ambrosian voice, whilst playing his divine lyre, drifting all who heard his piece into a harmonious reverie. Nearing the end of his performance, he gave one last final note, which shook the very mountain itself. His voice carried out in front of him in a golden light which blinded all present, and began to solidify. His voice, his final note, manifested into the shape of a boy. But he was not handsome, nor ugly. His sandy brown hair and complexion were not the radiant gold of Apollo's. Yet Apollo took the boy in his arms, and proudly declared this boy's name. "Omilia!" He proclaimed. Omilia meant "speech" in Greek, and the Gods gave their applause, both for the concert and for the boy.

Apollo took great care of his son, bathing him in the purest waters, feeding him the finest foods, showering him in praise. But something was wrong. Apollo noticed the boy did not have any abilities or powers. He concluded that Omilia's powers were latent, and he needed some form of catalyst to be released. So he arranged a tournament in order to bring out Omilia's powers, and invited all of the offspring of the gods to attend. In every single event however, Omilia came last, and every single god except his father laughed and ridiculed him. Even the singing competition, which surprised many. Omilia's voice was so bad, that many joked that his singing was akin to multiple cats in labor.

Feeling ashamed of himself, Omilia fell into a great depression. He was the son of the god of music, and born from his voice. So why was his singing so horrendous? He also began to harbor anger towards the gods for laughing at him at all the events. Apollo, seeing that his son had no powers and was the laughing stock of the entire Pantheon, hatched a plan to get his son out of his depression and gain some form of self-respect. He descended among the mortals and gave them an ultimatum.

"Do whatever my son says. Give the illusion that his words affect you physically. Those that do not comply will find that their medicine will become poison, and all music they hear or produce will turn into incoherent cacophony." And so every mortal gave Apollo their word, and Apollo returned to his son, and falsely told him that Zeus had banished Omilia from Olympus for being so pathetic. Omilia was cast down from the heavens, and into a small settlement built by mortals. Omilia began to beg for food, water, and shelter, not expecting much, but he was showered with full meals, clean water, and was offered to stay in many homes.

Omilia eventually grew into a man, and noticed that everyone did whatever he said, and those that didn't, died of poisoning, or tore out their ears, screaming in anguish. He wondered if he was actually controlling these mortals, and tested his theory by traveling to the nearby city and seeking out the king. He found the king at his throne, and gave a statement for all to hear.

"Give me your crown, your family and your city!" To his surprise and glee, the king took off his crown, gave the hand of his wife to Omilia, and left the city, never to return. But even this was not enough to prove that he had special abilities. To absolutely make sure that he was controlling these mortals, he came upon a temple built to commemorate Zeus, and told the

priests to destroy it, and then to commit suicide. He laughed in mirthful glee as the priests took hammers and disassembled the temple, before drinking cups of hemlock to kill themselves. He was now convinced that his speech was controlling mortals. But then, a deep hunger swelled up within him, and his greed went to his head. He decided that his powers were strong enough to control even the gods themselves. He constructed the mortals to build a stairway tall enough to reach the peak of Olympus, and carry him to the top. When he reached the top, he found Zeus and Apollo waiting there.

In the loudest voice he could muster, he gave his ultimatum: “Zeus! Give me reign over the heavens, and step down from your position as God of the sky!” Zeus however, crossed his arms and scoffed, before retreating back into his palace. Cheeks red with anger, Omilia repeatedly gave his ultimatum along with numerous curses. He ordered the mortals that were with him to strike down Zeus, but Apollo simply shook his head at the mortals and ordered them to go back to their regular lives. Omilia was furious, and demanded explanations from his father. Apollo said to him “My son, you have no powers. No one can have power over speech, because words do not inherently hold any power. I instructed every mortal to obey you under the threat of punishment, and I just lifted my command. Those mortals chose to give power to your words.” And so Omilia, feeling betrayed by everyone he knew, fled from Olympus and retreated from society itself. Because he is still a “god”, he is immortal, and will live the rest of his days as a recluse. But let it be known that we still worship Omilia. Because he embodies what speech is. Words can hurt, and make us do things we don’t want to do, but remember that it is we who give words the power over us, not the words itself.

What's Behind and Below Me

Keith Gordon

Routine flights always fail to capture my fullest attention. This flight feels just as my others had; I'd done the typical bomber-escort mission for what felt like a thousand times. I tend to find myself losing focus and thinking about everything but what I am doing, as I let my reflexes do as they do best. Simple things like this remind me of back home, when I would do my usual commute to work and find myself driving purely on instinct, guided by familiar sights and held captive within the boundaries of painted street-lines. Oh, how I miss the simple things that I once found tedious and lacked appreciation for. I come back to reality and catch a glimpse of the red tail in front of me disappearing in and out of the clouds. The red tail is the mark of the Tuskegee Airmen, the first group of black military pilots in the US, reminding me why I do this, regardless of how much I miss home-- I do this for my brothers flying next to me, and my people back home (Tuskegee Airmen). If I was asked in an interview, however, of course I would cite a love of country. I can't tell myself the same in the privacy of my own mind. Sure, the United States is far better than Germany or Russia, but that doesn't mean much to me as I'm seen as inferior by the very people I risk my life for in this plane.

I'm beginning to lose hope for my return back home. Everyday thus far I have told myself that I'll eventually return to my home with the friends and family I love, but is it really home? It doesn't feel like home when I am forced to get off the sidewalk if a white man walks by. It doesn't feel like home when government-sponsored segregation is the best plausible step forward from being three-fifths of a man. I will prove to the white folks back home that I am nothing less than an equal, an equal who can fight and fly like no other, regardless of their beliefs. I cannot wait for the moment I return and show my countrymen our flight record, and tote the fact that we have lost almost half the bombers my fellow white pilots have (Tuskegee Airmen). In order to do so, I have to make it through this flight. I need to take it one flight at a time. I need to focus. Enemy pilots will be here any moment. I can't let what is happening back home distract me from my mission.

I continue flying, without letting my mind drift away for what seems to be hours. Time changes drastically when I refuse to let my mind wander; wandering back home, wandering back to base, anywhere but my present location. It can best be defined as a sort of dream state. That has always been something I'm exceptionally decent at: dreaming, and flying. A few minutes later I begin to catch flak. This is a sure sign that we are in hostile territory, exactly where our bomber needs to be. I'd been shot at countless times, but this time was like no other. There were thousands of bullets, flying through the air much more skillfully than I could ever fly. I try to dodge them but there is nowhere to go, in a sky that once seemed so empty, yet full of endless possibility. Maybe I'll make it. Maybe I won't. I didn't join to become one of the first black pilots to enjoy my safety, I joined to fight. My safety is the last thing on my mind-- my bomber and my brothers' safety, however, is a different story. As I am performing as best as I always have, letting my adrenaline take control and use my body to perform all the maneuvers I have done so many times, they have become entirely natural, my mind begins wandering. I can't help but think: I will fulfill my commitment, but I can only hope that the folks back home will fulfill their commitment to truly being a country of freedom and equality. The United States will always be my home, but I hope someday, maybe someday, my home will accept me.

Identity

Julia Reyes

Growing up I never really felt the tensions between my cultures. I was just Julia, a girl who liked watching Barbie movies and reading Magic Tree House books. I never felt the need to identify myself as American or Mexican, and when I was young I never felt like an outsider being Mexican living in America. I was born and raised in California, it was all I knew. This all changed when I moved to Mexico, my parents heritage and my love for India Maria movies didn't count for much. I was an outsider. I was a “gringa.”

“How could I feel so isolated in a place that was supposed to be my home?” I asked to myself. “How could I feel so rejected by my people?” I thought. I was painfully aware that I looked different from everyone else; I had disgustingly pale skin opposed to their gorgeous tan skin. I was awkwardly tall opposed to their petite, and pixie like figures. I worked so hard to fit in, I studied to learn Spanish and by the end of my first year I could read, write, and speak spanish better than my peers. At the end of 5th grade (two years after) I was at the top of my class. I was finally accepted although I was aesthetically very different. My friends acknowledged my differences and embraced them although in their mind I would always be American.

When I moved back to California at 13 I faced a very similar challenge. Now my complexion wasn't pale enough, and I wasn't nearly tall enough. Being Mexican was common. I felt like my culture wasn't special, and that my traditions weren't as great as I felt they were. I was ashamed, and embarrassed of my heritage. I tried as best as I could to dissociate myself with anything related to Mexican culture and faked a caucasian lifestyle. I was in a way forced to assimilate to an American life to fit in. I celebrated things like Thanksgiving and Halloween that I never did before and I found odd. People pronounced my name with a hard J sound rather than the soft spoken way it was pronounced at home. People didn't understand where I came from so I didn't like where I came from.

I can't remember a specific moment that I realized that my Mexican culture is one of the best things about me, but when it happened everything changed. I once had a conversation with a white male classmate who once he found out I was mexican said to me “Why don't you just say you're from Spain? That's way better than being Mexican right?” Luckily I was at a point that comments like that didn't make me question my culture anymore, but it scares me how comments like these will affect other young latinos. There is a poisonous dialogue happening right now, the way that the Latino community is being talked about by others comes from a place of fear and misunderstanding that is often translated into hate. The scariest part is the possibility that Latinos will begin to doubt their own culture and question if the nasty things people are saying are true and believe that they should be ashamed of where they come from, though they have done nothing wrong. The key to equality is not erasing our differences, but embracing and celebrating what makes us so.

Not Just a Name Anaissa Medina

I still remember a day, at the beginning of my sixth grade school year, when I entered my sixth grade math teacher's classroom for extra tutoring. Once he finished helping me, I was getting ready to leave when he asked how to properly pronounce my name. At first, I pronounced it with a Latin accent and he could not repeat it. I repeated myself to him, this time however, with an American accent. He stopped me and asked, "Why did you do that?"

I asked, "Did what?"

He said, "Change your name like that. Just because I couldn't say it." I looked at him a little confused because I did not really think I changed my name. He continued, "Do not ever change who you are, simply because other people can't adapt to it. You are you and stay, that way. Your name is unique; don't let other people like me take that away. If they want to truly get to know you, they will figure out a way to learn it." At that time I thought he was being silly. After all, it was only my name.

As I left he asked, "So how do you say it?" Once again, I said it the way I grew up hearing it being told to me by my family, Ah-Nah-E-Ss-Ah. Then he said, "Have a nice day Anaissa." This time pronouncing it correctly.

The fact that he was able to say it correctly at last made me feel respected in a way. At that moment, I felt like he truly cared about me as a person, not just another student. Initially, I assumed that all that was present within the conversation was simple: people struggle to pronounce my name. However, now I see a deeper meaning to that conversation. I wasn't certain at the time what his intention was with our discussion, until now. My name isn't uncommon, it is unique. It is me. It is my ethnicity.

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I am Latina, and as with most stories, I am where I am today because my family made the decision to emigrate from Mexico to California. It seems so typical. Just another story about people "crossing the border", but if it weren't for this journey that my family made the decision to make, my future would not look as bright as it does today.

The American Dream has been the ultimate goal for people coming to the United States for centuries. Yet, no one knows exactly what the American Dream is. For my grandparents the American Dream was simply a better life for future generations than they had endured themselves. For me the American Dream is to graduate from a university, become my own boss, live comfortably, and return the favor to my parents and grandparents. If it weren't for their endurance, my dream would have never felt like such a reality.

My grandparents remind me every chance they get about how proud they are of me for all of my accomplishments and most of all for pursuing a college education. To me, it is natural to be attending college; it is just what people do after high school. That is what we are supposed to do. But then I take a step back and analyze what I found to be common knowledge: after high school you go to college. I realize that I made this assumption because of where and how I was raised. If circumstances would have remained the way they are traditionally destined for Latinas I may not have even finished high school. I would be working the fields struggling to help my family to keep a meal on the table and a roof over our heads.

This realization slowly began to come to me when I attended the Hispanic Youth Institute at Santa Clara University. I have gone through most of my life “checking-off” the box that says “Hispanic” as just part of who I am. The Institute I attended began to stir emotions linked to my ethnicity that I had never felt before. They forced us to remember what our family had endured through their lifetime. They forced us to imagine what life would be like in our ancestors’ shoes. Pursuing a college education is not just for ourselves; it is for every Latino who dreams for more than what they have. Many young Latinos, like me, that still live in Mexico cannot afford college and any hopes of furthering their own education disappear in mid air.

Not only am I Latina, but I am also female. A female Latina. I stand for the millions of women who wish to get an education and remind them that they can do it. The Institute emphasized “embracing our race” rather than being embarrassed by it. Recently Donald Trump made a comment about Latinos saying that we are just “criminals” and my grandmother turned to me and said, “See mija, keep going to school and prove him wrong.” Comments like these motivate me even more to stand up for the voiceless. It is MY people who are doing all of the jobs that no one else wants to do. It is MY people who live in silence praying that one day they will be heard. Hardships help build our emotional and physical endurance and help define who we are as individuals. I strongly believe that if everything in my life were handed to me on a silver platter, I would not have the drive and motivation to do things to the best of my ability. If it were not for reflecting that there are people my age everywhere who can only dream to be in the position I am in today, then I could have easily settled for a high school diploma. People are looking up to me to give them a voice where they never did before.

My grandmother was only able to finish elementary school before having to focus her attention to managing her family’s store. If I lived in Mexico then I would not have even had a high school diploma. Instead I am lucky that they made the sacrifices they did, because now my family is moving down a new path. When analyzing my family even further then I realize that there is a clear separation between the generation that moved to the United States and the generation before me that grew up in the United States. The ones that have grown up in the United States have nearly all graduated high school and have gone on to attend a university and receive a college degree. It is astounding when I think of it. To know that all it took was for my ancestors to make the decision to move to the United States and now my family’s social status is slowly being elevated. My uncle not only received a college degree but continued into graduate school and became a doctor of dental surgery. That has made our entire family proud, especially my grandparents. To know that all of their enduring has paid off and now their son is able to live a life different from what they ever experienced themselves.

When I was only three years old my family made the decision to move from East San Jose to the Central Valley for my benefit. I now believe that decision has been one of the many pieces of the puzzle that has led me to where I am today. My family history does not define who I am but I also do not forget it. Because of all that my family has endured I am able to have the opportunities I have today. I aim to make my family and my culture proud. Going to college is something to be proud about, but now I must stay focused and continue on what I know I am capable of. Everything.

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It is customary to adapt to our environment and to those within it. We attempt to either fit stereotypes or avoid them all together. Sometimes, we go to the extent of changing ourselves almost entirely, just to fit in. What my teacher taught me was true. I should not have to change

myself, nor my name, to fit the social norm. This lesson goes beyond just my name, it is applicable to relationships in general; whether it is between a teacher and a student, friends, boyfriend and girlfriend, siblings, among others. No two individuals will ever be completely identical, but efforts can be made to make them more relatable. My teacher and I were nowhere near identical. He had children, I didn't, he was a man and I am a girl, he was older and I was not yet a teenager. Despite such significant differences, my teacher and I were able to understand our uniqueness, which as a result, led to a greater understanding of one another. If individuals want to have equality, they must have the ability to understand and accept that those around them have their own unique characteristics. Mutual understanding, common ground and acceptance are key. Mutual lessons to be learned; as my sixth grade teacher brought to my attention before the end of the school year.

Several months after our initial interaction involving my, "uncommon name," my teacher asked me to stay in his classroom between passing periods. At first I thought I was in trouble, but then he said, "Anaissa, throughout this year you made me a better teacher. You ask me questions before, during, and after class. It keeps me on my toes. I appreciate you making me a better teacher." I never imagined that I would have the ability to teach my teacher. Despite very significant differences, we helped each other. Human interaction can leave a lasting impression. Something that seemed so minute at the time lead to a deeper understanding of ourselves.

On a societal level significant improvements can be made amongst groups of people, simply by understanding the roles they play. It is important not to get caught in believing that things have one way of being. Just like in the situation with my teacher, he probably never imagined he would learn something or improve upon himself through a student, as will every individual. Lessons can be learned through simple interactions between each other people which in result could ease tension between groups.

Understanding one's place and continuing to understand others through interactions could be the small pebble that ripples in effect to make a difference in the world. Our daily lives are chaotic and surprises are around every corner. If we take the time to set aside differences and understand those around us then the chaos could be minimized.

Humans naturally fear what is unfamiliar. Often modifying what they do not understand, to fit their own beliefs. In doing so, we lose the value behind what is unfamiliar. I have an "uncommon name" and it is natural for people to see it and try to modify it to fit to what they are used to. If the lesson of not changing myself for others had not been taught to me, I would have failed to appreciate the diversity around me. As a society, we must not force people to fit into what is "normal," but instead attempt to understand why they are different, learn from it, and seek the common ground.

Sister Cities: Making Connections Around the Globe

Elizabeth Cole

What connection could a city, such as Turlock, have with another town in a country across the globe? Sister cities. According to the official website for sister cities, “A sister city, county, or state relationship is a broad-based, long-term partnership between two communities in two countries.” [What is a Sister City?] This unique opportunity allows two cities from two countries to foster an association that might never have been made otherwise, giving people a chance to examine another culture and people.

By connecting specific cities with each other, this program allows these towns to have a close unique bond, sharing many aspects of culture, people, and society. According to the Sister Cities International website, their mission is, “to promote peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation — one individual, one community at a time.” [About Sister Cities International] The article continues to describe how this program facilitates connections, “Sister Cities International’s member programs focus on four main areas of exchange: arts and culture, youth and education, business and trade, and community development and technical exchange to connect citizens around the globe.” [About Sister Cities International] This program allows and advances the communication of ideas and inventions that cross national borders and language barriers. This helps third world countries to develop.

Following the chaos and international tensions caused by the World Wars, President Dwight D. Eisenhower created Sister Cities International in 1956 to promote peace by allowing a means to connect cities around the globe. The project grew. Today, according to Sister Cities International’s website, “This network unites tens of thousands of citizen diplomats and volunteers in 570 member communities with over 2,300 partnerships in 150 countries on six continents.” [About Sister Cities International] Sister cities are not limited to megalopolises, in fact, quite a few cities in the Central Valley are part of this program.

In Stanislaus county only a few towns have sister cities. Modesto has four: Khmelnytskyri, Ukraine; Kurume, Japan; Vijayawada, India and Vernon, British Columbia, Canada. Waterford has one sister city, Corn Island, Nicaragua. And Riverbank, my home town, has three: Fuyang, China; Furstenfeld, Austria and Tamazula de Gordiano, Mexico. I discovered the concept of sister cities when I saw a mural in downtown Riverbank depicting snapshots of these three cities. This mural ignited my thoughts and gave me a glance into different cultures and societies. But why doesn’t Turlock have any sister cities? As the second largest town in Stanislaus county and home to an increasingly well-known university, shouldn’t Turlock take advantage of this one-of-a-kind opportunity to foster international connections?

"What Is a Sister City?" Sister Cities International, n.d. Web. 29 Oct. 2016.

<http://www.sister-cities.org/what-sister-city>

“About Sister Cities International” Sister Cities International, n.d. Web. 29 Oct. 2016.

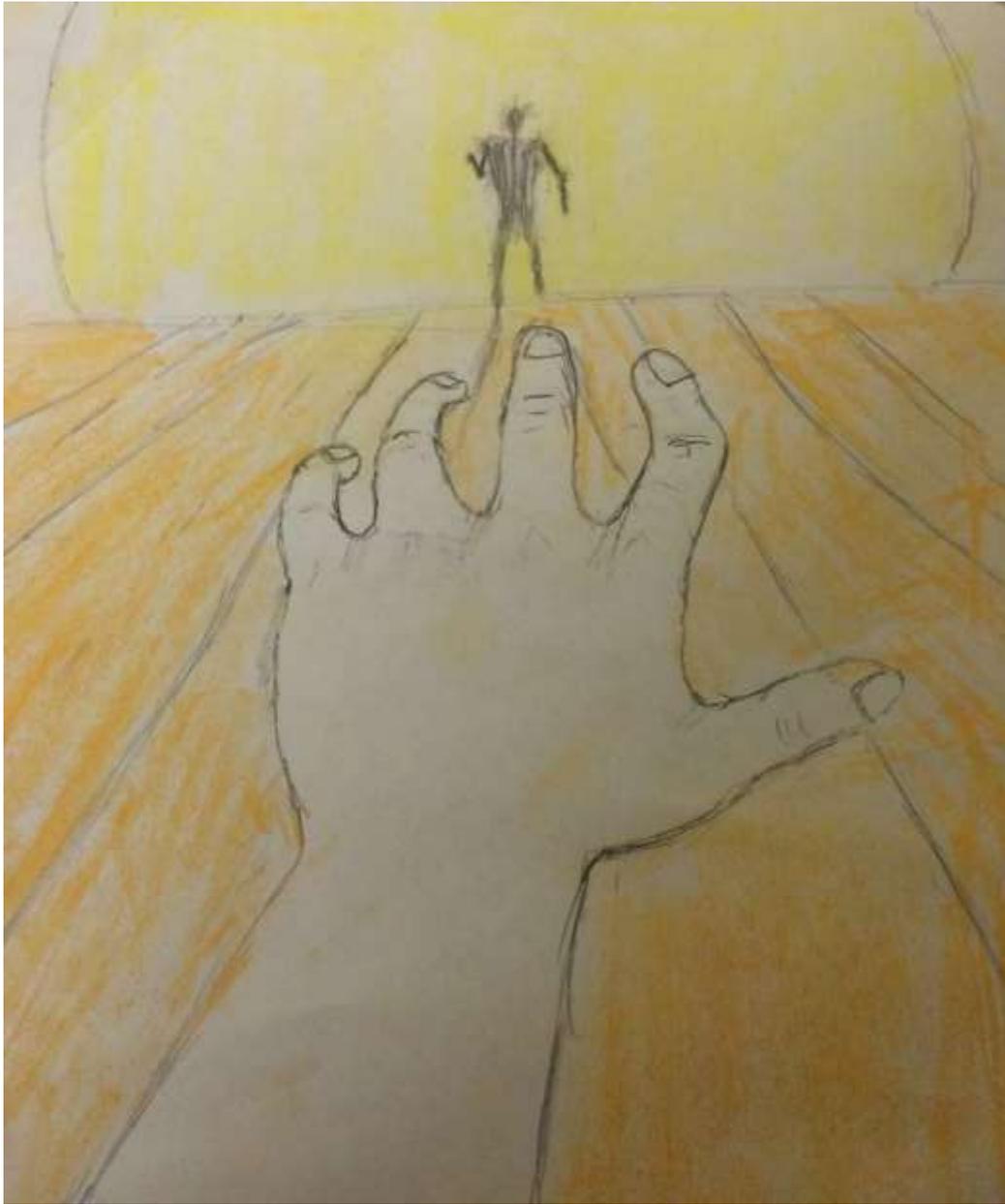
<http://www.sister-cities.org/about-sister-cities-international>

2nd place

Dave Gonzales

BANG! The gun starts, and you rush out of the starting block, alongside seven other competitors. Your muscles ache with each swing of your arm and legs, but you keep moving. This is your time to shine. Your big day. You've been training for the past few months for this one event. Your time is NOW! You pump your body even more, passing the person in 5th place, then the person in 4th. You inwardly smile to yourself. You can see your family cheering you on, your friends yelling your name. The runner at 3rd falters, and you take advantage of it, speeding up and becoming 3rd. You set your eyes on the person at 2nd place, and begin to pump even more energy into your muscles. You start to see black spots in your eyes; your breath becomes more labored. Faster! Faster! It seems as if you and the person in 2nd place are neck and neck. For a millisecond you shift your eyes towards the other runner, and it seems as if 2nd had the same idea. You see in the other runners eyes, in the cold hard blackness of 2nd's pupils, a reflection of yourself, running just as hard, just as fast. And yet, you are faster. You push again, and finally the stalemate is broken. You catch a glimpse of 2nd place's pained face, and see yourself smiling in the reflection of 2nd place's pupils. Well, now 2nd place is 3rd place, and you have become 2nd. You set your eyes on 1st place, and see that 1st place is starting to slow down. You channel every single morsel of energy your body still has remaining, and start to gain on 1st. This is it! One last obstacle, and you can have your glory! Ignoring the aching pains of your joints and muscles, you push onward, determined to win it all. And yet, you can't. 1st place is still ahead of you. The black spots are becoming more prevalent. Sweat cascades down your face, dripping from your eyelids to your eyes, but you do not stop to wipe. You turn the corner, and now the sun is right in your eyes, blinding you. You work and work, but as the last 300m of the race comes closer, you realize that 1st place is just too fast for you. For a fraction of a second, you hold your arm out to 1st place, a fading silhouette in the shimmering sun. You lost. 1st place crossed the finish line a second before you do. 1st place turns around, and shakes your hand. You gaze into 1st place's eyes, trying to see if there is a secret in 1st place's pupils, but you only see the tired and melancholy reflection of yourself. You were close, and yet so far. Your friends and family congratulate you for 2nd, but you only feel emptiness. You were right there! And yet, you weren't there. You gaze into the 2nd place medal around your neck. But a small smile slowly grows into your features.

You got 2nd place. One number away from one. You still have room to grow. Room to improve. You aren't perfect. Perfection is a curse; you stop growing when you are perfect. You were close, but you know you can get even closer. Take this defeat, this loss, this tragedy, and let it fuel your desire to be better than yourself.



Forever
Timothy Nersy

They wanted to have each other's heart,
Because he was in love and so was she,
But they couldn't have each other's heart,
Because everyone said they won't let it be.
The two loved in secret,
Because they didn't want to lose what was theirs,
They knew if someone drifted them apart,
They would both be in despair.
They didn't understand,
Why they couldn't love despite their opposite race,
Because under their skin,
They knew they were soulmates.
As they were both forced apart,
Taken away from each others lives,
It was very easy to see,
How they were broken down inside.
But this was not the end,
They will work together and strive,
To do whatever it takes,
To remain in each other's lives.
They don't care what people say,
They know they're meant to be together,
So despite what their culture's say,
They will be lovers, forever.

Hear Me Now
Trevor Nimoy

Hear me now
What if you
Got locked out
And you saw the reason why
Why you're stuck
Stuck outside
And it all because they're blind
Blind to how
Blind to why
Blind to what you are inside
All your thoughts
Where you're from
They will never stop and find

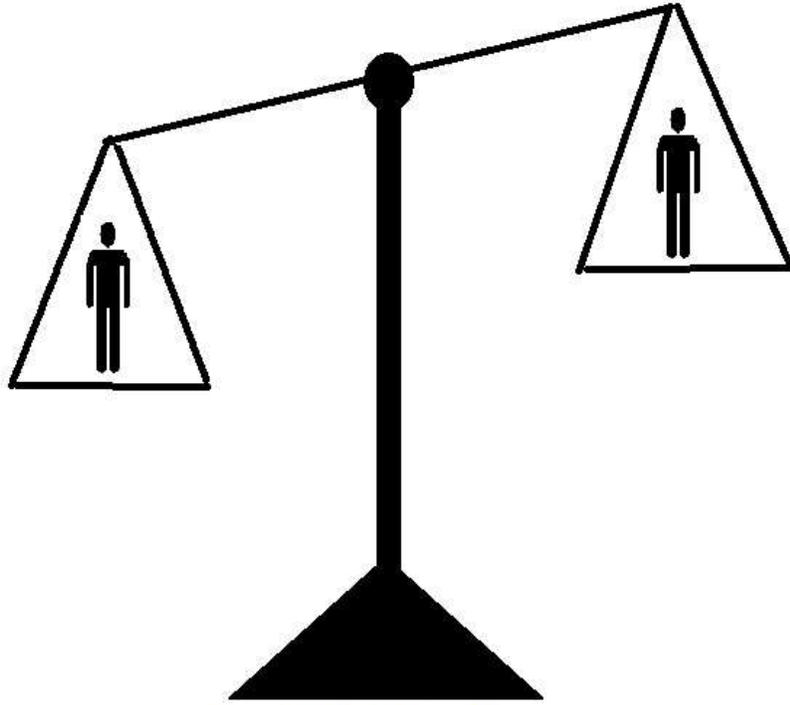
Hear me now
What if you
Get picked on
And you know that they are wrong
You know why
You know how
They marched to a different song
But that song
Wasn't right
But they nod and go along
So you scream
Then you fight
Just to show that you are strong

Hear me now
What if I
Had to show
How injustice isn't right
Who would care
Who would think
Should my image be in their sight
Would they think
Then decide
That their march was the wrong stride
What would happen
What would change
Would anything be the same
Would they worry
Would they hide
Or realize that we are on the same side



Between the Act
Brittaney Rigby

Between the act,
Before the notion.
We are without tact
And pensive motion.
Filled with no thought
For battles we fought.
Why so contradictory?
Every life is a victory!



**Social Injustice:
Close to Home and Across the Globe**

Image by Keith Gordon

An Uber Ride to Remember

By Katherine Fielding

It was the evening of September 18, 2016. To be precise it was Sunday. I had invited my friend, Charlotte, to stay in my dorm over the weekend. By this time we'd had our fun: watching movies, eating junk food, and staying up late chatting about everything and anything. But it was time for her to go as she had a train to catch back to Martinez.

I'd promised her earlier that day that I would take her to the train station. Not having my car, I pulled out my phone instead, and launched the Uber app. With a few quick taps on the screen I had chosen my pick-up location, where I wanted to go, and requested a driver. Minutes later I received a response from a driver called Amir, who according to the app, drove a gray Prius. The Uber app told me he would be here to pick us up in eight minutes.

"Come on," I said to my friend, "We'd better go down to the parking lot to meet him."

"All right," Charlotte replied sounding somewhat sad to be leaving. Then she hefted her bag onto her shoulder. Although bag was kind of an understatement. Her duffel bag was the biggest bag I had ever seen, and with its forest green color it looked more like a miniature tank than anything else.

"Are you sure you don't want any help with that?" I asked one last time.

"No, it's okay. I've got it." she answered. I eyed her dubiously, but she just smiled, and waited for me to open the door for her. The door creaked loudly as I swung it open. Patiently I held it as Charlotte staggered out with the enormous bag that barely fit through the door-frame. Following her out the door we headed for the elevator. We squeezed on, only just managing to fit with her bag. When we reached the ground floor she stumbled out, and barely made her way out of housing. As soon as we reached the parking lot I checked my phone again. The app now told

me the driver would be here in one minute. And sure enough, a minute later a gray Prius pulled up to the curb.

As Charlotte almost toppled onto the road, a middle-eastern man hopped out of the car, and quickly came to her rescue. He took the bag from her, and set it down while he opened the trunk. He then lifted the heavy bag with some struggle, and placed it into the car. Meanwhile Charlotte and I had clambered inside. Once we were all buckled up Amir started the car, and hit the road.

It was a fairly quiet ride to Senair Station, as Charlotte and I conversed intermittently. And it wasn't long before we arrived at the Amtrak station. Charlotte got out of the car, and Sayed helped her again with her overly large bag.

“Good-bye!” I called after my friend.

“See you soon!” she replied. Then she disappeared into the station. Once she was gone I politely asked Amir if he could take me back to where we had come from. He agreed, and we went off on our way once more. This trip, however, was not to be so silent.

“Why were all the people staring at me? It's just apartments right?” he asked in broken English.

“Oh, it's actually dorms. I live on campus at CSU Stanislaus.” I laughed, knowing what he meant. Everyone else seemed to be parents or students in the car park.

“So you go to school there?” he replied seeming genuinely interested.

“Yes,” was my answer.

“So you are not from here?”

“No, I live near San Francisco.”

“What do you study?” Amir queried.

“I’m an English major.” I responded amicably.

“Oh, so you write song?” he returned.

“No, I read books, and write stories, poems, and essays.” I explained.

“Ooooh,” was all he could manage in response.

“Well, I don’t get to do that right now actually. I have to do all my general education stuff for the first two years. Like math, science, and public speaking.” I said sighing.

“You just graduated from high school then?” he questioned.

“Yes,” I replied cordially.

“I went to high school in Afghanistan.” said Amir. At this I didn’t know what to say. I shouldn’t have been surprised, yet I was. I suppose I didn’t expect anyone to share such sensitive information. I stayed quiet, and merely nodded my head in acknowledgement. Finally after a lengthy silence Amir spoke again, “I want to continue my learning, but it’s so expensive, you know?”

“Mmmm,” I mumbled because I did know. It is expensive to go to college, and extend your knowledge. And in that moment it seemed unfair that I could go, and he couldn’t because he couldn’t afford it. I could tell in his voice he wanted it more than I did, valued it more than I did, would have appreciated it more than I did, and yet there we were; one of us, getting an amazing education, the other driving people around to just get by.

Interrupting my reverie, Sayed said, “It’s never too late to learn, you know. We are always learning from, uh, what is the word? Cradle, is that right? To grave.”

“Yes, that’s right.” I agreed. It amazed me that despite his position in society, and desire for something he could not attain, he could be so positive and optimistic. He seemed to be the

embodiment of hope, joy, and the pleasure we should take from the little things in life. It was while I was pondering over these things that he pulled up at Village Circle.

“Good luck.” he called as I climbed out of the car, “Study hard.”

“Thank you.” I replied smiling, “I will.”

It was strange evening that day, on September 18th, but it was a pleasant one. An awakening one. A thought-provoking one. And I hope that one day Amir can achieve his noble dreams, and show the world who he can truly be. I have thought upon this event many times since then, and I will continue to be reminded of my good fortunes, for it was eye-opening, and of course, an Uber ride to remember.

A Greedy Generosity

By Dennis Nguyen

I am not a bad person, I didn't do anything wrong.

I am not a bad person, I am just the CEO of a major company.

I just make a billion dollars, what is wrong with that?

I am not a bad person, I give my workers 25% more than I could.

I am not a bad person, I merely was smarter.

I thought of this idea first, I just want my pay.

I am not a bad person, I think of the poor.

Last year alone, I gave a hundred thousand.

I am not a bad person, I help those in need.

I employ ten thousand, without me they would be homeless, starving on the streets.

I am not a bad person, the dispossessed too I help.

I gave twenty to the beggar on Main Street.

I am not a bad person, even though I invested.

They may have gouged prices but that was not me.

I may have formed a trust, monopolized the industry.

I wasn't convicted of any wrong, it was good for the company.

I am not a bad person, I know I raised prices.

It was only ten percent, how much could that be?

I am not a bad person, I ignored the worker's union, sent jobs overseas

They were unreasonable, not the company and me.

That countries laws are looser, wages lower.

Now I don't have to heed unneeded safety restrictions.

I am not bad person, I found all the loopholes.

Now I pay no taxes, and can give that money to charity.

I may have formed a lobby, bribed the politicians.

They loosened regulations, increased subsidies.

It didn't hurt anyone, only helped me.

I am not a bad person, in fact I am quite good.

There is nothing wrong I supported, only the greater good.

The Vagabond
By Katherine Fielding

Slowly the sun rises
Above the hills
And sky-scrapers.
Morning fog
Rushes in
Filtering the sunlight.
On the cold
Pavement lays a man
Asleep, and
Wrapped in a threadbare quilt.
His matted hair gives way
To weathered skin,
And blue eyes
That have lost their glow.
His hands with nails
Caked in dirt,
Seem only good
For shaking
Paper cups
Filled with tarnished coins.
Drifter, Wanderer, Vagrant,
That is what he is.
But,
In his wistful dreams
He remembers a time
Before all hope
Was gone.

America the Beautiful, America the Great
By Alice Fielding

We started in Virginia,
On the East Coast.
My dad rode his bike,
And we drove the car.
Traffic is dangerous for cyclists.
So we used the back roads
that were in need of repair.
Some were made of dirt,
And were hard to travel.
When we set off
There were always things to see:
Run-down trailers
With private property signs,
Confederate flags
Blowing in the wind,
Plastic animals
On every front lawn,
And small towns
On the verge of disappearing.
Along the way we had to stop
Every hundred miles.
Dad couldn't cycle more.
We mainly stayed
In small towns,
And dumpy motels.
There's nowhere else
In the middle of nowhere.
Yet how can I complain
When those motel's
Were someone else's home?
The worst one
Was in Illinois.
It had mattresses
Yellowed with age.
They didn't have bed frames,
Or working AC.
The room was damp
Like a swimming pool.
And they had rats.
We left.
But the owners couldn't.
That place was their home,
And they couldn't afford better.
How many other Americans live like this too?



Image by Julissa Ruiz Ramirez

Helping the Poor

By Dennis Nguyen

As I wondered about the state of social justice in this country, and thought about how much I have been given and how much of an advantage I have over the majority of people in the world; In every sense my life has been easy. There is nothing in my life so far which I can complain about. I have had everything I have needed, and most everything I wanted.

So, I wondered why have I received so much and others had received so little?

It is the eternal question, why are some born rich and others poor, some with good families and others in bad ones, some in free countries and others in tyrannies.

Which leads to the question: Do I have a moral obligation to help those less fortunate?

The answer, most would agree, is a clear yes.

But then how much of an obligation do I have? And what exactly is help?

Is it giving money to charity? Is it volunteering at a local non-profit? Is it a more personal help between myself and someone else?

And what is a moral obligation anyways?

There is no way you can standardize this duty. The most fair way to give is to give back to the poorest person until your state would be equivalent to the state of the poorest person; then, if everyone were doing so, the imbalances in the world would be righted. But on the individual level:

1. Very few people will give that much.
2. In the pursuit of helping everyone you will in fact help no one because there are too many poor in the world, and even if you decide to only help a few poor people, because of the above you will be deciding individually how much is just.

Thus, the obligation which seems so clear at first ends up being defined by the one obligated,

which is really not an obligation at all. Each person can define the extent of their own obligation, and determine if this is sufficient.

So a clear societal obligation means nothing if a person is not honest with themselves.

And it is much easier to be dishonest with yourself than honest.

Any judgment I make of how I should help those less fortunate will always be tainted by natural human greed and laziness.

And then should this generosity come from the heart?

Although, the answer seems at first to be yes, exactly how is anyone helped if generosity is from the heart?

So, with all other things held equal, It is irrelevant if generosity is from the heart, or merely for the sake of seeming generous to society.

So, I have an obligation to help the poor, a duty whose extent I must honestly determine for myself, a duty in which sincerity is not important, only amount?

This can be so easily tainted that, while it may work as a temporary measure to reduce poverty, it will not be an effective method in the long term to end social inequality, evidenced by the fact that we still have poverty in the world after many years of this system.

We can still have personal charity if we so wish, but personal charity cannot be proposed as a solution to social injustice; and if we ever should devise a good system, we should no longer socially expect people to participate in philanthropy.

Deciding the Value of Life
By Keith Gordon

Across the world is a place we know
Though we know it only by name
A place we are so far removed
That we know nothing of their disdain
Their disdain for a country
Claiming justice for all
While our bombs do not differentiate
Between an innocent man taking his son to school
And an enemy of the United States.

We replace iron sights with camera lenses
Looking down from high above
Lenses on a war machine
Turning strangers into dust
A stranger thousands of miles away
That the operator knew nothing of
A stranger who could be innocent
But is guilty until proven he wasn't.

We repeat history year after year
And tell ourselves it will be different

Insert an alternate name in the blank
And welcome a brand new intervention
We can hope it will be the last
But the snake just sheds its skin
We'll learn our lesson for a few months
But next year we'll try it again.

Freedom comes at the price of death
For the very people we try to free
And while we think we are doing well
We are murdering people indiscriminately
And although they aren't citizens
Of an advanced first-world country
Their lives should not be lesser
Than an American like you or me.

Nevermore

By Julissa Ruiz Ramirez

Why have unnecessary war?
Leaving nothing but destruction
Leaving the innocent to implore
Imploring for their lives
Imploring for their seed
They only want to survive
Why must we plead?

Why have unnecessary war?
That leaves nothing but gore,
Refugees, bombings, and mass migrations,
Hatred, famine, and C-4
All in favor of the corporations
Oh God, please nevermore

Ignorance is bliss, but is that really so?
What if that ignorance caused war in Iraq, Yemen, and Syria?
All that what for? Civil-war? World war?
Why kill them off like bacteria?

Oh yes, I almost forgot: Money is the root of all evil

Acting all medieval for the sake of imperial profit

Tar-sands? Fracking? Global Climate Change?

For them we are a shooting range

Native uprising against Dakota Access:

Tribes fighting for their distress against Climate Change.

Some believe it's a Chinese Conspiracy

What else do you have to see?

Dead species rising? Or the rising sea?

The bourgeoisie over the proletariat

All this what for?

Money is the root of all evil

Of Destruction and upheaval

Oh God, please nevermore



Image by Savannah Ledford